

OMAN
عمان
DAILY

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SUNRISE 06:50 AM
PRAYER TIMINGS
FAJR 05:30 AM
DHUHR 12:18 PM
ASR 03:20 PM
MAGHRIB 05:40 PM
ISHA 06:56 PM



12
US DRIVER GUTHRIE
LEADS DAKAR
AFTER STAGE THREE
SWEEP FOR FORD

H M P R E S I D E S O V E R C O U N C I L O F M I N I S T E R S M E E T I N G

POLICIES TO ENHANCE FISCAL SUSTAINABILITY

HM HAILS GROWTH
IN ECONOMY'S
PERFORMANCE

2026 WILL BE MARKED
BY SUCCESSIVE
ACHIEVEMENTS

INVESTMENTS TO
STIMULATE VARIOUS
ECONOMIC SECTORS

EXPANSION OF
PROMISING SECTORS
TO GENERATE JOBS

EFFORTS TO REALISE
TARGETS OF OMAN
VISION 2040

ESTABLISHMENT
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FINANCIAL CENTRE

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HARMFUL TRENDS

MECHANISMS TO
PROMOTE POSITIVE
VALUES IN SOCIETY

TO MAKE E-PORTAL
AS CENTRAL GATEWAY
FOR ALL SERVICES

COUNCIL REAFFIRMS
CORE TENETS OF OMAN'S
FOREIGN POLICY



His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik presided over the Council of Ministers meeting at the premises of the Council of Ministers in Muscat on Tuesday.

HIS MAJESTY SULTAN HAITHAM BIN TARIK presided over the Council of Ministers meeting at the premises of the Council of Ministers in Muscat on Tuesday.

At the outset of the meeting, His Majesty the Sultan gave thanks and praise to the Almighty Allah for the abundant bounties that He bestowed on this dear nation. His Majesty prayed that the current year (2026) would be one marked by successive achievements and the realisation of aspirations for a promising tomorrow and a radiant future for the Sultanate of Oman and its loyal people.

His Majesty then proceeded to review a set of topics. In light of sustained positive growth in the national economy's performance and tangible improvements across financial, economic, and social indicators during the past period, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his satisfaction with the positive results

achieved. His Majesty commended the dedicated efforts of all relevant entities and the government's policies aimed at enhancing fiscal sustainability, which have helped foster an attractive investment climate and stimulate various economic sectors.

STATE BUDGET

In light of the adoption of the Eleventh Five-Year Development Plan (2026-2030) and the State Budget for fiscal year 2026, and following a review of the state's economic and financial performance along with its key annual targets, the Council of Ministers stressed the necessity of integration among state institutions and a strengthened partnership with the private sector to meet the plan's financial, economic and social objectives. It further emphasised focusing on the expansion of promising economic sectors

expected to generate employment opportunities and contribute to gross domestic product (GDP) growth.

Following a review of the key successes achieved by government entities in 2025 — including the Central Bank of Oman, the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones, the Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit, the Tax Authority, the Oman Investment Authority, and the State Financial and Administrative Audit Authority — as well as their ongoing challenges, work plans and objectives for 2026, the Council of Ministers commended the efforts of all government entities. It underscored the importance of further strengthening these efforts to realise the targets of Oman Vision 2040 and meet the aspirations of citizens.

DIVERSIFICATION

In recognition of the strategic

importance of establishing a global financial centre in the Sultanate of Oman to drive economic diversification, boost the financial sector's contribution to GDP, attract capital and foster an ecosystem attractive to investment, the Council of Ministers has approved the establishment of the Oman Global Financial Centre. The centre, which will enjoy legislative, administrative and regulatory autonomy, is designed to create a compelling environment for commercial banks and specialised global financial institutions in commercial and Islamic banking, finance, insurance, and related support services. Its establishment also aims to facilitate knowledge transfer and generate high-quality employment in the financial sector, built upon a new legal, judicial and financial framework aligned with international

standards.

In line with His Majesty the Sultan's continued focus on social and cultural issues, and his commitment to strengthening Omani society and protecting all its segments, and in view of the adverse impacts of modern technology and digital communication — including emerging social issues such as weakened community ties, the declining influence of positive role models, a lack of constructive intergenerational dialogue and other harmful trends among some youth — His Majesty has directed the Council of Ministers to study and analyse behavioural shifts in society. The Council is tasked with developing clear-cut, structured policies and operational mechanisms to promote positive values, foster constructive behaviours and mitigate the negative influence of social media on social conduct. **TURN TO P2**

HIS MAJESTY PRESIDES OVER THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS MEETING

FROM PAGE 1

TRAINING INITIATIVES
Following a review of the implementation progress, key indicators, and outcomes of the 2025 employment and training initiatives, the Council of Ministers commended the efforts of its Financial and Economic Committee, the Ministry of Labour, and all contributing government entities in meeting their targets. The Council also stressed the importance of sustaining this momentum and enhancing collaboration with private sector establishments to create wider avenues for sustainable employment opportunities.

In line with the Royal interest to accelerate the Government Digital Transformation Programme and to enhance the effectiveness of public services delivered through the Unified Government Services Portal, the Council of Ministers underscored the need for continued collaboration and integrated roles among all government units. The goal is to establish the Portal as the central gateway for government services, while leveraging artificial intelligence technologies to develop innovative digital offerings that meet user expectations and ensure satisfaction.

Following a review of the outcomes from the third meeting of the Oman-Saudi Coordination Council, held on December 23, 2025, the Council of Ministers expressed its satisfaction with the positive and fruitful results achieved across multiple areas. It reaffirmed Oman's commitment to strengthening cooperation with the sisterly Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, deepening the strategic partnership and advancing integration across various sectors in line with their shared aspirations. The Council of Ministers also highlighted the importance of ongoing consultations between the two countries on all regional and international matters of mutual interest.

Following a reference to the Royal and official reciprocal visits with several sisterly and friendly countries, and the anticipated economic outcomes thereof, the Council of Ministers stressed the need for both the public and private sectors to maximise the benefits from the agreements, memoranda, and programmes concluded by the Government of the Sultanate of Oman. It also emphasised translating these instruments into executable programmes and capitalising on the promising opportunities and future projects they generate.

FOREIGN POLICY
Within the framework of reviewing the bilateral relations with several sisterly and friendly countries, as well as regional and international affairs, the discussions reaffirmed the core tenets of Oman's foreign policy. These are based on good neighbourliness, positive neutrality and non-interference. The Council of Ministers emphasised Oman's commitment to forging friendly and cooperative ties with all states to achieve mutual benefit. It also reiterated Oman's full support for international law, respect for national sovereignty and independence, and its endorsement of United Nations efforts to maintain international peace and security. The Council further called on all parties to exercise restraint, engage in dialogue, prevent escalation, and pursue reconciliation to promote security, stability, and the protection of civilians.

At the conclusion of the meeting, His Majesty the Sultan offered prayers, beseeching continued righteousness and success in all endeavours that bring goodness and prosperity to this dear nation and its loyal people. — ONA



MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq presided over the Council of Ministers meeting at the premises of the Council of Ministers in Muscat on Tuesday. At the outset of the meeting, His Majesty the Sultan gave thanks and praise to the Almighty Allah for the abundant bounties that He bestowed on this dear nation. His Majesty prayed that the current year (2026) would be one marked by successive achievements and the realisation of aspirations for a promising tomorrow and a radiant future for the Sultanate of Oman and its loyal people. — ONA



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| THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS STRESSED THE NECESSITY OF INTEGRATION AMONG STATE INSTITUTIONS | COMMENDED EFFORTS OF ALL GOVERNMENT ENTITIES TO REALISE THE TARGETS OF OMAN VISION 2040 | GLOBAL FINANCIAL CENTRE WILL ENJOY LEGISLATIVE, ADMINISTRATIVE, AND REGULATORY AUTONOMY | HM HAS DIRECTED THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS TO STUDY AND ANALYSE BEHAVIOURAL SHIFTS IN SOCIETY | UNDERScoreD THE NEED FOR COLLABORATION AMONG ALL GOVERNMENT UNITS | EMPHASISED OMAN'S COMMITMENT TO FORGING FRIENDLY AND COOPERATIVE TIES WITH ALL STATES | REAFFIRMED THE CORE TENETS OF OMAN'S FOREIGN POLICY BASED ON GOOD NEIGHBOURLINESS AND NEUTRALITY |
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Global Financial Centre to foster environment for investments

MUSCAT: The establishment of the Oman Global Financial Centre, approved by the Council of Ministers in its meeting on Tuesday, marks a calculated strategic step based on comprehensive studies of global and regional experiences.

The establishment of the Centre aims to foster an attractive environment for investments, commercial banks, and global financial institutions specialising in commercial and Islamic banking, financial services, insurance, and other supporting activities. It also seeks to facilitate knowledge transfer and create more high-quality jobs within the financial sector.

Sultan bin Salim al Habsi, Minister of Finance, and Chairman of the Supervisory Committee for the Centre's establishment phase, stated that the Centre will bolster the financial sector's role in achieving economic diversification targets. This initiative integrates with ongoing efforts to develop the financial and investment sectors in line with Oman's future aspirations.

In a statement, the minister added that the Centre will serve as an enabling environment offering multiple incentives for investment management, company formation and the establishment of commercial partnerships. These benefits are designed to facilitate the movement of capital and financial services while supporting financial innovation.

He further explained that the Centre will leverage Oman's key strengths, including its political stability, investment attractiveness and robust economic partnerships with countries worldwide. — ONA



EDUCATIONAL, ENTERTAINING ENVIRONMENT FOR CHILDREN

Each section is unique, offering children a complete experience. For example, in the fire station, they dress up as firefighters, and a firefighter explains the causes of fires and how to react in case of one



AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JAN 6

THIS year, Muscat Nights returns with a host of exciting new and entertaining events for children. The 'Masha and the Bear' activities at Al Amerat Public Park are a highlight, fostering interaction and fun among children. This integrated educational and entertaining environment caters to children's enjoyment and imagination development.

The entire family is transported to a live, interactive space inspired by the beloved story, experiencing more than just watching; they live within the details of the tale.

Islam Ayman, the official in charge of the 'Masha and the Bear' and 'Children's World' at Al Amerat Public Park, said: "Last year, we held a flower festival at Al Qurum Natural Park, and this year we wanted to offer something new to the event. We were able to bring in the 'Masha and the Bear' activities, which are among the most popular with children."

"There are many activities accompanying the event, including theatrical performances and shows featuring Masha and the Bear characters, allowing children to interact with and watch them. We brought Masha from the television screen so they could see her in person and interact with her. We also prepared various activities and provided different areas for taking photos and playing games, where they can play augmented reality games and search for Masha using tablets," he added.

The Masha and the Bear events offer fun shows for children. Let your children have an unforgettable experience with Masha and the Bear at the Kids World.

The Kids World also attracted many visitors, as it is not just an entertainment event, but also an educational and entertaining one. The event consists of different sections, such as a fire station, space science, adventure science, imagination land, driving school and a construction zone.

Each section is unique, offering children a complete experience. For example, in the fire station, they dress up as firefighters, and a firefighter explains the causes of fires and how to react in case of one. Then, the alarm sounds, and the children descend to the attic and enter



a second building, where smoke and flames are simulated. The children try to extinguish the fire, experiencing firsthand the work of a firefighter. The second area is the astronomy zone, where a space captain greets them, dresses them all in spacesuits, and introduces them to space, planets, the solar system, and everything related to space.

Then, they move to the moon, taking photos as if they had travelled to space in a rocket. After that, there is another area, the alien's zone, where they can play with playdough. Each zone has its own special suit, such as an astronaut suit and an explorer suit. They can also take photos with dinosaurs and play in a treehouse. We brought them here so they could explore dinosaur bones and try to identify the different types.

AN ICONIC DESTINATION FOR 20 YEARS NOW PART OF HILTON

An aerial photograph of the Muscat Al Bandar coastline, showing the blue sea, sandy beaches, and the rugged mountains in the background under a clear sky.

DOUBLE TREE
by Hilton
MUSCAT AL WAHIA
هتل تري من هيلتون مسقط الواحية

Hilton
MUSCAT AL BANDAR
هيلتون مسقط البندر

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Hotel Muscat

Hilton.com
Al Jissah St, P.O BOX 644, Muscat, 100, Sultanate of Oman
T +968 2477 6666

SHORT TAKES

HIS MAJESTY ISSUES ROYAL DECREE

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Tuesday issued Royal Decree No 5/2026 ratifying the Air Services agreement between the Government of the Sultanate of Oman and the Government of the Republic of Cabo Verde, signed in Punta Cana on November 11, 2025. Article (1) ratifies the aforementioned agreement in accordance with the version attached to this decree. Article (2) says that this decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from its date of issue.

CONDOLENCES TO KING OF JORDAN

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of condolences to King Abdullah II Ibn Al Hussein of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan on the death of Eng Ali Abu al Ragheb, former prime minister of Jordan. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his heartfelt sentiments to King Abdullah II, the family of the deceased and the people of Jordan.

CERTIFICATES GIVEN TO ROP OFFICERS



MUSCAT: The Royal Oman Police (ROP) on Tuesday celebrated the handing over of certificates to graduating officers. The ceremony was held under the auspices of Lt Gen Hasan bin Mohsin al Shraiqi, Inspector General of Police and Customs, as part of celebrations marking the ROP Annual Day, which falls on January 5 every year. During the ceremony, Lt Gen Al Shraiqi felicitated the top graduating officers, presented the certificates to members of the batch and honoured the teaching and training staff. The ceremony was attended by senior ROP officers and the teaching and training staff of the Sultan Qaboos Academy for Police Sciences. — ONA

PROGRAMME HIGHLIGHTS CITIZENSHIP AND POSITIVE PARENTING

SUHAR: The Oman Human Rights Commission (OHRC), in cooperation with the “Children First” Association and the Office of the Governor of Al Batinah North, organised the final stop of the child rights awareness programme titled “Values and Belonging” on Tuesday in the Wilayat of Suhar. The ceremony was held under the auspices of HH Sayyidah Dr Mona bint Fahd al Said, Assistant Vice-Chancellor for International Cooperation at SQU, Chairperson



of the Children First Association. In her keynote address, she emphasised that the programme reflects the shared vision of both the Association

and the Commission to develop childhood, consolidate authentic Omani national values, and provide necessary protection for children amidst global and social shifts that impact the behaviour of the youth. She noted that this conclusion crowns a journey that spanned the entirety of 2025. The programme’s impact included implementation across 16 wilayats in 8 governorates and approximately 2,000 direct beneficiaries from various segments of society.

