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INBRIEF

NATION’S READINESS
2025 EXERCISE ENDS

The national exercise ‘Nation’s Readiness 2025’ concluded on Wednesday in Muscat Governorate. The two-day exercise was conducted by the National Committee for Emergency Management (NCEM) in collaboration with relevant authorities to test and enhance national response capabilities. The closing ceremony of the exercise was held under the auspices of Eng Ali bin Mohammed al Abri, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources for Water Resources. **DETAILS ON P5**

FIRST ENDOSCOPIC
ANEURYSM IN OMAN

A medical team at Khoula Hospital successfully performed a delicate surgical procedure to remove an aneurysm in the splenic artery using endoscopic surgery technology. The accomplishment was the first of its kind to be documented in the Middle East. Dr Ahmed bin Salim al Aufi, Consultant Vascular and Accident Surgeon at Khoula Hospital, said that the case pertains to a patient who visited the hospital suffering from pain in the upper left side of the abdomen. The condition of the patient, a female, was diagnosed after an ultrasound scan, followed by a CT scan. **SEE ALSO P2**

SQU STANDS THIRD
IN ARAB RANKING

Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) achieved a significant academic milestone by ranking third in the 2025 Arab Ranking for Universities. This regional classification is organised by the Association of Arab Universities (AArU) which is based in Amman, Jordan, an affiliate of the Arab League, in collaboration with the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organisation (ALECSO) and the Federation of Arab Scientific Research Councils. **DETAILS ON P5**

HM confers Oman Military Order upon Saudi Commander

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik conferred the Oman Military Order (Second Class) upon HRH Lt Gen Turki bin Bandar bin Abdulaziz al Saud, Commander of the Royal Saudi Air Force. This honour, bestowed by His Majesty, is in recognition of his efforts and contributions to strengthening the bonds of military cooperation between the two countries. The order was presented by HH Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence

Affairs, when he received the Commander of the Royal Saudi Air Force in his office at Muaskar Al Murtafaa. The ceremony was attended by Air Vice Marshal Khamis bin Hammad al Ghafri, Commander of the Royal Air Force of Oman (RAFO). It was also attended by the ambassador of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to the Sultanate of Oman and the Military Attaché of Saudi Arabia’s embassy in Muscat. — ONA

New road projects boost
Duqm’s economic appeal

T W O P R O J E C T S A N D A S S O C I A T E D S E R V I C E R O A D S S P A N 6 7 K M

THE Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) on Wednesday celebrated the opening of two significant additions to the road network in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD). The projects include the dualisation of Sultan Said bin Taimur Road (Southern National Road No 32) and the dualisation of the Ras Markaz Road. The ceremony was held under the auspices of Dr Said bin Mohammed al Saqri, Minister of Economy, who emphasised that the new transport projects align with national economic and social development plans. He noted that these infrastructure improvements positively impact the competitiveness of the national economy and support sustainable growth by enhancing trade movement and logistical connectivity between various industrial, tourism, and commercial projects. Eng Ahmed bin Ali Akaak, CEO of SEZAD, highlighted that 2025 has been a landmark year for infrastructure, seeing the completion of internal roads in the new Sai commercial district and ongoing work on the dual coastal road in the tourist area. He specifically noted the importance of the Omani-Saudi partnership in the Ras Markaz project, which was funded by the Saudi Fund for Development and executed by an Omani-Saudi consortium including

The year 2025 has been a landmark year for infrastructure in Al Duqm.

Strabag Oman and Al Rosan Contracting. The Southern Road serves as a vital artery connecting the city centre to Duqm Airport, oil storage areas, and renewable energy projects. Meanwhile, work continues on the northern section of the Sultan Said bin Taimur Road to facilitate access to the Duqm Refinery and heavy industrial zones for those arriving via the Sinaw-Mahout-Duqm road. Similarly, the Ras Markaz dualisation project connects the strategic

oil storage terminal and clean energy projects to the heart of Duqm. In total, the two projects and their associated service roads span approximately 67 km and feature full lighting. The Sultan Said bin Taimur project included the construction of eight intersections equipped with smart traffic signals and an integrated control system connected via fibre optics to the SEZAD headquarters. To ensure climate resilience, the roads were designed with box culverts

and advanced drainage systems. The Ras Markaz road was built to high specifications to prevent water accumulation, utilising concrete bridges over wadi paths and 100,000 metres of metal safety barriers to secure vehicles along the route. The inauguration was attended by Shaikh Dr Ali bin Masoud al Sunaidy, Chairman of OPAZ, and Sultan bin Abdulrahman al Marshad, CEO of the Saudi Fund for Development, alongside several other officials and dignitaries. — ONA

Russia plans a N-power plant on moon within a decade

MOSCOW: Russia plans to put a nuclear power plant on the moon in the next decade to supply its lunar space programme and a joint Russian-Chinese research station, as major powers rush to explore the Earth’s only natural satellite. Ever since Soviet cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin became the first human to go into space in 1961, Russia has prided itself as a leading power in space exploration, but in recent

decades it has fallen behind the United States and, increasingly, China. Russia’s ambitions suffered a massive blow in August 2023 when its unmanned Luna-25 mission smashed into the surface of the moon while attempting to land, and Elon Musk has revolutionised the launch of space vehicles - once a Russian speciality. Russia’s state space corporation, Roscosmos, said in a statement that

The purpose of the plant is to power Russia’s lunar programme.

it planned to build a lunar power plant by 2036 and signed a contract with the Lavochkin Association aerospace company to do it. Roscosmos did not say explicitly that the plant would be nuclear but it said the participants included Russian state nuclear corporation Rosatom and the Kurchatov Institute, Russia’s leading nuclear research institute. Roscosmos said the purpose of the plant was to

power Russia’s lunar programme, including rovers, an observatory and the infrastructure of the joint Russian-Chinese International Lunar Research Station. “The project is an important step towards the creation of a permanently functioning scientific lunar station and the transition from one-time missions to a long-term lunar exploration programme,” Roscosmos said. — Reuters

OMAN

SHORT TAKES



The committee discussed the opinion of the subcommittee formed to study the draft law on sports authorities.

STATE COUNCIL
REVIEWS SPORTS
DRAFT LAW

MUSCAT: The State Council’s Social and Cultural Committee held its fourth meeting for this year, under the chairmanship of Dr Mohammed bin Said al Hajri, chairman of the committee, on Wednesday.

The committee discussed the opinion of the subcommittee formed to study the draft law on sports authorities. The committee has a mandate to study and review draft laws, related to developing the national legislative framework and supporting comprehensive development in the sports sector.

The committee reviewed the objectives of the draft law, which focuses on establishing governance principles in the management of sports authorities and enhancing their administrative and financial autonomy. It aims to ensure increased institutional performance and improved output quality, in addition to supporting sports investment and activating partnerships between the public and private sectors.

The draft law also aims to create a structured legislative framework that provides an attractive and stimulating sports environment for discovering and developing national talent, building a solid sports foundation to enhance the sports presence both locally and internationally.

The committee stressed the importance of the draft law in regulating the work of sports authorities, defining their competencies and powers, and promoting the principles of transparency and accountability to ensure the sustainability of institutional work and raise the efficiency of performance in line with national trends and the goals of Oman Vision 2040.

150 TAKE PART IN CLINICAL FORUM



IBRI: The Directorate-General of Health Services in Al Sharqiyah North Governorate organised on Wednesday the Second National Clinical Audit Forum. The event saw the participation of more than 150 specialists in clinical auditing, healthcare professionals and medical staff from various health institutions across the governorates of the Sultanate of Oman. — ONA

GEN AL
NUMANI
RECEIVES
SAUDI AIR
FORCE
COMMANDER

MUSCAT: Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office, received in his office on Wednesday HRH Lt Gen Turki bin Bandar bin Abdulaziz al Saud, Commander of the Royal Saudi Air Force, and his accompanying delegation, as part of his official visit to the Sultanate of Oman.

During the meeting, the two sides discussed a number of topics of mutual interest. They also reviewed existing areas of military cooperation between the two countries and ways to enhance them to serve common interests.

Both sides expressed their pride in the depth of the historical relations linking the Sultanate of



The two sides reviewed existing areas of military cooperation. — ONA

Oman and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, affirming their aspirations for further cooperation and coordination across various fields.

The meeting was attended by the ambassador of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to the Sultanate of Oman. — ONA

Mid East’s first endoscopic
aneurysm resection

A Specialised medical team at Khoula Hospital successfully performed a delicate surgical procedure to remove an aneurysm in the splenic artery using endoscopic surgery technology. The accomplishment was the first of its kind to be documented in the Middle East.

Dr Ahmed bin Salim al Aufi, Consultant Vascular and Accident Surgeon at Khoula Hospital, said that the case pertains to a patient who visited the hospital suffering from pain in the upper left side of the abdomen.

The condition of the patient, a female, was diagnosed after an ultrasound scan, followed by a CT scan, which revealed a 2.8-centimetre aneurysm in the splenic artery, said Dr Ahmed al Aufi, noting that the size of the formation was considered dangerous and it prompted immediate surgical intervention due to the possibility that it might escalate into rupture—which is fatal in more than 80 per cent of the cases.

Dr Ahmed al Aufi pointed out that the decision to remove the aneurysm was deemed a life-saving procedure, and, accordingly, the endoscopic surgery technique was preferred instead of traditional surgery.

He explained that the endoscopic surgery technique had many advantages, most notably the speed of recovery, the smaller size of the wounds and complications related to the respiratory and musculoskeletal systems involved. In addition, the procedure cuts



The case pertains to a patient who suffered from pain in the upper left side of the abdomen. — ONA

The aneurysm’s location is sensitive due to its proximity to vital organs like the pancreas and stomach, in addition to the presence of delicate arterial branches from the aneurysm site, which increases the likelihood of bleeding or rupture during surgery.

down the period of hospitalisation, which, he said, was appropriate for the condition of the patient, herself a breastfeeding infant caretaker.

Dr Ahmed al Aufi said that the operation faced a number of challenges: The aneurysm’s location is sensitive due to its proximity to vital organs like the pancreas and stomach, in addition to the presence of delicate arterial branches from the aneurysm site, which increases the likelihood of bleeding or rupture during surgery.

Yet, the operation was successfully carried out, thanks to good planning and high coordination between the medical teams.

Dr Ahmed al Aufi stressed that a prominent feature of such an operation is the fact that it eliminates the risk of fatal arterial

rupture, improves the general health condition and offers a chance for faster recovery, compared to open surgery.

Dr Ahmed al Aufi confirmed that this achievement reflects the advanced level attained by vascular surgery at Khoula Hospital and highlights the efficiency of the surgical team and the readiness of the anaesthesia and surgical nursing teams.

Asked whether this technique could be generalised in future, Dr Ahmed al Aufi said that aneurysms in abdominal arteries are rare, and that a unified treatment approach cannot be adopted for all cases. He observed that each case is evaluated individually and, accordingly, the most appropriate treatment plan should be developed according to its clinical data. — ONA

Oman’s role in facilitating Yemen prisoner exchange hailed

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, DEC 24

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) commended the sincere efforts and noble diplomatic initiatives undertaken by the Sultanate of Oman in hosting and mediating the negotiations that resulted in the agreement for the exchange of prisoners and detainees in Yemen. The KSA affirmed that this humanitarian initiative will help alleviate suffering and contribute to building confidence among the parties.

The KSA also lauded the pivotal role played by the Office of the United Nations Special Envoy to Yemen, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), and all participating parties in the negotiations. The KSA reiterated its steadfast support for all endeavours aimed at establishing peace, security and stability, in alignment with the aspirations of the Yemeni people.

In Manama, the Kingdom of Bahrain has welcomed the diplomatic efforts made by the Sultanate of Oman towards the signing of an agreement that led to the exchange of prisoners and detainees in Yemen under the aegis of the United Nations (UN) and the International Committee of the Red Cross, and in cooperation with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

The Kingdom of Bahrain valued Oman’s efforts and described them as a positive step and a breakthrough in addressing the humanitarian situation and supporting efforts for a comprehensive peaceful settlement in the Republic of Yemen.

Bahrain affirmed its steadfast stand in backing for all international and regional efforts and initiatives—notably the efforts of the Sultanate of Oman aimed at reaching a lasting political solution in Yemen in accordance with the GCC Initiative, the outcomes of the Comprehensive National Dialogue



Oman stated that reaching the significant humanitarian agreement expresses hope that it will address other outstanding issues related to the situation in the Republic of Yemen.

Conference and the mandates of Security Council Resolution No 2216—in a manner that safeguards the sovereignty, unity, territorial integrity and independence of Yemen and fulfils the Yemeni people’s aspirations for security, peace, stability and sustainable prosperity.

In Doha, the State of Qatar has expressed its deep appreciation for

the diplomatic efforts undertaken by the Sultanate of Oman, which culminated in the signing of a prisoner and detainee exchange agreement for Yemen in Muscat. Qatar described the agreement as a significant step toward addressing urgent humanitarian concerns and advancing the pursuit of security and stability in the region.

The State of Qatar further

reaffirmed its unwavering solidarity with Yemen and its continued support for the Yemeni people in achieving their aspirations for security, stability and development.

The Sultanate of Oman welcomed the agreement signed in Muscat regarding the exchange of prisoners in Yemen. Oman praised the positive spirit that prevailed throughout the negotiations, which took place from December 9-23 .

Oman commended the cooperation of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the efforts of the Office of the UN Special Envoy for Yemen, the International Committee of the Red Cross, and all parties involved in the negotiations. Oman notes that these collective efforts contributed to reaching this significant humanitarian agreement, expressing hope that it will create the necessary conditions to address other outstanding issues related to the situation in the Republic of Yemen.



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SHORT TAKE



The step was in pursuance of efforts to employ Omani youth. — ONA

RAO RECEIVES TWO BATCHES OF OFFICER CADETS

MUSCAT: Acting in coordination with the Ministry of Labour, the Royal Army of Oman (RAO) on Wednesday received two batches of officer cadets nominated for military training. The step was in pursuance of efforts to employ Omani youth and help them join the fields of national duty.

This followed the candidates’ passing the stages of acceptance, evaluation, tests, and medical and physical examinations. Those who meet the conditions will undergo the basic military training programme in preparation for joining the RAO.

The RAO harnessed its human, administrative and health expertise and capabilities — including transport requirements and the appropriate environment — to expedite practical procedures for joining the military service, within the framework of the Sultan’s Armed Forces (SAF) plans that aim to make optimum use of the potential of qualified national competencies, support their wings and the departments of the Ministry of Defence, in serving dear Oman and its beloved leader. — ONA

SALE OF UNSTAMPED ENERGY DRINKS TO BE BANNED FROM JANUARY

MIDHUN RAJ
MUSCAT, DEC 24

The Tax Authority has announced that the sale or circulation of energy drinks and other excise products that do not bear the Digital Tax Stamp (DTS) will be prohibited starting from January 1, 2026.

According to the authority, the import of energy drinks and other excise goods without the digital tax stamp was already banned in June last year.

The upcoming measure extends enforcement to the local market by preventing the sale or circulation of any such products that do not carry



The Digital Tax Stamp is intended to ensure product authenticity.

the required stamp. The Digital Tax Stamp is part of the national excise tax system and is intended to ensure

product authenticity, quality and safety, while also strengthening tax compliance and combating illicit trade.

The Tax Authority has urged consumers to verify the presence of the DTS label on energy drinks and other excise products before purchasing them. Consumers can check the stamp using the designated DTS verification tools to confirm that products are compliant with regulations. The authority also called on businesses and retailers to ensure full compliance ahead of the January 2026 deadline to avoid penalties and disruptions to their operations.

2,510 CANCER CASES REGISTERED IN OMAN

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, DEC 24

THE Latest statistical report released by the National Cancer Registry indicated a significant increase in cancer rates in the Sultanate of Oman, posing a major challenge to public health.

The report indicates that 2,510 cases were registered in the Sultanate of Oman in 2021, up from the figure of 2,198 registered a year earlier.

The number of registered cases among Omanis reached 2,318, representing 92 per cent of the total cases with males Males accounting for 994 cases (42.9 per cent), and females 1,324 cases (57.1 per cent). Among non-Omanis, 163 cases were recorded (6 per cent). Additionally, 29 cases of latent cancer were detected among Omanis (1.15 per cent).

