

O M A N
Observer
D A I L Y

WINTER
AND VIRAL
SPREAD

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INBRIEF

REGISTRATION FOR
‘TOGETHER WE
ADVANCE’ FORUM

MUSCAT: The General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers announced the start of registration for participation in the fourth edition of the ‘Together We Advance’ forum, from Sunday until December 28. The forum, which will be held on February 8 and 9, 2026, aims to consolidate community partnership in decision-making in order to achieve national aspirations for progress and prosperity.

The forum will feature a number of discussion and dialogue sessions extending over two consecutive days, during which the topics chosen by the citizens participating in the electronic voting phase that took place during last October will be discussed, including: the ‘Oman Vision 2040 topic: the reality of achievement and prospects for progress, the investment aspirations in priority economic sectors topic, in addition to the development of the governorates topic and their role in promoting investment in manufacturing industries, the tourism industry and the digital economy. The forum will also discuss the topics of improving government services to enhance productivity and competitiveness, and self-employment and entrepreneurship to build a productive national economy and a sustainable labour market.

The forum will include a focused dialogue session on the role of the five-year plan and priority sectors in building a diversified and sustainable economy. — ONA

RAFO OFFICER
WINS FIRST PLACE IN
RAF CRANWELL



Lieutenant Ali bin Arif al Balushi from the Royal Air Force of Oman (RAFO) won the first place among international students at the Royal Air Force College Cranwell (RAFC) in the United Kingdom (UK). The award is granted to the officer who excels in leadership, discipline, competence and professionalism as well as academic excellence. The achievement reflects the advanced level of training and competitiveness of the affiliates of the Royal Air Force of Oman.

OMAN, TÜRKIYE
REVIEW ECONOMIC
COOPERATION

The Omani-Turkish Joint Committee held a meeting as part of its thirteenth session in the Turkish capital Ankara, on Saturday. The committee reviewed ways to enhance bilateral cooperation between the two friendly countries in various fields. The committee identified priorities and ways of transforming them into joint programmes and projects in several economic and development sectors of mutual interest. The meeting addressed several topics including trade and investment, the current state of bilateral trade, ways to diversify traded goods and increase trade volume between the two countries, activating the role of business councils, promoting joint investment opportunities including in e-commerce solutions, joint platforms and shipping and re-export facilities. **DETAILS ON P2**

Sayyid Theyazin opens Arab Shooting Championship

HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, presided over the opening ceremony of the Arab Shooting Championship 2025, in the presence of Maj Gen Mattar bin Salim al Balushi, first Vice-Chairman of Oman Shooting Association, on Saturday. The opening ceremony was held at the Al Shafaq Club of the Sultan’s Armed Forces. The ceremony combined authenticity and modernity with a visual presentation featuring the long history of shooting. At the end of the ceremony, HH Sayyid Theyazin announced the opening of the tournament.

Brig Gen Khalid bin Ali al Muqbali, Secretary General of the Oman Shooting Federation, emphasised that this championship aims to strengthen the bonds of brotherhood and



cooperation, as these sporting gatherings represent a means to unify and strengthen common ties within the framework of fraternal values and principles.

For his part, Eng Duaij Khalaf al Otaibi, President of the Arab

Shooting Federation, pointed in his speech to the vision of the Arab Federation in supporting and developing this sport and enhancing cooperation between the Arab national federations.

In his speech, Luciano Rossi,

President of the International Shooting Sport Federation, highlighted the importance of the championship and its international standing, announcing that the Sultanate of Oman has been granted the right to organise a new championship under the name (Sultan of Oman International Open Shooting Cup), following the International Shooting Sport Federation’s approval and official support for this new international event, to be a prominent platform for promoting sporting excellence, consolidating international cooperation, and embodying the sustainable partnership between the International Shooting Sport Federation and the Sultanate of Oman, reflecting the advanced position that the Sultanate of Oman enjoys on the world sports map. — ONA

1.6 million exposed
to acute food insecurity

UN SECRETARY-GENERAL Antonio Guterres said that the Gaza Strip is facing a worsening humanitarian catastrophe, noting that 1.6 million people in the Strip are exposed to extreme levels of acute food insecurity.

Guterres said in a press statement on Saturday that the suffering in Gaza has reached an unprecedented level as a result of the blockade and destruction, calling on the international community to take immediate action to stop the deterioration of the situation and ensure the entry of humanitarian aid without delay.

He stressed that ending the occupation and enabling the Palestinian people to exercise their legitimate rights is the only way to achieve security and just and lasting peace in the region. The humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip has worsened recently with heavy rains, which caused the flooding of the tents of thousands of displaced people who lack minimum means of protection.

Health authorities in the Gaza Strip announced the death of a



Palestinians gather to receive food portions at a charity kitchen in the Nuseirat refugee camp in the central Gaza Strip on Saturday. — AFP

one-month-old infant as a result of the storm and severe cold, bringing the number of deaths caused by the harsh weather conditions in the Strip to 13.

The international community’s failure to break the Israeli blockade imposed on the Gaza Strip has directly contributed to deepening the worsening humanitarian crisis.

Meanwhile, Türkiye’s MIT intelligence agency chief met Hamas’ negotiating team head Khalil al Hayya on Saturday and discussed necessary measures to be taken for proceeding to the second phase of the Gaza peace plan, Turkish security sources said.

The sources, speaking on condition of anonymity, said MIT chief Ibrahim Kalin met the Hamas delegation in Istanbul within the scope of the Gaza ceasefire agreement, and they discussed steps to be taken to prevent what they said were Israel’s ceasefire violations.

They also discussed measures to be taken to resolve existing issues for proceeding to the second phase of the plan, the sources also said, without giving details. — Agencies

SEE ALSO P6

Winter solstice begins in Oman today

MUSCAT: Winter solstice will begin in the Sultanate of Oman from Sunday marking the astronomical start of winter in the Northern Hemisphere. The phenomenon will begin at 7:03 pm local time on Sunday, which will see the shortest day and longest night of the year.

Maather bint Khamis al Wahibiyah, Head of the Community Outreach Committee at the Oman Society of Astronomy and Space, said that today will be the shortest day and the longest night. The sun will rise in Muscat at 6:44 am and set at 5:25 pm Oman local time,

with the day lasting 10 hours and 41 minutes. This marks the first day of winter, which will last for 88 days, 23 hours, and 42 minutes. The phenomenon follows the autumnal equinox that occurred last September.

Al Wahibiyah said that the winter solstice occurs as a result of the Earth’s axis tilting farthest from the Sun.

Because the Earth is not perpendicular to the sun but tilted at an angle of 23.5 degrees, the northern and southern hemispheres alternate in receiving

sunlight. The distance between the Earth and the sun is not the cause. Therefore, it is a common misconception to say that summer and winter result from the Earth’s proximity to or distance from the sun.

The Earth is at its closest point to the sun (perihelion) during winter in the northern hemisphere, confirming that the coldness of winter is not related to the distance between the Earth and the sun, but rather to the angle at which the sun’s rays strike the sun. — ONA

OMAN

SHORT TAKES



Poets were honoured in recognition of their creative contributions

POETRY FESTIVAL ENDS WITH ARAB, OMANI POETS FETED

MUSCAT: The activities of the 13th Omani Poetry Festival, organised by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, concluded after five days of rich literary engagement, featuring a distinguished group of Omani poets alongside participants from several Arab countries.

The closing ceremony was held at the Ministry of Information Theatre in Muscat under the auspices of Sayyid Saud bin Hilal al Busaidy, Governor of Muscat.

At the outset of the ceremony, poet Dr Omar Mahrous delivered a speech on behalf of the participating poets, describing the festival as “a luminous milestone that affirms the continuity of Oman’s cultural project, its conscious openness to Arab creativity, and its firm belief that poetry remains capable of uniting hearts, harmonising visions and elevating aesthetic taste.”

The ceremony also featured the screening of a documentary film highlighting the festival’s key events, underscoring its role as a prominent cultural platform that reflects the vitality of the poetic movement in the Sultanate of Oman. The film showcased poetry evenings, intellectual seminars and critical readings of the works of honoured Omani poets, while also spotlighting the contributions of guest poets from across the Arab world.

The event concluded with the minister honouring the poets who participated in the festival, in recognition of their creative contributions. — ONA

OMAN-TÜRKIYE JOINT COMMITTEE BOOSTS TRADE, INVESTMENT



Oman, Türkiye signed a MoU in education, further strengthening educational ties.

MUSCAT: The 13th session of the Omani-Turkish Joint Committee, held in Ankara, reviewed ways to enhance bilateral cooperation and boost trade and investment between the two friendly countries. The Omani delegation was headed by Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, while the Turkish side was led by Mehmet Şimşek, Minister of Treasury and Finance.

Discussions focused on expanding trade exchange, diversifying traded goods, and promoting joint investment opportunities, including e-commerce solutions, shipping, and re-export facilities. The committee also explored cooperation in industry, industrial zones, technology transfer, innovation-linked manufacturing and localisation.

Key areas of collaboration discussed included standards, accreditation, digital transformation in standardisation, financial and banking cooperation, SMEs, transport and logistics, energy and mining, tourism, culture, sports, education, higher education, scientific research, health, environment, urban planning, media and capacity building.

The meeting witnessed the signing of a memorandum of understanding in education, further strengthening educational ties between Oman and Türkiye. Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef held meetings with Turkish counterparts, including Minister Omar Bolat and Minister Mehmet Fatih Kacır, to discuss trade, investment, industrial partnerships, and the formation of technical working groups. — ONA

GLOBAL EXPERTS MEET TO ADVANCE EYE HEALTH

MUSCAT: The International Joint Conference on Ophthalmology Research, Medicine and Surgery, concluded here on Saturday.

Organised by the Medical City for Military and Security Services, the conference came up with several recommendations including enhancing early diagnosis and effective treatment of eye diseases, applying the findings of scientific research, and adopting modern medical technologies to ensure higher success rates in surgical procedures.

The conference stressed the



importance of continuous training for ophthalmologists and technicians to upgrade their skills, promoting scientific research and

international cooperation and raising community awareness of the importance of eye health care. It emphasised the need to develop health policies and update procedures related to eye care to ensure the provision of high-quality medical services to all society segments.

The conference witnessed specialised scientific sessions, high-quality lectures, and advanced workshops that discussed the latest scientific and research developments in the fields of ophthalmology and eye surgery. — ONA

Al Batinah North boosts green cover with 100,000 seedlings

SIHAM AL SAIDI
SUHAR, DEC 20

THE Al Batinah North Green Initiative continues to serve as a cornerstone of the governorate’s annual development plan, demonstrating a strong commitment to environmental sustainability and community wellbeing.

Aiming to increase green coverage by 5.2 per cent annually, the initiative seeks to improve air quality, reduce pollution, and enhance the quality of life by expanding urban green spaces in line with international standards.

As part of the initiative, the governorate’s central nursery is cultivating and planting 100,000 seedlings, contributing to Oman’s national goal of achieving carbon neutrality by 2050.

Trees play a vital role in absorbing carbon dioxide, reducing emissions, and addressing climate change challenges.

Eng Ali al Jabri, Director of the Technical Affairs Department at Al Batinah North Municipality, said, “The Green Al Batinah North Initiative reflects our strategic vision to balance development with environmental responsibility. By expanding green spaces and engaging the community, we are not only improving the urban landscape but also protecting natural resources for future generations.”

Community participation is a key feature of the initiative, with programmes such as Best



The initiative introduced innovative public projects, including the governorate’s first women-only walking track

The initiative seeks to improve air quality, reduce pollution and enhance the quality of life

Neighbourhood and Best Home Garden competitions, open planting days, and educational visits for schools to the central nursery. These efforts foster environmental awareness and encourage public involvement in sustainability efforts. Collaboration with OQ has resulted in the planting of 4,600 trees and shrubs within Sohar Industrial Port, significantly increasing green coverage in industrial areas and supporting carbon reduction goals.

The initiative has also introduced innovative public projects, including the governorate’s first women-only walking track and Oman’s first dedicated pathway for the visually impaired, inaugurated

on White Cane Day in October 2024.

Resident Idris al Maqbali from Suhar noted, “The expansion of green spaces has made a real difference in our daily lives. Parks and walking paths have become healthier and more welcoming places for families.

These projects are designed with people in mind and encourage us to adopt a more active and environmentally conscious lifestyle.”

Through smart farming technologies and the development of new public parks across the governorate, the Al Batinah North Green Initiative continues to promote a sustainable, inclusive and healthier future for the community.

National Museum opens ‘Silver Splendor’ exhibition in Belarus

MINSK: The National Museum has opened the exhibition ‘Silver Splendor: Collections from the Omani Court’ at the National Museum of Fine Arts in Minsk, Belarus, as part of Oman Day events and ongoing efforts to strengthen bilateral relations between the Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of Belarus. The exhibition will run until March 18, 2026.

The exhibition highlights Omani silver as a historically pioneering craft, showcasing a curated collection of artefacts belonging to the Sultans of Oman in Muscat and Zanzibar. It reflects the artistic, cultural and symbolic significance of silver in Omani society, where it represents beauty, protection and refined craftsmanship.

The opening ceremony was held under the auspices of HH Sayyidah Dr Mona bint Fahd al Said, Assistant Vice-Chancellor for International Cooperation at SQU and Vice-Chairperson of the Board of Trustees of the National Museum. In her address, she underlined the importance of strengthening friendship and expanding cultural and intellectual cooperation between the two friendly nations.

Jamal bin Hassan al Mousawi, Secretary-General of the National Museum, said the exhibition was organised following the official visit of President Alexander Lukashenko of Belarus to the Sultanate of Oman in December 2024 and his directive to host the exhibition in Minsk. He noted that



The exhibition by The National Museum in Belarus embodies Oman’s cultural diplomacy by presenting Omani heritage in a universal artistic language

the exhibition embodies Oman’s cultural diplomacy by presenting Omani heritage in a universal artistic language that fosters mutual understanding and cooperation.

He added that the displayed artefacts, particularly the Omani dagger, reflect the depth of craftsmanship and symbolic meaning in Omani culture, illustrating the convergence of art, royalty, authenticity and innovation. He also recalled Oman’s participation as guest of honour during the 80th anniversary of the National Museum of Fine Arts in Minsk, when the exhibition ‘Oman, Pearl of the East: Handicrafts’ was presented in 2019. The exhibition

is organised into five main sections: the Omani dagger, perfume culture, silver craftsmanship, traditional costumes, and elite attire of prominent Omani figures in East Africa. The dagger section traces its history from the third millennium BC and highlights various types, including the Saidi, Nizwa and Suri daggers.

The traditional costumes section showcases men’s and women’s attire, accessories and weapons adorned with silver, including a shield and flintlock weapon from the private collection of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik.

— ONA



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SHORTTAKES

GCC UNIFIED PRISONERS WEEK BEGINS TODAY

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, DEC 20

The Unified Gulf Prisoners Week activities, celebrated across GCC countries, officially begin today in Oman under the coordination of the Royal Oman Police Directorate of Public Relations and Security Information.

Observed annually in December, GCC Inmates Week focuses on prisoner rehabilitation, support for families and community integration. The week features training programmes, educational initiatives, family days and, in some cases, pardons for good behaviour to help prisoners reintegrate as productive members of society.

This year's activities include an exhibition of products made by male and female inmates of the Central Prison, under the auspices of Sayyid Salim bin Musallam al Busaidy, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Labour for Human Resources Development, at 10 am on Sunday at the Mall of Oman.

Lt Col Mohammed bin Salam al Sultaniya, Assistant Director of Security Relations and Media, on behalf of Major General Ali bin Abdullah al Shar, said the week emphasises the reformation of prisoners, including training in IT, soft skills and personality development to prepare inmates for a better future.

Community partnerships form a vital part of the GCC Inmates Week, with government agencies, charities, and educational institutions collaborating on rehabilitation efforts. Family days are organised to strengthen bonds and alleviate personal challenges faced by prisoners.

The Royal Oman Police also conducts public awareness campaigns and exhibitions to educate society about prisoner rehabilitation and the importance of second chances.

Village of Happiness hosts inclusive family carnival

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
MUSCAT, DEC 20

The two-day Village of Happiness Carnival, inaugurated by Dr Khamis bin Saif al Jabri, Chairman of Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit, at the Oman Civil Aviation Club on Friday, concluded successfully on Saturday. Organised by HH Sayyidah Hujaija bint Jaifer al Said, Chairperson of the Association for Children with Disabilities, and managed by the Civil Aviation Club, the carnival was held to mark the International Day of Persons with Disabilities.

The event reflected the objectives of Oman Vision 2040, particularly the Human and Society pillar, which focuses on building an inclusive society, empowering persons with disabilities, and ensuring their active participation in social, economic and cultural life.

In her address, HH Sayyidah Hujaija bint Jaifer al Said congratulated persons with disabilities and expressed her appreciation to strategic partners and sponsors whose support ensured that the carnival was fully accessible and offered free of charge to children and their families.

