

O M A N
Observer
D A I L Y



VOL. 45, NO. 73
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FESTIVAL STANDINGS

INBRIEF

RAFO TO CELEBRATE ANNUAL DAY TODAY

The Royal Air Force of Oman (RAFO) will celebrate its annual day on Sunday, under the auspices of HH Sayyid Dr Kamil bin Fahd bin Mahmood al Said, Secretary-General of the General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers. RAFO’s annual celebration affirms the high attention accorded by His Majesty the Sultan, the Supreme Commander, and embodies the modernisation and development achieved by RAFO in its air bases and the development of its national human resources through training, qualification and motivation. This has enabled it to fulfil its national roles and support comprehensive development efforts and the renewed renaissance march. The ceremony will include the graduation of the Basic Officers’ Course, the Limited Service Officers’ Course and university graduates.

MUSCAT MARATHON SETS NEW RECORD

The 12th edition of Discover Oman Muscat Marathon set a new record on Saturday attracting more than 15,000 runners from 94 nationalities over two consecutive days. This year’s edition was held in Al Khuwair Square, and was aimed at diversifying the hosting locations and enriching the experience of the runners and the public. It witnessed the participation of an elite group of professional runners, amateurs, families and first-time participants, across a variety of race categories, including the marathon, half marathon, 10 km and 5 km races, fun run and children’s races.

Oman named emerging tourism destination

MADRID: The Sultanate of Oman has won the Emerging Tourism Destination Award 2026, presented by Spanish travel magazine Viajar, during a ceremony attended by representatives from Spain’s travel, tourism and media sectors. The award recognises destinations that offer distinctive tourism initiatives and innovative experiences that attract the interest of the Spanish travel market.

Oman was selected for the diversity of its tourism offerings, the range of experiences available and its balanced blend of historical heritage, cultural richness and varied landscapes, alongside its strong commitment to a sustainable tourism model that preserves national identity and delivers authentic visitor experiences. The Sultanate of Oman is also recognised for its diverse and

innovative tourism products that cater to different interests and align with global travel trends, positioning it as an ideal destination for relaxation, leisure, cultural and historical exploration, adventure tourism and cruise travel. Haitham bin Mohammed al Ghassani, Director-General of Tourism Promotion at the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, said Oman’s selection reflects

the suitability of its tourism products and experiences for the Spanish market and their ability to meet visitor expectations. He attributed the recognition to improving tourism performance indicators, innovative plans targeting different segments and intensified promotional campaigns highlighting Oman’s unique assets and diverse offerings.

DETAILS ON P13

UKRAINE, RUSSIA, US AGREE TO MORE TALKS

Next round of talks in Abu Dhabi on February 1

UKRAINE and Russia ended two days of US-brokered direct talks on Saturday and agreed to hold more on February 1 in Abu Dhabi, even as Kyiv accused Moscow of undermining the negotiations towards ending the war by launching fresh strikes. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said of the talks that “a lot was discussed, and it is important that the conversations were constructive”. He added that the next round could take place “as early as next week”. On the eve of the second day of talks, Russia launched a barrage of drones and missiles on Ukraine, cutting off millions from electricity in sub-zero temperatures. Kyiv accused Moscow of undermining the negotiations by launching yet another “night of terror”. A UAE government spokesperson said the talks, which involved top military officers from both sides, had been held in a “constructive and positive atmosphere”. But weary Kyiv residents, who had gone through yet another

A Ukrainian serviceman stands next to a truck equipped with a machine gun during an air raid alert in Kyiv on Saturday. — AFP

sleepless night, had little hope for a breakthrough. “They’ll just say that everything is fine, that again, nothing has been agreed, and again there will be rockets,” said Anastasia Tolkachov, who had to spend a night in a car park. According to the Emirati spokesperson, the talks were held on “outstanding elements of the US-proposed peace framework as well as confidence-building measures”. According to Zelensky, “the central focus of the discussions was the possible parameters for ending the war”. Both warring sides say the fate of territory in the eastern Donbas region is the main unresolved issue in the search for a settlement. The European Union, which has sent hundreds of power generators to Ukraine, has accused Moscow of “deliberately depriving civilians of heat”. Zelensky last week declared a state of emergency in the energy sector, which has been battered by relentless Russian strikes on heat and electricity supplies. The war has killed tens of thousands, displaced millions and devastated large swathes of Ukraine. — AFP