Majlis Ash’shura discusses draft urban planning law

THE Majlis Ash'shura concluded its discussion on the Draft Urban Planning Law referred by the government. Following extensive deliberations, the Council approved the draft and referred it to the State Council to complete its legislative cycle. This took place during the 6th ordinary session of the third annual sitting (2025–2026) of the 10th Term (2023–2027). The session was chaired by Khalid bin Hilal al Maawali, Chairman of Majlis Ash'shura. Dr Hamoud bin Ahmed al Yahyai, Chairman of the Services and Public Utilities Committee, presented the committee's report. He noted that the study involved reviewing legislative models from neighbouring countries to align best practices with Oman's urban policies and hosting specialists from the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning, the Oman Society of Engineers, and academic experts to gather technical insights. The draft law is considered a fundamental pillar for achieving Oman Vision 2040 targets, providing a modern legal framework to manage rapid urbanisation and keep pace with Oman's socio-economic shifts. Members focused on several critical aspects to ensure the law's effectiveness, namely aligning the project with the National Strategy for Urban Development, organising mechanisms between government, non-government entities and



The session was chaired by Khalid bin Hilal al Maawali, Chairman of Majlis Ash'shura.

society, and ensuring infrastructure can adapt to global changes while maintaining social security, public health and environmental standards. The session also discussed means of implementing strict controls for land utilisation and ensuring the availability of basic services in residential layouts. The Council also discussed and approved a report from the Youth and Human Resources Committee regarding a desire to increase financial allocations and

support for sports clubs and federations. The report addressed challenges in sports investment and resource enhancement and recommendations to encourage partnerships and investment in sports infrastructure and associated services. The Majlis Ash'shura is scheduled to discuss the Statement of the Minister of Labour on Wednesday. The session will cover five main themes, specifically focusing on the employment and training sectors within both the public and private sectors. — ONA

Woman, 2 kids cycle from Suhar to Salalah

KABEEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, JAN 6

In a rare and inspiring journey, a woman and her two children have set out on a long-distance cycling expedition from Suhar to Salalah to express their gratitude to Oman, the country they call home away from home. Ramsheena, a native of Kerala's Kannur district and the wife of a restaurant employee in Suhar, is travelling with her 12-year-old son Mohammed Hannan and 11-year-old daughter Amina. The trio has already covered nearly 600 kilometres of the roughly 1,300-kilometre journey and remains determined to continue riding day and night until they reach Salalah. “The idea of cycling such a long distance came from a desire to do something different, driven by our passion for cycling and our wish to show gratitude to this country and its people,” Ramsheena said. A flag-off ceremony was held at Ambar Park in Suhar, attended by social and cultural activists who extended their best wishes. Many praised the effort as laudable, noting that the family had no



Ramsheena cycling with her son Mohammed Hannan and her daughter Amina.

prior experience in long-distance cycling. “They are not riding for adventure alone, but for a noble cause,” said one activist, pointing out that Ramsheena's husband could not accompany them due to work commitments. Preparations for the journey were completed weeks in advance, with the family gathering information from social media and other sources. Due to financial

constraints, bicycles were sponsored by residents of Suhar, while several Omani citizens stepped forward to support the family's expenses for the onward and return journey. Ramsheena acknowledged the physical and mental demands of the trip but said the favourable weather has made the journey more manageable. She also cited inspiration from renowned cyclist Sarah Davis, who cycled

1,600 kilometres across Oman last year. Describing the hospitality encountered along the way as exemplary, Ramsheena said her interactions with Omani families, women and children have reaffirmed her belief that Oman is a safe and welcoming country, even though cycling through long, deserted stretches toward Salalah remains a challenge.

وزارة التراث والسياحة
Ministry of Heritage and Tourism

Announcement of an Internal Tender

Tender No.	2/2026/MHT/HQ-1	Tender Name	Mail Handling, Packing, and Shipping of Outbound and Inbound Mail (Documents, Letters, Documents, and Promotional Materials) of the Ministry to Outside the Sultanate and Vice Versa in 2026
Fees of Tender Documents (Non-refundable)	25 R.O		
Tender Document Sales End Date	26/1/2026		
Last Date for Bid Submission	18/2/2026		
Grade	Excellent, First, Second, Third, Fourth		
E-Tendering Portal	https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om		
- Interested Companies registered with Projects, Tenders and Local Content Authority (in the mentioned Grade) may obtain Tender documents from the E. Tendering website: https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om; against non-refundable payment as mentioned above for each set of documents. - The Tenderers must acknowledge commitment to the bid. - All companies submitting bids for this tender are required to attach a valid and recently issued Omanization Compliance Certificate from the Ministry of Labour, provided that the certificate is not older than 30 days from the date of issuance. - This certificate is considered a mandatory document, and failure to submit it — for any reason — shall result in the outright disqualification of the bid, without being evaluated technically or financially. - The certificate must also demonstrate the company's compliance with the Omanization percentage required by the Ministry of Labour. If the required percentage is not met, the bid shall be automatically disqualified. - The Ministry shall not be obligated to accept the lowest or any other bids - The bid submission period starts after the end of the inquiry period shown in the e-tendering system, until the last date for submitting bids before (10:00 am, Oman time).			
Support and inquiries	For more information, related to the tender, kindly communicate through the website of the e-tendering system: https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om For inquiries related to the technical support for the e-tendering system, kindly communicate through etenderhd@ptlc.gov.om or 24402200		
For further information	Email : sotic@mht.gov.om Phones : 22088348 - 22088085		

WORLD

SHORT TAKES



China hopes for stable ties with South Korea

CHINA HOPES FOR STABLE TIES WITH SOUTH KOREA

BEIJING: China’s top legislator told South Korean President Lee Jae Myung in Beijing on Tuesday that he hoped for stable ties and deepening cooperation between the two countries. Zhao Leji, China’s third-highest-ranking official, told Lee during a meeting on Tuesday that China was willing to work with South Korea to “consolidate good-neighbourly friendship” and “deepen mutually beneficial cooperation”, Xinhua news agency reported.

Zhao, also the chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress of China, said he hoped for the “stable and long-term development” of ties and stronger communication and cooperation, Xinhua added.

Lee’s visit to China followed a US military operation in Caracas that ousted Venezuelan president Nicolas Maduro and brought him to New York to face narco-trafficking charges - a raid condemned by Beijing and Pyongyang. He also met with Chinese Premier Li Qiang on Tuesday, hailing improving ties as the “irreversible trend of the times”. — AFP

ISRAELI STRIKES UNDERMINE TRUCE EFFORTS IN LEBANON



A security personnel inspects the site of a destroyed building, in southern Lebanon. — AFP

BEIRUT: Lebanese President Joseph Aoun on Tuesday condemned Israel’s latest strikes on his country, saying they undermine efforts to prevent escalation. Aoun’s criticism came after Israel launched a series of strikes in southern and eastern Lebanon on Monday, saying it hit Hezbollah and Hamas targets. The attacks began with strikes on four villages where Israel had issued evacuation warnings, though later bombing including a strike in the early hours of Tuesday came without prior notice.

In a statement, Aoun said that “Israel’s continued attacks aim to thwart all efforts made locally, regionally and internationally to stop the ongoing Israeli escalation, despite the response shown by Lebanon to these efforts at various levels”. The latest strikes come with the committee monitoring the ceasefire, which includes the United States, France, Lebanon, Israel and the United Nations, set to meet on Wednesday.

Lebanon’s cabinet will also convene later this week to discuss the Lebanese military’s progress in disarming Hezbollah, a plan launched under heavy US pressure. In his statement, Aoun said the government’s plan to “extend its authority over the south of the Litani” was “implemented by the Lebanese army with professionalism, commitment and precision”. — AFP

JAPAN NUCLEAR PLANT OPERATOR MAY HAVE NEGLECTED QUAKE RISKS

TOKYO: A Japanese nuclear plant operator said it may have presented data underestimating earthquake risks to regulators, as Japan moves to revive nuclear power nearly 15 years after the Fukushima disaster. Chubu Electric Power’s Hamaoka plant — located in an area of central Japan at risk of a potential “megaquake” — is undergoing regulatory safety checks, with the aim of restarting two reactors.

But the company’s president said late on Monday that the estimated maximum seismic ground motion that the plant could experience during a quake “may have been underestimated”. “This incident

could seriously affect the (safety) review process and undermine the trust of local communities and other stakeholders in our nuclear business, and potentially shake its very foundation,” he told reporters during an emergency press conference.

The world’s biggest nuclear plant, Kashiwazaki-Kariwa, is expected to restart operations later this month, pending final approval from the Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA).

The estimate of maximum seismic ground motion is important for the earthquake-resistant design of nuclear plants. In September

2023, the NRA approved Chubu Electric’s estimate of 1,200 gal, a unit of acceleration used to measure the intensity of quakes.

But in February last year, the NRA received information from a whistleblower that the utility “may have used data different from what was presented” to the nuclear watchdog, NRA official Keiichi Watanabe said on Tuesday.

The NRA suspended its safety review process for the Hamaoka plant in late December, and the issue “will be discussed in meetings open to the public”, the first of which will be held on Wednesday, he said. — AFP

Thailand raps Cambodia for violating ceasefire

THAILAND

accused Cambodia of violating a 10-day-old truce

on Tuesday, saying cross-border mortar fire wounded a soldier, while Phnom Penh said a “pile of garbage” exploded, injuring two of its own troops. Bangkok’s foreign ministry said Thai forces “did not retaliate”, opting instead to contact the Cambodian side to verify what happened, adding that Phnom Penh “claimed it was an accident”. The Thai ministry also urged Cambodia to “prevent such incidents from recurring” and issue an apology, according to a statement.

A decades-old border dispute between the Southeast Asian nations erupted into military clashes several times last year, with fighting in December killing dozens of people and displacing around one million on both sides. The two countries agreed to a fragile truce on December 27, ending three weeks of clashes.

Cambodia “violated the ceasefire” on Tuesday morning, the Thai army said in a statement, accusing Cambodian forces of firing mortar rounds into Thailand’s Ubon Ratchathani province. One Thai soldier was hospitalised due to non-life-threatening shrapnel wounds to his right arm, the army said. The Thai army said in a separate statement that the Cambodian side had contacted a Thai military



A royalist activist protests in front of the Royal Embassy of Cambodia, in Bangkok. — Reuters

The Thai army said that the Cambodian side had contacted a Thai military unit and claimed “there was no intention to fire into Thai territory”. “The incident was caused by an operational error by Cambodian personnel,” it added

unit and claimed “there was no intention to fire into Thai territory”. “The incident was caused by an operational error by Cambodian personnel,” it added.

Thailand’s military also said it warned Cambodian forces that if a similar incident occurred, Thai forces may need to retaliate. Cambodia’s defence ministry spokeswoman Maly Socheata said two Cambodian soldiers were injured, one severely, on Tuesday morning when “an explosion occurred from a pile of garbage”.

The incident happened while Cambodian forces were performing “organisation and orderliness” duties in Cambodia’s Preah Vihear province, which sits opposite Thailand’s Ubon Ratchathani, she

said in a statement. The two injured soldiers were hospitalised. Maly Socheata did not mention the strike alleged by Thailand, but said both nations’ border coordination teams had consulted on the incident involving the Cambodian soldiers and addressed the matter. The explosion occurred in a frontier region known as the Emerald Triangle, where the borders of both countries and Laos meet, she said. In May, a Cambodian soldier was killed in a firefight with Thai troops in the area, reigniting the border conflict.

Thailand’s Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul said his government had lodged a protest with Phnom Penh, stating “the truce was violated”. — AFP



INDONESIA 'S FLOOD KILLS 16, DISPLACES HUNDREDS

JAKARTA: Torrential rains battered Indonesia’s Siau Island, causing a flash flood that killed at least 16 people, with another three missing, authorities said on Tuesday. An overflowing river flooded four towns on the small island north of Sulawesi on Monday, the national disaster mitigation agency said in a statement.

“Sixteen people have been reported dead due to the flash flood,” agency spokesman Abdul Muhari said, adding that teams were searching for the three missing. He said 22 people were injured and nearly 700 villagers displaced. “The flash flood was triggered by heavy-intensity rain that had drenched the area since the early hours, causing the river’s water flow to surge suddenly,” Abdul said.

Images shared by the search and rescue agency showed big rocks and uprooted trees that were swept away. The flood cut off access to some roads and damaged dozens of homes as well as public buildings and infrastructure, the spokesman said. Floods are common in Indonesia during the rainy season, which typically lasts between October and March. — AFP

VIOLENCE CASUALTIES

Residents, gold miners clash in Afghanistan



A clash over gold mining in northern Afghanistan has resulted in casualties, a Taliban official said on Tuesday, after a resident said multiple people were killed in the violence. “A clash between employees of a contracted company and local residents over the extraction of a gold mine in Chah Ab district of Takhar province has resulted in both human and financial losses,” said Humayoun Afghan, the spokesman for the Ministry of Mines and Petroleum. — AFP

CALL OF JUSTICE

Gas explosion hits western Russian city



A gas explosion in an apartment block in Russia’s western city of Tver killed one person early on Tuesday, regional authorities said. “The preliminary conclusion of experts is that the cause was a household gas explosion,” Tver regional governor Vitaly Korolev said on Telegram. “Initially, it was mistaken as the result of falling drone debris, since measures to repel an attack were indeed being taken in the region at that time,” he added. — AFP

ILLEGAL ENGAGEMENT

Somalia condemns Israeli minister visit



Somalia’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs on Tuesday condemned a visit by Israel’s Foreign Minister Gideon Saar to Hargeisa, saying it was a violation of Somalia’s sovereignty and territorial integrity. The ministry said that any official engagement without Somalia’s consent was illegal and void and called on international bodies to support its territorial integrity. The visit comes 10 days after Israel formally recognised the self-declared Republic of Somaliland as an independent state. — Reuters

SHORT TAKES



Maria Corina Machado.

MACHADO VOWS VENEZUELA RETURN, DEMANDS ELECTIONS

WASHINGTON: Venezuelan opposition leader Maria Corina Machado said that she plans to return home “as soon as possible,” and rejected the authority of the interim president who has replaced Nicolas Maduro in Caracas. Nobel Peace Prize winner Machado was speaking to US broadcaster Fox News, her first public comments since the US military forcibly removed Maduro from power. “I’m planning to go back to Venezuela as soon as possible,” Machado said.

The opposition figure also openly rejected the country’s interim president Delcy Rodriguez, saying she “is one of the main architects of torture, persecution, corruption, narco trafficking.” Rodriguez, who has signalled her willingness to cooperate with Washington, was Venezuela’s vice president under Maduro. Machado said Rodriguez is “rejected” by the Venezuelan people, and voters were on the opposition’s side. “In free and fair elections, we will win by over 90 per cent of the votes, I have no doubt about it,” Machado said.

Machado vowed to “turn Venezuela into the energy hub of the Americas” and “dismantle all these criminal structures” that have harmed her countrymen, promising to “bring millions of Venezuelans that have been forced to flee our country back home.” — AFP

SWITZERLAND ADMITS PROBE FAILURE



Swiss authorities admitted on Tuesday that fire safety inspections had not been carried out for the past five years at a bar where 40 people died in a New Year blaze. Although inspections including fire safety were conducted in 2016, 2018 and 2019, “periodic inspections were not conducted between 2020 and 2025. We bitterly regret this,” Crans-Montana mayor Nicolas Feraud said, five days on from the disaster. In a statement, the municipality said it discovered the failure after going through documents sent to the Wallis canton prosecutor’s office. — AFP

RULING COALITION IN EASTERN GERMAN STATE COLLAPSES

BERLIN: The centre-left premier of the eastern German state of Brandenburg said on Tuesday he would run a minority government pending talks to form a new majority after the coalition with the far-left Sahra Wagenknecht Alliance (BSW) collapsed.

The political turbulence in Brandenburg, the region around the capital Berlin, is unlikely to have any immediate impact on conservative Chancellor Friedrich Merz’s national coalition.

But it underlines the volatility in German politics, notably in eastern Germany, ahead of a series of state and local elections this year.

