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Royal directives on essential living requirements of citizens

RO 50 MILLION FOR PROJECTS TO GENERATE JOBS

THE Diwan of Royal Court on Sunday issued a statement reading as follows: “On the occasion of the glorious sixth anniversary of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik’s Accession Day on the eleventh of January, and driven by His Majesty’s enduring dedication to harnessing all means for the prosperity and well-being of his cherished people, His Majesty has issued his Royal directives to support key social and economic sectors that address the essential living requirements of citizens as follows:

FIRST: Allocating RO 50 million for projects with economic and investment returns that generate job opportunities for citizens. This will be achieved by increasing the funding for the Governorates Development Programme under the Eleventh Five-Year Development Plan (2026–2030) from RO 220 million to RO 270 million.

SECOND: Extending financial support to over 73,000 school students across both school semesters. This support is designated for students whose families are enrolled in the Family Support System under the Royal Oman Police National Records System and will be delivered by doubling the Childhood Scheme disbursed from the Social Protection Fund.

TURN TO P3



- SUPPORTS KEY SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC SECTORS
- RO 50M FOR PROJECTS GENERATING JOBS FOR CITIZENS
- RO 270 MILLION FOR GOVERNORATES DEVELOPMENT
- FINANCIAL SUPPORT TO OVER 73,000 SCHOOL STUDENTS
- AMENDMENTS TO BENEFIT LOW-INCOME FAMILIES
- EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMME TO PROVIDE 60,000 JOBS
- RO 100 MILLION SET FOR SOCIAL HOUSING PROGRAMME
- JOB SECURITY ALLOWANCE EXTENDED TO ONE YEAR

HM THE SULTAN AWARDS UNVEILED

With the Royal blessings of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, the Diwan of Royal Court announced four major awards, namely His Majesty the Sultan’s Culture and Social Award, His Majesty the Sultan’s Award for Research and Innovation, His Majesty the Sultan’s Award for Economy, Business and Digital Excellence, and His Majesty the Sultan’s Award for Governorates Development. Dr Habib bin Mohammed al Riyami, Chairman of Sultan Qaboos Higher Centre for Culture and Science, stated that each award will encompass several axes covering the various fields mentioned in its title. He affirmed that regional and international awards will remain as they are, given their role in consolidating the Sultanate of Oman’s stature in international forums. **SEE P5**

DECREE RATIFIES UN CONVENTION

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Sunday issued Royal Decree No 6/2026 on ratifying the Sultanate of Oman’s joining the United Nations Convention on International Settlement Agreements Resulting from Mediation, which was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on December 20, 2018. Article (1) ratifies the Sultanate of Oman’s joining the United Nations Convention on International Settlement Agreements Resulting from Mediation in accordance with the version attached to this decree. Article (2) stipulates that departments concerned shall deposit the document of joining the abovementioned convention in accordance with its provisions. Article (3) says that this decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from its date of issue. — **ONA**

HM CONFERS ROYAL ORDERS

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik conferred Royal orders upon a number of distinguished figures. This comes in appreciation from His Majesty for their pivotal roles and outstanding contributions across numerous fields. His Majesty the Sultan conferred the Royal Commendation Order (First Class) upon Sayyid Khalid bin Hamad al Busaidy for his service in the fields of arts and culture. The orders were presented by Sayyid Khalid bin Hilal al Busaidy, Minister of the Diwan of Royal Court, when he received them in his office on Sunday. **DETAILS ON P2**



Honourable Lady inaugurates Khasab Hospital

KHASAB: Her Highness The Honourable Lady Assayida Ahd Abdullah Hamed al Busaidi, Spouse of the Sultan of Oman, graced the official opening ceremony of Khasab Hospital on Sunday.

This project is part of the nation’s ongoing efforts to develop the health sector, strengthen the healthcare system, and provide advanced medical services to citizens and residents of Musandam Governorate.

Upon The Honourable Lady’s arrival at Khasab Hospital, folk art troupes from Musandam Governorate performed a variety of traditional Omani heritage arts to express joy and pride in



HH The Honourable Lady Assayida Ahd Abdullah Hamed al Busaidi, Spouse of the Sultan of Oman, graced the official opening ceremony of Khasab Hospital.

her esteemed presence. She also viewed a welcoming performance presented by students from local schools in celebration of this distinguished occasion.

The Honourable Lady was welcomed by Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health, Sayyid Ibrahim bin Said al Busaidy, Governor of Musandam, Dr Madeeha bint Ahmed al Shaibaniyah, Minister of Education, and Dr Laila bint Ahmed al Najjar, Minister of Social Development, alongside several senior officials.

Following the reception, The Honourable Lady unveiled the commemorative plaque, marking the official opening of Khasab Hospital. **TURN TO P4**

OMAN

His Majesty confers Royal orders



Dr Mohammed bin Awad al Hassan



Dr Hamad bin Saif al Hinai

HIS MAJESTY SULTAN HAITHAM BIN TARIK on Sunday conferred Royal orders upon a number of distinguished figures. This comes in appreciation from His Majesty for their pivotal roles and outstanding contributions across numerous fields.

His Majesty the Sultan conferred the Royal Commendation Order (First Class) upon Sayyid Khalid bin Hamad al Busaidy for his service in the fields of arts and culture. His Majesty also conferred Al Numan Order (First Class) upon Dr Mohammed bin Awad Al Hassan for his diplomatic service, and Dr Hamad bin Saif al Hinai for his representation of the Sultanate of Oman within international organisations.

Furthermore, His Majesty bestowed the Royal Commendation Order (Second Class) upon the following individuals: Dr Ali bin Abdul Hussein al Lawati for his contribution to building the foundational infrastructure of the health sector; Shaikh Ahmed bin Nasser al Nuaimi for his contribution to civil initiatives and social responsibility; Prof Dr Mohammed bin Zahir al Abri for his accomplishments in scientific research, innovation and academia; Yousuf bin Abdul Qadir al Kamali in the field of culture; Sulaiman bin Hamoud al Naabi in the field of sports and youth; Dr Hameed bin Hamoud al Faree in the health field; Eng Azzan bin Qais al Kindi and Suleiman bin Mohammed al Sulaimani for their achievements in entrepreneurship; Eng Muadh bin Ahmed al Hinai in the field of digital economy, communications and information technology; Dr Raed bin Abdulhafidh al Farsi in the field of disability affairs; Iman bint Ali al Rahbiyah in the field of school education; and Saleh bin Zaal al Farsi in the field of arts.

In addition, His Majesty conferred the Royal Commendation Order (Third Class) upon Nabati Sharqi Yabqa and Amir Hassan Nouri in the field of institutional excellence.

The orders were presented by Sayyid Khalid bin Hilal al Busaidy, Minister of the Diwan of Royal Court, when he received them in his office on Sunday.

On this occasion, the minister emphasised that these orders represent a profound appreciation from His Majesty for the dedicated efforts they have rendered in their respective fields of distinction.

He extended his heartfelt wishes for their continued success in all future scientific, research and professional pursuits, commending their ongoing endeavours undertaken from a profound sense of societal duty in service to this nation and its leader. — ONA



Eng Azzan bin Qais al Kindi



Suleiman bin Mohammed al Sulaimani



Dr Ali bin Abdul Hussein al Lawati



Shaikh Ahmed bin Nasser al Nuaimi



Eng Muadh bin Ahmed al Hinai



Dr Raed bin Abdulhafidh al Farsi



Prof Dr Mohammed bin Zahir al Abri



Yousuf bin Abdul Qadir al Kamali



Iman bint Ali al Rahbiyah



Saleh bin Zaal al Farsi



Sulaiman bin Hamoud al Naabi



Dr Hameed bin Hamoud al Faree



Nabati Sharqi Yabqa



Amir Hassan Nouri

His Majesty awards Royal medals to Royal Court Affairs officers



MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq, the Supreme Commander bestowed the Medals of Excellent Service and Royal Commendation upon a number of officers and non-commissioned

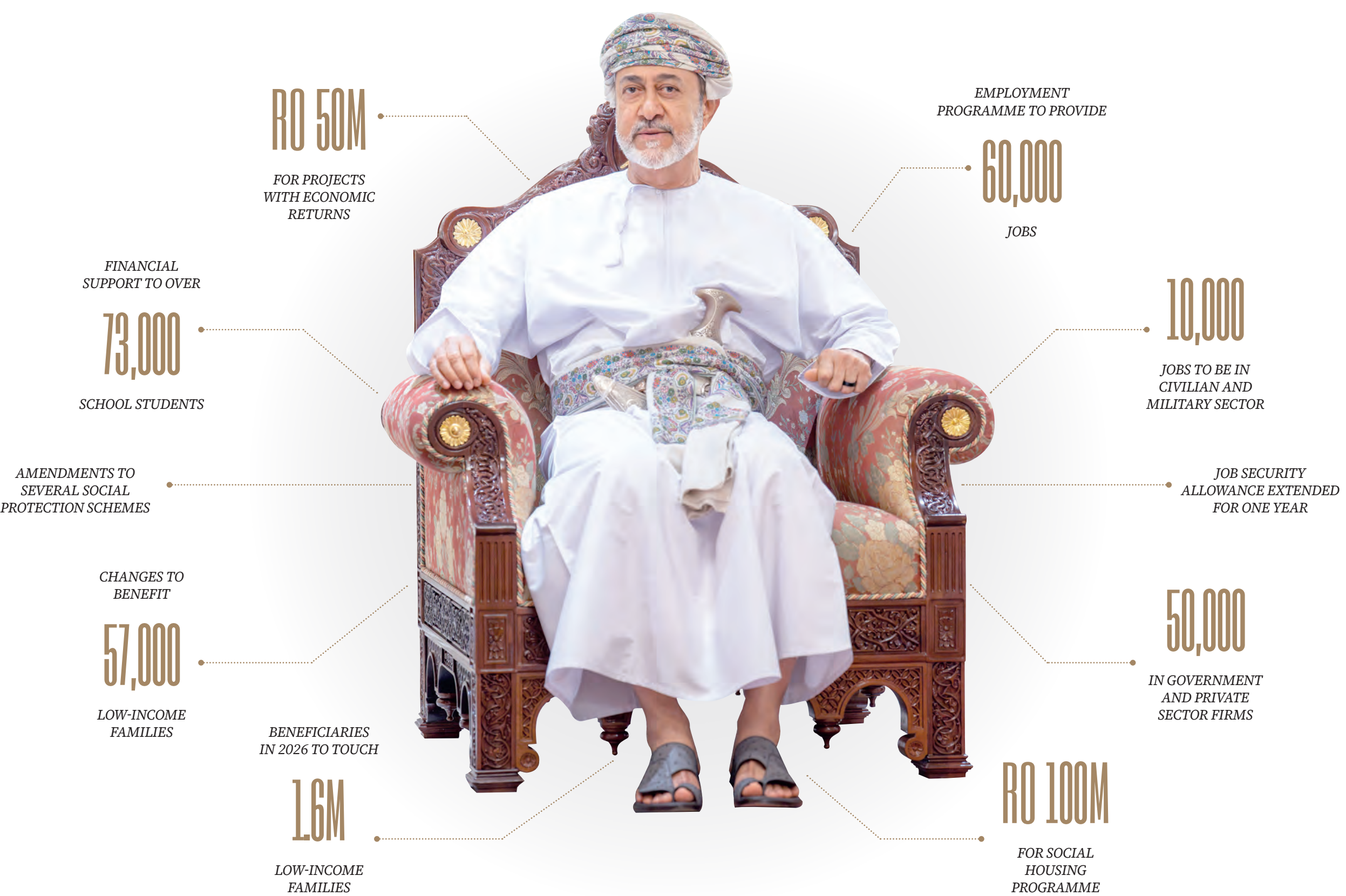
officers at the Royal Court Affairs (RCA).
Nasr bin Hamoud al Kindi, Secretary-General of the Royal Court Affairs pinned the medals. This comes in recognition of

their efforts and contributions in serving the nation and His Majesty the Supreme Commander.
On this occasion, Al Kindi congratulated the officers on this sublime bestowal, wishing

them continuous success, and exhorting them to continue their devotion in performing their national duty and serving the nation's leader.
The occasion was attended by

Shaikh Said bin Hilal al Khalili, Head of Human Resources, Financial and Support Affairs, alongside a number of heads of unit and senior officers at the Royal Court Affairs. — ONA

PROSPERITY AND WELL-BEING OF PEOPLE



Allocations show Royal care for welfare of citizens

THE Royal orders to increase the allocations for the Governorate Development Programme to RO 270 million during the Eleventh Five-Year Development Plan (2026–2030) confirm the Supreme commitment to enhancing social welfare and ensuring balanced regional development. This financial boost supports the expansion of the programme's projects, aims to maximise investment and economic returns, and builds upon the successes of the Tenth Five-Year Plan in stimulating economic activity, creating jobs and supporting small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Said bin Rashid al Qutbi, Director General of Social Sectors at the Ministry of Economy, explained that the programme translates the directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik.

Originally launched in 2022 with an annual allocation of RO 4 million per governorate, the programme has become a cornerstone for comprehensive development by utilising the natural resources and comparative advantages of each region.

The programme generated 1,400 direct job opportunities and 428 indirect jobs by the end of last year.

SOCIAL PROTECTION LAWS: The Royal directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to amend the provisions of certain social protection schemes reaffirm the government's established approach to developing the social protection system, enhancing the fairness of entitlement, and improving the efficiency of directing benefits to the most eligible. This aligns with economic and social changes and



SAID BIN RASHID AL QUTBI

Director General of Social Sectors at the Ministry of Economy

The allocation aims to maximise investment and economic returns, and builds upon the successes of the 10th Five-Year Plan



places the individual and the family at the forefront of national priorities.

The Royal directives aim to regulate support for societal groups, particularly the most vulnerable, ensuring that support is directed equitably to those entitled to it. They take into account the circumstances of low-income families, women, widows and divorcees, guarantee no harm to beneficiaries and enhance procedural control.

They ensure the continuity of disbursements according to approved regulations and the integration of verification mechanisms and data exchange. This framework safeguards rights, ensures proper implementation and solidifies principles of transparency and justice, thereby enhancing confidence in the system and reassuring beneficiaries. The Royal blessings included amendments to the provisions of certain social protection schemes.

The monthly Senior Citizens Scheme (for those aged 60 and above) of RO 115 will continue to be disbursed to

beneficiaries whose monthly income is RO 1,020 or less. For beneficiaries whose monthly incomes exceed RO 1,020 but are less than RO 1,250, their entitlement will be progressively reduced. Furthermore, individuals whose income reaches RO 1,250 or higher will no longer be eligible for the benefit.

The Royal blessings also stipulated that child support payments and children's shares from pensions shall not be counted as part of the family income of a widow or divorcee when calculating the Household Income Support Scheme.

Additionally, the calculation of equivalent income based on work capability for determining the Household Income Support Benefit has been abolished for a number of cases. These cases include: unmarried women who are 40 years of age or older; divorced women with children who are 40 years of age or older; divorced women with children not in their custody; and widows without children. — ONA

RO 50m for projects to generate more jobs

FROM PAGE 1

Third: His Majesty the Sultan has sanctioned amendments to the provisions of several Social Protection schemes. These amendments are designed to benefit low-income families, with the number of families receiving the Family Income Support scheme increasing to over 57,000. The total number of beneficiaries across all Social Protection programmes in 2026 will reach approximately 1.6 million recipients. The relevant authorities will announce the implementation details.

