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RAMADHAN
1446 AH
THURSDAY
MAR 20, 2025

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29

PRAYER TIMINGS

FAJR
04:56 AM

DHUHR
12:19 PM

ASR
03:45 PM

MAGHRIB
06:23 PM

ISHA
07:33 PM

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INBRIEF

HM GREETINGS TO
TUNISIA PRESIDENT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Kais Saied of the Republic of Tunisia, on his country’s Independence Anniversary. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his heartfelt sentiments and best wishes to President Saied. His Majesty also wished the people of Tunisia further progress and prosperity.

415,081 VISITED
TOURIST SITES IN
AL DAKHILIYAH



The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism said that the number of tourists who visited heritage and tourism sites in the Governorate of Al Dakhiliyah stood at 415,081 during 2024 compared to 312,243 during 2023.

The rise in the number of tourists is attributed to the activation of the role of heritage and tourism neighbourhoods.

Al Dakhiliyah Governorate is considered one of the most prominent destinations in Oman due to its geographical diversity and heritage landmarks.

Oman strongly condemns Israeli air raids on Syria

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman has strongly condemned the air raids launched by Israeli occupation forces on Daraa Governorate in the Syrian Arab Republic, describing the assaults as “yet another violation of Syrian territorial sovereignty”.

In a statement issued by the Foreign Ministry, the Sultanate of Oman reiterated its calls upon the international community to intervene immediately to deter

Israel and put an end to Israel’s disregard for international law. Such acts, the statement said, generate further tensions and regional escalation.

Meanwhile, Syria’s foreign ministry condemned a series of deadly Israeli strikes a day earlier, accusing Israel of seeking to sow instability in the country.

A foreign ministry statement denounced “in the strongest terms the recent Israeli air strikes

on Daraa”, in southern Syria, on Monday which authorities said killed three civilians. “This aggression is part of an Israeli campaign against the Syrian people and the stability of the country,” the statement said.

It added that “these deliberate attacks, launched without reason, reveal Israel’s total disregard for international law and norms” and “represent a direct threat to regional and international security”.

The Israeli military said it had struck “military targets” in southern Syrian including “command centres and military sites”.

On Tuesday afternoon, the Israeli military said it launched new air strikes targeting “two cannons” in the region of Khan Arnabah, in the south of Syria, close to the 1974 ceasefire line separating Israeli and Syrian forces on the Golan Heights.

— Agencies

RO 11.9 million provided in
social assistance benefits

6 main targets within Oman Vision 2040 achieved

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MARCH 19

THE Ministry of Social Development announced its achievements in 2024 and its future plans in the areas of welfare and integration of people with disabilities.

This was unveiled at a media briefing held on Wednesday in the presence of Dr Laila bint Ahmed al Najjar, Minister of Social Development. The sectors for the ministry achievements included social care, persons with disabilities, family and community development, voluntary civil work, and partnership and social responsibility.

The ministry reviewed six main targets it had accomplished within Oman Vision 2040 out of 32 targets, including electronic connectivity with the population base and the Central Bank of Oman and relevant authorities. The goals also include the preparation of a national guide for engineering specifications for urban environments and transportation for people with disabilities, the preparation of a guide for quality standards for services provided to people with disabilities, the completion of the intervention and referral system for domestic violence, the establishment and completion of a donation platform or charitable work portal and the development of guidelines for regulating integrated early childhood centres.

The ministry revealed that the total social assistance benefits disbursed in 2024 amounted to RO 11,968,546, provided to 102,167 cases. The ministry also indicated



Dr Laila bint Ahmed al Najjar, Minister of Social Development, addressing the media on Wednesday.

that a total of 1,635 beneficiaries received job-related training between 2020 and the end of 2024 including 234 in 2024. The ministry also provided 675 job opportunities in the public and private sectors for individuals from social protection and low-income families and people with disabilities between 2020 and 2025, including 92 job opportunities provided in 2024. This is in addition to 86 cases who received support to start home-based businesses at a total amount of RO 46,558.

Speaking on the occasion, Hamoud bin

Murdad al Shabibi, official spokesman for the ministry, said: “The media briefing is held as part of the ministry’s keenness to highlight its efforts. Among the most important things being reviewed is the ministry’s organisational structure, as well as the automation of all services to citizens, which are now provided through technical and electronic systems and that the ministry is moving towards focusing on expanding and empowering people with disabilities and expanding rehabilitation programmes.”

Amending the organisational structure of the Ministry of Social Development, pursuant to Royal Decree No 14/2024, is one of the most notable achievements during 2024. This achievement also marked a qualitative leap in the average achievement of digital transformation requirements and that all e-services for the ministry’s beneficiaries were automated at a rate of 100 per cent, five regulatory regulations were issued, and nine initiatives were launched as part of the outputs of the Laboratory for the Development of Services and Programmes for Persons with Disabilities. These initiatives include mandatory medical examination programmes for those intending to marry; developing the newborn screening programme by adding tests for genetic autonomic disorders for newborns; developing periodic medical examinations in the child’s record card by adding two visits at the ages of three and four year; strengthening partnerships to provide health and rehabilitation services at government rehabilitation centres;

TURN TO P3

‘Stranded’ Nasa astronauts back on Earth after splashdown

WASHINGTON: Nasa astronauts Butch Wilmore and Suni Williams returned to Earth in a SpaceX capsule on Tuesday with a soft splashdown off Florida’s coast, nine months after their faulty Boeing Starliner craft upended what was to be a week-long stay on the International Space Station.

Their return caps a protracted space mission that was fraught with uncertainty and technical troubles, turning a rare instance of Nasa’s contingency planning — and the latest failures of Starliner — into a global and political spectacle.

Wilmore and Williams, two veteran Nasa astronauts and retired US Navy test pilots, had launched into space as Starliner’s first crew

in June for what was expected to be an eight-day test mission. But issues with Starliner’s propulsion system led to cascading delays to their return home, culminating in a Nasa decision to fold them into its crew rotation schedule and return them on a SpaceX craft this year.

On Tuesday morning, Wilmore and Williams strapped inside their Crew Dragon spacecraft along with two other astronauts and undocked from the ISS at 1.05 am ET (0505 GMT) to embark on a 17-hour trip to Earth.

The four-person crew, formally part of Nasa’s Crew-9 astronaut rotation mission, plunged through Earth’s atmosphere, using its heatshield and two sets of



Nasa astronaut Suni Williams is helped out of a SpaceX Dragon spacecraft onboard the SpaceX recovery ship MEGAN after she, astronaut Nick Hague, and Butch Wilmore, and Roscosmos cosmonaut Aleksandr Gorbunov landed in the water off the coast of Tallahassee, Florida, on Tuesday. — Reuters

parachutes to slow its orbital speed of 27,359 kph to a soft 17 mph at splashdown, which occurred at 5:57 pm ET some 50 miles off Florida’s Gulf Coast under clear skies.

“What a ride,” Nasa astronaut Nick Hague, the Crew-9 mission commander inside the Dragon capsule, told mission control moments after splashing down. “I see a capsule full of grins, ear to ear.”

The astronauts will be flown on a Nasa plane to their crew quarters at the space agency’s Johnson Space Center in Houston for a few days of routine health checks before Nasa flight surgeons say they can go home to their families.

“They will get some well-deserved

time off, well-deserved time with their families,” Nasa’s Commercial Crew Program chief Steve Stich told reporters after the splashdown. “It’s been a long time for them.”

The mission captured the attention of US President Donald Trump, who upon taking office in January called for a quicker return of Wilmore and Williams and alleged, without evidence, that former president Joe Biden “abandoned” them on the ISS for political reasons.

The agency had swapped a delayed SpaceX capsule for one that would be ready sooner and sped through its methodical safety review process to heed the president’s call. — Reuters



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SHORTTAKES

CRACK DOWN ON FOOD SAFETY VIOLATIONS

MUSCAT: Muscat Municipality, in cooperation with the Royal Oman Police and the Public Prosecution, raided four homes in Muttrah as part of its efforts to ensure food safety and public health during Ramadhan.

In a statement, the municipality said the crackdown resulted in the seizure of 400 kg of food unfit for human consumption, along with cooking utensils that failed to meet health standards. Authorities recorded multiple health violations and legal action has been taken against the offenders.

Muscat Municipality has urged the public to follow food safety guidelines to prevent contamination and food poisoning, including avoiding storing cooked food in the fridge for an extended period, not leaving food out of the fridge for more than two hours and storing raw food separately from cooked food.

Vernal equinox begins today

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 19

THE vernal equinox in the Sultanate of Oman will begin today, March 20, marking the astronomical commencement of spring, according to the Oman Society for Astronomy and Space.

Astronomical calculations indicate that this year's vernal equinox will occur at 1:07 PM Muscat time. "At this moment, the sun will be positioned directly over the equator. In the Muscat Governorate, the sun will rise at 6:11 AM, reach its zenith at 12:14 PM and set at 6:18 PM. On this day, day and night will be approximately equal in length across most of the world, with the duration of daylight reaching 12 hours, 7 minutes and 24 seconds in Muscat Governorate, Asma bint Salem al Farsiyah, a member of the Omani Society for Astronomy and Space, said.

This phenomenon arises due to the Earth's axis being tilted at an angle of 23.5 degrees as it orbits the sun, resulting in varying levels of solar radiation between the two hemispheres throughout the year.

While the vernal equinox approximates equal day and night, the precise moment

of equal day and night for the Sultanate of Oman occurred on March 15. "The vernal equinox typically falls on the 20th, 21st, or 22nd of March, as the calendar year does not perfectly align with the tropical year," Asma said.

Leap days are implemented to realign the calendar with the tropical year. On this day, the sun transitions from the southern hemisphere to the northern hemisphere, signifying the start of spring in the northern hemisphere and autumn in the southern

hemisphere. The sun rises precisely at 90 degrees east and sets precisely west, aiding in directional orientation. At the poles, this marks the beginning of six months of daylight at the North Pole and six months of darkness at the South Pole.

Following the vernal equinox, daylight hours will gradually lengthen until the summer solstice. Spring is traditionally the season for planting, as the ground warms and daylight hours increase, fostering crop growth.



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DONATE BLOOD AFTER BREAKING FAST, NOT BEFORE

BLOOD DONATION MAY CAUSE TEMPORARY FATIGUE, ESPECIALLY WHILE FASTING, AS THE BODY EXPERIENCES A DECREASE IN FLUID AND ENERGY LEVELS

“I make sure to donate blood regularly every six months and during Ramadhan, I carefully choose the most suitable time. I prefer to donate after the Taraweeh prayers because by then, I have had sufficient meals after Iftar and regained my energy. This helps reduce fatigue and dizziness, making the donation process easier and safer.

SALIM AL RAWAHI, A blood donor

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حيث يأتي العالم للتسوق

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, MARCH 19

BLOOD donation is one of the most profound of humanitarian acts as it plays a crucial role in saving the lives of many lives. During the holy month of Ramadhan, the values of solidarity and social cooperation become more evident, encouraging many people to take the initiative to donate blood in line with the spirit of the blessed month. However, questions often arise regarding the best times to donate, the impact of fasting on donors and the necessary procedures to ensure the safety of both donors and recipients. From a religious standpoint, many scholars have permitted blood donation while fasting, provided it does not affect the donor's health. It is recommended if someone else is in urgent need. Moreover, donating blood does not invalidate the fast.

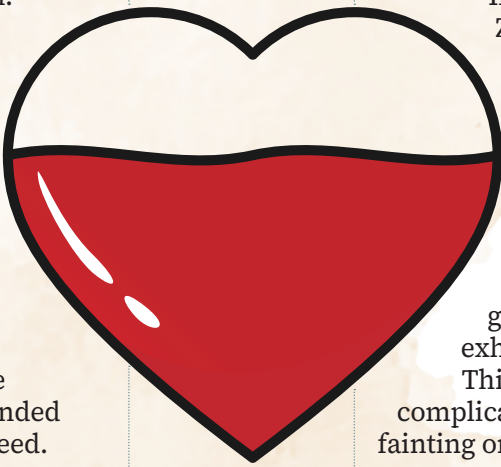
MEDICAL PERSPECTIVE
Dr Reem al Zaabi has clarified that blood donation does not pose serious health risks if done in accordance with medical guidelines. However, it may cause temporary dizziness or fatigue, especially while fasting, as the body experiences a decrease in fluid and energy levels. She advised those willing to donate blood during Ramadhan to do so after Iftar to ensure stable blood pressure and prevent fainting or dizziness. Additionally, she recommended drinking sufficient fluids before and after donation. Dr Al Zaabi further emphasised that post-iftar blood donation is preferable, as it allows the donor to replenish lost fluids by consuming drinks and water. She stressed the importance of following health guidelines to ensure a smooth and safe donation experience. After donating, it is essential to rest for 10-15 minutes before leaving the donation centre, consume plenty of fluids and eat a light meal to compensate for lost blood. Moreover, strenuous exercise

should be avoided for 24 hours to allow the body to recover properly. Despite the vital role of blood donation in saving lives, some individuals may impulsively donate out of goodwill, particularly after seeing urgent appeals for patients in need. However, they may overlook their own health at that time. Some donors may even hide general weakness from doctors due to enthusiasm or their desire to provide immediate assistance, especially during Ramadhan. In this regard, Dr Al Zaabi warned against the potential consequences of such actions. She explained that some donors might forget that they have not had a sufficient meal before donating or that they are experiencing general fatigue or extreme exhaustion. This could lead to severe complications such as sudden fainting or a sharp drop in blood pressure, putting the donor's health at risk. She added that while blood donation is undoubtedly a noble act, it must adhere to medical safety standards. She emphasised the importance of complete honesty with doctors before donating, as the success of the process depends on the donor's physical preparedness, ensuring their safety as well as that of the recipient. Salim al Rawahi, a regular blood donor, believes that donating blood during Ramadhan is a noble humanitarian act that carries double rewards, especially given the continuous need for blood by patients and accident victims. However, he highlights the importance of selecting the right time to donate to avoid any negative effects on the donor's health. "I make sure to donate blood regularly every six months and during Ramadhan, I carefully choose the most suitable time. I prefer to donate after the Taraweeh prayers because by then, I have had sufficient meals after Iftar and regained my energy. This helps reduce fatigue and dizziness, making the donation process easier and safer."

1 Those willing to donate blood during Ramadhan to do so after Iftar to ensure stable blood pressure and prevent dizziness.

2 Strenuous exercise should be avoided for 24 hours to allow the body to recover properly.

3 The process depends on the donor's physical preparedness, ensuring their safety as well as that of the recipient.



SHORTTAKES

CERN signs up Sohar University as associate member

STAFF REPORTER
SUHAR, MARCH 19

Sohar University (SU) is the first private higher education Institution in Oman to be an associate member of one of the entities of the European Organisation for Nuclear Research (CERN). The move reflects its commitment to research excellence and international collaboration. This CERN entity is known as the Compact Muon Solenoid (CMS) research experiment which include the world's largest and highest-energy particle accelerator that is related to advanced specialised technology. The R&D equipment and facilities available to CERN-CMS are the best advanced research equipment in the world, comprising very large facilities and equipment with a diameter of 14 metres and a length of 26.7 km, which are installed in a tunnel located 100 metres below the surface of the ground along the border between France and Switzerland and the total weight of the system is 14,000 metric tonnes. SU's associate-membership will enable the university researchers to have access and joint use of such an important research facility and thus enhance the position of the university and the Sultanate of Oman among higher education institutions and research centres in the world.

Dr Hamdan bin Sulaiman al Fazari, Vice Chancellor of SU, stressed that this partnership comes within the strategy of the university to promote scientific research and innovation, and provide opportunities for its students and researchers to benefit from the latest technologies and advanced laboratories at CERN-CMS, which contributes to the development of scientific knowledge and raising the level of national competencies in the technical and research fields. Prof Ghassan bin Adnan al Kindi, SU's Pro Vice-Chancellor for Research and Innovation, stated that CERN-CMS is associated with 247 higher education and research institutions from 58 countries, including the most prestigious universities and research institutes in the world. Prof Ghassan stressed that the scientific and research collaboration within CERN-CMS is described as one of the largest international scientific collaboration projects in history. The ambitious collaboration plan developed by SU with CERN-CMS allows for the acquisition and transfer of knowledge and building the research and technological capabilities of the university's cadres.

