

OMAN

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SUNRISE 06:42 AM

PRAYER TIMINGS

FAJR 05:26 AM

DHUHR 12:26 PM

ASR 03:40 PM

MAGHRIB 06:05 PM

ISHA 07:16 PM

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12

BLIKRA SPRINTS TO STAGE 4 TRIUMPH

INBRIEF

HM GREET'S IRAN, POPE, PORTUGAL

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Dr Masoud Pezeshkian of the Islamic Republic of Iran on his country's National Day. In his cable, His Majesty expressed his sincere wishes for Iran to achieve further accomplishments. His Majesty also wished the relations of cooperation and partnership to grow and expand across various sectors in a manner that serves the interests of both countries. His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to Pope Leo XIV, Head of the State of Vatican City, on his country's National Day. In his cable, His Majesty expressed his heartfelt sentiments to Pope Leo XIV and the people of his country, wishing them further progress and prosperity. His Majesty has sent a cable of greetings to President-elect António José Seguro on winning the presidential elections in the Republic of Portugal.

RAMADHAN WORKING HOURS



MUSCAT: The Ministry of Labour has formally issued the official working schedule for the blessed month of Ramadhan, 1447 AH, applying to both the civil units of the State's Administrative Apparatus and private sector establishments.

For civil units of the State's Administrative Apparatus, the official working hours are a standard daily schedule set at five consecutive hours, from 9 am to 2 pm. Flexible working arrangements: Unit heads are authorised to implement a flexible schedule. Employee's duty timings may be adjusted to suit operational needs within a designated window from 7 am to 3 pm. Working hours will be calculated as per the individual's arrival and departure time, in accordance with each unit's established procedures.

Remote work: Unit heads may implement remote work for roles where duties permit, provided it does not disrupt workflow. A minimum of 50 per cent of the unit's total staff must be physically present at the workplace at all times.

For private sector establishments, the working day for Muslim employees is reduced to a maximum of six hours per day, not exceeding a total of thirty hours per week. The ministry further encouraged private sector entities to adopt modern working methods, including flexible schedules and remote work. This approach aims to enhance productivity while respecting the distinctive spiritual character of the holy month. — ONA

TALKS FOCUS ON IRAN-US NEGOTIATIONS

HIS MAJESTY GIVES AUDIENCE TO IRANIAN OFFICIAL



His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik gave an audience at Al Barakah Palace on Tuesday to Dr Ali Larijani, Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

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During the audience, the guest conveyed greetings and best wishes of President Dr Masoud Pezeshkian of the

Islamic Republic of Iran to His Majesty the Sultan. The Iranian President also wished the people of Oman further progress and prosperity.

On his turn, His Majesty asked the guest to convey his greetings to President Pezeshkian, wishing Iran further stability and prosperity. The audience discussed the latest developments

of the Iranian-American negotiations. It also addressed pathways towards achieving a balanced and equitable agreement for all parties.

SUSTAINING PEACE
It also underscored the critical importance of resuming dialogue and returning to the negotiating table to bridge

perspectives and resolve outstanding differences through peaceful means. Such efforts are fundamental to promoting and sustaining peace and security both in the region and the world at large.

The audience was attended by Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office. — ONA

His Majesty receives credentials of ambassadors

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik received on Tuesday at Al Barakah Palace credentials of several ambassadors of countries appointed to the Sultanate of Oman.

His Majesty accepted the credentials of the following: Charles Kingston, Ambassador of New Zealand to the Sultanate of Oman; Yevgeny Sobolevsky, Ambassador of President Aleksandr Lukashenko of the Republic of Belarus to the Sultanate of Oman; Hoang Huu Anh, Ambassador of President Luong Cuong of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam to the

Sultanate of Oman; Miguel Porto Parga, Ambassador of President Miguel Díaz-Canel of the Republic of Cuba to the Sultanate of Oman; Kjersti Tromsdal, Ambassador of King Harald V of the Kingdom of Norway to the Sultanate of Oman; Miles Armitage, Ambassador of Sam Mostyn, Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia to the Sultanate of Oman; Andy Rodriguez Duran, Ambassador of President Luis Abinader of the Dominican Republic to the Sultanate of Oman; Shebba Shumbayawonda, Ambassador of Emmerson Mnangagwa, President of the Republic of Zimbabwe to the



Ekaterini Fafarioutou, Ambassador of the Hellenic Republic to the Sultanate of Oman, presenting her credentials.

Sultanate of Oman; Pavel Kafka, Ambassador of President Petr Pavel of the Czech Republic to the Sultanate of Oman; Zuraidah bint Abdullah, Ambassador of President Tharman Shanmugaratnam of the Republic of Singapore to the Sultanate of Oman; and Ekaterini Fafarioutou, Ambassador of President Konstantinos Tasoulas of the Hellenic Republic to the Sultanate of Oman.

During the audiences with His Majesty the Sultan, the ambassadors conveyed the greetings of their countries' leaders and their sincere wishes to His Majesty for continued success. **SEE ALSO P4**

OMAN

HIS MAJESTY, IRANIAN OFFICIAL DISCUSS IRAN-US NEGOTIATIONS



MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik gave an audience at Al Barakah Palace on Tuesday to Dr Ali Larijani, Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council of the Islamic Republic of Iran. During the audience, the guest conveyed greetings and best wishes of President Dr Masoud Pezeshkian of the Islamic Republic of Iran to His Majesty the Sultan. The audience discussed the latest developments of the Iranian-American negotiations. It also addressed pathways towards achieving a balanced and equitable agreement for all parties. — ONA

OMAN AND IRAN DISCUSS TIES



MUSCAT: Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office, received on Tuesday in his office Dr Ali Larijani, Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and his accompanying delegation. During the meeting, Al Numani underscored the depth of the bilateral relations between Oman and Iran. The two sides discussed several matters of mutual interest. On his turn, Dr Ali Larijani, Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council of Iran, expressed his appreciation for the Sultanate of Oman's stances regarding several regional and international files.

He also lauded Oman's active role in bridging points of view and its calling for constructive dialogue between related parties. The meeting was attended by the ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the Sultanate of Oman. Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, met on Tuesday with Dr Ali Larijani, Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The two sides exchanged views on regional and international issues of common interest. — ONA

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HM RECEIVES CREDENTIALS OF SEVERAL AMBASSADORS



Ambassador of New Zealand.

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Tuesday received at Al Barakah Palace the credentials of several ambassadors of countries appointed to the Sultanate of Oman. His Majesty accepted the credentials of Charles Kingston, Ambassador of Cindy Kiro, Governor-General of New Zealand to the Sultanate of Oman, Yevgeny Sobolevsky, Ambassador of President Aleksandr Lukashenko of the Republic of Belarus to the Sultanate of Oman, Hoang Huu Anh, Ambassador of President Luong Cuong of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam to the Sultanate of Oman, Miguel Porto Parga, Ambassador of President Miguel Díaz-Canel of the Republic of Cuba to the Sultanate of

Oman, Kjersti Tromsdal, Ambassador of King Harald V of the Kingdom of Norway to the Sultanate of Oman, Miles Armitage, Ambassador of Sam Mostyn, Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia to the Sultanate of Oman, Andy Rodriguez Duran, Ambassador of President Luis Abinader of the Dominican Republic to the Sultanate of Oman, Shebba Shumbayawonda, Ambassador of President Emmerson Mnangagwa, President of the Republic of Zimbabwe to the Sultanate of Oman, Pavel Kafka, Ambassador of President Petr Pavel of the Czech Republic to the Sultanate of Oman, Zuraidah bint Abdullah, Ambassador of President Tharman Shanmugaratnam of the Republic of Singapore

to the Sultanate of Oman and Ekaterini Fafarioutou, Ambassador of President Konstantinos Tasoulas of the Hellenic Republic to the Sultanate of Oman. During the audiences with His Majesty the Sultan, the ambassadors conveyed the greetings of their countries' leaders and their sincere wishes to His Majesty for continued success. They also wished the Omani people further progress and prosperity under the wise leadership of His Majesty. They emphasised their dedication to strengthening the relations of partnership and cooperation between their respective countries and the Sultanate of Oman across various fields, contributing to the support of shared aspirations and mutual

interests. On his part, His Majesty the Sultan welcomed the ambassadors, expressing his thanks and appreciation to the leaders of their countries for their greetings and kind wishes. He assured them that they would receive all the support and assistance from His Majesty, the Government, and the Omani people, thereby facilitating their duties and the advancement of joint cooperation. The credentials presentation ceremony was attended by the Minister of the Diwan of Royal Court, the Foreign Minister, the Commander of the Royal Guard of Oman, the Head of Royal Protocols and the Military Aides to His Majesty the Sultan. — ONA



Ambassador of the Republic of Belarus.



Ambassador of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam.



Ambassador of the Republic of Cuba.



Ambassador of the Kingdom of Norway.



Ambassador of Australia.



Ambassador of the Dominican Republic.



Ambassador of the Republic of Zimbabwe.



Ambassador of the Czech Republic.



Ambassador of the Republic of Singapore.

SHORT TAKES



RAMADHAN
COMMUNITY
INITIATIVES
LAUNCHED IN SUR

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
SUR, FEB 10

Three community initiatives were officially launched in Sur for the holy month of Ramadhan, with funding and support from Sharqiyah Desalination Company. The initiatives were inaugurated under the auspices of Shaikh Dr Hilal bin Ali al Habsi, Wali of Sur.

The initiatives form part of ongoing efforts to strengthen social solidarity and support vulnerable groups during Ramadhan, a month deeply associated with compassion, generosity and mutual support. The programmes include the “Iftar for Fasting People” initiative, now in its tenth consecutive year, the distribution of food baskets to 100 underprivileged families and a special initiative to support orphans during Eid.

The Wali of Sur commended the initiatives and highlighted their importance in reinforcing social cohesion within the community. He praised Sharqiyah Desalination Company for its continued commitment to social responsibility and for supporting programmes that directly benefit low-income families and vulnerable segments of society, particularly during the holy month. Such initiatives reflect a strong sense of partnership between institutions and the local community, contributing to broader social development goals.

Dr Saleh bin Hamad al Alawi explained that corporate social responsibility represents a moral and ethical obligation for institutions towards the communities in which they operate. He stressed that CSR goes beyond financial contributions to include meaningful engagement in improving social, economic and environmental conditions, while ensuring that initiatives create a positive and sustainable impact.

13th edition of Fak Kurba launched: OLA

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabiyousef

The 13th edition of the Fak Kurba programme, a humanitarian initiative for Ramadhan by the Oman Lawyers Association (OLA), was launched at an official ceremony held under the auspices of Abdulsalam bin Mohammed

al Murshidi, Chairman of Oman Investment Authority, on Tuesday. According to Dr Hamad bin Hamdan al Rubaie, Chairman of the Board of Directors of OLA, the initiative has achieved widespread positive impact in previous editions. Speaking to the Observer, Dr Al Rubaie confirmed that preliminary efforts to secure the release of

prisoners held in minor cases are currently underway, with the initiative receiving support from institutions, companies and individuals. “This year, the initiative aims to secure the release of as many individuals detained for minor financial offenses, with the participation of community members and various institutions

from across the country,” he said. “This has been evident in the statistics and achievements recorded throughout previous editions, as well as in assisting as many deserving individuals as possible,” he said. Most of the people acquitted of minor and unintentional financial offenses in the past 12 years were those detained for financial offenses.

Joint session discusses
articles of disagreement

MOHAMED AL BATTASHI
MUSCAT, FEB 10

THE State Council and Majlis Ash'shura held on Tuesday the first joint session of the third sitting of the eighth term of the Council of Oman, chaired by Shaikh Abdulmalik bin Abdullah al Khalili, Chairman of the State Council, and attended by Khalid bin Hilal al Maawali, Chairman of Majlis Ash'shura, along with members of both councils and their secretaries-general.

The joint session involved discussing and voting on the articles of disagreement between the two councils in 7 draft laws. These include draft laws concerning the Real Estate Register, Civil Society Institutions, Combating Information Technology Crimes, Amending Some Provisions of the Cultural Heritage Law, Sports Entities, Amending Some Provisions of the Arbitration Law in Civil and Commercial Disputes, and National Geospatial Data and Information.

Shaikh Abdulmalik bin Abdullah al Khalili, Chairman of the State Council, stated that the convening of the joint session comes in implementation of the provisions of Article (49) of the Council of Oman Law, which affirms the importance of consolidating the principle of coordination and integration between the two councils by holding joint sessions in case of disagreement and divergence of opinion on draft laws referred by the government, in order to produce a



The joint session involved discussing and voting on the articles of disagreement between the two councils in 7 draft laws.

unified, consolidated vision that embodies joint work.

He also emphasised, within the same framework, the harmony of work between the two councils and the Council of Ministers in serving the public interest, fostering constructive cooperation and advancing the comprehensive development march under the wise leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik.

He added that the State Council and Majlis Ash'shura had previously discussed a number of draft laws, including: the draft Real Estate Register Law, the draft Civil Society Institutions Law, the draft law amending some provisions of the Arbitration Law in Civil and Commercial Disputes, the draft Combating Information Technology Crimes Law, the draft law amending some provisions of the Cultural

Heritage Law, the draft National Geospatial Data and Information Law, in addition to the draft Sports Entities Law.

Dr Mohammed bin Said al Hajri, Member of the State Council and Member of the Social and Cultural Committee, clarified that the joint session discussed a number of articles of divergence and disagreement regarding several draft laws and legislative amendments. Among these is the draft Civil Society Institutions Law, which aims for a legislative treatment to be more comprehensive by including a group of institutions for which regulations were issued, specifically by merging them into one law encompassing all civil society institutions.

Younis bin Ali al Mandhari, Member of the Majlis Ash'shura and Chairman of the Youth and Human Resources Committee, stated that the Council began studying the draft Sports Entities Law last May and hosted all parties related to the draft law through the competent committee. All parties related to the draft law were hosted, including the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, as well as sports clubs and federations, to take their opinions on the articles of the law, which comprised 69 articles. He indicated that the Council amended some articles and added 3 new articles.

The joint committee between the State Council and Majlis Ash'shura stated that the draft Real Estate Register Law aims to enhance legal protection for owners and beneficiaries.



جامعة السلطان قابوس
Sultan Qaboos University

TENDER NOTICE

The Investment & Revenue Department at Sultan Qaboos University would like to invite companies to submit their quotations for:

S/N	Type of Business	Date of Site Visit	Tender #	The Last Date for Collecting the Document	The Last Date for Submission of the Quotations
1	Renting and operating locations to provide vending machines for cold and hot drinks and light snacks in various locations.	17/2/2026	SQU.IRD. 1/26	15/3/2026	1/4/2026 before 11:00 a.m.