The elections could see the already weakening support for the traditional centre-right and centre-left parties in Merz’s coalition further eroded. Brandenburg Premier Dietmar Woidke said repeated disagreements with the BSW made further cooperation impossible.

In the meantime, he would run

the government with his existing ministers, including Finance Minister Robert Crumbach, whose decision to quit the BSW triggered the crisis.

The BSW, the successor to the old East German Communist Party, combines left-wing economic policies with calls for immigration restrictions and opposition to military support for Ukraine.

But it has struggled to contain infighting over leadership and strategy. — Reuters

Trump’s Greenland claim: EU allies back Denmark

A GROUP of European leaders on Tuesday underlined their support for Denmark after US President Donald Trump again voiced designs on its autonomous Arctic territory of Greenland. The leaders of France, Britain, Germany, Italy, Poland and Spain as well as Denmark said that sovereignty, territorial integrity and the inviolability of borders were “universal principles, and we will not stop defending them”. Washington’s military intervention in Venezuela has reignited fears about Trump’s designs on Greenland, which has untapped rare earth deposits and could be a vital player as polar ice melts, opening up new shipping routes.

Greenland is on the shortest route for missiles between Russia and the United States, and Washington already has a military base there. With the situation in Venezuela more pressing, Trump quipped on Sunday that “we’ll worry about Greenland in about two months”. The European leaders’ joint statement said: “Arctic security remains a key priority for Europe and it is critical for international and transatlantic security.

“Nato has made clear that the Arctic region is a priority and European allies are stepping up. “We and many other allies have increased our presence, activities and investments, to keep the Arctic safe and to deter adversaries.” They stressed that Denmark — including Greenland — was part of Nato. “Security in the Arctic must therefore be achieved collectively, in conjunction with Nato allies including the United States, by upholding the principles of the UN Charter, including sovereignty, territorial integrity and the inviolability of borders,” the leaders said. “These are universal principles, and we will not stop defending them.”

The statement was signed by British Prime Minister Keir Starmer, Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen, French President Emmanuel Macron, German Chancellor Friedrich Merz, Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk and Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez. They added that the US was “an essential partner in this endeavour”. “Greenland belongs to its



A general view shows central areas of Nuuk, Greenland. — AFP file photo

people. It is for Denmark and Greenland, and them only, to decide on matters concerning Denmark and Greenland,” they said.

Denmark’s prime minister warned on Monday that any US move to take Greenland by force would destroy 80 years of transatlantic security links, after President Donald Trump repeated his desire to annex the mineral-rich Arctic territory. Washington’s military intervention in Venezuela has reignited fears about Trump’s designs on the autonomous Danish territory, which has untapped rare earth deposits and could be a vital player as polar ice melts, opening up new shipping routes. “We need Greenland from the standpoint of national security, and Denmark is not going to be able to do it,” the US leader said on Sunday.

In response, Greenland’s Prime Minister Jens-Frederik Nielsen told Trump to back off, while several European countries and the European Union rushed to back Denmark, which has urged Washington to stop threatening a Nato ally. In Copenhagen, Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen told the TV2 network: “If the United States decides to military attack another Nato country, then everything would stop — that includes Nato and therefore post-World War II security.”

Nielsen told Trump on social media:

“That’s enough now. No more pressure. No more insinuations. No more fantasies of annexation.” “We are open to dialogue,” he said. “But this must happen through the proper channels and with respect for international law.” On Monday, he called for renewed contact with the US and urged against panic. “The situation is not such that the United States can conquer Greenland. That is not the case. Therefore, we must not panic. We must restore the good cooperation we once had,” Nielsen said in Nuuk.

The controversy drew statements of support from around Europe. EU foreign policy spokesperson Anitta Hipper told reporters the bloc was committed to defending the territorial integrity of its members. British Prime Minister Keir Starmer said “only Greenland and the Kingdom of Denmark” could decide the territory’s future — sentiments reflected in statements from the leaders of Finland, Sweden and Norway. France’s foreign ministry spokesman Pascal Confavreux said that “borders cannot be changed by force” and added that his country felt “solidarity” with Denmark. The flare-up came after former Trump aide Katie Miller posted an online image of Greenland in the colours of the US flag with the caption “SOON”. — AFP

Ukraine’s European, US allies meet in Paris on security guarantees

PARIS: Key European allies of Ukraine and top US envoys met President Volodymyr Zelensky in Paris on Tuesday in their latest bid to agree security guarantees for any ceasefire in Russia’s war against its neighbour. The summit of the so-called “Coalition of the Willing” comes despite no drop in fighting, almost four years into Europe’s deadliest conflict since World War II. The capture by US forces of Venezuelan president Nicolas Maduro, an ally of Russian leader Vladimir Putin, has unsettled some European countries and added a potential new element of transatlantic uncertainty.

But no ceasefire deal has been reached as both sides remain at odds over territory in a post-war settlement,

with Kyiv insisting Russia must withdraw from the Ukrainian territory it currently occupies. Russia has repeatedly opposed any Nato boots on the ground in Ukraine to monitor a halt in hostilities. Representatives of 35 countries, including 27 heads of state, will gather in Paris for the meeting. The French presidency said the meeting aims to show the “alignment” between Washington, Kyiv and European allies on security guarantees for Ukraine.

Zelensky on his arrival in Paris on Tuesday was welcomed by French President Emmanuel Macron at the Elysee Palace for a one-to-one meeting before a lunch with other participants, including US envoys. US President Donald Trump’s



France’s President Emmanuel Macron (L) meets with Ukraine’s President Volodimir Zelenski (R) at the Elysee Palace. — AFP

special envoy Steve Witkoff and son-in-law Jared Kushner have travelled to the French capital to attend the meeting of the coalition, launched last year by France and Britain. British Prime Minister Keir Starmer, Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney,

German Chancellor Friedrich Merz and Italy’s Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni were among the leaders to attend the Paris talks, according to diplomatic sources.

Before leaving for Paris, Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk said the aim of

the meeting was to “tighten and align the European and American positions”. He said “only that kind of pressure has a chance of forcing the Russians to take the issue of a ceasefire, and then peace, seriously”. He warned, though, against expecting final decisions to be made in Paris.

An adviser to Macron on Monday said the new meeting was the culmination of efforts launched after Trump’s arrival at the White House to prevent “the United States from abandoning Ukraine.”

European leaders are to commit in particular to a shared vision of what a Russia-Ukraine ceasefire would look like, and their response in case of violations. They will also discuss the deployment

of a multinational force to “reassure Ukraine” as part of a possible political agreement, the French presidency said. To lay the groundwork, security advisers from 15 countries, including Britain, France and Germany as well as representatives from Nato and the European Union, gathered in Kyiv over the weekend.

Kyiv said in recent days a deal was “90 per cent” ready. But Russia, which occupies around 20 per cent of Ukraine, is pushing for full control of the country’s eastern Donbas region as part of a deal. Kyiv has warned ceding ground will embolden Moscow and said it will not sign a peace deal that fails to deter Russia from invading again. — AFP

OPINION

Starting the year without leaving yourself behind



HYESHA BARRETT

The writer is a Master Life Coach and Positive Parent Specialist

THE beginning of a new year carries a particular kind of energy. Not loud, not urgent, but quietly persuasive. It invites reflection before action, awareness before ambition. Yet, so often we meet this time with pressure. We tell ourselves we must be better, faster, more disciplined, more evolved. We treat the new year like a clean slate, forgetting that we are not blank pages. We arrive carrying the weight, wisdom, and weariness of everything that came before.

Starting the year on the right foot is not about erasing who you were last year. It is about understanding who you became. Momentum does not come from force; it comes from alignment. It begins when you stop fighting yourself and start listening instead.

The idea of “new year, new you” often implies reinvention, as though the current version of you is somehow insufficient. Nonetheless, growth is rarely a sharp break from the past. It is usually a continuation. A refinement. A gentle redirection informed by experience. The most sustainable change

begins when we acknowledge what worked, what didn’t, and why.

Before setting intentions, it helps to pause and ask quieter questions. Where did I expend energy that didn’t nourish me? Where did I abandon myself to keep the peace, meet expectations, or prove my worth? What patterns followed me through the year, even when I promised myself they wouldn’t? These are not questions of failure. They are questions of awareness, and awareness is the true starting point of momentum.

Momentum is not created by grand declarations. It is created by small, consistent acts of self-trust. It grows when you keep promises to yourself, especially the invisible ones. Resting when you are tired. Speaking honestly when silence costs you more. Choosing progress over perfection. Each of these choices sends a message to the nervous system: I am safe to move forward without abandoning myself.

The beginning of a year is also an invitation to recalibrate your relationship with time. Urgency often masquerades as motivation, but it rarely leads to lasting change. Pressure

Let momentum come from presence, not pressure. When you start from self-understanding, every step you take lands more firmly.

tightens the body and narrows perspective. Clarity, on the other hand, expands capacity. When you move from clarity, you are not chasing a version of yourself you think you should be. You are walking toward the life that feels more truthful.

Creating momentum means understanding that growth does not always feel exhilarating. Sometimes it feels quiet. Sometimes it feels uncomfortable. Sometimes it looks like choosing differently in moments no one else witnesses. The new habits you build, the boundaries you hold, the beliefs you begin to question will not announce themselves loudly. Their impact will be felt over time, in how steady you feel within yourself.

As this year begins, you do not need to become someone else. You need to become more fully who you already are. Let 2026 be the year you move forward without hostility toward yourself.

Let momentum come from presence, not pressure. When you start from self-understanding, every step you take lands more firmly. That is how real change begins, and that is how it lasts.

‘I CAN’T WALK ANYMORE’: AFGHANS FREEZE TO DEATH ON ROUTE TO IRAN

MOHSEN KARIMI

Habibullah set off from his home in western Afghanistan determined to find work in Iran, only for the 15-year-old to freeze to death while walking across the mountainous frontier.

“He was forced to go, to bring food for the family,” his mother, Mah Jan, said at her mud home in Ghunjan village.

Habibullah was one of at least 18 migrants who died last month while trying to cross illegally into Iran from Afghanistan’s Herat province, according to officials, when temperatures were around -3C.

With earthquakes and drought compounding a daily struggle to survive in Afghanistan, around half the population will need humanitarian assistance this year, according to the United Nations. Habibullah’s stepbrother, Gul Ahmad, said the teenager had tried shoe polishing but only earned up to 15 afghanis (23 cents) per day.

Habibullah was among 15 bodies returned from Iran, an Afghan border source said on condition of anonymity. A further three migrants who died were recovered on the Afghan side of the frontier, an army official said.

Over just a matter of days last month, around 1,600 Afghan migrants “who were at risk of perishing due to the weather” were rescued in the mountains, according to Iranian border guard commander Majid Shoja, quoted by the ILNA news agency. They are drawn to Iran due to greater job opportunities and a common language, but legal routes are limited.

Iran and Pakistan have combined to send back five million Afghans since September 2023, increasing the country’s population by 10 per cent, according to the International Organization for Migration. In the last week of December, “347 people who were trying to illegally cross the border into Iran were identified and arrested”, a military unit in western Afghanistan said.

Abdul Majeed Haidari, whose one-year-old son suffers from a heart problem, tried his luck in mid-December.

Working at a brick oven, the 25-year-old could no longer afford to pay for his son’s medication and family expenses.

“We left because we were so destitute,” his stepbrother Yunus, who accompanied him, said.

“We set out in the rain. In such weather, the radars and cameras of the border guards do not work properly. But the smuggler got lost,” he said.

They failed to light a fire for warmth and, as snow fell, Yunus recounted his stepbrother’s words: “I can’t walk anymore.”

“Some told us to leave him so as not to endanger the other 19 people in the group,” said Yunus, who requested his full name not be used. — AFP

How extraction is ending liberation around world

WHAT happened in Venezuela this week will be debated for years, but its meaning was instantly understood across much of the Global South. The US, under President Donald Trump, launched a direct military operation on Venezuelan territory and announced the capture of President Nicolás Maduro. Legal arguments will follow.

Diplomatic statements will pile up. Yet beneath the noise lies a far older story, one that predates modern international law and long predates oil.

It is the story of how empires deal with liberation. This is not only about Venezuela. It is about a pattern that has repeated itself for centuries: when a people attempt to control their land, their resources, and their political destiny, liberation itself becomes the threat, and the liberator becomes expendable.

In South America, this story begins with Simón Bolívar, “El Libertador.” Bolívar defeated Spanish colonial armies, but he could not defeat the forces that followed victory: Fragmentation, elite betrayal, and foreign interference. In 1828, he narrowly survived an assassination attempt in Bogotá.

He died two years later, politically isolated, warning that external powers would continue to manipulate newly independent states. Bolívar’s enemies did not need to kill him on the battlefield. They only needed to outlive his moment.

North Africa tells the same story. In Morocco, Abdelkrim al Khattabi humiliated Spanish and French forces during the Rif War in the 1920s, proving that colonial armies were not invincible.

His reward was exile, first removal from his people, then removal from history. Exile, after all, is colonialism’s quiet weapon: It denies martyrdom while suffocating momentum.

In Algeria, Emir Abdelkader led one



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The task of our generation is to prove that history is wrong, not with slogans, but with institutions strong enough that no liberator needs to be kidnapped for an empire to feel secure.

of the most disciplined anti-colonial resistances of the 19th century. France imprisoned him despite promises of safe passage, then later rebranded him as a “civilised” figure only once he no longer posed a political threat. Liberation is tolerated only when it is no longer liberating.

In Southeast Asia, Ho Chi Minh was not treated by France as a nationalist leader with legitimate claims, but as a criminal destabiliser. This framing, turning political resistance into criminality, became a template later refined through Cold War doctrine and, more recently, through the language of counterterrorism.

Even the Indian subcontinent illustrates the same logic with a painful twist. Mahatma Gandhi was repeatedly imprisoned by the British Empire. He was not assassinated by Britain, but by an extremist from within his own society. Colonialism fractures political cultures so deeply that, after independence, liberation itself can become internally contested. Empires do not always fire the final shot; sometimes they leave behind the conditions that make it inevitable. Seen through this lens, Venezuela is not an exception. It is a continuation.

Extraction, whether of gold in Sudan, cobalt in Congo, oil in the Orinoco, or data around the world has always required political compliance.

When compliance fails, legitimacy must be destroyed. Leaders are recast as tyrants, criminals, or threats to global order. Sovereignty becomes conditional. International law becomes selective. And intervention is presented not as conquest, but as correction. This is why the Venezuelan operation resonates so strongly across Africa, Asia, and the Muslim and Arab world. It reinforces a fear many states quietly hold: That sovereignty still depends less on law and more on leverage.

For us in the Gulf, this moment

carries specific weight.

First, it exposes the fragility of the crumbling rules-based international order. If borders can be crossed and leaders removed without multilateral consent, then mid-sized states must assume that legal protections alone are insufficient. Second, it reminds resource-rich countries that economic value is never neutral. Oil, gas, minerals, and even data are not just assets; they are pressure points. Without resilient institutions and diversified economies, extraction becomes a vulnerability rather than a blessing. Third, it elevates the importance of diplomacy as strategy, not symbolism. Countries like Oman have long invested in mediation, neutrality, and de-escalation. In an era where force is again normalised, such diplomatic capital becomes a form of national defence. Finally, it signals a deeper shift: Liberation in the 21st century cannot rely on heroic individuals alone.

