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SUNRISE 06:39 AM
PRAYER TIMINGS
FAJR 05:23 AM
DHUHR 12:26 PM
ASR 03:42 PM
MAGHRIB 06:08 PM
ISHA 07:19 PM

12 AUSTRALIA, IRELAND CRASH OUT AS ZIMBABWE QUALIFY

INBRIEF

HM'S GREETINGS TO GAMBIA PRESIDENT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Adama Barrow of the Republic of Gambia, on his country's Independence Anniversary. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his best wishes to President Adama and the people of Gambia further progress and prosperity.

HM CONGRATULATES BANGLADESH PM

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of congratulations to Tarique Rahman, Prime Minister of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, on his election victory and taking the constitutional oath as Prime Minister. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his best wishes to the Prime Minister for success in performing his responsibilities towards achieving further stability and economic recovery. His Majesty also wished the relations between the two countries continued growth and prosperity.

HM'S GREETINGS TO KING OF BHUTAN

King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck of the Kingdom of Bhutan received Issa bin Saleh al Shibani, who presented his credentials as the Non-Resident Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the Kingdom of Bhutan. The official ceremony took place at the Tashichho Dzong Royal Palace in the capital, Thimphu. During the meeting, the ambassador conveyed the greetings of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to the King of Bhutan, along with His Majesty's wishes to the King for continued health and happiness. His Majesty also wished the people of Bhutan further progress.

Iran, US agree on 'guiding principles' for deal at talks

Yield good progress towards common goals: Sayyid Badr

SAYYID BADR BIN HAMAD AL BUSAIDY, Foreign Minister, said, "Today's indirect negotiations between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the United States of America in Geneva concluded with good progress towards identifying common goals and relevant technical issues."

He added, "The spirit of our meetings was constructive. Together we made serious efforts to define a number of guiding principles for a final deal. The contribution of the IAEA Director-General was much appreciated. Much work is yet to be done, and the parties left with clear next steps before the next meeting."

Earlier, Sayyid Badr held a consultative meeting with Steve Witkoff, Special Envoy of the US President, as well as Jared Kushner, prior to the convening of the Iran-US talks round held in Geneva under the aegis of the Sultanate of Oman.

The discussions encompassed a comprehensive assessment of the broader context surrounding the talks, coupled with an in-depth examination of the political and technical requirements essential for their success. Conducted in a realistic and constructive spirit, the consultative meeting sought to enhance prospects for mutual understandings aligned with the talks' objectives. Today's talks yielded tangible progress, establishing a foundation for their continued pursuit in the forthcoming period.

Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, with US Special Envoy Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner, ahead of the indirect US-Iran talks, in Geneva on Tuesday.

> *The spirit of our meetings was constructive. Together we made serious efforts to define a number of guiding principles for a final deal*
>
> ***SAYYID BADR AL BUSAIDY***

Meanwhile, Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said that Iran and the United States agreed to "a set of guiding principles" laying the groundwork for a broader deal during talks in Geneva. "Ultimately, we were able to reach broad agreement on a set of guiding principles, based on which we will move forward and begin working on the text of a potential agreement," Araghchi said, which he described as "more constructive" than the previous round earlier this month. He added that once both sides had come up with draft texts for an agreement, "the drafts would be exchanged and a date for a third round (of talks) would be set".

Araghchi acknowledged that it "will take time to narrow" the gap between both countries' positions.

— Agencies

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SHORT*TAKES*

A total of 66 Zakat committees and 65 volunteer teams will benefit from this initiative. ***— ONA***

INVESTMENT LANDS ALLOCATED FOR ZAKAT COMMITTEES

MUSCAT: *A ceremony titled "Extended Giving" (Ata'a Mumtad) was held on Tuesday, marking the allocation of residential and commercial investment lands in prime locations across various governorates of the Sultanate of Oman for the benefit of Zakat committees and volunteer teams.*

The event was held under the auspices of Sultan bin Salim al Habsi, Minister of Finance.

This initiative is the result of institutional cooperation between the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning, the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs, and the Ministry of Social Development. It embodies the integration of government efforts to support sustainable giving initiatives and enhance social impact, reflecting the consolidation of social solidarity values and the role of community institutions in national development.

A total of 66 Zakat committees and 65 volunteer teams will benefit from this initiative, in recognition of their vital role in caring for eligible families and providing social support. The goal is to enable these institutions to generate sustainable self-resources by developing the granted lands, which will directly benefit the community and contribute to family stability and social cohesion.

Haban al Balushi, Director-General of Lands at the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning, confirmed that the initiative aims to empower Zakat committees and charitable teams to continue their voluntary efforts and community work. ***— ONA***

Foreign Minister, IAEA chief discuss Iran's nuclear plans

GENEVA: *Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, met with Rafael Mariano Grossi, Director-General of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), on Tuesday.*

They exchanged views on technical matters pertaining to the Iranian nuclear file and the ongoing Oman-mediated talks between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the United States of America.

Sayyid Badr expressed his appreciation for the technical and oversight role played by the IAEA in support of efforts aimed to advance the talks.

Sayyid Badr expressed his appreciation for the role played by IAEA.

The IAEA Director-General voiced his appreciation for the constructive role played by the Sultanate of Oman in supporting dialogue efforts, emphasising the IAEA's commitment to continuing its technical cooperation in a way that enhances opportunities to reach understandings to foster security and stability in the region.

Meet reviews addressing project in Muscat wilayat

BALQEES AL ORAIMI

MUSCAT, FEB 17

THE Wilayat of Muscat convened an expanded meeting to review the the National Addressing Projects, reaffirming its commitment to accelerating implementation and strengthening coordination among relevant entities.

The meeting was chaired by Ali bin Said bin Mohammed al Saeedi, Wali of Muscat, and brought together members of the wilayat-level team and representatives of concerned authorities. It formed part of ongoing efforts to activate addressing teams across Oman and ensure unified progress in line with the national framework governing the project. Discussions focused on the operational mechanisms adopted by Muscat, including coordination channels between local authorities and technical entities responsible for mapping, data management and field verification. Members examined practical steps aimed at enhancing workflow efficiency, reducing duplication of efforts and ensuring that milestones are achieved within the specified timelines.

Discussions focused on the operational mechanisms adopted by Muscat.

A key topic of discussion centred on the formation of dedicated sub-teams at the wilayat level to study and approve proposed street names. Officials underscored the importance of selecting names that authentically reflect the identity, history and cultural heritage of each area.

By incorporating historically significant figures, traditional landmarks and culturally resonant terminology, the project seeks not only to organise urban spaces, but also to preserve and celebrate local legacy.

Participants stressed that the naming process must be guided by clear criteria to ensure consistency, avoid repetition and maintain linguistic accuracy. In addition to reviewing existing proposals, the team discussed mechanisms for introducing new names where necessary, particularly in newly developed neighbourhoods and expanding residential zones.

Beyond its cultural dimension, the unified addressing system is designed to deliver tangible practical benefits. By standardising street names and assigning unique numbers to buildings, the system will create a precise and reliable geographical reference framework.

This, in turn, enhances navigation, facilitates postal and delivery services, and supports emergency response operations by enabling faster and more accurate location identification.

هيئة الخدمات المالية
FINANCIAL SERVICES AUTHORITY

Tender Announcement

Financial Services Authority announces the following tender :-

Tender name	Tender Number	Release the RFP	Last date for Purchase of RFP	Last date of Submiting the proposal	Tender fees in OMR
Providing human carders for Dhamani Platform	FSA 004/2026	18 February 2026	26 February 2026 03:00 PM	5 March 2026 02:00 PM	25 Non Refundable

- Specialized companies interested in participating in the above tender must deposit the tender fee into bank account, and submit payment receipt of the tender along with a copy of the commercial registration certificate and the contact details of the authorized person to the Services & Public Relations Department e-mail : Tenders@fsa.gov.om. hence, we shall provide you with Tender document by e-mail.
- All participating companies must provide a bank guarantee, issued by locally registered bank not less than 2 % of the tender value adressed to FSA , the bond shall be valid for 90 days from the submission of the proposal.
- All bids shall be submitted in tender box at the headquarters of the Financial Services Authority, located in Airport Heights.
- FSA is not obliged to accept the lowest bid or any other bid without any justifiable reasons.

To view

Bank account information :-
Name of beneficiary : Financial Services Authority
Account no : 0423019706330018
Bank : Bank Muscat- Corporate Branch- CBD
SWIFT code : BMUSOMRXXXX
Please attach a copy of the deposit receipt

For inquiries, please contact :-
E-mail : Tenders@fsa.gov.om
Telephone Number : 24823299, 24823133
Timing : 8:00 am to 3:00 pm
Workdays : Sunday to Thursday.

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بيانات

Oman highlights its commitment to cultural diversity at Unesco

PARIS: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Education (the Oman National Commission for Education, Culture and Science) and the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, participated on Tuesday in the 19th session of the Intergovernmental Committee for the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions.

Organised by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (Unesco), the meetings are being held from February 17 to 20 at the organisation's headquarters in the French capital, Paris.

The session involves the participation of States Parties to the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions who are not members of the Intergovernmental Committee. Oman's participation underscores its commitment to supporting international efforts aimed at safeguarding cultural diversity, promoting cultural and creative industries, empowering artists and creators, and developing national cultural policies that keep pace with rapid shifts in the digital environment.

Discussions explored legal options to enhance protection of cultural content in digital spaces. ***— ONA***

The session addressed several key topics, most notably the convention within the digital environment and a review of relevant guidelines. Discussions also explored potential legal options to enhance the protection of cultural content in digital spaces. Additionally, the Committee reviewed the Secretariat's report on the implementation of its 2025 decisions and its work plan for the 2026–2027 period, alongside the outcomes of the celebrations marking the 20th anniversary of the Convention's adoption.

The meetings further included discussions on the implementation report of Article 16 regarding preferential treatment for developing countries, an evaluation of the International Fund for Cultural Diversity's performance, and the approval of new projects.

— ONA

SHORTTAKES

The programme aims to facilitate the exchange of expertise. — ONA

ASDS SIGNS COOPERATION PACT WITH UNIVERSITIES

MUSCAT: *The Academy for Strategic and Defence Studies (ASDS) signed on Tuesday a cooperation programme with a number of private universities and colleges in the Sultanate of Oman.*

The programme aims to facilitate the exchange of expertise, enhance the quality of academic and training programmes, and promote cooperation in the fields of academia, scientific research, and innovation.

It further seeks to provide access to learning and scientific research resources, as well as qualification programmes and workshops, while enabling the utilisation of experts and consultants and fostering development in joint educational and digital fields.

The cooperation programme was signed by Maj Gen Hamid bin Ahmed Sakroon, Chairman of the Academy for Strategic and Defence Studies (ASDS), and Dr Juma bin Ali al Juma, Chairman of the Coordinating Committee for Private Universities and Colleges. — ONA

RO 2M VETERINARY HOSPITAL OPENS IN WILAYAT OF ADAM

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources inaugurated Al Bashayer Veterinary Hospital in the Wilayat of Adam, Al Dakhiliyah Governorate. The project cost approximately RO 2 million, with around RO 700,000 allocated to equip it with the latest specialised devices, equipment and advanced capabilities. Dr Ahmed bin Nasser al Bakri, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources for Agriculture, said that the hospital represents a qualitative addition to the veterinary health system in the Sultanate of Oman and a model for public-private partnership. — ONA

RNO seminar looks at innovation, capacity building

MUSCAT: *The Royal Navy of Oman organised on Tuesday the second annual scientific seminar titled "Innovation and Capacity Building." The event was held under the auspices of Air Vice Marshal Khamis bin Hammad al Ghafri, Commander of the Royal Air Force of Oman (RAFO), and in the presence of Rear Admiral Saif bin Nasser al Rahbi, Commander of the Royal Navy of Oman (RNO).*

The programme of the seminar, which was held at the Shafaq Club of the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF), included several key themes.

The first theme addressed "The Reality of Innovation in Higher Education Institutions in the Sultanate of Oman," while the second theme touched upon "The Experiences of Higher Education Institutions in Promoting Innovation and Supporting the Education and Learning Environment." — ONA

The seminar was accompanied by an exhibition featuring a number of technologies and innovations. — ONA

Multiple sclerosis patients face mental, social burden

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, FEB 17

A RECENT study conducted at Sultan Qaboos University has shed new light on the psychological, cognitive and social challenges faced by patients with multiple sclerosis (MS) in the Sultanate of Oman. The research was led by Prof Samir bin Hamad al Adawi from the Department of Behavioural Medicine, College of Medicine and Health Sciences, and carried out by a multidisciplinary research team.

Multiple sclerosis is a chronic autoimmune disease that has a profound impact on neurological functioning and patients' quality of life. The condition is increasingly understood through a biopsychosocial lens, where biological, psychological and social factors interact to influence disease progression and patient well-being. Although Oman reports a relatively low prevalence of MS, estimated at 15 cases per 100,000 people compared to other Gulf countries, understanding the condition's psychological and cognitive burden within the local context remains critically important.

Globally, growing attention has been directed towards the effects of MS on cognitive functioning and mental health. The disease can impair key cognitive abilities such as attention, memory and processing speed, which in turn affects patients' independence, daily functioning and overall quality of life.

Against this backdrop, Prof Al Adawi led a multi-centre exploratory study involving clinically stable MS patients recruited from Khoula Hospital and Sultan Qaboos University Hospital, both recognised as leading neurological referral centres in Oman. The study compared MS patients with healthy individuals across several domains, including intellectual ability, neuropsychological performance and emotional well-being, with particular attention to symptoms of anxiety and depression. It also examined gender differences and explored the relationship between cognitive performance and quality of life.

Multiple sclerosis is a chronic autoimmune disease that has a profound impact on neurological functioning and patients' quality of life. The condition is increasingly understood through a biopsychosocial lens, where biological, psychological and social factors interact to influence disease progression and patient well-being.

Oman has low prevalence of MS, estimated at 15 cases per 100,000 people compared to other Gulf countries.

The findings revealed that MS patients in Oman experience notable reductions in thinking ability, visual–spatial memory and cognitive processing speed when compared with healthy participants. Gender differences were generally minimal, although female patients demonstrated slightly stronger visual–spatial abilities. Importantly, the study highlighted a strong association between quality of life and cognitive performance, underscoring the close interplay between biological, psychological and social factors in the lived experience of MS.

These results confirm the presence of a significant psychological, cognitive and social burden among MS patients in Oman. The researchers emphasise the need for comprehensive assessment and integrated care approaches that are sensitive to cultural, social and healthcare system characteristics. A deeper understanding of these dynamics will support the development of tailored preventive and rehabilitative strategies, ultimately improving patients' quality of life and strengthening both local and international research and clinical efforts.

It is also worth noting that the Sultanate of Oman provides free and comprehensive healthcare services to its citizens through an integrated national health system, reflecting the country's strong commitment to public health and societal well-being.

Markets fully stocked to meet high demand during Ramadhan

MUSCAT: Markets, shops and shopping centres in different governorates of the Sultanate of Oman are undergoing strong purchasing activity and a high rate of readiness for the month of Ramadhan this year. In anticipation of high demand, trading parties take measures to ensure the availability of basic commodities like fruits and vegetables at reasonable and stable prices.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources reported that, with effect from February 1, 2026, the total number of imported livestock stood at 129,875 (including 9,456 heads of cattle and 120,419 sheep).

The ministry also affirmed the availability of fish during Ramadhan. It reported that it acted in coordination with fish sale companies, transporters and retailers to ensure the availability of adequate supplies.

In anticipation of high demand, trading parties take measures to ensure the availability of basic commodities. — ONA

Othman bin Ali al Hattali, Director of Operations at the Central Vegetable and Fruit Market (Silal), said that the market boasts highly equipped infrastructure, an integrated trading hall and modern service and logistics facilities — all designed to meet the availability of supplies during the peak period.

Mohammed bin Khalifa al Badrani, Director-General of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion in Dhofar Governorate, said that the governorate's markets are fully prepared to meet high demand for goods and foodstuffs during Ramadhan. He also affirmed the smooth operation of supply chains and the governorate's readiness to address any shortages in supply.

In the Governorate of Al Batinah South, the main markets in various wilayats have seen a tangible availability of food supplies, thanks to ongoing efforts and field monitoring conducted by municipalities and other departments.

Abdulaziz bin Mohammed al Maamari, Director of Al Rustaq Municipality Department, said that the municipality is conducting awareness programmes and inspecting the validity of products, their display and storage methods and ensuring compliance with approved health regulations.

In a related context, Said bin Ibrahim al Shehhi, Head of the Communication and Media Department at the Consumer Protection Department in Musandam Governorate, said that field monitoring showed that goods were available in sufficient quantities to meet the needs of consumers.

Sami bin Salim al Hadhrami, Director of the Health Affairs Department at Al Dakhiliyah Municipality, said that the authorities concerned have intensified preparations for the month of Ramadhan to ensure the availability and stability of basic goods and food supplies and to maintain health inspection.

Abdullah bin Rashid al Yaqoubi, Director of the Health Affairs Department at Al Dhahirah Municipality, said that the municipality entrusted specialised work teams with the mission of monitoring food establishments, markets and shops. — ONA

AL DARNA

RENEWS BONDS, PAVES WAY FOR RAMADHAN

RUQAYA AL KINDI

BEFORE Ramadhan arrives, Omani society has already taken a step ahead. In the old alleyways, in the courtyards of houses, and on the outskirts of villages and neighbourhoods, small groups of people form and gathered around delicious food, spontaneous conversation and hearts psychologically prepared to welcome the month of fasting. This is called 'Al Darna'.

"The custom is widespread in some governorates of the Sultanate of Oman, such as Al Dakhiliyah, some wilayats of Muscat and perhaps Dhofar and is absent from many wilayats of Al Batinah North, Musandam and Al Buraimi," said Younis al Maamari, a researcher in sociology.

Al Darna is not just a custom that precedes Ramadhan, but an intense social moment that rearranges the distances between people, and reminds them that Ramadhan is not welcomed individually, but collectively.

"In this quiet gathering, the unique attributes of Omani society are revealed as they are in their essence: close-knit, supportive/combined, simple in appearance, and profound in meaning. It is as if the gathering is an unwritten declaration that the bonds are still stronger than the fast pace of life, and that the preparation for the holy month begins with reviving the connection between people. In Islamic culture, worship is not understood in isolation from the community; the gathering/collective spirit is a religious value before it is a social one, and Al Darna represents a popular translation of this spirit," he said.