The World Health Organization (WHO), in collaboration with national partners, participated in the opening ceremony, aligning with this year's International Day of Persons with Disabilities theme: 'Fostering disability-inclusive societies for advancing social progress.'

The opening ceremony featured a traditional Omani dance performed



Over 2,000 children with disabilities and their families took part in the carnival

by children from the Hams Al Atheer Rehabilitation Center, followed by stage activities hosted by Mohammed bin Mousa al Balushi, a media presenter and a person with disability, underscoring the importance of empowerment and inclusion in leadership roles.

Dr Jean Jabbour, WHO Representative in Oman, highlighted that disability is an integral part of human diversity that enriches society, stressing the need to shift perspectives from limitations to capabilities.

The carnival also supported small and medium enterprises owned by persons with disabilities, offering a platform to showcase products and generate sustainable income, in line with the social and economic

sustainability goals of Oman Vision 2040. Among the participants was young entrepreneur Fatma Al Zahra al Lawati, who operated a stall featuring perfumed creams and handmade soaps, skills she acquired through the Down Syndrome Association.

Over 2,000 children with disabilities and their families took part in the carnival, alongside students from local schools, promoting values of coexistence, diversity and inclusiveness. Visitors enjoyed more than 30 activities, including educational workshops, arts and crafts, magic shows, horse riding, adapted car rides, face painting, circus performances and cartoon character shows — all designed with accessibility in mind.

Fireware and Nokia Host Exclusive Half-Day Event on the Future of Data Centers and AI-Ready Infrastructure



In the exquisite atmosphere of St.Regis Al Mouj, Muscat, Nokia and Fireware have successfully hosted an insightful session under the evocative title of: “The art of DC networking”. The key topics have been the evolution of data centers and the emerging trends of AI-driven infrastructures. on 9 December 2025 at The St. Regis Al Mouj Muscat Resort.

IT leaders from different business verticals gathered for a half-day program filled with expert insights, live demonstrations, and meaningful discussions on how modern data center architecture must evolve to support the next wave of technological growth.

Nokia's Data Center Fabric architecture is quickly becoming a global benchmark for performance, automation, and security. Nokia continues to lead network and operational innovation by introducing new high-performance data center switches and delivering exceptional flexibility for a wide range of deployment scenarios. Earlier in 2025,

Nokia was also named as a Visionary in the Gartner Magic Quadrant for Data Center Switching.

In his opening pitch, Stefano Resi, Head of Data Center Sales at Nokia MEA, has praised Fireware as “a company that has impressed us for its professionalism, technical orientation, and for the respect it receives from its customer”.

A major focus of the session was Nokia's Event-Driven Automation (EDA) platform, which transforms operational environments and contributes to a remarkable 96 percent reduction in downtime.

Nokia is a global leader in advanced networking technologies, empowering service providers, enterprises, and mission-critical industries with high-performance, secure, and automated infrastructure solutions. With a strong focus on future-ready networking, Nokia continues to shape the evolution of cloud, data center, and AI ecosystems with resilient, scalable innovations that support organizations worldwide.

OMAN AT ARAB MINISTERS OF SOCIAL AFFAIRS MEETING

AMMAN: *Oman participated in the 45th regular session of the Council of Arab Ministers of Social Affairs in Jordan. Dr Laila bint Ahmed al Najjar, Minister of Social Development, led Oman's delegation.*

Discussions focused on social dimensions of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, including poverty eradication, rights of persons with disabilities, integrated social protection, and care for the elderly. The council adopted an Arab road-map for building a welfare economy and reviewed programmes for 2026.

Dr Laila also participated in a Arab conference on implementing the Doha Declaration from the Second World Summit for Social Development, which addressed social inclusion, and Arab-international cooperation. — ONA

Investment Opportunity Samail Industrial City



The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates “Mada'yn” is pleased to announce the following investment opportunity in Samail Industrial City:

Opportunity Number	Project Name	Deadline for Documents Purchase	Field Visit Date	Proposal Submission Deadline	Fee (RO)
1/2025	Equipping, Managing, and Operating the Medical Fitness Examination Centre in Samail Industrial City	18/01/2026	14/01/2026	01/02/2026	25

Equipping and operating the medical fitness examination center aims to provide an examination service for physical fitness for employees expatriate workers and provide the highest levels of quality in the aspect of health benefits, which are provided to all employees who work within Samail Industrial City; in addition, the center serves local residents living near the Industrial city. The center's distinguished location enables its visitors to reach it easily due to its proximity to the gate and the highway. It is worth noting that the center extends over an area of 1100 square meters and includes many facilities, such as laboratories, clinics, cold rooms, X-ray rooms, and a number of other offices. The total area of land used is 3500 square meters.

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WINTER AND VIRAL SPREAD

AFRAH AL BALUSHI

IT IS a common misconception that cold weather itself causes illness. In reality, low temperatures do not directly lead to colds, influenza, or other viral infections. People become ill only when they are infected with viruses such as the common cold or flu, which are transmitted from person to person, not by the weather alone. However, winter creates conditions that make it easier for these viruses to spread. Cold, dry air weakens the body's natural defences. During winter, the air tends to be drier, which dries out the mucus lining in the nose and throat. These mucous membranes play a vital role in trapping germs before they enter the body. When they dry out, viruses can penetrate more easily, increasing susceptibility to

infection. The Ministry of Health (MoH) stresses the importance of preventive measures to reduce the risk of infection. These include frequent handwashing with soap and water or using hand sanitiser, avoiding crowded places, ensuring good ventilation in enclosed spaces, avoiding close contact with people showing symptoms of illness, refraining from touching the eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands and wearing masks in crowded areas. Health indicators show that the flu season has begun earlier than usual this year. Countries such as Japan have reported a sharp increase in cases since October, while parts of the European Union, including Spain, have already reached epidemic levels in certain regions. The MoH also urges high-risk groups to receive the annual flu vaccine, which remains the most effective

Cold weather doesn't cause illness, but winter conditions help viruses spread more easily

Dry air weakens the body's natural barriers, increasing susceptibility to infection

Vaccination, hygiene, ventilation, hydration and nutrition are key to prevention

method of prevention. The vaccine is safe, effective, and recommended for everyone aged six months and above. It is best administered just before the start of the flu season to ensure optimal protection. Medical professionals note that respiratory illnesses spread more rapidly in winter as viruses thrive in colder conditions, particularly in crowded indoor spaces with limited ventilation. Children and the elderly remain the most vulnerable. **BALANCED DIET** Experts further advise strengthening the immune system during winter by maintaining proper hydration. Drinking sufficient fluids helps keep the mucous membranes moist, reducing the likelihood of viral spread. A general guideline is to consume about 30 millilitres of fluids per kilogramme of body weight daily. For example, a

person weighing 70 kilogrammes should drink at least 2.1 litres of fluids per day. Water and unsweetened hot beverages are the healthiest choices. A balanced diet also plays a crucial role in supporting immunity. Adequate intake of micronutrients such as iron and zinc is essential, as these minerals support the function of T cells that help detect and fight viruses. Foods rich in iron and zinc include oats, lentils, sesame seeds and pumpkin seeds. Regular outdoor activity, such as walking, also contributes to overall immune strength. While winter invites warm clothing, hot drinks and cosy blankets, it also calls for increased vigilance. Staying warm, eating nutritious food, practising good hygiene, avoiding contact with infected individuals and staying well hydrated are simple yet effective steps to protect against seasonal viruses.

SHORT TAKES



The festival brought together elite military and artistic bands from various countries.

RGO BAND ENTHRALS AT DOHA INTL MUSIC, PEDESTRIAN FESTIVAL

DOHA: The Royal Guard of Oman Band delivered a dazzling musical performance during the opening ceremony of the first edition of the Doha International Music and Pedestrian Festival 2025, held at Katara Cultural Village in Doha.

The performance captivated audiences with its precision, discipline and rich musical repertoire, reflecting Oman’s distinguished military music heritage. The event was attended by Lt Gen (Pilot) Jassim bin Mohammed al Mannai, Chief of Staff of the Qatari Armed Forces, alongside Sayyid Ammar bin Abdullah al Busaidy, Ambassador of Oman to Qatar, in addition to senior officials, diplomats.

The participation of the Royal Guard of Oman Band comes at the invitation of the Qatari Ministry of Interior, reaffirming the band’s prominent international standing and its reputation for excellence in military music. The Royal Guard of Oman Band presented musical performances throughout the festival. The band also took part in Qatar’s National Day parade, contributing to the official celebrations marking the country’s National Day. — **ONA**

NATIONAL MUSEUM CONCLUDES RUSSIAN MUSIC SERIES



MUSCAT: The National Museum concluded its 2025 series of six musical evenings, organised in collaboration with the Rosconcert Music Foundation and the Ministry of Culture of the Russian Federation.

The events were part of the museum’s cultural programme celebrating 40 years of diplomatic and cultural relations between Oman and the Russian Federation.

The series aimed to highlight the depth of artistic cooperation between the two countries and promote cultural dialogue through music and the arts.

Through the musical evenings, the National Museum sought to consolidate its position as a platform for multicultural musical exchange, offering the public the opportunity to experience masterpieces of world classical music in a sophisticated artistic atmosphere. — **ONA**

AI detects fake Arabic news with 94% accuracy

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, DEC 20

A team at Sultan Qaboos University, led by Dr Ahmed Shahata from the College of Arts and Social Sciences, has developed a groundbreaking approach to tackling fake news in Arabic media, including social networks.

The team introduced ArabFake, a deep-learning algorithm designed to detect misleading news, classify content and evaluate the potential risks posed by its spread.

Built on the advanced MARBERTv2 model for multi-dialect Arabic tweets, ArabFake addresses the complexities of the



ArabFake addresses complexities of the Arabic language and performs three critical tasks.

Arabic language while performing three critical tasks: identifying fake news, categorising content and assessing risk.

The algorithm was trained on a verified dataset of 2,495 news items, labelled by experts for authenticity and risk,

and tested on two large datasets — ANS Corpus and AraNews — with nearly 200,000 Arabic news articles, both genuine and fabricated.

The results were impressive. ArabFake achieved 94.12 per cent accuracy in detecting fake news, 84.92 per cent in content classification and 88.91 per cent in risk assessment, demonstrating its reliability across multiple tasks.

The study also revealed patterns in Arabic fake news: fabricated stories accounted for 60.4 per cent of the dataset, while misleading economic information made up 22.4 per cent. Nearly two-

thirds of fake news was considered highly risky for society, highlighting the urgent need for effective detection systems.

ArabFake’s innovative use of equity recording techniques allowed it to identify linguistic patterns associated with fake news, providing insights into misinformation trends.

By simultaneously evaluating content authenticity, estimating risk levels and prioritising interventions, the algorithm offers practical opportunities for news organisations, fact-checking initiatives, content-moderation systems and media literacy programmes.

Khoula, Al Nahdha hospitals conduct 313 surgeries

MUSCAT: The Directorate-General of Khoula Hospital announced that it had performed 313 advanced surgeries across various specialties in the governorates of the Sultanate of Oman.

This is part of its efforts to enhance decentralisation and integration in providing specialised medical services.

In the field of colorectal surgery, more than 100 surgeries were performed at Ibra Hospital under the supervision of Dr Rashid bin Mohammed al Alawi, Consultant Colorectal Surgeon, in collaboration with a specialised medical team from Ibra Hospital.

In the field of spinal surgery, a specialised national medical team performed 14 emergency surgeries at the hospitals of Nizwa, Al Rustaq, Al Buraimi, Sohar and Sultan Qaboos Hospital in Salalah. This is in addition to three limb reconstruction surgeries using the



The surgeries are part of efforts to enhance decentralisation and integration in providing specialised medical services.

Ilizarov technique were performed in the hospitals of Ibra, Sohar and the University Medical City, under the supervision of a team from Khoula Hospital led by Dr Sultan bin Saif al Kalbani, Consultant Orthopaedic and Spinal Surgeon.

In the field of vascular surgery, Dr Ahmed bin Salem al Aufi, Consultant Vascular and Trauma Surgeon at Khoula Hospital,

performed eight surgeries in the hospitals of Ibra and Sinaw in Al Sharqiyah North Governorate.

A specialised neurology team also performed cerebral catheterisation procedures at Sohar Hospital, as part of efforts to bring advanced neurological services closer to patients in the governorates.

Meanwhile, Al Nahdha Hospital continued to conduct a number of

advanced surgeries and training programmes across various specialties. In ophthalmology, a specialised team conducted field visits to Khasab Hospital during which the team performed cataract surgeries and trained medical staff. A total of 100 surgeries were performed under the supervision of Dr Haitham bin Salem al Mahrouqi, Senior Specialist in Corneal Transplantation, Cataract Surgery and Vision Correction.

A specialised team from Al Nahdha Hospital also performed eyelid and orbital cosmetic surgeries during a visit to Al Rustaq Hospital, in addition to corneal transplant surgeries in Ibra Hospital, also under the supervision of the same team.

In the field of otolaryngology, 66 surgeries were performed in the hospitals of Khasab, Al Rustaq, Ibra, Sur, Al Buraimi and Sultan Qaboos Hospital in Salalah. — **ONA**

Oman’s wedding tourism generates RO 6m in 2024

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, DEC 20

OMAN Is strengthening its status as an attractive destination for big fat destination weddings. As a result, wedding tourism in the country generated over RO 6 million in 2024, and before the end of 2025, as many as 20 weddings are scheduled at various locations in Oman.

Promotion of wedding tourism in the country is in alignment with Oman Vision 2040, which aims to diversify the economy by promoting cultural and environmental tourism, further consolidating Oman’s status as a top wedding destination.

For couples seeking a truly memorable backdrop, Oman is fast emerging as the perfect destination, where rugged mountains meet pristine beaches and turquoise seas.

“Oman’s wedding tourism is seeing strong global demand, with more planners choosing the country as the backdrop for their special day,” said Khalid al Azri, Director of Cruise, Golf, Wedding and Charter. “So far, we have hosted more than a dozen weddings, and the number continues to grow.”

Oman offers a unique combination of picturesque landscapes and rich culture,

High-net-worth weddings not only promote tourism, but also generate jobs and support Omani small and medium enterprises.



A wedding ceremony being organised at Shangri-La Barr al Jissah.

making each wedding experience distinctive. The country’s diverse range of luxurious venues includes Al Bustan Palace, Shangri-La Barr al Jissah, and Anantara Al Jabal Al Akhdar, while more affordable options such as Sifawi Boutique Hotel cater to a wider audience.

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MoHT) collaborates with stakeholders to provide comprehensive services — from venue decoration and visas to transportation — ensuring a seamless experience for international clients. High-net-worth weddings not only promote tourism, but also generate jobs and support Omani small and medium enterprises.

India leads as the top source market for wedding tourism in Oman, with Indian couples often booking entire hotels for week-long celebrations. Each wedding typically attracts 400 to 800 guests, contributing significantly to the growth of hospitality, travel and other related sectors.

With incentives, packages and strong support from Customs, Emigration and the Airport Authority, Oman continues to strengthen its position as a world-class destination for destination weddings, perfectly aligned with Oman Vision 2040, which aims to diversify the economy and boost cultural and environmental tourism.

ROYAL OMAN POLICE

STATEMENT

With reference to the circular issued by the Ministry of Labour regarding the extension of the grace period granted for rectifying statuses and settling fines and financial obligations recorded against individuals and employers until 31 December 2025.

The Royal Oman Police calls upon all concerned categories to take advantage of this final additional grace period and to regularize their status in accordance with the applicable laws and regulations, as follows:

First:

Foreign nationals wishing to regularize their status by renewing their residence permits or transferring their employment within the Sultanate of Oman shall be exempted from all fines resulting from the expiry of their entry or residence permits (for holders of work residence permits), after verification of their status correction by the Ministry of Labour.

Second:

Foreign nationals wishing to leave the Sultanate of Oman permanently shall be exempted from all fines resulting from the termination of all types of non-work-related visas.

WORLD

SHORT TAKES



Former Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan

PAKISTAN COURT HANDS EX-PM KHAN 17-YEAR SENTENCE

ISLAMABAD: A Pakistani court sentenced former prime minister Imran Khan and his wife Bushra Bibi to 17 years on Saturday for corruption involving gifts the jailed leader received while in office. The ruling is the latest legal setback for Khan, who has faced a multitude of cases since his government was removed from power in 2022. Khan, incarcerated since 2023, has denied the charges and accused authorities of political persecution.

Both Khan and Bibi were handed a 10-year prison sentence on criminal breach of trust, and seven years on corruption charges in a case alleging the underpricing of state gifts. Under Pakistani law, government officials must declare all gifts, but are allowed to keep those below a certain value or buy them back at a discount.

Saturday’s sentencing came on charges of undervaluing a jewellery set made by the Italian luxury brand Bulgari that Saudi Arabia’s Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman presented to Khan and his wife in May 2021. The case is separate from an earlier case, linked to luxury watches also presented by Prince Mohammed, in which Khan was sentenced to 14 years and Bibi seven. — AFP

IRAN, UK FOREIGN MINISTERS IN RARE DIRECT CONTACT

TEHRAN: Iran’s Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi has spoken by phone with his British counterpart Yvette Cooper, an Iranian foreign ministry statement said on Saturday, in a rare case of direct contact between the two countries. The ministry said that in Friday’s call the ministers “stressed the need to continue consultations at various levels to strengthen mutual understanding and pursue issues of mutual interest”.

