

O M A N
عُضَائِد
D A I L Y

Observer

SUNRISE 06:50 AM

PRAYER TIMINGS

FAJR 05:30 AM

DHUHR 12:18 PM

ASR 03:19 PM

MAGHRIB 05:40 PM

ISHA 06:55 PM

12

MOROCCO ENTER
QUARTERS AS
CAMEROON
KNOCK OUT SA

INBRIEF

‘OMAN CELEBRATES’
CAMPAIGN IN MUSCAT

On the occasion of His Majesty the Sultan’s Accession Day, the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) will launch the third edition of the “National Campaign for Discounts and Promotional Offers on Wednesday. Titled ‘Oman Celebrates’, the campaign will be held in Muscat in partnership with Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) and the Consumer Protection Authority (CPA). The launch ceremony will be held under the auspices of Faisal bin Abdullah al Rawas, Chairman of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI). **DETAILS ON P13**

OMAN, UAE DISCUSS
REGIONAL ISSUES



Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, held fraternal consultations with Shaikh Abdullah bin Zayed al Nahyan, Prime Deputy Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the United Arab Emirates, during a meeting in Abu Dhabi on Monday. The discussions covered a range of recent regional developments and issues, exploring avenues for constructive engagement. This dialogue supports broader efforts to forge consensus and develop effective approaches aimed at strengthening collective security and regional stability, safeguarding common interests, and delivering benefits that fulfil the aspirations of the region’s peoples. Both sides reaffirmed their commitment to the path of the Gulf Cooperation Council and joint Gulf action.

INFLATION ALIGNS
WITH FORECASTS

The Ministry of Economy has confirmed that the inflation trajectory in the Sultanate of Oman throughout 2025 aligned with projections, which estimated a rate of approximately 1 per cent. The average inflation in the Consumer Price Index (CPI) recorded 0.94 per cent from January to November of last year. The ministry noted that on a local level, inflation continues its moderate path within target ranges. Global inflationary pressures remain relatively limited despite variables in international trade policies and rising customs duties, which still cast a shadow of uncertainty and raise concerns about future inflation. The ministry emphasised that the moderation of inflation in Oman over the years of the Tenth Five-Year Plan (2021–2025) resulted from the government’s adoption of proactive policies.

Venus to reach superior conjunction and disappear

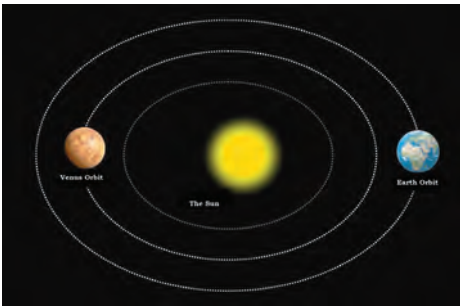
MUSCAT: Venus will reach superior conjunction with the Sun on Tuesday at precisely 9:10 pm Oman time, passing almost directly behind the Sun from Earth’s perspective in an alignment where the Sun lies between Earth and Venus.

Wisal bint Salim al Hinaiyah, Vice-Chair of the Community Communication Committee at Oman Astronomical Society, confirmed the timing based on astronomical calculations.

She said that a superior

conjunction marks the point in Venus’s orbit where it is farthest from Earth, at an estimated distance of 255.8 million kilometres. In this celestial arrangement, the order is Earth, the Sun, and then Venus, placing the planet on the opposite side of the Sun from our view.

Venus, an inner planet similar in size and composition to Earth, is known for its exceptional brightness, ranking as the third brightest object in the sky after the Sun and Moon. Its appearance as a



morning or evening star depends on its orbital position, and like the Moon, it exhibits phases observable

through telescopes, providing clear proof of its revolution around the Sun. Al Hinai noted that after shining prominently as a morning star for much of 2025, Venus began fading from view in late November as it moved closer to the Sun’s glare. It is now at its closest apparent proximity to the solar disk, rendering it unobservable to the naked eye or standard telescopes.

She said that following the conjunction, Venus will gradually move westward away from the Sun.

Its angular separation will increase daily, allowing it to re-emerge in the evening sky after sunset by mid-February, where it will later become the night sky’s brightest object after the Moon for several months.

Al Hinai emphasised that this superior conjunction is a key transition in Venus’s regular 584-day cycle, marking its shift from a morning to an evening star. While not directly observable, the event offers significant scientific and educational insight. — ONA

H M C O N F E R S M E D A L S O N R O P A N D C D A A O F F I C E R S

Royal Oman Police marks
Annual Day with pride

HIS Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, the Supreme Commander, received a cable of greetings from Lt Gen Hasan bin Mohsin al Shraiqi, Inspector General of Police and Customs, on the occasion of the Royal Oman Police (ROP) Day, observed on January 5 every year.

In his cable, Lt Gen Al Shraiqi expressed his heartfelt sentiments and best wishes to the leader of the country on this occasion. He also expressed profound gratitude and appreciation for the gracious care His Majesty accords to the Royal Oman Police and its loyal personnel.

Lt Gen Al Shraiqi emphasised that the ROP, with all its formations, is honoured to perform its sacred national duty with determination and sincerity, keeping pace with all development and modernisation programmes to solidify security and order throughout the nation and ensure comfort and safety for both citizens and residents.

The Royal Oman Police (ROP) celebrated its Annual Day



Shaikh Abdulmalik bin Abdullah al Khalili, Chairman of the State Council, handing over the medals on Monday.

and the ceremony was held under the auspices of Shaikh Abdulmalik bin Abdullah al Khalili, Chairman of the State Council. Meanwhile, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, the Supreme Commander, conferred the Medals of Royal

Commendation, Excellent Service and Proficiency upon several senior officers of the Royal Oman Police (ROP) and the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority (CDAA). On this occasion, Shaikh Abdulmalik bin Abdullah al

Khalili, Chairman of the State Council, handed over the medals on Monday at the Sultan Qaboos Academy for Police Sciences in Nizwa. Al Khalili congratulated the officers on this high royal honour, which comes in recognition of the continuous efforts made by the personnel of the ROP and the authority to advance the nation under the wise leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik.

Furthermore, the chief guest presented certificates of appreciation to several senior officers of the ROP and the CDAA in recognition of their long service and distinguished contributions.

The ceremony was attended by Lt Gen Hasan bin Mohsin al Shraiqi, Inspector General of Police and Customs, Major General Abdullah bin Ali al Harthy, Assistant Inspector General of Police, Customs for Operations, Maj Gen Khalifa bin Ali al Siyabi, Assistant Inspector General of Police and Customs for Administrative and Financial Affairs and several senior officers of the Royal Oman Police. — ONA

Maduro pleads not guilty to charges in court

NEW YORK: Toppled Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro pleaded not guilty on Monday to charges of narco-terrorism after President Donald Trump’s stunning capture of him rattled world leaders and left officials in Caracas scrambling to respond.

Maduro, 63, pleaded not guilty in New York federal court to four criminal counts that include narco-terrorism, cocaine importation conspiracy and possession of machine guns and destructive devices.

Maduro is accused of overseeing a cocaine-trafficking network that partnered with violent groups including Mexico’s Sinaloa and Zetas cartels, Colombian Farc rebels and Venezuela’s Tren de Aragua



Supporters of ousted Venezuela’s President Nicolas Maduro attend a rally outside the National Assembly in Caracas on Monday. — AFP

gang. Maduro has long denied the allegations, saying they were a mask for imperialist designs on Venezuela’s rich oil reserves.

While world leaders and US politicians grappled with the extraordinary seizure of a head of state, an emergency order

in Venezuela, published in full on Monday, orders police to search and capture anyone who supported Saturday’s US attack.

Also on Monday, the UN Security Council debated its legality and implications. Russia, China and leftist allies of Venezuela condemned the raid.

UN Chief Antonio Guterres raised concerns about instability in Venezuela and the legality of Trump’s strike, the most dramatic US intervention in Latin America since the 1989 Panama invasion.

“I am deeply concerned about the possible intensification of instability in the country, the potential impact on the region, and the precedent it may set,” Guterres said in a statement.

SEE ALSO P8



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SHORTTAKES



HH Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said receives Yasser Mohamed Ahmed Shaaban, Egyptian Ambassador.

BILATERAL RELATIONS WITH EGYPT REVIEWED

MUSCAT: HH Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, received in his office at Muaskar Al Murtafaa on Monday, Yasser Mohamed Ahmed Shaaban, Ambassador of the Arab Republic of Egypt to the Sultanate of Oman.

During the meeting, the two sides reviewed the bilateral relations between the two brotherly countries. They also exchanged views and discussed several topics of common interest.

The meeting was attended by the Military Attaché at the Embassy of the Arab Republic of Egypt in Muscat. — ONA

HM confers Royal medals on senior police officers



Shaikh Abdulmalik bin Abdullah al Khalili, Chairman of the State Council, handed over the medals.

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On this occasion, Shaikh Abdulmalik bin Abdullah al Khalili, Chairman of the State

Council, handed over the medals on Monday at the Sultan Qaboos Academy for Police Sciences in Nizwa.

ROYAL HONOUR, Al Khalili congratulated the officers on this high royal honour, which comes in recognition of the continuous efforts made by the personnel of the ROP and the Authority to advance the nation under the

wise leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik.

Furthermore, the Chairman of the State Council, the Chief Guest of the Royal Oman Police Annual Day celebrations, presented certificates of appreciation to several senior officers of the ROP and the CDAA in recognition of their long service and distinguished contributions.

The ceremony was attended

by Lt Gen Hassan bin Mohsin al Shuraiqi, Inspector General of Police and Customs, Maj Gen Abdullah bin Ali al Harthy, Assistant Inspector General of Police and Customs for Operations, Maj Gen Khalifa bin Ali al Siyabi, Assistant Inspector General of Police and Customs for Administrative and Financial Affairs and several senior officers of the Royal Oman Police. — ONA

ROP MARKS ANNUAL DAY, GRADUATION OF OFFICER CADETS

NIZWA: The Royal Oman Police (ROP) celebrated its Annual Day on Monday, observed on January 5 every year. The ceremony was held under the auspices of Shaikh Abdulmalik bin Abdullah al Khalili, Chairman of the State Council.

The celebration, held at the military parade ground of the Sultan Qaboos Academy for Police Sciences in the Wilayat of Nizwa, featured the graduation of the 58th batch of specialised officer cadets, the 57th batch of university officer cadets, the 12th batch of service-system officer cadets, and the officer skills qualification and development course. The graduates included officers from the Internal Security Service, the Royal Court Affairs, and the State Financial and Administrative Audit Authority.

The graduates represented diverse specialisations, including aviation engineering, maritime navigation, geophysics, logistics, geographic information systems, biotechnology, supply chain management, fire engineering, cybersecurity, criminology and criminal justice, and the Diploma of the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music (ABRSM) in command and control.

The ceremony commenced with a military salute to the chief guest, followed by the parade commander



requesting the Chief Guest to inspect the front row of the parade. The graduates then performed a military march past the main dais, after which the chief guest presented awards to the top performing graduates.

This was followed by the formal ceremony of handing over and receiving the banner of the Sultan Qaboos Academy for Police Sciences, transitioning from the 57th batch of university officer cadets to the 48th batch of bachelor's system officer cadets.

The graduates then performed the ROP anthem 'Humaat Al Haqq', took the oath of allegiance, and chanted 'Long Live' thrice for His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, the Supreme Commander, before offering a final salute to the chief guest, signalling the end of the parade.

The event also featured a mounted parade by the ROP Cavalry and various musical performances by the Royal Oman Police Band. During the celebration, the winners of the Royal Oman Police Awards for 2025 were announced: Al Sharqiyah North Governorate Police Command secured first place in the Traffic Safety Competition (Role Model and Commitment); Sultan Qaboos Academy for Police Sciences won first place in the ROP Infantry Competition and Muscat Governorate Police Command achieved first place in the Criminal Investigation Competition. — ONA

SHORT TAKES



SAF Assistant Chief of Staff for Operations and Planning with the Royal Jordanian Command and Staff College delegation.

JORDANIAN MILITARY DELEGATION HOLDS TALKS

MUSCAT: Brigadier Saïf bin Hamad al Yousifi, Assistant Chief of Staff of the Sultan’s Armed Forces (SAF) for Operations and Planning, received in his office at Muaskar Al Murtafaa, on Monday a delegation from the Royal Jordanian Command and Staff College, headed by Brigadier Nael bin Mohammed al Shqeirat. During the meeting, both sides exchanged views and discussed several topics of common interest. — ONA

OUTCOME OF SCHOOL PERFORMANCE ON JANUARY 7



The first phase of School Performance Evaluation Scheme was launched in September 2025. — ONA

MUSCAT: The ‘Omani Authority for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Education’ will announce the outcome of school performance for the first semester of School Year 2025/2026 on Wednesday, January 7, 2026, via the Authority’s official website.

The Authority explained that the Authority’s publishing of the results aims to enhance transparency, make information available to the educational community and support efforts to improve educational practices.

The first phase of School Performance Evaluation Scheme was launched in September 2025, and it included 58 public and private schools. The scheme forms part of the Authority’s ongoing efforts to enhance the quality of education in the Sultanate of Oman. — ONA

QURAN COMPETITION WINNERS HONOURED IN SHARQIYAH SOUTH



The contest serves as a means of spiritual cultivation and purification of heart.

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PROJECTS WORTH RO 319M COMING UP IN AL DAKHILIYAH

NIZWA: The Governorate of Al Dakhiliyah is witnessing the implementation of public service projects in the electricity, water and sanitation sectors to the tune of more than RO 319 million.

The projects are part of efforts undertaken by Nama Group subsidiaries to enhance the efficiency of infrastructure and improve the quality of services provided to citizens and residents across the governorate’s wilayats. The initiative aligns with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040 to realise developmental sustainability and enhance the



Al Dakhiliyah is witnessing the implementation of public service projects in the electricity, water and sanitation sectors. — ONA

readiness of vital services. Eng Yousef bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Head of Technical Affairs at Nama

Electricity Distribution Company, said that projects carried out by Nama Electricity Distribution Company in different wilayats of the governorate include upgrading the Adam 33 kV substation and the construction of two new substations in Birkat Al Mouz and in Samayil Industrial Area at a cost exceeding RO 5.1 million. The Birkat Al Mouz substation was commissioned last summer, while the remaining two substations (Birkat Al Mouz and in Samayil Industrial Area) are expected to be operational in the first quarter of 2026. — ONA

Child centre launches ‘Winter of Knowledge’

SAUD AL ANSARI
MUSCAT, JAN 5

AS PART of its cultural and educational mission, the Child Culture Centre — formerly known as the Children’s Museum — has launched its winter programme, Winter of Knowledge, aimed at enhancing cultural and intellectual awareness among children and youth aged 6 to 16.

One of the Centre’s flagship initiatives, the programme is designed to develop participants’ knowledge and skills while enriching their learning experiences in line with their interests and aspirations.

