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OMANI RALLY
DRIVERS LAUD OAA
SUPPORT FOR OMAN
INTL RALLY 2026

INBRIEF

HIS MAJESTY’S
CONGRATULATIONS
TO BRUNEI SULTAN

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of congratulations to Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah of Brunei Darussalam on the successful surgery he underwent. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan wished Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah a speedy recovery, praying to Allah the Almighty to grant him good health and long life.

SISI PRESIDES
OVER ISLAMIC
CONFERENCE



President Abdul Fattah el Sisi of the Arab Republic of Egypt met Dr Mohammed bin Said al Maamari, Minister of Awqaf and Religious Affairs. This took place during President Sisi's meeting with the ministers, muftis of countries, and heads of Islamic Councils and bodies participating in the 36th International Conference of the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs, hosted by the Arab Republic of Egypt. The meeting discussed the established Islamic values in various aspects of life, their interaction with modern developments, and their contribution to building human beings and the development journey. President Sisi expressed his wishes for the success of the conference in achieving its goals through formulating unified strategies that enhance the stability of societies.

MOLECULAR TESTS
FOR COLORECTAL
CANCER IN OMAN

The Royal Hospital succeeded in localising molecular tests for colorectal cancer (KRAS, NRAS, BRAF) as part of efforts made by the hospital's Department of Medical Laboratories, Section of Tissues and Cells. The tests will be conducted for the first time in the Sultanate of Oman within a period of just one working day. Earlier, the tests were carried out abroad with a waiting time of more than three weeks. Besides the acceleration of target treatments, the tests augment the efficiency of decision-making and improve the quality of healthcare provided to cancer patients. The progress is in pursuance of efforts undertaken by the Ministry of Health to develop specialised diagnostic services in line with the goals of Oman Vision 2040. **DETAILS ON P2**

Oman targets to welcome 70,000 tourists from Spain this year

MADRID: The Sultanate of Oman has launched a promotional campaign covering key attraction sites across the Kingdom of Spain, coinciding with its participation in the International Tourism Trade Fair, FITUR 2026, which begins on Wednesday, in Madrid. The campaign will also cover social media platforms, tourism websites and global promotional platforms to reach a wider audience.

Furthermore, the campaign focuses on promoting specialised tourism patterns such as marine tourism, adventure tourism, golf tourism, wedding tourism, cruise tourism, wellness tourism, and cultural and heritage tourism, which enjoy wide interest in the Spanish market. The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism is also conducting familiarisation trips for Spanish companies to the Sultanate of Oman



The campaign will also cover social media platforms and global promotional platforms.

and organising regular training meetings for representatives of tourism companies to introduce them to the tourism experiences offered by Oman. This campaign is expected to target approximately 70,000 people according to statistics received from the Tourism Representation Office in Spain, utilising 58 promotional mediums with an average of 185 display and repetition operations. — ONA

Sayyid Badr, FM's review regional developments

MUSCAT: Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, held a telephone call with Prince Faisal bin Farhan al Saud, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. They discussed the latest developments in the region and



SAYYID BADR
BIN HAMAD
AL BUSAIDY

exchanged views on a number of regional issues of common interest. The foreign minister also held a telephone call with Ayman Safadi, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates of the Kingdom of Jordan.

They discussed the latest regional developments and exchanged views on a number of issues and challenges of common concern and ways to address them in a manner that ensures respect for international law and fosters security and stability in the region.

ISRAEL ORDERS GAZANS
TO EVACUATE HOMES

European states rethink on US-backed Gaza base

ISRAELI forces have ordered dozens of Palestinian families in the southern Gaza Strip to leave their homes in the first forced evacuation since last October's ceasefire, as residents and Hamas said on Tuesday the military was expanding the area under its control.

Residents of Bani Suhaila, east of Khan Yunis, said the leaflets were dropped on families living in tent encampments in the Al Reqeb neighbourhood. "Urgent message. The area is under IDF control. You must evacuate immediately," said the leaflets, written in Arabic, Hebrew and English, which the army dropped over the Al Reqeb neighbourhood in the town of Bani Suhaila.

In the two-year war before the US brokered ceasefire was signed in October, Israel dropped leaflets over areas that were subsequently raided or bombarded, forcing some families to move several times.

The United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres called on Israel to halt its demolition of the UN Palestinian refugee agency's East Jerusalem compound and restore it and other UNRWA premises to the world body "without delay," a UN spokesperson said on Tuesday.

"The Secretary-General views as wholly unacceptable the continued escalatory actions against UNRWA, which are inconsistent with Israel's clear obligations under international law, including under the Charter of the United Nations and the Convention on the Privileges and Immunities of the United Nations," deputy UN spokesperson Farhan Haq told reporters.



Hiba Abu Jarad, mother of three-month-old Palestinian baby Shatha Abu Jarad, who died of cold weather according to medics, cries while holding Nada, Shatha's twin sister, in Gaza City on Tuesday. — AFP

The UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres called on Israel to halt its demolition of the UN Palestinian refugee agency's East Jerusalem compound and restore it and other UNRWA premises to the world body

RETHINK ON CENTRE Several European countries are considering whether to stop sending personnel to a US military-led coordination centre for Gaza, saying it has failed to increase aid flows to the war-shattered enclave or achieve political change, diplomats said. The Civil-Military Coordination Centre (CMCC) was established in southern Israel in October under President Donald Trump's plan to end the war in Gaza. It was tasked with monitoring the ceasefire, facilitating the entry of aid and

developing post-war policies for the Palestinian territory. Dozens of countries, including Germany, France, Britain, Egypt and the United Arab Emirates, sent personnel, including military planners and intelligence officials, to the centre as they sought to influence discussions on Gaza's future. But eight foreign diplomats said that officials from some European countries had not returned to the CMCC, located near the Gaza border, since the Christmas and New Year holidays. — Reuters

OMAN

SHORTTAKE



The conference included a series of discussion sessions and specialised workshops, in addition to an exhibition of modern health technologies. — ONA

Military medical city concludes health innovation conference

MUSCAT: The Medical City for Military and Security Services on Tuesday concluded the International Conference on Technology and Innovation in the Health Sector, which brought together an elite group of experts, specialists, and health leaders from within and outside the Sultanate of Oman.

The conference included a series of discussion sessions and specialised workshops, in addition to an exhibition of modern health technologies showcasing the latest digital and operational solutions that are reshaping the future of healthcare and hospitals. It saw participation from global technology companies, academic institutions, researchers, health leaders, and medical and administrative personnel. — ONA

Royal Hospital localises colorectal cancer tests

THE Royal Hospital succeeded in localising molecular tests for colorectal cancer (KRAS, NRAS, BRAF) as part of efforts made by the hospital's Department of Medical Laboratories, Section of Tissues and Cells.

The tests will be conducted for the first time in the Sultanate of Oman within a period of just one working day.

Earlier, the tests were carried out abroad with a waiting time of more than three weeks.

The accomplishment represents a milestone in the field of tumour diagnosis. Besides the acceleration of target treatments, the tests augment the efficiency of decision-making and improve the quality of healthcare provided to cancer patients.

The progress is in pursuance of efforts undertaken by the Ministry of Health to develop specialised diagnostic services and promote precision medicine in line with the goals of Oman Vision 2040, which focuses on localising advanced medical technologies and establishing a sustainable health system based on innovation.

Dr Mohammed al Masqari, Head of the Section of Tissues and Cells at the Royal Hospital's Department of Medical Laboratories, said, "Localising molecular



The accomplishment represents a milestone in the field of tumour diagnosis. — ONA

tests constitutes a strategic step in supporting the system of cancer treatment. The prompt results of the tests will offer physicians an opportunity to make accurate treatment decisions in a timely manner and contribute to improved patient well-being."

Al Masqari added that this achievement reflects the preparedness of medical laboratories and the efficiency of the national staff.

He affirmed the readiness of specialists to introduce more advanced tests that keep pace with the highest international standards. — ONA

OMAN, SPAIN HOLD CONSULTATIONS SESSION

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman and the Kingdom of Spain on Tuesday held the fourth round of the political consultation session in Muscat. The Omani side was chaired by Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthy, Under-Secretary of the Foreign Ministry for Political Affairs, while the Spanish side was chaired by Diego Martinez Belío, State Secretary for Foreign and Global Affairs.

During the session, the two sides reviewed bilateral relations between the two countries. They affirmed



The two sides reviewed bilateral relations between the two countries. — ONA

their keenness to continue developing cooperation in the fields of trade exchanges, investment, energy and culture. Furthermore, they exchanged views on a set of regional issues and developments on the international arena.

The session was attended by Ambassador Munthir bin Mahfoudh al Manthri, Head of the Europe Department, Francisco Javier delsturiz, Ambassador of Spain to Oman, and a number of officials from both sides. — ONA

Research project leads to production of spirulina algae

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 20

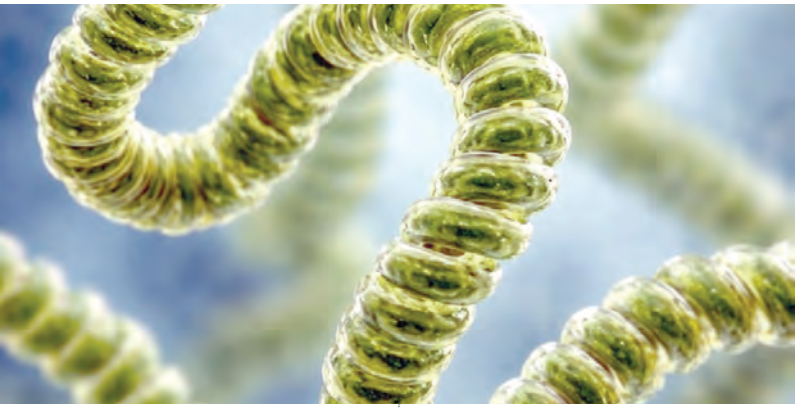
The Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) has made a new scientific milestone by producing spirulina algae in commercial quantities for the first time in its history.

The achievement reflects the development of research and innovation aimed at supporting national trends in a knowledge-based and sustainable economy.

A research team from the SQU and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources takes credit for the project, which was funded by the Agriculture and Fisheries Development Fund (AFDF).

The project aims to import strains of spirulina that are more adaptive to the climate of the Sultanate of Oman and more productive.

The breeds are studied for their nutritional content, notably the protein content of the cultivated species with optimal economic production. It culminates in composing and manufacturing spirulina-enhanced animal and fish feeds and testing the same in accordance with scientific



The project aims to import strains of spirulina that are more adaptive to the climate of the Sultanate of Oman and more productive. — ONA

principles.

The research project, led by Dr Hafez bin Ali al Mahrouqi, Supervisor of the Algae Unit at the Agricultural Experiment Station of the SQU, received a grant of RO 80,000 from the AFDF. It affirms the role of the SQU in converting research into applied projects that generate economic and developmental impact.

The project supports the trends of sustainability and food security in the Sultanate of Oman in line with Oman Vision 2040.

Due to its high nutritional value, spirulina serves as one of the most widely cultivated microalgae in the world. It consists of between 60 and 65 per cent protein mass. This makes the species an important nutritional supplement for humans and animals.

Its mass production will contribute to the growth of the sector of aquaculture and animal farming.

This type of algae is distinguished for its ability to adapt to local environmental conditions and its aptitude to grow in salt water that has seawater salinity. The research opens up broad prospects for optimising the use of seawater and lands in the vicinity of the Arabian Sea that are unsuitable for traditional agriculture.

جهاز الاستثمار العماني
Oman Investment Authority

NOMOU Program

Your chance to join the On-job training program of Oman Investment Authority

Program Objectives

Support and train fresh graduates

Empower and upskill national talents

Enable graduates to join the job market effectively

Majors

Business Administration

Accounting

Finance

Economics

Law

Information Technology

Human Resources Management

Media

Application Requirements

Bachelor's degree in one of the listed majors

Minimum cumulative GPA of 2.7

Additional Information

Applicants who meet the criteria will undergo written tests and personal interviews

Admitted participants will receive a monthly allowance

Don't miss this opportunity! Apply before: 5th February 2025

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OMAN INVESTMENT AUTHORITY

SHORT TAKE



The ceremony was held under the auspices of Dr Saif bin Abdullah al Haddabi, Chairman of the Research and Innovation Authority. — ONA

QUALIFIERS FOR GENEVA EXHIBITION OF INVENTIONS ANNOUNCED

MUSCAT: The Research and Innovation Authority announced the Omani innovative projects qualified to represent the Sultanate of Oman at the Geneva International Exhibition of Inventions in its 51st edition. The announcement was made during a ceremony held at the German University of Technology (GUTech) in Muscat.

The ceremony was held under the auspices of Dr Saif bin Abdullah al Haddabi, Chairman of the Research and Innovation Authority, in the presence of Dr Hussein bin Suleiman al Salmi, Vice-Dean for Financial and Administrative Affairs at the German University of Technology, along with a number of officials, academics and innovators.

This announcement comes within the framework of national efforts to enhance the research and innovation ecosystem, translating the objectives of Oman Vision 2040 aimed at building a knowledge-based economy, empowering national competencies and supporting innovation as a main pillar for sustainable development. — ONA

Financial bids opened for Oman’s air mobility study

VINOD NAIR
MUSCAT, JAN 20

THE Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MoTCIT) has opened the financial bid for the consultancy study to develop the national Advanced Air Mobility (AAM) Master Plan. The selected consulting firm will assist the MoTCIT and the National Steering Committee in designing and implementing Oman's National Advanced Air Mobility (AAM) Strategy.

The scope of work will focus on building eight integrated components and associated governance, producing deliverables, and making decisions to support regulatory, institutional, infrastructure, economic and social dimensions.

Seven international and local companies have submitted bids for the consultancy study. The National Aviation Strategy 2040 aims to reshape the air mobility sector with a road map to modernise aviation, promote innovation and advance sustainability while integrating emerging technologies.

In a previous interview, Kuljit

“Oman is actively exploring Advanced Air Mobility (AAM) with steps to establish a regulatory framework. Air transport has long been a catalyst for economic growth and cultural exchange

KULJIT GHATA-AURA
President of Boeing Middle East, Türkiye, Africa and Central Asia



The National Aviation Strategy 2040 aims to reshape the air mobility sector with a road map to modernise aviation.

