

### CITIZEN’S INITIATIVE TO RELEASE 30 INSOLVENT DEBTORS

**IBRI:** For the 10th year in a row, an Omani citizen took the initiative to release all 30 insolvent debtors detained by court order in Al Dhahirah Governorate. His offer applies to those who meet the conditions of the Fak Kurba Initiative (Relief from Distress Initiative).

The same citizen vowed to pursue his initiative during the rest of the holy month of Ramadhan by securing the



release of any new cases of insolvent debtors. It is worth noting that the Fak Kurba Initiative has been undertaken by the Omani Lawyers Association since the initiative was first launched in 2012. The Omani Lawyers Association has so far helped release more than 8,198 debtors detained in non-criminal financial cases — its theme being “Because we believe that a human being deserves another chance.” — ONA

### OMANI TEACHER’S DAY HONOURABLE LADY CONGRATULATES TEACHERS



Her Highness The Honourable Lady Assayida Ahd Abdullah Hamed al Busaidi, Spouse of the Sultan of Oman, on Monday, congratulated teachers on the occasion of the Omani Teacher’s Day, which is celebrated on February 24 annually. The message read as follows: “On the occasion of Omani Teacher’s Day, we are pleased to extend our warmest congratulations and best wishes to all teachers in our beloved country. We pray for your continued success in fulfilling your noble mission with sincerity and dedication, instilling noble values in our children, and preparing them in the best possible way to serve their nation. We ask Allah the Almighty to reward you abundantly for your tireless efforts and sincere contributions. Your vital role will always remain the foundation of nations’ progress, a cornerstone of progress and development, and a source of pride, honour and enduring appreciation from all.” — ONA

### OMAN ’S SOLIDARITY WITH KUWAIT ON MARITIME ZONES



A Kuwaiti passenger is seen heading to Kuwait at the border gate between Iraq and Kuwait, at Safwan border crossing near Basra, Iraq. — Reuters file photo

**THE SULTANATE OF OMAN** has viewed with great interest the lists of coordinates and the map deposited by the Republic of Iraq to the United Nations, which contain infringements on the sovereignty of the State of Kuwait over its maritime zones and its fixed and stable submerged features.

In a statement issued by the Foreign Ministry on Monday, the Sultanate of Oman affirmed its solidarity with the State of Kuwait regarding its sovereignty over all its maritime zones and submerged features.

The Sultanate of Oman called upon the Republic of Iraq to take into consideration the course of its historical and fraternal relations with the State of Kuwait, the principles of good neighbourliness, and the rules of international law, as well as the provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) of 1982, in accordance with the understandings, agreements, and bilateral memoranda of understanding signed between the two brotherly countries.

TURN TO P2

# Oman Air Enters Central Asia with Twice-Weekly Muscat-Tashkent Flights



OMAN AIR

is expanding its international network with the launch of direct flights between Muscat and Tashkent, commencing 1 June 2026. The new service will operate twice weekly, offering guests convenient access between the

two capitals and strengthening connectivity between Oman and Central Asia. It's the eighth new route the airline has announced since December.

As Uzbekistan’s capital and largest city, Tashkent is an increasingly popular tourist destination,

renowned for its unique culture, historic sites and monuments, and recreational parks. The new route is also expected to support inbound tourism to Oman while strengthening bilateral business and cultural ties between the two countries. Positioned along the historic Silk Road, Oman and

Uzbekistan share rich heritage and cultural depth, offering travellers the opportunity to explore two culturally distinctive yet historically connected destinations.

Con Korfiatis, Chief Executive Officer of Oman Air, said, “The

launch of Tashkent reflects Oman Air’s continued focus on building a commercially sustainable network that balances point-to-point demand with strategic growth markets. Central Asia represents a region of increasing relevance for both inbound and outbound travel, and the new service is designed to support Oman’s broader tourism ambitions by attracting visitors from Uzbekistan and the wider region. We look forward to welcoming guests from Uzbekistan to experience Oman’s renowned hospitality, and to offering our guests seamless access to one of Central Asia’s most compelling destinations”

Operating twice weekly, the 4-hour flight will provide a convenient option for both leisure and business travellers. Guests will experience Oman Air’s premium onboard service, modern fleet and signature Omani hospitality throughout their journey.

Tickets for the Muscat-Tashkent service are available for booking via [omanair.com](#) and the Oman Air mobile app.



## Hello Tashkent!

Starting **June 1**, fly direct from **Muscat** to **Tashkent**



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1447 AH  
TUESDAY  
FEB 24, 2026



FIRST QUARTER

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PRAYER TIMINGS

FAJR

05:18 AM

DHUHR

12:25 PM

ASR

03:44 PM

MAGHRIB

06:12 PM

ISHA

07:22 PM

omanobserver.com

HIS MAJESTY SENDS  
GREETINGS TO  
ESTONIA PRESIDENT

*His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Alar Karis of the Republic of Estonia on his country's National Day. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his heartfelt sentiments to Estonia in achieving further progress and prosperity under the leadership of President Alar Karis. His Majesty also wished the bilateral relations and cooperation further development and growth.*

OMAN’S SOLIDARITY  
WITH KUWAIT ON  
MARITIME ZONES

FROM PAGE 1

*Meanwhile, a telephone call was held between Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, and Dr Fuad Hussein, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Iraq, to consult on current developments in the region. During the call, both sides emphasised the importance of adhering to the principles of international law and respecting the sovereignty of states. They stressed the necessity of addressing disputes through peaceful means and constructive dialogue, contributing to the consolidation of security and stability, and achieving the aspirations of the region's peoples for development and prosperity. — ONA*

Researchers believe geographic isolation has restricted gene

BALQEES AL ORAIMI  
MUSCAT, FEB 23

An Omani researcher has completed the first genomic study of the wild hare in the Sultanate of Oman and across the Arabian Peninsula, marking an important step forward in national biodiversity research and conservation efforts. Asila bint Sulaiman al Naabi, a researcher at the Oman Animal and Plant Genetic Resources Center (Mawarid), affiliated with the Ministry of Education, earned her Master's degree in Zoology after conducting a pioneering study on the genetic diversity and population structure of wild hares using advanced genomic techniques. The research was carried

out at the Department of Animal and Veterinary Sciences, College of Agricultural and Marine Sciences at Sultan Qaboos University and represents the first comprehensive genomic investigation of the species in Oman and the wider Arabian Peninsula. Using double-digest Restriction-site Associated DNA sequencing (dd-RAD), an advanced genomic technique capable of analysing thousands of genetic markers simultaneously, the study examined dozens of wild hare samples collected from several governorates across the country to ensure broad geographic representation. The findings revealed that wild hare populations in Oman are not genetically uniform. Instead, distinct



ASILA BINT  
SULAIMAN AL  
NAABI

Researcher at the  
Oman Animal and  
Plant Genetic Resources  
Center (Mawarid)

genetic differences were identified among populations, suggesting that conservation strategies should be tailored to specific groups rather than applying a single nationwide approach. According to Al Naabi,



Dr Madeeha bint Ahmed al Shaibani chaired the meeting.

SQU APPROVES ALUMNI RULES AND DIRECT ADMISSIONS

**MUSCAT:** The Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) Council held its second meeting for the 2025-2026 academic year at the University Council Meeting Hall, on Monday. The meeting was chaired by Dr Madeeha bint Ahmed al Shaibani, Minister of Education and Chairperson of the University Council, and attended by HH Sayyid Dr Fahd bin Al Julanda al Said, Vice-Chancellor of SQU and Deputy Chairman of the University

Council. The council reviewed the latest developments in various aspects of university operations and the implementation status of decisions and recommendations made in previous meetings, emphasising the importance of following up on implementation according to plans. This is in a bid to strengthen the university's mission and build bridges of communication with its graduates.

Oman’s health sector  
poised for rapid progress

SAUD AL ANSARI  
MUSCAT, FEB 23

**THE** Ministry of Health held its media briefing on Sunday at the JW Marriott Hotel in Muscat, under the auspices of Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health, and in the presence of the under-secretaries, several officials and members of the media. The ministry highlighted its key achievements in 2025 and outlined strategic plans for 2026 within the framework of Oman Vision 2040. Dr Al Sabti affirmed that 2025 marked a pivotal year in the health sector, stating: “What has been achieved in 2025 reflects the extent of transformation in Oman's health sector, not only in infrastructure but also in the quality of services and localisation of advanced medical technologies.” He added, “Performing the first heart transplant in the Sultanate of Oman represents a historic milestone in empowering national competencies and enhancing self-sufficiency in specialised therapeutic services.” The minister further emphasised that the coming phase will focus on deepening digital transformation and expanding the use of artificial intelligence technologies. He stressed, “We are committed to implementing Oman Vision 2040 objectives through a resilient and sustainable health system based on good governance and investment in human capital.” In this context, Dr Ahmed bin Salim al Mandhari, Under-Secretary of the



Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health, speaking on the occasion.

Ministry of Health for Planning and Health Regulation, highlighted that the expansion of specialised services in referral hospitals has positively impacted performance indicators, noting: “Hospitals have witnessed a significant expansion in specialised services, which has reflected positively on reducing waiting times and improving the quality of care provided to patients.” He confirmed that the ministry is moving forward with developing an integrated healthcare model focused on patient safety and operational efficiency. Meanwhile, Dr Salem bin Mohammed al Maamari underlined that digital transformation is a strategic priority, stating: “Digital transformation is no longer optional but a necessity, and we have made great strides in linking health institutions electronically and enhancing virtual

services.” He added that the next phase will rely more on data-driven planning and health indicator analysis to ensure the sustainability and efficiency of the health system. Dr Bader bin Said al Aufi emphasised that effective resource management has contributed to tangible financial savings, explaining: “Prudent management of budgets and tenders has enabled the ministry to enhance pharmaceutical security and support national companies, thereby strengthening the financial sustainability of the sector.” Dr Fatma bint Mohammed al Ajmi, Executive President of the Oman Medical Specialty Board and Chairperson of the Health Sector Workforce Governance Committee, noted that the ministry focuses on promoting decentralised planning within a framework of central governance, coordinating with each governorate to study health needs and analyse gaps between supply and demand, ensuring efficient and equitable resource distribution based on accurate data. She added that the plan also aims to maintain sustainable health indicators through regulated procedures, strengthened regulatory frameworks, and policy alignment with demographic and epidemiological changes to ensure balanced development across all governorates of Oman. The briefing concluded with a reaffirmation of ongoing health projects and the inauguration of several hospitals and health centres across the governorates.



the research was designed to build a clearer scientific understanding of the species' genetic diversity. She noted that animals may appear similar physically yet vary significantly at the genetic level, making genetic

preservation vital for long-term species survival and ecological stability. One of the most notable discoveries concerns hares living on Masirah Island. The study found that the island population is genetically

distinct from those on the mainland. Researchers believe geographic isolation has restricted gene flow between Masirah Island and the mainland, resulting in a unique genetic structure. While this highlights the island's ecological significance, it also raises conservation concerns, as limited genetic exchange can increase vulnerability to disease and environmental change. The findings underline the need for carefully designed, science-based conservation strategies to safeguard this isolated population and prevent genetic erosion. Al Naabi emphasised that the research aims to support evidence-based decision-making.

SHORT TAKES



Such initiatives reflect UTAS-Al Musannah's direction toward strengthening partnerships with public and private sector entities in service of the wider community.

Beach cleanup Initiative strengthens partnership

STAFF REPORTER  
MUSCAT, FEB 23

To honour the valuable contributions of volunteers and to strengthen the spirit of community engagement, the Department of Continuing Education and Community Service, the Preparatory Studies Center Team and the College of Economics and Business Administration, organised a Beach Cleanup Campaign at Al Uwayd beach in the Wilayat of Al Musannah. The campaign was carried out in partnership with the Environment Authority, Al Musannah Municipality, and Wahat Al Majd School. Such initiatives reflect UTAS-Al Musannah's direction toward strengthening partnerships with public and private sector entities in service of the wider community.

During the cleanup, volunteers diligently collected and disposed of various types of waste found along the shoreline, contributing to the preservation of the beach's natural beauty and ecological well-being. The campaign also provided an opportunity to instil environmental values among students through practical engagement beyond the classroom setting.

The event witnessed remarkable participation from both university staff and students, who showcased strong teamwork, enthusiasm, and commitment throughout the activity. Their combined efforts greatly improved the cleanliness of the beach and served as an important reminder of the impact of individual responsibility and collective action in protecting the environment.

HOUSE RAIDED FOR SAMOSA PREPARATIONS



MUSCAT: The municipality of Al Musannah, Al Batinah South Governorate, carried out a raid on a residential house that was being used illegally to prepare samosas without obtaining the necessary licence. The raid was carried out in coordination with the Public Prosecution and the Royal Oman Police. The operation resulted in the seizure and destruction of 903 kilogrammes of food used in preparation, which was being prepared in completely unsanitary conditions, posing a risk to consumer safety.

137,000 CRUISE, YACHT TOURISTS VISITED OMAN IN 2025

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism has said that 137,330 tourists visited the Sultanate of Oman on board cruise ships and yachts in 2025. The ministry explained that efforts will focus on facilitating the reception of international cruise liners and the attraction of tourists from target markets in a manner that contributes to the promotion of Oman as a leading maritime destination in the region. The ministry added that the



2025-2026 will see repeated visits to Oman by cruise ship 'Vasco da Gama'. current season (2025-2026) will see repeated visits to Oman by cruise ship 'Vasco da Gama', which is

scheduled to arrive at the Port of Salalah on March 24. Meanwhile, cruise ship 'Celestial' is scheduled to make 5 visits to the Port of Khasab. The Port of Khasab also saw Cruise liner 'Arua' make its maiden voyage to Oman. During the rest of the current tourism season (2025-2026), 'Arua', which will dock at Sultan Qaboos port, is scheduled to make 11 visits to the Port of Khasab and 5 visits to Sultan Qaboos Port. — ONA

Oman prepares Unesco nomination for Salut

THE archaeological oasis of Bisya and Salut, located between Wadi Saifam and Wadi Bahla in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, is an extraordinary cultural treasure. Spanning the Bronze Age through the Iron Age and into the Islamic era, the site represents an organised human settlement of profound historical significance.

Ibtisam bint Abdullah al Maamari, Director of the World Heritage Department at the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, told ONA that Bisya and Salut in the Wilayat of Bahla exemplify outstanding universal value as a unique global artistic masterpiece.

"The site expresses human creativity, reflects the exchange of cultural values, bears witness to enduring traditions, and occupies a landscape of remarkable natural beauty," she said.

She added that the ministry, in partnership with stakeholders, is finalising the Unesco World Heritage nomination dossier titled 'Salut: An Iron Age Settlement', accompanied by a comprehensive site management plan, expected to be completed over the next two years.

Ahmed bin Mohammed al Tamimi, Director of the Bisya and Salut Archaeological Site Department, highlighted the site's exceptional richness, first documented in 1973, with excavations ongoing since the early 1980s.

International missions, including teams from the University of Milan and Sorbonne University, are examining tombs, settlements and urban structures to better understand the chronology and development of the site, which dates back to the late fourth millennium BCE.

Since the inauguration of the Bisya and Salut Visitor Centre in February 2023, the site has welcomed over 16,400 visitors, including citizens, residents and international tourists.



The Bisya and Salut Visitor Centre has welcomed over 16,400 visitors since Feb 2023.



Significant finds from the Bisya and Salut excavations have been displayed at the National Museum and the Oman Across Ages Museum

The Centre hosts educational programmes and cultural events in collaboration with local organisations, including poetry evenings, family exhibitions, children's activities and art exhibitions, fostering community engagement and cultural enrichment.

The Visitor Centre features exhibition panels on the history of archaeological investigations, patterns of human settlement,

tomb typologies, and ancient trade networks. It also houses a repository for artefacts from excavations, many of which are conserved on-site or at the ministry's laboratories, with selected items displayed at the National Museum and Oman Across Ages Museum.

Al Tamimi emphasised the site's significance, noting thousands of Bronze Age funerary monuments, the Salut Fortress with its urban settlement, third-millennium BCE towers, extensive cemeteries, and rock art.

The settlement demonstrates sophisticated governance, agriculture and aflaj irrigation systems. Ongoing projects include documenting rock art with local guides and installing interactive multimedia displays at the Visitor Centre to showcase new discoveries.

Notable finds, including Indus Valley-style seals, serpent figurines, terracotta artefacts and charred dates and date stones from the third millennium BCE, reveal ancient agricultural practices, trade networks, and Oman's civilisational connections with the wider ancient world. — ONA

Better late in Ramadhan than never: ROP to motorists

KABEER YOUSUF  
MUSCAT, FEB 23

Speeding, fatigue and rash driving are the three major reasons behind the majority of the accidents during the holy month of Ramadhan and one needs to exercise caution while driving, reminds the Royal Oman Police (ROP).

Accidents during the first few days of the holy month are high and it has been found that a large number of accidents reported during the holy month are said to be due to lack of attention in driving due to heat, coupled with sleep deprivation, which can result in loss of attention.

People tend to speed especially in the evenings close to breaking fasting. "It is better to arrive late for Iftar than never and remember there are your dear and near ones awaiting your safe arrival with a smiling face,"



People tend to speed especially in the evenings close to breaking fast.

an ROP official said. Speaking to the Observer, the officer said that one should get enough rest before hitting the road, especially on a long route.

"Pay extra caution on the road and always follow defensive driving, hoping that the other person on the road might err and cause an accident. Also, one shouldn't continue to drive

if he/she is fatigued while driving," he said. According to statistics, the casualty rate in Ramadhan was found to be 1.5 per cent and that in non-Ramadhan months was 1.2 per cent. Here are ROP's guidelines for safe driving during the holy month: 1. Avoid texting and using mobiles while driving. 2. Speed thrills but kills. 3. If you're walking, use a pedestrian crossing. "Safety on the road is a shared responsibility, and everyone should focus on the safety of oneself as well as the lives of others while on the road, whether driving, walking, or pillion-riding with a friend. It really pays off to protect yourself and others from accidents, as the cost of accidents is too high sometimes," he said.



