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ALCARAZ SWEEPS PAST DJOKOVIC TO WIN MAIDEN AUSTRALIAN OPEN TITLE

INBRIEF

OMAN AND US AGREE TO BOOST TRADE TIES

Faisal bin Abdullah al Rawas, Chairman of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), on Sunday received at the Chamber's headquarters in Muscat a trade delegation from the United States of America. The meeting aimed to strengthen economic and trade relations between the two friendly nations and explore opportunities for cooperation and joint investment to serve mutual interests and support economic diversification efforts. During the meeting, both sides discussed horizons for expanding partnerships between the private sectors in the Sultanate of Oman and the United States.

DETAILS ON P13

INDIA TO SPEND \$133 BN ON INFRA

India will spend a record \$133 billion on infrastructure, the finance minister unveiled on Sunday in her national budget speech, with plans for new high-speed train links and tech investments. The figure is an almost nine per cent jump from last year's budget. Data centres, artificial intelligence, and the mining and processing of rare earths will also receive government support, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman told parliament. She said public expenditure had increased significantly from around \$21 billion (Rs 2 trillion) in 2014-15 and that it was now at an "all-time high". The world's most populous country sees massive infrastructure spending as key to sustaining its high growth rate by boosting domestic manufacturing and creating millions of new jobs. SEE ALSO P15

UKRAINE WAR TALKS ON WEDNESDAY



A second round of talks between Russian, Ukrainian and US officials on a US-drafted plan to end the nearly four-year Ukraine war will begin on Wednesday, instead of on Sunday, President Volodymyr Zelensky said. Zelensky did not give a reason for the delay. DETAILS ON P7

Oman, a land with roots embedded in history

International Conference on Archaeology of Oman Peninsula

SAUD AL ANSARI
MUSCAT, FEB 1

THE PROCEEDINGS of the first International Conference on the Archaeology of the Oman Peninsula began on Sunday at Sultan Qaboos University, with the participation of approximately 100 scientists, researchers and archaeology specialists from the Sultanate of Oman and abroad.

During the event, 60 researchers and academics are presenting scientific papers across six primary themes. The opening ceremony was held under the auspices of Sayyid Ibrahim bin Said al Busaidy, Minister of Heritage and Tourism.

The three-day conference is a joint initiative organised by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism and Sultan Qaboos University to celebrate the Golden Jubilee of the Journal of Oman Studies (1975–2025). The conference aims to provide a scientific platform for dialogue and the exchange of expertise, discuss contemporary issues in archaeological research, site management and heritage protection, and explore horizons for scientific cooperation. These efforts seek to build a robust knowledge base that supports heritage preservation and cultural development.

The conference targets researchers, specialists, students



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and those interested in archaeology and heritage, offering insight into the latest studies, reports and academic papers covering a wide range of topics.

These include palaeoclimate and ancient environments, prehistory of the Omani Peninsula, Islamic periods, rock art, built architectural heritage and underwater archaeology.

The conference also aims to provide an academic platform for dialogue and exchange of expertise, addressing current issues in archaeological research, site management, and heritage protection, while exploring future prospects for scientific cooperation in support of cultural preservation and sustainable development. In his keynote address, Eng Ibrahim bin Said al Kharousi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism for Heritage, emphasised that the Sultanate of Oman is a land with roots deeply embedded in history and a living witness to civilisational and human interaction across the ages. TURN TO P3

Oman-GCC direct electrical interconnection

MUSCAT: The GCC Interconnection Authority (GCCIA) announced the commencement of the direct electrical interconnection project between the authority's grid and the grid of the Sultanate of Oman.

This strategic move reflects the advancement of Gulf integration within the energy sector and the strengthening of regional infrastructure. The announcement was made during a ceremony held on Sunday

evening in Muscat under the auspices of Mohsen bin Hamad al Hadrami, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Energy and Minerals and Chairman of the Board of Directors of the GCCIA.

Al Hadrami emphasised that the direct electrical interconnection project with the Sultanate of Oman is not merely a technical expansion of a power grid, but rather an extension of a long-term strategic vision established by the GCC

leaders. They approved the Gulf Interconnection Project as a cornerstone of Gulf infrastructure integration, driven by the conviction that energy security is a fundamental pillar for national stability, economic growth, and sustainable development.

He noted that the Gulf interconnection has proven, over more than two and a half decades, to be one of the most successful models of joint Gulf action, contributing to the

reliability of electrical grids and achieving significant economic savings for GCC member states.

He added that the direct connection project with Oman enhances the depth of the Gulf grid and increases its operational flexibility, embodying an advanced model of Gulf partnership in financing vital infrastructure projects to support energy transition and sustainable development in the region. TURN TO P5

Reopening of Gaza's Rafah crossing expected today, say officials

CAIRO: Gaza's main border crossing in Rafah will reopen for Palestinians on Monday, Israel said, with preparations under way at the war-ravaged enclave's main gateway that has been largely shut for almost two years.

Before the war, the Rafah border crossing with Egypt was the only direct exit point for most Gazans to reach the outside world as well as a key entry point for aid into the territory. It has been largely shut since May 2024 and under Israeli military control on the Gazan side.

COGAT, the Israeli military unit that oversees humanitarian

coordination, said the crossing will reopen in both directions for Gaza residents on foot only and its operation will be coordinated with Egypt and the European Union.

"Today, a pilot is under way to test and assess the operation of the crossing. The movement of residents in both directions, entry and exit to and from Gaza, is expected to begin tomorrow," COGAT said in a statement.

A Palestinian official and a European source close to the EU mission confirmed the details. The Egyptian foreign ministry did not immediately respond to a



A Palestinian patient with kidney failure undergoes dialysis treatment at Al Aqsa Martyrs Hospital in Deir al Balah in the central Gaza. — AFP

request for comment.

Israel has said the crossing would open under stringent security checks only for Palestinians who wish to leave the war-ravaged enclave and for those who fled the fighting in the first months of the war to return.

Many of those expected to leave are sick and wounded Gazans in need of medical care abroad. The Palestinian health ministry has said that there are 20,000 patients waiting to leave Gaza.

An Israeli defence official said that the crossing can hold between 150-200 people altogether in both directions.

There will be more people leaving than returning because patients leave together with escorts, the official added.

"(The Rafah crossing) is the lifeline for us, the patients. We don't have the resources to be treated in Gaza," said Moustafa Abdel Hadi, a kidney patient in a central Gaza hospital, awaiting a transplant abroad. "If the war impacted a healthy person by 1 per cent, it has impacted us 200 per cent," he said, sitting as he received dialysis treatment at Al Aqsa Martyrs Hospital. His travel request, he said, has been approved. — Reuters

هيئة الخدمات المالية
FINANCIAL SERVICES AUTHORITY

Tender Announcement

Financial Services Authority announces the following tender :-

Tender name	Tender Number	Release the RFP	Last date for Purchase of RFP	Last date of Submitting the proposal	Tender fees in OMR
Upgrade of Infrastructure for the Dhamani Electronic Platform Project	FSA 002/2026	1 February 2026	8 February 2026 03:00 PM	22 February 2026 02:00 PM	250 Non Refundable

- Specialized companies interested in participating in the above tender must deposit the tender fee into bank account, and submit payment receipt of the tender along with a copy of the commercial registration certificate and the contact details of the authorized person to the Services & Public Relations Department e-mail : Admin@fsa.gov.om, hence, we shall provide you with Tender document by e-mail.
- All participating companies must provide a bank guarantee, issued by locally registered bank not less than 2 % of the tender value addressed to FSA , the bond shall be valid for 90 days from the submission of the proposal.
- All bids shall be submitted in tender box at the headquarters of the Financial Services Authority, located in Airport Heights.
- FSA is not obliged to accept the lowest bid or any other bid without any justifiable reasons.

Bank account information :-

Name of beneficiary : Financial Services Authority

Account no : 0423019706330018

Bank : Bank Muscat- Corporate Branch- CBD

SWIFT code : BMUSOMRXXX

Please attach a copy of the deposit receipt

For inquiries, please contact :-

E-mail : Admin@fsa.gov.om

Telephone Number : 24823299, 24823133

Timing : 8:00 am to 3:00 pm

Workdays : Sunday to Thursday.

To view

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www.fsa.gov.om Communication & Media management Office

SHORT TAKES



The trainees will undergo basic military training as soldier recruits. — ONA

RGO RECEIVES
NEW BATCH FOR
MILITARY TRAINING

MUSCAT: The Royal Guard of Oman (RGO) on Sunday received a new batch of citizens who wish to get military training and join the RGO units. The programme is part of ongoing national efforts undertaken by the Sultan’s Armed Forces (SAF) to provide employment for citizens, in coordination with the Ministry of Labour. The trainees will undergo basic military training as soldier recruits. They will join the ranks of national duty after successfully completing training, meeting admission requirements and undergoing physical and medical examinations. To speed up the qualification of the trainees in accordance with the plans and programmes set by the SAF and the Ministry of Defence, the RGO is extending its full resources to the trainees, providing them with specialised personnel and giving them access to its administrative facilities. — ONA



RAMADHAN RETURNS
TO FEBRUARY
AFTER 31 YEARS

MUSCAT: In the Sultanate of Oman, the holy month of Ramadhan is expected to fall in February this year for the first time in nearly 31 years. Ramadhan is likely to begin on either Wednesday, February 18, or Thursday, February 19, depending on the official sighting of the crescent moon. Last year, it started on March 1, 2025, in Oman. Records show that Ramadhan previously began on February 12 in 1994 and on February 1 in 1995. Based on current astronomical projections, the holy month is expected to begin on February 8 in 2027. Most countries are expected to observe the crescent moon marking the start of Ramadhan on Tuesday, February 17, 2026. However, astronomical calculations indicate that sighting the crescent on that day will not be possible from any part of the Arab and Islamic world, whether with the naked eye, using telescopes, or even advanced astronomical imaging techniques. Accordingly, in countries that require a confirmed crescent sighting to determine the beginning of the Hijri month, Wednesday is expected to complete the month of Shaaban, with Thursday, February 19, likely to mark the first day of the holy month of Ramadhan. Nevertheless, Ramadhan may begin on Wednesday, February 18, in some countries that apply different criteria for determining the start of the month. According to astronomical calculations, these expectations are based on precise observational data and established scientific standards used to assess crescent visibility.

MUSCAT NIGHTS REPORTS OVER 1.5M VISITORS

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, FEB 1

Muscat Nights concluded with reports of over 1.5 million visitors, promising to incorporate more specialised environmental and educational events. Al Qurum Natural Park welcomed over 600,000 visitors during Muscat Nights, with families making up the majority at 60 to 70 per cent. Youth and senior citizens also attended, demonstrating the events’ ability to cater to different age groups and serve as a comprehensive



Future plans aim to introduce more specialised environmental and educational programmes.

family entertainment destination. Eng Yasser bin Salem al Amri, a member of the preparatory committee for Muscat Nights 2026,

noted the positive response to the local and international pavilions, which attracted families daily. Suggestions have been made to

increase service facilities, family seating areas and expand activities in high-demand areas. Future plans aim to introduce more specialised environmental and educational programmes, improve service facilities sustainably and enhance the park’s environmental identity through awareness initiatives and community partnerships. Hussein bin Said al Rumhi, supervisor of the Beach Events Committee at Muscat Nights 2026, highlighted the success of tournaments, sports and beach activities in promoting a healthy lifestyle and community sports culture.

Forum seeks to strengthen
institutional readiness

MOHAMMED AL BATTSHI
MUSCAT, FEB 1

THE Future Readiness Leadership Forum under the National Programme ‘Irtiqaa’ was launched on Sunday with the participation of senior government officials and decision-makers, in a four-month national track aimed at strengthening institutional readiness, accelerating government digital transformation, and aligning leadership decisions with future requirements in line with Oman Vision 2040. Organised by the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MoTCIT) in partnership with the Royal Academy of Management (RAM), the University of Technology and Applied Sciences (UTAS), and the Omani Society for Human Resource Management (OSHRM), the forum is designed as a high-level leadership platform for dialogue and forward planning, supporting government entities as they adapt to rapid technological change and evolving service expectations. Dr Ali bin Amer al Shaiithani, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology for Communications and Information Technology and Chairman of the Technical Committee of the National Programme for Government Digital Transformation (Tahawul), said, “Digital transformation is no longer a peripheral activity; it is a strategic direction led by senior leadership as the primary driver of transformation pathways toward the future. What we have witnessed through the Future Readiness Leadership Forum is a practical translation of this approach, where leadership steps forward not only to keep pace with change, but to shape it.” He added, “This forum embodies



The forum embodies institutional awareness of the importance of readiness as a strategic pillar in Oman’s journey toward the future.

institutional awareness of the importance of readiness as a strategic pillar in Oman’s journey toward the future. It also confirms that the sustainability of institutional impact is closely tied to aligning government visions and strengthening harmony among decision-makers. Without a doubt, the presence of such diverse leadership within a shared dialogue space reflects the maturity of the Omani experience and its serious commitment to building a digital transformation that enhances readiness, anticipates challenges and relies on strategic guidance in confronting rapid digital shifts.” Kawthar al Hinai, Head of the Capacity-Building and Change Management Track at the National Programme for Digital Transformation (Tahawul), said, “The programme is one of the main enablers for accelerating digital transformation in the Sultanate of Oman. It targets all

administrative levels, from senior leadership to executive teams. The programme covers 57 government institutions.” She explained that the forum aims to narrow gaps between administrative levels, establish a shared professional language across government, strengthen service design based on beneficiary expectations, apply best practices in managing life-events and maximise the use of artificial intelligence in leading institutional change. Tahir bin Mabkhout al Junaibi, Governor of Al Dhahirah, highlighted the importance of the forum in supporting development plans and strengthening coordination among government entities. He said participation in this national initiative would enhance institutional readiness to manage rapid transformations, improve the quality of public services, and connect local priorities with the broader national digital-transformation agenda.

Oman, a land with roots embedded in history

FROM P1

He noted that archaeological discoveries serve as material evidence reflecting human lifestyles and the interaction between humans and their environment over thousands of years. He further said that these findings have proven the grandeur of ancient Omani civilisation and its vital role in global trade and cultural networks, connecting the civilisations of Mesopotamia, the Indus Valley, and East Africa due to Oman’s geographic location and its maritime and terrestrial legacy. He pointed out that systematic archaeological research, which began in the 1950s, evolved institutionally with the establishment of the ministry, contributing to the organisation of surveys, excavations and the protection of archaeological sites.



The findings have proven the grandeur of ancient Omani civilisation and its vital role in global trade and cultural networks.

He highlighted prominent sites dating back to the third millennium BCE that reflect Oman’s historical status as a major centre for copper mining and export in the ancient world under the name ‘Magan,’ noting that modern discoveries have revealed sites spanning from the Neolithic period through the Bronze and Iron Ages to the Islamic eras, confirming continuous human settlement

in Oman over millennia. Dr Nasser al Jahwari, Chairman of the Organising Committee, said that holding this conference as a specialised international scientific event reflects the civilisational importance of the region. He added that it aims to consolidate Oman’s position as a hub for scientific dialogue in archaeology and heritage while enhancing research partnerships.