Additionally, 155 cases were reported among children aged 14 years and under. The Ministry of Health, represented by the

The report indicated that the average age at diagnosis for females was lower than for males, at 47 years for females compared to 58 years for males.



The number of registered cases among Omanis reached 2,318, representing 92 per cent of the total cases.

National Cancer Registry, on Tuesday released its periodic report on cancer incidence rates for 2021 in the Sultanate of Oman.

The report indicated that the average age at diagnosis for females was lower than for males, at 47 years for females compared to 58 years for males.

The report also showed that the incidence rate among females in the Sultanate of Oman was 129.4, compared to 117.2 for males, bringing the overall incidence rate to 122.2.

Crude incidence rate among females was 95.1, while among males it was 70.4, with a crude incidence rate of 82.7.

The National Cancer Registry’s report showed that breast cancer is the most common type of cancer among females in the Sultanate of Oman, with 393 cases, followed by thyroid cancer with 196 cases, colorectal cancer with 93 cases, Hodgkin lymphoma with 66 cases and brain cancer with 64 cases.

The most common types among males are colorectal cancer with 121 cases, followed by Hodgkin lymphoma with 79 cases, prostate cancer with 77 cases, thyroid cancer with 66 cases and leukemia with 65 cases.

Imam Jabir bin Zaid foundation launches community partnerships

AL SEEB: The Imam Jabir bin Zaid Waqf Foundation held its fourth annual ceremony on Wednesday in the Wilayat of Al Seeb, celebrating its achievements for the year and launching extensive community partnerships. The event was held under the auspices of Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health, in the presence of several high-ranking officials.

The annual celebration aims to highlight the Foundation’s accomplishments in the field of community endowments over the past year. It also serves to review its future strategic directions and plans to enhance the developmental role of Waqf (endowment) in community service, support local initiatives and expand partnerships with government entities, the private sector, and civil society organisations, in line with its mission.

During the previous period, the executive management focused on digital transformation to ensure



The annual celebration aims to highlight the Foundation’s accomplishments in the field of community endowments over the past year.

precision in data and operations management, which has positively impacted performance quality, speed of execution and information reliability.

The ceremony witnessed the signing of several agreements and Memoranda of Understanding

(MoUs). These included a cooperation agreement to support the “Quranic Licences” project and Tajweed courses with Sultan Qaboos University, a cooperation agreement to support “Sukoon Al Rahma” (Mercy Housing) at the Sultan Qaboos Comprehensive Cancer Care and

Research Centre with the University Medical City.

An MoU was also signed with “Athar” Health Waqf Foundation to solidify strategic partnerships and enhance integration in health endowments to meet contemporary challenges and achieve sustainable

development goals. An MoU was also inked with Bausher Waqf Foundation to establish a robust institutional cooperation framework to elevate the endowment sector in Oman and ensure its sustainability and compliance with Sharia purposes.

The Foundation handed over “Atta” (Giving) initiatives to various charity teams across the Sultanate’s governorates, supporting education and humanitarian aid. The event included a dialogue session between the Foundation and its partners to discuss strategic directions and the development of endowment projects.

Additionally, a Sharia workshop titled “Between Waqf and Will: Sharia Regulations and Practical Applications” was conducted by Dr Ahmed bin Salim al Kharousi from Sultan Qaboos University. Attended by over 100 participants, the workshop addressed the legal distinctions between endowments (Waqf) and wills (Wasiyya), common errors in drafting, and real-world practical models. — ONA

SPOTLIGHT

ROUNDABOUT BOTTLENECK SLOWS RUSH HOUR

KABEER
YOUSUF

LONG commutes have become an exhausting daily reality for thousands

of motorists navigating the Rusayl roundabout, one of Muscat's most critical yet congested traffic junctions. During peak morning and afternoon hours, the area frequently grinds to a crawl, delaying office arrivals, business meetings and homeward journeys.

Serving as a major gateway linking Muscat to the interior via the Nizwa road and providing access to the Rusayl Industrial Estate, the roundabout also connects routes leading to Salalah, Suhar, Ruwi and a key defence headquarters.

Despite the recent installation of traffic signals to reduce accidents, the intersection continues to bear the brunt of heavy vehicular movement.

Motorists note that traffic congestion at Rusayl has moved beyond a transportation issue to become an economic, environmental and quality-of-life concern, with thousands of productive hours lost daily and increased vehicle emissions adding to environmental stress.

Ibtisam al Maamari, an employee at the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MoHT), described the situation as an 'everyday nightmare'.

"Expanding road networks alone is not a sustainable long-term solution; greater emphasis should be placed on smarter traffic management systems and reliable public transport alternatives," she said.

Hafidh al Harthy of Sayyarati Rental pointed to the Rusayl-Bidbid Road Expansion Project, which includes additional lanes, flyovers and improved interchanges, as a potential game changer if completed swiftly.

He also highlighted flexible working hours and smart traffic management as immediate measures.

Other commuters echoed calls for structural solutions. Juma al Balushi favoured the construction of flyovers to ease traffic flow, while journalist Hammam al Badi suggested introducing a metro system and prioritising public transport use.

Zara, another journalist, proposed dedicated carpool lanes, employer-provided transport and affordable, efficient public transport to reduce reliance on private vehicles.

Rusayl roundabout is a major congestion hotspot during peak hours

Delays impact productivity, environment and daily quality of life

Road expansion and flyovers seen as short-term relief measures

Public transport and smart traffic systems urged as long-term solutions

'Expanding road networks alone is not a sustainable long-term solution; greater emphasis should be placed on smarter traffic management systems and reliable public transport alternatives'

IBTISAM AL MAAMARI,
MOHT EMPLOYEE

SHORT TAKES



‘NATION’S READINESS 2025’ EXERCISE CONCLUDES

MUSCAT: The national exercise ‘Nation’s Readiness 2025’ concluded on Wednesday in the Muscat Governorate. The two-day exercise was conducted by the National Committee for Emergency Management (NCEM) in collaboration with relevant authorities to test and enhance national response capabilities.

The closing ceremony of the exercise was held under the auspices of Eng Ali bin Mohammed al Abri, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources for Water Resources. The event was attended by several military commanders, officials and dignitaries in the Wilayat of Qurayat.

The final proceedings included a comprehensive briefing on the exercise’s objectives and hypotheses, followed by the execution of several practical simulations. These field operations mimicked expected events during emergencies, such as evacuation, search and rescue missions, with the active participation of various sectors under the National Committee for Emergency Management and the Sub-committee for Emergency Management in Muscat. — **ONA**



The final proceedings included a comprehensive briefing on the exercise’s objectives. — **ONA**

FORUM DISCUSSES ROLES OF WOMEN IN COUNCILS



The event emphasised the importance of female participation in legislative functions. — **ONA**

IBRA: The Directorate-General of Social Development in Al Sharqiyah North Governorate organised a Leadership Forum on Wednesday to discuss the evolving roles of Omani women in parliamentary councils.

The event emphasised the importance of female participation in legislative and oversight functions, as well as the positive impact of gender diversity on decision-making quality and work-life balance.

The forum was held under the auspices of Dr Fatima bint Mohammed al Ajmiyah, CEO of Oman Medical Speciality Board. It brought together 120 participants representing public and private sector employees, academics, civil society organisations, Omani Women’s Associations and members of the local community.

The forum featured two primary working papers that addressed the practical and strategic dimensions of women’s leadership.

The event also focused on engaging civil society and the media to create a supportive environment for women. By fostering an influential media discourse, the ministry aims to boost the Sultanate of Oman’s international indicators related to women’s political participation, ensuring that social development remains a collaborative effort between all segments of society. — **ONA**

Five new bridges to come up on Sohar-Buraimi road

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, DEC 24

The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology has commenced the implementation of a project to construct five new bridges on the Sohar–Buraimi Road, at a total cost exceeding RO 6 million.

The ministry stated that the project has reached an actual completion rate of 8 per cent so far, as part of its ongoing efforts to enhance infrastructure and improve the road network across the Sultanate of Oman.



The project aims to enhance road safety and improve traffic flow.

The project has been awarded to Al Rimal for Comprehensive Technical Services in partnership with Bajan Sant Mapana. The implementation period is set at 18 months, with completion scheduled by the end of 2026 in line with the approved timeline.

The project aims to enhance road safety and improve traffic flow along one of the country’s key national roads.

The Sohar–Buraimi Road serves as a vital link between border crossings in Al Buraimi Governorate and other governorates of the Sultanate of Oman, playing an important role in supporting trade and economic activity. The initiative forms part of the ministry’s broader strategy to maintain a safe and integrated road network and to support comprehensive development across the various governorates of the Sultanate of Oman.

SQU ranks third in 2025 university classification

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, DEC 24

SULTAN Qaboos University has been ranked third in the 2025 Arab Ranking of Universities, an emerging ranking organised by the Association of Arab Universities, an affiliate of the League of Arab States, headquartered in Amman, Jordan.

This regional ranking specialises in evaluating Arab universities through governance-based mechanisms that rely on the systematic sorting of data and human inputs, which are classified automatically without human intervention.

This approach enhances the credibility of the ranking among participating institutions and provides clear indicators of their academic, research and scientific standing.

This edition marks the third iteration of the Arab Ranking of Universities organised by the Association of Arab Universities. SQU participated for the first time and achieved third place among 236 Arab universities representing 20 Arab countries.

This achievement represents



This achievement represents a qualitative addition to SQU’s journey.

This approach enhances the credibility of the ranking among participating institutions and provides clear indicators of their academic, research and scientific standing.

a qualitative addition to SQU’s journey and strengthens its presence as a leading educational and research institution at both the Arab and international levels.

It further consolidates its scientific standing and its role in shaping the future and building competencies among graduates and researchers.

Moreover, this Arab recognition reflects SQU’s commitment to its strategic vision aimed at achieving academic and research excellence, enhancing its role in serving society, and supporting the knowledge-based economy, in line with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040.

The achievement also underscores the ongoing efforts made by SQU to continuously enhance and improve its academic and scientific environment, strengthen its research and innovation ecosystem, and expand its network of regional and international partnerships.

Municipal Council reviews community initiatives



Mohammed bin Sulaiman al Kindi, Governor of Al Batinah North, chaired the meeting.

SUHAR: The Municipal Council of Al Batinah North Governorate on Wednesday held its tenth meeting of the year, chaired by Mohammed bin Sulaiman al Kindi, Governor of Al Batinah North, and attended by the council members.

During the meeting, the Council reviewed the initiatives and programmes implemented by the Educational Research and Studies Committee at the Directorate-General of Education in the governorate through a presentation by committee specialists. The Council also hosted specialists and organisers of the “Wafaa” (Loyalty) initiative, who presented the team’s vision and

mission aimed at providing integrated social, health and entertainment services for the elderly, persons with disabilities and retirees.

The Council examined a report on field visits conducted by the Social Affairs Committee to the Wafaa Centers, the Al Noor Association for the Blind, and the Oman Association for Persons with Disabilities. Additionally, they reviewed the results of the Social Affairs Committee’s fifth meeting.

AL BATINAH SOUTH

The Municipal Council of Al Batinah South Governorate reviewed several service and development topics



Eng Masoud bin Said al Hashmi, Governor of Al Batinah South, approved the previous meeting’s minutes.

related to the growth of the governorate’s wilayats during its tenth meeting of 2025.

The meeting, chaired by Eng Masoud bin Said al Hashmi, Governor of Al Batinah South and Chairman of the Council, included the approval of the previous meeting’s minutes and discussions on various issues concerning the education sector.

During the session, the Department of Heritage and Tourism delivered a visual presentation outlining the procedures for obtaining licences for guest houses and “Green Inns.” This initiative aims to support sustainable tourism within the governorate by regulating these facilities and

encouraging local investment in the hospitality sector. The Council also deliberated on several general matters, including a study to intensify monitoring of animal feed products in commercial shops and farms.

The meeting addressed the planning of sites for commercial, industrial and service centres in villages and areas distant from city centres to ensure balanced development. Members also reviewed the annual report for 2025 and the report from the Committee for Governorate Development regarding their field visit to various projects in the Wilayat of Barka. — **ONA**

WORLD

SHORT TAKES



India's Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle Mk III-M1 blasts off from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre. — Reuters file photo

INDIA SPACE AGENCY LAUNCHES HEAVIEST SATELLITE

NEW DELHI: India's space agency launched its heaviest ever payload on Wednesday, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi calling the deployment "a significant stride" for the space sector. The LVM3-M6 rocket launched the US-built AST SpaceMobile communications satellite into low-Earth orbit.

The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) said it was the "heaviest payload to be launched from Indian soil".

The launch is a boost for India's ambitious low-cost space programme, with plans for an uncrewed orbital mission and human spaceflight in the coming years. The satellite, weighing 6,100 kilogrammes, was launched on a modified version of a rocket that India plans to use for its future space missions. India is vying for a larger slice of the booming commercial satellite business as phone, Internet and other companies seek expanded and more high-end communications.

Modi said the launch marked "a proud milestone in India's space journey". "It strengthens India's heavy-lift launch capability and reinforces our growing role in the global commercial launch market," he said in a statement. Earlier this year, ISRO launched the CMS-03 communication satellite, which weighs about 4,410 kilogrammes. — AFP

THAI, CAMBODIA MILITARIES RESUME CEASEFIRE TALKS



People make their way between Thailand and Cambodia border. — Reuters

BANGKOK: Military officials from Thailand and Cambodia began talks on Wednesday, both countries said, days after the neighbours agreed to discuss resumption of a ceasefire after 16 days of fierce border clashes that have killed at least 86 people. The talks come two days after a special meeting in Kuala Lumpur of Southeast Asian foreign ministers convened to try to salvage a truce.

Thai Defence Ministry spokesman Rear Admiral Surasant Kongsiri said Wednesday's meeting of the General Border Committee would last three days and could pave the way for an agreement. The talks were held at a border checkpoint towards the southern end of their 817-km (508 mile) frontier. "If the secretariat meeting goes smoothly and leads to an agreement, then there will be a meeting between the defence ministers of the two countries on December 27," Surasant told reporters. — AFP

UNILATERAL SANCTIONS

UN slams armed blockade on Venezuela



Four United Nations rights experts condemned the US partial naval blockade of Venezuela, determining it illegal armed aggression and calling on the US Congress to intervene. "There is no right to enforce unilateral sanctions through an armed blockade," the UN experts said. "It is such a serious use of force that it is also expressly recognised as illegal armed aggression under the General Assembly's 1974 Definition of Aggression," they said. — AFP

BANGLADESH LEADER SET TO RETURN FROM EXILE AHEAD OF POLLS

DHAKA: The Bangladesh Nationalist Party aims to gather five million supporters to welcome its leader Tarique Rahman home from nearly 17 years in exile on Thursday, a show of strength as he emerges as a leading contender for prime minister in February elections. Rahman, 60, is the son of ailing former prime minister Khaleda Zia and acting chairman of the party that is widely expected to come out on top in the parliamentary vote

set for February 12. His return from London comes as his BNP is on the ascendant following the ouster of its arch foe, long-time Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, in a student-led uprising last year. Apart from brief transition administrations, Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina have alternated in power since 1991.

A December survey by the US-based International Republican Institute suggests the BNP is on course to win the largest number

of parliamentary seats, with the Jamaat-e-Islami party also in the race. Hasina's Awami League party, which has been barred from the election, has threatened unrest that some fear could jeopardise the vote. Rahman's decision to return is driven by both political developments and personal circumstances. His mother has been seriously ill for months, prompting what party insiders describe as an urgent trip home. — Reuters

Black box recovered from crashed Libyan plane

TURKISH

authorities found the cockpit voice recorder and black

box from a private jet that crashed on Wednesday, killing the head of Libya's armed forces and his four aides. The Falcon 50 aircraft requested an emergency landing because of an electrical failure minutes after it took off from the Turkish capital Ankara, but contact was lost, Turkish officials said. The plane was returning to Tripoli. The wreckage was located by Turkish security personnel in the Haymana district near Ankara. Interior Minister Ali Yerlikaya told reporters at the crash site that the plane's voice recorder and the flight data recorder (black box) had been recovered. "The examination and evaluation processes of these devices have been initiated," he said.

