

OMAN
Observer
DAILY

SUNRISE 06:41 AM

PRAYER TIMINGS

FAJR 05:21 AM

DHUHR 12:07 PM

ASR 03:08 PM

MAGHRIB 05:28 PM

ISHA 06:43 PM

12

OMAN SAIL WIN SILVER AND BRONZE MEDALS IN KUWAIT

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INBRIEF

RO 150M SUGAR REFINERY IN SUHAR



Sohar Port and Freezone will see the opening of a modern sugar refinery on Monday. The unit will add momentum to investments in the area and boost the food security sector in the Sultanate of Oman. The plant will also boost the resilience of supply chains and contribute to economic diversification in line with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040. The project, located in the vicinity of Sohar Port, has an investment value of more than RO 150 million. It successfully passed the trial operation phase and met Category 2 standards according to European specifications, ahead of transition to the commercial operation stage by January 2026. The unit has a production capacity of one million tonnes a year and also boasts an extensive storage infrastructure that accommodates 500,000 tonnes of raw sugar and 70,000 tonnes of refined sugar.

Royal Decrees ratify agreements

HIS MAJESTY SULTAN HAITHAM BIN TARIK on Sunday issued three Royal Decrees.

Royal Decree No 105/2025 on the ratification of an agreement between the Government of the Sultanate of Oman and the Government of the Republic of Iraq on the Avoidance of Double Taxation and the Prevention of Fiscal Evasion with Respect to Taxes on Income and Capital, signed in Salalah on September 3, 2025.

Article (1) ratifies the aforementioned agreement in accordance with the version attached to this decree.

Article (2) says that this

decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from its date of issue.

Royal Decree No 106/2025 on the ratification of an agreement between the Government of the Sultanate of Oman and the Government of the Republic of Indonesia on mutual visa waiver for holders of diplomatic, service and special passports, signed in Muscat on November 24, 2025.

Article (1) ratifies the aforementioned agreement in accordance with the version attached to this decree.

Article (2) says that this decree shall be published

in the Official Gazette and enforced from its date of issue.

Royal Decree No 107/2025 on the ratification of an agreement between the Government of the Sultanate of Oman and the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, on work permit for spouses of official employees, signed in London on October 7, 2025.

Article (1) ratifies the aforesaid agreement as per the version attached to this decree.

Article (2) says that this decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from its date of issue. — ONA

LOW-PRESSURE BRINGS RAIN



Musandam Governorate experienced heavy rains due to the impact of a low-pressure trough. The General Directorate of Civil Defence and Ambulance in Musandam Governorate continued its field efforts on Sunday to address the impact of rains, where the teams contributed to clearing the affected roads, in addition to carrying out precautionary evacuation of one of the schools due to the rising water levels, to ensure the safety of students and staff.

DETAILS ON P5

Oman denounces attack on civilians in Sydney

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman voiced strong condemnation of the attack that targeted civilians on a beach in Sydney, Australia, resulting in a number of innocent victims.

The Sultanate of Oman expressed its sincere condolences and heartfelt sympathy to the victims' families and the government and people of Australia, wishing a speedy recovery for the injured.

In a statement issued on Sunday, the Foreign Ministry reaffirmed its firm stance, condemning all forms of violence and terrorism. It stressed the importance of promoting the values of coexistence and tolerance

among different religions and cultures, and fostering international understanding and cooperation to combat extremism.

Meanwhile, world leaders expressed their horror and revulsion at Sunday's mass shooting in which 11 people were killed at Sydney's iconic Bondi Beach.

Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said the "shocking and distressing" attack, which Australian police are calling a "terrorist" incident, was "beyond comprehension" as assailants fired on a gathering celebrating.

King Charles III, head of the 56 countries of the 56-nation Commonwealth, of

which Australia is a member, said he was "appalled" by "most dreadful antisemitic terrorist attack".

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio, also on X, said: "Our prayers are with the victims of this horrific attack."

EU chief Ursula von der Leyen said she was "shocked" at what she condemned as an "appalling act of violence".

British Prime Minister Keir Starmer lamented what he described as the "deeply distressing news from Australia. The United Kingdom sends our thoughts and condolences to everyone affected by the appalling attack in Bondi Beach," he added. — Agencies

OMANI POETRY FESTIVAL KICKS OFF



The 13th Omani Poetry Festival, organised by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, kicked off on Sunday and will run until December 18, under the auspices of Dr Mohammed bin Said al Maamari, Minister of Awqaf and Religious Affairs, at the Ministry of Information Theatre in Muscat, with the participation of a selection of poets from the Sultanate of Oman and Arab countries. Abdullah bin Mohammed al Harthy, Director-General of Knowledge and Cultural Development at the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, said: "This festival, which was launched in 1998, comes to celebrate great Omani heritage, highlights the features of the modern poetic scene in Oman, and honours the symbols of poetry and the torchbearers of the word."

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OMAN

SHORT TAKES



The meeting was chaired by Dr Laila bint Ahmed al Najjar, Minister of Social Development. — ONA

COMMITTEE FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES CARE MEETS

MUSCAT: The National Committee for the Care of Persons with Disabilities discussed on Sunday, in its meeting chaired by Dr Laila bint Ahmed al Najjar, Minister of Social Development and Chairperson of the Committee, a proposal to prepare a National Strategy for the Disability Sector in the Sultanate of Oman for the period 2026–2030.

The Committee reviewed the efforts made and measures taken in applying the mechanisms for functionality-based assessment of persons with disabilities.

Additionally, it discussed the mechanisms for dispensing prosthetic devices and assistive aids.

The Committee also discussed the decision to reconfigure the National Committee for Persons with Disabilities and its Technical Committee based on the Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

The meeting reviewed a summary report of the Ninth Annual Meeting of the ESCWA Expert Group on Disability, which was held in Cairo last year. — ONA

OAAAQA HOLDS 4TH MEETING FOR 2025



Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah chaired the meeting.

MUSCAT: The Board of Directors of Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Education (OAAAQA) held its fourth meeting for the year 2025 on Sunday at its headquarters, chaired by Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, Chairperson of the Board of Directors.

During the meeting, the Board discussed several topics, including updates on the project to re-engineer the quality audit system for General Foundation Programmes (GFPs), updating the Authority’s Strategic Plan (2026-2030).

During the meeting, a visual presentation highlighted the school performance evaluation processes carried out by the Authority; the signing of the Conflict of Interest form with institutions and programmes that will undergo evaluation processes; the Board of Directors’ self-evaluation for the year 2025 and the ratification of matters presented through circulation.

The meeting was attended by Dr Jokha bint Abdullah al Shukailiyah, Chief Executive Officer of Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Education (OAAAQA), and members of the Board of Directors. — ONA

Oman, Burkina Faso review political, cultural ties

MUSCAT: Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, received on Sunday at his office Karamoko Jean Marie Traoré, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Cooperation, and Burkinabe Abroad of the Republic of Burkina Faso.

During the meeting, the two ministers affirmed the importance of strengthening ties of cooperation and coordination between the two countries in diplomatic, political, cultural, economic, investment and



The two ministers affirmed the importance of strengthening coordination between the two countries. — ONA

commercial fields.

This cooperation aims to achieve the common interests of the two friendly peoples.

They also reviewed opportunities to enhance future partnerships that support sustainable development areas.

Both sides exchanged views on regional and international situations and discussed ways to support dialogue and understanding regarding issues of mutual concern. — ONA

Al Batinah North Seminar highlights child abuse surge



The General Directorate of Health Services organised a seminar on Child Protection from Abuse.

SIHAM AL SAIDI
SUHAR, DEC 14

In a continued effort to safeguard children’s rights and raise community awareness, the General Directorate of Health Services in Al Batinah North organised a comprehensive seminar on Child Protection from Abuse.

The event was held under the auspices of Dr Hassan bin Abdullah al Balushi, Director of Health Services in Al Batinah North, with participation from Dr Ibrahim al Shibli, General Director of Health Services in Al Buraimi, and Dr Yousef al Kaabi, Director of Primary

Cyberbullying was identified as a growing concern, affecting an estimated 20–40 per cent of children and adolescents globally

Healthcare.

Dr Khalid al Raisi, Specialist in Mental Health and member of the Child Protection Committee, highlighted the surge in child abuse reports in Al Batinah North, noting a 112-per cent increase in 2024 compared to the previous year, with neglect accounting for 41 per cent of reports and physical abuse 27 per cent. Speakers addressed the multi-dimensional aspects of child protection, including legal frameworks, psychological effects, digital risks and the role of cross-sector interventions.

Cyberbullying was identified as a growing concern, affecting an

estimated 20–40 per cent of children and adolescents globally.

The Ministry of Social Development outlined its role in intervention and counselling, while Public Prosecution official Amer al Amri discussed legal protections and the work of Child Protection Committees nationwide. Additional sessions covered forensic medicine, drug-related vulnerabilities and the long-term impacts of abuse.

The seminar concluded with a panel discussion and a ceremony honouring contributors, reaffirming the collective commitment to creating a safer environment for every child in Oman.

Study warns of pregnancy risks in women with Sickle Cell

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, DEC 14

A new Omani study funded by the Block Funding Programme of the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation has highlighted significant maternal and neonatal health risks faced by pregnant women living with Sickle Cell Disease (SCD).

Led by Salwa al Harthy, Senior Staff Nurse (A) – Midwifery at Sultan Qaboos University Hospital, the research provides important insights into pregnancy-related complications associated with SCD and underscores the need for enhanced clinical care and closer monitoring of this high-risk group.

Titled ‘Adverse Pregnancy, Fetal and Neonatal Outcomes in Women with Sickle Cell Disease: A Retrospective Case-Control Study’, the research compared outcomes in 171 pregnancies among women with SCD with



There was a call to determine the optimal timing of delivery for women with SCD in Oman.

171 pregnancies in women without the condition.

The findings revealed significantly higher risks among women with SCD, particularly those with severe anaemia, who showed markedly increased odds of adverse pregnancy outcomes. Mothers with SCD were more likely to deliver

infants with intrauterine growth restriction and low birth weight, while their babies were nearly four times more likely to require admission to the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit. Low haemoglobin levels, previous medical or surgical history, and preterm delivery were identified as strong predictors

of complications affecting both mothers and newborns.

Despite these risks, the study noted that fetal mortality in Oman remains relatively low, reflecting improvements in antenatal care and advances in clinical management in recent years. Al Harthy stressed the importance of a multidisciplinary approach involving obstetricians, haematologists, neonatologists and midwives to improve outcomes for pregnant women with SCD.

She also called for further research to identify additional predictors of adverse outcomes, explore possible links between SCD and congenital anomalies, and determine the optimal timing of delivery for women with SCD in Oman.

The study was published in the Women’s Health journal and was conducted by a research team comprising Salwa al Harthy, Dr Judie Arulappan and Dr Basma al Yazeedi.



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MOH 429410/2025

SHORT TAKES



The suspects had entered Oman on tourist visas and stayed at a hotel near jewellery stores in Al Ghubra.

TWO ARRESTED FOR RO 1 MILLION JEWELLERY THEFT

MUSCAT: The Royal Oman Police have arrested two European tourists in Muscat Governorate in connection with an organised jewellery theft valued at approximately RO 1 million.

According to officials, the suspects had entered Oman on tourist visas and stayed at a hotel near jewellery stores in Al Ghubra area, where they surveyed the location and planned the crime.

At around 4.00 am, they allegedly breached the rear wall of a jewellery store using a mechanical demolition tool, stole large quantities of jewellery, forced open the safe, and took the cash inside.

Police investigations, carried out by the Police Command in Muscat Governorate in cooperation with the Directorate-General of Inquiries and Criminal Investigation, led to the arrest of the suspects. Authorities also seized the tools used in the break-in and recovered the stolen jewellery, which had been hidden on a beach in the Sifah area after being transported by a rented boat under the guise of a leisure trip. The Royal Oman Police confirmed that legal procedures against the suspects are underway.

ALECSO ENLISTING TO SUPPORT OMANI RESEARCHERS



The centre was selected after competing with 35 Arab research centres. — ONA

DOHA: The Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organisation (ALECSO) has enlisted the Centre of Research in Environmental Science and Technology (CEEEST) at the National University of Science and Technology on ALECSO's list of Distinguished Arab Research Centres for 2025–2026 in the field of Renewable Energy. The announcement was made during an official ceremony held at Hamad bin Khalifa University in the State of Qatar.

The centre was selected after competing with 35 Arab research centres, including five research centres from the Sultanate of Oman. This inclusion grants the centre strategic advantages that include official Arab recognition, training and development programmes for researchers, and technical and financial support. Additionally, it expands opportunities for Arab and international cooperation and the dissemination of the centre's achievements on ALECSO's platforms.

This success comes within the framework of the efforts exerted by the Oman National Commission for Education, Culture and Science in supporting Omani research and researchers across various scientific fields.

It also represents a new addition to the journey of the National University of Science and Technology, reinforcing its role in leading applied research in the fields of environment and renewable energy in line with Oman Vision 2040. — ONA

OMAN WELCOMES OVER 55,000 VISITORS FROM THE PHILIPPINES IN 2024

VINOD R NAIR
MUSCAT, DEC 14

The Sultanate of Oman received more than 55,000 visitors from the Philippines in 2024, including 50,108 overnight visitors and 5,493 same-day visitors. Filipinos, numbering 44,809 nationals, form the fourth largest expatriate community in Oman, after Bangladeshis, Indians and Pakistanis.

Starting next year, the Philippines will be added to Oman's list of countries exempt from tourist visa requirements, bringing the total to 105 nations. The move further strengthens

Oman's position as an open and attractive international destination.

The decision reflects the growing partnership between Muscat and Manila, moving beyond labour relations to include investments, industry and quality tourism. Authorities noted that strict pre-departure procedures by the Philippines — such as proof of health fitness, financial solvency and confirmed travel arrangements — ensure compliance with regulations and provide confidence for both countries.

The Oman Visa and Medical Examination Centre in Manila, launched in July, facilitates work

visa procedures with services including biometric registration, medical examinations, document verification, and awareness programmes for workers and employers.

The exemption also reflects the mutual trust between Oman and the Philippines, highlighted by Oman's successful efforts in securing the release of Filipino nationals detained in Yemen.

Earlier initiatives such as the Cebu Investment Seminar, organised by Oman, have strengthened economic, trade and tourism ties, with its second edition scheduled to take place in Muscat next February.

Majlis Ash'shura reviews ministerial responses

THE Majlis Ash'shura Office reviewed on Sunday, during its sixth ordinary meeting of the third annual convening (2025-2026) of the tenth term (2023-2027), a number of ministerial responses to a series of follow-up instruments submitted by the Council members.

These include the response of the Council of Ministers to the desire expressed by the Council regarding the creation of a long-term cultural visa for a period of ten years.

The Council Office, headed by Khalid bin Hilal al Maawali, Chairman of Majlis Ash'shura, also reviewed the response of the Council of Ministers to the desire expressed by the Majlis Ash'shura regarding enhancing the quality of telecommunication services in the Sultanate of Oman.

The response indicated that the government pays continuous attention to the telecommunications sector through developing the communication infrastructure and improving its performance quality to keep pace with the rapid development in the sector, as it is considered an essential pillar for supporting the development process in various sectors.

During the meeting, the response of the Chairman of the Projects, Tenders and Local Content Authority to the briefing request submitted regarding the mechanisms and



The response indicated that the government pays continuous attention to the telecom sector. — ONA

controls related to allocating not less than 10 per cent of the total value of government purchases and tenders to small and medium enterprises (SMEs) was reviewed.

The meeting also reviewed the follow-up instruments submitted by the Council members, including the expressed desire regarding Omanisation in cybersecurity jobs in the Sultanate of Oman.

The meeting highlighted a briefing

request submitted to the Minister of Social Development regarding the availability of an integrated social security system for families of laid-off workers and those in financial distress. It also discussed the briefing request submitted to the Minister of Health and the Minister of Education regarding the proposed preventive measures to limit the spread of seasonal viruses in the community and educational environments. — ONA

Decades of Lebanese sweet making in Oman

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, DEC 14

When Beirut-born Muneer arrived in Oman in 1972, he had no idea that he would be introducing Lebanese sweets to the Sultanate of Oman, which was experiencing a new awakening since 1970.

Over time, he began to understand the eating habits and food preferences of the Omani people, whose sweet choices were traditionally limited to dates and similar treats.