CHILLED,  
SWEET AND  
OVER

90%

WATER, WATERMELON HAS BECOME A STAPLE FOR BREAKING THE FAST IN OMAN. ITS NATURAL HYDRATION, VITAMINS, AND GENTLE SUGARS MAKE IT THE PERFECT IFTAR FRUIT, BLENDING HEALTH, TRADITION, AND LOCAL AGRICULTURE



# IFTAR'S REFRESHING CHOICE

MOHAMED  
AL BATTASHI

AS the Maghrib call signals the end of the fast during Ramadhan, dining tables across Oman come alive with dates, laban, water and traditional dishes. Among them, one fruit often stands out in quiet simplicity: watermelon. Chilled, sliced and generously shared, it has become a preferred choice for breaking the fast, valued not only for its sweetness, but for its refreshing and restorative qualities.

After long hours without food or water, the body seeks gradual rehydration and steady energy. Watermelon, composed of more than 90 per cent water, offers a natural way to replenish fluids. Its light texture and soft fibre make it easy to digest, allowing the stomach to transition smoothly from fasting to eating.

From a nutritional standpoint, watermelon is more than a seasonal indulgence. It contains around 46 calories per cup and is rich in vitamin C and vitamin A, both important for immunity and skin health. It also provides beneficial plant compounds such as lycopene, beta-carotene and citrulline. Lycopene, an antioxidant, has been studied for its potential role in reducing oxidative stress and supporting heart health, while vitamin C contributes to lowering inflammation.



Its natural sugars offer a mild energy lift without overwhelming the body after fasting. When consumed in moderation, watermelon provides a lighter alternative to heavily sweetened desserts often served during Ramadhan. The fruit also contains potassium, which supports fluid balance and helps regulate blood pressure, important considerations after extended hours without hydration.

The Omani Nutrition and Dietetics Society emphasises that fruits and vegetables are essential for digestive health, microbiome support and stable energy levels. The society recommends three daily servings of vegetables and two servings of fruit, advising that fruits be consumed whole after washing rather than relying heavily on juices. A moderate

portion of watermelon at Iftar contributes meaningfully towards this recommended fruit intake, aligning with a balanced approach to Ramadhan nutrition.

Beyond its health value, watermelon also reflects local agricultural identity. Eng Ahmed bin Mubarak al Badi, agricultural expert at the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources in Dhank, explains that the Omani watermelon available in local markets is a pure variety, maintained without intentional genetic alteration. Although natural cross-pollination may occur due to insects and nearby gourd crops, the local variety preserves its defining characteristics.

He notes that some imported watermelons display mixed traits resulting from natural cross-

pollination, influencing their shape, colour and sweetness. In contrast, the Omani watermelon is recognised by its traditional form, its green outer skin even when fully ripe, and a comparatively lighter sweetness. This milder flavour profile makes it especially suitable for breaking the fast, offering gentle hydration and moderate natural sugars without excess intensity.

In homes and community gatherings alike, watermelon is often among the first foods enjoyed after dates and water. Its cooling freshness provides immediate comfort, particularly when Ramadhan coincides with warmer months. Simple to prepare and widely appreciated, it represents a thoughtful choice that blends nourishment, tradition and support for local produce.

SHORT TAKES



The expo seeks to showcase innovative student projects.

SQU launches 14th agricultural scientific festival ‘Midad’

MUSCAT: Sultan Qaboos University launched the 14th Agricultural Scientific Festival Midad’, organised by the Agricultural and Marine Sciences Society at the College of Agricultural and Marine Sciences.

The event, held at the Grand Hall of the Cultural Centre, took place under the auspices of HH Sayyid Dr Fahd bin Al Julanda al Said, Vice-Chancellor of SQU, and concludes today.

Held under the theme ‘Creative Cultural Industries in Agriculture and Marine Sciences,’ the festival presents a renewed vision that connects scientific knowledge with cultural identity while highlighting the potential of agriculture and marine resources to evolve into creative industries with sustainable economic and cultural value.

The festival aims to serve as a national platform that brings together scientific research, youth innovation, and cultural industries, reinforcing the role of the agricultural and marine sectors in economic diversification and sustainability in line with Oman Vision 2040.

It also seeks to showcase innovative student projects, promote environmental sustainability and the green economy, connect students with the labour market and entrepreneurs, and highlight industries linked to land and sea resources.

The three-day exhibition features interactive scientific corners representing the college’s various specialisations.

These include plant sciences, soil and water technologies, natural resource economics, marine sciences, animal and veterinary sciences, as well as food and nutrition.

Visitors can explore applied student projects, modern technologies, and hands-on interactive experiences.

The event also includes participation from government and private sector entities, in addition to entrepreneurial initiatives that reflect cultural and economic dimensions related to agriculture and marine resources.

Alongside the exhibition, the festival is hosting a series of specialised lectures delivered by national experts and researchers.

**HALCYON CAPITAL**

**AGENDA OF ANNUAL ORDINARY GENERAL MEETING**

The Board of Directors of Halcyon Capital Holding Co. SAOC invites all Shareholders to attend the Annual General Meeting, which will be held on Wednesday, 11th March 2026 at 3:00 pm through the electronic platform of the general meetings, which you can access through the Muscat Clearing and Depository website ([www.mcd.gov.om](http://www.mcd.gov.om)) to discuss the following Agenda.

However, in case the AGM was not held on the said date, the Company will hold a second AGM on Wednesday, 18th March 2026 at 3:00 pm to discuss the same following agenda:

- To consider and approve the report of the Board of Directors for the financial year ended 31st December 2025.
- To consider the Auditor's report and to approve the financial statements (Balance Sheet, Profit and Loss Account) in respect of the Company for the financial year ended 31st December 2025.
- To consider and approve the proposal to declare cash dividend of 10% of the issued share capital of the company (Balzas 100 per share) from the audited accounts of the Company for the financial year ended 31st December 2025. These dividends are to be paid to the Shareholders registered in the Company's register on the date of this AGM.
- To consider and approve, in accordance with Article 165 of the Commercial Companies Law of Oman ("CCL"), a proposal made by the shareholders representing more than 5% of the Company's share capital recommending, pursuant to Article 28 of the CCL, an ex-gratia payment of RO 250,000 from the retained earnings of the Company to the Board of Directors for their efforts and services rendered to the Company.
- To consider and approve transactions entered into by the Company with related parties during the financial year ended 31st December 2025 (as per the Annexure 1).
- To consider and approve transactions that the Company will enter into with related parties during the financial year ending 31st December 2026 (as per Annexure 2).
- To consider and approve the sitting fees of the directors and sub-committees of the Company during the year ended 31st December 2025 and determine the sitting fees for the next financial year (as per Annexure 3 & 4).
- To appoint auditors for the Company for the year ending 31st December 2026 and to fix their remuneration.

According to the Articles of Association of the Company and the regulations for convening general meetings via electronic means by the authority, we would like to draw your attention to the following:

(a) Only juristic persons shall have the right to appoint a proxy to attend the general meeting and vote on their behalf via electronic means, provided that the proxy person has an investor number in the MCD.

(b) Voting on any of the items presented on the agenda starts three days before the date of the general meeting until the voting process ends on the day of the meeting, and if the shareholder's share is increased or decreased, the voting process will be cancelled, and he must re-vote again on the meeting day.

For further information, please contact Mr. Badar Mahfoudh Khalafan Al Wahabi on telephone 22004507.

**Chairman**

**Halcyon Capital Holding Co. SAOC**  
P.O. Box 1273, P.C. 114, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman.  
Tel: (968) 22004500, Fax: (968) 22004546, E-mail: [info@hitarcapital.com](mailto:info@hitarcapital.com)

Sohar varsity students win global AI hackathon



The team emerged as the top winner after competing against more than 500 teams and 2,000 innovators from 45 countries.

SIHAM AL SAIDI  
SUHAR, FEB 23

In a major international achievement for Omani innovation, students from Sohar University secured first place at the Intelligent Planet Hackathon in Saudi Arabia with their project ‘Manara,’ an AI-powered platform designed to enhance crowd safety at large-scale gatherings.

The team emerged as the top winner after competing against more than 500 teams and 2,000 innovators from over 200 universities across 45 countries, making it one of the most competitive global hackathons in the field of smart technologies. Notably, the Sohar University team was the only finalist representing the Sultanate of Oman.

‘Manara’ impressed judges with its forward-thinking approach to crowd management. The AI-driven system shifts event safety strategies from reactive monitoring

‘Manara’ platform impressed judges with its forward-thinking approach to crowd management

to predictive prevention, using advanced machine-learning algorithms to forecast crowd density changes and potential risks 15 to 60 minutes in advance.

This early-warning capability can help authorities prevent dangerous situations such as stampedes, heat-related emergencies, or logistical disruptions during mega gatherings, including major religious pilgrimages and global events.

The platform functions through two integrated systems: a smart control dashboard for authorities and event organisers, and a ‘Personal Guardian’ mobile application that provides real-time guidance to visitors. Using a composite risk analysis model, Manara simultaneously evaluates crowd density, air quality and extreme heat conditions, enabling faster and more informed decision-making. Team spokesperson Khalsa al Jahwari said the recognition reflects the growing global potential of young innovators from Oman.

“Winning first place globally is not only a victory for our team, but for Oman,” she said. “We envisioned Manara as more than a technical project — it is a humanitarian solution designed to protect lives.

This achievement proves that Omani youth can compete at the highest international levels in artificial intelligence and innovation.”

Judges praised the project’s strong conceptual foundation and real-world applicability, describing it as a promising model for future smart city technologies.

Beyond safety, the system could also generate economic benefits by reducing waiting times, improving crowd movement, and supporting a religious tourism economy valued at more than \$40 billion. The win marks a significant milestone for Omani academia and innovation, highlighting the expanding global footprint of the country’s young talent in artificial intelligence and technology-driven solutions.

Oman Air announces service to Tashkent

MUSCAT: Oman Air has announced the launch of direct flights between Muscat and Tashkent, the capital of Uzbekistan, starting in June 2026.

The new service will operate with two flights per week, providing travellers with convenient access between the two capitals and enhancing air connectivity between Oman and the Central Asian region; this will be the eighth destination announced by the company since last December. Tashkent, one of Uzbekistan’s largest cities, is a rising tourist destination renowned for its unique culture, rich historical landmarks and vibrant parks. These flights are expected to boost inbound tourism to Oman, as well as strengthen bilateral trade and cultural ties.

Given their historical location on the Silk Road, Oman and Uzbekistan share a rich cultural heritage and deep historical roots, offering travellers the opportunity to explore two distinct yet historically intertwined destinations.

Oman Air CEO Con Korfiatis explained that the launch of the Tashkent route reflects Oman Air’s continued focus on building a commercially sustainable route network that



The launch of the Tashkent route reflects Oman Air’s continued focus on building a commercially sustainable route network that balances direct demand with growing strategic markets.

balances direct demand with growing strategic markets.

Central Asia is an increasingly important region for both tourist and business travel, and this new service has been designed to support the Sultanate of Oman’s broad tourism ambitions by attracting visitors from Uzbekistan and the surrounding region.

He noted that this station will give Oman Air passengers seamless access to one of the most attractive destinations in Central Asia, and that these flights, which take only 4 hours, will provide a convenient option for travellers for tourism or business.

**Muscat Governorate**

**MUSCAT MUNICIPALITY**

**Advertisement No. (6/2026)**

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

| Tender Number | Description of Tender                         | Last Date to Collect the Tender | Tender Return Date |
|---------------|-----------------------------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------|
| (PRE/26/016)  | Palm Trees' Replacement at Muscat Governorate | 08/03/2026                      | 16/03/2026         |

- Bidders shall submit their offers electronically.
- Clarification and Support:
  - For any inquiries regarding tenders, please visit e-tendering website: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>) .
  - For technical support of e-tendering system please send an email to ([etenderhd@gstb.gov.om](mailto:etenderhd@gstb.gov.om)) or call (+968 24402200).

WORLD

SHORT TAKES



A US military mine-resistant ambush moves in a convoy in Syria's northeastern Hasakah province. — AFP

US FORCES TO WITHDRAW FROM SYRIA IN A MONTH

**QAMISHLI:** US forces that led the coalition against the IS group will complete their withdrawal from Syria within a month, three sources said on Monday, as they began leaving a major base. The withdrawal comes as Syria's government expanded its control to the country's northeast, previously controlled by US-allied Kurdish forces, and formally joined the coalition against IS.

American forces have already withdrawn from two other bases in the past two weeks, Al Tanf in the southeast and Shadadi in the northeast. "Within a month, they will have withdrawn from Syria and there will no longer be any military presence in the bases," a Syrian government official said.

The United States began withdrawing on Monday from a major base in a northeastern region still under the control of Kurdish forces, which agreed last month to integrate their institutions with Damascus. A diplomat from a country allied with both the United States and Syria said the withdrawal should be completed within 20 days. The US may still carry out airstrikes in Syria from other bases in the region, he said. — AFP

CHAD SHUTS SUDAN BORDER OVER WAR SPILLOVER



People prepare to travel south to Adre, on the Chad-Sudan border. — Reuters

**N'DJAMENA:** Chad's government said on Monday it was closing the border with Sudan until further notice, following clashes between Chadian soldiers and armed groups involved in the civil war across the frontier. "This decision follows repeated incursions and violations committed by the forces involved in the conflict in Sudan on Chadian territory," Communications Minister Mahamat Gassim Cherif said in a statement.

Sudan's paramilitary Rapid Support Forces have been fighting government troops for almost three years in a conflict that has killed tens of thousands of people. It has forced 11 million people to flee their homes, triggering what the UN says is one of the world's worst humanitarian crises. The paramilitaries have conducted several operations near the Chad border and at least nine Chadian soldiers have been killed in separate incidents since December. Monday's statement said Chad "reserves the right to retaliate against any aggression or violation of the inviolability of its territory and its borders". "Cross-border movements of goods and people are suspended," the text said, adding that "exceptional exemptions" for humanitarian reasons would still be possible. — AFP

PHILIPPINES' DUTERTE AUTHORISED MURDERS, SAYS ICC AS HEARINGS OPEN

**THE HAGUE:** Rodrigo Duterte personally authorised murders and hand-picked some of the victims of his "war on drugs", the International Criminal Court heard on Monday, as proceedings against the former Philippines president kicked off. ICC deputy prosecutor Mame Mandiaye Niang said that the week-long "confirmation of charges" hearings, where judges will decide whether to open a full trial against Duterte, was "a reminder that those in power are not above

the law". The 80-year-old Duterte did not appear after the court granted a defence request for his absence, despite judges ruling he was fit to take part. Following the hearings, the judges will have 60 days to issue a written decision on whether he should face a full trial. Niang said Duterte played a "pivotal" role in the extrajudicial killings of suspected drug dealers and users, first as mayor of Davao City then as president. He "authorised murders

and personally selected some of the victims", said Niang. Duterte's defence lawyer Nicholas Kaufman hit back, calling the charges "grievously misplaced and politically motivated." Duterte "stands behind his legacy resolutely. He maintains his innocence absolutely," said Kaufman. Kaufman acknowledged that his client was "a unique phenomenon" who was "gung-ho in his ways" and full of "hyperbole, bluster and rhetoric." — AFP

Iran says would respond 'ferociously' to any attack

**IRAN** said on Monday that a US attack of any scale would spur the Islamic republic to respond "ferociously", after President Donald Trump said he was considering limited strikes against the country. The United States has built up forces in the Middle East to pile pressure on Iran to make a deal at negotiations due to restart on Thursday, with Trump weighing a limited strike if no agreement is reached.

On Monday Iran's foreign ministry reiterated that any strike, even limited, would be "would be regarded as an act of aggression. Period". "And any state would react to an act of aggression as part of its inherent right of self-defence ferociously so that's what we would do," ministry spokesman Esmaeil Baqaei said at a briefing in Tehran. The two countries concluded a second round of indirect talks in Switzerland on Tuesday. Further talks, confirmed by Iran but not by the United States, are scheduled for Thursday.

The European Union, which has been sidelined in mediation on Iran, called for a diplomatic solution ahead of the talks. "We don't need another war in this region. We already have a lot," EU foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas said ahead of a meeting of EU foreign ministers. "It is true that Iran is at its weakest point that they have been. We should be really using this time to find a diplomatic solution." Iran's clerical authorities have faced recent steep challenges, including a wave of mass protests that peaked in



An Iranian woman walks past a huge billboard, in Tehran. — AFP

“Any strike, even limited, would be “would be regarded as an act of aggression. Period”. And any state would react to an act of aggression as part of its inherent right of self-defence ferociously so that’s what we would do

Esmaeil Baqaei

January, last year's 12-day war with Israel, and the weakening of Iran's regional proxies.

Iran has, however, insisted only discussions on the country's nuclear programme are on the table at mediated talks.

The West believes the programme is aimed at making a bomb, which Tehran denies. Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi is leading the negotiations for Iran, while the United States is represented by envoy Steve Witkoff and Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner. Trump is wondering why Iran has not "capitulated" in the face of Washington's military deployment, Witkoff said in an interview with Fox News broadcast over the weekend.

Baqaei responded on Monday by saying that Iranians had never capitulated at any point in their history. Trump had initially threatened military action over the violent crackdown on the protests that rights groups say saw thousands of people killed by security forces, but his attention soon shifted to Iran's nuclear programme.

Meanwhile, India's foreign ministry urged its citizens on Monday to leave Iran, against a backdrop of fears of a possible US strike on Tehran. "In view of the evolving situation in Iran, Indian nationals who are currently in Iran... are advised to leave Iran by available means of transport, including commercial flights," the Indian Embassy in Tehran said in a post on social media.

