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ASR 03:35 PM
MAGHRIB 05:58 PM
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INBRIEF

ADVENTURE PARK
ADDED ATTRACTION
IN AL HOOTA CAVE

MUSCAT: Al Hoota Cave, the second largest cave in the Sultanate of Oman after Majlis Al Jinn Cave in the Wilayat of Qurayat, is embarking on a new phase of comprehensive development and was visited by more than 55,000 visitors in 2025. The recently opened Adventure Park, a valuable addition to attracting visitors to the cave, has also introduced electric vehicles to transport visitors to explore the various features of Al Hoota Cave.

Ibrahim bin Said al Wahaibi, Director of Al Hoota Cave Company, said: “Our vision stems from the exceptional value of Al Hoota Cave as one of the most prominent natural landmarks not only locally but also regionally and internationally. Therefore, the development plan aims to transform the site into an integrated tourist destination that combines scientific exploration with family entertainment. We strive to create a rich experience that targets all age groups and caters to diverse interests, while preserving the unique geological character of the area.” He added that preserving the cave’s ecosystems and natural beauty is the main focus in all development plans.

REPORT ON P3

28 KILLED IN GAZA

Palestinians inspect the site of an Israeli strike on a Hamas police station in Gaza City. REPORT ON P6

HM’s greetings conveyed
to Indian Prime Minister

Narendra Modi, Prime Minister of the Republic of India, on Saturday received Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, on the sidelines of the second ministerial meeting of the Arab-Indian Cooperation Forum, held in the Indian capital, New Delhi.

Sayyid Badr conveyed the greetings of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, to the Indian prime minister, along with His Majesty’s best wishes for continued progress and prosperity for him and the friendly Indian people. The Indian prime minister asked the foreign minister to convey his sincere greetings and appreciation to His Majesty and his best wishes for continued progress and prosperity for His Majesty and the Omani people. — ONA

Iran army chief warns US,
Israel against attack

IRANIAN ARMY chief Amir Hatami on Saturday warned the United States and Israel against an attack, saying his country’s forces were on high alert following Washington’s heavy military deployments in the Gulf.

He also insisted the Islamic Republic’s nuclear expertise could not be eliminated, after Trump said he expected Tehran to seek a deal to avoid US strikes.

“If the enemy makes a mistake, without a doubt it will endanger its own security, the security of the region, and the security of the Zionist regime,” Hatami said, according to the official IRNA news agency.

Iranian army chief Amir Hatami noted that Iran’s armed forces were “at full defensive and military readiness”.

Washington sent a naval strike group to the Middle East led by the USS Abraham Lincoln aircraft carrier, with Trump threatening to intervene militarily after a deadly crackdown by Iranian authorities on two weeks of protests.

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi had said earlier that Tehran was ready for nuclear talks, but its missiles and defence “will never be negotiated”.

With tensions heightened, Iranian authorities rushed to deny that several incidents on Saturday were linked to any attack or sabotage.

An explosion at a residential building in the southern Iranian port city of Bandar Abbas was unexplained for several hours before local firefighters announced it was a gas leak.

The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) denied that any of the buildings belonging to its naval forces in the province had been targeted, according to a statement carried by the Fars news agency.

The Tasnim agency on Saturday also denied “assassination rumours” surrounding the commander of the Guards’ navy, Alireza Tangsiri, while state television reported smoke in Parand on the outskirts of the capital, Tehran, was “caused by a minor fire in the reeds”.

The US carried out strikes on key Iranian nuclear sites in June when it briefly joined Israel’s 12-day war against its regional foe.

Israeli attacks also hit military sites across the country and killed senior officers and top nuclear scientists.

But Hatami on Saturday insisted that Iran’s nuclear technology “cannot be eliminated, even if scientists and sons of this nation are martyred”. — Reuters

Grand Canyon project in Jabal Shams well underway

ABDULAZIZ AL ABRI
MUSCAT, JAN 31

The Wilayat of Al Hamra in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate is entering a new phase of tourism and infrastructure development with the commencement of the Jabal Shams waterfront project, better known as the Grand Canyon, alongside the construction of a road leading to the mountain.

Shaikh Sulaiman bin Said al Azri, Wali of Al Hamra, said that the wilayat is witnessing the commencement of the first

phase of the Jabal Shams, Grand Canyon project, one of the most prominent development and tourism projects in the wilayat. The project is aimed at investing in the unique natural resources and transforming them into tourist and economic attractions that support the comprehensive development path in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate.

The project is part of the government’s efforts to develop mountain tourism destinations in accordance with the Oman Vision 2040, Al Azri said, stressing that Jebel Shams,

An artist’s impression of the project.

with its unique natural and geographical heritage, will be a significant centre for mountain tourism and eco-adventures in the Sultanate of Oman.

He noted that the project won first place in the 2024 competition for the best development project at the governorate level. In March 2025, the tender for the first phase, which includes site preparation, land development and the installation of utility networks and public facilities, was floated at a cost of RO 2.9 million. A tender for the

second phase, completion of the recreational and tourism installations, will be floated in the foreseeable future.

The project spans an area of 145,000 square metres, with a total cost of RO 11 million. The project’s annual investment returns are projected to exceed RO 1.26 million, the wali said, noting that the project will generate about 309 jobs and offer 32 investment opportunities for entrepreneurs in the accommodation, restaurant, commercial and adventure sectors.

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SHORT TAKES

CAPT SALEH: BOAT
BALANCE CRITICAL

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, JAN 31



CAPTAIN
SALEH
AL JABRI

A wide range of safety measures must be observed before heading out to sea, whether for a short trip or a longer voyage, according to Captain Saleh al Jabri, the renowned Omani sailor and navigator best known for commanding the Jewel of Muscat.

Speaking in the wake of last week's tragic sea accident that claimed three lives, Captain Saleh stressed that closely following safety instructions issued by authorities and wearing life jackets are two crucial steps before sailing.

"While on board, the safety instructions issued by the authorities should be strictly followed. Everyone must exercise high caution, as the sea can change its nature very quickly," said Saleh. "Movement inside the boat affects its balance, stability and position due to the principles of weight distribution and physics."

He explained that excessive movement can cause a boat to tilt, rock or shift direction, increasing the risk of hazards such as capsizing. "It is very important for passengers to remain seated or stay in designated positions. Maintaining balance is critical," he added. A clear understanding of the itinerary and prevailing sea conditions is also essential before setting out.

"I understand that the rescue and coastguard teams did a commendable job in saving other lives. I was told an investigation has been launched, which will look into several factors, including the number of life jackets on board. When passengers move around, the chances of a boat tilting or sinking increase," Captain Saleh said.

Arab-Indian cooperation
forum seeks coexistence

THE SULTANATE OF OMAN participated in the second session of the Ministerial Meeting of the Arab-Indian Cooperation Forum, held in the Indian capital, New Delhi, on Saturday.

Addressing the forum, Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, head of the Omani delegation, emphasised the deep historical ties that bind the Arab world and the Republic of India. He highlighted the deep-rooted cultural heritage and human bonds that have contributed over the centuries to fostering mutual understanding, promoting the values of tolerance and coexistence, and establishing a partnership based on positive cooperation and respect for the sovereignty and independence of states.

The foreign minister highlighted the strategic importance that the Sultanate of Oman attaches to Arab-Indian cooperation, emphasising its support for all cooperation programmes in vital and promising sectors, particularly trade and investment. This support aims to diversify economic partnerships and open broader horizons for the private sector, in addition to cooperation in health, pharmaceuticals, environmental protection and addressing cross-border challenges including combating terrorism, extremism and hate speech. Sayyid Badr explained that the

Sayyid Badr
reviews
cooperation
with Indian
counterpart



Both ministers reviewed ways to enhance ties across various sectors of mutual interest. — ONA

Forum in New Delhi, on Saturday. They reviewed bilateral cooperation between the two friendly countries and ways to enhance it across various

sectors of mutual interest particularly the economic, trade, investment, energy, transportation and logistics sectors to achieve the mutual interests of both nations.

They exchanged views on a number of regional and international issues of common concern emphasising the importance of continued coordination and consultation, strengthening dialogue and diplomacy, supporting efforts to de-escalate tensions in the region, averting the dangers of conflict, promoting security and stability. — ONA

resources and expertise of the Arab states, combined with India's advanced industrial and technological capabilities, create ample opportunities to enhance cooperation in energy security, agriculture, and food security, thereby supporting the sustainability of supply chains in these vital sectors.

He stressed the importance of cooperation and coordination regarding maritime security, maintaining the freedom of international trade, and ensuring the safety of sea lanes, which serves both the regional and global economies and safeguards shared interests.

He stressed the importance of exchanging views on regional and international issues and developments, emphasising the necessity of

reaching a just and comprehensive solution to the Palestinian cause that guarantees the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people in accordance with international law and the two-state solution. This solution must ensure the establishment of an independent Palestinian state based on the June 4, 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital and its full membership in the United Nations.

The foreign minister underscored the Sultanate of Oman's commitment to supporting partnerships based on mutual respect and shared interests, and elevating Arab-Indian relations to a comprehensive partnership that meets the aspirations of the peoples and keeps pace with future demands. — ONA

Suhar,
Musandam
airports to
enter key
phases

MUSCAT: The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) recently revealed its plans for the expansion of Suhar Airport and the development of the new airport in Musandam. A tender has been floated for the construction works of the new passenger terminal at Suhar Airport.

It also stated that all studies related to the approved site for Musandam airport have been completed, according to Eng. Salem al Harrasi, Head of the Airports Projects Team, CAA.

The executive plan for the project is expected to be approved during this current year. Al Harrasi said the technical and financial study for the tendering of engineering designs and supervision for the regional airports in Al Jabal Al Akhdhar, Ras Al Hadd and Masirah has been completed.

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TSS Tile & Stone
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Tender Announcement

Financial Services Authority announces the following tender :-

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

Specialized companies interested in participating in the above tender must deposit the tender fee into bank account, and submit payment receipt of the tender along with a copy of the commercial registration certificate and the contact details of the authorized person to the Services & Public Relations Department e-mail : Admin@fsa.gov.om, hence, we shall provide you with Tender document by e-mail.

All participating companies must provide a bank guarantee, issued by locally registered bank not less than 2 % of the tender value addressed to FSA , the bond shall be valid for 90 days from the submission of the proposal.

All bids shall be submitted in tender box at the headquarters of the Financial Services Authority, located in Airport Heights.

FSA is not obliged to accept the lowest bid or any other bid without any justifiable reasons.

Bank account information :-
Name of beneficiary : Financial Services Authority
Account no : 0423019706330018
Bank : Bank Muscat- Corporate Branch- CBD
SWIFT code : BMUSOMRXXXX
Please attach a copy of the deposit receipt

For inquiries, please contact :-
E-mail : Admin@fsa.gov.om
Telephone Number : 24823299, 24823133
Timing : 8:00 am to 3:00 pm
Workdays : Sunday to Thursday.

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SHORT TAKES



CONTRACTS
AWARDED FOR 7
RESIDENTIAL PARKS

MUSCAT: Eng Ahmed bin Said al Amri, Chairman of Muscat Municipality, chaired a meeting of the Municipality’s Internal Tenders Committee, during which contracts were awarded for seven residential park projects across several wilayats in the Governorate of Muscat as part of the municipality’s project plan for the current year.

The projects aim to increase the number of parks in residential neighbourhoods, enhance the urban landscape, and improve social well-being and public amenities for residents. The meeting approved the rehabilitation of Wadi Al Kabir Park, with an area of 2,363 square metres, to include children’s play areas, lighting, seating, and shaded zones.

The projects also include the rehabilitation of Al Khiran village Park, covering 5,878 square metres, as well as the construction of a residential park in Al Amerat, covering 8,750 square metres.

The Al Amerat Public Park will feature a multi-purpose sports court, shaded areas, lighting, and children’s playgrounds. The list also includes the development of two residential parks in Al Maabela. The first covers 7,417 square metres and the second 10,091 square metres. Both parks will offer a range of facilities, including lighting, seating areas, multi-purpose courts, shaded spaces, and children’s play areas. One of the parks will also include a café and public restrooms.



Hydroponics consumes less water because it operates in a closed cycle, allowing water to be recycled.

HYDROPONIC
PROJECT BOOSTS
SELF-SUFFICIENCY

Al RUSTAQ: A hydroponic farming project in the Wilayat of Al Rustaq, Al Batinah South Governorate, is emerging as a pioneering model for household-level food production, helping families achieve self-sufficiency in fresh vegetables while promoting sustainable agricultural practices.

The initiative focuses on making productive use of limited home garden spaces through hydroponic technology, a soil-free cultivation method that significantly reduces water consumption compared to conventional farming. The approach also enhances crop quality and improves overall productivity.

As part of the project, insect-proof white mesh shade structures were installed in participating homes, each covering approximately 18 square metres (6m x 3m x 3m).

A fully integrated hydroponic system was set up, including a pyramid-shaped growing structure and two polystyrene pipes. Crops grown under the system include lettuce, cucumbers, tomatoes, bell peppers and zucchini.

Participants were also able to compare hydroponic yields with soil-based agriculture. The results showed that households were able to meet their vegetable needs, underscoring the project’s success in strengthening food self-reliance.

Khawla bint Salim al Harasi, Head of the Rural Development Department at the Directorate-General of Agricultural, Fisheries and Water Resources in Al Batinah South Governorate, said the project reflects efforts to equip beneficiaries with practical knowledge and skills in hydroponics while raising awareness of sustainable farming practices. — ONA

ROP WARNS
PUBLIC
AGAINST FAKE
TRAFFIC FINE
SMS SCAM

MUSCAT: The Royal Oman Police (ROP) has warned the public against fraudulent text messages claiming that recipients must urgently pay traffic fines to avoid penalties.

According to ROP, the circulating messages are false and do not originate from official authorities. The scam messages state: “There is a traffic fine that has not yet been collected and is about to expire. Failure to pay within 13 hours will result in an additional late payment penalty of RO 100, and further legal penalties may apply. Please



ROP urges public not to click on unknown links.

complete payment immediately via the following secure link.”

Police said these messages are designed to mislead residents into clicking suspicious links and sharing personal or banking information.

ROP urged the public not to respond, not to click on unknown links, and to rely only on official Royal Oman Police platforms and channels for traffic fine inquiries and payments. Authorities continue to caution residents to remain vigilant against electronic fraud and report suspicious messages.

Advanced air mobility trials
gaining momentum: CAA

VINOD R NAIR
MUSCAT, JAN 31

THE National Aviation Strategy is aiming at integrating the Advanced Air Mobility (AAM) Programme, incorporating advanced air transport technologies, including drones, in a safe and economically viable manner.

Speaking to the Observer, Hamed al Brashdi, Director-General of Strategic Planning at CAA, said, “The aviation strategy includes three initiatives for advanced air mobility. One initiative focuses on setting regulations, the second involves sandboxing - a controlled area for operations and trials. The third initiative is about the UTM, which stands for creating a digital, collaborative ecosystem designed to safely manage unmanned aircraft operations, primarily at low altitudes.”