- The priority will be for the Small and Medium Establishments (SME), which fulfils the quality requirements. All classes of companies can also apply for these tenders.
- Tenderers who wish to participate in this Tender may collect Tender Documents from The Section of Revenue and Expenditures at the Investment & Revenue Department, Sultan Qaboos University, during the working hours for an amount of OR.25 for each tender document (non-refundable).
- The Site Visit for the selected shop is necessary. It will be on the above-mentioned date and the assembly point will be at the Investment & Revenue Department.
- The last date for submission of the quotations is on Wednesday, 1/4/2026. The quotations should be submitted in a sealed envelope addressed to the Director of The Investment & Revenue Department, located on the first floor of the commercial building at Sultan Qaboos University and deposited in the Tender Box kept in the Department, before 11:00 a.m.
- The exterior of the envelope should be marked with the name and number of the Tender being presented and should bear no identification or mark of the Tenderer.

The Investment & Revenue Department
P.O BOX 50, P.C. 123, ALKHOD, SULTANATE OF OMAN
Mobile : 93900477
E- mail : investment@sq.u.edu.om





AL WADI AL A'LA MOSQUE RESTORED

BAHLA: The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism has completed the restoration works of Al Wadi Al A'la Mosque in the Wilayat of Bahla, Governorate of Al Dakhiliyah. This effort is part of the ministry's ongoing initiatives to preserve historical mosques, safeguard their architectural value and enhance their sustainability as civilisational landmarks of historical importance.

The restoration works began last year, encompassing comprehensive treatment of the mosque's architectural and structural aspects in accordance with approved technical standards, ensuring the building's safety and continued usability. — ONA

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وزارة الصحة
Ministry of Health

Announcement

The Ministry of Health invites specialized companies to participate in the following Tender:-

Tender Ref:	Description	Last Date for Collection of Tender Document	Bid Submission Closing Date on/ Before 10:00 am Monday	Eligibility	Tender Fee (Non-Refundable)
559/2026/ MOH/ NIZH-6	Removing, Supply, Installation, Testing and Commissioning of Roof Mounted Extract Fans at Nizwa Hospital (I)	18/FEB/2026	23/MAR/2026	Specialized Companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board	R.O 25,000 Per set R.O 10,000 for SME

- Tenders should be submitted online on <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om> enclose **Electronic Bank Guarantee** issued by a Local bank for not less than One percent (1%) for the Tender value validity for (90) days from the Tender Submission date, addressed to The Chairman of the Tender Committee.
- Ministry is not bound to accept the lowest tender and reserves the right to accepts or reject any tender.
- For any Clarification, you may contact via Telephone: 24402200 , Email id etenderhd@ita.gov.om

OMAN

SHORT TAKES



The forum aimed to highlight the pivotal role of the National Professional Standards Strategy. — ONA

Musandam forum discusses national standards strategy

KHASAB: The forum on “The Importance of the National Professional Standards Strategy for Enhancing Professional Performance” reviewed the mechanism for implementing the strategy, which focuses on preparing integrated professional standards in cooperation with the relevant authorities and the private sector, and linking them to the professional licensing system. This aims to enhance the reliability and qualifications of workers in the labour market. The forum also reviewed the target sectors in the current phase, data on the number of developed standards and future expansion plans. Organised by the Ministry of Labour, the forum aimed to highlight the pivotal role of the National Professional Standards Strategy in raising performance efficiency, improving the quality of training and qualification, and ensuring the readiness of national cadres to engage in the labour market according to clear and specific standards for each profession. Additionally, it sought to enhance partnership between various government and private entities to ensure the effective application of professional standards, and to shed light on the experiences of sector skills units and showcase their applied models in a number of sectors, along with the results achieved in aligning training with labour market requirements. The forum included an introductory visual presentation on the strategy, an awareness film on the importance of national standards, as well as a presentation of successful models from sector skills units in a number of sectors. It also featured a dedicated segment for presenting the experiences of the sector skills units for accounting, logistics and engineering. — ONA

Tehran hails Oman’s role in hosting Iran-US talks

DR Ali Larijani, Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council of the Islamic Republic of Iran, affirmed the depth of the bilateral relations between the Sultanate of Oman and Iran, which are based on historical foundations and close ties between the two friendly countries, and are progressing very effectively between them to achieve common interests. In an exclusive interview with Oman TV, he said that his meeting in Muscat with His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik confirms the existence of a clear vision for advancing bilateral relations. The meeting also addressed the current state of relations between the two friendly countries at the regional and international levels. He noted his meetings with several Omani officials to discuss a number of shared issues and existing interests, from both sides’ perspectives, in line with the interests of the region. Dr Ali Larijani emphasised the importance of Oman’s role in creating a suitable environment for dialogue between Iran and the United States, describing it as “extremely positive” given Oman’s keen understanding of regional interests, its familiarity with the course of previous negotiations, and its advanced vision, which qualifies it to play a constructive and effective role. Regarding the Iranian-American negotiations hosted by Muscat, which are receiving widespread international attention, he said that the negotiating process in the previous stage witnessed gradual development, stressing that his country looks forward to engaging in negotiations whenever they are realistic, and that his country’s position in the first round was positive, considering that the next stage may hold opportunities for strategic de-escalation, or at least political repositioning, according to what the results of the dialogue will lead to. Regarding whether these negotiations reflect a real shift in managing the issues between Tehran and Washington or fall within the framework of crisis management only, he said that there are



Dr Ali Larijani, Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council of Iran.

many claims put forward by the American side, noting that if the negotiations on the nuclear file are successful, they can be expanded later to include other areas, but it is not possible at the present time to confirm the possibility of moving on to discussing other issues. Dr Ali Larijani stressed that Iran has believed from the beginning that war is not a solution to the disputes between the two countries, and that regional conflicts between Iran and the United States should be resolved through dialogue and talks, considering that relying on the language of force was a mistake on the part of some parties, and contributed to complicating the negotiation paths and creating many problems in the dialogue. Regarding the possibility that the ongoing negotiations will determine the shape of the relationship between Tehran and Washington, he stressed that it is still too early to talk about that, explaining that what has happened so far is only one stage, and that the developments of the next stage will determine the general direction. He pointed out that the success of the negotiations depends on the availability of a genuine political will on both sides, stressing that commitment to a reasonable and realistic framework will make these

negotiations successful, while putting forward additional demands will lead to their failure, and that if the goal of the American side is to prevent Iran from moving towards nuclear weapons, then resolving this issue is possible, but introducing other issues will complicate the process. Regarding the timeframe, he said that there is no specific timetable for the negotiations, and that his country wants to reach clear solutions without delay, and that the issues raised are solvable and do not require a long time if the necessary seriousness is present. Regarding the chances of success for these negotiations, Dr Ali Larijani said that he does not wish to delve into describing the political factors themselves, and that if the two parties adhere to the positions they announce, the possibility of reaching a solution remains, while emphasising the pivotal and essential role of the Sultanate of Oman in the course of these negotiations. Regarding the possibility of separating the course of negotiations from the political and field developments in the region, he stressed that the existing disputes in the region constitute one of the most prominent factors of tension, and that addressing these issues would contribute to restoring stability and peace to the region, and that the escalation of tensions as a result of military interventions leads to complicating the regional scene, while resolving these problems opens the way for development and progress of the countries of the region. In his assessment of the current US policy towards Iran, he considered that the traditional framework within which Washington operates has become more realistic, and that the United States previously linked the nuclear file with the military and missile files, while the focus is now limited to the nuclear file, which he described as the rational approach, stressing that military issues are not related to the nuclear file, and that finding a solution to this file is a fundamental and important step. — ONA

Oman participates in Arab information committee session



Oman’s delegation was headed by Mohammed bin Said al Balushi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Information. — ONA

KUWAIT: The Sultanate of Oman participated in the meeting of the 104th regular session of the Arab Permanent Information Committee, which was held in the State of Kuwait. The Sultanate of Oman’s delegation was headed by Mohammed bin Said al Balushi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Information. The meeting discussed a number of important topics, including enhancing media support for the Palestinian cause, following up on the implementation of the Arab Media Action Plan Abroad, as well as the executive plan for the joint Arab media strategy to combat terrorism, and the executive programme for the Arab Media Map for Sustainable Development 2030. The meeting also addressed developing a unified strategy for dealing with international media companies, encouraging quality and professional excellence in media work, and building the capacities of Arab media professionals, content producers and influencers. Additionally, it reviewed follow-ups on implementing the Arab Strategy for Media and Information Literacy, examining the recommendations of the expert team concerned. — ONA



Oman Authority for Quality Assurance of Education (OAQA)
TENDER NOTICE

Tender Number	Tender Title	Company Grade:	Tender Fee	Dates		
				Distribution Till	Last Day to receive Clarifications	Bid Submission Date
1/2026	The Enhanced Internal Quality Management System for the implementation of workshops and training programs to strengthen the capacities of internal auditors.	Excellent/ First	OMR 25	03 March 2026	05 March 2026	31 March 2026

The Oman Authority for Quality Assurance of Education (OAQA)` is hereby inviting all local, specialized bidders to participate in this TENDER as per the following instructions, in addition to all terms of TENDER enclosed in the TENDER documents.

For project brief, please visit the below link:
<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>

A. Purchase of Tender Documents
The Bidders may obtain the TENDER document by registering the company at eTendering System (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>)

B. Submission
All Proposals should be SUBMITTED ONLINE AT e-TENDERING System (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>)
Proposals to be accepted for evaluation which will be submitted through the eTendering System ONLY.

C. Correspondence Tender Inquiry:
All correspondence pertaining to the TENDER Inquiry must be online through the eTendering System ONLY.

e. Tendering System Inquiry:
All correspondence pertaining to the eTendering System technical support must be directed to the following helpdesk email address and phone number: etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om and +968 24402200
All correspondence pertaining to the OAQA tender must be directed to the following email address and phone number: tenders@oaaaqa.gov.om and +968 24121706

SHORT TAKES



Bangladesh Army personnel patrol outside a polling station in Dhaka. — AFP

BANGLADESH POLICE DEPLOY TO GUARD POLLING CENTRES

DHAKA: Bangladesh’s police chief said that more than 150,000 officers will be deployed for this week’s elections, warning that more than half of polling stations were flagged as vulnerable to violence. Police records show that five people were killed and more than 600 injured in political clashes during the campaign period from December 11 to February 9.

More than 157,000 police officers, backed by 100,000 soldiers and other security forces, will guard Thursday’s vote — the first since a mass uprising toppled the autocratic government of Sheikh Hasina in 2024. “We are 1,000 percent confident about doing our part,” Inspector General of Police Baharul Alam told reporters in Dhaka.

Alam said police had assessed that “more than 24,000 polling centres have been marked as either high-risk or moderately risky” for possible unrest, violence or ballot stuffing — more than half of the 42,000 centres nationwide. “The location of some centres is very remote, and there is intense competition, and hostility among candidates and their supporters,” he said. — AFP

EU PARLIAMENT ADOPTS BLOC’S 2040 CLIMATE TARGET

STRASBOURG: The European Parliament gave its final approval to an ambitious target for cutting EU greenhouse gas emissions by 2040, a key milestone towards the bloc’s goal of becoming carbon neutral by mid-century. Lawmakers voted by 413 to 226 in favour of a 90 per cent cut in greenhouse gas emissions compared to 1990 levels, with flexibility to use carbon credits bought outside the 27-nation EU to help reach the goal.

The target now requires an ultimate sign-off by EU member states.

In a compromise to address concerns by several countries including Italy, the final text allows for five per cent of cuts to be accounted for through carbon credits acquired for projects outside Europe. Activist groups have accused the bloc of simply sending the climate change campaign offshore. Further down the road, the EU could, if needed, eventually allow member states to make up a further five per cent of their targets via credits from international carbon markets.

Under pressure from Poland and Hungary, the final deal also put back by one year to 2028 an emissions trading system for road transport and heating buildings, with some member states still pushing for a delay past that date.

“We are only responsible for six per cent of global emissions,” the EU’s climate chief Wopke Hoekstra said recently. “The reality is while Europe is one of the leaders on climate action, and it is financing by far the most of climate action abroad, unfortunately solidarity and reciprocity do not always go hand in hand,” he said, warning: “That has to change.” — AFP

SOUTH KOREA POLICE RAID SPY AGENCY OVER DRONE FLIGHT INTO NORTH

SEOUL: Investigators raided South Korea’s spy agency as they searched for the source of a drone incursion into North Korea, an incident that threatens to blight efforts to mend relations with Pyongyang. South Korean President Lee Jae Myung has sought to repair ties with his nation’s nuclear-armed neighbour, vowing to stop the drones that buzzed across the border under his predecessor.

Pyongyang says it shot down a surveillance drone near the

industrial hub of Kaesong in January, accusing Seoul of dispatching the aircraft to glean intelligence on “important targets”. South Korea initially denied any official involvement, with Lee saying such an act would be tantamount to “firing a shot into the North”.

But a joint military-police task force said on Tuesday it was investigating three active-duty soldiers and one spy agency staffer in an effort to “thoroughly establish

the truth”. Investigators raided 18 locations of interest, including the Defence Intelligence Command and the National Intelligence Service.

The North Korean military downed a drone carrying “surveillance equipment” in early January, according to a statement published by the state-run Korean Central News Agency. Photos showed the wreckage of a winged craft scattered across the ground next to a collection components that allegedly included cameras. — AFP

Macron urges dialogue in ‘EU approach’ with Putin

FRENCH President Emmanuel Macron has said he wants to include European partners in a resumption of dialogue with Russian leader Vladimir Putin nearly four years after Moscow’s attack of Ukraine. He spoke after dispatching a top adviser to Moscow last week, in the first such meeting since Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. “What did I gain? Confirmation that Russia does not want peace right now,” he said in an interview with several European newspapers including Germany’s Sueddeutsche Zeitung. “But above all, we have rebuilt those channels of discussion at a technical level,” he said in the interview released on Tuesday. “My wish is to share this with my European partners and to have a well-organised European approach,” he added.

Dialogue with Putin should take place without “too many interlocutors, with a given mandate”, he said. Macron said last year he believed Europe should reach back out to Putin, rather than leaving the United States alone to take the lead in negotiations to end Russia’s war against Ukraine. “Whether we like Russia or not, Russia will still be there tomorrow,” Sueddeutsche Zeitung quoted the French president as saying. “It is therefore important that we structure the resumption of a European discussion with the Russians, without naivety, without putting pressure on the Ukrainians — but also so as not to depend on third parties in this discussion.”

The Kremlin said on Tuesday it welcomed Macron’s approach and



Workers clear debris at a heavily damaged thermal power plant in an undisclosed location in Ukraine. — AFP

“It is therefore important that we structure the resumption of a European discussion with the Russians, without naivety, without putting pressure on the Ukrainians — but also so as not to depend on third parties in this discussion.”

EMMANUEL MACRON

was awaiting a concrete proposition for further talks. “Russia has always advocated maintaining dialogue, which, in our view and firm belief, can help resolve the most urgent and most difficult problems,” Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters. After Macron sent his adviser Emmanuel Bonne to the Kremlin last week, Russia’s Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov had said Putin was ready to receive the French leader’s call. “If you want to call and discuss something seriously, then call,” he said in an interview to state-run broadcaster RT.

The French and Russian presidents last spoke in July, in their first known phone talks in over two-and-a-half years. The French leader tried in a series of phone calls in 2022 to warn Putin against attacking Ukraine and travelled to Moscow early that year. He kept up phone contact with Putin after the

attack but talks had ceased after a September 2022 phone call.