Ghata-Aura, President of Boeing Middle East, Türkiye, Africa and Central Asia, stated, “Oman is actively exploring Advanced Air Mobility (AAM) with steps to establish a regulatory framework. “Air transport has long been a catalyst for economic growth and cultural exchange. Thanks to the efforts of Oman Air, SalamAir, the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, and the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA), the aviation sector in Oman is driving connectivity and opportunity.”

In December, AeroVecto Aviation Services (AVAS) announced the

official launch of Advanced Air Mobility in Oman. AVAS will offer a suite of services designed to support the integration and expansion of next-generation air mobility technologies.

Fahad al Riyami, Founder of AeroVecto, said, “The launch of AeroVecto Aviation Services represents our commitment to shaping the future of air mobility. We believe that advanced air mobility will redefine how people and goods move, and AVAS is ready to support this transformation.”

Dr Mahir Ibrahim, Chief Engineer at AeroVecto, added: “Our partnerships with leading global organisations in the AAM sector are a testament to our collaborative approach. By working together, we can accelerate the adoption of innovative solutions and create new opportunities for communities and businesses. We are excited to announce more details of these partnerships soon.”

SkyCrest Aviation (operating as AeroVecto) is an Omani aerospace company developing Shuttle, a hybrid-electric aircraft built to redefine urban public transport, enhancing intracity transport with comfort, safety and accessibility in mind.

OHRC highlights institutional role to enhance cooperation

GENEVA: Oman Human Rights Commission (OHRC) organised a side event at the Palais des Nations in Geneva to showcase the Omani experience, highlight its roles in promoting and protecting human rights, open horizons for dialogue with international partners, and exchange best practices with international institutions and bodies concerned with human rights.

The event was organised in cooperation with the Permanent Mission of the Sultanate of Oman to the United Nations and other International Organisations in Geneva. It aimed to highlight the Commission's institutional role, enhance international cooperation and exchange expertise.

It also presented the features of the Commission's experience and priorities, provided a concise and reliable overview of its work, and highlighted national efforts in various fields — including labour rights — while introducing the Commission's awareness programmes and tools.

The event targeted a wide range of stakeholders in Geneva, including diplomatic missions accredited to the UN, international organisations, relevant UN agencies, National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs), civil society organisations and human rights enthusiasts, as well as researchers and media professionals.

The event featured three specialised working papers. The first paper addressed “Business and Human Rights” as a growing field linking economic development with human rights



Oman Human Rights Commission organised a side event at the Palais des Nations in Geneva to showcase its roles in promoting and protecting human rights. — ONA

standards, highlighting the Commission's methodology through assessment tools, recommendations, and follow-up, and reviewing its qualitative initiatives, such as the preparation of guiding manuals.

The second paper focused on the promotion and protection of labour rights through field monitoring of working conditions, housing and occupational safety, as well as mechanisms for receiving, verifying and following up on complaints with competent authorities.

The third paper presented an overview of parallel reports and awareness programmes, explaining the methodology for preparing shadow reports in accordance with UN guidelines and the importance of these reports in enhancing transparency and expanding international participation

and cooperation in human rights files.

Dr Rashid bin Hamad al Balushi, Chairman of Oman Human Rights Commission (OHRC), emphasised that the Sultanate of Oman — with its historical depth and influential geographical location — believes that true stability is only achieved through the rule of law and the safeguarding of human rights.

He reviewed the Commission's journey since its establishment in 2008 by Royal Decree, followed by its transition to a qualitative development phase with its reorganisation under Royal Decree No 57/2022.

This decree solidified the framework governing its work and defined its formation, decision-making mechanisms, and competencies in a manner that supports and enhances institutional independence.

Majan University College Hosts MUC Quality Day Conference 2026



Majan University College (MUC) successfully hosted the MUC Quality Day Conference 2026 on Monday, 19 January 2026, under the patronage of Major General/ Hamed bin Ahmed Sakroun, President of the Academy of Strategic & Defense Studies. Held under the theme “Building a Quality Ecosystem in Higher Education: From Leadership to Graduate Impact,” the conference brought together academic leaders, policymakers, and quality assurance experts from Oman, the GCC, and the United Kingdom.

The conference provided a high-level platform for strategic dialogue on leadership, governance, educational quality, graduate employability, and Artificial Intelligence in higher education, reinforcing Majan University College's role as a key contributor to the national higher education ecosystem and the objectives of Oman Vision 2040.

The event opened with welcoming remarks by Dr. Maha Kobeil, Dean and CEO of Majan University College, who emphasised the importance of embedding quality, innovation, and institutional accountability within higher education systems to ensure long-term impact and global competitiveness. This was followed by a keynote address delivered by Mr. Alistair Jarvis CBE, Chief Executive of Advance HE (UK), who highlighted the vital role of leadership and governance in translating quality frameworks into meaningful institutional outcomes that enhance student experience and graduate employability.

The second keynote was delivered by Ms. Nabila Al Macki, Deputy Dean for Academic Affairs at Majan University College, in which she highlighted Majan's academic quality framework, governance practices, and alignment with national and international standards.

The conference programme featured a series of expert panel discussions structured around three key themes.



The first session, “From Policy to Practice: Strengthening Quality and Governance in Education,” examined how regulatory frameworks and institutional strategies can be transformed into measurable and sustainable quality outcomes. Speakers included Dr. Tariq Al-Sindi (ANQAHE), Dr. Reem Al Alawi (OAAAQA), Dr. Tess Goodliffe (Sohar University) and Dr Kevin Konecny Associate Vice President (AURAK).

The second session, “Quality Education as a Pathway to Graduate Employability,” focused on aligning academic quality with labour-market needs and workforce readiness. The panel featured Eng. Hamed Al Hadhrami from Petroleum Development Oman (Eidaad Programme), Mr. Basil Hanna, Managing Director of Kaplan Middle East and North Africa and Dr Narimane Hadj Hamou, Founder and CEO, CLICKS.

The final session, “Teaching, Learning, and AI: A New Era Begins,” explored the transformative role of Artificial Intelligence in higher education, particularly in teaching, assessment, and quality assurance. Contributions were delivered by Sheikh Saif Hilal Al Hosni, Country Manager of Microsoft Oman and Bahrain; Mr. Mohamed Salah Younis, Senior Lecturer at Majan University College; and Professor Mary Malcolm, Chair of the Board of Directors of Global Banking School (UK) and Dr Rima AlZadjali, Dean of Oman College of Management and Technology.

The conference concluded with a vote of thanks delivered by Ms. Nabila Al Macki, Deputy Dean for Academic Affairs, recognising the contributions of speakers, partners, and participants to the success of the event.

Through its comprehensive programme and diverse international participation, the MUC Quality Day Conference 2026 strengthened collaboration between academia, government, and industry, and reaffirmed Majan University College's commitment to advancing quality, innovation, and graduate readiness in line with the national priorities of Oman Vision 2040.





DAZZLING CIRCUS EXTRAVAGANZA ENTHRALS



MOHAMED AL BATTASHI
MUSCAT, JAN 20

AS part of Muscat Nights 2026, the Circus Show at the Omani Automobile Association continues to attract large crowds with a spectacular mix of international performances, modern technology, and family-friendly entertainment.

Organised by Muscat Municipality, the circus forms part of a wider entertainment programme that includes the Light Festival and drone shows, offering visitors a complete cultural and visual experience that reflects Muscat’s growing role as a regional tourism destination.

From the first moments, the circus atmosphere captures the attention of children and adults alike. The show opens with an

adrenaline-filled motorcycle performance inside a giant metal globe, where riders move at high speed in perfect coordination. As more riders enter the globe, the challenge becomes more intense, drawing loud applause and excitement from the audience.

Comedy also plays an important role in the show, with two humorous performers interacting with the audience through playful challenges, music and exaggerated movements, creating a joyful and relaxed atmosphere inside the tent.

One of the most elegant moments of the evening is the aerial silk performance, where two female artists demonstrate flexibility and balance while moving smoothly in the air on red silk fabrics. Their synchronised movements reflect both strength and artistic harmony.

The show also features



trampoline performances, combining fast jumps and rotations with comic timing, as well as a high-risk tightrope act. The performers walk confidently on the suspended wire, ride bicycles and even carry other performers, demonstrating exceptional focus, balance, and discipline.

Modern technology adds a special visual dimension to the circus through three-dimensional hologram effects, enhancing the audience’s sense of immersion in the performances. A dedicated children’s area also provides an educational and interactive experience for younger visitors.

Abdullah al Amri, one of the audience members, praised the event, saying: “The variety of performances made the evening exciting and enjoyable. The organisation was excellent, and the atmosphere truly reflects the high standard of Muscat Nights events.”

Meanwhile, media figure Mohammed al Arimi described the circus as a unique experience, saying: “Muscat Nights Circus is a complete entertainment experience that combines classical circus arts with modern performances. The visual effects supported by 3D hologram technology create continuous excitement. This is not an ordinary show, but a full world of amazement and joy waiting for everyone.”

The event brings together artists from different countries, presenting aerial acts, acrobatics, balance skills and visual storytelling in a format that appeals to all age groups.

The Circus Show at Muscat Nights continues daily until January 31, from 4.00 pm to 10.00 pm, with ticket prices ranging from 7 to 20, making it accessible for families, tourists and residents.



JABAL SHAMS HITS MINUS 0.1°C



MUSCAT: Oman experienced a significant drop in temperatures on Tuesday, with Jabal Shams recording the lowest temperature in the country at minus 0.1 degrees Celsius, according to data released by the Civil Aviation Authority. The sub-zero reading was registered on Tuesday, highlighting the intensity of the cold wave currently affecting parts of Oman, particularly elevated areas.

SHORT TAKES

VIBRANT CULTURAL EVENING TO MARK INDIA’S 77TH REPUBLIC DAY

MUSCAT: The Indian Social Club Oman will celebrate India’s 77th Republic Day with a vibrant cultural evening themed ‘Samanvaya – Unity in Rhythms’ on Saturday, at the College of Banking and Financial Studies (CBFS) Auditorium.

The event will be presided over by Tavishi Behal Pandey, Deputy Chief of Mission from the Indian Embassy, along with other dignitaries. The celebration aims to showcase India’s rich heritage and cultural diversity through music and dance.

Performances will include classical and contemporary renditions of Bharatanatyam, Kathak, Kuchipudi, Mohiniattam, Yakshagana, and Sattriya, presented by artists from various dance institutes in Oman. The Indian Social Club’s Open Mic group will also perform, adding a musical dimension to the festivities.

The event opens its doors at 6:30 pm, with the programme starting at 7 pm, offering an evening of patriotism, talent and cultural pride for the Indian community in Oman.

AYN PLATFORM RELEASES FOUR NEW AUDIOBOOKS

MUSCAT: The Ayn platform, affiliated with the Ministry of Information, has released four new audiobooks under the Nizwa Magazine Books project. The new release enhances Ayn platform’s efforts to provide intellectual and literary publications in audio format, expanding the audio library for a diverse audience seeking both knowledge and enjoyment. These releases



are part of the audiobook project launched by the Ministry of Information in 2021 with the aim of reintroducing intellectual and creative works through a medium that relies on expressive

reading and artistic production, giving texts a new presence and bringing them closer to the listener.

The books are: *Conceptual Metaphor Studies*, authored by Dr Abdullah al Harrasi, *Chek’s Terrible Revenge and Other Stories* from Contemporary Russian Literature, which was also published in the Nizwa Magazine Books project in 2017. The book is a collection of short stories translated from the

Russian language by the Omani translator Ahmed bin Mohammed al Rahbi. The third book, entitled *Challenges of the Green Economy: The Sultanate of Oman as a Model*, was authored by Ali bin Sulaiman al Rawahi and published in 2020 as part of the Nizwa Magazine Books project. The fourth book, titled *It’s a High Wave*, by the writer and poet Khamis Qalam, was published in 2020 by the Nizwa Book Series. — ONA

Omani crafts making way into global markets

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JAN 20

YOUSEF bin Abdullah al Jahwari, the founder and CEO of Al Madar Ceramics Factory in Al Suwaiq, stated in an interview with the Observer that handcrafted products bring value to the local market due to their high quality and unique Omani heritage.

The production of ceramic products is a specialised Omani craft that focuses on creating pottery using innovative and advanced techniques to produce modern shapes with a traditional touch. These ceramic products, known for their quality, professionalism and sustainability, are based on traditional Omani designs that have been reimaged to meet market demands. This reflects the factory’s main goal of offering distinctive, high-quality ceramic products.

Al Jahwari started his ceramics project in 2001 as a personal endeavour, initially learning and experimenting on



The production focuses on creating pottery using innovative techniques.

his own while facing challenges in acquiring tools and materials. He began by designing and crafting ceramics, presenting two gifts to the late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos, who praised and encouraged him to continue. With his growing expertise and creativity in ceramics, Yousef

established an Omani factory that employs local talent and offers a variety of products, including cups, dinnerware sets, gifts, vases and ceramic medallions.

Al Madar Factory is a specialised Omani industrial facility that aims to provide high-quality products following strict professional standards, focusing on continuous improvement and best industry practices. The factory operates with a clear vision to support the local market, enhance the value of its products, and contribute to the industrial sector’s development through skilled personnel and well-thought-out operational plans. It is dedicated to combining quality, sustainability, and innovation to earn customer trust and build long-term partnerships. The products are exported to all Gulf countries, and the factory has also established suppliers and new relationships with European and American markets.

Al Jahwari commended his transition from craftsman

to business leader through continuous development and establishing new global relationships. He said, “We have design, development, and quality control departments that have strengthened our market position and allowed us to evolve from a small-scale craftsman to an institution with Omani employees. This is a significant and positive contribution to the ceramics industry market.” He also expressed gratitude for the support received from government and private entities, including the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority, for financial and administrative assistance.

To train and develop Omani employees, Al Madar has a specialised training department for new employees and offers training courses in ceramics manufacturing. Al Jahwari believes that the future of Omani crafts is promising, thanks to ongoing development and extensive government support.

RAM programme to train local leaders

MUSCAT: The Royal Academy of Management (RAM) has launched the Executive Programme in Local Administration.

This comes in line with national directions to strengthen administrative and economic decentralisation and empower local leaders and competencies across the governorates.