He also noted the development of the Journal of Oman Studies into an open-access publication in cooperation with the international publisher ‘Archaeopress,’ as part of an effort to include it in international databases. Meanwhile, Sultan bin Saif al Bakri from the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, Supervisor of the Archaeological Missions Programme and Heritage Publications, stated that the launch of the Journal of Omani Studies website reflects Oman’s strong commitment to supporting scientific research, preserving national heritage and enhancing its presence in international academic forums. He said that the launch of the journal’s website marks a significant milestone in its academic journey and represents a strategic step in keeping pace with digital transformation.

SPOTLIGHT

The programme, implemented in Al Dhahirah, brings together 12 female trainees and reflects growing recognition that Omani weaving is not only a cultural symbol but also a promising, productive sector.

WOMEN REVIVE WEAVING CRAFT

A traditional craft deeply rooted in Omani heritage is being reintroduced with a modern outlook in Al Dhahirah Governorate, where a specialised weaving training programme is empowering women and transforming heritage into a sustainable economic opportunity.

The programme, implemented by the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones, brings together 12 female trainees and reflects a growing recognition that Omani weaving is not only a cultural symbol but also a promising productive sector.

The initiative blends authenticity with innovation, adopting modern approaches in design, production and marketing to strengthen the presence of Omani products in both local and international markets.

Iman bint Saif al Ghasani, Social Responsibility Specialist and supervisor of the programme, said the Authority’s support for traditional crafts stems from a firm belief in their economic and cultural value.

“These crafts can form part of national development pathways when developed into sustainable, productive activities that respond to market demand while preserving their social and cultural dimensions,” she said.

The training in the Wilayat of Ibri is part of the social responsibility initiatives of Serca, Biladco and Junok — companies implementing the main roads and surface water drainage



The crafts form part of national development pathways when developed into sustainable, productive activities that respond to market demand while preserving their social and cultural dimensions.

IMAN BINT SAIF
AL GHASANI
Social
Responsibility
Specialist



A Landmark National Step to Strengthen Insurance Protection: Oman Introduces the First Natural Disaster Coverage Within Third Party Motor Policies in the GCC

By **Hasan Yaseen Al Lawati**,
CEO of Oman Qatar Insurance Company



OMAN continues to reinforce its position as a forward looking nation, guided by a clear vision and a consistent commitment to strengthening regulatory and financial frameworks that place the protection of people and their assets at the forefront. The recent decision by the Financial Services Authority to introduce natural disaster coverage within third party motor insurance policies marks a significant national milestone and reflects a proactive approach to safeguarding the community and enhancing social and economic resilience.

This initiative represents the first of its kind across the GCC and the first dedicated framework in the Arab region to address third party losses arising from natural

disasters. It underscores Oman’s leadership in developing innovative insurance solutions that respond to evolving climate risks and future challenges.

Given Oman’s exposure to climate related events such as cyclones and flooding, many individuals have in recent years suffered vehicle losses without adequate insurance protection or compensation. This new coverage directly addresses that gap by providing meaningful and immediate financial protection to policyholders affected by such events, reducing their financial burden and strengthening their sense of security and stability.

This initiative also demonstrates the government’s commitment, represented by the Financial Services Authority, to building a more resilient and sustainable insurance ecosystem that prioritizes the interests of citizens and residents while enhancing the sector’s readiness to face emerging risks.

Its success is expected to pave the way for the introduction of further specialized insurance solutions, expanding protection levels across the market and supporting the broader goals of economic stability and community wellbeing.

At Oman Qatar Insurance Company, we are fully prepared to implement this coverage effectively. All operational and technical preparations have been completed, particularly within our claims management function, to ensure fast response times, smooth processes, and a fair and seamless experience for customers when settling claims.

We view this initiative as a strong example of constructive collaboration between the Financial Services Authority and insurance companies. It reflects a progressive national vision that prioritizes protection, preparedness, and trust. We remain committed to leveraging our expertise and capabilities to support this direction and to deliver services that meet our customers’ expectations and strengthen confidence in the insurance sector.

project for the Special Economic Zone in Al Dhahirah (EZAD – Phase 1). The partnership highlights the role of public-private cooperation in empowering local communities and creating sustainable income sources linked to development projects.

Al Ghasani explained that the programme focuses on market-oriented production, enabling participants to create contemporary heritage products with a refined character that reflects Omani identity while meeting quality and design standards suitable for institutional use.

The initiative follows an integrated operational model that covers production stages, provision of raw materials, packaging and order delivery, in cooperation with trainer Anwar al Shibli, a certified weaving specialist and owner of Al Sidaa Foundation.

She described the programme as a foundational step towards positioning Omani textile products as high-quality heritage gifts with a cohesive design identity. The current phase prioritises readiness for institutional and local markets, with attention to quality, design and packaging. Future expansion could open access to wider marketing channels, including international markets, through private-sector partnerships.

Trainer Anwar al Shibli emphasised that weaving is “an artistic language and a cultural identity capable of evolving.”

“I chose weaving as a training path because there is a real need to transfer this skill systematically, enabling trainees to turn it from a hobby into a source of income while preserving its authenticity,” she said. The training covers the fundamentals of hand weaving, understanding materials, loom setup, design, colour coordination, and transforming ideas into finished pieces. It also focuses on quality, precision and



professional development, equipping participants to market their products as viable small enterprises.

From a social perspective, Al Shibli noted that training enhances women’s self-confidence, provides a platform for creative expression, and strengthens their sense of belonging while ensuring traditional crafts are passed on to new generations.

For trainee Halima bint Said al Abri, the programme represents both learning and cultural pride. She joined out of passion for the craft and its place in Omani heritage, particularly after visiting a weaving factory in Samayil.

Through the training, she has learned weaving fundamentals, measurements, thread counts, loom components, and the distinction between basic and decorative patterns.

“This craft teaches patience and mastery,” she said, expressing optimism about its future. She believes weaving can thrive by combining traditional authenticity with modern design, noting its growing economic relevance locally and internationally.

The initiative reflects a broader national effort to link heritage preservation with economic empowerment — ensuring that tradition continues not only as memory, but as livelihood. — ONA

ENERGYSHARING



The announcement was made during a ceremony held on Sunday evening in Muscat.

OMAN-GCC DIRECT ELECTRICAL INTERCONNECTION

FROM P1

For his part, Eng Ahmed bin Ali al Ibrahim, CEO of the GCCIA, said that the project is one of the largest expansion projects in the authority's history. It aims to boost the Gulf grid's capacity to accommodate the rapid growth in electricity demand, amid the expansion of internal grids, significant changes in electrical loads, and increased power generation across the GCC, while also supporting renewable energy projects and enhancing grid readiness for emergencies.

He confirmed that the project will achieve substantial operational and economic benefits, enhance the reliability of Gulf electrical grids during the transition toward renewable energy, and increase power exchange capacity among member states. He further noted that the project embodies the authority's ability to transform the strategic vision of the GCC leaders into executive projects with tangible impact. He revealed that the total cost of the project is approximately \$700 million, funded through Gulf financing partnerships. The authority previously signed financing agreements with the Qatar Fund for Development and Sohar International Bank to provide \$600 million in financing for the project.

Fahad bin Hamad al Sulaiti, Director-General of the Qatar Fund for Development, stated that the fund's participation in financing the project falls within its commitment to strengthening the economies of Arab countries by supporting vital infrastructure projects and sustainable development through the provision of necessary financing and loans.

He pointed out that this initiative is based on a shared belief in the importance of regional cooperation, noting that energy represents an essential element for achieving stability and socio-economic development.

The project involves the construction of two 400 kV electrical lines spanning approximately 530 kilometers, connecting the authority's Al Sila station in the United Arab Emirates with the Ibri station to be established by the authority in the Sultanate of Oman. It also includes the construction of two main 400 kV transmission stations in both Ibri and Al Bynouna, equipped with the latest protection, control, and communication systems according to international best practices. — ONA

Biodiversity programme enhances youth awareness

MUSCAT: Sponsored by the British Embassy Muscat, Outward Bound Oman launched the first cohorts of the Biodiversity Gems Programme, an initiative aimed at increasing youth awareness of environmental sustainability and biodiversity in the Sultanate of Oman. The programme targets young people aged 14 to 25.

The programme is one of the key outcomes of the Oman: The Jewel of Arabia exploratory expedition,



conducted in early 2025 where members of the Outward Bound Oman's team joined as expedition members.

The expedition explored Oman's

diverse natural environments and strengthened the understanding of the link between biodiversity conservation and sustainable development.

Designed to engage Omani youth in hands-on environmental learning, the programme offers a three-day immersive experience in nature, combining discussions, interactive activities and awareness sessions focused on local flora and fauna.

Participants also take part in outdoor field activities such as hiking and camping, in addition to individual reflection sessions in natural settings.

Space ambitions set to generate thousands of jobs

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, FEB 1

THOUSANDS of employment opportunities for Omanis are expected to emerge as a byproduct of Oman's ambitious national space plans once the sector becomes fully operational, according to Andy Grey, CEO of Exotopic and a space engineer.

Speaking to Observer on the sidelines of a space-focused forum titled 'From Spaceport to Marketplace: Unlocking Space Sector Opportunities', Grey said knowledge and specialised expertise would be key criteria in recruiting talent for space-related roles.

The event, held at the British Embassy under the auspices of Dr Liane Saunders, British Ambassador to Oman, featured a keynote address by HH Sayyid Azzan bin Qais al Said, Founder and CEO of NASCOM and Etlaq Spaceport.

"Oman's space programme can open up jobs galore. Employment opportunities in the global space sector are expanding rapidly across engineering, science and data-driven roles, fuelled by both public agencies and private companies," Grey said.

He explained that the space sector spans a vast ecosystem — from launch infrastructure and satellite development to downstream services such as navigation, mapping and data applications.

"From the spaceport to launch operations and from satellite-



A space-focused forum was held at the British Embassy recently.

Employment opportunities in the global space sector are expanding rapidly across engineering, science and data-driven roles

based services like Google Maps to hardware development, specialised skills are required at every stage. The potential is enormous. Oman's space mission is not just a mission — it is a long-term plan that can generate thousands of direct and indirect jobs," he added.

Grey noted that key areas of opportunity include satellite design, launch vehicle development, artificial intelligence, cybersecurity and space law, with roles ranging from technicians to highly specialised engineers. Growth areas are also emerging in satellite manufacturing, mission operations and data analysis.

He stressed that beyond formal degrees, sector awareness and up-to-date technical knowledge are crucial. "Understanding space technologies, services and global trends will help build a specialised workforce capable of supporting the

sector," he said.

Career pathways in the space industry include: Aerospace and engineering roles: Aerospace Engineer, Satellite Engineer, Propulsion Systems Specialist, Avionics Test Engineer, Thermal Engineer.

Data science and IT: AI and Machine Learning Architect, Software Engineer, Cybersecurity Analyst, Data Analyst

Mission operations: Flight Dynamics Engineer, Ground Systems Analyst, Mission Control Specialist, Space Systems Operator

Scientific and specialised fields: Astrophysicist, Planetary Scientist, Space Medicine Specialist, Researcher and Business and legal fields: Project Manager, Business Development Manager (satellite operations), Space Law and Policy Expert.

Commenting on Oman's national space road-map, Grey said the country is progressing steadily. "The national space plan is effective and Oman has been advancing step by step. We now have the Oman Space Accelerator, the Oman Space Hub, and recently hosted the Middle East Space Conference. With specialised facilities and education and training programmes at Sultan Qaboos University, and engagement from global players such as Airbus, Oman is moving firmly towards its goals," he said.

"Oman's strength lies not only in its geography, but in its willingness to learn and its ability to collaborate internationally."

Omani manufacturing expertise showcased at Gulfood 2026

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, FEB 1

In line with Oman Vision 2040, Oman Refreshment Company participated in Gulfood 2026, the world's largest food and beverage exhibition, to strengthen international partnerships and expand the presence of Omani-made food and beverage products.

In its fourth consecutive participation, the continued presence at the event aligns with advancing industrial diversification and competitive national industries with global reach. The exhibition provided a platform to reinforce the role of Omani manufacturing in international food and beverage value chains.

"Our participation in Gulfood represented our wider effort to support



Gulfood 2026 brought together global food innovators and industry leaders.

Oman's manufacturing presence beyond our borders," said Moosa bin Mohammed al Raisi, Board Member at Oman REFCO.

"Industrial capability and export growth are central to the objectives of Oman Vision 2040, and Gulfood provided an opportunity to cultivate partnerships and open new

markets for locally made products, while showcasing the quality and reliability that define our operations in Oman."

At this year's exhibition, Oman REFCO highlighted its manufacturing expertise alongside its long-standing strategic partner of 52 years, PepsiCo, as well as its locally developed product portfolio. Among the local products on display was Top Fruit, Oman REFCO's homegrown brand, which is currently distributed across GCC markets and selected international destinations, including Europe, Africa and South America.

Gulfood 2026 brought together global food innovators and industry leaders, providing a platform to shape the next phase of international food and beverage growth.

جامعة الشرقية
A' SHARQIYAH UNIVERSITY

TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

ASU's Tender Committee is pleased to invite specialized companies to participate in the following tender:

Tender details:

Tender No.	Description	Targeted Companies	Tender Document Collection Deadline	Site Visit	Bids Submission Deadline	Document Fees	Degree
(ASU/13/25/26)	Construction of Indoor Sport Complex Tender at A' Sharqiyah University- Ibra	Building construction contractors experienced in multi-disciplinary construction projects.	08/02/2026	04/02/2026 At 10:30AM	22/02/2025	OMR 200	Company classified as excellent degree

- Specialized companies interested in participating in the tender should obtain the tender documents during official working days from Sunday to Thursday, between 9:00 AM and 2:00 PM.
- Tender collection process:** The interested companies shall follow the following steps:
 - The payment should be made directly to ASU under the following bank account:

Account Name	AL SHARQIYAH UNIVERSITY
Account Number	0423010693610011
SWIFT CODE	BMUSOMRX
 - After payment, send the receipt to along with the reference number, title of the tender and CR of the company.
 - Participating companies will receive the tender document via email.
 - Companies that hold Riyadh certificate are exempted from tender document fees. Companies should send Riyadh certificate to zayana.alaamri@asu.edu.om, along with the reference number, title of the tender and CR of the company
- ASU general terms and conditions of tenders shall apply on all submitted bids. http://www.asu.edu.om/downloads/purchase_terms_conditions.pdf
- ASU is not bound to accept the lowest bid.
- For further details, please don't hesitate to contact us at: zayana.alaamri@asu.edu.om or Tel **25401116**.

WORLD

SHORT TAKES



Bystanders walk past a burnt vehicle along a road on the outskirts of Quetta, a day after an attack by separatists. — AFP

PAKISTAN FORCES KILL 145 FIGHTERS IN TWO-DAY BATTLE

QUETTA: Pakistani security forces killed 145 fighters in a 40-hour battle launched as a series of coordinated gun and bomb attacks across Balochistan left nearly 50 people dead, the province’s chief minister said on Sunday.

Authorities in the southwestern province are battling one of the deadliest flare-ups in years, as insurgents in the resource-rich province bordering Iran and Afghanistan step up assaults on security forces, civilians and infrastructure.

Attackers dressed as ordinary civilians entered hospitals, schools, banks and markets on Saturday before opening fire, Pakistan’s junior interior minister Talal Chaudhry said.