Oman candidate for Human Rights Council membership

GENEVA: The Sultanate of Oman reviewed the progress and achievements it has made in the field of human rights since the third Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of human rights in January 2021. This was part of the Sultanate of Oman’s participation at the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of the Human Rights Council in Geneva, Switzerland. The Omani delegation is headed by Dr Abdullah bin Mohammed al Saeedi, Minister of Justice and Legal Affairs. The Sultanate of Oman prepared its report through the Legal Committee, which held a series of meetings, workshops, and forums with numerous civil society organisations and government entities in the Sultanate of Oman. The report highlights the efforts made by the Sultanate of Oman to join international human rights conventions, particularly the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, having

Oman’s official candidacy for the membership of the Human Rights Council for 2028-2030 period for the first time. This candidacy stems from the country’s firm commitment to promoting human rights and is a result of its positive cooperation with various international human rights mechanisms

The Omani delegation is headed by Dr Abdullah bin Mohammed al Saeedi, Minister of Justice and Legal Affairs.

previously joined the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. This brings the country’s total membership to eight out of the nine core international human rights treaties. The report also details the progress made in enacting various human rights laws including those related to social protection, media, Omani nationality, organ and tissue transplantation, combating human trafficking, the rights of persons with disabilities and the regulations governing domestic workers. Idris bin Abdulrahman al Khanjari, Permanent Representative of the Sultanate of Oman to the United Nations and Other International Organisations in Geneva, delivered a statement expressing the Sultanate of Oman’s attention to the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) mechanism of human rights.

He emphasised the Sultanate of Oman’s official candidacy for the membership of the Human Rights Council for the 2028-2030 period for the first time. This candidacy stems from the country’s firm commitment to promoting human rights and is a result of its positive cooperation with various international human rights mechanisms. During the session, the Sultanate of Oman received numerous interventions and recommendations related to human rights. The Omani delegation participating in the Universal Periodic Review of the Human Rights Council at the United Nations headquarters in Geneva, also delivered responses and clarifications on a wide range of human rights-related issues raised by the 94 states participating in the review process. — ONA

OMAN

SHORT TAKES



Almakhtar Almujaini finished 10th overall in a highly competitive field.

OMANI RIDERS
COMPETE AT
DUBAI KITESURF
COMPETITION

NAJAH AL RIYAMI
MUSCAT, JAN 24

The Dubai Kitesurf Competition, organised by Dubai International Marine Club, held on January 16, welcomed elite and emerging kitesurfers from across the region for one of the season’s most competitive marine sports events.

The competition featured multiple disciplines, including Freestyle and Course Race, with athletes competing across several divisions such as the Senior Men’s category. Riders were tested on technical execution, speed, balance, and adaptability, as fluctuating wind conditions added an extra layer of challenge throughout the event.

Omani athletes recorded a notable presence at the competition, reflecting the steady growth of kitesurfing in Oman and the increasing participation of its riders in high-profile regional events. Competing against experienced international athletes, Omani riders gained valuable exposure and competitive experience.

Among the Omani participants, Almakhtar Almujaini competed in the Senior Men’s division, finishing 10th overall in a highly competitive field. His performance across the event’s disciplines demonstrated consistency and resilience under demanding conditions.

Almakhtar highlighted the challenge and value of the experience, saying: “I was very excited to take part in this competition, and Alhamdulillah I achieved third place in freestyle and sixth place in the course race. The event was very challenging due to the strong wind conditions and the high level of competition. Next time, I will give my best and aim for first place.”

The participation of Omani riders in events such as the Dubai Kitesurf Competition underlines the importance of regional competitions in developing talent, raising performance standards, and strengthening ties between Gulf sports communities.

As Oman continues to invest in water sports and athlete development, increased representation at international and regional competitions is expected to play a key role in advancing the country’s presence on the marine sports stage.

WINNERS CROWNED
AT SOHAR CAMEL
FESTIVAL



The festival showcased 400 camels across multiple events.

SUHAR: The three-day Sohar Camel Festival concluded on Saturday at the camel racing field in Al Batinah North Governorate, showcasing 400 camels across multiple events.