The study on developing the masterplan for the AAM is being handled by the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MoTCIT) in collaboration with the Civil Aviation Authority. “They are currently analysing the tenders to choose consultants who will work under the national programme for aviation AAM, helping us select the companies and operators eligible for the sandbox.”

MoTCIT recently opened the financial bid for the consultancy study to develop the national Advanced Air Mobility (AAM) Master Plan.

An AAM (Advanced Air Mobility) sandbox is a controlled, regulatory-



The study on developing the masterplan for the AAM is being handled by the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MoTCIT) in collaboration with the Civil Aviation Authority.

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friendly environment designed to test and certify eVTOL aircraft and autonomous flight technologies. The CAA is currently preparing the regulations specific to AAM for the sandbox.

Regarding the possibility of seeing actual air taxi operations in the Sultanate of Oman, Al Brashdi said, “We cannot provide a timeframe because countries are currently focusing on trials, while authorities are working on supporting it with appropriate regulations. Hopefully, we are planning a sandbox trial for this year.” The AAM operations will not impact existing aircraft movements, as they will be operated in a separate zone.

“The companies are currently working on developing prototypes, which could be 18-seaters or even four-seaters, but they are still in the experimental stage. Many Omani SMEs are showing interest in the project, particularly in unmanned aircraft that can be used for cargo or small shipments.”

Meanwhile, Fahad al Riyami of AeroVecto Aviation Services, one of the Omani companies actively involved in the project, mentioned that his company is working on a hybrid electric aircraft (eVTOL) capable of carrying around 18 passengers with an aisle. They are also forming partnerships to design and plan a network of vertiports and air mobility infrastructure.

55,000 tourists visited Al Hoota Cave in 2025

YUSEF AL HABSI
MUSCAT, JAN 31

Al Hoota Cave, the second largest cave in the Sultanate of Oman after Majlis Al Jinn Cave in the Wilayat of Qurayat, is embarking on a new phase of comprehensive development and was visited by more than 55,000 visitors in 2025. The recently opened Adventure Park, a valuable addition to attracting visitors to the cave, has also introduced electric vehicles to transport visitors to explore the various features of Al Hoota Cave.

Ibrahim bin Said al Wahaibi, Director of Al Hoota Cave Company, said: “Our vision stems from the exceptional value of Al Hoota Cave as one of the most prominent natural landmarks not only locally but also regionally and internationally. Therefore, the development plan aims to transform the site into an integrated tourist destination that combines scientific



Al Hoota Cave is one of the most prominent natural landmarks internationally.

exploration with family entertainment. We strive to create a rich experience that targets all age groups and caters to diverse interests, while preserving the unique geological character of the area.” He added that preserving the cave’s ecosystems and natural beauty is the main focus in all development plans. The

addition of activities such as adventure tourism and ropes courses was based on meticulous studies to ensure these facilities integrate with the surrounding environment without compromising the integrity of the geological formations. He stressed that Al Hoota Cave has witnessed remarkable growth in visitor

numbers, recording an impressive 44,000 visitors in 2024. Thanks to development and promotional efforts, the number crossed 55,000 in 2025 which reflects the increasing confidence in the site as a preferred destination.

He noted that the development projects involve multiple phases, including technical studies, planning, implementation and evaluation, to ensure the highest quality standards. He added that work is proceeding according to schedule and financial details and the final timeline for the remaining facilities will be announced in due course upon completion of the current phases, in a manner that serves the best interests of the project and the public. He pointed out that the transition from a train system to electric vehicles is part of a comprehensive development plan aimed at enhancing efficiency and preserving the cave’s environment from emissions and noise.



MUSCAT NIGHTS 2026 EDITION

A RECORD-BREAKING SUCCESS



The Muscat Nights 2026 festival, which concluded on Saturday, January 31, 2026, marked a significant milestone in the event's history. Attracting around one million visitors over its duration, the festival expanded its geographical footprint to include new locations. The festival represented the pinnacle of cultural and entertainment programming in the Sultanate of Oman. Historically established to celebrate Omani heritage while embracing modern global influences, the festival has evolved into a multi-venue extravaganza that serves as a vital engine for the local economy and a showcase for the nation's 'Vision 2040' objectives.

Photos by **Khalfan al Ruzaiqi**

SHORT TAKES



The exhibition, in collaboration with Oman Night Markets, offered a valuable platform to enhance educational awareness.

EXPO SHOWCASES
LEARNING
OPPORTUNITIES

MUSCAT: An educational exhibition organised by WJ Towell at Souq Al Madina in Madinat Sultan Qaboos recently attracted a strong public turnout and enthusiastic family participation.

The event brought together private schools, nurseries and educational course providers, giving parents and guardians a chance to explore academic programmes, teaching methods and learning services across the Sultanate of Oman.

The exhibition, organised in collaboration with Oman Night Markets, offered a valuable platform to enhance educational awareness and help families make informed decisions about their children's education.

In line with Souq Al Madina's community focus, the event also featured free activities for children, including educational games, creative workshops and sports programmes, creating a lively, family-friendly atmosphere.

Visitors engaged actively with participating institutions, spending extended time exploring different educational options and speaking directly with school representatives.

OMAN SHOWCASES
HERITAGE AT CAIRO
INTL BOOK FAIR



CAIRO: The Sultanate of Oman is taking part in the 57th Cairo International Book Fair, which opened in the Egyptian capital and runs until February 3, highlighting the country's rich intellectual and cultural output.

Abdullah bin Nasser al Rahbi, Oman's Ambassador to Egypt and Permanent Representative to the League of Arab States, attended the opening ceremony, which was inaugurated by Egyptian Prime Minister Dr Mostafa Madbouly in the presence of senior officials.

During a visit to the Omani pavilion, Egypt's Minister of Culture Dr Ahmed Fouad Hano praised Oman's participation, noting that Oman was the guest of honour at the fair's 56th edition.

He described Oman as a major pillar of cultural and artistic activity in the region and the Arab world, underscoring its rich cultural, scientific, and intellectual heritage. — ONA

Krishikkottam to hold organic farming at harvest fest

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, JAN 31

More than 500 members of Oman Krishikkottam, a community organisation dedicated to promoting organic farming, are set to showcase the fruits of months of labour at the Shahi Foods & Spices Harvest Fest 2026. The event will take place on March 27 at Majan Heights in Al Wadi Al Kabir.

The festival will open its doors to the public, offering visitors an opportunity to learn about sustainable agriculture and best farming practices. Renowned film and television artist Vinod Kovoov will grace the occasion as the chief guest.

During the event, Binci James, an organic farming success story from Kerala, will be honoured with the Prakruthi Mitra (Friend of



Nature) award. The festival will also recognise the best organic farmer among Oman Krishikkottam members, conferring the title 'Oman Karshakasree',

along with a cash prize sponsored by Shahi Foods & Spices.

Selected senior farmers will also be felicitated for their long-standing dedication to organic farming.

"With more enthusiasts joining our group, recognising achievements inspires others and fosters healthy competition," organisers said during a recent press briefing.

The festival will also feature a vibrant cultural programme, including performances by popular singers Reshma Raghavendra and Vishnu Vardhan, promising an engaging musical evening for attendees.

Organisers expressed confidence that the Harvest Fest 2026 will strengthen community ties while promoting organic farming and sustainability.

Digital transformation in
education well underway

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JAN 31

OMAN is steadily advancing a comprehensive digital transformation of its education sector, embedding e-learning into national development strategies such as Oman Vision 2040. While earlier efforts introduced technology through limited initiatives and pilot projects, challenges such as uneven infrastructure and varying digital competencies among teachers and students highlighted the need for a more sustainable and system-wide approach. Today, Oman's digital education drive is built on an integrated framework designed to modernise learning environments and enhance educational outcomes.

At the core of this transformation is the expansion of digital infrastructure. The government, in partnership with the private sector, is extending fibre optic networks and 5G connectivity to ensure high-speed Internet access for schools. Classrooms, particularly at the primary level, are being equipped with interactive screens, and Internet speeds have been upgraded to reach up to 1 gigabit, creating a more dynamic and connected learning space.

The Ministry of Education, in cooperation with BP Oman, has launched a major project to digitise the Omani curriculum for Grades 1-12. Textbooks are being transformed into interactive digital content that supports self-directed and collaborative learning while catering to students' diverse abilities. QR codes in textbooks now link learners directly to updated digital resources, interactive books and educational videos available through the Educational Portal.

Teachers are undergoing training in advanced digital skills to enable them to manage digital classrooms



More than 1,100 digital educational resources uploaded, including e-books, videos and interactive activities.

effectively, design innovative content, and foster 21st-century skills among students. In parallel, the Ministry has introduced guidelines on the ethical and effective use of artificial intelligence in education, encouraging data-driven decision-making, personalised learning experiences, and timely feedback.

A major milestone in this journey is the 'Noor Educational Platform,' an integrated digital environment for managing teaching and learning. The platform connects curriculum content with learning outcomes and offers tools such as electronic lesson planning, vocabulary banks, and digital repositories.

During the first and second phases of implementation (2024-2025), the system was rolled out in 578 schools, achieving 96 per cent teacher access and 65 per cent student access. The third phase (2025-2026) is now expanding to 730 schools across 11 educational governorates, with the ultimate goal of full nationwide coverage.

More than 1,100 digital resources — including e-books, interactive activities, and videos — have already been uploaded, produced collaboratively by central ministry teams and local educational directorates.

These efforts reflect Oman's strategic commitment to building a smart, inclusive, and future-focused education system that supports a competitive, knowledge-based economy.

Schools are increasingly moving from traditional, teacher-centred methods to more interactive and student-driven models that encourage critical thinking, creativity, and problem solving. Digital tools are enabling continuous assessment, real-time feedback, and closer communication between schools and families, strengthening the overall learning ecosystem and ensuring that students remain engaged both inside and outside the classroom.

As global education systems evolve rapidly, Oman's structured and phased approach to digital transformation positions the Sultanate as a regional model in aligning technology with long-term national development goals. By combining infrastructure investment, curriculum innovation, teacher empowerment, and smart governance, the country is laying the foundation for a resilient education system capable of adapting to future challenges while nurturing a digitally fluent generation ready to lead.

Air Conditioning factory begins operations in Salalah Free Zone

SALALAH: The Salalah Free Zone has announced the start of full operations at a new factory specialising in the manufacture of air conditioning units, marking another step in the growth of high-quality industrial investments in the zone.

The plant, operated by Engineering Industries Company, has an annual production capacity of around 70,000 units and represents an investment of approximately RO 4.62 million. Its launch follows an investment agreement signed in 2024 as part of ongoing efforts

to attract direct industrial investments to the free zone.

Operating under an industrial licence within the engineering and electronics industries category, the factory will supply both the local market and export destinations. Its operational strategy focuses on strengthening its domestic presence while expanding exports to regional and global markets, including GCC countries, the Middle East, Africa, and parts of Europe and Asia. The company aims to leverage the Salalah Free Zone's strategic location,



The factory will supply both the local market and export destinations and leverage the Salalah Free Zone's strategic location.

advanced logistics network, and integrated infrastructure that support manufacturing industries.

The factory's products meet international specifications and standards. The facility operates under the ISO 9001 quality management system, and its air conditioning units undergo rigorous testing in line with Gulf standards. The plant has also secured the Gulf Standardisation Mark, enhancing its competitiveness in both local and international markets.

Dr Ali bin Mohammed Tabouk, CEO of the Salalah Free Zone, said the launch reflects growing investor confidence in the zone's business environment and highlights the success of efforts to attract value-added industrial projects.

Dr Jawad al Rashid, owner of the factory and Chairman of Engineering Industries Company, said the decision to establish the plant in the Salalah Free Zone was driven by its strategic location and ease of access to global markets, along with its integrated infrastructure and investor-friendly facilities.

— ONA

WORLD

SHORT TAKES



British Prime Minister Keir Starmer and Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi after their joint press conference following their bilateral meeting at the Prime Minister's Office in Tokyo. — AFP

BRITAIN, JAPAN TO DEEPEN DEFENCE, SECURITY TIES

TOKYO: Britain and Japan agreed to strengthen defence and economic ties, visiting Prime Minister Keir Starmer said on Saturday, after his bid to forge closer links with China drew warnings from US President Donald Trump.

Starmer noted that Japan and Britain were the leading economies in a trans-Pacific that includes fellow G7 member Canada, as well as other international trade and defence pacts.

"We set out a clear priority to build an even deeper partnership in the years to come," Starmer said as he stood beside Japan's Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi after a bilateral meeting in Tokyo.

"That includes working together to strengthen our collective security, across the Euro-Atlantic and in the Indo-Pacific." Takaichi said they agreed to hold a meeting of British and Japanese foreign and defence ministers this year. — AFP



An electoral billboard of presidential candidate Andre Ventura knocked down by Storm Kristin in Lisbon. — AFP

PORTUGAL BRACES FOR MORE RAIN MANY STILL WITHOUT POWER

LISBON: Portugal braced for more heavy rain as 200,000 consumers were still without power, days after Storm Kristin swept the country, killing five people. The national weather agency, IPMA, has placed all of mainland Portugal on alert for heavy rain until Monday and urged the public to stay informed.

Storm Kristin struck central and northern Portugal overnight on Tuesday with hurricane-force winds, causing flooding, property damage and travel disruptions.

Some 211,000 customers were still without power on Saturday, mainly in the centre of the country, according to E-redes, the electricity distribution network operator.

The majority were in the Leiria district in central Portugal, where the storm knocked down poles and high-voltage lines.

Generators have been deployed to support hospitals, water systems and telecommunications. — AFP

FRESH HOPE

Lebanon-Syria deal on prisoner handover



Lebanon and Syria will sign a deal next week on the handover of some 300 Syrian convicts in Lebanese jails, Deputy Prime Minister Tarek Mitri said.

Beirut and Damascus have sought to reset ties since Syria's new authorities took power in late 2024, but the issue of Syrian inmates in Lebanese prisons has been a key sticking point. The deal, which the cabinet approved, will cover around 300 Syrians convicted of crimes in Lebanon. — AFP

GAZA CIVIL DEFENCE SAYS ISRAELI STRIKES KILL 28

GAZA CITY: Israeli air strikes killed 28 people in Gaza, including children, according to the civil defence agency, as the military said it attacked in response to a Hamas ceasefire violation.

Despite a US-brokered ceasefire entering its second phase earlier this month, violence in the Palestinian territory has continued, with both Israel and Hamas accusing each other of violating the truce agreement.

The latest bloodshed comes after



A combination image of screen grabs from a video obtained by Reuters shows a projectile falling, an explosion and smoke rising during an Israeli airstrike on a building in Gaza City. — Reuters

Israel announced it would reopen the crucial Rafah crossing between Gaza and Egypt on Sunday for the 'limited movement of people'.

"Twenty-eight martyrs have been recovered, a quarter of whom are children, a third of whom are women and one elderly man," the civil defence agency, a rescue force operating under the Hamas authority, said in a statement, adding that people were still missing under the rubble. — AFP

Funding lapse triggers partial US shutdown

THE US government entered a partial shutdown on Saturday as a midnight funding deadline passed without Congress approving a 2026 budget, though disruption was expected to be limited with the House set to move early next week to ratify a Senate-backed deal.

