

O M A N  
عُومَانِ  
D A I L Y

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GRAMMY  
WINNER'S HEART  
'BEATS' FOR  
SALALAH

INBRIEF

HM GREET'S  
GOVERNOR GENERAL  
OF NEW ZEALAND

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to Cindy Kiro, Governor General of New Zealand, on the occasion of her country's National Day.

In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sentiments and best wishes of success to the Governor General in realising further aspirations of progress and prosperity for the people of New Zealand. His Majesty also wished the relations of cooperation and partnership between Oman and New Zealand further progress.

SOHAR SULFUR ENHANCES OMAN'S  
STATUS IN GLOBAL MARKET



Sohar Sulphur Fertilizers company, which specialises in the production of sulphur fertilizers, is undertaking efforts to support and enhance Omani exports. The company, which exports its products to more than 26 countries around the world, is headquartered in Madayn in the Wilayat of Suhar in Al Batinah North Governorate. Sohar Sulphur Fertilizers was established in 2011 as a joint venture between OQ (a subsidiary of Oman Investment Authority) and Aqua Venture International, with the aim of developing an Omani hub for manufacturing and marketing sulphur fertilizers -bentonite and other micronutrients.

OMAN, UK EXPLORE  
BUSINESS VENTURES

The Sultanate of Oman hosted the first meeting of the Omani-British Strategic Consultation Team. The meeting was held at Oman Across Ages Museum in the Wilayat of Manah, the Governorate of Al Dakhiliyah.

The first meeting of the year reviewed several topics related to investment, developing the business environment and exchanging views on investment cooperation opportunities, such as the two countries' investment strategies and target sectors.

The meeting also touched on the ongoing efforts to enhance investment attractiveness in the Sultanate of Oman. It also explored opportunities to form investment partnerships in the field of scientific innovation and green energy, as well as transferring knowledge on best practices in the field of promoting national identity and effective communication. **DETAILS ON P13**

Oman rejects attempt  
to displace Palestinians

W O R L D   R E J E C T S   T R U M P   P L A N   T O   T A K E   O V E R   G A Z A

MUSCAT/PARIS: The Sultanate of Oman has affirmed its unwavering stance and categorical rejection of any attempts to displace the population of the Gaza Strip and the occupied Palestinian territories.

Oman called for the need to respect the Palestinian people's legitimate rights to establish their independent state on their land.

In a statement issued by the Foreign Ministry on Wednesday, the Sultanate of Oman warned that any plans aimed at transferring Palestinians from their lands constitute a flagrant violation of international law and resolutions of international legitimacy. It added that such action constitutes a threat to security and stability in the region.

The Sultanate of Oman called upon the international community to shoulder its responsibilities in protecting the rights of the Palestinian people. It underlined the necessity of reaching a just and comprehensive solution to the Palestinian issue, based on resolutions of international legitimacy and the Arab Peace Initiative - a solution that ensures the establishment of an independent Palestinian state on the borders of June 4, 1967, with Al Quds A'Sharqiyah (East Jerusalem) as its capital.

Meanwhile, the head of the UN refugee agency voiced consternation at President Donald Trump's shock proposal for the United States to take over the Gaza Strip and resettle its people.

Filippo Grandi, the United Nations' high commissioner for refugees, said in an interview in Brussels it was not "clear" what the idea entailed, which made it difficult to comment on such a "sensitive issue".



A Palestinian child is pictured amid the rubble of destroyed buildings at Saftawi street in Jabalia, in the northern Gaza Strip, on Wednesday. — AFP

"It's something very surprising, but we have to see what it means in concrete terms," Grandi said.

Trump made his announcement to audible gasps on Tuesday during a joint press conference with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, whom he was hosting at the White House for talks.

In a proposal that lacked details, Trump said he would make the war-battered enclave "unbelievable" by removing unexploded

bombs and rubble, and economically redeveloping it.

Many global leaders expressed opposition after Trump said he wanted to take control of the Gaza Strip and "permanently" resettle Palestinians in other countries.

Trump's shock proposal to rebuild Gaza and turn it into "the Riviera of the Middle East" triggered a flurry of condemnations in the Middle East and deep reservations among US allies. **SEE ALSO P6**

MAJLIS  
ASH'SHURA  
TO DISCUSS  
KEY DRAFT  
LAWS AND  
AGREEMENTS



The Majlis Ash'shura will hold its fourth and fifth regular sittings of the second annual session on Sunday and Monday.

MUSCAT: The Majlis Ash'shura will hold its fourth and fifth regular sittings of the second annual session (2024-2025) of its Tenth Term (2023-2027) on Sunday and Monday. During these sittings, the council will deliberate on and approve a range of legislative proposals, including five draft laws and agreements referred by the government, two proposals submitted by the council and three reports on expressed desires from its standing committees.

In a statement, Shaikh Ahmed bin Mohammed al Nadabi, Secretary-General of Majlis Ash'shura, noted that the upcoming

sittings will feature extensive discussions on pivotal legislation such as the Real Estate Regulation Law, the Telecommunications and Information Technology Regulation Law, the Anti-Human Trafficking Law and the State Revenue Collection Law.

He said that these draft laws have been studied in depth over the past several months, in accordance with Article 49 of the Oman Council Law, which requires that government-drafted laws be reviewed, approved or amended by the Majlis within three months from referral before being forwarded to the Sultan for final ratification. **TURN TO P5**

Climate scientist says 2C climate goal 'dead'

WASHINGTON: Holding long-term global warming to two degrees Celsius — the fallback target of the Paris climate accord — is now "impossible," according to a stark new analysis published by leading scientists.

Led by renowned climatologist James Hansen, the paper appears in the journal "Environment: Science and Policy for Sustainable Development" and concludes that Earth's climate is more sensitive to rising greenhouse gas emissions than previously thought. Compounding the crisis, Hansen and colleagues argued, is a recent decline in sunlight-blocking aerosol pollution from the shipping industry, which had been mitigating some of the warming.

An ambitious climate change scenario



A man died and hundreds of people have been evacuated from forest fires that have torn through about 3,000 hectares near the tourist hotspot of El Bolson, in Argentina's Patagonia mountains.

outlined by the UN's climate panel, which gives the planet a 50 per cent chance of keeping warming under 2C by the year 2100, "is an implausible scenario," Hansen told a briefing. "That scenario is now impossible," said Hansen, formerly a top Nasa climate scientist who famously announced to the US Congress in 1988 that global warming was under way.

"The two degree target is dead. "Instead, he and co-authors argued, the amount of greenhouse gases already pumped into the atmosphere by burning fossil fuels meant increased warming is now guaranteed. Temperatures will stay at or above 1.5C in the coming years — devastating coral reefs and fuelling more intense storms — before rising to around 2.0C by 2045, they forecast. — AFP



LANGUAGE SKILLS



The objectives include providing students with language skills in speaking and writing, preparing students for the requirements of the global labour market.

FOUR SCHOOLS TO TEACH CHINESE LANGUAGE IN 2025-26

MUSCAT: The Chinese language will be taught as an elective subject in grades (11-12) during the academic year 2025-26 in government schools. The language will be taught be 5 classes per week at Sayyid Sultan bin Ahmed School (11-12) and Juwayriya Bint Abi Sufyan School (9-12) in Muscat; and Al Turath District School (9-12) and Al Shatha Bint Jaber Basic Education School (9-12) in the Al Dakhiliyah Governorate.

Teaching Chinese language subjects enables students to learn the Chinese language, including introducing students to themselves, providing guidance about some places, hobbies and aspirations, talking about days and months, and Knowing numbers and dates in simplified Chinese (reading and writing).

The objectives include providing students with language skills in speaking and writing, preparing students for the requirements of the global labour market, enabling students to acquire an additional global language to enhance their academic and professional opportunities, and expanding students' cognitive horizons in Chinese culture, history and arts.

It may be noted that Dr Madeeha bint Ahmed al Shaibaniyah, Minister of Education (MoE), issued Ministerial Resolution 192/2024 last year, which stipulated the cancellation of the two previous decisions (389/2011) and (129/2022) related to the formation of the special committee for preparation, implementation, and follow-up to pilot the teaching of the French and German language subjects.

The issuance of this decision comes in line with the ministry's efforts to expand the teaching of several foreign languages during the coming years, including the Chinese language and it coincides with the creation of the Foreign Languages Curricula Department in the Human Sciences Curricula Development Department at the General Directorate of Curriculum Development.

It seeks to transfer of powers of the committee referred to in the two canceled decisions to this department. The Ministry of Education confirms that it continues to teach French and German as elective subjects (a subject that is not compulsory, unlike the other core subjects. It is a subject that a student chooses to study on an option basis) in grades 11-12 in some schools in the educational directorates in the same governorates in which it was previously applied — namely the Muscat, Al Batinah North and Al Batinah South.

Children introduced to Oman's history, heritage

KABEER YOUSUF @kabiyousef

A group of Omani children recently had the opportunity to explore the rich heritage, culture and archaeological wonders of Oman. This hands-on experience at one of the region's most prominent archaeological sites, dating back to the Early Iron Age (circa 3000 BCE), aimed to deepen their understanding of Oman's historical and cultural significance.

The students, from Ahmad bin Majid International School, were hosted by the Department of Archaeology at Sultan Qaboos University as part of the 'Manaqi Archaeological Site Research Project'. The visit, which aimed to promote community partnership and raise youth awareness of Oman's



The visit underscored the significance of field learning in connecting students to their heritage and fostering national pride.

rich heritage, allowed both male and female students to visit the archaeological site on separate days.

The Manaqi Archaeological Site, one of the largest settlements of its era, contains artefacts and

evidence of ancient social and economic life. It features residential structures, tombs and a unique funerary site for children, offering rare insights into burial practices in the Arabian Peninsula. The site

EACH COMMEMORATIVE STAMP ISSUANCE TELLS TIMELESS STORY

MUSCAT: Building on its tradition of commemorating national feats, Oman Post recently unveiled the 280th Anniversary of the Al Busaid Dynasty's Reign stamp collection. This collection signifies 280 years of transformative leadership, paying tribute to the dynasty's enduring impact on Oman's past, present and future.

Featuring portraits of notable leaders from the Al Busaid Dynasty, the stamps are crafted with exceptional artistry, showcasing a regal palette of deep reds, greens and gold accents that reflect Oman's royal and cultural heritage. Oman Post's dedication to



preserving and celebrating Oman's history ensures that the nation's most significant attainment continues to resonate with collectors and admirers worldwide, solidifying its legacy as a guardian of the Sultanate's rich and inspiring heritage.

Oman Post embraces its role as a custodian of Oman's history and heritage, commemorating pivotal national and historical events through its meticulously crafted stamp collections. Each stamp issuance tells a timeless story, celebrating Oman's journey and accomplishments while inspiring pride in future generations.

Among its most notable recent releases is the commemorative stamp esteeming the 5th Anniversary of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik's Accession to Power. This special edition stamp highlights the pillars of Oman Vision 2040: Economy; Development, People and Society, Governance & Institutional Performance, and Sustainable Environment. Symbolising the Sultanate of Oman's remarkable progress, it embodies the aspirations and victories realised under His Majesty's visionary leadership, paving the way for a prosperous future.

Fine waivers will help expats work legally

VINOD NAIR MUSCAT, FEB 5

THE government has been implementing various corrective measures periodically to regulate the labour market and address any discrepancies, according to Dr Mahad bin Saeed Baowin, Minister of Labour.

The government decided to waive fines accumulated for more than seven years and cancel fees incurred during the Covid-19 period. Individuals will have until the end of July to correct their status, either by renewing licences or terminating services without penalties.

In an interview with Oman TV, Dr Baowin said, "We want to give those wishing to regularise their status the opportunity to remain in the country and work under the right conditions. They can renew their work permits for the next two years. If an employer does not wish to renew a worker's permit, they can terminate their services and provide a travel ticket. All existing fines and fees will also be cancelled."

"The Wage Protection System (WPS) is not new but has been mandatory since mid-2023 to ensure that private sector workers' salaries are transferred through a transparent system. Currently, the fine



Regulations will ensure the rights of workers, employers

is imposed on the registry only, not based on the number of workers. This will continue for the first two to three months, after which the second phase will begin, applying fines based on the number of workers whose wages are not transferred through the WPS," he added.

Dr Baowin said that the labour market faces several challenges due to its constantly evolving nature, with new types of jobs and specialisations emerging. "To address these challenges, it is essential to focus on training programmes linked to employment or on-the-job training across various sectors. Additionally, there are many expatriates working in low-skilled jobs or roles that are not in demand among citizens," he said.

"The regulations issued by the Ministry of Labour are not obstacles but rather commitments that ensure everyone's rights, including the timely payment of wages. Organised companies provide higher quality services and avoid harmful practices such as hidden trade. In 2021, 2022 and 2023, the ministry successfully protected around 50,000 to 60,000 jobs by negotiating with companies to retain the largest possible number of Omanis. The public sector absorbs around 12,000 to 16,000 new employees or job seekers annually," he added.

DEFENCE MINISTRY SECRETARY GENERAL RECEIVES TÜRKİYE OFFICIAL



MUSCAT: Dr Mohammed Nasser al Zaabi, Secretary General at the Ministry of Defence on Wednesday received Prof Haluk Görgün, President of the Defence Industry Agency of the Republic of Türkiye. During the meeting, the two sides exchanged views on several matters of mutual interest. They also discussed means of enhancing military cooperation. The meeting was attended by Brigadier Ahmed Ibrahim Ambusaidi, Director General of International Cooperation at the Ministry of Defence. It was also attended by the Ambassador of the Republic of Türkiye to the Sultanate of Oman and the Military Attaché of Türkiye's embassy in Muscat. — ONA

also serves as a hub for scientific research, attracting collaboration from international universities such as Sorbonne University and the University of Poland. During the two-day visit, the children participated in field tours and workshops, observing excavation processes, exploring artifacts and learning about documentation techniques under the guidance of archaeologists. They also had the opportunity to analyse findings, date artefacts and study human remains, gaining practical insights into archaeology. Experts, including Dr Mohammed Abdul Hamid from Sultan Qaboos University, explained the research team's work and the significance of the site. International archaeologists praised the students' enthusiasm, emphasising the importance of

preserving Oman's heritage. The visit underscored the significance of field learning in connecting students to their heritage and fostering national pride. Waheeda Said, CEO and Board Member of Ahmad bin Majid International School, highlighted the importance of collaboration between universities and schools in establishing effective STEM programmes, promoting 21st-century skills acquisition, cultural preservation, social responsibility and community engagement partnerships that foster action research. She noted that such field visits would nurture a sense of national belonging and ignite students' passion for Oman's history, tradition and heritage, strengthening their community ties.

SPOTLIGHT



AFRAH AL BALUSHI  
MUSCAT, FEB 5

**HAVE** YOU ever wondered about the relationship between your happiness at work and productivity? Employees' mental health is key to success and innovation in the workplace. Work is not just a place to earn money and achieve professional success but an environment that constitutes a large part of an individual's life and directly affects their psychological state, as employees spend most of their daytime at work. Discrimination, inequality, excessive workload, weak participation in work-related decisions and lack of job security pose risks to mental health. The World Health Organization estimates that 15 per cent of working-age adults suffered from mental disorders in 2019. Globally, about 12 billion working days are wasted each year due to depression and anxiety, costing the economy \$1 trillion annually in lost productivity. Psychologists point out that employees face anxiety, depression and an inability to bear the workload, especially if they do not receive appreciation and incentives. A decent workplace can improve confidence and social interaction, thus easing mental pressure. Protecting and promoting mental health at work is linked to enhancing the ability to identify and deal with mental health problems at work, and this is especially the responsibility of those who supervise others, such as managers. Caring for mental health

and providing psychological support within the work environment enable individuals to face various challenges and overcome setbacks. It also leads to better productivity, lower attrition and higher motivation to carry out responsibilities.