FSA SUSPENDS SOME ACTIVITIES

MUSCAT: The Financial Services Authority has issued administrative Decision No 20/205 suspending some activities of Financial Corporation Company (SAOG) permanently and issued compulsory instructions to the company. The move was made to enhance compliance and ensure the integrity of the

Rehabilitation centre to come up in Batinah South

THE Ministry of Health (MoH) on Wednesday signed an agreement to establish a National Rehabilitation Centre, funded by Shaikh Mohammed bin Saud Bahwan. The agreement aims to finance the establishment of a rehabilitation and healthcare centre for adults and children in the Al Batinah South Governorate. Dr Abdullah bin Hamoud al Harthy, International Relations Advisor at the minister's Office, said that this National Rehabilitation Centre is the first of its kind in the Sultanate of Oman, linking healthcare and community institutions to rehabilitate individuals injured in accidents, sports injuries and other cases, for both adults and children. He added that the centre also connects healthcare institutions across Oman, including the Medical City for Military and Security Services (MCMSS) and the University Medical City. This project is expected to provide comprehensive rehabilitation services at a high level, utilising the latest technologies and practices, contributing to enhancing quality of life, reintegrating individuals and fostering their interaction with society. Dr Al Harthy indicated that the centre will provide specialised rehabilitation services, including neurological rehabilitation, burn and muscle rehabilitation and cardiopulmonary rehabilitation, along with other comprehensive rehabilitation services. Dr Ali bin Abdhulhussain al Lawati, Advisor for Engineering Affairs at the minister's Office, said that this project is part of a larger initiative in the Al Batinah South Governorate, where health projects occupy an area of 700,000 square metres on the same land where the rehabilitation



Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health, with officials after signing the agreement on Wednesday

It is the first of its kind in Oman, funded by Shaikh Mohammed bin Saud Bahwan, linking healthcare and community institutions to rehabilitate individuals injured in accidents, sports and other cases

centre will be established. He added that the National Rehabilitation Centre will feature several specialised departments for physical therapy, occupational therapy, speech and language therapy, prosthetics, as well as administrative divisions, a training and research centre, workshops and storage facilities. Ahmed bin Muslim al Rawas, Assistant Chairman for Administrative Affairs and Human Resources at the MCMSS, emphasised that the Centre reflects the partnership and integration between all healthcare institutions in the Sultanate of Oman. This centre, he added, will enhance the quality of healthcare services provided in this sector, improving their effectiveness and ensuring comprehensive and efficient services for patients in these institutions. This contributes to achieving a unified vision aimed at enhancing the health of individuals and the community. Al Rawas also pointed out that this connection and integration help minimise service gaps, ensuring that patients receive timely and appropriate rehabilitation treatment. Thakiya bint Said al Noobiyah, Senior Specialist in Prosthetics and Orthopedics at the Directorate General of Al Khoula Hospital, explained that the National Rehabilitation Centre will operate according to unified frameworks, policies and protocols based on evidence for diagnosis, treatment and rehabilitation to ensure effective care. It will also serve as a research and academic centre specialising in enhancing and developing the efficiency of human resources in this field, ensuring continuous professional development. Al Noobi added that the centre will include specialised teams to help patients reintegrate into society. It will also bring together a distinguished group of specialists, including rehabilitation practitioners, neurologists, neurosurgeons, general practitioners, rehabilitation therapists, nursing care professionals, as well as prosthetics and orthotics experts.

Accordingly, FSA suspended the company from carrying out the brokerage activity, marketing non-Omani securities; and research and advice activity permanently. The decision also included obliging the company to take a set of procedure within not more than three months from the date of the decision.

ROP SEIZE 65 VEHICLES

MUSCAT: The Police Command in the Governorate of Muscat, in collaboration with the Special Task Units of Bousher and Seeb, has seized 65 vehicles and detained a group of individuals involved in drifting. In a statement, Royal Oman Police said, 'The offenders were reportedly causing noise disturbances and disrupting public peace during late-night hours.' It added that legal procedures are currently underway, as authorities continue their efforts to uphold public order and safety in the region.



Ministry of Health

Announcement

The Ministry of Health invites specialized companies to participate in the following Tenders: -

Tender Ref:	Description	Last Date for Collection of Tender Document	Bid Submission Closing Date on / Before 10:00 am Wednesday	Eligibility	Tender Fee (Non-Refundable) Per set
980/2025/ MOH/ HQ-78	Provision of Consultancy Services (Design and Supervision) for Construction of National Rehabilitation and Wellness Center in Al Madina Azarqa at Governorate of South Al Batinah	3/4/2025	30/4/2025	Specialized Companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board in Excellent & First Grade	- SME: 14.700 - LO: 150

- Tenders should be submitted on line on <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>.
- Ministry is not bound to accept the lowest tender and reserves the right to accepts or reject any tender.
- For any Clarification, you may contact via Telephone: 24402200, Email id etenderhd@ita.gov.om



MUSCAT GOVERNORATE MUSCAT MUNICIPALITY

Advertisement No. (6/2025)

Muscat Municipality invites interested companies to the following bidding :

Serial	Bidding No.	Bidding Description	Document Fee	Deadline for obtaining bidding docs.	Deadline for inquires submission	Deadline for submission
1	12/2024 ReTender	Design, construct and operate slaughter house in plot no. (185) at Quriyat	R.O. 790	8/4/2025	10/4/2025	28/4/2025
2	14/2024 ReTender	Manage and operate service building in Fins Rest area at Quriyat	R.O. 25	8/4/2025	10/4/2025	28/4/2025
3	1/2025	Manage and operate cafe in plot no. (1023) at Al Qurum, with an area of 630 m².	R.O. 25	8/4/2025	10/4/2025	28/4/2025
4	2/2025	Manage and operate of two (2) kiosks on plot No. (651) in Bausher Heights, Wilayat Bausher, with an area of 12m² per kiosk	R.O. 25	8/4/2025	10/4/2025	28/4/2025
5	3/2025	Manage and operate cafe in plot no. (1023) in Sur Al-Hadid at Al Seeb, with an area of 97m².	R.O. 25	8/4/2025	10/4/2025	28/4/2025
6	4/2025	Selling of used spare parts, oil drums and used (Oils, Batteries and Tires)	R.O. 25	8/4/2025	10/4/2025	28/4/2025

Registered companies with Muscat Municipality which are Specialized in above bids are invited to participate as per the following procedures:

- Company registration with Muscat Municipality must be valid to obtain the bid document.
- Pay the specified document fee for the requested bid via bank deposit to Muscat Municipality's Bank account as follows:

Bank Muscat **0423010702710024**
- A copy of the transaction's receipt MUST be send to the following e-mail (SQ.QS@mm.gov.om), provided with the company data (name and bid number, delegate name,office phone number, mobile number, email address approved by the company and commercial registration number of the company).
- The tender document will be provided to the company via email.
- 2:00 PM** on the above mentioned dates, is the last timing for obtaining Bidding Documents.
- Documents must be enclosed in a plain closed envelope (without any company information) and place in the box located in bulding **(A)** in Muscat Municipality, Head Office, Darsait.

NOTES:

- Companies which are not registered in Muscat Municipality or their registration has been expired shall register through the municipality's website (www.mm.gov.om).
- For technical support, please contact Muscat Municipality through this email (crm@mm.gov.om).
- If the bidders have any inquiries regarding the scope of the work, they have to sent their inquiries through the following e-mail (mais.h.ahnouli@mm.gov.om)
- 10:00 AM** on the above submission mentioned dates, is the last timing for receving bids. Offers submitted after the above mentioned date & time shall not be accepted for any reason.
- Muscat Municipality has the right to accept or reject any offer without assigning any reason.

Website: www.mm.gov.om

WORLD

SHORT TAKES



Riot police officers stand guard as supporters of the Mayor of Istanbul demonstrate against his detention, in Istanbul. — AFP

TÜRKIYE DETAINS ISTANBUL MAYOR OVER CORRUPTION

ISTANBUL: Turkish police detained Istanbul’s powerful mayor Ekrem Imamoglu early on Wednesday as part of a corruption probe. Türkiye’s justice minister on Wednesday said police had detained Istanbul’s popular opposition Mayor Ekrem Imamoglu in connection with two separate probes, including “helping a terror group”. Imamoglu was one of seven people under investigation for “helping a terror group,” said minister Yilmaz Tunc.

Widely seen as the strongest challenger to Erdogan, Imamoglu has faced a string of what critics say are politically motivated legal cases. As reports of his detention emerged, Türkiye briefly shut down access to social networks and hundreds of police surrounded City Hall and closed off Taksim Square, with the authorities banning all demonstrations for the next four days.

The move appeared to be in connection with a probe into alleged “tender rigging” by Imamoglu that was opened in 2023. But local reports, including from state news agency Anadolu, said it was also linked to a separate probe for allegedly aiding the banned Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK), saying he was one of seven people detained.

— AFP

THOUSANDS MARCH IN SUPPORT OF COLOMBIA’S PRESIDENT



Colombia’s President Gustavo Petro (C) speaks during a rally in Bogota. — AFP

BOGOTA: Colombia’s leftist president called thousands of supporters to the streets, a political show of strength in an effort to press lawmakers into passing stalled health and labour reforms. In major cities from Bogota to Medellin, thousands of Gustavo Petro’s supporters blocked streets, waved flags and chanted slogans of support.

Petro, 64, is the first leftist president in Colombia’s history, but has failed to pass the bulk of his reformist agenda through Congress. With little more than a year left in his four-year term, Petro is now in a race to fulfil key pledges and cement his political legacy.

Petro has blamed powerful business interests for blocking reforms, which among other measures would give workers extra pay for working nights, Sundays or public holidays. He joined the march in Bogota’s Plaza de Bolivar, telling protesters that a corrupt “oligarchy” has “betrayed the Colombian people, for greed and for money.” “Colombia’s Congress is turning its back on the people,” he said, demanding a referendum on the reforms.

— AFP

COURT ORDER Bosnia issues arrest warrant for Serb leader



Bosnian authorities have issued an arrest warrant for Serb leader Milorad Dodik, a senior police officer said, as part of an investigation into his alleged flouting of the country’s constitution. The announcement comes a week after police said they were seeking to question Dodik. Tensions have soared since Dodik was convicted last month for defying Christian Schmidt, the international envoy charged with overseeing the peace accords that ended Bosnia’s war.

— AFP

US RELEASES FINAL TROVE OF SECRET KENNEDY ASSASSINATION FILES

WASHINGTON: The US National Archives released the final batch of files related to the assassination of president John F Kennedy — a case that still fuels conspiracy theories more than 60 years after his death. The move follows an executive order issued by President Donald Trump in January directing the unredacted release of the remaining files related to the assassinations of Kennedy, his brother, former attorney general Robert F Kennedy and civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr.

“In accordance with President Donald Trump’s directive... all records previously withheld for classification that are part of the President John F Kennedy Assassination Records Collection are released,” the Archives said.

The National Archives has released millions of pages of records over the past decades relating to the assassination of then-president Kennedy in November 1963, but thousands of documents had been held back at the request of the

Central Intelligence Agency and Federal Bureau of Investigation, citing national security concerns.

The Warren Commission that investigated the shooting of the charismatic 46-year-old president determined that it was carried out by a former Marine sharpshooter, Lee Harvey Oswald, acting alone. But that formal conclusion has done little to quell speculation that a more sinister plot was behind Kennedy’s murder in Dallas, Texas.

— AFP

Kremlin accuses Kyiv of ‘countering’ peace efforts

THE Kremlin accused Kyiv on Wednesday of countering US-Russia efforts to end the conflict in Ukraine, saying it had tried to strike Russian energy infrastructure despite Vladimir Putin and Donald Trump agreeing a halt on such attacks. Putin announced a 30-day pause on striking Ukrainian energy facilities following a call with Trump on Tuesday, after turning down the US president’s previous demand to pause all hostilities.

“Unfortunately, so far see there has been no reciprocity on the part of the Kyiv regime. There were attempts to strike our energy infrastructure,” Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

“These attacks are countering our common (Russian-American) efforts.” Peskov said Putin had “immediately” given the command to stop energy attacks on Ukraine, claiming that seven Russian drones were “in the air” to be used on Ukrainian energy infrastructure but were instead shot down by air defences.

Both countries attacked each other with drones after the Putin-Trump call. The Kremlin said Putin had only committed to a ceasefire in strikes on energy infrastructure, clarifying a discrepancy between Russian and US reports after US envoy Steve Witkoff said Moscow had agreed to halt strikes on all infrastructure. Kyiv had last week committed to an unconditional ceasefire with Russia.

Unfortunately, so far see there has been no reciprocity on the part of the Kyiv regime. There were attempts to strike our energy infrastructure. These attacks are countering our common (Russian-American) efforts

DMITRY PESKOV



Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky (L) speaks as Finnish President Alexander Stubb listens, at the Presidential Palace in Helsinki. — AFP

The Kremlin said that Putin and Trump “trust each other and are intent to gradually move towards the normalisation of ties” more than three years into Moscow’s offensive. Peskov said the phone call between Trump and Putin lasted around two hours and that the pair had also discussed military aid to Ukraine, without giving details as “it is quite a sensitive topic and probably should not be discussed in public”.

President Volodymyr Zelensky warned on Wednesday against heeding a Kremlin call to halt military aid for his country and announced he would speak with US President Donald Trump later within hours. “I do not believe that we should make any concessions in

terms of assistance for Ukraine but rather there should be an increase in assistance for Ukraine.”

The call between Trump and Putin failed to secure the breakthrough ceasefire that Ukraine has been pushing for, after Kyiv endorsed the US-led proposal.

Zelensky said Washington should take a lead role in overseeing any agreement leading to a halt in Russian and Ukrainian attacks on energy infrastructure. “The United States should be the main controlling entity,” Zelensky said. “If the Russians don’t hit our targets, we will definitely not hit their targets.” And the Ukrainian leader said he hoped that the US would continue to exert pressure on Russia.

— AFP



GAZA TOLL SHOWS 970 DEATHS IN TWO DAYS

GAZA: The health ministry in Hamas-run Gaza on Wednesday published a new death toll from the war with Israel, showing an additional 970 deaths in 48 hours, after Israel intensified deadly strikes on the territory. The death toll from the war in the Gaza recorded by the ministry at midday on Monday stood at 48,577. By midday on Wednesday, the figure had risen to 49,547, it said. Israel launched a wave of strikes on Gaza overnight between Monday and Tuesday.

The health ministry in Gaza said that a foreign UN worker was killed and five others seriously injured on Wednesday by an Israeli strike on their headquarters in the centre of the territory. A statement from the health ministry said there was “one death and five severe injuries among foreign staff working for UN institutions... due to the bombing of their headquarters by the occupation in the central governorate a short while ago”.

— AFP

REFUGEE MISERY Myanmar camps receive last WFP aid



Distraught Myanmar relief camp dwellers received final handouts from the World Food Programme on Wednesday as the UN agency begins halting aid to a million people in the country because funding has dried up. WFP Myanmar chief Michael Dunford said that the organisation was being forced to winnow down aid because donors were no longer forthcoming. 379 households are living in the Waingmaw Lisu Baptist Association camp.

— AFP

COASTGUARD MISSION Six die, 40 missing in shipwreck off Italy



At least six migrants have died and 40 were missing after a shipwreck off the Italian island of Lampedusa, a spokesperson for the United Nations’ Refugee Agency (UNHCR) said on Wednesday. The Italian coastguard said separately it intervened after being alerted to a rubber dinghy in distress, finding 10 survivors and six bodies. Survivors told rescuers that many among a group of 56 migrants fell into the water due to bad weather.

— Reuters

When dialogue is absent, violence becomes default



IBRAHIM SAID

The author is a poet

RELIGIOUS occasions provide an opportunity to revisit history with a fresh perspective, free from rigid judgments of right and wrong. Instead, they encourage a deeper understanding of past events and their lasting impact, helping us recognise the forces that have shaped societies over time.

In The Great Discord, Taha Hussein highlights the assassination of Caliph Uthman bin Affan in 656 AD as a turning point that fractured the Islamic nation. This event, he argues, led to deep divisions and the breakdown of justice, triggering conflicts such as the Battle of the Camel, Siffin, arbitration and Nahrawan, which ultimately weakened Ali Ibn Abi Talib's rule.

Hussein describes the chaos of Nahrawan, where Iraqis fought among themselves, consumed by uncertainty and despair. When Ali called for a march on Syria, his commanders hesitated, making excuses about depleted weapons and exhaustion — an early sign of a fractured and disillusioned society. This divide, Hussein suggests, echoed historical rivalries, as if the old Persian and Roman empires had found new battlegrounds within the Muslim world. More significantly, Iraq itself became internally divided. Ali's decision to relocate the capital from Medina to Kufa underscored the role of Iraq, particularly Kufa, in the events leading

to Uthman's downfall. Many of those involved in the uprising were from Kufa, and the city remained a centre of opposition until the fall of the Umayyad dynasty.

While many historians emphasise Uthman's assassination as the key moment of division, earlier events, such as the murder of Caliph Umar Ibn Al Khattab by Abu Lu'lu'a, suggest a longer history of internal strife. These acts of violence highlight a fundamental flaw in the prevailing political mindset of the time: the belief that the sword was the ultimate arbiter of justice. But relying on force, rather than dialogue, only deepened divisions. The absence of alternative solutions left dissenters with no recourse but bloodshed. When the people of Medina opposed Uthman's rule, they found no means of resolution other than storming his house and assassinating him. Had peaceful alternatives existed, they might have been pursued. Instead, a cycle of violence was set in motion — one that would continue long after his death.