India's foreign ministry estimates there are usually around 10,000 citizens in Iran. "All Indian citizens and PIOs (people of Indian origin) should exercise due caution, avoid areas of protests or demonstrations, stay in contact with the Indian Embassy in Iran and monitor local media for any developments," it added.

The warning comes ahead of a planned visit by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Israel on Wednesday. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Sunday said Modi's visit would help forge a new alliance to counter what he described as "radical" adversaries. Modi visited Israel as prime minister in 2017, before Netanyahu made a reciprocal visit to India the following year. — AFP

HUMAN RIGHTS ARE UNDER ASSAULT GLOBALLY

**GENEVA:** Human rights are under assault worldwide, the United Nations chief warned on Monday, citing widespread abuses of international law and devastating civilian suffering in conflicts in Sudan, Gaza and Ukraine. "The rule of law is being outmuscled by the rule of force," said UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres.

"Around the world, human rights are being pushed back deliberately, strategically, and sometimes proudly," Guterres said. The UN human rights chief has said his office is in "survival mode" due to funding cuts that have come alongside pressure on UN experts and US disengagement.

The US, the UN's top donor, has paid just \$160 million of the more than \$4 billion it owes to the global body, a UN spokesperson said last week. — Reuters

ROAD ACCIDENT

Foreigners among 19 killed in Nepal bus crash



A passenger bus plunged 200 metres from a mountainous road in west Nepal before dawn, killing 19 people including three foreign nationals, police said. Among those killed were a British, Chinese and Indian citizen. The bus was carrying 44 passengers. A New Zealander and a Chinese national were among 25 injured when the bus heading for Kathmandu from the tourist town of Pokhara fell from the road at Behighat in Dhading district, 80 km west of the capital. — Reuters

INTENTION TO ELECTION

Iraq's Maliki defends next PM candidacy



The leading candidate to become Iraq's next prime minister, former premier Nouri al Maliki, said that he will not withdraw his nomination after pressure from the US, while also seeking to allay Washington's concerns. "I have absolutely no intention of withdrawing out of respect for my country, its sovereignty, and its will," Maliki said. "No one has the right to say whom we can or cannot vote for," the power broker added. "I will not withdraw until the end." — AFP

REPORTED CASUALTIES

13 civilians killed in Pakistan strikes, says UN



At least 13 civilians were killed and seven injured in Pakistani air strikes in eastern Afghanistan, the United Nations said, as cross-border tensions escalated following a string of bombings in Pakistan. The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) said it had received "credible reports" that overnight Pakistani airstrikes on February 21-22 killed at least 13 civilians and injured seven in the Behsud and Khogyani districts of Nangarhar province. — Reuters

SHORT TAKES



Netherlands' Willem-Alexander (C-R) next to new PM Rob Jetten (C-L) poses with members of the Jetten cabinet, at Huis ten Bosch Palace in The Hague. — AFP

NEW DUTCH GOVERNMENT SWORN IN UNDER CENTRIST JETTEN

**THE HAGUE:** A new Dutch government took power on Monday, with 38-year old centrist Rob Jetten sworn in as the country's youngest-ever prime minister and the first openly gay one. Jetten pulled off a stunning election win in October, coming from behind to dethrone the far-right Freedom Party (PVV) led by firebrand politician Geert Wilders by a razor-thin margin.

The snap election was called after the PVV withdrew from the previous coalition, the Netherlands' most right-wing government in recent history, which lasted just 11 months. Jetten's D66 has teamed up with the centre-right CDA party and the liberal VVD to form a coalition, but will fall nine seats short of a parliamentary majority with only 66 seats. The parties took 117 days to form their coalition — much less than the 223 days taken to form the previous government.

After his election victory, Jetten declared that it was possible to beat populist movements “if you campaign with a positive message for your country”. — AFP

CUBAN ‘ HUMANITARIAN CATASTROPHE ’



Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodriguez accused the United States of trying to trigger a “humanitarian catastrophe” in his country with an oil blockade he called an “aggressive escalation”. US President Donald Trump cut off key supplies of Venezuelan oil to Cuba after ousting Venezuela's president Nicolas Maduro, and has threatened sanctions on states that sell oil to Havana. — AFP

SPAIN TO DECLASSIFY DOCUMENTS ON FAILED 1981 COUP ATTEMPT

**MADRID:** Spain's leftist government said on Monday it will release classified documents related to a failed 1981 coup attempt, calling the move a step toward settling a “historical debt” with citizens.

The February 23, 1981 coup attempt came six years after the death of General Francisco Franco and was led by military officers nostalgic for the privileges they enjoyed during more than four decades of his rule. It has come to symbolise a turning point when Spain's transition to democracy

wavered but ultimately prevailed.

The coup is one of modern Spain's most studied events, yet historians say key uncertainties persist, including how extensive the conspiracy network was and which members of the military supported it. “Memory cannot be locked away. Tomorrow we will declassify the 23-F documents to repay a historic debt to the public. Democracies must understand their past to build a freer future,” Socialist Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez wrote on X, in a

reference to the date of the coup.

Government sources said the cabinet is expected to formally approve the measure on Tuesday, with the declassification taking effect the following day. The previously confidential archives will be made available to the public on the official website of La Moncloa, the seat of the Spanish government.

The siege only ended when it became clear that King Juan Carlos, Franco's designated successor, would not support the uprising. — AFP

EU ire as Hungary stalls new Russia sanctions

**THE** EU's top diplomat said she did not expect to get a deal on new Russia sanctions on Monday after Hungary vowed to block them unless Ukraine re-opens a key oil pipeline. The 27-nation bloc has been pushing to impose a new round of economic punishment on Moscow for Tuesday's fourth anniversary of the Kremlin's full-scale attack. “I think there is not going to be progress regarding this today, but we will definitely make this push,” Kaja Kallas, the EU high representative for foreign affairs, said at the start of a meeting of EU foreign ministers.

Hungary's Prime Minister Viktor Orban — the friendliest EU leader to the Kremlin — said on Sunday that Budapest would veto sanctions until the Druzhba pipeline is re-opened. “As long as it doesn't happen, there will be no change in the Hungarian position,” Hungarian Foreign Minister Peter Szijjarto told journalists as he arrived for the Brussels meeting.



People take part in a solidarity march ahead of the fourth anniversary of Ukraine war, in Budapest, Hungary. — Reuters

Ukraine says the Druzhba pipeline, that crosses its territory to deliver Russian oil to Slovakia and Hungary, was damaged January 27 by Russian strikes. “I am astonished by the Hungarian position. We will discuss this with our Hungarian colleagues,” German Foreign Minister Johann Wadephul said. But he added he was “confident that, at the end of the day, we will be successful.”

Estonia's Foreign Minister Margus Tsahkna said “there is actually no reason to block” sanctions as the pipeline closure was Russia's fault, not Ukraine's. “If we are not able to put the sanctions on Russia, then Russia will be happy,” he said. Poland's top diplomat Radoslaw Sikorski called the Hungarian position “shocking”. Beyond the sanctions, Budapest has also thrown a last minute spanner in the works of a 90-billion-euro (\$106 billion) EU loan for Ukraine desperately needed to keep Kyiv afloat. That move drew a stinging rebuke from Brussels as it appeared Orban was backtracking on an agreement reached in December among EU leaders.

“We expect that the commitment by all leaders is respected and honoured by all the leaders,” EU spokeswoman Paula Pinho

said. “I think it's legitimate to expect the respect of such a high-level commitment.” Hungary has repeatedly stalled EU measures on Ukraine during the four-year war and Orban's hardline stance comes as he fights for political survival in an election this April. The EU has already imposed 19 rounds of sanctions on Moscow over its attack on Ukraine. Brussels has proposed banning shipping services for Russian crude oil as part of the latest sanctions in a bid to further curb Moscow's revenues.

German Chancellor Friedrich Merz on Monday denounced the “utter barbarity” of Russia under President Vladimir Putin in a speech a day ahead of the fourth anniversary of Russia's full-scale attack on Ukraine. “This country, under this leadership, is currently at the lowest point of utter barbarity, and no one should have any doubt about what kind of regime and barbarity we are dealing with out of Russia these days,” Merz said in Berlin. Meanwhile, Russian strikes killed

three people and wounded several others overnight, regional authorities said on Monday, as Moscow continued its assaults on the eve of the war's four-year anniversary. In the south, two people were killed when Russian drones hit industrial, energy and civilian infrastructure in the Odesa region, regional governor Oleg Kiper said on Telegram. At least three people were wounded, he added.

In Zaporizhzhia, a drone attack on industrial facilities killed a 33-year-old man and wounded another, according to regional chief Ivan Fedorov. The city, a major industrial hub near the front line, faces regular strikes as Russian forces intensify pressure on Ukraine's southeast. Further north, a missile hit Kharkiv's Kholodnogirsky district, mayor Igor Terekhov said early on Monday.

He gave no immediate casualty figures as emergency teams worked to assess the damage. — AFP

Violence sweeps Mexico after most-wanted drug cartel leader killed

**GUADALAJARA:** Mexico was on high alert on Monday with schools closed and travellers stranded, as members of a powerful drug cartel went on a violent rampage across parts of the country after the army announced it had killed its leader. Nemesio “El Mencho” Oseguera, leader of the Jalisco New Generation Cartel (CJNG), was wounded in a clash with soldiers in the town of Tapalpa, in Jalisco state, and died while being flown to Mexico City, the army said on Sunday. He had a \$15 million US bounty on his head.

News of his death triggered cartel members across the country to block roads, torch vehicles and businesses and send fearful residents into hiding. The streets of the state capital Guadalajara were almost empty as stores, pharmacies and gas stations shut down. Maria Medina, who works in a gas station that was set on fire, said men with guns showed up and

told everyone to get out. “I thought they were going to kidnap us. I ran to a taco stand to take cover with the people there,” Medina said. The violence spread to the neighbouring state of Michoacan, where Oseguera's cartel also has a presence, and gripped the resort city of Puerto Vallarta.

Travel warnings from the UK, Canada and the US have been issued in the fallout, with Australia urging citizens to “exercise a degree of caution” early on Monday. The UK Foreign Office advised on Monday against all but essential travel to parts of Mexico, including Jalisco. Washington asked US citizens to “shelter in place until further notice.” Canada told citizens to keep a “low profile,” citing “shootouts with security forces and explosions.” Dozens of US and Canadian flights have also been cancelled following the unrest.

Mexican President Claudia



Firefighters extinguish a burning vehicle set on fire by organised crime groups, Mexico. — AFP

Sheinbaum urged citizens to remain calm. Oseguera, 59, was considered the last of the drug lords who acted in the flashy, brutal mold of the

now-imprisoned Joaquin “El Chapo” Guzman and Ismael “El Mayo” Zambada. With his son Ruben “El Menchito” Oseguera Gonzalez,

35, convicted by a federal jury in Washington in September, experts have warned the “the absence of a direct succession” could lead to a “power vacuum.” “That opens the door to violent realignments within the organisation,” David Mora, an expert at the Crisis Group analysis centre, said.

Mexico said in addition to its own military intelligence, the operation to seize Oseguera was carried out with “complementary information” from US authorities. White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt said Washington “provided intelligence support.” Six suspected cartel gunmen besides Oseguera were also killed and three soldiers were wounded, the Mexican army said. Two cartel suspects were arrested and a variety of weapons seized, including rocket launchers capable of taking down airplanes and destroying armoured vehicles, the army said. — AFP

OPINION

Oman’s strategic positioning: A diplomatic balancing act



AS tensions simmer between the US and Iran, Kuwait and Iraq grapple with maritime disputes, and the US Ambassador to Israel sparks controversy, the Sultanate of Oman navigates these complex issues with finesse, making its role in regional diplomacy a masterclass in strategic positioning.

Oman’s neutrality is its greatest strength. By maintaining good relations with Iran, the US, and other regional players, Oman has become a trusted mediator.

Its involvement in US-Iran nuclear talks demonstrates its ability to facilitate dialogue, even in the most sensitive situations. Oman’s diplomatic efforts have helped ease tensions, preventing escalation and promoting stability in the region.

The Kuwait-Iraq maritime dispute showcases Oman’s commitment to regional cooperation. By supporting Kuwait’s sovereignty and calling for respect of international law, Oman reinforces the importance of adhering to agreements and respecting territorial integrity.

This stance also highlights Oman’s role as a responsible regional actor, working to maintain stability and security.

Also, Oman’s response to the US Ambassador to Israel’s comments on Arab lands demonstrates its commitment to diplomacy and international law. By condemning the remarks as “dangerous and

inflammatory,” Oman joins other Arab and Muslim countries in rejecting any attempts to undermine regional stability and legitimacy.

Oman’s diplomatic balancing act is no easy feat. The country must navigate complex relationships, economic pressures and regional tensions. Yet, its approach offers valuable lessons in pragmatism and cooperation. By prioritising dialogue, respect and stability, Oman positions itself as a beacon of hope in a volatile region.

Oman’s economic diversification efforts also play a crucial role in its diplomatic strategy. By investing in sectors like tourism, logistics and manufacturing, Oman reduces its reliance on oil revenues and strengthens its economic resilience. This, in turn, enables the country to maintain its independent foreign policy and pursue its national interests.

As regional dynamics evolve, Oman’s strategic positioning will only grow in importance. Its unique blend of neutrality, diplomatic skill and commitment to cooperation makes it an indispensable player in shaping the Middle East’s future.

Oman’s leadership is keenly aware of the challenges facing the region and is working to promote a more stable and prosperous Middle East.

With its rich history, forward-looking vision and skilled diplomacy, Oman is poised to continue playing a constructive role in

*Oman’s approach to peace is rooted in its values of tolerance, respect and cooperation. By prioritising people-to-people ties and economic development, Oman promotes a holistic vision of peace that benefits all nations.*

regional affairs.

As the world watches the US-Iran talks, Kuwait-Iraq dispute and Israel-Palestine tensions, Oman’s calm and measured approach offers a refreshing alternative.

In a region fraught with conflict, Oman’s diplomacy is a testament to the power of cooperation and dialogue.

Oman’s strategic location on the Arabian Peninsula, overlooking the Strait of Hormuz, adds to its importance. The country’s ports, including the Port of Salalah and the Port of Duqm, are critical hubs for global trade, making Oman a key player in regional and international maritime security.

Oman is steadfast in its pursuit of regional peace, prioritising dialogue and cooperation in a volatile Middle East. The country’s diplomatic efforts focus on easing tensions, promoting stability and fostering economic cooperation.

Oman’s approach to peace is rooted in its values of tolerance, respect and cooperation. By prioritising people-to-people ties and economic development, Oman promotes a holistic vision of peace that benefits all nations. As Oman continues to navigate complex regional dynamics, its diplomatic efforts will remain focused on promoting stability, security and cooperation.

By doing so, Oman will not only safeguard its national interests, but also contribute to a more peaceful and prosperous Middle East.

AI AGENT INVASION HAS PEOPLE TRYING TO PICK WINNERS

THOMAS URBAIN

An onslaught of artificial intelligence agents that handle tasks from writing code to dispensing tax advice has the tech world and financial markets scrambling to pick winners and shed losers.

Gone are the days of being satisfied with OpenAI’s ChatGPT simply creating responses to text prompts.

Makers of leading AI models have embraced “agentic” capabilities that provide software assistants capable of independently tending to tasks, such as creating software applications, based on simple descriptions.

Futurum chief strategist Shay Bloor sees the moment as an “inflection point” where millions of AI agents will soon be routinely handling tasks long tended to by people. “We’ve never had a tech disruption at this scale before,” Bloor said.

The turning point has been marked by rapid-fire releases of ever-improving AI models, including recent new versions from OpenAI and Anthropic.

Add to that the November debut of autonomous AI agent OpenClaw that some have equated to the fictional “Jarvis” AI assistant from the “Iron Man” superhero films.

The creator of OpenClaw was snapped up by ChatGPT-maker OpenAI, signalling that the San Francisco-based startup has even more ambitious agentic aspirations. Investors quickly saw AI agents as a threat to software publishers, particularly those serving businesses.

Monday.com, which specialises in workplace collaboration, along with Salesforce and Thomson Reuters with its tax, accounting and trade software arms, saw their stock value plummet 30 per cent or more on Wall Street in a matter of days.

Claude-maker Anthropic has OpenAI, Google’s Gemini and even Grok from xAI nipping at its heels in the market for professional AI.

Even though massive spending on AI infrastructure has some investors worried, Bloor contends “the risk is not overinvesting, but underinvesting” in the transformative technology.

Schloetzer reasons that the economic impact of AI may not be clear for several years, the same way it took time for the Internet itself to become a vital part of daily life.

A recent blog post by US entrepreneur Matt Shumer titled “Something Big Is Happening” includes a prediction that AI will be tackling jobs in law, finance, accounting, consulting, medicine and other fields.

— AFP

Our parents remain with us even after their passing

THIS year’s blessed holy month of Ramadhan marks almost one year since my mother passed away. I find myself thinking less about the day itself and more about the lessons she left behind. It has been a difficult year for many reasons, and I often feel that I did not have the space to grieve properly. Life did not pause. Responsibilities multiplied. Yet her voice continues to surface in my daily life — sometimes in the most ordinary moments.

One of the clearest lessons she left me is about something very simple: towels. My mother grew up destitute, and that shaped her permanently. She understood the value of money in a deeply personal way. Even when her circumstances improved, she never lost her caution. At the same time, she had a sharp sense of where money should be spent. She was not frugal. She was principled. There is a difference.

For years, she complained about my towels. According to her, they were too old. I thought they were fine. They were clean. They did their job. Why replace them? But for her, this was not minor. A towel, she would argue, touches the body every single day. Why should it be worn out and lifeless? Replacing it was not luxury. It was self-respect.

