

Observer



IN BRIEF

HM THANKED BY CHINESE PRESIDENT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has received a cable of thanks from President Xi Jinping of the People's Republic of China, in reply to His Majesty's greetings cable on the occasion of the Lunar New Year.

In his cable, President Xi Jinping expressed his utmost thanks for His Majesty's greetings, wishing His Majesty good health and success.

OMAN RANKS 8TH IN ENTREPRENEURSHIP



The Sultanate of Oman ranked eighth globally in the Global Entrepreneurship Index 2024 out of 56 countries, after recording a score of 5.7 compared to 5.4 in 2023. According to the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor report, the Sultanate of Oman ranked eighth in 13 main indicators, covering 9 axes of national entrepreneurship included in the report. **DETAILS ON P13**

AGREEMENT INKED FOR LNG DELIVERIES

Oman LNG announced the signing of a 10-year Sale and Purchase Agreement (SPA) with Mercuria, a leading Switzerland-based trading company. Under this agreement, Oman LNG will supply Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) to Mercuria on a Free on Board (FOB) basis, with deliveries (800,000 metric tonnes per annum) set to commence in April 2025.

The signing ceremony marks a significant milestone in Oman LNG's commitment to delivering reliable and sustainable energy to global markets. By securing this long-term partnership, Oman LNG reinforces its strategic role as a key supplier of LNG, contributing to the stability and diversification of global energy supplies. Mercuria, a globally recognised trading company, is active in a broad range of energy markets, including crude oil and refined petroleum products, natural gas, power, biodiesel, base metals, and agricultural products. DETAILS ON P13

Oman welcomes Saudi hosting Russia-US talks

THE SULTANATE OF OMAN has welcomed the statement issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on the Kingdom's hosting talks in Riyadh between the Russian Federation and the United States of America.

In a statement issued by the Foreign Ministry on Tuesday, Oman affirmed its support for those benign efforts aimed to promote dialogue and diplomacy to reach political solutions that achieve peace, security and stability.

Meanwhile, Russia and the United States said will name teams to negotiate a path to ending the war in Ukraine, the powers decided on Tuesday in discussions that drew a rebuke from Kyiv over its exclusion.

Washington noted European nations would have to have a seat at the negotiating table “at some point”, after the first high-level official Washington-Moscow talks since the 2022 war on Ukraine.

Some European leaders, alarmed by President Donald Trump's overhaul of US policy on Russia, fear Washington will make serious concessions to Moscow and re-write the continent's security arrangement in a Cold War-style deal.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky slammed his nation's exclusion from the Riyadh gathering, which lasted for more than four hours. He said that any talks aimed at ending the war should be "fair" and involve European countries, including Türkiye - which offered to host negotiations.



Saudi Arabia's Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan al Saud, National Security Adviser Mosaad bin Mohammad al Aiban, the Russian president's foreign policy adviser Yuri Ushakov, and Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov attend a meeting with the US Middle East envoy, Secretary of State, and National Security Adviser together at Riyadh's Diriyah Palace on Tuesday. — AFP

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov agreed to “appoint respective high-level teams to begin working on a path to ending the conflict in Ukraine as soon as possible”, the State Department said.

Washington added the sides had also agreed to “establish a consultation mechanism” to address “irritants” to Russia and America’s relationship, noting the sides would lay the groundwork for future cooperation. — **Agencies**

GAZA ARAB PLAN MAY INVOLVE \$20 BILLION REGIONAL CONTRIBUTION: SOURCES



Palestinians stand near a truck loaded with humanitarian aid in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip on Tuesday. — AFP

CAIRO: Egypt's President Abdel Fattah al Sisi is expected to travel to Riyadh on Thursday, two Egyptian security sources said, where he is due to discuss an Arab plan for Gaza that may include up to \$20 billion from the region for reconstruction.

Arab states are expected to discuss a post-war plan for Gaza to counter US President Donald Trump's proposal to redevelop the strip under US control and displace Palestinians, a prospect that has angered regional leaders.

Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, the United Arab Emirates and Qatar are set to review and discuss the Arab plan in Riyadh before it is presented at a scheduled Arab summit which

takes place in Cairo on March 4, four sources with knowledge of the matter said. On Friday, a gathering of Arab state leaders, including Jordan, Egypt, the UAE and Qatar, was expected in Saudi Arabia, which is spearheading Arab efforts on Trump's plan, although some sources said the date had not been confirmed yet. Arab states were dismayed by Trump's plan to "clean out" Palestinians from Gaza and resettle most of them in Jordan and Egypt, to create a Middle East Riviera. The idea was immediately rejected by Cairo and Amman and seen in most of the region as deeply destabilising.

The Arab proposal, mostly based on an Egyptian plan, involves forming a national Palestinian committee to govern Gaza and international participation in reconstruction without displacing Palestinians abroad. — **Reuters**

Oman ranks among world's top 29 winter sun destinations

LONDON: British paper 'The Sunday Times' has placed the Sultanate of Oman among the 29 Winter Sun Destinations in 2025. The classification stems from a number of factors, including Oman's moderate winter temperatures averaging 23 degrees Celsius, in addition to the country's diverse natural beauty, ancient history and Arab hospitality. The newspaper commended the unique features that make the Sultanate of Oman an ideal destination for visitors who wish to enjoy warm sunshine during winter. It also highlighted the diverse tourist activities offered by the Sultanate of Oman.

Giving examples, the paper said that adventure enthusiasts can explore the Musandam Governorate, famous for its towering hills overlooking pristine bays of clear waters. It added that tourists can go on diving trips or experience the riding of camels over sand dunes in Rimal Al Sharqiya or enjoy camping in desert sands in an environment that reflects the authentic Omani culture.

The newspaper also highlighted the exotic beauty of the Wilayat of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, considered a haven for those seeking tranquility and relaxation. It added that the Wilayat



An ideal destination for visitors who wish to enjoy warm sunshine during winter.

of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar boasts a set of picturesque valleys, stunning mountain views and refreshing cool air – in stark contrast to the hot atmosphere in surrounding areas.

The paper added that, in Muscat, visitors can explore Oman's cultural heritage by visiting mosques, traditional markets known for the scent of frankincense or enjoying the view of the capital city's long coastline featuring a set of luxurious resorts, including the Shangri-La Resort that stands out for its world-class services and panoramic views over the waters of the Sea of Oman.

The newspaper stressed that Oman constitutes an exceptional

destination that combines adventure, history and recreation under the winter sun. It pointed out that Oman offers a comprehensive tourism experience that combines discovering the picturesque landscapes of the Arabian Peninsula and learning about the ancient Omani traditions, thus emerging as an unforgettable destination for travellers looking for warm winter and beautiful nature. 'The Sunday Times' classification enhances the position of the Sultanate of Oman on the world tourism map. It reaffirms Oman's attractiveness as a preferred destination for tourists from all over the world. — ONA

OMAN



ROYAL OFFICE
MINISTER RECEIVES
SOMALI AMBASSADOR

MUSCAT: Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office received in his office on Tuesday Bashir Hassan Hagi, Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Somalia to the Sultanate of Oman. The meeting touched on the bilateral relation and means of enhancing joint cooperation in all areas to meet the aspirations of the two countries. — ONA

Session looks at economic empowerment of women

REPRESENTED by the Ministry of Social Development, the Sultanate of Oman on Tuesday participated via video conferencing in the 44th session of the Arab Women's Committee at the Arab League.

Oman's delegation was headed by Dr Laila bint Ahmed al Najjar, Minister of Social Development.

The meeting made a follow-up of the Arab Women's Development Agenda (2023-2028) and the Agenda of Women, Security and Peace, as well as the economic and social empowerment of women in the Arab region.

The meeting also looked into cooperation with international and regional bodies, in



Oman's delegation was headed by Dr Laila bint Ahmed al Najjar, Minister of Social Development. — ONA

addition to bilateral cooperation in the field of women's empowerment.

Reading out Oman's speech, Dr Laila said that, during its presidency of

the 43rd session of the Arab Women's Committee, Oman focussed on enhancing institutional integration towards the launch and implementation of initiatives and programmes that consolidate the role of women in the field of innovation, based on the "Declaration of Muscat as the capital of Arab women 2024".

Yesterday (February 17, 2025), Oman participated via video conferencing in the Arab preparatory meeting for the 69th session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW). During the meeting, Oman affirmed its commitment to the provisions of agreements on human rights, including provisions on dignity for all human beings and provisions on women's right to a safe life. — ONA

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From 12th February to 12th April 2025

*Images are for illustrative purpose only and may differ from the actual product

Inspector General holds meetings in Iran



TEHRAN: Lt Gen Hasan bin Mohsin al Shraiqi, Inspector General of Police and Customs, held several bilateral meetings with Iranian officials during his official visit to the Islamic Republic of Iran. During the meetings, they discussed enhancing cooperation in security and police fields, as well as exchanging views on various topics of mutual interest. — ONA

Plan to combat human trafficking discussed



MUSCAT: The National Committee to Combat Human Trafficking on Tuesday held its regular meeting under the chairmanship of Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthy, Under-Secretary of the Foreign Ministry for Political Affairs.

During the meeting, the outcomes of the Committee's delegation's visit to the Kingdom of Bahrain were discussed, as well as developments in the implementation of the National Action Plan to Combat Human Trafficking in the Sultanate of Oman (2024-2026) and the extent of achievement and observations thereon were reviewed.

In addition, the member bodies reviewed their efforts and activities in order to devote awareness on the importance of combating the crime of human trafficking. — ONA

RNO chief receives Saudi delegation



MUSCAT: Rear Admiral Saif bin Nasser al Rahbi, Commander of the Royal Navy of Oman received in his office at Muaskar Al Murtafaa on Tuesday Rear Admiral Abdullah Mohammed al Zahrani, Head of the Saudi delegation in the bilateral talks between the Royal Navy of Oman and the Royal Saudi Naval Forces.

During the meeting, the two sides exchanged views and discussed a range of issues of common interest, particularly in the maritime areas and means of promoting them. — ONA

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SHORT TAKES



Dr S Jaishankar and Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, unveils 'Mandvi to Muscat: Indian Community and the Shared History of India and Oman'

Book chronicling Oman-India people relations launched

MUSCAT: The book titled ‘Mandvi to Muscat: Indian Community and the Shared History of India and Oman’ was officially launched on Sunday by Dr S Jaishankar, External Affairs Minister of India and Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister. The book brought out by the Embassy of India in Muscat, highlights the deep-rooted history of the Indian diaspora in Oman and the centuries-old people-to-people ties that have shaped the bilateral relationship.

The book is the culmination of the eight-month-long lecture series organised by the Embassy of India from October 2023 to May 2024. The series, inaugurated by V Muraleedharan, then Minister of State for External Affairs of India, in October 2023, focused on revitalising awareness about the contributions of the Indian community in strengthening India-Oman ties. Scholars, historians and anthropologists from India, Oman, US and UAE contributed to the series, while members of historical Indian families in Oman shared personal family narratives. The book combines both academic perspectives and family histories narrated by members of these families, offering a valuable resource for understanding the cultural and historical contributions of the Indian community to Oman’s society.

Pact inked to fund construction of camel racetrack in Duqm



DUQM: The Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD) on Tuesday signed a cooperation agreement with Vulcan Green Steel, a subsidiary of Jindal Shaded Iron and Steel Group to fund the construction of a camel racetrack in the Wilayat of Al Duqm on an area of 4.8 million square metres and a length of 6 km at an estimated cost of RO 350,000. The agreement was signed by Ahmed bin Ali Akaak, CEO of SEZAD and Yousef bin Sulaiman al Raisi, General Manager of Vulcan Green Steel.

Ali Akaak said that the construction of the camel racetrack field in Al Duqm comes within the framework of SEZAD’s efforts aimed to enhance the services provided to local communities and promote social investment. — ONA

OVERCAST SKIES AND ISOLATED RAINS LIKELY

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

Scattered rains fell over the governorates of Al Buraimi, Al Dhahirah, Al Batinah North, Al Batinah South and Al Dakhiliyah as part of the impact of a weak trough over Oman.

“The weather will continue to be this way until Friday, but it is only isolated rains. The fog will also continue in Dhofar and Al Wusta, but this has been a regular feature in the month of February and people are used to it,” said the weather expert at the Oman Directorate General of Meteorology.

There are also chances of fog formation/low clouds over parts of Al

Buraimi, Al Dhahirah, and Al Sharqiyah South and parts areas adjoining Sea of Oman.

“Clouds are expected to flow over the northern governorates of the Sultanate of Oman, with chances of scattered rain continuing in the coming hours,” stated the Directorate General of Meteorology on Tuesday. Chances of fog and low clouds forming and sometimes reduced horizontal visibility could be experienced in Dhofar, Al Wusta, and Al Sharqiyah South and parts of the coasts of the Sea of Oman during late night and morning. The weather pattern is expected to continue until Friday.

“The weather has been great with gentle rain,” said a citizen in Suhar on

Tuesday.

The temperature has been warm lately, but after Friday there could be a slight dip.

“It could go down at least 2 degrees Celsius,” said the weather forecaster. On Tuesday, many places in the northern governorates of Oman enjoyed gentle rain. Meanwhile, the Directorate General of Meteorology has also alerted on dust rising over desert and open areas. Over most of the governorates, wind is expected to be southerly to southeasterly, light to moderate, occasionally fresh over desert and open areas and northerly to northeasterly over the Sea of Oman and occasionally fresh over western coasts of Musandam.

SPF highlights benefits for Omanis working in GCC

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, FEB 18

In a move aimed at enhancing social security for Omani citizens working in the GCC countries, the Social Protection Fund has reiterated that their contributions enhance their job security and guarantee them a stable standard of living regardless of their work conditions or change in their place of residence.

In an interview with the Observer, Abdullah bin Ibrahim al Houti, a subscription specialist at the Social Protection Fund, stated, “The purpose of this system is to ensure the provision of insurance protection for Omani citizens working in the GCC countries. This allows them to benefit from old age, disability and death insurance, as well as maintain their retirement benefits even while working outside the Sultanate of Oman. The system represents social security that enhances their financial stability and provides them with job security.” When asked how the system contributes to enhancing social security, Al Houti explained, “The system provides a social safety net for Omani citizens abroad, guaranteeing them and



Omani citizens working in the GCC countries receive the same level of insurance protection as if they were working inside the Sultanate of Oman, including insurance for retirement age, disability and death. These benefits guarantee their retirement

Abdullah bin Ibrahim al Houti

their families financial stability in the event of retirement, disability, or death. This directly contributes to enhancing their sense of job security and guarantees them a stable standard of living regardless of their work conditions or change in their place of residence.” Regarding the target groups for this system and the specific conditions that must be met to register an Omani worker, Al Houti affirmed, “The system includes all Omani citizens working in GCC countries, whether in the civil, private, or military sectors.”

“The process begins with registering the employer first according to the procedures approved in the country of the workplace. This is followed by registering the Omani employee by following the procedures in that country and submitting the required documents to the Social Protection Fund in the Sultanate of Oman.” Regarding the registration mechanism, whether it is automatic when working in a Gulf country or if the citizen must take certain steps, Al Houti said, “Registration is not automatic.

The employee and the employer must take actual steps to register and submit the registration request with the required documents to the relevant authorities in the country of the workplace. The documents

include the unified form approved by the retirement authority in the country of the workplace. The requirements of the employment contract should include a valid copy of the personal ID card and a certified statement of salary progression from the date of joining the job.”

Regarding the benefits Omanis registered in this system receive compared to workers inside Oman, Al Houti said, “Omani citizens working in the GCC countries receive the same level of insurance protection as if they were working inside the Sultanate of Oman, including insurance for retirement age, disability and death. These benefits guarantee their retirement and social rights equally with their colleagues working inside the country.”

“Contributions are based on the wage subject to subscription, where the contribution rate is 18.5 per cent of the registered wage, distributed as 7.5 per cent paid by the insured and 11 percent paid by the employer. If the employer’s contribution in the country of work is less than the required rate, the insured bears the difference.” On future plans, Al Houti said, “We are constantly working to improve the system’s mechanisms through civil retirement funds and social insurance institutions in the GCC countries.”

Oman participates in ‘Trade for Peace Week’

GENEVA: The Sultanate of Oman participated in the high-level opening session of the Trade for Peace Week in Geneva under the theme “Building Resilience through Trade: Private Sector Engagement for Sustainable Peace.”

