

OMAN
عمان
DAILY
Observer

VOL. 45, NO. 74
PAGES 20 | BAISAS 210

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AN 8-PAGE SUPPLEMENT
ON INDIA'S 77TH REPUBLIC
DAY IS DISTRIBUTED WITH
TODAY'S EDITION

INBRIEF

HM’S GREETINGS TO INDIA, AUSTRALIA

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to Sam Mostyn, Governor-General of Australia, on her country’s National Day. His Majesty the Sultan has also sent a cable of greetings to President Droupadi Murmu of the Republic of India on her country’s Republic Day. In his cables, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his heartfelt sentiments and lauded the relations binding the Sultanate of Oman with Australia and the Republic of India. His Majesty also underlined the keenness to enhance this cooperation and utilise these relations in a manner that serves the common interests.

SAYYID BILARAB TO GRACE HM CUP FINAL



At the behest of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, HH Sayyid Bilarab bin Haitham al Said, Minister of State and Governor of Muscat, will grace the final match

of His Majesty the Sultan’s Football Cup for the 2025/2026 sports season. The final is scheduled to take place at 8:00 pm on Saturday (February 14), at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher.

RAFO CELEBRATES ANNUAL DAY



The Royal Air Force of Oman (RAFO) celebrated its Annual Day, which falls on January 25 each year, along with the graduation of the Basic Officer Candidate Course and the Limited Service/University Graduate Officer Candidate Course. The ceremony took place at the military parade grounds of Ghala Base and Sultan Qaboos Air Academy, under the auspices of HH Sayyid Dr Kamil bin Fahd bin Mahmood al Said, Secretary-General of the General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers.

DETAILS ON P3

HM receives message from Sultan of Brunei Darussalam

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has received a written message from Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah of Brunei Darussalam. The message deals with the cordial relations and bilateral cooperation between the two countries.

The message was handed over to Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, when he received Dato Erywan, Second Minister of Foreign Affairs of Brunei



The message was handed over to Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy by Dato Erywan in Muscat.

Darussalam, who is on an official visit to the Sultanate of Oman.

During the meeting, which was held at the General Diwan of the Foreign Ministry on Sunday, the two sides reviewed the friendship relations between the two countries.

They emphasised a shared commitment to enhancing existing cooperation across various fields to serve mutual interests, particularly in economic and commercial domains. The focus was also on

developing partnerships in the field of renewable energy, tourism projects and infrastructure sectors such as transportation, in addition to deepening cultural and civilisational communication between the two peoples.

They also exchanged viewpoints on a number of issues and regional developments in both the Asean region and the Middle East, in addition to the developments on the international arena. — ONA

OMAN TO JOIN ‘ARTEMIS’ FOR SPACE EXPLORATION

Oman and US hold third strategic dialogue in Muscat

THE Sultanate of Oman and the United States of America held the third session of their Strategic Dialogue on Sunday at Diplomatic Club in Muscat.

The Omani side was chaired by Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthy, Under-Secretary of the Foreign Ministry for Political Affairs, while the American side was chaired by Allison Hooker, US Under-Secretary of State for Political Affairs.

The two sides discussed means of maximising the benefits of the Free Trade Agreement between the two countries and augmenting American investments in sectors of priority for the Sultanate of Oman. These sectors include the digital economy, technology and space, in addition to mining, logistics, aviation and infrastructure.

Cooperation in the fields of education and culture was also discussed, particularly educational programmes, academic and professional exchange and investment in research and innovation.

The two sides further exchanged views and positions on a number of regional and international issues, emphasising the importance of backing efforts for peace, stability and development.

During the dialogue, the Omani



The Sultanate of Oman and the US signed a cooperation agreement on the occasion.

Cooperation in sectors include digital economy, technology and space, in addition to mining, logistics, aviation and infrastructure. Ties in the fields of education and culture were also discussed

side announced the Sultanate of Oman's approval to join the 'Artemis Accords' for space exploration. A cooperation statement on the 250th anniversary of the founding of the US was also signed.

The statement also included the commemoration of the historical relations between the two countries. Furthermore, a memorandum of understanding (MoU) for partnership and cooperation was signed between the Embassy of the United States of America in the Sultanate of Oman and the Oman

American Business Centre.

Earlier, Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, received Allison Hooker, US Under-Secretary of State for Political Affairs.

During the meeting, the two sides discussed prospects for enhancing bilateral cooperation across various political and economic fields. They also touched on ways to encourage American investments in priority sectors for the Sultanate of Oman in a manner that supports the long-term strategic partnership between the two countries. — ONA

US storm leaves 800,000 without power, 10,000 flights cancelled

WASHINGTON: More than 800,000 customers in the US as far west as New Mexico were without electricity and over 10,000 flights were cancelled on Sunday ahead of a monster winter storm that threatened to paralyse eastern states with heavy snowfall.

Forecasters said snow, sleet, freezing rain and dangerously frigid temperatures would sweep the eastern two-thirds of the nation on Sunday and into the week. Calling the storms “historic,” President Donald Trump on Saturday approved federal emergency disaster declarations in South Carolina, Virginia, Tennessee, Georgia, North Carolina, Maryland, Arkansas, Kentucky, Louisiana,



A woman with snow in her hair looks on, as a major winter storm spreads across a large swath of the United States, in New York City, US, on Sunday. — Reuters

Mississippi, Indiana and West Virginia. “We will continue to monitor, and stay in touch with all States in the path of this storm. Stay Safe, and Stay Warm,” Trump wrote in a post on Truth Social.

Seventeen states and the District of Columbia have declared weather emergencies, the Department of Homeland Security said. DHS Secretary Kristi Noem, at a news conference on Saturday, warned Americans to take precautions.

“It's going to be very, very cold,” Noem said. “So we'd encourage everybody to stock up on fuel, stock up on food, and we will get through this together.” The number of power outages continued to rise. As of 10:18 a.m. EST (1518 GMT) on Sunday,

more than 800,000 US customers were without electricity, according to PowerOutage.us, with at least 300,000 in Tennessee and over 100,000 each in Mississippi, Texas and Louisiana. Other states affected included Kentucky, Georgia, North Carolina and Alabama.

The Department of Energy issued an emergency order authorising the Electric Reliability Council of Texas to deploy backup generation resources at data centres and other major facilities, aiming to limit blackouts in the state.

On Sunday, the DOE issued an emergency order to authorise grid operator PJM Interconnection to run “specified resources” in the mid-Atlantic region. SEE ALSO P7

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SHORTTAKES



Gen Al Numani receives Ahmed Mahmoud Ahmed Ruwaidi, Palestinian Ambassador.



Gen Al Numani with Allison Hooker, Under-Secretary of State for Political Affairs of the US.

Numani receives
Palestinian
Ambassador and US
Under Secy of State

MUSCAT: Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office, received in his office on Sunday Ahmed Mahmoud Ahmed Ruwaidi, the newly appointed Ambassador of Palestine to Oman, who expressed his appreciation for the efforts exerted by Oman to enhance cooperation to achieve common interests between the two brotherly countries, and for the firm and balanced political positions adopted by Oman and its support aimed at achieving peace in coordination with all relevant international parties.

During the meeting, friendly conversations were exchanged and a number of matters of common interest were discussed.

Gen Al Numani also received Allison Hooker, Under-Secretary of State for Political Affairs of the US, and her accompanying delegation. He welcomed the guest, who expressed her thanks and appreciation to the Sultanate of Oman for strengthening cooperation to achieve common interests between the two friendly countries. During the meeting, friendly conversations and views were exchanged on topics of common interest. The interview was attended by Ana Escrogima, the accredited US Ambassador to the Sultanate of Oman. — ONA

Sur hackathon spotlights
smart cities, AI technology

STAFF REPORTER

THE ‘Smart Governorates and Cities Conference and Hackathon’ began on Sunday in Sur, aiming to build a smarter and more sustainable future based on innovation and digital transformation. The event was held under the auspices of Dr Yahya bin Badr al Maawali, Governor of Al Sharqiyah South.

The conference serves as a strategic national platform that brings together decision-makers, experts and innovators to promote the concepts of smart governorates. This aligns with the priorities of ‘Oman Vision 2040,’ which aims to enhance the quality of government services and achieve technical integration across various sectors.

The conference sessions discuss local and international trends and policies in the fields of sustainability and innovation. They focus on the role of emerging technologies and artificial intelligence applications in managing governorates, addressing developmental and environmental challenges through innovative digital solutions that enhance institutional efficiency.

Dr Al Maawali emphasised in his speech that the conference embodies a strategic approach to serve society and promote comprehensive development. He noted that innovation and digital transformation have become a national necessity driven by global changes, contributing to increasing government performance efficiency and improving the quality of life for



Entrepreneurs from Sur showcased innovative digital solutions at the conference.

The conference focuses on the role of emerging technologies and artificial intelligence applications in managing governorates

citizens and residents. He affirmed that the conference and hackathon align with the targets of Oman Vision 2040, particularly in the pillars of the economy, development, governance, and institutional performance, to build a knowledge-based economy and an effective digital government capable of competing regionally and globally. He also underlined the Governorate’s full commitment to supporting the outcomes of the ‘Smart Governorates Conference and Hackathon 2026’ and working to transform the creative solutions presented by participants into implementable field projects. Dr Ali bin Amer al Shaithani, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology for Communications and Information Technology, stated that the conference represents a pioneering idea for developing smart governorate models. He indicated

that adopting modern technologies contributes to raising performance efficiency, improving productivity, and reducing costs. He expressed his hope that the hackathon would produce quality solutions that support digital transformation pathways and increase user satisfaction. The conference featured a presentation by the international speaker, Mounir Kabbara, who addressed the accelerated transformations in global urbanisation patterns, where 68 per cent of the world’s population is expected to live in cities by 2050. Kabbara reviewed the significant growth in the smart cities market, which is estimated to reach \$4.06 trillion by 2031. He also highlighted the evolution stages of cities from traditional models to ‘cognitive cities’ reliant on data and artificial intelligence, explaining ways to overcome challenges faced by municipalities, such as cybersecurity and upgrade costs, through flexible financing models and effective data governance. The hackathon accompanying the conference focused on six main themes: Environment and Sustainability, Smart Cities and Services, Smart Agriculture and Fishing, Transportation and Safety, E-commerce, and Smart Urban Planning. The Smart Governorates Conference concluded with a set of strategic recommendations aimed at accelerating the pace of digital transformation in the Sultanate of Oman, in line with the targets of ‘Oman Vision 2040.’



البحر
DUQM

الهيئة العامة للمناطق الاقتصادية الخاصة والمناطق الحرة
Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones
Sultanate of Oman



Announcement of Tender
Project for the Management and Operation of the Recreational Building
at the Special Economic Zone at Duqm, Al Wusta Governorate

Place for purchasing and receiving the electronic version of the tender documents	Via the Authority's Tenders Email: tenders@opaz.gov.om
Tender Documents Sale Start Date:	Tuesday, 20 January 2026
Tender Documents Sale End Date:	Monday, 2 February 2026 (14:00 PM)
Site Visit Date for the Project Building:	Monday, 2 February 2026 (10:00 AM)
Deadline for Receiving Tender Submissions from Companies:	Thursday, 12 February 2026
Tender Document Fee:	OMR 100 (One Hundred Omani Rials Only) 

• Bank Name: Bank Muscat

• Branch Name: Corporate Branch

• SWIFT Code: BMUSOMRXXXX

• Branch Code: 0423

Terms and Notes:

1. Local and international companies specialized in management and operation, and registered with the Projects, Tenders and Local Content Authority, may obtain the specifications and conditions of the tender via the following email address: tenders@opaz.gov.om

2. Companies wishing to participate must submit their bids during the tender period through a signed and stamped electronic link sent via the tenders email, in addition to submitting a bank guarantee amounting to (1%) of the bid value and a written undertaking confirming the bid's validity for a period of ninety (90) days from the submission date, addressed to the Chairman of the Procurement Committee at the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones.

3. The original bank guarantee must be submitted to the Contracts and Tenders Department at the Authority's main building located at Airport Heights.

4. Preference shall be given to Omani small and medium enterprises, if available.

The Authority is not obliged to accept the highest or lowest bid or any bid and reserves the right to accept or reject any bid without stating reasons.

• For communication, assistance, and inquiries:

• Tel: +968 24507500

• Email: tenders@opaz.gov.om



OMANI-SAUDI NAVAL
EXERCISE ‘WINDS OF
PEACE 2026’ BEGINS



The exercise encompasses training programmes and practical applications.

MUSCAT: The Omani-Saudi joint naval drill ‘Winds of Peace 2026’ commenced on Sunday. The exercise is being carried out by vessels from the Royal Navy of Oman’s fleet. It features the participation of crews from vessels of the Royal Saudi Naval Forces. It is supported by the Royal Army of Oman and the Royal Air Force of Oman. The exercise will encompass numerous training programmes and practical applications, involving the execution of various naval operations, formations, manoeuvres and specialised exercises. This will be alongside an exchange of expertise among the participating ship crews, in accordance with the exercise’s planned agenda. The execution of this joint exercise falls within the framework of the annual training plans of the Royal Navy of Oman and the joint exercise plans with the navies of sisterly and friendly countries. It aims to maintain the operational readiness levels of the Royal Navy of Oman’s fleet and its personnel across various naval specialisations, aligning with the national tasks assigned to it. — ONA

SHORT TAKES



7 government departments and private establishments took part in the forum.

DATES, HONEY FORUM IN JAALAN EXPLORES INNOVATIVE MARKETING

JAALAN BANI BU HASSAN: The 4th Dates and Honey Forum held in Jaalan Bani Bu Hassan, Al Sharqiyah South Governorate, presented innovative marketing methods aimed at enhancing the added value of Omani agricultural products and achieving sustainability in the sectors of beekeeping and date palm farming. The forum, which saw the participation of 7 government departments and private establishments, was aimed at encouraging farmers and beekeepers to develop their industries in accordance with the latest marketing practices. Salim bin Sultan al Araiimi, Director of the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources in the Wilayat of Jaalan Bani Bu Hassan, told ONA that the forum participants applied modern display methods and attractive packaging procedures that adhered to the highest standards of food safety. This approach, he observed, contributes to enhancing the marketing climate for local products and activating the role of small and medium enterprises.

Al Araiimi said, “The forum focuses on diversifying products made from dates — like sweets, biscuits and dates syrup — and presenting them in modern ways that meet consumers’ aspirations. It also outlines the stages of producing Omani honey and highlights the progress made in the household-based food processing sector.” Al Araiimi pointed out that the production of dates in the Al Sharqiyah South Governorate in 2024 stood at 28,387 tonnes and that Jaalan Bani Bu Hassan occupied first place at the level of the governorate (12,588 tonnes) and 10th place at the level of Oman — thus affirming its status as a strong contributor to food security and the diversification of national economy at large. — ONA

RAFO holds Annual Day parade and graduations

THE Royal Air Force of Oman celebrated on Sunday its annual day, which coincides with January 25 of each year, and the graduation of the basic officer candidate course, the limited service officer candidate course and university graduates, at the military parade ground at Ghala Air Base and the Sultan Qaboos Air Academy, under the auspices of HH Sayyid Dr Kamil bin Fahd bin Mahmood al Said, Secretary-General of the General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers. The graduating class presented a military parade that embodied high skill and efficiency, and highlighted the great attention and high care that this branch of the armed forces receives from His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, the Supreme Commander. The graduation ceremony began with a military salute to His Highness the Secretary-General of the General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers, the patron of the occasion, upon his arrival at the celebration square. The RAFO Band played the Royal Anthem, and then His Highness inspected the front row of the graduating class. The graduating class then presented a military marching display, led by the flag of the Sultan Qaboos Air Academy, passing in front of the main platform accompanied by military music. Then the class advanced in a parade formation. His Highness, the patron of the ceremony, presented the Sword of Honour to Lieutenant Al Farouq bin Hamad al Jabri, who achieved first place at the general level for the basic officer candidates course. His Highness also honoured Lieutenant Juma Abdulrahman



The graduating class presented a military parade embodying high skill and efficiency.

bin Nabhan al Amri, who achieved first place at the level of the limited service officer candidates course and university graduates. Then the ceremony of handing over and receiving the flag of the Sultan Qaboos Air Academy took place from the graduating class to the class currently receiving training at the Sultan Qaboos Air Academy, whose members swore to preserve and protect it. Then the graduating officers sang the anthem of the Royal Air Force of Oman,

performed the oath of allegiance and the call of support, and chanted three times, ‘Long live His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, the Supreme Commander. A number of RAFO fighter jets performed an air show in the sky above the celebration square, embodying the modernisation and development achieved by the Royal Air Force of Oman in its armament, training and human capabilities, and the high care and attention it receives from His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik. Afterwards, the band played the Royal Anthem. The leader of the graduating class asked HH Sayyid Dr Kamil bin Fahd al Said, the patron of the occasion, for permission to leave, and the graduating class left the parade ground, passing in front of the main platform. The Royal Air Force of Oman Band presented a variety of musical and military pieces that reflected the high level of artistic skill and masterful military musical performance, which embodies the high level of skill of the Royal Air Force of Oman Band members and the modern equipment and musical instruments provided to them. The ceremony was attended by Their Highnesses and Excellencies, commanders of the Sultan’s Armed Forces and other military and security agencies, members of the State Council, invited retired commanders, Their Excellencies, senior officers of the Sultan’s Armed Forces and other military and security agencies, as well as retired senior officers, military attachés from the embassies of brotherly and friendly countries in Oman, members of the Royal Air Force of Oman, and parents of the graduates. — ONA

