

O M A N
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SUNRISE 06:49 AM

PRAYER TIMINGS

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ASR 03:33 PM

MAGHRIB 05:55 PM

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SINNER RACES ON, 'GROSS' PIE FOR KEYS AS HEATWAVE HITS MELBOURNE

INBRIEF

RAIN ACROSS MUSCAT GOVERNORATE



Some wilayats in Muscat Governorate experienced light to moderate rainfall on Monday with the Wilayat of Al Seeb reporting the heaviest rainfall. This was due to the influence of cumulonimbus clouds forming over the Sea of Oman and affecting the Sultanate of Oman. Oman Met Office said that the latest satellite images show continued flow of clouds over the northern governorates bringing chances of scattered rain in the governorates of Musandam, Al Batinah North, Al Batinah South, Muscat and parts of Al Hajar Mountains. Jabal Shams in the Wilayat of Al Hamra recorded the lowest temperature of -4.0 degrees Celsius, while the highest temperature was 29.6 degrees Celsius in Al Mazyouna in Dhofar Governorate.

DEAL FOR WIND TURBINE FACTORY

The Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) on Monday signed a usufruct agreement with Mawarid Turbine to establish a wind turbine manufacturing and assembly plant in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD), alongside two additional agreements to install six wind turbines to generate power required to operate the plant. The agreements were signed on behalf of OPAZ by Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Chairman of the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ), and on behalf of Mawarid Turbine by Mustafa bin Mohammed al Hinai, CEO of the company. [DETAILS ON P3](#)

US JUDGE CONSIDERS PAUSE IN MINNESOTA

A US judge on Monday weighed Minnesota's request to temporarily stop the Trump administration's immigration crackdown in the state, following the fatal shooting of a second US citizen over the weekend that sparked a fierce backlash. Lawyers urged US District Judge to immediately suspend the administration's surge of 3,000 immigration agents, which they characterised as a violent and illegal occupation that is putting public safety at risk. [SEE ALSO P7](#)

Oman joining 'Artemis Accords' to boost space cooperation

MUSCAT: Oman-US relations continue to witness development across various levels, particularly in the field of space exploration. The Sultanate of Oman has officially approved its joining the Artemis Accords, alongside signing an agreement aimed at enhancing joint cooperation in the peaceful exploration of space.

In this context, Casey Swails, Deputy Associate Administrator at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (Nasa), stated that Oman's inclusion in this group of 61 nations within the Artemis Accords reflects its commitment to shared values for space exploration

conducted for peaceful purposes.

Swails emphasised that building government-level partnerships is a fundamental pillar for agreeing on common goals and achievement mechanisms, which is what the Artemis Accords aim to achieve.

She explained that this step demonstrates the Omani government's keen interest in investing in the space sector, which is considered as one of the fastest-growing sectors globally and an essential component of technological progress. She noted that during her participation in the Third Omani-US Strategic Dialogue, she observed a genuine desire from



Casey Swails, Deputy Associate Administrator at Nasa

the Omani government to direct investments toward space, Artificial Intelligence (AI) and advanced technologies.

Swails detailed that the Accords establish unified standards to ensure interoperability, emphasising the need for regulatory frameworks in space similar to those on Earth. Just as there are strict rules for traffic and aviation safety, the space sector requires a common framework to address challenges and coordinate missions between nations.

She added that the principles of the Accords also include emergency cooperation by providing support to astronauts in distress, regardless

of nationality. The Accords also include commitment to sharing scientific data, mission information and launch schedules to foster trust among signatory nations.

Swails stressed that deep space missions will grow increasingly complex in the future, making international cooperation a necessity. She noted that reaching ambitious goals would be impossible without the concerted efforts of international, commercial and academic partnerships.

Swails reaffirmed that Oman and the US share deep-rooted historical relations built on trust, diplomacy and cooperation. [SEE ALSO P13](#)

Oman targets to handle 40 million passengers

Aircraft maintenance building to be operational this year

VINOD NAIR
MUSCAT, JAN 26

THE Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) on Monday presented the National Aviation Strategy 2040, which will be a comprehensive, long-term road map for developing the civil aviation sector.

Speaking on the occasion, Eng Nayef bin Ali al Abri, Chairman of the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA), said that the strategy sets growth targets for 2040, including handling over 40 million passengers annually, transporting nearly one million tonnes of air cargo, attracting cumulative private sector investments exceeding RO 1 billion and raising the sector's contribution to GDP to more than 3.5 per cent.

In response to journalists' inquiries, officials at the Civil Aviation Authority clarified that the completion rate of the aircraft maintenance building at Muscat International Airport has reached 98 per cent and it is expected to be operational this year.

It also focuses on three main pillars, which include developing airports to provide an exceptional experience for aviation users through suitable infrastructure, high-quality services, enhancing



National Aviation Strategy 2040 unveils a road map for a sustainable and competitive aviation future.

The strategy sets growth targets for 2040, including handling over 40 million passengers annually, and raising the sector's contribution to GDP to more than 3.5%

local and international connectivity through an Air Transport Capacity and Destinations Programme, the Support Services Development Programme to enhance the efficiency of aviation services, and the Advanced Air Mobility (AAM) Programme.

The implementation plan spans 15 years, and is divided into three phases. Phase one, covering 2026-2027, focuses on initiation and readiness; it includes 17 key initiatives, most notably the establishment of the organisational

framework, legislation and governance model, alongside urgent operational initiatives.

It encompasses the redesign of operational processes at Muscat International Airport, the enhancement of passenger connectivity at Muscat and Salalah airports, the provision of aircraft catering and maintenance services at local airports based on commercial demand, and the development and localisation of heavy aircraft maintenance capabilities within Oman. [TURN TO P2](#)

SQU's database exceeds 2,100 research outputs

MUSCAT: Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) has achieved a qualitative research milestone in 2025, as the number of its scientific papers indexed in the Scopus database exceeded 2,100 research outputs. This figure serves as an indicator of the university's escalating scientific productivity and its enhanced international academic presence.

This accomplishment crowns a sustained upward

trajectory in research outputs in recent years. The university's research production has achieved a cumulative growth estimated at 35 per cent during the period from 2023 to 2025. This reflects a gradual and balanced development based on the accumulation of institutional efforts, the systematic expansion of the research ecosystem, and the reinforcement of the research and innovation environment,

moving beyond temporary spikes.

The published research encompassed multiple scientific fields, including medical sciences, social sciences and humanities, engineering, as well as agricultural and environmental sciences, and interdisciplinary research. This enhances the diversity of the university's research activity and its relevance to developmental and societal

issues. This notable progress is attributed to the development of the research environment at the university. This has been achieved through strengthening support for researchers and empowering them to direct their research towards serving national priorities, alongside organising mechanisms to support scientific publishing and expanding the involvement of university students in research studies. — [ONA](#)

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SHORTTAKES



Dr Abdullah bin Nasser al Harrasi held talks with Salman bin Yousef al Dosari.

Oman, Saudi Arabia explore AI and digital media collaboration

MUSCAT: Dr Abdullah bin Nasser al Harrasi, Minister of Information, received at his office on Monday Salman bin Yousef al Dosari, Minister of Media of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

The meeting took place within the framework of the Saudi minister’s visit to the Sultanate of Oman.

During the meeting, the two sides underscored the depth of the longstanding fraternal and historical ties between Oman and Saudi Arabia.

They highlighted the sustained progress across all domains of bilateral cooperation, a trajectory advanced under the prudent leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud, alongside His Royal Highness Prince Mohammed bin Salman al Saud, Crown Prince and Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

The two ministers also explored avenues to advance and strengthen media partnership between the two nations. Discussions encompassed collaboration in journalism, television, radio, and digital and electronic media, as well as initiatives for professional training and the exchange of expertise among media personnel, all aimed at serving their shared interests. — ONA

Global leaders discuss labour market challenges



The two-day event, themed ‘Future in Progress’, brings together over 10,000 participants from 100 countries.

SHADDAD AL MUSALMY
RIYADH, JAN 26

THE Global Labour Market Conference (GLMC) kicked off on Monday in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. The two-day event, themed ‘Future in Progress’, brings together over 10,000 participants from 100 countries, including more than 40 labour ministers, international organisations, private sector leaders and academics.

The Sultanate of Oman is represented by a good number of officials, seeking to leverage this platform to learn from global best practices and share its own experiences in promoting decent work and social justice.

According to Nabhan al Battashi, Chairman of the General Federation of Oman Workers (GFWO), Oman’s participation in the conference is a significant step towards addressing global labour market challenges

and sharing expertise. “Oman’s presence at the GLMC underscores its commitment to advancing labour standards and promoting social justice,” he told the Observer.

Nabhan emphasised that the labour market conference is a crucial step towards Gulf integration, promoting unified labour market policies tailored to each GCC country’s specific needs.

He highlighted the importance of sharing experiences and expertise among GCC states. “It is extremely important to convene at such an event in order to gain insight into different experiences, exchange expertise, and become familiar with regulatory systems applied in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and across other GCC states,” Nabhan added.

He emphasised Oman’s focus on achieving Omanisation objectives. “In the Sultanate of Oman, this file has received considerable attention, with numerous

initiatives underway to achieve its objectives in the near future. Likewise, what we have observed in Saudi Arabia reflects a highly successful and closely aligned approach to handling the job-seekers’ file,” Nabhan added.

In the opening remarks, Saudi Minister of Human Resources and Social Development Ahmed al Rajhi emphasised Saudi Arabia’s commitment to advancing global dialogue on the future of work and addressing shared labour market challenges. The event featured over 200 speakers across sessions, ministerial meetings, agreement signings, and the graduation of the first Labour Market Academy cohort.

The GLMC provided a unique opportunity for Oman to engage with global stakeholders, share its experiences and learn from best practices. Oman’s participation is expected to enhance its labour market reforms and promote decent work and social justice.

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Oman eyes 40 million passengers

FROM PAGE 1

In addition, it involves the revision and updating of aviation economic regulations and the continuous advancement of safety and security standards across the civil aviation sector.

Phase two will see the activation of compliance with CORSIA (the Carbon Offsetting and Reduction Scheme for International Aviation) while mitigating the financial impact on national carriers; ensuring sector readiness for emerging aviation technologies and alternative fuels; maximising the capacity of Omani airspace; establishing the regulatory and legislative framework for Advanced Air Mobility; designing and activating an Unmanned Aircraft Traffic Management (UTM) platform.

Airports across Oman recorded robust activity, with passenger numbers reaching 15,213,150, reflecting the recovery of the aviation sector and the growing demand for air transport.

MILESTONES

For his part, Hamid bin Ahmed al Barashdi, Director-General of Strategic Planning at the Civil Aviation Authority, said: “The launch of the National Aviation Strategy 2040 represents a pivotal milestone in the journey of developing the civil aviation sector, as it is based on 9 fundamental principles that form the foundation for a sustainable aviation sector. It will be implemented through three phases encompassing 39 initiatives aimed at enhancing safety, growing the economy, building national competencies, stimulating innovation, digital transformation and sustainability.”

Rawya bint Nasser al Adawi, Acting Director-General of Civil Aviation Regulation at the Civil Aviation Authority, confirmed that the authority achieved advanced results in the field of aviation security during 2025. She indicated that the Sultanate of Oman recorded a compliance rate of 94.4 per cent in the Universal Security Audit Programme with a Continuous Monitoring Approach and a 100-per cent compliance rate for facilitation requirements. She noted that the authority signed 8 international air transport service agreements and held 21 bilateral negotiation meetings with a number of countries worldwide last year.

Eng Saleh bin Abdullah al Harthy, Director-General of Air Navigation at the Civil Aviation Authority, said that the authority recorded a total air traffic movement of 643,069 aircraft during 2025, including 585,357 aircraft transiting Omani airspace.

QUALITATIVE LEAP

In the field of meteorology, Abdullah bin Rashid al Khadouri, Director-General of Meteorology at the Civil Aviation Authority, said: “The authority witnessed a qualitative leap in enhancing the meteorological and early warning system during 2025, through the implementation of a set of strategic projects, most notably the flood modelling index, the launch of the Oman Meteorology website and its accompanying application, along with advanced weather maps for numerical models with a resolution of up to 2.1 km, in addition to activating the unified warnings protocol mechanism.”

Meanwhile, a tender for the construction works of Sohar Airport will be announced, and most technical studies related to the Musandam Airport project have been completed, with its executive plan to be approved during the year.

SHORT TAKE



ROYAL ARMY OF OMAN RECEIVES NEW BATCH OF TRAINEES

MUSCAT: The Royal Army of Oman (RAO) received a new batch of citizens who will embark on a military training programme and join the RAO units. The programme is in pursuance of integrated national efforts made by the Sultan’s Armed Forces (SAF) to employ citizens in coordination with the Ministry of Labour.

The RAO has extended its expertise, capabilities, facilities and human resources to the new recruits in a manner that provides them with a suitable environment and enables them to join the military service.

The training programme constitutes part of national plans to supply the SAF and other departments of the Ministry of Defence with qualified talent. — ONA

Agreement inked for wind turbine factory at SEZAD

THE Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) signed on Monday a usufruct agreement with Mawarid Turbine to establish a wind turbine manufacturing and assembly plant in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD), alongside two additional agreements to install six wind turbines to generate power required to operate the plant.

The agreements were signed on behalf of OPAZ by Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Chairman of the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ), and on behalf of Mawarid Turbine by Mustafa bin Mohammed al Hinai, CEO of the company.

Under the agreements, Mawarid Turbine was granted usufruct rights over three plots of land: the first for the construction of the wind turbine manufacturing and assembly plant, the second for the installation of a single wind turbine, and the third for the installation of five wind turbines. The company also plans to reserve additional land to support future expansions of the project.

The project aims to localise the wind turbine industry in Oman in line with Oman Vision 2040 targets for green energy. The plant’s



The agreements were signed by Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, OPAZ Chairman, and Mustafa al Hinai, CEO of Mawarid Turbine.

The first phase of the project is valued at RO 70 million which includes manufacturing of wind turbine components and blades

expected production capacity ranges between 800 and 1,000 megawatts.

The company is also currently developing an initial concept for a battery production project to support energy storage systems. This agreement represents a strategic step that reflects the Authority’s commitment to supporting renewable energy projects and strengthening the localisation of clean industries in the areas under its supervision.

It contributes to attracting high-quality international investments, transferring advanced technologies, creating sustainable employment opportunities, and reinforcing Duqm’s position as a leading

regional hub for green industries and a low-carbon economy. The first phase of the project is valued at approximately RO 70 million and includes the manufacturing of several wind turbine components and blades.

The second phase will involve the establishment of a specialised factory for the production of wind turbine towers and other components.

Eng Ahmed bin Ali Akaak, CEO of SEZAD, said that the zone holds competitive advantages that make it an ideal environment for renewable energy projects, citing the availability of wind and solar resources, robust infrastructure and ample industrial land.

He noted that the zone’s 2025-2030 strategy focuses on positioning Duqm as a preferred hub for renewable energy and future industries, welcoming the wind turbine factory as a project with sustainable economic impact.

He added that the SEZAD welcomes Mawarid Turbine and the wind turbine plant, which will benefit from the zone’s significant capabilities to support and market its products locally and internationally through exports via Duqm Port, which has previously handled oversized cargo shipments.

— ONA

AEICD announces installation of 183-kw solar energy panels

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, JAN 26

Marking a significant step towards sustainability and long-term community impact in the Sultanate of Oman, the Association of Early Intervention for Children with Disabilities (AEICD) has announced the completion of the installation of a 183-kw solar energy system at its main facilities in Muscat.

The solar energy panels were installed across multiple on-site structures, including car park shading areas, pergolas and rooftop facilities in partnership with bp Oman, maximising space utilisation while ensuring operational efficiency.

The project is expected to significantly reduce electricity costs for the Association’s facilities. These savings will be redirected towards strengthening and expanding core programmes, supporting improved service delivery for more than 400 children with disabilities annually.

Speaking to the Observer, Sabah al Bahlani, CEO of AEICD, said that the solar system is expected to generate approximately 336 MWh of clean electricity annually, contributing to the avoidance of nearly 218 metric tonnes of CO₂ emissions each year, in alignment with Oman’s national renewable energy and climate objectives.

“The project forms part of the Association’s long-term sustainability initiative, which focuses on reducing environmental impact, improving operational efficiency, and ensuring reliable, clean energy use to support high-quality services. We are deeply grateful to bp Oman for their continued support and trust in our mission,” she said. This solar energy project enables the Association to reduce operational costs while directing more resources towards improving the quality of services provided to children with disabilities and their families.



The solar system is expected to generate approximately 336 MWh of clean electricity annually.