After working in various jobs in food preparation and sales, Muneer opened the first Al Fawaris bakery in Ruwi in 1999. He started serving citizens and



Al Fawaris has successfully introduced Omani and other Arab nationals in Oman to Lebanese delicacies.

other Arab nationals under one roof, introducing them to the art of sweet making.

This marked the beginning of a successful business venture as Al

Fawaris expanded its range of sweets, offering popular Lebanese treats like Baklava, Kanafeh, Maamoul, Znoud el Sit, Halawet el Jibn and Layali Lubnan.

Fuad, Muneer's son who now runs the business, mentions that other favourites include Mafroukeh, Nammoura, Sfouf, Ashta, Awamat, cookies, Qatayef,

Lebanese doughnuts, Basma, Halva, Jazariah, Mahalabiyeh and Meghli. Al Fawaris has successfully introduced Omani and other Arab nationals in Oman to Lebanese delicacies.

According to Fuad, Lebanese sweets are considered oriental treats, featuring a rich variety of desserts and pastries made with ingredients like phyllo dough, semolina, nuts such as pistachios, walnuts, and cashews, cheese, and a sweet syrup flavoured with rose or orange blossom water. "We are proud to have brought Lebanese flavours to Oman, and our journey continues despite competition in the market," Fuad added.

SPOTLIGHT

Experts highlight that obesity is a complex, chronic condition, not just a lifestyle issue, requiring long-term, multi-faceted management

Recognising obesity as a disease helps combat stigma, ensures better patient care, and promotes access to comprehensive treatment options

IS OBESITY A DISEASE?

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

THE QUESTION of whether obesity should be classified as a disease took centre stage during the recent Oman Summit for Diabetes and Endocrine Across the Lifespan, as leading international and national experts called for a shift in how obesity is understood, treated, and managed.

“It is time to recognise that obesity can be a disease for some, though not for all,” said Dr Francesco Rubino, a renowned clinician and scientist and Chair of Metabolic and Bariatric Surgery at King’s College London, while addressing the summit.

Dr Rubino, an honorary consultant surgeon at King’s College Hospital and a pioneer in metabolic and bariatric surgery, explained that obesity has long been misunderstood due to an overreliance on Body Mass Index (BMI) as a diagnostic tool.

“Obesity has been ill-conceived for many years. We have focused on BMI as a measure of excess body fat, but it does not tell us whether organs are functioning properly or whether the body is healthy or sick. This has made it difficult to define and treat obesity effectively,” he told Observer.

He noted that this limitation prompted the launch of an initiative four years ago to redefine obesity using criteria beyond BMI, including the impact of excess fat on organ function. Dr Rubino’s work also focuses on clinical research, surgical interventions, public education, and combating obesity-related stigma.

Echoing similar views, Sayyidah Dr Noor al Busaidy, Director of the National Diabetes and Endocrine Center, stressed that obesity is a disease and should not be associated with a lack of willpower.

“The physiology of obesity is vast. Some doctors define it as a neuro-endocrine disease, while others view it as a gastrointestinal disorder. The key message is that obesity is highly complex,” she said.

She emphasised that patients should not be blamed and that obesity requires long-term management rather than a one-time intervention. “Management involves multiple pathways—medication, lifestyle modification, surgery, and more. There is no single solution. Lifestyle intervention remains the core, including balanced nutrition, physical activity, adequate sleep, and stress management,” she added.

Dr Amira al Kharousi, Specialist in Obesity and Bariatric Surgery at the National Diabetes and Endocrine Center, noted that global scientific organisations no longer regard obesity as merely a lifestyle condition.

“The traditional belief that obesity is just a lifestyle disease is outdated. Obesity is a disease that can be treated, and there are multiple therapeutic options available to address obesity and its related complications,” she said.

Dr Al Kharousi outlined a structured, three-pillar approach to obesity management, beginning with lifestyle and behavioural medicine, including psychological support, followed by pharmacological treatment, and, when necessary, bariatric surgery. She added that several less invasive procedures are also available between these stages.

Experts at the summit agreed that recognising obesity as a complex, chronic disease is essential to improving patient care, reducing stigma, and ensuring access to comprehensive and effective treatment pathways.



Obesity has long been misunderstood. Focusing solely on BMI measures body fat but tells us nothing about organ function or overall health. This is why defining and effectively treating obesity has been so challenging.

DR FRANCESCO RUBINO
Pioneer in metabolic and bariatric surgery

SHORT TAKES



The Al Dhahirah Media Forum was organised by the Communication & Media Dept of Al Dhahirah.

AL DHAHIRAH MEDIA FORUM FOCUSES ON DIGITAL CONTENT

IBRI: The Third Al Dhahirah Media Forum commenced on Sunday under the theme ‘Digital Content Creation: Strategies for Creativity and Impact.’ Organised by the Communication and Media Department of Al Dhahirah Governorate, the three-day forum is held under the auspices of Najeeb bin Ali al Rawas, Governor of Al Dhahirah, with the participation of officials, media professionals and digital content creators.

The opening ceremony featured a welcome address outlining the forum’s vision and objectives, which focus on strengthening the skills of media practitioners and advancing digital content creation practices in line with rapid sector developments, while reinforcing professional and responsible media standards.

The programme included a visual presentation highlighting key milestones from the forum’s second edition, followed by a speech by the Director of the Communication and Media Department, who reviewed the department’s achievements and outlined the course of the Third Al Dhahirah Media Forum. The forum’s keynote speaker, Dr Sultan bin Khamis al Yahyai, Chairman of the Journalists Committee in Al Dhahirah and Al Buraimi governorates, delivered a keynote address offering insights into the future of digital content creation and the media’s role in shaping societal awareness and influence.

The forum also featured a visual presentation titled ‘Humans and Nature’, alongside a panel discussion, ‘The Digital Content Creation Journey: From Idea to Impact’, with the participation of a group of content creators.

In addition, a specialised working paper addressed key regulatory updates in the Executive Regulation of the Media Law, presented by Dr Mohammed bin Ali al Hinaï, Director-General of the General Directorate of Publications and Artistic Works at the Ministry of Information.

LOW-PRESSURE TROUGH BRINGS RAIN TO MUSANDAM

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
MUSCAT, DEC 14

The effects of a low-pressure trough that brought heavy rains to Musandam are expected to continue until Friday.

The General Directorate of Civil Defence and Ambulance in Musandam Governorate continued field operations on Sunday, clearing affected roads and carrying out a precautionary evacuation of a school due to rising water levels to

ensure the safety of students and staff.

Active southerly to south-easterly winds have been observed in Muscat and other governorates, accompanied by rainfall. Cloud flow and rainy cells over the Gulf have begun affecting Musandam, with intensification expected along the northern coasts of the Sea of Oman and the adjacent Al Hajar Mountains.

Weather forecaster Ibrahim al Barashdi said cloud advection will

continue, bringing isolated rain and chances of thunderstorms.

“Rains are also expected in the coastal areas of the Sea of Oman, Al Dhahirah, Al Buraimi, and may extend to Muscat and Al Dakhiliyah,” he explained.

Rainfall in Muscat is expected on Thursday afternoon through Friday morning, while Musandam could receive the highest amounts, ranging from 10 to 35 mm. During thunderstorms, wave heights in the Sea of Oman may reach 2.5 metres.

TRA e-fraud session seeks dialogue with community

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, DEC 14

THE Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) on Sunday organised a dialogue session with consumers, part of the “Constructive Dialogue” initiative, to discuss the phenomenon of electronic fraud and the challenges posed by the sharing of unlicensed networks.

The initiative aims to enhance direct dialogue with the community, build a more secure and trusted telecommunications environment, and improve service quality by involving the community in formulating regulatory and oversight solutions.

Eng Ahmed bin Hassan al Hadabi, official spokesperson for the TRA, stated: “This dialogue session, with the participation of various segments of society, aimed to shed light on the issue of electronic fraud. The TRA is committed to continuing its efforts to raise awareness among users of telecommunications and technological services, which have become widespread and present in every sector.” Rashid bin Salem al Salmi, CEO of Inside Oman Company, explained



The meeting also covered cyber crimes and modern fraud methods.

The session addressed the sharing of unlicensed networks, starting with the clarity of the legal definitions for these practices, moving through the adequacy of current penalties

that AI-powered fraud attacks, specifically non-random AI-driven attacks, constitute 80 per cent of all cyberattacks. These include online marketing and fake offers, random attacks aimed at hacking, data collection for profit, and targeted attacks against individuals and organisations.

Al Salmi further stated that AI enhances the scope, speed, and sophistication of attacks in terms of attack techniques, process automation, and deepfakes.

The session addressed the sharing of unlicensed networks, starting with the clarity of the legal definitions for these practices, moving through

the adequacy of current penalties and fines, and concluding with the security risks they entail. Participants also touched upon the impact of these networks on the quality of telecommunications services.

The meeting also covered cyber crimes and modern fraud methods, reviewing the techniques employed by fraudsters to obtain data or deceive users, and discussing expected future patterns in light of the evolution of digital crime tools. The session further discussed the readiness of concerned authorities to deal with these cases, the effectiveness of current regulatory frameworks in closing loopholes that fraudsters might exploit, and prevention methods and the level of community awareness. Participants debated the capacity of prevailing digital awareness to reduce the number of fraud victims.

The meeting concluded with a presentation summarising the discussions and proposals, in the context of the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority’s efforts to build a more secure and trustworthy communications environment, and to improve the quality of services by involving the community in formulating regulatory and supervisory solutions.



AL BATINAH SOUTH TOURISM PROJECTS POST 48.7 PER CENT RISE

NAKHAL: The number of permits issued for tourism investment projects in Al Batinah South Governorate between January and October 2025 grew by 48.7 per cent to 174, compared to 117 issued during the corresponding period in 2024. According to updated statistics from the Heritage and Tourism Department in Al Batinah South Governorate, the number of eco-lodges in the governorate stood at 48. — **ONA**

PAKISTAN SOCIAL CLUB REACTIVATED

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabiyousef

The Pakistan Social Club (PSC), which was inactive for nearly 5 years, has reopened with the support of officials from the Ministry of Social Development and Dr Syed Naveed Sardar Bokhari, Ambassador of Pakistan to Oman. An interim committee was elected to lead its activities.

At a ceremony, members of the Interim Committee of the Pakistan Social Club Oman for the year 2025-26 were sworn in. The Board of Directors includes Nadeem Azeemi as Chairman, Zahid Shakoor as Vice-Chairman, Kashif Ahmed Zaeem as General Secretary and Imran Toor as Finance Secretary.

“We are embarking on a new chapter as we reopen the doors of Pakistan Social Club after almost five years. We pledge to follow the rules and regulations.”

TENDER NOTICE

وزارة الزراعة والثروة السمكية وموارد المياه

Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources Announces the following Tender:-

Tender No.	Tender Title	Tender Document Sales Start Date	Tender Document Sales End Date	Bid Submission Closing	Companies that are Eligible to Participate	Tender Document Fee (R.O)
830/2025/MAFWR/HQ-94	Design & Build of the Boat Ramp at Sur Fishery Harbour.	Tuesday 9/12/2025	Monday 29/12/2025	Sunday 18/1/2026	SMEs Specialized companies registered with Excellent and First grades	(25/-) Omani riyals for local companies (10/-) Omani riyals for SMEs

- Interested Companies registered with The General Secretariat of the Tender Board (in the above mentioned Grade) may obtain Tender documents from the E-Tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>.

- The value of the document will be paid & submitted on line on given website.

- The Tenderer should attach Bid Commitment Declaration for local companies.

- All correspondence pertaining to the tender inquiry must be online at e-tendering System.

- All correspondence pertaining to the e-tendering System technical support must be directed to the following helpdesk email address and phone number: +968 24402244 or etenderhd@ptlc.gov.om.

TENDERS COMMITTEE

Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources

OIG

شركة المجموعة العمانية الدولية ش.م.ع.م
OMAN INTERNATIONAL GROUP SAOC

الخدمات الإدارية والمهنية
FACILITIES MANAGEMENT SERVICES

Notice of Annual General Meeting of Oman International Group SAOC

We, the Board of Directors of Oman International Group SAOC (the “Company”) hereby invite the shareholders of the Company to attend the Annual General Meeting of the Company to be held at the Al-Rawahy Complex, Wattayah, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman on Tuesday, 30 December 2025 at 11.00 am, and if the quorum of the meeting is not complete, then the second AGM is determined to be held on Thursday, 1 January 2026 at 11:00 am in the same previously mentioned location to consider and to approve the following agenda:

Agenda for the Meeting

- 1) The consideration and approval of the Report of the Directors for the financial year ended 30 September 2025.
- 2) The consideration and approval of the financial statements and auditors' report for the year ended 30 September 2025.
- 3) The approval of the final dividend for the financial year ended 30 September 2025.
- 4) The consideration and approval of the Board of Directors' remuneration for the financial year ended 30 September 2025 in accordance with the attached Schedule of Director's Sitting Fees.
- 5) The consideration of a sitting fee meeting for the Board of Directors for the next financial year ending on 30 September 2026.
- 6) The consideration and approval of related party transactions which were entered into by the Company with third parties during the year ended 30 September 2025.
- 7) The consideration and the approval of related party transactions, which are expected to be concluded during the year ending 30 September 2026.
- 8) Electing new board members for the company. A Candidate who wishes to nominate himself shall fill out the MOCI's Standard Application Form in this regard, and submit it to the Head Office of the Company prior to the AGM of two working days.
- 9) The approval of the appointment of the auditors of the Company, and to determine the auditors' remuneration for the financial year ending on the 30 September 2026.

In accordance with the provisions of the Company's Articles of Association, a shareholder entitled to attend and vote at the meeting convened by this Notice is entitled to authorise another shareholder to attend the meeting and vote on his/ her behalf at the meeting.

If you wish to appoint a proxy, please complete and submit the attached proxy form to the Company's office.

To prevent delay in starting the meeting, shareholders are required to arrive about half an hour before the scheduled time for starting the meeting.

For further information, please contact our Finance Manager, Mr. Devang Pandya on telephone no. 24576951.

Chairman

Auditors

Legal Adviser

WORLD

SHORT TAKES



Sudanese take to the streets during a rally in support of the army, Port Sudan. — AFP

SIX PEACEKEEPERS IN SUDAN KILLED IN UN BASE ATTACK

DHAKA: At least six Bangladeshi peacekeepers were killed and eight wounded in a drone attack on a UN base in the disputed Abyei region between Sudan and South Sudan, Bangladesh’s armed forces said. Bangladesh is one of the largest contributors to UN peacekeeping missions and its troops have long been deployed in the volatile region.

“A drone attack was carried out by separatist armed groups on the Kadugali Logistics Base under the UN peacekeeping mission in Abyei, Sudan, yesterday (Saturday) from approximately 3:40 pm to 3:50 pm local time,” the armed forces’ public relations division said in a statement on Sunday. Bangladesh’s army said earlier that authorities were doing their best to provide medical treatment and rescue operations for those injured.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres condemned the attack in a post on X, expressing his condolences to the families of those killed and wishing a speedy recovery to the injured. “Attacks against UN peacekeepers like this one are unjustifiable & may constitute war crimes. I remind everyone of their obligation to protect UN personnel & civilians,” he said. — **Reuters**

SYRIA IDENTIFIES GUNMAN WHO KILLED AMERICANS

DAMASCUS: Syria’s interior ministry said on Sunday the gunman who killed three Americans in the central Palmyra region the previous day was a member of the security forces who was to have been fired for extremism. Two US troops and a civilian interpreter died in what the Syrian government described as a “terrorist attack” on Saturday, while Washington said it had been carried out by an IS group militant who was then killed.

The Syrian authorities “had decided to fire him” from the security forces before the attack, interior ministry spokesman Nouredine al Baba told state television. A Syrian security official said on Sunday that “11 members of the general security forces were arrested and brought in for questioning after the attack”.

The official said the gunman had belonged to the security forces “for more than 10 months and was posted to several cities before being transferred to Palmyra”.

Palmyra, home to Unesco-listed ancient ruins, was controlled by IS at the height of its territorial expansion in Syria. US President Donald Trump vowed “very serious retaliation” following Saturday’s attack. A Syrian defence ministry official said that prior to the attack, US forces had “arrived by land from the direction of the Al Tanf military base” in southeastern Syria, near the border with Jordan. — **AFP**

SRI LANKAN LAWMAKERS TO MEET TO FAST-TRACK CYCLONE AID

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka’s parliament will interrupt its recess to fast-track financial aid needed for rebuilding after Cyclone Ditwah, which killed nearly 650 people, officials said. President Anura Kumara Dissanayake had said last week that the island nation would need at least \$1.66 billion in 2026 — in addition to the \$166 million he said the government would spend this year — to rebuild and recover from what he described as the “most challenging natural disaster” to hit the country.