Lieutenant General Mohammed al Haddad and four other aides

were returning to Tripoli after holding talks in Ankara with Turkish military officials. There were eight people aboard the plane, including three crew members. Libya's Prime Minister Abdulhamid Dbeibah expressed "deep sadness and great sorrow" over the death of the army chief. Yerlikaya said the bodies were still at the crash site that covers approximately three square kilometres, adding that a 22-member Libyan delegation, including five relatives of the deceased, had arrived in Ankara. A total of 408 personnel from the government's disaster agency AFAD, police and health services

The wreckage was located by Turkish security personnel in the Haymana district near Ankara. Interior Minister Ali Yerlikaya told reporters at the crash site that the plane's voice recorder and the flight data recorder (black box) had been recovered



Rescuers work as search and rescue operations continue in Ankara. — AFP

are at the scene, the minister said, while the real-time imagery from the area is being relayed by drones. Turkish officials said the Ankara prosecutor's office has launched an investigation into the incident.

Tolga Tuzun Inan of Istanbul-based Bahcesehir University said a single electrical failure would not leave an aircraft completely dark. "When multiple triggering factors combine with meteorological conditions, such a situation may occur," he told the private NTV broadcaster. He said data from the black box would reveal what happened, adding that the analysis process may take several months. Haddad had been the army's chief of general staff since August 2020 and was appointed by then-prime minister Fayeze al Sarraj.

A senior Turkish official said the plane requested an emergency landing because of an electrical failure 16 minutes after it took off. The jet carried eight passengers including Haddad, four members of his entourage and three crew members "reported an emergency to the air traffic control centre due to an electrical failure, asking for an emergency landing," Burhanettin Duran, head of the presidency's communications directorate, said on X. Turkish Justice Minister Yilmaz Tunc said the Ankara chief prosecutor's office has launched an investigation into the incident.

Several Turkish media outlets broadcast images showing the sky lit up by an explosion not far from the location where the aircraft sent a signal. — AFP



FESTIVE LIGHTS, SECURITY TIGHT IN DAMASCUS

DAMASCUS: Christmas lights illuminate Damascus's Old City while government forces patrol its shadows as security fears haunt Syria's Christian community. Interior ministry forces searched some pedestrians or stopped people on motorbikes in the Old City. At one of the district's main entrances, an armed member of the government security forces was holding a walkie-talkie and a map of where his personnel were deployed. "We've put a security plan in place that includes several districts and areas in the capital, in order to ensure the safety of all citizens," he said on condition of anonymity. "It is the state's duty to protect all its people, Christian and Muslim, and today we are doing our duty to protect the churches and secure people's celebrations," he added. — AFP

INSUFFICIENT EVIDENCE

Serbia court drops case over train disaster



A Serbian court dropped charges against a former construction minister over the Novi Sad railway station canopy collapse that killed 16 people, citing a lack of evidence. Goran Vesic, 56, who resigned days after the accident, was charged in September along with 12 others with a "serious crime against public safety" by the Novi Sad chief prosecutor. However, the Novi Sad High Court said there was "insufficient evidence to support reasonable suspicion". — AFP

GLOBAL HEALTH STRATEGY

US signs health deals with African nations



The US has signed four new global health memorandums of understanding (MoUs) with Madagascar, Sierra Leone, Botswana and Ethiopia, which total nearly \$2.3 billion in funding. The Trump administration unveiled its "America First Global Health Strategy" in September, a new approach to overseas aid that seeks to improve target countries' self-reliance in managing their health sectors. The MoU is aimed at strengthening disease detection and health worker capacity. — Reuters

SHORT TAKES



Kosovo's acting PM Albin Kurti, gestures as he speaks during an interview, in Pristina. — AFP

KOSOVO, SERBIA
‘NEED TO NORMALISE’
RELATIONS, SAYS PM

PRISTINA: Kosovo and Serbia need to “normalise” their relations, Kosovo’s Prime Minister Albin Kurti said on Wednesday, several days before legislative elections where he is seeking to extend his term with more solid backing. “We need to normalise relations with Serbia,” said Kurti. “But normalising relations with a neighbouring authoritarian regime that doesn’t recognise you, that also doesn’t admit to the crimes committed during the war, is quite difficult,” he added.

Tensions between the two neighbours are regularly high, and renewed unrest would provide Russia with means of destabilising his country. “We do have a normalisation agreement,” Kurti said, referring to the agreement signed under the auspices of the European Union in 2023. “We must implement it, which implies mutual recognition between the countries, at least de facto recognition.” But to resume dialogue, Serbia “must hand over Milan Radoicic,” a Serb accused of plotting an attack in northern Kosovo in 2023, Kurti asserted, hoping that “the EU, France, and Germany will put pressure” on Belgrade to do so. “There are many links” between the two countries, said Kurti, and if Russia were to decide to destabilise the region, “in its march toward Western Europe, it can count on Serbia as an ally. — AFP

BLASTS, FIRE SHATTER NURSING HOME



A pair of explosions and a fire ripped through a nursing home near Philadelphia, killing a female employee and a resident, and injuring 20 people, officials said. All residents and staff of the Silver Lake Nursing Home in Bristol Township, about 33 km northeast of Philadelphia, have now been accounted for and the injured taken to local hospitals, Police Chief Charles Winik said. Fire Marshal Kevin Dippolito said numerous patients and staff were initially trapped inside a demolished portion of the building. — Reuters

EL SALVADOR
DEFENDS
MEGA-PRISON
KEY TO TRUMP
DEPORTATIONS

SAN SALVADOR: El Salvador’s leader Nayib Bukele on Tuesday defended a huge prison that has become key to deportations from the United States under President Donald Trump, after drawing criticism for alleged rights abuses. The Terrorism Confinement Center (CECOT) is a maximum security facility lauded by Bukele as part of his attempts to rid the Central American country of prolific narco-gangs.

US broadcaster CBS News had

been due to air an investigation about alleged abuses at CECOT on its flagship “60 Minutes” program, but it was pulled at the last minute, leading to accusations of political meddling. Bukele fired back against allegations about the prison’s conditions, saying that “if you are convinced that torture is taking place at CECOT, El Salvador is ready to cooperate fully” by releasing the entire prison population to any country willing to take them.

“The only condition is

straightforward: it must be everyone,” Bukele said in the social media post, specifying that this would include “all gang leaders and all those described as political prisoners.” Bukele’s post follows former US secretary of state Hillary Clinton labeling the prison “brutal” on social media.

“Curious to learn more about CECOT? Hear Juan, Andry, and Wilmer share firsthand how the Trump administration branded them as gang members. — AFP

European countries slam
United States visa bans

THE European Union, France and Germany condemned US visa bans on European citizens combating online hate and disinformation, with Brussels saying on Wednesday it could “respond swiftly and decisively” against the “unjustified measures”. US President Donald Trump’s administration imposed visa bans on five European citizens, including French former EU commissioner Thierry Breton, who it accuses of working to censor freedom of speech or unfairly target US tech giants with overly burdensome regulation. A European Commission spokesperson said it “strongly condemns the US decision”, adding: “Freedom of expression is a fundamental right in Europe and a shared core value with the United States across the democratic world.”

The visa bans are likely to exacerbate growing divergences between Washington and some European capitals over issues including free speech, defence, immigration, far-right politics, trade and the Russia-Ukraine war. They come just weeks after a US National Security Strategy document warned Europe faced “civilisational erasure” and must change course if it is to remain a reliable US ally. Breton was one of the architects of the EU’s Digital Services Act, a landmark piece of legislation aimed at making the internet safer that has irritated US officials. They were particularly riled by Brussels’ sanction earlier this month against Elon Musk’s X platform, which was fined 120 million euros for breaching online content rules. Musk and Breton have often sparred online over EU tech regulation, with Musk referring to him as the “tyrant of Europe”.

The bans also targeted Imran Ahmed, the British CEO of the US-based Center for Countering Digital Hate; Anna-Lena von Hodenberg and Josephine Ballon of the German non-profit HateAid; and Clare Melford, co-founder of the Global Disinformation Index, according to US Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy Sarah Rogers.

The EU’s DSA is meant to make the online environment safer, in part by compelling tech giants to do more to tackle illegal content, including hate speech and child



European Union flags flutter outside the European Commission headquarters, in Brussels. — Reuters

abuse material. Washington has said the EU was pursuing “undue” restrictions on freedom of expression in its efforts to combat hateful speech, misinformation and disinformation, and that the DSA unfairly targets US tech giants and US citizens. The European Commission spokesperson said the EU had the right to regulate economic activity, and had requested more information from Washington about the measures. “If needed, we will respond swiftly and decisively to defend our regulatory autonomy against unjustified measures,” they said.

French President Emmanuel Macron said: “These measures amount to intimidation and coercion aimed at undermining European digital sovereignty.” On X, he said the DSA was approved in a democratic process, and existed “to ensure fair competition among platforms, without targeting any third country, and to ensure that what is illegal offline is also illegal online.” Breton, a former French finance minister and the European commissioner for the internal market from 2019 to 2024, was the most high-profile individual targeted. “As a reminder: 90 per cent of the European Parliament - our democratically elected body - and all 27 Member States unanimously voted the DSA. To our American friends: Censorship isn’t

where you think it is.”

Germany’s justice ministry said the two German activists had the government’s “support and solidarity” and the visa bans on them were unacceptable, adding that HateAid supported people affected by unlawful digital hate speech. “Anyone who describes this as censorship is misrepresenting our constitutional system,” it said in a statement. “The rules by which we want to live in the digital space in Germany and in Europe are not decided in Washington.”

A Global Disinformation Index spokesperson called the visa bans “an authoritarian attack on free speech and an egregious act of government censorship.” “The Trump Administration is, once again, using the full weight of the federal government to intimidate, censor, and silence voices they disagree with,” they said. “Their actions today are immoral, unlawful, and un-American.”

The European Union will keep protecting freedom of speech, EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said on Tuesday. “Freedom of speech is the foundation of our strong and vibrant European democracy. we are proud of it. We will protect it,” she said on social media platform X. — Reuters

Zelensky reveals plan to end Russian war, key questions remain

KYIV: Ukraine won some concessions in the latest version of a US-led draft plan to end the Russian attack, revealed by President Volodymyr Zelensky, though key questions remain over territory and whether Moscow could accept the new terms. The 20-point plan, agreed on by US and Ukrainian negotiators, was being reviewed by Moscow, but the Kremlin is unlikely to abandon its hardline territorial demands for full Ukrainian withdrawal from the east.

Zelensky conceded there are some points in the document that he does not like, but Kyiv has succeeded in removing immediate requirements for Ukraine to withdraw from the Donetsk region or that land seized

by Moscow’s army would be recognised as Russian. Nevertheless, the Ukrainian leader still indicated the proposal would pave the way for Kyiv to pull some troops back, including from the 20 per cent of the Donetsk region that it controls, where demilitarised zones would be established. It also got rid of demands that Kyiv must legally renounce its bid for Nato membership.

Zelensky presented the plan during a two-hour briefing with journalists, reading from a highlighted and annotated version.

“In the Donetsk, Lugansk, Zaporizhzhia, and Kherson regions, the line of troop deployment as of the date of this agreement is de facto recognised as the line of contact,” Zelensky said of the



People visit the graves of fallen Ukrainian soldiers, in Lviv. — AFP

latest version. “A working group will convene to determine the redeployment of forces necessary to end the conflict, as well as to define the parameters of potential future special economic

zones,” he added.

This appears to suggest the plan opens the way for, but delays, options that Ukraine was previously reluctant to consider — a withdrawal of troops and the creation of

demilitarised zones. “We are in a situation where the Russians want us to withdraw from the Donetsk region, while the Americans are trying to find a way,” Zelensky said. “They are looking for a demilitarised zone or a free economic zone, meaning a format that could satisfy both sides,” he continued.

In Moscow, President Vladimir Putin has shown no willingness to compromise, doubling down on his hardline demands for a sweeping Ukrainian withdrawal and a string of political concessions that Kyiv and its European backers have previously cast as capitulation. Any plan that involves Ukraine pulling back its troops would need to pass a referendum in Ukraine, Zelensky said.

“A free economic zone. If we are discussing this, then we need to go to a referendum,” Zelensky said, referring to plans to designate areas Ukraine pulls out from as a demilitarised free trade zone.

On Nato, Zelensky said: “It is the choice of Nato members whether to have Ukraine or not. Our choice has been made. We moved away from the proposed changes to the Constitution of Ukraine that would have prohibited Ukraine from joining Nato.” Nevertheless, the prospects of Ukraine being admitted to the bloc appear slim-to-none, as it has been ruled out by Washington. Moscow has repeatedly said Nato membership for Ukraine is unacceptable, presenting it as one of the reasons it invaded in the first place. — AFP

OPINION

The year we could not outrun



RUMAITHA AL BUSAIDI

The writer is an Omani environmental strategist advancing Middle East climate action and women's leadership

THERE is a particular kind of patience you learn when you wait for turtles. The air carries salt and expectation. The sand feels blank, almost indifferent, until the first movement arrives. Soon, the shoreline becomes a slow unfolding of intention. A body shaped by maps older than any border pulls itself forward. Suddenly, you are no longer the main character. You are a witness to learning discipline without being asked. The ritual continues with steady determination, uninterested in your calendar or your urgency. She has done this before. She will do it again. Your presence changes nothing about the outcome. Somehow, this is the first relief.

I have been thinking of this feeling as 2025 closes. It names a truth we resist: we are rarely in charge in the way we imagine. A phrase found me this week that gave language to the unease behind so many conversations, a collective narcissistic injury, a bruise to our self-image as a species. It arrives when the story of control collapses, our tools outgrow our wisdom and nature stops negotiating.

This feeling unsettles us, leaving us hungry for certainty, making us search for anything

that makes us feel large again.

This year kept saying no again and again. Many felt it in the blue light of our screens during our sleepless nights, watching Gaza become a map of grief on our screens, lives and homes reduced to updates that arrived faster than the heart can hold. Helpless witnessing sat alongside a wider sense of a world out of balance. We saw the climate tilt in ways that defied ancient rhythms. Prices climbed until necessities felt like luxury. Our connectivity only served to highlight our powerlessness. It is no wonder we felt so tender.

The strange part was how ordinary the heaviness looked from the outside. People went to work, coffee still steamed and roads still filled. Yet everyone seemed to be carrying a second weather inside them: a small vigilance, a shortening of patience, a softer threshold for tears. Even the celebration came with a double awareness. In this atmosphere, the injury stops being a theory. It becomes a daily encounter with limits and a choice about what we do when we meet them.

When this year felt heavy, I kept returning to my grandmother, whose hands knew scarcity and the art of the mend. Modern life

Many felt it in the blue light of our screeless nights, watching Gaza become a map of grief on our screens, lives and homes reduced to updates that arrived faster than the heart can hold

teaches us to discard what fails and search for a version that works. However, 2025 taught us that there are no replacements for this world. We are being drawn back to fundamentals, learning the slow, jagged art of repairing bruised egos and broken certainties. Healing asks us to release the illusion of mastery. Humility becomes craft. Repair becomes the way we honour what cannot be replaced.

2026 must be a year of repair. We need less spectacle and more proof. We need public language that tells the truth about limits and trade-offs. We need decisions that treat climate, conflict and the cost of living as one shared reality. We can design for what holds and refuse what merely performs.

The beach was never only a metaphor. The turtle finishes its work and turns towards the water. It does not wait for applause. The sand holds the story for a moment, then the tide arrives and softens every line. The tracks fade, and still the effort mattered. This is the lesson left behind.

We do not wait to feel powerful before we act. We choose care over certainty. We build what holds, knowing that responsibility, not control, is what lasts. If 2025 brought us to that edge, then 2026 is the year we step forward.

GRIEF, TRAUMA WEIGH ON SURVIVORS OF HONG KONG FIRE

HOLMES CHAN AND SAMMY HEUNG

Hong Kong fire survivor Yip Ka-kui has turned happy holiday photos into a heartfelt tribute to his beloved wife, a month after she died in the huge blaze that destroyed their home.

Yip, 68, is among thousands grieving the 161 killed at the Wang Fuk Court housing complex, a disaster few could imagine happening in one of Asia's safest and most developed cities.