What happens in Al Darna is that families or neighbours gather for a meal, usually a large and varied meal, for lunch or any time during the day, consisting of rice with fish, chicken, meat, and other various dishes of pastries, salads, appetisers, and so on, and they eat from it until they are feeling full.

> *In Islamic culture, worship is not understood in isolation from the community; the gathering/ collective spirit is a religious value before it is a social one, and Al Darna represents a popular translation of this spirit.*
>
> ***YOUNIS AL MAAMARI***
> *A researcher in sociology*

"The food is prepared together by family members, young and old, and it is special because it is the last meal they will eat during the daytime before Ramadhan. In the past, Al Darna also played social roles, as families shared food with other families or neighbours. It is a kind of continuous social solidarity in Omani society," Al Maamari pointed out.

The tradition of the Al Darna, as he added, may differ within the wilayats, in its timing (it may be on the last day or the last days before Ramadhan), the food served, and the place of gathering, but they all share the characteristic of being a happy and joyful custom to welcome the fasting month.

Social media has helped spread the culture of Al Darna in some wilayats; where it was not present, even in a simple way, as he explained, "Even if the custom is not actually practised, these platforms have helped spread knowledge about it. Some members of the community have confirmed that this custom has begun to fade in some wilayats and increase in others based on the level of social change in each of them," he shared.

The form of the gathering may change, and the city may shorten it or communication technologies may reshape it, but what remains constant is humanity's need to come together. For Al Darna, in its deepest sense, is not a fleeting ritual, but rather an annual reminder that when a community gathers voluntarily, it renews its unwritten moral contract to remain cohesive and to prepare to welcome the holy month with a collective heart.

Tender Notice for the sale of used and unused Cables
Tender No. AW/T/PH2/01/2026

Al Watanyiah United Engineering and Contracting Co. LLC hereby announce a Tender for the sale of used and unused Cables, as described in the table below, on an "**as is, where is**" **basis**. Those wishing to submit a Bid must obtain the Tender documents from the Company's Head Office (HO) in Ghala Industrial Area after paying the specified Tender Fee in the Company's Bank Dhofar account: **01040605344006 (IBAN NO: OM080250001040605344006)**.

S. No.	Tender for the Sale of	Location	Tender Fee (RO)	Earnest Money Deposit (RO)	Period for purchase of Tender	Last date for submission of offer
1	Used and unused High Tension (HT) and Low Voltage (LV) armored and unarmored cables, instrumentation cables, fiber optic cables, earth cables, and wires of various sizes and lengths.	Ghala	300/-	10%. of the Total Bid Value	16/02/2026 To 01/03/2026	11/03/2026 5.00 PM

- The last date for submission of Bids accompanied by an Earnest Money Deposit (EMD) issued by any local bank in Oman (equivalent to 10%) of the total Bid value is on Wednesday, 11th March, 5 PM, detailed date on the above table.
- The EMD must be valid for 30 days from the last date of submission of the Bid and the original EMD along with the Bid must be submitted in the tender box at the reception of our Head Office at Ghala, Muscat, Oman on or before the date and time mentioned above.
- **Contact details: 2450 2581 / 82 - Extn. 149 / 150. GSM: 9294 7637 / 7722 8166**

SHORTTAKES

The accomplishment underscores Sohar University's enduring dedication to academic excellence.

SOHAR UNIVERSITY EARNS ACCA ACCREDITATION

SUHAR: *Sohar University has attained a significant professional accomplishment with the certification of its Bachelor in Accountancy Programme beginning May 2023 by the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA), validating the programme's conformity with globally recognised professional standards.*

In conjunction with this accreditation, ACCA has sanctioned exemptions for certain professional courses subsequent to a comprehensive academic and quality assurance evaluation. The exemptions were conferred on various occasions, indicating the University's ongoing collaboration with ACCA and its dedication to sustaining professional congruence. Under the sanctioned exemption framework, qualifying students who successfully finish designated courses within the Bachelor in Accountancy Programme may receive exemptions for essential ACCA modules, including Applied Knowledge Level (Business and Technology, Management Accounting, Financial Accounting, Corporate and Business Law), Financial Reporting, Audit and Assurance, Financial Management, and Performance Management, contingent upon cohort eligibility criteria.

Oman's first agentic AI for recruitment launched

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, FEB 17

THE Oman Society for Human Resources Management (OSHRM), in collaboration with the Ministry of Labour, and Elevatus, hosted a high-level evening event on Sunday exploring the future of recruitment and digital transformation in human resources.

Dr Ghalib bin Saif al Hosni, Chairman, OSHRM and Chief Human Resources Officer at Omantel, emphasised the strategic role of human resources in translating national ambitions into actionable plans and measurable outcomes. He stated that HR functions are no longer administrative units but strategic enablers aligned with institutional performance and national competitiveness.

He noted that empowering HR leaders with intelligent digital solutions has become essential in responding to evolving workforce expectations, rapid technological advancements, and increasing demand for efficiency and transparency in recruitment practices.

Empowering HR leaders with intelligent digital solutions has become essential in responding to evolving workforce expectations.

Dr Wail bin Saif al Harrasi, Founder and CEO of Wabas Enterprises and Investments, reflected on Oman Vision 2040 as a transformational roadmap reshaping the Sultanate of Oman's economic and developmental landscape. He stressed that digital transformation and artificial intelligence are foundational pillars in building a competitive, knowledge-based economy, enhancing sustainability, and strengthening human capital development.

He pointed out that integrating advanced technologies within institutional frameworks is not merely a technological shift but a strategic necessity to ensure resilience, adaptability, and long-term growth.

A key highlight of the evening was the official launch of 'Enfinity', introduced as the first hiring agentic AI in the Sultanate of Oman, embedded within the Elevatus recruitment platform. The unveiling was presented by Eng Nadine Zureikat, Chief Revenue Officer at Elevatus, who outlined the evolution from conventional artificial intelligence systems toward Agentic AI capable of executing enterprise hiring with autonomy, governance and scalability.

During a live demonstration, attendees were shown how Enfinity receives clearly defined hiring objectives, analyses organisational data, determines execution pathways and activates recruitment workflows across enterprise systems within structured governance frameworks. The presentation illustrated a clear shift from task-based automation toward a continuously executing, goal-driven recruitment model designed to operate end-to-end.

According to the demonstration, Enfinity functions as an integrated digital hiring system capable of delivering recruitment outcomes from sourcing to offer issuance within defined institutional rules. It analyses candidate and organisational data, activates sourcing channels, conducts screening and interview processes, and manages offer stages — all while maintaining alignment with internal policies, compliance standards and regulatory frameworks. Human oversight remains embedded throughout the process, with final decision-making authority retained by institutional leadership.

Eng Ali al Lawati, Head of Omantel Academy and Safiya Adam, Acting Head of Human Resources at Oman Flour Mills, shared their institutions' experiences following the deployment of the Elevatus platform as part of broader recruitment digital transformation initiatives.

Al Sharqiyah South discusses services

SUR: The Municipal Council in Al Sharqiyah South Governorate discussed, during its meeting, the latest updates on service and planning topics, as part of following up the progress of municipal work and improving the level of services provided in the governorate.

The meeting was chaired by Dr Yahya bin Badr al Maawali, Governor of Al Sharqiyah South and Chairman of the Municipal Council. The meeting also touched on efforts of the Ministry of Labour to employ the national workforce in the private sector within the governorate.

The meeting was chaired by Dr Yahya bin Badr al Maawali, Governor of Al Sharqiyah South and Chairman of the Municipal Council. ***— ONA***

The council also discussed proposals regarding the development of tourist sites in the Wilayat of Masirah, as well as a number of committee minutes and responses received from relevant authorities. **— ONA**

Khor Al Qurm creek boosts ecology

AL MUSANNAH: The creek of Khor Al Qurm in the Wilayat of Al Musannah constitutes an important coastal environment in supporting the ecological balance in the Sultanate of Oman due to the fact that it provides a natural habitat for a number of marine organisms and birds.

Musallam bin Mubarak al Mahri, Director of the Environment Department in Al Batinah South Governorate, said that the Authority plays an active role in protecting coastal creeks through the implementation of environmental monitoring programmes, monitoring water quality, the cultivation of mangrove trees and the restoration of damaged natural habitats to ensure the sustainability of ecosystems.

Al Mahri said that the number of mangrove trees that were planted until the end of 2025 stood at 31,575. He explained that the project serves as a cornerstone in the protection of the vital ecosystem and supporting biodiversity.

The project serves as a cornerstone in supporting biodiversity.

Al Mahri pointed out that the mangrove seedlings are brought from the plantation of Muscat Municipality.

He added that the Environment Authority is joining hands with government departments, private sector establishments and civil society institutions to raise public awareness about the importance of coastal creeks and their environmental role.

He underlined the significance of such efforts in minimising the deterioration of coastal ecosystems and enhancing their ability to support fish stocks, protect beaches from erosion and promote environmental sustainability in Oman.

Khor Al Qurm creek is set to be an attractive tourist destination thanks to its distinctive natural features, he observed. **— ONA**

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Dhofar Generating Company SAOG

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www.dgcoman.com

BOARD OF DIRECTORS' REPORT

Dear Shareholders,

The Board of Directors ('the Board') of Dhofar Generating Company SAOG ('DGC' or 'Company') is pleased to present the audited financial statements for the year ended December 31, 2025.

Financial Performance

In its meeting held on 16 February 2026, the Board approved the Company's audited financial results for the year ended 31 December 2025.

Summary Financials

Amount in ﷼ 'millions	2025	2024	%age
Income Statement			
Revenue	65.3	59.5	9.7%
Direct costs	(57.8)	(50.3)	14.9%
Gross profit	**7.5**	**9.2**	**(18.5%)**
Admin, financial and tax costs	(7.1)	(7.7)	(7.8%)
Profit after tax	**0.4**	**1.5**	**(73.3%)**

The Company continued its track record of exceptional operational performance with 99.2% availability. The Company achieved a profit after tax of ﷼ 0.4 million in 2025, reflecting a 73.3% decrease compared to the previous year. The decrease in profit after tax is mainly due to an increase in maintenance costs, attributed to consistent increase in load factor ensuring plant reliability and meeting its obligations under the PPA. The Company met its obligations to the lenders by the timely debt service of ﷼ 13.3 million during the year (2024: ﷼ 16.8m).

You can refer to the Management Discussion and Analysis Report section of the Annual Report for more information on the Company's financial results.

Operational Performance

The overall power demand in the Dhofar region has risen significantly, driven primarily by industrial and rural development. As a result, the power plant load factor increased to 34.9% (2024: 24.1%) for the Existing Plant and 61.7% (57.6%) for the New Plant.

The Company delivered outstanding operational performance during the year ensuring uninterrupted power supply in the Dhofar region. The commercial availability factor stood at 99.59% for the Existing Plant and 98.76% for the New Plant, compared to 99.54% for both plants in 2024. These results reflect a remarkable achievement in ensuring reliability and efficiency.

This exceptional performance was achieved despite an unprecedented disruption that happened on 6 October 2025, when an external grid disturbance occurred on Dhofar grid resulting in both plant trips resulting in a blackout. Currently, a review is being carried out by Authority and off-taker to study the main causes of the blackout incident.

NOMAC Oman as an operator remains a key partner for the Company in this delivering the exceptional performance. The operator has adopted a strategy of continuous improvement and reliability of supply programs to ensure consistent performance. The advanced Monitoring Performance System is an excellent initiative which has helped secure stable and top-notch performance.

The power demand in the Dhofar region is expected to rise and the Company is committed to maintaining its track record of operational excellence and high availability.

Dividends

The cash sweep mechanism under the financing agreements commenced from 31 July 2021 in absence of backstop DRSA LC as required under the loan documents. This has restricted the Company's ability to make any dividend distributions during the year.

Health, Safety, and the Environment (HSE)

HSE of our people and community remain fundamental to our business. We remain committed to maintaining world-class health and safety standards across all operations, with continuous improvement as a core priority for our management team.

The Company, for over a decade, has a legacy of an impeccable safety track record with zero Lost Time Incidents (LTIs) which continued in 2025. The team remains ever vigilant, never granting safety a day off, upholding safety principles and ambitious goals.

The Company has been accredited as 'Green Company' by the Environment Authority Oman in recognition of its commitment to environmental requirements and sustainability standards which is an assurance of the management philosophy of continuous improvement ensuring a safe environment while delivering sustainable value

Corporate Governance

The Board convened all necessary meetings during the year, along with Board Audit and Risk Committee and Nomination and Remuneration Committee meetings, as required.

Your Company remains in compliance with the Code of Corporate Governance of the Financial Service Authority. Also, the company complies with CMA E/1/2022 security guidelines issued for Public Joint stock companies.

Our people

Business results are intrinsically linked to people's performance. Excellence, whether in equipment reliability, financial management, administration, or HSE can only be achieved through collective effort toward a common goal. We are pleased to report that the strong coordination and alignment across the entire business team, including the operator, has delivered outstanding results. The Board and management remain committed to strengthening the framework that enables this successful collaboration. Developing Omani talent continues to be a key priority across the business value chain.

On behalf of the Board, I extend my sincere gratitude to the entire team for their dedication and hard work throughout the year in fulfilling our business commitments

Social Responsibility

The Board has developed a Corporate Social Responsibility(CSR) policy to help guide us to be a better and more effective corporate citizen while recognizing the scale of our footprint. By its very nature, the Company is a responsible corporate citizen as it focuses on providing clean and reliable power. The scope of the policy includes:

- Practical financial assistance, sponsored programs, free products and services to a wide range of educational, charitable, cultural, health, community and environment cause in Oman, and
- Community support through sponsorship of worthy initiatives in the field of education.

In line with the vision developed in the CSR policy and within the approved budget by shareholders, the Company invested ﷼ 15,000 during 2025 as follows:

#	Beneficiary	Amount (﷼)	Description
1	Ministry of Health	12,000	Provided 3 medical devices to Sultan Qaboos Hospital's center for Cardiac Medicine and Surgery. Sultan Qaboos Hospital is the main hospital in Dhofar Governorate.
2	Oman Charitable Organization	3,000	Contributed 20% of CSR budget to Oman Charitable Organization complying to CMA circular 172/2021.
	Total	**15,000**	

In addition to that, the Company along with NOMAC had initiated further support to local community by:

- Train 6 engineers for two months each.
- Donated unused laboratory equipment to University of Technology and Applied Sciences (Salalah)
- Accommodate visit of 35 students specialized in engineering field for one day visit from different colleges and universities in Dhofar Governorate.
- Blood donation campaign with the plant employees and contractors.

Strategic Positioning and Outlook

DGC is one of two independent power plants owners in the Dhofar region, with a 62% share in the southern power grid of the Sultanate of Oman. It owns and operates two power plants: a 273MW Open Cycle Gas Turbine power plant (Existing Plant') and a 445MW Combined Cycle Gas Turbine Power Plant ('New Plant').

Dhofar Grid is experiencing a continuous increase in power demand due to emerging industries in the Dhofar region as seen in 2025. The increase in demand is expected to continue in the future. The Company and operator will continue their proactive approach towards plant operations to ensure a high reliability factor which is of paramount importance for all stakeholders.

In Appreciation

Finally, on behalf of the Board of Directors, we express our sincere gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik for the visionary leadership and continued support in ensuring a thriving environment for the sector. We also acknowledge the progressive and enlightened vision of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said, which remains a model for others to emulate and has laid the foundation for the success achieved by many today.

We deeply appreciate the support of all our key stakeholders, particularly our customer, NAMA Power and Water Procurement Company SAOC; our fuel supplier, Integrated Gas Company SAOC; the Authority for Public Services Regulation; and the Ministry of Energy and Minerals.

The Board of Directors remains committed to pursuing all opportunities with a view to maintaining the company's growth while enhancing shareholders' value. We are grateful for your constant support as we work to deliver on our commitments.

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION AS AT 31 DECEMBER 2025

	31-Dec-25 ﷼	31-Dec-24 ﷼
ASSETS		
Non-current assets		
Property, plant and equipment	**130,074,295**	134,059,390
Right of use assets	**1,580,649**	1,630,045
Finance lease receivable	**28,144,372**	31,674,585
Trade and other receivables	**2,550,098**	2,870,308
Prepayments	**984,600**	932,551
Derivative financial instruments	**361,583**	1,366,552
Total non-current assets	**163,695,597**	172,533,431
Current assets		
Inventories	**5,447,338**	5,501,376
Finance lease receivable	**3,467,758**	3,205,488
Trade and other receivables	**6,468,806**	5,823,260
Advances and prepayments	**379,302**	483,858
Derivative financial instruments	**101,985**	385,438
Cash and cash equivalents	**4,336,819**	3,339,639
Total current assets	**20,202,008**	18,739,059
TOTAL ASSETS	**183,897,605**	191,272,490
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES		
EQUITY		
Share capital	**22,224,000**	22,224,000
Legal reserve	**1,269,353**	1,225,563
Retained earnings	**30,132,493**	29,738,386
Equity before hedging reserve	**53,625,846**	53,187,949
Hedging reserve	**394,033**	1,489,192
Total equity	**54,019,879**	54,677,141
LIABILITIES		
Non-current liabilities		
Term loan	**92,432,051**	100,368,951
Lease liabilities	**1,919,003**	1,941,257
Deferred tax liabilities	**12,525,621**	12,635,411
Provision for decommissioning costs	**5,259,786**	5,142,287
End of service benefits	**81,643**	67,401
Total non-current liabilities	**112,218,104**	120,155,307
Current liabilities		
Term loan	**8,385,896**	8,008,830
Lease liabilities	**22,259**	21,049
Trade and other payables	**9,251,467**	8,410,163
Total current liabilities	**17,659,622**	16,440,042
Total liabilities	**129,877,726**	136,595,349
TOTAL EQUITY AND LIABILITIES	**183,897,605**	191,272,490
Net assets per share (RO)	**0.243**	0.246

STATEMENT OF PROFIT OR LOSS AND OTHER COMPREHENSIVE INCOME FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2025

	31-Dec-25 ﷼	31-Dec-24 ﷼
Revenue	**65,263,909**	59,514,670
Operating costs	**(57,842,302)**	(50,364,425)
Gross profit	**7,421,607**	9,150,245
Other income	-	11,857
General and administrative expenses	**(981,338)**	(988,035)
Profit before interest and tax	**6,440,269**	8,174,067
Finance income	**259,364**	177,674
Finance cost	**(6,178,263)**	(6,222,388)
Profit before tax	**521,370**	2,129,353
Income tax expense	**(83,473)**	(671,499)
Profit for the year	**437,897**	1,457,854
Other comprehensive income:		
Items that are or may be reclassified subsequently to profit or loss		
Fair value of cash flow hedge adjustments - gross	**(537,827)**	1,502,117
Reclassification to profit or loss - gross	**(750,596)**	(1,754,254)
Deferred tax on change in fair value of cash flow hedge	**193,264**	37,820
Other comprehensive (loss) for the year - net of tax	**(1,095,159)**	(214,317)
Total comprehensive (loss)/income for the year	**(657,262)**	1,243,537
Basic and Diluted Earning per share (RO)	**0.002**	0.007

The financial statements were approved by a resolution of the Board of Directors on 16 February 2026.