Parliament Speaker Jagath

Wickramaratne on Sunday issued a notice for an urgent meeting of the legislature, which had gone into recess after approving the 2026 budget earlier this month and was not scheduled to meet again until January 6. “I have summoned the parliament to meet on Thursday (18th)... having been requested so to do by the Hon. Prime Minister (Harini Amarasuriya),” the Speaker said in a gazette notification.

Officials at the country’s finance ministry said that the meeting was being held to approve next year’s expenditure for cyclone recovery.

Official figures show that 643 people were killed, with another 184 still missing, following landslides and floods triggered by the cyclone. At least 2.3 million people — just over 10 per cent of the country’s population — were affected by the devastating calamity. Nearly 75,000 people remain housed in state-run camps. An official leading the recovery effort has estimated that overall damage could cost up to \$7 billion. The United Nations set up a \$35.3 million fund to provide food and temporary shelter to 658,000 of the worst-affected people. — **AFP**

Thailand declares curfew as Cambodia clash spreads

THAILAND

Announced a curfew in its southeastern Trat province on Sunday as fighting with Cambodia spread to coastal areas of a disputed border region, two days after US President and would-be peacemaker Donald Trump said the sides had agreed to stop. The Southeast Asian neighbours have resorted to arms several times this year since a Cambodian soldier was killed in a May skirmish, reigniting a conflict that has displaced hundreds of thousands of people on both sides of the border.

“Overall, there have been clashes continuously” since Cambodia again reiterated its openness to a ceasefire on Saturday, Thai Defence Ministry spokesman Rear Admiral Surasant Kongsiri told a press conference in Bangkok after announcing the curfew. Thailand is open to a diplomatic solution but “Cambodia has to cease hostility first before we can negotiate,” he said. Thai forces said they had destroyed a bridge that Cambodia used to deliver heavy weapons and other equipment to the region and launched an operation targeting pre-positioned artillery in Cambodia’s coastal Koh Kong province. Cambodia accused Thailand of striking civilian infrastructure.

Thailand’s curfew covers five districts of Trat province that neighbour Koh Kong, excluding the tourist islands of Koh Chang and Koh Kood. The military had previously imposed a curfew in



A security volunteer stands as he remains in the evacuation zone in the Thai province of Buriram. — AFP

Thailand’s curfew covers five districts of Trat province that neighbour Koh Kong, excluding the tourist islands of Koh Chang and Koh Kood. The military had previously imposed a curfew in the eastern Sakeo province, which remains in force

the eastern Sakeo province, which remains in force.

Thailand and Cambodia have exchanged heavy-weapons fire at multiple points along their 817 kilometre (508 mile) border since Monday, in some of the most intense fighting since a five-day clash in July that ended with Trump and Malaysian mediation.

Trump said he spoke to Thailand’s caretaker Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul and Cambodian premier Hun Manet on Friday, and said they had agreed to “cease all shooting”. On Saturday, Anutin vowed to keep fighting “until we feel no more harm and threats to our land and people”.

A White House spokesperson later said Trump expected all parties to honour commitments and that “he

will hold anyone accountable as necessary to stop the killing and ensure durable peace”.

Meanwhile, Thailand’s military said it was considering blocking fuel exports to Cambodia. Thai military commanders have been discussing blocking fuel exports to Cambodia, including asking the navy to be “vigilant against” ships carrying strategic supplies and designating maritime zones near Cambodian ports as “high-risk”, a navy official told a press conference on Sunday.

“At this time there are no orders on these measures,” said Captain Nara Khunkothom, assistant spokesperson for the Royal Thai Navy. The Thai energy ministry said on Friday that Thailand had halted exporting oil to Cambodia since June. — **Reuters**

GREEK FARMERS CONTINUE BLOCKADES, REBUFF TALKS

ATHENS: Protesting farmers in Greece vowed to maintain road blockades for a second straight week, even as the prime minister on Sunday reiterated that the government was open to talks. Greek farmers are outraged over long delays in subsidy payments triggered by a scandal involving embezzled European Union agriculture aid, and are also under pressure from low prices, rising energy costs and worsening climate conditions. “Occupying roads and other public infrastructure that

belongs to everyone... are actions which harm the country” as well as “local economies in the regions”, conservative Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis said in a statement on Facebook. Following a meeting, farmers’ unions rejected the prime minister’s invitation to hold talks on Monday, after protesters last week temporarily blocked the central port of Volos. On Sunday, farmers maintained blockades with tractors, notably on roads in Thessaly, disrupting traffic. — **AFP**

SOARING LEVELS

Smog crisis worsens in Islamabad



Checkpoints set up this month are part of a crackdown by authorities to combat soaring smog levels, with winter months the worst due to atmospheric inversions that trap pollutants at ground level. So far in December, it has already registered seven very unhealthy days for PM2.5 particulates of more than 150 microgrammes per cubic metre. The annual readings are far beyond the safe level of five microgrammes recommended by the World Health Organization. — **AFP**

ATTACK OPERATIONS

Israel troops kill man in West Bank



The Palestinian health ministry said Israeli forces killed a 23-year-old man in the occupied West Bank. The ministry reported the death of Muhammad Wael al Sharouf, “who was shot by (Israeli) forces north” of the city of Hebron. It comes after the Palestinian civil affairs authority said on Saturday that Israeli forces killed a 16-year-old in an incident in the northern West Bank, after the military said an individual threw an explosive at soldiers. — **AFP**

DISPERSE CROWDS

Tunisian police clash with youths in Kairouan



Clashes erupted for a second night between police and youths in the central Tunisian city of Kairouan after a man died following a police chase. Thousands have been protesting in the southern city of Gabes, demanding the closure of a chemical plant on environmental grounds. Witnesses said demonstrators in Kairouan threw stones, petrol bombs and flares, and blocked streets by burning tyres, prompting police to disperse crowds with tear gas. — **Reuters**

SHORTTAKES



Chile's presidential candidate Jose Antonio Kast poses during the presidential runoff election in Paine. — AFP

CHILE FAR RIGHT EYES COMEBACK IN PRESIDENTIAL VOTE

SANTIAGO: Chileans began voting for a new president, making a stark choice between the most right-wing candidate in 35 years of democracy and the head of a leftist coalition. Polls show far-right candidate Jose Antonio Kast as the strong front-runner in the runoff vote against his rival Jeannette Jara, a long-standing member of the Communist Party. Almost 16 million citizens can cast their ballot in the election, with Kast's tough-on-crime and anti-migrant message seemingly resonating with many Chileans.

Kast has vowed to deport hundreds of thousands of illegal migrants, opposed abortion without exceptions, and voiced support for the bloody dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet (1973-1990). Security is the priority for 44-year old Santiago housewife Ursula Villalobos, who plans to vote for Kast and is willing to accept some radical changes if they bring safety.

"What's important," she said, "is that people can leave their homes without fear and return at night without worrying that something will happen to them on street corners. "Given the extreme situation we're in right now, if we have to take somewhat extreme measures at the beginning to achieve a peaceful country later on, then yes, I would be willing to do that." — AFP

UNIVERSITY SHOOTING LEAVES TWO DEAD

Providence police have detained a "person of interest" in connection with the Brown University shooting that left two students dead and another nine people wounded at the US Ivy League school. Providence's Chief Public Information Officer for Public Safety Kristy DosReis said a person of interest was in police custody after the shooting. Brown said in an advisory that police had also lifted a shelter-in-place order for its campus in Rhode Island. More than 400 law enforcement personnel had been deployed. — Reuters

FRENCH PM URGED TO INTERVENE OVER COW SLAUGHTER PROTESTS

TOULOUSE: Prime Minister Sebastien Lecornu was urged on Sunday by local officials to intervene to avoid an escalation as French farmers protested the use of police force and the culling of cows due to a skin disease. Farmers in southern France have been incensed by what they see as the government's heavy-handed response to an outbreak of nodular dermatitis, widely known as lumpy skin disease. They have blocked roads and dumped manure in

protest after veterinarians this week slaughtered a herd of more than 200 cows in a village near the Spanish border after discovering a single case of the disease. Police had used tear gas to clear away angry demonstrators protecting the cattle. "With each passing hour, indignation and anger are rising inexorably in the face of people's despair," said Carole Delga, head of the southern region of Occitanie, which has emerged as the epicentre of the outbreak. "It is time for you

to intervene to ensure, as soon as possible, a frank and sincere dialogue with the farmers," she said in an open letter to Lecornu. Delga said that many French people were "shocked" by the images of animals being slaughtered. "They do not understand the massive use of force by the police," she said, referring to the culling of the entire herd in the village of Les Bordes-sur-Arize. "We must do everything we can to avoid escalation and confrontation." — AFP

Mass shooting at Australia's Bondi Beach event kills 12

AT Least 12 people were killed and almost 30 wounded when gunmen fired on a holiday event at Sydney's Bondi Beach on Sunday in what Australian police and officials described as a terrorist attack. One suspected gunman was killed and another was in a critical condition, New South Wales Police Commissioner Mal Lanyon told a press conference. At least 29 people injured, including two police officers, were taken to hospital, he said. Police were investigating whether a third gunman was involved in the shooting, and a bomb-disposal unit was working on several suspected improvised explosive devices, Lanyon said. Mike Burgess, a top Australian intelligence official, said one of the suspected attackers was known to authorities but had not been deemed an immediate threat. Mass shootings are rare in Australia, one of the world's safest countries. Sunday's attack was the worst such incident in the country since 1996, when a gunman killed 35 people at a tourist site in the southern state of Tasmania.



Emergency personnel work at the scene of a shooting incident at Bondi Beach, Sydney. — Reuters

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese convened a meeting of the country's national security council and condemned the attack, saying the evil that was unleashed was "beyond comprehension". "This is a targeted attack on Jewish Australians on the first day of Hanukkah, which should be a day of joy, a celebration of faith," he said. "At this dark moment for our nation, our police and security agencies are working to determine anyone associated with this outrage." Witnesses said the shooting at the famed beach on a hot summer's evening lasted about 10 minutes, sending hundreds of people scattering along the sand and into nearby streets and parks.

Police said around 1,000 people had attended the Hanukkah event alone. "I was just getting ready to go home, and, like, I was packing my bag, got my flip-flops, was ready to catch my bus, and then I started hearing the shots," said Bondi Junction resident Marcos Carvalho, 38. "We all panicked and started running as well. So we left everything behind, like flip-flops, everything. We just ran through the hill," he said. "I must have heard, I don't know, maybe, like, 40, 50 shots."

One of the world's most famous beaches, Bondi is typically crowded with locals and tourists. "If we were targeted deliberately in this way, it's something of a scale that none of us could have ever fathomed. It's a horrific thing," Alex Ryvchin, co-chief executive of the Executive Council of Australian Jewry, told Sky News, adding his media adviser had been wounded in the attack.

Bondi resident Grace Mathew said she saw people running past her and heard gunshots. "Initially you just think, it's a beautiful day down by the beach," she said. "You sort of think that people are just having a good time. Then more people ran past and said there's a shooter, there's a mass shooting and they're killing people."

Muslim groups condemned the shooting. "These acts of violence and crimes have no place in our society. Those responsible must be held fully accountable and face the full force of the law," the Australian National Imams Council, the Council of Imams NSW and the Australian Muslim community said in a statement. "Our hearts, thoughts and prayers are with the victims, their families, and all those who witnessed or were affected

by this deeply traumatic attack."

Videos circulating on X appeared to show people on the beach and nearby park scattering as multiple gunshots and police sirens could be heard. One video showed a man dressed in a black shirt firing a large weapon before being tackled by a man in a white T-shirt who wrestled the weapon off him. Another man was seen firing a weapon from a pedestrian bridge. Another video showed two men pressed onto the ground by uniformed police on a small pedestrian bridge. Officers could be seen trying to resuscitate one of the men. Reuters confirmed the videos from verified corroborating footage showing the same men.

The attack came almost exactly 11 years after a lone gunman took 18 people hostage at the Lindt Cafe in Sydney. Two hostages and the gunman were killed after a 16-hour standoff. "Australians are in deep mourning tonight, with hateful violence striking at the heart of an iconic Australian community, a place we all know so well and love, Bondi," said Sussan Ley, the leader of Australia's opposition Liberal Party. — Reuters

Ukraine's Zelensky ditches Nato ambition ahead of peace talks

BERLIN: Ukraine has relinquished its ambition of joining the Nato military alliance in exchange for Western security guarantees as a compromise to end the war with Russia, President Volodymyr Zelensky said ahead of talks with US envoys in Berlin. The move marks a major shift for Ukraine, which has fought to join Nato as a safeguard against Russian attacks and has such an aspiration included in its constitution. It also meets one of Russia's war aims, although Kyiv has so far held firm against ceding territory to Moscow. Zelensky said on Sunday that the US, and European and other partners' security guarantees instead of Nato membership were a compromise on Ukraine's side.

"From the very beginning, Ukraine's desire was to join Nato, these are real security guarantees. Some partners from the US and Europe did not support this direction," he said in answer to questions from reporters. "Thus, today, bilateral security guarantees between Ukraine and the US, Article 5-like guarantees for us from the US, and security guarantees from European colleagues, as well as other countries - Canada, Japan - are an opportunity to prevent another Russian invasion," Zelensky said. "And it is already a compromise from our part," he said, adding that the security guarantees should be legally binding.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has repeatedly demanded that Ukraine officially renounce its Nato



A police officer works at the site of the Russian drone strike, in Zaporizhzhia. — Reuters

ambitions and withdraw troops from the about 10 per centff of Donbas which Kyiv still controls. Moscow has also said that Ukraine must be a neutral country and that no Nato troops can be stationed in Ukraine. Russian sources

said earlier this year that Putin wants a "written" pledge by major Western powers not to enlarge the US-led Nato alliance eastwards — shorthand for formally ruling out membership to Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova and other

former Soviet republics. Zelensky had earlier called for a "dignified" peace and guarantees that Russia would not attack Ukraine again as he prepared to meet US envoys and European allies in Berlin to end Europe's deadliest conflict since World War Two. Under pressure from US President Donald Trump to sign a peace deal that initially backed Moscow's demands, Zelensky accused Russia of dragging out the war through deadly bombings of cities and Ukraine's power and water supplies. Although the exact make-up of the meetings on Sunday and Monday have not been made public, a US official said Trump's envoy Steve Witkoff and son-in-law Jared Kushner were travelling to Germany for talks involving Ukrainians and Europeans.

The choice to send Witkoff, who has led negotiations with Ukraine and Russia on a US peace proposal, appeared to be a signal that Washington saw a chance of progress nearly four years after Russia's 2022 attack.

Zelensky said Ukraine, the Europeans and US are looking at a 20-point plan and that at the end of this there is a ceasefire. He said Kyiv has no direct talks with Russia. Zelensky said a ceasefire along the current front lines would be a fair option. German Chancellor Friedrich Merz is hosting Zelensky and European leaders for a summit in the German capital on Monday, the latest in a series of public shows of support for the Ukrainian leader from allies across Europe. — Reuters

OPINION

Celebrating translation in a globalised world



SANDHYA RAO MEHTA

The writer is an Associate Professor, Sultan Qaboos University

In a post global world, the power of translation is taking centre stage in ways that centre regional cultural and linguistic dynamics. This was the key take away from a major international conference which took place in Muscat last week.

The 8th edition of the International Association for Translation and Intercultural Studies (IATIS) was held by the Department of English and Translation, Sultan Qaboos University.

Hosting over 250 presentations, panels, workshops and public symposia, this intellectually stimulating event showcased a kaleidoscopic interpretation of translation.

Not only did it focus on traditional areas of translation studies such as literary and machine translation, but it brought attention to emerging areas of translation which are gaining focus and attention.

Such areas include ethical challenges posed by Artificial Intelligence in translation; the role of translation in crisis management and climate change; the links between translation and global displacement, as well as emerging linkages with reproductive health.

As the organisers of the conference state ‘these contributions illustrate the field’s

vitality and its continuing capacity to respond meaningfully to global transformations’.

Another interpretation of translation in the conference was an exploration of the way that visual art translates and re-imagines belonging, identity and global migration.

The most interesting addition to this conference event was the exhibition that ran parallel to the academic presentations. This included participation from various ministries and agencies in Oman which are closely linked to preserving and disseminating Oman’s rich cultural heritage.