The initiative is designed to enhance the leadership and administrative capacities of local administration professionals, improve institutional performance and contribute to sustainable local development by enhancing the ability to respond effectively to local needs. Designed for 25 participants, the programme reflects RAM’s ongoing commitment to preparing local leaders to address the requirements of the emerging developmental phase. Participants will gain practical and integrated knowledge and skills in modern local administration, development planning, project management and local investment, while strengthening their leadership competencies and adopting effective



The initiative is designed to enhance the leadership and administrative capacities of local administration professionals.

management practices. The programme enables participants to apply best practices in local administration, develop strategic plans that support national priorities outlined in Oman Vision 2040, and identify viable projects and manage projects efficiently. It also strengthens their capacity to foster community partnerships, build effective stakeholder relationships and community partnerships, and adopt innovative solutions that promote digital transformation

and enhance local administrative performance. Dr Fathiya bint Abdullah al Rashdi, Vice-President for Programme Affairs at RAM, stated that the Executive Programme in Local Administration focuses on developing practical capabilities that enable local administration leaders to plan, implement and monitor initiatives efficiently. She emphasised that the programme adopts an applied methodology that combines theoretical

knowledge with practical, real-world case studies from the local work environment, thereby enhancing institutional coordination and fostering innovative developmental solutions. Sheikha al Maskari, Programme Supervisor, highlighted that the programme provides an integrated learning experience, enabling participants to apply modern administrative tools within the local work environment, efficiently monitor the implementation of initiatives and projects. Participants will also benefit from having access to a platform for exchanging expertise and developing practical solutions that enhance operational processes and improve performance efficiency in local administrations. The Executive Programme in Local Administration includes a number of bespoke, carefully designed modules aimed at building both theoretical foundations and practical skills. These include Development Planning and Project Management, Leadership Skills and Effective Management. — ONA

Invitation to the Ordinary General Meeting of Sohar International Money Market Fund

The members of the Fund Management Body of Sohar International Money Market Fund (the “Fund”) are pleased to invite the unitholders of the Fund to attend the Ordinary General Meeting of the Fund (“OGM”) to be held at 12:30 PM on Tuesday, 3 February 2026, at the Headquarters of Sohar International Bank SAOG to discuss and consider the below agenda items.

If the quorum requirement for holding OGM is not met, a second OGM shall be convened at 12:30 PM on Wednesday, 4 February 2026, at the same venue as the first OGM.

AGENDA FOR THE OGM

1. To approve the election of three (3) new Fund Management Body members for five (5) years office term.

Any person who wishes to be nominated is required to fill in the Nomination Form and email it to sami.habib@sib.om. The completed Nomination Form should be delivered to the Fund at least two (2) working days prior to the date of the OGM (no later than the end of business hours on Sunday, 1 February 2026). Nomination Forms received after such date will not be accepted. The candidates must satisfy the Fund Management Body membership requirements.

According to Article (252) of the Executive Regulation of the Capital Market Law (Financial Services Authority Decision number 1/2009), each unitholder shall have the right to nominate a proxy to attend the OGM and vote on their behalf on the resolutions of the OGM by completing the proxy form attached to this invitation.

For more information, please contact: Mr. Sami Habib on sami.habib@sib.om

#968 24730000
sib.om

WORLD

SHORT TAKES



A marine life ranger stands near the closed signage of the North Steyne Beach in Sydney. — AFP

SHARK ATTACKS:
AUSTRALIA SHUTS
DOZENS OF BEACHES

SYDNEY: Dozens of beaches along Australia's east coast, including in Sydney, closed on Tuesday after four shark attacks in two days, as heavy rains left waters murky and more likely to attract the animals.

Beaches around Port Macquarie, around 400 km north of Sydney, were shut after a man was bitten while surfing earlier in the day. He remains in hospital in a stable condition, health authorities said. "If you're thinking about going for a swim, think of going to a local pool because at this stage, we're advising that beaches are unsafe," Steven Pearce, the chief executive of Surf Life Saving New South Wales (NSW) told reporters on Tuesday.

"We have such poor water quality that's really conducive to some bull shark activity."

The closures come in the middle of the Southern Hemisphere summer, when beaches across Australia are normally packed with locals and tourists.

On Monday, emergency services were called to a beach in Sydney's Manly after reports a surfer in his 20s had been bitten by a shark. Eyewitness Max White said another surfer had kept the man alive using his board's leg rope as a makeshift tourniquet to stem the bleeding. — Reuters

INDONESIA REVOKES
PERMITS OF 28 FIRMS
AFTER WORST FLOODS



A youth dives into floodwaters after heavy rain left residential areas partially submerged in Jakarta on Sunday. — AFP

JAKARTA: Indonesia stripped more than two dozen permits from forestry, mining and hydroelectric companies in Sumatra on Tuesday, a government minister said, just weeks after deadly floods devastated parts of the island.

Environmentalists, experts and the government said deforestation played a role in last year's disaster that killed more than 1,000 people across three provinces on the island, according to a National Disaster Mitigation Agency tally.

A task force audited companies in the three provinces and presented its findings to President Prabowo Subianto during a teleconference on Monday, State Secretariat Minister Prasetyo Hadi told reporters the day after.

"Based on the report, the president has decided to revoke the permit of 28 companies that were proven to commit violations," Prasetyo said during the Tuesday briefing.

He did not specify what type of violations the firms had allegedly committed or which permits were revoked. — AFP

GAZA TRANSITION

UAE president joins 'Board of Peace'



The United Arab Emirate's president has accepted an invitation to join US President Donald Trump's "Board of Peace", the Ministry of Foreign Affairs said on Tuesday, the body meant to oversee post-war reconstruction in Gaza.

The positive response comes amid controversy over the body, with Washington asking various leaders to sit on the President Donald Trump-chaired board on which a permanent seat costs \$1 billion. — AFP

HEAVIEST IN 20 YEARS

Record Tunisia floods kill four people



Flooding in Tunisia has killed four people, authorities said on Tuesday, with one official reporting a "critical" situation as parts of the North African country experienced their heaviest rainfall in more than 70 years.

All four deaths occurred in Moknine, in the Monastir governorate, where "two people were swept away by floodwaters, while a woman drowned in her home", said Khalil Mechri, a civil defence spokesman. — AFP

BORDER DISPUTE

Thai forces razed Cambodian homes



Thai forces demolished Cambodian homes in contested border areas after a ceasefire ended clashes between the neighbours, a rights group said. A border dispute between the nations erupted into military clashes several times last year, with fighting in December killing dozens of people and displacing around one million others on both sides. The two countries agreed to a ceasefire in late December, ending three weeks of clashes. — AFP

Israel begins demolitions
at UNRWA headquarters

ISRAELI bulldozers began demolitions at the headquarters of the UN agency for Palestinian refugees in east Jerusalem on Tuesday, in what the organisation called an "unprecedented attack".

UNRWA spokesman Jonathan Fowler said that Israeli forces "stormed into" the compound shortly after 7 am (0500 GMT) and ejected security guards from the site, before bulldozers entered and began demolishing buildings.

"This is an unprecedented attack against UNRWA and its premises. And it also constitutes a serious violation of international law and the privileges and immunities of the United Nations," Fowler said.

"What happens today to UNRWA can happen tomorrow to any other international organisation or diplomatic mission around the world," he added.

Roland Friedrich, the agency's director in the West Bank called the move political, telling AFP "it seems the intent is to seize the land for settlement construction as has openly been stated by Israeli officials for many years in the media and elsewhere".

AFP photos showed heavy machinery demolishing structures at the compound, where an Israeli flag fluttered overhead.

An AFP photographer reported that far-right National Security Minister Itamar Ben Gvir had made a brief visit to the site.

"This is a historic day, a day of celebration and a very important day for governance in Jerusalem," Ben Gvir was quoted as saying in a statement.

"For years, these supporters of terrorism were here, and today they are being removed from here along with everything they built in this

JONATHAN FOWLER
UNRWA spokesman

This is an unprecedented attack against UNRWA and its premises. And it also constitutes a serious violation of international law and the privileges and immunities of the United Nations, What happens today to UNRWA can happen tomorrow to any other international organisation or diplomatic mission around the world



A structure being demolished inside the headquarters of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) in the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood of Israeli-annexed east Jerusalem on Tuesday. — AFP

place. This is what will happen to every supporter of terrorism," he added.

Israel has repeatedly accused UNRWA of providing cover for Hamas fighters, claiming that some of its employees took part in the group's October 7, 2023 attack on Israel, which sparked the war in Gaza.

A series of investigations, including one led by France's former foreign minister Catherine Colonna, found some "neutrality-related issues" at UNRWA but stressed Israel had not provided conclusive evidence for its headline allegation.

In a statement, the Israeli foreign ministry defended the demolitions and said "the State of Israel owns the Jerusalem compound".

The compound in Israeli-annexed

east Jerusalem has been empty of UNRWA staff since January 2025, when a law banning its operations took effect after a months-long battle over its work in the Gaza Strip.

"UNRWA-Hamas had already ceased its operations at this site and no longer had any UN personnel or UN activity there," the foreign ministry said.

"The compound does not enjoy any immunity and the seizure of this compound by Israeli authorities was carried out in accordance with both Israeli and international law," it said.

UNRWA's Friedrich said the UN rejected the Israeli claim and insisted that the compound "remains United Nations property and is protected by the privileges and immunities of the UN, regardless of whether it is currently in use". — AFP

SYRIA-KURD NEGOTIATIONS COLLAPSE

Kurdish civilians gather with their weapons in the city of Qamishli on Tuesday as the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) called for "young Kurds, men and women" both within and outside Syria to "join the ranks of the resistance". Negotiations have collapsed between the Syrian president and the chief of the country's Kurdish-led forces, a Kurdish official said, as the army deployed reinforcements to flashpoint areas in the north.

Syrian government troops thrust deeper into areas held by Kurdish forces in northeastern Syria on Tuesday, Syrian military sources said, pressing rapid gains against Kurdish fighters who vowed to defend their remaining enclaves. Amid reported clashes, three Syrian sources said the US-led coalition against IS was negotiating for the government to take over an SDF-guarded camp housing thousands of civilians linked to the group near the town of Al Hol, close to the Iraqi border. The Syrian military said it was advancing on Al Hol. — AFP

SHORT TAKES



An emergency services member works with a dog on the site of a high-speed trains collision that killed at least 41 people, in Adamuz on Friday. — Reuters

SPAIN MOURNS AS TRAIN CRASH TOLL RISES TO 40

ADAMUZ: Spain begins three days of national mourning on Tuesday for the 40 people killed in a high-speed train crash that the prime minister has vowed to investigate.

The crash late on Sunday is Spain's deadliest train accident since 2013, when 80 people died after a train veered off a curved section of track outside the northwestern city of Santiago de Compostela. The latest disaster took place when a train operated by rail company Iryo, travelling from Malaga to Madrid, derailed near Adamuz in the southern Andalusia region.

It crossed onto the other track, where it crashed into an oncoming train, which also derailed.

"This is a day of sorrow for all of Spain, for our entire country," Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez told reporters during a visit to Adamuz on Monday as he declared three days of mourning.

"We will uncover the answer, and once the cause of this tragedy is determined, we will present it with absolute transparency." Forty deaths have been confirmed due to the crash, the head of Andalusia's regional government, Juan Manuel Moreno, told a news conference, raising the toll from 39.

It would take 24-48 hours "to know with certainty how many deaths have resulted from this terrible accident," he added. Heavy machinery was deployed on Monday to lift the most severely damaged train carriages and give rescuers better access to the site of the disaster. — Reuters

HARRY LASHES MALTA



Waves lash a beach club as Storm Harry wreaks havoc across the island, in Sliema, Malta, on Tuesday. — Reuters

POLAND MOVES TO PHASE OUT AID FOR UKRAINIAN REFUGEES

WARSAW: Poland's government on Tuesday moved to phase out assistance for Ukrainian refugees put in place when Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022, as public support for the aid wanes.

"After four years, the situation is more stable" in Ukraine, Adam Szlapka, spokesman for Poland's pro-European government, said at a press conference. The draft law, which will now go to parliament, says initial aid for Ukrainians was "adopted as an emergency, temporary measure".

It includes plans to repeal previous provisions creating a

separate system of assistance for Ukrainians, and would eliminate most of their special entitlements to social benefits, accommodation and medical care. Some existing protections, such as means of confirming legal residence and identity, will be retained. The draft law has drawn criticism, including from business interests.

The Lewiatan Confederation, an NGO representing Polish entrepreneurs, argues the move "could paralyse the labour market".

In a press release, it said the protections have "enabled legal employment for around 1.24

million people", citing that Ukrainians currently account for 66 per cent of Poland's foreign workforce.

In 2024, Poland's Ukrainian workforce accounted for 2.7 per cent of the country's GDP, amounting to more than the total Polish aid contribution. Poland was the entry point for millions of Ukrainian refugees crossing into Europe at the invasion's outset, and remains a critical hub for the delivery of humanitarian and military aid.

But public opinion on Ukrainians in Poland has soured since the beginning of the war. — AFP

France prefers respect over bullies: Macron

FRENCH President Emmanuel Macron on Tuesday said the European Union should not bend to "the law of the strongest" and that it was staggering the bloc was having to contemplate using its "anti-coercion instrument" against the United States.

"We do believe that we need more growth, we need more stability in this world, but we do prefer respect to bullies," Macron told the World Economic Forum in Davos, speaking in English.

"We do prefer science to (conspiracies) and we do prefer rule of law to brutality."

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen vowed on Tuesday an "unflinching" response to Donald Trump's threats over Greenland, as the US president said he was ready to hold a meeting in Davos about the Arctic island.

In a speech to the World Economic Forum in the Swiss ski resort, von der Leyen warned that Trump risked plunging US ties with the European Union into a "downward spiral" over the autonomous Danish territory.

Trump, who will address the annual gathering of global elites on Wednesday, has put the transatlantic alliance to the test with his demand to take over Greenland.

Europe is weighing countermeasures after the US president threatened to impose tariffs on eight European countries over the Greenland standoff — although Washington has said any retaliatory levies would be "unwise".

"The proposed additional tariffs are a mistake, especially between long-standing allies," von der Leyen

Plunging us into a downward spiral would only aid the very adversaries we are both so committed to keeping out of the strategic landscape. So our response will be unflinching, united and proportional

URSULA VON DER LEYEN European Commission President



France's President Emmanuel Macron speaks at WEF in Davos on Tuesday. — AFP

told the meeting of world business and political leaders.

"Plunging us into a downward spiral would only aid the very adversaries we are both so committed to keeping out of the strategic landscape. So our response will be unflinching, united and proportional," she said.