The funding lapse followed a breakdown in negotiations driven by Democratic anger over the killing of two protesters in Minneapolis by federal immigration agents, which derailed talks over new money for the Department of Homeland Security (DHS).

"Instead of going after drug smugglers, child predators, and human traffickers, the Trump Administration is wasting valuable resources targeting peaceful protestors in Chicago and Minneapolis," Senate Democratic Minority Whip Dick Durbin posted on social media.

"This Administration continues to make Americans less safe."

Roughly three-quarters of federal operations are affected, potentially triggering shutdown procedures across a wide range of agencies and operations, from education and health to housing and defence.

Federal departments were expected to begin implementing shutdown plans overnight, but congressional leaders in both parties said the Senate's action made a short disruption far more likely than a prolonged impasse.

If the House approves the package as expected early next week, funding would be restored within



An LAPD officer fires a non-lethal munition while facing protesters during a 'National Shutdown' protest against US Immigration and Customs Enforcement in Los Angeles. — AFP

Three-quarters of federal operations are affected, potentially triggering shutdown procedures across a wide range of agencies and operations, from education and health to housing and defence

days, limiting the practical impact of the shutdown on government services, contractors and federal workers.

If the shutdown extended more than a few days, however, tens of thousands of federal workers would risk being put on unpaid leave or working without their money until funding is restored.

The House of Representatives was out of session as the deadline expired and is not scheduled to return until Monday.

President Donald Trump backed the Senate deal and urged swift House action, signalling he wanted to avoid a prolonged shutdown -- the second of his second term -- after a record-length stoppage last fall disrupted federal services for more than a month.

The Senate breakthrough came only after Republican Senator Lindsey Graham of South Carolina lifted a procedural block that had stalled the package late on Thursday. — AFP



MARCH FOR PALESTINE

A woman uses a megaphone as people take part in the National March for Palestine - hands off Gaza, a pro-Palestinian protest calling for the government to 'end the genocide and stop arming Israel', in London. — Reuters

CASH-STRAPPED POLICE

Thousands rally in support of French police



Thousands of protesters including far-right politicians rallied across France in support of the country's cash-strapped police force, with some of the demonstrators launching smoke bombs and blowing whistles.

Heeding a call of the Alliance union, demonstrators staged rallies in around 20 cities, including Paris, where between 15,000 and 20,000 people turned up, according to the organisers. — AFP

CLASHES TRIGGER ATTACKS

Attacks in Pakistan kill 21, dozens dead



Fighters launched 'coordinated' attacks across Pakistan's Balochistan province on Saturday, killing at least 10 security personnel and 11 civilians. Officials said dozens of fighters were also killed in clashes triggered by the attacks, a day after the military said its forces had killed dozens of ethnic Baloch insurgents. The senior security official said, "fighters... launched coordinated attacks this morning at more than 12 locations". — AFP

The New York Times

A city where every step outside risks death by drone



ANDREW E KRAMER

The writer is an American journalist who works as the chief of NYT Kyiv bureau

It was pickup time at the day care. As other children and parents milled about, Tanya Leshchenko sat on a bench in a hallway and bundled her 5-year-old daughter into a purple winter coat. But before stepping outside, one more task remained.

Leshchenko checked an online chat group for warnings of incoming attack drones. The group posts crowdsourced alerts in the city of Kherson, in southern Ukraine, where the daily risk of death from flying robots offers a vision of an eerie, postapocalyptic future.

One warning last fall simply said, “I hear a drone!” — an ominous buzzing that has become a grim, intermittent soundtrack in the city. On the day when Leshchenko, 36, was picking up her daughter, however, the sky was calm. They walked out and headed toward the bus stop.

“You cannot outrun a drone,” Leshchenko said, before adding: “It’s scary.”

In Kherson, a city of broad tree-lined boulevards and stately czarist-era mansions, residents fear the open sky. The entire city lies within range of cheap Russian quadcopter drones, which Moscow’s forces launch from territory they occupy just across the Dnieper River.

About 200 civilians have been killed and 2,000 wounded in drone strikes over the past year, authorities say. Ukrainians call the attacks a “human safari.” Russian drone operators drop grenades on people working in their gardens or ambling down sidewalks.

Kherson, whose population has fallen to about 65,000 after three-quarters of residents

fled, has become the site of the most intensive use of drones in targeting civilians anywhere in the world, rights groups say. The United Nations has called the attacks war crimes.

Life is moving below ground. Hospitals, a maternity ward, government offices, a theatre and dozens of other institutions have been relocated to underground sites. Basement activity rooms have replaced outdoor playgrounds. All schools are online only.

The city is experimenting with myriad drone defences, though none are wholly effective. The military has built a wall of jamming antennas along a riverbank. Dozens of miles of nets intended to catch drones before they reach an object and explode have been strung over thoroughfares. On sidewalks, 250 concrete escape chambers have been set up.

Municipal workers carry hand-held drone detectors as they labour outside repairing bomb damage or mending drone nets. The devices work by intercepting feeds from drones’ cameras, showing what the Russian drone operator sees when zeroing in on a target. Seeing yourself or your car on the detector’s screen is terrible news.

It happened once to Yaroslav Shanko, the city’s military-civilian administrator, a position akin to mayor. How did he respond? “You need to reach maximum speed and manoeuvre” to get out of the drone’s view, Shanko said. Screeching around corners and plowing down alleys at more than 80 mph, Shanko’s driver escaped the drone.

Hospitals, a maternity ward, government offices, a theatre and dozens of other institutions have been relocated to underground sites. Basement activity rooms have replaced outdoor playgrounds and all schools are online only

Rights groups say that other war-torn or crime-afflicted cities around the world are likely to look like Kherson in the future.

Small quadcopter drones, some adapted from hobbyist models, have democratised precision-guided munitions that previously cost tens or hundreds of thousands of dollars. They have been used to target civilians in the Sudanese civil war and in Mexican gang conflicts, said Belkis Wille, an associate director at Human Rights Watch.

“Kherson is the clearest example of a campaign to target civilians with quadcopter drones, but this is really just the start of what we fear will become a reality for civilians in conflict areas” around the world, Wille said. “The cost of targeting civilians has come way down.”

Kherson has never caught a break through four years of war. Russian forces occupied the city for nine months at the start of the full-scale attack, before retreating. An 18th-century Russian aristocrat and lover of Catherine the Great, Prince Grigory Potemkin, is considered the founder of the modern city and was buried in a local church. When they retreated, Russian soldiers took his bones with them.

Drone injuries are now so common, said Oleh Pinchuk, a surgeon, that “we forgot about car accidents here.” Sometimes, the wounded watch wide-eyed in a hospital bed, several days into their recovery, when Russian forces post video online from the camera of the drone that attacked them. They see themselves on the screen, getting bigger and bigger as the drone draws nearer.

All-night concerts bring fleeting normalcy in a war-ravaged nation



SUI-LEE WEE

The writer is Southeast Asia Bureau Chief, NYT



LAUREN DECICCA

The writer is a documentary photographer based in Bangkok

THE performer stood in front of an audience of 800, right before dawn on a recent Sunday. It was the tail end of his eight-hour extravaganza featuring pop, hip-hop and Burmese folk music. He was upbeat, relishing his recent return to the stage.

“Regardless of any difficulties you face, one day, summer will come,” Than Zaw Htwe, 30, told his audience, many of whom were sitting cross-legged on a silver tarp in an open field on the outskirts of Yangon, Myanmar’s biggest city.

Life in Myanmar was upended five years ago, when the military seized power in a coup. Now the junta is trying to project a veneer of legitimacy and normalcy, even as it is fighting a grinding civil war with pro-democracy rebels and other groups. It has held elections, which have been widely derided as a sham. It has organised a massive hot-air balloon festival. And it has allowed some traditional music artists to return to the stage.

Than Zaw Htwe is one of them, leading a new 70-member troupe that was founded in October. He performs zat pwe, or ‘story show,’ an opera-like art form that dates back to the 1800s. Today, it is a kaleidoscope of Burmese pop, synchronised dance, slapstick comedy and the retelling of legends.

His shows — which go from 10 pm to 6 am — are booked out until April. Known by his stage name San Yay Moe, his videos have flooded Burmese TikTok accounts.

“People are feeling mentally suffocated,” he said in an interview. “They need happiness.”

Another performer had a similar message for his audience at one of his recent shows. ‘Live in the present,’ said Chit Myo Htike, perhaps the most prominent zat pwe performer and whose stage name is Phoe Chit.

Many urbanites in the country are doing just that. In Yangon, domestic tourism is booming in parts of the country where there is no fighting. Bazaars are now held regularly. Many of these events are sanctioned by the junta, which controls the nation’s cities but not its hinterlands.

On a recent Sunday, I stood in line with hundreds of people to watch a performance. It was the last night of a three-day run in Hmawbi township, on Yangon’s outskirts.

The tickets ranged from 30,000 to 60,000 kyats, or about \$14 to \$28, which is relatively pricey, given that the average monthly wage is about \$75.

Domestic tourism is booming in parts of the country where there is no fighting. Bazaars are now held regularly. Many of these events are sanctioned by the junta, which controls the nation’s cities but not its hinterlands



Performers dance a Phoe Chit in the outskirts of Yangon, Myanmar.

With temperatures dipping in to the low 60s Fahrenheit, many in the audience settled in with blankets and beanies.

“For three days a week, this is their happy hour,” Aung Kyaw Tun, the founder of the San Yay Moe troupe, said in English. He said he once experimented with shorter shows that ended at midnight, but the audience was not satisfied and clamoured to stay until the morning.

It was clear that San Yay Moe was the biggest draw.

In keeping with tradition, audience members showed their appreciation by heading to the stage and pinning cash on the performers’ outfits.

At one point, San Yay Moe had so much money pinned on his sleeves that the bills looked like feathers on wings.

Around midnight, I went backstage, where wages were being distributed. Aung Kyaw Tun said he made about 100 million kyats, or \$25,000, for the three nights. San Yay Moe gets to take home the money that is given to him by fans, this time roughly 70 million kyats, or \$17,500.

At 1.30 am, it was time for San Yan Moe to perform a medley of songs. He strode out in a purple suit with a strip of silver sequins running down his trousers and top. A group of backup dancers gyrated behind him.

Next up was one of his hypersonic costume changes. Off came his purple top and on came a white vest.

The audience waved their hands in the air. Near the stage, a group of men moshed around.

At 3.30 am, the show moved into an adaptation of the Ramayana, the Hindu epic. By this time, I was fading; but not San Yay Moe, who was in character, writhing onstage.

Two weeks later, I returned to Yangon to see Phoe Chit perform. His show felt almost like a spiritual experience.

The audience knew the words to all his songs, and took out handkerchiefs and cellphones to wave along to the music. One was a ballad titled ‘To A Friend,’ in which the singer urges a jilted friend to move on.

Then, Phoe Chit moved to a play in multiple acts that touched on filial themes and had a climax in which the lead character was forced to marry his brother’s pregnant girlfriend.

This month, Phoe Chit, 43, was among a list of celebrities who received distinguished artist awards from Senior Gen Min Aung Hlaing, the military commander who led the coup in 2021.

In 2022, Phoe Chit was detained for a brief period on suspicion that he was helping fund armed resistance to the junta, according to some reports.

Phoe Chit declined to comment but said that his troupe started performing in February after a hiatus of six years because he got the approval from the authorities.

OPINION

When resignation becomes a path to healing



DR HAMED
AL SINAWI

The writer is a senior consultant psychiatrist at SQU Hospital

MRS B, a 45-year-old mother of four, came to my clinic feeling sad with frequent anxiety attacks, losing interest in almost everything and having self-doubts about her ability to do her job. She was recently promoted to a senior leadership role, but instead of feeling pride, she started to have waves of negative emotions.

Despite her long record of strong performance, she found herself terrified of disappointing her supervisor or making a mistake. Each morning became a battle when getting out of bed felt like lifting a weight heavier than anything she carried at work. Anxiety soon seeped into every corner of her life. She struggled with sleep, emotional eating and a constant knot of worry in her stomach.

Her productivity dropped, which only intensified her self-criticism. To compensate, she stayed late at the office, pushing herself beyond exhaustion. At home, her presence faded; she had little energy left for her children, her husband, or even her aging parents.

At work, she masked her distress. Like many leaders, she believed she had to appear strong, composed and in control. Internally, however, she felt like a shadow of herself. Worse, she found herself struggling not only with self-doubt but with a work culture driven by competition, power dynamics and unspoken political games. Navigating this environment felt misaligned with her values, and she felt emotionally unsafe. It became clear that the exhaustion she carried was not a sign of weakness but a response to a system that rewarded endurance and punished vulnerability.

Eventually, Mrs B reached a point of emotional saturation, still functioning, still respected, but crumbling inside. The idea of resigning surfaced not as an escape but as a means of survival. Yet the decision was not easy. Stepping down meant risking financial security, professional identity and the external validation that had shaped her sense of worth for years.

When she finally submitted her resignation, the emotions were mixed: relief, grief and a quiet fear of what would come next. Letting go of the role also meant letting go of the identity she had built around being dependable, capable

She found herself struggling not only with self-doubt but with a work culture driven by competition, power dynamics and unspoken political games

and endlessly resilient.

But what happened next was not expected. With the pressure gone, her body collapsed into a state of deep exhaustion. She slept more, moved less and felt little motivation to engage with the world. At first, she feared she was regressing. In reality, she was experiencing what psychologists describe as a “nervous system shutdown” after prolonged hypervigilance.

For years, she had lived in survival mode; now she was finally stopping.

During this period, she realised that her withdrawal had a protective function. By becoming less productive and less visible, she lowered the expectations placed on her, both by others and by herself. For the first time, she was no longer performing.

Today, she is more at ease with herself, but no longer drowning. Her journey is slow and uneven, marked by new self-awareness and a growing tenderness towards herself. Mrs B's story is a reminder that sometimes stepping down is not stepping back, but stepping towards healing — a reclaiming of dignity, balance and a life no longer defined by relentless performance.

Encircled city in Sudan’s Kordofan targeted by drones

The city of El-Obeid in Sudan’s Kordofan region, largely encircled by paramilitary forces, was targeted by drone attacks on Friday that hit multiple government-linked facilities, several witnesses said.

The drone strikes, which began early in the morning and lasted two hours, hit a military base, a police headquarters, the regional parliament and the premises of a telecoms company, witnesses said. A military source said that the army’s air defences had intercepted 20 aerial targets. The paramilitaries had no immediate comment on the reports. Since April 2023, Sudan’s government army has been fighting its former allies in the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF).

The war has killed tens of thousands of people, displaced millions more and triggered a humanitarian crisis. El Obeid, located about 350 km southwest of Khartoum, remains under army control after it managed to loosen a lengthy RSF siege last February. The paramilitary force, however, has redoubled its efforts to take the city after forcing the army out of neighbouring Darfur last year, cutting off most access routes in and out.