One of the main takeaways from the conference was how important translation has become in today’s world where communication between non-English speaking communities is increasingly prevalent. While most translation until now has been centred on English, whether from, or into English, there is increased focus on working with other languages in order to increase visibility in other regions of the world.

Papers, for example, showed how an increase in literary translations from the non-English speaking world is resulting in intercultural awareness in non-Eurocentric contexts.

The way in which marginalised

The pedagogical implications of translation strategies were explored and various alternatives suggested in the conference

communities are finding a voice through translated works also adds depth to translation projects around the world.

Another significant question that is forward-looking, of course, is the role of Artificial Intelligence in translation. Whose work can an AI produced, or collaborated one be considered to be? Who would be responsible for any possible mistranslations? These are questions that will be relevant in the coming years as technology takes over.

The workshops that ran parallel to the conference gave hands-on experience and training to aspiring and practicing translators. Aspects that were explored included subtitling, post-editing, gamification and collaboration in low tech contexts.

The focus on education was central to this conference, as the participants included academicians, students, as well as practicing translators. The pedagogical implications of translation strategies were explored and various alternatives suggested. These also included using easily accessible technology in developing countries and maintaining ethics in translation projects.

The conference reminded one of the transformative role of translation in a rapidly changing world.

INDONESIA FLOODS THREATEN RARE ORANGUTANS

SARA HUSSEIN

Indonesia’s deadly flooding was an ‘extinction-level disturbance’ for the world’s rarest great ape, the tapanuli orangutan, causing catastrophic damage to its habitat and survival prospects, scientists warned.

Only scientifically classified as a species in 2017, tapanulis are incredibly rare, with fewer than 800 left in the wild, confined to a small range in part of Indonesia’s Sumatra.

One dead suspected tapanuli orangutan has already been found in the region, conservationists said.

“The loss of even a single orangutan is a devastating blow to the survival of the species,” said Panut Hadisiswoyo, founder and chairman of the Orangutan Information Centre in Indonesia.

And an analysis of satellite imagery combined with knowledge of the tapanuli’s range suggests that the flooding which killed nearly 1,000 people last month may also have devastated wildlife in the Batang Toru region.

The scientists focused on the so-called West Block, the most densely populated of three known tapanuli habitats, and home to an estimated 581 tapanulis before the disaster.

There, “we think that between six and 11 percent of orangutans were likely killed,” said Erik Meijaard, a longtime orangutan conservationist.

“Any kind of adult mortality that exceeds one per cent, you’re driving the species to extinction, irrespective of how big the population is at the start,” he said.

But tapanulis have such a small population and range to begin with that they are especially vulnerable, he added.

Satellite imagery shows massive gashes in the mountainous landscape, some of which extend for more than a kilometre and are nearly 100 metres wide, Meijaard said.

The tide of mud, trees and water toppling down hillsides would have carried away everything in its path, including other wildlife like elephants.

David Gaveau, a remote sensing expert and founder of conservation start-up The Tree Map, said he was flabbergasted by the before-and-after comparison of the region.

“I have never seen anything like this before during my 20 years of monitoring deforestation in Indonesia with satellites,” he said.

The devastation means remaining tapanulis will be even more vulnerable, with sources of food and shelter now washed away. — AFP

Trump voices frustration over Ukraine war talks

US President Donald Trump is ‘extremely frustrated’ with Russia and Ukraine, his spokeswoman said, as Kyiv said Washington was still pushing it to make major territorial concessions as part of its plan to end the nearly four-year war.

“The president is extremely frustrated with both sides of this war,” Karoline Leavitt told reporters. “He doesn’t want any more talk. He wants action. He wants this war to come to an end.”

Earlier, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky made remarks that appeared to show little had changed in Washington’s core position on how the conflict should end since it sent a 28-point plan to Kyiv and Moscow last month that heavily favoured Russia.

Zelensky said that Washington was still pushing it to cede land to Russia as part of an agreement to end the war that started with Moscow’s February 2022 attack.

Washington wants only Ukraine, not Russia, to withdraw its troops from parts of the eastern Donetsk region, where a demilitarised “free economic zone” would be installed as a buffer between the two armies, Zelensky told reporters.

Under the latest US plan, Moscow would also stay where it is in the south of the country, but pull some of its troops out of Ukrainian regions that Russian President Vladimir Putin has not claimed to have annexed in the north.

Ukraine has been revising the original US proposal and this week sent a 20-point counter-proposal to Washington, the full details of which have not been published.

“We have two key points of disagreement: the territories of Donetsk and everything related to them, and the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant. These are the two topics we continue to discuss,”



Ukrainian serviceman camouflages a Humvee vehicle, amid Russia’s attack on Ukraine, near the frontline town of Kupiansk, Ukraine. — Reuters



BARBARA WOJAZER

The writer is a reporter with AFP

Zelensky told reporters at a briefing.

“They see Ukrainian forces leaving the territory of Donetsk region, and the supposed compromise is that Russian forces do not enter this territory... which they already call a ‘free economic zone,’” Zelensky said about the US plan. Zelensky has long said he has no “constitutional” or “moral” right to cede Ukrainian land and said that Ukrainians should have the final word.

“Whether through elections or a referendum, there must be a position from the people of Ukraine,” he said.

Zelensky also pushed back against the idea of a unilateral Ukrainian withdrawal in the Donetsk region.

“Why doesn’t the other side of the war pull back the same distance in the other direction?” he said, adding there were “a great many questions” still unresolved.

Under the US plan, Russia would relinquish territory it has

captured in the Kharkiv, Sumy and Dnipropetrovsk regions —three areas over which Moscow has not made a formal territorial claim.

Zelensky said that although there was no strict deadline to finalise an agreement, Washington wanted to have the contours of a deal ready by Christmas. In 2022, Russia claimed to formally annex the Donetsk, Kherson, Lugansk and Zaporizhzhia regions, despite not having full control over them.

Ukraine’s troops still hold around one fifth of the Donetsk region, according to analysis of data from the Institute for the Study of War (ISW). Much of eastern and southern Ukraine has been decimated by fighting.

Tens of thousands have been killed and millions forced to flee their homes.

Russia, which has the numerical advantage in manpower and weapons, has been grinding forward on the battlefield. — AFP

When taxi drivers chase shadows...



ABDULAZIZ
AL JAHDHAMI

The writer is author,
translator and
communications
professional

EVERY morning before the sun rises, and long after the city has fallen asleep, taxi drivers are already on the road. In many cities, they play a crucial role in keeping people and businesses moving. They provide accessible transportation and often work long, exhausting hours. They guide strangers’ home, carry people to work, and transport dreams, worries, hopes, and stories from one destination to another.

However, the choices they make on the road matter more than they may realise. Alongside their importance, a concerning issue continues to grow: the rising recklessness of some taxi drivers. The pressure to pick up as many passengers as possible, especially during peak hours or in competitive areas, can push drivers towards dangerous behaviours.

It is not uncommon to see a taxi suddenly deviate to the roadside, stop in the middle of the street, or cut off other vehicles just to catch a potential passenger! In these moments, the driver risks not only their own safety, but also the lives of passengers, cyclists, motorcyclists, and pedestrians. The pursuit of income should never outweigh the responsibility of safe driving.

Every passenger will eventually be found. Every destination can wait a moment longer. But a fare earned through recklessness

could be lost forever in the aftermath of an accident.

Traffic laws, for most drivers, act like the steady rhythm of a familiar song. But for some taxi drivers, they seem more like optional background music, pleasant perhaps, but not worth following too closely. Sudden U-turns without checking mirrors, speeding around blind corners, and unexpected stops in crowded areas are just to name a few examples of the reckless behaviours often seen on the road.

It is as if, in those brief moments, the entire road disappears and only the passenger exists. The driver sacrifices safety, their own well-being, and the lives of everyone around them for the sake of a few extra dollars. The same behaviour that earns quick profit can just as easily cause an accident that ends all earnings.

Taxi drivers are essential to the rhythm of city life. However, their value must not come at the cost of safety. Recklessness may offer speed, but it sacrifices stability and sometimes even human life. It is time for taxi drivers to see the road not as a race, but as a responsibility. Every destination matters, yes, but arriving safely matters most.

To address this issue, stricter enforcement of traffic laws and better driver training are essential. Yet beyond regulations, a cultural shift within the taxi industry is needed

Taxi drivers are essential to the rhythm of city life. However, their value must not come at the cost of safety. Recklessness may offer speed, but it sacrifices stability and sometimes even human life

— one that values safety over speed and responsibility over competition. Taxi drivers must remember that they are professionals entrusted with the lives of everyone who shares the road with them.

Solutions must come from multiple directions: stricter penalties to discourage repeat offenders, improved training programmes to instil safe driving habits, and a renewed focus on cooperation rather than conflict on the road. When safety becomes a priority — not a luxury — the road transforms from a battleground into a shared space built on respect.

Traffic rules are not chains meant to restrict drivers; they are tools designed to protect them. When taxi drivers choose to follow these laws, they are not just avoiding fines — they are demonstrating pride, discipline, and mastery of their craft. Every taxi driver understands the pressure of competition. A waving hand on the roadside can feel like opportunity calling. But reaching that passenger should never mean risking lives.

Speed may win a race, but awareness wins a life. Our roads are not arenas, and our drivers are not competitors — they are custodians of every life that crosses their path. The true mark of a professional is not how quickly they arrive, but how safely they bring others along. A single passenger is never worth a single life.

HOW TRUMP IS MOLDING 2028 DEMOCRATIC CONTENDERS

JAMES OLIPHANT

President Donald Trump’s aggressive policy agenda is doing more than reshaping the economy and immigration enforcement - it’s also giving a handful of Democratic governors a national stage to position themselves as potential 2028 presidential contenders.

California’s Gavin Newsom, Illinois’ J B Pritzker, and Maryland’s Wes Moore have seized on Trump’s moves to rally their party’s base, sharpen their contrasts with the White House, and build networks beyond their home states.

Trump’s push for Republican states to redraw their congressional districts to favour his party in next year’s midterm elections, his military-style immigration raids in Democratic cities and deep federal spending cuts have triggered fierce resistance among Democrats. That opposition has become a political asset for governors looking to raise their profiles.

California Governor Gavin Newsom pushed back against Trump’s redistricting effort by successfully championing a ballot measure in his state that may allow Democrats to take extra seats in next year’s congressional elections. Newsom, who is weighing a 2028 presidential run, celebrated his win with a speech to Democrats in Houston, Texas, a move viewed as raising his profile beyond his home state.

Illinois’ Pritzker, meanwhile, has positioned himself as a defender of immigrant communities against Trump’s enforcement surge. Last week, he signed legislation barring federal arrests at schools and courthouses. He has also headlined Democratic events in New Hampshire and Minnesota, where he has urged his party to be bolder against Trump.

Moore has blasted Trump’s efforts to shrink the federal workforce and slash SNAP food benefits for low-income families during a recent government shutdown. He responded by restoring full SNAP benefits in Maryland and campaigning for Democrats in swing states, framing his actions as a direct counter to Trump’s policies.

Their actions have been greeted by relief and excitement in a party that is looking for a jolt after Trump trounced Democratic presidential nominee Kamala Harris last year, and Republicans gained control of Congress.

Mike Doyle, chair of the Harris County Democratic Party in Houston, attended Newsom’s speech and said the crowd “was as enthusiastic” as he had ever seen. He credited Newsom for coming to Texas, a state in which Democrats are hoping to boost their electoral fortunes in the midterms and beyond. Newsom’s “decision to essentially kick off his 2028 presidential campaign in Houston demonstrated to a lot of folks on the ground exactly the kind of aggressive, mathematically sophisticated thinking Democrats need nationally,” Doyle said. — Reuters

A new framework for financing global security

INTENSIFYING

great-power rivalries have made increased defence spending a priority that few states dare to question. This growing sense of insecurity propelled global military spending, which increased by 37 per cent from 2015 to 2024, when it reached \$2.7 trillion – a sum almost equivalent to Africa’s entire GDP.

The Nato alliance accounted for over 50 per cent of this spending, with most of its members investing more in defence at the expense of other public spending. In Canada, the United Kingdom, and Germany, foreign aid has taken a hit. Tepid public support for such programming makes it politically expendable, while security anxieties and the search for a defence-industrial boom fuel military spending.

Yet surging military budgets have not improved global security. Instead, military investment increases instability, destroys ecosystems, fuels arms races, and heightens conflict risks. It can also indirectly crowd out public investment in a guns-versus-butter tradeoff.

The financing gap for the non-climate-related Sustainable Development Goals would have easily been closed in 2024 if the increases in defence spending had been redirected for that purpose. And since sectoral investments in health, education, and energy infrastructure have larger “fiscal multipliers” than military spending, these investments would likely have boosted GDP by more than we can expect defence spending to.

Public investment in human capital and infrastructure builds resilience and makes it more likely that societies will resolve disputes without violence and displacement. Most countries’ biggest security risks are not territorial; they are threats like pandemics, climate change, and cyberterrorism. An aid-for-defence swap may be politically rational, but it amounts



NILIMA GULRAJANI

The writer is a Principal Research Fellow at ODI Global, where she leads the Donors in a Post-Aid World programme, and an associate at Trinity College, University of Toronto

to robbing Peter (a resilience-based multidimensional understanding of security) to pay Paul (a narrow, militarised understanding).

The development-finance gaps resulting from this swap are unlikely to be funded by private sources. Fragile countries tend to be more dependent on grants and highly concessional loans, and social sectors generally do not generate the kinds of returns that private investors seek. That is why countries like Haiti and Sudan have long struggled to attract foreign direct investment, and why infrastructure projects in larger and less risky emerging markets appeal to private investors.

Now, pension funds, insurance companies, and banks are rushing to seize opportunities created by increased public-sector investments in defence, some of which are being directed by new multilateral entities like the Defence, Security and Resilience Bank. Stimulating such capital flows raises questions about the future of global ESG (environmental, social, and governance) investment frameworks, which have typically assigned defence industries a higher risk, owing to uncertainties about their business ethics, product use, governance, and environmental impact. Security financing does not have to be a zero-sum game. An improved defence financing framework could help us address the complexities of today’s collective security challenges.

A better approach would have three pillars. First, it would embrace a more multidimensional perspective on security.

In June, Nato members agreed to spend 5 per cent of their GDP on defence by 2035, with 3.5 per cent of GDP focused on core defence and 1.5 per cent on security-related spending to “protect our critical infrastructure, defend our networks, ensure our civil preparedness and resilience, unleash innovation, and strengthen our defence industrial base.” For now, at least, the 1.5 per cent is more focused on civilian defence than a holistic understanding of security.



Global defence spending now outpaces development aid by 13 to one.

We have already seen creative accounting practices to minimise the fiscal burden of the higher target, as in the case of Italy’s effort to include a €13.5 billion (\$15.8 billion) suspension bridge. Moreover, direct contributions towards Ukraine’s defence will count towards the 5 per cent target, providing a template for funding future military operations elsewhere in the world.

In a promising sign, some Nato members are now exploring whether development spending in security-adjacent areas like international peacekeeping missions, early-warning systems for climate shocks, and resilient supply chains for essential medicines and vaccines might count towards the 1.5 per cent target. But while shoehorning these budget lines into Nato’s accounting framework could protect them from cuts, it might also jeopardise the integrity of standardised defence accounting if the boundaries of “security-related” remain unclear. It also raises the likelihood of “securitising” aid and politicising engagement in ways that will endanger lives.

A better approach, then, is to measure the full spectrum of national inputs for global security and assess their value in terms of military defence and deterrence, as well as economic growth and resilience.

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SPORTS

SHORT TAKES



Manchester City's Erling Haaland scores their first goal. — Reuters

MAN CITY KEEP PRESSURE ON ARSENAL WITH 3-0 WIN AT PALACE

LONDON: Manchester City kept up the pressure on Premier League leaders Arsenal with a 3-0 win at Crystal Palace on Sunday, thanks to a double from Erling Haaland and Phil Foden's fine finish.

Palace created the better chances in the first half with Jeremy Pino fluffing the best of the lot, hitting the bar with the goal begging after he was played in by Adam Wharton.

City had offered little, except for Foden testing goalkeeper Dean Henderson from a free-kick, before Haaland met Matheus Nunes' inviting cross with an unstoppable header in the 41st minute from his first sight of goal.