The programme offers a diverse range of interactive and hands-on activities spanning culture, arts, science, technology, creativity and innovation. These activities are intended to broaden perspectives, nurture creative thinking, and encourage exploration within an engaging environment that blends education with enjoyment.

A key focus of Winter of Knowledge is reinforcing Omani identity and fostering pride in the nation’s cultural heritage, while also promoting sustainability and social responsibility. Through inclusive and varied content, the programme aligns with Oman Vision 2040 and the Sustainable Development Goals, combining culture, knowledge and purposeful entertainment.

The initiative highlights the Child Culture Centre’s role in supporting creativity and innovation, and in nurturing a conscious and creative generation capable of engaging



The programme seeks to develop the children’s cognitive, scientific and creative skills.

The programme is designed to develop participants’ knowledge and skills and enrich learning experiences

positively with contemporary challenges and future opportunities.

Zahra bint Said al Siyabiyah from the Child Culture Centre said the programme aims to strengthen partnerships with local cultural and knowledge-based institutions, create a stimulating environment for cultural engagement, and reinforce national identity among young participants.

She added that the programme also seeks to expand children’s and adolescents’ horizons by developing their cognitive, scientific, intellectual and creative skills, with a focus on empowerment and enhancing cultural production rooted in renewal, creativity and innovation across the Sultanate of Oman.

Coach Mohammed al Shueili said the primary objective of the programme is to develop children’s cognitive and physical skills while contributing to the formation of a conscious generation capable of distinguishing right from wrong. He

noted that one of the event’s main goals is to bring joy and happiness to children.

Al Shueili highlighted the inclusive nature of the programme, which brings together children with and without disabilities to promote social integration. He stressed that children with disabilities are regarded as equal to their peers, each possessing unique abilities and potential, adding that participants demonstrated remarkable creativity and excellence throughout the activities.

Sulaiman al Rashdi, whose two children are participating in the programme, said the initiative introduces children and youth to broader life concepts and provides diverse knowledge and experiences that expand their understanding and outlook.

He noted that such workshops equip participants with practical and intellectual skills that positively influence their future, helping them face life’s challenges.

RO 600 for Omani citizenship application

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 5

Minister of Interior, Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidy, issued Ministerial Decision No 92/2014, detailing the Executive Regulations of the Omani Nationality Law. This decision is based on Royal Decree No 38/2014. A fee of RO 600 has been fixed for an application to obtain Omani nationality (through naturalisation) and RO 300 for an application by a foreign woman married to an Omani, or the widow/divorcee of an Omani.

The regulations state that applications related to nationality matters must be submitted to the application office in the department. The department is responsible for studying applications for obtaining, renouncing, or regaining nationality.

GENERAL CONDITIONS

- * All documents and papers



The Minister of Interior issued Ministerial Decision No. 92/2014, detailing the Executive Regulations of the Omani Nationality Law

submitted must be in Arabic.

- * Applicants for Omani nationality or its restoration must appear before the department to undergo the required tests (Arabic language or others).

RESTORING NATIONALITY

Anyone who has lost Omani nationality or renounced it to acquire another nationality may apply to restore it, provided

they meet certain conditions, including permanent residence in Oman for at least two years and proof of renouncing the other nationality.

Nationality for a Foreign Woman Married to an Omani:

A foreign woman who is the wife of an Omani man has the right to apply for Omani nationality under the following conditions:

1. The marriage must have taken place with the prior approval of the Ministry of Interior (if required by law).
2. She must have been married and residing in Oman with her husband for at least 10 years.
3. She must have an Omani son with her Omani husband.
4. She must have good conduct and no prior convictions for crimes involving moral turpitude or dishonesty.

Nationality for a Foreigner Married to an Omani Woman

The marriage must have been approved by the ministry.



QURAYAT EMERGES AS A COMMUNITY HUB

QURAYAT ADDED A UNIQUE CULTURAL AND SOCIAL DIMENSION THAT REFLECTS THE WILAYAT’S IDENTITY AND CLOSE-KNIT COMMUNITY SPIRIT



MOHAMED AL BATTASHI

THE Muscat Nights Festival continues to deliver a vibrant and diverse cultural experience across multiple venues in Muscat, with Qurayat emerging this year as one of the festival's most distinctive and community-driven locations. Alongside other festival sites, Qurayat has added a unique cultural and social dimension that reflects the wilayat’s identity and close-knit community spirit. Ahmed bin Abdullah al Balushi, a member of the organising committee for Muscat Nights activities in Qurayat, said the programme was designed to align with the broader vision of the festival while highlighting the area’s special character. He explained that bringing Muscat Nights to Qurayat was the result of coordinated efforts involving the Qurayat Club and the Municipal Council, aimed at distributing tourism and entertainment activities more evenly across the governorate. Qurayat’s coastal setting, maritime heritage and strong social fabric played a key role in shaping the activities offered at the site. “The

location allowed us to present events that reflect local traditions, traditional crafts and familiar social atmospheres, giving visitors a warm and welcoming experience that particularly appeals to families,” Al Balushi said. The festival programme in Qurayat featured a wide range of activities, including family-friendly entertainment, dedicated spaces for productive families and small businesses to showcase their products, children’s activities, light cultural performances, traditional arts, and both modern and traditional sports events. One of the major highlights was the fireworks display, which attracted strong public interest and left a lasting impression on visitors. Beyond entertainment, the Muscat Nights Festival has contributed meaningfully to the local economy. Al Balushi noted that the event drew visitors from within and beyond the wilayat, stimulating commercial activity and supporting entrepreneurs and productive families. He added that the festival has helped strengthen Qurayat’s position as an emerging tourism and leisure destination within the wider Muscat Nights landscape.

Community participation proved to be a cornerstone of the event’s success. Local residents actively supported the festival through attendance, participation and cooperation with organisers.

“Community interaction is essential to the success of any event, and the response we witnessed in Qurayat was extremely encouraging,” Al Balushi said, adding that such engagement opens the door for further development in future editions.

Despite some organisational and logistical challenges, particularly given that this was an early experience for the site, organisers worked closely with relevant authorities to ensure smooth operations.

Al Balushi expressed optimism that future editions would allow additional preparation time for contractors and organisers, enabling further improvements in readiness and visitor experience. He also pointed to growing public demand for Qurayat to be elevated from a supporting venue to a main festival location in the coming years.

From a visitor’s perspective, the festival succeeded in creating a welcoming and enjoyable atmosphere. Abdullah al Amri, a resident of Qurayat, said the site’s accessibility and natural setting were among the main reasons for his visit. “The festival felt close to the people of the wilayat, well-organised and family-friendly,” he said.

Describing his experience as highly positive, Al Amri highlighted the diversity of activities and the comfortable, inclusive environment. He added that Muscat Nights provides safe and enjoyable entertainment options for families and youth, offering a balanced programme that caters to a wide range of interests.

He strongly recommended visiting the festival, noting its role in enriching social life and bringing people together in a lively yet organised setting.



SHORT TAKES



The conference addresses the latest research developments in theory and algorithms. — ONA

NUMERICAL ANALYSIS CONFERENCE OPENS

MUSCAT: The 6th International Conference on Numerical Analysis and Optimal Solutions (N-A-O 2026) kicked off on Monday at Sultan Qaboos University (SQU).

The 3-day conference is organised by the Department of Mathematics at the SQU’s College of Science. The opening ceremony was held under the auspices of Dr Mohammed bin Nasser al Saqri, Dean of the College of Arts and Social Sciences at Sultan Qaboos University, Member of the State Council.

The conference addresses the latest research developments in the fields of theory, algorithms and advanced applications in engineering, science and medicine. It seeks to promote multidisciplinary research and integrate research efforts among sectors of relevance to pure and applied scientific knowledge.

During the conference, the participants will present their innovative research findings and discuss the latest developments in methods and techniques applicable to their fields of specialisation. The conference will also provide an opportunity for regional researchers to showcase their latest scientific contributions. — ONA

KNOWLEDGE OMAN TO FOCUS TOWARDS DEEPER COLLAB



Balqees al Hassani

MUSCAT: Knowledge Oman has announced collaboration and strategic partnerships as the core focus of its 2026 road-map, building on a year of impactful achievements that strengthened its role as a bridge between knowledge, industry and society.

“Our success in 2025 was driven by people who believed in the power of knowledge to create real societal impact. In 2026, we are taking this further by inviting organisations to move beyond traditional engagement and work hand-in-hand with society. At Knowledge Oman, we believe corporates can play a meaningful role in shaping minds, inspiring communities, and contributing to sustainable national development,” said Balqees al Hassani, President of Knowledge Oman.

In 2025, Knowledge Oman expanded its footprint and relevance through a series of successful programmes designed to educate, inspire, and engage diverse segments of the community. Among the key milestones was the introduction of KO Talks, a platform that hosted thought-provoking discussions led by industry experts, professionals, and leaders, creating accessible knowledge-sharing opportunities for the wider public. KO Academy, a structured learning initiative aimed at equipping youth and professionals with practical, future-ready skills aligned with market needs, was launched.

Knowledge Oman is shifting its focus in 2026 toward deeper collaboration with organisations and corporates, with a clear objective: bringing institutions closer to society and ensuring that knowledge, innovation and opportunity are accessible to all.

DIMA W’ATTAYEEN RECORDS HIGHEST TEMPERATURE AT 30.6 °C

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 5

Dima W’attayeen recorded the highest temperature in the Sultanate of Oman during the past 24 hours, reaching 30.6 °C, according to data released by the Oman Meteorology on Monday. Qarn Alam followed closely with a maximum temperature of 30.5 °C, while Bahla registered 29.9 °C. Al Rustaq recorded 29.6 °C, and both al Mudhaibi and Nakhal saw temperatures of 29.4 °C. Meanwhile, Al Awabi and Bidbid each recorded



highs of 29.3 °C, while Nizwa reached 29.2 °C. Fahud reported a maximum temperature of 29.1 °C, and Ibra recorded 28.9 °C. The Met Office noted that all readings were taken from its

official meteorological stations across the Sultanate. On the other hand, Jabel Shams recorded the lowest temperature during the past 24 hours, reaching 3.7 °C. Other areas also experienced notably cool conditions, particularly in higher and inland areas. Jabel Harem recorded 6.0 °C, while Saiq registered 8.8 °C. Temperatures in Muqshin and Haima dropped to 9.5 °C and 9.6 °C, respectively. In Al Dhahirah Governorate, Yanqul recorded 10.6 °C, while Thumrait in Dhofar Governorate saw a low of 10.5 °C. Qumayra registered 11.7 °C.

TREKKING WOES

ROP, CDAA CALL FOR CAUTION WHILE HIKING

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, JAN 05

THE Royal Oman Police (ROP) and the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority (CDAA) have urged hikers to prioritise safety while venturing out on hikes or treks.

The advice comes days after an Indian woman living in Muscat died in a trekking accident at Jabal Shams region. Sharada Iyer, 52, formerly the Manager of Loyalty with Oman Air, met a tragic end while mountaineering with friends.

Authorities said Iyer, originally from Thazhava in Kerala, was part of a group trekking along the marked paths of the rugged Wadi Ghul in the Jabal Shams area in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate when the accident occurred.

“One should give priority to safety by staying away from unstable cliffs, informing others of their plans, choosing trails suited to their fitness, carrying essential gear such as water, first-aid, navigation, and illumination, checking the weather, staying on marked paths, and avoiding selfies on dangerous ledges to prevent falls and injuries, and to use the service of a guide,” the ROP statement said.

While trekking or hiking are high adrenaline-pumping sport activities, thanks to the Sultanate of Oman’s unique terrain that complements mountain sports, they can also be dangerous if not carried out properly and under the supervision of an expert, and any sport activity for that matter.

Trekking involves inherent risks related to the natural environment, physical demands and potential for unforeseen circumstances. The key to safety is being well-informed and prepared for potential hazards and to make it very safe with proper planning, preparation and caution.

These precautions start from understanding one’s physical endurance to knowing the route and remembering to stay hydrated very often to keeping proper communication networks open.

Mahmoud bin Juma al Qasimi, a passionate Omani hiker who has been



While trekking or hiking are high adrenaline-pumping sport activities, thanks to the Sultanate of Oman’s unique terrain that complements mountain sports, they can also be dangerous if not carried out properly.

on the heights since 2017, advocates that mountain hiking and running are somewhat dangerous, especially if you’re not with a specialist who knows the area well, particularly in valleys where a life jacket is necessary.

“Through my mountain hiking, I’ve encountered many dangers, the most significant being dehydration due to insufficient water intake followed by the intense heat of the sun, descending steep slopes. These sports activities, which require strong physical fitness, continuous practice, and specific clothing, especially hiking boots and a backpack containing first aid supplies, food, and water.” He advises hikers to have a leader who knows the route and the area, as well as an experienced guide. Hiking at night is also dangerous due to the abundance of reptiles. Wireless communication devices should be available to the hike leader and their assistants.

Rahees Melekkandy, another enthusiast who knows the route map of most of the mountains, advises one to be honest about his/her fitness level and not to overestimate oneself.

“Before the trek, one should know the route, distance, weather, and difficulty level and keep someone informed about the plans and the expected return time. It is also important to wear comfortable trekking shoes, clothing, protection, and to keep sufficient water, energy snacks, a first-aid kit, and a fully charged phone.”

“Make sure one stays with the group and does not wander off alone away from the group. Also, shortcuts can be dangerous, and always follow marked trails and make sure to sip water to keep you hydrated even if you are not feeling thirsty. Be careful on slippery, rocky or steep paths, respect nature and don’t litter, harm plants or disturb animals,” he added.

SEZAD opens tender for new road project

MUSCAT: The Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) announced the issuance of a tender for the construction of a new road network with a total length of 30.8 kilometres in municipal plans where the public-benefit status has been lifted in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD).

The project covers several residential areas and the light and medium industries zone across seven sub-plans, comprising blocks 13, 53, 54, 55, 56, 60, and 61. OPAZ invited specialised and experienced companies to participate in the tender, which has been issued through the Isnad Platform, noting that the deadline for



The project covers several residential areas and the light and medium industries zone across seven sub-plans.

submitting bids is February 5.

The detailed designs of the new road network focus on enhancing the competitiveness of the municipal plans and enabling them to serve as

an attractive investment destination for investors interested in the commercial and industrial sectors within the Special Economic Zone at Duqm.

The road network project is among the initiatives implemented by the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones to enhance the efficiency of the transport system in the area, develop basic infrastructure, support economic and social development, and link the municipal plans with various residential and investment areas.

The project includes the construction of 30.8 km of local roads, installation of LED street lighting, development of rainwater drainage channels and box culverts for surface water runoff, as well as the provision of road safety features along the network.

Major Projects On Museums And Visitor Centres

01

Natural History Museum



- Governorate

: Muscat
- Location

: Oman Botanic Garden
- Current Project Status

: In The Process Of Tendering

02

Maritime History Museum



- Governorate

: South Sharqiyah
- Wilayat

: Sur
- Design

: Bilarab Bin Haitham Award For Architectural Design
- Consultant

: Ibrahim Jaidah
- Current Project Status

: In The Process Of Tendering And Value Engineering

03

Dibba Archaeological Visitor Centre



Governorate

Wilayat

Current Project Status

: Musandam

: Dibba

: Construction 90% Complete.