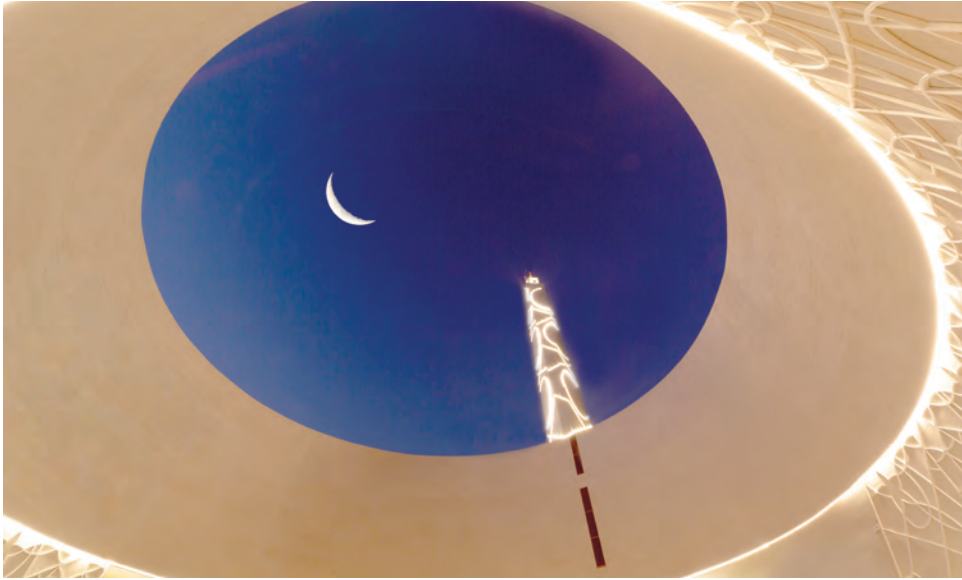
The same logic applied to the doors of my house. She disliked them because they were old and, in her view, did not represent me well. “This is the first thing people see,” she would say. For her, appearances were never about showing off. They were about dignity. They signalled whether you valued your environment and, by extension, yourself. Independence defined her. It was not a preference; it was central to her identity. When



DR NAJMA AL ZIDJALY

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*In the most practical aspects of life — how we spend, how we care for our homes, how we treat ourselves — our parents remain with us. And sometimes, their most enduring teachings are wrapped in the simplest objects*



Ramadhan is not about self-denial for its own sake. It is about intention.

she fell for the last time last year and it became clear she would not walk again, something irreversible shifted. She had always lived on her own terms. The prospect of losing that autonomy was devastating. Shortly after, she passed away. Even in that final chapter, her commitment to dignity remained intact.

The holy month of Ramadhan, I realise, carries a similar lesson. It is often described as a month of restraint — we fast, we reduce, we discipline ourselves. But Ramadhan is not about self-denial for its own sake. It is about intention. It teaches us to distinguish between excess and necessity, between waste and value.

My mother practiced that balance long before I recognised it. She disliked waste. She rejected extravagance. Yet she believed that neglecting oneself was not virtue. Being careful with money did not mean living in quiet deterioration. It meant choosing deliberately.

In a year that has been emotionally

and professionally overwhelming, I have returned to these small lessons. I did eventually replace the towels. I have yet to change the doors. But I now understand what she was teaching me. She was not arguing about fabric or wood. She was insisting on self-respect. Grief, I am learning, does not always land as flowing tears or sad moments. Sometimes it takes the shape of memories tethered to daily routines. It appears when I reach for a towel and remember her criticism. It appears when I look at the old front door and hear her voice.

Almost a year after her passing, I realise that even without a formal space to mourn, her lessons continue to guide me. Perhaps that is its own form of continuity. In the most practical aspects of life — how we spend, how we care for our homes, how we treat ourselves — our parents remain with us. And sometimes, their most enduring teachings are wrapped in the simplest objects.

# The most sustainable meal is already in your fridge



LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

The writer is a senior editor of Observer

**FOOD** wastage is a massive global issue that can be termed in three different ways — as an environmental crisis, an economic loss and a social irony. The paradox of hunger is that, according to statistics, we currently produce enough food to feed 10 billion people, yet nearly 800 million go to bed hungry. The excess food produce is dumped into the sea by countries so the price is maintained. It is not just that; preserving it and storing it are all issues that make it an easier option for countries to dump the extra production.

In a world where people are going homeless and hungry, a report from the World Economic Forum in 2024 revealed that a shocking 15 per cent of fish and seafood in our food chain goes to waste.

Aquatic food is an important part of food security.

“The Investigating Global Aquatic Food Loss and Waste whitepaper finds that 23.8 million tonnes of edible aquatic food were lost or wasted in 2021,” stated the WEF report.

The report pointed out that the biggest sources of food loss and waste (FLW) come from processing on land and discards from wild-capture fishing (as opposed to fish farms), with each accounting for over a third of the total figure.

Waste is not a production problem; it’s a distribution and valuation problem. And finally, it depends on what we do once it reaches us and we store it in our refrigerators.

Supply Chain Inefficiency: In developing

nations, waste happens at the start of the chain (poor storage/cooling). In developed nations, it happens at the end (retail and plate waste).

Whether we like it or not, we are also into discriminating against the vegetables, and it is called the ‘ugly produce bias.’ We adapted the supermodel concept to our vegetables, too. We forgot that it is the nutritional value that matters and not the glossy appearance.

What is the end result?

Perfectly nutritious produce is often discarded before reaching shelves simply because it’s the wrong shape or colour. And the images we hold so closely to our hearts are often photoshopped. I know a person who makes fertile soil from the vegetable waste produced in the kitchen. I followed suit, and I now have a tomato plant growing in the pot. These are small and fun measures.

The reality is that we are bearing an invisible cost from an environmental perspective. Experts point out the connection of methane and landfills.

According to them, food does not just “biodegrade” cleanly in a landfill. It rots anaerobically, releasing methane — a greenhouse gas roughly 25 times more potent than carbon dioxide.

In other words, when we throw away food, we are guilty of contributing to wasted resources. It has been a long process before the burger reached us — when we throw away a burger, we are not just wasting meat; we are wasting the thousands of litres of water it took to grow the grain, the fuel for transport

The paradox of hunger is that, according to statistics, we currently produce enough food to feed 10 billion people, yet nearly 800 million go to bed hungry. The excess food produce is dumped into the sea by countries so the price is maintained

and the land used for grazing. Not to forget farmers’ efforts and time.

And you know what? If food waste were a country, it would be the third-largest emitter of greenhouse gases in the world. Now that is food for thought. Maybe this will make us look into our refrigerator once again to make sure we consume what we store and analyse what we are throwing out.

Once again, experts advise us to understand “Best Before” vs. “Use By”:

Much of domestic waste comes from a misunderstanding of labels — “Best Before” is a quality suggestion; “Use By” is a safety deadline. People often toss perfectly good food out of caution.

It is Ramadhan, and everyone makes sure they have all the essentials as they try to prepare dishes for Iftar and Suhoor. Then there is the over-purchasing trap due to bulk buying and “Buy One Get One Free” deals.

Analysts say the average household loses hundreds and at times thousands a year on food that goes straight to the bin. So could it be a “waste tax” we pay ourselves?

I came across a hotel in town that practices the concept of Green Ramadhan. A local hotel uses AI technology to forecast the usage and wastage of food. To maintain zero wastage, it has tied up with Oman Food Bank so untouched food can be distributed within minutes, where there is no need to reheate. Halving the food loss and waste could reduce the emissions by 2.2 Gt CO<sub>2</sub>e per year, says a poster at the venue, encouraging everyone to practice zero food wastage.

## ZIMBABWE FARMERS SEEK US HELP OVER PAYOUTS

KUDZANAI MUSENGI

As white Zimbabwe farmers again ask the Trump administration to weigh in on long-promised government compensation for their evictions 25 years ago, many of them are increasingly ageing and desperate.

Farmers’ unions engaged a US lobbying firm late last year to raise their plight in Washington in the hopes of a funding breakthrough, according to a public disclosure filing.

The government of Zimbabwean President Emmerson Mnangagwa has been unable to deliver on a 2020 deal to pay compensation of \$3.5 billion to about 3,500 commercial farmers evicted in a botched land reform programme in the early 2000s.

Saddled by \$21 billion debt, the government changed the offer in 2023 to one per cent in cash with the remainder in US-dollar-denominated Zimbabwean treasury bonds with two per cent interest.

Nearly 1,000 farmers have signed up, Finance Minister Mthuli Ncube said, with several hundred reportedly already receiving some cash and bonds last year. However, the process has been opaque and achingly slow, and many farmers have refused the new deal.

Outside intervention is “not necessarily a bad thing,” Ncube said about reports of hiring US firm Mercury Public Affairs, which has ties to President Donald Trump’s administration.

“We are committed to paying and if they are trying to get other people to get us to pay, we have no problems with that,” Ncube said.

“We are paying anyway and we would like to pay faster,” he said.

According to a letter in a Department of Justice disclosure filing, four groups representing former commercial farmers engaged the firm to support their bid for “full compensation”.

The group would contact administration representatives “to promote paying the Zimbabwean farmers the remaining balance of \$3.5 billion owed,” it said. This could be through new financing from international institutions such as the World Bank. With many farmers now in their 70s and 80s, some are in financial difficulty, said Harry Orphanides from the Property and Farm Compensation Association, one of the groups that approached the US firm.

“It’s a serious strain on the farmers, especially those who are elderly and have no other sources of income as they were completely dependent on farming,” Orphanides said.

“Some of them are really desperate,” he said. About 4,000 farms were seized without compensation in the late president Robert Mugabe’s land reform drive, which aimed to redistribute the country’s arable land - then largely owned by the white minority - to black subsistence farmers. — AFP

# Sanchez reaps gains from anti-Trump stance

**PEDRO** Sanchez’s thinly veiled criticisms of US policy play well with his voters but are irritating Spain’s powerful ally, where political advisers close to the White House warn the Socialist prime minister to watch his step. From condemning the United States’ intervention in Venezuela to pushing for stricter controls of social media platforms and opting out of Nato’s defence spending target, Sanchez has taken a strikingly defiant tone on issues key to the US agenda.

More than once, the Spanish leader, one of a dwindling number of left-leaning voices in Europe, has pointedly framed his policies in contrast to President Donald Trump’s.

In an op-ed in the New York Times, he said “MAGA-style leaders” were fooling the public on the supposed evils of migration, and that his own plans to crimp digital platforms were “making social media great again”.

Supporters say he is sticking to long-held positions popular with voters and with allies in the southern hemisphere, where Europe wants to strengthen ties to reduce dependency on the US and China.

But advisers close to the Trump administration say he is tempting fate, in particular with his refusal to spend more on defence, which has prompted numerous rebukes from Trump.

Benjamin Leon, a longtime Republican donor sworn in last week as US ambassador to Madrid, told US senators at his confirmation hearing that he would press Spain to commit to the US-led Nato alliance’s spending target of 5 per cent of GDP, an amount Sanchez has resisted. Sanchez’s refusal to let vessels transporting weapons to Israel dock in Spain has prompted a US investigation that could result in restrictions on Spanish shipping to the United States.

Asked about ties with Sanchez, a US State Department spokesperson



US President Donald Trump and Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez pose for a photo at a world leaders’ summit on ending the Gaza war, in Sharm el Sheikh, Egypt. — Reuters file photo

agenda. Foreign policy provides an opportunity to project strength, analysts and pollsters said.

Historians say he is drawing on long-standing resentment of the US, rooted in the support it gave Spain’s late right-wing dictator Francisco Franco after World War Two in exchange for the use of military bases.

In a YouGov poll last month, 66 per cent of Spaniards had an “unfavourable” view of the US, even more than the 45 per cent before Trump’s second term began.

Sanchez’s other foreign policies also enjoy broad support. According to surveys, most Spaniards view Israel’s actions in Gaza as genocide, something Israel denies, and condemn the US intervention in Venezuela.

And in an Ipsos poll, over 80 per cent supported Sanchez’s proposal to ban social media for those under 14. On defence, Spaniards are more divided, but left-leaning voters support his lower spending pledge, polls indicate.

“These are areas where he can set the agenda, offsetting the image of paralysis and reinforcing his profile as a bulwark against the far right,” said Paula Canas, analyst at GAD3.

Some in the conservative opposition blame Sanchez for Spain’s exclusion from a bloc set up by the US to trade critical minerals, and from preparatory meetings for December’s G20 summit of industrial and developing nations.

Yet Sanchez seems unabashed. A person familiar with his policy development said he had a “nose” for international affairs and, though unafraid to speak his mind, knew where the “red lines” were.

Three sources close to Sanchez said ties with the US remained strong, and there was no sign of diplomatic communication drying up.

His supporters can point to Greenland, where Trump’s threats of annexation drove European leaders to take a vocal hard line that secured a retreat.



VICTORIA WALDERSEE

The writer is a Senior Politics & Economics Correspondent for Reuters in Madrid, Spain

highlighted Leon’s posting and said the US looked forward to working with Spain on “common challenges”.

“I want to get along with Spain,” said Wilson Beaver, senior adviser on defence at the Heritage Foundation, a right-wing think tank in Trump’s orbit. “It’s Prime Minister Sánchez getting in the way.”

Joshua Trevino of the America First Policy Institute said Spain “nearly stands alone in its willingness to be on the wrong side of the US on all these issues”.

Spain’s European allies have mostly opted to humour Trump and keep their differences private in the hope that this will advance their agendas, or at least soften his hostility.

But some have also been frustrated by Sanchez, notably his refusal to match their defence spending plans.

“He’s playing to a domestic anti-Trump and anti-American audience to great effect, leaving both transatlantic and European solidarity at the wayside,” said one European diplomat, who declined to be named. Sanchez is in a tight spot at home, where scandals and disputes with splinter parties have stalled his legislative

# SPORTS

## TWO TOURNEYS



The committee has allocated cash prizes for the top finishers in both championships.

### 75 players compete in Ramadhan Billiards and Snooker Championships

AHMED AL KAABI  
MUSCAT, FEB 23

The Oman Billiards and Snooker Committee is organising the Billiards and Snooker Championships during the month of Ramadhan, with the participation of 75 players of various nationalities. The tournaments are part of the committee's programmes aimed at promoting the sport and raising the level of technical competition through regular events that provide players with greater opportunities for match practice and experience.

The competitions are being held at 'Active Oman' every Monday and Tuesday throughout the holy month after Taraweeh prayers, starting from February 24 and concluding on March 13. The event is conducted under a structured technical and administrative framework focused on applying approved regulations and ensuring matches proceed according to a set schedule, reflecting positively on the overall quality of competition.

**BILLIARDS CHAMPIONSHIP SYSTEM**  
The billiards tournament is played in the 9-ball format under a double-elimination system, which grants each player two chances to remain in contention. Winners advance directly through the main bracket, while defeated players move to the losers' bracket for another opportunity to compete for top positions. Main bracket matches are played in a best-of-15 frames format.

**SNOOKER CHAMPIONSHIP SYSTEM**  
The snooker competition follows a best-of-5 frames format in the main bracket, while losers' bracket matches are played as best-of-3 frames, creating a progressive competitive pathway and increasing comeback opportunities for players.

**CASH PRIZES**  
The committee has allocated cash prizes for the top finishers in both championships to support and motivate players to deliver strong performances. The initiative aims to enhance the technical standard of the tournaments and encourage fair competition, while promoting continuous development through exposure to diverse playing styles and competitive experiences.

In this regard, Hamoud al Harthy, Secretary of the Oman Billiards and Snooker Committee, stated that organising the two championships during Ramadhan aligns with the committee's plan to further activate the sport and expand participation through regular competitions that provide players with meaningful competitive exposure. He noted that the Ramadhan tournaments aim to bring together practitioners of the sport in the Sultanate within a competitive setting, offering greater opportunities to compete in strong matches and gain experience across different levels.

Al Harthy added that clear technical regulations have been implemented to ensure fairness, alongside the allocation of cash prizes to encourage players to perform at their best. He expressed hope that the competitions would help raise the overall standard of billiards and snooker and strengthen their presence within Oman's sporting community. He concluded by emphasising that Ramadhan tournaments represent an important milestone within the committee's ongoing efforts to build a sustainable competitive environment and provide players of various nationalities with a unified sporting platform that enriches technical experience and supports the sport's development at the local level.

## Oman to open Fifa Series 2026 against Sierra Leone

WALEED AL JAHWARI  
MUSCAT, FEB 23

THE Oman national football team will compete in the Azerbaijan-hosted group alongside Azerbaijan, Sierra Leone and Saint Lucia as part of the Fifa Series scheduled for March 2026. Oman will open their campaign against Sierra Leone on Friday, March 27, at 3 pm (Oman time) at Dalga Arena, while hosts Azerbaijan will face Saint Lucia on the same day in the other group fixture.

Under the tournament format, the winner of Oman's clash with Sierra Leone will meet the winner of Azerbaijan versus Saint Lucia on Monday, March 30, at 7 pm (Oman time), while the two losing teams will contest the third-place match earlier that day at 3 pm.

Oman's Portuguese head coach Carlos Queiroz is overseeing preparations for the March international window and is currently in the Sultanate of Oman following the domestic top-tier Jindal Football League matches to assess players ahead of naming the final squad.

The Oman Football Association (OFA) is expected to announce the preliminary squad soon, marking the start of the national team's training camp preparations for the March Fifa Series 2026.

The Fifa Series 2026 marks the second edition of the global initiative launched by Fifa to provide structured international match opportunities during the official windows. For the first time, the competition will feature both men's and women's tournaments, bringing together a total of 48 national teams from across the six continental confederations.



Oman will open their campaign against Sierra Leone on Friday, March 27, at 3 pm (Oman time) at Dalga Arena.



CARLOS QUEIROZ  
Oman head coach

This year's edition consists of 12 groups, nine in the men's competition and three in the women's competition. The men's tournament will include 36 teams divided into nine groups of four teams, while the women's competition will feature 12 teams across three groups of four.

Men's matches will be staged across Australia, Azerbaijan, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, New Zealand, Puerto Rico, Rwanda — which will host two separate

groups — and Uzbekistan, offering participating teams varied competitive environments and international exposure.