El Obeid lies along a strategic route linking Darfur and Khartoum. According to satellite images analysed by the Humanitarian Research Lab at Yale University earth fortifications have been thrown up, suggesting the city is bracing for a siege. More than 88,000 have fled the Kordofan region since October. The reported attack on El Obeid came after the army announced on Monday that it had broken the siege of Dilling, a city in South Kordofan that the RSF had besieged for more than 19 months.

“This week, the security situation in the city of Dilling has deteriorated significantly,” Farhan Haq, a spokesman for UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, told reporters on Friday.

Around 117,000 people, nearly half the population of Dilling, have fled the city, while many others remain trapped and cut off from aid, Haq warned. Since the capture in October of El-Fasher, the army’s last stronghold in neighbouring Darfur, the paramilitaries have focused their offensives on Kordofan, a vast region rich in oil and gold. Civilians have been driven from their homes and face an almost total collapse of basic services, the UN chief’s spokesperson warned.

South Kordofan’s capital Kadugli — where some 500,000 residents are facing famine — has been besieged by the RSF for more than a year and a half. And since late October, more than 88,000 people have fled the Kordofan region, according to the International Organization for Migration (IOM). Overall, the war has killed several tens of thousands of people, uprooted around 11 million, and triggered what the UN calls “the world’s worst humanitarian crisis”. — AFP

Why walking exercise is not enough after 50

I am seventy-five years old, I take 5 grammes of creatine monohydrate every day and I do mild muscle training daily as part of my routine. I have been taking a creatine supplement for two years alongside mild muscle-strengthening exercises and have personally noticed the benefits of this natural supplement in my strength, energy and daily functioning.

Creatine is widely known for strengthening muscles but its benefits go well beyond exercise performance. It is not a steroid, it is legal and it can be bought without a doctor’s prescription. It is used not only by athletes but by many millions of ordinary people, particularly the elderly, and extensive medical research has shown it to be safe and effective as a supplement.

As we age, muscle strength naturally declines. This loss affects energy, balance and confidence in everyday movement. Vascular exercise such as walking is clearly beneficial for heart health but muscle strengthening becomes equally and often more important with age.

Stronger muscles give you more energy to complete daily tasks such as climbing stairs, carrying shopping and getting up from a chair. They also reduce the risk of falls by strengthening the muscles in the legs and improving stability. Walking alone is not enough as you age because it does not adequately maintain muscle strength. Creatine supports muscle function by helping muscles produce and store energy. It is a natural substance found in small amounts in foods like meat and fish and is also made naturally by the body.

Supplementing with creatine increases the amount available to muscles and other tissues. For most people a daily dose of 3 to 5 grammes is sufficient, which is about one level teaspoon of creatine monohydrate powder. Taking more



KARIM
EASTERBROOK

The writer is a former Cambridge School Principal and Author



Stronger muscles give you more energy to complete daily tasks such as climbing stairs, carrying shopping and getting up from a chair. They also reduce the risk of falls

does not add benefits and may cause digestive discomfort. Creatine can be taken once a day, mixed with water, juice or a shake. The timing is flexible because creatine works gradually by building up energy reserves in cells. Regular daily use matters more than the time of day. Drinking enough fluids during the day supports how the body responds to creatine.

At my age the benefits of creatine combined with muscle strengthening are especially relevant. Creatine helps support muscle maintenance and strength, making movement feel easier and more controlled.

This supports independence and helps prevent falls which are often caused by weakened leg and core muscles rather than poor cardiovascular fitness. Creatine also supports bone health indirectly. Stronger muscles place healthy stress on bones, helping slow age-related bone loss.

When combined with gentle resistance exercises, this improves

balance and confidence in movement. There are benefits beyond muscles and bones. Creatine plays a role in how brain cells produce energy, and research suggests it may help reduce mental fatigue and support focus and clarity. Many people notice steadier energy levels, particularly during periods of stress, illness, or reduced activity.

A loading phase or high doses are unnecessary. A steady intake of one level teaspoon per day raises creatine levels safely over a few weeks without bloating or stomach upset. Creatine monohydrate is the most studied and reliable form, and choosing a pure, unflavoured powder avoids unnecessary additives. For healthy adults without existing kidney disease, creatine is generally well tolerated. Taken daily and combined with mild, regular muscle training, it supports strength, mobility, energy and overall well-being, addressing some of the most practical physical challenges of ageing.

‘Wake up sleepyhead,’ and change lives for the better



RAY PETERSEN
r.j.petersen52@gmail.com

The writer is a media consultant

MOST mornings, between 4.30 am and 5.30 am, I wake up, thanking God for that small mercy, I’m not particularly religious, but as at any time of life, I am grateful for each day on top of the ground, because, as my late father used to say, “You’re looking at that pine lid for an awful long time.”

Then, using my toes to feel my way into my slippers, I shuffle my way off to the bathroom, awakening my still slumbering body as I go. Habitually a night-time, pre-sleep, shower kinda guy, reaching my handbasin, I now must make my first decision of the day.

Do I splash cold water on my face for a shock, rude awakening, or stand there with my finger under the running tap waiting for the warm/hot water to start running? The executive decision made, I must admit that with the advancing years, I have become more likely to opt for hot water, figuring maybe I don’t need the harsher ‘shock treatment’ anymore.

I plug the basin and let the water run. As it does, I lean briefly on the hand basin, gazing without intent at the bathroom mirror in front of me, squinting, because I’m not yet wearing my glasses, to see if I still look like

Kevin Costner, the movie star I have always sought to convince myself I look like, but I’m just not seeing it today.

So, I launch into my routine of a vigorous face scrub, concentrating on ‘waking up’ my eyes, clean my ears with cotton buds knowing full well that’s against sound medical research and advice, brush my teeth, gargle, spit, spray or roll on some deodorant and look again at myself while reaching for my hairbrush to comb my diminishing grey hair straight back with only three or four strokes.

I’m not terribly fussy, and I am a bit lazy, and I figure that ‘tidy-ish,’ in terms of morning ablutions, is enough. Only then do I put my glasses on, take a last look at my face in the mirror, and am rudely reminded of my mate Steve’s opinion that I’m “a lot more Gary Lineker than Kevin Costner!” Now, no disrespect to you Gary, but Costner you aint!

Thus, not humbled, but more like reality checked, I toddle off out of the bathroom. But every day is pretty much the same as my attention is, in vanity I guess, drawn to myself in the full length mirror to my left, and I just must pause, suck in my tummy, stand a little taller, give myself a once-over, and content I am looking my best, now stride confidently back into the bedroom, for the moment, Adonis.

For those few brief seconds, I don’t envy those with immense power, wealth, athleticism or good looks - well, maybe athleticism

Such thoughts are usually wasted however, as my wife usually mutters “five more minutes,” and buries her head under the pillow.

For those few brief seconds, I don’t envy those with immense power, wealth, athleticism or good looks - well, maybe athleticism, as one arthritic knee and one titanium knee rob me of a modicum of dignity – knowing we are all the same, all as vulnerable as each other, for that brief time. My attire complete, I can now, somewhat jauntily, face the world. I make breakfast for my wife before savouring my morning coffee, Alicafe, I love it! And before long I’m ready to face the day, and whatever life throws at me.

So, coated and booted, I venture outdoors, where it’s often raining, and a lot colder than in Oman right now, around 2 degree Celsius, unplug my electric car, and silently ‘tootle’ down the road to the motorway and on my 30 minute commute to the University Technical College where, hopefully, I can positively influence young lives, prioritising their need for communication skills and resilience, because their world will challenge them far beyond their expectations.

As such, my ordinary days both challenge and reward me, making getting up tomorrow easier.

PRAGUE’S HOMELESS FIND SAFE HAVEN ON RIVER BOAT

JAN FLEMR

For Jaromir Cervenka, the Hermes boat anchored in Prague and accommodating the Czech capital’s homeless has become more than a temporary home.

The 49-year-old ended up on the street after a divorce more than two decades ago, sleeping on benches or in dormitories.

He moved to Hermes when it opened in February 2007, and he has recently become its paid captain and maintenance worker with his own cabin.

“It’s cool to have a place to stay that is warm and where you can wash,” Cervenka, a trained blacksmith, said.

Hermes is one of several safe havens for the growing number of homeless people in Prague. Statistics are scarce, but the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) put Czech homelessness at 104,818 people in a 2024 report.

With 0.97 per cent of population affected, the Czech Republic is the third worst-off among OECD members behind New Zealand and Slovakia, it said.

The Czech Statistical Office said in 2024 that 154,000 Czechs were affected by “acute housing crisis”, including 61,000 children living in dormitories.

Jan Frantisek Krupa, heading the Czech branch of Salvation Army, put the number of homeless Czechs “somewhere between 30,000 and 70,000”.

“But I’m not counting those who live in non-standard housing, dormitories or flats with a short-term contract. If we included them, we’d be over 100,000,” he said.

Hermes opens at 7:30 pm and closes at 6:30 am all year long, accommodating 180 people, with 30 beds for women and 150 for men.

Dozens of people clutching plastic bags queued before the opening outside the long, low boat on a freezing January evening as a cold snap sent temperatures way below zero.

“Bed occupancy is naturally lower in the summer when it’s under 100 people, while before winter... the boat is full with 160 to 180 people,” said Katerina Prochazkova, the head of social services on Hermes.

After registering, they can take a shower and have a cup of tea, while cooking is prohibited in the wooden interior.

Prochazkova said the boat had transported dry material like sand and gravel on the Elbe River before being revamped into the shelter.

“It is the largest dormitory for the homeless in the country,” she said.

David Mudroch first came to Hermes last October after struggling to pay his rent. He left in November as he got a job with accommodation.

“But they sacked me in January because of a hand injury so I came back. I hope it won’t be for long,” said the bespectacled 22-year-old, seeking a job as an ambulance assistant in a Prague hospital. — AFP

Students are skipping the hardest part of growing up

BACK in 2023, when ChatGPT was still new, a professor friend had a colleague observe her class. Afterward, he complimented her on her teaching but asked if she knew her students were typing her questions into ChatGPT and reading its output aloud as their replies.

At the time, I chalked this up to cognitive offloading, the use of artificial intelligence to reduce the amount of thinking required to complete a task. Looking back, though, I think it was an early case of emotional offloading, the use of AI to reduce the energy required to navigate human interaction.

You’ve probably heard of extreme cases in which people treat bots as therapists or friends. But many more have them intervene in their social lives in subtler ways. On dating apps, people are leaning on AI to help them seem more educated or confident; one app, Hinge, reports that many younger users “vibe check” messages with AI before sending them. (Young men, especially, lean on it to help them initiate conversations.) In the classroom, the domain I know best, some students are using the tools not just to reduce effort on homework but also to avoid the stress of an unscripted conversation with a professor — the possibility of making a mistake, drawing a blank or looking dumb — even when their interactions are not graded.

Last fall, The Times reported on students at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, who cheated in their course, then wrote their apologies using AI in a situation where unforged communication to their professors might have made a difference, they still wouldn’t (or couldn’t) forgo AI as a social prosthetic. As an academic administrator, I’m paid to worry about students’ use of AI to do their critical thinking. Universities have whole frameworks and apparatuses for academic integrity. AI has been a meteor strike on those frameworks, for obvious reasons.

But as educators, we have to do more than ensure that students learn things; we have to help them become new people, too. From that perspective, emotional offloading worries me more than the cognitive



CLAY SHIRKY

The writer is a vice-provost at New York University, has been helping faculty members and students adapt to digital tools since 2015

kind, because farming out your social intuitions could hurt young people more than opting out of writing their own history papers.

A generation gap has formed around AI use. One study found that 18-to-25-year-olds alone accounted for 46 per cent of ChatGPT use. And this analysis didn’t even include users 17 and under. Teenagers and young adults, stuck in the gradual transition from managed childhoods to adult freedoms, are both eager to make human connection and exquisitely alert to the possibility of embarrassment. (You remember.) AI offers them a way to manage some of that anxiety of presenting themselves in new roles when they don’t have a lot of experience to go on. In 2022, 41 per cent of young adults reported feelings of anxiety most days.

Even informal social settings require participants to develop and then act within appropriate roles, a phenomenon best described by the sociologist Erving Goffman. There are ways people are expected to behave on a date or in a grocery store or at a restaurant and different ways in different kinds of restaurants. But in certain situations, like starting at a new job, rules aren’t immediately clear. In his book “The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life,” Dr Goffman writes: “When the individual does move into a new position in society and obtains a new part to perform, he is not likely to be told in full detail how to conduct himself, nor will the facts of his new situation press sufficiently on him from the start to determine his conduct without his further giving thought to it.”

When we take on new roles — which we do all our lives, but especially as we figure out how to become adults — we learn by doing and often by doing badly: being too formal or informal with new colleagues, too strait-laced or casual in new situations. I still remember the shock on learning, years later, that because of my odd dress and awkward demeanour, my friends’ nickname for me freshman year was “the horror child.” Dr Goffman was writing in the mid-1950s, when more socialising happened face-to-face. At the time, writing was relatively formal, whether for public consumption, as with literature

or journalism, or for particular audiences, as with memos and contracts. Even letters and telegrams often involved real compositional thought; the postcard was as informal as it got.

That started to change in the 1990s, when the inrush of digital communications — emails, instant messages, texting, Facebook, WhatsApp — made writing essential to much of human interaction and socialising much easier to script. The words you send other people are a big part of your presentation of self in everyday life. And every place where writing has become a social interface is now ripe for an injection of AI, adding an automated editor into every conversation, draining some of the personal from interpersonal interaction.

At a recent panel about student AI use hosted by high school educators, I heard several teens describe using AI to puzzle through past human interactions and rehearse upcoming ones. One talked about needing to have a tough conversation — “I want to say this to my friend, but I don’t want to sound rude” — so she asked AI to help her rehearse the conversation.

Another said she had grown up hating to make phone calls, a common dislike among young people, which meant that most of her interaction at a distance was done via text, with time to compose and edit replies, which was time that could now include instant vibe checks. These teens were adamant that they did not want to go directly to their parents or friends with these issues and that the steady availability of AI was a relief to them. They also rejected the idea of AI therapists; they weren’t treating AI as a replacement for another person but instead were using it to second-guess their developing sense of how to treat other people.

It took us nearly two decades from the arrival of the smartphone to start instituting collective responses. If we move at the same rate here, we will start treating AI’s threat to human relationships as a collective issue in the late 2030s. We can already see the outlines of emotional offloading; it would be good if we didn’t wait that long to react. — The New York Times

SPORTS

SHORT TAKES



A player from Nizwa team tries to get past a player from Salalah team.

NIZWA SECURED IMPORTANT WIN OVER SALALAH

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, JAN 31

Nizwa Club claimed a valuable 76-52 victory over Salalah Club in the 2026 Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth Basketball Shield, in a match held at the secondary hall of the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher. With the win, Nizwa raised their tally to three points, while Salalah remained on one point.

The contest began on an even note, with both sides exchanging quick attacks and showing strong defensive focus, making the first quarter highly competitive. Salalah edged ahead late in the period to take a narrow 11-10 lead.