SHORT*TAKES*

Ashwini Vaishnaw, Minister for Railways, Information & Broadcasting and Electronics and Information Technology speaks during a press conference, in New Delhi. ***— Reuters***

INDIA'S AI SUMMIT DISCUSES AGE-BASED RESTRICTIONS

NEW DELHI: *India is discussing age restrictions with social media companies, IT minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said on Tuesday, following moves by Australia and other countries to ban young teens from popular platforms. Vaishnaw, speaking at a global artificial intelligence conference in New Delhi, also said stronger rules were needed on deepfakes, while hailing an expected $200 billion in AI investment over the next two years.*

"This is something which has now been accepted by many countries that age-based regulation has to be there," Vaishnaw told reporters at the AI Impact Summit. "Right now we are in a conversation regarding deepfakes, regarding age-based restrictions with the various social media platforms and... what is the right way to go about this," he said.

A state minister in India's Andhra Pradesh had previously said it was preparing the ground for a ban on children using social media, but Vaishnaw's remarks are the first indication of national action from the world's most populous country. India last week tightened rules regulating artificial intelligence technology, requiring social media platforms to clearly label AI content and comply with takedown requests by authorities within three hours. ***— AFP***

SYRIA STARTS EMPTYING IS-LINKED AL HOL CAMP

DAMASCUS: *Syria began evacuating remaining residents of Al Hol camp, which long housed relatives of suspected IS group fighters, as it empties the formerly Kurdish-controlled facility, two officials said. Al Hol, located in a desert region of Hasakeh province, had been Syria's largest camp housing relatives of suspected IS fighters.*

The facility had housed some 24,000 people, mostly Syrians but also Iraqis and more than 6,000 other foreigners of around 40 nationalities. Fadi al Qassem, the official appointed by the government to manage Al Hol's affairs, said that "we carried out an evaluation of the camp's needs and found the camp lacks the basic conditions for habitation, so we made an urgent decision" to move residents to camps in Aleppo province. Al Hol camp "will be fully evacuated within a week, and nobody will remain", he said, adding that "the evacuation started today".

On Monday, the United Nations refugee agency's spokesperson in Syria, Celine Schmitt, said that "UNHCR has observed a significant decrease in the number of residents in Al Hol camp in recent weeks". "The government has informed UNHCR and partners of its plan to relocate the relatively small remaining caseload in the coming days to Akhtarin camp... and has requested our support to assist the population there," she said. "It remains important that the government is able to identify the foreign nationals who have left (Al Hol) so that appropriate repatriation processes can be pursued," she added. ***— AFP***

UN CALLS FOR 'URGENT REFORMS' TO UPHOLD MIGRANTS' RIGHTS IN LIBYA

TRIPOLI: *The UN called on the Libyan authorities to undertake urgent reforms to protect the rights and dignity of migrants and refugees. "In Libya, systematic and widespread human rights violations and abuses against migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees persist with impunity", said a report by the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).*

The document denounces "an exploitative model" that preys on migrants' "heightened vulnerability" and has become "a brutal and normalised reality". The UN report, which paints a bleak picture of their conditions in Libya, identified four patterns of violations and abuses. These include everything from "illegal and dangerous interceptions at sea" to "slavery" and "gender-based violence", as well as "torture" and "enforced disappearance".

People "arbitrarily" detained in official and unofficial detention centres must be released immediately, urged the two UN agencies. According to them, by the end of 2025, nearly 5,000 people were held in "official" centres, known as DCIM, but the real figure is much higher, according to NGOs.

The situation has fostered human trafficking and abuses against migrants, who have fallen victim in particular to extortion and slavery, according to the UN and international NGOs. ***— AFP***

Bangladesh's new leader Tarique Rahman sworn in

BANGLADESH Prime Minister Tarique Rahman was sworn into office on Tuesday to lead the first elected government since a deadly 2024 uprising, facing a daunting list of challenges. Top of the list for 60-year old Rahman will be to improving security, healing rifts in a country polarised by years of bitter rivalry, and tackling the economic woes of the world's second-largest garment exporter.

Rahman takes over from the interim government that has steered the country of 170 million people for 18 months since the autocratic government of Sheikh Hasina was overthrown. "I will faithfully discharge the duties of the office of prime minister of the government, in accordance with the law," he said, sworn in by President Mohammed Shahabuddin, in a ceremony held outside the parliament building, and broadcast on state television.

Rahman, chief of the BNP and scion of one of the country's most powerful political dynasties, won a landslide victory in the February 12 elections. "This victory belongs to Bangladesh, belongs to democracy," Rahman said in his victory speech on Saturday. "This victory belongs to people who aspire to and have sacrificed for democracy."

The new leader has pledged to restore stability and revive growth after months of turmoil that rattled investor confidence in the world's second-largest garment exporter. He has also called for all parties to "remain united" in a country polarised by years of bitter rivalry. "We are about to begin our journey in a situation marked by a fragile economy left behind by the authoritarian regime, weakened constitutional and statutory institutions, and a deteriorating law and order situation," he added in his victory speech.

Bangladeshi President Mohammed Shahabuddin (L) administers oath-taking ceremony of Tarique Rahman (R) as the country's Prime Minister, in Dhaka. ***— Reuters***

> *I will faithfully discharge the duties of the office of prime minister of the government, in accordance with the law. This victory belongs to people who aspire to and have sacrificed for democracy*
>
> ***TARIQUE RAHMAN***

After Rahman was sworn in, his ministers then lined up to take their oath of office. Lawmakers, who all promised loyalty to Bangladesh, were earlier sworn in to parliament by the Chief Election Commissioner AMM Nasir Uddin, before the BNP members chose Rahman as their leader.

Rahman's win marks a remarkable turnaround for a man who only returned to Bangladesh in December after 17 years in exile in Britain, far from Dhaka's political storms. The BNP coalition won 212 seats, compared with 77 for the Jamaat-e-Islami-led alliance. Jamaat, which secured more than a quarter of seats in parliament — a four-fold increase on its previous best — has challenged results in 32 constituencies.

But Jamaat leader Shafiqur Rahman, 67, has also said the Islamist party would "serve as a vigilant, principled, and peaceful opposition".

Hasina's Awami League party was barred from taking part in the elections. Hasina, 78, who was sentenced to death in absentia for crimes against humanity, issued a statement from hiding in India decrying an "illegal" election. But India praised the BNP's "decisive win" — a notable shift after deeply strained ties.

Only seven women were directly elected, although a further 50 seats reserved for women will be allocated to parties according to their share of the vote. Four members of minority communities won seats, including two Hindus — a population that makes up roughly seven per cent in Muslim-majority Bangladesh. Despite weeks of turbulence ahead of the polls, voting day passed without major unrest and the country has so far responded to the results with relative calm.

"If the BNP can do a good job with the economy, it will make everything else easier for the government," Crisis Group analyst Thomas Kean said. "It will help to create a level of stability, to tackle the many other challenges beyond the economy." **— AFP**

BLEAK FUTURE FOR WEST BANK SCHOOLS

NABLUS: *The Palestinian Authority's deepening budget shortfall is cutting through every layer of society across the West Bank.*

But nowhere are the consequences more stark than in its schools, where reduced salaries for teachers, shortened weeks and mounting uncertainty are reshaping the future of around 630,000 pupils.

Unable to meet its wage bill in full, the Palestinian Authority has cut teachers' pay to 60 per cent, with public schools now operating at less than two-thirds capacity. The shortfall stems in part from Israel's decision to withhold customs tax revenues it collects on the Palestinian Authority's behalf, a measure taken after the war in Gaza erupted in October 2023. For UN-run schools teaching around 48,000 students in refugee camps across the West Bank, the picture is equally bleak.

The territory has shifted from "a learning poverty crisis to a full-scale systemic emergency," said Jonathan Fowler, spokesman for the UN agency for Palestinian refugees. ***— AFP***

INSURGENCIES BATTLES

Bomb attacks kill 17 in northwest Pakistan

Two bomb attacks and a gunfight between police and militants in northwest Pakistan killed at least 14 security personnel and three civilians including a child. The separate incidents in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province come as Pakistan's security forces battle intensifying insurgencies in southern and northern provinces that border Afghanistan. The IS group claimed responsibility for a massive blast that killed 31 and wounded 169. ***— AFP***

MASSIVE MOBILISATION

Ethiopian troops mobilise on Tigray border

Ethiopian federal and Tigrayan troops have massed along the border of the country, raising fears of renewed war. "The ENDF is encircling Tigray," a Western diplomatic source said, adding that Tigrayan forces "are also deploying toward their borders". "Such large numbers of troops positioning themselves face to face is not a good sign". A local source in Tigray described it as "a massive mobilisation of federal forces and Tigrayan forces". ***— AFP***

SEVERE STORM

New Zealand heavy rains cause outage

Heavy rains have lashed New Zealand in recent days, killing one man, flooding large areas and cutting off several communities. The severe storm has prompted a state of emergency in North Island, where the Waikato Regional Council said "one in 100 year" rainfall had caused widespread flooding. Energy operator PowerCo said about 10,000 households were without power in the lower North Island and over 200 households on Banks Peninsula. ***— AFP***

SHORTTAKES

Jesse Jackson

US CIVIL RIGHTS LEADER JESSE JACKSON DIES AT 84

WASHINGTON: *Charismatic US civil rights leader Jesse Jackson, an eloquent Baptist minister raised in the segregated South who became a close associate of Martin Luther King Jr and twice ran for the Democratic presidential nomination, has died at age 84, his family said in a statement on Tuesday. "Our father was a servant leader - not only to our family, but to the oppressed, the voiceless, and the overlooked around the world," the Jackson family said. Jackson, an inspirational orator and long-time Chicagoan, was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease in 2017. His death comes at a time when the administration of Donald Trump has targeted US institutions, from museums to monuments to national parks, to remove what the president calls "anti-American" ideology, leading to the restoration of Confederate statues and other moves that civil rights advocates say could reverse decades of social progress.*

*Jackson weathered a spate of controversies but remained America's pre-eminent civil rights figure for decades. He ran for the Democratic presidential nomination in 1984 and 1988, attracting Black voters and many white liberals in mounting unexpectedly strong campaigns but fell short of becoming the first Black major party White House nominee. — **Reuters***

SPAIN APPROVES $8 BN AFTER STORM

*The Spanish government approved financial aid worth around 7 billion euros ($8 billion) for people affected by the storms that battered the Extremadura and Andalusia regions in the past weeks. Spain and Portugal have been hit by several storms since the start of the year that have caused widespread damage to infrastructure and crops, while forcing authorities to evacuate thousands of people. — **AFP***

TRUMP'S NEW ENVOY ARRIVES IN SOUTH AFRICA WITH RELATIONS FRAYED

JOHANNESBURG: *A conservative media critic picked by President Donald Trump to be US ambassador to South Africa has arrived to take up his post, the US embassy said on Tuesday, with bilateral relations fractured over a range of issues. Washington and Pretoria are at odds over a series of international and domestic policies, from South Africa's genocide case against Israel to Trump's disputed claims that white Afrikaners are being persecuted.*

Brent Bozell, 70, needs to present his credentials to President Cyril Ramaphosa before officially taking up his post. "I'm confirming that he's in (the) country," a US embassy official said. Trump chose the right-wing Bozell for the job in March, soon after expelling South Africa's ambassador on accusations that he was critical of Washington. Pretoria has yet to announce a successor.

Trump said at the time that Bozell "brings fearless tenacity, extraordinary experience, and vast knowledge to a nation that desperately needs it". Bozell is founder of the Media Research Center, a non-profit that says it works to "expose and counter the leftist bias of the national news media".

*Bozell also told the Senators: "I will communicate our objections to South Africa's geostrategic drift from non-alignment toward our competitors, including Russia, China and Iran." — **AFP***

Moscow, Kyiv meet for US-brokered peace talks

RUSSIAN and Ukrainian negotiators met in Geneva for fresh US-brokered talks seeking to end the four-year war, hours after both sides launched a fresh wave of long-range strikes. US President Donald Trump is seeking to position himself as peacemaker of the conflict unleashed when Russia attacked Ukraine in February 2022, but previous rounds of talks mediated by the White House have yielded no breakthroughs.

Before the meetings began, Ukraine accused Russia of undermining peace efforts by launching 29 missiles and 396 drones in a series of attacks that authorities said killed at least four people, wounded others and cut power to tens of thousands in southern Ukraine. "The extent to which Russia disregards peace efforts: a massive missile and drone strike against Ukraine right before the next round of talks in Geneva," Foreign Minister Andriy Sybiga wrote on social media.

Ukrainian energy officials said a Russian drone strike had killed three staff of a power plant in the frontline town of Sloviansk in eastern Ukraine. Another person was killed in the northeastern Sumy region. Sybiga repeated Ukraine's call for allies to exert greater pressure on Russia to negotiate in good faith by applying more sanctions on Moscow.

The talks, which the Kremlin asked to hold behind closed doors and with no media present, come after two earlier rounds held this year in Abu Dhabi. "Ukraine better come to the table, fast," Trump told reporters ahead of the negotiations. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky earlier confirmed his team had arrived in Geneva, while a source with the Russian delegation confirmed their team had touched down in the Swiss city in the early hours.

Russia meanwhile claimed to have repelled more than 150 Ukrainian drones mainly over southern regions and Crimean peninsula — occupied by the Kremlin in 2014 — and officials said an oil depot in southern Russia caught fire. The defence ministry in Moscow said its own attack on Ukraine had targeted energy infrastructure, as well as military facilities. The Kremlin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov told journalists on Tuesday to expect no major news on Tuesday from the talks that are scheduled to roll over into Wednesday too.

*A resident walks near damaged cars at the site of a Russian drone strike, in Odesa, Ukraine. — **Reuters***

The war has spiralled into Europe's deadliest conflict since World War II, with hundreds of thousands killed, millions forced to flee their homes in Ukraine and much of the eastern and southern part of the country scarred by war. Russia occupies around one-fifth of Ukraine — including the Crimean peninsula it seized in 2014 — and areas that Moscow-backed separatists had taken prior to the 2022 attack. But its war-time economic worries are mounting, with growth stagnating and a ballooning budget deficit as oil revenues drop to a five-year low.

The talks are scheduled after several successful counterattacks by Ukraine on territory occupied by Russia. The Kremlin wants Ukrainian troops to withdraw from swathes of heavily fortified and strategic territory as part of any peace deal. Kyiv has rejected this deeply unpopular demand, which would be politically and militarily fraught, and has instead demanded robust security guarantees from the West before agreeing to any proposals with Russia.

Russia's better-resourced army has been making steady gains across the sprawling front line in the eastern and southern Ukraine in recent months. But Ukrainian forces have recently made significant battlefield gains, recapturing 201 square kilometres (78 square miles) last week, according to an analysis of data from the Institute for the Study of War. The counterattacks likely leveraged Russian forces' lack of access to Starlink, which has disrupted communications, the ISW said.

— AFP

France's Macron hails growing India ties, eyes fighter jet deal

MUMBAI: French President Emmanuel Macron praised the "remarkable acceleration" of ties with India, after a meeting on Tuesday with Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Mumbai. Macron said the shift came in response to the "changing international order", adding that both countries did not want to "be subjected to any form of hegemony" or the "conflict of a few". India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi said ties between India and France were "very special" after talks with Macron. "The India-France partnership knows no boundaries, it can reach from deep oceans to the tallest mountain," Modi said. "In today's turbulent world, this is a partnership for global stability," he added.

French President Emmanuel Macron met Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Mumbai, as he begins a three-day visit to India focused on artificial intelligence cooperation and a potential multibillion dollar fighter jet deal. France is seeking to expand its military partnership with New Delhi, with discussions expected on a possible contract for 114 additional French Dassault Rafale fighter jets.

Modi, in a statement on social media addressed to his "dear friend" Macron, after he began his trip with his wife Brigitte in India's financial capital, said he looked forward to "advancing our bilateral ties to new heights". Modi, who will meet Macron later on Tuesday afternoon, said he was "confident that our discussions will further strengthen cooperation".

Macron, on his fourth visit to India since taking office in 2017, began on Tuesday with a programme including honouring the victims of the 2008 Mumbai attacks, and meeting Bollywood film stars, including Shabana Azmi and Manoj Bajpayee. He also called Modi his "dear friend", in post on X, saying they will "go even further" in cooperation. The visit follows New Delhi's confirmation last week that it intends to place a major order for Rafale jets, as well as the signing of a landmark free trade agreement between India and the European Union in January. Macron will travel to New Delhi for an artificial intelligence summit on Wednesday and Thursday.

*France's President Emmanuel Macron (L) and India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi shake hands, in Mumbai. — **AFP***

New Delhi has sought over the past decade to reduce its dependence on Russia, its traditional main supplier of military equipment, turning to other countries while also pushing for more domestic production. An Indian defence ministry statement last week said the proposed purchase of Rafale jets had been cleared — with "the majority" of them to be manufactured in India.

Christophe Jaffrelot, an India specialist at Sciences Po Center for International Studies in Paris, described the potential EUR30 billion ($35 billion) deal for 114 Rafales as the "contract of the century". — AFP

Healing ourselves to heal our homes

HYESHA BARRETT

The writer is a Master Life Coach and Positive Parent Specialist

PARENTING HAS a quiet way of revealing us to ourselves. We often begin the journey believing we are here to shape our children, guide their behaviour, and teach them how to navigate the world. Yet somewhere along the way, many parents discover something unexpected. It is not only the child who is growing: it is us.

The moments that challenge us most, rarely come from the child alone. They come from what the child awakens within us. A slammed door, a meltdown in the supermarket, a defiant "no" at the end of a long day. On the surface, these look like behavioural problems to solve. Yet beneath them, something deeper stirs. Our own impatience. Our old wounds. The parts of us that were seldom soothed, hardly heard, barely guided gently.