04

Qalhat Archaeological City Visitor Centre



Governorate

Wilayat

Current Project Status

: South Sharqiyah

: Sur

: In Tender Process

05

Bat, Al-Khutm And Al-Ayn Archaeological Sites Visitor Centre



Governorate

Wilayat

Current Project Status

: Al Dhahirah

: Ibri

: Tender Scheduled In The First Quarter 2026

WORLD

SHORT TAKES

XI URGES S KOREA’S
 LEE TO MAKE
 ‘RIGHT CHOICES’



Jens-Frederik Nielsen (2nd R), Prime Minister of Greenland, and MPs take part in a procession in Nuuk. — AFP

BEIJING: Chinese President Xi Jinping called on his visiting South Korean counterpart to join Beijing in making the “right strategic choices” in a world that is “becoming more complex and turbulent”, state media reported. Beijing and Seoul “bear important responsibilities” in upholding peace in the region, Xi said, noting that the sides “have broad common interests”. “They should firmly stand on the right side of history and make the right strategic choices.”

The South Korean leader then said he wished to open a “new phase” in relations, “based on the trust” between himself and Xi. And he vowed to “seek feasible alternatives together for peace on the Korean Peninsula”, footage broadcast by Seoul’s Yonhap news agency showed.

The leaders then witnessed the signing of “15 cooperation documents” spanning technological innovation, the environment, transportation and trade, Xinhua said. A state banquet followed the signing of the agreements, the report added. Lee hopes to secure pledges to expand economic cooperation with his country’s largest trading partner. — AFP

GREENLAND PRIME
 MINISTER REACTS TO
 TRUMP THREATS



Jens-Frederik Nielsen (2nd R), Prime Minister of Greenland, and MPs take part in a procession in Nuuk. — AFP

COPENHAGEN: President Donald Trump’s call that Greenland should become part of the United States was met with international condemnation on Monday as the autonomous Danish territory’s prime minister warned, “That’s enough now”.

Washington’s military intervention in Venezuela has reignited fears for Greenland, which Trump has repeatedly said he wants to annex, given its strategic location in the Arctic. While aboard Air Force One en route to Washington, Trump reiterated the goal. “We need Greenland from the standpoint of national security, and Denmark is not going to be able to do it,” he said in response to a reporter’s question. “We’ll worry about Greenland in about two months... let’s talk about Greenland in 20 days.”

The territory’s prime minister issued a clear warning: “That’s enough now.” “No more pressure. No more insinuations. No more fantasies of annexation,” Jens-Frederik Nielsen said on Facebook. “We are open to dialogue. We are open to discussions. But this must happen through the proper channels and with respect for international law.” Expressing its “solidarity” with Denmark on Monday, France’s foreign ministry spokesman Pascal Confavreux told television channel TF1 that “borders cannot be changed by force”. — AFP

UK TOUGHENS
 TACTICS TO
 CUT MIGRANT
 BOAT
 CROSSINGS

LONDON: UK authorities will deploy new counter-terror style powers to seize the phones of migrants who arrive by small boats from northern France, to tackle criminal gangs behind the crossings. The initiative is part of Labour Prime Minister Keir Starmer’s attempts to slash the number of migrant arrivals, and stem a surge in support for Brexit figurehead Nigel Farage’s anti-immigration party Reform UK. Over 41,000 people made the perilous sea journey across the Channel last year — the second highest tally since

records began in 2018. Police and immigration enforcement officers will confiscate phones and SIM cards from migrants at the Manston processing centre, near Ramsgate, on the southeast coast of England. The seizures will be allowed without the need to make an arrest under new legislation — the Border Security, Asylum and Immigration Bill — passed by parliament last year. Authorities hope the seizures will enable them to access information on phones such as contacts and maps to help disrupt the people

smuggling networks and prosecute the ringleaders. “We promised to restore order and control to our borders which means taking on the people smuggling networks behind this deadly trade,” Border Security Minister Alex Norris said. “That is exactly why we are implementing robust new laws with powerful offences to intercept, disrupt and dismantle these vile gangs faster than ever before and cut off their supply chains,” he added. Charities representing migrants have condemned the new measures. — AFP

Venezuela offers to help
 US after Maduro capture

VENEZUELA’S

acting president offered on Sunday to collaborate with the United States on an agenda focused on “shared development”, striking a conciliatory tone for the first time since US forces captured the oil-rich nation’s president, Nicolas Maduro. In a statement posted on social media, Acting President Delcy Rodriguez said her government was prioritising a move towards respectful relations with the United States, having earlier criticised the raid on Saturday as an illegal grab for the country’s national resources.

“We invite the US government to collaborate with us on an agenda of cooperation oriented towards shared development within the framework of international law to strengthen lasting community coexistence,” Rodriguez said. “President Donald Trump, our peoples and our region deserve peace and dialogue, not war.” Rodriguez, who also serves as oil minister, has long been considered the most pragmatic member of Maduro’s inner circle and Trump had said she was willing to work with the US.

Publicly, however, she and other officials had called the detentions of Maduro and his wife Cilia Flores a kidnapping and said Maduro remains the nation’s legitimate leader. Trump told reporters on Sunday that he could order another strike if Venezuela does not cooperate with US efforts to open up its oil industry and stop drug



Delcy Rodriguez, the acting President of Venezuela, attends a meeting with officials. — Reuters



We invite the US government to collaborate with us on an agenda of cooperation oriented towards shared development within the framework of international law to strengthen lasting community coexistence

Delcy Rodriguez

trafficking. Trump also threatened military action in Colombia and Mexico and said Cuba’s communist regime “looks like it’s ready to fall” on its own. The Colombian and Mexican embassies in Washington did not immediately return requests for comment.

Rodriguez’s statement came on the eve of Maduro’s scheduled appearance before a federal judge in New York. Trump administration officials have portrayed his seizure as a law-enforcement action to hold Maduro accountable for criminal charges filed in 2020 that accuse him of narco-terrorism conspiracy.

But Trump has also said other factors were at play, saying the raid was prompted in part by an influx of Venezuelan immigrants to the United States and the country’s decision to nationalise US oil

interests decades ago. “We’re taking back what they stole,” he said aboard Air Force One as he returned on Sunday to Washington from Florida. “We’re in charge.”

Oil companies will return to Venezuela and rebuild the country’s petroleum industry, Trump said. “They’re going to spend billions of dollars and they’re going to take the oil out of the ground,” he said.

Maduro, 63, faces charges that accuse him of providing support to major drug trafficking groups, such as the Sinaloa Cartel and the Tren de Aragua gang.

Prosecutors say he directed cocaine trafficking routes, used the military to protect shipments, sheltered violent trafficking groups and used presidential facilities to move drugs. — Reuters

ISRAEL STICKS TO BAN ON GAZA MEDIA ACCESS

GAZA: Israel’s government has told the Supreme Court that a ban on international media access to Gaza should remain in place due to security risks in the Palestinian territory, according to a court submission. Since the outbreak of the Gaza war in October 2023, Israeli authorities have barred foreign journalists from independently entering the devastated territory. Instead, Israel has allowed only a limited number of reporters to enter Gaza on a case-by-case basis, embedded with its military forces inside the blockaded territory.

The Foreign Press Association (FPA), which represents hundreds of foreign journalists working in Israel and the Palestinian territories, filed a petition with the Supreme Court in 2024 seeking immediate and unrestricted access for international media to the Gaza Strip. Since then, the court has given several extensions to the Israeli authorities to come up with a plan, but at a hearing last month, it set January 4 as a final deadline. — AFP

ANNOUNCED INVESTIGATION

Lithuania assesses telecom cable damage



Lithuanian experts are studying the damage to an undersea fibre-optic cable in the Baltic Sea linking the country to Latvia, the country’s NKVC crisis management centre said. The damage was first reported by Latvian authorities on Sunday. “We are assessing what the possible consequences of this entire incident,” Vilmantas Vitkauskas, the centre head, said. Latvian Prime Minister Evika Silina said that “the incident has not affected Latvian communication users”. — AFP

SECURITY SHAKE-UP

Zelensky ousts Ukraine’s top intelligence chief



Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky ousted the country’s security service chief in the latest change to Kyiv’s top intelligence positions, almost four years into the Russian attack. Zelensky and Vasyl Maliuk, a popular military leader who won praise for overseeing ambitious operations against Russian forces, said that Maliuk was stepping down as head of the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU). Zelensky said that he had met Maliuk and thanked him for his service. — AFP

RECONSTRUCTION EFFORTS

EU chief von der Leyen to visit Syria



EU chief Ursula von der Leyen will visit Syria this week on a first trip to the country since the fall of Bashar al Assad. Von der Leyen will head to Syria as part of a tour of the Middle East that will also see her visit Jordan and Lebanon, spokeswoman Paula Pinho said. The EU is a key financial donor for Damascus and has rolled back sanctions imposed during the civil war to try to boost reconstruction efforts. — AFP

Oman’s 2026 budget prioritises people and progress



THE Sultanate of Oman’s 2026 Budget has been making waves, and for good reason, as the government’s focus on social and development aspects is a clear indication of its commitment to improving the lives of its citizens. With a strong emphasis on healthcare, education and infrastructure, the budget aims to boost economic growth and create a better quality of life for Omanis.

One of the standout features of the budget is the increased allocation for the health sector. The government recognises the importance of a robust healthcare system, and the additional funding will go a long way in upgrading medical facilities and services.

This is particularly significant in the wake of the Covid pandemic, which highlighted the need for a resilient healthcare infrastructure. Education is another key area that has received a significant boost. The budget includes plans to upgrade schools and universities, providing students with modern facilities and resources to excel.

By investing in education, the Sultanate of Oman is investing in its future, and this will undoubtedly have a positive impact on the country’s long-term growth and development.

The budget also places a strong emphasis on infrastructure development. Plans are underway to improve transportation

networks, including roads, airports and ports. This will not only enhance connectivity within the country, but also boost trade and commerce, making Oman an attractive destination for investors and tourists alike.

In addition to these development initiatives, the budget also includes measures to support low-income families and individuals. The government is committed to ensuring that all Omanis have access to basic necessities like housing, food and healthcare. The increased social welfare allocations will go a long way in eliminating poverty and promoting social equality.

Oman’s 2026 budget is a testament to the government’s commitment to creating a better future for its citizens. By prioritising social and development aspects, the government is laying the foundation for sustainable growth and prosperity.

As the Sultanate of Oman moves forward, it will be exciting to see these initiatives come to life and transform the lives of its people. The budget’s focus on sustainability and economic diversification is also noteworthy, as the Sultanate of Oman is keen to reduce its reliance on oil revenues and create a more diversified economy. The budget includes initiatives to support entrepreneurship, innovation, and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which will help drive economic growth and create new

With a strong emphasis on healthcare, education and infrastructure, the budget aims to boost economic growth and create a better quality of life for Omanis

opportunities for Omanis.

Overall, the 2026 budget is a bold and ambitious plan to build a better future for its citizens. With its focus on social and development aspects, the budget is a step in the right direction. Additionally, the budget’s emphasis on transparency and accountability is a welcome move. The government’s commitment to ensuring that budget allocations are utilised efficiently and effectively will help build trust with citizens and stakeholders. The focus on digital transformation is also noteworthy, as it will help drive innovation and improve service delivery. The private sector is also expected to play a significant role in driving economic growth, and the budget includes initiatives to support entrepreneurship and SMEs. With the right policies and support, Oman is well-positioned to become a hub for innovation and entrepreneurship in the region.

As Oman implements its 2026 budget, it will be crucial to ensure that the benefits of growth are shared equitably among all citizens. The government’s commitment to social welfare and poverty reduction is a step in the right direction, and it’s essential to continue to prioritise the needs of vulnerable groups. With careful planning and implementation, the 2026 budget has the potential to transform the country’s future and improve the lives of its citizens.

MADURO’S FALL TESTS VENEZUELA’S RULING ‘CLUB’

JAVIER TOVAR

The ousting of Nicolas Maduro as Venezuela’s president puts to the test his “Chavista” factions that have governed the oil-rich nation for 27 years.

What happens to the so-called “club of five” powerful leftist figures, now that two of its most important members - Maduro and his wife Cilia Flores — have been captured and sent to the United States to face trial?

Anointed by his mentor Hugo Chavez before the latter’s death in 2013, Maduro kept a tight grip on power until his capture by US forces on Saturday. Maduro ruled alongside Flores and three other powerful figures include former vice-president Delcy Rodriguez — now Venezuela’s interim leader - her brother Jorge, and their rival: hardline Interior Minister Diosdado Cabello.

“It’s like a club of five,” a diplomatic source in Caracas said. “They can speak, they have a voice in the government, but Maduro was the one who kept the balance. Now that he’s gone, who knows?”

The image of Maduro handcuffed and blindfolded as US forces transported him to New York to face trial made headlines around the world. During months in the crosshairs of US President Donald Trump, who accused him of being a drug trafficker, the 63-year-old former bus driver deflected pressure by dancing to techno music at near-daily rallies, always broadcast live, as he chanted the mantra “No war, yes peace!” - in English. Frequently underestimated, Maduro managed to eliminate internal resistance and keep the opposition at bay. Murals, songs and films celebrated him, as did the animated cartoon “Super Moustache,” in which he appeared as a superhero, fighting imperialism alongside “Super Cilita,” who is based on Flores. Toy figurines of both characters were also produced. The military swore absolute loyalty to him, led by Defence Minister Vladimir Padrino Lopez. Though defiant at first and calling for Maduro’s return, Venezuela’s interim leader Rodriguez called for a “balanced and respectful relationship” between the South American country and the United States on Sunday. “The top level of government has survival as its absolute priority,” Antulio Rosales, political scientist and professor at York University in Canada, said. Rodriguez controlled the economy and the oil industry as vice-president while her brother Jorge is the speaker of parliament.

They are known for their incendiary rhetoric, often mixing belligerence, irony and insults against the “enemies of the fatherland.” — AFP

Climate adaptation more than covers its cost...

HUMANITY has long learned to live with extreme weather. Much of the Netherlands would be under water were it not for centuries of ingenious adaptation to the constant threat of flooding. Likewise, ancient communities on the banks of the Tigris and Euphrates developed ways to capture and direct excess water to nourish and protect fields.

But the number of places exposed to extreme weather will only grow. According to new research from the McKinsey Global Institute, Advancing adaptation: Mapping costs from cooling to coastal defences, the world spends \$190 billion per year on investments in 20 key adaptation measures that protect roughly 1.2 billion people. But three billion more people, over three-quarters of whom live in low-income regions, have only limited protection. Extending developed-economy standards of protection to all exposed places would require \$540 billion annually. That means there is a \$350-billion gap, 60 per cent of which is needed to help low-income areas build greater resilience. Moreover, adaptation costs will rise. On current emissions trajectories, the world is likely to reach 2° Celsius above pre-industrial levels by about 2050, exposing an additional 2.2 billion people to heat stress and another 1.1 billion to drought, for example.

