

OMAN

عمان

DAILY

Observer

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SUNRISE 06:43 AM

PRAYER TIMINGS

FAJR 05:22 AM

DHUHR 12:08 PM

ASR 03:09 PM

MAGHRIB 05:29 PM

ISHA 06:44 PM

20

A CYCLING JOURNEY
THROUGH AL
HAMRA'S HISTORY
AND HERITAGE

INBRIEF

HM’S GREETINGS TO EMIR OF QATAR

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to Shaikh Tamim bin Hamad al Thani, Emir of the State of Qatar, on his country’s National Day. In his cable, His Majesty wished Shaikh Tamim good health, happiness and a long life. His Majesty also prayed to Allah the Almighty for the return of this occasion on Shaikh Tamim at a time the people of Qatar realise aspirations of further progress and prosperity.

MOBILE GENETIC RESEARCH LAB



The Oman Animal and Plant Genetic Resources Centre (Mawarid), operating under the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, has inaugurated the nation’s first mobile research laboratory dedicated to genetic resources and life sciences. The launch ceremony was held under the auspices of Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation. This state-of-the-art mobile facility represents a flagship national initiative designed to extend specialised laboratory services to all governorates. By enabling on-site sample processing and preliminary analysis, the laboratory will significantly expedite scientific research, enhance the efficiency of specimen collection and ensure high-quality preservation protocols.

DETAILS ON P5

UN CHIEF URGES RESTRAINT IN YEMEN

United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on Wednesday urged all parties in Yemen to exercise maximum restraint after an advance by southern separatists that risks rekindling a 10-year-old civil war after a long lull. He also said the operating environment had become untenable in the areas held by the Ansar Allah - Yemen’s capital Sanaa and the heavily populated northwest. The separatist Southern Transitional Council says it has taken over the eastern provinces of Hadhramaut and Mahra and is now firmly established across all provinces of the former state of South Yemen. The STC has been an important part of a coalition fighting alongside the internationally recognised government.

Oman’s pursuit for equitable labour market hailed

MUSCAT: The National Forum for Joint Dialogue commenced its proceedings in Muscat on Wednesday, engaging stakeholders in critical discussions aimed at enhancing Oman’s work environment. Central themes included establishing a dedicated platform for exchanging insights and expertise, and addressing the challenges facing the labour market amidst evolving local and global economic dynamics.

In his opening address, Dr Mahad bin Said Baowain, Minister of Labour, underscored that joint dialogue is a cornerstone of Oman’s national approach, fundamental to strengthening the constructive partnership between

“The Sultanate of Oman’s experience over the years has proven that dialogue is far more than a communication tool

DR MAHAD BIN SAID BAOWAIN

INDIAN PRIME MINISTER ARRIVES ON 2-DAY OFFICIAL VISIT

Oman, India sign joint document and 4 MoUs

NARENDRA Modi, Prime Minister of the Republic of India, arrived in Muscat on Wednesday afternoon for a two-day official visit to the Sultanate of Oman. During the visit, the guest will meet His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik.

HH Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, led the welcoming party for the guest and his accompanying delegation upon his arrival at Muscat International Airport. HH Sayyid Shihab extended a formal welcome to the distinguished guest and his accompanying party, wishing them a successful visit in the Sultanate of Oman.

Later, the Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of India signed an executive programme, a joint vision document, and four memoranda of understanding (MoUs) in Muscat.

The signing took place within the framework of the current official visit of the Prime Minister of the Republic of India to the Sultanate of Oman.

The signing ceremony included the Joint Maritime Vision Document and an executive programme for cooperation in millet cultivation and innovation in the food and agricultural industries.

Additionally, four MoUs were signed covering cooperation in maritime heritage and museums; scientific research, innovation, and skills development; agriculture and its related sectors and an MoU between Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) and the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII).

Signing on behalf of the Government of



Narendra Modi, Prime Minister of the Republic of India, arrived in Muscat on Wednesday. HH Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, led the welcoming party for the guest and his accompanying delegation.

the Sultanate of Oman were Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister; Issa bin Saleh al Shibani, Ambassador of Oman to India, and Zakariya bin Abdullah al Saadi, CEO of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry. Representing the Government of the Republic of India were Dr S

Jaishankar, Minister of External Affairs, Piyush Goyal, Minister of Commerce and Industry, Godavarthi Venkata Srinivas, Ambassador of India to the Oman, and Chandrajit Banerjee, Director-General of the Confederation of Indian Industry.

TURN TO P3



WINNERS OF SULTAN QABOOS AWARD FETED

Assigned by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, Dr Mohammed bin Said al Maamari, Minister of Awqaf and Religious Affairs, presided over the award ceremony of the 12th edition of the Sultan Qaboos Award for Culture, Arts and Literature, on Wednesday. The winners were: the Assilah Forum Foundation in the field of private cultural institutions (Culture category), Essam Mohammed Said Darwish in the field of sculpture (Arts category) and Hikmat al Sabbagh, also known as Yumna al Eid, in the field of autobiography (Literature category).

OMAN

SHORT TAKE

DR JOKHA ELECTED HEAD OF HIGHER EDUCATION QUALITY ASSURANCE

CAIRO: Dr Jokha bint Abdullah al Shukailiyah, Chief Executive Officer of Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Education (OAAAQA), was on Wednesday elected Head of the Arab Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, with effect from January 1, 2026, for a period of four years.



DR JOKHA BINT ABDULLAH AL SHUKAILIYAH

Dr Jokha's election caps up a professional career full of accomplishments in developing policies and standards of educational quality and academic accreditation, both locally and regionally.

Dr Jokha takes credit for significantly enhancing the status of

the Sultanate of Oman at international forums. She also played a major role in consolidating regional and international cooperation through active participation in specialised networks and authorities, in addition to promoting the exchange of experiences with leading global institutions.

Dr Jokha's election to the position reflects the great confidence attached to the Sultanate of Oman, represented by Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Education.

It also affirms the prestigious status of national competencies and their ability to lead regional and international initiatives. — ONA

Credentials copies of Palestine, Lebanon envoys received



During the separate meetings, Sayyid Badr extended a warm welcome to the ambassadors. — ONA



MUSCAT: Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, on Wednesday received the credentials copies from both Ahmed Mahmoud Ahmed al Rowaidhi, Ambassador of the State of Palestine, and Majdi Ramadan,

Ambassador of the Lebanese Republic, newly appointed to the Sultanate of Oman.

During the separate meetings, Sayyid Badr extended a warm welcome to the ambassadors. He wished them success in

their diplomatic missions and expressed his sincere hope for the continued progress and prosperity of the bilateral relations between the Sultanate of Oman and their respective countries. The meetings were attended

by Najib bin Yahya al Balushi, Head of the Protocols Department at the Foreign Ministry, and Shaikh Faisal bin Omar al Marhoon, Head of the Arab Affairs Department at the Foreign Ministry. — ONA

Remediation of soil begins

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, DEC 17

THE Environment Authority (EA), through its Environmental Emergency Centre, has begun the remediation of beach sand contaminated by a marine oil spill at Awqad Beach in Dhofar Governorate.

The project aims to safely return the treated sand to its original location in Salalah.

The Authority has partnered with the Swiss-Omani company

Arva Greentech Remediation SPC, which employs an innovative, environmentally certified, and emission-free technology for treating contaminated waste.

The project inauguration was held under the auspices of Dr Thomas Oertle, Swiss Ambassador to the Sultanate of Oman, who officially activated the Arvox SRT Plant, in the presence of Eng Mouza al Salami, Director of the Environmental Emergency Centre, along with Oskar Lienemann, CEO, and

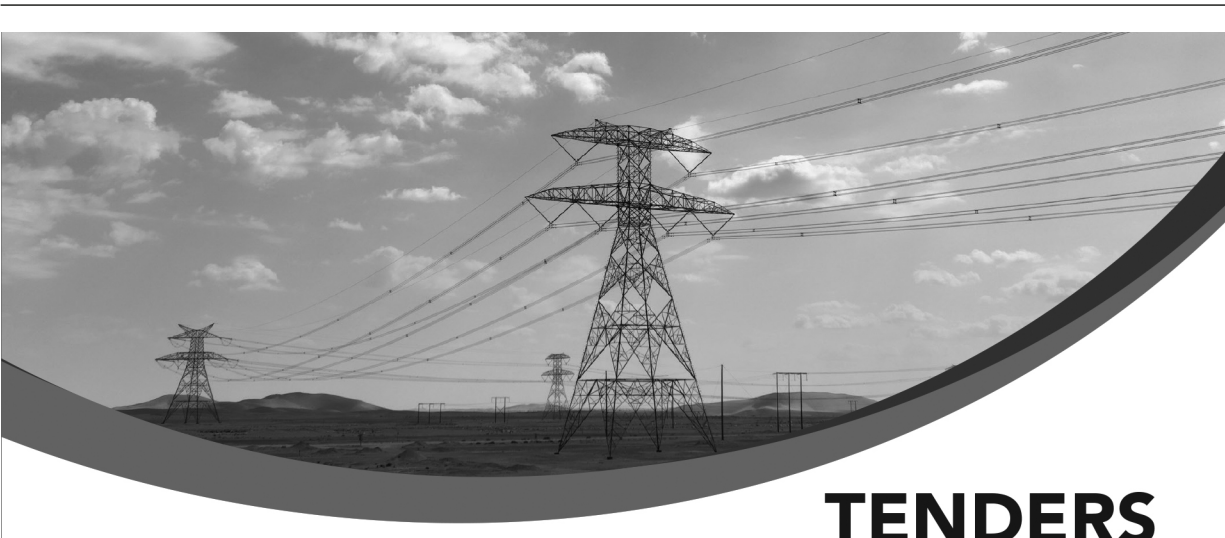
Gopakumar Pillai, Operations Manager at Arva Greentech Remediation AG.

The oil spill occurred in July, affecting extensive stretches of the coastline from Khor Salalah to Awqad Beach, as well as the western area of Raysut Beach, posing potential environmental risks.

Thanks to the swift response of the Environment Authority and relevant national authorities, the spread of the contamination was effectively contained. Specialised technical teams

from the Directorate-General of Environment in Dhofar, in coordination with Dhofar Municipality and other relevant bodies, promptly removed the pollutants using approved equipment as part of the National Oil Spill Response Plan, in collaboration with Salalah Port and specialised environmental protection companies.

A spokesperson from Arva highlighted that the project represents a significant advancement in environmental remediation efforts.



TENDERSADVERTISEMENT

Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC) announces the following Tender:

SR. NO.	TENDER NO.	TENDER NAME	FLOATING DATE	LAST DATE FOR OBTAINING THE DOCUMENTS	BID SUBMISSION DATE	REQUIREMENTS FROM PARTICIPATORS	TENDER DOCUMENT'S FEES (INCLUDING VAT) (RO)
1	95/2025 (International)	Construction of Al Khuwair 400/132kV and Associated 400 kV OHL from Al Khuwair to Misfah IPP Grid Stations.	18/12/2025	01/01/2026	27/01/2026	Local & International Companies with Experience in Same Field, have a Valid Commercial Registration.	2,625/-
2	96/2025 (International)	Construction of Mabelah Industrial 400/132kV Grid Station and Associated 400kV OHL / UGC from Mabelah Industrial to Jefneen Grid Stations.	18/12/2025	01/01/2026	27/01/2026	Local & International Companies with Experience in Same Field, have a Valid Commercial Registration.	2,625/-
3	106/2025	Supply and Installation of 132kV Composite Insulators for the Replacement of Dhofar Network Insulators.	18/12/2025	23/12/2025	30/12/2025	Local Companies with Experience in Same Field, have a Valid Commercial Registration.	2,625/-
4	108/2025	Corporate Agreement for Supply and Installation of OETC Vehicle Tires for Five (5) Years.	18/12/2025	01/01/2026	27/01/2026	Local Companies with Experience in Same Field, have a Valid Commercial Registration.	52/250

Participation	Interested Companies may obtain Tender Document with the necessity Apply on E-tendering.
Buying the Tender	By E-Tendering System.
Fees	Against non-refundable payment as mentioned above against each set of document. (Payment Through Bank Transfer), SMEs are exempted from tender's fees.
The deadline for clarification	Before (21) Days from bid submission date.
Submission:	The submission of hard copy will be only for Bid Bond & other documents by E-Tendering.
Terms and conditions	- Specifying the name of the Company or whatever refers to in the Bid Guarantee Envelope. - The bid should be valid for not less than (90) days from bid submission date. - The Tenderer should enclose a bank guarantee issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman for the value of 1% of the bid value and should be valid for (90) days from bid submission date, addressed to Oman Electricity Transmission Company (SAOC). Small & Medium Enterprises are exempted from the submission of 1% of the bid bond. - Any bid not comply with the required guarantee, will not be accepted. - OETC is not bound to accept the lowest or any other offers.
Offer	The bid bond should be submitted in Tender Box No. (1) at the company's building before 11:00 am on the assigned date for submission of the Tenders.
Company Address	Muscat - Al Mawaleh Road No: 2153 - Building No. 423 0 Block No: 321 - Contact Details: 93515198 , 92217856 , 91491551
Email Website	tenders@omangrid.com www.omangrid.com / link of E-Tendering System https://www.omangrid.com/en/Pages/Services.aspx

STATE, SHURA COUNCILS AGREE ON DRAFT ANTI-CYBER CRIMES LAW



MUSCAT: The joint committee of the State Council and the Majlis Ash'shura concluded discussions of the articles of disagreement regarding the draft law on combating cybercrimes at its meeting held on Wednesday. The meeting was attended by members of both councils, alongside the secretary-general of the State Council, the secretary-general of the Majlis Ash'shura, and specialists from the secretariat-generals of both councils. It discussed the articles of disagreement between the two councils regarding the draft law referred by the Council of Ministers.

Poetry grows through critical reflection

BADAR AL DHAFARI
MUSCAT, DEC 17

Poetry endures when it is approached through critical reflection rather than ceremonial praise. Within this spirit, the 13th Omani Poetry Festival, organised by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, continues to reaffirm poetry's place as a living intellectual and cultural practice.

As part of the festival's programme, the second critical seminar, titled "Readings in the Poetic Experiences of the Honoured Poets in Classical Arabic Poetry", was held at the Grand Millennium Muscat Hotel, bringing together poets, academics and literary researchers.

The seminar focused on a group of honoured poets, formally recognised by the festival in each edition for their literary contributions, with specialised research papers dedicated to examining and discussing their poetic works within an academic framework.

The first paper, presented by Professor Dr Issa al Sulaimani, offered an objective critical reading of the poetic experience of Salim al Kalbani, focusing



The seminar focused on a group of honoured poets, formally recognised by the festival in each edition.

on the concept of textual unity and the poet's overall artistic vision. Al Sulaimani emphasised that a poem should be read as an integrated artistic whole rather than as isolated themes or individual lines.

The paper reviewed earlier critical studies of Al Kalbani's poetry, noting that many focused on thematic or formal aspects without sufficiently engaging with the internal coherence and aesthetic structure of the poetic text. It presented Al Kalbani as a poet shaped by contemporary intellectual transformations while remaining rooted in the traditions of Classical Arabic poetry.