Europe "must respond" to any trade war, Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen later told her parliament, adding: "We are compelled to do so".

Trump has pressed on with his Greenland campaign on his Truth Social platform, posting a fake photo of himself planting a flag in a landscape of rock and ice next to a sign reading. He later wrote he had had a "very good" call with Nato Secretary-General Mark Rutte over mineral-rich Greenland.

"I agreed to a meeting of the various parties in Davos, Switzerland," he said late on Monday

— after telling reporters he did not think European leaders would "push back too much" on his attempt to buy the vast island.

Trump argues he wants to protect Greenland from perceived Russian and Chinese threats, although analysts suggest Beijing is a small player in the region.

EU leaders will hold an emergency summit on Greenland in Brussels on Thursday. Europe, which is ramping up defence spending to break its security reliance on the United States, still needs Washington's help to end the Ukraine war and deter the looming Russian threat to its east.

But President Volodymyr Zelensky warned on Tuesday that he feared the furore over Greenland could divert attention.

"I'm worried about any loss of focus during a full-scale war," Zelensky told reporters, adding that the two crises should not be seen as "interchangeable". — AFP

Penguins bring forward breeding season as Antarctica warms: Study

PARIS: Penguins are bringing forward their breeding season at record rates as Antarctica rapidly warms due to climate change, according to research published by a global team of scientists on Tuesday.

The unprecedented shift observed over a decade in penguin breeding patterns was "highly correlated" with rising temperatures on the frozen continent, said the study's lead author, Ignacio Juarez Martinez.

Penguin breeding is closely linked to food availability, and less sea ice has meant hunting grounds and nesting sites are more available during the year.

Scientists observing penguin populations in Antarctica had expected breeding to occur a little earlier but were "very surprised both by the

scale and the speed of the advance", Martinez said.

"The scale is so great that penguins in most areas are now breeding earlier than in any historical records," said Martinez, a scientist from the University of Oxford and Oxford Brookes University.

For this study, scientists observed nesting zones of Gentoo, Chinstrap and Adelie penguins between 2012 and 2022 using dozens of time-lapse cameras placed at colonies across Antarctica.

Gentoo penguins demonstrated the greatest change with the timing of their breeding season brought forward 13 days over the decade — and up to 24 days in some colonies.

This is the fastest change in breeding season observed in any bird — and possibly vertebrate — to date, the scientists said.



Gentoo penguins at the Paradise Bay in the Gerlache Strait. — AFP file photo

Adelie and Chinstrap penguins also advanced their breeding season by an average of 10 days.

The findings were published in the Journal of Animal Ecology.

Antarctica is one of the fastest-warming regions in the world and annual average temperatures there reached record highs last year, the EU climate monitor Copernicus said this month.

The exact mechanisms by which rising temperatures affect penguin behaviour are not yet fully understood by scientists.

The three species traditionally staggered their breeding seasons but the earlier timing was likely causing an overlap, increasing competition for food and snow-free nesting space.

This was better news for Gentoos — natural foragers suited to more temperate conditions — and less so for Chinstrap and Adelie penguins.

"We have already seen Gentoos take nests that were previously occupied by Adelies or Chinstraps," said Martinez.

Gentoo numbers are already expanding in a milder Antarctica while Chinstrap and Adelie penguins, more

dependent on krill — tiny shrimp-like creatures on which they feed — and specific ice conditions, are declining.

"As penguins are considered 'a bellwether of climate change', the results of this study have implications for species across the planet," Fiona Jones, a co-author of the study from Oxford University, said in a statement.

Martinez said it was "too early to tell" if this adaptation was beneficial or if penguins were being forced to make drastic changes that could affect their breeding success.

"We are now studying their ability to raise chicks of each species. If they maintain a high number of chicks, that will mean this is good news and they are indeed adapting to climate change," he said. — AFP

OPINION

How tightening your grip makes you lose momentum



HYESHA BARRETT
The author is a Master Life Coach and NLP Practitioner based in Muscat

WHEN progress slows, motivation dips, or the year feels heavier than it did at the start, our instinct is to pull in harder. We set stricter rules, demand more consistency, and tell ourselves to try again, only harder than before. This tightening often replaces intention with effort and pressure with urgency. What began as self-guided growth becomes a self-imposed strain.

What if that tightening is exactly what keeps us from moving forward? There's a useful analogy in learning how to kitesurf. In kiteboarding, beginners are often told not to hold the bar too tightly or to pull it in when afraid, even though it feels instinctive to do so. Gripping the bar harder in moments of confusion or perceived loss of control tends to make the kite behave more unpredictably, sometimes even crashing it entirely. Instructors encourage students to let go of the bar or lighten their grip to depower the kite and return to stability. That letting go, which feels counterintuitive, actually creates more control; not less.

Momentum in life works in a similar way. When we feel ourselves slipping, the response to clamp down more tightly often produces tension and resistance, not progress. The nervous system perceives the tighter grip as threat, not support. Just like a

kite's power surges when we yank the bar, our internal energy tightens and distorts when we try to force movement through pressure alone.

Getting off track rarely happens suddenly. It happens through small acts of disconnection: ignoring fatigue, overlooking emotional signals, overriding discomfort without reflection. Over time, enthusiasm turns into unsustainable effort. The path is still there, but we are no longer truly present on it.

Staying on track is not about forcing consistency or clinging to motivation. Motivation is emotional and inherently unstable. What sustains direction is awareness: the ability to notice when resistance rises and when avoidance begins to feel easier than engagement.

Many people respond to losing momentum by increasing control, tightening expectations, and demanding better behaviour from themselves. However, just as pulling the bar harder can crash a kite, tightening our internal grip can fuel anxiety, frustration and retreat. Sustainable momentum comes not from force, but from supporting the whole system.

To regain and maintain momentum, begin smaller than your mind wants. Favour manageable actions over heroic efforts.

Getting back on track is not about returning to who you were at the start of the year. It is about meeting who you are now, with honesty, respect, and the willingness to let go of the bar when life feels too heavy. Only then do you find the rhythm that carries you forward with less strain and more grace.

One aligned choice, gently repeated, builds trust between intention and behaviour. Momentum grows from credibility with yourself, not from pressure applied to yourself. There is often grief involved in staying on track too: grief for the old ways of coping, the familiar stories of identity, and the habits that once felt protective. Progress asks us to loosen our grip on what once kept us safe, even if it no longer serves us.

Staying on track is not rigid adherence. It is responsiveness. It means noticing when something is no longer working and adjusting without self-betrayal. It means choosing curiosity over punishment, compassion over control. Those who sustain momentum are not the most forceful; they are the most attuned.

The path is not a straight line. It curves, pauses, and sometimes disappears from view. Getting back on track is not about returning to who you were at the start of the year. It is about meeting who you are now, with honesty, respect, and the willingness to let go of the bar when life feels too heavy. Only then do you find the rhythm that carries you forward with less strain and more grace.

Letting go doesn't mean giving up. It means trusting the breeze beneath you, not your clenched hands. Often, that is the moment you finally begin to fly.

MALAWI SUFFERS AS US AID CUTS CRIPPLE HEALTHCARE

JACK MCBRAMS

A catastrophic collapse of healthcare services in Malawi, a year after US funding cuts, is undoing a decade of progress against HIV/AIDS, providers warn, leaving some of the most vulnerable feeling like “living dead”.

In the impoverished southern Africa country, the US government’s decision to slash foreign aid in January 2025 has led to significant cuts in HIV treatments, a spike in pregnancies and a return to discrimination. Chisomo Nkwanga, an HIV-positive man who lives in the northern town of Mzuzu, said that the end of US-funded specialised care was like a death sentence. After his normal provider of life-saving antiretroviral therapy (ART) vanished due to budget cuts, he turned to a public hospital.

More than one million of aid-dependent Malawi’s roughly 22 million people live with HIV and the United States previously provided 60 per cent of its HIV treatment budget.

Globally, researchers estimate that hundreds of thousands of preventable deaths have been caused by the Trump administration’s dismantling of US foreign aid, which has upended humanitarian efforts to fight HIV, malaria and tuberculosis in some of the world’s poorest regions. In Malawi, the drying up of support from USAID and the flagship US anti-HIV programme, PEPFAR, has left a “system in panic”, said Gift Trapence, executive director of the Centre for the Development of People (CEDEP). “The funding cut came on such short notice that we couldn’t prepare or engage existing service providers,” Trapence said.

“We had to lay off staff... we closed two drop-in centres and maintained two on skeleton staff,” he said. The Family Planning Association of Malawi (FPAM) non-government organisation, a cornerstone of rural healthcare, has been forced to ground the mobile clinics that served as the only medical link for remote villages.

“We had two big grants that were supporting our work, particularly in areas where there were no other service providers,” said executive director Donald Makwakwa. For over a decade, Malawi’s fight against AIDS relied on “peer navigators” and drop-in centres that supported people with HIV and ensured they followed treatment. With the funding for these services gone, the default rate for people taking the HIV drug PrEP hit 80 per cent in districts like Blantyre, according to a report by the CEDEP. “This is a crisis waiting to happen,” the report quoted former district healthcare coordinator Fyness Jere as saying. — AFP

A simple tool for making sense of a complex world

THERE is a beautiful Hadith that says when a person passes away, three things continue to benefit them: useful knowledge, sustainable charity and righteous offspring who pray for them.

I often reflect on this when I think about the kind of work I want to leave behind. Not work measured only in projects delivered or titles earned, but in ideas that quietly help people live and think better long after we are gone.

KNIFE was born from that reflection.

It is my contribution to useful knowledge, not in the form of heavy theory or complex models, but as a simple thinking tool that helps people understand what is happening around them and respond with more clarity, calm, and purpose.

We live in a time where news is overwhelming, opinions are louder than facts, speed has replaced depth and reaction often replaces reflection. From geopolitical tensions to technological disruption, from economic uncertainty to social polarisation, the world does not merely feel complex. It feels noisy. KNIFE exists to gently reverse that, not by giving ready-made answers, but by giving a way to think. It is a small framework with a large ambition: helping people cut through confusion without cutting people.

KNIFE is a five-part lens that can be used to look at any issue, decision, or situation, whether in public policy, business strategy, community leadership, or personal life. K stands for Knowledge or Key Pattern. What is really happening here? What pattern is repeating beneath the headlines, beneath the emotions, beneath the daily



KHALID AL HURAIBI
The writer is an innovator and an insights storyteller

noise? Often, we argue about events without first agreeing on the pattern they belong to.

N stands for Narrative or Meaning. What story are we telling ourselves and others about what is happening? Is this story helping us act wisely, or trapping us in fear, pride, or false certainty? Many crises are not only crises of facts, but crises of meaning.

I stands for Integrity. Are our values, words and actions aligned? Or are we saying one thing while practising another? Integrity is not about perfection, but about coherence between what we claim and what we choose.

F stands for Framework or Architecture. What system or approach are we using to deal with this issue? Is it designed to succeed, to learn and to evolve, or merely to survive and delay problems? Many failures are not moral failures, but design failures.

E stands for Elevation. Does this decision, policy, or path raise our thinking, dignity and long-term impact, or reduce them? Does it make us smaller, louder, more divided, or wiser, calmer and more capable?

You can apply this lens to a country, a company, a community, or even your own life.

Imagine a young professional feeling stuck at work. The salary is decent, but something feels off. Instead of reacting emotionally, complaining endlessly, or quitting impulsively, they apply KNIFE. They start with Knowledge and recognise a pattern of being underutilised rather than simply being bored. They question the Narrative that this is “just how work is” and realise this story is limiting their agency. They reflect on Integrity and ask whether staying silent about their growth aligns with who they claim they want to

become. They assess the Framework of their job and see there is no learning path, no mentorship, no exposure. Finally, they ask whether this path Elevates them or slowly shrinks them.

What once felt like vague discomfort becomes clear insight. No panic. No drama. Just clarity. This is not about becoming smarter. It is about becoming clearer.

Like SWOT, KNIFE helps analyse reality. Like Jobs-to-Be-Done, it focuses on what truly matters beneath surface symptoms. Like Simon Sinek’s Golden Circle, it reconnects us to purpose. But KNIFE differs in one important way: it does not separate thinking from ethics, or strategy from dignity.

KNIFE insists that how we think, why we act and what we build must belong to the same human story. I created KNIFE because I have seen brilliant strategies collapse due to weak integrity, massive resources wasted due to poor framing and societies divided not by lack of intelligence, but by lack of clarity. We are not short of information. We are short of wisdom in using it. KNIFE is my humble contribution to restoring clarity, coherence and meaning to how we interpret our world. If you lead a company, a public institution, a school, or a civil society initiative, KNIFE can help you diagnose problems calmly, design strategies honestly, and lead with both intelligence and humanity. It does not replace expertise. It organises it. It does not simplify reality. It makes complexity livable.

I do not offer KNIFE as a product. I offer it as a shared thinking language, one that helps people disagree without becoming enemies and decide without losing their conscience.

That, to me, is useful knowledge legacy worth leaving behind.

Trump finally gets his hands on Nobel!



SAMUEL KUTTY

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

AS the first year of US President Donald Trump's second term progressed, numerous controversies emerged that did not escape the world's attention. From his proposal to slash funding for Nasa research to the current Nobel Prize episode, an overwhelming amount of news surfaced daily.

The latest development links his drive to acquire Greenland to his failure to win the Nobel Peace Prize, stating that he “no longer feels obligated to think purely of peace” because the Norwegian Nobel Committee did not award him the prize.

For over 300 years, Greenland has belonged to the Danish Kingdom, and global leaders have criticised Trump's claim that the United States should acquire the territory, a vast, frozen island located in the Arctic.

In a message to Norway's Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Store, Trump criticised the European country for not awarding him the Nobel Peace Prize, which he has long coveted.

“Considering your Country decided not to give me the Nobel Peace Prize for having stopped 8 Wars PLUS, I no longer feel an obligation to think purely of Peace, although it will always be predominant, but can now think about what is good and proper for the United States of America,” Trump said in the message.

The Nobel Committee awarded the 2025 peace prize to Maria Corina Machado, the leader of Venezuela's democratic opposition,

who on the other hand gifted her medal to Trump when they met in Washington last week.

Machado received the award for her leadership of Venezuela's opposition movement amid a crackdown by President Nicolás Maduro, most notably during the widely criticised 2023 presidential election.