Fourth: Accelerating the implementation of the approved job-seeker employment programme for 2026, which comprises 60,000 job opportunities. This includes 10,000 positions within the civilian and military government sector and 50,000 positions in government companies and private sector establishments.

Fifth: Allocating RO 100 million to support the Social Housing Programme for the years 2026 and 2027.

Sixth: Extending the payment period for the Job Security Allowance to one year from the current six months. This applies to all eligible insured persons whose total entitlement period does not exceed one full year, in accordance with the details to be announced by the relevant authorities.

May the Almighty Allah grant His Majesty good health and success for the good of this dear homeland!"

— ONA

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Honourable Lady opens Khasab Hospital

FROM PAGE 1

Project officials presented a brief overview of the hospital's medical capabilities and equipment, praising the efforts invested in completing this health landmark, which was designed and constructed according to the highest technical standards to meet the needs for integrated medical services and healthcare in the governorate.

The Honourable Lady also viewed a visual presentation detailing the hospital's readiness, the current state of health services in Musandam and the approved development plans aimed at elevating the level of healthcare.

During her tour of the hospital's departments, she was briefed on the functions of each unit. The hospital features specialised medical sections including the Daycare Clinic, Surgery, Internal Medicine, Paediatrics, Dialysis, Emergency, Obstetrics and Gynaecology, Burns,



Her Highness The Honourable Lady Assayida Ahd Abdullah Hamed al Busaidi, Spouse of the Sultan of Oman, graced the official opening ceremony of Khasab Hospital on Sunday.

Operating Theatres and Intensive Care, Physical Therapy, Radiology, Laboratories, and Sterilisation, as well as a Training and Development Centre and various administrative and support service departments.

During the visit, The Honourable Lady met with members of the

medical and administrative staff. She expressed her deep appreciation for their efforts in delivering health services and affirmed her pride in the dedication shown by those working in this sector to serve the community, valuing their role in advancing the quality of healthcare

in Musandam. At the conclusion of her visit, The Honourable Lady recorded a commemorative entry in the hospital's guestbook to mark her visit to Musandam Governorate and the official opening of Khasab Hospital.

The opening ceremony was attended by several ministers, senior officials, and prominent figures and dignitaries from Musandam Governorate.

DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

Her Highness The Honourable Lady Assayida Ahd Abdullah Hamed al Busaidi, Spouse of the Sultan of Oman, also conducted a visit to the Sultan Faisal bin Turki Road project and the Aymas Development Project in Musandam Governorate.

During the visit, The Honourable Lady viewed a visual presentation detailing the progress and readiness of the Sultan Faisal bin Turki Road project. This vital infrastructure development serves as a strategic

link between the wilayats of Musandam Governorate and is considered a key initiative aimed at modernising the road network and enhancing connectivity across the governorate.

The Honourable Lady also explored the unique natural features of the Aymas Development Project site, which boasts stunning coastlines and surrounding mountainous landscapes that represent significant natural attractions. She was briefed on the existing and planned projects for the Aymas Development site.

The project comes within the framework of the ongoing efforts directed by His Majesty the Sultan to stimulate tourism development, upgrade infrastructure and capitalise on the exceptional natural assets of Musandam Governorate.

The Honourable Lady was accompanied during the visit by Sayyid Ibrahim bin Said al Busaidy, Governor of Musandam. — ONA



We are pleased to extend our sincere congratulations and best wishes to His Majesty **Sultan Haitham bin Tarik** on the 6th anniversary of His Majesty's Accession to the Throne

We reaffirm our commitment to supporting Oman under His Majesty's strong leadership as we celebrate the Sultanate's continued prosperity.



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Honourable Lady visits Musandam

HER Highness The Honourable Lady Assayida Ahd Abdullah Hamed al Busaidi, Spouse of the Sultan of Oman, paid a visit to the Governorate of Musandam. The visit included Bassa Beach Park in the Wilayat of Khasab, one of the tourism and development projects in the governorate. It serves as a recreational space for the people of the governorate and its visitors and embodies the ongoing development efforts in the tourism sector.

The Honourable Lady also visited the 'Zaree Khasab' Exhibition Project initiative, as well as the outlet of the Craft House affiliated to the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority in the governorate. During the visit, she viewed the handicrafts, artisanal works, jewellery and unique products included in the two projects, masterfully created by the skilled hands of the governorate's craftsmen, carrying in their details an authentic heritage character of Musandam and reflecting the diversity of the local environment and the richness of its cultural heritage.

The Honourable Lady commended the efforts made in highlighting Omani craft heritage, supporting traditional industries and encouraging initiatives that contribute to strengthening the community economy.

She also toured the Wilayat of Bukha, where she visited the historic mosque in the centre of the wilayat. She was briefed on the civilisational and religious value of this Islamic landmark, its indication of the care Omanis have given to Islamic architecture since ancient times, and the authentic



artistic and architectural features it carries.

The Honourable Lady also visited the Musandam Females Market affiliated to the Omani Women's Association in the Wilayat of Khasab. The market featured diverse pavilions that embodied aspects of Musandam Governorate and reflected its rich authentic heritage, entrenched social customs and traditional lifestyles expressing the depth of local identity and its cultural distinctiveness.

At the market, she listened to a briefing on the community roles undertaken by the Omani Women's Association in the Wilayat of Khasab, alongside other associations in the governorate, in supporting

productive families, empowering women, enhancing community participation and developing craft skills. This contributes to preserving and nurturing cultural heritage and entrenching the values of authenticity and belonging in society.

The Honourable Lady expressed her appreciation for the efforts made and the commendable initiatives and the positive impact they have achieved in serving the community, wishing those in charge continued success.

During her tours, the Honourable Lady was accompanied by Sayyid Ibrahim bin Said al Busaidy, Governor of Musandam, as well as some female ministers and senior officials. — ONA



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HM THE SULTAN’S AWARDS UNVEILED



Dr Habib bin Mohammed al Riyami, Chairman of Sultan Qaboos Higher Centre for Culture and Science, stated that each award will encompass several axes covering the various fields mentioned in its title.

WITH the Royal blessings of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, the Diwan of Royal Court announced four major awards, namely His Majesty the Sultan's Culture and Social Award, His Majesty the Sultan's Award for Research and Innovation, His Majesty the Sultan's Award for Economy, Business and Digital Excellence, and His Majesty the Sultan's Award for Governorates Development.

Dr Habib bin Mohammed al Riyami, Chairman of Sultan Qaboos Higher Centre for Culture and Science, stated that each award will encompass several axes covering the various fields mentioned in its title.

He affirmed that regional and international awards will remain as they are, given their role in consolidating the Sultanate of Oman's stature in international forums.

At a press conference held at the theatre of the Ministry of Information on Sunday, he added that, to ensure coordination among the entities concerned with managing and organising these awards, and to

“The Diwan of the Royal Court will set up a dedicated website for the four awards and establish a clear timeline for each, including dates for registration, result announcements, and award ceremonies. Committees will also be formed to oversee the shortlisting and arbitration processes

DR HABIB
AL RIYAMI

unify standards and enhance their institutional governance to achieve their objectives, the responsibility for their general supervision has been assigned to the Diwan of Royal Court.

He clarified that in this context, the Diwan of Royal Court will work in the coming period to set up a website for these four awards and establish a “timeline” for each award, including dates for opening registration, announcing results and holding award ceremonies for the winners, in addition to forming committees concerned with the shortlisting and arbitration processes. He said that the name of each award clarifies its cycle period, target groups, fields and value.

The value of His Majesty the Sultan's Culture and Social Award is RO 625,500. It targets individuals, civil society institutions and private sector establishments in the fields of Volunteer Work (annually), Youth Excellence (annually), Tangible and Intangible Cultural Heritage (annually), Cultural Recognition (annually) and Educational Excellence (biennially).

He pointed out that the value of His

Majesty the Sultan's Award for Research and Innovation is RO 123,000. It targets individuals and institutions in the fields of Research for the best published scientific research, best research institution and best student innovative idea (annually), and the Innovation field for the best patent and best startup institution (annually).

Dr Habib said that the value of His Majesty the Sultan's Award for Economy, Business and Digital Excellence is RO 445,000.

It targets institutions and individuals in the fields of Industrial Excellence, awarded to the first-place winner in Industrial Excellence at the Sultanate of Oman level, the best industrial company in applying Local Value Added standards, the best industrial company in adopting modern industrial technologies, and the best industrial company in adhering to environmental, safety and social responsibility standards, as well as the best industrial company in adopting administrative standards, corporate governance and customer service (every three years).

He added that the fields of His

Majesty the Sultan's Award for Economy, Business and Digital Excellence include Entrepreneurship, awarded to an institution with pioneering, innovative and sustainable projects across various sectors, a creative handicraft institution, and an initiative supporting entrepreneurship (every three years).

In the field of Digital Excellence, it is awarded for a digital service provided to citizens/business sector/governance, an entity achieving innovation and digital transformation, an innovative initiative for innovation and digital transformation, a technology institution achieving international partnership in the field of technology, and an open award (every three years). He pointed out that the value of His Majesty the Sultan's Award for Governorates Development is RO 1,070,000.

It targets governorates, individuals and institutions in the 'Governorates' awards field, awarded to governorates winning the first three places, the Institutions and Individuals Award for the first three places, and the Individuals Award, also awarded for the first three places, and held biennially. — ONA

Award for research boosts science

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation (MoHERI) confirmed that the launch of His Majesty the Sultan's Award for Research and Innovation is an initiative embodying the insightful vision of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik.

This initiative highlights the continuous Royal commitment to consolidating the status of science and knowledge, strengthening the scientific research and innovation ecosystem as a fundamental pillar of comprehensive and sustainable development in the Sultanate of Oman.

Dr Rahma Ibrahim Al Mahrouqi, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, told Oman News Agency (ONA) that this award represents a practical translation of the Royal keenness in empowering Omani citizens and investing in research and creative potential.

She noted that such efforts contribute to the transition toward a knowledge and innovation-based economy, enhancing Oman's regional and international competitiveness in alignment with the goals of Oman Vision 2040.

She also added that the Sultan's award serves as a qualitative national incentive for researchers and innovators.

It provides a leading platform to honour scientific and creative excellence while encouraging applied research with a developmental impact.

By linking research outcomes with societal needs and development requirements, the award fosters integrated roles between academic and research institutions and both the government and private sectors.

Furthermore, the Minister pointed out that the award will support the national

innovation environment by stimulating a culture of creativity and knowledge-based entrepreneurship.

It aims to empower young researchers, attract talent, and strengthen local and international research partnerships. These outcomes are expected to positively influence the development of national policies and programs, creating innovative solutions for high-priority national challenges across various sectors.

The Sultan's Award for Research and Innovation also motivates researchers to refine their capabilities, ultimately improving Oman's ranking in global indices. The Minister concluded by emphasizing that this award is a badge of honour for every researcher and innovator, serving as a powerful motivation to double efforts and increase scientific contributions to the nation. — ONA

TENDER NOTICE

وزارة الزراعة والسمكية وموارد المياه
Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources

The Ministry of Agricultural, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources Announces the following Tender:-

Tender No.	Tender Title	Tender Document Sales Start Date	Tender Document Sales End Date	Bid Submission Closing	Companies that are Eligible to Participate	Tender Document Fee (R.O)
660/2025/MAFWRI/DGAWRM-17-Recall - 1	Cleaning work for the administration building and its buildings in Muscat Governorate for a period of 2 years 2026 - 2028	Thursday 08-01-2026	Wednesday 14-01-2026	Wednesday 21-01-2026	Specialized companies in the field of services registered with the Projects, Tenders and Local Content Authority with excellent, first, second, third and fourth grades.	(25/-) Omani riyals for local companies (10/-) Omani riyals for SMEs

- Interested Companies registered with The General Secretariat of the Tender Board (in the above mentioned Grade) may obtain Tender documents from the E-Tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>.

- The value of the document will be paid & submitted on line on given website.

- The Tenderer should attach Bid Commitment Declaration for local companies.

- All correspondence pertaining to the tender inquiry must be online at e-tendering System.

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

TENDERS COMMITTEE

Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources

OMAN

SHORT TAKES



Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy shakes hands with Olivier Jean Patrick Nduhungirehe.

OMAN, RWANDA
DISCUSS MEANS
OF COOPERATION

MUSCAT: Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, received Olivier Jean Patrick Nduhungirehe, Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the Republic of Rwanda.

The meeting reviewed the friendship relations between the Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of Rwanda. It also discussed means of enhancing bilateral cooperation in a number of diplomatic, cultural, economic, investment, agricultural, and tourism fields along with all avenues that would contribute to expanding partnership areas and achieving mutual benefits for the two countries.

The meeting was attended by Ambassador Dr Mohammed bin Ali al Balushi, Head of Africa Department at the Foreign Ministry, and a number of officials from both sides. — ONA



Al Mahrrouqi holds talks with Rwandan Minister

OMAN, RWANDA
DISCUSS WAYS TO
ENHANCE TOURISM

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of Rwanda explored avenues for strengthening tourism cooperation, joint marketing, and the exchange of expertise in the management and development of tourism resources and products. The discussions aimed to bolster bilateral relations and support sustainable tourism development.

This occurred during a meeting held by Salim bin Mohammed al Mahrrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism, at his office with Olivier Nduhungirehe, Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the Republic of Rwanda, and Yusuf Murangwa, Rwanda's Minister of Finance and Economic Planning. The meeting was attended by Dan Munyuza, Ambassador of the Republic of Rwanda to the Sultanate of Oman. — ONA

Sayyid Hamoud holds talks with Interior Ministers chief

MUSCAT: Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidy, Minister of Interior, received at his office Dr Mohammad Ali Koman, Secretary-General of the Arab Interior Ministers Council.

The visit to the Sultanate of Oman comes as part of the Secretary-General's customary consultative tour in preparation for the upcoming Council meeting.

During the meeting, the two sides



discussed several topics included on the agenda of the 43rd session. They also emphasised the significance of strengthening joint Arab security cooperation.

The meeting was attended by Eng Khalid bin Hilal al Busaidy, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Interior, and Maj Gen Abdullah bin Ali al Harthy, Assistant Inspector General of Police and Customs for Operations. — ONA

Comprehensive national
employment plan devised

THE Ministry of Labour has worked on preparing a comprehensive national plan for employment and skills development. This plan is based on an effective strategic partnership between the government sector, government-owned companies and private sector establishments, to implement the Royal directives aimed at accelerating the pace of employment and providing 60,000 job opportunities for citizens during 2026.

The ministry clarified that the preparation of this plan is based on a precise analysis of labour market needs, linking employment opportunities to high-value-added sectors, and enhancing alignment between the outputs of education and training and the needs of the national economy. This contributes to raising the efficiency of the national workforce and enhancing its competitiveness. The targeted job opportunities are distributed as follows:

In the government sector, 10,000 jobs will be provided in the government sector (civil, military and security). This aims to enhance the efficiency of the state's administrative apparatus, improve the quality of public services, and focus on vital sectors with developmental and service priority.

As for government support pathways, 17,000 opportunities will be provided within government support pathways. These include wage support programmes, training coupled with employment and on-the-job training programmes. These pathways aim to enable job-seekers to acquire the required practical and professional skills, enhance



The preparation of this plan is based on a precise analysis of labour market needs.