“In each case, the attackers came in dressed as civilians and indiscriminately targeted ordinary people working in shops,” he said, adding militants had used civilians as human shields.

The banned separatist group Baloch Liberation Army claimed responsibility for the attacks, saying it had launched a coordinated operation dubbed Herof, or “black storm”, targeting security forces across the province.

In Quetta, the provincial capital, the aftermath was visible in burnt-out vehicles at a police station, bullet-riddled doors and streets sealed off with yellow tape, as security forces tightened patrols and restricted movement following the attacks.

Chief Minister of Balochistan Sarfraz Bugti said 17 law enforcement personnel and 31 civilians were killed in the militant attacks. Pakistan’s military said 92 militants were killed on Saturday, while 41 were killed on Friday. “We had intelligence reports that this kind of operation was being planned, and as a result of those, we started pre-operations a day before,” Bugti said. — Reuters

GERMAN MINISTER SEEKS TO INTENSIFY ASIA, PACIFIC TIES

BERLIN: German Foreign Minister Johann Wadephul is set to embark on a five-day trip to South-East Asia and the Pacific region as he seeks to deepen alliances with countries including Australia and New Zealand to counterbalance US and Chinese dominance.

At a time when power politics threaten to replace the strength of the law, “we must expand our global network of robust partnerships along our core interests,” Germany’s top diplomat said before embarking on the long-haul journey.



JOHANN WADEPHUL
German FM

Wadephul will kick off the trip with a visit to Singapore on Monday, followed by visits to New Zealand, Tonga, Australia and Brunei. All five countries share Germany’s desire for a stable international order and Berlin’s commitment to multilateralism, the minister said. — dpa

PROTESTERS DEMAND ‘JUSTICE’ AFTER SWISS RESORT FIRE

LUTRY: Several hundred demonstrators marched in Switzerland to demand ‘justice and truth’ over a New Year’s blaze in a ski resort that killed 40 people and injured 155 others, most of them teens and young adults.

The protest was held in Lutry, a suburb of Lausanne, from where several of the victims who died in the January 1 blaze in the Crans-Montana resort hailed.

“Tristan would have been 18 in four months’ time, but I’m also the



A mother of victim Tristan takes part to a silent in Lutry, near Lausanne.

mother of 155 other victims,” one woman who lost her son, Vincianne Stucky, told the crowd as she held up

his photo. “We will go to the end,” she said. She was among family members and friends of those killed. Some held white roses in their hands, others placards reading “You are not alone”.

The march started at the stadium of the local football club, which had seven of its players killed in the fire. It then paused before a church whose bells rang out for five minutes as many demonstrators laid flowers, before turning and returning to the stadium. — AFP

Israel says to terminate MSF work in Gaza Strip

ISRAEL said on Sunday it was terminating the humanitarian operations of Doctors Without Borders (MSF) in Gaza after the international medical charity failed to provide a list of its Palestinian staff.

In December, Israel announced it would prevent 37 aid organisations, including MSF, from working in Gaza from March 1 for failing to submit detailed information about their Palestinian employees, drawing widespread condemnation from NGOs and the UN.

“The Ministry of Diaspora Affairs and Combating Antisemitism is moving to terminate the activities of Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) in the Gaza Strip,” the ministry said on Sunday. The decision follows “MSF’s failure to submit lists of local employees, a requirement applicable to all humanitarian organisations operating in the region”, it added.

The ministry had earlier alleged that two MSF employees had links with Palestinian groups Hamas and Islamic Jihad, which the charity has vehemently denied. On Sunday, the ministry said MSF had committed in early January to sharing the staff list as required by the Israeli authorities, but ultimately refrained. “Subsequently, MSF announced it does not intend to proceed with the registration process at all, contradicting its previous statements and the binding protocol,” the ministry added, saying “MSF will cease its operations and depart the Gaza Strip



A Palestinian burn victim, Maria Abu Aawad, lies on a hospital bed at a Doctors Without Borders (MSF) hospital in Zawaida, in the central Gaza Strip. — Reuters file photo

by February 28”.

In a statement last Friday, MSF acknowledged that it had, as an “exceptional measure”, agreed to share a list of names of its Palestinian and international staff with the Israeli authorities.

“However, despite repeated efforts, it became evident that we were unable to build engagement with Israeli authorities on the concrete assurances required,” it said. “These included that any staff information would be used only for its stated administrative purpose and would not put colleagues at risk.”

Without those assurances, MSF “concluded that we will not share staff information in the current circumstances”.

The group says 15 of its

employees have been killed over the course of the war.

Minister of Diaspora Affairs and Combating Antisemitism Amichai Chikli said the organisation had “abruptly changed” its position.

“It appears the organisation’s employees do not meet the established criteria,” Chikli said.

MSF has long been a key provider of medical and humanitarian aid in Gaza, particularly since the war broke out in October 2023.

The charity says it currently provides at least 20 per cent of hospital beds in the territory and operates around 20 health centres.

In 2025 alone, it carried out more than 800,000 medical consultations and more than 10,000 infant deliveries, and it also provides drinking water. — AFP



MOON MISSION RETURNS

The Space Launch System (SLS) rocket and the Orion spacecraft, integrated for the Artemis II mission, are seen at Launch Pad 39B at the Kennedy Space Center in Cape Canaveral, Florida, ahead of the first crewed mission to the Moon in more than 50 years. Weather permitting, Nasa crews now are aiming to conduct their final tests Monday, after which a launch date will be determined. The change narrows the possibility that Nasa can launch their Artemis 2 team of four astronauts on their Moon flyby in February -- just three days of potential windows remain in that month. The team remains in quarantine in Houston, Nasa said. — AFP

HIGHWAY CRASH

Türkiye road accidents kill at least 16



At least 16 people were killed in two road accidents in southern Türkiye, authorities said. A bus crashed off a highway near the city of Antalya, killing nine people and injuring 25, seven of whom are in critical condition, Antalya provincial governor Hulusi Sahin said. Seven people died and five were injured in a second accident at Burdur, on the highway from Antalya to Isparta, the DHA news agency reported. — AFP

GREAT CONCERN

Pope urges US, Cuba to engage in talks



Pope Leo said he was deeply concerned about rising tensions between the US and Cuba, and he called for “sincere and effective dialogue” to prevent violence and further suffering for the Cuban people. Pope Leo said he had received reports ‘with great concern’ of rising tensions between Cuba and the US. He joined Cuban bishops in “urging those responsible to promote sincere and effective dialogue to avoid violence and further suffering for the Cuban people.” — Reuters

QUORUM NOT MET

Iraq parliament delays vote again



Iraq’s parliament has again postponed the election of the country’s new president, state media reported, amid intense political horse-trading and US pressure over the new prime minister. It was the second time parliament has delayed the presidential vote, which had first been due last week. A correspondent in the parliament said the required quorum was not reached. The vote was therefore delayed, according to the official INA press agency. — AFP

SHORT TAKES



A landslide collapsed several mines at a major coltan mining site in DR Congo killing at least 200.

‘AT LEAST 200’ FEARED DEAD IN DR CONGO LANDSLIDE

KINSHASA: The Democratic Republic of Congo’s government said on Sunday it feared “at least 200 dead” in a “massive” landslide that struck a militia-held mine in the country’s east.

Since its resurgence in 2021, the M23 armed group has seized vast tracts of the DRC’s resource-rich east, capturing the Rubaya mine in North Kivu province in April 2024 with Rwanda’s help.

Scavengers said part of a hillside in the mining zone collapsed on Wednesday afternoon. A second landslide struck on Thursday morning.

The M23’s appointed governor, Eraston Bahati Musanga, said there were “at least 200 deaths”.

AFP was unable to independently verify a toll.

The phone network has been down for several days there, and Congolese authorities and civil society groups fled the area when the M23 arrived.

Information is arriving “in dribs and drabs from motorbike couriers circulating the region”, making it difficult to establish an accurate toll, a humanitarian source said.

The Rubaya mine produces 15 to 30 per cent of the world’s supply of coltan, a key component in the production of electronics such as laptops and mobile phones.

Experts estimate that the M23 makes around \$800,000 a month from the mine thanks to a seven-dollars-a-kilo tax on the production and sale of coltan.

UN experts also accuse Rwanda — which denies providing the M23 with military support — of using the militia to syphon off the DRC’s mineral riches.

Kinshasa on Sunday urged “the international community to fully grasp the scale of this tragedy” which is blamed on “armed occupation and an organised system of looting” by the Rwanda-backed militia.

Besides containing at least 60 per cent of the world’s coltan, the wider eastern DRC is also home to vast reserves of gold and tin. — AFP

THOUSANDS OF KURDS RALLY IN NORTHEAST SYRIA

QAMISHLI: Thousands of Syrian Kurds rallied in the northeast city of Qamishli on Sunday in a show of solidarity ahead of the implementation of a recent deal with the government.

Damascus and Kurdish forces reached a comprehensive agreement on Friday to gradually integrate the Kurds’ military and civilian institutions into the state, after under-pressure Kurds ceded territory to advancing government forces in recent weeks.

The developments have come as a blow to the Kurds, who had sought to preserve the de facto autonomy they exercised after seizing swathes of north and northeast Syria in battles against the IS group during



Syrian Kurds during a demonstration in northeastern Syria, as they rally behind the Kurdish forces. — AFP

Syria’s civil war, backed by a US-led coalition.

In Qamishli, the main Kurdish city in the northeast, thousands of men, women and children filled the streets, according to a

correspondent, waving Kurdish flags and holding up pictures of fighters who were killed.

Student Barine Hamza, 18, said “we have come out for Kurdish unity”.

“We are afraid of being betrayed because we do not trust this government,” she said.

The text of the deal maintains an ongoing ceasefire and introduces a “gradual integration” of the Kurdish forces and administrative institutions.

It appeared to include some of the Kurds’ demands, such as establishing brigades of fighters from the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in Kurdish-majority areas.

— AFP

Ukraine conflict talks postponed to Wednesday

A second round of talks between Russian, Ukrainian and US officials on a US-drafted plan to end the nearly four-year Ukraine war will begin on Wednesday, instead of on Sunday, President Volodymyr Zelensky said.

Zelensky did not give a reason for the delay.

The announcement comes a day after one of Russian President Vladimir Putin’s top envoys held surprise talks with US officials in Florida without Ukraine.

“The dates for the next trilateral meetings have been set — February 4 and 5 in Abu Dhabi,” Zelensky said in a post on X.

Neither the Kremlin nor the United States have confirmed the new dates.

The United States says it is close to brokering a deal to end the conflict — Europe’s deadliest since World War II — but neither Moscow nor Kyiv have been able to find a compromise on the key issue of territory.

Russia, which occupies around 20 per cent of its neighbour, is pushing for full control of Ukraine’s eastern Donetsk region as part of any deal. It has threatened to take it by force if talks fail.

Ukraine has warned ceding ground will embolden Moscow and that it will not sign a deal that fails to deter Russia from invading again.

Many Ukrainians find the idea of surrendering territory that their soldiers have defended for years unconscionable.

The first round of talks on the US plan, held in Abu Dhabi last Friday and Saturday, failed to yield a breakthrough.

A day ahead of Zelensky’s announcement, Russia’s top economic envoy Kirill Dmitriev met with US officials in Florida for separate talks on the war.



A local restaurant distributes hot soup to attendees of an outdoor party on a side of the frozen Dnipro River in a residential neighbourhood of Kyiv. — AFP

Among those US officials were President Donald Trump’s peace envoy Steve Witkoff, Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent, son-in-law Jared Kushner, and White House Senior Adviser Josh Gruenbaum.

“We are encouraged by this meeting that Russia is working toward securing peace in Ukraine,” Witkoff said, though neither side released details of what was discussed.

Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022, describing it as a “special military operation” to prevent the expansion of Nato — a war aim that Kyiv has called a pretext for an illegal land grab.

The conflict has since resulted in a tidal wave of destruction that has left entire cities

in ruins and tens of thousands of soldiers and civilians dead.

Russian attacks on Ukraine overnight and early on Sunday killed at least two people and injured seven others, regional authorities said.

Among the attacks was a drone strike on a maternity hospital in the southern city of Zaporizhzhia that injured two women undergoing a medical examination, the region’s governor and rescuers said.

Ukraine’s defence minister on Sunday thanked Elon Musk after the US tycoon said efforts to stop Russia from using Starlink satellites for drone attacks seemed to have worked. — AFP

Snowstorm disrupts travel in southern US as blast of icy weather widens

WASHINGTON: Travel misery was set to continue on Sunday as a powerful snowstorm blasted southern US states, bringing subzero temperatures to regions not accustomed to the deadly winter conditions.

The latest bout of extreme weather came about a week after a monster storm pummelled a wide swath of the United States, killing more than 100 people and leaving many communities struggling to dig out from snow and ice.

Heavy snow fell in North Carolina and neighbouring states Saturday, as authorities urged residents to stay off the roads and warned oceanfront structures were threatened by the storm.

All of North and South Carolina, and portions of Georgia, eastern Tennessee and Kentucky, as well as southern Virginia were under a winter storm warning.

North Carolina saw 750 car crashes on Saturday, the highway patrol said.

Faust, North Carolina recorded 14.5 inches of snow, while West

Critz, Virginia got 12.5 inches. Harrisburg, Tennessee received more than nine inches of accumulation.

In the North Carolina town of Cape Carteret, high winds sent thick snow blowing sideways, prompting the National Weather Service to warn that travel was “Treacherous and Potentially Life-Threatening especially if you become stranded.”

In dramatic footage released by police in Gastonia, North Carolina, a train plowed at high speed into a semi-truck that had gotten stuck on the tracks, crushing the vehicle. No one was hurt.

The weekend storm forced more than 1,800 flight cancellations Saturday and Sunday at Charlotte Douglas International Airport in North Carolina, a major hub for American Airlines, data from the tracker FlightAware showed.

A 300-strong “snow team” was working to clear runways, taxiways, roads and sidewalks, the airport said Saturday.

More than 600 flights were cancelled Saturday at Atlanta’s



People sled down Flagstaff Hill in Boston Common after a snowstorm in Boston, Massachusetts. — AFP

international airport, the world’s busiest. About 50 flights in and out of Atlanta were cancelled in the early hours of Sunday.

“An explosively deepening coastal cyclone will continue to bring moderate to heavy snow, high winds, and possibly blizzard conditions for the Carolinas,” the National Weather Service said Saturday.

“An intense surge of arctic air behind the coastal storm will send below freezing temperatures down toward South Florida by Sunday morning.”

Davis, West Virginia recorded the lowest temperature in the lower 48 states on Saturday — a frigid minus 28F.

About 156,000 customers remained without power early

Sunday, mostly in the south, according to poweroutage.us, with Mississippi, Tennessee and Louisiana hardest hit.

In North Carolina, the National Park Service announced the closure of campgrounds and some beaches at the Outer Banks, a series of barrier islands off the coast of the southern state that are vulnerable to storms.

It said oceanfront structures were threatened, and a section of highway that threads through its dunes was closed. In Mississippi, Governor Tate Reeves said the US Army Corps of Engineers helped to install generators at critical sites, and authorities were opening 79 shelters and warming centres across the state.

