

OMAN

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INBRIEF

National campaign to curb tobacco use launched

ROYAL DECREE FIXES
ND HOLIDAYS

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Tuesday issued Royal Decree No 15/2025 amending some provisions of Royal Decree No 88/2022 on fixing official holidays.

The Decree reads as follows: Article (1) states that the text of Clause 'D', item 'Firstly', 'Article (1)' of Royal Decree No 88/2022, shall be replaced with the following: D - The National Day of the Sultanate of Oman to be on November 20 and 21. Article (2) says that this Decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from its date of issue. — ONA

HM CUP FOOTBALL
FINAL ON FEB 20



Assigned by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, Shaikh Al Fadhl bin Mohammed al Harthy, Secretary-General of the Council of Ministers, will preside over the final match of His Majesty the Sultan's Cup Football Championship (2024-2025) on February 20. The Ibra Sports Complex in the Al Sharqiyah North Governorate will host the final. The return legs of the quarterfinals are scheduled for January 28 and 29. The semifinal first leg matches will take place on February 7 and 8, with the return legs scheduled for February 17 and 18. These matches will determine the two finalists who will compete for the prestigious title on February 20.



TURKISH SKI RESORT FIRE KILLS 66

A fire at a ski resort hotel in Türkiye's Bolu mountains killed 66 people on Tuesday and forced panicked guests to jump out of windows in the middle of the night. Some 51 people were also injured, officials said.

Politics has ‘weaponised’ science, says UN climate chief

PARIS: The UN's climate chief on Tuesday said that the science of global warming had been “weaponised” by politics, a day after Donald Trump withdrew the United States from the Paris Agreement.

The move places the United States alongside Iran, Libya and Yemen as the only countries in the world outside the 2015 pact, in which governments agreed to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels to avoid the worst impacts of climate change.

Simon Stiell said that shifting

geopolitical events could not change the hard facts that underpin climate change and the disastrous consequences linked to a warming planet.

Last year was the hottest on record, and the combined average temperature of 2023 and 2024 exceeded the 1.5 degrees Celsius benchmark set under the Paris climate accord for the first time. Stiell said that support for climate science was “far, far more significant than those few voices that challenge” it.

“The science has actually been



Simon Stiell

weaponised, and again that is reflective of the politics,” he told an audience at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland.

On the first day of his second term as president, Trump announced that the United States would again withdraw from the Paris climate accord endorsed by nearly 200 nations.

Trump, who has expressed scepticism of climate change and global efforts to confront it, did the same thing during his first term but Joe Biden rejoined the pact. “We’ve

been here before,” said Stiell.

But the world was undergoing an “unstoppable” energy transition that attracted \$2 trillion for renewable power in 2024, he said, twice the amount invested in fossil fuels.

“Anyone who steps back from this significant forward momentum creates a vacuum that others will fill and will benefit from,” Stiell added.

He said it was critical that these opportunities were better advertised “in a language that resonates with the hearts and minds of ordinary people all over the world”. — AFP

OMAN

MOSDWORKSHOP



The National Guide for Engineering Standards and Specifications for the Inclusive Urban Environment and Means of Transport for People with Disabilities to ease transport access

National guide for access to people with disabilities introduced

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
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A workshop was organised by the Ministry of Social Development (MoSD) to introduce the National Guide for Engineering Standards and Specifications for the Inclusive Urban Environment and Means of Transport for People with Disabilities.

Over 60 participants from various institutions took part in the workshop held under the auspices of Shaikh Rashid bin Ahmed al Shamsi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Social Development at the headquarters of the National Center for Autism in Al Khoudh. The workshop witnessed a review of the guide's main themes like basic engineering standards and specifications for people with disabilities, the inclusive urban environment, and means of transport for feedback and comments before its implementation.

Nada bint Malallah al Sadiqiyah, Director of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities, said: "This guide comes in implementation of Article 9 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities to provide an accessible environment for persons with disabilities. The National Committee for the Care of Persons with Disabilities confirmed the completion of work to prepare this comprehensive national guide with the participation of the competent government agencies and civil society institutions, and the representatives of persons with disabilities."

She also added that this guide will guarantee the right of persons with disabilities to easy and accessible access to various facilities and buildings and the provision of services appropriate to their conditions. It will also facilitate the application of international and national standards for various competent authorities to make the environment and means of transportation easy to access and use. Oman is moving towards establishing an innovative national system for access to sustainable development in line with Oman 2040 Vision, which has placed innovation as a major factor for all its strategic goals.

The Ministry of Social Development seeks to benefit from modern innovations in accessibility and modern technologies in developing assistive technologies in programs and services provided to persons with disabilities.

STATE COUNCIL CHAIRMAN RECEIVES UAE SPEAKER



MUSCAT: Shaikh Abdulmalik bin Abdullah al Khalili, Chairman of the State Council on Tuesday received Saqr Ghobash, Speaker of the Federal National Council of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and his accompanying delegation. The Chairman of the State Council lauded the depth of fraternal relations between Oman and the United Arab Emirates. These relations, he added, have consolidated over decades between the two countries' leaderships.

On his turn the Speaker of the Federal National Council of the UAE underscored the depth of distinguished parliamentary relations between the two councils. He also stressed the importance of boosting these relations towards wider horizons.

The meeting was attended by several officials from the State Council. — ONA

Oman Design Week starts

KABEERYOUSUF
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UNDER the auspices of His Highness Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar, Oman Design Week (ODW) officially began at the Al Irfan Boulevard Garden in the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC) on Tuesday.

The opening ceremony was attended by Her Highness Sayyidah Meyyan bint Shihab al Said, Chairperson of the Oman Design Association; Dr Hashil bin Obaid al Mahrouqi, CEO of OMRAN Group; and enthusiasts from various fields of creativity and design.

The event will run until January 25. Organised by Oman Tourism Development Company (OMRAN Group) in collaboration with the Oman Design Association, the event aims to position the Sultanate of Oman as a global hub for creativity and culture.

Oman Design Week, which follows the recent launch of the national visual identity, also aims to showcase the transformative role of creativity and design in enriching the tourism experience and promoting environmental sustainability through innovation.

Open to the public from 4 pm to 10 pm on weekdays and from 4 pm to 12 midnight at the weekends, Oman Design Week offers a dynamic platform to explore the intersection of contemporary design and Omani heritage, presenting a seamless blend of tradition and modernity.

The event features the works of 40 artists and designers, showcasing 10 major art installations including large-scale sculptures, innovative designs, and eco-conscious creations made from recycled materials.

Additionally, there are three interactive workshops designed to empower Omani youth and inspire the next generation to engage with the fields of design.

HH Sayyidah Meyyan said, "The inaugural



Open to the public from 4pm to 10pm on weekdays and from 4pm to 12 midnight on weekends, Oman Design Week offers a dynamic platform to explore the intersection of contemporary design.

edition of Oman Design Week features the participation of a distinguished group of designers and artists, supported by institutions and partners from both the public and private sectors, embodying the spirit of collaboration in fostering Oman's creative ecosystem.

This is vividly reflected in the deeply rooted Omani creative sensibilities evident in architectural designs and the harmony across various design and art disciplines in the Sultanate of Oman."

Dr Al Mahrouqi said, "At OMRAN Group, we take great pride in supporting and hosting this initiative, which underscores the contributions of Omani design and arts

to the tourism sector. This event marks an important step in realising OMRAN Group's vision of enriching culture and creativity within Omani tourism. It aligns with our commitment to offering innovative tourism experiences."

Oman Design Week promises a rich schedule of exhibitions, workshops, and interactive experiences that delve into the heart of Omani culture while embracing contemporary design trends.

By connecting tradition with innovation, the event is set to leave a lasting impression on visitors and participants, elevating Oman's reputation as a hub for creativity and sustainable tourism.

Catamaran carrying ‘Mission Inclusion’ docks in Salalah

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH
@patkaushal

A journey of hope and inclusion recently anchored in Salalah, Oman, as the world's first fully accessible catamaran, Lo Spirito di Stella, berthed at the Hawana boat port. The Italian catamaran, which began its ambitious 'Mission Inclusion' on July 1, 2023, has been sailing across five continents to promote inclusion, break stereotypes, and highlight the capabilities of people with disabilities.

During its three-day stop in Salalah, the catamaran welcomed 54 visitors from the Al Wafa Centre for the Rehabilitation of People with Disabilities, along with many others from the local community. The experience left an indelible mark on those who visited, giving them a rare opportunity to connect with a vessel designed to be barrier-free.

For many, the visit to 'Lo Spirito di Stella' was transformative. Mona Bait Ali Sulaiman, an autism trainer at Al

Wafa Centre, shared her perspective and said, "Both parents and their children with various disabilities enjoyed visiting the catamaran. For most, it was a first-time experience. While some were initially hesitant, they later embraced the adventure and expressed a desire for more such excursions in the future." Samiya Bawain, Activity In-Charge at the Al Wafa Centre, echoed these sentiments, emphasising the need for inclusive activities.

"This trip demonstrated the importance of initiatives that make people with disabilities feel like integral members of society. I thank the 'Lo Spirito di Stella' team for choosing Salalah as one of their stops," she said.

The catamaran's journey is not just about sailing; it is a global mission to uphold the values of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Built to accommodate individuals with diverse physical, sensory, and cognitive capabilities, Lo Spirito di



Catamaran Lo Spirito di Stella

Stella symbolises a world without barriers.

Speaking about the project, Gianni Garofalo, captain of the

catamaran, said: "Our mission is to show that inclusion is possible in all aspects of life. The catamaran is a testament to overcoming barriers—

physical, societal, and emotional. By hosting people with disabilities alongside able-bodied individuals, we foster a shared experience that breaks down stereotypes." The vessel's tour also aims to highlight the re-integration of disabled servicemen and women into society.

The story of Lo Spirito di Stella traces back to its founder, Andrea Stella, who faced life-changing circumstances after a spinal injury left him in a wheelchair. Instead of giving up, Stella pursued his passion for sailing, building a fully accessible catamaran in 2003. Till now Lo Spirito di Stella has covered 24 ports across 15 countries. Together, it promotes Italian culture, maritime tradition, and universal values of inclusion.

So far the catamaran has covered France, Spain, Netherlands, Bahamas, the US, Colombia, Panama, Ecuador, Polynesia, Bora Bora, Samoa, Fiji Island, Australia, Indonesia, Singapore, UAE, Qatar, and Oman.

DAVOSLAUNCH



Dr Said bin Mohammed al Saqri, Minister of Economy, expressed confidence in the brand's ability to enhance Oman's standing on the global stage.

NEW NATION BRAND UNVEILED AT WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM

DAVOS: In a significant stride towards enhancing Oman's global presence, the Sultanate of Oman proudly launched its New Nation Brand at the prestigious World Economic Forum in Davos. This landmark event marks a pivotal chapter in Oman's journey to strengthen its international partnerships and showcase the rich tapestry of its culture and economic potential.

The launch of the New Oman Nation Brand at Davos represents the Sultanate of Oman's commitment to the world as a cooperative and trustworthy partner. Focused on fostering meaningful connections and innovative collaborations, the new brand embodies the core values of warmth, partnership, and intelligent foresight that define Oman's national identity. Speaking at the event, Dr Said bin Mohammed al Saqri, Minister of Economy, expressed confidence in the brand's ability to enhance Oman's standing on the global stage.

"This initiative is a testament to our unwavering dedication and spirit of cooperation and partnership. We present to the world a narrative woven with our cultural richness and strategic foresight, aiming to create impactful global dialogues and partnerships," Dr Al Saqri said.

The launch in Davos serves not only as an invitation to international investors and media to explore Oman's opportunities but also as a celebration of the innovative spirit thriving within its communities. With a focus on sustainable development and economic growth, the Sultanate of Oman is poised to become a hub for strategic and meaningful engagements on the global stage.

The New Oman Nation Brand reflects the collective ambition to build a future where Oman plays a central role in addressing global challenges and fostering a sustainable, interconnected world. Oman's Nation Branding Strategy is centred around creating an inclusive and dynamic narrative that highlights the country's unique attributes in hospitality, culture, and sustainable innovation. It aims to position Oman as a leader in global cooperation and forward-thinking solutions.

KABEER YOUSUF
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As many as 18 Japanese pyrotechnicians, who flew in to add colour to the 5th Anniversary of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik's Accession, bade adieu to the Sultanate of Oman, carrying sweet memories of Oman and its people on Sunday.

They praised the government and the people for their great hospitality, which made them feel at home. The team conducted a 12-minute-long fireworks display that drew praise from viewers for being spectacular, breathtaking, and innovative, according to the Hanabi (fireworks) artists.

"We have been here for the last ten days preparing for the celebrations, and we are glad to have done our level best to make the day

Development projects in Wilayat of Sur reviewed

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, JAN 21

DR Yahya bin Badr al Maawali, Governor of Al Sharqiyah South, toured the Wilayat of Sur on Tuesday to follow up on the implementation of development projects in the wilayat. He was accompanied on the tour by Eng Badr bin Salim al Maamari, Secretary-General of the Tender Board; Eng Khamis bin Mohammed al Shammakhi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology for Transport; the Wali of Sur; and other officials.

The tour reviewed various stages of the projects and the challenges facing their implementation. Among the sites visited was the Al Sharqiyah Expressway Project, which is one of the strategic road projects to enhance economic and social development in the region. Governor Dr Al Maawali said, "These projects come within the government's efforts to enhance sustainable development and improve the quality of life for citizens. We are committed to providing the necessary support to ensure the completion of these projects according to the highest quality standards and on time."

According to Al Maamari, "The development projects in the Wilayat of Sur reflect the government's keenness to develop the infrastructure in a way that contributes to achieving economic and social



Dr Yahya bin Badr al Maawali, Governor of Al Sharqiyah South, at a project site in Sur on Tuesday

development. We are working to ensure the provision of the necessary resources and overcome the obstacles that may face the implementation of these projects." MoTCIT official Al Shammakhi said that "the Al Sharqiyah Expressway Project represents a qualitative addition to the road network in the Sultanate of Oman, as it will facilitate traffic and enhance communication between the wilayats of Al Sharqiyah South Governorate."

On the sidelines of the tour, a number of citizens gave their feedback on the

development projects taking place in Sur. Ahmed bin Saeed said: "We are proud of the projects being implemented in our wilayat, and we hope that they will contribute to improving the level of services and providing job opportunities for the people of the Wilayat."

Maryam al Hatroushi, another resident, said: "The Eastern Expressway Project will have a positive impact on our daily lives, as it will reduce the time spent in transportation and increase development opportunities in the region."

Al Khadra sculpture symposium returns for 3rd edition

SIHAM AL SAIDI
IBRA, JAN 21

The third edition of the Al Khadra International Sculpture Symposium has recently concluded, building on the remarkable success of its previous two editions. Organised by the Al Khadra team under the supervision of the Office of the Governor of Al Sharqiyah North, the event was coordinated with the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth (MoCSY) and supported by public and private institutions, alongside the local community.

The symposium welcomed artists from 13 countries across Europe, Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East, showcasing the Sultanate of Oman's commitment to promoting cultural exchange. Participating nations included Russia, Spain, Argentina, Iran, India, Iraq, Egypt, Poland, Macedonia, Tunisia and Oman.

The symposium celebrated the



The symposium welcomes artists from 13 countries across Europe, Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East.

universal art of sculpture, with previous editions hosting artists from 19 countries. This year, 14 new sculptures were created, contributing to the growing legacy of this global art form and leaving behind beautiful memories tied to the Sultanate of Oman's cultural landscape.

Yousuf al Rawahi, from the main supervision team in the symposium, highlighted: "The initiative aims to highlight the Sultanate of Oman's cultural and touristic appeal within Oman

Vision 2040, which emphasises fostering a creative and innovative society. By inviting renowned sculptors to Oman, the symposium serves as a platform to introduce the world to the Sultanate of Oman's rich heritage and timeless values.