Even as the Hong Kong government forges ahead with investigations and relief efforts, experts caution that the psychological scars will be hard to heal for survivors, bereaved families and onlookers alike. In dozens of shots compiled into a memorial video, Yip's wife of four decades, Pak Shui-lin, 66, gently smiles at the camera at the Pyramids of Giza, the Taj Mahal and the Eiffel Tower.

"I blame myself. I always feel I was late to warn her, so she couldn't escape in time," said retired engineer Yip, recalling how the couple tried to flee the burning building on November 26.

Flames quickly engulfed seven out of eight residential towers, which were undergoing renovations and wrapped in substandard netting that may have contributed to the fire's spread.

Yip got out first. When the fire alarms failed to sound, his wife knocked on neighbours' doors to warn them, according to one person she saved. Yip said he did not think Pak was trying to "exchange one life for another", only that she was "doing what needed to be done".

"The difference of a few minutes between us means that I will never see her again. That's what I can't accept." Not long after the fire started, counselling psychologist Isaac Yu helped organise dozens of others in his field to support displaced residents. "The scale, immediacy and level of shock of this (incident) were beyond" anything they had trained for, Yu said.

Those who lost everything might have appeared calm at first, he recalled, but the fear was that they would break down during quiet moments and develop post-traumatic stress disorder.

NGOs such as the Samaritan Befrienders have contacted bereaved families to offer free mental-health services, with additional support available in transitional housing and schools, authorities said. Many of Hong Kong's 7.5 million residents obsessively followed live updates of the fire, which could have caused them mental strain, Yu added.

"For those who don't actively seek help, I'm worried about missing the chance to intervene, which may lead to more serious mental health problems and tragedies," he said. — AFP

Thai border clashes hit tourism in Cambodia

CHASING

visitors around Cambodia's Angkor temple ruins to offer his services, tour guide Bun Ratana says he has had little work since deadly clashes with Thailand broke out, despite it being high season.

The Unesco heritage site lies in Siem Reap city, just a two-hour drive from the Thai border, which for more than two weeks has been roiled by military combat that has killed dozens.

Travel cancellations due to the conflict have left the centuries-old stone structures — Cambodia's top tourist attraction — unusually quiet and businesses desperate.

With more than 10 cancelled tours in December alone, Bun Ratana said his income has plunged by around 80 per cent, to just \$150, compared to the same month last year. He blamed the renewed fighting, rooted in a border dispute dating to the colonial era. But he is hopeful tourists will return to the Angkor archaeological park — home to scores of temple ruins from the Khmer Empire, including the Bayon Temple and the top attraction Angkor Wat.

"Some tourists are scared, but here in Siem Reap it is safe," Bun Ratana said. After the dispute flared with fresh fighting in May, the neighbours shuttered overland crossings.

Tour operators, vendors and drivers in Siem Reap and Bangkok say the closures and renewed clashes in July and this month have sharply hit business. Founder of tour agency Journey Cambodia, Ream Boret, said bookings were down. Outside Angkor Wat, tuk-tuk driver Nov Mao said his income had halved since the clashes began.

Tourism makes up around a tenth of Cambodia's GDP, with a record-breaking 6.7 million arrivals last year.



This photo taken on December 18 shows tourists and monks visiting the Angkor Wat temple in Siem Reap province. — AFP



SUY SE

The writer is a video journalist and correspondent at AFP

But ticket sales to Angkor were down at least 17 per cent year-on-year from June to November, according to Angkor Enterprise - spiralling after July's five-day clashes killed dozens.

Unlike past Decembers, quietness has fallen over the park, as local and foreign tourists have "disappeared", said T-shirt vendor Run Kea.

"I think they may be scared... I am scared too," the 40-year-old said, adding she was only making a fraction of her usual earnings.

Around 420 km away in the Thai capital, minivans that once plied the six-hour route shuttling tourists to Angkor Wat sit idle since border crossings were closed to tourists earlier this year.

Tour agencies said that bus trips to the border had ceased, and uncertainty had hit tourism in Thailand too.

Thai owner of Lampoo Ocean Travel Prasit Chankiang said when customers ask if they could travel to Cambodia, "we can only tell them that they can't go - and there's nothing we can tell them about

when they might be able to travel again".

Arnaud Darc, hospitality industry expert and CEO of Cambodia-based Thalias Group, said the local tourism industry relied heavily on the Angkor temples and a few entry points to the country, especially overland routes via neighbouring nations. "Disruption is concentrated in overland regional travel, not in global demand for Cambodia," he said, citing fewer Thai visitors but more Chinese arrivals.

Several foreign tourists at Cambodia's most famous temple complex said they had not been put off travelling by the conflict.

An American tourist called Dorothy said she wasn't worried about visiting Angkor as she was clued in to travel logistics and border rules, saying she felt "very safe". "We are very happy that we came here and we feel safe at the moment," said German visitor Kay Florek, who arrived in Siem Reap with her family despite hearing news of combat.

But experts say fear persists, which has been worsened by widespread media reports and a blockbuster movie about Internet scam networks run by criminal groups across the region.

At cyberscam compounds, mostly in Cambodia and Myanmar, thousands of willing and trafficked scammers con victims out of billions of dollars a year with romance and investment schemes, monitors say. "Sadly, the reality on the ground is that Cambodia's top tourism hotspots are safe - but the headlines have done damage already," said Hannah Pearson, director of Southeast Asia tourism consultancy Pear Anderson.

Like Cambodia, she said Thailand had also recorded fewer visitors this year, "triggered initially by worries over scam centres" and worsened by the border clashes.

Bondi Beach and the politics of antisemitism



BADR AL ABRI

The writer is author of *The Jurisprudence of Extremism*

Refer the readers at the outset to two earlier articles published in Oman newspaper: “Zionism and the Question of the State: From Secularism to Religious Fundamentalism” and “The Rise of Antisemitism between Hitler and Netanyahu.” Both addressed the complex position of Jews within global Zionism and racial antisemitism. To avoid repeating the conceptual and historical background beyond the scope of this piece, the focus here is a humanitarian issue arising from the killing of Jews during celebrations of Hanukkah, the Festival of Lights, which commemorates the Maccabean victory in the second century BCE and the restoration of religious freedom.

The incident occurred on December 14, 2025 at Bondi Beach in Sydney. The attack was carried out by Sajid Akram, originally from Hyderabad, India, who migrated to Australia in 1998, together with his son, Naveed Akram, an Australian citizen by birth. They opened fire on those celebrating, killing around 16 people and injuring others. Amid the chaos, Ahmed al Ahmad, of Syrian origin, intervened and managed to stop Naveed Akram from continuing the attack. His courageous act prevented further loss of life and disrupted a narrative that could otherwise have fuelled widespread Islamophobia.

There is no dispute that this was a crime against humanity. No religion, ideology or grievance can justify the killing of innocent people. All religious traditions uphold the sanctity of life and the right to practise religious and cultural rituals freely.

Collective blame must not be imposed on any religion, ethnicity or nation for crimes committed by individuals. This principle applies universally, including to the atrocities committed against civilians in Gaza since October 2023 and the devastating events that followed.

A fundamental distinction must always be drawn between aggressors and non-aggressors. Peace is the default principle governing human relations, and life, dignity and property are inviolable. Terrorising civilians is unacceptable under any circumstances. It is equally essential to distinguish between religions and those who claim affiliation with them. The presence of extremist texts or historical episodes within religious traditions does not render all adherents extremists. Such texts are context-bound and often misused. Extremism by some individuals can never justify generalising an entire community. Each incident must be examined within its specific context, free from methodological and moral distortion.

At the time of writing, the motives behind the Bondi attack remain unclear. There have been indications linking it to IS. In the Western public imagination, IS is often equated wholesale with Islam, a narrative that has long served to intensify Islamophobia. At the same time, the incident has been used to revive the rhetoric of antisemitism, with renewed attempts to instrumentalise such tragedies to justify other crimes under the banner of protecting Jewish identity. Religious and historical

Collective blame must not be imposed on any religion, ethnicity or nation for crimes committed by individuals. This principle applies universally, including to the atrocities committed against civilians in Gaza since October 2023 and the devastating events that followed

narratives are repeatedly drawn into these debates in ways that demand sober, disciplined analysis rather than ideological projection.

Two broader issues emerge. The first concerns the growing sense of insecurity felt by Jews worldwide, particularly as a reaction to events in Palestine and Gaza. This was reflected in Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s 2024 address to the US Congress, where he warned of a global rise in antisemitism and efforts to delegitimise Israel. Such conditions understandably lead some Jews to conceal their religious identity or travel under different nationalities.

The second issue lies in the prevalence of reckless public discourse — political and religious — that relies on generalisation and confusion. These narratives shape negative collective perceptions and can encourage extremism and violence. Populist rhetoric is easily exploited by political actors or militant groups to mobilise individuals lacking critical awareness, often in the name of religion or ideology. What is urgently needed today is a disciplined, humane discourse. The Bondi Beach attack has no connection to Islam or Muslims, just as the crime committed against Jews there is utterly indefensible. Human life is indivisible. Crimes committed against Palestinians do not implicate Jews as a whole, nor do they justify violence against Jews because of their faith or identity.

(The original version of this article was published in Arabic in the print edition of Oman newspaper on December 24 and is translated by Badr al Dhafari)

A NEW LEASE OF LIFE...



ISHWAR DESHMUKH

The writer works with Indian School in Salalah, Sultanate of Oman

A new lease of life, in simple words, is the time to start a new journey after retirement or disengagement. It is time to chase our dreams and passions. To a certain extent, a person can fulfil the unfulfilled desires of their life, like exploring places, enjoying social life, venturing into new hobbies and giving time to maintain good health. It's time to reflect upon the life lived so far and

plan the new lease on life, as it's the inception of the best time.

Good health — One of the key elements to lead a happy retired life is to engage in any form of exercise. Time must be refocused on one's health and fitness, as many years have been spent raising and working for the family; shouldering the responsibilities of family members is a priority. In the long journey of commitment towards family, health and diet certainly deteriorate. Hence, the time after retirement should be utilised to keep and improve good health. Regular exercise and a balanced diet will enable one to remain independent for longer. A healthy diet combined with proper exercise helps maintain good health, as it is vital in the golden years of life.

Science has proved that man is a social animal. Being happy with oneself or in isolation is challenging. After retirement, a social life is a must and is invaluable. A social life keeps you busy and serves as a tool to provide help as needed.

One must have a planned routine; otherwise, retirement might become problematic. A regular schedule for the day will keep you from the bad habits of oversleeping, becoming addicted to mechanical devices, feeling lethargic and making excuses for not exercising. One must plan a new routine after retirement that will provide reason and motivation for enjoying life.

Travelling and exploring new destinations according to your budget relieves stress, enhances happiness and reduces depression. You learn the culture, food, and history of places and gain a life-enriching experience. It's one of the incredible ways to spend life. It's your day, and there is no fixed time, as if you're working official hours at your workplace. The day is full of challenges and uncertainties. I will be entering my second inning in a few years. It's a takeaway for those who find these tips helpful, but please try to put them into action for a purposeful life. Now, the daily schedule is in your control; try to make your dreams come true and turn them into reality. Time flies very fast, so we often take it for granted. Please don't wait until it's too late. I want to conclude with a quote: “You are never too old to set a new goal or dream a new dream.”

Time for Europe’s carbon market to look ahead

THE European Union's carbon-pricing policy has long been the subject of fierce debate. To some, it is a bold experiment in aligning markets with planetary limits; to others, it is an added burden on households and businesses already strained by rising energy costs. One fact, however, remains difficult to dismiss: the EU's Emissions Trading System (ETS) has reduced carbon dioxide emissions faster and more cheaply than almost any other climate policy. The question now is not whether carbon should be priced, but how to make the system fairer, more efficient and resilient to political headwinds. Europe's climate credibility depends on striking the right balance between ambition and economic pragmatism.

Since its launch in 2005, the ETS has delivered large, market-driven emissions reductions. Power-sector emissions have plunged, coal has been largely priced out of the market, emissions across participating sectors have fallen by roughly 50 per cent, and billions of dollars in ETS revenues have been channelled into clean-energy technologies.

As a result, what began as an experimental cap-and-trade scheme has grown into the world's largest carbon market by revenue and become a model for similar systems from California to China. Today, nearly 30 per cent of global CO2 emissions are covered by some form of pricing scheme – compared to less than 6 per cent two decades ago – generating over \$100 billion in public revenue each year.

Such growth inevitably introduces new challenges. As the ETS expands to sectors like transportation and construction, and as free allowances are phased out between 2026 and 2034, rising carbon prices will hit businesses and households more directly. These realities should not be ignored, but they are no reason to abandon a policy that has demonstrated its



The EU's Emissions Trading System (ETS) has reduced carbon dioxide emissions faster and more cheaply than almost any other climate policy.



GÜNTHER THALLINGER

The writer is a member of the Board of Management of Allianz SE, is responsible for Investment Management and Sustainability



LUDOVIC SUBRAN

The writer is Chief Investment Officer and Chief Economist at Allianz

effectiveness. Instead, they call for careful recalibration to keep the system fair and politically sustainable. While the temptation to soften or suspend carbon pricing during periods of economic stress is strong, abrupt policy reversals would erode investor confidence, heighten uncertainty and undermine Europe's credibility as a climate leader. Stability is the foundation of long-term innovation, and Europe's clean-tech investment boom depends on it.

That said, the goal of carbon pricing is not to punish industry. By signalling that pollution comes at a high cost and that cleaner production pays, companies are able to pursue the most efficient path to reduce emissions, rather than conforming to one-size-fits-all mandates. The revenues can – and should – be reinvested in the economy to support vulnerable businesses and households through the transition. A “climate dividend” for households, funded by ETS proceeds, could offset higher energy and transportation costs while strengthening public trust. Targeted support, when conditional on measurable decarbonisation gains, could ease affected industries’ transition until low-carbon alternatives become commercially viable, so long as policymakers avoid subsidies that shield inefficiency under the guise

of promoting competitiveness. The EU's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM), entering into force in 2026, is a crucial – albeit misunderstood – companion to the ETS. It extends the carbon price to imports of steel, aluminium, cement, fertilisers, electricity and hydrogen, ensuring that European firms are not undercut by more carbon-intensive foreign competitors. Contrary to what some critics claim, this is not protectionism; it is climate realism.

The CBAM could also catalyse a quiet revolution in global climate policy. By tying access to the world's largest single market to carbon transparency, the EU is sending a clear message: if you want to sell here, you must play by the same environmental rules. Other major economies, including the United States, are already exploring similar ideas, reflecting a growing recognition that fair competition and climate action can go hand in hand.

Yet the very possibility of carbon-pricing systems converging across borders is precisely why some governments and industry groups seek to block or fragment emissions trading. After all, a transparent, comparable carbon price erodes the competitive advantage of carbon-intensive manufacturing.

The EU should not allow political pressures to dictate the pace or direction of its energy transition. But the CBAM must be refined to ensure that ambition does not harden into rigidity. To this end, four measures stand out.

First, benchmarking imports could offer partial relief to foreign producers that match best-in-class EU standards. This approach would reward climate-efficient production, reduce trade tensions and allow the EU to maintain free allowances for clean European producers.

Second, the EU should introduce export rebates for European firms operating in markets that lack effective carbon pricing.

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SPORTS

STRONGFINISH



The Omani national team took part in the tournament with nine players.

OMAN CLAIM BRONZE IN GCC U10 TENNIS CHAMPIONSHIP

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, DEC 24

The GCC Under-10 Tennis Championship concluded in Qatar, with national teams from Gulf Cooperation Council countries participating in a highly competitive atmosphere and showcasing promising technical levels that reflected the growing development of the sport’s grassroots across the region.

The Omani national team took part in the tournament with nine players. It delivered a strong performance, highlighted by securing third place in the doubles competition through the duo of Omar al Shaibani and Hood al Hashemi, who produced impressive displays throughout the championship. Their achievement earned them a place on the podium and added a new milestone to Omani tennis at the age-group level.