DR MAHAD BIN SAID BAOWAIN
Minister of Labour

This aims to enhance the efficiency of the state's administrative apparatus, improve the quality of public services, and focus on vital sectors with developmental and service priority

their employability and ensure their sustainable integration into the labour market.

In the private sector, as many as 33,000 job opportunities will be provided in the private sector, as the main driver of employment and economic growth. This will be achieved through effective partnerships with private sector institutions, under the direct supervision and follow-up of employment governance committees.

These opportunities span strategic economic sectors, including industry, oil and gas, transport and logistics, tourism, the banking sector, health, education, real estate development, information technology, communications, food security, public services, financial services, mining, retail, construction, alongside other sectors supporting economic diversification.

Dr Mahad bin Said Baowain, Minister of Labour, affirmed that the Royal directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik embody His Majesty's insightful vision for

building a balanced economy led by the qualified Omani individual.

He said: "This national employment plan is not limited to providing numbers and job opportunities only. Rather, it is based on building quality and sustainable jobs linked to training and qualification, and aligned with the requirements of the current and future labour market. This enhances the competitiveness of the national workforce and prepares it for the opportunities arising from economic and technological transformations."

He added that the ministry was keen to implement this plan according to clear performance indicators, precise governance mechanisms and periodic follow-up. This ensures regular and transparent measurement of achieved targets and addresses any challenges that may arise during implementation stages, thereby achieving efficiency in performance and maximising developmental impact.

He affirmed that the integration between employment policies and education and training policies represents a fundamental pillar of this plan.

He pointed out that the ministry is working to enhance partnerships with education and training institutions and the private sector to ensure that skills are aligned with market needs and to achieve career stability for citizens.

He called for positive interaction with this national initiative, stressing that employment is a shared national responsibility and that sustainable development is only achieved through the integration of efforts and the unification of visions among the various parties of the economic ecosystem. — ONA

Royal grant embodies priority of family stability

MUSCAT: The Royal grant from His Majesty the Sultan allocating RO 100 million for a housing assistance programme to cover 3,500 families during 2026 and 2027 embodies the support for family stability and the enhancement of the quality of life for families with low-income across the various governorates of the Sultanate of Oman.

This grant is an extension of a series of Royal directives that place the citizen at the forefront of priorities, affirming the wise leadership's keenness to provide suitable housing as a fundamental pillar of social stability. Dr Khalfan bin Said al Shueili, Minister of Housing and Urban Planning, said that this Royal grant embodies the continuous giving approach established by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and reflects the Royal care for entrenching family stability as one of the fundamental foundations of social development. He added that the Royal directives

since the dawn of the Renewed Renaissance have formed a clear road map, enabling the achievement of qualitative accomplishments in the social housing programme. These accomplishments have included providing suitable housing for thousands of families, alongside developing legislative and service frameworks that serve eligible beneficiaries and enhance the quality of life within a cohesive and stable society.

He clarified that the continuous journey of giving confirms that the Omani citizen is the pivot and goal of development. This reflects the government's commitment to directing resources towards priorities that have a direct impact on the quality of life and ensuring the continuity of providing suitable housing as a pivotal element in enhancing social cohesion and achieving sustainable development. The Social Housing Programme achieved qualitative results as part of the ongoing efforts to elevate the



These accomplishments have included providing housing for thousands of families.



DR KHALFAN BIN SAID AL SHUEILI
Minister of Housing and Urban Planning

quality of life for eligible families. More than 8,000 families have been enabled to achieve family stability, with a value exceeding RO 200 million. The accomplishments included 465 housing units at a cost of RO 23 million, in addition to 543 housing units implemented in partnership with the private sector. This enhances the integration between the public and private sectors in achieving sustainable

social impact.

Furthermore, an amount of RO 26.4 million was allocated as assistance for families residing in mountainous areas and those affected by climatic conditions, thereby reinforcing community protection and enhancing the ability to overcome exceptional circumstances.

In 2025, RO 50 million was allocated as a Royal grant that provided housing for more than 1,700 families, in addition to allocating RO 4 million through Royal directives for both Al Wusta and Dhofar governorates.

The Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning worked on purchasing 278 housing units within future city projects and residential neighbourhoods, at a value exceeding RO 11.8 million.

This aims to provide suitable housing with modern specifications within communities that have complete services and accelerate the pace of providing ready housing for eligible beneficiaries. — ONA

SHORT TAKES



People ride in the back of a vehicle in the Ashrafieh neighbourhood, Aleppo. — Reuters

SYRIA GOVERNMENT FORCES TAKE CONTROL OF ALEPPO CITY

DAMASCUS: Syria’s government was in full control of Aleppo on Sunday after taking over the city’s neighbourhoods and evacuating fighters there following days of deadly clashes. Residents of the Ashrafiyeh neighbourhood, the first of two areas to fall to the Syrian army, began returning to their homes to inspect the damage, finding shrapnel and broken glass littering the streets. An unspecified number of dead were transferred from the Sheikh Maqsud neighbourhood.

A correspondent saw crossed-out images of Syrian President Ahmed al Sharaa, Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan and US envoy Tom Barrack, as people chanted against Sharaa. US envoy Tom Barrack met on Saturday with Syrian President Ahmed al Sharaa, and afterwards issued a call for a “return to dialogue” with the Kurds in accordance with an integration agreement sealed last year. — AFP



A billboard features India’s PM Narendra Modi and German Chancellor Friedrich Merz, in Ahmedabad. — AFP

GERMANY’S MERZ HEADS TO INDIA TO BOLSTER TIES

BERLIN: German Chancellor Friedrich Merz left for India on Sunday for a visit to bolster economic and security ties between the top EU economy and the Asian population giant. Both Berlin and New Delhi face a turbulent world order and a set of economic and geopolitical challenges from the world’s two largest economies, the United States and China.

Merz’s visit from Monday — his first to an Asian country since he took office last May — comes two weeks ahead of a planned EU-India summit and as India and the bloc are working on a free trade agreement. “This agreement is envisioned not just as a trade deal, but as a comprehensive partnership that addresses modern economic realities,” India’s commerce ministry said.

During Merz’s two-day visit, Prime Minister Narendra Modi will host him in Ahmedabad, in the premier’s western home state of Gujarat, before Merz travels to the southern technology hub of Bengaluru. The two leaders will attend a traditional kite festival and visit the Sabarmati Ashram, the spiritual retreat where Mahatma Gandhi, the leader of the Indian independence struggle, lived for many years. — AFP

SUDAN PM ANNOUNCES GOVT RETURN TO KHARTOUM FROM WARTIME CAPITAL

KHARTOUM: Sudan’s Prime Minister Kamil Idris announced on Sunday the government’s return to Khartoum, after nearly three years of operating from its wartime capital of Port Sudan. In the early days of the regular military’s war with the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces in April 2023, the army-aligned government fled the capital, which was quickly overrun by rival troops. It has pursued a gradual return to Khartoum since the army recaptured the city last

March. “Today, we return, and the Government of Hope returns to the national capital,” Idris told reporters in Khartoum, promising “better services” for residents. For close to two years, the Sudanese capital — composed of the three cities of Khartoum, Omdurman and Khartoum North (Bahri) — was an active battlefield. Entire neighbourhoods were besieged, rival fighters shot artillery across the Nile River and millions of people were displaced from the city. Between

March and October, 1.2 million people returned to Khartoum, according to the United Nations. Many found a city with barely functioning services, their homes destroyed and neighbourhoods pockmarked by makeshift cemeteries authorities are now exhuming. The war is estimated to have killed tens of thousands of people in the capital alone, but the complete toll is unknown, as many families are forced to bury their dead in makeshift graves. — AFP

Massive rallies across US post ICE fatal shooting

THOUSANDS of demonstrators took to the streets of Minneapolis chanting the name of the woman killed by a federal agent in the city, amid widespread anger at use of force in the Trump administration’s immigration crackdown. Organisers said more than 1,000 events were planned across the United States under the slogan “ICE, Out for Good” — referring to the Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency that is drawing growing opposition over its execution of President Donald Trump’s effort at mass deportations. The slogan is also a reference to Renee Good, the 37-year old mother shot dead in her car by an ICE agent.

Thousands braved frigid weather and streamed toward a snow-covered park to mobilise near the scene of the shooting. They carried signs demanding “ICE OUT” of Minnesota. At the start of the protest, a voice called out, “Say her name!” The crowd shouted back: “Renee Good!”

Her death has sparked strong emotions in this Democratic stronghold, and across the nation. “We got ICE shooting women in the face for self-defence. It doesn’t make any sense,” said Alex Vega, a protester in Boston. “Let them come around here with that, and let’s see what’s really going to happen to ICE.”

In Philadelphia, protesters marched in the rain from City Hall to the ICE field office. Others mobilised in New York, Washington and Boston, with the gatherings drawing dozens to hundreds of demonstrators. More protests



Protesters hold signs as they march from Powderhorn Park in Minneapolis. — AFP

Thousands braved frigid weather and streamed toward a snow-covered park to mobilise near the scene of the shooting. They carried signs demanding “ICE OUT” of Minnesota

were planned for Sunday. The calls to protest were being amplified by the “No Kings” movement, a network of left-wing organisations that mounted nationwide demonstrations against Trump last year.

The Trump administration has sought to paint Good as a “domestic terrorist,” vigorously insisting the agent who fatally shot her was acting in self-defence. This narrative is strongly disputed by local officials, who say footage shows Good’s vehicle turning away from the agent and did not pose a threat to his life. Cell phone footage apparently taken by the officer

who fired the fatal shots shows him interacting with Good, who had blocked the road with her car in an apparent effort to impede the agents. He approaches and circles Good’s car, as she says to him: “I’m not mad at you.”

Another agent can be heard ordering Good to exit the vehicle before she tries to drive off and shots ring out. The agent filming the video can then be heard. The White House insisted the video gave weight to the officer’s claim of self-defence — even though the clip does not clearly show the moment the car moved away, or him opening fire. — AFP



GAZANS CLING TO MSF AS ISRAEL ORDERS IT OUT

KHAN YUNIS: At a hospital in Gaza, wards are filled with patients fearing they will be left without care if Doctors Without Borders (MSF) is forced out under an Israeli ban due to take effect in March. Last month, Israel announced it would prevent 37 aid organisations, including MSF, from operating in Gaza from March 1 for failing to provide detailed information on their Palestinian staff.

“They stood by us throughout the war,” said 10-year old Adam Asfour, his left arm pinned with metal rods after he was wounded by shrapnel in a bombing in September. “When I heard it was possible they would stop providing services, it made me very sad,” he added from his bed at Gaza’s Nasser Hospital. — AFP

PUBLIC APPROVAL

Japan PM Takaichi may call early election



Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi may call an early general election, the head of her party’s coalition partner said on Sunday, after media reported she was considering a February vote. It would be the first time for the conservative Takaichi, Japan’s first female prime minister and a fan of Britain’s Margaret Thatcher, to face the voters, giving her a chance to capitalise on the strong public approval ratings she has enjoyed since taking office in October. — Reuters

PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

Benin heads to polls after coup attempt



Benin voted in parliamentary and local elections, just one month after a failed coup plot shook the west African country and three months ahead of presidential polls. The elections come at a fraught moment for Benin, still reeling from a deadly coup attempt by army mutineers on December 7, which was put down by the military. The legislative elections will define the political landscape ahead of April’s presidential polls. — AFP

UNSPECIFIED CONSEQUENCES

Trump tells Cuba to ‘make a deal’



US President Donald Trump urged Cuba on Sunday to “make a deal” or face unspecified consequences, warning that the flow of Venezuelan oil and money to Havana would now stop. Earlier on Sunday Trump reposted a message suggesting that US Secretary of State Marco Rubio could become the president of now communist-ruled Cuba. Trump said that “Cuba lived, for many years, on large amounts of OIL and MONEY from Venezuela. — AFP

OPINION

Are workplaces failing millennials?



**DR HAMED
AL SINAWI**

The writer is a senior consultant psychiatrist at SQU Hospital

LAST weekend, I invited my 25-year-old son out for hot chocolate. Halfway through the drive, I told him, “You get to pick the café — and you’re paying”. His usually serious expression softened into a smile as he nodded and said, “Deal”. Our conversation drifted naturally from reminiscing about his childhood to his current work life and eventually to his views on millennials’ work ethics.

This conversation reminded me of a popular talk by the motivational speaker, Simon Sinek, titled ‘Millennials in the Workplace’.

In it, Sinek argues that poor parenting practices, addictive technology and a culture of instant gratification have shaped a generation that appears entitled and impatient at work.

He suggests that many millennials grew up being told they were ‘special’ and rewarded with participation medals regardless of their performance.

When they entered adult life and discovered that the world does not automatically reward effort with praise, their self-image suffered.

Sinek also explains how social media is shaping behaviour through the ‘likes’ and ‘followers’ which provide constant ‘dopamine

hits’, encouraging a dependence on external validation.

According to him, this has replaced deeper human connections with superficial interactions, limiting opportunities for young people to develop resilience, frustration tolerance and emotional coping skills.

He argues that technology has reinforced expectations of instant gratification. Today, you do not need to drive to a bookshop to buy a book when you can download it into your iPad or watch TV series one episode per week when Netflix allows you to binge watch the whole series in a single weekend. When workplaces cannot match this speed, when promotions take time, feedback is delayed, or progress is slow, frustration becomes inevitable.

A research paper analysing viewers’ comments on Sinek’s talk reported many critics who argued that he relied heavily on generalisations and shifting blame onto an entire generation. While parenting and technology undoubtedly influence development, they are not the only factors at play.

Sinek’s description creates a stereotype that overlooks those who grew up in disciplined households, learned perseverance early and entered a workforce shaped by economic instability, rising living costs and

Many millennials grew up being told they were ‘special’ and rewarded with participation medals regardless of their performance

shrinking job security. Many millennials work long hours, juggle multiple roles and face pressures their parents’ generation never encountered.

On the other hand, some viewers found Sinek’s message comforting and logical as it offered a sense of relief as their struggles were not ‘entirely their fault’. Others found the explanation helped them make sense of the frustrations they experience daily at work.

In my opinion, generations are shaped not only by parenting and technology, but also by culture, socioeconomic conditions, education systems and global events.

Reducing a complex group of people to a single narrative may be convenient but practically unhelpful.

Perhaps the real question is not whether millennials are the problem, but whether our workplaces are ready to move beyond generational blame. Progress does not come from labelling an entire generation as broken. It comes from curiosity, dialogue and leadership willing to engage with complexity rather than stereotypes.

In the end, the loud reaction to Sinek’s talk tells us something valuable: people want to be seen as individuals, not stereotypes. And that is a lesson every workplace would benefit from learning.

THE QUESTIONS AI FORCES US TO ASK



**AHLAM
AL BALUSHI**

After attending a lecture by Dr Rami Shaheen, organised by the Ministry of Information, I found myself leaving not with clear answers, but with important questions.

Questions about artificial intelligence, about our role in using it and about what it truly means to be a responsible digital citizen in today’s world. Dr Rami offered a refreshing definition of a positive digital citizen. It is not someone who fears AI or rejects it, but someone who knows how to use it wisely. AI, as he explained, is an enabler. It helps us work faster, improve quality and make better decisions. But it does not replace human judgment, responsibility, or purpose. In this sense, AI is not a shortcut. It is a tool that strengthens human capability.

Yet despite this, many of us still feel uncomfortable using AI. Sometimes there is even a sense of guilt or shame. This raises an important question: if AI was created to support us, why do we hesitate to use it?