Since President Trump assumed office, he has been obsessed with the Nobel Peace Prize. He has mentioned it dozens of times publicly, be it in his speeches, interviews, or campaign rallies. He has even no hesitation in expressing his deep sense of unfairness regarding president Barack Obama receiving it in 2009.

Trump frequently claims to have ended eight wars, branding himself as “the president of peace” and thus worthy of the Nobel Prize. However, these assertions have been exaggerated. He also claims that the most recent conflict he resolved was the two-year hostilities between Hamas and Israel in Gaza.

The additional seven pairs include Israel and Iran, Pakistan and India, Armenia and Azerbaijan, Egypt and Ethiopia, Thailand and Cambodia, Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Serbia and Kosovo.

However, what is significant about Machado's gesture towards Trump is that it comes despite her refusal to endorse her as Venezuela's new leader, even though her

Since President Trump assumed office, he has been obsessed with the Nobel Peace Prize. He has mentioned it dozens of times publicly, be it in his speeches, interviews or campaign rallies

movement claimed victory in the widely contested 2024 elections. Interestingly, when Machado was first awarded the prize, she dedicated it to Trump and the people of Venezuela.

Machado later revealed that the gift was in recognition of what she described as his commitment to the freedom of the Venezuelan people. “I presented the President of the United States with the medal, the Nobel Peace Prize,” Machado told reporters after leaving the White House.

But Machado's “gifting” act kicked off a global debate not just over symbolism and politics, but over a basic legal question as to whether the Nobel Prize can be transferred at all.

The Nobel Foundation later reiterated that Nobel Prizes cannot be passed on — even symbolically — days after clarifying that a laureate cannot share the prize with others or transfer it once it has been announced.

The Foundation stated that the Peace Prize Machado presented to Trump cannot be assigned to anyone else. “No matter what happens to the medal, diploma, or prize money, the original laureate will always be noted in history as the one who received the prize.”

But The New York Times, quoting analysts, said Trump's “public jockeying for the prize reflects his focus on accolades, praise and acceptance — and a burning desire to best his predecessors.”

TRUMP UNLOADS ON ALLIES AS DAVOS SHOWDOWN LOOMS

DANNY KEMP

US President Donald Trump has made an astonishing series of attacks apparently designed to humiliate allies France, Britain and Canada as the row over Greenland threatens to engulf the Davos forum.

In a flurry of Truth Social posts and comments to reporters a day before he leaves for the elite gathering on Wednesday, Trump leaked apparently private text messages from French President Emmanuel Macron and the head of Nato. His comments leave the transatlantic alliance in perhaps its most fragile state since World War II - and underscore that Trump is determined to make a show of power at the meeting in the Swiss ski resort. On the first anniversary of his inauguration for a second term that has already upended the global order, Trump took particular aim at Macron as their longstanding bromance appeared to implode.

Trump first expressed his disdain for Macron's refusal to join his so-called “Board of Peace” for resolving conflicts worldwide.

“Nobody wants him because he's going to be out of office very soon,” Trump told reporters as he prepared to board Air Force One in Florida.

A number of Western leaders harbour worries that the body, originally designed for Gaza, would create a shadow UN, while the inclusion of Russian President Vladimir Putin has caused alarm.

Shortly afterwards, Trump posted a private text message from Macron in which the French leader said “I do not understand what you are doing on Greenland” and offered to organise a G7 summit in Paris with Russia attending on the sidelines. But Trump was far from finished.

From Air Force One, he posted an altered picture of him meeting European leaders in the Oval Office - with a picture of not only the United States but Canada and Greenland covered in the stars and stripes. The original photo, taken when European leaders rushed to the White House last August with Ukrainian President Zelensky to prop up US support for Kyiv, had already been mocked in some quarters as a sign of European weakness.

While Trump's quest to take control of Greenland is the one that has shaken the world at the start of 2026, he has also called for Canada to become the 51st US state.

He followed up on the posts with an image of himself holding the American flag on an icy landscape next to a sign saying “Greenland. US Territory, Est 2026”, accompanied by Vice-President JD Vance and Secretary of State Marco Rubio. Next in Trump's sights was Britain, whose pride in its “special relationship” with the United States has come under fresh strain from his designs on Greenland. Trump lashed out at what he called London's “great stupidity” for its deal to give Mauritius the Chagos Islands, an Indian Ocean archipelago that is home to the key Diego Garcia US-UK military base. — AFP

ICE and normalisation of state violence

IN recent weeks, Americans have watched a familiar federal acronym take on a darker meaning in public life: ICE. Officially, US Immigration and Customs Enforcement is a federal law enforcement agency inside the Department of Homeland Security, created in 2003 after the Homeland Security Act reorganised immigration and customs enforcement functions. Its core enforcement arm, Enforcement and Removal Operations, carries out arrests, detention and deportations, powers that, in practice, can place extraordinary coercive force in everyday streets, workplaces and homes.

What many communities are describing now, however, is not simply “enforcement.” It is a pattern of raids, aggressive stops and heavy-handed operations that increasingly resemble a domestic dragnet. And the numbers show how quickly the machinery has expanded in the past year.

Independent detention monitors report that ICE held 65,735 people in detention as of November 30, 2025, with 73.6 per cent having no criminal convictions. Reuters similarly reported that ICE was detaining roughly 69,000 people as of January 7, 2026, amid a broader crackdown and swelling budgets. Another major US outlet reported internal ICE statistics showing about 73,000 people in custody in mid-January 2026, described as the highest level recorded by the agency. These figures are not abstractions. They represent families, long-term residents, asylum-seekers and workers, many held in a detention system increasingly criticised for overcrowding and weak oversight.

The consequences are visible in both custody and community encounters. Reuters reported that 2025 saw a record 30 deaths in ICE custody, the highest in two decades, and that four additional deaths occurred in the first days of 2026. Separate reporting has intensified scrutiny over use of force and medical neglect inside facilities, including contested



US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents stand guard during protests against increased immigration enforcement and the fatal shooting of Renee Nicole Good by an ICE agent, in Minneapolis, Minnesota, US, on January 9. — Reuters file photo

accounts surrounding deaths that investigators may classify as homicide. But the most alarming turn is not only what happens behind detention walls; it's what appears to be happening on the street. Multiple investigations and lawsuits describe incidents where US citizens and lawful permanent residents were detained, manhandled or subjected to aggressive tactics. A recent lawsuit filed by a green card holder in Massachusetts alleges she and her two US citizen children were “illegally and forcefully detained” and hospitalised after a “violent” encounter with ICE. ProPublica has documented a broader pattern of immigration agents arresting Americans, including many cases that later collapsed or were dismissed, raising questions about standards, accountability and escalation. A bipartisan set of lawmakers has also pointed to instances in which citizens were arrested, sometimes with “violent physical force,” and in some cases held in immigration detention facilities.

Taken together, these accounts reinforce what targeted communities have said for years: people are being profiled and swept up based on skin colour, language or accent. A recent report from North Carolina described two US citizen brothers alleging they were racially profiled and assaulted during an ICE encounter. When enforcement

becomes indistinguishable from racial sorting, civil liberties are no longer theoretical. They are immediate.

Even more alarming is the emerging reality that citizens who try to protect others or who are simply caught in the path of an ICE operation can end up injured or dead. The killing of Renee Macklin Good, a white woman shot in her car by an ICE officer in Minneapolis on January 7, has become a flashpoint precisely because it punctures the myth that only “non-citizens” are at risk when enforcement becomes militarised. Whatever the final legal determinations, the social meaning is already stark: when a domestic agency operates with maximum coercive discretion and minimal public visibility, ordinary people can die in moments of chaos, before accountability arrives, if it arrives at all.

This is not merely a US crisis. It is a dangerous precedent for the wider Western political environment, where anti-immigration parties and “border-first” ideologies are increasingly normalised. The United States has long exported security models, from counterterror frameworks to surveillance practices, through alliances, training and political influence. When the US treats mass detention, aggressive street operations, and blurred lines between immigration control and everyday policing as acceptable governance, other countries will feel permitted to follow. The likely targets will be the same everywhere: migrants, refugees and especially people of colour.

If the United States wants to claim leadership on human rights, it cannot build an internal system that looks, to many communities, like a roaming apparatus of fear. The question is no longer whether immigration policy should be “tough” or “lenient.” The question is whether a democracy can tolerate a domestic enforcement regime that appears to punish identity, skin tone, accent, last name, and that increasingly endangers citizens who stand too close.

24HDUBAI



The incident put an end to the team's defence of the race crown they had earned in 2025.

LATE ACCIDENT
RUINS AL ZUBAIR’S
PUSH FOR PODIUM

MUSCAT: An accident midway through the last quarter of the Michelin Dubai 24H race at the Dubai Autodrome prevented Al Manar by Dragon Racing from pushing on for a podium finish on Sunday.

Oman's Al Faisal al Zubair, Zimbabwean Axcil Jeffries, American Dustin Blattner and German driver Dennis Marschall had led early in the race, fought back through the field on a couple of occasions and were holding fourth overall in their Ferrari 296 GT3 when Al Zubair was involved in an accident three and a half hours from the chequered flag after 504 laps.

The Omani was taken for protocol medical checks and later released but the incident put an end to the team's defence of the race crown they had earned in 2025. Team WRT BMW M4s filled the top two positions at the finish after 604 laps with the Winward Racing Mercedes-AMG GT3 Evo rounding off the podium places.

Al Zubair said: "It was a great race weekend and my first time racing there with the Ferrari. Our line-up was extremely strong and we had a great time until the crash and were in the top five, I believe, on alternate pit stops. The race started strong. We started near the back of the grid and got into the top 15 in the first hour.

"We had a really strong pace. Unfortunately, around 21 hours into the race, with about three and a half hours to go, I got into an accident. I hit the wall and got a minor fracture in the spine. Just a bit bruised up. This is part of motor sport. It happens. I am looking forward to recovery and feeling better soon."

An accident for Al Zubair within three and a half hours of the finish halted progress and the Omani was taken for medical checks and released without injury. The team was classified in 47th position in the results. The Tsunami RT Porsche 911 GT3 R had topped the times in the free practice session on Friday morning with a best lap of 1min 57.655sec after a 43-lap stint on the race circuit. The Al Manar by Dragon Racing Ferrari ran for 48 laps and a best run of 1 min 58.777 sec put the crew down in 15th of the 34 GT3 teams.

The Sainteloc Racing Junior Team was quickest in the first of the three qualifying stints with a lap of 1 min 57.606 sec. The Al Manar Ferrari was classified in eighth. A much stronger second stint saw the Ferrari up to third behind the Winward Racing Mercedes and the TFT Racing Mercedes.

Dragon Racing's other Ferrari ran quickest in Q3 with a lap of 1 min 56.468 sec and the Al Manar car was seventh.



An Indian player in action during the preliminary round of the WTT Contender Muscat 2026.

WTT Contender Muscat
2026 makes strong start

RIYADH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JAN 20

THE preliminary rounds of the WTT Contender Muscat 2026 officially got underway on Monday at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher, witnessing intense competition and high technical standards as world-class players from various countries opened their campaigns in one of the most prominent international table tennis events on the global calendar.

The opening days of the tournament featured highly competitive matches, reflecting the depth and quality of the participating field, alongside the participation of Oman national team players who are using the championship as an opportunity to gain valuable international experience and test their capabilities against elite opponents.

FEI, PICARD POST WINS
In the men's singles preliminary matches, Chinese player Xui Fei defeated Oman's Mohammed al Mutawa 3-0, while Spain's Daniel Berzosa edged past Czech player Lubomir Jancaric 3-2. France's Vincent Picard secured a narrow 3-2 victory over Ho Kwan Kit of Hong Kong.



Slovakia's Ema Labosova in action.

Oman's Badar al Jassasi suffered defeats against Chan Baldwin of Hong Kong 0-3 and Romania's Rares Cipus 2-3. Bilal al Rashdi lost to Kazakhstan's Kirill Gerassimenko and Norway's Borgar Haug, both by 0-3 scorelines. Meanwhile, Mohammed al Balushi was beaten by Germany's Andrei Bertelsmeier and Chinese Taipei's Hong Jing Kai, while Ahmed al Riyami exited after losses to Germany's Wim Verdonshot and Singapore's Pang Koen. Other Omani players also bowed out after challenging encounters against opponents from China, France, India and Chinese Taipei.

VORONINA, XIAO IMPRESS
In the women's singles, Mashhood Ashtari lost to China's Han Fei 1-3 before falling to Spain's Maria Xiao 0-3. Ema Labosova was defeated by Vlada Voronina 1-3 and Huang Yu-Jie 0-3. Several other preliminary matches saw strong performances from players representing China, Germany, Kazakhstan and Hong Kong, underlining the fierce level of competition.

Speaking after his match, Oman national team player Mohammed al Mutawa described the tournament as highly challenging, stating: "The competition is extremely tough, with many strong and experienced players from around the world, but the organisation has been excellent and reflects Oman's ability to host major international events."

"I am aiming to qualify for the knockout stages, and I will give my maximum effort to reach the advanced rounds. I have previous international experience where I achieved notable results and I hope to make good use of that experience in this championship."

The WTT Contender Muscat 2026 will continue in the coming days with the start of the main draw matches, as expectations rise for more thrilling encounters that highlight the growing stature of the tournament on the international table tennis stage.

Chakraborty clinches blitz title at Muscat Nights Championship

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, JAN 20

The blitz chess competitions were held on Monday evening as part of the Muscat Nights International Chess Championship, in a fast-paced and exciting atmosphere that reflected the true nature of blitz chess, which relies on quick decision-making and precise execution under time pressure. The blitz event added a different technical dimension alongside the classical chess competitions and attracted strong interest from both players and spectators.

The blitz championship was played according to the Swiss system over 11 rounds, with a time control of 3 minutes per player plus a 2-second increment per move. This format imposed a high tempo on the players. It tested their ability to maintain focus and make decisive moves, where fine details played a

crucial role in determining match results and final standings.

MAYANK ON TOP
At the end of the eleven rounds, India's Mayank Chakraborty claimed the championship title after finishing in first place with 10 points, delivering a consistent performance that allowed him to pull ahead of a strong chase group of top-rated players. Egypt's Adham Fawzy secured second place with 9 points, while India's Pranesh M finished third with 9 points as well. Iran's Radin Yadegar followed closely in fourth place, also with 9 points, highlighting the intense competition and close margins at the top, with tie-break criteria determining the final order among players with equal scores.