Meanwhile, Russian forces killed an 11-year-old girl and her mother in bomb strikes on the embattled city of Sloviansk in eastern Ukraine, local authorities announced on Tuesday. Seven more people were wounded in the attack on the industrial hub that Russian forces are slowly clawing their way towards.

“The dead are an 11-year-old girl and her mother. Among the wounded is a 7-year-old girl,” regional official Vadym Filashkin wrote on social media. He posted images showing several buildings on fire and windows blown out from rooms scattered with debris.

Filashkin said rescue workers were at the scene and that the number of casualties was still being determined. “Everyday in (the) Donetsk region brings new and ongoing war crimes by the Russians,” he added. The wider Donetsk region, where Sloviansk is located, is one of five regions the Kremlin claims as part of Russia.

Ukraine and France have agreed to start joint weapons production, Ukraine’s defence minister said, after hosting his French counterpart in Kyiv. France has been an important ally for Ukraine since Russia launched its invasion nearly four years ago, supplying Kyiv with military aid and political backing. The two countries signed a letter of intent paving the way for “large-scale joint projects in the defence-industrial sector”, Defence Minister Mykhailo Fedorov wrote on Telegram after meeting his French counterpart Catherine Vautrin in Kyiv. — AFP

SECURITY INCIDENT

Heavy gunfire in Guinea’s capital



Heavy security was deployed after automatic gunfire rang out near Conakry’s central prison in the Guinean capital’s administrative centre where the presidency is located. Security blocked access to the area late on Tuesday morning, although all routes to the prison were later reopened. At least three armoured vehicles belonging to the special forces were also visible in front of the prison and three ambulances were seen leaving it. — AFP

COLD FRONT RUSHING

Rain in Colombia displaces thousands



Twenty-two people have died as a rare spell of torrential rain in Colombia left thousands of families displaced. Colombian officials confirmed that 14 of the fatalities came in the departments of Cordoba and Sucre, with at least 9,000 homes affected. A cold front rushing in from the north of the Americas to the Caribbean coast of Colombia increased rainfall last month by 64 per cent compared to the historical average. — AFP

RESCUE ACCIDENT

Helicopter falls in Libya during evacuation



A helicopter has crashed in southeastern Libya, killing a medic and two crew members carrying out a medical evacuation. The chopper went down overnight near an airbase in the Kufra region about 60 kilometres north of the border between Libya and Chad. The aircraft was attempting to evacuate a soldier who had been involved in a road accident in the desert. Two foreign nationals were among those on board who were killed. — AFP

OPINION

Raising resilient children in an uncertain world



HYESHA BARRETT

The writer is a Master Life Coach and NLP Practitioner

WE are raising children in times that feel unpredictable and unsteady. Climate change, global conflict, economic pressure and digital overload shape not only the headlines, but the emotional climate of our homes. Children absorb the world around them, not as information but as tone and energy. They feel what we carry long before they understand the facts. This moment invites us to ask something deeper than how to protect them from every discomfort. It asks how we help them grow the strength that comes from connection and adaptability, rather than fear.

Resilience is not something a child either has or lacks. It is a capacity that develops through relationships and lived experience. When children feel emotionally safe and understood, challenges become opportunities to learn, instead of threats to avoid. Developmental research consistently shows that even one reliable adult who listens, stays present and offers steady support, can dramatically change how a child copes with stress. Connection, more than control, shapes how their nervous system interprets the world, and whether they meet it with curiosity or caution.

Shielding children from every struggle does not build confidence. It quietly teaches them they cannot cope alone. Resilience grows when they face manageable

challenges, stumble, regroup and try again with support nearby. Guided exposure to difficulty helps them develop problem-solving skills, and trust in themselves. They learn not that life is easy, but that they are capable, resourceful and stronger than they imagined.

Emotional literacy is one of the simplest ways to nurture this strength. Helping children name what they feel, and responding with validation teaches them that emotions are signals, not problems. A calm reflection such as “that feels hard right now” allows their body to settle, permitting their thinking brain to come back online. When children understand their inner world, they can regulate it with greater ease and confidence.

Autonomy, within safe limits also matters. Offering age-appropriate choices gives children a sense of agency and responsibility. This is not permissiveness. It is guidance with room to practise. When children experience that their decisions matter, they carry a deeper sense of competence into uncertain situations, and begin to trust their own judgement.

How we model resilience is equally important. Children learn more from what we embody than from what we say. When we pause, breathe, acknowledge mistakes or talk through our own problem-solving,

In an uncertain world, our role is not to eliminate every storm. It is to become the steady presence that teaches them they can weather it. When children feel seen, safe and capable, they grow into adults who meet life with courage, rather than fear.

we show them how to move through stress with steadiness and self-compassion. Our regulation becomes their template.

Simple structure supports this process. Predictable routines around sleep, meals and connection create a sense of safety, even when the outside world feels chaotic. Within that stability, play and creativity invite flexibility, imagination and joy. These small everyday experiences, quietly strengthen a child’s capacity to adapt and recover.

Resilience is not toughness or emotional suppression. It is the ability to stay open to life, to bend without breaking, and to trust that support exists when things feel hard. Children do not need certainty about the future. They need the lived experience of being supported as they navigate it, knowing they are not alone in their struggles. Over time, these small moments of safety accumulate into deep inner strength, that carries them through life.

In an uncertain world, our role is not to eliminate every storm. It is to become the steady presence that teaches them they can weather it. When children feel seen, safe and capable, they grow into adults who meet life with courage, rather than fear. That quiet inner confidence, built day by day through connection and care, may be the most protective gift we can offer.

RISE OF ‘WRECKING-BALL POLITICS’ IN FOCUS AT MUNICH SECURITY MEET

BRYN STOLE AND FEMKE COLBORNE

The global rise of “wrecking-ball politics” will be the focus of this week’s Munich Security Conference, organisers said on Monday, with US Secretary of State Marco Rubio expected to lead a large US delegation.

More than 60 heads of state and government and around 100 foreign and defence ministers are due to participate in the security policy talks from February 13 to 15.

The annual meeting in the southern German city was upended last year when US Vice-President JD Vance delivered a blistering attack on European democracy and EU immigration and free speech policies.

Although Vance is not expected this year, Rubio will head a US delegation that will also include around 50 members of the US Congress, Wolfgang Ischinger, director of the event, told a press conference.

Asked whether he expected Rubio to replicate Vance’s attack on Europe, Ischinger replied: “I am assuming... that we can expect the US Secretary of State to talk about US foreign policy and not about issues that do not directly fall under his purview.”

A report released by the conference on Monday warned that the world has entered “a period of wrecking-ball politics” where “sweeping destruction — rather than careful reforms and policy corrections — is the order of the day”.

The 2026 Munich Security Report describes US President Donald Trump as the “most powerful of those who take the axe to existing rules and institutions”, with profound implications for trade, security and development elsewhere in the world.

Trump’s efforts to dismantle parts of the US-dominated global order set up in the aftermath of World War II are echoed in political movements elsewhere in the world, according to the report, titled “Under Destruction”.

That poses profound challenges for countries that have long benefited from the US-led international order, such as American allies in Europe and Asia.

Many have come to understand that “if they continue to be bystanders to bulldozer politics, they will end up at the mercy of great power politics and should not be surprised to find cherished rules and institutions in rubble”, according to the report. — AFP

For Oman, peace is part of its culture and practice

FEBRUARY 6, 2026, was a day of significant implications. The world’s eyes were fixed on Muscat, awaiting the outcome of the US-Iranian negotiations. Initially, the US preferred Ankara while Tehran insisted on Muscat.

Iran’s choice of Muscat to host the talks indicates its confidence that the Sultanate of Oman is best positioned to manage them, especially given that the two countries had previously held nuclear talks in Muscat in 2015. However, the moral support Oman brought to the talks was significant, being held at the residence of Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister. This signifies that peace in Oman is not merely a policy, but a social culture that precedes and transcends all political considerations.

Friday’s round of negotiations gave hope to the world, with many countries, most notably Iran and Oman, issuing optimistic statements. However, we should not go so far with this optimism as the US hasn’t yet explicitly revealed its position. In fact, it has issued a new package of sanctions against Iran and continues to bolster its forces in the region.

Why is the West so insistent on striking Iran? The objective is global hegemony following the collapse of the Soviet Union. After the Islamic civilisation’s capitulation, the next target will be China and then India.

If negotiations fail, the coming war will not be merely a war of economic interests, but a war aimed at entrenching Western values as the fundamental driving force of the superpowers in all their political,



Friday’s round of negotiations gave hope to the world, with many countries lauding the role of Oman in de-escalation.



KHAMIS BIN RASHID AL ADAWI

The writer interested in issues of thought and history, and the author of the book ‘Politics with Religion’

economic and technological aspects.

If a war were to engulf Iran and topple its current regime, the aftermath would not be a tour to Mashhad or a vacation in Isfahan. Throughout history, all wars have demonstrated that the collapse of states, especially major powers like Iran, plunges the entire region into chaos. The post-war period would have both direct and indirect consequences, including:

- A resurgence of violence in the region. Al Qaeda and IS are still active, awaiting opportune moments to launch fierce attacks.
- The GCC states will be directly affected, as they host a large Iranian community. Iranian merchants are linked to Iran, whether through imported goods or through banking and economic institutions.
- Muslims generally view Israel as an occupying force in Palestine, the land of Al Aqsa Mosque, and believe that many of the tragedies that have befallen them in the

modern era are due to it or that Israel has a hand in them. The West, which is betting on the peace process in the region and the subsequent normalisation with Israel, must forget all of this. The fall of Iran would have far-reaching consequences, either leading to another sectarian conflict or prompting Muslims to realise that their countries will remain unstable as long as Israel exists. Both scenarios threaten the Western presence and interests in the region.

A major shift in the global geopolitical landscape would occur. The fall of Iran would reshape the region to the interest of China and Russia. The West, led by the US, has failed to establish equitable relations with Muslims due to its hegemony, the plundering of resources, and the wars it has inflicted upon the region. This transformation will not resemble the current relationship; rather, the region will strive for a form of parity that respects its sovereignty, interests, cultures, and religions.

In conclusion, Oman, a House of Peace, under the leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, serves as a model for the philosophy of peace in the world. It has come to represent a humanitarian philosophy that says that peace cannot prevail unless it is deeply rooted in society and becomes ingrained as a social culture and a daily practice. We pray to Almighty Allah that this house will succeed in extinguishing the war whose flames are raging hour by hour, especially since Oman has accustomed the world to the success of its peace efforts, its ability to resolve complex issues and its role in pushing them towards de-escalation.

Quiet yet effective diplomacy at the right time



SAMUEL KUTTY

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

CONFLICT is an inevitable aspect of human life, arising from differences in viewpoints, beliefs, values, and priorities. Polarisation paralyses governments, disrupts communities, and erodes public trust. Moreover, it is not confined to any single region or ideology — the problem is global.

In politically divided societies, shouting the loudest does not necessarily resolve the issue at hand. In fact, the more people dig in their heels, the less likely anyone is to listen. However, to prevent conflicts from escalating into violence and to promote peace, engaging in dialogue is essential.

Although a relatively novel concept, dialogue has only recently gained recognition as a crucial peacebuilding activity, an important complement to mediation, and a preferred approach in reconciliation initiatives.

In diplomatic language, different terms are used to describe exchanges between two opposing parties. More broadly, the terms dialogue or negotiation are regularly used, or more indiscriminately, talks or discussions or, more ambiguously, exchange of views.

In recent years, the world has witnessed a rise in armed conflicts, often characterised by intense violence, divided armed factions, and significant impacts on civilians. Major conflicts in Ukraine, Gaza, Sudan, and Myanmar have resulted in widespread displacement and humanitarian emergencies.

In addition to these ongoing conflicts, reports indicate a growing US naval presence in the region, prompting speculation that the US could be preparing for another Middle East war, this time with Iran. Yet, despite the familiar rhetoric of escalation, much of what is unfolding appears to be more of a “good start” to talks than preparation for war.

The two nations held indirect talks on February 6 in the Sultanate of Oman regarding Tehran's nuclear programme, agreeing to continue negotiations “in a very positive atmosphere.” These talks, the first since nuclear negotiations between Iran and the United States collapsed last year, also underscore the value of Oman’s discreet diplomacy.

Oman’s cordial ties with Iran will continue to be significant for all Gulf nations, specifically, and for the world more broadly. Oman has primarily acted as a mediator in discussions aimed at alleviating tensions among countries in the region and beyond.

Leveraging its GCC membership and unique ties with Tehran, Oman has created diplomatic opportunities for other Arab nations to engage with Iran during critical moments when direct involvement would have posed greater political challenges.

Although the exact details of the negotiations remain unclear, CNN quoted US President Donald Trump aboard Air Force One saying, “We likewise had very good talks on Iran. Iran looks like it wants to make a deal very badly. We have to see what that deal is.

Oman’s cordial ties with Iran will continue to be significant for all Gulf nations specifically, and for the world more broadly. Oman has primarily acted as a mediator in discussions aimed at alleviating tensions among countries in the region and beyond

But I think Iran looks like they want to make a deal very badly.”

At the same time, Iran’s Foreign Minister, Abbas Araghchi, was quoted by Iranian media as saying, “Our discussions are focused exclusively on the nuclear issue, and we are not addressing any other subjects with the Americans.”

What is significant is that, after years of stalled negotiations, abandoned agreements, and punitive posturing, even limited engagement represents a shift away from the reflexive reliance on threats and sanctions.

Just as noteworthy about the Muscat discussions is that their significance lies more in what they prevented than in what they accomplished. A collapse would likely have intensified military concerns at a time when the region is already saturated with troops. Continuing, even cautiously, allows time to explore options for peace.

This suggests that negotiations, despite their imperfections, remain the only enduring means to address conflicts with significant regional consequences. In addition to regional instability, these conflicts also significantly impact markets, global security, and the lives of many people.

Those advocating for military action against Iran should confront the reality rather than merely engaging in rhetoric. Any assault would not be a neat, limited operation; it would very likely cause innocent casualties, escalate regional conflicts, and perpetuate cycles of retaliation.

FROM THE SKY, NGO SEARCHES FOR MIGRANT BOATS IN DISTRESS

MICHELE CATTANI

Every hour is crucial when searching for distressed west African migrant boats in the Atlantic, where the long route and harsh weather easily spell disaster, a non-profit that conducts aerial surveillance said during a recent mission.

AFP rode along with the organisation Humanitarian Pilots Initiative (HPI) as it raced to locate several missing pirogues - long, rickety canoes - that had left The Gambia but never showed up at their final destination. The mission: search an area larger than Switzerland, from hundreds of metres in the air, with an aim of rendering aid before it is too late.

“People could be dead or dying from dehydration, heat stroke or any other conditions,” pilot Omar El Manfalouty said.

Migrants departing from west Africa and travelling up the Atlantic are usually trying to reach Europe via the Canary Islands off northwest Africa. The Spanish archipelago is the jumping off point for their continued journey onward to the European continent. With many recent departures taking place from further south in The Gambia and Guinea, migrants are now spending longer at sea and facing more hardships. More than 3,000 migrants died in 2025 while attempting to reach Spain clandestinely, according to the Spanish NGO Caminando Fronteras. While HPI has operated since 2016 in the central Mediterranean, it is a relative newcomer to the Atlantic.