At the Battle of Siffin, Qurans were raised on the tips of spears, symbolising an appeal to divine law. But in reality, the power lay not in the scripture, but in the hands that wielded it. The reliance on force over reason led to a prolonged era of conflict, where fathers fought sons and brothers turned against each other. Taha Hussein recounts that when Ali surveyed the dead after the Battle of the Camel, he lamented: "I complain to you, O

By revisiting the past with an open mind, we gain insights that remain relevant today — reminding us that history, if not understood, is bound to repeat itself.

Allah, of my agony and my affliction; I have avenged my soul, but at the cost of my kin." This sorrow reflected his growing realisation that violence had become inevitable. He later observed: "I once believed that rulers oppressed their people, but I have learned that people can oppress their rulers." Such divisions extended beyond battlefields. At Nahrawan, Adi Ibn Hatim fought alongside Ali. Iraq, weakened by internal discord, became vulnerable to Umayyad manipulation, and the subsequent Abbasid revolution emerged as a reaction to Umayyad oppression.

The shift of the imperial capital from Damascus to Baghdad under Caliph Al Mansur was a direct response to this power struggle. Centuries later, the poet Abu Al Ala al Ma'arri reflected on the transience of power: "If Al Mansur were resurrected, he would cry out: O City of Peace, do not find peace! For the Hashemites have relinquished their throne, and power now belongs to the Daylamites. Had I foreseen this fate, I would not have slain Abu Muslim."

The lesson from history is clear: when dialogue is absent, violence becomes the default. By revisiting the past with an open mind, we gain insights that remain relevant today — reminding us that history, if not understood, is bound to repeat itself.

Translated by Badr al Dhafari.
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WHAT HAPPENS TO THE HUMAN BODY IN DEEP SPACE?

ISSAM AHMED

Bone and muscle deterioration, radiation exposure, vision impairment — these are just a few of the challenges space travellers face on long-duration missions, even before considering the psychological toll of isolation.

As US astronauts Butch Wilmore and Suni Williams prepare to return home after nine months aboard the International Space Station (ISS), some of the health risks they've faced are well-documented and managed, while others remain a mystery.

These dangers will only grow as humanity pushes deeper into the solar system, including to Mars, demanding innovative solutions to safeguard the future of space exploration.

Despite the attention their mission has received, Wilmore and Williams' nine-month stay is "par for the course," said Rihana Bokhari, an assistant professor at the Center for Space Medicine at Baylor College of Medicine.

ISS missions typically last six months, but some astronauts stay up to a year, and researchers are confident in their ability to maintain astronaut health for that duration.

Most people know that lifting weights builds muscle and strengthens bones, but even basic movement on Earth resists gravity, an element missing in orbit.

To counteract this, astronauts use three exercise machines on the ISS, including a 2009-installed resistance device that simulates free weights using vacuum tubes and flywheel cables.

A two-hour daily workout keeps them in shape. "The best results that we have to show that we're being very effective is that we don't really have a fracture problem in astronauts when they return to the ground," though bone loss is still detectable on scans, Bokhari said.

Balance disruption is another issue, added Emmanuel Urquieta, vice-chair of Aerospace Medicine at the University of Central Florida.

"This happens to every single astronaut, even those who go into space just for a few days," he said, as they work to rebuild trust in their inner ear. Astronauts must retrain their bodies during Nasa's 45-day post-mission rehabilitation programme.

Another challenge is "fluid shift" — the redistribution of bodily fluids towards the head in microgravity. This can increase calcium levels in urine, raising the risk of kidney stones.

Fluid shifts might also contribute to increased intracranial pressure, altering the shape of the eyeball and causing spaceflight-associated neuro-ocular syndrome (SANS), causing mild-to-moderate vision impairment. — AFP

Work, rest and Ramadhan

THE light outside our family farm is bathed in gold. But as the sun exchanges places with the Ramadhan moon, many people feel a sense of worry. They struggle to pray diligently, perform at work, and rest adequately while making time for family and friends.

The holy month urges us to make wise use of our time and reap its benefits in full. But how?

We find the answer in the Holy Quran, in reading Seneca's writings circa 40 AD, and in an essay written by Bertrand Russel in 1932. The answer comes from understanding that work, pleasure, and spirituality are all essential, and in giving each element the respect it deserves.



AMMAR AL NAAIMI

THE SPIRITUALITY OF WORK Understand that your daily job is also spiritual. We learn this In Surah Juma, Verse 10, wherein Allah Almighty urges Muslims to head out into work and seek prosperity after the prayer.

The Prophet adds another element, where he says "Allah loves to see his servant who does a job meticulously." So, surely working hard is a virtue, is it not? When you understand this, you'll see that honest work, done well, is a carefully crafted form of worship.

Seneca, in "Letters from a Stoic" highlights that to do a work well is to capture the essence of goodness in some way. Therefore, honest work with deliberation cleanses the soul, allowing the mind to pursue happiness.

THE CASE FOR PLEASURE Know that enjoying yourself is a key aspect of life, including during the holy month. Seneca's "On the Shortness of Life" highlights that workaholics are making a mistake.

True, Time IS money, but workaholics spend too much of it on the world around them, and not enough of it on themselves. Those who drown in pleasure are no better, turning their joys into prisons.

Russell's 'In Praise of Idleness' is just as harsh. He says that in economic terms, spending 2 hours of your time as a consumer is

The beauty of Ramadhan is that it makes connecting with your maker easier than ever before. Your work time is reduced, and you forego meals. This is prime time to kick any bad habits you have and give room for prayer, the Quran and charitable work.



People stand in front of a giant Quran at the newly-opened Holy Quran Museum in Mecca. — AFP

actually more important for the world than the 8 hours you put in at work. The world does not lack for production but for consumers. Russell is also convinced that work isn't even as good for you as people pretend it is.

The mind, he says, needs nourishment beyond what is provided at daily work. It requires intellectual pursuit, artistic expression, and sometimes, just plain fun.

Our most significant source, the Holy Quran, is certain in its explanation. Al Baqarah 201 showcases that there is room for happiness in life, as well as in paradise.

We should not forget to enjoy the blessings with which Allah has wreathed us. Rather, the pleasure of life should be the kindling we rely on to enflame our spirit to do more good.

NOT ALL ABOUT THIS LIFE The beauty of Ramadhan is that it makes connecting with your maker easier than ever before. Your work time is reduced, and you forego

meals. This is prime time to kick any bad habits you have and give room for prayer, the Quran, and charitable work.

The Holy Quran has many, many verses which discuss the spiritual bliss which comes from leading a virtuous life. Therefore, I will highlight here that philosophy says the same. Seneca concludes his essay by asserting that neither hard work nor pleasure is enough to fill a person's cup. There must be a higher spiritual purpose. To him, that purpose is philosophy or the pursuit of wisdom.

PLAN EVERY SECOND There are 24 hours in a day, and I'm not asking you to meticulously plan every second of them to achieve maximum value. Instead, what I ask of you is this: Today, when Ramadhan's moon lights the world without and the soul within, ask yourself whether you're honestly trying to give yourself the best life possible. Try to make some time for work, some for joy, and some for your soul. That way, you won't regret how you've spent this Ramadhan.

OPINION

The great rhino and the hidden predator



RUMAITHA AL BUSAIDI

The writer is environmental strategist and advocate for sustainable development

Once stood in the African savanna, watching a rhino in the distance, its massive frame unshaken, its presence undeniable. You cannot ignore a rhino. It commands attention, demands space. Much like climate change. The world sees it. We talk about it. We debate solutions, set targets and negotiate policies in global summits. But what if, hidden behind the great rhino, lurked an even more elusive force, one that determines the fate of our battle against climate change? That hidden force is the energy-water-food nexus, an intricate web of interdependence, rarely given the same limelight. Yet, it is the linchpin of sustainability. Energy drives water systems, water is essential for food production, food security is tied to energy availability. Policy discussions often compartmentalise climate action, treating energy, water and food security as separate challenges. The result is solutions that tackle symptoms rather than systemic vulnerabilities. Many net-zero strategies focus on the energy transition without fully considering water stress or food production constraints. The impact of this imbalance is already visible. Take desalination, for example. In Oman and across the Gulf, desalination plants provide a critical lifeline in water-scarce regions. Yet, the industry emits over 76 million metric

tonnes of CO₂ per year and consumes 10 to 15 times more energy than conventional freshwater treatment. Meanwhile, rising temperatures and shifting rainfall patterns are putting pressure on water supplies needed for agriculture. The latest reports warn that climate change could shrink global crop yields by up to 25 per cent by 2050. In many parts of the world, communities are experiencing food shortages not because there is no food but because the systems supporting its production and transportation are failing. In Oman, the need to address this hidden nexus is particularly urgent. With majority of its food imported, any disruption in global markets has immediate consequences. Rising fuel costs affect the price of every shipment. Water scarcity limits local agricultural potential. At the same time, Oman has made significant strides in developing alternative food systems, particularly in aquaculture, the fastest-growing food sector globally. Fish farming presents an opportunity to improve food security while reducing reliance on imports, but it comes with its own challenges. Hatcheries and production facilities require vast amounts of energy. Cold storage and transport demand reliable infrastructure. If not carefully managed, aquaculture can strain freshwater supplies and contribute to environmental degradation. The solution

The great rhino of climate change remains at the forefront and it should. But we should pay attention to what is lurking behind it. The energy-water-food nexus is not a separate challenge; it is the very foundation on which climate resilience will be built.

lies in integrating more efficient water and energy practices, such as recirculating aquaculture systems that reduce freshwater dependency and optimise energy use. These innovations could strengthen Oman's food security while keeping resource consumption in check. This is where strategy must evolve. Climate policies cannot be designed in isolation. When countries pledge to reduce emissions, they must also account for how energy choices will affect water supplies and food security. Addressing the nexus requires a shift in mindset, one that recognises the interwoven nature of energy, water and food security. In Oman, this means integrating climate adaptation plans with long-term economic and infrastructure strategies, ensuring that resilience is built into the country's sustainability efforts rather than treated as an afterthought. The great rhino of climate change remains at the forefront and it should. But we should pay attention to what is lurking behind it. The energy-water-food nexus is not a separate challenge; it is the very foundation on which climate resilience will be built. If we fail to recognise it, we will continue solving one crisis while quietly fueling another. The question is, how long can we afford to ignore what is shaping the ground beneath our feet?

Technology firms fight to stem rising deluge of deepfake

THOMAS URBAIN

Tech firms are fighting the scourge of deepfakes, those deceptively realistic voices or videos used by scammers that are more available than ever thanks to artificial intelligence. Ever-improving generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) tools have become weapons in the hands of bad actors intent on tricking people out of their money or even their identities. Debby Bodkin tells of her 93-year-old mother receiving a telephone call, a cloned voice claiming, “It’s me, mom... I’ve had an accident.” When asked where they were, the machine-made impersonator named a hospital. Fortunately, it was a granddaughter who answered the phone, opting to hang up and call Bodkin at work where she was safe and well. “It’s not the first time scammers have called grandma,” said Bodkin. “It’s daily.” Such deepfake phone scams typically go on to coax victims into paying for medical care or other made-up emergencies. Used on social networks to hijack the notoriety of celebrities or other high-profile figures, sometimes for disinformation, deepfakes are also being exploited by criminal gangs. Hong Kong police earlier this year revealed that a multinational firm employee was tricked into wiring \$26 million to crooks who staged a video conference with AI avatars of his colleagues. A recent study by identification start-up iBoom found that a scant tenth of one per cent of Americans and Britons were able to correctly tell when a picture or video was a deepfake. A decade ago, there was a single AI tool for generating synthetic voices — now there are hundreds of them, according to voice authentication specialist Vijay Balasubramanian, CEO of Pindrop Security. GenAI has changed the game, he said.

“Before, it took 20 hours (of voice recording) to recreate your voice,” said the executive. “Now, it’s five seconds.” Firms such as Intel have stepped up with tools to detect GenAI-made audio or video in real-time. Intel “FakeCatcher” detects colour changes in facial blood vessels to distinguish genuine from bogus imagery. Siwei Lyu, a professor of computer science at the State University of New York at Buffalo, believes “deepfakes will become like spam,” an internet nightmare that people eventually get under control. “Those detection algorithms will be like spam filters in our email software,” Lyu predicted. “We’re not there yet.” — AFP

Community-led tourism enhances sustainability

OMAN’S tourism sector stands at a crossroads. As the country seeks to diversify its economy beyond hydrocarbons, tourism has emerged as a promising pillar of Oman Vision 2040. Yet, the question remains: how can Oman develop its tourism sector to ensure sustainable economic benefits, protect cultural heritage and empower local communities? The answer lies in community-driven and managed tourism. This model has already shown remarkable success in places like Nizwa, Misfat Al Abriyeen and other parts of the Arab world. For too long, tourism development has been driven by top-down interventions — large-scale investments, state-led infrastructure projects, and policies designed to attract international capital. While such initiatives have their place, they often fail to empower local communities as key stakeholders in their own development. Instead of imposing state control or foreign-driven tourism models, what Oman’s tourism sector needs is an ecosystem — one that provides the right regulatory, financial and institutional support while allowing communities to lead and benefit directly. Communities like Harat Al Aqr in Nizwa and Misfat Al Abriyeen in Al Hamra have already demonstrated the power of locally driven tourism models that have been facilitated through community-owned companies. Nizwa, with its rich historical and cultural assets, has built a thriving tourism economy around Harat Al Aqr that surrounds the great citadel of Nizwa. Visitors are provided with an opportunity to immerse themselves in an authentic experience of traditional souq, heritage sites and cultural festivals. Visitors are



AHMED AL MUKHAINI

The author is a policy analyst

For community-managed tourism to thrive, it does not need heavy state intervention or corporate control. What it needs is an enabling ecosystem — a framework that provides the necessary support, incentives and protections while ensuring that local communities retain ownership and leadership.

drawn not just to the architecture but to the living heritage — the traditions, crafts and community-driven experiences that make the city unique. Importantly, much of Nizwa’s tourism activity is local-led, ensuring that revenue generated stays within the community rather than being extracted by external operators. In addition, their successful model was based on capitalising existing vernacular architecture and traditional dwellings and adapting them for touristic reuse. Similarly, Misfat Al Abriyeen, a picturesque mountain village, has become one of Oman’s best examples of sustainable rural tourism. Community-run guesthouses, guided experiences and locally operated businesses ensure that tourism supports local livelihoods rather than disrupting them. Oman is not alone in facing the challenge of creating sustainable, community-led tourism models. Across the Arab world, several destinations have successfully leveraged local knowledge and community involvement to drive tourism growth. One striking example is Dana Biosphere Reserve in Jordan, where local communities play a key role in eco-tourism initiatives. Similarly, Morocco’s Medinas (traditional cities), including those in Fez and Marrakech, thrive on local artisanship, community-run guesthouses (riads) and small-scale tourism enterprises that ensure revenue stays within the local economy. These models offer valuable insights for Oman — particularly in how to develop heritage-based tourism without excessive commercialisation. For community-managed tourism to thrive, it does not need heavy state intervention or corporate control. What it needs is an enabling ecosystem — a framework that

provides the necessary support, incentives and protections while ensuring that local communities retain ownership and leadership. First, there must be financial and technical support for community-based tourism initiatives. Access to microfinance, grants and business training can help small tourism entrepreneurs — such as guesthouse owners, tour guides and local artisans — develop and scale their businesses sustainably. Second, regulations should be designed to protect and empower local tourism enterprises, rather than overburden them with bureaucracy. Policies should ensure that big tourism corporations do not outcompete or displace community-based initiatives, particularly in fragile heritage and environmental areas. Third, Oman needs strong partnerships between the government, private sector and local communities. The state’s role should be that of a facilitator rather than a controller, ensuring that tourism growth aligns with local interests, sustainability and long-term cultural preservation. As Oman looks to grow its tourism sector, it must focus on retailers and outlets that provide much needed services that are rooted in communities and their cultures. Harat Al Aqr, Misfat Al Abriyeen, Dana and Medinas show that sustainable tourism is about creating the right ecosystem where local communities can thrive. By fostering entrepreneurship, protecting local interests and ensuring that economic benefits remain within communities, Oman can build a tourism sector that is economically viable, socially inclusive and culturally sustainable — one that truly reflects Oman’s identity, heritage and long-term vision.