The second paper, presented by Dr Mohammed al Hajri, examined the poetic

experience of Shaikh Abu Al Fadl Mohammed bin Issa al Harthy, portraying him as a poet whose work represented a meeting point for multiple poetic currents. Al Hajri described Al Harthy's poetry as a "confluence of poetic valleys", reflecting the diversity of themes, stylistic approaches and intellectual concerns in his verse.

The study highlighted Al Harthy's cultural presence and his role in fostering poetic dialogue, identifying love poetry and wisdom as two dominant thematic strands in his work.

Through such critical seminars, the Omani Poetry Festival continues to honour distinguished poetic voices and deepen scholarly engagement with Oman's literary heritage.

SHORT TAKE



The forum is a commitment to promoting digital transformation.

FORUM EXPLORES TRANSFORMATION IN HEALTHCARE

MUSCAT: The College of Nursing at Sultan Qaboos University (SQU), represented by the Adult Health and Critical Care Department, organised the 3rd Nursing Informatics Forum 2025 under the theme ‘From Academic Innovation to Clinical Implementation’. The forum was held under the esteemed auspices of the Dean of the College of Nursing, Dr Huda al Numani, and was generously supported by Oman Liquefied Natural Gas (Oman LNG), reflecting a strong partnership between academia and industry in advancing healthcare innovation.

The forum forms part of the College’s strategic commitment to promoting digital transformation in healthcare and empowering nursing students with future-ready competencies. It aimed to showcase innovative technological projects developed by nursing students as part of the Nursing Informatics course, highlighting how academic knowledge can be translated into practical, real-world healthcare solutions. Dr Nasser al Salmi, head of the adult health and critical care department, emphasised the critical role of nursing informatics in modern healthcare delivery, noting that digital health technologies are no longer optional but essential tools for improving patient safety and care quality.



OMSB BOARD OF TRUSTEES HOLDS MEETING

MUSCAT: The Board of Trustees of Oman Medical Specialty Board (OMSB) on Wednesday held its fourth meeting. The meeting was chaired by Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health, Chairman of Board of Trustees. The meeting discussed strategic plans for 2026 and approved the list of doctors graduating from the OMSB during the academic year 2024-2025. The Board also reviewed updates made to specialty training programmes.

SALE OF SCAFFOLDING & FORMWORK

Leading Construction Company in Oman intends to dispose off their used Scaffolding and formwork in “as is where is” condition. The items identified are presently located at their Barka Khazaen Yard and will be offered for inspection to the public **on 21/12/2025, 22/12/2025 & 23/12/2025 between 08.00am to 12.00pm and 03.00pm to 05.00pm.**

Last date for submission of closed tender is **24/12/2025 at 05.00pm** at their Barka Khazaen Office.

Interested parties may contact at
Tel: (+968) 26983777/26983741
Mobile: (+968) 91354151

MOORE STEPHENS LLC

NOTICE ON THE COMMENCEMENT OF LIQUIDATION OF LIFT & SHIFT ENGINEERING MIDDLE EAST LLC (AS APPEARED IN OFFICIAL GAZETTE NO 1626)

Moore Stephens LLC, announces the liquidation process of Lift & Shift Engineering Middle East LLC, bearing commercial registration number 1148570, in accordance with the decision taken by the Company’s Shareholders on 4 March 2025. The liquidator alone have the right to represent the Company under liquidation before third parties, and all parties are to confirm with the liquidator for all matters concerning the company’s business at the following address:

Office No. 41, 4th Floor, Building No.1022, Way No. 1013; Al Walaj Street, Al Qurum
P.O. Box 933, Ruwi, Postal Code 112, Sultanate of Oman
Tel: 24061000, Fax: 24061099, Email: liquidation@moore-oman.com

By this announcement, the liquidator calls the company’s creditors to submit their claims against the company, together with the supporting documents, to the above address within 180 days from the date of publishing this announcement for the first time, and any debtors should settle the company’s rights with the liquidator on the address above.

Moore Stephens LLC
Official Liquidators of Lift & Shift Middle Engineering LLC (Under voluntary liquidation)

OMAN ADVANCES HALAL SYSTEM

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman’s National Halal System Task Force convened for its third meeting to review progress on the development and launch of the integrated framework, a key initiative aimed at enhancing the global competitiveness of Omani products and ensuring their compliance with domestic and international market standards.

The meeting was chaired by Dr Saleh bin Said Masan, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion for Commerce and Industry.

Discussions focused on the significant growth of the global halal economy, now valued at over \$7 trillion, with projections indicating it will reach approximately \$10 trillion by 2030. This expansive market encompasses diverse sectors including halal food— ONA

Mobile lab for life science, genetic research launched



The inauguration took place at Innovation Park Muscat under the auspices of Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation.

currently implementing field-based research projects across various governorates, highlighting the vital role of the mobile laboratory in supporting and expediting field research.

Dr Mohammed bin Nasser al Yahyai, Director of the Oman Animal and Plant Genetic Resources Centre (Mawarid), said that Oman’s rich geographical diversity requires flexible research tools to access various natural environments. He explained that the mobile laboratory reduces sample loss from long distances and allows analysis on-site, ensuring greater accuracy, higher quality results, and improved efficiency in genetic and environmental research. Moza bint Mohammed al Kharousiyah, Head of the Research Facilities Section at Mawarid, stated

that the mobile laboratory also supports awareness and community engagement through scientific events and visits to schools and universities.

Al Munther al Maamari, Plant Genetic Resources Specialist at Mawarid, stated that the laboratory provides its services to researchers across plant, animal, and marine sectors.

Dr Ahmed bin Saleh al Ansari, Assistant Professor at the College of Agricultural and Marine Sciences at Sultan Qaboos University, said that the mobile laboratory for studying native Omani plant and animal species serves as an innovative educational and research platform, enabling university students to conduct field-based scientific investigations using advanced genetic tools.

Invest in Oman’s Future

Worth RO 150 Million (an increase not exceeding OMR 50 million) , 7 Years at 4.15% p.a.

Local Sovereign Sukuk

On behalf of the Government of the Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Finance, the Oman Sovereign Sukuk S.A.O.C. announces the 10th series issuance of Local Sovereign Sukuk (LSS) to be auctioned. The subscription of 10th issuance of LSS will start on Wednesday, 17th of December 2025, carrying a profit rate of 4.15% per annum for a maturity period of 7 years (maturing on 25th of December 2032). Investors can apply for these Sukuk by completing the application form through licensed banks: Bank Muscat (including its Islamic banking window, Meethaq), Ahli Bank (including its Islamic banking window, Ahli Islamic), Bank Nizwa, Sohar International Bank, Bank Dhofar (including its Islamic banking window, Dhofar Islamic), National Bank of Oman (including its Islamic banking window, Muzn Islamic Banking), and Oman Arab Bank.

Sharia-compliant

Sukuk are Sharia-compliant investments in tangible projects based on real assets.

Competitive profit rate

Profit shall accrue from the date of issue, and will be paid semi-annually on the 25th of June and 25th of December in each year up to scheduled maturity. The first payment will be made on 25th of June 2026. Profit payments will cease once the Sukuk matures on the 25th of December 2032.

Liquidity

The Sukuk will be listed and can be traded before maturity in the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) at the prevailing market price.

Who Can Invest?

The 10th issuance of Local Sovereign Sukuk is offered to all categories of investors, residents and non-residents (irrespective of their nationalities).

How to buy the Sukuk?

Investors may obtain the Sukuk prospectus and application form through the Ministry of Finance’s

website or licensed banks: Bank Muscat (including its Islamic banking window, Meethaq), Ahli Bank (including its Islamic banking window, Ahli Islamic), Bank Nizwa, Sohar International Bank, Bank Dhofar (including its Islamic banking window, Dhofar Islamic), National Bank of Oman (including its Islamic banking window, Muzn Islamic Banking), and Oman Arab Bank.

Bank Account Details

The investor must provide the same bank account details as those registered with Muscat Clearing and Depository Co. S.A.O.C. (MCD).

MCD Investor Code

Those who don’t have an MCD Investor Code can obtain it from MCD’s website (www.mcd.gov.om) or via the Oman Stocks app at least one day before applying through the commercial bank.

For any enquires:
Tel: +968 24822222
E-mail: mcd.support@mcd.om

You can also use the “Contact Us” section on the company’s website.

The 10th issuance

Open: Wednesday, December 17th, 2025

Close: Monday, December 22nd, 2025

Issue date: Thursday, December 25th, 2025

The Minimum Subscription Amount

RO 100

To view the prospectus of the 10th issuance of Local Sovereign Sukuk, please visit the Ministry of Finance website| www.mof.gov.om

For further details, contact the issue managers:



WORLD

SHORT TAKES



Cambodian soldiers transferred from a frontline lie in hospital beds at Ou Chrov referral hospital. — Reuters

CAMBODIA ACCUSES THAILAND ARMY OF USING ‘TOXIC GAS’

OU CHROV: From their hospital beds in Banteay Meanchey province in northwest Cambodia, several soldiers and police described experiencing respiratory problems after Thai aircraft dropped what they said was “poisonous water”. Cambodia’s Ministry of Defence has claimed on almost a daily basis that the Thai military is using “toxic gas”, including as recently as Wednesday in the village where Kun Yong had been stationed. In a statement, the ministry called the use of gas, among other tactics, a clear violation of international law.

It has not named the suspected gas, provided evidence, or said whether it has formally protested its use to international authorities. Spokespeople for the ministry and the national government did not answer phone calls seeking fresh comment.

Thai Air Force spokesman Air Marshal Jackkrit Thammavichai said that the air force had never used chemical weapons, and called reports of their use “fake news” aimed at discrediting its operations. “If it were chemical weapons, they wouldn’t be experiencing difficulties breathing, they would have died,” he said. — Reuters

MEXICAN PRESIDENT CALLS ON UN TO ‘AVOID BLOODSHED’

MEXICO CITY: Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum on Wednesday asked the United Nations to act in order to avoid bloodshed in Venezuela, as tensions escalate between the South American country and the United States. Sheinbaum said during her morning press conference that Mexico is against intervention and against foreign interference in Venezuela. “I call on the United Nations to fulfil its role. It has not been present. It must assume its role to prevent any bloodshed,” she said.

US President Donald Trump on Tuesday ordered a “blockade” of all sanctioned oil tankers entering and leaving Venezuela, a move that the government of Nicolas Maduro called a “grotesque threat.” Trump, who has labelled the “Venezuelan Regime” a foreign terrorist organisation, is scheduled to speak to US citizens later on Wednesday evening from the White House.

US tensions with Venezuela have escalated as Trump has moved thousands of troops and nearly a dozen warships — including an aircraft carrier — to the region. Venezuela’s government said in a statement it rejected Trump’s “grotesque threat.” — Reuters



SHEINBAUM

M23 STILL IN SEIZED CONGO TOWN DESPITE WITHDRAWAL PLEDGE

KINSHASA: Rwanda-backed M23 group has not withdrawn from the eastern Congolese town of Uvira despite an announcement earlier this week that they would pull back. M23 spokesperson Willy Ngoma said on Wednesday that “we are ready to leave (Uvira), but our conditions have to be reviewed”. The spokesperson added that the citizens of Uvira needed to be protected and it should be occupied by a neutral force. The group had said on Monday they would withdraw to help efforts

by US President Donald Trump’s administration and Qatar to mediate peace in the long-running war between the rebels and government forces in Democratic Republic of Congo. M23 entered Uvira, near the Burundi border, earlier this month, less than a week after the presidents of Congo and Rwanda met with US President Donald Trump in Washington to reaffirm their commitment to the Washington Accords peace agreement. The US has criticised seizure of the

town as a threat to mediation efforts. Corneille Nangaa, head of the Congo River Alliance, which includes M23, said on Monday on X the withdrawal would be a “unilateral trust-building measure in order to give the Doha peace process the maximum chance to succeed”. However, Congo’s communications minister Patrick Muyaya dismissed the announcement of a withdrawal from Uvira as a “diversion,” alleging it was an attempt to relieve pressure on Rwanda. — Reuters

Sudan most neglected crisis of 2025 in aid: Poll

THE humanitarian catastrophe engulfing Sudan, unleashing horrific violence on children and uprooting nearly a quarter of the population, is the world’s most neglected crisis of 2025, according to a poll of aid agencies. Some 30 million Sudanese people — roughly equivalent to Australia’s population — need assistance, but experts warn that warehouses are nearly empty, aid operations face collapse and two cities have tipped into famine. “The Sudan crisis should be front page news every single day,” said Save the Children humanitarian director Abdurahman Sharif. “Children are living a nightmare in plain sight, yet the world continues to shamefully look away.”

Sudan was named by a third of respondents in a Thomson Reuters Foundation crisis poll of 22 leading aid organisations. Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), widely considered the deadliest conflict since World War Two, ranked second. Although Sudan has received some media attention, Sharif said the true scale of the catastrophe remained “largely out of sight and out of mind.”

The United Nations has called Sudan the world’s biggest humanitarian crisis, but a \$4.16 billion appeal is barely a third funded. The poll’s respondents highlighted a number of overlooked emergencies, including Myanmar, Afghanistan, Somalia, Africa’s Sahel region and Mozambique. Many agencies said they were reluctant to single out just one crisis in a year when the United States and other



A Sudanese displaced woman carries a water container at a camp, North Darfur. — Reuters

Some 30 million Sudanese people — roughly equivalent to Australia’s population — need assistance, but experts warn that warehouses are nearly empty, aid operations face collapse and two cities have tipped into famine

Western donors slashed aid despite soaring humanitarian needs. “It feels as though the world is turning its back on humanity,” said Oxfam’s humanitarian director Marta Valdes Garcia.

The conflict between the Sudanese army and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces, which erupted out of a power struggle in April 2023, has created the world’s largest displacement crisis with 12 million people fleeing their homes. Aid groups cited appalling human rights violations, including child cruelty and conscription. “What is being done to Sudan’s children is unconscionable, occurring on a massive scale and with apparent impunity,” said World Vision’s humanitarian operations director Moussa Sangara. Hospitals and

schools have been destroyed or occupied, and 21 million people face acute hunger.

The UN World Food Programme (WFP) has warned that, without additional funds, it will have to cut rations for communities in famine or at risk. Aid organisations say violence, blockades and bureaucratic obstacles are making it hard to reach civilians in conflict zones. “What we are witnessing in Sudan is nothing short of an indictment of humanity,” said the UN refugee agency’s regional director Mamadou Dian Balde. “If the world does not urgently step up - diplomatically, financially, and morally — an already catastrophic situation will deteriorate further with millions of Sudanese and their neighbours paying the price.” — Reuters



SETTLER KILLS 16-YEAR-OLD PALESTINIAN IN WEST BANK

RAMALLAH: An Israeli settler shot dead a 16-year-old Palestinian in the town of Tuqu’ after the funeral of another teenager, the town’s mayor said. Violence has escalated in the West Bank since the beginning of the war in Gaza in October 2023. Attacks by Israeli settlers against Palestinians in the West Bank have increased sharply, with the UN reporting the highest number of attacks on record in October.