The excitement continued in the following positions, with India's Iniyan Pa finishing fifth on 8.5 points, followed by Iran's



India's Mayank Chakraborty claimed the championship title after finishing in first place with 10 points.

Poormosavi, Seyed Kian in sixth with 8.5 points, and Iran's Samimi, Armin in seventh, also on 8.5 points,

keeping the battle tight through the middle of the standings with only half-point differences separating the players.

In positions eight through eleven, Turkey's Akbas, Umut Ata were eighth with 8 points, Russia's Rogov, Matfey came ninth with 8 points, Iran's Biglarifard, Koorosh finished 10th with 8 points, while Syria's Rami, Talab completed the list of leading players in 11th place, also with 8 points, underscoring the highly competitive density and balance among a wide group of participants.

Khalid al Malki, a member of the Oman Chess Committee, said the second edition of the championship has seen clear growth in participation and technical standards, with around 270 players from 35 countries, compared to 200 players from 26 countries last year. He added that the positive feedback from players and delegations

confirms the success of the organisation and the championship's rising international profile.

Jordanian international player Ahmed al Khatib praised the high technical and organisational standards of the Muscat Nights International Chess Championship, describing it as comparable to major global events.

On his first visit to Oman, he said the tournament exceeded his expectations in terms of organisation, facilities, and player comfort. He noted the strong and diverse level of competition, featuring experienced international players and promising young talents, made the title race highly competitive.

Al Khatib concluded that, beyond results, the tournament offers valuable experience, and he commended the organising committee for their professional efforts.

SPORTS

KEYBACKING



The OAA also offered financial support to Can-Am motorcycle competitors.

Omani rally drivers
laud OAA support for
Oman Intl Rally 2026

SPORTS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 20

The Omani rally drivers participating in the first round of the Middle East Rally Championship, hosted by the Wilayat of Suhar at the end of this week, extended their thanks and appreciation to the management of the Oman Automobile Association (OAA) for supporting them to take part in this rally. This support helped ease the financial burden on these young participants, who have shown full readiness to actively participate and represent Oman in the top-class event.

This initiative by the management of the OAA comes as an encouragement for Omani champions to continue practicing this sport, especially since Oman was among the first countries to host the Middle East Rally Championship successfully since the 1970s, as acknowledged by all.

The OAA provided support to nine Omani drivers in the car category to ensure optimal preparation for competing in the opening round of the championship. It also offered financial support to Can-Am motorcycle competitors, in line with their counterparts among car drivers. Oman International Rally is being held for the second consecutive year in Suhar, having achieved great success last year in terms of organisation and hosting, and also witnessed intense competition for the championship title and leadership across the various categories in the rally.

Rally driver Ghaith al Qasimi says: “On behalf of the Omani competitors, we would like to thank the management of the OAA for standing behind the Omani drivers and providing financial support for participating in this rally, which has removed many of the obstacles facing drivers, represented by providing race requirements such as tyres, necessary spare parts for the cars and other requirements.”

Osaka steals AO show as
Sinner strolls through



Japan's Naomi Osaka celebrates after winning her first round match against Croatia's Antonia Ruzic. — Reuters



Italy's Jannik Sinner in action during his first round match against France's Hugo Gaston during the Australian Open in Melbourne. — Reuters

JANNIK SINNER barely broke sweat in launching his quest to win a third Australian Open in a row on Tuesday as Naomi Osaka stole the show with a bold fashion statement.

Popular Frenchman Gael Monfils meanwhile bid farewell to Melbourne Park with an epic defeat and thanks for “an amazing ride”.

The Italian Sinner strolled into round two when French opponent Hugo Gaston retired on Rod Laver Arena with the second seed in full control at 6-2, 6-1.

Gaston, who had an abdominal injury, slumped to his chair and shook his head as his tournament ended in distress.

Two-time reigning champion Sinner said it was not how he wanted to win, but was pleased with his night's work.

Great entertainer Monfils was bundled out in the first round in a brave goodbye to a tournament he has lit up so many times down the years. The 39-year-old, one of the most colourful and popular players in men's tennis,

battled all the way but Australian qualifier Dane Sweeny prevailed 6-7 (3/7), 7-5, 6-4, 7-5 in an epic lasting nearly four hours.

There was an on-court presentation and standing ovation afterwards for Monfils, who said: “Somehow it is the finish line, but thank you so much for an amazing ride.”

Monfils, who has won 13 ATP titles in a career stretching back to 2004, said in October that this year would be his last in tennis.

Italian fifth seed Lorenzo Musetti moved on when his Belgian opponent Raphael Collignon retired in the fourth set.

Ben Shelton, the eighth seed and a semi-finalist last year, saw off France's Ugo Humbert, 6-3, 7-6 (7/2), 7-6 (7/5).

But Brazilian 19-year-old Joao Fonseca, touted on the eve of the tournament by Roger Federer as a star of the future, was dumped out by Eliot Spizzirri at the first hurdle. The American defied the crowd of chanting Brazilian fans to win 6-4, 2-6, 6-1, 6-2.

Former world number one Osaka emerged for the last match on Rod Laver Arena clutching a white parasol and wearing a

matching wide-brimmed hat and veil.

The 28-year-old from Japan is well known for her on- and off-court fashion statements.

She wore her latest outfit as she came out for her night match against Croatia's Antonia Ruzic. She waved regally to the crowd and the four-time Grand Slam champion then folded up the umbrella and neatly put the hat and veil to the side.

Osaka, a two-time former champion, went on to win 6-3, 3-6, 6-4 and said of her eye-catching outfit: “It is modelled after jellyfish, it's really beautiful.”

In the first match of the day, Madison Keys admitted being “very nervous” as she launched her title defence with a shaky win.

Keys lost the first four games before rallying to beat Ukraine's Oleksandra Oliynykova 7-6 (8/6), 6-1.

Janice Tjen clocked another milestone in her rapid rise as she became the first Indonesian to win a match at the Australian Open in 28 years.

Unseeded Tjen stunned Canadian 22nd seed Leylah Fernandez 6-2, 7-6 (7/1). — AFP

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RO 250m projects under way: OETC

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, JAN 20

OMAN Electricity Transmission Company (OETC), the sole operator of the Sultanate of Oman's transmission system, is currently executing projects valued at over RO 250 million, aimed at integrating a series of upcoming wind and gas-based Independent Power Projects (IPPs) into the national grid.

As many as 10 projects, awarded during 2025, are under execution, some of which focus on expanding and modernising the grid.

In a post, majority state-owned OETC – part of the Nama Group – said these investments will help strengthen the electricity sector and support the nation's development journey by delivering high-quality, strategic projects that advance a smart national grid—one capable of keeping pace with economic growth and meeting future energy needs.

The initiatives include grid stations linked to two wind IPPs currently in early procurement in Al Wusta and Dhofar governorates.

Around RO 33 million has been earmarked for a 400 kV grid station to facilitate the evacuation



New grid stations will help integrated wind farms and a gas-fired power project into the national grid.

of renewable electricity from the Duqm Wind IPP at Ras Madrakah, a major farm with an expected capacity of 234–240 MW.

The new grid, complete with line-in / line-out (LILO) infrastructure, will be established between the Duqm Industrial Grid Station and Al Jazer Grid Station.

In Dhofar, a new 132 kV grid station is under development to enable the export of clean electricity from the Sadah Wind IPP, currently under tender with a

projected capacity of 81–99 MW.

OETC has allocated approximately RO 19 million for this facility, which will connect Mirbat to the existing Sadah Grid Station.

In Muscat Governorate, OETC is investing around RO 44 million in a new high-voltage facility at Misfah to connect a planned gas-fired IPP with a capacity of 1,600 MW.

The Misfah IPP is part of two combined-cycle gas turbine

(CCGT) schemes, the second of which is planned at Duqm with a capacity of 800 MW. This project includes the construction of a 132 kV substation and a 400 kV underground transmission cable linking the facility to the existing Misfah Grid Station.

The largest of OETC's expansion projects is a RO 62 million investment in grid infrastructure in key oilfield areas in Al Dhahirah Governorate, including the construction of the 400/132 kV

These investments will help strengthen the electricity sector and support the nation's development journey by delivering high-quality, strategic projects that advance a smart national grid—one capable of keeping pace with economic growth and meeting future energy needs.

Wadi Latham Grid Station and the 132 kV Al Safah Grid Station with associated infrastructure.

Other projects under implementation include the Al Kamil Grid Station (400/132 kV), Al Jazer Grid Station (400/33 kV), Mahadha 220 kV Grid Station, Surab Grid Station (400/33 kV) with a 400 kV LILO linking the Duqm and Mahout Grid Stations, and the upgrading of the existing 220/132 kV Sohar Freezone (SFZ) Grid Station.

Last year, OETC announced that it had budgeted \$2.2 billion for the execution of 32 key projects over 2024–2028, aimed at integrating, expanding, and modernising Oman's critical power transmission and dispatch infrastructure.

RO 185m Sultan Haitham City project to boost integrated urban development



Thee project will be developed over an area of approximately 460,000 square metres in Neighbourhood 6 (C and D).

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 20

A major new landmark development has been announced for Sultan Haitham City following the signing of a development agreement between the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning (MoHUP), and Al Adrak Group.

Valued at RO 185 million (\$420 million), the project will be developed over an area of approximately 460,000 square metres in Neighbourhood 6 (C and D), marking a significant milestone in the expansion of one of Oman's most ambitious urban developments.

The agreement was signed by Dr Khalfan bin Said al Shueili, Minister of Housing and Urban Planning, and Dr Thomas Alexander, Chairman of Al Adrak Group.

The project reflects the Ministry's strategy of partnering with leading private sector developers to deliver high-quality, sustainable urban communities aligned with Oman Vision 2040. It is expected to enhance both the residential appeal and investment attractiveness of Sultan Haitham City as development accelerates.

Al Adrak Group brings extensive experience in real estate and infrastructure development.

Through its real estate arm, Adante Realty, the group is currently developing Yenaier Residences, a flagship project that is already underway and attracting strong market interest.

The signing of the agreement coincides with Adante Realty's first anniversary, marking a key milestone in the company's growth and its expanding contribution to Oman's real estate sector.

The new development further strengthens Sultan Haitham City's position as a future-ready urban destination and highlights the growing role of public-private partnerships in shaping Oman's next generation of cities.



Inviation to the Extraordinary General Meeting
of Sohar International Money Market Fund

The members of the Fund Management Body of Sohar International Money Market Fund (The "Fund") are pleased to invite the unitholders to attend the Extraordinary General Meeting of the Fund ("EGM") to be held at 12 PM on Tuesday, 3 February 2026, at the Headquarters of Sohar International Bank SAOG, to discuss and consider the agenda items below.

If the quorum requirement for holding EGM is not met, a second EGM shall be convened at 12 PM on Wednesday, 4 February 2026, at the same venue as the first EGM.

AGENDA FOR THE EGM

1. To approve the addition of a new article (Article 8) to the Fund's Articles of Association in relation to the issuance of different classes of units of the Fund, in accordance with the amended and restated Articles of Association.

2. To approve the prospectus of the Fund in light of the amendments made in relation to the issuance of different classes of units of the Fund.

According to Article (252) of the Executive Regulation of the Capital Market Law (Financial Services Authority Decision number 1/2009), each unitholder shall have the right to nominate a proxy to attend the EGM and vote on their behalf on the resolutions of the EGM by completing the proxy form attached to this invitation.

For more information, please contact: Mr. Sami Habib on sami.habib@sib.om

+ 968 24730000
sib.om



SHORTTAKES



The workshop aims to review the designation of measurement and calibration laboratories.

METROLOGY LAB DESIGNATION REVIEWED IN OMAN

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP), through its Directorate General for Standards and Metrology (DGSM), in cooperation with the GCC Standardisation Organisation, held a workshop on Tuesday to review the designation of measurement and calibration laboratories.

The workshop brought together stakeholders from industrial, health, service and regulatory sectors, reflecting MoCIIP's efforts to strengthen national partnerships and enhance Oman's metrology infrastructure. Imad bin Khamis al Shukaili, Director General of DGSM, said the workshop aimed to clarify the roles and responsibilities of Designated Institutes (DIs) and the services they provide in disseminating international units of measurement. He highlighted achievements recorded in 2025, during which the National Calibration Centre calibrated 970 devices and instruments. In addition, more than 2,300 scales and liquid fuel pumps were verified, generating revenues of RO 16,500.

Al Shukaili noted that the workshop represents a qualitative step towards developing national technical capabilities and optimising available resources in support of economic development. He said these efforts enhance the competitiveness of Omani products and services in regional and international markets, while protecting consumers and ensuring measurement accuracy in line with global standards. — ONA

IFC backs Oman’s global solar supply chain push

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, JAN 20

THE World Bank Group's private sector arm, the International Finance Corporation (IFC), is positioning Oman as a credible hub for high-tech industrial investment through its backing of United Solar Polysilicon's (USP) large-scale manufacturing project in Sohar, one of the most significant industrial financings in the Sultanate of Oman in nearly two decades.

The project marks a renewed engagement by IFC in Oman's industrial sector, anchored in renewable energy supply chains and export-oriented manufacturing. In an exclusive interview with the Observer, Wendy Werner, World Bank Group Country Manager for the Sultanate of Oman, said the USP project aligns closely with Oman's diversification and competitiveness agenda.

"The USP represents an important contribution to Oman's diversification objectives," Werner said.

"It is also a significant contribution to the renewable supply chain in the region and globally, which means it has both strong development impact and commercial importance."

The comments follow the recent signing of financing agreements under which IFC led a major debt package for the 100,000-tonne polysilicon plant at SOHAR Port and Freezone.

While the agreement itself formalised IFC's participation, the broader significance lies in the signal it sends to international lenders and institutional investors about Oman's industrial readiness.

Beyond IFC's own investment of about \$250 million, the project mobilised a wide group of international and local lenders. Werner noted that IFC's due diligence and standards played a catalytic role in crowding in capital.



Many of these lenders took comfort from IFC's role in the project and to mobilise this volume of financing and equity

WENDY WERNER
World Bank Group Country Manager for the Sultanate of Oman.

"Many of these lenders took comfort from IFC's role in the project and to mobilise this volume of financing and equity," she said, adding that IFC's participation is often decisive in establishing bankability.