Idris bin Abdul Rahman al Khanjari, Permanent Representative of the Sultanate of Oman to the United Nations Office and other international organisations in Geneva delivered a statement reviewing Oman’s experience in how trade can serve as a tool for economic development, regional stability



and long-term peace.

He said that Oman stands as a significant example of how trade can foster stability, diversify economies, and open doors to sustainable progress. Oman’s approach to economic

development has long been rooted in a strong understanding of the importance of trade.

He added that Oman has entered a new phase of development formalised in Oman Vision 2040. This vision, he said, represents a significant milestone in the country’s comprehensive national development. Among its goals are economic development, social justice, and environmental protection. A key focus is continually renewing capabilities to cope with market dynamics and future expectations.

He pointed out that according to Oman Vision 2040, it is crucial to ensure effective economic leadership with clear mandates, established authority, and a swift response to development needs.

He further said that Oman has used trade as both a tool and vehicle for development, achieving a level of stability and prosperity. He pointed out that Oman’s leadership implemented strategies to diversify the economy, with significant investments in infrastructure, tourism, logistics, manufacturing and agriculture.

— ONA

Madayan highlights investment avenues in thriving food sector

DUBAI: The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates “Madayn” organised an event highlighting the ‘Investment Opportunities and Key Enablers in Oman’s Thriving Food Sector’ on the sidelines of its participation in Gulfood 2025 in Dubai, United Arab Emirates. The event attracted a significant gathering of CEOs, investors and industry leaders from the global food sector, providing a platform for insightful discussions and

networking opportunities.

As part of the event, Madayn signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Agro Solution Korea Company Ltd from South Korea to establish a specialised food industry project in the Sultanate of Oman. The project focuses on developing smart farms for Korean fruit production and launching a farm-based café. Concluding the event, Madayn honoured leading Omani companies



The event included a discussion session featuring both Omani and international experts. — ONA

and factories in the food sector in recognition of their role in driving growth, excellence and innovation.

Speaking at the event, Eng Dawood bin Salim al Hadabi, CEO of Madayn, said, “This gathering presents a gateway to enhance connections with existing partners while showcasing the investment incentives and services we offer to potential investors, as well as spotlighting the high-quality products and

remarkable capabilities of Omani businesses participating in Gulfood 2025.” Al Hadabi added, “The food manufacturing sector is a cornerstone of economic growth and an essential part of daily life. To support its sustainability and growth, we have dedicated well-equipped spaces within our industrial cities as we continue to introduce strategic initiatives that encourage innovation and expansion.” — ONA

SPOTLIGHT

“Medical check up is not necessary for healthy people but chronically ill people and pregnant women must consult a doctor. This is to check whether these people can fast or not.”

DR SANJAY DALAL

FIT FOR FASTING? CHECK YOUR VITALS

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabiyousef

WHILE MEDICAL examination is not required for a healthy individual to fast during the holy month of Ramadhan, a comprehensive check up is essential for those who suffer from chronic diseases, depend on dialysis, and other illnesses that require medical attention on a regular basis, according to doctors.

“Medical check up is not necessary for healthy people but chronically ill people and pregnant women must consult a doctor. This is to check whether these people can fast or not,” says Dr Sanjay Dalal.

Dr Anil Devaraj, an internal medicine specialist, suggests that it is advisable for people with diabetes to undergo a medical check-up before Ramadhan, especially for those with frequent fluctuations in their blood sugar levels.

If one is suffering from a chronic illness, a comprehensive medical examination is necessary before Ramadhan

“This allows the doctor to assess how medications, including insulin, are working, enabling them to recommend adjustments to dosages, medication timing, and necessary precautions during fasting and after breaking the fast. Basic tests, including blood sugar levels, cholesterol, and liver and kidney function, will help the doctor provide tailored advice on precautions to take,” he added.

“One should consult a doctor at least a week before the beginning of the holy month or a few days before fasting,” says another doctor.

Accordingly, this is more applicable to those who work longer hours outdoors exposing themselves to the sun as they are prone to dehydration and fatigue due to abstaining from food and water.

Doing certain physical and mental preparations well before the beginning of the holy month will help one follow the rituals of the month in full.

This starts with checking his/her sugar level, blood pressure, creatine, to help oneself prepare the body and mind for Ramadhan.

“Pre-medical test is important for those who are on medication for renal failure, diabetes, BP, or other chronic diseases, especially those who are on insulin before they begin to fast. They tend to get hypoglycaemia during the day as they don’t take food or medication. They need to ensure their vitals before fasting.

Mini Padikkal, a clinical nutritionist, says, “Such tests are advised for those who have chronic diseases if he or she is planning to observe Ramadhan fasting. Such people should get going with both pre and post Ramadhan checkup packages.”

One shouldn’t hesitate to consult a medical expert before Ramadhan fasting if s/he is unsure whether the body will be able to take the stress of fasting for one month. Health experts can guide such medical patients about the feasibility of their body being able to undergo stress or not.

According to the Ministry of Health (MoH), represented by the Department of Non-Communicable Diseases Control Section, the management of diabetes in Ramadhan is of prime importance with a focus on the risk for patients with diabetes and to assess their ability to fast.



SHORT TAKES



Exhibition titled 'Bracelet' reflected the young artists' creative talents.

100 student artworks showcase creativity in Al Dakhiliyah

NIZWA: The Directorate-General of Education in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate organised an art exhibition titled 'Bracelet', featuring over 100 diverse artworks by female students from schools across the governorate.

The exhibition displayed works in drawing, photography and artistic formation, reflecting the young artists' creative talents. Khalid bin Saif al Subaihi, Head of the Educational Activities Department at the Ministry of Education in Al Dakhiliyah, emphasised that the exhibition aims to nurture students' artistic abilities and encourage them to further develop their talents.

He noted that this event builds on the success of last year's Student Schools Exhibition. — ONA

Thamrait hosts 25th annual Camel Racing Festival

THAMRAIT: In Dhofar Governorate, the Wilayat of Thamrait launched its 25th Annual Camel Racing Festival. Organised by the Wali of Thamrait Office, the festival, which runs from February 16 to 22, features a variety of competitions, including: Milking Competition (February 16–18), Camel Beauty Contest (February 19–21), Competitive Racing Events (February 19–20), Open Shooting Competition (February 20–22 at Halouf and Masheela Field).

Ahmed bin Hamad al Maawali, Wali of Thamrait, said it attracts significant participation from camel owners across the governorates. The event also includes a large-scale shooting competition, featuring over a thousand participants.

LAWYERS FORUM TO COMMENCE ON FEB 20

KABEER YOUSUF @kabiyousef

The Seventh Lawyers Forum will commence on February 20, featuring an international conference on the sidelines of the forum titled: “The Role of National Legislation in Encouraging Foreign Investments”.

The event will be held under the auspices of Khalifa bin Said al Busaidy, President of the Supreme Court, and will be attended by the President of the International Union of Lawyers, the

President of the Arab Lawyers Union, and several esteemed guests from various Arab countries. Lawyers from around the world will also participate in this event.

Dr Hamad al Rubaie, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Oman Lawyers Association, mentioned that the conference will consist of two working sessions. These sessions will cover various topics presented by lawyers and legal experts, such as the significance of laws in attracting foreign investments, the influence of legislative system

development on foreign investments, the role of the National Programme for the Development of the Private Sector and Foreign Trade in enhancing international competitiveness indicators, investment opportunities in special economic zones and free zones, and the alignment between banking law and Oman Vision 2040.

The Oman Lawyers Association (OLA), established on March 17, 2007, recently became a member of the Arab Lawyers Union during the Arab Lawyers Union congress in Bahrain.

MoE gears up to launch Chinese in 4 govt schools

STAFF REPORTER MUSCAT, FEB 18

THE Ministry of Education organised, over the past two days, an introductory meeting on the Chinese language. The meeting targeted students and their parents in schools that will implement the teaching of the Chinese language for the academic year 2025-2026, in the governorates of Muscat and Al Dakhiliyah.

The meeting included two presentations, the first entitled: “Teaching Chinese Language: A New Window to the Future in the Schools of the Sultanate of Oman” presented by specialists from the Foreign Languages Curricula Department at the Ministry. The presentation included an introduction to the Chinese language, and a cooperation plan with the International Exchange Center for Language Education of the Ministry of Education of China to teach Chinese language optionally in Sayyid Sultan bin Ahmed School (11-12) for Boys; Juwayriya bint Abi Sufyan School (9-12) for Girls in Al



The project to start in Sayyid Sultan bin Ahmed School (11-12) for Boys; Juwayriya bint Abi Sufyan School (9-12) for Girls in Al Amerat; Hay Al Turath School (9-12) for Boys; and Al Shatha bint Jaber School for Basic Education (9-12) for Girls in Nizwa.

Amerat; Hay Al Turath School (9-12) for Boys; and Al Shatha bint Jaber School for Basic Education (9-12) for Girls in Nizwa. The presentation also addressed the inclusion of Chinese language in the 2025-2026 curriculum, and its introductory programme targeting directors and vocational guidance specialists in the schools where it will be implemented, and a draft decision to form the main committee, and the working

teams to select and harmonise Chinese language curricula and follow up on its teaching. The second presentation was given by Julie Lee, a Chinese language teacher at the American School in Muscat Governorate. The presentation included a practical lesson in the Chinese language for non-native speakers.

On teaching the Chinese language, Abdullah al Balushi, Senior French Language

Curriculum Specialist at the Foreign Languages Department, said: “The ministry provides a unique experience in learning the Chinese language for students wishing to study it, as the programme will be applied to grades 11 and 12 students optionally, and the subject will be taught by specialists in teaching the Chinese language to non-native speakers, who speak English besides the Chinese language; in addition to providing a simplified curriculum in line with the Omani cultural context; to achieve the goals set by the ministry on the one hand, and the approved linguistic framework for the levels in the Chinese language on the other hand. The ministry will also provide educational tools, curriculum enhancement and enrichment learning resources that support the curriculum, including printed and electronic materials.

“The Chinese language is currently being taught in a number of private schools in the Sultanate of Oman, and students' results and academic achievement are high.”

Omani Crafts Exhibition opens in Muscat

MUSCAT: The Omani Crafts Exhibition, themed ‘Authenticity and Modernity’, was inaugurated in Muscat under the auspices of Shaikh Rashid bin Ahmed al Shamsi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Social Development, in the presence of dignitaries and officials from various government entities.

Organised by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, the exhibition, which runs until February 22, highlights Oman's deep-rooted



The exhibition showcases traditional crafts alongside contemporary innovations.

craftsmanship, showcasing traditional crafts alongside contemporary innovations.

The exhibition is divided into two pavilions: The Authenticity Pavilion, which features three distinct sections: a display of collectibles and discoveries from Omani craft heritage, a governorates corner representing traditional crafts across the country, and a photographic exhibition portraying the essence of Omani craftsmanship. — ONA

Driver gets jail for death of 4 people

MUSCAT: In a recent ruling by a court in Liwa, Mohammed Faras, an Indian, has been convicted for reckless driving on May 28 last year that resulted in the deaths of four individuals and injuries to 15 others.

The truck, driving in the opposite direction of the road, collided with 11 vehicles. Faras was found guilty of two offenses: speeding in a dangerous manner that endangered lives and property, and intentionally driving against the direction of traffic on a divided road.



Ministry of Health

Announcement

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

Tender Ref:	Description	Last Date for Collection of Bidding Document	Bid Submission Closing Date on / Before 10:00 am Tuesday	Eligibility	Tender Fee (Non-Refundable)
1/2025	Renting Area for Coffee Shop at Nizwa Hospital	02/March/2025	25/March/2025	Specialized Companies	R.O 25.000 Per set

- Bidding Documents can be purchased from the Financial Affairs Dept Between 8.00 A.M and 12.00 P.M on working days, on payment of Tender Fee mentioned above.
- Ministry is not bound to accept the lowest tender and reserves the right to accepts or reject any Bidding.
- For any Clarification, you may contact via Telephone: 25211016 , 25211926

WORLD

SHORT TAKES



A displaced Sudanese woman kneels to pray near the town of Tawila in North Darfur. — AFP

OVER 200 PEOPLE KILLED IN SUDAN FRESH ASSAULT

PORT SUDAN: Sudanese paramilitaries have killed more than 200 people, including women and children, in a three-day assault on villages in the country’s south, a lawyer group monitoring the war said on Tuesday. The Emergency Lawyers group, which documents rights abuses, said the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces attacked unarmed civilians in the villages of Al Kadaris and Al Khelwat, in White Nile state.

The RSF carried out “executions, kidnappings, enforced disappearances and property looting” during the assault since Saturday, which also left hundreds wounded or missing, it said. The lawyer group said some residents were shot at while attempting to flee across the Nile River. Some drowned in the process, with the lawyers calling the attack an act of “genocide”.

Sudan’s army-aligned foreign ministry said the death toll from the RSF attacks so far was 433 civilians, including babies. It called the assault a “horrible massacre”. The war has killed tens of thousands, displaced over 12 million and created what the International Rescue Committee has called the “biggest humanitarian crisis ever recorded”. — AFP

UN CONDEMNS SUMMARY EXECUTIONS OF CHILDREN IN CONGO



A group of street children share food given to them by a local resident, in Goma. — AFP

GENEVA: The M23 armed group has summarily executed children in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, the United Nations said on Tuesday. The UN rights office warned the situation in eastern DRC was “deteriorating sharply, resulting in serious human rights violations and abuses”. “Our office has confirmed cases of summary execution of children by M23 after they entered the city of Bukavu last week,” rights office spokeswoman Ravina Shamdasani told reporters in Geneva. “We are also aware that children were in possession of weapons,” she said. She urged “Rwanda and M23 to ensure that human rights and international humanitarian law are respected”.

M23 fighters and Rwandan soldiers have seized Goma and Bukavu, the capitals of North and South Kivu provinces respectively. In South Kivu, more than 150,000 people have been forced to flee, UN refugee agency UNHCR said. UN experts say Rwanda effectively controls M23 and has at least 4,000 troops fighting alongside it. The DRC government accuses Rwanda of “expansionist ambitions” and says it is stealing vast amounts of minerals. — AFP

RUSSIA THREAT

Denmark to announce rearmament plans



Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen said her government would announce plans for a “massive” rearming of Denmark’s military due to the growing threat posed by Russia. “We must upgrade massively to protect Denmark. And we must rearm massively to avoid war,” Frederiksen told parliament on Tuesday. According to Danish public broadcaster DR, the government is expected to announce the creation of a 50-billion-kroner fund for additional defence spending in 2025-2026. — AFP

UN NUCLEAR CHIEF TO VIEW CONTAMINATED FUKUSHIMA SOIL TODAY

TOKYO: The UN nuclear watchdog chief will visit storage facilities for vast quantities of soil contaminated in the 2011 Fukushima disaster for the first time this week. Rafael Grossi, head of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), will tour the plant on Wednesday. He will also be shown some of the 13 million cubic metres of soil and 300,000 cubic metres of ash from incinerated organic material. For comparison, the capacity of the Tokyo Dome arena, where pop

superstar Taylor Swift performed last year, is 1.24 million cubic metres.

Japan plans to recycle roughly 75 per cent of the removed soil. If this material is confirmed safe, authorities want to use it for building road and railway embankments among other projects. The remaining soil will be disposed of outside the Fukushima region ahead of a 2045 deadline. The central government has said it intends to confirm the disposal site

this year, with Fukushima’s regional governor reportedly urging it to come up with a plan quickly. The IAEA published its final report on the recycling and disposal of the soil in September, saying that Japan’s approach was consistent with UN safety standards.

The plant on Japan’s northeast coast was hit by a tsunami in March 2011 that killed 18,000 people. Although almost all areas of the Fukushima region have gradually been declared safe. — AFP

Palestinians to decide Gaza future, says Qatar

QATAR, a key mediator in the Gaza conflict, said on Tuesday that Palestinians — not outsiders — must decide the territory’s future after the Israel-Hamas war. Foreign ministry spokesman Majed al Ansari told a Doha news conference that the issue was “a Palestinian question”, after Israel insisted on removing Hamas and the United States proposed taking over the territory.

“From our perspective, this is a Palestinian question on what happens post this conflict,” said Ansari when asked about Israel’s stated objective to eliminate Hamas. “It is a Palestinian question on who represents the Palestinians in an official capacity and also the political groups and parties in the political sphere,” he said.

Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Saar said earlier on Tuesday that negotiations for the next phase of the Gaza ceasefire, which Qatar helped broker, would begin this week.

The second phase of the truce is meant to facilitate the release of all remaining hostages seized during October 7, 2023 attack that sparked the war, and lead to a permanent end to the fighting. Saar said Israel demanded the “complete demilitarisation of Gaza” and would “not accept the continued presence of Hamas or any other groups” in the territory, ruled by Hamas since 2007.

US President Donald Trump has proposed a takeover of the Gaza Strip, under which its 2.4 million inhabitants would be moved to



Palestinians camp amid the ruins of their houses in Jabalia in the northern Gaza Strip. — AFP

From our perspective, this is a Palestinian question on what happens post this conflict. It is a Palestinian question on who represents the Palestinians in an official capacity and also the political groups and parties in the political sphere.

MAJED AL ANSARI

Egypt or Jordan. The plan has drawn widespread condemnation, with Arab states preparing a response. Trump’s proposal has added strains to the fragile Gaza ceasefire, which has largely halted the violence since it took effect on January 19, after more than 15 months of war.

The ongoing first phase of the truce, which is set to expire on March 1, has so far seen the release of 19 Israeli hostages in exchange for more than 1,100 Palestinians in Israeli custody. More hostage-prisoner exchanges are expected before the end of the first phase, which has also allowed humanitarian aid into besieged Gaza. Ansari, the Qatari spokesman, said that “the aid enters the Gaza Strip today is insufficient”. “Using humanitarian aid as a bargaining chip in negotiations is a crime in and of itself.”

Efforts were underway to secure the release this week of all remaining living hostages eligible to be freed from Gaza under the first phase of the Israel-Hamas ceasefire deal, an Israeli official source said on Tuesday.

A Palestinian source close to the negotiations said that “a proposal was presented by the mediators in recent days” for Gaza militants “to deliver the bodies of several Israeli prisoners before Friday, and to increase the number” of living captives to be released during the seventh hostage-prisoner swap on Saturday.

“The mediators are continuing their efforts as they aim for this step to create a positive atmosphere, insisting on the continuation of the ceasefire and the implementation of the agreement,” the Palestinian source added. — AFP

ISRAEL KEEPS FIVE POSITIONS IN LEBANON

KFAR KILA: Israeli troops withdrew from all but five points in south Lebanon on Tuesday, allowing displaced residents to return to border villages largely destroyed in more than a year of hostilities. Lebanon said any Israeli presence on its soil constituted “occupation”, warning it would ask the UN Security Council to push Israel to leave and that its armed forces were ready to assume duties on the border.

Unable to reach homes because of the destruction, residents returned on foot. Israel had announced before the pullout deadline that it would keep troops in “five strategic points” near the border. — AFP



EFFICIENCY MISSION

Vietnam approves plan for leaner govt



Vietnam’s National Assembly approved a bold reform plan that will slash up to a fifth of government bodies, as the country tries to improve administrative efficiency. The number of government ministries will be reduced to 14, to be up and running from March 1. The assembly passed an amendment to a law on organising government, paving the way for approval of the planned cull of 15% to 20% of the state apparatus. — Reuters

DAINGEROUS INCIDENT

Philippine slams helicopter manoeuvres



The Philippine Coast Guard condemned “dangerous” manoeuvres by a Chinese Navy helicopter that it said flew within three metres of a surveillance flight carrying a group of journalists over the contested Scarborough Shoal. The People’s Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) helicopter had been “as close as three metres” to the fisheries bureau’s Cessna, the coast guard said. “This reckless action posed a serious risk to the safety of the pilots and passengers.” — AFP

SHORT TAKES



South Korea President Yoon Suk Yeol attends a hearing of his impeachment trial at the Constitutional Court in Seoul. — AFP

SOUTH KOREA'S PARLIAMENT PRESSES FOR YOON'S REMOVAL

SEOUL: South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol could try to impose martial law again or undermine constitutional institutions should he be reinstated, lawyers for parliament argued on Tuesday as his impeachment trial entered its final phase. After weeks of testimony by high-ranking current and former officials, including some facing criminal charges for their role in the brief imposition of martial law on December 3, lawyers for both sides summarised their arguments and evidence at the Constitutional Court.

The Constitutional Court is due to hold another hearing to question three more witnesses on Thursday, including the impeached prime minister and the former police chief. The court is reviewing parliament's impeachment of Yoon on December 14 and will decide whether to remove him from office permanently or reinstate him. If he is removed, a new presidential election must be held within 60 days. Prosecutors have also indicted Yoon on separate criminal charges of leading an insurrection. — Reuters

VATICAN CANCELS POPE'S EVENTS



Pope Francis, who is spending his fifth day in hospital for what doctors described as a "complex" respiratory infection, will not take part in this weekend's Holy Year events, the Vatican said on Tuesday. All public events on the pope's calendar were cancelled through Sunday, the Vatican said in a brief statement. Vatican spokesman Matteo Bruni said Francis had slept peacefully overnight and had eaten breakfast. — Reuters

CROATIA PRESIDENT CALLS FOR CAUTION AMID GEOPOLITICAL UNCERTAINTY

ZAGREB: Croatia's President Zoran Milanovic called for his country to stick to a cautious diplomatic path amid surging geopolitical uncertainty in Europe, as he was sworn into his second term on Tuesday. Many countries in Europe are reeling from a change of direction from the new US administration and worry that Washington may upend decades of security arrangements in Europe. "There is no need to hastily push ourselves to the front lines in

matters that we cannot significantly influence, cannot change, that we very often do not understand," said Milanovic. As a Nato and EU member, Croatia has donated hundreds of millions of euros in aid to help Ukraine's fight against Russia's attack, including military helicopters. The president has been a frequent critic of the military aid and Croatia's plans to help train Ukrainian troops. Milanovic took the oath for

the largely ceremonial post in the Balkan country of 3.8 million people, after securing a landslide win in January as the left-wing opposition candidate. Milanovic stressed that Croatia should follow a "national policy that will contribute the most to our interests in this new world". "This is not naivety, this is not a betrayal of the Western political and military alliances, to which we belong... It is simply a fight for one's own interests," the 58-year-old stressed. — AFP

Russia, US to name team of negotiators on Ukraine

WASHINGTON said Russia and the United States will name teams to negotiate a path to ending the war in Ukraine as soon as possible, as the superpowers met on Tuesday in Saudi Arabia without Kyiv or the EU. However, no specifics on a possible meeting between Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin emerged from the gathering in Riyadh, the first high-level official Washington-Moscow talks since Ukraine's 2022 attack. Some European leaders, alarmed by Trump's overhaul of US policy on Russia, fear Washington will make serious concessions to Moscow and re-write the continent's security arrangement in a Cold War-style deal between superpowers.

On Tuesday, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov agreed to "appoint respective high-level teams to begin working on a path to ending the conflict in Ukraine as soon as possible", the State Department said. Washington added the sides had also agreed to "establish a consultation mechanism" to address "irritants" to Russia and America's relationship, noting the sides would lay the groundwork for future cooperation.

Russia offered less detail on the outcome of the talks, saying: "We discussed and outlined our principled positions, and agreed that separate teams of negotiators will be in touch on this topic in due course." "It is still difficult to talk about a specific date for a meeting between the two leaders," said Yuri Ushakov, Putin's foreign policy aide. Russia sketched out some of its perspectives on future talks to ending the fighting in Ukraine, arguing that settling the war required a reorganisation of Europe's defence agreements.

European leaders held an emergency meeting in Paris a day earlier, but struggled to put on a united front. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, in Turkey on Tuesday, said on the eve of the talks that he was not invited and would not "recognise any things or any agreements about us without us". Isolated by the West for three years, Russia is hoping for a "restoration" of ties with the United States and a comeback to the



US, Russia delegates attend a meeting with Saudi Arabia's officials, at Riyadh's Diriyah Palace. — AFP

international arena. Both Russia and the United States have cast Tuesday's meeting as the beginning of a potentially lengthy process and downplayed the prospects of a breakthrough. Russia's Ushakov told state media the talks would discuss "how to start negotiations on Ukraine".

Trump has said he wants to end the war in Ukraine, but has thus far presented no concrete plan. The United States has urged both sides that concessions will have to be made if any peace talks materialise. Russia on the eve of the summit said there cannot be even a "thought" on it giving up territory seized from Ukraine.

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said Washington was aiming for a "fair" and "sustainable" solution to the Ukraine war, after a meeting with his Russian counterpart in Riyadh. In remarks to reporters after the Saudi-hosted meeting with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, Rubio said that "the goal is to bring an end to this conflict in a way that's fair, enduring, sustainable and acceptable to all parties involved". Rubio said that European nations would have to be involved in talks on ending the war, and

that "extraordinary opportunities existed to partner" with Russia. "The key to unlock that is the end to this conflict," he said. Rubio and Lavrov agreed to "lay the groundwork for future cooperation on matters of mutual geopolitical interest and historic economic and investment opportunities which will emerge from a successful end to the conflict in Ukraine", the spokeswoman said. Rubio said he was "convinced" that Moscow was willing to engage in a "serious process" to end the war.

The Kremlin said on Tuesday that Ukraine had the "right" to join the European Union, but not the Nato military alliance. It also said Putin was "ready" to negotiate with Zelensky "if necessary", though repeated its questioning of his "legitimacy" -- a reference to his five-year term expiring last year, despite Ukrainian law not requiring elections during wartime. The Ukrainian leader was in Turkey on Tuesday for discussions on the conflict with President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. He is due in Saudi Arabia on Wednesday, though he said he does not plan to meet with US or Russian officials. — AFP

Delta plane flips upside down on landing at Toronto airport

TORONTO: A Delta Air Lines regional jet flipped upside down upon landing at Canada's Toronto Pearson Airport amid windy weather following a snowstorm, injuring 18 of the 80 people on board, officials said. Three people on flight DL4819 from Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport suffered critical injuries, among them a child, a Canadian air ambulance official said, with 15 others also immediately taken to hospitals. Some of the injured have since been released, Delta said late on Monday.

The US carrier said a CRJ900 aircraft operated by its Endeavor Air subsidiary was involved in a single-aircraft accident with 76 passengers and four crew members on board. The 16-year-old CRJ900, made by Canada's Bombardier and powered by GE Aerospace engines, can seat up to 90 people. At least one of the two wings was no longer attached

to the plane, video showed after the accident. Canadian authorities said they would investigate the cause of the crash, which was not yet known.

Toronto Pearson Airport said earlier it was dealing with high winds and frigid temperatures as airlines attempted to catch up with missed flights after a weekend snowstorm dumped more than 22 cm (8.6 inches) of snow at the airport. The Delta plane touched down in Toronto at 2:13 pm. After an 86-minute flight and came to rest near the intersection of runway 23 and runway 15, FlightRadar24 data showed.

The reported weather conditions at time of the crash indicated a "gusting crosswind and blowing snow," the flight tracking website said. Toronto Pearson Fire Chief Todd Aitken said late on Monday the runway was dry and there were no crosswind conditions, but several pilots Reuters spoke to who had seen



The wreckage of a Delta Air Lines-operated CRJ900 aircraft lays on the runway at Toronto Pearson International Airport. — Reuters

videos of the incident pushed back against this comment. US aviation safety expert and pilot

John Cox said there was an average crosswind of 19 knots (22 mph) from the right as it was landing, but he

noted this was an average and gusts would go up and down. "It's gusty so they are constantly going to have to be making adjustments in the air speed, adjustments in the vertical profile and adjustments in the lateral profile," he said of the pilots, adding that "it's normal for what professional pilots do." Investigators would try to figure out why the right wing separated from the plane, Cox said.

Michael J McCormick, associate professor of air traffic management at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, said the upside-down position made the Toronto crash fairly unique. "But the fact that 80 people survived an event like this is a testament to the engineering and the technology, the regulatory background that would go into creating a system where somebody can actually survive something that not too long ago would have been fatal," he said. — Reuters

OPINION

When startup founders fly with confidence



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THE best role models don't just inspire — they redefine what's possible. In every society, certain individuals stand out, shaping the future with their courage and vision. Among them are the brave startup founders who push boundaries and challenge the status quo. I still remember the first time I met Malik al Nabhani and Anwaar al Hinai. Fresh out of engineering school, they reached out, eager to learn how their corporate employers could contribute to local content development. Even then, their curiosity and drive were evident. Years later, in 2020, they took a brave leap, leaving behind the stability of corporate life to build something extraordinary. That leap became Serb, a startup that disrupted the aviation world with its cutting-edge Unmanned Traffic Management System (UTMS). UTMS is what keeps drone operations safe, efficient and scalable — integrating airspace, regulations and technology into one seamless system. This was not just another tech startup; it was a mission to transform how drones operate in the Sultanate of Oman and beyond. The journey wasn't easy. For five years, Malik, Anwaar and their team strategised, built and pitched their vision to investors

across Oman, the GCC and international platforms like the Web Summit in Lisbon, Portugal. They navigated the ups and downs of the startup world, learning, iterating and pushing forward. This year, their persistence paid off in a big way. Serb rebranded from AirGo and secured a vital partnership with the Civil Aviation Authority, led by Naif al Abri and his team. Working closely with the Authority for SME Development, the Promising Startups Programme and the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, Serb is now the backbone of Oman's drone industry. It has simplified the complex world of drone regulation, making it easier for pilots and regulators to collaborate, ensuring safety while unlocking massive new opportunities. Drones are no longer just high-tech toys; they're transforming industries. In photography, healthcare, education, delivery, defence and emergency response, drones are becoming an everyday necessity. Thanks to Serb, hundreds of drone pilots in Oman can now get their AirPass licence for under RO 100, opening doors to new careers and business opportunities. The global unmanned traffic management

Serb is a symbol of what's possible when founders believe in their mission and refuse to give up. Their journey is proof that when entrepreneurs take flight with confidence, they don't just build companies — they reshape industries and inspire entire nations

market is projected to reach RO 1.2 billion by 2031, growing at a rapid pace. Oman's startup ecosystem, though young, is gaining momentum, valued at around RO 133 million between 2021 and 2023. Serb is not just part of this movement — it's leading the way, proving that Omani startups can compete on a global scale. The story of Serb offers valuable lessons for any aspiring entrepreneur. First, challenges are not roadblocks but stepping stones. Malik and Anwaar built their success in the face of uncertainty, proving that persistence and adaptability matter more than initial advantages. Second, innovation doesn't happen in isolation. They leveraged Oman's growing ecosystem, engaged with regulators and positioned Serb within a global movement. Finally, confidence is key. They didn't wait for the perfect conditions or endless funding; they took action, refined their vision and pushed forward. Serb is more than a startup. It's a symbol of what's possible when founders believe in their mission and refuse to give up. Their journey is proof that when entrepreneurs take flight with confidence, they don't just build companies — they reshape industries and inspire entire nations.