Israeli forces killed Sabah on Monday during a military raid on the town, the Palestinian health ministry said. The military said the incident was under review. It said rocks were thrown at soldiers who used riot dispersal means and later responded with fire. The West Bank is home to 2.7 million Palestinians who have limited self-rule under Israeli military occupation. Hundreds of thousands of Israelis have settled there. — Reuters

EMISSION CONTROL

Delhi starts measures to curb pollution



Authorities in India’s capital Delhi rolled out strict measures in an attempt to curb pollution, including a ban on vehicles not compliant with latest emission control norms and regulating attendance in private and government offices. India’s Environment Minister Bhupender Yadav directed authorities to ensure construction and demolition activities in Delhi and its suburbs were permitted only if proper waste handling infrastructure was available. — Reuters

MONITORING ELECTIONS

Myanmar seeks to prosecute hundreds



Myanmar’s junta said that it was seeking to prosecute more than 200 people for “disruption” of upcoming military-run elections, wielding new legislation. The junta introduced legislation to shield the election from “disruption and destruction”, with clauses forbidding criticism or protest against the vote. “A total of 229 people” are being pursued for prosecution under the law “for attempting to sabotage election processes”, it said. — AFP

ILLEGAL HOUSING

Spain evicts migrants from occupied building



Spanish police on Wednesday evicted hundreds of migrants from a former high school in the northeastern city of Badalona, in what a union representing local tenants described as the largest such eviction ever in Spain. Brief clashes erupted between riot police and activists and migrants, but most left peacefully, carrying their belongings in carts or sat in the street with their luggage, with no other place to go. — Reuters

SHORT TAKES



Greek PM Kyriakos Mitsotakis speaks at the Greek parliament, in Athens. — Reuters

GREECE APPROVES 2026 BUDGET AMID HUGE PROTESTS

Greece’s parliament approved the country’s 2026 budget amid protests by farmers and public sector workers over delayed subsidies and a cost-of-living crisis. The budget includes forecasts that the economy will grow 2.4 per cent next year from a projected 2.2 per cent this year and generate a primary surplus, which excludes debt servicing costs, of 2.8 per cent of gross domestic product. Earlier on Tuesday, hundreds of Greeks rallied in central Athens and doctors and teachers joined public sector workers who walked off the job. Protesters also expressed solidarity with farmers who have deployed thousands of tractors and trucks in dozens of blockades for a third week, disrupting traffic along major motorways and border crossings to protest at delays in European Union aid and other payments prompted by probes into a corruption scandal. Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis announced the distribution of about 160 million euros in aid to farmers and breeders, on top of about 500 million euros already released recently. He added that his centre-right government would offer 400 million euros in new subsidies to help renovate homes which are currently off the market, a move aimed at covering a shortfall in long-term rentals that has spiked housing costs. — Reuters

EU AGREES ON DEFORESTATION LAW



The European parliament on Wednesday approved an EU deal to delay its anti-deforestation law by a year, until December 2026, clearing the penultimate legal hurdle before the delay can pass into law. The parliament voted to approve the delay, with 405 lawmakers in favour, 242 against and 8 abstentions. The delay still requires formal approval by EU countries — who are expected to pass the deal without changes later this week. — Reuters

ROB EINER’S SON CHARGED WITH PARENTS’ MURDER

LOS ANGELES: The son of famed Hollywood director Rob Reiner was charged with two counts of first-degree murder over the brutal slaying of his parents, the chief prosecutor of Los Angeles said. Nick Reiner, 32, who has a history of substance abuse stretching back to his teenage years, could face life in prison without the possibility of parole or the death penalty if convicted over the killings that shocked Hollywood. In a statement, District Attorney Nathan Hochman’s office said Nick

Reiner had been charged with “with two counts of murder with the special circumstance allegation of multiple murders.” “He also faces a special allegation that he personally used a dangerous and deadly weapon, a knife,” it added. Reiner is expected to be arraigned as soon as he is able to appear at a Los Angeles courthouse. His lawyer, Alan Jackson, told reporters he had so far not been medically cleared to appear, a process he described as “procedural.” “The bailiff has indicated that the

sheriff’s department will take it on a day-by-day basis, and so hopefully he’ll be cleared tomorrow, and we can get him here.” Reiner was arrested on Sunday after the bodies of his 78-year-old father and his mother, Michele Singer Reiner, 70, were discovered at their home in the upscale Brentwood neighbourhood of Los Angeles. Prosecutors said Rob Reiner — who directed huge hits including “When Harry Met Sally” and “A Few Good Men” — and his wife were stabbed to death. — AFP

Putin vows to achieve war goals, expand ‘buffer zone’

PRESIDENT

Vladimir Putin said that Russia would achieve its goals in Ukraine by diplomatic or military means, and would seek to expand a “security buffer zone” there. “First, the goals of the special military operation will undoubtedly be achieved. We would prefer to do this and address the root causes of the conflict through diplomacy,” Putin said. “If the opposing side and their foreign patrons refuse to engage in substantive discussions, Russia will achieve the liberation of its historical lands by military means. The task of creating and expanding a security buffer zone will also be consistently addressed.”

Of the regions of Ukraine that Russia has claimed as its own territory, it currently controls Crimea, around 90 per cent of the Donbas region and 75 per cent of Kherson and Zaporizhzhia. In addition, Russia holds some territory in the adjoining regions of Kharkiv, Sumy, Dnipropetrovsk and Mykolaiv. Putin’s comments signalled that Moscow would seek further gains on some of these fronts. With the war at a key juncture as US President Donald Trump pushes hard for a quick peace agreement, Putin said Russia was advancing on all fronts. But his defence minister, Andrei Belousov, acknowledged that Ukrainian forces were trying to take back control of the northeastern town of Kupiansk - an effort he said was not succeeding. Putin said people in Europe were being indoctrinated with fears of a war with Russia, and accused their leaders of whipping up hysteria. “I have repeatedly stated: this is a lie, nonsense, pure nonsense about some imaginary Russian threat to European countries. But this is being done quite deliberately,” he said. Putin has said Russia is not seeking war with Europe, but is ready for war if that is Europe’s choice. Meanwhile, finding a legal way to use frozen Russian assets to help finance Ukraine remains “far from easy”, Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni said on Wednesday, ahead of a summit of European Union leaders in Brussels. Addressing parliament, Meloni said Italy backed efforts



Russia’s President Vladimir Putin delivers a speech at an expanded meeting of the Collegium of the Russian Defence Ministry in Moscow. — Reuters

to make Moscow bear the costs of its attack on Ukraine, but warned that any mechanism must rest on firm legal foundations and avoid exposing countries to open-ended liabilities. Italy is one of the EU’s largest economies and its position on financing could sway the balance between countries pushing for bold measures to sustain Ukraine and those worried about legal blowback and market instability. “Italy, of course, considers sacred the principle that Russia should primarily pay for the reconstruction of the nation it attacked, but this result must be achieved with a solid legal basis,” Meloni said. She added that she wanted clarity over the proposed use of Russian assets “particularly those related to reputation, retaliation, or new, heavy burdens on national budgets”. EU leaders are set to review proposals aimed at using proceeds from immobilised Russian sovereign assets, mostly held in Belgium, to support Ukraine’s huge budget and defence needs — something Moscow fiercely opposes. The main problem still to

be resolved is Belgium’s demand that others in the 27-nation bloc share the financial risks if Russia were to successfully sue either Belgium or the Belgian central securities depository Euroclear, where they are held. Meloni has consistently supported Ukraine following the Russian attack, reassuring Western allies who feared she might follow the pro-Moscow line of one of her coalition parties, the far-right League. Meloni on Wednesday said Russia was making “unreasonable” demands in US-brokered peace discussions, singling out Moscow’s insistence on controlling the entire Donbas region. “Unlike what propaganda claims, the main obstacle to a peace agreement is Russia’s inability to conquer the four Ukrainian regions that it unilaterally declared annexed in late 2022,” Meloni said, referring to the fact Moscow has demanded control over areas that it has failed to seize by arms. She added that significant progress had been made in recent talks in Berlin on security guarantees for Ukraine. — Reuters

Philippines denies claims of training for alleged Bondi gunmen

MANILA: There is no evidence indicating that the two suspects involved in the Bondi Beach attack received any form of military training while in the Philippines, the Philippines’ National Security Adviser said on Wednesday. In a statement, Eduardo Año said that a mere visit to the country does not substantiate allegations of terrorist training, and the duration of their stay would not have permitted any meaningful or structured training. The alleged father-and-son gunmen opened fire on a Hanukkah celebration at Sydney’s Bondi Beach on Sunday, killing 15 in an attack that shocked Australia and heightened fears of violent extremism. Año said the government was investigating the two men’s travel from November 1 to 28 and coordinating with Australian authorities to determine the purpose of the visit, dismissing media reports portraying the

southern Philippines as a hotspot for violent extremism as “outdated” and “misleading”. Immigration records show the pair landed in Manila and travelled to Davao City in Mindanao, a region long-plagued by militancy, before the attack that Australian police say appeared to have been inspired by IS. Since the 2017 Marawi siege, a five-month battle in which the IS-inspired Maute group seized the southern city and fought government forces, Philippine troops have significantly degraded IS-affiliated groups, Año said. “The remnants of these groups have been fragmented, deprived of leadership, and operationally degraded,” he added. The man who allegedly opened fire on a Jewish Hanukkah celebration on Sydney’s famed Bondi Beach has been charged with 59 offences, including murder and terrorism, police said on Wednesday. Funerals of the Jewish victims of the



NSW Premier Chris Minns and Australian PM Anthony Albanese attend an interfaith memorial, in Sydney. — Reuters

attack began on Wednesday, amid anger over how the gunmen - one of whom was briefly investigated for links to extremists — were allowed access to powerful firearms. Sajid Akram, 50, was shot dead by police at the scene, while his 24-year-old son Naveed Akram emerged from a coma on Tuesday afternoon after also being shot by police. New South Wales Police said on Wednesday that a man had been charged with 59 offences, including 15 counts of murder, 40 counts of wounding with attempt to murder, as well as a terror offence and other charges. “Police will allege in court the man engaged in conduct that caused death, serious injury and endangered life to advance a religious cause and cause fear in the community,” it said in a statement. “Early indications point to a terrorist attack inspired by IS, a listed terrorist organisation in Australia.” — Reuters

OPINION

Stone, craft and the new luxury logic



RUMAITHA
AL BUSAIDI

The writer is environmental strategist and advocate for sustainable development. Follow her on LinkedIn @rumaithaalbusaidi

LATELY, I have had an influx of international friends visiting me in Oman. I observe myself building itineraries the way you build a story, with a beginning that feels rooted and a middle that surprises people into attention. The first thing we do is go to forts. There is something about an Omani fort that resets the body. The thick walls hold memory. The light moves across carved doors and worn steps like it has done for centuries. You stand there, and you can feel in your bones that heritage is craft, protection and patience. Then we do something our forefathers would recognise: the gathering, the hospitality, the ritual of sitting together, and still would never imagine we take coffee inside those same walls, at tables where the view is history itself. The air smells of cardamom and stone. At sunset, the light softens the edges of doors and makes the restored woodwork glow. We attend curated evenings where fine dining and architecture meet, where the mood is deliberate, and where the service carries local knowledge in every gesture: the way tea is poured, the stories offered with the meal, and the unhurried pacing that refuses to perform for

cameras. In these moments, luxury becomes a way of hosting, restoring and translating heritage into a living experience. Jewellery follows naturally. Gold and silver here carry more than shine. They carry lineage, the logic of gifting, weddings and celebration. A piece can be delicate and still feel permanent. It teaches the same lesson forts teach: value is built over time and time contributes to value. This is circularity in a different form: inheritance as a luxury model, where provenance is lived rather than manufactured. This intuition I have developed through playing host also has an economic dimension. Earlier this month, I came across recent Lombard Odier research on luxury under pressure. By 2030, Gen Z and Millennials are expected to account for up to 70 per cent of global luxury spending, with \$83.5 trillion passing to them by 2048. What they reward is telling. They are drawn to experiences that feel immersive, culturally resonant and real. Sustainability is woven into this shift. The research shows 69 per cent of Gen Z luxury consumers prioritise environmental conscience, with two-thirds concerned about greenwashing, where proof is becoming part of pleasure. Part of this year, I worked as an

Clarity itself becomes a form of luxury: knowing what you are and refusing to perform otherwise.

environmental advocate with a Swiss watch project focused on circular luxury. The work trained my eye differently. I started noticing what could be repaired, what stories could survive questions about sourcing and labour and what claims could hold up under scrutiny. When I walk through a restored fort now, I see circularity in stone. It keeps heritage alive through restoration and livelihoods. Integrity shows up in material choices, including craft and experiences designed with restraint instead of imitation. Continuity is becoming desirable again. Around 40 per cent of Gen Z consumers plan to buy pre-owned watches. Objects with a past are no longer a compromise. They are a choice. Oman has been practicing this logic for generations: through inherited gold, through forts that become gathering spaces, through craft that passes from hand to hand without announcing its sustainability credentials. When my friends leave, they remember the forts, the gold, the hospitality and the feeling of being guided through a country that knows what it is. Clarity itself becomes a form of luxury: knowing what you are and refusing to perform otherwise. Oman has the chance to shape luxury's next chapter in its own image: stone, craft, generosity and proof.