Parenting has a way of pressing on those tender places. Not to shame us, but to show us where healing is needed. Many of us were raised with the belief that good parenting means controlling outcomes. If the child behaves, we have succeeded. If they struggle, we have failed. This mindset quietly pushes us toward managing behaviour rather than understanding emotion. We focus outward, trying to fix the child, while overlooking the internal world that shapes how we show up.

Children, however, do not learn primarily from what we say. They learn from who we are. They study our tone, our reactions, the way we handle stress and repair mistakes. Long before they understand language, they understand energy. A calm, grounded presence teaches safety. A reactive or overwhelmed one teaches uncertainty. Our nervous systems speak to theirs constantly, creating an invisible dialogue that shapes trust, connection, and emotional security.

This is why the work of parenting begins within. When we learn to pause before reacting, to notice our triggers, to regulate our own emotions, something shifts in the entire home. Not because we have found the perfect strategy, but because we have changed the emotional climate. A regulated parent becomes an anchor. From that steadiness, children find their way back to balance more easily.

This inner work is rarely dramatic. It is made up of small, quiet choices. Taking a breath instead of raising your voice. Stepping away for a moment to ground yourself. After a hard day, offering yourself compassion instead of criticism. Over time, these choices build emotional resilience not only for your child, but for you as well.

When we choose to grow alongside our children, parenting transforms from a role into a relationship, and from a responsibility into an invitation. An invitation to break cycles, to rewrite old stories and to create homes where everyone feels seen, safe, and valued.

These moments may seem insignificant, yet they ripple outward in powerful ways. As we heal, our responses soften. We listen more, we react less. We become curious, instead of controlling. The home begins to feel safer, not because conflict disappears, but because connection strengthens. Children sense when they are met with presence, rather than pressure.

Over time, something beautiful happens. The patterns that once felt automatic begin to loosen. Old scripts no longer run the show. We stop parenting from fear and start parenting from awareness.

Healing ourselves does not mean becoming perfect. It means becoming conscious. It means recognising that our children do not need flawless parents. They need attuned ones. Parents who can pause, repair, and return to love again and again.

When we choose to grow alongside our children, parenting transforms from a role into a relationship, and from a responsibility into an invitation. An invitation to break cycles, to rewrite old stories and to create homes where everyone feels seen, safe, and valued.

When we parent from the inside out, we do more than guide our children. We heal the very ground they grow upon, planting seeds of safety, trust, and emotional freedom that will carry forward for generations to come.

Why more under-50s getting bowel cancer? 'We don't know'

DANIEL LAWLER

The death of US actor James Van Der Beek was just the latest reminder that colorectal cancer has been surging among people under 50 in recent years — and no one knows why.

The "Dawson's Creek" star died last week, aged 48, after being diagnosed with colorectal cancer, also known as bowel cancer.

Fellow US actor Chadwick Boseman of "Black Panther" fame died from the same disease in 2020 at the age of 43. The rate of people under 50 being diagnosed with this cancer has risen by roughly a third since the 1990s, Helen Coleman, a cancer epidemiology professor at Queen's University Belfast, said.It is now the leading cause of death from cancer among under-50s in the United States, according to research published in the JAMA journal last month. The vast majority of cases are still among older people — only six per cent of all colorectal cancers are diagnosed in people under 50, according to her research in Northern Ireland.

However, young people are less likely to think they could be susceptible to this cancer, which was long considered to only be suffered by the elderly.

Similar to other cancers among young people, colorectal cancer has been linked with being overweight, having a bad diet, not exercising enough, drinking and smoking.

But these lifestyle factors are not enough to "account for the massive change that we have seen in a relatively short time frame," Coleman said.

And many of the younger patients appear to have been in good health, including Van Der Beek, who was in great shape before being diagnosed in 2023.A study in the journal Nature last year discovered a "really important first clue" in this area, Coleman said. It found that DNA mutations of a toxin called colibactin, which is caused by the common bacteria E.Coli, were much more common in younger people with colorectal cancer than in older patients. There has also been research suggesting that repeatedly using antibiotics could be associated with early colorectal cancer.

The most noticeable symptom of colorectal cancer is changes in bowel movements — such as diarrhoea or constipation.

*Other symptoms include blood in faeces, unexplained weight loss and fatigue.Because of the increasing number of younger cases, in 2021 the United States lowered the age it starts colorectal cancer screening from 50 to 45.There have been calls for other countries to do the same. The UK and France start screening from age 50. — **AFP***

Ramadhan is coming

KHALID AL HURAIBI

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The writer is an innovator and an insights storyteller

ONE of the most influential television series of the past decade is Game of Thrones. Beyond its dragons and battles, the series captured global attention through a simple yet powerful warning: "Winter is Coming." It was not merely about the weather. It is a reminder that in today's world Murphy's Law applies, "anything that can go wrong will go wrong", and that unseen dangers were approaching, that complacency would be costly, and that societies ignoring early signals would eventually pay a heavy price.

As the holy month of Ramadhan 2026 approaches, a similar warning seems to echo across today's international landscape. "Ramadhan is Coming" is not only a spiritual reminder. It is a strategic one. It arrives at a moment of growing global polarisation, rising military spending and fragile, struggling diplomacy, especially in our wider Global South region.

According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), global military expenditure is almost RO1 billion in 2024, the highest level ever recorded and is expected to rise in 2025. Major powers are expanding their defence budgets while reducing investments in diplomacy and development. History suggests that this combination rarely leads to stability. It usually signals preparation for confrontation.

This tension is more visible than in the never ending bullying of sovereign nations such as Iran by the US, mainly on behalf of an aspiring regional bully- the Israeli occupation. Years of sanctions, assassinations, cyber operations, maritime incidents and proxy conflicts have created traumatised, fragmented populations and a volatile environment. While ongoing negotiations in our Muscat demonstrate Oman's continued role as a trusted mediator, the wider regional context remains fragile. A single miscalculation, political, military, or technological, could trigger escalation far beyond bilateral disputes.

History is unforgiving to societies that ignore early warnings. It rewards those who prepare, adapt and lead with conscience. As we enter this sacred month, the real question is not whether storms are gathering, but whether we are ready to navigate them with wisdom, unity and purpose.

At the same time, Washington's relations with Europe are increasingly strained over the threat to annex Greenland, trade tariffs, energy security, elections interference and defence burdens. In South America, the kidnapping of the Venezuelan President and the looting of its natural resources, economic pressure, political interference and sanctions continue to shape domestic politics. These patterns reflect what analysts wrongly call "coercive diplomacy" while it's nothing but crimes against humanity: Enforcing obedience through violence rather than building consensus through partnership.Such strategies have failed repeatedly in both ancient and modern history. The First World War was preceded by rigid alliances and misjudged deterrence. The Second World War followed economic collapse and unchecked expansionism. The Cold War drained trillions of dollars from social development. Today, the world appears to be drifting toward a new era of both; moral and moral collapse, due to impunity towards two connected, most heinous crimes- genocide and paedophilia, enabled by data colonisation, cyber warfare and economic sanctions.

More than 60 countries are now dFor us in Oman, the stakes are particularly high. Oman's long-standing foreign policy has been built on balance, dialogue and non-alignment and history proved us right time and again. This approach has protected our sovereignty while enhancing our international credibility. Yet in a polarised world, maintaining equilibrium requires greater strategic discipline than ever before.Oman Vision 2040 depends on stable trade routes, investor confidence and predictable regional relations. Prolonged crises would affect logistics, tourism, manufacturing and financial services. Social stability, too, is inseparable from economic certainty.

Yet Ramadhan offers an alternative narrative.

It is a month of restraint, reflection and moral recalibration. It reminds societies that real strength lies not only in military power, but in wisdom; not only in deterrence, but in dialogue. At a time when global discourse is dominated by threats and ultimatums, Ramadhan invites patience, accountability and ethical leadership. Oman's quiet diplomacy reflects this spirit. It shows that influence does not require intimidation and that credibility can be more powerful than coercion. In an era of strategic noise, this model remains one of the region's most valuable assets.

Knowledge demands that we read global signals honestly, relying on data rather than propaganda. Narrative requires shaping our own story — one rooted in stability, mediation and shared prosperity. Impact reminds us that every foreign policy decision must be judged by its effects on people's lives. Framework calls for institutional resilience, diversification and crisis preparedness. Elevation challenges leaders and citizens alike to rise above fear and short-term thinking.

"Winter is Coming" warned of darkness. "Ramadhan is Coming" can remind us of responsibility.

The coming months will test whether the struggling diplomacy can still prevail over militarisation and resource theft, and whether cooperation can outpace bullying. This is not a time for complacency. It is a time for strategic awareness, moral clarity and collective discipline.

History is unforgiving to societies that ignore early warnings. It rewards those who prepare, adapt and lead with conscience. As we enter this sacred month, the real question is not whether storms are gathering, but whether we are ready to navigate them with wisdom, unity and purpose.

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Ramadhan... may the lamp of our bonds burn brightly

SAMUEL KUTTY

The writer is a freelance journalist and author who worked in Oman and India

WITH THE onset of the holy month of Ramadhan, hundreds of millions of Muslims worldwide come together in the tradition of daily fasting from dawn to dusk, while also engaging in increased worship, religious reflection, and acts of charity.

The month of Ramadhan is beautiful, as the collective act of fasting fosters a sense of togetherness, friendship, and shared goals that not only bring families closer but also strengthen their bonds with one another and the larger community.

This year, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Türkiye, the United Kingdom, the United States, Australia, India, and many other countries are preparing to begin their fast on February 19, subject to the all-important moon sighting. The duration of Ramadhan can be either 29 or 30 days, depending on the sighting of the next crescent moon.

Having lived in Oman for almost 25 years as a non-Muslim expatriate, I have experienced Ramadhan as a significant period of the year. The profound sense of humanity and unity that the holy month embodies has deeply moved me.

Even three years after leaving Oman, I still remember people of all ages — both wealthy and less fortunate — gathering together to pray at the mosques, fostering a sense of equality before Allah.

It is a time for kindness and introspection. It's not solely about self-importance but rather about reflecting on oneself and choosing to contribute more positively.

I feel that during Ramadhan, the fasting members become more aware of others; they tend to be kinder and, indeed, more thoughtful. This is likely because Ramadhan is a key month when many citizens and residents assist others, offer help, and, in summary, seek redemption and strive to be virtuous.

Giving to those in need is an important aspect of Ramadhan. Every Muslim is obligated to support the poor and vulnerable members of their community. In other words, Ramadhan is a time for caring for one another. Fasting seeks to create a sense of equality between the wealthy and the less fortunate.

This year's Ramadhan, traditionally a time of peace, takes place amid ongoing conflicts and devastation. For countless people in conflict zones such as Sudan, Gaza, Yemen, and Syria, Ramadhan is marked by extreme hunger, displacement, and violence rather than celebration. This situation is further exacerbated by the looming threat of a US-Iran conflict.

In Palestine, most of the mosques are in ruins following Israeli bombings during the two-year war, by an unstable ceasefire. Vulnerable people in these countries are forced to observe Ramadhan without sustenance, access to food, drinking water, or essential items. supplies.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has called on the global community "bridge divides, deliver help and hope to those in need" in a statement issued prior to the holy month of Ramadhan.

Having lived in Oman for almost 25 years as a non-Muslim expatriate, I regarded Ramadhan as a serious period of the year. The profound sense of humanity and oneness that the holy month embodies has profoundly moved me

In his comments, Guterres stated that Ramadhan embodies a noble ideal rooted in compassion, solidarity, and unity. However, he pointed out that for millions worldwide, this ideal remains distant due to ongoing conflict, hunger, displacement, and discrimination.

He specifically referenced the suffering of people in Afghanistan, Yemen, Gaza, Sudan, and other regions affected by crises.

"In a message marking the start of the holy month of Ramadhan, the secretary-general said this month is a sacred period of reflection and prayer, representing a noble vision of hope and peace," Guterres' spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said during a news conference on Friday.

Certainly, the sacred month of Ramadhan offers an opportunity for individuals and communities to connect with one another and demonstrate kindness towards those in need. In a world marked by conflict, occupation, and systemic inequality, this cultivated compassion should move beyond feelings and translate into meaningful actions.

I hope the tranquillity of this holy month remains intact, undisturbed, unlike in years when individuals suffered from. I also believe that the strength of the prayer will become even more significant and meaningful this Ramadhan. No doubt, during these challenging times, the essence of Ramadhan shines as a symbol of hope. Most importantly, may the light of hope shine brightly in the hearts of all, in every household, and within every community. I wish all my Muslim brethren peace and joy.

CHINA'S HUMANOID ROBOTS TAKE CENTRE STAGE

LAURIE CHEN

China's most-watched TV show, the annual CCTV Spring Festival gala, showcased the country's cutting-edge industrial policy and Beijing's push to dominate humanoid robots and the future of manufacturing.

Four rising humanoid robot startups — Unitree Robotics, Galbot, Noetix and MagicLab — demonstrated their products at the gala, a televised event and touchstone for China comparable to the Super Bowl for the United States.

The programme's first three sketches prominently featured humanoid robots, including a lengthy martial arts demonstration where over a dozen Unitree humanoids performed sophisticated fight sequences waving swords, poles and nunchucks in close proximity to human children performers.

The fight sequences included a technically ambitious one that imitated the wobbly moves and backward falls of China's "drunken boxing" martial arts style, showing innovations in multi-robot coordination and fault recovery — where a robot can get up after falling down.

The programme's opening sketch also prominently featured Bytedance's AI chatbot Doubao, while four Noetix humanoid robots appeared alongside human actors in a comedy skit and MagicLab robots performed a synchronised dance with human performers during the song "We Are Made in China".

The hype surrounding China's humanoid robot sector comes as major players including AgiBot and Unitree prepare for initial public offerings this year, and domestic artificial intelligence startups release a raft of frontier models during the lucrative nine-day Lunar New Year public holiday.

Last year's gala stunned viewers with 16 full-size Unitree humanoids twirling handkerchiefs and dancing in unison with human performers.

Unitree's founder met President Xi Jinping weeks later at a high-profile tech symposium - the first of its kind since 2018.

Xi has met five robotics startup founders in the past year, comparable to the four electric vehicle and four semiconductor entrepreneurs he met in the same timeframe, giving the nascent sector unusual visibility.

The CCTV show, which drew 79 per cent of live TV viewership in China last year, has for decades been used to highlight Beijing's tech ambitions, including its space programme, drones and robotics, said Georg Stieler, Asia managing director and head of robotics and automation at technology consultancy Stieler.

"What distinguishes the gala from comparable events elsewhere is the directness of the pipeline from industrial policy to prime-time spectacle," Stieler said. ***— Reuters***

Ramadhan far from home

EXPERIENCING Ramadhan in Europe is a unique kind of contradiction. The month is deeply spiritual, communal and transformative for Muslims around the world, yet in much of Europe it passes almost invisibly, folded into the ordinary rhythm of daily life. Unlike in Muslim-majority countries, where Ramadhan reshapes public schedules, social life and even city landscapes, European societies largely continue as normal. Muslims fast, pray and reflect, but they do so within systems that rarely adapt or acknowledge the month in any meaningful way.

In many Muslim countries, Ramadhan changes the pace of life. Work hours are often reduced, schools may adjust their schedules and evenings become the heart of social activity. Restaurants close during the day and reopen after Iftar. Streets come alive at night with families gathering, markets buzzing and mosques filled for prayer. Ramadhan becomes a collective experience.

In Europe, however, Ramadhan is treated like any other month. Muslims work full shifts, attend school for regular hours, take exams, commute and meet deadlines, all while fasting. There is little institutional recognition that millions of people are observing a spiritual practice. Even in countries like France, which has one of the largest Muslim populations in Europe, Ramadhan does not affect the public calendar. The month remains personal rather than societal.

One of the clearest examples is Eid. In most European countries, Eid is not a public holiday, meaning Muslims must often request time off work or miss school to celebrate. This stands in contrast to Christian holidays such as Christmas and Easter, which are automatically built into national schedules.

A few years ago, some US states began allowing students from different religious backgrounds to take days off for major religious events, recognising that public life should not revolve solely around Christianity. Europe, despite its diversity, has been slower to move in that direction.

Worshippers leave after Friday prayers ahead of the beginning of Ramadhan at Khizra mosque in Manchester, Britain. ***— Reuters***

OMAN AL YAHYAI

The writer is a multilingual writer and media professional based in Paris. She specialises in human rights and immigration

Of course, Ramadhan is not completely absent from European public spaces. In larger cities, some grocery stores will add small decorations or special shelves to mark the beginning of the month. One might find Ramadhan desserts, dates, or imported ingredients that cater to Muslim communities.

But this is still far from the atmosphere in Muslim countries, where malls, streets, and public spaces are often decorated extensively. In Europe, Ramadhan remains something you notice mostly if you are already looking for it.

Beyond the lack of adaptation, there is also the constant need to explain. Most people in Europe understand the basic concept of fasting, but every year Muslims are asked the same questions: Can you drink water? Do you fast if you're sick? Don't you get hungry? As someone who lived in France for eight years, I found myself answering these questions every Ramadhan, often to the same colleagues or classmates.

The curiosity is usually harmless, but it highlights how Ramadhan is still seen as something unfamiliar, even after decades of Muslim presence in Europe.

The physical challenge of fasting also depends heavily on the season. When Ramadhan falls during the summer months, the days in Europe can be extremely long. In some places, fasting begins around 4 or 5 am and lasts until nearly 10 or 11 pm. That means going without food or water for up to 18 hours, while still working, studying, commuting and functioning in a society that does not slow down. It can be exhausting, especially for students sitting through exams or workers doing physically demanding jobs. In contrast, winter Ramadhans are much shorter and often easier to manage.

Fasting may start around 6 or 7 am and end by 5 or 6 pm, making it more comfortable and less disruptive. The experience of Ramadhan in Europe can therefore vary dramatically depending on the time of year.

Another everyday challenge is prayer. In many European schools and workplaces, there are no dedicated spaces for Muslims to pray, even though prayer is a central part of Ramadhan. Muslims often have to improvise, finding a quiet corner, praying in a car, or delaying prayers until they return home. In Muslim-majority countries, prayer spaces are built into public life. In Europe, practicing often requires private negotiation and personal adjustment.

Perhaps the most striking difference is the public environment during the day. In Muslim countries, restaurants and cafés are often closed during fasting hours, and the entire society shares the rhythm of hunger and anticipation until Iftar.

In Europe, life continues normally. People eat lunch in front of fasting coworkers, cafés remain open, and the smell of food is everywhere. Muslims must get used to fasting in a world where the majority is not fasting, a daily reminder that Ramadhan here is an individual act rather than a collective one.

Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in these pages are solely those of the authors and do not reflect the opinion of the Observer

SPORTS

SPANISH*LEAGUE*

Girona's Spanish midfielder #08 Fran Beltran scores his team's second goal during the Spanish league match between Girona FC and FC Barcelona at Montilivi Stadium in Girona. ***— AFP***

BARCA SUFFER TITLE BLOW IN GIRONA DERBY DEFEAT

GIRONA, Spain: *Spanish champions Barcelona fell to a damaging 2-1 defeat at Girona on Monday to leave them trailing Real Madrid by two points at the top of La Liga.*

Los Blancos beat Real Sociedad on Saturday to overtake the Catalans and Hansi Flick's side could not defeat Girona in an gripping derby clash to reclaim the lead.

Teenage star Lamine Yamal missed a penalty for Barcelona, who took the lead through defender Pau Cubarsi just before the hour mark.

However goals from Thomas Lemar and Fran Beltran helped Girona, 12th, mount an impressive comeback.

"In the end Girona deserved it, they had a lot of chances, we defended very badly," admitted Flick.

"We are not in a good mood, not in a good moment, I gave the team two days off because I think it's important they reset. There's a long way (to go), we're now in second, now we have to fight for first place in the table."

Barca were still licking their wounds after a heavy 4-0 defeat by Atletico Madrid in the Copa del Rey first-leg semifinal last week, and this defeat made things even worse. "We have to improve because they can't score these two goals against us," Cubarsi said. "We have to be self-critical, we didn't play a great game, we have to improve, but now we have to rest and charge our batteries."

Both sides were attacking with abandon in a very open first half and it was remarkable they went in goalless at the break.

Raphinha whipped a shot narrowly wide and Yamal fired straight at Girona goalkeeper Paulo Gazzaniga when through on goal.

At the other end Ukrainian striker Vladyslav Vanat missed a slew of presentable opportunities.

Ferran Torres fired a good chance wide for Barca and Raphinha drove against the upright as Flick's side pushed for the opener.

They should have got it when Dani Olmo was clumsily felled in the box by Daley Blind, but Yamal hit the post from the spot.

Barcelona eventually took the lead through Pau Cubarsi's header from Jules Kounde's cross after 59 minutes, but Girona swiftly pulled level. Thomas Lemar slipped away from Eric Garcia and turned home Vanat's pass from close range. ***— AFP***

Al Amerat players and support staff celebrate with the Ministry Shield. ***— Abdulwahid al Hamadani***

Al Amerat clinch Ministry Shield handball crown

RIYADH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, FEB 17

AL AMERAT CLUB clinched the 15th edition of the Ministry Shield Handball Championship 2025-26 after a thrilling 33-31 extra-time victory over defending champions Oman Club in the final held on Tuesday evening at the main hall of Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher.

The final was held under the auspices of Eng Badr bin Salim al Maamari, Chairman of the Projects, Tenders and Local Content Authority, and attended by Moosa bin Khamis al Balushi, Chairman of the Oman Handball Association, alongside board members and club representatives.

Earlier in the day, Seeb secured third place with a 29-25 win over Nizwa in the playoff match.

Oman Club made a strong start, scoring two early goals and asserting dominance through disciplined defence and effective attacking transitions. Despite Al Amerat quickly regaining composure and reducing the deficit, Oman maintained control for most of the first half, capitalising on solid defensive organisation and outstanding saves from their goalkeeper.

However, Al Amerat mounted a late surge to narrow the gap, with the first half ending 14-10 in favour of Oman.

Al Amerat player scores a goal against Oman Club.

The second half unfolded with intense exchanges as both teams traded goals. Mohammed Yaseen Mohammed Ali emerged as a key figure for Al Amerat, delivering an impressive performance that reignited his side's momentum.

Although Oman Club continued to find the net and preserve their lead, Al Amerat gradually reduced the deficit before equalising in the closing stages, sending the match into extra time amid electrifying crowd support.

SUPERIOR COMPOSURE

In the extra time, Al Amerat displayed superior composure and determination, capitalising on decisive moments to secure a historic 33-31 victory and claim their first-ever Ministry Shield title, adding it to their Second Division league triumph and promotion this season.

Al Amerat player Omar Adlan expressed his delight, stating: "We faced an experienced champion side, but our determination made the difference. The atmosphere was incredible, and the fans pushed us until the final whistle."

Head coach Khalid bin Mubarak al Oraimi praised his team's tactical discipline and collective spirit, affirming that the club has proven its ability to compete at the highest level and will aim to build on this success in the top division.

Oman Club coach Ibrahim Bou Drali acknowledged his team's strong performance but admitted missed opportunities proved costly, adding that preparations will now focus on strengthening the squad for next season.

Player Mohammed Ihab described the defeat as painful but emphasised that Oman Club will return stronger.

Al Amerat were awarded the championship shield, 27 gold medals and a financial prize, while Oman received silver medals and Seeb bronze, concluding a memorable edition featuring 15 participating clubs.

Sohar move up to fourth, Bahla cruise in Jindal League

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, FEB 17

Sohar secured a 2–0 victory over Al Rustaq at Sohar Sports Complex in Round 14 of the Jindal League, continuing their climb up the standings while deepening Al Rustaq's struggles at the bottom of the table.

The first half was moderate in tempo and ended goalless, with Sohar enjoying the better share of play. The hosts relied on high pressing and wing play, delivering balls toward Mutasim al Maqbali. The most notable chance saw Mutasim fire over the crossbar, alongside attempts from Ammar al Abdulsalam. Al Rustaq, meanwhile, created only limited threats, as goalkeeper Magdy Shaaban and Sohar's defence remained alert.

At the start of the second half, Al Rustaq pushed forward in search of an opening goal, given their urgent need for points. However, Sohar proved more effective, as Saud al Maqbali broke the deadlock in the 58th minute with a strike to the left of Al Rustaq's goalkeeper, raising the tempo and attacking intensity of the match.

Al Rustaq attempted a quick response, but Qusai al Maamari missed a clear opportunity in the 62nd minute after shooting straight at the goalkeeper, while Omar al Salti's effort in the 63rd minute went just wide of the post. Sohar maintained their pressure until substitute Abdullah al Mashaikhi doubled the lead in the 80th minute, after referee Yahya al Balushi consulted VAR and confirmed the goal despite the assistant's initial flag.

Sohar and Al Rustaq players in action during their Round 14 match of the Jindal League.

Al Rustaq's late attempts failed to reduce the deficit, and the match ended with a 2–0 victory for Sohar following a goalless first half.

With this win, Sohar moved up to 29 points in fourth place, level on points with Al Shabab, who hold third place on goal difference. Al Rustaq remain bottom of the table with just four points.

BAHLA HIT FOUR

In the other match of the same round, Bahla delivered a commanding 4–1 victory over Saham at Nizwa Sports Complex, showcasing clear dominance and strong technical performance.

Majid al Shukaili gave Bahla an early lead in the seventh minute before Mohammed Jaber Said equalised for Saham in the 18th minute. However, Abdulsalam bin Muslim al Shukaili restored Bahla's advantage in the 41st minute to end the first half 2–1.

In the second half, Loki Fiki Ndafon added the third goal in the 50th minute, and Ammar bin Saif al Shiyadi sealed the win with a fourth goal in the 71st minute.

Bahla's victory lifted them to 25 points in fifth place, while Saham remain eighth with 16 points, as the league continues to witness tight competition and closely matched performances among teams.

BOUNCING BACK

Coco Gauff of the US in action during her round of 32 match against Russia's Anna Kalinskaya at the Dubai Championships. ***— Reuters***

GAUFF CRUISES INTO DUBAI LAST 16, ANDREEVA RECEIVES WALKOVER

DUBAI: *Coco Gauff bounced back from her shock early exit in Doha last week with a comfortable victory over Anna Kalinskaya at the WTA 1000 event in Dubai on Tuesday.*

The American, who lost to lucky loser Elisabetta Cocciaretto in her opening match in Qatar, made no such mistake against Kalinskaya, easing through the second-round tie 6-4, 6-4.

Gauff will face Belgian Elise Mertens in the last 16.

The two-time Grand Slam champion created headlines earlier this week for comments about anti-immigration policies in the United States, saying: "I don't think people should be dying in the streets for just existing."

Gauff struggled at times in Dubai, serving 12 double-faults, but broke Russian Kalinskaya's serve six times to emerge victorious from a scrappy encounter.

"It wasn't the prettiest one, but it was enough for today," Gauff, seeded third, said.

"It was pretty windy. I was just trying to adjust — both of us were struggling with consistency on the court."

Mirra Andreeva and Belinda Bencic were both beneficiaries of second-round walkovers.

Russian teenager Andreeva, who received a first-round bye, will face Romanian Jaqueline Cristian for a quarter-final place after Daria Kasatkina pulled out with a hip injury.

In-form Czech youngster Sara Bejlek, who won a title in Abu Dhabi earlier this month, also withdrew with an abdominal injury, handing Bencic a spot in round three.

American fourth seed Jessica Pegula cruised through with a 6-4, 6-0 thrashing of Varvara Gracheva and will next play compatriot Iva Jovic.

The tournament in Dubai, one of the 10 WTA 1000 competitions, has been severely hit by the withdrawals of world number one Aryna Sabalenka and six-time Grand Slam champion Iga Swiatek.

Second seed Amanda Anisimova had also been given a walkover on Monday after her second-round opponent Barbora Krejcikova pulled out.

Canadian teenager Victoria Mboko, who reached the Qatar Open final last week, also withdrew ahead of the tournament, citing an elbow injury. ***— AFP***

Oman captain Jatinder Singh (2L) and his teammates celebrate after the dismissal of Sri Lanka's Pathum Nissanka during the 2026 ICC Men's T20 World Cup group stage match at the Pallekele International Cricket Stadium in Kandy on February 12. ***— AFP***

World Cup lessons drive OC push for elite exposure

OMAN may still have one match left to play at the ICC Men's T20 World Cup, but their hopes of advancing are over. Eliminated from the Super Eight race after three heavy defeats in Group B, the Associate nation is already looking ahead - with senior Oman Cricket official and national team manager Alkesh Joshi outlining a structured long-term plan centred on stronger opposition, player wellbeing and sustained international exposure.

"Overall, with ten World Cup debutants in the squad, despite the three defeats, I believe we have done reasonably well," Joshi said at the Pallekele International Cricket Stadium in Kandy on Tuesday, where the team is training ahead of their final group game against Australia on February 20.

"I certainly expected a better display, more in terms of execution of our batting and bowling. Hopefully, they will do better against Australia as they have nothing to lose," he added.

Oman had arrived early in Sri Lanka to prepare for the tournament and showed encouraging signs in the build-up, registering morale-boosting victories over Sri Lanka A and Zimbabwe in official World Cup warm-up matches.

"We came down well in advance to acclimatise and did get off to morale-boosting wins over Sri Lanka A and Zimbabwe, two tough opponents. The boys showed a lot of character in those victories," said Joshi, who also serves as Oman Cricket Treasurer.

However, once the tournament began, Oman struggled to replicate that form, suffering defeats to Zimbabwe (SSC ground in Colombo), hosts Sri Lanka (Pallekele) and Ireland (SSC). "It clearly underlined that our boys do not lack talent or skills, but when it came to the main tournament, they failed to cross over the line, quite clearly because of the lack of experience and nerves at the biggest stage," said Joshi, who has been closely associated with this World Cup campaign.

ALKESH JOSHI
Oman team manager

"This is after all the World Cup. We reached this stage after strong performances in the qualifiers and to make it for a second successive World Cup and fourth overall, the best by an Asian Associate nation, proves that our boys don't lack talent and skills."

STRUCTURED EXPOSURE

Joshi identified consistent competition against top-ranked sides as the key priority once the tournament concludes for Oman.

"Following our elimination from the race for Super Eight stage from a very tough group that included two former world champions — Sri Lanka and Australia — the Oman Cricket board will gather to review the team's performance but the road ahead for us is clear," he said.

"We must have a very structured programme where we consistently play against high-class opposition and play high-quality cricket. To play against higher-ranked rivals is extremely critical for the growth of Oman Cricket."

Beyond the current tournament, Oman are preparing for an intense international calendar as they target qualification for global events across formats.

He said: "This year and 2027 are busy times for Oman Cricket as we shift our focus to the 50-over format with Oman in the race to qualify for the 2027 ODI World Cup," Joshi said. "We have four tours of ICC Cricket World Cup League where we are currently fourth in the eight-nation table. We also will play the ACC Premier Cup. We also have the T20 World Cup Qualifier in 2027 and hopefully we can qualify for the 50-over World Cup."

MENTAL CONDITIONING

Recognising the pressures of elite competition, Oman Cricket is placing renewed emphasis on player wellbeing and psychological preparation.

"In light of such a hectic and packed cricket schedule, we have decided to focus on our players' wellbeing and mental conditioning," Joshi said. "Plans are to have clinics and workshops with renowned mental conditioning coaches in July and August, followed by extensive top-class exposure against better teams."

Exposure tours and training camps abroad are also part of the strategy. "We will camp in a country where we can get different types of wicket conditions and better opposition as we move forward with hopes," he said.

Dominos BGO Team survive TCBL All-Stars scare in thriller

MUSCAT: Dominos Pizza — BGO Team survived a scare to beat TCBL All-Stars 112-106 in a thrilling match of the Tuesday Club Basketball League (TCBL) Clash with the Titans 2026.

After a three-year hiatus, the much-anticipated TCBL Clash with the Titans roared back to life at the Torch Basketball Court in Al Ghubra on Sunday night. The match reignited one of Oman basketball's anticipated events in the Filipino Community Sports event.

Designed as a stage where emerging talent meets proven champions, the Clash with the Titans series features the TCBL All-Star Selection; composed of top performers from the ongoing Winter Cup Season 3 competing against powerhouse squads from leading community and commercial leagues in Oman.

BGO Team's Alipio (#18) delivered a standout performance to earn Best Player of the Game honours, finishing with 33 points highlighted by timely shooting and crucial free throws in the closing minutes. Alipio wasted no time imposing his presence, knocking down an early three-pointer and completing a three-point play as Ginebra surged to a 30-21 advantage after the first quarter.

Dominos Pizza — BGO Team beat TCBL All-Stars 112-106 in a thrilling match of the Tuesday Club Basketball League (TCBL) Clash with the Titans 2026.

The Dominos Pizza-sponsored team extended its dominance in the second period behind Lazo (#24), who buried a three-pointer, while Moralde (#17) and Busquit (#20) added consecutive baskets to push the lead to 63-45 at half-time, threatening to turn the contest into a rout. But the TCBL All-Stars responded with determination. Behind the aggressive play of Soriano (#31), who finished with 28 points, the All-Stars mounted a furious third-quarter rally. Soriano converted steals into fast-break points, while Hipolito (#98) added crucial baskets as the All-Stars erased the deficit and seized a 75-73 lead heading into the final period.

Ochona (#59) added 13 points for the All-Stars, while Gnotob (#107) and Tenerife (#61) contributed 11 and 10 points respectively in a collective effort that underscored the depth of talent within the TCBL ranks.

The fourth quarter featured multiple lead changes in a tense finish.

With the All-Stars holding a slim 106-105 lead in the final minute, Alipio calmly sank pressure free throws to tie the game before Moralde delivered the decisive blow.

Moralde grabbed a crucial offensive rebound and scored the go-ahead basket with less than a minute remaining, giving Ginebra a 108-106 advantage. He then converted two free throws in the closing seconds to secure the victory, while Celiza (#1) added the final basket at the buzzer. Ginebra's experience ultimately proved decisive, as the team executed efficiently in critical moments to escape with the six-point win.

The Tuesday Basketball Club League awarded Anwar H Razmi, General Manager of Domino's Pizza Oman, in recognition of his unwavering support to the Filipino Community League.

Brief Scores: Dominos Pizza - BGO Team 112 — Alipio 33, Busquit 20, Moralde 20, Lazo 14
TCBL All-Stars 106 — Soriano 28, Hipolito 22, Ochona 13, Gnotob 11, Tenerife 10

CRUCIAL *KNOCK*

*Nepal's Dipendra Singh Airee (L) plays a shot during the 2026 ICC Men's T20 World Cup group stage match against Scotland at the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai on Tuesday. — **AFP***

NEPAL SEAL HISTORIC SEVEN-WICKET WIN OVER SCOTLAND

MUMBAI: *Dipendra Singh Airee hit an unbeaten 50 as Nepal saved their best for last to end their T20 World Cup campaign with a seven-wicket win over Scotland on Tuesday.*

Chasing 171 for victory, Nepal looked in trouble at 98-3 in the 14th over before Airee took the initiative in his 23-ball knock as his team achieved the target with four balls to spare in Mumbai.

Airee put on 73 runs with Gulsan Jha, who made 24 not out, as Nepal earned their first win after three losses in Group C.

Nepal's fans erupted with joy at the Wankhede Stadium after seeing their team win for the first time in the tournament since 2014.

"I want to thank the fans who came from Nepal and supported us, that gives a lot of motivation to all of us," said player of the match Airee.

"And in the last World Cup, we didn't win a single match. So that's why this win is very important for us."

It was Nepal's first victory in the T20 World Cup since they beat Hong Kong and Afghanistan in the opening stage 12 years ago.

Nepal had given England a mighty scare in their opener before losing by four runs and then went down in the next two games.

Put in to bat, Scotland posted 170-7 after a 45-ball 71 by opener Michael Jones.

Nepal pace bowler Sompal Kami stood out with figures of 3-25.

Nepal started strongly with Kushal Bhurtel scoring 45 as he put on 74 runs with fellow opener Aasif Sheikh, who made 33.

*Spinner Michael Leask picked up three quick wickets as Scotland fought back but Airee led Nepal over the line for a memorable win. — **AFP***

*Zimbabwe's Blessing Muzarabani (C) celebrates with teammates after taking the wicket of Australia's Matt Renshaw during the 2026 ICC T20 World Cup. — **AFP***

Australia, Ireland crash out as Zimbabwe qualify

THE 2021 champions Australia were knocked out of the T20 World Cup on Tuesday, with Zimbabwe qualifying for the Super Eights after their match against Ireland was washed out without a ball being bowled in Kandy.

Zimbabwe joined Sri Lanka as qualifiers from Group B and will move on to face the West Indies, India and South Africa in the next phase. Ireland were also eliminated.

Persistent drizzle all day at the Pallekelle stadium kept the covers on and the umpires finally called it off at 5:30 pm local time (1200 GMT) with no prospect of beginning the minimum five-over match before the 6:10 pm cut-off time.