GRADUATING AIR OFFICERS FETED AS RAFO MARKS ANNUAL DAY

MUSCAT: Air Vice Marshal Khamis bin Hammad al Ghafri, Commander of the Royal Air Force of Oman (RAFO), presented diplomas in military science and Royal Patent Certificate to graduating officers as part of RAFO’s annual day celebration. The Commander of RAFO congratulated the graduates on their outstanding performance at the graduation ceremony which, he said, reflected their distinguished military skills and discipline. He



Air Vice Marshal Khamis bin Hammad al Ghafri feted the graduating officers.

congratulated them on receiving the trust of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, the Supreme Commander, urging them to carry on with their hard work and wishing them continued success. The Commander of RAFO also honoured the air bases that won the top positions in various competitions and activities, praising their outstanding performance and dedicated efforts across all fields and wishing them continued success. — ONA

Al Suwaiq Hospital achieves surgical milestone with keyhole colon operation

AL SUWAIQ: Al Suwaiq Hospital recently succeeded in conducting the first laparoscopic colon resection in its history. The surgery set a milestone in the hospital’s medical achievements. It was the outcome of rapid development in the hospital’s facilities, helping it keep pace with updates in surgical specialisations. Dr Hatim bin Dhiab al Saadi, Director of Al Suwaiq Hospital, told ONA that the surgery lasted three hours and was conducted in accordance with approved medical standards. He added that the patient’s condition was clinically stable and was discharged from the hospital on the fourth day after the surgery. Dr Hatim added that the surgery gains significance as a new accomplishment in providing specialised surgical care within Al Batinah North Governorate. He pointed out that the hospital brought this type



The hospital seeks to expand its advanced endoscopic surgeries to include upper and lower gastrointestinal surgeries.

of specialised surgery close to the local community, noting that, earlier, patients from Al Batinah North and Al Batinah South governorates could only access this service in Muscat. The success at Al Suwaiq

Hospital also reflects the high level of integration and institutional cooperation with the specialised team of the Royal Hospital, said Dr Hatim, noting that this step contributes to the principle of decentralisation in

health services. Dr Hatim explained that the operation was performed by qualified national staff from Al Suwaiq Hospital, assisted by a specialised surgical team from the Royal Hospital. — ONA

Tender

مدائن
madayn

The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn) announces the following Tenders:

Tender Number	Tender Name	Last date of Buying	Date of Submission	Type of Work	Register Degree	Fee (R.O)
9/2025/ PEIE/ HQ-9 (RE-TENDER)	Construction of Infrastructure Facilities and Plug & Play Industrial Complex at Madha Industrial City in Musandam Governorate	08-02-2026	08-03-2026	Construction	First and above	500
1/2026/ PEIE/ HQ-1	Facilities Management Services (FMS) at Al Wadi Al Kabir Industrial City	08-02-2026	08-03-2026	Services	Second and above	100

Interested Companies registered with Tender Board may obtain the Tender documents from the E-Tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om> against non-refundable payment as mentioned above for each set of documents. Tenders should be submitted on line on given website.

1. Tender Inquiry: All correspondence pertaining to the TENDER Inquiry must be online at eTendering System.

2. eTendering System Inquiry: All correspondence pertaining to the eTendering System technical support must be directed to the following helpdesk email address and phone number: etenderhd@gstb.gov.om and +968 24402200

Note: Bid Submission will be online only.

Madayn is not bound to accept the lowest or any other Offer and has the right to cancel these tenders and the tenderers have no right to claim for any compensations.

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in



The roaming ‘Fantasy Tales Parade’ is one of the festival’s biggest crowd-pullers at Muscat Nights festival which has turned Al Qurum Natural Park into a major family entertainment hub

FANTASY LIGHTS UP AL QURUM PARK



GBS removes 1.5 tonnes of plastic waste from Azaiba beach



As much as 1.5 tonnes weighing waste from Azaiba beach, most of which was plastic comprising bottles, caps, chips packets and the like which would pose great threat to the marine population, was removed.

The beach cleaning campaign, conducted as part of the CSR programme, in coordination with the Royal Oman Police (ROP), Muscat Municipality and Oman Observer Daily, saw nearly 35 volunteers cleaning up the entire area for about 3 hours.

All the waste materials were then transported by the Muscat Municipality to recycling plant.

Speaking to the Observer, Khamis Salim al Junaibi, Chairman of the Board of Directors said that the corporate motto was to commitment to excellence and dedication to deliver the best.

“We will continue to work and produce in order to benefit the future of our country. We will always keep our goals at the highest level in order to contribute to the economy and employment of our country,” Khamis Salim al Junaibi said.

GBS is a multi-discipline EPCC company operating in oil & gas sector in process plants and pipelines, petrochemicals, power production and transmission, water and wastewater, and Industrial sectors. We have been actively engaged in and possess excellent capabilities to execute Shutdown, Maintenance & Turn around Jobs.



M.S. Rao, CEO of GBS said that doing business is not always about just making profits but to contribute to the society in a positive way and make the world a better place to live.

“We care for the marine life as well as the human lives and we try to contribute to the society in whatever way possible. We are strongly aimed to contribute effectively to the country’s economy, employment creation for nationals and their career progression. We also totally support In Country Value (ICV) by local sourcing of goods and services and remaining steadfast in supporting the nation,” Rao said.



IDRIS AL BALUSHI

MUSCAT

NIGHTS festival continues to transform Al Qurum Natural Park into a vibrant destination for family entertainment, with immersive attractions that place children and shared family moments at the heart of the experience.

Among the most popular highlights drawing large crowds are the roaming Parade Show and the Illuminated Cartoon Characters World, two attractions that have quickly become defining features of the festival’s joyful atmosphere.

The Parade Show, known as Mawkiab Hikayat Al Khayal (The Fantasy Tales Parade), moves dynamically through the park multiple times a day. Featuring 25 performers, the parade delivers a visually rich journey filled with fantasy, music, elaborate costumes, cosplay performances, and decorated floats.

The parade creates spontaneous moments of excitement and invites visitors to follow along as the spectacle unfolds.

Designed to captivate both children and adults, the parade injects a contagious energy into the festival grounds. Its interactive nature encourages families to move together and experience Muscat Nights as an unfolding story rather than a static event.

Balkees al Busaidy, a mother of primary school children, shared how the parade became an unexpected highlight of her family’s visit. “We visited Al Qurum Natural Park for the fireworks, but the children were completely drawn to the parade with its dazzling



costumes and the larger-than-life floats and carriages being a real showstopper.”

“We were forced to chase after the parade the whole night because the children couldn’t get enough of it. But it turned out to be a great experience, as it allowed them to explore the entire park and see other activities while following the parade.”

Complementing the parade’s movement and performance is the Illuminated Cartoon Characters World, where the attraction features an

impressive collection of massive, glowing inflatable figures representing beloved cartoon and cinematic characters. The installation invites families to stroll through, take photos, and admire the detailed silhouettes of characters that generations have grown up watching.

Characters such as Tom & Jerry, Superman, Tweety Bird and the Minions from Despicable Me stand illuminated against the night sky, creating a dreamlike environment that resonates strongly with younger visitors.

Said al Azri, a father of a child with special needs, described how the parade exceeded his expectations. “I didn’t expect my daughter to interact or enjoy the parade as much as she did, but the professionalism and inclusivity of the cosplayers made all the difference,” he said.

He noted that their evening concluded with a visit to the Cartoon Characters World, where his daughter was equally enthralled. “Seeing all the large inflated figures lined up together was fascinating. She was more than thrilled to meet her favourite characters and felt completely in her element.”

For younger visitors like primary school student Qusai al Balushi, the experience felt nothing short of magical. “I loved the parade and the glowing cartoon characters. Everything was colourful and fun, and I hope I can come again next year,” he said, adding, “I felt like I stepped into a storybook.”

Muscat Nights festival at Al Qurum Natural Park continues to reaffirm its role as a celebration of family, fantasy, and shared joy, where every child, and every story, finds a place to shine.

SHORT TAKES



Sayyid Faisal bin Hamoud al Busaidy, Governor of Musandam, who chaired the meeting held in Khasab, discussed enhancing safety levels and facilitating access between various areas.

SERVICE DELIVERY IN FOCUS AT MUSANDAM COUNCIL MEETING

KHASAB: *The Municipal Council of Musandam Governorate discussed development proposals aimed at improving traffic flow, enhancing safety levels and facilitating access between various areas of the Wilayat of Khasab.*

This comes within the framework of efforts to develop the infrastructure of Khasab and enhance the efficiency of the road network in line with urban and population growth.

This took place during the Municipal Council's first meeting this year, chaired by Sayyid Faisal bin Hamoud al Busaidy, Governor of Musandam.

This falls within a comprehensive approach to enhance the infrastructure of the Wilayat of Khasab and achieve balanced and sustainable development that meets the aspirations of citizens and contributes to improving the level of services provided. — ONA

Karwa Motors–Mwasalat sign cooperation deal

KARWA Motors has signed a cooperation agreement with Mwasalat to strengthen joint collaboration between the two sides in several areas of mutual interest.

The agreement aims to improve operational efficiency, exchange technical expertise, and develop operational solutions, in addition to supporting business sustainability and enhancing operational readiness.

The agreement was signed by Dr Ibrahim bin Ali al Balushi, Chief Executive Officer of Karwa Motors, and Eng Badr bin Mohammed al Nadabi, Chief Executive Officer of Mwasalat.

This comes as part of Karwa Motors' strategy to enhance industrial and operational integration, and to expand cooperation in supply, technical services, and logistical support, in line with national directions to develop the industrial and transport sectors.

Karwa Motors affirmed that this step is part of its phased plan to expand strategic partnerships with leading national institutions and strengthen integration between the industrial and service sectors, supporting the development of an integrated industrial and



Dr Ibrahim bin Ali al Balushi, CEO, Karwa Motors, and Eng Badr bin Mohammed Al Nadabi, CEO, Mwasalat, after the agreement.

The agreement represents an important strategic step within Karwa Motors' journey to expand its institutional partnerships

operational ecosystem within Oman.

Dr Ibrahim al Balushi stated that the agreement represents an important strategic step within Karwa Motors' journey to expand its institutional partnerships and enhance industrial and operational integration.

He added: "Cooperation with Mwasalat reflects our commitment to working with leading national

institutions to develop practical and sustainable solutions, and to create added value for both the industrial and transport sectors, in line with the objectives of Oman's future vision."

Eng Badr bin Mohammed al Nadabi, said: "The signing of this cooperation agreement with Karwa Motors comes within the framework of Mwasalat's ongoing commitment to developing the transport system in Oman, enhancing operational efficiency, and supporting sustainability and innovation trends in the sector.

He affirmed that this cooperation serves as a platform for exchanging technical and operational expertise, and exploring smart future solutions that contribute to improving the quality of transport services in its various forms and raising operational efficiency, in line with the objectives of the transition toward more sustainable and flexible transport.

He added that strategic partnerships with specialised companies represent a fundamental pillar in developing the sector, enhancing its readiness for future requirements, and supporting national efforts aimed at building a modern transport ecosystem based on innovation and advanced technologies.”



ARABIC LANGUAGE PROGRAMME BEGINS

MUSCAT: The Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) on Sunday launched the 3rd edition of its landmark 'Arabic Language and Omani Culture Programme' organised by the university's International Cooperation Office. The programme's opening ceremony was held under the auspices of HH Sayyid Dr Fahd bin Al Julanda al Said, Vice-Chancellor of SQU (SQU). Salim bin Mohammed al Hajri, Acting Head of the Academic and Student Exchange Department at the SQU, underlined role of Arabic language in promoting cultural communication and enhancing knowledge transfer. The programme reflects the university's efforts in teaching Arabic to non-native speakers, in cooperation with Kazan Federal University in Russia, the universities of Pusan National University and Dankook University in South Korea and Peking University in China. — **ONA**

Medical conference in Samayil highlights emergency care challenges

SAMAYIL: The Omani Association for Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation Conference 2026 convened in Samayil to address the key challenges faced by emergency departments. Organised in collaboration with Samayil Hospital, the event brought together more than 90 medical and paramedical staff, students, and specialists from the Ministry of Health and the Oman Medical Association.

The opening ceremony was held under the auspices of HH Sayyid Mohammed bin Thuwaini al Said and attended by dignitaries and officials. Dr Zakia bint Rashid al Dughaishi, Director of Samayil Hospital, highlighted the rapid development of Oman's health sector, noting improvements in infrastructure and health services aligned with the nation's vision for an integrated and advanced health system.



The event brought together more than 90 medical and paramedical staff.

Dr Mahmoud bin Nasser al Rahbi, President of the Omani Association for Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation, said the conference serves as a platform to exchange professional experiences, promote evidence-based practice and enhance teamwork across medical disciplines, aiming to improve decision-making, patient safety and efficiency in emergency care.

The conference featured three scientific sessions: Emergency Medicine and Resuscitation covering legal

and ethical considerations, soft skills, lessons from practice, and updates to cardiopulmonary resuscitation per American Heart Association guidelines; Children's Emergency and Resuscitation focusing on neonatal resuscitation, diabetic ketoacidosis in children, seizure management and paediatric emergency protocols; and Emergency and Resuscitation of Surgical Cases and Injuries addressing cardiac arrest from injuries, pre-hospital first aid, and ENT emergencies. — ONA

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On behalf of the Government of the Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Finance, the Central Bank of Oman announces the 80th issuance of Government Development Bonds (GDBs) to be auctioned. The 80th Issuance of GDBs will be issued on Tuesday, 3rd February 2026, carrying a coupon rate of 4.05% per annum for a maturity period of 5 years (maturing on 3rd February 2031). These Bonds will be auctioned and priced on Sunday, 1st February 2026. Investors may apply for these Bonds through licensed commercial banks by completing the application form.

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WORLD

SHORTTAKES



Former Iraqi PM Nouri al Maliki.

IRAQI LAWMAKERS TO ELECT PRESIDENT AND PM NEXT

BAGHDAD: Iraq’s parliament will meet on Tuesday to elect the country’s new president, who will then appoint a prime minister expected to be Nouri al Maliki after he was endorsed by the large bloc. Parliamentary speaker Haibat al Halbussi announced on Sunday that the new parliament will convene on Tuesday to elect a president, according to the official INA press agency.

The president will then have 15 days to appoint a prime minister, who is usually nominated by the largest Shiite bloc formed through post-election alliances. On Saturday, the Coordination Framework alliance endorsed former prime minister Maliki as the country’s next premier. The alliance, to which Maliki belongs, spoke of his “political and administrative experience and his record in running the state”.

The presidency is usually held by the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK). Although Maliki’s endorsement effectively guarantees him the post, forming a new government remains a daunting challenge that could drag on for months and still fail. The designated premier has one month to form a government and present it to parliament for a vote of confidence. — AFP

BANGLADESH SLAMS INDIA REGARDING HASINA’S SPEECH

DHAKA: Bangladesh said on Sunday it was “surprised” and “shocked” that India had allowed fugitive former prime minister Sheikh Hasina to make a public address in New Delhi. Hasina, 78, fled to neighbouring India in August 2024 after a student-led uprising ended her iron-fisted 15-year rule. She made her first public speech since then in an audio address to a packed press club in Delhi on Friday. She was found guilty in absentia by a Dhaka court in November of incitement, issuing an order to kill and inaction to prevent atrocities and was sentenced to be hanged.

“The government and the people of Bangladesh are surprised and shocked,” Dhaka’s foreign ministry said in a statement. “Allowing the event to take place in the Indian capital and letting mass murderer Hasina openly deliver her hate speech... constitute a clear affront to the people and the Government of Bangladesh.” It said allowing Hasina to make the speech set “a dangerous precedent” that could “seriously impair bilateral relations”.