‘EASIEST SCAM IN THE WORLD’: MUSICIANS SOUND ALARM OVER AI IMPERSONATORS

CLARA LALANNE

Does the latest track by your favourite singer sound slightly off? You may be right. Fraudulent AI-generated tracks are increasingly appearing in artists’ own profiles on streaming platforms, presented as their original work. British folk musician Emily Portman got a shock in July when she received a message from a fan congratulating her on the new album — even though she hadn’t released one since 2022. That’s when she discovered “Orca” on numerous streaming platforms, including Spotify and Apple Music. The titles of the songs resembled something she might have created herself, but “very quickly I recognised it was AI-produced music”, she said. According to the independent artist, the AI behind “Orca” was “trained” on her previous albums, mimicking her folk-inspired instrumentation and lyrics. Portman said people were fooled despite the “pristine perfection” of the vocals and “vacuous lyrics”. The musician couldn’t identify the perpetrators of the fraud, but believes she knows how they operate. Scammers claiming to be artists approach distribution companies, which then upload the music online without any identity checks, she said. On the other side of the world, Australian musician Paul Bender also discovered from early this year that four “bizarrely bad” AI-generated songs had been added to the profiles of his band, The Sweet Enoughs. He said the streaming industry hadn’t kept pace with security measures such as two-factor authentication now widely used in other sectors. “You just say: ‘Yes that’s me’... and upload a song to whoever’s profile,” he said. “It’s the easiest scam in the world.” After an Instagram discussion, Bender, who is also the bassist for the Grammy-nominated band Hiatus Kaiyote, received hundreds of messages from artists and music fans. He compiled a list of numerous suspect albums, particularly in the catalogues of deceased artists, such as the experimental Scottish musician Sophie, who died in 2021. AI-powered music generators such as Suno and Udio have become increasingly refined. Almost all listeners are now unable to distinguish AI-generated tracks from the real thing, according to an Ipsos study for the French platform Deezer in November. This has driven success for bands solely created by AI, such as The Velvet Sundown, which has garnered one million subscribers on Spotify, but also led to a rise in fraudulent activity. — AFP

Anti-Semitism, Palestine, the burden of misnaming

RECENTLY, a troubling claim has gained traction in political and media discourse: that international recognition of the State of Palestine fuels anti-Semitism. Some Israeli officials have gone further, suggesting that solidarity with Palestinian rights is itself a form of hostility towards Jews. This argument deserves careful examination — not dismissal, but scrutiny — because it risks collapsing moral clarity into confusion, and justice into accusation. For Arabs and Muslims, this debate is neither abstract nor new. It strikes at a deep historical irony: Arabs are themselves Semitic peoples. Arabic is a Semitic language. Arab and Jewish histories are intertwined across centuries of shared geography, trade, culture and faith. To suggest that Arab advocacy for Palestinian statehood is inherently anti-Semitic is not only analytically flawed — it erases this shared lineage and weaponises identity against itself. Anti-Semitism, as understood in contemporary Western discourse, is real. It is dangerous. It must be confronted unequivocally wherever it appears. Hatred of Jews — whether religious, racial, or cultural — has no place in ethical politics or moral struggle. But conflating anti-Semitism with criticism of Israeli state policy, or with opposition to political Zionism, does not protect Jewish communities. It distorts the concept until it loses credibility — and in doing so, it risks weakening the very fight against genuine anti-Jewish hatred. The current tension lies in a dangerous misnaming. Political Zionism is a modern nationalist ideology. Judaism is a faith, a civilisation and a moral tradition. Jews, as they stand today, are a people — diverse in belief, geography and political position. These categories



AHMED
AL MUKHAINI

The author is a policy analyst

The moral strength of the Palestinian cause lies precisely in its universality: a demand for dignity, equality and freedom under international law. Any rhetoric that abandons those principles betrays the cause rather than serving it.

are not interchangeable, and treating them as such does injustice to all three. When states recognise Palestine, they are not endorsing hatred against Jews. They are responding — belatedly — to decades of occupation, displacement and the systematic denial of Palestinian self-determination. Recognition is not an act of erasure; it is an attempt, however imperfect, to restore balance to an international order that has long privileged power over rights. The claim that Palestinian recognition causes anti-Semitism reverses causality. History suggests that hatred surges not after legal recognition, but after images of unchecked violence, civilian death and perceived impunity. What we are witnessing globally is not a rise in hatred towards Jews as Jews, but an intensification of anger towards policies perceived as unjust, disproportionate and immune from accountability. When governments respond to that anger by framing it as ethnic or religious hatred, they shift the conversation away from law, responsibility and reform — and towards fear. This is not a defence of anger spilling into abuse. It is a call to distinguish between protest and prejudice, between resistance to oppression and hatred of a people. The failure to draw this line clearly harms everyone: Palestinians whose suffering is delegitimised; Jews whose legitimate fears are instrumentalised; and the international system, whose moral language becomes incoherent. Arab and Muslims must also speak clearly. Our solidarity with Palestine must never slide into the dehumanisation of Jews, Christians, or anyone else. The moral strength of the Palestinian cause lies precisely in its universality: a demand for dignity, equality and freedom under

international law. Any rhetoric that abandons those principles betrays the cause rather than serving it. At the same time, Israeli leaders must recognise that invoking anti-Semitism as a shield against accountability is not only ineffective — it is corrosive. It alienates allies, silences necessary debate and places Jewish communities worldwide in an impossible position: asked to carry the political weight of a state’s actions, whether they support them or not. There is a greater danger here. When every critique is branded hatred, the word itself loses meaning. And when that happens, real anti-Semitism — violent, conspiratorial and genocidal — becomes harder to confront, not easier. The path forward requires intellectual honesty and moral courage. Recognition of Palestine should be framed not as an act against Jews, but as an act for justice. Opposition to occupation should be articulated not as revenge, but as restoration of rights. And the fight against anti-Semitism should be reclaimed from political instrumentalisation and returned to its proper place: the defence of human dignity against hatred. This is not a zero-sum moral universe. One can stand firmly against anti-Semitism and equally firmly against the annihilation of Palestinian rights. One can honour Jewish historical suffering without permitting it to be used as justification for another people’s dispossession. One can reject hatred without surrendering justice. If there is to be a future beyond accusation and counter-accusation, it will begin by naming things correctly. Not every critique is hatred. Not every recognition is hostility. And not every demand for freedom is a threat. Justice does not require enemies. It requires clarity.

Apathy has become a widespread disease



SONIA AMBROSIO

The writer is journalist, academic and researcher in media studies

AS The curtains close in 2025, I wonder why millions of people have remained indifferent to the unfolding events while lawbreakers have been changing the world. Regrettably, many choose to ignore it, whether out of ignorance or convenience. I view this as a wake-up call.

The terrible changes occurring are a result of human choices, not divine will. Those in power are normalising the most troubling aspects of human behaviour, while we passively, like sitting ducks, wait to be the next victims.

I wonder what world we will live in a year or a decade from now. Technological advances, economic instability and geopolitical unrest were major themes of the year, with troubling issues like wars, genocide, modern slavery and dubious business practices becoming normalised. It is as if all sense of humanity is lost. Yet, it is our nature to remain optimistic.

During the year, bots emerged as ‘hidden influences’ within the digital landscape, coinciding with the rise of artificial intelligence. We noted that the BRICS alliance is gaining strength amid global instability, while climate-related disasters are intensifying. However, the US-China trade tensions became the defining feature of the year.

As 2026 approaches, I contemplate whether emerging leaders can cultivate trust amid persistent political and economic instability.

Urgent environmental issues, significant technological advancements and evolving political situations will intersect to shape the upcoming year. Social and ethical issues are turning into major concerns. I see less investment in education and more in weapons and defence as nations assess their priorities.

The planet’s abundant natural wealth, while essential for modern society and life itself, is being rapidly exploited and turned into a commodity for economic profit in the hands of a few. People rarely grasp the long-term environmental and societal consequences of this accelerated extraction. Rushing to turn natural resources into financial capital might be shortsighted without appreciating the vital importance of these reserves for future generations.

The race for rare earths has the potential to fuel geopolitical tensions, as these elements are vital for green tech, defence and electronics. Economic reliance, the weaponisation of supply chains and competition for the newly accessible resources in the Arctic are some consequences, along with a lack of concern for environmental damage.

Who cares? Wealth inequality is expanding faster than the rate of poverty reduction around the world. Over 35 per cent of all personal wealth is in the hands of the world’s wealthiest 1 per cent, exceeding the combined wealth of the bottom 95

The terrible changes occurring are a result of human choices, not divine will. Those in power are normalising the most troubling aspects of human behaviour, while we passively, like sitting ducks, wait to be the next victims

per cent. This highlights a split caused by disproportionate asset growth for the super-rich. Then, I step away from the grandeur to focus on the every day. Every time I go grocery shopping, I wonder how families cope with feeding their children. Fresh fruits and vegetables, often called ‘pure gifts from Mother Nature’, are increasingly becoming luxury items because of rising costs caused by climate change, inflation, labour issues and complex supply chains. Consumers are seeing items priced out of reach, affecting their health and creating a divide where food feels like a luxury.

There is widespread lethargy because people don’t see the situation as their concern. But it is! We are helping power-centric people become ultra-billionaires. The small screen damages mental development, the excessive reliance on digital tools reduces critical thinking (if any exists), fosters mental laziness (which is plentiful), and harms reading and writing skills. Who needs these abilities when artificial intelligence can do the work? We are also losing strength in our arms and fingers as they become better at tapping buttons. Technologies are pushing us towards machine-generated solutions, which insult our incredible physical capabilities.

Whatever we are turning into is already taking shape. Challenging reality, with its sheer scale of absurdity and impact, is becoming a common way to explain the inexplicable in our modernity.

VANCE ASKS FOR PATIENCE IN PENNSYLVANIA ON US COST OF LIVING

JARRETT RENSHAW

US Vice-President J D Vance called for patience as the administration works to rein in high living costs during a speech in Pennsylvania, one week after President Donald Trump’s economic remarks there veered off topic.

The visit to Pennsylvania’s Lehigh Valley underscored a broader White House effort to sharpen its economic message as Republicans look to retain power in the 2026 midterm elections, amid signs voter frustration over costs is undercutting the party’s political standing.

“Even though we’ve made incredible progress, we understand that there’s a lot more work to do, and the thing that I’d ask from the American people is a little bit of patience,” Vance said. “I promise you, there is no person more impatient to solve the affordability crisis than Donald J Trump.”

Later, Vance visited Allentown Rescue Mission, a Christian homeless shelter and rehabilitation centre for men. Analysts said Vance’s disciplined and policy-focused approach could allow him to make a stronger economic case than Trump, who excels with the party base but struggles to persuade people beyond it. “Trump knows one thing: he speaks to the base well. J D Vance can actually stick to the subject and the prepared arguments. That’s impossible for Trump,” said Larry Sabato, a political science professor at the University of Virginia. Trump visited Pennsylvania’s Pocono Mountains last week to deliver what was billed as the first in a series of speeches by the president to address criticism that he was not paying sufficient attention to voters who say they are struggling with high prices. Instead, the 90-minute speech veered into attacks on Somali migrants in Minnesota and wind turbines. Trump blasted the word “affordability” as a Democratic hoax to exaggerate the cost of living. While Trump acknowledged that prices were high, he said the economy was booming and people were taking home more pay.

US economic growth remains steady, but inflation continues to pinch households. Wage gains have lagged behind living expenses for many Americans, leaving households under pressure. Consumer confidence fell to its lowest level in seven months in November. Vance toured a massive Uline shipping supplies distribution facility near Allentown before delivering remarks. Uline is owned by billionaire founders Liz and Dick Uihlein, who rank among Trump’s biggest political donors, contributing tens of millions of dollars to his campaign and allied causes, according to campaign finance records. Mike Barnes, a 40-year-old warehouse worker in the Lehigh Valley, said the last few years have been tough for his family of four, noting high utility and grocery costs have offset any increase in wages. — Reuters

Antitrust delayed is antitrust denied

WHEN A US federal judge ruled in late November that Meta does not maintain an illegal monopoly in social media, it was a reminder that even the strongest evidence can look weak when enforcers act too late.

Rejecting the US Federal Trade Commission’s narrow market definition, the court instead concluded that Meta, formerly known as Facebook, competes against a broad array of rivals such as TikTok and YouTube. While legal scholars can and will dissect the opinion, the biggest takeaway is that timing matters in dynamic markets, implying that antitrust authorities must develop a preventive approach, rather than relying solely on reactive measures.

The case centred on Facebook’s acquisitions of Instagram in 2012 and WhatsApp in 2014, when both were unmistakably competitive threats. Facebook said so itself: internal emails and strategy documents spelled out its intention to copy, acquire, or neutralise rivals, while the firm’s leaders explicitly acknowledged the existential threat posed by Instagram. FTC lawyers rarely uncover this type of smoking-gun evidence.

But the case collapsed under the weight of today’s market reality. Instead of considering the world as it existed when the mergers occurred, the court (incorrectly) cited the rise of TikTok, Snapchat and YouTube Shorts as evidence that Facebook lacked monopoly power. But TikTok’s success hardly disproves Facebook’s earlier dominance, because ByteDance, its parent company, spent vast sums on user acquisition, at one point becoming one of the largest buyers of ads on Facebook, Instagram and Snap in the United States. A Chinese company with almost unlimited capital breaking into the market is hardly proof of healthy competition.

The flaws in the court’s reasoning reflect a deeper problem with litigating consummated mergers: it asks judges to travel back in time and forget what they now know.



The court concluded that Meta, formerly known as Facebook, competes against a broad array of rivals such as TikTok and YouTube.

Questions like “Would Instagram have become this significant without Facebook’s investment?” or “What competition might have emerged if the acquisitions had not taken place?” are inherently counterfactual. It is very difficult to measure the impact of competition that never existed.

This suggests that the acquisitions should have been challenged when they were first proposed – a difficult task, but not as hard as challenging consummated deals. Predicting the future is less formidable than reconstructing the present on the basis of an imaginary past.

The flaws of late enforcement were also on display in the Google antitrust trial. Even as a US federal judge ruled in 2024 that Google had illegally monopolised general-search services, the remedy was softened by the perception that AI chatbots were already reshaping the market. Even the boldest proposed remedies centred less on restoring competition in search and more on ensuring that the next tech frontier remains open.

The same dynamic was evident in the landmark antitrust case that the US federal government brought against Microsoft in the 1990s. Instead of reviving competition in operating systems, where Microsoft’s dominance was entrenched, the litigation cleared space for the next generation of companies by preventing Microsoft from extending its monopoly into

browsers and apps. In fast-moving markets, prevention is better than cure, which is why intervening early to block illegal mergers must be the norm, not the exception. Regulators should have prevented Facebook from acquiring Instagram and WhatsApp in the first place, but erred on the side of caution, fearing false positives and believing that the market would self-correct. But that decision has proved impossible to unwind, even though Facebook’s acquisition of direct competitors in a competitive market should have been a straightforward win for antitrust authorities – the very kind of textbook harm the law is designed to prevent. To their credit, the FTC and the Department of Justice under former US president Joe Biden had begun to develop and use their preventive toolkit. They challenged several mergers (including Nvidia-Arm, Illumina-GRAIL and Microsoft-Activision Blizzard), examined practices in nascent industries such as AI partnerships, and launched early probes into emerging monopolies in the cloud computing and semiconductor markets. But the pendulum has swung back under Donald Trump’s second administration, which has pursued merger settlements, dialled back investigations into AI giants, and revived the myth that tech firms are the guardians of innovation and national security.

It doesn’t have to be this way. US antitrust regulators now have stronger merger guidelines and a clearer understanding of how digital markets work. What they need is the political will to act early and decisively. The same applies to other governments. The most consequential tech mergers are reviewed simultaneously in multiple jurisdictions, and regulators in the European Union and the United Kingdom also have powerful preventive tools, including merger review and market studies. Even just initiating an investigation can create enough friction and uncertainty for parties to abandon a deal, as happened with Nvidia-Arm and Visa-Plaid. ©Project Syndicate, 2025



MADHAVI SINGH

The writer is Deputy Director of the Thurman Arnold Project and a resident fellow at the Information Society Project at Yale Law School

SPORTS

ROUND THREE



A group of local rally drivers will participate in this rally both in cars as well as on Can-Ams.

FINAL ROUND OF OAA SPRINT RALLY IN NAKHAL TOMORROW

MUSCAT: The third and final round of the Sprint Rally, organised by the Oman Automobile Association (OAA), starts on Friday with two new stages taking place in the Wilayat of Nakhal in the Al Batinah South Governorate.

This round will be held over two stages, the first of which is the Nakhal stage, covering a distance of approximately five kilometres and the second stage will be held in Al Sareer area, covering a distance of 19 km. The two stages will be repeated three times, separated by two services and refuelling period, before heading to the price giving ceremony area which will be held near the Sultan Qaboos Mosque in the Wilayat of Nakhal.