The Omani squad included Omar al Shaibani, Fayadh al Hilali, Hood al Hashemi, Ali al Riyami, Muhannad al Najjar, Saeed al Marjabi, Ahmed al Touqi, Elias al Touqi and Sara al Maskari. The delegation was headed by Othman bin Gharib al Raisi, with coach Sofiane Doub accompanying the team.

In a statement, Othman al Raisi, Head of the Omani delegation, said that this participation represented an important stage in the development pathway of young players, noting that the championship provided a valuable opportunity to gain experience and compete against different playing styles.

He said they were pleased with the level shown by the players and with the result achieved in the doubles event, which reflects the great efforts made in preparation and training programmes over the past period. He added that such tournaments are not measured only by medals, but by the confidence, technical maturity and ability that players gain in dealing with international competition environments.

STRONG FOUNDATION

Al Raisi added that both the technical and administrative staff are closely monitoring the players’ development as part of a long-term plan to build a strong foundation for Oman tennis. He explained that the focus is on investing in this age group as it represents the future of the sport and that the federation will continue to provide opportunities through international exposure, training camps and tournaments to raise the technical and mental levels of the players and ensure their readiness for upcoming Gulf and continental competitions. The technical and administrative teams praised the players’ performances throughout the championship, stressing that such international participation play a key role in developing technical skills, refining talent and preparing a generation capable of representing Oman with distinction in future regional and international events. The championship concluded with a closing and awards ceremony held in a friendly atmosphere that reflected the spirit of sportsmanship among the GCC national teams and highlighted the shared commitment to supporting youth development and advancing the sport across the region.



The championship concluded in Qatar, with national teams from GCC countries taking part.

Ghala Golf Club hosts thrilling finale of GCC junior golf



The winners pose with the chief guest at the podium. — Pics by Faisal al Balushi

RIYADH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, DEC 24

THE GCC Ladies and Juniors Golf Championship 2025 concluded on Wednesday evening at Ghala Golf Club, under the auspices of HH Sayyid Fahr bin Fatik al Said, following three days of intense competition and high technical standards that highlighted the steady growth of golf across the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries.

The closing ceremony saw the crowning of champions across various age categories.

In the Ladies Team Championship, the United Arab Emirates claimed first place with a total score of +7, ahead of Saudi Arabia in second place and Bahrain in third, while Oman finished fourth.

The UAE continued their dominance in the girls under-16 team championship, finishing first, followed by Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Oman.

In the boys under-16 team championship, Qatar secured the title, with Bahrain finishing second and the UAE third, while Oman were placed sixth.

Meanwhile, Bahrain topped the standings in the under-13 team championship, with Oman achieving an impressive second place ahead of the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait.

At the individual level, Jamie Camero of the UAE captured the ladies’ individual title with a total of 218 strokes, followed by compatriot Lara Elchaib, while Faye al Balushi finished third.

Omani golfer Nada Mir was placed fourth to emerge as the best local player. In the girls under-16 individual category, Anca Mateiu of the UAE claimed first place, with fellow Emirati Sara Abubaker finishing second.

The under-13 individual title went to Omani golfer Yusuf al Ramhy, who delivered a standout performance. In the boys under-16 individual championship, Qatar’s Danil Sokolov secured first place after an outstanding showing.

Speaking after his victory, Danil Sokolov, representing Qatar, said: “The championship was highly competitive and full of challenges. Playing at the Ghala Golf Club gave us valuable experience and I am delighted to win the title against such strong Gulf competition.”

Anca Mateiu, representing the UAE, expressed her delight at winning the under-16 title, stating: “The organisation was excellent and the course was of a very high standard, which helped us perform at our best. This championship is an important milestone in my career.”



The under-13 individual title went to Oman’s Yusuf al Ramhy, who delivered a standout performance.



Meanwhile, Ahmed al Jahdami, Secretary-General of the Oman Golf Association, highlighted the importance of hosting the event, saying, “We are proud of the successful organisation of this GCC championship, which demonstrated Oman’s readiness to host major tournaments and contributed significantly

to developing players’ skills, particularly among the younger age groups.” The championship concluded with widespread praise for participating delegations for the organisation and technical level, further cementing Ghala Golf Club’s reputation as a leading regional venue for major golf tournaments.

SOLIDSHOW



The Arab Shooting Championship concludes on Thursday at the National Olympic Shooting Complex in Muscat.

OMAN DOMINATE KEY EVENTS AT ARAB SHOOTING CHAMPIONSHIP

RIYADH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, DEC 24

Shooters from the Sultanate of Oman continued to deliver standout performances on Wednesday as several major events concluded at the Arab Shooting Championship for air and pellet weapons, one day before the tournament’s official close. Oman claimed the top honours in the men’s 25 metre pistol individual event, with Yousuf bin Amer al Khatri securing the gold medal and teammate Yaqoub bin Abdullah al Siyabi taking silver, underlining the host nation’s dominance in the discipline. Bahrain’s Abdulmajid Jumaa Abdulkhaliq finished third to earn the bronze. The Omani team further strengthened its position in the medal standings by winning gold in the men’s 25 metre pistol team competition, finishing ahead of Bahrain, who claimed silver, while Qatar secured the bronze medal. In the women’s 25 metre pistol individual event, Moza Ali of Bahrain captured the gold medal following a strong showing, Ghazlan Hassan of Kuwait finished second to claim silver, while Salma al Mass of Qatar earned the bronze. The women’s team competition in the same discipline saw Qatar take gold, with Bahrain securing silver and Oman finishing third with the bronze medal. Meanwhile, the 10 metres mixed pistol team event concluded with Kuwait winning the gold medal, Bahrain placed second, while the Oman team secured the bronze. The Arab Shooting Championship concludes on Thursday at the National Olympic Shooting Complex in Muscat, following several days of high level competition that highlighted the technical progress of Arab shooters and the championship’s strong organisational standards.



Oman won the gold in the men’s 25 metre pistol team competition, Bahrain claimed silver, while Qatar secured the bronze medal.



Arsenal players celebrate after winning the penalty shoot-out against Crystal Palace in the English League Cup. — Reuters

Arsenal reach League Cup semis with shoot-out win

KEPA Arrizabalaga was Arsenal’s League Cup quarterfinal hero with the decisive penalty shoot-out save that completed a miserable evening for Crystal Palace defender Maxence Lacroix on Tuesday. Lacroix’s own goal put Arsenal ahead with 10 minutes left at the Emirates Stadium before Marc Guehi snatched Palace’s stoppage-time equaliser in the 1-1 draw. That set the stage for a shoot-out in which both teams scored their first seven penalties. William Saliba converted Arsenal’s eighth kick and Kepa dived to his right to save Lacroix’s effort and secure an 8-7 victory. It was a cathartic moment for the Spanish goalkeeper, who infamously refused to be substituted before Chelsea’s League Cup final penalty shoot-out defeat against Manchester City in 2019. Kepa also missed a spot-kick in the Blues’ 2022 League Cup final shoot-out loss to Liverpool. The Gunners will play London rivals Chelsea in the semifinals over two legs in January and February, with Manchester City facing holders Newcastle in the other last four clash. “We generated a lot and should have scored many more goals. When you don’t close the games, it can always happen that you concede,” Arsenal boss Mikel Arteta said. “We had some big individual performances. Kepa, his level of commitment with the group is just incredible. “I think the players were so composed with the penalties and in the end,



Arsenal’s Gabriel Jesus heads at goal. — Reuters

Kepa managed to save one. We are where we want to be.” Arsenal are into the League Cup semifinals for a second successive year as they chase their first trophy since winning the FA Cup in 2020. The north Londoners have only won the League Cup twice, with their last triumph coming in 1992-93, before any of their current squad were born. After celebrating Christmas on Thursday, Arteta’s men will turn their attention back to the title race with home games against Brighton and third-placed Aston Villa to close out 2025. Winning their first English title since 2004 is clearly Arsenal’s main aim this season, but lifting the League Cup in March would be a significant boost to a club starved of silverware in recent years. Arteta made eight changes to the side that won at Everton on Saturday, but still fielded a strong line-up featuring William Saliba, Mikel Merino, Eberechi Eze, Gabriel Martinelli and Gabriel

Jesus. Jesus, who ruptured the anterior cruciate ligament in his left knee in January, started for the first time in 345 days after returning to action as a substitute against Club Brugge earlier this month. **KEPA REDEMPTION** Noni Madueke, another of Arteta’s changes, should have put Arsenal ahead early on but he was twice denied by Palace ‘keeper Walter Benitez, who produced an inspired performance. Benitez plunged to his left to keep out Jesus’s close-range header with another fine save and repelled another blast from Madueke. By the time Jurrien Timber headed wastefully over from 10 yards, Arteta must have been wondering if Arsenal would ever make the breakthrough. Arteta sent on Bukayo Saka and Martin Odegaard in the second half, the latter making an immediate impact with a cross that Jesus nodded narrowly wide. Arsenal finally broke the stalemate in the 80th minute. Not for the first time this season, it was a Gunners set-piece that did the damage as Saka’s corner caused chaos and Lacroix, under pressure from Saliba, poked past Benitez as he tried to clear. But Palace gave Arsenal a taste of their own set-piece medicine, equalising with their first shot on target in the 95th minute. Adam Wharton’s free-kick was headed down by Jefferson Lerma and Guehi slotted home from close range. After a host of nerveless penalties in the shoot-out, Kepa ended as Arsenal’s saviour. — AFP

Johnson, Castle shine as Spurs rout defending champs Thunder

LOS ANGELES: Keldon Johnson and Stephon Castle combined for 49 points as the San Antonio Spurs produced a second-half scoring blitz to rout the NBA champion Oklahoma City Thunder 130-110 on Tuesday. Ten days after eliminating the Thunder from the NBA Cup semi-finals, the Spurs once again proved too strong for the Western Conference leaders as they powered to their seventh straight victory in San Antonio. Starting shooting guard Castle finished with 24 points including four three-pointers but the key contribution came from Johnson, who added 25 off the bench including five threes. The Thunder fell to 26-4 after the loss, while the Spurs improved to 22-7 to stay in second place in

the West. San Antonio’s Victor Wembanyama finished with 12 points while reigning NBA Most Valuable Player Shai Gilgeous-Alexander led the Thunder scoring with 33 points. “It shows how serious we are — we’ve got the same aspirations that they have, we just want to come out and compete every time we play them,” said Castle, who poured in 10 of his 24 points during the fourth quarter in which the Spurs outscored the Thunder 43-28. The Denver Nuggets meanwhile missed the chance to close the gap on Oklahoma City after losing a thrilling duel 131-130 against the Dallas Mavericks on the road in Texas. Mavericks prodigy Cooper Flagg once again stole the show, with the gifted 19-year old No.1 draft pick



Oklahoma City Thunder guard Isaiah Joe (11) drives to the basket against San Antonio Spurs forward Keldon Johnson (3). — **Imagn Images**

scoring a game high 33 points with nine rebounds and nine assists. Flagg’s performance was backed by 31 points from Anthony Davis as Dallas out-duelled Nuggets duo Nikola Jokic and Jamal Murray, who accounted for 60 Denver points. The Nuggets almost snatched victory at the buzzer, but Peyton Watson’s wide open three-point attempt bounced out after hitting the rim. “We’re just coming together, trying to have each other’s backs,” Flagg said. “Obviously Jamal and (Jokic) had it going — so we were just trying to take those guys away and make somebody else beat us.” Dallas improved to 12-19 while the Nuggets slipped to 21-8 in the West. Flagg meanwhile took encouragement from another hard-fought win by the Mavs, who

last week took down the Eastern Conference-leading Detroit Pistons. “We’re learning from all of these experiences,” Flagg said. “You know we’ve been in a lot of really close games, so just trying to take stuff from those games and learn from it and get better.” Elsewhere on Tuesday, Anthony Edwards rattled in 38 points as the Minnesota Timberwolves took down the New York Knicks 115-104 in Minneapolis. Edwards knocked down four three-pointers while teammate Julius Randle added 25 points as the Wolves eclipsed a 40-point performance from Karl-Anthony Towns. Knicks star Jalen Brunson, who scored 47 points in Sunday’s win over Miami, missed the game with a right ankle problem. — AFP

SPORTS



MUSCAT CLASSIC TO KICK START
TOUR OF OMAN
FROM FEB 6

ANUROOP ATHIPARAMBATH
@anuroop_ath

THE Muscat Classic race, which precedes the Tour of Oman as a warm-up event, has been upgraded to the ProSeries category in its fourth and upcoming edition on February 6, 2026.

A new UCI points system will be applied to the ranking of the biggest one-day race on the Asian continent, placing it on a par with the Japan Cup at the end of the season.

The 15th edition of the five-stage Tour of Oman will be held from February 7 to 11. The cycling world body, UCI's calendar event is organised by the Oman Cycling Association in cooperation with the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth.

The opening one-day race with a possible sprint finish, the Muscat Classic race will run for 180 km from Al Mouj to Al Bustan.

The first stage of the tour will start from the Flagpole in Muscat Governorate and finish at Hawiyat Najm in the Wilayat of Qurayat, over a distance of 175 km.

The second stage will start from Al Faihaa in the Wilayat of Samayil and finish at Jabal Al Sharqi in the Wilayat of Al Hamra, covering 194 km.

The 195-km third stage will begin from the Al Rustaq Fort and end at the Yiti Heights. The



Defending champion Adam Yates is expected to run a title campaign.

- TOUR OF OMAN PAST WINNERS**
- 2025: Adam Yates (GBR)
 - 2024: Adam Yates (GBR)
 - 2023: Matteo Jorgenson (USA)
 - 2022: Jan Hirt (CZE)
 - 2019: Alexey Lutsenko (KAZ)
 - 2018: Alexey Lutsenko (KAZ)
 - 2017: Ben Hermans (BEL)
 - 2016: Vincenzo Nibali (ITA)
 - 2015: Rafael Valls (ESP)
 - 2014: Chris Froome (GBR)
 - 2013: Chris Froome (GBR)
 - 2012: Peter Velits (SVK)
 - 2011: Robert Gesink (NED)
 - 2010: Fabian Cancellara (SUI)
- MUSCAT CLASSIC PAST WINNERS**
- 2025: Rick Pluimers (Tudor Pro Cycling Team)
 - 2024: Finn Fisher-Black (UAE Team Emirates)
 - 2023: Jenthe Biermans (Team Arkéa Samsic)

fourth stage will start from Al Sawadi Beach in the Wilayat of Barka and finish in the Wilayat of Suhar, over a distance of 152 km. The final stage of the tour will start from the Wilayat of Nizwa and conclude at Al Jabal Al Akhdhar, covering 160 km.

18 TEAMS

A total of 18 international teams will participate in this edition: Alpecin–Deceuninck, EF Education–EasyPost, Groupama–FDJ United, Movistar Team, Team Jayco AlUla, Visma | Lease a Bike, UAE Team Emirates–XRG, Soudal Quick-Step, XDS Astana Team, Lotto Intermarché, Uno-X Mobility, Cofidis, Q36.5 Pro Cycling Team, TotalEnergies, Tudor Pro Cycling Team, Caja Rural–Seguros RGA, Burgos Burpellet BH, in addition to the Oman national team.

Prominent riders expected to feature in the Tour of Oman 2026 include defending and two-time champion Adam Yates of Britain and UAE Team Emirates - XRG, Jordan Jegat of Total Energies and Valentin Paret-Peintre Soudal of Soudal Quick-Step.

Ranking wise, Roger Adria of Movistar Team, Brieuc Rolland of Groupama - FDJ United, Alexander Kamp of Uno-X Mobility and Rune Herregodts UAE Team Emirates come in the fourth to seventh rankings for the cycling spectacle in the Sultanate of Oman.

TOP COMPETITORS				
Competitors sorted by their position in the PCS ranking				
Pos.	Rider	Team	Points	#
1.	Adam Yates	UAE Team Emirates - XRG	846	43
2.	Jordan Jegat	TotalEnergies	634	77
3.	Valentin Paret-Peintre	Soudal Quick-Step	367	175
4.	Roger Adria	Movistar Team	309	206
5.	Brieuc Rolland	Groupama - FDJ United	169	364
6.	Alexander	Kamp Uno-X Mobility	49	825
7.	Rune Herregodts	UAE Team Emirates - XRG	17	1280



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OQ Trading eyes global growth

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, DEC 24

OQ Trading (OQT) – the international trading arm of Oman’s integrated energy group OQ – expects its trading volumes to exceed 60 million tonnes in 2025, up from 55 million tonnes in 2024, highlighting its expanding role in maximising the value of Omani energy resources and its growing presence as a global commodity trader.