The freezing weather forced Nasa to postpone a key fuelling test over the weekend of the 322-foot rocket that is on the Cape Canaveral launch pad in Florida.

That in turn is likely to push back by at least a couple of days a planned manned Moon flyby slated for this month. — AFP

OPINION

Linguistic landscapes open new pathways in education



SANDHYA RAO MEHTA

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In an age which is as transformational as it is transforming, education needs to evolve to remain effective and productive.

Traditional teaching methods tend to rely heavily on content learning from textbooks. However, these are no longer sufficient to engage learners today. This is true for many areas, including language learning.

Research has shown that language is best learnt when used in real life contexts, not by rote learning grammar or sentence rules.

In fact, today, English, as other languages, is used primarily for communication purposes and this has changed the way that it is taught in schools and institutes of higher education.

An effective way to include real world opportunities to learn language is by using linguistic landscapes. This basically means using the visible language around us: street signs, billboards, shop names, and even digital displays. In linguistic landscape research, these are considered to be texts.

In a research conducted by a team at Sultan Qaboos University, such linguistic landscapes are being investigated for their potential for language learning, as well as for

more advanced linguistics studies. In fact, such studies are of direct relevance to urban designers, tourism specialists, as well as policy-makers.

The team explored various centres of tourist and heritage importance in Muscat and surrounding areas to investigate ways in which the signs around these places could help to develop English language proficiency among undergraduate students.

According to Dr Victoria Tuzlukova, the principal investigator of this project, the study “began with a detailed assessment of the number of languages present, their distribution and the structural features of bilingual signage, based on their digital images.

At the qualitative stage, the signs were further categorised and interpreted in relation to their potential for inclusive task-based English language teaching and collaborative experiential learning.”

The study was divided into 4 stages: a pre-visit linguistic awareness task, an on-site or virtual language collection task, a post-visit collaborative meaning-making task and finally, a role-play and simulation task.

Through all stages, students were made aware of language use around them, through

hoardings, street signs and boards on heritage buildings. They would then either be taken to such a site or they would digitally explore a unique place, usually in groups.

The teams would then come together to share their findings on the way that language is used, identifying important and frequently used words and phrases, documenting them and creating a reading list with meanings.

The project concluded that using the linguistic landscape as a teaching and learning tool enhances engagement. Students feel more motivated when learning is connected to their surroundings and personal experiences. Instead of memorising isolated words from a textbook, they interact with meaningful language-in-use which they encounter daily. This approach also supports experiential learning, where students actively construct knowledge rather than passively receiving information.

Increasingly, innovative teaching methods are becoming vital to rethinking education. By embracing approaches like the use of linguistic landscapes, educators can create dynamic, inclusive and effective learning environments that prepare students not only to learn English, but to use it confidently in everyday life.

In a study conducted by a team at SQU, linguistic landscapes are being explored for their potential in language learning as well as in advanced linguistic research

STARMER BLENDS DIPLOMACY WITH CULTURE IN CHINA

British Prime Minister Keir Starmer concluded an official visit to China on Saturday — a four-day tour of Beijing and Shanghai that he described as “historic”. While in the country, Starmer discussed trade, football and elephants with Chinese leader Xi Jinping. Here is what to know about the trip.

Starmer is the first British prime minister to visit China in eight years.

“They say that eight days is a long time in politics. Try eight years,” he said upon arriving in Beijing.

Starmer met with Chinese officials, including Xi, on Thursday. The two leaders spoke for about three hours — longer than initially scheduled, Downing Street noted.

Clouding the visit was criticism by US President Donald Trump, who warned that rapprochement between London and Beijing was “very dangerous”.

Speaking to business leaders, Starmer summarised his goal in China with a parable.

“President Xi tells the story of blind men being presented with an elephant. One touches the leg and thinks it’s a pillow. Another feels the belly and thinks it’s a wall,” Starmer said.

“Too often this reflects how China is seen. But I profoundly believe that broader and deeper engagement, which we’ve been talking about all this week, is our way of seeing the whole elephant and therefore building a more sophisticated relationship fit for these times.”

Xi echoed calls for engagement, telling Starmer the countries should “strengthen dialogue and cooperation”.

Starmer rarely misses an opportunity to discuss the English Premier League, the world’s most-watched football competition, with his foreign counterparts.

On Thursday, Starmer presented Xi Jinping with a football from a recent match between Arsenal — Starmer’s favourite club — and Manchester United, which Xi reportedly supports.

Xi, often characterised by Chinese state media as an avid reader of world literature in his youth, also discussed Shakespeare, Starmer said.

Starmer faces a challenging situation at home, where he is striving to deliver on campaign promises to reduce undocumented immigration, boost growth and combat the high cost of living.

While in China, Starmer touted the benefits his visit would have for British people, including visa-free travel for UK citizens on stays of less than 30 days, Downing Street said.

A spokesman for Beijing’s foreign ministry specified that the measure will come into effect “at an appropriate time upon completing the necessary procedures”. — AFP

Deep learning drives greater career success

In today’s rapidly changing world, higher-order thinking skills, such as problem-solving and critical thinking, are valued by employers far more than basic skills like fact recall and memorisation (Burbach et al., 2004; O’Leary, 2017). In 2020, the World Economic Forum (WEF, 2020, p. 5) reported that “The top skills and skill groups which employers see as rising in prominence in the lead up to 2025 include groups such as critical thinking and analysis as well as problem-solving, and skills in self-management such as active learning, resilience, stress tolerance and flexibility.” Mio and Dombi (2023) further emphasise these evolving skill demands.

According to the Pennsylvania Department of Education’s Focus on Effective Instruction page (2021): “The most effective and equitable way to support students in their learning is to ensure the majority of time is spent engaging with grade-level content, remediating with precision and only as necessary. It is entirely possible to hold high expectations for all students while addressing unfinished learning in the context of grade-level work. Since time is a scarce commodity in classrooms, strategic instructional choices about which content to prioritise must be made.

In addition, Research on Student Approaches to Learning traces back to the concept of surface learning. This approach is characterised by shallow and limited interaction with educational material, where students rely heavily on memorisation to reproduce information exactly as required for assessments, rather than striving for a thorough understanding. Motivation in this approach is often externally driven, influenced by fear of failure or the need to meet minimal course requirements, rather than by genuine interest or intrinsic curiosity



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in the subject (Biggs, Kember, & Leung, 2001). Consequently, learners adopting a surface approach typically focus only on the specified curriculum content, overlooking additional resources that could enhance their understanding. Such a narrow and goal-focused strategy may hinder long-term memory retention and reduce the learner’s ability to apply knowledge effectively across different contexts.

Conversely, the Pennsylvania Department of Education (2019) describes deep learning as a process in which students engage in higher-order thinking — creativity, analysis, synthesis and evaluation — while connecting new ideas to prior knowledge. This process is supported by skill-focused guidance, purposeful reflection time, and well-designed activities aligned with clear outcomes and assessment criteria. Extended project-based tasks foster deeper understanding and collaboration, while effective pacing sustains engagement without overwhelming learners. Structured scaffolding, reinforced with

optional support materials, enables students to meet higher academic expectations.

In summary, surface learning is typified by a minimal level of engagement, with students focusing primarily on memorisation and recall passing assessments, often motivated by external factors such as fear of failure or simply meeting course requirements. This approach tends to limit the learner’s capacity for long-term retention and the flexible application of knowledge across contexts. Conversely, deep learning encourages active, critical and thoughtful interaction with content, emphasising higher-order thinking skills including creativity, analysis, synthesis and evaluation. Intrinsically motivated by genuine curiosity, deep learners seek to integrate new information with existing knowledge and extend their studies beyond the core curriculum. Ultimately, while surface learning may yield short-term academic gains, deep learning fosters enduring intellectual development and meaningful comprehension.

The story behind employee’s ID



ABDULAZIZ
AL JAHDHAMI

The writer is author, translator and communications professional

EVERY morning, millions of people wake before sunrise, pack their lunches in silence, hug their families and step into workplaces hoping their efforts will be valued. Too often, that hope is misplaced. Instead of being treated as human beings, some employees are handled like replaceable objects — machines that can be switched off or furniture discarded when worn out.

In the corners of such workplaces sits a broken chair. No one asks how long it served or how many people depended on it. It is simply replaced. Now imagine human beings treated the same way. Sadly, this is already happening! Employees are managed like machines, tables, or pieces of furniture, as if they were objects rather than people. This mindset ignores one simple truth that people are not things.

Machines are powered by electricity. Furniture remains silent no matter how heavy the load. Employees, however, run on energy, motivation, health and hope. When employers expect endless output without rest, appreciation, or understanding, workers begin to break — not mechanically, but emotionally and mentally.

In many workplaces, employees are described as “assets” of an organisation. While the term may be intended to signal importance, problems arise when people are treated the same way as objects that can be used, replaced, or discarded. Machines and equipment are designed to perform specific

functions. They do not feel stress, fatigue, or injustice.

However, employees do. They are human beings with emotions, families, ambitions and limits. When workers are treated merely as tools for production, employers fail to recognise that respect, motivation, rest and fairness are essential for sustained performance.

The damage does not stop at the workplace door. It follows employees’ home, sits with them at dinner tables and echoes in conversations cut short by worry. Children sense it. Partners feel it. Families live with the fear of sudden unemployment and the weight of unpaid bills. A workplace that treats employees like furniture may see short-term productivity, but this is rarely sustainable. Over time, morale declines, absenteeism increases and staff turnover rises. Constantly replacing employees is costly and disruptive, weakening teamwork, efficiency and institutional knowledge.

Moreover, a lack of empathy creates toxic work environments. Trust between management and employees erodes, conflicts become common, and organisations damage not only morale but also their reputation and long-term success.

When large numbers of workers are treated as objects rather than human beings, society feels the impact. Stress-related health problems increase. Families struggle under the pressure of overwork and insecurity. Communities lose stability. A society that tolerates the dehumanisation of workers

In many workplaces, employees are described as “assets” of an organisation. While the term may be intended to signal importance, problems arise when people are treated the same way as objects that can be used, replaced, or discarded

risks normalising unfair labour practices and eroding respect for human dignity.

Yet there is another way — and we know it. Imagine workplaces where people are listened to, not monitored every second. Where struggling employees are supported, not replaced. Where success is measured not only by profit, but by well-being. This is not an unrealistic dream. Organisations that respect workers see stronger commitment and better results.

People work harder when they feel valued. They stay longer when they are treated with dignity. Employees should be recognised not merely as assets, but as partners in an organisation’s success. Fair wages, reasonable working hours, opportunities for growth and respect for work-life balance are not luxuries; they are necessities. When workers are treated with dignity, they are more engaged, productive and committed.

Human-centred workplaces benefit everyone. Employees feel valued. Businesses thrive. Society becomes more just and stable. Humanity is not a cost; it is an investment. Somewhere along the way, we forgot that behind every employee ID card is a life.

A chair can be replaced. A machine can be repaired. But when a human being is broken by unfair treatment, the damage runs deep. Employees are not furniture filling office space; they are the heart of every organisation. Let us build workplaces where people return home tired but respected, busy but valued — employed but never dehumanised.

CLIMATE CHANGE PUTS NORWAY’S LOVE OF SKIING TO TEST

PIERRE-HENRY DESHAYES

Skiers swish down the slope, no sun or sky in sight. It may be the middle of winter high up in the North, but lack of snow has Norwegians flocking to an indoor ski centre near Oslo.

In Norway, the saying goes that babies are born with skis on their feet. With the opening ceremony of the Milan-Cortina Winter Olympics approaching, the Scandinavian country has won the most Winter Olympic medals.

But how long can Norway’s success last? With shorter winters and less snow, will Scandinavians be able to continue to practice their favourite pastime, and will their athletes continue to dominate?

By the end of this century, Norwegian winters are expected to be 2 to 3C warmer, and the ski season, defined by at least 25 centimetres of snow, between one and three months shorter depending on the location. “Most of Norway’s habitation is in coastal areas and in these areas we are actually seeing that many of the towns will not have any winter as we know it in the future,” climatologist Hans Olav Hygen said.

In Oslo, the winter season already lasts a month less than 30 years ago. There’s not always snow on the neighbourhood ski slopes, and school outings to teach kids the basics are becoming rarer.

“We already see the change from skiing being a mass sport in Norway to more and more people that are not used to skiing and don’t use skiing as a winter recreational activity,” Hygen said.

From 2014 to 2024, memberships in ski clubs tumbled by 37 per cent, according to the national ski federation. Other factors have also contributed to the decline, including people spending more time on screens, higher costs and youths drawn to other sports with famous Norwegian athletes, such as football (Erling Braut Haaland), tennis (Casper Ruud) and golf (Viktor Hovland).

“With the challenge posed by climate change, a lot of people are turning to other activities that are more predictable and accessible,” said Marit Gjerland of the ski federation.

Seeing the writing on the wall, Norway launched a “Snow for the Future” project nearly 10 years ago to explore sustainable solutions for producing artificial snow. “In order to preserve the ski culture, it is essential to have access to snow where people live,” Gjerland said.

“There is of course always snow in the mountains, but that’s far for people. We want to bring it to the people.”

Current snow-making machines typically require temperatures of -2 to -3C for water droplets to freeze. In Trondheim, the Sintef research institute has worked on solutions that function in temperatures above freezing, similar to a refrigerator. — AFP

With Trump silent, last US-Russia N-pact to end

COME Thursday, barring a last-minute change, the final treaty in the world that restricted nuclear weapon deployment will be over. New START, the last nuclear treaty between Washington and Moscow after decades of agreements dating to the Cold War, is set to expire, and with it restrictions on the two top nuclear powers.

The expiration comes as President Donald Trump, vowing “America First,” smashes through international agreements that limit the United States, although in the case of New START, the issue may more be inertia than ideology.

Russian President Vladimir Putin in September suggested a one-year extension of New START. Trump, asked afterwards by a reporter for a reaction while he was boarding his helicopter, said an extension “sounds like a good idea to me” - but little has been heard since.

Putin ally Dmitry Medvedev, who as Russia’s president signed New START with counterpart Barack Obama in 2010, said in a recent interview with the Kommersant newspaper that Russia has received no “substantive reaction” on New START but was still giving time to Trump.

A White House official said on condition of anonymity that Trump would like to see “limits on nuclear weapons and involve China in arms control talks.”

The way to do that, the official said, Trump “will clarify on his own timeline.”

Daryl Kimball, Executive Director of the Arms Control Association, which supports reducing nuclear risks, said Trump’s second administration, which has sidelined career diplomats and entrusted decision-making only to a handful of people, is not functioning in a normal way that would allow complex negotiations.

Trump “seems to have the right instinct on this issue but has thus far failed to follow through with a



An unarmed Trident II D5 missile is test-launched from the Ohio-class US Navy ballistic missile submarine USS Nebraska off the coast of California, on March 26, 2018. — Reuters file photo



SHAUN TANDON

The writer covers the State Department for the international news agency AFP

coherent strategy,” Kimball said.

Jon Wolfsthal, director of global risk at the Federation of American Scientists, said Trump and Putin could pick up the phone and agree immediately at a political level to extend New START.

“This is a piece of low-hanging fruit that the Trump administration should have seized months ago,” he said.