Winners were announced across 14 contest rounds, including Golden Singles, Silver Singles, Golden and Silver Laqaya, Golden and Silver Deposit, and young camel categories. Notable winners included Shahbar, Samha, Musayha Kashaw, Buwayda Falhoud, and Al Ghazila, reflecting the continued enthusiasm and wide participation of camel owners from across Oman.

The festival highlighted the rich heritage and enduring popularity of camel sports in the Sultanate of Oman. — ONA

OMAN MARKS INTERNATIONAL DAY OF EDUCATION

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Education, joins the world to celebrate the International Day of Education, which is observed on January 24 annually.

This year, the occasion is celebrated under the theme: ‘The Power of Youth in Co-creating Education.’

The theme underscores the pivotal role young people play in developing educational systems and building a sustainable future.

Oman embodies this theme through a range of national initiatives and policies that place youth at the heart of the educational and developmental process. A key example is the youth’s participation in shaping Oman Vision 2040 out of a belief in their capabilities and genuine



Oman achieved remarkable progress in the 2023 Youth Development Index, advancing to 33rd place globally.

contributions to shaping the future.

Oman achieved remarkable progress in the 2023 Youth Development Index, advancing to 33rd place globally, a jump of 19

places. This underscores its ongoing commitment to empowering youth and enhancing their active participation across various sectors particularly education.

The Ministry of Education has also introduced technical, vocational, and technological education tracks in secondary education to meet labour market demands and enhance students’ readiness for future opportunities. This is in addition to supporting the participation of Omani youth in international forums, including the Unesco World Youth Forum.

The Ministry of Education continues its efforts to implement the Youth Declaration issued by the Education Transformation Summit by forming the National Team for Monitoring the Greening of Education, with the participation

of youth organisations. It also organises ongoing youth dialogues between university students and decision-makers on issues of leadership, innovation, and the labour market.

These efforts complement the national initiatives implemented by the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Youth, most notably the Youth Ambassadors Project and the Youth Excellence Award, which contribute to developing youths’ skills and strengthening their role in society.

Oman’s participation in the celebration of the International Day of Education affirms its commitment to empowering youth and consolidating their role as active partners in shaping education and building a future based on knowledge and innovation. — ONA

Oman customs processes
1.29m declarations in 2025

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, JAN 24

MORE than 1.29 million customs declarations were processed in 2025, underscoring Oman’s progress in digital transformation under Oman Vision 2040 while maintaining high customs control standards, according to the Directorate-General of Customs.

The department also handled over 1,000 customs cases during the year — a 10 per cent increase compared to 2024 — reflecting heightened vigilance in combating smuggling and reinforcing its evolving role from a regulatory authority to a service-oriented partner supporting the public and business community.

Speaking on the sidelines of International Customs Day, observed annually on January 26, Brigadier General Said bin Khamis al Ghaithi, Director-General of Customs, said the authority continues to introduce innovative solutions that position Omani ports as reliable and competitive gateways for global trade.

“Oman Customs has evolved from its traditional role of revenue collection into an integrated risk management system and a fundamental pillar of national



Innovative solutions position Omani ports as reliable and competitive gateways for global trade.

Customs Day is being observed under the theme ‘Customs Protects Society Through Vigilance and Commitment’

security,” he said. “Strict controls at border crossings help prevent the entry of prohibited goods that threaten public safety.”

He noted that customs authorities recorded over a thousand seizures in 2025, marking a 10 per cent rise from the previous year, demonstrating robust enforcement efforts to ensure a secure environment for citizens and investors.

This year’s International Customs Day is being observed under the theme ‘Customs Protects Society Through Vigilance and Commitment’, highlighting the growing role of customs authorities amid increasing global risks, changing crime patterns and evolving smuggling methods. Customs officers remain the first line of defence at air, land and sea borders.

Brig Gen Al Ghaithi emphasised

that customs also plays a key role in economic diversification by enhancing investment attractiveness and facilitating trade flows.

“The Directorate has recorded growth in trade volumes, with non-oil exports rising by 1 per cent and imports increasing by 13 per cent,” he said.

“Goods release times have been reduced to record lows — 1 minute 36 seconds at land ports, 1 minute 25 seconds at seaports, and 1 minute 55 seconds at airports — directly supporting the logistics sector and strengthening Oman’s position as a regional trade and re-export hub.”