Marking a distressful anniversary: goodbyes left unsaid



SONIA AMBROSIO

The writer is journalist, academic and researcher in media studies

FIVE years later, we still don't know much about the mysterious virus that prompted global stay-at-home orders and shutdowns. Medical communities continue to work to find answers. Well over 7 million people have died because of Covid-19. Covid-19 is still causing illness and death in 2025. Even now, it is painful to reflect on the suffering, grief, anxiety, and everything else we went through because of Covid-19. Hundreds of thousands of individuals, like myself, have lost a family member or friend and we could not say goodbye or provide or receive comfort. We cried alone. Many of us mourned without being able to share our grief. Within days of the World Health Organization officially declaring Covid-19 a global pandemic on March 11, 2020, meeting in person was a no-no. We all began to adapt to a new way of life: masking, social distancing and online meetings. On March 18, 2020, when the world was already on high alert for the Covid-19, we were told classes would be suspended. A journalism student asked me, "Miss, what will happen?". I recall saying, "We don't know, but nothing will be the same ever again." That last in-person journalism class was emotional. And nothing has been the same since! During the pandemic, I have observed that the disease triggered different types of

crises, exacerbated inequalities and led to wide-ranging social changes. Many of these changes brought out the best and the worst in people. I can't say the days of lockdowns and quarantines are a distant memory for me. The physical, mental and emotional effects persist in various ways for many. However, I no longer talk to the walls. The psychological experience of missing social interactions has taught me to appreciate and enjoy every opportunity. The World Health Organization is continuing its efforts to understand the disease and has been asking China, where the outbreak began in Wuhan in December 2019, to share data on the origins of Covid-19. "This is a moral and scientific imperative. Without transparency, sharing and cooperation among countries, the world cannot adequately prevent and prepare for future epidemics and pandemics." There are people still dealing with long-term symptoms of Covid-19. Hospitalisation due to Covid or flu can have unintended consequences, especially for older adults. Public healthcare is essential for everyone, and no community should be discriminated against. Unfortunately, the pandemic and its ramifications faded in the public and government authorities' memories. Would this be due to an absence of personal narratives or follow-up stories? Each victim had a name and a story. They were not mere

Within days of the WHO officially declaring Covid-19 a global pandemic on March 11, 2020, meeting in person was a no-no. We all began to adapt to a new way of life: masking, social distancing and online meetings

numbers. During Covid-19, individuals working on the front lines of the epidemic, like as hospitals and medical centres, performed well. Amazing work done around the clock and with passion. Are we better prepared for another pandemic? Diseases that were once considered eradicated are making a comeback. Would people face fewer restrictions? Given the current awareness, would vaccinations be mandatory again? In the political scenario, the chaos and the circus in the global arena have since grown shamelessly. A new period of far-reaching values has surged. Four years ago, I wrote suggesting waiting for the post-pandemic to see how individuals would be responding to the new world order, which included changes in politics, the economy, business and education. People have become more cynical, or are no longer willing to hide their lack of sensibility. Scientists and scientific information became contentious during the pandemic, with many questioning the benefits of particular recommendations and misleading information about the virus and vaccines. Recent rhetoric fosters conspiratorial thinking regarding science and health organisations. People's lack of trust in science and health authorities is a significant issue for future health emergencies and disease outbreaks.

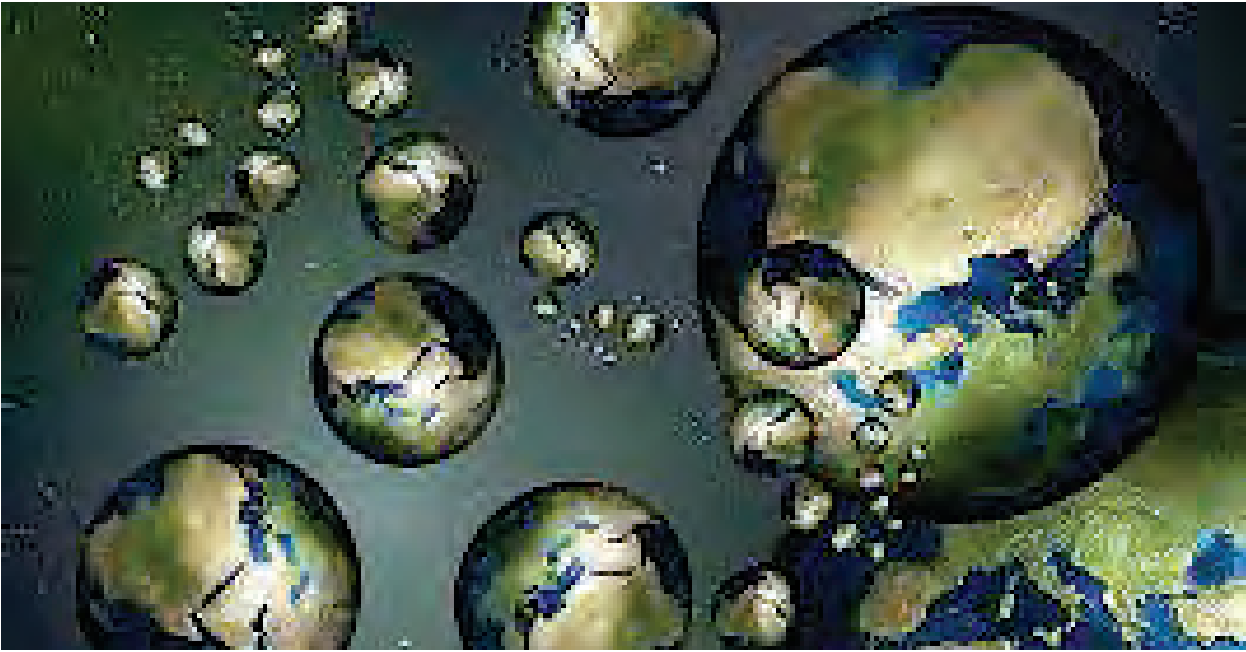
UGANDA... THE QUIET POWER IN EASTERN DRC CONFLICT

ROSE TROUP BUCHANAN AND MARION DOUET

Uganda's role in eastern DR Congo has largely gone under the radar during recent violence but its complex approach aims to secure long-standing security and economic interests in the mineral-rich area, experts say. Backed by Rwanda, the M23 armed group has swept through the east of the Democratic Republic of Congo, taking two regional capitals. It is the latest escalation in an area that has long been victim of a patchwork of armed actors scrambling for dominance over the region's vast resources of coltan, gold, tin and tungsten. Numerous countries have been drawn in over the years, including peacekeepers from southern and eastern Africa trying to support the flailing Congolese military, and Burundian forces protecting their border. Uganda has played a particularly complex role. In 2021, it launched Operation Shujaa, deploying troops with the DRC's consent to Ituri and North Kivu provinces – ostensibly to clear the area of the Allied Democratic Forces, a Ugandan militia with links to the IS group. But it has gone a step further in recent weeks, increasing its presence nearly in tandem with the M23's advances further south. Last month, Uganda said it had "taken control" of security in the Ituri provincial capital, Bunia. "Uganda's attitude remains ambiguous," Kristof Titeca, an East Africa expert at the University of Antwerp, said. "It is difficult to know how its attitude towards Kinshasa, Kigali and the M23 will evolve." Uganda is primarily concerned with security but also has economic interests, experts say. It wants "a buffer zone" to protect itself from the militia and the general chaos emanating out of eastern DRC, a diplomat specialising in the Great Lakes region said on condition of anonymity. But it also wants to ensure "a bigger market for Uganda and for Ugandan products", said Phillip Apuuli Kasaija, a politics professor at Makerere University in Kampala. He said Uganda was making vast sums by taking Congolese gold that was then "labelled... and exported as Ugandan". "For the last three years, Uganda's gold exports have gone through the roof," he said. Uganda-based refiners have denied dealing in smuggled gold and the government last year tightened gold trading regulations, saying it wanted to curb smuggling. In January, Ugandan army spokesman Felix Kulayigye openly called for more roads – the "veins of business" – in eastern Congo. The border is also the site of a massive oil exploration project in Lake Albert between Uganda, the French firm TotalEnergies and the China National Offshore Oil Corporation. Envy of Uganda's economic advances in the DRC may even have spurred Rwanda's support for the M23. — AFP

The scientific origin of parallel worlds

IN this article, we continue our discussion on parallel worlds, building upon last week's article. We explore the scientific origins of the parallel worlds' hypothesis, which began gaining traction in the mid-20th century as major advancements in physics transformed our understanding of time, space and subatomic particles. Three major scientific theories or breakthroughs in modern physics propose the possibility of parallel worlds. Quantum mechanics and its relation to parallel worlds: Physicist Hugh Everett III proposed an interpretation of quantum mechanics in 1957 suggesting that every quantum probability manifests in a separate "world" or "branch" of the universe. This interpretation challenges one of the most perplexing issues in quantum physics: the "collapse of the wave function". According to Everett's perspective, the wave function does not collapse; rather, the universe branches out at every quantum event to accommodate all possible outcomes. This implies the existence of an infinite number of constantly diverging universes, each containing a version of us making different choices. Although this interpretation remains controversial, it was the first serious scientific formulation of the parallel worlds concept and was later examined more rigorously by prominent physicists such as John Wheeler and Bryce DeWitt. The theory of inflationary multiverses: In the early 1980s, physicist Alan Guth introduced the "Inflation Theory", revolutionising modern cosmology. This theory posits that the universe underwent an enormous expansion in its earliest moments. Subsequent developments in this theory suggested that inflation is not a temporary event but an ongoing process, where each "inflation bubble" gives rise to a distinct universe with its own physical laws and variables. According to this hypothesis, the "Multiverse" is akin to a cosmic foam where new universes are continuously generated. Some may



Three major scientific theories or breakthroughs in modern physics propose the possibility of parallel worlds.



DR MUAMAR AL TOBI

The writer is Omani academic and researcher

resemble our own, while others may be vastly different. While this concept remains scientifically debatable, it is supported by mathematical models such as the "Eternal Inflation" framework. String theory and extra dimensions: String theory aims to unify the four fundamental forces of nature: gravity, electromagnetism, and the strong and weak nuclear forces, into a single mathematical framework. Many scientists view it as a promising candidate for a "Theory of Everything". According to string theory, fundamental particles are not point-like but are rather tiny vibrating strings whose frequencies determine their properties. This theory necessitates the existence of extra dimensions beyond the four familiar ones (three spatial dimensions and one temporal). In some models, the number of dimensions extends to ten or eleven. Certain versions of string theory suggest the possibility of parallel universes existing in these additional dimensions, which remain undetectable due to the limitations of our current observational tools. Although string theory remains largely theoretical and lacks experimental confirmation, it raises profound questions about a reality

that might be far richer than our conventional understanding. Observational Evidence and Experimental Tests: Despite the captivating allure of the parallel worlds' hypothesis, a fundamental question arises: To what extent can science empirically validate the existence of parallel worlds with certainty? To address this, we must acknowledge that many proposed multiverse models, assuming they exist, are difficult to test directly due to our physical separation from them. However, some indirect indications suggest that our known universe might not be alone. These include: Cosmic Microwave Background (CMB) radiation measurements: Scientists using the Planck Satellite and WMAP have observed subtle variations in CMB radiation. Some theoretical models interpret these anomalies as potential signatures of collisions or interactions between our universe and other bubbles in the multiverse. Search for particle or energy leakage: If extra dimensions exist, we might detect hints of them in the Large Hadron Collider (LHC). One possible indicator would be an unexplained disappearance of energy or particles, suggesting their leakage into parallel worlds.

SPORTS

GLOBALAUDIENCE



Inter Milan’s Carlos Augusto celebrates scoring their first goal with Alessandro Bastoni. — Reuters

INDIA COULD ‘POTENTIALLY HOST’ ITALIAN SUPER CUP

BANGALORE: Serie A might consider India as a potential host for the Italian Super Cup, in an effort to broaden the tournament’s global audience, the Italian league’s commercial and marketing director Michele Ciccarese has said.

The Italian Super Cup, which is played between the winners and the runners-up of the previous season’s Serie A and Coppa Italia, was hosted in Saudi Arabia in January where AC Milan defeated Inter Milan 3-2 to win the trophy for the eighth time.

When asked about India’s potential to host the Super Cup, Ciccarese confirmed that it aligned with the league’s strategy.

“What we do is to bring our international trophy like the Super Cup in all over the world, for a simple reason, to engage a wider audience and bring the best of that culture,” Ciccarese said during the RCB Innovation Lab Indian Sports Summit.

“So, that’s exactly what we might do, and take the conversation forward to... come here and play in India.”

India’s bid to host the 2036 Olympics is an attempt to position the country as a global sports hub.

Ciccarese suggested that the influence of the Indian Premier League (IPL) cricket competition could promote the country and bring attention to the achievements of other sports, drawing parallels with the “Made in Italy” project.

“Made in Italy is how we engaged with all the 20 Serie A clubs, and each club provides one of the important players to promote, not only the city, but the clubs, the territory, the production chain and everything that is around that club,” he said.

“That’s exactly what we are suggesting, or maybe potentially to create a cross-market activation with the IPL, together in order to help grow the grassroots, to have the right presence in the 2036 Olympics for Indian football.” — Reuters

Oman take on S Korea in crunch WC qualifier today

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MARCH 19

THE runners-up of Arabian Gulf Cup, Oman, will return to action of the AFC Asian Qualifiers - Road to 26 as they will take on group toppers South Korea in a tough clash in the latter’s home in Goyang on Thursday. The match will kick off at the Goyang Stadium at 3 pm (Oman Time). In the other matches of the same group, hosts Iraq will face Kuwait while Jordan will meet Palestine in Amman.

As four more rounds to go, the Red Warriors will eye to clinch full points to revive their hopes in securing a direct slot or advancing to the play-offs for the additional two tickets to the finals. Oman, chasing qualification for the Fifa World Cup for the first time in history, will also be confident to end the remaining games of the qualifiers on a positive note. On the other side, the opponents are well placed to confirm their ticket to the World Cup as two more wins may well be enough to confirm their 11th successive appearance on the global stage.

The team, coached by Rasheed Jaber, had some training sessions at Goyang Stadium which will host Thursday’s encounter. During the training sessions, the domestic experienced coach and his assistant coach Yaqoob al Sabahi besides other members in the technical coaching staff focused on different aspects including practices on creating attempts from different sides, utilising the scoring attempts and other dedicated technical sessions.

The 61-year-old studied all the alternatives of replacing Mohammed al Musallami and Harib al Saadi who will be missed in the starting line-up for the Thursday’s clash.

The last two joiners to the national team camp in South Korea were Issam al Subhi of Iraqi Air Force Team (Al Quwa Al Jawiya) and Mohsin al Ghassani (Bangkok United SC).

“Iraq league is one of the developed league in the region. It is very competitive and I learned a lot during the last games with the team. I will work hard to convert this experience into the national team,” Al Subhi said.

“The team’s preparations are going very well and we are almost adapted with the



The Red Warriors will eye to clinch full points to revive their hopes in securing a direct slot. The match will kick off at the Goyang Stadium at 3 pm (Oman Time).



cold weather,” he added.

“It is very great experience for me with Bangkok United SC at the Thai League. I managed to earn a new experience and

still the experiment is going on. The weather is very cold in South Korea but this is not an excuse. We will deliver our outmost performance to register positive result,” Mohsin said.

“These kind of matches normally depend on small details and we will work hard to snatch the scoring attempts. Technical team and the players are fully aware of the importance of this encounter and will do our best in 90 minutes,” he concluded.

Oman are currently placed fourth in Group B, with six points from two wins and four defeats. South Korea are topping the group with 14 points while Iraq are second with 11 points.

Jordan are in third place with nine points. The first two teams in each group of the Asian qualifiers will secure direct spots while third and fourth place will enter additional qualifying stages.



Sultanate of Oman

MINISTRY OF CULTURE, SPORTS and YOUTH

TENDERS ANNOUNCEMENT

MINISTRY OF CULTURE, SPORTS and YOUTH, Muscat, hereby give notice of tenders for the following projects

Tender No.	Project Category	Location	Last day to Purchase Tender Documents	Last Date of Tender Submission
3/2025	Construction and Maintenance	RENOVATION / MAINTENANCE WORKS IN QURAYAT SPORTS HALL	05/04/2025	14/04/2025
RE-TENDER 29/2024	Construction and Maintenance	DESIGN AND BUILD CONTRACT OF ASPHALT ROADS AND ALLIED WORKS IN CAMEL RACE TRACK AT BIDIYAH IN NORTH SHARQIYA GOVERNORATE	05/04/2025	14/04/2025
RE-TENDER 30/2024	Construction and Maintenance	DESIGN AND BUILD CONTRACT OF CAMEL RACE TRACK, FENCING AND GATES INCLUDING TEMPORARY STABLE, TEST ROOM, STORE AND MEDIA REST ROOM WITH SHADED CARPARK AT MUDAIBI IN NORTH SHARQIYA GOVERNORATE	05/04/2025	14/04/2025
RE-TENDER 31/2024	Construction and Maintenance	DESIGN AND BUILD CONTRACT OF CAMEL RACE TRACK, FENCING AND GATES INCLUDING TEMPORARY STABLE, TEST ROOM, STORE AND MEDIA REST ROOM WITH SHADED CARPARK AT BIDIYAH IN NORTH SHARQIYA GOVERNORATE	05/04/2025	14/04/2025
RE-TENDER 38/2024	Construction and Maintenance	DESIGN AND BUILD CONTRACT OF SYNTHETIC TURF FOOTBAL COURT, GRAND STAND AND ADMINISTRATION BLOCK AT HAIMA IN AL WUSTA GOVERNORATE	05/04/2025	14/04/2025
RE-TENDER 1/2025	Services	ALMANTHORA ALHASANAH OF BIOGRAPHY OF OMAN SCHOLARS	05/04/2025	14/04/2025
RE-TENDER 2/2025	Services	JAWABAT ABU SAID AL KUDAMI	05/04/2025	14/04/2025

Companies, which are registered with the Tender Board and engaged in same category with experience as noted above, can obtain the Tender Documents at the Tender Board E-tendering digital portal link (<http://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>).