A UK government source said Cooper “emphasised the need for a diplomatic solution on Iran’s nuclear programme and raised a number of other issues”. The source in London said Cooper raised the case of Lindsay and Craig Foreman, a British couple detained in Iran for nearly a year on suspicion of espionage.

The Iranian ministry statement did not mention the case of the two Britons. It said Araghchi criticised “the irresponsible approach of the three European countries towards the Iranian nuclear issue”, referring to Britain, France and Germany. The three countries at the end of September initiated the reinstatement of UN sanctions against Iran because of its nuclear programme.

The Foremans, both in their early fifties, were seized in January as they passed through Kerman, in central Iran, while on a round-the-world motorbike trip. Iran accuses the couple of entering the country pretending to be tourists so as to gather information for foreign intelligence services, an allegation the couple’s family rejects. — AFP

SUDAN PRIME MINISTER HEADS TO NEW YORK FOR UN TALKS

PORT SUDAN: Sudan’s Prime Minister Kamil Idris left for New York to meet the UN chief and other officials and discuss humanitarian access and a possible ceasefire, two government sources said. The trip comes as fighting between Sudan’s army and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), which erupted in April 2023, intensifies in southern Kordofan, raising fears of new atrocities similar to those reported in the city of El-Fasher in late October.

Reports of mass killings and abductions followed the RSF’s capture of the army’s last

stronghold in the western Darfur region. A Sudanese government source said, on condition of anonymity, that Idris is expected to meet UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, with the aim of “putting an end to the worsening humanitarian crisis” in Sudan.

Idris’s adviser Mohamed Abdel Qader also said the talks would focus on “facilitating aid access” and reaffirm the government’s commitment to a road-map handed over to the UN, including a “conditional ceasefire linked to the withdrawal of the RSF from

areas and cities it occupies”.

Earlier this month, Guterres said the United Nations was preparing talks with both sides in Geneva, but without specifying a date. Renewed hopes for diplomacy emerged last month when US President Donald Trump pledged to help end the conflict after Saudi Arabia’s crown prince and de facto ruler, Prince Mohammed bin Salman, urged him to intervene.

Sudan’s army chief Abdel Fattah al Burhan said last week he was ready to work with Trump to resolve the conflict. — AFP

US strikes kill at least five IS members in Syria



A US Airman attaches a GBU-31 munitions system to an F-15E Strike Eagle in the US Central Command area of responsibility. — AFP

The US strikes targeted IS cells in Syria’s vast Badia desert including in Homs and Raqa provinces, and did not include ground operations. Most of the targets were in a mountainous area running north of Palmyra including towards Deir Ezzor.

provinces, and did not include ground operations. Most of the targets were in a mountainous area running north of Palmyra including towards Deir Ezzor, the source said, requesting anonymity. US Central Command (CENTCOM) said in a statement that the United States “struck more than 70 targets at multiple locations across central Syria with fighter jets, attack helicopters and artillery”.

The operation employed more than 100 precision munitions targeting known ISIS infrastructure and weapons sites,” CENTCOM said, using an acronym for the IS group. A Syrian security official, also requesting anonymity, said that “the bombardment was intense” and lasted around five hours. “The targets were far from population centres,” the official said, adding that no displacement of residents

had been reported and government forces had not been ordered to deploy to the targeted areas. Syria’s foreign ministry, while not directly commenting on the strikes, said on X that the country was committed to fighting IS and “ensuring that it has no safe havens on Syrian territory, and will continue to intensify military operations against it wherever it poses a threat”.

Trump said in a post on his Truth Social network that the United States was “inflicting very serious retaliation, just as I promised, on the murderous terrorists responsible” for the Palmyra attack. CENTCOM said that since the attack, US and allied forces have “conducted 10 operations in Syria and Iraq resulting in the deaths or detention of 23 terrorist operatives”, without specifying which groups the militants belonged to. The US personnel who were targeted were supporting Operation Inherent Resolve, the international effort to combat IS, which seized swathes of Syrian and Iraqi territory in 2014.

IS was territorially defeated in Syria in 2019 but still maintains a presence particularly in the country’s vast desert. US forces are currently deployed in Syria’s Kurdish-controlled northeast as well as at Al Tanf near the border with Jordan. Jordan played a key role in the US-led coalition against the IS, carrying out strikes and making military bases available, while the country has also been the target of IS attacks. In December 2014, an aircraft belonging to the Royal Jordanian Air Force crashed in Syria and the pilot was later burned alive after being captured by IS. — AFP



THOUSANDS ATTEND FUNERAL OF STUDENT LEADER

DHAKA: Massive crowds gathered in Bangladesh’s capital on Saturday for the funeral of a slain student leader, held under tight security after two days of protests and violence. Tens of thousands of people joined the funeral procession to pay their respects to Sharif Osman Hadi, a key figure in last year’s pro-democracy uprising who was set to contest the general elections in February. He was shot by masked gunmen last week while leaving a mosque in Dhaka, and died in a hospital in Singapore on Thursday.

“You are in our hearts and you will remain in the heart of all Bangladeshis as long as the country exists,” interim leader Muhammad Yunus said in an emotional speech in front of the parliament building, where funeral prayers were held. Police wearing body cameras were deployed in the area, and flags were flown at half-mast to mark a day of state mourning. Hadi’s body was then buried at the central mosque of Dhaka University. — AFP

UNKNOWN AERIAL VEHICLE

Drone found crashed in northwest Türkiye



A drone of unknown origin has been found in Türkiye, less than a day after another unmanned aerial vehicle of suspected Russian origin crashed in the northwest. The drone was found in an empty field near the town of Balikesir, some three hours southwest of Istanbul. According to the Turkish interior ministry, the drone “is believed to be of Russian-made Orlan-10 type used for reconnaissance and surveillance purposes according to initial findings”. — AFP

ELEPHANT CORRIDORS

7 elephants killed by train accident in India



A passenger train smashed into a herd of elephants in India’s northeast, killing seven animals on the spot. No travellers were injured in the accident in Assam state, home to 4,000 of the roughly 22,000 wild elephants in India. Senior Assam police official VV Rakesh Reddy said that seven jumbos were killed, and one elephant sustained an injury. Five coaches of the train, which was headed to New Delhi from remote Mizoram state, were derailed. — AFP

LATEST DETENTION

Benin detains ex-minister over foiled coup



Benin on Saturday placed former defence minister and prominent opposition politician Candide Azannai in pre-trial detention as part of an investigation into the west African country’s failed early December coup. Azannai was accused of plotting against the state and incitement to rebellion. The detention of the prominent opposition figure is the latest in the wake of the foiled takeover, after some 30 people, mostly soldiers, were jailed on treason grounds. — AFP

The meek ants really did inherit the Earth



CARA GIAIMO

The author is an animal and plant correspondent for the New York Times

If Life is a numbers game, ants are winning. There are around 20 quadrillion individual ants on Earth (more than 2 million per human), representing over 15,000 species, according to one estimate. Their omnipresence bolsters their global importance as aerators of soil, recyclers of dead matter and dispersers of seeds. A new paper investigated one way these tiny workers achieved such enormous success. For the study, published on Friday in the journal Science Advances, researchers measured the exoskeletons, or cuticles, of nearly 1,000 ants across hundreds of species. They found a strong correlation between thinner cuticles and larger colony sizes.

This suggests that over evolutionary time, some ant species may have made a “trade-off between quality and quantity,” raising their overall numbers by giving each worker slightly less cuticle, said Arthur Matte, a doctoral student at the University of Cambridge and the lead author of the new paper. These ants “sacrifice their self-investment to have a more distributed workforce,” allowing their society to become more complex, he said. An ant’s cuticle guards against threats at all scales, from fungal infections to looming hiking boots. The thicker the cuticle, the better it protects. But cuticle-building requires nitrogen — a limited resource. As a result, “the costliness of producing a single worker is higher” when that worker has a larger cuticle, said Evan Economo, a professor at the University of

Maryland and the Okinawa Institute of Science and Technology and one of the study’s authors.

In 2017, researchers published a paper investigating the cuticle thickness of 42 ant species. The group, led by myrmecologist Christian Peeters, who died in 2020, found a broad range: Some ants’ cuticles were just over 1 micrometre thick (comparable to the length of a bacterium), while others’ were nearly 100 times as thick, about the width of a human hair. What could account for this variation? Perhaps, Peeters and his co-authors wrote, some species were redistributing their “manufacturing costs,” reducing their investment in each worker’s exoskeleton in order to make more workers overall.

The scope of the 2017 study was limited by the methods available. Team members analysed cuticle thickness by hand, using scissors and digital microscopes. It took them several months to gather their measurements. Matte wanted to pick up their thread and “investigate the evolution of cuticle investment,” he said. But that would require a much larger data set, and proceeding by hand could take years. So Matte developed computer vision algorithms that used CT scans of ants to measure cuticle thickness. He ran his algorithms on digitised specimens from Antscan, a database built by Economo and his colleagues. After about a week, he had 880 cuticle measurements of ants from 507 species.

The researchers checked for correlations between the cuticle and other ant attributes, such as body size, preferred habitat and

A new paper investigated one way these tiny workers achieved such enormous success. Researchers measured the exoskeletons, or cuticles, of nearly 1,000 ants across hundreds of species. They found a strong correlation between thinner cuticles and larger colony sizes

evolutionary history. Some showed no link with cuticle thickness, such as whether or not a species lives in trees, Economo said. But ants in hot climates are more likely to have thicker cuticles, they found. So are ants that hunt or farm fungus instead of feeding on sugar liquids, like honeydew harvested from aphids. With these diet strategies, larger colony sizes are still associated with thinner cuticles. “The nutritional strategy will shape the magnitude at which the trade-off will happen, but the trade-off will always be there,” Matte said.

The team also found that, in addition to having larger colonies, ant groups with thinner cuticles seem to have a greater ability to adapt to new environments through diversification. The rapid diversification of ants has “led to their role as ecological engineers” that can work in habitats across the world, said Mathieu Molet, a professor at the Institute of Ecology and Environmental Sciences of Paris at the Sorbonne who was an author of the 2017 study but was not involved with the new one.

In addition, ants’ outsize impact on their environments “is mainly thanks to these species that evolved cheap workers,” Molet said. Pinpointing the trade-off they made in order to accomplish these feats is “an amazing result,” and experiments could help reveal how it might have played out. Economo also looks forward to learning how everything fits together. “I think as we understand more about the evolution of social complexity in ants, there’s going to be a lot of pieces to that puzzle,” he said. “This is one of them.”

With new Europe loan, Ukraine plans to sustain war efforts

UKRAINIAN Officials breathed a sigh of relief after European leaders agreed to keep their country funded with a \$105 billion loan, which will cover a large portion of Ukraine’s financial needs over the next two years and help sustain its war effort against Russia. “For us, this is a reinforcement,” President Volodymyr Zelensky wrote in a social media post. “It is a signal to the Russians that there is no point for them to continue the war because we have financial support, and therefore, we will not collapse on the front line.”

A day earlier, as tense negotiations over the loan unfolded in Brussels, he had warned that without the money Ukraine would be forced to sharply scale back domestic drone production, undermining its ability to counter Russian assaults. Some Ukrainian lawmakers lamented Europe’s failure to agree on its first choice of using Russian frozen assets as backing for the loan — an option Ukraine had pushed for months, arguing that Moscow should pay for the destruction it caused. With several European leaders opposing the move, the European Union instead decided to use its budget as collateral.

But for Ukraine, receiving the money matters more than its source. Ukraine faced an imminent budget crunch and deep uncertainty over how long it could sustain its war effort. The interest-free loan, which will cover roughly two-thirds of the country’s financial needs for the next two years, largely resolves both issues. It also bolsters Ukraine’s position in ongoing peace talks, weakening Moscow’s argument that Ukraine is running out of resources and should settle for a deal now. Rustem Umerov, a senior Ukrainian official, said Friday that he was in the United States to “begin another round of



Ukrainian soldiers during a live-fire training exercise at a military training ground in the Dnipro region.

consultations with the American side,” adding that European officials would also take part.

Viktor Taran, a Ukrainian political scientist and a major in the Ukrainian armed forces, said the new loan “significantly strengthens our negotiating position, sending a signal to Putin, who was convinced that Ukraine would be left alone and that he would be able to squeeze it to the end.” It was not immediately clear when Ukraine would begin receiving the European money, but the country needs it soon to cover the budget gap, which will open in the spring. Ukraine’s budget for next year projects a \$42 billion deficit. About half that deficit is already covered by committed financial aid from the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the EU and other Western countries. The remaining half, however, had yet to be secured before Europe approved the new loan.

Ukraine also has extra military needs that are not included in the budget. While the official budget projects \$66 billion in military expenses next year, the Kyiv School of Economics Institute, a Ukrainian economic think tank,

Ukraine faced an imminent budget crunch and deep uncertainty over how long it could sustain its war effort. The interest-free loan bolsters Ukraine’s position in ongoing peace talks, weakening Moscow’s argument that Ukraine is running out of resources and should settle for a deal now

said Ukraine will likely require \$100 billion for its defence. The Ukrainian Defence Ministry said the country would need at least \$120 billion. Without the loan, Ukraine would have been forced to delay payments starting in the spring and cut spending in the second half of next year, according to Nataliia Shapoval, head of the Kyiv School of Economics Institute. She estimated Ukraine would have had to slash 25% to 30% of its projected expenditures.

Spending cuts would hit the military, as emphasised by Zelensky, but also non-military expenses such as pensions and salaries of civil servants, which are entirely covered by foreign aid. Ukraine devotes all its state revenues to financing defence.

Ukraine has felt the impact of stalled or delayed financial aid in the past. Last year, as Congress held up a \$60 billion financial and military aid package for months, the country was forced to divert funds earmarked for troop salaries to purchase weapons and ammunition. The uncertainty over whether it would receive the money needed to buy weapons also disrupted Ukraine’s war planning, Ukrainian officials said.

Ultimately, Ukraine had to sharply raise taxes to support the army, adding financial pressure on a population already impoverished by the war.

With the new European loan, “it seems that a catastrophe has been avoided,” said Danylo Hetmantsev, a lawmaker from Zelensky’s party and the head of parliament’s committee on finance, tax and customs policy. The \$105 billion loan will not cover all of Ukraine’s financial needs for the next two years, which the EU estimates at \$135.7 billion for both military and non-military spending. But by securing a large portion of Ukraine’s budget needs, the loan is expected to help unlock additional aid from other institutions like the IMF, which is currently considering an extra \$8 billion in lending to Ukraine through 2026-29.

Under President Donald Trump, the United States has mostly stopped financing for Ukraine, leaving Europe and other countries such as Canada and Japan to support the country. Trump signed a sweeping US defence bill Thursday that allocates \$800 million for Ukraine over the next two years.



CONSTANT MÉHEUT

The writer is a reporter, currently covering the war in Ukraine

OPINION

Why do we dream of the dead



DR HAMED
AL SINAWI

The writer is a senior consultant psychiatrist at SQU Hospital

MR A came for therapy following the death of his mother from cancer. She was his main source of support, especially since his father died when he was a child and his mother brought him up on her own. She refused to remarry and had to work to support the family.

Recently, he told me that he often sees her in his dreams, and she appears happy and much healthier looking.

Most dreams are about a happy memory they shared, while sometimes the mother appears to be saying something. While he does not always remember the details of such dreams, he says they bring him comfort as he gets to “see mum again.”

For many people, dreaming of the dead provides comfort, meaning and acceptance, while various myths about the meaning of such dreams exist.

Psychologists interpret such dreams as a subconscious processing of grief, while members of the public may see it as their deceased loved one communicating a message.

In many cultures, ancestors appear in

dreams to share wisdom or remind you of family heritage and traditions, while others see dreams as a way of “offering guidance, reassurance, or a final farewell.”

My curiosity led me to a study published in 2013 in ‘The American Journal of Hospice and Palliative Medicine’ that showed common themes reported by people who dream of the dead, which included pleasant memories or experiences with the deceased being free of illness; some reported the deceased in the afterlife appearing comfortable and at peace, and the deceased communicating a message.

Some participants in the study believed that such dreams allow them to continue to cope with their complicated feelings about the death of their loved ones.

The famous psychotherapists Carl Jung and Sigmund Freud had different interpretations of dreams.

Jung believed that dreams formed a direct line to the unconscious and provided insight into our psyche. So, dreaming of a loved one who died might signify that you miss them and that you are still trying to fully make sense of their being gone.

Sigmund Freud, on the other hand,

For many people, dreaming of the dead provides comfort, meaning and acceptance, while various myths about the meaning of such dreams exist

considered dreams as “concealed realisations of repressed desires.” This means the future that the dream shows us is not a prediction, but that which we would like to occur. So, the recurring dream my client had about his dead mother does not predict that she is somehow alive, but rather, that he wishes her to be.