We know from experience that using AI is not effortless. It requires clear thinking, good prompts, review and correction. It often takes several attempts to reach a result that truly reflects our intention. So why do we still question the value of AI-supported work? And why do we sometimes judge others for using AI, while justifying our own use of it?

Another question stayed with me. If we are already capable writers, why do we still turn to AI to polish our work? The answer may not be about laziness. It may be about clarity, confidence and professionalism. AI can help organise ideas, improve flow and highlight gaps. It does not replace our voice; it reflects it back to us in a clearer form. This leads to a deeper concern. As we use AI more often, will we start to write like it? Will our language slowly become uniform, predictable and less human? And if that happens, how do we protect originality and authentic expression while still benefitting from AI’s strengths?

At the heart of all these questions is balance. AI should support our skills, not weaken them. It should help us think better, not think less. The responsibility lies with us to remain aware, intentional and critical in how we use it.

Perhaps these questions do not need final answers. What matters more is that we keep asking them. Because as long as we question how we use technology, we remain in control of it, not the other way around.

How the private sector is powering digital economy



**MOOSA BIN
MOHAMMED
AL RAISI**

OMAN Vision 2040 places technology and artificial intelligence at the core of economic growth and diversification. Across the country, businesses are beginning to factor this focus into how they invest and plan for the future.

The government has made this a priority. Policies, incentives and national programmes have been put in place to make technology adoption viable across sectors, not just for large enterprises, but for the wider economy.

One of the most prominent examples is the Oman Future Fund, a RO 2 billion initiative aimed at supporting high-potential local projects. The fund is helping bolster the startup and innovation ecosystem by backing solutions that respond to the needs of a modern digital economy.

Free zones such as Knowledge Oasis Muscat and the Duqm Special Economic Zone have also become key entry points for technology investment, supported by flexible licensing and investor-friendly regulations.

Infrastructure has been another major focus. Through the National Broadband Strategy, Oman is targeting 95 per cent urban coverage by 2030. This level of connectivity lays a strong foundation for the expansion of essential digital services across the economy.

National initiatives such as the National Digital Economy Programme, Digital Oman and the AI and Advanced Technologies Programme take this groundwork further. These modernise government services and support the private sector in adopting technology and leading transformation within their operations.

Estimates suggest that placing 20 per cent of SMEs on digital platforms could generate between 150,000 and 200,000 jobs, particularly in digital marketing



These changes are already underway. Around 30 per cent of large industrial companies in Oman have begun using artificial intelligence, particularly in manufacturing, oil and gas; and logistics.

Small and medium-sized enterprises face tighter constraints, mainly related to costs and skills. Targeted training programmes and financial incentives have therefore been critical in allowing SMEs to adopt digital tools gradually and sustainably.

The impact of digital transformation is evident across several sectors. In manufacturing, predictive maintenance powered by AI has reduced unplanned downtime by as much as 50 per cent.

In financial services, fraud detection tools and data analytics have lowered losses and improved service quality. In retail, intelligent recommendation engines and data-driven analysis have helped businesses better understand customers and improve sales performance.

Technology is also influencing employment patterns. Estimates suggest that placing 20 per cent of

SMEs on digital platforms could generate between 150,000 and 200,000 jobs, particularly in digital marketing, design, accounting and logistics.

In parallel, the AI sector attracted around RO 60 million in investment in 2024, with funding expected to grow by about 20 per cent annually as startups expand.

Skills availability is an important consideration, particularly as artificial intelligence and advanced technology require specialised expertise. Encouragingly, the government is integrating AI into education and professional training programmes to help assemble a capable and prepared workforce.

Oman’s digital environment is also opening the door to new investment opportunities. Reliable infrastructure and regulatory consistency are making the country increasingly attractive to foreign investors. Continued alignment with successful regional experiences will help refine policies as the ecosystem matures.

With consistent cooperation across sectors and investment in local talent and infrastructure, the ambitions of Oman Vision 2040 are in clear sight.

Commemorating Oman’s evolving story



ABDULAZIZ
AL JAHDHAMI

The writer is author, translator and communications professional

SOME moments in a nation’s life arrive not with noise or show, but quietly, carrying the promise of persistence. As the sun rises each January over Oman’s mountains, deserts and seas, it mirrors a moment of deep national reflection.

The anniversary of the accession of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to the throne marks not merely the passage of time, but the constant revealing of a vision carefully crafted for the Sultanate of Oman’s future.

From the very beginning, His Majesty’s words to the nation resonated with reassurance and resolve. He spoke of responsibility before privilege, of work before reward and of the future as a shared responsibility. In doing so, he set a tone that continues to define his reign — one marked by modesty, discipline and thoughtful progress.

His Majesty addressed, “The trust thrust on our shoulders and the resultant immense responsibilities require us all to work together for the sake of our country’s magnificence, with a persistent resolve to promote it to the loftiest levels. This cannot be realised without your support, cooperation and combination of all efforts to achieve the desired supreme national goal. Your contribution to enrich all efforts of progress, development and prosperity will be highly appreciated.”

At the heart of this new chapter stands

Oman Vision 2040, a national road map that reimagines development beyond oil dependence and short-term gains. Over the past six years, the vision has taken tangible shape. Government institutions were restructured to improve efficiency and accountability, aligning authority with responsibility.

Streamlined ministries, clarified mandates, and enhanced governance frameworks have fostered transparency and institutional effectiveness. Laws and regulations were modernised to keep pace with a rapidly changing world, while preserving the values that define Omani identity. These changes have strengthened public trust and laid the groundwork for long-term national resilience.

Economic reforms became both a necessity and an opportunity. His Majesty guided the nation through global economic uncertainty with fiscal discipline and measured reform, reinforcing financial stability while protecting the social welfare of citizens. New sectors have begun to redefine the country’s economic landscape. These efforts signal a future where opportunity is diversified and resilience strengthened.

Yet the most powerful legacy of the past years lies in the renewed spirit of Omanis.

His Majesty has consistently placed citizens at the heart of national priorities, affirming that development without dignity is incomplete. Education, healthcare, youth empowerment and social protection are not

At the heart of this new chapter stands Oman Vision 2040, a national road map that reimagines development beyond oil dependence and short-term gains. Over the past six years, the vision has taken tangible shape

merely policies, but expression of leadership that sees citizens as a pillar of the nation’s future. Omani youth are being inspired to lead with competence, creativity and ethical responsibility.

On the international front, Oman’s foreign policy continues to reflect wisdom, balance and principle. The Sultanate of Oman remains a voice of dialogue and moderation, building bridges, encouraging peaceful solutions and nurturing respectful relations with nations across the globe. In a world marked by uncertainty, Oman’s diplomacy stands as a testament to the values of coexistence and mutual understanding.

As Oman commemorates His Majesty’s reign, we look back with gratitude and forward with confidence. This anniversary is not only a celebration of leadership, but also a reaffirmation of a shared journey in which tradition and modernity walk side by side, and where progress is guided by vision rather than motivation.

It is a reminder that true leadership is measured not by the noise it creates, but by the confidence it instils, the resilience it builds and the hope it renews. Under His Majesty’s wise guidance, Oman has learned to face change with courage, turn challenge into opportunity and place firm faith in its people.

United in purpose and inspired by vision, the nation moves forward with calm hearts and confidence that the path ahead, shaped by wisdom and shared responsibility, will lead to a future worthy of Oman’s legacy and generations to come.

HOPES WANE FOR SURVIVORS IN GARBAGE SITE COLLAPSE

CHERYL BALDICANTOS AND PAM CASTRO

Hopes of finding survivors days after the collapse of a massive mountain of trash in the central Philippines were fading, officials said on Sunday, as rescue workers dug through tonnes of rubble.

The recovery of a body on Sunday brought the confirmed death toll to seven, with at least 29 people still missing as the crucial 72-hour window since the landslide in Cebu City came to an end.

About 50 sanitation workers were buried on Thursday when the mountain of garbage toppled onto them from an estimated height of 20 storeys at the Binaliw Landfill, a privately operated facility that handles refuse for the city of nearly one million.

“Yesterday, we detected two signs of life through our specialised radar. There were still heartbeats 30 metres below the debris, but right now, there are no reports of that anymore,” local fire officer Wendell Villanueva said on Sunday.

He said it was unlikely “for people to still be alive” three days after “tonnes of debris and trash had collapsed over them”.

So far, 12 employees have been pulled alive from the garbage and hospitalised. On Saturday, a rescue official said emergency workers had faced the danger of further collapse by the still-shifting mountain of refuse, forcing pauses in their efforts.

Rain had only increased that danger, Villanueva said. In a phone call, Villanueva said the focus was expected to turn from rescue to recovery on Monday, later adding that the final decision would be up to an inter-agency team.

A public information officer separately said the focus was likely to shift to recovering bodies. Outside the disaster site, dozens of family members huddled under tents provided to shield them from the sun, while others found spots nearer the facility to watch the rescue efforts.

“What we want now is to find them. Alive or dead - so we can properly take care of them,” said Jezille Matabid, whose brother Junelle, a welder at the site, was among the missing.

Another woman, who declined to give her name, said the lack of information about her older sister, a landfill employee, had been agonising.

“We feel like we’re going crazy here just waiting for an update. She’s three months pregnant,” she said. Elmer Aguilar, whose brother Larry, a welder, was among the missing, said he had come with 10 others hoping to aid in the search effort, only to be turned away. “We went here because we thought we could help dig, but when we arrived, the guards did not allow us to enter.”

Joel Garganera, a Cebu City council member, described the height from which the trash fell as “alarming”, estimating the top of the pile had stood 20 storeys above the area struck. — AFP

An overlooked way to close Africa’s health gaps

EVERY year, millions of Africans fall into poverty simply because they got sick. A complicated pregnancy, a malaria infection, or an unexpected surgery can push a household to the brink, because many African countries suffer from a health-financing deficit.

The reasons for these gaps are well known: chronic under-investment, limited fiscal space, fragmented insurance markets and an international development system geared more towards reacting to crises than to preventing them. Although global leaders have made repeated commitments to universal health coverage, too many African families still must pay for healthcare out of pocket, often falling into hardship or debt simply for seeking medical care.

But there is another story that deserves greater attention. Africans already fund a sizable share of the continent’s social protection, not through public budgets or donor funds, but through extraordinary commitments from the diaspora. In recent years, Africans abroad have sent home more than \$100 billion in remittances, exceeding the sums from foreign direct investment and official development assistance combined. These transfers are not just acts of love and social responsibility. They are an underappreciated economic engine and an essential lifeline for millions of households.

Nonetheless, reliance on remittances underscores the failures of Africa’s formal institutions. Despite improvements in health outcomes over the past two decades, out-of-pocket payments still account for up to 40 per cent of total health spending in many African countries. At the same time, remittances have grown steadily and consistently; and unlike aid, they go directly to households, bypassing bureaucracy and political volatility. Yet these flows’ full potential remains untapped. They usually arrive only



Many African countries suffer from a health-financing deficit.



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EKHOSUEHI
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The writer is Secretary General of the Insurance Development Forum

after a medical emergency has forced a family into crisis – when a bill has ballooned beyond control, or a loved one is already fighting for his or her life – rather than being pooled or structured in ways that would build sustainable health systems.

The solution is to devise a way to convert today’s emergency transfers into a more enduring health-financing tool. To that end, a working group comprising leading experts in health financing, insurance innovation, diaspora engagement and global advocacy came together as part of the 17 Rooms Initiative to develop what we are calling HealthBridge.

HealthBridge reimagines Africa’s remittances not as emergency transfers, but as a foundation for financing proactive healthcare. The idea is straightforward: build a mechanism that allows diaspora communities voluntarily to channel a small portion of their remittances into a pooled fund that will finance essential health services for their families and communities back home. Rather than scramble to send money after a health crisis, those across the diaspora can ensure that families are covered before disaster strikes. The HealthBridge model has four core components. The first is pooled remittance contributions.

Diaspora members can choose to contribute a modest amount regularly – say, \$10-20 per month – into a regional solidarity fund, which could in turn be matched by employers, philanthropic organisations, or governments.

The second component is prepaid access. Named beneficiaries in Africa (often relatives) would be entitled to a package of essential health services, particularly for urgent or emergency care, with delivery either through public systems, accredited private providers, or regional networks.

The third component is cross-border portability. Since health threats do not observe national borders, HealthBridge would ensure regional coverage that follows the person, not the passport. This condition is especially important for families living in border regions, migrants and communities affected by conflict.

The final element is transparency and accountability. A new digital platform would allow contributors to track payments, delivery and outcomes, thus building trust and ensuring that this model strengthens rather than fragments existing health systems.

Our proposal builds on successful innovations such as Rwanda’s community-based health insurance model and Kenya’s M-TIBA health wallet. It also reflects a simple truth: diaspora Africans are already paying for healthcare, but in ways that do not strengthen health systems, ensure accountability, or generate long-term resilience.

The costs of doing nothing are enormous. With millions of African households pushed into poverty by medical expenses every year, governments too often find themselves reacting to crises without the pre-positioned resources needed to respond effectively. HealthBridge could help reverse these dynamics by offering a practical way for diaspora communities to co-invest in health systems. ©Project Syndicate, 2026

SPORTS

SHORTTAKES



From previous training programme.

OOA TO PROVIDE TRAINING ACROSS THE GOVERNORATES IN 2026

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JAN 11



DR ISHAQ
AL BALUSHI

Director of the Oman
Olympic Academy

The Oman Olympic Academy(OOA) will implement an ambitious nationwide plan for 2026, aimed at decentralising sports education and ensuring equal access to professional training across all governorates of the Sultanate of Oman. Dr Ishaq bin Ahmed al Balushi, Director of the

Oman Olympic Academy, confirmed to Observer that the Academy will prioritise the distribution of courses and workshops beyond Muscat, marking a strategic shift toward inclusive and sustainable sports development.

“This year will be built on two main pillars,” Dr al Balushi said. “The first focuses on the management of sports associations and clubs, which will be delivered in three phases across different governorates.”

The first phase of the Sports Management Programme will be held between March and June 2026, targeting Muscat and Al Batinah North. The second phase will take place from September to October for Al Dakhiliyah and Al Dhahirah, while the final phase will be delivered in Al Sharqiyah South, ensuring nationwide coverage.

Alongside governance and management education, spreading Olympic culture and values remains a core objective of the Academy’s 2026 agenda. According to Dr al Balushi, this programme will be rolled out in Muscat, Al Sharqiyah North and Al Wusta in February, followed by Dhofar, Al Buraimi and Musandam in September.

The Academy will also continue to deliver its regular Olympic Solidarity linked courses, which remain a cornerstone of its annual calendar. These include the Sports Leaders Programme during January 19 to 21 while Sports Training Course to take place between January 26 to28. Sports Media for Digital Platforms will be held during April 6 to 8 and Health and Sports Nutrition Course during April 13 to 15.

Reflecting on the Academy’s achievements, Dr al Balushi revealed that between 2019 and the end of 2025, the Oman Olympic Academy delivered 45 programmes, amounting to 935 training hours. By the end of 2026, the total number of programmes is expected to reach 54 events, supported by 46 approved lecturers.

Participation levels have also continued to rise, with 908 participants benefiting from Academy programmes in recent years in a figure that underlines the growing demand for structured sports education in Oman.