Our analysis finds that at 2°C warming, the world would need to spend \$1.2 trillion annually to protect everyone exposed to climate hazards at developed-economy standards, or almost 1 per cent of GDP in affected places, by 2050. More than three-quarters of that spending would go towards



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protecting against heat and drought.

That may sound expensive, but the benefits of that adaptation would exceed the cost by roughly seven times. Air conditioners not only protect but also improve the productivity of indoor workers. Cooling shelters save lives in heatwaves. Irrigation prevents crops from dying in hot, dry conditions. Sea dikes shield assets along coastlines from flooding. If deployed effectively, such solutions deliver immense value.

But recognising that adaptation is a good investment does not guarantee that the money will be spent. After all, the world spends only one-third of what’s required today, and achieving developed-economy standards of protection at 2°C by 2050 will require 6.2 times as much as what is spent today. A lack of capacity to spend, competing priorities, collective-action problems, and other factors all threaten to hamper implementation.

Moreover, the challenges of scaling up adaptation could look very different in developed and developing countries. For example, the costs would be highest by far in Sub-Saharan Africa, reaching 3 per cent of projected GDP in exposed places, or about 50 per cent more than governments in the region spent as a share of GDP to service their external debt in 2024. The shares of GDP needed for protection at developed-economy standards by 2°C in the Middle East and North Africa and in India are somewhat lower; and in North America, they are lower still, totalling around 0.3 per cent of GDP in exposed places.

Economic development can help improve the capacity to spend, but even if adaptation spending

grew in lockstep with GDP growth, only about 60 per cent of what is needed would be covered globally at 2°C. If lower-income regions were to increase spending in line with their anticipated economic growth, it would cover only one-quarter of the costs of adapting at 2°C. Moreover, the presence or absence of adaptation measures can itself influence the pace of economic development. Drought or flooding can slow income growth for smallholder farmers, and heat stress can affect the productivity of outdoor workers.

So, what can be done, and what role do different actors play? The good news is that many households can implement some adaptation measures on their own, particularly for heat. If made affordable, solutions like passive cooling (shade, natural ventilation, and so forth), reflective roofs, fans, or air conditioners can offer meaningful protection in many cases.

But governments also have an important role to play, especially in lower-income areas and communities. They can finance critical infrastructure like coastal protection, and establish cooling shelters to protect the public. They can also create incentives to adapt, by setting and enforcing standards that enhance resilience, while raising awareness of risks. And they can deploy targeted subsidies or procurement programmes to make adaptation more affordable for households and small firms.

At the same time, businesses, particularly large ones, can manage their own exposures. They can also innovate to help make adaptation measures more affordable and effective, such as by offering better and cheaper cooling systems.

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SPORTS

QUARTERFINAL DRAW



The draw ceremony being held at the Oman Olympic Committee headquarters. — **Huda al Bahri**

MINISTRY’S SHIELD HANDBALL DRAW SETS UP QUARTERFINAL SHOWDOWNS

RIYADH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JAN 5

The quarterfinal draw for the 15th edition of the Ministry’s Shield Handball Championship for the 2025–26 season was held on Monday at the Oman Olympic Committee headquarters in Muscat, setting the stage for a series of highly competitive encounters, most notably an early showdown between defending champions Oman Club and Muscat Club.

Under the auspices of Juma bin Said al Mahrami, Secretary-General of Seeb Club and in the presence of representatives from the eight participating clubs, Seeb, Majees, Oman Club, Al Amerat, Muscat, Al Shabab, Al Musannah and Nizwa.

The quarterfinal fixtures will see Seeb face Majees, while holders Oman Club take on Muscat in what is expected to be the standout tie of the round, the remaining two fixtures will pit Al Amerat against Al Shabab and Al Musannah against Nizwa.

The matches between Seeb and Majees, and Oman and Muscat, will be staged following the conclusion of Oman’s senior national team participation in the 22nd Asian Men’s Handball Championship, which will be hosted by Kuwait from January 15 to 29 and serves as a qualifier for the 2027 IHF World Championship in Germany. The dates for the other two quarterfinal matches will be announced later this month by the competition committee.

During the draw ceremony, Yaqoob al Qasmi, a member of the Oman Handball Association’s Competitions Committee, explained the tournament regulations, noting that quarterfinal matches will be played on a knockout basis, with any draws decided directly by seven metre throws without extra-time. The extra-time will only be applied in the semifinals and final, in accordance with international handball regulations.

DEMANDING TEST
Commenting on Al Shabab’s quarterfinal encounter against Al Amerat, Al Shabab representative Ahmed bin Hilal al Balushi said the match would be a demanding test.

“Al Amerat are a well-organised side with quality players, We respect them greatly, but our ambition is to reach the semifinals and compete strongly for the title. We will prepare thoroughly for this challenge,” he said.

Meanwhile, Al Amerat head coach Khalid al Araimi expressed confidence in his team’s readiness, stating: “Facing Al Shabab is an important challenge for us at this stage. We are aiming to deliver a performance that reflects the work we have put in, focusing on the fine details that often decide knockout matches.”

The Ministry’s Shield is regarded as one of the most prestigious domestic handball competitions in Oman, offering clubs a valuable platform to assess their technical readiness and enhance their competitive presence throughout the season.

Muscat Club currently top the tournament’s all-time honours list with eight titles, followed by Oman Club with four championships, while Ahli Sidab have claimed the trophy on two occasions, underlining the competition’s long standing history of intense rivalry among Omani clubs.

Queiroz to meet OFA chief on his future as coach



Oman head coach Carlos Queiroz is expected to return in Muscat by mid-January for talks that could define the Red Warriors’ long-term future.

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JAN 5

OMAN head coach Carlos Queiroz is expected to return in Muscat by mid-January for talks that could define the Red Warriors’ long-term future. The veteran Portuguese coach has been away in Portugal since December 20, spending the Christmas and New Year period in his homeland.

His return is expected to trigger high-level discussions at the Oman Football Association (OFA), amid growing anticipation over whether his tenure will be extended beyond its initial term.

According to Saif al Jabri, spokesperson of the OFA, Queiroz is scheduled to meet Sayyid Suleiman bin Hamoud al Busaidy, OFA Chairman, shortly after his arrival. “The Portuguese coach will meet the chairman upon his return to Muscat to discuss several topics, including his future with the national team and, in the event of a renewal, the proposed programme

for the next phase,” Al Jabri told Oman Observer, adding that the agenda and final outcomes of the meeting will be disclosed at a later stage.

The next key events for Oman team will be taking part in the 27th edition of the Arabian Gulf Cup which will take place in Riyadh city, Saudi Arabia, from September 23 to October 6 and then the AFC Asian Cup qualifiers later this year.

Queiroz officially began his assignment with the Oman national team on July 21, 2025, signing a one-year contract that placed him in charge during a crucial transitional period.

HIGH-PRESSURE FIXTURES
Despite the relatively short time frame, his tenure has been tested immediately by high-pressure competitive fixtures. Under Queiroz’s supervision, Oman competed in two major tournaments including: the Playoff Stage of 2026 Fifa World Cup Asian Qualifiers and the Fifa Arab Cup which served as benchmarks for evaluating progress and squad depth.

In the November World Cup qualifiers, Oman were drawn into a challenging group alongside Qatar and the UAE. The campaign began as the Red Warriors held hosts Qatar to a goalless draw in Doha. Then, Oman had suffered a narrow 2-1 defeat, finishing third in the group.

Qatar topped the standings to secure direct qualification, while UAE ended in second place and Oman third.

In December, Oman’s Arab Cup campaign followed a similar narrative of competitiveness as they exited at the group stage, finishing third in Group B with four points, narrowly missing a place in the knockout rounds. Oman opened their campaign with a hard-fought goalless draw against Morocco, the eventual champions and one of Africa’s strongest sides, a result that drew praise for tactical discipline and defensive resilience.

The second match saw Oman suffer a 2-1 defeat against Saudi Arabia, despite delivering a competitive performance. The campaign concluded on a positive note with a 2-1 victory over Comoros.

Al Bashayer overcome Nizwa as Seeb rout Salalah

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, JAN 5

The second round of the first stage of the Oman Basketball League Finals for the 2025–26 season produced two standout results, with Al Bashayer defeating Nizwa 89–75, while Seeb claimed a commanding 110–39 victory over Salalah.

With these results, Al Bashayer moved up to 12 points, Seeb to 11 points, while Nizwa remained on 8 points and Salalah on 7.

The opening match saw an intense and fast-paced contest between Al Bashayer and Nizwa, before Al Bashayer gradually asserted their superiority thanks to their strong team chemistry and balance in both offence and defence. Demont Harris, Noah al Mahrouqi, Hadeet Beit Bakhit, Ibrahim Thomas, and Osama al Riyami led the scoring for Al Bashayer, while Kingsley, Mohammed al Anqoodi, and Saeed Ghassan stood out for Nizwa.

Al Bashayer made a strong start, imposing their style of play early and finishing the first quarter ahead 23–14. They maintained control in the second quarter, adding 22 points to Nizwa’s 16 to go into half-time with a 45–30 lead.

Nizwa showed improvement offensively in the third quarter, scoring 21 points, but Al Bashayer kept their edge with 22 points of their own to extend their lead to 67–51 at the end of the quarter.

In the final quarter, Nizwa pushed hard



Salalah and Seeb players in action during the final round of Oman Basketball League. — **Ammar al Musafir**

and scored 24 points in an attempt to close the gap, but Al Bashayer managed the game intelligently, adding 22 points to seal an 89–75 victory.

The match was officiated by international referee Issam al Siyabi as first referee, Mazin al Hilali as second referee, and international referee Wafa al Samari as third referee, with Maryam

al Zadjali, Huda al Hinai and Majid al Akhzami on the scorers’ table.

SEEB DOMINATE
In the second match, Seeb delivered a powerful attacking display to underline their title ambitions, sweeping aside Salalah with a dominant 110–39 win after taking full control from the second quarter onwards.

Ahmed al Sinani, Al Waqas al Hinai, Abdulrahman al Shueibi and Zakariya al Wihaibi led the scoring for Seeb, while Mohammed al Hooti and Majid al Shajabi were the most prominent players for Salalah.

The first quarter was relatively balanced, with Seeb edging it 19–17, before their offence exploded in the second quarter, where they scored 36 points compared to just six for Salalah, taking a commanding 55–23 lead into half-time.

Seeb continued their dominance in the third quarter, adding 34 points while Salalah managed only five, stretching the margin to 86–28. In the final quarter, Seeb maintained the same rhythm, scoring 24 points to Salalah’s 10, completing an emphatic 110–39 victory.

The match was officiated by international referee Rashid al Mushaifri as first referee, Ali al Salmani as second referee, and international referee Thani al Khalasi as third referee, with Omaima al Hajri, Huda al Hinai and Hafez Awlad Ahmed at the scorers’ table.

EIGHT MATCHES



In Group 1, the National Centre for Statistics & Information defeated the University of Technology and Applied Sciences 2–1. — **Faisal al Balushi**

STRONG START TO 2026 GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS EIGHTS FOOTBALL

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, JAN 5

The group stage of the 2026 Government Institutions Eights Football Championship officially began on Sunday evening, organised by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth (MoCSY), with eight matches played at Al Amal Sports Club Stadium. The opening round saw strong spectator attendance and lively engagement from representatives of the participating institutions, marking an enthusiastic start that reflects the growing importance of this tournament on the government’s sporting calendar.

The first day produced a range of results that highlighted the close competitive levels across teams. In Group 1, the National Centre for Statistics & Information defeated the University of Technology and Applied Sciences 2–1, while the Ministry of Finance secured a 1–0 victory over the Authority of Projects, Tenders & Local Content.

In Group 2, the Civil Aviation Authority and the Ministry of Energy and Minerals drew 2–2, whereas MoCSY claimed a narrow 1–0 win against Muscat Municipality, propelling the ministry’s team to the top of the group after the opening round.

Group 3 saw the Ministry of Labour continue their strong form with a comprehensive 4–0 victory over the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs, and the Central Bank of Oman outplayed the Social Protection Fund 3–0, underscoring both teams’ ambitions to qualify.

In Group 4, matches were tightly contested: the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology drew 1–1 with University Medical City, and the Ministry of Information and the Ministry of Education played out an exciting 2–2 draw, with end-to-end action until the final minutes.

These results signal a strong opening to the championship, which features 32 teams divided into eight groups.

Ibrahim al Shibli, championship director, affirmed that the second edition has begun with excellent organisation, attendance, and level of competition. He explained that the tournament was officially launched on December 24, 2025 under the auspices of Basil al Rawas, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth for Sports and Youth, with wide participation from government institutions. Thirty-two organisations were drawn into eight groups of four, and early impressions from participating teams have been overwhelmingly positive, especially from newcomers.

The organising committee introduced several improvements this year, including the appointment of specialist referees and technical support from the Oman Football Association, aimed at enhancing professionalism and match quality. The championship will continue until January 28.

Similarly, Mohammed al Brashdi from the Ministry of Information highlighted that the tournament offers a significant opportunity to enhance competition and interaction among ministry employees. He noted his team’s diligent preparation despite work-related challenges and affirmed their aim to perform well and compete strongly for advancement.



The Ministry of Information and the Ministry of Education played out an exciting 2–2 draw.

Head hits back for Australia after Root’s majestic 160

AN imperious Joe Root hit a magnificent 160 to drive England to 384 in the fifth and final Ashes Test on Monday before Travis Head let rip to haul Australia back into the contest with a rapid-fire unbeaten 91.

Root’s superb innings, his 41st ton to match Ricky Ponting, was only ended courtesy of a brilliant caught-and-bowled by Michael Nesar, who finished with 4-60.

Australia were left to negotiate the final session of day two at a sold-out Sydney Cricket Ground, which they did for the loss of Jake Weatherald (21) and Marnus Labuschagne (48).

By stumps the hosts — who have already won the series — had raced to 166-2 with nightwatchman Nesar on one alongside Head. “I think it’s set interestingly,” Root told TNT Sports. He added: “Most important for us is not panicking, not dwelling too much on what happened here.

“It’s how we respond tomorrow morning and maximise that chance first up.”

Weatherald, who needed a big score to stave off the critics, again failed to live up to expectations since making his debut at the first Test in Perth. He was dropped twice in the space of three balls, by Root then Ben Duckett, before Ben Stokes trapped him lbw.

But Head, who like Root has slammed two centuries this series, was in the zone.

He clattered three boundaries off the second over from Matthew Potts, in the side for the injured Gus Atkinson, and there was no let-up, blitzing a quickfire 50 off 55 balls.

Labuschagne was also in good touch, stroking seven boundaries before thick-edging Stokes to Jacob Bethell at gully.

Labuschagne and Stokes had clashed between overs, with the England captain aiming an expletive at the batsman.