Rally driver Haitham Soomar and his well-known navigator Taha Soomar are currently leading the championship after winning the second round, which took place in Al Misfah and Al Jifnain. He had previously achieved second place in the first round of the Sprint Rally in Al Jifnain and Al Misfah areas.

A group of local rally drivers will participate in this rally both in cars as well as on Can-Ams. Competitor Haitham Soomar, driving a Mitsubishi Evo 7, aiming to achieve the title of the third and final round to be crowned championship title this year after three rounds in which he competed with a group of local competitors. As for the motorcycle category (Can-Am), the group is led by Saif al Harthy on a Can-Am Maverick, who was hoping to win this round to secure the title of this category, but fortunately will miss this rally due to not availability of his Can Am. The first stage of the rally will start at 10 am from Nakhal before the participating cars and bikes move on to complete the rally in the second stage in the Al Sareer area.

The rally includes a group of competitors, including Salem al Tooqi, Ghaith al Qasimi, Hafidh al Numani, Bashar al Qasimi, Musab Soomar, and Mazin al Shaibani.

Haitham Soomar, driving a Mitsubishi Evo 7, aims to achieve the title of the third and final round to be crowned with the championship title this year.



Seeb, Majees power into Ministry’s Shield semis



Majees secured a place in the last four after an exciting five-set win over Masirah.

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, DEC 17

SEEB Club booked their place in the semifinals of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth Shield Volleyball Championship after a straight-set victory over Al Ittihad. The match was played at the main hall of the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher, as Seeb once again demonstrated their technical superiority and vast experience in decisive encounters.

Seeb entered the match with high concentration and imposed their rhythm from the opening set, relying on powerful serves and well-organised blocking, which gave them a clear advantage and an early 11-4 lead. Despite Al Ittihad’s attempts to re-enter the match and show balanced attacking play, weaknesses in defensive coverage allowed the gap to widen, with Seeb taking the first set 25-16.

Al Ittihad started the second set more positively and managed to take a two-point lead early on, but Seeb quickly regained their balance and levelled the score at 3-3. The teams remained locked at 6-6 before Seeb’s experience proved decisive, as they tightened control, gradually extended their lead, and closed the set with the same scoreline, 25-16.

The third set was more evenly contested at the start, with Al Ittihad moving three points ahead, capitalising on a brief lapse from Seeb. However, Seeb responded strongly, drawing level at 6-6 before taking full command through defensive stability and attacking efficiency. They maintained their advantage to seal the set 25-21 and complete a clean 3-0 victory.



Seeb booked their place in the semifinals of the Ministry’s Shield after a straight-set victory over Al Ittihad.

FIVE-SET THRILLER

Majees Club also secured a place in the semifinals after an exciting five-set win over Masirah, in a fiercely contested match that remained intense until the final moments.

The match began in favour of Masirah, who entered with strong focus and successfully dictated play in the first set, benefiting from solid reception and effective attacking to win it 25-20, amid a relative dip in Majees’ finishing.

Majees bounced back strongly in the second set, showing a completely different performance. They dominated proceedings with powerful serving and disciplined defence, unsettling Masirah and comfortably taking the set 25-11.

The third set saw continued back-and-forth action, with both sides exchanging points in a highly competitive contest. Masirah pushed hard to regain momentum, but Majees’ experience in handling crucial points allowed them to edge the set 27-25.

Masirah refused to surrender and returned strongly in the fourth set, which was evenly balanced for most of its duration. Masirah eventually clinched it 26-24 after a run of late points, forcing a decisive fifth set. In the final set, Majees appeared calmer and more composed, capitalising on Masirah’s errors, varying their attacking options, and succeeding at the net to take the set 15-10 and claim a dramatic 3-2 victory.

Chelsea edge Cardiff to reach League Cup semifinals

CARDIFF: Chelsea booked their place in the League Cup semifinals with a 3-1 win at third-tier Cardiff City on Tuesday where the Premier League side needed goals from substitutes Alejandro Garnacho and Pedro Neto to put away the courageous Welsh club.

The hosts were the only non-Premier League side left in the competition but they more than held their own against the Club World Cup winners who were forced to turn to their bench to overcome the League One leaders.

Cardiff were the better side in the opening half, enjoying plenty of possession early on and came closest to scoring through a deflected cross from Isaak Davies which forced Chelsea keeper Filip Jorgensen into a reaction



Chelsea’s Pedro Neto celebrates scoring their second goal with Alejandro Garnacho and teammates during the Carabao Cup quarterfinal against Cardiff City at Cardiff City Stadium in Wales, Britain. — Reuters

save at his near post. Chelsea, lacking urgency, struggled to get in behind Cardiff who were very disciplined without the ball, and

the boisterous crowd inside the sold-out Cardiff City Stadium cheered every challenge and clearance from the home side.

Chelsea manager Enzo Maresca named an entirely changed starting 11 from the side which beat Everton 2-0 on Saturday, and after an underwhelming opening half he sent on Joao Pedro and Garnacho for the second half.

Garnacho had the first chance after the break with Cardiff keeper Nathan Trott making a fine save from the close-range effort but the substitute opened the scoring in the 57th minute with Chelsea capitalising on a poor pass out from the back.

Facundo Buonanotte gathered possession, drove forward into the area and fed Garnacho who slipped his shot past Trott.

Chelsea went looking for the killer second goal and Trott

tipped over a Buonanotte strike from distance. The game looked to be slipping away from Cardiff before David Turnbull got on the end of Perry Ng’s floated cross into the box to steer his header beyond Jorgensen with 15 minutes left.

Trott dived bravely at Pedro’s feet to deny the Chelsea man a tap-in, but the visitors retook the lead with eight minutes remaining when Neto’s shot took a deflection on its way past the Cardiff keeper and Garnacho netted his second in added time.

Manchester City host Brentford and Newcastle United welcome Fulham in Wednesday’s quarter-finals, with Arsenal and Crystal Palace contesting the final game of the round next Tuesday. — Reuters

24TITLES



Spain's Carlos Alcaraz celebrates with coach Juan Carlos Ferrero after winning the French Open 2024 final against Germany's Alexander Zverev at Roland Garros. — Reuters

ALCARAZ SPLITS WITH COACH FERRERO AFTER SEVEN YEARS

PARIS: World tennis number one Carlos Alcaraz has split with his coach Juan Carlos Ferrero, they said on Wednesday, ending a seven-year partnership that delivered 24 titles including six Grand Slam crowns.

A former world number one himself and fellow Spaniard, 45-year old Ferrero began coaching Alcaraz when he was 15 and quickly developed him into a major force.

Ferrero, the 2003 French Open champion, converted his gifted protege from a claycourt specialist to a player who dominated on all surfaces.

“Thank you for turning childhood dreams into realities,” the 22-year old Alcaraz wrote in a statement, without specifying any reason for ending the partnership but mentioning new adventures and projects for both.

“We started this journey when I was barely a kid, and throughout all this time you’ve accompanied me on an incredible journey, on and off the court. And I’ve enjoyed every step of it so much with you.

“We’ve managed to reach the top, and I feel that if our sports paths had to part ways, it had to be from up there. From the place we always worked toward and always aspired to reach.”

Alcaraz finished the year with the French Open and US Open titles while he won eight titles in all as he secured the year-end number one for a second time in his career.

The split comes at a crucial time in Alcaraz’s career as he bids to eclipse Spanish great Rafael Nadal and become the youngest man to complete the set of all four Grand Slam titles when he heads to the Australian Open in the New Year.

The Melbourne Grand Slam main draw will begin on January 18. Alcaraz will look to go beyond the quarterfinals for the first time in his career after making the last eight in the previous two editions.

Ferrero, who has worked alongside Samuel Lopez in Alcaraz’s team, said on social media he wished to have continued coaching the player and hoped their paths would cross again. — Reuters



New York Knicks players celebrate with the NBA Cup trophy after their final against the San Antonio Spurs.



KNICKS DOWN SPURS TO CLINCH NBA CUP

OG Anunoby scored 28 points as the New York Knicks ended their 52-year trophy drought with a 124-113 NBA Cup final victory over the San Antonio Spurs on Tuesday.

Forward Anunoby rattled in five three-pointers and point guard Jalen Brunson finished with 25 points as New York clinched their first silverware since the 1973 NBA Finals at the T-Mobile Arena in Las Vegas.

San Antonio went into the final brimming with confidence after upsetting top seeds and reigning NBA champions Oklahoma City in Saturday’s semi-finals thanks to a superb display from French prodigy Victor Wembanyama.

But a dogged all-round performance from New York kept Wembanyama in check and thwarted San Antonio’s hopes of crowning their cup campaign with victory.

The Knicks limited Wembanyama to 18 points while delivering a balanced offensive performance to pull clear in the fourth quarter after trailing by 11 points late in the third.

Seven Knicks players finished in double figures, with Anunoby and Brunson backed by Karl-Anthony Towns (16 points), Jordan Clarkson (15), Tyler Kolek (14) and 11 points apiece from Josh Hart and Mikal Bridges.

Mitchell Robertson provided a valuable defensive cameo from the bench, hauling in 15 rebounds with two blocks.

“OG Anunoby, Tyler Kolek, Jordan Clarkson, Mitchell Robertson — they played their asses off tonight,” said Brunson after being named the tournament’s Most Valuable Player.

“Without them we don’t win this,” Brunson said. “We got down 10 or whatever it was and we found a way to win.

“That’s going to be our motto going forward: we’re going to find a way.”

San Antonio had looked to be motoring towards victory when Wembanyama knocked down a 27-foot three-pointer with just over two minutes left in the third period to put the Spurs up 92-81.

But Clarkson and Kolek drained three-pointers to trim the Spurs lead to five points and the Knicks then cut loose in the fourth quarter, outscoring their opponents 35-19 to seal the win.

EMOTIONAL WEMBANYAMA

Knicks head coach Mike Brown said winning the title augured well for hopes of mounting a championship run at the NBA Finals in his first season in charge.

“Any time you can participate in an event where you’re the last one standing and you’re able to hang up a banner, especially at iconic MSG (Madison Square Garden), you take that seriously,” Brown said. “And all of our guys took it seriously.”

San Antonio’s scoring was led by Dylan

Harper with 21 off the bench, while De’Aaron Fox was the pick of the starters with 16 points.

An emotional Wembanyama fought back tears at the post-game press conference, indicating he was mourning the loss of a loved one.

“Sorry, I just lost somebody today,” he said, before taking one question and departing.

Spurs coach Mitch Johnson blamed collective shortcomings for the defeat rather than Wembanyama’s performance.

“I think we struggled more as a team... We gave up a lot of offensive rebounds, which hurt us getting out in transition,” Johnson said.

“When we played with the appropriate space but the right spacing and the right tempo we got some really good looks. And we missed them. I think it was probably more of a team thing than I thought Victor was individually struggling.”

Johnson though believes San Antonio have plenty to build on as they set about pursuing leaders Oklahoma City in the Western Conference.

“Playing really competitive games against really, really good teams,” Johnson said. “Seasoned, experienced teams that have been in similar situations. To be able to feel those games, work those games, be in the moment in those games, I think is a valuable experience.” — AFP

CAREY GOES FROM ASHES VILLAIN TO HERO WITH TON IN ADELAIDE

CAREY STEADIES AUSTRALIA WITH FIRST ASHES CENTURY

KHAWAJA SCORES DEFIANT 82 AS LATE INCLUSION FOR SMITH

ENGLAND BOWLERS TOIL IN SWELTERING CONDITIONS

ADELAIDE: Hometown hero Alex Carey rode his luck to a first Ashes century to rescue Australia as England’s bowlers toiled in an Adelaide Oval cauldron on a scorching opening day of the third Test on Wednesday.

The wicketkeeper’s 106 helped drive Australia to 326 for eight at stumps, with Mitchell Starc (33 not out) and Nathan Lyon, scoreless off 18 balls, having provided stubborn tail-end resistance.

Carey survived a caught-behind decision on 72 with the help of a glitch in the review technology before going on to score his third Test century.

In front of a big family gathering in the sell-out crowd of 56,298 at his home stadium, Carey raised his bat and his head to the sky in a tribute to his father who died of leukaemia in September.

“It was pretty special to make a hundred here in front of home fans and family, and you know why I was looking to the heavens,” he said.

“I’ll try not to tear up. It was a

great moment.

“Dad played the biggest role in my cricket, coached me all the way through and sort of let me go as I got into my older teenage years, but (he) would always shoot a message (like) ‘put the reverse sweep away’”.

Carey was ably backed by Usman Khawaja, who capitalised on his late inclusion in place of an unwell Steve Smith by scoring 82 off 126 balls.

The pair combined in a crucial 91-run stand that pulled the hosts from peril after they were reduced to 94 for four straight after lunch.

Trailing 2-0 in the series, England’s hopes of keeping the Ashes alive suffered an early blow when home captain Pat Cummins won the toss and put his team in to bat on a firm wicket begging for a big score.

At stumps, with the temperature still hovering around 35 degrees Celsius (95F), England’s prospects appeared bleak after Carey and Starc pushed the hosts past 300.

With day two expected to hit 39 degrees, the tourists will be



Australia's Alex Carey celebrates after reaching his century during the third Ashes Test against England at Adelaide Oval, Australia. — Reuters

desperate for quick wickets in the morning to avert another punishing day in the field.

MISSED CHANCES

Yet again, England had moments of ascendancy but were unable to take their chances.

Khawaja was the chief

beneficiary, being dropped on three by Harry Brook at second slip with a thick edge off the bowling of recalled paceman Josh Tongue.

A diving Brydon Carse put down a tougher chance to remove Carey for 52 when he smashed Archer into the covers.

Captain Ben Stokes burned two of England’s reviews trying to dislodge Carey, first for lbw when he was on 52 and later for the caught-behind appeal off the bowling of recalled seamer Josh Tongue.

Carey admitted he may have “feathered” the ball but a noise picked up by the ‘Snicko’ technology did not align with the ball travelling by the bat on review of the delivery, so the decision stood.

England bowling coach David Saker said the tourists were hard done by. “The boys are pretty confident he hit it,” Saker told reporters. “Those decisions hurt.”

Wednesday’s cheers for Carey came two years after he became the villain of the 2023 Ashes for throwing down Jonny Bairstow’s

stumps in a controversial run-out during the second Test at Lord’s.

He was eventually caught for 106 trying to slog-sweep the spin of Will Jacks, sending a top-edge soaring.

It continued a pattern of soft dismissals that kept England buoyed despite the taxing weather.

Both Australia’s openers Travis Head (10) and Jake Weatherald (18) fell cheaply in a six-ball burst before the first drinks break.

A driving Head was caught for 10 off seamer Carse, with Zak Crawley diving to his left at short cover to pluck a brilliant one-hander above the grass.

Weatherald fell trying to pull a sizzling Jofra Archer bouncer only to gift an easy catch behind the wicket.

Khawaja and Labuschagne steered Australia to 94 for two at lunch but Labuschagne and new batter Cameron Green threw away their wickets in three balls after the break.