The Directorate continues to roll out major initiatives, including the Bayan system, which has achieved comprehensive electronic integration with various entities. Artificial Intelligence is now being incorporated into risk management, customs valuation, post-clearance auditing, and big data analysis through business intelligence tools.

Other key initiatives include the pre-clearance service, allowing procedures to be completed before goods arrive, and the Authorised Economic Operator (AEO) programme, which builds partnerships with compliant companies and grants them global competitive advantage.

MoAFWR develops innovative solutions to
combat destructive coconut leaf beetle

MAZID MUSTAHIL AKAAK
SALALAH, JAN 24

The coconut leaf beetle is a significant pest in Dhofar Governorate, causing damage by feeding on young palm leaves, leading to stunted growth and reduced yields, prompting annual control campaigns by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MoAFWR) using drone spraying and ground teams.

These damaged leaves can be distinguished by the brown scratches and elongated spots that run along them.

When the damage is extensive enough, the leaves turn completely brown and dry, until whole fronds are left dead, and the palm itself eventually dies.

“The insect was introduced



The damaged coconut leaves can be distinguished by the brown scratches and elongated spots.

to Oman around 2020... Its introduction is attributed to imports from abroad, possibly carried in ornamental seedlings,” says Musallam al Maashani, a Plant Protection Specialist working in the ministry’s Agricultural Research Station in Salalah.

“There is no doubt that the presence of these insects poses

a threat to the ecosystem in Oman, but through the control operations implemented by the ministry, results have been achieved in keeping the levels of spread of these insects below the economic threshold.”

Currently, the insect’s range is limited to the southern region of the country, where the ministry is working to resolve the crisis

before it gets out of hand.

Al Maashani says that the ministry is “currently working on implementing both chemical and biological control methods,” adding that they do not want to “rely directly on chemical substances.”

Al Maashani goes on to emphasise the importance of working with local farmers to resolve the crisis as it spreads.

“We maintain constant communication with the agricultural community and farmers to monitor the insect situation and receive reports from them. We also provide them with direct instructions on how to deal with the insect if symptoms of infestation appear on the farm, from cleaning and pruning trees to spraying the appropriate pesticide.

SHORTTAKES



The hackathon aims to empower participants to develop smart tech solutions.

AL SHARQIYAH SOUTH HOLDS ‘SMART GOVERNORATES HACKATHON’

SUR: The ‘Smart Governorates Hackathon’ concludes on Sunday, in Al Sharqiyah South Governorate, and is held under the slogan ‘Digital Transformation for a Sustainable Future.’

Organised in collaboration with the Oman Information Technology Association, the four-day event brings together young innovators, entrepreneurs and tech enthusiasts from across Oman.

The hackathon aims to empower participants to develop smart technological solutions addressing local development challenges and transform creative ideas into viable prototypes. It aligns with the goals of Oman Vision 2040, focusing on digital transformation, innovation, sustainable development and building a knowledge-based economy.

More than 100 participants — including university students, programmers, app developers and UI/UX designers — are working in multidisciplinary teams under the guidance of experts in digital transformation, artificial intelligence and sustainability.

The event features six main themes: environment and sustainability, smart cities and services, smart agriculture and fishing, transportation and safety, e-commerce, and smart urban planning.

Eng Abdullah bin Saif al Araiimi, Head of the Digital Transformation Team in Al Sharqiyah South, highlighted the hackathon’s role in promoting innovation, supporting technical initiatives and strengthening public-private sector partnerships.

The hackathon serves as a prelude to the Smart Governorates Conference. The conference will bring together decision-makers, government agencies, the private sector, academic institutions, experts, and innovators to share best practices and experiences in developing smart governorates.

— ONA

HIHS CELEBRATES GRADUATION OF NEW MEDICAL PROFESSIONALS

OHOUUD AL JILANI
MUSCAT, JAN 24

The Higher Institute of Health Specialties (HIHS) held a graduation ceremony for the 29th batch under the auspices of Shaikh Ghosn bin Hilal al Alawi, Chairman of the State Audit Institution (SAI), in the Al Bustan Palace Hotel.

Dr Manal al Zadjali, Dean of HIHS, delivered a speech in which she said that HIHS is a leading health institute in the GCC region, offering specialised health programmes to build qualified medical professionals through ten specialised health programmes.