The hosts lead the series 3-1 and have already retained the Ashes, with England desperate for another win after victory at the previous Test in Melbourne.

“Fresh start tomorrow,” said Nesar. “But the wicket seems to be quickening up just a little bit, so we’re going to be mindful of that tomorrow.”



England’s Joe Root celebrates after reaching his century during the fifth Ashes Test in Sydney. — **Reuters**

ROOT JOINS PONTING

England resumed at 211-3 but lost Harry Brook (84), Stokes (0) and Jamie Smith (46) before lunch.

Will Jacks (27), Brydon Carse (1) and Josh Tongue (0), along with Root, departed in the second session.

The day belonged to Root, who started on 72 and reached an almost chanceless century off 146 balls to reaffirm his status as an all-time great.

The 35-year-old had begun the series under pressure after failing to make a hundred in Australia over three previous Ashes tours. He snapped the drought with an unbeaten 138 in the day-night Test at Brisbane and his exploits in Sydney drew him level third with Australia’s Ponting on the all-time century-makers’ list, with 41.

Only India’s Sachin Tendulkar (51) and South Africa’s Jacques Kallis (45) have scored more Test centuries.

Root and Brook came together with England in trouble at 57-3 on Sunday, with both eyeing big centuries on an ideal batting deck. But Brook only lasted five balls on

Monday, adding six to his overnight 78 before dabbing at a Scott Boland delivery and edging into the safe hands of Steve Smith at slip. It ended a 169-run partnership, not just England’s best of the series but the biggest by either team, surpassing Head and Alex Carey’s 162 in Adelaide.

Stokes only survived 11 balls before getting the faintest of edges off Mitchell Starc to Carey. Jamie Smith lived dangerously and was fortunate to survive after chipping Cameron Green to Labuschagne at cover on 22. He began walking off but replays showed Green overstepped and it was a no-ball.

He added another 24 before medium-pacer Labuschagne bagged him in his first over. The run rate slowed significantly after lunch when the new ball was taken, but Root persisted, passing 150 for a 17th time, just one behind the legendary Don Bradman and three short of Tendulkar.

He and Jacks put on 52 for the seventh wicket until Jacks sent a leading edge to Green in the gully off Nesar. Root was ninth man out and Tongue followed without any addition to the score. — **AFP**

Yalla Shabab retain crown in OC Premier Division

MUSCAT: For Yalla Shabab, success has become a pattern. Their undefeated run in the Oman Cricket Premier Division 2025-26, capped by a win over Oman Stallions, confirmed their consistency and highlighted the sustained excellence of Chaitanya Khimji-owned teams in Oman’s domestic cricket.

For the second successive season, both teams ended as champions and runners-up respectively in the Premier Division.

Five wins from five matches underlined not just a championship season but the ongoing development of a culture of success under Chaitanya’s long-term vision.

The final act unfolded when Yalla Shabab defeated Oman Stallions in a clash that symbolised both rivalry and shared excellence.

At the close of the league, Yalla Shabab topped the six-team single round-robin table unbeaten with 10 points, while Oman Stallions finished as deserving runners-up on eight points.

Muscat CT came third with six points, followed by Majees with four, IAS (Ibn Abdul Samad



Yalla Shabab and Oman Stallion players celebrate 1-2 finish in Premier Division League.



CHAITANYA
KHIMJI

Chaitanya Khimji-owned teams dominated Oman Cricket’s 50-over league, finishing as the top two sides with Oman Stallions as runners-up

Eng & Cons) on two, and Renaissance CT, which failed to open their account.

For Chaitanya, whose involvement in Oman’s domestic cricket has steadily transformed teams into title contenders and talent nurseries, the success carried deeper meaning than silverware alone. “It’s been four

victorious seasons since the time I have been part of these two families. Yalla Shabab and Oman Stallions, you have always made me proud on and off the field. Thank you so much,” Chaitanya said, reflecting on a journey that has blended performance with purpose.

Yalla Shabab’s 2025-26 campaign was built on discipline, clarity of roles, and calm leadership under captain Saishiv Narayan, whose side showed remarkable composure across conditions and opponents.

CONSISTENCY

Whether defending totals or chasing with assurance, Yalla Shabab played with the confidence of a team that knew how to win — and expected to.

That consistency has become a hallmark of

Chaitanya-owned teams, a theme he highlighted while celebrating yet another successful season.

“Back-to-back titles are never an accident; they are the rewards for discipline, belief and relentless teamwork.

We celebrate two teams who turned consistency into a champions’ legacy in the Oman Premier 50 Overs League.”

Oman Stallions, led by Mohammed Nadeem, once again proved to be formidable contenders.

Their eight-point finish and runners-up position continued a pattern of sustained excellence, even if the final hurdle remained just out of reach this season.

While team balance defined Yalla Shabab’s success, the league also showcased individual performances of the highest quality.

Zohaib Amanat emerged as Yalla Shabab’s batting

cornerstone, scoring 228 runs in four innings at an average of 57.0, consistently providing stability at the top order.

Across the league, Ashish Odedra of Muscat CT finished as the leading run-scorer with 251 runs at an average of 62.75, while Oman Stallions’ Ameer Zeeshan was breathtakingly efficient, amassing 216 runs at an astonishing average of 108.0, highlighting the depth of batting talent in the competition.

On the bowling front, Oman Stallions’ Hassnain Ali Shah led the charts with 15 wickets in five innings, regularly turning matches with pace and precision. Jay Odedra of Yalla Shabab, with 10 wickets, provided crucial breakthroughs, while Renaissance’s pacer Sufyan Mehmood finished second-best with 13 wickets from five innings.

The top two teams have now sent seven members into the Oman squad of the ICC Men’s T20 World Cup. “Champions are remembered, but back-to-back champions make history,” said Chaitanya. “Congratulations to both teams on an extraordinary achievement.”

SPORTS

TURBULENT SPELL



Manchester United manager Ruben Amorim before the match against AFC Bournemouth at the Vitality Stadium, Bournemouth, Britain - April 27, 2025. — Reuters

AMORIM SACKED BY MAN UTD AFTER 14-MONTH REIGN

LONDON: Ruben Amorim was sacked by Manchester United on Monday, bringing a dramatic end to his turbulent 14-month spell as manager of the struggling Premier League giants.

The dismissal of the Portuguese follows growing tensions with Old Trafford bosses, including director of football Jason Wilcox, over recent days.

The club, sixth in the Premier League table after a 1-1 draw at Leeds on Sunday, issued a statement saying Amorim had “departed his role as head coach of Manchester United”, thanking him for his service.

“The club’s leadership has reluctantly made the decision that it is the right time to make a change,” United said in their statement.

“This will give the team the best opportunity of the highest possible Premier League finish.”

Current under-18s coach Darren Fletcher, a former United midfielder and technical director between 2021 and 2024, will take charge of the team against struggling Burnley on Wednesday.

The BBC said the club were planning to appoint a caretaker boss for the rest of the season.

Names in the frame for the full-time job include Enzo Maresca, who left Chelsea last week, Crystal Palace boss Oliver Glasner and former England manager Gareth Southgate.

RIISING TENSIONS

Amorim had hinted at deep frustrations on Friday, suggesting he was not being fully backed in the transfer market. And he made a string of eye-catching comments after Sunday’s draw at Elland Road, where he stressed he was United’s manager rather than “just the coach”.

The Portuguese told the scouting department and Wilcox “to do their job” during a blockbuster end to a post-match press conference that raised major doubts over his future.

And he repeatedly suggested to the media that he would leave when his contract expired in 18 months’ time. But reports on Monday said United’s decision to axe their manager was due to the lack of progress rather than a power struggle.

The dismissal is a dismal end for Amorim, who won just 25 of his 63 games at United in all competitions during the shortest reign for a permanent manager since David Moyes was sacked just eight months into his tenure in 2014.

He had the worst win ratio (32 per cent), the worst goals-conceded-per-game ratio (1.53) and the lowest clean-sheet ratio (15 per cent) of any United boss in the Premier League.

Amorim arrived at Old Trafford to replace Erik ten Hag in November 2024 as one of the most sought-after coaches in world football following a successful stint at Sporting Lisbon, where he won two league titles. But he was powerless to stop United’s slide to a 15th-place finish in the Premier League — their worst campaign for 51 years — at one stage describing his team as “maybe the worst” in the history of the club.

Amorim had the chance to end the 2024-25 campaign on a high in Bilbao but United lost the Europa League final against Tottenham and missed out on European football this season as a result. The club backed their manager in the summer transfer window, spending more than £200 million (\$269 million) on new signings including Bryan Mbeumo, Benjamin Sesko and Matheus Cunha.

But they have again flattered to deceive, winning just eight of their 20 league games so far and falling 17 points behind leaders Arsenal.

Amorim has been hit by injuries and a number of players are on Africa Cup of Nations duty but he has been criticised for sticking rigidly to his preferred 3-4-3 formation despite evidence it was not the best fit for his players. His exit leaves the club searching for their seventh permanent manager since the retirement of Alex Ferguson, who left as a Premier League champion in 2013.

Since then, apart from the occasional cup success, the 20-time English champions have been also-rans, overshadowed by bitter rivals Manchester City and Liverpool. — AFP



Morocco’s Brahim Diaz celebrates with the man of the match trophy after the CAF Africa Cup of Nations Morocco 2026 Round of 16 match against Tanzania at the Prince Moulay Abdellah Stadium, Rabat, Morocco. — Reuters

MOROCCO ENTER QUARTERS AS CAMEROON KNOCK OUT SA

A BRAHIM

DIAZ goal sent Morocco through to the Africa Cup of Nations quarterfinals at Tanzania’s expense on Sunday, with Cameroon now standing in the way of the hosts after the Indomitable Lions edged South Africa 2-1 in their last-16 clash.

Real Madrid winger Diaz scored once in each of Morocco’s three group matches at the tournament and maintained his goal-a-game record with the 64th-minute strike that sealed a 1-0 victory at the Prince Moulay Abdellah Stadium in Rabat.

He is the first Moroccan player to find the net in four consecutive Afcon matches and his celebrations included holding up a shirt belonging to injured midfielder Azzedine Ounahi. Diaz later dedicated the last-16 victory to his teammate, who arrived at the stadium using crutches and has been ruled out of the rest of the competition with a calf injury. The goal came after Morocco squandered numerous chances while stretching their unbeaten run to 23 matches — their last loss was to South Africa at the 2024 Afcon.

Paris Saint-Germain defender Achraf Hakimi, the African player of the year, set up the winning goal as he made his first start in the tournament having recovered from an ankle injury. Morocco were favourites for several reasons, including home advantage, the backing of almost 70,000 supporters, and lying 101 places above Tanzania in the world rankings.

However, it was Tanzania who had the



Cameroon’s #26 Christian Kofane shoots the ball past South Africa’s #19 Nkosinathi Sibisi during the Africa Cup of Nations round of 16 match at Al Medina Stadium in Rabat. — AFP

first chance in the third minute, but Saimon Msuva misconnected with a Selemani Mwalimu cross.

Morocco had the ball in the net after 15 minutes as Ismael Saibari nodded Abdessamad Ezzalzouli’s free-kick past goalkeeper Hussein Masaranga, but the goal was ruled out for offside. The pressure from the hosts mounted in the second half and Hakimi rifled a free-kick against the crossbar before the goal finally arrived. Hakimi teed up Diaz, who beat Masaranga at his near post with an angled shot from close range.

“The reading of the game is simple: we only started playing in the second half but we hands down deserved to go through,” said Morocco coach Walid Regragui.

It was a valiant effort from Tanzania in their first ever appearance in the knockout stages, but the 2027 co-hosts head home having still never won a game at the Cup of

Nations in 13 attempts. “I am so proud of what my team produced,” said Tanzania’s Argentinian coach Miguel Angel Gamondi. “They showed that the gap between Morocco and us is not as big as people think. We will come back stronger, I am convinced of that.”

MOROCCO TO FACE CAMEROON

Morocco will now face Cameroon on Friday after the Indomitable Lions got the better of South Africa at Al Medina Stadium across Rabat in Sunday’s late game.

Goals either side of half-time by Junior Tchamadeu and Christian Kofane made the difference for Cameroon against a South Africa team coached by Hugo Broos, the Belgian who led the Indomitable Lions to their fifth continental title in Gabon in 2017.

Tchamadeu, the London-born Stoke City full-back, opened the scoring from close range in the 34th minute after a deflected shot fell into his path. Teenage Bayer Leverkusen forward Christian Kofane then headed in the crucial second goal two minutes after half-time.

A late rally from South Africa saw Evidence Makgopa pull one back on 88 minutes, but Cameroon nervously held on.

Cameroon, the five-time continental champions, can now go into their quarterfinal showdown with Morocco in relaxed mood, knowing the pressure is on the host country.

“I want to savour this victory first of all. The game against Morocco is still a long way away,” said Cameroon coach David Pagou, who only took over the team days before the tournament began. — AFP

Oman to host Arab club chess with 10 teams

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, JAN 5

The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Oman Chess Committee (OCC), is hosting the Arab Clubs Chess Championship from January 8 to 14 at the Sohar Sports Complex in North Al Batinah Governorate, with the participation of 10 Arab clubs representing some of the strongest teams in the region.

The tournament will be played under the Swiss system over seven rounds, with a time control of 90 minutes per player plus a 30-second increment per move, ensuring a high level of competition and allowing players to showcase their technical and tactical abilities.

Each club will participate with five players, four main players and one reserve, adding depth to the competition and giving teams greater tactical flexibility.

Three clubs will represent Oman: Masirah,



Salalah and Nakhal, alongside prominent Arab clubs including Fujairah and Sharjah from the United Arab Emirates, Tadhamun Shabwa Club from Yemen, Palestine Society Club from Palestine, Peshmerga Sports Club from Iraq, Al Rowad Club from Egypt, and

Barada Club from Syria.

In a statement, Ahmed al Balushi, OCC Chairman, said that hosting the championship marks an important milestone in the development of chess in Oman. “We are proud at the Oman Chess Committee to host the Arab Clubs Championship on Omani soil. This reflects the great trust that Arab federations and clubs place in Oman, and it also provides a valuable opportunity for our players to compete against diverse chess schools and high-level opponents.”

He added: “We have been keen to provide all the organisational and technical requirements to ensure the success of the championship, including venues, officiating and logistics, in a manner befitting the status of this Arab event.

We look forward to a successful tournament that will further enhance Oman’s presence on the Arab chess map.”



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SHORTTAKES

‘Oman Celebrates’ discounts campaign set to begin



NASRA BINT SULTAN AL HABSIYAH
Director General of Trade at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion.