Bangladesh voters go to the polls on February 12 to choose new leaders after a period of turmoil that followed the overthrow of Hasina’s autocratic government. Hasina said in her audio address that “Bangladesh will never experience free and fair elections” under interim leader Muhammad Yunus. More than 100,000 people watched the address, which was broadcast online. Bangladesh has asked India to extradite Hasina, but New Delhi has yet to comment on the request. — AFP

INDISCRIMINATE BOMBS

Fresh conflict in S Sudan displaces 180,000



Renewed fighting in South Sudan has displaced more than 180,000 people, with witnesses describing indiscriminate use of barrel bombs and civilians fleeing into swamps as the country’s fragile peace unravels. Authorities estimate the displaced at more than 180,000, the UN humanitarian agency OCHA said. “Most people are settling under trees. Their homes and health facilities have been looted or burned and there is a lot of hunger.” — AFP

DEMOCRACY BALLOT

Final polls close in Myanmar’s election



Voting concluded in Myanmar’s month-long election on Sunday, with the dominant pro-military party on course for landslide victory in a junta-run poll critics say will only prolong the army’s grip on power. The election’s third and final phase closed after voting took place in dozens of constituencies across the country. The military pledges the election will return power to the people, but democracy advocates say the ballot is stacked with military allies. — AFP

ELECTRICITY FAILURE

Power outage ends in Greenland capital



Power returned to Greenland’s capital on Sunday after a sweeping outage overnight caused by a transmission failure due to strong winds. Nuuk, home to around 20,000 people and mostly powered by a hydroelectric plant, was left without electricity at around 10:30 pm on Saturday. “The entire city now has electricity, water and heating again,” Nukissiorfiit said early on Sunday. Internet connectivity had also been affected. — AFP

Damascus opens humanitarian corridor to Kobane

DAMASCUS: Syria’s military said on Sunday it had opened a humanitarian corridor to the Kurdish-majority town of Kobane, filled with people displaced by recent clashes, as a UN convoy carrying life-saving aid headed there. The aid came as the Syrian government and Kurdish forces extended a ceasefire agreement by 15 days, after Kurdish forces relinquished swathes

of territory to government troops. Earlier this week, residents in Kobane, also known as Ain al Arab, said that they lacked food, water and power and that the enclave was flooded with people who had fled the Syrian army’s advances. In a statement, the Syrian military said it was opening two corridors, one to Kobane and another in nearby Hasakeh province

to allow “the entry of aid”. Gonzalo Vargas Llosa, representative of the United Nations’ refugee agency in Syria, said that “thanks to the cooperation with the Syrian government... a convoy of 24 trucks carrying essential food, relief items, and diesel” departed for Kobane “to deliver life-saving and winter assistance to civilians affected by the hostilities”.

The Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) lost large areas to government forces during the weeks-long clashes, and find themselves restricted to areas in the northeast and Kobane in the north. The town is surrounded by the Turkish border to the north and government forces on all sides. It is 200 kilometres from the Kurds’ stronghold in far northeast. — AFP

Israeli fire strikes on Gaza amidst ongoing deal talks

ISRAELI

fire killed two Palestinians in the Tuffah neighbourhood in the northern Gaza Strip on Sunday, and an Israeli drone wounded four others in a separate incident in Gaza City, local health authorities said. Medical workers said an Israeli drone exploded on the rooftop of a multi-floor building in Gaza City, wounding four civilians in the street nearby. There was no comment by the Israeli military on either incident.

Gaza has been reduced to rubble in the war that was triggered by an attack by Palestinian militant group Hamas on southern Israel on October 7, 2023, that killed 1,200 people, according to Israeli tallies. The Gaza health ministry says more than 71,000 people, mostly civilians, have been killed by Israeli fire since then. It says that at least 480 people were killed by Israeli fire since the ceasefire agreement came into effect last October.

Israel said four soldiers have been killed by in Gaza since the ceasefire began. Both sides have traded blame over the violation of the truce. Earlier this month, Washington announced that the plan had now moved into the second phase, under which Israel is expected to withdraw troops further from Gaza, and Hamas is due to yield control of the territory’s administration.

US envoys Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner met in Israel with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, mainly to discuss Gaza, two people briefed on the matter



A mourner reacts during the funeral of Palestinians, at Al Shifa Hospital in Gaza. — Reuters

Medical workers said an Israeli drone exploded on the rooftop of a multi-floor building in Gaza City, wounding four civilians in the street nearby. The Palestinian Health Ministry in Gaza said on Saturday that Israeli fire had killed three people, including two children

said, as local authorities reported further violence in the enclave. Meanwhile, in Khan Yunis, over a hundred people attended the funeral of a person who was killed by Israeli drone fire on Saturday, after holding special prayers in front of his white-shrouded body at the morgue in Nasser Hospital.

“They are liars, there is no ceasefire,” said Fares Erheimat, a relative of the dead man, during the funeral.

US envoys Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner were in Israel on Saturday to meet with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, mainly to discuss Gaza, two people briefed on the matter said, as local authorities reported further violence in the enclave.

The US on Thursday announced plans for a “New Gaza” rebuilt from scratch, to include residential towers, data centres and seaside resorts. The project forms part of President Donald Trump’s push to advance an October ceasefire between Israel and Palestinian group Hamas that has been shaken by repeated violations.

The Palestinian Health Ministry in Gaza said on Saturday that Israeli fire had killed three people, including two children, in two separate incidents in the northern Gaza Strip. A statement from the Israeli military said that its troops operating in the northern Gaza Strip identified several militants “who crossed the Yellow Line, planted an explosive device in the area, and approached the troops, posing an immediate threat to them.”

Under the ceasefire accord, Israeli troops were to retreat to a yellow line marked on military maps that runs nearly the full length of Gaza. A source in the Israeli military said that the military was aware of only one incident on Saturday and that those involved were not children.

A spokesperson for the Israeli prime minister’s office confirmed that the meeting was planned but did not provide further details. Gaza has been reduced to rubble in the war that was triggered by an attack on southern Israel on October 7, 2023 that killed 1,200 people, according to Israeli tallies. Earlier this month, Washington announced that the plan had now moved into the second phase, under which Israel is expected to withdraw troops further from Gaza. — Reuters

INDONESIA RESUMES SEARCH FOR DOZENS MISSING

CISARUA: Indonesian rescuers resumed searching on Sunday for around 80 people missing in a deadly landslide, after the mission coordinator said operations had to be suspended overnight due to harsh weather. Triggered by heavy rain, the landslide barrelled into villages in Java’s West Bandung region early on Saturday morning, burying residential areas and forcing dozens of people to evacuate their homes.

At least nine people were killed and around 80 are still missing, the local search and rescue agency confirmed on Saturday, warning that the figures were provisional. The rain forced rescue efforts to pause overnight, mission coordinator Ade Dian Permana said in a statement. But operations resumed on Sunday morning as the rain subsided. Rescuers, helped by the military, police and volunteers, have been excavating manually. — AFP

SHORT TAKES



Residents arrive to Kramatorsk after their evacuation, Ukraine. — Reuters

1,700 BUILDINGS STILL WITHOUT HEAT IN KYIV

KYIV: Around 1,700 apartment buildings in the Ukrainian capital Kyiv were still without heating following a Russian missile and drone attack earlier this week, Kyiv Mayor Vitalii Klitschko said on Sunday. Moscow has sharply intensified bombardments of Ukraine’s energy system since it attacked its neighbour in 2022. Russia launched a vast attack on Ukraine’s energy system on Saturday, rocking Kyiv with explosions overnight, leaving 1.2 million properties without power countrywide during sub-zero winter temperatures. “Russia’s main targets right now are our energy sector, critical infrastructure, and residential buildings,” Ukraine’s President Volodymyr Zelensky said on X. This week alone, he said Russia had launched more than 1,700 attack drones, over 1,380 guided aerial bombs and 69 missiles on Ukraine. Every massive attack by Russia could have a devastating impact, said Zelensky, who on Sunday visited Lithuania. “We are working with every leader to strengthen Ukraine. Everyone must clearly understand the threat coming from Russia,” he said. Deputy Prime Minister Oleksiy Kuleba said on Saturday that more than 3,200 of Kyiv’s buildings were without heating late that evening, down from 6,000 in the morning. — Reuters

CROWDS FLOCK TO TOKYO ZOO



Panda fans flocked to the Ueno Zoo in Tokyo on Sunday to say goodbye to its star attractions — two giant pandas, who will be sent back to China at the end of the month. The departure of four-year-old twins Xiao Xiao and Lei Lei leaves Japan panda-less for the first time since 1972, prompting thousands to apply for lottery-assigned tickets to say goodbye. While their move to China has been planned for some time, the pandas’ coming absence has been viewed as a reflection of deteriorating China-Japan relations in recent months. — Reuters

AUSTRALIA CALLS ON TRUMP TO RESPECT NATO SOLDIERS

SYDNEY: Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said on Sunday that comments from US President Donald Trump lamenting the efforts of non-US troops in Afghanistan were “completely unacceptable”. Trump said in a Fox News interview that Nato sent “some troops” but “stayed a little back, a little off the front lines”. Trump appeared to be partially walking back his remarks on Saturday amid growing outrage from European and now Australian allies. Speaking on the ABC’s *Insiders* programme on Sunday morning,

Albanese said Australian families of fallen soldiers would be “hurting” as a result of Trump’s comments. “Those 47 Australian families who will be hurting by these comments, they deserve our absolute respect, our admiration,” Albanese said. “The bravery that was shown by 40,000 Australians (who) served in Afghanistan, they were certainly on the frontlines in order to, along with our other allies, defend democracy and freedom and to defend our national interests,” he added. “They deserve our respect.” A day after British Prime

Minister Keir Starmer condemned Trump’s remarks as “appalling”, Trump appeared to change his position. “The GREAT and very BRAVE soldiers of the United Kingdom will always be with the United States of America!” Trump said on his Truth Social platform. “I think President Trump’s comments overnight indicate a very different position. He’s acknowledged the contribution,” Albanese told the ABC, but added that Trump’s previous comments were “entirely not appropriate. Completely unacceptable”. — AFP

MASSIVE WINTER STORM SWEEPS ACROSS THE US

A massive winter storm headed towards the northeast United States on Sunday after sweeping across much of the country, threatening tens of millions of Americans with blackouts, transportation chaos and bone-chilling cold. After battering the country’s southwest and central areas, the storm system began to hit the heavily populated mid-Atlantic and northeastern states with snow and freezing rain as a frigid air mass settled in across the nation. “The snow sleet impacts will linger well into next week with rounds of re-freezing that keeps surfaces icy and dangerous to both drive and walk on for the foreseeable future,” the National Weather Service (NWS) said. Snowfall was reported across the central United States, including Kansas, Oklahoma and Missouri, where some spots already recorded 20 centimetres on the ground by Saturday night, the NWS said.

Shoppers stripped supermarket shelves as the weather service forecast huge snowfall in some areas and possibly “catastrophic” ice accumulations. Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy warned that up to 240 million Americans could be affected by the storm. At least 20 states and the US capital Washington have declared states of emergency. “Take this storm seriously, folks,” the NWS said on X, predicting an “astonishingly long swath” of snowfall from Colorado to Maine. About 14,000 flights in and out of the United States had been cancelled over the weekend, with thousands more delayed, according to tracker FlightAware. In Dallas, which has typically mild temperatures in January, freezing rain pelted the Texas city and the mercury plummeted to 21F (-6C). State officials vowed that the Texas power grid was in better shape than five years ago, when it failed during a deadly winter storm and left millions without power. More than 180,000 US customers were without power as of early on Sunday morning, with about 45,000 reported in Texas and about 67,000 in neighbouring Louisiana. Speaking at the Washington headquarters of the US Federal



A snow removal machine is seen working on the tarmac of LaGuardia airport in New York. — AFP

Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), Department of Homeland Security chief Kristi Noem urged Americans impacted by the weather to “be smart, stay home if possible, take care of your family members, check on your neighbours and continue to work with your local officials.” US President Donald Trump, who was riding out the storm at the White House, said on his Truth Social platform: “We will continue to monitor, and stay in touch with all States in the path of this storm. Stay Safe and Stay Warm!” The brutal storm system is the result of a stretched polar vortex, an Arctic region of cold, low-pressure air that normally forms a relatively compact, circular system but sometimes morphs into a more oval shape, sending cold air spilling across North America. Scientists say the increasing frequency of such disruptions of the polar vortex may be linked to climate change, though the debate is not settled and natural variability plays a role. But Trump — who scoffs at climate change

science and has rolled back green energy policies — questioned how the cold front fit into broader climate shifts. “WHATEVER HAPPENED TO GLOBAL WARMING???” the Republican leader posted on Truth Social. The NWS warned that heavy ice could cause “long-duration power outages, extensive tree damage, and extremely dangerous or impassable travel conditions,” including in many states less accustomed to intense winter weather. New York Governor Kathy Hochul warned residents to stay inside amid frigid conditions: “Five or six minutes outside could literally be dangerous for your health.” She stressed precautions like protecting pipes, using heaters safely, and checking on vulnerable neighbours. Authorities warned of life-threatening cold that could last a week post-storm, especially in the Northern Plains and Upper Midwest, where wind chill lows were forecast to dip to extremes under -45C. Such temperatures can cause frostbite within minutes. — AFP

Second killing in Minneapolis by US federal agents sparks uproar

MINNEAPOLIS: The killing of a US citizen by federal immigration agents on Saturday — the second in Minneapolis this month — sparked new protests and impassioned demands by local leaders for the Trump administration to end its operation in the city. Federal agents shot dead Alex Pretti, a 37-year old ICU nurse, while scuffling with him on an icy roadway, less than three weeks after an Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officer shot and killed Renee Good, also 37, in her car. The Trump administration quickly claimed, as it did after Good’s death, that Pretti had intended to harm the federal agents, even as video of the incident appeared to contradict their account. The

Department of Homeland Security (DHS) pointed to a pistol and ammunition it said was discovered on Pretti. “He was there to perpetuate violence,” Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem told a briefing, while White House deputy chief of staff Stephen Miller referred to Pretti as an “assassin,” in a post amplified on X by Vice President JD Vance. After an agent shoves a woman protester to the ground on the sidewalk, Pretti steps in between them and is sprayed in the face by a chemical irritant. The agent then pulls Pretti to the ground and several officers struggle to detain him on the icy roadway. Seconds later, as an officer apparently discovers and pulls a gun from Pretti’s pants, agents open fire, also



A federal agent lobs a teargas canister towards protesters, in Minneapolis. — AFP

shooting his motionless body several times from a distance. Pretti’s parents in a statement circulated by US media called him a “kind-hearted soul” and accused the Trump administration of telling “sickening lies” about

their son. Minnesota Governor Tim Walz called the shooting “horrific” and demanded state authorities lead the investigation. “The federal government cannot be trusted to lead this

investigation. The state will handle it, period,” Walz told a news conference. Federal authorities controversially blocked local investigators from jointly probing Good’s death. One Senate Republican on Saturday called for a joint investigation into the shooting. “The events in Minneapolis are incredibly disturbing. The credibility of ICE and DHS are at stake,” Senator Bill Cassidy, a Louisiana Republican, wrote on X. “There must be a full joint federal and state investigation. We can trust the American people with the truth.” Republican President Donald Trump meanwhile ratcheted up his war of words with Walz and Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey, accusing the Democratic leaders of

“inciting insurrection” with their rhetoric. Trump had previously threatened to send troops to Minnesota by invoking the Insurrection Act. As the president presses a sweeping campaign to deport undocumented migrants, thousands of ICE agents have been deployed to the Democratic-led city. Public outrage was also rekindled earlier this week by the detention of a five-year old boy as federal agents sought to arrest his father. Frey at a news conference urged Trump to end the federal immigration operation, which has sparked sometimes violent demonstrations. “This is a moment to act like a leader. Put Minneapolis, put America first in this moment — let’s achieve peace.” — AFP

OPINION

How visual culture preserves heritage across generations



DR SANDHYA RAO MEHTA

The writer is Associate Professor, Sultan Qaboos University

WINTER is the ripe time for festivals – there are literary festivals, art shows and biennales that are making an artistic mark in our region. This year’s Muscat Nights festival is no exception to this celebration, as it combines visual arts with history and heritage.

Tangible cultural heritage typically includes paintings, photographs, artefacts, even sites and monuments significant in cultural histories. It generally comments on the history and cultural facets of a nation.

Art is an important way in which cultural heritage is not only retained, but is also introduced and disseminated. This is because art enables one to visualise history in ways that are difficult to do in other formats, like long-form reading or archaeological texts.

The various installations, art shows and the design week showcased in Muscat Nights are a glaring example of the way that art can function in ways that help to create a strong national identity through pride in shared visual elements.

Art carries the history of people, places and power. Paintings, sculptures, songs,

dances, and murals record myths, victories, struggles, rituals, and everyday life. Even when words and books disappear, these visual forms retain and reflect the strength of a community.

Art also helps to pass culture across generations. When shown in the form of crafts, music and physical performances, art can be appreciated by both watching and actually practicing and doing them.

Images of elders performing traditional dances, creating time-honoured dishes, and even engaging in traditional crafts like carving and weaving show how heritage can be passed on to younger generations through practice, not just passive retention and memory.

Visual art also protects language and communication. This is because artistic installations often use locally used symbolic and metaphoric language. This includes calligraphy, visual motifs and patterns, which keep endangered languages and meanings from disappearing. A corollary to this is that art helps to strengthen cultural identity.

The creation of art reminds us of our origins, roots and journeys. It builds an understanding of the complex ways in which

history intertwines with ordinary people and builds pride and belonging. This is especially true for communities that have struggled and faced historical challenges and need to retain these stories for the future.

Heritage is not a concept that is frozen in time. The real value of art is that heritage is interpreted by artists in multiple ways, usually in keeping with contemporary audiences. Often blending old techniques to depict new themes, art ensures that traditional culture stays alive instead of just being an item in a museum.

As the Muscat Nights, with its global audience shows, art connects people across the world. In spite of all our differences, art travels across cultures to remind us of the oneness of the human experience.

Whether it is film, music or artistic installations, local heritage is shared through a collective and collaborative platform. In many ways, art is cultural memory, which is alive and thriving.

It goes beyond being just a repository of memory and offers opportunities to practice it, feel it and share it across generations.