‘BOLD GENERATION’ OF AFRICA SEE FUTURE AT HOME

They see themselves as the “bold generation” and the “conscious youth” of the African continent. AFP met six African students from Generation Z who, from Dakar to Nairobi and Johannesburg to Abidjan, displayed a realistic optimism and a desire to transform their countries. Born just before or after 2000, these students in urban planning, environment, medicine or biology combine their education with a deep political commitment, far from the stereotype of a self-centred generation cut off from reality. For Dakar native Sokhna Ndeye Merry Sall it began with morning prayer. For Ivorian Marie Elodie Yeo Guefala it was a tour of a cramped student room on the Bingerville campus near Abidjan. Thick fog enveloped the famous Mandela Bridge in Johannesburg when Palesa Molefe went to class at the University of Witwatersrand while Kenyan Geoffrey Mboya made light work of Nairobi's traffic jams riding on the back of a motorcycle taxi. All six of them said they want to stay in their countries to contribute to development. That kind of commitment is not always obvious: nearly six out of 10 young Africans plan to emigrate within three years, primarily to find a job, according to a 2024 study by the South African Ichikowitz Family Foundation. That report was conducted in 16 countries on the continent. In Nigeria, this widespread aspiration for a better life abroad even has its own slang — “japa” — which means “to flee” in Yoruba language. “There's the ‘japa’ syndrome everybody talks about, but, for me, I mean, I'm a patriot,” said Nigerian student Covenant Oluwafemi Odelele. The 21-year-old juggles “marathon days” between medical studies and a project preparing his classmates to enter into the job market. “I just want to do all I can to help develop my country.” -Senegalese Sall said she is shocked to see many of her young compatriots risking their lives and taking the road of irregular emigration. The 21-year-old student in biology, chemistry and geosciences at the Cheikh Anta Diop University in Dakar also talked about the crowded lecture halls and the college years cut short by “political unrest”. Her face dimly lit by the flame of a Bunsen burner, Ivorian student Guefala, 25, pointed to the difficulty of studying with frequent power cuts as her laboratory often plunges into darkness. Despite difficulties, the six students all showed a deep desire to transform their countries. And they did not wait until the end of their studies to get involved in community or political life. — AFP

Arab solidarity needed now, no complacency

THE recent shift in American politics, marked by economic turbulence and deep societal polarisation, has paved the way for the election of a controversial and extreme figure as the 47th President of the United States. His victory has sent shockwaves across the world, from Canada and China to Europe and, inevitably, the Middle East. This imperialist arrogance, which holds little regard for anything beyond American interests, is particularly evident under the leadership of Donald Trump. He is backed by a powerful coalition of tech billionaires, Jewish business elites and Republican hardliners — individuals who have seized this moment to reshape America's political landscape, dismantle state institutions and exploit opportunities for influence and profit. The aggressive approach extends beyond domestic affairs, manifesting in an unchecked pursuit of power on the global stage. From imposing tariffs and disregarding trade agreements to seeking control over territories such as Canada, Greenland and the Panama Canal, this administration's policies embody a reckless disregard for international norms. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the Middle East, where the destruction and occupation of Gaza serve as stark reminders of the administration's indifference to human values. Under this ideology, everything — norms, ethics, agreements and even allies — is expendable if it serves American interests and bolsters Trump's standing among his domestic base and the Zionist lobby. This supremacist and imperialist mindset has left the Arab world grappling with complex realities, the most pressing being the existential threat to Palestine. The discourse surrounding Gaza, the plans to forcibly displace its people and the



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Trump's policies, driven by slogans such as “America First” and “Make America Great Again,” highlight the urgency for Arab states to reposition themselves in this evolving global order.

increasingly belligerent rhetoric directed at Arab nations are clear indications of the perilous road ahead. In this climate, the Arab world must reassess its position. The so-called Arab system, weakened by internal betrayals, political deterioration and public disillusionment, is struggling to assert itself on the global stage. However, some nations have taken a firm stance against these policies, including Oman, which has consistently rejected such aggression, alongside Saudi Arabia and Egypt, both of which have refused to accept the displacement of Palestinians from their homeland. In light of the aggressive expansion of Trumpism, Arab nations must recognise the existential threat they face. The unwavering support of the American administration for the Zionist agenda demands a strategic and unified response. This could mark a historic turning point — an opportunity to strengthen Arab and Islamic cooperation and forge new alliances before a modern-day Sykes-Picot Agreement redraws the region's borders. The necessity for Arab solidarity has never been greater. If there is complacency in the face of this growing threat, the repercussions will extend far beyond Gaza. On a global scale, resistance to American unilateralism is emerging. A wave of opposition is forming, with major powers such as China, the European Union and Canada signalling their readiness to push back against the aggressive policies emanating from Washington. China, in particular, stands to benefit significantly from America's internal and external instability, much like the US once capitalised on Europe's decline during the Second World War.

Ironically, despite the intellectual and academic elite in the US — including prominent thinkers, scientists and policymakers — there appears to be little influence over this political frenzy. Nevertheless, dissenting voices are beginning to surface. In a recent New York Times article, columnist David Brooks criticised Trump's approach, arguing that history has repeatedly shown that radical upheavals, rather than strengthening governments, often lead to catastrophic failures. Similarly, The Economist has drawn comparisons between Trump and President William McKinley (1897–1901), noting their shared vision of economic protectionism and expansionism. Trump's admiration for McKinley's policies, which saw the annexation of territories such as Hawaii, Guam, the Philippines and Puerto Rico, is indicative of his broader geopolitical ambitions. Despite widespread despair and self-doubt within Arab circles, the existential challenges facing the region necessitate a departure from resignation and passivity. The Gaza war has exposed the hypocrisy and double standards of Western powers, reinforcing the need for Arabs to redefine their political strategy. Trump's policies, driven by slogans such as “America First” and “Make America Great Again,” highlight the urgency for Arab states to reposition themselves in this evolving global order. Strengthening regional cooperation and asserting Arab interests on the international stage are crucial steps in safeguarding security, stability and economic prosperity amid the ongoing political, economic and military conflicts that show little regard for allies or adversaries alike. Translated by Badr al Dhafari. The original version of this article was published in Oman Arabic newspaper on February 17, 2025.

Investments in fight against corruption pay off



SAMUEL KUTTY

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

ON February 11, the Transparency International released its Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) for 2024, rankings of which are used as a proxy for assessing the levels of public sector corruption. Since its inception in 1995, the Index has become a leading global indicator of public sector corruption. It ranks 180 countries and territories worldwide by their perceived levels of public sector corruption. The scores reflect the views of experts and businesspeople, not the public. While 32 countries have significantly reduced their corruption levels since 2012, the report shows that 148 countries have stayed stagnant or gotten worse during the same period. The global average of 43 has stood unchanged for years and over two-thirds of countries’ score remained below 50. The index uses more than a dozen sources of information to score countries on a scale of 0-100 points, where 100 is very clean and 0 is highly corrupt. For the Arab countries, the report showcases a “welcome trend”, especially those in the Gulf region, showing significant progress in technological solutions in public administration, aiming to improve transparency. The UAE ranked the highest among Arab states with a score of 68/100. While Oman is up 12 points to 55 points, its highest-ever score, Bahrain registered a big 11-point increase to 53/100, Saudi Arabia scored a seven-point increase, Qatar improved one place to 59/100 and Kuwait stayed unchanged at 46/100.

These achievements underscore the unwavering commitment of Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries to strengthening their anti-corruption frameworks and governance structures. “In the Gulf Cooperation Council, investment in technological solutions to public administration, known as e-governance, has been introduced. These solutions tackle corrupt practices such as bribes by removing middlemen and provide citizens with more transparency through digitisation”, the Berlin-based agency said while releasing the report. The GCC governments have long released ambitious economic and developmental “visions” and goals for the future. As part of their proactive efforts, all of them have adopted e-governance and digitalisation programs to streamline public administration and curb corruption. E-procurement systems have played a pivotal role in minimising bribery and ensuring greater transparency in budget allocations. Heads of these countries recognise that embracing advanced technologies paves the way for entirely new business models. Oman’s digital strategy, as outlined in its “Oman Vision 2040,” aims to leverage technology as a key driver for economic diversification, sustainable development, and improved quality of life by focusing on building a robust digital infrastructure, enhancing e-governance, promoting innovation in various sectors. In recent years, the GCC countries have

For Arab countries, the Transparency International report showcases a “welcome trend”, especially those in the Gulf region, showing significant progress in technological solutions in public administration, aiming to improve transparency

changed their approach to corruption and bribery, with relevant laws now in place to attract international investment and promote confidence in the region. They acknowledge that corruption practices are a real burden to a healthy economic environment. The countries have also ratified and agreed to the UN Convention Against Corruption, as well as the Arab Convention Against Corruption. The GCC has also appointed a ministerial committee to combat corruption in the member countries. The committee pursues the perpetrators of cross-border corruption crimes, and the revenues resulting from their criminal activities, and to take precautionary measures on them, under laws in force in each country. Nevertheless, what Transparency International is very important, “even in countries with relatively low perceived corruption, the influence of lobbying presents additional challenges”. However, the core focus of the 2024 Corruption Perceptions Index is the threat that corruption poses to climate action and how undue influence and business interests prevent the adoption of necessary and ambitious policies and expose poorer nations to further corrupt practices. “We must urgently root out corruption before it fully derails meaningful climate action. Governments and multilateral organisations must embed anti-corruption measures into climate efforts to safeguard finance, rebuild trust and maximise impact,” stresses Maira Martini, CEO of Transparency International.

CAN EU MATCH WORDS WITH ACTIONS POST MUNICH?

MATHIEU RABECHAULT AND STUART WILLIAMS

Lofty rhetoric and frank acknowledgements of a new world order have not been in short supply from European leaders since the new American administration of Donald Trump took office, making clear starkly different policy priorities. Trump spoke over the heads of not only Europe but also Ukraine by declaring he was ready to negotiate with Russia to end the three-year war, while his Vice-President J D Vance left seasoned policymakers dazed with a withering attack on the European Union at the Munich Security Forum. The shock switch in policy from the United States has prompted calls for Europe to ramp up its own defence capacities through higher spending and even to consider sending troops to Ukraine to enforce an eventual ceasefire. Emergency talks of key European leaders called on Monday by French President Emmanuel Macron were aimed at showing a united front, but immediately exposed tensions with German Chancellor Olaf Scholz saying he was “a little irritated” by suggestions, from the likes of British Prime Minister Keir Starmer, that troops should be deployed. In the most concrete sign that the United States has brought Russia back from the cold, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov held talks with American counterpart Marco Rubio in Saudi Arabia. Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk told reporters in Paris: “Everyone at this meeting is aware that transatlantic relations, the Nato alliance and our friendship with the United States have entered a new phase.” Nato chief Mark Rutte said the Europeans were “ready and willing” to step up, while EU commission chief Ursula von der Leyen called for a “surge” in defence. The chairman of the Munich Security Forum Christoph Heusgen, after the annual conference was shocked by Vance’s speech, went as far as to say: “We have to fear that our common-value base is not that common anymore”. As if to emphasise his point, some accounts on social media edited his speech to show him weeping when he said this, although in fact his emotion came after he thanked his team over his last year in charge. “This unfortunately shows again how the mechanisms of disinformation work,” Heusgen later said on social media. Phillips O’Brien, professor of strategic studies at the University of St Andrews, said that while the west is “perilously close to the worst-case scenario on Trump and Ukraine”, Europe should have seen the trouble coming. “The European reaction seemed stunned – which is just as worrying,” he said. — AFP

Climate action demands global fraternity

THE existential threat of the climate crisis casts a long shadow over our planet. Its effects are not equally distributed: vulnerable countries, particularly small island developing states (SIDS) like mine, are on the front lines. We must contend with rising sea levels, more frequent and intense extreme weather events, and the destruction of our livelihoods. To address these challenges and strengthen the resilience of our people and systems, many leaders, including me, have had to reshape policies and reconceive the relationship between government and the governed. While sea-level rise could directly affect 250 million people by the end of this century, it is already a lived reality for tens of millions in low-lying coastal countries and SIDS. Elsewhere, people are plagued by prolonged droughts and fires. These forces are putting our territories, economies, and very existence at risk, and countering them requires not only urgent action, but also a fundamental shift in our global consciousness – a recognition of our shared humanity and intertwined fate. Simply put, this crisis demands global solidarity. As a 2025 honouree of the Zayed Award for Human Fraternity, I believe that recognising our responsibility to care for one another is an essential element of the climate response and as important as scientific, technological, financial, and diplomatic measures. Just as a family supports its most vulnerable members, so, too, must the global community rally around those countries bearing the brunt of a crisis they did little to create. As it stands, the global financial architecture is ill-equipped to address the climate crisis. It was designed for a different era that did not contemplate the interconnectedness of our economies and ecosystems or the dangers of global warming. The Bretton Woods institutions, for example, were established more



Sea-level rise could directly affect 250 million people by the end of this century.



MIA AMOR MOTTLEY

The writer is Prime Minister and Finance Minister of Barbados and a 2025 honoree of the Zayed Award for Human Fraternity

than 80 years ago to help European economies recover from World War II. But the unprecedented scale and urgency of the climate crisis require a new approach to unlock the financing that developing countries need for mitigation and adaptation. The system must be reformed to make sustainable development, climate resilience and equitable access to finance its top priorities. This is not charity; it is an investment in our collective future. When some people are left to die, all of humanity – present and future – will eventually suffer. The Bridgetown Initiative, which many vulnerable countries have championed, calls for multilateral development banks to expand their lending capacity and to ensure that their risk-assessment frameworks reflect the realities of climate vulnerability. It also advocates increased concessional finance, recognising that grants and low-interest loans are essential for countries struggling to cope with the climate emergency. And the initiative proposes innovative mechanisms like debt-for-nature and debt-for-climate swaps, offering a path to debt relief while generating the financial resources vulnerable countries need to take ownership

of their climate transitions and build more resilient economies and societies. But finance alone is not enough. A paradigm shift is needed in how we understand development, moving from the narrow pursuit of GDP growth to a more holistic approach that values social justice, environmental sustainability, and human well-being. This requires a fundamental rethink of our economic models. Infinite growth on a finite planet is simply not possible. We must embrace a circular economy that improves resource efficiency, minimises waste, and promotes sustainable consumption. Such a shift ultimately hinges on global fraternity. We must recognise that, in an interconnected world, our actions have consequences for others, and that protecting our planet is a shared responsibility. That means equitably distributing the burden of climate change, so that those who have contributed the least to the problem do not suffer its worst effects. Leading a small island country like Barbados has taught me valuable lessons about the power of community and resilience, as well as the importance of long-term vision. ©Project Syndicate, 2025

SPORTS

GULF CLUB HANDBALL



Oman Club players promised all efforts to secure slot in the semifinals of the Gulf event.

OMAN CLUB IN MUST-WIN MATCH AGAINST KUWAIT SC

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, FEB 18

Oman Club will chase a semifinal spot in the 41st Gulf Club Handball Championship as they will take on Kuwait SC in a must win match on Wednesday. The high-stake encounter is set to begin at 6 pm at the indoor hall of Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex. In the same Group B, toppers Qatar’s Al Arabi will face Dibba Al Huson in their final group-stage match at 4 pm at the same venue. Oman’s Asad al Hasani and his teammates will work hard to secure slot in the semis of the Gulf event as they are hosting the event and getting support from their fans. Oman Club managed to earn two points from one win against Dibba Al Huson by 29-26 and they lost against Qatar’s Al Arabi by 30-20 on Monday night.

Mohammed bin Said al Azzan, Oman Club’s assistant coach, said that the team is fully prepared to give their best against Kuwait SC. “Our goal is to perform much better in this game than in the previous two. The tactical instructions to the players focus on patience, maintaining concentration, capitalising on opponents’ mistakes and strengthening our defence,” he said.

On the other hand, Kuwait SC will aim to boost their last 34-22 victory over Dibba Al Huson. A win against Oman Club would secure their place in the next stage. “Oman Club is a strong rival and well balanced team with top players including the Bahraini professional player. We must use our positive momentum and learn from our mistakes in the loss to Al Arabi,” coach Haitham al Rashidi said.

Qatar’s Al Arabi already secured a semifinal spot after consecutive victories over Dibba Al Huson and Oman Club. They will now seek a third straight win to confirm their dominance in Group B and build momentum for the semifinals.



Seeb, Al Shabab in intense preparation for final

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, FEB 18

AL SHABAB, who are seeking for their historic maiden title, and four-time winners Seeb are undergoing intensive warming-up sessions for the title showdown of the His Majesty’s Cup football championship which is scheduled on Thursday at Ibra Sports Complex. The match will kick off at 7 pm.

Al Shabab began their final warm-up sessions at their home ground in Barka, with the presence of several officials from the wilayats of Barka and Wadi Al Maawil. The team travelled to Ibra on Tuesday, two days ahead of the final, to complete their last preparations. The Al Batinah South-based side is eager to end their season on a high note.

Head coach Hassan Rustam sees this as a golden opportunity for his team, knowing they are just one step away from a historic triumph. The squad is expected to put in a determined effort to achieve their dream title.

Seeb Club began their final preparations on Monday, gearing up for the decisive match against Al Shabab. Serbian head coach Nikola Djurovic is focused on ending his team’s journey in the tournament with success. The Muscat-based team conducted their last training sessions at their headquarters in Al Khoudh, focusing on both physical conditioning and tactical strategies. A final session will take place at Ibra Sports Complex before the highly anticipated clash.

The Oman Football Association (OFA) announced the seating allocation for the final. Both Seeb and Al Shabab fans will be allocated 40 per cent each of the stadium’s capacity, while 20 per cent of the seats are reserved for spectators from Al Sharqiyah North Governorate. To enhance the matchday experience, the Ministry of



Al Shabab players during training ahead of their HM Cup final match against Seeb on Thursday.