Bolívar, Abdolqader al Jazaeri, Abdelkrim, Abdelkader, Ho Chi Minh, Omar al Mukhtar and Gandhi all proved that charisma and courage can break empires, but they also showed that liberation collapses without systems that outlast leaders.

“Killing Bolívar” today does not always mean assassination. It means dismantling the idea that a society can control its resources, write its own narrative, and choose its own path without external permission. The real question raised by Venezuela is not who governs Caracas. It is whether liberation itself is still allowed to survive in a world where extraction remains the highest priority. History suggests a sobering answer: Liberation is tolerated only when it no longer interferes with power. The task of our generation is to prove that history is wrong, not with slogans, but with institutions strong enough that no liberator needs to be kidnapped for an empire to feel secure.

When Washington claims democracy and takes control



OMAN
AL YAHYAI

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IN early January 2026, the United States armed forces carried out an unprecedented military operation in Venezuela that resulted in the capture of President Nicolás Maduro and his wife, Cilia Flores, who were transported to New York to face charges including drug trafficking and narco-terrorism. US prosecutors have charged Maduro with leading a corrupt regime that facilitated massive cocaine shipments into the United States and other violent criminal acts. The Trump administration has framed the intervention as an effort to defend democracy and combat drug trafficking, a familiar rhetorical script that masks deeper geopolitical and economic interests.

President Donald Trump publicly asserted that Washington would ‘run’ Venezuela until a “safe, proper and judicious transition” could occur, signalling direct US oversight over the country’s governance. Many international legal scholars and foreign observers have condemned the operation as a violation of international law, arguing that it bypasses both congressional authorisation and United Nations sanction and amounts to an act of military aggression.

The use of democratic rhetoric to justify forceful regime change represents a profound contradiction. If the United States really sought to strengthen democracy abroad, it would foreground diplomatic engagement, respect for national sovereignty and multilateral frameworks. Instead, Washington launched an unilateral military strike on foreign soil, hardly a democratic

practice, and proceeded to abduct a sitting head of state with no clear mandate other than executive will. Critics, including former US vice president Kamala Harris, have labelled the operation “unlawful and unwise,” warning that it reflects strategic motives far more rooted in control and influence than in any altruistic defence of democratic norms.

Underneath the official narrative lies a persistent pattern in US foreign policy: resource interests and geopolitical influence routinely trump the principles of self-determination and international law. Venezuela possesses vast oil reserves, among the largest in the world, making it a strategic prize in international energy politics.

Historically, US interventions in oil-rich regions have been framed as efforts to “protect” allies or “ensure stability,” while in practice securing access to resources and strategic ports.

The 1991 Gulf War, launched in the wake of Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait, was justified by Washington as necessary to defend sovereignty and regional order. Yet the intervention also ensured enduring US military presence in the region and reinforced American access to Middle Eastern oil infrastructure. Such operations underscore how resource geopolitics inform military action.

Comparable patterns can be found in other events of US intervention. Yemen, a country ravaged by prolonged conflict exacerbated by foreign involvement, has seen its local population suffer devastating humanitarian

The use of democratic rhetoric to justify forceful regime change represents a profound contradiction. If the United States really sought to strengthen democracy abroad, it would foreground diplomatic engagement, respect for national sovereignty and multilateral frameworks

collapse. External powers, including the United States, have supported or enabled factions in ways that prolong war rather than resolve it, with millions facing famine, displacement and disease. Somalia’s decades of foreign military presence and proxy wars have destabilised political structures and undermined local governance, leaving the country mired in insecurity long after foreign troops withdrew or shifted tactics. Though often justified as counter-terrorism and stabilisation efforts, these interventions have worsened social, political and economic conditions for ordinary people.

Moreover, the claim of fighting for democracy rings particularly hollow given the domestic challenges to democratic norms within the United States itself, including questions about political violence and erosion of checks and balances. When a country with its own struggles at home invokes the rhetorical mantle of democracy abroad to justify military conquest, it shows how political language can be used to justify actions driven more by power and control than by principle.

Political autonomy and economic self-determination for nations should not be subordinated to external military force, particularly without broad international consensus. What is unfolding in Venezuela risks not only destabilising the region further, but also setting a dangerous precedent: that a powerful nation may deploy its military to capture foreign leaders and impose its own governance in the name of democracy.

SMART GLASSES FIND PURPOSE AMONG BLIND USERS

THOMAS URBAIN

The actual use-value of smart glasses remains keenly debated - but less so among blind people, who are increasingly relying on the latest models to improve their lives.

Does this restaurant serve fish? Does this bus go to my neighbourhood? None of the emerging leaders in the nascent smart glasses market designed their models to answer these questions with blind users in mind.

But several small startups - some exhibiting at the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas this week - are helping build a dedicated ecosystem out of existing products.

For sighted people, smart glasses just tell them what they already see, noted Aaron Preece, editor-in-chief of AccessWorld magazine, published by the American Foundation for the Blind (AFB).

“But for blind people, it’s useful.”

Smartphone apps already serve people with blindness, “but you have to hold the device in the right direction,” said Preece, who is blind.

“If it’s on your head, it’s definitely a lot more intuitive.”

According to the International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness, 43 million people worldwide are blind, while another 295 million have moderate to severe visual impairment.

The most popular smart glasses are Meta’s AI glasses, which come in Ray-Ban or Oakley styles and can describe what’s in front of the user through voice commands. Using the Be My Eyes app, users can even get a volunteer to describe the scene captured through the camera.

California startup Agiga developed its EchoVision glasses with input from blind users, including music legend Stevie Wonder.

The company says its audio descriptions are richer and more comprehensive than existing products. The glasses’ 110-degree camera angle captures 50 per cent more than other smart glasses, said Agiga CEO Xiaoran Wang, reducing the need for users to turn their heads to capture a scene.

Launch is planned for the first quarter of 2026 at \$599, not including an AI service subscription. This compares to Meta’s Ray-Ban starting price of \$299.

Netherlands-based Envision recently launched a model in partnership with Hong Kong specialist Solos, priced at \$699 with one year’s access to its Ally software (\$10 monthly thereafter).

CEO Karthik Mahadevan doubts a manufacturer focused exclusively on the blind and visually impaired can succeed, as “you cannot be both affordable and only serving a niche.”

He prefers partnering with manufacturers to focus on software usable across multiple glass brands and welcomes upcoming models from Google, Samsung, and Lenovo. — AFP

Landmines destroy lives on Bangla-Myanmar border

IN the dense hill forests along Bangladesh’s border with war-torn Myanmar, villagers are losing limbs to landmines, casualties of a conflict not of their making. Ali Hossain, 40, was collecting firewood in early 2025 when a blast shattered his life. “I went into the jungle with fellow villagers. Suddenly, there was an explosion, and my leg was blown off,” he said. “I screamed at the top of my voice.”

Neighbours rushed to stem the spurting blood.

“They picked me up, gathered my severed leg and took me to hospital,” he said. In Ashartoli, a small settlement in Bandarban district - the village name translates as “haven of hope” - the weapons of a foreign war have turned forests, farms and footpaths deadly.

Bangladesh’s 271-km eastern border with Myanmar cuts through forests, much of it unmarked, as well as rivers.

It is crossed daily by villagers, as their families have done for generations, for collecting firewood or smalltime trading.

Surgeons chopped Hossain’s leg off above the knee.

“My wife had to carry me on her back,” he said, gesturing towards the steep hillside around his home, as he recalled the months after the blast. A year later, Hossain walks with an artificial leg and a crutch, but he cannot return to his job on a rubber plantation.

Needing 300 taka (\$2.50) a day for medicine, his two young sons now take on his former dangerous task, collecting firewood after school.

Similar stories echo across the border region.

“My father and forefathers collected wood from the jungle,” said Mohammad Abu Taleb, 47. “I learned no other trade.”

He crossed unwittingly into Myanmar.

“I stepped on a pile of dry leaves, and there was an explosion,” he said, leaning on a crutch. “It took away my whole life.”



This aerial photograph shows a dense forest in the Bangladesh-Myanmar frontier district of Bandarban. — AFP



SHEIKH SABIHA
ALAM

The writer is a journalist with AFP based in Dhaka

His 10-year-old son has since dropped out of school to help support the family. Taleb said trips to repair his artificial leg and attend medical checkups cost around \$80 - an impossible burden for a family struggling to survive.

Nurul Amin, 23, lost his leg while attempting to bring a cow across the border, a memory blurred by pain.

“They carried me on their shoulders to the hospital,” he recalls, saying he was more worried that his monthly income had now fallen to around \$25-\$30. “That’s not enough for a family,” he said. “I have no other way to survive.”

Myanmar is the world’s most dangerous country for landmine casualties, according to the International Campaign to Ban Landmines, which has detailed the “massive” and growing use of the weapons, banned by many countries.

It recorded more than 2,000 casualties in Myanmar in 2024, the latest full statistics available - double the total reported the year before.

“The use of mines appeared to significantly increase in 2024-2025,” it said in its Landmine Monitor report, highlighting “an increase

in the number of mine victims, particularly near the border” with Bangladesh.

Bangladesh accuses Myanmar’s military and rival armed forces of planting the mines.

Guerrilla Arakan Army fighters - one of the many factions challenging the junta’s rule - control swathes of jungle across the border with Myanmar. More than a million Rohingya refugees who fled Myanmar also live in Bangladesh’s border regions - caught between the warring military and separatist groups. Bangladesh police say that at least 28 people were injured by landmines in 2025. In November, a Bangladesh border guard was killed when a landmine tore off both his legs.

“This cruelty cannot be legitimised,” said Lieutenant Colonel Kafil Uddin Kayes, a local Border Guard Bangladesh commander.

Bangladesh’s border force has put up warning signs and red flags, and conducts regular mine-sweeping operations. But villagers say warnings offer little protection when survival depends on entering forests seeded with explosives, leaving communities in Bangladesh to pay the price of war.

SPORTS

SHORTTAKES



HH Sayyid Bilarab bin Haitham al Said

SAYYID BILARAB TO PRESIDE OVER ANNUAL ROYAL CAVALRY RACE

MUSCAT: At the behest of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, HH Sayyid Bilarab bin Haitham al Said will preside over the Annual Royal Cavalry Race, which will be held at Al Rahba Racetrack in the Wilayat of Barka on Wednesday.

The event is organised by the Royal Court Affairs, represented by the Royal Cavalry. The event comprises five races, the most prominent of which is the fifth race, where jockeys will compete for the honour of winning His Majesty the Sultan’s Cup.

The event will also include various equestrian displays performed by the riders of the Royal Cavalry, accompanied by a selection of musical pieces. Additionally, groups of citizens will participate by performing traditional Omani arts associated with horsemanship. — ONA

NEWCASTLE’S HOWE RULES HIMSELF OUT OF MAN UTD JOB



Newcastle United manager Eddie Howe reacts during the Premier League match against Burnley at Turf Moor, Burnley, Britain. — Reuters

LONDON: Eddie Howe said on Tuesday that he is “100 per cent” committed to Newcastle as he dismissed speculation linking him with the vacant Manchester United manager’s job. Ruben Amorim was sacked on Monday after 14 months in charge at Old Trafford after an explosive post-match interview following his team’s 1-1 draw at Leeds. Newcastle boss Howe has been touted as a possible permanent replacement for the Portuguese boss. He was also linked to the Chelsea job after the departure last week of Enzo Maresca, who has since been replaced by Strasbourg boss Liam Rosenior. The 48-year-old Howe was asked by reporters on Tuesday whether anything could tempt him away from St James’ Park.

“No, not at this current time,” he said on the eve of his team’s home match against Leeds.

“The most important thing for me is happiness in the role, happiness in the job, the relationships I have with the people around me. Now, that’s not always been consistently good and things can change at any football club.

“But, at the moment, I am very happy.”

Howe is in his fifth season at St James’ Park and last year led Newcastle to a first major trophy in 56 years. They are currently ninth in the Premier League, just five points off a Champions League place.

“I’m 100 per cent here, working as hard as I can, head down, ignoring all the stuff that you guys (the press) write, good or bad, because it’s irrelevant,” said Howe.

“It’s about today’s work and trying to prepare the team as well as we can for Leeds, so that will never change from my perspective, my commitment to my work and my job.” — AFP

Al Bashayer a win away from OBL championship

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, JAN 6

THE third round of the first phase of the Oman Basketball League (OBL) Finals 2025–26 takes place on Wednesday, featuring two crucial matches in a decisive evening that could reshape the title race and largely determine the final standings. Both games will be played at the Auxiliary Hall of the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher.

The action begins at 6 pm with Nizwa facing Salalah in a must-win battle to escape the bottom and decide the fight for third place. Attention then shifts at 8 pm to the headline clash between Al Bashayer and Seeb, a showdown that could allow the league leaders to seal the championship early or keep the title race alive until the final round.

NIZWA TAKE ON SALALAH
Round 3 opens with a decisive encounter between Nizwa and Salalah after both teams suffered defeats against Al Bashayer and Seeb in the previous two rounds, leaving each side with one last opportunity to rescue their finals campaign.

Nizwa enter the match with eight points and hold a mathematical advantage that would allow them to secure third place with a victory, making this clash extremely important as they aim to end their season on a positive note.

Head coach Hatem al Tijani is relying on a blend of experience and energy, led by Sami al Hashmi, Nikola



League leaders Al Bashayer look to seal the championship early while Seeb aim to extend the title race.

ROUND 3 HEATS UP
TITLE RACE IN OMAN
BASKETBALL LEAGUE

SEEB HOPE TO EXTEND
CHAMPIONSHIP RACE
WITH VICTORY

NIZWA, SALALAH IN
BATTLE FOR THIRD
POSITION

Dakivos, Nasser Ambusaidi, Basel al Subhi, Kinglisy and Ibrahimia Thomas, in a bid to control the tempo.

Salalah, meanwhile, are clinging to their final hopes. With seven points, a win would take them to nine and postpone the decision to the next round, keeping their third-place ambitions alive. Coached by national trainer Shaker al Balushi, the team is counting on a group of young, improving players such as Saeed Ahed, Bashar Bait Farid, Mazdan al Riyami, Ayman Mustahil and Ahmed al Jahwari, in what is expected to be a physical and tactically intense contest.

IHF team to visit Muscat for 2028 worlds bid inspection

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JAN 6

A delegation from the International Handball Federation (IHF) is scheduled to visit Muscat before the end of this month to assess the Sultanate of Oman’s readiness to stage the 2028 IHF Men’s and Women’s Beach Handball World Championships.

The inspection visit follows the formal bid which was submitted in September last year by the Oman Handball Association (OHA), positioning Oman among the shortlisted candidates to host the global showpiece.

The IHF delegation will conduct a comprehensive evaluation of sporting venues, beach facilities, accommodation, hotels, logistics infrastructure and operational readiness, during their visit in Muscat before making a final decision on the host nation.

Confirming the visit, Moosa bin Khamis al Balushi, OHA Chairman, told Oman Observer that the association has received an official notification from the IHF regarding the inspection mission.

“We have received an



Oman have qualified for the 2026 IHF Men’s Beach Handball World Championship to be held in Croatia.



OHA CHAIRMAN
MOOSA
AL BALUSHI

said the hosting country will be announced in three months’ time.

official letter from the International Handball Federation informing us of their intention to visit Oman to assess the readiness of our bid,” Al Balushi said. “The evaluation will include facilities, venues, hotels and

all other operational aspects required to host an event of this magnitude.”