Art helps transmit culture across generations, and when expressed through crafts, music, and performance, it can be appreciated not only by observing, but also through active participation

MUSEVENI’S SON TIGHTENS GRIP ON UGANDA

AMMU KANNAMPILLY

As Uganda’s 81-year-old President Yoweri Museveni starts a seventh term, his tough-talking son and head of the military Muhoozi Kainerugaba is favourite to succeed him after consolidating his power base and sidelining critics. Kainerugaba, best-known to many Ugandans for his fiery social media posts, helped his father to election victory last week by ordering a crackdown on opponents and cutting the Internet, said sources familiar with the matter. Having repeatedly threatened to kill opposition leader Bobi Wine, who says the vote was rigged and is in hiding, Kainerugaba boasted that 30 “terrorists” from Wine’s party had been killed and 2,000 “hooligans” arrested. There was no immediate response from the party. In the run-up to the vote, security forces disrupted opposition rallies, detaining supporters and sometimes opening fire.

Adding to accounts from a business source and a security official, Andrew Mwenda, a close adviser to Kainerugaba, said he had played a critical role in the four-day Internet blackout, saying it was to prevent any sabotage.

Kainerugaba personally mobilised the police and army to target “roughnecks and ruffians” supporting the opposition National Unity Platform party led by popstar-turned-politician Wine, Mwenda added. “He’s number one in security in this country,” Mwenda said.

Kainerugaba could not be reached and spokespeople for the government, military and presidency did not respond to requests for comment on the Internet blackout, crackdown or succession plans. Kainerugaba, who attended Britain’s prestigious Sandhurst military academy and is an admirer of Mao Zedong and Fidel Castro, first announced in 2023 that he wanted to be president after his father, saying he was “tired of waiting forever”.

Since then, he has sidelined critics within the ruling party and military, retiring rival officers and boosting pay to secure soldiers’ loyalty.

Museveni has never commented in public about who will follow him, beyond saying his party will make the decision.

Though Kainerugaba’s presidential ambitions have previously sparked concern in Museveni’s inner circle, his role in securing the election victory has strengthened his position, the security official and business source said. A handover from father to son would not be without risks of a backlash in the East African country, which has a \$65 billion economy and enjoyed decades of stability under Museveni. Kainerugaba does not speak to journalists and has a reputation for late-night social media posts. — **Reuters**

Deaths mount as Trump pushes on immigration

THE fatal shooting of a man in Minneapolis on Saturday added to a mounting death toll in US President Donald Trump’s intensifying immigration push this month, increasing scrutiny on the crackdown as backlash builds.

The incident was one of five shootings in January involving federal agents conducting immigration enforcement, including the fatal shooting of Minnesota woman Renee Good.

At least six immigrants have died this month in federal immigration detention, an unusually rapid pace. The Trump administration is dramatically ramping up immigration enforcement with \$170 billion budgeted for immigration agencies through September 2029, a historic sum.

Minneapolis has become the focus of the Republican president’s crackdown this month, with some 3,000 agents deployed. Thousands of protesters took to the streets despite sub-zero temperatures on Friday to voice opposition to Trump’s enforcement and demand he withdraw the agents, which Minnesota officials have called an occupation. Trump has argued the militarised operations are necessary to remove criminals from the US, but many of those arrested were picked up solely for possible civil immigration violations - the legal equivalent to a traffic violation.

The man killed in Minneapolis on Saturday was a US citizen, identified in news reports as Alex Pretti, 37, a registered nurse and lawfully permitted gun owner.

The US Department of Homeland Security said a Border Patrol agent fired at the man, who resisted agents’ attempts to disarm him, but local leaders challenged that account.

In bystander videos verified by Reuters, agents are seen pepper spraying Pretti and other protesters as he films them with his cellphone.



People mourn as they gather at the site where a man was fatally shot by federal agents trying to detain him, in Minneapolis, Minnesota, US, on Sunday. — **Reuters**



TED HESSON

The writer is Immigration Reporter at Reuters

Minneapolis has become the focus of the president’s crackdown this month, with some 3,000 agents deployed

No weapon is visible. After multiple agents wrestle him to the ground, one draws his weapon and multiple shots can be heard.

The shooting followed Good’s death earlier this month, when US Immigration and Customs Enforcement officer Jonathan Ross fired into her vehicle. Within hours of that shooting, Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem called Good a “domestic terrorist” who tried to ram the ICE officer with her car, although the department has not presented evidence of a link to terrorism. Video shows Ross fired as Good’s car moved past him.

Federal agents have been involved in three other shootings this month during immigration actions. The day after Good’s death, a US Border Patrol agent shot and wounded a Venezuelan man and woman in Portland, Oregon, after what DHS called “a targeted vehicle stop.”

DHS said the driver, Venezuelan immigrant Luis Nino-Moncada, attempted to run over the agents before the agent fired, wounding Nino-Moncada and his passenger, a Venezuelan woman. The Justice Department later charged Nino-Moncada with assaulting an officer. His passenger, Yorlenys Zambrano-Contreras, pleaded guilty this week

to entering the US illegally in 2023.

On January 15, an ICE agent shot Julio Cesar Sosa-Celis in the leg in Minneapolis after DHS said he fled authorities. DHS said at the time that Sosa-Celis, a Venezuelan immigrant, and two other men hit an officer with a snow shovel and broom handle, prompting the shooting. Court documents unsealed this week told a different story. An FBI affidavit said the ICE officers had scanned a license plate registered with a different person suspected of an immigration violation, leading them to chase the wrong person before the alleged assault and shooting.

At least six people have died in ICE detention centers since the start of 2026, following at least 30 deaths in ICE custody last year, a two-decade high. The death of Cuban immigrant Geraldo Lunas Campos has received the most scrutiny after federal authorities provided shifting accounts of what happened.

ICE initially said Lunas died on January 3 at a Trump-era detention camp on the grounds of a US military base in Texas after experiencing “medical distress.” After the Washington Post reported the death would likely be classified as a homicide by the El Paso County medical examiner, DHS issued a new statement saying Lunas tried to commit suicide and then resisted security officers and died.

The medical examiner released a report this week that found the death was a homicide due to “asphyxia due to neck and torso compression,” the Post reported. On January 14, two other immigrant detainees died: a Nicaraguan man found unresponsive in the military base site, called East Camp Montana, and a Mexican man found unresponsive in a Georgia detention center, according to ICE.

Both deaths remain under investigation, but ICE said the Nicaraguan man, Victor Manuel Diaz, was presumed to have committed suicide.

Nobody moves forward empty-handed



ABDULAZIZ
AL JAHDHAMI

The writer is author,
translator and a
communications
professional

It is said that we do not grow when life is easy; we grow when we learn from what challenges us. So, it is with a year — it is not measured by days, but by the lessons it leaves behind. Every year arrives with blank pages, yet it departs with lessons written through experience. The year stands not as a collection of months, but as a journey marked by effort, learning and change. Some lessons arrived through achievements, others through challenges, but each became a stepping stone, elevating perspective and strengthening perseverance. Together, they remind us that growth is not accidental; it is earned. The workplace proved to be more than a place of productivity; it became a place of possibility. Through collaboration, one truth stood clear: great work is never the result of one voice, but of many moving in harmony. Like a symphony, success depended as much on listening as on contributing. Leadership revealed that the strongest leaders do not cast long shadows; they light the path. Guidance, trust, and belief in people created space for confidence and creativity to flourish. Feedback, too, became fuel rather than resistance. From the business world came a defining lesson of the year that change is not the enemy of progress; it is its engine. Those who learned, adapted and moved forward with courage discovered that resilience could turn

uncertainty into opportunity. Beyond office walls, society reflected the importance of empathy and shared responsibility. Everyone is fighting a battle we cannot see and understanding this transformed interaction. Communities flourished when kindness replaced judgement and listening became more valued than speaking. Family stood at the centre of it all. Among the noise of daily demands, it reminded us that success without connection is an empty victory. Like roots beneath a tree, family support often remained unseen, yet it was essential for growth — offering strength, balance and perspective when it was needed most. The approach of a new year does not call for reinvention, but for improvement. Growth is not a leap, but a series of small, thoughtful steps. Progress is built quietly, one action at a time. Improving the next version of ourselves means setting goals, not just intentions. It means choosing consistency over passion, awareness over speed and learning over comfort. Emotional intelligence, clear communication and balance become the foundation for sustainable growth. This new year invites us to sharpen our focus, strengthen our character and remain open to change — understanding that becoming better is not about arriving, but about continuing. The path forward calls for

The approach of a new year does not call for reinvention, but for improvement. Growth is not a leap, but a series of small, thoughtful steps. Progress is built quietly, one action at a time

clarity, discipline and belief. It encourages balance over burnout and learning over fear. Each day becomes an opportunity to choose progress, even when it feels slow. As the calendar turns, the lessons remain — guiding our steps towards building a better version of ourselves. They are not meant to be left behind, but carried forward like a torch, lighting the way into what comes next. The year just lived was a teacher — patient yet persistent. It taught through moments of challenge and clarity alike. Carrying these lessons forward ensures the next chapter begins not as an empty page, but as a continuation — written with wisdom earned, resilience strengthened and hope renewed. Though the year has closed its chapter, its impact continues, living on in wiser decisions, braver actions and broader perspectives. Moving forward requires intention. It asks for the courage to let go of what no longer serves us and the curiosity to keep learning. The future does not demand perfection; it asks for presence, effort and faith in the process. When values guide choices and purpose directs action, progress becomes certain even when it unfolds quietly. The journey continues not with urgency, but with meaning — guided by the understanding that becoming better is a lifelong pursuit, and every step forward, no matter how small, matters.

PENTAGON FORESEES ‘MORE LIMITED’ ROLE IN DETERRING NORTH KOREA

PHIL STEWART AND IDREES ALI

The Pentagon foresees a “more limited” role in deterring North Korea, with South Korea taking primary responsibility, according to a policy document released last Friday, a move that could lead to a reduction of US forces on the Korean Peninsula. South Korea hosts about 28,500 US troops in a combined defence against North Korea’s military threat, and Seoul has raised its defence budget by 7.5 per cent for this year. “South Korea is capable of taking primary responsibility for deterring North Korea with critical but more limited US support,” the Pentagon said in the 25-page National Defence Strategy document that guides its policies. “This shift in the balance of responsibility is consistent with America’s interest in updating US force posture on the Korean Peninsula.” In recent years, US officials have signalled a desire to make US forces in South Korea more flexible, to potentially operate outside the Korean Peninsula in response to a broader range of threats. South Korea has resisted the idea of shifting the role of US troops but has worked to grow its defence capabilities in the past 20 years, with the goal of being able to take on the wartime command of combined US and South Korean forces. South Korea has 450,000 troops. Its Defence Ministry said the US military based in the country is the “core” of the alliance that has deterred North Korean aggression and ensured peace on the peninsula and the region. “We will be cooperating closely with the US to continue developing it in that direction,” it said. North Korea routinely criticises the US military presence in South Korea and joint drills - which the allies say are defensive - as dress rehearsals for invasion against it driven by what it calls Washington’s hegemonic zeal. The Pentagon’s top policy official, Elbridge Colby, is due to travel to Asia this week and is expected to visit South Korea, a US official said. The wide-ranging document, which each new administration publishes, said the Pentagon’s priority was defending the homeland. In the Indo-Pacific region, the document said, the Pentagon was focused on ensuring that China could not dominate the United States or US allies. “This does not require regime change or some other existential struggle. Rather, a decent peace, on terms favourable to Americans but that China can also accept and live under, is possible,” the document said. The document is based on President Donald Trump’s National Security Strategy, published last year, which said the United States will reassert its dominance in the Western Hemisphere, build military strength in the Indo-Pacific and possibly reassess its relationship with Europe. Trump said last Thursday the US had an “armada” heading towards Iran but that he hoped he would not have to use it, as he renewed warnings to Tehran. — Reuters

India’s solar boom... an uncertain tomorrow

The race for green energy is on. India, driven by soaring electricity demand and a push to reduce reliance on China, is rapidly producing solar panels, fuelling a booming yet uncertain market. At the Adani Group’s factory in Mundra, in India’s western state of Gujarat, assembly lines churn out photovoltaic panels around the clock. Up to 10,000 a day come off the line, with most sent straight to Khavda, further north, where the Indian conglomerate is finishing what will be the world’s largest solar park. But Adani Solar’s CEO, Muralee Krishnan, says operations are “actually lagging”. “Our capacity needs to be fully used - we should work 48 hours a day.” The intensity is matched by other major producers in the world’s most populous nation. At the Tata conglomerate factory in Tirunelveli, in the southern state of Tamil Nadu, 4,000 mostly women employees also work non-stop shifts. “They operate 24/7, so you get better yield, better efficiency, better productivity,” said Praveer Sinha, CEO of Tata Power. “You cannot stop the production line... there is a rush to produce to maximise the output.” With the twin imperatives of development and lower carbon emissions, India has set itself ambitious renewable energy targets. Last year, it said half its electricity-generation capacity was now “green”, five years ahead of the timeline set in the Paris Agreement on lowering emissions. But 75 per cent of electricity is still generated by coal-fired power plants, with inflexible operations and long-term coal power purchase agreements hampering renewable uptake. There are signs of change. Last year, coal-fired power generation fell three per cent, only the second full-year drop recorded in half a decade, according to the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air. Renewable capacity of 230 gigawatts (GW) is set to rise to 500 GW by 2030, including 280 GW of solar. But Prime Minister Narendra



A 42-year-old widow lives in Modhera, India’s first solar-powered village.



PHILIPPE
ALFROY

The writer is AFP
Bureau Chief for
South Asia

With the twin imperatives of development and lower carbon emissions, India has set itself ambitious renewable energy targets

Modi has placed another constraint on the industry: “Make in India.” That means there is no question of importing solar panels from China, which supplies 90 per cent of the world’s market. All public tenders require “local” production, which India supports with substantial subsidies that have attracted big businesses. Tata, a pioneer in solar panels since the 1990s, has been joined by Adani and Reliance, which have built state-of-the-art, highly automated factories. “The quality of the product is very, very critical,” said Ashish Khanna, CEO of Adani Green Energy. “When you are building a project of this size, you also need to be very reassured of the supply chain. We cannot have a disruption or interruption in that particular process.” But for now, the technology and raw materials still come from China. And Beijing has complained to the World Trade Organization over the subsidies and restrictions on its solar panels. The solar push is so intense that Adani is considering silicon mining to secure a key raw material, company insiders say, and there are suggestions Tata Power is eyeing in-house silicon-wafer production. Growth in the sector is already staggering, with solar manufacturing capacity expected to soon exceed 125 GW. But that is triple current domestic demand, according to Wood Mackenzie

analyst Yana Hryshko. Government incentives have “been highly effective in spurring factory announcements, but the industry is now seeing warning signs of rapid overcapacity”, Hryshko said in a report last year. The sector’s long-term sustainability may therefore depend on exports, with some companies already targeting global markets. “Solar is a huge market: the world will see it doubling, from 2,000 GW to 4,000 GW in four years,” said Ashish Khanna, head of the International Solar Alliance. “The question is now - will Indian manufacturers be globally competitive compared to China?” Tejpreet Chopra, from the private power company Bharat Light and Power, points out that “the problem is that it’s cheaper to import from China than to buy local”. And the level of manufacturing in China “is so much higher that it’s very difficult to match”, he added. The sector also faces “geopolitical” headwinds from US President Donald Trump’s tariffs, with Chopra adding that they make it “very difficult to sell to the United States”. Despite these challenges, the head of Tata Power, which does not yet export, remains convinced his business has a bright future. “We strongly believe,” said Praveer Sinha, “that solar will play a very important role in the renewable space of India.”

SPORTS

SHORT TAKES



Dignitaries at the agreement signing ceremony at Jindal Steel’s headquarters in Sohar

OFA, JINDAL SEAL TWO-SEASON PARTNERSHIP

SOHAR: The Oman Football Association (OFA) and Jindal Steel signed a strategic partnership agreement on Thursday, extending over two football seasons, as part of efforts to strengthen cooperation with the private sector and support the development of football in the Sultanate of Oman.

The agreement follows a memorandum of understanding signed by both parties at Jindal Steel’s headquarters in Sohar late last year and formalises the collaboration into a long-term strategic partnership.

Under the agreement, Jindal Steel will support Oman’s Elite League, branded as the Jindal League, establish specialised centres for the development of promising players, and launch a new competition to be held for the first time. The initiatives aim to enhance youth development structures and improve pathways for the identification and nurturing of football talent.

Following the signing ceremony, guests visited the Fan Zone, which featured activities and programmes for spectators and remained open until the conclusion of the Jindal League match between Sohar Club and Samayil Club.

The Oman Football Association (OFA) commended this strategic partnership, emphasising its importance in supporting the development of the game. This was highlighted in a speech delivered during the ceremony by Eng Qutaiba bin Mubarak al Ghailani, Vice-Chairman of the Association’s Board of Directors, in which he expressed sincere thanks and appreciation to the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth (MoCSY) for its continued support and encouragement of such agreements that serve Omani sport in general and football in particular.

The Association also praised its partnership and cooperation with Jindal Steel, valuing the company’s role in supporting Omani football and expressing its aspiration for further fruitful collaboration with the leading company in the Sultanate of Oman, in a manner that contributes to achieving the partnership’s objectives and serving the nation’s most popular sport.