Culture, Sports and Youth, OFA and the Al Sharqiyah North Governorate office have organised an entertainment zone in Ibra. The fan city included different corners including: Trophy corner, Youth space, E-Games section, Photography zone, Kids’ area and Heritage musical performances. Another event was the Trophy Tour

which began on Friday in the Wilayat Al Qabil and will conclude on matchday in Ibra. On Sunday, the trophy reached Al Mudhaibi, where it was warmly welcomed, followed by a stop in Sinaw on Monday. The tour has sparked excitement among fans, adding to the anticipation of the final.

GCC Beach Games ‘Muscat 2025’ to begin on April 5

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, FEB 18

Muscat is set to host the third edition of the GCC Beach Games ‘Muscat 2025’, from April 5 to 11. Organised by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth and the Oman Olympic Committee (OOC), the event will welcome athletes from six GCC nations: UAE, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain and Oman. Competitors will vie for top honours in eight sports: beach football, beach volleyball, beach handball, open-water swimming, sailing, tent pegging, beach athletics and paragliding.

Beach football will take place at sand courts of the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex from April 7 to 11, while beach volleyball will be hosted along Muscat’s shores. Beach handball runs from April 5 to 11 at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex. Open-water swimming along Muscat’s beaches will be held from April 9 to 11, with sailing from April 6 to 10. Tent pegging events will take place at Al Rahba Farm from April 8 to 10, beach athletics from April 8 to 10 on Muscat’s beaches, and paragliding at Al Hail Beach from April 5 to 7.



OOC Secretary-General Taha al Kishry highlighted Oman’s role in major sporting events.

HOSTING CAPABILITIES

OOC Secretary-General Taha al Kishry highlighted Oman’s role in major sporting events during the press conference: “Hosting the GCC Beach Games affirms Oman’s leadership in organising international beach sports, thanks to our extensive coastline and advanced infrastructure.”

Beyond competition, the Games enhances sports tourism, showcasing Oman’s natural landscapes. “This event boosts Oman’s tourism appeal and prepares national teams for upcoming international championships,” Al Kishry noted. He emphasised OOC’s strategic preparations, including intensive training camps for Omani athletes to ensure

optimal performance.

The chosen sports align with GCC popularity and Oman’s hosting capabilities. “Selection was based on strategic criteria, ensuring high competition levels and maximising participation,” Al Kishry explained. Coordination with national federations helped select sports with strong regional representation, ensuring a competitive and engaging tournament.

The organising committee ensured that venues meet international standards. “Venues were carefully selected to facilitate accessibility for athletes, officials, and spectators, enhancing the event’s overall experience,” Al Kishry stated.

GAMES LOGO

The event’s branding is a key focus. “The official logo embodies competition, sportsmanship, and GCC heritage and will be central to promotional campaigns across digital and traditional media,” Al Kishry said.

Extensive media partnerships ensure wide coverage, including live broadcasting on television and digital platforms. Social media will provide real-time updates, behind-the-scenes content and exclusive interviews with athletes and officials.

The organising committee has unveiled the official logo for ‘Muscat 2025’. The logo captures the essence of the competition through a meaningful design.

The deep blue colour symbolises the sea, reflecting Oman’s stunning coastal beauty, while the fortress-like mountains represent the nation’s rich heritage and strength. The golden-yellow hue signifies Muscat’s sandy beaches, which will serve as the primary venue for the event. Additionally, the open blue sky, with ‘2025’ cleverly integrated in negative space, embodies progress and the limitless opportunities.

WORLD CUP LEAGUE 2



Nosthush Kenjige in action at the OCA ground.

KENJIGE SPINS USA TO DOMINANT 57-RUN WIN OVER OMAN

MUSCAT: Oman’s spin-heavy strategy backfired as Nosthush Kenjige’s career-best spell tore through their batting line-up, leading the USA to a commanding 57-run victory in the ICC World Cup League 2 at the Oman Cricket Academy ground on Tuesday.

The left-arm spinner’s five-wicket haul (5-11) proved decisive as Oman collapsed for just 65, their lowest-ever ODI total, while chasing a modest 123-run target. Previously, Oman’s lowest ODI score was 81 against Namibia in Windhoek in April 2019.

With this win, the USA avenged their earlier defeat against Oman in the tri-series and strengthened their position at the top of the points table with 22 points from 16 matches.

Oman remained second with 18 at the end of the tri-series, which also featured Namibia (12 points from 16 games), while Canada, with four games in hand, is third on 16 points.

Batting first, the USA struggled early, losing four wickets inside the first 10 overs. Oman’s spinners, led by Shakeel Ahmed (3-20) and Aamir Kaleem (2-22), ran through the top order, reducing the visitors to 31-5.

However, Milind Kumar (47 off 82, 6x4) held the innings together with two crucial partnerships. He added 30 runs with Aaron Jones (16) for the sixth wicket and another 33 with Sanjay Krishnamurthi (16) for the seventh, helping the USA post 122 before they were bowled out in 35.3 overs. Oman’s spinners dominated the innings, with nine of the ten wickets falling to them with Kenjige run out.

Shakeel Ahmed finished as the leading wicket-taker of the tri-series with 13 scalps. Samay Shrivastava (2/41), Siddharth Bukkapatnam (1/11), and Jay Odedra (1/23) also played key roles in restricting the USA.

OMAN’S BATTING COLLAPSE

Chasing 123, Oman struggled from the outset as both openers, including skipper Jatinder Singh (7), fell cheaply. Hammad Mirza (29 off 43) was the only batter to offer resistance, but he found little support. Oman’s highest partnership was a modest 22-run stand between Mirza and Hashir Dafedar (9) for the third wicket. The next-best was a 16-run fourth-wicket stand with Sufyan Mehmood (0).

Kenjige’s relentless accuracy triggered a dramatic collapse, as Oman crumbled from 57-5 to 65 all out, losing their last five wickets for just eight runs.

BRIEF SCORES: USA 122 in 35.3 overs (Milind Kumar 47, Aaron Jones 16, Sanjay Krishnamurthi 16; Shakeel Ahmed 3-20, Aamir Kaleem 2-22, Samay Shrivastava 2-41) beat Oman 65 in 25.3 overs (Hammad Mirza 29; Nosthush Kenjige 5-11, Milind Kumar 2-17, Yasir Mohammad 2-10).



Oman and US players fight for the ball during FIH Hockey Men’s Nations Cup 2 match at the Hockey Oman stadium. – Abdulwahid al Hamadani

US blank Oman to reach semis, Egypt in last four

AHMED AL KAABI

MUSCAT, FEB 18

OMAN SUFFERED a 4-0 defeat against the US in their second match of the FIH Hockey Men’s Nations Cup 2 Oman 2025 at Hockey Oman Stadium in Al Amerat on Tuesday night. They will face Austria in their next match on Thursday.

The match began with both teams exchanging early chances, but the US took the lead in the 11th minute through Marius Leser. Oman pushed forward for an equaliser, earning a penalty corner, but failed to capitalise, ending the first quarter 1-0. In the second quarter, Oman continued pressing, but the US controlled possession, maintaining their lead at half-time.

The US increased their intensity in the third quarter, forcing Oman into a defensive stance. Sekayi Charasika extended the lead in the 43rd minute, making it 2-0. In the final quarter, Charasika struck again (48’), and Hanzor Motta sealed the win with a fourth goal in the dying seconds. With the 4-0 victory, the US secured their second win, topping the group with six points and sealing a spot in the semifinals. Oman remained at the bottom with no points. Kayi Charasika was awarded the best player of the match.

POLAND SECURE LAST-MINUTE DRAW

In the opening Pool A match, Poland secured a late draw against China in a tight 1-1 battle.

China started aggressively, taking an early lead in the second minute through Jieming Chao. Despite Poland’s counterattacks, a

disallowed goal kept China ahead 1-0 at the end of the first quarter. Poland pushed hard in the second quarter but struggled against China’s solid defence, while Chao nearly doubled the lead, only to be denied by Polish goalkeeper Mateusz Popiołkowski. The third quarter saw Poland earn its first penalty corner, but Chinese goalkeeper Runze Cu made a crucial save, keeping the score unchanged. In the final quarter, Poland dominated, earning seven penalty corners but failing to convert. Just as China looked set for victory, Jieming Chao committed a late foul, giving Poland a penalty, which Jarzynski Gracjan converted to secure a 1-1 draw. Runze Cu’s outstanding performance earned him the best player award, leaving Poland in second place with four points, while China remain third with one.

EGYPT BEAT CHILE TO REACH SEMIS

In the second Pool A match, Egypt reached semifinal with a 3-1 win over Chile.

Chile struck first in the fifth minute through Juan Amoroso’s penalty corner, but Egypt responded late in the first quarter, with Mohamed Nasr assisting Ahmed El Genini to level the score at 1-1. The second quarter saw Egypt dominate but fail to break through Chile’s solid defence. In the third quarter, Egypt continued pressing, with El Genini and Mahmoud Mamdouh missing key chances, while Chile struggled to create real threats. The final quarter was decisive – Mostafa Ragab put Egypt ahead in the 55th minute, and Mohamed Ragab sealed the victory with a last-minute goal (59’). With the 3-1 win, Egypt advanced to

the semifinals, while Chile lose their chance to qualify for the semifinals after suffering two consecutive losses. Mohamed Nasr was awarded the best player.

AUSTRIA EDGE SCOTLAND

In the second Pool A match, Austria edged Scotland 3-2 in a thrilling comeback victory.

The match began cautiously, with both teams creating minimal chances in the first quarter. In the second quarter, Scotland’s Jamie Golden finally broke the deadlock with a powerful penalty corner goal in the 26th minute, giving his team a 1-0 lead at half-time, despite Austria’s late pressure.

Austria upped the intensity in the third quarter, equalising through Joseph Winkler (36’) after a clever pass from Fulop Losonci. Florian Steyrer then converted a penalty corner (42’), putting Austria ahead 2-1.

Losonci extended Austria’s advantage to 3-1 with a powerful strike in the 55th minute. Scotland responded quickly, with Golden scoring in the 56th minute to make it 3-2. Despite Scotland’s relentless pressure in the final moments, Austria held firm to secure a crucial 3-2 victory. Florian Hackl won the player of the match award.

Florian Hackl expressed his excitement after his team’s strong comeback following their loss the previous night.

He emphasised the strength and potential of their young squad, stating that despite their first-game setback, they showed great resilience and development. Looking ahead, he stressed the importance of improving with each game. Hackl thanked his teammates for their efforts and dedication.

Oman Sail Winter Cup reveals new generation of future champs

MUSCAT: The Oman Sail Winter Cup, held over four days from February 11-14 at Barcelo Musannah Resort, put 50 of the best young sailors from across Oman Sail’s three sailing schools to the test in Optimist, ILCA 4, ILCA 6 and ILCA 7 classes. Prizes were awarded for the top three in each category, with the best performing sailors in line to represent the nation in upcoming regattas.

Khamis al Mashaikhi won four out of five races to seal victory in the Optimist event ahead of Hood bin Saad al Nofli, who picked up a victory and three second placed finishes. Mohammed bin Ziyad al Qasimi finished third after finishing on the podium three times during the competition.

All three sailors continued their fine form on the water after excellent performances at the recent Admiral’s Cup in Pattaya, Thailand.

Mohammed bin Ziyad al Qasimi also finished as the top Junior, leading Khaled bin Yahya al Sarihi – fourth overall – and Mohammed bin Suleiman al Balushi, who also finished sixth overall.

The highest ranked female sailor was Tarteel bint Zaid al Hasaniyah, fifth overall and a strong performer throughout. Hadeel bint Yousuf al Mushaifriyah finished second in the Optimist Girls competition and 13th overall, and Abeer bint Kalil al Zakwaniyah finished third – 19th overall.

The top three in the ILCA 4 category were separated by just four



Action during ILKA races.

points after each notching a win in the opening three races. Hassan bin Nasser al Wahaibi finished first, just a single point ahead of Tamim bin Sulaiman al Balushi. Saoud bin Talib al Shaqsi finished third.

Al Motasem bin Hamoud al Farsi swept to victory in the ILCA 6 competition with four consecutive wins to secure the win with one race to spare. Alsalm bin Ali al Hamdani finished second four times to secure second place, just four points behind the winner. Hatem bin Mohsen al Araiimi ended the event in third after two podium finishes and victory in the final race. In the ILCA 7 category, Hussain bin Said al Jabri won all five races to win the event ahead of Ali bin Hussein al Saadi, himself finishing second in all five races. In

addition, Mussanah Sailing School earned the Best Sailing School competition award following the impressive performances of their young sailors across all events.

Hashim al Rashdi, Oman Sail’s Head Coach of Performance, said: “We are very pleased with the outcomes of the Winter Cup and the level of performance from all sailors. The skills shown by the highest performing sailors are a result of their dedication in training camps and commitment to becoming accomplished sailors. We have a busy season ahead and our squad will now start working towards building on these results so that we can proudly represent the nation and continue developing our young sailors.”

Reviving
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20–22 February 2025
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MARKETREACH



The deal covers the annual supply of 800,000 metric tonnes of LNG, with deliveries set to begin in April 2025.

OMAN LNG AND MERCURIA SIGN 10-YEAR GAS DEAL

MUSCAT: Oman LNG has signed a 10-year liquefied natural gas (LNG) sale and purchase agreement with Mercuria Energy Group, a leading Swiss-based energy trading firm. The deal covers the annual

This agreement aligns with Oman LNG's strategy to ensure stable and sustainable energy exports while strengthening its position in the global LNG market.

supply of 800,000 metric tonnes of LNG, with deliveries set to begin in April 2025. This agreement aligns with Oman LNG's strategy to ensure stable and sustainable energy exports while strengthening its position in the global LNG market.

Hamad bin Mohammed al Naamani, CEO of Oman LNG, emphasised that the partnership with Mercuria will expand the company's market reach and reinforce its commitment to energy security and sustainability.

Marco Dunand, CEO of Mercuria Energy Group, stated that this deal supports Mercuria's strategy to grow its LNG portfolio and meet the increasing global demand for natural gas. Oman continues to solidify its status as a key LNG supplier, leveraging its strategic location and robust energy infrastructure. — ONA

Oman ranks 8th in global entrepreneurship index

THE Sultanate of Oman has secured the eighth position in the 2024 Global Entrepreneurship Index, climbing three spots from last year.

According to the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) Report, Oman scored 5.7, an improvement from 5.4 in 2023, placing it among the top entrepreneurial ecosystems globally.

The ranking evaluates 56 countries based on 13 key indicators spanning nine core aspects of national entrepreneurship. Oman performed strongly in areas such as access to financing, government policies, education, market dynamics, research and development transfer, and infrastructure.

This achievement reflects Oman's growing reputation as a hub for start-ups and small businesses.

The Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development (Riyada), in collaboration with public and private sector stakeholders, has played a pivotal role in strengthening Oman's entrepreneurial ecosystem. Several strategic initiatives have driven this progress, including:

Supportive Policies & Regulations: Streamlining laws to facilitate start-up creation and offering procedural and financial incentives for SME investment.

Enhanced Access to Financing: Expanding funding programmes in partnership with Development Bank, Oman Future Fund, and private financial institutions to improve capital flow to start-ups.

Innovation & Technology Investments: Boosting support for technology-driven start-ups and increasing research and development funding.

Business Incubators & Accelerators: Establishing entrepreneurship hubs and accelerators across Oman to nurture new businesses.

Education & Training: Integrating entrepreneurship curricula in schools



Oman performed strongly in areas such as access to financing, government policies, education, market dynamics, research and development transfer, and infrastructure.

and universities in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation. Halima bint Rashid al Zariyah, Chairperson of the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority (SMEDA), emphasised that Oman's improved ranking underscores the success of its entrepreneurship strategy. She noted that the country's supportive business environment has enabled start-ups and SMEs to thrive, particularly those focused on innovation and modern technologies.

She further highlighted that this achievement results from effective collaboration between the government and private sector, reinforcing Oman's ambition to diversify its economy through entrepreneurship.

Dr Abdullah bin Mohammed al Shukaili, Head of the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) Research Team in Oman and

Executive Director of the Entrepreneurship Centre at the University of Nizwa, described the ranking as a major milestone. He stated that Oman's pro-business policies and commitment to SME development have enhanced its position as a regional leader in entrepreneurship. The Global Entrepreneurship Monitor Report, one of the world's most respected studies on entrepreneurship, praised Oman's business-friendly policies, financial support programmes and incubator networks.