Among the participating nations are five teams that have already secured qualification for the 2026 Fifa World Cup, alongside several emerging football nations. From the Conmebol region, Chile and Venezuela will compete in the men's tournament, while Brazil will participate in the women's competition.

## Nizwa University, SQU open with convincing wins

RIYADH AL BALUSHI  
@riyadhbaluch

The inaugural Oman Logistics Academy Football Championship for Higher Education Institutions kicked off on Sunday evening, at Goal One Stadium in Al Athaiba, marking the beginning of a dynamic competition that blends academic excellence with sporting ambition. The tournament, organised by the Oman Logistics Academy in cooperation with the Oman University Sports Committee, is held under the auspices of former Oman national team captain Imad bin Ali al Hosni.

Featuring 10 higher education institutions competing across 26 matches, the championship forms part of the Academy's 'Koorathon' initiative, designed to strengthen the integration between education, sport and the logistics sector in alignment with Oman Vision 2040.

The opening night delivered two decisive encounters, both ending in emphatic 3-0 victories.

In the first match, Nizwa University produced a commanding performance



The best player award being presented.

to defeat Oman Logistics Academy Team B. From the outset, Nizwa asserted control with disciplined organisation and effective attacking transitions. The breakthrough came through Asaad al Shammakhi, who opened the scoring with a composed finish. Mohammed al Dhahri doubled the advantage after capitalising on defensive hesitation, while Yousuf al Ghowri sealed the result with a well-taken third goal that confirmed Nizwa's dominance.

Al Shammakhi's influential display earned him the Best Player of the Match award, reflecting his impact both in attack and in linking play



The best player award being presented.

across midfield. Nizwa's defensive structure also stood out, successfully neutralising the Academy side's attempts to respond and maintaining a clean sheet throughout.

**SQU THUMP OTC**  
The second fixture saw Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) secure an equally convincing 3-0 victory over Oman Tourism College (OTC). SQU demonstrated tactical maturity and sharp finishing, taking control early in the contest. Malik al Katheri opened the scoring with a clinical strike before Hamza al Jabri extended the lead through a swift attacking

move. Salim al Hashmi added the third goal to cap a well-rounded team performance.

Al Katheri was named Best Player of the Match following a standout performance that combined attacking efficiency with intelligent movement and leadership on the field.

Beyond the results, the championship reflects a broader vision articulated by Dr Mansoor bin Mahfoodh al Qasimi, CEO of the Oman Logistics Academy, who emphasised that the tournament is more than a sporting competition. It represents a strategic platform to foster teamwork, discipline and leadership among students qualities essential in both academic and professional environments.

With 26 matches scheduled, the championship aims to serve as a national platform that promotes sportsmanship, institutional pride and healthy competition among Oman's higher education institutions. The strong start by Nizwa University and Sultan Qaboos University sets the tone for what promises to be a competitive and high quality tournament in the weeks ahead.

IMPRESSIVE SHOW



Royal Cavalry’s ‘Muthabir’ was ridden by jockey Abdulaziz al Balushi and trained by Ibrahim al Hadhrami.

MUTHABIR SECURES VICTORY FOR ROYAL CAVALRY IN AL AIN

RIYADH AL BALUSHI  
@riyadhbaluch

The Royal Cavalry continued its distinguished presence on the regional racing stage as ‘Muthabir’ claimed first place in the fourth race, designated for Purebred Arabian horses over a distance of 1,600 metres, held on Monday evening at Al Ain Racecourse in the United Arab Emirates.

Delivering a composed and tactical performance, Muthabir maintained a steady rhythm during the early stages before accelerating decisively in the final stretch to secure a well earned victory. The horse was ridden by jockey Abdulaziz al Balushi and trained by Ibrahim al Hadhrami, highlighting the team’s strong preparation and competitive readiness.

Speaking after the race, Abdulaziz al Balushi expressed his delight with the result, stating: “Praise be to God for this victory. The competition was intense from the start, but Muthabir showed great fighting spirit and responded perfectly in the final turn. I extend my thanks to the Royal Cavalry and to trainer Ibrahim al Hadhrami for their trust and continuous support. We look forward to maintaining this positive momentum in the upcoming races.”

Finishing second was the mare ‘Jazeela’, owned by Khalfan al Qubaisi, ridden by Sam Hitchcott and trained by Musabah al Muhairi, after a strong challenge throughout the race. Third place went to ‘RB Blite Dat’, owned by Al Laith Racing, ridden by Richard Mullen and also trained by Musabah al Muhairi.

This victory adds another milestone to the Royal Cavalry’s record in international participation and reflects the continued development of Purebred Arabian racing under its banner, reinforcing its competitive standing across prominent Gulf racecourses, including the prestigious Al Ain track.



Royal Cavalry’s ‘Muthabir’ claimed first place in the fourth race, designated for Purebred Arabian horses over a distance of 1,600 metres.



Samayil crushed Saham 4-0 at the Sohar Sports Complex as part of the 15th round of the Jindal Football League.

Samayil cruise as Sur win, Dhofar–Sohar draw in JL

AHMED AL KAABI  
MUSCAT, FEB 23

**SAMAYIL** secured a resounding 4-0 victory against hosts Saham in a match held at the Sohar Sports Complex as part of the 15th round of the Jindal Football League.

Saham began the first half with relative superiority, but a lack of positional discipline among some players reduced their effectiveness. Despite creating several chances, they failed to convert any of them. Samayil, meanwhile, capitalised on limited opportunities and received an early ‘gift’ in the 13th minute when Marwan al Ghafri scored an own goal, giving the visitors a 1-0 lead at the half-time.

At the start of the second half, Saham attempted to respond, making two substitutions by introducing Ali al Hashemi and Osama al Balushi. However, Samayil struck again in the 59th minute through a penalty converted by Musab al Lamki following a VAR review, after Saeed al Ruzaiqi was pushed by the goalkeeper from a Bashar al Maharbi cross. Saham pressed forward but was denied by Samayil’s solid defence and the standout performance of goalkeeper Alaa al Hamadani. Substitute



Sur secured a 2-1 victory over Bahla at the Sur Sports Complex.

Osama al Zaabi sealed the result with a powerful long-range strike in the 84th minute before adding a fourth goal with a header from Badr al Jabri’s cross in the 90th minute. With this win, Samayil moved up to 14 points in ninth place, while Saham remained on 16 points in eighth.

**SUR EDGE BAHLA**  
At Sur Sports Complex, the home side secured a 2-1 victory over Bahla in Round 15, earning an important boost in the standings.

Ayman Ibrahim and Abdulrahman al Muqaimi scored for Sur, while Qasim al Salmi netted Bahla’s lone goal. The win lifted Sur to 12 points in 12th place, while Bahla stayed sixth with 25 points.

**GOALLESS DRAW**  
Dhofar and Sohar shared the points in a 0-0 draw at Al Saada Sports Complex in the final matches of Round 15 of the Jindal League, despite several chances and periods of high tempo.

The first half featured opportunities for both sides, including an early header from Atikor that was saved by Mazin al Kasbi. Mazin al Saadi also came close for Sohar, while Dhofar threatened through Mohammed al Araimi and Hamood al Saadi. Before half-time, Sohar missed a penalty as Dwayne Carl Mokit sent his effort over the bar.

In the second half, Sohar held a slight edge, with Al Kasbi producing key saves. Dhofar were reduced to 10 men in the 69th minute after Mohammed bin Mubarak al Najashi was sent off. Despite Sohar’s pressure, neither side found the breakthrough, and a late chance for substitute Rashid Abdulhamid went begging.

The draw lifted Sohar to 30 points in fourth place, while Dhofar moved to 14 points in tenth.

Muscat to host Asian Youth Table Tennis Championship in June

ADIL AL BALUSHI  
MUSCAT, FEB 23

The Oman Table Tennis Association (OTTA) will host the 30th edition of the Asian Youth Table Tennis Championship in the capital city Muscat during June 21 to 27. The prestigious continental event will take place at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex, bringing together Asia’s most promising young table tennis talents for a week of high-level competition. The decision was confirmed by the Asian Table Tennis Union (ATTU), which approved Oman’s bid as part of its 2026 calendar of major events across the continent.

The championship in Muscat is expected to attract qualifiers from four regional zones, ensuring wide representation and tight competition. The Central Asia

qualification tournament will be staged in Almaty, Kazakhstan, from April 3 to 5. South Asia’s qualification rounds will take place during March and April, with the host country to be announced soon.

Singapore will organise the South East Asia qualifiers from April 14 to 19, while West Asia’s qualifying event will be held in Amman, Jordan, from March 26 to 27. Teams that secure qualification from these regions will vie in Muscat to compete for continental honours, making the Omani capital the focal point of Asian youth table tennis this summer.

The Asian Youth Championship in Muscat is part of a busy year for the sport across the Asian continent. Following the youth event, attention will shift to the 2026 Asian Games, scheduled for September 20 to 28 in Nagoya, Japan. The 2026 Asian Para



Muscat will host the 30th edition of the Asian Youth Table Tennis Championship from June 21 to 27.

Games will follow from October 16 to 23, before the curtain falls on the continental season with the 29th ITTF-ATTU Asian Championships in

Tashkent, Uzbekistan, from October 19 to 25.

**HOSTING CAPABILITY**  
By hosting the youth championship, Oman further demonstrates its capability to stage international events at the highest standards as a reputation it has steadily built over recent years. Earlier this year, OTTA had managed successfully to host the WTT Contender Muscat 2026 in last January. More than 100 paddlers took part in the major TT event representing 34 countries including Australia, China, Chinese Taipei, Germany, Hong Kong, India, Iran, Italy, Kazakhstan, Moldova, Nepal, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Saudi Arabia, Serbia, Singapore, Slovakia, Spain, Turkey, the United States, Wales, Malaysia, Jordan, South Korea, and the hosts Oman. China’s World No 31 Wen Ruibo

had lifted the men’s singles title of WTT Contender Muscat 2026 after defeating Germany’s World No 20 Patrick Franziska in a thrilling seven-game final. In the women’s singles final, China’s World No 15 Shi Xunhao had delivered an authoritative performance to secure the title with a straight-game 4-0 win over her compatriot He Zhuojia, confirming China’s dominance in the singles categories.

It is expected that OTTA will host another major TT event represented by WTT Star Contender 2026 during coming November in Muscat following the successful maiden edition of the same event last year. World No 7 Felix Lebrun from France had defeated his brother and teammate Alixes Lebrun (World No 13) 4-3 in a thrilling final to clinch the men’s title of WTT Star Contender Muscat 2025.

SPORTS

T20 WORLD CUP



England's Liam Dawson celebrates after taking the wicket of Sri Lanka's Kamindu Mendis at Pallekele International Cricket Stadium in Kandy. — AFP

ENGLAND AIM TO SPIN THEIR WAY TO SEMIFINALS

**KANDY, Sri Lanka:** England are yet to catch fire at the T20 World Cup, but they won't mind one bit if another 'ugly' win secures Harry Brook's side a semifinal berth with a game to spare. England bowled out Sri Lanka for 95 on Sunday to open their Super Eights campaign with a 51-run win.

With the Pakistan-New Zealand clash on Saturday being washed out, a win against Pakistan on Tuesday at the same stadium will be enough to see the 2010 and 2022 T20 World Cup champions into the last four.

England again stuttered with the bat and were restricted to 146-9 by Sri Lanka on Sunday. "We know that we can play a lot better," all-rounder Liam Dawson told reporters after the win, in comments only made public on Monday.

"But at the end of the day in tournament cricket, you just need to get the win, however ugly." England's bowlers came to the rescue for the third time in the tournament, after also defending below-par totals against Nepal and Italy.

"The fight we've shown with the ball shows that this team is in a very good place," said Dawson. Pakistan possess a dangerous spin attack, featuring a unique weapon in Usman Tariq and his pronounced pause before he releases the ball. But Dawson said England would fight fire with fire with their own potent slow-bowling arsenal. England captain Brook also has speedster Jofra Archer, the hit-the-deck-hard Jamie Overton and left-arm swing bowler Sam Curran as the seam options.

England's flexibility enabled Will Jacks to open the bowling with his off-spin on Sunday and destroy Sri Lanka's top order.

He returned figures of 3-22 in tandem with Archer, who removed both opening batsmen, to leave Sri Lanka in tatters at 34-5 at the end of the six-over power play.

England's variety offers Brook endless options, said Dawson who bowls left-arm spin, as does Jacob Bethell.

"We're all very different types of spinners. Jacksy gets very good over-spin, very good bounce.

"Dilly (wrist spinner Adil Rashid) has all these variations and me, I'm probably more of a defensive spinner and that's my role. I'm just trying to be consistent for the captain.

"Adil can use all of his tricks and he comes on to get wickets and get us back in games or put us ahead in games.

"Obviously, Jacks, he's been brilliant. He's exploited conditions here very well." — AFP



West Indies' Shimron Hetmyer plays a shot during the 2026 ICC Men's T20 Cricket World Cup Super Eights match between West Indies and Zimbabwe at the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai on Monday. — AFP

Windies thrash Zimbabwe after piling up 254-6

**THE** West Indies blew away T20 World Cup surprise packages Zimbabwe by a colossal 107 runs in Mumbai on Monday as Shai Hope's team opened their Super Eights campaign with a dominant victory.

Shimron Hetmyer blasted 85 off 34 balls as the West Indies piled up 254-6, the second highest total in the history of the tournament.

Zimbabwe, who stunned Australia and Sri Lanka to reach the Super Eights, got off to an awful start chasing a monumental 255.

They were reduced to 20-3 in the third over when two wickets fell to Akeal Hosein's left-arm spin and never threatened to get close.

They were all out for 147 in 17.4 overs with Brad Evans hitting some lusty late blows before being last man out for 43 off 21 balls with five sixes.

Left-armer Gudakesh Motie was the pick of the West Indies bowlers with 4-28 as he found some sharp turn.

Hosein took 3-28. Zimbabwe captain Sikandar Raza won the toss and opted to bowl, then saw his bowlers flogged to all parts of the Wankhede stadium.

Only Sri Lanka, who made 260-6 against Kenya in 2007, have scored more in a T20 World Cup match.



West Indies' Gudakesh Motie (C) celebrates with teammates after taking the wicket of Zimbabwe's Tashinga Musekiwa at the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai. — AFP

Coming in at 17-1, the left-handed Hetmyer was given a life Zimbabwe would come to regret.

A routine catch at deep fine leg was spilled by Tashinga Musekiwa when the batsman was on nine.

Hetmyer took full advantage, racing to his fifty off 19 balls, equalling South Africa's Aiden Markram for the fastest half-century of the tournament so far.

Hetmyer and Rovman Powell, who came in at 54-2, completed their century stand in 45 balls.

They had added 122 off 52 balls when Hetmyer became the third wicket to go down with 176 on the board in the 15th over.

Hetmyer, having been dropped for a second time on 70 by the hapless Musekiwa, this time was held in the deep by Brian Bennett having smashed seven sixes and seven fours.

Powell was out soon after for 59, off 35 balls, with four sixes.

Sherfane Rutherford took up the mantle and guided his side past 200 and then 250 as he scored 31 not out off 13 balls with two sixes.

Romario Shepherd joined in the fun by smacking 21 and Jason Holder took 13 off three balls as 38 runs were bludgeoned off the final two overs. — AFP

Barcelona blank Levante to get back on top of La Liga

**BARCELONA:** Barcelona cruised to a 3-0 victory over Levante to reclaim pole position in La Liga on Sunday.

After Real Madrid fell to a 2-1 defeat at Osasuna on Saturday, Hansi Flick's side moved a point clear of their bitter rivals with a comfortable victory at Camp Nou against the team in 19th.

Marc Bernal and Frenkie de Jong gave Barca a commanding first-half lead and Fermin Lopez wrapped up the win with a sensational drive late on. Barcelona were glad to get back to winning ways after a 4-0 thrashing by Atletico Madrid in the Copa del Rey semifinal first leg last week and then a 2-1 defeat by Girona on Monday in La Liga.

"It was a really bad moment for us but in the end today we gave a good response," Flick told reporters.

"It's important now to be on top of the table but in the end there's a long way to go."

Despite Flick's calls for improvement in defence, Barca were as open as ever, although Levante's poor finishing meant they could not capitalise.

Bernal sent Barca ahead after good work by Joao Cancelo, who impressed on a rare start after his arrival on loan in January, and Eric Garcia.

It was Bernal's second goal since returning from a long-term knee injury, which kept the 18-year-old out of action for over a year.

"I thought of my father (in my celebration) and my physio — he told me I would score and he has helped me a lot in this process," Bernal told Movistar.

Veteran Polish forward Robert Lewandowski could have doubled Barca's advantage but fired into the ground and over the bar when well placed.

Cancelo hit the post with a cross



Barcelona's Spanish midfielder #16 Fermin Lopez celebrates scoring his team's third goal during the Spanish league match against Levante UD at Camp Nou Stadium in Barcelona. — AFP

aimed at Lewandowski, before the Portuguese defender carved out the second for De Jong with a similar ball in from the left.

De Jong delivered the finishing touch to give Barca a two-goal lead at the break. "Joao today he showed his strength, his positive things, he gave us a lot of moments, great chances, for me it was a really good game from him and this is what I want to see," said Flick.

Garcia should have expanded Barcelona's advantage early in the second half but nodded wide from Jules Kounde's tempting cross.

Eventually substitute Lopez got a spectacular third, rattling home a long-range effort in off the post.

The midfielder might have added a fourth late on but Levante goalkeeper Mathew Ryan denied him with an excellent reflex save, after first thwarting Raphinha.

Flick was able to bring back

midfielder Pedri as a substitute after a month out with a hamstring injury, with the Spaniard likely to be key in the testing weeks ahead. Defeat leaves Levante seven points from safety.