“The project forms part of the Association’s long-term sustainability initiative, which focuses on reducing environmental impact, improving operational efficiency, and ensuring reliable, clean energy use to support high-quality services. We are deeply grateful to bp Oman for their continued support and trust in our mission

SABAH AL
BAHLANI
CEO of AEICD

“By reducing operational expenses, the initiative enhances service continuity and allows a greater proportion of resources to be allocated to care, therapy and community-based support programmes, reinforcing the Association’s mission and long-term resilience.”

The project was implemented in collaboration with Nafath Renewable Energy, an Omani company established in 2013.

“Sustainability is not only about clean energy; it is about creating long-term value for people. This project delivers measurable environmental and economic impact while strengthening the resilience and long-term sustainability of an institution that plays a vital role in early intervention and community well-being,” said Eng Musab al Farsi, CEO of Nafath Renewable Energy.

Ibrahim al Hinai, Social Investment Manager at bp Oman, Kuwait and Qatar, said that this initiative reflects bp Oman’s commitment towards empowering people with disabilities in Oman.

“This programme also diversifies energy sources provided to our communities. This will redirect electricity costs and enable the association to provide further services towards children and their families,” Al Hinai added.

Jabal REIF expands with a landmark acquisition of a Prime Retail Property in Muscat under a long-term lease

Jabal Real Estate Investment Fund (REIF), a closed-ended listed fund focused on income-generating commercial real estate, is pleased to announce the successful acquisition of the Nesto Hypermarket building, a newly constructed, high-quality retail asset strategically located in Ansab, Muscat.

This landmark acquisition reflects REIF’s ongoing commitment to strengthening its portfolio with high-performing and long-term leased assets that provide strong income visibility and compelling long-term returns. The transaction is also aligned with Islamic investment principles, providing investors with access to Sharia-compliant real estate opportunities in Oman.

The acquisition was completed on 22 January 2026, with a net investment value of OMR 10.2 million, financed through Islamic financing.

The acquired asset is a newly completed, high-quality retail property strategically located in the residential area of Ansab, Muscat, and is fully leased and occupied by Nesto Hypermarkets LLC, one of the region’s leading retail operators. The property is well positioned to become a key shopping destination for the rapidly growing community in Ansab and surrounding areas. It comprises a built-up area of around 18,000 sqm, situated on a freehold land plot. The asset is secured by a 20-year lease agreement, with rent paid in advance on a regular basis, enhancing cash collection certainty and further mitigating credit risk.

“This acquisition represents another important milestone for REIF in executing its portfolio strategy—targeting prime commercial assets with strong tenants, long-term leases, and resilient income characteristics,” said Mr. Hisham Salim Nasser Al Khadouri, Real Estate Manager of REIF’s investment manager, Jabal Asset Management LLC.

“The transaction represents a defensive addition to REIF’s portfolio and supports the Fund’s objective of delivering stable, sustainable income and attractive long-term value for investors, while contributing to the continued development of Oman’s modern commercial real estate landscape” added Mr. Issa Al Battashi, Managing Director of REIF’s investment manager, Jabal Asset Management LLC, and Board Member of REIF.

The Investment Manager remains confident

in the positive momentum of Oman’s real estate market, a view supported by leading industry experts. This growth continues to be driven by government-led reforms and Vision 2040 initiatives, which are accelerating economic diversification and strengthening the Sultanate’s long-term investment appeal. According to Savills’ Oman Property Market – Q3 2025 report, market conditions remained steady, supported by resilient demand across key sectors and sustained economic stability.

The Investment Manager further noted that the downward interest rate environment is becoming increasingly supportive of real estate investment. As deposit rates continue to decline, investors are increasingly seeking alternative opportunities that offer stable, long-term income and capital preservation. In this context, REIF presents an attractive option, offering access to income-generating real estate investments that are also structured in accordance with Sharia-compliant principles.

About Jabal Asset Management

Jabal Asset Management (JAM) is a Muscat-based Emerging Markets specialist investment manager and broker, licensed by the Financial Services Authority of Oman. JAM offers seven investment funds, discretionary mandates, and bespoke solutions across Oman, the GCC, China, India, and global emerging markets, spanning equities, fixed income, real estate, and private equity. JAM’s flagship digital platform J Invest Mobile App seamlessly integrates brokerage and asset management, enabling clients to open accounts, onboard digitally, and invest in global emerging markets with ease.

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Heritage and global flavours take centre stage



AFRAH AL BALUSHI

MUSCAT NIGHTS 2026 is drawing thousands of visitors with an exceptional culinary experience that goes far beyond dining, evolving into a vibrant cultural and entertainment celebration.

This year, the festival's main venues have been transformed into world-class destinations, uniting the richness of authentic Omani cuisine with the latest international gastronomic trends under one umbrella.

Designed as a complete lifestyle experience, the venues blend diverse food offerings with immersive entertainment.

From the moment families arrive, the festive atmosphere sets the tone for a winter season filled with flavour, fun and cultural discovery across all Muscat Nights locations.

Dining options span traditional and contemporary tastes across key venues. The Heritage Village in Al Qurum and Al Amerat offers a live encounter with traditional Omani dishes set against heritage-style architecture.

At the Food Festival in Al Qurum Natural Park, a dedicated food zone presents a wide range of local and international cuisines in an open-air environment, running daily from 4 pm to 11 pm.

Meanwhile, Seeb Beach (Sur Al Hadid) features a corniche lined

MUSCAT NIGHTS 2026 SERVES UP HERITAGE AND GLOBAL FLAVOURS IN GRAND CULINARY SHOWCASE

TRADITIONAL OMANI DISHES AND INTERNATIONAL FLAVOURS SHOWCASED ACROSS MULTIPLE FESTIVAL VENUES

DINING PAIRED WITH LASER SHOWS, DANCING FOUNTAINS, LIVE COOKING THEATRES AND CULTURAL PERFORMANCES

with restaurants and cafés, offering beachfront dining experiences, while major shopping centres such as Oman Avenues Mall combine food courts with entertainment activities.

Qurayat introduced a new seafood-focused experience this year, serving Omani favourites such as salona fish, spiced octopus (qash'a), coastal-style lobster and charcoal-grilled Omani mishkak. Modern dessert zones near Al Qurum Natural Park fountains added further appeal with crepes, French toast and waffles.

Visitors expressed satisfaction with the organisation and the wide range of options catering to different budgets and tastes. Muscat Municipality's provision of comfortable seating areas and



convenient transport services was widely appreciated, making dining a seamless part of the Muscat Nights experience. Food prices were considered reasonable, with both cash and card payment options available, although some smaller vendors reported pressure on electronic payment networks during peak hours.

Rashid al Yafei, a visitor, said the festival offered "a unique opportunity to experience cultural diversity through food," highlighting the presence of both traditional Omani and international dishes.

Al Qurum Natural Park witnessed remarkable turnout, where visitors enjoyed meals alongside dancing fountain shows, laser displays and an interactive cooking theatre featuring international chefs conducting live workshops and competitions. At Al Amerat's Heritage Village, visitors took a journey into the heart of Omani

culinary traditions. Omani craftswomen demonstrated the preparation of rakhal bread and traditional sweets, turning dining into an educational and cultural experience rooted in national identity. A modern dimension was evident at Seeb Beach and Wadi Al Khoudh, where food trucks and speciality cafés run by young Omani entrepreneurs offered creative fast food and winter beverages, especially popular among youth seeking open-air dining with an adventurous touch.

Blending food, entertainment and learning, Muscat Nights 2026 continues to attract food lovers of all ages, reinforcing Muscat's position as a leading winter destination in the region. The food and entertainment events run until January 31, inviting residents and visitors alike to explore this dynamic fusion of flavours and festivities.

SHORTTAKES



The Digital Transformation Plan (2026–2030) is under implementation.

AL SHARQIYAH SOUTH DIGITISES 14 GOVT SERVICES

SUR: Al Sharqiyah South Governorate witnessed the implementation of distinctive packages of digital projects and initiatives during 2025. This included the digitisation of 14 government services, the completion of 5,694 digital government transactions and the full execution of 12 digital projects, while work is ongoing to implement 4 other digital projects.

Eng Abdullah bin Saif al Araimi, Head of Digital Transformation Team in Al Sharqiyah South Governorate, stated that this work comes within an integrated phased framework aimed at enhancing performance efficiency, raising the readiness of the digital infrastructure and achieving a sustainable impact on service quality.

He indicated that the Digital Transformation Plan (2026–2030) has been prepared, the ‘Al Sharqiyah South Hackathon’ was implemented in cooperation with Oman Investment Authority, the ‘Smart Helmet’ project was launched to enhance fieldwork using augmented reality and the ‘Smart Lighting’ project was launched as part of smart city initiatives. — ONA

MoARA delegation studies Al Azhar model to promote positive parenting

MUSCAT: A delegation from the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs (MoARA) visited Egypt to study Al Azhar Al Sharif's approach to strengthening the role of religious leaders in promoting positive parenting, in a move aimed at supporting child and family well-being in Oman.

Organised by Unicef Oman in partnership with Unicef Egypt, the study tour took place from December 21 to 23, 2025, in collaboration with the International Islamic Centre for Population Studies and Research, led by Prof Dr Gamal Abou El Sourour. The visit focused on Al Azhar's accredited training model, which integrates positive parenting principles into religious discourse. The approach draws on the long-standing influence of religious institutions in fostering nurturing family environments and reinforcing shared social and moral values.

Participants took part in an intensive training programme covering key themes, including the role of fathers in child-rearing and their partnership with mothers, the importance of the first 1,000 days in a child's life, and the long-term impact of early experiences on children's physical and psychological development.

The programme also addressed constructive family communication, practical skills for positive engagement with children, and effective methods for enabling male and female religious leaders to advocate positive parenting within their communities.

Dr Farida al Sharji, former
director of the Women's



The visit focused on Al Azhar's accredited training model, which integrates positive parenting principles into religious discourse.

Guidance Department, MoARA, said the visit reflects the ministry's commitment to building the capacities of Omani religious leaders in the field of positive parenting. "We are keen to learn from successful experiences such as that of Al Azhar Al Sharif and to translate these insights into practice in ways that support Omani families, nurture children's skills, enhance their well-being, and reinforce the values of constructive communication and social cohesion."

The delegation also held high-level meetings with Prof Dr Ahmed al Tayeb, Grand Imam of Al Azhar; Prof Dr Mohamed Abdel Rahman al Duweini, Deputy of Al Azhar; and Dr Nazir Mohamed Ayyad, Grand Mufti of Egypt. Discussions highlighted Egypt's experience in preparing and qualifying religious leaders, integrating positive parenting concepts into religious and social

messaging, and applying best practices to strengthen their role in supporting families and communities.

The visit marks the first step in the ministry's efforts to embed positive parenting principles into its engagement with Omani communities, drawing on leading regional experiences to support children's psychological and social development from an early age. The knowledge exchange – described as the first of its kind between Oman and Egypt – is expected to contribute to the development of training programmes and educational tools that promote safe and nurturing child-rearing practices. The ministry and Unicef will continue working together to apply these best practices, strengthen child and family well-being, and reinforce values of empathy, tolerance and constructive dialogue within Omani society.

Embassy and schools mark 77th Republic Day of India

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, JAN 26

THE 77th Republic Day of India was celebrated in Muscat with patriotic fervour and vibrant community participation, as the Embassy of India and the Indian Social Club (ISC) Oman hosted grand events reflecting unity, culture and national pride.

The official celebrations at the Embassy of India began with Chargé d'Affaires Tavishi Behal Pandey laying a floral tribute at the statue of Mahatma Gandhi, honouring his enduring legacy of peace and non-violence. She then unfurled the National Flag, followed by the rendition of the Indian National Anthem by students of Indian School Muscat.

Addressing the gathering, Tavishi read excerpts from the President of India's Republic Day address, highlighting India's democratic values, developmental progress and aspirations for the future.

The occasion was further distinguished by the presence of Commander Y Hemant and Commander Vikas Sheoran, marking the successful maiden voyage of INSV Kaundinya from Porbandar to Muscat. Patriotic songs presented by ISM students added to the solemn yet celebratory atmosphere.

On January 24, the ISC Oman lit up the CBFS auditorium with a spectacular Republic Day programme themed ‘Samanvaya - Unity in Rhythm.’

The event was graced by Tavishi Behal Pandey along with dignitaries and members



Chargé d’Affaires Tavishi B Pandey unfurled the National Flag in embassy premises in Muscat on Monday.

of the Indian community.

Guests were welcomed with a vibrant photo booth and artistic décor by ISC's Rangrez team, including a unique interactive canopy where attendees painted Indian motifs and landscapes on a large canvas. The VIP lounge hosted an art exhibition curated by Rangrez, while the stage shimmered with lights displaying 'Happy Republic Day 2026' and 'I Love India.'

Vice-Chairman Suhail Khan welcomed the gathering, and mementos were presented to participating dance institutes in recognition of their contributions.

These included Nrityanjali (Premila Ramesh), Rajesh Master Dance Institute,

Bhramari Nrithya Fine Arts Academy
(Vidushi Theertha Kateel), Tharang Dance
Academy (Sreekala M Menon), Antranga
Dance Institute (Sneha Nambiar), Leelangika
(Jhumpa Chakaborty), and Sattriya (Pompy
Gogoi and Archana Borah Baruah).

The evening featured melodious performances by ISC's in-house talents, The Muscat Singers – Tariq Ansari, Medha Govilkar, Neha Shah, Sapna Kamath and Ami Vyas – along with energetic classical and contemporary dance performances that captivated the audience.

General Secretary Shakeel K M thanked sponsors, participants, volunteers and guests for making the event a success.

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On behalf of the Government of the Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Finance, the Central Bank of Oman announces the **81st Issuance of Government Development Bonds (GDBs)** to be auctioned. The 81st Issuance of GDBs will be issued on Tuesday, 3rd February 2026, carrying a coupon rate of **4.30% per annum** for a maturity period of 10 years (maturing on 3rd February 2036). These Bonds will be auctioned and priced on Sunday, 1st February 2026. Investors may apply for these Bonds through licensed commercial banks by completing the application form.

Security of Capital

The GDBs are direct and unconditional obligations of the Government of the Sultanate of Oman.

Steady Returns

Interest shall accrue from the date of issuance and will be paid semi-annually on **3rd February and 3rd August** of every year until maturity. The first payment will be made on **3rd August 2026**. Interest payments will cease once the Bond matures.

Liquidity

The bonds will be listed and can be traded before maturity in the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) at the prevailing market price.

Collateral Advantage

The Bonds can be used as collateral security to obtain loans from any licensed commercial bank.

Who Can Invest?

The 81st Issuance of GDBs is offered to all categories of investors, residents and non-residents (irrespective of their nationalities).

How to buy the bonds?

Investors may obtain bonds through any licensed commercial bank operating in the Sultanate of Oman, upon the submission of an eligible application form. Investors must provide their MCD Investor Code in the application form.

Bank Account Details

The investor must provide the same Bank Account details registered with Muscat Clearing and Depository Co. S.A.O.C. (MCD).

MCD Investor Code

Anyone without an MCD Investor Code can obtain it from MCD's website (www.mcd.gov.om) or via the Oman Stocks app at least one day before applying through the commercial bank.

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81st

Issuance

Opens: Sunday, 25th January 2026

Closes: Thursday, 29th January 2026

Auction: Sunday, 1st February 2026

The minimum subscription amount

RO 100

To view the prospectus for the 81st Issuance of GDBs, please visit the following websites:

Ministry of Finance | www.mof.gov.om

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P.O Box 1161, Postal Code 112, Sultanate of Oman

WORLD

SHORT TAKES



The South Korean and American flags fly next to each other at Yongin, South Korea. — Reuters file photo

US DEFENCE OFFICIAL HAILS ‘MODEL ALLY’ IN S KOREA TALKS

SEOUL: The Pentagon’s number three official hailed South Korea as a “model ally” as he met with local counterparts in Seoul on Monday, days after Washington’s new defence strategy called for reduced support for partners overseas. Under-Secretary of Defence for Policy Elbridge Colby arrived in South Korea on Monday and is seen as a key proponent of President Donald Trump’s “America First” foreign policy.

Arriving in Seoul on his first overseas trip as the Pentagon’s number three official, Colby in a post on X called South Korea a “model ally”. And he praised President Lee Jae Myung’s pledge to spend 3.5 per cent of the country’s GDP on the military. That decision, he told a forum, “reflects a clear-eyed and sage understanding of how to address the security environment that we all face and how to put our storied and historic alliance on sound footing for the long haul,” according to South Korea’s Yonhap News Agency.