Analysts from the Observatory noted that these initiatives have significantly increased SME contributions to the national economy, boosting Oman's competitiveness on the global stage.

With continued investment in start-ups, technology and financing, Oman is well-positioned to further strengthen its entrepreneurial landscape in the years ahead. — ONA

Oman's Asyad Shipping fleet to hit 112 ships by 2029

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, FEB 18

AN AMBITIOUS fleet renewal plan unveiled by wholly Omani government-owned Asyad Shipping envisions the expansion of the fleet to a total of 122 vessels by 2029, up from 89 ships presently.

Details about this growth are outlined in the newly approved prospectus of the company's Initial Public Offering (IPO), which opens on the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) tomorrow, February 20, 2025.

Around 20 per cent of Asyad Shipping's capital will be offered for public subscription over a weeklong period through to February 27, 2025, aimed at raising around RO 128 million from retail and institutional subscribers.

Earlier, Asyad Shipping – part of Asyad Group – had revealed that it plans to invest between \$2.3 billion to \$2.7 billion in new vessel acquisitions over the next five years, designed to solidify its position as the



Asyad Shipping's Valemex VLOC dry bulk carrier.

country's preeminent maritime transportation services provider.

At present, the fleet is made up of a diverse mix of 22 crude tankers (16 VLCCs - four of which are under order), 34 products tankers (27 MRs, two LR2s, two methanol carriers, two small tankers and one small chemical tanker), 18 dry bulk carriers (four VLOCs, eight Ultramax vessels, three Supramax vessels,

two Handymax vessels and one Kamsarmax vessel), 10 gas carriers eight LNG carriers two of which are under order, one VLGC and one MGC, and five container vessels (two Handymax vessels, one Handysize vessel, one Supramax vessel and one Panamax vessel).

By 2029, the fleet will receive a significant makeover. Of the targeted fleet size of 122 vessels, 65 are proposed to be fully owned

or co-owned, while the balance 47 will be chartered-in, according to Asyad Shipping.

In line with the company's dominant business line, a total of 13 crude carriers will be added to the fleet by 2029. Four of these Very Large Crude Carriers (VLCCs) are already on order from South Korean shipyards and are slated for delivery during 2026-2027.

They will replace four existing vessels, while chartered-in VLCCs will be reduced by three. Thus, by 2029, the crude carrying business will be upgraded to a total of 21 fully owned or co-owned vessels and 3 chartered-in ships.

Products Shipping – another key part of Asyad Shipping's business – will see the acquisition of six additional vessels, disposal of three existing vessels and reduction of four chartered-in ships. The renewed fleet in this segment will comprise of 15 chartered-in and 18 owned or co-owned vessels by 2029.

Dry Bulk Shipping, which serves Oman's large metallurgical sector,

will be boosted with the addition of six vessels and charter-in of 15 more vessels. The total make-up of this segment, by 2029, will comprise 22 chartered-in and 17 owned or co-owned vessels.

The Gas Shipping segment - catering to the transportation of LNG, as well as LPG and NGLs - is poised to be bolstered via the acquisition of four vessels, two of which are already under construction. During the same period, five existing gas carriers will be disposed of, leaving a total fleet of six owned or co-owned Gas Shipping vessels.

The Liner Shipping business will grow by one vessel, while the chartered-in component will be increased by four ships, resulting in seven owned Liner Shipping vessels in five years.

"The Company believes its modern fleet is one of the key competitive advantages in the markets in which it operates, and it continually seeks to renew portions of its fleet to maintain the competitive profile of its vessels," Asyad Shipping added.

ADVERTORIALS

STRONG COMMITMENT



It aims to empower women financially, enabling them to make informed decisions.

DHOFAR ISLAMIC’S LADIES ACCOUNT ENABLES WOMEN ACHIEVE THEIR FINANCIAL ASPIRATIONS

MUSCAT: Designed exclusively for ladies, Dhofar Islamic’s ladies Account — the Sharia-compliant savings account under BankDhofar’s Islamic banking window — is built on the Mudharaba principle. It aims to empower women financially, enabling them to make informed decisions and achieve their aspirations.

With a strong commitment to supporting ladies’ financial independence, Dhofar Islamic offers exclusive benefits, including special rates on financing and deposits, ensuring that ladies receive competitive returns for their personal or business financial needs.

Through its Ladies Banking services, Dhofar Islamic provides ladies with a range of tailored benefits, such as the ease of opening an account via mobile banking, a monthly return based on the Mudharaba account balance and competitive financing rates. Amer bin Said al Amri, DGM and Head of Retail Banking at Dhofar Islamic, highlighted the bank’s commitment to inclusivity, stating: “Dhofar Islamic is characterised by diversity, inclusiveness and meeting the needs of all segments of society.

Therefore, the Ladies Account is committed to providing ladies in the Sultanate of Oman with the financial tools that enable them to achieve their future aspirations and ambitions.”

The Ladies Account offers more than just banking services. Customers also gain access to exclusive benefits on credit cards, including loyalty points under the Dhofar Islamic Rewards Programme, discounts at select stores and privileges that enhance their lifestyle. In addition to financial products, the account provides financial guidance and advisory support, enabling ladies to plan effectively for their future.

Dhofar Islamic continues to expand its footprint in Oman’s Islamic banking sector. Its network now includes 25 branches across Oman, complemented by over 400 self-service terminals, including ATMs, CDMs and MDMs, serving both BankDhofar and Dhofar Islamic customers.

The bank remains committed to following the best international practices in Islamic banking while offering innovative solutions that align with Sharia principles and meet the evolving needs of its customers.

ALOFT MUSCAT UNVEILS ENTICING IFTAR EXPERIENCE FOR RAMADHAN

MUSCAT: As the sacred month of Ramadhan commences, Aloft Muscat invites guests to gather with loved ones and indulge in a memorable Iftar experience at The Backstage.

The Backstage offers a distinctive

Ramadhan ambiance, creating the perfect setting for a delightful evening. Guests can savour a rich selection of exquisite dishes, from live cooking stations to unique desserts and refreshing beverages.

Details & Timings: Available



from sunset until 22:00. RO 14 per person (adults) – Inclusive of Ramadhan juices, still water, regular coffee and tea.

“Ramadhan is a time for reflection, connection and celebration,” said Ramy Hamdoun, General Manager of Aloft Muscat. “We are proud to offer a thoughtfully curated Iftar experience that reflects the spirit of this special month, bringing people together over delicious food and warm hospitality.”

For inquiries and reservations, please contact: reservations.muscat@aloft.com | +968 22701777 / 9659 4126.

Enjoy fun experiences in the Chery Arrizo 6 Pro

THE Chery Arrizo 6 Pro is a sophisticated sedan designed to elevate the driving experience with its advanced technology, premium comfort and intelligent safety features. Engineered for those who seek a blend of style, performance and practicality, the Arrizo 6 Pro makes every journey more enjoyable, ensuring lasting memories with every drive.

The Arrizo 6 Pro is crafted to leave a lasting impression with its dynamic and modern exterior. The bold front grille, sleek LED headlamps and aerodynamic silhouettes reflect a refined and sporty aesthetic, making the sedan stand out on any road.

Inside, the cabin exudes luxury with high-quality materials, a spacious layout and a driver-centric design.

The leather seats, intuitive dashboard and ambient lighting create a sophisticated and comfortable environment, perfect for long journeys or city commutes.

The 10.25-inch touchscreen



The Arrizo 6 Pro is crafted to leave a lasting impression with its dynamic and modern exterior.

infotainment system, integrated with Apple CarPlay and Android Auto, ensures seamless connectivity, allowing passengers to stay entertained and informed on the go.

Under the hood, the Arrizo 6 Pro boasts an advanced turbocharged engine, delivering an exhilarating balance of power and efficiency.

The continuously variable

transmission (CVT) ensures smooth acceleration and enhanced fuel economy, making every drive effortless.

Advanced driving features such as cruise control, electric power steering and multiple driving modes allow drivers to personalise their experience, ensuring a responsive and dynamic ride. Whether navigating through city traffic or

cruising on highways, the Arrizo 6 Pro guarantees an exceptional driving experience.

Safety remains a top priority in the Arrizo 6 Pro, equipped with cutting-edge features to protect both driver and passengers.

The sedan comes with a 360-degree camera system, blind-spot monitoring, lane departure warning and an advanced electronic stability programme for superior handling and control.

Additionally, multiple airbags, a reinforced high-strength body and an intelligent braking system work together to ensure the highest level of protection.

The Arrizo 6 Pro is designed with smart technology to make every trip more enjoyable and convenient. The intelligent keyless entry, push-start ignition and an advanced climate control system provide ease of access and comfort. Moreover, the voice control system allows drivers to operate essential functions hands-free, enhancing safety and convenience on the road.

NBO CELEBRATES MOTHER’S DAY WITH SPECIAL REWARDS

MUSCAT: The National Bank of Oman (NBO) has announced launching a special Mother’s Day campaign, rewarding top-spending cardholders with special packages in celebration of this special occasion on March 21, 2025.

From February 15 to March 10, all NBO cardholders — including Debit, Credit and Badeel Prepaid Card customers — can participate by purchasing through POS and eCommerce transactions.

Speaking on this exclusive offer, Maha al Raisi, Assistant General Manager and Head of Product at NBO, said: “As we celebrate this special occasion, we aim to offer



All NBO cardholders can participate by purchasing through POS and eCommerce transactions.

our customers a meaningful way to celebrate with their loved ones.

“Not only does this campaign reward our valued cardholders, but it also helps to strengthen their familial bonds by providing a truly memorable experience. With NBO cards, customers can enjoy easy transactions, enhanced security and exclusive rewards, making their shopping journey even more rewarding. Through this initiative, we recognise and appreciate our customers.” As part of the campaign, the highest spenders across various card categories will be rewarded with one winner to be selected from each of the Infinite,

Signature, Platinum and Gold Credit Card categories.

For Debit Cards, two winners will be chosen from the Sadara, Mazaya and Mass/Classic categories. Additionally, one winner each will be selected from the Badeel General Purpose and Travel categories under Badeel Cards. Please note that ATM transactions and government-related spending will not be considered. With a strong focus on customer satisfaction, NBO continues to introduce engaging campaigns and reward programmes to provide exceptional value.

Malabar Gold & Diamonds honoured as Oman’s most trusted brand for 7th time

MUSCAT: Malabar Gold & Diamonds, currently ranked as the 6th largest jewellery retailer globally with over 375 showrooms across 13 countries, has been honoured with ‘Oman’s Most Trusted Brand’ award in the jewellery category. This is the 7th time that Malabar Gold & Diamonds is emerging as ‘Oman’s Most Trusted Brand’.

HH Sayyid Dr Faris bin Turki al Said, Member of the Technical Team for Oman’s Promotional Identity, handed over the award to Najeeb K, Regional Head – Oman, Malabar Gold & Diamonds in the presence of Muhsin P, Branch Head, Malabar Gold & Diamonds, Shereef Padincharath, Deputy Head -Supply Chain, Malabar Gold & Diamonds,



Oman’s Most Trusted Brand Awards acknowledges brands that have won the confidence of their customers through a voting proces.

and Saleh Zakwani - Executive Chairman, Apex Media.

The award is instituted by Apex Media, one of Oman’s premier publishing houses involved in a host of publishing and digital activities. Oman’s Most Trusted Brand Awards acknowledges brands that have won the confidence of their customers through a voting process, which is also an opportunity for customers to prove their loyalty towards their favourite brands.

“We are extremely delighted to have been awarded this prestigious honour. Malabar Gold & Diamonds being crowned as Oman’s Most Trusted Brand for the 7th time is testament to our acceptance as the most preferred jeweller amongst both citizens and residents alike.

Our commitment to providing jewellery lovers in Oman with exquisite jewellery and exceptional remains as strong as ever.

“We dedicate this inspiring triumph to our millions of satisfied customers, team members and investors, without whose wholehearted support, this exceptional accomplishment would not have been possible,” said Najeeb K, Regional Head, Malabar Gold & Diamonds.

Malabar Gold & Diamonds currently operated 12 outlets in Oman, providing customers its multi-national customers with a wide variety of jewellery in both traditional and contemporary designs, curated from over 20 countries.

BUSINESS



The outlook for OQEP’s dividend distribution remains highly favourable.

REPORT: OQEP POISED FOR STRONG RETURNS AMID MARKET UNDERVALUATION

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, FEB 18

OQ EXPLORATION and Production (OQEP) — one of the largest producers of oil and gas in the Sultanate of Oman — is emerging as a highly attractive investment opportunity, despite initial struggles following its IPO, according to a recent report by Oman Investment Bank (OIB). The OIB — the nation’s first government-owned corporate investment bank — maintains an overweight recommendation on the stock, citing robust financial performance, strong cash flows, and an attractive dividend yield among the highest on the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX).

While concerns over market saturation and oil price volatility weighed on OQEP’s stock post-listing, OIB asserts that these fears have been overblown. The company’s preliminary FY24 results exceeded forecasts, demonstrating its financial resilience.

With revenues of \$2.31 billion and a net profit of \$818 million, OQEP outperformed OIB’s estimates by 4% and 2%, respectively. The final results, expected soon, are likely to confirm a substantial performance dividend for 2025, further boosting investor confidence.

DIVIDEND YIELDS AMONG THE HIGHEST ON MSX
One of OQEP’s key strengths is its industry-leading dividend yield. The company’s base dividend of \$600 million translates to a 9.2% yield, already among the most attractive on MSX.

Additionally, OQEP has the potential to distribute an additional \$265 million in performance dividends for 2025, increasing the total dividend yield to an impressive 13.3%. This figure surpasses many global energy players, including Saudi Aramco, and is more than triple the yield offered by emerging market peers such as Dana Gas, KazMunaiGas, and MedcoEnergt.

OIB highlights that even at lower oil prices, OQEP’s base dividend remains secure at \$50 per barrel, while the performance dividend becomes payable at \$55 per barrel, increasing as oil prices rise. With Brent crude averaging over \$77 per barrel in 2025 so far, the outlook for OQEP’s dividend distribution remains highly favourable.

STRONG CASH FLOW AND MARKET POSITION
OQEP’s strong free cash flow generation and conservative financial management further strengthen its investment case. The company boasts approximately 1 billion barrels of oil equivalent (2P working reserves) and a current production capacity of 240,000 barrels of oil equivalent per day (kboed), positioning it as a key player in the upstream oil sector.

Despite its strong financial fundamentals, OQEP is currently trading at some of the lowest valuation multiples among its global peers. OIB sees this as an unjustified market reaction, particularly given the company’s performance and oil price stability.

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, FEB 18

EVENTS of the ‘GCC Economic Diversification Indicators’ Forum concluded here on February 18, 2025. The event, organised by the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) in partnership with the Konrad Adenauer Foundation’s Regional Programme for Gulf States and the Smart Investment and Consulting Gateway, aimed to assess economic diversification metrics within countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).

In his keynote address, His Highness Sayyid Dr Adham bin Turki al Said, Chairman of the Economic Committee at OCCI, emphasised the

importance of economic diversification, stating: “Why is economic diversification an imperative and no longer a choice?

The reason is simple: our economies are not sustainable in their current growth models, and we need new models. In response, governments in the region have taken the lead by crafting national visions that centre on socioeconomic challenges—how to create jobs, how to build more versatile economies, and, most importantly, how to sustain fiscal stability.”



HH SAYYID DR ADHAM BIN TURKI AL SAID
Chairman of the Economic Committee at OCCI

about meeting a target—it should reflect meaningful economic transformation,” he stressed.

Muscat to Salalah: The high cost of limited flights

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, FEB 18

TRAVELLING BETWEEN Muscat and Salalah should be straightforward and budget-friendly, especially given the route’s significance for business and leisure travellers. Yet, in recent weeks, passengers have faced soaring last-minute ticket prices and a frustrating lack of available flights. What should be a routine domestic trip has turned into an expensive and inconvenient challenge.

A DOMESTIC FLIGHT THAT COSTS A FORTUNE
The surge in complaints is impossible to ignore. Travellers struggle to find reasonably priced seats, with last-minute one-way fares exceeding RO 100—comparable to some international flights. For many, the only alternative is the gruelling 10-hour drive, a choice made out of necessity rather than preference.