Thrilling finals mark close of WTT Muscat 2026

RIYADH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JAN 25

THE WTT Contender Muscat 2026, held under the auspices of Nasser bin Sulaiman al Harthy, Adviser to the Chairman of the Oman Investment Authority, concluded successfully on Saturday evening, at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher, following six days of high intensity international table tennis competition that began on Monday.

The prestigious tournament brought together nearly 200 elite players from 34 countries, delivering world-class performances across all categories and reinforcing Oman’s growing stature as a key host of major international sporting events.

The championship witnessed dominant performances by Chinese players across several categories. In the Women’s Singles final, China’s Shi Xunyao claimed the title after defeating her compatriot Tseng Chiman in straight games (11–5, 11–6, 11–7), demonstrating technical superiority and composure throughout the match.

The Men’s Singles final delivered one of the most dramatic encounters of the tournament, as China’s Wen Ruibo edged Slovenia’s Darko Jorgic in a thrilling seven game battle, winning 4–3 after a fiercely contested match that captivated the audience until the final point.

In the Men’s Doubles, Chinese pair Lin Shidong and Huang Youzheng secured the title with a 3–1 victory over Germany’s Benedikt Duda and Patrick Franziska, while China continued its dominance in the Women’s Doubles as Qin Yuxuan and Tseng Chiman defeated Hong Kong’s Do Hoi Kem and Ng Wing Lam in straight games.

The Mixed Doubles competition produced one of the tournament’s biggest highlights, with India’s Manush Shah and Diya Chitale claiming the title after a thrilling 3–2 victory over the Chinese duo Huang Youzheng and Shi Xunyao, in a match widely regarded as one of the most exciting of the championship.

Egyptian international Dina Meshref praised the tournament’s competitive standard and organisation, stating that the event provided strong technical challenges and an ideal environment for top level performance. She emphasised that competing in Muscat added valuable experience to her international campaign.



China’s Shi Xunyao claimed the women’s individual title at WTT Contender Muscat 2026



Wen Ruibo of China wins men’s crown at WTT.

Oman national team player Mohammed al Mutawa described the tournament as a significant opportunity for local players, noting that competing against world class opponents from different playing styles contributed greatly to player development and international exposure.

Czech player Stepan Brhel commended the high organisational standards, while Slovakian players Emma Labosova and Dominika Wiltshckova highlighted the professionalism of the event and the quality of competition.

French player Joe Seyfried also praised the strong level of play and the

enthusiastic crowd support throughout the tournament.

Meanwhile, Sourabh Chakraborty, coach of the Indian team, expressed his appreciation for the excellent organisation, stating that the successful staging of the tournament reflects Oman’s growing expertise in hosting elite international table tennis events.

The tournament featured nearly 200 players from 34 countries and offered a total prize of \$100,000. WTT Contender Muscat 2026 concluded as a resounding success, further solidifying Oman’s position on the global table tennis map.

Seeb go top of Jindal League after beating Al Nahda

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, JAN 25

Al Seeb continued their dominance at the top of the Jindal League standings after securing a dramatic and valuable 2–1 victory over closest rivals Al Nahda, in a thrilling summit clash at Al Seeb Sports Stadium during Week 11, played in front of an impressive and passionate crowd.

Al Nahda started strongly and imposed themselves early, showing better organisation and attacking movement in the final third. Their pressure paid off just before the break when Ahed al Mashaykhi capitalised on a swift counterattack to fire home the opener in the 44th minute, giving his side a deserved halftime lead.

THE SECOND HALF DIFFERENT STORY

Al Seeb returned with greater intensity, pushing forward and making key substitutions to energeise their attack. The tempo



Tight contest as Al Seeb and Al Nahda players challenge for the ball

increased as chances came at both ends, before Salah al Yahyaei produced a moment of brilliance in the 85th minute, weaving past defenders and unleashing a powerful strike to level the score.

Rather than settling for a draw, Al Seeb continued their relentless pressure, and their persistence paid off at the death. In the 90th minute, Nasser al Rawahi rose highest to head home the winner, sparking wild celebrations in the stands. The closing moments also saw Al Nahda defender Thani al Rashdi sent off, before the final whistle confirmed Al Seeb’s crucial win.

The result lifts Al Seeb to 31 points, extending their lead over second-placed Al Nahda, who remain on 22.

SOHAR EDGE SAMAYIL

Elsewhere, Sohar secured an important 1–0 home victory over Samayil at Sohar Sports Complex in Week 10 action.

Despite the goalless first

half, Samayil looked the more threatening side and missed several clear opportunities, most notably a penalty in the 10th minute that was brilliantly saved twice by Sohar goalkeeper Majdi Shaaban.

Sohar improved after the restart and gradually took control before finally breaking the deadlock in the 71st minute. Mutasim al Maqbali converted from a corner-kick situation, finishing neatly inside the box to score the decisive goal.

SUR OVERCOME AL KHABOURAH

In another fixture, Sur defeated Al Khabourah 2–0 at Al Rustaq Sports Complex. Axel Mayee opened the scoring in the first half, before Saud al Farsi sealed the victory with a stoppage-time goal in the 90+6 minute.

The win takes Sur to seven points in 12th place, while Al Khabourah drop to 10th with 10 points.

SHORTTAKES



Champion Ruwan Jayasinghe along with others of the Ghala Golf Club Championship

JAYASINGHE CLAIMS GHALA GOLF CHAMPIONSHIP

SPORT REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 25

Sri Lanka’s Ruwan Jayasinghe was crowned champion of the Ghala Golf Club Championship 2026 following two days of high-level competition at Gahla Golf Club, in a tournament held with the support and sponsorship of Enterprise Rent A Car Oman, reaffirming the event’s growing stature on Oman’s national sporting calendar.

The closing ceremony was held under the auspices of Ambassador Najib bin Yahya al Balushi, Head of Protocol at the Foreign Ministry, and attended by Faiz Mohammed Riyadh, Vice-Chairman of the Oman Golf Association, alongside officials, players and partners, highlighting the championship’s importance and the continued momentum behind the development of golf in the Sultanate.

Over the course of two competitive days, the tournament brought together a wide field of players across multiple divisions in an atmosphere defined by sportsmanship, professionalism and community spirit. The strong turnout reflected the steady growth of golf in Oman and the vital role of private-sector partnerships in supporting the sport at both grassroots and elite levels.

Across the championship, players delivered impressive performances in all categories.

Jayasinghe secured the Champion Golfer 2026 title with a composed and consistent display, while Oman national team player Azzan al Rumhy finished Gross Runner-Up, confirming his status among the country’s leading golfers after a closely contested campaign.

In the remaining divisions, Hussain al Balushi claimed the Senior Champion title, Jameela Daud lifted the Ladies Champion trophy, and Yousef al Rumhy topped the Junior Champion category. Meanwhile, Yousef al Balushi captured the Net-Champion honour.

All winners were recognised during the official presentation ceremony in the presence of the chief guests, Ahmed al Farsi, club officials and Enterprise Rent A Car Oman’s senior management team. The diversity of champions highlighted both the competitive depth of the field and the inclusive nature of the championship.

In addition to the main titles, the tournament featured popular on-course competitions that added extra excitement for players and spectators alike. The Nearest-to-the-Pin challenges, which rewarded precision and composure under pressure, proved to be a highlight across both days. On Day One, Azzan al Rumhy won the award on Hole 2, while Alao Hakeem claimed Hole 12. On Day Two, Badar al Amri secured the prize on Hole 5, and Karl Armstrong topped Hole 15. Speaking during the ceremony, Aqeel Bhatti, CEO of Enterprise Rent A Car Oman, reaffirmed the company’s commitment to supporting sport in Oman.

Malaysia, Iran claim Muscat 3×3 basketball tourney titles

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, JAN 25

MALAYSIA claimed the men’s title and Iran won the women’s crown as the Muscat Nights International 3×3 Basketball Championship came to a close on Saturday at Al Araiimi Boulevard.

Malaysia secured the men’s championship after edging Oman’s national team (B) 16–14 in a closely contested final, while Iran captured the women’s title with a 21–14 victory over India.

The awards ceremony was held under the auspices of Salim al Araiimi, Board Member of Al Araiimi Boulevard, in the presence of Eng Khalfan bin Saleh al Naabi, Chairman of the Oman Basketball Association (OBA), Eng Salim al Busaidy, Director General of Muscat Municipality in the Wilayat of Al Seeb, along with several officials, and drew a strong crowd attendance.

Before the finals, classification matches were also contested. Oman (A) finished third in the men’s category after defeating the Philippines 21–13, while Oman (A) women secured third place with a narrow 5–4 win over Oman (B).

MEN’S FINAL
The men’s final remained thrilling until the last moments, with Malaysia narrowly defeating Oman (B) 16–14.

Oman (B) took an early lead through Osama al Riyami, and both sides exchanged baskets in a balanced contest. Oman showed strong periods of dominance thanks to Abdulrahman al Maamari and Ahmed al Sinani. However, Malaysia’s experience and decisive shooting in the closing minutes proved crucial, allowing them to snatch the win and the title.

WOMEN’S FINAL
In the women’s final, Iran delivered a commanding performance to defeat India (Maaza Ahmedabad) 21–14 after controlling the game from the outset.

Elina opened the scoring for Iran, followed by Shadi with two quick points. Although India attempted to close the gap, Kimia extended Iran’s advantage with key baskets. Iran maintained their attacking rhythm and gradually widened the margin, while India struggled to match the pace. The Iranian team ultimately sealed the victory and deservedly lifted the trophy.

Malaysian player Yop Chin See expressed his happiness after



Malaysia snatch the men’s title at the Muscat Nights International 3x3 Basketball Championship.



Iran captured the women’s title. — Ammar Al Musafir

Said al Habsi, Acting Secretary-General of the OBA, says the championship achieved significant technical and organisational success thanks to the cooperation of all partners

winning the title, noting that the tournament featured strong competition and that the final was challenging before his team managed to rally and secure victory through teamwork. He also praised the organisation and atmosphere in Muscat and hoped to return for future editions.

Meanwhile, Iranian player Shadi Abdolvand said the women’s title was the result of teamwork and strong chemistry among the players, adding that the fast-paced competition helped raise their technical level.

She also commended the

professional organisation and hospitality.

On the organisational side, Said al Habsi, Acting Secretary-General of the OBA, stressed that the championship achieved significant technical and organisational success thanks to the cooperation of all partners.

He praised Muscat Municipality’s partnership and noted that the positive results of the national teams and valuable international exposure would contribute to developing the sport and strengthening Omani basketball’s presence regionally and internationally in the coming years.

Al Wahaibi readies for 2026 campaign ahead of Dakar Rally 2027

SPORT REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 25

The Omani international rally driver Hamad al Wahaibi is set to embark on an intensive competitive programme during the 2026 season, which represents a key phase in his preparations for the Dakar Rally 2027, scheduled to be hosted by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Al Wahaibi will kick off his 2026 campaign by competing in the Hail International Baja, to be held in Saudi Arabia from January 28 to 31, which serves as the opening round of the FIA Baja World Cup.

Last season marked Al Wahaibi’s first experience in Baja rallies, where he competed in the Side by Side (T4) category. Despite being

new to this discipline, he delivered impressive performances and concluded the 2025 Baja World Cup season in third place in his class.

For the 2026 season, Al Wahaibi will continue racing with RX Sport Team, under the supervision and management of Emirati racer Rashid al Ketbi. However, he has decided to step up to a higher level by moving to the Challenger category (T3), driving the new Can-Am Maverick R Challenger. He will be among the first drivers to compete with this vehicle in the Challenger class.

The Omani racer aims to participate in six rounds of the 2026 Baja World Cup, which will take place in Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Greece, Italy, Spain and Dubai. In addition, he will take part in two



Hamad al Wahaibi crowned champion of the round.

rounds of the World Rally-Raid Championship in Morocco and Abu Dhabi, as these longer and more demanding rallies will provide valuable experience in preparation for the Dakar Rally.

With Saudi Arabia hosting the Dakar Rally 2027, and as part of his plan to adapt to the Kingdom’s terrain and rally conditions, Al Wahaibi will also compete in four additional rounds of the Saudi Baja Championship.

Speaking about his upcoming season, Al Wahaibi stated that “The 2026 season represents a crucial and decisive stage in my sporting career, as part of an integrated preparation plan aimed at achieving the highest possible level of readiness for the Dakar Rally 2027”.

Al Wahaibi added that “My participation in Baja rallies last season was a new experience, but it yielded positive results, culminating in a third-place finish in the Side by Side (T4) category in the 2025 season”.

“Moving to a higher category is a strategic step towards Dakar, I will compete with the Can-Am Maverick R Challenger, becoming one of the first drivers to use this car in the Challenger class”. Al Wahaibi concluded.

Al Wahaibi also highlighted that the 2026 programme will be intensive, featuring participation in six Baja World Cup rounds across several countries, in addition to selected rounds of the World Rally-Raid Championship.

SPORTS

SHORTTAKES



New York Knicks guard Jalen Brunson (11) drives for a score past Philadelphia 76ers forward Paul George (8). — **Imagn Images**

KNICKS EDGE 76ERS AS WARRIORS-WOLVES SUSPENDED

LOS ANGELES: The New York Knicks edged a contentious clash with the Philadelphia 76ers 112-109 on Saturday, as Jalen Brunson poured in 31 points to help get his team’s season back on track.

The Knicks will hope they have turned a corner with back-to-back wins, after a 54-point blowout victory over the Brooklyn Nets on Wednesday ended a slump that saw them drop nine of 12 games.

New York clung to a three-point lead in the final 10 seconds as the Sixers’ Tyrese Maxey missed a three-pointer under pressure before OG Anunoby stole the ball from Joel Embiid.

On both occasions, Philadelphia’s claims of an intentional foul were rejected by officials.

“Composure... we don’t make it easy on ourselves, but I liked the way we fought,” said Brunson, when asked how his team survived the tense final moments.

“Obviously we had a slump and worked our way through it. It happened, and now we just got to keep on climbing.”

New York clung to a three-point lead in the final 10 seconds as the Sixers’ Tyrese Maxey missed a three-pointer under pressure before OG Anunoby stole the ball from Joel Embiid

Sixers centre Embiid — the game’s top scorer with 38 points, 11 rebounds and five assists — told reporters that both he and Maxey had been “fouled for sure.”

Cameroonian-American star Embiid was dominant in the first half, scoring 28 points to hand the 76ers a 64-60 halftime lead.

But the Knicks surged back, outscoring the Sixers 30-13 in a third quarter in which Embiid was denied a single point.

The Knicks built a 17-point advantage, before 11 points without reply for Philadelphia in the fourth quarter set up a tense finish at the Xfinity Mobile Arena.

The Knicks (27-18) now sit third in the Eastern Conference, with the 76ers in sixth (24-20).

Elsewhere, the Golden State Warriors’ visit to the Minnesota Timberwolves was suspended until Sunday, after federal immigration agents shot dead a man in Minneapolis, sparking fresh protests.

“The decision was made to prioritise the safety and security of the Minneapolis community,” said an NBA statement.

The Wizards-Hornets game began earlier than originally scheduled due to a massive winter storm sweeping across the United States. The game in Charlotte ended in a 119-115 victory for the hosts.

— AFP

DJOKOVIC, ALCARAZ INTO MELBOURNE LAST FIGHT

Spain’s Carlos Alcaraz in action during his fourth round match against Tommy Paul of the US. — **Reuters**



a lack of consistency in his serving technique.

He is now sporting a new-look serve that has become a handy weapon — and been compared to Djokovic’s serve.

“I had a Djokovic message saying, ‘you have to pay me,’” he said in his on-court interview after making light work of 19th seed Paul, to laughter from an adoring crowd.

Alexander Zverev, well beaten by Jannik Sinner in last year’s final, plays Learner Tien of the United States next.

Germany’s third seed demolished Argentina’s 18th seed Francisco Cerundolo in straight sets.

The 25th seed Tien ran out a surprisingly easy three-set winner over three-time finalist Daniil Medvedev. Tien, 20, eased into his first Grand Slam quarterfinal despite a nosebleed in the first set that required lengthy treatment.

He later said his nose was just dry. “Every year since I’ve been coming here, the crowd support has been amazing,” said Tien, the youngest men’s quarterfinalist at Melbourne Park since Nick Kyrgios in 2015.

“A crowd like this with this much energy and support, it means the world to me to do it here.”

World number one Sabalenka will face impressive 18-year old American Iva Jovic in a tasty last-eight encounter.

CARLOS ALCARAZ powered into the Australian Open quarterfinals on Sunday and Novak Djokovic joined him without hitting a ball, as the next generation roared.

Aryna Sabalenka surged through but Coco Gauff was forced to fight at Melbourne Park, where temperatures eased to 22C after the brutal heat of a day earlier.

Top seed Alcaraz was in ominous touch at Rod Laver Arena, dismissing the American Tommy Paul 7-6 (8/6), 6-4, 7-5 in a masterclass.

The 22-year old plays home hope and sixth seed Alex de Minaur, who defeated 10th seed Alexander Bublik in straight sets.

Djokovic, chasing a record 25th Grand Slam crown, was scheduled to face Jakub Mensik in the last 16 on Monday but the Czech player pulled out injured.