Carse caught both at midwicket off the bowling of Archer in near-identical dismissals. — Reuters

SPORTS

DEMBELE
NAMED FIFA
BEST PLAYER
OF 2025



BONMATI
WINS WOMEN’S
AWARD FOR
THIRD TIME

DEMBELE, 28, WON THE BALLON D'OR IN SEPTEMBER, REWARDING AN EXCEPTIONAL SEASON WITH PSG



FRANCE and Paris Saint-Germain attacker Ousmane Dembele won the men's Fifa Best award at a ceremony in Qatar on Tuesday, while Barcelona midfield maestro Aitana Bonmati collected the women's prize.

Dembele, 28, won the Ballon d'Or in September, rewarding an exceptional season with PSG, which included the Ligue 1 club's first Champions League title.

"I wanted to thank my team-mates. Hard work pays off, it's been a fantastic year for me, both individually and collectively," said Dembele after the ceremony, which took place on the eve of the Intercontinental Cup final between PSG and Flamengo, also being held in Qatar.

Former Borussia Dortmund and Barcelona forward Dembele, who was part of the France team that won the World Cup in 2018, scored 35 goals in all competitions as PSG claimed a French league and cup double as well as European glory.

PSG's Spanish coach Luis Enrique was named best coach of a men's team, ahead of Barcelona's Hansi Flick and Liverpool's Premier League winning manager Arne Slot.

Bonmati, 27, was crowned women's player of the year for the third time in a row, after also picking up her third consecutive Ballon d'Or in the autumn.

"I am grateful to have the honour," she said, before thanking her team-mates and coaches, as well as the fans who voted for her.

The personal awards come at the end of a year of ups and

PSG's Spanish coach Luis Enrique was named best coach of a men's team, ahead of Barcelona's Hansi Flick and Liverpool's Premier League winning manager Arne Slot.

England manager Sarina Wiegman picked up the award for coaching a women's side after she won a third consecutive Euros title in the summer.

Italy's Gianluigi Donnarumma picked up the men's award for best goalkeeper, while Chelsea's Euro 2025 winner Hannah Hampton won the trophy in the women's category.

Santiago Montiel of Argentina's Independiente won the coveted Puskas award for best goal of the year.

downs for the Spaniard, who won the Spanish domestic league crown but lost both the Champions League and European Championship finals last season.

Bonmati was named player of the tournament at the Euros, despite not starting either of Spain's first two matches as she recovered from a bout of viral meningitis.

She is currently out of action after fracturing her leg in training on the eve of Spain's successful Nations League final second leg win over Germany.

England manager Sarina Wiegman picked up the award for coaching a women's side after she won a third consecutive Euros title in the summer.

In the goalkeeping category, Italy's Gianluigi Donnarumma, who joined Manchester City after winning the Champions League with PSG, picked up the men's award, while Chelsea's Euro 2025 winner Hannah Hampton won the trophy in the women's category.

Santiago Montiel won the coveted Puskas award for best goal of the year thanks to his overhead kick from outside the penalty area for Independiente against Independiente Rivadavia in an Argentinian top flight match. Lizbeth Ovalle's scorpion kick for Tigres against Guadalajara in a Mexican league match won the Marta award.

The winners were chosen by a combined vote of fans, media representatives, captains and national team coaches for their performances between August 11, 2024 and August 2, 2025. — AFP

BONMATI, 27, ALSO PICKED UP HER THIRD CONSECUTIVE BALLON D'OR IN THE AUTUMN



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SHORTTAKES

OMAN’S RAKIZA FUND RAISES \$1 BN IN GLOBAL CAPITAL



MUNEER ALI AL MUNEERI
CEO of Rakiza Fund

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, DEC 17

RAKIZA — Oman’s first dedicated infrastructure investment fund, established by the Oman Investment Authority (OIA) — has so far raised \$1 billion in capital from international investors to support the development of priority national infrastructure projects and attract foreign investment.

The portfolio reflects Rakiza’s success in opening a new gateway for investment into Oman’s infrastructure sector, said Muneer Ali al Muneeri, CEO of Rakiza Fund.

“Rakiza is the first investment fund in the Sultanate of Oman dedicated to the infrastructure sector and one of the first of its kind in the region. It was established by the Oman Investment Authority in 2018 to support the privatisation programme, attract foreign direct investment and promote priority national infrastructure projects,” Al Muneeri said.

“Since our launch, we have raised \$1 billion from major international investors and built a distinctive, fully independent investment model separate from the sovereign fund”, he added in an interview featured in the latest edition of Enjaz & Eejaz, OIA’s quarterly newsletter.

Among Rakiza’s notable investments is the Silal, which has significantly strengthened Oman’s food security and supply chain, reducing summer produce spoilage from 30% to less than 5% within a year, while also supporting market regulation through licensed Omani operations.

The Fund has also partnered with a leading British company in Helios Towers Oman, enhancing the country’s telecom infrastructure, enabling operators such as Vodafone to expand and increasing electricity coverage to telecom towers to 99%.

In addition, Rakiza’s investment in SOHAR Port and Freezone, alongside the Asyad Group and other shareholders, has helped raise container handling capacity to one million TEUs, giving the port a market share of around 31%.

Consortium wins 120 MW JBB wind power project

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, DEC 17

A CONSORTIUM led by EDF power solutions, Al Khadra Partners and OQ Alternative Energy (OQAE), the National Champion for Clean Energy, signed a 20-year Power Purchase Agreement (PPA) with Nama Power and Water Procurement Company (Nama PWP) to develop the 120 MW Jaalan Bani Bu Ali (JBB) Wind Power Plant in the Sultanate of Oman.

The JBB Wind Project is located in the Al Sharqiyah South Governorate, approximately 440 km from the Port of Duqm and spans an area of 10.7km2 of land. The wind farm will consist of 16 wind turbines, each with a power output of 7.7 MW. The project is expected to reach financial close in 2026 and connect to the grid in Q3 2027.

Upon completion, JBB Wind Farm will generate renewable electricity sufficient to power over 13,500 Omani households. The project will enable the country to avoid more than 270,000 tonnes of CO₂ annually, contributing to Oman’s climate change mitigation goals, while creating jobs and sharing expertise with the local population.

On this occasion, Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals, stated: “We are pleased to mark the signing of the Jaalan Bani Bu Ali Wind Power Project agreement in the Al Sharqiyah South Governorate.

The project represents a pioneering step within the Sultanate of Oman’s efforts to



Dignitaries and executives at the signing in Muscat on Tuesday.

“The project represents a pioneering step within the Sultanate of Oman’s efforts to strengthen the national renewable energy system, embodying our firm commitment to achieving the pillars of Oman Vision 2040 for the energy sector and the net-zero target by 2050”.

Al Aufi added: “The Wilayat of Jaalan Bani Bu Ali was selected as the site for this vital project, which spans an area of approximately 11 million square metres and stands as one of the country’s most prominent wind energy projects.

The project entails an investment of around RO 50.86 million and will contribute to reducing carbon emissions by approximately 270,000 tonnes annually.

This reflects the Sultanate of Oman’s strategic direction towards building a modern energy system based on sustainability, enhancing the efficient use of the Sultanate of Oman’s natural resources and strengthening the contribution of national competencies in the energy sector”.

He further stated: “The signing of this project agreement reaffirms the Sultanate of Oman’s determination to move forward with the transition towards a low-carbon economy and to enhance its position as a leading regional hub for renewable energy.

We have set a target for renewable energy to account for 30 per cent of electricity generation in the Sultanate of Oman by 2030 — an economy capable of attracting high-quality investments and supporting sustainable development plans, delivering tangible impacts on the climate, the economy and Omani society”.

Ahmed bin Salim al Abri, CEO of Nama Power and Water Procurement, highlighted that: “The JBB Wind Power Project represents a key milestone in the Sultanate of Oman’s transition to clean energy, with an annual generation capacity of approximately 352,380 MWh”.

OQ launches nine Ladayn plastics projects worth RO 40 million

SAEED AL MASHARFI
SUHAR, DEC 17

OQ GROUP celebrated the inauguration of nine new factories under the Ladayn Plastics Industries Programme at Suhar Industrial City, under the auspices of Shaikh Dr Ali bin Masoud al Sunaidy, Chairman of the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ).

The nine projects, with investments of approximately RO 40 million, form part of a broader portfolio of 27 projects with total investments of over RO 85 million planned under the Ladayn initiative.

The newly launched nine projects focus on the manufacture of three-layer food packaging containers, the production of packaging bags, dairy and confectionery packaging materials, plastic colour masterbatches and compounds, thermoplastics, a range of plastic and packaging solutions, plastic materials for the medical sector and polypropylene yarns.

Ashraf al Maamari, Group Chief Executive Officer of OQ, said: “There are defining moments in a nation’s development journey



The nine projects focus on an array of plastics- and polymer-based packaging solutions and applications.

when projects evolve from being industrial facilities into true milestones that build confidence and reinforce Oman’s position as a leader in future industries”.

Al Maamari noted that these projects align closely with national priorities, stating: “Through these initiatives, we are contributing to the government’s efforts

to advance economic diversification and translate the objectives of Oman Vision 2040, which receive great care and attention from His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq, may Allah protect and preserve him”.

He explained that the newly launched factories go beyond conventional manufacturing, saying: “These facilities are not merely production lines; they represent a strategic step towards converting petrochemical feedstock into high-value finished products, creating an attractive environment for local and foreign investment and generating a positive economic impact that will extend well into the future”.

Highlighting OQ’s value-creation strategy, he said: “This step reflects OQ Group’s strategy to maximise the value of national resources and contribute to building an integrated value chain, with products from this industrial ecosystem targeted for export to more than 80 countries worldwide”.

He stressed the programme’s broader economic significance, noting: “The Ladayn Programme represents a key pillar of national development, opening wide

investment opportunities in Oman and enabling advanced expertise and modern technologies to strengthen industrial growth while raising efficiency and quality across production processes”.

Underscoring the social and developmental impact, he said: “These factories do not only produce goods; they also create opportunities — opportunities for employment, innovation and a growing Omani manufacturing presence in regional and global markets”.

Al Maamari emphasised that the programme’s success was built on strong institutional collaboration, stating: “This programme would not have been possible without genuine integration between the public and private sectors; and close cooperation with Madayn, the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ), particularly SOHAR Port and Freezone and Salalah Free Zone, as well as the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, all of which contributed to developing advanced infrastructure and a robust investment environment”.

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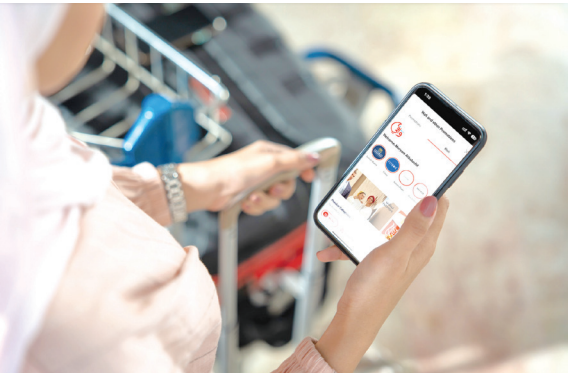
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SHORTTAKES



Through Wafi, rewards are embedded into the same digital world customers already use to manage their plans, payments and services.

VODAFONE OMAN REDEFINES LOYALTY WITH “WAFI”

MUSCAT: Closing 2025 on a high note, Vodafone Oman has introduced Wafi, Oman’s first-of-its-kind loyalty experience offering instant rewards without the need for point collection. The launch strengthens the company’s digital ecosystem with experiences designed around convenience, relevance and the growing customer expectation for immediate and accessible value-add.

Through Wafi, rewards are embedded into the same digital world customers already use to manage their plans, payments and services on the My Vodafone App. They can instantly unlock offers from partner brands across dining, fashion and entertainment, and enjoy everyday savings.

The rewards are not tied to points or minimum spend but simply are a given benefit of being a Vodafone customer, reflecting Wafi’s slogan: “You’re with us. That’s what matters”. The programme moves beyond traditional, transactional schemes towards building deeper connections and delivering everyday value to customers.

“Today’s customers don’t separate loyalty from experience; they expect recognition to happen naturally, as part of how they already connect”, said Aisha al Kiyumi, Head of Commercial Planning at Vodafone Oman. “Wafi was developed from that understanding.

It’s not a new platform or process, but an extension of the relationship we already have with our customers, one that rewards them in real time, through the same journey they trust every day”.

The launch of Wafi marks the beginning of a dynamic platform that will grow through new partnerships and insights drawn from customer engagement. As usage grows, new categories and experiences will be added, ensuring that Wafi develops in line with how customers in Oman engage, spend and connect in their everyday lives.

The introduction of Wafi reinforces Vodafone Oman’s commitment to create a fully digital experience centred on the customer. From connectivity and payments to engagement and now rewards, every advancement echoes a single idea that technology should be in sync with people’s lives.

20 more chances to drive home a new Toyota Yaris

THE excitement surrounding Saud Bahwan Automotive’s historic 50th Anniversary Mega Celebration continues to grow as another group of customers takes home brand-new Toyota Yaris vehicles. With every draw, more Toyota buyers are discovering that their purchase comes with not just unmatched quality and value, but also the chance to win big.

Celebrating five decades of partnership between Saud Bahwan Automotive and Toyota, the campaign reflects a journey built on trust, reliability and customer happiness. Along with the opportunity to win one of 50 Toyota Yaris cars, customers also enjoy exclusive benefits including 50% VAT covered, 5 years/50,000 km service, 50% insurance covered and RO 50 worth Thiqah Loyalty Points.

This latest raffle draw highlights winners from across Oman, each representing a special bond with the Toyota brand.

A delighted winner from Al Seeb, Salim bin Abdullah al Masroori, who purchased a Veloz, expressed his happiness saying, “Toyota has always stood for peace of mind. Winning this Yaris gives me an encouraging feeling and I feel even more confident in my choice”.

Another thrilled winner, Nasir Gulam Hussain Sayed from Muscat, who purchased a Fortuner, said, “Toyota delivers quality you can count on. Winning a Yaris through this campaign is a wonderful surprise for



Celebrating five decades of partnership between Saud Bahwan Automotive and Toyota, the campaign reflects a journey built on trust, reliability and customer happiness.

me and my family”. Zayan bint Khalfan al Musalhiyah from Barka, who bought a RAV4 Adventure, added, “Toyota vehicles have always been part of our family. Winning a Yaris during this iconic 50th anniversary celebration is truly special”.

Among this group of winners is Mahmood bin Hamood al Waheibi from Sinaw, who purchased a Land Cruiser Pick-Up. He shared, “Toyota has been a trusted companion for years. This win is a moment of pride for me”. Concluding this set of

winners are customers holding Coupon No 11665 and Coupon No 11560, each turning their Toyota purchase into an unforgettable moment as part of the 50th Anniversary Mega Celebration.

With every draw, more customers are turning their Toyota purchase into a memorable celebration. This mega campaign, one of the largest ever held in Oman, continues to create memorable moments for delighted winners across Oman.

EDO achieves investment grade rating from Fitch

MUSCAT: Energy Development Oman (EDO) has been upgraded by Fitch Ratings to BBB- with a stable outlook, following the recent upgrade of the Sultanate of Oman’s sovereign credit rating to BBB-.