MUSCAT: The third edition of the National Discounts and Promotions Campaign, branded “Oman Celebrates”, will be launched on Wednesday in Muscat, the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion has announced. Organised in partnership with the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) and the Consumer Protection Authority, the campaign

marks the anniversary of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik’s accession to the throne. The launch ceremony will be held under the auspices of Faisal bin Abdullah al Rawas, Chairman of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry. Running from January 11 to February 11, the campaign builds on the strong performance of earlier editions. The second edition attracted 814 participating outlets, an increase of more than 154 per cent compared to the first, highlighting growing business and consumer engagement. The initiative aims to stimulate commercial activity, strengthen public-private sector cooperation and provide essential goods at affordable prices. It also seeks to support retailers and brands by boosting sales and enhancing their market presence across the Sultanate of Oman. Nasra bint Sultan al Habsiyah, Director General of Trade at the ministry, said participating outlets will offer discounts of at least 30 per cent, alongside promotions such as raffles, prizes and instant gifts. All offers will be governed by clear regulations to ensure transparency and protect consumer rights. She added that applications will be submitted through the ‘Oman Business’ platform, with a unified process for companies operating in multiple governorates, helping to streamline procedures and speed up participation. — ONA

Uptrend in Oman’s non hydrocarbon revenues

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, JAN 5

NON-HYDROCARBON

revenues — encompassing taxes, levies, fees and other non-oil income streams — continue to trend upward, reflecting the Omani government’s sustained efforts to diversify public revenues away from hydrocarbons. This momentum is evident in rising collections from Value Added Tax (VAT) and excise taxes, budgeted at RO 735 million in 2026, representing an 8 per cent increase over the 2025 budget estimate of RO 680 million. Corporate Income Tax revenues are also projected to rise, reaching RO 684 million, up 4.3 per cent from RO 656 million in the 2025 budget. Dividends of RO 800 million from subsidiaries of the Oman Investment Authority (OIA) remain another significant pillar of non-oil revenues, unchanged from the 2025 budget. A further — albeit initially modest — uplift is expected from 2028, when Oman’s Personal Income Tax (PIT) comes into force. The first such levy in the GCC, PIT will apply primarily to high-earning individuals at a flat rate of 5 per cent on annual incomes exceeding RO 42,000 (approximately \$109,000). According to S&P Global Ratings, PIT is expected to generate around RO 80 million in its first year, equivalent to roughly 0.1 per cent of GDP, supplementing existing tax revenues — principally corporate



Fiscal diversification remains a cornerstone of Oman’s economic sustainability strategy.

Dividends of RO 800 million from subsidiaries of the Oman Investment Authority (OIA) remain another significant pillar of non-oil revenues, unchanged from the 2025 budget.

income tax and VAT — which currently account for about 14 per cent of total government revenue. Fiscal diversification remains a cornerstone of Oman’s economic sustainability strategy, with non-oil revenues recording strong growth over the past five years. Collections increased from approximately RO 2.7 billion in 2020 to RO 3.507 billion in 2024, representing a near-30 per cent rise in absolute terms, driven largely by higher VAT and excise receipts, corporate taxes, government fees and non-tax income such as dividends and service charges. For FY 2025, non-hydrocarbon

revenues are estimated at around RO 3.573 billion, including RO 680 million from VAT and excise taxes, RO 656 million from corporate income tax, RO 800 million in OIA-related dividends and approximately RO 1.4 billion from various government fees. Despite this progress, hydrocarbon revenues continue to dominate Oman’s fiscal structure. In FY 2026, oil and gas revenues are projected to account for 67 per cent of total government revenues, budgeted at RO 7.7 billion, a 1.4 per cent increase compared to the 2025 budget estimate of RO 7.6 billion. According to KPMG, oil and gas revenues budgeted at RO 7.7 billion for 2026 nevertheless represent a 5.8 per cent decline compared with the 2025 preliminary outturn of RO 8.2 billion, reflecting lower realised oil prices and the accounting of production costs associated with Energy Development Oman and other producers. Oil revenues, estimated at RO 5.7 billion, are down 10.2 per cent from the 2025 preliminary figure of RO 6.4 billion, based on a more conservative assumed average oil price of \$60 per barrel, compared with \$70 per barrel realised in 2025. By contrast, gas revenues are budgeted at RO 1.9 billion, marking a 10.4 per cent increase over the 2025 budget estimate of RO 1.7 billion, driven by the signing of 17 new gas sales and purchase agreements and annual increases in gas sale prices. Compared with the 2025 preliminary outturn of RO 1.8 billion, gas revenues are expected to rise by around 10 per cent.

Oman introduces dedicated economic and development tracks

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, JAN 5

Oman has introduced a new, more flexible national planning model under its Eleventh Five-Year Development Plan (2026–2030), reflecting the need to adapt to accelerating global and regional economic changes, according to Dr Nasser bin Rashid al Maawali, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Economy. “For the first time, the five-year plan is not treated as one rigid block”, Dr Al Maawali said, explaining that previous development plans were implemented as a single five-year framework. “Planning for five years as one unit has become challenging due to the speed of local and international changes”. Instead, the Eleventh Plan has been divided into three implementation phases — two



New planning framework strengthens integration between national priorities and community needs.

years, two years and one year — to enhance flexibility and allow for adjustments in response to emerging economic and geopolitical developments. “This approach provides greater flexibility and the ability to absorb any changes, whether local, regional or international”, he said. Dr Al Maawali also highlighted the introduction of separate economic and development tracks within the Plan, another first in Oman’s five-year planning process. “For the first time, we have created a dedicated economic track alongside the development track”, he said. “The development track focuses on essential needs such as roads, hospitals, schools and infrastructure, while the economic track concentrates on enabling growth and addressing economic challenges”. He added that approximately

50 per cent of the Plan’s strategic programmes are directed towards economic priorities, with the remaining 50 per cent focused on development needs, ensuring balance between growth and social requirements. The new planning framework also strengthens integration between national priorities and community needs. “The plan was prepared through broad societal participation”, Dr Al Maawali said. “We listened to youth, the private sector and various segments of society, while at the same time reflecting national priorities such as Net Zero and digital transformation”. According to Dr Al Maawali, the revised planning model is designed to improve execution, accountability and responsiveness, positioning the Eleventh Five-Year Development Plan as a more agile and results-driven road map for Oman’s economic future.

ADVERTORIALS

SHORTTAKES



The bank has adopted advanced security protocols to protect sensitive customer information.

CYBERSECURITY AT THE CORE OF BANKDHOFAR’S DIGITAL BANKING STRATEGY

MUSCAT: In an era where digital banking is rapidly reshaping financial services, cybersecurity and trust have become foundational pillars of sustainable growth. For BankDhofar — a recognised leader in digital innovation in Oman — protecting customer data, defending against cyber threats and building confidence in digital channels are not just technical objectives; they are strategic priorities that safeguard the future of banking in Oman.

BankDhofar has integrated cybersecurity deeply into its digital transformation journey, ensuring that robust defences support every digital product and service it offers. As part of this commitment, the bank has adopted advanced security protocols and industry standards to protect sensitive customer information.

Its mobile banking platform, for example, incorporates technologies such as SIM-based verification and biometric authentication — reinforcing secure access across digital channels. These measures ensure that mobile users can transact with confidence while minimising the risk of unauthorised access or fraud.

BankDhofar has previously achieved PCI DSS (Payment Card Industry Data Security Standard) certification, a globally recognised standard for safeguarding cardholder data. Such compliance reflects systematic investments in people, technology and governance frameworks that protect payment card information and build lasting trust with customers.

BankDhofar also strengthens its cybersecurity posture by leveraging strategic partnerships with technology leaders. Its collaboration with Omantel — utilising cloud-first infrastructure such as Oracle Cloud Infrastructure (OCI) enhances data protection through scalable, encrypted and resilient environments.

In addition to infrastructure, partnerships — such as those with global payments networks like Mastercard — introduce advanced tokenisation and fraud-mitigation technologies into the bank’s payment ecosystem. These integrations enhance transaction security both in-store and online, embedding best-in-class global cybersecurity measures into local financial services.

Recognising that cybersecurity is a shared responsibility, BankDhofar has expanded its efforts beyond technology to include customer awareness and education.

The bank regularly runs fraud and security awareness campaigns to inform customers about phishing, impersonation scams and other emerging threats — encouraging safe practices like protecting personal data, recognising fraud signals and reporting suspicious activity promptly.

Bank Muscat supports Muscat Nights 2026

BANK MUSCAT, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, is participating in supporting the activities of Muscat Nights 2026, organised by Muscat Municipality from January 1 to 30, 2026. This participation reflects the Bank’s commitment to contributing to national events and initiatives that enhance quality of life, support the local economy and align with sustainable development goals.

The Bank places particular importance on events that stimulate the tourism and commercial sectors, create broader opportunities for entrepreneurs, small and medium enterprises and national talents; and generate positive social and economic impact.

Through this participation, the Bank reaffirms its commitment to its role as an active development partner, supporting initiatives that create seasonal employment opportunities, encourage entrepreneurship, strengthen the presence of Omani enterprises in major events and promote the Sultanate of Oman’s tourism and cultural assets.

This also highlights the progress Oman has made in organising diverse events, in line with the Bank’s vision to empower society and maximise local economic impact.

The activities of Muscat Nights 2026 will be held across several key locations in Muscat Governorate, including Al Qurum Natural Park, Al Amerat Public Park, the Oman Automobile Association, the Royal Opera House Muscat, Al Seeb Beach, Wilayat of Qurayat, Wadi Al Khoudh, in addition to various shopping malls. This wide geographic spread offers the public a rich



Through this participation, the Bank reaffirms its commitment to its role as an active development partner.

diversity of activities and experiences.

The events will run daily as part of an integrated season of cultural and entertainment programmes aimed at stimulating economic and tourism activity, enhancing community engagement and delivering high-quality experiences for visitors.

Al Qurum Natural Park witnessed strong visitor turnout during the recent period, with large crowds attending the water fountain shows. Visitors also enjoyed the nighttime drone displays, in addition to the daily performances of the Muscat Nights International Circus held at the Oman Automobile Association venue.

These performances feature acrobatics, aerial acts, balance skills, sleight of hand, as well as the integration of hologram technologies and other attractions.

The events also include dedicated activities for children, offering interactive educational experiences and simplified

presentations on astronomy and space, alongside creative art activities at the drawing & colouring corner and hands-on crafts.

All of this is delivered within an integrated edutainment environment that balances enjoyment with the development of children’s imagination.

Bank Muscat’s support for these events underscores its institutional approach to backing national initiatives with sustainable impact and strengthening its presence in both the economic and social spheres.

This further reinforces the Bank’s position as a leading financial institution that actively contributes to Oman’s comprehensive development journey, while reflecting its commitment to social responsibility by supporting initiatives that deliver balanced economic and social value, strengthen social cohesion, and provide a safe and inclusive entertainment environment for all segments of society.

Amouage introduces new Essences Collection

MUSCAT: Time is central to Amouage’s Essences Collection. When he conceived it, Renaud Salmon, Chief Creative Officer at the esteemed Omani High Perfumery House, decided that every aspect of the range — from the narratives behind the perfumes, to their formulation and visual representation — would reflect the paramount importance of time.

“For the second trilogy of Essences”, says Salmon, “I wanted to consider time in an even deeper way — to think about how it is part of the very fabric of everything around us”.

Line 618 — reaching towards the infinite

The line is perhaps the most hopeful of geometric shapes. It moves from one point to another. It evokes



Every aspect of the range reflects the paramount importance of time.

travel and journeys. It is a channel to eternity, unaffected by bends or deviations. The extraordinary technical skills of Nathalie Lorson were called upon to provide an olfactory representation of a single,

clear-sighted form which progresses to infinity. The fruit of her labours is ‘Line 618’, named after the numbers in the Golden Ratio, the concept that plays a crucial role in geometry and contributes to pleasing proportions in art and design.

Remain — beginning from a single moment

The dot, or the point, is the smallest of all geometric representations and yet in many ways it is also the most powerful. A beginning and an origin, it is the basic building block of all other forms: every shape and curve that could ever be imagined is essentially made up of a series of precisely aligned dots.

To convey this idea of a single moment that exists within the entirety of all the other

moments that come after it, Salmon enlisted the skills of Pierre Negrin. The result of their efforts is ‘Remain’, a singular study in the notion of singularity itself.

Sequence — the cycle of endlessness

The circle is a shape with profound resonance. In addition to existing in countless natural forms around us, it has been employed for millennia in all manner of artworks as a way of making statements on cyclical patterns.

No stranger to conveying grand messages, Julien Rasquinet was tasked with giving the circle olfactory form. His talents led to the composition of ‘Sequence’ — a statement on the power of every dusk to turn into a dawn.

Sohar International main partner of Muscat Nights 2026

MUSCAT: Reinforcing its commitment to advancing national initiatives, cultural vitality and sustainable community development, Sohar International has announced its partnership with Muscat Municipality as the Main Partner of Muscat Nights 2026, one of the Sultanate of Oman’s most prominent cultural and entertainment festivals.

Running from January 1 to 31, 2026, the month-long festivities will take place across multiple locations in Muscat, offering a diverse calendar of cultural, artistic and entertainment experiences.

The festival serves as a unifying platform that brings communities together, celebrates Oman’s rich cultural heritage and further



The month-long festivities will take place across multiple locations in Muscat.

strengthens Muscat’s position as a dynamic and vibrant cultural destination.

Commenting on the partnership, Abdulwahid bin Mohamed al Murshidi, Chief Executive Officer

of Sohar International, stated: “At Sohar International, we view our role as extending beyond banking to actively supporting initiatives that contribute to social cohesion, cultural enrichment and economic participation.

Our partnership with Muscat Municipality for Muscat Nights 2026 reflects this commitment by creating a comprehensive season that integrates entertainment, culture, sports and economic activity across the governorate.

Through this initiative, we aim to stimulate domestic tourism, encourage community engagement and unlock new developmental opportunities, while reinforcing Muscat’s positioning as a distinctive winter destination — fully

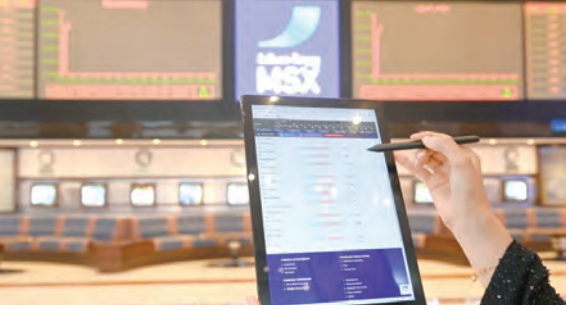
aligned with Oman Vision 2040 and its objectives for economic diversification and sustainable growth”.

As the Main Partner, Sohar International will actively contribute to the festival, providing strategic support, financial backing and on-ground engagement.

The Bank’s involvement highlights its commitment to fostering meaningful social connections and supporting national initiatives that have long-term societal impact.

During the festival, Sohar International hosts a dedicated booth at Al Qurum Natural Park, where visitors can interact with the Bank, explore its services and participate in activities that enhance the overall festival experience.

SHORTTAKES



The list reflects a notable expansion in the number of eligible securities, increasing from 13 securities in the previous year to 22 securities this year.

