

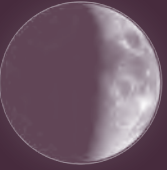
OMAN
Observer
DAILY



VOL. 45, NO. 100
PAGES 20 | BAISAS 210


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04
RAMADHAN
1447 AH
SUNDAY
FEB 22, 2026



1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30

PRAYER TIMINGS

FAJR
05:19 AM

DHUHR
12:25 PM

ASR
03:44 PM

MAGHRIB
06:11 PM

ISHA
07:22 PM

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INBRIEF

HIS MAJESTY GREETSA
SAUDI KING SALMAN

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to King Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud, of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, on the occasion of his country's Founding Day. In his cable, His Majesty expressed his sincere greetings and best wishes to King Salman, praying to Allah the Almighty to grant the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia permanent stability and progress.



1,681 JOB VACANCIES
IN STATE UNITS

The Ministry of Labour announced the availability of 1,681 job vacancies in a number of government units, and registration for competition for the opportunities will continue until March 5. The ministry said that the announced jobs are distributed across various educational qualifications, starting from a bachelor's degree and down to below a General Education Diploma, as 1,503 vacancies will be announced with a Bachelor's degree and a post-general education diploma, and 178 job vacancies with a General Education Diploma and below. This announcement is one of the job announcements for the administrative units of the state issued by the ministry for the year 2026, according to a well-thought-out plan and based on the actual needs of the government units.

Oman’s non-oil exports increase by 7.5 per cent

MUSCAT: Oman’s foreign trade remained resilient in 2025, with the total value of trade reaching RO 40.4 billion, despite a notable decline in oil export revenues. The latest figures underline the growing importance of non-oil exports and re-export activities in sustaining economic momentum, in line with the

Sultanate of Oman’s long-term diversification strategy. According to data released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information, non-oil exports rose by 7.5 per cent to approximately RO 6.7 billion in 2025, compared with RO 6.2 billion in 2024. Re-export activities recorded even stronger growth, increasing by 20.3 per

cent to RO 2.056 billion, up from RO 1.708 billion a year earlier. This growth reflects the continued revitalisation of ports, improvements in logistics infrastructure and government initiatives aimed at strengthening Oman’s role as a regional trade and distribution hub. Non-oil export growth was driven mainly by products

from the chemical and related industries, metals and metal products, plastics, as well as machinery and electrical equipment. These sectors have benefited from increased industrial capacity, higher value-added production and improved access to regional and international markets.

DETAILS ON P13

Iran president says will not bow to US pressure

P r e s i d e n t T r u m p p u s h e s A m e r i c a t o w a r d s w a r

IRANIAN President Masoud Pezeshkian said on Saturday that his country would not bow its head to pressure from world powers amid nuclear talks with the United States. “World powers are lining up to force us to bow our heads... but we will not bow our heads despite all the problems that they are creating for us,” Pezeshkian said in a speech carried live by state TV. Meanwhile, President Donald Trump has pushed the United States to the brink of war with Iran even as aides urge him to focus more on voters’ economic worries, highlighting the political risks of military escalation ahead of this year’s midterm elections. Trump has ordered a huge buildup of forces in the Middle East and preparations for a potential multi-week air attack on Iran. But he has not laid out in detail to the American public why he might be leading the US into its most aggressive action against the Islamic Republic since its 1979 revolution. Trump’s fixation on Iran has emerged as the starkest example yet of how foreign policy, including his expanded use of raw military force, has topped his agenda in the first 13 months of his second term, often overshadowing domestic issues like the cost of living that public opinion polls show are much higher priorities for most Americans. A senior White House official



Iranian women break Ramadhan fast during Iftar, at the Imamzadeh Saleh mosque in Tehran on Saturday. — AFP

said that despite Trump’s bellicose rhetoric there was still no “unified support” within the administration to go ahead with an attack on Iran. Trump’s aides are also mindful of the need to avoid sending a “distracted message” to undecided voters more concerned about the economy, the official said on condition of anonymity because they were not authorised to speak to the press. White House advisers and Republican campaign officials want Trump focused on the economy, a point that was stressed as the top

campaign issue at a private briefing last week with numerous cabinet secretaries, according to a person who attended. Trump was not present. A second White House official, responding to questions for this story, said Trump’s foreign policy agenda “has directly translated into wins for the American people.” “All of the President’s actions put America First — be it through making the entire world safer or bringing economic deliverables home to our country,” the official said. — Agencies

New study probes why chronic pain lasts longer in women

NEW YORK: To all the women who’ve heard the frustrating “it’s all in your head” in response to medical maladies, a new study out feels your pain. Research published in the journal Science Immunology shows that women actually do experience exacerbated chronic pain compared to men - a gap that can be explained by biological differences in the immune system. “The pain of women has been overlooked in clinical practice,” lead author Geoffroy Laumet said, “with the idea that it’s more in the mind,

or that it’s because women are softer and more emotional.” “But here, our study shows that the difference is real... it’s not a social construct. It has a real biological mechanism that is behind it.” Pain occurs when neurons react to stimuli: stubbing your toe, or tripping and skinning your knee, for example. But chronic pain persists with mild to no stimulation - and women constitute 60 to 70 per cent of the patients experiencing it, Laumet said.



The research could open new doors to improved pain treatment.

The scientist at Michigan State University said his team set out to explore how hormone-regulated immune cells, known as monocytes, impacted pain resolution. Researchers learned those monocytes play a key role in communicating with the neurons that sense pain - and then working to shut down those pain-sensing neurons by producing the anti-inflammatory interleukin 10, or IL-10. Their studies weren’t originally aimed at exploring potential

differences related to gender, but the data was clear: it took longer for pain to resolve in female mice, and the monocytes producing IL-10 were less active in them. Those cells are more active in males, according to the study. Laumet is hopeful the new research could open new doors to improved pain treatment. In the long-term, he said research can probe how to stimulate the monocytes and boost IL-10 production to “enhance the body’s ability to resolve pain.” — AFP

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Oman Radio offers Ramadhan shows

THE Sultanate of Oman Radio has announced a diverse programming schedule for the holy month of Ramadhan 1447 AH across its various channels — General Radio, Youth Radio, Holy Quran Radio and English Radio — featuring a mix of live shows, dramas, cultural discussions and educational content.

Among the prominent live programmes is ‘Good Morning,’ a daily show presented by Aisha al Hinai and Khalid al Badai that accompanies listeners at the start of their day during Ramadhan. Another highlight is ‘Ramadhan Nights,’ presented by Maryam al Badai and directed by Shamsa al Raisi, which covers cultural, social, economic and artistic activities taking place across the country.

The programme ‘With Ramadhan,’ broadcast from Salalah on Friday and Saturday evenings, explores Ramadhan traditions locally, regionally and across the Islamic world.



من تلاتية بحر العرب
للكتاب: يوسف الخزامي
الإعداد الدرامي: نور الدين الهاشمي
إخراج: محمد الورددي

The station is also airing several radio dramas. The series ‘Ras Madrasah,’ adapted from the novel by Dr Younis al Akhzami, revisits legends of shipwrecks in the Arabian Sea and portrays Bedouin life in the Ras Madrasah region. Directed



الإذاعة الكلاسيكية | إذاعة الشباب | إذاعة سلطنة عمان | إذاعة القرآن الكريم | OMAN FM

by Hamad bin Amer al Wardi, it features a cast of Omani actors including Ahmed bin Darwish al Hamdani, Talib bin Mohammed al Balushi and Hilal al Hilali.

Another drama, ‘People of the Sea,’ written and directed by Talib bin Mohammed al Balushi, explores Oman’s maritime heritage and social life shaped by navigation, trade and travel while highlighting values such as tolerance and social cohesion. Meanwhile, ‘Al Hara’ focuses on the everyday interactions of residents in a neighbourhood and the values of generosity, solidarity and respect among neighbours.

The schedule also features a wide range of recorded programmes covering religion, culture, health and social issues. These include

‘Our Values Are Life,’ presented by Sheikh Abdullah bin Ali al Shahri, which addresses ethical values within families and society, and ‘The Harmonious Discourse,’ presented by Dr Mohammed bin Said al Maamari, which introduces Oman’s Human Harmony Project aimed at strengthening understanding between peoples.

Entrepreneurship and creativity are highlighted in the programme ‘We Can,’ which hosts successful entrepreneurs and small business owners from across Oman. Cultural and literary discussions are also part of the lineup, including ‘A Book I Liked,’ which promotes reading and introduces notable works in literature, history and science.

Youth Radio offers interactive

competitions and youth-focused programmes such as ‘Zawarah Competition,’ where participants virtually visit different locations while answering questions related to Omani culture, heritage and tourism. The channel also features health and awareness programmes addressing fasting, social issues and community well-being.

Specialised content is broadcast through Holy Quran Radio, which presents religious discussions, competitions and programmes on Islamic teachings during Ramadhan.

Meanwhile, English Radio provides programmes for a wider audience, including lifestyle, faith-based and discussion shows such as ‘Jump Start,’ ‘Love Your Life,’ and ‘Late Night Drive.’

Through this varied lineup, the broadcaster aims to offer informative, spiritual and entertaining content that reflects the spirit of Ramadhan while engaging listeners across the Sultanate of Oman. — ONA



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SHORT TAKES



The meeting reflects the centre’s commitment to deepening mutual understanding and strengthening Oman-US ties.

OMAN CULTURAL CENTER HOSTS RAMADHAN DIALOGUE

WASHINGTON: As part of ongoing efforts to strengthen Omani cultural engagement in the United States and reinforce bridges of dialogue between nations, the Sultan Qaboos Cultural Center hosted a special Ramadan iftar and panel discussion in the US capital with representatives from the Al Amana Centre.

The event was held under the auspices and in the presence of Dr Majid al Khalili, Executive Director of the Center, and attended by Sabra al Hooti, Deputy Chief of Mission at the Embassy of the Sultanate of Oman in Washington.

The gathering reflects the centre’s continued commitment to deepening mutual understanding and strengthening the longstanding ties between the Sultanate of Oman and the United States through meaningful cultural and intellectual exchange.

The evening opened with welcoming remarks by Hiba Abdulkhaliq, Senior Programme Officer at the Sultan Qaboos Cultural Center, who highlighted the important role cultural institutions play in fostering spaces for constructive dialogue and mutual respect.

The programme featured a presentation titled ‘A Sacred Trust,’ which highlighted the enduring humanitarian legacy of the Al Amana Centre since its establishment in 1891. The presentation traced the Centre’s contributions to education and medical services and its evolution into a leading institution for interfaith dialogue in cooperation with the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs.

The presentation was delivered by Justin Meyers, Executive Director of the Centre, and Mohammed bin Ali al Shuelli, Associate Director, who outlined key milestones in the Centre’s institutional development and its contemporary initiatives promoting coexistence and trust-building among communities. The evening concluded with a discussion on the importance of experiential learning as a pathway for moving societies beyond tolerance toward mutual respect and reconciliation, followed by an engaging dialogue with attendees on advancing these shared values across diverse international contexts.

ISC OMAN HOSTS WOMEN’S GALA 2026

MUSCAT: The Indian Social Club (ISC) Oman – Deccani Wing successfully hosted its much-anticipated annual ladies’ event, drawing enthusiastic participation from over 100 women in a vibrant celebration of culture, talent, and togetherness.

The event unfolded in an atmosphere of warmth and elegance, bringing together members of the community for an evening filled with camaraderie and joyful engagement. A series of lively activities — including interactive games, spot questions, lucky draws, and cookery contests — added excitement and encouraged participants to showcase their creativity and skills.

The programme was meticulously coordinated by Deccani Wing Ladies Co-ordinator Kauser Suhail, with the support of Mariam Khatoon and a dedicated team of volunteers. Special appreciation was extended to Humera Fasi, Nikhat Ali, Sameena Mannan, Tamkeen, Akhsia, Saher, and Zainab for their invaluable contributions to the event’s success.

The evening was gracefully anchored by Rania Manaal Sabri, whose confident and engaging presentation kept the audience entertained throughout.

A major highlight was the cookery contest themed ‘Ramzan Special – Dahi Bada’ and ‘Eid Special – Sheerkhurma.’ The competition witnessed enthusiastic participation, with entries judged by renowned HyderabadI influencer and recipe blogger Afshaan Jabeen.

ROYAL NAVY OF OMAN JOINS INTERNATIONAL NAVAL REVIEW IN INDIA

VISAKHAPATNAM: The Royal Navy of Oman took part in the International Maritime Review 2026 held in Visakhapatnam, India, with its vessel RNOV Sadah.

The participation reflects the longstanding ties between the Sultanate of Oman and India, as well as growing cooperation in joint naval training, exercises and the exchange of expertise.

Such engagements contribute to strengthening maritime security and underline Oman’s active role in



regional and international waters. They also reaffirm the country’s commitment to enhancing strategic maritime partnerships and promoting cooperation among friendly nations.

The international naval review brought together naval forces from several countries, providing a platform to showcase maritime capabilities while fostering collaboration and mutual understanding among participating nations. — ONA

Shinas market supports productive families

AHMED AL KAABI
SHINAS, FEB 21

THE seasonal Ramadhan market in Shinas has become a lively hub that supports productive families and small businesses while reviving flavours closely tied to Omani heritage.

Ramadhan evenings are not only a time of prayer and reflection across Al Batinah North Governorate, but also a period of vibrant community activity. In Shinas, the markets capture this spirit, where the sounds of vendors and the movement of shoppers blend with the scent of freshly prepared dishes.

The Ramadhan market for productive families has witnessed a strong turnout since the beginning of the month. Organised by Shinas Municipality, the initiative aims to support home-based businesses and encourage local production. Stalls offer a variety of items ranging from traditional Ramadhan foods and sweets to handicrafts, giving families and young entrepreneurs an opportunity to showcase their talents.

The activities of productive families extend beyond the municipal market to several locations across the wilayat. One of the busiest spots is the area near Shinas Fort, where food carts and small enterprises attract both residents and visitors.

Backing productive families and home-based ventures also contributes to household stability. Many of these initiatives are led by women who work diligently to supplement family income. The holy month provides an ideal opportunity for them as demand rises for traditional foods, sweets and hospitality items that feature prominently on Ramadhan tables.



The Ramadhan market for productive families, organised by Shinas Municipality, is drawing large crowds.

Ramadhan offers an opportunity to focus on preparing and selling food products. This seasonal shift provides an additional income stream and helps support families as living costs increase

Local resident Yusuf al Abri said he prefers to buy from productive families whenever possible. “During Ramadhan, I make it a point to purchase from them because my support directly benefits their households. Many depend on these activities as a source of income, and their products carry a special homemade quality,” he said.

Meanwhile, Mirza bin Murad al Balushi, who operates a cart near Shinas Fort, noted a significant increase in demand. “Sales usually double, especially before Iftar and after Taraweeh prayers. People look for traditional flavours such as luqaimat and other Ramadhan favourites,” he explained.

Another participant, Yusuf al Sharqi, said the market allows families to present dishes that remain central to Gulf culinary traditions, including samosas, baklava, dalaj and sweet vermicelli.

For some vendors, the season also means adjusting their usual routines. Al Sharqi explained that while his family’s work during the rest of the year is connected to fishing, Ramadhan offers an opportunity to focus on preparing and selling food products. This seasonal shift provides an additional income stream and helps support families as living costs increase.

Although vendors say turnout this year is slightly lower due to markets being spread across different locations, traditional dishes continue to dominate Ramadhan tables in Shinas.

More than just a marketplace, the Ramadhan market reflects the spirit of the holy month — a place where heritage, entrepreneurship and community solidarity come together, highlighting the role of local initiatives in supporting families and preserving cultural traditions.