The momentum shifted in the second quarter as Nizwa imposed its rhythm at both ends of the court. Their players successfully limited Salalah's threat in the paint while executing organised offensive plays and fast breaks. Nizwa overturned the deficit and widened the gap by scoring 23 points to Salalah's 11, closing the first half in front, 33-22.

Nizwa's dominance became more evident in the third quarter, which proved to be the turning point of the match. Tight defence, quick transitions and varied scoring options allowed them to significantly extend their advantage. They added 29 points while restricting Salalah to just eight, stretching the score to a comfortable 62-30.

Salalah attempted a comeback in the fourth quarter and showed better attacking efficiency, scoring 22 points. However, Nizwa managed the clock well and responded with 14 points of their own to maintain control and seal the game with a 76-52 victory.

Individually, Mohammed al Anquodi led Nizwa's scoring with 17 points, followed by professional player Agassi Tonyan with 14. Jenksley and Said Ghassan each contributed 10 points. For Salalah, Majid al Balushi and Qaisar al Balushi scored 12 points apiece, while professional player Masoud al Hashmi added 10.

Competition heats up at Shotokan Karate Championship in Muscat

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, JAN 31

Competition heated up at the 11th Shotokan Karate Centre Open Championship, with clubs and academies from 10 countries battling for top honours in both kata and kumite events. The tournament is being held as part of the Muscat Nights festival.

The official opening ceremony took place on Friday at Ahli Sidab Sports Hall in Darsait under the auspices of Sayyid Shabib bin Harib Al Busaidy, Director-General of Muscat Municipality.

The official opening ceremony featured wheelchair kata and kumite events, a special kata performance by a child with Down syndrome, and the recognition of referees and winners.

The day's contests delivered plenty of excitement and



Kata and Kumite crowning events for wheelchair users. — Photo by Khalfan al Ruzaiqi

challenge. In the under-6 kumite (under 20kg), Nasr al Maamari of Al Qudra Club secured first place, followed by Marwan al Jalndani of Samayil Eagles, while Al Harith al Harrasi and Faris al Sulaimani shared third.

In the 7-year boys' kata, Taimoor Nasser of Karate Champions

claimed gold, with team-mate Abdullah Ishaq finishing second. Zhang Chengyuan and Mohammed Ayman shared third place. In the same age group's kumite, Aws al Ghabshi of Al Qudra won gold in the under-20kg division, while Noah Benny Peter of Aiki School of Martial Arts topped the under-

25kg category.

The boys' 9-year kumite (30kg and above) saw Hisham al Maskari of Al Qudra claim gold, with Mutaz al Muharbi of Samayil second, while Ahmed al Zadjali and Daniel Thomas shared third. In the girls' kumite (under 30kg), Navira J K finished first, followed by Sanvika Ashbind, while Yamama al Rawahi and Razan Mustafa shared bronze.

The under-10 open divisions also witnessed strong performances, with Yusr Sayed Nasr of Tawar winning, while Aws Rabi Khafajah of Tawar topped the boys' kumite.

At the team level (8-10 years), the Champ team secured first place in both girls' kata and kumite, Emperor Academy won the boys' kata title, and Al Qudra claimed gold in boys' kumite.

Competitions continued with boys' kata for the 11, 12 and 13-year categories. In the 11-year

division, Hamed al Qasmi of Samayil Eagles finished first, followed by Abdullah Mohammed of Tawar. Wisam al Shuhi and Aryan Joby shared third.

In the 12-year category, Kareem Naseem of Tawar won gold, Johan Chacko of Aiki School took silver, while Ahmed al Nuaimani and Anant Mukul Danji shared third.

In the 13-year division, Aditya Shashikant of The Champ Sports and Arts claimed first place, Brian Dos of Shotokan Centre finished second, while Shihab Ba Omar and Mohammed Zaher shared third.

Fatima al Rasbi expressed her delight at taking part in the championship. She said the strong competition and professional organisation helped her stay focused and perform well, adding that the exposure gained will help her improve and achieve better results in future tournaments.

Al Rahba hosts fourteenth horse racing competition

RIYADH AL BALUSHI
BARKA, JAN 31

THE 14th horse racing event of the season was staged on Thursday at Al Rahba Racecourse in the Wilayat of Barka, featuring eight races that brought together Purebred Arabian horses and Thoroughbreds in a highly competitive atmosphere marked by strong performances and enthusiastic participation.

The opening race, dedicated to locally bred Purebred Arabian horses, was won by Nawader Al Faisal, ridden by Amer bin Ali al Rasbi and trained by Nasser bin Hamad al Qutaiti, while Barq Al Suwaih finished second and SS R Asila claimed third place.

In the second race for Thoroughbreds, Grylet Alaska, under jockey Issa bin Mohammed al Balushi, crossed the line first, ahead of Redan in second place and Silky Smooth in third. The third race saw Dhiban, ridden by Al Mutasim bin Said al Balushi, secure victory, followed by Rogue Fox and Classic Medal.

The fourth race for Purebred Arabians went to Ihtiraz with jockey Mohammed bin Obaid al Hajri, while Haviyadand Al Murabit S E completed the podium. In the fifth race, Sareh Manlou claimed first place under Hamad bin Sultan al Malki, ahead of Sabri and RB Gifted.

The sixth race witnessed a strong showing by Redha Majan, ridden by Amer bin Ali al Rasbi, who added another victory to his tally during the evening. Al Shahem H2 finished second, while Lucky Boytook claimed third place. Reflecting on his performance, Al Rasbi said that the success was the result of solid preparation and teamwork, noting that consistency and focus were key factors behind the positive results achieved during the meeting.

In the seventh race, Saji Al Zaman secured first place with jockey Mounes bin Salem al Siyabi, followed by Khitab De Fast in second and Nibras in third, in a race that showcased tight competition until the final meters.

The event concluded with the



Crowning the winners of the eighth race for top-rated horses. — Photo by Mohammed al Balushi



MARWAN
BIN DARWISH
AL BALUSHI

The result reflected the intensive preparation and commitment of the technical team, praising the overall level of competition and describing the race as a positive indicator for the upcoming stages of the season



The horse Madur, winner of the highest-rated race.

eighth and final race for Purebred Arabian horses, where Mador, ridden by Mazen bin Mubarak al Yahyaei and trained by Marwan bin Darwish al Balushi, claimed first place. RB Bradley Nelson finished second, while RB Free Bird secured third. Commenting on the victory, trainer Marwan bin Darwish al Balushi emphasised that the result reflected the intensive preparation and commitment of the technical team, praising the overall level of competition and describing the race as a positive indicator for the upcoming stages of the season.

For his part, jockey Mazen bin Mubarak al Yahyaei expressed

SHUAIB AL ZADJALI

A JOURNEY OF 5 OLYMPICS, 2 WORLD CUPS FOR CLEAN SPORT

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JAN 31

FROM THE Olympic arenas to Fifa World Cup stadiums, Oman's anti-doping expert Shuaib bin Mohammed al Zadjali carved out a remarkable international career defined by trust, professionalism and unwavering commitment to sporting integrity.

An internationally certified Doping Control Officer (IDCO) and Blood Collection Officer (BCO), al Zadjali represented the Sultanate of Oman at the highest levels of global sport including his active participation at five consecutive Olympic Games, two Fifa World Cups and five Asian Games representing a rare distinction that places him among the most experienced anti-doping professionals in the region.

"My journey and sporting career in the international stage began at the 2006 Asian Games in Doha following an experience that described both my demanding and transformative. I have been selected from a large pool of candidates after a rigorous process of interviews and examinations conducted in cooperation with the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) and international sports bodies. I could manage to quickly learn consistency and excellence were non-negotiable in this field," he said.

"The qualification is not a one-time achievement. Even today, participation in major international events requires maintaining certifications, passing periodic evaluations, and meeting strict professional standards. This continuous assessment is essential to ensuring credibility and confidence in anti-doping operations worldwide," he added.

Following his successful debut in Doha, Al Zadjali went on to build a sustained presence at the Asian Games, serving in Guangzhou 2010, Incheon 2014, Indonesia 2018, and most recently in China, reflecting long term regional engagement and institutional trust in his expertise.

"At the global stage, my career reached even greater through participation in five Olympic Games starting from Beijing 2008, London 2012, Rio de Janeiro 2016, Tokyo 2020, and Paris 2024. While I initially served in field-

level roles, my progression to supervisory positions at the Tokyo and Paris editions marked a significant milestone, underscoring international confidence in my leadership, judgement and technical competence," he clarified.

Beyond the Olympics, al Zadjali also contributed to anti-doping operations at two of the most watched sporting events in the world including the Fifa World Cup Russia 2018 and Qatar 2022. "My involvement in these tournaments further reinforced standing as a trusted figure within the global anti-doping system," he said.

Over the course of more than two decades, al Zadjali has earned numerous internationally accredited certifications in doping control, sample management, education, and capacity building. Alongside his field duties, he has played an influential role in delivering awareness and education programmes for athletes, coaches, and national sports federations, emphasising compliance, transparency, and ethical responsibility.

At the national level, his contribution extends beyond event participation. Al Zadjali currently serves as Secretary-General of the Oman Anti-Doping Committee, in addition to holding the position of Secretary of the International Convention against Doping in Sport between the Government of the Sultanate of Oman and Unesco. These roles highlight Oman's growing institutional presence and commitment to international anti-doping frameworks.

"Anti-doping work goes beyond regulations and procedures. I firmly believe that protecting sport begins with education and the cultivation of values at an early age. My views in international assignments as a national responsibility that reflects positively on Omani expertise and reinforces the Sultanate of Oman contribution to safeguarding fairness and credibility in global sport."

Looking ahead, al Zadjali confirmed that preparations are underway for upcoming international assignments, pending final approvals from relevant local and international authorities. While details will be announced in due course, he will remain focused on continuing his mission within the evolving global sports landscape.



SPORTS



ELENA RYBAKINA took revenge over world number one Aryna Sabalenka to win a nail-biting Australian Open final on Saturday and clinch her second Grand Slam title.

The big serving Kazakh fifth seed held her nerve to pull through 6-4, 4-6, 6-4 at Rod Laver Arena in Melbourne in 2 hrs 18 mins.

It was payback after the Belarusian Sabalenka won the 2023 final between two of the hardest hitters in women's tennis.

The ice-cool Rybakina, 26, who was born in Moscow, adds her Melbourne triumph to her Wimbledon win in 2022.

It was more disappointment in a major final for Sabalenka, who won the US Open last year for the second time but lost the French Open and Melbourne title deciders.

She was into her fourth Australian Open final in a row and had been imperious until now, with tears in her eyes at the end.

With the roof on because of drizzle in Melbourne, Rybakina immediately broke serve and then comfortably held for 2-0.

Rybakina faced two break points at 4-3, but found her range with her serve to send down an ace and dig herself out of trouble, leaving Sabalenka visibly frustrated.

Rybakina looked in the zone and wrapped up the set in 37 minutes on her first set point when Sabalenka fired long. Incredibly, it was the first set Sabalenka had dropped in 2026.

The second game of the second set was tense, Rybakina saving three break points in a 10-minute arm-wrestle.

They went with serve and the seventh game was another tussle, Sabalenka holding for 4-3 after the best rally of a cagey affair.

The tension ratcheted up and the top seed quickly forged three set points at 5-4 on the Kazakh's serve, ruthlessly levelling the match at the first chance to force a deciding set.

Sabalenka was now in the ascendancy and smacked a scorching backhand to break for a 2-0 lead, then holding for 3-0.

Rybakina, who also had not dropped a set in reaching the final, looked unusually rattled. She reset to hold, then wrestled back the break, allowing herself the merest of smiles.

At 3-3 the title threatened to swing either way.

But a surging Rybakina won a fourth game in a row to break for 4-3, then held to put a thrilling victory within sight.

Rybakina sealed the championship with her sixth ace of the match. The finalists were familiar foes, having met 14 times previously, with Sabalenka winning eight of them.

Sabalenka came into the final as favourite but Rybakina has been one of the form players on the women's tour in recent months.

She also defeated Sabalenka in the decider at the season-ending WTA Finals. — AFP

*Ice-cool
Rybakina*

BEATS

*Sabalenka in tense
Australian Open final*

BUSINESS

SHORTTAKES



Taif becomes Oman Air’s fifth destination in Saudi Arabia.

OMAN AIR LAUNCHES FIRST DIRECT TAIF FLIGHT, EXPANDS SAUDI NETWORK

MUSCAT: Oman Air on Saturday operated its first direct flight to Taif, launching a new route with three services a week as it seeks to strengthen travel links between Oman and Saudi Arabia and support two-way tourism flows.

The new destination offers Omani travellers direct access to Taif — known for its mild climate and location near Mecca — while aiming to attract visitors from Saudi Arabia to Oman and connect them onward via Muscat International Airport.

Mike Rutter, chief commercial officer, said the launch reflects the carrier’s commitment to expand its network in line with market demand and regional travel needs and will support business, religious and leisure travel.

Taif becomes Oman Air’s fifth destination in Saudi Arabia, joining Jeddah, Riyadh, Dammam and Madinah; and the service is operated using Boeing 737 aircraft.

In an interview with Observer on the sidelines of the launch, Rutter said the airline’s route and capacity investments over the past 12 months had added nearly RO 800 million to Oman’s economy and that additional services into Salalah — starting with Moscow–Salalah — could add more than RO 320 million to the economy of Dhofar through tourism and related activity, aligning with Oman Vision 2040 goals.

On Saudi Arabia, he said adding Taif strengthens journey flexibility by allowing travellers to enter via one city and depart from another, which he expects to serve both business traffic and rising religious travel demand during peak periods.

Rutter said Oman Air increased capacity to Salalah by 19% in 2025 and by a further 20% in the first three months of 2026. For the full year, he said the airline expects domestic capacity to rise by 30% and international capacity by 425%, with more network announcements due mid-year for capacity to be deployed in the October–November period, including Far East destinations.

Oman boosts trade with digital port reforms



Oman has been ranked among leading performers on cross-border trade in the World Bank’s Doing Business 2020 report.

THE Sultanate of Oman is making notable efforts to enhance the efficiency of its international trade and strengthen its competitiveness in logistics by improving export and import processes, streamlining customs procedures, expanding digital trade and developing strategic ports, Oman News Agency reported.

Oman’s three main seaports — SOHAR Port and Freezone, Port of Duqm and Port of Salalah — are described as key pillars of external trade and logistics gateways linking the country to regional and global markets. ONA said Oman has invested in upgrading these ports as part of economic diversification strategies, modernising infrastructure and raising operational and digital efficiency to meet growth in trade volumes.

The Royal Oman Police, represented by the Directorate General of Customs, has undertaken a wide-ranging shift across administrative,

The ‘Bayan’ system, which connects 74 government and private entities and provides 496 e-services without the need to visit Customs headquarters or border posts

procedural and technical levels to improve customs services for the business community, facilitate international trade flows, encourage foreign investment, strengthen the logistics sector and safeguard supply chains. A core element is the move towards a comprehensive electronic system for customs procedures and operations.