“Such adaptation, such clear-eyed realism about the situation that we face and the need for greater balance in the sharing of burdens, will ensure that deterrence remains credible, sustainable and resilient in this changing world,” he added. — AFP

CHINA’S XI URGES GREATER TIES WITH VIETNAM

BEIJING: Chinese President Xi Jinping sought to strengthen ties with Vietnam in a call to its newly reappointed leader, according to Chinese state media, saying the two nations should enhance cooperation in regional and international affairs. The call was the first between the two leaders since To Lam was unanimously reappointed as head of Vietnam’s ruling Communist Party for the next five years.

Xi, in a congratulatory message to Lam, described the two nations as a “community with a shared future” and said Beijing was willing to strengthen communications with Hanoi. “China and Vietnam should stay the course and remain unwavering in their aspirations, working together to advance development,” Chinese state broadcaster CCTV quoted Xi as saying.

Xi urged Lam to “jointly oppose hegemonism and bloc confrontation”, state media reported, although he did not mention any particular country. China and the US reached a one-year tariff truce following talks between Xi and President Donald Trump in South Korea last October.

Vietnam has in recent years deepened its engagement with Washington. It pledged to cut tariffs on several US products and moved to approve Starlink services, part of efforts to stave off US levies due to its large bilateral trade surplus.

Xi said the two sides must “strengthen confidence, uphold fundamental principles while advancing innovation, and guard against and defuse various risks and challenges”. — Reuters

JAPAN COURT HOLDS NORTH KOREA LIABLE FOR FAKE SCHEME

TOKYO: A Tokyo court ordered Pyongyang to pay more than \$500,000 in compensation to four individuals lured to North Korea by a fantastical propaganda scheme promising a “paradise on Earth”.

More than 90,000 ethnic Koreans and their Japanese spouses are said to have migrated to North Korea between 1959 and 1984, drawn by the claims that North Korea was a paradise under a now-defunct repatriation initiative critics say amounted to state kidnapping.

Instead of finding a “paradise on Earth”, victims of the scheme said in a 2018 complaint that they had been denied basic human rights and even minimum sustenance under the programme, despite assurances of free education and medicine. They later escaped, sometimes only after decades in the North.

The years-long and highly unusual case, seeking to directly sue Pyongyang, symbolically summoned North Korean leader Kim Jong Un to court. The Tokyo

District Court ruled the four plaintiffs had “most of their lives taken away” by Pyongyang, and that each deserved at least 20 million yen (\$130,000) in redress.

Monday’s verdict was the first time “a Japanese court exercised its sovereignty against North Korea to recognise its malpractice,” Atsushi Shiraki, one of the lawyers representing the plaintiffs, said. The district court dismissed the suit in 2022, ruling that a Japanese court did not have jurisdiction. — AFP

Philippines ferry sinking kills 18, leaving 10 missing



A crew member who survived the sinking disembarks from a Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) vessel in Manila. — Reuters

A ferry with more than 340 people onboard sank early on Monday off the southern Philippines, killing at least 18 and leaving 10 still missing, the coast guard said. Search-and-rescue efforts were expected to continue through the night, Philippine Coast Guard spokeswoman Noemie Cayabyab said, adding that an earlier tally of passengers had been reduced to 344 as some on the ship’s manifest never boarded.

The MV Trisha Kerstin 3 issued a distress signal around 1:50 am, a bit over four hours after it departed the Port of Zamboanga City on the southwestern tip of Mindanao, the coast guard said in a statement. Video released by the governor of Basilan province showed barefoot survivors being wrapped in blankets and placed on gurneys, while victims of the sinking were carried past in body bags.

The triple-decker vessel sank on nearly the same route where 31 people died in 2023 after a fire aboard the Lady Mary Joy 3 ferry. Both ships were owned by locally based Aleson Shipping Lines. Sheryl Balondo, a rescuer in Isabela City, one of two municipalities where survivors were being taken, said their office had received more than 100 phone calls from concerned family members. “There’s a tug in our hearts whenever we pick up a call. Their voices sounded worried,” she said. “What we can only say is that, as of now, we don’t have the final list (of names), because the search and retrieval operation is ongoing.”

The 44-metre ferry went down

The 44-metre ferry went down about five kilometres east of Baluk-Baluk Island, part of the Basilan province chain of islands off the Zamboanga peninsula. Based on the account of some survivors, the waters in the area were rough at the time

about five kilometres east of Baluk-Baluk Island, part of the Basilan province chain of islands off the Zamboanga peninsula. “Based on the account of some survivors, the waters in the area were rough at the time,” Cayabyab said in a televised interview. At least two survivors disputed that account, saying the seas had been calm when the ship capsized. “I hope they investigate this, because we did not have bad weather. Why did it sink when there was no storm?” asked Jun Guro, a lawyer whose interview was posted by the Isabela City government in Basilan. Only moments before the ship sank, Kyle Punsalang, a recent graduate of a maritime academy, sent his brother a text he would share on Facebook. “Our boat is tipping over,” Punsalang said.

“Please help.”

Basilan emergency responder Ronalyn Perez said earlier that rescuers were struggling to handle the influx of survivors. “The challenge really is the number of patients that are coming in. We are short-staffed at the moment,” Perez said in an interview, adding that at least 18 had been brought to one local hospital. Video released by the Philippine Coast Guard showed survivors being plucked from the water and receiving medical attention.

Some could be heard shouting for help in the dark in a live video on Facebook. “We cannot say for now the reason of the sinking, but we were instructed to conduct a marine casualty investigation to determine the cause,” Romel Dua, a coast guard commander from southern Mindanao, said. In a statement, the coast guard said the ferry had not been overloaded. “Our thoughts and hearts are with everyone who was on board,” Aleson Shipping Lines said in a statement, adding it was “working tirelessly” in close coordination with the coast guard.

Philippine industry regulator the Maritime Industry Authority said later it had “dispatched an investigation team to determine the probable cause or any factors that may have contributed to the incident”. The archipelago nation of 116 million has a long history of disasters involving the inter-island ferries that ply its seas. Many rely on cheap and poorly regulated boats and ships for transport between the country’s more than 7,000 islands, despite regular accidents. — AFP



RAFAH CROSSING ONLY OPEN FOR PEDESTRIANS

GAZA: Israel said on Monday it would only allow pedestrians to travel through the Rafah crossing between Gaza and Egypt as part of its “limited reopening” once it has recovered the remains of the last hostage in the Palestinian territory. Reopening Rafah, a vital entry point for aid into Gaza, forms part of a truce framework announced by US President Donald Trump in October, but the crossing has remained closed since Israeli forces took control of it during the war in the Palestinian territory.

Visiting US envoys had reportedly pressed Israeli officials to reopen the crossing during talks in Jerusalem over the weekend. World leaders and aid agencies have repeatedly pushed for more humanitarian convoys to be able to access Gaza, which has been left devastated by more than two years of war and depends on the inflow of essential medical equipment, food and other supplies. Rafah had been the only gateway connecting Gazans to the outside world. — AFP

SECURITY DEMANDS

Suspicious device found at Australia rally



Thousands rallied for Indigenous peoples’ rights on Australia Day but one protest was interrupted when police found a suspicious device containing screws and ball bearings. In Perth in Australia’s west, police said they evacuated a rally of a few hundred people after a “very rudimentary” device the size of a coffee cup was found in front of a stage. Detectives arrested a 31-year-old man and searched his home after he “told police it may contain explosives”. — Reuters

SUDDEN FLASH

Lightning strike injures 89 at rally in Brazil



Lightning struck near a rally of supporters of Brazil’s former far-right president Jair Bolsonaro in Brasilia, injuring 89 people. Thousands gathered in the rain in the Brazilian capital to support Bolsonaro. Footage shows crowds with colourful umbrellas and plastic ponchos stunned by a sudden flash of light and rumbling sound. The fire department said that they treated 89 people at the scene, including 47 who were taken to hospital. — AFP

DISEASE SURVEILLANCE

Ethiopia declares end of Marburg outbreak



Ethiopia declared the end of an outbreak of Marburg, a virus in the same family as Ebola, the World Health Organization (WHO) said on Monday. “Ethiopia has officially declared the end of its first-ever Marburg virus disease outbreak following enhanced surveillance with no new confirmed cases. The outbreak was contained in less than three months through a government-led response supported by WHO,” the UN agency posted on X. — AFP

SHORT TAKES



Protesters against Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) march through the streets, Minneapolis. — AFP

US JUDGE TO CONSIDER CAMPAIGN HALT IN MINNEAPOLIS

MINNEAPOLIS: A federal judge in Minnesota will consider whether to halt the deployment of thousands of immigration agents to the state, after the killings of two US citizens sparked uproar. Minneapolis has been rocked by increasingly tense protests since Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents fatally shot Renee Good, a 37-year old mother of three, in her car, on January 7. On Saturday, ICE agents killed intensive care nurse Alex Pretti, also 37, claiming he intended to harm them during a confrontation. The US District Court for Minnesota will hold hearings in two key lawsuits, as pressure mounts for an independent investigation into the killings. In one case, Minnesota’s attorney general has asked a federal judge to halt the surge of ICE agents to the area. The other case focuses on stopping federal officials from destroying evidence related to Pretti’s killing. The lawsuits highlight the deep rift between local and federal officials over the ICE deployment, which has put pressure on Trump’s aggressive deportation campaign. Democratic-led Minneapolis is a sanctuary city, meaning police do not cooperate with federal immigration authorities. — AFP

3 WOMEN DIE IN GREEK FACTORY BLAZE



Three women died in a fire at a biscuit factory in central Greece early on Monday — one of the country’s deadliest recent industrial accidents, officials said. Two other women were reported missing. Six employees have been hospitalised but are not believed to be in immediate danger. Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis said: “A fire department team is already examining the causes of this tragedy so that we know exactly what happened and assign responsibility where it is due.” — AFP

WORLD NOT READY FOR RISE IN EXTREME HEAT, SAY SCIENTISTS

PARIS: Nearly 3.8 billion people could face extreme heat by 2050 and while tropical countries will bear the brunt cooler regions will also need to adapt, scientists said on Monday. Demand for cooling will “drastically” increase in giant countries like Brazil, Indonesia and Nigeria, where hundreds of millions of people lack air conditioning or other means of beating the heat. But even a moderate increase in hotter days could have a “severe impact” in nations not used to such conditions. In a new study, they looked at different global warming scenarios

to project how often people in future might experience temperatures considered uncomfortably hot or cold. They found “that the population experiencing extreme heat conditions is projected to nearly double” by 2050 if global average temperatures rise 2C above pre-industrial times. But most of the impact would be felt this decade as the world fast approaches the 1.5C mark, the study’s lead author Jesus Lizana said. “The key take away from this is that the need for adaptation to extreme heat is more urgent than previously known,” said Lizana,

an environmental scientist. “New infrastructure, such as sustainable air conditioning or passive cooling, needs to be built out within the next few years to ensure people can cope with dangerous heat.” Prolonged exposure to extreme heat can overwhelm the body’s natural cooling systems, causing symptoms ranging from dizziness and headaches to organ failure and death. It is often called a silent killer because most heat deaths occur gradually as high temperatures and other environmental factors work together to undermine the body’s internal thermostat. — AFP

Historic winter storm kills at least 11 across US

A monster storm barrelling across the United States had killed at least 11 people on Monday, prompting warnings to stay off the roads, mass flight cancellations and power outages after a weekend of misery. The storm dumped snow, sleet and freezing rain across swathes of the country from Texas to New England, with temperatures set to fall dangerously low this week. New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani said five people were found dead outside over the weekend, telling reporters “there is no more powerful reminder of the danger of extreme cold.” In Texas, authorities confirmed three deaths, including a 16-year-old girl killed in a sledding accident. Two people died in Louisiana from hypothermia, the southern state’s health department said.

Meanwhile, one person was killed and two others injured on Saturday during a winter weather related collision in southeast Iowa, according to local State Patrol. The PowerOutage.com tracking site showed more than 820,000 customers without electricity as of Monday, mostly in the US South where the storm intensified on Saturday. In Tennessee, where a band of ice has downed power lines, more than 250,000 residential and commercial customers were without electricity, while Louisiana and Mississippi — where such storms are less common — each had over 100,000 outages as of Monday. The outages are particularly dangerous as the South is being walloped by treacherous cold that the National Weather Service warns could set records. Authorities from Texas to North Carolina and New York urged residents to stay home due to the perilous conditions. “Stay off the roads unless absolutely necessary,” Texas’s Emergency Management Division posted on X. The storm was moving Monday through the US northeast and southeast Canada, with some areas in Toronto seeing record-breaking snowfall. At least 20 states and the US capital Washington have declared states of emergency.



A view of the US Capitol as snow falls in Washington, DC. — AFP

Federal offices have been pre-emptively closed for Monday and several major airports in Washington, Philadelphia and New York had nearly all flights cancelled for the day. Tracking site Flightaware.com showed more than 19,000 flights into and out of the country had been scrapped since Saturday. In Maine, a small aircraft carrying eight passengers crashed on takeoff on Sunday evening at Bangor International Airport, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) reported. It was not immediately clear if the crash was weather-related or the conditions of the passengers. President Donald Trump, who was riding out the storm at the White House, said on his Truth Social platform on Saturday: “We will continue to monitor, and stay in touch with all States in the path of this storm. Stay Safe, and Stay Warm!” The brutal storm system is the result of a stretched polar vortex, an Arctic region of cold, low-pressure air that normally

forms a relatively compact, circular system but sometimes morphs into a more oval shape, sending cold air spilling across North America. Scientists say the increasing frequency of such disruptions may be linked to climate change, though the debate is not settled and natural variability plays a role. But Trump — who scoffs at climate change science and has rolled back green energy policies — questioned how the cold front fit into broader climatic shifts. “WHATEVER HAPPENED TO GLOBAL WARMING???” the Republican leader posted. The NWS warned that heavy ice could cause “long-duration power outages, extensive tree damage, and extremely dangerous or impassable travel conditions,” including in many states less accustomed to intense winter weather. Authorities warned of life-threatening cold that could last a week post-storm, especially in the Northern Plains and Upper Midwest, where wind chill lows were forecast to under -45C. — AFP

Russia says Ukraine talks in UAE held in ‘constructive spirit’

MOSCOW: The Kremlin on Monday said the US-brokered trilateral talks in the UAE between Russian and Ukrainian negotiators had been held in a “constructive spirit” but that there was still “significant work ahead”. “It would be a mistake to expect any significant results from the initial contacts... But the very fact that these contacts have begun in a constructive spirit can be viewed positively. However, there is significant work ahead,” Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told journalists. The two-day meeting in Abu Dhabi on Friday and Saturday was the first time negotiators from Moscow and Kyiv have faced each other to talk about a plan being pushed by US President Donald Trump to end the

nearly four-year war. The trilateral talks in the UAE will resume on February 1, according to a US official. “I wouldn’t say there was any friendliness there, it’s hardly possible at this stage,” Peskov said on Monday. “But if you’re trying to achieve something through negotiations, you need to speak constructively.” Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said earlier that during the Abu Dhabi meeting “a lot was discussed, and it is important that the conversations were constructive”. On the eve of day two, Russian drones and missiles cut off millions from electricity in sub-zero temperatures, prompting Kyiv to accuse Moscow of undermining the negotiations. Kyiv said on Monday Russia launched



Ukrainian rescuers prepare beds in a heated tent due to strikes damaging energy infrastructure in Kyiv. — AFP

138 drones at Ukraine’s territory overnight, with hits “recorded at 11 locations” according to its air force. Meanwhile, German Foreign Minister Johann Wadephul denounced Russia’s “stubborn insistence

on the crucial territorial issue” following talks between Russian, Ukrainian and US envoys in Abu Dhabi on ending the Ukraine war. “What I am hearing and reading today, including from the negotiations in the

United Arab Emirates, is only Russia’s stubborn insistence on the crucial territorial issue,” Wadephul said during a visit to Latvia. “And if there is no flexibility here, I fear that the negotiations may still take a long time or may not be successful at this stage.” Wadephul welcomed the US-mediated talks but added that it was “clear that Europe must be at the table when decisions are made about the security order of our continent — and Russia must know that our commitment to diplomacy does not come at the expense of our determination to support Ukraine”. Speaking alongside Latvia’s foreign minister, Wadephul stressed that it was “a decisive moment for the future of our European continent”. “We will only

see real peace negotiations if Russia understands that Europe stands united with Ukraine,” he said. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky sought more air defence support from allies on Sunday as hundreds of buildings in Kyiv were without heating in freezing temperatures for a second day after Russian strikes. Russia has hit Ukrainian energy infrastructure throughout the nearly four-year war. “This week alone, the Russians have launched more than 1,700 attack drones, over 1,380 guided aerial bombs, and 69 missiles of various types,” Zelensky said as he arrived in Vilnius. “That is why missiles for air defence systems are needed everyday...,” he added. — AFP

OPINION

Oman making strides in creating job opportunities for citizens



OMAN is making significant strides in creating job opportunities for its citizens, with a bold initiative to generate 60,000 jobs in 2026. This move is part of the country’s broader vision to diversify its economy and reduce reliance on the public sector, as outlined in Oman Vision 2040.