Psychologists conclude that dreams have a significant impact on the bereavement processes.

They increase our acceptance of the fact that our loved one is dead, provide us with comfort and reflect our spiritual beliefs. What we gain from our dreams of the deceased is comfort, acceptance and meaning; therefore, we cannot argue with the idea that these types of dreams serve an important purpose.

In my opinion, we may never be fully able to scientifically understand dreams, but we can take comfort in knowing that just as our bodies can recover from physical injury, so too can our subconscious recover from psychological injury, and dreams may be an important tool in that recovery process and in healing from loss.

SRI LANKA FARMERS REPLANT AFTER CYCLONE

UDITHA JAYASINGHE

Mud and sand have swamped a rice crop across Kalanchi Dewage Risman’s two-acre tract that had just been starting to show green shoots when Cyclone Ditwah ripped through Sri Lanka.

“I have to clear out the mud, level out the field and then plant again,” said Risman, 55, who earns his livelihood from rice farming, along with his wife and two sons, but faces the prospect of going even deeper into debt to make a recovery. “It’s already mid-December and rice planted this late won’t provide a good harvest.”

Replanting is a daunting task after Ditwah flooded crops across 535,000 hectares, while government data shows more than 120,000 hectares have been completely washed away or buried under mud and sand.

Ditwah hit key growing regions for rice, vegetables and maize farmed by nearly 1.8 million families when it scythed through the island of 22 million in November, killing 643 people and sending more than 70,000 into relief centres.

Just a fortnight before, nearly 800,000 farmers had cultivated 563,950 hectares of paddy in the main growing season from November to February, UN estimates show. But floods, prolonged inundation and winds have caused severe damage to about 95,799 hectares of other field crops, while 13,463 hectares of maize, pulses, bananas and vegetables have also suffered. Torrential rain and floods tore up 483 dams and 1,936 canals to swathe rice fields in central Sri Lanka in mud, the agriculture ministry’s initial estimates showed.

Rice farming supports about 300 families in the region and many are pooling resources to salvage at least some fields, said six farmers.

Many have yet to receive any of the promised government compensation of \$485 for fields that have been completely destroyed and they worry the money will fall short.

Niluka Yaparatne, 48, is looking for a home to rent after a landslide that killed seven neighbours smashed into her home, nestled on a hillside. She said her family had taken a Re 2 million loan to build the home. “We built it bit by bit and finally completed it in 2022,” said Yaparatne, now living with a relative after she and her disabled husband, Pattini Gedara Nihal, 51, fled with their three children in a three-wheeler in the middle of the night. “We need to find a home near the children’s school, but rent prices are higher now.”

Torrential rain brought by the cyclone swamped the paddy field farmed by her husband with mud and sand, while authorities have declared the entire block of more than 50 homes landslide-prone, and evacuated families to nearby relief centres. — Reuters

Oman’s progressive vision of leadership and harmony

PLATO'S

Republic remains one of the most influential works in Western philosophy, offering a profound exploration of justice, the ideal state and the nature of true leadership.

Written around 375 BC in ancient Greece, it takes the form of a dialogue led by Socrates, Plato’s former teacher. In this work, Plato argued that the best rulers are ‘philosopher-kings’ — autocratic leaders whose love of wisdom, moral virtue and devotion to truth distinguish them from ordinary politicians.

In Plato’s ideal society, rulers would be chosen not by birth, wealth or popularity, but through a rigorous process designed to identify those most capable of understanding and pursuing the common good. These philosopher kings would govern not for personal gain but out of duty to the community. Only those who possessed true knowledge — especially knowledge of ‘the Good’ — would be permitted to rule. Such leaders would undergo extensive education in philosophy, mathematics and rational thought, learning to subordinate personal desires to the welfare of society.

Plato’s vision of a just society also rested on the principle of functional specialisation: each class would perform the role for which it was best suited. The rulers would embody reason, the soldiers courage or spirit, and the producers would provide goods and services such as food, clothing, and shelter. Justice, in this model, would arise when every part of society fulfilled its function under the guidance of wise rulers.

To prevent corruption, Plato insisted that rulers live simply, without private wealth or families, dedicating themselves wholly to the public good. The result has been a society marked by civility,



KARIM
EASTERBROOK

The writer is a Former Cambridge School Principal and Author

Omanis are renowned for their hospitality and openness, and the country’s leadership has fostered a culture of mutual respect and understanding



peace and harmonious coexistence. Omanis are renowned for their hospitality and openness, and the country’s leadership has fostered a culture of mutual respect and understanding.

The absence of political turmoil and the presence of social stability suggest that the benign autocracies have succeeded in creating an environment where people can live together in peace.

A benign autocracy offers several advantages. Its leadership remains consistent and can focus on long-term goals, ensuring continuity of policy. Decision-making is swift, since a single, well-intentioned leader can act decisively in times of crisis without the delays of legislative negotiation. Such a system can pursue multi-decade strategies in infrastructure, education and industry without the disruptions caused by political turnover.

Oman Vision 2040 exemplifies this capacity for sustained national planning. By contrast, Western democracies often struggle to maintain similar long-term initiatives, as each new government redefines national priorities.

Combative election cycles encourage short-term thinking, with leaders pursuing policies that yield immediate popularity rather than enduring benefit. The result is a lack of continuity that undermines strategic planning and national coherence.

A benign autocracy can also achieve greater administrative efficiency. Centralised authority allows for streamlined governance, clearer accountability and reduced bureaucratic overlap. Democracies, on the other hand, can suffer from gridlock, where competing parties and institutions slow progress and blur responsibility.

Moreover, by uniting the population under a shared national vision, a benign autocracy can foster social cohesion and a sense of collective purpose, avoiding the political polarisation that often characterises pluralistic democracies.

However, the success of any autocracy depends entirely on the moral character of its ruler. Without the wisdom, restraint and justice exemplified by Oman’s leadership, such a system can easily degenerate into tyranny and corruption.

Stoicism... A quality in few but sought by man



RAY PETERSEN

The writer is a media consultant

Sometimes feel that we are complex beings, capable of much more than we either achieve or demonstrate, and that it is because we tend towards response rather than being more the sum of our qualities, most evident in stoicism, or enduring hardship without complaint, without emotion. It's a difficult perspective, as it asks of us the virtues of wisdom, courage, justice and temperance, the characteristics maybe of heroes, and maybe we are just too modest to see ourselves of that ilk.

Greek philosopher Zeno of Citium's four pillars of stoicism are predicated first upon the ability, in wisdom, to display sound judgement by the judicious recognition of good and evil, and having the ability to focus upon what can, and cannot, be controlled, including the depth and compassion, or vehemence, of one's determinations. Another Greek, Democritus, achieved fame almost three thousand years ago by theorising that "Nothing exists except atoms and space, that everything else is opinion," so, he was a man ahead of his time, and philosophically he wrote of "not trusting all men, but men of worth, the former being silly while the latter is much more prudent."

Courage is almost self-evident as a quality to aspire to, and is also recognised as fortitude, standing firm, facing fear, or

patient enough to take that backward step as part of a bigger picture, and in being patient, being also resilient. The great Ibn Khaldun, the 14th-century philosopher still influential today, once wrote on the premise that physicality was not a characteristic of the fall of nations, but rather their psychological failings, and that courage, though sustained through physicality, is powerless compared to psychological strength.

Justice, unlike judgement, is cut and dried, and determines right and wrong, and being an essential nature of humanity and the common good, is often manifested as fairness. The morality ascribed to the virtuous makes them inseparable, and the stoic therefore, possessing one virtue, is believed to be virtuous, organic, and whole, albeit rarely expressive. The great polymath Avicenna noted that "Allah would not grant us minds, and then dictate divine laws that defy the mind," and so doing points to the roles of justice, morality and virtue as essential to mankind.

Finally, temperance, or the gifts of moderation, self-control and discipline, is all about avoiding excess and is the 'bread and butter' of the stoical. The Arabic proverb that describes temperance as, "Unlike the stomach, the brain doesn't alert you when it's empty," thus, with subtlety, reminds us of our

Justice, unlike judgement, is cut and dried, and determines right and wrong, and being an essential nature of humanity and the common good, is often manifested as fairness

need for discipline if we are to remain stoical. Or, as humorously identified by Shakespeare, who penned, "Have more than you show, speak less than you know," a credo by which a great many politicians and business leaders could well emulate as they frequently are 'hoist by the petard', of their vanities and desires.

Impulsive and rash behaviour are not stoical traits with, again Zeno, adamant that we have "two eyes, two ears and one mouth," with good reason. Again, it is those who would lead us, in their folly and haste, grasp opportunism and promise miracles, who would lead us away from our temperate judgements and sustainable opinions. These people, the alarmists in our midst, would have us believe that as soon as we hear them, we must act.

However, the humanity within us, our compassionate goodness and our conscientious consideration should be too much of who and what we are to be profited from by shallow opportunism. Averroes, too, believed we all share the same amount of intellect, so it must be a matter of balance then, as he also said, "An army of philosophers could not take that which is wrong, and make it right," which must be encouragement to trust our inner stoicism, which we must all have, in some measure.

HOW AI TOOLS ARE EASING LOAD FOR INDIAN WOMEN

RINIKI SANYAL

Priyanshi Durbha has spent more than a decade helping companies adopt emerging technologies like AI into their workflows. But the 37-year-old Bengaluru resident says her most transformative AI moment didn't happen at work - it happened in her kitchen. One weekend earlier this year, overwhelmed by grocery lists and the mental math of planning protein-packed meals for a marathon-running husband and a picky five-year-old, she asked ChatGPT to help her plan some meals with what she had in the pantry.

"When it threw up a tabular plan for breakfast, lunch, and dinner, I pinned it to the fridge and thought, 'I can conquer the world,'" she says. Her experience mirrors a broader shift.

India is rapidly emerging as one of the world's fastest adopters of AI, with 92 per cent of its skilled workforce already using AI tools at work, according to Microsoft and LinkedIn's 2024 Work Trend Index - far ahead of the global average of 75 per cent. The country is also OpenAI's second-largest market, CEO Sam Altman revealed earlier this year, after the United States. Reuters interviews with three experts and three women in cities across the country illustrate how the shift to AI is having a profound impact on India's urban working women, who - according to government data - tend to shoulder more of the household and caregiving work than their male counterparts.

"These tools have become companions, not just conveniences," says Payal Arora, an Amsterdam-based digital cultures researcher who studies how women improvise with tech. "They help women sustain themselves in a system that still expects them to manage family, in-laws, and professional work without missing a beat."

For Stuti Agarwal, a 37-year-old Mumbai-based content creator and mother of two, the mental load felt like "having too many browser tabs open; close one, another pops up." AI gave her a way to batch decisions: summarise a school circular, draft a polite message to a teacher, or generate a grocery-to-meal plan in one click.

In the north Indian city of Lucknow, Galaxy Arora Seth, a 35-year-old maternity and baby photographer, uses generative tools to plan age-appropriate activities for her six-year-old, brainstorm branded content scripts, and calibrate balanced meals for her toddler. "I feel calmer, more creative, and more in control since using AI," she says. Urban Indian women turning to AI to lighten the mental load at home is a new trend, and there's no public data tracking it yet, according to Arora. But for those women who do use AI tools at home, the technology is filling gaps that policy and social norms leave wide open. "I like ChatGPT because it doesn't judge," Agarwal says. "You can tell it you're feeling low and then ask how to bake a cake for your son's birthday the next moment."

Divija Bhasin, a Delhi-based counselling psychologist, says outsourcing low-stakes cognitive tasks can ease cumulative stress and preserve time for women, which is linked to better well-being.

— Reuters

Innovation for women...

WORLDWIDE, women manage an estimated \$32 trillion in annual spending and are projected to control 75 per cent of discretionary spending within the next five years. Yet across nearly every industry, most products fall short of meeting their needs, reflecting a tacit assumption that women are somehow a niche market.

For decades, companies have relied on superficial gestures: pink packaging, token "female-friendly" campaigns, and even the so-called pink tax, whereby women are charged more for the same product. Many of these "personalised" offerings amount to little more than marketing in disguise.

The result is a persistent gap between what women need and what companies deliver. Closing it requires designing products and services that reflect women's priorities, decisions, careers and lived experiences.

Historically, women have been expected to adapt to systems and services that were not built with them in mind. The evidence is everywhere: personal protective equipment is rarely made to fit, smartphones tend to be too large for smaller hands, and voice assistants consistently fail to recognise female voices. When male data are used as the benchmark for what's considered "normal", women are underserved, and entire markets remain underdeveloped.

This oversight represents one of today's largest untapped growth opportunities. Consider financial services: women add \$5 trillion to the global wealth pool each year, but products still cater to men's earning patterns and priorities. Despite managing a greater share of household budgets, women are up to eight percentage points less likely than men to feel financially skilled. Products that account for caregiving breaks, pay gaps, and longer lifespans could generate billions in value while improving women's financial security.

Even in traditionally female-oriented industries like beauty, personal care and groceries, only two-thirds of women feel their needs are met. While many brands continue to prioritise marketing over substance, most women say they would pay up to 15 per cent more for safer, higher-quality, or more convenient options. To seize this opportunity, companies should



There is a persistent gap between what women need and what companies deliver.



ALEX FRIEDMAN

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TRISH STROMAN

The writer is Managing Director and Senior Partner at Boston Consulting Group

focus on what women actually value rather than "feminising" existing products. Nowhere are the stakes higher than in healthcare, where overlooking women's experiences can have life-altering consequences. While women make 83 per cent of household healthcare decisions, only 41 per cent say their concerns are adequately addressed. Underdiagnosis and undertreatment - particularly related to menopause and bone, cognitive, and cardiovascular health - represent a \$100 billion-plus market opportunity in the United States alone. Cardiovascular disease, the leading cause of death among women, illustrates the problem. It remains chronically underdiagnosed because screening protocols are based on male symptom profiles. Correcting those biases could expand the cardiovascular market by 74 per cent to \$20 billion by 2030.

That same dynamic is playing out in nearly every industry: when women are excluded, markets underperform their potential; when they are addressed, well-being improves and profits rise.

But that requires a fundamental shift. Women's lives are not linear; their health, careers, families and identities constantly evolve, as do their goals and values. Designing with that evolution in mind is the foundation of meaningful innovation.

To achieve this, research must go beyond demographics. Companies should invest in female-specific, life-stage research that captures the full

depth of women's lived experiences. Collaborating with universities, health providers, and data scientists can help generate new insights and drive inclusive innovation. Ensuring that products reflect women's actual experiences rather than assumptions requires rethinking research and development. Companies must adopt agile R&D practices like rapid prototyping, cross-functional collaboration and real-time feedback. Likewise, involving women early in product testing can lead to stronger sales and better marketing.

Perhaps most importantly, innovation thrives when the people making decisions understand the people they serve. When women shape strategy, investment and product design, solutions naturally become more relevant and effective. Studies have consistently shown that diversity gives organisations a clear strategic edge.

Finally, after decades of neglect, innovation and investment are beginning to catch up. Although less than 4 per cent of US research funding goes to women's health, startups are personalising midlife hormone care for women, and major providers have established dedicated centres focused on women's cardiovascular and overall health. The lesson is clear: by involving women in the innovation process, companies can tap into markets that have been hiding in plain sight. Serving women better is more than fair: it could unleash a wave of global economic growth.

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SPORTS

SHORT TAKES



Oman Dentist Cricket Team celebrates anniversary.

OMAN DENTIST CRICKET TEAM PREPARES FOR NEW SEASON

MUSCAT: From its humble beginnings in 2012 as the Mazoon Medical Center Cricket Team, later evolving into the Muscat Dentist XI, the Oman Dentist Cricket Team has steadily built a reputation in the local cricket scene. They have participated in numerous tournaments and won several trophies along the way. Under the leadership of Captain Dr Hareesh Basheer and Vice-Captain Dr Frank, with key players including Dr Mohit (wicketkeeper), Dr Ashik, Dr Manoj, Dr Khader, Dr Mujeeb, Dr Naveen, Dr Rafi, Dr Sanal Mohan, Dr Ismail, Dr Nazer, Dr Nishant, Dr Hasham, and Dr Rahul, the team continues to inspire as Oman’s only dedicated dentists’ cricket squad. The team is now preparing for the upcoming Private Health Establishment Cricket Tournament and the Ramadhan Cricket Tournament in 2026, marking another exciting chapter in their journey.

AL AMERAT, AL MUSANNAH ADVANCE IN 2ND DIVISION HANDBALL LEAGUE



The victory marked Al Musannah second win of the season, lifting their total to four points and keeping their qualification hopes alive.