Palace pressed for an equaliser and Wharton went close within three minutes of the restart, beating keeper Gianluigi Donnarumma with a low effort that thudded off the post. But Foden settled the contest with 20 minutes left, firing past Henderson from the edge of the box for his sixth goal in his last five games.

Haaland then confirmed the inevitable when he converted an 89th-minute penalty after Henderson brought down Savinho, ignoring Palace fans' taunts about the spot kick he handed to Omar Marmoush in May's FA Cup final. City's win, their fourth consecutive league victory, keeps them second on 34 points from 16 games, two behind Arsenal. Palace are fifth with 26 points.

CITY AVENGE FA CUP FINAL DEFEAT

Sunday's game was the first between Palace and City since the FA Cup final, when the Manchester side failed to convert their chances and the Eagles' early goal was enough for a famous triumph.

The roles were reversed on Sunday as Palace posed the greater threat before the break but failed to make their superiority pay, while Haaland needed only one opportunity.

Jeremy Pino skimmed the top of the crossbar with only Donnarumma to beat and Ismaïla Sarr nearly found Jean-Philippe Mateta as the hosts made the early running. — Reuters

Dhofar, Al Nahda, Samayil and Al Nasr shine in Round 7 of Jindal League

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, DEC 14

Dhofar's first football team pulled off a dramatic 3-2 victory over their guests Sur in a thrilling encounter at Al Saada Sports Complex Stadium, as part of Round 7 of the Jindal Football League for the 2025-2026 season.

Dhofar took an early lead in the second minute through Mohammed Al Habsi, but Sur responded quickly as Sami Al Hasani equalised in the sixth minute. Sur then turned the match around in the 25th minute when professional forward Kingsley headed home to give his side a 2-1 lead at halftime.

Dhofar came out stronger in the second half and pressed for an equaliser, which arrived in the 73rd minute through Hamoud Al Saadi. Sur's task became more difficult after substitute Hamid Al Wahaibi was sent off in the 77th minute, and Dhofar capitalised on the numerical advantage when Ammar Abed scored the winning goal in stoppage time. The win lifted Dhofar to 8 points in tenth place, while Sur remained on 4 points in twelfth.



Dhofar and Sur players fight for the ball.

AL NAHDA EDGE AL RUSTAQ AND MAINTAIN TOP SPOT

Al Nahda claimed a crucial 1-0 victory over Al Rustaq in the match played at the Al Buraimi Sports Complex, further strengthening their position at the top of the table.

After a goalless first half, in which Al

Nizwa crowned Youth Basketball champions

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, DEC 14

NIZWA Club were crowned champions of the Youth Basketball Championship for the 2025-2026 sports season after a deserved 68-52 victory over Al Amerat Club in the final match, which was held in an exciting and highly competitive atmosphere. The award ceremony was held under the auspices of Eng Sami al Sahib, Vice-President for Strategic Affairs at Jindal Steel Sohar, in the presence of Eng Khalfan bin Saleh al Naabi, Chairman of the OBA, Saeed al Habsi, Secretary-General of the Association and Chairman of the Competitions Committee, along with several club representatives and sports figures.

The match began at a fast and intense pace from both sides, with Nizwa imposing themselves early before Al Amerat managed to level the score at 5-5. As the tempo increased, Nizwa showed strong focus and organised movement, allowing them to extend their lead, capitalising on consecutive three-pointers by Elyas al Obaidani to go ahead 14-7. Al Amerat reduced the deficit through Mohammed al Battashi, but Nizwa maintained their advantage, while Al Amerat's Noah Brinks stood out by scoring seven points. The first quarter ended with Nizwa leading 16-13.

In the second quarter, Nizwa continued their offensive pressure, with Adam al Hinai boosting the score with a three-pointer, followed by another three from Elyas al Obaidani to widen the gap to 22-13. Al Amerat refused to give in, cutting the deficit with five consecutive points to make it 22-18. The excitement continued until the end of the first half, which Nizwa closed in front at 36-32.

The third quarter saw balanced play, with both teams exchanging attacks. Nizwa continued to control the scoreboard, with Al Mulhim al Obaidani and Adam al Hinai contributing important baskets, ending the quarter with a 46-38 advantage.

Nizwa sealed the win in the final quarter, asserting their dominance through quick transitions and accurate shooting. Neil al Adki added five consecutive points, while further three-pointers and fast-break scores stretched the lead beyond recovery, allowing Nizwa to close the game with a 68-52 victory.



Nizwa players celebrate with the trophy and gold medals. — Moosa al Balushi



Nizwa players Al Mulhim al Obaidani named the tournament's top scorer, Adam al Hinai winning Best Playmaker.

The match was officiated by Ali al Salmani as first referee, Majid al Akhzami as second referee, and Thabit al Hinai as third referee, with Munira al Numani, Salma al Ghailani and Juma al Hinai at the officials' table.

AWARDS AND HONOURS

Following the final, the patron of the ceremony and the Association's officials presented the awards. Nizwa Club received the championship trophy and gold medals, Al Amerat Club were awarded the runners-up trophy and silver medals, while Seeb Club claimed third place and the bronze medals. On the individual awards front, Nizwa players dominated all honours, with Al Mulhim al Obaidani named the tournament's top scorer, Adam al Hinai winning Best Playmaker, and Elyas al Obaidani receiving the Best Three-Point Scorer award.

Eng Al Sahib praised the high technical level of the final, noting that the match reflected the development of basketball in Oman and showcased impressive individual skills. He expressed his pleasure at sponsoring the final and reaffirmed Jindal Sohar Steel's commitment to supporting the Oman Basketball Association as part of its corporate social responsibility strategy, stressing that the private sector is a key partner in sports development.

— Photos by Moosa al Balushi

Rustaq created more chances while Al Nahda threatened on the counter and hit the crossbar through Perry Mari, Al Nahda took control in the second period. The decisive moment came in the 84th minute when substitute Abdulrahman Al Ghassani scored from close range after rounding the goalkeeper.

Al Nahda held on to claim three points and move to 16 points at the summit, while Al Rustaq remained bottom without a point.

SAMAYIL OVERPOWER AL SHABAB

Samayil returned with all three points after defeating hosts Al Shabab 3-1 in the match held at Al Seeb Sports Stadium.

Al Shabab asserted early dominance and applied sustained pressure on goalkeeper Alaa al Hamadani, but Samayil's organised defence prevented an early breakthrough. As the match progressed, Samayil regained balance and took the lead in the 42nd minute through Badr Al Jabri. Al Shabab responded quickly, with Yousuf Al Malki scoring the equaliser in the 45th minute, ending the first half level.

In the second half, Samayil maintained their structured performance, and tactical

substitutions paid off as Khalid al Buraiki scored the second goal in the 77th minute. With Al Shabab pushing forward in search of an equaliser, Samayil exploited a counterattack deep into stoppage time, with substitute Osama al Zaabi netting the third goal in the 94th minute.

Following this win, Samayil raised their tally to 9 points in ninth place, while Al Shabab remained on 9 points in eighth, noting that Al Shabab have played only five matches so far.

AL NASR SNATCH A HARD-FOUGHT WIN OVER AL KHABOURAH

Al Nasr earned a valuable 1-0 victory over Al Khabourah at Al Rustaq Sports Complex.

The first half was cautious and largely confined to midfield, ending goalless after Mulhim al Sunaidy missed a late chance. The tempo improved after the break, with Al Khabourah wasting several opportunities before Al Nasr struck on the counter in the 83rd minute through Zakaria al Qartoubi.

Al Nasr held firm under late pressure to move up to 13 points in third place, while Al Khabourah slipped to 11th with seven points.

SHORTTAKES



Eng Saba al Busaidy

ESPORTS TEAM KICKS OFF WORLD CUP CAMPAIGN TODAY

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, DEC 14

The Omani national esports team is set to begin, for the first time in its history, its participation in the Esports World Cup 25 for the game Rocket League, hosted by the Saudi capital, Riyadh, from 15 to 20 December. This historic milestone reflects the growing presence of Omani esports on the international stage. The Omani team's matches will kick off at 8 pm Muscat time over two days, today, and tomorrow where it will face eight of the world's strongest Rocket League nations: Italy, Saudi Arabia, Norway, the United States, Brazil, Chile, and Germany, in a highly competitive group filled with major challenges and intense matchups.

The national squad competing in the tournament consists of Amjad al Zadjali, Sultan al Balushi, and Abdullah al Ameri, under the leadership of head coach Abdullah al Atiqi. This historic participation represents the culmination of long-term preparation and development programs aimed at building a team capable of true competition, rather than mere participation.

A PROUD GLOBAL PRESENCE

Engineer Saba al Busaidy, Chairperson of the Oman Esports and Electronic Games Committee, affirmed that the national team's participation in the Rocket League World Cup marks a qualitative achievement and a pivotal moment in the journey of esports in the Sultanate of Oman. She noted that this qualification reflects the extensive technical and organisational efforts exerted during the past period. Al Busaidy stated that the players have presented a commendable model that reflects the impact of structured preparation programs, training camps, and competitive participations, which ultimately led to qualification for this major global event. She emphasised that Oman's presence among the world's elite national teams represents an important step toward solidifying its position on the worldwide esports map.

LONG-TERM PREPARATION

Al Busaidy explained that the team's preparation was not the result of a short-term effort, but rather part of a long-term program that extended for more than a year, implemented under a clear technical vision aimed at building a truly competitive national team. The preparation stages included strong regional and continental participations, technical development programmes, and continuous performance evaluations, all of which contributed to refining the players' skills and enhancing their individual and collective readiness. She highlighted key preparation milestones, including participation in the Asian Youth Games, where the team won the bronze medal, as well as the Islamic Solidarity Games, in which the team finished fourth amid strong competition. In addition, the team underwent specialised domestic training camps and an overseas training camp ahead of the World Cup to reach the highest levels of readiness and cohesion.

FLEXIBILITY IN FACING CHALLENGES

Regarding challenges, Al Busaidy pointed out that the nature of esports requires daily practice and continuous development, which poses difficulties given the players' academic and professional commitments. She stressed that the committee addressed these challenges with high flexibility through coordination with relevant entities, transforming them into a unifying national opportunity that supported the players and enabled them to represent Oman in the best possible manner.



The event featured more than 4,500 runners representing 68 countries.

Global runners conquer Himam Trail Run Race

THE Himam Trail Run Race 2025 concluded its main competitive events on Friday, December 12, following two days of racing across the diverse landscapes of the Al Hajar Mountains. With more than 4,500 runners representing 68 countries, the event reaffirmed its status as one of Oman's most prominent mountain sports gatherings. This year's edition was marked by strong competition across all distances, reflecting both the expanding international appeal of the race and the high level of technical and organisational readiness achieved by the organising team, supported by medical, volunteer, and security units deployed across the routes.

In the flagship Al Hajar ULTRA 120 km, Spanish runner Maite Mayora secured first place in the women's division with a time of 19:02:45, followed by China's Wenfei Xie in 20:12:57 and Russia's Tatiana Fedoseeva in 20:13:23.

The men's race saw Morocco's Ahmed Ayyoup take the title in 14:44:01, with France's Victor Guerdin finishing second in 15:08:32 and Oman's Saleh al Saidi placing third in 17:11:43. The demanding route began in Al Hamra and crossed the eastern Hajar range and the high terrain of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar before descending into Birkat Al Mouz, combining steep elevation gains with long technical sections and exposed rocky corridors.

In the Skyward Canyon 60 km, held along canyon paths and climbs from Izki, France's Clara Magnin won the women's category in 08:20:24, followed by Claire Stone of the United Kingdom and Jordanka Petrushevskva of North Macedonia.

Omani runner Amjad al Jamoudi led the men's division with a time of 05:46:16, ahead of Russia's Navil Shaimukhametov and Australia's Vlad Ixel, who placed second and third respectively. In the Old Capital Trail 35 km, which began in the historic market district of Nizwa, Iran's Zahra Ashoori claimed the women's title in 04:54:49, followed by France's Aurelie Braux and the South Africa's Leila Knight. Morocco's Abdelaziz Ahnida won the men's category in 03:09:19, while Omani athletes Yousef al Sibih and Yousef al Naabi finished second and third.

The Scenic Sprint 20 km concluded with a strong field, where the United States' Lilly Willis took first place in the women's category in 02:10:32, followed by France's Fe Valvekens and India's Divya Reddy. In the men's division, Oman's Salim al Falahi secured victory in 01:51:48, ahead of France's Hector Chan and Oman's Al Azher al Hattali. Across all distances, participants navigated routes that highlighted the geological



Eng Salim al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals, honoured the winners of all race categories.



In the Skyward Canyon 60 km, France's Clara Magnin won the women's category, followed by Claire Stone of the United Kingdom and Jordanka Petrushevskva of North Macedonia.

contrasts and cultural landscapes of the Al Hajar range, from wadis and terraced farms to ridge-line crossings and traditional village pathways.

The closing ceremony took place under the auspices of Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals, who honoured the winners of all race categories and recognised partners, supporters, and volunteers whose contributions were essential to the successful delivery of the event.

The 2025 edition was supported by the Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, and the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, alongside extensive operational support from the Sultan's Armed Forces, the Royal Air Force of Oman, the Royal Oman Police, and the Ministry of Health.

Additional contributions came from the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs, the

Royal Omani Amateur Radio Society, the Oman Scouts and Guides, and the University of Nizwa.

Corporate partners included OXY Oman, Petroleum Development Oman (PDO), Oman LNG, and Sohar Aluminium.

The organising committee affirmed that the Himam Trail Run Race continues to strengthen its position as a leading mountain running event in the region, highlighting Oman's natural and cultural landscapes and contributing to the country's growing presence in adventure sport tourism.

The race programme will continue next weekend with a dedicated community and family event featuring children's races and short-distance runs designed to encourage wider participation in sport. These activities aim to promote healthier lifestyles, introduce younger runners to the spirit of trail running, and strengthen community engagement around outdoor activity.

SPORTS

SHORT TAKES



New York Knicks forward Og Anunoby (8) goes up for the dunk as Orlando Magic guard Jett Howard (13) and forward Tristan da Silva (23) look on.

WEMBAY SHINES AS SPURS STUN THUNDER, KNICKS DOWN MAGIC

LAS VEGAS: Victor Wembanyama made a triumphant return from injury to lead the San Antonio Spurs to a stunning NBA Cup semifinal upset of the Oklahoma City Thunder on Saturday as the New York Knicks downed the Orlando Magic to book their place in the final.

French prodigy Wembanyama, who has missed the Spurs' last 12 games after suffering a left calf strain last month, produced a dominant performance at both ends of the court to set up a thrilling 111-109 victory at Las Vegas's T-Mobile Arena.

The 7ft 4in (2.24m) 21-year-old finished with 22 points, nine rebounds and two blocks in 21 minutes on court, helping the Spurs climb out of a 16-point hole in the second quarter to inflict only the second Oklahoma City defeat this season.

NBA champions Oklahoma City had gone into the game on the back of a 16-game winning streak, boasting a 24-1 record for the season that had prompted talk of them breaking Golden State's record 73-win season.

But after making a smooth start to control the game, Wembanyama began to make his presence felt off the bench in the second quarter to breathe new life into the San Antonio ranks.

"I knew I had limited minutes so I had to make the most out of it," Wembanyama said.

"Winning against a team like this, it might seem like it's just a game but it's a collective effort and it's not an easy thing.

"It's only their second loss of the season. It means something."

Wembanyama was one of four San Antonio players to finish with double figures, with Devin Vassell scoring 23, and Stephon Castle and De'Aaron Fox adding 22 apiece.

"It says a lot. And it says a lot about where this team is going to be in the future," he said.

Reigning NBA Most Valuable Player Shai Gilgeous-Alexander led the Thunder scoring with 29 points, while Jalen Williams and Chet Holmgren added 17 points each.

BRUNSON STARS FOR KNICKS

In Saturday's other semifinal, Jalen Brunson scored 40 points to power the New York Knicks to their first NBA Cup final with a 132-120 win over the Orlando Magic. The Knicks' in-form offence proved too hot for injury-hit Orlando as New York took their recent streak to nine wins from 10 games. "We came out here and did exactly what we said we wanted to do, which was play Knicks basketball," said Karl-Anthony Towns, who backed Brunson with 29 points.

The Magic had led 36-33 after making a rapid start to a breathless opening quarter — earning the Knicks players some harsh and fiery words from coach Mike Brown in an early timeout.

"The way they came out, physicality-wise, we weren't ready for it," said Brunson.

"We bounced back and responded to that, and the way we played the rest of the game is a testament to that first timeout."