The organisers aspire to establish a contemporary sculpture museum in coordination with relevant authorities. Such a museum would be the first of its kind in Oman, enhancing the

country's global tourist appeal and positioning it as a hub for cultural exchange."

Hatim al Shueili, an Omani sculpture participant, said: "In my work titled Duality of Life and Death, it was inspiring to participate in such an international event hosted in Oman. Our friends in the field are travelling to Oman to join the symposium, which benefits the Omani treasure in sculpture, gaining experience and sharing ideas."

Laura Marcos, a sculptor from Argentina, expressed her pleasure in participating, saying: "It is my first time visiting Oman, such a beautiful country. It was not only about working in sculpture but also meeting sculptors and sharing experiences and ideas from around the world. It was a great chance to see this beautiful country and meet these friendly people in Oman, which makes me happy and wish to come again to Oman."

Japanese who lit up Accession Day fete return home with memories



The team conducted a 12-minute-long fireworks display that drew praise from viewers.

even more colourful, depicting the achievements of the government and the love of the people, besides portraying the unique culture of the

country," said Harunobu Yonenaga, the group leader.

The team included Harunobu Yonenaga, Katsushi Saiki, Keisuke

Saiki, Kentaro Saito, Kohei Ogatsu, Tomohiro Yamazaki, Hiroshi Sasaki, Jumpe Kawaguchi, Takuma Minai, Yuya Misono, Yunoshin Saito,

Fiord Santos, Takumi Ogasawara, Kohei Iwatsu, Yoshiki Takezawa, Kei Sasaki, Kazuhiro Teraq, and Riiko Aratake from six Japanese pyrotechnics companies. They formed a single group for the purpose, called Hanabi Japan, at the request of Dr Mohammed bin Said al Busaidy, Ambassador of Oman to Japan, who was impressed by their show in Tokyo.

However, carrying the materials and equipment required for the show posed challenges. "We approached many shipping companies but weren't able to strike a deal with them. Finally, the government sent a special ship to transport the equipment and materials by sea, which helped us conduct the show as we wanted," Yonenaga said. In Japan, Hanabi or fireworks, are traditional events held almost every weekend.



ADVENTURE BUGS FLOCK TO WADI AL KHOUDH

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
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If you love adventure and seek thrill, come to Wadi Al Khoudh, one of the seven venues of the Muscat Nights 2024. The activities at this place start from 4:00 pm to 10:00 pm, with an entrance fee of 600 baisas per person.

Wadi Al Khoudh in the Wilayat of Al Seeb includes mountain walking paths, zip line, trampolines, in addition to special tracks for all terrain vehicles, and four-wheel drive challenges. The venue has also been equipped with family-friendly seating to enjoy outdoor entertainment and cooking parties, in a completely safe environment.

Wadi Al Khoudh is hosting the event for the first time and targets young people. The organisers have strategically distributed the sites throughout Muscat, ensuring easy access for all residents and visitors of the city.

The venues includes mountain walking paths, zip line, trampolines, in addition to special tracks for all terrain vehicles, and four-wheel drive challenges



This wadi is one of the beautiful tourist places and is frequented by many families and young adventure lovers. Many families also gather on its banks to enjoy the winter.

Muscat Municipality explained that the expansion of event sites has contributed to attracting large numbers of visitors, both from within and outside Muscat Governorate. The organisers explained that the events were not limited to entertainment only; rather, they enhanced community interaction by providing a distinctive family environment that combines cultural and entertainment activities.

This year's Muscat Nights events shine with a unique mix of diversity, as they have attracted more than a million visitors so far. Due to the large turnout of visitors and wide interaction, the Muscat Nights Festival has been extended until February 1. The organisers announced that this decision came in response to the unprecedented turnout and in support of

entrepreneurs and local companies. This large turnout highlights the importance of the event in promoting local culture and providing a platform for social interaction and entertainment.



Muscat Nights is a great opportunity to showcase local culture, arts and entertainment and create unforgettable memories for everyone and that continues to provide a unique winter experience, targeting all family members.

61 women get training in leadership skills

SIDRAH 3.0, a transformative six-month youth leadership development program for Omani women aged 20 to 35, celebrated the graduation of 61 participants from nine governorates. This milestone event, hosted at the National Bank of Oman and held under the esteemed patronage of Omani businesswomen and Chairperson of National Bank of Oman, Shaikha Amal bint Suhail Bahwan, highlights Sidrah's growing impact in nurturing leadership, and promoting social responsibility.

“It is truly inspiring to witness the remarkable development of our participants. They have transformed into highly vibrant women, equipped with the growth and entrepreneurial mindsets to make a meaningful impact in their community,” said Shatha bint Salim Al Maskiry, Founder of Lahunna Oman. “This journey also sets a powerful example for future generations of female leaders.”

Co-developed by Lahunna Oman and Outward Bound Oman, Sidrah 3.0 aligns with Oman Vision 2040 by inspiring participants to become changemakers in their communities



Sidrah 3.0 aligns with Oman Vision 2040 by inspiring participants to become changemakers in their communities and contributors to the nation's economic diversification goals.

and contributors to the nation's economic diversification goals. The program unfolded in two dynamic phases.

The first phase featured a six-day outdoor experience that fostered teamwork, resilience and critical thinking through hiking, and camping. Members collectively engaged in 2,160 hours of hiking and

camping, which provided them with practical skills and experiences.

The second phase spanned 12-14 weeks and was designed as a comprehensive hybrid learning experience. Participants attended in workshops and had to complete their e-learning curriculum. They also benefited from group coaching and received one-on-one coaching. This unique combination equipped the women with essential skills in leadership, problem-solving, and entrepreneurship, preparing them to thrive as future leaders.

HH Sayyid Faisal bin Turki al Said, Patron of OBO said, “Since its establishment, Outward Bound Oman has been committed to providing innovative development programmes aimed at empowering young men and women in the Sultanate of Oman. In 2025, we are pleased to celebrate the success of the third cohort of the Leadership Programme for Omani women, which focused primarily on developing entrepreneurship skills. This initiative reflects the growing need to foster a spirit of initiative and innovation, directly contributing to the advancement of economic and social development in Oman.”

MoE unveils ‘Stations in Oman’

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 21

The Ministry of Education (MoE) celebrated the launch of “Stations in Oman” book. The launch ceremony was attended by Dr Said bin Saif al Amri, Head of the Office of the Minister of Education, and a number of directors general and officials from the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MoHT), and the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth (MoCSY).

The launch ceremony included a speech by the ministry, delivered by Dr Warda al Busaidy, Director of the Citizenship Department, and a poem recited by student Mohammed al Qatabi. Students Enas al Rahbi and Hasna al Kharousi presented a silent play that tells the story of the Omani people's adherence to their identity and history, and their preservation of authentic Omani customs and traditions. A visual presentation followed which included the book's chapters,



The book represents a qualitative leap in the field of citizenship education and is a strategic step aimed at strengthening the national identity.

contents and objectives.

Dr Said al Amri, Head of the Office of the Minister of Education, said: “The “Stations in Oman” book represents a qualitative leap in the field of citizenship education and is a strategic step aimed at strengthening the national identity and instilling the values of citizenship in the younger generations, using an

enjoyable narrative style and smooth language. It provides educational content that enhances understanding and pride in our history and culture, contributing to building a creative generation capable of contributing to achieving Oman's future vision.” The book “Stations in Oman” provides a comprehensive view of the historical and cultural milestones that the Sultanate of Oman has gone through, as it reviews various aspects of the Sultanate of Oman's history and achievements, including: the growing stage of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, the achievements of the renewed renaissance in various fields, and inspiring stories that highlight the national and social values that enrich the identity of the Omani student. The book combines enjoyable storytelling with expressive drawings that add a creative touch to the content, making it an integrated educational tool that aims to enhance national belonging.

Programme to enhance entrepreneurs’ skills concludes

MUSCAT: The Development Bank, in partnership with Outward Bound Oman, has concluded the “The Pioneers of Development” programme held in Rimal Al Sharqiya. The programme aimed to develop entrepreneurial skills, strengthen the ability to face challenges, and expand the networking opportunities of Omani entrepreneurs.

The programme sought to enhance the life skills of entrepreneurs, enabling them to increase the success rates of their companies and projects through a well-structured set of outdoor activities and group discussions, accompanied by a 3-day hiking and camping experience in an



The programme included a 3-day hiking and camping experience in desert

inspiring desert environment. The programme also focused on developing essential entrepreneurial capabilities, team leadership, creative thinking, seizing opportunities, and boosting resilience to

overcome challenges. More than 27 entrepreneurs participated in the programme from the customers’ base of Development Bank, which provided an exceptional opportunity to improve their competitive

capabilities, contributing to the sustainability of their businesses and the enhancement of the local economy.

Mohammed bin Nasser al Abdulsalam, Marketing Manager at Development Bank, said: “We are proud to organise this programme, which reflects our commitment to supporting entrepreneurship and enhancing leadership skills among Omani youth. This programme is an effective opportunity that combines practical experience and theoretical knowledge, enabling entrepreneurs to face market challenges and contribute to sustainable economic development.”



MUSCAT GOVERNORATE MUSCAT MUNICIPALITY

Advertisement No. (1/2025)

International Companies specialized in the field and registered with **Tender Board**, may obtain tender documents for the website through the following link: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>) against non-refundable fees as mentioned below starting from the date of this announcement and until the end of deadline stipulated below.

Tender Number	Description of Tender	Last Date to Collect the Tender	Tender Return Date
PRE/24/265 (RE-Call)	Annual Maintenance Contract (AMC) of Oracle E-Business HRMS and Financial System (Re Tender)	15/02/2025	03/03/2025
PRE/24/319 (RE-Call)	Purchase of Golf Car (Re Tender)	01/02/2025	06/02/2025
PRE/23/150 (RE-Call)	Consultancy Services for Master Planning for Al Naseem Park (Re Tender)	15/02/2025	03/03/2025
PRE/24/133 (RE-Call)	Consultancy Services for Master Planning for Riyam Park (Re Tender)	15/02/2025	03/03/2025
PRE/24/293	Supply, Installation & Commissioning of Lighting for Oman Flag at Al Khuwair Square	01/02/2025	06/02/2025
PRE/25/016	Supply, Installation & Commissioning of CCTV System for Oman Flag at Al Khuwair Square	01/02/2025	06/02/2025
PRE/24/275	Construction of Park in Al Khairan	15/02/2025	03/03/2025
PRE/25/019	Construction of Park in Al Mubella	15/02/2025	03/03/2025
PRE/24/274	Construction of Park in Al Amrat	15/02/2025	03/03/2025
PRE/25/006	Renewal of Adobe Software	15/02/2025	03/03/2025

1. Bidders shall submit their offers electronically.

2. Clarification and Support:

- For any inquiries regarding tenders, please visit e-tendering website: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>).
- For technical support of e-tendering system please send an email to (etenderhd@gstb.gov.om) or call (+968 24402200).



سلطنة عُمان
وزارة النقل والاتصالات وتقنية المعلومات
Sultanate of Oman
Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology

إعلان مزايمة استثمارية Investment Announcement

Investment Announcement No. 2/2025 Bidding for Development and Management of Shelter Yards for Land Transportation

The internal investment committee at the Ministry of Transport, Communications, and Information Technology in cooperation with the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning announces the following request for investment bidding for local companies and specialized investors in (**Land Transportation**) to submit investment offers for the (**Development and Management of Shelter Yards for Land Transportation**) in lands owned by the ministry through the **Tatwir platform** (www.tatwir.om). This is in line with **Oman Vision 2040** in promoting investment, encouraging private sector participation, and enhancing the efficient organization and management of land transport services.

To apply and view the conditions on the Tatwir platform:
www.tatwir.om

INTERNAL INVESTMENT COMMITTEE

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CONDOLENCE



The Management & Staff of
NATIONAL TELEPHONE SERVICES CO. LLC
deeply mourn the tragic demise of
SHAMJEER O.M
on 19/01/2025
Our heartfelt condolences to the bereaved family.
May God give them the strength to bear with this irreparable loss

WORLD

SHORT TAKES



Russia’s President Vladimir Putin holds a videocall with Chinese President Xi Jinping at the Novo-Ogaryovo state residence outside Moscow. — AFP

PUTIN AND XI PRAISE TIES, HOURS AFTER TRUMP SWORN IN

MOSCOW: Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping praised their deepening cooperation in a video call on Tuesday, hours after Donald Trump’s inauguration as US President. Putin, addressing Xi as his “dear friend”, said Russia and China were building ties “on the basis of friendship, mutual trust and support”, despite external pressure. “Russia and China’s joint work plays an important stabilising role in international affairs,” Putin said in the call. Xi said he hoped to work with Putin to take ties with Moscow to “new heights” this year, according to Chinese state broadcaster CCTV. “Both sides should continue to deepen strategic coordination, resolutely support each other, and safeguard the legitimate interests of both countries,” CCTV reported Xi as saying. The two countries should also “expand bilateral relations, driving practical cooperation to deeper levels”, he added. Moscow and Beijing have strengthened military and trade ties since Russia sent troops into Ukraine, alarming the United States. — AFP

AFGHAN GOVT SWAPS PRISONERS WITH THE UNITED STATES



Afghan Khan Mohammad (C) speaks to the media as he arrived in Jalalabad. — AFP

KABUL: The Taliban government said on Tuesday it had released two American citizens from prison in return for an Afghan fighter held in the United States. Discussions about the prisoner exchange were confirmed last year, but the swap was announced after outgoing US president Joe Biden handed over to Donald Trump, who was inaugurated on Monday. “An Afghan fighter Khan Mohammed imprisoned in America has been released in exchange for American citizens and returned to the country,” the Afghan foreign ministry said in a statement. The ministry said Mohammed had been serving a life sentence in California after being arrested “almost two decades ago” in the eastern Afghan province of Nangarhar. Mohammed, who was convicted of narco-terrorism by a US court, returned to the province on Tuesday, where he was greeted by a crowd and presented with garlands of flowers. Taliban government spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said that two US nationals had been released, declining to provide any further details on the exchange. — AFP

EU PLEDGES 60 MILLION EUROS IN AID FOR LEBANON MILITARY

BRUSSELS: The European Union on Tuesday announced a 60 million euro support package for Lebanon’s armed forces, as the crisis-hit country seeks to implement a fragile truce between Israel and Hezbollah. EU foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas said the aid came “at a critical juncture for the implementation of the ceasefire agreement between Lebanon and Israel”. The Lebanese armed forces “are essential to regional and domestic stability, and deserve all our support in

performing their critical mission”, she said. Under the ceasefire deal Beirut said Israel must withdraw from the south of the country by January 26, with the Lebanese military then set to deploy alongside UN peacekeepers. At the same time, Hezbollah is required to dismantle any remaining military infrastructure in the south and pull its forces back north of the Litani River, some 30 kilometres from the border. The EU aid is

the latest from the West aimed at bolstering Lebanon’s military, with the US last week saying it would donate more than \$117 million in security assistance. During a visit to Beirut on Friday, French President Emmanuel Macron said that Paris would soon host an aid conference to help rebuild Lebanon after the Israel-Hezbollah war. Lebanon has struggled for years to finance its public institutions including the army following a 2019 economic crisis. — AFP

Israeli forces launch deadly raid in West Bank

ISRAELI security forces backed by helicopters raided the volatile West Bank city of Jenin on Tuesday, killing at least four Palestinians in what Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called a “large-scale and significant military operation”. The action, launched a day after U.S. President Donald Trump declared he was lifting sanctions on violent Israeli settlers who attacked Palestinian villages, was announced by Netanyahu as a new offensive against Palestinian groups.