Pakistani community launches food drive

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, FEB 21

In the spirit of generosity and compassion that defines the holy month, an elite group of the Pakistani expatriate community in Oman has launched its annual Ramadhan Ration Drive 2026, providing essential food supplies to over 100 deserving families across Oman.

The initiative was formally inaugurated by Syed Naveed Safdar Bokhari, Ambassador of Pakistan to Oman, at Ghuman House, which served as the central hub for organising and distributing the relief goods.

Each ration pack includes essential items such as flour, sugar, cooking oil, pulses and dates, ensuring families can



Each ration pack ensures families can observe their fast with dignity and ease.

observe their fasts with dignity and ease.

Speaking at the inauguration, Ambassador Bokhari praised the Elite Group of the Pakistani Community in Oman for their

consistent philanthropic efforts. “The Pakistani community in Oman has always been at the forefront of charitable activities. Seeing this elite group come together to support over 100 families is a testament to the true spirit of Ramadhan and the values of our people,” he said.

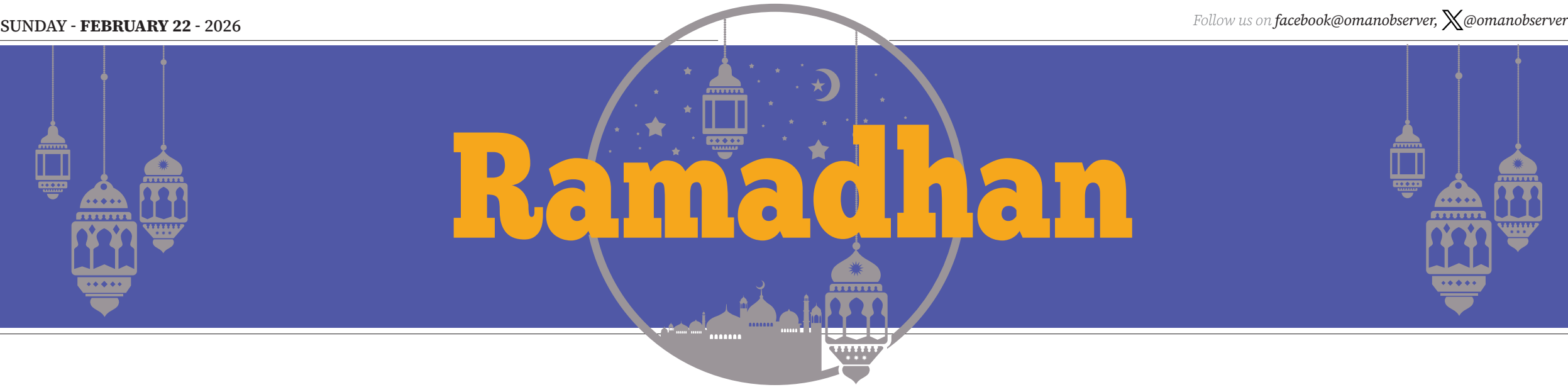
The organisers, Ibrahim Ahmed and Syed Zaib Hassan Jaffery, reaffirmed their commitment to ensuring the rations reach those most in need. By focusing on local communities in Oman, the drive aims to ease the financial burden on low-income households during the festive month.

The initiative, targeting families across various regions of Oman, received widespread

appreciation from residents. “This drive is a shining example of how the Pakistani expatriate community positively contributes to the social fabric of Oman while supporting their own,” noted community members.

The Ramadhan Ration Drive highlights the enduring commitment of the Pakistani community in Oman to philanthropy and social solidarity, offering practical support and reinforcing community bonds during the holy month.

Elite Group members Qamar Riaz, Ahmed Ghuman, Kashif Gujjar, Bilal Yousaf, Usman Hashmi, Ahmed Raza Qadri and Aqib Gujjar, actively assisted in coordinating the drive.



A SEASON OF LIGHT, GENEROSITY AND TOGETHERNESS

environment. For many, the first night of Taraweeh marks the heartfelt beginning of Ramadhan, and families often attend in large numbers to join communal prayers.

“Ramadhan is a time of reflection, prayer and inner peace,” said Ali al Qanubi. “Seeing the mosques ready and the streets beautifully decorated fills our hearts with serenity and hope. It reminds us of the spiritual essence of this holy month.”

At home, families across the Sultanate of Oman are gearing up for the holy month. Prayer spaces are arranged, kitchens are stocked for Suhoor and Iftar, and traditional dishes are being prepared to welcome family and friends. Markets and souqs have seen a surge in activity as people purchase dates, essential goods, traditional foods and decorations, while also preparing charity contributions for the less fortunate.

“Ramadhan is the season of giving,” said Ibrahim al Maawali. “People are not only shopping for their families, but also preparing to support others through charity, food donations and shared meals. It is a time to extend kindness and generosity to the whole community.”

The holy month also encourages parents to teach their children the values of sharing and helping others. Many families involve their children in charitable acts, from preparing food baskets for those in need to assisting with decorations and community activities. These traditions help instil the values of generosity, patience and empathy from an early age.

Throughout Oman, Ramadhan is more than a period of fasting; it is a season of faith, unity and tradition. Families reconnect, neighbours collaborate, and communities organise initiatives that highlight the spirit of compassion and togetherness. The streets, mosques, homes, and markets come alive with activity and devotion, reflecting the enduring cultural and spiritual heritage of Oman.

Ramadhan in Oman remains a deeply cherished time, where faith, family and community intersect, creating an atmosphere of harmony and shared purpose. It is a month that reminds every Omani of the importance of giving, supporting one another, and nurturing the values that make the nation resilient, compassionate, and united.

Aquinex

NOTICE FOR PRE-QUALIFICATION OF CONTRACTORS
PQ Reference: Q260032

Aquatic Investments Excellence LLC (Aquinex) is spearheading the development of a mega aquaculture facility in Al Jazer, Sultanate of Oman. Spanning an area of approximately 80 km2 with an initial target production capacity of 70,000 MT per year.

Aquinex invites Expressions of Interest (EOI) from reputed and experienced contractors for the **Pre-Qualification process** regarding the upcoming construction of **Al Jazer Shrimp farm accommodation** and its associated facilities.

Project Name: Al Jazer Shrimp Farm Project

RFPQ Title: PreQualification of Contractors for the Construction Works of Al Jazer Shrimp Farm Accommodation

1. Scope of Work
Phase 01 involves a landmark construction program comprising **75 buildings** with an estimated built-up area of **41,889 m²**. The scope includes:

- Residential Developments:** Accommodation for workers, senior staff, VIPs, and family apartments.
- Community & Lifestyle Facilities:** Administration buildings, mosque, retail shops, gyms, swimming pools, and central dining/laundry services.
- Critical Infrastructure:** Internal road networks (including MEP), Sewage Treatment Plants (STP), and Reverse Osmosis (RO) facilities.

2. Eligibility
Contractors must be registered and possess a proven track record in executing projects of similar magnitude and complexity within the Sultanate of Oman.

3. Request for Pre-Qualification Documents
Interested parties are requested to submit their credentials and request the Pre-Qualification (PQ) documents by emailing procurement@aquinex.om no later than **26/02/2026**.

SAUD AL ANSARI
MUSCAT, FEB 21

CITIES and villages across the Sultanate of Oman are decked up for Ramadhan, creating scenes of warmth, spirituality and celebration. Streets are adorned with crescent moons, traditional lanterns and shimmering lights, transforming neighbourhoods into vibrant spaces that reflect the joy and anticipation of the blessed month.

In many towns and villages, residents have come together to decorate streets collectively, reviving a tradition that strengthens community ties and fosters a sense of belonging. Families, neighbours, and local committees collaborate to hang lanterns, display crescent moons, and prepare decorations that welcome the month with colour and light.

“Decorating the street together brings us closer and strengthens our bonds,” said Majid al Kindi, a resident of Nizwa. “It reminds us of the true meaning of Ramadhan — unity, compassion and generosity. Seeing the community come together fills us with pride and joy.”

Mosques throughout Oman are also being meticulously prepared to welcome worshippers for prayers. Cleaning, maintenance, and organisation efforts aim to create a serene and spiritual

Decorating the street together brings us closer and strengthens our bonds... It reminds us of the true meaning of Ramadhan — unity, compassion and generosity. Seeing the community come together fills us with pride and joy.

MAJID AL KINDI
Nizwa resident

SHORT TAKES



The exhibition aims to provide Eid clothing for more than 5,000 children from low-income families.

500 EXHIBITORS
SHOWCASE AT DAR AL
ATTA CHARITY EXPO

MUSCAT: The 28th edition of the Giving Exhibition organised by the Dar Al Atta Association concluded at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre, bringing together more than 500 exhibitors from across the Sultanate of Oman and the region.

Held under the auspices of HH Sayyidah Afra bint Talal al Said, the four-day exhibition was inaugurated in the presence of Maryam bint Issa al Zadjali, founder and chairperson of the association's board of directors.

The annual exhibition has grown into one of the most prominent charitable and community events in Oman, attracting a wide range of exhibitors offering fashion items, accessories, gold and silver jewellery, perfumes, incense, luxury goods, handicrafts, as well as products from small and medium enterprises.

Organisers said the exhibition aims to provide Eid clothing for more than 5,000 children from low-income families registered with the association. In addition to its charitable mission, the event also serves as a platform to support entrepreneurs, enhance household incomes and create marketing opportunities for small businesses and home-based ventures.

This year's edition has also embraced digital transformation. The association introduced an integrated electronic system that allows exhibitors to register book spaces and complete payments online. Electronic payment options have also been implemented for visitors, helping streamline entry and reduce waiting times while improving overall event management.

Speaking at the opening, Maryam bint Issa al Zadjali noted that the exhibition continues to evolve each year and remains one of the most significant charity-driven events organised in Oman. She added that the current edition features a renewed format and wider participation compared with previous years.

Al Zadjali highlighted the strong presence of local and Gulf exhibitors, saying the diversity has enhanced both the quality and range of products on display while strengthening the exhibition's role as a platform that blends charity, entrepreneurship and community engagement.

Since its inception, the Giving Exhibition has played an important role in supporting families in need while encouraging local enterprise, making it a key annual event that reflects the spirit of generosity and social solidarity in Oman. — ONA

ISC DECCANI
WING TO HOST
HYDERABADI
COMMUNITY
IFTAR ON
FEBRUARY 27

MUSCAT: The Deccani Wing of the Indian Social Club (ISC), Oman, will host its annual Hyderabad Community Iftar on Friday, February 27, at the iconic Clock Tower in Ruwi, continuing a proud tradition spanning over two decades.

Recognised as one of the largest community Iftar gatherings in Oman, the event brings together thousands of fasting individuals from diverse nationalities, reflecting the Hyderabad community's enduring commitment to unity, service, and compassion during the holy month of Ramadhan.

Extensive arrangements have been put in place by ISC Deccani Wing volunteers to ensure a smooth and comfortable experience for

attendees. A dedicated enclosure exclusively for ladies, with seating capacity for more than 1,000 women, has been arranged to ensure privacy and convenience.

Suhail Khan, Head of the Organising Committee, said the event represents "a legacy of service and unity upheld for over 20 years," adding that it is heartening to witness people from different communities come together in the true spirit of Ramadhan.

Mansoor Sabri, Co-Convenor of the ISC Deccani Wing, highlighted the dedication of volunteers and continued support from well-wishers, describing the annual Iftar as "a symbol of togetherness and goodwill in Oman."

Syed Azeemuddin Ahmed noted

that elaborate arrangements have been made to welcome attendees with dignity and warmth, while Ahmed Maseehuddin emphasised that the gathering reflects the essence of Ramadhan — compassion, sharing and service.

Volunteer Habeeb Salem shared that serving at the event brings immense satisfaction, knowing it contributes to a noble cause and supports thousands of fasting individuals.

The Clock Tower venue continues to stand as a symbol of community bonding and shared heritage. The ISC Deccani Wing has extended a warm invitation to members of the community and well-wishers to participate in this spiritually uplifting gathering.

5G, satellite technology
power digital learning

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, FEB 21

THE Ministry of Education has worked to ensure smooth access to education in all regions, including schools in remote geographical areas.

It has successfully overcome the technical challenges particularly in remote schools suffering from weak Internet services, by deploying satellite technologies and 5G. It is also adopting advanced digital solutions to manage massive data volumes and efficiently link educational systems to national networks.

Internet coverage in schools has reached 100 per cent since 2021, with a focus on improving quality. Furthermore, the percentage of schools covered by fibre optic and 5G networks has increased from 74 per cent to over 97 per cent, enabling educational applications that require high speeds.

Over the past period, the ministry has worked to empower the digital infrastructure of all schools. The ministry has collaborated with telecommunications companies to upgrade Internet speeds to ten times their



97 per cent of the schools are covered by fibre optic and 5G networks.

previous speed using fibre optic technology or 5G. The ministry also coordinated with the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) to upgrade Internet networks in remote schools using Starlink. Fifty government schools have been

connected to the Starlink high-speed satellite Internet service to improve the quality of digital services.

Omar bin Abdullah al Qutbi, Vice-President of the TRA, emphasised the issue of coverage in cities and

rural areas. He stated that the Authority is continuously working with companies to ensure the expansion of services beyond city centres to include economic zones, main roads, and rural areas, thus guaranteeing access to telecommunications services throughout the Sultanate of Oman. He explained that the expansion of fibre optic and 5G networks has contributed to enhancing coverage both within and outside cities, in addition to satellite technology solutions. The ministry is giving considerable attention to modernising learning environments, enhancing the efficiency of educational infrastructure, and improving the performance of educational institutions, in line with global developments and responsive to the specific needs of the local context.

Fibre optic subscriptions saw a 93 per cent increase, from 180,000 to over 350,000 subscribers, while fixed 5G subscriptions grew by 189 per cent, from 76,000 to 220,000 subscribers. Fibre optics and 5G thus represent approximately 95% of all fixed Internet subscribers, while older technologies with limited speeds are declining.

Ukrainian culture takes centre stage in Muscat

MUSCAT: The National Museum of Oman hosted the Ukrainian Cultural Nights' event in cooperation with the Embassy of Ukraine in Oman, as part of efforts to promote cultural exchange and civilisational dialogue between the two countries.

The event was sponsored by HH Sayyidah Mayyan bint Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Chairperson of the Board of Directors of the Omani Design Society (Design Oman).

The programme aimed to highlight aspects of contemporary Ukrainian culture while showcasing shared artistic and human connections between Oman and Ukraine. A diverse line-up of cultural and artistic segments reflected both rich heritage and modern creativity.

The evening witnessed the attendance of their highnesses, excellencies, ambassadors, officials, intellectuals and artists, as well as members of the public, creating an atmosphere that underscored the community's appreciation for cultural diplomacy and artistic dialogue.

A visual documentary presentation titled 'Modern Ukraine: Art and World Heritage' reviewed key aspects of Ukraine's artistic and cultural landscape, its contribution to



The Ukrainian Cultural Nights were hosted by The National Msuem of Oman.

global heritage, and its presence on international cultural platforms.

Olga Selykh, Ambassador of Ukraine to the Sultanate of Oman, described the event as historic.

She said it marks an important step toward building a strong bridge of friendship between the Omani and Ukrainian peoples, grounded in mutual respect for traditions, values and cultural diversity.

The programme also featured musical performances by soprano Natalia Shelevnitska, widely recognised in Ukraine as a 'People's Artist,' alongside a presentation of

traditional Ukrainian fashion inspired by ancient art schools listed on Unesco's Intangible Cultural Heritage register.

