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INBRIEF

FIVE DEALS WORTH
RO 12 MILLION INKED

Suhar Investment Forum 2026, organised by Al Batinah North Governorate Branch of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, focuses on investment-ready opportunities, presenting around 50 opportunities with a total estimated value of approximately RO 300 million across promising sectors. The forum witnessed the signing of a number of agreements and memoranda of understanding across several sectors, totalling five agreements with an overall investment value of approximately RO 12 million. The forum also included two panel discussions.

SEE ALSO P13



'ARABIAN GULF SECURITY 4'
CONCLUDES IN DOHA

Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidy, Minister of Interior, on Wednesday attended the conclusion of the joint tactical exercise 'Arabian Gulf Security 4', held in the State of Qatar. The event was attended by the GCC interior ministers. The Sultanate of Oman participated in the exercise with a force from the Royal Oman Police, the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority, and the Medical City for Military and Security Services.

DETAILS ON P2

AIR GASES PLANT
OPENS IN RUSAYL

Al Rusayl Industrial City saw the inauguration of an air gases production plant for the Global Gas Services Company on Wednesday. Spanning a total area of 20,000 square metres with an investment volume reaching RO 4 million, the facility has a daily production capacity of 173 tonnes of oxygen, nitrogen and argon. The opening of the plant comes as part of efforts to strengthen the infrastructure of the industrial gases sector in the Sultanate of Oman and to support various industries.

First day of Ramadhan likely on February 19

SHADDAD AL MUSALMY
MUSCAT, FEB 4

Astronomers in the Sultanate of Oman have predicted that the first day of Ramadhan this year is likely to fall on Thursday (February 19). This means Eid Al Fitr will fall on Friday, March 20. "As per the report from the International Astronomical Centre, it is impossible to see the new moon on

the evening of Tuesday (February 17)," Abdulwahab al Busaidy, Board Member of the Oman Space and Astronomical Society, said. "As a result, for those countries and Oman, that rely solely on sighting the moon, Ramadhan will begin on Thursday, February 19. For the countries that rely just on a new moon being born, like our neighbouring countries, Ramadhan for them and many countries will

begin on Wednesday, February 18," he added. As for the Eid Al Fitr, Al Busaidy said this year will be much easier for astronomers to know when it will fall. "Eid Al Fitr moon will be easily seen on Thursday, March 19 across the world. As a result, all countries including Oman and our neighbouring countries and most of the Islamic countries and possibly the entire Muslim world will be

having the first day of Eid Al Fitr on March 20," he said. For many, Ramadhan and Eid days are so special because it is the time when family and friends come together. "I celebrate Ramadhan and Eid in a unique way at home with my family.. During Ramadhan, I will be inviting my extended family every weekend," Abdullah bin Salim al Numani, bank employee, said.

Israeli strikes kill 23 in
Gaza as truce in danger

P a u s e i n p a t i e n t s c r o s s i n g r a f a h b o r d e r

ISRAELI tank shelling and air strikes killed 23 Palestinians, including seven children, in Gaza on Wednesday, health officials said, the latest violence to undermine a truce in the enclave. Among the dead was a medic who rushed to help victims of a strike in the southern city of Khan Yunis and was then killed by a second attack on the same location, health officials said. Other strikes hit Gaza City in the north, where health officials said a 5-month-old boy was killed. The attacks come three days after Israel reopened Gaza's main border crossing with Egypt, a major step in the US-backed truce. "While we were sleeping in our house, the tank shelled us and the shells hit our house, our children were martyred - my son was martyred, my brother's son and daughter were martyred... We have nothing to do with anything; we are peaceful people," said Abu Mohamed Habouch, speaking at a funeral for his family. Tents in Mawasi, a coastal area near Khan Yunis crowded with Gazans displaced by the conflict, had been ripped apart by the strikes. Nearly all of Gaza's population of over 2 million has been forced to flee their homes. Hamas said Israel's action undermined efforts to stabilise the ceasefire. In a statement, the group called for "immediate international pressure to halt violations." Palestinian patients preparing to cross through the newly opened Rafah crossing to Egypt were told that Israel had postponed the passage of patients through the border.



Mourners react during the funeral of Palestinians killed on Wednesday in an Israeli strike in the southern Gaza Strip, on Wednesday. — Reuters

The Israeli agency that controls access to Gaza, COGAT, said the Rafah crossing remained open, but it had not received the necessary details from the World Health Organisation to facilitate crossings. The WHO did not immediately respond to a request for comment. An Egyptian security source said that Israel had cited security issues in the Rafah area as the reason for the temporary closure,

but those had since been resolved and work had resumed at the border. Reopening the crossing was one of the requirements under the October ceasefire that set out the first phase of US President Donald Trump's plan to stop fighting between Israel and Hamas. Sixteen patients from Gaza and 40 of their escorts crossed into Egypt on Tuesday, Gazan medics said. — Reuters

Omani youth’s fig cultivation a successful venture in Ibri

IBRI: Omani youth are increasingly investing their talents and capabilities into successful roles in managing, operating, and investing in local agricultural crops with commercial viability, thereby securing sustainable economic returns. An Omani youth, Abdulrahman bin Hamoud al Kalbani, from the town of Al Houmaniya in the Wilayat of Ibri, has managed to transform his passion for agriculture into a productive enterprise specialising in fig cultivation. Abdulrahman al Kalbani stated that his agricultural project began in 2023 as a personal experiment

driven by an interest in growing fig trees due to their high nutritional and economic value. He noted that he initially planted approximately 300 trees on his farm in the village of Al Houmaniya, achieving encouraging results in the first season that exceeded expectations, which provided a strong incentive to continue expansion and development. He added that the success of the first phase led to the planting of an additional 300 trees in another field, accompanied by a noticeable improvement in crop quality. This gradual expansion has continued until the number of



Abdulrahman al Kalbani's agricultural project began in 2023 as a personal experiment.

currently planted fig trees reached approximately 1,200, distributed over an area of nearly four acres. He said that continuous care for the trees has contributed in raising production levels, with daily production during the harvest season reaching more than 100 kg of figs. This success is attributed to the adoption of modern agricultural methods, including regular irrigation, organic fertilisation, and periodic pruning, in addition to washing the trees approximately every two weeks to ensure healthy growth and high productivity. Regarding marketing, Al Kalbani indicated that the product is

marketed locally by packaging it in plastic containers designated for sale and distributing them to shops and retail outlets within the wilayat. He emphasised his ongoing efforts to develop display and packaging methods in line with market requirements and consumer needs. Concerning the varieties grown, Al Kalbani mentioned that he relies on two main types: Brown Turkey and Deanna, due to their abundant production, high quality, and relative resistance to pests. He is also currently experimenting with 10 other varieties to select the most suitable for future expansion. — ONA

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Small and Medium Enterprise Banking

SHORT TAKES



Omani-Bahraini relations represent a distinguished model. — ONA

STATE COUNCIL CHIEF RECEIVES BAHRAINI SPEAKER

MUSCAT: Shaikh Abdulmalik bin Abdullah al Khalili, Chairman of the State Council, on Wednesday received Ahmed bin Salman al Musallam, Speaker of the Council of Representatives in the Kingdom of Bahrain, and his accompanying delegation. The meeting took place within the framework of his official visit to the Sultanate of Oman.

The Chairman of the State Council lauded the strength and depth of the fraternal relations binding the Sultanate of Oman and the Kingdom of Bahrain. He noted that these relations are built upon a long history of close cooperation and mutual understanding between the leaderships of the two countries. — ONA

TALKS EXPLORE TIES BETWEEN OMAN AND BAHRAIN



Khalid bin Hilal al Maawali with Ahmed bin Salman al Musallam. — ONA

MUSCAT: Khalid bin Hilal al Maawali, Chairman of Majlis Ash’shura, on Wednesday received Ahmed bin Salman al Musallam, Speaker of the Council of Representatives in the Kingdom of Bahrain, and his accompanying delegation, as part of his official visit to the Sultanate of Oman. During the meeting, the Chairman of Majlis Ash’shura emphasised the depth of the fraternal and historical relations between the Sultanate of Oman and the Kingdom of Bahrain, and their ongoing development and growth across various fields. He pointed to the mutual commitment to advancing these relations towards wider horizons. — ONA

MoI CONDUCTS INTERVIEWS FOR PRESENTERS

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Information on Wednesday conducted interviews for more than 20 applicants from private television and radio stations and podcast platforms in Oman for appointment as broadcasters and programme presenters to attract young talent. The ministry’s Broadcaster Selection Committee conducted the interviews in person, in accordance with Article (93) of the Executive Regulations of the Media Law. The article stipulates several conditions, including maintaining integrity and honour, and successfully completing the training and qualification programme determined by the Ministry of Information.

Int’l conference discusses education in digital era

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, FEB 4

THE International Conference on the Teaching Profession commenced on Wednesday at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre, under the auspices of Dr Abdullah bin Nasser al Harrasi, Minister of Information. The conference provides a high-level platform for dialogue and knowledge exchange, addressing the future of education in the rapidly evolving digital era, particularly in the age of artificial intelligence (AI), and emphasising the pivotal role of teachers in shaping future generations.

Organised by the Ministry of Education in collaboration with the Omani National Commission for Education, Culture and Science, the conference continues a successful knowledge journey launched through the Educational Research Forum, executed by the Specialised Institute for Teacher Professional Training. The event gathers policymakers, regional and international experts, researchers and educational practitioners to exchange best practices and strategies to advance Oman’s educational landscape and the wider Gulf region.

Dr Madeeha bint Ahmed al Shaibani, Minister of Education (MoE), highlighted that the conference serves as a strategic platform to strengthen collaboration between GCC countries, regional and international organisations, and technology companies. She emphasised that education is undergoing a historic transformation in the AI era, making it a shared human responsibility and a key pillar for sustainable development. Advanced technologies are no longer merely supportive tools; they are influential in redefining learning, innovation and human capital development.

Dr Madiha praised GCC countries for their leadership in adopting digital transformation and investing in educational innovation, noting that these efforts have positioned them among the leading nations



The conference provides a platform for dialogue and knowledge exchange on education.

in education according to international standards. She affirmed that teachers remain the cornerstone of any sustainable education system, acting as lifelong learning leaders, facilitators of critical thinking, and catalysts for innovation.

Investing in teachers, she added, is the most vital and sustainable investment for the future of nations.

The conference also marked the launch of the Arabic version of the Global Teacher Report, prepared by Unesco in collaboration with the Regional Center for Quality and Excellence in Education, highlighting the critical role of the teaching profession.

Dr Salem bin Mohammed al Malak, Director-General of the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (ISESCO), expressed his congratulations to the minister for her achievements in both higher education and general education. He noted that the conference highlights global challenges, including teacher shortages and gaps in professional development, while emphasising the teacher’s essential role in fostering innovation and preparing future generations.

Dr Mohammed bin Saud al Muqbil, Director-General of the Arab Bureau of Education for the Gulf States, praised

Oman and the Ministry of Education for hosting the event, emphasising that the Gulf Teacher Forum reflects the member states’ commitment to sustainable education, teacher empowerment and effective use of AI to enhance educational outcomes. He also highlighted the forum’s role in providing a scientific space for knowledge exchange, professional development, and preparing teachers to contribute meaningfully to students’ learning and innovation.

The conference programme features three main themes: Educational Leadership and Learning Environments, Empowering Teachers in the Digital and AI Era, and Sustainable Professional Development.

Activities include high-level panel discussions, keynote addresses by international experts, teacher-led research presentations, practical workshops and an interactive educational exhibition.

The conference aims to showcase pioneering experiences in educational technology, enhance AI integration into teaching practices, support sustainable educational leadership, facilitate regional and international knowledge exchange and foster strategic partnerships between educational institutions and research centres.

‘Arabian Gulf Security 4’ drill concludes in Doha

DOHA: Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidy, Minister of Interior, on Wednesday attended the conclusion of the joint tactical exercise ‘Arabian Gulf Security 4’, held in the State of Qatar. The event was attended by the GCC interior ministers.

The Sultanate of Oman participated in the exercise with a force from the Royal Oman Police, the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority, and the Medical City for Military and Security Services. This participation falls within the framework of enhancing the joint Gulf security work system and elevating levels of field coordination and integration among the GCC security agencies.

Sayyid Hamoud was received by Shaikh Khalifa bin Hamad al Thani, Minister of Interior and Commander of the Internal Security Force (Lekhwiya).

The concluding exercise included a demonstration of rapid intervention operations



The Royal Oman Police, the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority, and the Medical City for Military and Security Services took part in the exercise.

and countering potential security threats, along with precise simulations of counter-terrorism scenarios, protection of vital installations and crisis management. Throughout these demonstrations, the security units displayed exceptional speed of response and meticulous coordination among various formations.

The exercise, which involved Gulf security agencies and forces as well as specialised security units from the United States of America, aimed to elevate the level of security preparedness, enhance field integration and coordination, and test the efficiency of operational plans and response mechanisms. This reflects

the high professionalism and advanced capability the Gulf security agencies have achieved in dealing with various security challenges.

The exercise, which lasted 11 days, involved the execution of over 70 training scenarios, amounting to more than 260 hours of intensive field training.

Earlier on Wednesday, Sayyid Hamoud arrived in Doha. He was received by Sayyid Ammar bin Abdullah al Busaidy, Ambassador of Oman to Qatar.

The Minister of Interior was accompanied by a delegation comprising Maj Gen Abdullah bin Ali al Harthy, Assistant Inspector General of Police and Customs for Operations; Maj Gen Sulaiman bin Ali al Husseini, Chairman of the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority; and a number of officials.

The conclusion of the exercise was attended by Jasem bin Mohammed Al Budaiwi, GCC Secretary-General. — ONA

SHORT TAKES



Oman's delegation is led by Dr Ali bin Amer al Shaithani. — ONA

OMAN AT DIGITAL ORGANIZATION MEETINGS

KUWAIT: The Sultanate of Oman is taking part in the 5th General Assembly of the Digital Cooperation Organization (DCO) and the 2nd edition of the International Digital Cooperation Forum held concurrently in the State of Kuwait. Representatives of more than 60 countries are taking part in the meetings, which began on Wednesday.

Oman's delegation is led by Dr Ali bin Amer al Shaithani, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology for Communications and Information Technology.

Themed “Inclusive Prosperity in the Age of Artificial Intelligence (AI)”, the International Digital Cooperation Forum's meeting is in pursuance of the DCO's efforts to promote international cooperation and ensure that all countries and societies garner the gains of the digital revolution.

During the forum, the participants explore means of using AI and modern digital technologies to achieve sustainable and inclusive economic growth, in addition to minimising the digital divide between countries and ensuring the ethical and responsible use of technology. — ONA

130 GRADUATE AS PART OF 2026 OQ BATCH



The partnership aims to provide 600 job opportunities for graduates and job-seekers. — ONA

MUSCAT: OQ Group welcomed 130 graduates into its 2026 Graduate Development Programme intake during the official onboarding ceremony held on Wednesday.

The event was held under the auspices of Said bin Abdullah al Balushi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Labour for Human Resources Development at the Oman Institute for Energy. “The Ministry of Labour places strong emphasis on qualification and training to enable Omani youth to meet the needs of the labour market and its rapidly evolving skills requirements, through its various plans and programmes, and in cooperation with government entities and companies,” he said.

The intake represents a tangible outcome of the strategic agreement signed between OQ and the Ministry of Labour in October 2025, reflecting a strong public-private partnership approach to sustainable employment and national capacity building.

The partnership aims to provide 600 job opportunities for graduates and job-seekers in fields aligned with OQ's business needs and future growth plans. It translates national workforce priorities into structured, employment-linked talent pathways, reinforcing a shared commitment to building a sustainable workforce pipeline that links education, employability and long-term career progression. — ONA

Pact signed to train 321 Omanis in wind turbine manufacturing

MUSCAT: Mawarid Turbine Company and the National University of Science and Technology signed a cooperation agreement on Wednesday to qualify approximately 321 Omani graduates. This cohort represents the first national batch to receive intensive and specialised industrial training in the field of wind turbine manufacturing, preparing them for employment at the factory currently being established by Mawarid Turbine in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm.

The signing ceremony was held under the auspices of Dr Mansour bin Talib al Hinai, Chairman of the Authority for Public Services Regulation (APSR), who emphasised the significance of the agreement as an initiative developed in coordination with various



The cohort represents the first national batch to receive intensive and specialised industrial training. — ONA

entities through the Employment Governance Committee in the Public Services Sector.

The agreement was signed by Mustafa bin Mohammed al Hinai, CEO of Mawarid

Turbine, and Dr Ali bin Saud al Bimani, Vice-Chancellor of the National University of Science and Technology. The programme, which is carried out in integration with the Ministry of Labour and

the Authority for Public Services Regulation, is a specialised training initiative and the first of its kind in wind turbine manufacturing.