Djokovic will face American ninth seed Taylor Fritz or fifth seed Lorenzo Musetti of Italy for a place in the semi-finals.

Alcaraz, who like Djokovic is yet to drop a set at this year’s tournament, has never gone beyond the quarterfinals in Melbourne.

If he can finally break his Australian duck he will become the youngest man in history to win a career Grand Slam of all four majors. The Spaniard has in the past struggled with precision and

Belarusian top seed Sabalenka, a two-time Melbourne champion, opened the day on Rod Laver Arena and saw off the brave challenge of 19-year old Canadian Victoria Mboko.

Sabalenka won 6-1, 7-6 (7/1) while Jovic destroyed unseeded Yulia Putintseva 6-0, 6-1 in just 53 dominant minutes.

“What an incredible player for such a young age,” said Sabalenka of the 17th-seeded Canadian Mboko, who has emerged as a serious threat in the past year.

“She pushed me really hard today and played incredible tennis.”

Sabalenka raced through the second-set tiebreak — the 20th Grand Slam tiebreak in a row she has won — to seal victory.

She has yet to drop a set as her title charge gathers pace.

But in Jovic, who only turned

18 last month, she clashes with a player in red-hot form and rising fast, now ranked 27 having been 191 this time last year.

Jovic, who stunned two-time Grand Slam finalist and seventh seed Jasmine Paolini in the third round, said she did not consider herself an underdog.

“It’s just another week that I’m winning more matches,” she added. Jovic is the youngest player to reach the women’s quarterfinals at the Australian Open without dropping a set since Venus Williams in 1998.

Third-seeded American Gauff faces Ukraine’s Elina Svitolina.

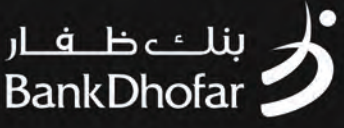
The 12th-seeded Svitolina saw off another 18-year old, Russian Mirra Andreeva, 6-2, 6-4.

Gauff dropped a set for the second match in a row before clawing her way past Karolina Muchova 6-1, 3-6, 6-3. — **AFP**



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Oman to build first offshore tugboat

THE Sultanate of Oman will build its first locally manufactured offshore tugboat following the signing of a strategic agreement between Asyad Drydock and global maritime services provider Svitzer, for Oman LNG.

The project marks a major step forward in strengthening the country’s industrial, maritime and shipbuilding capabilities.

The agreement was signed under the auspices of Abdulsalam bin Mohammed al Murshidi, Chairman of Oman Investment Authority and forms part of the long-standing partnership between Oman LNG and Asyad Group, which is anchored in closer integration across the national energy, logistics and maritime sectors.

The project represents a shift from operational and maritime support services to a more advanced phase of industrial cooperation, reflecting Oman

The project marks a major step forward in strengthening the country’s industrial, maritime and shipbuilding capabilities.

LNG’s commitment to local value creation and Asyad Drydock’s growing technical readiness to undertake complex vessel construction.

Al Murshidi said the project stands as a clear outcome of the ‘Rawabet’ programme launched by the Oman Investment Authority to enhance integration among national companies. He underscored the focus on local

content and in-country value, noting that the initiative brings advanced maritime technology to Oman while generating employment opportunities for Omanis. He also affirmed the capability of Duqm Drydock to manufacture tugboats in the coming period, pointing to the significant progress achieved in 2025, both in terms of the number of vessels serviced and the

qualitative transition towards full-scale shipbuilding.

Hamed bin Mohammed al Naamany, Chief Executive Officer of Oman LNG, said the decision to build the tugboat locally, supported by Asyad Group’s investment, contributes to strengthening Oman’s maritime heritage, developing national capabilities, transferring knowledge and supporting future growth in marine asset manufacturing and construction.

He added that the project reflects growing confidence in Asyad Drydock’s technical expertise, advanced infrastructure and qualified Omani workforce, enabling the execution of ship repair, construction and major marine projects in line with the highest international standards.

Ahmed bin Ali al Balushi, CEO of Asyad Drydock and Infrastructure Services at Asyad Group, said the drydock serves as a national industrial platform

for localising the construction of high-value marine assets through a sustainable approach that increases local content.

He noted that local content in this project is expected to reach around 50 per cent. Al Balushi revealed that Asyad Drydock’s total local expenditure in 2025 reached approximately RO 46 million, while spending on small and medium-sized enterprises amounted to around RO 7.78 million, underscoring the company’s commitment to supporting national institutions and developing local talent.

He added that the project exemplifies Oman LNG’s approach to translating local value-added commitments into tangible outcomes by embedding them into contracts and operating models.

The Omanisation rate among service providers exceeded 85%, with 79% of total supply chain spending directed to locally registered companies. — ONA

Export diversification key to Oman’s sustainable growth

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, JAN 25

Export diversification will be critical to Oman’s long-term economic sustainability, according to a new International Monetary Fund (IMF) report, which urges faster development of a diversified tradables sector despite progress in reducing reliance on hydrocarbons.

Titled ‘Beyond Oil: Accelerating Export Diversification for Sustainable Growth’, the report highlights the finite nature of Oman’s hydrocarbon resources and oil-price volatility, arguing that a broader export base is essential to support growth, external balances and job creation.

“Currently, non-hydrocarbon activities concentrate primarily in low-added-value, non-tradable sectors that rely on low-skilled labour, while most manufacturing products are imported.

A sustained decline in hydrocarbon revenues would weigh down on growth, as well as to external and fiscal positions.

Strengthening non-hydrocarbon tradables — manufacturing and tradable services — is essential to broaden the export base, generate foreign currency earnings, improve productivity and create high-quality jobs for Oman’s

The report stresses the importance of deeper integration into regional and global value chains, leveraging Oman’s strategic Arabian Sea location and special economic zones such as Duqm and Sohar.

growing labour force”, the paper stressed.

“Achieving these goals will require sustained structural reforms aimed at improving the business climate, boosting human capital, enhancing infrastructure and logistics performance; and incentivising investment in higher-value-added activities”, the IMF staff further said, noting that the 11th Five-Year Development Plan presents a strategic opportunity to set clear priorities and sequence reforms to support this transition.

The report calls for deeper private sector participation, including reducing the state’s economic footprint, accelerating labour market reforms, streamlining regulations and improving SOE governance.

It also stresses the importance of deeper

integration into regional and global value chains, leveraging Oman’s strategic Arabian Sea location and special economic zones such as Duqm and Sohar.

SEZs and industrial cities could act as catalysts for export diversification, provided industrial policies are well-targeted, time-bound and supported by strong governance.

Linking SEZs to local SMEs, building sector-specific skills and embedding sustainability standards would strengthen domestic spillovers.

Finally, the IMF emphasises the need to invest in human capital, innovation and financing — particularly venture capital and green finance — supported by stronger institutions and credible fiscal frameworks to sustain reform momentum and reduce exposure to oil price cycles.

TENDER NOTICE

Oman Water & Wastewater Services Company (Nama Water Services) hereby announces the following Tenders:-

Tender No.	Description of Project	Eligibility	Tender Fee (RO)	Last Date of Distribution of Tender Documents	Bid Submission Date
T/2748169/2025	Supply and Installation of Cooling system in Permeate Pump Room at Al Ansab STP	Local Companies registered with Projects, Tenders and Local Content Authority specialized in the works mentioned	R.O 50/- (Plus 5% VAT) Non-refundable	05/02/2026	23/02/2026
T/2751176/2026	Rehabilitation and Upgradation of Odor Control Unit at Central Pump Station	Local Companies registered with Projects, Tenders and Local Content Authority specialized in the works mentioned	R.O 100/- (Plus 5% VAT) Non-refundable	05/02/2026	23/02/2026
T/2750175/2026	Transporting (60-70 m3/day) of drinking water from Al Khashba TFS to Al Washehi reservoir and transporting (160-170 m3/day) of drinking water from Al Jarda TFS to Al Rubkhah network reservoir in North Sharqiyah Governorate	Local Companies registered with Projects, Tenders and Local Content Authority specialized in the works mentioned	R.O 50/- (Plus 5% VAT) Non-refundable	05/02/2026	16/02/2026
T/2738198-2/2025 Refloat	Supply, Installation and Commissioning of P&B Relay & IPMCS - Retrofit Project A'Seeb STP, MPS2 and MPS3	Local Companies registered with Projects, Tenders and Local Content Authority specialized in the works mentioned	R.O 50/- (Plus 5% VAT) Non-refundable	05/02/2026	23/02/2026
T/2753175/2026	Call-Off Contract for the Inspection of Tankers and Laboratory Testing of Water Samples	Local Companies registered with Projects, Tenders and Local Content Authority specialized in the works mentioned	R.O 500 /- (Plus 5% VAT) Non-refundable	05/02/2026	23/02/2026

The tender documents can be obtained from the e-tendering page (Supplier Login) from this announcement date. The applicants shall pay the tender fee by logging into their (I-supplier Page).

Applicants who are not registered shall register through the following link: <https://nws.nama.om/Business-with-Us/Vendor-Registration> in order to receive the login credentials of the Supplier portal.

All applicants who have paid the tender fee shall have access to the Tender Documents through Nama Water Services e-tendering page (Supplier Login <https://nws.nama.om/en-us/Business-with-Us/Supplierlogin>). All participating companies shall submit a Bid Bond of 1% of the bid value in a sealed envelope. Bid Bonds must be obtained from a local Bank registered in the Sultanate of Oman addressed to Oman Water and Wastewater Services Company (Nama Water Services) Chairman of Tender Committee not later than 2:00 pm on the bid submission date.

The bid along with all required documents shall be uploaded through Oman Water and Wastewater Services Company (Nama Water Services) e-tendering page not later than 2:00 pm on the date specified above. For more details refer to Tender Page of our website www.nws.nama.om & in case of general queries you may contact us through the email ID of tender@owwsc.nama.om



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The agreement reflects the bank’s continued focus on partnering with projects that demonstrate strong fundamentals.

AHLIBANK SIGNS FINANCING PACT FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF LUMA RESIDENCES

MUSCAT: Reaffirming its longstanding role in supporting Oman’s economic advancement, ahlibank has signed a financing agreement with Muscat Bay for the development of Luma Residences, a premium residential project within the destination. The agreement reflects the bank’s continued focus on partnering with projects that demonstrate strong fundamentals, disciplined execution and alignment with national priorities under Oman Vision 2040.

Commenting on the agreement, Zaliya al Balushi, General Manager — Head of Corporate Banking, ahlibank, stated, “At ahlibank, corporate financing is approached as a strategic lever for strengthening the economy over the long term.

By supporting initiatives such as Luma Residences, we aim to facilitate projects that foster market confidence, promote responsible development practices and contribute to the steady growth of Oman’s urban landscape. In doing so, ahlibank remains closely aligned with the Sultanate of Oman’s development efforts that focus on long-term value and execution”.

Under the agreement, ahlibank will extend financing for the development of residential units within the Integrated Tourism Complex (ITC) of the Luma Residences project. The partnership underscores growing confidence in ahlibank’s capability to support a diverse portfolio of national development initiatives through effective collaboration with both public and private sector stakeholders.

Such agreements demonstrate the bank’s alignment with national priorities in advancing the economic diversification agenda. They also underline its commitment to delivering high-quality financing solutions that respond to evolving needs, while building well-structured partnerships that support the structuring and execution of complex projects within a stable and well-governed framework.

Luma Residences is being delivered as part of Muscat Bay, which has emerged as a notable example of integrated residential and destination-led development in the Sultanate of Oman. The project represents a continuation of Muscat Bay’s phased development approach, contributing to the evolution of high-quality urban environments that generate economic activity across a range of sectors.

From a banking perspective, developments of this scale require financing structures that are carefully calibrated, supported by robust governance frameworks and underpinned by a clear assessment of project fundamentals.

OOREDOO NAMED OMAN’S MOST TRUSTED TELECOM BRAND

MUSCAT: Ooredoo has been voted Oman’s Most Trusted Telecom Brand for the fifth consecutive year at the Oman Most Trusted Brand (OMTB) Awards 2025, reaffirming its position as one of the Sultanate of Oman’s most trusted and recognised telecommunications providers. Regarded as a benchmark for consumer confidence, the OMTB Awards are determined through public voting, with more than one million votes cast across multiple categories. Ooredoo’s



continued leadership in the telecom category reflects the strong confidence customers place in the brand’s ability to deliver reliable connectivity, innovative digital services and consistently high-quality customer experience.

Over the years, the company has continued to invest in advanced infrastructure, expand digital offerings and enhance customer touchpoints to meet the evolving needs of individuals, businesses and communities across Oman.

Toyota sets new hybrid standard on Oman roads

TOYOTA is strengthening its established leadership in Hybrid Electric Vehicles (HEVs) as demand for efficient and sustainable mobility continues to rise in Oman. With a well-proven range already trusted by motorists across the Sultanate of Oman, the brand’s hybrid models continue to attract drivers seeking fuel economy, performance and advanced technology designed for local conditions.

Reflecting Toyota’s long-standing commitment to innovation, the HEV line-up combines dynamic powertrains, comfort-focused interiors and comprehensive safety systems suited for everyday use.

Among the key models contributing to Toyota’s hybrid presence is the RAV4 Hybrid, which pairs a petrol engine with an electric motor to deliver a total of 219 hp. Its fuel efficiency of 22.2 km/L, combined with confident performance on both city routes and longer drives, has made it a popular choice.

The model also offers a spacious cabin, practical storage areas and premium features such as Qi wireless charging, ventilated front seats and a six-speaker sound system. Safety is supported through 7 SRS airbags, Vehicle Stability Control, ABS,



Among the key models contributing to Toyota’s hybrid presence is the RAV4 Hybrid.

EBD and Downhill Assist Control.

Toyota’s strong position in the sedan segment is reinforced by the Camry Hybrid, a model that continues to build on a four-decade legacy. Supported by Toyota’s Hybrid System and the TNGA-K platform, it delivers a total output of 226 hp through an ECVT, offering smooth acceleration and impressive fuel efficiency. A range of driving modes — including Normal, Eco, Sport

and EV mode — allows adaptability across different environments. The interior is equipped with refined materials, a 12.3-inch touchscreen with wireless Apple CarPlay and Android Auto; and a range of comfort and convenience features.

In addition, Toyota Safety Sense enhances daily driving through systems such as Pre-Collision detection, Dynamic Radar Cruise Control and Lane Tracing Assist.

Yango reveals insights from its services in MENA

MUSCAT: Yango Group announced new insights from across its services in the Middle East and North Africa, highlighting how people across the region used mobility, entertainment, artificial intelligence and AI-powered technologies in their day-to-day lives throughout 2025.

Drawing on aggregated data, the overview looks at everyday behaviours and usage patterns across multiple markets, reflecting a year in which millions of daily moments — from morning commutes and evening streaming to smart speaker queries — came together to reveal how digital services are increasingly woven into routines across MENA.

Yango Ride’s urban mobility data from 2025 shows that convenience and reliability continue to define how people move across MENA cities, rather than premium



The overview looks at everyday behaviours and usage patterns across multiple markets.

experiences.

Across markets including the UAE and Oman, journeys to and from international airports consistently ranked among the most common ride-hailing use cases.

In Oman, destinations within the Muscat Governorate dominated customer demand, with frequent trips centred around Muscat International Airport as well as major commercial hubs such as Mall of Oman and Oman Avenues Mall, particularly in the

Wilayats of Al Seeb and Bausher.

The prominence of these locations highlights how ride-hailing is used not only for long-distance or travel-related journeys, but also as a practical solution for everyday retail and leisure mobility.

A similar pattern emerged in the UAE, where airport connectivity and large urban destinations shaped demand. Trips to Zayed International Airport and Dubai International Airport ranked among the most frequent, alongside high-traffic commercial and lifestyle destinations such as Yas Mall and Dubai Mall. The concentration of rides around these locations reinforces the role of ride-hailing as an extension of daily urban infrastructure, supporting shopping, social activities and routine city movement rather than occasional, discretionary travel.

Bank Muscat inaugurates lighting project in Ibri

MUSCAT: As part of its ongoing efforts to promote community development and support youth initiatives, Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, recently celebrated the inauguration of the lighting project for Sadadab Sports and Cultural Team in the Wilayat of Ibri, implemented as part of its Green Sports Programme, one of the Bank’s flagship corporate social responsibility initiatives.

The ceremony was held under the auspices of Rashed bin Abdullah al Kiyumi, CEO of Shams AlDin and Al Kiyumi International, and attended by Juma bin Khamis al Yaqoubi, Regional Manager, Al Dhahirah Governorate in Bank Muscat,



The Green Sports Programme contributes to providing a safe and integrated sporting environment.

alongside a number of team officials and residents of the Wilayat.

During the ceremony, Juma bin Khamis al Yaqoubi, Regional Manager, Al Dhahirah Governorate in Bank Muscat, stated: “The

inauguration of the floodlighting project at the Sadadab Sports and Cultural Team field in the Wilayat of Ibri reflects Bank Muscat’s commitment to supporting community sports teams and empowering them to play their vital role in attracting youth and developing their capabilities.

The Green Sports Programme contributes to providing a safe and integrated sporting environment that enables members to practice sports, or organise cultural and social activities at different times, positively impacting the community”. He also wished the team’s management continued success in implementing its various activities and initiatives.