The job creation plan is a collaborative effort between the government and private sector, with 33,000 jobs targeted in the private sector, spanning industries like oil and gas, tourism, IT, and healthcare. Another 17,000 jobs will be supported through innovative programmes like wage subsidies and on-the-job training, designed to bridge the skills gap and boost employability. The government sector will see 10,000 new positions, addressing civil, military and security roles based on genuine workforce needs.

This initiative is not just about filling positions; it’s about transforming Oman’s workforce to meet the demands of a rapidly evolving economy.

The plan prioritises quality, sustainability and future readiness, with clear performance indicators, robust governance frameworks,

and regular monitoring to ensure these new jobs lead to enduring career paths for Omani citizens.

The Ministry of Labour has been emphasising that this initiative is about building a competitive economy powered by Omani talent, linking employment with training and future-oriented sectors.

The country’s Eleventh Five-Year Development Plan (2026-2030) places a strong emphasis on job creation, income growth, and workforce preparedness.

Oman’s job creation plan is a critical step towards addressing unemployment and fostering sustainable growth, with external forecasts suggesting the country needs over 220,000 jobs by 2032 to meet workforce demands. This initiative is a testament to Oman’s commitment to reforming its employment landscape and creating a knowledge-based economy.

The plan is expected to have a significant impact on Oman’s economy, with the private sector playing a key role in driving growth and employment.

The government’s focus on linking employment with training and future-

The country’s Eleventh Five-Year Development Plan (2026-2030) places a strong emphasis on job creation, income growth, and workforce preparedness.

oriented sectors will help ensure that Omani citizens are equipped with the skills needed to thrive in emerging sectors.

As Oman continues to implement its job creation plan, it is likely to see significant benefits, including reduced unemployment, increased economic diversification and improved competitiveness.

The country’s commitment to creating a knowledge-based economy is expected to drive growth and prosperity for its citizens.

As for sectors being targeted for job creation, the plan focuses on industries like oil and gas, tourism, IT, healthcare, logistics and manufacturing. These sectors are expected to drive growth and create new opportunities for Omani citizens.

Also, there are training programmes. The government is investing in upskilling and reskilling programmes to equip Omanis with the skills needed for emerging sectors. This includes vocational training, internships and on-the-job training.

In regards to private sector involvement, the government is offering incentives like wage subsidies and tax breaks to encourage companies to hire Omani citizens.

Social media giants face landmark trial over addiction claims

GLENN CHAPMAN

A landmark trial beginning this week in Los Angeles could establish a legal precedent on whether social media companies deliberately designed their platforms to addict children.

Jury selection is set to start in California state court on Tuesday in what is being called a “bellwether” proceeding because its outcome could set the tone for a tidal wave of similar litigation across the United States.

Defendants in the suit are Alphabet, ByteDance and Meta, the tech titans behind YouTube, TikTok and Instagram.

Meta co-founder and chief executive Mark Zuckerberg is slated to be called as a witness during the trial. Social media firms are accused in the hundreds of lawsuits of addicting young users to content that has led to depression, eating disorders, psychiatric hospitalisation and even suicide.

Lawyers for the plaintiffs are explicitly borrowing strategies used against the tobacco industry in the 1990s and 2000s that faced a similar onslaught of lawsuits arguing that companies sold a defective product.

The trial before Judge Carolyn Kuhl in state court is expected to start the first week of February, after a jury is selected.

It focuses on allegations that a 19-year-old woman identified by the initials K.G.M. suffered severe mental harm because she was addicted to social media. “This is the first time that a social media company has ever had to face a jury for harming kids,” said Social Media Victims Law Center founder Matthew Bergman, whose team is involved in more than 1,000 such cases.

The centre is a legal organisation dedicated to holding social media companies accountable for harms caused to young people online.

A decisive outcome of the trial could provide a “data point” for settling similar cases en masse, according to Bergman.

Snapchat last week confirmed that it made a deal to avoid the civil trial accusing it, along with Meta, TikTok and YouTube, of addicting young people to social media.

The terms of that deal were not disclosed.

Internet titans have argued that they are shielded by Section 230 of the US Communications Decency Act, which frees them of responsibility for what social media users post.

However, this case argues those firms are culpable for business models designed to hold people’s attention and promote content that winds up harming their mental health.

“We are faulting them for designing their platforms to addict kids and for developing algorithms that show kids not what they want to see but what they cannot look away from.” — AFP

Minneapolis, Gaza share the same violent language

EVERY day now, I sit at my computer and ask myself: What is there left to say about the two news stories I care about most? One is unfolding in my hometown, on the banks of the Mississippi River; the other is unfolding on the West Bank of the Jordan and on both banks of the Wadi Gaza.



THOMAS L. FRIEDMAN

The author is a reporter and a NYT columnist

Which video should I linger on longest? The footage of Renee Good, shot in the face by an Immigration and Customs Enforcement officer in Minneapolis while she was clearly trying to evacuate the scene? Or the video from Saturday of federal agents shooting Alex Jeffrey Pretti, an intensive care nurse, after he tried to help a woman who was being pepper-sprayed? Or perhaps the video from Wednesday showing the aftermath of Israeli strikes that killed three Palestinian journalists, among others, in the Gaza Strip?

These stories have much more in common than you might think. All are driven, in my view, by terrible leaders who prefer easy, violent solutions to the hard work of negotiated problem-solving. These leaders see an ironfisted approach as the best way to win their next elections: President Donald Trump in the 2026 midterms; Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel, who is expected to call elections around the same time; and Hamas, in its desperate effort to lead the Palestinian movement in the postwar era, despite having lost the war.

Good and Pretti were both clearly present as observers — and trying to defend others — yet both were drawn into the chaos and shot at close range by agents who should never have pulled a trigger. Yet the Trump team insists that ICE is blameless. That is not how you build legitimacy for a government effort to track down and deport immigrants lacking permanent legal status.

The winning message remains: high wall, big gate. Control the border, but increase legal immigration. Democrats must never forget that one reason Trump returned to power was the previous administration’s failure to control illegal immigration

That same instinct for “fire, ready, aim” is one of the morally corrupting legacies of Israel’s war in Gaza. One of the Palestinian journalists killed by the Israeli air strike on Wednesday, Abdel Raouf Shaath, had worked for years as a cameraman for CBS News and other outlets; the others were local journalists Mohammad Salah Qishta and Anas Ghneim.

Really? Was that the only way to handle the situation during a ceasefire? Immediately launch an air strike and ask questions later? Israel can assassinate nuclear scientists in Iran in the dead of night from 1,200 miles away, yet it can’t distinguish a journalist from a combatant in broad daylight next door? It’s shameful. This comes only months after Israeli forces killed Reuters journalist Hussam al Masri on the stairs of Gaza’s Nasser Hospital in August.

Netanyahu apologised for that earlier killing. But regarding the three journalists killed last week, the Israeli military released a boilerplate statement saying troops identified “several suspects who operated a drone affiliated with Hamas” and “struck the suspects who activated the drone.”

Here is what is really happening: Netanyahu is running for reelection. Israel currently occupies approximately 53 per cent of the Gaza Strip, with Hamas holding the other 47 per cent. Trump — with help from Egypt, Qatar and Türkiye — is pushing for Hamas to disarm, for its military leaders to leave and for the organisation to become a purely political entity.

In return, Trump expects Israel to begin a withdrawal toward its own border.

Netanyahu knows that if he runs for election with Hamas still holding political influence in Gaza and the Israeli military pulling back, he will be savaged by the far-right extremists in his coalition. Those allies don’t just want to stay

in Gaza; they want to annex the West Bank. So Netanyahu wants the war to continue; he wants to provoke Hamas into fighting so he never has to withdraw.

Meanwhile, Hamas is clinging to its weapons to maintain control on the ground. Even if forced to become a political entity, it will do everything in its power to hijack the technocratic Palestinian government the Trump administration is trying to install.

Back at home, Trump seems to believe the chaos in Minneapolis will work for him in November — even though polls show a majority of Americans disapprove of ICE’s tactics. He is betting he can run on a “law and order” platform fuelled by anti-immigration sentiment.

To my friends and family in Minnesota: Stay proud of the way you are documenting abuses and standing up for your neighbours — those with legal papers and those without them — who abide by the law, work hard and enrich our city. But it is vital that this campaign be accompanied by a loud commitment to immigration reform that both controls the border and creates a legal pathway to citizenship.

The winning message remains: high wall, big gate. Control the border, but increase legal immigration.

Democrats must never forget that one reason Trump returned to power was the previous administration’s failure to control illegal immigration. Independent voters still care deeply about that.

Trump, Netanyahu and Hamas each have their eyes on the prize: the 2026 elections. The people of Minnesota, Israel and Gaza must keep that in mind. Because if Trump maintains control of Congress, if Netanyahu wins reelection and if Hamas seizes control of the Palestinian movement, all three societies will head into a darkness from which recovery will be agonisingly difficult.

Which is your third place?



LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

The writer is a senior editor of Observer

YOU have your home, and then you have your workplace. The ratio of time spent in these spaces varies from person to person.

Most people spend more hours at work than at home. The homemakers have to work at the same space. So they don't have much of a choice. And then you have the third place.

In the 1980s, American sociologist Ray Oldenburg developed the notion of a "third place": a space for informal, free social interaction, essential to democracy. Unesco states that the concept has gained unexpected popularity over the years. Coffeehouses serve as a perfect example of the third place.

In Oman, we love the coffee shops and tea corners. Initially, it was the men who enjoyed the sit-outs, but women found their space too.

According to rentechdigital.com, there are 1,078 cafes in Oman as of October 15, 2025, which is a 2.74 per cent increase from 2023.

"Of these locations, 913 cafes which is 84.69 per cent of all cafes in Oman, are single-owner operations, while the remaining 165 which is 15.31 per cent are part of larger brands. The top three places with the most cafes are Muscat Governorate with 574 cafes, Al Batinah North Governorate with 255 cafes, and Dhofar Governorate with 149 cafes. The average age of cafes in Oman is four years and eight months," the study stated.

The key factor is that we like to spend time there. The reasons could be many such as the ambience, the feeling of an outing and of course the flavour of coffee. Then came the

trend of working from cafes.

This could be the very fact that the third place could be challenged.

The question that is being asked today is this — The "Third Place" Crisis: Where do people go to hang out now that coffee shops feel like offices and parks feel at times, crowded?

The coffee shops are no longer your living room because try laughing out loud and you will get a blank look (the laptop stare), if not a stare because you have invaded the audio frequency through their noise-cancelling headphones. So now it is not a place of clinking spoons and loud laughter; rather, it's a silent space because even the kids are busy playing with the mobile phones, lest the remote worker get disturbed.

I have my set of Gen Z friends who love to hang out and try doing something impulsive, and they will freeze. We have our sessions of chatting, doodling, discussions and laughter.

The global analysis is that the coffee shops have transitioned from social hubs to satellite offices. This is how it is described: You aren't "hanging out"; you are "renting" 15 square inches of space for the price of a latte. Oh, and the flavours of latte, from Dutch to Spanish, the aroma and taste is remarkable.

So should we have more public places to have more options?

Now I can hear someone say, 'Why do we need a third place? We didn't have it before.' Actually we did.

Years ago, we had gone to Nizwa for National Day celebration. We were to host

The coffee shops are no longer your living room because try laughing out loud and you will get a blank look, if not a stare because you have invaded the audio frequency through their noise-cancelling headphones

the live radio programme from there. As we were a ladies' team, we were being hosted by a relative of one of our team members. By evening they asked me also to get ready for a walk, and we walked and talked and visited houses in the neighbourhood.

An unforgettable evening because of the friendship and bonding, the opportunity to experience the Omani hospitality, and the nature of the place. I can never forget looking at the water puddle after a gentle rain reflecting the full moon and breathing in the fragrance of jasmine filling the air in the garden.

Do we need more urban green spaces? Malls tend to discourage staying too long by not providing sitting benches.

The libraries — the last true bastion of free existence — are often treated as "hush-hush" zones, not "hangout" zones.

But in reality, the malls are becoming the new 'third places' where Gen Z likes to walk, sit, and exist, including working on their laptops.

Niche hobbies are also helping people find their own community. Artists are super good at this. Then you have crocheters, hikers, and trekkers, in addition to having climbing gyms, board game cafes, or community gardens. Apparently we are moving from a "general" community to an "interest-based" community.

Now think about it: do you have your favourite third place? Is it changing?

The good news is that we like to communicate and co-exist.

DRUGMAKERS TURN TO AI TO SPEED TRIALS, REGULATORY SUBMISSIONS

MAGGIE FICK AND MICHAEL ERMAN

Artificial intelligence has yet to deliver on the most challenging aspect of drug development — finding new molecules that lead to major medical advances — but it is already streamlining less glamorous parts of the process, industry executives say. AI is helping find participants and sites for clinical trials and drafting documents for regulators, shaving weeks off these labour-intensive processes, seven large drugmakers and six smaller biotech companies said at the recent JP Morgan Healthcare Conference.

It can take a decade and \$2 billion to bring a new drug to market, pharmaceutical companies say. Many, including Eli Lilly , which has partnered with leading chipmaker Nvidia , are betting AI can also improve the success rate of new drugs. Drug companies have announced a slew of deals for tools to unleash the promise of AI, seen as the biggest technological upheaval since the Internet, much as other industries are doing.

Agentic AI — or AI that is autonomous requiring little human intervention - could increase clinical development productivity by about 35 to 45 per cent over the next five years, consultancy McKinsey predicted last year. Israel-based Teva Pharmaceutical Industries said it is utilising AI in multiple ways so it can focus on the big picture goal of successfully bringing new drugs to market. "Everything else that's around that needs to be as efficient and as small as possible," Teva CEO Richard Francis said. "This is where I think AI digitisation, modernisation, process improvement, all the stuff that we get actually quite excited about, makes a difference."

Executives from global pharmaceutical companies AstraZeneca , Roche and Pfizer, as well as smaller biotechs like Spyre and Nuvalent, described tracking thousands of pages of documents for regulators, including clinical, safety and manufacturing records. The documents must be compiled, cross-checked and kept consistent across geographies, often requiring the costly use of outside contractors, AstraZeneca Chief Financial Officer Aradhana Sarin explained.

Jorge Conde, a general partner at venture capital firm Andreessen Horowitz, is investing in fixes to what he calls drug development's "messy middle," including putting \$4.3 million into startup Alleviate Health.

He described trial enrolment as a "leaky funnel" in which participants drop out along the way, and sees Alleviate using AI technology to help with patient outreach. TD Cowen analyst Brendan Smith said the use of AI, including large language models like Microsoft Copilot, for administrative tasks has become fairly common in the pharmaceutical industry. — Reuters

Why power makes leaders see threats everywhere

FROM Moscow to Washington, big power politics have returned to the global stage. It would be easy to dismiss the actions of the last few years as large nations doing what they have always done, but recent insights in the field of behavioural geopolitics point to a different dynamic.

Increased power, perhaps counterintuitively, appears to breed increased fear of weaker competitors. This can trigger preventive action such as foreign interventions that, to outsiders, may look illogical.

This new geopolitical era was arguably kicked off in 2022 with Russia's full-scale war with its much smaller neighbour, Ukraine. But the shift back towards "big power" thinking truly went into hyperdrive with President Donald Trump's return to the White House.

First came the global trade war, with the US president making it clear that he expected to set the terms of any trade negotiation, and then came the release of the administration's National Security Strategy that resurrected the concept of "spheres of influence".

But the real turning point came when the calendar turned to 2026. In less than one month, the Trump administration has conducted a military raid on Venezuela to seize the country's president, threatened to intervene in Iran and pursued a bellicose campaign to acquire Greenland (which at least for now, looks like it is de-escalating).

One way to make sense of what we're seeing is to look at geopolitics through the lens of behavioural psychology. In two papers from 2023 and 2025, Caleb Pomeroy from the University of Toronto used research on the impact of power on business leaders' thinking and actions to analyse international policymaking.

This research identified a broad range of behavioural patterns, from the benign to the consequential.