Dr Abeer bint Ali al Kalbani, Director of National Competency Development and Local Content at Mawarid Turbine, explained that the programme will commence during the current month of February within a clear industrial framework based on the realities of production lines and manufacturing requirements. The focus will be on qualifying the national workforce in the manufacturing of turbine blades and the assembly of nacelle units, while building practical efficiency, industrial discipline, and an applied understanding of international quality and safety standards. — ONA

Oman transitioning towards sustainable development

THE Sultanate of Oman reaffirmed its steadfast commitment to achieving comprehensive and sustainable social development, guided by a national approach that places the citizen at its core as both the driver and ultimate beneficiary of progress. This commitment aligns with the Sustainable Development Goals and the national Oman Vision 2040, which prioritises enhancing societal well-being, ensuring equal opportunities, and protecting the most vulnerable segments of the population.

This statement was delivered in a speech by Ambassador Omar bin Said al Kathiri, Oman's Permanent Representative to the United Nations in New York, during the Sultanate of Oman's participation in the 64th session of the Commission for Social Development.

Convening under the theme “Fostering Social Development and Social Justice through Coordinated, Equitable and Inclusive Policies,” the session was held at United Nations Headquarters in New York.

Al Kathiri elaborated that Oman has implemented an integrated suite of policies and programmes designed to strengthen social protection. Key initiatives include the enactment of the Social Protection Law and the Labour Law, as well as the establishment of the Social Protection Fund as a unified umbrella system. These measures, he



Ambassador Omar bin Said al Kathiri, Oman's Permanent Representative to the United Nations in New York. — ONA

affirmed, ensure comprehensive coverage and the sustainability of social benefits for all members of society. Additionally, the Job Security System has been instituted to protect individuals affected by workforce reductions.

He further explained that Oman is transitioning toward a new phase of sustainable development through a strategic framework focused on expanding economic diversification, pursuing comprehensive development across all governorates, and cultivating a skilled national workforce. These efforts collectively reinforce the nation's social protection infrastructure.

He highlighted that Oman has launched several pivotal national programs, including the National Employment Program, which seeks to generate opportunities for job seekers; the National Program for Economic Diversification, aimed at broadening the national production base; and the National Programme for Financial Sustainability and Development of the Financial Sector.

Notably, Oman ranked first in the Gulf region in establishing a comprehensive sustainable finance framework for the public sector, financing environmental projects to accelerate the realisation of the Oman Vision 2040.

The Ambassador affirmed that Oman places particular emphasis on enhancing the efficiency of social spending and improving the quality of essential services — especially in education, health and social housing. This focus is complemented by ongoing development of government support programmes, all of which contribute to strengthening social stability, promoting inclusion and achieving sustainable growth.

He reiterated Oman's dedication to continued collaboration with international partners and to supporting United Nations efforts in advancing comprehensive social development, promoting social justice and building more equitable and sustainable societies for present and future generations. — ONA

Conference highlights education in health professions

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
MUSCAT, FEB 4

The National University of Science and Technology's International conference on Higher Education in Health held at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre, under the auspices of Shaikh Ghosn bin Hilal al Alawi, Chairman of the State Financial and Administrative Audit Institution, witnessed global Participation and High-quality scientific discourse and broad participation from academics and healthcare practitioners.

Dr Mohamed Ali, Chancellor, National University, emphasised the significance of launching the conference for the first time, describing it as a new platform that strengthens the Oman's role in advancing medical and health professions. “This is an opportunity for the National and international experts to be under one roof and share their learnings, and expertise with others. This enhances our knowledge. We are always learning from others and that



The conference is a platform that strengthens Oman's role in advancing medical professions.

is very important. Your own perception is something, but when you learn from others, our own. Knowledge is enhanced,” he told the Observer.

Dr Ali bin Saud al Baimani, Vice-Chancellor of the National University, noted that the conference reflects the University's commitment to excellence and innovation, and contributes to the advancement of health professions education through the adoption of global best practices in support of the healthcare system in the Sultanate of Oman.

“This for our experts and students to learn more about the latest development especially with the advancement of AI — It is here to stay and so we wanted to ensure that teachers, students and especially parents know how to use it. At the National University we have a research centre for AI,” Dr Al Baimani said.

The Conference Chair and Dean of the College of Medicine, Professor Mohammed al Shafae, stated that organising this scientific event represents a pivotal milestone for the

National University, affirming that the scale of international participation reflects the Sultanate's growing stature as a regional hub for academic excellence in health professions education.

“The main objective of this conference is to improve the quality of education in the health Professions. This is part of the priority of the Oman's Economic Vision His Majesty's vision in developing the human resources in the health sector,” he said.

Prof Richard Reznick noted that in the last thirty or forty years there have been many changes. Then there was no such thing as simulation based learning, and now virtually every academic institution has robust programmes appropriately in stimulation. The biggest concern about health care delivery has not been in the quality of care but in the communication of professionalism. Patient safety was not a word 25 years ago and we have invested heavily in performance based assessment and competency based education.

SPOTLIGHT



TOURIST
SAFETY
SHOULD BE
THE HIGHEST
PRIORITY

VINOD NAIR
MUSCAT, FEB 4

THE cliché is that Oman’s geographical terrain is ideal for adventure and fun, with rugged mountains on one side and a pristine coastline of nearly 3,000 km on the other, stretching from the south to the north. Let’s not forget the vast desert areas that offer ample opportunities for dune bashing, trekking, and hiking trails, among other activities.

However, adventure also calls for caution, especially in difficult terrains, and for first-time tourists

in the country. It is extremely important to follow weather updates and take them seriously, as the sea can turn rough on short notice, and some mountain tops are susceptible to rapid weather changes that can lead to flash floods due to thunderstorms.

In this context, the execution of guidelines is crucial to preserving the country’s image as a safe tourism destination.

The recent incident involving a tourist boat sent shockwaves across the country but also sent a strong message to all tourism service providers to follow guidelines, provide timely service vessels

and take weather warnings from the meteorological department seriously, rather than relying solely on years of experience.

“For marine tourism operators, it is necessary to follow weather warnings on the state of the sea regardless of the prevailing conditions at the time of starting the service. In a region known for its extreme hot weather, it is unlikely that a foreign tourist will be aware of the volatility in our climate. It is the responsibility of the service provider to ensure the safety of tourists on board before venturing into the sea,” said a tour operator at the Marina Bandar Al Rowdha.

He added, “Another issue we face all the time is the reluctance of some tourists to use safety jackets and their disregard for safety instructions. These are seasoned travellers who may have enjoyed similar experiences during trips to other countries. They tend to take safety instructions lightly, endangering their own lives, fellow travellers and crew members in the process.” Sources in the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MoTCIT) affirm that regulations and guidelines are in place for all marine tour operators, but ultimately, it is the responsibility of individuals and enterprises to ensure their implementation.

Ahmed al Balushi, a guide affiliated with a leading tour operator, said, “It is not just marine tourism that is risky; even trekking and simple visits to small mountainous areas can be challenging. We brief all our guests to use appropriate clothing, footwear, water and other safety accessories. More importantly, we emphasise that trip plans can be changed or cancelled without prior notice based on the local climate.”

Ravish Parab, who recently arranged a three-day tour for one of his visiting guests, said, “Overall, experiences were good during a visit to dolphin watching or during travel inland, but the execution of safety standards can still be improved. It felt like they were not uniformly followed by everyone, but in general, the operators were polite and helpful.”

“It is not just marine tourism that is risky; even trekking and simple visits to small mountainous areas can be challenging. We brief all our guests to use appropriate clothing, footwear, water and other safety accessories. More importantly, we emphasise that trip plans can be changed or cancelled without prior notice based on the local climate.”

AHMED AL
BALUSHI
A guide



Recall

HINO 700 SERIES

RECALL DATE: 05-02-2026

Brand of Commodity	Year of Production*	#Number of Affected Commodities
ZSIEPVA-VRP	2024 to 2025	140

*Not all vehicles in this production period, are affected.
#Subject to revision, based on the information received from the manufacturer, from time to time.

Recall consequence

In some vehicles of Hino 700 Series, strength of supply pump housing is insufficient due to inappropriate surface treatment process. Therefore cracks may develop when repeated to the supply pump, resulting in fuel leak.

Recall Action

Defect in the durability of the supply cover, which is considered insufficient due to an improper surface treatment process that causes cracks when repeating the process, which leads to fuel leakage.

SHORT TAKES



Companies have been asked to submit the required documents and supporting materials.

COMPANIES TOLD TO UPDATE POLLUTION RESPONSE PLANS: EA

MUSCAT: The Environment Authority (EA) has issued a public notice urging all licensed companies and establishments in Oman to comply with the Environment Protection and Pollution Control Law issued under Royal Decree No 114/2001, with a specific focus on updating and aligning their emergency response plans.

In a statement, the authority called on entities to review and update their environmental emergency plans, particularly those related to oil and chemical pollution incidents, in line with approved best practices. Companies have been asked to submit the required documents and supporting materials to the Environmental Emergency Centre at the Authority's headquarters via email at mail@ea.gov.om

The required submissions include company background information demonstrating capacity to respond to pollution incidents, copies of commercial registration certificates, and detailed emergency plans for Tier 1 and Tier 2 oil spill response. Firms must also provide inventories of equipment, materials and chemicals used in spill response, along with their locations across the Sultanate of Oman.

Additional requirements include details of trained personnel and emergency contact numbers, information on partner or contracted service providers, and copies of relevant certifications such as ISO 9001 and ISO 14001. Companies capable of responding to chemical pollution incidents must also submit lists of safety and rescue equipment used in such cases.

The authority said the directive is part of efforts to strengthen preparedness and ensure an effective national response to environmental emergencies.

OMAN PARTICIPATES IN OIC MEETINGS IN MAURITANIA

NOUAKCHOTT: The Sultanate of Oman on Wednesday took part in meetings of the Parliamentary Union of Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) Member States, held in Nouakchott, Islamic Republic of Mauritania. The meetings formed part of the 55th session of the Executive Committee of the OIC Parliamentary Union.

The Omani delegation was led by Mohammed bin Salim al Harthy, Member of the State Council.



The 55th session of the Executive Committee of the OIC Parliamentary Union focused on developing mechanisms for joint parliamentary work. — ONA

The meeting discussed the draft agenda of the Executive Committee in the presence of members of the Committee on Economic and Environmental Affairs. During the meeting, two Vice-Presidents of the Executive Committee were elected as representatives of African and Asian groups.

The meeting also approved the distribution of seats of members of the Executive Committee for the next session of its meetings. — ONA

Forum highlights media role in development

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, FEB 4

THE Saudi Media Forum concluded its activities with the participation of an official delegation from the Sultanate of Oman's Ministry of Information. The participation aimed to exchange expertise on media, its role in development, and the future vision for media transformation.

This participation came within the framework of strengthening fraternal relations and joint media cooperation between Saudi Arabia and Oman, and exchanging experiences and methods that enhance the media's impact in serving societies. The fifth edition of the Saudi Media Forum 2026 was launched from February 2 to 4 under the theme 'Media in a Changing World'. The forum witnessed a notable presence of official delegations from various Arab and regional countries.

The forum organisers clarified that this edition embodies the Kingdom's Vision 2030 in supporting the knowledge economy, enhancing Riyadh's position as an international platform for exchanging media expertise, and empowering the sector with tools for innovation and development, particularly in the fields of artificial intelligence and modern media technologies.

The forum served as an international media platform, bringing together over 300 media leaders and experts from more than 20 countries to discuss the challenges and



The forum addressed the importance of strengthening media cooperation between countries.

opportunities facing the media industry amidst rapid digital and technological transformations. This was achieved through over 150 specialised and diverse dialogue sessions. The sessions provided a valuable experience, enabling the Sultanate of Oman to understand global public opinion trends, grasp modern media influence tools, enhance strategic media planning, and connect media with development, tourism, and investment. Furthermore, they fostered a professional network that supports the presence of Omani media and expands its influence regionally and internationally.

The forum addressed the importance of strengthening media cooperation

between countries, exploring new avenues for collaboration in training, exchanging expertise, and developing media content to keep pace with the rapidly changing global landscape. This took place amidst a broad presence of international organisations and professional bodies in the media sector.

Oman's benefit from the forum lies in acquiring leading experiences in digital media transformation, building Gulf and international media partnerships, developing the skills of national talent, and anticipating the future of media and modern technologies. This will enhance the Sultanate of Oman's presence and its media message regionally and internationally.

Workshop highlights air traffic contingency management

MUSCAT: Represented by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA), the Sultanate of Oman is hosting a two-day workshop on a framework for Air Traffic Contingency Management in the Middle East region (ME). The workshop, organised by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), began in Muscat on Wednesday.

The workshop reviews the requirements and objectives of emergency planning adopted by the ICAO, the working mechanism of the



The workshop reviews the requirements and objectives of emergency planning. — ONA

ICAO Crisis Coordination Team and the experiences of ME adjoining regions,

namely Asia and the Pacific.

The workshop will deal with the new emergency framework for managing air traffic in ICAO regions, with emphasis on cross-border coordination, emergency plans among neighbouring countries and regions, automated connectivity, information exchange and operational challenges. It also seeks ways to achieve the goals of ICAO Project 30/10, which aims to cut down longitudinal distances between flights crossing regions. — ONA

Oman at Indian tuna commission meeting

PERTH: The Sultanate of Oman is participating in the 16th meeting of the Committee on the Allocation of Fishing Quotas of the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC), held in Perth, Australia. The meeting includes representatives from 29 member-states and 9 regional and international organisations concerned with tuna fisheries management.

The Sultanate of Oman's delegation to the meeting is headed by Eng Yaqoub bin Khalfan al Busaidy, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources for Fisheries.

The meeting, which continues until February 6, reviews a number of important technical topics, most notably discussing the distribution of fishing quotas and considerations for artisanal and small-scale fisheries, and reviewing the general framework for quota allocation, including baseline requirements,



The meeting, which continues until February 6, reviews a number of important technical topics. — ONA

special provisions for developing countries, and proposed alternatives.

During its participation, the Omani delegation emphasised the importance of enhancing cooperation among member states to reach an agreement satisfactory to all parties that ensures the sustainable use of tuna resources in the Indian Ocean. The delegation affirmed its commitment

to supporting the work and directives of the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission in preserving these resources, which guarantees the Sultanate of Oman's right to invest in high-seas tuna fisheries. It also stressed aligning national plans with global approaches in this field, contributing to food security and supporting sustainable development goals. — ONA

وزارة التراث والسياحة
Ministry of Heritage and Tourism

Announcement of an Internal Tender

Tender No.	19/2026/MHT/HQ-3	Tender Name	Tender for the Provision of Audio-Visual (AV) Production Works at Daba Archaeological Visitors Center, Wilayat of Dibba, Musandam Governorate.
Fees of Tender Documents (Non-refundable)	25 O.R		
Tender Document Sales End Date	24/2/2026		
Last Date for Bid Submission	24/3/2026		
Grade	First, Second, Third, Fourth		
E-Tendering Portal	https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om		

Interested Companies registered with Tender Board (in the mentioned Grade) may obtain Tender documents from the E. Tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>, against non-refundable payment as mentioned above for each set of documents.

The Tenderers must acknowledge commitment to the bid.

All companies submitting bids for this tender are required to attach a valid and recently issued Omanization Compliance Certificate from the Ministry of Labour, provided that the certificate is not older than 30 days from the date of issuance.

This certificate is considered a mandatory document, and failure to submit it — for any reason — shall result in the outright disqualification of the bid, without being evaluated technically or financially.

The certificate must also demonstrate the company's compliance with the Omanization percentage required by the Ministry of Labour. If the required percentage is not met, the bid shall be automatically disqualified.

The Ministry shall not be obligated to accept the lowest or any other bids

The bid submission period starts after the end of the inquiry period shown in the e-tendering system, until the last date for submitting bids before (10:00 am, Oman time).

Support and inquiries	For more information, related to the tender, kindly communicate through the website of the e-tendering system: https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om
	For inquiries related to the technical support for the e-tendering system, kindly communicate through etenderhd@ptlc.gov.om or 24402200
For further information	Email : sotc@mht.gov.om Phones : 22088348 - 22088085

WORLD

SHORT TAKES



Seif Al-Islam Al Gaddafi

LIBYA GOVT PROBES KILLING OF LATE RULER GADDAFI’S SON

TRIPOLI: Libyan prosecutors said on Wednesday they were investigating the killing of Seif Al-Islam al Gaddafi, son of slain ruler Muammar Gaddafi, in the city of Zintan.

The public prosecutor’s office said forensic experts had been dispatched to Zintan in northwest Libya, where he was shot dead, adding that efforts were underway to identify suspects.