For his part, Dr Hamid bin Masood al Shmali, Head of Sadadab Sports Cultural Team in the Wilayat of Ibri, expressed his sincere appreciation and gratitude to Bank Muscat for its continuous support of local sports teams, noting that the lighting project represents a significant milestone in the team’s journey.

He explained: “The project will help expand the scope of sports and community activities organised by the team, in addition to supporting and refining the talents of its members and developing their skills. We are committed to making optimal use of the project in a manner that serves the residents of the Wilayat”.



SOHAR's strategic location on major global shipping routes linking Asia, Europe and Africa has been a critical factor in drawing investors.

SOHAR SECURES \$4.9 BILLION INVESTMENT BOOST

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, JAN 25

SOHAR Port and Freezone (SOHAR) has reinforced its position as one of Oman's most important economic engines after attracting \$4.9 billion in investments over the past six years, a milestone that highlights growing global confidence in the Sultanate of Oman's industrial and logistics ambitions.

The investment inflow, achieved through the signing of 55 new leasing agreements at SOHAR, reflects the success of the port's integrated development model, which combines deep-sea port capabilities with a fully serviced industrial freezone.

This approach has enabled SOHAR to move beyond its traditional role as a trade gateway and emerge as a hub for value-added manufacturing, logistics and industrial clustering.

Investments have been channelled into key sectors such as petrochemicals, metals, logistics, manufacturing and downstream industries, strengthening supply chains and supporting Oman's drive to diversify its economy away from hydrocarbons.

By attracting both anchor tenants and specialised industrial players, SOHAR has created strong synergies between port operations and industrial activity, enhancing efficiency and competitiveness across its ecosystem.

SOHAR's strategic location on major global shipping routes linking Asia, Europe and Africa has been a critical factor in drawing investors.

This advantage is complemented by modern infrastructure, deep-water berths, efficient cargo handling and seamless multimodal connectivity. Equally important is SOHAR's single-entity management structure, which allows investors to benefit from streamlined procedures, faster approvals and a more coordinated service offering.

CEO TALK

Beyond the checklist: Fire safety hits boardroom

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, JAN 25

FIRE safety has long been treated as a late-stage requirement — something to satisfy approvals before a project moves forward. But Shaikh (Eng) Ahmed Saeed Hassan Bait Saeed, CEO of Ahmed Saeed for Engineering Consultancy, argues the conversation is shifting: fire engineering is increasingly tied to investor confidence, insurer expectations and the long-term value of assets in Oman's fast-evolving built environment.

In an interview with the *Observer*, Shaikh (Eng) Ahmed Saeed framed fire safety as a “quiet enabler” of development — supporting safer hotels for tourism, safer factories for industry and safer public buildings for everyday life. As projects become larger and more complex, he said, fire engineering must be treated as part of city resilience, not a checklist item added at the end.

That shift is not only about safety. It is also about delivery certainty. When fire engineering is brought in early, it can reduce redesign, avoid last-minute changes and support smoother approval pathways — practical outcomes developers understand immediately, especially as timelines and financing costs tighten.

Shaikh (Eng) Ahmed Saeed traces his professional direction to an early realisation: safety decisions outlive the drawings. He recalled working on projects where fire safety was treated as a final requirement rather than a design responsibility — an experience that pushed him to specialise in a field where engineering protects people, not just structures. That same philosophy later shaped the company's mission. He said the gap was rarely in regulations themselves, but in how



SHAIKH (ENG) AHMED SAEED HASSAN BAIT SAEED
CEO of Ahmed Saeed for Engineering Consultancy.

projects approached them.

Too many teams focus on passing inspections while overlooking how buildings operate under real-world conditions. His aim, he said, was to work with architects, developers and authorities from the start — using engineering judgement rather than relying solely on checklists.

Building a specialised consultancy in a highly regulated space came with one central test: trust. Fire safety decisions affect cost, approvals and timelines, which makes clients naturally cautious — particularly when recommendations require changes to design assumptions already embedded in budgets and drawings.

He said the challenge is to prove that good fire engineering should not delay projects — it should improve them. For him, the standard is simple: maintain technical rigour while communicating solutions clearly for non-engineers, so decisions remain practical and deliverable on site.

Shaikh (Eng) Ahmed Saeed believes fire safety is moving into the same strategic category as structural integrity, ESG performance and operational continuity. The logic, he argued, is straightforward: early fire-safety thinking protects both lives and asset value. Investors and insurers are increasingly focused on risk, not just returns — and confidence has economic value.

A well-designed safety strategy, he noted, supports occupancy confidence, reduces disruption risk and strengthens the reputation of owners and developers. “Safety is part of quality”, he said in effect — and quality sustains value over a

building's life cycle.

Asked about Oman's priorities, Shaikh (Eng) Ahmed Saeed linked fire engineering directly to national outcomes. Safer hotels support tourism expansion. Safer factories strengthen industrial growth. Safer public buildings protect productivity and community life. The work may be invisible to most occupants, he said, but its impact is measurable in resilience and continuity.

His point is not to make fire risk a constant public conversation — but to design it out so effectively that people can live, work and invest safely without thinking about it at all.

He pointed to two major shifts: the rise of performance-based design and the growing role of digital tools. Fire and evacuation scenarios can now be simulated more precisely, enabling better design decisions and more efficient solutions.

In parallel, fire systems are becoming smarter and more integrated with building management platforms — raising expectations for coordination, commissioning and operational readiness.

For young Omanis entering safety-critical disciplines, Shaikh (Eng) Ahmed Saeed's message is grounded: specialise, keep learning and treat responsibility seriously. The work may not always be visible, but it is always necessary — and engineers in this space carry a form of quiet leadership that directly serves society.

He said he is encouraged by a market-wide mindset change: more clients are involving fire engineers earlier, asking better questions and recognising safety as part of quality design rather than a late-stage obstacle.

‘Tumouhi’ initiative to support 50 SMEs in first phase

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JAN 25

Around 50 Omani entrepreneurs representing small and medium enterprises (SMEs) are participating in the second edition of the “Tumouhi” training programme, launched by Oman Arab Bank (OAB) with the aim of fostering the growth of SMEs.

The initiative, announced at a press conference, underscores a strategic commitment to supporting SMEs and enhancing the contribution to driving the national economy.

The programme serves as an integrated platform that transcends the traditional framework of banking programmes, offering a comprehensive development path



SULAIMAN AL HARTHY
CEO, Oman Arab Bank

focused on capacity building, empowering individuals and achieving sustainable long-term growth. Oman is intensifying its support for SMEs through specialised training programmes and initiatives in partnership with all parties, with the aim of raising technical and administrative efficiency, enhancing local added value and sustainable growth.

Sulaiman al Harthy, CEO of Oman Arab Bank, stated that the programme aims to educate,

train and provide SME owners with an opportunity to exchange experiences and contribute to its success.

The initiative aligns closely with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040, reflecting the pivotal role of OAB as an active partner in economic development through the integration of financial solutions and non-financial support.

Khaled al Riyami, Head of the SME Department, said: “This year's programme differs from the previous one by including individual interviews with business owners.

The initiative currently covers five governorates, with a sixth to follow and that companies will be selected based on their sector and capabilities”.

Al Riyami noted that the

programme includes a three-month training period followed by a five-month incubation period for SMEs, in collaboration with the Oman Academy for Small and Medium Enterprises.

The initiative will be implemented in several phases throughout 2026, with 50 SMEs participating in each phase. It will begin with a national campaign to collect applications, followed by the selection of companies based on rigorous criteria that ensure geographical and sectoral diversity.

The selected companies will embark on a comprehensive development journey encompassing training, mentorship and incubation, focusing on key areas such as business development, financial management, marketing

and governance, in line with market needs and fostering opportunities for sustainable growth.

In addition to providing direct support to participating companies, the initiative focuses on showcasing its impact through ongoing media content and regular coverage highlighting success stories and the development of entrepreneurs.

This approach reflects the belief that true impact is built through long-term commitment and continuous engagement with the entrepreneurial community.

The conclusion of the initiative will include a graduation and awards ceremony at the end of the year, celebrating the achievements of participating companies and laying the groundwork for launching similar future editions.

AGGRESSIVE WARNING

Trump threatens 100% Canada tariff



US President Donald Trump warned Canada he would impose a 100 % tariff on all Canadian imports if Ottawa proceeds with a trade deal involving China, claiming such a pact would harm Canadian businesses and society.

Trump's comments escalated tensions with Canadian PM Mark Carney, who has urged support for domestic products amidst rising geopolitical and trade disputes. — Reuters

RETALIATION FEARS

Mexico weighs Cuba oil halt



Mexico is reviewing whether to continue sending oil to Cuba as fears grow within President Claudia Sheinbaum's government that the US could retaliate against the policy.

With Venezuela's supplies cut off, Mexico became Cuba's largest oil source, but officials worry that continuing shipments might draw US sanctions or pressure, despite humanitarian concerns. — Reuters

STEADY GROWTH

US business steady, sentiment improves



US business activity remained steady in January with the S&P Global Composite PMI showing modest expansion, as gains in new orders were balanced by a weak labour market and cost worries tied to tariffs.

A separate survey showed consumer sentiment improved modestly, though optimism remains low as inflation and economic pressures persist across households and firms. — Reuters

OPINION

Why stability can be more dangerous than change



KAMLA AL RAHBI

The writer is a leadership and business strategist focused on decision-making, organisational clarity, and cognitive frameworks in complex environments.

Leadership and economic discourse, stability is often praised as a sign of maturity, control and sound governance. Organisations that avoid disruption are commonly described as resilient, disciplined and well-managed. Yet history repeatedly shows that prolonged stability, when left unexamined, can quietly evolve into one of the most dangerous conditions an organisation or economy can face. The risk does not lie in stability itself, but in the assumptions that begin to accompany it. When systems operate without visible disruption for extended periods, leaders gradually stop questioning the foundations of their success. Processes that once required deliberate oversight become automatic. Decisions that were once strategic turn habitual. Over time, stability ceases to be a result of good leadership and becomes a justification for maintaining the status quo. This is where danger begins to accumulate invisibly. Stable environments tend to reward predictability over judgment. Leaders learn that repeating past decisions carries less personal risk than challenging existing structures. The organisation, in turn, reinforces this behaviour by equating continuity with competence. Performance metrics continue to appear healthy, quarterly targets are met and no immediate signals demand intervention. However, beneath these surface indicators, strategic sensitivity erodes. Economic history offers countless examples of institutions

that collapsed not because of sudden shocks, but because they failed to recognise slow-moving structural changes. Markets shift gradually, technologies evolve quietly and consumer expectations recalibrate long before disruption becomes obvious. Stability dulls the organisation's ability to interpret these weak signals. By the time change becomes unavoidable, the cost of adaptation has multiplied. One of the most underestimated consequences of prolonged stability is decision fatigue disguised as confidence. Leaders who operate in stable systems often believe their judgment has improved simply because outcomes remain consistent. In reality, decision-making has narrowed. Alternatives are no longer explored with the same rigour. Risk assessments become less analytical and more intuitive. This creates a false sense of mastery, where leaders feel in control precisely when they are least prepared for deviation. From an economic leadership perspective, stability also reshapes power dynamics within organisations. Hierarchies solidify, informal influence concentrates and dissent gradually disappears from decision rooms. When nothing appears broken, questioning the system can be interpreted as unnecessary or even disruptive. This suppresses internal intelligence long before external pressures force change. The paradox is that change itself is rarely the primary threat. Most organisations are capable of adapting when they recognise the need early. What

This is where danger begins to accumulate invisibly. Stable environments tend to reward predictability over judgment. Leaders learn that repeating past decisions carries less personal risk than challenging existing structures.

proves far more damaging is delayed change triggered by misplaced trust in stability. Once decline becomes visible, leaders are often forced into reactive decisions under pressure, rather than deliberate strategic recalibration. At that stage, even well-designed reforms struggle to regain lost momentum. In economic terms, stability without periodic challenge produces fragility. Systems become efficient but brittle, optimised for conditions that no longer fully exist. Growth slows not because opportunity disappears, but because decision frameworks fail to evolve alongside reality. This is why some of the most dramatic failures occur in organisations that were once considered models of stability. Effective leadership does not reject stability, nor does it glorify constant change. Instead, it treats stability as a condition that requires continuous interrogation. Leaders who sustain long-term performance understand that periods of calm are precisely when strategic judgment must sharpen, not relax. They deliberately introduce questions into stable systems, testing assumptions before markets, technology, or competition force those tests upon them. Ultimately, stability becomes dangerous only when it is mistaken for permanence. In an environment shaped by accelerating economic shifts, demographic transitions and technological advancement, stability should be viewed as a temporary state not a strategic destination.

ELLIOTT’S TOYOTA BET ALREADY LOOKS GOLDEN

HUDSON LOCKETT

A US hedge fund has picked the right target, the right opponent, the right argument and the right time with its challenge to insiders’ \$36 billion bid to take Toyota Industries private. Having helped successfully press Akio Toyoda and other Toyota group insiders for a higher offer, Elliott Investment Management led by Paul Singer has now upped its stake in Industries to about 6.7%. The move underscores that there is more to gain from this campaign in Japan than just return on investment. The shareholding of nearly 7% recalls a similar stake taken by Elliott in its bid to block an intergroup merger at Samsung in 2015. While shareholders narrowly waved through that deal after the South Korean group sent them fruit baskets, the environment for activism today in Japan appears more evolved. With its latest bet, Elliott is already winning: the take-private consortium, which includes Toyota Motor and unlisted real-estate firm Toyota Fudosan, raised their proposal by 15% last week to 18,800 yen per share. Back-of-the-envelope maths suggest Elliott paid around 16,650 yen per share across September and October for its original stake of 5.01%. That shakes out to a cost of purchase of around 255 billion yen, about \$1.6 billion at current exchange rates. Even at the revised offer price, that would amount to a return of about 33 billion yen on the activist’s initial stake. But as of Friday afternoon in Tokyo, shares in Industries were trading at 19,600 yen, 4% above the tender offer price. That represents a potential barrier to insiders’ deal: if minority shareholders want to cash out their shareholdings, they would do much better to sell into the market if they can find buyers than take the tender offer. An estimate suggests the consortium’s higher offer still undervalues its target by 39%. Elliott can’t take sole credit for share price resistance, nor for the revised tender offer. An open letter from the Asian Corporate Governance Association flagged obvious deficiencies in the deal. The US fund, though, is due recognition for doubling down on its bet. Even if the tender is successful at the current offer price, a larger stake could play to Elliott’s advantage in court by bolstering its claim to speak on behalf of minority shareholders. — Reuters

India’s Goldilocks phase: A 3rd largest economy?

The latest International Monetary Fund (IMF) World Economic Outlook has raised India's growth projection from 6 to 7.3 per cent. It forecasts global growth at 3.3 per cent, signalling India as a key global growth engine. Economists describe India as entering a Goldilocks phase. This term signifies an economy characterised by strong, sustained growth, moderate inflation and improved macroeconomic stability. If India sustains its growth trajectory, it could overtake Germany and Japan in the coming years and move into the global top three. Over the last decade, a transparent, broad-based transformation has unfolded across India. It rests on four major pillars that repeatedly surfaced in the Davos 2026 discussions. The first pillar is large-scale public investment in physical, social and digital infrastructure. The second pillar is inclusive growth, which aims to make gains accessible to all sections of society. The third pillar is the renewed thrust on the manufacturing and innovation sector. The fourth pillar is simplification and deregulation. A series of reforms has been undertaken to make it easier to start and run a business, reduce red tape and the legal framework; and improve the overall investment climate. These four pillars, combined with rapid technological advances, create new opportunities for productivity gains. India is looking at macroeconomic growth of 6 to 8 per cent in real terms, 2 to 4 per cent inflation and nominal growth of 10 to 13 per cent, with a 95 per cent confidence interval, over the next five years. The scale of progress can be gauged with a few indicative statistics: 540 million new bank accounts, 800 million people with access to government subsidised



DR MYTHILI KOLLURU

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India must build a business-enabling ecosystem, demonstrate committed regulatory governance, and continue prudent macroeconomic management to foster growth and development amid massive competition and shifting trade norms.



A man walks between the buildings at a commercial centre in New Delhi. — Reuters

monthly food staples through the nationwide food security programme and roughly 250 million people have emerged from extreme poverty. If these trends continue, India is expected to maintain robust growth in the coming years and attract long-term capital investments as the investors associate India with stability and predictability. Despite the positive sentiments about India, the Goldilocks phase is neither permanent nor guaranteed. One major concern is global debt, which could reduce capital flows to India. Financial crisis in major world economies can spill over into emerging economies like India, potentially causing currency volatility and tighter financial conditions. Additionally, geopolitical tensions and supply chain disruptions could directly affect India's trade, limit access to technology and increase energy prices, posing risks to economic stability. According to Gita Gopinath, an Indian origin economist who is currently a professor at Harvard University and a senior leader at the International Monetary Fund, stated at Davos 2026 that pollution is a crucial roadblock for India. According to the World Bank's 2022 report, 1.7 million lives are lost in India each year due to pollution.