The last date of tender submission on above E-tendering site

INTERNAL TENDER COMMITTEE OF MINISTRY OF CULTURE, SPORTS and YOUTH

Any participants have doubt in adopting e-tendering can contact over the phone 24402200 or through email etenderhd@ita.gov.om

OBA General Assembly holds first meeting

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, MARCH 19

The General Assembly of the Oman Basketball Association (OBA) held its first meeting at City Seasons Hotel, chaired by Eng Khalfan bin Saleh al Naabi, Chairman of Oman Basketball Association (OBA), with the presence of board members and representatives from 21 clubs: Al Nasr, Ahli Sidab, Bausher, Sohar, Saham, Salalah, Dhofar, Oman Club, Qurayat, Mirbat, Masirah, Nizwa, Al Ittihad, Al Bashayer, Al Salam, Al Suwaiq, Seeb, Al Shabab, Al Amerat and Al Orouba.

The meeting discussed and approved the general budget for 2025, reviewed amendments to the statutes and examined various activities.

Eng Khalfan bin Saleh al Naabi opened the meeting with a speech praising the continuous cooperation between the General Assembly and the association in supporting activities and developing local competitions. He also congratulated the clubs



The meeting discussed and approved the general budget for 2025.

that secured top positions in the general league and the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth Shield.

Regarding efforts to market the OBA’s activities, Al Naabi stated that they are working on attracting sponsoring companies to organise new tournaments. He indicated that negotiations with several companies have reached final stages, with positive signs of signing multiple agreements soon.

He affirmed that women’s basketball is witnessing continuous growth, citing the U16 girls’ national team’s third-place

finish in the Gulf 3x3 Basketball Championship. He also referred to ongoing projects with the International Federation for Women’s Sports and the Olympic Solidarity Committee aimed at promoting and developing basketball in the Sultanate of Oman.

Regarding upcoming events, Al Naabi revealed that the OBA will host the Arab Youth 3x3 Basketball Championship in September in Dhofar, followed by the Gulf Men’s National Teams Championship in November at Al Mouj Muscat. He urged clubs and fans to support these events and attend the matches.

Representatives from Qurayat, Seeb and Oman Club were appointed to review the minutes of the previous meeting, which were subsequently discussed and approved. The assembly also ratified the technical report, which included national team participation, international referee activities, women’s basketball competitions and sports development programmes.

PSMCRICKET



JAZZ BOYS, FIGHTERS, PIZZA MODOO AND ALI SHAH IN SEMIS

MUSCAT: The PSM Ramadhan tape ball cricket tournament is coming closer to the final stage as Jazz Boys, MIS Fighters, Pizza Modoo and Ali Shah XI qualified to the semifinals.

In the first quarterfinal, Jazz boys defeated Rahat Computers. Asked to bat first, Jazz Boys scored 118 for 7 wickets with Junaid scoring 32 runs not out. Hamza of Rahat Computers took four wickets for 15 runs.

Chasing 118, Rahat scored 93 runs for 8 wickets. Faisal Shah of Jazz Boys claimed two wickets. Juanid was adjudged the man of the match.

In the second quarterfinal, MIS Fighters scored a massive 154 for 1 wicket with Ishtiaq scoring a brilliant 81 runs in 24 balls with nine sixers. Omair hit 43 runs.

Chasing a huge target, Musa XI could only reach 83 for 9 in 8 overs. Ishtiaq won the man of the match award.

In other quarterfinal, Ali Shah XI scored 117 for 6 wickets with Rana Taha smashing a blistering 80 runs in 33 balls (6x8, 4x5).

In reply, MTB Abuqabas fell short by 15 runs. Shahzaib scored 39 runs. Umair took two 2 wickets for Ali Shah. Taha was declared the best player.

Earlier, Pizza Modoo became the first team to reach the semifinals with a walkover win.

RUTHE, 15, BECOMES YOUNGEST TO RUN A SUB-4 MINUTE MILE



AUCKLAND: New Zealand’s Sam Ruthe has made history by becoming the youngest athlete and the first 15-year-old to run a mile in under four minutes, breaking the record by two seconds on Wednesday at Mt Smart Stadium in Auckland.

The middle-distance prodigy completed the race in a record three minutes and 58.35 seconds, with pacemakers Sam Tanner and Ben Wall also finishing within the four-minute mark.

“This was probably my favourite goal that I’ve reached. I’ve definitely enjoyed this one the most, with all the people here supporting me,” Ruthe said.

“This has been the most set up for me, so I’m really happy to have gotten this one.”

Ruthe, who achieved the record-breaking feat 24 days short of his 16th birthday, beat his previous best time of four minutes and 1.72 seconds, which he achieved at the Cooks Classic in Whanganui in January. — Reuters



Los Angeles Clippers’ James Harden (1) shoots against the Cleveland Cavaliers during the second half at Intuit Dome. — Reuters

Clippers rally to beat Cavs, Warriors and Celtics win

KAWHI Leonard scored 33 points and Ivica Zubac added 28 on his 28th birthday on Tuesday as the Los Angeles Clippers rallied to hand the NBA-leading Cleveland Cavaliers a second straight defeat, 132-119.

The Cavs, the runaway leaders in the Eastern Conference, got off to a hot start as they launched a five-game road trip in Los Angeles, scoring 45 points in the first quarter on the way to a 73-68 half-time lead.

But the Clippers, with coach Tyronn Lue absent because of back spasms, held the Cavs to 46 points in the second half in a gritty performance that saw Cleveland drop a second successive game for the first time since January.

Max Strus scored 24 points to lead the Cavaliers, whose 16-game winning streak was ended on Sunday by Orlando.

“It’s my birthday, I had to bring it,” Zubac said, adding that the Clippers “wanted this one bad” as they chase the Golden State Warriors and Minnesota Timberwolves for sixth place in the West and direct entry into the play-offs.

Golden State star guard Stephen Curry was a spectator as the Warriors rebounded from a Monday loss to Denver with a 104-93 victory over Giannis Antetokounmpo and the Milwaukee Bucks in San Francisco.

Warriors coach Steve Kerr said his

“exhausted” superstar needed some rest after a lackluster performance in the loss to Denver.

In Curry’s absence, Jimmy Butler scored 24 points, Brandin Podziemski added 17 as he started at guard and the Warriors thwarted the Bucks’ second-half comeback bid. Draymond Green scored just three points but was a defensive force. He had three of his four blocked shots in the first quarter and finished with two steals to go with his 10 rebounds.

“Draymond, that defence tonight on Giannis was incredible,” Kerr said. “To hold him to five field goals — Draymond showed why he’s one of the great defenders in the world. “It wasn’t just the defence,” Kerr added. “It was the leadership, the energy.”

Kyle Kuzma led the Bucks with 22 points, Antetokounmpo scored 20 and Damian Lillard added 16.

Trailing 58-44 at halftime, the Bucks took a six-point lead late in the third quarter as the weary-looking Warriors coughed up 10 of their 19 turnovers.

But Butler’s three free throws to end the third put the Warriors up by two going into the fourth quarter and the Bucks couldn’t get back in front again.

SCHEIERMAN SHINES

The Celtics were also short-handed in Boston, where Kristaps Porzingis and

rookie Baylor Scheierman stepped up as the reigning champions shook off the absence of star duo Jayson Tatum and Jaylen Brown to beat the Brooklyn Nets 104-96.

Porzingis scored a game-high 25 points with 13 rebounds, a steal and three blocked shots.

Scheierman scored 12 of his career-high 20 points in the fourth quarter as the Celtics finally pulled away in a game in which they struggled to find their offensive footing without Brown and Tatum — both rested with nagging knee injuries.

It gave Scheierman a chance to shine and he took it. He connected on seven of eight shots, including six of seven from three-point range.

His three-pointer to end the third quarter sent Boston into the final period with a 71-70 lead.

The 30th pick in the NBA draft drilled back-to-back threes midway through the fourth that gave the Celtics a four-point lead they wouldn’t relinquish.

“Probably a top-three environment I’ve ever been a part of,” said Scheierman, who left the court to a huge ovation. “It’s just special.”

The play-off-bound Celtics notched their 50th win of the season. Trailing only the Cavs in the East, they have a comfortable lead over the third-placed New York Knicks.

— AFP

Suryakumar to lead Mumbai in IPL opener against Chennai

MUMBAI: Suryakumar Yadav will lead Mumbai Indians in their Indian Premier League opener against Chennai Super Kings on Sunday while regular skipper Hardik Pandya serves a one-match ban.

Mumbai’s slow over-rate in their final league game last year was there third offence of the season, which incurred a one-match suspension for Pandya.

“That is out of my control,” all-rounder Pandya told reporters in a pre-tournament press conference in Mumbai on Wednesday.

“We bowled the last over one-and-a-half or two minutes late. At that point I didn’t know the consequences.”

“It is unfortunate, but the rules say it. I will have to go with the



Suryakumar Yadav will lead Mumbai Indians against Chennai Super Kings on Sunday while regular skipper Hardik Pandya serves a one-match ban. — Reuters

process,” Hardik added.

Mumbai are spoilt for choice though when it comes to leadership.

Apart from India test and one-day captain Rohit Sharma and national T20 skipper Suryakumar, Mumbai also boast pacer Jasprit Bumrah, who has captained in tests and T20 Internationals.

Bumrah will miss the early part of the league with a back injury he suffered in Australia earlier this year.

“I’m lucky that I have three captains who are playing with me,” all-rounder Pandya said.

“I know that there are three different minds, who have led India in different formats and so many years of experience are always there.”

Mumbai and Chennai are IPL’s two most successful sides having claimed five titles each.

Head coach Mahela Jayawardene said Mumbai had identified the core group and added more experience to bid for a sixth IPL trophy.

“It’s not an easy thing to win an IPL trophy, we all know that and Mumbai has been successful delivering that,” the former Sri Lanka captain said.

“We have seven guys in our main squad who have won IPL trophies with different franchises.

“As a coach, I’m trying to get that structure in place, get the best out of them and then add the other elements that we need to add to be a bit more different,” the Mumbai head coach added. — Reuters

OSAKA SURVIVES FIRST-ROUND SCARE IN MIAMI



WTA MIAMI OPEN RESULTS

WOMEN

First round

Viktoriya Tomova (BUL) bt Caty McNally (USA) 6-3, 2-6, 6-3

Gabriela Ruse (ROM) bt Polina Kudermetova (RUS) 6-1, 6-7 (5/7), 6-2

Rebeka Masarova (SUI) bt Greet Minnen (BEL) 6-7 (4/7), 6-4, 7-5

Sorana Cirstea (ROM) bt Elisabetta Cocciaretto (ITA) 6-3, 7-6 (7/5)

Lauren Davis (USA) bt Aoi Ito (JPN) 6-4, 3-6, 6-4

Taylor Townsend (USA) bt Ann Li (USA) 3-6, 6-4, 6-2

Alycia Parks (USA) bt Varvara Gracheva (FRA) 3-6, 7-6 (7/0), 6-3

Ashlyn Krueger (USA) bt Renata Zarazua (MEX) 6-3, 6-2

Sofia Kenin (USA) bt Petra Kvitova (CZE) 6-4, 7-5

Lucia Bronzetti (ITA) bt Jessica Bouzas (ESP) 6-4, 6-3

Magda Linette (POL) bt Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova (RUS) 7-6 (7/3), 6-2

Linda Fruhvirtova (CZE) bt Claire Liu (USA) 7-5, 4-6, 6-3

Hailey Baptiste (USA) bt Olga Danilovic (SRB) 6-3, 6-7 (5/7), 6-1

Naomi Osaka (JPN) bt Yuliia Starodubtseva (UKR) 3-6, 6-4, 6-3

Katerina Siniakova (CZE) bt Yuan Yue (CHN) 6-2, 2-6, 7-6 (7/4)

Rebecca Sramkova (SVK) bt Lucrezia Stefanini (ITA) 3-6, 6-1, 6-3

FOUR-TIME

Grand Slam champion Naomi Osaka rallied to beat Ukrainian qualifier Yuliia Starodubtseva 3-6, 6-4, 6-3 on Tuesday to reach the second round of the Miami Open.

The Japanese star captured her first match win since she reached the third round of the Australian Open -- where she retired with an abdominal injury while trailing Belinda Bencic.

Osaka bounced back from a first-round loss to Camila Osorio at Indian Wells, a match she called the “worst

match I’ve ever played in my life”.

She said Tuesday she’d learned from that disappointing performance.

“(In Indian Wells) I was just over-hitting a lot, so I tried to use my legs,” she said in her on-court interview.

“I was going to run into every corner if I had to, and we were going to have to play for three hours if she was going to beat me.”

In fact, Osaka polished off the victory in two hours and 28 minutes, battling back after dropping the first five games.

Starodubtseva led 4-2 in the second set, but Osaka’s 10 aces helped her recover and she was in control in the third set to launch her bid for a first

title in the city she considers her US home. She was runner-up to Iga Swiatek in 2022 in her best Miami Open finish.

Osaka next faces 24th seed Liudmila Samsonova. The 27-year-old is still trying to return to peak form after returning from a 15-month break last year after giving birth to daughter Shai in 2023.

Her year got off to a promising start when she reached her first final since 2022 in Auckland, but she withdrew with an abdominal injury while leading that match and was later forced out in Melbourne.

In other first-round action, Sofia Kenin beat Petra Kvitova 6-4, 7-5

in a battle of former Grand Slam champions.

Kenin the 2020 Australian Open winner, booked an all-American second-round meeting with world number three Coco Gauff, the 2023 US Open champion who is coming off a fourth-round exit at Indian Wells.

Kvitova, a two-time Wimbledon champion who won the Miami Open in 2023, is still seeking her first match win since returning to action in February, a little more than seven months after giving birth to son Petr last July.

She had stepped away from the game due to her pregnancy on New Year’s Day 2024. — AFP



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Oman's presence at the event includes a pavilion featuring ten Omani tourism companies.

OMAN SHOWCASES TOURISM POTENTIAL AT MOSCOW TRAVEL EXHIBITION

MOSCOW: The Sultanate of Oman is participating in the Moscow International Travel and Tourism Exhibition, showcasing the latest developments in its tourism sector and strengthening ties with global industry leaders.

Oman's presence at the event includes a pavilion featuring ten Omani tourism companies, providing a platform for networking, knowledge exchange, and engagement in specialised seminars and workshops.

Haitham bin Mohammed al Ghassani, Director-General of Tourism Promotion and Official Spokesperson at the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, emphasised the significance of Oman's participation in international tourism exhibitions.

He highlighted that such events serve as key opportunities to enhance the country's global presence and promote its diverse tourism offerings.

The Omani pavilion, designed with traditional architectural elements, integrates modern technology to showcase the Sultanate's tourism potential. According to Al Ghassani, the ministry's objectives for participating in international exhibitions include: Strengthening Oman's presence in global tourism forums; Showcasing the latest developments in the country's tourism sector; Engaging with leading international tourism companies and organisations to foster collaboration and increase tourist arrivals. — ONA

IMF urges SME integration into Oman's SEZ value chain

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, MARCH 19

THE integration of small and medium enterprises into the value chains of special economic zones (SEZs) can help maximise long-term gains to the SMEs and the broader economy, according to a recent report published by the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

In its report, titled 'Fostering Entrepreneurship and SMEs to Support Economic Diversification in Oman', the IMF highlighted the strategic role SEZs play in boosting SMEs.

"The diversity of industries across SEZs presents a unique opportunity for SME growth. Current pilot initiatives to facilitate the integration of SMEs in SEZs should be further expanded.

Efforts should particularly focus on connecting large multinational enterprises operating in SEZs with SMEs, by identifying the needs of the former and helping the latter acquire the knowledge and skills to supply large foreign firms.

Local SMEs in Oman would benefit from policies that enhance spillovers from multinational enterprises (MNEs) by strengthening linkages between them and by increasing local SME capacity," the report stated.

A key recommendation by the IMF is enhancing SME access



The diversity of industries across SEZs presents a unique opportunity for SME growth, according to the IMF.

to technology, digitisation and research and development (R&D) through grants and business incubators, which will increase their competitiveness in both domestic and global markets.

This is in addition to supporting SMEs to reach export markets, through various means such as financial assistance, marketing and connecting entrepreneurs with foreign enterprises and investors, it noted.

Another crucial area highlighted by the IMF is workforce development. The organisation stresses the importance of collaboration between universities and SEZs to identify future workforce needs,

and adapting courses to business requirements. Incentivising internships of students in local SMEs and foreign multinational enterprises is also key to building human capital, it further states.