In the Mediterranean, it has already helped spot more than 1,000 boats, alerting international NGO rescue ships which then go and help. AFP flew with HPI on its third mission in nine months in the Atlantic, riding for several days in the NGO’s Beechcraft Baron 58 nicknamed “Seabird”.

“The Atlantic Ocean is huge. It’s a vast area and it’s impossible to cover it in its entirety,” said El Manfalouty. “We brought our longest-range aircraft here and we’re focusing on the area which other actors cannot reach, approximately between 300 and 500 nautical miles from the Canaries,” he said. Once HPI spots a vessel, it sends an alert for emergency response to nearby merchant ships so that they can provide immediate support. From there, Spain’s maritime safety and rescue authority, Salvamento Marítimo, takes over.

“Having an aircraft in the area to support from the air with 10 times the speed (of boats) makes a lot of sense,” said Samira, the mission’s tactical coordinator who asked not to use her last name due to threats the NGO receives in several European countries. One morning in January the crew received an alert from another NGO that a boat which had departed The Gambia carrying 103 people, including nine women and three children, was missing. — AFP

The dangerous overuse of AI in today’s world

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE is everywhere now. It writes our emails, generates our images, answers our questions, helps companies hire workers and even assists students with homework. AI is often presented as the future, a tool that will make life faster, easier and more efficient. And in some ways, it does. But the world’s rapid and excessive dependence on AI is creating serious dangers that are being ignored. From environmental destruction to misinformation and the decline of critical thinking, the costs of AI may outweigh the benefits if society continues down this path without limits.

One of the most overlooked consequences of AI is its impact on the environment. Many people assume that AI is “clean” because it exists online, but the reality is that AI requires enormous physical infrastructure. AI systems run on massive data centres filled with servers that consume huge amounts of energy and must be constantly cooled to avoid overheating. Cooling these facilities often requires extreme amounts of water.

With more people using AI generators daily, whether for school, entertainment or business, water consumption continues to rise. This is happening at a time when the world is already facing a growing water crisis. The United Nations has recently warned that we are now using more freshwater than the Earth can sustainably provide. In other words, we are consuming water faster than nature can replace it. Adding AI’s increasing water demand into this equation makes the crisis even worse. It is disturbing that a technology used to generate memes, essays and artificial images is contributing to the depletion of one of the planet’s most essential resources.

A second major danger of AI is its role in spreading misinformation. AI-generated photos, videos and audio are becoming so realistic that it is increasingly difficult to tell what is real and what is fabricated.



One of the most overlooked consequences of AI is its impact on the environment.

This has enormous implications for politics, journalism and public trust.

Recently, for example, a fake image spread widely on social media showing New York Mayor Zohran Mamdani as a child alongside Jeffrey Epstein and other powerful US figures. The photo looked convincing, but it was completely AI-generated. This is not just harmless Internet content, it is an example of how easily AI can be used to manipulate narratives, damage reputations and fuel conspiracy theories.

In a world where people already struggle to agree on basic facts, AI makes the situation far more dangerous. If anyone can create a realistic fake image or video in seconds, truth becomes harder to defend. Misinformation spreads faster than corrections and the public becomes more cynical, more divided and more vulnerable to propaganda. AI is turning reality itself into something that can be edited, fabricated and weaponised.

A third concern is the growing dependence on AI in schools and universities. Students are increasingly using AI to complete assignments, solve math problems, write essays and even generate



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SPORTS

AL NAHDA VS OMAN CLUB



HM CUP TROPHY TOUR AHEAD OF FINAL SHOWDOWN

SPORTS REPORTER
MUSCAT, FEB 10

As part of the promotional build-up to the final of the His Majesty the Sultan’s Cup Football Championship, the prestigious trophy is touring several wilayats of Muscat Governorate in a community-focused initiative aimed at bringing the event closer to football fans and enhancing public engagement ahead of the showpiece match.

The trophy tour began in Muttrah on February 7, before moving to Bausher on February 8, followed by Muscat on February 9. The tour continues to Al Seeb on February 10 and Al Amerat on February 11, before concluding in Qurayat on February 12, 2026, giving supporters across the governorate the opportunity to view the trophy and capture memorable moments.

The Sultan’s Cup final is scheduled to take place on February 14 at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher, under the auspices of HH Sayyid Bilarab bin Haitham al Said, Minister of State and Governor of Muscat. The eagerly awaited final will bring together Al Nahda Club and Oman Club in what is expected to be a highly competitive encounter.

Meanwhile, the Oman Football Association has appointed international referee Qasim al Hatmi to officiate the final. He will be assisted by Rashid al Ghaithi and Omar al Alawi, with Ali al Ajmi named as the fourth official.

The Video Assistant Referee (VAR) team will be led by Mohammed al Manai, assisted by Jassim al Ameri, while Ahmed Jameel Bait Jameel will serve as the fifth official. Ali al Shukairi has been appointed as the referees’ assessor.

The organisation of the trophy tour, alongside the selection of an experienced officiating team, underlines the importance of the HM Cup final, widely regarded as the pinnacle of domestic football in the Sultanate, with a strong turnout expected for a fitting climax to the season.



Al Nahda hold Al Shabab to dramatic draw in Gulf CL



Al Nahda and Al Shabab players in action during their Gulf Champions League second-leg match at the Seeb Stadium on Tuesday. — **Ruqaya al Lawati**

RIYADH AL BALUSHI
@riyadhbalach

AL NAHDA of Oman and Saudi Arabia’s Al Shabab played out an exciting draw in their Gulf Club Championship encounter at the Seeb Stadium on Tuesday night in front of a passionate crowd that added to the intensity of the contest.

Both teams featured several high-profile players, including a number of international representatives, giving the match a strong competitive and technical edge. Al Nahda relied on their experienced national team players, while Al Shabab fielded a squad packed with internationally renowned names.

The opening half saw balanced exchanges between the two sides. Al Shabab enjoyed more attacking possession, while Al Nahda created the more dangerous chances. Al Nahda’s Amir Alaa Kanani came close to breaking the deadlock with three attempts on goal, but Al Shabab goalkeeper Marcelo Grohe produced excellent saves to deny him.

At the other end, Al Shabab’s George Brownhill tested Al Nahda goalkeeper Fayeze al Rushaidi with two shots, both of which were successfully dealt with. The first half ended goalless at 0–0.

Al Nahda began the second half strongly, launching four attacks within the opening five minutes. In the 53rd minute, Perry Jean Olumo came close to

scoring when his powerful effort struck the post and went out.

Despite Al Nahda’s pressure, Al Shabab took the lead in the 58th minute through Unai Hernández, who found the net to give his side the advantage.

Al Nahda continued to press in search of an equaliser, backed by strong crowd support, and their persistence paid off in the final moments. In the 90th minute, Mohammed al Habsi scored the equaliser, securing a valuable point for the Omani side.

The match ended in a draw, with Al Nahda now turning their attention to their next Gulf Club Championship fixture, an away clash against Al Rayyan of Qatar.

Gulf Youth Ice Hockey Challenge Cup concludes

SPORTS REPORTER
MUSCAT, FEB 10

The Fun Zone Ice Skating Hall in Muscat witnessed a memorable conclusion to the Gulf Youth Ice Hockey Challenge Cup, organised jointly by the Omani Skating Sports Committee and the Abu Dhabi Winter Sports Club.

The tournament delivered exciting competition among eight teams representing some of the region’s most promising young talents. Teams were distributed as follows: Sultanate of Oman participated with three teams competing in the Cubs and Juniors categories and from the United Arab Emirates, five teams representing clubs from Abu Dhabi, Dubai and Al Ain.

The teams competed across two groups, with four teams in the Cubs division and four in the Juniors division, creating a lively and highly competitive atmosphere on the ice at Fun Zone.



In Cubs Division, Dubai Sandstorm claimed first place, Oman secured second.

UAE TEAMS TOP, OMAN SECOND
The championship concluded with strong technical performances and thrilling contests. In Cubs Division, Dubai Sandstorm claimed first place, while Oman secured

second after a heroic match that ended in a draw and was decided by penalty shootouts. In the Juniors Division, Al Ain Theebbs were crowned champions, with Abu Dhabi Storms finishing runners-up. The closing ceremony was

attended by Saud al Aufi, Chairman of the Omani Skating Sports Committee, and Khalid al Habsi, Director of the Abu Dhabi Winter Sports Club Academy and Head of Delegation. Both officials presented trophies and medals to the winning teams.

The strong presence of parents from both Oman and the UAE provided exceptional moral support and motivation for the young players, adding a vibrant and positive spirit to the event. Organisers noted that this edition continues the success achieved during the previous tournament held in Al Ain.

At the conclusion of the championship, the organising committee expressed its sincere thanks and appreciation to all contributors, organisers and parents who played a vital role in the event’s success, helping deliver a tournament worthy of the growing stature of ice hockey in the region.

FINAL STAGE



The five clubs earned qualification by finishing at the top of their respective groups in the first round.

BEACH HANDBALL
YOUTH LEAGUE SET
FOR GRAND FINALE
ON SUNDAY

RIYADH AL BALUSHI
@riyadhbhaluch

The lineup of clubs advancing to the second stage of the Youth Beach Handball League (born in 2008 and above) for the 2025-26 sports season has been finalised following the conclusion of the first round of the competition. Defending champions Muscat Club, along with Al Oruba, Saham, Khasab, and Al Ittihad, have secured their places in the decisive phase of the tournament.

The league will conclude on Sunday, under the auspices of Adel bin Khadem bin Saeed al Zari, Chairman of Masirah Club, with the final matches scheduled to kick off at the sand court of the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher.

The five clubs earned qualification by finishing at the top of their respective groups in the first round. Saham topped Group 1, followed by Khasab in second place, while Muscat Club claimed first position in Group 2 with Al Oruba finishing second, Al Ittihad advanced from Group 3 after dominating their group. Group 1 matches, held at the Sohar Sports Complex, produced closely contested results, with Khasab defeating Al Khabourah, Saham overcoming Al Rustaq and later Khasab, while Al Salam recorded a victory over Al Khabourah and Al Rustaq edged past Al Salam, confirming Saham's top position in a highly competitive group.

IMPRESSIVE MUSCAT

In Group 2, hosted at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher, Muscat continued their impressive run as they strengthened their title defence with consecutive victories, including key wins over Masirah and Al Oruba.

Al Oruba also registered an important win against Al Musannah, while Masirah defeated Al Shabab and Al Musannah claimed victory over Al Shabab in a group marked by strong technical performances.

Meanwhile, Al Ittihad asserted full control of Group 3 by defeating Salalah Club in both the home and away fixtures by two sets to nil, securing qualification with confidence.

The league's opening round had already set the tone for an exciting season, with tightly matched contests and the emergence of several promising young talents.

Attention now turns to the final stage of the championship, where Muscat Club will aim to retain their title, while the remaining qualified teams seek to dethrone the holders and mount a serious challenge for the league crown, in what is expected to be a thrilling climax to the season.

Ahmed al Wahaibi clinches 30th Assarain Golf Classic crown

MUSCAT: Ahmed al Wahaibi of Oman emerged champion at the 30th Assarain Golf Classic after overcoming stiff competition from a strong field at Ghala Golf Club. The prestigious tournament was held on February 6 and 7 and attracted around 135 golfers, underscoring its status as one of Oman's premier golfing events.

Expressing his delight after the victory, Ahmed said, "The Assarain Golf Classic is a fantastic tournament, and it feels great to win a competition of this stature. I would like to thank my playing partners over the last few days. It was a pleasure to be part of this event, and I sincerely thank the sponsor, Assarain Group of Companies."

Ahmed al Farsi, GM of Ghala Golf Club and event manager, praised



The prestigious tournament was held on February 6 and 7 at the Ghala Golf Club and attracted around 135 golfers.

the atmosphere and participation at the tournament. "The atmosphere was electric from the first day. I was truly amazed by the participation and overall feel of the 2026 Assarain Golf Classic. We were oversubscribed and had to implement a cut-off for players, but overall it was a tremendous occasion," he said.

Crowning the final day was a high profile prize giving ceremony,

where HH Sayyid Azzan bin Qais al Said, Guest of Honour, presented the awards to the winners amid an impressive gathering of dignitaries.

Continuing its long-standing tradition, the Assarain Golf Classic concluded with the raffle draw for a Hublot watch, which was won by Fahad al Kitani.

Ibrahim al Wahaibi, Director of Assarain Group, said, "I would like to

Farhan, spinners guide
Pakistan to easy USA win

OPENER

Sahibzada Farhan hit a solid half-century while spinner Usman Tariq grabbed three wickets as Pakistan downed the United States by 32 runs in a T20 World Cup Group A game in Colombo on Tuesday.

The 29-year-old hit five sixes and six fours in his 41-ball 73 and was aided by a brilliant 32-ball 46 by Babar Azam (four fours, one six) to guide Pakistan to a strong 190-9 total at the Sinhalese Sports Club ground.

Their spinners then checked the inexperienced USA batting with Tariq taking 3-27 and Shadab Khan 2-26 to restrict their opponents to 158-8 in 20 overs.

The win avenged Pakistan's shock defeat at the hands of USA in the T20 World Cup two years ago and handed them a second win in as many games following their close three-wicket win over the Netherlands on Saturday.

For the USA, Shubham Ranjane top scored with a valiant 30-ball 51 including three sixes and as many fours before he fell to pace bowler Shaheen Shah Afridi, who was playing his 100th T20 international.

Opener Shayan Jahangir muscled his way to an attractive 34-ball 49 studded with two sixes and five fours while Milind Kumar scored 29 before United States were derailed from 123-3 to lose the match.

Earlier, Farhan and fellow opener Saim Ayub, who scored a 17-ball 19 with two sixes, put on 54 in five overs.

Pakistan then lost two wickets in the



Pakistan's Sahibzada Farhan plays a shot during the 2026 ICC Men's T20 World Cup group stage match between Pakistan and USA at the Sinhalese Sports Club (SSC) Ground in Colombo on Tuesday. — AFP

sixth over of their innings, bowled by Shadley van Schalkwyk.

Ayub was caught off a slower one while skipper Salman Agha holed out on the deep square-leg boundary for one.

Farhan and Azam took control with an 81-run third-wicket stand as Pakistan cut loose in the middle overs.

Farhan passed 1,000 T20 international

runs in his 41st match before he was caught in the covers off spinner Harmeet Singh in the 16th over.

Shadab Khan launched an assault to score 30 off 12 balls before Pakistan lost five wickets for just 13 runs in the last two overs.

Schalkwyk was the best USA bowler with 4-25, following his four-wicket haul against India in the 29-run defeat on Saturday. — AFP

New Zealand set new T20 World Cup
record partnership to crush UAE



New Zealand's Finn Allen (R) and Tim Seifert celebrate after their team's victory at the end of the 2026 ICC Men's T20 World Cup group stage match against United Arab Emirates in Chennai. — AFP

CHENNAI, India: Finn Allen and Tim Seifert posted a T20 World Cup record partnership of 175 as New Zealand crushed the United Arab Emirates by 10 wickets with almost five overs to spare in Chennai on Tuesday.