“The victim died from wounds by gunfire,” the office said in a statement, adding that investigators were looking to “speak to witnesses and anyone who may be able to shed light on the incident”.

Marcel Ceccaldi, a lawyer who had been representing Seif Al-Islam, said he was killed by an unidentified “four-man commando” who stormed his house on Tuesday.

The head of the Presidential Council, a transitional body supposed to represent all of divided Libya under a UN agreement, urged “political forces, the media and social actors to show restraint in public statements and to avoid incitement to hate”.

“We call on all political forces to wait for the results of the official investigation,” a statement by Mohamed al-Menfi said, referring to Seif Al-Islam as a “presidential candidate”. — AFP

UAE PLEDGES \$500 M FOR SUDAN AID US GATHERS DONORS



Displaced families from Kadugli gather at Umdulu Camp, in Engpung County, Sudan. — Reuters

WASHINGTON: The United Arab Emirates on Tuesday pledged to donate \$500 million to a UN fund for humanitarian aid for Sudan, amid a US push to renew efforts towards a truce in the conflict that has devastated the country.

Speaking at a donor event in Washington, UAE state minister Lana Nusseibeh said her country wanted to see a truce in the conflict.

The US special envoy for Africa, Massad Boulos, said he expected a total of \$1.5 billion of new funding to be pledged at the Washington event, including an additional \$200 million for Sudan from the United States.

Other states represented at the event did not make clear promises of new aid.

The conflict in Sudan has killed tens of thousands of people, displaced millions and spread famine across the vast country. Fighting has raged in several areas in the past few months, with the latest frontline in the southern Kordofan region, where the army has claimed progress in recent days. — AFP

OVER 250 PEOPLE KILLED AFTER SEPARATIST ATTACKS IN PAKISTAN

ISLAMABAD: More than 250 people have been killed in coordinated attacks launched by separatists across Pakistan’s Balochistan province since Saturday, a security official said on Wednesday, with fighting continuing as government forces pursue the militants.

Pakistan has been battling a separatist insurgency for decades, with frequent armed attacks on security forces, foreign nationals and non-local Pakistanis in the mineral-rich province bordering Afghanistan and Iran.

A senior official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said on Wednesday that “197 terrorists

have been killed in the ongoing counter-terrorism operations”. He added that at least 36 civilians and 22 security personnel were killed during the coordinated attacks in restive Balochistan. Sporadic clashes were still taking place in some districts, after militants stormed banks, jails, police stations and military installations over the weekend.

The chief minister of Balochistan, Sarfraz Bugti, told a news conference in Quetta on Sunday that all the districts under attack were cleared. “We are chasing them, we will not let them go so easily,” he said. The Baloch Liberation Army

(BLA), the province’s most active militant separatist group, claimed responsibility for the attacks in a statement sent to AFP.

The group, which the United States has designated a terrorist organisation, said it had targeted military installations as well as police and civil administration officials in gun attacks and suicide bombings. The BLA has intensified attacks on Pakistanis from other provinces working in the region in recent years, as well as foreign energy firms. Last year, the separatists attacked a train with 450 passengers on board, sparking a deadly two-day siege. — AFP

UN experts lambast Israeli ‘terrorist’ death penalty bill

UNITED Nations experts on Wednesday called on Israel to withdraw a bill proposing the mandatory death penalty for terrorist acts, warning it would violate the right to life and discriminate against Palestinians.

Israel’s parliament last November passed a first reading of a draft amendment to the country’s penal code, demanded by far-right National Security Minister Itamar Ben Gvir.

“Mandatory death sentences are contrary to the right to life,” a dozen independent UN rights experts warned in a statement.



Palestinians walk past the rubble of residential buildings destroyed during Israel’s two-year offensive, in Gaza City on Wednesday. — Reuters

The Ramallah-based Palestinian foreign ministry called it a “new form of escalating Israeli extremism and criminality against the Palestinian people”.

statement said “the death penalty would be imposed by military courts under military law for terrorist acts causing the death of a person, even if not intended”.

In Israel and occupied East Jerusalem, meanwhile, capital punishment would continue to be applied only under Israeli criminal law and only for the “intentional killing of Israeli citizens or residents”.

The experts’ statement warned that under both tracks, “vague and overbroad definitions of terrorist offences under Israeli law would apply, which can include conduct that is not genuinely terrorist, and the death penalty would be

mandatory”.

The experts, including Francesca Albanese, the special rapporteur for the rights situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, stressed that unintentional killings were not considered among the “most serious” crimes to which the death penalty can be applied under international law.

“Since Israeli military trials of civilians typically do not meet fair trial standards under international human rights law and humanitarian law, any resulting death sentence would further violate the right to life,” said the experts, who also included the special rapporteurs for protecting rights while countering terrorism and for extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions.

“Denial of a fair trial is also a war crime,” they stressed.

The independent experts, who are mandated by the UN Human Rights Council but who do not speak on behalf of the United Nations, also warned that “the bill makes matters worse by allowing death sentences to be imposed by a simple majority vote of military judges”.

Hamas said in November that the proposed law “embodies the ugly fascist face of the rogue Zionist occupation and represents a blatant violation of international law”.

The Ramallah-based Palestinian foreign ministry called it a “new form of escalating Israeli extremism and criminality against the Palestinian people”. — AFP



SAUDI TO PROVIDE PASSPORTS FOR CAMELS

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia has announced plans to issue passports to the kingdom’s millions of camels, to help better manage the country’s prized herds. The Ministry of Environment, Water and Agriculture promised the initiative would enhance the “productivity and efficiency in the sector and build a reliable reference database for camels”. A social media post from the ministry on Tuesday included a picture of the document: a green passport stamped with the country’s coat of arms and a golden image of a camel. The passport will “contribute to organising sales and trading operations by regulating commerce and transport, ensuring official documentation, protecting owners’ rights and facilitating proof of ownership,” according to Al Ekhbariya. In 2024, the government estimated there were around 2.2 million camels in the kingdom. — AFP

CONTRACT ROW

Panama rejects arbitration in canal port case



PANAMA CITY: Panama’s President Jose Raul Molina on Wednesday rejected the decision by CK Hutchison to launch arbitration over the annulment of its contract to operate two ports on the Panama Canal. CK Hutchison’s subsidiary Panama Ports Company said it had begun arbitration after Panama’s Supreme Court last week invalidated its contract. US President Donald Trump last year put Panama under pressure to terminate PPC’s contract.

TREATY TO EXPIRE

Pope Leo warns of ‘new arms race’



VATICAN CITY: Pope Leo XIV warned on Wednesday of the risk of “a new arms race” as the last US-Russia nuclear treaty is set to expire. New START, the last nuclear treaty between Washington and Moscow after decades of agreements dating to the Cold War, is due to expire on Thursday.

“I urge you not to abandon this instrument without seeking to ensure that it is followed up in a concrete and effective manner,” the pope said.

NO SAFETY

‘Greek trains still a fire risk’



ATHENS: Experts acting for families in Greece’s worst rail disaster said on Wednesday that fire-proofing faults contributed to deaths and injuries in the 2023 accident, and warned that the problem still existed today.

“At this moment, an unknown number of train carriages circulate under the same... conditions, which do not offer fire-proof safety,” lawyer Antonis Psaropoulos, father of one of the victims, told reporters.

SHORT TAKES



US President Barack Obama (L) and Russian President Dmitry Medvedev sign the new Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START II) at Prague Castle in Prague on April 8, 2010. — Reuters file photo

‘EXPIRING NUCLEAR PACT MAKES EVERY CRISIS MORE DANGEROUS’

GENEVA: Allowing the last US-Russia nuclear arms control deal to expire could unleash a new nuclear arms race, making all crises more dangerous, the ICAN campaign group warned on Wednesday, calling for urgent new disarmament action.

The New START agreement is set to expire on Thursday, formally releasing both Moscow and Washington from a raft of restrictions on their nuclear arsenals. The International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons, winner of the 2017 Nobel Peace Prize, warned against allowing the treaty, which controls 87 per cent of the world’s nuclear weapons, to lapse.

“Without New START, there is a real danger the new arms race will accelerate between the US and Russia,” ICAN chief Melissa Parke said in a statement. That, she warned, would mean “more warheads, more delivery systems, more exercises — and other nuclear-armed states will feel pressure to keep up”.

“That makes every crisis more dangerous and increases the risk of mistakes and miscalculation.”

Parke urged Washington and Moscow to “publicly commit to respect New START’s limits while a new framework is negotiated”. Russian President Vladimir Putin already last September offered a one-year extension of the pact. While US President Donald Trump said at the time it “sounds like a good idea”, the Kremlin says it has not received an answer. If the treaty does lapse, “the two countries will be free to build and deploy more weapons, with the two sides unable to verify what the other is doing”, ICAN said. — AFP

LEONARDO HITS SPAIN



People walk in a shopping area amid rain as storm Leonardo hits parts of Spain, in Ronda, Spain on Wednesday. — Reuters

TOP COLOMBIA CARTEL HALTS PEACE TALKS AFTER TRUMP-PETRO PACT

BOGOTÁ: Colombia’s most powerful cartel walked away from months-long peace talks on Wednesday, after Presidents Gustavo Petro and Donald Trump vowed a new offensive targeting three key cocaine trafficking bosses.

At the White House, the two presidents agreed to joint military and intelligence actions against Colombian criminal capos who together produce and supply much of the world’s cocaine. Colombian Defence Minister Pedro Sanchez said the two countries would target Ivan Mordisco, Colombia’s most wanted rebel; Chiquito Malo, commander



US President Donald Trump and his Colombian counterpart Gustavo Petro meet at the Oval Office at the White House on Tuesday. — Reuters

of the Clan del Golfo cartel; and Pablito, an ELN guerrilla leader operating on the Venezuelan border.

The Petro-Trump pact upends years of spluttering Colombian efforts to negotiate peace accords with big criminal groups. Colombia produces about 70 per cent of the world’s cocaine, and the US is by far the world’s largest consumer. “These are not new Colombian targets, but they are new targets for a joint US-Colombia operation,” Sanchez told Colombia’s Caracol radio.

Sanchez said Venezuela would also be asked to join the campaign. Many cartel and guerrilla fighters have traditionally found safety crossing the Colombia-Venezuela border. — AFP

Ukraine, Russia resume peace talks in Abu Dhabi

UKRAINIAN AND Russian negotiators began a second round of US-brokered talks in Abu Dhabi on Wednesday, seeking to advance efforts to end Europe’s biggest conflict since World War Two as fighting raged on. The two-day trilateral meetings come after Ukraine’s President Volodymyr Zelensky said Russia had exploited a US-backed energy truce last week to stockpile munitions, attacking Ukraine with a record number of ballistic missiles on Tuesday.

“Another round of negotiations has begun in Abu Dhabi,” said Rustem Umerov, Ukraine’s top negotiator, on the Telegram app. “The negotiation process started in a trilateral format — Ukraine, the United States and Russia.” Photographs released by the United Arab Emirates’ foreign ministry showed the three delegations sitting around a U-shaped table, with US officials seated at the centre, including special envoy Steve Witkoff and US President Donald Trump’s son-in-law Jared Kushner.

Umerov said that teams would later meet in separate groups to discuss specific topics and would then follow up with a joint meeting to coordinate their positions.

Shortly after talks began, Russian forces struck a crowded market in eastern Ukraine with cluster munitions, killing at least seven people and wounding 15, the Donetsk region’s Governor Vadym Filashkin said.

Trump’s administration has pushed both Kyiv and Moscow to find a compromise to end the four-year war, but the two sides remain far apart on key points despite several rounds of talks with US officials.

The most sensitive issues are Moscow’s demands that Kyiv give up land it still controls and the fate of the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant, Europe’s largest, which sits in a Russian-occupied area.

Moscow wants Kyiv to pull its troops out of all of the Donetsk region, including a belt of heavily fortified cities regarded as one of Ukraine’s strongest defences, as a precondition for any deal.



Employees repair sections of the Darnytska combined heat and power plant damaged by Russian air strikes in Kyiv on Wednesday. — AFP

Ukraine said the conflict should be frozen along the current front line and has rejected any unilateral pullback of its forces.

Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said on Wednesday that Russian troops would keep fighting until Kyiv made “decisions” that could bring the war to an end. Russia currently occupies about 20 per cent of Ukraine’s national territory, including Crimea and parts of the eastern Donbas region seized before the 2022 attack. Analysts say Russia has gained about 1.5 per cent of Ukrainian territory since early 2024.

PAINFUL CONCESSIONS

Polls show that the majority of Ukrainians oppose a deal that hands Moscow more land. Kyiv residents told Reuters on Wednesday they were sceptical the new round of talks would bring any major breakthroughs.

“Let’s hope that it will change (something), of course. But I don’t believe it will change

anything now,” Serhii, 38, a taxi driver, said. “We will not give in, and they will not give in either.”

The first round of talks was held in the UAE last month, marking the first direct public negotiations between Moscow and Kyiv. Chinese President Xi Jinping and Russian President Vladimir Putin hailed their ties during a video call on Wednesday held in the run-up to the fourth anniversary of Moscow’s war in Ukraine.

The Kremlin said Xi - who it said supported this week’s talks - had invited Putin to China in the coming months. Beijing has sought to cast itself as a peacemaker in the war and is a close ally of Moscow, which is increasingly struggling to fund its vast war economy.

A source close to the government told Reuters that Russia’s public deficit could balloon to almost triple the official target by end-2026. — Reuters

Musk’s mega-merger bets on sci-fi future of data centers in space

WASHINGTON: Seventy-five years ago, the idea of harnessing the power of the skies was little more than fantasy spun by futurists like Arthur C Clarke and Isaac Asimov. Elon Musk’s mega-merger of his companies xAI and SpaceX this week brings this sci-fi dream a step closer.

NASA engineers and technologists have speculated for nearly two decades about moving energy-hungry computing off the planet. More recently, the idea has captured the attention of Big Tech including Alphabet and Jeff Bezos’ Blue Origin. The physics made sense, the solar energy was abundant. Still, the challenges seemed insurmountable.

Musk, though, known for betting on seemingly far-out theories and getting them to

work, may finally be laying the groundwork to make data centres in space a reality. He is armed with the world’s busiest satellite launch fleet, an AI startup, and an appetite for infrastructure that stretches from Earth to vacuum.

“In the long term, space-based AI is obviously the only way to scale,” Musk said on Monday. “To harness even a millionth of our Sun’s energy would require over a million times more energy than our civilisation currently uses! The only logical solution therefore is to transport these resource-intensive efforts to a location with vast power and space.” The merger sharpens investor focus on how he might overcome big hurdles through a tightly woven ecosystem of rockets,



Advocates argue space-based data centers would be a cheaper alternative to data centers on Earth, thanks to constant solar energy and the ability to dump heat directly into space. — This is AI generated image

satellites and AI systems, to take AI infrastructure beyond Earth. It comes just as SpaceX is preparing for a potential \$1.5 trillion IPO. SpaceX has sought permission to launch up to 1 million solar-powered satellites engineered as orbital data centres, far beyond anything currently deployed or proposed. In a filing with the

Federal Communications Commission, SpaceX describes a solar-powered, optical-link-driven “orbital data-centre system,” though it did not say how many Starship launches would be required to scale the space data-centre network to an operational degree.

“Compute in space isn’t sci-fi anymore,” said David Ariosto, author and founder of space intelligence firm The Space Agency. “And Elon Musk has already proven himself capable across multiple domains.”

Advocates argue space-based data centres would be a cheaper alternative to data centres on Earth, thanks to constant solar energy and the ability to dump heat directly into space. But some experts have warned that big

commercial gains are years from reality as the concept faces daunting challenges and is fraught with technical risks: radiation, debris, heat management, latency, and formidable economics that include high maintenance costs.

“There’s some real challenges here, and how do you then make that cost-effective?” said Armand Musey, founder of Summit Ridge Group, who said the financial details of a project such as this was hard to model because the “technical unknowns haven’t been clarified.” “But never say never,” said Musey, who called Musk’s track record “unbelievable.” “I think a large part of it is, it’s a bet on Elon. His success is really hard for people to ignore.” — Reuters

OPINION

The gap between degrees and dollars



**RUMAITHA
AL BUSAIDI**

The writer is environmental strategist and advocate for sustainable development

WE are only two months into 2026, and a lot has already shifted beneath our feet. In New York, the fourth session of the UN tax committee opened this week with an empty chair. The United States exited the Paris Agreement last month and has signalled a wider retreat from multilateral climate cooperation. While legal arguments continue, the political reality is already here.

For Oman, these talks offer an early glimpse of how the world intends to fund survival as extremes accelerate. Voluntary climate finance has a credibility problem. The gap between grand announcements and actual arrivals has become its own kind of climate risk.