Additionally, the organisation recommends enabling SMEs to hire skilled foreign workers through wage subsidies or time-bound cash grants.

Additionally, incentives may be offered to encourage high-skilled expatriates working in Oman to create SMEs within SEZs

Lastly, the IMF recommends linking SMEs with larger multinational firms to help SMEs "acquire the knowledge

and skills to meet production requirements for foreign companies". It suggests that the 'Invest in Oman' initiative could be used to facilitate connections between SMEs and multinational enterprises.

The Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) currently offers various incentives for SMEs including mandating the allocation of 10 per cent of the value of public tenders and procurements within its zones to SMEs.

This is in addition to the introduction of a general business incubator and a specialised supply chain and logistics incubator.

Pact signed to establish a manufacturing facility in Nizwa

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, MARCH 19

OMAN-BASED Bukaka International LLC, in a significant boost to Oman's industrial sector, has signed an agreement with the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn) to establish a state-of-the-art manufacturing facility in Nizwa Industrial City.

The RO 3 million investment will focus on producing essential oil and gas equipment, strengthening local supply chains, and supporting Oman's In-Country Value (ICV) strategy.

In an exclusive interview with *Oman Observer*, Endra Satya Prihandito, General Manager of Bukaka International LLC, emphasised the facility's importance in advancing Oman's industrial capabilities.

"This agreement marks a major milestone for Bukaka in Oman. By localising production, we are reducing reliance on imports while providing high-quality engineering solutions tailored to regional needs."

CUTTING-EDGE TECHNOLOGY AND SUSTAINABILITY

The upcoming facility will integrate advanced technologies to ensure efficiency and high production standards. "Our plant will feature automated welding systems, CNC



Abdullah Afifuddin Suhaeli, Director (right), signs the agreement on behalf of Bukaka International LLC.

machining, and advanced non-destructive testing (NDT) technologies," Prihandito said.

"These innovations will enhance precision, improve safety, and ensure that our products meet the highest industry benchmarks."

Sustainability is also a priority for the project. The company plans to implement energy-efficient production processes and waste reduction strategies, aligning with

Oman's goals for industrial sustainability.

STRENGTHENING OMAN'S INDUSTRIAL BASE

The Nizwa facility is a key part of Bukaka International's regional growth strategy. Once operational, it will manufacture pressure vessels, process skids, storage tanks, and structural steel components, helping meet the growing demand for locally produced oil and gas equipment.

"This investment is not just about expansion—it's about contributing to Oman's industrial future," Prihandito explained.

"Localising production allows us to respond quickly to market needs while supporting the country's economic diversification goals."

The project also aligns with Oman's ICV strategy by prioritising local suppliers and talent development. "We are committed to strengthening the domestic supply chain by sourcing materials locally and partnering with Omani businesses," he added.

CREATING JOBS AND BUILDING SKILLS

Bukaka International's new facility is expected to create job opportunities and enhance workforce skills in Oman. The company plans to implement specialised training programmes to equip local professionals with the expertise needed in

the manufacturing and engineering sectors.

"We see this facility as a platform for talent development," Prihandito said. "By providing hands-on experience and industry-specific training, we aim to build a skilled workforce that can drive innovation in Oman's manufacturing sector."

The company is also collaborating with Omani universities and vocational training centres to ensure a steady pipeline of skilled engineers and technicians.

FUTURE EXPANSION AND GROWTH PLANS

Looking ahead, Bukaka International is exploring additional investment opportunities in Oman and the wider GCC region. The company is considering expanding production lines and potentially entering new sectors such as renewable energy.

"Our long-term vision is to continuously expand our capabilities and contribute to Oman's industrial excellence," Prihandito stated. "

We are open to strategic partnerships and new projects that align with our expertise and the country's economic priorities."

With this agreement, Bukaka International is taking a significant step toward enhancing Oman's manufacturing capabilities and positioning itself as a key player in the region's industrial growth.

ADVERTORIALS

NEWEXPERIENCE



The Ford Explorer redefines the SUV experience.

OWN THE FORD EXPLORER WITH ATTRACTIVE RAMADHAN BENEFITS

MUSCAT: The Ford Explorer is now available with exclusive Ramadhan benefits. The benefits include 5 years/100,000 km of free service, a 5-year/100,000 km manufacturer’s warranty, 5 years/100,000 km of roadside assistance, Free Insurance, and 1-year free registration. Customers can also get a chance to win 1 out of 8 iPhone 16 Pro Max in the raffle draw (Conditions apply. Please visit the Ford showroom for details.). The offer ends on April 17, 2025.

The Ford Explorer redefines the SUV experience, seamlessly blending bold design, cutting-edge technology, advanced safety features and exceptional power for an unmatched driving experience.

Whether conquering rugged terrain or navigating city streets, the Explorer’s intelligent systems ensure supreme comfort, control and confidence, making it the ultimate companion for families and adventure seekers alike.

The Ford Explorer is powered by a formidable 2.3-litre turbocharged EcoBoost engine, delivering an impressive 300 horsepower and 420Nm of torque. Paired with an all-new 10-speed automatic transmission, the Explorer offers smooth, responsive shifts for an effortlessly dynamic drive.

Its Intelligent All-Wheel-Drive (AWD) system, combined with a Terrain Management System featuring seven selectable drive modes, including standard Sand Mode, ensures that the Explorer is built to tackle any road or off-road challenge with ease.

The Ford Explorer is engineered to elevate every journey with its suite of state-of-the-art technology. A centrally mounted 8-inch digital touchscreen with the intuitive SYNC 3 infotainment system provides seamless access to navigation, entertainment and connectivity features.

With available Apple CarPlay integration, drivers can stay connected without distraction. A wireless charging pad and multiple USB ports, including new type-C outlets, offer ultimate convenience, while the available 980-watt, 12-speaker B&O premium audio system immerses passengers in a superior listening experience.

Safety is at the heart of the Ford Explorer, equipped with Ford Co-Pilot360, an advanced suite of driver-assist technologies designed to enhance protection on the road. Standard features include Pre-Collision Assist with Automatic Emergency Braking, Pedestrian Detection, Forward Collision Warning, Dynamic Brake Support and Blind Spot Information System with Cross-Traffic Alert

In Oman, Ford vehicles are brought to you by Arabian Car Marketing Co. LLC. Please log on to www.fordoman.com, www.facebook.com/FordOman, www.youtube.com/FordOmanChannel or www.instagram.com/ford_oman for the latest news, test drive requests and the latest press releases.

NATIONAL FINANCE PROVIDES VARIETY OF FINANCING OPTIONS

MUSCAT: Dedicated to offering customers the ideal solutions for transforming their homes into comfortable and functional havens, National Finance, the leading finance company in the Sultanate of Oman, has renewed its strategic partnerships with esteemed retail brands for Consumer Durables Financing (CDF) solutions.

This initiative enables customers to effortlessly acquire elegant, high-quality furniture and home décor at Arina Homes and Homes R Us, explore innovative kitchen solutions and designs at Alma Kitchens, and equip their homes with top-tier electronics and appliances at Abraj Muscat Electronics.

Through these collaborations, National Finance empowers customers to enhance their homes with a thoughtfully curated selection



This initiative enables customers to effortlessly acquire elegant, high-quality furniture.

of sophisticated, durable products that seamlessly blend aesthetic appeal with practical functionality.

Commenting on the offering, Tariq al Farsi, Chief Executive Officer at National Finance, stated, “We are constantly evolving our offerings to provide customers with innovative and improved financing solutions that not only address their aspirations for lifestyle upgrades but also offer them the financial flexibility they need.

Through our strategic partnerships with leading retailers, we aim to offer seamless and flexible financing, allowing customers to instantly acquire the décor and appliances they desire while benefiting from a repayment structure that alleviates financial pressures.

We recognise the significance of creating a comfortable and functional living space, and our goal is to provide financing solutions that remove any barriers to achieving this vision.”

Ramadhan just got bigger: MG’s Festival of Winning

MG Motor Oman is bringing the spirit of generosity and celebration to new heights this Ramadhan with its Festival of Winning.

Purchase any MG vehicle during the holy month for an incredible opportunity to be one of 10 lucky customers to get their car for free!

In addition to this once-in-a-lifetime chance, MG Motor Oman is offering exceptional benefits, making this the perfect time to drive home a brand-new MG.

- Customers can enjoy:
- Free service 140,000 km / 7 years (whichever comes first)
 - Free insurance
 - Free registration
 - Free window tinting

As a special Ramadhan surprise, simply walking into an MG showroom and enquiring about any MG car gives visitors the chance to win 1 of 100 smartphones!



In addition to this once-in-a-lifetime chance, MG Motor Oman is offering exceptional benefits.

MG OMAN’S CSR INITIATIVE – DRIVE WITH PURPOSE
This Ramadhan, MG Motor Oman is committed to giving back to the community with its Drive with Purpose initiative.

For every MG test drive, RO 5 will be donated to Dar Al Atta to support those in need. Visit our showroom, experience the thrill, and make a difference.
Mohsin bin Hani al Bahrani,

CEO of MHD ACERE, expressed his excitement about this grand offer, stating: “Ramadhan is a time of giving, and at MG, we wanted to make this season extra special for our valued customers. With the Festival of Winning we are not just offering incredible deals but also the opportunity to win big. We invite everyone to visit our showrooms, experience our exceptional lineup, and take advantage of this fantastic opportunity.”

Don’t miss out on the biggest Ramadhan celebration yet! Visit your nearest MG showroom today or call 80080111 to learn more.

LOOK OUT FOR THE NEW MG MODELS!
While exploring MG’s exciting Ramadhan offers, keep an eye out for the all-new MG HS, MG RX9, and MG7, showcasing innovation, style, and performance like never before.

BANKDHOFAR UNDERSCORES FRAUD AWARENESS AMID RISING REPORTS

MUSCAT: As part of its commitment to customer protection and financial literacy, the bank has announced an awareness campaign designed to educate customers about the latest fraud scenarios and help them protect their personal and banking information.

In recent months, the bank has witnessed a surge in fraud cases, where customers have unknowingly shared sensitive account information, resulting in unauthorised transactions. The bank’s initiative aims to raise awareness around these fraudulent activities and equip customers with



the knowledge to safeguard their accounts.

Some of the cases that have been reported include:

- Case 1: A customer shared their account details with a recruitment office for female workers and later received an SMS notifying

them that their email address had been updated. The next day, RO 501 was deducted via Internet banking.

- Case 2: A customer visited a website to raise a complaint and entered their account details. Soon after, multiple OTPs were received, and RO 5,000 was transferred to an unknown beneficiary.

- Case 3: A fraudster impersonated a Customer Protection Authority official through a video call and instructed the customer to visit a fake website to resolve an issue.

The customer provided personal details, leading to RO 35,000 being

deducted from their accounts.

- Case 4: A fraudster impersonating Omantel staff requested sensitive account information. After the customer shared the details, they suspected a scam and contacted the call centre.
- Case 5: A customer clicked on a fraudulent link from the ‘Hurmoz House’ labour department SMS, leading to unauthorised transactions totalling RO 10,950.

In each of these instances, BankDhofar’s call centre agents acted swiftly to block cards, disable digital channels, and freeze accounts, minimising further losses.

Sohar International announces RO 2.1 million debt relief initiative

MUSCAT: In line with its unwavering commitment to social responsibility and customer-centric values, Sohar International has announced a debt relief initiative totalling RO 2.1 million.

This initiative aims to support a select group of financially distressed Omani customers by alleviating their financial burdens and fostering economic stability.

As part of this initiative, eligible customers will have their outstanding debts with the bank absolved, provided they meet specified criteria including but not limited to financial, social, or health-related challenges. By addressing these pressing concerns, Sohar International seeks to provide much-

needed relief to individuals facing financial hardship, ensuring they can rebuild their financial well-being with greater confidence.

Commenting on this initiative, Abdulwahid al Murshidi, Chief Executive Officer of Sohar International, stated: “At Sohar International, we recognise our responsibility to contribute to the financial security and prosperity of our community.

This debt relief initiative is a testament to our unwavering dedication to supporting those in need and reinforcing our role as a trusted financial partner. By easing financial burdens, we aim to empower our customers, enabling them to navigate challenges and



This initiative aims to support a select group of financially distressed Omani customers by alleviating their financial burdens and fostering economic stability.

regain economic stability.”
This initiative aligns with Oman’s sustainable development goals

and Oman Vision 2040, reflecting Sohar International’s ongoing commitment to creating meaningful financial solutions that positively impact individuals and contribute to the nation’s long-term economic resilience.

It is worth noting that in 2024, Sohar International was recognised with the prestigious ‘Exemplary CSR Leadership’ accolade at the Oman CSR Summit and Awards. This award highlights the bank’s strategic commitment to corporate social responsibility (CSR), emphasising human development, sustainability, and community empowerment.

Through key initiatives, including the enhancement of healthcare,

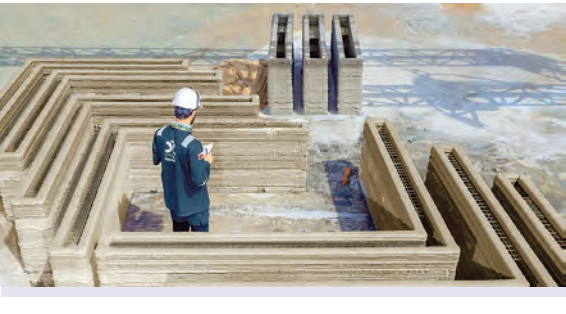
support for entrepreneurship, and promotion of local culture, Sohar International has consistently demonstrated a long-term approach to societal development.

The debt relief programme further reinforces the bank’s ongoing efforts to foster positive economic impact and advance social inclusion.

As a key pillar of its corporate responsibility, Sohar International continues to drive impactful initiatives that strengthen community support, financial inclusion, and long-term prosperity. Through innovative and customer-focused strategies, the bank remains dedicated to enhancing the financial well-being of individuals and businesses alike.

BUSINESS

SHORTTAKES



The company has already implemented several groundbreaking projects using 3D concrete printing.

INNOTECH LEADS OMAN’S 3D PRINTING REVOLUTION IN CONSTRUCTION

MUSCAT: Innotech, a pioneering Omani company in 3D printing, is redefining the construction sector with cutting-edge technology and sustainable solutions. Founded in 2013 and operating under the supervision of the Public Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises, Innotech is at the forefront of transforming traditional building methods to enhance efficiency, reduce costs, and minimise environmental impact.

Eng Othman bin Maktoum al Mandhari, co-founder of Innotech, highlighted the company's commitment to integrating advanced construction techniques with sustainability. “We focus on developing localised concrete mixes suited to Oman's environmental conditions, ensuring reduced carbon emissions and minimal construction waste,” he said.

The company has already implemented several groundbreaking projects using 3D concrete printing. These include a multi-purpose hall for Petroleum Development Oman (PDO), service facilities at Al Naseem Public Park, the Ibn Al Nazar Center in the Wilayat of Samayil for the Ministry of Education (currently under construction), the “Mini Oasis” project in Al Zama, the Wilayat of Al Rustaq for Omran (currently under construction), and six service stations and administrative offices in Al Wusta Governorate (currently under construction).

Innotech's innovation and rapid growth have attracted significant investment, notably from Itcha Group, to scale operations and advance next-generation construction technologies. The company has also gained international recognition, ranking among the top five regional startups in modern construction technologies at a prestigious global competition. — **ONA**

BOJ KEEPS INTEREST RATES STEADY, WARNS OF TRUMP TARIFF RISKS

TOKYO: The Bank of Japan kept interest rates steady on Wednesday and warned of heightening global economic uncertainty, suggesting the timing of further rate hikes will depend largely on the fallout from potentially higher US tariffs.

But Governor Kazuo Ueda also said rising food costs and stronger-than-expected wage growth could push up underlying inflation, highlighting the central bank's attention to mounting domestic price pressures.

“Japan's wage and price conditions are on track, possibly stronger than expected. But the uncertain US and global outlook makes it difficult to assess the potential impact on Japan's economy,” Ueda told a press conference.

“As such, we would like to look at upcoming data in early April, to reconsider our forecasts,” Ueda said.

— **Reuters**

Taxi Muscat rolls out unique B2B2C concept

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, MARCH 19

TAXI Muscat, the newest of Oman’s on-demand ride-hailing taxi operators, has announced the introduction of a first-ever Business-to-Business-to-Customer (B2B2C) model, enabling local hotels, shopping malls, hospitals, and tourist complexes, among other commercial establishments, to partner with them in a mutually beneficial manner.

Since its soft launch last year, the company has been leveraging its advanced mobile platform to offer passengers and third-party partners a differentiated service that combines flexible ride options, a high degree of convenience, budget-friendly fares, and tracking features for enhanced safety and security.

“Our ride-hailing app incorporating a B2B2C model is not only unique to Oman but is a global first as well,” said Khalid bin Mohammed al Alawi, CEO of Big Data Technologies, which owns and operates Taxi Muscat.