In addition, Dr al Balushi highlighted the Academy’s specialised library, which houses more than 727 books and publications, describing it as a vital resource for researchers, coaches and sports administrators. “The library is open to all those seeking knowledge,” he said. “We hope it will play a greater role in supporting learning and professional development within the sports community.”



A training programme held earlier.

Al Amerat claim third straight Beach Soccer title



Al Amerat celebrate their Beach Soccer League triumph after being crowned champions of the 2025–2026 season. — Faisal Al Balushi

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, JAN 11

AL AMERAT Club continued its dominance in the Omani Beach Soccer League, clinching the 2025–2026 season title for the third straight time after a thrilling 7–6 victory over Al Oruba in the final, held at the sandy pitch of the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher. With this achievement, Al Amerat retained the league shield, while Al Oruba slipped to third place. Masirah Club secured second place after defeating Saham 6–2 in the match that preceded the final.

The award ceremony was held under the auspices of Abdullah al Rashidi, a member of the OFA Board, in the presence of Mohammed bin Sulaiman al Yahmadi, Secretary-General of the Association, along with several club officials.

A THRILLING FINAL

Al Amerat took an early lead through Ahmed al Owaisi, but Muslim al Arimi



quickly equalised for Al Oruba. Al Oruba then went ahead through goalkeeper Majid al Afari, ending the first period with a 2–1 lead.

In the second period, Al Oruba strengthened their advantage with two more goals from Muslim al Araimi and Abdullah al Mukhaini. Khalid al Araimi reduced the deficit for Al Amerat, as the second period ended 4–2 in Al Oruba’s favour. Al Amerat mounted a strong comeback in the third period, with goals from Khalid al Araimi and Sami al Balushi. Al Oruba regained the lead through

Muslim al Araimi, but Sami al Balushi responded with two quick goals to put Al Amerat ahead 6–5. In the final moments, Fahad al Meshikhi equalised for Al Oruba, forcing the match into a decisive fourth period. It was Al Amerat who had the last word, as Salim al Araimi scored the winning goal just 30 seconds from time to secure the title.

MASIRAH CLAIM SECOND PLACE

In the match before the final, Masirah Club dominated Saham and claimed a deserved 6–2 victory to finish as league runners-up. The goals were scored by Younis al Owaisi, Youssef al Zadjali, Sherif al Balushi and Khalfan al Ghazali, in a performance that highlighted Masirah’s technical and organisational superiority.

Al Amerat head coach Jalal al Sinani expressed his pride in winning a third consecutive title, crediting the club’s technical and administrative stability and strong backing from the management. He also praised the fighting spirit of his players and the tough challenge posed in the final.

Muttrah crowned Muscat Nights 3x3 champions

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, JAN 11

The Muttrah Athlete Development Centre team was crowned champions of the Muscat Nights 3x3 Basketball Championship for youth development centres, following an impressive performance in the tournament that concluded at Seeb Beach as part of the Muscat Nights sports programme. The event, held from January 9-10, featured a high technical standard and intense competition among elite centre players, with 32 athletes divided into eight teams.

The championship delivered a series of strong and closely contested matches, with each team playing three games in the group stage, while the qualified teams contested five matches in the knockout rounds, creating a competitive environment that allowed players to showcase their individual and team abilities. Muttrah claimed



Players in action during the Championship. — Ammar al Musafir

the title through the efforts of Wail al Busaidy, Mohammed al Kharousi, Abdulrahman Shamas and Omar al Busaidy. Muscat finished second, represented by Murshid Bousalasal, Mohammed al Ajmi, Saeed al Wahaibi and Omar al Rashdi, while Bausher secured third place through Mohammed al Fahdi, Moataz al Rashidi, Abdullah al Ameri and Ahmed al Ghadani.

INSPIRING ATMOSPHERE Alaa al Hadhrami, Chairman of the 3x3 Basketball Committee at the Oman Basketball Association, said that hosting the tournament within the Muscat Nights festival and in front of a diverse crowd provided strong motivation for the players and attracted the attention of visitors, helping to promote 3x3 basketball, expand its player base, and connect

the sport with the wider community in an open and engaging environment. He added that the event offered players a valuable competitive experience outside their daily training routines, allowing coaches to assess their abilities in real match conditions. He noted that this was the first 3x3 competition for most of the participants, making it an important starting point for future involvement in similar tournaments. Such championships, he stressed, also open the door for players to consider specialising in 3x3 basketball, supporting the long-term development plans of the sport in Oman. Meanwhile, head coach Abdullah Hashim highlighted the importance of the tournament in revealing players’ individual abilities, particularly in ball control, quick decision-making and playing under pressure.

NBA ACTION



Boston Celtics guard Jaylen Brown (7) drives to the basket against San Antonio Spurs forward Victor Wembanyama (1). — **Imagn Images**

WEMBANYAMA SHINES LATE AS SPURS DOWN CELTICS

LOS ANGELES: Victor Wembanyama stepped it up in the second half on Saturday, drilling a go-ahead jump shot with 1:33 to play and adding the final dagger in the San Antonio Spurs’ 100-95 NBA victory over the Boston Celtics.

The French star, who again came off the bench as the Spurs ease him back into action in the wake of a knee injury, scored 16 of his 21 points in the second half, adding six rebounds and three blocked shots.

“My mindset was just, I have to close out the game,” Wembanyama said of his pivotal jumpers, adding that the victory showed the Spurs’ character.

“It felt like they were playing better basketball than us, but we stayed in there,” he said.

De’Aaron Fox scored 21 points for San Antonio and Keldon Johnson added 18 points and 10 rebounds as the Spurs kicked off a three-game road trip with victory in the clash of East and West second-placed teams.

Derrick White scored 29 points and grabbed nine rebounds and Jaylen Brown added 27 points, eight rebounds and seven assists for Boston.

In Detroit, the Los Angeles Clippers erased a double-digit deficit to hand the Eastern Conference leading Pistons a 98-92 defeat.

Kawhi Leonard scored 26 points and John Collins added 25 for the Clippers, who trailed by as many as 19 in the first half and were down 14 early in the fourth quarter.

Collins made a pair of free throws to give the Clippers a 93-92 lead with two minutes remaining and James Harden fed Ivica Zubac for a dunk and the Clippers held on for the win.

They out-scored the Pistons 30-16 in the fourth quarter, Detroit coughing up 12 of their 25 turnovers in the final frame.

Duncan Robinson scored 20 points to lead the Pistons, who were without key contributors Cade Cunningham, Jalen Duren and Tobias Harris as well as ailing Isaiah Stewart.

Elsewhere, Donovan Mitchell scored 28 points and passed off eight assists to spark the Cleveland Cavaliers over Minnesota 146-134.

Two nights after losing at Minnesota, the Cavs also had 24 points on 11-of-16 shooting from Evan Mobley and 23 points off the bench from Jaylon Tyson to rally past the Timberwolves.

“They got up 12 and we responded, did what we had to do and got the win,” Mitchell said, noting the improvements from Thursday’s loss.

“We made adjustments,” he said. “We locked in, dialled in and did a good job. We kept our foot on the gas, they made some runs and we continued like always.”

Anthony Edwards led Minnesota with 25 points while Julius Randle had 22 and reserve Naz Reid contributed 23, hitting 5-of-6 three-point attempts.

Andrew Nembhard scored 29 points to lead the Indiana Pacers to a 123-99 blowout win over the Miami Heat. The lowly Pacers led by double digits most of the night and won a second straight game for just the third time this season. — **AFP**



Mohamed Salah celebrates after the match. — **Reuters**

Salah leads Egypt dethrone champions Ivory Coast

MOHAMED

Salah scored as Egypt won 3-2 to dump defending champions Ivory Coast out of the Africa Cup of Nations in a thrilling quarter-final on Saturday. Omar Marmoush and Ramy Rabia netted for Egypt, then Ahmed Aboul-Fetouh conceded an own goal before half-time.

Salah then edged closer to a first Africa Cup of Nations winners medal by doubling the lead soon after the break before Guela Doue pulled a goal back for Ivory Coast.

Egypt will face Senegal on Wednesday in Tangiers with the winners meeting hosts Morocco or Nigeria four days later in the final. The triumph in Agadir confirmed the AFCON dominance of Egypt over Ivory Coast since they first met 56 years ago. The Pharaohs have won 11 times and the Elephants just once.

Ivory Coast become the eighth consecutive title-holders unable to successfully defend the title since Egypt achieved the feat in 2010. Salah has helped Liverpool win the Premier League, FA Cup, League Cup, Champions League and Club World Cup, in its previous format, but the most prized African medal has eluded him.

The 33-year-old has twice been a runner-up after losses in the AFCON final to Cameroon in 2017 and Senegal five years later. He was also in Egyptian teams that twice made unexpected last-16 exits. Now he is two matches away from realising his long-time dream of helping Egypt win the AFCON a record-extending eighth time. Salah arrived in Morocco for the premier



Egypt’s Mohamed Salah scores their third goal. — **Reuters**

African sporting event amid uncertainty over his future at Liverpool after a post-match outburst following a draw at Leeds United.

The Egyptian, demoted to the substitutes’ bench after a run of poor results by the Anfield outfit, claimed he had been “thrown under the bus”.

But he has been back to his predatory best at the AFCON, scoring the match winners against Zimbabwe and South Africa at the group stage, then the goal that sealed a last-16 victory over Benin.

on Saturday, Egypt took the lead just 182 seconds after the kick-off through Manchester City striker Marmoush. Ivory Coast lost possession, Emam Ashour delivered a superb pass and Marmoush took advantage of Odilon Kossounou slipping to beat goalkeeper Yahia Fofana. Egypt increased their lead on 32

minutes when centre-back Rabia soared above Ibrahim Sangare at the far post to meet a Salah corner, and his looping header beat Fofana.

The defending champions were rattled and needed to score. It came after 40 minutes when Egyptian Aboul-Fetouh conceded an own goal. Yan Diomande, the 19-year old RB Leipzig striker, floated a free kick into the heart of the six-yard box, Kossounou nodded the ball goalwards and it entered the net off the midriff of Aboul-Fetouh. Salah restored Egypt’s two-goal lead just seven minutes into the second half, and once again Ashour from African club giants Al Ahly was the creator.

The midfielder gained possession on the left wing, and his low, curved cross was perfectly weighted for Salah to push the ball into the net despite being under pressure from Ghislain Konan. — **AFP**

Medvedev wins Brisbane Open title

Daniil Medvedev beat Brandon Nakashima 6-2 7-6(1) to lift the Brisbane Open title on Sunday, starting the 2026 season on a strong note in the buildup to the Australian Open. The victory marked Medvedev’s 22nd ATP title — at 22 different events — and his first since the former world number one ended an 882-day wait for a title with a win over Corentin Moutet in the Almaty Open final in October last year.

The 2021 US Open champion dedicated the win to his coaching staff and family, having missed his daughter’s first birthday to play in the

tournament.

“I want to dedicate this to my family who could not make it to Australia, as it’s too far from my home,” Medvedev said at the presentation ceremony.

“It’s 23 hours from where I live and with two young kids, it’s not easy. I decided to play in tournament and I stuck with the decision.

“But my daughter had her birthday when I was here — so I dedicate this to her first birthday. This (trophy) is a bit too heavy for her, though.”

It was Medvedev’s second appearance in Brisbane with the 29-



Russia’s Medvedev celebrates with the trophy. — **Reuters**

year old finishing as a runner-up in 2019 while it is also his first title win in a season-opening tournament since winning Sydney in 2018.

Medvedev, a three-times Australian Open finalist, started the match on a strong note with punishing baseline exchanges. However, he made a double fault and then dropped another serve into the net at set point to open the door for his opponent.

But Nakashima committed multiple unforced errors of his own and the Russian took the first set with blistering aces. — **Reuters**



ACCESSION DAY ANNIVERSARY

Oxy is pleased to extend its sincere congratulations and best wishes to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on the 6th anniversary of His Majesty's Accession to the Throne.

We reaffirm our commitment to supporting Oman under His Majesty's strong leadership as we celebrate the Sultanate's continued prosperity.



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Oman, Rwanda sign 4 strategic deals

THE Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of Rwanda have signed four cooperation agreements and programmes aimed at deepening bilateral ties and broadening joint collaboration across priority sectors, including logistics, land ports, supply chains, data centres, cloud computing, digital infrastructure, artificial intelligence and air connectivity.

The first agreement focuses on cooperation in logistics services, the development and operation of land ports (dry ports) and supply chain-related services. It is designed to enhance logistical integration between the two countries, promote the exchange of expertise and support capacity-building in a sector considered vital to trade facilitation and economic diversification.

The second agreement targets cooperation in data centres, cloud computing, infrastructure and artificial intelligence projects and services. It aims to strengthen partnerships in advanced digital fields through skills development, knowledge-sharing and joint capacity-building, while also supporting the formulation and development of relevant policies and legislation.

The third agreement relates to enhancing



The agreements align with Oman's strategic objective of expanding international partnerships in transport, logistics and information; and communications technology, with a particular focus on East Africa.

air connectivity between the two countries through the launch of direct Oman Air flights between Muscat and Kigali.

This step is expected to ease travel, stimulate trade and tourism flows; and strengthen links between Oman and the African continent. Flights are scheduled to commence at a frequency of two services

per week from June 2026, subject to regulatory approvals.

The fourth agreement comprises a memorandum of understanding between the Rwanda Development Board and Oman Airports for Airport Management. The MoU seeks to enhance cooperation in airport development and management, facilitate

the exchange of operational expertise and explore joint investment opportunities in aviation and related infrastructure.

Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, said the agreements align with Oman's strategic objective of expanding international partnerships in transport, logistics and information; and communications technology, with a particular focus on East Africa.

He stressed that cooperation with Rwanda will strengthen collaboration in land transport, dry ports, airport ground handling and investment exchange, noting that the launch of direct Oman Air flights will open new avenues for bilateral cooperation.

Al Maawali added that the agreements also create significant opportunities for exchanging knowledge and capabilities in digital government and data centre development.

The agreements underscore the strength of Oman-Rwanda relations and reflect a shared commitment to expanding economic and technical cooperation in support of sustainable development, regional integration and stronger Middle East-Africa partnerships in priority sectors. — ONA

RO 50 million allocation strengthens investment, fiscal sustainability

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JAN 11

The generous allocation of RO 50 million, in accordance with Royal Directives marking the sixth anniversary of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik's accession, will help support economic and investment-oriented projects that generate employment opportunities for citizens and contribute to the financial sustainability of the Sultanate of Oman.

The allocation for economic and investment-oriented projects was enabled by an increase in the budget for the governorates' development programme under the Eleventh Five-Year Development Plan (2026–2030), from RO 220 million to RO 270 million.

Oman's 2026 budget reflects a well-considered transition of the national economy from a phase of financial stability to one of controlled growth.

The current approach prioritises development and investment spending without compromising fiscal discipline, thereby supporting the sustainability of public finances and enhancing the economy's resilience to shocks.

According to preliminary results for the 2025 budget, key financial indicators showed a 23% reduction in the annual deficit, from RO 620 million to RO 480 million.

Public spending increased by approximately RO 1 million to cover social and economic expenditures, bringing total public spending by the end of 2025 to around RO 12.240 billion — representing a 4% increase compared to the initial budget allocation at the beginning of the year.

Oman also saw its sovereign ratings upgraded to investment grade by all agencies, reflecting continued improvement in public finance indicators and the country's external financial position.