Al Balushi indicated that the outcome of the bidding process is expected to be announced within a defined time frame following the inspection. “It is anticipated that within the next three months, the IHF will announce the name of the country that will host the 2028 World Beach Handball Championships,” he said.

“A positive discussion between OHA and IHF officials already took place recently during the IHF General

AL BASHAYER IN POLE POSITION
In the marquee match of the third round, league leaders Al Bashayer face second-placed Seeb in a fixture that has all the qualities of an early final showdown.

Defending champions Al Bashayer topped the standings with 12 points, just one point ahead of Seeb, making this clash pivotal in the championship battle.

Al Bashayer are aiming to wrap up the title with a win, building on their victory over Seeb in the preliminary stage and their strong form under head coach Mahmoud Ambo Ali and his assistant Tamim al Riyami.

The team boasts a powerful lineup of local and international stars, including Osama al Riyami, Mahmoud al Souli, Ahmed al Halhali, Bassam al Subhi, Noah al Mahrouqi and Ibrahimia Thomas, as they push for early confirmation of the league shield.

Seeb, however, approach the game with a simple mission: win or fall out of the title race. Victory is their only route to keeping the championship alive and forcing a final-round showdown.

Under head coach Iskandar al Nabulsi and assistant Raed al Hinai, Seeb will depend on the experience and attacking variety of players such as Ahmed al Maamari, Maroun al Hadidi, Jawad Adekyu, Mamadou Badji and Zakariya al Wahaibi, as they attempt to halt Al Bashayer’s momentum and keep the battle for the title going until the very end.

Assembly held in Cairo, Egypt, last month, where Oman’s bid was presented and reviewed in detail,” he concluded.

Oman’s confidence in securing the hosting rights has been bolstered by its recent success in staging major international and continental handball events. Muscat had hosted the 10th Asian Men’s Beach Handball Championship 2025 from May 6 to 15.

The championship concluded with Oman’s men’s national team delivering a landmark achievement, defeating regional powerhouse Iran 2-0 in the final to claim the continental title for the second time. The victory also secured Oman’s qualification for the 2026 IHF Men’s Beach Handball World Championship, scheduled to take place in Croatia.

Oman’s bid is further strengthened by its proven track record as a global host.

The Sultanate of Oman had successfully staged the IHF Men’s and Women’s Beach Handball World Championships in Al Musannah in 2012, an event that remains a reference point within the IHF calendar for its organisation and coastal facilities.

EXCITINGMATCHES



The Supreme Judiciary Council defeated the Ministry of Interior 1–0 in a hard-fought contest.

GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS EIGHTS FOOTBALL ENTERS SECOND DAY

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, JAN 6

The second day of the 2026 Government Institutions Eights Football Championship, organised by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth (MoCSY), witnessed the continuation of high-level competition and excitement, as group matches from Groups 5 to 8 were played on Monday evening at Al Amal Sports Club Stadium.

In Group 5, a highly competitive encounter between the Royal Court Affairs and the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning (MoHUP) ended in a 3–1 victory for the Royal Court Affairs, marked by attacking exchanges and intensity until the final minutes. Meanwhile, the Authority for Public Services Regulation claimed an important 3–1 win over the Majlis Ash’shura.

In Group 6, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MoAFWR) continued its impressive form with a commanding 5–1 victory over the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority (SMEDA), demonstrating clear attacking superiority. In the other match, the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MoHT) edged past the Ministry of Social Development (MoSD) with a 2–1 win in a closely fought contest decided in the final moments.

Group 7 saw a tight and disciplined match between the Environment Authority and the State Audit Institution, which ended in a 1–1 draw, while the encounter between the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation (MoHERI), and the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) finished in a goalless draw.

In Group 8, the Diwan of the Royal Court secured a convincing 3–0 victory over the National Records and Archives Authority (NRAA), dominating the match from the outset. Meanwhile, the Supreme Judiciary Council defeated the Ministry of Interior (MoI) 1–0 in a hard-fought contest that remained competitive until the final whistle.

IMPORTANT EXPERIENCE
Majid al Hinai, a player for the University Medical City team, said that taking part in the current edition of the Government Institutions Championship represents a new and important experience for his team, noting that this is their first appearance in a tournament that features a strong lineup of competitive teams and talented players.

Al Hinai explained that the level of the championship reflects the intensity of competition among the participating institutions. He added that while his team has previously competed in similar tournaments within the university, this external participation presents a different challenge and a new ambition. We are aiming to deliver a strong performance and to reach the furthest stage possible in the tournament, he said.

With the conclusion of the second day, the opening round of the group stage was completed, providing early indications of the battle for qualification to the knockout stages. The championship features 32 government institutions divided into eight groups, under a professional organisational framework that reflects MoCSY’s commitment to promoting institutional sport, fair competition, and teamwork within the government workplace.



Australia’s Travis Head walks back to the pavilion after losing his wicket, LBW bowled by England’s Jacob Bethell. — Reuters

Head, Smith centuries put Australia in charge

RUN-MACHINE TRAVIS Head hit a swashbuckling 163 and Steve Smith a composed unbeaten 129 as Australia built a 134-run lead over England to seize control on day three of the fifth and final Ashes Test on Tuesday.

It was destructive opener Head’s third ton of the series, to go with the phenomenal match-winning 123 he made in Perth and 170 at Adelaide.

Smith was equally impressive, with his first hundred of the series driving the hosts to 518-7 by stumps at a packed Sydney Cricket Ground in reply to England’s 384.

Beau Webster was alongside him on 42 at the close.

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

“Nice batting wicket out there. Nice to start my innings on the back of a great innings from Travis Head,” Smith told Fox Sports.

“When you’re out there with him they forget about you and I was able to get into my work. Worked out well today.”

Head brought up three figures off just 105 balls and seemed destined to score 200.

But he came undone in the third over after lunch by the part-time spin of Jacob Bethell, who was bowling for the first time in the series.

In his second over, Bethell trapped the 32-year-old lbw attempting a sweep shot to end a magnificent knock.

Skipper Smith treated Bethell with contempt, launching him for a big six on his way to a 37th Test hundred.

It was Smith’s 13th Ashes century to move past England legend Jack Hobbs. Only Donald Bradman with 19 has more.

Usman Khawaja, in his 88th and last Test after announcing his retirement, fell lbw to Brydon Carse for 17 while Alex Carey made 16 before Josh Tongue enticed an edge.

Nightwatchman Michael Nesar made 24 and Cameron Green 37.

“This is proper Test cricket now in terms of the graft and the stuff that you have to put in,” said Bethell, as the tourists attempt to finish a dismal series on a high.

“Yeah, it was a tough day, but you know, that’s what it’s about. We’ve got to come out tomorrow, take those three wickets early on and get back in again.”

DROPPED CATCHES
Head resumed on 91 and Nesar on one after Jake Weatherald (21) and Marnus Labuschagne (48) were out on Monday.

Head clattered an early midwicket



Australia’s Travis Head in action during the fifth Ashes Test at Sydney Cricket Ground. — Reuters

boundary off Ben Stokes and reached three figures with his 17th four, crunched through the covers from Tongue, windmilling his bat in celebration. It was his 12th century and first in Sydney to cement his reputation as one of the game’s most versatile batsmen.

Head only moved to the top of the order in the second innings of the first Test in Perth due to Khawaja’s back injury, but he has made the position his own.

With his hundred secure, he banged three straight fours off Matthew Potts then had a massive letoff on 121 when he pulled Carse and Will Jacks dropped a sitter near the ropes. Nesar ably stuck around for 90 balls to foil England, who wasted their last two reviews on him. Batting like a top-order batsman, he smacked four boundaries before getting a thin edge to wicketkeeper Jamie Smith off Carse.

Smith, on 12, was dropped at leg slip by Zak Crawley but safely made it to lunch and passed 50 with a drive down the ground.

When Khawaja departed, Carey produced a series of textbook strokes before being dismissed in similar fashion to his last two Tests. Unruffled, Smith slammed Stokes to the ropes for four to put Australia in the lead for the first time and, steely eyed, kept going to yet another stylish century.

All-rounder Green came into the Test under increasing pressure after failing to fire with either bat or ball through the series, with his automatic selection being questioned.

He produced a glorious cover drive and a big six to show flashes of what he can do.

But he then needlessly spooned Carse to Ben Duckett in the deep to throw away his wicket. — AFP

SPORTS

EPLCHALLENGE



Strasbourg’s British head coach Liam Rosenior greets supporters at the end of the French L1 match between RC Strasbourg Alsace and AJ Auxerre at the Stade de la Meinau in Strasbourg, eastern France. — AFP

CHELSEA APPOINT ROSENIOR AS NEW HEAD COACH

LONDON: Liam Rosenior was confirmed as Premier League club Chelsea’s new head coach on Tuesday following the departure of Italian Enzo Maresca last week.

The 41-year-old Englishman has signed a deal until 2032, becoming the fourth full-time head coach appointed since a takeover of the club led by American Todd Boehly in 2022.

“I am extremely humbled and honoured to be appointed head coach of Chelsea Football Club,” Rosenior, who leaves his post at French club Racing Strasbourg, said in a club statement.

“This is a club with a unique spirit and a proud history of winning trophies.”

London-born Rosenior, whose playing career included spells at Fulham, Hull City and Brighton and Hove Albion, took charge of Strasbourg in July 2024 after coaching spells at Derby County, where he was assistant to Wayne Rooney, and Hull in England’s second tier.

Former England forward Rooney described Rosenior as “as good a coach as I’ve ever worked with”.

While he is relatively inexperienced as a top-level coach, his reputation was enhanced after leading Strasbourg to European qualification following a seventh-placed finish in Ligue 1.

Part of that squad was Chelsea’s young Brazilian midfielder Andrey Santos, who was on loan.

“He’s a great coach. I love working with him. All the players are excited by his commitment, his vision,” Santos, who scored 10 league goals for Strasbourg last season, said in an interview about Rosenior.

Rosenior became the leading candidate to replace Maresca, thanks in large part to the fact that Strasbourg and Chelsea are part of the same multi-club ownership structure, with the French club taken over by Boehly’s consortium BlueCo in 2023.

His immediate task will be to turn around Chelsea’s form after a run of only one win in eight Premier League games although he will likely be watching from the stands at Craven Cottage on Wednesday as Chelsea visit London rivals Fulham with under-21s coach Calum McFarlane taking the team.

Rosenior’s first game in charge will be Saturday’s FA Cup trip away at Charlton Athletic.

Chelsea were third in the standings in November and being tipped as title contenders but have since slipped to fifth and are 17 points behind leaders Arsenal after 20 matches.

Rosenior will be tasked with steadying the ship and getting the most out of an expensively-assembled squad full of international household names, a contrast to his time at Strasbourg where he worked with an unsung squad. — Reuters



Egypt’s Mohamed Salah celebrates scoring their third goal during the CAF Africa Cup of Nations Round of 16 match against Benin at Adrar Stadium, Agadir, Morocco. — Reuters

Salah seals Egypt win as Osimhen powers Nigeria

MOHAMED SALAH sealed an extra-time win for Egypt against Benin on Monday to take the Pharaohs through to the quarterfinals of the Africa Cup of Nations, before Victor Osimhen netted twice as Nigeria cruised to an emphatic victory in their last-16 clash with Mozambique.

Captain Salah scored after 124 minutes to clinch a 3-1 extra-time triumph for the Egyptians over plucky minnows Benin in a thrilling last-16 encounter in Agadir.

Egypt’s tally of seven Afcon titles is more than any other country but the last of those victories came in 2010 and Liverpool superstar Salah has never picked up a winner’s medal in the competition.

Marwan Attia put the Pharaohs ahead on 69 minutes, sidefooting superbly into the roof of the net from just outside the box after being set up by Mohamed Hany.

Benin lie 57 places below Egypt in the world rankings but they forced extra time by equalising in the 83rd minute when Jodel Dossou scored from close range after goalkeeper Mohamed El Shenawy had done superbly to palm a Mohamed Tijani cross away from his line.

To extra time they went, with Egypt looking to avoid a repeat of 2024 when they were eliminated in the last 16 on penalties by the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Yasser Ibrahim headed Egypt back in front seven minutes into the extra period, before Salah ended any doubt about the outcome on the breakaway right at the end with his third goal at the tournament.



Nigeria’s Victor Osimhen celebrates scoring their third goal with Ademola Lookman. — Reuters

Egypt will now stay in Agadir to face title-holders Ivory Coast or Burkina Faso on Saturday in the quarterfinals.

“Before the game, I said there are no easy teams, and Benin were tough opponents. Egypt are a great team and I want to make my people happy,” said Pharaohs coach Hossam Hassan.

SUPER EAGLES IMPRESS

Osimhen grabbed a brace and Ademola Lookman played a part in all the goals as Nigeria comprehensively beat Mozambique 4-0 on a rainy night in Fes.

Atalanta forward Lookman, a former winner of the African footballer of the year award like Osimhen, opened the scoring after 20 minutes from an Akor Adams assist.

Osimhen had started the game without wearing his trademark mask but restored the face covering before netting Nigeria’s second goal on 25 minutes after a Lookman cross from the left was helped on by Adams.

The Galatasaray forward then scored again from another Lookman delivery just after half-time, his third goal in three games after seven Cup of Nations appearances without finding the net. Lookman was again the provider as Sevilla forward Adams rifled in the fourth quarter of an hour from the end, as the Super Eagles recorded the biggest win in an Afcon knockout tie since Egypt hammered Algeria 4-0 in the semifinals at the 2010 tournament in Angola.

“I am very happy. It was a good performance from the team, scoring four goals. There is lots to be happy with. Hopefully we can keep up the good work,” said Lookman, named man of the match.

Mozambique go home but this Cup of Nations can go down as a success for them after they reached the knockout phase for the very first time.

Determined to make up for their failure to qualify for the World Cup, Nigeria march on to a last-eight tie on Saturday in Marrakesh against either Algeria or DR Congo.

Those teams clash in Rabat in the last 16 on Tuesday and a victory in that game for DR Congo would offer Nigeria a chance to avenge their defeat on penalties against the Leopards in a World Cup qualifying play-off in November.

The final last-16 ties take place on Tuesday with Algeria facing the Congolese before the Ivorians meet West African neighbours Burkina Faso in Marrakesh. — AFP

US driver Guthrie leads Dakar after Stage 3 sweep for Ford

AL ULA, Saudi Arabia: Ford Raptors filled the top five places in the Dakar Rally as American Mitch Guthrie Jr won the third 421km stage in Saudi Arabia, his first victory in the top car category, and took the overall lead on Tuesday.

Guthrie ended the loop starting and finishing in Al Ula with a 26 second overall lead over Czech driver Martin Prokop with Sweden’s Mattias Ekstrom third.

“We started at the back and (co-driver) Kellon (Walch) killed it with the navigation,” said Guthrie. “There were a lot of tricky spots, but we had no flat tyres. The car was great so we just kept moving all day, really.”

Spaniard Carlos Sainz, a four-time



Ford Racing US driver Mitch Guthrie Jr and his co-driver US’s Kellon Walch ended the loop starting and finishing in Al Ula with a 26-second overall lead over Czech driver Martin Prokop with Sweden’s Mattias Ekstrom third in Stage 3 of the 48th edition of the Dakar Rally 2026 in Saudi Arabia. — AFP

Dakar winner still competing at 63, was in fourth place overall and compatriot Nani Roma fifth.