MSX ISSUES LIST OF SECURITIES SUBJECT TO MARKET MAKING ACTIVITIES

MUSCAT: The Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) has issued the updated annual list of securities eligible for market making activities. The list identifies the securities on which market making operations and continuous buy and sell orders will be provided, with the aim of enhancing liquidity, improving trading efficiency and narrowing bid-ask spreads.

This year’s list reflects a notable expansion in the number of eligible securities, increasing from 13 securities in the previous year to 22 securities this year.

This growth indicates improved liquidity levels, higher trading activity and a broader base of securities meeting the regulatory and technical requirements for market making.

The eligible securities are distributed across sectors as follows: 11 companies from the Services sector, 9 companies from the Financial sector, one company from the Industrial sector and one investment fund, bringing the total number of eligible securities to 22, representing the main sectors of the market.

This wider sectoral diversification contributes to enhanced market depth and more balanced trading activity.

Market making is a key mechanism supporting the efficiency of capital markets. Market makers provide continuous buy and sell orders for designated securities, contributing to improved liquidity, more efficient price discovery, orderly trading and reduced unjustified price volatility.

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, JAN 5

OMAN’S 2026 State General Budget may be judged less by its headline deficit and more by whether it can convert improving investor confidence into steady non-oil growth, as indicators tracked by leading brokerage firm United Securities show stronger banking activity, a sharp recovery in the Muscat Stock Exchange and rising foreign direct investment.

United Securities Research said the MSX gained 28.2% in 2025, with the MSX30 touching 5,985 in December and ending the year near its peak, as sentiment improved alongside domestic developments and regulatory support.

The same note reported broad-based strength in the banking system, with sector assets up 6.6% year-on-year in the first nine months of 2025.

Credit expanded 8.0%, while bank investments rose 19.1%. Asset quality remained stable, it said, with non-performing loans at 4.5% and a capital adequacy ratio of 18%.

Foreign direct investment inflows increased 12.8% year-on-year in the first half of 2025, driven by higher investment in oil and gas exploration, manufacturing and construction, while the UK, the United States and Kuwait remained the top three source countries, according to the note.

MoU signed for hydrogen-based transport efficiency solutions

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, JAN 5

Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing Co SAOG has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Hydronova LLC to cooperate in the development and deployment of hydrogen-based solutions and technologies, marking a new step in the company’s transition towards a more diversified and sustainable energy portfolio.

The agreement focuses on the use of hydrogen injection technology as a maintenance and efficiency solution for trucks and heavy equipment – an area with high fuel consumption and emissions intensity.

The technologies will be implemented in multiple phases, either through Al Maha’s service station network or under alternative operational models, depending on project requirements and performance outcomes.

Under the MoU, the scope of cooperation includes both maintenance solutions and refuelling-related technologies, aimed at improving operational efficiency while supporting the gradual shift towards cleaner

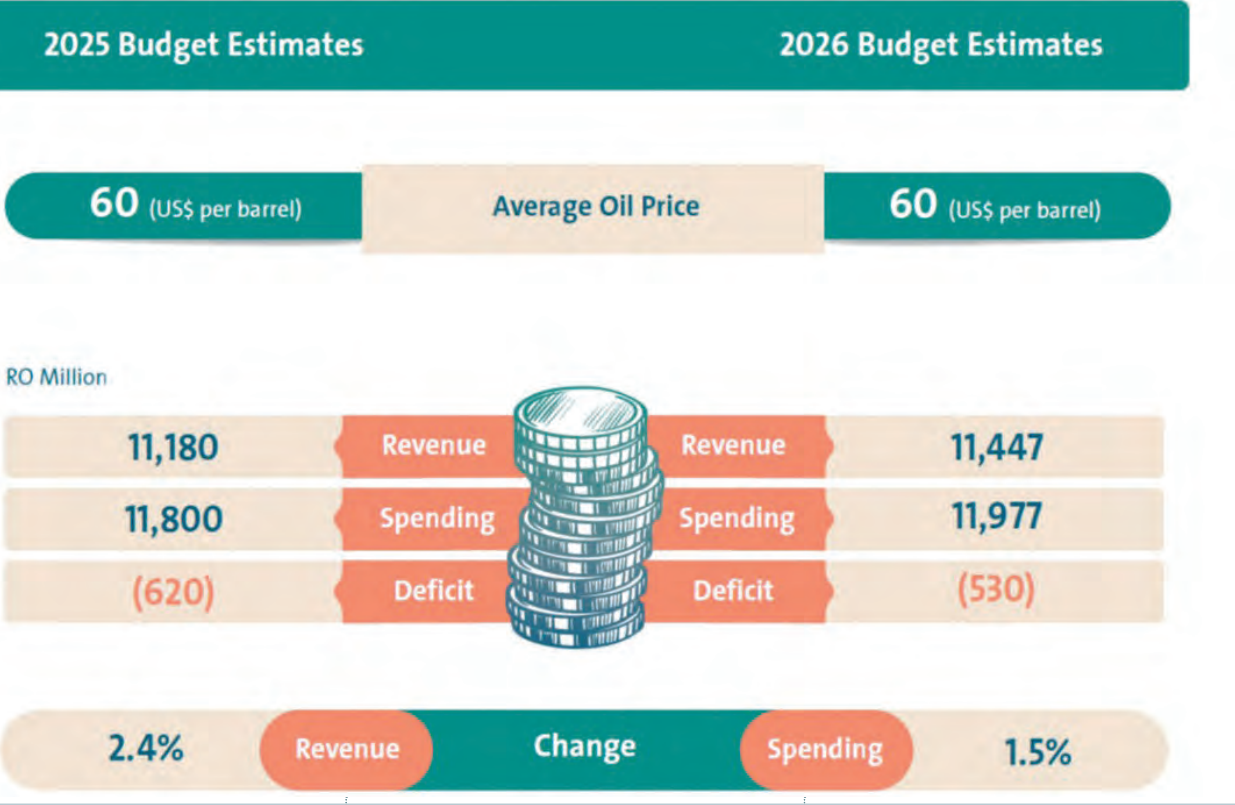


The agreement focuses on the use of hydrogen injection technology as a maintenance and efficiency solution for trucks and heavy equipment.

energy use in the transport and logistics sectors.

Commenting on the partnership, Eng Hamed bin Salim al Maghdari, Chief Executive Officer of Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing, said the collaboration reflects the company’s long-term strategic direction.

“This collaboration represents one of the company’s strategic future projects, reflecting



Total debt at RO 13.827 billion in 2026 is equivalent to 33.0% of GDP.

Foreign direct investment inflows increased 12.8% year-on-year in the first half of 2025, driven by higher investment in oil and gas exploration, manufacturing and construction, while the UK, the United States and Kuwait remained the top three source countries, according to the note.

These signals come as the 2026 budget projects a deficit of RO 530 million, following an estimated RO 480 million deficit in 2025 that the report

said came in below the original budget target.

The research note said the 2026 deficit is expected to be funded through RO 130 million of borrowing, with the remaining RO 400 million covered by reserve withdrawals.

Despite the planned borrowing, it expects the debt-to-GDP ratio to remain within a 30–35% range in 2026.

A fiscal table included in the report places total debt at RO 13.827 billion in 2026, equivalent to 33.0% of GDP, alongside projected total revenues of RO 11.447 billion and expenditures of RO 11.977

billion.

On ratings, the note summarised improvements in 2025 from Moody’s and Fitch, while S&P reaffirmed its rating with a stable outlook, developments that typically help lower sovereign borrowing costs over time.

Population dynamics add another layer to the 2026 “confidence test”. Oman’s population reached 5.3 million as of September 2025, with Omanis accounting for 56.6%, the note said — a reminder that investment and credit momentum must translate into jobs, services and productive private-sector growth.

TECH SHIFT

AI drives autos at CES



Autonomous driving and artificial intelligence are set to dominate CES in Las Vegas as automakers slow electric vehicle ambitions and seek new revenue. Suppliers and start-ups will showcase driverless hardware and software, with deals expected.

Analysts say AI’s role in enabling safe autonomy and broader connected products will be under intense investor scrutiny this week globally. — Reuters

MARKET CALM

Oil slips despite Venezuela shock



Oil prices edged lower as ample global supply outweighed fears over Venezuela after the US captured President Nicolas Maduro. Brent fell to \$60.74 a barrel and WTI to \$57.38, both down 0.4%.

Early Asian trade was volatile as investors weighed sanctions, Opec dynamics and the risk of disrupted exports despite ongoing geopolitical uncertainty across energy markets worldwide. — Reuters

ECONOMIC PULSE

China services growth hits 6-month low



China’s services sector expanded at its slowest pace in six months in December, a private survey showed, as new business softened and foreign demand fell.

The S&P Global PMI slipped to 52.0. New export orders contracted, blamed on fewer tourists, although business confidence rose to a nine-month high on expectations of improved conditions in 2026. — Reuters

OPINION

Why haven't Trump's tariffs had a bigger impact?



ANA SWANSON

The writer covers trade and international economics for The Times and is based in Washington.

PRESIDENT

Donald Trump raised the taxes that the United States charges on imports last year to levels not seen in a century.

Prices of goods have increased as a result and businesses that depend on imported products and supplies have struggled, with some closing their doors. Still, the effects have not been felt as strongly as some experts predicted after early April when Trump announced double-digit tariffs on imports from countries worldwide.

A new working paper from economists at Harvard University and the University of Chicago helps explain why. It shows that the tariff rate importers have paid is significantly lower than the tariff figures that Trump announced. The reasons include exemptions for certain countries and industries, rates that were lowered for some goods by the time they arrived in the US and evasion of the rules by some companies.

By analysing the government's tariff revenue and the value of imports, the economists concluded that the actual US tariff rate was 14.1% at the end of September.

The figure is about half the tariff rate that the administration had officially announced.

The average trade-weighted tariff rate for the United States was nominally 27.4% in September, the authors estimated, down from a peak of 32.8% in April.

"The actual tariffs are much lower than what were announced and that is one of the reasons why the effects have not been as big as feared", said Gita Gopinath, a Harvard economist and former first deputy managing director of the International Monetary Fund.

One factor was an exemption for products that were on boats en route to the United States when tariffs were announced. Shipping goods by ocean to US ports often takes weeks, meaning the tariffs that businesses paid rose more slowly than what Trump announced throughout the year.

The exemptions for products and countries included semiconductors and some products containing them, a move widely seen as a favour to tech executives.

Though officials said they would announce more tariffs on chips and electronics, those have not come.

As a result, companies paid an actual tariff rate of 9% on chips brought into the United States, the authors calculated, far below the tariff level for other commodities.

And exports from places that make a lot of semiconductors, like Taiwan, faced a far

By analysing the government's tariff revenue and the value of imports, the economists concluded that the actual US tariff rate was 14.1% at the end of September. The figure is about half the tariff rate that the administration had officially announced.

lower actual rate (8%) than the official one (28%). Canada and Mexico also received significant exemptions from the nominally high tariffs that Trump put on them last year. Many goods that are mostly made in North America qualify for zero tariffs under the US-Mexico-Canada Agreement, which Trump signed in his first term.

Because US tariffs were low overall in the past, many companies had not bothered to declare that their goods were compliant with the trade pact when filing customs forms. But in 2025, roughly 90% of goods coming from Canada and Mexico were declared to be compliant, up from less than 50% the previous year.

Tariff evasion has also reduced the actual tariff rate that companies pay. Companies can pursue a variety of strategies, many of them illegal, to alter the information on customs forms about a product's content, value or origin and pay a lower tariff than they are supposed to.

As concerns about affordability grow, the Trump administration may offer more exemptions and delays to planned tariffs. On Wednesday, Trump issued an executive order to delay a planned increase in tariffs on vanities, kitchen cabinets and upholstered furniture for one year. — *The New York Times*

HONG KONG'S IPO REVIVAL FACES HOST OF SPOILERS

HUDSON LOCKETT

IPO fever has caught on in Hong Kong in a big way. On Friday, shares in Shanghai Biren Technology zoomed up 76% after the Chinese artificial intelligence chip designer raised more than \$700 million in its initial public offering.

That came three days after market debuts for six different companies, which raised \$900 million in between them.

It caps a strong year for Hong Kong Exchanges and Clearing, with AI leading the charge. But a host of potential spoilers may make that hard to sustain.

In 2025, Hong Kong-listed IPOs hauled in \$37 billion, supported by an average first-day rise of about 37%, rising to 42% after a full month of trading, per Dealogic. That momentum looks set to continue for now, at least. Indeed, IPOs for start-ups Zhipu and MiniMax are due later this week.

In 2025, Hong Kong-listed IPOs hauled in \$37 billion, supported by an average first-day rise of about 37%, rising to 42% after a full month of trading. That momentum looks set to continue for now, at least.

So far, so good. But investors' big bets are actually targeting the country's deep-pocketed technology heavyweights: last year, shares in Alibaba jumped 75% while Tencent's rose 44%, largely due to their AI initiatives.

Moreover, upstart players are just as exposed to an incoming regulatory wave as established outfits, which may be better equipped to handle it. On December 27, China's cybersecurity regulator issued draft regulations for overseeing public-facing AI services that simulate human personalities.

That means local ChatGPT-like bots could be held liable for user addiction, endangerment of national security and spreading rumours, among other things. The risk from such oversight may be among the reasons why China-based AI outfit Manus upped sticks to Singapore, where it became fair game for acquisition by Mark Zuckerberg's Meta.

Then there's geopolitics. Donald Trump may have lifted a ban on sales of Nvidia's H200 AI processors to Chinese companies, but there is no guarantee the US president won't reverse that if it gives him leverage in trade negotiations with the People's Republic.

And Beijing remains keen to wean its domestic tech groups off their reliance on foreign semiconductors; local chip champ Huawei has already laid out a three-year road map to challenge Nvidia's stranglehold on processors used for AI training.

Such factors could soon put the squeeze on a trade that just delivered Hong Kong's strongest year of listings since 2021. All the more reason to get deals out the door as quickly as possible.

— Reuters

How Oman can reclaim its trade-hub legacy

OMAN'S

identity was shaped by trade long before modern borders and

balance sheets. For centuries, Omani merchants linked East Africa, the Gulf and India through routes built on trust, safe passage and practical deal-making. That legacy is not nostalgia; it is strategic capital — especially now, as the world shifts from "cheapest wins" to "most reliable wins".

Globalisation is being rewritten by geopolitics. Tariffs, sanctions and shipping disruptions now shape supply chains as much as price. Companies ask hard questions: Will a tariff appear overnight? Will a payment be blocked? Will my customer reject my origin documents? The winners will be places that can still connect markets — legally, predictably and fast.

The Strait of Hormuz is the most sensitive chokepoint: roughly 20–30% of global oil trade; and about 20% and about 20% of global LNG trade pass through a channel around 21 miles wide at its narrowest point. When tensions rise, costs rise — insurance, freight rates, lead times and commodity prices.

China-India: In FY 2024–25, India imported \$113.45 billion from China and exported only \$14.25 billion — leaving a deficit near \$99.2 billion. That gap reflects India's demand for machinery, electronics, chemicals and components; and it will keep driving supply-chain redesign.