New York went on a tear at the start of the second quarter, capitalising on a missed floating jump shot from Desmond Bane to take the lead through Josh Hart.

The Knicks briefly relinquished their advantage soon after half-time, when Bane put the Magic back ahead with a running layup.

But Orlando ultimately could not keep pace with Brunson, who late in the third quarter left opposing guard Anthony Black sitting helplessly on the floor before executing a three-point step-back jumpshot. Orlando's Jalen Suggs managed a team-high 26 points, but failed to complete the game after suffering with an apparent injury to his left side. — AFP



Group photo of the winners.

Oman Sail win silver and bronze medals in Kuwait

OMAN SAIL'S Women's Sailing Team have won three medals at the 2nd Arab Women's Sailing Championship held at the Kuwaiti Maritime Sports Club in Kuwait from 2-5 December 2025. The five-strong team competed in Optimist, ILCA 4 and ILCA 6 categories against 37 female sailors from nine nations, including Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Libya, the UAE, Sudan and hosts Kuwait.

Building upon the achievements at last year's inaugural Arab Women's Sailing Championship in Bahrain, where Hadeel al Mushaifri won a bronze medal in the Optimist class, Tarteel al Hasni won silver in the Optimist category after a strong performance throughout the event.

She showed solid tactical awareness and the ability to adjust to changing conditions against a strong fleet of sailors. Malak al Dosari of Bahrain took the gold while Laila Diaa of Egypt won bronze. Abeer al Zakwani from Oman finished in fourth and Layan al Ruzaiqi finished seventh.

Hadeel al Mushaifri finished third in the ILCA 4 event to take the bronze medal. Karma Walid of Egypt won the gold with an excellent display, while Marwa al Hammadi from the UAE took the silver.

Ibtisam al Salmi won bronze in the ILCA 6 competition, finishing just behind Duha al Bashar of the UAE in second and Amina Shah from Kuwait to claimed gold for the host nation. She sailed well and demonstrated significant progress over the past year which bodes well for future events.

Ibtisam al Salmi expressed her pride and happiness at winning the bronze medal in the ILCA 6 class, noting that "The achievement holds great personal meaning as it marks an exceptional end to a year of hard work and intensive training". She added that "returning to the podium after years away from the ILCA to compete in larger classes makes this moment even more meaningful".

Al Salmi explained that the competition was far from easy, with several highly experienced sailors in the fleet. She highlighted that "The biggest challenges were shifting winds and the demanding schedule of up to four races a day, each lasting 45 minutes".

Looking ahead, Al Salmi said, "I aim to compete strongly in upcoming Arab and Asian championships, with a focus on international camps and events". She encouraged young women to try sailing, describing it as "an exciting and rewarding sport full of challenge, passion, and endless opportunities for growth and learning".

The team was coached by Sultan al Zadjali, Head Coach of the Optimist Team, and



Oman Women's Sailing Team.



Ibtisam al Salmi won bronze in the ILCA 6 competition.

Ahmed al Wahaibi, Head Coach of the ILCA Team, and supported by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth (MoCSY).

Abdulaziz bin Salim al Shidi, Oman Sail's Acting Director of Sailing, said, "This event signalled great progress for our Women's Sailing Team and an opportunity to build on the achievement. We are all very proud of our sailors for representing Oman at

this level and bringing medals home to our nation. The team demonstrated great determination and a high level of ability to compete against their peers from across the region. We go into the next series of regattas confident that we can continue to perform well and claim more honours for Oman."

POWERFUL EXAMPLE

The Oman Sail Women's Sailing programme is a powerful example of how a sports initiative can be strategically aligned with the national development goals outlined in Oman Vision 2040. Oman Sail has been a pioneer in women's sailing within the region since launching the first all-female team in 2012. The following year, Raiya al Habsi made history by becoming the first Arab woman to be nominated for the Rolex World Sailor of the Year Award after competing in the Rolex Fastnet Race onboard the victorious MOD70 Oman Air Musandam.

By ensuring sailing offers equal opportunities, the programme serves as a high-impact catalyst for social change, and contributes significantly to multiple pillars of the Vision, moving beyond sports to impact social, economic, and human capital development for the long-term benefit of the nation.

The 2nd Arab Women's Sailing Championship was organised by the Sailing, Rowing and Kayaking Committee of the Kuwaiti Marine Sports Club and supervised by an international panel of referees from Morocco, Algeria, Italy, Poland, France, and Russia. Dr Malav Shroff OLY, President of the Asian Sailing Federation, congratulated the winners and praised Kuwait for organising a smooth and successful event.

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SHORT TAKES



The two sides reviewed ways to facilitate closer business engagement and enhance cooperation frameworks.

OMAN, BURKINA FASO SEEK STRONGER ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIP

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman and Burkina Faso are moving to deepen bilateral economic and investment cooperation, following high-level talks between Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion and Karamoko Jean Marie Traoré, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Burkina Faso.

The meeting focused on exploring new avenues for collaboration in sectors of mutual interest, strengthening trade exchange and encouraging reciprocal investments that support sustainable economic growth in both countries.

The two sides reviewed ways to facilitate closer business engagement and enhance cooperation frameworks that could unlock investment opportunities and improve market access.

Discussions also highlighted the importance of exchanging expertise and best practices, particularly in the commercial, industrial and investment fields. Both ministers stressed the need to strengthen communication channels between public and private sector institutions to support joint ventures and private sector-led initiatives.

Al Yousef reaffirmed Oman's commitment to expanding its economic partnerships with African countries, noting that such cooperation aligns with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040.

The national strategy places strong emphasis on economic diversification, improving the competitiveness of the business environment and attracting high-quality foreign investment across priority sectors.

The talks form part of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion's broader efforts to strengthen Oman's international economic relations and build strategic partnerships that contribute to sustainable development — **ONA**

Hydrogen alliance kicks off NoorBridge project

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, DEC 14

MARKING a significant step in deepening strategic cooperation between Oman and the Netherlands in the global green hydrogen economy, the Holland Hydrogen Hub (H3) — an alliance of private Dutch businesses — has announced the launch of the NoorBridge project, a collaborative initiative aimed at exploring cost-optimal green energy trade between the two countries.

Holland Hydrogen Hub, which brings together interests spanning the hydrogen value chain, is seeking to leverage the technological capabilities of its members to unlock commercial opportunities arising from Oman's emerging green hydrogen industry. To this end, the alliance has been collaborating with Hydrom, the national orchestrator of Oman's green hydrogen sector and OQ, Oman's integrated global energy group.

Flowing from this broader objective, the NoorBridge project focuses primarily on the study of cost-effective and sustainable energy carriers capable of supporting the transportation of low-carbon molecules to European markets.

"Holland Hydrogen Hub, together with leading partners — Avans University of Applied Sciences, TNO and the Port of Rotterdam on the Dutch side; and ASYAD Group, OQ, Hydrom and Sultan Qaboos University from Oman — will jointly study the potential of diverse energy carriers, including liquid hydrogen (LH₂), ammonia, methanol, e-NG, liquid organic hydrogen carriers (LOHC), solid hydrogen (NaBH₄), and metal fuels", the alliance said in a post on Sunday, December 14, 2025.

The goal, it explained, is to "identify and realise pathways that



Representatives of the Holland Hydrogen Hub and their Omani partner organisations at the recent Green Hydrogen Summit Oman, Muscat.

Holland Hydrogen Hub, which brings together interests spanning the hydrogen value chain, is seeking to leverage the technological capabilities of its members to unlock commercial opportunities arising from Oman's emerging green hydrogen industry. To this end, the alliance has been collaborating with Hydrom, the national orchestrator of Oman's green hydrogen sector and OQ, Oman's integrated global energy group.

make large-scale green energy corridors efficient, sustainable and future-ready".

"This collaboration was proudly announced during the Green Hydrogen Summit Oman and we're excited to begin this journey towards accelerating the global energy transition", the Dutch alliance added.

NoorBridge brings together a strong consortium of academic, industrial and institutional partners from both countries. On the Dutch side, the involvement of Avans University of Applied Sciences, TNO and the Port of Rotterdam ensures a combination of applied research, systems-modelling expertise and real-world port and logistics insights.

From Oman, the participation of ASYAD Group, OQ, Hydrom and Sultan Qaboos University anchors the project in national hydrogen strategy, energy and logistics infrastructure and local scientific capability.

This cross-disciplinary collaboration is designed not only to generate analytical outcomes, but also to build long-term institutional linkages, align policy and infrastructure planning and accelerate readiness for commercial-scale green energy

trade. NoorBridge supports Oman's aspiration to become a global supplier of green molecules while reinforcing the Netherlands' role as a key hydrogen entry point into Europe.

Earlier this year, the Sultanate of Oman, the Netherlands and Germany signed a Joint Development Agreement to establish the world's first commercial-scale liquid hydrogen export corridor linking Oman's Port of Duqm with European ports, including Amsterdam and Duisburg.

The agreement was signed during the state visit of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to the Netherlands in April 2025. The project envisages the commercial-scale transport of renewable, RFNBO-compliant liquid hydrogen to Europe, alongside the development of supporting infrastructure such as liquefaction facilities, storage, import terminals, pipelines, rail links and inland waterways.

Separately, members of the alliance are also participating in a pilot initiative, in partnership with SOHAR Port and Freezone, to assess the feasibility of producing green hydrogen using alternative technologies.

Sanad Lab to develop future services road map

SAEED AL MASHARFI
MUSCAT, DEC 14

REPRESENTATIVES of Sanad Services Centres met on Sunday, December 14, 2025, under the auspices of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP); and with the participation of a number of dignitaries and officials from government entities and the private sector.

Addressing the meeting, Dr Saleh bin Said Masan, Under-Secretary of the

Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion for Commerce and Industry, outlined the objectives of the Sanad Services Centres Lab was announced.

The multi-day Lab aims to develop a comprehensive road map for Sanad Centres through the design of practical initiatives to enhance service quality, improve work procedures and strengthen beneficiary experience, while supporting the sustainability of the



DR SALEH
BIN SAID MASAN

Under-Secretary for
Commerce and Industry —
MoCIIP.

centres as a key partner in delivering government and

community services.

The meeting also discussed the pivotal role of Sanad Centres in supporting the objectives of Oman Vision 2040, particularly in bringing government services closer to beneficiaries and creating employment opportunities for Omani youth.

It was emphasised that digital transformation is not about phasing out service centres, but about evolving their role and strengthening their function as effective digital support and

enablement points.

In addition, the meeting reviewed the position of Sanad Centres as a national model for empowering Omani youth through the management of small enterprises that provide government and private services, particularly electronic services and the added value these centres contribute to the economy and society.

The meeting further addressed the expansion of the Sanad Centres network to more than 920 centres,

its contribution to creating over 2,350 job opportunities, the completion of more than 800,000 transactions during the third quarter of 2025, the provision of 388 electronic services and the achievement of a 100% Omanisation rate.

Emphasis was placed on the importance of continuing to develop the centres, ensure their sustainability and enhance their operational efficiency, in order to improve service quality and strengthen their social impact.

ADVERTORIALS

SHORTTAKES



The launch of the new card supports of the Central Bank’s directions aimed at unifying payment systems.

MEETHAQ ISLAMIC BANKING LAUNCHES THE “MAAL” DEBIT CARD

MUSCAT: Meethaq Islamic Banking from Bank Muscat has launched the National Payment Card “Maal” debit card, recently introduced by the Central Bank of Oman, as part of Meethaq’s ongoing efforts to provide innovative and secure payment solutions that keep pace with the latest developments, enhance the national payments ecosystem and elevate the banking experience for its customers across the Sultanate of Oman.

The launch of the new card supports of the Central Bank’s directions aimed at unifying payment systems and boosting reliance on the national payments infrastructure, thereby delivering added value to the national economy while promoting enhanced security, trust and efficiency in financial transactions.

The “Maal” card is distinguished by its use of the latest global security standards, offering cardholders direct, around-the-clock access to their accounts for cash withdrawals and purchases across merchant outlets within the Sultanate of Oman.

It also enables secure payments on local websites, bill payments, government services; and provides faster and more efficient transaction processing.

Being powered by the local OmanNet network ensures added privacy and protection. Point-of-sale devices will be gradually enabled to accept the Maal card to better serve customers and enhance their banking experience.

Sami Bait Rashid, Assistant General Manager, Meethaq Personal Banking, stated that the launch of the “Maal” card reflects Meethaq’s continued commitment to offering modern banking services compliant with Islamic Sharia principles.

“We are pleased to be among the first institutions to adopt this initiative, given its role in enhancing operational efficiency, simplifying customer transactions and supporting digital transformation efforts in the financial sector, particularly within Islamic banking”, he added.

The “Maal” debit card is issued to Meethaq customers at no additional cost.

It will be issued automatically to new customers upon opening an account, while existing customers will be notified via SMS once their cards are ready for collection.

Meethaq Islamic Banking continues to invest in upgrading payment systems and offering innovative solutions tailored to diverse customer needs. The new card enables users to benefit from secure and reliable services, allowing them to conduct withdrawals and payments quickly and seamlessly, delivering a more advanced banking experience.

Arabian Car Marketing unveils Lincoln Navigator

IN a spectacular evening celebrating innovation, craftsmanship and distinctive luxury, Arabian Car Marketing Company, the distributor of Lincoln vehicles in Oman, unveiled the highly awaited, all-new Lincoln Navigator at an event held at the Grand Hyatt Muscat.

The occasion brought together distinguished guests, esteemed partners and automotive enthusiasts from across Oman, making it an unforgettable celebration of luxury and engineering prowess.

The launch of the all-new Lincoln Navigator was more than just the introduction of a vehicle; it marked a milestone in the luxury automotive landscape of Oman, ushering in a new era where sophistication, performance and technology seamlessly converge.

The evening commenced with a warm welcome from Deenadayakaran Jeevamanickam, Business Head, Arabian Car Marketing Company, who reflected on Lincoln’s commitment to creating compelling vehicles with an exceptional ownership experience to match.

He said, “Tonight, we gather not merely to unveil a vehicle, but to introduce an experience — an evolution of what modern luxury represents.

The All-New Lincoln Navigator stands as a testament to power shaped by elegance, reflecting prestige, craftsmanship and innovation in every detail. At Arabian Car Marketing Company, we take immense pride in carrying forward Lincoln’s distinguished legacy by curating extraordinary experiences worthy of the Lincoln name”.

Later in the evening, Hani Badawi, Regional Manager, Lincoln Middle East, shared his insights on the significance of the Navigator in Lincoln’s global portfolio.

He said, “The Navigator is the cornerstone of the Lincoln brand — our flagship SUV that embodies the very best of Lincoln globally.

Today we elevate its legacy with a bold, confident new design, a completely reimagined interior, thoughtful signature



The launch of the all-new Lincoln Navigator was more than just the introduction of a vehicle; it marked a milestone in the luxury automotive landscape of Oman.

features and differentiated connected experiences crafted for the discerning tastes of Middle East drivers — delivering an elevated experience that seamlessly blends sophisticated design, intuitive technology and unparalleled comfort”.

The all-new Lincoln Navigator exterior styling is highlighted by the signature Lincoln Front Light Bar and illuminated Lincoln Star. Its bold presence is further accentuated by the Satin Chrome Mesh grille in the Reserve trim and top-tier Satin Aluminium Full Jewel grille in the Presidential trim.

The vehicle also introduces the class-exclusive Lincoln Split Gate, offering versatile cargo access and convenient seating for family or leisure settings.

Complementing the exterior are 22-inch wheels with refined finishes and Adaptive

Pixel Projector Headlamps that adjust with the speed for enhanced visibility and pre-illuminates the road ahead with the adaptive dynamic bending light.

Inside, the all-new Navigator’s cabin has been transformed into a sanctuary of personalised luxury, featuring the 48-inch panoramic display alongside an 11.1-inch touchscreen, offering seamless connectivity, intuitive control and a multidimensional entertainment experience powered by the 28-speaker Revel Ultima 3D audio system.

The Lincoln Digital Experience, backed by Google apps and Services, ensures effortless access to navigation, entertainment and vehicle controls, while Lincoln Rejuvenate provides a multi-sensory spa-like experience, blending sight, sound, scent, seat comfort and climate control to allow passengers to relax and recharge.

NBO and PayByte sign acquiring services agreement

MUSCAT: National Bank of Oman (NBO) has signed an Acquiring Services Agreement with Digital Payment Solutions Trading LLC, PayByte, at the Bank’s Head Office.