“We are acting systematically and resolutely against the axis wherever it extends its arms - in Gaza, Lebanon, Syria, Yemen and Judea and Samaria,” Netanyahu said. Judea and Samaria are terms Israel uses for the occupied West Bank. The military said soldiers, police and intelligence services had begun a counter-terrorism action in Jenin. It follows a weeks-long operation by Palestinian security forces to reassert control in the adjacent refugee camp, a major centre of armed militant groups including Hamas and Islamic Jihad. As the operation began, Palestinian forces withdrew from the refugee camp and the sound of heavy gunfire could be heard in mobile phone footage shared on social media. Palestinian health services said at least four Palestinians were killed and 35 wounded as the Israeli raid began. The move into Jenin, where the Israeli army has carried out multiple raids and large-scale incursions over



Israeli forces in armoured vehicles conduct a raid in Jenin in the occupied West Bank. — AFP

As the operation began, Palestinian forces withdrew from the refugee camp and the sound of heavy gunfire could be heard in mobile phone footage. Palestinian health services said at least four Palestinians were killed and 35 wounded

recent years, comes only two days after the start of a ceasefire in Gaza and underscores the threat of more violence in the West Bank. An Israeli air strike last week in the Jenin refugee camp killed at least three Palestinians and wounded scores more. Hardline pro-settler Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, who has responsibility for large parts of Israeli policy in the West Bank, said the operation was the start of a “strong and ongoing campaign” against militant groups “for the protection of settlements and settlers”. Around 700,000 Israeli settlers live among 2.7 million Palestinians in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, land Israel captured in 1967. Most countries consider Israel’s settlements on territory seized in war to be illegal. Israel disputes this, citing historical and biblical ties to the land.

The internationally recognised Palestinian Authority has limited self rule over some territory in the West Bank under Israeli military occupation. In the days leading up to the operation, Palestinians throughout the West Bank said multiple road blocks had been set up throughout the territory, which has seen an upsurge in violence since the start of the war in Gaza. Late on Monday, bands of Israeli settlers attacked Palestinians, smashing cars and burning property, near the village of al-Funduq. Meanwhile in Gaza, Palestinian rescue workers continued the search for remains of people buried under the wreckage of their houses and along the roadsides, locating at least 150 bodies since the truce went into effect, according to the Gaza civil emergency service. — Reuters

TURKISH SKI RESORT FIRE KILLS 66



KARTALKAYA: A fire at a ski resort hotel in Türkiye’s Bolu mountains killed 66 people on Tuesday and forced panicked guests to jump out of windows in the middle of the night. Some 51 people were also injured, Interior Minister Ali Yerlikaya said at the Kartalkaya ski resort in northwest Türkiye. The fire began around 3:30 am on the restaurant floor of the 12-storey Grand Kartal Hotel, authorities said. Several fire engines and ambulances surrounded the charred, wood-fronted building, with white bed sheets tied together and dangling from one upper-floor window where people tried to flee. An investigation was underway into the fire, which coincided with school holidays when many families from nearby Istanbul and Ankara head to the Bolu mountains to ski. — Reuters

ETHICAL GUIDELINES

Norway urges firms to respect animals



Norway’s sovereign wealth fund, the world’s largest, will urge the companies in which it holds stakes to respect animal welfare. “We regularly update our expectations of companies related to corporate governance, and we have recently included animal welfare in the expectations of consumer interests,” fund official Caroline Eriksen said. The fund is asking companies in which it owns shares to respect the health code for terrestrial animals. — AFP

ELECTION CLAIMS

Court rejects appeal of Romania vote



Europe’s top rights court rejected far-right candidate Calin Georgescu’s appeal of a Romanian court decision to annul the 2024 presidential election after he won the first round amid claims of Russian interference. The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) said it rejected the request by Georgescu for the urgent ruling as “it fell outside of the scope” of the court’s ability to issue such a measure to reverse the annulment of the election process. — AFP

GUIDED PLATFORM

Spanish ministers quit X platform



Three members of Spain’s leftist government including a deputy prime minister quit X, calling the social platform “propaganda machine” Labour Minister Yolanda Diaz, a deputy premier in the government, said X had become “a propaganda machine” promoting some ideas over others through algorithms. Diaz’s allies Ernest Urtasun and Sira Rego, respectively ministers for culture and children, also announced they were leaving. — AFP

FUNDAMENTAL CHANGE



Britain’s Prime Minister Keir Starmer speaks during a press conference at the Downing Street Briefing Room in central London. — AFP

UK PM VOWS TO FIGHT NEW ‘TERRORISM’ THREAT

LONDON: British Prime Minister Keir Starmer on Tuesday pledged to fight the changing face of “terrorism” after a teenager admitted the murder of three young girls in a stabbing spree that triggered riots last year. Starmer said the “barbaric” killings, which were not treated as “terrorism” by the judicial authorities, were “a sign Britain now faces a new threat... acts of extreme violence perpetrated by loners, misfits, young men in their bedrooms” who were accessing material online.

Bebe King, six, Elsie Dot Stancombe, seven, and Alice da Silva Aguiar, nine, were killed in the attack in the northwestern seaside town of Southport near Liverpool on July 29, 2024. Axel Rudakubana, 18, who was born in Wales to Rwandan parents, on Monday admitted murder as his trial was due to start, prompting the government to announce a public inquiry into the events leading up to the killings.

The government has admitted that despite Rudakubana being referred three times to its anti-extremism scheme, Prevent, over concerns about his obsession with violence, nothing was done to stop him. Starmer said the girls’ deaths should mark a “line in the sand” and “a fundamental change in how Britain protects its citizens and its children”. Admitting that questions now needed to be answered, the prime minister said failure by the state in the case “frankly leaps off the page”.

Prevent aims to “stop people from becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism” or help rehabilitate those already involved in terror, according to the interior ministry. The decision that Rudakubana did not meet the threshold for intervention by Prevent was “clearly wrong” and had failed the families of the victims, Starmer said. In the past the “predominant threat was from highly organised groups with clear political intent, groups like Al-Qaeda”, Starmer said, adding that had now changed.

It now included not just those inspired by traditional “terrorist” groups but also individuals “fixated on... extreme violence, seemingly for its own sake”, he said, pledging new laws if necessary. “If the law needs to change, to recognise this new and dangerous threat, then we will change it and quickly, and we will also review our entire counter extremist system to make sure we have what we need to defeat it,” he said. The public inquiry will look at the contact multiple agencies had with Rudakubana. — AFP

ZELENSKY URGES ‘UNITED’ EUROPEAN DEFENCE POLICY AT DAVOS

DAVOS: Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said on Tuesday that Europe should develop a joint defence policy and be willing to increase spending to guarantee its own security from emerging threats. His comments to the World Economic Forum in Davos came a day after the inauguration of US President Donald Trump, who has demanded Nato members raise their defence spending and boasted he can end the war in Ukraine, without offering a clear road map. Zelensky said Europe needed to

be ready to stand on its own feet and must work to remain relevant as a “strong global” player and “indispensable” on the global stage. “We need a united European security and defence policy, and all European countries must be willing to spend as much on security as is truly needed,” Zelensky argued in his address to the WEF. “Europe must be able to guarantee peace and security for itself,” he added. “European leaders should remember this — battles involving North Korean soldiers are now

happening in places geographically closer to Davos than to Pyongyang,” he said. And he pointed to a recent pact between Russia and Iran boosting their economic and military cooperation, saying the accord was an example of a changing landscape that was a threat to Europe. Zelensky also questioned whether Trump was committed to Nato and European security, claiming that Washington has openly indicated their security priorities lie in the Middle East and in the Asia-Pacific region. — AFP

WHO ‘regrets’ Trump decision to pull US

THE World Health Organization said on Tuesday it regretted US President Donald Trump’s decision — just hours after taking power — to withdraw his country from the UN agency, saying it hoped he would “reconsider”. Trump on Monday signed an executive order directing the United States to withdraw from the WHO, a body he has repeatedly criticised over its handling of the Covid-19 pandemic. Speaking at the White House hours after his inauguration, Trump said the United States was paying far more to the UN body compared to China, adding: “World Health ripped us off.”

The United States, the largest donor to the Geneva-based organisation, provides substantial financial support that is vital to the WHO’s operations. The UN health agency said on Tuesday it regretted the decision. “WHO plays a crucial role in protecting the health and security of the world’s people, including Americans,” spokesman Tarik Jasarevic told reporters in Geneva. “We hope the United States will reconsider and we look forward to engaging in constructive dialogue to maintain the partnership between the USA and WHO, for the benefit of the health and well-being of millions of people around the globe.”

The US withdrawal is expected to trigger a significant restructuring of the institution and could further disrupt global health initiatives. This marks the second time Trump has sought to sever ties with the WHO. During his first term, the United States issued a notice of intent to withdraw, accusing the organisation of being overly influenced by China during the pandemic’s early stages. That move was later reversed under former president Joe Biden’s administration. Jasarevic stressed that it would take one year from formal notification for the US to leave WHO, according to the rules in place.

In China, a foreign ministry spokesman said Beijing would continue supporting the WHO. “The role of the WHO should only be strengthened, not weakened,” Guo Jiakun



The US President Donald Trump gestures on the day he signs executive orders during the inaugural parade inside Capital One Arena on the inauguration day, in Washington. — Reuters

said. “China will, as always, support the WHO in fulfilling its responsibilities... and work towards building a shared community of health for humanity.” In his new executive order, Trump directed agencies to “pause the future transfer of any United States Government funds, support, or resources to the WHO” and to “identify credible and transparent United States and international partners to assume necessary activities previously undertaken by the WHO.”

The administration also announced plans to review and rescind Biden’s 2024 US Global Health Security Strategy, which was designed to prevent, detect, and respond to infectious disease threats, “as soon as practicable.” Several experts expressed dismay at the withdrawal. “We cannot make WHO more effective by walking away from it,” Tom Frieden, a former senior health

official under Barack Obama, wrote on X. “The decision to withdraw weakens America’s influence, increases the risk of a deadly pandemic, and makes all of us less safe.” Others warned that by withdrawing from the organisation, the United States will lose privileged access to important epidemic surveillance data which could harm the capacity to monitor and prevent health threats from abroad. timing of the US withdrawal comes amid mounting fears over the pandemic potential of the current bird flu outbreak (H5N1), which has infected dozens and claimed one life in the United States. Meanwhile, WHO member states have been negotiating the world’s first treaty on pandemic prevention, preparedness, and response since late 2021 — negotiations now seemingly set to proceed without US participation. — AFP

South Korea’s suspended president attends impeachment hearing

SEOUL: South Korea’s impeached President Yoon Suk Yeol appeared at the Constitutional Court for the first time on Tuesday, and vowed to cooperate with the judges who will decide whether to remove him from office. Thousands of protesters — both for and against Yoon — flocked to the Constitutional Court, which is holding hearings to decide whether to uphold his impeachment. “I will respond to any questions or provide further remarks if necessary,” Yoon told the judge. Yoon was asked whether he had instructed top military commanders to “drag out” lawmakers from parliament to prevent them voting down his martial law decree. “No,” he told the judge.

Court spokesperson Cheon Jae-hyun told reporters that Yoon’s legal team have requested to call “at least 24 individuals” as witnesses, including election-related officials. Yoon, who remains head of state,

is being held in a detention centre pending a criminal probe on charges of insurrection. Yoon and his legal team have sought to justify his attempt to suspend civilian rule as a necessary measure due to election fraud, after the opposition won parliamentary elections by a landslide last year.

According to pool reporters, he appeared in court wearing a suit — not his standard-issue prison uniform, which he has been required to wear since he was formally arrested on Sunday. Yoon’s legal team said he wanted to “personally appear to explain the circumstances surrounding the declaration of martial law”. Shortly after the hearing, the Corruption Investigation Office probing the martial law declaration said it had sent six investigators and a prosecutor to the detention centre to question Yoon, who has been refusing to submit to their



South Korea impeached President Yoon Suk Yeol attends his impeachment trial at the Constitutional Court, in Seoul. — AFP

questioning. However the van escorting Yoon was seen travelling to a hospital in Seoul, instead of the detention centre. The justice ministry said Yoon went for “a medical treatment”, based on results of a medical exam the previous day.

If the court rules against Yoon, he will lose the presidency and elections will be called within 60 days. The lawyers prosecuting the case, who were selected by the parliament, slammed the comments made by Yoon and his lawyers as

“largely contradictory, irrational, and unclear, making them entirely incomprehensible”. “If they continue to evade responsibility as they did today, it will only work against them in the impeachment trial and cause even greater disappointment among the public,” they added. Yoon stayed away from the first two hearings last week, but the trial — which could last months — will continue even if he is absent.

Yoon made his first court appearance on Saturday at a hearing on whether to extend his detention. When it was extended, hundreds of pro-Yoon protesters attacked the court building and scuffled with police officers. Dozens were arrested. The impeached president’s decision to start showing up at the Constitutional Court hearing is more about inflaming his die-hard supporters than helping the judicial process along, legal expert Kim Nam-ju said. — AFP

OPINION

New Year’s resolutions versus realistic promises



HYESHA BARRETT

The author is a Master Life Coach and NLP Practitioner based in Muscat

ANOTHER year gone by, 2025 is here. The ideal time to hit the refresh button, let bygones be bygones, accept that we may not have accomplished everything we had hoped for last year, and with keen awareness start this year with a revived energy for structured thoughts and fresh beginnings.

Let’s aim to think and act differently, through consciously taking daily action to not let our subconscious patterning run the show — to not revert back to our old ways, nor to fall back into past habits. Now is the time to recalibrate our minds to move out of our comfort zones, to find peace in making mistakes and being comfortable with being uncomfortable.

New Year resolutions serve as a fresh start, offering an opportunity to reflect on the past year while setting intentions for the future. The allure of New Year promises lies in the potential for personal growth, transformation and an aspiration to live a more fulfilled life.

The concept of a “clean slate” fosters optimism and provides encouragement to visualise our ideal selves. However, the

enthusiasm of January can often diminish as the year progresses — hence, the challenge lies not in the act of making resolutions, but in the execution and commitment to those promises.

Let’s accept that falling off the bandwagon is a common experience. The reasons contributing to the decline in our commitments which can often throw us off kilter are usually unrealistic expectations, lack of immediate results, overwhelm, loss of motivation and absence of support or accountability.

Instead of vague agreements and overly ambitious goals, specific commitments are more attainable and provide a clear benchmark for success. It’s essential to view our pledges as living commitments rather than rigid orders.

Life is indeed unpredictable and circumstances may require us to pivot or reassess our objectives. Regular reflection on our progress can promote adaptability and resilience. If a particular resolution feels unattainable or unsatisfying, re-evaluating its relevance or adjusting its parameters can create a healthier path toward success.

While the road to achieving these promises

Setting realistic and specific objectives, cultivating a growth mindset, establishing a routine and tracking your progress while celebrating small wins with an accountability partner are some ways to help not burn the stick at both ends.

may be fraught with challenges, the potential for positive change is immense. By setting realistic goals, fostering accountability and embracing flexibility, we can navigate our declarations with purpose and intention. As we step into a new year, let us remember that the journey of self-improvement is ongoing, whereby each day presents an opportunity to renew our commitment striving to become a better version of ourselves.

Setting realistic and specific objectives, cultivating a growth mindset, establishing a routine and tracking your progress while celebrating small wins with an accountability partner are some ways to help not burn the stick at both ends.

Embracing imperfection and reflecting on your purpose will provide deeper motivation to rekindle your enthusiasm, while reinforcing commitment to your resolutions and promises. This will allow flexibility to flow and accept that setbacks are part of this journey.

When we acknowledge that growth is not linear encompassing endless ups and downs, we can become more compassionate with ourselves and each other. Here’s to a great year ahead!

STUDY SHOWS DIABETES DRUGS’ POTENTIAL BEYOND WEIGHT LOSS

JULIEN DURY

A new study highlighted on Monday the potential benefits of popular diabetes drugs on a wide range of health issues including dementia and cardiovascular diseases, although experts warned against seeing them as miracle drugs.

The study published in Nature Medicine is unique in its scope, marking a milestone in the study of new-generation weight-loss drugs such as Ozempic, Wegovy and Mounjaro, which have already somewhat revolutionised the fight against obesity. “No one had comprehensively investigated the effectiveness and the risks of GLP-1 receptor agonists across all health outcomes,” said epidemiologist Ziyad al Aly.