An art exhibition titled 'Spaces of Tranquility Between: The Sultanate of Oman and Ukraine' was inaugurated by prominent Ukrainian visual artist Volodymyr Kozyuk. The exhibition features works such as 'Wheat Field.. Road,' depicting the meeting of light and earth; 'Rhapsody from Podolia,' portraying harmony between water and fields; and 'Awakening of Polesia,' capturing nature's transition from winter to spring. — ONA

Aquinex

NOTICE INVITING TENDER
Tender Ref: Q260036

Aquatic Investments Excellence LLC (Aquinox) is developing a, 152,000 MT/year extruded shrimp feed facility in Duqm. The plant features advanced extrusion technology, automated processing, and comprehensive storage and administrative infrastructure.

Aquinox Invites sealed tenders from experienced contractors for the following package:

Project Name: Duqm Shrimp Feed Plant Project

Tender Title: Construction of Feed Plant & Associated Facilities

1. Scope of Work

The package covers comprehensive construction and infrastructure works for the Feed Plant and associated facilities, including but not limited to:

- **Civil & Structural:** Construction of the production tower, raw material silo complex, finished goods warehouse, and administrative buildings (including all earthworks, foundations, and structural frameworks).
- **Architectural:** Building envelopes, cladding, roofing, and internal finishes for all plant facilities.
- **MEP:** Mechanical, electrical, and plumbing systems, including process services, HVAC, fire detection and protection, and power distribution.
- **Process Integration:** Structural and MEP provisions required for the installation of automated production lines.
- **Ancillary Works:** All required support infrastructure for plant operations.

2. Eligibility

Contractors must be registered and possess a proven track record in executing large-scale industrial facilities, including civil, structural, architectural, and MEP works of similar magnitude and complexity.

3. Tender Documents

Interested parties may request the tender documents by emailing procurement@aquinox.om (referencing the tender number) no later than **26/02/2026**.

WORLD

SHORT TAKES



France’s President Emmanuel Macron speaks to the press, in Paris. — AFP

MACRON URGES ‘CALM’ AHEAD OF TENSE RALLY

LYON: French President Emmanuel Macron appealed on Saturday for cooler heads to prevail ahead of a rally for a far-right activist whose killing, blamed on the hard left, has put the country on edge. Macron also said his government would hold a meeting next week to discuss “violent action groups” in the wake of the fatal beating of Quentin Deranque, which has ignited tensions between the left and right ahead of the 2027 presidential vote.

A rally, widely publicised online by ultra-nationalist and far-right groups, is expected to be attended by 2,000 to 3,000 people, with the authorities fearing further clashes with left-wing protesters. Speaking at a farming trade fair in Paris, Macron urged “everyone to remain” calm ahead of the rally for Deranque in Lyon, which is set to go ahead under high security later on Saturday despite Lyon’s left-wing green mayor asking the state to ban it. “In the Republic, no violence is legitimate,” said Macron, who will be unable to contest next year’s election after hitting the two-term limit. “There is no place for militias, no matter where they come from.” — AFP

SLOVAKIA THREATENS TO STOP ELECTRICITY TO UKRAINE



The Druzhba oil pipeline between Hungary and Russia in Szazhalombatta. — Reuters

BRATISLAVA: Slovakia’s Prime Minister Robert Fico threatened on Saturday to cut off emergency electricity supplies to Ukraine unless Kyiv acts within two days to resume the pumping of Russian oil to Slovakia over Ukraine’s territory, cut off for nearly a month. Slovakia, along with Hungary, is one of just two EU countries that still rely on significant amounts of Russian oil shipped via the Soviet-era Druzhba pipeline over Ukraine. “If oil supplies to Slovakia are not resumed on Monday, I will ask SEPS, the state-owned joint-stock company, to stop emergency electricity supplies to Ukraine,” Fico said in a post on X. Ukraine has proposed alternative transit routes to ship oil to Europe while emergency pipeline repair works are under way. In a letter seen by Reuters, the Ukrainian mission to the EU proposed shipments through Ukraine’s oil transportation system or a maritime route, potentially including the Odesa-Brody pipeline linking Ukraine’s main Black Sea port to the EU. “Ukraine consistently reiterates its continuous readiness to ensure transportation of the oil within the available legal framework,” it said. — Reuters

POLITICAL MEASURES

Venezuela grants amnesty to 379 prisoners



Venezuelan authorities have granted amnesty to 379 political prisoners after a new law was enacted by interim authorities following the US toppling of former leader Nicolas Maduro. National Assembly deputy Jorge Arreaza, the lawmaker overseeing the amnesty process, said that the 379 prisoners “must be released, granted amnesty, between tonight and tomorrow morning.” “Requests have been submitted by the Public Prosecutor’s Office to the competent courts to grant amnesty measures,” he said. — AFP

ATTACKS ON SUDAN HEALTHCARE FACILITIES KILLED 69 THIS YEAR, SAYS WHO

CAIRO: Five attacks on healthcare facilities have killed dozens of people in Sudan since the beginning of the year, the WHO said, as the war nears the start of its fourth year. The fighting between Sudan’s army and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces has dismantled an already fragile medical system, with more than a third of facilities currently out of service. “During the first 50 days of 2026, five attacks on health care have already been recorded in Sudan, killing 69 people and

injuring 49,” WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus wrote on X. A hospital was targeted in the southeastern state of Senнар, leaving three patients dead and seven people wounded, including an employee, Tedros said. In three other attacks early this month, more than 30 people were killed when medical centres were targeted in South Kordofan, a vast region south of the capital Khartoum that is currently a focus of the fighting. The WHO has confirmed at least

206 attacks on healthcare facilities since the start of the war in April 2023, resulting in the deaths of around 2,000 people and injuries to several hundred. Last year alone, 65 attacks killed more than 1,620 people, accounting for 80 per cent of all deaths worldwide linked to attacks on the medical sector. Some 4.2 million cases of acute malnutrition are expected to arise in Sudan this year, including more than 800,000 cases of severe acute malnutrition. — AFP

Global summit calls for secure and trustworthy AI

DOZENS of nations including the United States and China called for “secure, trustworthy and robust” artificial intelligence, in a declaration issued on Saturday after a major summit on the technology in New Delhi. The statement signed by 86 countries did not include concrete commitments to regulate the fast-developing technology, instead highlighting several voluntary, non-binding initiatives. “AI’s promise is best realised only when its benefits are shared by humanity,” said the statement, released by the five-day AI Impact Summit. It called the advent of generative AI “an inflection point in the trajectory of technological evolution”. “Advancing secure, trustworthy and robust AI is foundational to building trust and maximising societal and economic benefits,” it said.

The summit — attended by tens of thousands including top tech CEOs — was the fourth annual global meeting to discuss the promises and pitfalls of AI, and the first hosted by a developing country. Hot topics discussed included AI’s potential societal benefits, such as drug discovery and translation tools, but also the threat of job losses, online abuse and the heavy power consumption of data centres. Analysts had said earlier that the summit’s broad focus, and vague promises made at the previous meetings in France, South Korea and Britain, would make strong pledges or immediate action unlikely. The United States, home to



India’s PM Narendra Modi (C) takes a group photo with AI company leaders at the AI Impact Summit in New Delhi. — AFP

The statement signed by 86 countries did not include concrete commitments to regulate the fast-developing technology, instead highlighting several voluntary, non-binding initiatives

industry-leading companies such as Google and ChatGPT maker OpenAI, did not sign last year’s summit statement, warning that regulation could be a drag on innovation. “We totally reject global governance of AI,” US delegation head Michael Kratsios had said at the Delhi summit on Friday. The United States signed a bilateral declaration on AI with India on Friday, pledging to “pursue a global approach to AI that is unapologetically friendly to entrepreneurship and innovation”. But it also put its name to the main summit statement, the release of which was originally expected on Friday but was delayed by one day to maximise the number of signatories, India’s government said. On AI safety risks — from misinformation and surveillance to fears of the creation of devastating

new pathogens — Saturday’s summit declaration struck a cautious tone. “Deepening our understanding of the potential security aspects remains important,” it said. “We recognise the importance of security in AI systems, industry-led voluntary measures, and the adoption of technical solutions, and appropriate policy frameworks that enable innovation.” On jobs, it emphasised reskilling initiatives to “support participants in preparation for a future AI driven economy”. And “we underscore the importance of developing energy-efficient AI systems” given the technology’s growing demands on natural resources, it said. Computing expert and AI safety campaigner Stuart Russell said that Saturday’s commitments were “not completely inconsequential”. — AFP



IRAN PREPARES COUNTERPROPOSAL TO US

TEHRAN: Iran’s foreign minister said he expected to have a draft counterproposal ready within days following nuclear talks with the United States this week, while US President Donald Trump said he was considering limited military strikes. Two US officials said that US military planning on Iran had reached an advanced stage, with options including targeting individuals as part of an attack and even pursuing leadership change in Tehran, if ordered by Trump. Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian said on Saturday that his country would not bow its head to pressure from world powers amid nuclear talks with the United States. “World powers are lining up to force us to bow our heads... but we will not bow our heads despite all the problems that they are creating for us,” Pezeshkian said in a speech carried live by state TV. Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi said after indirect discussions in Geneva this week with Trump’s Special Envoy Steve Witkoff and son-in-law Jared Kushner that the sides had reached an understanding on main “guiding principles,” but that did not mean a deal was imminent. — Reuters

INFECTIOUS DISEASE

Virus kills dozens of tigers in Thailand park



A deadly virus and bacterial infection have killed at least 72 tigers at a private animal park in Thailand’s north in recent weeks. The provincial livestock office in Chiang Mai said that testing detected the highly infectious canine distemper virus. “When tigers fall ill, it is more difficult to detect than in animals like cats or dogs. By the time we realised they were sick, it was already too late,” Somchuan Ratanamungklanon, director of the national livestock department, said. — AFP

PERILOUS CROSSING

Migrant boat capsizes off Greek island



The bodies of three migrants were picked up in waters off the Greek island of Crete during a rescue effort involving a commercial ship. Twenty migrants were rescued by the commercial vessel which was directed to the area on the orders of the Greek Search and Rescue Center. The search for survivors was continuing with four patrol boats, an aircraft, and two ships from the European border agency Frontex, a spokesperson for the Greek coast guard said. — AFP

The New York Times

Nasa conducts launchpad test of the Artemis Rocket



KENNETH CHANG

The author is a science reporter, writing about Nasa and the solar system

NASA successfully completed a countdown rehearsal for the Artemis II moon mission, experiencing only a few small glitches along the way. That was a marked improvement from the agency's first try a couple of weeks ago, which was cut short because of leaks of hydrogen, the fuel used by the rocket. "Proud of the @NASA team as this was a big step toward America's return to the lunar environment," Jared Isaacman, the Nasa administrator, wrote on X on Friday morning. "We are going." Unless a review of data reveals a subtle showstopper, the almost flawless rehearsal should pave the way for a launch attempt for Artemis II in a couple of weeks. "We don't have any indications of anything that we're worried about," John Honeycutt, the chair of the mission management team for Artemis II, said during a news conference on Friday morning. "But we're just getting started." Lori Glaze, the acting associate administrator for Nasa's exploration systems development mission directorate, said the agency was aiming to hold a rigorous review of the data late next week to determine if the mission was ready to fly. If the mission passes muster, Nasa officials can then announce a launch date. The agency is currently targeting March 6, Glaze said. "For right now, that's the direction that we're headed," she said. There are additional launch opportunities on March 7, 8, 9 and 11. If Artemis II misses those, it will have to wait for the next set of possible launch dates in April. The crew of four — three Nasa astronauts and one from the Canadian Space Agency — will enter quarantine on Thursday, a precaution to ensure that they remain healthy. "The excitement for Artemis II is



Space fans at the rollout of the Artemis II rocket at the Kennedy Space Center in Cape Canaveral

really, really starting to build," she said. That launch will send the astronauts on a 10-day journey that will swing around the moon and return to Earth. The astronauts will not land on the moon, but they will be the first to leave low-Earth orbit since the end of Nasa's Apollo program more than 50 years ago. The two-day countdown test at Nasa's Kennedy Space Center in Florida included filling up the tanks of the giant Space Launch System rocket with millions of pounds of liquid hydrogen and liquid oxygen. The SLS design is, in large part, a remix of decades-old technologies from Nasa's space shuttles. The rocket on the launchpad includes leftover engines and other parts from the retired shuttles. Like the shuttles, SLS has been bedeviled by hydrogen leaks at the launchpad. Because hydrogen is the lightest element, it is efficient, providing the most energy per pound of any fuel. But hydrogen molecules, which consist of pairs of hydrogen atoms, are also small and

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notoriously difficult to contain. During the first attempt, sizable hydrogen leaks occurred at the interface between the rocket and the launchpad. The tanks were eventually filled, but hours behind schedule. But in the final part of the countdown, the hydrogen leak reappeared, and the rehearsal was ended with about five minutes left in the countdown. Technicians have since replaced the seals at the junction. On Thursday, the hydrogen remained well behaved throughout the countdown, with concentrations near the connection at 1.6 per cent or less, far below the 16 per cent limit. "Really no leakage to speak of," said Charlie Blackwell-Thompson, the launch director. Minor issues included a problem with ground communications in the launch control centre and a "voltage anomaly" in the measurement of a battery that briefly paused the countdown with 90 seconds left. The countdown resumed and ticked down to 33 seconds, and then stopped as planned. The countdown clock was then reset to 10 minutes as systems were reconnected. That allowed Nasa to practice how to reset a launch attempt to fix a last-minute problem instead of scrubbing the attempt. The reset, which included replenishing hydrogen and oxygen in the rocket's propellant tanks, was expected to take about an hour. "We did it in 57 minutes," Blackwell-Thompson said. The countdown then resumed, again ending as planned — this time with 29 seconds left. It was a busy night in Florida. As the Artemis II rocket sat on the pad, a SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket launched from a nearby launchpad at the Cape Canaveral Space Force Station, carrying a load of Starlink satellites to orbit.