Wolfsthal is among experts involved in the “Doomsday Clock” meant to symbolise how near humanity is to destruction. It was recently moved closer to midnight in part due to New START’s demise.

Trump called in October for the United States to resume nuclear testing for the first time in more than 30 years, although it is not clear he will carry it out.

Russia in 2023 already suspended a key element of New START, allowing inspections, as relations deteriorated sharply with US President Joe Biden’s administration over Russia’s war of Ukraine.

Alexander Khramchikhin, a Russian military analyst, said the two powers already had indicated they will do as they like.

“It’s clear that the treaty has reached its end,” he said. “It’s just an empty formality that will disappear.”

Vassily Kashin, director of the Center for Comprehensive European and International Studies in Moscow, said Russia would watch if the United States ramps up its nuclear arsenal and, if so, would decide measures in response. “But if the Americans don’t take any drastic measures, such as installing warheads, Russia will most likely simply wait, observe and remain silent,” he said.

New START restricted Russia and the United States to a maximum of 1,550 deployed strategic nuclear warheads each - a reduction of nearly 30 per cent from the previous limit set in 2002.

It also limits launchers and heavy bombers to 800 each, although the number is still easily enough to destroy Earth.

During his first term, also faced with New START’s expiration, Trump insisted a new treaty bring in China - whose arsenal is fast growing, although well below the other two powers. A US negotiator even provocatively put an empty chair with a Chinese flag.

SPORTS

SHORT TAKES



The instructor conducts a live match simulation, demonstrating foul judgement and movement techniques. — **Khalfan al Ruzaiqi**

BASKETBALL REFEREES CAMP CONCLUDES

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, FEB 1

The basketball referees training camp concluded successfully yesterday at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex, organised by the Referees Committee of the Oman Basketball Association in coordination with FIBA Asia, as part of ongoing efforts to enhance the technical and officiating standards of local referees.

The three-day camp brought together 40 male and female referees and was supervised by Kuwaiti Asian lecturer Mohammed al Omairi, who delivered a comprehensive programme combining both theoretical sessions and practical applications aimed at refining officiating skills and updating participants on the latest developments in the game’s rules.

In his closing remarks, Ahmed bin Hamad al Khusaibi, Chairman of the Referees Committee, expressed satisfaction with the camp’s success, describing it as part of the committee’s strategic plan to strengthen referees’ knowledge and capabilities. He emphasised that such specialised programmes provide an ideal platform for exchanging expertise, applying rule updates, and improving overall officiating performance, which he described as a fundamental pillar in the development of basketball in Oman. He also praised the Board’s support and wished the participants continued progress in their refereeing careers.

The camp’s sessions and workshops covered a wide range of topics, including the latest amendments to the Laws of the Game, the activation of the Instant Replay System (IRS), officiating mechanics, decision-making procedures, and administrative skills such as time management, handling match pressure, and mental and physical preparedness. Practical components focused on court positioning, Individual Officiating Techniques (IOT), foul standards, misconduct situations, and other modern officiating updates, ensuring referees are fully prepared to manage matches at both local and regional levels.

SPORT REPORTER
MUSCAT, FEB 1

Al Musannah and Fanja returned to the Jindal League through the gates of determination and persistence, securing the two promotion spots before the curtain fell on the season, while fine margins and misfortune denied Al Wahda, Muscat, Nizwa and Jaalan in the closing stages.

Al Musannah was not satisfied with promotion alone, but crowned themselves champions with two rounds to spare after raising their tally to 32 points, thanks to a decisive 1-0 victory over Nizwa in the title-deciding match. Fanja, meanwhile, claimed the

second ticket with 25 points after a valuable goalless draw against Al Wahda in the final round, a result that proved enough to seal their return to the top flight.

The league witnessed fierce competition from the outset, with positions changing hands several times. However, as the finish line approached, Al Musannah and Fanja gradually pulled away at the top to confirm their merit and rightful promotion.

Al Musannah entered the season with a clear vision, relying on a national technical staff led by coach Hussein Al Saadi, who was granted full confidence to build a team for the future through a blend of youthful



Al Musannah, champions of the First Division League.

talent and experienced players.

The team delivered a balanced campaign marked by away victories, defensive solidity and strong tactical cohesion. As the decisive

rounds approached, Al Musannah handled the pressure with composure, putting together a series of positive results that gave them an early advantage before officially confirming

Tawar crowned champions of 11th SKC tournament



A group photo of the top four place winners. — **Khalfan al Ruzaiqi**

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, FEB 1

QATAR'S Tawar Club emerged champions of the 11th Shotokan Karate Centre(SKC) Open Championship, staged as part of the Muscat Nights festival, while hosts Shotokan Karate Centre finished runners-up at the conclusion of the tournament at Ahli Sidab Sports Hall in Darsait.

The two-day event featured intense and action-packed contests, bringing together 400 male and female athletes from 10 countries representing 24 clubs and academies, who competed in kata and kumite (sparring) across various age groups.

The closing ceremony and prize presentation were held under the patronage of Dr Faisal Al Maawali, Chairman of the Oman Karate Committee, who crowned the winners and honoured the top-performing teams.

OVERALL STANDINGS

In the overall club rankings, Tawar Club topped the standings with 49 medals, including 26 gold, 15 silver and 8 bronze medals, earning the championship trophy and a cash prize of RO 1,000.

SKC finished second with an impressive total of 99 medals (13 gold, 18 silver and 68 bronze), receiving the runners-up trophy and RO 750.

The Champ Sports & Arts secured third



place with 35 medals (13 gold, 6 silver and 16 bronze), while Emperor Club placed fourth with 20 medals (8 gold, 6 silver and 6 bronze).

The final day featured a series of strong contests across youth and senior categories. In the men’s over-30 kata, Yaseen al Lawati of Karate Champions Club claimed first place.

In the men’s over-30 kumite, Hamza al Kaabi of Al Qudra Club won gold. In the under-30 kumite (-65 kg), Idrees Al Batrani of Karate Champions Club secured first place. In the under-30 kata, Jishnu Balachandran captured the gold medal, Mohammed.

WOMEN'S CATEGORIES

In the women’s senior kumite (18 years and above), Aster Rai secured first place.

In the 18 years and above kata division, Kajol Majdi Mwiangi won gold, Hemlata Ranjit finished secon.

Hosting the Shotokan Championship within Muscat Nights adds real value to



karate both locally and internationally. It helps expand the sport’s reach, highlights national talents, and gives players vital opportunities for competition and experience. Our focus is not only on winning titles, but on spreading the game and developing athletes through continuous tournaments, training programs, and international participation to strengthen karate across Oman.

Navas Mokeri, Chairman of the SKC, said the team’s second-place finish reflects years of hard work since the centre’s founding in 1999 at Ahli Sidab Club. He noted that Shotokan focuses on discipline and technical development, adding that the goal is to strengthen preparations and aim for first place in future editions.

He praised the tournament’s strong organisation and competitiveness, highlighting the participation of more than 400 players, and affirmed the centre’s commitment to continuing to continue participating in and host international competitions to develop in Oman.

Al Musannah and Fanja return to Jindal League next season

the title with another win over Nizwa on the closing night. They ended the season with impressive numbers: 10 wins in 14 matches, the strongest defence in the competition, and an efficient attack led by several standout performers, collecting 32 points and returning to the top tier as deserved champions after proving themselves the most consistent and well-prepared side.

Fanja... a return built on intelligence and patience

Fanja’s season, in contrast, was full of ups and downs. A shaky start was followed by a change in the technical staff, with Ibrahim Al Anbouri taking charge, marking the beginning of

their true resurgence.

The team relied more on fighting spirit than star names and managed to secure crucial points away from home. Heading into the final rounds, Fanja knew that any slip could cost them their dream, so they approached each match with careful calculations. and earned a valuable point that guaranteed the second promotion spot.

They finished the season with 25 points, and their steady upward trajectory proved that their return was no coincidence, but rather the result of coordinated administrative and technical work that restored Fanja to their natural place among the elite.

SHORT TAKES



Oman Basketball Association Crowns Sohar Festival Winners.

OBA CROWNS SOHAR FESTIVAL BASKETBALL CHAMPIONS

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, FEB 1

The Oman Basketball Association (OBA) continued its efforts to promote the game and strengthen its community presence by organising the Second Sohar Festival Championship, alongside the 3x3 Basketball Championship for Athlete Development Centres, as part of the sporting activities accompanying the Sohar Festival. The competitions were held in a vibrant and competitive atmosphere, with strong crowd attendance reflecting the growing popularity of basketball across the governorates of the Sultanate of Oman.

The matches took place on the mobile court at the Sohar Entertainment Centre in Sohar, where visitors enthusiastically engaged with the games. The venue transformed into a lively sporting hub, full of energy and movement, embodying the spirit and ambition of youth.

Before the awards ceremony, held under the patronage of Eng Khalfan bin Saleh al Naabi, Chairman of the Association, spectators witnessed the decisive finals of both tournaments.

3X3 CENTRES FINAL

The final of the Athlete Development Centres 3x3 Championship was intense and evenly matched, featuring a showdown between Al Nujoom (The Stars) and Fast Break. The game was marked by high tempo, disciplined defence, and quick offensive transitions. Both teams exchanged points throughout the contest, before Al Nujoom capitalised on key opportunities in the closing minutes to secure an 8-6 victory and claim the title.

SOHAR FESTIVAL FINAL

Meanwhile, the final of the Second Sohar Festival Championship brought together Old School and Super Science in a thrilling and closely contested encounter. Both sides delivered a strong technical performance, showcasing experience and composure, with continuous scoring exchanges and solid defensive displays. In the decisive moments, Old School asserted their advantage to seal a 14-11 win and lift the championship trophy.

At the conclusion of the competitions, Eng Khalfan al Naabi crowned the winning teams. In the 3x3 Centres Championship, Al Nujoom secured first place after an impressive performance throughout the tournament, while Fast Break finished second and Sohar claimed third place.

In the Second Sohar Festival Championship, Old School lifted the title, with Super Science settling for second place and Al Salam completing the podium in third.

The organisation of both tournaments comes as part of the Association's strategy to expand participation, discover young talent, promote a culture of competition, and support community and sporting events that contribute to energising the sports movement in the wilayat, while reinforcing basketball's position as an accessible and inclusive sport for all.



OAA Managing Director Sulaiman al Rawahi handing over the winner's trophy to Tommy Kiely.

Kiely clinches OIDC Round 2 honours

ANUROOP ATHIPARAMBATH
[@anuroop_ath](#)

IRISH DRIFTER Tommy Kiely claimed the top honours in the second round of the Oman International Drift Championship (OIDC) 2026 at the weekend. Compatriot Conor Shanahan took second spot while Abdulla Hamada of Jordan finished third at the Muscat Drift Arena.

Kiely, who finished second in the first round, now leads the standings for the overall championship ahead of the third and concluding round on February 5 and 6.

In the Middle East and North Africa (Mena) category, Abdulla Hamada came on top followed by Khalifa al Falasi of the United Arab Emirates in second and Dany Neville of Lebanon in third position.

In the national category, Haitham al Hadidi took the top spot beating Round 1 topper Ahmed al Amri into second while Tariq al Shaihani claimed third spot.

Adrienne Wheatley of Ireland bagged the Ladies Cup for the second round.

The Oman Automobile Association organised OIDC 2026 completed the second round in front of a packed house as 54 drifters entered the qualifying round on January 29 at the Muscat Drift Arena.

Round One winner Ahmed Daham of Jordan, Dutch drifters Sebastian Fontijn and Clint van Oort, former champion Ali Makseed of Kuwait, Benediktas Cirba of Lithuania and Nasser al Harbali were all among those who made it to the Top 32 after the qualifying hurdle.

Tommy Kiely, Conor Shanahan, Abdullah



Celebrating with the winning player.



Car show before the start of the championship.



A shot from the drift championship.

Hamada, Sebastian Fontijn, Jack Shanahan, Nasser al Harbali, Robert Babagulian and Khalifa al Falasi made it to the Top 8.

Kiely, Conor, Hamada and Fontijn progressed to the Top 4. Kiely and Conor set up the final battle in which Kiely triumphed to take the title.

OAA Managing Director Suleiman al Rawahi gave away the trophies to the top-three winners in the different categories.

FOUR OMANIS IN TOP 32

Four Omanis – Ahmed al Amri, Haitham al Hadidi, Riyad al Mabsli and Tariq al Shaihani – qualified for the Top 32. Seven local drifters vied in the qualifying for the second round including Haitham al Hadidi, Ali al Shaihani, Waqqas al Saud, Ali al Balushi, Tariq al Shaihani, Ahmed al Amri and Sultan al Balushi.

The first day of the championship on January 28, was dedicated to qualifying rounds, where drivers competed to secure their positions in the finals. The day two (January 29), featured the Top 32 battles, followed by Top 16, Top 8, with the final head-to-head Twin Drift battles as motorsport fans enjoyed the high-adrenaline competition held as part of Muscat Nights Festival.

The event is being organised by the OAA under the chairmanship of Brigadier Jamal bin Said al Tai, managing director Sulaiman al Rawahi and race director Fahmi al Busaidy. Shell is the main sponsor.

The event was supported by comprehensive logistical preparations and world-class spectator facilities, ensuring an exceptional experience for the large crowds that flocked to the OAA facility.

Ekitike double as Liverpool crush Newcastle to end slump

LIVERPOOL: Liverpool's Hugo Ekitike struck twice in two minutes to spark Arne Slot's side to a 4-1 comeback win over Newcastle United on Saturday for the champions' first Premier League victory in over a month.

Florian Wirtz and Ibrahima Konate scored in the second half to help Liverpool climb to fifth in the table with 39 points, 14 behind leaders Arsenal, as Newcastle fell to 10th on 33.

Newcastle started briskly and

Anthony Gordon scored his first league goal in open play for more than a year in the 36th minute as the visiting fans eyed a first victory at Anfield since 1994.

The optimism was short-lived, however, as Ekitike turned the game on its head with goals in the 41st and 43rd minutes.

Ekitike scored with a stab home at the near post after Wirtz worked the ball into the box before pulling it back for the Frenchman who then latched onto a ball



down the line from Milos Kerkez and poked it into the far corner to put the hosts ahead.

Wirtz struck in the 67th minute with a shot in off the far post after a one-two with Mohamed Salah and Konate, whose father died this month, scored deep into stoppage time to complete the rout. Konate, who missed two games – including Wednesday's 6-0 thrashing of Qarabag – could turn their league fortunes around. — Reuters

"I know that the team had some injured players, and the manager said to take my time and I don't have to rush back," Konate said. "It was important for me to come back and help the team."

Slot's team had not won a league match in their previous five attempts, but hoped their Champions League victories over the last two weeks – including Wednesday's 6-0 thrashing of Qarabag – could turn their league fortunes around. — Reuters

SPORTS

CARLOS ALCARAZ swept past Novak Djokovic to win his first Australian Open on Sunday and become the youngest man to complete a career Grand Slam, denying the Serbian great an unprecedented 25th major. The Spaniard was imperious after a slow start in dismissing the 38-year old, 2-6, 6-2, 6-3, 7-5 on Rod Laver Arena to claim a seventh Slam title and cement himself as undisputed world number one.

In doing so, he became the youngest man in the Open era to win all four majors, adding to his two titles each from Wimbledon and the French and US Opens.