Fitch affirmed EDO’s Standalone Credit Profile at bbb+, citing the company’s large-scale oil and gas operations, resilient cash flow generation as a result of contracted gas sales in addition to its flexible royalty framework, prudent dividend policy, and low leverage.

With the Fitch upgrade, EDO has now secured investment grade ratings from both Fitch Ratings and S&P Global Ratings,



This milestone reflects EDO’s positive business trajectory and the strength of its financial profile.

following S&P’s upgrade to BBB- in September 2024. This milestone reflects EDO’s positive business trajectory and the strength of its financial profile. The investment grade status will broaden the company’s investor base and supports access to more competitive financing, reinforcing its capacity to fund operations and future growth while contributing to Oman’s energy-sector development objectives.

Commenting on the rating, Sultan al Mamari, EDO’s Chief Financial Officer, said, “We are delighted to have achieved Investment Grade status from two leading international rating agencies.

Bank Muscat participates in 8th edition of Muscat Eat Festival

MUSCAT: Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, participated in the 8th edition of the Muscat Eat Festival, which was held at the Oman Automobile Association in Muscat over the weekends from December 4-6 and 11-13, 2025.

The bank’s stage at the event featured a range of interactive games and engaging awareness activities designed for all segments of society.

These activities focused on various topics such as saving, spending and personal budget management, offering visitors an educational and entertaining experience that combines learning with fun. In addition, the bank



The bank’s stage at the event featured a range of interactive games and engaging awareness activities designed for all segments of society.

offered free entry to the festival for the first 1,000 participants holding a Floosi debit card, as part of its efforts to encourage all visitors to benefit from the educational and interactive activities.

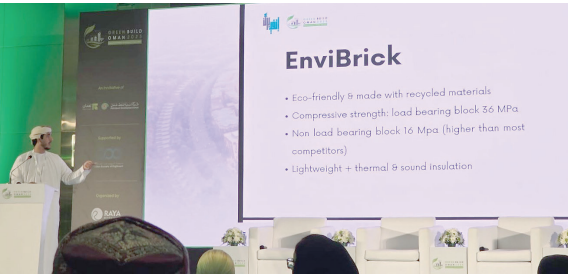
The Floosi Savings Account is one of the Bank’s solutions designed specifically for individuals aged 7 to 17. The solution offers multiple benefits such as a daily transaction limit of RO 50 per transaction and a monthly cumulative limit of RO 200 for Point of Sale (PoS), e-commerce transactions and ATM withdrawals.

For more information about the product, customers may visit the page via Accounts Details — Bank Muscat. Commenting on the Bank’s

participation, Saleh bin Mohammed al Maaani, Deputy General Manager of Capital Regions at Bank Muscat said: “Bank Muscat places great importance on taking part in such events, as they reflect the Bank’s commitment to introducing customers to its wide range of services and initiatives.

The Bank is keen to be part of the Muscat Eat Festival to attract large numbers of visitors to learn more about its offerings and enjoy the various entertainment activities. I would like to extend my sincere thanks and appreciation to the organisers and our valued customers for their continuous trust in the Bank’s services and products.”

SHORTTAKES



Mohamed Alderiy highlights how material science and local innovation can directly support Oman’s sustainability and energy-efficiency goals.

STARTUP RESHAPES SUSTAINABLE CONSTRUCTION IN OMAN

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, DEC 17

Omani startup EnviBrick showcased a home-grown construction innovation at the Green Build Oman 2025 event, positioning its engineered bricks as a practical solution to one of the country’s most pressing challenges: high energy consumption in buildings.

Mohamed Alderiy, Founder of EnviBrick, highlighted how material science and local innovation can directly support Oman’s sustainability and energy-efficiency goals. According to him, the company is “not just producing bricks, but creating a new construction technology” designed for the region’s climate.

Setting the market context, Alderiy cited data from Mordor Intelligence showing that the GCC green buildings market is projected to grow from \$35.8 billion in 2024 to about \$66.8 billion by 2029, reflecting a compound annual growth rate of nearly 11 per cent.

This rapid expansion, he noted, creates a clear opportunity for locally developed materials that can reduce emissions while remaining commercially competitive. At the core of EnviBrick’s value proposition is addressing energy use driven by building temperature.

In Oman, more than 60 per cent of energy consumption in buildings is linked to air conditioning, with around 65 per cent directly attributed to heat transfer through building structures. EnviBrick’s engineered design focuses on reducing this heat transfer while maintaining a lightweight structure, directly lowering cooling demand and associated energy costs.

The product specifications presented underscored the brick’s technical strength. EnviBrick blocks are manufactured using recycled materials, reinforcing their eco-friendly credentials.

Oman-India CEPA to boost business opportunities

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, DEC 17

A Summit exploring Omani-Indian business opportunities was held on December 17, 2025 ahead of the expected signing of a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) between the two nations. It was organised by the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP), Invest Oman, Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) and Invest India.

Delivering the keynote address, Qais bin Mohammed al Yusef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, highlighted the significance of economic relations between the two nations: “India is a global economic force whose growth trajectory continues to shape regional and international markets.

Oman engages with India fully aware of its scale, ambition and capabilities – and equally aware of what Oman itself brings to this partnership. Our relationship is not defined by size, but by complementarity.

The ancient trade routes that once linked our ports remain relevant today, connecting India to the Gulf, East Africa and global markets through Oman’s logistics corridors, ports and industrial hubs”, he said.

Al Yusef added: “Bilateral trade reached more than \$2.7 billion in the first half of 2025 alone, representing a 63 per cent increase since 2020, reflecting strong momentum and diversification”.

“India is now Oman’s third-largest trading partner, while Oman continues to serve as a reliable destination for Indian investments across strategic sectors. Indian investment in Oman has more than tripled since 2020, now reaching \$5 billion. These investments span green steel, green ammonia, aluminium manufacturing and logistics – demonstrating confidence in Oman as a long-term operating base, not merely a market”, he said.

Significantly, Omani companies continue to expand their footprint in India, strengthening supply chains and connectivity between the two economies, Al Yusef pointed out. “I would also like to highlight the dedicated investment fund established with the Oman Investment Authority. These flows reflect something fundamental: confidence in systems, not



‘CEPA is a tool to deepen investment, strengthen supply chains and enable joint growth — not only in trade, but also in production, innovation and regional integration’: Al Yusef

just opportunities”. Commenting on the upcoming Free Trade Agreement, also known as the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), the Minister pointed out that while the agreement provides an important framework, its true value will be realised through implementation.

“It is a tool to deepen investment, strengthen supply chains and enable joint growth — not only in trade, but also in production, innovation and regional integration.

I invite business leaders from both Oman and India to explore its benefits and take full advantage of this agreement”.

In his opening remarks, Indian Minister of Commerce and Industry Piyush Goyal described the agreement as a historic milestone in bilateral relations, noting that it will be the first free trade agreement Oman signs with a country in 17 years.

He said the agreement opens wide-ranging opportunities across sectors including

textiles, footwear, automobiles, gems and jewellery, agrochemicals, renewable energy and auto components, positioning Oman as a gateway to the GCC, Eastern Europe, Central Asia and Africa.

Goyal also highlighted strong potential for collaboration in services such as professional services, accounting, business processes, research and development, tourism, healthcare and education, noting that tourism in particular holds significant scope for growth.

Looking ahead, he identified four priority areas for future cooperation: energy transition — including renewables, battery storage, green hydrogen and ammonia — infrastructure and multimodal logistics, food security and startups and technology, including artificial intelligence.

The summit included two investment presentations, one held by Invest Oman and another by Invest India. This was followed by two panel discussions: one addressing ‘Expanding Oman-India Trade Relations’ and another on ‘Advancing Oman-India Investment Partnership’.

The Free Trade Agreement between the two nations is expected to be signed with the arrival of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi to the Sultanate of Oman.

Tamakkun Programme empowers Omani youth and SMEs

FAISAL AL AJMI
MUSCAT, DEC 17

The third edition of the Tamakkun Programme for Independent Freelancing has concluded, demonstrating the fruits of the labour made by the members through their unity and innovation in providing support to Omani youth.

The programme is initiated by the Oman Youth Centre and is a move towards a greater plan of promoting youth as a source for innovation and a means to develop the Small and Medium-sized Enterprise (SMEs) sector according to Oman Vision 2040.



Tamakkun empowers Omani youth and SMEs, driving innovation and growth.

Alia bint Saeed al Shanfariay, CEO of the Oman Youth Centre, said, “This programme is one of the strategies of the Youth Centre, aiming to empower and develop the competencies of the young generation in many different sectors”. “This programme aims

for the participants to convert their competencies into productive projects; actually, more than 265 youths have participated in this programme, where 50 of them joined the final round and were able to accumulate total revenue over RO 32,000”.

The programme was implemented in partnership with more than five SMEs, as well as eight medium enterprise owners, freelancers and productive families, to stress the Youth Centre’s commitment to making the greatest social and economic impact.

Khamis bin Naser al Shuaibi, Director General of Shared Services at Oman Oil Marketing

Company, emphasised innovation in development.

“Innovation is not an expense but rather an essential tool in building opportunities, creating value and building national competitiveness”, Al Shuaibi stated.

Al Shuaibi defined Tamakkun as “a real-world example” that fills “the gap between innovation and marketplace, talent and sustainability, ambition and access to appropriate tools” because “it provides skills in innovative thinking, projects and business development” so projects “can be nurtured and grown into mature business models with high scalability”.

SANCTIONS ESCALATION

Trump orders blockade on Venezuela tankers



US President Donald Trump ordered a “blockade” of sanctioned oil tankers entering or leaving Venezuela, escalating pressure on President Nicolas Maduro by targeting the country’s main revenue source.

How the order will be enforced remains unclear, including possible Coast Guard interdictions. US has recently deployed thousands of troops to the region. — Reuters

CARBON TRADE

EU widens carbon levy net



The European Union plans to expand its carbon border levy to include car parts and washing machines, under proposals unveiled by the European Commission.

The measures would also tighten loopholes to prevent foreign firms from evading the fee. The Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism will start imposing costs from January on high-emission imports. — Reuters

COAL OUTLOOK

IEA sees coal peak before 2030



Global coal demand hit a record high in 2025 but is expected to decline by 2030 as renewables, nuclear power and abundant natural gas gain ground, the International Energy Agency said. Coal remains the largest source of electricity generation worldwide.

The IEA forecast demand rising 0.5% in 2025 to 8.85 billion metric tonnes. Phasing down coal is critical to meeting global climate targets. — Reuters

OPINION

Why cancelling inactive commercial registrations makes sense



HAIDER
AL LAWATI
haiderdawood@hotmail.com

The writer is a Muscat-based economic analyst who previously worked for CBO and OCCI.

THE Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion sometimes cancels inactive commercial registrations under its supervision. The cancellation of inactive or expired commercial registrations is attributed to several important regulatory and legal reasons, in accordance with the Commercial Register Law and its Executive Regulations.

This process is carried out in coordination with relevant entities such as the Royal Oman Police, the Tax Authority, the Ministry of Labour and other concerned bodies, in order to ensure the correctness of procedures and protect the rights of all parties.

The main objective of this step is to stop distorting market statistics and the actual size and activity of the private sector. This makes it necessary to remove them in order to improve the accuracy of economic and administrative indicators relied upon by government entities and investors.

This step also enhances market transparency, since the presence of inactive records may lead to misleading data about companies actually operating in the Omani market, which negatively affects investor confidence and hinders economic planning.

In addition, it reduces administrative and regulatory burdens, allowing inspection teams and government departments to focus

more on active establishments and their compliance with laws, rather than dealing with old records unrelated to actual business activity.

At the level of business owners, this process enables them to settle their legal matters and avoid accumulating fines.

According to data from the Ministry, it has cancelled more than 42,000 commercial registrations since the 1970s to date. Also, the Ministry has provided multiple channels for renewing commercial registrations, as well as for those wishing to cancel them, either by visiting the Ministry or through available electronic portals.

The Ministry follows up on lists of registrations scheduled for cancellation prior to deletion and publishes proposed cancellation lists for 30 days as part of legal procedures. This grants investors the opportunity to review the status of their registration and take action before final cancellation.

Investors may also apply for voluntary cancellation if they have ceased operations and wish to officially terminate their commercial activity, by completing a voluntary cancellation form in coordination with the ministry and relevant authorities, after confirming that no obligations remain.

The cancellation procedures were implemented after a thorough review of

The main objective of this step is to stop distorting market statistics and the actual size and activity of the private sector. This makes it necessary to remove in order to improve the accuracy of economic and administrative indicators relied upon by government entities and investors.

the actual status of commercial registers, in accordance with the Ministry’s public statement and after verifying that they are free of any obligations to the Tax Authority, the Ministry of Labour and the Royal Oman Police.

This contributes to correcting legal situations that have accumulated over many years, especially when data held by government entities is inaccurate, which affects indicators of the size of the private sector, the growth of small and medium enterprises and labour market data.

It is also considered a burden on updating processes and electronic integration among government entities.

This step also helps register holders avoid paying accumulated fines or being bound by financial or administrative obligations and grants them the ability to open new registers without legal obstacles.

In addition, this step supports the National Team for Combating Concealed Commercial Activities by eliminating registers that are being used to conduct commercial activity despite having originally expired.

In conclusion, the cancellation of inactive commercial registrations aims to recalibrate business data, raise the level of market transparency and enhance the reliability of economic and administrative indicators relied upon by various government entities.

BANK OF AMERICA LOOKS RIPE FOR ACTIVIST TREATMENT

STEPHEN GANDEL

Pushy investors have historically steered clear of banks. Conventional wisdom holds that activist campaigns mix poorly with systemically important, regulated institutions. But that’s changing. Uppity shareholder Cevian Capital in 2023 took a 1% UBS stake. On a smaller scale, HoldCo Asset Management in 2025 pressured Comerica to sell itself.

In 2026, it’s possible to imagine an activist arriving at Bank of America. As of December 3, shares in the lender led by Brian Moynihan had trailed JPMorgan, Citigroup, Wells Fargo, Goldman Sachs and Morgan Stanley over a one, two, three, four and five-year period. BofA’s stock traded at 1.7 times 12-month forward tangible book value, according to Visible Alpha — more than a third below JPMorgan’s multiple.

The two mega-banks’ valuations were roughly equal as recently as 2022. Storming the gates with, say, a 1% stake would cost \$3.9 billion using early December prices.

That’s a prohibitively large outlay even for big activists like Elliott Investment Management. Yet smaller purchases can work: just ask Engine No 1, which successfully pushed for change at Exxon Mobil with a 0.02% holding. ValueAct Capital Management got onto Microsoft’s board over a decade ago with a sub-1% stake.

The key is to make a case that other shareholders find compelling, forcing management to listen and avoiding a proxy fight. An activist wouldn’t have to target Moynihan personally, since he seems likely to stay through 2030. Better to focus on BofA’s new “medium-term” 16% to 18% return on tangible equity target, which seems low relative to JPMorgan’s forecast 21% in 2028, using analyst estimates gathered by Visible Alpha in December.

The overriding aim of an activist at BofA could be to nudge Moynihan to beat his goals.