RIYADH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, DEC 20

Al Amerat Club strengthened their position at the top of the Second Division Handball League for the 2025–2026 season after securing a convincing 32–22 victory over Al Suwaiq Club in a match played the evening before last at the indoor hall of Al Rustaq Sports Complex, as part of the league’s fifth round. With this win, Al Amerat raised their tally to eight points, recording their fourth consecutive victory and concluding the first round of the competition with an impressive and dominant performance. In the second match, Al Musannah Club claimed a hard fought 26–25 win over Masirah Club at the main indoor hall of the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher, the victory marked Al Musannah second win of the season, lifting their total to four points and keeping their qualification hopes alive. The first round of the league will conclude with a single match between Al Musannah and Al Suwaiq on the 23rd of the current month, which is expected to play a key role in determining the final standings of the qualifying teams. The Second Division Handball League is played under a single round league format, with the top three teams advancing to the second stage, the qualified teams then compete in another single round league, with the top ranked team advancing directly to the final, while the second and third placed teams face each other in a playoff match the winner advances to the final to contest the title, while the loser secures third place.

1,500 runners participate in Jebel Sifah Marathon

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabiyousef

THE INAUGURAL of Jebel Sifah Ultra Marathon, with over 1,500 runners that showed the endurance, nature and community, took place at the mountainous Sifah village and adjacent places on Friday. Organised by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth (MoCSY), Jebel Sifah, in collaboration with Sabco Sports, the marathon was carved through coastal trails, mountain slopes, and traditional villages, offering runners an immersive journey through Oman’s natural and cultural heritage. The more than 1,500 runners of all ages and abilities transformed the integrated destination into a vibrant hub of movement, community, and endurance as the endurance sport also featured a diverse race programme, from the ambitious 50 km to the 10 km, 5 km, Fun Run and Kids Race, designed to promote inclusive participation and inspire a culture of active, healthy living. The destination, Jebel Sifah by Orascom Development and Omran, lying just 40 minutes from Muscat, is a destination where sports, nature, and integrated living come together effortlessly, with its vibrant marina, 9-hole golf course, diverse real estate offerings, advanced infrastructure, and premium hospitality experiences. Its proven track record in hosting global events, from international sport fishing competitions to major endurance races, firmly positions it as Oman’s leading hub for outdoor adventure, tourism and future-ready investment. Speaking to the Observer, Mohammed bin Ahmed al Amri, General Manager of Sports activities at the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth said that the Sifah Ultra Marathon supports the Ministry’s mission of promoting physical activity, enhancing community engagement, and supporting sustainable sports development across the Sultanate of Oman. “It is a proud moment for Oman’s growing sports scene in alignment with the Sultanate’s 2040 vision.” Al Amri said. Engineer Ashraf Nessim, CEO of Muriya, developer of award-winning destinations Hawana Salalah and Jebel Sifah, said that hosting the first edition of the Sifah



The marathon aims to promote inclusive participation and inspire a culture of active and healthy living.

Ultra Marathon represents a meaningful contribution to the Sultanate of Oman’s national priorities in advancing sports tourism, youth engagement, wellness and economic diversification, in alignment with Oman Vision 2040. “It also reaffirms Muriya’s long-term commitment to positioning our destinations as leading hubs for sustainable, experience-driven tourism and high-value investment opportunities”, he concluded. Reflecting on the delivery and impact of the event, Ali al Ajmi, General Manager of Sabco Sports, added: “Witnessing athletes, families, and communities united across Jebel Sifah’s breathtaking trails was a powerful reminder of sport’s ability to inspire and connect. The resounding success of this inaugural edition demonstrates Oman’s growing reputation as a destination for world-class endurance events. We extend our deepest thanks to our partners and participants who helped

bring this to life.” In the challenging 50 km Ultra race, Abdulaziz Hunaida from Morocco won first place in the men’s category, followed by Nader Abdallah from Sudan in second place, and Navil from Eastern Europe securing third place. In the women’s race, Kenya’s Falida Massanga led the first place, with Tatina Fidasifa from Eastern Europe securing second place, and Kenya’s Broods Masky rounding out the podium in third. “At Jebel Sifah, the Ultra Marathon showcases the destination’s versatility and readiness to host world-class events without compromising comfort, lifestyle, or authenticity. Alongside internationally recognised international fishing championships previously hosted at the destination, it reinforces that endurance sports are not one-off initiatives, but part of a broader, long-term strategy to position Jebel Sifah as a hub for major international sporting events,” said Firas Matraji, Chief Operating Officer.

Al Amerat, Al Oruba post victories in Beach Soccer League

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, DEC 20

The actions of 2025/2026 Oman Beach Soccer League is underway as the matches of the ninth and tenth rounds delivered a series of tough matches which featured emphatic victories and closely fought contests that further shaped the league standings. In the ninth round, Al Oruba produced one of their most dominant performances of the season with an 8-1 victory over the opponent Salalah, in a match took place at the Sands Court of the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex. Al Oruba controlled proceedings from the opening set and displayed sharp attacking movement. Musallam al Oraimi scored two goals beside Hatim al Zaabai and Omar al Farsi while Majid al Affari and Mohammed Mahfoudh netted one goal. Salalah team players struggled to contain the pace



Al Oruba controlled proceedings from the opening set and displayed sharp attacking movement.

and pressure throughout the match. The convincing win reaffirmed Al Oruba’s status as one of the league’s strongest contenders against league leaders Al Amerat.

Defending champions Al Amerat continued their impressive run with an entertaining 8-5 win over Saham, also at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex. Sami

al Balushi and Yahya al Murkhi netted three goals each while Nooh al Zadjali and Ahmed al Owaisi scored one goal each. At the same venue, Masirah edged Taqah 2-1 in a tightly contested encounter. The match was marked by strong defensive organisation from both sides, with Masirah managing to capitalise on key moments to secure a narrow but valuable victory. Action resumed with the tenth round, where Al Oruba secured a hard-fought 3–2 victory over Mirbat. Meanwhile, Saham registered a convincing 6-2 win against Taqah, marking a strong response following earlier setbacks in the competition. The final match of the tenth round will see Salalah to take on Masirah on Monday in Salalah, a fixture that is expected to be fiercely contested as both sides look to improve their positions and close the league on a positive note.

SHORTTAKES



Shubman Gill

GILL DROPPED, KISHAN BACK FOR INDIA’S T20 WORLD CUP TITLE DEFENCE

NEW DELHI: India’s test and one-day captain Shubman Gill could not find a place in their 15-member squad for next year’s home Twenty20 World Cup, but stumper-batter Ishan Kishan returned to the side on Saturday.

Opener Gill has gone 18 innings in T20 Internationals without a 50 and missed Friday’s match against South Africa with a foot injury.

Wicketkeeper-batsman Sanju Samson has impressed in limited opportunities and made a breezy 37 as Abhishek Sharma’s opening partner in the 30-run win over the South Africans in Ahmedabad. “It’s more to do with the combination that we want to play, or what the team management is comfortable with playing,” chief selector Ajit Agarkar told reporters in Mumbai.

“We felt the keeper at the top at this point gives us a lot more solidity than anywhere else in the team to play different combinations.

“There are only 15 that we could have picked. Someone has to miss out. It’s him. It’s not because he’s not a good player.”

Kishan was recalled after he led Jharkhand’s successful campaign in the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy, smashing a hundred in Friday’s final against Haryana. The same squad will play a five-match home T20 series against New Zealand next month. Jasprit Bumrah will lead India’s pace attack that also contains left-arm seamer Arshdeep Singh.

Varun Chakaravarthy will spearhead the spin department, which also includes left-arm wrist-spinner Kuldeep Yadav. India will also expect Hardik Pandya, their premier seam-bowling all-rounder, to play a crucial role in their title defence in the tournament to be played from February 7 to March 8 across eight venues in India and Sri Lanka.

INDIA SQUAD: Suryakumar Yadav (captain), Abhishek Sharma, Sanju Samson (wicketkeeper), Tilak Varma, Hardik Pandya, Shivam Dube, Axar Patel (vice captain), Rinku Singh, Jasprit Bumrah, Harshit Rana, Arshdeep Singh, Kuldeep Yadav, Varun Chakaravarthy, Washington Sundar, Ishan Kishan (wicketkeeper). — AFP



Ishan Kishan



Ibri collected their first three points of the league, raising their tally to four points in 13th place.

Ibri claim 1st win, Rustaq snatch 1st point in round 8

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, DEC 20

IBRI CLUB claimed its first victory of the current Jindal Football League season after securing a valuable 1-0 away win over Samayil Club in the match held at Nizwa Sports Complex, concluding the eighth round of the league.

Samayil began the match with high pressing from the opening minutes and asserted their dominance in search of an early goal. The most dangerous chance came in the fifth minute through Ahmed Al Jabri, whose powerful shot was confidently saved by Ibri goalkeeper Omar Al Abri. Ibri, meanwhile, relied in the first half on defensive organisation and tactical discipline, attempting to capitalise on counterattacks without posing real danger to Samayil’s goal.

Samayil players continued to control the flow of play in the first half and came close to opening the scoring following a well-delivered cross by Ahmed al Jabri, which Badr al Jabri headed narrowly wide of the left post. In the 33rd minute, Bashar al Maharbi missed a clear opportunity with a surprise header that sailed just over the crossbar. Ibri created little in attack during the first half, leaving Samayil as the more threatening side without finding the net, as the half ended goalless.



Al Rustaq claimed their first point of the season after holding Dhofar to a goalless draw.

At the start of the second half, Ibri showed a different approach, with their players adopting a more attacking mindset in search of a goal that would secure their first three points of the season. From a swift counterattack, Abdulrahman al Yaqoubi threaded a precise through ball to Mohammed al Alawi, who skillfully beat the Samayil defence before calmly slotting the ball past goalkeeper Alaa al Hamadani in the 49th minute to score the match’s only goal.

Following the goal, Samayil increased the pressure in an attempt to equalise, but their efforts lacked effectiveness in the final third due to Ibri’s solid defensive organisation. Ibri professional Jackson Bisan nearly doubled the lead, but Alaa al Hamadani produced a

fine save to deny him. Samayil’s best chance came through a shot by Osama al Zuaabi in the 78th minute, which failed to find the back of the net.

In the remaining minutes, Ibri players managed the match intelligently, closing spaces and limiting Samayil’s attacking threat. The closing stages saw Samayil’s Ahmed al Farsi sent off after receiving a second yellow card for protesting against match referee Nayef al Balushi, forcing Samayil to complete the match with ten men. The final whistle confirmed a 1-0 victory for Ibri.

With this result, Ibri collected their first three points of the league, raising their tally to four points in 13th place (second from bottom), offering renewed hope and a fresh start in their campaign. Samayil, meanwhile, remained in tenth place with nine points.

AL RUSTAQ DRAW WITH DHOFAR
In the final match of Round 8, Al Rustaq claimed their first point of the season after holding Dhofar to a goalless draw at Al Rustaq Sports Complex. The match was evenly contested and characterised by defensive caution and a scarcity of clear chances. Yet, the point proved valuable for Al Rustaq as they continue their difficult journey this season. As a result, Al Rustaq stayed at the bottom of the table with their first point, while Dhofar moved up to nine points in ninth place.

Seeb cruise past Masirah to share top spot in OBL with Al Bashayer

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, DEC 20

Seeb Club continued their strong performances in the Oman General Basketball League (OBL) after securing a dominant 105-33victory over Masirah Club in their preliminary round match of the 2025-2026 season. With this win, Seeb raised their tally to six points, sharing the top spot in the standings with Al Bashayer, who have the same number of points.

The match was largely one-sided, reflecting the clear gap in technical ability and experience between the two sides. Seeb imposed their rhythm from the opening minutes, relying on organised team play,

quick ball movement, and effective defensive pressure. Several players stood out for Seeb, notably Mamoudy Badji, Rashid al Zahaibi, Ahmed al Sinani, Jawad Eid Kio Yu, and Zakaria al Wihaibi, while Jalal al Musallami and Omar al Hassani were the most prominent scorers for Masirah.

Seeb opened the game with strong offensive pressure, capitalising on fast transitions from defence to attack. Their sharp execution and control of rebounds allowed them to extend the scoring margin early, ending the first quarter ahead 19-6.

In the second quarter, Seeb continued to assert their complete dominance over the game, raising



Seeb imposed their rhythm from the opening minutes, relying on organised team play, quick ball movement, and effective defensive pressure.

— Ammar al Musafer

the tempo of play and intensifying their offensive pressure. They benefited from a wide range of attacking options, combining penetration plays with successful three-point shooting from beyond the arc. Seeb added a further 33 points, extending the gap and confirming their clear superiority, while Masirah managed only six points, as Seeb went into halftime leading 52-12.

At the start of the third quarter, Seeb maintained their strong presence on the court, sustaining a high level of performance without any drop in intensity, while allowing several players to showcase their abilities. Seeb capitalised on Masirah’s defensive

lapses and limited offensive options, further extending their dominance. Seeb added 32 points during the quarter, while Masirah managed only seven, as Seeb closed the third period firmly in front at 84-19. Masirah showed slight improvement in the final quarter, managing to score 14 points, but Seeb remained in full control and closed the game strongly with 21 points, sealing the emphatic 105-33 victory.

The match was officiated by Mazal al Hilali as first referee, Thani al Khalasi as second referee, and Wafaa al Samri as third referee. The scorer’s table was handled by Rayan al Dhabouni, Moosa al Siyabi, and Hafez Awlad Ahmed.

SPORTS

SHORT TAKES



AC Milan's Christopher Nkunku in action with Napoli's Stanislav Lobotka. — Reuters

BOLOGNA, NAPOLI REACH ITALIAN SUPER CUP FINAL

RIYADH, Saudi Arabia: Bologna reached the Italian Super Cup final on Friday after beating Inter Milan 3-2 on penalties following a 1-1 draw in Riyadh.

Ciro Immobile scored the winning penalty for Bologna in front of a sparse crowd in Saudi Arabia, setting up a final showdown with Serie A champions Napoli on Monday.

Napoli booked a spot in the final by beating AC Milan 2-0 on Thursday.

"I've had three and a half months of suffering but I've a big family who helped me," said Immobile, who has missed almost all this season with a thigh injury. "Napoli are in great shape, but it's a one-off match and anything can happen."

Riccardo Orsolini levelled the scores for Italian Cup holders Bologna with his penalty 10 minutes before half-time, cancelling out Marcus Thuram's early volleyed opener for Inter.

Vincenzo Italiano's players held their nerve better in the shoot-out, with Alessandro Bastoni, Nicolo Barella and Ange-Yoan Bonny all failing from the spot for Inter.

Traditionally featuring the Serie A and Italian Cup champions, since 2023 the Italian Super Cup has also included the runners-up from league and cup. The four-team tournament is contracted to be held in Saudi Arabia until 2029.

NAPOLI BEAT MILAN
Napoli downed AC Milan 2-0 in Thursday's Italian Super Cup semifinal in Riyadh.

David Neres opened the scoring near the break with Rasmus Hojlund's lightning low shot after the hour sealing the encounter at the King Saud University Stadium, one of the proposed venues for the 2034 World Cup.

The Serie A champions will face Bologna in Monday's final.

Napoli are seeking their third win in the annual competition but first since 2014.

The win in Saudi Arabia was a quick pick-me-up after Napoli lost 1-0 to Udinese in the league at the weekend to leave them third, two points adrift of Inter and one behind Milan.

This is the 38th edition of a tournament featuring the Serie A and Italian Cup champions, and the league and cup runners-ups and contracted to be held in Saudi until 2029. — AFP



Inter Milan's Stefan de Vrij scores a penalty during the shoot-out past Bologna's Federico Ravaglia. — Reuters



Chelsea's Robert Sanchez saves a header on goal from Newcastle United's Lewis Miley. — Reuters

Newcastle squander two-goal lead in 2-2 draw with Chelsea

CHELSEA saved Enzo Maresca from more awkward questions as they fought back from two goals down to rescue a 2-2 draw against Newcastle on Saturday.

Maresca's side were in danger of a damaging defeat after Newcastle's Nick Woltemade struck twice in the first half at St James' Park.

But Chelsea hit back after the interval thanks to Reece James's superb free-kick and Joao Pedro's eye-catching solo effort.

Chelsea remain fourth in the Premier League after a disappointing run of just one win in their last five top-flight matches.

But the Blues' gritty fightback was essential for Maresca after a turbulent week that raised questions about the Italian's long-term future with the club. Maresca claimed on Friday that reports he could replace Pep Guardiola as Manchester City boss were "100 per cent speculation".

City have reportedly placed Maresca on a list of candidates should Guardiola walk away at the end of the season.

The City link came after Maresca appeared to criticise a lack of support from the Chelsea hierarchy.

Maresca, who is under contract under 2029, said after last weekend's win over Everton that the previous 48 hours had been his worst at the club because he and his players had not received the support he expected during a difficult run of results.

There has been criticism this season of Chelsea's rotation policy, which at times has left the team looking disjointed and poorly organised.



Chelsea's Marc Cucurella and Chelsea's Trevoh Chalobah in action with Newcastle United's Sandro Tonali and Newcastle United's Bruno Guimaraes. — Reuters

	WOLTEMADE SCORES TWICE FOR NEWCASTLE IN FIRST HALF	
	JAMES'S FREE KICK SPARKS CHELSEA COMEBACK	
	PEDRO EQUALISES FOR VISITORS IN SECOND PERIOD	

JIG OF DELIGHT
After making 11 changes for the League Cup quarterfinal win at third-tier Cardiff on Tuesday, Maresca reverted to his senior stars, but they made a dismal start on foggy Tyneside. Woltemade was clearly determined to find redemption after his own goal condemned the Magpies to a 1-0 defeat at bitter rivals Sunderland last weekend.