At 22, he surpassed legendary countryman Rafael Nadal — in the crowd to witness the feat — who was two years older when he did the same.

A seventh Slam put him alongside John McEnroe and Mats Wilander and one behind Andre Agassi, Jimmy Connors and Ivan Lendl.

“It’s an honour to be here in Melbourne every year,” Alcaraz said, before writing on a TV camera lens: “Job finished. Four out of four complete.”

“So I just want to say thank you very much for pushing me in the tough moments during the matches.”

He paid tribute to Djokovic. “You were talking about how I’m doing the things I am, but what you’re doing is really inspiring, not only for tennis players but athletes around the world.”

It was a first defeat for Djokovic in a Melbourne final, having won all 10 previously, leaving him still searching for a landmark 25th major to better Australia’s Margaret Court, who was also watching on centre court.

Djokovic, striving to become the oldest man to lift a Grand Slam singles trophy, last won one at the US Open in 2023. Since then Alcaraz and Jannik Sinner have shared the spoils.

“I must be very honest and say that I didn’t think I would be standing in the closing ceremony of a Grand Slam again so I owe you the gratitude of pushing me forward in the last couple weeks,” Djokovic said, speaking to the fans in the stadium.

He went on to hint this could be his last time at Melbourne Park.

“God knows what happens tomorrow, let alone in six months or 12 months, so it has been a great ride.”

He also joked with Nadal in the stands, saying: “There are too many Spanish legends. I feel like I was one against two tonight. It’s not fair.”

FATIGUE Both men battled through five long sets in their semifinals, Alcaraz against Alexander Zverev and Djokovic with Sinner, and recovery was always going to be key.

But they showed few signs of fatigue in another gladiatorial contest.

They both opened with comfortable holds before a double fault and netted forehand presented the first break point chance for Djokovic at 2-1.

Alcaraz saved it, but the aggressive fourth seed kept pressing and converted on his third, then consolidated for a 4-1 lead.

Djokovic was reading Alcaraz’s serve well and once he got in the rallies was authoritative, with a sensational forehand winner earning him two set points.

He claimed the set in a statement 33 minutes after a ninth unforced error from the top seed, having dominated the big moments.

It was vintage Djokovic, but Alcaraz came storming back, upping the tempo to break for 2-1 in the second set, pumping his fist when he saved a break point and held in the next game.

Djokovic put drops in his eyes and began rubbing them, unable to tame a now rampant Alcaraz who broke again for 5-2.

There were some sensational rallies that had the crowd on their feet in set three, which went with serve until Djokovic slapped a forehand wide under pressure to slip 2-3 behind.

He gamely saved four set points at 3-5 but with his energy levels dropping was unable to save a fifth as the Spaniard took control.

On the back foot, Djokovic then saved six break points in an 11-minute opening service game in set four to stay alive and kept fighting hard.

But Alcaraz ground him down and pounced as Djokovic served to stay in the match to seal a maiden Australian championship.

It ensured he remained world number one and Sinner two, with Djokovic moving up a place to three ahead of Zverev. — AFP



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BUSINESS

SHORTTAKES

SEZAD’S FIRST DUQM
NOW SESSION OF 2026
ON FEBRUARY 11

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, FEB 1



ENG AHMED
AKAAK

CEO, SEZAD

The Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD) will host the first Duqm Now session of 2026.

Titled, ‘Duqm Made’, the event will be held on Wednesday, February 11, 2026 at 7.30 pm at Crowne Plaza Duqm. Al Duqm is built for industry and in a trade environment where tariffs, compliance expectations and routing

decisions are evolving rapidly, industrial locations are increasingly judged on how well they convert output into exports, on time and with minimal friction. With its location on the Arabian Sea and proximity to major shipping lanes, Al Duqm is well placed to support companies looking for resilient routes and dependable operating conditions.

The backdrop is a global trading system that remains large, active and more politically and operationally complex.

UNCTAD estimates global trade reached a record level of more than \$35 trillion in 2025. At the same time, WTO economists have pointed to weaker prospects for 2026, noting the effects of higher tariffs and ongoing policy uncertainty. The IMF similarly expects trade policy uncertainty to remain elevated through 2026, including in relation to tariffs.

Commenting on the session, Eng Ahmed Akaak, CEO, SEZAD, said: “Duqm Made is about what turns production into dependable exports. We’ll follow the journey from output to shipment using real examples from major Duqm tenants, looking at what keeps standards consistent, operations running smoothly and goods moving quickly from factory gate to ship.

We’ll also cover the documentation, including emissions data, that buyers increasingly expect. If you build, invest, supply or support industrial activity, you’ll come away with a clear picture of what strong export performance looks like in practice”. Oman’s trade figures help explain why this operational focus matters.

NCSI data for January to October 2025 shows total merchandise exports of RO 19.3 billion (\$50 billion), while non-oil exports rose 9.9% to RO 5.6 billion (\$14.5 billion) compared with the same period of 2024, a reminder that a growing share of Oman’s export momentum is coming from the parts of the economy that rely on consistent, repeatable delivery.

February’s Duqm Now session will bring together investors, tenants, suppliers and partners to look at how competitiveness is built in practice, with attention to what gets measured, where time is saved and how delivery remains predictable as volumes grow.

OCCI, US eye technology, food investment sectors

FAISAL

ABDULLAH AL ROWAS, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), received on Sunday at the Chamber’s headquarters in Muscat a trade delegation from the United States.

The meeting aimed to strengthen economic and trade relations between the two friendly nations and explore opportunities for cooperation and joint investment to serve mutual interests and support economic diversification efforts.

During the meeting, both sides discussed horizons for expanding partnerships between the private sectors in Oman and the United States. They explored investment opportunities across several economic sectors, most notably manufacturing, environmental services, cybersecurity, oil and gas technology, alloy manufacturing and distribution, data analytics, semiconductors, food and agricultural products, and artificial intelligence (AI) applications.

Al Rowas emphasized that the Chamber accords great importance to strengthening economic partnerships with the United States, based on the deep historical relations between the two countries.

He noted that these ties offer genuine opportunities to expand cooperation between the private sectors and open new horizons for joint investment in strategic sectors, benefiting from the framework of the Free Trade



Oman and US agreed to explore opportunities for cooperation and joint investment.

Oman and US explored investment opportunities across several sectors including environmental services, cybersecurity, oil and gas technology, alloy manufacturing and distribution

Agreement (FTA) between Oman and the United States, which encourages bilateral investment.

He explained that the Chamber works to enhance trade and economic relations through the exchange of trade delegations and the organization of economic forums and meetings.

He also highlighted the role of the Omani Trade Office in the United States in connecting the Omani business community with its American counterparts to facilitate direct communication and build partnerships.

The OCCI Chairmen pointed out that this meeting represents an important opportunity to enhance communication between business owners and explore cooperation in manufacturing, technology, and innovation, in line with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040 aimed at diversifying income

sources and strengthening the private sector’s role in sustainable economic development.

Saud Ahmed Al Nahari, member of the OCCI Board of Directors, stated that this US trade delegation is the first to be dispatched to the Sultanate of Oman by the Omani Trade Office in the United States since its establishment last year.

He noted that the delegation targets two vital sectors: food security and agricultural industries, alongside advanced technical sectors such as semiconductors and cybersecurity.

He emphasized that bilateral meetings between Omani companies and their American counterparts constitute a significant step toward strengthening economic and trade relations and opening new avenues for cooperation in various investment fields. — ONA

AL SUWAIQ PORT CARGO TOPS 939,000 TONNES IN 2025, UP 25%

AL SUWAIQ: Al Suwaiq Port handled 939,682 tonnes of cargo in 2025, a 25% rise from 749,855 tonnes in 2024, reflecting improved operational efficiency and higher throughput, Oman News Agency reported.

The port, located in Al Batinah North Governorate, received 1,053 vessels during the year as it pursued initiatives to speed up handling and reduce berthing time by attracting ships with larger carrying capacity. Dry bulk volumes more than



Al Suwaiq Port received 1,053 vessels during the year

doubled to 528,599 tonnes in 2025 from 286,279 tonnes a year earlier, while shipments of foodstuffs — including vegetables, fruit and

meat — reached 144,353 tonnes, reinforcing the port’s role in supporting domestic supply chains and food security.

Eng Samir bin Ghulam al Balushi, Director of Al Suwaiq Port, said that 2025 saw cargo handling reach a record level close to one million tonnes, alongside upgrades to the operational area, the reorganisation of cargo yards and improved truck movement within the port to ease congestion and optimise storage space. — ONA

Genel Energy advances Block 54 development in Al Wusta

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, FEB 1

UK-based upstream energy company Genel Energy has announced the successful completion of the re-entry and workover of the Batha West-1 (BW-1) well in Block 54 in Oman’s Al Wusta Governorate — a key milestone that paves the way for a deeper understanding of the hydrocarbon potential of the onshore licence.

London-headquartered Genel Energy holds a 40% non-operating interest in the 5,632 km² concession, while OQ Exploration & Production (OQEP) — the upstream arm of OQ Group — holds the remaining 60% operating interest. Both parties signed an Exploration and Production Sharing Agreement (EPSA) with



Block 54 is considered high-potential but relatively underexplored. (Picture for illustration only)

the Omani government early last year to develop the block, also known as the Karawan Concession. Commenting on the company’s performance in the block in a recent trading and operations update, Paul Weir, Chief Executive of Genel, said: “On Block 54 in Oman, preliminary operational work has been completed safely, ahead of time and under budget. Work is ongoing to assess the accumulated data to inform the focus of our activities over the next two years, which will include drilling two wells”.

Weir added that the BW-1 well operation represents the first of several steps towards understanding the full potential of the licence. “Work is now underway to analyse the data collected and assess its implications for the location of

further activity on the block, including the acquisition of 3D seismic data and the drilling of two exploration wells over the next two years”.

In addition to testing the BW-1 discovery well, the joint venture partners have outlined a three-year work programme encompassing a borehole workover and formal well testing of multiple pay zones to confirm reservoir deliverability. This phase also includes 300 km² of 3D seismic acquisition and the drilling of two vertical exploration wells.

Located within the South Oman Salt Basin — a region associated with significant commercial discoveries — Block 54 is considered high-potential but relatively underexplored compared with neighbouring productive acreage.

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SHORTTAKES



BankDhofar organises workshop on Data Privacy and Electronic Transactions laws.

BANKDHOFAR
TRAINS ON DIGITAL
PRIVACY LAWS

MUSCAT: BankDhofar organised a specialised workshop, in cooperation with the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, highlighting the importance of the Data Privacy Law and the Electronic Transactions Law in strengthening digital trust. The event brought together a distinguished group of company representatives and experts from various sectors, including insurance, energy, real estate and financial services.

The workshop forms part of the bank's ongoing efforts to enable its partners and stakeholders to keep pace with legislative and technological developments that support business continuity and reinforce confidence in digital financial services, in line with BankDhofar's vision of promoting innovation and excellence in the banking sector.

The initiative aimed to raise awareness of the latest regulatory frameworks governing the protection of personal data and the management of electronic transactions, amidst the rapid acceleration of digital transformation in the Sultanate of Oman and the wider region.

Speaking at the event, Dr Khalid bin Salem al Hmoudi, Head of the Human Capital Group at BankDhofar, emphasised that the workshop reflects the bank's commitment to fostering a secure and trustworthy business environment.

He noted that compliance with data privacy and electronic transactions legislation is no longer optional, but a strategic imperative to safeguard customers and enable innovation in digital services.

"These legislations represent a cornerstone in building trust between institutions and their customers, providing a clear legal framework that mitigates both technical and legal risks", he added.

The workshop featured a series of panel discussions and presentations addressing key aspects of the Data Privacy Law, including individuals' rights to access personal data, mechanisms for data collection and processing; and the regulatory obligations placed on organisations.

Lexus Oman introduces innovative vehicle range

MUSCAT: Lexus continues to elevate the luxury automobile landscape in Oman with a model range that blends pioneering craftsmanship, bold design and progressive technologies. With its focus on exceptional quality and refined engineering, Lexus ensures that every journey in Oman becomes an experience defined by comfort, innovation and performance.

Customers can now explore the dynamic Lexus line-up at Lexus showrooms across Oman and discover a world of luxury, performance and state-of-the-art



Leading this impressive range is the LX700h, which introduces a new era of hybrid sophistication in the flagship SUV category.

CONNECT marks 40 years of
shaping exhibition sector

AS CONNECT marks 40 years of shaping Oman's exhibitions and conferences landscape, the milestone reflects far more than longevity. It stands as a testament to four decades of advancing industry dialogue, enabling business connections, accelerating knowledge exchange and positioning the Sultanate of Oman as a regional and international hub for investment, innovation and collaboration.

Founded in 1986, CONNECT has evolved in parallel with Oman's economic and social development, consistently delivering world-class platforms that support national priorities, drive sectoral growth and strengthen international engagement. Over time, its platforms have grown from standalone events into strategic, year-round ecosystems that actively contribute to economic development, policy dialogue and market advancement.

Today, CONNECT is not only the most established Oman-based event organiser, but also the largest. Its flagship events: Oman Petroleum & Energy Show (OPES), Oman Sustainability Week (OSW) and Oman Design & Build Week (ODBW), are currently the only events to



SAYYID KHALID
BIN HAMED
BIN HAMOUD
AL BUSAIDY

Executive
Chairman,
SABCO Group

In 2025 alone, CONNECT's events attracted more than 70,000 visits from over 40 countries, reinforcing Oman's growing role as a regional and global convening hub for high-impact industry dialogue.

occupy the entire Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC), including all exhibition halls, meeting rooms and ballrooms.

With demand continuing to grow, CONNECT anticipates the need to introduce temporary structures at its flagship events within the next two years to accommodate increasing international participation.

In 2025 alone, CONNECT's events attracted more than 70,000 visits from over 40 countries, reinforcing Oman's growing role as a regional and global convening hub for high-impact industry dialogue.

CONNECT's top-tier platforms: Oman Petroleum and Energy Show, Oman Sustainability Week; and Oman Design and Build Week, delivered a combined 70,955 visits in 2025, including 20,609 unique international attendees.

Based on an average stay of 2.5 nights, these events generated an estimated 27,905 hotel bed-nights, contributing over RO 2.5 million in direct economic impact, with wider tourism, hospitality, transport and services spending driving total economic benefits exceeding RO 4 million to the national economy.

Beyond economic impact, CONNECT's platforms are also recognised for their quality and

experience. In 2025, the average Net Promoter Score (NPS) across OPES and OSW reached +42, one of the highest event satisfaction scores in the region, reflecting strong international confidence in Oman's event ecosystem and CONNECT's delivery standards.

"Marking 40 years of CONNECT is a moment of great pride. Since its founding in 1986, CONNECT has grown from a pioneering idea into one of the region's most respected event organisers: a journey built on excellence, ambition and the dedication of exceptional people.

The company's recent international recognition reflects not only the quality of its platforms, but the values and professionalism behind them. As the industry evolves and new opportunities emerge, CONNECT is exceptionally well positioned to lead its next chapter with confidence and vision.