Australia, who had been beaten by Sri Lanka and Zimbabwe, needed an Ireland victory to keep their hopes alive.

Zimbabwe are now on an unassailable five points with a game to still to come, while Ireland are third on three points.

Australia, on two points, have one game remaining against Oman on Friday, but cannot overtake Zimbabwe.

Australia had a shambolic build-up to the tournament They lost leading pace bowlers Pat Cummins and Josh Hazlewood to injury, while captain Mitchell Marsh missed the first two games after being hit in the groin in training and suffering testicular bleeding

Test great Steve Smith was left out despite being in terrific form top of the order in the Big Bash League and his expertise in playing against spin bowling.

*Zimbabwe captain Sikandar Raza (L) inspects the covered pitch as rain delays the start of the 2026 ICC Men's T20 World Cup group stage match against Ireland at Pallekele International Cricket Stadium. — **AFP***

COLOURFUL FANS

He flew in as cover last week and was formally added to the Australia squad at the weekend. But then he was left out for the must-win game against Sri Lanka on Monday which saw an Australia middle-order collapse as they lost by eight wickets.

Zimbabwe captain Skiander Raza hailed his side's achievement in reaching the last eight, but warned there were tougher battles to come. "We have come this far. We will celebrate but we have a game against Sri Lanka to come. This is only a tick in the box and this is not the only thing that we set out for. Everyone loves an underdog story."

Ireland skipper Lorcan Tucker was downcast after his side did not get to play.

"Obviously very disappointed to go out in this fashion, but completely uncontrollable," said Tucker. "Our batting failed. There were big moments particularly against Sri Lanka when we dropped so many catches."

The rain did not dampen the spirits of a hearty and colourful band of about two dozen Zimbabwe fans, who danced and sang throughout the damp afternoon to serenade their team's qualification. "I can tell you, whichever corner they're sitting at, at any ground, they'll be the loudest, and they have the songs," said Raza of the fans. — **AFP**

New Zealand cruise into Super Eights despite Samra ton

CHENNAI, India: New Zealand sealed their qualification to the next phase of the T20 World Cup with an eight-wicket thumping of Canada in Chennai on Tuesday.

Chasing 174 to win, New Zealand were never in trouble and reached 176-2 with almost five overs to spare.

Glenn Phillips was on 76 not out at the end with Rachin Ravindra unbeaten on 59.

"We did get on a bit of a run at the end there, which was fantastic," said Phillips.

"But honestly, Rach and I were just trying to stick to our processes and take it one ball at a time."

The result eliminates the 2024 semifinalists Afghanistan as New Zealand joined South Africa as the two qualifiers for the Super Eights from Group D.

Canada's Yuvraj Samra earlier became the youngest player to score a T20 World Cup century, when he blasted 110 in 65 balls to help his side to 173-4.

The 19-year-old brilliantly anchored the innings after captain Dilpreet Bajwa opted to bat first.

Samra and Bajwa got Canada off to a superb start with an opening partnership of 116 in 14 overs.

Bajwa fell caught by Phillips off Kyle Jamieson for 36, but Samra carried on and accelerated after the loss of his captain.

He reached his hundred off 58 balls, hitting six sixes and 11 fours in all in the highest individual innings of the tournament so far.

"I manifested this moment ever since we qualified for the World Cup," said the youngster, who was named after Indian great Yuvraj Singh. "Every single day, I dreamed about scoring a hundred on this stage.

"To do it here, in my first appearance, and as the youngest player in this World Cup, it's truly a dream come true."

Phillips was full of praise for the teenager, calling his innings "fabulous".

"He's a really clean striker of the ball. Got a long future ahead of him," Phillips added. — **AFP**

New Zealand's Glenn Phillips (L) and Rachin Ravindra run between the wickets at the MA Chidambaram Stadium in Chennai on Tuesday. — AFP

*Canada's Yuvraj Samra celebrates after scoring a century. — **AFP***

MUSCAT STOCK EXCHANGE 7,306.608

BUSINESS

CRUDE OIL
OMAN $67.03
BRENT $68.34
LIGHT $63.33

SHORTTAKES

Under the new directives, all drone retail outlets must fulfill specific accreditation requirements to operate legally.

CAA ANNOUNCES RULES ON DRONE SALES IN OMAN

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, FEB 17

The Sultanate of Oman is taking a significant step towards securing its national airspace and formalising the rapidly growing unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) market.

In a circular released on February 17, 2026, the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) established a comprehensive regulatory framework for the sale and registration of drones. According to CAA, these new measures are designed to ensure safety, protect national security and build consumer trust in the domestic market.

NEW REQUIREMENTS FOR RETAILERS

Under the new directives, all drone retail outlets must fulfill specific accreditation requirements to operate legally. Businesses are now required to add "drone sales activity" to their official commercial registration and obtain a specialised licence from the CAA.

Furthermore, authorised sellers must manage their inventory through the AirPortal system. This digital platform allows retailers to register drones from the moment of import until they reach the end user. The CAA emphasised that retailers are strictly prohibited from handing over any aircraft to a buyer until the digital transfer of ownership is completed.

GUIDELINES FOR BUYERS

For consumers, the verification process has been simplified through the use of technology. The CAA advises all individuals to purchase exclusively from authorised points of sale to avoid legal accountability. The primary method of verification for a buyer is the Serb application, a dedicated mobile platform for drone management in Oman.

A retailer is considered "duly authorised" if they can transfer the drone's ownership directly to the buyer's account within the app. If the drone appears in the user's Serb app immediately upon purchase, it is officially registered and legal; failure to complete this transfer indicates the device is non-compliant.

TRA chief urges telecoms to diversify services

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, FEB 17

THE head of the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) has urged private-sector companies in Oman to diversify investment and develop new revenue streams beyond traditional telecoms, arguing that broader digital services would strengthen company profitability while giving consumers more choice and better value.

Eng Omar bin Hamdan al Ismaili, CEO of the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA), said companies should "look for alternative sources to grow revenues and profits", with a stronger focus on innovation and new services that extend beyond core voice and data.

Briefing the media, he also called for faster adoption of automation across factories and sectors linked to manufacturing and exports, framing automation as a competitiveness and sustainability lever that can help firms reduce inefficiencies, raise productivity and keep pace with regional and global markets.

"The goal is not only stronger company performance", he said, "but a market where consumers benefit from more diversified services — not limited to the traditional offerings that have dominated the sector for years".

SHIFTING BEYOND 'TRADITIONAL TELECOMS'

Figures presented at the media briefing show that Oman's telecoms market is increasingly moving towards new digital use-cases, particularly connected devices and industrial applications.

Internet of Things (IoT) subscriptions rose to 1.632 million in 2025 from 356,000 in 2021, a cumulative increase of 358% over five years — a sign of rising demand for connectivity in logistics, utilities and smart meter operations.

The expansion has been supported by continued investment in national digital infrastructure. Fibre subscriptions reached 356,000 in 2025, up from 184,000 in 2021. On 5G, fixed wireless subscriptions climbed to 220,000 in 2025 from 76,000 in 2021.

Sector revenues also increased. Licensed telecoms companies generated RO 961 million in 2025, compared with RO 768 million in 2021.

Officials from the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) addressing the media on Tuesday.

Briefing the media, Eng Omar bin Hamdan al Ismaili, CEO of the TRA, also called for faster adoption of automation across factories and sectors linked to manufacturing and exports, framing automation as a competitiveness and sustainability lever that can help firms reduce inefficiencies, raise productivity and keep pace with regional and global markets.

SERVICE OVERSIGHT

Al Ismaili's remarks come as the regulator highlights both infrastructure progress and a stronger focus on consumer outcomes and service performance.

Data from field-visit results showed mobile download speeds rising to 113 Mbps in 2025 from 44 Mbps in 2021, while fixed download speeds reached 91 Mbps in 2025.

At the same time, complaints submitted to service providers declined to 240,212 in 2025 from 378,943 in 2021, while escalated complaints to the authority rose to 6,605 in 2025 from 1,369 in 2021 — a shift that can indicate higher consumer awareness and greater willin on routes. In his call for automation, Al Ismaili positioned technology adoption as part of a broader sustainability agenda, saying the shift should be paired with skills development and workforce readiness.

He argued that automation does not have to mean fewer opportunities, but rather a transition towards new roles — in areas such as systems operation, maintenance, software, data analysis, cybersecurity, supply-chain management and tech-enabled industrial services — particularly as Oman pushes for a more resilient, sustainable economy aligned with national priorities.

The TRA's regulatory track in recent years has also expanded to cover emerging areas linked to digital diversification, including IoT services, telecom service quality, consumer rights, telecom towers and rules related to cloud computing and data centres — areas increasingly relevant to operators seeking new revenue lines.

Indian JV partner explores cooperation on nano fertilisers with OMIFCO

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, FEB 17

The Indian Farmers Fertiliser Cooperative Limited (IFFCO) — a 25% shareholder in Oman India Fertiliser Company SAOC (OMIFCO), which owns and operates a major ammonia-urea fertiliser complex at Sur — has proposed introducing nano fertilisers to support Oman's food security and environmental objectives.

A senior IFFCO executive made the pitch during a meeting with officials from OQ, representing the Omani government's 50% stake in OMIFCO.

Executives from Krishak Bharati Cooperative Limited (KRIBHCO), holding the remaining 25% stake, were also present at the Muscat meeting. Nano fertilisers are engineered at the nanoscale (particles typically less than 100 nm) to interact more efficiently with plants.

Representatives of OQ, IFFCO and KRIBHCO — joint venture partners of OMIFCO — during their meeting in Muscat.

Their extremely small size provides a larger surface area relative to volume, potentially improving nutrient uptake, enabling targeted or slow-release delivery; and reducing waste and environmental impact compared with conventional fertilisers.

"I am pleased to share that we discussed IFFCO's innovative Nano Fertilisers during our meeting.

I highlighted the importance and growing need for nano-technology-based fertilisers in ensuring food security and environmental sustainability", said K J Patel, MD — IFFCO, in a post.

Patel added that Omani representatives expressed interest in exploring the promotion of nano fertilisers in Oman through OMIFCO. "We agreed to work together to develop a suitable strategy to take this initiative forward. Glad that IFFCO's Nano Fertilisers are now going global", he stated.

IFFCO has been an early adopter and developer of nano fertiliser technology among major fertiliser producers, launching nano liquid urea in 2021, followed by nano DAP and developing nano NPK formulations.

Also attending the Muscat meeting were Mulham al Jarf, Deputy President for Investment at the Oman Investment Authority and Chairman of OQ; Azzan Abdullatif, Chief Portfolio Officer, OQ; S S Yadav, Managing Director, KRIBHCO and Chairman of the OMIFCO Board; Rakesh Kapur, Joint MD, IFFCO and OMIFCO Board member; Manish Kumar, Finance Director, KRIBHCO and OMIFCO Board member; and Harish Garg, FC & Board Secretary, OMIFCO.

Patel noted, "The meeting provided an excellent opportunity to deliberate on matters relating to OMIFCO and to further strengthen the spirit of partnership that underpins this successful joint venture. Our discussions were constructive and forward-looking, reflecting our shared commitment to operational excellence, long-term sustainability and value creation for all OMIFCO stakeholders".

SHORT*TAKES*

This strategic partnership introduces a dynamic range of SUVs and sedans to the Omani market.

BAIC LAUNCHED IN OMAN WITH NEW SHOWROOMS IN AL QURUM AND SUHAR

MUSCAT: *Gulf Great Sands LLC (GGS) has officially announced the grand launch of the BAIC brand in Oman, which will provide Omani customers a range of offroad SUVs.*

The launch was celebrated with the inauguration of a flagship, state-of-the-art showrooms in Al Qurum and Suhar, designed to offer customers an Adventure for everyone.

This strategic partnership introduces a dynamic range of SUVs and sedans to the Omani market, blending cutting-edge technology, robust performance and modern luxury.

A spokesperson for BAIC International stated, "We are thrilled to continue partnering with Gulf Great Sands to bring BAIC's brand vision of innovation and quality to Oman.

GGS is a perfect partner for BAIC as our customers will get aftersales service across 12 service centres in Oman through experienced and trained manpower.

We are confident that the Omani market will appreciate the blend of heritage, technology and rugged capability that defines our brand".

A spokesperson for Gulf Great Sands LLC (GGS) added, "The launch of BAIC brand in Oman represents our commitment to offering our customers world-class vehicles that deliver exceptional value and performance.

BAIC range includes SUVs based on varied customer needs: An SUV for a family weekend getaway, or an affordable and rugged Offroad SUV, as well as an offroad SUV for those desiring more adventure with the latest in connected technology and intelligent driving. We invite all automotive enthusiasts to visit us and experience the future of driving".

The launch features four distinct models, catering to off-road enthusiasts, families and city commuters alike.

As the top-tier model in the lineup, the BJ40 Pro is engineered to satisfy the ultimate desire for adventure, seamlessly transitioning from city streets to rugged terrain

Designed to make off-road adventures more affordable, the BJ40 Honour proves that rugged capability can be both high-performing and attainable.

The BJ30 Hybrid offers fun and freedom for long family drives, designed to take passengers further, whether on the highway or off the beaten path.

Rounding out the lineup is the U5 Plus, a family sedan that serves as a cheerful companion for daily life.

DHOFAR ISLAMIC SPOTLIGHTS OMAN AT 17TH IFSB SUMMIT

MUSCAT: *Dhofar Islamic, the Islamic banking window of BankDhofar, sponsored the 17th Islamic Financial Services Board (IFSB) Summit, held recently under the theme "Islamic Finance for the Future: Unlocking New Frontiers with Global Impact". The event was hosted by the Central Bank of Oman at the St Regis Hotel in Muscat.*

The summit brought together central banks, regulatory authorities, international institutions and leaders from the Islamic banking industry, aiming to contribute to the development of a global financial system rooted in stability and ethical values. It also focused on key Islamic finance priorities, including addressing current challenges, supporting non-banking financial sector growth, developing the sukuk market and enhancing financial inclusion.

Amer bin Saeed al Amri, Chief Executive Officer of Dhofar Islamic, stated: "The 17th IFSB Summit is one of the premier global platforms bringing together industry leaders and Islamic finance institutions under one roof".

Drive your dream this Ramadhan with Chery

CHERY Oman is celebrating the spirit of the holy month with the launch of its "Drive Your Dream this Ramadhan" campaign, offering a 60-day window of exceptional rewards and value. Running from February 11 to April 11, 2026, New World Autos, the distributor for Chery in Oman, invites customers to experience a truly rewarding purchase journey.

This year, the campaign is headlined by a grand raffle draw giving every customer the incredible opportunity to win the latest 2026 Tiggo 9 PHEV, a flagship model that represents the pinnacle of Chery's luxury and green technology.

This season provides a great opportunity for prospective buyers to drive home a premium vehicle through a highly attractive installment plan designed for maximum affordability. Customers can choose from an impressive 2026 lineup with starting monthly installments that cater to every lifestyle.

The Arrizo 5 Std is available starting from RO 60, while the Arrizo 6 Comfort begins at RO 76 and the Arrizo 8 Comfort starts at RO 100. For SUV enthusiasts, the Tiggo 4 Comfort starts at RO 80, the Tiggo 7 Standard starts at RO 85, the Tiggo 8 Luxury starts at RO 120 and the flagship Tiggo 9 Luxury FWD is starting from RO 142.

Customers can choose from 2026 lineup with starting monthly installments that cater to every lifestyle.

To make the dream of ownership even more accessible, the campaign is complemented by a comprehensive suite of benefits including a free service package for 3 years or 30,000 km, free insurance (Oman only) for private vehicles and free registration for all models.

These elements are designed to reduce the initial cost of ownership and provide a seamless, high-value delivery process.

Additionally, every new Chery vehicle comes with three years of roadside assistance through AAA, ensuring total peace of mind for every journey across Oman.

4th Ominvest Ramadhan championship launched

MUSCAT: Oman International Development and Investment Company SAOG (Ominvest) is set to launch the fourth edition of the Ominvest Ramadhan Football Championship for Group Companies.

This tournament reinforces the Group's commitment to promoting people wellbeing and strengthening the unity among its employees across its companies.

This year's championship features seven teams representing Ominvest Group companies, alongside a guest team, the Authority for Public Services Regulation.

The teams have been divided into two groups, which will compete in the group stage to secure places in the knockout rounds, culminating in the final match that will determine the champion of the fourth edition.

This tournament reinforces the Group's commitment to promoting people wellbeing.

The draw ceremony was held in the presence of team representatives, reflecting the Group's commitment to a fair and transparent competition and its dedication to fostering a spirit of camaraderie and teamwork among participants.

Waleed bin Nasser al Yarubi, Chief People, Corporate Communication and Sustainability Officer at Ominvest, said: "As we launch the fourth edition of the Ominvest Ramadhan Championship, we remain steadfast in our commitment to fostering a culture of inclusion and teamwork.

This initiative is a cornerstone of our sustainability agenda, directly supporting the global goals of the UN SDGs for health and wellbeing. We believe that a healthy, active lifestyle is fundamental to the professional and personal fulfilment of our employees".

Malabar Gold & Diamonds inaugurates showroom in Suhar

SUHAR: Malabar Gold & Diamonds, the 5th largest jewellery retailer globally with over 420 showrooms across 14 countries, has just unveiled their expanded and renovated showroom at Lulu Hypermarket, Suhar.

The revamped showroom was inaugurated by Shaikh Saud bin Mohammed al Hinai, Wali of Suhar, in the presence of Najeeb K, Regional Head-Malabar Gold & Diamonds Oman; Muhasin P — Branch Head at Malabar Gold & Diamonds, other senior management team members from Malabar Gold & Diamonds, customers and well-wishers.

"We are delighted to unveil our newly expanded and renovated showroom in Suhar, thoughtfully designed to offer a more immersive, comfortable and elevated jewellery shopping experience.

The showroom was inaugurated by Shaikh Saud bin Mohammed al Hinai, Wali of Suhar

With a refreshed aesthetic, enhanced layouts and a wider display of exquisite collections, the showroom reflects our commitment to continuously evolve in line with our customers' expectations.

Oman continues to be one of our most important and promising markets, driven by strong customer trust and a deep appreciation for fine craftsmanship.

Today, with 11 world-class showrooms across the Sultanate of Oman, Malabar Gold & Diamonds remains steadfast in its vision to bring global standards of quality, innovation and service excellence to every region we serve. This milestone in Suhar marks another step forward in strengthening our long-term presence and commitment to Oman", commented Shamlal Ahamed, MD-International Operations, Malabar Gold & Diamonds.