The ripple effects extend beyond personal inconvenience. Businesses and tourism are taking a hit, particularly in Dhofar Governorate, where the local economy relies on a steady flow of domestic visitors. High fares and limited flights discourage travel, especially outside the monsoon season (khareef), when tourism is crucial for sustaining local businesses.



Travellers struggle to find reasonably priced seats, with last-minute one-way fares exceeding RO 100—comparable to some international flights.

OMAN AIR’S RESPONSE: IS IT ENOUGH?
In response to growing frustration, Oman Air clarified its fixed pricing policy for Omani citizens: “The national carrier has set a fixed fare of RO 64 for a round-trip and RO 35 for a one-way ticket in economy class for Omani citizens year-round. During the khareef season, the round-trip fare is further reduced to RO 54, in line with the government’s directives.”

This policy provides some relief for Omani travellers but does not fully address the broader issue: the limited number of flights and high fares for non-citizens, including expatriates, tourists, and business travellers.

Oman Air also highlighted

its efforts to increase flight frequency, operating five daily flights to Salalah and up to 12 during peak periods. Yet, availability and pricing challenges persist, especially for last-minute travellers.

THE ROOT OF THE PROBLEM: SUPPLY VS. DEMAND
Even with fixed fares for some, many travellers simply can’t find seats. Oman Air and SalamAir are the only two major carriers on this route, and flights frequently sell out, particularly during peak times. The imbalance between demand and available seats leaves late bookers with few options and inflated prices.

This isn’t just about affordability—it’s about accessibility. Business professionals needing urgent

travel, tourists seeking flexibility, and expatriates commuting between Muscat and Salalah all feel the strain. An aviation expert, speaking to the *Observer*, highlighted the core issue: a fundamental mismatch between supply and demand. “The problem isn’t just pricing—it’s capacity constraints. With only two carriers on this critical route, demand often exceeds supply, especially during peak seasons.”

HE OUTLINED THREE KEY STEPS TO ADDRESS THE ISSUE:

1. Increase Flight Frequency, Especially during Peak Times: “Adding more flights, particularly on weekends and holidays, would ease congestion and stabilise prices. Passengers are frustrated because flights sell out too quickly, leading to artificial price hikes,” he said.
2. Greater Pricing Transparency for All Travellers: “While fixed fares for Omani citizens are a positive step, inconsistent pricing for expatriates, tourists, and business travellers remains an issue. A clear, structured pricing model would prevent sudden price surges and ensure fairness for all,” the expert further noted.
3. Encourage Competition and Alternative Travel Options: “The lack of competition is a major driver of high ticket prices. Inviting more budget carriers or regional airlines to operate on this route would foster competitive pricing, benefiting consumers,” he added.

OMAN TO HOST 5TH EMIRATES ENERGY AWARD CYCLE

NASRULAH AL AJMI
MUSCAT, FEB 18

THE Dubai Supreme Council of Energy announced the launch of the fifth cycle of the Emirates Energy Award 2023-2025 in the Sultanate of Oman during a press conference at The St. Regis Al Mouj Muscat Resort. Held under the auspices of Shaikh Mohammed bin Rashid al Maktoum, Vice-President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai, the award is themed ‘Empowering Carbon Neutrality.’

Ahmad Buti al Muhaïrbi, Secretary-General of the Dubai Supreme Council of Energy, and Vice Chairman of the Executive Committee of Emirates Energy Award (EEA), stated: “We are pleased to launch the fifth cycle of the Emirates Energy Award 2023-2025 in the Sultanate of Oman, a leading country in advancing sustainable energy strategies and adopting innovative solutions to meet the growing energy demand.

This step aligns with the award’s objectives of encouraging innovation, driving the development of renewable energy technologies, and supporting



Top officials of the Dubai Supreme Council of Energy addressing the media on Tuesday.

initiatives that contribute to carbon neutrality and environmental sustainability.”

Speaking at the media briefing, Eng Faisal Ali Rashid, Senior Director, Demand Side Management, highlighted the Emirates Energy Award as a key initiative by the Dubai Supreme Council of Energy, recognising innovation and excellence in renewable energy, energy efficiency, resource management, and environmental sustainability.

Under the theme ‘Empowering Carbon Neutrality,’ the award serves as a platform to

inspire innovations that drive a greener, more sustainable future.

He stated, “Since its launch, the award has attracted high-quality entries from various countries, and we have witnessed outstanding projects from the Sultanate of Oman, which is striving for a transformative shift in the energy sector by expanding renewable energy sources and enhancing grid efficiency. We look forward to receiving more exceptional Omani projects that will contribute to advancing sustainability and addressing climate change challenges.”

The Sultanate of Oman continues its efforts to solidify sustainability in the energy sector by implementing strategic and high-impact projects aimed at meeting the growing demand for electricity, enhancing resource efficiency, and increasing reliance on renewable energy sources.

These projects contribute to multiple benefits, including creating new job opportunities, reducing environmental impact, and achieving energy self-sufficiency, ensuring a more sustainable and prosperous future for generations to come.

Economic diversification must drive meaningful transformation

He noted that current assessments of economic diversification solely rely on the oil and non-oil sectors, failing to delve deep into the drivers of growth within non-oil economies.

“We must move beyond the oil vs. non-oil binary thinking. Instead, we should focus on the smaller elements that contribute to meaningful change.” He also underlined the importance of intra-sector diversification.

“Another aspect often overlooked is intra-sector diversification. Rather than focusing solely on an overall shift away from oil, we should ask: how have we diversified within the oil and gas sector over the past 60 years?” Referencing diversification trends in Oman,

HH Sayyid Adham pointed out that more than 25 new export lines have emerged in the past 20 years, including refined petroleum products, treated aluminium, and steel. These industries did not exist in the 1990s or early 2000s. This diversification within industries is critical, yet we often fail to measure it, he remarked.

He also highlighted the role of the private sector within the process of diversification. “Economic diversification is not solely the government’s responsibility. The private sector must play a crucial role,” he said, noting that the private sector must play a key role in developing diversification strategies.

OPINION

More mergers & acquisitions predicted for 2025



ANDY JALIL

The author is our foreign correspondent based in the UK

CONSOLIDATION IS expected to ramp up in the UK wealth sector in 2025, as companies continue to battle rising staff costs and technology expenses, according to bosses and experts.

It was a busy year for M&A in the UK wealth industry in 2024, with 67 M&A transactions worth \$10.5 billion completed, according to a Boston Consulting Group analysis of GlobalData figures.

Among high-profile private equity deals were Hargreaves Lansdown, the trading platform sold to a consortium led by CVC Capital Partners, part-owner of the six nations rugby tournament and the sale of the cyber security business Darktrace to the US investor Thoma Bravo.

Nonetheless, this was down 19 per cent on 2023 when 83 deals were done for a total of \$14.5 billion, an analysis showed.

Bosses in the financial district of London (the area known as ‘The City’) are now predicting that the sector will be a breeding ground for deals this year. Managing director and partner at Boston Consulting Group, Dean Frankle, said this year is “going to be a year of increased M&A”.

He added that consolidation has been “particularly acute” in the UK wealth industry, because of the amount of private

equity ownership in the sector.

Many owners have held these assets for more than three years so will now be more open to selling.

City wealth firm Evelyn Partners has for years been rumoured to be a takeover target. The firm, which is around £62.7 billion in assets, is owned by private equity giants Permira and Warburg Pincus, and sold its accountancy business to private equity firm Apax for £700m in November.

Chief executive officer at Rathbones, Paul Stockton, is also expecting to see more M&A deals in the UK wealth sector this year.

The cost of doing business have continued to rise, he said, with wealth managers forced to shell out more money on top talent and technology to scale their businesses and win new clients.

Meanwhile, volatile markets combined with an influx of new regulation, including the Financial Conduct Authority’s Consumer Duty and ongoing advice rules, have squeezed margins further.

Rathbones has been battling to bring down costs since its mega merger with Investec Wealth and Investment in September 2023 and is currently exploring a voluntary redundancy scheme.

“It is a hugely competitive industry,” Stockton said. “If you’re in the middle, it’s not a comfortable space to be.” Despite

Chief executive officer at Rathbones, Paul Stockton, is also expecting to see more M&A deals in the UK wealth sector this year. The cost of doing business have continued to rise, he said, with wealth managers forced to shell out more money on top talent and technology to scale their businesses and win new clients.

the spike in wealth M&A deals since the pandemic, the market remains highly fragmented.

Managing director and head of the financial services group at investment bank Stephens, Hugh Elwes, said there are still a lot of smaller, regional wealth firms in the UK.

Meanwhile, there is a glut of financial advisers looking to retire, but not enough young talent to replace them.

“I reckon that we are only halfway through the consolidation process. There are now 40 different consolidation vehicles, mostly financed by private capital, but there’s a lot of businesses out there,” Elwes said.

Independent Wealth Planners (IWP), which is backed by private capital firm Ares Management, is one of the largest consolidators in the UK, having bought more than 30 Independent Financial Advisors in the country since 2019.

It was sold to Titan Wealth in December after accruing a significant debt pile.

Quilter boss Andy McGlone expects consolidation will continue among the smaller firms in the market, “but I wouldn’t anticipate a significant increase from what we’ve observed in recent years.”

He added that the advice giant has been more focused on organic growth in recent years, but remains “open to the right opportunities as they become available”.

BEWARE OF CHINESE STOCKS AI SIREN SONG

ROBYN MAK

Chinese stocks look dangerously alluring. President Xi Jinping’s meeting with technology tycoons on Monday capped a rally for some of the country’s biggest private-sector firms. His show of support for them builds on some recent wins in their artificial intelligence innovations. But it also precedes big challenges on the horizon.

Since upstart DeepSeek released its groundbreaking low-cost large language training model last month, Hong Kong’s Hang Seng technology index, which counts most of China’s AI giants as constituents, is up by nearly a fifth. There is rising optimism that the country can catch up with, or overtake, American innovators like OpenAI and Meta.

The rare show of support from the Chinese leader for Alibaba tab founder Jack Ma and bosses from DeepSeek, Huawei, BYD and more, further fuels hope that regulatory crackdowns on the sector are over.

Since late January, investors have added \$210 billion in combined market value to Tencent and Alibaba alone.

True, AI’s immense potential is tantalising. Analysts at Goldman Sachs estimate adoption of the technology could lift earnings per share in Chinese stocks by 2.5% annually over the next decade and will underpin a 16% rally in the MSCI China over the next twelve months as growth prospects of the world’s second-largest economy improve.

Yet Xi’s affirmation of the state’s unwavering support for private firms echoes his sentiments at a similar confab in 2018, not long before the tech crackdown began. Chinese officials are currently setting up a committee to develop AI industry standards and risk assessments.

That suggests a bigger role ahead for the government and sharply contrasts with the approach in the United States, where President Donald Trump is dismantling his predecessor’s efforts to curb AI risks. The immediate threat to China’s tech giants, though, may be an intensifying price war.

AI offerings from upstarts DeepSeek, Zhipu and more have proliferated alongside deep-pocketed incumbents like Alibaba and Baidu in what one Tencent executive dubbed “a war of hundred models”.

Last year, Alibaba, for example, announced price cuts of up to 97% on a range of its Tongyi Qwen large language models. The \$300 billion e-commerce group is forecast to generate just \$386 million in earnings before interest, taxes and amortisation, per Visible Alpha. — Reuters

Blue carbon economy in Oman: Progress, challenges

“WE live now... in a ‘full world,’ with an economy that exceeds Earth’s regenerative and absorptive capacity by over-harvesting sources such as fish and forests and over-filling sinks such as the atmosphere and oceans.” — Kate Raworth. This quote highlights the excessive exploitation of natural resources, leading to an environmental crisis where consumption surpasses the Earth’s regenerative capacity.

As nations worldwide intensify their efforts to combat climate change, innovative strategies are emerging to reduce carbon emissions while sustaining economic growth.

One such approach is the blue carbon economy, which leverages coastal and marine ecosystems — including seagrasses, mangroves and salt marshes — to capture and store carbon dioxide.

Oman, with its vast and diverse coastline stretching approximately 1,967 miles along the Arabian Sea and the Sea of Oman, boasts rich marine biodiversity.

The country has embraced blue carbon strategies to align with its Vision 2040 and long-term sustainability goals. Collaborating with the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and initiatives like the Oman Blue Carbon Project, Oman demonstrates a strong commitment to rehabilitating mangrove ecosystems and enhancing climate resilience.



As nations worldwide intensify their efforts to combat climate change, innovative strategies are emerging to reduce carbon emissions while sustaining economic growth.



DR UMAIR WAQAS

The author is Assistant Professor in Supply Chain Management, College of Commerce and Business Administration, Dhofar University, Oman.

soil quality management and water salinity optimisation.

Ensuring mangrove survival across diverse coastal conditions presents a complex scientific challenge.

While the government has made strategic decisions and substantial financial commitments, sustaining coastal restoration in the long term requires continuous monitoring and investment, including support from the private sector.

Additionally, climate change poses a significant challenge despite Oman’s relatively low contribution to global carbon emissions.

Rising temperatures, sea level rise and coastal erosion threaten restoration efforts. Adaptive strategies are necessary to ensure the resilience of coastal ecosystems.

Moreover, balancing economic development — such as coastal tourism and urban expansion — with mangrove conservation requires a robust regulatory framework that integrates conservation policies into national development plans.

Oman’s universities play a crucial role in the success of blue carbon initiatives by fostering research, education and policy recommendations. With world-class infrastructure, laboratories

and experts, universities can conduct scientific research on carbon sequestration, biodiversity conservation and climate adaptation.

They can develop innovative restoration techniques, such as biotechnology applications for mangrove resilience, and introduce specialised courses on blue carbon, climate resilience and coastal sustainability.

Universities also train students and local communities in planting, monitoring and conservation practices while collaborating with government agencies, the private sector and international institutions to adopt best practices in coastal ecosystem management.

Community participation and awareness are vital in fostering a sustainable blue economy. Encouraging citizen science projects, where local communities contribute to coastal monitoring and data collection, can strengthen conservation efforts.

Eco-tourism and sustainable livelihood opportunities linked to mangrove conservation can further incentivise environmental stewardship.

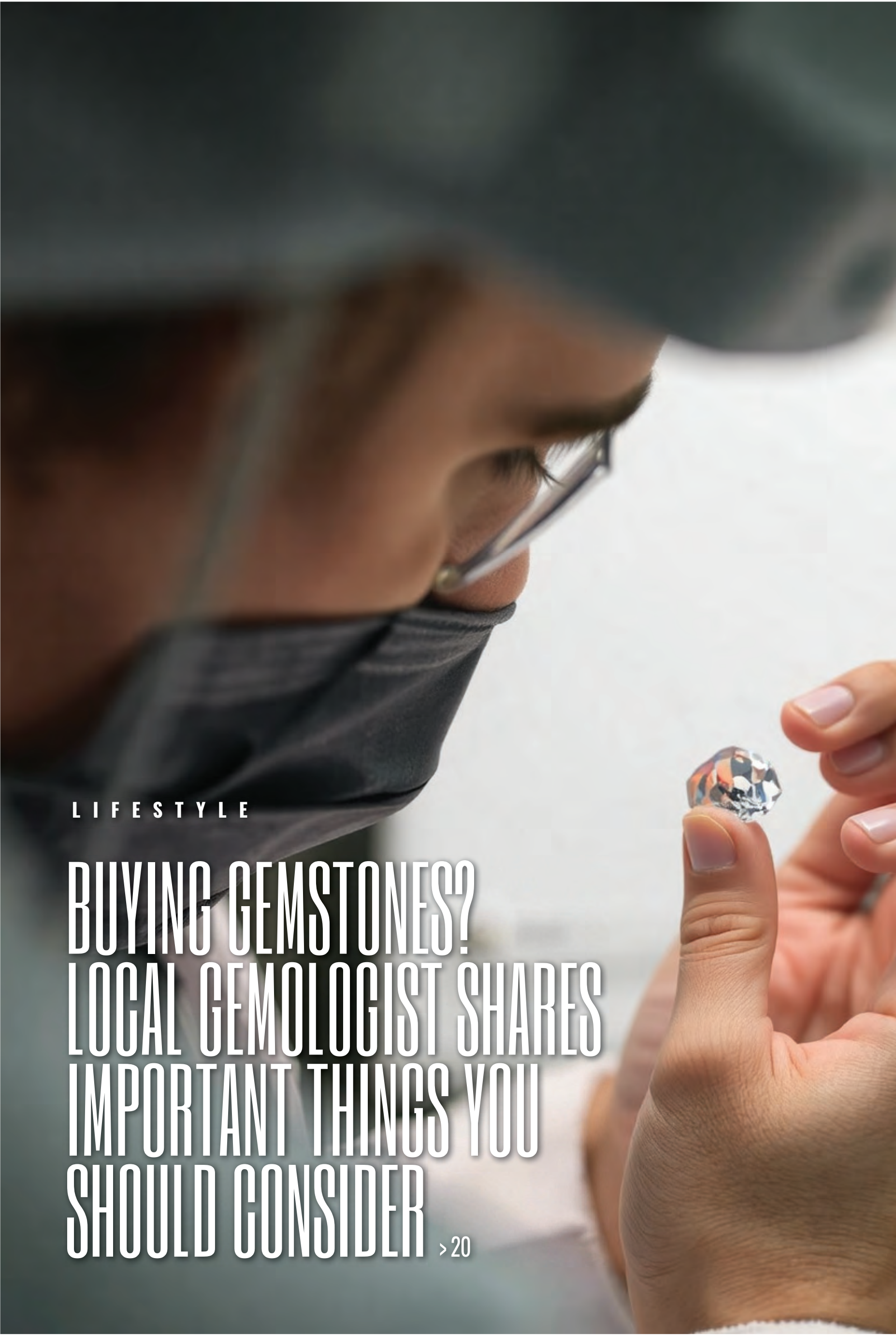
Additionally, businesses can implement Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programmes focused on coastal conservation, promoting long-term sustainability.