State-owned OQT trades a broad range of products, including crude oil, refined products, petrochemicals, fertilisers and carbon, with Oman LNG volumes set to join the portfolio from January 2026, CEO Wail al Jamali said.

“We have a sizeable crude offtake from the Ministry of Energy and Minerals and supply Oman’s share of the OQ8 (Duqm) refinery’s feedstock requirements. Beyond physical



OQ Trading is set to shortly add LNG from Oman to its trading portfolio.

trading, we are also active in derivatives and paper products, both for hedging and expressing market views,” Al Jamali

explained in an interview with The Energy Year.

He also highlighted OQT’s growing global footprint: “We facilitate exports through our international network, ensuring OQ’s products reach optimal destinations while supporting feedstock and blend requirements for OQ’s plants. Our offices span Muscat, Dubai, Singapore, Shanghai, Rotterdam, London and Houston.

Through our affiliate Hass Petroleum—a medium-tier African retailer in which OQT acquired a 40% stake in 2017—we operate across nine East African countries. Approximately 50% of our portfolio is non-Omani, with third-party volumes sourced from countries including Nigeria, Singapore and the UAE.”

According to Al Jamali, a key part of OQT’s mandate is to act as a market intelligence and optimisation partner to OQ, and advise on production, product specifications and

investment planning using real-time market insights.

Its commercial optimisation team works closely with OQ to bridge trading and asset planning, enhance plant performance, and exceed short-term tactical targets to capture better margins.

While Oman remains central to OQT’s core activities, growth opportunities are increasingly international.

The company has adopted a “diversify, expand and partner” strategy to broaden its portfolio and global footprint, with third-party trading now accounting for roughly half of total volumes.

“Our aim is to trade products as global books, spanning Houston, London and Singapore. We are also implementing an internal energy transition plan aligned with market developments to remain agile in a rapidly evolving energy landscape,” Al Jamali added.

OCCI forum hosts CEOs of Omani tech, telecom startups



“The digital economy has become a fundamental pillar for diversifying sources of income and enhancing the competitiveness of the private sector”: OCCI Board Chairman

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, DEC 24

THE second CEOs’ Forum for startup companies operating in the technology and telecommunications sectors took place yesterday, December 23, in Muscat, under the auspices of Abdulsalam bin Mohammed al Murshidi, President of the Oman Investment Authority (OIA).

The event, organised by the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), was attended by senior government officials, chief executive officers of technology companies, and digital economy experts, with the aim of supporting the growth of the technology sector and advancing the knowledge-based economy.

Shaikh Faisal bin Abdullah al Rawas, Chairman of OCCI’s Board of Directors, highlighted the significance of the forum: “Organising this forum stems from the Chamber’s belief in the importance of the technology sector as one of the main drivers of economic growth.

The digital economy has become a fundamental pillar for diversifying sources of income and enhancing the competitiveness of the private sector,” he said.

“Digital transformation is no longer an option but a necessity for shaping a globally competitive economy capable of creating quality opportunities and empowering Omani youth to contribute to a nation rich in opportunities,” Al Rawas further added.

Eng Ibrahim bin Abdullah al Hawsani, OCCI Board Member and Chairman of the Digital Economy and Artificial Intelligence Committee, also addressed the forum, stating: “Today, we are brought together by

leaders of a sector that is considered one of the most prominent drivers of economic growth.

This meeting builds on a path we initiated during the first gathering between sector leaders and policymakers, reaffirming the importance of direct dialogue and the formation of impactful partnerships to strengthen the national technology ecosystem.”

He added: “His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has emphasized on more than one occasion the importance of building a knowledge-based and innovation-driven economy, accelerating digital transformation, and investing in advanced technologies and artificial intelligence, as key engines for economic diversification and enhanced competitiveness.”

“From this perspective, today’s meeting embodies these noble directives and translates them into practical initiatives led by the private sector through effective partnerships with relevant stakeholders.

This national vision has been reflected in advanced international indicators, with the Sultanate of Oman ranking 41st globally in the United Nations E-Government Development Index, 35th in AI readiness, and 50th in network readiness, in addition to achieving a globally advanced ranking in cybersecurity.”

The forum featured two working papers addressing AI. The first paper, presented by Dr Saeed bin Salem Jaaboub, Vice President for Postgraduate Studies, Research and Innovation at the University of Technology and Applied Sciences, was titled “Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Sectors: Transformations in Intellectual Property Models and Economies.”



TENDER NOTICE

Oman Water & Wastewater Services Company (Nama Water Services) hereby announces the following Tenders:

Tender No.	Description of Project	Eligibility	Tender Fee (RO)	Last Date of Distribution of Tender Documents	Bid Submission Date
T/2748168/2025	Construction of Reinforcement of Al Hazm to Al Rustaq Water Transmission System in South Al Batinah Governorate	Local Companies registered with Projects, Tender and Local Content Authority in Excellent Grade and International Companies specialized in the works mentioned	R.O 1000/- (Plus 5% VAT) Non-refundable	8/1/2026	16/2/2026
T/2745171/2025	Consultancy Services for Designs and Supervision of Wastewater Networks Systems and STPs for Sawqirah, Abu Madhabi and Al-Ajaz in Al Wusta Governorate	Local Companies registered with Projects, Tender and Local Content Authority and International Companies specialized in the works mentioned	R.O 250/- (Plus 5% VAT) Non-refundable	8/1/2026	9/2/2026
T/2742173/2025	Call-off contract for supply and delivery of ductal iron fittings (DI) for three years	Local Companies registered with Projects, Tender and Local Content Authority specialized in the works mentioned	R.O 250/- (Plus 5% VAT) Non-refundable	8/1/2026	26/01/2026
T/2748173/2025	Supply, Installation, and commissioning of Emergency Submersible Pumping System at Main Pumping Station 1 at Seeb STP	Local Companies registered with Projects, Tender and Local Content Authority and specialized in the works mentioned	R.O 50/- (Plus 5% VAT) Non-refundable	8/1/2026	26/01/2026
T/2749176/2025	Supply, Installation and Testing of Internal Lining System for Cluster No.3 in Al Dakhiliyah and South Al Batinah Governorates	Local Companies registered with Projects, Tender and Local Content Authority and specialized in the works mentioned	R.O 100/- (Plus 5% VAT) Non-refundable	8/1/2026	26/01/2026
T/2737173-2/2025 (Refloat)	Rehabilitation of Control Room at Seeb STP	Local Companies registered with Projects, Tender and Local Content Authority and specialized in the works mentioned	R.O 100/- (Plus 5% VAT) Non-refundable	8/1/2026	26/01/2026

The tender documents can be obtained from the e-tendering page (Supplier Login) from this announcement date. The applicants shall pay the tender fee by logging into their (I-supplier Page).

Applicants who are not registered shall register through the following link: <https://nws.nama.om/Business-with-Us/Vendor-Registration> in order to receive the login credentials of the Supplier portal.

All applicants who have paid the tender fee shall have access to the Tender Documents through Nama Water Services e-tendering page (Supplier Login <https://nws.nama.om/en-us/Business-with-Us/Supplierlogin>). All participating companies shall submit a Bid Bond of 1% of the bid value in a sealed envelope. Bid Bonds must be obtained from a local Bank registered in the Sultanate of Oman addressed to Oman Water and Wastewater Services Company (Nama Water Services) Chairman of Tender Committee not later than 2:00 pm on the bid submission date.

The bid along with all required documents shall be uploaded through Oman Water and Wastewater Services Company (Nama Water Services) e-tendering page not later than 2:00 pm on the date specified above. For more details refer to Tender Page of our website www.nws.nama.om & in case of general queries you may contact us through the email ID of tender@owwsc.nama.om

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The transaction underscores ahlibank's proven capabilities as issue manager.

AHLIBANK LEADS LANDMARK RO 200M GOVERNMENT SUKUK ISSUANCE

MUSCAT: Affirming its growing stature as a trusted partner to sovereign issuers, ahlibank, together with its Islamic window, ahli islamic, has successfully led the issuance of an RO 200 million Government of Oman Sovereign Sukuk, in collaboration with two other local banks, which closed on December 22, 2025, achieving an oversubscription of over 1.85 times.

The transaction underscores ahlibank's proven capabilities as Issue Manager, reflecting its ability to structure, market and deliver high-demand Islamic capital market instruments. Through comprehensive management of the issuance lifecycle, from investor sounding and pricing to marketing, distribution and final allocation, the issuance aligns with national financing objectives and reinforces ahlibank's credibility in sovereign advisory and public debt execution.

Commenting on the transaction, Hanaa al Kharusi, Senior General Manager, Wholesale Banking at ahlibank stated, "This sukuk issuance reflects more than a successful transaction; it demonstrates ahlibank's role in supporting Oman's broader economic and fiscal strategy through its Investment Banking team capabilities.

The strong oversubscription achieved serves as a clear market signal of sustained investor confidence in the Government of Oman's credit profile, as well as in ahlibank's execution strategy and market positioning.

Our continued engagement in sovereign Islamic issuances reinforces our commitment to developing resilient funding platforms, deepening investor participation and contributing to a robust and diversified financial ecosystem that supports sustainable national growth".

Reflecting the strength of market demand, strong investor appetite resulted in a final orderbook of over RO 277 million, enabling effective pricing tension and ensuring that 100% of the issuance was allocated at or below the Ministry of Finance's target rate of 4.15%.

This transaction marks ahlibank's second sukuk issuance for the Ministry of Finance this year, underscoring continued trust in the bank's advisory, structuring and execution capabilities.

Completed in record time, the issuance also reflects the bank's agility and ability to mobilise investor demand efficiently within dynamic market conditions.

AUDI OMAN LAUNCHES LEASING AND OWNERSHIP OFFERS

MUSCAT: Audi Oman, represented by Premium Motors, is concluding the year with an exceptional end-of-year campaign, introducing attractive leasing solutions and exclusive ownership benefits across its 2025 model range. The campaign reinforces Audi Oman's commitment to delivering premium mobility paired with transparency, confidence and long-term value. As part of the campaign, customers can now enjoy competitive daily leasing rates



across Audi's most popular sedans and SUVs. Customers can lease the 2025 Audi Q2 from RO 9 per day, the Audi Q3 from RO 11 per day, the

Audi A5 from RO 13 per day and the Audi A6 from RO 14 per day, while the Audi Q5 and Audi Q6 are available from RO 16 per day and the flagship Audi Q8 can be leased from RO 23 per day for lease period of 5 years. Each leasing package is designed to deliver complete peace of mind, with insurance, registration, warranty, service and maintenance included, ensuring a seamless and worry-free Audi experience throughout the lease period.

Sohar International recognised by CBO

REINFORCING its commitment to advancing Oman's national

financial infrastructure and digital transformation agenda, Sohar International has been formally recognised by the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) during the CBO's Annual Meeting with Financial Institutions, held under the theme "Reimagining Tomorrow". The recognition acknowledges the bank's successful implementation of the Electronic Direct Debit (e-Mandate) service in full alignment with the CBO's national rollout plan, as well as its pioneering role in launching Oman's National Payment Card – "Maal". Together, these achievements reinforce the resilience and efficiency of the national payments infrastructure and underscore Sohar International's leadership in supporting Oman's digital transformation agenda.

The awards were presented by Ahmed bin Jaafar Salim al Musalmi, Governor of the Central Bank of Oman and received by Abdulwahid bin Mohamed al Murshidi, Chief Executive Officer of Sohar International.

Commenting on the recognition, Abdulwahid bin Mohamed al Murshidi, Chief Executive Officer of Sohar International, said: "This recognition by the Central Bank of Oman underscores our steadfast commitment to advancing the national financial agenda through responsible innovation



The recognition acknowledges the bank's successful implementation of the e-Mandate service in full alignment with the CBO's national rollout plan.

and disciplined execution. The successful implementation of the e-Mandate service, alongside our role in launching Oman's National Payment Card, reflects the strength of strategic collaboration between regulators and financial institutions in translating vision into measurable outcomes. At Sohar International, we regard digital transformation not as an isolated initiative, but as a national responsibility – one that reinforces trust, broadens financial inclusion and strengthens the resilience of the banking sector".

The bank's 2025 milestones extend well beyond regulatory compliance, reflecting a deliberate integration of technology, collaboration and capability development across the financial ecosystem. Through a focused portfolio of initiatives, Sohar International has advanced financial inclusion, promoted responsible and sustainable credit allocation and invested in national talent development through awareness programmes, educational workshops and digital literacy initiatives.

National Finance promotes inclusivity & empowerment

MUSCAT: Demonstrating its continued commitment to advancing social inclusion and empowering children and individuals with disabilities, National Finance, the Sultanate of Oman's leading finance company, proudly supported the 2025 edition of Village of Happiness Carnival.

The two-day celebration, held from December 19 & 20 at Civil Aviation Club, brought together individuals with disabilities and their families for a vibrant carnival filled with interactive, fun and educational activities, fostering meaningful community engagement and a strong sense of togetherness.



At the event, National Finance created an engaging and interactive booth experience for visitors, featuring a Gratefulness Tree where guests could express their gratitude, an interactive screen with

educational games and a question wheel offering fun challenges and valuable prizes. This initiative reflected the company's commitment to fostering inclusivity, learning and meaningful engagement within the community. Hosted annually by HH Sayyidah Hujaija bint Jaifer al Said, Chairperson of the Association for Children with Disabilities and the founder of Links Oman, Village of Happiness Carnival stands as a powerful testament to social unity and progress, celebrating the talents, capabilities and contributions of individuals with disabilities. This year's edition was held under the

auspices of Dr Khamis bin Saif al Jabri, Chairman of Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit. Commenting on the initiative, Tariq bin Sulaiman al Farsi, Chief Executive Officer at National Finance, remarked, "We take pride in supporting the Village of Happiness Carnival, an initiative that leaves a tangible impact in promoting equality and strengthening bonds with persons with disabilities and their families. It also reaffirms their meaningful contributions across various fields through their unique capabilities and inspiring talents."

OAB drives innovation, entrepreneurship across Al Sharqiyah South Governorate

MUSCAT: Oman Arab Bank (OAB) successfully concluded the "Tumouhi" workshop for the development of small and medium enterprises (SMEs), held on December 21-22, 2025, at Sur Grand Hotel in Al Sharqiyah South Governorate. The two-day workshop brought together a distinguished group of local entrepreneurs, business owners and experts in an inspiring forum aimed at supporting the growth of this vital sector. The workshop was held under the auspices of Dr Yahya bin Badr al Maawali, Governor of Al Sharqiyah South. The workshop featured a series of interactive

panel discussions and one-on-one mentoring sessions designed to equip SMEs in Al Sharqiyah South Governorate with the knowledge, tools and resources needed to accelerate their growth. Participants also had the opportunity to engage with specialists in diverse fields such as financing strategies, digital transformation and business innovation, while exploring collaboration opportunities and building strong networks. Suleiman al Hinai, Head of Corporate Banking Group at OAB, stated: "The success of the 'Tumouhi' workshop in Al Sharqiyah South Governorate reflects our



The workshop featured a series of interactive panel discussions and one-on-one mentoring sessions.

commitment to supporting the SME sector across Oman. It was truly inspiring to witness the passion, creativity and determination of local entrepreneurs. We are proud to provide a platform that empowers SMEs to thrive and contribute effectively to the nation's economy". During the workshop, Oman Arab Bank showcased a range of tailored financial solutions for SMEs, including flexible financing options, advisory services and digital banking tools. Participants expressed their appreciation for the practical insights and personalised guidance offered throughout the workshop, emphasising the importance of direct engagement with the Bank's experts

and peers in the sector. These workshops align with OAB's mission to foster sustainable economic growth by supporting the SME ecosystem and promoting entrepreneurship across Oman. By combining education, mentorship and financial support, the Bank continues to enable businesses to seize real opportunities for growth and innovation. The "Tumouhi" workshop in Al Sharqiyah South Governorate reinforces Oman Arab Bank's position as a trusted partner for SMEs, committed to supporting their journey from early development stages to achieving long-term success.