Brazilian Lucas Moraes was sixth with Dacia Sandrider teammates Cristina Gutierrez, Nasser al Attiyah and Sebastien Loeb seventh, 10th and 12th respectively.

Five-time winner Al Attiyah had led the standings after Monday’s stage but dropped to 11 minutes and 39 seconds off the pace.

Al Attiyah, who suffered two punctures, was the only driver of Monday’s leading six to remain in the top 10. Toyota had filled the top five places in Monday’s stage.

Nine-time world rally champion Loeb also lost time with two

punctures in the first 100km and no further spare tyre after that.

“We’re driving at about 20 per cent of our capacity just to avoid punctures and we still get them,” said the Frenchman. “I’m just happy to be at the finish because at one point I really didn’t think we were going to make it”.

In the motorcycle category, Spain’s Tosha Schareina won the stage for Honda with Australia’s defending champion Daniel Sanders retaining the overall lead on a KTM, one minute and seven seconds ahead of Honda’s Ricky Brabec.

Wednesday’s fourth stage is 417km from Al Ula with an overnight bivouac in the desert. — Reuters



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SHORTTAKES



The system will operate 18 modern cable cars, each with a capacity of eight visitors.

MUTTRAH TELEFERIK TO WELCOME OVER 4M VISITORS ANNUALLY

SAEED AL MASHARFI
MUSCAT, JAN 6

The Muttrah Teleferik cable car project is entering an advanced phase of readiness, marking a major milestone in the development of tourism infrastructure in the Wilayat of Muttrah. According to the latest updates, the project is expected to attract more than four million visitors annually, positioning it among the region's most prominent urban tourism attractions.

Designed to offer a smooth and scenic experience, the system will operate 18 modern cable cars, each with a capacity of eight visitors, allowing guests to enjoy panoramic views of Muttrah's coastline, rugged mountains and historic urban landscape. With an operational capacity of around 400 visitors per hour, the teleferik is engineered to efficiently handle high visitor volumes, particularly during peak tourism seasons.

Beyond its role as a transport attraction, the project is envisioned as a catalyst for a wider tourism and leisure ecosystem. It is expected to boost visitor movement across key areas of Muttrah, extend average visitor stay and stimulate new investment opportunities in hospitality, retail and cultural experiences along the route. Ahead of its anticipated launch in Q1 2026, the cable car services will feature three stations, starting at the Muttrah Fish Market, passing through the mountain top behind the Riaym Park, ending in Hay Al Ward; forming a continuous route linking key Muttrah landmarks and expected to be the longest overwater cable car in the Middle East.

Budget 2026 as Oman's confidence barometer

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, JAN 6

OMAN'S Budget 2026 is being read through one number: the deficit.

Leading Omani brokerage services firm United Securities says the more revealing test is confidence — whether the fiscal plan can turn market optimism and credit growth into lasting, sustained non-oil expansion as the country enters the 11th Five-Year Plan.

A research note from the Muscat-based company highlights the government's decision to keep the oil-price assumption at \$60 a barrel, calling it an “adequate margin of safety” that protects the baseline and leaves room for upside if prices surprise higher.

It is a cautious anchor and it signals that policy is trying to avoid the boom-bust rhythm that has shaped past budget cycles.

A second, quieter stabiliser is gas. United Securities argues that greater reliance on gas revenues can help reduce exposure to oil-price swings, giving the budget a broader hydrocarbon base and, in theory, more predictable planning space for diversification spending.

That framing is supported by a better-than-planned 2025 outcome. The firm estimates the 2025 deficit at RO 480 million, below the RO 620 million originally budgeted, largely because oil prices came in higher than assumed while non-oil revenues broadly held to plan.

For 2026, the budgeted deficit is RO 530 million. United Securities'



An oil-price assumption of \$60 a barrel provides an “adequate margin of safety”, protecting the baseline while preserving upside should prices surprise to the upside.

A second, quieter stabiliser is gas. United Securities argues that greater reliance on gas revenues can help reduce exposure to oil-price swings, giving the budget a broader hydrocarbon base and, in theory, more predictable planning space for diversification spending.

key point is that deficits are no longer automatically treated as a red flag.

Under the 11th Plan, the note expects deficits through 2030, reflecting a deliberate choice to fund investment-led growth while keeping debt within a manageable band.

It expects debt metrics to stay around the 30–35% of GDP range in 2026, helped by recent sovereign rating improvements that should support borrowing costs over time.

On the growth side, United Securities forecasts real GDP growth of 4.0% in 2026, a step up from its 2025 estimate of 2.7%, with both hydrocarbon and non-hydrocarbon activity contributing.

The message is straightforward: fiscal discipline is meant to create space for acceleration, not austerity.

Confidence also shows up in the financial system. The research points to continued growth in banking assets and lending; and it flags the pace of further interest-rate reductions as a variable that could lift credit demand in 2026.

Housing, it argues, is likely to be one of the main beneficiaries — a reminder that the budget's impact will be felt not only through government contracts, but also through household and business financing conditions.

The conclusion is balanced: Budget 2026 is cautious where it must be, but it is also asking for execution — timely projects, disciplined spending quality and non-oil revenue growth that supports competitiveness.

If those pieces move together, confidence can become growth. If not, the deficit will be the headline again.

Oman advances heritage tourism with five flagship projects

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, JAN 6

The Sultanate of Oman is significantly advancing its Oman Vision 2040 goals by investing in a robust pipeline of high-profile cultural and historical projects. Led by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, these initiatives aim to diversify the national economy by transforming the country into a global hub for heritage and ecological tourism.

From the rugged cliffs of Musandam to the ancient maritime hubs of Sur, the government is delivering a sophisticated network of museums and visitor centres that blend modern architectural innovation with the preservation of the Sultanate of Oman's unique historical identity.

At the forefront of this cultural expansion is the Natural History Museum in Muscat, situated within the sprawling Oman Botanic Garden. Currently in the tendering phase, this landmark



These initiatives aim to diversify the national economy by transforming the country into a global hub for heritage and ecological tourism.

institution is designed to be a living archive of the nation's geological and biological evolution.

The broader Botanic Garden project, which was recently handed over to Muscat Municipality for operational management, represents one of the largest environmental initiatives in the Middle East.

Complementing this is the Maritime History Museum in Sur, a project that has already garnered international acclaim.

Designed by the award-winning architect Ibrahim Jaidah, the museum recently underwent value engineering to ensure its ambitious design — inspired by Oman's seafaring legacy — remains both a functional educational space and a sustainable architectural masterpiece.

In the northern enclave of Musandam, the Dibba Archaeological Visitor Centre is nearing its final stages of development, with construction currently 90% complete.

This facility is expected to open its doors in 2026, providing an interactive gateway to Bronze Age excavations and on-site discoveries.

By integrating state-of-the-art exhibition technology with active archaeological zones, the centre is set to become a primary destination for researchers and tourists alike, showcasing the strategic historical importance of the Wilayat of Dibba.

Further south, the ancient city of Qalhat — a Unesco World Heritage site — is also set for a major transformation.

The ministry is currently overseeing the tender process for the Qalhat Archaeological City Visitor Centre, with bids scheduled for evaluation in early 2026.

The centre's design, which draws inspiration from seashells and local wadi formations, aims to provide a central hub for visitors exploring the ruins of one of Oman's most vital medieval ports.

This project is supported by

strategic funding partnerships, including an agreement with Oman LNG, highlighting the collaborative effort between the public and private sectors to enhance the Sultanate of Oman's heritage infrastructure.

Finally, the Ministry has set its sights on the interior Al Dhahirah Governorate with plans for the Bat, Al Khutm and Al Ayn Archaeological Sites Visitor Centre.

While still in the early stages, the project is scheduled for tendering in the first quarter of 2026. These sites, famous for their prehistoric beehive tombs, represent some of the most complete settlements and necropolises from the third millennium BC.

By establishing dedicated visitor centres at these remote locations, Oman is ensuring that its most ancient treasures are accessible and preserved for future generations, further solidifying the nation's status as a leader in cultural heritage management.

ADVERTORIALS

SHORTTAKES



The concert is expected to attract an audience of approximately 10,000 attendees.

SOHAR INTERNATIONAL
MAIN SPONSOR OF
ABDUL MAJEED
ABDULLAH’S
CONCERT IN OMAN

MUSCAT: In a strategic move reaffirming its commitment to supporting Oman’s cultural and entertainment landscape, Sohar International has announced its main sponsorship of the largest concert by renowned artist Abdul Majeed Abdullah, scheduled to take place at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC) in Muscat on January 8, 2025. The concert is expected to attract an audience of approximately 10,000 attendees, underscoring its scale and significance within the Sultanate of Oman’s cultural calendar.

The event represents a landmark moment in Oman’s arts and entertainment scene, bringing one of the Arab world’s most celebrated artists back to Oman for a major live performance. Through this sponsorship, Sohar International reinforces its strategic vision to promote cultural and entertainment tourism, enrich community experiences and contribute to strengthening Oman’s position on the regional and global map for major artistic and entertainment events.

This sponsorship reflects Sohar International’s broader strategy to support economic diversification and national development by investing in high-impact cultural initiatives that stimulate entertainment tourism and enhance the Sultanate of Oman’s overall investment and tourism appeal. It also highlights the Bank’s commitment to strategic engagement in large-scale, high-profile events that contribute to the growth of the national tourism and economic ecosystem.

In parallel, the sponsorship underscores Sohar International’s social responsibility by enabling broader community access to distinctive cultural experiences. As part of this initiative, the Bank is offering a 10% discount on concert tickets for its credit cardholders, supporting wider participation and creating a comprehensive event that blends cultural value with premium entertainment.

Abdulwahid bin Mohamed al Murshidi, Chief Executive Officer of Sohar International, stated: “Our sponsorship of this event reflects Sohar International’s commitment to culture, arts and top-quality entertainment. We pursue well-planned partnerships that deliver real benefits to society and the national economy, especially during the peak winter tourism season in the Sultanate of Oman.

OMAN OIL
PRICE RISES
BY \$1.06 PER
BARREL

MUSCAT: The official price of Oman crude oil for March delivery reached \$59.67 on Tuesday. The price of Oman crude oil rose by \$1.06 compared to yesterday’s price of \$58.61. The average monthly price of Omani crude oil for January delivery was \$64.44 per barrel, a decrease of 60 cents compared to the price for December delivery. Meanwhile, international oil prices edged slightly higher on Tuesday as the market weighed expectations of ample global supply



this year against uncertainty around Venezuelan crude output following the US capture of President Nicolas Maduro.

Brent crude futures rose 0.5%, or 30 cents, to \$62.06 a barrel by 09:30 GMT while US West Texas Intermediate crude was at \$58.57 a barrel, up 0.4%, or 25 cents. “It is premature to evaluate the impact of Nicolas Maduro’s capture on the oil balance. What seems obvious, nonetheless, is that oil supply will be sufficient in 2026, with or without an increase in production from the Opec member”, said PVM Oil analyst Tamas Varga. — Agencies

LX 600 conferred as
luxury SUV of the year

In a landmark celebration of automotive excellence, the Lexus LX 600 has been conferred the prestigious Flagship Luxury SUV of the Year award by the Signature 2025 Luxury 100, honouring its position as the pinnacle of luxury and performance.

This prestigious accolade recognises the LX 600 for its rare ability to unify three often-competing ideals: a commanding road presence, uncompromising interior luxury and genuine all-terrain capability.

As the pinnacle of the Lexus SUV lineup, the LX 600 was selected for representing the highest expression of the brand’s philosophy, where design authority and engineering excellence converge to create a vehicle designed for both leadership and longevity.

The Signature Luxury 100 is far more than a popularity-driven ranking; it is a definitive celebration of excellence across the luxury landscape.

Guided by editorial integrity and a rigorous evaluation process, the platform recognises brands, products and leaders that shape the future of luxury through substance, craft and purpose.

Each entry is assessed through a multi-layered methodology that considers design philosophy, innovation, heritage, performance and the emotional connection a product creates with its audience.

Under the hood, the Lexus LX 600 is powered by a mighty 3.5-litre twin-turbocharged V6 engine that delivers high



The LX 600 was selected for representing the highest expression of the brand’s philosophy.

performance with rugged capabilities at its core.

Mated to a sophisticated 10-speed automatic transmission, the powertrain ensures confident and effortless acceleration whether navigating urban roads, long-distance highways, or challenging desert terrain.

The vehicle’s advanced four-wheel-drive architecture is further enhanced by Active Height Control with Adaptive Variable Suspension, a Multi-Terrain Mode with four

cameras and a Panoramic View Monitor, providing a balanced and smooth drive that stays true to the Lexus driving signature.

The interior of the LX 600 serves as a sanctuary of refined craftsmanship, designed to make every experience extraordinary.

The cabin introduces a driver-centric cockpit featuring a head-up display; and a leather and wood-wrapped steering wheel, allowing for better focus and clarity on the road ahead.

National Finance fosters institutional leadership

MUSCAT: National Finance, the Sultanate of Oman’s leading finance company, continues to strengthen its position as one of the Sultanate of Oman’s most established institutions in the country’s financial services sector, recognised for its scale, resilience and consistently high standards of governance and oversight. With a proven record of market

leadership across asset size, nationwide presence, revenues and profitability, the company remains a trusted partner for individuals and businesses seeking reliable, well-structured financing solutions that support evolving customer needs, business growth and long-term economic participation. Commenting on the



TARIQ BIN
SULAIMAN
AL FARSI

CEO of National
Finance.

company’s strategic direction, Tariq bin Sulaiman al Farsi, CEO of National Finance, said, “Leadership in financial services is about staying relevant over time through disciplined capital management, strong governance and a clear understanding of evolving customer expectations. At National Finance, we focus on strengthening the fundamentals that create

enduring value, while continuously refining our operations and the way we serve our clients. As the industry becomes increasingly digital and data-driven, we are making purposeful investments to ensure our systems, people and decision-making frameworks are equipped to perform effectively in a faster, more dynamic environment.

SOHAR Port and Freezone advances community development in 2025

SUHAR: SOHAR Port and Freezone strengthened its approach to social responsibility in 2025 through a structured institutional framework aligned with national priorities, linking social impact with economic contribution and supporting national capacity building.

The initiatives focused on education, social care, youth empowerment and community capacity building, positively impacting approximately 50,000 beneficiaries across the Sultanate of Oman.

In education, more than 2,000 students received essential school supplies, alongside targeted investments to upgrade science laboratories and learning environments in two educational institutions. In addition, 39



The initiatives focused on education, social care, youth empowerment and community capacity building.

educational visits welcomed over 1,500 students, providing practical exposure to port and freezone operations and strengthening alignment between education and the industrial and logistics sectors. Youth initiatives engaged 155

participants through structured training programmes focused on professional readiness and community engagement, while more than 1,000 students benefitted from the Maseer programme through educational and awareness

activities. Healthcare capacity was also supported through hands-on training for 75 nursing students using advanced simulation equipment. Volunteer initiatives delivered through the Ayadi platform benefitted 126 participants. In parallel, SOHAR

Port and Freezone allocated 20% of its annual social responsibility budget to programmes implemented in partnership with the Oman Charitable Organisation, supporting more than 45,500 beneficiaries, alongside collaboration with three local charitable organisations.