She said that a total of 3,878 students graduated from the HIHS since its inception and today we are celebrating the graduation of 192 graduates from various governorates of the Sultanate of Oman who will contribute to the development and advancement of the health sector. This graduation is part of a long journey of an ambitious nation that has placed human beings at the heart of the development goals of Oman Vision 2040.”

She urged the graduates to be exemplary in terms of ethics, distinguished in their performance and not to give up learning, as their graduation is just the beginning of a long medical career that is supposed to be successful.

The Higher Institute of Health Specialties offers PG diploma in paediatric and neonatal critical care nursing, PG diploma in mental health nursing, PG diploma in critical care nursing for adults, PG diploma in emergency nursing, PG diploma in infection control and prevention, PG diploma in renal nursing, PG diploma in community health, PG diploma in health services management, PG diploma in midwifery and diploma in sterile processing technology.

3 teams take top honours at ‘Oman Game Jam 2026’

THREE teams emerged as winners at the conclusion of the ‘Oman Game Jam 2026’ video game development camp, organised by the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MoTCIT).

The closing ceremony was held under the auspices of Dr Ali bin Amer al Shaithani, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology for Communications and Information Technology, at Al Nahda Training Institute.

The camp was part of the ‘Makin’ initiative aimed at qualifying digital talents. It was implemented by Al Nahda Training Institute in collaboration with global technology company Unity, with participation from specialists in technology and video game development.

Spanning six months, the programme targeted job seekers from various technical backgrounds as well as digital game development enthusiasts. A total of 50 participants took part in two main tracks — game programming and design art.

The camp combined theoretical learning with practical application, focusing on the development of real projects using the Unity engine. Participants also received training

The camp was part of the ‘Makin’ initiative aimed at qualifying digital talents



Next Levet secured first place, followed by DSHMO in second place and Metro in third.

in professional and personal skills to enhance their readiness for the job market.

In addition, the programme created avenues for exposure to the labour market through engagement with specialised technology companies. This enabled participants to explore freelance pathways and tap into opportunities in the local and regional digital gaming industry.

During the final competition, teams worked over three consecutive days to design innovative games reflecting Omani identity, while ensuring technical completeness and functionality.

Next Levet secured first place, followed by DSHMO in second place and Metro in third. Sirdam ranked fourth, while Heisenberg came fifth. The winning teams received financial awards in recognition of their creativity and excellence.

The camp marks a significant step in supporting and empowering Omani youth and strengthening their competitiveness in the digital game development sector.

It also underscores the ministry’s commitment to nurturing national technological talent and building advanced digital capabilities among young Omanis.

SHURA PARTAKES IN ARAB PARLIAMENTARY SESSION IN CAIRO

CAIRO: Majlis Ash’shura took part in the second plenary session of the second term of the fourth legislative chapter of the Arab Parliament, held at the headquarters of the League of Arab States in Cairo, on Saturday.

The session reviewed the report of the Arab Parliament’s Palestine Committee, as well as reports from the four standing committees: the Foreign Affairs, Political Affairs and National Security; the Economic and Financial Affairs Committee; the Legislative and Legal Affairs and Human Rights Committee; and the Social, Educational, Cultural, Women’s and Youth Affairs

Committee.

The session also discussed several proposals, including establishing an Arab Women Parliamentarians Forum and setting up a Forum of Young Arab Parliamentarians.

Majlis Ash’shura earlier participated in the meetings of the Bureau of the Arab Parliament and the meetings of its standing committees.

Shaikh Said bin Hamad al Saadi, Deputy Chairman of Majlis Ash’shura and Vice-President of the Arab Parliament, participated in the meeting of the Legislative and Legal Affairs and Human Rights Committee. The

meeting discussed an Arab parliamentary vision for consumer protection in the Arab world as well as the draft general framework and themes of the 2025 report on the state of human rights in the Arab world.

Hamid bin Ali al Nasser, a member of Majlis Ash’shura, participated in the meeting of the Economic and Financial Affairs Committee, which discussed several financial and administrative matters, including a presentation on the mechanisms and procedures proposed to support the Palestinian economy.

— ONA

Oman’s first international handicrafts forum showcases creativity and heritage

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JAN 24

The first International Handicrafts Forum, organised by the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority (Riyada), concludes on January 26 at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre.