GLP-1 medications, which first came on the market about a decade ago, combat obesity and related conditions by mimicking the function of a hormone that secretes insulin, slows down the emptying of the stomach and suppresses appetite.

They are widely considered as one of the great medical developments of the last few years, generating colossal revenues for drugmakers such as Novo Nordisk (Ozempic/Wegovy) and Eli Lilly (Mounjaro). Multiple studies had already shown that their benefits might go beyond weight loss and diabetes. Those studies showed that patients taking GLP-1 medication fared better against a wide range of health problems such as dementia, cardiovascular diseases or alcohol addiction.

Monday’s vast study confirmed the findings of the previous research, also bringing more specific information about the drugs’ promising effects.

Researchers carried out their investigation in the US, using health data from hundreds of thousands of veterans. They compared two groups of diabetics: one receiving standard treatment, the other on GLP-1 medication.

The GLP-1 patients had “a lower risk of drug use, psychological or convulsive disorders, neurocognitive disorders, including Alzheimer’s disease and other types of dementia, coagulation and cardiometabolic disorders, infectious diseases and various respiratory pathologies,” the study found. Obesity is associated with multiple health problems, said Al Aly, the epidemiologist and GLP-1 drugs help patients loose weight.

But the researcher said the drugs could also potentially have a more direct impact. Monday’s study marks a major milestone.

Until now, work on the potential of GLP-1 was scattered and no study had given such a broad overview of the drugs. — AFP

Smarter charges help SMEs and families grow

SMALL and medium enterprises (SMEs) and middle-income families are the engines of economic growth. They generate jobs and income generation opportunities, drive innovation and sustain markets. In Oman, where SMEs account for over 96 per cent of businesses and contribute 24 per cent of GDP, their success is essential for national prosperity. Yet, excessive charges and fees and counterproductive regulatory frameworks are stifling their potential. These excessive charges are making our market less attractive, especially for almost a third of the population who are under 30s and the other third who are retired or almost retired. This is in addition to the fact that excessive charges make any market less attractive for any Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and high growth startups.

The growing pressures on SMEs — from commercial registration fees to municipal and labor clearances, taxes, Social Protection Fund fees, online salary transaction fees, rents and banking costs — restrict their ability to innovate and compete. At the same time, middle-income families, who rely on these businesses for opportunities, are squeezed by rising costs, reducing their disposable income and economic participation. To reverse this trend, Oman needs a smarter approach to charges—one that fosters growth while aligning with the goals of Oman Vision 2040.

Today, income generation is no longer confined to traditional public sector or big corporate jobs. Digital transformation has unlocked opportunities for remote work, digital nomads and online entrepreneurship. Platforms such as Upwork and Fiverr empower individuals to earn across borders,



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while global firms increasingly hire remote talent. For Oman, similar platforms are yet to be successful, and capitalising on these trends could diversify income sources and reduce unemployment.

By adopting “smart charges,” Oman can encourage SMEs and individuals to thrive in the digital economy, unlocking new streams of revenue while building a robust and inclusive financial framework.

“Smart charges” refer to flexible, data-driven fee structures designed to align with economic growth goals. Using artificial intelligence (AI), these charges can be tailored to the needs of SMEs, digital workers and middle-income families. AI can analyse economic data, market trends and business performance to ensure charges are proportional, fair and growth-oriented.

For instance:

- Dynamic Fee Adjustments: AI could adjust fees based on the size and maturity of a business. Startups might pay lower fees in their initial years, while established firms contribute more.
- Targeted Incentives: Digital freelancers and remote workers could receive discounts on licensing or banking fees, incentivizing them to register and operate locally.
- Outcome-Based Models: Charges could be tied to performance indicators like revenue growth or job creation, ensuring they support rather than hinder economic activity.

This approach echoes the insights of Ibn Khaldun, who argued that fair and proportional taxation stimulates prosperity. As he wrote: “If the government takes excessive property through taxation, its effects will appear in reduced productivity and economic decline.” Nobel laureate Paul Krugman offers a modern perspective: “Economic policies that stifle the middle class ultimately stifle economic growth.” By replacing blunt fees with

smarter, AI-driven models, Oman can promote economic vitality without burdening businesses or families.

Countries with comparable market sizes offer valuable lessons. Estonia, known as a global leader in digital innovation, has implemented e-residency programmes and capped fees for SMEs and digital entrepreneurs. This has attracted a global workforce and fueled local economic growth.

Bahrain, another regional success story, has simplified its licensing processes and introduced incentives for digital startups, positioning itself as a hub for fintech and remote work.

Even larger economies like Singapore and Ireland have used targeted fee reductions and tax incentives to attract global talent and foster SME growth. Their success underscores the importance of aligning charges with broader economic goals.

By implementing smart charges, the government can create an ecosystem that incentivises SMEs to grow naturally, encourages digital entrepreneurship and stabilises the disposable income of families. This approach will not only reduce financial burdens but also unlock new income-generating opportunities, from digital freelancing to remote work.

Smart charges are more than a financial tool — they represent a strategic shift toward inclusive and sustainable economic growth that reduces the gap between income classes. By leveraging AI and adopting global best practices, Oman can ensure that its SMEs and families flourish in an increasingly competitive world.

As we look towards Oman Vision 2040, the question is no longer whether smarter charges are needed, but how quickly we can implement these solutions that drive progress for all.

Peace finally gets a chance in war-torn Gaza!



SAMUEL KUTTY

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

THANK God, the guns have stopped roaring, and the skies are silent after months of bombing following a ceasefire deal between Hamas and Israel. The air now is a mix of relief, hope, and even disbelief as the bloodshed has finally ceased.

Even before the ceasefire deal officially commenced, people began heading back to their devastated homes in the Gaza Strip. as video footage showed, some on their feet and others on donkey carts. They are on the verge of resuming life once more!

However, the return to their homes is occurring amid looming uncertainty about whether the ceasefire agreement between Hamas and Israel will bring lasting peace.

Many Palestinians still feel that the pain, the sorrow, and the struggle for their survival will follow them as they consider the ceasefire to be more than just a temporary halt to the fighting unless all who are involved in the negotiations ensure that the deal is fully implemented.

In Israel, several far-right ministers resigned in protest over the terms of the deal. The Israeli military, in the meantime, warned the people of Gaza that moving from the south to the north of the strip would be perilous.

Israel and Hamas agreed on January 15 last after months of negotiations by the US, Egypt, and Qatar to end the Gaza war. What is significant is that the accord for the truce came just ahead of Donald Trump taking over power.

According to the deal, during the first phase lasting six weeks, a total of 33 Israeli captives will be released in exchange for about 1,900 Palestinian prisoners and

detainees from Gaza. Additionally, Israeli forces will withdraw from Gaza neighbourhoods, Palestinians will be allowed to return to their homes, and trucks carrying humanitarian aid will be permitted into the territory each day.

The second phase is expected to see the release of remaining captives and the full withdrawal of Israeli troops as part of the restoration of peace. The third and final stage will involve the reconstruction of Gaza, which could take years.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's speech after the deal adds to their skepticism as he stated, "Israel retains the right to resume war in Gaza, and it has the US backing to do so should the second phase of the agreement collapses."

Interestingly, when the ceasefire was finally announced, both Joe Biden as president and Donald Trump as president-elect stood up to take credit for the accord.

While Biden claimed during a press conference that the ceasefire was "developed and negotiated by my team and will be largely implemented by the incoming administration," Trump, in a social media post, stated he was the "crucial force behind the deal."

Though what comes next for Palestine and Israel, and the region is less clear, what we read from Trump's statement suggests that he desires a sustainable ceasefire in place. Breaking the deal, as many analysts believe, will endanger Israel's ties with the new US administration.

As agencies reveal, the war has killed more than 46,900 Palestinians, according to local health authorities. An estimated 12,000 are reported to be buried under rubble, humanitarian workers in Gaza

Ceasefires come and go. But the biggest concern is whether this will lead to lasting peace or if it is merely a temporary pause. The global community bears the responsibility to ensure that the ceasefire holds and that urgent, sustained humanitarian access into Gaza is permitted

stated. More than 100,000 are thought to have been injured. Some 90 per cent of Gaza's population has been displaced. The United Nations reports that the health system, road network, and other vital infrastructure have been severely damaged.

Along with the release of captives and prisoners and the delivery of aid and humanitarian assistance, what is equally important is the reconstruction of Gaza and its governance. World leaders must continue mediation and diplomacy to bring lasting stability to the region.

Ceasefires come and go. But the biggest concern is whether this will lead to lasting peace or if it is merely a temporary pause. The global community bears the responsibility to ensure that the ceasefire holds and that urgent, sustained humanitarian access into Gaza is permitted. A slight misstep could escalate the situation again!

As Agnès Callamard, Amnesty International's Secretary General, rightly pointed out, "For Palestinians who have lost countless loved ones; in many cases had their entire families wiped out or seen their homes reduced to rubble, an end to the fighting does not begin to repair their shattered lives or heal their trauma."

The release of Israeli captives and Palestinian detainees will bring relief to families in Israel and across the Occupied Palestinian Territory, but it likewise will not erase the ordeals they have faced in captivity.

Along with thousands, I, too, pray and wish for a peaceful future with a sustained, region-wide ceasefire, which will be essential for lasting peace, healing, and the flourishing of communities. After all, peace doesn't come from the barrel of a gun!

A NEW AMERICAN ERA IS USHERED IN BY A FAMILIAR TRUMP

JAMES OLIPHANT

In his inaugural address, President Donald Trump promised a new golden age, casting himself as a uniter. But for a speech that heralded a bright future, it often echoed the past. Much of Trump's rhetoric mirrored his words eight years ago, when he was first sworn in as president and spoke about a country with a failing economy and cities torn apart by crime.

On Monday, he portrayed himself as a victim of a weaponised justice system under Democratic former president Joe Biden. Trump said he had a mandate to carry out his vision for the country after winning the popular vote in an improbable political comeback that culminated in his taking the oath of office in the very building his supporters stormed four years ago in a failed attempt to overturn his 2020 election loss.

"From this moment on, America's decline is over," Trump said, speaking in the US Capitol Rotunda. "Our golden age has just begun."

He promised to be "a peacemaker and a uniter." Trump, however, then swiftly announced sweeping policy changes on issues that have divided the country. He vowed to end federal diversity initiatives and said he would sign an order declaring that there are only two genders. He called for a "revolution of common sense" on gender and racial diversity issues as he defines it, one that includes some and excludes others.

He thanked the Black and Hispanic voters who supported his campaign and, in honour of Martin Luther King Jr.

Day, said he wanted to make the slain civil rights leader's dream a reality. Trump's idea of that dream appears to be what he referred to as a "colourblind" America that is a pure meritocracy. Despite a close popular vote in the 2024 election of just over one percentage point, Trump suggested his victory gave him licence to pursue his hard-right policies, while adding that he believes the attempt on his life last year was a matter of divine intervention that further fuelled his resolve.

"I was saved by God to make America great again," Trump said. After contentious elections, new presidents often moderate their campaign-style rhetoric and drop attacks on their political adversaries. Not Trump. With Biden seated nearby, Trump tore into the outgoing president's policies on everything from immigration to foreign affairs. He argued that his win had given him a "mandate to completely and totally reverse a horrible betrayal." — Reuters

The climate policy pendulum

IT is tough to be optimistic about the climate these days. While the costs of extreme weather events like the Los Angeles wildfires pile up, the US federal policy pendulum is swinging away from facts, reason, and basic human decency. Nonetheless, even as the US government moves in the wrong direction, trends in science, economics, and increasingly local politics indicate that the pendulum will swing back in due course.

After all, no one can argue with the physics of today's clean energy technologies. Heat pumps, induction stoves, and electric vehicles (EVs) — to name just three — are fundamentally better technologies than what came before. The best gas furnaces might reach 95 per cent efficiency, meaning they are converting 95 per cent of the energy they use into heat; but most heat pumps easily top 200 per cent, with some reaching 400 per cent or more. Similar comparisons can be made between induction and gas stoves, and between EVs and gasoline- or diesel-powered vehicles. By and large, we know what technologies we should be using to eliminate greenhouse-gas emissions; and in cases where we don't, we know what kinds of things to try.

This knowledge extends well beyond EVs and heat pumps to entire industrial sectors like cement or iron and steel. Here, former US president Joe Biden's administration has made an important contribution with the Department of Energy's Liftoff Reports, which chart pathways to commercialisation for a broad selection of low-carbon technologies. Consider cement, which accounts for some 8 per cent of annual global greenhouse-gas emissions. Ordinary Portland cement, patented 200 years ago, has dominated the sector for decades. While measures like clinker substitution and efficiency improvements can abate up to 40 per cent of emissions, getting to zero will require additional steps. These generally fall into two categories: cutting emissions from producing



No one can argue with the physics of today's clean energy technologies.



GERNOT WAGNER

The writer is a climate economist at Columbia Business School

Although US President Donald Trump and his fellow Republicans give climate advocates plenty to worry about, all hope is not lost. Clean-energy technologies still have decisive physical advantages over the alternatives, and economic common sense will eventually win out

Portland cement or switching away from it altogether. Promising US start-ups like Brimstone and Sublime Systems are racing to demonstrate that either path is commercially viable.

One key ingredient is public subsidies to help firms climb the learning curve and slide down the cost curve towards faster commercialisation. Both Brimstone and Sublime Systems received early research and development funding from the US Advanced Research Projects Agency-Energy (ARPA-E) and have now advanced to the deployment stage, receiving up to \$190 and \$90 million, respectively, to build their first commercial plants. All told, the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and the Inflation Reduction Act allocated around \$100 billion for such purposes, with public funding contingent on matching private investments.

Moreover, these sums are dwarfed by the Department of Energy's loan programme. With just \$17 billion in taxpayer funds, the IRA authorises the department's Loan Programmes Office to lend \$350 billion for investments in clean energy and domestic EV manufacturing. And those public funds then catalyse multiples more in private investments. While some Republicans and members of Donald Trump's administration want to cut this programme, doing so would only hurt US competitiveness.

Can we restore sanity to our national policies? It might be trite to say that change begins at home, but what is trite is often true. A good place to look is New York. While the city has many problems, its climate policies are not among them. Around 70 per cent of New York's direct emissions come from heating and cooling buildings, while the other 30 per cent comes from cars and trucks. Fortunately, Local Law 97 is already addressing the former. The law is one of the most ambitious decarbonisation measures for buildings anywhere, requiring most to reduce their emissions by 40 per cent this decade, and by 100 per cent by 2050. And while New York can do only so much about vehicle emissions, its long-delayed congestion pricing programme is finally being implemented. That is a good start.

Given that New York used to be the world's most congested city, the quality-of-life improvement from less traffic can already be felt. The same goes for another measure that took an absurdly long time to address: the lack of trash bins. Over the past year, the city has finally issued official trash, recycling, and compost bins, with enforcement for residential buildings beginning this month. Cleaning up our own act — including with mandatory composting and other policies — will not save the planet. But effective government just might.

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SPORTS

OLYMPIC VALUES



Ali bin Salim al Busafi, Director of Olympic Solidarity Department, delivered a presentation on key updates to the Olympic Solidarity plan for the next four years.

OOC REVIEWS INTERNATIONAL OLYMPIC SOLIDARITY PLANS 2025–2028

MUSCAT: The Oman Olympic Committee (OOC), represented by Olympic Solidarity Department, reviewed the International Olympic Solidarity Programmes for the period 2025–2028 during a meeting held on Tuesday at Oman Olympic Academy (OOA) headquarters. The meeting was attended by representatives from sports federations and committees.

Ali bin Salim al Busafi, Director of Olympic Solidarity Department, delivered a presentation on key updates to the Olympic Solidarity plan for the next four years.