Commenting on the programmes, Rashad al Wahaibi, Communications Advisor of SOHAR Port and Freezone, said: “Our approach to social responsibility is guided by a clear, results-driven framework focused on delivering measurable outcomes that support national priorities and strengthen the link between social impact and economic value. Through structured programmes and effective partnerships, we aim to ensure that our community initiatives deliver sustainable, long-term impact”.

SHORTTAKES



Net electricity production also posted a solid increase, rising by 4.3 per cent to 46,984 GWh.

OMAN’S ELECTRICITY OUTPUT UP 5% BY NOVEMBER 2025

MUSCAT: Electricity production in the Sultanate of Oman rose by 5 per cent by the end of November 2025, reflecting steady growth in power generation alongside evolving demand patterns across the country, according to official electricity sector data.

Total electricity output reached around 48,357.2 gigawatt-hours (GWh) during the first eleven months of 2025, compared with 46,063.5 GWh recorded over the same period in 2024. Net electricity production also posted a solid increase, rising by 4.3 per cent year-on-year to 46,984 GWh, up from 45,044.8 GWh last year.

At the governorate level, electricity generation remained concentrated in key industrial and population centres.

The Al Batinah North, Al Batinah South and Al Dhahirah Governorates collectively accounted for the largest share of net electricity production, totalling about 27,980.8 GWh. This was followed by Al Sharqiyah North and Al Sharqiyah South Governorates, which together generated approximately 9,975.9 GWh. Dhofar Governorate ranked next with net production of 4,907.8 GWh.

In contrast, Muscat Governorate recorded a notable decline, with net electricity production falling by 17.6 per cent compared to the same period in 2024, underscoring shifts in generation patterns and grid dynamics.

Meanwhile, the water sector showed a slight contraction. Total water production reached about 466.5 million cubic metres by the end of November 2025, marking a 2.2 per cent decrease from 476.9 million cubic metres produced during the same period last year. — ONA

Novel tech to unlock ultra-heavy oil reservoir

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, JAN 6

TWO US-based, energy-linked firms have announced that they have been selected by the Omani government to assess the viability of deploying advanced electric heating technology to unlock the hydrocarbon potential of Block 71, home to the ultra-heavy oil Habbab reservoir in southern Oman.

Westlawn Middle East, the regional arm of Houston-based private investment firm Westlawn Group, said it is partnering with energy technology company Salamander Solutions, also headquartered in Houston, to evaluate the application of electric heating technology for producing oil from the block's bitumen-like crude.

According to press statements issued by the two companies, an agreement signed with Oman's Ministry of Energy and Minerals grants them the right to drill appraisal wells in Block 71 to assess the technical and commercial merits of applying what they describe as a proprietary and innovative technology to one of the Sultanate of Oman's most challenging yet high-potential reservoirs.

First identified in 1982, the Habbab field has long resisted commercial development, with repeated efforts to bring its hydrocarbons to surface proving unsuccessful.

Petroleum Development Oman (PDO), the Sultanate of Oman's largest hydrocarbons

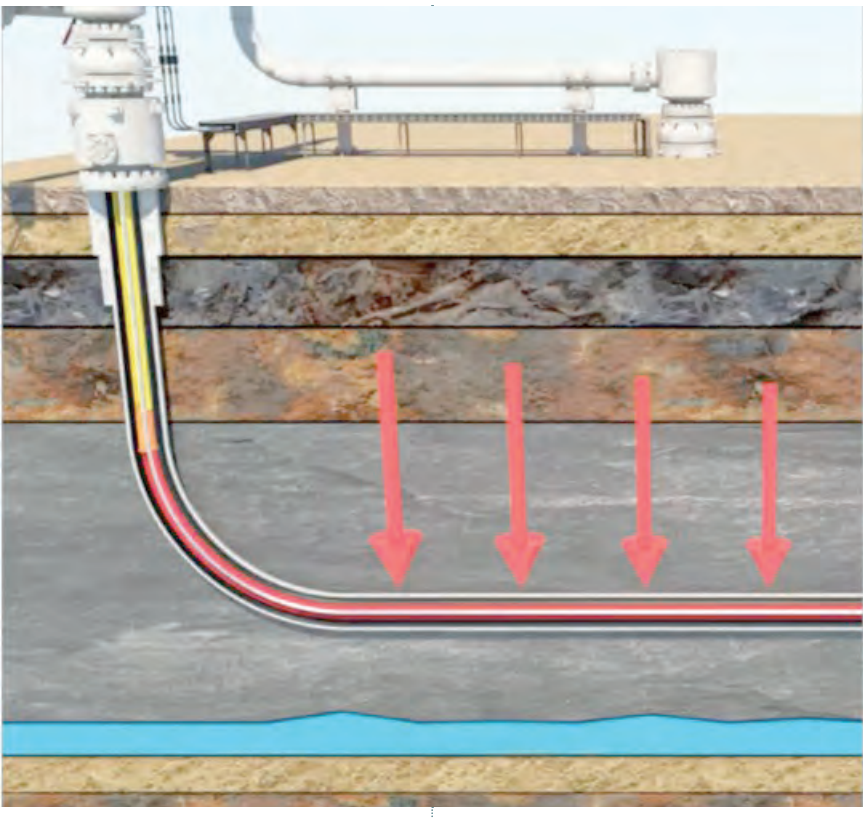


Illustration of Salamander's electric heating solution.

producer and the former licence holder under Block 6, previously piloted a range of steam and chemical injection techniques to unlock the reservoir's potential. While these trials delivered encouraging results, they ultimately lacked the certainty required for PDO to justify the significant capital investment needed for a standalone development.

Habbab nonetheless represents a sizeable opportunity for an upstream firm backed by the right technology. The field is estimated to contain approximately 2.4 billion barrels of ultra-heavy crude oil (stocktank oil initially in place,

STOIP).

The hydrocarbons are hosted in a thinly laminated sandstone reservoir with an oil column of around 100 metres, encountered at depths starting near 1,550 metres. However, the crude's ultra-heavy nature presents formidable production challenges. With surface viscosity estimated at more than 1.5 million centipoise, the oil is roughly 1.5 million times more viscous than water at ambient temperature.

The companies said that technical and commercial success at the conclusion of the feasibility study could pave the way for a long-term concession agreement with the Omani

government.

"This is our first transaction in Oman since establishing our in-country presence in 2024 and we are delighted to partner with the Ministry of Energy and Minerals and Salamander Solutions. We look forward to unlocking significant value for the country", said Chadi Letayf, Executive Vice President of Westlawn.

Hatem Haidar, CEO of Salamander Solutions, added: "This agreement marks a significant milestone in deploying our proprietary electric heating technology in the Middle East. We are excited to partner with the Ministry of Energy and Minerals and Westlawn to demonstrate its value in unlocking complex reservoirs".

Salamander said its heater cable technology is designed to extend beyond the reach of conventional thermal methods, delivering up to 3 MW of power over a continuous heated length of up to three kilometres when installed in wells.

The cables are engineered to operate under harsh downhole conditions at full power and maximum temperature for more than a decade. For Westlawn, the agreement marks its debut in Oman's upstream energy sector.

Founded in 2021, the firm invests in operated and non-operated producing, development and exploration assets, as well as technologies aimed at enhancing hydrocarbon recovery.

Its investment footprint spans the United States, Latin America, the Caribbean and the Middle East.

Oil falls as Venezuela headlines fail to spark supply shock

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, JAN 6

Oil prices edged lower in early Asian trading on Monday, moving against initial expectations of a rebound after fresh political developments in Venezuela, as traders judged the risk to global supply to be limited and the wider market to remain comfortably supplied.

Brent crude was quoted around \$60.9 a barrel at the start of the week, while US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) traded near \$57.4, according to market levels cited by Ali bin Abdullah al Riyami, a well-known Omani energy expert.

The muted reaction underscores a market increasingly driven by fundamentals rather than headlines, with the immediate focus returning to the balance of supply and demand.

"Venezuela's impact on global supply is limited", Al Riyami said. "Even in optimistic estimates,



The price drift lower comes as traders weigh geopolitical headlines.

exports are around 700,000 barrels per day, which is small compared with global production above 100

million barrels per day. Traders are looking through the political noise and asking whether there is an actual loss of barrels — and so far, they're not seeing it".

Venezuela's export flows, while strategically significant for certain buyers, represent a narrow slice of the global oil system.

Much of the country's crude has been directed to China, with a smaller share moving to the United States, meaning any disruption would likely be absorbed without materially tightening global balances, Al Riyami said.

Markets also appeared unconvinced that recent measures affecting some vessels would translate into a physical shortage. "The discussion around restrictions and shipping has not turned into a clear, sustained drop in flows", Al Riyami said. "Without a visible tightening in supply, the risk premium doesn't build".

The price drift lower comes

as traders weigh geopolitical headlines against a broader picture of ample supply. US shale output has continued to provide a buffer to global markets, while Opec+ has maintained policy flexibility that has helped keep production levels elevated, reinforcing the sense that the market remains well supplied.

That backdrop has reduced sensitivity to disruptions that do not involve major producers or critical chokepoints. "In a market that feels well supplied, you need a real, measurable disruption to move prices higher", Al Riyami said. "Otherwise, the baseline pressure stays downward".

Still, analysts cautioned against drawing firm conclusions from a single session, particularly as markets reassess demand signals from major consuming economies and the direction of monetary policy — both key drivers of energy consumption expectations.

Al Riyami said the near-term

direction of crude would likely depend on whether supply remains abundant and whether geopolitical risk escalates enough to affect physical availability.

"It is too early for a definitive call on the next few weeks", he said. "But if supply stays comfortable and fears cool, the path of least resistance remains lower".

He added that traders will be watching upcoming inventory readings and OPEC+ guidance for confirmation of market tightness — or its absence.

Broader market sentiment has remained cautious after oil's reported weak performance last year. "If 2025 ended with prices down sharply — around 20% by some estimates — that tells you the market has been pricing in oversupply concerns", Al Riyami said.

"Headlines alone won't reverse that unless they change the fundamentals," he added.

FACTORY SLUMP

US manufacturing extends contraction



US manufacturing activity sank to a 14-month low in December, marking a tenth consecutive contraction as new orders weakened and input costs rose. An ISM survey signalled little near-term recovery, with respondents blaming import tariffs.

Economists, however, expect conditions to improve later this year as tax cuts filter through, despite claims of fiscal and security gains. — Reuters

CORPORATE RESTRUCTURING

Jollibee plans US listing spinoff



Jollibee Foods plans to spin off its international operations and list the new business on a United States exchange, while retaining its Philippine unit locally.

The move aims to create two focused, independently listed companies. Shares jumped 14.5%, with the transaction targeted for late 2027, subject to market conditions, approvals, due diligence and regulatory clearances. — Reuters

OIL TRADE

Reliance halts Russian crude imports



Reliance Industries expects no Russian crude deliveries in January, potentially pushing India's imports to multi-year lows. The refiner, India's biggest buyer of Russian oil last year, cited the absence of cargoes for weeks.

The update followed US warnings of possible higher tariffs over India's continued purchases from Washington amidst tightening scrutiny of energy trade ties. — Reuters

OPINION

Replacing humans with AI is not going to work today!



TARIQ
AL BARWANI

The writer is strategic adviser, businessman and motivational speaker.

A few weeks ago, I wrote the article “Replacing humans with AI today is a recipe for failure”, in which I explored how the rush to automate and change/ substitute human skill with artificial intelligence is producing more harm than good in business and service delivery. Building on that foundation, I would like to focus this week on why the effort to replace humans with AI is going terribly wrong. I will share some of the flawed implementations and misplaced expectations that led to breakdowns in customer experience, ethical challenges and hard lessons from companies that learnt the limits of AI the hard way. This should probably reduce the pressure or urge of the many companies and governments that wish to jump on the AI bandwagon that promises cost savings, 24/7 operations and higher productivity — apart from promoting the notorious AI-ready badge. In the last 2 years, virtually every leader of an institution had the goal to adopt AI in one way or another. Nevertheless, harsh reality was the outcome, especially with those that simply replaced humans with AI systems yet failed in a big and disastrous way. Not everyone likes to share their failure, but the proof is in the pudding on the mere/ small number of initiatives that actually succeeded. In Oman — and I know for a fact — there have been many seminars, workshops and even startups that are working on AI solutions, yet these all remain

to be a showcase for a better future. On paper, not in practice though! A report by one of the leading technology and science institutes in the world, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, found that only 5–7% of AI projects generate real good value (and immediate financial revenue), yet 93–95% of implementations fall short of expectations. Furthermore, over 55% of companies that replaced employees with AI now regret it. Clearly, replacing humans with AI today is neither healthy nor wealthy for any organisation. It’s too early for ambitious initiatives but definitely is improving day by day. AI today does wonders. Yet if one doesn’t adopt it slowly and/or gradually, their fate is most probably doom. The MIT report, which is available readily online to read, is a revelation and indeed an eye-opener! One of the most striking examples of AI gone wrong comes from the largest fast-food chain restaurant, McDonald’s, which introduced an AI voice-ordering system and installed it in over 100 locations. The system was meant to streamline orders and reduce wait times; nevertheless, the outcome was a disaster. The AI system misunderstood customer requests and ultimately caused both confusion (eg, wrong orders). McDonald’s terminated the initiative to save the company from reputational and financial impact. I did share in my previous article another example of the Swedish fintech giant company called

In the last 2 years, specifically 2024-2025, virtually every leader of an institution had the goal to adopt AI in one way or another. Nevertheless, harsh reality was the outcome, especially with those that simply replaced humans for AI systems yet failed in a big and disastrous way.

Klarna, which made headlines after laying off around 700 customer-service employees and replacing much of the function with AI systems. The result was a catastrophe. So what is the problem? Why don’t AI replacement and adoption really work? I will tell you, assuming technology can think the way humans do is the main problem. At least today, they can’t and I can’t promise nor predict if this won’t happen/change in the future. AI is great at patterns and repetition, but it falls apart when put into a situation a real smart human can do and at various disciplines. Conversations sometimes get illusional and/or off-script too, customers get emotional and situations at many times require judgement rather than logic. Rushing into adopting AI without rethinking how work actually happens is a big mistake. Humans continue to add value where AI cannot due to being a machine in the first place. To conclude, let me reemphasise that I am an AI supporter myself; however, I still believe that AI is not ready to replace quality/ educated humans. AI isn’t failing, but the way we’re using it is. Judgement, empathy and control are something that only humans can lead today, not machines and certainly not AI. The real opportunity lies in collaboration, not substitution and those who understand this will get far more value from AI than those who learn it the hard way. Until we catch up again next week, believe in yourself; you are not replaceable yet!