China-US: US goods imports from China were \$438.7 billion in 2024. Even after years of tariffs and "de-risking" rhetoric, the volume remains huge.

This is the trade-war paradox: politics says decouple, but business keeps moving — often by shifting value addition and origin to third locations.

Russia enters the equation: China–Russia trade reached about \$244.8 billion in 2024, while India–Russia trade in 2023–24 amounted to about \$65.69 billion. Sanctions risk, payment frictions and documentation demands are pushing firms towards predictable platforms that can intermediate, transform and certify.

Regionally, Saudi Arabia is a major gravity well. India's imports from Saudi Arabia reached about \$31.42 billion in FY 2023–24. China imported about \$57.53 billion from Saudi Arabia in 2024 (largely fuels).

Oman can become the "compliance



For centuries, Omani merchants linked East Africa, the Gulf and India through routes built on trust, safe passage and practical deal-making.



DR YOUSUF HAMED AL BALUSHI

yousef@omaninvestgateway.com

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

Tariffs, sanctions and shipping disruptions now shape supply chains as much as price. Companies ask hard questions: Will a tariff appear overnight? Will a payment be blocked? Will my customer reject my origin documents? The winners will be places that can still connect markets — legally, predictably and fast.

relay" of this new map: a place where Chinese suppliers can serve Indian demand without forcing Indian buyers into fragile single-source risk; where Indian manufacturers can scale into the US with cleaner origin outcomes; and where Russia-linked commodities and inputs can be processed, packaged and documented with transparency.

The Oman play is not to be a parking lot for containers. It is to be a neutral, rules-based manufacturing and logistics platform — a "station" where value is added legitimately so goods qualify under trade agreements and can be sold across competing blocs with lower friction.

That platform logic depends on two corridors.

First, the US–Oman Free Trade Agreement (in force since 1 January 2009) provides preferential access for qualifying goods. A central lever is the rule-of-origin threshold often stated as 35% value content: a meaningful share of a product's appraised value must be added in Oman through manufacturing activity, labour, overheads and qualifying inputs. This is how "trade hub" becomes factories, skills and jobs.

Second, the India–Oman CEPA, signed on December 18, 2025, expands the corridor logic at exactly the moment India is widening its trade options.

Reported deal terms indicate Oman will provide zero-duty access on over 98% of its tariff lines, while India will cut tariffs on about 78% of its tariff lines, covering nearly 95% of imports from Oman by value. Annual India–Oman trade already exceeds \$10 billion.

With these two corridors, Oman can offer a rare proposition: manufacture-to-qualify—serving India and the US from one base. In simple terms: bring inputs, add value in Oman and export with preferential access — backed by documentation buyers, banks and customs trust.

Oman has the physical ingredients to make it real. The Empty Quarter crossing is designed for roughly 966 trucks per day and can move cargo from Al Duqm or Suhar into major Saudi demand centres in about 24–48 hours.

Hafeet Rail is under construction, with testing and commissioning expected in early 2026. Salalah's sea-air model can cut transit time by 20–40% versus routing around the Cape of Good Hope, while saving 10–20% versus pure air freight for suitable cargo.

But infrastructure alone does not create a platform. Execution does — especially the "first 100 days" of an investor's experience.

First, make compliance a national service. Establish an Origin & Compliance Centre (public-private) that advises by HS code, validates 35% value-content calculations and trains firms to document substantial transformation — supported by digital traceability so audits become routine, not disruptive.

Second, build investor-ready capacity at speed. Develop build-to-lease factories and "ready-to-operate" industrial districts with pre-zoned land, plug-and-play utilities and fast licensing.

Partner with experienced developers and link incentives to performance — jobs, export volume and local supplier development.

Third, upgrade customs into a trusted-trader system: risk-based inspection, guaranteed clearance times for compliant manufacturers and end-to-end digital documentation ("origin passports").

In a trade-war world, speed plus certainty is worth more than a marginal tax break.

Finally, focus on winnable clusters where rules of origin and logistics both work: electronics and appliance assembly, auto components, packaging materials, specialty chemicals, pharmaceuticals and food processing.

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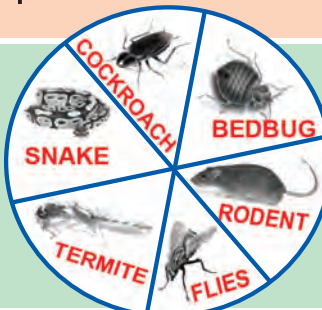
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CHASING OMAN'S SEA OF CLOUDS > 20

FRANCHISE POWER

‘AVATAR: FIRE AND ASH’ REACHES \$1 BILLION IN GLOBAL TICKET SALES



The film, which returned audiences to the visually stunning planet of Pandora, has brought in \$1.03 billion in worldwide ticket sales.

James Cameron’s science-fiction fantasy “Avatar: Fire and Ash” has surpassed \$1 billion in global box office proceeds, the director’s fourth film to cross that threshold.

The film, which returned audiences to the visually stunning planet of Pandora, has brought in \$1.03 billion in worldwide ticket sales, Walt Disney Studios said on Sunday. “Fire and Ash” is the third movie in the “Avatar” series, which has earned a combined \$6.35 billion globally. The movie picks up where the second film, “Avatar: The Way of Water”, left off — with characters Jake (Sam Worthington) and Neytiri (Zoe Saldana) mourning the loss of a son.

“These movies consistently draw audiences to the movie theatre”, said Paul Dergarabedian, Comscore head of marketplace trends, who noted that the visually stunning 3D films are “tailor made” for watching in theatres. The first film in the franchise, “Avatar”, which opened in 2009 and brought in \$2.9 billion in ticket sales worldwide, becoming the highest-grossing movie ever in absolute dollars, according to Comscore, although it’s behind the 1939 classic “Gone With the Wind” if box office returns are adjusted for inflation and average ticket prices over the decades.

Thirteen years later, in 2022, “Avatar: The Way of Water” opened, grossed more than \$2.3 billion globally and won an Oscar for best achievement in visual effects.

The latest instalment, released in time for the holiday season, racked up \$306 million in the US and Canada; and \$777.1 million internationally, Disney reported.

Cameron’s first billion-dollar blockbuster was “Titanic”, released in 1997, which has brought in nearly \$2.3 billion, worldwide. — Reuters

QUICK FEATURES



LIFESTYLE

People watch hot air balloons from Mondovi Piazza, near Turin, Northwestern Italy, during the 36th International Epiphany Hot Air Balloon Rally on January 4, 2026.

— AFP



ENTERTAINMENT

Jean Smart poses with the Best Actress in a Comedy Series award for “Hacks” during the 31st Annual Critics Choice Awards in Santa Monica, California, US.

— Reuters



FESTIVALS

A person poses behind an ice pillar decorated with flowers at the annual Ice and Snow Festival in Harbin, Heilongjiang Province, China.

— Reuters

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China’s birth-rate push sputters as couples stay child-free



Twenty-five-year-old Grace and her husband have decided to remain child-free, pushing back against pressure from family and society as China struggles to reverse its declining birth rate.

A decade after Beijing ended its strict one-child policy and introduced a two-child policy in 2016, the country now faces a deepening demographic crisis marked by fewer births and a rapidly ageing population. China’s population has shrunk for three consecutive years and the United Nations predicts it could fall from about 1.4 billion today to 633 million by 2100.

In 2024, the country recorded just 9.54 million births, roughly half the number seen in 2016.

Against this backdrop, more young couples are choosing to delay parenthood or reject it entirely, challenging long-held cultural norms around marriage and family.

Grace describes herself and her husband as DINKs, or “dual income, no kids”, a term that has gone viral on Chinese social media platform Xiaohongshu, attracting more than 731 million views.

She cited high living costs, career pressures and the need for financial stability as reasons for her decision, saying she would not consider having children without a secure income and savings.

However, she added that publicly celebrating a child-free lifestyle could invite backlash. Demographers warn that persistently low fertility could accelerate population decline and ageing, increasing the burden of elderly care and slowing economic growth.

For many young Chinese, however, the reality remains simple: limited time, rising costs and an uncertain future make starting a family feel increasingly out of reach.

— AFP



Paul Thomas Anderson accepts the Best Picture Award for “One Battle After Another” — Reuters

One Battle After Another biggest winner at the Critics Choice Awards



Chalamet accepts the Best Actor Award for “Marty Supreme”



Jessie Buckley with the Best Actress award for “Hamnet”



Sarah Snook poses with the Best Actress award in limited series



Stephen Graham accepts the Best Actor in limited series award

THE 31st Critics Choice Awards, held on Sunday in Los Angeles, saw the politically charged and stylistically bold film One Battle After Another emerge as the night’s biggest winner.

The film secured three major trophies, including the prestigious award for best picture, cementing its status as a strong awards-season contender. Directed by Paul Thomas Anderson, the film also earned him the prize for best director, while Anderson further strengthened the project’s success by winning best adapted screenplay. Its dominance underscored the critics’ enthusiasm for ambitious storytelling that blends political commentary with cinematic flair.

Acting honours at the ceremony boosted several performers’ momentum ahead of the Academy

Awards. Timothée Chalamet claimed the best actor award for his role in Marty Supreme, while Jessie Buckley took home best actress for her performance in the literary adaptation Hamnet.

In the supporting categories, Jacob Elordi was recognised as best supporting actor for Frankenstein and Amy Madigan won best supporting actress for Weapons. Rising talent also received attention, with Miles Caton earning best young actor/actress for his role in the period horror film Sinners, highlighting the Critics Choice Awards’ tradition of spotlighting emerging performers alongside established stars.

Although it missed out on the top prize, Sinners proved to be one of the evening’s most decorated films, winning four awards overall. These included best original screenplay for

Ryan Coogler, reinforcing the film’s critical acclaim for its writing and atmospheric storytelling.

Other film honours included best animated feature for KPop Demon Hunters and best foreign language film for The Secret Agent, reflecting the diversity of genres and global cinema celebrated by North America’s largest critics’ group.

On the television side, The Pitt dominated the drama categories, winning best drama series along with acting awards for Noah Wyle and Rhea Seehorn.

Comedy accolades went to The Studio, with Seth Rogen taking best actor, while Jean Smart won best actress for Hacks. In the limited series categories, Adolescence was named best limited series, with Stephen Graham and Sarah Snook receiving acting honours for their standout performances. — AFP

FEATURES

YERU EBUEN

THERE is a particular morning in Oman when the mountains seem to forget themselves. Valleys vanish. Villages float. What was solid the night before dissolves into an undulating white ocean. This is the season of the Sea of Clouds, a fleeting atmospheric spectacle that draws early risers, photographers, hikers and quiet observers to the highlands of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar and Jabal Shams.

It is not an event announced with banners or festivals. Instead, it is whispered about through hikers’ WhatsApp groups, photographers’ Instagram captions, weekend camping forums and the knowing nods of mountain residents who understand the rhythm of weather better than any algorithm. “You don’t plan it too tightly”, one recurring sentiment goes. “You prepare. And then you wait.”

What exactly is the Sea of Clouds? Scientifically, the phenomenon is a form of temperature inversion. Under normal conditions, air temperature decreases with altitude. But during certain periods — especially in late autumn and winter — cooler, denser air settles into valleys overnight while warmer air remains above. Moisture trapped in the cold air condenses into low-lying clouds or fog, filling wadis and basins. From higher elevations, this fog layer appears like a calm, endless sea.

In Oman’s mountain ranges, this effect is amplified by topography. Deep valleys, sharp escarpments and high plateaus create ideal conditions for cloud pooling, particularly when humidity from the Arabian Sea or residual monsoon moisture lingers inland. Calm winds are essential; too much movement disperses the clouds before sunrise.

While the Sea of Clouds can occasionally be seen from other elevated points, Al Jabal Al Akhdhar and Jabal Shams offer the most consistent and dramatic vantage points.

Al Jabal Al Akhdhar, sitting at around 2,000 metres above sea level, combines altitude with accessibility. Its terraced villages, cliffside viewpoints and agricultural plateaus overlook deep valleys where clouds accumulate. Many visitors note that the phenomenon here feels intimate — clouds drifting between villages, sunlight piercing through in slow, cinematic shafts.

Jabal Shams, Oman’s highest peak at over 3,000 metres, delivers scale. Here, the clouds collect far below, filling what is often described as Oman’s “Grand Canyon”. When conditions align, the view is staggering: sheer rock walls rising from a white void, with only distant ridgelines breaking the horizon.

When does it happen? Based on observations shared by hikers, tour guides, photographers and local residents — and supported by seasonal forecasts from Oman’s meteorological channels — the prime window typically runs from late November through February, with December and January offering the highest probability.

The most reliable conditions occur after a cool night following high humidity or light moisture with minimal wind and during early morning hours, usually between 5:30 am and 8:30 am.

This window is crucial. By mid-morning, rising temperatures and solar heating break the inversion, lifting or dispersing the clouds. Miss it by an hour and the mountains return to themselves.

What makes the Sea of Clouds so compelling is its impermanence. Unlike a waterfall or a canyon, it cannot be visited on demand. Many seasoned mountain-goers emphasise this in their shared experiences: you may camp overnight and see nothing, or arrive with low expectations and witness something unforgettable.

This unpredictability has shaped a quiet



CHASING OMAN'S SEA OF CLOUDS



PHOTOS BY AHMED AL RAWAHI

culture around the phenomenon. The advice repeated across blogs and social posts is consistent: don’t chase it in a rush. Stay the night. Wake early. Be patient.

How to experience it properly
Camp or stay overnight
Arriving before sunrise is non-negotiable. Camping near cliff edges (where permitted and safely distanced) or booking a local guesthouse increases your chances significantly. Many who have witnessed the best displays were already awake, tea in hand, watching the sky shift from indigo to gold.

Prepare for the cold
Even for seasoned Oman travellers, the temperature drop surprises. Winter nights in Al Jabal Al Akhdhar and Jabal Shams can fall close to freezing. Pack thermal layers, windproof jackets, gloves and proper sleeping gear if camping. Several social media accounts recount abandoning viewpoints early simply because they underestimated the cold.

Choose your viewpoint carefully
Not all viewpoints work equally well. You need elevation above the valley floor but not so high that clouds never reach you. Locals often recommend spots slightly removed from main tourist lookouts — places where the landscape opens wide and the horizon remains uninterrupted. Stillness is your ally. If the night is windy, expectations should be tempered. Many experienced observers check wind forecasts more carefully than cloud predictions.

Stay after the reveal
One of the most overlooked pleasures is watching the clouds dissolve. As sunlight warms the valleys, the “sea” begins to ripple, thin and lift — sometimes creating moments more dramatic than the initial reveal.

A quiet reminder
Perhaps what draws people back to the Sea of Clouds is not just the visual spectacle, but the discipline it demands: early mornings, patience, respect for weather and acceptance that nature does not perform on command.

In a country often defined by its deserts and coastlines, this seasonal phenomenon reminds us that Oman’s mountains have their own language — one spoken softly, briefly and only to those willing to listen at dawn.