For example, people who



A member of the White Angels police evacuation unit uses a detector to monitor the skies in search of Russian combat drones during an evacuation from the town of Druzhkivka, Ukraine. — Reuters



JOACHIM KLEMENT

The writer is an author and an investment strategist for Panmure Liberum

feel powerful tend to make the opening argument in a debate or a negotiation, which typically gives them an advantage. But the research found that those who feel powerful also rely more heavily on stereotypes and discount others' views, which can lead them to ignore important input when making decisions. That last feature can become especially troubling as people move up corporate and government hierarchies, where the issues they face become harder to resolve. As President Dwight D Eisenhower reportedly said, "No easy problems ever come to the President of the United States. If they are easy to solve, somebody else has solved them".

As a result of the increasing complexity of the problems at hand and the limited availability of data on how to resolve them, business executives typically rely more on what Nobel-winning psychologist Daniel Kahneman called "System 1 thinking": fast, intuitive decision-making based on heuristics, emotions and experience rather than deliberate thought and deep analysis. One major

downside of System 1 thinking is that it often increases the fear of being challenged. Criticism naturally triggers our innate fight or flight instincts. And in a work setting, distancing oneself from the challenger is often not possible, creating a perception of being attacked without the possibility to deflect the criticism.

Pomeroy's research argues that these findings from the business world can translate to foreign relations. Using surveys and government documents, he demonstrates that, in many cases, the more dominant a politician thinks their country is, the more they typically fear other nations, big and small.

For example, in a 2020 survey among Russian policy elites, politicians who perceived Russia to be more powerful than the average respondent felt more threatened not only by the US and the potential eastward expansion of Nato, but also by neighbouring Ukraine.

No other psychological or demographic factor increased the perception of Ukraine as a threat to Russians. — Reuters

SPORTS

EIGHTSTOURNEY



Royal Court Affairs secured qualification with a dramatic 12-11 penalty victory over the Ministry of Education (A).

RCA OMAN, MoCSY ADVANCE TO FINAL AFTER PENALTY WINS

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, JAN 26

The semifinal matches of the Government Institutions Eight-a-side Football Championship 2026 organised by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth (MoCSY) delivered decisive and highly competitive encounters, marked by intensity and excitement until the very last moments, with both games ultimately decided by penalty shoot-outs to determine the finalists.

In the first match, the Ministry of Education (A) and Royal Court Affairs played out a goalless draw in regulation time in a tactically disciplined and defensively cautious contest. The tie was eventually settled through penalties, where Royal Court Affairs secured qualification with a dramatic 12-11 victory after a long and thrilling shoot-out.

The second encounter between the Diwan of Royal Court and the MoCSY also ended goalless in a balanced contest that featured strong physical and tactical battles. The match proceeded to penalties, where the MoCSY edged through 4-3 to book their place in the final.

With these results, Royal Court Affairs will face the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth in a highly anticipated final to determine this year's champions, while the Ministry of Education (A) will meet the Royal Court Diwan in the third-place playoff. Both matches are scheduled to take place on January 28, at the Al Amal Club grass pitch. The third-place match will kick off at 6:25 pm, followed by the final at 8 pm, as teams look to conclude a fiercely competitive edition of the tournament on a high note.

Following the qualification, Majdi Shanshoon of RCA said his side had reached the final for the second consecutive year after a hard-fought and exciting semifinal. He noted that the achievement came as a result of the players' determination and high level of focus, adding that the team aims to maintain the same performance in the final to secure victory and retain the title.

For his part, Said al Maamari of the MoCSY expressed his happiness with the win and qualification, emphasising that the players gave their all throughout the match. He explained that the game was intense across both halves before being decided on penalties, and stressed that the team's focus is now on continuing their momentum, winning the final.

Oman's Ali al Balushi strikes gold at Paris Indoor athletics

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JAN 26

Oman's leading sprinter Ali bin Anwar al Balushi continued his impressive rise on the international stage after clinching the gold medal in the men's 60 metres at the Meeting de Paris Indoor 2026, part of the World Athletics Indoor Tour Silver, in Paris on Sunday.

Al Balushi delivered a commanding performance in the final, clocking a seasonal best of 6.52 seconds to secure first place and top the podium. Cameroon's Emmanuel-Alobwede Esemé finished second with a time of 6.55 seconds, while Italy's Filippo Randazzo

claimed third place in 6.59 seconds. Cuba's Jenns Reynold Fernandez was placed fourth in 6.61 seconds, followed by his compatriot in fifth at 6.63 seconds, with Benin's William Aguessy rounding off the field in sixth, also in 6.63 seconds.

Earlier in the day, Al Balushi underlined his strong form by winning Heat 2 of the Men's 60 metres, crossing the line first in 6.60 seconds.

Cuba's Reynier Mena finished second in 6.64 seconds, with Randazzo taking third place in 6.65 seconds, confirming Al Balushi's consistency throughout the competition.

The Paris triumph came



Ali al Balushi clocked a seasonal best of 6.52 seconds to secure first place at the Meeting de Paris Indoor 2026.

Al Shabab, Saham, Al Nasr post key victories in JL

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, JAN 26

AL SHABAB maintained their positive run in the Jindal Football League after defeating visitors Dhofar 2-0 at Seeb Stadium in the closing match of Round 11, strengthening their title push and climbing to second place in the standings.

Dhofar started the match brightly in the opening minutes, applying early attacking pressure in search of a breakthrough, but Al Shabab's solid defensive organisation shut down all routes to goal.

As the game progressed, Al Shabab gradually took control and opened the scoring in the 28th minute through a set piece by international player Musab al Maamari. His effort deflected off a defender, wrong-footing goalkeeper Mazin al Kasbi before finding the net.

Dhofar came close to equalising on several occasions, but the brilliance of goalkeeper Abdulmalik al Badri and poor finishing denied them. The first half also saw a controversial refereeing moment when a penalty was initially awarded to Al Shabab before being overturned after consultation with the assistant referee, leaving the hosts ahead 1-0 at the break.

In the second half, Dhofar increased their attacking pressure, but Al Shabab managed the game smartly. Bashar al Balushi sealed the victory in the 62nd minute with an impressive individual effort inside the box to double the lead. The score remained unchanged until the final whistle, as Al Shabab raised their tally to 25 points in second place, while Dhofar stayed on nine points in 11th.

SAHAM EDGE OMAN CLUB

At the Seeb Stadium, Saham claimed an important and hard-fought 1-0 win over hosts Oman Club in a match marked by tactical discipline.

The only goal came in the 45th minute through Mohsin Jawhar, who produced a brilliant solo run from midfield before finishing with a low strike into the far corner past goalkeeper Faris al Ghaithi. In the second half, Oman Club pushed



Oman Club goalkeeper Faris al Ghaithi makes a clearance against Saham.



Al Shabab defeated Dhofar in Round 11 match of the Jindal League.

The only goal came in the 45th minute through Mohsin Jawhar, who produced a brilliant solo run from midfield before finishing with a low strike into the far corner past goalkeeper Faris al Ghaithi.

forward with several attacking substitutions, but Saham's organised defence held firm to protect the lead. The win lifted Saham to seventh place with 16 points, while Oman Club remained eighth with 14 points.

AL NASR PREVAIL OVER BAHLA IN FIVE-GOAL THRILLER

At Al Saada Sports Complex, Al Nasr secured a dramatic 3-2 victory over Bahla in one of the most exciting matches of the round.

Bahla took an early lead in the fourth minute through Abdulsalam al Shukaili, before

Hussain al Shihri equalised for Al Nasr from the penalty spot. The drama continued in the second half as Bahla regained the lead through Majid al Shukaili, but Al Nasr responded strongly, taking advantage of Bahla being reduced to 10 men after their goalkeeper was sent off.

Bini Mugibaya netted the equaliser in the 85th minute, before substitute Osama Majdi struck a decisive winner deep into stoppage time in the 98th minute to secure three valuable points.

Al Nasr moved up to fifth place with 22 points, while Bahla remained sixth on 16 points.

less than a week after another notable showing by the Omani sprinter at the Bauhaus-Galan Indoor 2026 in Sweden.

In Stockholm city, Al Balushi clocked 6.60 seconds in the men's 60 metres final to finish fifth in a high-calibre field featuring several of the world's elite sprinters, marking a strong opening to his indoor season.

IMPRESSIVE LIST

Al Balushi's latest success adds to an impressive list of achievements over the past year. In November 2025, he had claimed gold for Oman in the men's 100 metres, recording a time of

10.34 seconds, and played a pivotal role in the national team's silver-medal finish in the men's 4x100 metres relay, alongside Mohammed al Saadi, Rashid al Asmi and Mulhim al Balushi.

In September, the Omani sprinter had competed at the World Athletics Championships in Tokyo, where he had produced a commendable performance in the men's 100 metres.

Racing at the Japan National Stadium, Al Balushi clocked 10.25 seconds to finish fourth in Heat 3 of the opening round, against a world-class field that included USA's Noah Lyles, Jamaica's Ackeem Blake and Bahamas' Terrence Jones.

EMPOWERING YOUTH



The programme is a national initiative implemented by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, with support from OQ Exploration & Production, aiming to empower community teams.

TAZEEZ PROGRAMME LAUNCHED TO EMPOWER COMMUNITY TEAMS

RIYADH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JAN 26

The ‘Tazeez for Community Teams’ Programme was officially launched under the auspices of Basil bin Ahmed al Rawas, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth for Sports and Youth, during a formal ceremony attended by senior officials, representatives of public and private entities, as well as sports clubs and community teams.

The programme is a national initiative implemented by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, with strategic support and partnership from OQ Exploration & Production, aiming to develop and empower community teams administratively, organisationally and financially, while enhancing their integration with sports clubs to build a sustainable youth, sports and economic ecosystem.

Faris bin Mohammed al Auqi, Director of the Youth Programmes Department at the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, emphasised that the ‘Tazeez’ programme embodies one of the ministry’s core pillars — empowering Omani youth and maximising the role of community teams as active partners in development.

Al Auqi added that the ministry places great importance on supporting and empowering community teams by strengthening their administrative, organisational and financial capacities and by linking them with sports clubs. This approach, he explained, enables community teams to transform into entities capable of diversifying income sources, creating job opportunities and enhancing the community economy, stressed that the programme aligns with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040.

On his part, Sultan bin Hamad al Rumhi, Director of External Relations and Social Investment at OQ Exploration & Production, affirmed that the company’s support for the ‘Tazeez’ programme stems from its firm belief that genuine investment in the future of nations begins with investment in people and that empowering youth is a cornerstone of sustainable development, explained that OQ views youth empowerment as an integral part of its national strategy and corporate responsibility, rather than as temporary community initiatives.

The launch ceremony also featured a visual presentation introducing the ‘Tazeez’ programme, outlining its objectives, implementation phases and key components.

BOWLERS, ABHISHEK FIRE INDIA TO T20 SERIES WIN OVER NZ



INSPIRED bowling and a 14-ball fifty by opener Abhishek Sharma led India to a crushing eight-wicket series-clinching win over New Zealand in the third T20 international on Sunday.

Pace bowler Jasprit Bumrah with figures of 3-17 and leg-spinner Ravi Bishnoi (2-18) kept New Zealand down to 153-9 after India elected to field first in Guwahati.

Left-handed Abhishek then hit an unbeaten 20-ball 68 and skipper Suryakumar Yadav made 57 not out as India romped home with 10 overs to spare to take an unbeatable 3-0 lead in the five-match series.

It was the ninth straight T20 series win for reigning T20 World Cup champions India.

The series is a warm-up ahead of the T20 World Cup starting on February 7 in India and Sri Lanka.

“This is the brand of cricket which we want to play, irrespective of our batting first or chasing,” said Suryakumar.

“For example, if we are 24 for 3 or 44 for 4

tomorrow, we know how to bat.”

New Zealand quick Matt Henry bowled Sanju Samson with the first ball of India’s chase but the hosts soon took charge with Ishan Kishan and fellow left-hander Abhishek hitting a flurry of fours and sixes.

The pair put on 53 runs off 19 balls before Kishan fell for 28 off Ish Sodhi, but Abhishek raced to India’s second fastest in the format.

Abhishek missed out on his mentor Yuvraj Singh’s fastest T20 fifty record for India by two balls. Yuvraj scored a fifty in 12 balls in 2007.

Abhishek kept up the attack with Suryakumar, who hit his second successive fifty in his 26-ball knock. The duo put on an unbeaten stand of 102 to underline India’s status as the world’s number one-ranked T20 team.

India’s bowlers set up victory with the pacers taking three wickets inside first six overs including Harshit Rana dismissing Devon Conway for the fifth time in successive white-ball matches.



Rachin Ravindra fell for four to Hardik Pandya. Bumrah, who was named player of the match, then bowled wicketkeeper-batter Tim Seifert for 12 as New Zealand slumped to 34-3.

Glenn Phillips, who made 48 off 40 balls, and attempted to pull things back in a partnership of 54 for the fourth wicket with Mark Chapman before Bishnoi broke through.

Bishnoi, who made the Indian XI after nearly a year, had Chapman caught behind for 32 and later denied Phillips a half-century. Wickets kept tumbling and despite skipper Mitchell Santner’s 27 off 17 balls New Zealand fell well short of a testing total.

“I think I’ll give credit to India with the ball as well,” said Santner. “They made it really tough for us. Obviously wickets in the powerplay is key. And then for us to scrap to 150, we knew it would be a challenge from there.”

The fourth match is on Wednesday in Visakhapatnam. — AFP

Shotokan Karate Open returns to Muscat Nights with 400 athletes

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, JAN 26

The organising committee of the 11th Shotokan Karate Centre Open Championship has officially revealed details of the upcoming edition, which will be hosted at the Ahli Sidab Sports Hall in Darsait as part of the Muscat Nights festival from January 30 to 31, 2026. The announcement was made during a press conference held on Sunday evening at Second Cup Cafe in Al Qurum.

At the beginning of the conference, international referee Yousuf al Siyabi, Chairman of the Championship’s Technical Committee, presented a comprehensive overview of

the event’s objectives and background. He noted that this year’s edition marks the 11th in the tournament’s history and the second to be held under the Muscat Nights umbrella, expressing hope that it will continue to feature annually following the success of previous editions.

Al Siyabi highlighted the championship’s strong international character, emphasising the organising committee’s commitment to attracting wide regional and overseas participation. Teams and clubs from Oman, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Qatar and Kuwait will compete, alongside participants from Algeria, Libya, Iran and Sudan. He added that the repeated participation of



Officials unveil the details of the 11th Shotokan Karate Centre Open Championship. — Khalfan al Ruzaiqi

several countries reflects growing confidence in the tournament’s reputation and organisational standards.

This year’s championship will feature 400 male and female athletes representing more than 30 clubs, centres

and academies, including 160 female competitors. Participants will compete in both kata and kumite events across 54 teams, with 20 teams in kata and 34 in kumite. Male competitors account for 240 athletes. The matches will

be overseen by 37 certified referees, supported by 30 organisers to ensure smooth technical and administrative operations over the two days of competition. Al Siyabi also confirmed the continued inclusion of inclusive sports categories, with participation from Al Tadamun Wheelchair Team of Sohar Club and the Oman Down Syndrome Association team.

KEY FIXTURE

International referee Hilal al Abdali, Head of the Championship’s Media Committee, described the event as a key fixture in the Oman Karate Committee’s calendar, organised by an experienced national team to ensure high professional

standards. He added that the championship also supports tourism. In previous editions, several delegations arrived days early to enjoy Muscat Nights events, enhancing the festival’s international appeal.

Meanwhile, Hussain al Rumhi, Supervisor of Sports and Beach Events at Muscat Nights, said the championship goes beyond sport, carrying economic, cultural and tourism benefits. By attracting teams and fans, it boosts local activity, strengthens Oman’s reputation as an international host.

The championship will also feature accompanying activities, including a technical lecture for coaches on January 29 at Ahli Sidab Club’s lecture hall.

SPORTS

PREMIERLEAGUE



Manchester United's Matheus Cunha celebrates scoring their third goal. — Reuters

ARSENAL ROCKED BY MAN UTD, VILLA REKINDLE PREMIER LEAGUE TITLE BID

LONDON: Manchester United inflicted Arsenal's first home defeat of the season in a 3-2 thriller to blow the Premier League title race open on Sunday as Aston Villa beat Newcastle to close within four points of the Gunners.

Villa's impressive 2-0 victory at Newcastle took Unai Emery's men level on points with Manchester City, whose own title chances were boosted by events at the Emirates Stadium.

A week on from dominating City in the Manchester derby, Michael Carrick's dream start as United boss continued thanks to Matheus Cunha's stunning later winner.

"A really painful one," said Arsenal boss Mikel Arteta. "But now it is time to be very close to those players that have given us so much joy and support them because we all want to win."