TESLA SLUMP
BURNISHES
ELON MUSK’S
FUTURIST CRED

JONATHAN GUILFORD

A Model S is not an iPhone, a fact less obvious back in 2022. Then, electric-vehicle pioneer Tesla accounted for every dollar of profit generated from battery-powered rides. In that sense, it was similar to Apple, whose trailblazing smartphones became a recurring financial gift. The automaker’s CEO, however, has been steering the \$1.4 trillion company into artificial intelligence, self-driving and beyond, fantastical initiatives that look more prescient now. Like Apple, Tesla has lost a crown. The company delivered 1.6 million cars last year, a nearly 10% drop from its 2023 peak. China’s BYD eclipsed it by selling over 2 million battery-electric vehicles. When the iPhone maker led by Tim Cook lost market share, however, it stayed immensely profitable. Apple accounts for 43% of worldwide handset revenue, Counterpoint Research reckons, despite slipping to 18% of shipments. Tesla is different. Automotive revenue in 2026 is expected to dip 16% below its high, according to estimates gathered by Visible Alpha. The corresponding gross margin sits at half of 2022’s level. As subsidies for battery-powered rides shrink or vanish and EV growth stalls, the company’s operating profitability looks unremarkable next to rivals. Even a futurist like Musk could not have envisioned all these shifts, especially ones instigated by Donald Trump’s return to the White House. Other things were clearer. Tesla once held manufacturing advantages, like its giant die-casting machines, but they have since spread widely. Proprietary chargers are now accessible to rivals. The iPhone’s secret sauce is a connection to differentiated services and undergirding other industries. Musk’s noodling over machine-learning and Optimus robots while abandoning efforts at a more reasonably priced vehicle might seem a concession that making cars is just too tough a business. Yet the technological advancements also point to something bigger. Tesla’s camera-reliant approach to self-driving diverges from competitors and depends on costly AI expertise. If successful, it would change what a car is. — Reuters

South Korea crushes
global benchmarks

SOUTH Korea’s stock market renaissance in 2025 was one for the history books. Buoyed by world-beating gains in arms exporters to eye-popping surge in artificial intelligence (AI) and K-beauty shares, the market is headed for its strongest advance in a quarter-century. The Kospi Index has soared 76% this year, compared with the S&P 500’s 17% advance so far and the MSCI Asia-Pacific Index’s 25% gain. The South Korean benchmark’s performance, the best among major equity gauges, has been helped by chip heavyweights Samsung Electronics Co and SK Hynix Inc as well as defence and nuclear firms. Analysts see further upside ahead, with Citigroup Inc, JPMorgan Chase & Co and Nomura Holdings Inc among brokers forecasting at least another 20% climb next year. Strong earnings growth should bolster that upward trajectory, analysts added. Here is a recap of the winners and losers from the market in 2025.

AI PROXY TRADES The biggest AI winners weren’t conventional chipmakers or large-cap names but proxy plays. That includes power transformer maker Hyosung Heavy Industries Corp and nuclear power provider Doosan Enerbility Co, which saw shares up more than 320% each this year, according to Korea Exchange prices. Despite their high valuations, bulls argue that there’s no quick carbon-free alternative to meet surging power demand of AI data centres, making these players indispensable. Investor interest in power grid and infrastructure stocks should continue into 2026, according to Morgan Stanley analysts. Among them, HD Hyundai Electric Co is entering “a multi-decade rerating as grid modernisation, AI data centre and decarbonisation converge”, they said.



Traditional dancers marked the opening of the South Korean stock market on January 2, 2026. — AFP



YOUKYUNG LEE

The writer is Asia stocks reporter based in Seoul.

The South Korean benchmark’s performance, the best among major equity gauges, has been helped by chip heavyweights Samsung Electronics Co and SK Hynix Inc as well as defence and nuclear firms.

MEMORY BULLS Samsung and SK Hynix had a standout year, cementing their status as Kospi heavyweights and the world’s top manufacturers of memory chips. Thanks to growing demand from global tech giants for specialised, high-performance chips, Samsung has jumped 125% this year to an all-time high. SK Hynix rose about 270%. The momentum has spilled over into related firms like SK Hynix’s parent SK Square Co and Korea Circuit Co, which counts Broadcom Inc as its customer. Both stocks are up more than 330% each. “Shortages in memory chips are unquestionably taking hold so I expect an extremely strong year for South Korean semiconductor stocks”, said Kang DaeKwon, the chief investment officer of Life Asset Management in Seoul. DEFENCE STARS US President Donald Trump’s reshaping of traditional security alliances spurred new defence spending across Europe and Asia this year, driving renewed interest in South Korean contractors known for delivering weapons faster and at lower cost. Hanwha Aerospace Co, the maker of the K9 self-propelled howitzer, emerged as one of the biggest

winners, with shares up nearly 200% this year. Shipbuilder Hanwha Ocean Co has jumped 204%. Must Asset Management says that given recent success by local companies making inroads in Europe, these firms will likely see more partnerships in coming years among Nato members. K-BEAUTY LEADERS Less than two years after its initial public offering, APR Corp has leapfrogged beauty giants Amorepacific Corp and LG H&H Co in market value. Up 362%, the Medicube maker and at-home beauty device leader topped stock gains in the MSCI Korea Index. “To me, APR’s outperformance isn’t just about better execution. It’s about playing a different game”, said Jung In Yun, the chief executive officer of Fibonacci Asset Management Global in Singapore. “It sells outcomes and experiences through social-first channels, not just skincare through traditional retail”. LG H&H, the company behind The Whoo skincare brand, is headed for a fifth consecutive year of stock declines, while Amorepacific has risen 14% this year. Investors say that expectations are high for APR to continue outperforming, though its high valuation makes the stock vulnerable to sharp swings if setbacks occur. LOSING GAMES Despite South Korea’s broad market rally, game developers were notably left behind. Krafton Inc, has lost about one-fifth of its market value while Com2uS Corp shed more than one-third. Worries about their limited appeal in Asia and inability to compete with Chinese rivals have forced investors to look elsewhere. With demand for South Korean role-playing games constrained in Asia, the upside remains limited, according to Life Asset’s Kang. Other equity market loser standouts include electric vehicle supply chain companies hit by dwindling demand for EVs. — AFP

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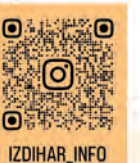
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HOW TO ENJOY MUSCAT NIGHTS LIKE LOCALS WHO VALUE THEIR TIME



Yeru Ebuen
The writer is a luxury media strategist, editor and creative director specialising in emerging digital trends and current events.

By now, Muscat Nights is no longer a single festival but a seasonal rhythm that moves across the city, inviting residents to choose how they spend an evening rather than surrendering to one crowded venue.

It rewards those who think strategically. The question is no longer where Muscat Nights is, but which version of it suits your mood, time, and tolerance for crowds.

At its visual core sits Al Qurum Natural Park, where illuminated gardens, lakeside light shows, drones, and themed food festivals deliver spectacle at scale. Al Amerat Public Park leans into classic family entertainment, with heritage zones, rides, and large stages built for long visits and patient queues.

The Oman Automobile Association becomes a hub for youth driven energy and motorsport culture. OCEC provides a climate controlled alternative with multilingual performances and exhibitions. Seeb Beach shifts the tempo toward winter sport and open air evenings, while Wadi Al Khoud attracts those who prefer movement and adventure to promenades and stalls.

Yet the defining local conversation has been logistical. Traffic congestion and parking pressure, shape the experience more than any light installation. Limited parking, narrow access roads, and regular evening congestion mean that arriving without a plan can quietly erase the magic before it begins. The most effective way to enjoy Muscat Nights is to treat time as currency. Go early on weekdays for the calmest version of the festival and reserve weekends for venues designed to absorb crowds. Use the multi venue logic.

If one location feels overwhelmed, pivot rather than persist. Anchor your evening around a single must see moment, then spend the rest browsing food, crafts, and open spaces.

Equally important is the exit. Smart visitors park with departure in mind, not convenience. Leaving smoothly matters as much as arriving well.

When approached this way, Muscat Nights becomes a flexible winter passport rather than a test of endurance. The lights still glow, the atmosphere still hums, but you leave with energy intact, and the sense that the city has once again learned how to host itself.

That, ultimately, is the local advantage. Not doing everything, not chasing noise, but selecting the right place for the right night. Muscat Nights rewards discernment. It asks you to read the city, listen to its rhythms, and move accordingly. Do that, and the festival stops feeling overwhelming and starts feeling exactly what it was meant to be: a luminous pause in winter. For those willing to plan, the reward is simple and lasting, and memorable.

QUICK FEATURES



GASTRONOMY

Kiyoshi Kimura, the Tokyo-based operator of sushi restaurant chain Sushizanmai, displays a 243-kilogramme bluefin tuna that fetched 510.3 million yen at his main restaurant in Tokyo. — **AFP**



IN MEMORIAM

Portraits of late French actress Brigitte Bardot are displayed as tribute on barriers at the entrance of “La Madrague” house in Saint-Tropez. — **AFP**



TOURISM

Tourists take pictures at the Yehliu Geopark, which is made of sedimentary rocks being impacted by sea erosion and full of ‘mushroom rocks’, in New Taipei City. — **AFP**

INSTA PICKS

 **ph_laetitia and 3 others**
21 hours ago



The roots and traditions of Omani culture

 **rumpa_mitra and oman_tourism_love**
13 hours ago



Hiking trails in Oman reveal a world of wondrous beauty

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Béla Tarr, Hungarian filmmaker who directed ‘Damnation’ and ‘Sátántangó,’ dies at 70



Tarr was best known for the best known for the movie “Satan­tango” (1994), a seven-hour epic about the collapse of communism

BUDAPEST: Legendary Hungarian filmmaker Bela Tarr, known for his long takes, monochromatic films and depictions of desolate landscapes on the silver screen, died on Tuesday at the age of 70. Hungary’s national news agency MTI reported his death citing a statement director Ben­ce Flie­gauf made on behalf of the family.

“It is with deep sorrow that we announce that film director Bela Tarr passed away early this morning after a long and serious illness” local news site Telex quoted the statement as saying.

Bela Tarr was born in the southern Hungarian university town of Pecs in 1955. He started filmmaking as an amateur at the age of 16 with a camera his father gifted to him. Tarr then joined Hungary’s leading experimental film studio Bela Balazs Studio, which enabled him to make his first feature film, “Family Nest”, in 1977.

He made the first Hungarian independent feature film,

“Damnation”, which was screened at the Berlin International Film Festival in 1988.

The film was co-written by Laszlo Krasznahorkai, whom he frequently collaborated with and who, in 2025, won the Nobel prize for literature. Tarr was best known for the best known for the movie “Satan­tango” (1994), a seven-hour epic about the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe and its material and spiritual decline.

It was adapted from one of Krasznahorkai’s best-known novels.

After completing his last feature film, “The Turin Horse” in 2011, Tarr announced his retirement, although he still did two short movies, in 2017 and 2019.

In recent years, Tarr devoted himself to educating a new generation of directors, teaching at multiple film academies in Hungary, Germany and France. “I had done everything I wanted to” he told Hungarian weekly HVG in a 2019 interview. — AFP



Performers take part in the annual Cape Town Minstrel Carnival parade, in Cape Town, South Africa. — Reuters

Thousands attend annual minstrel parade in Cape Town

THOUSANDS lined the streets of Cape Town on Monday for the colourful annual minstrels’ parade, a cornerstone of South African culture rooted in the city’s history of slavery.

Troupes of thousands of minstrels marched and danced in bright, satin costumes, many twirling umbrellas and tossing walking sticks as they were accompanied by brass bands, traditional goema beats and strumming banjos.

Spectators pitched tents and umbrellas to shield themselves against the scorching heat during the hours-long New Year’s parade, marred this year by disputes over the route, date and claims of commercialisation.

“It is not New Year unless you see the troupes, that is my heritage”, said Vanessa Hendricks, 65, who has been attending the Tweede Nuwe Jaar (Second New Year) carnival since she was 16 years old.

The tradition began more than 100 years ago, when enslaved people from Africa and Southeast Asia were given a day off to celebrate the new year.

With some people of European descent, they formed a population still largely known as Cape Coloureds, many of whom cherish the carnival as a celebration of their culture, identity and heritage.

“This is a cultural practice that you will not see anywhere else”, said city mayor, Geordin Hill-Lewis, at the start of the parade.

“It is globally unique to Cape Town, deeply entrenched as part of our city’s beloved and beautiful heritage”, he said.

Organisers said around 17 troupes made up of about 20,000 performers were expected at this year’s event, which culminated in a city stadium for an on-stage competition watched by more than 15,000 people. — AFP



FEATURES

IDRIS AL BALUSHI

WHEN Saba al Rashdi first picked up a pencil, it was not ambition that guided her hand, but instinct. She was still very young, watching the world from a seated position as other children ran past her, their laughter echoing through spaces she could not yet reach. While her sisters and neighbourhood children walked, played and raced freely, Saba moved differently, delayed by joint- and nerve-related health challenges that prevented her from walking until after the age of four. But in those quiet moments on the floor, something remarkable began to unfold. She drew.

At first, they were simple lines, circles and scattered scribbles, marks that many adults might overlook.

But her father, Ahmed al Rashdi, noticed something deeper. With awareness shaped by reading and observation, he understood that children's early drawings are not random, but emotional expressions.

He began placing paper and pencils in her hands, giving her space to release what she could not yet say or do.

Drawing became Saba's movement, her voice and her way of reaching the world that felt just beyond her grasp.

As the years passed, her drawings accumulated. When Saba was six or seven, a visiting Iraqi artist stayed with the family and paused before the young girl's artwork. What she saw was not imitation or chance, but raw potential. The lines, the shapes, the instinctive balance, Saba, she said, possessed an extraordinary ability.

From that moment, her parents knew that her talent was not simply a pastime, but a path.

Saba's art evolved naturally. Faces, eyes and human figures emerged, first as outlines, then as expressive forms reflecting her surroundings. She was introduced to art workshops with experienced artists who understood how to teach children gently, without forcing technique before emotion. She explored colour, texture and especially collage, cutting, layering and assembling pieces into new visual stories.

Each artwork carried traces of curiosity and joy, unburdened by rules.

Yet the journey was never without challenge. Saba lives with weakness on the left side of her body, relying primarily on one hand to create. She also experienced seizures during parts of her childhood, conditions that required careful medical attention. Despite this, her father emphasises that Saba never stopped enjoying life.

Art was never paused for illness. Instead, it became a source of balance, resilience and happiness.

Over the past two years, her health has improved significantly and with it, her confidence. Saba is social, emotionally intelligent and deeply responsive to beauty. She loves music, songs and rhythmic sounds, tools that help her learn and engage, especially as she is classified as having a learning delay.

For her, learning is not linear, but sensory, absorbed through sound, colour and emotion.

Education, however, presented one of the family's greatest challenges. In Oman, students in special education often stop formal schooling after grade nine.

Unwilling to accept this limitation, Saba's family chose another path. Since 2025, she has continued her education through online home schooling, learning with dedicated teachers beyond the traditional system. Art remains at the centre of her studies. Alongside hand drawing, she is now learning



DRAWING BEYOND LIMITS

Saba's joint- and nerve-related health challenges prevented her from walking until after the age of four. But in those quiet moments on the floor, something remarkable began to unfold. She drew.



digital art, a skill her father believes could one day become a sustainable source of income and independence.

Saba's talent has already crossed borders. She won second place in a pan-Arab children's art competition in Egypt, with her work later featured by The Observer, bringing her unexpected recognition and support.

She also participated in the Arab Reading Challenge, reading and summarising 25 books and was honoured in Dubai with a medal, an achievement that symbolised not only literacy, but determination.

To her father, Saba is more than a gifted artist. She is proof. Proof that talent is not limited by physical or cognitive differences and that with the right support, children like Saba can thrive.

He hopes her journey sends a message to institutions that overlook such potential, reminding them that history's greatest contributors often emerged from the margins.

Saba al Rashdi continues to draw, one line at a time, reshaping not only paper, but perceptions.