Launched on January 22, the forum aimed to enhance knowledge exchange, foster partnerships, and connect traditional crafts with modern economic and industrial systems.

The event brought together 320 handicraft institutions and artisans, 10 local and international startups, 8 professionals, researchers, designers, emerging youth talents, and supporting entities from government and private sectors, including investors.

Riyada highlighted the forum’s objectives as marketing and promoting Omani handicrafts,

positioning crafts as a key component of the creative economy, encouraging innovation and modern technologies in craft development, and building sustainable local and international strategic partnerships.

Ilham al Hadabi, Director of the Handicrafts Department at Riyada, said the forum provided a marketing platform for artisans and handicraft institutions across Oman.

It also hosted international participants and experts, offering opportunities to showcase handicraft products locally and abroad.

The forum featured a visual presentation of creative handicrafts, exhibitions for artisans and startups, and the Crafts Forum, which provided visitors with a cultural experience highlighting Omani hospitality, folk arts, traditional foods, and open majlis. Musical



The forum featured a visual presentation of creative handicrafts, exhibitions for artisans and startups.

performances and cultural sessions ran throughout the event.

In addition, the Handicrafts Innovation Lab, in collaboration with the Youth Centre, offered an interactive space to stimulate creativity and innovation. The

Challenges Arena showcased inspiring stories of handicraft institutions, highlighting heritage continuity and sustainable success.

The Omani Handicrafts Museum provided an interactive display of the evolution of handicrafts in Oman,

illustrating the past, present, and future of the industry.

Yousef bin Abdullah al Jahwari, founder and CEO of Al Madar Ceramics Factory, described the forum as a platform to take Omani ceramic crafts to global markets while maintaining a distinctive Omani identity.

The forum is part of the National Programme for Creative Craft Industries, a strategic initiative built on pillars of innovation, creative thinking, local content governance, product marketing, national identity protection, investment exploration, and economic sustainability.

It serves as an integrated marketing platform connecting craftsmen with entrepreneurs, promoting craft products, opening new sales outlets, and supporting small and medium enterprises in the sector.



AN IDEAL SPACE FOR OMANI THEATRE



THE active presence of theatrical performances within the Muscat Nights 2026 festivities represents one of the most significant entertainment and cultural pillars offered to the public.

These performances provide an ideal space for Omani theatre practitioners to exchange expertise, appropriately activate the performing arts and highlight vibrant youth talent, reflecting the cultural and artistic movement currently witnessed in the Sultanate of Oman.

The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth (MoCSY) has bolstered the role of Omani theatre troupes as creative platforms that contribute to spreading cultural awareness and serve as an entertainment element that enhances interaction between the public and artists across various creative spectrums.

Sarah al Ajmi, Head of the Performing Arts Department at the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, stated that Omani theatre is one of the most prominent features of the cultural scene in the Sultanate of Oman. She noted that its presence in this year's Muscat Nights 2026 serves as an artistic space expressing cultural identity and keeping pace with the local creative movement.

She added that the inclusion of theatrical performances in the event's general programme reaffirms the role of theatre in enhancing cultural awareness and

The presence of Omani theatre is part of a purposeful cultural vision to highlight national creative energies, serving as an interactive platform that combines entertainment with knowledge.

SARAH AL AJMI
Head of the Performing Arts Department, MoCSY

making performing arts accessible to various segments of society. She further clarified that the presence of Omani theatre is part of a purposeful cultural vision to highlight national creative energies, serving as an interactive platform that combines entertainment with knowledge.

Al Ajmi explained that the process was based on specific technical and organisational criteria. These included the quality of the script and performance, the suitability of the shows for the audience and their ability to provide a rich theatrical experience consistent with the atmosphere of Muscat Nights 2026, while ensuring the representation of various Omani theatrical experiences.

She detailed that the performances varied between



children's theatre, comedy and shows by troupes for people with disabilities, which included two performances: one by the "Creativity through Disability" theatre and another by the Oman Deaf Theatre Troupe.

On another note, Jassim bin Mubarak al Battashi, Head of the Muscat Folk Theatre Troupe, pointed out that theatre is a competitor to other forms of recreation and cannot be separated from entertainment tools. He described it as one of the most important cultural and artistic entertainment instruments, noting that many countries worldwide rely on theatre to deliver social messages with added value to their people.