Europe worries about another Trump blow-up on technology



JEANNA SMIALEK

The writer is the Brussels bureau chief for The New York Times

AFTER a year filled with trade-related drama between the United States and the European Union, one outstanding gripe still has potential to fuel the fire: how the bloc regulates technology. At the heart of that dispute is the bloc's Digital Services Act, which requires big technology companies to take steps to prevent illegal or dangerous content on their platforms. The Trump administration, arguing that the regulations impede free speech and put up unfair barriers to American firms, has warned repeatedly that it could retaliate. Now, European officials are beginning to fret, privately and in public, that this is merely the calm before the next Trump-created storm. "The US will in the coming months — that's certain — attack us over digital regulation," President Emmanuel Macron of France told several European news outlets in an interview this month, suggesting that the United States could hit the EU with tariffs related to the Digital Services Act. The Trump administration has recently echoed that prediction. Europe's online services regulation "has become almost like a digital speed trap to try and fine American companies," David Sacks, a White House official, said on his All-In podcast last month. "You could argue that it's effectively like a tariff on American tech companies operating in Europe," he added. "If that's the case, well, I mean, I guess Europe is allowed to have tariffs — but then that's going to change the tariffs that we set." Sarah B. Rogers, the undersecretary of state for public diplomacy at the State Department and a guest on that podcast episode, agreed that "a lot of Americans see this as a tax." Bill White, the US ambassador to Belgium, said in an interview that Michael J Rigas, a top State Department official, would come to Brussels in early March in part to discuss free speech and digital regulation with EU officials. The State Department press office confirmed that he would make the trip and would



Google's European headquarters in Dublin, Ireland.

discuss EU digital regulations. It is not clear what the United States might do if it decided to attack Europe over its digital regulations, or which companies it might target. Some trade experts have suggested that one option would be a "301 investigation," a mechanism under US trade law to fight against unfair foreign trade practices. The tool allows the United States to impose tariffs, fees or other punishments on countries that are found to have cheated on trade. Trump has used such an investigation against China, but so far he has wielded other tools against Europe. His use of one trade weapon in particular — a wide-reaching mandate that allows for across-the-board tariffs in the case of a national emergency — is now up for review before the Supreme Court, which could rule on the case as soon as Friday. Nor is it clear what precisely would prompt the United States to act, if it did at all. For months, the Trump administration has vaguely threatened to place tariffs or other penalties on European companies if the bloc continues to enforce its digital rules. The US Office of the Trade Representative suggested in a memorandum last year that it was contemplating how it could punish nations that it thought discriminated against American firms with digital services regulations. In December, the office posted on the social platform X that "if the EU and EU Member States insist on continuing to restrict, limit, and deter the competitiveness of US service providers through discriminatory means, the United States will have no choice but to begin using every tool at its disposal to counter these unreasonable measures." The office noted that US law permits "the assessment of fees or restrictions on foreign services" in response, among

other options. It has previously pointed out that European companies such as Accenture, Spotify and Capgemini operate in the United States, suggesting they could be in the crosshairs. The United States has already imposed travel bans on several people involved in digital regulation, including a former EU official. Asked for comment, the US trade office replied that while a US-EU trade deal struck last year addressed many issues, the Trump administration still wants to "achieve fairness" in digital trade and has "additional options" if negotiation doesn't work. But some experts say that the United States is unlikely to follow through on its threats to attack Europe over its technology regulations, in part because tensions between the two trading partners have finally cooled. The European Parliament could next week take another step toward approving the trade deal that was struck last year and that would apply 15 per cent tariffs to many European goods. "I think the threshold for something major is very high," said Jacob Funk Kirkegaard, a senior fellow at Bruegel, a Brussels-based think tank. So far, the European Commission, the bloc's executive arm, has said repeatedly that it would not move away from its digital regulations. It has continued to actively enforce them in recent months, despite the Trump administration's threats. In December, the commission announced that it would issue a fine of 120 million euros (about \$141 million) against X over transparency issues. Regulators in Brussels have also been investigating Google and Meta for possible violations of online competition and safety laws. "I want to be very clear: Our digital sovereignty is our digital sovereignty," Ursula von der Leyen, the president of the commission, said at the Munich Security Conference last week. "We have a long tradition in freedom of speech. Actually the Enlightenment started on our continent." Europe, she said, will "not flinch" in enforcing its digital rules.

OPINION

When do we become ‘old’? Rethinking age in a changing world



DR HAMED AL SINAWI

The writer is a senior consultant psychiatrist at SQU Hospital

DR HAMED AL SINAWI

It was around 7 pm when the doorbell rang. My 28-year-old son was sitting in the living room. He rushed to open the door, only to find two young boys standing outside. “Sorry, uncle, can we have our football? It fell into your yard,” the one boy said politely.

My son froze. “Uncle?” he repeated silently as he retrieved the ball. He handed it back to the children, then walked back inside muttering to himself, “So I’m an uncle now.”

His reaction reminded me that aging is not just a biological process; it is a social one. Sometimes it begins with a single word spoken by a stranger.

But what does it actually mean to be ‘old’? And at what point do people start to feel that they have reached old age?

A recent study published by the American Psychological Association suggests that middle-aged and older adults today believe that old age begins significantly later compared to those who lived decades earlier.

Another study that involved interviewing 14,000 participants found that people born in

1956 considered someone ‘old’ at around age 74. In contrast, people born in 1911 believed old age began at 71. The difference may seem small, but it reflects major changes in life expectancy, health and retirement patterns.

According to the researchers, as people live longer and stay healthier, society’s benchmarks for when someone becomes ‘old’ have stretched further into the future. The study also revealed that, as individuals, themselves grow older, their idea of ‘old age’ moves forward too. A 64-year-old might say old age begins at 74. But ask the same person again at age 74, and they may say it starts at 76 or 77. In other words, old age appears to shift with every birthday.

Gender and health also shape these perceptions.

Women, on average, place the onset of old age two years later than men. People who feel lonely or in poor health tend to perceive themselves as older, while those who feel connected and healthy view old age as something further ahead.

Despite these trends, the researchers noted that the ‘postponement of old age’ has slowed in recent years, raising questions about

What does it actually mean to be ‘old’? And at what point do people start to feel that they have reached old age?

whether attitudes towards aging are truly becoming more positive or whether people are simply avoiding the label because society still treats old age as something undesirable.

This ambivalence plays out in small, everyday moments, like a young boy calling a 28-year-old ‘uncle.’ For the child, the term was probably a sign of respect, a cultural habit of addressing older youth politely.

But for my son, it felt like crossing an invisible threshold into a stage he believed was still far away.

Understanding how people perceive aging has important implications for healthcare, retirement planning and how we prepare ourselves for our own aging.

If society views old age as a period of decline and loss, people will resist it. However, if we frame it as a stage that brings wisdom, perspective and purpose, perhaps fewer people will flinch at being called ‘uncle.’

For now, my son has accepted his new honorary title, though with mild reluctance, but this incident reminded me that age is not a fixed number, but a story each of us writes as we go.

LAOS LAWMAKER’S EXIT SPARKS RARE DISSENT

When one of the few lawmakers willing to call out corruption in single-party Laos was left off the candidate list ahead of this weekend’s heavily managed election, a rare wave of dissent erupted.

Weeks after the candidates were publicised, outspoken MP Valy Vetsaphong announced she had removed herself from the ballot, ending her decade-long career in parliament - but some remain sceptical about her departure.

Her announcement came just days before Sunday’s poll, in which all 243 candidates contesting 175 seats are pre-selected by the ruling communist party, making the exercise largely performative.

The Southeast Asian nation has no opposition parties and no fully independent news outlets. The ruling Lao People’s Revolutionary Party has held power for more than 50 years.

Dissent is dangerous, protests are swiftly crushed and government critics are often jailed or disappear.

But after Valy, one of only six non-communist party members allowed in the National Assembly, said she was quitting politics to focus on economic development work and allow herself “more personal time”, social media erupted.

Some users openly expressed support for her online, while others voiced discontent over her exit - revealing a rare crack in the state’s overarching control.

Comments referred to her as “number one in the hearts of the people” and warned that “those who speak for the people are often eliminated”.

“It’s sad to see this, as she was very vocal and really represented the Laos people,” said a 30-year-old development worker in the capital Vientiane.

Valy, who serves on the board of Laos’ chamber of commerce, may have been allowed more space to speak out due to her business background, said the development worker, who requested anonymity for security reasons.

Despite the stiff restrictions in Laos, he pointed to signs of change, such as more online discussion about politics and younger candidates on the ballot compared to previous elections.

“It may look the same, but we do see some improvements, more openness from the government, and things are more relaxed compared to the past,” he said.

Laos state media this week also touted a shifting profile of candidates.

“Younger and middle-aged candidates make up the majority,” the Lao News Agency said, adding that the government was aiming to elect women to at least 30 per cent of seats.

But Valy will not be one of them.

— AFP

Ramadhan, peace and the need for restraint

RAMADHAN is a month in which Muslims are commanded to slow down, restrain anger, reflect on conduct and deepen responsibility toward others. Fasting is not merely abstention from food and drink; it is moral discipline.

The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) taught that if someone provokes you while fasting, you should reply, “I am fasting.” The believer is instructed to step away from confrontation rather than escalate it. At the very time when over a billion Muslims are reminded to prioritise peace over aggression, the world once again hears threats of military action. To threaten war as a first resort in any international dispute shows a lack of political intelligence and moral principles.

Ramadhan emphasises charity and empathy. Hunger becomes a shared experience that sharpens awareness of those who live with deprivation permanently. The spiritual logic is simple: when people discipline their appetites, they reduce their capacity for cruelty. When they confront their own vulnerability, they become less inclined to impose suffering on others. War represents the collapse of this discipline.

It is the moment when leaders abandon persuasion and revert to coercion, replacing language with force.

Some modern states describe themselves as “civilised.” They speak the language of international law, multilateral institutions and diplomacy. Yet when tensions rise, the reflex response often remains the threat of violence.

This is not civilisation but the abandonment of it. The distance between the caveman’s club and the state’s missile is a technical advance, not a moral one. When diplomacy fails, power resorts to harm and in that moment, their talk



Children celebrate the start of Ramadhan in Mosul, Iraq. — Reuters



KARIM EASTERBROOK

The writer is a Former Cambridge School Principal and Author

Ramadhan reminds us that peace begins with discipline: discipline of speech and of power. This lesson is not only for Muslims. It is for any society that claims moral maturity

of civilisation reveals just how thin its veneer really is.

If humanity is serious about calling itself civilised, diplomacy cannot be treated as a public relations ritual performed after threats fail.

It must be the primary instrument of conflict resolution. That requires patience, humility and recognition that adversaries have their own interests, fears and internal constraints. Threats do not produce peace; they produce escalation, arms races and cycles of instability that rarely end where they begin.

Ramadhan offers a moral mirror to the wider world. It teaches that restraint is not weakness, that self-control is a form of strength and that peace is not passivity but discipline. The Quranic ethic does not deny conflict but insists that justice and restraint govern human action. Even outside religious belief, this principle should be uppermost.

A world that relies on intimidation as its default language is not progressing; it is regressing. We live in an age of extraordinary scientific knowledge, instant communication and economic interdependence.

There is no credible excuse for conducting international relations as though humanity were still living in caves and settling disputes with clubs. If the most powerful states cannot use restraint, dialogue and diplomacy, then their lectures about “civilised values” ring hollow.

Ramadhan reminds us that peace begins with discipline: discipline of speech, of desire and of power. This lesson is not only for Muslims. It is for any society that claims moral maturity.

If we continue to reach for threats and war rather than dialogue and compromise, then we are not civilised at all. We are merely well-armed cavemen pretending otherwise.

Making children, adults and influencing them...



RAY PETERSEN

The writer is a media consultant

GOOD role models are essential to our children and young people, for as former basketball superstar Kareem Abdul-Jabbar once said, “As a parent, I have a job as a role model for my children, and by extension, to other young people.”

What a refreshing attitude he displays in taking responsibility for bringing up his children in the ‘right’ way, while still understanding that, in being a role model, he has the ability to inspire other young people positively. If we think about it, he was not only a basketballer, but an outstanding one who was a professional at the highest level of America’s National Basketball Association, the NBA. He was a record six times the sport’s most valuable player (MVP), for 39 years held the record as the highest scorer in a season, only knocked off that pedestal by LeBron James, and is widely respected as one of the greatest of all time.

Born in 1947, and growing up as Ferdinand Lewis Alcindor Jr, he converted in 1971, his Islamic name meaning ‘noble one, servant of the Almighty.’ Finding his faith challenged two years later, he undertook a pilgrimage, including learning Arabic, and emerged with much greater clarity and his faith renewed. Here was a man humble enough to recognise that he ‘didn’t have all the answers,’ so rejecting ease and entitlement, he asked difficult questions, sought genuine and resilient answers, and has, ever since,

become renowned for his clarity of purpose, respected both on and off the court.

Yet, keeping his faith, and maintaining dignity and a sense of right and wrong, continued to be challenged as he has frequently suffered from migraines, though that probably pales in respect of his wider health issues as he has confronted chronic myeloid leukaemia, an aggressive form of bone marrow and blood cancer since 2009, at the same time as he faced a diagnosis of prostate cancer. It would be 2012 before he felt confident he had achieved an acceptable state of well-being. Then, in April 2015, he was diagnosed with a cardiovascular condition, and just days later had quadruple coronary bypass surgery, and has since suffered from atrial fibrillation, a rapid and irregular rhythmic condition of the heart.

Despite these setbacks, he continues to inspire young African-Americans, and Muslims whether in his writings, in as diverse topics as his perspective of the so-called Harlem renaissance, ‘On the Shoulders of Giants;’ his love of Jazz, in ‘Giant Steps,’ an appraisal of John Coltrane’s album of the same name; and his ‘Brothers in Arms,’ a WWII historical about America’s first African-American tank battalion. He also co-wrote a series of three mystery novels featuring the elder brother of Sherlock Holmes, Mycroft Holmes. In all, he has written or co-written 17 books.

He has contributed to ‘Time Magazine,’ on

Abdul-Jabbar’s sporting legacy has been defined as “elegant and graceful,” his nature as “compassionate and understanding,” hardly qualities you would find every day in the rough and tumble that is the highly competitive NBA

a regular basis, ‘Jacobin’ irregularly, and is a frequent public speaker on contentious and controversial issues facing America and the world. He has also been widely acclaimed for his achievements, recognised in 2012 as the Cultural Ambassador of the United States, the President’s Medal of Freedom in 2016, and was appointed to the President’s Council on Fitness, Sports, and Nutrition in 2017. During 2011, he was awarded the Double Helix Medal for his cancer awareness advocacy and an Honorary Degree from the New York Institute of Technology for his cancer research support.

Abdul-Jabbar’s sporting legacy has been defined as “elegant and graceful,” his nature as “compassionate and understanding,” hardly qualities you would find every day in the rough and tumble that is the highly competitive NBA. His global perspective, his charitable works and his care and concern for minorities are appreciated by those who feel neglected, and his social activism has identified him as a ‘lightning rod’ for minorities, and a headache for the ‘establishment.’ His achievements on and off the court have made him a man you could aspire to be, should aspire to be, and who is the ideal role model for so many.

Most of us ‘wannabe’ someone... and let it be someone real... not some charming yet vacuous influencer... but someone whose personality, characteristics, and qualities, you truly admire.

TRUMP HITS SNAG AFTER SNAG AHEAD OF MAJOR US ADDRESS

AURÉLIA END

For a year, Donald Trump has governed the United States with little standing in his way. Now, as the president prepares for his State of the Union address on Tuesday, he’s weighed down with Supreme Court reversals on tariffs, souring public opinion on his immigration crackdown and mounting economic concerns.

Trump is unlikely to back down in his speech, a primetime American political institution where the president is invited by Congress to present his accomplishments and lay out his agenda.

But his boasts will have less sting on Democrats — and world leaders — who have up to this point been bulldozed by his agenda.

On Friday, the Supreme Court delivered a sharp rebuke of his use of tariffs, which he slapped on countries often arbitrarily via a simple order on social media in an effort to gain leverage over diplomatic matters sometimes wholly unrelated to trade. The same day, the government data showed the US economy expanded at a 1.4-per cent annual rate in the October to December period - significantly below the 2.5 per cent pace that analysts had forecasted for the quarter.

Polls meanwhile show growing dissatisfaction with the cost of living as well as Trump’s crackdown on undocumented immigrants.

Trump’s strategy so far on inflation has been to cede no ground. “I’ve won affordability,” Trump said during a speech in the southeastern state of Georgia on Thursday.

But “you cannot out-message the economy. People know what they are spending,” Todd Belt, a political science professor at George Washington University, said.

“People become very resentful when being told something they know is not true,” he said, which applies to both the cost of living and the crackdown on immigrants, which many Americans had falsely believed would focus on deporting violent criminals.

American voters have proven extremely sensitive to economic issues, which in part sunk Trump’s predecessor Joe Biden but now threaten Republicans. As midterms approach in November, the House of Representatives and a third of the Senate will be up for grabs.

Trump has already warned that if Democrats take control, they could try to impeach him.

Even the normally bombastic Trump has been cowed in recent days, including when a racist video of Barack Obama — the country’s first Black president — was posted onto his Truth Social account.

The White House tried to brush off the issue before claiming that an unnamed aide posted it, as even loyal members of Congress broke ranks to criticise the president. — AFP

Minnesota reels after anti-migrant ‘occupation’

THE Trump administration has framed its divisive push to round up undocumented migrants in Minnesota as a win for his mass deportation agenda, despite a major backlash and decisive local opposition.