The fired-up German striker took just four minutes to make the impact he desired.

Jacob Murphy's cross reached Anthony Gordon at the far post and when his shot was pushed out by Chelsea goalkeeper Robert Sanchez, the ball fell kindly for Woltemade to slot into the empty net from five yards. Maresca was left to rue Chelsea's woeful defending as Woltemade celebrated only his second goal in his last 12 games in all competitions. Unable to handle

Newcastle's intensity, Chelsea fell further behind in the 20th minute.

Gordon was given too much time by Chelsea's sloppy defence and the winger delivered a pin-point cross that invited a finishing touch.

Woltemade obliged, sticking out a boot to poke home from close range before a lengthy VAR check confirmed the German was just inside.

With Chelsea in disarray, Gordon and Woltemade carved open them yet again on the stroke of half-time, but on this occasion the German somehow volleyed wide when it seemed easier to score.

The visitors' pressure was rewarded with a superb 66th-minute equaliser as Joao Pedro cleverly headed Sanchez's long kick past Malick Thiaw before racing into the Newcastle area for a clinical low finish. Maresca's relief was palpable as he danced a jubilant jig on the touchline. — AFP

NBA champions Thunder suffer rare loss to Timberwolves

LOS ANGELES, United States: The NBA Western Conference-leading Oklahoma City Thunder suffered just their third defeat of the season on Friday, in a last-minute 112-107 loss to the Minnesota Timberwolves.

A whopping 35 points from reigning NBA Most Valuable Player Shai Gilgeous-Alexander wasn't enough to prevent the reverse — the previously imperious Thunder's second in their past three games.

Anthony Edwards top-scored for the Timberwolves, earning 26 points, plus 12 rebounds, three assists and two blocks.

The NBA champion Thunder had held the lead with 40 seconds left on the clock, before an Edwards 24-foot three-point step back jumpshot gave the Timberwolves

the decisive advantage. "It was a close game, it could have gone either way. We've played a lot of these games this season. We've won a lot of them," said Thunder coach Mark Daigneault. "We had a lead going into the closing possessions, and then they just made a couple more plays than we did," he told reporters after. The loss leaves the Thunder at 25-3, and comes just days after their elimination from the NBA Cup semi-final in Las Vegas by the San Antonio Spurs. Oklahoma City had been on a 16-game winning streak that prompted talk of them breaking Golden State's record 73-win season.

Also on Friday, the San Antonio Spurs crushed the Atlanta Hawks 126-98, with French NBA superstar Victor Wembanyama coming off



Oklahoma City Thunder center Isaiah Hartenstein (55) defends against Minnesota Timberwolves forward Jaden McDaniels (3). — Imagin Images

the bench to score 26 points in just 21 minutes. His time still being

managed since returning from injury, Wembanyama also managed

12 rebounds, three assists, two blocks — and a spectacular one-handed alley-oop dunk.

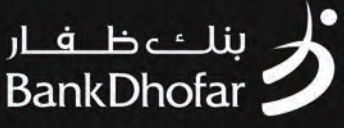
The Spurs' win follows their own disappointment of defeat in the NBA Cup final in Las Vegas on Tuesday by the New York Knicks.

Victory takes the Spurs to third in the Western Conference, on 20-7.

It was Wembanyama's 100th game in a row making at least one block, a streak achieved only twice before in NBA history — Dikembe Mutombo (116) and Patrick Ewing (145).

The 7ft 4in (2.24m) prodigy, 21, had missed a dozen Spurs games after suffering a left calf strain last month. The Boston Celtics beat the Miami Heat 129-116, with Jaylen Brown reaching 30 points for a sixth consecutive game. — AFP

BUSINESS



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SHORTTAKES



The number of guests staying at these hotels increased by 10.3 per cent to 1.89 million.

HOTEL REVENUES IN OMAN REACH RO 222.1 MILLION

MUSCAT: Oman’s hotel sector continued its strong recovery, with revenues at 3- to 5-star hotels rising by 19.4 per cent to RO 222.1 million by the end of October 2025, compared with RO 186.1 million in the same period last year, according to data from the National Centre for Statistics and Information.

The number of guests staying at these hotels increased by 10.3 per cent to 1.89 million, up from 1.72 million a year earlier, reflecting sustained growth in tourism activity across the Sultanate of Oman.

Occupancy rates also improved, rising to 53.6 per cent compared with 47.2 per cent during the same period in 2024.

By nationality, visitors from Oceania recorded the highest growth, up 40.5 per cent to 34,441 guests, followed by travellers from the Americas, who increased by 31.5 per cent to 62,083. European guest numbers rose by 23.1 per cent to 483,574, while arrivals from Africa climbed by 18.7 per cent to 11,962.

Asian nationalities accounted for 273,573 guests, marking a 9 per cent increase. Domestically, the number of Omani guests grew by 6.9 per cent to 714,128, while visitors from GCC countries rose by 6.7 per cent to 181,610.

In contrast, the number of guests from other Arab countries declined slightly by 1.8 per cent to 84,268 by the end of October 2025. — ONA

CEPA opens Indian market to Omani exports

THE Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion has confirmed that the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) between the Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of India grants preferential access to 97.4 per cent of Omani goods exported to the Indian market, marking a major milestone in bilateral economic relations.

The Ministry said the agreement reflects the depth of the long-standing partnership between the two countries and builds on the outcomes of the Royal Visit of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to India.

Following the visit, Oman reactivated negotiations through a comprehensive economic, legal and technical approach aimed at maximising national benefits and supporting priority sectors.

Negotiations, which ran from 2023 to 2025 across five main rounds, were supported by specialised studies, including an economic assessment by Deloitte & Touche. The study highlighted the agreement’s positive impact on tariff liberalisation, export growth and investment flows, as well as its potential to enhance the competitiveness of Omani products abroad.

Trade between Oman and India reached around \$7 billion in 2024, positioning India as one of Oman’s key trading partners, particularly for non-oil exports such as polyethylene, urea, gypsum, ethylene and metal-related products.



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Under the agreement, overall market access for Omani goods to India stands at about 77.8 per cent, with enhanced concessions for strategically important products. In return, Oman will gradually liberalise customs duties on 99.22 per cent of Indian goods, in line with national economic priorities and industry protection policies.

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The agreement consists of 16 chapters covering trade in goods and services, customs procedures, rules of origin, trade remedies, intellectual property, the movement of natural persons, SMEs and economic cooperation.

It also includes safeguards such as anti-dumping and countervailing measures, while preserving Omanisation policies and professions reserved for Omanis.

India ranks among the top ten

foreign investors in Oman, with investments totalling around RO 286 million in the first quarter of 2025 across sectors including steel, fertilisers, clean energy, healthcare and petrochemicals.

The Ministry expects CEPA to further support food and drug security, digital trade, logistics, mining, innovation, tourism and emerging industries aligned with Oman Vision 2040.

With Indian tariffs averaging around 17 per cent before the agreement, CEPA is set to significantly lower trade barriers, giving Omani firms access to a vast market valued at more than \$17 trillion. A national rapid intervention team will monitor implementation, as Oman moves towards ratification and deeper integration into the global trading system. — ONA

Solar Wadi targets 500 MWp of renewable capacity in Oman

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, DEC 20

SOLAR

Wadi, one of Oman’s pioneering independent renewable energy companies, is targeting the development of around 500 MWp of cumulative renewable capacity over the next three years, supporting the decarbonisation goals of industrial, commercial and government customers across the Sultanate of Oman.

According to CEO David Kennedy, the largest project currently in the pipeline is a 93 MW solar PV plant under development at Suhar Industrial City. This project is also expected to serve as a blueprint for decarbonising other industrial hubs operating under the auspices of the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn).

“We currently have the 93-MW solar PV project at Suhar Industrial



DAVID KENNEDY
CEO, Solar Wadi

needs of tenants. Beyond this, our overall development pipeline exceeds 1 GW, with a mandate to deliver approximately 500 MWp of cumulative capacity over the next three years”, Kennedy said.

He added that the long-term vision is to replicate the Suhar model across all 15 industrial cities managed by Madayn.

“Cities such as Nizwa and Sur will require up to 30 MW each, while larger hubs like Al Rusayl could need as much as 60 MWp. In total, the Madayn portfolio could require around 300 MWp of solar capacity”, he said to The Energy Year, a UK-based international

City in final development. It is scheduled to reach commercial operations by mid-2026 and is designed to meet around 40% of the energy



The biggest initiative currently in Solar Wadi’s project pipeline is a 93 MW solar PV plant under development at Suhar Industrial City.

business news portal.

Solar Wadi, a wholly owned subsidiary of Omani government-backed Naqaa Sustainable Energy, is also exploring opportunities to support the energy transition of large industrial consumers, including steel and aluminium producers, with power requirements ranging from 1 to 50 MW.

Work is already underway on several smaller projects — such as

installations at Oman Data Park and the Arab Open University in Muscat — with a combined capacity of around 5 MWp and a further 5–10 MWp of commercial and industrial solar projects expected to follow in early 2026, the CEO noted.

“Our plants can typically supply about 40% of the power needs of industrial facilities operating around the clock and up to 60% for daytime-only operations.

This is particularly important for exporters to the EU and the United States, where carbon taxes are being introduced. Reducing carbon footprints is therefore both an environmental and an economic imperative”, he said.

He also underscored Solar Wadi’s wholly Omani ownership and its role in developing national capabilities in line with Oman Vision 2040. “We are building local capacity through Omanisation and by prioritising local content while adhering to global best practices.

As the renewable energy sector is still relatively young in Oman, we partner with experienced international EPC contractors on larger projects, working closely with local EPCs and suppliers to enable knowledge transfer.

Over time, our goal is to source the majority of our requirements domestically — an approach that is central to Oman Vision 2040 and critical to creating a self-sustaining renewable energy sector in Oman”, he added.

ADVERTORIALS

SHORTTAKES



These prestigious awards recognise the most innovative and customer-focused financial institutions across various sectors in the region.

BANK MUSCAT
HONOURED WITH
‘BEST PRIVATE BANK
IN OMAN’ AWARD

MUSCAT: In recognition of its pioneering role in providing exceptional banking solutions that cater to the diverse needs of customers, Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, was recently awarded the “Best Private Bank in Oman” by MEED at the MENA Excellence Wealth and Private Banking Awards.

These prestigious awards recognise the most innovative and customer-focused financial institutions across various sectors in the region. The bank’s award was received by Salim bin Said al Shanfari, the representative of Bank Muscat’s office in UAE, attended by prominent figures from across the Middle East and the world.

This recognition highlights the professional standards which the bank consistently adheres to, in line with international standards and practices. It also underscores Bank Muscat’s effective role in offering the best banking solutions and products to customers, in alignment with the bank’s corporate vision “To serve you better every day”.

Abdulnasir al Raisi, General Manager of Personal Banking at Bank Muscat, said: “We take pride in the recognition that the Bank has been honoured with as the best private bank in Oman by MEED. This recognition further underscores the bank’s leading role in providing a full suite of distinguished banking services and solutions that aim to cater to the various needs of its valued private banking customers.

These services include banking and wealth management solutions, backed with an experienced team of relationship managers. We would like to thank our customers for their continued confidence and support over the years, as we continue to strive to bring the best banking experience to all of them.

The bank will maintain its commitment to offering the best banking services and products to enhance the banking experience for all its customers”.

Bank Muscat has dedicated Private Banking desks at the Bank’s Head Office at Airport Heights, Madinat Al Sultan Qaboos branch, Al Athaiba 18th November Street branch and Suhar mega branch in Al Batinah North Governorate.

These desks are equipped with the latest technologies to offer an exceptional banking experience to private banking customers, aligned with the best banking standards in the Sultanate of Oman and internationally. Customers enjoy convenience while initiating and completing various transactions, with the support of dedicated relationship managers who ensure efficient and swift customer service.

MUSCAT AI
SOLUTIONS
LAUNCHES EV
GROUP DIGITAL
PLATFORM

MUSCAT: Muscat Ai Solutions has announced the official launch of EV Group, the first comprehensive digital platform in the Sultanate of Oman dedicated to supporting the electric vehicle (EV) community.

The application brings together smart EV charging, trip planning, a centralised marketplace and maintenance services into a single

platform.

Users can locate charging stations across Oman with real-time status updates, connector types, and pricing, while benefitting from a free marketplace to buy and sell electric vehicles, accessories and related services – supporting local businesses and entrepreneurs.

Hussain al Lawati, CEO of Muscat Ai Solutions, stated that EV Group represents a practical step towards Oman Vision 2040 and the country’s green transformation by providing a reliable local digital solution for the EV ecosystem.

The application is available for free download on the Apple App Store and Google Play.

Kia K8 now with exclusive
year-end savings offer

THE Kia K8 continues to stand out as a bold and luxurious sedan, combining striking design, advanced technology and refined performance to deliver an exceptional driving experience.

Now, with the Kia Big Savings Year-End Offer, customers in Oman can enjoy RO 1,500 in savings, along with three years or 30,000 km of complimentary service, one-year insurance and registration, making it the perfect time to own this flagship sedan.

The K8 raises the bar in the executive sedan segment. Its 3.5-litre GDI Smartstream engine, paired with an 8-speed automatic transmission, delivers 296 horsepower at 6,400 rpm, providing smooth, dynamic performance for every journey.

Inside, the cabin offers modern luxury and comfort for all passengers. Features include crisp leather seats, ventilated power front seats with lumbar support, a memory seating system and a panoramic sunroof, creating an executive lounge experience on the move.

Advanced technology includes a 12.3-inch TFT digital cluster, a 12.3-inch infotainment system with Apple CarPlay and Android Auto, Bluetooth with voice recognition and a 14-speaker Meridian surround sound system. Additional convenience comes from wireless charging trays, remote engine start and keyless entry.

The K8 also provides practical luxury, with a 510-litre rear boot for luggage and



The K8 raises the bar in the executive sedan segment.

daily essentials. Driver-focused features, such as the head-up display, ensure important information is always within view, enhancing safety and confidence behind the wheel.

Safety is at the forefront with Kia’s Advanced Driver Assistance System (ADAS). The K8 is equipped with Forward Collision-Avoidance Assist (FCA), Surround View Monitor (SVM) and Front & Reverse Parking Assist, helping drivers navigate safely while protecting all occupants.

The Big Savings Year-End Offer makes the K8 an even more attractive choice. With

RO 1,500 in savings, plus service, insurance and registration benefits, this is a unique opportunity to experience bold design, modern luxury and cutting-edge technology in one exceptional sedan.

Visit your nearest Kia showroom today to explore the Kia K8 and the exclusive Big Savings offer and discover why it continues to set the benchmark for luxury and innovation in Oman.

Reliable International Automotive LLC (RIA), the official distributor of Kia in Oman, is committed to delivering an exceptional ownership experience.

Muzn Islamic Banking unveils 0% easy payment plan

MUSCAT: The National Bank of Oman’s (NBO) Muzn Islamic Banking has announced the launch of its Easy Payment Plan (EPP), providing its customers with transparent, responsible and Sharia-compliant methods to manage their spending.

The service allows Muzn Islamic Banking’s credit cardholders the option to pay for any purchases above RO 100 at participating outlets in equal monthly instalments of 6 or 12 months with no extra fees or charges.

Commenting on the launch, Salima bint Obaid al Marzooqiyah – Assistant General Manager



The plan offers customers the benefit of 0% charges at retail partners.

and Chief Islamic Banking Officer – said:

“At Muzn Islamic Banking, we design every solution to balance modern convenience with the principles of Islamic finance. The EPP is more than a payment feature; it reflects our commitment to financial inclusion by giving customers the flexibility to manage expenses in a transparent, responsible and accessible way.

By allowing larger payments to be paid in manageable instalments, we enable our community to participate confidently in today’s marketplace while staying true

to Sharia principles”.

The plan offers customers the benefit of 0% profit charges at selected retail partners, including leading names such as Muscat Duty Free, Extra, Emax, Home Centre, Pan Emirates and Lulu Hypermarket, among others, covering electronics, furniture, lifestyle, gold and more.

Muzn Islamic Banking’s EPP is designed to simplify the management of personal finances, ensuring customers can make both significant purchases and everyday expenses without the strain of large lump-sum payments.

Mojawhraty By Malabar launches 2nd showroom at Mall of Oman

MUSCAT: Mojawhraty by Malabar, the latest retail concept from Malabar Gold & Diamonds dedicated exclusively to Arabic jewellery, has unveiled its 2nd showroom in Oman at Mall of Oman, Muscat. With the first showroom being launched at Muttrah Souq, this brings the total showroom count of Mojawhraty by Malabar to 7 in the GCC.