Chasing the UAE's 173-6, Seifert struck an unbeaten 89 and Allen scored 84 not out as they pummelled the UAE bowling to all parts of the ground in an unbroken opening stand.

The opening pair crashed 78 from the first six-over power play and posted their century stand off only 8.3 overs.

Seifert hit one of his three huge sixes to clinch the contest after just 15.2 overs, he also struck 12 fours. Allen had five sixes and five fours.

They beat the previous

record for any wicket at a T20 World Cup — an unbroken 170 by England openers Alex Hales and Jos Buttler against India in the semifinal of the 2022 edition at the Adelaide Oval.

"The main thing is that we're playing how we want to play, especially me and Finn putting pressure on the bowlers in the power play," said Seifert, who was named player of the match.

"Every game's going to be a little bit different, every ground's going to be different.

"So in a World Cup, you've just got to be able to adapt to the conditions you're playing in."

Seifert said he was unaware the pair had posted a new World Cup record partnership for any wicket.

"No, I didn't know that," he said. "I'm not much of a stats

guy, but look, we'll take it."

The UAE's 173-6 was largely thanks to their captain Muhammad Waseem's 66 not out.

Choosing to bat first, Waseem and Alishan Sharafu put on 107 for the second wicket.

It took a sensational piece of New Zealand fielding to break the partnership.

Mark Chapman intercepted a Sharafu slog-sweep a whisker inside the boundary and before he stepped over the ropes relayed the ball to Daryl Mitchell to complete the dismissal.

The 31-year-old Waseem, who was one of only three current UAE players to play in their last appearance in a T20 World Cup in 2022, hit four fours and three sixes in facing 45 balls. — AFP

congratulate all the winners in their respective categories and thank all the participants. With the success of the 2026 event, we are committed to making the Assarain Golf Classic bigger and better in the coming years while maintaining the high professional standards of hosting one of the oldest golf tournaments in the Sultanate."

The Assarain Golf Classic is supported by Hublot from Mistal.

ASSARAIN GOLF CLASSIC 2026
WINNERS LIST

Men's Gross: 1. Ahmed al Wahaibi (69+74=143 Gross), 2. Suan Long Lai (76+72=148 Gross), 3. Ruwan Jayasinghe (73+76=149 Gross C/B), 4. Nasih al Barwani (74+75=149 Gross); Men's Net: 1. Nasih al Barwani (67+68=135Net C/B), 2. Faris al Busaidy (68+67=135 Net C/B), 3. Ahmed al Wahaibi (65+70=135 Net), 4.

Siddharth Bhardwaj (72+67=139 Net); Ladies Gross: 1. Lynn Casey (71+72=143 Gross), 2. Venus Mangadlao (91+92=183 Gross); Net: 1. Suna Jackson (66+71=137 Net), 2. Huwaida al Barwani (70+73=143 Net); Junior Gross: Dineth Jayasinghe (80+78=158 Gross), Net: Taimur al Busaidy (73+67=140 Net) On Course Features: Day 1: NTP 2nd Hole: Rahul Singh, NTP 5th Hole: Karl Armstrong, NTP 12th Hole: Taimur al Busaidy, NTP 15th Hole: Mubarak al Naamani, 2nd Best Shot 18th Hole: Azzan al Rumhy, Longest Drive Hole 3: Pransh Jagwani; Day 2: NTP 2nd Hole: Ali Musbah, NTP 5th Hole: Amjad Al Toky, NTP 12th Hole: Ravi Seshan, NTP 15th Hole: Alexander Rose, 2nd Best Shot 18th Hole: Bharath Gopal, Longest Drive Hole 13: Dineth Jayasinghe, Day 1 Best Net – Fahad al Kitani 67 Net, Day 2 Best Net – Hussain Dad al Balushi 66 Net, Day 1 Best Gross – Ahmed al Wahaibi 69 Gross, Day 2 Best Gross – Suan Long Lai 72 Gross, Luxury Watch winner: Fahad al Kitani.

SPORTS

STAGE 4 ACTION

GENERAL AFTER STAGE 4		
1.	MAURO SCHMID TEAM JAYCO ALULA	16H 10' 03"
2.	CHRISTIAN SCARONI XDS ASTANA TEAM	+ 04"
3.	MARTIN TJØTTA UNO-X MOBILITY	+ 09"
4.	SEBASTIAN BERWICK CAJA RURAL-SEGUROS RGA	+ 13"
5.	FERNANDO DIEGO PESCADOR MOVISTAR TEAM	+ 17"
6.	CHRISTOPHER HARPER PINARELLO-QUE Pasa PRO CYCLING TEAM	+ 21"
7.	CRISTIAN RODRIGUEZ XDS ASTANA TEAM	+ 21"
8.	PAUL DOUBLE TEAM JAYCO ALULA	+ 25"
9.	DIEGO UISSI XDS ASTANA TEAM	+ 28"
10.	NAIRO QUINTANA MOVISTAR TEAM	+ 30"



Team Jayco AlUla Swiss rider Mauro Schmid celebrates on the podium wearing the red jersey of the overall leader after Stage 4. — AFP



Norwegian rider Erlend Blikra celebrates on the podium after winning Stage 4. — AFP



Uno-X Mobility Norwegian rider Erlend Blikra celebrates while crossing the finish line to win the 4th stage of the Tour of Oman cycling race from Al Sawadi to Sohar, on February 10, 2026. — AFP

BLIKRA SPRINTS TO STAGE 4 TRIUMPH

SCHMID KEEPS RED JERSEY AHEAD OF FINAL STAGE

ANUROOP ATHIPARAMBATH
@anuroop_ath

NORWEGIAN RIDER ERLEND BLIKRA of Uno-X Mobility prevailed over his rivals on the line in the Tour of Oman 2026 ‘sprinters special’ Stage 4 as Mauro Schmid kept his red jersey in Sohar on Tuesday. Sprinter Blikra secured his credentials in the penultimate stage with a time of three hours nine minutes and two seconds as the bunch sprint finish put 74 riders with the same time among the 111 cyclists who completed the race.

Swiss rider Schmid of Team Jayco AlUla retained his four-second advantage over Christian Scaroni (25th) of XDS Astana Team by placing 31st in Stage 4 as both clocked 03:09:02.

Blikra powered to victory over the 146.8 km coastal stage, which started from Al Sawadi Beach in Barka and concluded at the Sohar Corniche. The golden jersey for the most aggressive rider went once again to Poland’s Patryk Goszczurny of Team Visma / Lease a Bike, while the green jersey for the points classification was claimed by French rider Baptiste Veistroffer of Lotto–Intermarché. The white jersey for best under-23 rider was awarded to Norwegian cyclist Martin Tjøtta of Uno-X Mobility.

Shaikh Saud bin Mohammed al Hinai, Wali of Sohar, was the chief guest for the awards ceremony.

Speaking after his victory, Blikra expressed pride in his performance. “I feel extremely happy and proud to win such an important stage of Tour of Oman. The competition was intense from the very first kilometres and the stage required high concentration and tactical discipline. The support of my teammates was decisive in achieving this result.”

BIG RELIEF
The Norwegian sprinter was relieved after

TOUR OF OMAN STAGE 4 RESULTS	
(Read as rank, rider, country, team, time)	
1.	Erlend Blikra (NOR) – Uno-X Mobility – 03:09:02
2.	Emmanuel Houcou (FRA) – Pinarello-Q36.5 Pro CT – 03:09:02
3.	Juan Sebastian Molano (COL) – UAE Team Emirates XRG – 03:09:02
4.	Stanislaw Aniolkowski (POL) – Cofidis – 03:09:02
5.	Stefano Oldani (ITA) – Caja Rural-Seguros RGA – 03:09:02
6.	Rick Pluimers (NED) – Tudor Pro CT – 03:09:02
7.	Fernando Gaviria (COL) – Caja Rural-Seguros RGA – 03:09:02
8.	Amaury Capiot (BEL) – Team Jayco AlUla – 03:09:02
9.	Ivan Garcia Cortina (ESP) – Movistar Team – 03:09:02
10.	Emilien Jeanniere (FRA) – TotalEnergies – 03:09:02

the top-class finish.

“It’s a relief to start the season this way. I’ll be able to keep doing my best with even more confidence. It was a real team effort today, and not just from the riders. I crashed yesterday and had to receive quite a lot of treatment from our physio to be fit today. In the final kilometre, the wind was coming from the right, so I wanted to be on the left-hand side. It was fairly straightforward since it was a straight finish. We were already at the front coming out of the roundabouts in the final kilometres, so it wasn’t too complicated after that. In any case, I was able to launch my sprint without stress, on the left side as I wanted, and it worked.”

“The Tour of Oman is exceptional in terms of organisation, diverse routes, and stunning natural scenery. It provides riders with a true test of both physical and technical readiness. This win gives me extra motivation and we look forward to a strong finish that reflects the teamwork we have shown throughout the race,” Blikra added.

Stage 4 featured a fast and tactical coastal route, starting from Al Sawadi Beach, passing through Al Musannah Roundabout, Al Tharmad, Barcelo Al Musannah Resort, Wudam Al Sahil, Al Suwaiq Fort, and continuing along Sultan Qaboos Road towards Sohar, via Al Khabourah and Saham. The route passed key landmarks in Sohar, including Bahjat Al Anzar Farm and the Sultan Qaboos Mosque, before turning near the Al Batinah North Governor’s Office and concluding at the Sohar Corniche.

AL JABAL AL AKHDHAR STAGE
All the eyes now turn to Wednesday’s fifth and final stage, a 156-kilometre decisive showdown starting from Nizwa Fort and concluding at Al Jabal Al Akhdhar (Green Mountain). The stage will combine speed, tactical intelligence, and endurance, passing historic landmarks and open roads before the demanding mountain finish determines the champion of the 15th edition of Tour of Oman.

The complexity of the route, combined with wind conditions, team coordination and pace control, makes it one of the most decisive and technically demanding stages of the Tour.

A bunch sprint finish was the expected scenario at the end of the coastal route that concluded in Sohar. The two attackers of the day, caught with 3 km to go, made way for a hard-fought showdown won by Blikra. The Norwegian sprinter, who had finished fourth in the opening stage, finished ahead of French sprinter Emmanuel Houcou, 22, who came close to a major upset, and Juan Sebastian Molano, the winner at Bimmah Sink Hole three days ago. The sprinters’ battle did not affect the overall classification leaders. Schmid will start Wednesday’s final stage in the red jersey, but to keep it he will have to withstand the assault of the pure climbers on the way to the finish at Green Mountain.



MUSCAT STOCK EXCHANGE
6,892.434

BUSINESS

CRUDE OIL
OMAN \$68.00
BRENT \$69.07
LIGHT \$64.30



SHORTTAKES



Hotel occupancy rates increased to 56.7 per cent, up from 49.9 per cent recorded a year earlier.

HOTEL REVENUES IN OMAN RISE

MUSCAT: Revenues of three- to five-star hotels in the Sultanate of Oman rose by 22.2 per cent by the end of December 2025, reaching around **ﷵ** 297.316 million compared with the same period of 2024. Hotel occupancy rates also increased to 56.7 per cent, up from 49.9 per cent recorded a year earlier.

Tourism sector statistics for December 2025 showed a 10.8 per cent rise in the number of guests staying in three- to

The number of Omani guests grew by 6.6 per cent to reach 857,481, while guests from Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries increased by 7.2 per cent to 212,798. In contrast, the number of visitors from other Arab countries declined by 1.6 per cent to 101,377.

five-star hotels, totalling 2,376,955 visitors compared with the corresponding period of 2024.

Data issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information indicated that the number of Omani guests grew by 6.6 per cent to reach 857,481, while

guests from Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries increased by 7.2 per cent to 212,798. In contrast, the number of visitors from other Arab countries declined by 1.6 per cent to 101,377.

The number of hotel guests from Asia rose by 11 per cent to 345,526, while visitors from Africa climbed by 20.2 per cent to 15,321.

European guest numbers expanded by 22.3 per cent to 659,571, while arrivals from the Americas increased by 28.6 per cent to 79,420. Guests from Oceania also recorded a 25.2 per cent rise, reaching 41,386 by the end of December 2025.

These indicators underline the strong performance of Oman’s hotel sector, supported by sustained growth in tourism activity. — ONA

No merger between Oman Air and SalamAir

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, FEB 10

ENG Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, said there is no merger between Oman Air and SalamAir, amidst widespread social media speculation, adding that what is being discussed is a government-led purchase/acquisition — not an operational merger.

In an exclusive interview with the *Observer*, Al Maawali drew a clear distinction between “merger” and “acquisition”, saying the transaction being considered would be a purchase by the government, not by Oman Air.

He said more details would be announced “soon”.

Separately, the minister said an issue that had driven up aircraft-fuel costs at Salalah Airport has been resolved, following lengthy discussions that concluded around two weeks ago.

The issue dates back to a tender launched by Oman Airports to operate aviation-fuel services at Salalah and other airports.

Al Maawali said costs were inflated by a complex supply chain involving multiple transport and handling stages: fuel is sourced from Sohar Refinery, shipped to storage at Port of Salalah, then moved by truck to airport tanks before being pumped into aircraft — adding shipping, storage and

Al Maawali said costs were inflated by a complex supply chain involving multiple transport and handling stages: fuel is sourced from Sohar Refinery, shipped to storage at Port of Salalah, then moved by truck to airport tanks before being pumped into aircraft — adding shipping, storage and handling expenses.



‘What is being discussed is a government-led purchase/acquisition — not an operational merger’: — Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology

handling expenses.

He argued that pricing could have been structured across airport contracts in a way that offsets lower traffic at Salalah with discounts linked to higher-volume airports such as Muscat International Airport, rather than treating each location in isolation.

REGIONAL AIRCRAFT PLAN AND NEW ROUTES

On network development, Al Maawali said work is under way on deploying smaller regional aircraft to activate under-served domestic destinations, namely Al Jabal Al Akhdhar, Masirah, Khasab

and Suhar.

He added that connectivity plans also include expanding regional links from specific airports: direct services from Salalah to Saudi Arabia, with potential later stages extending to Somalia and Yemen.

From Suhar, he said the aim is to connect to Taif and Al Ahsa, as well as Shiraz, Bandar Abbas and Gwadar.

The remarks come as Oman looks to reduce operating costs in aviation services while improving inter-governorate and regional air links to support tourism and business travel.

DOMESTIC LIQUIDITY IN OMAN EXPANDS 6.4%

MUSCAT: Domestic liquidity in the Sultanate of Oman increased by 6.4 per cent at the end of November 2025 to reach **ﷵ** 26.42 billion, compared with **ﷵ** 24.83 billion in the same period of 2024, according to preliminary data released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

Currency in circulation rose by 1.6 per cent to **ﷵ** 1.53 billion from **ﷵ** 1.51 billion a year earlier, while the narrow money supply

grew by 12.2 per cent to **ﷵ** 7.90 billion compared with **ﷵ** 7.05 billion in November 2024.