As part of that transition, Customs launched the “Bayan” system, which connects 74 government and private entities and provides 496 e-services without the need to visit Customs headquarters or border posts. Services include pre-clearance, e-payment, advance and deferred customs duty payment, clearance against bank guarantees, refunds of duties and guarantees, renewal of customs clearance licences, temporary import requests and requests to split consignments.

ONA said these measures helped position Oman among leading performers on cross-border trade in the World Bank’s Doing Business 2020 report, ranking first

in the Gulf on “Trading Across Borders”. The report highlighted infrastructure upgrades at SOHAR, electronic risk-based inspections and enhancements to customs auditing.

Customs has also launched a secure customs corridor linking ports with free zones and investment customs warehouses to ease cargo movement and introduced an electronic air waybill initiative enabling airlines and handlers to submit cargo documents digitally, speeding procedures and simplifying clearance.

Eng Abdullah bin Ali al Busaidy said the government is building an integrated, flexible logistics system to cut time and costs for moving goods through improved gateways, stronger transport links and digital solutions. Omar bin Mahmoud al Maharzi said Omani ports are connected to 86 commercial ports in 40 countries via about 200 direct weekly voyages, supporting the goals of the National Logistics Strategy 2040. — ONA

\$100m chemicals project to boost downstream industry in Salalah

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, JAN 31

A new \$100 million chemicals investment in the Salalah Free Zone, backed by a local subsidiary of India’s Deepak Fertilisers & Petrochemicals Corporation Ltd (DFPCL), is set to drive the growth of a chemicals-based industrial ecosystem in Oman’s Dhofar Governorate.

Last week, Deepak Oman Industries LLC (SFZ) — a subsidiary of the Pune-based, publicly listed DFPCL — signed an agreement with OQ Base Industries (SFZ) SAOG (OQBI), a subsidiary of OQ Group, for the long-term offtake of ammonia from the latter’s integrated petrochemicals complex in the Salalah Free Zone.

The agreement secures Deepak Oman Industries a supply of ammonia for a ten-year renewable period, enabling the establishment of a new plant within the Free Zone to produce sodium nitrite and sodium nitrate with an investment of around \$100 million.

The plant, with a production capacity of approximately 70,000 tonnes per year, will market its output to pharmaceutical and specialised fertiliser industries.

Significantly, the investment introduces



Deepak Oman’s new chemical project will source its feedstock requirements from OQBI’s complex in Salalah.

specialised chemical manufacturing into Oman’s industrial system, according to Ali al Lawati, Chief People & Technology Officer at OQ and Chairman of the Board of OQ Base Industries.

“By connecting this facility directly to OQ Base Industries’ ammonia production in Salalah, a higher-value segment of the chemical chain is now anchored within the

country rather than remaining external to it”, Al Lawati said in a post.

“Within this framework, OQ’s integrated ecosystem acts as a unified industrial platform, aligning feedstock, logistics, infrastructure and industrial land to reduce risk, secure supply and enable downstream manufacturing to scale with confidence”, he added.

According to the official, the Salalah project is projected to generate about 150 direct employment opportunities, fostering specialised skills development in Salalah while strengthening the foundation for further downstream industries, greater SME participation and more resilient domestic supply chains.

Earlier, in a filing to the Muscat Stock Exchange, Ihsan al Jandal, Chief Operating Officer of OQBI, said the offtake agreement “underscores OQBI’s commitment to supporting Oman Vision 2040, fostering industrial diversification and promoting value-chain localisation within the Sultanate of Oman’s petrochemical sector”.

Deepak Fertilisers & Petrochemicals Corporation Ltd, Deepak Oman’s parent company, is a well-established producer of a wide range of industrial chemicals and agricultural fertilisers.

Over the past 45 years, it has evolved from an ammonia manufacturer into a multi-product conglomerate with manufacturing facilities across several Indian states, supplying products such as nitric acid, methanol, technical ammonium nitrate and NPK and specialty fertilisers to domestic and international markets.

ADVERTORIALS

SHORTTAKES



Oman's Most Trusted Brand in the FMCG category, reinforcing its long-standing position among consumers across Oman.

BAHAR WINS OMAN TRUST AWARD FOR FIFTH TIME

Bahar, the flagship brand of The National Detergent Company (NDC), has been named Oman's Most Trusted Brand in the FMCG category for the fifth time, according to the organisers of the Oman's Most Trusted Brand Awards.

The awards, now in their ninth edition, are based on a public voting process that recorded more than one million votes this year. The ceremony was held at Kempinski Hotel Muscat under the auspices of Pankaj Kanaksi Gokaldas Khimji, Adviser for External Trade and International Cooperation at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion.

Murali Sundar, Chief Executive Officer of NDC, said the recognition reflects consumer trust built on consistent quality and meeting everyday household cleaning needs. Anish Kumar said the brand's performance was driven by "disciplined brand management" and accessibility across key retail touchpoints.

Bahar has been in the market for more than four decades in Oman and the GCC; and offers products across fabric and home-care categories, including detergent powders, gels, capsules, abaya shampoo, fabric conditioner and stain remover, NDC said. The company said it exports to multiple GCC markets and is the Gulf's first ISO-certified soap and detergent producer.

NVIDIA CEO DENIES HE IS UNHAPPY WITH OPENAI

TAIPEI: Nvidia plans to make a 'huge' investment into OpenAI, probably its largest ever, CEO Jensen Huang said on Saturday, denying he was unhappy with the ChatGPT maker.

The chipmaker in September announced plans to invest up to \$100 billion in OpenAI, a deal that would give OpenAI the cash and access it needs to buy advanced chips that are key to maintaining its dominance in an increasingly competitive landscape. The Wall Street Journal reported that the plan had stalled after some inside the chip giant expressed doubts about the deal. Huang has also privately criticised what he has described as a lack of discipline in OpenAI's business approach and expressed concern about the competition it faces from the likes of Alphabet's GOOGLE.O Google and Anthropic, the WSJ said.

Huang said it was "nonsense" to say he was unhappy with OpenAI. "We are going to make a huge investment in OpenAI. I believe in OpenAI, the work that they do is incredible, they are one of the most consequential companies of our time and I really love working with Sam," he said. — Reuters

Sohar Intl supports design, innovation drive

SOHAR International has concluded its participation as the Creative Arm Partner of Oman Design Week 2026, reaffirming its commitment to supporting Oman's creative economy and strengthening the role of design, architecture and innovation in national development. The second edition of Oman Design Week took place from 27 to 31 January at Al Khuwair Square on Ministries Street, as part of the cultural programme of Muscat Nights 2026. Jointly organised by Muscat Municipality and the Oman Design Association, the five-day event brought together designers, architects, artists and creative professionals from Oman and abroad, offering a platform for dialogue, collaboration and creative expression.

The opening ceremony was held under the auspices of Sayyid Ibrahim bin Said al Busaidy, Minister of Heritage and Tourism and was attended by senior officials and dignitaries, including Abdulwahid bin Mohamed al Murshidi, Chief Executive Officer of Sohar International, reflecting the bank's strong support for national cultural and creative initiatives.

Commenting on the partnership, Abdulwahid bin Mohamed al Murshidi, Chief Executive Officer of Sohar International, said: "Our partnership with Oman Design Week reflects Sohar International's belief in the power of creativity as a driver of economic and social progress. Supporting platforms that empower local talent, encourage innovation and bring communities together is central to our role as a national financial partner. The success of this year's event highlights the growing importance of design and creative industries in shaping Oman's future".

Held under the theme "Between Us", Oman Design Week 2026 explored shared spaces between individuals, cultures and ideas, presenting design as a universal language that fosters communication, integration and cultural dialogue. The



The second edition of Oman Design Week took place from 27 to 31 January at Al Khuwair Square.

programme featured a diverse mix of professional workshops, intellectual talks, exhibitions, immersive digital and physical installations; and a dedicated creative marketplace that enabled designers and artists to showcase and commercialise their work. As part of its participation, Sohar International hosted a dedicated stall where visitors were introduced to the bank's range of products and services, highlighting its digital capabilities and customer-centric solutions in an engaging and interactive setting.

Beyond Oman Design Week, Sohar International continues to support a wide range of cultural, tourism and community

events across the Sultanate of Oman, including Muscat Nights, regional festivals in various governorates and seasonal initiatives such as Khareef Dhofar Season. Through these engagements, the bank plays an active role in promoting community participation, supporting local economies and contributing to vibrant cultural experiences that enhance Oman's tourism and creative sectors. Sohar International continues to champion initiatives that enrich the cultural landscape, strengthen the creative economy and promote meaningful engagement between creativity and community — further reinforcing Oman's position as a bridge between cultures and a hub for innovation.

OCCI to launch OMNEX 2026 at OCEC on Feb 2

MUSCAT: The Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), represented by the Omani-Turkish Joint Business Council, will launch the Oman International Expo and Forum (OMNEX 2026) on Monday, February 2, 2026, at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre.

The event will run until February 4 with broad local and international participation. The Republic of Türkiye will take part as Guest of Honour, in a move aimed at supporting investment promotion efforts and strengthening economic and trade ties. The forum will feature specialised investment

sessions, workshops and bilateral meetings bringing together officials and business leaders. An accompanying exhibition will showcase Omani, Turkish and international products and services, alongside cultural and artistic activities highlighting the heritage and shared history of both countries.

Organisers said OMNEX 2026 will focus on a range of strategic sectors, including trade and investment, industry, energy and mining, tourism and heritage, technology and innovation, services and transport, education and health, youth and sport; and agriculture and fisheries — aiming to

deepen integration across key segments of the national economy.

Faisal bin Abdullah al Rawas, OCCI Chairman said the event comes as part of the chamber's efforts to support the private sector and strengthen its role as a key partner in economic development. He added that it reflects the chamber's commitment to providing high-quality economic platforms that open new investment horizons and enhance partnerships locally and internationally, in line with Oman Vision 2040 objectives for economic diversification and attracting quality investments.

Salem bin Abdullah al Rawas, Chairman of the Omani side of the Omani-Turkish Joint Business Council, said the expo and forum present genuine investment opportunities in promising sectors that form a cornerstone of the national economy. He described the event as a milestone in the development of economic relations between Oman and Türkiye, adding that Türkiye's designation as Guest of Honour underscores the strength of the partnership and could open new avenues for exchanging ideas and expertise; and for building strategic business-to-business cooperation.

Warsh ‘regime change’ faces steep hurdles at US central bank

WASHINGTON: Kevin Warsh checks a long list of boxes for President Donald Trump as his pick to run the Federal Reserve, with longstanding political and social ties to the president, deep Wall Street connections and a well-tailored demeanor, but how deeply and quickly he will cut interest rates and how aggressively he will pursue his “regime change” at the Fed remain open questions.

Trump has called for rate cuts to what amount to crisis levels of perhaps 1 per cent. That's an aim Warsh, an inflation hawk in his prior term as a Fed governor from 2006 to 2011, may find too aggressive and which economic data and the views of his 18 policymaking colleagues

may make impossible. Rate futures remained priced for just two quarter-point rate cuts in 2026 from the current 3.50 per cent to 3.75 per cent range and did not move appreciably after Trump announced the nomination in a social media post. Likewise, Warsh's years of Fed criticism, begun after he left the board in 2011 and intensified over the past year as Trump considered him to succeed current Chair Jerome Powell, now meet the challenge of how to turn think-tank speeches and newspaper op-eds into reform that can get through the Fed's Board of Governors, get sign-off from Trump and Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent and clear the US Congress if it involves amending the Federal



Kevin Warsh

Reserve Act. Change, in other words, may be easier said than done.

Warsh “is a pragmatist who won't want to lose market trust by making cuts that aren't warranted. His long history of concern about inflation suggests that he won't allow the economy to overheat”, said Heather Long, chief economist for Navy Federal Credit Union.

“He's been an outspoken critic of the Fed's balance sheet and groupthink. More clarity is needed on how far he intends to go” in pursuing other changes at the Fed.

It also may take more than just “breaking some heads” at the Fed, as Warsh put it in a July interview on Fox News, speaking of the people who are about to become

his colleagues.The Fed particularly in the last 20 years has become a complex, hybrid beast that grew with an expansion of power during the financial crisis and through the pandemic.

That may be just what Warsh and Treasury's Bessent, in recent writing, have in mind in their criticisms. The Fed's mix of monetary policy powers, considered its sole province, along with the sort of regulatory authority that is usually situated in the executive branch and controlling legislation set by Congress, has left even Supreme Court justices puzzled about exactly where the Fed fits in the federal system. It's a legal issue with deep ramifications. — Reuters

SELECTIVEGROWTH



Solar panels now power parts of the main infrastructure works at the Special Economic Zone at Al Dhahirah, supporting road and drainage construction.

SOLAR PROJECT POWERS AL DHAHIRAH SEZ INFRASTRUCTURE

IBRI: The Special Economic Zone at Al Dhahirah (SEZAD) has brought into operation a solar energy system integrated into its main infrastructure project, covering the construction of primary roads and surface-water drainage networks. The works are being implemented by an Omani-Saudi business consortium.

The hybrid renewable system has a peak capacity of 512 kWp, supported by battery storage of 788 kWh, with daily electricity production reaching 2,446 kWh, according to officials.

It is designed to meet 100% of the project’s power needs during winter. In summer, it is expected to supply 70% of evening power through solar-charged batteries, with the remaining 30% provided by diesel generators.

Officials said the initiative is expected to reduce carbon emissions by an average of 24.8 tonnes of CO₂ per month and deliver cost savings of up to 25%.

Eng Ibrahim bin Yusuf al Zadjali, Project Manager of SEZAD, said the move aligns with the mandate of the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) to encourage renewable energy adoption.

He noted that OPAZ has allocated 17 square kilometres within the SEZAD master plan for solar farms and renewable energy projects.

The first phase included the installation of 600 solar panels over 5,000 square metres, implemented by an Omani technical team from IP Energy.