Polysilicon is a critical upstream input for solar photovoltaic manufacturing, and global production remains highly concentrated outside China.

IFC views the Sohar facility as strategically important not only for Oman, but also for diversifying global supply chains amid growing geopolitical and trade risks.

As part of its engagement, IFC is also working with USP on advisory and benchmarking support to ensure the plant meets global best practices

"We work closely with USP on advisory engagement to achieve some of the best efficiency and environmental and social impact from this project," Werner said. "That partnership early on has helped to achieve very strong impacts."

She highlighted the project's employment effect, noting that around 3,000 direct and indirect jobs are expected to be created. "This supports Oman's objectives to have quality employment alongside economic diversification," she added.

Werner said IFC's involvement also serves as a broader signal to global

investors assessing Oman as a destination for advanced manufacturing. "It definitely serves as an indicator of what Oman can do," she said, pointing to the speed of execution, the ability to deploy new technology at scale, and the enabling infrastructure provided by Sohar Freezone.

According to her, other large industrial and technology investors are already viewing USP as a benchmark for what is achievable in the Sultanate of Oman.

From IFC's perspective, the longer-term test will be whether Oman can sustain momentum across the wider renewable and energy value chain. "Oman is already able to bring in very large-scale projects," Werner said.

"We see the renewable and energy supply chains as high potential here, as reflected in the government's strategy and execution."

For United Solar, the project represents a strategic bet on Oman as a globally competitive industrial base. Binyam Giorgis, Group CFO of United Solar Holding, said the company deliberately selected Sohar after assessing multiple locations worldwide.

"We selected Sohar because of port access, the efficiency of Invest Oman and government processes, and the availability of reliable energy," he said.

He described the plant as a critical asset for supply chain resilience. "Outside of China, there is very limited polysilicon capacity," Giorgis said. "This factory will increase the resilience and diversification of the solar supply chain, making it a critical asset in the Middle East and globally."

According to Giorgis, United Solar has raised around \$1.6 billion for the project to date, including more than \$900 million in recent debt financing led by IFC and local banks.

"This financing is a strong statement about Oman," he said, "bringing together global and local institutions to support a complex, high-tech industrial project."

BOJ to signal more rate hikes as yen, politics fuel inflation risks

TOKYO: The Bank of Japan (BOJ) is expected to raise its growth forecast on Friday and signal its readiness to hike interest rates further, as recent yen falls and prospects of solid wage gains keep policymakers alert to containing inflationary pressure.

But BOJ Governor Kazuo Ueda is likely to offer few clues on how soon the central bank could resume rate hikes, a decision complicated by rising bond yields and Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi's announcement on Monday to call a snap election in February.

Having just raised interest rates to a 30-year high of 0.75 per cent in December, the central bank is set to keep borrowing costs steady at its two-day policy meeting ending on Friday.

Markets will be looking to Ueda's post-meeting press conference for policy signals, particularly focussing on how the BOJ chief reconciles the need to keep unwelcome yen falls at bay while seeking to avoid further rises in bond yields.

Takaichi on Monday echoed proposals by rival parties to cut



The Japanese national flag waves at the Bank of Japan building in Tokyo. — Reuters

Japan's consumption tax and vowed to end "excessively tight fiscal policy," heightening the chance of more spending and tax cuts after the election.

While expansionary fiscal steps may push up inflation and give the BOJ another reason to raise rates, a

Takaichi victory may embolden her reflationist advisers favouring low rates to underpin a fragile economy, some analysts say.

"So far, the BOJ has maintained a negative stance toward consecutive rate hikes" on concerns over the impact on Japan's financial system

and pressure from Takaichi's administration, said Ayako Fujita, Japan chief economist at JPMorgan Securities. "Whether the recent yen depreciation will prompt a change in this stance is a key point to watch," she said.

Concern over Japan's worsening finances has driven bond yields sharply higher since early November with the 10-year Japanese government bond yield hitting a 27-year high of 2.30 per cent on Tuesday.

Moreover, since fiscal and monetary dove Takaichi became prime minister in October, the yen has fallen about 8 per cent against the dollar to briefly hit an 18-month low of 159.45 last week, its lowest level since Japan last intervened in July 2024.

The yen bounced back somewhat and stood around 158.18 on Tuesday. But the currency's downtrend, which boosts import costs and broader consumer prices, has led to market views the BOJ could speed up rate hikes to forestall the risk of too-high inflation.

Sources said some BOJ policymakers see scope to raise rates sooner than markets expect with April a distinct possibility, as a sliding yen risks adding to already broadening inflationary pressure.

The central bank ended a decade-long, massive stimulus in 2024 followed by several sequences of hikes in its short-term policy rate including one to 0.75% from 0.5% last month.

Analysts expect the BOJ to wait until July before raising rates again, with more than 75% of them expecting it to climb to 1% or higher by September.

The BOJ's quarterly outlook report, due on Friday, will likely highlight the bank's growing conviction that Japan is on course to meet the conditions for further rate increases. In the report, the BOJ is expected to revise up its economic forecast for fiscal 2026 from the 0.7% growth rate expected three months ago, reflecting the boost from the government's stimulus package and the fading impact of US tariffs, the sources said. — Reuters

TRADE POLICY

India relaxes wheat export curbs



India will allow limited exports of wheat flour and derivatives after a three-year ban, citing improved harvest prospects and ample domestic supply.

Bloomberg said the Indian government approved a one-time quota of up to 500,000 tonnes, while the ban on raw wheat remains. The move comes amid strong global demand and ongoing trade discussions between India and the United States— ONA

ENERGY MARKETS

Oil holds amid tariff fears



Oil prices were steady as investors weighed US tariff threats against Europe linked to Greenland, while stronger global growth expectations supported the market. Brent traded near \$64 a barrel and WTI around \$59.

Analysts said trade tensions may not immediately affect supply, with IMF growth upgrades and firm diesel prices lending support despite renewed trade-war concerns. — Reuters

PRECIOUS METALS

Gold steady near record highs



Gold and silver traded near record highs as geopolitical tensions over Greenland boosted demand for safe-haven assets. Spot gold held above \$4,670 an ounce, while US futures gained.

Silver eased slightly after earlier highs A weaker dollar, amid tensions between the United States and the European Union and a sell-off in United States stocks and bonds, added support to bullion prices. — ONA

OPINION

Piezoelectric power: Turning motion into electricity



NAJAH
AL RIYAMI

The writer is
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Master's graduate.

RESEARCHERS are making fresh progress in piezoelectric generation, a technology that converts mechanical movement such as pressure, vibration, or bending into electricity. Recent breakthroughs in lead-free piezoelectric materials have renewed interest in using everyday motion to power small electronic devices, particularly at a time when industries are seeking alternatives to batteries and low-impact renewable solutions.

At its core, piezoelectric technology works by producing an electrical charge when certain materials are mechanically stressed. For decades, this effect has been used in specialised applications including medical ultrasound devices, led lights, and precision sensors.

What has changed is the development of flexible, non-toxic materials that can be produced at lower temperatures and integrated into surfaces and fabrics, allowing piezoelectric systems to move beyond laboratories and into real-world environments.

One example of its potential is energy generated from walking. Floors embedded with piezoelectric elements can capture

energy from footsteps and convert it into electricity. In practice, however, the amount of power produced is small, typically measured in milliwatts. This means that while a busy walkway could power indicator lights, environmental sensors, or wireless data transmitters, it cannot supply enough electricity to run homes or commercial buildings. The value lies not in replacing conventional power sources, but in creating systems that operate independently without external wiring or batteries.

This same principle applies to wearable technology. Researchers have demonstrated piezoelectric fibres woven into textiles that generate electricity from body movement. Clothing that produces power has clear appeal, particularly for health monitoring and sports technology. Yet the energy harvested from motion such as walking or arm movement remains limited.

At present, it is sufficient to support low-power wearables or medical sensors, but not to charge smartphones or other energy-intensive devices. As a result, expectations around “self-charging clothes” remain firmly grounded in practical constraints.

Where piezoelectric generation shows its strongest potential is in self-powered infrastructure. Vibrations from bridges, railways, roads, and industrial machinery can

At its core, piezoelectric technology works by producing an electrical charge when certain materials are mechanically stressed. For decades, this effect has been used in specialised applications including medical ultrasound devices, led lights, and precision sensors

be continuously converted into electricity to run monitoring equipment. These systems reduce the need for battery replacement in hard-to-reach locations, cutting maintenance costs and electronic waste while improving long-term reliability.

Despite growing interest, piezoelectric energy is best understood as a supplement rather than a replacement for established renewables such as solar and wind. Its role is not to feed power into the grid, but to quietly support a growing ecosystem of connected devices that require small, reliable amounts of electricity.

Scaling the technology remains a challenge. Ensuring durability, cost efficiency, and consistent output over long periods is still an active area of research. Even so, advances in materials science suggest piezoelectric generation will continue to expand into niche but meaningful applications.

Rather than delivering large amounts of power, the real significance of piezoelectric technology lies in its ability to eliminate batteries altogether. By harvesting energy from motion that already exists, it enables devices to power themselves, reshaping how energy is used at the smallest scale and contributing to a more efficient and sustainable technological landscape.

TRUMP’S EMBRACE OF OIL INDUSTRY IS TURNING INTO AN AWKWARD GRIP

RON BOUSSO

President Donald Trump has lavished the US oil industry with favourable policies since returning to the White House, but his twin demands for cheap oil and “energy dominance” are increasingly colliding with companies’ bottom lines.

Over the past year, the Republican president has rolled out numerous pro-fossil fuel measures and offered strong support for US oil firms abroad, a sharp departure from his Democratic predecessor Joe Biden’s focus on combating climate change.

Within hours of taking office, Trump declared a national energy emergency, opening the way to relaxed environmental rules and expanded drilling permits on federal land and in Alaska.

He also quickly lifted Biden’s freeze on permitting new liquefied natural gas (LNG) terminals and

sped up project approvals.

The policies are set to reinforce America’s status as the world’s largest oil and gas producer. US crude oil and liquids production is projected to hit a record of nearly 24 million barrels per day in 2026, accounting for 22% of global supply, according to the Energy Information Administration .

What’s more, the US in 2025 became the first country to export more than 100 million metric tons of LNG in a single year, powered by production from new plants.

But the industry’s early enthusiasm for Trump’s “drill, baby, drill!” ethos has been tempered by his push for low energy prices and his appeals to the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries to increase output. OPEC+, which includes Russia, sharply raised production targets throughout the year, sending US benchmark crude to a near five-year low of \$55 a barrel in mid-December.

The price drop, and expectations of a future global supply glut, pushed US drillers to scale back operations, with the domestic oil rig count falling 15% over the past year, according to energy service provider Baker Hughes.

That pullback is set to slow the pace of US output growth this year and next.

At the same time, Trump has used America’s oil and gas strength to advance his “energy dominance” agenda and the so-called Donroe doctrine, his rebranding of a 19th-century principle asserting US influence over the Americas.

The administration has wielded its oil and LNG wealth in negotiations intended to narrow trade imbalances with dozens of countries. — Reuters

The silent enabler of Oman’s 11th 5-Year Plan

THE launch of Oman’s Eleventh Five-Year Development Plan (2026–2030) marks an important milestone in the Sultanate of Oman’s long-term development journey under Oman Vision 2040. The plan outlines ambitious objectives related to economic growth, diversification, employment generation, fiscal stability, and environmental responsibility.

Alongside these priorities, sustainable supply chains emerge as a critical enabling factor, given their wide-ranging influence across the economy.

The success of the 11th Five-Year Plan will be shaped by investment volumes, sectoral priorities, and the effectiveness with which Oman designs, manages, and governs its supply networks.

These networks act as the practical bridge between strategic ambitions and economic outcomes, determining how policy directions are translated into measurable results across sectors and regions.

At its foundation, the plan seeks to advance a diversified, resilient, and competitive economy.

Key growth sectors, including manufacturing, tourism, logistics, renewable energy, food security, mining, healthcare, and the digital economy, operate through interconnected systems of sourcing, production, transportation, storage, and distribution.

The performance of these systems influences cost efficiency, market responsiveness, environmental impact, and resilience to external shocks.

Strengthening sustainable supply chains, therefore, strengthens the overall economic ecosystem.

Economic diversification, a central pillar of the 11th Plan, gains momentum through responsible and integrated value chains.

Diversification extends beyond the introduction of new sectors and includes the development of domestic production ecosystems that enhance local value addition, support national suppliers, and strengthen export capacity.

Efficient and sustainable supply chains promote local sourcing, supplier upgrading, and quality



Strengthening sustainable supply chains, therefore, strengthens the overall economic ecosystem.



DR UMAIR
WAQAS

The author is Assistant Professor in Supply Chain Management, College of Commerce and Business Administration, Dhofar University, Oman.

standards, enabling economic value to circulate within the national economy while reinforcing global competitiveness.

Employment creation represents another cornerstone of the plan and remains closely connected to the expansion of value chains. While large-scale projects generate direct employment, a significant share of job opportunities emerges across logistics, warehousing, procurement, maintenance, compliance, and digital services.

Well-structured supply chains support stable employment pathways, workforce skill development, and private sector participation aligned with future economic needs.

This multiplier effect plays a vital role in enhancing workforce participation and long-term labour market sustainability.

Fiscal stability, which underpins confidence in the 11th Plan, is also reinforced through efficient supply chain practices. Public investment in infrastructure, healthcare, education, and industrial development achieves stronger returns when supported by transparent procurement processes, optimized logistics, and effective inventory management.

Streamlined supply networks contribute to cost efficiency, lifecycle value optimization, and improved accountability, supporting responsible fiscal management alongside continued development activity.

Environmental responsibility, a

defining principle of Oman Vision 2040, is closely linked to the design and operation of value chains.

Environmental impacts arise across the full production and distribution cycle, including resource extraction, transportation, energy use, packaging, and waste management.

Integrating sustainability across supply systems through green logistics, circular economy principles, energy-efficient operations, and responsible sourcing enables economic growth aligned with environmental stewardship and climate objectives.

The 11th Five-Year Plan also places strong emphasis on governance, performance assessment, and digital transformation. Modern sustainable supply chains increasingly function as real-time information platforms, providing visibility into operational efficiency, emissions, risks, and compliance.

Digitally enabled systems enhance transparency, improve predictability, and strengthen resilience. In an interconnected global environment shaped by uncertainty, resilient value chains serve as strategic assets that support continuity and adaptability.