In recent remarks, Dr Nasser bin Rashid al Maawali, Under-Secretary of the



Oman's policy framework is anchored in fiscal sustainability, economic diversification and sustainable social development.

Ministry of Economy, noted that Oman has strengthened its social, economic and financial stability over the past six years and continues to pursue sustainable development under the Eleventh Five-Year Plan. He added that current economic conditions provide greater flexibility in economic planning options.

The State Budget Guide for the current fiscal year indicates that Oman's policy framework is anchored in fiscal sustainability, economic diversification and sustainable social development.

The financial framework of the Eleventh Five-Year Development Plan is therefore a cornerstone of the government's commitment to maintaining public debt within safe limits, enhancing and diversifying non-oil revenues, improving the efficiency of public spending and continuing to finance priority development projects.

This includes maintaining subsidies for essential goods and services; and strengthening the social protection system to ensure social and economic stability.

The financial framework seeks to strike a balance between fiscal sustainability and economic growth. This is reflected in plans to raise the contribution of non-oil revenues to around 37.4% of total public revenues.



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ADVERTORIALS

SHORTTAKES



The transaction involved the structuring and coordination of a dual-currency, multi-tranche syndicated loan exceeding RO 154 million.

AHLIBANK ANNOUNCES FINANCIAL CLOSURE OF MAZOOON COPPER PROJECT

MUSCAT: Reaffirming its role as a trusted advisor to nationally strategic developments, ahlibank marks the successful financial closure of the Mazoon Copper Project, Oman’s largest copper mining development, led by Minerals Development Oman.

The transaction involved the structuring and coordination of a dual-currency, multi-tranche syndicated loan exceeding RO 154 million (\$400 million), incorporating both conventional and Islamic tranches, underscoring the bank’s proven capability in delivering complex project finance solutions and its growing leadership in advising on large-scale investments aligned with the Sultanate of Oman’s industrial and economic diversification agenda. The financing saw the participation of both ahlibank and ahli islamic, alongside a group of local financial institutions.

Hanaa al Kharusi, Senior General Manager, Wholesale Banking at ahlibank, said, “The Mazoon Copper Project represents a pivotal step in strengthening Oman’s non-hydrocarbon industrial base and securing its position within global critical minerals supply chains. Projects of this scale demand not only long-term capital, but also clarity of foresight, disciplined risk stewardship and an ability to align financial architecture with national development priorities.

For a financial institution, relevance is defined by its capacity to translate strategic ambition into robust and bankable financing frameworks, while balancing risk, tenor and stakeholder alignment across market cycles. Our role as financial advisor reflects ahlibank’s continued commitment to enabling transformational initiatives that contribute meaningfully to economic resilience and sustainable growth”.

In its advisory capacity, ahlibank supported the transaction across the full financing lifecycle, including transaction structuring, lender engagement and coordination, and execution management, ensuring alignment between sponsor objectives, lender requirements and the project’s long-term operational and financial sustainability, thereby reinforcing the transaction’s overall bankability and execution certainty.

The financing follows the ground-breaking of the Mazoon Copper Project in Yanqul, in the Al Dhahirah Governorate, held under the auspices of senior leadership. The project will comprise five open-pit mines and a state-of-the-art processing plant, with copper concentrate production expected to commence from 2027. Once operational, the project is set to play a central role in meeting rising global demand for copper, while positioning Oman as a strategic producer of high-quality copper concentrate.

AMWAL PAY AND BANK NIZWA LAUNCH SECURE E-PAYMENT GATEWAY

MUSCAT: Amwal Pay has announced a strategic partnership with Bank Nizwa to launch an advanced e-payment gateway tailored for the Omani market. This collaboration provides local merchants with a robust, CBO-licensed solution for integrating fast and reliable payment processing into their websites and mobile applications. By combining Bank Nizwa’s Islamic banking expertise with Amwal Pay’s homegrown software,



the partnership offers a seamless checkout experience that adheres to strict Omani banking regulations. The gateway is designed for easy

integration, allowing businesses of all sizes to accept digital payments securely and efficiently. Khuzi al Rawas, CEO and Co-Founder of Amwal Pay, stated: “On behalf of the Amwal Pay team, we are proud of this partnership with Bank Nizwa. It marks a significant milestone in our journey to shape the future of digital payments in Oman, providing a national infrastructure that empowers local businesses to thrive in the digital economy”.

BankDhofar launches Numo SME banking

BANKDHOFAR has officially launched ‘Numo’, the new brand for its SME banking services, during an event held under the auspices of Dr Khamis bin Saif al Jabri, Chairman of Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit.

The launch underscores the bank’s commitment to supporting small and medium-sized enterprises at every stage of their journey – from the spark of an idea to scaling products for regional and global markets by providing specialised and integrated banking services tailored to their needs positioning SMEs as a key engine of sustainable economic growth in Oman.

On the sidelines of the launch ceremony, BankDhofar signed a cooperation agreement with the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) aimed at simplifying and accelerating transactions for the bank’s SME customers.

Under the agreement, SMEs will be able to access a wide range of government services through Sanad offices located across all governorates and wilayats of the Sultanate of Oman.

The agreement was signed on behalf of BankDhofar by Ahmed bin Said al Ibrahim, Chief Government Banking Officer and on behalf of the Ministry by Dr Saleh bin Said Masan, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment



The agreement was signed by Ahmed bin Said al Ibrahim, Chief Government Banking Officer and Dr Saleh bin Said Masan, Under-Secretary for Commerce and Industry at the MoCIIP.

Promotion for Commerce and Industry.

More than just a traditional business account, Numo offers a complete suite of SME products.

It reimagines SME banking as a transformational partnership, bringing together customised financial solutions, relationship management, digital tools and dedicated SME centres. Numo empowers entrepreneurs to operate with greater speed, clarity and confidence.

Anchored in BankDhofar’s broader SME

and corporate banking strategy – and aligned with the economic diversification priorities of Oman Vision 2040 – Numo addresses a long-standing market need: a banking partner that truly understands the pressures, aspirations and day-to-day realities of business owners.

Omani entrepreneurs are ambitious yet often time-constrained and require more than conventional banking services.

They need a partner who understands their journey and supports their growth.

Pact to develop zinc ash recycling industrial park

SUHAR: SOHAR Port and Freezone has signed a \$50 million investment agreement with Oman Zinc LLC, to develop a zinc ash recycling industrial park on a 10-hectare site within SOHAR Freezone.

Designed to turn steelmaking residues into valuable industrial materials, the project strengthens SOHAR’s position as a regional hub for sustainable metals processing and circular economy manufacturing.

Delivered in phases, the industrial park will process zinc ash and Electric Arc Furnace dust to produce up to 10,000 tonnes per year of refined zinc ingots and 50,000 tonnes per year of rubber-grade zinc oxide.



The project strengthens SOHAR’s position as a regional hub for sustainable metals processing and circular economy manufacturing.

These outputs will supply high-growth downstream industries across the GCC, Southeast Asia, Europe and Africa, supporting applications in galvanising, alloys, rubber, batteries and

specialty chemicals. The project is built around SOHAR’s end-to-end advantage. Feedstock will be imported and handled through SOHAR Port from local and international suppliers, creating

an integrated value chain that connects global shipping routes directly to processing, storage and export manufacturing within the Freezone.

Lin Feng, Chairman of Oman Zinc, said: “SOHAR Port and Freezone stands out as the strategic gateway for our international expansion, offering strong logistics connectivity, world-class infrastructure and direct access to high-growth markets. This investment reflects our confidence in SOHAR as a premier destination for sustainable industry, where innovative recycling meets long-term profitability and regional leadership”.

Bank Muscat participates in Al Dhahirah Tourism Festival

MUSCAT: As part of its firm commitment to supporting national initiatives and enhancing economic and social development across the various governorates of the Sultanate of Oman, Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in Oman, is participating in supporting the Al Dhahirah Tourism Festival, which runs from January 8 to February 6, 2026.

The opening ceremony was held under the auspices of Najeeb bin Ali al Rawas, Governor of Al Dhahirah, in the presence of Khalaf bin Rashid al Kalbani, Regional Manager of Bank Muscat in Al Batinah North Governorate and a number of officials and audience. The event witnessed a wide participation from local



Al Dhahirah Tourism Festival is considered one of the most prominent seasonal events contributing to the revitalisation of tourism and commercial activity in the governorate.

institutions, companies and entrepreneurs; and an expected large public turnout reflecting the importance of the festival and its growing stature on Oman’s tourism events map.

Al Dhahirah Tourism Festival is considered one of the most prominent seasonal events contributing to the revitalisation of tourism and commercial activity in the governorate.

It serves as a dynamic platform for attracting visitors from within and outside the governorate, promoting domestic tourism and highlighting the natural, heritage and cultural assets of Al Dhahirah Governorate.

The previous edition of the festival witnessed remarkable turnout, with visitor numbers exceeding 300,000, reflecting the

continued success the festival achieves year after year.

This year’s festival features the participation of 150 local companies from various sectors, in addition to more than 120 home-based business projects from the governorate

This step reflects the growing focus on supporting small and medium enterprises and empowering entrepreneurs, while providing direct marketing opportunities to showcase national products and enhance the contribution of these segments to the local economic cycle.

The festival includes a diverse programme of entertainment and cultural activities targeting all segments of society.

SHORTTAKES



Direct contribution of travel and tourism to GCC GDP reached \$93.5 billion in 2024.

GCC TOURISM REVENUES REACH \$120.2 BILLION IN 2024

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, JAN 11

Total international tourism revenues in the GCC reached \$120.2 billion in 2024, representing an 8.9% increase compared to the previous year, according to a recent GCC Statistics Centre report. The total number of tourists to the region rose by 6.1% year-on-year to 72.2 million visitors.

Tourism demand to the GCC in 2024 was led by the Middle East, which accounted for 18.8% of total inbound tourists, followed by Europe (14.6%) and the Asia-Pacific region (14.5%). Arrivals from the Americas and Africa increased by 11.4% and 5.5%, respectively, compared to 2023.

According to the report, 86.7% of visitors (62.2 million) travelled to the GCC in 2024 for personal purposes, while 10.9% (9.6 million) visited the region for business and conference-related purposes.

Total employment in the GCC tourism sector reached 1.7 million workers in 2024, reflecting a 2.8% increase compared to 2023. Saudi Arabia accounted for the largest share of tourism employment at 55.5%, followed by the UAE at 29.2%, underscoring the sector's role in job creation across major GCC economies.

Hotel infrastructure continued to expand in line with rising visitor numbers. The total number of hotel establishments across the GCC reached 11.2 thousand properties in 2024, marking a 1.3% year-on-year increase, with a combined capacity of 711.5 thousand rooms. Saudi Arabia led the region with 8,393 hotel establishments, followed by the UAE with 1,205 properties, while average hotel room occupancy rates stood at 56.7% in Saudi Arabia and 54.7% in the UAE.

In terms of economic impact, the report noted that the direct contribution of travel and tourism to GCC GDP reached \$93.5 billion in 2024, accounting for 4.3% of total GDP and achieving 64.1% of the sector's 2030 target under the GCC Joint Tourism Strategy.

RO 3.4 billion drives Oman's logistics shift

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, JAN 11

AN investment of RO 3.4 billion by the end of 2025 highlights the depth of Oman's transformation in transport, logistics and the digital economy, confirming these sectors as central pillars of diversification under Oman Vision 2040. The scale of realised capital spending reflects a decisive move from planning to delivery, with infrastructure, services and digital systems now visibly reshaping how goods, data and people move across the Sultanate of Oman.

According to the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MoTCIT) Achievement Bulletin, the gains recorded by 2025 represent concrete outcomes rather than projections.

The semi-annual bulletin shows that cumulative investment in the transport and logistics sector reached RO 2.3 billion between 2021 and the end of 2024, before rising to RO 3.4 billion by the end of 2025.

These funds have already been deployed across ports, logistics zones, land transport networks and digital platforms that support sector efficiency and connectivity.

The investment drive reinforces Oman's strategic ambition to position itself as a competitive logistics gateway linking regional and global trade routes.

Digital transformation stands out as one of the most visible results of this spending. By the end of 2024, 1,700 essential government services had been fully digitised out of 2,523 identified services. This figure increased to 2,277 services by the end of 2025, reflecting near-



Container and cargo movement reached 4.3 million TEUs in 2024, with a more than five million TEUs handled in 2025.

complete digitisation of core public services.

For businesses, particularly those operating in trade, transport and logistics, this shift has reduced processing times, improved transparency and lowered administrative costs, strengthening the overall business environment.

Progress in workforce localisation also reflects structural change, especially in technology-driven fields. Omanisation in the IT sector rose from 38 per cent in 2024 to 45.5 per cent in 2025, signalling stronger absorption of Omani professionals into high-value digital roles.

In the transport and logistics sector, Omanisation increased from 20 per cent to 21.6 per cent over the same period. While more gradual, the rise points to sustained efforts to build national capabilities in operational and technical functions traditionally

dominated by expatriate labour.

Trade and operational indicators underline the sector's growing capacity. Container and cargo movement reached 4.3 million TEUs in 2024, with a more than five million TEUs handled in 2025.

This increase reflects higher port throughput, improved efficiency and stronger integration with regional supply chains.

General cargo volumes followed a similar trend, rising from 115.7 million tonnes in 2024 to 143 million tonnes in 2025, underscoring the expanding scale of Oman's logistics activity.

The bulletin also points to marked improvements in digital governance. The performance rate of the National Digital Transformation Programme rose from 73 per cent in 2024 to 94 per cent in 2025, indicating stronger execution, better coordination across government

entities and more effective monitoring of complex digital initiatives.

Financial performance across key subsectors further reinforces the narrative of real gains. The ports sector recorded revenue growth of 12.9 per cent, supported by rising volumes and operational efficiencies.

Maritime affairs posted a 6.5 per cent increase, while land transport led with an 18 per cent growth rate, reflecting robust demand for freight and mobility services.

Equally significant is the improvement in project delivery. While the project implementation commitment rate had been set at 70 per cent, actual achievement reached 85 per cent in 2025.

This overperformance signals stronger planning discipline, improved execution capacity and higher accountability across major transport and digital projects.

Oman's Asyad Shipping sells four ageing LNG vessels

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, JAN 11

Asyad Shipping, the majority state-owned Omani national maritime transportation company, has announced the sale of four legacy LNG vessels that once played a central role in establishing Oman as a reliable LNG exporter.

In a filing to the Muscat Stock Exchange on Sunday, the publicly listed company said an agreement for the sale of the partially owned LNG carriers Ibra, Ibri, Nizwa and Salalah was reached last month.

The transaction — part of Asyad Shipping's ongoing fleet renewal strategy — is expected to result in an "aggregate negative profit and loss impact of approximately RO 20 million (\$51 million), of which



Salalah LNG, one of four first-generation LNG vessels, covered by the latest sale announced by Asyad Shipping.

a portion is attributable to non-controlling interests".

The four vessels were built around two decades ago at a total investment cost of RO 42.35 million (\$110 million).

Developed in the mid-2000s, the LNG carriers formed part of Oman's first generation of LNG shipping assets supporting exports from the Oman LNG and Qalhat LNG facilities at Sur. Delivered between 2005 and 2006, the vessels — each with a capacity of around 145,000 cubic metres — were built at leading shipyards in Japan and South Korea and owned through Oman Shipping Company (now Asyad Shipping).