Science is tightening the timeline. A study released this week by the University of Colorado Boulder uses ancient lake sediments to deliver a warning. Tropical land regions can warm far faster than the surrounding oceans during high carbon periods, in some cases approaching twice the rate. Global averages of 1.5°C look polite on a chart. Heat on the ground however is personal. It is a work shift in Muscat that starts before dawn and still feels unsafe by noon. It is a farmer watching water vanish

faster than the season suggests. The tropics do not experience warming as a trend line. We experience it as a threat to human endurance.

Tax has entered the climate conversation with force. Negotiators in New York are drafting a new framework and treating polluter pays as a design brief. The debate has moved from whether to tax to how to collect. Proposals include levies on fossil fuel profits and forms of global wealth taxation. Advocates cite \$1.7 trillion annually as the scale needed to fund climate loss and damage and close the gap between diplomatic promises and lived reality.

Oman sits in a rare position inside this tension. The nation produces hydrocarbons while living in a region where warming hits harder. Transition requires holding both truths at once, then building a future resilient enough to survive them.

The Sultanate of Oman is already building for this shift. This week, the Oman Net-Zero Centre announced plans to establish a national framework for carbon certification and a digital Carbon Registry. While delegates in New York debate how to tax carbon, Oman is building the infrastructure to price it properly and

Revenue takes years to mobilise and distribute and while doing all of this temperature does not wait for fiscal years.

prove it credibly. A national certification system aligned with international standards can help Omani industries substantiate emissions claims and access finance linked to verified reductions. It also strengthens the market readiness of low carbon exports, including green hydrogen headed to Europe, where documentation and credibility decide whether value is recognised.

The 11th Five-Year Plan launched at the start of this year turns Oman Vision 2040 into programme and reinforces a green economy direction as a national growth strategy. Financial regulation is tightening too. The Central Bank of Oman is pushing institutions to price climate exposure rather than defer it, starting from this year. However, an uncomfortable gap remains.

Scientists measure acceleration today. Negotiators move through sessions and ratification timelines. Revenue takes years to mobilise and distribute and while doing all of this temperature does not wait for fiscal years.

As New York moves towards a draft text, one question deserves to stay in the light. Can money ever move fast enough to meet the heat?

END OF NUCLEAR
TREATY MARKS
CHANGING TIMES
FOR WORLD POWERS

FABIEN ZAMORA

The expiry on Thursday of the New START treaty between the United States and Russia signals the end of major bilateral nuclear-disarmament accords and a shift towards a looser nuclear order, profoundly reshaped by China’s growing diplomatic and technological power.

Signed in 2010, the accord was a key component of the US administration’s policy to reset relations with the Kremlin. New START limited the arsenals of the two nuclear powers to a maximum of 1,550 deployed strategic offensive warheads each — a reduction of nearly 30 percent compared with the previous ceiling set in 2002. It capped the number of launchers and heavy bombers at 800.

Crucially, the treaty also provided for mutual inspections of military sites, a pillar of the “trust but verify” disarmament policy when Ronald Reagan was US president. Moscow and former US president Joe Biden’s administration reached a last-minute deal in January 2021 to extend it until February 4, 2026, in a climate of mistrust that predated Russia’s invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022. On August 9, 2022, Russia announced it was suspending US inspections of its military sites under the treaty, saying this was in response to US obstacles to Russian inspections in the United States. No inspections have taken place since, reducing New START to a commitment to remain under the agreed limits.

In September 2025, Russian President Vladimir Putin proposed extending the treaty’s terms for one year — an idea US President Donald Trump approved but has not followed up on.

“This proposal concerned only the caps to the numbers of warheads, which is not the most important element when talking about arms control,” said Heloise Fayet of the French Institute of International Relations (IFRI).

“The most important part of New START — inspections and mutual verification — is not included.” The treaty’s expiry raised fears of a renewed arms race, which Pope Leo XIV on Wednesday urged the world to avert.

The Kremlin said it would act “responsibly” after the expiration. Technical constraints are expected to limit how quickly both sides could increase their arsenals, however. “The bottlenecks are hard to assess on the Russian side,” Fayet said. “For the Americans, they can reactivate warheads held in storage, which is not very complicated, especially as the US National Nuclear Security Administration is stepping up its production of tritium, a crucial gas.” — AFP

Inciting wars from the
convenience of home

IN today’s world, it is all too easy to become an activist with a barrage of tweets, articles, or videos, eavesdropping here and there, inciting people to wage ill-conceived wars that claim innocent lives.

War knows no victor; everyone is a loser both in the short and long term.

Defending an innocent nation is a noble humanitarian imperative. Peace cannot coexist with injustice; it can only be achieved by eliminating injustice and establishing equality and justice for all humanity. There is a significant difference between someone who calls for lifting injustice from a nation or state based on a shared affiliation, such as race, religion, language, or culture, and someone who calls for lifting injustice from a nation or state based on the shared dignity of humanity. Humanity and the peoples of the world are united in their right to global peace and in their shared humanity, particularly regarding the right to life and the equal enjoyment of its blessings and bounties. We should defend humanity simply because we are human beings.

Peace and coexistence are the common nature for all people on a land that can accommodate everyone. Wars, enmity and conflict are diseases created by humankind throughout history with closed-minded policies, contemporary lust and reckless politics.

Some politicians across the political spectrum instigate wars. We have to be careful and avoid generalisation so as not to criminalise other members of the same political body to which they belong.

However, the collective consciousness sometimes falls victim to generalisation and uncontrolled narrative, the kind of which we see in some social media



BADR AL ABRI

The writer is author of The Jurisprudence of Extremism



A child holds a container at a tent camp in Gaza City. — Reuters

writings. We have witnessed the negative impact of such content in Lebanon, Syria and Iraq. Some people attempt to incite troubles in India and Nepal as well. Reason in the face of wars, enmity and conflict does not stem from impressions or negative emotions stirred by some who are safe and secure in their homes. Some of them fly into a rage if the electricity and water were cut off for half a day, or if their salary were reduced, they would lash out at those around them. It is not easy to witness thousands displaced, hundreds killed, women widowed and children orphaned, while others incite wars as if it were a football match, not a war that spares no one.

Patience and reason are the essence of wisdom. Those who call for peace are not the same as those who call for war; those who strive to extinguish conflicts are not the same as those who ignite them, and those who advocate for the sanctity of human life are not the same as those who seek to divide people and incite discord and conflict among

them.

We must unite to extinguish the wars in Yemen, Sudan, Libya, Gaza, and elsewhere, and to work together to reconstruct these countries through development, science, knowledge and progress. This spirit stems not from Arabism but from humanity. If intellectual, religious and cultural discourses are refined and freed from the narrow affiliation, embracing the broader scope of humanity and existence, this will influence politicians and their supporters. This is because they always cling to affiliations to fulfil their ambitions, using these issues to justify the instigation of wars. I don’t say this out of sentimentality or wishful thinking, but rather, in my view, as a vision that may lead us to some form of healing. When we think with the spirit of humanity, peace and revival, and recognise the compassion within human nature, we will see positive fruits in neighbouring countries before those farther away.

Corporate governance between form and substance



AHMED AL MUKHAINI

The author is a policy analyst

CORPORATE GOVERNANCE in the Sultanate of Oman is not in crisis. That, paradoxically, is precisely the problem. For more than a decade, governance has been treated as a matter largely settled — codified in regulations, embedded in listing rules, reinforced through templates, committees and disclosures. Boards exist. Audit and risk committees meet. Annual reports are produced with increasing polish. From a distance, the architecture appears sound. Yet beneath this apparent order lies a quieter risk: complacency born of compliance, and a widening gap between governance as form and governance as substance.

This is the dialectic we are now compelled to confront. Compliance reassures; substance restrains. Compliance satisfies the regulator; substance disciplines power. When governance tilts too far towards the former, it risks becoming ceremonial — technically correct, institutionally hollow.

Corporate governance is often designed as if alignment were the norm and conflict the exception. In reality, alignment is temporary; conflict is structural. Interests diverge between majority and minority shareholders, between boards and management, between short-term returns and long-term viability, and — critically — between influence and accountability. Governance frameworks that function only when interests coincide are not frameworks at all; they are rituals. The true test of governance is not whether it operates

smoothly in calm conditions, but whether it disciplines power when interests collide.

Many governance failures begin with a convenient abstraction: the idea that the “interest of the company” is singular, obvious and uncontested. In practice, the company is a site of layered and sometimes competing claims — economic, fiduciary, contractual and reputational. Treating corporate interest as self-evident allows dominant actors to equate their preferences with the company’s good, converting influence into legitimacy. Advanced governance systems resist this shortcut by recognising plurality and by requiring reasoned prioritisation when interests diverge.

The challenge becomes sharper where a high-net-worth individual or a powerful institutional investor occupies the boardroom or the share register. Such presence is often defended as stability, vision, or market confidence. Influence in itself is not a flaw; in many cases it brings capital, continuity and strategic ambition. The flaw emerges when influence displaces deliberation, when authority substitutes for process and when deference replaces independent judgement.

In such settings, formal compliance often intensifies precisely as substantive governance weakens. More policies are adopted, more disclosures produced, more committees convened — while the real questions go unasked. Who ultimately bears the risk of this decision? Which interest is being prioritised, and which is being quietly subordinated? What trade-offs are being

Many governance failures begin with a convenient abstraction: the idea that the “interest of the company” is singular, obvious and uncontested. In practice, the company is a site of layered and sometimes competing claims — economic, fiduciary, contractual and reputational

accepted without articulation?

Compliance is frequently mistaken for neutrality. In fact, compliance always reflects an underlying hierarchy — explicit or implicit — about whose interests prevail when trade-offs arise. Where the law is silent on prioritisation, that hierarchy does not disappear; it migrates into informal power structures. Governance codes and disclosure rules may mask this reality, creating the appearance of order while leaving the resolution of conflicts to influence, personality, or market dominance rather than to principled judgement.

This is where Omani corporate governance reveals a structural vulnerability. The legal and regulatory framework speaks clearly about procedures, disclosures and duties, but far less clearly about how competing interests are to be weighed when they cannot be reconciled. The result is not flexibility, but discretion — often exercised by the most powerful actor in the room.

In more mature governance systems, the company is not treated as a monolith. Law and jurisprudence acknowledge that different interests surface with different urgency depending on context. The preservation of the company as a going concern takes precedence over distributive objectives.

The real question, then, is not whether Oman has governance rules. It is whether it is prepared to confront what governance is for: not the management of alignment, but the ordering of competing interests in moments when alignment inevitably fails.

DOCTORS HOPE UK ARCHIVE CAN SOLVE UNDER-50S BOWEL CANCER MYSTERY

HELEN ROWE

In a dusty hospital basement on the outskirts of London, over 100 years of medical history lines the shelves, neatly arranged in row after row of cardboard specimen boxes.

Largely forgotten until recently, it is hoped this unique archive will help unravel the mystery of the rising number of younger people getting bowel cancer. The archive contains tens of thousands of tumour and tissue specimens, some dating back to the early 20th century.

Preserved in formaldehyde and paraffin wax, they come from patients treated at the UK’s national bowel hospital, St Mark’s, in northwest London. In a study which began in January, researchers are using cutting-edge technology to compare archive tumours from the 1960s with ones from the present day. Historically, patients treated at the hospital would have had a “very difficult time” with the disease, said Kevin Monahan, a consultant gastroenterologist, who is co-leading the groundbreaking project by St Mark’s and the Institute of Cancer Research, London.

Their recovery — even after surgery — would have been “far from certain”.

“We want to think about whether we can convert the suffering that they went through decades ago into a new hope for their grandchildren and their great grandchildren and others who might be at risk,” he said.

The growing numbers of younger people being diagnosed with bowel cancer has left doctors worldwide perplexed. According to Bowel Cancer UK, cases of the disease in people under 50 in Britain have increased by over 50 per cent in the past 25 years. Over 2,600 cases are diagnosed annually out of the nearly 44,000 cases across all age groups.

Research published by Bristol University and others in the British Journal of Surgery in 2020 showed an “exponential increase” over a similar period, with the conclusions supported by findings from both European and American studies.

“We can’t time travel back to the 1960s... to see what people were exposed to (but)... in a way we have a record of it... within these boxes,” Monahan said. The bowel cancer expert and co-study lead, Trevor Graham of the London institute, aims to map how the DNA differs in the 1960s specimens from the ones of the current day.

By sequencing the DNA and using other laboratory techniques that “weren’t possible even five years ago”, they hope to pinpoint what is driving modern-day cases.

The project comes around a decade after the entire archive at St Mark’s was nearly consigned to the hospital incinerator. — AFP

Unesco recognition inspires hope in Afghan artist’s city

ISABELLE WESSELINGH AND MOHSEN KARIMI

HUNDREDS OF years after the celebrated painter Kamal ud-Din Behzad roamed the streets of Herat, artists in the Afghan city are finding joy and hope in his recognition by Unesco.

Sitting cross-legged on a red carpet, artist Mohammad Younes Qane uses an ultra-fine paintbrush to trace details such as a horse’s mane or the beads of a necklace.

“When I paint, I’m taken back 500 years, to the streets of Herat back then,” when the rulers of the Timurid empire were patrons of artists such as Behzad, Qane said with a smile.

Since he was a teenager, the 45-year-old has been practising Behzad’s celebrated miniature art style, which inspired French artist Henri Matisse. A contemporary of Italian masters Leonardo da Vinci and Sandro Botticelli, Behzad brought a new style to Herat before settling in Tabriz, in modern-day Iran.

Celebrating his “vibrant cultural expression”, the UN’s cultural agency inscribed Behzad’s style of miniature art on its list of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in December.

Such recognition was “truly joyful news”, coming “at a time when we are in darkness and facing very difficult conditions”, Qane said.

Since the Taliban authorities returned to power in 2021 and imposed their strict interpretation of law, many artists have left Afghanistan.

Qane has closed his gallery and works at home, with clients now rare and exhibitions non-existent. He sometimes climbs the hill to a white tomb believed to be Behzad’s, where he finds peace.

Taliban officials have banned music in public places, as well as the representation of living things.

Numerous residents pointed to the increasing enforcement of the ban on showing human faces, which are a common feature of Behzad-style artworks.



An Afghan woman painting miniature art at a workshop in Herat. — AFP

Celebrating the ‘vibrant cultural expression’, the UN’s cultural agency inscribed Behzad’s style of miniature art on its list of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in December

“It’s very sad, because we are proud of Behzad in Herat,” said one resident, speaking on condition of anonymity for security reasons.

Ahmad Jawid Zargham, the former head of the provincial arts and culture department, said paintings were “simple and without soul” before Behzad.

“He introduced scenes from people’s everyday life. For example, ordinary people, passersby, dervishes, mullahs, scenes of teaching girls and boys, or groups of workers busy with architecture,” Zargham said.

At Herat’s central mosque, which is covered in blue ceramic tiles, there are delicate floral and geometric motifs created by Behzad.

But his decorated manuscripts are kept abroad, at world-renowned institutions such as New York’s Metropolitan Museum of Art, the British Library in London and the Topkapi Palace Museum in Istanbul.

Michael Barry, a leading specialist in miniature art, said that people being deprived of their cultural patrimony was “the height of injustice”.

At the same time, he remained

“very aware of the care that is required to maintain these delicate works”, which can easily be damaged by light exposure.

Conscious of the difficulties of repatriating Behzad’s artworks, Barry instead enlarged and reproduced them in 2017 for an exhibition at Herat’s citadel.

But residents can no longer view the bright autumn colours of the tree of life, a symbol often painted by Behzad, as the wooden door has been padlocked shut.

Despite welcoming the Unesco recognition, the provincial arts and culture department did not give an explanation for its closure.

Recalling Herat’s importance, Barry said the city was the “world capital of painting, poetry, music, philosophy, mathematics. The Florence of the Islamic world”.

“The most important centre of Islamic civilisation in the 15th century endorsed figurative art,” he added.

But nowadays, at the citadel, faces shown on panels about the city’s history have been painted black. Despite such measures enforced by the Taliban government’s police, Behzad is still inspiring young Afghans.

Around a dozen women gathered in a workshop to paint miniature art scenes on glass or paper, which they sell through social media or to acquaintances.

The Unesco recognition is motivating, said Parisa Narwan, 24, who has been unable to participate in scholarships and exhibitions abroad because it has become practically impossible to get visas.

Artists need opportunities “including international exhibitions and financial support”, she said.

One of the other artists contemplated how she would address Behzad today: “I wish he could have lived now - I would ask him to improve the women’s life in Afghanistan because it is really difficult.”