Earlier, Sevilla earned a 1-0 win at Getafe, while Celta Vigo defeated Mallorca 2-0, leaving the islanders 18th. Valencia are 16th, two points above the drop zone after they lost 2-1 in an east coast derby clash at Villarreal, third. Marcelino Garcia Toral's side trail leaders Barca by 10 points, making a title challenge unlikely, but their win helped them move three points ahead of Atletico Madrid in fourth. — AFP

**LA LIGA RESULTS ON SUNDAY:** Getafe 0 Sevilla 1 (Sow 64); Barcelona 3 (Bernal 4, De Jong 32, Lopez 81) Levante 0; Celta Vigo 2 (Aspas 85-pen, 90+5) Real Mallorca 0; Villarreal 2 (Comesana 31, Gueye 45+6-pen) Valencia 1 (Ramazani 27-pen)

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# BUSINESS

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## SHORT TAKES



The ginger initiative builds on the experience of Dhofar's earlier turmeric localisation project.

### Dhofar ginger pilot shows import-substitution potential

QASIM AL MAASHANI  
MUSCAT, FEB 23

A government-backed ginger cultivation project in Dhofar Governorate is showing early signs of commercial promise after second-season output rose to 2.5 tonnes — results officials say could support import substitution and new farm incomes if scaled up.

The project was launched in 2024 by the Directorate General of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources in Dhofar and is financed by the Agricultural and Fisheries Development Fund. It is being implemented in the Wilayats of Rakhyout and Dhalkout over a 2024–2027 timeline.

Eng Ridwan bin Abdullah al Ibrahim, Director of the Agricultural Development Department at the directorate and the project manager, said the pilot targets 60 farmers and is structured as a full support programme — not only crop planting — providing technical and extension services from land preparation through to harvest.

The first phase was inaugurated in June 2024 with around 30 farmers and a combined cultivated area estimated at about two feddans. Production in the first season reached roughly one tonne after harvest, he said.

A second phase was completed in 2025, bringing in another 30 farmers. The second-season crop was harvested in February 2026 and yielded an estimated 2.5 tonnes — more than double the first season's output.

“These initial results indicate ginger is a promising crop that can be expanded on an investment basis to increase domestic production and replace imports”, Al Ibrahim said, adding that the programme includes guidance on field preparation, installation of modern irrigation systems and close monitoring across growth stages.

## Oman power demand to grow 7.2% annually through 2031

CONRAD PRABHU  
MUSCAT, FEB 23

Sustained economic expansion and the proliferation of large-scale industrial and commercial projects are expected to drive robust electricity demand growth across the Sultanate of Oman over the 2025–2031 period, according to projections outlined by the state electricity procurer, Nama Power and Water Procurement Company.

Within the Main Interconnected System (MIS) — the national grid covering north and central Oman (excluding Musandam Governorate) — peak demand is forecast to rise at an average annual rate of 7.2%, increasing from 7,503 MW in 2024 to 12,198 MW by 2031.

In the Dhofar Power System (DPS), peak demand is projected to grow at 9.1% annually, climbing from 801 MW in 2024 to 1,469 MW by 2031.

“This significant growth is driven by robust GDP expansion, major infrastructure developments and the anticipated connection of large-scale projects across priority sectors under the national economic diversification



In 2031, solar's share rises to 23.26%, lifting overall renewable generation to 39%.

agenda”, the company noted in its planning report.

To accommodate the rising demand, Oman's power system will undergo substantial expansion between 2025 and 2031.

The procurement strategy prioritises a balanced generation mix comprising utility-scale renewable energy, energy storage and high-efficiency thermal capacity, aligned with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040.

The goal is to ensure long-term

capacity adequacy, fuel efficiency and energy security.

In line with the national energy transition and net-zero ambitions, new clean energy projects are expected to help achieve the target of sourcing 30% of electricity from renewables by 2030.

The existing project pipeline suggests that this goal is within reach — and may potentially be exceeded — as solar and wind developments accelerate.

By 2030, wind energy is

projected to contribute 6.75% of generation and solar PV 16.16%, bringing combined renewable generation to 30%. Gas-fired plants would account for 53.46%. In 2031, solar's share rises to 23.26%, lifting overall renewable generation to 39%, while gas-based generation declines to 48.52%.

Installed renewable capacity is expected to reach 9,087 MW by 2030 and 12,182 MW by 2031, reflecting rapid deployment of solar, wind and waste-to-

energy (WTE) projects. Major developments in the pipeline include Ibri III Solar (500 MW); JBB Wind (105 MW); Duqm II Wind (300 MW); Mahout Wind (800 MW); Al Kamil Solar (400 MW); Marsa Solar (280 MW); Dhofar II Wind (132 MW); Sadah Wind (120 MW); Sinaw Solar (400 MW); a 1,000 MW Solar IPP in 2029; Shaleem Wind (100 MW); Al Jazir Wind (100 MW); and Duqm III Wind (300 MW).

Further capacity growth is expected in 2030–2031 with six large Solar PV IPPs (each 1,000 MW), along with the 95 MW Barka Waste-to-Energy project in 2031, broadening the renewable mix beyond solar and wind. Together, these investments underpin the sharp rise in installed renewable capacity.

A critical enabler of the energy transition is the 400 kV North–South Interconnect, which links Oman's northern and central regions, including Al Duqm and Al Wusta Governorate. By Q4 2026, the interconnection is expected to extend to the Dhofar Power System, creating a unified national grid that facilitates power sharing and enhances system resilience.

## BNPL regulations to boost instalment financing

AFRAH AL BALUSHI  
MUSCAT, FEB 23

**AHMED** bin Jaafar al Musalmi, Governor of the Central Bank of Oman, issued a decision promulgating regulations governing the rollout of “Buy Now, Pay Later” (BNPL) schemes — an initiative that will enable consumers in the Sultanate of Oman to join a global market projected to grow from \$28.44 billion in 2026 to nearly \$83.36 billion by 2034.

Regulating the sector promotes financial stability by curbing unregulated practices in short-term consumer finance.

Furthermore, capital and collateral requirements reduce the risk of sudden bankruptcy and protect customer rights.

The activity involves short-term financing provided by a licensee to a customer without collateral, for the purpose of purchasing goods and services through monthly instalments, repaid to the licensee on the agreed-upon dates.

The decision stipulates that the regulations prohibit engaging in this activity without a licence.

The licence is granted to legal entities that take the form of an Omani company wholly owned by Omanis or with non-Omani shareholders, according to the percentage of ownership.

In addition, an economic feasibility study is required, including a strategic vision for the activity, financial projections for the first five years, a business plan and arrangements with licensed banks or payment service providers, if any and with providers of goods and services.

The regulations authorise the Governor, in cases he deems appropriate, to grant exceptions to some licensing conditions if the proposed business model



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**AHMED BIN JAAFAR AL MUSALMI**  
Governor, CBO



Regulating the BNPL sector promotes financial stability by curbing unregulated practices in short-term consumer finance.

contributes to providing these services to the public who lack access to banking and financial services; and encourages the activity to reach remote or underserved areas.

The activity must commence within six months of obtaining the licence and a branch may not be established without the approval of the Central Bank.

The regulations outline obligations and prohibitions, as well as adherence to specific terms and conditions for conducting business.

These include: verifying the client's financial solvency and credit history, ensuring their ability to repay, documenting all transactions with clients with the necessary paperwork, guaranteeing fair and reasonable

BUSINESS FEATURE



BUILDING 

CONFIDENCE IN

OMAN'S OILFIELD

MANUFACTURING

JOMAR MENDOZA

AS Oman advances its ambitions under Oman Vision 2040, the spotlight is increasingly shifting from mere production to how industrial capability is built, verified and sustained within the country. One process now gaining strategic importance in the upstream oil and gas value chain is the Factory Acceptance Test (FAT) — a rigorous pre-delivery evaluation that ensures equipment performs exactly as intended before it ever reaches the field.

A recent FAT conducted on an oil beam pumping unit in Nizwa underscores how this process is becoming more than a technical checkpoint. It is emerging as a catalyst for localisation, in-country value (ICV) development and the strengthening of Oman's manufacturing ecosystem.

WHAT FAT REALLY MEANS

Factory Acceptance Testing is a structured and documented procedure carried out at the manufacturer's facility to verify that equipment meets contractual, operational and safety specifications. In the case of oilfield equipment such as beam pumping units, FAT typically includes dimensional checks, mechanical alignment, load testing, functional operation, safety interlocks and compliance with applicable standards.

The objective is straightforward: identify and resolve any issues before the equipment is shipped and installed. In upstream operations, where downtime is costly and logistics can be complex, this early verification significantly reduces technical risk.

Speaking to the *Observer*, Endra Satya Prihandito, General Manager of Bukaka International LLC, said FAT plays a decisive role in safeguarding reliability and efficiency. "Factory



“  
Factory Acceptance Testing ensures equipment is fully tested for performance, safety and integrity before reaching the field, reducing operational risk and unplanned downtime.”

ENDRA SATYA PRIHANDITO  
General Manager of Bukaka International LLC

Acceptance Testing ensures equipment is fully tested for performance, safety and integrity before reaching the field, reducing operational risk and unplanned downtime”, he noted.

RELIABILITY BEFORE DEPLOYMENT

For oil producers operating in Oman's upstream sector, FAT provides confidence that equipment arriving on site is fit for purpose. Beam pumping units, which are critical to artificial lift operations, must operate continuously under demanding conditions. Any failure can lead to production losses, increased maintenance costs and safety concerns.

By completing FAT at the workshop stage, operators can witness performance validation, verify documentation and approve compliance before acceptance. According to Prihandito, a successful FAT also sends a wider signal. "It demonstrates the facility's readiness to support Oman's upstream sector. It confirms that the workshop operates with disciplined quality standards and is prepared to deliver reliable equipment to oil and gas operators across the Sultanate of Oman".

LOCAL TESTING, LOCAL VALUE

Traditionally, FAT for specialised oilfield equipment has often been conducted overseas, requiring Omani operators to send technical teams abroad or rely on third-party inspections. Conducting FAT locally changes that equation.

Local FAT shortens supply chains, reduces lead times and lowers costs

associated with international logistics and travel. More importantly, it embeds technical know-how within the country. Engineers, technicians and inspectors gain hands-on exposure to global testing practices, building skills that remain in Oman.

"Local FAT strengthens Oman's industrial capability by building technical expertise and developing the local workforce", Prihandito explained. "It improves responsiveness and reduces reliance on overseas facilities".

This approach aligns closely with Oman's ICV objectives, which prioritise local content, skills development and domestic industrial participation. Each FAT conducted locally represents retained economic value — from employment and services to knowledge transfer.

FROM ASSEMBLY TO MANUFACTURING

The Nizwa workshop currently focuses on assembly, testing and servicing of oilfield equipment, but the trajectory is clearly forward-looking. The company is gradually expanding its capabilities towards broader manufacturing, supported by a phased development strategy.

Central to this ambition is the company's commitment to internationally recognised certifications, including API Q1 for quality management systems and API 11E for pumping units. These certifications are widely regarded as benchmarks in the global oil and gas industry, enabling locally produced equipment to meet international operator requirements.

In parallel, the company is pursuing "Made in Oman" certification, reinforcing alignment with national industrial policies and signalling confidence in domestic production quality.

"Expanding local assembly and testing facilities creates a practical pathway towards full-scale manufacturing by building systems, expertise and quality standards step by step", Prihandito said. "Through planned API certifications and the pursuit of 'Made in Oman' status, our Nizwa workshop is positioned to play a strategic role in supporting Oman's long-term oil and gas industrial growth".

SUPPORTING OMAN VISION 2040

Under Oman Vision 2040, Oman aims to diversify its economy, deepen industrial capacity and reduce dependence on imports. Localised FAT directly supports these goals by anchoring more of the value chain within the country.

Instead of importing fully assembled and tested equipment, Oman can increasingly rely on locally assembled, tested and eventually manufactured assets. This enhances supply security, builds resilience and ensures faster response to operational needs in the upstream sector.

For policymakers and operators alike, FAT is no longer just a quality assurance exercise. It is a foundation stone for industrial maturity — one that bridges the gap between assembly and manufacturing; and between policy ambition and operational reality.

As Oman continues to invest in energy infrastructure and industrial development, processes like Factory Acceptance Testing will quietly but decisively shape the country's journey towards a more self-reliant, value-driven oil and gas sector — firmly rooted in Omani soil, skills and standards.

SHORTTAKES



The initiative falls under the Tahawul programme to improve efficiency.

ENERGY MINISTRY  
REVIEWS MINING  
DIGITAL SERVICES

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Energy and Minerals, working with the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, has conducted a series of meetings and field visits with mining companies across several governorates to assess operational challenges and the performance of digital services. Officials said the initiative covered nine visits to OCCI branches, where companies provided feedback on licensing, applications and transaction processing. Issues raised included service timelines, clarity of procedures and access to online platforms. The ministry said feedback collected during the visits is being reviewed for inclusion in upcoming development plans, with performance indicators to track improvements. Updates to several mining-related digital services are expected to be rolled out in phases. The discussions also covered the use of the ministry’s digital platforms, including the Taqa investment portal, which supports tendering and licensing processes in the energy and minerals sectors, as well as other systems supporting supplier registration, emissions reporting and data management.

NEW INDIA  
ASSURANCE OMAN  
REVIEWS BROKER-  
DRIVEN GROWTH



MUSCAT: The Oman operations of The New India Assurance Company Limited — Oman Operations held a brokers’ meeting in Muscat on February 16 to review market conditions and outline priorities for 2026, amidst rising competition in the Sultanate of Oman’s insurance sector. Company officials said the insurer closed 2025 with gross written premiums exceeding RO 20 million, with brokers accounting for about 45 per cent of its portfolio, underscoring the continued role of intermediaries in distribution. During the session, management discussed underwriting discipline, expansion in fire and engineering, corporate medical and SME segments, as well as operational efficiency and digital processes. Brokers raised issues related to service delivery, claims handling and evolving market risks, according to participants. The meeting brought together teams from underwriting, claims, medical and operations, allowing for direct exchanges on market developments and service expectations for the year ahead. Company executives said maintaining sustainable growth and stable broker relationships would remain central to their strategy in 2026.

TRADE STANDOFF

EU rejects fresh US tariffs



The European Commission said it would accept no increase in US tariffs, insisting Washington honour last year’s EU-US trade deal after a Supreme Court ruling struck down earlier levies. The bloc demanded clarity after Trump imposed temporary tariffs of up to 15%. Brussels warned the moves undermine commitments to fair transatlantic trade, stressing that agreed terms must be respected. — Reuters

EXPORT SURGE

South Korea exports jump on chips



South Korea’s exports rose 23.5 per cent year-on-year in the first 20 days of February, lifted by robust semiconductor demand, customs data showed. Shipments reached \$43.5 billion, while imports climbed 11.7%, resulting in a \$4.9 billion surplus. Semiconductor exports surged 134.1% to \$15.1 billion, accounting for more than a third of total exports during the period. — ONA

OIL VOLATILITY

Crude slips amidst tariff jitters



Oil prices edged lower as uncertainty over new United States tariffs weighed on global growth prospects, while upcoming US-Iran nuclear talks eased geopolitical risk. Brent crude fell 0.6 per cent to \$71.31 a barrel, while WTI slipped to \$66.06. Prices had climbed more than 5 per cent last week on conflict fears, leaving markets cautious despite still-elevated levels. — Reuters

Omani ports post 21.6%  
container growth in 2025

JOMAR MENDOZA  
MUSCAT, FEB 23

OMAN’S ports recorded broad-based growth across vessel traffic, cargo volumes and container handling in 2025, underlining the Sultanate of Oman’s strengthening position as a regional logistics and maritime hub, according to a post by the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MoTCIT). The Ministry, in its post titled “Omani Ports Statistics During 2025”, shows that key performance indicators across the port sector improved compared to 2024, reflecting higher trade flows, increased shipping activity and continued investments in port infrastructure and logistics services.

According to the data, the total number of vehicles handled at Omani ports reached 98,968 units in 2025, marking an 8.3 per cent increase from 91,374 units in 2024. The rise points to stronger import and export activity, particularly in automotive trade, as well as improved operational efficiency at ports. Vessel movement also registered notable growth. Ship calls increased to 13,576 in 2025, up from 12,393 in 2024, representing a 9.5 per cent year-on-year rise. The increase highlights Oman’s growing attractiveness as a stopover and destination for regional and international shipping lines, supported by its strategic location on global



The total number of vehicles handled at Omani ports reached 98,968 units in 2025, from 91,374 units in 2024.

trade routes linking Asia, Africa and Europe. Container throughput recorded the strongest growth among the indicators. The number of containers handled reached 5,178,622 TEUs in 2025, compared to 4,260,056 TEUs in 2024, reflecting a sharp 21.6 per cent increase. This surge underscores rising demand for containerised trade, as well as the expanding role of Omani ports in transshipment and value-added logistics activities. Meanwhile, the total volume of goods handled across Omani ports climbed to 143.49

million tonnes in 2025, up from 137.62 million tonnes in 2024, translating into a 4.3 per cent increase. The growth in cargo volumes reflects steady expansion in both bulk and general cargo, supported by industrial activity, energy exports and non-oil trade. The Ministry highlighted that the positive performance aligns with the government’s broader objectives to enhance Oman’s logistics ecosystem, improve port competitiveness and support economic diversification under Oman Vision 2040.

Continued upgrades in port infrastructure, digitalisation of services and integration with free zones and logistics parks have contributed to smoother cargo flows and faster turnaround times. The ministry also emphasised that the steady rise in maritime indicators demonstrates the resilience of the port sector amidst global trade uncertainties. By strengthening connectivity and operational efficiency, Omani ports are increasingly positioned as reliable gateways for regional and international trade.