Named after major Omani cities, they were deployed under long-term LNG offtake arrangements, primarily serving Asian markets.

"The four vessels being disposed of formed part of the Company's initial fleet and have served as core assets since the Company's inception. Following the expiry of their long-term time charter contracts, each with an original duration of approximately 20 years, the vessels demonstrated strong financial and technical performance over their operational lives, providing reliable international maritime transportation services for liquefied natural gas", Asyad Shipping said in its filing.

"The disposal reflects the Company's ongoing efforts to optimise its fleet profile, particularly in light of the vessels' age and older technology, as well as the increasing regulatory and commercial challenges associated

with the emissions performance of older vessels in the current market environment", the company added.

Last month, Asyad Shipping also disposed of its VLCC Saiq in a deal valued at RO 23 million (\$60 million). The vessel, built in 2011, is expected to be delivered to its new owner in the first quarter of 2026.

Asyad Shipping has outlined an ambitious growth strategy that envisions investments of between \$2.3 billion and \$2.7 billion through 2029 to expand its fleet across key segments of its diversified shipping portfolio.

As of mid-2025, the company operated a fleet of 94 vessels across multiple commodity segments, comprising owned, leased and committed ships, up from 86 vessels at the end of 2024.

TECH RACE

China closes US AI gap



China is narrowing the technology gap with the United States as risk-taking and innovation accelerate, leading artificial intelligence researchers say. Recent Hong Kong debuts by MiniMax and Zhipu AI signal confidence as Beijing fast-tracks AI and chip listings.

Tencent's chief AI scientist Yao Shunyu says a Chinese champion could emerge within three to five years, despite chipmaking tool constraints. — Reuters

ENERGY SHIFT

Exxon weighs return to Venezuela



Exxon Mobil is prepared to assess a return to Venezuela after nearly two decades, though legal reforms are required, CEO Darren Woods said.

He called the country currently uninvestable, seeking security guarantees for a technical review. The comments followed a White House meeting with President Trump after Venezuelan leader Nicolas Maduro was removed in a sudden US operation. — Reuters

DATA CONTROL

India eyes tough smartphone security



India plans sweeping smartphone security rules that would compel manufacturers to share source code and flag major software updates, drawing resistance from Apple and Samsung. Industry argues the 83 standards lack global precedent and risk exposing proprietary details.

The proposal aligns with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's push to protect user data amid fraud in a market of 750 million phones. — Reuters

OPINION

The urgent need for an attitude paradigm: Empathy



DR MYTHILI KOLLURU

The writer is an assistant professor at the marketing and management department of the College of Banking and Financial Studies.

OVER the last decade, the world has witnessed an upsurge in hate crimes, online toxicity, identity-based polarisation and cyberbullying within and across countries. These macro behavioural trends are strongly evident in adolescence and adulthood.

Meta-analysis of dozens of research works is increasingly linking children's heavy, prolonged early screen exposure to being associated with weak social skills, aggressive mentality, anxiety and low self-esteem, though not all screen time is harmful; screen time is one of the major factors among many to also play a strong, decisive role in building aggressive and antisocial behaviour.

In today's digitalised world, it is not only children who are shaped by their screen time; adults are also being influenced by it. Systematic studies have shown that constant exposure to hate speech, violent, hostile content can increase anxiety, confusion and mistrust; and it distorts people's decision-making capacity and behaviour.

Lack of authenticity and the inability to distinguish credible from fake content can damage relationships, cause polarisation, undermine trust and create a credibility crisis in the personal and professional spaces. All social media platforms and AI-generated content are shaping human mindsets and conversations, encompassing civic behaviour, workplace relationships and lifestyle choices. In our lives, both as children

and adults, we have become increasingly digital, inadvertently training our brains' neural networks to prioritise instant reactions and rewards over empathy.

An expression of empathy is not a sign of weakness, but instead draws on an individual's strength of character. Empathy refers to the capacity to understand and emotionally resonate with others' experiences.

Empathy is a higher-order emotion that involves both sensing another person's feelings and imagining their perspective. It is a core skill that must be taught systematically from early schooling through the workplace.

There is credible research-based evidence demonstrating that empathy education reduces bullying and aggression; and correlates with schools and that empathy-based organisational training improves relationships, reduces conflict and supports performance.

One such country is Denmark, which has institutionalised empathy in its national curriculum since the 1990s. Danish schools report some of the lowest bullying rates in Europe, 6.3%.

Empathy is an impulse that helps people survive in groups. Denmark, ranked among the world's happiest countries, has been among the top three for seven years, in part because it has long taught empathy in schools. Empathy promotes the growth of individuals in a world under pressure from digital overload, misinformation and

In today's digitalised world, it is not only children who are shaped by their screen time; adults are also being influenced by it. Systematic studies have shown that constant exposure to hate speech, violent, hostile content can increase anxiety, confusion and mistrust; and it distorts people's decision-making capacity and behaviour.

polarisation. Another interesting approach in the Danish schools is that 60% of tasks are carried out through teamwork.

In Danish schools, they also practice 'Hygge', a concept that nurtures relationships, encourages close conversations and promotes a non-judgmental attitude that supports empathy and behaviour. The unique approach adopted by Denmark provides a pathway for societies to navigate the complexities and challenges of the new normal.

In an age of algorithmic outrage, polarised politics and hostile immigration debates, AI-generated deep fakes, algorithm-driven outrage cycles, hostile comments, controlling behaviour and dehumanising language about marginalised sections of society, we need empathy to listen, to understand, to express moral concern and compassion for others' perspectives, to handle conflict more constructively and to de-escalate situations

In such a dynamic global landscape, empathy will not grow by chance or accident; it must grow through the conscious choice of leaders and institutional heads.

Empathy must graduate from a corporate workshop to a national priority, transforming people into listeners and thinkers before action. It is necessary to institutionalise empathy to heal the fractured workplaces and nurture sustainable growth across global classrooms and boardrooms. Empathy can guide societies to navigate the vagaries of the world.

RIO-GLENCORE WOULD BE M&A GIFT THAT KEEPS GIVING

ANTONY CURRIE

M&A bankers will be rubbing their hands with glee at the news Rio Tinto and Glencore are back in preliminary talks. The mining giants said they're discussing a number of options, including a full, all-stock deal with Rio as the acquirer. That would put the combined company's market worth at \$207 billion. But follow-on deals could bump up the value to shareholders by 50% or more, unlock other benefits and even prompt rival BHP.

The two have mulled getting together in the past, most recently around a year ago. A couple of things have changed since those conversations ended. First, Rio has a new CEO, Simon Trott, who took the helm in August. Second, the pending \$54 billion tie-up of Anglo American and Teck Resources has increased peers' fears of missing out on any further consolidation. Those may help overcome obstacles like valuation and culture clashes.

Glencore offers what Rio and BHP crave – further diversification from iron ore in the form of copper, a key metal in the energy transition whose price per tonne surpassed a record \$13,000 earlier this week.

Trouble is, the Swiss-based firm run by Gary Nagle also has assets Trott might not be so keen on, not least coal. Rio sold the last of its mines in 2018 to Glencore. Moreover, a standalone metals business containing a mix of copper, aluminium, lithium and zinc could trade at more than 10 times EBITDA for the next 12 months, based on the average multiple of Southern Copper, Freeport-McMoRan and Antofagasta.

To compare, Rio, BHP and iron ore specialist Fortescue trade at an average just north of 6 times EBITDA, and fossil fuel excavators Whitehaven Coal and New Hope at around 5.5 times. Spinning off or selling those carbon-heavy businesses may add some \$100 billion to shareholder value, Breakingviews calculates.

That's not all. China's Chinalco owns 14.5% of Rio, just below the cap imposed by the Australian government, and has not wanted to sell any shares. That has tied Rio's hands on buybacks. An all-stock merger with Glencore would dilute the state-owned enterprise and give scope for decent stock repurchases. And if a spun-out iron ore business were only listed in Sydney, as opposed to Rio's current set-up of 75% of shares on the London Stock Exchange, it would be able to pass on more of the \$9 billion or so in Australian dividend tax breaks known as franking credits that are currently on the books.

If such a breakup were to unlock significant value, the pressure would build on BHP CEO Mike Henry to follow suit and carve out his copper business – assuming he doesn't launch a bid for Nagle's firm himself. In any event, a Rio-Glencore combo would be an M&A gift that keeps on giving.

— Reuters

LSE's blight fails to deter Swiss Exchange boss

RECENT years have seen some high-profile companies pull away from the London Stock Exchange (LSE), these have included AstraZeneca, Ferguson, Arm Holdings, Wise, CRH, Flutter and Ashtead

But that's "more a UK thing" according to Bjorn Sibbern, CEO of SIX Swiss Exchange, which secured Europe's biggest initial public offering in 2025. Zurich-based SMG Swiss Marketplace Group was valued at roughly 4.5 billion Swiss francs (\$5.6 billion) following its stock market debut in September. It was also the largest tech IPO in Europe since 2021.

"Companies have decided to leave the UK for listings in the US but I think that's more a UK thing, we do not see it to the same extent in Europe", Sibbern said, citing Swiss skin care company Galderma's float on SIX in 2024 in what was Switzerland's biggest IPO since 2017.

"Galderma is a good example, they could have listed in the US (but) they decided to list in Switzerland and it has been a great success. So, we do not see the same trend", he said.

"Many companies that have global profiles quite often have a connection to Switzerland. As part of their listing consideration, they will look at Switzerland. Whether they will list with us or consider a dual listing, only time will tell. But it is not only Swiss companies that look at us".

SIX became the only exchange operator to have listing venues in Switzerland, the EU and the UK following its acquisition of Aquis in a £225 million deal in November 2024. The exchange completed a £2.8 billion takeover of Spanish rival BME in June 2020.

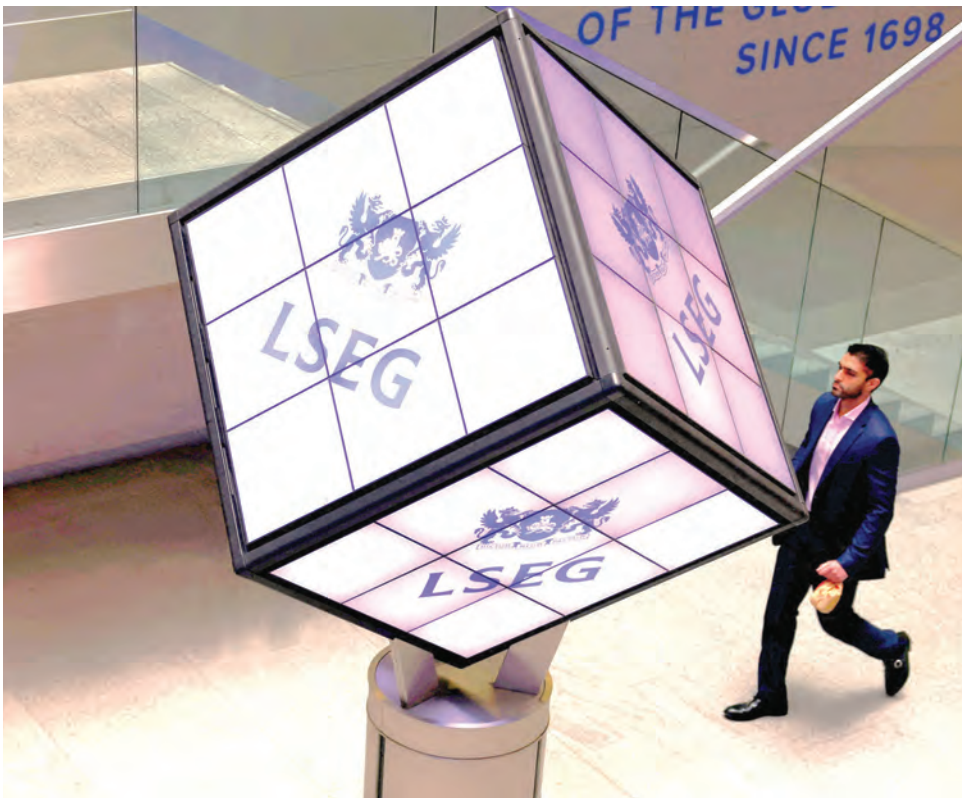
"Instead of sitting and defending our equity trading in Spain and Switzerland, we decided to play offence", he said. "With Aquis we can offer trading for our customers in 16 markets. But we also said 'we keep the brand, we keep the business model, we keep the management team' and they will



ANDY JALIL
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The writer is our foreign correspondent based in the UK.

The SIX Swiss Exchange CEO confirmed the Swiss bourse is on a lookout for more acquisitions this year as part of its growth strategy. Any deals will likely be around SIX's four business lines, which are exchanges, securities services, financial information and banking services.



A man walks through the lobby of the London Stock Exchange in London. — Reuters

continue to compete with us in Spain and Switzerland".

Sibbern said that the Swiss and Spanish exchanges will see Aquis's technology to support trading". In two years' time, hopefully equity trading in Spain and Switzerland will be done on the same platform as Aquis", he said.

The SIX Swiss Exchange CEO confirmed the Swiss bourse is on a lookout for more acquisitions this year as part of its growth strategy. Any deals will likely be around SIX's four business lines, which are exchanges, securities services, financial information and banking services.

Sibbern, who was named on a list compiled by financial firms of the Most Influential in European Finance earlier this year, was promoted to CEO of Switzerland's exchange operator in January only a year after joining as global head of exchanges.

He admitted that the rise of private markets has led to the number of listed companies falling in Europe and globally, but said the public and private markets share a

"healthy relationship".

In March, the European Commission, the EU's executive arm, followed in the UK's footsteps to propose measures supporting "exits by investors in private companies, possibly through multilateral intermittent trading of private company shares".

"There has been a significant decline in the number of listed companies compared to 40 years ago. Alternative funding from private equity is here to stay and is tempting to say that's a big threat But I think we go hand in hand", he said.

"Being a listed company gets you much more publicity in a world where customers and stakeholders want to know the companies they are buying products from".

Global IPO activity accelerated in Q3 2025, with deal volume rising 19 per cent and proceeds surging 89 per cent, compared with a year earlier, according to EY. But Europe missed out on the biggest stock market debuts with nine of the top ten global IPOs coming from either India, the US or Greater China.