Girls are banned from school beyond the age of 12, and women are barred from most jobs. — AFP

SPORTS

WEST ASIA PARA GAMES

IRAQ, SAUDI AND UAE SHINE

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, FEB 4

MUSCAT hosted the official opening ceremony of the fifth West Asia Para Games (Muscat 2026) on Tuesday evening, in a festive atmosphere that reflected the Sultanate of Oman's stature as a host of major international championships for persons with disabilities.

The opening ceremony was held under the auspices of Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthy, Under-Secretary of the Foreign Ministry for Political Affairs, and attended by Basil bin Ahmed al Rawas, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth for Sports and Youth, Chair of the Games' Higher Organising Committee, along with heads of national Paralympic delegations, representatives of sports federations, several dignitaries, ambassadors and guests.

The ceremony featured symbolic segments that reflected the spirit of the Games and their human message. It began with the Omani national anthem, followed by the parade of participating delegations, then a short film highlighting the journey of the Paralympic movement. This was followed by an artistic performance that embodied the identity of the Games.

Speeches were delivered by the Organising Committee and the West Asia Paralympic Federation, after which the athletes' and referees' oaths were taken, the Games were officially declared open, and the Games' flag was raised.

In his speech during the ceremony, Dr Mansoor al Touqi, Chairman of the Oman Paralympic Committee (OPC), stressed that Muscat's hosting of the fifth edition reflects Oman's vision in supporting persons with disabilities and its belief that will power is the true driver of development. He explained that this edition is the largest in the history of the Games in terms of the number of countries, athletes and sports, with 11 West Asian nations competing in nine para sports, giving the event significant technical and organisational



In the men's 200m T11 category, Iraq's Okab Mohammed won gold, Saudi Arabia's Mohammed Aami took silver, and Oman's Ibrahim al Amri claimed bronze.



Dignitaries during the West Asia Para Games opening ceremony. **RIGHT: The Oman contingent during the march past.**
— **Abdulwahid al Hamadani**

weight. Al Touqi praised the role of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth and the OPC in preparation and organisation, as well as the technical cooperation with international federations.

BADMINTON RESULTS

The badminton competitions saw several champions crowned across the various singles, doubles and mixed doubles events.

In men's wheelchair doubles, the Iraqi pair of Abbas Ahmed

and Karar Hussein won the gold medal, while Saudi duo Majed al Shafie and Mohammed Ahmed took silver. The bronze went to the Omani-Iraqi pairing of Ashraf al Khasibi and Mahdi Hussein.

In mixed wheelchair doubles, Iraq's Mohammed Karim and Bahrain's Ruba Youssef claimed gold, while the Emirati pair Omair Younis and Siham al Rashidi took silver. In standing mixed doubles, gold went to Iraqi-Lebanese duo Abbas Ahmed and Aya Youssef,

silver to Iraqi-Bahraini pair Karar Hussein and Zainab Ali, and bronze to Bahrain's Elyas al Yasi and Syria's Altaf Sharif.

In short-stature men's doubles, Iraq's Imad Adel and Saudi Arabia's Younus al Subhi captured gold, with silver going to Jordan's Mohammed al Tawwalbeh and Lebanon's Reda Nabil.

In singles wheelchair events, Iraq's Mohammed Karim won gold, Saudi Arabia's Mahdi Saleh took silver, and bronze was shared

by Iraq's Hassan Wathiq and the UAE's Siham al Rashidi. In men's standing singles, Iraq's Abbas Ahmed took gold, his compatriot Mahdi Hussein silver, while bronze medals went to Bahrain's Elyas Abdullah and Iraq's Abdullah Mahmoud.

In women's standing singles, Lebanon's Aya Youssef won the gold, with Syria's Altaf Sharif taking silver. In men's short-stature singles, Saudi's Younus al Subhi claimed gold, Iraq's Imad Adel took silver, Lebanon's Reda Nabil and Jordan's Musab al Tawwalbeh shared bronze medals.

WHEELCHAIR BASKETBALL AND ATHLETICS RESULTS

In wheelchair basketball, Iraq beat the UAE 60-47, while Oman lost a hard-fought game against Bahrain 67-61.

In athletics, the excitement continued with wide participation from athletes representing various countries. In the men's 200m wheelchair race, the UAE's Mohammed Fahdani took first place, while Saudi athletes Jamaan al Zahrani and Saleh al Suwailim finished second and third respectively.

In the men's 200m T11 category, Iraq's Okab Mohammed won gold, Saudi Arabia's Mohammed Aami took silver, and Oman's Ibrahim al Amri claimed bronze.

The men's 1,500 metre wheelchair race witnessed complete Saudi dominance, with Al Bara al Qarni taking first place, followed by Saleh al Suwailim in second and Jamaan al Zahrani in third.

In the men's discus throw F11, the UAE's Mohammed al Kaabi won gold, Iraq's Abbas Hammadi took silver, and Saudi Arabia's Ziyad al Khuraiib claimed bronze. In the men's javelin wheelchair event, Saudi athlete Salam Haider took first place, while Emiratis Sultan al Shamsi and Ahmed Zwaidi finished second and third respectively.

In the women's javelin wheelchair, Bahrain's Ruba al Omari won gold, Oman's Shareefa al Hatmi took silver and the UAE's Shaima al Rashidi secured bronze. In the women's shot put F37, the UAE's Maryam al Zwaidi took first, Bahrain's Maryam al Humaidi second and the UAE's Maryam al Matrooshi third.

Arsenal sink Chelsea to reach League Cup final

LONDON: Arsenal reached the League Cup final for the first time in eight years as Kai Havertz sealed a 1-0 win against Chelsea in the semifinal second leg on Tuesday.

Mikel Arteta's side had put themselves in pole position in the first leg and Havertz came off the bench to finish the 4-2 aggregate victory in the closing moments at the Emirates Stadium.

It was a cathartic triumph for the Gunners, who had lost their previous four semifinals in the 2025 Champions League and League Cup, the 2022



Arsenal's Kai Havertz scores their first goal against Chelsea in English League Cup semifinal second leg at Emirates Stadium, London.
— **Reuters**

League Cup and the 2021 Europa League. In their first final for six years, Arsenal will face Manchester City or Newcastle at Wembley on March 22.

City hold a 2-0 lead over Newcastle ahead of Wednesday's second leg at the Etihad Stadium.

Arsenal haven't won the League Cup since 1993, losing in their last three final appearances. Now they have the chance to end that drought by winning the club's first trophy since the 2020 FA Cup.

That remains the sole silverware won by Arteta since he was hired in December

2019. "We knew it was going to be a real battle out there. That resilience, that clarity to understand what kind of game we had to play, we did so well," Arteta said.

"There was a special atmosphere inside our stadium. It makes such a difference. We've been waiting a few years to get into this position and we're certainly going to enjoy it."

Arsenal are six points clear at the top of the Premier League and reached the Champions League last 16 by winning all eight of their group matches. — **AFP**

FIRSTSTUDENT



Ilaan Shafeek with the trophy.

ISB’S ILAAN SHAFEEK WINS INDIAN NATIONAL SCHOOL CHESS TITLE

MUSCAT: Ilaan Shafeek, a Class 4 student of Indian School Bausher (ISB), has created history by becoming the first student from Oman to win the Indian National School Chess Championship. The 14th edition of the championship was held at the Sarusahjai Indoor Stadium, Guwahati, Assam, from December 27 to 31, 2025 with participants from 28 states of India.

Competing in the Under-9 category, Ilaan delivered an outstanding performance, scoring 8 points by winning seven games and drawing two, to clinch the national title.

The Indian National School Chess Championship is regarded as one of the most competitive school-level tournaments in India. Ilaan impressed throughout the event with his composure, positional understanding and maturity beyond his age.

Following his achievement, Ilaan received a warm welcome on his return to Muscat by teachers, coaches, friends and family members from Indian School Bausher.

His parents expressed their gratitude to Indian School Bausher for its continuous support and encouragement. Special appreciation was extended to the school principal, Prabhakaran, for promoting both academic and sporting excellence.

Ilaan is the son of Shafeek and Nashija Shafeek, natives of Thrissur district, Kerala.

Special recognition was also given to Ilaan’s chess coach and Chess Master Academy coach, Megdi (Egypt), whose structured training and mentorship played a key role in strengthening Ilaan’s competitive skills.

CLASSICAL CHAMPION

Earlier in December 2025, Ilaan also won a Fide-rated Classical Open Tournament in Oman featuring 54 players from eight countries, becoming the youngest Classical Fide-rated champion in the history of Oman.

He further won the gold medal in his category at the Abu Dhabi Chess Festival. His current international Fide rating is 1767, the highest in his age category in Oman.

In November 2025, Ilaan represented Oman at the Arab Club Chess Championship, where he drew against Syrian International Master Talal al Zaim and defeated Palestinian coach Ahmed Nidal.

Chess excellence runs in the family, with his siblings Sinan Shafeek (Indian School Seeb) and Izaan Shafeek (Indian School Bausher) being CBSE National School bronze medallists. Another sibling, Eshal Shafeek, is a talented young artist.

Record chase puts India in ICC U19 World Cup final

A magnificent hundred from Aaron George saw India pull off a record chase and beat Afghanistan by seven wickets in the ICC Men’s U19 Cricket World Cup 2026 semifinals.

Faisal Khan and Uzairullah Niazi had each reached three figures for Afghanistan as they made 310 for four from their 50 overs.

That left India needing to pull off the biggest chase in the history of the competition to progress, and they did just that.

George was the star of the show, scoring a sensational 115, having earlier played second fiddle to Vaibhav Sooryavanshi and then Ayush Mhatre.

Although he could not quite see India home, the job was effectively done as they sealed a date with England in Friday’s final with 8.5 overs to spare.

After winning the toss, Afghanistan elected to bat, with Khalid Ahmadzai (31) and Osman Sadat (39) starting strongly as they put on 53 for the first wicket.

Osman kicked on after being joined by Faisal Khan, with the pair adding a further 64. Faisal, who already has two fifties and a hundred to his name in the tournament, was in exquisite form, and he and Uzairullah Niazi timed their innings to perfection.

Faisal hit 15 boundaries in his 110 and he and Uzairullah combined to take Afghanistan to 265 for three with their 148-run stand.

Even before Deepesh Devendran removed Faisal, Uzairullah had started to up the ante, going after the Indian bowling.

And he ramped it up and matched his batting partner in making it to three figures, only the second time in the tournament’s history that two batters had hit centuries in the same innings of a knockout clash.

With Uzairullah finishing unbeaten on 101, Afghanistan completed their innings on 310 for four, leaving India with history to make to progress to the final.

GEORGE PILES UP RUNS

India’s chase needed a fast start and in Vaibhav Sooryavanshi, they had just the man to send them on their way.

The 14-year-old showed intent from the off and hammered four sixes in his 33 balls at the crease on his way to a blistering 68.

He was given one life, when put down on 22, while opening partner Aaron George was on 20 when Wahid Zadrn spilled a chance he had offered up.

Sooryavanshi brought up his half-century in 25 deliveries and had brought the required rate down to a manageable level when he top-edged one to midwicket off Nooristani Omarzai.

By that point, India had 90 on the board inside 10 overs, and the arrival of Ayush Mhatre did nothing to slow the chase.

The skipper got off the mark with a six and took full advantage of good batting conditions as he and George put on 114 for the second wicket.

Mhatre (62) fell to Nooristani (2/64) with 107 still required but Vihaan Malhotra quickly settled in alongside George.



Vaibhav Sooryavanshi

He got one life when he appeared to have been caught and bowled by Abdul Aziz, only to earn a reprieve thanks to a no-ball.

George finally departed for 115 off 104 deliveries with 300 on the board, but Malhotra quickly wrapped things up on his way to 38 not out.

BRIEF SCORES

Afghanistan 310/4 in 50 overs (Faisal Khan 110, Uzairullah Niazi 101 not out; Kanishk Chouhan 2/55, Deepesh Devendran 2/64)
India 311/3 in 41.1 overs (Aaron George 115, Vaibhav Sooryavanshi 68, Ayush Mhatre 62; Nooristani Omarzai 2/64, Wahid Zadrn 1/67)

England spinners seal Sri Lanka series sweep ahead of T20 WC

KANDY: Spinners Jacob Bethell and Will Jacks led the way as England beat Sri Lanka by 12 runs in a low-scoring match on Tuesday to sweep their Twenty20 series 3-0 ahead of the World Cup.

England posted a meagre 128-9 with the bat, their lowest total against Sri Lanka in the format, as pace bowler Dushmantha Chameera bagged a five-wicket haul, but all-rounders Jacks (3-14) and Bethell (4-11) produced their best bowling performances in the format to restrict the hosts to 116.

“We’ve shown we can adapt to surfaces... the way the spinners bowled, 16 overs against Sri Lanka in their own conditions was an awesome effort,” England captain



England players celebrate with the trophy after winning the series. — Reuters

Harry Brook said.
Ben Duckett was dismissed for a golden duck by Chameera, and Bethell, Tom Banton and Brook

fell cheaply, leaving England struggling at 34-4 in the sixth over.
Jos Buttler (25) was beaten by

Maheesh Theekshana’s sharp turn off Kandy’s spin-friendly track, which found the gap between the England opener’s bat and pad to hit the stumps.

Player of the match Sam Curran made a battling 58 to lift England to a respectable total and Luke Wood removed Kamil Mishara for a duck in the first over. The spinners then took over, with Liam Dawson getting Pathum Nissanka caught at cover for 23

Adil Rashid bowled Pavan Rathnayake, before Jacks worked through Sri Lanka’s middle order, dismissing Kusal Mendis (26), Kamindu Mendis (14) and Janith Liyanage (17) to reduce Sri Lanka to 97-6 in the 16th over.

Bethell took three wickets in the 18th over and with Sri Lanka needing 14 to win from the last over Theekshana’s attempt to hit Bethell for six got him caught as the hosts were all out with three balls remaining.

“Great win to be part of, the way the boys kept fighting to the end... the World Cup is here, so when we have the opportunity to play here we have the experiences to carry over,” Brook said.

England, twice world champions in the format, will fly to Mumbai to begin their T20 World Cup campaign against Nepal in Group C on Sunday, the same day Sri Lanka face Ireland at Colombo in Group B. — Reuters

SPORTS

ROUND12



Sohar continued their positive run in the Jindal League with a 2–0 victory over Saham.

SOHAR BLANK SAHAM, AL NASR MOVE UP TO FOURTH IN JINDAL LEAGUE

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, FEB 4

Sohar Club continued their positive run in the Jindal Football League with a deserved 2–0 victory over Saham Club at the Sohar Sports Complex in Round 12 action.

Sohar made a flying start, applying early attacking pressure and stunning their opponents with a goal after just one minute. Professional forward Owen Atikor capitalised on a precise pass from Mazin al Saadi inside the box and fired home amid defensive confusion to beat goalkeeper Muhannad al Maamari.

Saham tried to respond quickly and thought they had equalised through a well-worked move finished by their foreign striker, but the goal was ruled out for offside. The first half saw both teams spread play through the wings, while Saham were dealt a setback after Mohammed Bahlouli left the pitch injured. Meanwhile, Sohar’s defence remained compact, closing down spaces and neutralising the threat of Mohsin Jawhar and his teammates to head into the break leading 1–0.

The tempo increased after half-time as Saham pushed hard for an equaliser and created several chances, but poor finishing denied them. Sohar relied on disciplined defending and quick counter-attacks, exploiting the spaces left behind. Their efforts paid off late in the game when Idris al Maqbali sealed the win in the 88th minute, finishing off a precise assist from Abdullah al Balushi to confirm the two-goal triumph.

The victory lifted Sohar to 25 points in third place, level with Al Nahda Club, while Saham remained on 16 points in seventh.

AL KHABOURAH EARN KEY WIN
Elsewhere, Al Khabourah Club claimed an important 2–0 away win over Al Rustaq Club at the Al Rustaq Sports Complex. Al Khabourah looked more organised and clinical, with Darwish al Saadi opening the scoring before Yan Hermes Mokombo added a second to secure all three points. The result moved Al Khabourah up to ninth place with 13 points, while Al Rustaq stayed at the bottom with four.

At the Sur Sports Complex, Oman Club and Sur Club played out a goalless draw in a cautious encounter with few clear chances. Oman Club moved to 15 points in eighth place, while Sur reached eight points in 12th.

AL NASR CLIMB TO FOURTH
Al Nasr Club secured an important 1–0 victory over Samayil Club in their match at the Nizwa Sports Complex.

Abdulfadhel Saonina scored the only goal of the game, earning Al Nasr three valuable points and lifting their tally to 25 points, putting them in fourth place. Meanwhile, Samayil remained on 11 points in 11th position.



Al Nasr players celebrate a goal against Samail.

Barca edge past Albacete into Copa del Rey semis



Barcelona’s Lamine Yamal in action against Albacete.