Foreign assets also expanded by 7.4 per cent to **ﷵ** 7.56 billion, up from **ﷵ** 7.04 billion during the corresponding period last year. Private sector deposits in local banks increased by 9.9 per cent to **ﷵ** 22.68 billion, compared with **ﷵ** 20.64 billion a year earlier.

Total loans and financing extended by commercial banks and

Islamic windows rose by 8.8 per cent to **ﷵ** 35.08 billion by the end of November 2025, against **ﷵ** 32.17 billion in the same period of 2024, while the average interest rate on total loans declined by 3.9 per cent to 5.446 per cent from 5.667 per cent.

The effective exchange rate index of the Rial Omani recorded a marginal rise of 0.1 point to 114.3 by the end of November 2025.

— ONA

Oman’s SME sector grows strongly, reaching 130,359 firms

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, FEB 10

Oman’s small and medium enterprise (SME) sector reached 130,359 registered firms by end-December 2025, as the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority (Riyada) rolled out a 2026 plan built on more than 700 initiatives and training programmes.

The plan has eight pillars: entrepreneurship culture; SMEs’ regional and global expansion; maximising local content; broader, more innovative financing options; expanding incubators and entrepreneurship centres; developing governorates by comparative advantage; the National Handicrafts Programme; and innovation- and technology-based startups.

Halima bint Rashid al Zaree, Riyada’s Chairperson, said she was “optimistic” the push would lift SMEs’ contribution to GDP. She said ready-made factories—



Officials of the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority (Riyada) addressing the 2026 Entrepreneurial Media Forum on Tuesday.

especially for manufacturing and the digital economy—would speed up business launches and employment.

Riyada said Entrepreneurship Card holders totalled 58,388 in the second half of 2025, including 25,986 active cards, representing about 192,714 employees, while

the Entrepreneurship Readiness Programme trained 7,453 beneficiaries.

By Q4 2025, it delivered 245 specialised and general training programmes (29,513 beneficiaries), provided general consulting to 9,000 entrepreneurs, completed 5,939 feasibility studies and

enrolled 281 in mentorship.

Usufruct approvals for industrial land reached 395 by end-December and 877 plots were offered through the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning’s development platform.

Incentives include nominal annual fees, a grace period linked to business plans and priority access to financing, marketing, training and qualification.

To raise local value added, Riyada said 294 small enterprises upgraded to medium-sized firms and 41 medium enterprises grew into large companies. It enrolled 4,188 enterprises in supplier development and said partnerships generated 2,170 job opportunities.

With Madayn, it launched the first 10 ready-made industrial workshops at Nizwa Industrial Area in February 2026. Riyada said it joined 413 local and international events last year, benefiting 23,794 enterprises, while 608 benefited from

e-marketing.

In crafts, 5,813 support applications were approved by end-2025; 7,026 artisans received home-based licences worth RO 4.049 million; and 777 benefited from craft training.

House of Crafts outlets opened in Muscat, Dhofar, Musandam and Al Dakhiliyah, registering 175 craft enterprises (112 in Muscat, 54 in Dhofar, 34 in Musandam and 30 in Al Dakhiliyah) and listing 1,744 products online.

Since inception, Riyada has launched 30 business incubators, incubating 137 SMEs, creating 231 jobs and generating revenues exceeding RO 3 million.

For 2026, it aims to finance at least 200 projects. “Al-Azm” loan approvals reached 514 by end-December, totalling **ﷵ** 44.385 million. Innovation-based startups numbered 205, employing 825 people with a market value of **ﷵ** 395 million, while workshops on innovative financing mechanisms drew 12,569 participants.

ADVERTORIALS

SHORT TAKES

HILTON MUSCAT BARR AL JISSAH RESORTS APPOINTS NEW EXECUTIVE CHEF



GURKAN GOZYILMAZ

MUSCAT: Hilton Muscat, Barr Al Jissah Resorts proudly announces the appointment of Gurkan Gozyilmaz as Executive Chef, overseeing the culinary operations across DoubleTree by Hilton Muscat Al Waha, Hilton Muscat Al Bandar and Al Husn Hotel Muscat. Located along

Oman’s picturesque coastline, Hilton Muscat Barr Al Jissah Resorts is one of the Sultanate of Oman’s most established resort destinations, renowned for its diverse dining experiences, expansive beachfront; and strong leisure and luxury appeal.

Chef Gozyilmaz’s appointment further reinforces Hilton’s commitment to culinary excellence and elevated guest experiences across the destination.

Chef Gozyilmaz brings more than 20 years of international luxury hospitality experience and has recently been recognised as Hilton’s Top Executive Chef in Europe, Middle East and Africa (EMEA) regions, receiving the Hilton F&D Rockstar Award — an internal accolade celebrating outstanding culinary leadership and operational excellence across the region.

Most recently, he served as Executive Chef at the Forbes 5-Star Waldorf Astoria Dubai International Financial Centre.

His career also includes over two years leading the pre-opening and post-opening culinary operations at Waldorf Astoria Kuwait, where he played a pivotal role in establishing luxury dining concepts, large-scale banqueting operations and high-performing culinary teams.

His broader experience spans senior leadership roles across the Middle East and Asia, with a strong track record in multi-restaurant operations, complex pre-openings and large-scale events within globally recognised luxury brands.

In his new role, Chef Gozyilmaz will lead the strategic direction of the resort’s culinary vision, focusing on enhancing food and beverage quality, driving innovation across dining concepts and ensuring consistency and excellence across more than 14 dining venues, as well as the resort’s extensive banqueting and group dining operations.

He will also play a key role in developing culinary talent, strengthening operational standards; and supporting sustainable and locally inspired dining experiences across both day-to-day resort operations.

As Executive Chef, Gurkan Gozyilmaz will play a pivotal role in overseeing large-scale banqueting and bespoke event dining, ensuring exceptional culinary standards, seamless execution and innovative food concepts that elevate everything from high-profile corporate gatherings to landmark social celebrations.

“I am excited to join Hilton Muscat, Barr Al Jissah Resorts at such a dynamic time for this iconic destination. I look forward to working with the talented culinary teams to celebrate local flavours, introduce creative dining experiences and deliver the highest standards of quality and hospitality for our guests”, said Gurkan Gozyilmaz, Executive Chef.

“Chef Gurkan’s international experience, leadership approach and passion for culinary excellence make him a valuable addition to our resort leadership team”, said Matthew Mullan, Resort General Manager.

NBO LAUNCHES API GATEWAY, DEVELOPER’S PORTAL AND SANDBOX CAPABILITIES

MUSCAT: The National Bank of Oman (NBO) celebrated the launch of its API Gateway, a Developer’s Portal and Sandbox Capabilities, reinforcing the Bank’s commitment to advancing API Banking and digital innovation in Oman.

The event was hosted under the auspices of Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology and attended by Abdullah bin Zahran al Hinai, Chief Executive Officer of NBO.



NBO Gateway’s Sandbox provides a secure environment that enables developers, NBO’s corporate clients & accelerator participants to safely test, prototype and integrate with NBO’s application programming interfaces (APIs) positioning NBO as the first commercial bank in Oman to offer sandbox and test app tools under the API Banking framework.

During the event, attendees experienced a live demonstration of the Sandbox and Test App environment.

SBA announces return of Ramadhan campaign

EMBRACING

the spirit of giving this holy month of Ramadhan, Saud Bahwan Automotive is delighted to announce the return of “Toyota’s Biggest Excitement” campaign (from February 8 to April 8, 2026).

This year’s promotion prioritises exceptional value, starting with the “VAT on Us” benefit, where the value-added tax is covered by Toyota on behalf of the customer.

This is apart from a zero per cent interest offer for three years, extensive service packages ranging from 5 years / 50,000 km up to 10 years/100,000 km and one year of free insurance. Additionally, every purchase comes with one year of registration and Thiqah Loyalty Points worth RO 50 (Terms & Conditions Apply).

“Ramadhan is a time for celebration and community. With the ‘VAT on Us’ offer, 0% interest and the chance to win a Supra GR or one of five Urban Cruisers, we are providing our customers with unmatched



The campaign highlights Toyota’s diverse and impressive vehicle lineup.

value and the thrill of a lifetime.

Our goal is to ensure that every Toyota owner enjoys total peace of mind through our extensive service and insurance benefits”, said a representative from Saud Bahwan Automotive.

The campaign highlights Toyota’s diverse and impressive vehicle lineup, which continues to set benchmarks for performance and reliability

across the Sultanate of Oman.

Since its global debut in 1982, the Toyota Camry has evolved over nine generations to become a true icon of reliability. The latest model redefines refinement with a striking new look and intelligent hybrid power. Built on the TNGA-K platform, it offers enhanced agility and a choice between a 201 HP 2.5-litre engine or a 226

HP electrified hybrid system, delivering a drive that is both responsive and rewarding.

With its sleek, aerodynamic profile and bold front grille, the Yaris makes a sophisticated impression. Perfect for city manoeuvring, it is powered by a 1.5-litre Dual VVT-i engine delivering 104 HP. Paired with a smooth CVT transmission, the Yaris strikes the perfect balance between sporty energy and exceptional fuel efficiency for daily commutes.

A global symbol of trust, the Corolla continues to raise the bar for sedans. Drivers can choose between the 2.0-litre Dynamic Force engine with 168 HP for a spirited drive, or the 1.6-litre engine for maximum fuel economy. Both options offer the smooth acceleration and enduring reliability that have made the Corolla a household name in Oman.

The Toyota Crown represents the pinnacle of innovation, offering two powerful hybrid options. The 2.4-litre turbo hybrid delivers a combined 340 HP with All-Wheel Drive, while the 2.5-litre hybrid achieves an impressive fuel efficiency of 21.6 km/l.

Hakkasan Muscat celebrates Year of the Horse

MUSCAT: Celebrate the arrival of the Year of the Horse at Hakkasan Muscat at The St Regis Al Mouj Muscat Resort, where contemporary Cantonese cuisine meets centuries-old Lunar New Year traditions.

Available until February 16, this bespoke selection of dishes invites guests to experience a curated selection of symbolic dishes designed to honour prosperity, vitality and success for the year ahead. Chinese New Year has long been one of Hakkasan’s most meaningful



celebrations. This year, the exclusive selection draws inspiration from the spirit of the Horse, a symbol of energy, movement and good fortune.

Offered alongside Hakkasan’s signature dishes and à la carte

selection, the limited-edition dishes are designed to be shared and enjoyed by parties of two or more, echoing the essence of reunion and connection that defines the Lunar New Year.

Each dish carries intention and meaning. The Fortune Money Bag features delicately crafted dumplings shaped like traditional prosperity pouches, filled with crab, scallop and water chestnut; and served on a spicy chilli sauce to awaken the palate. The Wok-Fried Tiger Prawn brings a vibrant

balance of texture and flavour, pairing crisp prawns with red plum, pickled radish and sweet potato, finished in a fragrant red osmanthus sauce.

At the heart of the offering, the Brown Jasmine Rice is presented in a six-petal floral arrangement, symbolising harmony and completeness. It is accompanied by smoked roasted duck, seasonal vegetables, egg floss and crisp soybean crumb segments, inviting guests to share from the centre of the table.

Lulu wins ‘Oman’s Most Trusted Brand 2025’ title

MUSCAT: Lulu Hypermarket became the proud recipient of the prestigious ‘Oman’s Most Trusted Brand Awards 2025’ in the Hypermarkets category for setting a new benchmark in the retail industry.

The award is a recognition of Lulu’s unwavering commitment to quality and service excellence and a symbol of consumer confidence and trust. The ninth edition of the OMTB Award was held on January 21, 2026, at Kempinski Hotel Muscat under the auspices of Pankaj Kanaksi Gokaldas Khimji, Adviser for External Trade and International Cooperation at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion.

Also present at the event were Lulu’s senior delegates and executives, as well as top management and business leaders from leading brands across Oman.



The award is a recognition of Lulu’s unwavering commitment to quality and service excellence and a symbol of consumer confidence and trust.

Expressing joy over winning the award, Shabeer K A, Director of Lulu Hypermarkets — Oman, said, “We at Lulu are proud to be recognised as Oman’s Most Trusted Brand in Retail. This recognition is driven by customer trust and we extend our heartfelt thanks to everyone who voted for us and chose us as the Most Trusted Brand in Oman.

The award reflects our commitment to enriching the shopping experience across the Sultanate of Oman. By embracing innovation and digital transformation, we continue to make everyday essentials more accessible, convenient and reliable.

Listening closely to our customers, we place their needs at the centre of every decision through seamless omni-channel services and enhanced in-store experiences. Our goal is simple: to build lasting trust and set new

standards in retail excellence”.

“Being a customer-centric Group, Lulu promises to be Oman’s most trusted retail destination — delivering value, convenience and innovation.

By placing customers at the centre of every experience, we strive to make essentials more accessible, build lasting trust and set new standards in retail excellence. We are also committed to delivering the best prices and unmatched value, ensuring every household can shop with confidence and convenience”, he added.

Oman’s Most Trusted Brand Awards acknowledge brands that have won the confidence of their customers through a voting process, which is also an opportunity for customers to prove their loyalty towards their favourite brands.

SHORTTAKES



The programme aims to enhance project management efficiency and strengthen the contract management system.

‘IMKAN PLUS’ PROGRAMME LAUNCHED IN OMAN

MUSCAT: The Projects, Tenders and Local Content Authority, in cooperation with the Public Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development (Riyada), has launched the “Imkan Plus” programme to enhance project management efficiency and strengthen the contract management system by developing the capabilities of national engineering talent working in contracting and engineering consultancy firms registered with Riyada

The five-month programme aims to upgrade project and contract management skills in line with modern professional practices, improve project execution quality, enhance spending efficiency and reduce change orders, with each group participating in six-week training sessions that combine theoretical and practical learning.

The initiative builds on earlier training programmes introduced by the Authority to qualify national professionals for government projects and contracts, focusing on strengthening technical and analytical skills related to project implementation, supervision and monitoring so participants can effectively manage the full project cycle and apply their expertise to ongoing national projects.

Engineer Abdullah bin Saif al Hosni, Director of the Imkan Plus programme, said the initiative targets national companies operating in contracting, civil and architectural engineering and consultancy services.

More than 7,200 companies were registered with Riyada in the construction and engineering consultancy sector in 2025, including about 1,380 construction-focused firms representing roughly 19 per cent of total companies in the sector, underscoring the importance of investing in talent development.

He noted that the programme includes a comprehensive assessment framework to measure participants’ knowledge and skills, while earlier programmes achieved a final success rate of 89 per cent, demonstrating the effectiveness of combining theoretical instruction with practical application. Participants will receive completion certificates, with outstanding performers awarded certificates of excellence, alongside post-training follow-up support within a broader national training framework.

Engineer Ahmed bin Humaid al Asmi, Director of the Local Added Value Department at Riyada, said the programme reflects the strategic partnership between Riyada and the Projects, Tenders and Local Content Authority to strengthen the national project management system through investment in local talent.