SHORTTAKES



Asyad Express provides a wide range of value-added solutions designed to support business growth.

ASYAD EXPRESS STRENGTHENS LAST-MILE DELIVERY LEADERSHIP

MUSCAT: Asyad Express, a subsidiary of Asyad Group, is reinforcing its position as a leading provider of last-mile delivery services in Oman and the wider region, supported by a modern logistics network known for speed, reliability and nationwide reach. The company has emerged as a key logistics partner for e-commerce platforms and small and medium enterprises (SMEs), helping them scale operations and improve customer satisfaction.

With an integrated delivery network covering all governorates of Oman, including remote areas, Asyad Express ensures fast and dependable parcel delivery across the country.

The company offers same-day delivery within Muscat and delivery of up to 72 hours nationwide, providing businesses with flexible and competitive solutions tailored to the fast-growing e-commerce market. Beyond core delivery services, Asyad Express provides a wide range of value-added solutions designed to support business growth. These include cash-on-delivery options, returns management, shipment insurance and innovative packaging solutions.

Together, these services help SMEs streamline operations, expand their customer base and strengthen consumer trust.

By leveraging its robust infrastructure and advanced delivery capabilities, Asyad Express is playing a pivotal role in supporting the growth of Oman's e-commerce sector and enabling businesses to reach customers more effectively across the region. The company's expansion efforts align closely with Oman Vision 2040, particularly in promoting economic diversification, empowering the private sector and fostering innovation and entrepreneurship.

Oman rolls out water and wastewater projects

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, DEC 24

NAMA Water Services (NWS), the state-owned integrated water and wastewater utility of the Sultanate of Oman, has announced a wide-ranging package of infrastructure tenders aimed at strengthening water transmission resilience, advancing wastewater planning and upgrading critical operational assets across several governorates, underscoring the company's ongoing drive to enhance service reliability and support sustainable urban development.

At the forefront of the tender batch is the construction of reinforcement works for the Al Hazm–Al Rustaq water transmission system in Al Batinah South Governorate, a strategically important project designed to bolster the robustness of one of the region's key water supply corridors.

The project is expected to improve network reliability, reduce system vulnerability and support rising domestic, commercial and industrial demand in Al Batinah South Governorate, one of Oman's fastest-growing population centres.

Equally significant is a tender for consultancy services for the design and supervision of wastewater networks and sewage treatment plants in Sawqirah, Abu Madhabi and Al Ajaez in Al Wusta Governorate.

The consultancy assignment reflects Nama Water Services' emphasis on forward-looking sanitation planning in emerging urban areas, with the project expected to lay the groundwork for improved wastewater



The projects aim to strengthen water transmission resilience, advance wastewater planning and upgrade critical operational assets across several governorates.

management, environmental protection and public health outcomes in the governorate.

Beyond these priority projects, Nama Water Services has floated several additional tenders covering supply, installation, rehabilitation and long-term procurement works that collectively address both operational efficiency and system resilience.

One such tender is a three-year call-off contract for the supply and delivery of ductile iron fittings, which are essential components for water transmission and distribution networks.

The long-term nature of the contract is intended to ensure steady availability of critical materials and minimise supply-chain disruptions.

Another tender focuses on the supply, installation and commissioning of an emergency submersible pumping system

at Main Pumping Station 1 at Al Seeb Sewage Treatment Plant (STP).

This project is aimed at enhancing emergency response capabilities and safeguarding continuous wastewater operations in the event of system failures or peak load conditions, particularly in one of Muscat's key treatment facilities.

Nama Water Services has also invited bids for the supply, installation and testing of an internal lining system for Cluster No 3 in Al Dakhiliyah and Al Batinah South Governorates.

The project is expected to extend the operational life of existing pipelines, improve hydraulic efficiency and reduce water losses, aligning with the company's asset management and network optimisation strategy.

Completing the tender list is a project for the rehabilitation of the control room at Al Seeb STP,

which will involve upgrading monitoring, control and operational systems.

The rehabilitation is intended to improve operational oversight, system reliability and safety at the facility, supporting uninterrupted wastewater treatment services.

Eligibility for the tenders is open to local companies registered with the Projects, Tender and Local Content Authority, while selected projects also allow participation by specialised international companies with relevant expertise.

Tender documents are available through Nama Water Services' e-tendering portal, with all bids required to be submitted electronically.

Bid submissions must be completed by 2:00 pm on the respective closing dates, which fall between late January and mid-February 2026.

GCC marks Gulf Statistics Day, highlights unified data vision

MUSCAT: The Statistical Centre of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) marked Gulf Statistics Day on December 24, underscoring the vital role of official statistics in decision-making and sustainable development. This year's celebration was held under the theme "Unified Data... A Shared Gulf Vision". Jassim bin Mohammed al Budaiwi, Secretary-General of the GCC, said Gulf Statistics Day recognises the contributions of professionals working in the statistical field and their essential role in supporting development policies across the region.

He noted that, guided by the vision of GCC leaders, statistical cooperation has become a cornerstone of joint Gulf action.



JASSIM BIN MOHAMMED AL BUDAIWI

Secretary-General of the GCC

economic and social integration among GCC member states.

This year's celebration coincided with the outcomes of the 2025 GCC Summit in Manama, which

He highlighted that the GCC Statistical Centre, established in 2011, serves as a central source of unified data, supports evidence-based decision-making and strengthens

emphasised enhancing integration, unifying policies and advancing sustainable development as key priorities.

The theme of the event reflects the summit's directives, as unified data provides the technical foundation for monitoring economic integration, diversification indicators and progress towards the GCC's Sustainable Development Goals.

As part of the celebration, the centre honoured winners of its statistical competition, which aims to promote statistical awareness, encourage innovation in data use and inspire Gulf talent to apply data in analysis, research and forecasting.

The event also featured a panel

discussion titled "Unified Data for a Shared Gulf Vision Towards Statistical Integration Supporting Sustainable Development". Discussions focused on standardising data and indicators, strengthening official statistics, digital transformation of statistical systems and enhancing cooperation between statistical agencies and policymakers.

Participants addressed challenges related to data integration, quality and timeliness, as well as the role of statistics in strategic planning, measuring impact and improving public policy efficiency across GCC countries.

On the sidelines of the event, the GCC Statistical Centre launched the Youth Creativity in Data Award,

targeting Gulf youth aged 18 to 34. The initiative, launched in partnership with Qatar's Ministry of Youth and Sports and the Qatar National Statistics Centre, aims to promote data literacy and encourage young people to use data in support of sustainable development.

Intisar bint Abdullah al Wahaibiyah, Director General of the GCC Statistical Centre, said the award sends a clear message that Gulf youth are future leaders in the data and statistics field.

She emphasised that data is no longer just numbers, but a powerful tool shaping development and decision-making, adding that investing in young talent is essential to building a knowledge-based economy in the GCC. — ONA

CONSUMER SENTIMENT

US consumer confidence slips further



US consumer confidence weakened in December as concerns over jobs and incomes deepened, reinforcing expectations of slower consumer spending after a strong third quarter. The Conference Board's index fell 3.8 points to 89.1, below forecasts. Economists polled had forecast the index at 91.0. Inflation, tariffs and politics dominated concerns, alongside global conflicts. — Reuters

ENERGY MARKETS

Oil extends rally on risks



Oil prices climbed for a sixth straight session, supported by strong US economic data and geopolitical risks involving Venezuela and Russia. Brent crude futures climbed 17 cents, or 0.27%, to \$62.55 a barrel, while WTI crude added 20 cents, or 0.34%, to \$58.58. Both contracts have gained about 6% since December 16, when they plunged to near five-year lows. — Reuters

PRECIOUS METALS

Gold, silver hit fresh records



Gold surged past \$4,500 an ounce for the first time, while silver and platinum hit record highs as investors sought protection from geopolitical and trade risks. Silver gained 1.1% to \$72.16/ounce, after hitting \$72.70. Expectations of future US rate cuts boosted demand. Palladium jumped to a 3-year high, underscoring a broad rally across precious metal markets. — Reuters

OPINION

What does ‘Muscat Nights 2026’ offer?



HAIDER AL LAWATI
haiderdawood@hotmail.com

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

FOR many years, we have been accustomed to celebrating the annual Muscat Festival during a season characterised by winter weather and cooler temperatures. In the past, these events were held in the Ministries’ District in Muscat, and in several public parks. As the festival has evolved year after year, Muscat Municipality, along with the relevant authorities, has sought to offer more to the public and visitors alike. In 2026, the municipality intends to launch the festival and ‘Muscat Nights 2026’ in a new format, extending for an entire month starting from the beginning of the season, marked by cool and pleasant weather. This will allow visitors to attend and participate in a wide range of activities that include entertainment, cultural, sports, artistic, creative and other events. The goal of the 2026 festival is to attract more than one million visitors, offering them a new immersive experience that appeals to all segments of Omani society, including citizens and expatriates, as well as visitors arriving from abroad to take part in the events. Muscat Municipality has selected several public parks and venues across Muscat Governorate to host these activities, in addition to existing shopping malls in the capital. This distribution provides visitors with the opportunity to experience the

festival in multiple locations. This year, Muscat Nights will feature the ‘Festival of Lights’ as the largest and most prominent visual experience, presented in a creative and unconventional style linked to art and modern technologies. This experience will transform the lake at Al Qurum Natural Park into an open-air stage featuring water fountains with artistic movements synchronised with music and lighting, alongside stunning nighttime visual displays. The events will also include daily performances at the Oman Automobile Association venue by artists presenting acrobatics, aerial acts, balancing performances and sleight of hand, in addition to incorporating hologram technology as one of the key elements of the shows. Children will be offering them educational and artistic experiences through role-playing and exposure to scientific professions, as well as simplified presentations from the world of astronomy and space, besides engaging them in artistic and creative activities. For young adventurers, there will be events including cycling races, endurance challenges, archery, martial arts, football matches, as well as bowling, billiards and snooker — affirming the importance of sports as an integral part of community lifestyle. Omani beaches will also be part of Muscat Nights 2026 through activities related to the

The goal of the 2026 event is to attract more than one million visitors, offering them a new immersive experience that appeals to all segments of Omani society, including citizens and expatriates, as well as visitors arriving from abroad to take part in the events

sea, transforming existing spaces into arenas for sports, entertainment and recreation. Meanwhile, a heritage village will be presented in a new look, reflecting the depth of Omani identity and reinforcing local cultural heritage. It will feature live demonstrations of traditional crafts, folk arts, local cuisine and traditional architectural environments that connect visitors with Omani cultural heritage. The upcoming festival will also launch contemporary creative programmes that bring together visitors from various fields to interact with creators, highlighting local and international creative talents and transforming public spaces into open galleries for art and design. All these initiatives offer creative ideas to society, expand community participation, provide opportunities for small and medium enterprises to benefit from these creative experiences and enhance the skills of individuals interested in providing services to visitors during the events and activities. Today, the Muscat Nights aims to strengthen vision and identity by presenting events rooted in culture, art, heritage, tourism and entertainment, while conveying a distinctive message that it is a meeting point of civilisations and a gateway to modern Omani culture.

EV REVOLUTION ROLLS ON BUT BATTERY METALS LOSE THEIR CHARGE

ANDY HOME

It’s been a third tough year for battery metals such as lithium, nickel and cobalt as all three markets struggle to absorb the wave of supply that followed the 2022 price boom. Yet the electric vehicle (EV) revolution rolls on. Demand for batteries and the metals that make them work is still growing at a super-charged pace. It should only be a matter of time before demand momentum absorbs the current supply glut. At least that was the hope. Chinese companies, however, are embarked on a simultaneous technological revolution as they strive to develop ever more powerful batteries at ever lower cost. Battery chemistry is evolving fast and it’s already clear that not every battery metal is going to be a winner in the intense competition between materials. The road to electrification may be currently bumpy. US President Donald Trump has rolled back the Biden administration’s EV

subsidy schemes and the European Union has deferred its phase-out of combustion-engine vehicles beyond 2035. But the underlying momentum is undiminished. Global EV sales increased by 21% year-on-year to 18.5 million vehicles in the first 11 months of 2025, according to consultancy Rho Motion. China remains the driver of the global technology shift. The world’s largest EV market has grown by another 19% this year, accounting for 62% of global sales. It should therefore be no great surprise that it is Chinese companies that are at the forefront of the revolution in battery chemistry. The Chinese EV market is now dominated by batteries using lithium-iron-phosphate (LFP) chemistry. They are safer and cheaper than those using a combination of nickel, cobalt and manganese (NCM) and the performance gap is steadily narrowing. LFP accounted for 48% of global EV batteries last year. Macquarie Bank expects that share to rise to 65% by 2029, a sharp upwards revision from its previous 49% forecast. This is clearly not good news for either Indonesia or the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the world’s largest producers of nickel and cobalt respectively. Indonesia has failed to temper its production growth to reflect the new battery reality, generating a tsunami of surplus metal. Ever more of the country’s nickel has been heading for a London Metal Exchange warehouse rather than a battery precursor plant. — Reuters

European Union puts Mercosur deal in doubt

BRAZILIAN president Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva has said that Brazil will walk away if the trade agreement between the EU and South American trade bloc Mercosur is not finalised this month. He was reacting after Italy and France said they were not ready to back the agreement, which has been 26 years in the making. It dealt a blow to European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen’s plan to sign off on the trade deal last week. Italian prime minister Georgia Meloni told law makers in Rome she will delay the Mercosur deal unless more is done to support Italy’s farmers. France is insisting imported food complies with EU rules on the use of pesticide and chlorine, before it will back the deal. As the EU struggles to complete a trade deal with Mercosur, competitors eyeing South America’s consumer market and vast mineral resources are making note. Talks between the South American bloc and partners such as the United Arab Emirates, Canada and India are gaining renewed importance while a divided EU wavers after more than a quarter century. The prospect of rivals locking in preferential access to Mercosur’s markets, including critical minerals is sharpening attention in capitals from London to Tokyo. “We are determined to deepen our trade ties, Yasushi Noguchi, Japan’s ambassador to Brazil said. Japan is “very interested in how things happen” on the EU-Mercosur deal since Japanese companies often compete directly with European firms, he added. Impatience surfaced at a recent meeting of Mercosur government leaders after resistance from European farmers once again caused a delay. “Without political will and courage from its leaders, it will not be possible to conclude a negotiation that has dragged on for 26 years”, Brazilian president told the summit he hosted last week. “Meanwhile, Mercosur will continue



ANDY JALIL
andyjalil@aol.com

The writer is our foreign correspondent based in the UK.

Talks between the South American bloc and partners such as the United Arab Emirates, Canada and India are gaining renewed importance while a divided EU wavers after more than a quarter century. The prospect of rivals locking in preferential access to Mercosur’s markets, including critical minerals is sharpening attention in capitals from London to Tokyo.



European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen speaks during a press conference with Uruguay’s President Luis Lacalle Pou, Argentina’s President Javier Milei, Brazil’s President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, Paraguay’s President Santiago Pena at the Mercosur Summit in Montevideo, Uruguay, in this file photo. — Reuters

working with other partners”. European Commission president had been expected at the summit to sign the deal. But she cancelled her trip after the EU failed to muster the votes to approve it. European officials are now aiming for a mid-January ratification. Italian prime minister Meloni, who holds the key vote, told Lula da Silva last week she is confident she can support the agreement if she gets more time to rally domestic support. Mercosur, which includes Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay and Bolivia, previously accepted a last-minute EU demand for safeguard measures to protect its farmers. EU countries such as France and Poland have long opposed the deal, arguing that giving access to South America’s behemoth agricultural industry would hurt European farmers. Bloomberg Economics estimated the deal would trigger as much as a 0.7 per cent economic boost by 2040 for Mercosur countries and 0.1 per cent for Europe. While Italy has been hesitant on

the Mercosur agreement, it is also involved on an entirely different issue with the UK. An Italian defence company has warned that it could shut up shop in Britain if it does not secure a £1 billion helicopter contract. Leonardo said it would have to reassess its UK operations if it did not win a Ministry of Defence contract to replace Puma, which has been used by the British military as a transport and military aircraft since the 1960s. This could put the country’s last helicopter factory at risk of closure. Roberto Cingolani, the chief executive, has written to John Healey, the defence secretary, arguing that the potential contract was a cornerstone of its UK strategy and that its factory in Yeovil, Somerset, which employs 3,300 people, could be at risk of closure if the work was not secured. “Any delay or cancellation in the programme would force a re-evaluation of Leonardo’s UK presence, including investment in electronics and cybersecurity”, Cingolani said in the letter.