Querying the allocation of resources among BofA’s business lines would be a start. One of the group’s priorities is to grow its global markets unit. But the business of trading and lending against securities has a targeted return on allocated capital of just 15% over time, compared with 40% for the mighty consumer bank.

Why not steer more firepower to the latter division at the expense of global markets? Shareholder Peter Blaustein of PB Investment Partners asked the bank about capital allocation at the group’s November investor day and Moynihan responded by saying that the consumer division will get all the capital it can put to work wisely.

An activist could help to make sure that’s happening. — Reuters

BoE faces pressure to cut rates as economy shrinks

THE Bank of England (BoE) is coming under mounting pressure to boost the ailing UK economy after fresh data revealed it suffered another contraction in October. The central bank’s Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) will meet and where economists are pencilling a 25 basis point reduction to interest rates taking the base level to 3.75 per cent.

Expectations of a cut follow the Office for National Statistics (ONS) revealing that the UK economy shrank 0.1 per cent in October.

The contraction came as businesses paused on major investment plans amidst fears they would be targeted for a hefty tax raid as Chancellor Rachel Reeves looked to balance public finances in her last Budget.

Director of economic statistics at the ONS, Liz McKeown, said: “The economy contracted slightly in the latest three months as production fell again and services growth stalled”.

“Within production there was continued weakness in car manufacturing, with the industry only making a slight recovery in October from the substantial fall in output seen in the previous month”.

The economy also contracted by 0.1 in September after a £1.9 billion cyber-attack on Jaguar Land Rover triggered a collapse in the manufacturing sector.

The prospect of the UK economy shrinking over the last three months of the year is “now a possibility” after the grim GDP figures. The figures dealt another major blow to the Labour government’s sluggish growth mission.

Philip Shaw, chief economist at Investec, said the continued weakness in the economy will “put further pressure on the MPC to lower interest rates by a further 25 basis points at its final meeting of the year”.

The problems with the economy give rise to the feeling that the UK is not currently a place that consumers or businesses want to spend money.

Analysts have pointed to the chaos on the road to the Labour government’s second Autumn Budget as hampering growth. Head



ANDY JALIL
andyjalil@aol.com

The writer is our foreign correspondent based in the UK.

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A woman with an umbrella stands in front of the Bank of England. — Reuters

of Markets at Interactive Investor, Richard Hunter said: “The 0.1 per cent increase which had been expected was not helped by a high level of uncertainty around the Budget and its stultifying actions”.

Hunter added the economy was heading closer to a “technical recession” which could lead to the Bank being “forced to take action and ease interest rates more aggressively”.

Chief investment officer, Neil Birrell, at Premier Miton Investors, said: “The malaise that hung over the UK economy ahead of the budget is evidenced by October’s GDP numbers, when the economy shrank.

“It’s tough to see how this will reverse any time soon. The one hope is that there will be an interest rate cut and more to follow. It’s time to worry about recession, not inflation”. Still, the upcoming

decision is expected to be a close call between the MPC’s members.

The latest reading for inflation sat at 3.6 per cent, falling slightly from 3.8 per cent though remaining well above the Bank’s two per cent target.

Ahead of the next rate decision, the ONS will publish the latest unemployment data followed by inflation.

The Bank of England has estimated Chancellor Reeves’ Budget would strip up to 0.5 basis points off inflation for a year from April, mainly due to axing green levies from energy bills and the freeze on fuel duty.

But when appearing before the Treasury Committee, Clare Lombardelli, the deputy governor for Monetary Policy, said there were arguments to be made on whether rate-setters should “look through” the Budget measures and place greater weight on other factors.

SalamAir launches Muscat–Abha route

MUSCAT: SalamAir has launched its first direct flights between Muscat and Abha, strengthening air connectivity between the Sultanate of Oman and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and supporting growing tourism links between the two countries.

The inaugural flight took off on December 16, marking SalamAir's entry into Abha, the gateway to Saudi Arabia's Asir region. A launch ceremony was held at Muscat International Airport, attended by Ibrahim Saad Ibrahim bin Bishan, Ambassador of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to the Sultanate of Oman, alongside officials from the Civil Aviation Authority and key industry partners.

Abha is regarded as one of



The inaugural flight took off on December 16, marking SalamAir's entry into Abha, the gateway to Saudi Arabia's Asir region.

Saudi Arabia's leading tourism destinations, known for its mild climate, mountainous landscapes

and rich cultural heritage. Ongoing development initiatives aimed at preserving the region's

natural environment have enhanced its year-round appeal, particularly during the summer season and major tourism events.

The new direct service is expected to stimulate two-way tourism between Oman and the Asir region, while also supporting broader economic, social and cultural exchange between the two neighbouring countries.

Stephen Allen, Chief Commercial Officer of SalamAir, said the year-round service to Abha reflects the airline's continued commitment to expanding travel options across the GCC. He noted that Abha is SalamAir's fifth destination in Saudi Arabia, reinforcing the carrier's strategy of strengthening regional connectivity through

affordable and convenient air travel.

Allen added that the route provides travellers with greater choice while serving as an additional bridge between Oman and Saudi Arabia, supporting business, leisure and cultural exchanges.

Hatem al Harbi, Chief Executive Officer of the Tourism Destinations Sector at the Asir Region Development Authority, said the launch of direct flights from Muscat represents an important step in showcasing the region's growing tourism potential.

He added that the new service will help strengthen cooperation and attract visitors from Oman through integrated tourism experiences across the Asir region.

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A CYCLING JOURNEY THROUGH AL HAMRA'S HISTORY AND HERITAGE

> 20

CHANGINGWORLD

CAN NEW YEAR RESOLUTIONS REALLY CHANGE OUR LIVES?



SHADDAD AL MUSALMY
The writer is a Senior Editor at the Oman Daily Observer

As the New Year approaches, millions of people around the world are getting ready to make a promise to themselves to become a better version of themselves.

New Year's resolutions have become a tradition, with people vowing to adopt healthier habits, pursue long-held passions and leave bad habits behind. But do these resolutions really work?

The answer is complicated. While many of us start the year with enthusiasm and determination, many, including myself,

We need to break down our goals into smaller, manageable steps and identify potential obstacles. And last but not least, we have to track our progress and celebrate small wins; and not to be too hard on ourselves when we slip up.

actually achieve resolutions. The problem lies not in the goals themselves, but in the way we approach them.

One of the main reasons resolutions fail is that they are often too vague and unrealistic. People set grand goals, like "I'm going to exercise every day" or "I'm going to eat only salads to lose weight", without thinking about the practicalities of how they will achieve them. When reality sets in, the motivation wears off and old habits creep back in.

Another reason is that resolutions are often focused on deprivation rather than growth. People focus on what they're giving up, rather than what they're gaining.

This mindset can lead to feelings of guilt and shame when we inevitably slip up.

So, how can we make this New Year's resolution stick? After my quick research, I found out that we need to set specific, achievable goals. Instead of "I want to be healthier", try "I will walk for 30 minutes, 3 times a week".

Also, we need to focus on addition, not subtraction. Instead of "I'll stop eating junk food", try "I will add more fruits and veggies to my diet".

In addition, we need to break down our goals into smaller, manageable steps and identify potential obstacles.

And last but not least, we have to track our progress and celebrate small wins; and not to be too hard on ourselves when we slip up.

Ultimately, the success of our New Year's resolution depends on our mindset. Instead of viewing it as a chore or a restriction, let us try to approach it as an opportunity for growth and self-improvement. Let us focus on the benefits of our goals and remind ourselves why we started in the first place.

As the saying goes, "You don't have to be great to start, but you have to start to be great". So, let us take the first step and see where it takes us.

Happy and fulfilling new year in advance!

QUICK FEATURES



FILMS

US-French actor Timothee Chalamet, businesspeople Barbara Corcoran and Daniel Lubetzky attend the NY premiere of "Marty Supreme" in New York. — AFP



LIFESTYLE

People drive miniature cars in the Asakusa district of Tokyo, Japan while enjoying the one-of-a-kind experience. — AFP



TOURISM

A photo shows the ferris wheel at the Christmas market and fairground in the Jardin des Tuileries gardens in central Paris in December. — AFP

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‘IN HER PRIME’: RARE BLOOMING OF PALM TREES IN RIO DE JANEIRO



Talipot palms blooming for the first time at Aterro do Flamengo park in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. —AFP

RIO DE JANEIRO: An extraordinary botanical spectacle is drawing crowds in Rio de Janeiro. Several talipot palm trees, planted more than six decades ago, are blooming for the first — and last — time in their lives.

The trees, growing in Rio’s Aterro do Flamengo park and the Botanical Garden, were planted in the 1960s by the legendary landscape architect Roberto Burle Marx.

Now, some six decades later, these giants have reached the peak of their existence in the Brazilian seaside city.

The talipot palm (*Corypha umbraculifera*), native to southern India and Sri Lanka, is one of the largest palm species on the planet, some reaching more than 30 metres (98 feet) tall.

It flowers only once in its entire life, if it reaches between 40 and 70 years of age.

“The talipot palm only fruits once in its lifetime and can produce up to five million fruits”, Marcus Nadruz, from the Research Institute of the Rio

de Janeiro Botanical Garden, said.

The inflorescences, or flower clusters on stems, began to unfurl in October, forming enormous crowns atop the palm trees that teem with millions of tiny yellowish blossoms.

The entire process, from the opening of the first flowers to the ripening of the fruit, will take about a year, explained Nadruz.

But this splendour has an inevitable end. Once the fruit falls, the palm trees will slowly begin to die.

“I was born in 1961, so she’s my age and in her prime”, said Deborah Faride, who travelled to see the trees from Sao Paulo and was taking pictures of them with a friend.

“We’re the same age and we’re blooming together. Just one detail: the talipot is going to die. And I’m going to continue, God willing”.

The Botanical Garden plans to collect the seeds to cultivate new seedlings to replace these older plants and will also distribute them for landscaping projects in public spaces. — AFP



The Colosseum is seen through a window of the new metro line of the Colosseum metro station. — Reuters

A metro station reveals old Roman treasures

BEYOND the entrance of Rome’s newest metro station under the Colosseum, there are display cases filled with hundreds of ancient artefacts found during a decade-long construction project.

Spread out over four levels to a depth of 32 metres in the heart of Rome, the “Colosseo-Fori Imperiali” station on the city’s C-line unveiled on Tuesday is a feat of modern engineering.

For the price of a 1.5-euro ticket, travellers can access the station’s underground museum holding 350 objects — from ceramic jugs and lamps to bronze statuettes and a wooden sword.

A little further, the remains of a bathhouse of the home of a wealthy Roman can be seen.

Ancient Rome was built in layers. Temples and forums were built on older foundations before themselves being covered over, creating a fascinating terrain for archaeologists. At ground level, a triangular opening even offers an unusual viewpoint on the Colosseum. “The most important thing that we have managed to do is to show an insight... into daily life”, Elisa Cella, an archaeologist at the Colosseum archaeological park, said at the presentation.

EXTRAORDINARY PAST

Rome mayor Roberto Gualtieri called the station opening “an extraordinary and historic event”.

He also defended the costly and lengthy works, which have caused widespread disruption for residents and tourists in the area for years.

The project had to be delayed several times due to complaints and unexpected discoveries.

“These archaeological digs and finds are not an obstacle”, he said, calling them an opportunity to reveal the city’s “extraordinary past”.

Faced with the unique geological complexity of Rome, the excavation adopted a method of “descending archaeology” specifically developed for underground stations in the historic centre.

It involves installing intermediate slabs as excavations progress from top to bottom, thereby ensuring the stability of the structures.

Also inaugurated on Tuesday was the Porta Metronia station — where excavations revealed a vast military complex from the 2nd century AD including a residence decorated with frescoes and mosaics. The residence was dismantled, restored and then reinstalled in a space which



People look at the artefacts found during the construction of the new metro line at the Colosseum metro station. — Reuters

metro travellers can admire from an elevated walkway. “Rome has always built on top of itself”, said Simona Morretta, head of excavations and of the Porta Metronia museum.

Launched in 2007, the

construction of the C line connecting the city’s northeast to the southeast has suffered significant delays.

Once completed, it will have 31 stations over a length of 29 kilometres. — AFP

FEATURES



AHMED AL KAABI

In the Wilayat of Al Hamra, amidst the mountains and farms that rely on aflaj as a primary source of life, a tourism experience sets off as simple in concept, yet profound in meaning. It is an experience that goes beyond cycling or covering a specific distance, offering visitors the opportunity to truly get to know the place and understand its details as they are lived daily by its people.

This tour presents a unique model of tourism, where the route becomes a space to introduce the history of Oman and the region, discuss the aflaj and irrigation systems, ancient villages and the way people live, along with their customs and traditions. The journey does not move at road speed; instead, it pauses for stories, information and experiences that cannot be found in books or on websites.

At a time when many tourism activities have become similar across destinations, this tour comes to reaffirm that the value of a journey is not measured by distance, but by the knowledge the visitor gains and the authentic experience they live delivered in the voices of the people of the place and remembered long after the journey ends.

Alaa al Subhi explained that this activity is organised by Canyon Adventure Tours, one of the tourism initiatives that combine physical activity with a cultural dimension at the same time. He noted that the tour distance usually reaches around 20 kilometres, but remains flexible and depends on the guest's fitness level, as it can be reduced or extended to suit participants' abilities.

Al Subhi clarified that the starting point is Al Hamra Centre (Al Hamra City Centre), which is considered the heart of the city and a suitable meeting point to begin the journey, before setting off along a carefully designed route that passes through several important natural and historical sites.

He stressed that the goal of the tour is not limited to practising a sporting activity, but goes further to become a comprehensive cultural journey, during which participants



are introduced to the history of the Sultanate of Oman in general and the history of the region in particular, in addition to highlighting customs and traditions that remain present in the details of daily life.

He added that the tour includes stops within farms, where participants learn about the types of aflaj, traditional irrigation systems, mechanisms for water distribution and water shares; and their vital role in sustaining agriculture over hundreds of years. The participants then head to the old village, which carries many historical indications in its details, in terms of its urban and defensive planning, types of traditional houses and how the settlement was designed to protect its residents and adapt to the nature of the place.

Al Subhi pointed out that these aspects are what make the tour unique. It's not simply a sporting activity; anyone can ride a bicycle on public roads. The real difference lies in it being a sports and cultural tour led by specialised local guides who possess the knowledge and ability to narrate the history of the region and convey the details of its customs and traditions vividly and engagingly. He emphasised that safety is a top priority in these tours, with a trained team available to handle various emergencies and potential accidents. All participants are required to wear safety helmets, first-aid kits are always available and a designated person is on standby to intervene in case of any emergency.

Al Subhi concluded by noting that these tours began in 2016 and 2017 and have continued to this day, with growing interest from visitors due to the distinctive experience they offer, blending sports and culture. He affirmed that the information provided during the journey cannot be found on websites, in newspapers, or in magazines, as it is conveyed by local people who live these details every day and share a part of their lifestyle with visitors, including traditional Omani food and some local products such as perfume oils, allowing tourists to leave with an authentic and well-rounded experience.