She also spoke on how pollution poses a bigger long term threat to India's economy than tariffs. She further stated that investor perspectives and confidence could be influenced by the pollution levels and India must address the issue on a war footing, as it is a crisis situation. Some of the other challenges include land acquisition, deregulation and underutilisation of demographic dividends. Despite these challenges, the overall mood at Davos 2026 regarding India was one of cautious optimism. Juvencio Maeztu Herrera the Global CEO of Ikea stated that 'India is a large market with a young population, it is a democracy and has the potential to leapfrog from agriculture to artificial intelligence'. India must build a business-enabling ecosystem, demonstrate committed regulatory governance and continue prudent macroeconomic management to foster growth and development amidst massive competition and shifting trade norms. The task ahead is to leverage the Goldilocks phase as a springboard to become the third-largest economy in the world by maintaining a sustained and broad-based transformation that improves lives across all sections of Indian society.

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ART/LIFE

A COMING OF AGE TOLD THROUGH PAINT > 20



IN FASHION

ROBBIE WILLIAMS TOPS BEATLES FOR MOST NUMBER ONE ALBUMS IN UK



Pop superstar Robbie Williams surpassed the Beatles to become the artist with the most number one albums in the history of the British charts, sales trackers confirmed on Friday.

The milestone came a week after Williams released Britpop, which was officially announced as his 16th album to reach the top of the UK charts. The achievement marked another major chapter in a career that has spanned more than three decades and consistently placed him among Britain's most successful recording artists.

"He's the one!" said the Official Charts Company in response to the record-breaking feat, referencing She's the One, the hit 1998 single that became one of the defining songs of Williams' solo career following his departure from Take That.

Since launching his chart-topping solo career with his 1997 debut album Life Thru a Lens, Williams, now 51, has sold an estimated 20 million albums in the UK alone. His latest release, Britpop, is his first album in seven years, making its chart success particularly notable.

"Not even the confident young 16-year-old from Stoke-on-Trent would have believed this was possible when he joined Take That back in 1990", said Official Charts chief executive Martin Talbot in a statement.

"But here he is, on top of the world, the UK's number one album artist of all time", Talbot added. Across his 35-year career, Williams has sold an estimated 80 million albums worldwide, cementing his status as one of the most commercially successful artists of his generation.

The Beatles now occupy second place on the British album chart-topping list with 15 number one albums. They are followed by the Rolling Stones and Taylor Swift, who are tied with 14 each, while Elvis Presley ranks next with 13 chart-topping albums.

The Beatles were an English rock band formed in Liverpool in 1960, widely regarded as the most influential band in the history of popular music. The group consisted of John Lennon, Paul McCartney, George Harrison, and Ringo Starr. Rising from Liverpool's skiffle and rock-and-roll scene, The Beatles achieved global fame in the early 1960s, sparking a cultural phenomenon known as "Beatlemania."

Their music revolutionised the recording industry, songwriting, album production, and the role of artists as creative innovators rather than just performers.

— AFP

QUICK FEATURES



FESTIVAL

Clowns pose backstage during the 48th Monte-Carlo International Circus Festival in Monaco. — AFP



CELEBRATIONS

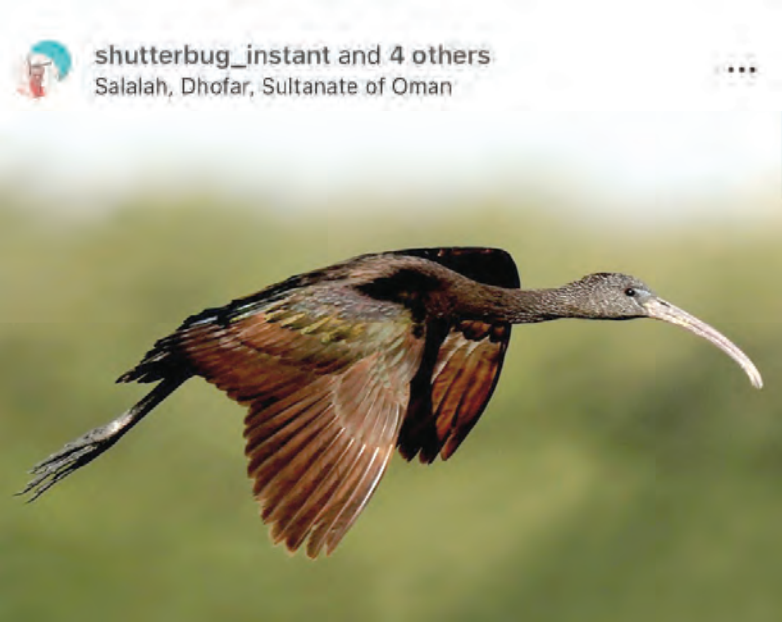
Australian music producer Gem Auset attends the Los Angeles Chapter Nominee Celebration at The Aster. — AFP



LIFESTYLE

A man with a child plays music for residents and others who gathered to dance outdoors on a freezing day in a residential neighbourhood of Kyiv. — AFP

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



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LITERARY COUNCIL
CELEBRATES OMANI FOLK
POETRY AND PERFORMANCE
AT MUSCAT NIGHTS

IDRIS AL BALUSHI

The Literary Council for Poetry and Folk Heritage continues its vibrant participation in Muscat Nights, presenting a series of poetic evenings dedicated to Omani Nabati and folk poetry in its many forms. These evenings celebrate the richness of Oman’s oral traditions and aim to connect audiences with the cultural expressions that have been passed down through generations.

As part of this ongoing programme, the Council will host a special poetry evening on Tuesday at Al Amerat Public Park. The event will bring together a distinguished group of poets and performers in an atmosphere that blends spoken word with traditional musical arts. The evening will feature several well-known Omani folk performance styles, including Al Shuhshuh, Al Taghrood and Al Meydan, alongside the widely cherished arts of Al Razha and Al Tghreer. Together, these performances will offer audiences an immersive cultural experience that reflects the diversity and depth of Oman’s intangible heritage.

The Literary Council’s participation in Muscat Nights has already included three poetry evenings highlighting different folk arts that Oman is renowned for. Through these events, the Council continues to play an important role in preserving popular poetry and traditional performance arts, while also presenting them in engaging public



ABDULLAH AL NUMANI
Poet



KHAMIS AL HASHMI
Poet



JUMA AL RASBI
Poet

settings that appeal to both older generations and younger audiences.

The poets taking part in Tuesday’s evening are Abdullah bin Mohammed al Numani, Ahmed bin Rashid al Sawti, Waleed bin Bakheet al Sinani, Khamis bin Salem al Hashmi and Juma bin Salem al Rasbi, known as Wad Katuri. Each poet brings a distinct voice and style, contributing to a rich and varied programme.

This poetry evening at Al Amerat Public Park is expected to attract poetry enthusiasts and families alike, offering a meaningful cultural gathering within the festive atmosphere of Muscat Nights and reaffirming the enduring presence of poetry and folk arts in Omani society.



Sundance Film Festival
hits Utah, one last time

THE first Sundance Film Festival since the death of founder Robert Redford began in Park City last week, marking the final time the event was held in the mountains of Utah.

Hollywood names including Olivia Wilde, Natalie Portman and Ethan Hawke were expected to walk the red carpet at the snowcapped Rocky Mountain resort, alongside emerging filmmakers, at one of the most influential gatherings in the global film calendar.

Amy Redford, daughter of the Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid star who founded the festival in 1978, described the edition as an emotional one, coming just four months after her father’s death.

“Very proud”, she said when asked about his legacy.

“He was somebody that created from the field, not from on high”, she said, stressing that the focus of the festival was always meant to be storytellers rather than its founder.

Among the many films screened was The Invite, directed by and starring Wilde alongside Seth Rogen and Edward Norton, based on a script co-written by Rashida Jones. Jon Hamm and John Slattery reunited in Gail Daughtry and the Celebrity Sex Pass, while The Gallerist featured Natalie Portman and Da’Vine Joy Randolph in a dark satire set around Art Basel Miami.

Highly anticipated non-celebrity titles included John Wilson’s The History of Concrete, an unconventional take on selling a film about building materials. The international lineup featured Molly Manners’ debut Extra Geography from the UK.

Other films included Hanging by a Wire, which followed a race to rescue schoolboys stranded in a Himalayan cable car, Cyprus-set drama Hold On to Me and Kenyan documentary Kikuyu Land, examining land dispossession through corruption.



The festival was set to move next year to Boulder, Colorado, after outgrowing Park City. Programmer John Nein said leaving Utah was bittersweet, noting that the town’s remoteness and cold helped shape the festival’s unique atmosphere.

Festival director Eugene



Hernandez said the Sundance Institute would maintain roots in Utah, but described this year’s programme as memorable.

“There was laughter, there were tears, there was joy, connection and community”, he said. “Those are the things that make a festival”. — AFP

FEATURES

IDRIS AL BALUSHI

THERE are moments when language fails, when emotion becomes too heavy to carry or too tangled to explain. For Omani artist Hussain al Ghamlasi, those moments found their release not in words, but in paint. What began in 2018 as an unconscious act of emotional survival has since evolved into a long-running gallery series that traces not only the growth of an artist, but the coming of age of a human being learning how to exist, feel and belong. “I was using art as therapy without knowing it”, Al Ghamlasi reflects. “I was manifesting what I felt, things I couldn’t express in language”. That instinctive process became the foundation of a series rooted in honesty rather than beauty, one that resists comfort and leans into emotional truth.

At the heart of the current exhibition is a body of work titled An Authentic Feeling, a coming of age collection shaped by instability, self reflection and emotional hunger.

Growing up, Al Ghamlasi moved nine times and attended five different schools. Despite the constant change, he describes himself as a kind child, always seeking validation and acceptance. Yet that kindness coexisted with loneliness and the persistent feeling of not belonging, culturally, socially, or emotionally. He questioned whether he fit the image of what it meant to be Omani, while struggling with independence and a toxic relationship with both friends and himself.

Those tensions surface vividly on the canvas. His work, blending cubism and impressionism, avoids direct narratives and instead invites interpretation. Faces fragment, bodies distort and colours speak loudly. Beauty is intentionally avoided. “Most of the time my feelings weren’t beautiful”, he explains. “So I didn’t want beauty to describe them”. The result is raw, strong and often uncomfortable work that reflects an organic and instinctive process.

Al Ghamlasi speaks of his paintings as if they are family. “They are part of my life”, he says. “Like my sons and daughters”. Over the years, these works travelled with him, exhibited in cafés, universities and cities including Salalah. Letting them go felt like watching children leave home. One painting, his largest and most cherished, was severely damaged during transport, torn apart on the highway. He stopped the car and cried. “It felt like it was its time to die”, he recalls.

That loss became part of the series’ emotional evolution. The current exhibition reunites the works in one space, creating what feels like a family gathering. At the centre hangs a large painting representing a rare moment of happiness and emotional safety in a relationship.

To one side, a figure using Arabic sign language embodies the pain and resolve of independence, hurt but determined to care for himself. On the other, society appears as a force that dictates right and wrong without understanding the artist’s inner world or lived experience.

Despite the intensity of the themes, many viewers interpret the paintings as joyful.

This surprises Al Ghamlasi, yet he welcomes it. He believes the layered details, every hand motion and gesture, carry stories that continue to reveal themselves over time.

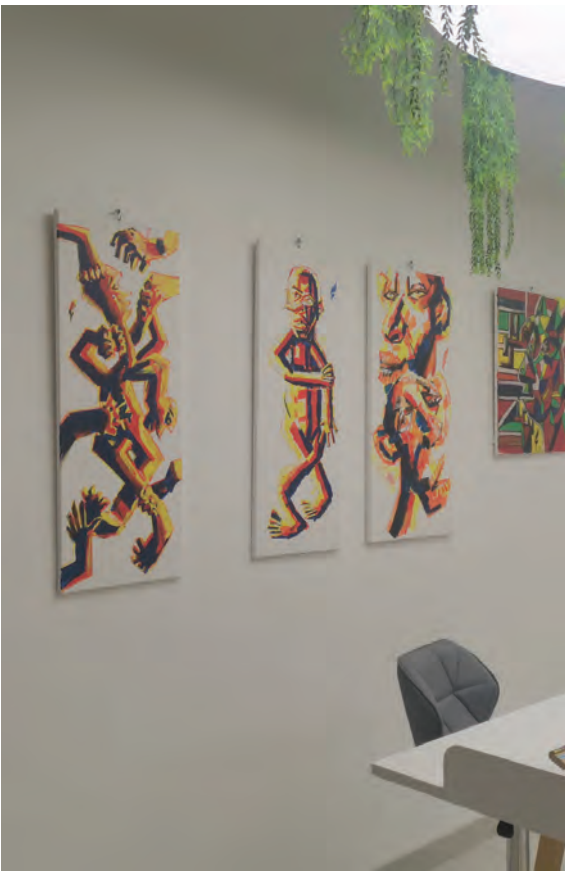
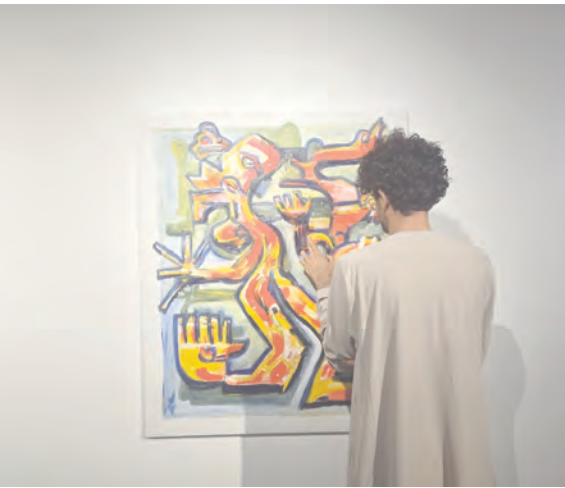
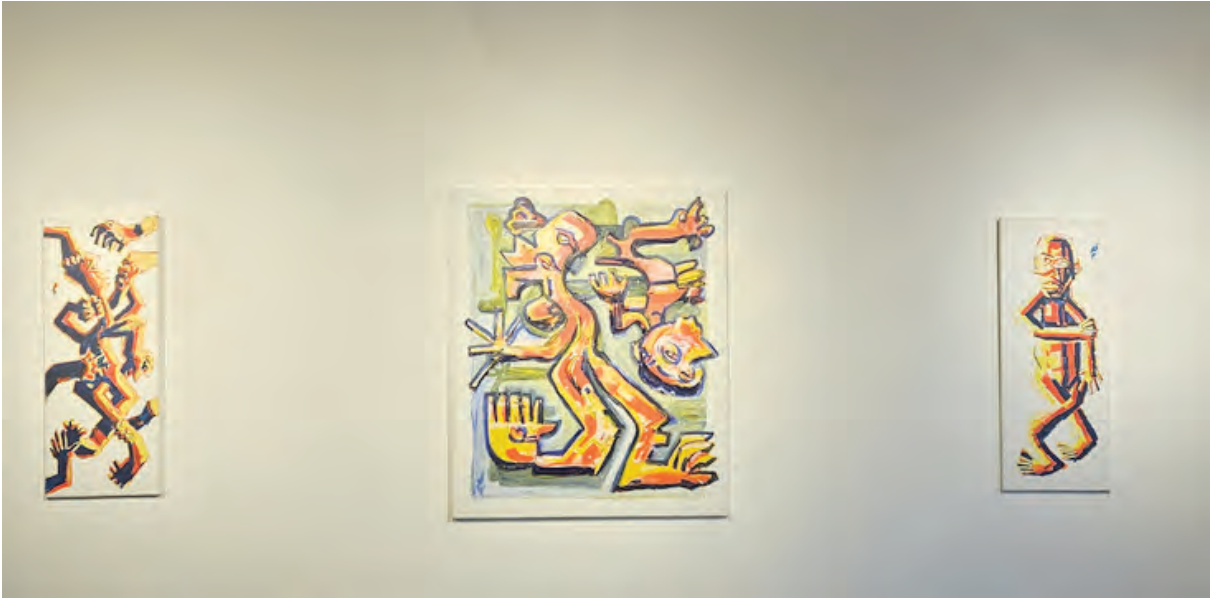
Omani audiences responded with openness and curiosity. In a cultural context where emotional depth, particularly among men, is often restrained, the exhibition became a moment of release.

Visitors engaged deeply, returned with others and shared personal reflections. Some said they appreciated the work even more once they understood it. Others simply



A COMING OF AGE TOLD THROUGH PAINT

The current exhibition reunites the works in one space, creating what feels like a family gathering. At the centre hangs a large painting representing a rare moment of happiness and emotional safety in a relationship.



expressed pride. “Those words can make a person feel whole again”, he says. One of the most powerful moments came when people showed up unexpectedly, bringing flowers and leaving behind family obligations and work just to be present. “I was hugging everyone”, he recalls. “I was annoyingly happy, a happiness mixed with pain”. The series continues beyond the gallery walls. It inspired Al Ghamlasi to begin writing a book, drawn from the same lived experiences. Humorous yet painful, it is intended as a legacy, something honest, human and enduring. This exhibition is not an emotional arrival but a declaration of agency. “I didn’t wait for help”, he says. “I made it happen”. As the series evolves, Al Ghamlasi sees his emotional language becoming more refined, more personal and more impactful, continuing his journey of growth as both an artist and a human being.