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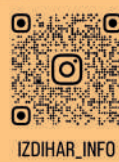
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ART/LIFE



CHANGING WORLD

WEDDING WARDROBE DILEMMA: A COMMON STRUGGLE



SHADDAD AL MUSALMY
The writer is a Senior Editor at Oman Daily Observer.

Weddings in Oman are a grand affair, with elaborate decorations, sumptuous food and, of course, impeccable fashion.

For many women in our societies, the excitement of attending a wedding is often matched by the stress of deciding what to wear.

It's a dilemma that is all too familiar to hours spent scrolling through social media, flipping through fashion magazines and trying on outfit after outfit, only to settle on something at the last minute.

The pressure to look perfect is palpable, with social media showcasing the latest trends and styles. The expectation to dress to impress can be overwhelming, especially with the rise of influencers and bloggers setting the fashion agenda.

Add to that the desire to fit in with the wedding's theme or colour scheme and it's no wonder women are spending hours agonising over their wardrobe choices.

Perhaps it is time to redefine what it means to be fashionably dressed. Instead of striving for perfection, maybe women can focus more on feeling confident and comfortable in what they wear.

But it's not just about keeping up with the latest trends. Traditional Omani attire, such as the elegant abaya or the intricately designed dress, requires careful consideration and planning. Women often spend hours ensuring their outfits are perfectly coordinated, from the intricate embroidery to the matching accessories. The attention to detail is meticulous, with every aspect of the outfit scrutinised to ensure it meets the high standards of Omani fashion.

The stress of choosing an outfit can be exhausting, taking away from the joy and excitement of celebrating with loved ones. This was evident when I saw the lady of the house panicking on what to wear for the wedding this weekend.

So, what is the solution? Perhaps it is time to redefine what it means to be fashionably dressed. Instead of striving for perfection, maybe women can focus more on feeling confident and comfortable in what they wear.

After all, weddings are about celebrating love and community, not just showcasing the wardrobes. Let us work towards making weddings a more relaxed and enjoyable experience for everyone, where women can focus on the joy of the occasion rather than stressing about what to wear.

Maybe they can start by embracing the idea that it is okay to repeat an outfit or opt for something simple yet elegant. Let them shift the focus from fashion perfection to creating meaningful memories with family and friends.

By doing so, we can break free from the pressure of fashion expectations and truly enjoy the magic of weddings in Oman.

QUICK FEATURES



HISTORICAL ARTEFACTS

People walk next to King Khufu's boat gem, also known as the Solar Boat, as work to restore the second solar boat has started with wooden planks part of the 1,650-piece structure. — Reuters



ENTERTAINMENT

The cast of the beloved Netflix show "Stranger Things" at the world premiere of the show's Season 5, at the TCL Chinese theatre in Los Angeles. — AFP



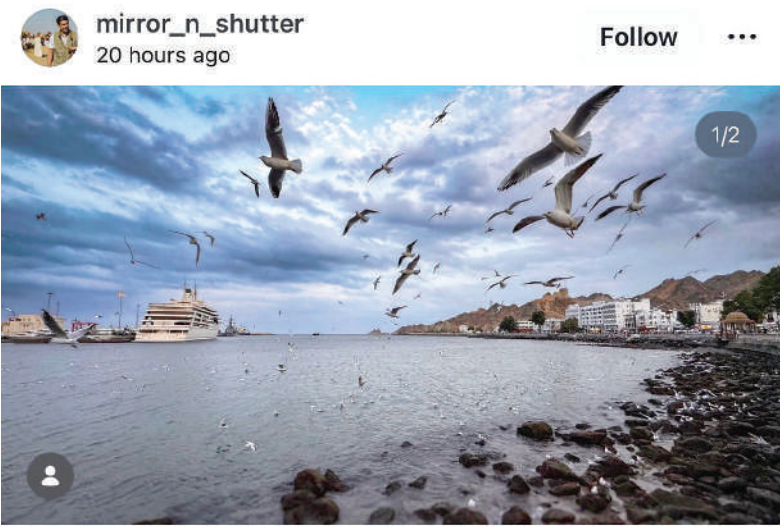
CELEBRATIONS

People walk near a Christmas tree at Bryant Park's holiday market in New York City, US. —Reuters

INSTA PICKS



Arabian Eagle Owl Gazing through the Distance



Dreamy winter evenings by the harbour

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YOUNG DESIGNERS SET FOR AN EXCEPTIONAL EXPERIENCE AT “ALAMAT LAB” FOR GRAPHIC DESIGN

BADR AL DHAFRI

Alamah Marketing, in collaboration with Al Hajar Mountains Hotels and Resorts, has launched the “Alamat” Graphic Design Lab, a space dedicated to exploration and experimentation in typography and poster design.

The Alamat Lab aims to create an integrated experience for those interested in Arabic typography and poster design. The programme offers participants the opportunity to learn from specialised experts through a series of workshops and lectures held over two weeks, concluding with a public exhibition that allows participants to showcase their creative works.

The programme is implemented in three main phases. The first phase is an open call, with registration opened to young Omani designers and residents of Oman. The second phase consists of workshops and lectures held over a two-week period. The final phase features a public exhibition hosted at Al Mirani Fort and Muttrah Fort, where participants will present their final works.

The workshops are delivered by a group of Omani and Arab designers and artists. They include a conceptual thinking workshop (from research and idea to concept) by Ruqaiya Mazar; an Arabic pattern lettering workshop by Farah Aladawy; and a Latin typography workshop by Ali Waqar.

The programme also features a workshop on the grid systems in graphic design by Marwa



al Bahrani; a workshop on the art of authentic Arabic calligraphy by Ahmed al Rawahi & Mohammed Mehdi; and a foundational workshop on Arabic type design by Aissam Hamoud.

In addition, participants will take part in an illustration in graphic design projects workshop by Samah al Ansari; a publication-focused workshop titled Community in Print: Old Muscat Zine by Reem Falanaz; and an experimental typography workshop exploring the power of analog processes, led by Marwa al Bahrani and Ali Waqar.

Hashar bin Khamis al Manadhari, Chief Executive Officer of Alamah Marketing, said that the launch of the Alamat Lab reflects Alamah’s commitment to enriching the creative landscape and investing in talents that contribute to the growth of Oman’s creative industries. He noted that the initiative brings together expertise and experimentation in an inspiring endeavour that connects creative industries with artists.

Alamah is a leading house of expertise in the creative marketing communications sector, specialising in branding, corporate identity, advertising campaigns and marketing consultancy.



An employee shows an opened box of caviar at the Caviar de Neuvic boutique in Paris. — AFP

ROSSEN BOSSEV

THERE is no rest for Matev Mateev in the run up to the festive season as the world’s gastronomists dig deep to splash out on his beluga caviar.

November and December are the busiest months for Matev on his farm on Kardzhali lake in the heart of the Rhodope mountains of southern Bulgaria, the mythical birthplace of Orpheus.

In the large lake “sturgeons enjoy natural conditions similar to those of the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea, their seas of origin”, Matev said, his cheeks red from the cold.

“It is deep and the water feeding it comes from an unpolluted mountain”, added the 53-year-old.

Matev, a pioneer in Bulgarian caviar production, was born in the area known for exceptional biodiversity and crystal-clear rivers.

He started his business in the 1990s, shortly after the collapse of four decades of totalitarian communist rule that left Bulgaria in severe economic crisis.

Matev said he started breeding carp before he “chanced upon” the sturgeon and, subsequently, caviar.

Caviar producers worldwide breed different species of the fish, but Matev picked one of the rarest — the beluga.

Bulgaria ranks among Europe’s largest producers of this “king of caviars” with annual production exceeding 520 kilos (1,150 pounds) in 2023, according to Eurostat.

The beluga, one of the largest freshwater fish, can live more than 100 years and grows up to six metres (yards) in length.

But breeding it requires hefty investment and time — it matures slowly and becomes fertile late, at around 15 years of age, compared with seven to 10 years for other species.

“These days we only produce beluga caviar from fish over 20”, said Matev, while his 25-year-old son Boris joked, “Some are older than me”.

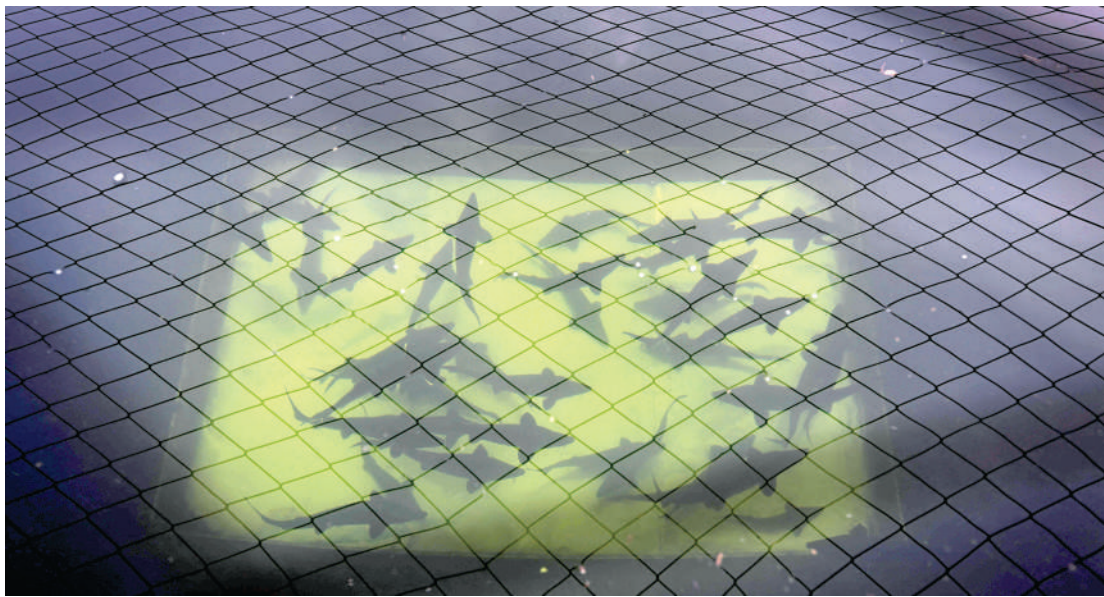
In the laboratory where the caviar is extracted and refined, Matev works with his brother and son.

“Each kilo of caviar passes through my hands”, Matev said. He exports his to “almost every place in the world, almost every continent”, but especially to France.

Two thousand kilometres from Lake Kardzhali, luxury shops in Paris sell his beluga in small round tins under different brand names.

“We are in the peak season as Christmas is approaching”, said Olivier Veillet, of Caviar

Mountain lake: Home to king of caviars



Young sturgeon fish at a floating fish farm in Kardzhali dam, southern Bulgaria. — AFP



Workers catch sturgeon fish at a fish farm in Kardzhali dam, southern Bulgaria. — AFP

A pioneer in Bulgarian caviar production has to go the extra mile ahead of the festive season to whet appetites for his beluga caviar, striving to meet demand from all over the world, as November and December are the busiest months for Matev on the southern Bulgarian Kardzhali lake in the heart of the Rhodope Mountains, the alleged birthplace of the mythical Orpheus

de Neuvic, a caviar company in Paris.

Beluga caviar is the most expensive kind: “You’ll pay 192 euros (\$225) for a 30-gram box”, he said in front of a refrigerated display case containing the precious delicacy.

Charles de Saint-Vincent, manager at the Maison Boutary restaurant in Paris, said beluga was “two to four times more expensive than ‘classic’ caviar”, selling for 3,000 to 8,000 euros per kilo.

While other caviars are brown, beluga grey and rather large.

Hollywood legend Elizabeth Taylor “called beluga caviar her ‘grey babies’”, said Saint-Vincent, the author of “Caviar: A Simple Guide for Lovers”.

“It is a rich but not too strong caviar, sweet and intense at the same time, particularly rich in texture and with a very buttery flavour that lingers”, he said.

China dominates global

production with Europe’s top sturgeon caviar producers being Italy with some 65 tonnes and France with 44.5 tons a year.

But beluga caviar accounts for only one per cent of the total, said Saint-Vincent.

Bulgaria has found a niche, he added, because the Danube and the Black Sea are a natural habitat of the sturgeon, including beluga and Bulgarians are familiar with the species.

The EU member country currently has a handful of sturgeon farms, mainly of the oscietra sturgeon, with most of the production coming from the three farms at Kardzhali lake.

While sturgeon farming is thriving, the wild sturgeon remains seriously endangered as a victim of overfishing and pollution dating from the 1980s. An indefinite ban on fishing the species in Bulgaria comes into effect on January 1st. — AFP

FEATURES



CREATIVITY FOR GIVING: PORTRAITS OF PURPOSE

AT THE STUDENT ENDOWMENT EXHIBITION

IDRIS AL BALUSHI

At the entrance of Muttrah Souq, where the rhythm of daily life blends with the enduring presence of the sea, the evening of December 23 carried a different kind of energy. Passersby were drawn not only by curiosity, but by a quiet invitation to pause and reflect. Here, the second Student Endowment Exhibition, Creativity for Giving, unfolded as more than an art showcase. It stood as a human-centred initiative where education, creativity and social responsibility converged.

Organised by Al Zahra College for Women in partnership with Siraj Endowment Foundation and the Office of the Wali of Muttrah; and held under the auspices of Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, the exhibition reflected a broader vision of learning. It emphasised how academic spaces can extend beyond classrooms and become active contributors to community development and sustainable giving.

What immediately distinguished the exhibition was its focus on the students themselves. Each artwork felt like a portrait, not only of a subject, but of its creator. The pieces carried traces of long hours, field visits, research and self-doubt, transformed into confidence and expression. Rather than presenting polished outcomes alone, the exhibition revealed process, growth and personal investment.

Dr Musallam bin Ali bin Salim Al Maani, Dean of Al Zahra College for Women, described the initiative as part of the college's ongoing commitment to engaging with the local community. By transforming student projects into charitable contributions, the exhibition allowed creative outputs to gain a second life, one rooted in service. The proceeds from the sale of artworks were dedicated to Siraj Endowment Foundation, reinforcing the idea that creativity can be both expressive and generous.

Photography played a significant role in narrating this vision. Student Duaa al Rashidi participated through courses in graphic and photographic imaging, where students were encouraged to step beyond



the familiar environment of the college. Travelling across governorates such as Al Dakhiliyah and Muscat, Duaa documented scenes from Nizwa, Bahla and Muttrah. Her photographs carried a sense of observation rather than spectacle, focusing on quiet streets, architectural details and moments where place and memory intersect. Standing beside her work, it became clear that these images were also a reflection of her own journey as a student learning to see with intention and empathy.

In another corner of the exhibition, black-and-white ink drawings offered a different emotional texture. Graphic design student Shaikha al Farqani presented abstract works inspired by botanical and animal motifs. Restricted to black ink, each line demanded precision and patience. The absence of colour shifted attention to form, rhythm and balance, allowing viewers to appreciate the discipline behind the creativity. Each piece took nearly a week to complete, shaped by careful research into abstract decorative patterns and personal interpretation.

For Shaikha, participation in the exhibition extended beyond displaying artwork. It was an opportunity to contribute to a collective effort, where individual creativity became part of a larger narrative of giving. The artworks were modestly priced, reinforcing accessibility while emphasising that the true value lay in intention rather than profit.

As visitors moved through the space, the exhibition revealed its deeper impact. It was not only about supporting charitable causes, but about shaping a generation of students who understand the social dimensions of their talents. The initiative encouraged young women to see their skills as tools for connection, empathy and responsibility.

Creativity for Giving ultimately stood as a portrait of purpose. Through the faces reflected in photographs, the patience embedded in ink drawings and the quiet pride of students explaining their work, the exhibition affirmed that when creativity is guided by compassion, it becomes a lasting contribution to both community and self.