Oman’s commitment to advancing its blue carbon economy through large-scale mangrove restoration is a strategic step towards environmental sustainability. By involving universities, government agencies and private stakeholders, Oman can overcome challenges and maximise the long-term benefits of its blue carbon initiatives.

With careful planning, scientific research and strong policy support, Oman has the potential to become a regional leader in blue carbon conservation and climate resilience.

These efforts will not only enhance environmental sustainability, but also contribute to economic diversification and global climate goals, solidifying Oman’s role in the global movement towards a sustainable future.

ART/LIFE



L I F E S T Y L E

BUYING GEMSTONES? LOCAL GEMOLOGIST SHARES IMPORTANT THINGS YOU SHOULD CONSIDER >20

ENTERTAINMENT

‘Conclave’ and ‘Brutalist’ share BAFTA honours



PAPAL THRILLER “Conclave” and immigrant epic “The Brutalist” on Sunday tied for top honours at Britain’s BAFTA awards with each film picking up four coveted gongs.

“Conclave”, directed by German-born Edward Berger, won the BAFTA for the best film with its tale of the intrigue and horse-trading behind the scenes during the election of a new pope.

Accepting the award, Berger recalled the journey to make the film took seven years, paying tribute to British screenplay writer Peter Straughan’s “wonderful script” and lead actor Ralph Fiennes.

US film-maker Brady Corbet took the BAFTA for best director for “The Brutalist”, while leading man Adrien Brody scooped up the best actor gong for his portrayal of a Hungarian Holocaust survivor and architect who emigrates to the United States.

Brody told a winners press conference that the film was “an opportunity for me to honour my own ancestral struggles”.

In “a film that speaks to tremendous cruelty and despicable behaviour in our past... we see elements existing today that can guide us and remind us of that,” he added.

Veteran British actor Fiennes, who played a cardinal in “Conclave”, once again saw his hopes of winning a BAFTA gong dashed, losing out to Brody in the race for the honour.

Scandal-hit “Emilia Perez”, a surreal musical about a Mexican druglord, had been heavily favoured at the beginning of the year. But it ended the evening with just two BAFTAs, including one for Zoe Saldana for best supporting actress.

Until last month, French director Jacques Audiard’s movie had been expected to be a frontrunner having won 11 nominations but the controversy revolving around one of its main casts caused an uproar affecting its standing. — AFP

Q U I C K F E A T U R E S



FESTIVAL

Aerial view of the Chinese Lantern Festival in Santiago. “The Tianfu” Festival is a Chinese lantern festival held in Chile. — AFP



FILM

Bollywood actors Rakesh Roshan (L) and Rekha (R) pose as they arrive at a celebration party for the Indian Hindi-language documentary series ‘The Roshans’ in Mumbai. — AFP



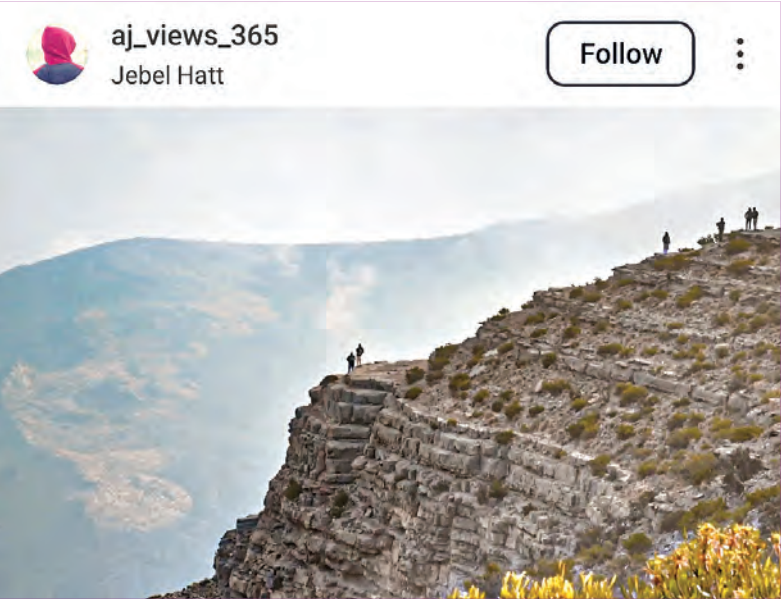
LIFESTYLE

Camel riders approach the end of the race in Nouakchott. Camel racing is an important part of tradition in Mauritania. — AFP

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



Appreciating Local Culture



Beauty of Remote Places

SHARE A SLICE OF YOUR LIFE

We select photos daily for our Instagram Top Picks of the Day. To be selected, follow us on Instagram and every time you upload or share your photos, make sure to tag us and use #OmanObserver and #BeAnObserver.

Sweet: Study reveals what Egyptian mummies smelled like



ANCIENT EGYPTIAN mummies mostly smelled “woody,” “spicy” and “sweet”, according to research published in the *Journal of the American Chemical Society* on Thursday. Researchers analysed nine mummified bodies from the Egyptian Museum in Cairo, most of which date from the 1st and 2nd millennium BC, using a combination of tools and sensory techniques, in what they said is the first study of its kind.

“The smell of mummified bodies has for years attracted significant interest from experts and the general public, but no combined chemical and perceptual scientific study has been conducted until now,” said lead author Professor Matija Strli from University College London (UCL) and the University of Ljubljana.

“This ground-breaking research really helps us better plan conservation and understand the ancient embalming materials. It adds

another layer of data to enrich the museum exhibition of mummified bodies.”

The researchers deployed a panel of trained human “sniffers” tasked with describing the smells’ quality, intensity and pleasantness as well as measuring the molecules and compounds involved using methods such as gas chromatography and mass spectrometry.

This enabled the team to determine whether these components originated from preservatives, microorganisms or pesticides, for example.

The experts qualified the remains mostly as “hedonically pleasant with ‘balsamic’ descriptors (‘heavy’, ‘sweet’, ‘woody’ odours),” according to the study.

The smells were described as “woody” in 78% of the case studies, “spicy” in 67%, and “sweet” in 56%, while “incense-like” and “stale, rancid” got 33% each. — dpa



Iran’s early recordings revive forgotten sound heritage

IN A CENTURY-OLD building in Tehran, Saeed Anvarinejad turned the dial of a vintage radio to tune into some of Iran’s earliest recorded sounds, some serving as reminders of the seismic changes that shaped the country’s history.

Along with a team of fellow enthusiasts, he spent months tracking down the earliest recordings of Iranian music, speeches, interviews, theatrical plays, radio broadcasts and even the hum of daily life from more than a century ago up to the present day.

“Sound is a phenomenon we pay little attention to... although it’s very important,” said Anvarinejad, one of the organisers of the “SoundScape” exhibition.

And “the era of early sound recording in Iran is a very important time in the socio-political history of the country”.

He highlighted the emotional power of early voice recordings, saying they captured “in a very raw and pure way... the feeling that people have at that moment,” unlike written records.

According to Anvarinejad, the oldest surviving sound recordings from Iran date back to 1898 and 1899, during the reign of Mozaffar al Din Shah of the Qajar dynasty, which reigned over the country from the late 18th to the early 20th century.

His rule saw the unfolding of the Constitutional Revolution, a pivotal moment in Iran’s political transformation that established a parliament and constitutional monarchy.

“It was a time when... a new order was taking shape in the Iranian mind and very important things were happening politically, socially and culturally,” he added.

“We thought it would be good to have a new approach to the sound (from that time) and engage audiences with it.”

Upon tuning the wooden-framed antique radio, a chilling broadcast announced the overthrow of prime minister Mohammad Mosaddegh in 1953, who had pushed for the nationalisation of Iran’s oil industry sparking a coup d’etat orchestrated by the United States and Britain.



“This is Tehran! Good news! Good news! People of the cities of Iran, be awake and alert, the traitor Mosaddegh has fled!” crackled the voice of a radio anchor.

- ‘MYSTERIOUS VOID’ -

Other audio included Iran’s first recorded call to prayer in either 1912 or 1913, and the 1959 report on the death of Qamar, the first woman singer to perform in public in the country.

One striking installation at the exhibition involved a mechanical device mounted on a concrete wall with gears, chains, wheels and a lever which played old recordings of the stringed tar instrument through retro telephone handsets.

Another, “Mowj Negar”, featured printed sound waves arranged in three rows on one wall, with a metal device which moved along the waves.

When moved, the device activates melodies from the Qajar and early Pahlavi (1925-1979) eras that once echoed through Iran’s grand palaces and bustling city streets.

Nearby stood a wooden cabinet named “The Silent Closet”, displaying a series of photos from the First World War — but without a single accompanying sound.

“There are no sound recordings from Iran during this period, not because technology was unavailable, but likely because the country was in such turmoil that recording sound was not a priority,” said Atabak



Axon, another exhibition organiser.

“There was a 12-year silence that remains a mysterious void in Iran’s auditory history.”

For centuries, sound has played a central role in Persian culture, connecting belief with poetry and identity.

For 21-year-old Sarvin Faizian, visiting the exhibition with friends was a deeply moving experience “as if I was experiencing my parents’ past.”

Similarly, Fatemeh Sadeghi described feeling overwhelmed by nostalgia, while 63-year-old Kamran Asadi found the exhibition unexpectedly personal.

“It is a very good and intimate atmosphere for me,” he said, lingering on an old song playing in the background.

“It is good for the younger generation to learn where Iran’s heritage of music and art came from.” — AFP

FEATURES

BY MAZOUN AL GHAILANI

IN RECENT years, the gemstone market has experienced a surge of excitement and confusion with the rise of commercially manufactured stones. How are these captivating natural treasures classified, and what criteria—such as value, colour, and origin—play a pivotal role in this determination?

For gemstone enthusiasts like Muath bin Abdullah al Ghafri, the art of distinguishing between authentic stones and imitations is a passion steeped in knowledge and experience.

“There are simple methods to detect gemstones without a lab,” Muath shares. “Take the handkerchief and perfume method: if you wipe the stone with a scented cloth and it leaves a trace of colour, that indicates it’s dyed and thus, a fake.” He cautions, however, that relying solely on light to identify authenticity can be misleading. Some genuine stones are naturally opaque, rendering such tests ineffective.

The secrets embedded in gemstones are as vast as their colours are diverse. Muath’s journey through collecting exquisite gems grants him the ability to discern subtle differences between stones that may appear similar yet vary significantly in composition.

He explains, “Stones like Agate, Star Sapphire, and Garnet, while all boasting shades of red, are geologically distinct. Agate is a pure blood-red, resembling natural rock, whereas Star Sapphire bears a pinkish hue, and Garnet reveals a deeper, darker red that transforms into a maroon when illuminated.”

OMAN: A GEMSTONE PARADISE

Muath’s journey of collecting luxury and unique gemstones enables him to identify stones that are similar in colour but geologically different in composition and name. He explained, “There are many stones with the same colour, but their chemical properties differ due to their geological formation, such as Agate, Star Sapphire, and Garnet. These stones are all red in colour, but it is possible to distinguish between them. For example, Agate is pure red, like blood, and resembles natural rock, while Star Sapphire is pinkish-red. The Garnet stone is a very dark red and can be distinguished when exposed to light, changing to dark brown or maroon.”

Oman is a prime location for exploring gemstones, with the most common stones being Omani Agate and Quartz. There are many places to extract gemstones, such as the Wilayat of Samayil in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate and Saih Hatat and the mountains of Qurayat in Muscat Governorate, Wadi Haibi in the Wilayat of Suhar in Al Batinah North Governorate.

At first glance, one is amazed by the sparkling beauty of the gemstones, the formation of their layers, and the variety of stunning colours. This geological difference relates to the classification of the rocks in which the gemstones originated, such as metamorphic, sedimentary, and igneous rocks. Each classification of rock contains a list of gemstones. Agate is extracted from igneous rocks and belongs to the silica stones. It consists of silica dioxide mixed with iron oxide, and sometimes, some agate contains nickel.

Certain gemstones undergo treatment processes for enhancement. Heat treatment focuses on deepening the stone’s colour, making it darker. The glass treatment method alters the chemical properties of the stone, giving it a shiny, glass-like appearance. The treatment of gemstones plays a role in their economic and investment value. “The value of untreated gemstones increases over time because they have not been chemically interfered with, and their properties have not changed, so their value remains high. As for treated gemstones, their investment value decreases, but not all stones are affected. Some gemstones are labour-intensive during the treatment process, so their value can actually increase. There are also a few countries from which prized gemstones are extracted, like Africa, which holds treasures of precious stones,” Muath shared.

He added, “For instance, the treated Star Sapphire appears red, while the untreated Star Sapphire is purple-grey. Additionally, the investment value of a gemstone



Buying gemstones? Local gemologist shares important things you should consider

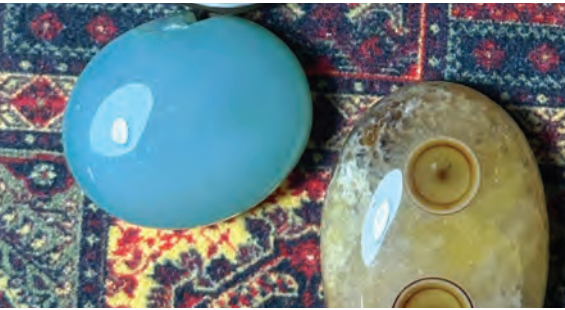


decreases when it is abundant. In contrast, if the gemstone is rare, like the ruby—which is a very dark red colour resembling the blood of a deer—it is considered a rare stone and has a significantly higher value compared to gemstones that are easy to obtain.”

Most gemstones do not deteriorate under natural conditions, except for a few that can dry out and become brittle, making them prone to breaking. Opal, for example, is formed in watery environments. Therefore, soaking the stone in water for up to two days is essential for its preservation.

In the Wilayat of Nizwa, with its historical significance, is another gem hotspot. Local artisans produce traditional silver jewellery adorned with semi-precious stones like garnet and turquoise, allowing visitors to take home pieces that reflect Omani craftsmanship and history.

Lastly, the Wilayat of Suhar, once famous for pearl diving, is now embracing gemstone trading. The city features a growing



selection of turquoise and coral jewellery, with artisans blending modern techniques into traditional designs. As more visitors are drawn to Oman’s rich cultural tapestry, the gemstone trade is flourishing, creating new opportunities for local artisans and preserving age-old practices.

While exploring these markets, travellers can engage with artisans, learning about the intricate processes that go into crafting each piece, from the initial selection of raw stones to the meticulous polishing that reveals their inner beauty. This connection to the makers adds a personal touch to each purchase, turning gemstones from mere commodities into meaningful keepsakes.

Muath encourages those interested in gemstones to appreciate not just their beauty but the stories and histories they carry. “Every stone has a journey. From the depths of the earth to the hands of skilled craftsmen, they embody time, culture and nature,” he reflects.