According to WHO, risks to mental health at work include the under-use of skills or being under-skilled for work; excessive workloads or work pace; understaffing; long, unsocial or inflexible hours; lack of control over job design or workload; unsafe or poor physical working conditions; an organisational culture that enables negative behaviours; limited support from colleagues or authoritarian supervision; violence, harassment or bullying; discrimination and exclusion; unclear job roles; under- or over-promotion; job insecurity; inadequate pay; poor investment in career development; and conflicting home/work demands.

Employers attach great importance to work-life balance to enhance productivity and creativity by setting up regulations and communication channels that make work comfortable. At the same time, work requires two parties: the institutions and workplaces, and the employees themselves. Employees also play a role in achieving that environment. They must do their bit to bring in positivity by following a healthy lifestyle and maintaining balanced nutrition.

GLOBALLY, ABOUT

12  
BILLION

WORKING DAYS  
ARE WASTED EACH YEAR DUE  
TO DEPRESSION  
AND ANXIETY, COSTING  
THE ECONOMY \$1 TRILLION  
ANNUALLY IN LOST  
PRODUCTIVITY

MIND  
YOUR  
MIND

Employees' **mental health is key to success** and innovation in the workplace

SHORT TAKES



The conference will address many topics that reflect the latest trends in medical education. — ONA

SQU CONFERENCE ADDRESSES MEDICAL EDUCATION

MUSCAT: Sultan Qaboos University (SQU), represented by the College of Medicine and Health Sciences, will hold a 2-day conference titled “Medical Education Conference 2025”, from Monday February 10, under the theme “Innovation and Modern Technologies: Opportunities and Challenges”.

Prof Rashid bin Khalfan al Abri, Dean of the SQU College of Medicine and Health Sciences (Chairman of the Medical Education Conference 2025), said in a press statement that the conference represents an important platform for exchanging knowledge and exploring the latest innovations and technologies in medical education. The participants look forward to fruitful discussions on enhancing academic cooperation and improving the quality of medical education in the region.

The conference focuses on introducing innovative ideas and modern techniques in teaching, assessment and enhancing the well-being of participants in medical education. In particular, the event seeks to hone the skills of attendees in leadership and professional growth, in addition to means of supporting educational research scholarships and establishing a network of medical educators who are committed to achieving academic excellence in their respective institutions.

The conference gains special significance due to the fact that it coincides with the meeting of the GCC Deans Committee of Medical Colleges.

— ONA

MAJLIS ASH’SHURA TO DISCUSS DRAFT LAWS AND AGREEMENTS

FROM PAGE 1

Al Nadabi emphasised that these legislative projects are at a critical stage in reflecting the integrated national approach and aligning with Oman Vision 2040. He highlighted that the specialised committees have meticulously compared the draft laws with similar regional legislation and incorporated appropriate amendments to enhance their relevance and impact. The sessions will focus on discussing the Majlis’s proposed revisions, paving the way for their subsequent submission to the State Council.

In addition, the sittings will address the view of the Public Services and Utilities Committee regarding a maritime transport agreement between the Government of Oman and the Government of the Republic of South Africa, as well as a cooperation agreement between Oman and the Government of the Republic of Tunisia in the field of maritime transport and port services.

Furthermore, the agenda includes the review of several legislative proposals submitted by the Majlis, such as the draft law for establishing a fund to support sports, cultural and youth activities, and a proposal to amend the law governing private entities in the sports sector, originally issued under Royal Decree No 81/2007. The sessions will also cover reports from the standing committees on expressed desires, including initiatives to establish a centre for Omani talents, to enhance the economic returns of certain heritage sites listed as World Heritage and to adopt an initiative by the Ministry of Information to create personal communication channels to improve media performance in serving the community.

The forthcoming sittings underscore the robust legislative activity at the Majlis, reflecting its commitment to establishing a modern legislative framework that meets national development goals and aligns with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040.

RAFO COMMANDER RECEIVES UNITED STATES OFFICIAL

MUSCAT: Air Vice Marshal Khamis bin Hammad al Ghafri, Commander of the Royal Air Force of Oman (Rafo) on Wednesday received Lieutenant General Derek C France, Commander of the Ninth Air Force (Air Forces Central) of the United States of America. During the meeting, both sides exchanged views on several topics of mutual concern. The meeting was attended by Air Commodore Khalid bin Mohammed al Abri, Rafo Director General of Operations. — ONA



The meeting exchanged views on several topics of mutual concern. — ONA

Winter camps give big boost to domestic tourism

AFRAH AL BALUSHI  
MUSCAT, FEB 5

DURING the winter season, many families in Oman take advantage of the cooler weather by planning various recreational activities that bring joy to all. Some opt for camping and barbecue trips, while others enjoy night gatherings with family and friends.

Winter camping is a unique tourism activity in Oman, with the Sultanate of Oman aiming to attract visitors from both within the country and abroad. It is one of the most popular tourism activities in Oman, known for its economic benefits as well as the opportunity to enjoy the natural surroundings, tourism and investment prospects. These camps also offer opportunities for small and medium enterprises and individuals with limited income.

This year, 209 camps were observed in Al Batinah North, with Suhar leading with 119 camps, followed by Al Suwaiq with 41 camps, Saham and Al Khabourah with 29 and 11 camps respectively, Shinas with 7 camps and Liwa with 2 camps. Additionally, camps are spread across various governorates that boast picturesque landscapes.

Engineer Nasser al Hinai, Director General of Al Batinah North Municipality, emphasised the importance of winter camps in supporting domestic tourism and diversifying income sources. The municipality is committed to providing facilities that meet the highest environmental and health standards to ensure the sustainability of this sector.

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There is a growing demand for winter camps in Oman, especially among families and young people seeking a natural and recreational atmosphere.

The success of winter camping in Oman is driven by the moderate climate and beautiful natural locations, making camping an unforgettable experience. Suitable camping sites can be found throughout the Sultanate, from vast deserts to charming beaches, and from towering mountains to lush valleys.

There is a growing demand for winter camps in Oman, especially among families and young people seeking a natural and recreational atmosphere. The winter camping season typically runs from October to April, offering ideal weather for outdoor enjoyment.

Winter camps offer essential services and facilities such as

sleeping tents, food preparation areas, heritage sessions, bathrooms and entertainment options for guests of all ages.

Visitors can explore tourist and archaeological sites, taking advantage of Oman’s unique nature to enhance tourism and attract investments, supporting sustainable development and environmental conservation efforts.

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism continues to support and promote the establishment of camps, providing facilities to owners and travel supply companies. This support aligns with the ministry’s goal of showcasing Oman’s tourism assets and bolstering the tourism sector.

‘Discover Oman Ironman 70.3 Muscat’ from today

MUSCAT: The official announcement of Oman’s hosting of the ‘Discover Oman Ironman 70.3 Muscat’ championship was made on Wednesday during a press conference held in Muscat.

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MoHT) is participating as a strategic partner alongside Trilone Middle East LLC, a leading sports event management company, in organising the event.

The championship will take place from February 6 to 8 in Muscat, featuring 1,100 athletes from 81 countries in its seventh edition.

Mohammed al Obaidani, CEO of Middle East Global Events, expressed his excitement, saying, “As we celebrate the seventh edition of the ‘Discover Oman Ironman 70.3 Muscat’, it is amazing to see how this event has evolved to become one of the most sought-after races in the region.”



The official announcement of ‘Discover Oman Ironman 70.3 Muscat’ championship was made on Wednesday during a press conference.

Sajda bint Rashid al Ghaithi, Director of the Tourism Marketing Department at the MoHT, affirmed that the ‘Discover Oman Ironman 70.3 Muscat’ championship enjoys significant attention in the Sultanate of Oman, as it is considered one of the most challenging races in the global Ironman series, contributing to the growth of sports and cultural tourism.

“This championship is one of the largest world-class sporting events held in the Sultanate of Oman. Supported by the Ministry of Heritage and

Tourism, it features a variety of competitions, including swimming, cycling and running. Oman’s unique environment, which blends authentic Arab culture with modern urban life, makes it the ideal destination for hosting the Ironman championship,” she stated.

Participants will take on the race challenges, which consist of three stages: a 1.9-kilometre swim, with the swimming course in the waters of the Arabian Sea, ranked as the third-best in the Europe, Middle East and Africa (EMEA) region; a 90-kilometre cycling

route, considered one of the best courses in the Ironman championship series; and a 21.1-kilometre run along the scenic coastline of Al Qurum Beach in Muscat Governorate.

On Thursday, February 6, Al Qurum Beach will host the athletes’ check-in and equipment collection, in addition to being the perfect venue for experiencing the Ironman atmosphere.

On Friday, February 7, the day will be dedicated to women and children, featuring the ‘She Runs 5K’ race for women — whether professional runners or beginners — starting at 8:00am and the ‘Iron Kids’ race for children at 4:00pm, giving young champions a chance to shine.

The main event will take place on Saturday, February 8, where both professional and amateur athletes will compete in an exciting race, covering the swimming, cycling and running stages.

WORLD

SHORT TAKES



Ukrainian firefighters try to put out a fire in a building after a drone strike in Kharkiv. — AFP

KREMLIN CALLS ZELENSKY’S TALKS ‘EMPTY WORDS’

**MOSCOW:** The Kremlin on Wednesday dismissed Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky saying he was ready for direct talks with his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin as “empty words”. Asked how he would feel if he sat opposite Putin at a negotiating table, Zelensky said in an interview: “If that is the only set-up in which we can bring peace to the citizens of Ukraine and not lose people, definitely we will go for this set-up.”

“So far this cannot be seen as anything but empty words,” Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said. Putin last week said Moscow would hold talks with Ukraine, but ruled out speaking directly to Zelensky. The Kremlin spokesman also reiterated Russia’s frequent claim that Zelensky is not a legitimate president. “Zelensky has big problems de jure (legally) in Ukraine. But even despite that we remain ready for talks,” Peskov said. Meanwhile, Russia on Wednesday said its troops took two more Ukrainian villages in the country’s east and north-east as the conflict nears the end of its third year. — AFP



Speaker of the House Martin Romualdez wields the gavel as he confirms the impeachment vote of Philippine Vice President Sara Duterte, Metro Manila. — AFP

PHILIPPINE HOUSE IMPEACHES V-P SARA DUTERTE

The Philippine lower house on Wednesday impeached Vice President Sara Duterte, the daughter of the country’s firebrand former leader, setting the stage for a rare, high-profile trial in the Senate. The impeachment stemmed from allegations Duterte misused public funds while vice president and education minister, amassed unexplained wealth, and threatened the lives of President Ferdinand Marcos Jr, the first lady and the lower house speaker. She has repeatedly denied wrongdoing.

The impeachment comes amid a bitter rift between her and Marcos that has played out in public following the collapse of a powerful alliance between their families that brought them a landslide victory in the 2022 election. The impeachment complaint was received by the Senate shortly after 215 of the 306 lower house lawmakers endorsed it amid cheers and applause. The 33-page complaint was filed on the grounds of culpable violation of the constitution, graft and corruption, other high crimes, and betrayal of public trust. A representative of Duterte did not immediately respond to a request for comment. — Reuters

SCAM CENTRES

Thailand cuts power to Myanmar regions



Thailand cut cross-border electricity supplies to five locations in Myanmar, in an effort to stamp out online scam centres blamed for scaring away tourists. “Thailand has stopped the electricity supply to Myanmar in five locations based on the decision of the National Security Council,” Interior Minister Anutin Charnvirakul told reporters. Transmission was cut at two points, two in Mae Sot in the west and one at Three Pagodas Pass. — AFP

JUDICIAL DISPUTE

EU dismisses Poland’s complaints over fines



The European Union’s General Court dismissed complaints by Poland over 320 million euros in fines it had to pay the EU in 2022 and 2023 in a dispute over judicial reforms that critics said undermined the independence of Polish courts. “The General Court dismisses Poland’s actions in their entirety. In recovering the amounts payable, the commission did not infringe EU law,” the court said. Poland can appeal the ruling at the EU Court of Justice. — Reuters

INTENSE CLASHES

Troops launch fresh east DRC offensive



M23 fighters and Rwandan forces on Wednesday launched a new offensive in eastern DR Congo, seizing the mining town of Nyabibwe, about 100 kilometres from the provincial capital Bukavu. Intense clashes broke out at dawn between the anti-government armed group with its Rwandan allies and Congolese armed forces, the sources said, a day after a humanitarian ceasefire unilaterally announced by the M23 was due to have taken effect. — AFP

Deportation from Gaza Strip ‘strictly prohibited’, says UN

**UN** rights chief Volker Turk insisted on Wednesday that deporting people from occupied territory was strictly prohibited, after President Donald Trump’s shock proposal for the United States to take over Gaza and resettle its people. Much of the Gaza Strip was levelled in a 15-month war triggered by October 2023 attack, and Trump has repeatedly claimed credit for sealing a ceasefire agreement that took effect last month. In a proposal that lacked details on how he would move out more than two million Palestinians or control Gaza, Trump said he would make the war-battered territory “unbelievable” by removing unexploded bombs and rubble, and economically redeveloping it.

“It is crucial that we move towards the next phase of the ceasefire, to release all hostages and arbitrarily detained prisoners, end the war and reconstruct Gaza, with full respect for international humanitarian law and international human rights law,” Turk said in a statement.

“The suffering of people in the occupied Palestinian territories and Israel has been unbearable. Palestinians and Israelis need peace and security, on the basis of full dignity and equality.”

Turk, the United Nations high commissioner for human rights, said international law was “very clear”.

“The right to self-determination is a fundamental principle of international law and must be protected by all states, as the International Court of Justice recently underlined afresh. Any forcible transfer in or deportation of people from occupied territory is strictly prohibited.”

The head of the UN refugee agency voiced consternation on Wednesday at President Donald Trump’s shock proposal for the



Palestinians walk past collapsed buildings along Saftawi street in Jabalia in the northern Gaza Strip. — AFP



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VOLKER TURK

United States to take over the Gaza Strip and resettle its people. “It’s something very surprising, but we have to see what it means in concrete terms,” the United Nations’ high commissioner for refugees, Filippo Grandi, said in an interview in Brussels, adding that it was difficult to comment on such a “sensitive issue”.

Trump’s proposal to take over the Gaza Strip and resettle its people faced a resounding rejection from Palestinians, Middle East leaders and governments elsewhere on Wednesday. Trump made his announcement to audible gasps during a joint press conference on Tuesday with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, whom he was hosting at the White House for talks.

Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas “strongly rejected” on Wednesday his US counterpart Donald Trump’s proposal to “take over” and “own” the Gaza Strip.

“President Mahmud Abbas and the Palestinian leadership expressed their strong rejection of calls to seize the Gaza Strip and displace Palestinians outside their homeland,” Abbas’s office

said in a statement, adding that “legitimate Palestinian rights are not negotiable”. Reading the statement on Palestinian public television, Abbas spokesman Nabil Abu Rudeina stressed that the Gaza Strip “is an integral part of the State of Palestine”.

The Palestine Liberation Organisation, an alliance of factions headed by Abbas, also condemned Trump’s proposal to relocate Gazans to Egypt or Jordan. It rejected “all calls for the displacement of Palestinians from their homeland”, its secretary general, Hussein al-Sheikh, said.

In addition, Egypt called for the swift reconstruction of Gaza and said Palestinians should not have to leave the territory, where he said the Palestinian Authority should “assume its duties”.