The programmes are divided into five main categories, covering the core areas of sports development: Olympic values, management and knowledge exchange, sports development, technical teams and Olympic Games. These programmes target national Olympic committees, federations, sports committees, clubs and professionals working in sports institutions.

The meeting included an in-depth explanation of the grants and programmes within each of the five categories. The Olympic Values Programme features educational and training grants, the Olympic Day, and initiatives to promote Olympic values. The Management and Knowledge Exchange Programme encompasses international executive courses in sports management, sports administration courses, and the development of national Olympic committee management.

The Technical Teams Programme offers various grants for athletes and coaches, including technical grants for coaches and technical teams, Olympic coaching grants, athlete career transitions, and support for athletes' committees. The Olympic Games Programme provides support to athletes selected by national Olympic committees who meet eligibility criteria for preparation and qualification for the 34th Olympic Games in Los Angeles 2028, with a focus on individual sports. Lastly, the Sports Development Programme includes grants for team support, continental athlete support, youth athlete development, and the enhancement of national sports systems.

Saeed bin Juma al Harrasi, Senior Administrator at the Olympic Solidarity Department, gave a presentation on Olympic Solidarity, detailing how to submit applications via the platform. The platform contains comprehensive information on various Olympic programmes, including the requirements and criteria for each programme and the submission timelines. He also outlined the stages of application, from initial submission to the final approval process. The platform aims to facilitate transparent and efficient access to Olympic programmes, enhancing the opportunities for committees, federations, and sports professionals.

The International Olympic Solidarity is one of the core initiatives of the International Olympic Committee aimed at supporting national Olympic committees, particularly in developing countries.



The meeting was attended by representatives from sports federations and committees.

Oman’s Musab takes crown at international bowling

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JAN 21

OMAN'S young bowling star and member of the national men's team, Musab al Adawi, clinched the title of Muscat International Bowling Championship which was concluded on Monday as part of Muscat Nights Festival 2025 at Seeb Bowling Centre.

As many as 147 players representing 14 countries from across the world took part in the event which ran for 10 days since January 10 under the organisation of Oman Bowling Committee (OBC) in cooperation with Muscat Nights Festival.

Musab al Adawi, who hails from Bahla, won the first-place trophy and cash award of RO 8,000 following his sensational display among the world's top bowlers including Tun Hakim, the reigning world champion from Malaysia, besides Kuwait bowling team, bronze medallists in the recent Bowling World Cup.

Players competed fiercely through the preliminary, semifinal and final stages, showcasing top-tier talent. All the players were competing for a prize pool of RO 30,000, the highest in the region.

Speaking after the final match, winner Musab al Adawi said that this was a moment of pride. “I am very pleased by winning this essential title particularly against elite global players from the World Cup. Taking this prestigious title among world champions is a great honour for me and Omani bowling in general,” he said.

“I will keep the momentum high to deliver my excellent execution in the upcoming tournaments, which will provide invaluable learning opportunities,” he ended

The final match registered a tough competition between Oman's Musab al Adawi and Kuwait's Aseel al Roumi. It was a closely contested as Al Adawi emerged victorious by a narrow margin of 189 with 175 points for Aseel. The 22-year-old dominated in the final stages particularly during the decisive frame where he sealed the win after a missed opportunity by Al Roumi to secure enough points.

Following the final match, chief guest Sayyid Ahmed bin Hilal al Busaidy, Wali of Bausher, delivered the awards and trophies to the top winners in presence



Oman's Musab al Adawi in action during the Muscat International Bowling Championship.



Top three winners, Oman's Musab al Adawi (C) with Kuwait's Aseel al Roumi (L) and Mahmoud al Attar of the UAE pose with their trophies on the podium.

of Shaikh Said bin Rashid al Qatabi, Chairman of OBC, Dr Sami al Wahaibi from Muscat Municipality and Hisham bin Salim al Sinani, Director-General of Development and Sponsorship at the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth.

Kuwaiti bowler Aseel al Roumi took the runner-up trophy and a cash award of RO 4,000, while Mahmoud al Attar of the UAE took third place with a cash prize of RO 3,000.

Ziad al Tuwarefi from Saudi Arabia finished fourth and Oman's Mohammed al Hashmi came in fifth position. Malaysia's

world champion Tun Hakim finished sixth ahead of Hassan al Kharousi in seventh. Hyun Min Kim from South Korea ended in eighth position.

Shaikh Said al Qatabi, Chairman of OBC, expressed gratitude to all sponsors including Muscat Municipality, Muscat Nights organisers and the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth. “ This event saw record-breaking participation and we have plans to host similar events in the future. Also, we will work with our stakeholders to organise some mega events in the coming period,” he added.

Oman Chess set for national age-category tourney

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, JAN 21

The Oman Chess Committee is preparing to organise the Oman Individual Chess Championships for age categories from January 23 to 26. The championship will be held at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex, with the participation of 80 players representing various clubs in the Sultanate of Oman.

The championships includes five age categories: under 8 years, under 10 years, under 12 years, under 14 years and under 16 years. The competition will follow the Swiss system with seven rounds, where each player is allocated 60 minutes, along with a 30-second increment per move.

In a special statement, Ahmed al Balushi, Chairman of the Oman Chess Committee, highlighted the importance of the championship, saying:

“This championship is one



The Oman Individual Chess Championships for age categories will be held from January 23 to 26 with the participation of 80 players.

of the most prominent events organised by the committee. Through it, we aim to achieve strategic objectives aimed at developing the game in Oman. Our focus is not only on competition but also on building a generation of qualified players who can represent the Sultanate of Oman in international arenas.”

Al Balushi added: “We

have ensured a professional organisational environment that aligns with the standards of the International Chess Federation (Fide) by implementing the Swiss system and adding time increments per move, providing players with a unique experience and an opportunity to learn and grow. Additionally, the

chosen age categories form the foundational base for expanding the chess-playing community in Oman.”

He continued: “The support and cooperation of clubs with the Oman Chess Committee are the cornerstone of the success of such championships. Positive engagement from parents also enhances the players' ability to achieve advanced levels.”

Finally, Al Balushi invited the public and chess enthusiasts to attend the championship and cheer for the young players, emphasising that such support reflects the significance of chess as a mental sport that contributes to developing intellectual and creative skills in youth.

The committee seeks to provide participants with opportunities to obtain international ratings and titles, thereby elevating the status of chess in Oman at both local and international levels.

DAY TWO



EXCITING MATCHES
AT EIGHTS FOOTBALL
TOURNAMENT

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, JAN 21

The second day of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth's Eights Football Tournament for Government Institutions 2025 witnessed intense competition among the participating teams across various groups, as they continued to deliver outstanding performances.

In Group Five, the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) team secured a 1-0 victory over the Ministry of Finance team, while the match between the Consumer Protection Authority and the Ministry of Energy and Minerals ended in a goalless draw.

In Group Six, the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority team achieved a valuable 2-1 victory against the Public Services Regulation Authority team, whereas the match between the State Financial and Administrative Audit Institution and the Ministry of Labour also ended in a goalless draw.

In Group Seven, the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism team triumphed with a massive 8-1 victory over the Royal Academy of Oman team, while the match between the Royal Court Affairs team and the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs team ended in a 1-1 draw.

Group Eight saw a clear dominance from the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology team, which defeated the General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers team 4-0. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Information team shows their strong performance with 4-0 victory, against the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority team.

Khamis Salalawi, captain of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources team, commented, "I extend my sincere thanks to the organisers of this tournament. We did not expect such a high level of organisation, as the event has been hosted in an ideal environment with top-notch facilities, making the tournament a remarkable experience from the start."

He added, "everything is set for great performances and enjoyable football matches without any obstacles. For me, even though this is my first time participating in this tournament, I can confidently say it has been successful in every aspect since its inception."

Regarding the importance of such tournaments, Salalawi highlighted that they provide an excellent opportunity to promote physical activity among employees of various ministries. He remarked, "these tournaments are not just about sports competition; they significantly contribute to revitalising employees and alleviating work stress. Additionally, they create opportunities for networking and building relationships among staff from different government institutions."



The championship sees participation from 13 Asian countries and includes regional qualifiers for West and Central Asia. — Abdulwahid al Hamadani

U14 Asian ITF tournament
reaches knockout stage

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, JAN 21

THE quarterfinal matches for boys and girls and the semifinals for doubles are ongoing in the second stage of the Asian and International Tennis Federation (ITF) U-14 Championship hosted by Oman. The championship sees participation from 13 Asian countries and includes regional qualifiers for West and Central Asia.

The championship will conclude on Thursday at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex tennis courts in Bausher.

The doubles category in the second phase witnessed remarkable performances. The Jordanian duo of Omar Istambouli and Rayan al Kawar defeated the Qatari pair of Abdulrahman al Nuaimi and Mohammed Samara 3-6, 6-2, 10-6. The Yemeni pair of Ayham al Zara and Mohammed al Awadhy overcame the Kuwaiti duo of Saud al Sabah and Faisal al Mutawa with a 7-6, 6-0 victory.

In another match, the Lebanese duo of Ilyas Charabieh and Garbiel Gostin excelled, defeating their opponents 6-2, 5-7, 10-5. Meanwhile, Oman's national team duo of Moataz al Mazrouei and Ali al Busaidi delivered an outstanding performance, defeating the Tajik pair of Ahmad Foustov

and Shukrukh Nigmatov 6-3, 6-1. The Iraqi duo of Ahmed al Taleb and Hassan Girar also secured a win against Bahrain's Ali al Khayat and Nasser Mohammed, finishing 6-3, 6-1.

Ahmed al Balushi, Director of the Asian and ITF U-14 Championship, expressed his immense pride in hosting the tournament's second edition in Oman. He highlighted that the trust of the ITF in awarding Oman the hosting rights again stems from the remarkable success of the inaugural edition last year. Al Balushi noted that while the first edition included only eight participating teams, the current edition features 13, adding a valuable dimension to the competition.

"We have witnessed intense matches and exceptional competition, reflecting the high calibre of the participating players," said Al Balushi. "The championship includes top-ranked Asian players, competing against such experienced players provides valuable exposure for others."

Al Balushi emphasised that meticulous preparations were made to ensure the championship's success, including selecting a hotel near the tennis courts to facilitate players' transportation. He noted that the matches are held in morning and evening sessions, and the championship is a ranking tournament, with the top two teams

qualifying directly for the Asian finals.

He further explained that all teams accredited by the ITF are participating in this edition. The ITF representative commended Oman's exemplary organisation, both in this edition and the previous one. Additionally, Al Balushi highlighted the introduction of new enhancements in the Asian Federation's system, such as real-time results through the ITF system, streamlining match management and the drawing process.

LOCAL TALENTS

Regarding match management, Al Balushi stated, "the tournament is officiated by international referee Ahmad al Hawaj from Bahrain, alongside a group of skilled local referees who have demonstrated exceptional expertise, enhancing their confidence. So far, no errors have been recorded, showcasing their high level of competence."

On the performance of local players, Al Balushi praised the achievements of Areen and Talia, noting that Areen secured third place in the first edition and reached the doubles semifinal with her partner. He also commended the efforts of Moataz al Mazrouei and Azan, who, despite unfavourable draws, showcased strong performances. "We hope they achieve better results in the second stage," he added.

England's Buttler wants 'alliance' with coach McCullum

KOLKATA: England captain Jos Buttler said on Tuesday he wants to build an "alliance" with new white-ball coach Brendon McCullum, as they named their side for the first of five T20s in India.

Ben Duckett will open alongside Phil Salt, who will also keep wicket for the match at Kolkata's Eden Gardens on Wednesday. Harry Brook was named Buttler's deputy.

England's first white-ball assignment under McCullum, who was previously in charge only of England's Test side, also includes three ODI matches.

The series will be followed by the eight-team ODI Champions Trophy starting February 19 in Pakistan and Dubai.

Buttler said he is looking "to

build that coach-captain alliance" after McCullum forged a successful partnership with Test skipper Ben Stokes. "It's not a new set-up as Baz (McCullum) has been around for a while," Buttler told reporters on the eve of the T20 opener.

"There's a lot of players in this squad that have been with him in the Test set-up for a number of years already," he added. "I'm just looking forward to building that relationship in the white-ball set-up."

GOOD CHEMISTRY

India captain Suryakumar Yadav said he already shares good chemistry with coach Gautam Gambhir, having played under the former batsman in the Indian Premier League.



India's Mohammed Shami bowls in the nets during a practice session. — AFP

"I know how he works — without talking he can read your mind," said Yadav, who played at IPL team Kolkata Knight Riders with Gambhir as captain.

"The way his coaching style is, we are moving in the right direction."

He said Gambhir "keeps it simple" and gives the players "freedom" to express themselves.

England continued with Buttler as white-ball captain despite a disappointing ODI World Cup in India in 2023 when the defending champions won only three of their nine matches.

Last year the 34-year-old Buttler struggled with a calf injury.

He will be playing in India as a batsman only with Salt taking over the gloves starting with the T20s.

Jofra Archer leads a pace-bowling unit that includes Mark Wood and Gus Atkinson.

Buttler spoke up for players having their families with them on tours, after the family time of Indian players was restricted following their recent 3-1 Test defeat in Australia. "I think it's great to be able to have families on the tour with you, to live that life out with your family as well," he said.

"I don't think it affects the cricket too much, I think it's something that is very manageable." — **AFP**

England XI: Ben Duckett, Phil Salt (wk), Jos Buttler (capt), Harry Brook (vice-capt), Liam Livingstone, Jacob Bethell, Jamie Overton, Gus Atkinson, Jofra Archer, Adil Rashid, Mark Wood.

SPORTS

SABALENKA SURVIVES, BADOSA STUNS GAUFF

DJOKOVIC BEATS
ALCARAZ IN AO
BLOCKBUSTER



Spain's Paula Badosa in action during her quarterfinal against Coco Gauff of the US in the Australian Open at Melbourne Park. — Reuters

Germany's Alexander Zverev celebrates after beating Tommy Paul of the US. — Reuters

Belarus' Aryna Sabalenka in action during her quarterfinal match against Russia's Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova. — Reuters

A vintage Novak Djokovic tamed Carlos Alcaraz in a late-night blockbuster to set up an Australian Open semifinal with Alexander Zverev as two-time women's defending champion Aryna Sabalenka fought on.

The 37-year-old Djokovic rolled back the years at the scene of his greatest achievements on Rod Laver Arena in Melbourne with a 4-6, 6-4, 6-3, 6-4 triumph sealed close to 1:00 am.

The Serb surged into the semifinals and a date with world number two Zverev to edge closer to an 11th Melbourne crown and all-time record 25th Slam title.

"I just wish that this match today was the final," said Djokovic, paying tribute to "terrific guy" Alcaraz after they dished up three hours and 37 minutes of high-quality tennis.

"Just one of the most epic matches I have played on this court, any court really."

With former rival Andy Murray now in his coaching corner, Djokovic was at his imperious and defiant best, cupping his ear to the crowd after winning big points.

Djokovic was at the centre of a row on Monday after he demanded an apology — and got one — from a local TV presenter for what he called "insulting and offensive comments".

Spain's world number three Alcaraz will have to wait another year to get a kangaroo tattoo. He had vowed to get one if he won the Australian Open for the first time.

The 21-year-old four-time major champion has still never been beyond the Melbourne Park last eight.

Former number one Djokovic extended his career advantage over Alcaraz to 5-3, having also beaten him in the Paris Olympics final in their last meeting.

Alcaraz got the better of his rival in the 2023 and 2024 Wimbledon finals.

In hot and windy conditions, Germany's Zverev defeated the American Tommy Paul 7-6 (7/1), 7-6 (7/0), 2-6, 6-1 to step up his quest to win a Grand Slam for the first time.

The 27-year-old lost his cool at one point — because of a feather.

The umpire called for a replay when the feather drifted in front of him as he played a shot at a critical juncture.

"C'mon, that is unbelievable on break point," he shouted, before taking out his fury on Paul by breaking to love.