Minneapolis Somali community organiser Mowlid Mohamed said the announcement the massive federal deployment was winding down was “good news, however we don’t know how true it is. It’s hard to believe anything from this administration.”

Local leaders insist the anti-migrant sweeps galvanised opposition which quickly organised to protect vulnerable people who were too terrified to venture out for fear of arrest and deportation, and to monitor and track immigration officers.

The killings of two US citizens, Renee Good and Alex Pretti, alongside the shooting of an unarmed Venezuelan and the arrest of a photogenic five-year-old, proved to be watershed moments.

Hamline University politics professor David Schultz said those developments were what it took “to turn the tide of public opinion against the operation nationally.”

He said that “massive overreach” by the Trump administration helped rally opposition to the deployment - but that “if Trump’s goal was to scare immigrants, he did win - absolutely.”

Criticism led to an apparent re-think by the White House which swapped out the top commander overseeing the operation which was wound down last week.

The sight of detachments of disguised federal officers marauding around the Midwestern Democratic stronghold sparked wide-ranging local action to counter the sweeps.

Initial claims Good and Pretti were “domestic terrorists” were widely condemned - including from within Trump’s own Republican party.

Officials subsequently announced they would pull back on the unprecedented weeks-long surge, nonetheless touting over 4,000



A detainee boards a deportation flight on Eastern Air Express at Minneapolis-St Paul International Airport in Minneapolis, Minnesota. — Reuters



GREGORY WALTON

The writer is AFP’s New York correspondent

The killings of two US citizens, Renee Good and Alex Pretti, alongside the shooting of an unarmed Venezuelan and the arrest of a photogenic five-year-old, proved to be watershed moments

arrests in the state that they say included “worst of the worst” criminals. Just one-in-10 of the arrests could be reliably tracked using public data, making it difficult to assess how many of those swept up were truly serious criminals.

But nationwide data for 2026 shows just over a quarter of people currently in immigration detention nationwide are convicted criminals, and 47.4 per cent are completely innocent. Trump’s border pointman Tom Homan, who has said a limited detachment of agents will remain behind in Minnesota, claimed the withdrawal was because of improved cooperation with local authorities. But the Democratic sheriff who oversees Minneapolis’s largest county jail has insisted no policy has changed.

Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey, outspoken in his criticism of the surge, claimed victory, saying, “They thought they could break us, but a love for our neighbours and a resolve to endure can outlast an occupation.”

Minneapolis authorities estimated the cost of the operation at \$203 million - including losses to the economy, community livelihoods, neighbours’ mental health, and to food and shelter security.

Chelsea Kane, a local who joined a network tracking ICE patrols, said the grassroots response was

“something that our city is going to be proud of forever.”

“Tyranny tried to come here, tyranny tried to choke us out, and we stood up and said ‘no’.”

The software engineer, 37, said she hoped other cities could follow Minneapolis’s example in standing up to ICE.

Kane, a former soldier, also stressed that while “it’s slower on detainment in Minneapolis, they’ve just moved to the suburbs... ICE has not left the Twin Cities.”

Many local people said the invasive sweeps in the state had left behind “generational trauma,” a description echoed by a Mexican migrant, Carlos, who has effectively been confined to his home since early December. Since the announcement of the withdrawal he has left his home only twice, to work.

“I don’t go to the supermarket, or anywhere else,” said the man in his 40s who requested to use a pseudonym for fear of retaliation.

Carlos and his wife now dream of returning to Mexico, even after calling Minneapolis home for more than a decade.

“We came here fleeing our country because we had no safety there,” he said softly. “(If) we find ourselves in the same situation here, then I think it’s better in our own country.”

SPORTS



Al Shabab player celebrates scoring the winning goal.

Al Shabab crush Al Khabourah 3–0 in Jindal League as Kenian scores hatrick

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, FEB 21

AL SHABAB continued their strong run in the Jindal League, securing a commanding 3–0 victory over their guests Al Khabourah at Seeb Sports Stadium in Week 15 action, reaffirming their determination to chase the league leaders and maintain pressure in the title race.

Both teams entered the match with a clear intent to control the midfield, and the opening minutes saw balanced play and mutual attempts to dominate possession. The rhythm was briefly disrupted when Al Shabab's foreign player Robin suffered an injury that halted play for several minutes. Once the match resumed, Al



Al Khabourah player controls the ball.

Shabab intensified their attacking pressure, capitalising on Kenian's movement and their quick transitions from defence to attack.

The breakthrough came in the 13th minute from a free kick near Al Khabourah's

penalty area, taken by Musab al Maamari. Goalkeeper Youssef al Sheyadi produced an excellent save, but the rebound fell kindly to Maliko Kenian, who reacted swiftly and slotted the ball into the net to give Al Shabab the lead. After conceding, Al Khabourah attempted to respond through the energetic runs of left-back Jan Herms, who delivered several crosses into the box, but Al Shabab's defence remained alert and neutralised the danger.

Before the end of the first half, Kenian capitalised on a defensive error by Al Khabourah in the 40th minute, controlling the ball confidently before firing it into the net to double the advantage and send Al Shabab into halftime with a comfortable 2–0 lead. In the second half, Al Khabourah showed improvement, with the coach making several substitutions to enhance performance, bringing renewed energy and

better midfield organisation. The visitors increased their attacking efforts but lacked the decisive finishing touch in front of goal.

In the 64th minute, a swift counterattack saw Kenian once again demonstrate his quality, skillfully controlling the ball and striking powerfully into the net to complete his hat-trick and effectively seal the match. As the tempo dropped in the closing stages, the referee issued a red card to Al Khabourah's Salmeen al Battashi in the 85th minute for a rough challenge, compounding the visitors' difficulties until the final whistle.

With this victory, Al Shabab raised their tally to 32 points in second place, continuing their pursuit of leaders Al Seeb, while Al Khabourah remain on 14 points in ninth place, leaving their position increasingly precarious as the decisive stages of the competition approach.

Al Ittihad edge Santos in thrilling derby to open Al Shabab Club Cup 2026

RIYADH AL BALUSHI
@riyadhbaluch

The 2026 Al Shabab Club Cup kicked off in a special Ramadhan atmosphere, as Al Ittihad Sports Ground hosted a high-profile regional derby between Al Ittihad and Santos on the first day of the holy month of Ramadhan.

The match lived up to expectations, delivering a tactically disciplined and highly competitive encounter. Backed by strong home support, Al Ittihad began the game determined to control the tempo, while Santos relied on compact defensive organisation and swift counterattacks.

Al Ittihad applied early pressure, creating several attacking moves through the flanks and central build-up play. Santos, however,



Youssef al Balushi attempts to kick the ball towards Santos goalkeeper's goal.

remained well-structured at the back, successfully neutralising much of the home side's threat. Despite chances at both ends, the



A shot during an attempt to build an attack for Al Ittihad team.

first half ended goalless.

The intensity increased in the second half as both teams battled for midfield dominance.

Santos nearly broke the deadlock on a quick counterattack, but Al Ittihad's defence stood firm. Persistence eventually paid off for

the hosts when Ahmed al Khuzairi scored the decisive goal, finishing off a well-worked move with a precise strike that sparked jubilant celebrations among the home supporters.

Santos pushed forward in the closing stages in search of an equaliser, committing more players to attack, but Al Ittihad managed the final minutes with discipline and composure to secure a 1–0 victory.

The opening derby confirmed that this year's tournament promises intense competition, highlighted by passionate fan support and closely matched teams.

With this win, Al Ittihad claimed their first three points of the campaign, marking a strong start to their quest for the title on a memorable Ramadhan night.

TOP SPORTING ACTIVITIES IN RAMADHAN



ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, FEB 21

AS the holy month of Ramadhan began in the Sultanate of Oman on Thursday, a familiar rhythm returns to towns and neighbourhoods across the country. After Iftar and Taraweeh prayers, open grounds, sandy courts and school yards light up with energy as communities gather for one of the most Ramadhan traditions by practicing late-night sport.

While football remains the country's most popular game, volleyball takes centre stage during Ramadhan, emerging as one of the most widely played and socially embraced sporting activities. Alongside volleyball, football matches, running sessions in parks and even chess tournaments contribute to a vibrant sporting culture that defines the month.

From Muscat to the interior wilayats, make-shift courts are set up and floodlights switched on as players of all ages compete in friendly yet spirited matches that often continue until midnight. What began decades ago as informal recreation has steadily evolved into a structured and competitive seasonal phenomenon.

ORGANISED TOURNAMENTS

In earlier years, volleyball during Ramadhan was primarily a recreational activity as a way for everyone to stay active and strengthen social bonds after fasting hours. Today, however, the scene has grown increasingly professional. Amateur teams across various governorates now organise well-structured tournaments complete with sponsorship support, official match schedules, referees and attractive prizes for winners. These competitions attract strong participation not only from local players but also from neighbouring wilayats, adding a competitive and thrilling edge to the events.

Ali bin Suleiman al Balushi, a veteran of Omani volleyball with more than 33 years of experience as a player, coach and former official at the Oman Volleyball Association (OVA), witnessed this transformation first-hand.

"In the 1980s, volleyball and football were widely played in schools such as Al Saidia School in Muscat and across many governorates including Al Dakhiliyah and others," he recalled. "Volleyball was the second most popular sport in Oman after football."

According to Al Balushi, the simplicity of volleyball is one of the key reasons for its enduring

popularity, particularly during Ramadhan. "Volleyball is very easy to set up. You only need a 9-by-9 metre space, a net and two strong poles to fix it. Within a short time, you have a proper outdoor court," he explained. "Compared to other sports like football, which requires a larger grass field, or handball, which needs a flat surface with specific dimensions, volleyball is much more accessible."

This ease of organisation has made volleyball especially popular in interior regions, where communities can quickly prepare playing areas in open spaces. The game's straightforward rules and fast-paced format also make it appealing to players of all skill levels. "The system of play is simple and exciting," Al Balushi added. "That encourages people to take part and creates strong competitive spirit during Ramadhan nights."

GRASSROOTS GROWTH

The growth of organised tournaments has been particularly evident in wilayats such as Sur (by Ghazi Ramadhan which is Ramadhan Sporting Festival), Barka (where Al Rumais hosts one of the most recognised Ramadhan volleyball competitions in the country.), Qurayat, Duqm and other wilayats. Teams travel from different governorates

to participate, reflecting the sport's expanding reach and appeal.

"Volleyball is not played just for fun only," Al Balushi said. "There are now structured tournaments across wilayats, and this is a positive sign for the sport's future. It shows that volleyball can continue to grow at the grassroots level."

These tournaments not only enhance competition but also strengthen community bonds, drawing families and spectators who gather to support local teams. The festive atmosphere, combined with sporting passion, turns Ramadhan nights into social occasions that blend faith, fitness and fellowship.

BEYOND VOLLEYBALL

Although volleyball dominates many neighbourhood courts, other sporting activities remain popular throughout the month. Football matches continue to attract large participation, while running groups take advantage of cooler night temperatures in parks and designated tracks. Chess competitions also draw enthusiasts seeking mental challenge during the holy month. Together, these activities highlight the deep-rooted culture of sport in Omani society as a culture that thrives even during periods of fasting and spiritual reflection.

SPORTS

NUGGETS NOTCH
RECORD-SETTING,
54-POINT ROUT OF
TRAIL BLAZERS



Denver Nuggets center Nikola Jokic (15) grabs a rebound over Portland Trail Blazers guard Jrue Holiday (5) and forward Deni Avdija (8) during. — **Imagn Images**

NIKOLA JOKIC recorded 32 points, nine rebounds and seven assists in three quarters and the Denver Nuggets rolled to a record-setting 157-103 victory over the host Portland Trail Blazers on Friday night. The 157 points were the most scored by an NBA team this season. It was the sixth highest single game total in Nuggets history. Jamal Murray added 25 points, six rebounds and six assists as the Nuggets set a team regular-season record with the 54 point margin of

Denver scored 41 points in each of the first two quarters to hold an 82-53 halftime lead. Jokic put up 24 points and Murray added 18 for the Nuggets while Holiday had 11 first-half points for Portland.

victory. Tim Hardaway Jr. added 19 points off the bench and made four 3-pointers to raise his career total to 2,003. Cameron Johnson had 15 points and Christian Braun added 11 points, eight rebounds and seven assists for Denver, which didn't look the least bit taxed on the second end of a road back-to-back. The Nuggets also posted the second-most points in a half (82 before halftime) in franchise history. Denver's previous record for a regular-season winning margin was 52 points against the Seattle SuperSonics on March 16, 2008. The Nuggets won a

playoff game by 58 points when they routed the New Orleans Hornets in a first-round game on April 27, 2009. Jrue Holiday scored 19 points as Portland was blown out while playing for the first since Feb. 9. Deni Avdija registered 15 points, 13 assists and eight rebounds and Donovan Clingan added 15 points and nine boards for the Trail Blazers. Scoot Henderson and Vit Krejci added 11 points apiece off the bench and Toumani Camara had 10 for Portland, which took its sixth-worst loss in club history. The Nuggets shot 57.3% from

the field and were 21 of 41 (51.2%) from 3-point range. Denver held a dominating 60-36 rebounding advantage. The Trail Blazers hit 40.7% of their field-goal attempts, including 15 of 47 (31.9%) from behind the arc. Denver scored 41 points in each of the first two quarters to hold an 82-53 halftime lead. Jokic put up 24 points and Murray added 18 for the Nuggets while Holiday had 11 first-half points for Portland. Jokic had 19 points in the opening quarter as Denver took a 14-point advantage. — **Reuters**

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BUSINESS

SHORT TAKES



A'Saffa Foods is ramping up annual broiler chicken production capacity to 60 million birds.

OMANI BROILER CHICKEN EXPANSION PROJECT SET FOR Q3 COMPLETION

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, FEB 21

Broiler chicken production at A'Saffa Foods — one of Oman's biggest poultry farms — is projected to jump by around 25% once a major expansion project is slated for completion in the third quarter of this year.

Publicly-listed A'Saffa Foods, which operates a fully integrated production facility at Thamrait in Dhofar Governorate, is ramping up annual broiler chicken production capacity from 48 million birds to 60 million birds as part of a strategic expansion of its core operations.

The initiative, first announced by the Board of Directors in December 2024, forms part of a five-year strategic growth initiative to meet rising demand for locally produced poultry in Oman and neighbouring markets, reflecting broader goals around food security and reducing reliance on imports.

"This strategic expansion will enhance production efficiency, optimise operational costs and strengthen the Company's ability to meet future demand", Chairman Eng Ali bin Hilal al Kuwari stated in the 2025 Directors' Report.

"The project involves both capacity expansion and optimisation of existing facilities and is expected to contribute positively to market share growth and competitive positioning within the poultry sector. The expansion project is currently in progress and is expected to be completed during Q3 of 2026", he added.

A'Saffa Foods operated at full capacity in 2025, with the parent company reporting revenues totalling RO 58.23 million for the year.

Oman trade remains resilient above 40 billion

MUSCAT: Oman's foreign trade performance remained resilient in 2025, with the total value of trade reaching RO 40.4 billion, despite a notable decline in oil export revenues.

The latest figures underline the growing importance of non-oil exports and re-export activities in sustaining economic momentum, in line with the Sultanate of Oman's long-term diversification strategy.

According to data released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information, non-oil exports rose by 7.5 per cent to approximately RO 6.7 billion in 2025, compared with RO 6.2 billion in 2024. Re-export activities recorded even stronger growth, increasing by 20.3 per cent to RO 2.056 billion, up from RO 1.708 billion a year earlier.

This growth reflects the continued revitalisation of ports, improvements in logistics infrastructure and government initiatives aimed at strengthening Oman's role as a regional trade and distribution hub.