A Lisandro Martinez own goal put Arsenal in front but the Red Devils quickly levelled when Bryan Mbeumo pounced on an error by Martin Zubimendi. Patrick Dorgu's brilliant strike put the visitors in front early in the second half.

Not for the first time this season, despite their lofty league position, Arsenal were blunt as an attacking force from open play. But they could rely on their prowess from set-pieces to equalise when Mikel Merino forced in a corner on 84 minutes.

Just moments later Cunha took aim from outside the box and delivered a telling blow to the Gunners' hopes of a first league title in 22 years.

Victory also propelled United into the top four to boost their chances of Champions League next season for the first time in three years. "To come here and score three goals in the manner we did, going one down, coming back, then the setback, and still keeping going," said Carrick. "It was a huge moment for us."

VILLA STAY IN HUNT

Villa kept their outside shot at a first league title since 1981 alive with their first victory at St James' Park for 21 years. "We are competing against Arsenal, Manchester City, Chelsea, Liverpool, Newcastle, Tottenham... Wow, the power they have!" Emery said. "But we are competing and we are there."

Emiliano Buendia's brilliant strike from outside the box opened the scoring before Ollie Watkins secured victory when the England international headed in Lucas Digne's cross two minutes from time. Newcastle slip to ninth but still only four points outside the top five, which will likely be enough for a place in the Champions League.

Chelsea piled more pain on Crystal Palace with a 3-1 win at Selhurst Park. Nottingham Forest gave their survival chances a huge boost by inflicting just a second home defeat on Brentford. — AFP



Aston Villa's Ollie Watkins scores their second goal against Newcastle United. — Reuters

SINNER RACES ON, 'GROSS' PIE FOR KEYS AS HEATWAVE HITS MELBOURNE



Italy's Jannik Sinner in action during his fourth round match against Italy's Luciano Darderi. — Reuters

JANNIK SINNER sent an Australian Open statement in rolling into the quarterfinals on Monday but fellow champion Madison Keys was dethroned as Melbourne braced for forecast 45C heat.

Fifth seed Lorenzo Musetti battled stifling conditions to set up a last-eight showdown with Novak Djokovic and six-time major champion Iga Swiatek progressed in rampant fashion.

Two-time defending champion Sinner raced to a 6-1, 6-3, 7-6 (7/2) victory over fellow Italian and close friend Luciano Darderi.

The second seed plays the United States' all-action eighth seed Ben Shelton after he beat Norway's 12th-seeded Casper Ruud in four sets.

Djokovic and Sinner are on course for a blockbuster last-four showdown.

Sinner told Margaret Court Arena, where temperatures hovered around 30C in the early evening: "It was difficult to put the match away, happy I closed it in three sets."

Sinner sent down a bumper 19 aces in the match, and said his hard work had paid off.

"Still room to improve but happy how I have come back in the new season," he added.

In another clash between compatriots and friends, Jessica Pegula defeated title-holder Keys, 6-3, 6-4.

The Americans host a tennis podcast



Jessica Pegula celebrates after winning her fourth round match against Madison Keys. — Reuters

together, 'The Player's Box', and had even been planning to record an episode on the eve of their match.

All that was put aside as a clinical Pegula dominated to set up a last-eight encounter with another American in fourth seed Amanda Anisimova.

Anisimova, beaten finalist at last year's US Open and Wimbledon, cooled herself off with bags of ice before taming China's Wang Xinyu 7-6 (7/4), 6-4.

Pegula, the sixth seed, is chasing an elusive Grand Slam title aged 31, her best performance to date reaching the US Open final in 2024.

An erratic Keys made 27 unforced errors to Pegula's 17 and fired down six double faults as her title defence folded.

The forfeit, as a part of a jokey bet with Pegula, will be a slice of apple pie with melted cheddar cheese on top.

"A bet is a bet, so I'll do it. I hope it's less gross than I think it's going to be, but we will find out," said Keys, who described herself as proud despite defeat.

RYBAKINA TO MEET SWIATEK

Fifth seed Elena Rybakina dismantled 21st seed Elise Mertens of Belgium 6-1, 6-3 and will play second seed Swiatek.

The Pole demolished home qualifier Maddison Inglis 6-0, 6-3 as she closes on a first Australian crown, having won all three of the other majors.

Inglis, ranked 168, was in the biggest match of her life after two-time Melbourne champion Naomi Osaka pulled out injured from their third-round meeting.

Just being in the fourth round earned Inglis a life-changing Aus\$480,000 (US\$330,000) — she plans to buy a toaster and a kettle with the windfall.

In the last match of the day on Rod Laver Arena, Shelton defeated father-to-be Ruud 3-6, 6-4, 6-3, 6-4, letting out an almighty roar in victory. — AFP

MUSCAT STOCK EXCHANGE
6,195.487

BUSINESS

CRUDE OIL
OMAN \$63.55
BRENT \$66.01
LIGHT \$61.21



SHORT TAKES



KOWEPO has a 35% stake in the new Duqm combined cycle gas turbine project.

KOREA’S KOWEPO EYES APRIL FINANCIAL CLOSE FOR \$940M DUQM POWER PROJECT

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, JAN 26

South Korea’s KOWEPO (Korea Western Power Co), which is leading a consortium of investors co-developing a new gas-based power project at Duqm in the Sultanate of Oman, says it plans to achieve financial close on the estimated \$940 million project by April this year.

Last week, the KOWEPO-led consortium was awarded a contract by Nama Power and Water Procurement Company (PWP), the country’s single buyer of power and water, for the implementation of an 877-MW combined-cycle gas turbine (CCGT) power plant at Duqm.

Co-developers alongside KOWEPO, which holds a 35% stake, include Qatar’s Nebras Power (30%), UAE-based Etihad Water and Electricity (30%) and Bahwan Infrastructure Services of Oman (5%). In a statement, the Korean energy firm said it plans to establish a special purpose company (SPC) in Oman and complete financing by April, ahead of breaking ground on the Duqm project. The plant is scheduled to begin commercial operations in April 2029 and will operate under a 20-year contract.

Headquartered in Taejeon-gun, KOWEPO is one of six wholly owned generation subsidiaries spun off from Korea Electric Power Corporation (KEPCO), the country’s largest utility.

The company owns and operates multiple large thermal and combined-cycle power plants across western Korea, with total installed capacity accounting for around 8–9% of national electricity generation.

KOWEPO made its debut in Oman’s power sector in May 2023, when it secured a contract to develop the Manah-I Solar Independent Power Project, a 500-MW solar PV plant developed in partnership with France’s EDF Renewables.

OMAN SIGNS ARTEMIS ACCORDS WITH THE US

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, JAN 26

THE Sultanate of Oman signed the Artemis Accords with the United States, against the backdrop of the 2nd Middle East Space Conference which opened in Muscat on January 26, 2026. The agreement was signed by Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology and the United States Ambassador to the Sultanate of Oman, Ana A Escrogima.

Speaking at the signing, Ambassador Ana A Escrogima underscored the significance of the Accords, saying: “The Artemis Accords provide a practical framework that supports collaboration, investment and responsible activity in a rapidly evolving domain.

This signing marks a deepening of cooperation between our countries, both at the government level and the private sector”.

The Ambassador also noted the expanding scope of bilateral engagement in the sector, adding: “For the first time, the space sector took a central role in our strategic dialogue that took place yesterday, as both Oman and the United States explored the farthest reaches of our potential cooperation in space. Looking ahead, we are genuinely excited about what this partnership can achieve.

Investing in space is increasingly connected to economic growth, innovation and human development. And Oman’s plans and ambitions in



The agreement was signed by Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology and the United States Ambassador to the Sultanate of Oman, Ana A Escrogima.

this area align well with American experience in entrepreneurship”.

According to Ministry officials, the agreement aims to strengthen cooperation in the peaceful exploration of space, regulate partnerships related to the return to the Moon, pave the way for future missions to Mars and establish joint frameworks for civil space activities.

Speaking earlier at the event, Dr Ali bin Amer al Shaithani, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology for Communications and Information Technology, described the signing of the accords as “further evidence” of Oman’s strategic space ambitions.

Speaking at the signing, Casey Swails, Nasa’s Deputy Associate Administrator, said Oman’s accession to the Artemis Accords strengthens the potential for deeper civil space cooperation and long-term technology partnerships, as Nasa advances its next phase of lunar missions.

“Oman signing the Artemis Accords matters so much”, Swails said. “We share values, we share ambition and with the strong and longstanding partnership between the United States and Oman, the potential for our collaborations in space is exciting, and I think we’re just getting started”, adding that the Artemis programme is “more than just going back to the moon, it’s about staying, it’s about building technology”, as preparations progress for Artemis 2.

Investing in space is increasingly connected to economic growth, innovation and human development. And Oman’s plans and ambitions in this area align well with American experience in entrepreneurship.

ANA A ESCROGIMA
United States
Ambassador to the
Sultanate of Oman

CBO ISSUES RO 9.7 MILLION IN TREASURY BILLS

MUSCAT: The total value of government treasury bills allocated this week stood at RO 9.7 million, according to the Central Bank of Oman (CBO).

The CBO said RO 5.2 million was allocated in 28-day treasury bills at an average accepted price of RO 99.712 per RO 100. The lowest accepted price was RO 99.710, with an average discount rate of 3.76030 % and an average yield of 3.77119 %.

Allocations of 91-day treasury bills amounted to RO 3 million, with an average accepted price of RO 99.803 and a minimum accepted price of RO 99.503 per RO 100. The average discount rate was 3.86058 %, while the average yield reached 3.89810 %.

Meanwhile, RO 1.5 million worth of 182-day treasury bills was issued at an average accepted price of RO 89.200 per RO 100, with the lowest accepted price also at RO 89.20.

The average discount rate stood at 3.60989 %, and the average yield at 3.67606 %. — ONA

Oman to get dedicated MicroGEO satellite by 2027

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, JAN 26

Oman’s MB Group has signed a strategic agreement with US satellite company Astranis to deliver the Sultanate of Oman’s first dedicated MicroGEO communications satellite, contracted under Astranis’ Block 3 launch with SpaceX later this year, with services expected to commence by early 2027.

The deal is part of a wider \$200 million MB Group investment package aligned with Oman Vision 2040 that includes ground stations and supporting infrastructure to provide what the partners describe as sovereign, secure connectivity for government, enterprises and communities.

The agreement was announced on January 26 in statements issued from San Francisco and Muscat, framing the project as an expansion of satellite broadband capacity across key Middle East markets, with Oman positioned as the anchor for a dedicated national



The MicroGEO communications satellite has been contracted under Astranis’ Block 3 launch with SpaceX later this year.

asset rather than shared regional capacity.

At the signing ceremony, Mahfouz Al Shaikh, Executive Vice-President, said the agreement between MBCTLC, a subsidiary of the Mohammed Al Barwani Group, and Astranis marked “a strategic step” in building Oman’s satellite communications ecosystem and strengthening national digital infrastructure.

The event was held under the auspices of Dr Ali bin Amer al Shaithani, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology for Communications and Information Technology. Al Shaikh said the initiative is designed with “sovereign safeguards” and would provide secure, dedicated satellite coverage, with services expected to begin by early 2027.

He added that the project is

intended to enhance reliability through an integrated in-country ground station and distributed backup teleport stations and linked it to wider goals including digital-economy growth, investment attraction and quality job creation.

Usama al Barwani, Vice Chairperson of MB LLC, positioned the agreement as part of a diversification drive into advanced technology.

MB Group, he said, had been looking for an entry point into communications and AI-linked opportunities, building on its industrial base in oil and gas and mining. He described Astranis as a disruptive player in the space economy and said the group sees strategic value in moving into next-generation connectivity solutions.

Astranis co-founder and CEO John Gedmark said the partnership would expand sovereign connectivity in the region, “starting in Oman” and described the agreement as

building a digital backbone that can power the economy, connect communities and enable innovation aligned with Oman Vision 2040 objectives.

In remarks delivered at the ceremony, Gedmark argued that sovereign, secure communications are increasingly being treated as strategic infrastructure.

In a more uncertain global environment, he said, countries are placing greater emphasis on secure connectivity with strong control and resilience, comparable in importance to critical energy and transportation systems.

Astranis said it builds small geostationary communications satellites for high-orbit networks and provides dedicated, secure connectivity for enterprise and sovereign customers.

MB Group said it operates across more than 20 countries, with businesses spanning energy, mining, marine engineering, aviation, manufacturing, real estate and strategic investments.

BUSINESS FEATURE

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
MUSCAT, JAN 26

IN 2026, Oman is witnessing a significant shift in its real estate and urban planning sectors through destination-led living. This concept moves away from traditional “dormitory” residential areas, focusing instead on integrated communities where leisure, nature and residency are inextricably linked. The momentum is largely driven by Oman Vision 2040, which prioritises sustainable urban development and economic diversification.

The core pillars of the trend are integrated tourism complexes (ITCs), wellness and nature-inspired design, smart cities and sustainability.

ITCs are considered the primary vehicle for destination-led living. These are self-contained “micro-cities” where non-GCC nationals can enjoy freehold ownership and automatic residency.

Buyers are no longer just looking for a house; they are purchasing access to marinas, golf courses and private beaches.

The “destination” aspect is increasingly defined by the environment. Developers are betting on Oman’s unique geography — its cooler mountain climates and pristine coastlines — to attract residents seeking a healthier lifestyle.

Jabal Sifah by Muriya is currently seeing a surge in “wellness-led” projects like Olive Farms by Raya, which sold out its first phase in record time in early 2026.

Commenting on the launch of Olive Farms by Raya, Engineer Ashraf Nessim, CEO of Muriya, said: “Olive Farms by Raya, represents a natural progression of our vision for Jabal Sifah and a direct response to what today’s homeowners are seeking healthier, more meaningful ways of living.

Inspired by the strong success and demand we witnessed with Sifah Farms, this new phase reflects our customer-centric approach

and our commitment to developing communities that place wellbeing, nature and quality of life at their core. Aligned with Oman Vision 2040, Olive Farms by Raya, embodies our belief that sustainable living and healthy environments are fundamental to building resilient communities and future generations”.

The 45 minute-drive from Muscat, is a location that is nestled between the Al Hajar Mountains and the Sea of Oman. The place is gaining momentum as a long-term wellbeing and destination-led living.

Jabal Sifah spans over six million square metres of coastal land and has a world-class marina, championship 9-hole golf course, boutique hotel, waterfront dining and retail, with a diverse collection of freehold residential offerings,



“
Olive Farms by Raya,
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response to what today’s
homeowners are seeking
healthier, more meaningful
ways of living.

ENGINEER ASHRAF
NESSIM
CEO of Muriya



45

minute-drive from
Muscat, is a location that
is nestled between the Al
Hajar Mountains and the
Sea of Oman



41

different
nationalities
have made
it their
destination home

DESTINATION-LED LIVING GAINING MOMENTUM IN OMAN



85%

of Jabal Sifah is dedicated to open green
areas and outdoor amenities, making
it an ideal setting for residents to enjoy
walking trails, jogging, cycling and active
family living.

from beachfront villas and town houses, to serene apartments with panoramic sea and golf course views.

Over 85% of Jabal Sifah is dedicated to open green areas and outdoor amenities, making it an ideal setting for residents to enjoy walking trails, jogging, cycling and active family living.

Jabal Sifah also initiated a tree-planting campaign earlier this year, planting olive trees across Jabal Sifah destination, an enduring symbol of health, longevity and balance.

While nationals have made it as their second home, about 41 different nationalities have made it their destination home. The rise in expatriates is due to simplified “Investor Residency” programmes tied to ITC property.

When it comes to sustainability, growing premium is on “Eco-Luxury” units with lower utility costs.

The residents have begun to explore the coastline with their own boats.

Aiman al Rahbi has his company dealing with boat rides and horse rides. “The beaches are pristine and the only way to access them is via boats. For instance there is one called sugar beach because the sand is shiny”, said Al Rahbi.

From yacht marinas and beach clubs to padel courts and mountain hikes — the activities are plenty. The white sandy beaches or the scenic mountain views, Oman’s physical topography is an asset.

The clear, tranquil waters are ideal for swimming, snorkeling and diving, with opportunities to see coral reefs and marine life. The modern marina at Jabal Sifah provides berths for yachts, boat trips and is surrounded by restaurants and shops. The coastline is part of a development that includes a 9-hole golf course.

It is situated about 45 minutes to an hour from Muscat and it is easily accessible by road but is known for being a quiet, scenic escape from the city.

The area is heavily focused on preserving its natural, rugged beauty while providing luxury, low-density living, with over 85% of the development dedicated to open spaces and unspoiled environment.