“Developed in-house here in Oman, this app makes ride-hailing a simple, affordable, and safe experience for tourists and other passengers while also creating multiple job opportunities for local Omanis and businesses.”

Speaking to the *Observer*, Alawi outlined the novelty behind the service’s distinctive B2B2C offering. “In a standard B2C model like Uber, a customer opens an app, requests a ride and a driver accepts the request.

However, in the B2B2C model, businesses act as intermediaries to facilitate transportation for their guests.

This means that customers do not need



“Our ride-hailing app incorporating a B2B2C model is not only unique to Oman but is a global first as well.

KHALID BIN MOHAMMED AL ALAWI
CEO, Taxi Muscat

to download an app; instead, the business—whether an airport, hotel, hospital, or mall—provides access to transportation services. No other company globally has implemented this kind of technology. We take pride in being pioneers in this space,” he explained.

According to the CEO, Taxi Muscat’s B2B2C framework is flexible and scalable. Businesses can either operate the application themselves or co-brand it for public visibility. For instance, Muscat International Airport could integrate its logo alongside Taxi Muscat’s, allowing passengers to book rides directly at kiosks without needing an app.

Furthermore, the model enables multiple layers of business opportunities. A hotel, for example, might outsource its transportation services to another entity, which can further subcontract to other operators.

Each stakeholder in this chain benefits from commissions, ensuring profitability while maintaining affordability for customers, he noted.

A key feature of Taxi Muscat’s ride-hailing platform is its queue-based ride allocation, says Alawi. “Instead of multiple taxi drivers responding to a request, creating a chaotic situation at pick-up points like airports,

our system assigns a ride only when the passenger reaches the front of the queue.

The passenger simply provides a code to the first available taxi, ensuring an organised, efficient process. This also simplifies cancellations—if a passenger no longer needs a taxi, the next available driver takes the ride without disruption.”

Beyond providing seamless on-demand cab services, Taxi Muscat aims to support the domestic road travel needs of international tourists.

“We provide comprehensive concierge transportation services for hotels, covering both short and long trips. By offering affordable transport solutions, we aim to attract more tourists to Oman. Our research at key locations, such as cruise ports, indicates that transportation costs deter many visitors from exploring the country. Addressing this issue can significantly boost local tourism.”

A key distinguishing factor is the ability of users—particularly international tourists—to access Taxi Muscat’s services without needing OTP verification via their international numbers.

“Tourists find our service a welcome change because, traditionally, hotel guests must visit a concierge desk, request a taxi, negotiate fares, and then proceed with their journey. With our service, the entire process is digitised—guests simply input their number, receive a ride code via WhatsApp, and complete their trip effortlessly,” Al Alawi explained.

He also emphasised that Taxi Muscat’s driver-centric business model will attract more taxi owners to partner with the brand. Around 880 taxis are currently registered with Taxi Muscat, a figure targeted to grow to 4,000 vehicles by the end of this year, the CEO added.

INDIA MOVES TO IMPOSE TARIFFS ON STEEL IMPORTS

NEW DELHI: India is poised to join the wave of protectionist measures in the steel sector, preparing plans to impose import tariffs one week after US President Donald Trump's decision to impose 25 per cent tariffs on steel and aluminium imports.

The Indian Ministry of Commerce has proposed a 12 per cent tariff on a wide range of imported steel products, at a time when the global steel market is facing turmoil.

Many countries are taking protectionist measures to counter the influx of the metal into their markets, particularly from China, which produces one billion tons of steel annually.

The Indian Ministry of Commerce said in a statement that safeguard measures are used in “times of unfavourable and unexpected import surges that cause or threaten to cause permanent damage to the domestic industry.”

India is the world's second-largest steel producer and has joined many countries from Asia to Europe and Latin America



The Indian Ministry of Commerce has proposed a 12 per cent tariff on a wide range of imported steel products.

in trying to adapt to President Trump's decision to impose tariffs on US imports.

Meanwhile, China's real estate crisis has led to a significant increase in its steel exports,

contributing to a large surplus in the global market amid weak global demand.

According to the preliminary decision issued after an investigation by the Indian Trade

Commission, the proposed tariffs on Indian steel imports will be in place for 200 days, with a final decision to be issued after 30 days of consultation and a public hearing. — **ONA**

Turkish lira touches record low, stocks and bonds slide

ISTANBUL: Türkiye's lira fell as much as 12.7% and touched a new all-time low of 42 to the dollar on Wednesday, with bonds and stocks also tumbling sharply, after authorities detained President Tayyip Erdogan's main political rival.

The move against Ekrem Imamoglu, the mayor of Istanbul, was called “a coup attempt” by the opposition and appears to cap an aggressive months-long legal crackdown on opposition figures

across the country which has been condemned as a politicised attempt to silence dissent.

Imamoglu was expected to be named as the main opposition's presidential candidate within days. The lira traded at 38.90 to the dollar at 1016 GMT, from a close of 36.67 on Tuesday, having recouped some of the losses from the all-time low it hit earlier - but still having had its biggest decline since July 2023.

The earlier tumble to 42 marked one of the lira's largest absolute



A money changer holds Turkish lira banknotes at a currency exchange office in Ankara. — **Reuters**

intraday moves on record.

Türkiye's international government bonds also came under pressure with longer-dated maturities suffering the sharpest falls. The 2045 maturity fell 1.6 cents to be bid at 85.117 cents, its lowest level since

“In Türkiye this morning, bonds and FX are coming under pressure after a potential presidential candidate, the mayor of Istanbul, was arrested,” said Frantisek Taborsky, EMEA FX & fixed income

strategist at ING.

“(Türkiye's lira) is the most heavily positioned carry-trade in the emerging markets space at the moment in our view, and a sharp move could potentially lead to further outflows. On the other hand, we should see local banks providing some FX support.”

Finance Minister Mehmet Simsek said they were doing everything necessary to ensure healthy functioning of the markets, without giving further details. — **Reuters**

OPINION

The state of the Arab economy in the next phase



HAIDER AL LAWATI
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The writer is a Muscat-based economic analyst who previously worked for CBO and OCCI

DESPITE the wars and conflicts affecting Arab economies—especially the recent violent and destructive war in Gaza and other Arab countries—some economic indicators in the region continue to show remarkable growth. However, this progress is overshadowed by rising unemployment rates and increasing job layoffs across Arab nations.

The Arab Investment and Export Credit Guarantee Corporation reported that the Arab region's GDP grew by 1.8% last year, surpassing \$3.5 trillion. This growth occurred despite numerous challenges, including ongoing conflicts in Gaza, Lebanon, and Syria, as well as external pressures on the Arab oil and gas sectors.

Recent data indicate that economic growth is concentrated in several key Arab countries, particularly Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Egypt, Iraq and Algeria, which collectively account for over 72% of the region's total GDP.

Looking ahead, the Arab economy is expected to expand further, with a projected growth rate of 4.1% in 2025. This positive

outlook is primarily driven by 14 Arab countries, including nine oil-producing economies, which contribute more than 78% of the region's GDP. The growth stems from improved revenues in the oil and gas sectors, as well as increased production of goods and services, despite external policies—such as those implemented by former US President Donald Trump—that aimed to suppress oil prices and challenge Arab economic reliance on these industries.

According to the International Monetary Fund, Arab economic performance varied in the past year due to a 4% decline in crude oil production and a 1% drop in global oil prices. Additional factors impacting the region include the widening conflict in Gaza, Lebanon, Yemen, Syria, and Iraq, the ongoing war in Sudan, climate change, and rising external debt.

Despite these challenges, economic data show an improvement in per capita GDP across Arab countries, rising by 1.2% to \$7,557 in 2024. Projections suggest a further 1% increase, bringing the average to \$7,602 in 2025. When adjusted for purchasing power parity, per capita GDP rose by 2%, reaching

The Arab Investment and Export Credit Guarantee Corporation reported that the Arab region's GDP grew by 1.8% last year, surpassing \$3.5 trillion. This growth occurred despite numerous challenges, including ongoing conflicts in Gaza, Lebanon, and Syria, as well as external pressures on the Arab oil and gas sectors.

approximately \$19,000 in 2024. However, substantial economic disparities persist across the region.

The Arab region's population grew by 2%, surpassing 467 million in 2024. However, unemployment remains a pressing concern, with the average jobless rate reaching 9.7%—a worrying indicator for future economic stability.

On the issue of debt, Arab nations continue to seek external loans to service financial obligations. In 2024, government debt as a percentage of GDP declined to 48.3%, with projections suggesting a further decrease to 47.6% by the end of 2025. Conversely, external debt rose to approximately 56% of Arab GDP in 2024, with expectations of a slight decline to 54.5% in 2025.

Meanwhile, Arab countries are working toward reducing inflation rates, leveraging budget surpluses, enhancing foreign trade value, and expanding foreign currency reserves.

These efforts aim to strengthen economic resilience and ensure the region can sustain imports of goods and services for extended periods in the coming years.

CHINA STOCK RALLY IS A WORRYING FLIGHT TO SAFETY

BY HUDSON LOCKETT

HONG KONG: Chinese retail investors appear to be regaining some of their long-lost risk appetite in local stocks. That should be a welcome sign that efforts to restore confidence in the economy are finally having an impact.

On closer look, however, the recent equities boom should worry Beijing.

The problem is punters' lack of appetite for Chinese stocks writ large, as the benchmark CSI 300 index of top Shanghai- and Shenzhen-listed stocks is up less than 2% year to date.

A minor rally from official vows to boost consumption, which pushed the gauge into positive territory for the year last week, has since fizzled after details were released.

Instead, money is flowing into Hong Kong's stock market, where the Hang Seng Index has risen more than a fifth this year - the best performance among major indices globally.

That's driven mostly by mainland traders: net purchases this year have totalled HK\$386 billion (\$49.7 billion), per figures from Hong Kong's Stock Connect trading scheme, already an increase of 190% on the first full quarter of 2024.

Much of those flows have been into large tech listings like Alibaba and Tencent after AI start-up DeepSeek released its low-cost large language model, fuelling hopes that China is catching up with the West.

The hype looks justified, especially now that Beijing has thrown its weight behind the trend.

But Western tech giants have yet to revolutionise their own businesses, or bottom lines, through AI, suggesting any benefits to their Chinese rivals will also take time to manifest — and retail investors are not the patient type.

That is one strike against the rally's staying power.

The second is that the Hong Kong rally appears to be partly driven by a desire to minimise exposure to the mainland's currency risk. US President Donald Trump has already raised tariffs on Chinese exports by 20 percentage points this year and more levies are expected for many of America's top trading partners on April 2, once a review of reciprocal tariffs is complete.

Beijing has kept the yuan steady at around 7.2 per dollar so far this year but Trump's standing threat to raise levies on Chinese goods to 60% has stoked expectations of inevitable devaluation to cushion the blow to the country's export-reliant economy.

Against this backdrop, Hong Kong's stock rally looks more like a bet against China's economy than a vote of confidence. —Reuters

Could Trump's DEI agenda follow into the UK?

DONALD Trump's first act as the president of the United States was to sign an executive order on January 20 to end "radical and wasteful" DEI – Diversity, Equity and Inclusion – programmes in the US. This prompted several global companies, including Amazon, Meta, Ford and McDonald's, to go ahead and pull back on their DEI initiatives. The question arises, will more and more companies follow this trend?

It appears Trump's attack on DEI will not be slowing down in a hurry. In fact, it is likely to escalate. Only recently he blamed a plane crash in Washington DC on a diversity programme at the Federal Aviation Administration.

In the financial district of London, there are numerous firms that are US-headquartered. American businesses, legal, insurance, tech, etc. are booming in London. Major companies in the capital, over the years, have had DEI as a priority of their internal strategies. While some businesses, particularly Lloyds of London, have made DEI a key priority.

But the backlash from the US has already caused some boards and HRs considerable concern. As businesses work out internally what their approach will be, from a UK perspective, what does the law say? Partner at law firm Siddons, Helen Crossland, is clear that 'in comparison to the US and other jurisdictions, the UK has greater statutory protections when it comes to discrimination.'

Matthew Newnham, partner at Birketts, explained that under the Equality Act 2010 there are "obligations on employers to take certain positive steps in favour of those employees with 'protected characteristics'".

Newnham added that under the current Labour government, "these duties are likely to be further strengthened". However, Libby Payne, pointed out that "legal obligations and DEI policies are two separate things."

Payne, a partner at Withers, added: "While comprehensive DEI policies are potentially valuable in preventing and defending claims, on their own they are unlikely to be sufficient, the most



US President Donald Trump sits at the Resolute Desk, where he signed executive orders during a brief event in the Oval Office at the White House in Washington. — Reuters



ANDY JALIL

The writer is our foreign correspondent based in the UK

important element is the culture of the business. A business with a culture that is not aligned with its own DEI policies will see little benefit from them and similarly a business with a naturally diverse and inclusive culture will have all the benefits in terms of ease of recruitment and retention and reduced liability for claims, even if they do not have extensive policies in place."

Crossland added that the UK laws "butt against some business leaders' ideological preferences", but noted that "rolling back DEI initiatives will risk breaking the law and inviting PR damage that could be unpredictable and commercially costly.

Focusing on the legal sector: A partner at CM Murray, Emma Bartlett, noted that "many UK law firms of US headquartered firms have invested significant time and resources into DEI".

Her opinion is that this war on DEI in the US is "unlikely to result in such UK firms taking a similar path." From a legal view of the law

sector, she also pointed out that "it is a legislative requirement and a regulatory duty" as regulators, the Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA), "monitors diversity in UK law firms."

Bartlett explained: "It requires UK law firms to report on their diversity, requires those working in regulated UK firms to treat each other fairly, and SRA Principle 6 provides that solicitors and law firms must encourage equality, diversity and inclusion."

Payne added that "Clients are frequently interested in the make-up of teams, with diversity within a team and an inclusive culture being viewed as a positive signal of a high performing team."

However, a handful of US law firms in London were approached for comment on their stance on the US backlash. Notably, most of those requests were ignored. But newly appointed senior partner at Kennedys, John Bruce was clear that "globally, Kennedys remains committed to DEI initiatives – and proudly so."

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INDIAN male MBA , 20 years experience in Oman & GCC in Project sales/ Dealer market in All construction materials including Cables & Accessories having D/L looking for the post of Sales Manager/ Assistant Manager.
Contact: 00968 78099493

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CHIEF accountant, MBA finance, 9+ years experience in financial statements, auditing, budgeting, VAT, tax, fixed assets, reconciliation, payroll. Seeking a full-time or part-time position in a senior role. Contact: akramhaniffa@yahoo.com / 93988825.

B. COM. 35 years of experience in accounts, sales coordinator, admin, HR, personal assistant, document controller with Oman D/L, looking for a job.
Contact: 92558734

SEEKING a new Job / Logistics & supply chain professional with 10-plus years experienced in Export & Import of Sea, Land & Air transport modes (Email: nouchimp1986@gmail.com, Mob: 79820286)

ACCOUNTS/ Finance: Indian male (MBA Fin) having more than 19 years of experience in Oman accounts & finance looking for suitable placement, NOC available and can join immediately.
Contact: 92076716

MASTER'S graduate in MSc Global logistics, operations & supply chain management from London, seeking a full-time job in Oman. Possess 2 years of sales executive experience in London and 1 year as a purchase executive in Oman. Holding a valid Oman D/L. Contact: 77231865, email: finan8157@gmail.com

INDIAN Male, Storekeeper / Document Controller 2+yrs of experience in GCC, Completed BCA, ready to join immediately. Email: swamierzhasouth@gmail.com
GSM: +968 71818173

FINANCE Manager, CA,CPA,20 years experience (Oman& India). Financial reporting, Budgeting, Taxation, Financial modelling, Feasibility, Valuation. Available to join immediately.
92148608

A SUDANESE resident in Salalah, BSc of administrative sciences with 21 years of experience in the fields of (sales/ management/ logistics and fleet).
Contact: +968 98510880.

INDIAN male (Mechanical Engineering) with 3 years experience in Diesel engine works (Gensets/ Engines), 2 years in Machine Maintenance, seeks job.
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INDIAN male 14 years experience light/ heavy driver. Looking for suitable opening currently in Oman.
Contact: 77050986/ 91280205, email: kokkadmou@gmail.com

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Contact: 78611653. Email: jobcpacma@gmail.com

ACCOUNTANT with 5 years expertise in Accounts Payable, Receivables, Financial Reporting, VAT, Payroll, and Bank & Cash Reconciliation. Actively looking for new opportunities.
Contact: 79791746
Email: Ibrahimshaw52@gmail.com

SIT. WANTED

MECHANICAL ENGINEER (8+ yrs exp, Indian Male) Planning, MEP, QA/QC certified. Elevator & construction industry background.
Contact: 92712939, anwarmhdas@gmail.com

INDIAN Male /10+ years of experience in Sea, Air & Land shipments/ Looking for Sr. Logistics operations role. Aware of Incoterms & international procedures.
MOB: 79820286
EMAIL: nouchimp1986@gmail.com

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Ramadhan

4

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Grand Mufti of Oman



If a person swallows a pin or pieces of paper, does it break the fast?