I extend my sincere appreciation to our partners and our teams, past and present, for their contributions to this remarkable journey". — Sayyid Khalid bin Hamed bin Hamoud al Busaidy — Executive Chairman, SABCO Group. "2026 marks CONNECT's 40th anniversary, a milestone we approach with pride and confidence in what the business represents today.

Oman Air takes delivery of new Boeing 737 Max-8

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, FEB 1

Oman Air has celebrated the arrival of its newest Boeing 737 MAX-8, the latest in a series of seven Boeing 787 and 737 deliveries received over the last 12 months.

This milestone brings the airline's total fleet to 33 aircraft, concluding a significant investment phase that has fuelled its recent network growth and increased flight frequencies.

The 737 Max-8, which joins Oman Air's narrowbody fleet, will operate to medium- and short-haul destinations,



The new Boeing 737 MAX-8 is the latest in a series of seven Boeing 787 and 737 deliveries received over the last 12 months

enabling the airline to serve its growing network with greater capacity, efficiency and

advanced technology for the years ahead. Designed with a strong focus on passenger

comfort and wellbeing, guests travelling on the B73 Max-8 will benefit from a notably quieter flight experience thanks to advanced noise-reduction engine technology alongside enhanced comfort features, while the aircraft's high-efficiency engines reduce fuel burn and carbon emissions, supporting sustainable growth while maintaining a premium, modern cabin environment.

Looking ahead, six new widebody aircraft are scheduled to join Oman Air's fleet from mid-2028, providing additional long-haul capacity and further strengthening its global connectivity.

CAUTIOUSBUDGET



India's Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman before leaving her office to present the annual federal budget in parliament in New Delhi. —Reuters

India budget pledges record \$133 billion to infrastructure

NEW DELHI: India will spend a record \$133 billion on infrastructure, the finance minister unveiled on Sunday in her national budget speech, with plans for new high-speed train links and tech investments.

The figure is an almost nine percent jump from last year's budget.

Data centres, artificial intelligence, and the mining and processing of rare earths will also receive government support, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman told parliament.

She said public expenditure had increased significantly from around \$21 billion in 2014-15 and that it was now at an "all-time high".

The world's most populous country sees massive infrastructure spending as key to sustaining its high growth rate by boosting domestic manufacturing and creating millions of new jobs.

"India is not content with simply being the fastest-growing economy," Prime Minister Narendra Modi said after the budget.

"India wants to become the world's third-largest economy. This year's budget presents an ambitious roadmap to give new momentum to" domestic manufacturing and self-reliance.

Sectors including textiles, pharmaceuticals, electronics and chemicals are primary targets to boost exports, Sitharaman said.

She promised the development of three chemical business parks, as well as mega textile hubs.

Around \$5 billion will also be allocated to boost domestic electronics manufacturing, she said.

It is the first budget since US President Donald Trump imposed 50 percent tariffs on most Indian imports in August. — AFP

OPEC+ agrees oil output pause extension move

OPEC+ has agreed in principle to keep its planned pause on oil output increases for March when it meets later on Sunday, according to three delegates and a draft statement seen by Reuters, even after crude prices hit six-month highs on concern the US could launch a military strike on OPEC member Iran.

The meeting of eight OPEC+ members comes as Brent crude closed near \$70 a barrel on Friday, close to the six-month high of \$71.89 reached on Thursday, despite speculation that a supply glut in 2026 would push prices down.

The eight producers — Saudi Arabia, Russia, the United Arab Emirates, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Iraq, Algeria and Oman — raised production quotas by about 2.9 million barrels per day from April through December 2025, roughly 3% of global demand.

They then froze further planned increases for January through March 2026 because of seasonally weaker consumption.

TRUMP WEIGHING OPTIONSSunday's meeting is not expected to take any decisions for output policy beyond March, sources said on Friday.

OPEC+ includes the Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, plus Russia and other allies. The full OPEC+ pumps about half of the world's oil.

A separate OPEC+ panel called the Joint Ministerial Monitoring Committee is also scheduled to meet on Sunday, delegates said. The JMMC does not have decision-making authority on production policy.

US President Donald Trump is weighing options on Iran that include targeted strikes against security forces and leaders, aiming to inspire protesters, multiple sources said on Thursday.

Washington has imposed extensive sanctions on Tehran to choke off its oil revenue, a crucial source of state funding.



Illustration shows oil pump miniature model and OPEC logo

Oil prices have also been supported by supply losses in Kazakhstan, where the oil sector has suffered a series of disruptions in recent months

Both the US and Iran have since signalled willingness to engage in dialogue, but Tehran on Friday said its defence capabilities should not be included in any talks.

Oil prices have also been supported by supply losses in Kazakhstan, where the oil sector has suffered a series of disruptions in recent months. Kazakhstan said on Wednesday it was restarting the huge Tengiz oilfield in stages.

The eight countries plan to hold their next meeting on March 1, the draft statement showed.

OPEC+ had previously decided in November 2025 to pause increases in oil production for the first quarter of 2026 (January-March) due to seasonally weaker demand, as part of efforts to manage supply and stabilise the market.

The pause comes amid concerns over market oversupply — analysis from some energy research organisations has warned of a potential oil supply surplus in early 2026, unless major supply disruptions occur.

Despite the planned pause, Brent

crude prices have risen toward multi-month highs this month — driven in part by supply concerns and weak demand forecasts — underscoring why producers are cautious about ramping up output.

Historical signals show OPEC+ has been balancing between gradually increasing output and pausing or rolling back increases depending on market signals — a strategy aimed at protecting prices while monitoring demand changes.

Meanwhile, lawyers for Diezani Alison-Madueke, the first woman president of OPEC, denied in a London court last week that the former Nigerian minister took bribes in their first formal response at her corruption trial.

The 65-year-old, who sat in the dock at Southwark Crown Court taking notes on the third day of the trial, is accused of multiple bribery counts stemming from a years-long investigation. The alleged offences occurred between 2011 and 2015, when she was Nigeria's oil minister but maintained a UK address.

— Reuters

Ammonia from Saudi Arabia to fuel Germany's green hydrogen plans

RIYADH: German and Saudi energy companies have signed an agreement to export ammonia, strengthening their partnership on green hydrogen.

A memorandum of understanding was signed in Riyadh on Sunday by Saudi firm ACWA Power, German energy supplier EnBW Baden-Württemberg, the northern German port of Rostock and gas importer VNG.

The deal was announced during a visit by German Economy Minister Katherina Reiche, who met Saudi Energy Minister Abdulaziz bin Salman.

Hydrogen produced in a climate-



The hydrogen and ammonia production plant in Yanbu is scheduled to start commercial operations in 2030.

neutral way, such as using solar power, can serve as a clean energy source. Under the plan, hydrogen will be exported from the Red Sea port of Yanbu to Rostock as ammonia, which is easier to transport and store. In Rostock, the ammonia will be converted back into hydrogen using a cracker developed by VNG.

The hydrogen and ammonia production plant in Yanbu is scheduled to start commercial operations in 2030. ACWA is also considering participating in developing and potentially financing ammonia infrastructure in Germany. — dpa

DEAL APPROVED

Trump: India will buy oil from Venezuela



US President Donald Trump said India will buy Venezuelan oil to help replace some Russian crude imports, Reuters reported, adding that the concept of the deal is already agreed. Trump spoke aboard Air Force One and also welcomed the idea of China striking a similar deal. Washington has eased some Venezuela oil sanctions to support such exports. — Reuters

TECH FIRM PULLS OUT

Capgemini to sell US unit



French tech firm Capgemini said on Sunday it is selling its US subsidiary, Capgemini Government Solutions. The move follows criticism over a contract with US immigration agency ICE amidst protests against President Trump's immigration policies. Capgemini said US legal constraints prevented it from fully controlling the subsidiary's operations to align with the group's objectives. — Reuters

PRIVATE SURVEY

China new home prices edge up in January



Average new home prices across 100 Chinese cities rose in January, while declines in the resale market eased, according to a private survey, following renewed government signals of support for the property sector. New home prices increased 0.18% month-on-month, slower than December's rise, with gains led by first- and second-tier cities, while lower-tier cities continued to see declines. — Reuters

OPINION

How leaders confuse confidence with clarity



KAMLA AL RAHBI

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

Leadership and economic decision-making, confidence is often mistaken for clarity. A decisive tone, firm language and the absence of visible doubt are frequently interpreted as evidence of sound judgment. Yet history shows that some of the most costly institutional failures were led by individuals who appeared entirely confident in their direction.

Confidence, in itself, is not a flaw. It is necessary for leadership, particularly in environments shaped by uncertainty, political pressure and economic constraints. The problem arises when confidence replaces clarity, rather than being built upon it. Clarity is rooted in understanding. It requires leaders to grasp not only what they believe, but why they believe it, what assumptions support that belief and what evidence challenges it. Confidence, by contrast, can exist without any of this. It can be sustained by repetition, authority, or past success, even when conditions have fundamentally changed.

In many organisations, confidence is rewarded more visibly than clarity. Leaders who speak assertively are perceived as capable. Those who pause, question, or reframe issues are often seen as hesitant. Over time, this dynamic encourages a culture where certainty is performative rather than analytical. This distinction matters because confident decisions are not necessarily clear decisions. A confident leader may move quickly, communicate decisively and align teams around a single

narrative, while still operating on an incomplete or outdated understanding of the problem. When this happens, execution may be strong, but direction is misaligned.

Institutions frequently confuse alignment with clarity. When everyone agrees, leaders assume the thinking must be sound. In reality, agreement often reflects shared assumptions rather than rigorous analysis. Teams align around what feels familiar, not necessarily what is accurate. The absence of challenge is interpreted as consensus and consensus is mistaken for insight.

Economic leadership amplifies this risk. In environments driven by performance indicators, quarterly targets and external scrutiny, confident narratives offer reassurance. They stabilise markets, calm stakeholders, and project control. Clarity, however, is less visible. It does not always produce immediate certainty. It often introduces complexity, trade-offs, and uncomfortable questions. As a result, leaders may unconsciously favour confidence over clarity, especially when pressure is high. They double down on familiar strategies, rely on past frameworks and frame emerging signals as temporary disruptions rather than structural shifts.

Confidence becomes a defence mechanism against uncertainty, not a response to understanding. The cost of this confusion is rarely immediate. Decisions made without clarity often succeed at first. Processes hold, metrics remain acceptable and institutional confidence grows. The problem emerges later, when conditions

Confidence, in itself, is not a flaw. It is necessary for leadership, particularly in environments shaped by uncertainty, political pressure and economic constraints.

evolve and the underlying assumptions no longer apply. At that point, leaders respond by reinforcing their confidence rather than reassessing their clarity. Organisations then enter a cycle where failure is attributed to execution, timing, or external factors, while the original thinking remains untouched.

Confidence hardens into rigidity. What was once decisiveness becomes resistance to re-evaluation.

Clarity requires a different form of leadership discipline. It demands the ability to distinguish between knowing and assuming, between familiarity and understanding. It requires leaders to tolerate ambiguity long enough to define the problem accurately before committing to a solution.

This is not indecision. It is intellectual responsibility. In economic and institutional contexts, clarity also involves recognising the limits of past success. Experience provides perspective, but it can also distort judgment when leaders assume continuity where none exists. Confidence built on yesterday's conditions cannot substitute for clarity about today's realities.

Strong leadership does not eliminate doubt. It manages it. It acknowledges uncertainty without being paralysed by it. Most importantly, it understands that confidence should be the outcome of clarity, not its replacement. When leaders confuse the two, institutions may appear stable while quietly drifting off course. When they are aligned correctly, confidence becomes credible, decisions become resilient and leadership regains its strategic depth.

MERGING MARKETS FACE HURDLES IN CUTTING EMISSIONS

GAVIN MAGUIRE

While North America and Europe race to build data centres to power 21st-century businesses, many emerging markets remain anchored to 20th-century industries such as steel, cement and plastics for jobs and economic growth.

That divergence is also shaping energy transition paths. In the United States and Europe, competition to lead in artificial intelligence and data processing is driving power system upgrades to deliver more electricity, more reliably. By contrast, many economies in Asia, Africa and the Middle East remain tied to power-hungry heavy industries focused on producing raw materials and consumer goods.

As a result, fossil fuels — particularly coal — are likely to retain a central role in their energy systems far longer than Western policymakers often assume.

Although Europe and the United States were once powered by heavy industry, decades of offshoring have shifted much of that production elsewhere. Since the 1990s, China has led the expansion of global capacity for metals, cement, chemicals, ceramics and glass, using those materials to build its world-leading manufacturing sector.

Other emerging economies, including Vietnam, Indonesia, Nigeria, Egypt, Türkiye and India, have followed similar development paths and are now major producers of raw materials.

Around three-quarters of global steel and chemicals production capacity is located in Asia, Africa, the Middle East and Latin America, according to Global Energy Monitor data.

For cement and clinker — key components of concrete — about 85% of global capacity lies outside North America and Europe.

These regions also account for nearly 90% of new steel, cement and chemicals capacity currently under construction.

Beyond low production costs, many of these countries are among the fastest-growing consumers of cement, steel and plastics.

Rising domestic demand, combined with expanding supply chains in transport, storage and processing, has reinforced the economic importance of basic materials industries and the jobs they support.

However, dependence on these sectors shapes national power systems. — Reuters

Global growth and the jobs dilemma

According to IMF projections, emerging markets and developing economies are growing at roughly 4 — 4.4 per cent, compared with developed economies at 1.6 — 1.8 per cent. The growth narrative reflects optimism and hope, yet millions of people worldwide will remain excluded from dignified, stable work. The central global challenge and conundrum facing economies is to achieve meaningful global growth and job-generating opportunities for both the young and the ageing populations worldwide.

Today, the world is facing an entanglement of technology, geopolitics, geo-economics and youth employment. In the next 10-15 years, emerging economies will see a billion people entering the job market while the current trajectories may create only a few hundred million jobs. In principle, investments must be made in infrastructure, both physical and capital, business policy refinement and catalytic financing for micro and macro businesses, where the majority of the jobs are created.

Once this is done and momentum is generated, then the flywheel will begin to run and job creation becomes self-sustaining. The emerging-market job engine needs to move beyond its reliance on outsourcing from developed economies amidst geopolitical escalations. The five sectors that can fuel this growth are infrastructure, primary healthcare, agriculture, tourism and value-added manufacturing. These sectors are relatively insulated from the AI factor though AI is reshaping them.

Talking about growth and jobs the president of Singapore, Tharman Shanmugaratnam recently stated, ‘amidst global challenges, security, global health, climate change and disruptions public policy must place peoples need for career security, dignified and meaningful at the centre. The Southeastern stories of success begin with reform from



DR MYTHILI KOLLURU

The writer is an assistant professor at the marketing and management department, CBFS

The real measure of growth lies not in its wealth but in its ability to create opportunities where people can participate in it through dignified, meaningful work



IMF: emerging markets and developing economies are growing at roughly 4 — 4.4 per cent, compared with developed economies at 1.6 — 1.8 per cent.

the school system at a young age, where the educational ecosystems provide pathways for people to excel based on their capabilities. We need to bridge the ‘parity of esteem’ between vocational and academic pathways.