Under the agreement, NBO will provide point of sale terminals and payment processing services to merchants onboarded by PayByte, supporting wider acceptance of secure digital payments across the Sultanate of Oman and strengthening national efforts towards cashless transactions.

The collaboration aims to support businesses of all sizes by broadening access to reliable



NBO and PayByte seek to accelerate the adoption of digital payments.

digital payment channels, enabling smoother transactions and contributing to a more inclusive and efficient financial ecosystem.

By working together, NBO and PayByte seek to accelerate the adoption of digital payments, foster innovation within the acquiring space and reinforce national efforts to promote a cashless economy aligned with Oman Vision 2040.

Commenting on the agreement, Dr Ali bin Salim al Shekaili, Assistant General Manager and Head of Digital and E-Channels at NBO, said, “We continue to invest in robust, secure and scalable payment

infrastructure that supports merchants at every stage of their growth.

Our agreement with PayByte strengthens NBO’s acquiring capabilities and expands access to reliable digital payment solutions, contributing to a more integrated and efficient payments ecosystem that supports economic activity across Oman. This collaboration reflects our commitment to advancing secure digital payment acceptance, strengthening customer trust and supporting financial inclusion and business competitiveness across the Sultanate of Oman”.

BankDhofar receives Citibank’s 2025 STP Excellence Award

MUSCAT: BankDhofar has been awarded the prestigious Straight-Through-Processing (STP) Excellence Award for 2025 by Citibank, in recognition of its exceptional performance in the automated, error-free processing of US Dollar payments.

The award marks a significant milestone in the bank’s continuous drive towards operational excellence, customer trust and technological advancement.

The Citibank STP Award is presented annually to financial institutions that achieve outstanding accuracy and efficiency in processing international payments.

The accolade reflects Citibank’s



BankDhofar achieved a near-perfect 99.9% STP rate in both Trade and Treasury Finance Payments.

rigorous global standards for automation, compliance and transaction integrity.

Achieving high STP performance is vital for banks that handle large cross-border payment volumes, as it minimises delays, reduces manual intervention, strengthens risk controls and enhances the overall customer experience.

BankDhofar’s recognition places it among a select group of institutions globally that deliver consistent, high-quality payment processing aligned with international benchmarks. BankDhofar achieved a near-perfect 99.9% STP rate in both Trade and Treasury Finance Payments, underscoring its

strong internal capabilities and commitment to delivering seamless financial services.

This level of performance reflects the bank’s focus on precision, speed and reliability in every stage of the payments workflow. Robust automation systems, advanced integration platforms and a meticulous approach to compliance have collectively contributed to BankDhofar’s ability to process large payment volumes with exceptional accuracy.

The award also highlights BankDhofar’s ongoing investment in technology-driven enhancements that support real-time processing and reduce operational risk.

SHORTTAKES



The dialogue is one of the GCF’s most prominent annual regional events and runs until December 16.

OMAN HOSTS GCF REGIONAL DIALOGUE

MUSCAT: The Environment Authority on Sunday hosted the Green Climate Fund (GCF) Regional Dialogue for the Middle East and North Africa, reinforcing the Sultanate of Oman’s growing role in regional and international climate action.

Held under the auspices of Dr Abdullah bin Ali al Amri, Chairman of the Environment Authority, the event reflects Oman’s commitment to supporting climate initiatives, strengthening regional cooperation and deepening partnerships with the Green Climate Fund.

The dialogue is one of the GCF’s most prominent annual regional events and runs until December 16.

The gathering brings together National Designated Authorities, accredited entities, banks and financial institutions, United Nations organisations, implementing partners and government representatives from across the region.

Its objective is to enhance regional coordination, exchange experiences and discuss priorities related to climate finance, mitigation and adaptation.

The programme includes specialised technical sessions and interactive workshops focused on building institutional capacity to prepare and develop climate project proposals. It also addresses ways to improve countries’ readiness to access financing from the Green Climate Fund and reviews the Fund’s strategic directions for the coming period.

Hosting the dialogue aligns with Oman’s commitments under the Paris Agreement on climate change and its support for developing countries in accessing international climate finance. It also supports Oman Vision 2040, which prioritises environmental sustainability and the transition towards a low-emission, climate-resilient economy.

Through hosting this regional platform, Oman continues to position itself as an active contributor to collective climate action and a facilitator of cooperation across the Middle East and North Africa. — ONA

Oman-France economic partnership soars

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, DEC 14

THE enduring bilateral relationship between the Sultanate of Oman and the French Republic is entering a new, intensified phase, marked by a commitment to a “win-win” economic partnership. This renewed vigour, driven by high-level diplomatic and business engagement, focuses heavily on Oman’s ambitious Oman Vision 2040 and the global shift towards green energy and technology.

In an exclusive interview with the Observer, Nicholas Forissier, France’s Minister Delegate for Foreign Trade and Economic Attractiveness, underscored the strategic importance of this collaboration.

“The idea is that the French government I represent wants to say to our friends from Oman that France is here”, Minister Forissier stated, emphasising that the strong links between the two nations are “based on history... and confidence, trust between each other”.

His visit, accompanied by a delegation from the International MEDEF (the employers’ association in Paris), was an intentional push to strengthen relations, particularly on the economic level, after a period of lower engagement.

THE WIN-WIN IMPERATIVE

The cornerstone of this enhanced relationship is a balanced, mutually beneficial partnership. Minister Forissier stressed that the goal is to build relations in an “operational way”, centred on companies from both sides. “The agreements, to my opinion,



Nicholas Forissier, France’s Minister Delegate for Foreign Trade and Economic Attractiveness, speaks to Oman Observer in an exclusive interview.

should always be balanced. And at least we have to try to find a good balance between each country, each company, of the two sides. This is how trade works”, he explained.

This philosophy appears to be driving remarkable results, with bilateral trade between Oman and France growing by a notable 60% in 2024, a positive trend that continued into 2025.

This surge confirms the shared belief that there is still significant room for growth, beyond what are already deeply rooted French contributions in sectors like waste treatment, drinking water production and urban advertising.

FOCUS ON OMAN VISION 2040 PILLARS

The French government and its companies are keen to align their expertise with the strategic pillars of Oman Vision 2040, particularly in three key sectors: Energy Transition, Special Sector (Aerospace) and

Cutting-Edge Technologies. Oman’s leadership in the energy transition has deeply impressed the French delegation.

The Sultanate of Oman’s targets — aiming for up to 30% of energy needs from sustainable and renewable sources by 2030, 60% by 2040 and achieving net-zero by 2050 — present enormous opportunities.

French giants like TotalEnergies and EDF Renouvelables have already made substantial investments, totalling €2 billion and are ready to further accompany Oman’s ambitious programme. “You are doing it, you are applying it with a very determined attitude”, the Minister observed.

In the aerospace and cutting-edge technology domains, France is leveraging its advanced capabilities. The contract on Oman’s first telecommunications satellite with Airbus Defence and Space, showcases the depth of cooperation in the special

sector. Furthermore, France is looking to support Oman’s digital innovation ecosystem, drawing on its own successes. Discussions are underway to help develop Oman’s startup hub, Terminal 11, potentially mirroring the success of Paris’s Station F.

DIPLOMATIC AND BUSINESS MOBILITY

Beyond sector-specific partnerships, France is a strong proponent of facilitating greater economic and people-to-people mobility.

Minister Forissier affirmed France’s unequivocal support for the introduction of a Schengen visa waiver for Omani nationals and actively backs the EU initiative to sign comprehensive economic partnership agreements with Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries.

“We are pleading for a responsible but very open attitude in these questions of free trade agreements”, he noted, stressing the importance of solid, long-term agreements. Furthermore, the Minister extended a strong personal and official commitment to the continuity of this engagement.

“I will personally come back”, he declared, adding that “probably the President will also come to Oman in the coming times. Because we really want to reinforce our relations”.

The French-Omani relationship, built on a long history of trust, is now being rapidly modernised and operationalised, setting the stage for a period of sustained economic cooperation and investment that is poised to benefit both nations well into the future.

Oman advances strategic mineral exploration

MUSCAT: Oman’s mining sector is emerging as one of the country’s most promising growth areas, supported by a clear exploration road map and improved availability of geological data across several governorates.

Recent aerial and geochemical surveys conducted by Minerals Development Oman (MDO) have identified geological indicators of strategic minerals, including gold, copper, zinc, lead and chromium.

Engineer Mattar bin Salim al Badi, CEO of Minerals Development Oman, said the findings point to fertile geological environments that require further detailed exploration to confirm resource size and quality.

He stressed that the current phase remains technical in nature and that commercially viable reserves can only be confirmed after completing

internationally recognised exploration programmes.

Al Badi noted that official reserve estimates will only be announced once standards such as the Australian or Canadian reporting codes are met, as these are relied upon by investors and financial institutions.

As such, it is premature to declare precise quantities of minerals, including gold, at this stage.

He said Oman’s mining sector underwent major regulatory reforms between 2017 and 2023, adopting a new investment model similar to that used in the oil and gas industry.

This approach focuses on allocating large concession areas, making wide-scale aerial surveys more cost-effective and internationally competitive.



MDO, which operates as the sector’s investment and development arm, holds 14 concession areas covering about 24,000 square kilometres.

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development arm, holds 14 concession areas covering about 24,000 square kilometres.

Since launching intensive exploration activities in 2022, the company has conducted aerial surveys over more than 16,000 square kilometres, drilled over 100,000 metres and analysed more than 80,000 samples using ground surveys and satellite imagery.

The company’s strategy aims to reduce investor risk by providing high-quality geological data, while promoting responsible development of metallic, precious and rare earth minerals.

It also seeks to attract international partnerships and expand downstream value creation.

Al Badi highlighted a major industrial minerals project in the Al Shuwaymiyah region, which

includes a dedicated export terminal and targets production of 23 million tonnes of limestone and gypsum in its first phase, rising to 40 million tonnes.

He also stressed the importance of environmental protection and community acceptance, citing the use of dry tailings technology at the Yanqul project to safeguard groundwater.

MDO is also working to build a local mining services ecosystem, issuing tenders for specialised laboratories and supporting the localisation of drilling and surveying services.

The long-term goal is to develop an integrated mining industry in Oman, spanning research, services and downstream processing, while maximising local added value.

— ONA

ENERGY DIPLOMACY

China seeks deeper UAE energy ties



China’s Foreign Minister Wang Yi pledged deeper cooperation with the United Arab Emirates in investment, oil and gas and infrastructure during talks in Abu Dhabi with Shaikh Abdullah bin Zayed. The meeting formed part of Wang’s 3-nation Middle East tour.

China was keen to strengthen high-level exchanges, reinforce political trust and elevate bilateral relations with the Gulf state, Wang said. — Reuters

MARKET AMBITIONS

SpaceX share sale signals IPO



SpaceX has launched a secondary share sale valuing the company at about \$800 billion, fuelling expectations of a possible initial public offering (IPO) next year, according to a letter seen by the media.

The sale allows up to \$2.56 billion in shares to be bought at \$421 each.

Growth in Starlink services and advances in Starship have driven investor interest. — Reuters

LEGAL ESCALATION

French court freezes Google assets



A French court has ordered the temporary freeze of about €110 million in Alphabet-owned company’s (Google) assets, following a claim by the administrator of its former Russian unit, documents show.

The move marks a rare effort by Russian-linked entities to pursue Western assets abroad.

Separately, Russia’s central bank is suing Euroclear over frozen Russian holdings in Europe. — Reuters

OPINION

Invisible costs for women: Pink tax and safety tax



DR MYTHILI KOLLURU

The writer is an assistant professor at the marketing and management department of the College of Banking and Financial Studies.

SURPRISINGLY, taxes that are not actual government taxes are still being paid by women. Both ‘pink tax’ or ‘gender tax’ and ‘safety tax’ are economic burdens that women face worldwide. The pink tax has existed for decades but gained mainstream recognition since the late 20th century.

Safety tax, on the other hand, has existed in practice even longer, but systematic documentation has brought it to the forefront explicitly in the 21st century. The World Economic Forum and the United Nations have stressed that gender-based price disparities are one of the major contributors to widening gender economic inequality.

Both the ‘pink tax’ and the ‘safety tax’ are globally prevalent, though the forms vary by region and product category.

The initial debate was centred around the so-called ‘tampon tax’ that was a VAT or sales tax on menstrual products, but with time, it has expanded to include a broader range of goods and services marketed for men and women.

“Pink tax” refers to charging higher prices for products and services explicitly marketed for women than for similar or identical products and services marketed for men.

The price disparity, though well-documented across countries, remains widespread for products such as razors

and razor cartridges, lotion, shower gels, deodorant, toys, clothing, tailoring expenses and shampoo, as well as for services such as haircuts, dry cleaning and other retail services.

Evidence shows that bikes and helmets are more costly than similar items for men. There are also differences in senior health care products, insurance, services and housing. While individual price differentials might seem insignificant, the cumulative narrative tells a different story.

Some manufacturers and retailers claim the price differential is due to higher production costs for women’s products. However, substantial research has proved that even when production costs are similar, differential pricing still exists.

Research shows a 10 to 15% price hike on everyday products for men, despite the products appearing identical, with only minor variations in packaging or colour. There’s also a substantial cumulative financial burden for women over their lifetime and this exacerbates the existing gender pay gap.

Safety tax has no legal identity and is not an economic term; it’s a descriptive phrase that captures the hidden and extra costs women pay to feel safe and secure.

To protect themselves against gender-based violence and the fear of unsafe public spaces, they spend more on safer transportation options, housing options

The World Economic Forum and the United Nations have stressed that gender-based price disparities are one of the major contributors to widening gender economic inequality.

in safer neighbourhoods and protective technologies. It refers to indirect causes of security systems and the emotional burden of constant precautions for personal safety.

These expenses are less spoken about and are not labelled, yet reflect deep societal and structural inequalities with disproportionate safety concerns for women.

A 2021 publication by the Kellogg School of Management shows that some countries and states within countries are framing laws to prevent this. Not only do women earn less than men, but they also pay more than men. The pink tax is a stark reminder that discrimination can appear in the least expected places.

In some parts of the world, such as America, Canada, India, Rwanda and Australia, as well as in some US states, such as California, legal reforms have recently emerged. Consumer awareness and public advocacy could help combat these unfair costs; together, the pink and safety taxes exacerbate global financial inequality.

The world needs to harness collective voices that can directly influence change against gender discriminatory pricing. Most women are unaware of the price differentials and the substantial savings that could be achieved in a fair system. Regulatory authorities, along with consumer education, can only bring about reform and change to ensure we live and thrive sustainably in an equitable society.

VENEZUELAN OIL RICHES WILL STAY MOSTLY THEORETICAL

YAWEN CHEN

The US seizure of a sanctioned tanker has sharpened President Donald Trump’s standoff with Venezuela’s Nicolás Maduro. It does not, however, make the country’s 300 billion barrels of theoretical oil reserves — the world’s largest — any easier to turn into usable supply.

Even if Washington’s pressure campaign leads to tangible political change, oil investors have little cause to overhaul their supply-demand assumptions. A US military buildup offshore has prompted RBC analysts to see outright regime change in the first quarter of 2026 as a possibility. If that ever occurred, one key focus would be what happens with the country’s oil operations, which in 2009 produced over 3 million barrels a day.

In the context of daily global supply of around 100 million barrels, this is a market-moving amount that could prevent geopolitical shocks elsewhere from sending crude values soaring.

In the context of daily global supply of around 100 million barrels, this is a market-moving amount that could prevent geopolitical shocks elsewhere from sending crude values soaring. While the International Energy Agency foresees a 2026 supply glut that could push Brent crude below its current \$60 a barrel, a more balanced supply-demand picture later in the decade could lift it to \$80 by 2028, Goldman Sachs analysts reckon.

Still, last month Venezuela exported only around 900,000 barrels a day. National output has been declining ever since 2006, three years after then-President Hugo Chávez fired 19,000 striking staff from PDVSA, the dominant state-owned oil company that controls everything from production fields to export terminals.

In 2007 he expropriated foreign partners, gutting the sector’s expertise and capital. Much of Venezuelan oil infrastructure has deteriorated and more recently US sanctions have blacklisted PDVSA.

Optimists argue that lifting sanctions could unlock a quick increase of several hundred thousand barrels a day. Chevron, the only major US company still operating in the country, has shown through its joint ventures that incremental gains are possible when Washington grants waivers. But larger increases require heavy investment and a stable operating environment, two things Venezuela has lacked for years.