Non-oil export growth was driven mainly by products from the chemical and related industries, metals and metal products, plastics, as well



Non-oil exports rose by 7.5 per cent to around RO 6.7 billion in 2025, compared with RO 6.2 billion a year earlier.

as machinery and electrical equipment. These sectors have benefited from increased industrial capacity, higher value-added production and improved access to regional and international markets. The steady expansion of non-oil exports highlights progress in reducing reliance on hydrocarbons and broadening the country's export base. In contrast, the value of oil

exports declined by 15.2 per cent to RO 14.5 billion in 2025, compared with RO 17.1 billion in 2024. This drop was largely attributed to a fall in the average price of Omani crude oil, which declined to \$71 per barrel from \$80.8 the previous year. Total oil exports stood at 307.9 million barrels, broadly unchanged from 308.4 million barrels in 2024, while average daily oil production increased from 992,600 barrels

per day to more than one million barrels per day, partly offsetting the impact of lower prices. As a result of weaker oil revenues, the total value of Omani merchandise exports fell by 7.1 per cent to RO 23.2 billion, down from RO 25 billion in 2024. Imports also recorded a decline, while commodity exports increased by 2.7 per cent, rising from RO 16.7 billion to more than RO 17.1 billion, reflecting sustained

demand for Omani products in key markets.

The United Arab Emirates remained Oman's largest trading partner for non-oil exports, with shipments exceeding RO 1.31 billion, representing a year-on-year increase of 25.3 per cent.

Non-oil exports to Saudi Arabia also rose strongly, from RO 849 million to RO 1.067 billion, while exports to India increased by 6 per cent to around RO 700 million.

In contrast, non-oil exports to South Korea and the United States declined by 26.1 per cent and 13.3 per cent, respectively. In re-export activity, the UAE accounted for 35.2 per cent of Oman's total re-exports, with goods valued at RO 724 million, followed by Iran, the United Kingdom, Saudi Arabia and India.

On the import side, shipments from the UAE and China increased, while imports from India, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia declined.

Overall, the latest trade figures underscore Oman's gradual transition towards a more balanced and diversified trade structure, with non-oil exports and re-exports playing an increasingly central role in supporting economic resilience amid global price fluctuations.

— ONA

MSX targets 'structural' liquidity with tighter rules

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, FEB 21

MUSCAT Stock Exchange (MSX) is tightening market-making obligations and streamlining foreign investor onboarding as it seeks to convert bursts of trading activity into "structural" liquidity that can absorb institutional-sized orders without sharp price swings, its chief executive said.

In an exclusive interview with the Observer, Haitham bin Salim al Salmi, CEO, said "real progress" in 2026 should be judged beyond index levels by three indicators: executable liquidity depth, a more stable ownership structure with higher long-term institutional participation and a rising number of listed companies consistently meeting international size, liquidity and free-float thresholds in line with MSCI and FTSE criteria.

"As Market classification is not achieved through short-term performance spikes, but through consistent technical eligibility over time. For us, real progress means a deeper, more stable and globally investable market", he noted.

According to the official, liquidity has become the market's central narrative, but the challenge is quality as much as quantity, arguing that deeper order books improve price discovery and reduce distortions caused by thin trading.

As a first step, MSX is enhancing its market-making framework by strengthening quoting obligations, tightening bid-ask spreads and requiring continuous two-sided



2026 progress will be measured by executable depth, investor mix and MSCI/FTSE eligibility; Tabadul flows seen as early indicator.

HAITHAM BIN SALIM AL SALMI
CEO — MSX



Trading value through Tabadul-linked activity in 2025 reached to about RO 585 million, providing an early benchmark of activity that it intends to scale in the coming phase.

markets even during volatile periods — measures aimed at keeping tradable depth available when investors need it most.

In parallel, the exchange is seeking to broaden its capital base through regional integration via Tabadul and by simplifying access for foreign investors, supported by improved banking integration.

Al Salmi said diversified participation helps balance the order book and supports "credible price formation".

On regional connectivity, he said MSX will judge early success during the first 6-12 months by tangible cross-border trading flows, a measurable rise in non-resident participation and a stronger contribution from regional market makers to price stability.

A testament to this momentum, trading value through Tabadul-linked activity in 2025 reached approximately AED 5.6 billion

(equivalent to about RO 585 million), providing an early benchmark of activity that it intends to scale in the coming phase.

Al Salmi framed the push as part of a broader shift towards a more institutionally oriented market model, where stability of the investor base can dampen volatility and support deeper, more predictable liquidity.

Over time, he said, the number of companies meeting international eligibility thresholds on a sustained basis — a prerequisite for consistent foreign allocations that are often benchmark-driven — remains a key area of focus.

The exchange's direction of travel is "structural", he said, positioning deeper liquidity and wider participation as essential to strengthening capital markets' role in financing the national economy under Oman Vision 2040.

ADVERTORIALS

SHORTTAKES



The event witnessed strong public attendance and positive engagement from visitors.

SAYARTI CONCLUDES PARTICIPATION IN AL MOUJ MUSCAT WINTER PROMENADE

MUSCAT: Sayarti, a subsidiary of The Zubair Corporation specialising in vehicle rental, leasing and pre-owned car sales, has successfully concluded its participation in the Al Mouj Muscat Winter Promenade, held as part of the weekly Saturday seasonal activities at Al Mouj Muscat.

The event witnessed strong public attendance and positive engagement from visitors.

Al Mouj Muscat’s weekly promenade has become a prominent platform that attracts diverse segments of the community, providing businesses and entrepreneurs with the opportunity to showcase their products and services in an open, engaging environment that fosters meaningful interaction.

Commenting on the participation, Sohraab Hasnain, General Manager of Sayarti Car Rental & Used Cars, stated that the company’s continued presence at Al Mouj Muscat reflects its field-oriented strategy and its commitment to strengthening direct customer engagement.

He highlighted that the strong turnout and positive interaction during the event demonstrate growing market confidence in the company’s services.

The strong turnout and positive interaction during the event demonstrate growing market confidence in the company’s services.

GCC ECONOMIES POST STRONG GAINS ACROSS KEY SECTORS

MUSCAT: The economies of the Gulf Cooperation Council recorded notable advances in competitiveness, energy, trade and digitalisation during 2024, driven by continued expansion in non-oil sectors, improvements in quality of life and sustained investment in digital infrastructure.

According to the GCC in Figures report issued by the GCC Statistical Centre, the region maintained real economic growth supported by diversification programmes and

financial reforms implemented across member states.

Combined GDP of GCC countries reached \$2.3 trillion, ranking ninth globally, with an annual growth rate of 2.2 per cent. The bloc also strengthened its position in global economic indicators related to competitiveness, resilience and economic dynamism.

In the energy sector, GCC countries ranked first worldwide in oil reserves, estimated at 511.9 billion barrels, third globally in

natural gas production at 442 billion cubic metres and second in natural gas reserves at 44.3 billion cubic metres.

Trade performance also remained strong, with the GCC ranking tenth globally in total exports valued at \$849.6 billion and eleventh in imports at \$739 billion.

Total trade volume reached \$1.589 trillion, placing the region tenth worldwide, while the GCC ranked sixth globally in trade surplus at \$109.7 billion. — ONA

Avicen holds interviews to empower Omani talent

IN alignment with the goals of Oman Vision 2040 and under the directives of Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health, along with the guidance of Ibrahim bin Nasser al Rashdi, Director General of the Drug Safety Centre at the Ministry of Health, Oman’s leading healthcare group Avicen conducted a large-scale Omani pharmacist campus interview on February 18, 2026 at the National University of Science and Technology.

The initiative reflects Avicen’s ongoing commitment to strengthening the national workforce and supporting Omanisation within the healthcare and pharmaceutical sectors. The campus recruitment drive attracted a strong turnout of pharmacy graduates and final-year students, eager to begin their professional journey with one of the Sultanate of Oman’s most trusted healthcare providers.

The interview panel was led by Sumaya bint Hamoud al Balushi, Group HR Manager, alongside senior leadership members including Nissar Edathum Chalil, Managing Director of Avicen Group, Vinu Kondarampaatu, Head of Operations and Khansaa bint Ayyoub al Zadjali, HR Executive.

Their active participation underscored the organisation’s strategic focus on talent



The initiative reflects Avicen’s ongoing commitment to strengthening the national workforce.

acquisition and professional development for Omani pharmacists.

The event was organised with the valuable support of Dr Khalid al Balushi, Dean of the University, Marwa al Hashmi, Head of Placement and Alumni Office; and P Mohamed Ali, Chancellor of the National University of Science and Technology.

Their collaboration highlights the strong

partnership between academia and industry in preparing graduates for impactful roles in the healthcare sector.

During the recruitment campaign, candidates underwent structured interviews and engaged directly with the leadership team, gaining insights into Avicen’s vision, operational standards, training programmes and long-term career growth opportunities.

Energy and services stocks lift MSX main index

MUSCAT: The main index of the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) rose by 47 points last week to close at 7,225 points, supported by gains in several energy and services companies, despite limited profit-taking that weighed on some leading stocks.

The index was buoyed by advances in shares of Renaissance Services, Omantel, Abraj Energy Services, Al Suwadi Power, OQ Exploration and Production, Asyad Shipping and SMN Power Holding.

These gains also lifted the services sector index, which rose 45 points to close at 2,807 points. In contrast, other sector



Total trading value for the week reached RO 360.8 million.

indices ended the week lower, with the financial sector index falling 47 points, the Sharia-compliant index declining by around three points and the industrial sector index edging down by one point.

Investor sentiment softened towards the end of the week as local funds and institutions reduced purchases following strong earlier gains, prompting some investors to book profits after the main index briefly exceeded 7,300 points mid-week.

Total trading value for the week reached RO 360.8 million, down 4.3 per cent from RO 377.2

million the previous week, while the number of executed transactions fell by 22 per cent to 30,650.

Market capitalisation rose by RO 179.5 million to close the week at RO 35.93 billion.

Liva Group accounted for the largest share of trading value at RO 66.4 million, followed by OQ Exploration and Production, Sohar International, OQ Base Industries and Bank Muscat.

Overall, 35 securities recorded gains, 41 declined and 22 closed unchanged, reflecting mixed market performance amidst profit-taking and sectoral rotation. — ONA

Bank Muscat launches virtual reality simulation & gamification platform

MUSCAT: Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, announced the launch of an innovative Virtual Simulation and Gamification platform as part of its prestigious EAGLEs Programme for branch managers and employees.

This strategic initiative reinforces the Bank’s commitment to developing next-generation banking leaders through an immersive, technology-driven learning experience enhanced by Artificial Intelligence (AI). The platform represents a significant leap forward in banking education, combining advanced virtual simulation technology AI-driven insights and engaging gamification elements.

It enables branch managers and employees to navigate realistic banking scenarios, make critical decisions in real time and develop essential leadership competencies within a dynamic, risk-free learning environment.

Through AI-powered analytics and adaptive



The platform represents a significant leap forward in banking education, combining advanced virtual simulation technology AI-driven insights.

learning models, the platform provides personalised feedback, identifies capability gaps and tailors development pathways to strengthen overall staff performance.

Bank Muscat is keen to invest in developing the skills of its employees, reflecting its vision to remain at the forefront of banking innovation in Oman.

This new platform, which integrates Virtual Reality and Artificial Intelligence, will further cultivate a culture of excellence, innovation and sustainable professional growth, enabling employees to better serve customers and contribute to developing services.

Ultimately, this approach creates a success-driven work culture that values innovation and fosters a supportive environment for employees.

The EAGLEs Programme is part of the Bank’s ongoing efforts to align with customer expectations and meet their banking needs,

in line with its vision, “To serve you better, everyday”.

The programme is a leading initiative in the field of leadership engagement and development. The incorporation of AI-enabled learning and advanced simulation technologies elevates the programme to new heights marking a pivotal moment in the Bank’s Talent Development Strategy and aligning with Bank Muscat’s broader digital and AI transformation agenda.

Bank Muscat places great importance on developing the skills of its employees through a wide range of training programmes and educational opportunities from the outset of their employment.

The Bank has set a strategic plan aimed at extending its support to developing human resources and opening new pathways for young Omanis to showcase their professional potential.

SHORTTAKES



The platform allows buyers to confirm that sellers hold official licences.

MA'ROOF PLATFORM STRENGTHENS TRUST IN OMAN'S E-COMMERCE

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion is stepping up efforts to regulate Oman's e-commerce sector and build consumer confidence through the Ma'roof Oman platform, a national initiative that verifies licensed online stores operating in the Sultanate of Oman.

The platform allows buyers to confirm that sellers hold official licences issued by the Ministry, facilitates communication between merchants and customers; and promotes transparency in digital transactions, particularly during peak shopping periods such as Ramadhan and Eid.

Ma'roof Oman supports the growth of the digital economy by helping online businesses demonstrate their legitimacy and reach a wider customer base, while enabling consumers to make informed and secure purchasing decisions.

As of February 2026, the platform had registered 340 e-commerce stores, with 670 applications submitted, reflecting growing awareness among business owners of the importance of authentication and a rising preference among consumers to deal with licensed sellers.

Azza bint Ibrahim al Kindi, Director of the Department of Commercial Affairs and E-Commerce at the Ministry, said the platform represents a strategic step in regulating online trade and promoting a culture of safe and responsible shopping.

She noted that Ma'roof Oman enhances the credibility of compliant merchants, strengthens their competitive position and empowers consumers to verify store authenticity before completing purchases.

The Ministry, she added, is committed to providing a secure and stimulating digital environment that supports sustainable growth and protects consumer rights. — ONA

Tahwul initiative drives major gains in digital govt

OMAN'S National Government Digital

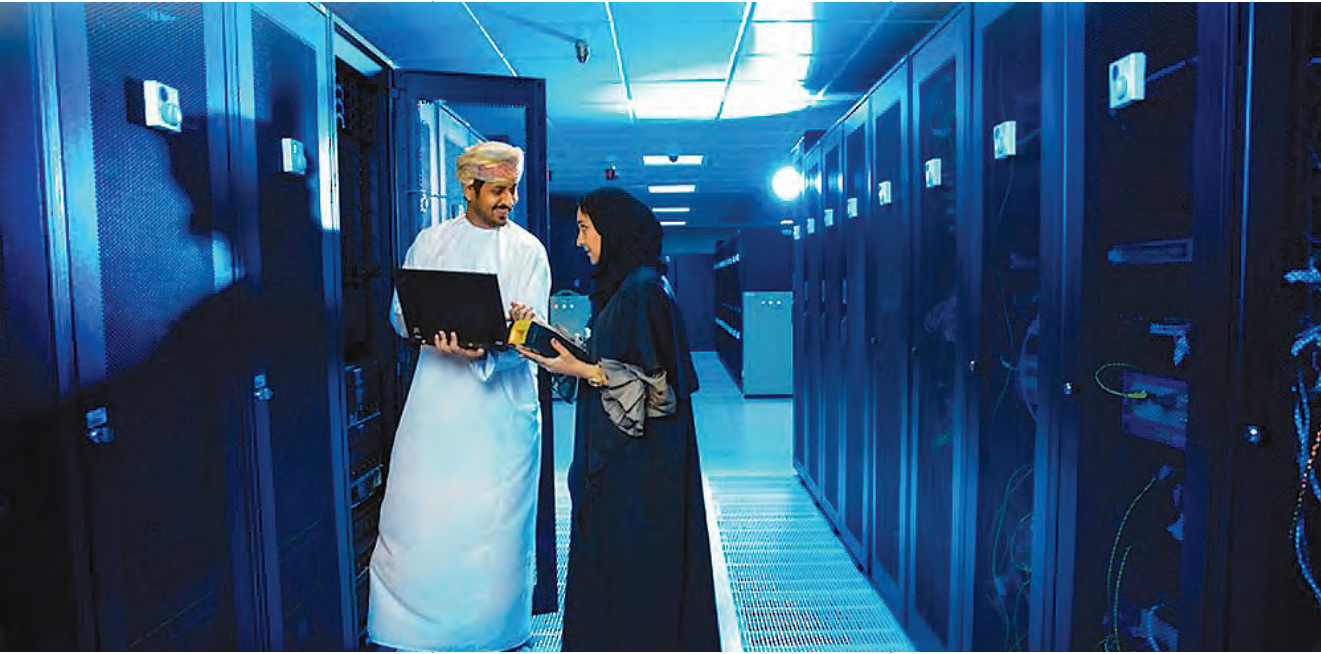
Transformation Programme, Tahwul (2021–2025), recorded a strong overall performance rate of 94 per cent by the end of December 2025, marking a sharp improvement from 73 per cent a year earlier.