The main infrastructure project is running ahead of schedule, with actual completion at 14.87%, above the planned target of 14.41%, officials said. — ONA

Non-oil exports reach RO 5 billion, up 10.3 pc

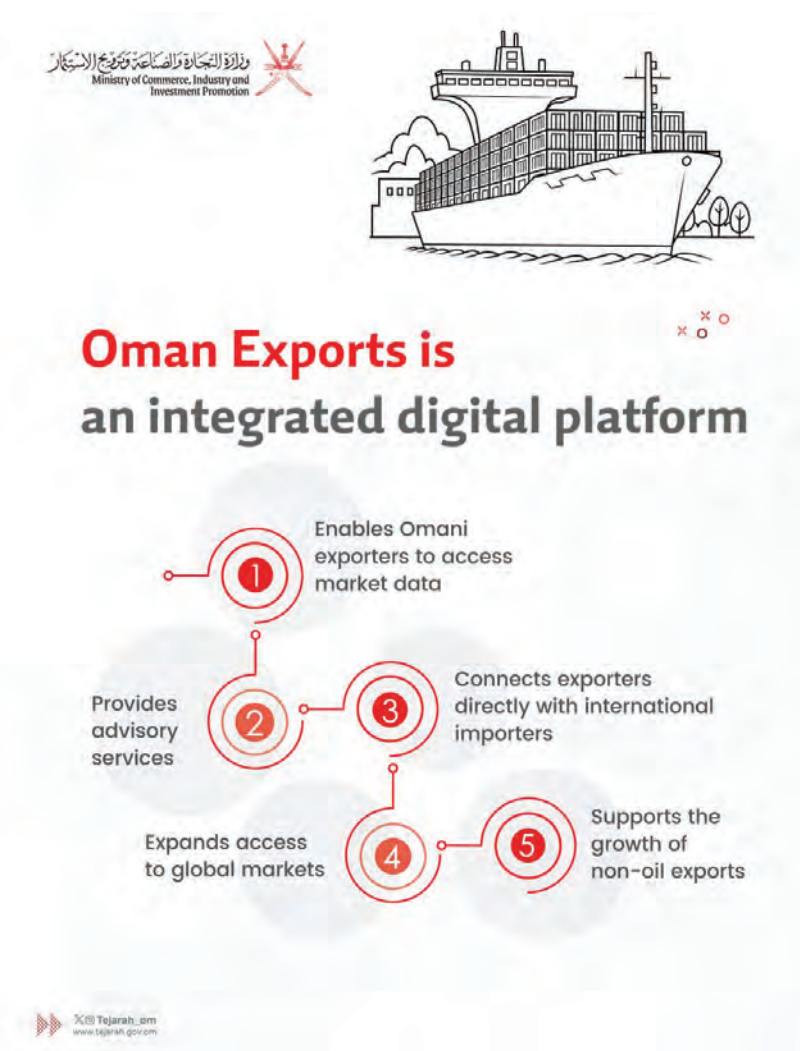
BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 31

THE non-oil exports in the Sultanate of Oman recorded a strong performance in 2025, reflecting the positive transformation of the country’s economy in line with the aspirations of Oman Vision 2040. The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) continues to implement programmes and policies aimed at developing exports and strengthening the presence of Omani products in regional and global markets, contributing to the diversification of national income sources and reinforcing the position of the Sultanate of Oman as a reliable trading partner within international trade chains.

Official statistical indicators showed that the value of Oman’s non-oil exports reached approximately RO 5.002 billion, achieving growth of 10.3 per cent by the end of September 2025 compared with the same period in 2024.

This reflects an improvement in the competitiveness of national products and the success of efforts to open new markets. This growth is attributed to an integrated support framework that included external promotion, facilitation of procedures, participation in international exhibitions and the enhancement of product quality, strengthening the ability of Omani products to compete sustainably in global markets.

At the sectoral level, data showed that growth was driven by the expansion of several key export sectors. Base metals and articles thereof led exports



with a value surpassing RO 1 billion, followed by chemical industry products valued at nearly RO 658 million, while exports of electrical machinery and equipment reached approximately RO 460 million.

Exports were distributed across a wide range of regional and international markets, led by the GCC countries, alongside Asian, African and European markets. This reflects the diversification of Oman’s export base in terms of products and destinations, reducing reliance on a single market and enhancing the resilience and growth potential of Omani exports amidst global trade

fluctuations.

Ibtisam bint Ahmed al Farooji, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion for Investment Promotion, affirmed that the strong performance of non-oil exports reflects the effectiveness of the national policies and programmes adopted by the Ministry to enhance the competitiveness of the national economy.

She noted that the MoCIIP is working to develop an integrated export support ecosystem focused on empowering national products, enhancing the readiness of Omani companies and

expanding the base of trade partners. These efforts contribute to increasing the share of non-oil exports in gross domestic product and achieving the objectives of economic diversification.

She added that it places strong emphasis on enhancing the access of Omani products to external markets through the development of promotion and attraction tools, intensified participation in international exhibitions and events; and the activation of trade agreements. This is complemented by support for initiatives aimed at building the capabilities of Omani exporters and improving the competitiveness of their products in line with global market requirements.

Meanwhile, Lubna bint Mohammed al Harthy, Director of the Export Development Department at the Ministry, explained that the “Oman Exports” initiative represents a qualitative shift in the export support ecosystem. It provides an integrated digital platform that enables exporters to access market data and advisory services and facilitates direct connections with importers.

She added that the platform contributes to facilitating export procedures, providing specialised trade reports and market studies, supporting access to required certifications and licences; and handling exporters’ enquiries and complaints. She noted that the number of companies registered on the Oman Exports platform reached 365 by the end of September 2025, in addition to 37 applications under processing, reflecting growing private-sector interest in benefitting from the platform’s services.

Muscat to host Fiber Connect Council MENA conference

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 31

Oman will host the 15th edition of the Fiber Connect Council MENA Conference and Expo on February 2–3, 2026 in Muscat, under the auspices of His Highness Sayyid Dr Adham bin Turki al Said.

The two-day event will bring together 14 leading national and international companies specialising in fibre, artificial intelligence and communications technologies, alongside more than 20 expert speakers and delegates from over 20 countries across the Middle East, North Africa and Europe.

An accompanying exhibition will run alongside the conference, showcasing innovations in fibre networks, 5G, the Internet of Things (IoT), data centres and wider digital infrastructure.

Held under the theme “Fiber Empowered Futures: Connecting Intelligence, Infrastructure and Innovation”, the conference will highlight milestones in digital transformation across the MENA region and focus on fibre’s role as the foundation for future-ready digital economies.

Key topics will include next-generation fibre networks, open-access models, data centres, sustainability, smart cities



His Highness Sayyid Dr Adham bin Turki al Said

and how fibre connectivity can support inclusive digital growth. The programme features keynote speeches, expert-led panel discussions and knowledge-sharing sessions aimed at



Dr Alaa Jasim, President of Fiber Connect Council MENA

strengthening dialogue, collaboration and strategic partnerships across Oman, the wider MENA region and Europe.

Dr Alaa Jasim, President of Fiber Connect Council MENA,

said the conference continues to provide a platform where industry leaders and policymakers can exchange insights, address challenges and explore opportunities shaping the next phase of connectivity in the region.

He added that hosting the event in Muscat reflects Oman’s expanding digital infrastructure and aligns with Oman Vision 2040, which places digital transformation, advanced connectivity and knowledge-based growth at the heart of national development.

The council will also unveil a new regional study on the evolving digital infrastructure landscape in MENA. The study

highlights fibre as the often underestimated backbone of AI-ready infrastructure, enabling the convergence of fibre-to-the-home, 5G, data centres and AI applications at scale; and points to a shift from expanding connectivity towards building computing capacity, driven by investments in hyperscale and sovereign data centres, and subsea cable systems.

The conference is supported by 14 national and international sponsors. Oman Broadband Company and Ooredoo are platinum sponsors, while Omantel is the technology partner and Earthlink Telecommunications the strategic partner.

REMAINED WARY

Toyota recalls 161,268 US vehicles



Toyota is recalling 161,268 vehicles in the US for a problem with the rear-view camera display when the vehicle is in reverse, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration said on Saturday. — Reuters

FOSSIL BUSINESS

Pop Mart sets London as EU hub



Chinese toy firm Pop Mart, maker of the viral Labubu dolls, has chosen London as its European headquarters and plans to open seven new UK stores, creating more than 150 jobs. The move comes as UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer’s China visit secures fresh investment and trade deals aimed at boosting Britain’s economy. — Reuters

EXPRESSED FRUSTRATION

OPEC+ likely to extend output freeze



LONDON: OPEC+ is expected to keep its pause on oil production increases in March, even as Brent crude rises above \$70 a barrel on fears of possible US military action against Iran. Prices have also been supported by supply disruptions in Kazakhstan. — Reuters

OPINION

Startups and students support entrepreneurship, innovation



DR HILAL
AL SAWAI

The writer is local content, sustainability and innovation expert

In Oman, the diversification of the economy and reduction of the reliance on oil require innovation and entrepreneurship, which are already acting as catalysts for economic growth. Students and startups are driving significant changes on this front. They combine fresh energy and adaptability to transform innovative ways of thinking into meaningful solutions for both local and global challenges. The entrepreneurial ecosystem in Oman is emboldened by startups. Unlike traditional businesses, the models of these businesses are built around innovation, technology and new ways of doing business. From digital platforms and Fintech to renewable energy and innovative logistics, startups offer innovative ways of doing things. This results in economic diversification and in the creation of job opportunities. Additionally, a culture of entrepreneurship, especially the taking of calculated risks is fostered. Many Omani startups focus on solving the local challenges, which makes their innovations scalable to global markets. Students are equally important when it comes to entrepreneurship. Students today are learners and are also meant to be entrepreneurial, innovative and

leadership potential. The integration of entrepreneurship in Oman’s colleges and universities is on the rise, thanks to initiatives such as business incubators, innovation labs and startup competitions. Students gain exposure to the real world and learn important life skills such as leadership, problem-solving and financial literacy. Additionally, when entrepreneurial thinking is fostered in students, it stimulates the confidence to transform ideas into profitable businesses. Students working with startups cements the innovation ecosystem. Students with their youthful outlook and digital and other skills complement the experience and market knowledge of startup employees. The hands-on knowledge gained from internships, hackathons and collaborations with startup employees is immensely valuable. Startups also gain from the knowledge students bring that drives innovation. Government backing strengthens students and startups even more. Support for small and medium enterprises, policy access, funding and entrepreneurship training are ways for governments to promote innovation. Along with the youthful drive, the initiatives are positive for developing a sustainable ecosystem for risk-taking

Student entrepreneurship nurtures self-reliance and responsibility. Instead of depending on a formal job, young people start to view business ownership more seriously

and long-term development. Startups supporting young founders also stimulate others as they provide proof of the success that can be attained through innovation and perseverance. Furthermore, student entrepreneurship nurtures self-reliance and responsibility. Instead of depending on a formal job, young people start to view business ownership more seriously. This perspective shift is vital for Oman’s emerging labour force as it alleviates unemployment and builds the economy. Student entrepreneurs are active members of society, whether through startups, social enterprises, or innovative projects within existing companies. To sum up, students and startups play critical roles in fostering entrepreneurship and innovation in Oman. While students provide the necessary component for continuous growth, in the form of ideas, skills and passion, startups offer economic diversification and new innovative drives. All of them, when backed with the education system and national programmes, are creating a dynamic entrepreneurial culture. Oman will continue to build a highly innovative, competitive and sustainable future by focusing on its youth and the startup ecosystem.

RECORD RENEWABLES GROWTH DRIVES GLOBAL CAPACITY EXPANSION

NAJAH AL RIYAMI

Global renewable energy capacity is experiencing record-breaking growth, with unprecedented expansion across solar, wind and energy storage reshaping power systems worldwide. Recent international energy assessments report that renewables now account for the overwhelming majority of newly installed electricity generation capacity, marking a decisive shift away from fossil-fuel-dominated expansion towards clean power systems (IRENA, 2024). According to the International Renewable Energy Agency, annual renewable capacity additions reached historic highs in the most recent reporting cycle, with total new installations exceeding half a terawatt in a single year for the first time. Solar photovoltaics led this surge, representing the largest share of new capacity, followed by onshore and offshore wind (IRENA, 2024). This acceleration reflects rapid cost declines, manufacturing scale and supportive policy frameworks across major economies. The level of annual growth recorded is more than double the average yearly additions seen just five years earlier (IEA, 2025). The International Energy Agency reports that renewables now consistently deliver more than ninety per cent of net new global power capacity additions, fundamentally changing how electricity systems grow (IEA, 2025). In several large markets, solar and wind generation have reached record shares of national electricity supply during peak periods. Analysts note that clean generation growth has, in some regions, outpaced demand growth, enabling renewables to displace higher-emission sources in the generation mix (Ember, 2025). A parallel driver of this expansion is the rapid scale-up of battery energy storage systems. Grid-scale batteries are increasingly deployed alongside solar and wind projects to manage variability and provide frequency and voltage support. Energy storage installations have also set new records, with annual deployments rising sharply year over year (IEA, 2025). This pairing of renewables with storage is widely viewed as essential to sustaining high penetration levels while maintaining grid reliability. Growth is not limited to traditional renewable leaders in Europe and East Asia. The Gulf Cooperation Council region is also expanding clean energy capacity as part of economic diversification and energy transition strategies. Large competitive solar tenders and utility-scale renewable parks are now common across Gulf markets, supported by long-term national targets and procurement programs (IRENA, 2024). Oman has emerged as an active contributor within this regional shift. The Sultanate of Oman has commissioned major solar and wind projects in recent years and continues to advance additional capacity through independent power producer frameworks and national energy planning.

What ‘mobility’ should mean in Aviation 2040?

OMAN’S National Aviation Strategy 2040 should not be judged by runway upgrades, terminal expansions, or a longer list of destinations. It should be judged by something far more consequential for economic cohesion: whether aviation becomes a practical tool of mobility equity that connects governorates at a reasonable cost and with reliable frequency, or whether it remains a service that works best for those who can absorb peak-season prices and uncertainty. In its detailed statement, the Civil Aviation Authority frames the strategy as a long-term road map that turns aviation into an economic and development engine supporting diversification and fiscal sustainability. It also sets ambitious 2040 targets, including more than 40 million passengers, one million tonnes of air cargo, private-sector investment exceeding RO 1 billion and lifting the sector’s GDP contribution to more than 3.5%. These numbers are impressive, but they will only carry public legitimacy if they translate into something the economy can feel: affordable and dependable domestic mobility that reduces friction in daily life and in commerce. Domestic mobility is not a soft, social add-on. It is a hard economic input. When seats are scarce during peak weeks and fares surge, the country pays a hidden tax. Businesses postpone travel or push costs onto customers. SMEs absorb higher logistics and procurement expenses. Labour-market efficiency declines because people cannot move easily for interviews, training, or urgent family needs. Domestic tourism becomes less competitive precisely when it should be strongest. Even inflation dynamics can be affected when seasonal price spikes become normalised rather than treated as a system failure. The strategy itself implicitly recognises that domestic connectivity is not purely a commercial matter. In Phase Two (2027–2030), it proposes developing a public service obligation (PSO) system to support domestic air routes. This is not a technical footnote. It is a policy signal that



Phase Two of the National Aviation Strategy proposes developing a public service obligation (PSO) system to support domestic air routes.

the state understands a basic truth: some routes are essential for economic cohesion and the market alone will not always deliver them at the price and reliability the country needs. But Oman must be precise here. A PSO system can be designed as a disciplined contract that buys measurable public value, or it can become an open-ended subsidy that erodes accountability. The difference is in the details. If PSO support is deployed, it must purchase clear outcomes such as minimum frequencies, minimum seat capacity during peak periods, standards for on-time performance and transparent passenger-handling requirements when disruptions occur. It must also include fare safeguards, not as blunt price controls, but as rational ranges that prevent scarcity pricing from turning domestic travel into a seasonal financial shock. The public will accept support if they can see what it buys and they will resent it if it disappears into opaque arrangements. Phase One (2026–2027) highlights strengthening passenger connectivity between Muscat and

Salalah airports. That is a necessary step, yet it will not be sufficient if peak demand continues to be treated as an unavoidable reality rather than a design challenge. Peak season is not destiny. It is predictable. When a predictable problem produces the same predictable outcome every year — limited supply and runaway prices — the answer is not to tell the public to adjust expectations. The answer is to adjust the instruments that shape capacity, competition and incentives. The Authority’s statement also emphasises a competitive and efficient aviation network serving multiple sectors. This matters, because equity does not have to conflict with competitiveness. In fact, well-designed equity improves competitiveness by lowering the economy’s transaction costs. The statement lists governance, economic legislation, service quality and private-sector attraction as key enablers. The practical test will be whether those enablers become enforceable rules and measurable standards, rather than broad commitments. The strategy is linked to Oman Vision 2040 through diversification, stronger tourism and logistics positioning, Omanisation through skills and job creation; and sustainability, innovation and digital transformation. Those are big promises and they deserve a dashboard the public can follow. People should be able to see peak domestic fares relative to income, capacity versus demand during peak weeks, delay and cancellation rates; and the real spillovers into domestic tourism, business travel and job access across governorates. If Oman gets domestic connectivity right — through dependable capacity, smart and transparent PSO contracts; and fair market rules that prevent extreme seasonal volatility — the Aviation Strategy 2040 will feel credible long before 2040 arrives. If it does not, the strategy risks becoming a high-ambition document that under-delivers on the most basic purpose of transport in a modern economy: making movement predictable, affordable and productive for the whole country.