Phase 1 of Al Suwaiq Industrial City to launch this year

BUSINESS REPORTER  
MUSCAT, FEB 23

The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn) is advancing the development of infrastructure and utilities project for Phase 1 of Al Suwaiq Industrial City in Al Batinah North Governorate. The project is currently in the stage of technical and financial evaluation of the bids submitted by participating companies, with construction scheduled to commence during 2026. Hamood al Balushi, Assistant Director General of Al Suwaiq Industrial City, said that Phase 1 development covers an area of five million sqm and comprises the construction of internal roads, water, electricity and sewage networks, as well as other essential infrastructure and facilities. The tender also includes establishing several greenhouse units for the implementation of advanced agri-tech solutions, with the aim of supporting



HAMOOD AL BALUSHI  
Assistant Director  
General of Al Suwaiq  
Industrial City

food security and promoting agricultural investments alongside related industries. Al Balushi highlighted that, despite the city still being in its infrastructure preparation phase, Al Suwaiq Industrial City received more than 14 investment applications in 2025 across diverse sectors, including food, marble, plastics and building materials. Two of these projects have already been localised, covering a total area exceeding 6,800 sqm with a combined investment value touching RO 400,000. The city’s management continues to review the remaining applications in preparation for their localisation in the

upcoming phase. He added that Madayn offers exceptional incentives to investors in Al Suwaiq Industrial City, including a two-year rental exemption, followed by a 50% rent reduction for the subsequent three years. These incentives aim to position Al Suwaiq Industrial City as an attractive destination for local and foreign investments, particularly given the availability of modern infrastructure and streamlined government services provided by Madayn. Madayn has already conducted studies to identify investment opportunities aligned with the economic diversification strategy and Oman Vision 2040. Al Suwaiq Industrial City targets investments in key sectors, including petrochemicals, food sector, modern agriculture, energy and supporting technologies, recycling and environmental industries, light and medium industries, pharmaceuticals, technology and innovation, heavy industries and logistics.

OPINION

Investing in teachers is investing in the future



TARIQ  
AL BARWANI

The writer is strategic adviser, businessman and motivational speaker.

**TODAY** Oman is celebrating Teachers’ Day — a moment of national reflection and gratitude for the teachers and educators who have shaped generations and continue to light the path for those who will lead tomorrow.

It is a day to honour the patience, dedication and commitment of teachers whose work often happens beyond the spotlight but leaves a lasting imprint on individuals and society alike. As we mark this important occasion, I sat with myself reflecting on the important role that teachers and educators overall play in our collective journey.

What can we do today that can help build a greater future tomorrow? Thus, the idea of creating a platform that would support, encourage and celebrate so as to invest in teachers for our future came to mind. To start with, why invest in the first place?

Let’s not deny, teachers are the foundation of human development. Long before strategies, plans, or innovations take shape, teachers nurture the minds that will bring them to life.

They spark curiosity, encourage questioning and create environments where learning becomes a lifelong affair. When we invest in teachers, for example through training, support and recognition, we strengthen the very roots of progress, which is the cornerstone of our success as a nation.

Teachers shape values that define societies. In classrooms, for example, students learn

respect, responsibility, collaboration and empathy. These lessons extend far beyond academic achievement.

They shape how individuals contribute to their communities and interact with the world. A society that supports its teachers builds not only knowledge but also character.

Investing in teachers is indeed important, especially when a country is in a rapid transformation. As technology evolves and new opportunities emerge, it is important that our teachers have the necessary knowledge, skills and practical experience (to some extent) to guide students in developing critical thinking, adaptability and resilience.

They help young people navigate uncertainty with confidence and prepare them for careers that may not yet exist. Empowered teachers can inspire innovation and cultivate problem solvers who drive progress.

Teachers play a vital emotional role. For many students, a teacher is a source of encouragement during moments of doubt and a steady presence during times of change. Their belief in a student’s potential can transform self-confidence and open doors that might otherwise remain closed. This human connection is one of the most powerful aspects of education.

Now from a national perspective, investing in teachers aligns closely with the aspirations of building a knowledge-driven and future-ready society.

Whether in economic diversification, technological advancement, or social

Teachers are the foundation of human development. Long before strategies, plans, or innovations take shape, teachers nurture the minds that will bring them to life. They spark curiosity, encourage questioning and create environments where learning becomes a lifelong affair.

development, teachers would play an important role in preparing individuals (our kids included) to contribute meaningfully. Therefore, supporting teachers is not just an educational priority; it should, in fact, be a strategic investment in sustainable progress.

Valuing teachers elevates the teaching profession and inspires talented individuals to pursue it as a meaningful career.

When teachers feel respected and empowered, they bring passion and creativity into their classrooms, creating learning experiences that inspire students to dream bigger and aim higher.

In my humble opinion and as we celebrate Teachers’ Day today, appreciation should go beyond words. It should be reflected in how we support them, listen to their insights and recognise the essential role they play in shaping the nation’s future.

Every effort to empower teachers, whether through policy, community support, or simple acts of gratitude, contributes to a stronger and more resilient society.

In the end, teachers are not only educators; they are builders of possibility, guardians of knowledge and champions of potential and future talents who will lead our nation. Today is a reminder that the future we aim to have, ie, a future of innovation, opportunity and shared prosperity, really begins in classrooms guided by dedicated teachers.

Hence, if we really wish to build a brighter tomorrow, the path and agenda are clear, ie, invest in teachers, as that would ultimately invest in our future.

TARIFFS RESET  
WEAKENS TRUMP’S  
HAND IN CHINA  
TALKS

HUDSON LOCKETT

Going toe-to-toe with an autocrat can be hard if you’re only pretending at omnipotence. That is the lesson Donald Trump must keep in mind now that the Supreme Court has struck down most of the US president’s tariffs on imports from China, whose leader Xi Jinping now looks all the more savvy for playing hardball in trade talks over the past year.

Both sides understand that the American leader has a weaker hand heading into an in-person meeting in Beijing next month, even if he still has plenty of levers left to pull in his battle against US consumers’ love for low-cost Chinese goods.

Analysts at Citigroup estimate that once Trump’s global levies of 15% announced on Saturday are taken into account, the court’s ruling drags effective tariffs on Chinese exports down about 5 percentage points to 26%.

That is their lowest level since he made the first of his second-term hikes to China tariffs on February 2, 2025.

Worse still for Trump, the replacement Section 122 tariffs that stopped those levies from dropping all the way to 11% only last for 150 days. That may encourage Chinese negotiators to hold back from making any firm commitments at an upcoming summit between the two superpowers’ leaders, currently planned for March 31 to April 2.

Trump still has a few cards to play: investigations into alleged unfair trade practices by China already underway could boost the potency of so-called Section 301 tariffs that can replace stopgap levies.

That may help at the margins when attempting to hammer out a favourable arrangement which safeguards the flow of Chinese rare earths to American manufacturers in exchange for Chinese access to US semiconductors.

But the White House has lost the ‘anytime, anywhere’ tariffs threat it previously deployed at whim, not only against China but also any allies dealing with America’s chief geopolitical rival. Trump’s vow last month to slap 100% blanket levies on Canada if it goes ahead with a preliminary China trade deal, for instance, now amounts to a damp squib.

Future attempts to press-gang other trading partners like the European Union into an unwieldy trade alliance against Beijing likewise look more difficult, as do sudden punitive hikes against re-exporters of Chinese goods like Vietnam. — Reuters

Oman’s next fortune  
is a value network

If you want to understand the new world economy, stop staring only at stock charts and start watching shipping risk. When risk rises, money moves. In today’s trade environment, insurance premiums, route diversions and delivery uncertainty are shaping investment decisions at least as much as interest rates.

Global firms are quietly shifting from “lowest cost” to “most reliable” and that single change is rewriting where factories expand, where inventories sit and where regional headquarters choose to base operations. The winners of 2026 will be the places that can keep production supplied and customers served when the old assumptions break.

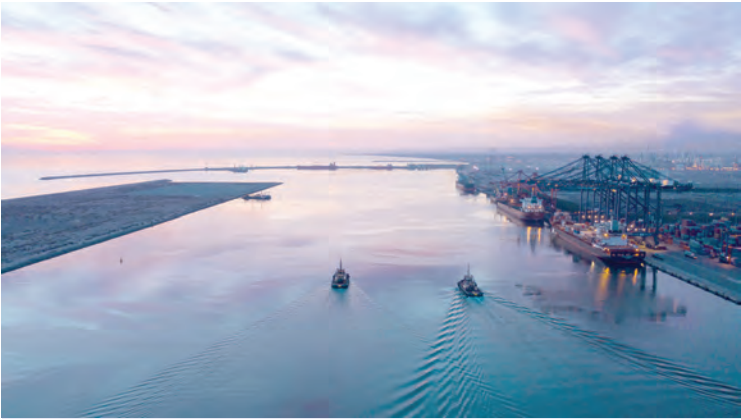
That is why Oman’s moment is now. The Sultanate of Oman’s open-ocean position outside the Strait of Hormuz is not just a geographic advantage; it is a credibility advantage in a nervous trading system. But geography alone does not create prosperity.

Prosperity comes when a country turns movement into transformation — processing, manufacturing, assembly and export-ready services that capture margin.

Oman should stop marketing itself primarily as a safer passage and start selling itself as a safer place to make things, assemble things and export value-added products with predictable lead times.

The right framework is a value network, not a single supply chain. Supply chains are linear: one weak link can break the entire sequence. Value networks are layered: multiple suppliers, multiple routes, shared infrastructure and shared standards that allow rerouting when shocks hit. In a volatile decade, resilience becomes a product and customers pay a premium for it.

Oman has begun strengthening the “software” that makes networks function: Royal Decree 38/2025 unified the legal framework for



The Sultanate of Oman’s open-ocean position outside the Strait of Hormuz is not just a geographic advantage; it is a credibility advantage in a nervous trading system.



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The writer is founder and CEO - Smart Investment Gateway, economists, board adviser & business transformation mentor.

Trade disruption is rewriting the map — Oman can benefit by turning logistics into industry, led by the private sector.

Special Economic Zones and Free Zones and is widely summarised as including a 10-year income tax exemption for qualifying enterprises, plus streamlined approvals through a one-stop shop.

For investors, time saved on licensing, utilities and customs often matters more than marginal differences in rent.

Just as important, Oman is starting to treat borders as seams rather than edges. Al Rawdah Special Economic Zone in Mahadha is a clear signal.

In May 2025, OPAZ signed an agreement with Mahdah Development Company — represented by DP World — to develop and operate the first phase.

A global zone operator brings more than buildings; it brings operating discipline, tenant pipelines and customer relationships that local markets cannot easily replicate.

For Omani firms, the message is simple: build for a corridor, not a single city — design products, packaging and distribution with the UAE market in mind from day one, then scale outward.

Infrastructure then turns strategy into daily reality. Hafeet Rail’s main route between Suhar and Abu Dhabi is widely reported as 238 kilometres, connecting SOHAR Port and Freezone into the UAE’s rail system via Al Ain. This is not just transport — it is a new pricing of distance.

Reliable rail makes “twin-plant” strategies practical: energy- and land-intensive processing in Oman, with finishing, branding and distribution in the UAE.

It also diversifies national risk. When maritime freight rates swing or schedules wobble, overland capacity helps keep factories running and shelves stocked. In an era of “just-in-case” inventory, continuity is a competitive advantage that markets reward.

Now add the industrial bets that can make Oman a producer, not merely a transit point. United Solar Polysilicon is building a plant in SOHAR Port and Freezone designed for 100,000 tonnes per year of high-purity polysilicon, with late-2025 coverage estimating investment above \$1.6 billion.

One upstream anchor like this can pull an ecosystem behind it ,wafers, cells, modules, packaging, testing, maintenance and eventually recycling, because manufacturers prefer to cluster near critical inputs.

The same logic applies to low-carbon industry: global buyers increasingly prefer (and in some cases require) lower-carbon steel, chemicals and fuels. Oman can use renewable power and zone infrastructure to produce “green molecules” and, more profitably, embed them into higher-value industrial products.

This is where the private sector has the biggest and most practical opening.

The headline projects may be large, but the durable job creation and profit pools sit in the middle: zone services (utilities operations, maintenance, labs, safety, cold chain), cross-border logistics and compliance technology (customs workflows, cargo visibility, secure documentation, trade-finance services), circular-economy operators (scrap aggregation, by-product processing, water reuse, heat recovery) and component manufacturing (valves, sensors, power electronics, precision machining, industrial gases, packaging).

# CLASSIFIEDS

## SIT. WANTED

SALES professional with 5 yrs Experience in Medical sector. Graduate, Available in Muscat. akhilmanu777@gmail.com Contact: 76323324

INDIAN male, 10 year experience in Oman as Coordinator have Driving licence. 90789282

INDIAN electrical engineer more than 20 years experience in "MEP" construction field in Oman seeks suitable job. Contact: 92919281

ACCOUNTS/ SALES Indian male (b com) having 2+ years of experience in India accounts sales looking for suitable placement, join immediately. Contact: 76324360

15+ experience in building material, project sales & Trade market, deal with corporate project customers, looking for a suitable job. Contact 78384283

INDIAN male MBA Graduate with 15yrs experience in Oman seek suitable senior position in finance office admin., sales DTC. Contact: 94158080

LOOKING for SUPPLY CHAIN / SALES jobs Indian male 24 years. Commerce graduate, Experience in logistics, procurement and sales in reputed company in Oman.Valid Oman D/L. Contact +96891121694, issacantony2002@gmail.com

OPERATIONS Support / Tendering / Contract Management / Procurement professional with 18+ years' Oil & Gas experience. NOC & driving license available. 96227272, jijilmathew@gmail.com

LOGISTICS Documentation Executive. Indian male, 25 years, BBA, PG Diploma in Logistics & SCM and have 2 years of experience in this field. Seeking a position in Logistics field Mob: +968 7506 9882 Mail: shafazhussain18@gmail.com

INDIAN male civil engineer with more than 30 years experience in different ministers, seek immediate suitable position. CONTACT: 94158080

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send CV to mohammed92563101@gmail.com

## SIT. WANTED

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

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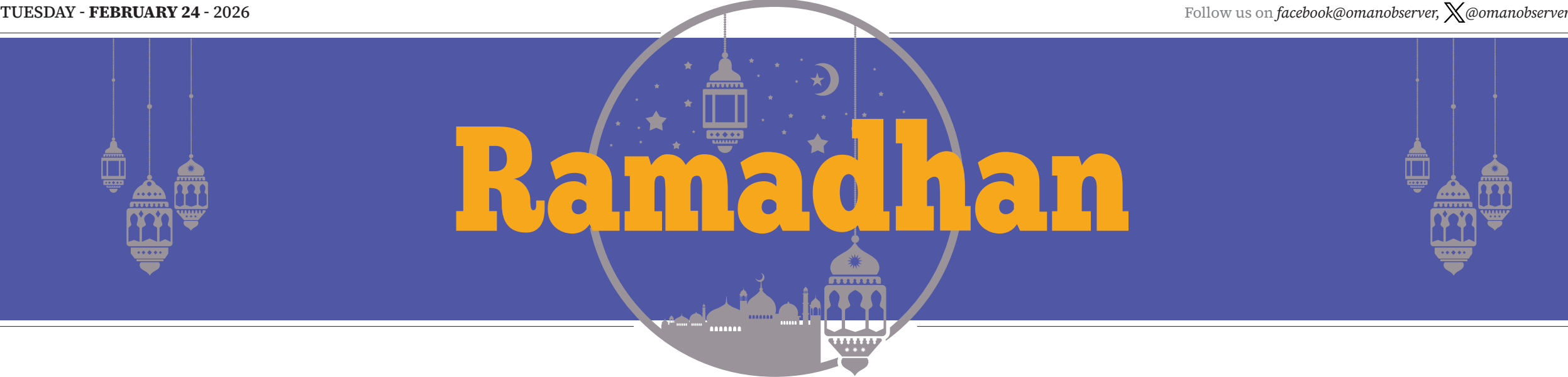


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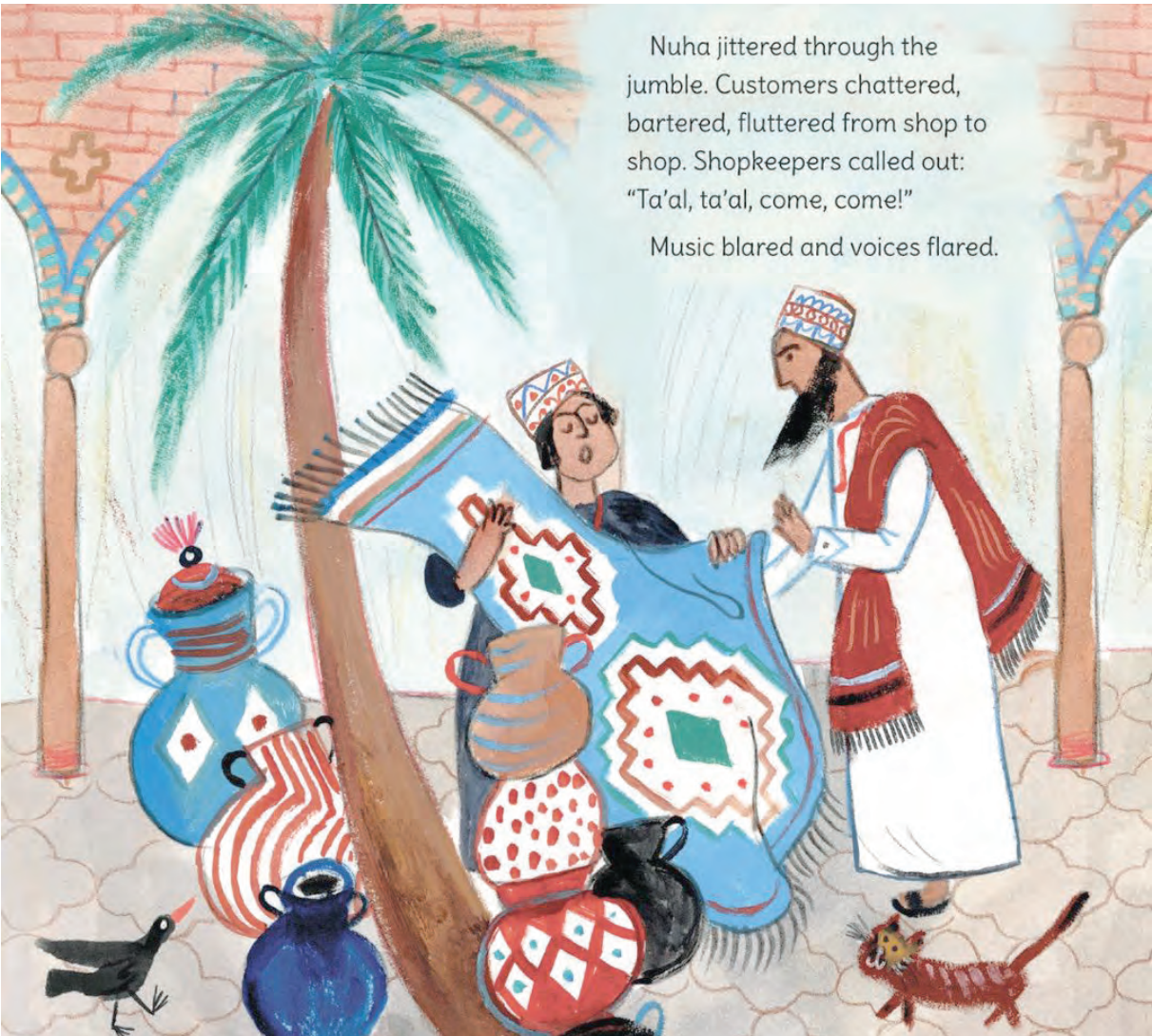
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# BOOK TOUCHES CROSS-CULTURAL FAMILIES



GEORGINA BENISON

**OMAN** provides rich pickings for the imagination of poets and authors. Quite a few literary publications in recent years have been set in Muscat, elsewhere in Oman or colonial Zanzibar.