According to the programme's 2025 annual performance report, all 3,166 priority government services targeted for simplification were completed, while 90 per cent of priority basic services and automatic permits were successfully digitised, covering 2,277 services out of the 2,523 planned.

The report also showed steady institutional progress, with 85 per cent of government entities achieving the required level of digital transformation maturity and an average performance of 80 per cent across governorates.

Thirteen institutions reached an advanced level of digital proficiency, while 36 were rated above average, with no entities falling below the required benchmarks.

Among the top-performing institutions in 2025 were the Royal Oman Police, the National Centre for Statistics



90 per cent of priority basic services and automatic permits were successfully digitised.

and Information, the Oman Investment Authority, the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority, the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones, Muscat Governorate, Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority, the Ministry of Finance, the State Audit Institution and the Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit.

Beneficiary satisfaction with digital services rose to 78 per cent across 48 government

institutions, while digital transactions processed through the OmanNet e-payment gateway reached 45.85 million between January and September 2025. Data exchange through the National Integration Platform exceeded 2.26 billion records by the end of November 2025, highlighting deeper system integration across government entities.

Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications

and Information Technology and General Supervisor of the Tahwul programme, said 2025 represented a turning point, as the focus shifted from policy and regulatory frameworks to large-scale implementation.

He noted that the next phase will build on these achievements by advancing digital maturity, accelerating innovation and strengthening proactive digital government, in line with Oman's long-term development goals. — ONA

OCCI SETS THREE RAMADHAN ECONOMIC DIALOGUES

MUSCAT: The Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) will organise three Ramadhan evenings this year, aimed at supporting economic diversification and fostering dialogue between the public and private sectors.

The series will provide a comprehensive outlook on key sectors shaping Oman's economic future. The first session, scheduled for February 23 in Muscat, will focus on the future of the real estate sector and sustainable cities, examining the new

Real Estate Development Law, market performance, investment opportunities and challenges facing developers, alongside initiatives to promote integrated and smart urban development.

The second evening, to be held on March 2, will address the priorities of the Eleventh Five-Year Plan, highlighting its role in advancing Oman Vision 2040, improving the business environment and driving diversification through value-added industries, sustainable tourism and digital transformation. The third

seminar, planned for mid-March, will explore economic diplomacy and its role in supporting the national economy, with emphasis on investment attraction, export promotion and the contribution of Omani missions abroad in building long-term economic partnerships.

Faisal bin Abdullah al Rawas, Chairman of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), said the Ramadhan evenings aim to create shared visions between government and the private sector. — ONA

OCEC-KIT alliance to elevate business events in Oman

MUSCAT: The Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC) has signed a strategic partnership agreement with KIT Group and KIT Group Middle East to enhance Oman's business events sector.

Under the agreement, KIT Group will serve as the Centre's in-house professional conference organiser and preferred partner for regional and international events, supporting the delivery of global standards in event planning and execution. The partnership is designed to raise service quality and operational efficiency, strengthening Oman's competitiveness as a destination for major conferences and exhibitions. The collaboration is expected



The partnership strengthens Oman's competitiveness as a destination for major conferences and exhibitions.

to enrich the local business events ecosystem by leveraging international expertise, expanding the range of events hosted in Oman and supporting the development of national talent in the meetings and conferences sector.

It also aligns with broader economic diversification objectives by boosting business tourism, promoting knowledge transfer and encouraging innovation and sustainability within the events industry.

The agreement reinforces the Centre's ambition to position Oman as a leading regional hub for high-value business events with lasting economic and knowledge-based

impact. Said bin Salim al Shanfari, Chief Executive Officer of the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre, said the partnership marks a qualitative leap in developing a globally competitive conferences and events ecosystem, in line with Oman Vision 2040. Khalid bin Walid al Zadjali, Director of the Oman Convention Bureau at the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, added that the collaboration reflects a shared commitment to strengthening the sector through cooperation with experienced international partners and enhancing Oman's standing in the global meetings industry. — ONA

ECONOMIC SLOWDOWN

Shutdown weighs on US growth



US economic growth slowed more than expected in the fourth quarter as government spending recorded its steepest decline since 1972, largely due to last year's 43-day shutdown.

However, steady consumer and business spending highlighted underlying resilience. Most of the shutdown's drag on GDP is expected to be reversed in the first quarter, according to economists. — Reuters

TRADE UNCERTAINTY

Asia reacts to new Trump tariffs



Asian economies assessed renewed trade uncertainty after US President Donald Trump pledged fresh tariffs, hours after the Supreme Court struck down several earlier levies.

The court ruling invalidated duties imposed on major exporters including China, Japan and South Korea. Trump announced later a new 10% import tariff, prompting concerns over further policy shifts. — Reuters

INFLATION RISKS

ECB flags Chinese import impact



Euro zone inflation faces significant risks in both directions, ECB policymaker Fabio Panetta said, citing the growing influence of low-cost Chinese imports.

After a sharp inflation slowdown in early 2026, Panetta said upcoming ECB staff projections would be key to guiding policy decisions. He stressed that both upside and downside inflation pressures warrant close monitoring. — Reuters

OPINION

The impact of ICV and Ramadhan in Oman



DR HILAL AL SAWAI

The writer is local content, sustainability and innovation expert

THE Sultanate of Oman integrates economic development while incorporating cultural values. In-Country Value (ICV) and the Ramadhan period of the Islamic calendar, have significant cultural and economic impact on the Sultanate of Oman. The In-Country Value (ICV) initiative is designed to enhance the economy while focusing on local contributions. Ramadhan is a time for spiritual nourishment, instilling values of generosity and social responsibility. The ICV initiative and Ramadhan period of the Islamic calendar, influence and impact businesses, communities and individuals.

UNDERSTANDING ICV IN OMAN
The In-Country Value (ICV) initiative offers an avenue for businesses to enhance economic development within the Sultanate of Oman. The initiative focuses on reducing the reliance of businesses on foreign goods and services through the procurement of local goods and services, development of Omani human resources, the patronage of local small and medium enterprises (SMEs); and local manufacturing and services. Additionally, the ICV initiative promotes the creation of job opportunities for Omani citizens and the enhancement of economic development. The ICV initiative has promoted a collaborative approach and amalgamation of the private sector objectives and government’s economic development goals. The ICV initiative has been embraced by private sector businesses, from the development of ICV policies to the integration

of ICV targets in all aspects of business, including community service, procurement, local hiring and national training.

IMPORTANCE OF RAMADHAN IN OMAN
The month of Ramadhan is the holiest month in the religion of Islam and is of great significance in the Sultanate of Oman. It is a month of fasting, prayer and reflection. It is also a month of great charitable donations and giving. During the month of Ramadhan, life in Oman changes in a variety of ways such as work hours being reduced and social events being increased after the sunsets, as well as increased visible charitable donations. The month of Ramadhan also means that many businesses with locations in Oman change their hours of operation to accommodate the fasting hours and communities centre their Ramadhan initiatives to serve those in the community that are less fortunate. Ramadhan also guides people in the Omani community to practice virtues of patience, honesty and compassion as well as the virtue of unity. The month of Ramadhan is also a time when the Oman ICV (In-Country Value) programme can clearly demonstrate social responsibility. Several businesses choose to implement their ICV values by partnering with local charities to obtain food to distribute as part of their Ramadhan charitable initiatives. This even includes local purchases of iftar (the meal to break the daily Ramadhan fast) food items such as dates, water and other food items from Omani businesses

The initiative focuses on reducing the reliance of businesses on foreign goods and services through the procurement of local goods and services, development of Omani human resources, the patronage of local small and medium enterprises (SMEs); and local manufacturing and services.

to distribute as part of their Ramadhan charitable initiatives. Also, the month of Ramadhan is a time when national (Omani) employees can be trained and ethical practices of team work can be emphasised. Ramadhan encourages ethical and transparent dealings and a good spirit towards employees which are all values that are aligned with ICV objectives.

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL IMPACT
Ramadhan and ICV working together gives a positive contribution to Oman’s economy and society. As the demand from local suppliers rises and SMEs gain recognition, the local communities are served. Furthermore, companies demonstrate their support to national development and social causes through ICV and Ramadhan. Integrating ICV and Ramadhan leads to the construction of a resilient economy, one which is supported by local resources and uses their cultural identity, demonstrating to what extent religious beliefs and economic policies can function together to the benefit of a society. Both ICV and Ramadhan will have a significant effect on the present and future of Oman. ICV will strengthen the economic foundation and Ramadhan will strengthen the morals and the social unity. When both positive influences of ICV and Ramadhan are combined, it drives both businesses and individuals to act and take social, economic and ethical positive impacts. It is both the social and economic development of the country; and development of the culture and the morals of the country.

AI’S ENVIRONMENTAL COST COMES UNDER SCRUTINY

NAJAH AL RIYAMI

Artificial intelligence is increasingly promoted as a catalyst for climate action, with applications ranging from grid optimisation to industrial efficiency. However, new research and policy reports warn that AI itself is emerging as a significant and poorly regulated environmental burden, driven by rapidly rising electricity demand, water consumption and carbon emissions from data centres. A recent report by Arthur D Little, The Hidden Cost of AI, warns that the rapid expansion of generative AI could dramatically reshape global energy demand. The study estimates that AI-related computing could account for up to 3 per cent of global electricity consumption by 2030, a level comparable to the power demand of major industrial economies if left unmanaged. The report highlights that data centres supporting large language models are being built at unprecedented speed, often outpacing the development of renewable generation and grid infrastructure. As a result, AI growth risks reinforcing dependence on fossil-fuel-based electricity in regions where clean energy capacity is not expanding fast enough. A major concern identified across multiple studies is the lack of transparency and measurement. An industry analysis cited by Manufacturing.net found that 97 per cent of companies fail to measure the environmental footprint of their AI systems, meaning emissions, energy intensity and water use frequently go unreported in sustainability disclosures. This reporting gap makes it difficult for regulators and investors to assess AI’s true climate impact. Water consumption is emerging as another critical issue. Research from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology shows that large AI data centres can consume millions of litres of fresh water annually for cooling, intensifying pressure on already stressed water systems. This is particularly relevant for arid regions, including the Middle East, where water scarcity and energy planning are closely intertwined. Beyond operational impacts, the United Nations Environment Programme has drawn attention to AI’s material footprint. In its recent digital sustainability assessments, UNEP warns that rising demand for AI hardware is increasing reliance on critical minerals, accelerating mining activity and contributing to electronic waste unless circular-economy frameworks are strengthened.

Strategy and integration drive real development

AIRPORTS are often filed as a transport story. In Oman, they increasingly read as an economic story – about reducing the cost of distance, widening access to opportunity and connecting governorates in ways that support jobs and private activity. That is why the discussion around planning and activating a wider network of regional airports, including Al Jabal Al Akhdhar, matters beyond aviation. The policy choice is clear. Oman can build regional airports that merely “operate”, or it can develop regional airports that actively “develop” the places they serve. A runway can host flights and still fail to generate meaningful local value. Development requires more than movement. It requires that arrivals convert into spending, investment and employment that stays in the local economy. This is where Al Jabal Al Akhdhar becomes a useful test. The destination does not compete on volume; it competes on experience – climate, landscape and premium positioning. If air connectivity expands, success should not be measured by how quickly timetables fill, but by what the additional access delivers: longer stays, higher visitor spending, stronger demand beyond peak periods and more viable local SMEs in transport, hospitality, food services and curated experiences. A rush for volume risks diluting the experience and increasing pressure on local infrastructure and the environment. A value-driven approach aims to raise economic return per trip, not simply add traffic. Supporters of regional airports often point – rightly – to wider national ambitions for aviation and logistics. Targets circulated under long-term planning frameworks



Aviation can help make growth more balanced and more local – but only if airports are treated as economic platforms.



QASIM AL MAASHANI

The author is the head of the Business and Politics department at Oman Observer

Oman’s regional airports plan can rebalance growth – but only if it is run as an economic system, not a construction programme.

include lifting passenger capacity to around 40 million annually, expanding air cargo throughput to about one million tonnes and raising aviation’s contribution to GDP to roughly 3.5% by 2040. These are big numbers and they set an important direction. But numbers alone do not deliver outcomes. Outcomes depend on operating economics, route strategy and how each airport is integrated into a local economy. The main risks are familiar. Demand is frequently overestimated, costs are underestimated and operations are treated as an afterthought. Passenger volumes do not rise automatically and routes do not survive on good intentions. A regional airport can be completed while routes remain commercially fragile, or flights can operate while the local impact stays thin because visitors arrive and depart without meaningful spending or supply-chain linkages. If operating costs resemble a major hub model rather than a lean regional model, the facility can drift into recurring fiscal support. If regional airports are to serve development, they must be run like

a market system, not a construction project. That begins with purpose: not every regional airport should be positioned as tourism. Some may serve domestic connectivity for communities facing long travel times; others may be better suited for seasonal and charter operations, emergency support, training aviation, or light high-value cargo. Each airport needs a defined economic function, realistic demand assumptions and a credible path to cover operating costs over time. Airline partnerships are equally decisive. The answer is not open-ended subsidies, but time-bound, performance-based support, with incentives tied to clear outcomes such as schedule reliability, acceptable load factors and demonstrable local benefit. The objective is to nurture routes until they can stand on commercial legs, with accountability on both sides. Finally, credibility depends on measurement. If airports are expected to create jobs and strengthen governorate links, outcomes should be tracked transparently: direct and indirect employment, SME activity, tourist nights and spending; and improvements in access to business and public services. Without clear indicators, debate drifts toward impressions – and policy becomes vulnerable to noise. Oman’s regional airports opportunity can be stated plainly: aviation can help make growth more balanced and more local – but only if airports are treated as economic platforms, not symbols. A runway does not create jobs by itself. Development comes from what follows: the operating model, the route strategy, the integration with local services and investment; and the willingness to measure results and adjust course.

CLASSIFIEDS

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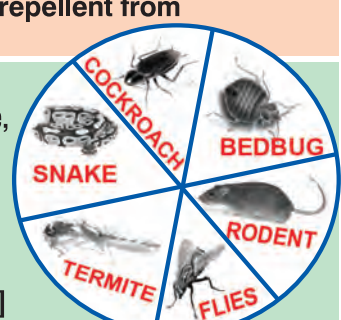
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SIT. VACANT

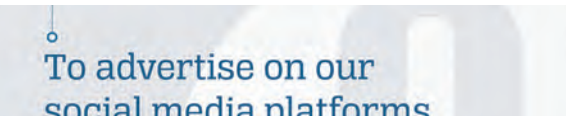
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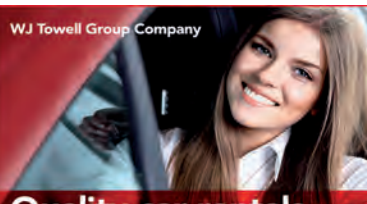


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ECHOES OF **LIGHT**

CAPTURING THE SPIRIT OF RAMADHAN NIGHTS

Photographer **SULTAN BIN SAID AL SAIFI** captures the quiet beauty, community warmth and spiritual reflections that define Ramadhan evenings in historic Nizwa



photographing volunteers distributing meals, families sharing Iftar, or worshippers leaving the mosque, he prefers candid moments. Natural gestures and unplanned interactions reveal authenticity far more than posed images.