World number one and defending champion Jannik Sinner plays home hope Alex de Minaur in the quarterfinals on Wednesday, the winner facing American 21st seed Ben Shelton or the unseeded Italian Lorenzo Sonego.

AS IF BY MAGIC

Sabalenka will face Paula Badosa in the last four as the Belarusian bids to win the Australian Open for a third time in a row, something last achieved 26 years ago by Martina Hingis.

The world number one kept that dream alive but had to battle for it in beating Russian 27th seed Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova 6-2, 2-6, 6-3 in the wind.

"Honestly I was just praying, trying to put the ball back in these tough conditions," said Sabalenka.

"I'm just super happy I was able to somehow magically win this match."

At 33, Pavlyuchenkova had been enjoying a late-career renaissance and was the oldest remaining woman in the draw.

Sabalenka next plays Badosa, the Spanish 11th seed who stunned world number three Coco Gauff 7-5, 6-4.

Badosa is into her first Slam semifinal at the age of 27. "I'm a bit emotional," said Badosa. "I'm a very emotional person. I wanted to play my best game. I think I did it."

It capped a remarkable comeback for the Spaniard, who was ranked outside the top 100 a year ago after a stress fracture in her back.

"I mean, a year ago, I was here with my back and I didn't know if I had to retire from this sport, and now I'm here playing against the best in the world," said Badosa.

Third-seeded American Gauff, 20, described herself as "disappointed but not completely crushed" after her first defeat of 2025.

On Wednesday, Iga Swiatek will look to continue her march to a first Australian Open title when she faces Emma Navarro.

The winner plays Madison Keys or Elina Svitolina in the last four. — AFP

AUSTRALIAN OPEN DAY 10 RESULTS

Men (quarterfinals)

Novak Djokovic (SRB x7) bt Carlos Alcaraz (ESP x3)
4-6, 6-4, 6-3, 6-4

Alexander Zverev (GER x2) bt Tommy Paul (USA x12)
7-6 (7/1), 7-6 (7/0), 2-6, 6-1

Women (quarterfinals)

Aryna Sabalenka (BLR x1) bt Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova (RUS x27) 6-2, 2-6, 6-3

Paula Badosa (ESP x11) bt Coco Gauff (USA x3)
7-5, 6-4

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5-YEARSTRATEGY

CEO Emile Hoogsteden highlighted plans focused on investment, sustainability and innovation, aligning with Oman Vision 2040.

SOHAR UNVEILS \$1.7 BILLION INVESTMENT PLAN

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, JAN 21

BUILDING on a record-breaking year for 2024, SOHAR Port and Freezone (SOHAR) unveiled an ambitious five-year strategy to strengthen its position as a regional leader in logistics and industry. Speaking at the annual Business Reception, CEO Emile Hoogsteden highlighted plans focused on investment, sustainability and innovation, aligning with Oman Vision 2040.

Hoogsteden emphasised SOHAR's commitment to strategic growth, announcing \$1.7 billion in new investments and the leasing of 265 hectares of land through the completion of port infrastructure and Freezone Phase 2. With land availability becoming a challenge, SOHAR is securing space in the northern region to accommodate expansion needs by 2027.

Energy and sustainability remain central to SOHAR's vision. The Port is addressing gas and power challenges through long-term agreements and aims to boost bunkering volumes to 500,000 tonnes, achieving a compound annual growth rate of 44.3 per cent. Additionally, renewable energy initiatives are set to reduce carbon dioxide emissions by 30 per cent, underscoring SOHAR's commitment to decarbonisation.

Collaboration and partnerships play a pivotal role in SOHAR's road map, with ongoing negotiations for land acquisitions and new memorandum of understanding with customers. Partnering with tenants, SOHAR aims to foster mutual growth and sustainability.

Strategic infrastructure development is also a priority, with the Hafeet Rail project set to be operational by 2028, enhancing connectivity. Simultaneously, the Port is advancing full digitalisation and cloud adoption to optimise operations and drive efficiency.

Highlighting the importance of people in this journey, Hoogsteden reaffirmed SOHAR's focus on leadership development in sustainability, technology, and operations. "The next five years are critical as we enhance our infrastructure, expand our capabilities and invest in talent to meet the evolving demands of the global marketplace," he said.

With its comprehensive strategy, SOHAR is poised to solidify its position as a hub for innovation, sustainability and regional growth, setting new benchmarks for Oman's industrial and logistics sectors.

Madayn launches incentives in Al Mazunah Free Zone

THE Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn) has announced a new package of incentives aimed at strengthening the investment climate in Al Mazunah Free Zone.

The announcement, made during the Al Mazunah Economic Forum and Exhibition, is part of efforts to attract fresh investments and foster economic growth in Oman.

Eng Ahmed bin Khamis al Kasbi, Director General of Al Mazunah Free Zone, said, "This incentive package is designed to ease financial pressures on investors, encourage project expansion and strengthen partnerships.

Key benefits include a 30 per cent exemption on accumulated debts and a 50 per cent reduction in rental fees for five years, applicable to both new and existing investors. These measures reflect our commitment to building a supportive and sustainable investment ecosystem."

Over the years, Al Mazunah Free Zone has witnessed remarkable progress in investment and trade activities. In 2024, the zone recorded an impressive increase in the volume of imported goods, exceeding 240,000 tonnes — a growth of more than 20 per cent compared to 2023. This upward trend highlights the zone's strategic importance as a regional trade hub.

Eng Al Kasbi emphasised the readiness of the Free Zone to host diverse investments, thanks to its state-of-the-art infrastructure. The zone is equipped with essential facilities, including road networks, electricity, water, communication systems, and advanced storage and transportation solutions. Its proximity to the Yemeni border enhances its appeal as a strategic gateway for regional and



The Free Zone has recorded significant growth, with imported goods surpassing 240,000 tonnes in 2024 — a 20 per cent increase compared to the previous year.



ENG AHMED
BIN KHAMIS
AL KASBI
Director General of
Al Mazunah Free
Zonees

international trade.

The Al Mazunah Economic Forum and Exhibition has further elevated the zone's profile by bringing together over 100 local and international companies. The event serves as a platform for showcasing investment opportunities, promoting collaboration and driving innovation to meet Oman's

economic aspirations.

These new incentives aim to attract long-term investments, foster innovation and enhance economic sustainability.

By addressing the needs of both new and existing investors, Madayn reinforces its mission to position Al Mazunah Free Zone as a key driver of Oman's economic diversification agenda.

Madayn's proactive measures underline its role in creating a dynamic business environment that supports growth, competitiveness and regional connectivity, ultimately contributing to Oman Vision 2040 goals. — ONA

Vale Oman targets switch to renewable power by 2030

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, JAN 21

BRAZILIAN mining giant Vale says its iron ore pelletising plant at SOHAR Port and Freezone will be powered by renewable electricity by 2030, in line with a commitment by the parent organisation to decarbonisation its operations globally.

According to Nasser al Azri, CEO — Vale in Oman, the switch to green energy for the production of iron ore pellets — the primary feedstock for direct reduction iron (DRI) plants in the region — is also designed to support the aspirations of steel mills to transition to low-carbon steel production.

In a recent interview with CNBC Arabia, Al Azri said the company is taking concrete steps to decarbonise its Sohar operations, centring on the production of 9 million tonnes per annum of iron ore pellets.

With steelmaking accounting for around 8 per cent of global CO2 emissions, the industry has a responsibility to cut the greenhouse gas (GHG) footprint associated with its operations, he noted.

Vale in Oman, for its part, plans to source its electricity



Vale Oman CEO Nasser al Azri featured during the interview with CNBC Arabia.

requirements from renewable sources by 2030, said the official.

Also contributing to its CO2 emission reduction strategy, he added, is a new iron ore concentration plant currently being developed by Vale in partnership with a Chinese steelmaker at Sohar. High grade iron ore from the plant will play an essential part in Vale's decarbonisation journey, he stated.

Last October, Vale and Jinnan Iron & Steel Group announced a joint partnership to establish the Sohar Concentration Plant with

an initial investment of over \$600 million.

The facility, scheduled to commence operations by mid-2027, will supply high-quality iron ore for production of pellets and briquettes, which are key to the manufacturing of low-carbon steel products via the direct reduction route.

The plant will process 18 million tonnes of low-grade iron ore annually, producing 12.6 million tonnes of high-grade concentrate.

Shedding light on the demand outlook for steel products, Al Azri

said the Gulf region continues to remain an important market for Vale Oman's output. Markets include the UAE, Saudi, Qatar, India and countries of East Africa. Europe is a promising market as well, given especially the emphasis on green steel as part of their decarbonisation journey, he said.

Integral to Vale's success in the region, Al Azri stressed, is Oman's strategic location and its proximity to all of the markets currently served by Vale.

"We are in the region for just-in-time delivery to our clients, which are in the GCC. (In 2024), we (have) handled the highest volume in our history, which is a step towards solidifying our position in the region. But in addition to the GCC, we do exports to North Africa and India as well."

Vale's growth strategy, said Al Azri, is connected to the region's ambitions to emerge as a leader in green steel. The parent company is currently in discussion with a number of partners in the region, notably in the UAE and Saudi Arabia, to set up "additional operations" to help strengthen the group's positioning in the emerging low-carbon steel sector.

ADVERTORIALS

NEWTENURE

ST REGIS AL MOUJ MUSCAT RESORT WELCOMES NEW GENERAL MANAGER



WASSIM DAAGEH
General Manager,
St Regis Al Mouj
Muscat Resort

MUSCAT: The St Regis Al Mouj Muscat Resort, Muscat’s most alluring address, welcomes Wassim Daageh as General Manager, joining the resort from his previous role as General Manager in Doha, Qatar.

With over two decades of exemplary experience in the luxury hospitality

sector, Wassim is dedicated to further elevate the resort’s operations within the region’s luxury landscape. Owned by the renowned Alfardan Group, the resort is a luxurious coastal haven nestled in the heart of Al Mouj Muscat. This exquisite property seamlessly blends Omani heritage with contemporary design, offering guests an unparalleled experience of refined elegance and exceptional service.

Wassim’s career spans multiple leadership positions across some of the world’s most renowned properties. He has overseen large-scale, high-profile international events — including the FIFA World Cup and Formula 1— and consistently delivered guest experiences defined by personal attention and service excellence.

Throughout his tenure, he has garnered numerous industry accolades, from the Qatar Tourism Service Excellence Award to being named Global General Manager of the Year for one of Marriott International’s hotels, and was repeatedly recognised in the ‘General Manager Power 100’ by Hotelier Middle East.

“I am deeply grateful for the journey that has led me to this moment,” said Wassim Daageh.

“My time in Qatar, a place I have proudly called home, has been invaluable and I now look forward to this new chapter at The St Regis Al Mouj Muscat Resort and The St Regis Residences in Oman. Both destinations will undoubtedly shape my perspectives and approach to hospitality and I am honored to continue contributing to the region’s vibrant and evolving luxury landscape.”

A graduate with a bachelor’s degree in Hotel Management, Wassim is also a Six Sigma Green Belt and a certified service culture trainer for two of Marriott International brands.

His innovative approach has led to the implementation of progressive operational enhancements such as key mobile check-in, unique dining-to-go concepts and advanced digital communication platforms for guests.

Wassim is deeply committed to sustainability and community engagement. He champions initiatives that nurture local talent, support indigenous artisans, and promote responsible sourcing from local producers, aligning with the St. Regis dedication to creating meaningful connections within its communities.

Under Wassim’s visionary leadership, guests can expect thoughtfully curated experiences that reflect the essence of St. Regis hospitality—where every detail is crafted with care and every moment is an opportunity for connection.

NOW OPEN MUDARABAH SAVINGS ACCOUNT VIA DHOFAR ISLAMIC APP

MUSCAT: Dhofar Islamic, the Islamic banking window of BankDhofar, has introduced a new feature that allows customers to open a Mudaraba Savings Account conveniently through its mobile application.

This service, available in a few simple steps, comes with an exemption from debit card fees starting from mid-January until December 31, 2025.

The initiative reaffirms Dhofar Islamic’s dedication to offering innovative banking solutions



that cater to customers’ everyday financial needs. By enhancing the features of its electronic

channels and mobile application, Dhofar Islamic ensures a seamless and efficient experience for its customers.

The ability to open a Mudaraba Savings Account within minutes through the mobile app saves valuable time and effort, significantly elevating the banking experience.

Customers can simply download the app, complete the process effortlessly, and track their request status with exceptional ease and comfort.

Chery Arrizo 8 now offers impressive savings

CHERY Oman recently unveiled a fantastic campaign that encourages car buyers to make the most of impressive savings.

Customers purchasing any Chery model will benefit with free service up to 50,000 kms, free VAT, registration 1 year, insurance 1 year, Scratch and Win assured gifts such as 1 Samsung S24 Plus Phone, 2 laptops, 3 Smart TVs, 54 Fuel Cards and Engine warranty of 10 years /1,000,000 kms (Conditions apply. Please visit any Chery showroom for more details.) The offer that began on December 2, 2024 will last until January 30, 2025.

The dynamic Arrizo 8, is available in both 1.6-litre and 2.0-litre engine variants. Designed to deliver a seamless blend of power, style and advanced technology, the Arrizo 8 is set to redefine



The Arrizo 8, is available in both 1.6-litre and 2.0-litre engine variants.

driving experiences for car enthusiasts. Both variants are equipped with cutting-edge Turbocharged Direct Injection (TDI) technology, ensuring optimal fuel economy without compromising on power. The Arrizo 8 is a statement

of sophistication. With its bold grille, sleek LED headlights and aerodynamic silhouette, the sedan exudes modernity and elegance. Inside, drivers are welcomed by a premium cabin featuring plush upholstery, multi-colour ambient lighting

and a driver-centric cockpit that redefines comfort.

The Arrizo 8 is loaded with smart features, including Dual 12.3-inch Screens, a fully digital dashboard and infotainment system for an intuitive user experience.

Advanced Driver Assistance Systems (ADAS) enhances safety with adaptive cruise control, lane-keeping assist and collision avoidance.

The Arrizo 8 sets a benchmark in safety, boasting a 5-star NCAP rating. With its rigid body structure and a suite of active and passive safety features, this sedan ensures peace of mind on every journey.

Whether seeking an efficient urban companion or a performance-driven powerhouse, the Arrizo 8 delivers. Available in a range of stunning colours it offers something for every taste and preference.

Khedmah, Vodafone Oman sign collection services pact

MUSCAT: In a strategic initiative to expand its service portfolio and enhance customer convenience, Oman Investment and Finance Company (OIFC) Khedmah has signed a bill collections agreement with Oman Future Telecommunications (Vodafone Oman).

The agreement was formalised by Said bin Ahmed Safar, Chief Executive Officer of OIFC, and Eng Badr bin Saud al Zidi, Chief Executive Officer of Vodafone Oman.

This strategic partnership enables Vodafone Oman customers to seamlessly manage and pay their prepaid and postpaid bills securely through the user-friendly Khedmah App, the Khedmah website, or through its extensive network of branches.

Commenting on the occasion, Saud bin Ahmed al Siyabi, Chief Operating Officer



Said bin Ahmed Safar, CEO of OIFC, and Eng Badr bin Saud al Zidi, CEO of Vodafone Oman.

of OIFC Khedmah, remarked, “We are excited to partner with Vodafone Oman,

a collaboration that underscores the shared commitment of both companies to streamline bill payment and recharge processes for Vodafone Oman customers.

This partnership is a testament to the growth both companies are experiencing and our collective efforts to enhance the customer experience.

It highlights the trust Khedmah has built in bill collection and its deep expertise in customer service. This partnership will further solidify Khedmah’s position as a leader in digital billing and collection.”

Khedmah’s dedication to excellence and innovation is reflected in its ongoing efforts to deliver unique digital solutions that address the diverse needs of customers across Oman.

MG RX9: Redefining luxury and performance in the SUV segment

MUSCAT: MHD ACERE, the official distributor of MG in Oman, recently launched all-new MG RX9, setting a new standard in the SUV segment, the MG RX9 blends sophistication, power and versatility, offering an unparalleled driving experience for both urban explorers and adventure enthusiasts.