QASIM
AL MAASHANI

The author is the head of the Business and Politics department at Oman Observer

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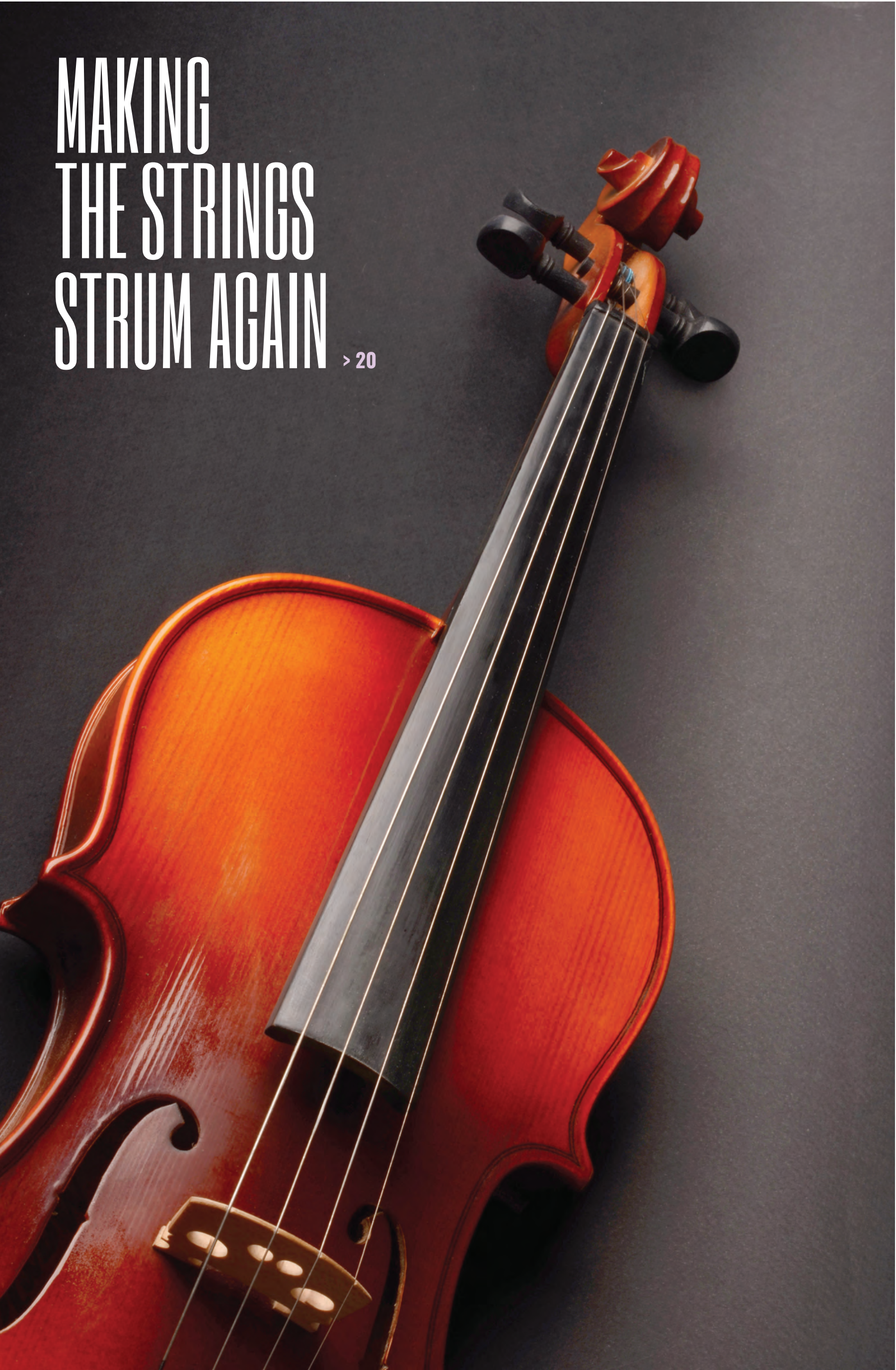
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POPALBUM

PARIS HILTON SEEKS TO UNVEIL NEW SIDES TO HERSELF IN DOCUMENTARY ‘INFINITE ICON’



Paris Hilton is known for being a socialite, reality TV star, model and occasional actor. Now the 44-year-old American wants to show audiences she can be a musician and activist, too.

“Infinite Icon: A Virtual Memoir”, arrived in theatres on January 30, following Hilton as she records her 2024 electro-pop album “Infinite Icon” and prepares for a one-time performance at the Hollywood Palladium.

She said she wants to show a more serious side to herself than the bubbly blonde persona she was known for when she first became famous in the late 1990s.

“In the beginning, I developed this persona and character, I think, as an armor or shield”, she said at her home in Beverly Hills.

“I had just been through so much trauma in my life and then getting the first reality show with ‘The Simple Life’ and then playing that character on and on — you know, I didn’t realise I’d have to do it for five seasons straight — and then the whole world just got to know me in that way”, she added.

While the media personality said that she believes that her playful persona will always be a part of her, she now wants to show a more mature side.

That includes her campaigning for greater federal oversight of youth care programmes.

Hilton, the great-granddaughter of Hilton Hotels founder Conrad Hilton, has spoken out about the emotional and physical abuse she endured when she was placed in residential youth treatment facilities as a teen. She has also been working with congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez to push for passage of the Defiance Act, which would improve rights for those affected by deep-fake obscene content.

“I knew that I had to stand up and use my voice”, Hilton said, highlighting how her campaigning had contributed to 15 state laws and two federal bills.

Her activism was “the most meaningful work of her life”, Hilton added. — Reuters

QUICK FEATURES



PREMIERE

Britain’s King Charles III meets British actor Kate Winslet during the premiere of Prime Video’s Finding Harmony: A King’s Vision, at Windsor Castle in Windsor.

— AFP



ENTERTAINMENT

Australian actor Jacob Elordi attends the world premiere of “Wuthering Heights” at the TCL Chinese Theatre in Los Angeles.

— AFP



ANNIVERSARY

A celebration of the 25th anniversary of the Harry Potter movie franchise in front of the Eiffel Tower in Paris.

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EXPO ON SILVER CULTURE



Elizabeth Davis with Ana Escrogima, Ambassador of the US to Oman

KABEER YOUSUF

An exhibition of Oman’s unique tradition in silver is currently underway, drawing art lovers, diplomats and cultural enthusiasts at the Diplomatic Club.

Named ‘Silver — An Omani Heritage’, the solo spotlight by Elizabeth Davis was graced by Ana Escrogima, Ambassador of the US to Oman and Dr Siham al Harthy, OCCI Board Member.

The artist has turned her creativity and genuine thoughts into converting the silver pieces into a world where threads of heritage are spun with emotion, memory and artistry.

Elizabeth, who is well known for her experimental approach, has incorporated unconventional materials such as paper, plastic bottles, wrapping paper, glass beads, medicine capsules and plastic wrap, transforming discarded objects into thoughtful artistic expressions. The use of recycled and everyday materials adds another layer to the exhibition, subtly commenting on sustainability while elevating

the ordinary into the poetic. Elizabeth said, “There is a strong influence of Omani culture in my work as I have been here for a long time and have always been enchanted with the diversity and beauty of the landscape, culture and people. I have always been influenced by the impressionism movement and most of my work of art is based on this”.

She explained that while the creative process begins slowly, with time spent waiting for the muse and conceptual clarity, the execution itself often happens swiftly. “I do not have a fixed time — it all depends on my mood”, she added.

“The silver collections of Elizabeth are to be seen, to be felt physically. It will leave memories to cherish a journey of tradition and honour. It is silver that shimmers and silently glows And into our soul, it flows and echoes”, said the guests.

The exhibition will run for a month and showcases 45 artworks, including paintings, mixed-media works on wood and sculptures — all unified by a striking silver palette.



AL AMERAT QURAN SCHOOL
A COMMUNITY TRIUMPH

It was not an easy journey for Amal al Abri, the founder of Al Amerat Quran Endowment School.

What began as a small voluntary initiative in the women’s prayer hall at Tunis Mosque gradually turned into one of the most inspiring community education projects in Al Amerat.

Through determination, personal sacrifice and strong belief in the value of Quran education, she managed to transform a simple idea into a sustainable endowment school serving hundreds of students.

The idea was born when children attending Quran lessons exceeded the capacity of the mosque space. Amal al Abri realised that the need was growing and that many families were searching for affordable, reliable and value-based education for their children. Together with her husband, she decided to take a courageous step by renting a building and establishing organised classrooms, officially founding the school in 2014.

The school started with only 40 students. Over the years, trust in the project increased and the number gradually rose to nearly 200, coming from Al Amerat and surrounding areas.

Today, the school stands as a respected educational centre that combines Quran education with academic enrichment in Arabic, English and mathematics.

The development of the school did not stop at student numbers. Continuous improvements were made to the facilities, including classroom construction, renovation of floors and walls, ceiling maintenance, storage rooms and sanitation facilities.



What began as a small Quran class in a mosque has grown into Al Amerat’s thriving Quran Endowment School, serving hundreds of students with affordable, value-based education while empowering the community

Every step aimed to provide a safe and welcoming learning environment.

Educationally, the school adopted modern teaching strategies and contemporary phonics programmes, while maintaining Quran values as the foundation. This balance allowed students to grow academically and morally at the same time.

The school serves multiple segments of society. In the morning, it welcomes preschool children aged three to five. In the evening, it offers free Quran education for women, as well as Quran learning programmes for school students. This

wide service scope reflects the school’s strong social commitment.

One of the school’s most remarkable achievements is offering education at a symbolic monthly fee of only RO 16, making quality learning accessible to families who cannot afford private schools. In addition, dozens of students are fully sponsored every year and receive free education.

The endowment fund plays a critical role in sustaining the school, covering teachers’ salaries, rent, utility bills and maintenance. However, the journey has not been free of hardship.

Amal al Abri openly acknowledges that maintaining the school has required personal sacrifices, including selling valuable belongings and relying on family support during difficult financial periods.

Despite these challenges, her vision remains clear. The future goal is to establish a modern, safe building equipped with smart classrooms and advanced educational tools that reflect the dignity of Quran education in today’s world.

Beyond education, the school contributes to society by providing job opportunities for Omani women, training secondary school graduates and organising seasonal educational programmes throughout the year.

The Al Amerat Quran Endowment School is not merely an educational institution; it is a living story of perseverance, faith and community service. It proves that with sincerity, vision and dedication, small voluntary efforts can grow into powerful institutions that shape generations and strengthen society.

FEATURES

Youssef bin Saeed al Azki is a veteran luthier or a craftsman who builds or repairs string instruments. Step into his instrument repair shop: the air thick with wood shavings, soft melodies playing in the background and stringed beauties waiting for their turn to be reborn

MAKING THE STRINGS STRUM AGAIN



AFRAH AL BALUSHI

MUSICAL instruments are the musician's soul. When a violin or an oud goes out of tune or a piano loses its luster, it can feel like losing a part of oneself. This is where the unsung heroes like Youssef bin Saeed al Azki who step in to breathe life back into these cherished companions.

Al Azki is one such a veteran luthier or a craftsman who builds or repairs string instruments. Step into his instrument repair shop: the room is full of machines and frames and stringed beauties waiting for their turn to be reborn.

Al Azki's journey in this craft began over 30 years ago, driven by his passion for melodies. He started as a hobbyist in his youth and with continued encouragement from his family and friends, it evolved into a profession. He then honed his talent through research, study and training.



Al Azki hopes to receive support from relevant authorities and seeks opportunities to contribute to the development and preservation of this craft

Al Azki focuses on using local, environmentally-friendly raw materials in the maintenance and repair of musical instruments, drawing on his skill in selecting and evaluating the woods used in crafting wooden instruments.

He hosts workshops, conducts training courses and encourages young people to engage in this art. He also makes the oud which is a traditional Omani stringed instrument using wood native to Oman.

Al Azki clarified that his craft differs from others in terms of precision and innovation. While preserving the spirit and authenticity of the traditional craft, he also focuses on its acoustic performance and contemporary aesthetics.

The luthier said that the most prominent challenges he encountered were securing high-quality wood and hand tools, adhering to necessary standards and principles. He also noted the lack of specialists to help him overcome training obstacles and the absence of relationships with professional musicians at the beginning of his journey. Instrument making depends on reputation and making it competitive with other instruments in terms of tone accuracy, durability and aesthetic appeal.

Al Azki hopes to receive support from relevant authorities and seeks opportunities to contribute to the development and preservation of this craft. The importance of training lies in enhancing the efficiency of handcrafting and mastering precise acoustic calibration techniques to ensure high-quality musical output. It also involves keeping pace with modern woodworking methods.

He believes the future of Omani crafts is very promising. Modern advancements provide precise tools to improve sound quality, while digital platforms contribute to give Omani crafts a global market.

Al Azki aspires to establish a leading national workshop for oud and violin production according to international standards. This workshop would train young Omanis in this craft and export musical instruments bearing the "Made in Oman" label to leading international musicians. He advises young Omani enthusiasts to be patient in learning the secrets of the craft thoroughly and to prioritise quality over quick profits. He also emphasises the need to integrate manual skill with modern technologies and digital marketing to achieve global recognition and compete effectively. Furthermore, calling on Omani society to appreciate the artistic value and cultural identity behind every locally crafted product. "By supporting Omani products, we are not just selling a machine or a piece of equipment; we are preserving our heritage from extinction and contributing to the sustainability of our national economy with a global reach", said Al Azki.

In line with Oman Vision 2040 to enhance economic sustainability, the Sultanate of Oman is paying close attention to entrepreneurs in the crafts sector, aiming to empower artisans, develop skills, support financing and innovation; and establish marketing platforms to promote products both locally and internationally.