The new showroom was inaugurated by Shaikh Faisal bin Abdullah al Rawas, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Oman Chamber of Commerce & Industry (OCCI), in the presence of Malabar Group Vice Chairman, Abdul Salam K P; Regional Head of Malabar Gold & Diamonds in Oman, Najeeb K; Business Head of Arabic Value Chain, Sherif Abdelmonem



The new showroom was inaugurated by Shaikh Faisal bin Abdullah al Rawas, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Oman Chamber of Commerce & Industry (OCCI).

Meligy Hassanin; Branch head, Muhasin P P; Chairman Of Babil Internation Group, Mohammed Basheer Saidarakath ; other senior management team members from Malabar Gold & Diamonds, customers and well-wishers.

“The opening of our second Mojawhraty showroom in Oman reflects the growing acceptance of our Arabic jewellery offerings across the region. Our aim is to honour the deep cultural heritage of Arabic design while presenting it through a modern, world-class retail experience. With every expansion, we move closer to our long-term vision of strengthening our global footprint and delivering jewellery that resonates with the tastes and traditions of our Arab customers.

We have an ambitious expansion plan for Mojawhraty in the pipeline, with more showroom launches planned across the GCC with the aim of establishing Mojawhraty by Malabar as the go-to destination for Arabic jewellery”, commented Abdul Salam K P, Vice Chairman of Malabar Group.

The new showroom at Mall of Oman marks yet another milestone in the rapid expansion of Mojawhraty by Malabar, which now operates seven showrooms across the GCC; 2 showrooms in Oman at Mall of Oman & Muttrah Souq, 2 showrooms in the UAE at Dalma Mall & Ajman City Centre, 2 showrooms in Bahrain at Bahrain City Centre & Bab Al Bahrain , 1 showroom in Nakheel Mall, Dammam.

SHORT TAKES



Credit to the private sector increased by 4.4 per cent year-on-year to reach RO 21.6 billion.

BANK CREDIT IN OMAN UP 8.6%

MUSCAT: Total credit extended by conventional commercial banks in the Sultanate of Oman rose by 8.6 per cent by the end of October 2025, reflecting steady growth in banking activity, according to official data.

Credit to the private sector increased by 4.4 per cent year-on-year to reach RO 21.6 billion, underscoring continued lending support to businesses and individuals.

Banks' investments in securities also strengthened, rising by 5.9 per cent to around RO 6.5 billion during the same period.

Investment in government development bonds recorded a notable increase of 10.6 per cent, reaching RO 2.1 billion, highlighting banks' growing exposure to domestic sovereign instruments. In contrast, investments in foreign securities declined by 3.9 per cent to RO 2.4 billion.

On the liabilities side, total deposits with conventional commercial banks edged up by 1.4 per cent to RO 25.7 billion by the end of October 2025.

Government deposits rose sharply by 9.8 per cent to approximately RO 5.9 billion, while deposits from public sector institutions fell steeply by 44.7 per cent to around RO 1.5 billion.

Private sector deposits increased by 8.4 per cent to RO 17.4 billion, accounting for 67.5 per cent of total deposits, reinforcing the central role of households and businesses in Oman's banking system. — ONA

Business tourism delivers RO 15 million in returns

THE Sultanate of Oman generated around RO 15 million in economic returns from incentive and meetings tourism in 2025, underscoring the sector's growing contribution to the national economy.

The gains were driven by a rise in corporate meetings and incentive travel, with more than 100 groups hosted during the year, alongside a steady increase in regional and international conferences.

Since the start of 2025, Oman has hosted 24 conferences, reflecting sustained efforts to position the country as a competitive destination for business events.

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism views this segment as a strategic pillar in strengthening Oman's standing on the global tourism map and supporting the objectives of Oman Vision 2040.

Khaled bin Waleed al Zadjali, Director of the Oman Convention Bureau at the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, said the Ministry successfully attracted and coordinated several high-profile international and regional conferences in 2024.

These included the International Conference of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, which drew 2,300 participants and generated RO 1.86 million in economic returns and the Middle East and Africa Council of Ophthalmology Conference,



Since the start of 2025, Oman has hosted 24 conferences, reflecting sustained efforts to position the country as a competitive destination for business events.

which yielded RO 1.2 million.

Oman also welcomed major incentive groups from international markets, notably 1,600 visitors from Italy, generating RO 2 million and another group of 1,400 visitors that delivered RO 420,000 in returns.

Al Zadjali noted that the economic impact of incentive and conference tourism is three to five times higher than that of traditional tourism, as business travellers typically spend more on accommodation, transport and specialised services.

He explained that this tourism segment requires extensive logistical support, including conference venues, hospitality services and event management, creating wider economic spillovers and benefitting multiple sectors such as healthcare, energy and knowledge-based industries.

The Ministry works closely with public and private partners, including the Royal Oman Police and the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, to streamline procedures and

enhance service delivery.

The Ministry is also investing in capacity-building for tourism professionals and promoting Oman in key international markets through global exhibitions, targeted workshops and partnerships with hotel groups.

With expanding infrastructure and a focus on spreading events across the governorates, incentive and meetings tourism is expected to play an increasingly central role in Oman's diversified growth strategy. — ONA

ISLAMIC BANKING ASSETS HIT RO 9.2 BILLION

MUSCAT: The total assets of Islamic banks and Islamic windows operating in the Sultanate of Oman rose to approximately RO 9.2 billion by the end of October 2025, representing 19.5 per cent of the country's overall banking sector assets. This marked a year-on-year increase of 10.8 per cent, reflecting

sustained growth in Sharia-compliant financial services. Outstanding financing provided by Islamic banks and windows also expanded, rising by 10.4 per cent to reach about RO 7.4 billion over the same period. The increase points to growing demand for Islamic financing across retail and

corporate segments.

Deposits held with Islamic banks and windows climbed by 11.9 per cent to approximately RO 7.3 billion by the end of October 2025, further strengthening the sector's funding base and confirming rising customer confidence in Islamic banking products. — ONA

Oman to host second edition of Middle East Space Conference

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, DEC 20

THE Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, has announced that it will host the second edition of the Middle East Space Conference in January 2026, in collaboration with space consulting firm Novaspace.

According to a statement issued by Novaspace, the conference will take place from January 26 to 28, 2026 and will address the strategic, operational and enabling dimensions of space development in the Middle East.

The event is expected to bring together policymakers, industry leaders, investors and technical experts from across the region and



The upcoming conference will address the strategic, operational and enabling dimensions of space development in the Middle East.

around the world. The inaugural edition of the conference in 2024 attracted more than 400 global and regional participants and showcased 25 local and international space companies. It also coincided with several major sector announcements.

Among them was the establishment of Spacerz, a satellite manufacturing company launched by ETCO Space in partnership with Polish satellite manufacturer SatRev and a Polish technology firm, both collaborators on the Aman-1 satellite. The company focuses on satellite manufacturing in Oman and also offers space launch services.

Another key announcement was the launch of MENA's first spaceport by a subsidiary of the National Aerospace Services Company, under the name Etlaq. Located in Al Duqm,

construction of the spaceport has already begun and it is scheduled to become fully operational by 2027.

Earlier this year, the company also launched a pilot experimental rocket initiative — the Genesis Programme — aimed at developing Oman's space launch capabilities and fostering a national space launch culture ahead of full-scale commercial operations.

The hosting of the first edition of the conference in 2024 formed part of the Ministry's initiatives under the National Space Programme, which was launched in 2023. The 10-year framework has identified economic diversification as a key pillar behind boosting the sector, which currently contributes 0.05% to the local GDP with a market value of \$155 million as of 2021.

DRONE WARFARE

Ukraine strikes Russian Caspian assets



Ukraine said its drones struck a Lukoil-owned oil rig in the Caspian Sea and damaged a Russian military patrol ship nearby, stepping up pressure on Moscow's energy infrastructure.

The Ukrainian general staff said the attack occurred on Friday and damaged a Filanovsky drilling platform. It marked Kyiv's first acknowledgement of strikes on Caspian rigs, previously hit several times in December. — Reuters

DRUG PRICING

Trump secures major drug price cuts



US President Donald Trump and nine major pharmaceutical companies agreed to cut medicine prices for Medicaid patients and cash-paying consumers. The firms include Bristol Myers Squibb, Merck, Gilead, Roche's Genentech, Novartis and Sanofi.

Trump said the US would no longer subsidise global drug prices under a new government-backed pricing framework. — Reuters

AI FUNDING

SoftBank rushes to fund OpenAI



SoftBank Group is scrambling to meet a \$22.5 billion funding commitment to OpenAI by year-end, sources said, using asset sales and other financing options. The move marks founder Masayoshi Son's boldest artificial intelligence bet yet.

SoftBank has sold its Nvidia stake, reduced holdings in T-Mobile US and cut jobs to raise cash as competition in the AI sector intensifies globally. — Reuters

OPINION

How local manufacturing can support sustainable growth



DR HILAL
AL SAWAI

The writer is local content, sustainability and innovation expert.

LOCAL manufacturing contributes immensely to the economic growth of Oman. On the economic front, Oman has continuously sought to diversify and minimise its dependence on oil revenues. Economic diversification positions local manufacturing as one of the main pillars of national development.

Through domestic manufacturing, Oman aims to generate employment, enhance economic activity and promote economic resilience.

Oman's manufacturing sector is diversified and includes food processing, construction materials, chemical manufacturing, plastics and metals, textiles and traditional handicrafts.

To help attract foreign and local investment, industrial and free trade zones — such as Suhar Industrial Port, the Duqm Special Economic Zone, and Al Rusayl Industrial City — offer reliable and modern infrastructure, efficient logistics and operational incentives that enable manufacturers to operate competitively and efficiently.

Travelling across Oman, one can observe a growing food production industry. The country no longer relies solely on imported goods, as it has become increasingly self-sufficient. Oman has the capacity to produce its own food, including fish and agricultural

products. Value addition to raw food products is particularly important, enabling the production of dairy, bottled water, fish products, bread and other essential foods.

Oman not only meets domestic demand but is also able to export food products, particularly fish, supported by a strong fishing industry.

Local food production is vital for food security, especially during periods of global supply disruption.

Oman is also self-sufficient in another key area: building materials. The country produces glass, steel, cement, tiles and other construction inputs used in roads and major infrastructure projects.

Domestic production of construction materials helps reduce costs, supports local construction activity and creates employment opportunities for Omani citizens, whose participation is critical to national development projects.

Community values are strongly reflected in Oman's encouragement of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). These enterprises often focus on community-oriented industries such as furniture, crafts and leather goods.

Traditional crafts — including pottery and jewellery — are preserved through such initiatives, reinforcing cultural heritage and community identity.

The government supports SMEs by

Oman's manufacturing sector is diversified and includes food processing, construction materials, chemical manufacturing, plastics and metals, textiles and traditional handicrafts.

facilitating access to finance and markets, as well as providing training and capacity-building programmes.

The promotion of consumer awareness through "Made in Oman" initiatives further stimulates the local economy and creates employment opportunities. Oman Vision 2040 encourages greater innovation, sustainability and increased participation of Omanis in industrial activities.

While some finished goods continue to be imported, Oman has made durable progress in strengthening local manufacturing capabilities.

Challenges remain, including competition from low-cost imports, shortages of skilled labour in specialised fields and technological gaps. However, the increasing adoption of renewable energy and environmentally friendly practices is creating a strong foundation for sustainable industrial growth.

A key strategy for strengthening manufacturing is the diversification of outputs. This reduces reliance on a single product and lowers economic risk, while reinforcing self-reliance.

With continued government support, technological advancement and rising consumer awareness, Oman's manufacturing sector is well positioned to contribute significantly to sustainable economic development and to foster greater national pride in locally made products.

RENEWABLES
RESHAPE OMAN'S
ENERGY TRAJECTORY



NAJAH
AL RIYAMI

The writer is a Media and Communication Master's graduate.

THE global electricity system is undergoing its fastest transformation in decades and new data from Ember Energy suggests the shift is no longer gradual.

According to Ember's Global Electricity Review 2025, clean electricity sources generated 40.9 per cent of global power in 2024, marking the first time since the 1940s that non-fossil sources crossed the 40 per cent threshold. At the centre

of this change are solar and wind, which together are reshaping energy systems at a pace few regions can afford to ignore.

While much of the growth is driven by China, Europe and the United States, the implications for the Gulf and for Oman in particular, are increasingly significant.

As electricity demand rises alongside industrial expansion, desalination and cooling needs, the data points to renewables not just as climate tools, but as strategic infrastructure for long-term energy security.

Ember's analysis shows that solar and wind accounted for the entirety of global electricity demand growth in the first half of 2025, effectively preventing an increase in fossil fuel generation during that period.

Solar alone added more new electricity than any other power source for the third consecutive year, with global solar generation nearly doubling over the past three years.

In 2024, solar supplied approximately 6.9 per cent of global electricity, while wind contributed 8.1 per cent, together surpassing hydropower's annual contribution for the first time.

Oman has already signalled its intention to diversify its energy mix through utility-scale solar projects, independent power producers and long-term net-zero ambitions. The global trends identified by Ember reinforce the strategic logic behind this direction.

As electricity systems increasingly decouple demand growth from fossil fuels, countries that invest early in clean generation stand to gain both economically and in terms of energy resilience.

The report also highlights that capacity growth alone is not enough. Grid flexibility, energy storage and demand management will determine how effectively renewable capacity translates into reliable power supply. For Oman, this aligns with growing interest in battery storage, hybrid solar-gas systems and digital grid management to support industrial zones, desalination facilities and expanding urban centres.

Perhaps the most striking insight from the data is the scale of momentum behind clean power.

How quiet economics is redefining sovereignty

IN an era where traditional political power is steadily eroded by economic leverage, sovereignty is no longer asserted through speeches or alliances alone. It is constructed — patiently and quietly — within trade corridors, energy systems and maritime networks.

From this perspective, the Omani-Indian joint statement issued during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Muscat signals more than a strengthening of bilateral ties.

It reflects a subtle recalibration of how a mid-sized state protects autonomy in a fragmented global order.

Most commentary on such visits gravitates towards trade volumes, memoranda of understanding and sectoral cooperation.

Yet Oman's engagement with India reveals a deeper logic: the deliberate use of economic architecture as a form of political insulation.

Political pressure today is increasingly applied indirectly. Supply chains are politicised, investment flows become conditional and future regulatory regimes—particularly environmental ones — are quietly weaponised.

For countries without the scale to absorb such shocks, dependency becomes vulnerability. Oman's expanding partnership with India addresses this challenge not by replacing one dependency with another, but by diffusing economic reliance across multiple centres of gravity.

India, a rising power with a non-coercive economic posture, offers scale without overt conditionality. This makes the relationship less about alignment and more about balance.

Diversification, in this context, is not a growth slogan. It is a risk-management strategy.

The Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) is often framed as a trade-expansion tool. Its more strategic value for Oman lies elsewhere.

Integration with one of the world's largest economies



Oman's deepening economic partnership with India illustrates how sovereignty can now be built through diversification and foresight.



QASIM
AL MAASHANI

The author is the head of the Business and Politics department at Oman Observer.

As geopolitical pressure increasingly operates through trade, energy and supply chains rather than military force, Oman is deploying a quieter strategy. Its deepening economic partnership with India illustrates how sovereignty can now be built through diversification, foresight and restraint — rather than rhetoric.

enhances Muscat's negotiating latitude with other partners and reduces exposure to supply-chain concentration in an increasingly fragmented global market.

Rather than chasing export volumes alone, Oman appears focused on constructing an economic safety net — one that preserves decision-making space during external shocks. In geopolitical terms, optionality is power.

The joint emphasis on renewable energy and green hydrogen is frequently interpreted through the lens of climate commitments. Strategically, it serves a broader purpose.

As carbon regulation, border adjustment mechanisms and green standards gain traction, states without credible clean-energy pathways risk future exclusion from major markets.

By investing early in clean energy partnerships, Oman is not merely selling a future commodity — it is buying future mobility.

Cooperation with India in this field underwrites long-term relevance in a system where energy access increasingly defines economic participation.

The joint maritime cooperation vision underscores another strategic recalibration. Sea lanes,

ports and undersea infrastructure are no longer neutral commercial assets; they are pressure points in global competition.

Oman's approach is notable for what it avoids. By enhancing maritime cooperation without formal military alignment, Muscat strengthens the economic value of its geography while maintaining political neutrality.

It is a policy of presence without polarisation, where geography is leveraged as an economic asset rather than securitised as a battleground.

Acknowledging the Indian community's contribution to Oman's development is more than diplomatic courtesy. It reflects a recognition that economic resilience begins with social and labour-market stability.

The next phase, however, will determine the partnership's depth: moving from labour reliance towards skills, training and knowledge exchange. States that fail to control the quality of their human capital ultimately cede economic sovereignty, regardless of investment inflows.