The momentum is fuelled by a “slow and steady” urbanism strategy. According to experts, Oman is doubling down on low-rise, high-privacy and culturally authentic developments. This has made Muscat a “trending Destination-led living” for 2026 in global travel and residency reports, as people seek out environments that offer “space to think”.

Apparently the trend of Oman as a Destination-led living is also a response to a global post-pandemic shift towards wellness, remote work and a desire for communities that offer more than just a roof. In other words, the work from home could be from the destination home in Oman.



The Blue Carbon initiative aims to support the plantation of 100 million mangrove trees to absorb an estimated 14 million tonnes of CO₂ emissions annually.

ZERO-CARBON APPROACH TO DRIVE SUSTAINABILITY

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JAN 26

Guided by its zero-carbon approach, the Sultanate of Oman is making tangible strides in the advancement of environmental and climate mitigation projects and initiatives designed to preserve resources and support sustainability.

According to the Ministry of Economy, Oman ranked 55th globally in the Environmental Performance Index. It boasts 32 nature reserves, 10.8 million trees (the total planted vegetation cover), 17,839 square kilometres of protected area and 589 environmental projects implemented over the past five years. The country is also home to rich biodiversity, with more than 1,200 plant species, over 518 bird species and more than 988 fish species.

Dr Abdullah bin Ali al Amri, Chairman of the Environment Authority, has affirmed that the Authority achieved significant accomplishments during the Tenth Five-Year Plan (2021-2025), reflecting its commitment to environmental conservation and promoting sustainability.

Speaking at the recent annual media briefing, he noted that governance and legislative efforts included the implementation of several development projects, the issuance of 21 regulations and the successful prosecution of 342 cases against environmental offenders. The compliance rate with deterrent penalties reached 82%, the response rate to pollution reports was 99.2% and the level of technology use for environmental monitoring was 87%.

Adopting ambitious environmental projects to enhance sustainability is in line with Oman Vision 2040, supporting the circular economy, protecting biodiversity and achieving carbon neutrality.

Among these projects is the Blue Carbon initiative, which aims to plant 100 million mangrove trees to absorb 14 million tonnes of carbon dioxide. To date, 1.5 million trees have been successfully planted.

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, JAN 26

The events of the 2nd Middle East Space Conference (MESOC) kicked off yesterday, January 26, 2026, in Muscat, under the auspices of HH Sayyid Dr Kamil bin Fahd bin Mahmood al Said, Secretary-General of the General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers.

The three-day event is organised by NovaSpace, in partnership with the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology.

In his opening remarks, Dr Ali bin Amer al Shaithani, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology for Communications and Information Technology, said: “This conference comes as a continuation of the success achieved by the first edition in 2024, which established a promising regional and international dialogue and contributed to building fruitful partnerships in the space sector.

The space sector in the Sultanate of Oman is witnessing a qualitative and rapid transformation, stemming from a clear and enlightened national vision under the leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik — may God protect and preserve him — and through the implementation of strategic initiatives within the National Space Policy and the Executive Programme for Space 2023–2033, under the umbrella of the National Digital Economy Programme”.

Dr Al Shaithani added: “Since the previous edition of the conference in January 2023, the space sector in the Sultanate of Oman witnessed a remarkable event that drew global attention:



The event was held under the auspices of HH Sayyid Dr Kamil bin Fahd al Said, Secretary-General of the General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers.

the successful experimental launch of the Duqm-1 rocket from the experimental launch platform in the Wilayat of Al Duqm, Al Wusta Governorate.

“These efforts were also crowned — thanks to the gracious patronage of His Majesty — by the signing of an agreement for the design, manufacturing and launch of Oman’s dedicated communications satellite, in partnership with Airbus Defence and Space.

This project will serve as a driver for sector growth, empowering local institutions and maximising national added value”.

He further stated that work is continuing to enhance Oman’s enabling environment for space investment and development: “To further strengthen this path, the Ministry is working to implement a number of other strategic projects, including preparing a legislative framework for the space sector aimed at attracting global investments and stimulating the growth of local companies, thereby creating an enabling and supportive environment for the space sector”.

In his keynote address, Pacôme Révillon, Executive Officer of NovaSpace, underscored the growing regional importance of the forum and Oman’s role within it, saying: “The Middle East Space Conference is built around a clear mandate: driving space collaboration and innovation across the region, with Oman playing an increasingly important role.

Space ambitions are accelerating. Governments are strengthening their commitment to space programmes, while commercial capabilities are scaling rapidly across all application segments — whether communications, observation, exploration and much more”.

Révillon also pointed to the sector’s wider economic value, noting: “Space is increasingly recognised as a strategic enabler for economic diversification, resilience and long-term development.

The video you have just seen reflects NovaSpace’s role in this evolving landscape. We work with governments, agencies, industry leaders and investors worldwide, providing insight and expertise to navigate a space sector that is transforming at unprecedented speed”.

He said discussions over the coming days will explore the practical deployment

of space capabilities across multiple areas, adding: “Over the next three days, discussions involving decision-makers from government agencies and industry will focus on how space capabilities are deployed to meet national and regional priorities.

From national strategies to regulatory frameworks, from infrastructure to services and from education to research and innovation, these exchanges will cover the various dimensions and dynamics of the space domain”.

The first day of the forum included the signing of the “Artemis Accords” between the Sultanate of Oman and the United States. In addition, an agreement was signed between Oman Telecommunications Company (Omantel) and OQ Gas Networks to provide satellite services for monitoring and surveillance of gas network pipelines.

Moreover, the winners of the Oman Space Accelerator Programme were announced and honoured by the patron of the event and the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology.

The first day of the conference highlighted space policy and industry through presentations by local, regional and international speakers, alongside several panel discussions addressing key themes, including shaping the space sector in the Middle East, seizing opportunities for Oman’s space sector, the view from global space and government agencies, building next-generation space infrastructure and investment strategies for sovereign and corporate funds.

Parallel to the conference, an exhibition showcasing 25 regional and global space companies was inaugurated.

Oman’s cities face the next test: Who pays to keep public spaces alive?

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, JAN 25

A debate over how Oman’s cities stay lively after “opening day” is gaining attention as public investment expands into parks and waterfronts and the Sultanate of Oman moves towards activating a new real estate framework.

In an interview with the Observer, an investor with interests spanning financial markets, energy and urban planning said the urban scenes people increasingly want — busy promenades, parks, cafés and regular events — are not created by buildings alone. He described real estate development as a system that “generates places that work” because it delivers public-facing assets and



Cleaning, landscaping, lighting, security, repairs and programming are the difference between a place that stays active daily and one that becomes seasonal or underused.

then keeps them running through ongoing management and activity.

His remarks come as Oman continues to channel spending

into liveability-focused projects. Government-backed programmes have highlighted RO 507 million in governorate development spending under the Tenth Five-Year Plan, with initiatives including internal roads, public parks and waterfront development, as the country pushes decentralised local development aligned with Oman Vision 2040.

Urban specialists often say the hard part starts after construction finishes. Cleaning, landscaping, lighting, security, repairs and programming are the difference between a place that stays active daily and one that becomes seasonal or underused. That operating burden typically falls either on public budgets or private stakeholders, and the balance

between the two can shape public attitudes towards the term “development”.

Oman’s regulatory direction is also shifting. Royal Decree 79/2025 states that the Real Estate Regulation Law comes into force 180 days after publication in the Official Gazette, placing its effective date on March 13, 2026, based on the Gazette publication date of September 14, 2025, according to the document.

Internationally, one widely used approach to funding “place operations” is the Business Improvement District model, where a defined area raises multi-year revenue through a compulsory assessment on local property owners and/or businesses to supplement services such

as cleaning, security and area promotion.

For Oman, the investor said, the practical question is not whether to build attractive public realms, but how to keep them inclusive and well-managed without creating perceptions of quasi-private space or pushing up costs. He said this is where public concerns typically concentrate: affordability pressures, access rules and whether local character and small businesses are protected as investment arrives.

He said the debate reflects a wider shift in how cities are judged — less by what is built and more by whether places are operated sustainably, with clear accountability over who manages and who pays.

SAFE HAVENS

Gold breaks \$5,000 record



Gold surged past \$5,000 an ounce to a fresh record as investors flocked to safe-haven assets amidst rising geopolitical tensions. Frictions involving the US, Nato and Greenland added to market unease.

Prices rose 64 per cent in 2025, supported by easier US monetary policy, strong central bank demand and sustained buying by China, alongside record ETF inflows. — ONA

ENERGY MARKETS

Oil extends gains on tensions

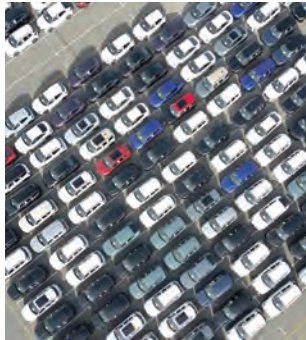


Oil prices extended gains as geopolitical tensions between the US and Iran kept markets on edge, despite Kazakhstan restoring full pipeline exports. Brent rose to \$66 a barrel, while WTI climbed to \$61.21.

Both benchmarks posted weekly gains of nearly 3 per cent, reaching their highest levels since mid-January amidst heightened Middle East security concerns. — ONA

TRADE TALKS

India cuts EU car tariffs



India plans to slash tariffs on cars imported from EU to 40% from as high as 110%, sources said, in the biggest opening yet of the country’s vast market as the two sides close in on a free trade pact.

Duties on selected vehicles priced above €15,000 would be reduced immediately, with a further cut to 10 per cent over time, easing access for European automakers. — Reuters

OPINION

Mobile phones will not only be smart but intelligent too



TARIQ
AL BARWANI

The writer is strategic adviser, businessman and motivational speaker.

ABOUT 20 years ago, Apple founder and CEO Steve Jobs introduced a revolutionary smartphone — the iPhone. When he walked onto the stage and introduced what looked like a simple black rectangle, few people, myself included, truly understood the scale of what was about to happen.

At the time, mobile phones were dominated by physical keyboards, styluses and tiny screens; and users had learned to live with and accept, their limitations. Then Jobs swiped his finger across a full glass display, zoomed in with a pinch and demonstrated that a phone could be operated entirely through touch. That moment wasn't just a product launch; it was a technological reset.

Within a few years, every major smartphone manufacturer followed the same path, abandoning buttons in favour of touchscreens and app-based experiences.

What started as a bold disruption quickly became the global standard, redefining how we communicate with one another, browse the internet, capture memories, and carry computing power in our pockets. What comes next is increasingly predictable and with this article, I aim to shed light on what the future of smartphones may look like, based on the technological developments that have

already begun and continue to evolve.

Briefly, future mobile phones will not just be smart but also intelligent. Instead of relying heavily on cloud-based processing, they will handle much of their artificial intelligence directly on the device itself, becoming truly AI-native smartphones.

This will make interactions faster, more private and deeply personal. Phones will learn our habits, anticipate our needs and assist us throughout the day without constant input. AI will no longer feel like a separate feature running somewhere in the cloud; it will quietly power everything we do, transforming the phone from a serving device (as it largely is today) into a personal assistant.

Alongside this intelligence, apps are evolving in remarkable ways. They are beginning to act on our behalf rather than simply respond to commands. From managing schedules and booking travel to handling payments and adjusting plans in real time, smartphones are becoming proactive assistants.

This level of automation brings unmatched convenience while also raising important questions about how much trust and control we are willing to hand over to our devices. Yes, it's exciting, but also a little scary.

Hardware design is keeping pace with these developments. Foldable phones,

What started as a bold disruption quickly became the global standard, redefining how we communicate with one another, browse the internet, capture memories and carry computing power in our pockets.

for example, will no longer be fragile and expensive devices but durable, practical and increasingly affordable too. They will make real sense for productivity, creativity and media consumption.

Photography will also shift focus from bigger megapixels to smarter processing. Phones will stabilise video, enhance low-light images and edit content in real time, allowing users to capture moments effortlessly.

Displays, too, will evolve, with glasses-free 3D viewing becoming possible and early holographic experiences already being explored by companies as I write this article.

Connectivity is changing as well. Satellite communication is moving towards the mainstream (hello, Starlink), enabling messaging and emergency features even when traditional networks fail. Physical SIM cards are already being replaced by eSIMs, making it easier than ever to switch networks or activate new devices instantly.

These changes may seem small, but together they reflect a much larger shift: smartphones are becoming more flexible, resilient and digitally empowered than ever before.

To conclude my article this week, future mobile phones will undoubtedly become intelligent and revolutionary, much like the iPhone redefined mobile technology nearly two decades ago.

STRATEGIC
OUTLOOK: IRAN
CONFRONTATION
AND ENERGY
SECURITY



ALI AL RIYAMI

The writer is an Oman-based energy affairs expert.

The signals coming out of the region point to something bigger than the familiar cycle of strikes and counterstrikes with Iran.

This time, the objective seems to go beyond disabling nuclear facilities or missile sites.

What's being contemplated is a fundamental change in the political order itself — a far more ambitious

and risky undertaking.

That kind of goal requires boots on the ground, whether foreign or domestic and a population at least partially receptive to change. Iran's internal pressures may create openings, but no one should expect Tehran to fold quietly.

Resistance is certain and the conflict would likely be drawn-out, destructive and spill well beyond Iran's borders.

The energy dimension is where the global impact becomes immediate. The Strait of Hormuz is the world's most sensitive chokepoint, with nearly a fifth of global oil trade flowing through it. Any disruption there would send shockwaves through markets overnight.

Risk premiums would spike, crude prices would surge and volatility would dominate trading.

The uncertainty alone — even before actual supply interruptions — would rattle investors and push major consumers to scramble for alternatives.

The longer such a confrontation drags on, the heavier the strain on energy flows. Supply chains could be redrawn, strategic reserves tapped and non-Gulf producers leaned on more heavily.

At the same time, Gulf states would face the dual burden of keeping oil moving while protecting infrastructure and shipping lanes. The risk of spillover — through proxy attacks, cyber strikes, or economic destabilisation — would test regional resilience and international alliances alike. In short, a war of this scale with Iran would not remain a regional affair. It would quickly evolve into a global crisis, reshaping energy security and geopolitical alignments.

Markets would react instantly with price spikes and heightened risk premiums, but the real question is whether the conflict could be contained before it becomes a grinding war that undermines the stability of global energy supplies.

For policymakers, the challenge is clear: prepare for immediate shocks, shore up resilience and think beyond the short-term volatility to the structural shifts this kind of crisis could accelerate.

Davos: Turning dialogue into deals for Oman

DAVOS has always been a temperature check on the global economy: not because one summit decides outcomes, but because it reveals what investors, policymakers and leaders will do next. The World Economic Forum Annual Meeting 2026, held from 19-23 January under the theme “A Spirit of Dialogue”, convened 3,000 leaders amidst a world that is steadier than the headlines suggest, yet complex in how trade, technology and capital move.

Three messages stood out for the global community.

First, the world economy is proving more resilient than expected, but the margin for error is thin. The IMF's January 2026 update projects global growth of 3.3% in 2026 (and 3.3% in 2025), supported by technology investment and easing financial conditions, even as trade policy shifts and geopolitics keep risk premia high. In Davos, leaders were not celebrating a boom; they were stress-testing assumptions and hedging against downside risks.

Second, trade is growing in value, but fragmenting in structure. UNCTAD estimates global trade in goods and services may exceed \$35 trillion for the first time in 2025 — about a 7% rise versus 2024 — driven by services. Yet the “how” of trade is changing: standards, data rules, security reviews and supply-chain resilience now shape market access as much as tariffs do. For firms, diversification is no longer optional; it is a board-level requirement.

Third, capital is available, but it is moving more selectively. UNCTAD reports global FDI reached about \$1.4 trillion in 2024, but once conduit flows are excluded, underlying investment fell and investment in SDG-related sectors declined by 11%. Investors are rewarding scale, certainty and bankable execution. Countries that provide credible pipelines, transparent governance and reliable infrastructure will capture a bigger share of a more cautious pool.

For the Middle East, Davos 2026 reinforced a practical reality: the next decade will be shaped less by oil cycles and more by two transitions running in parallel — an energy transition and an “intelligent economy” transition.

Artificial intelligence is no longer a side topic; it is becoming a primary



Flags flutter during the 56th annual World Economic Forum (WEF) meeting, in Davos, Switzerland. — Reuters



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The World Economic Forum Annual Meeting 2026, held from 19-23 January under the theme “A Spirit of Dialogue”, convened 3,000 leaders amidst a world that is steadier than the headlines suggest, yet complex in how trade, technology and capital move.

productivity variable. IMF analysis suggests roughly 40% of global employment is exposed to AI-driven change (and around 60% in advanced economies). That translates into productivity gains and higher-value job creation — but only where skills policy, data governance and competition rules keep pace. Oman's relevance in this landscape is straightforward: stability, geography and a reform trajectory that is increasingly measurable. Macroeconomic fundamentals have improved.