LAMINE YAMAL and RONALD ARAUJO goals helped Barcelona reach the Copa del Rey semifinals with a nervy 2-1 win at Albacete on Tuesday.

The record 32-time cup winners were pushed to the end in a tight quarterfinal clash by their second division opponents, who stunned Real Madrid in the previous round.

Yamal fired Barca ahead just before half-time and Araujo headed home the second early after the break on his first start since taking a month-long mental health break at the end of last year.

Albacete created several chances in the last half hour and Javi Moreno headed home with three minutes to go to give Hansi Flick’s Barca a scare.

“The last few minutes... it’s normal, they got a goal, the cup is like this,” Araujo told Barca’s media channel.

“I’m very happy (to start again), it was an important step... a hug to the coach, he helped me a lot.”

Holders Barca spurned some fine chances, just as they did in their win over Elche in La Liga on Saturday.

“It was a tough match at the end, it was very hard.



Ronald Araujo celebrates after scoring for Barcelona.

We could have made it much easier for ourselves, we missed many chances, but I think also we deserved (to win),” said Flick.

“I’m happy, proud of the team and we’re in the semifinals, and that’s the best thing.”

Barcelona controlled the game in the first half but could not easily break down Albacete’s resistance.

Marcus Rashford spurned a couple of decent openings in the opening few minutes, and after that the hosts shut up shop against Flick’s side.

Spanish champions Barcelona’s brightest player was, as usual, teenage star Yamal, and he struck in the 39th minute.

Rashford pressed well to win the ball back, and Frenkie de Jong’s pass bobbled into Yamal’s path for the 18-year-old to curl home.

Antonio Puertas got in behind Barcelona’s defence at the other end but took a heavy touch and goalkeeper Joan Garcia was able to snag the loose ball.

The stopper accidentally gave away a corner as he walked off the pitch with it to pat Araujo on the head, in a comical moment before the break.

Dani Olmo should have

doubled Barca’s lead early in the second half when Rashford put the ball on a plate for him but his shot was blocked.

Puertas’s volley deflected off De Jong and just over Garcia’s goal as the hosts threatened sporadically.

Araujo headed in Rashford’s corner as Barcelona doubled their lead and seemed set to cruise to victory, before some late Albacete resistance threatened an upset.

HOLDING ON
Jefte Betancor, who scored Albacete’s stunning winner against Real Madrid, cut inside Araujo and whipped a shot just wide.

Puertas put the ball in the back of Barca’s net with seven minutes to go but there was an offside earlier in the move and it was disallowed.

Albacete finally scored in the 87th minute when Moreno’s powerful header from Jose Lazo’s free-kick flew past Garcia, but they could not find another to force the game to extra-time.

Gerard Martin headed Fran Gamez’s effort off the line as Barca endured a nervy five minutes of stoppage time to triumph.

“We have to finish with more conviction,” said Flick, who said he was happy that Araujo netted on his return to the starting line-up.

“He scored a very important goal for us, it could help him to get more confidence and believe in himself,” added the German coach.

In the other quarterfinals, Valencia welcome Athletic Bilbao and Real Sociedad visit Alaves on Wednesday, while Atletico Madrid travel to face Real Betis on Thursday.

— AFP

MUSCAT STOCK EXCHANGE
6,380.592

BUSINESS

CRUDE OIL
OMAN \$66.75
BRENT \$67.52
LIGHT \$63.47



SHORT TAKES



The pact was signed by Ashraf bin Hamad al Maamari, OQ Group CEO and Eng Shafi bin Taleb al Ajmi, CEO of Kuwait Petroleum International

OQ, KPI TO DEVELOP PETROCHEMICAL COMPLEX IN DUQM

KUWAIT: OQ Group of the Sultanate of Oman and Kuwait Petroleum International (KPI) signed an agreement in Kuwait on February 3, 2026 to develop a petrochemical complex in the Duqm Special Economic Zone. The signing took place on the sidelines of the Kuwait Oil & Gas Show and Conference.

The pact was signed by Ashraf bin Hamad al Maamari, OQ Group CEO and Eng Shafi bin Taleb al Ajmi, CEO — Kuwait Petroleum International. It underscores the shared commitment of both sides to move forward with the project, reflecting its strategic importance and its role in supporting regional cooperation and enhancing economic diversification efforts, in line with Oman Vision 2040.

Ashraf al Maamari, Group CEO of OQ, stated that the established partnership with Kuwait Petroleum International (KPI) provides a strong foundation for the continued development of this strategic project. OQ Group and KPI possess the capabilities and expertise necessary to propel the project forward, achieving its objectives and enhancing its global competitiveness.

For his part, Eng Shafi al Ajmi, CEO of Kuwait Petroleum International, affirmed the company's full commitment to this unique project alongside OQ Group as its strategic partner.

Describing the project as a key pillar in Duqm's downstream industrial sector, he added that it embodies the depth of the extended partnership between the State of Kuwait and the Sultanate of Oman, noting that the company continues to work closely with OQ Group to improve the optimal framework for the project and maximise its economic feasibility. — ONA

Oman backs \$75m agro-chemicals project in Uzbek capital Tashkent

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, FEB 4

Uzbek-Oman Investment Company (UzOman) — a joint investment fund established by the sovereign wealth funds of Oman and Uzbekistan — has announced the signing of agreements paving the way for the creation of a state-of-the-art agro-chemicals project in the Uzbek capital, Tashkent, with an investment of around \$75 million.

The project, which will specialise in the production of advanced agricultural inputs, is expected to have benefits not only for the modernisation of Uzbekistan's agricultural sector but also for Oman's strategic food security goals. For Uzbekistan, the initiative will help reduce dependence on imported farm inputs. For the Sultanate of Oman, it will open up Uzbekistan as a new source of fruits and vegetables, contributing to

more diverse, dependable and resilient food supply chains.

Significantly, Türkiye's leading agricultural inputs company, Hektaş Ticaret TAS, has been brought in to invest around \$50 million as the project's strategic and operating partner. UzOman, as the minority equity partner, will contribute the remaining \$25 million.

Welcoming the trilateral dimension of the partnership, UzOman noted in a statement: "The project represents a continuation and strengthening of the long-standing partnership between the Oman Investment Authority and Ordu Yardımlaşma Kurumu (OYAK), Türkiye's largest complementary pension fund and the majority shareholder of Hektaş, reflecting a shared vision to promote industrial development, regional integration and sustainable long-term value creation".

The manufacturing facility is planned for



Besides supporting the modernization of Uzbekistan's agricultural sector, the project will also indirectly contribute to Oman's food security goals (Picture for illustration)

Suhar forum showcases projects worth £300m

SIHAM AL SAIDI
SUHAR, FEB 4

WITH more than 50 investment opportunities valued at approximately £300 million and the signing of five agreements worth nearly £12 million, the Suhar Investment Forum 2026 officially opened at the Radisson Blu Suhar on Wednesday.

The two-day event, organised by the Al Batinah North branch of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), opened under the auspices of Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Chairman of the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ). It has brought together senior government officials, global investors and private sector leaders.

Eng Said al Abri, Chairman of OCCI Al Batinah North and Head of the Organising Committee, gave an overview of Suhar's integrated economic ecosystem, underpinned by Sohar Port, the free zone, industrial cities and advanced infrastructure. He noted that companies representing around 50 nationalities are currently operating in Suhar, underscoring growing international confidence in the governorate's investment climate.

Al Abri pointed to Sohar Port's connectivity with more than 500 ports worldwide, supported by modern road networks and the upcoming railway link with the UAE, positioning Suhar as a competitive regional logistics hub. He stressed that the forum focuses on investment-ready projects, while the accompanying exhibition, featuring over 21 public and private entities, serves as a direct bridge between investors and opportunity owners.



The two-day event, organised by the Al Batinah North branch of the (OCCI), opened under the auspices of Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Chairman of OPAZ on Wednesday

Five agreements spanning steel, plastics, food industries, metal processing and recycling were signed on the first day of the forum

International investors attending the forum emphasised its strategic importance. Nabil Mohamed, Senior Advisor for the Middle East and Africa at Business Finland, described the forum as "a valuable platform to understand Oman's industrial and innovation landscape". He noted that Suhar's integrated model and openness to international partnerships make it "particularly attractive for Finnish companies seeking reliable partners and long-term opportunities in manufacturing, clean technologies and digital solutions".

Similarly, Nitin Kalara, Founder and CEO of Blu Parrot venture for Data Sciences and Agentic AI, said his participation reflects growing global interest in Oman's emerging technology ecosystem. "The Suhar Investment Forum provides direct access to decision-makers and potential partners", he said, adding that the Sultanate of Oman offers "a promising gateway for AI-

driven solutions, data sciences and regional expansion", particularly through partnerships with local institutions and industries.

The forum also featured keynote speeches by senior officials, highlighting efforts to enhance Oman's investment competitiveness through regulatory reforms, digital transformation and strengthened public private partnerships.

Two high-level panel discussions addressed Suhar's transformation into a smart industrial city and the pillars of investment competitiveness, focusing on finance, logistics, sustainability and clean energy.

The forum concluded its first day with the signing of five agreements spanning steel, plastics, food industries, metal processing and recycling, reinforcing Suhar's position as a leading industrial and investment gateway aligned with Oman Vision 2040.

ADVERTORIALS

SHORTTAKES



Available only from February 6 to 7, 2026, this exclusive promotion lets customers shop for the latest electronics at Sharaf DG stores across Oman.

NBO, SHARAF DG OFFER 20% CASHBACK ON EASY PAYMENT PLANS

MUSCAT: The National Bank of Oman (NBO) has announced a new limited-time promotional campaign in partnership with Sharaf DG, offering NBO Credit Cardholders 20% cashback, credited in the form of NBO Reward Points, on eligible electronics purchases converted into Easy Payment Plans (EPP). The offer includes a maximum cashback cap of RO 50 per customer.

Available only from February 6 to 7, 2026, this exclusive promotion lets customers shop for the latest electronics at Sharaf DG stores across Oman while enjoying flexible payment options and valuable rewards.

Commenting on the offer, Maha bint Saud al Raisi — Assistant General Manager and Head of Products at NBO — said: “This collaboration reflects our commitment at NBO to continuously enhance our Credit Card offerings and deliver greater value to our customers. Our Credit Cards are designed to provide a comprehensive and rewarding lifestyle experience, offering the flexibility of Easy Payment Plans, the ability to earn and redeem NBO Reward Points across a wide range of partners; and seamless local and international acceptance”.

This initiative reflects NBO’s continued commitment to enhancing the customer experience through strategic retail partnerships and innovative payment solutions.

By combining the convenience of Easy Payment Plans with rewards-based cashback, the campaign enables customers to better manage their spending while enjoying tangible benefits on high-value electronics purchases.

The offer is valid exclusively on NBO Credit Cards and applies only to Easy Payment Plan transactions completed through in-store conversion at Sharaf DG. Customers must be registered with the NBO Rewards Programme to qualify. Customers can redeem their NBO Reward Points through a variety of attractive options, including the NBO Reward Store, point transfers to Shukrans and the purchase of vouchers from leading brands such as Lulu Hypermarket, Mall of Oman, Ooredoo and others.

In addition, NBO Credit Cardholders enjoy premium privileges such as airport lounge access, complimentary chauffeur services, travel insurance coverage and exclusive benefits, including dedicated private parking at Mall of Oman.

Toyota GAZOO shines in Rallye Monte Carlo

TOYOTA GAZOO Racing World Rally Team

(TGR-WRT) opened the 2026 FIA World Rally Championship (WRC) season with a historic one-two-three finish at Rallye Monte-Carlo, led by a breakthrough victory from Oliver Solberg and co-driver Elliott Edmondson in the No 99 Toyota GR YARIS Rally 1.

Solberg was joined on the podium by teammates Elfyn Evans and Scott Martin in second place in the No 33 Toyota GR YARIS Rally1, followed by third-place winners Sébastien Ogier and Vincent Landais in the No 1 Toyota GR YARIS Rally1.

Together, they secured Toyota’s first-ever podium lockout at the iconic season opener and the first single-manufacturer sweep at the event since 2015. Following this opening round, TGR-WRT currently occupies the top three positions in the drivers’ championship standings. Toyota also leads the manufacturers’ championship with a total of 59 points.

Akio Toyoda, TGR-WRT Chairman, commented: “Oliver and Elliott, congratulations on your victory! I never thought that I would be able to say congratulations to you for the second time so soon. I am happy to have such reliable team-mates join the TOYOTA GAZOO Racing WRT family. I also want to thank Elfyn, Scott, Seb and Vincent for making a 1-2-3 finish in this season opener”. Toyoda added: “Thank you to everyone on the team for achieving the best possible results on such



Toyota Gazoo Racing claims sweeping 1-2-3 finish at Rallye Monte-Carlo

Representing Toyota’s belief that ‘the roads build the people and the people build the cars’, TGR highlights the role of motorsports as a fundamental pillar of Toyota’s commitment to making ‘ever-better’ cars.

difficult roads and conditions. I believe we will face many tough situations this season as well. Let’s continue making ever-better cars on various roads”. Competing in his first full season with TGR-WRT’s Rally1 line-up, Solberg delivered a commanding performance across one of the most demanding editions of Rallye Monte-Carlo in recent memory.

The 24-year-old took control of the rally from the second stage of the opening leg and went on to become the youngest winner of Rallye Monte-Carlo in the modern era, as well as the first member of his family to claim victory at the legendary event.

The win also marked Solberg’s second victory in just his first two starts with the Toyota GR YARIS Rally1, following his debut triumph at Rally Estonia, underlining a

remarkable start to his tenure with the team.

As the rally progressed, crews faced constantly changing conditions across stages in the French Alps and the mountains above Monaco, with snow, ice, rain, mud and very limited dry asphalt.

Despite the treacherous surfaces and several close calls, Solberg maintained composure throughout the event and ultimately secured victory by a 51.8-second margin.

On the final day, Evans and Martin delivered a strong and consistent drive to finish second, claiming their fifth Rallye Monte-Carlo podium together with TGR-WRT.

The duo also topped the rally-ending Power Stage and placed second in the Super Sunday classification, ensuring a valuable points haul at the season’s opening round. Ogier and Landais completed the podium in third after a closely fought battle across the latter stages of the rally, securing Ogier’s 15th Rallye Monte-Carlo podium finish from 17 starts and reinforcing Toyota’s dominance at the event.

Over the years, Toyota has been participating in many different forms of motorsports, including Formula One, the World Endurance Championship (WEC) and the Nürburgring 24 Hours endurance race. Toyota’s participation in these events was overseen by separate entities within the company until April 2015, when Toyota established TGR, to consolidate all of its motorsports activities under one in-house brand.

Oman Arab Bank concludes Tumouhi Roadshow

MUSCAT: Oman Arab Bank has successfully concluded the Tumouhi SME Development Roadshow — Al Musannah Edition, reinforcing its commitment to empowering small and medium enterprises across the Sultanate of Oman.

The guest of honour at the event was Eng Masoud bin Said al Hashmi, Governor of Al Batinah South. In attendance was also Shaikh Ahmed bin Ali al Habsi, Wali of Al Musannah.

The two-day workshop brought together SME owners, entrepreneurs and business professionals for a series of expert-led discussions and practical knowledge-sharing sessions.

Participants engaged directly with Oman Arab Bank specialists, gaining insights into key business challenges, growth strategies and financial solutions tailored to the SME



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sector.

The Al Musannah edition formed part of the Bank’s ongoing Tumouhi programme, which focuses on building long-term partnerships with SMEs by combining financial

support with advisory and developmental initiatives.

The roadshow provided a platform for open dialogue, enabling entrepreneurs to exchange experiences and explore opportunities aligned

with their business goals.

Sulaiman al Hinai, Chief Wholesale Banking Officer of Oman Arab Bank, commented on the successful conclusion of the event, stating, “The strong engagement we witnessed in Al Musannah reflects the growing demand for practical, value-driven support among SMEs.

Tumouhi is designed to create meaningful impact by listening to business owners and responding with solutions that support resilience and sustainable growth.

We are proud to see this platform continue to deliver tangible value to the SME community”. Attendees also had the opportunity to learn more about Oman Arab Bank’s SME-focused offerings and how the Tumouhi programme supports businesses at different stages of development.

Bank Muscat boosts social responsibility and sustainability

MUSCAT: Bank Muscat continues to reinforce sustainability and social responsibility as central pillars of its strategy, aligning its efforts with Oman Vision 2040. Focusing on youth, sports, education, economy, environment and community service, the Bank integrates sustainability principles across its operations to deliver long-term value to society, the economy and the environment.

Recognising corporate social responsibility (CSR) as a key driver of sustainable development, Bank Muscat has established one of the Sultanate of Oman’s first dedicated



Media visit to Bank Muscat

units for social responsibility management and publishes an annual Sustainability and Community Service Report.