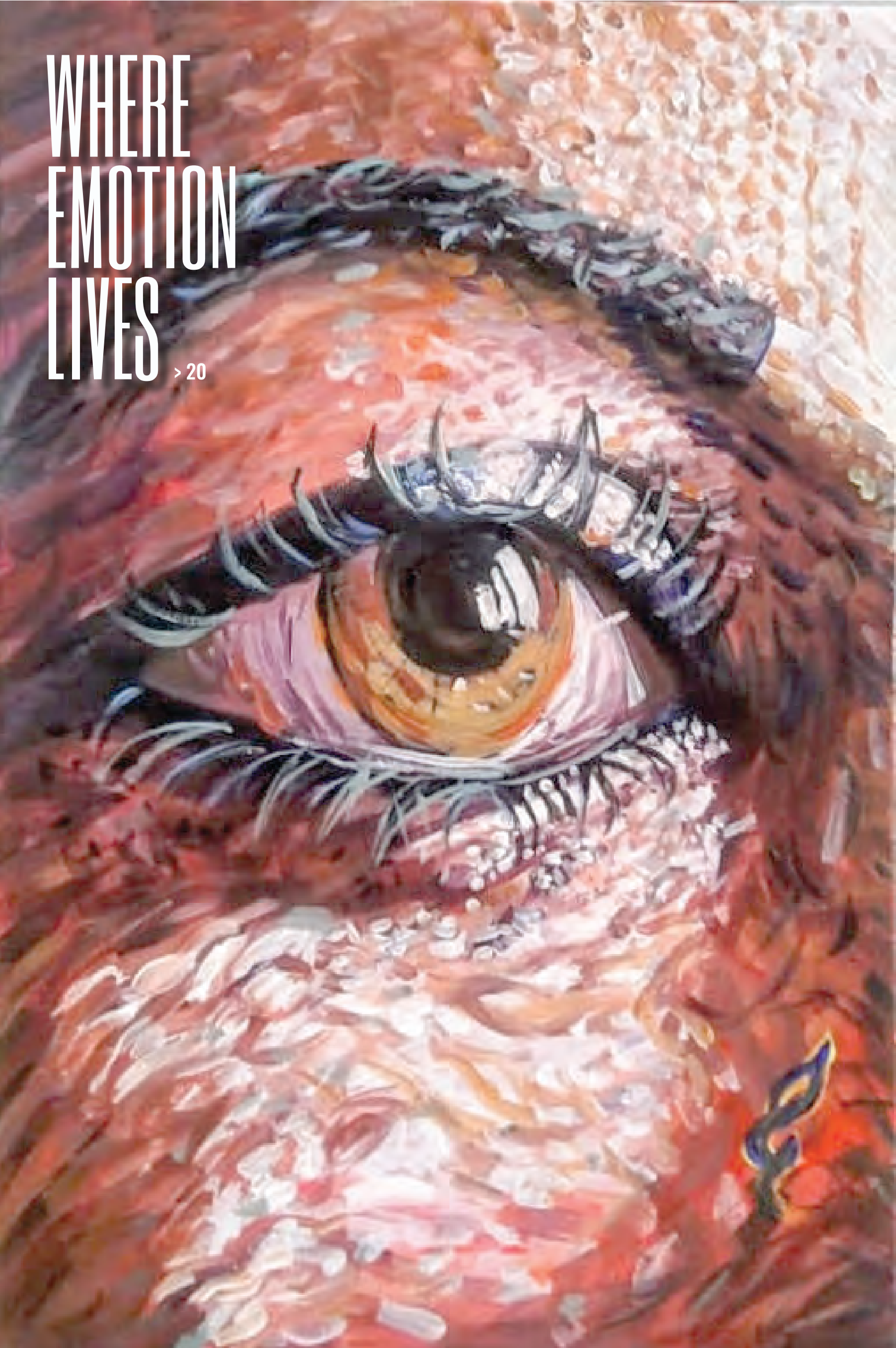
In this sense, workforce development is not a social policy — it is a strategic one. The inclusion of a humanitarian stance on Gaza may appear peripheral to economic cooperation. In practice, it reinforces Oman's long-standing consistency between policy and principle.

In an era of transactional diplomacy, ethical coherence has become a scarce but valuable form of credibility — one that enhances trust with partners seeking stability over opportunism. What is unfolding between Oman and India is not economic expansion in the conventional sense.

It is the quiet construction of resilience — through diversified partnerships, anticipatory energy policy, geographic leverage and human capital development.

In today's global system, sovereignty is no longer loudly declared. It is built—methodically, economically and often out of sight.

ART/LIFE



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CLASSICREMAKE

‘TOMB RAIDER’ LARA CROFT TO STAR IN TWO NEW GAMES 30 YEARS ON



ophie Turner playing the Lara Croft role in web series

Paris: With a remake of the first “Tomb Raider” game and an original title also starring its protagonist Lara Croft in the pipeline, American studio Crystal Dynamics say they are crafting “a love letter by fans, for fans” of the classic series.

Pistol-toting heroine Lara Croft will return to PlayStation, Xbox and PC next year in “Tomb Raider: Legacy of Atlantis”, a remake of the very first game released in 1996.

And 2027 will bring “Tomb Raider: Catalyst”, the next instalment in the saga that has sold more than 100 million copies worldwide.

The remake especially is “a love letter by fans, all of us, for fans... something special to celebrate that moment” 30 years on, Crystal Dynamics boss Scot Amos said.

The remake will be “built from scratch” on the modern Unreal 5 game engine and more in line with 2020s gameplay tastes, Amos said.

“You want it to feel like it felt when you played the first time, but play like a modern game,” added Will Kerslake, director of the project, which is being co-developed with Polish studio Flying Wild Hog.

With advanced graphics for its time and a memorable heroine, the original “Tomb Raider” wowed gamers and made Croft an early mascot for the industry.

Crystal Dynamics has been running the series since the mid-2000s, when publisher Eidos tapped them to take over from British creators Core Design following a string of lacklustre releases.

The studio already has one remake of the original “Tomb Raider”, released in 2006, under its belt.

Since then, the game series’s story was rebooted in 2013 with a new trilogy starring a younger Lara Croft.

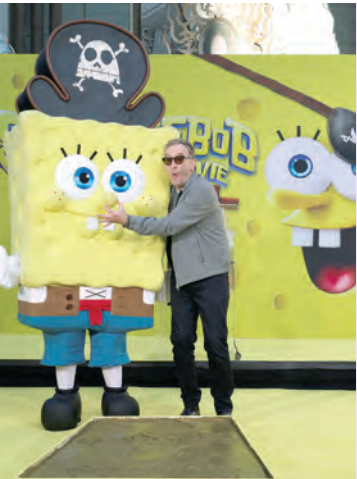
British actress Alix Wilton Regan will voice Lara Croft in the upcoming games, with the character also given a visual makeover -- depicting a “top of her game, experienced” protagonist in “Catalyst”, Kerslake said.

Developed by Crystal Dynamics’ lead team, Amos trailed the all-new title set in India as “the largest ‘Tomb Raider’ that we’ve made to date”.

Crystal Dynamics, owned by Sweden’s Embracer group, signed a deal with Amazon’s video games arm to develop the new “Tomb Raider” titles.

And decades after the original movies starring Angelina Jolie, a series is in development for the US tech giant’s Prime Video streaming service, with Britain’s Phoebe Waller-Bridge on board as writer and actress Sophie Turner playing the Lara Croft role. — **AFP**

QUICK FEATURES



EVENTS

Tom Kenny reacts next to SpongeBob SquarePants during a ceremony to celebrate the release of the film “The SpongeBob Movie: Search for SquarePants”, in the forecourt of the TCL Chinese theatre. — **Reuters**



ENTERTAINMENT

US actor Brandon Flynn attends the NY premiere of “Marty Supreme” in New York. — **AFP**



THEATRE

Cast member Phillip Attmore performs during a media call of the stage production ‘Top Hat The Musical’ at the Southbank Centre in London. — **Reuters**

INSTA PICKS



The hunter rules the sky



Witness to history

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‘IMMENSE’ COLLECTION OF DINOSAUR FOOTPRINTS FOUND IN ITALY

ROME: Hundreds of metres of dinosaur tracks with toes and claws have been found in the Italian Alps in a region that will host the 2026 Winter Olympics, authorities said.

“This set of dinosaur footprints is one of the largest collections in all of Europe, in the whole world”, Attilio Fontana, head of the Lombardy region in northern Italy, told a press conference.

The tracks, which are over 200 million years old, were discovered in the Stelvio National Park, in an area between the towns of Bormio and Livigno, which host part of the games.

Nature photographer Elio Della Ferrera first spotted the imprints in September in an almost vertical rocky slope.

Some measured up to 40 centimetres in diameter.

The collection “extends for hundreds of metres and also represents a series of animal behaviours, because in addition to seeing animals walking together, there are also places where these animals meet”, Fontana said.

Della Ferrera called in palaeontologist Cristiano Dal Sasso from Milan’s Natural History Museum, who assembled a team of Italian experts to study the site.

“It’s an immense scientific heritage”, Dal Sasso said in the region’s press release.

“The parallel walks are clear evidence of herds moving in synchrony and there are also traces of more complex



Photos on a screen show dinosaur tracks discovered in Italy’s Stelvio National Park. — AFP

behaviours, such as groups of animals gathered in a circle, perhaps for defence”.

The tracks, currently covered by snow and off the beaten track, are preserved in Upper Triassic dolomitic rocks, dating back approximately 210 million years.

Most of the footprints are elongated and made by bipeds. The best-preserved ones bear traces of at least four toes.

That suggests they belong to prosauropods, herbivorous dinosaurs with long necks and small heads, which are considered the ancestors of the large sauropods of the Jurassic period like the Brontosaurus, the experts said.

Prosauropods had sharp claws and adults could reach up to 10 metres in length.

There may also be tracks of predatory dinosaurs and archosaurs, the ancestors of crocodiles, the press release said.

The prints are on an almost-vertical slope due to the formation of the Alpine chain.

— AFP



The move opens a new era of transparency for the world’s \$1.7-trillion fashion industry. The image is AI generated

PASSPORT FOR CLOTHES SOON

CLOTHES destined for Europe could soon require digital passports to prove their green credentials, opening a new era of transparency for the world’s \$1.7-trillion fashion industry.

Consumers will be able to scan QR codes or electronic tags to see the garments’ digital product passports (DPPs) and check if a fashion brand’s green claims are true.

The passports will tell consumers what the clothes are made of, how much energy, water and chemicals were used to make them, and who took part in each stage of their production.

Textile suppliers from Bangladesh, the world’s second largest apparel exporter, may need to implement an initial version of the passport as early as 2027, according to analysis by the European Parliamentary Research Service.

“As consumers place a higher premium on sustainability and transparency, the digital product passport could be a key tool to provide granular records about the environmental footprint of each piece of cloth - starting from the cotton field to finished garment,” said Asif Ibrahim, vice chairman of the Dhaka-based apparel manufacturing company Newage Group of Industries.

But Ibrahim said smaller manufacturers were far from ready to fulfill the stringent, new European Union (EU) needs, which aim to stop manufacturers overclaiming their green credentials.

From payroll information to material certifications, fashion makers already provide reams of data about labour and environmental standards to meet buyers’ requirements and audits.

Yet a 2023 report by the British-based NGO Greenpeace said some brands and suppliers had misled consumers - for instance highlighting their recycling record, even if most of the ‘recycled’ fibre came from plastic bottles not textile scraps.

“Providing authentic and traceable data from across the supply chain is key to stop the problem of greenwashing,” said Rezwan Ahmed, CEO of Aus Bangla Jutex Ltd, a company producing bags, caps and aprons from recycled and organic cotton.



Cotton ginnings, washers and dye factories, as well as the makers of finished garments, will all upload any relevant data and certificates to their digital profiles, then must add details about each batch of production in real time

BLOCKCHAIN DATA Bangladeshi suppliers have already started working with technology companies to get ready for the changes.

Ahmed has partnered with Aware, a Dutch firm working with several fashion suppliers, using decentralised blockchain to record relevant data as fabric becomes a finished garment.

A manufacturer inputs key pieces of data - perhaps yarn count, water consumption or colour - and Aware’s blockchain-based platform then generates a QR code for consumers.

“The manufacturers will have control over what they disclose to their brands and consumers - as we want to give the manufacturers ownership of data,” said Md. Mueyed Hasan, Bangladesh country manager at Aware.

Cotton ginnings, washers and dye factories, as well as the makers of finished garments, will all upload any relevant data and certificates to their digital profiles, then must add details about each batch of production in real time.

Claims about energy and water usage will be verified by third

parties, he said.

SCALING CAPACITY The passport may require Bangladesh’s smaller garment makers to upgrade their hardware and software capacity as well as how they manage their data, said Ibrahim from the Newage Group.

Smaller manufacturers make up a large share of Bangladesh’s roughly 3,320 export-oriented apparel factories, according to Mapped in Bangladesh, a project developed by BRAC University in the Bangladeshi capital.

British-based DigiProdPass has partnered with Bangladesh’s garment manufacturers’ association BGMEA to help smaller producers meet the new passport requirements.

Salauddin Sohag, managing director of DigiProdPass, said his company is rolling out pilot studies and plans to train smaller businesses to help them adapt. “Suppliers will need support from global fashion brands and development organisations to upgrade their capacity - while the government should incentivise the early adopters,” said Ibrahim. — Reuters

FEATURES



Hussain bin Abdullah al Ghamlasi with his art work



WHERE EMOTION LIVES

HUSSAIN STANDS AMONG A NEW GENERATION OF OMANI VISUAL ARTISTS WHOSE WORK IS ROOTED IN PERSONAL EXPERIENCE RATHER THAN IMITATION. HIS GREATEST INSPIRATIONS ARE HIS OWN LIFE AND THE SOCIETY AROUND HIM. EACH CANVAS BECOMES A PROCESS OF DISCOVERY, GUIDED BY INSTINCT, FEELING AND HONESTY.

IDRIS AL BALUSHI

FOR Hussain bin Abdullah al Ghamlasi, art was never a dramatic discovery. It entered his life quietly during his school years, where his natural ability helped him form friendships and create safe emotional spaces. Even as a child, he understood he was gifted, choosing to nurture that talent indirectly while allowing it to grow alongside him.

Today, Hussain stands among a new generation of Omani visual artists whose work is rooted in personal experience rather than imitation. His greatest inspirations are his own life and the society around him. Art, for him, is not a way to explain emotions but a place where they are uncovered. Each canvas becomes a process of discovery, guided by instinct, feeling and honesty.

As his artistic identity matured, so did his understanding of national identity. Early on, his patriotism took recognisable forms, portraits drawn out of love for country. Now, that connection is more subtle and profound. Whether his work leans towards abstraction, cubism, or expressionism, Hussain considers it inherently Omani because it carries his perspective. His ambition extends internationally, not to leave Oman behind, but to represent it through a contemporary visual language.

Before he knew Impressionism existed as a movement, Hussain found himself working within its spirit. That intuitive alignment later drew him to Vincent van Gogh, an artist he relates to both creatively and personally. Van Gogh's instability, intensity and relentless devotion to art echo aspects of Hussain's own journey.

Hussain prefers oil paints on dry canvas, often using a painting knife to create sharp edges and layered textures. This approach gives his work a bold physical presence. He describes his style as unfiltered and deeply honest, realistic not in form, but in



emotion and idea. Labels and strict schools matter less to him than truth.

Being a young visual artist in Oman comes with challenges. Hussain speaks openly about the difficulty of being recognised or respected, despite years of commitment. He believes contemporary art remains widely misunderstood, even as the market shows signs of growth and long-term potential.

One of his most personal works, Contradiction, reflects this tension. Currently exhibited in Salalah before returning to Muscat, the piece draws from his background in sociology. His art often addresses social issues, particularly family dynamics and neglected roles within society. These themes are not confrontational, but observational, inviting viewers to reflect rather than react.

After more than eleven years of painting, Hussain's relationship with criticism has matured. What once felt confusing or discouraging has become part of his growth. Accepting critique, whether positive or negative, has helped shape his artistic confidence and personal resilience.

Social media has played a supportive role in building his presence. While it did not bring immediate impact, it provided visibility and connection. Through these platforms, audiences discover his work, workshops and programmes, making social media a practical bridge rather than a measure

of success.

Hussain has participated in numerous exhibitions through the Omani Society for Fine Arts, as well as universities and cultural centers, between 2017 and 2022. Though grateful for the support, he notes that he has never received an award. His unconventional style often fell outside traditional judging standards, positioning him as an outsider within formal exhibitions.

Choosing art as a full-time path required sacrifice. A graduate in English education, Hussain left traditional employment to focus entirely on his practice. He now designs and leads workshops and monthly programmes, integrating teaching with artistic exploration. For the first time, he has found balance by merging his personal life with his creative work.

Looking ahead, Hussain hopes to become a key voice in Oman's modern art movement. He believes it is already in motion, driven by young artists creating regardless of readiness or approval. Art, in his view, does not wait for permission.

At the heart of his work lies a simple message: humanity, acceptance and adaptability. Life is constantly changing and understanding that change with empathy allows for deeper connection. Through unfiltered expression, Hussain bin Abdullah al Ghamlasi continues to paint not just images, but lived truth.