The revamped showroom houses an exquisite array of designs in gold, diamond and precious gems across Malabar Gold & Diamonds numerous exclusive brands such as Mine, Era, Viraaz, Precia, Ethnix & Divine. Comprising traditional jewellery, modern jewellery, daily wear jewellery and much more, the designs have been curated from over 20 countries.

SHORT TAKES

The initiative reflects ongoing national efforts to strengthen private-sector growth and support economic diversification.

NEW LOAN GUARANTEES BOOST SME FINANCING IN OMAN

MUSCAT: *The Development Bank has partnered with Sohar International to introduce a new loan guarantee programme designed to improve access to financing for Omani companies, particularly small and medium enterprises seeking expansion or new project development.*

The initiative reflects ongoing national efforts to strengthen private-sector growth and support economic diversification by addressing financing gaps faced by promising businesses during key growth phases.

Through the programme, Sohar Islamic will provide Sharia-compliant financing to eligible companies, while the Development Bank will guarantee between 50 per cent and 80 per cent of the loan value, depending on project size, nature and economic feasibility. The risk-sharing structure is expected to encourage greater lending by reducing exposure for participating financial institutions.

Hussein bin Ali al Lawati, CEO of the Development Bank, said the programme will help Omani companies reach advanced stages of growth by widening access to funding and enabling more enterprises to invest, expand operations and generate employment opportunities. He noted that collaboration with partner banks strengthens the availability of diversified financing solutions across the Sultanate of Oman and enhances credit confidence within the market.

*AbdulWahid bin Mohammed al Murshidi, CEO of Sohar International, emphasised that sustainable SME growth requires not only liquidity but also strong risk-management frameworks and disciplined capital allocation. — **ONA***

Bukaka achieves oil & gas FAT milestone in Nizwa

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, FEB 17

OMAN-BASED Bukaka International LLC has successfully completed its first Factory Acceptance Test (FAT) at its newly established workshop in Nizwa Industrial City, marking a significant operational milestone that strengthens local industrial capability and supports Oman's oil and gas sector through enhanced in-country value.

The FAT was conducted on a Type C1280 Beam Pumping Unit (BPU), confirming that the new workshop is fully equipped to carry out assembly and testing activities in accordance with international oilfield engineering standards.

A Factory Acceptance Test is a comprehensive quality-assurance procedure undertaken at the manufacturing site before equipment is delivered to clients.

During the process, engineers and stakeholders subject machinery to a series of rigorous operational, safety and performance tests to verify compliance with technical specifications and field-readiness requirements.

Successful completion provides the final approval for deployment in demanding production environments such as oilfields.

Beyond the technical achievement, the milestone signals the operational readiness of the Nizwa facility and demonstrates Bukaka's capability to mobilise quickly, implement strict quality-control processes and meet the performance expectations of operators in the energy sector. The workshop is positioned as a strategic hub for assembly, testing and future manufacturing of oilfield equipment in the Sultanate of Oman.

Under the company's phased in-country development strategy, key BPU components are engineered and manufactured at Bukaka's specialised facilities in Indonesia before being transported to Oman for final assembly and testing.

The workshop is positioned as a strategic hub for assembly, testing and future manufacturing of oilfield equipment in Oman.

Beyond the technical achievement, the milestone signals the operational readiness of the Nizwa facility and demonstrates Bukaka's capability to mobilise quickly, implement strict quality-control processes and meet the performance expectations of operators in the energy sector.

This approach enables immediate operational capability while facilitating technology transfer, building local technical expertise and progressively expanding domestic production capacity.

Over time, the company plans to elevate the facility's role from assembly and testing to full-scale manufacturing of Beam Pumping Units and related oilfield equipment, supporting the localisation of industrial supply chains and creating skilled employment opportunities for Omani professionals.

The successful FAT also reflects the rapid operational transition achieved by the Nizwa workshop within a relatively short period following the launch of the facility.

Bukaka inaugurated the RO 3 million plant in 2025, equipping it with advanced manufacturing technologies, including automated welding systems, CNC machining capabilities and non-destructive testing equipment designed to meet international quality benchmarks.

Looking ahead, the company aims to further strengthen the facility's global competitiveness by pursuing internationally recognised certifications, including API Q1 and API 11E, which demonstrate compliance with stringent oil and gas industry standards.

In parallel, Bukaka is working towards obtaining "Made in Oman" certification, underscoring its commitment to deepening domestic industrial participation and supporting Oman's broader economic diversification objectives.

With a fully operational workshop, a clear road map for capability expansion and a strong focus on international standards, Bukaka's Nizwa facility is expected to play an increasingly strategic role in supporting the sustainable growth of Oman's oil and gas industry while reinforcing the country's ambitions to expand local manufacturing capacity.

Madayn–be'ah pact strengthens industrial waste management

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, FEB 17

The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn) has signed a cooperation programme with Oman Environmental Services Holding Company (be'ah) aimed at enhancing the management, treatment and regulation of industrial waste across Oman's industrial cities, in line with national sustainability and environmental protection priorities.

The cooperation programme establishes a comprehensive framework to regulate the handling of industrial and hazardous waste generated by manufacturing activities operating within Madayn's industrial estates. It seeks to create an integrated waste-management system that complies with approved environmental standards while increasing recycling rates, improving waste tracking and reducing the amount of waste disposed of in landfills.

The programme establishes a framework to regulate the handling of industrial and hazardous waste.

Officials noted that the initiative reflects growing attention to the environmental impact of industrial growth and the need to develop structured systems that support responsible production and resource efficiency.

By strengthening monitoring mechanisms and introducing advanced treatment processes, the programme is expected to support the transition towards a circular economy in the Sultanate of Oman's industrial sector.

Under the agreement, companies operating in industrial cities will be registered within be'ah's electronic waste-management systems and will be required to implement the "Manifest System" prior to transporting waste to treatment facilities.

The programme also provides for the organisation of waste transportation routes and ensures that waste is properly sorted, classified and repackaged according to approved technical and environmental specifications before disposal or recycling.

As part of the cooperation framework, be'ah will offer specialised technical support in evaluating and classifying industrial waste streams, determining treatment methods and associated costs; and providing transparent data on the quantities of waste received at treatment facilities.

The agreement also enables joint inspection procedures between the two entities to verify compliance with local and international environmental regulations governing waste disposal and industrial emissions.

Beyond operational improvements, the programme includes awareness and training initiatives designed to promote sustainable practices among investors, factory operators and employees within industrial cities.

By strengthening environmental governance, encouraging recycling and improving waste-treatment infrastructure, the partnership is expected to significantly reduce the environmental footprint of manufacturing activities while reinforcing Oman's broader sustainable development and industrial-growth objectives.

OIL WATCH

Brent slips ahead nuclear talks

Brent crude edged lower on Tuesday as traders weighed supply risks after naval drills by Iran near the Strait of Hormuz ahead of nuclear talks with the US.

*Brent slipped 0.86% to $68.34 a barrel, while WTI held $63.33, reflecting cautious sentiment and holiday-thinned trading conditions across global markets amidst uncertainty over negotiations and potential policy signals later this week, analysts said. — **Reuters***

GOLD MARKET

Gold falls as dollar strengthens

Gold prices fell on Tuesday as a firmer dollar and subdued Asian trading during the Lunar New Year holiday reduced demand. Spot gold dropped 0.9% to $4,947.98 an ounce, while April futures declined 1.6% to $4,966.80.

*A 0.2% rise in the dollar index made bullion costlier for overseas buyers, reinforcing short-term downward pressure on markets. — **ONA***

AUTO SANCTIONS

China-Russia car trade persists

Thousands of vehicles continue moving from China to Russia via grey-market channels that bypass sanctions imposed after the war in Ukraine.

*Data from Autostat show shipments often ordered through intermediaries supplying Russian dealers despite manufacturers' withdrawal pledges, highlighting persistent demand and enforcement gaps across cross-border automotive trade networks. — **Reuters***

Creating a generation of young sustainability leaders

SADIYA AL BAKRI

The writer is the Founder of the Save and Sustain Green Ambassador Programme

IT is a week where young people are not being told what sustainability is instead they are being shown how it works. This week, the Save and Sustain Green Ambassador Programme is bringing sustainability to life through hands-on learning and real industry exposure, enabling students to experience environmental responsibility beyond theory.

Through structured workshops and field visits, students are seeing how sustainability operates in real systems and how these practices can be implemented within schools and communities.

A total of 120 students, 12 teachers, 5 EFP Oman team and representatives from the Ministry of Education are taking part in the programme's first official field trip series, marking a key milestone in the programme's implementation journey.

This week, students began their industry learning journey starting with JW Marriott Muscat, where they observed sustainability systems in action, including waste segregation, composting, energy efficiency and the hotel's in-house water production and bottling system using glass bottles.

The hotel reported saving approximately four million plastic water bottles in two years through this initiative alone.

During the visit, the Director of Engineering shared a message that resonated strongly with students and educators alike: 'Sustainability starts from home'.

Save and Sustain is now active in eight government schools in Muscat, five boys' schools and three girls' schools, supported through sponsorship by be'ah, Ooredoo, Petrogas E&P, Phoenix Power and Oman Refco.

The programme is delivered in close coordination with school leadership and relevant authorities, ensuring consistency, accountability and long-term integration within school environments.

Over the past four months, students have completed four practical workshops focused on implementation and behaviour change: Empowerment, Green Habits, Journey of Waste and Energy Champions. Students have been trained on correct segregation practices, supported with facilities where possible and engaged through gamified activities designed to make sustainability learning memorable, measurable and student-led.

With its structured model of seven workshops and three field trips, the programme is designed to be scalable and replicable, allowing more schools to benefit from the same quality learning experience while maintaining consistency and impact.

The programme is delivered in close coordination with school leadership and relevant authorities, ensuring consistency, accountability and long-term integration within school environments.

Currently, 18 additional government schools in Muscat are ready and waiting to join this journey.

With the right support, the programme has the potential to develop up to 540 Green Ambassadors across Muscat — creating a generation of young sustainability leaders equipped with real skills, real exposure and real responsibility.

By engaging students at school level and exposing them to real operational systems, the programme supports long-term behavioural change that extends beyond the classroom and into homes and communities.

As the programme expands, there is a strong opportunity for corporate partners to support wider participation, including increasing sponsorship for girls' schools, ensuring equal access to these impactful learning experiences.

Organisations interested in supporting youth sustainability education and meaningful long-term ESG outcomes are encouraged to explore partnership opportunities with the Save and Sustain Green Ambassador Programme.

SCIENCE DIPLOMACY AS A BRIDGE FOR MEDIATION

AZIZA AL MUGHAIRY

The writer is a Muscat-based independent researcher

SCIENCE diplomacy is an ancient concept, but the academic literature is new. Therefore, the constituency of the field is only presently being defined.

Science for diplomacy (advice informing policy): The best example, as previously mentioned, is CERN, which was formed in 1954 with twelve countries. Geneva, Switzerland, was chosen to be the site for the project, primarily due to its diplomatic neutrality, which was the most valuable asset, as building the initial facilities of CERN would have cost the equivalent of $1.57 billion in the present day.

This, perhaps, is one of the best examples of how a nation has successfully leveraged its neutrality.

The International Space Station (ISS) is another powerful example of science for diplomacy.

Built and operated by the United States, Russia, Europe, Japan and Canada, it has sustained cooperation between geopolitical rivals for over two decades, demonstrating how shared scientific goals can maintain dialogue and trust even during periods of political tension on Earth.

Diplomacy for science (enabling bilateral or multilateral cooperation): The Square Kilometre Array required a formal intergovernmental treaty (the SKAO Convention) signed by several nations.

Diplomats had to negotiate complex issues like land rights on Indigenous territories, data-sharing protocols across borders and how to split the massive electricity costs.

This successful project now spans Africa and Australia.

Science in diplomacy (collaboration improving relations): The best example of science in diplomacy is the Montreal Protocol, which is considered to be the most successful environmental treaty.

It was driven by scientific findings that CFCs were depleting the ozone layer. Scientists provided the evidence that allowed the US State Department and others to negotiate a global phase-out of these substances.

Another example is the IPCC (1988–present): the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change summarises the latest climate research to provide a neutral, evidence-based foundation for global negotiations like the Paris Agreement, which was initiated by a famous atmospheric physicist who served as the first chair of the IPCC.

Given the nature of these fundamental tenets of science diplomacy, it is important to note that science diplomacy usually serves the greater good.

However, it is not a fundamental form of diplomacy. Often, when two different nations wish to pursue a scientific venture together while their political relations are strained, this opens the door for mediation diplomacy and shuttle mediation diplomacy.

How Oman is betting its future on green growth

OVER the first five years of Oman Vision 2040, the Sultanate of Oman has moved steadily from ambition to action. The latest progress report shows that nearly 74 per cent of national indicators are advancing positively.

Behind these figures lies something more important than statistics: a structural shift in how Oman defines growth, competitiveness and long-term prosperity.

Sustainability is no longer positioned as a supporting theme. It is increasingly becoming the foundation of economic strategy.

Four interconnected areas are shaping this transformation: green hydrogen development, sustainable mobility infrastructure, circular economy systems and environmentally responsible industrial value addition. Together, they represent more than projects.

They form a coherent development model where efficiency, environmental responsibility and economic performance reinforce one another.

Green hydrogen stands at the forefront of this transition. Several large-scale projects have progressed from announcement to construction, including the landmark ACME development in Al Duqm.

With world-class renewable resources, structured governance, and direct access to global shipping routes, Oman is positioning itself as a reliable supplier to Europe and Asia. What distinguishes Oman's approach is discipline.

Rather than pursuing rapid expansion without safeguards, authorities have focused on clear regulations, phased incentives and coordination between institutions and investors.

This measured strategy builds credibility. It signals that the sector is being developed as a long-term national asset rather than a short-term trend. Sustainable transport and logistics are advancing in parallel. Investment in roads, ports, airports and digital systems is strengthening connectivity between industrial zones and export markets.

At the same time, environmental performance is being integrated into infrastructure planning from the outset. Digital platforms such as Marsad and Khuta are enhancing transparency across supply networks. Emissions monitoring and performance-based systems are gradually becoming standard practice. This reflects a broader shift: sustainability is no longer treated as compliance; it is becoming operational logic within modern supply chain management.

Facilities such as the Duqm Refinery and the Salalah Ammonia Plant demonstrate that industrial expansion and environmental management can advance together.

DR UMAIR WAQAS

The writer is Assistant Professor — Supply Chain Management, College of Commerce and Business Administration, Dhofar University

Four interconnected areas are shaping this transformation: green hydrogen development, sustainable mobility infrastructure, circular economy systems and environmentally responsible industrial value addition.

The circular economy represents another powerful pillar. Oman's decision to commission a national Circularity Gap Report marked a regional first.

More importantly, it was followed by practical action. Recycling capacity has expanded, engineered landfills have been modernised and waste-processing facilities across the country are converting organic and construction waste into compost, biochar and reusable materials.

Waste streams that once represented environmental cost are increasingly generating economic value. This is how circularity becomes meaningful, not through theory, but through functioning systems that reduce landfill pressure while creating new business opportunities. Institutional support has also strengthened.

The Oman Net Zero Centre plays a coordinating role in emissions-reduction strategies and infrastructure readiness. By embedding sustainability standards into procurement and project design, long-term objectives are translated into everyday practice.

Green value addition in industry further illustrates this evolution. Facilities such as the Duqm Refinery and the Salalah Ammonia Plant demonstrate that industrial expansion and environmental management can advance together.

Meanwhile, investment in solar panel manufacturing, wind turbine components, advanced materials and speciality chemicals is diversifying the production base. Local manufacturing strengthens supply chains, reduces reliance on imports and builds technical capability within the country. Over time, this contributes to employment generation, knowledge transfer and greater economic resilience.

What connects these developments is a recognition that sustainability and competitiveness are not opposing forces. In global markets where carbon intensity is increasingly priced and supply chain transparency is demanded, early adaptation creates an advantage. Oman's progress illustrates that effective transformation depends not only on planning but also on execution.

Policies are moving beyond documentation. Facilities are operational. Investments are materialising. Measurable outcomes are emerging.

There are also broader lessons. Early investment in infrastructure and governance creates durable advantages. Coordination across industrial, environmental and financial policies produces stronger results than fragmented efforts. Engaging stakeholders builds confidence and institutional legitimacy.

Most importantly, Oman's journey challenges the outdated narrative that sustainability constrains growth. In practice, resource efficiency lowers costs, clean energy strengthens energy security and circular systems unlock new revenue streams.

As global standards evolve, countries that embed sustainability into economic design will be better positioned to attract capital, secure market access and maintain competitiveness.

Oman's strategic choices suggest that it intends to be among them. Sustainability in Oman is no longer an aspiration. It is increasingly a practical driver of diversification, fiscal stability and long-term prosperity under Oman Vision 2040.