The social and binary hierarchy must be reduced. Many perceive manufacturing as high-end only, despite the influence of AI countries like Vietnam and Brazil demonstrate that manufacturing is happening at the middle and lower levels of production. For example, if some countries, like China, face excess production, decant their production to Africa and other emerging economies this could create huge scope for manufacturing employment. Research has shown that the job multiplier from every \$1 invested in renewable energy is three times higher than in fossil fuels. Africa and South Asian countries are rich in solar, wind, hydro and thermal resources. This is a clear indicator that green transition is an employment generator for emerging economies.

The renewable energy sector offers opportunities for unskilled, semi-skilled and highly skilled professionals. Technology is a disruptor; emerging economies must engage with it innovatively so that it enables the systematic creation of jobs. If economies adopt a structured acceleration

approach, it could create millions of entrepreneurial and employment opportunities.

Africa will have a population of 200 million by 2050, constituting 25% of the worlds workforce. Africa is working towards stable and inclusive work. Nigeria is leveraging technology to empower the young. Nigeria has an approach called the ‘ward-based development programme’. It aims to identify the smallest political and administrative units within the municipality, empowering them to become more productive and generate more employment. Nigeria’s focus is on young people, women, dignity and human capital development.

The real measure of growth lies not in its wealth but in its ability to create opportunities where people can participate in it through dignified, meaningful work. Not only the job market but the very nature of jobs has changed with the proliferation of artificial intelligence (AI) and technology.

The next generation of employment must be differently skilled and there will be a departure from lifetime employment and traditional career paths towards flexible paths with many gig opportunities. Public policy and renewed focus on human capabilities can build economies where growth and employment opportunities reinforce each other.

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SPECIAL TRIBUTE

CATHERINE O’HARA, STAR OF ‘SCHITT’S CREEK’ AND ‘HOME ALONE’, DEAD AT 71



Catherine O'Hara, the shape-shifting Canadian comic actor whose characters ranged from the deliriously theatrical Moira Rose in “Schitt’s Creek” to the frantic mother in “Home Alone”, has died at 71 — prompting an outpouring of tributes led by her co-star Macaulay Culkin and Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney.

A representative from the office of her manager Marc Gurvitz confirmed the death of O'Hara, who earned the 2020 Emmy for best comedy actress, helping to propel “Schitt’s Creek” to TV awards season dominance at the 2021 Golden Globes.

The BBC, citing a statement from Creative Artists Agency, reported she died on Friday at her home in Los Angeles, following a brief illness.

O'Hara portrayed Kate McCallister, the mother of Macaulay Culkin's character in the movie “Home Alone”, and Delia Deetz in the film “Beetlejuice”. Culkin paid homage to O'Hara on the social media platform Instagram.

“Mama. I thought we had time. I wanted more. I wanted to sit in a chair next to you. I heard you. But I had so much more to say. I love you. I’ll see you later”, Culkin wrote alongside images of the two of them.

PRIME MINISTERS PAST AND PRESENT MOURN HER LOSS

Carney wrote on X: “I join Canadians and fans across the world in mourning the loss of Catherine O'Hara”.

His predecessor, former Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, called her “a beloved Canadian icon with a rare gift for comedy and heart” on X and added: “She made people laugh across generations”. His post included a photo of the two of them.

O'Hara was born on March 4, 1954 and grew up in Toronto as the sixth of seven children. She began her acting career in 1974 as a cast member of the improvisational theatre troupe called “The Second City” in Toronto.

She offered her voice for numerous animated projects, including Sally in “The Nightmare Before Christmas”, Pinktail in “The Wild Robot”, Brook Ripple in “Elemental” and multiple voices in “Frankenweenie”, including Mrs Frankenstein.

More recently, O'Hara joined the cast of Seth Rogen’s 2025 Hollywood satire series “The Studio” as Patty Leigh, the fired head of a Hollywood film studio. She also delved into some dramatic roles, including the 1997 film “Hope”.

O'Hara is survived by her husband Bo Welch, whom she met in 1987 on the set of “Beetlejuice” and their two sons. — Reuters

QUICK FEATURES



CARNIVAL

Masked revellers, wearing costumes celebrating Milano Cortina Winter Olympics 2026, pose on the first day of the Venice carnival, in Venice. — Reuters



FASHION

A model walks the runway during the Nairobi Fashion Week, an annual fashion event that showcases designers, at the Sarit Centre in Westlands, Nairobi. — Reuters



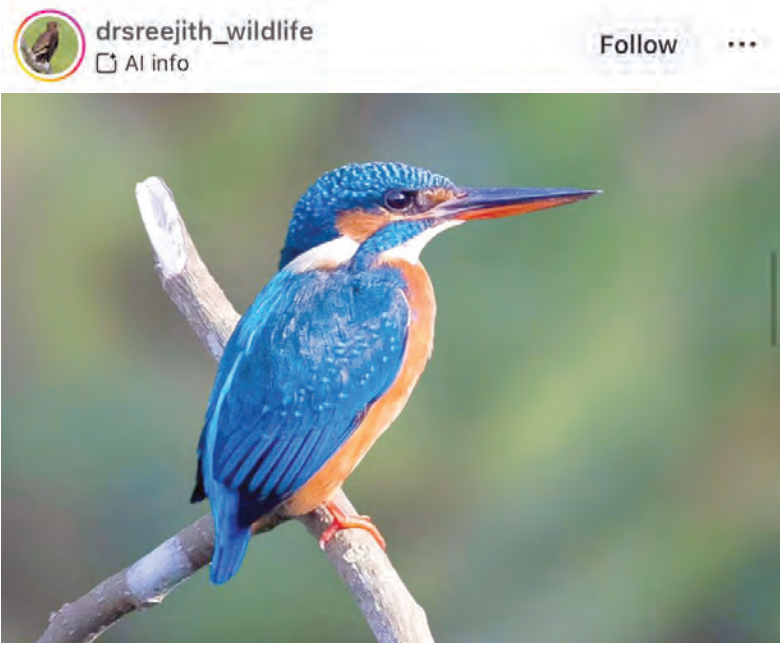
LIFESTYLE

Children slide down on the frozen Dnipro River during an outdoor party in a residential neighbourhood of Kyiv, during mass power outages amid the Russian invasion of Ukraine. — AFP

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LULA REVIVED BRAZILIAN CINEMA, SAYS ‘THE SECRET AGENT’ DIRECTOR



RAMON SAHMKOW

Brasília: Brazil’s latest Oscar-nominated thriller “The Secret Agent” has resonated with audiences around the world as a universal tale of authoritarian regimes using their power “to crush people”, director Kleber Mendonca Filho said in an interview.

Following on “I’m Still Here”, winner of last year’s Oscar for Best Foreign Language Film, the new film about Brazil’s 1964-1985 dictatorship has captivated Hollywood.

Fresh from winning two Golden Globes, the period thriller picked up four Oscar nominations on Thursday — Best Picture, Best International Feature Film, Best Actor for Wagner Moura and Best Casting.

Mendonca Filho, the director of 2016’s “Aquarius”, about a woman refusing to be driven out of her home by developers and 2019’s anti-imperialism drama “Bacurau”, links the current boom in the Brazilian film industry to the return to power of leftist President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva in 2023.

Under Lula’s far-right predecessor Jair Bolsonaro,



“culture was extinguished in Brazil”, he said. Mendonca Filho spoke with AFP from Recife, his hometown in northeastern Brazil, where he received the news of the Oscar nominations. In the film set in Recife, Moura — of “Civil War”, “Elite Squad” and “Narcos” fame — plays a university professor recently arrived from Sao Paulo, who is unaware that he is being hunted by hitmen linked to the military regime. Mendonca Filho lavished Moura with praise, saying “he’s a great actor, a great artist and a great person. And he’s exactly where he should be” among the nominees for best performance.

— AFP

FELA KUTI TO BE FIRST AFRICAN TO GET GRAMMYS LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD



NIGERIA’S Afrobeat king Fela Kuti will this weekend be posthumously recognised by the Grammys with a Lifetime Achievement Award, becoming the first African artist to receive the distinction.

After a lifetime of clashes with successive powers in Nigeria, the recognition comes nearly three decades after Fela’s death and long after his influence reshaped global music.

He is one of several artists getting the award at a ceremony in Los Angeles on Saturday, the eve of the main Grammys gala.

Others are Cher, Whitney Houston, Carlos Santana, Paul Simon and Chaka Khan.

In the 1970s, Fela the multi-instrumentalist and full-of-life performer invented Afrobeat: a mixture of jazz, funk and African rhythms.

That laid the groundwork for Afrobeats — a later genre that has attracted a global audience by blending traditional African rhythms with contemporary pop sounds, with its roots in Nigeria.

Two years ago the Grammys introduced the category of Best African Performance in 2024 and it has been dominated by Afrobeats artists, especially from Nigeria.

Of the five nominees for the Best African performance this year, three are Nigerian Afrobeats singers, after another Nigerian, Tems, won last year.

“Fela’s influence spans generations, inspiring artists such as Beyonce, Paul McCartney and Thom Yorke; and shaping modern Nigerian Afrobeats”, said a citation on the Grammys list of this year’s honorees.

Known also as the “Black President”, the activist and legendary musician, died in 1997 at the age 58.

His legacy lives on through his sons, Femi Kuti and Seun Kuti and grandson Made.

‘Better later than never’ Yemisi Ransome-Kuti, Fela’s first cousin and who is also the head of the family said on Friday the award



is “a celebration for the African people and they should take (it).. as their award. Another African is being celebrated.

“But we also want to send a message to those who are giving these acknowledgements, please... not wait till people are dead”, she said. His songs were long, defiant and explicitly anti- governments in power and corruption.

His manager for Rikki Stein, speaking on the phone from Los

Angeles where he will join the Kuti family at the ceremony, was confident the award will “significantly uplift Fela’s music — 50 albums out there — I’m sure it’s going to continue onward and upward”.

“An increasing number of people who weren’t even born when Fela died are expressing interest in listening to Fela’s music and hopefully Fela’s message”, he said.

— AFP

FEATURES



TRIUMPHANT TOSCA

GEORGINA BENISON

THE enduring success and popularity of “Tosca”, despite its dark psychological themes, surely lies in Giacomo Puccini’s lush romantic music and his lyrical vocal lines. The much-awaited highlight of The Royal Opera House Muscat (ROHM) 2025/26 season was David Livermore’s innovative production last weekend, based on the May 2018 premiere in Valencia, set in 1800 in two sold-out performances.

How this first Gulf “Tosca” would be received by the public was a question yet to be answered. The large orchestra of the Azerbaijan State Academic Opera and Ballet Theatre delivered the two-and-half-hour long score to perfect aplomb under the experienced musical directorship of Fabio Mastrangelo.

The most striking aspect of the production was Livermore’s (rather distracting) raked triangular set which revolved throughout the evening. It created many shapes and scenes, sometimes with giddy effect on the audience and posing challenges of balance and safety to the singers themselves. Enhancing the dramatic impact were evocative projections, designed by D-wok Video, from the dome of the Sant’Andrea Church to changing skies and white doves in flight, symbolising a yearning for freedom.

The youthful Azerbaijani tenor, Yusif Eyvazov in the leaning church was the painter, Mario Cavaradossi, working on a portrait of Mary Magdalene which descended miraculously from the flies.

His voice had a lyrical, attractive quality in the extremely challenging, “Recondita Armonia”(Hidden Harmony) well sustained in his upper register.

The comic Sacristan, portrayed to a tee by Albanian baritone, Gezim Myshketa, was the perfect fall-guy, astride on the sloping floor polishing ecclesiastical candlesticks! A clever juxtaposition between Eyvazov’s clear engaging voice and Myshketa’s light baritone was a delightful cameo, accompanied by Puccini’s warm, compelling score.

The brief appearance of Dario Russo as Republican fugitive, Cesare Angelotti provided a tantalising taste of his sumptuous bass timbre before the arrival of Carmen Giannattasio as the jealous, suspicious singer, Floria Tosca. In white dress and lilies for the shrine, Ms Giannattasio’s seductive vocal entry blossomed into her light, agile technique in ‘Non la sospiri, la nostra casetta’ (Do you not long for our little cottage) as her lush love-motif is heard in Puccini’s gorgeous 1900 orchestration.

Tosca’s jealousy is reflected in her rising vocal and dynamic intensity, executed



Photos by **Khalid Al Busaidi**



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with perfect control and placing, while Cavaradossi falls hopelessly under her spell. Eyvazov’s sincere and powerful delivery of ‘Qual occhio al mondo’ (what eyes in the world) belied its challengingly high, sustained tessitura. Carmen’s response is measured acquiescence and the duet was simply sublime, blending their voices, soaring above the orchestra and bringing goose bumps to an enthralled audience.

Bonaparte’s victory heralded the entry of the Ladies Chorus and new ROHM Children’s Choir, directed by Sara Matteucci, which includes 34 young singers, 16 of whom are Omani, singing the ‘Te Deum’.

Baron Scarpia, Chief of Police appeared high above on the prow of the Palazzo Farnese, remonstrating the crowd for their lack of respect in church.

The deceitful Scarpia was portrayed with distinguished gravitas by Italian Baritone, Ambrogio Maestri. As a would-be lover, Maestri maintained a warm, steady baritone against frequent brass interjections and strong orchestral chords.

His Aria “Tre sbirre una carrozza... Presto!” (Three men and a carriage. Quick — follow!) was deceptively beautiful against a stunning sunset projection, but his intentions are sheer lust and tyranny. The entire chorus and children’s choir filed on stage at the end of Act One, where they took their curtain call to rapturous applause and shouts from an adoring public.

Scarpia is a paradox in the opera. Maestri’s vocal placing in the passionate “Se la giurata fede debo tradir” was superb; clear and comfortable while conniving to gain Tosca in the Palazzo. Carmen Giannattasio soared above his cynical propositions with scream-like vocalise. Meanwhile Cavaradossi is held in a dungeon cleverly constructed below the revolving set — a spacial juxtaposition — while Puccini’s romantic chromatic harmony seduced the listener, if not Tosca.

Giannattasio’s interpretation of the impossibly beautiful, prayerful “Vissi d’Arte, vissi d’Amore” (I lived for Art, I lived for Love) was sung entirely lying down.

Her dramatic confidence and measured vocal control, accompanied by plaintive strings and harp, held the audience spellbound. Her blood-red cloak contrasted forebodingly with Scarpia’s Cardinal red; all else was grey against a blood-red sky.

A five minute set change to Act 3 revealed a silver Statue of Justice as pastoral woodwind melodies invoked the shepherd boy.

Sariya al Lawati sang the short, beautifully falling phrases in “Io de Sospiri” (I give you sighs) delightfully with vocal accuracy and maturity for her age. Church bells toll for matins — and Cavaradossi’s ‘mock’ execution. An orchestral interlude dripping with leitmotifs introduced perhaps the most famous Aria in Tosca: ‘E lucevan le stelle’ (And the stars were shining).

Eyvazov’s stunning interpretation was beautifully poised, broad and rich, above some challenging string solos and a poignant clarinet countermelody from Budagov Vali.

The lyrical tenderness of the final duet, ‘Amaro sol per te m’era il morire’ (only for you did death taste bitter for me) surpassed the pathos of Act 1.

All was shattered by forceful triumphant brass scoring as Tosca hurled herself from the parapet of the Castel Sant’Angelo, receiving tears, gasps and unanimous accolades for yet another ROHM success from the audience!