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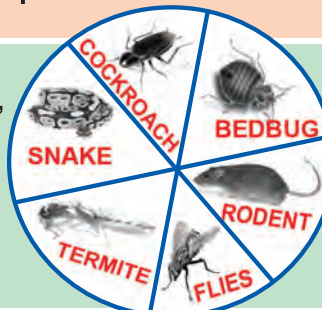
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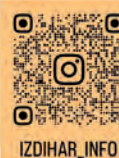
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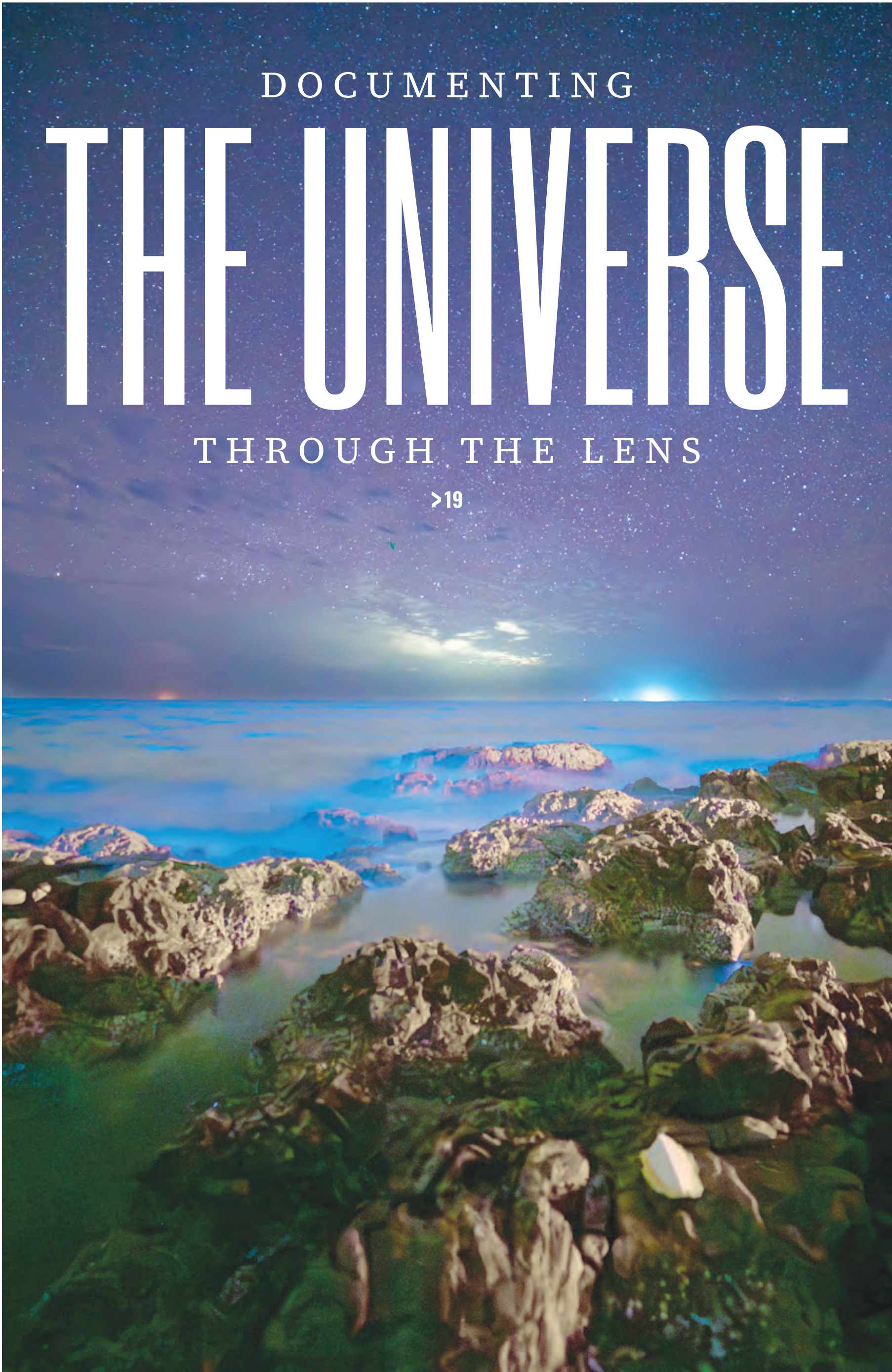
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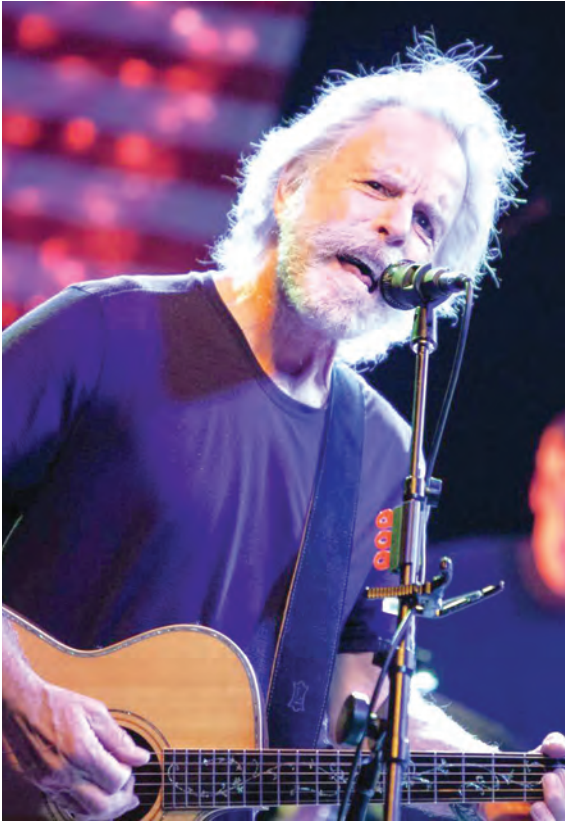


ART/LIFE



TRIBUTE

BOB WEIR, GRATEFUL DEAD GUITARIST, DEAD AT 78



American guitarist and songwriter Bob Weir, a founding member of the revolutionary, psychedelic jam band Grateful Dead, has died aged 78, his family announced on Saturday.

Weir was diagnosed with cancer in July and had beaten the disease, but “succumbed to underlying lung issues”, his family said in a statement on his personal website, without specifying where or when he died.

“For over sixty years, Bobby took to the road”, the statement said. “Bobby will forever be a guiding force whose unique artistry reshaped American music”.

“His work did more than fill rooms with music; it was warm sunlight that filled the soul, building a community, a language and a feeling of family that generations of fans carry with them”.

Founded in San Francisco by Weir, Jerry Garcia, Ron “Pigpen” McKernan, Phil Lesh and Bill Kreutzmann, the Grateful Dead was one of the leading music groups to emerge from the 1960s counterculture movement.

Known for never performing the same show twice, the group revolutionised fan engagement, as followers — known as “Deadheads” — recorded and swapped bootleg tapes of the concerts in a communal, drug-addled camp environment.

Following Weir’s death, 79-year-old Kreutzmann became the last living member of the Grateful Dead founders.

Weir was inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame in 1994 as part of the Grateful Dead and received Kennedy Center Honors with the group in 2024, in the final year of Joe Biden’s presidency.

“As we remember Bobby, it’s hard not to feel the echo of the way he lived”, the family said.

“A man driftin’ and dreamin’, never worrying if the road would lead him home. A child of countless trees. A child of boundless seas”, the family said, quoting the songs “Cassidy” and “Lost Sailor”, written by Weir and the late John Perry Barlow.

— AFP

QUICK FEATURES



PARTY

US actress Zoey Deutch attends the BAFTA Tea Party at The Four Seasons Hotel in Beverly Hills, California.

—AFP



HOLIDAY

People attend an ice sculpture festival in Victory Park during the New Year and Christmas holiday season in Moscow.

— Reuters



MUSIC

Maja Bilka, from Poland, poses for a photograph at a mural for David Bowie marking the 10th anniversary of his death.

— Reuters

ARWA AL HASHIMI

UNDER the clear skies of Oman stands Qasim bin Hamad al Busaidy, an astronomer and astrophotographer, holding his camera and telescope, turning simple nightly curiosity into a world full of creativity and discovery. A member of the Omani Astronomical Society, Qasim began his journey in astrophotography driven more by curiosity than anything else: “I didn’t have advanced equipment at the beginning, just a passion for the sky and a desire to understand what I saw every night and to find answers to many questions. Over time, this curiosity turned into a passion and then into a clear path in my life”.

The moment he realised that the sky was not just a beautiful view but a subject worth documenting was when he visited a site far from light pollution. “I was amazed by the details that were not visible in urban environments. At that moment, I understood the importance of sharing this visual experience with society, especially for those who had never had the chance to experience it or aspired to do so”, Qasim explains.

What sets Qasim apart is the combination of art and science. He doesn’t just capture images; he documents cosmic history and makes each shot tell the story of celestial bodies that are light-years away. “What attracted me to astrophotography is that it combines photography and astronomy in one field, where art meets science. We photograph the sky, but we also document cosmic history”.

His first photograph that felt truly complete was of Saturn, after acquiring an electronic telescope and an astrophotography camera. Qasim describes the moment: “That’s when I felt that I was on the right path and that the effort and patience I had invested were not wasted, but a real step forward, giving me strong motivation to continue in this field”.

His experience evolved over the years through trial and error, as each mistake was a chance to learn and gain new skills. A turning point in his journey came when he joined the Omani Astronomical Society: “I met friends who shared the same passion and through this astronomical community, I learned a lot. They were truly companions of the sky and astronomy and greatly contributed to refining my experience and expanding my horizons”.

Astrophotography has taught him patience and humility in front of the universe. “I became calmer and more accepting of the idea that some things take their natural time and I realised the true scale of human existence in front of this vast universe”, Qasim says.

Equipment is at the heart of the practical experience. Qasim relies on telescopes and cameras specialised for astrophotography, along with precise mounts and advanced software. He always chooses equipment that balances quality, reliability and cost: “Trusting the gear in the field is essential”.

In terms of techniques, Qasim prefers photographing solar system objects, especially Saturn, using methods like stacking multiple shots to extract the finest details. He also practices wide-field photography to capture the Milky Way’s arms and incorporates natural elements like mountains and trees, creating a visual balance that connects the sky to the Earth, adding an artistic and human dimension.

Weather and location play a major role in his technical decisions while photographing: “Weather conditions are factors we cannot control, but they directly affect planning. Things do not always go as planned, so taking weather into account is an essential part of any astrophotography session”.

Qasim has a unique vision of stars; he does not see them as mere points of light. Each star has its own identity; and scientific and cultural characteristics. “Each star has multiple names across different cultures, linked to stories and a long history, which adds a scientific and cultural dimension beyond the visual appearance alone”.

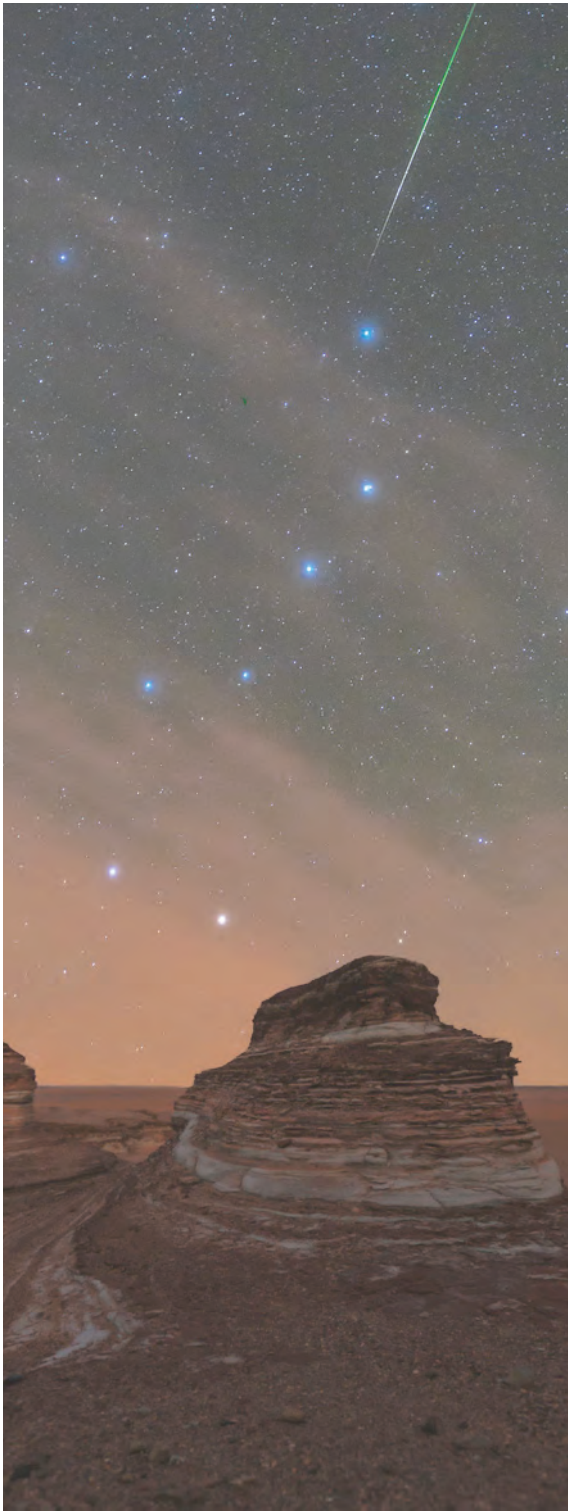
Among his most impactful photographs is a panoramic shot of the Milky Way from Jabal Shams, featuring an Al Allalan tree. The image “combines the vast sky with Oman’s authentic nature, documenting not only an astronomical scene but also the connection between Earth and sky, reflecting the place’s identity and spirit”.

Photography rules exist to be understood, not strictly followed and



DOCUMENTING THE UNIVERSE THROUGH THE LENS

QASIM PREFERS PHOTOGRAPHING SOLAR SYSTEM OBJECTS, USING METHODS LIKE STACKING MULTIPLE SHOTS TO EXTRACT THE FINEST DETAILS. HE ALSO PRACTICES WIDE-FIELD PHOTOGRAPHY TO CAPTURE THE MILKY WAY’S ARMS AND INCORPORATES NATURAL ELEMENTS



Qasim bin Hamad Al Busaidy
An astronomer, astrophotographer and a member of the Omani Astronomical Society

Qasim sometimes relies solely on instinct: “In some moments, feeling the scene is more important than strict adherence to settings, especially when the shot is unique and cannot be repeated”.

Audience is important to him, whether specialists who appreciate the details or the general public who respond to the feeling of the image. He adds, “When a photo succeeds in reaching both, that’s a true achievement”.

Qasim has won numerous local and international awards, including participation in the lunar eclipse competition in Kuwait, which was a significant moral boost, more than a goal in itself. Oman’s diverse landscapes have provided him with stunning backdrops, such as Khloof Beach with its bioluminescence phenomenon, adding a magical dimension to his work.

His journey could be summed up in a single image capturing the sky, Earth and humanity, reflecting his passion and patience in capturing cosmic beauty, highlighting the human connection to nature and the universe; and showcasing the constant search for hidden details that reveal the wonders of our world.

Qasim al Busaidy, with this passion, does not merely take photos; he documents humanity’s journey under the universe, transforming each star and planet into an artistic and scientific story that inspires admiration and thought, leaving Oman’s skies as a testament to the vision of a dedicated artist capturing cosmic history with a dreamer’s eye and perseverance.

CELEBRATIONS

ACROSS GOVERNORATES



The Directorate General of Education in Al Dhahirah Governorate celebrated the anniversary of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik's Accession Day by presenting the national operetta titled 'Harbours of Glory'. Held under the auspices of Najeeb bin Ali al Rawas, Governor of Al Dhahirah, this student-led national operetta served as a patriotic spectacle embodying the spirit of belonging and loyalty. The performance reflected the unity of the citizens and their solidarity with the wise leadership. Meanwhile, the Directorate General of Education in Al Sharqiyah South Governorate celebrated the 6th anniversary of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik's Accession Day. The celebration was based on a student operetta titled 'Farhat Watan' (A Nation's Joy). The Directorate General of Education in Al Batinah South Governorate also celebrated the anniversary.



FIREWORKS MARK HM 'S ACCESSION DAY



A fireworks display was held to celebrate the anniversary of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik's Accession Day on Sunday. The display was held at Al Seeb Dam in the Wilayat of Al Seeb, and Muscat Governorate.