Foreign Minister Badr Abdelatty’s call came during pre-scheduled talks with Palestinian prime minister Mohammed Mustafa in Cairo, hours after a shock proposal from President Donald Trump for the United States to take over the Gaza Strip and resettle its people in other countries. — AFP

SWEDISH KING LEADS MOURNING AFTER SCHOOL MASSACRE

**ÖREBRO:** Sweden on Wednesday mourned the victims of its worst mass killing as police indicated that the gunman likely shot himself after killing 10 people at an adult education centre. Candles were lit and flowers laid in front of the cordoned off Campus Risbergska school for young adults in Örebro as residents flocked to pay their respects.

“We are very shocked,” King Carl XVI Gustaf told reporters, after he and Queen Silvia laid flowers near the school, highlighting the country’s struggle to understand events. “All of Sweden is mourning today.” Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson, who also visited the site on Wednesday, has described the massacre as “the worst mass shooting in Swedish history”. “Tuesday, February 4 will forever mark a dark day in Swedish history,” he said in a statement. Police were working to establish the reason for the killing spree, and had not seen an indication of an “ideological motive”, he said. — AFP

# Computational propaganda: A new frontier in influence

NASSER AL ABRI

THE landscape of propaganda has evolved from traditional media campaigns to highly sophisticated, algorithm-driven operations. Computational propaganda has emerged as a powerful tool, capable of shaping public opinion, influencing political decisions and manipulating social narratives. The advent of digital technology has revolutionised the practice of propaganda. Computational propaganda leverages advanced technologies such as algorithms, big data and artificial intelligence to automate and scale the dissemination of persuasive content. Unlike its predecessors, computational propaganda enables precision targeting, tailoring messages to specific audiences based on their digital footprints. These advantages make computational propaganda a formidable tool for influencing public opinion, bypassing rational thinking by exploiting emotions and biases. Targeted campaigns often focus on specific groups, such as policymakers or vulnerable populations, rather than the general public. Kate Starbird of the University of Washington introduced the concept of participatory disinformation. This term describes the collaborative efforts of political elites, media personalities, grassroots activists and online audiences in producing and disseminating misinformation. Starbird's research highlighted how these dynamics fuelled the violent events at the US Capitol on January 6, 2021. Using visual data models, she demonstrated how participatory disinformation amplified false narratives and mobilised individuals towards coordinated action. Similarly, several researchers have examined the process of “collective sense-

making” in a case that sparked significant debate in American media—the period following the assassination attempt on Donald Trump in Pennsylvania. The concept refers to how individuals collaborate online to gather information and interpret uncertain events. Conflict narratives Computational propaganda's influence extends beyond elections to evidence manipulation during conflicts, such as the Gaza war (2023–2025). Khouri (2024) highlights Israel's long-standing media manipulation tactics, particularly targeting organisations like UNRWA during the 2023 Gaza war. After a preliminary ICJ ruling suggested possible genocide, Israel launched a campaign alleging UNRWA staff's involvement in Hamas attacks. Amplified by Western media, these claims led to funding cuts and calls to dissolve the agency. However, independent investigations by outlets like Sky News and Channel 4 exposed flaws in these narratives, undermining Israel's credibility and prompting greater scrutiny of its claims by global media. At its core, computational propaganda relies on big data and artificial intelligence to craft highly targeted messages. By analysing digital profiles, propagandists identify vulnerabilities, emotions and preferences to create content that resonates with specific individuals or groups. For example, during conflicts like the war in Ukraine, computational propaganda has been used to shape international narratives by presenting biased perspectives tailored to different audiences. According to an investigation by Israel's Channel 12, Hamas employed a sophisticated deception strategy as part of its preparations for the Al Aqsa Flood operation on October 7, 2023. This included misleading Israeli

*Understanding the mechanisms and implications of computational propaganda is crucial for safeguarding democratic values, fostering resilience, and ensuring societal harmony.*

intelligence through reduced border activity and mock military drills, causing the Israeli military to underestimate Hamas's readiness. Tools such as social bots, AI-generated content and data analytics amplify the reach and impact of these campaigns. Social media platforms, with their vast user bases and real-time interaction capabilities, serve as the primary battlegrounds for these operations. Countering computational propaganda Despite its growing prevalence, computational propaganda remains difficult to detect and counteract due to: **Lack of transparency:** Governments and organisations involved in such operations often classify their activities as intelligence work, limiting public access to information. **Absence of quantitative data:** Measuring the impact of computational propaganda is challenging, as its effects are often indirect and long-term. Moreover, the interplay between technology and politics complicates the fight against misinformation. As Philip Howard (2023) highlights, understanding computational propaganda requires a multidisciplinary approach that combines technical expertise with qualitative analysis. This dual perspective enables a deeper comprehension of how computational propaganda operates within broader systems of power and knowledge. Understanding the mechanisms and implications of computational propaganda is crucial for safeguarding democratic values, fostering resilience, and ensuring societal harmony. By promoting media literacy, regulating digital platforms, and enhancing transparency, we can mitigate the risks posed by this powerful tool and navigate the challenges of the digital age with greater confidence.

## NO NEW CLOTHES: S. KOREAN CLIMATE ACTIVIST TARGETS HYPERCONSUMPTION

CLAIRE LEE AND CAT BARTON

Recovering South Korean shopaholic-turned-climate activist Lee So-yeon used to buy new clothes almost daily -- until a \$1.50 winter coat triggered an awakening that stopped her shopping entirely. While looking at the ultra-cheap padded jacket at an H&M shop in the United States, where she was working at the time, Lee asked herself how any item of clothing could be sold so cheaply. The 30-year-old embarked on a deep dive into fast fashion production methods and was horrified at the human, social and environmental toll hyper-consumerism is having on the planet — and on the mental health of women who make and buy cheap clothes. “I used to buy one new outfit each (working) day of the week,” Lee said, adding that each item from major high street retailers would typically cost less than a dollar. But the reason the clothes are so cheap, Lee learned, is because the women who sew for companies are paid little, while the business model itself is causing significant environmental harm. Lee stopped buying any new clothes — and has not purchased a single fast fashion garment since her epiphany around six years ago. Her much more compact wardrobe consists of used items that she received from friends and family, including a vintage leather jacket that once belonged to her mother. She is part of a small but growing global movement seeking to promote second-hand clothing and help people — especially women — opt out of the cycle of over-consumption. The app Lucky Sweater provides a platform for users to trade items from their closets with each other, focussing on sustainable brands, founder Tanya Dastyar said. The global fashion industry is one of the most polluting, accounting for up to 10 percent of greenhouse gas emissions, according to World Bank estimates. Most modern clothes are made of synthetic materials like nylon and polyester, which are essentially plastic and do not biodegrade in landfills, industry data shows. Keeping clothes out of landfills can help, but in South Korea, many still avoid used garments, said Kim Dong-hyun, who runs a used clothing export factory. — AFP

# How Trump is making America China’s chump

WHEN I look at the torrent of executive orders and tariffs that President Donald Trump has issued since taking office, I fear that I'm watching the real-life version of that Certified Financial Planner Board commercial that tries to show why expertise really does matter. In the commercial, a surgeon comes into a hospital room and meets his patient. First, the doctor calls her Brenda and she says, “It's Carol.” Then the doctor asks, “So which leg are we operating on?” And she says, “You mean arm.” The doctor then waves off her obvious concern, saying, “It's all connected.” Now totally terrified, the patient finally asks the surgeon: “Are you sure you're an orthopedist?” The doctor responds: “Actually, I'm a Sagittarius.” Pardon my skepticism, but I have serious doubts about the degree to which Trump and his team of budget surgeons have actually studied not just how to implement all the cuts and tariffs and freezes and dismissals they've rushed to make but also the long-term effects they will have on the totality of American governance, trade and investment. It's hard for me to say it better than the normally pro-Trump Wall Street Journal's editorial titled “The Dumbest Trade War in History,” which says “Trump will impose 25 per cent tariffs on Canada and Mexico for no good reason.” But Trump's impulsive tariffs — which he seems to announce and put on hold at whim — are symptomatic of a deeper challenge to US manufacturers that I want to write about today: how US companies keep pace with China in the industries of the future — artificial intelligence, advanced logic chips,



THOMAS L. FRIEDMAN

The author is author and The New York Times columnist

Tariffs only buy a country time so its companies can make the necessary changes to compete without walls. Trump's strategy is to hurt our car companies' exports with a tariff wall and then shoot them in the back behind the wall

electric vehicles, clean tech and autonomous cars — when these companies are constantly being whipsawed between Democratic and Republican presidents in a world where these companies have to make multibillion-dollar bets five years in advance. And they have to make those bets while competing against China, where the government wakes up every day and asks manufacturers: How can I help you? And: Let's take the long view together on how we win globally. To understand that better, I visited Ford Motor headquarters in Dearborn, Michigan, last week to see how it is competing with China's EV juggernaut. Nearly half of new car sales in China are battery-electric or plug-in hybrid electric cars and its companies control about 60 per cent of the global market for these models. The latter is due in large part to the fact that China makes the best car batteries in the world and any US automaker that wants to be competitive in the EV business today needs battery technology transfer from China. We are talking about a total reversal from 25 years ago, when China needed tech transfer from General Motors and Ford to build internationally competitive cars. “Cars today are becoming digital transportation devices,” Ford CEO Jim Farley said. And China is 10 years ahead in making the batteries for those cars and creating that all-around digital driving experience, he said. Shortly after being sworn in — and with no prior consultation with Ford, or apparently any other US automakers — Trump revoked Biden's 2021 executive order that sought to ensure that half of all new vehicles sold in the US by 2030 were electric.

It is precisely the kind of shortsighted, stop-start thinking that got us into this mess in the first place. My fellow Americans, do you know why we are so behind China today on EV batteries? Two reasons. First, China graduates so many more electrical and automobile engineers than we do. But second, US innovators invented CATL's breakthrough LFP battery technology for EVs — but gave it away to China. The American way is: invent, ignore, leap forward with one administration and then leap backward with the next. It's flat-out crazy. Just as the adjacencies of steel, coal, combustion engines and manual labour created a multiplier effect in the 20th century, the ecosystem of EVs, AI, robotics, advanced batteries, clean tech, autonomous driving systems and digitised mind labour will do the same in the 21st century. If America absents itself from any part of that ecosystem, it will be left behind. Trump's strategy is to hurt our car companies' exports with a tariff wall and then shoot them in the back behind the wall. If Trump had any common sense, he'd say: I am for all of the above — gasoline cars, plug-in hybrids, all-electric EVs and autonomous cars — all I care is that you buy American. And to make sure that our great American EV makers can get to scale, I am going to use the money from tariffs to do what the silly progressive Democrats refused to do: pass a bill to build a national transmission grid and network of fast-charging stations, so anyone who buys an EV will never have to worry about long-distance travel. Now, that's how to make America great. Anything less is just faking it.

OPINION

When the world pauses, nature pays the price



RUMAITHA  
AL BUSAIDI

LinkedIn @  
rumaithaalbusaidi

The writer is  
environmental  
strategist and  
advocate for  
sustainable  
development

THE 90-day stop order on USAID funding was announced quietly, wrapped in bureaucratic language. Three months. A temporary pause. Nothing to worry about. Except in the world of climate action, time is never on our side.

In those three months, conservation efforts stall, species lose vital protections and critical climate initiatives falter. A coral reef left unmonitored for a season can suffer irreversible bleaching. A mangrove forest, once promised restoration, remains vulnerable to rising tides. A coastal community expecting resilience support is left exposed to the next storm. But the damage is not limited to the environment.

This funding freeze has sent shockwaves far beyond climate action. Across the world, global health programmes have been thrown into uncertainty, leaving malaria treatments delayed and maternal health services disrupted. Humanitarian aid efforts have been suspended, food security programmes have been left without resources and countless initiatives designed to protect lives and livelihoods now hang in the balance. What was once a temporary policy decision has now spiraled into a global crisis affecting

those who can least afford it.

As chaos unfolds across multiple sectors, one thing has become clear. The world cannot afford to be held hostage by policy shifts in one country. Lord Adair Turner has called for China, the EU and the UK to step up and form a climate coalition independent of the US, warning that the planet does not have the luxury of waiting. When a major player steps back, the responsibility falls on the rest of the world to push forward.

Here in Oman, we are already feeling the strain. The Environment Society of Oman's Marine Turtle Conservation project has been directly affected. This long-term programme, supported by the US Fish and Wildlife Service, has been at the forefront of protecting some of the region's most endangered marine species. For decades, it has safeguarded nesting sites, monitored turtle populations and worked alongside local communities to ensure these ancient creatures have a future in our waters.

Now, we are scrambling to find ways to keep this work going. Every survey, every community engagement and every protective measure is a battle against time and dwindling resources. The work must continue, because conservation does not wait

Now more than ever, we need partners, supporters and individuals who believe that protecting Oman's marine life is not just an environmental issue, but a responsibility. This is about safeguarding our country's natural heritage for future generations.

for funding cycles to align. A turtle's journey to lay her eggs does not pause while policies are reconsidered. The threats these species face from rising temperatures to habitat destruction are relentless.

Oman, like many nations, must decide to forge a new path. We need stronger regional collaboration, private investment in sustainability and policies that make conservation a national priority rather than an externally funded initiative. If Europe and China can find ways to push forward despite geopolitical tensions, we must take control of our environmental future rather than being at the mercy of decisions beyond our borders.

At the ESO, we refuse to sit back and watch our efforts unravel. But we cannot do it alone. Now more than ever, we need partners, supporters and individuals who believe that protecting Oman's marine life is not just an environmental issue, but a responsibility. This is about safeguarding our country's natural heritage for future generations. If you care about Oman's wildlife, its ecosystems and its future, reach out. Extend a helping hand. Together, we will ensure this work continues, because while policies may change, our duty to this planet does not.

S.AFRICA’S UNITY GOVT STAYS THE COURSE AFTER A STORMY START

CLÉMENT VARANGES

In the seven months since it was formed, South Africa's unlikely unity government has been stretched and cracked but remains intact under the leadership of President Cyril Ramaphosa, who delivers its first state of the nation address on Thursday.

Several loud quarrels have erupted over sticking points such as language education in schools and Ramaphosa's warm words towards Russia but nothing that has made real the threats and fears of collapse.

“They think we are at each other’s throats. We are not. We continue to meet and talk,” Ramaphosa said in the wake of the latest crisis sparked by his signing of a property expropriation bill last month. The second-largest partner in the 10-party coalition, the Democratic Alliance, was angry that Ramaphosa signed the act without consulting his partners in the government of national unity (GNU).

“This is not how coalitions work,” DA leader John Steenhuisen fumed. “We will not be reduced to being spectators.” But the party did not object to the need for land reform in the country, where most farmland is owned by whites. It also sided with Ramaphosa when the bill was attacked by US President Donald Trump for allowing the “confiscation” of property, saying this was untrue.

The DA has six ministries in exchange for propping up Ramaphosa's ANC in government after it failed to win enough votes in the May election to govern alone, a first since the party took power in 1994 and ended decades of white-minority apartheid rule.

It was an unlikely collaboration, with the DA a long and critical rival of the African National Congress (ANC). But the GNU, which includes eight other smaller parties, has been credited with bringing some stability to the continent's most industrialised economy as it faces a host of challenges, from an unemployment rate topping 30 per cent to high rates of crime.