Communal gatherings also offer powerful visual stories. Long rows of Iftar plates, people seated side by side, and prayer lines form natural patterns. With thoughtful composition, these busy scenes become harmonious frames that highlight unity rather than crowding. Leading lines created by carpets or tables guide the viewer's eye across the image.

Yet the quiet moments matter just as much. After prayers, when the streets fall into stillness, he often turns his focus to solitude. A single figure in reflection beneath soft light can express the spiritual depth of Ramadhan more strongly than a bustling marketplace. Minimal framing and gentle shadows bring out a sense of peace and contemplation.

Details add another layer of intimacy. Close-ups of prayer beads, open Qurans, or lanterns glowing against the night sky symbolise faith and tradition. By isolating these elements, Sultan invites viewers to notice the subtle signs that define the month. Colour tone, too, shapes emotion. Warm golds and amber hues dominate his photographs, reinforcing a sense of comfort and spirituality. Careful balance keeps the scenes natural rather than overly stylised.

For Sultan, Ramadhan is best captured not simply as an event, but as a feeling. Through light, architecture, human expression and small details, his photographs reflect the spirituality, generosity and unity that fill Ramadhan nights. Each image becomes more than documentation — it becomes a memory, a shared moment and a quiet reflection of the month's enduring glow.

ARWA AL HASHIMI

RAMADHAN nights carry a rhythm that feels both intimate and expansive, especially in Oman, where faith and community shape everyday life. For Omani photographer Sultan bin Said al Saifi of Nizwa, these evenings are more than scenes to document — they are living stories of identity, memory and belonging. Known for capturing people's lives and Oman's natural beauty, he approaches Ramadhan with a lens that seeks authenticity rather than spectacle.

When he hears the words 'Ramadhan nights,' he thinks of neighbourhoods such as Harat Al Aqr and Harat Al Ain, where streets glow with decorations and communal Iftars bring generations together. The charm, he says, lies in how familiar spaces transform. Ordinary streets become warm corridors of life, and his photography focuses on this interplay of light, space and human emotion.

Lighting sits at the heart of his work. After sunset, natural light fades and soft artificial light takes over. Mosque courtyards glow after



Taraweeh prayers, lanterns sway above doorways, and strings of bulbs cast golden reflections on mud-brick walls. Working patiently with low light, he preserves the



Pictures by **Sultan bin Said al Saifi**

calm of the moment, allowing the atmosphere to speak for itself. The result is imagery that conveys serenity without staging.

Architecture plays an equally important role. In the historic quarters of Nizwa, traditional doorways, narrow alleys and courtyards provide depth and texture. By framing people within these spaces, Sultan connects human presence with cultural

heritage. Children wandering through decorated alleys or elders resting beside old doors quietly tell stories of continuity. In his work, the surroundings are never just a backdrop — they are part of the narrative.

Human expression ultimately defines his Ramadhan photography. Faces during this month often carry a glow shaped by gratitude, reflection and generosity. Whether

FATWA

QUESTION & ANSWER



Shaikh
Dr Kahlani
Al Kharousi

Assistant Grand Mufti of the Sultanate of Oman

QUESTION

A woman on kidney dialysis has been advised not to fast. What should she do?

ANSWER

If her illness is temporary, she should not fast during dialysis and make up the missed days later. If it is chronic and fasting would harm her, she does not fast or make up the days; instead, she feeds one poor person for each missed day.

QURAN

VERSE OF THE DAY

{ رَبَّنَا لَا تُزِغْ قُلُوبَنَا بَعْدَ إِذْ هَدَيْتَنَا وَهَبْ لَنَا مِنْ لَدُنْكَ رَحْمَةً إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ الْوَهَّابُ }

Our Lord, do not let our hearts deviate after You have guided us, and grant us Your mercy; for You are the Munificent Bestower.

[Surat Al Imran - Verse 8]

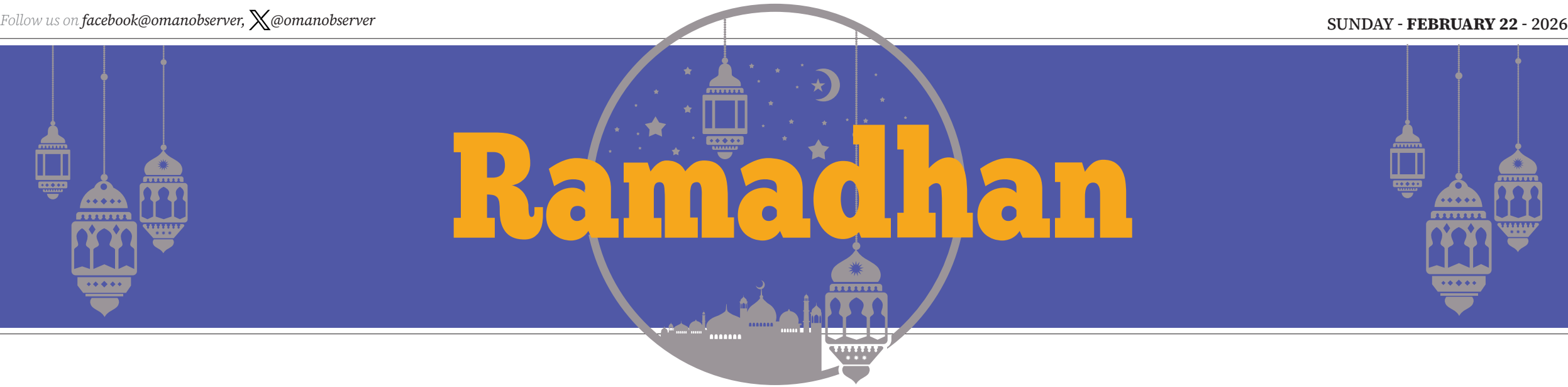
HADITH

A GUIDE FOR THE FAITHFUL

Abu Thabit (May Allah be pleased with him) said: The Prophet (PBUH) said:

"He who asks Allah for martyrdom, Allah will raise him to the high status of the martyrs, even if he dies on his bed."

[Muslim]



H E A L T H F I R S T T H I S H O L Y M O N T H

RESEARCH SHOWS PREPARATION KEY TO SAFER RAMADHAN FASTING

BUTHAINA AL RIYAMI

RAMADHAN is the awaited month for Muslims around the world, marked by spiritual reflection and reunion with family and faith. The anticipation begins with the sighting of the crescent moon, signalling the start of the blessed month. With that announcement, a sense of peace fills the atmosphere, lifting people from daily pressures and drawing them into Ramadhan's spiritual and cultural rhythm.

While Ramadhan is often viewed through a spiritual lens, preparation for the month has broader dimensions. Recent Omani research highlights the importance of health preparation, showing that planning before Ramadhan plays a measurable role in well-being, especially for those managing chronic conditions.

A 2025 study titled "Impact of the IDF-DAR Risk Stratification and Pre-Ramadhan Education on Diabetes-Related Complications," published in the Journal of Diabetes and Endocrine Practice, was conducted across three healthcare centres in Oman by a multidisciplinary team of researchers. The study focused on structured pre-Ramadhan assessments and education for people living with diabetes, emphasising that Ramadhan begins before the first day of fasting.

PREPARATION AS PREVENTION

Patients attending diabetes clinics received tailored education weeks before Ramadhan. Healthcare teams provided guidance on meal timing, medication adjustments, hydration, and warning signs that require breaking the fast. The findings showed that patients who followed structured guidance experienced fewer fasting-related complications and felt more confident managing their health.

One notable case involved a 26-year-old woman with longstanding type



1 diabetes who strongly wished to fast. Instead of discouraging her, the diabetes care team designed an individualised Ramadhan care plan. She received intensive education on carbohydrate counting, insulin adjustment, and continuous glucose monitoring. Her glucose readings were remotely monitored through a dedicated communication channel, with regular check-ins and access to real-time support.

With this closely supervised approach, she completed Ramadhan without severe hypoglycaemia, hyperglycaemia, emergency visits, or hospital admissions. The case demonstrated that with proper planning and support, even high-risk individuals can fast safely and meaningfully.

A SHIFT IN APPROACH

Although the study focused on diabetes, its implications extend further. Health professionals stress that preparation should go beyond stocking food and planning Iftar menus. It should include personalised nutritional plans based on health status, gradual caffeine reduction, sleep adjustments, and portion control before Ramadhan begins.

The researchers recommend making pre-Ramadhan education a routine part of healthcare services, particularly for patients with chronic conditions. Their findings align with global health guidance and reinforce a clear message: the quality and safety of Ramadhan are shaped not only during the month itself, but also in the quiet weeks leading up to it.

RAMADHAN TWEETS



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Ramadan 🌙 we welcome it with light, and live it in serenity 🇲🇪
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The spirit of Ramadhan in Omani culture



محمد الكثيري
@mohammedSalala4

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"The night is repose and the day is tranquility
If only all of time were Ramadan."
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Bahla Souq adorned with Ramadhan ornaments



PROMINENT

OMANI FIGURES

Who is he?
Dr Rashid bin Omairah Al-Hashimi

Dr Rashid bin Omairah Al-Hashimi al Rustaqi was a prominent Omani physician, pharmacist, scholar, writer, and poet who lived during the late 10th–11th century AH (roughly late 15th to early 17th AD). He was born in the village of Al 'Aini in Rustaq into a family with a long tradition in medicine.



RAMADHAN

TRADITION



Since the days of the Ottoman Empire, those fasting during Ramadhan have been woken up by street criers for the pre-dawn Suhoor. This tradition continues in many Islamic countries, often with the chosen men donning the traditional attire. The nafar of Morocco, the mesaharaty drummers of Egypt and Türkiye, and the sheriwalas of Old Delhi are just a few examples.



HEALTH

TIPS



GET PLENTY OF REST

An accumulated lack of sleep will affect your concentration, focus, and decision-making. If you can't get the recommended 8 hours of sleep in a night, then make sure you schedule some time to rest during the day. Just 10-20 minutes of sleep in the afternoon will help re-energise you, lift your mood, and improve performance for the rest of the day.

Italian-Russian residency concludes with ROHM grand finale concert



STAFF REPORTER

THE concert conducted by Anna Skryleva on February 14, Music Theatre Headquartres of the Royal Guard, marked the successful conclusion of the cultural mission in Oman. This initiative strengthened the historic partnership with the Royal Opera House Muscat (ROHM) and was developed within the framework of P+ARTS (Partnership for Artistic Research in Technology and Sustainability).

Supported by the European Union, the programme features NABA as the lead partner of an elite network comprising ten academic and AFAM institutions, united to merge artistic research, technological innovation, and sustainable models.

The Middle Eastern residency was characterised by high-profile educational and performance milestones. On February 9, five musicians from the Accademia—Chiara Rollini and Laila Farag (violins), Lois Loos (viola), Andrea Cavalazzi (cello), and Giulio Ruggeri (double bass) — performed alongside the Muscat Royal Philharmonic Orchestra. This performance was followed by a dedicated masterclass for the local string section, which allowed 20 local musicians to join the orchestral ranks for the final concert on February 14.

For the final performance, the versatile artist, conductor, pianist, and composer Anna Skryleva curated a repertoire exploring two cornerstones of the Russian tradition: Suites from Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky’s The Nutcracker and Igor Stravinsky’s The Firebird. From Tchaikovsky’s world-renowned score, Skryleva selected movements of great intensity—from the Russian Dance to the Waltz of the Flowers, and the Dance of the Prince and the Sugar Plum Fairy—highlighting the perfect balance between intricate detail and symphonic power. Completing the programme was the 1945 version of Stravinsky’s Suite, a masterpiece that condenses the imaginative power of the 1910 original into a score that alternates ethereal lyricism with avant-garde rhythmic drives.

Beyond the music, academic dialogue took center stage on February 12 during a roundtable discussion at the MultiPurpose Room at the ROHM. Moderated by Umberto Bellodi (P+ARTS scientific representative for the Accademia), the panel featured prominent figures including Umberto Fanni (Director General and Artistic Director, ROHM), Luisa Vinci (Strategic Coordination



and Development, Accademia Teatro alla Scala), Daniele Borniquez (Head of Music Department, Accademia Teatro alla Scala), Elisa Poli (NABA and P+ARTS Coordinator), musicologist Livio Aragona (Conservatory ‘G Verdi’ of Milan), and Brigadier General Ramis bin Jamaan Al Aweera of the Royal Guard. The debate underscored the vision of artistic research as a strategic engine for the evolution of the entire music production industry.

This project represents more than just a diplomatic bridge between Italy and Oman; it confirms that the internationalization of artistic education is the most effective tool for translating tradition into new contemporary languages.

The Accademia Teatro alla Scala and the ROHM thus sign a new chapter in an evolving cooperation, capable of transforming technical synergy into a shared vision for the future of music.

SHORTSTORIES

STORIES WRITTEN IN THE SHADOW OF NOON



ARWA AL HASHIMI

In the landscape of contemporary Omani fiction, Mahmoud al Rahbi stands out as one of the writers who has shaped the short story with a refined artistic awareness. His collection Sa’at Zawal (The Hour of Decline) marks a significant milestone in his literary journey. The work, which won the Sultan Qaboos Award for Culture, Arts and Literature in 2012, does more than present separate narratives; it constructs a cohesive fictional world built around an intense human moment, one that resembles “zawal” as a turning point between two states: before transformation and after it.

In this collection, Al Rahbi does not rely on dramatic events or complex plots. Instead,

he focuses on small details that reveal both the fragility and resilience of human beings. His characters appear ordinary at first glance: a man revisiting an old memory, a woman confronting prolonged silence, or an individual standing at the threshold of a decisive choice. Yet this “ordinariness” transforms under the writer’s lens into a space for reflection on time, identity, and the choices that shape human destiny.

Time in Sa’at Zawal is not merely a backdrop for events; it is an active element in shaping meaning. The hour of decline, suggesting the moment when noon begins to fade, becomes a symbol of transition and subtle change. Al Rahbi captures the instant when convictions shift or hidden truths surface, giving it a quiet philosophical dimension, far removed from direct moralising.

Stylistically, the text is marked by a clear linguistic economy. Sentences are often concise, the rhythm measured, and the language carefully crafted. There is no unnecessary elaboration or excessive ornamentation; rather, a deliberate precision that gives each word its full weight. This density turns reading into a contemplative experience, leaving space for the reader to engage actively with the text and complete its meanings.

Oman is present throughout the narratives without affectation. Place is not merely decorative; it forms part of the characters’ consciousness and identity. The village, the house, and the details of everyday life quietly permeate the stories, affirming that the local setting can embrace universal human concerns. In this fusion between specificity and broader human resonance lies one of the collection’s strengths.

Al Rahbi, born in Oman in 1969, is considered one of the country’s leading short story writers. He has published several short story collections and narrative works. In addition to winning the Sultan Qaboos Award for Culture, Arts and Literature, he previously received first place in the Dubai Cultural Award for short story writing. Some of his works have been translated into other languages, contributing to introducing international readers to modern Omani fiction.

Ultimately, Sa’at Zawal offers a model of short fiction that values depth over spectacle and suggestion over direct statement. It is writing that aligns itself with the honest moment, affirming that major transformations may begin with a small detail or with a passing hour at midday. The collection stands as a testament to the ability of Omani literature to articulate the complexities of human existence with quiet strength and artistic confidence.



MAHMOUD AL RAHBI

قصص

ساعة زوال

محمود الرحبي