But few works of fiction set in Oman have been written and published for the youngest of readers, especially pre-school children aged 3 to 5 years old. Nazneen Akbari has set her delightful 32-page picture book 'Home Away from Home' in Muttrah Souq and is one of the first internationally released picture books from Oman.

The story follows Nuha, an Omani-American girl visiting her grandmother in Muscat for the first time: "This summer, Nuha and Mama are travelling to Oman to visit her 'Jadda' (grandmother). Mama



NAZNEEN AKBARI  
Author of 'Home Away from Home'

*The picture book captures the emotions of children growing up between cultures*

is excited to visit home, but Nuha is already worried about spending the summer in Oman; it doesn't feel like home to her. The air is warm and sticky, people wear different clothes, and a language she barely understands swirls around her. At least she has her dearest doll, Mary, to keep her company."

When she realises she has left Mary behind, Nuha wonders how she can possibly feel at home in Oman now; the thought of staying there all summer feels impossible. "Oman is your home away from home," Mama said softly. "Your Jadda hasn't seen you in three years and she's excited to spend the summer with you. You'll have fun together."

When Jadda takes her to the market to look for a new doll, Nuha begins to realise that Oman is special in its own way, and even finds glimpses of home. As they walk through Muttrah Souq, Nuha experiences the wonderful sights, sounds, smells and tastes of Oman, and slowly begins to appreciate sharing

the beauty of Arabic culture with her grandmother.

The narrative centres on a child who navigates life between two homes, ultimately discovering that 'home' is shaped more by relationships than location alone. Through simple storytelling and evocative imagery it addresses themes for children such as reconnecting with faraway grandparents, cultural transition and rediscovering their identity. It considers the meaning of 'home' among children whose lives are spent in-between places, cultures and emotional worlds.

Nazneen is of Indian heritage, grew up in Oman, and has lived all over the world. By day she works, and by night she's dreaming up picture books with her husband and her children. 'Home Away from Home' is based partly on the author's own experience of moving from India to Oman as a child.

Rashin Kheiriyeh provided the magical mixed-media illustrations which bring the tale to life for parents

and children alike, offering an authentic and joyful portrayal of Omani life. Her brightly coloured folk-art inflections evoke the warmth of Oman and Nuha's family.

Iranian-born Rashin is an internationally acclaimed, award-winning illustrator, author, animation director and painter who has published more than 65 children's books around the world.

'Home Away From Home' has been awarded the US seal of the Junior Library Guild (JLG) Gold Standard. Published by Barefoot Books it can be bought online via [nazneenakbari.com](#). The last page provides further information about Oman, the historic Muttrah Souq and an Arabic glossary. The story will resonate particularly strongly during Ramadhan as it explores themes of family love, Muslim identity and cultural pride.

Nazneen will be conducting a workshop at the Muscat International Book Fair on March 28.

## FATWA

QUESTION & ANSWER

Shaikh  
Dr Kahlan  
Al Kharousi

Assistant Grand Mufti of the Sultanate of Oman

**QUESTION**

Does smelling perfume or incense nullify someone's fasting?

**ANSWER**

Merely, smelling fragrance does not break the fast, but intentionally inhaling incense smoke should be avoided, as it may affect the validity of the fast.

## QURAN

VERSE OF THE DAY

﴿قُلْ لَا يَسْتَوِي الْخَبِيثُ وَالطَّيِّبُ وَلَوْ أَعْجَبَكَ كَثْرَةُ الْخَبِيثِ فَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ يَا أُولِي الْأَلْبَابِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَفْلَحُونَ﴾

"Evil and good are not equal, even though the abundance of evil may fascinate you; so heed Allah (God), you prudent persons, so that you may prosper!"

[Surat Al Maidah]-Verse 100

## HADITH

A GUIDE FOR THE FAITHFUL

Sahl bin Sa'd (May Allah be pleased with him) reported:  
The Messenger of Allah (PBUH) said:

People will continue to adhere to good as long as they hasten to break the Saum (fasting).

[Al-Bukhari and Muslim].

# Ramadhan

G L I M P S E S   F R O M   T H E   W O R L D

# RAMADHAN IN NEPAL

KABEER YOUSUF

# RAMADHAN

is celebrated with great joy and devotion in Nepal

where the Muslim population is approximately five per cent which is around 1.5 million people.

Ramadhan is considered to be one of important religious observances celebrated by the Muslim community in Nepal, where Islam is the third-largest religion after Hindu and Buddhism.

Mosques are located in major cities in Nepal, and halal foods are available in hotels and restaurants in different parts of the country and the country has long been recognised for its tradition of religious tolerance and harmony.

“There is no significant difference between the ways Ramadhan is observed in Nepal and in Oman. We observe the fasting days along with our Muslim friend and join in their Iftar gatherings thus solidifying the true essence of brotherhood and bonhomie,” says Dornath Aryal, Ambassador of Nepal to the Sultanate of Oman.

He extended greetings and sincere wishes to all for good health, happiness, peace, progress, and prosperity on this auspicious occasion of the Holy Month of Ramadhan.

Seraj Mohammad, a Nepali national who is currently working in Suhar, said that in Nepal, before the commencement of Ramadhan, believers prepare themselves spiritually and physically.

For the Muslims in Nepal, the day begins with Suhoor (Sehri), a pre-dawn meal taken before the Fajr (morning) prayer. After Suhoor, Muslims perform the Fajr prayer either at the mosque or at home. They then observe a fast throughout the day, refraining from food and drink until sunset. The fast is broken at sunset with Iftar. It is customary in Nepal for Muslim families to bring a variety of dishes from their homes to the nearby mosque to share with others, strengthening bonds of solidarity and friendship.

After Iftar, the Maghrib prayer is



offered, and worshippers come back home. At around 1pm, the midday prayer is offered, followed by the Asr (afternoon) prayer at approximately 4pm and following the prayer, people begin the preparations for Iftar. As the day ends, special nightly prayers known as Taraweeh are held during Ramadhan, at around 8pm. In many mosques, 20 Rak'ahs of Taraweeh are performed.

Throughout the day, Muslims observe and complete the five obligatory daily prayers as an essential part of their faith during the holy month. This spiritual routine which continues for approximately one

month, ends with the sighting of the new moon, and the month concludes with the offering of Eid prayer, marking the celebration of Eid Al Fitr.

Ramadhan is also regarded as a sacred month of compassion, forgiveness and charity. Muslims seek forgiveness from Allah for their past mistakes, ask pardon from those they may have hurt, and extend generosity to the poor and needy through charitable giving (Zakat and Sadaqah). It is a time of self-reflection and discipline. Throughout the month, prayers are offered for peace, harmony, and well-being for families, communities and the world at large.

## RAMADHAN TWEETS

Translated from Arabic by Grok

From the alleyways of cities to the mountain villages, #Ramadan in #Oman is one soul and one heart 📍🌱

#Ramadan\_Kareem #OurRamadanIsCaptivating  
#SultanateofOman

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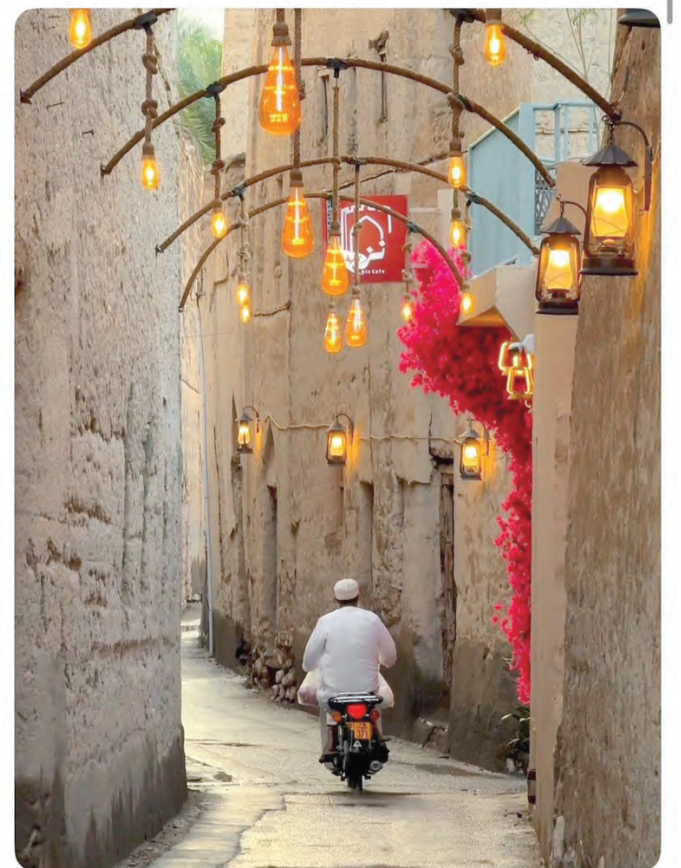


*Ramadhan vibrates with captivating beauty in Omani villages.*



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#رمضان\_کریم



*Ramadhan mubarak from the alleyways of Nizwa.*

# PROMINENT OMANI FIGURES

Who is he?  
Ahmad Ibn Majid

(Lion of the Seas) (825–906 AH / 1421–1500 CE) was a renowned navigator and scholar of maritime science. Trained first by his father, a sea captain, and later by other captains in Omani ports, he independently studied the stars, tracking their movements and understanding their role in maritime seasons.

# RAMADHAN

## TRADITION



*If you're in Iraq during Ramadhan, you'll likely encounter groups of men playing Mheibes. Believed to have origins in the Abbasid Caliphate (750-1258), the game sees one team hide a ring among its members while the other must try to work out who has it by reading their body language.*

MAKE SUHOOR  
A MUST FOR  
LASTING ENERGY

Suhoor, your meal before sunrise, is key to keeping your energy up all day. Choose a balanced meal with complex carbs, fibre, and protein. Eating whole grains, fruits, veggies, and lean proteins helps because they provide energy slowly, helping you stay energised and sharp. If you skip Suhoor, you might feel tired and dehydrated, which can make fasting tougher.

FEATURES



# AN OMANI DRAMA EXPLORES HUMAN STRUGGLES INTERTWINED WITH HERITAGE AND DESTINY

**THE** Sultanate of Oman Television, as part of its Ramadan 1447 AH / 2026 programming, presents the highly anticipated Omani drama series *Al Qaffir*, featuring an ensemble of Omani performers. The series is adapted from Zahran al Qasimi’s acclaimed novel *Taghribat al Qaffir* or *The Water Diviner*, which was awarded the International Prize for Arabic Fiction (IPAF) in 2023.

The narrative unfolds around the profound connection between humanity and water, delving into the daily realities of a traditional Omani village through the eyes of one man bound by destiny to pursue water’s hidden paths. The titular role of *Al Qaffir* — one who seeks water beneath the earth — embodies a vocation that transcends profession, representing an inherited bond with water from the moment of birth. This connection is tragically forged through the loss of his mother, who drowned in a village well while pregnant, and his father, who perished beneath the collapsed roof of an ancient falaj. The series masterfully evokes the memory of aflaj and their integral role in sustaining rural life, while weaving together the myths, legends, and oral traditions that have long surrounded these vital waterways.

Directed by Syrian filmmaker Tamer Marwan Ishaq, with associate directors Mukhlis al Saleh, Hussein al Baram, and Osama Mur’i, and executive direction by Nahla Dourobi and Ali Abdo, the production brings together seasoned talent and emerging performers making their television debut.

Samira al Wahaibi returns to the screen after an absence in the role of “Kadhiya,” aunt to Abdullah Jamil (father of Salim al Qaffir), portrayed by Mohammed bin Khamis al Maamari. The character of *Al Qaffir* is portrayed across two stages of life: child actor Firas al Rawahi embodies his early years, while Mohammed bin Saleh al Siyabi assumes the role in young adulthood. Abdulsalam al Tamimi delivers a compelling performance as Hamed, the village elder, while



The series is adapted from Zahran al Qasimi’s acclaimed novel *Taghribat al Qaffir* or *The Water Diviner*, which was awarded the International Prize for Arabic Fiction (IPAF) in 2023.

Zakaria al Zedjali portrays Zuhair, the elder’s nephew, whose machinations form the narrative’s central axis of conflict. The series deftly interweaves its primary storyline with intersecting human struggles, creating a rich tapestry of relationships and rivalries. In this context, director Tamer Marwan Ishaq elaborated on his creative vision: “Approaching this project from a directorial standpoint, and following a thorough engagement with the source novel, I reached an understanding with the author to introduce additional narrative threads, characters, and

conceptual elements necessary to expand the work into a 30-episode dramatic arc. Our paramount concern throughout this process was ensuring these augmentations served to amplify the novel’s essential truth without diminishing its core integrity. The original work is extraordinary and distinctive; one cannot overlook its innovative concept, its literary resonance both locally and throughout the Arab world, nor the singular stature it has attained in the realm of letters.” He continued: “As a director, I find myself utterly captivated by this novel. I make no secret of my wonder at its depiction of the Omani village and the visually rich intersections teeming with detail that it encompasses. My creative endeavour has been to achieve harmony between the dramatic adaptation, the foundational narrative, the characters who inhabit it, and the prevailing atmosphere. Through this process, I have discovered that life in the Omani village is inextricably woven into documented events and occurrences reaching far back into the depths of time.” Actor Samira al Wahaibi shared her reflections on this artistic homecoming: “My participation in this production marks my return following a hiatus spanning nearly two decades. — ONA

## MURALREIMAGINED

### ARTIST CREATES ‘LATIN AMERICAN MONA LISA’ WITH BOTTLE CAPS



Children look at a mural made with plastic bottle caps by Venezuelan artist Oscar Olivares on an apartment building in the Zacamil neighborhood in Mejicanos. The artwork, over 13 meters tall and made with more than 100,000 recycled plastic bottle caps, is regarded as the world’s tallest bottle-cap mural. — AFP

Call it a Renaissance in recycling, a bold new fusion of art, community and environmental awareness that is giving new life to discarded materials and transforming the ordinary into the extraordinary. Standing tall on the façade of a modest apartment building in a working-class neighbourhood just outside the capital of El Salvador, a gargantuan mural made entirely of plastic bottle caps now reimagines the world’s most famous portrait for a new era and a new region. This is not the *Mona Lisa* one would expect to see framed behind glass in the halls of the Louvre, but rather a vibrant, 13-metre-high reinterpretation of the iconic figure, crafted from more than 100,000 recycled bottle caps in shades bright enough to catch the eye from blocks away. The artwork occupies an entire side of a building in Zacamil, a neighbourhood in the Mejicanos suburb of San Salvador that has faced hardship and social challenges, including past gang control, a dynamic that has shifted in recent years following a controversial security crackdown led by President Nayib Bukele. The mastermind behind the installation is Venezuelan artist Oscar Olivares, whose creative vision took shape over three intense weeks of assembling thousands of coloured caps into this sweeping image. Drawing inspiration from Renaissance master Leonardo da Vinci, whose original *Mona Lisa* helped define the Italian Renaissance, Olivares also nodded to the pointillist techniques of French artist Paul Signac, using tiny individual elements to build up a broader, cohesive portrait. “I wanted to portray a Latin American *Mona Lisa*,” Olivares explained, describing his intention to reflect the spirit, features and culture of the region rather than simply replicate the European original. In this version, the subject has a sun kissed complexion and expressive eyes rendered through warm reds, oranges and yellows, while her jewellery, hair and dress evoke the grace and presence of a modern Latina woman. The bottle caps themselves were collected over several months by local residents, recyclers and volunteers, each washed and sorted before being woven into the mosaic like composition, an act of community participation that transformed everyday waste into something monumental and meaningful. Olivares’s work with plastic caps extends far beyond El Salvador. He has created similar large scale murals in Venezuela, Mexico, Saudi Arabia, France and Italy, repurposing more than two million plastic caps across more than two dozen installations worldwide. Through these projects, he hopes to encourage viewers to see plastic waste from a completely different perspective, not as disposable trash, but as a resource capable of creating beauty, conversation and cultural renewal. — AFP