While it has fumed and flexed, the centre-right DA is also aware that, should it quit the unity government, the ANC could find support from the radical-left EFF and the populist MK parties, now in opposition. It is a scenario it calls a “doomsday coalition”. “This is something the DA will move Table Mountain to avoid,” Sunday Times editor-in-chief Makhudu Sefara wrote in a weekend column. “And therein lies the extent to which they’re prepared to compromise.” — AFP

China tests US e-hegemony

GLOBAL

media raced to cover last week's most prominent digital event: China's surprise generative model, DeepSeek, which competes with ChatGPT and Gemini. The astonishment was not only in the model's linguistic and analytical capabilities but also in its development cost, reportedly under \$6 million while American models have cost hundreds of billions.

This discrepancy has unsettled American tech giants such as Google, Microsoft, and OpenAI, whose market values have taken a hit and incurred heavy losses, provoking a strong reaction from the US government.

The US President expressed his discontent and escalated threats toward China, viewing its rapid digital incursion as an existential challenge to American technological, economic, and military hegemony. The crisis has evolved beyond mere discontent or fear. It has reached the point of questioning the integrity of the Chinese company behind DeepSeek typical of every economic and industrial battle with China. For example, OpenAI has directly accused the Chinese firm of, as yet unproven, exploiting data from OpenAI (which is used to train ChatGPT) for its own model, DeepSeek, and even of using OpenAI's training methodology according to a BBC investigation.

OpenAI's claim is based on the principle that it is nearly impossible to achieve high performance on a large dataset at such a low cost, casting doubt on how the Chinese model could attain competitive capabilities compared to its American counterparts.

Amid this digital confrontation between China and the US, the US President, despite his concerns believed that this new Chinese technological edge and rapid digital expansion should serve as a wake-up call for the American tech sector. This sentiment recalls long-standing American fears when facing major rivals, such as the decline in US educational standards during the



DR MUAMAR  
BIN ALI AL TOBI

The writer is an  
academic and  
researcher

The real struggle is one of existential significance, one that is steering the entire world toward the creation of a new global order that may ultimately be defined by Chinese leadership, whether sooner or later.



While the Chinese model demonstrates high linguistic and analytical proficiency, its current performance does not render it decisively superior to the paid version of ChatGPT

1980s, which led to the famous “A Nation at Risk” report during the Cold War with the Soviet Union.

I found that while the Chinese model demonstrates high linguistic and analytical proficiency, its current performance does not render it decisively superior to the paid version of ChatGPT, although a fair comparison shows the free Chinese model outperforming its free American counterpart. I view the US–China conflict over the emergence of the Chinese generative model as one rooted in political and economic competition — a race for digital hegemony that now forms the backbone of the global economy. We are living in a digital age where artificial intelligence and its astonishing models dominate both economic and military supremacy.

Recent reports of an occupying entity's use of AI-powered, unprecedented weapons of mass destruction in conflict zones underscore this transformation. We must recognise that we have entered a digital era where diverse digital

industries are rising, affecting our daily lives. It is misleading, as the American and Western media would have us believe, to confine digital systems and AI solely to generative models like ChatGPT and DeepSeek. In reality, there are intelligent systems powered by AI algorithms that offer far greater value to developers and decision-makers in major powers such as the US and China, addressing critical industrial, economic, and military interests.

Scientific forecasts, whose precision appears only in academic publications, suggest that the contest between these nations extends well beyond the generative models. The digital race now encompasses advanced military technology, including smart weapons, biological arms, and space-based military innovations.

The real struggle is one of existential significance, one that is steering the entire world toward the creation of a new global order that may ultimately be defined by Chinese leadership, whether sooner or later.

# Tangomania in the Arab World



SONIA  
AMBROSIO

The writer is  
journalist, academic  
and researcher in  
media studies

SAUDI ARABIA has experienced significant social and political transformations lately. Who would have predicted tango lessons in Riyadh, or Argentinian tango classes taught by a female Saudi instructor?

Tango is a form of Arab modernism, particularly in the Arab Gulf. Workshops, concerts and festivals are happening around the region, interlacing Arabic-speaking cultures with the tango world of Buenos Aires.

It is not just in Saudi Arabia. The United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain and Oman are involved in the relationship between music and dance. Egypt, Syria, Türkiye and Lebanon have long been entangled with the tango cultural form, which draws on dance, music and poetry.

It is a new Arab world where men and women can dance together without fear or veil. Interestingly, in 2009, a Unesco summit in Abu Dhabi, the United Arab Emirates, recognised the tango dance as ‘Immaterial’ Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

According to the literature, the tango beat existed as early as 711. Most scholars agree that the official origins of tango in Buenos Aires occurred in the 1880s. The literature suggests that tango music emerged from a blend of various rhythms.

It is associated with melancholy and nostalgia for belonging. It developed as

poor people’s music in the working-class neighbourhoods of Buenos Aires, Argentina and Montevideo, Uruguay.

A cross-cultural melancholy brought about by the large influx of immigrants from Syria, Lebanon and Palestine to Buenos Aires, Brazil and Mexico. All were displaced from their culture, homeland and family.

By 1913, tango had become popular worldwide. Tangomania was at its height shortly before World War I.

It reached the silver screen in 1921. Since then, tango has been immortalised in films as an art form and storytelling. The silent movie and epic war drama, The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse (1921) inspired a tango craze and fashion trend. Tango Bar (1935) was the last film the tango singer Carlos Gardel made. He died in an airplane crash the same year.

Tango elements are present in famous films such as Scent of a Woman (1992), Moulin Rouge (2001) and Chicago (2002). Evita (1996) transforms tango into a political metaphor, whereas Shall We Dance (2004) uses it as a catalyst for personal transformation.

Returning to the Arab world, the lyrics of “Aatini al Nay wa Ghanni” (“Bring me the flute and sing”) can be interpreted as the consolidation of an Arabicised Argentine tango back in 1964. Although this song is musically based upon “La Cumparsita,” the

According to the literature, the tango beat existed as early as 711. Most scholars agree that the official origins of tango in Buenos Aires occurred in the 1880s. The literature suggests that tango music emerged from a blend of various rhythms

lyrics are an adaptation of an excerpt from Kahlil Gibran’s Arabic poem al Mawakib (The Processions), published in 1919.

By the 1950s, Lebanese singer Fairouz had translated and performed the well-known tangos La Caminito and Poema in Arabic. One of my favourites is Tango Ya Zambak.

To better understand tango as a cultural bridge between South America and Arab countries, one has to read the stories of Amal El Atrache, known as Asmahan and her brother, Farid El Atrache. Tango’s Arab heritage can also be traced back to Eugenio Majul, whose parents were Syrian and Lebanese; Maria de La Fuente, of Arab lineage; and Fairuz, of Lebanese origin.

The straight-backed, strolling, and crossing-floor tango dance characterises the construction of a liberal modern Arab society; the twisting of the legs is reserved for stage dance performances.

Tango is a thriving business in the region. Attire and footwear are part of the strategy for social integration. Never before has tango been danced by so many people and in so many different places as it has today.

Tango is celebrating its 10th anniversary in Oman. The first public event occurred in October 2015, followed by a Christmas celebration with tango performers at a local hotel. Tango classes have previously been offered in Muscat since early that year.

## SHAKY ECONOMY DISRUPTS ORBAN’S RE-ELECTION PLAYBOOK

GERGELY SZAKACS

Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban’s hopes that a strong economy will propel his Fidesz party to another election victory in 2026 are being challenged by a rebound in inflation, sagging household morale and even a plunge in the birth rate he so wants to boost. Last week’s warning by the central bank of heightened inflation risks was the latest bad news for the veteran leader, whose government now faces the threat of possible US tariffs hitting its export-reliant economy.

Hungary endured the worst inflationary surge in the European Union following Russia’s February 2022 war on Ukraine and prices remain a big concern for households.

“Hungarians have not seen such a decline in living standards since Fidesz came to power (in 2010),” said Balazs Szent-Ivanyi, a political economist at Aston University focusing on central Europe. An EU survey conducted in January found consumers were more pessimistic about their economic prospects than a year ago, while nearly four out of ten Hungarians expect their financial situation to deteriorate, according to insurer Generali. “The high levels of inflation in 2022 and 2023 have left their mark, with many households seeing declines in their real incomes,” Szent-Ivanyi said, adding that Orban’s party could still use its media network to shape public discourse in its favour ahead of the vote.

Orban launched a \$5.35 billion spending spree ahead of the last election in 2022 to fend off a threat from a previous opposition challenger — with the vote handing him another landslide victory at the cost of fanning inflation.

None of the 12 economists surveyed in a January Reuters poll expect Hungary’s economy to reach the 3.4 per cent growth Orban baked into this year’s budget. Erste Bank, last year’s most accurate forecaster of Hungarian economic indicators, sees growth at 2 per cent.

The European Commission sees growth at 1.8 per cent which, while impressive compared with the stagnation some euro zone governments are facing, would cap the weakest three-year stretch leading up to a national election during Orban’s 15-year rule. Orban plans to raise family benefits in the second half and further still in 2026, but even with what his cabinet has described as the most generous such scheme in Europe, Hungary’s birth rate has plunged to its lowest in more than a decade. Some polls show Peter Magyar’s surging centre-right Tisza party has overtaken Fidesz.

Capital Economics Emerging Europe analyst Nicholas Farr says that raises the “real prospect” of Orban losing an election for the first time since taking power in 2010. With the race looking tight, Orban will pull out the stops towards the end of the year to boost the economy, also using his dominance of media and public institutions to his advantage, Eurasia Group Europe Managing Director Mujtaba Rahman said. — Reuters

# Understanding one’s preferred learning style

WE ALL know and understand that education plays a key role in the continuing growth and diversification of the Sultanate of Oman’s economy and this process requires a focus on targeted human resource development. For this reason, the Oman government has always aimed to ensure that school students transitioning to higher education take programmes in areas deemed relevant to the job market’s needs.

One way to achieve this objective is by offering undergraduate scholarships that enable school leavers to pursue their higher studies in specified areas of specialisation at higher education institutions (HEIs) in and outside of Oman. However, it is not just about choosing a subject area and institution that suits the job market’s needs and a student’s interests, preferences and passions. Students are advised to also first figure out what type of learner they are and choose the suitable programme and institution accordingly.

One has to consider one’s learning abilities or preferred learning styles. Students are advised to ask themselves: Am I a more practical learner who understands and retains knowledge and develops skills better by doing and applying what I learned, including by working as a team? Or am I more research-oriented, ie, more of an academic who learns most effectively when information is presented to me in written words while I like to study independently? Or am I a little bit of everything?

For example, two of my Oman nieces on my husband’s side of the family are both smart and intelligent, but they each benefitted from different learning and teaching methods while pursuing their higher studies. One of them studied relatively more independently at the research-oriented Sultan Qaboos University and a renowned university in Australia, while the other graduated from a European University of Applied Sciences.

There are a few European countries, including Germany, the Netherlands, and Ireland, for example, where they have a so-



The effective PBL method shows students the practical application of knowledge in a real-world setting.



BREGJE VAN  
BAAREN

called binary or two-tier higher education system. Apart from vocational institutions, they offer undergraduate degree programmes universities and universities of applied sciences or institutes of technology. The latter two types of institutions offer four-year Bachelor’s degree programmes during which students mainly focus on the practical application of knowledge and are getting prepared for specific professions, such as ‘electrical engineering’ or ‘marketing management.’ During their course of studies, students usually work with fellow students in a team on specific projects while simulating real-life cases and work placements at actual companies or government entities, which are generally an essential part of the programme.

There is, however, an increasingly blurry line between institutions focusing on applied learning instead and those who take a more academic research-oriented approach. Many HEIs now use problem-based learning (PBL) and teaching methodologies, which are based on a relatively practical

approach to learning and their students are expected to solve real-life issues. This way, they take an active, task-orientated and self-directed approach to their own learning and develop practical and creative research skills.

In other words, the effective PBL method shows students the practical application of knowledge in a real-world setting. Mainly when conducted as a teamwork activity, PBL also helps students develop versatile communication, collaboration and perspective-taking skills and encourages student engagement and motivation.

Understanding one’s preferred and personal learning style as a student is deemed essential, as the job market also needs a variety of graduates. Choosing the most suitable learning and teaching approach will allow students to thrive in a way that suits them and their individual skills and capabilities, while all roads usually lead to Rome. Besides, Einstein once said, “Everyone is a genius. But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing it is stupid.”

# SPORTS

WORLD ENDURANCE



The agreement being signed.

## SOHAR INTERNATIONAL TO SUPPORT AHMAD IN 2025 CAMPAIGN

MUSCAT: Oman’s Ahmad al Harthy, who will compete for a second season with BMW and Team WRT this year in the prestigious FIA World Endurance Championship, on Wednesday revealed his banking partner for the 2025 campaign – Sohar International. Announced during a special ceremony in Muscat, the new agreement with Sohar International marks a renewal of a key partnership which first developed in 2022 when the Omani banking leader supported Al Harthy in the European Le Mans Series.

In the few short years since, Al Harthy’s stock and profile within global motorsport have continued to rise at an impressive rate. Now, Sohar International will be supporting the incredibly successful endurance racer in the world’s biggest championship of its kind – FIA WEC.

Following an excellent maiden season driving a Team WRT engineered BMW M4 LMGT3 last year, where two LMGT3 podiums were achieved en-route to sixth in the championship standings, Al Harthy remains with the squad for 2025 as team-mate to motorcycling legend Valentino Rossi in the high-profile No 46 car. Additionally, the duo will be partnered by South Africa’s Kelvin van der Linde. Joined by a range of dignitaries at Wednesday’s partnership launch, Al Harthy gave a presentation outlining his determination for the coming FIA WEC campaign, which actually marks his third year in total in the global championship, and his delight at having the vital support of Sohar International.

Financial leader providing key support for Omani’s World Endurance bid

Agreement revealed during special launch in Muscat

Al Harthy ready for second year with BMW at World Championship level

Like Oman’s number one racing driver, Sohar International is a true homegrown success story from the Sultanate of Oman. Running operations throughout Wholesale Banking, Retail Banking, Investments, Government and Project Finance Syndication and Treasury and Islamic Banking, the bank is proud to again support Al Harthy and share the opportunities such global exposure will bring.

Abdulwahid bin Mohamed al Mushidi – Acting CEO, Sohar International, said: “Ahmad al Harthy has consistently demonstrated perseverance and excellence on the global motorsport stage, embodying the same agility and resilience that define Sohar International. We take great pride in supporting homegrown talent who not only carry the Omani flag internationally but also inspire the next generation to push boundaries and achieve greatness. Our financial services, vision and values align seamlessly with Ahmad’s approach to racing and his role as a distinguished ambassador for Oman. He has accomplished much in his remarkable motorsport career, and this year holds great promise. Sohar International is proud to support him as he takes on the biggest challenge of his career yet.”

Ahmad said: “I’m really delighted to have Sohar International onboard for our 2025 season, focused on the FIA World Endurance Championship with BMW and Team WRT. We obviously share many synergies with Sohar and I am very excited to be working with them again, it means so much to have a financial partner in this amazing motorsport programme of ours. Together we will showcase and highlight the presence of Oman on the world stage, sharing all the benefits being part of the world’s biggest endurance championship brings. I’m looking forward to taking on FIA WEC for a second year with BMW, and my great team-mates Vale and Kelvin, and I want to thank the entire team for their belief. We’re all looking forward to a successful season.”

# Seeb crowned OBL champions after thrilling win over Al Bashayer

AHMED AL KAABI  
MUSCAT, FEB 5

SEEB CLUB has been crowned the champions of the 2024-2025 Oman Basketball League after securing a hard-fought 62-61 victory over Al Bashayer, claiming their sixth title in the tournament’s history.

The final match was held under the auspices of Dr Yahya bin Nasser al Khasaibi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs, and was attended by Eng Khalfan al Naabi, Chairman of the Oman Basketball Association. The game took place at the secondary hall of Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher on Tuesday night.