Al Battashi emphasised that Omani theatre troupes must demonstrate a continuous desire for work to move forward. He noted that Omani theatre needs more presence and sustainability, stressing the need for continuous production throughout the year rather than limiting its role to domestic and international competitions.

Yousef bin Mohammed al Balushi, Head of the Mazoon Folk Theatre Troupe, stated that the participation of Omani theatre in general, and folk troupes in particular, in national events is a vital opportunity and a major cultural-artistic milestone in the Sultanate of Oman.

Al Balushi explained that it is a unique experience due to the direct communication between the stage and the audience.

He highlighted the availability of all necessary requirements, including lighting, acoustics and a fully integrated stage, which allows for a better understanding of the diverse audience and the ability to improvise when facing sudden challenges, such as weather conditions or technical obstacles.

— ONA



Shinas Seafront reopens inclusively to public

SIHAM AL SAIDI
SUHAR, JAN 24

AL Batinah North Governorate has marked a major milestone in coastal tourism and community development with the completion of the Shinas Seafront Park Redevelopment Project, a thoughtfully planned initiative that blends recreation, sustainability and investment opportunities along one of Shinas’ most promising shorelines.

Covering 35,250 square metres and stretching 439 metres along the coast, the project transforms the waterfront into a vibrant public destination designed for families, youth and visitors.

The redevelopment features 989 metres of pedestrian walkways paved with interlock tiles to encourage active lifestyles, along with 10 shaded structures positioned to offer comfort and resting areas for park users.

A standout element of the project is the children’s play zone, which spans 1,237 square metres and includes 28 play units. Among them is an interactive game specifically designed for children with disabilities. The play area is fitted with safe rubber flooring and built to high safety standards, underlining



The redevelopment features 989 metres of pedestrian walkways to encourage active lifestyles.

The project’s strong focus on inclusivity. Eng Alia al Attar, project supervisor, said the development was guided by a people-centred and sustainable vision. “Our goal was to create a seafront space that serves the community in multiple ways – recreationally, environmentally and economically. The park was designed to be accessible, safe and welcoming for all age groups, while also respecting the natural coastal setting,” she said.

Environmental sustainability

formed a core component of the redevelopment. Around 4,686 square metres of green spaces have been landscaped to enhance the park’s visual appeal and ecological balance. These areas are estimated to reduce carbon emissions by approximately 2.8 tonnes annually, supporting the governorate’s broader sustainability goals. The park also includes essential service facilities such as public restrooms and an investment outlet with a combined area of 91.8 square metres. In addition, internal roads and parking areas covering 3,952 square metres ensure smooth accessibility and traffic flow.

Residents say the impact is already visible. A Shinas resident and father, described the park as “a much-needed space for families.”

“My children finally have a safe place to play by the sea, and we can enjoy walking and relaxing together. It has changed how we spend our evenings,” he said.

With five investment kiosks and two power outlets allocated for free investment, the project also creates opportunities for small businesses and young entrepreneurs, positioning Shinas Seafront Park as a model for integrated coastal development in Oman.

‘Wateen’ campaign launched to strengthen heart disease prevention

SUHAR: The ‘Wateen’ campaign promoting heart disease prevention was launched in the Wilayat of Suhar, Al Batinah North Governorate, under the slogan ‘Prevention First.’

The initiative was organised as part of the Suhar Festival activities, with participation from students of the College of Medicine and Health Sciences at the National University of Science and Technology, in cooperation with the Oman Heart Association.

The campaign offers an integrated preventive package that combines field blood pressure screenings with training in cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) skills. It aims to enhance community readiness in dealing with major cardiovascular emergencies, including stroke, heart failure and coronary artery disease.

Dr Afrah bint Hamoud al Jabri, member of the Oman Heart Association and a certified trainer from the American Heart Association, emphasised that CPR empowerment is a key preventive pillar. She said it helps break the barrier of fear among individuals and equips them with the confidence and readiness to act during the critical ‘golden minutes’ following sudden cardiac arrest.

She explained that prompt and systematic initial intervention not only saves lives but also protects vital organs from permanent damage. She added that adherence to regular medical check-ups



The campaign offers a package that combines BP screenings with training in cardiopulmonary resuscitation CPR skills.

and BP monitoring acts as a safety valve for the early detection of conditions leading to heart failure and coronary artery disease.