From a policy perspective, supply chain sustainability functions as a strategic development instrument.

Alignment among industrial policy, investment incentives, public procurement frameworks, and regulatory standards strengthens policy coherence and implementation effectiveness. This alignment enables collaboration between public and private stakeholders in pursuit of shared economic, social, and environmental objectives.

In conclusion, Oman’s Eleventh Five-Year Development Plan presents a clear and forward-looking roadmap for national progress. Its outcomes will be shaped by the systems that connect strategy with execution.

Sustainable supply chains provide the framework through which diversification, employment generation, fiscal efficiency, and environmental responsibility advance together.

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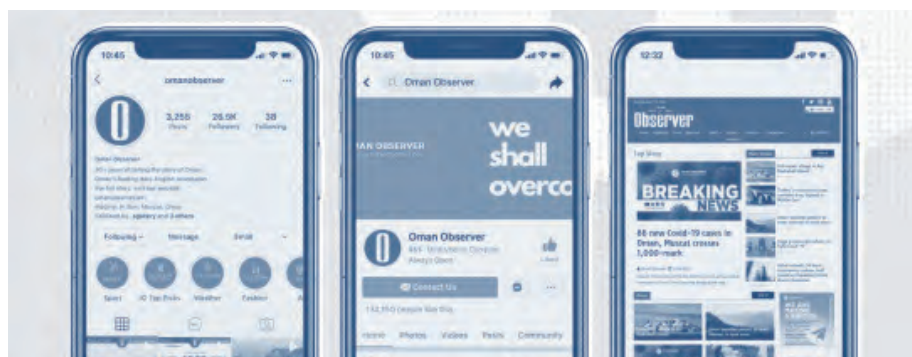
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NOW THEY’RE VANISHING

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ON SECOND THOUGHT

HOW OMAN IS CHANGING THE WAY WE PAY?



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

Progress used to be easy to spot. It came with cranes on the skyline, new highways cutting through mountains, or shiny buildings rising from empty land. Today, it often arrives quietly — through an app update, a QR code at the counter, or a phone tapped gently against a screen. Oman’s growing shift towards digital payments fits firmly into this quieter kind of change.

The recent rollout of local mobile payment platforms like Global Pay may not feel dramatic, but its impact could be far-reaching. How we pay for things shapes how we live, work and participate in the economy. In many ways, it decides who gets included and who gets left behind.

Cash has long been part of daily life in Oman. It is familiar, trusted and simple. From corner shops to cafés, cash has always worked. But it also has its limits. Cash makes it harder for small businesses to keep records, grow credit histories or access financing. For individuals without bank accounts, it can quietly block access to wider financial opportunities.

Digital payments, when done properly, begin to remove those barriers. They make transactions easier to track, safer to manage and more transparent. For small businesses, this can mean building a financial footprint that helps them grow. For young entrepreneurs, it reduces friction between an idea and actually getting started. For expatriates and unbanked workers, it can offer a more secure way to receive, store and send money.

What stands out about Oman’s approach is its pace. Rather than racing ahead, the shift feels measured. There is less emphasis on flashy innovation and more on building systems that fit local habits, regulations and expectations. That sense of balance has long been one of Oman’s strengths.

Of course, this transition comes with questions. Digital security matters. Not everyone is comfortable with apps and online systems. A move towards cashless payments must not exclude older people, rural communities or those unfamiliar with technology. Convenience should never come at the cost of accessibility.

Money, after all, is personal. It carries trust, privacy and control. Technology must support these values, not undermine them. Oman’s challenge — and opportunity — is to modernise without losing its human touch.

In many ways, digital payments reflect a bigger national story. Vision 2040 speaks of diversification, resilience and inclusion. But those ideas only become real when they show up in everyday life — when paying for groceries, running a small business or sending money home becomes simpler and fairer.

Progress does not always announce itself loudly. Sometimes, it arrives quietly and waits for us to catch up.

QUICK FEATURES



EVENTS

French actress Anja Verderosa and French actor Jonathan Cohen pose ahead of the 51st edition of the Cesar Film Awards ceremony, at The Elysee Montmartre.

— AFP



CULTURE

Palace attendants known as abdi dalem pray during the ‘Labuhan Laut’ ritual of the Yogyakarta Palace, expressing gratitude for the sea’s blessings.

— AFP



TRIBUTE

Valentino Garavani, Italian haute couture ‘emperor’ who painted fashion red, dies at 93.

— AFP

INSTA PICKS



Great white pelican arrives at Oman after 8 long years.



Muscat Nights Lake show.

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ACTOR MCCONAUGHEY SEEKS TO PATENT IMAGE TO PROTECT FROM AI

Actor Matthew McConaughey has filed recordings of his image and voice with US patent authorities to protect them from unauthorised usage by artificial intelligence platforms, a representative said.

Several video clips and audio recordings were registered by the commercial arm of the just keep livin Foundation, a non-profit created by the Oscar-winning actor and his wife Camila, according to the United States Patent and Trademark Office database.

Many artists are increasingly concerned about the uncontrolled use of their image via generative AI since the rollout of ChatGPT and other AI-powered tools.

Several US states have adopted legislation that serves as consumer protection against certain AI systems and deepfakes, but much of this applies mainly to malicious use or commercial purposes.

Only a few, notably Tennessee's ELVIS Act passed in 2024, offer more targeted protections for artists against AI-generated cloning or impersonation.

A few actors have taken legal action to assert their rights. Among the most notable is Scarlett Johansson, who sued the image-generating app Lisa AI in 2023 for creating an AI-generated avatar in her likeness for an advertisement without



Matthew McConaughey

her consent.

McConaughey's approach is novel in that he is taking the lead in protecting his image and voice.

The star of "Interstellar" and "Dallas Buyers Club" is no opponent of generative artificial intelligence.

He has acquired a stake in ElevenLabs, a startup specialising in AI voice modelling, and the company has created an AI audio version of McConaughey — with his permission.

Attorney Kevin Yorn, who represents McConaughey, said the aim of filing with the patent office was "to make sure that our clients have the same kind of protections that their businesses have".

"The second part is to make sure that our clients are able to capture some of the value that is being created with this new technology using their voice and likeness", he added. — AFP



An adventurer who put Oman's flag atop world's top peaks

DRIVEN by an early passion for nature, sports, and mountains, Omani adventurer Sulaiman Hamoud al Naabi has carved his mark in the world of mountaineering. He has achieved milestones by raising the Omani flag atop the world's highest peaks, most notably reaching the summit of Mount Everest as the first Omani and second Arab to do so, while also completing the Seven Summits program.

In an interview with Oman News Agency (ONA), Al Naabi reflected on his beginnings: "In 2015, I participated in an official educational trip to climb Mount Kilimanjaro without prior knowledge of the Seven Summits program. After reaching the peak, the expedition leader introduced me to the program as one of the world's greatest mountaineering challenges. That moment was the turning point that launched my professional career in high-altitude climbing."

He noted that transitioning from a hobbyist to a professional was a gradual process requiring physical and mental preparation. Al Naabi moved from passion-driven climbs to disciplined, professional training programs and risk management, ensuring his representation of Oman at international forums met global standards.

Al Naabi explained that the Seven Summits challenge involves climbing the highest peak on each of the seven continents. It is considered one of the most grueling global challenges due to the diverse climatic and geographical environments. When combined with reaching both the North and South Poles, it forms the Grand Slam Explorer program—one of the rarest and most dangerous exploration feats in the world.

He added that on 30 September 2015 he reached the summit of Mount Kilimanjaro (Africa), followed with reaching Aconcagua (South America) on 19 December 2026, becoming the first Omani to scale the world's second-highest peak. On 23 July 2018 he scaled Mount Elbrus (Europe), then completing the professional Seven Summits program itinerary (New Zealand route) in 3 September 2018. Further, in 16 February 2019 he scaled Mount Kosciuszko (Australia).



Al Naabi pointed out that on 20 June 2019 he became the first Omani to reach the summit of Denali (North

America), followed with scaling Mont Blanc (Western Europe) on 25 August 2019 as preparation for higher peaks.

He added that in May 2022 he reached the summit of Mount Everest (the world's highest peak), while on 12 May he climbed Mount Lhotse (the world's fourth-highest) less than 24 hours later.

Al Naabi noted that in December 2022 he reached Mount Vinson (Antarctica) and visited the South Pole.

On 23 April 2023, he said that he scaled the highest peak in the Svalbard Archipelago (Arctic), while on 28 February 2025 he scaled Carstensz Pyramid (Oceania), officially becoming the first Omani

to complete the Seven Summits and reach both Poles.

Al Naabi described the challenges as not only physical but also mental. He faced temperatures as low as -60°C, gale-force winds, avalanche risks, and oxygen depletion at high altitudes. "On a psychological level, the isolation and long durations of missions were significant challenges, made even harder by witnessing other climbers lose their lives on certain routes," he shared.

He also highlighted the transition from being a physics teacher at the Ministry of Education to having his services transferred to the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, which allowed him to focus professionally on his missions.

Beyond individual records, Al Naabi's experience has created a lasting social impact. As a member of the National Youth Commission and head of the "Young Traveler" project, he trains youth in safe adventure culture. He also contributes to developing adventure sports in Oman through his membership in the Oman Adventure Committee.

Concluding his remarks, Al Naabi emphasised that his recent decoration with the Order of Commendation is a national honor that motivates him to continue turning his experiences into a sustainable legacy for Omani youth and strengthening Oman's presence on the global stage. — ONA

FEATURES

YERU EBUEEN

THERE are parts of Oman where the land still remembers how people once moved through it. Before asphalt, before four-wheel drives, before destinations were pinned on digital maps, there were trails that were narrow, patient lines etched into mountainsides by hooves, bare feet and time. They connected villages to one another, the interior to the coast, families to trade and survival. Many of those paths still exist. Fewer people remember why.

It was this quiet disappearance that drew Hamdoon al Hashmi, founder of Navigator Expedition, into the Western Al Hajar Mountains late last year. Over nine days, he and a small team retraced a 125-kilometre route once used by villagers and traders not as a challenge to be conquered, but as a record to be preserved.

“As modernisation moves quickly, these trails are slowly fading from memory,” Hamdoon shared. “I wanted to walk one before it disappeared entirely.”

Unlike Oman’s better-known mountain routes like the Balcony Walk on Jabal Shams or the curated trails of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar, this path remains largely unmarked and uncommercialised. It begins in Hadash, a village now known among climbers for its sheer limestone walls, and threads its way through Aqbat Hadash, Al Suwgra, Al Rus, Birkat Al Sharaf and Murabadh. From there, it cuts across remote shelters above Al Hamra, climbs to the summit of Jabal Shams, the country’s highest peak, before descending towards Hail Al Shas and ending in Misfat Al Abriyeen.

To walk it is to move not only across geography, but across eras. Terraced farms appear without warning. Stone huts sit abandoned yet intact. Villages emerge where hospitality remains instinctive rather than staged.

“You see how people once lived with the land, not against it,” Hamdoon said. “Nothing feels accidental.”

This was not a spontaneous undertaking. Planning began more than a year earlier, involving detailed route mapping, satellite navigation, radio coordination and emergency protocols. Several sections of the trail remain inaccessible by vehicle even today, requiring the team to rely on donkeys to transport water and supplies to high-altitude checkpoints, the same method used by earlier generations.

Two fellow adventurers joined Hamdoon: Ibrahim bin Said bin Abdullah al Abri, an experienced long-distance trekker, and Mohammed bin Khalid bin Saif al Rawahi, a coach specialising in outdoor skills development. They set off from Hadash Guesthouse in the early morning, the surrounding mud houses carrying the quiet dignity of age.

The mountains imposed their rhythm quickly. The ascent towards Aqbat Hadash was steep and unrelenting, demanding both physical endurance and mental discipline. Cold nights followed long days. Horizons stretched endlessly. “You adapt,” Hamdoon said. “The mountains don’t rush you, but they don’t adjust for you either.”

Midway through the expedition, the fragility of such journeys became clear. At around 2 am, Mohammed was struck by severe kidney pain. The emergency plan was activated, and he was evacuated to a hospital in Al Jabal Al Akhdhar. He rejoined the team the following day, recovered but resolute. The episode served as a reminder that preparation matters as much as ambition and that endurance is often mental before it is physical.

If hardship defined the terrain, generosity defined the people. In one mountain village, a family slaughtered a goat and invited to share a meal with the trekkers. Around the



THESE TRAILS BUILT OMAN

NOW THEY’RE VANISHING



fire, stories were exchanged not only of the trail, but of how life in Oman has changed, and what has been gained alongside what has been lost. “Hospitality here isn’t a performance,” Hamdoon reflected. “It’s instinct. You are a guest, and that is enough.”

The landscapes themselves resist easy description. Juniper trees stand twisted like sculpture. Golden grass clings to cliffs, giving sections of the Western Al Hajar Mountains an almost savannah-like appearance. Hidden settlements such as Al Maawil Cave reveal dwellings carved directly into rocks, reminders of how mountain life once demanded ingenuity and restraint. “Standing there,” Hamdoon said, “I kept asking myself why we travel abroad for trekking when this exists here.”

That question carries broader implications. Globally, adventure tourism continues to expand, driven by travellers seeking experiences rooted in nature, culture and challenge rather than luxury alone. Oman, with its varied terrain and living heritage, is well placed to benefit, provided development is approached with care.

Hamdoon believes this Western Hajar route could one day stand alongside iconic international treks, bringing economic opportunity to mountain communities while safeguarding their traditions. But he is cautious. “Development has to be responsible,” he said. “Once a trail is reshaped too much, you lose what made it meaningful in the first place.”

The purpose of the expedition was not to promote a product or launch a destination, but to document a route before it is altered by modern projects. The Western Al Hajar Mountains hold more than dramatic views. They hold memory, of movement, trade, resilience and community.

As Oman continues to modernise, the question is not whether progress will happen, but whether it will leave room for the paths that shaped the country long before highways did. These trails are not relics. They are living records of how people once understood their land.

For Hamdoon, the trek marked both the fulfilment of a long-held ambition and the beginning of a larger mission: to tell stories that outlast social media cycles, and to remind Omanis that some of the country’s most valuable routes are the ones nearly forgotten.

In the Western Al Hajar Mountains, the mountains are still waiting. The question is whether we are willing to walk them and remember why they mattered.