The exterior of the MG RX9 exudes sophistication with its sharp lines, premium 21-inch dual-tone alloy wheels and pop-out flush door handles.

Noise-cancelling front windcreens enhance the tranquil experience, while the composed and confident design ensures that the MG RX9 turns heads wherever it goes.

Inside, the MG RX9 offers an unmatched level of comfort. Spacious seating and thoughtful



The exterior of the MG RX9 exudes sophistication with its sharp lines.

design create a serene environment for all passengers. The 140-degree reclining second-row seats provide flight-like comfort, while the 3rd-row passengers enjoy up to 35 degrees of reclining space and

ample legroom. Every aspect of the interior is designed to make every journey effortless and enjoyable. Powered by the 2.0T “Net Blue” engine, the MG RX9 delivers 201 HP

and 350 Nm of torque, offering an exhilarating performance across any terrain.

With five distinct driving modes — Auto, Sport, Snow, Off-Road and Eco — this SUV adapts seamlessly to every environment, putting you in control of thrilling adventures or smooth urban drives.

Advanced technology is at the heart of the MG RX9. From wireless charging and seamless smartphone integration with Apple CarPlay and Android Auto to the premium 12-speaker BOSE audio system, it ensures every drive is convenient and connected. Dual 12.3-inch displays add a touch of luxury while putting entertainment and essential controls at your fingertips. Safety is a priority in the MG RX9.

Equipped with side and curtain airbags, Advanced Driver Assistance

Systems (ADAS), Lane Departure Warning, Blind Spot Monitoring and a 360-degree camera system, it provides confidence and peace of mind on every journey.

Built with over 80 per cent high-strength steel, the MG RX9 combines strength and style in one remarkable package.

Mohsin Hani Bahrani, CEO of MHD ACERE, emphasised the significance of the MG RX9 for the Omani market: “The MG RX9 represents a remarkable step forward in redefining what a premium SUV can offer. It combines elegance, power and advanced technology, ensuring that every drive is an extraordinary experience. At MHD ACERE, we are committed to bringing innovative and versatile vehicles to Oman and the MG RX9 is a testament to that promise.”

BUSINESS

NEW INITIATIVE



This initiative aligns with the company’s strategy to improve basic services, promote sustainable development and support environmental goals.

SEWAGE TREATMENT PLANTS BOOST SUSTAINABILITY IN AL KHABOURAH AND AL SUWAIQ

SUWAIQ: Nama Water Services has completed the expansion of sewage treatment plants in the Wilayats of Al Khabourah and Al Suwaiq. This initiative aligns with the company’s strategy to improve basic services, promote sustainable development and support Oman’s environmental goals.

Eng Hilal bin Masoud al Sharji, Acting Director of Operations Support at Nama Water Services, highlighted the project’s impact.

“These expanded facilities significantly enhance wastewater infrastructure, ensuring environmental preservation and efficient reuse of treated water for agriculture, irrigation and industrial purposes.

This supports Oman’s strategic vision to protect groundwater resources and expand green spaces while improving food security,” he said.

The plants employ advanced international wastewater treatment techniques, with a total combined capacity of 4,500 cubic metres daily.

The Al Khabourah facility handles 2,500 cubic metres daily, while the Al Suwaiq plant processes 2,000 cubic metres. Both plants have the potential to scale operations in response to urban and population growth in the two wilayats.

Nama Water Services is also advancing related projects. These include constructing a sewage network, treatment plant and irrigation line in the Wilayat Al Musannah to connect 2,000 residential units and the third phase of Sohar’s sewage network, which will connect 4,200 residential and commercial units to the existing system.

Eng Abdullah bin Salem al Shamsi, Director of Operations and Maintenance in Al Batinah North Governorate, emphasised that the plants are equipped to handle daily wastewater needs and provide cost-effective solutions for tanker emptying services, as approved by the relevant authorities.

These initiatives collectively reinforce Nama Water Services’ commitment to environmental sanitation, efficient resource management and the development of modern infrastructure.

— ONA

GCC renewable energy production grows by 72.4%

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, JAN 21

ELECTRICITY generated from renewables in countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) increased by 72.4 per cent in 2023 in comparison to 2022, according to a recent report published by the GCC Statistics Centre.

According to the report, energy produced by renewable energy plants amounted to 14,403 gigawatt hours (GWh), marking a stark difference from the 2022 figure of 8,352 GWh.

Furthermore, the capacity of renewable energy plants in the GCC also recorded a significant increase of 74.7 per cent, reaching around 10,742 megawatts in 2023, in comparison to a capacity of 6,147 MW 2022.

The increase, according to the Centre, could be attributed to the growing attention to renewable energy within member states, the establishment of clean and sustainable energy regulations



Each member state has pledged to introduce a specific percentage of renewable energy within its energy mix.

and their commitment to achieving net-zero carbon emissions.

While the GCC council lacks any unified region-wide renewable energy mandates, each member state has pledged to introduce a specific percentage of renewable energy within its energy mix.

Ranking first is Saudi Arabia,

which pledged to achieve 50 per cent of renewable energy in its electricity mix by 2030.

In second place is the United Arab Emirates which has pledged to achieve 44 per cent of renewable energy production by 2050 as part of the country’s Energy Strategy 2050.

Similarly, in line with Vision 2040, Oman has pledged to

The increase, according to the Centre, could be attributed to the growing attention to renewable energy within member states, the establishment of clean and sustainable energy regulations, and their commitment to achieving net-zero carbon emissions.

achieve 20 per cent energy production from renewables by 2030, later aiming to increase this figure to 35-39 per cent by 2040. Bahrain has committed to achieving 20 per cent of its power generation from renewables by 20235.

Meanwhile, Qatar has not committed to a percentage of total electricity production, but has pledged to produce 2,000–4,000 MW of renewable energy by 2030 and 5,000 MW by 2035.

While the production of renewable energy has been on the rise, it is worth noting that it only amounted to 1.81 per cent of the total electricity production in the GCC for 2023.

SMEDA to host dialogue session uniting stakeholders

NASRULAH AL AJMI
MUSCAT, JAN 21

The Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority (SMEDA) in collaboration with the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, will host a key dialogue session on January 29, 2025, uniting key stakeholders to enhance the role of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and startups in driving innovation and economic development.

The session highlights the nation’s commitment to fostering collaboration and empowering entrepreneurs in vital sectors.

On Tuesday, the SMEs Development Authority extended an open invitation to SMEs and startup owners to participate in Dialogue Session 9.

The event focuses on expanding opportunities for the development and investment of startups in the transport, logistics



The session seeks to strengthen partnerships by promoting synergy and integration between SMEs and stakeholders to create a collaborative business environment.

and information technology sectors.

The Authority emphasised that this session continues Oman’s approach to fostering partnerships and integration, with active involvement from their key partner, the Ministry of

Transport, Communications and Information Technology.

Under the theme Fostering Partnership and Communication, the session aims to unlock the potential of SMEs and startups in the transport, logistics and information technology sectors — industries critical to Oman’s economic diversification efforts and offering significant prospects for innovation and growth.

The event will feature Halima bint Rashid al Zariyah, Chairperson of the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority (SMEDA) and Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MoTCIT). Both leaders will address participants, stressing the importance of nurturing a supportive ecosystem for SMEs and fostering meaningful collaboration with relevant entities.

The dialogue session seeks to

achieve several key objectives, including strengthening partnerships by promoting synergy and integration between SMEs and stakeholders to create a collaborative business environment.

It also aims to contribute to policy development by establishing robust support mechanisms for SMEs in Oman, exploring promising opportunities in vital economic sectors and inspiring innovation by encouraging entrepreneurs to present groundbreaking ideas that advance these industries.

This event underscores Oman’s dedication to entrepreneurship, providing SMEs and startups with a platform to engage with policymakers, industry leaders and peers.

Through dialogue and the exchange of insights, the session aspires to empower entrepreneurs to play a leading role in shaping the nation’s future.

Artificial lift technologies in focus at 10th MEALF conference

FAISAL AL AJMI
MUSCAT, JAN 21

THE 10th edition of the Middle East Artificial Lift Forum (MEALF) commenced its three-day conference at the JW Marriott Muscat Hotel here on January 20, 2025, drawing together industry leaders and experts in the field of artificial lift technologies. The event focuses on the growing use of artificial lift systems in oil production operations across the Middle East.

The forum provided cutting-edge technical solutions while fostering a global hub for knowledge-sharing and best practices to meet the future needs of the industry. It cultivated a sense of community among artificial lift users, offering a valuable platform for the exchange of ideas and experiences.

The opening ceremony was attended by Eng Mohsin bin Hamad al Hadhrami, Under-Secretary of the



Eng Mohsin al Hadhrami, Ministry Under-Secretary, addressing the MEALF Conference.

Ministry of Energy and Minerals, who delivered the inaugural address, highlighting the crucial role of artificial lift technologies in optimising oil recovery and enhancing production efficiencies across the region.

In his speech, Al Hadhrami, said, “Artificial lift is crucial for maintaining oil production in Oman, due to the unique nature of our reservoirs, which require lifting systems from the outset, unlike other countries with natural flow.”

He added: “As leaders, we must encourage collaboration and the sharing of ideas. In my experience, success comes from addressing challenges with technology providers, rather than working in isolation.”

As part of the opening celebrations, the event also honoured its key sponsors, acknowledging their contributions to the success of the forum. These sponsors play a pivotal role in advancing the development and application of artificial lift solutions, vital for ensuring the continued growth and sustainability of the oil and gas sector.

In addition, the MEALF 2025 exhibition offered delegates the opportunity to explore the latest equipment, technologies and services related to artificial lift operations.

The exhibition ensured participants remain informed about the most current products and

innovations on the market, aligning with the forum’s commitment to upholding industry-leading standards.

MEALF 2025 is set to be a vital event for professionals looking to stay at the cutting edge of artificial lift technologies, playing a key role in advancing energy security and sustainability across the region.

Since its inception in 2003, MEALF has served as a premier platform for fostering dialogue and innovation in the artificial lift domain. This year’s edition brings together a diverse range of stakeholders, from engineers to policymakers, offering valuable opportunities for networking and knowledge exchange.

The 10th Middle East Artificial Lift Forum has reinforced its role in driving innovation and collaboration, shaping the future of oil production in the region through ongoing dialogue and technological advancements.

OPINION

Finance bosses call for action on stock market exodus



ANDY JALIL

The author is our foreign correspondent based in the UK.

THE UK government is facing fresh calls to accelerate its reform of rules in London’s financial district (known as the ‘City’) and stem the exodus of cash away from London’s markets, as the new Lord Mayor, Alastair King, urged ministers to develop a more supportive tax and regulatory environment.

Alastair King urged Prime Minister Keir Starmer to go faster with efforts to boost investment into London listed firms, claiming the government’s current plans are not going “far enough”.

“It cannot be logically correct that, as it stands, we do not pay taxes on purchases of international vehicles such as Tesla, but we are taxed on investing in a British brand like Aston Martin,” King said, referring to the stamp duty of 0.5pc tax levied on UK share trading. Changing this “misalignment” would provide a “shot in the arm for home grown companies looking to scale up”, he added.

Meanwhile, the boss Steven Fine, of Peel Hunt, a leading UK investment bank, said that firmer measures should be taken to reverse the “exodus” of investors from UK focused equity funds, adding that ministers should offer tax breaks to encourage a “home market bias”.

The calls could revive the debate around stamp duty on share trading after years

of demand for it to be eased or dropped entirely

The boss of London Stock Exchange (LSE), Julia Hoggett, described the tax as “pernicious” earlier this year while fund management group Abrdn and trade body, the Quoted Companies Alliance (QCA), also called for the charge to be retired for FTSE 250 companies.

“Scrapping stamp duty on share trading would send out a powerful signal that the UK and the financial district of London (The ‘City’) are open for business,” QCA chief executive, James Ashton said, adding that there was no equivalent in the US or Germany (the powerhouse of the EU).

The mayor also called for ministers to encourage more retail investors into stocks and shares ISAs and urged the Chancellor Rachel Reeves to go further in her plans for pension fund reform.

Reeves has outlined plans to consolidate the UK’s sprawling local government pension systems in a bid to fuel investment. She said that unleashing a wave of investment from pension funds will be at the heart of the government’s “growth mission”.

“Growth is our number one mission and reinvigorating our capital markets is key to delivering that”, a Treasury spokesperson said. Another LSE-listed firm waved through a take-private deal in the latest of a torrent

Alastair King urged Prime Minister Keir Starmer to go faster with efforts to boost investment into London listed firms, claiming the government’s current plans are not going “far enough”.

of exits from the City’s bourse. Learning Technologies, an AIM (Alternative Investment Market) listed edtech company, agreed to an £836m takeover from US private equity giant General Atlantic, making it one of 45 listed companies to sell-up or enter talks with a suitor.

According to numbers compiled by Peel Hunt, the total value of take-private deals has now reached a record £52bn in value. Including exits from the LSC and companies swapping their listings to overseas markets, the total value of companies leaving the market is set to go above £100bn according to figures from Peel Hunt.

London’s AIM market has felt the brunt of exits in the past year with the total number of companies on the market shrinking to below 700 for the first time since 2001, according to accountancy firm UHY Hacker Young. A total of 16 AIM-listed companies have been bought by private companies last year.

London markets faced further scrutiny last month after Pallister Capital renewed its call for Rio Tinto to abandon its primary London listing, arguing its corporate structure had cost shareholders \$50bn (£39.4bn) in value.

In a letter to the board, reported by the Financial Times, Pallister Capital said Rio Tinto’s dual listing in London and Sydney had been an “unmitigated failure”.

BARCLAYS-SANTANDER UK IS A MATTER OF WHEN AND HOW

LIAM PROUD

If Banco Santander’s Ana Botín wants to sell her British retail business, there’s an obvious buyer: Barclays boss C S Venkatakrishnan. The biggest questions would be when the 42-billion-pound (\$51 billion) UK bank decides to pounce — and whether its relatively new CEO, known as Venkat, can get his buyback-hungry investors on side.

The Spanish banking giant is reviewing its UK presence, Reuters reported on Sunday citing a person familiar with the matter. Santander, worth 75 billion euros (\$77 billion), said in a statement that Britain was a core market. The group took full control of building society Abbey National in 2004 and current executive chair Ana ran the local division from 2010 to 2014.

Performance has often lagged larger rivals, however. In 2023, Santander UK managed a 14.4 per cent return on tangible equity, compared with 16.5 per cent on average for NatWest and Lloyds Banking Group, using Visible Alpha data. Its performance took a dive last year after the bank set some money aside over an ongoing UK motor-finance regulatory saga.

Barclays looks like the most logical home for the business. Venkat wants to boost his UK division to reduce the group’s reliance on volatile trading and investment banking.

He aims to get that latter unit, which investors tend to dislike, down to about 50 per cent of risk-weighted assets by 2026, compared with 57 per cent in September. Buying mortgage-heavy Santander UK would push that number down to 48 per cent in a stroke, according to Breakingviews calculations. It also helps that Barclays’ stock has more than doubled over the last year, giving Venkat more firepower.

The price negotiations would keep advisers busy. On the average 1.2 times price-to-tangible-book-value of Lloyds and NatWest, Santander UK would be worth 13.6 billion pounds. Use the same duo’s 6.8 times 2026 price-earnings multiple, however, and the Spanish-owned unit’s equity value drops to 9.5 billion pounds, based on Visible Alpha-gathered estimates for its net income that year.

Assume Venkat paid the mid-point of those two numbers, or 11.6 billion pounds. He’d get 1.4 billion pounds of earnings from the acquired business in 2026, based on analyst forecasts, implying a handy 12 per cent return on investment even before factoring in any cost savings. — Reuters

Oman means business: A nation ready for tomorrow



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This advantageous position is enhanced by world-class infrastructure, including the expanding Port of Duqm, the efficient Port of Salalah, Sohar, and the historic Port Sultan Qaboos.