The IMF notes Oman's economy expanded by 1.6% in 2024 and accelerated to 2.3% year-on-year in the first half of 2025, supported by nonhydrocarbon growth of 3.5%.

Inflation remained low (0.6% in 2024; 0.9% during January-October 2025). Prudent fiscal management kept the overall balance in surplus, estimated at 0.7% of GDP in 2025, with government debt at 36.1% of GDP by September 2025. Even with softer oil prices, the current account deficit is estimated at 1.1% of GDP in 2025. These are not abstract statistics; they are the ingredients of investor confidence and lower risk premiums.

Where are the clearest opportunities?

First, logistics and “safe passage” trade. When global shipping lanes face disruption, reliable ports, customs efficiency and multimodal corridors become strategic assets. Oman can position Suhar, Al Duqm and Salalah not only as national infrastructure, but as regional risk-management tools for firms that need redundancy. The prize is not just throughput; it is higher-value

services: warehousing, cold chain and trade-linked manufacturing that clusters around movement.

Second, green molecules and industrial diversification. Oman's green hydrogen platform is moving from ambition to execution.

Hydrom has allocated around 50,000 km² for green hydrogen development and outlines a project pipeline that targets roughly 1.0-1.5 million tonnes per annum by 2030, supported by tens of billions of dollars in awarded and committed investments. Hydrogen is not merely an export; it can anchor downstream industry — green ammonia, e-fuels, low-carbon metals and new chemical value chains. Third, bankable industrial projects. Global investors are hunting for “shovel-ready” opportunities linked to the new industrial policy cycle: advanced materials, clean-tech components and resilient supply chains. Oman should target niches where it has structural advantages — competitive energy, improving logistics and the ability to deliver predictable permitting, land readiness and utility access.

Fourth, the intelligent economy. Davos made one point unmistakable: AI will reward early adopters and punish laggards. Oman's next competitiveness leap will come from digitising trade, licensing and industrial permitting; building trusted data frameworks; and scaling applied AI in logistics, health, tourism and energy management. What should Oman do next? Five recommendations are immediate and practical.

1. Turn projects into pipelines: publish a rolling investable national portfolio with timelines, land readiness, offtake pathways and incentives — and manage it with a delivery-unit mindset focused on execution speed.

2. Make skills the flagship infrastructure: accelerate programmes for AI, industrial maintenance, process engineering and logistics, co-designed with anchor investors.

3. Deepen trade facilitation: expand single-window services, digitise customs clearance end-to-end and institutionalise fast-track lanes for strategic investors.

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ART/LIFE



LUNCH MUSIC OF TOSCA

> 20

CULTURALBRIDGE

GERMANY, ITALY LAUNCH NEW GOETHE CULTURAL ROUTE



Germany and Italy aim to jointly develop a new cultural route that commemorates German literary giant Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's (1749-1832) famous "Italian Journey".

The plan to trace Goethe's footsteps through Italy was agreed upon by German Minister of State for Culture Wolfram Weimer and Italian Minister of Culture Alessandro Giuli during government consultations in Rome last week.

The aim is to create a cultural route along key locations of the famous poet's journey.

Goethe travelled through Italy between 1786 and 1788. His account "Italian Journey", which was written between 1813 and 1817, is based on this trip.

The journey took him through Verona, Venice, Florence, Naples and all the way to Sicily, but he spent most of his time in Rome, where he stayed on Via del Corso.

In the Italian capital he lived in a kind of shared apartment with the painter Johann Heinrich Wilhelm Tischbein and other artists. Today, the house is home to the Casa di Goethe (Goethe's House) museum.

Weimer said that Goethe's travel account at the time sparked a lasting longing for Italy in Germany and shaped the image of Italy for many generations.

He added that it is now a great pleasure for him to revive the "Italian Journey" and create this pilgrimage route in Goethe's footsteps.

The planned route aims to showcase the cultural, historical and artistic impressions that had a lasting impact on Goethe and it is intended for culturally interested travellers as well as a young, international audience.

Both analogue and digital offerings are planned, including an interactive application and an exhibition at the Casa di Goethe on the reception of Goethe in Italian art and literature.

The route aims to highlight the historical, artistic and cultural influences that shaped Goethe's perceptions of Italy and left a lasting imprint on European intellectual and artistic history.

Officials say the new route will serve as a dynamic cultural bridge between the two countries — strengthening artistic cooperation while promoting tourism and shared European heritage.

It's being positioned not only as a heritage travel experience for culturally interested visitors but also as an interactive, modern cultural project to attract younger international audiences.

The project includes digital elements such as an interactive mobile application that helps visitors follow Goethe's footsteps and learn about his experiences in each city. — **dpa**

QUICK FEATURES



HISTORY

Historical reenactors from the King's Army branch of the English Civil War Society march on horseback along The Mall to mark King Charles I's execution in 1649.

— Reuters



WINTER STORM

A massive winter storm dumped snow and freezing rain from New Mexico to North Carolina as it swept across the United States. — **AFP**



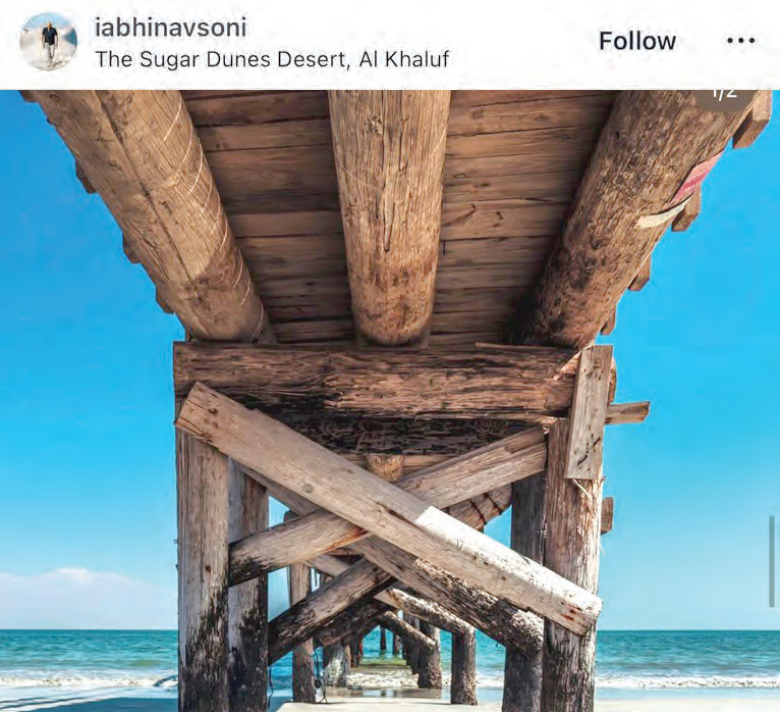
FASHION

Sophie Marceau poses during a photocall before Jacquemus Menswear Fall/Winter 2026-2027 collection show during Men's Fashion Week in Paris, France. — **Reuters**

INSTA PICKS



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ARIANA SNUBBED AND CHALAMET SUPREME? FIVE OSCARS TAKEAWAYS



“Sinners” set a new Oscars record with 16 nominations, but it was not the only talking point from the Academy’s announcement on Thursday. Among the biggest surprises and snubs was the absence of Ariana Grande. The pop star earned a best supporting actress nomination last year for the first Wicked film, but missed out this year despite taking a larger role in the second chapter. In fact, Wicked: For Good received no nominations at all, after the first film landed 10 nods and won two Oscars. Other notable omissions included One Battle After Another star Chase Infiniti and Hamnet lead Paul Mescal. Surprise acting nominations went to Delroy Lindo for Sinners and Elle Fanning for Norwegian dramedy Sentimental Value. Warner Bros emerged as a dominant force, with Sinners leading the field and One Battle After Another close behind with 13 nominations. The studio’s success comes amidst uncertainty over its future, as it is the subject of a bidding war between Paramount Skydance and Netflix. Records also fell beyond

Sinners. A record four non-English-language acting performances were nominated, reflecting the Academy’s increasingly global outlook. Three Norwegian actors from Sentimental Value were recognised, alongside Brazilian actor Wagner Moura for The Secret Agent. Meanwhile, Hamnet director Chloe Zhao became only the second woman to receive multiple directing nominations, after Jane Campion. This year also marked the introduction of a best casting category, the first new Oscar category since 2002. Nominations largely mirrored best picture frontrunners, including Hamnet, Marty Supreme, One Battle After Another, The Secret Agent and Sinners. Timothée Chalamet continued his strong Oscars run with his third best actor nomination for Marty Supreme, while also earning a producer nomination for the same film. The movie outperformed expectations with nine nominations, strengthening Chalamet’s chances ahead of the March ceremony. — AFP



PRESERVING OMAN’S RARE KOHL CRAFT

ARWA AL HASHIMI

In an age dominated by mass-produced cosmetics and modern beauty trends, a traditional Omani craft continues to survive through the dedication of women who believe in the value of heritage and authenticity. One such example is the traditional kohl made from whale liver, a rare practice that has been preserved and developed by Omani craftswoman Khusayfa bint Taib bin Hamad al Hakmani. Khusayfa’s connection to traditional crafts began at an early age. She describes herself as a woman who has carried a deep passion for Omani heritage and traditional industries since childhood. This interest was not accidental; it was nurtured within her family. She learned the craft from her maternal aunt, Moza bint Mohammed al Hakmani, who passed down the knowledge as part of a long-standing family tradition. What began as inherited knowledge later became a personal mission to preserve and refine a product deeply rooted in Omani culture. Unlike commercial kohl products commonly found today, whale liver kohl is valued not merely as a cosmetic item but as a traditional remedy. According to Khusayfa, this type of kohl is known for its natural composition and its role in eye comfort and treatment rather than decoration alone. Prepared using inherited methods, it is considered gentler on the eyes compared to modern products that often contain chemical substances. Its long history of use has built a strong sense of trust among those who rely on it. The craft itself is a family legacy. While Khusayfa acknowledges that the foundation of this practice was passed down from earlier generations, she emphasises her role in developing the product without compromising



Khusayfa bint Taib bin Hamad al Hakmani keeps a centuries-old Omani tradition alive. Using whale liver, she prepares authentic kohl that not only enhances beauty passing down a rare craft rooted in heritage and meticulous craftsmanship

its authenticity. Her work focuses on maintaining the original essence of the kohl while presenting it in a form suitable for today’s users. Despite the rapid spread of modern cosmetics, this traditional craft continues to hold its place. Khusayfa believes that many people still turn to traditional kohl because of its proven natural benefits and the experiences shared across generations. Whale, or shark, liver contains natural fats that are believed to strengthen eyesight and protect the eyes from dryness and inflammation. This, she explains, is what sets it apart from commercial kohl, which often relies on artificial ingredients. The preparation process is both detailed and demanding, requiring patience and precision. It consists of five main stages. The whale liver is first collected and melted to extract the oil. The oil is then poured into a clean clay container or sea shells, where a cotton wick is placed and lit. The container is covered with shells or pottery to trap the smoke. The black soot produced by the burning oil collects

on the inner surface of the cover and becomes the base kohl powder. In the following stage, cow butter is melted and mixed with a measured amount of clean water. The collected black powder is then added gradually until the mixture forms a cohesive dough. Khusayfa stresses that accurate measurements are essential to achieve the right consistency. Finally, the mixture is shaped into small round pieces and placed into specially prepared kohl containers, marking the completion of the process. While the purpose and method of using kohl have remained largely unchanged over time, the challenges surrounding its production have increased. The craft is entirely handmade and requires significant effort. In addition, sourcing containers and application tools from outside the island of Masirah adds to the cost and time involved. Marketing the product also presents difficulties, particularly in reaching younger audiences. When young people learn that kohl is produced using traditional methods from whale liver, their reactions are often a mix of curiosity and surprise. With further explanation of its benefits and preparation, interest tends to grow. While some immediately appreciate its authenticity, others need time to build trust. Khusayfa believes that Omani women play a crucial role in protecting such crafts from disappearing. She calls on women to show greater interest in their heritage, preserve it and contribute to its development and promotion. Her message to future generations is clear: safeguarding traditional crafts is a responsibility tied to identity and history. She encourages youngsters to protect their heritage, develop it responsibly and share it with the world. Khusayfa also expresses her readiness to conduct training workshops for youth, ensuring that this rare craft continues to live on.

FEATURES



PHOTOS BY KHALID AL BUSAIDI

LUNCH MUSIC OF
TOSCA



GEORGINA BENISON

IT'S that time of year again, when members of the public are treated by ROHM to an hors d'oeuvre in the Opera Galleria's large foyer. On Saturday lunchtime the courtyard was transformed into an intimate chamber opera hall with red velvet seats and a grand piano. Three understudies from the Royal Opera House Muscat's forthcoming production of Giacomo Puccini's "Tosca" presented a selection of arias and ensembles free of charge to entice the audience to see the full-blown performance on Thursday and Saturday evenings next weekend. Some would-be-shoppers entered the mall and met the impromptu performance going on with some surprise and confusion, but after a little disturbance all settled into enjoying the unexpected promotion.

Puccini's "Tosca" is one of the darkest operas in the repertoire, so no "Carmen" gypsies or "Magic Flute" animals here. It was going to be a serious affair in the bright light of a January lunchtime. The young Russian pianist, Daniil Kirilov sat at the Concert Grand and opened with a lush romantic introduction to the 'starter course', Act 1 Italian Tenor, Davide Battianello made an immediate impression with his interpretation as Mario Cavaradossi in the extremely challenging, "Recondita Armonia" (Hidden Harmony). His smiling lyrical delivery belied the sustained high tessitura of this role which resonated powerfully in the acoustics of the Galleria.

Off-stage, Floria Tosca was heard and there followed the agitated dialogue, "Mario! Mario! Qual occhio al mondo" (what eyes in the world could be more beautiful) from Azerbaijani dramatic soprano, Affag Abassova. Tosca's haughty, suspicious character was portrayed superbly in this highly theatrical role, melting into Ms Abassova's gorgeous lush vocal quality in, "Non la sospiri la nostalgic casetta" (Do you not long for our little house).

In the Finale to Act 1 the strong voice of



Belarusian Baritone, Anatoly Silvko was heard from the balcony behind declaiming "Tre sbirre una carrozza.... Presto!" (Three men and a carriage. Quick — follow!) as the deceitful conniving, Baron Scarpia, Chief of Police. Members of the chorus from the Azerbaijan State Academic Opera made a powerful commentary from the wings as the tyrannical, lustful Baron arrived on stage to conclude his gloating intentions for Tosca.

The 'side course' in the menu comprised "Se la giurata fede debo tradir" duet from Act 2 between Tosca and Scarpia — while Cavaradossi was carted off to jail. It is an angry exchange between them with Tosca pleading then bargaining to spare Cavaradossi's life. Guards throw a dishevelled, tortured Cavaradossi onto the stage floor as a prelude to the 'mains course' at the Castel Sant'Angelo — and the two most famous arias from "Tosca".

Ms Abassova portrayed the heartbroken Tosca in the prayerful "Vissi d'Arte, vissi d'Amore" (I lived for Art, I lived for Love) with a dramatic intensity sustained throughout that held the audience captivated. A short piano interlude brought Davide Battianello slowly back to perform "E Lucevan le stelle" (And the stars were shining). His interpretation was beautifully poised with subtle placing, sometimes in effective unison with the piano scoring, doubling the melody and providing poignancy to the inevitable tragic conclusion.

The handsome quartet, youthful and dressed in concert black lined up for well deserved applause and cheers from the assembled throng. In what could be termed the 'sweet course' to conclude the gastronomic analogy came the refreshing encores. The role of Scarpia provided a limited monochrome vision of Anatoly Silvko's extreme talent and so he treated listeners to the "Cavatina" from Rachmaninov's 1892 romantic Opera "Aleko", composed when Rachmaninov was only nineteen! It was a true Russian Bass-baritone aria, allowing the attractive young baritone's emotional expressiveness and acting ability to shine. The solo demonstrated Silvko's considerable breath capacity as Aleko remembers tenderly his early days with his young wife, yearning, then descending into grief.

That could only be followed by the perennial favourite "Brindisi" Drinking Song from Verdi's "La Traviata". It was amusing, jovial and flirtatious with some impressively high improvised harmony from Ms Abassova — and what an excellent note to end on!