To highlight its initiatives, the Bank recently organised a media visit showcasing its CSR programmes, enhancing transparency and providing journalists with first-hand insight into its community engagement efforts.

Bank Muscat’s programmes are designed to reach a wide range of beneficiaries while aligning with Oman Vision 2040, United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

(SDGs) and internal policies.

The Bank’s initiatives span financial inclusion, literacy, SME development, youth and sports, environment and alternative energy.

Among its flagship programmes is the Green Sports Programme, launched in 2012, which has supported 223 local teams and benefitted over 77,000 individuals by developing and upgrading sports fields across the Sultanate of Oman.

The Tadamun Programme assists eligible families by providing essential home appliances, benefiting more than 2,200 households.

SHORTTAKES



A shop attendant displays a pair of gold bracelets for Chinese weddings at a jewellery store in Hong Kong

GOLD GAINS OVER 17% SO FAR IN 2026

BENGALURU: Gold rose further on Wednesday, after logging its biggest daily gain in 17 years in the previous session, as investors flocked to the safe-haven asset amidst fresh geopolitical tensions between the US and Iran.

Spot gold was up 2.4% at \$5,057.50 per ounce, as of 09:45 GMT, building on a 5.9% rise on Tuesday. US gold futures for April delivery climbed 3% to \$5,080.90 per ounce.

“It is a confluence of risk factors that’s really driving the demand. One, there is that central bank independence question, and two, there’s all the geopolitical risk aspects”, said WisdomTree commodities strategist Nitesh Shah.

The US military said on Tuesday it shot down an Iranian drone that “aggressively” approached the Abraham Lincoln aircraft carrier in the Arabian Sea. The incident came as diplomats sought to arrange nuclear talks between Iran and the United States.

Meanwhile, US President Donald Trump said on Monday that the investigation into Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell should be taken to the end, raising fresh concerns about the central bank’s independence.

Gold is clawing back losses after sinking to \$4,403.24 on Monday, extending losses from Friday, in the sharpest two-day sell-off in decades, sparked by Trump’s announcement of Kevin Warsh as his pick to lead the Fed and compounded by CME margin hikes. The metal is currently up over 17% for the year.

Investors will keep an eye on the ADP private payrolls report, to be released later in the day, for clues into the Fed’s policy path. Markets currently expect at least two Fed rate cuts in 2026.

“With the Fed still expected to cut further rates this year, this should allow gold to reach \$6,200/oz later this year”, said UBS analyst Giovanni Staunovo. — Reuters

Crude rises on US-Iran tensions, broader selloff

OIL prices rose on Wednesday after the United States shot down an Iranian drone and armed Iranian boats approached a US-flagged vessel, reviving fears of escalation ahead of planned talks.

Brent crude futures were up 46 cents, or 0.7%, at \$67.79 a barrel by 10:34 GMT. US West Texas Intermediate was up 52 cents, or 0.8%, at \$63.73.

Both benchmarks have seesawed this week on alternating headlines about possible de-escalation talks and concerns over disruption to oil flows through the Strait of Hormuz.

A broader selloff in equities — which often move in tandem with oil — limited gains.

“Oil would be lower without Middle Eastern sabre-rattling”, analysts at PVM said in a note.

The US military said it shot down an Iranian drone on Tuesday that “aggressively” approached a US aircraft carrier in the Arabian Sea. Separately, maritime sources and a security consultancy said Iranian gunboats approached a US-flagged tanker north of Oman.

The US and Iran are due to hold talks there on Friday, a regional official said.

Several OPEC members —



Brent crude futures were up 46 cents, or 0.7%, at \$67.79 a barrel

oil prices were also supported by a US-India trade agreement that raised hopes of stronger global energy demand.

including Saudi Arabia, Iran, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait and Iraq — export most of their crude via the Strait of Hormuz, mainly to Asia.

Oil also drew support from industry data showing a sharp drop in US crude stockpiles. Inventories fell by more than 11 million barrels last week, sources said, citing figures from the American Petroleum Institute.

Official data from the US Energy

Information Administration is due at 15:30 GMT; analysts polled by Reuters were expecting a rise in crude inventories.

On Tuesday, oil prices were also supported by a US-India trade agreement that raised hopes of stronger global energy demand, while continued Russian attacks on Ukraine added to concerns that Moscow’s oil would remain under sanctions for longer. — Reuters

UK POWER FIRM SEES LOWER EARNINGS AMIDST NETWORK UPGRADES

British utility SSE forecast annual adjusted earnings below last year on Wednesday, citing mixed weather conditions, as it advances its five-year plan to upgrade the UK’s electricity networks.

Scotland-headquartered SSE launched a 33 billion pound (\$45.22 billion) five-year investment plan in November as it seeks to expand its renewables portfolio, underlining the broader need to modernise United Kingdom’s ageing grid as power demand rises from electric vehicles and artificial intelligence.

“Since announcing our 33 billion



<blockquote>SSE launched a 33 billion pound (\$45.22 billion) five-year investment plan in November

pound investment programme, our focus has been on accelerating investment and delivering the plan

that will create compounding, long-term earnings and value for investors”, CFO Barry O’Regan said in a statement.

Last month, SSE and RWE emerged as the biggest winners in Britain’s latest power auction, which secured a record amount of offshore wind capacity, as the country aims to largely decarbonise its power sector by 2030.

SSE expects adjusted earnings per share of between 144 and 152 pence for the year ending March 2026, compared with 160.9 pence last year. — Reuters

China to launch LNG futures as soon as next month

SHANGHAI: China is set to introduce domestic, yuan-denominated liquefied natural gas (LNG) futures as soon as next month, sources familiar with the matter said, a move that could reduce Chinese importers’ reliance on Western pricing benchmarks.

The contracts will be listed on the Shanghai Futures Exchange (ShFE), the sources said, declining to be named as they were not authorised to speak publicly.

ShFE and the China Securities Regulatory Commission did not respond to requests for comment.

The exchange has long sought to boost its global profile by offering internationally accessible contracts and challenging the dominance of Western benchmarks in commodities such as LNG and nickel. The new futures aim to reduce the need for Chinese firms



A company logo of Shanghai Futures Exchange is displayed at a booth during LME Week Asia in Hong Kong . — Reuters

to price physical LNG contracts using overseas indices, while encouraging foreign participation in China’s markets. The launch comes amidst heightened volatility caused by US trade policies, with local-

currency price management seen as enhancing China’s energy security.

China’s LNG imports fell last year due to US tariffs, weak industrial demand and strong domestic gas supply.

However, rising global LNG output this year is expected to ease supply constraints that have persisted since Russia’s war in Ukraine in 2022.

As a result, China’s LNG imports are forecast to rise 12% to 76.5 million metric tonnes this year, according to Rystad Energy analyst Ole Dramdal.

Despite being the world’s largest buyer of many commodities, China largely relies on foreign markets for price discovery.

Yuan-denominated LNG futures could help shift influence towards domestic pricing and support the broader use of the yuan in commodity trade.

The move aligns with growing views that US policy shifts are accelerating a move towards a multipolar trading system, weakening the dollar’s dominance.

China also plans to develop financial products linked to the contracts, including LNG-linked loans and asset-backed securities, helping to build a domestic LNG financial ecosystem.

Global energy firms, traders and exporters with exposure to China are expected to participate, analysts said, though foreign companies would need China-based trading entities to access the market.

“China needs a benchmark that reflects its own demand and supply”, said a state gas trader involved in the discussions, adding that future long-term LNG contracts could increasingly reference Shanghai prices. — Reuters

ENERGY

Equinor cuts green capex after profit slide



Equinor said it will scale back investments in renewables and low-carbon energy after fourth-quarter pretax profit fell 22% to \$6.2 billion.

The group plans to cut capital spending to \$9 billion in 2027, lower its 2030 and 2035 green targets; and slash share buybacks, while keeping oil and gas investment steady. — Reuters

FINANCE

Call for outflows from US wealth unit



UBS expects additional client outflows in its US wealth management business during the first half of 2026 as departing advisers take clients with them, CFO Todd Tuckner said. While the bank noted headwinds in net new money from adviser departures, it still expects overall net inflows to remain positive for the full year. — Reuters

RETAIL

Amazon expands stores to rival Walmart



Amazon is deepening its push into brick-and-mortar retail with its first 225,000-sq-ft mega-store near Chicago, aiming to compete with Walmart, Target and Costco.

Physical store revenue, including Whole Foods, Amazon Fresh and Amazon Go, is expected to rise 5.4% to \$5.9 billion in Q4. — Reuters

Financing challenges in promoting development



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FINANCING plays a major role in enhancing the development of national economies through projects that are implemented at the governmental, private and public-private partnership levels.

The Omani experience has demonstrated that integrated cooperation among relevant entities represents the sound approach to achieving further economic and social development in the country, in order to keep pace with the changes taking place on the global stage.

During the first five years following the launch of Oman Vision 2040, the Sultanate of Oman witnessed the implementation of numerous projects in the industrial, service, health, education and tourism sectors.

These projects aimed to serve various segments of society, the economy and development in general. They also provided a number of job opportunities for Omanis holding academic qualifications in several fields, which underscores the necessity of providing financial resources by both governmental and private financing institutions in this regard.

These institutions play a pivotal role in supporting development projects due to their close connection to infrastructure, industries, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). They also work to stimulate private investment by sharing risks with the

private sector, encouraging it to undertake development projects and reducing the risks it bears in this context.

In addition, they facilitate the financing of innovation and entrepreneurship for small and medium-sized projects — especially in technological sectors — helping to develop the knowledge economy. It also helps create innovative job opportunities, provide sustainable and environmentally friendly financing; and support renewable energy projects.

Today, Oman has many governmental and private financing institutions that bear the responsibility of financing projects and initiatives proposed by institutions and individuals.

These include the Oman Investment Authority and its investment vehicle, the Future Fund Oman, in addition to banks such as the Development Bank, which provides loans for tourism, industrial, green energy and innovation projects to promote entrepreneurship development.

However, in all cases, there are many complex challenges facing financing in Oman and the countries of the region. Some of these challenges are traditional, while others have emerged as a result of global and local economic transformations. These challenges include the heavy reliance on oil and the risks associated with it.

The Omani economy still depends largely on oil revenues, which makes sovereign financing and public finances vulnerable to

During the first five years following the launch of Oman Vision 2040, the Sultanate of Oman witnessed the implementation of numerous projects in the industrial, service, health, education and tourism sectors.

fluctuations in global oil prices. This can lead to unexpected annual deficits at times and expose the country's plans to risks, including the need to refinance debt if revenues decline. In addition, the lack of advanced financing instruments sometimes affects the implementation small and medium-sized enterprises due to the lack of cash savings and real estate assets required as banking collateral by project owners.

Furthermore, bureaucracy and impropriety practiced by some individuals in administrative procedures hinder rapid access to financing. This situation requires intensified efforts to raise awareness among project owners about available financing options.

It needs adherence to legal and regulatory frameworks and transparency in partnership processes between government institutions and the private sector.

This area also requires further development to become an effective tool for financing infrastructure, according to the International Monetary Fund. Moreover, greater flexibility is needed in the implementation of certain legal legislations, along with reducing the multiplicity of regulatory bodies responsible for financing projects.

It also needs the means to attract foreign investment, expand the financing ecosystem and national financing instruments; and stimulate public-private partnerships (PPP) to broaden the development framework.

INDIA’S MARKETS GET TARIFF RELIEF BUT NOT A BUY YET

The US-India trade deal has blown away clouds over the unloved Indian rupee and is probably enough to pause relentless foreign selling in stocks, but investors say earnings growth must rebound and fundamentals improve for sustained buying.

The long-awaited deal sparked a surge in the stock market and the rupee's best rally in seven years on Tuesday, as it signalled improving diplomatic and trade relations with the US.

That, however, was just one of the factors hanging over the currency and stock markets, which have underperformed regional and global peers by a wide margin since the beginning of last year and seen foreign allocations dwindle to a two-decade low. Although near record peaks, Indian equities are vulnerable to disruption from artificial intelligence and, without any companies in the sector, have been left behind in the rush to AI.

The deal does not resolve some of the recent issues surrounding Indian equities: still-elevated valuations, relatively lower forward earnings growth versus EM peers and a lack of globally scalable AI-beneficiary businesses.

Details of the trade deal also remain sparse, even if they do allow companies to at least start planning capital spending.

"I'm not convinced tariffs have an immediate impact, but it certainly feeds into sentiment — that's

probably the best way to think of it", said Michael Bourke, head of global emerging markets for equities at M&G Investments.

"Just because tariffs have gone down, do you suddenly see earnings surge? I'm not yet convinced that's a line I would draw", he said.

The deal is meaningful for markets, but primarily for sentiment and valuation rather than near-term earnings uplift, said Naomi Waistell, fund manager in the emerging equities team at Carmignac, which manages \$48.5 billion in assets.

"The deal does not resolve some of the recent issues surrounding Indian equities: still-elevated valuations, relatively lower forward earnings growth versus EM peers and a lack of globally scalable AI-beneficiary businesses". Foreign investors have pulled roughly \$23 billion out of Indian stocks since the start of 2025, although they poured in \$580 million on Tuesday.

Vikas Jain, head of India fixed income, currencies and commodities trading at Bank of America in Mumbai, said there should be some revival in the near term for foreign investor flows. "The underweight investors will come to an immediate neutral position. Going overweight will depend on growth revival and the kind of policies of the government". — Reuters

2025: The year of the ‘pivotal ETF moment’

AMONG a group of standout winners from Europe's booming ETF (Exchange Traded Fund) market last year were UBS Asset Management and VanEck, with the duo more than doubling net inflows.

An ETF, a type of investment fund that holds a collection of assets, such as stocks or bonds, is traded on a stock exchange like individual stocks. They offer flexibility because they can be bought and sold throughout the trading day at market prices, unlike traditional mutual funds which are priced only once a day.

JPMorgan's fund management division has dominated the active ETF industry (where a manager actively makes a decision about buying and selling assets), managing \$37.8 bn according to ETFGI (an electronic funds transfer).

In the US, ETFs have pulled in record flows, where they have specific tax advantages over traditional mutual funds. Active ETFs pulled in \$215 bn during the first half of last year — up from \$132.5 bn a year earlier.

According to data provided by ETFGI, UBS Asset Management last year gathered \$20.3 bn across its ETF arm, which is Europe's fifth largest provider of the products. The figure was more than double the \$9.8 bn it pulled in during the whole of 2024.

Head of UBS and index fund client coverage at UBS Asset Management, Amanda Rebello said the haul came after it established a new ETF range during the first half of last year that saw "strong flows".

"These updated price points opened a wide range of target clients, who additionally then saw the potential of our other suites within our ETF range, including our currency-hedged exposures, our thematic funds and our newly launched active collateralised loan obligation ETF". she said.

US-headquartered VanEck, which sits just outside Europe's top 10 largest ETF funds in 12th position,



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The writer is our foreign correspondent based in the UK.

ETF assets break new record: Overall, ETF assets in Europe stood at \$3.2 tn at the end of 2025, an almost 42 per cent year-on-year increase. Blackrock's iShares division, which is Europe's largest ETF provider, trounced its rivals in terms of new business won. It pulled in \$136.4 bn last year, up from around \$90 bn in 2024.



An ETF, a type of investment fund that holds a collection of assets, such as stocks or bonds, is traded on a stock exchange like individual stocks.

gathered \$10 bn of net ETF inflows last year.

This was up from the \$4.2 bn it collected during 2024. Other firms experienced a turnaround in fortunes in 2025 and reversed heavy outflows from the previous year.

Legal & General's ETF business, which saw investors pull a net \$3.6 bn in 2024 — the largest redemptions of any European provider — ended 2025 with \$3.9 bn of new money.

The inflows came after Eric Adler, chief executive of L&G's asset management arm said last year that the UK's largest asset manager planned to "double down" on its European ETF business.

Last year, L&G merged its ETF and index businesses, a move which prompted a handful of departures. Elsewhere, Pimco's ETFs pulled in \$2.3 bn last year, a turnaround from the \$745m of net outflows recorded during the previous year. WisdomTree, meanwhile, pulled in \$6.8 bn of net inflows last year, marking a turnaround from the \$1.7 bn its ETFs bled in 2024.

Head of distribution in Europe for WisdomTree, Adria Beso, said

ETFs focused on European defence, crypto and hedged precious metals were among those that "attracted significant interest" in 2025.

"That momentum has continued into early 2026, with sustained investor interest in our European defence and rare earths miners ETFs", said Beso.