Wood Mackenzie estimates that \$15 billion to \$20 billion of investment would be needed by joint ventures operating in the main Orinoco Belt production area over the next decade to add just 500,000 barrels a day. — Reuters

London is still home to the best tech founders

READING captions of some newspaper articles one might get the impression that building a startup these days in the UK is not the right thing to do. Capital markets remain cautious, the macro-economics is gloomy and tech founders are contending with everything from rising costs to customers taking their time to make decisions.

Yet inside Antler’s London office (a global early-stage venture capital firm investing in tech startups), Adam French, a partner in the firm, says there will be more than 100 new founders proving that the UK’s tech ecosystem is the best in the world. Half of these founders have relocated from outside the UK to build in this country.

They include senior leaders from tech unicorns and some of the world’s best tech companies. They include outliers who know what it takes to perform at the highest level and are now entering entrepreneurship, people such as a former Team GB boxer now launching a health-tech venture.

London may be criticised for “losing its edge” to Paris earlier this year when it was overtaken by the French capital as Europe’s leading tech hub for the first time, reigniting concerns over the strength and attractiveness of the UK’s biggest city.

But the reality we see everyday is the opposite. London still attracts the best founder talent in Europe. It still has the most experienced investors, the deepest capital markets and a talent pipeline that can compete with anywhere in the world.

That does not mean it is easy. The pressure is real. AI companies have proven that European startups can scale as quickly as their US peers and that technical excellence can trump access to capital. That is inspiring but also daunting. The founders in UK residency know they are building in an era where product cycles have compressed from months to weeks. In this execution era, speed and precision are



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The writer is our foreign correspondent based in the UK.

London still attracts the best founder talent in Europe. It still has the most experienced investors, the deepest capital markets and a talent pipeline that can compete with anywhere in the world.



Two men observe the new Eden Dock development in the financial and business district in London, Britain. — Reuters

everything. That is why the calibre of founders choosing to build in London matters so much.

There is a tech eco system here whose maturity and scale are surpassed only by Silicon Valley. So, the founders produced in the UK are serial entrepreneurs, technical domain experts, or senior operators leaving top global companies to start again from scratch.

They are not tourists in entrepreneurship, they are elite builders and that’s exactly what we are seeing.

Take the present cohort: a second-time founder with a medical background who is building a reusable rocket launch system for biomedical purposes in the UK. A lawyer who retrained as a software engineer to democratise access to legal support. A physicist whose quantum computing ideas are drawing attention from everyone he speaks with.

These are not hobby projects. They are major plans built by people who have already proven they can execute. And they chose London because nowhere else offers the same combination of technical talent, domain expertise and capital willing to back hard problems.

The UK now produces four times as many technical founders as it did five years ago and the number of AI specialist founders has doubled since 2022.

French says, these are people who could work anywhere in the world, but have chosen the UK because they believe it is still one of the best places to start.

One of the companies formed in the last residency, Pesto, has already raised £1 million in funding to transform operations for food and drinks manufacturers. That’s a tangible example of what happens when world-class founders are backed early and supported to execute.

In fact, the UK’s advantage has always been its people: ambitious, pragmatic builders who thrive in complexity. The founders in residency embody that. Currently, the founders building in London are proving that even in a tough climate, the UK remains Europe’s beating heart of innovation.

MSX records full ESG compliance

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, DEC 14

Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) has announced that all companies listed on its Main and Parallel markets have achieved full compliance with mandatory Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) and sustainability disclosure requirements in 2025.

The milestone marks a significant step in the development of Oman's capital market and reflects growing alignment with the expectations of local and international institutional investors. It also demonstrates the readiness of listed companies to adopt global best practices in ESG reporting, enhancing transparency, governance and investor confidence.

MSX introduced ESG standards to strengthen the competitiveness of



MSX introduced ESG standards to strengthen the competitiveness of Oman's capital market and attract foreign investment.

Oman's capital market and attract foreign investment, while supporting national commitments such as achieving net-zero

emissions by 2050 and advancing economic diversification under Oman Vision 2040. The achievement builds on a multi-year

transformation that began in 2022, when MSX, in coordination with GCC exchanges, unified sustainability and governance indicators.

In 2023, MSX published Oman's first ESG reporting guide and launched a digital disclosure platform to support structured and consistent reporting.

Between 2023 and 2024, reporting was voluntary, allowing companies to develop internal ESG capabilities. Participation rose steadily, signalling growing awareness ahead of mandatory implementation in 2025.

With full compliance now achieved, MSX is positioned as a forward-looking, sustainability-aligned marketplace capable of supporting new financial instruments, expanding its investor base and attracting global capital focused on responsible investment.

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ART/LIFE



A R T

THE MAN WITH THE LEFT-HANDED BRUSH

> 20

CREATIVE PROJECTS OMANI INSTITUTIONS SWEEP KUWAIT CREATIVITY AWARDS



KUWAIT: The Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit won the Kuwait Creativity Award 2025 for the initiative ‘All of Oman’ in the category of Government Communication. This national achievement is added to the record of pioneering Omani experiences in institutional communication and community engagement.

This achievement is a culmination of the Unit’s efforts in developing the government communication system and introducing innovative initiatives that reflect the state’s direction in enhancing institutional communication and establishing a responsible national discourse that supports the path of sustainable development.

The ‘All of Oman’ initiative is one of the national communication initiatives launched by the Unit. It aims to enhance community awareness of the national vision and establish the concept of partnership between the state and the community through diverse communication content that highlights the vision’s priorities, tracks national achievements, and brings public policies closer in a clear language and using modern tools.

The initiative contributes to presenting an effective model for government communication based on transparency, interaction, and listening to the community, thus enhancing trust, supporting community participation, and keeping pace with transformations in modern communication and media patterns.

Oman Radio also won the Kuwait Creativity Award 2025 for the programme Studio Al Dhahira (Noon Studio) in the category of Radio and TV Programmes at the Arab Media Forum in Kuwait.

The award witnessed wide Arab participation of about 1,600 entries from various Arab countries, distributed across several creative fields and axes, reflecting the scale of the competition and the value of the award at the Arab level.

The programme is a daily dialogue programme presented by Abdullah al Saidi on Oman’s radio. It addresses various local issues, follows up on public affairs developments, and discusses social, developmental, and economic topics, while highlighting issues relevant to community life and hosting specialists and officials in various fields.

The win is a culmination of the efforts of Oman Radio in offering professional radio content that meets audience aspirations, enhances the role of media in serving the community, establishes responsible dialogue, and follows up on public issues objectively and professionally.

The Youth Centre in Oman also won the Kuwait Media Creativity Award in its thirteenth session, which was held in Kuwait with the presence of several governmental and media institutions from various Arab countries. — **ONA**

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



FASHION

Dresses by Christian Dior displayed at the exhibition “La collection Dior d’Azzedine Ala?” from the Azzedine Ala Foundation at La Galerie Dior in Paris. — **AFP**



GASTRONOMY

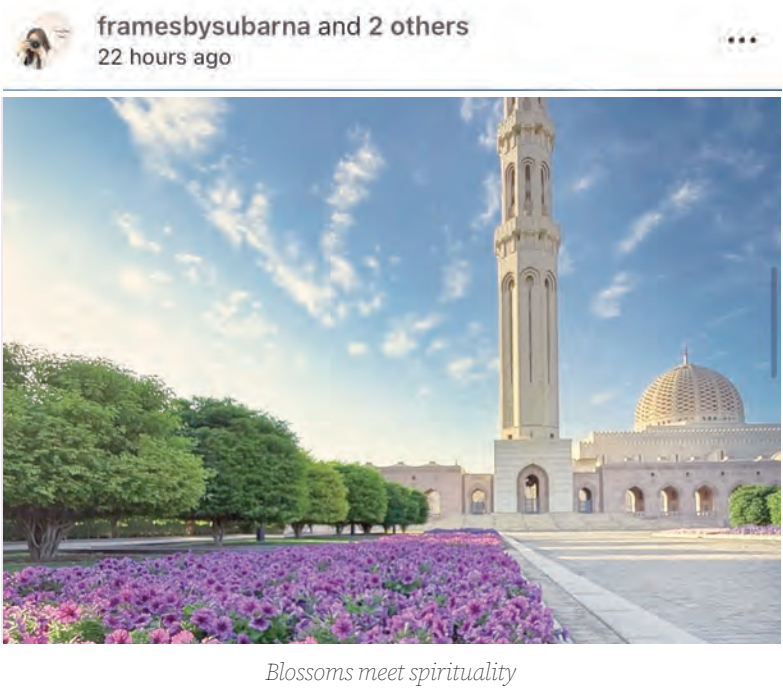
The Baita Resch chef prepares the “Casunzei” ravioli, one of Cortina d’Ampezzo’s most traditional dishes, ahead of the Milano Cortina 2026 Olympic Games, in Cortina d’Ampezzo. — **AFP**



ENTERTAINMENT

US actors Paul Rudd and Jack Black attend the premiere of Columbia Pictures’ “Anaconda” at The United Theatre on Broadway. — **AFP**

INSTA PICKS



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Hollywood meets the world in Sundance line-up

Hollywood A-listers Jon Hamm, Olivia Wilde and Russell Crowe will rub shoulders with some of cinema’s best and brightest new talent at the Sundance film festival next month, organisers said on Wednesday.

The first edition of the festival since the death in September of founder Robert Redford will see a firmament of stars descend on Park City, Utah for one of the most important gatherings in the global movie calendar.

“I think that this is going to be such a celebratory year and a very special one”, Sundance director of programming Kim Yutani said.

“Any time you can bring together such an eclectic group of artists and storytellers... I think about Charli XCX and Billie Jean King, Salman Rushdie, Rinko Kikuchi together... it’s such a special (group) of people that we can have on the mountain”.

A rich vein of comedy runs through this year’s programme, said Yutani.

“There are films that are looking at things in a kind of more quirky and unique way, like ‘The History of Concrete’ by John Wilson, which is going to have its own enthusiastic audience”, she said.

International With the movie industry still struggling to find its feet after successive blows from the streaming revolution, the Covid pandemic and Hollywood



Sundance-Film-Festival-2026

strikes that crippled Tinseltown in 2023, the involvement of such famous faces is a vote of confidence in independent filmmaking, said festival programmer John Nein.

“When you see Chris Pine and Jenny Slate in ‘Carousel’, or when you see Channing Tatum and Gemma Chan in ‘Josephine’... that’s one of the signs of optimism at a time when we are looking at some real challenges in the sector, that notable actors continue to want to be involved in these projects”, he said.

Sundance received more than 16,000 submissions, whittling them down to 90 feature-length films, with 40 per cent of them from first-time feature directors.

All but a handful of the titles that will be screened in the festival’s snow-capped Rocky Mountain base will be world premieres, selected from 164 countries and territories around the globe. — AFP



Guo Pu training at a breakdancing studio in Pingyi county, in eastern China’s Shandong province. — AFP

Teen on mission to show China is cool

LUDOVIC EHRET

FLIPPING and spinning on a studio floor, 17-year-old Royal is a star in China’s breakdancing scene and aiming for gold at the World Championships in Japan this week.

Royal, real name Guo Pu, shot to fame when she won both the youth and adult Asian Championships in June.

She is part of a growing Chinese force in breakdancing, which combines acrobatic floor moves, footwork and rhythmic expression to hip-hop or funk and was included as an Olympic sport for the first time at Paris 2024.

“At first my grandmother would not let me dance breaking because back then, breaking’s reputation truly was not very good”, Royal said at the studio where she trains in her hometown of Pingyi, in the eastern province of Shandong.

“But after I achieved some results, she stopped saying anything”, she smiled.

Having already won the youth world title in August, Royal will compete alongside other “B-girls” and “B-boys” at the adult World Championships taking place on Friday and Saturday in Fukuoka, Japan, the country which has long dominated the sport. “I want to win that gold medal for China and show the world that Chinese breaking is getting cooler and cooler”, she said.

“I also participated in a local children’s artistic show for the Chinese New Year. That’s when coach Mike saw me”.

Mike, whose real name is Li Shilong, said “she immediately impressed me”.

“During her performance I saw a light in her eyes... It was a kind of light that shows a real passion, a real drive for dance and for art”.

“I felt that this girl might have been born for breaking”.

Royal has now put school on hold to dedicate her time entirely to dancing.

Like other top athletes in China, she will benefit from easier access to university thanks to her sporting achievements.

Royal describes herself as “not very talkative” and still “pretty nervous before competitions”, but says she is able to “open up” on stage.

In addition to her Asian and world titles, Royal won gold at this year’s World Games — a top competition for non-Olympic sports.



Guo Pu training at a breakdancing studio in Pingyi county, in eastern China’s Shandong province. — AFP

She has developed a healthy rivalry with fellow Chinese breakdancer Liu Qingyi, known as “671”, who won bronze at the Paris Games.

The country’s next generation of breakdancers looks promising, with China winning five out of six medals at the youth World Championships in August.

“In four years, China has gone from being unknown in the world of breakdancing to ranking among the world’s top three and is now seen as the future of breaking”, Mounir Biba, a 13-time world champion and head coach of the Chinese team, said.

“There is talent, there is a lot of potential. There are a lot of young dancers in China”, he said, adding that financial support from the government was helping the sport grow.

Having breakdancing in the Olympics has encouraged the surge of interest in China, according to coach Mike.

Authorities see an opportunity to win international honours while parents, reassured by breakdancing’s new respectability, are more willing to let their children practise it.

The Chinese DanceSport Federation now organises numerous competitions, Mike said, while funds are allocated to training facilities.

The only downside, according to the coach, is that some Chinese dancers do not necessarily fully understand the culture of breakdancing, which originated in New York in the 1970s.

“The (skill) difficulty level in China



Guo Pu reacting during a training session at a breakdancing studio in Pingyi county, in eastern China’s Shandong province. — AFP

is exceptionally high. However, the understanding of dance and the depth of exploration into dance artistry remains insufficient”, he said.

“This is an area where we need to learn from Western nations”, Mike said.

“Breakdancing and other street dance styles... their essence is innovation. I believe that by understanding the core of this culture, Chinese children will become more creative”.

Royal is keen to push the sport’s creativity.

“I really want to inspire the next generation of B-girls”, she said.

“By passing on the history and the culture of breaking and developing a style of breaking that’s unique to girls”. — AFP

FEATURES

THE MAN WITH THE
LEFT-HANDED
BRUSH



IDRIS AL BALUSHI

In a quiet space where patience meets pigment, Rashid bin Sulaiman al Amri paints with a hand that once felt unfamiliar and with a resolve that now feels unbreakable. Today, many know him by a name that carries both truth and triumph: the man with the left-handed brush.

Rashid's relationship with art began early. As a child, his mother noticed his talent for drawing, a gentle spark that flickered but did not yet become a steady flame. Years later, in 2020, he returned to art with renewed intent. Then, in December of that same year, everything changed. A stroke altered his path, leaving him with partial paralysis on his right side and forcing him to confront a reality he had never imagined.

The beginning was profoundly difficult. For a time, Rashid believed his dreams had turned to ash. Yet belief has a way of reshaping itself. He chose to trust in a simple conviction: nothing is impossible. What first appeared as a limitation slowly transformed into a source of distinction.

His first painting with his left hand was not accidental. He chose to draw his right hand. "It was a message to myself, a quiet declaration that strength could return, and that determination could redraw the boundaries of the possible". With that single work, Rashid reframed loss into purpose.

He began again from the basics, sketching simple subjects, relearning motion, patience and control. Over time, his style gravitated towards realism, a genre that mirrors his own journey with honesty and precision. He studies other realist artists, drawing inspiration from their growth, while remaining committed to finding his own voice, one canvas at a time.

What fuels him most is progress. Each new painting must be better than the last. This steady evolution is his engine, his reason to return to the easel day after day. For Rashid, art and challenge are inseparable, two forces folded into one.

Those around him see more than technique. They see courage, a personal challenge turned outward, proof that perseverance can become its own form of beauty. His story has resonated with many, not because it is extraordinary, but because it is honest.

Rashid dreams of taking his work beyond borders, participating in competitions and exhibitions inside Oman and abroad, representing his country through art shaped



by resilience. His message is clear and generous: nothing is impossible. Try first. What we often call inability is, sometimes, simply the absence of an attempt.

Once, he believed he could not draw with his left hand. The truth, he discovered, was that he had never tried. When he did, he succeeded and in doing so, found his signature. Today, that signature is known across his canvases and in his name, Rashid bin Sulaiman al Amri, the man who turned a left hand into an indelible, lasting mark.