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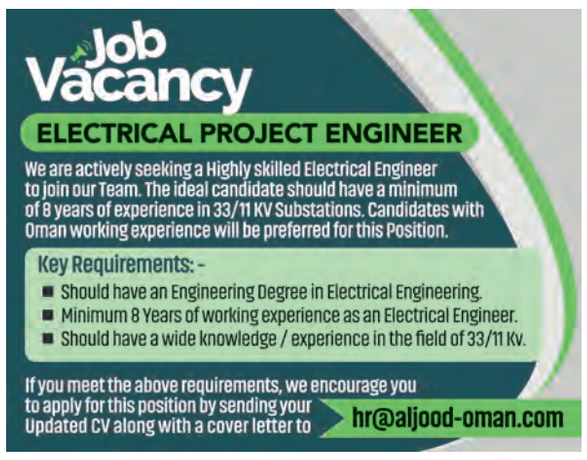

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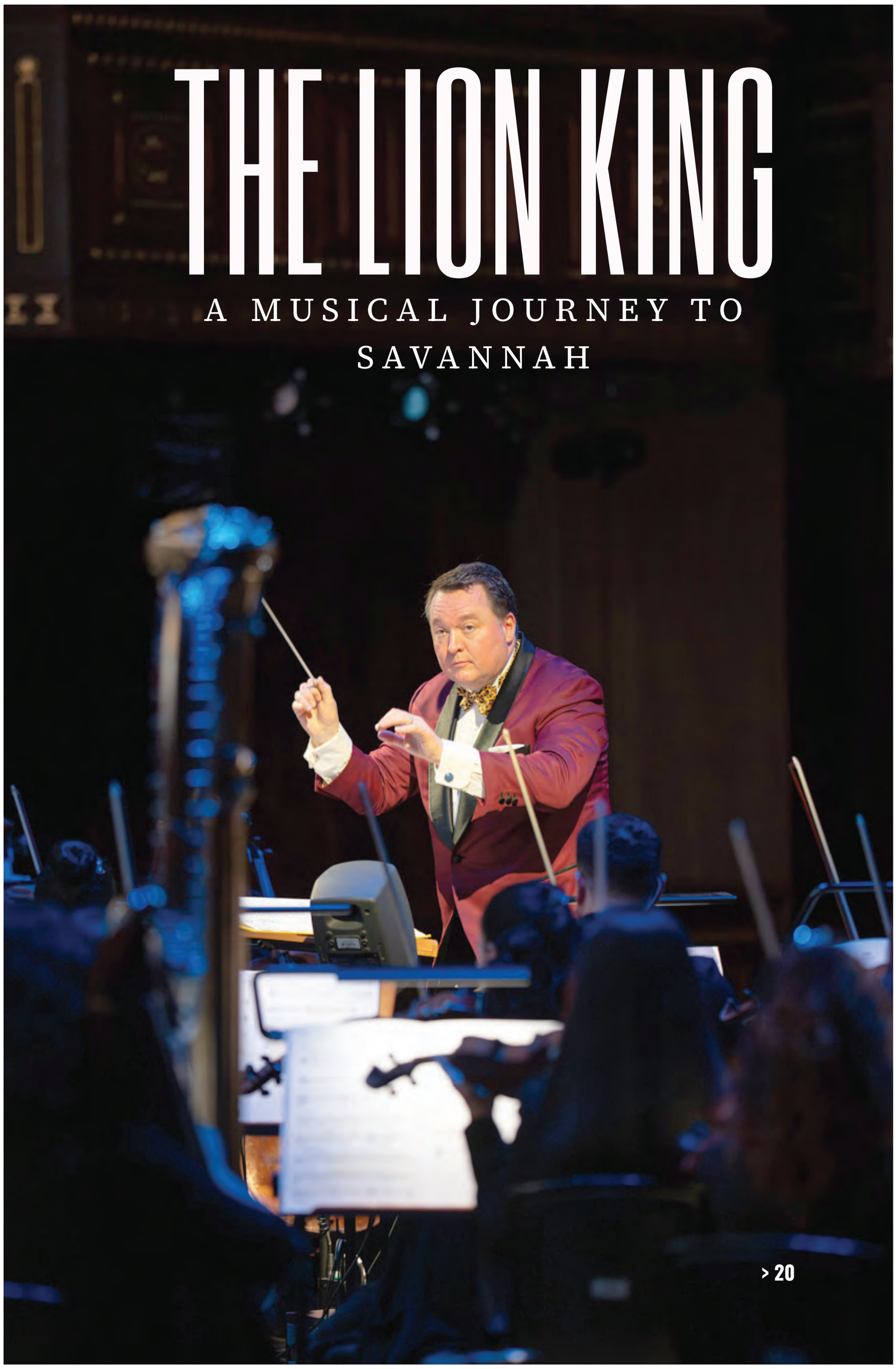


THE LION KING

A MUSICAL JOURNEY TO SAVANNAH

> 20

ON SECOND THOUGHT

RAMADHAN DINING TRENDS COME AND GO, THE MEANING SHOULDN'T

Yeru Ebuen
The writer is a luxury media strategist and a creative director

Over the past three years, Ramadhan dining across the Gulf has quietly shifted from something simple into something planned, packaged, and often performative. Iftar is no longer just about breaking fast. It's a booking. A calendar slot. A decision weighed against traffic, price, ambience, and whether the table will photograph well.

Across the region, hotels and restaurants have leaned heavily into the idea of Ramadhan as a "season". Ticketed iftars, curated tents, themed menus, and set experiences have become the norm rather than the exception.

Social media has played its part, amplifying beautifully laid spreads and softly lit majlis-style set-ups, turning what was once intimate into something increasingly public.

At the same time, there's a noticeable shift in how people talk about food during Ramadhan. Overindulgence, once quietly accepted, is now openly questioned. Conversations around sustainability, moderation, and mindful eating have grown louder, particularly since the pandemic years. Some diners are deliberately choosing simpler meals or fewer outings, framing restraint as part of the spiritual discipline Ramadhan calls for.

Price has also become a defining factor. Rising food costs across the Gulf have made people more selective. Value is discussed openly — not just in terms of quantity, but quality and purpose. Is this iftar worth it? Does it feel meaningful, or just expensive? These are questions people now ask without embarrassment.

Another clear trend is delivery. Ordering iftar has evolved from a convenience into a strategy especially for families balancing work, long commutes, and hosting responsibilities. What was once seen as a shortcut is now simply part of how modern Ramadhan works.

In Oman, these regional shifts take on a slightly different texture. Muscat's hotel suhoors, for example, have turned into late-night social spaces in their own right. They're less about spectacle and more about atmosphere: lingering conversations, familiar faces, a slower pace. At the same time, there's growing visibility around community-focused initiatives, from shared meals to quiet acts of giving that don't ask for applause.

And this is where it's worth pausing. Because beyond the trends, the bookings, and the social chatter, Ramadhan is meant to centre on reflection. Its spirit lies in self-discipline, generosity, empathy, and awareness not only of hunger, but of others. Fasting is not about deprivation for its own sake; it's about mindfulness, intention, and reconnecting with what actually matters.

So yes, enjoy the iftars. Support local restaurants. Gather with friends. But perhaps the real success of Ramadhan isn't measured by how many places we try, but by how often we slow down, show restraint, and remember why this month exists in the first place.

Sometimes, the most meaningful table is the simplest one.

QUICK FEATURES

PARADE

Revellers take part in the Mardi Gras parade which includes balls, parties and celebrations with floats and costumed dancers in New Orleans, Louisiana.
— AFP

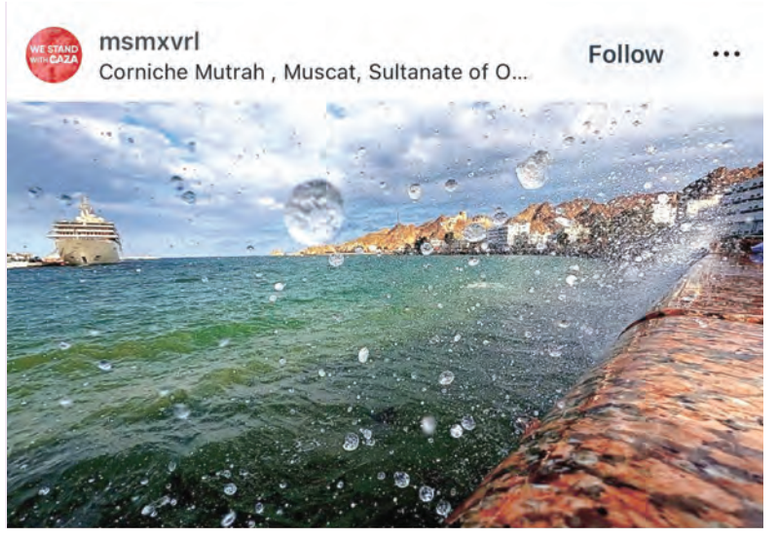
FILM AWARDS

Kirsten Dunst attends the Film Independent Spirit Awards at the Hollywood Palladium in Los Angeles, California, US. ***— Reuters***

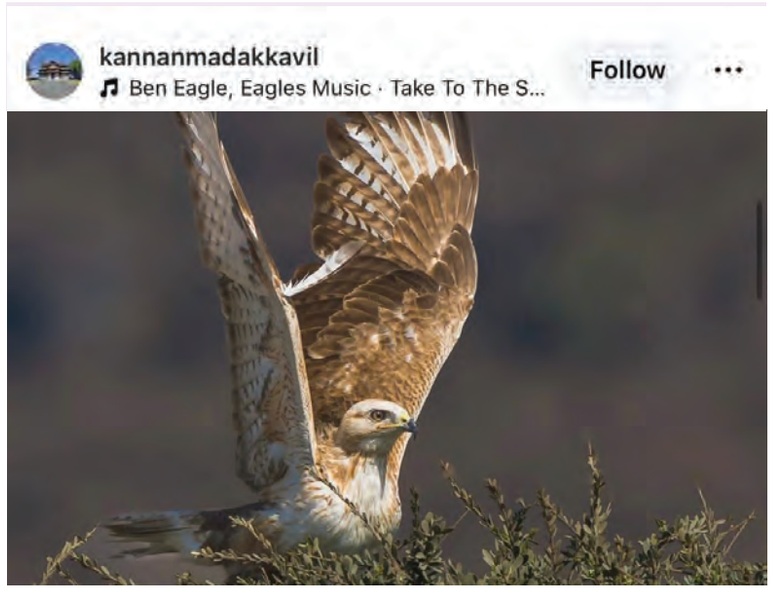
POWERLIFTING

Afghan athlete Mudasir Tahiri carries a donkey on his shoulders to show his strength at a field in the Nahr-e-Shahi district of Balkh province.
— AFP

INSTA PICKS



Muttrah during rain season



Eagle elegance in full supply

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'GODFATHER' AND 'APOCALYPSE NOW' ACTOR ROBERT DUVALL DEAD AT 95

LOS ANGELES: *Robert Duvall, who played the smooth mafia lawyer in "The Godfather" and stole the show with his depiction of a surfing-crazed colonel in "Apocalypse Now," has died at the age of 95, his wife said on Monday. His death on Sunday was confirmed by his wife Luciana Duvall.*

"Yesterday we said goodbye to my beloved husband, cherished friend, and one of the greatest actors of our time. Bob passed away peacefully at home," she wrote.

Blunt-talking, prolific and glitz-averse, Duvall won an Oscar for best actor and was nominated six other times. Over his six decades-long career, he shone in both lead and supporting roles, and eventually became a director. He kept acting in his 90s.

"His passion for his craft was matched only by his deep love for characters, a great meal, and holding court."
Duvall won his Academy Award in 1983 for playing a washed-up country singer in "Tender Mercies."

But his most memorable characters also included the soft-spoken, loyal mob consigliere Tom Hagen in the first two installments of "The Godfather" and the maniacal Lieutenant Colonel William Kilgore in Francis Ford Coppola's 1979 Vietnam War epic "Apocalypse Now."

"It was an honor to have worked with Robert Duvall," Oscar winner Al Pacino, who acted alongside Duvall in "The Godfather" films, said.

"He was a born actor as they say, his connection with it, his understanding and his phenomenal gift will always be remembered. I will miss him."
As Colonel Kilgore, Duvall earned an Oscar nomination and became a bona fide star after years playing lesser roles, in a performance where he utters what is now one of cinema's most famous lines. "I love the smell of napalm in the morning," his war-loving character -- bare chested, cocky and sporting a big black cowboy hat — muses as low-flying US warplanes bomb a beachfront tree line where he wants to go surfing.

That character was originally created to be even more over the top -- his name was at first supposed to be Colonel Carnage -- but Duvall had it toned down, demonstrating his meticulous approach to acting.
"I did my homework," Duvall told veteran talk show host Larry King in 2015. "I did my research."

*Duvall was sort of a late bloomer in Hollywood -- he was already 31 when he delivered his breakout performance as the mysterious recluse Boo Radley in the 1962 film adaptation of Harper Lee's novel "To Kill a Mockingbird." He would go on to play myriad roles — a bullying corporate executive in "Network" (1976), a Marine officer who treats his family like soldiers in "The Great Santini" (1979), and then his star turn in "Tender Mercies." — **AFP***

Photos by Abdullah al Hinai

Bridging Oman's Wadis and the Danube

STAFF REPORTER

THE magic of the Sultanate of Oman came to life in the heart of Budapest at the historic Uránia National Film Theatre. The "Omani Film Night" was far more than a simple screening series; it was a high-profile cultural diplomacy event born from a unique Hungarian-Omani collaboration, bringing the spirit of the Omani mountains and emerald waters to the Hungarian capital.

DIPLOMACY AND CINEMATIC ART

The evening was graced by the presence of Malallah bin Mahmoud al Balushi, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to Hungary. In his opening remarks, the Ambassador emphasised that cinema is one of the most powerful tools for dialogue, understanding and tolerance. The event was organised by the Oman Film Society to mark the anniversary of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik's accession to the throne, in close cooperation with the Embassy of the Sultanate of Oman in Hungary.

"This initiative goes beyond film screenings; it is a platform for cultural dialogue that strengthens the ties between our two nations," added Mohammed bin Abdullah al Ajmi, Chairman of the Oman Film Society.

A MULTI-DIMENSIONAL CULTURAL EXPERIENCE

The programme offered a rich journey into Omani heritage: Photography Exhibition: Organised in collaboration with the Photography Club of the University of Technology and Applied Sciences, Muscat, the gallery showcased images reflecting everyday life, breathtaking landscapes and the rich human heritage of Oman.

Panel Discussion: Moderated by Fahad al Maimani with popular Hungarian actor Balázs Csórics, the audience and Omani film-makers discussed industry challenges and opportunities for co-production and knowledge exchange.

Live music was predominantly present during the evening as Sulaiman al Kindi, a master of the oud, performed traditional pieces, creating an atmosphere echoing the musical traditions of Oman's coast and mountains.

THE VISIONARY BEHIND THE EVENT

The initiative and lead organisation are credited to Tamás Dombóvári, a renowned Hungarian photographer. Currently a lecturer at the University of Technology and Applied Sciences in Muscat and a member of the Oman Film Society's Local and International Committee, his expertise and cross-cultural ties were instrumental in bringing Omani cinema to the Hungarian public.

EIGHT STORIES FROM OMAN

The screenings featured eight Omani short films, showcasing technical and narrative diversity: Flaming Souls (Yaqoub al Khanjari), Black Liver (Mohammed al Ghafri), Dahjan al Ward (Mohammed al Ajmi), Long Distances (Ali bin Said al Bimani and Hamad al Qassabi), Ramad (Sulaiman al Khalili), Water Religion (Haitham al Musallami), Never Dive Alone (Fahad al Maimani), and Delusion (Issa al Subhi).

THE LION KING

A MUSICAL JOURNEY TO SAVANNAH

PHOTOS BY KHALID AL BUSAIDI

GEORGINA BENISON

THE Royal Opera House Muscat presented Disney's family favourite, "The Lion King, live in concert" for two sold-out performances last weekend. Film lovers of all ages were eager to relive the wonder of Disney's 1994 animation, or experience its powerful story for the first time with live orchestral accompaniment.

Bang on time, seventy four musicians from the Armenian State Symphony Orchestra took their seats on stage beneath the especially erected giant screen. Finnish-American guest conductor, Erik Ochsner, ran to the podium with great enthusiasm and introduced the visiting orchestra. He welcomed the audience, inviting everyone to immerse themselves into the movie screening, perfectly synchronised with the huge symphony orchestra in front of their eyes, creating a three-dimensional sound world.

As Ochsner's baton was raised to Hans Zimmer's award-winning score, viewers were immediately transported to a Disneyland of African drumming and its wild savannah kingdom. The opening "Circle of Life", composed by Elton John and Tim Rice, began with Lebo M's original Zulu vocals, 'ingonyama bagithi baba' (Here Comes The Lion, father) over the credits. It marks the moment the young Simba is held up by Rafiki (Robert Guillaume), an old mandrill shaman and advisor, for all the animals of Pride Rock to see.

The gorgeous first scene introduced the uptight hornbill, Zazu, as the majordomo to the king, humorously voiced by Rowan Atkinson. Mufasa gives his young son a hunting lesson and Zazu becomes the butt of the young lion's antics in 'The Morning Report'.

Simba encounters Scar, the lion-villain, interpreted brilliantly by the deliciously camp voice of Jeremy Irons. Scar wants to be King and thus spends his time trying to kill or banish his young nephew. He piques the cub's curiosity in the Elephant Graveyard by cunningly reminding him that he has been strictly forbidden to enter by his father, Mufasa.

Simba asks Nala, his best friend and betrothed, to come with him to the graveyard, accompanied by Zazu. There is some flippant levity in Rice and John's calypso-style "I just can't wait to be King" sung by a boastful Simba with an assorted ensemble of technicolour animals on the way.

The cubs venture further into the lurking danger of the Graveyard. Scar's henchmen, a trio of dysfunctional hyenas headed by Whoopi Goldberg, appeared out of eerie sculls and provided the menacing dark humour in 'Lion King'. Luckily for the pair, they are rescued by Mufasa before they come to any real danger.

'Be Prepared' is a seductive, sleazy Tango sung to the hyenas (voice of Jim Cummings) which reveals Scar's evil ambition to usurp his older brother's throne by promising the hyena pack hunting rights in Pride Lands. An attempt at assassination by Scar leads to Mufasa's death, reflected in a beautiful musical sequence featuring the woodwind and string sections. As Simba is overcome with grief, crying over his father's lifeless body, a mournful lament was heard on solo block-flute (recorder) by flautist, Veronika Simonsen. It forms the prelude to his exile, deceived by Scar into believing that he is guilty of Mufasa's death.

Simba is rescued by two outcasts, a meerkat named Timon and Pumbaa, a naive warthog. He spends his formative years under their hedonistic influence in an idyllic, carefree oasis with their motto "Hakuna Matata" ('no worries' in Swahili). The well known anthem was enjoyed by the audience, who sung along or danced in their seats to the rhythmic playing of the Armenian musicians.

After a short technical delay part two began with a lively musical medley of familiar numbers, including Hakuna Matata. The iconic 'Wimoweh' chant of "In the Jungle, the Mighty Jungle, the lion sleeps tonight" was adapted from the 1939 South African, 'Mbube' and set a light-hearted dance mood.

John and Rice's romantic, "Can you feel the love tonight" was beautifully performed and added lyrical intimacy to Simba and Nala's reunion. The fighting which ensued when Simba decided to return and reclaim his kingdom brought out the emotional breadth of Zimmer's instrumental composition style. The brass section underscored the battle scenes splendidly while the percussion amplified the intensity of the threatening fire looming underneath. After Scar was finally mauled to death by the betrayed hyenas, rains quenched the drought and a new calm was symbolised in Zimmer's sweeping orchestration and complex harmonic language.

The "Circle of Life" theme reprised with African drumming and chanting as the lush green savannah completed its cycle of destruction and renewal. Curtain calls, clapping and adulation continued for a long time before the audience moved reluctantly out into the Muscat night air.