It has been unanimously agreed by scholars that even swallowing of inedible items like leather, paper and hair will be treated on par with breaking the fast with edible ones. Allah knows best.



HOW AL KAMIL EMBODIES THE SPIRIT OF GIVING



HADITH GUIDE FOR THE FAITHFUL

Narrated Abu Hurayrah:

The Prophet said: When any of you hears the summons to prayer while he has a vessel in his hand, he should not lay it down till he fulfils his need.

QURAN VERSE OF THE DAY



The righteous will be amidst shades and fountains. And fruits as they desire. "Eat and drink pleasantly, for what you used to do." This is how We reward the doers of good.

(al Mursalat)



DUA SUPPLICATION TO ALLAH

O Allah, on this day, multiply for me its blessings, and ease my path towards its bounties, do not deprive me of the acceptance of its good deeds, O the Guide towards the clear truth.

BY AHMED AL KAABI

RAMADHAN is more than just a month of fasting; it is a season of giving where diverse factions of society come together to engage in social and cultural events that enrich the community. This blessed time fosters an unparalleled spirit of generosity, as individuals and organisations alike strive to contribute to the betterment of those in need.

Charitable acts during Ramadhan are not merely obligations; they embody the core values of solidarity and cooperation encouraged by Islam. During this time, the desire to make a meaningful impact leads people to actively seek causes that resonate with them, creating a vibrant tapestry of kindness across communities.

The Wilayat of Al Kamil W'al Wafi charity team is at the forefront of this spirit, working diligently to enhance charitable initiatives that support vulnerable individuals and families. As demand for humanitarian aid rises during Ramadhan, the team has committed itself to raising awareness about the significance of charitable work and encouraging community involvement.

Shaikh Hamad al Hashimi, the founder, shares that the initiative aims not only to provide immediate assistance but also to empower struggling families to achieve self-sufficiency.

Beginning as a personal endeavour, Shaikh Hamad's vision has since thrived, attracting a dedicated group of young volunteers. With support from Shaikh Saud bin Badr al Barwani, the former governor of the region, the team's efforts have expanded significantly, fostering a culture of volunteerism among the youth.

Throughout Ramadhan, the team



implements various projects, such as distributing Iftar meals at designated locations and providing food baskets through vouchers or complete packages. In partnership with the local Zakat Committee, they offer financial support to unemployed individuals, demonstrating their commitment to uplifting those in need. Furthermore, the welfare of orphans is a focal point, as the team provides monthly sponsorships and launches community awareness campaigns to boost charitable giving.

Their initiatives do not cease with the end of Ramadhan; they continue beyond the holy month through sustainable projects aimed at long-term support. These efforts include ongoing orphan sponsorship, providing financial aid for low-income families, assisting with rent and utility bills, and running community service camps. They also focus on offering medical aid, vocational training programmes—such as sewing workshops—and support for the elderly and people with disabilities. Their comprehensive approach reflects a steadfast dedication to making a lasting difference in society.

The team's activities rely on a multi-

faceted funding strategy that encompasses backing from the Oman Charitable Organization, which supports their Iftar initiatives, and partnerships with the Al Yusr Charity Foundation. Regular contributions from private companies, such as the Natural Fertiliser Company and local gas firms, along with generous individuals and philanthropists, play a crucial role in sustaining their operations. The team also collaborates with other charitable organisations in Muscat, facilitated by the Ministry of Social Development and the Social Development Committee at the Governor's Office. This collaboration ensures that their reach and effectiveness continue to expand.

As they gaze towards the future, the Wilayat of Al Kamil W'al Wafi charity team is eager to implement sustainable investment projects, such as establishing a charitable endowment to ensure the longevity of their volunteer efforts. They aim to refine their administrative structures, bolster financial and technological resources, and continually evaluate their impact through public opinion surveys and assessments from the Ministry of Social Development. Shaikh Hamad al Hashimi emphasises that the foundation of their success lies within the community itself; public awareness and support are vital for the continuation of their charitable initiatives.

To make a donation, individuals can contribute through the Jood platform via a dedicated link or by making direct bank deposits into the team's accounts. The wilayat charity team remains unwavering in its mission to promote the spirit of solidarity during Ramadhan, addressing essential community needs and reinforcing the belief that charitable work is a shared responsibility—a collective effort crucial for its sustainability and growth.



The healing power of kindness: How compassion boosts your health

BY NAJAH AL RIYAMI

IN OUR fast-paced world, kindness stands as a powerful force that enhances both mental and physical health. More than just a moral virtue, science reveals that acts of kindness reduce stress, bolster the immune system, and improve overall well-being. Small gestures—such as helping a stranger, offering a kind word or demonstrating patience—can create a lasting impact on ourselves and those around us.

Oman, renowned for its warm hospitality and deep-rooted traditions of generosity, embodies the very spirit of kindness and community. Whether through the time-honoured custom of offering coffee and dates to guests, the unwavering support among neighbours, or national efforts to assist those in need, the Omani culture thrives on compassion and mutual respect.

When asked about the significance of kindness, Rob Scott Hughes, Managing Partner at Harakati, reflects, “I can’t control the world, but I can choose how I respond to it. I aim to treat others as I would like to be treated.” He adds, “Kindness feels natural to us as social beings. It draws us together, strengthens our connections, and, in a way, I believe we’re wired to feel good when we show kindness to others.”

Mahatma Gandhi’s famous quote, “The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others,” highlights the transformative power of selfless giving. By helping others, we shift our focus from personal worries to a larger purpose, fostering fulfilment and emotional growth. Service cultivates empathy, resilience

and gratitude while revealing our true strengths and values. This, in turn, creates a ripple effect, inspiring kindness in others. Ultimately, in giving, we gain a deeper sense of identity, connection and meaning in our lives.

Practising kindness triggers the release of oxytocin, serotonin and dopamine in our brains—hormones that reduce stress, enhance mood, and promote heart health. Research indicates that acts of kindness also lower cortisol, the hormone responsible for stress, leading to improved emotional resilience. Studies suggest that kind individuals tend to have stronger immune systems, recover faster from illnesses, and even enjoy longer lives. Older adults who engage in volunteer work or compassionate acts often experience less cognitive decline and greater life satisfaction.

While showing kindness to others is vital, self-kindness holds equal importance. Negative self-talk and self-criticism activate the body’s stress response, heightening anxiety. In contrast, self-compassion alleviates stress, fosters emotional strength, and enhances mental well-being. Simple habits — such as speaking kindly to oneself, practising gratitude, or establishing boundaries — can significantly improve both emotional and physical health.

Kindness can manifest as a quiet force that lifts spirits in the smallest moments — whether it’s offering a helping hand to a struggling worker or sharing a warm smile that acknowledges someone’s presence. As Mark Twain eloquently stated, “Kindness is the language which the deaf can hear and the blind can see.” It transcends barriers, communicated

not in words but through gestures of care and connection.

Roya, a business owner, recounts her experience of unexpected kindness whilst travelling alone in India. On her birthday, a fellow traveller from Spain — someone she had just met — organised a surprise celebration for her. “It was one of the most selfless acts of kindness I’ve ever encountered — making me feel seen, valued and celebrated, with no expectations in return,” she shares.

Science demonstrates that witnessing or receiving kindness increases the likelihood of us being kind ourselves. The ripple effect is undeniable — one small act can inspire countless others. Even simple gestures, like a compliment or an expression of gratitude, can uplift someone’s day.

Kindness is a straightforward act that requires no special skills—only a genuine willingness to be present and compassionate. This simple choice has the power to heal, connect and transform lives. From the quiet courage of Rosa Parks to the selfless compassion of Mother Teresa, it’s the everyday acts of kindness that resonate most deeply.

Over time, these ripples of kindness can transform relationships, workplaces and even entire societies. A culture of kindness fosters empathy, reduces stress and strengthens human connections. By embracing kindness, we not only enhance our own well-being but also contribute to a world where compassion becomes second nature.

In essence, kindness is contagious — and in a world that can sometimes feel disconnected, even the smallest act has the potential to ignite a wave of positivity far beyond what we can perceive.

RAMADHAN TRADITIONS AROUND THE WORLD

Sheer Korma, hospitality, and community prayers in Afghanistan

In Afghanistan, Ramadhan is a time of profound spirituality and rich traditions. As the moon is sighted, families prepare for a month marked by fasting and reflection. The Iftar table is adorned with sweet dishes, notably Sheer Korma, a vermicelli dish prepared with milk and nuts. The spirit of hospitality flourishes during this month, with families routinely inviting neighbours to join in breaking fast. Mosques become bustling centres of prayer, where nightly gatherings foster a sense of unity and community. Special midnight prayers draw worshippers, reinforcing faith and devotion. Charity holds a significant place in Afghan Ramadhan, as people make efforts to support those in need, embodying the essence of compassion and solidarity. For Afghans, Ramadhan transcends beyond fasting; it symbolises resilience, community, and a heartfelt connection to faith and tradition.

DAILY HEALTH TIPS TO REMEMBER



Adjust your medication timing

Fasting during Ramadhan can influence the timing and effectiveness of medications for those who depend on them for chronic conditions. If you take prescribed medications, consult your healthcare provider beforehand to discuss how to adjust your medication schedule during the holy month. For example, certain medications that should be taken with food may need to be rescheduled to ensure they are taken during non-fasting hours. Some individuals might find it necessary to shift doses to just before Suhoor or immediately after Iftar. Additionally, monitoring any changes in your body’s response to medications due to fasting is crucial, as hydration and food intake can impact absorption. Keeping track of how you feel and any side effects is valuable for your healthcare provider. If you notice significant changes in your health while fasting, don’t hesitate to seek assistance. Being proactive in managing your medications during Ramadhan can lead to a safer, healthier fasting experience.

SIGNIFICANT HISTORICAL EVENTS IN ISLAM

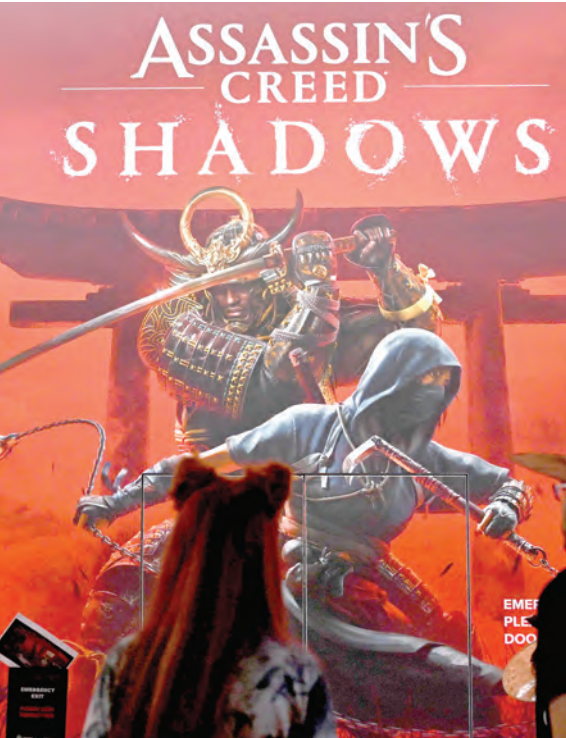


1095 CE: The First Crusade Begins

The First Crusade, called by Pope Urban II in 1095, sparked religious wars between Christians and Muslims, aimed at reclaiming Jerusalem. It culminated in the city’s capture in 1099 and the establishment of Crusader states, intensifying hostilities and shaping medieval history while prompting responses from leaders like Saladin.

FEATURES

Historic fantasy ‘Assassin’s Creed’ sparks bitter battles



THE “ASSASSIN’S CREED” series of video games is adored for painstaking historical accuracy, but also sparks controversy with heavy use of artistic licence — most recently with a black samurai in the latest instalment, “Shadows”.

Released on Thursday, “Shadows” takes place in 16th-century feudal Japan, replete with imposing fortified cities and tranquil temples crafted by developers.

“They’ve done a really fantastic job with very accurate recreations,” said Pierre-Francois Souyri, a historian among a dozen French and Japanese experts consulted for the game in a bid to weed out clichés and anachronisms.

Since being tapped in late 2021, Souyri says he has answered “a hundred or more questions” from the development team, ranging from how salt was produced to how puppet shows were staged.

Souyri adds that within the carefully crafted setting, “it’s not too hard to come up with characters who find themselves having adventures” in “a very eventful period” marked by intense conflicts.

The casting of a Black samurai, Yasuke, as one of the two primary protagonists in the upcoming “Assassin’s Creed” game has ignited a fierce online debate. The other protagonist is a young female ninja, Fujibayashi Naoe. The portrayal of an African character as a samurai led to significant backlash, prompting a petition in Japan that amassed over 100,000 signatures. Critics argue that this decision reflects a troubling lack of historical accuracy and cultural respect from the game developers.

Historian Souyri contends that the game’s framing of Yasuke as a samurai is a creative interpretation rather than a strict historical account, emphasising that the game should not be treated as a doctoral thesis. Yasuke is a historical figure, albeit one whose exact status in the samurai hierarchy is debated among historians. Goza, an assistant professor specialising in medieval history, asserts that there is no definitive proof that Yasuke possessed the qualifications to be recognised as a samurai. He points out that historical records often highlight Yasuke’s skin colour and physical prowess, rather than his martial accomplishments. Goza suggests that the warlord Oda Nobunaga may have kept Yasuke close primarily to showcase him.

The controversy surrounding Yasuke’s inclusion has become one of the most contentious issues within the “Assassin’s Creed” franchise, even before the game’s release. A report by the European Video Game Observatory noted that Ubisoft’s announcement of Yasuke sparked a wave of outrage online, and much of the discourse was influenced by a small group of American conservative accounts. Their involvement is seen as part of a broader culture war.

Ubisoft’s long-standing hesitance to feature a Japan-based game may have changed due to the success of recent titles like “Sekiro” and “Ghost of Tsushima.” While the fascination with Japan’s feudal period continues to grow, Goza warns that these portrayals may inadvertently reinforce stereotypes, turning them into a “clear example” of how cultural depictions can sometimes perpetuate discrimination. —AFP



In US, a pastry chef attempts to crack an egg-free menu

SINCE AVIAN flu turned eggs into a luxury item, pastry chef Annie Clemmons has spent countless hours in her Maryland workshop, racking her brains about how to replace them in her recipes.

“It won’t taste like chickpeas!” she said as she poured aquafaba — the watery byproduct of the cooked pulses — into the bowl of her electric mixer.

A customer had recently ordered a meringue-based red fruit pavlova, and requested that it be delivered the same day.

Instead of beating egg whites until they are stiff, as in the traditional recipe, Clemmons uses an alternative well-known to vegan and egg-intolerant cooks.

“It takes a bit longer,” she said, adding: “You won’t see the difference in colour or taste.”

And for the custard, she uses cornstarch as a thickener.

“It won’t be as creamy,” she said, adding a spoonful of cardamom to enhance the flavour.

Like gold

The increasing number of outbreaks of avian flu on US farms has made eggs an expensive — and rare — commodity.

And so Clemmons has been looking for ways to replace this “foundational ingredient.”

“They’re like gold,” she said, showing off the 20 eggs she still has in stock. “Never in a million years did I think it would be a luxury item.”

She estimates that an egg that used to cost eight cents now costs 45 cents — more than five times the price.

The 51-year-old set up Chapman’s DC — a pastry home-delivery business — in 2020, after her hotel and restaurant-sector work dried up due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

“I have to think really hard about when I’m going to use those eggs,” said Clemmons, whose business delivers to homes in the Washington metro area. “I don’t know next time I’ll be able to use eggs with abandon.”

“I’m grateful again that I have substitutes and other tools to use, but I really, really wish we could get the egg back soon,” she added.

No endpoint

The White House this week touted a sharp drop in wholesale prices for standard eggs “for three straight weeks.”



According to the United States Department of Agriculture, this is the result of both sluggish demand in the face of high prices and a respite of avian flu, which has so far led to the euthanasia of more than 30 million laying hens.

“However, these declines have yet to be reflected on store shelves,” the agency said in a recent statement.

According to consumer price index data, egg prices increased by over 12 per cent in February, and by close to 59 per cent from a year before.

Clemmons noted that President Donald Trump promised that the price of groceries would start to fall on the day after he took office.

“I can’t see the endpoint,” she said.

The single mother said she prides herself on



her customers’ support when they are faced with adjusted recipes or price increases.

But, she added, the new administration’s mass layoffs of federal workers have undoubtedly hampered demand for her cakes.

“I live in the Washington DC area and a huge portion of my community has suffered a disruption, this upheaval of losing their income, their jobs, their livelihood,” she said.

“People are being a little more cautious with their spending,” she added. “So I don’t get as many orders.”

Beyond eggs, Clemmons said she is also concerned about a potential knock-on effect from Trump’s tariff policies on another essential ingredient: sugar.

If sugar prices were to rise sharply, Clemmons expects she would then reach her limit, and could be forced to start looking for a new job. —AFP