IN a world grappling with unprecedented challenges, Oman emerges as a beacon of stability and opportunity, offering practical solutions to global businesses seeking growth and reliability.

The country’s remarkable transformation over recent years has positioned it as more than just another business destination — it stands as a forward-thinking nation that successfully blends traditional strengths with modern innovations.

As international businesses navigate through supply chain disruptions, energy concerns and economic uncertainties, Oman’s strategic advantages become increasingly valuable. The country serves as a natural bridge connecting the major markets of Asia, Africa and Europe, providing businesses with unparalleled access to global trade routes.

This advantageous position is enhanced by world-class infrastructure, including the expanding Port of Duqm, the efficient Port of Salalah, Sohar and the historic Port Sultan Qaboos. These maritime gateways, complemented by modern highway networks and state-of-

the-art airports, ensure smooth movement of goods across international markets.

Perhaps most notably, Oman is taking a leading role in the global transition to sustainable energy. The country is leveraging its natural advantages — abundant sunshine and consistent wind patterns — to pioneer green energy solutions. The development of the world’s largest green hydrogen project exemplifies Oman’s commitment to sustainable development.

This initiative opens new possibilities for businesses seeking clean energy solutions, from manufacturing to data centre operations. Companies choosing Oman gain access to renewable energy sources that can power their operations while meeting growing global demands for sustainable business practices.

Under the visionary leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, Oman follows a clear and ambitious road map known as Vision 2040. This comprehensive plan has already yielded significant results through successful economic reforms, modernised business regulations and digital government services.

The country’s political and economic stability, particularly noteworthy in today’s uncertain global environment, provides businesses with the confidence to make long-term investments and strategic decisions.

Recent years have witnessed a transformative series of business-friendly reforms in Oman. The introduction of the Foreign Capital Investment Law, allowing 100 per cent foreign ownership in most sectors, has revolutionised the investment landscape.

The government has streamlined business registration processes, created competitive tax incentives and established special economic zones and free ports. The launch of the Oman Investment Authority has further simplified the investment process, providing clear guidance and support for international investors.

What sets Oman apart is its unique ability to embrace modern business practices while maintaining its rich cultural heritage. This cultural strength creates an environment where business relationships are built on trust and respect, characteristics increasingly valued in the global

marketplace.

The country’s workforce combines technical expertise with strong work ethics, offering companies access to talented professionals who understand both local and international business practices.

The past five years have been particularly transformative for Oman’s business ecosystem. Government services have been digitised, making administrative processes more efficient and transparent. Infrastructure developments have enhanced connectivity both within the country and to international markets.

These improvements, combined with streamlined regulations and successful efforts to attract international investment, have created a robust foundation for future growth.

Oman’s modern business environment supports diverse sectors, from manufacturing and logistics to technology and healthcare. Companies looking to establish regional headquarters, set up manufacturing facilities, or create distribution networks find the necessary infrastructure and regulatory support readily available.

The country’s commitment to sustainable development makes it particularly attractive for green energy projects and environmentally conscious businesses.

The practical advantages of choosing Oman extend beyond business infrastructure. The country offers an exceptional quality of life for international professionals and their families. Modern healthcare facilities, quality education options and a rich cultural environment make Oman an attractive destination for global talent. The country’s traditional values of hospitality and tolerance create a welcoming atmosphere for people from diverse backgrounds.

Looking ahead, Oman’s role in the global business landscape continues to strengthen.

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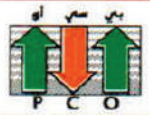
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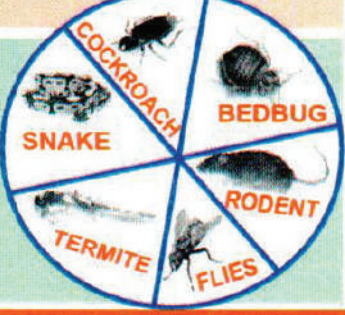
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DISCOVERY

Homo erectus, not sapiens, first humans to survive desert: study



OUR ANCESTOR *Homo erectus* was able to survive punishingly hot and dry desert more than a million years ago, according to a new study that casts doubt on the idea that *Homo sapiens* were the first humans capable of living in such hostile terrain. The moment when the first members of the extended human family called hominins adapted to life in desert or tropical forests marks “a turning point in the history of human survival and expansion in extreme environments,” lead study author Julio Mercader Florin of the University of Calgary said to AFP.

Scientists have long thought that only *Homo sapiens*, who first appeared around 300,000 years ago, were capable of living sustainably in such inhospitable regions. The first hominins to have split off from the other great apes were believed to be limited to less hostile ecosystems, such as forest, grassland and wetlands.

One of the world’s most important prehistoric sites, Olduvai Gorge in modern-day Tanzania, was thought to home to those easier types of landscapes. But this steep ravine in East Africa’s Great Rift Valley, which has played a key role in the understanding of human evolution, was actually a desert steppe, according to the study published in the journal *Communications Earth & Environment* on Thursday.

After collecting archaeological, geological and palaeoclimatic data, the international team of researchers were able to reconstruct the gorge’s ecosystem over the years.

Fossilised pollen of the *Ephedra* shrub — which commonly lives in arid areas — as well as traces of past wildfires and signs in the soil show there was an extreme drought in the area between one and 1.2 million years ago.

Research from the Engaji Nanyori site indicates that *Homo erectus* was more resilient and strategically adept than previously believed.

According to Mercader Florin, these early humans thrived in harsh environments by concentrating on ecological hotspots, like river confluences, where water and food were more reliable. Their repeated use of these focal points showcases significant adaptability and planning skills. Specialised tools uncovered at the site, including hand axes, scrapers and cleavers, reveal their advanced techniques for processing animal carcasses.

Cut marks on bones from species like cows, hippos and antelopes suggest effective resource utilisation, enabling them to thrive in arid conditions with scarce resources. Mercader Florin emphasised that these findings illustrate *Homo erectus*’s capability to endure long-term in extreme environments with low food density and challenging navigation.

This adaptability suggests that their range extended into the Saharo-Sindian region of Africa and similar habitats in Asia, proving they were equipped for diverse ecosystems. — AFP

QUICK FEATURES



FILM

Actor Adrien Brody speaks during a pre-recorded interview with BBC in London, Britain. — Reuters



FASHION

Designer Giorgio Armani appears at the end of the Giorgio Armani Fall-Winter 2025/2026 menswear collection during Milan Fashion Week, in Milan, Italy. — Reuters



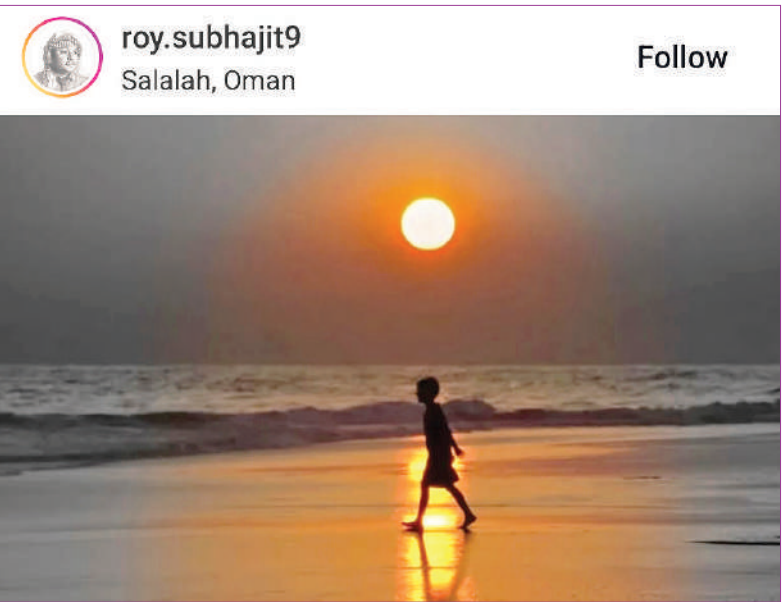
LIFESTYLE

A visitor picks up tulips in the tulip picking garden, where members of the public are invited to freely pick bunches of tulips, at the Museumplein on National Tulip Day in Amsterdam. — AFP

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



Appreciating Local Scene



Chasing Sunset

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World needs a new Bob Dylan, actor Chalamet says



THE WORLD needs a new Bob Dylan for an age that has become too “cynical”, actor Timothee Chalamet said on Thursday while presenting the new biographical film on the US folk troubadour. Asked ahead of the inauguration of US president-elect Donald Trump if he had embraced 1960s nostalgia in starring as the singer in “A Complete Unknown”, the French-American superstar noted the divergence with his own generation. “I think there is a nostalgia, because in the 1960s, this type of music and artists, like Bob Dylan, Joan Baez or James Baldwin -- there was no precedent,” Chalamet said in French ahead of the France premiere of the film on January 29. Such artists thought “that things could change and that art could

change political aspects or the cultural attitude”, he said. “Today, the cynicism is stronger,” he said. “For the young American, French and global generation, the obstacles are probably even bigger than in the 1960s: the environmental and political obstacles.” “It would be good if someone like Dylan emerged but, there again, there’s this cynicism... If someone makes an ethical, optimistic song, you’d think it had some ‘corporate’ element, that it was done in their own interests.” The Dylan biopic will be competing at Britain’s BAFTA awards next month as the race for Oscars glory gathers pace, as will “Dune: Part Two”, the science fiction extravaganza in which Chalamet also stars. —AFP



Kashmir’s saffron growers experiment with indoor farming as climate pressures mount

TUCKED in a valley beneath the snow-capped Himalayas of the Indian Kashmir region is the town of Pampore, famed for its farms that grow the world’s most expensive spice - the red-hued saffron. This is where most of saffron is farmed in India, the world’s second-largest producer behind Iran of the spice, which costs up to 325,000 rupees (\$3,800) a kg (2.2 pounds) because it is so labour-intensive to harvest. Come October, the crocus plants begin to bloom, covering the fields with bright purple flowers from which strands of fragrant red saffron are picked by hand, to be used in foods such as paella, and in fragrances and cloth dyes. “I am proud to cultivate this crop,” said Nisar Ahmad Malik, as he gathered flowers from his ancestral field. But, while Malik has stuck to traditional farming, citing the “rich colour, fragrance and aroma” of his produce through the years, some agrarian experts have been experimenting with indoor cultivation of the crop as global warming fears increase. About 90% of India’s saffron is produced in Kashmir, of which a majority is grown in Pampore, but the small town is under threat of rapid urbanisation, according to the Indian Council of Scientific & Industrial Research (CSIR). Experts say rising temperatures and erratic rainfall pose a risk to saffron production, which has dropped from 8 metric tons in the financial year 2010-11 to 2.6 metric tons in 2023-24, the federal government told parliament in February, adding that efforts were being made to boost production. One such programme is a project to help grow the plant indoors in a controlled environment in tubes containing moisture and vital nutrients, which Dr. Bashir Ilahi at state-run Sher-e-Kashmir University of Agricultural Sciences said has shown good results. “Growing saffron in a controlled environment demonstrates temperature resistance and significantly reduces the risk of crop failure,” said Ilahi, standing



in his laboratory between stacks of crates containing tubes of the purple flower. Ilahi and other local experts have been helping farmers with demonstrations on how to grow the crocus plant indoors. “It is an amazing innovation,” said Abdul Majeed, president of Kashmir’s Saffron Growers Association, some of whose



members, including Majeed, have been cultivating the crop indoors for a few years. Manzoor Ahmad Mir, a saffron grower, urged more state support. “The government should promote indoor saffron cultivation on a much larger scale as climate change is affecting the entire world, and Kashmir is no exception,” Mir said. —Reuters

DRIVING IN OMAN: A COMPREHENSIVE GUIDE FOR FIRST-TIME VISITORS

BY YERU EBUEEN

WHEN embarking on an adventure in a new country, understanding the transport system can significantly impact your experience. In Oman, where stunning landscapes and rich culture await at every corner, navigating the roads can be both a joy and a challenge.

As a visitor, you may find yourself wondering about your options for getting around, especially if you're accustomed to more extensive public transport systems.

Oman's public transport system is mainly focused on urban areas like Muscat, making it difficult for visitors to fully experience the beauty of the country. While there are buses and taxis available, relying solely on these options can limit your travel experience.

On the bright side, public buses are a cost-effective way to get around, often cheaper than renting a car or using taxis. Plus, travelling by bus or taxi allows visitors to engage with locals and enjoy a richer cultural experience.

However, there are significant drawbacks. The public transport network does not extend far beyond major cities, which can make reaching remote attractions quite a challenge. Additionally, bus and taxi schedules can feel restrictive, preventing travellers from

exploring at their own pace.

Given these limitations, many believe that renting a car is the ideal way to experience Oman. It provides the freedom to venture off the beaten path and discover the country's many hidden gems.

Renting a car in Oman offers unparalleled flexibility. With wide, well-maintained roads, driving across the country is a straightforward pleasure. Whether you want to catch the sunrise at Jabal Shams or enjoy a sunset at Jabreen Castle, a rental car allows you to tailor your itinerary spontaneously.

Most rental companies operate 24/7 at airports, ensuring a smooth pick-up and drop-off process. To rent a car in Oman, travellers typically need a valid driver's license from their home country — an international permit is required only if the license is not in the Roman alphabet — a credit card for payment and an ID or passport.

Most rental agencies require drivers to be at least 25 years old, although some will accommodate those aged 21 to 24 for an additional fee. Driving in Oman is a pleasurable experience, largely due to the well-maintained roads and clear signage, which is usually available in both Arabic and English. When navigating the roads, it's essential to be aware of the speed limits, which are set at 120 km/h on highways, 100 km/h on main roads and vary between 40 to 80 km/h in urban areas.

While most roads are well-paved, those looking to venture into rugged terrain must secure a 4x4 vehicle. Safety remains a top priority, with recommendations for visitors to wear seat belts, avoid mobile phone usage while driving and verify the fuel requirements of their rental. Rental cars in Oman usually come with basic Collision Damage Waiver (CDW) insurance, which covers damages caused by third parties. If your trip includes off-roading — like a drive to Jabal Shams — consider adding extra insurance for comprehensive coverage. This ensures you're protected against the unique challenges of Oman's diverse terrain.

When driving, keep an eye out for common road hazards such as speed bumps, particularly at the entrances to urban areas and be vigilant about the numerous speed cameras along the routes. Thankfully, refuelling is remarkably affordable in Oman, with a full tank costing around \$40 and all petrol stations provide helpful assistance to ensure a smooth experience.

While a standard car may suffice for general touring, if your itinerary includes visiting destinations like Jabal Shams, Al Jabal Al Akhdhar, or the Rimal Al Sharqiya, a 4x4 is essential for navigating rougher terrains.

To farther ensure a safe driving experience in Oman, it is important to remember several key guidelines. First, always drive

on the right side of the road to adhere to local regulations. Seat belts are mandatory, so make sure to buckle up and refrain from using your phone while driving to avoid distractions. Additionally, be mindful of the speed limits and familiarise yourself with local traffic laws to ensure compliance. It's crucial to understand that drinking and driving is strictly prohibited and violations carry severe penalties. By following these pointers, you can help create a safer driving environment for yourself and others on the road.

Rental prices can vary between companies, but most include unlimited mileage, local taxes, third-party liability insurance and additional perks. Always clarify what's included to avoid surprises.

To ensure a seamless experience when renting a car in Oman, it's essential to follow a few important tips. First, before driving off, thoroughly inspect your rental car for any existing damage. Document any issues with photographs and make sure they are recorded in the rental agreement to avoid any disputes later. Additionally, it's crucial to know your fuel type; if you're uncertain, check for labels inside the vehicle to ensure you fill it with the correct fuel. Finally, gas stations are plentiful throughout Oman, so it's wise to download maps in advance. This will allow you to locate fuel stations easily without relying on mobile data during your journey.