Seeb’s victory was driven by standout performances from several players. Kely Jordan led the scoring for his team with 27 points, while Mazen al Hadidi and Rashid al Zuhaibi added 7 points each. On the Al Bashayer side, Samkelo Brian was the top scorer with 19 points, followed by Bassam al Busaidi with 11 points and Ahmed al Halhali with 9 points.

The game began at a rapid pace, with Seeb launching an early attack through Kelly Jordan, who missed two free throws. Al Bashayer took advantage as Hadeed Bait Bukhait intercepted the ball and scored the first two points.

The pressure continued, with Saeed al Saadi extending Al Bashayer’s lead to 4-0. Seeb responded through Rashid al Zuhaibi, who put up two points, but Al Bashayer remained aggressive. Saeed al Saadi added another two-pointer, pushing the score to 6-2.

Al Bashayer continued capitalising on scoring opportunities, with Ahmed al Halhali sinking a three-pointer to increase the lead to 9-2. Al Bashayer took the lead at the end of the first quarter with 13-8.

The second quarter began cautiously from both sides, with neither team managing to score in the first two minutes. Eventually, Saeed al Saadi broke the deadlock with two points for Al Bashayer, countered by a free throw from Rashid al Zuhaibi.

Al Bashayer took advantage of Seeb’s defensive errors, with Ahmed al Halhali scoring two points from a free throw, followed by a three-pointer from Bassam al Busaidy, extending their lead to 20-15. However, Seeb did not back down,



Seeb players celebrate with the OBL Shield. — Abdulwahid al Hamadani



Runner-ups Al Bashayer players pose with their silver medals.

as Mazen al Hadidi and Kelly Jordan orchestrated a comeback, cutting the deficit to 20-19. A defensive mistake from Al Bashayer allowed Kelly Jordan to score another two points, putting Seeb in the lead for the first time at 21-20. The teams continued exchanging points, and by half-time, Al Bashayer were narrowly ahead at 25-23.

**THRILLING CONTEST**  
Both teams started the third quarter with aggressive offensive plays. Al Bashayer maintained a 29-25 lead early on, but Seeb quickly responded, with Romero Wilfred scoring two points. Samkelo Bryan added two more for Al Bashayer to keep them ahead by five.

In the fourth minute, Rashid al Zuhaibi scored two points, followed by

an incredible three-pointer from Kelly Jordan, tying the score at 32-32. In the final moments of the quarter, Saeed al Saadi put Al Bashayer ahead again with two points, but Seeb responded with a three-pointer from Ahmed al Sanani, putting Seeb ahead at 35-34 before the final quarter.

The excitement continued into the final quarter, with Al Bashayer managing to force a 45-45 tie in the closing moments, sending the game into overtime.

The overtime was filled with back-and-forth scoring, as both teams fought fiercely for the title. In the final seconds, Kelly Jordan sealed the win for Seeb by scoring the last point, securing a dramatic 62-61 victory amid electrifying scenes.

After the final whistle, Dr Yahya al Khasibi and Eng Khalfaan al Naabi presented the awards. Seeb received the gold medals and the league shield, while Al Bashayer took the silver medals, and Nizwa claimed the bronze.

Al Naabi praised the high level of competition in the final, highlighting the close technical battle that resulted in a thrilling last-minute decision. He extended his gratitude to the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, referees, tournament committees, and the enthusiastic fans for their contributions to the successful season.

Looking ahead, he announced that the ministry Shield Championship will kick off in the coming days, expressing his hope for an equally exciting conclusion to that tournament.

## UAE’s Al Nasr edge Dhofar to enter semis of Gulf CL

ADIL AL BALUSHI  
MUSCAT, FEB 5

Omani club Dhofar’s hopes of advancing to the next phase of the Gulf Champions League Championship ended following their 2-1 defeat against UAE’s Al Nasr on Tuesday night at Al Saada Sports Complex. The first-leg match ended with a 5-2 win for the UAE club.

The loss left Dhofar’s credit in Group A at four points, while Al Nasr raised their tally to 13 points to secure a spot in the semifinal of the Gulf Champions League.

Hosts Dhofar took the lead through Hamood al Saadi, who scored the opening goal with a header in the 38th minute. Al Nasr bounced back strongly



Oman’s Dhofar Club and UAE’s Al Nasr Club players in action.

in the second half, managing to visit the opponent’s target twice in the 59th and 78th minutes through Haris Seferovic.

In the other group, Iraq’s

Duhok SC joined Al Nasr in the semifinal after thrashing Yemen’s Ahli Sanaa Club SC 3-0 in the second-leg match of Group B in the fifth round of the championship. The victory

put Duhok SC on eight points, while the Yemeni club exited with three points after the group stage concluded.

The first goal in the match for Iraq’s Duhok SC was scored by Bayara Abubaker in the seventh minute, and the first half ended 1-0.

In the second half, the Iraqi team doubled their lead with two more goals scored by Peter Georgis in the 78th minute and Yannick Zakri in the 98th minute, both from penalty kicks.

In the semifinal, Duhok SC, second in Group A, will meet Saudi’s Al Ittifaq, who are top of Group B. Al Nasr, who are topping Group A, will await the final round of Group B fixtures to determine the second-placed team in Group B.

OMAN CRICKET LEAGUE



(L-R) Priyanka Mendonca, Pratima B, Trupti Pawde of Indian Social Club Manglorean Konkani Wing.

ISC MKW BEAT PSM-W; MCCC YELLOW U11, BSC AEC U11 POST BIG WINS

MUSCAT: Indian Social Club Manglorean Konkani Wing (MKW) beat Pakistan School Muscat Women's by nine wickets in the Women's Cricket League 2024-25 organised by the Oman Cricket.

In a closely contested match, PSM Women's scored 119/7 in 20 overs courtesy Lujaina Sajid's 27. The PSM were well restricted by the bowlers of ISC MKW led by Priyanka Mendonca picking 3-10 and Pratima B bagging 2-19.

In response, ISC MKW's openers stitched a match-winning 102-run partnership as Priyanka Mendonca scored 44 and Trupti Pawde scored 49.

In the Under-11 Junior Cricket League, MCCC Yellow U11 beat MCCC Blue U11 by 248 runs.

In another match, BSC AEC U11 beat MCCC Red U11 by 246 runs.

BRIEF SCORES

PSM-W 119/7 in 20 overs (Lujaina Sajid 27(36); Priyanka Mendonca 3/10) lost to ISC MKW 120/1 in 14.5 overs (Trupti Pawde 49(47); Eshal Siddiqui 1/27) by 9 wickets.

MCCC Yellow U11 327/1 in 20 overs (Ashbel Burboz 196(75) — 4x39) beat MCCC Blue U11 79/10 in 18.5 overs (Burhanuddin BM 3/11) by 248 runs.

BSC AEC U11 326/1 in 20 overs (Aarav Chirmure 171(76) — 4x27; Dharvik VS 1/39) beat MCCC Red U11 80/10 in 19.3 overs (Karthik Iyer 10(18) — 4x1; Shubh Seth 2/7) by 246 runs.



Ashbel Burboz of MCCC Yellow U11



Action from the first round of the Oman International Drift Championship in Muscat.

OIDC comes to Suhar for first ever appearance

ANUROOP ATHIPARAMBATH  
@anuroop\_ath

THE Oman International Drift Championship (OIDC) will make a first appearance in the bustling city of Suhar as it hosts the OIDC 2025's second and concluding third rounds.

The globally recognised drifting spectacle — organised by the Oman Automobile Association — is in its seventh edition, attended by 56 drivers from 18 countries.

Sohar Talent Square, a new venue that will be officially inaugurated during the finals of the second round, will stage the intense drift action. The qualifiers for the second round will begin on February 13 with the knockout stage set for February 14.

The first round, which concluded at OAA's Muscat Drift Arena on January 31, saw former champion Ali Makhseed of Kuwait claiming the opening victory of OIDC 2025 when he beat local hope Ahmed al Amri.

Dutch driver Clint van Oort finished third to make a strong start.

Ali Makhseed and Ahmed al Amri repeated their one-two spots in the Middle East and North Africa (Mena) section while Omani driver Haitham al Hadidi claimed the third position.

In the National category for Omani drivers, Ahmed al Amri came on top followed by Haitham al Hadidi and Tariq al Shaihani in second and third spots respectively.



Action from the first round of the Oman International Drift Championship in Muscat.

SUHAR IN FOCUS

The drifting action is the second major motorsports event coming to the city after the recently concluded Oman International Rally 2025, won by Qatar's Nasser Saleh al Attiyah for a record-breaking eighth time.

The drift event is organised in collaboration with the Office of the Governor of Al Batinah North and the Oman Automobile Association, as part of efforts to strengthen Oman's presence on the

international motorsport scene.

The OIDC 2025 will conclude with the third and final round at Sohar Talent Square on February 20 and 21.

The overall winners in various categories will be crowned after the third round.

The event is being organised by the OAA under the chairmanship of Brigadier Jamal bin Said al Tai, managing director Suleiman al Rawahi and race director Fahmi al Busaidy.

Royal Court Affairs, Ministry of Education in final of Eights tourney

AHMED AL KAABI  
MUSCAT, FEB 5

The Royal Court Affairs (RCA) team has secured a place in the final of the Government Institutions Eights Football Championship after defeating the State Audit Institution with a 2-1 victory. Similarly, the Ministry of Education earned their spot in the final by overcoming the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MoTCIT) with a 4-1 win in a match hosted at Al Amal Club Stadium. The championship final is set to take place on February 24.

The match started at a fast pace, with the State Audit Institution surprising their opponents with an early goal in the first minute. Azzan

al Kindi capitalised on a defensive lapse to put his team ahead.

Azzan al Kindi almost doubled the lead after breaking through on goal, but the defence and goalkeeper managed to deny him.

Meanwhile, RCA intensified their attacking efforts, with their most dangerous chance coming from a powerful shot by Taisir al Alawi, which narrowly missed the post. The relentless pressure paid off in the 14th minute, when Taisir al Alawi successfully equalised, bringing the match back to level terms. The two teams continued to exchange attacks but failed to add more goals before half-time, which ended 1-1.

Both teams started the second half seeking to break the deadlock. The opening minutes saw chances



The Royal Court Affairs and State Audit Institution players fight for the ball.

for both sides, but solid defensive displays and goalkeeping heroics kept the score level. As the match neared its conclusion, Qasim al Abdulsalam netted a decisive goal for RCA, securing a 2-1 victory and leading his team to the final.

CONVINCING WIN

The second semifinal was evenly contested in the opening minutes, with both teams exchanging attacks in search of an early breakthrough. However, neither side managed to break the deadlock until the 19th minute, when Mahmoud al Shaidi found the back of the net, giving the Ministry of Education a crucial lead before half-time.

MoTCIT entered the second half with a clear attacking intent, determined to level the score. They created several chances, the most notable being a powerful strike by Waleed al Rawahi in the 22nd minute, which narrowly missed the target.

The Ministry of Education responded swiftly with a counter-

attack, led by Mahmoud al Shaidi, whose powerful shot was blocked by the goalkeeper. However, Yusuf bin Mubarak al Hinai capitalised on the rebound, slotting home the second goal in the 24th minute.

Just a few minutes later, Muaid al Khadhoury reignited hopes for his team with a low-driven shot in the 29th minute, cutting the deficit to 2-1.

However, the Ministry of Education quickly regained control, as Mahmoud al Shaidi scored his second goal in the 30th minute, extending the lead to 3-1.

Two minutes later, Yusuf al Hinai punished a defensive error by Waleed al Rawahi, launching a fast break and scoring the fourth goal, sealing a dominant 4-1 victory.

## نتوجه بخالص الشكر والتقدير لجميع شركاء النجاح في ليالي مسقط

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NEWFRAMEWORK



This initiative aims to provide a structured framework for listed firms to formulate and disclose their dividend policies with greater clarity.

MSX UNVEILS DIVIDEND POLICY GUIDELINES TO BOOST TRANSPARENCY

MUSCAT: The Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) has introduced Guidelines for Dividend Policy for Public Joint Stock Companies, reinforcing its commitment to transparency and investor confidence.

The launch event, held under the auspices of Dr Said bin Mohammed al Saqri, Minister of Economy, was attended by key executives and representatives from MSX-listed companies.

This initiative aims to provide a structured framework for listed firms to formulate and disclose their dividend policies with greater clarity. It sets standards for profit distribution, ensuring companies adopt consistent and transparent financial practices aligned with international best practices.

By enhancing disclosure requirements, the guidelines help investors better understand dividend policies, enabling them to make informed decisions based on reliable and up-to-date information.

MSX sees this as a crucial step in strengthening corporate governance and fostering a sustainable financial environment.

Following the launch, MSX conducted a workshop to elaborate on the guidelines' key aspects, including its implementation mechanisms and impact on the market.

Al Dhahirah food security projects reach RO 35m

INVESTMENT in food security projects within the animal sector in Al Dhahirah Governorate has exceeded RO 35 million, spanning a total area of 5,000 acres.

These projects are a major step toward enhancing food security and promoting sustainable development in the governorate.

Eng Salim bin Ali al Omrani, Director-General of Agricultural Wealth and Water Resources in Al Dhahirah Governorate, highlighted that seven key projects are underway to strengthen the governorate's food security.

Among them, the Gulf International Poultry Farms Project, led by the Arab Food Production Company in partnership with the Gulf Japan Food Fund, IFFCO Group, and Japan's Ise Foods Company, is a significant investment.

With an investment of RO 27 million, the farm, located in the Wilayat of Ibri, will produce 360 million eggs annually to meet the demand in Oman and the GCC Covering an area of 4,285 acres, the project includes five breeding sheds, 15 production sheds, a water treatment facility, a fertiliser processing plant, veterinary services, and a fuel station for company vehicles.

It is expected to create 148 jobs, including 80 for Omanis.

Another major initiative is a laying hen



These projects are a major step toward enhancing food security and promoting sustainable development in the governorate.

farm by Sabil Agricultural Consulting Company, a locally-driven investment. In its first phase, the project will establish one breeding shed and three production sheds, aiming to produce 46 million table eggs annually.

With an investment of RO 1.5 million, it will contribute 6.5% of Oman's total egg production. The second phase will introduce additional breeding facilities, a feed factory, a water treatment plant, a biogas facility and a slaughterhouse for birds. In the livestock sector, Al Inam Business Company is developing a goat farming project in the Wilayat of Dhank to boost red meat production.

The farm is designed to produce 10,000 goats annually in its initial phase, with plans to expand capacity to half a million goats per year.

The project, which covers 95 acres, has an initial investment of RO 417,000, with pilot operations set to begin in 2025. Al Omrani also announced that 30 additional investment opportunities in agriculture, livestock, and water resource management will be introduced this year in Al Dhahirah Governorate.

These projects align with Oman Vision 2040, aiming to strengthen food security, enhance local production and reduce dependency on imports. — ONA

OMAN, UK STRENGTHEN INVESTMENT TIES AT CONSULTATION MEETING

MANAH: Oman hosted the inaugural meeting of the Omani-British Strategic Consultation Team for 2025 at the Oman Across Time Museum in the Wilayat of Manah, Al Dakhiliyah Governorate.

The meeting focused on investment strategies,

business development, and sector-specific cooperation opportunities between the two countries. Discussions covered efforts to enhance Oman's investment appeal, foster partnerships in scientific innovation, green energy, and knowledge transfer and explore best practices in

national identity promotion and strategic communication.

Delegations from both governments, private sector representatives, and consultants participated, reflecting a joint commitment to economic, investment and development collaboration.