He added that the initiative will help enhance governance, clarify responsibilities among contracting parties, improve adherence to project timelines and technical standards; and support local content by empowering national enterprises, thereby creating sustainable value for the national economy and reinforcing confidence in domestic implementing companies. — ONA

DEBT STRATEGY

BP suspends buyback to cut debt



BP suspended its share buyback programme after recording about \$4 billion in write-downs in its renewables and biogas businesses, shifting focus to balance-sheet strengthening ahead of a new CEO’s arrival in April.

The company plans to redirect excess cash into higher-return oil and gas projects. Shares fell 5.4 per cent in early trading. — Reuters

METALS MOVEMENT

Gold and silver prices decline



Gold prices fell 0.7 per cent to \$5,029.49 an ounce on Tuesday as investors remained cautious ahead of key jobs and inflation data from the United States that could signal the Federal Reserve’s interest-rate path.

US gold futures slipped 0.5 per cent, while silver declined 2.1 per cent to \$81.64 after strong gains in the previous session. — ONA

LNG OUTLOOK

China LNG imports seen rising



China’s liquefied natural gas imports are forecast to increase by 3 per cent to 10 per cent in 2026, reaching about 70.5–75.5 million tonnes, supported by lower global prices and rising use in power generation and transport.

However, analysts expect volumes to remain below 2024 levels due to persistent domestic economic weakness. — Reuters

Oman–Brazil pact targets 300K-tonne meat output

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, FEB 10

OMAN Food Capital, a holding company under Oman Investment Authority, has signed a strategic partnership with JBS SA of Brazil, one of the largest food companies in the world. The \$150 million agreement (approximately ~~5~~ 57.7 million) will see JBS SA operate new facilities in the Sultanate of Oman for the local production of red meat and poultry, whilst establishing a regional export hub serving global markets.

The partnership advances OIA’s strategy to build an integrated national food sector ecosystem and maximise value from agricultural and food value chains.

By attracting a global partner of JBS’s caliber and facilitating the transfer of advanced knowledge and technologies to the Omani market, the agreement will strengthen manufacturing industries and boost the added value of national products.

Under this partnership, JBS will build its largest investment in the Middle East in the meat and poultry sector by completing the construction of the integrated poultry plant operated by A’Namaa Poultry Company in Ibri, in addition to the slaughter and processing facility for cattle and sheep operated by Al Bashayer Meat Company in Thamrait.

Upon completion, the production capacity is expected to reach approximately 300,000 tonnes annually, comprising 77,000 tonnes of beef, 20,000 tonnes of mutton and 208,000 tonnes of poultry.

The partnership will contribute to enhancing food



Officials representing the Oman Investment Authority, Oman Food Capital and Brazilian meat giant JBS SA at the signing.

security in the Sultanate of Oman on the one hand, whilst reinforcing Oman’s position as a platform for producing halal food products ready for export to regional and global markets on the other.

It is also expected to create more than 3000 direct jobs in the Sultanate of Oman over the next five years across various stages of the production chain, thereby supporting local economic development, improving workforce capabilities and advancing the growth of the food and agricultural industries sector in the Sultanate of Oman.

Muneer bin Ali al Muneeri, Deputy President of Oman Investment Authority for Operations and Chairman of the Board of Directors of Oman Food Capital, stated that the signing stems from OIA’s efforts to ensure the sustainability and efficiency of its investment assets within the National Development Fund, enabling them to attract strategic partnerships that add

value to the economy, create employment opportunities, strengthen supply chains, contribute to the global reach of products and embody the priorities of the Eleventh Five-Year Plan under Oman Vision 2040.

For his part, Gilberto Tomazoni, Global Chief Executive Officer of JBS, stated that establishing the early stages of supply chains in the region has become a strategic imperative for the next phase, given the region’s large and growing market.

He added that this solid foundation in the Sultanate of Oman will enable the company to access nearby regional markets and strengthen its presence in the region, affirming that they have found in OIA a trusted and ideal partner, in addition to the investment enablers present in Oman, most notably stability and an attractive investment environment.

Abdullah bin Mohammed al

Rashdi, Chief Executive Officer of Oman Food Capital, affirmed that the partnership represents a pivotal step in the company’s journey towards building an integrated and sustainable food sector based on innovation, international partnerships; and economic and social impact.

It marks a new phase for Oman’s food sector and establishes an effective model for strategic partnerships capable of transforming investment opportunities into integrated production platforms with tangible impact. It also demonstrates growing confidence from global companies in Oman’s investment environment and its readiness to become a leading regional hub in advanced food value chains.

This marks JBS’s debut into primary production in the Middle East. The global food company has a diverse portfolio of high-quality products including poultry, beef, mutton, fish and plant-based proteins.

Al Buraimi surpasses food-security targets

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, FEB 10

Al Buraimi Governorate has moved beyond its planned targets for food-security projects, with current investment in the sector standing at RO 62 million.

According to Sayyid Dr Hamad bin Ahmed al Busaidy, Governor of Al Buraimi, Al Buraimi Governorate has prioritised attracting large-scale agricultural and food projects in line with Oman Vision 2040, which identifies the Wilayats of Mahadha and Al Sinainah as a core “food basket” area for the Sultanate of Oman.

In an interview, he pointed to a set of flagship investments



SAYYID DR HAMAD
BIN AHMED
AL BUSAIDY
Governor of Al
Buraimi — Al Buraimi
Governorate

already under way, including a ~~5~~ 5 million programme to plant 50,000 palm trees in Al Sinainah and the Al Miera Poultry project valued at ~~20~~ 20 million. Wheat cultivation projects are also being developed in both Mahadha and Al Sinainah, he said.

Al Busaidy added that the next phase will extend into Al Rawdah, where further food-security projects — alongside related processing and manufacturing activities — are expected to be anchored within a planned economic area, supporting a more integrated farm-to-market chain. On infrastructure, the governor said road works are being accelerated to support the governorate’s investment agenda

and improve connectivity across its wilayats. He said around 60 km of roads have been paved and completed, while another 100 km are currently under paving.

He added that the governorate has approached the relevant authorities to secure approval for an additional 178 km this year, with the aim of expanding road coverage to most parts of the governorate.

Officials view the combination of agricultural investment and enabling infrastructure as critical to lowering logistics costs, improving distribution efficiency and strengthening the commercial viability of food projects — while advancing national efforts to bolster domestic supply resilience.

OPINION

Gold, baggage and tax sops for NRIs in Indian budget 2026



R MADHUSOODANAN
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The writer is the Executive Advisor to the Board, Global Money Exchange, Muscat.

THE Indian Union Budget 2026-27, presented in the Indian Parliament on February 1, has delivered a series of measures welcomed by Indians living abroad, including higher gold-carrying limits, expanded baggage allowances, tax relief and investment-friendly reforms aimed at strengthening engagement with the diaspora. One of the most appreciated changes relates to gold jewellery, long a source of customs disputes at Indian airports. Under the revised rules effective February 2, female passengers may now carry up to 40 grammes of gold jewellery duty-free, while male passengers are permitted up to 20 grammes. Earlier, the allowance was restricted to value-based limits of ₹1 lakh and ₹50,000 respectively. The shift to weight-based limits has been widely welcomed, particularly among expatriates in Gulf countries, as it simplifies compliance and reduces confrontation at the airports, a long-pending demand given the cultural importance of gold in weddings and festivals. The duty-free baggage allowance has also been increased from ₹50,000 to ₹75,000, benefitting expatriates bringing gifts, electronic items and household goods for family members. In addition, passengers

above 18 years of age may carry one laptop or notebook for personal or family use, provided it is not intended for sale. Among other measures welcomed by Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) and Persons Resident Outside India (PROIs) is the increase in the aggregate investment limit in Indian equity markets from 10 per cent to 24 per cent. The reduction of Tax Collected at Source (TCS) on foreign travel, overseas medical expenses and education remittances from 5 per cent to 2 per cent, under Liberalised Remittance Scheme (LRS) has also been positively received. The abolition of the Tax Deduction and Collection Account Number (TAN) requirement for resident buyers in property transactions involving NRIs is viewed as a significant procedural relief. On the direct taxation front, tax incentives on global income for returning professionals are seen as an attempt to encourage skilled diaspora members to work in India. The measure is expected to attract high-skilled Indians who were previously deterred by complex tax provisions. The one-time disclosure scheme — FAST-Ds-2026 — provides NRIs a six-month window to declare previously unreported foreign assets or income by paying only tax and

The shift to weight-based limits has been widely welcomed, particularly among expatriates in Gulf countries, as it simplifies compliance and reduces confrontation at the airports, a long-pending demand given the cultural importance of gold in weddings and festivals.

interest, along with reduced penalties and waiver of prosecution. The extension of deadlines for filing belated and revised returns; and the option to update returns during reassessment proceedings, have also been described as taxpayer-friendly steps. The new Income Tax law will come into effect from April 1, 2026, the Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman informed Parliament. From a broader economic perspective, the Budget emphasises growth, fiscal discipline and investment expansion. A major thrust has been given to capital expenditure to stimulate economic activity amidst global uncertainty, while prioritising long-term domestic sector development. However, sections of the migrant community expressed disappointment that several long-standing demands were not addressed. These include a comprehensive social security framework under a single umbrella, permission to participate in long-term government small-savings schemes, concerns over perceived tax discrimination and the issue of excessive airfares during festive and peak travel seasons. As a result, the overall response among expatriates has remained mixed despite the relief measures announced.

THE MUSCAT MODEL:
NAVIGATING THE
“SUBSURFACE” OF
SCIENCE DIPLOMACY

AZIZA AL MUGHAIRY

The formal study of science diplomacy rests on three pillars: science for diplomacy (advice informing policy), diplomacy for science (enabling bilateral or multilateral cooperation) and science in diplomacy (collaboration for improving relations). When we think of these, one imagines the International Space Station or CERN, as they are human brilliances in their own right. Yet a fourth, more subtle pillar is emerging based on the case study of Oman. This emerging concept may be described as Mediatory Science Diplomacy. Oman is historically synonymous with mediation, a trait certainly forged in its maritime DNA. For centuries, Omani ports were not merely locations where goods were exchanged; they were knowledge clearinghouses. A merchant from Gujarat and a trader from Zanzibar did not simply exchange spices; they exchanged navigational mathematics, botanical knowledge and maritime engineering. Such “Port Logic” created a culture of mutual benefit and intellectual trade. This legacy transcends the pages of history. From ancient Egyptian medical exchanges to the Academy of Gundeshapur in Persia — the predecessor to Baghdad’s House of Wisdom — the sciences have always been a reliable diplomatic currency. Yet, since modern academic literature on science diplomacy is newly amassed, this has left a conceptual gap concerning the specific role of the mediating state in scientific and technical exchanges. In contemporary high-stakes international discussions involving deeply technical subject matter — from environmental monitoring to nuclear verification technologies — progress often depends not only on scientific expertise, but on the existence of a diplomatic environment that allows specialists to engage with one another in a sustained and depoliticised manner. In such contexts, the mediator’s role is not to shape the science itself, but to safeguard the conditions under which technical dialogue can occur. This involves cultivating trust, ensuring discretion and upholding the dignity of all participants, allowing experts to meet primarily as engineers, scientists and inspectors rather than as political adversaries. Oman’s diplomatic tradition demonstrates that science diplomacy does not always require a laboratory. At times, the most powerful scientific instrument is a round table in a quiet room. By blending the ancient tradition of maritime mediation with the modern requirements of global technical governance, the Sultanate of Oman has shown that the diplomatic virtues of patience, neutrality and respect are precisely what is needed to navigate the uncharted technical waters of the future.

Sustainability’s future
is emotional. Why?

WE have extraordinary knowledge about the environment in this day and age. Satellites monitor glaciers retreating to within a centimetre. Real-time measurements of the atmosphere’s chemistry are made via sensors. We have never known so much about the planet’s physical condition. Knowledge has grown, but commitment has not. Progress is still unequal and slow despite decades of data, summits and sustainability roadmaps. Lack of knowledge is no longer the cause. It is an emotional failure. Today, the primary obstacle to sustainability is psychological rather than scientific or technological. Global initiatives have long ignored the emotional climate that shapes human behaviour in favour of controlling the physical climate. These days, fear, hope, exhaustion and denial influence whether communities take decisive action, adjust gradually, or completely retreat. These forces are strong, silent and mostly unregulated. Particularly among young people, climate anxiety has emerged as a hallmark of the modern period. Although they feel unable to change the planet’s course, many people have strong feelings for it. Concern frequently curdles into paralysis when it is not accompanied by agency. People just freeze rather than fight change. Eco-fatigue is at the other extreme of the spectrum. The urgency has faded into noise after years of campaigns and warnings. When every company promises “net zero” and every brand says it’s “green”, language loses credibility. Without substance, repetition fosters apathy rather than action. And yet, hope persists. Across the world and here in Oman, small but meaningful movements continue to take root. Students organise recycling initiatives. Families invest in solar energy. Entrepreneurs build businesses grounded in environmental responsibility. These efforts may seem modest, but they matter. Hope, when renewed and shared, remains the



Global initiatives have long ignored the emotional climate that shapes human behaviour in favour of controlling the physical climate.



DR SUAAD JASSEM

The writer is Assistant Professor of Accounting and Auditing at the College of Banking and Financial Studies

most reliable fuel for long-term change. Sustainability is not sustained by policy alone. It depends on belief. Emotions are not soft variables; they are economic and social ones. When people feel connected to a purpose, they commit. When they trust, they endure. For businesses, this demands a shift from polished messaging to authentic engagement. Consumers and employees have become skilled at detecting sincerity. The question is no longer, “What is your sustainability initiative?” but, “Do you genuinely stand behind it?” Governments face a similar reality. Every nation has a sustainability strategy on paper, but no strategy succeeds without public emotional investment. Change lasts only when sustainability is framed not as sacrifice for the planet, but as a pathway to a better, fairer life. There is even a case for measuring what might be called emotional sustainability that involves levels of trust, optimism and shared purpose within organisations and communities.

Carbon can be quantified. So can conviction. Education, too, must evolve. Our schools are rich in climate science but often silent on how to process the emotions that knowledge provokes. Students learn about rising temperatures and melting ice caps, yet rarely discuss the anxiety, grief, or helplessness these realities create. If we want future innovators and decision-makers, we must also teach emotional intelligence. Particularly the ability to convert concern into constructive action. Sustainability education should include empathy, collaboration and resilience alongside data and diagrams. Oman is particularly well positioned to lead this shift. Cultural values of stewardship, balance and gratitude towards nature are deeply rooted in our heritage. Reconnecting modern sustainability efforts to these traditions can transform environmental responsibility from obligation into shared identity. Leadership in the sustainability era requires more than technical competence. It requires emotional awareness. Policies succeed when they resonate with lived experience. When citizens feel included, treated fairly and heard, trust follows and trust sustains momentum. Public emotion should be treated as a strategic factor. Climate communication that acknowledges fear, celebrates progress and invites participation can convert apathy into action. In this sense, managing the emotional climate is becoming a new form of governance. If the physical climate measures the heat of the planet, the emotional climate measures the warmth of human will. One cannot be stabilised without the other. The future of sustainability will be decided by our ability to turn anxiety into agency, fatigue into focus and fear into faith. The most powerful technology we possess has never been artificial intelligence or renewable energy. It has always been the human spirit. Hence, before we cool the Earth, we must first warm the human spirit.