ETF assets break new record: Overall, ETF assets in Europe stood at \$3.2 tn at the end of 2025, an almost 42 per cent year-on-year increase. Blackrock's iShares division, which is Europe's largest ETF provider, trounced its rivals in terms of new business won. It pulled in \$136.4 bn last year, up from around \$90 bn in 2024.

"Structural, demographic and market forces signal a pivotal moment for the European ETF landscape", said Deborah Fuhr, founder of ETFGI.

"The industry is not simply growing — it is redefining how Europe invests, with ETFs at the centre of a long-term transformation in portfolio design, wealth management and capital markets access".

CLASSIFIEDS

Urgent Requirement for
Sohar Production Company

AL RAI
TECHNICAL SERVICES

IT PROFESSIONAL
Project Engineer - Information Technology / Automation / SAP
Bachelor's degree in Science & Engineering with 10 to 12 years' experience required in project, design & engineering in Steel & Aluminum Plant, Oil & Gas and Refineries
Send CV to: hr@alraioman.com / abinashtalrai@gmail.com

SIT. WANTED

SALES
professional
with 5 yrs
Experience in
Medical sector.
Graduate,
Available in
Muscat.
akhilmanu777@gmail.com
Contact:
76323324

INDIAN electrical
engineer more
than 20 years
experience
in "MEP"
construction field
in Oman seeks
suitable job.
Contact: 92919281

LOOKING for
part time OR full
time Accounts/
Finance job.
20yrs experience
in Muscat. Upto
finalization &
Audit.
Please contact:
92065499

OPERATIONS
Support /
Tendering
/ Contract
Management /
Procurement
professional with
18+ years' Oil &
Gas experience.
NOC & driving
license available.
96227272,
jijilmathew@gmail.com

ACCOUNTS/
SALES Indian
male (b com)
having 2+ years of
experience
in India accounts
sales looking for
suitable
placement,
join immediately.
Contact: 76324360

INDIAN male MBA
Graduate with
15yrs experience
in Oman seek
suitable senior
position in
finance office
admin., sales DTC.
Contact: 94158080

LOOKING for
SUPPLY CHAIN /
SALES jobs
Indian male 24
years. Commerce
graduate,
Experience
in logistics,
procurement and
sales in reputed
company in
Oman. Valid Oman
D/L.
Contact
+96891121694,
issacantony2002@gmail.com

ACCOUNTS/
Finance: Indian
male (MBA Fin)
having more
than 19 years of
experience in
Oman accounts
& finance looking
for suitable
placement, NOC
available and can
join immediately.
Contact: 92076716

15+ experience
in building
material, project
sales & Trade
market, deal with
corporate project
customers,
looking for a
suitable job.
Contact 78384283

Looking for part
time OR full
time Accounts/
Finance job.
20yrs experience
in Muscat. Upto
finalization &
Audit.
Please contact:
92065499

LOGISTICS
Documentation
Executive. Indian
male, 25 years,
BBA, PG Diploma
in Logistics & SCM
and have 2 years of
experience in this
field.
Seeking a position
in Logistics field
Mob: +968 7506
9882
Mail:
shafazhussain18@gmail.com

INDIAN male civil
engineer with
more than 30 years
experience in
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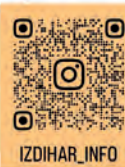
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ART/LIFE



CHANGING WORLD

PARENTS’ DILEMMA: WHEN SCHOOLS SEEM LIKE STRUGGLE



**SHADDAD
AL MUSALMY**
*The writer is a
Senior Editor at
Oman Daily Ob-
server.*

I remember those mornings all too well – the tears, the tantrums, the “I don’t want to go to school today”.

As parents, we have all been there, torn between ensuring our kids get their education and acknowledging their struggles.

It is a delicate balance, one that requires empathy, understanding, and patience.

For me, it is about finding that sweet spot. When my little one says he is not feeling up to school, I take a moment to listen.

“You’re really upset, aren’t you?” I ask.

Sometimes, that’s all they need – someone to validate their feelings.

It is amazing how a simple acknowledgment can diffuse tension and open the door to communication.

I dig deeper to understand what is going on. Is it a friend issue, a bully, or just a tough assignment? Often, it is not about the school itself, but something bigger.

Maybe they’re feeling overwhelmed, anxious, or just need some extra attention. That’s when I offer support – a listening ear, a reassuring hug, or a plan to tackle the problem together.

Being a compassionate parent doesn’t mean giving in to every whim. It is about understanding the root cause and addressing it. Missing a day of school won’t define their future, but nurturing their emotional well-being will shape their resilience.

It is about understanding the root cause and addressing it.

Missing a day of school won’t define their future, but nurturing their emotional well-being will shape their resilience.

It is a lesson I have learned over time – that sometimes, it is okay to prioritise feelings over academics.

I have found that when kids feel heard and understood, they are more likely to open up about their struggles. And that is when the real work begins.

Together, we brainstorm solutions, come up with strategies, and face challenges head-on. It is not always easy, but it’s worth it.

As parents, we are not just educators; we are guides, mentors, and safe havens.

Our kids need us to be there for them, to listen, and to support them through life’s ups and downs.

So, take a step back, breathe, and listen. Your child’s feelings are valid, and sometimes, that’s all they need – someone to hear them out .

In the end, it is not about getting them to school; it is about raising happy, confident, and resilient individuals.

And that’s a journey worth taking, one that requires patience, empathy, and understanding.

By being there for our kids, we can help them navigate life’s challenges and thrive in the process.

Until next, take care of your children.

QUICK FEATURES



VINTAGE

Tourists ride in an old classic American car used as a taxi in the beautiful city of Havana.

— AFP



LIFESTYLE

In eastern Uganda’s Jinja district, groups of older women have embraced cricket as a way to stay physically active and socially connected later in life.

— AFP



BOLLYWOOD

Bollywood actress Tripti Dimri poses during an event for the promotion of her upcoming Indian Hindi-language action thriller film ‘O’Romeo’ in Mumbai.

— AFP

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ART, BALLET & MUSIC — A JOY IN THE STRUCTURED WORLD

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

Little ballerinas were getting ready to perform for the official opening of the new premises of Music Palace, which is now known as the Royal Academy. They were also excited, as their parents were there to watch their performance. Children moved swiftly from Movement Hall to Ballet Studio to Music Studio and Art Studio. And they performed, moving to the music and even narrating part of the Cinderella story. Royal Academy is the first institution in Oman to introduce baby ballet from the age of three, alongside graded ballet pathways leading to international certification through annual examinations, contributing to the development of structured ballet education in the local cultural landscape. Royal Academy, previously known as Music Palace, has been active in arts education in Muscat for almost 15 years and was formerly located in Al Mouj. They are entering a new chapter under the name Royal Academy, at a new location on 18 November Street. The founder of the academy, Sayyidah Susan al Said, speaking to Observer, said, “In this busy world today, where there are so many digital distractions, it is important to have that quality time to just be themselves and create their own personal movement in art and music”. The academy offers programmes in ballet, music and visual arts, with a strong focus on classical ballet education. The ballet programme

is accredited by the Royal Academy of Dance (RAD), London and follows an internationally recognised syllabus. Students in the RAD track receive structured training and internationally accredited certification, with the academic year divided into two semesters and official examinations held annually in May/June. “We have had parents requesting something like this for a while now. One thing I am proud of is the inclusivity, as it is not just for Western students who may have a background in ballet; we also have students with lahaf and the covering. So it is very much a form of dance that creates composure and elegance. It is for everyone”, Sayyidah Susan pointed out. There are also open ballet classes that are for students who enjoy ballet purely for passion, fitness, or artistic expression. “In the structured world, music and dance give the young, growing body and mind the freedom to have ecstasy and celebration that they so deserve in growing up because there are so many constrictions in the world and this is a release and joy”, she concluded.



Brandenburg Gate, Berlin

GERMANY’S VISUAL WONDERS FOR GEN Z

FOR travellers who live through their lenses, Germany is fast becoming a destination that delivers both iconic sights and hidden ‘micro-moments’ perfect for capturing and sharing. From sweeping urban skylines to misty forests, alpine lakes and historic towns, the country offers a rich visual tapestry ideal for the next generation of explorers. The appeal for Gen Z travellers lies in Germany’s compact travel distances, efficient rail networks and walkable cities, making it possible to experience modern metropolises, historic towns and dramatic natural landscapes in a single itinerary. Coastal journeys along the Baltic showcase the towering white cliffs of Königsstuhl, while the twisted, atmospheric trees of the Ghost Forest provide a cinematic backdrop. In Saxony, the Bastei Bridge rises over sandstone cliffs, offering sweeping valley views, while Kromlau Park’s Rakotz Bridge forms a perfect circle reflected in its still waters, evoking a fairy-tale scene. Germany’s urban centres provide striking contrasts. Frankfurt’s reflective skyscrapers along the river offer modern cityscapes, while Berlin’s Brandenburg Gate transforms throughout the day, giving endless angles for street-life photography. Hamburg’s Elbphilharmonie blends contemporary architecture with panoramic harbour views, combining design, culture and landscape in one frame. Historic towns like Schwäbisch Hall charm with timber-framed houses, pastel façades and winding streets, while Bavaria’s Obersee provides tranquil alpine reflections — a slower counterpoint to urban energy. For high-altitude shots, Zugspitze, Germany’s tallest peak, allows easy access to platforms above the clouds and the Moselle River winds



Frankfurt am Main Skyline



Garmisch-Partenkirchen



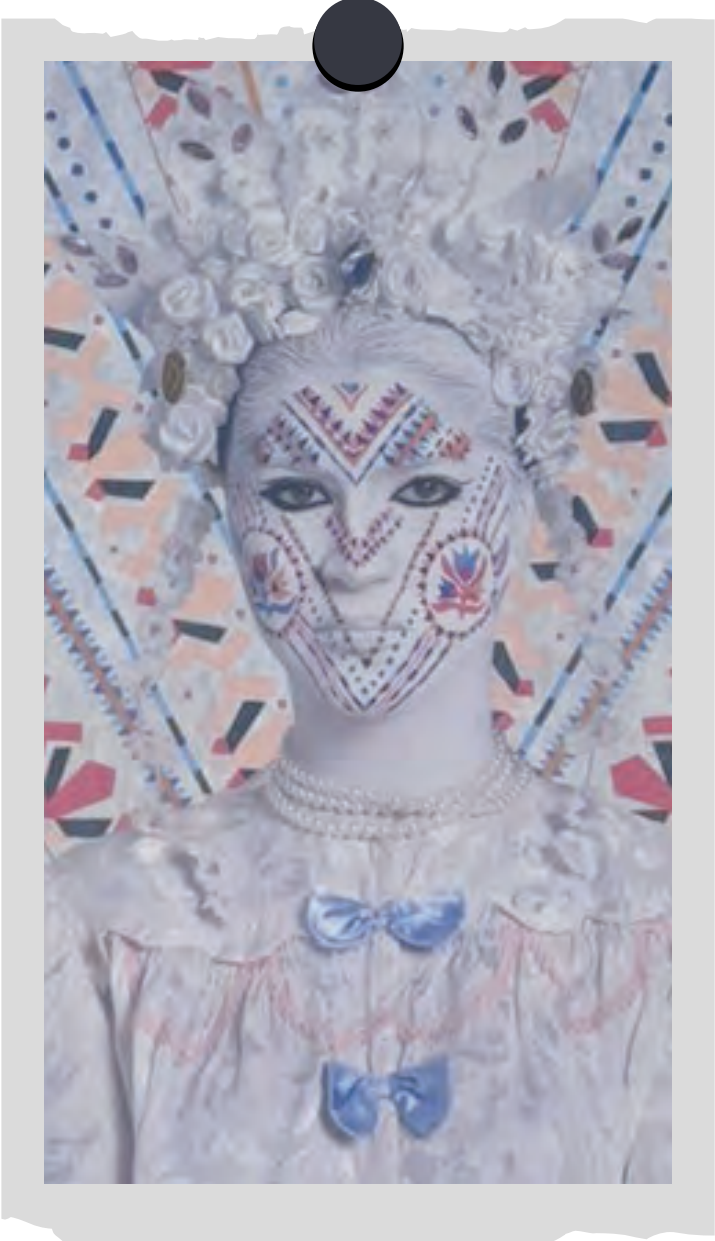
Rakotzbrücke in Kromlau Park

Gen Z travellers are redefining the way destinations are discovered and shared. With its photogenic diversity and seamless connectivity, Germany offers the perfect mix of adventure and content-ready experiences for the modern explorer

through vineyards and rolling hills, creating natural symmetry and scenic depth. Highlighting Germany’s appeal to younger travellers, Yamina Sofo, Director, Marketing & Sales Office, GNT0 GCC, said: “Gen Z travellers are redefining how destinations are explored and shared. Germany’s mix of visually striking cities, authentic neighbourhoods and dramatic natural landscapes, all seamlessly connected, inspires creativity, storytelling and meaningful travel experiences”. Germany’s combination of photogenic diversity and efficient connectivity makes it particularly attractive for those seeking both adventure and content-ready

experiences. Multi-city itineraries allow travellers to weave together the coast, cities, historic towns and mountains in a way that encourages seeing — and sharing — the world from new perspectives in 2026. Whether chasing sunrise over the Bastei cliffs, capturing reflections on the Moselle, or framing modern architecture against urban skylines, Germany offers endless opportunities for visual storytelling. Its seamless blend of nature, history and contemporary design makes it an increasingly popular choice for travellers who live through their lenses, creating memories that are as visually striking as they are personally meaningful.

FEATURES



FACES OF TRADITION: A SLOVAK CULTURAL JOURNEY IN THE HEART OF MUSCAT



PHOTOS BY AYMAN AL HADHRAMI

IDRIS AL BALUSHI

UNDER the soft gallery lights of the Omani Society for Fine Arts, faces from another time and place look back at the viewer, serene, solemn and quietly powerful. Adorned with intricate headpieces and delicate face paintings, they tell stories that stretch across centuries and borders. This is “Party in the 21st Century”, a travelling international exhibition that revives Slovakia’s traditional culture through a strikingly modern artistic lens.

The exhibition is a rare fusion of art and science, blending ethnographic research with contemporary portrait photography and face painting.

At its heart are nearly extinct Slovak headbands and wreaths, historically worn by unmarried young women, symbols of identity, purity and transition. What could have remained confined to museum archives is instead reborn here as a living, breathing visual experience.

The project, created by Slovak photographers Lubomír Sabo and Zuzana SÉNÁŠIOVÁ in collaboration with

ethnologist Katarína Sabová, features 40 high resolution photographic portraits of young women wearing traditional headpieces, accompanied by original samples of the accessories themselves.

Each portrait is set against a hand painted acrylic background, echoing motifs from the specific village or region in Slovakia where the headpiece originates.

The result is both intimate and expansive, a visual map of Slovak heritage rendered through faces and colour.

As viewers move from one portrait to the next, history and modernity intertwine.

The women’s expressions mirror the emotions traditionally associated with brides in Slovak culture, anticipation, pride, vulnerability, while the contemporary photographic style grounds the images firmly in the present.

It is a quiet reminder that traditions do not disappear, they wait to be reinterpreted.

The exhibition’s opening in Muscat marks another stop in an impressive international journey. Previously

shown in dozens of countries, including the United States, Germany, Bulgaria, Türkiye, the United Arab Emirates, China, Japan and South Korea, the exhibition arrives in Oman as part of a broader cultural dialogue between nations.

Speaking at the opening, Mr Marek EŠTOK, State Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, emphasised the exhibition’s role in cultural diplomacy.

Prepared by the Slovak Embassy in Cairo, accredited also to the Sultanate of Oman, in cooperation with the Omani Society for Fine Arts and supported by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth of Oman, the exhibition coincides with political consultations between Slovakia and Oman at the level of Deputy Foreign Ministers.

“This project aims to revive and promote Slovakia’s traditional culture and customs”, EŠTOK noted, highlighting how art can become a bridge between nations.

By presenting cultural heritage in a contemporary form, the exhibition fosters mutual understanding and celebrates shared values, particularly

the deep respect for tradition found in both Slovak and Omani societies.

For visitors, the experience is both educational and emotional.

Walking through the gallery, Hanna Mustafa, one of the attendees, paused frequently before the portraits, drawn in by their quiet intensity. “I loved walking around the beautiful art pieces”, she said. “They were fascinating and it was lovely to witness different cultures and a new international trend in art.

The portraits were straightforward yet deeply moving”.

Her reaction echoes the exhibition’s broader impact. Without relying on spectacle, “Party in the 21st Century” invites viewers to slow down, to look closely and to reflect on how identity is carried, on the head, on the face and across generations.

Open to the public until February 9, 2026, the exhibition stands as a testament to the power of cultural exchange. In these faces from Slovakia, presented in the heart of Muscat, tradition finds new life and art quietly fulfills its most enduring role, connecting people, across time and across borders.