— ONA

New Promising Companies Market to boost Oman’s investment appeal: FSA

NASRULAH AL AJMI  
MUSCAT, FEB 5

THE FINANCIAL Services Authority (FSA) has announced a landmark initiative to boost Oman's investment environment and support the private sector with the establishment of the Promising Companies Market.

This move, stemming from Royal Decree 18/2025, creates a secondary market within the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) aimed at small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and other promising businesses.

According to the Authority, the market is designed to provide SMEs with an alternative financing mechanism, enabling access to capital for growth and expansion.

Companies with a minimum market value of RO 500,000 are eligible to list, ensuring inclusivity for a wide range of businesses.



The new market is expected to serve as a significant tool for attracting investments and diversifying the economy.

The FSA emphasised that companies listed in the Promising Companies Market will adhere to governance standards to safeguard sustainability and growth.

These standards reflect the FSA's commitment to aligning Oman's financial markets with international best practices while supporting the strategic objectives of Oman Vision 2040.

In addition to regulating the market, the FSA will ensure that listed companies meet transparency and disclosure requirements.

This oversight is critical to maintaining investor confidence and fostering a robust investment environment.

The new market is expected to serve as a significant tool for attracting investments and diversifying the economy. By providing an accessible and structured platform for SMEs, the

FSA aims to stimulate the growth of privately-owned, family-owned, and medium-sized enterprises, contributing to Oman's economic development.

The FSA also noted the broader implications of this initiative, which aligns with the Sultanate of Oman's efforts to enhance its global competitiveness.

By supporting the financial market's diversification, the FSA is positioning Oman as a hub for innovation and entrepreneurial growth.

The FSA reaffirmed its commitment to working closely with relevant authorities to ensure the success of the Promising Companies Market. Through this initiative, the FSA continues to demonstrate its leadership in developing Oman's financial sector and enabling businesses to thrive in a sustainable and forward-looking economic environment.

ADVERTORIALS

ENHANCEDACCESS



BankDhofar’s extensive network now includes 131 branches across Oman.

BANKDHOFAR OPENS NEW BRANCH IN AL GHUBRAH

MUSCAT: BankDhofar, Oman’s second-largest bank by branch network, has inaugurated a new branch in Al Ghubrah, Muscat Governorate, as part of its ongoing efforts to enhance accessibility and foster lasting relationships with customers.

The new branch underscores the bank’s commitment to delivering high-quality products, services, and financing solutions tailored to diverse customer needs.

The inauguration ceremony was held under the auspices of Shaikh Omar bin Ali al Junaibi, Majlis Ash’shura Representative from the Wilayat of Bahla. BankDhofar’s extensive network now includes 131 branches across Oman including Dhofar Islamic, complemented by over 400 ATMs, cash deposit machines, and multi-purpose service machines.

Strategically located in the vibrant Al Ghubrah area, the new branch serves a broad spectrum of customers, including small and medium enterprises (SMEs). Recognising the critical role SMEs play in driving Oman’s economic growth, BankDhofar remains dedicated to empowering entrepreneurs and nurturing their success.

As with its nationwide network, the Al Ghubrah branch is equipped with advanced digital technologies to deliver a superior and seamless banking experience.

Designed for customer comfort, convenience, and efficiency, the branch ensures prompt service, with a commitment to address customer queries within 10 minutes of arrival – a hallmark of BankDhofar’s customer-first approach. This swift service reflects the bank’s respect for customers’ time, further strengthening trust and loyalty.

BankDhofar offers a comprehensive suite of banking solutions tailored to various customer segments, including women, youth, children, high-income individuals, and families. Specialised services for affluent customers are delivered with utmost confidentiality and professionalism.

Additionally, the bank provides structured investment and savings plans, including fixed and recurring deposit accounts, children’s education savings plans, and retirement-focused solutions that promote financial security.

Beyond its branch network, BankDhofar empowers customers with its user-friendly mobile banking app, enabling them to manage accounts, pay bills, transfer funds, and open new accounts effortlessly.

OOREDOO WINS BRONZE STEVIE AWARD FOR CORPORATE SUSTAINABILITY LEADERSHIP

MUSCAT: Ooredoo has been honoured with a Bronze Stevie Award for the “Most Innovative Corporate Sustainability Programme” category at the prestigious Middle East & North Africa Stevie Awards 2025. The accolade recognises Ooredoo’s commitment to driving impactful corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives and championing sustainability across the Sultanate



of Oman. The Stevie Awards are widely recognised as one of the world’s premier business accolades, celebrating achievements in innovation and excellence across industries. The Middle East & North Africa Stevie Awards specifically

spotlight organisations driving workplace innovation across 18 countries in the region. This year’s winners were determined by a panel of 118 global executives. Commenting on the achievement, Feras al Shaikh, Director of Branding and Communications at Ooredoo, said: “This Bronze Stevie Award showcases our leadership in sustainability and our commitment to driving meaningful change across Oman.

Toyota Corolla: Make your journey rewarding

THE Toyota Corolla continues to set the gold standard in the automotive world, effortlessly blending elegant design, advanced technology and a beautifully crafted interior. Since its debut, the Corolla has become an icon synonymous with reliability, versatility and pure driving satisfaction.

From its sleek, dynamic exterior to its sophisticated, well-appointed cabin, the Corolla exemplifies the perfect harmony of style, spaciousness, comfort, fuel efficiency and power.

The Corolla offers two impressive engine options designed to thrill and perform. The 2.0-litre Dynamic Force engine packs a powerful 168 horsepower and 20.39 kg-m of torque, paired with a Direct Shift CVT transmission, delivering a more immersive and engaging driving experience.

For those seeking an



Since its debut, the Corolla has become an icon synonymous with reliability, versatility and pure driving satisfaction.

exceptional balance of power and fuel economy, the 1.6-litre four-cylinder engine option generates 121 horsepower and 15.7 kg-m of torque, also equipped with a smooth CVT transmission for an economical yet responsive drive.

Inside, the Corolla’s interior is as refined as it is inviting. The minimalist yet sophisticated design emphasises space, comfort and elegance, making each journey a pleasure. Newly cushioned, ergonomically designed seats,

a spacious armrest and ample legroom create a premium experience for both driver and passengers.

Rear-seat passengers will appreciate the added comfort of rear AC vents, while a host of thoughtful amenities—such as a moon roof, a 4.2-inch multi-information display (MID), a 7-inch display audio system, cruise control and a six-speaker sound system enhance every drive.

Toyota’s unwavering commitment to safety shines in the Corolla, equipped with a suite of advanced safety features to keep you and your loved ones protected.

Four SRS airbags, Vehicle Stability Control (VSC), Anti-lock Braking System (ABS), Brake Assist, Electronic Brakeforce Distribution (EBD) and a Tyre Pressure Monitoring System (TPMS) work in unison, providing peace of mind at every turn.

SOHAR INTERNATIONAL SPONSORS 8TH AL BASHAIR FESTIVAL 2025

MUSCAT: Sohar International, Oman’s Best Bank, is proud to serve as the Strategic Sponsor for the 8th Al Bashair Festival 2025, a premier camel racing event set to take place from February 10 to February 15, 2025, in Adam, Al Dakhiliyah Governorate.

This sponsorship reflects the bank’s commitment to preserving Oman’s rich heritage while fostering economic diversification and strengthening synergies

between the private and public sectors. As a key contributor to national progress, Sohar International continues to champion initiatives that drive cultural, social, and economic value.

The Al Bashair Festival, a cornerstone of Oman’s cultural calendar, not only celebrates tradition but also stimulates tourism, entrepreneurship and local business growth.

Through this collaboration, Sohar International reinforces



This sponsorship reflects the bank’s commitment to preserving Oman’s rich heritage.

its role as an enabler of sustainable development,

aligning with Oman Vision 2040 and supporting initiatives that contribute to a dynamic and inclusive economy.

Commenting on the sponsorship of the event, Abdulwahid al Murshidi, Acting Chief Executive Officer at Sohar International stated, “Sohar International remains committed to championing initiatives that celebrate Oman’s rich heritage while driving broader economic and social value.

Malabar Gold & Diamonds to expand into New Zealand

MUSCAT: Malabar Gold & Diamonds, the 6th largest jewellery retailer globally with over 375 showrooms across 13 countries, is set to expand its footprint into New Zealand.

This strategic move is aligned with the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) signed between the United Arab Emirates and New Zealand, which fosters increased trade and economic collaboration between the two nations.

With the entirety of Malabar Gold & Diamonds’ international operations based out of the Malabar International Hub in the UAE, the signing of CEPA between the UAE & New Zealand will enable the brand to further streamline their business operation as it relates to expanding their retail presence into the 14th global country of operation.

“As a globally recognised jewellery retailer managing its international operations from the UAE, the Comprehensive Economic



The signing of CEPA between the UAE & New Zealand will enable the brand to further streamline their business operation.

Partnership Agreement (CEPA) between the UAE and New Zealand significantly bolsters our

This agreement not only allows us to strengthen economic ties but

also provides us with an opportunity to introduce our products and services to a whole new audience. By capitalising on the opportunities presented by this bilateral trade

agreement, Malabar Gold & Diamonds marks a significant milestone in our overarching vision to become the world’s number one jewellery retailer,” commented M P Ahammed, Chairman of Malabar Group.

In the initial phase of its expansion into New Zealand, Malabar Gold & Diamonds will invest NZD 75 million to establish its presence in the region. This significant investment will see the launch of three world-class showrooms, bringing the brand’s exceptional jewellery collections and renowned craftsmanship to New Zealand’s discerning customers.

“It’s encouraging to see the CEPA already driving increased trade and investment between our two countries,” said New Zealand Trade Commissioner to the United Arab Emirates and Consul General to Dubai & Northern Emirates, Ahmad Zakkout. “We’re excited to continue fostering investment and business

opportunities between New Zealand and the United Arab Emirates,” he continued.

“New Zealand is a market brimming with potential, offering us an exceptional opportunity to connect with a diverse customer base that appreciates the artistry, quality, and authenticity synonymous with Malabar Gold & Diamonds,” commented Shamlal Ahamed, Managing Director – International Operations, Malabar Gold & Diamonds.

“As the UAE stands as one of the world’s premier jewellery trading hubs and the base of our international operations, the provisions in CEPA that promote UAE-NZ trade open a more efficient and streamlined pathway into the market. With a legacy built on trust, transparency, and customer satisfaction, this expansion into New Zealand represents a transformative step in redefining the region’s jewellery landscape”.

BUSINESS

LOCALIMPACT



SME SEMINAR  
EXPLORES  
EMPOWERMENT  
AND GROWTH  
OPPORTUNITIES

FAISAL AL AJMI  
MUSCAT, FEB 5

THE Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), in collaboration with Reema Integrated Projects Foundation, held a seminar entitled “Empowerment and Excellence: Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in the Prosperous Era” at the Chamber’s headquarters on February 5, 2025.

The event was under the auspices of Eng Badr bin Salim al Maamari, Secretary-General of the Tender Board, and attended by Shaikh Faisal bin Abdullah al Rawas, Chairman of OCCI’s Board of Directors, alongside various board members and prominent figures.

The seminar focused on empowering SMEs in Oman, addressing their challenges and opportunities, and highlighting support from financing entities. It also discussed the impact of local content programmes and strategies for enhanced collaboration to unlock the sector’s potential.

A key feature of the event was an exhibition showcasing the products and services of local entrepreneurs, offering them a platform to network, expand their market reach, and promote their innovations. The exhibition served as a catalyst for creating new business connections and facilitated dialogue between entrepreneurs, financial institutions and investors.

Shaikh Ahmed bin Amer al Maslahi, Chairman of OCCI’s SME Committee, praised His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik’s support for SMEs, highlighting their role in economic diversification. He emphasised the government’s focus on integrating SMEs with larger enterprises to ensure long-term sustainability.

Al Maslahi highlighted that OCCI’s support for SME growth was in line with Oman Vision 2040. Since 2022, the SMEs Committee has worked with key entities to improve the business environment, foster regional development and drive diversification. With around 28,000 registered SMEs, the sector plays a vital role in job creation and economic growth.

The seminar addressed key issues facing Omani SMEs, including creating an accurate database for active businesses, simplifying financing processes and accelerating funding. It also highlighted the importance of local content in expanding opportunities and securing fair contracts for SMEs in both public and private sectors.

Speaking to the Observer, Ahmed bin Said Kashoub, Chairman of the Omani Securities Association, stated that decision-makers must address challenges faced by entrepreneurs and SMEs, including financial obstacles and funding difficulties. The forum aims to explore solutions to streamline financial processes and support business growth in the Sultanate of Oman.

Oman’s 44.01 completes \$5m additional Series A investment

BUSINESS REPORTER  
MUSCAT, FEB 5

AWARD-WINNING Omani climate tech startup 44.01 has received an additional \$5 million in Series A investment from Norwegian sovereign investor Nysnø Climate Investments and MENA-focused VC fund Jasoor Ventures, bringing the total Series A fundraise to \$42 million.

The Series A round was led by Equinor Ventures in July 2024 with Shorooq Partners in the UAE, as well as (in alphabetical order) Air Liquide Venture Capital (ALIAD), Alumni Ventures, Amazon’s Climate Pledge Fund, Climate Investment, Innovation Development Oman, Planet A Ventures, Salica Oryx Fund, Siemens Financial Services,

Sumitomo Corporation and several other investors. Existing investors including Breakthrough Energy Ventures also recommitment to 44.01’s technology by participating in the round.

Nysnø Climate Investments, the Norwegian state’s climate investment company, invests in companies and funds with technology for reducing greenhouse gas emissions. With a managed capital of 5.4 billion NOK, Nysnø invests in renewable energy, digital technologies, resource efficiency, sustainable consumption and circular economy.

Additional investment from Norway and MENA reflects international optimism about the potential of mineralisation to help countries meet their

OMAN,  
JORDAN BOOST  
MARITIME  
COOPERATION

**MUSCAT:** Oman and Jordan reviewed their maritime partnership in Muscat on Wednesday, February 5, focusing on safety, security, environmental protection, and maritime education and training.

The Omani-Jordanian Joint Maritime Committee examined ways to activate the bilateral maritime transport agreement and

implement a mutual recognition memorandum for seafarers’ certificates.

These steps aim to enhance the maritime sector and unlock future cooperation opportunities.

Both sides emphasised the need for continued coordination to advance maritime transport systems, strengthen collaboration between regulatory bodies, and

support sustainable sector growth.

Oman’s delegation was led by Eng Khamis bin Mohammed al Shammakhi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology for Transport, while Jordan was represented by Eng Omar Mustafa al Dabbas, Director-General of the Jordan Maritime Authority. — ONA

Hotel Indigo breaks  
ground on project at Yiti

CONRAD PRABHU  
MUSCAT, FEB 5

**CONSTRUCTION** work has commenced on a new luxury property of the prestigious Hotel Indigo chain in the Sultanate of Oman – the latest in a string of new investments in the country’s burgeoning tourism and hospitality industry.

Hotel Indigo – part of IHG Hotels & Resorts (InterContinental Hotels Group) – is coming up at The Sustainable City Yiti, a world-scale mixed-use development promoted by the partnership of wholly Omani government-owned Omran Group and UAE-based Diamond Developers. Total investment in the City, currently in an advanced stage of development at Yiti in Muscat Governorate, is estimated at around \$1 billion.

Announcing the ground-breaking on the hotel project in a recent post, well-known Omani architectural and planning consultancy Hoehler

Hotel Indigo – part of IHG Hotels & Resorts (InterContinental Hotels Group) – is coming up at The Sustainable City Yiti, a world-scale mixed-use development promoted by the partnership of wholly Omani government-owned Omran Group and UAE-based Diamond Developers.