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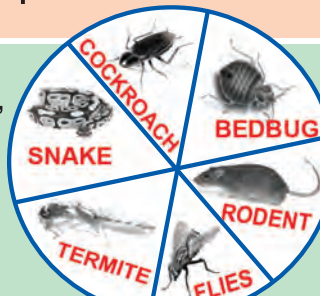
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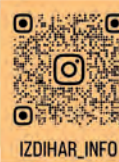
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ART/LIFE



AN OMANI 'S JOURNEY WITH PALM FRONDS

> 20

ON SECOND THOUGHT

WANT TO GO VIRAL? ALWAYS THINK ABOUT THE CONSEQUENCES



Yeru Ebuén
The writer is a luxury media strategist and a creative director

Every now and then, a story goes viral not because it's extraordinary, but because it taps into a blind spot many people don't realise they have. What may have started as casual content: a joke, a gesture, a throwaway act, ends up triggering legal consequences and a wider conversation about respect, law and responsibility. These are often the stories that travel fastest, precisely because they feel familiar before they feel serious.

That's usually how these moments unfold. Someone films something they believe is harmless. The algorithm does the rest. Screenshots circulate. Comment sections fill up. And then, often to the genuine surprise of the person involved, authorities step in. The shock isn't always about the punishment itself, but about the realisation that what felt informal, personal and online is very much subject to real-world law.

This was the case for the individual recently caught disrespecting Omani currency, a clip that quickly moved from niche circulation into wider public discussion. What made the incident trend wasn't just the act itself, but the reaction to it. Online, confusion followed. Some brushed it off as "just a joke." Others questioned why officials were involved at all. A few insisted they had no idea such a law existed. But ignorance, as unglamorous as it sounds, has never been a defence anywhere.

That misunderstanding often comes from treating currency as a personal object rather than what it actually is: a public instrument. Money isn't only about purchasing power. It represents trust, stability and a shared agreement between people who may have little else in common. When you undermine that symbol, even casually, you're not just making light of a banknote. You're testing the boundaries of public order.

It's also worth saying that Oman is hardly an outlier in this. The UK has laws against defacing banknotes. In the United States, deliberately mutilating currency with intent to render it unfit for circulation is a federal offence. Singapore criminalises damaging or defacing notes and coins. Even in places where enforcement feels quieter, central banks routinely remind the public that money is not a canvas for expression or humour.

In that sense, Oman's approach is globally consistent.

The deeper issue here is awareness. Social media has blurred the line between private behaviour and public conduct. A decade ago, an ill-judged joke might have been witnessed by a few friends and forgotten by the next day. Today, it can be replayed thousands of times, detached from context, and interpreted as intent. Once it's out there, it no longer belongs solely to you.

That's why this story matters beyond the individual involved. It's a reminder that living in a country, any country, comes with an obligation to understand its basic rules. Not out of fear, but out of respect. Respect for the systems that allow people from different backgrounds to coexist, transact and trust one another in everyday life.

QUICK FEATURES



FILM PREMIERE

The British pop icon signer Charli XCX attends the UK premiere of "Wuthering Heights" in London, Britain.
— Reuters



LIFESTYLE

A couple stands on the embankment of the frozen Motlawa River in central Gdansk.
— AFP



ANIMAL PLANET

Musher Nukaaraq Lennert Olsen prepares his sled dogs for a ride at the "dog town" near Sisimiut, Greenland. — AFP

INSTA PICKS



Domesticated Mallard in the ponds of Salalah



Oman tour on wheels

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FRENCH DUO REACH SHANGHAI, COMPLETING YEAR-AND-A-HALF WALK



Two French adventurers reached the end of an epic walk from their hometown to Shanghai on Saturday, after nearly a year and a half crossing 16 countries almost entirely on foot.

Tired but delighted, Loic Voisot and Benjamin Humblot embraced as they stood by the river on the Bund promenade, the Chinese financial hub's distinctive skyline glittering in the background.

Voisot, 26, and Humblot, 27, set off from Annecy in southeastern France in September 2024.

Yearning for a "great adventure", they wanted to visit China but without flying, to avoid contributing to the harmful environmental impact of the aviation industry.

"We're having a hard time believing it's real, that we've done all that on foot, that we're finally here, after having thought of Shanghai for so long," a weather-beaten Voisot said.

"I think first and foremost we're proud, especially of having dared to do this... We weren't sure we'd make it, but we told ourselves we'd try it out."

The pair spent 518 days on the road, crossing a distance of about 12,850 kilometres (7,980 miles) and taking rests every five or seven days.

They walked around 45 kilometres a day, except for a brief cross into Russia by bus for safety and logistical reasons.

Around 50 people gathered at the start point of the final 10-kilometre stretch of their odyssey, including locals who have been following their journey through China this autumn on social media.

Along the way their numbers swelled, as media, French residents of Shanghai and others joined the procession.

A huge cheer went up as the two men declared their walk was over.

Expectedly, the French duo had encountered some challenges along the way.

"There were very hard winters, we had to cross the desert in Uzbekistan," said Voisot, taking pride in "having had the willpower to always keep going".

And while Humblot said they had generally eaten very well, there was one thing they both missed terribly - French cheese.

Both said that the magnitude of the feat they achieved had not yet sunk in, and that they were tempted "to maybe keep the adventure going".

Asked what he would do first now the walk was over, Voisot said: "Sleep a lot!" — AFP



Muscat's heritage precinct set for major cultural revival

HISTORIC Muscat stands today as a complete cultural monument and a distinguished tourist destination, with the National Museum at its heart and as its focal point.

The city's iconic white houses, imposing walls, and formidable fortresses inspire visitors, serving as a beacon of civilisation whose influence has enriched the history of the Arabian Gulf and western Indian Ocean for centuries.

Through a series of conservation and rehabilitation initiatives, alongside the creation of new social, cultural and recreational spaces, Muscat actively preserves its historic character while solidifying its status as a premier regional destination — a city alive with heritage and authenticity.

Jamal bin Hassan al Mousawi, Secretary-General of the National Museum, stated, "The Museum is implementing the Historic Muscat Rehabilitation Project to transform the area into an open-air museum with multiple venues and diverse experiences. This includes its role as a national museum, alongside private and specialised museums, historic palaces such as Bayt Al Greiza, and significant houses like Bait Sayyid Nadir, Bait Sayyidah Muzna, and Bait Sayyidah Aliya.

The vision also encompasses educational spaces like Al Saidiyah School and community-centric urban oases such as Al Saidiyah Street and Al Madbagha Street."

In remarks to the Oman News Agency, he elaborated, "Our rehabilitation projects for Historic Muscat focus on restoring the historical houses under the Museum's custodianship to their original condition, as they existed prior to the introduction of non-original additions using modern materials. For Bait Sayyid Nadir and Bait Sayyidah Muzna, a key focus is reviving the lost craftsmanship of producing traditional materials for internal and external finishes, flooring, walls, and ceilings. We are reprocessing these structures using the same traditional materials employed in Muscat for centuries, which have proven their enduring value."

He noted that Bait Abu Dina in Muscat, originally a private residence that later came under the National Museum's ownership, had lost its historic character due



to reconstruction. "It is now being rehabilitated as a prototype for 21st-century Muscat-like architecture, one that addresses contemporary needs while remaining faithful to the traditional architectural principles of its era — in scale, proportion, massing, and spatial organisation — and which reinstates artisanal craftsmanship in its finishes and interior fittings."

Al Mousawi detailed the National Museum's multi-venue system and the ongoing rehabilitation of Historic Muscat: "Beyond our purpose-built main headquarters the Museum oversees several landmark structures. Work on Bayt Al Greiza, part of a dedicated preservation programme, will continue through the end of 2026, with its halls and facilities opening progressively this year.

Similarly, the remaining historic houses of the Al Busaidy Sayyids, notably Bait Sayyid Nadir and Bait Sayyidah Muzna opposite Bait Sayyidah Ghaliyah (the French House), are at an advanced stage. Electrical, mechanical, security, and climate control systems are being installed, to be followed by final interior finishes and furnishing."

Bait Sayyid Nadir, one of the Al Busaid State residences in Muscat, is believed to have been constructed in the first third of the 19th century. It is named after its last resident, Sayyid Nadir bin Faisal al Busaidy, brother of Sultan Taimour bin Faisal al Busaidy.

After his passing in 1971, the house briefly served as ministerial offices, then as a museum, and later

housed administrative offices for the Al Busaid State before its ownership was transferred to the National Museum.

Along with Bait Sayyidah Muzna and the adjacent French House, it is among the last surviving historic houses in Muscat.

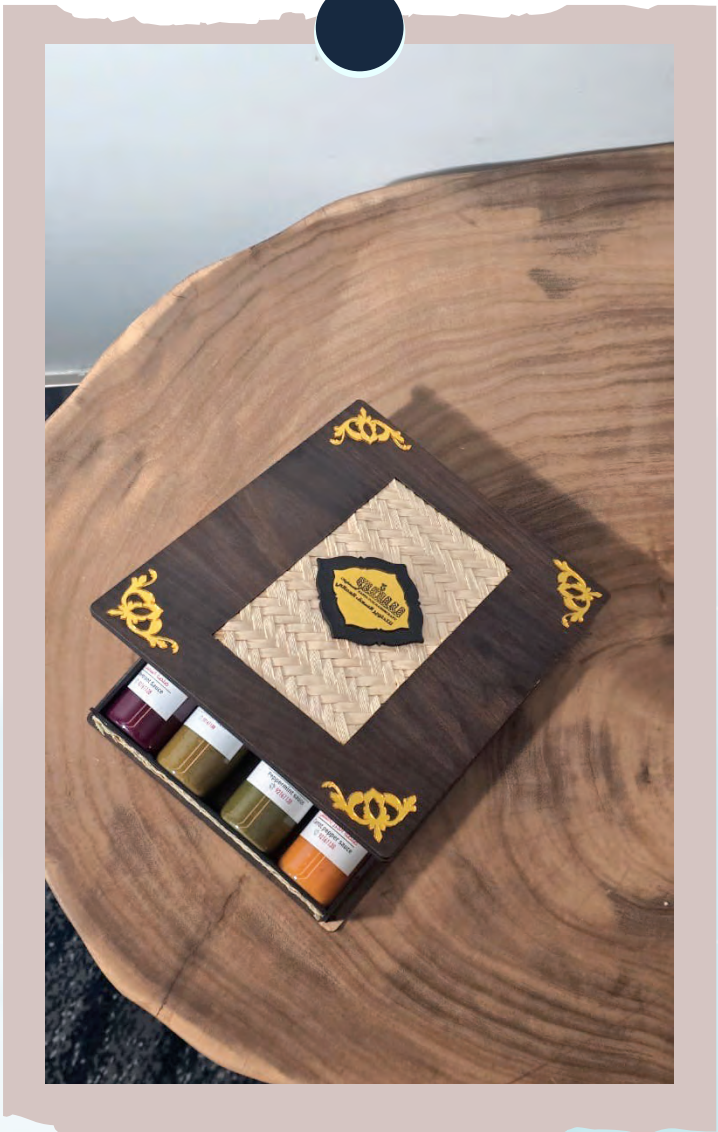
"Concerning Muscat's exterior precinct," Al Mousawi continued, "the Muscat Gate is being rehabilitated as a Visitor Centre to orient guests to the varied cultural experiences within Historic Muscat. It is scheduled to reopen by year's end. Furthermore, the Al Saidiya School building, inaugurated in 1940 as a landmark of formal education in Oman, is being meticulously restored to its former state while preserving its original architectural and interior elements."

He outlined additional development projects underway in the area: "A key community initiative is Al Saidiya Street, the grounds adjoining Al Saidiya School. In the heart of outer Muscat, this will become a lush garden intended primarily to inspire and serve the local community, while offering tourists a space for respite and reflection amidst the urban rehabilitation.

"Al Saidiya Street will be revived as a model garden or farm, reminiscent of Muscat's past, particularly the Al Tuwyan area known for its farms and verdant spaces traditionally termed 'Bagh'."

Similarly, Bagh Al Madbagha in Al Madbagha is being developed as a social, cultural, and recreational hub for the community." — ONA

FEATURES



An Omani Artisan’s Journey with Palm Fronds

BUTHAINA AL RIYAMI

IN the quiet alleys of Al Rustaq, where the breezes embrace the scent of ancient history and the fort narrates the glories of the Omani people, a gentle story is woven through palm fronds. Unlike the usual paths of acquiring traditional crafts, which often begin with childhood talent or inherited artistry, Azza al Bahri’s path challenges a familiar narrative; craft does not always emerge from inheritance, but sometimes from personal choice and dedication.

Her journey began with something far quieter: empty time, a stretch that, for many others, is often dismissed as pause, waiting, or absence.

But for Azza al Bahri, it was the beginning of a journey that redefined how she valued her time, instead of filling hours with waiting and absence.

“A love of learning new skills drove me to learn this craft”, Azza al Bahri, the owner of Saffa Handcraft, a small entrepreneurial venture rooted in traditional craft, explains candidly as she recalls the beginning of her journey.

She narrates that her journey began with enrolling in a training course, even though she had no early artistic background to rely on – no mentor and no inherited tradition.

Azza chose to shift her life from living with an abundance of free time to filling that time with purpose. The first piece she ever made was a file crafted from palm fronds. This simple file became proof that something could be created from nothing more than the willingness to try.

THE MAKING OF A PIECE

Each piece of her work is not accidental; rather, it is the result of continuous research and ongoing learning. Despite the fact that each piece stands as creatively unique, all of them share common foundational steps; each begins with an idea, followed by sketching on paper, taking precise measurements and selecting colours and materials.

Then, all these steps find their way into palm-frond weaving (Safah), followed by fixing and cutting the woven parts, sewing, shaping and finally producing a distinctive piece.

CRAFT, IDENTITY & GROWTH

When asked to define her artistic style, she admits candidly that she is still growing and that her skills need further expansion, which is why she remains committed to continuous training, refusing to stop at a single point.

However, she believes that what distinguishes her work is its quality and constant renewal. If her current identity were represented by one word, it would be “growth”. She also clarifies that she does not strictly prefer simplicity over intricate detail, nor the opposite; each has its place, depending on the piece and its purpose.

In fact, Omani culture is inseparable from her work. The Omani culture and environment appear both in the nature of the craft she practices and in the materials she uses.

EYES ON THE HORIZON

Azza sees the future of handicrafts

in Oman with optimism, describing it as bright. Today, she is an officially accredited trainer through higher education institutions and actively works to teach others.

Looking ahead, Azza’s aspirations stretch beyond being a palm-frond-weaving trainer. She aspires to own a centre that serves as a hub for the exchange of knowledge related to different crafts, reflecting a milestone in her journey: empty time, often underestimated, carries potential when met with intention. For her, learning should never stop and renewal must be constant.

Her story goes beyond narration about palm fronds and handmade objects; it shows how free time, when met with intention, can be woven into a purposeful direction.