The Sustainable City Yiti will feature two luxury hotel developments.

+ alSalmy said: “Today was the ground breaking ceremony in Yiti for the 4-star hotel, the Indigo Hotel! Hoehler + alSalmy will be overseeing the supervision of the project.

We’re excited for the next phases and what’s to come! Big thanks to our site supervision team for their

work and being a part of today’s event.”

The 4-star Hotel Indigo Sustainable City will feature 173 rooms and luxury serviced apartments.

Overlooking the expanse of the Sea of Oman, the property is slated for launch in the second half of 2026.

Significantly, the new hotel will be second Hotel Indigo branded property in Oman. The brand made its debut in the Middle East last year with the launch of Hotel Indigo Jabal Akhdar Resort & Spa in the Wilayat of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar. The boutique hotel features 173 rooms, suites, and chalets.

Hotel Indigo will be one of two luxury hotels planned at The Sustainable City Yiti. Agreements have already been signed for the development of the Nikki Beach Resort & Spa Muscat featuring 140 hotel rooms and 30 villas with private pools. Facilities will include the beach club, three signature restaurants, three swimming pools, a spa, gym and marina.

SAROOJ OASIS SALES LAUNCHED IN SULTAN HAITHAM CITY

FAISAL AL AJMI  
MUSCAT, FEB 5

THE launch of Sarooj Oasis sales marks a major step in the development of Sultan Haitham City, offering an integrated residential and commercial community. Covering 86,000 square metres, the project includes 210 residential units, a business centre, and retail spaces exceeding 11,000 square metres, with a total built-up area of 65,000 square metres.

Designed to blend Omani heritage with modern architecture, Sarooj Oasis provides a variety of residential, commercial and community spaces.

The development offers a diverse selection of homes, including Althuraya Villas, which provide luxurious valley views and privacy, and Ahd Villas, designed for affordable yet elegant sustainable living.

Additionally, modern apartment buildings offer a contemporary urban lifestyle close to commercial and cultural hubs.

In his speech, Anthony al Helou, CEO at Sarooj Construction Company (SCC), Emphasised and



noted on the importance of the partnership between Sarooj Oasis Project and the role of the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning in making this project take flight, which is an important step that allows more partnerships to be possible in future endeavours.

At the heart of the project is The Plaza, a lively central space surrounded by retail outlets and sustainable transport facilities, enhancing social

and commercial engagement.

The business centre is a landmark hub, designed to offer a modern workspace easily accessible to all residents.

Sarooj Oasis is built with sustainability and convenience in mind, featuring pedestrian-friendly pathways and cycling tracks to encourage an active lifestyle.

The development incorporates mixed-use buildings, underground parking, and a central park, creating a well-balanced environment for families and professionals alike. A dedicated commercial plaza, along a sustainable transit corridor, ensures easy access to shopping and leisure.

Daycare facilities and proximity to schools make the project ideal for families seeking a connected, community-focused lifestyle.

As an investment, Sarooj Oasis offers a unique real estate opportunity, combining modern luxury with sustainability. With a variety of residential and commercial units, the project is designed to provide long-term value while delivering comfort, accessibility and environmental responsibility.



44.01’s carbon mineralisation project in the UAE.

Net-Zero ambitions. Mafic and ultramafic rock formations capable of mineralising CO2 are found on every continent making 44.01’s mineralisation technology a truly global climate solution. Mineralisation projects can be built quickly and modularly, offering

a cost-effective alternative to conventional geological carbon storage.

44.01 is now working to further develop and commercialise its technology. In 2024, 44.01 and ADNOC announced plans to scale up deployment of carbon mineralisation in the UAE following a successful pilot.

44.01 is also evaluating international opportunities, including in Norway where the company has recently established an office.

Talal Hasan, Founder and CEO of 44.01, said “I am excited to welcome Nysnø and Jasoor to 44.01. We believe carbon mineralisation will play a significant role in helping protect and repair our climate, and I look forward to working with our

new investors to help scale our technology internationally.”

John E Johannessen at Nysnø Climate Investments, said “We are very excited to support the talented 44.01 team and to join a strong investor consortium. Norway has long been a frontrunner in carbon capture and storage, and we are now looking forward to seeing 44.01’s solution for permanent CO2 removal through mineralisation being adopted and scaled in Norway as well as internationally, making significant impact in reducing climate gas emissions to the atmosphere.”

44.01 won the Earthshot Prize in 2022 and the company’s Project Hajar in the UAE was named an XPRIZE Carbon Removal Top 20 Finalist.

OPINION

Gamification: A game-changer for corporate transparency



**DR SUAAD JASSEM**

*The writer is assistant professor at College of Banking and Financial Studies*

**THE** fast advancement of digital transformation has transformed numerous businesses, with gamification technologies playing an important role in enhancing corporate transparency.

Gamification, the incorporation of game-like elements like as incentives, leaderboards, and challenges into non-game environments, has demonstrated efficacy in cultivating a culture of accountability and transparency.

For instance, multinational corporations like Deloitte and PwC have successfully implemented gamified platforms for compliance training and whistleblower programmes, reinforcing integrity and corporate responsibility.

Organisations can enhance employee motivation to comply with ethical practices and standards by implementing gamified solutions. These instruments typically make inflexible processes more interactive, promoting active involvement and improving comprehension.

Gamified training systems simplify complex regulations, facilitating understanding and application in routine activities. This guarantees that staff are well educated and fosters a sense of ownership and accountability.

Transparency is enhanced with interactive dashboards and performance analytics. Gamification may transform mundane reporting into dynamic and visually stimulating activities, enabling stakeholders to monitor progress and pinpoint areas for enhancement in real-time.

Leaderboards can display departmental accomplishments, promoting healthy competition and motivating teams to thrive while upholding ethical standards. This transparency fosters confidence among employees, management, and external stakeholders.

Integrating gamification into corporate governance also mitigates the issues of fraud and malfeasance. Organisations can cultivate an environment that recognises and values ethical behaviour by incentivising employees to report inconsistencies or complying with best practices.

This proactive strategy mitigates risks and strengthens a culture of transparency. Case examples of successful implementations, particularly by multinational organisations utilising gamified platforms to promote whistleblowing or oversee compliance, illustrate the concrete advantages of these technologies.

The efficacy of gamification technologies

*Integrating gamification into corporate governance also mitigates the issues of fraud and malfeasance. Organisations can cultivate an environment that recognises and values ethical behaviour by incentivising employees to report inconsistencies or complying with best practices.*

is largely contingent upon their meticulous design and execution.

Organisations must guarantee that these tools are congruent with their objectives and principles. Moreover, ongoing surveillance and feedback systems are crucial for optimising these systems and enhancing their effectiveness. Regular staff surveys can assess engagement levels, while data analytics can evaluate the efficacy of certain gamified efforts.

Investing in training programs to acclimatise personnel to gamified platforms can augment their efficacy, facilitating seamless incorporation into daily workflows.

The evolving business landscape presents gamification technologies as a promising means to enhance transparency and accountability. By converting compliance and governance into compelling and beneficial experiences, organisations may cultivate stronger, more ethical entities.

Disseminating novel methodologies can stimulate dialogues that encourage the broader implementation of these technologies. By promoting gamification as a means to enhance transparency, we may facilitate significant advancement and transform corporate governance for the contemporary age.

WHAT’S FUELLING THE STEEP RISE IN GLOBAL GOLD PRICES?



**HAIDER AL LAWATI**  
*haiderdawood@hotmail.com*

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

**ANALYSTS** expect gold prices to continue rising in the coming period due to ongoing global political and economic instability, as well as increasing geopolitical conflicts.

Additionally, the recent decisions by US President Donald Trump to impose higher tariffs on imports from Mexico, Canada (currently paused for 30 days), and China have further influenced market trends. According to global financial and banking data, gold prices are rising daily. The value of an ounce of gold is projected to reach \$3,000 in the first half of 2025. Over the past months, gold has surged by more than 30%, reaching \$650 per ounce since the beginning of 2024—its largest increase since 2008.

Several factors contribute to this price surge. Central banks have purchased approximately 528 tonnes of gold in the past eight months, driven by economic uncertainty and geopolitical concerns. Additionally, the price of gold is influenced by supply and demand dynamics. Increased consumer demand can drive prices higher, while economic and political crises encourage investors to seek gold as a safe-haven asset.

Interest rates also play a crucial role. When interest rates rise, gold prices may decline as other investments become more attractive. Conversely, a weaker US dollar often strengthens gold’s appeal as a store of value.

Experts suggest that gold can be a good investment depending on an individual’s financial situation and goals. It serves as a hedge against economic instability, diversifies investment portfolios, and helps reduce risk. However, gold investment also comes with storage and insurance costs, requiring individuals to seek financial advice before making decisions.

The leading gold-producing nations include China, Australia, Russia, the USA, and South Africa. Among the top gold consumers, India ranks high due to cultural, economic, and religious factors, followed by China and several Arab Gulf states.

Gold remains a symbol of wealth and social status worldwide. While the US and European markets focus on gold primarily for investment and inflation protection, future price expectations remain bullish.

Factors such as weak US economic data, escalating trade tensions following new US tariffs, and potential Federal Reserve decisions on interest rates will continue to shape the gold market. Traders should closely monitor global trends to make informed decisions.

Indian Budget 2025: NRIs unimpressed

**THE** Union Budget presented by Indian Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on February 1, 2025, was a big win for the Indian middle class but failed to address many of the long-pending demands of the middle-class Indian diaspora.

Their demands included, among other things, a comprehensive social security scheme under one umbrella covering pension, health insurance, other contingency schemes, and a rehabilitation programme on resettlement. The existing schemes have not reached them due to multiple reasons.

Currently, NRIs are not permitted to join most of the popular Small Saving Schemes of the Indian government, including the Sovereign Gold Bond Scheme (SGBs). Discriminatory personal tax laws and excessive airfare during festive and school vacations are other areas of concern.

The representations made by Overseas Associations did not find any respite in this matter. On the other hand, the Union Budget tightens tax regulations for NRIs including students and young professionals abroad.

There will be more scrutiny on their remittances, residential status, financial transfer, and higher compliance and risk of double taxation.

These reforms, positioned as part of India’s broader alignment with international tax norms, introduce financial complexity for those balancing obligations between their host country and India.

It is worthwhile to mention that the Indian diaspora has sent back home a whopping amount of \$129 billion in 2024, the highest ever. The forex earnings are vital for the economic development of India. As such NRIs deserve better treatment.

However, the NRIs also benefited from the proposed income tax upward revision on the basic exemption limit of Rs 12 lakhs from the existing Rs 7 lakhs and the benefits due to the revised tax slabs, on their domestic income.

The NRI entrepreneurs and the investing community are happy as their demand for parity in taxation, and exemptions were met. The foreign investor-friendly



The budget yielded no concrete measures to arrest the depreciation of the Indian Rupee . — Reuters



**R MADHU-SOODANAN**

*The writer is the Executive Advisor to the Board, Global Money Exchange, Muscat*

announcements and the 100 per cent FDI in the insurance sector will attract more capital flows to the country.

Back home, various initiatives in the agricultural MSME, urban reforms, increase in capex, education, employment generations, duty cuts, export reforms, the commitment to doing ease of business, etc. are the government’s efforts to accelerate growth.

**INDIAN RUPEE OUTLOOK**

No concrete measures were seen to arrest the depreciation of the INR. The Indian Rupee has been under pressure since October 2024 and it depreciated over 4 per cent against USD.

All Emerging Market (EM) currencies will continue to be under pressure in the short term because of the rates held, the hawkish stand of the FED, and the US trade and tariff policies. Indian forex outflow is continuing.

In a statement, the Indian Finance Minister: “There has been no ‘devaluation’ of the Indian Rupee, which is a feature of a fixed exchange rate regime. The value of the INR is

market-determined, with no target or specific level or band.” This statement is also to be seen as a shift from the earlier stand.

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has been constantly intervening in the forex market to keep the rupee fall minimum. Going forward, the intervention will be less and the rate will be market driven.

NRIs and Indian exporters are expected to benefit from this move. The RBI policy review scheduled during the week will give cues about the rupee’s movements in the short term.

The NRIs and Indian exporters are happy with the INR depreciation as they get more value for their earnings.

No doubt, the provisions of the budget indicate the strategic approach of the government toward economic expansion, fiscal prudence, and sectoral growth.

While the Indian middle class has been taken by surprise by giving higher tax exemptions and reduced tax slabs, it failed to impress its counterparts abroad whose remittances are vital to the Indian economy.

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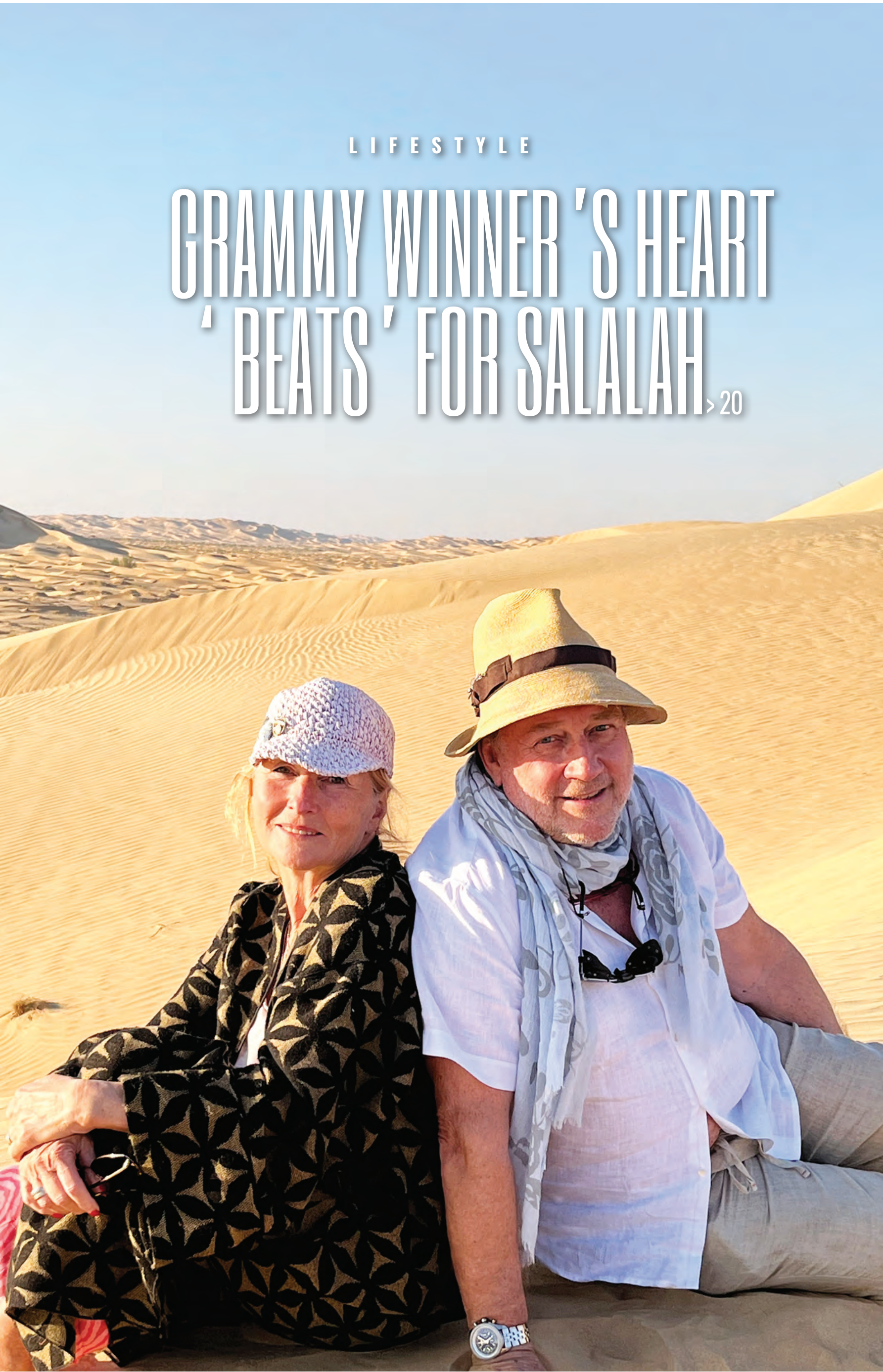
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ENTERTAINMENT

### Baldoni, Lively lawyers face off in \$400m 'It Ends With Us' case



LAWYERS FOR Hollywood stars Justin Baldoni and Blake Lively faced off Monday in their \$400 million defamation fight, as Baldoni's side dropped a cache of case documents online prompting censure from the judge.

Hollywood power couple Lively and Ryan Reynolds are being targeted by Baldoni, Lively's co-star on bleak romance movie "It Ends With Us," after she sued Baldoni and alleged misconduct.

In the latest caustic twist in the legal battle engulfing the film, Baldoni's team created a website containing a trove of messages and documents relating to the case.

In court, Judge Lewis Liman said the latest amended complaint, which included emails and text messages between Baldoni and Lively and Reynolds -- who Baldoni is also suing -- broke court procedure, US media reported.

The Manhattan federal judge threatened to bring forward the date of the trial, currently slated for March 2026, if the parties to the case continue to litigate the dispute in the media.

"You've got a lot in front of the court that gives, I think, the public plenty to feast upon," Liman said reportedly.

The \$400 million suit from Baldoni, who also directed the film, came after Lively filed a misconduct complaint against him, protesting her treatment on set, and then a lawsuit accusing him of launching a retaliatory media campaign against her. Baldoni has sought to have the case against him dismissed.

"We just couldn't be more pleased with how all the issues were managed. We're going to move as quickly as we possibly can and prove our innocence," Baldoni's lawyer Bryan Freedman said outside court following the hearing.

Lively's lawyer Michael Gottlieb said he was "very happy with how the hearing went" -- but did not elaborate.

The war between the stars was dragged into the spotlight when fans noticed during promotion of the film that they did not follow one another on social media. It quickly emerged that Lively had complained of Baldoni's behavior on the set, accusing him of -- among other things -- speaking inappropriately about his personal life and seeking to add intimate scenes into the film that she had not previously agreed to.

Baldoni has also sued The New York Times after it published a piece about that alleged smear campaign, including what it said were emails and texts discussing the media outcry. Baldoni countered that Lively hijacked the production of "It Ends With Us" and that she defamed him and, with Reynolds, sought to extort him. —AFP

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



MUSIC

French singer Clara Luciani (R) poses next to her wax statue during its unveiling at the Musee Grevin wax museum in Paris. — AFP



LIFESTYLE

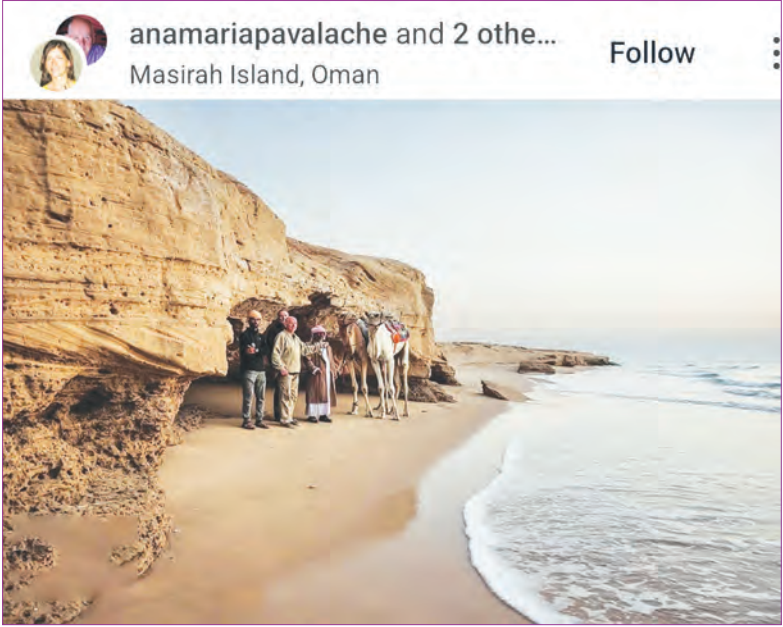
British-US editor-in-chief of Vogue Anna Wintour poses with their medal after being appointed as a Member of the Order of the Companions of Honour (CH) following an Investiture ceremony at Buckingham Palace in London. —AFP



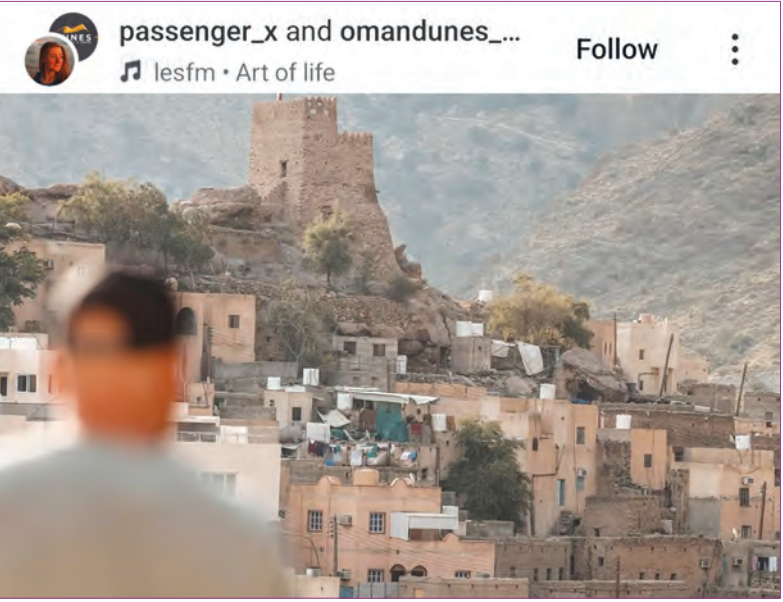
GASTRONOMY

A chef prepares meals on the deck of Bustronomy, a double-decker restaurant bus, in Dubai, United Arab Emirates. —AFP

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Juliette Binoche to lead Cannes Film Festival jury



FRENCH ACTRESS Juliette Binoche will be president of the jury at this year's Cannes Film Festival, organisers announced on Tuesday.

Binoche will be marking 40 years since her first appearance at the renowned French film festival, according to the event's web site.

"Juliette Binoche has won over audiences and critics alike, bringing together today's greatest film-makers in her world-class filmography," a statement said.

The jury selects the winner of the festival's main prize, the Palme d'Or, which will be awarded this year on May 24.

Binoche, who is best known internationally for her role in "The English Patient," has been president of the European Film Academy since May 2024.

She is one of the few

French actresses to have won an Oscar. She has also been named best actress by the three major film festivals in Cannes, Berlin and Venice.

"I'm looking forward to sharing these life experiences with the members of the Jury and the public," she said in a statement.

The festival opens on May 13. US director Greta Gerwig was president of the jury last year.

The Cannes Film Festival, established in 1946, is renowned for its prestigious reputation and world premieres of major films. It showcases diverse cinema, awards the coveted Palme d'Or, and attracts celebrities, making it a prime networking venue in the industry. Each year, it generates immense anticipation and media attention. — dpa



Centuries-old Algerian indigenous tradition champions sharing

IN A VILLAGE nestled in the mountains of northeastern Algeria, locals and visitors gathered under a cold winter sky to celebrate Tamechrit, a centuries-old Berber tradition rooted in sharing.

Seeking to preserve a practice that faded during the Algerian civil war of the 1990s, villagers marked Tamechrit with Berber music and food on the occasion coinciding in January with the Amazigh new year.

The minority community of Berbers refer to themselves as the Amazigh, meaning "free people". They have long fought for recognition for their ancient culture and language in modern states across North Africa.

Berbers are descendants of pre-Arab North Africans, whose historic homelands stretched from the Canary Isles and Morocco to the deserts of western Egypt.

"We hope to perpetuate this tradition during cultural or religious festivals," bringing together different people from the village and even those who have left, Dahmane Barbacha, a 41-year-old from Ath Atig village, said.

Children wore temporary Amazigh face tattoos at the event that dates back to the 13th century, according to historian Saleh Ahmed Baroudi.

Tamechrit means "offering" in Tamazight, the community's language recognised as an official language alongside Arabic in Algeria. It represents "an occasion for gathering, fraternity, and reconciliation between families" across Amazigh villages, said Baroudi, who teaches contemporary Algerian history.

Different regions of the country use other names for the custom, he added.

The merrymaking is also held to observe major Islamic events such as the fasting month of Ramadan, Prophet Mohammed's birthday, and Ashura.

It is often held in Zawiyas, small places for worship and religious teaching, usually where a local saint or holy figure lived and was buried.

Baroudi said most of those sites are in mountainous regions, adding to the "spiritual dimension" of Tamechrit.



RECONCILIATION

The festival begins days in advance, when men from the village collect donations to purchase cattle whose meat is later distributed equally among families.

During the event a communal meal -- usually couscous prepared by village women -- is served to everyone, regardless of social standing.

Ammar Benkherouf, a 36-year-old living in France, said he has been taking annual leaves in recent years to attend the ceremony.

"I can't describe the happiness it brings me to help keep this heritage alive," he said.

By midday, the communal couscous is served to villagers and visitors while volunteers distribute the portioned meat around the village's households.

Tamechrit had also been a tool for fostering solidarity during Algeria's Independence War against French colonial rule from 1954-1962, according to Baroudi.

The ritual then faded during the country's civil war between 1992 and 2002, a conflict between authorities and Islamist groups that claimed the lives of around 200,000 after the Islamic Salvation

Front (FIS) party won municipal and legislative elections.

Tamechrit then "made a comeback in the early 2000s" with the end of the civil war, said Baroudi.

Today, Tamechrit continues to bring together villagers and resolve conflicts between them.

Farhat Medhous, a 31-year-old who heads a cultural association in Ath Atig, said his group now looks to "restore women's participation in these traditions inherited from their ancestors".

He said that, traditionally, women held their own gatherings in a separate area from the men's, but their involvement diminished even after the civil war.

In addition, he added, the association aims at teaching the younger generations Tamechrit values, meaning sharing and reconciliation.

He said this year's festivity was organised by villagers aged 18 to 40.

"We have held activities for children to teach them the values of volunteerism and community," said Medhous. "This prepares them to preserve these traditions as they grow older." — AFP

FEATURES

BY KAUSHALENDRA SINGH  
PHOTOS BY BIRGITT WOLFF

**HAROLD** Faltermeyer, a two-time Grammy Award-winning composer celebrated for his iconic scores such as the ‘Top Gun Anthem’ and ‘Beverly Hills Cop’, recently visited the Wilayat of Salalah. Captivated by its natural beauty and tranquillity, he shared insights on his musical journey, the evolution of the industry, and his newfound inspiration in Salalah. In a candid conversation with the Oman Observer, Faltermeyer reflected on his past, present, and future in music:

**MUSICALLY, HOW DO THINGS DIFFER FROM THE 1980S, WHEN YOU WON TWO GRAMMY AWARDS, TO NOW?**  
The landscape has changed significantly. In the past, large studios and expensive equipment were essential for music creation. Today, technology has made the process considerably more accessible. Composers can now create with minimal resources, and sound storage is far more efficient. While this accessibility is advantageous, it also necessitates that composers continually innovate to avoid what I term “musical pollution”—the practice of reusing pre-made sounds without creativity.

**HAS THE AUDIENCE CHANGED? HAVE YOU HAD TO EVOLVE YOUR STYLE TO REMAIN RELEVANT?**  
Absolutely. A composer must adapt to the times, taking into account sociological and political influences. Stagnation leads to obsolescence. For me, the challenge lies in striking a balance—preserving my signature style while integrating modern elements. I adjust instruments and sounds to align with my artistic vision rather than using them in their original form.

**COULD YOU SHARE DETAILS ABOUT YOUR CURRENT AND UPCOMING PROJECTS?**  
I have chosen to step away from composing for films. After the global success of ‘Top Gun: Maverick’, I felt there was no greater milestone to achieve. Instead, I am focusing on theatrical productions, which allow for greater creative freedom. Unlike films, which require meticulous frame-by-frame work, theatre enables me to explore multiple genres—from classical to jazz to pop. I recently completed a successful musical in Germany, and I found the process profoundly rewarding.

**YOU’VE COMPOSED SOME LEGENDARY SCORES. ARE THERE ANY INTERESTING STORIES BEHIND THEM?**  
One of the more amusing anecdotes concerns the creation of the ‘Top Gun Anthem’. Initially, I composed a brief melody for a scene in an entirely different film about a character aspiring to be a baseball star. While I was developing it, Billy Idol, who was working in a neighbouring studio, heard the tune and assumed it was connected to ‘Top Gun’. His interest sparked the thought that perhaps he was onto something! Later, when I was approached for ideas regarding ‘Top Gun’, I played that melody, and the rest, as they say, is history.

**EVERY MUSICIAN HAS A GOLDEN PERIOD. WHEN WAS YOURS?**  
Without a doubt, it was the 1980s. That period marked the beginning of my innovative approach to film scoring, starting with ‘Beverly Hills Cop’. At that time, comedies typically utilised grand orchestras, but I introduced electronic scoring, which revolutionised the industry. The true measure of success is when others begin to imitate your work. Winning two Grammys in 1986 and 1987 confirmed I was on the right path.

**IS THERE ANYTHING LEFT FOR YOU TO ACHIEVE?**  
At this stage, my aspirations are quite simple: to maintain good health, cherish moments with my family, and enjoy my music.

**WHO INSPIRED YOU AS A MUSICIAN?**  
I have always been captivated by romantic operas—particularly the works of composers like Verdi and Puccini. Upon moving to America, I became enamoured with the West Coast sound, including bands such as



# GRAMMY WINNER’S HEART ‘BEATS’ FOR SALALAH



the Eagles, Doobie Brothers, Toto, and Earth, Wind & Fire. I eventually had the privilege of collaborating with many of them, which was an extraordinary experience.

**HAVE YOU EXPLORED ARABIC MUSIC AND ITS INSTRUMENTS?**  
Certainly! I have integrated Oriental instruments into my work, notably in the video game ‘Two Worlds’, which featured themes of lost cities and ancient cultures. Arabic music is incredibly rich—both vibrant and deeply rooted. During my visit to Oman’s desert, I was captivated by traditional music. Instruments like the Oud provide a unique texture that I would relish the opportunity to experiment with further.

**HOW HAS SALALAH INFLUENCED YOUR ARTISTIC VISION?**

The beauty and tranquillity of Salalah have been profoundly inspiring. I find great solace in sitting by the shore and contemplating—it’s akin to meditation. The ancient architecture also intrigues me; it harmoniously blends with nature, much like the traditional Alpine homes I admire in Germany and Austria. This connection to the environment resonates deeply within me. I have been so moved by Salalah that I intend to dedicate some music to this remarkable place.

Salalah has left a lasting impression on Harold Faltermeyer. His visit has indelibly marked him, just as his music has touched the world. His passion for exploration and innovation continues to thrive, proving that creativity knows no bounds—whether in Hollywood or amid the serene landscapes of Oman.