Speaking on the campaign’s role in reshaping community behaviour, Dr Samah bint Abdullah al Araiimi, member of the Oman Heart Association and a certified trainer from the American Heart Association, said the initiative seeks to build a comprehensive health security system that begins with the individual and extends to the wider community. She noted that the campaign works to correct misconceptions related to diet and physical

activity, highlighting them as the first line of defence against stroke and other cardiovascular diseases. Integrating scientific awareness with practical application, she said, transforms knowledge into sustainable preventive behaviour, reduces emergency response time and improves public safety while protecting heart health.

The field initiative reinforces the principles of quality health education, successfully shifting preventive awareness from theory to practical application through broad community engagement.

— ONA

Tender

Oman chamber of commerce and industry branch in Batinah South Governorate would like to announce the following public tender:

Tender No.	Tender Name	Specialized companies	Tender Fees (irrevocable)	Deadline for Obtaining Documents	Deadline for Tender submission
2026/1	Organization of the Investment Opportunities Forum in South Al Batinah Governorate	Companies and Institutions Specialized in Organizing Events and Exhibitions	25 I- R.O	5 February 2026	Before 12 pm 19 February 2026

Companies may obtain the tender documents from the OCCI Branch in Batinah South Governorate, during the official working hours against the payment of tender fees.

Tender Terms:

- Provide valued CR, OCCI membership, Tender Board membership and taxation certificate.
- Interested companies should enclose their bids a 1% Bank guarantee/ certified cheque of proposal value issued by one of the banks operating in Oman valid for 90 days from the deadline of submitting the bids addressed in the name of Oman chamber of commerce and industry branch in Batinah South Governorate. The bids without this temporary guarantee will not be considered.
- The bids should be submitted in red waxed envelopes addressed to - Head of main tendering Committee in OCCI Branch in Batinah South Governorate- Rustaq, written outside the Number and title of the Tender. No indication about the bidder is allowed on the envelope.
- Offers should be deposited in the tender box kept in Oman chamber of commerce and industry branch in Batinah South Governorate.
- OCCI is not bound to accept the lowest or any other bids. It has the right to accept or reject any bids without showing reasons or cancel the tender.
- Interested companies should submit the Tenders before 12 pm 12 February 2026.

For any inquiries please call: 26875118
Email: asaad.mahdhour@omanchamber.om

chamber_oman

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Sahara Hospitality Co. (S.A.O.G.)

P.O. Box 311, Muscat, Postal Code 100, Sultanate of Oman.

DIRECTORS' REPORT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30TH NOVEMBER 2025

On behalf of the Board of Directors, it is my pleasure to present the Annual Report on the business and operations of Sahara Hospitality Company, S.A.O.G. (hereinafter referred to as "SHC") for the financial year ended November 30, 2025.

FINANCIAL RESULTS
The financial results achieved during the financial year ended November 30, 2025, are as follows

Key Financial Indicators	Year ended November 30, 2025 R.O. 000's	Year ended November 30, 2024 R.O. 000's
Turnover	13,983	13,326
Gross Profit	3,318	3,470

The Net Profit after tax for the year was RO 2,723,493 as against RO 2,890,200 in the year 2024.

As previously mentioned, the company's operations are predominantly reliant on PDO activities and availability of contractors' staff where our Permanent Accommodation for Contractors (PAC) are located. During the year under review, we are pleased to report that:

- The occupancy levels at Fahud, Nimr and Rima were 93%, 92% and 99% respectively.
- The net asset value per share has improved from RO 3.615 in 2024 to RO 3.709 in 2025 financial year.
- The basic earnings per share in 2025 stood at RO 0.344 compared to RO 0.365 in 2024.

The Board of Directors is pleased to recommend distribution of cash dividend of 25% (250 Baizas per equity share) on the paid up share capital subject to shareholders approval at the Annual General Meeting (AGM).

The company has been adhering to the principles of good Corporate Governance over the years and the Board of Directors supports the broad principles of Corporate Governance as issued by FSA. In addition to the basic governance issues, the Board lays great emphasis on transparency, accountability and integrity and are pleased to state that a report on Code of Corporate Governance including the relevant auditor's certificate regarding compliance with conditions of Corporate Governance as stipulated by FSA is provided in Annexure II.

Once again, the Board of Directors and Management Team would reaffirm their commitment and enthusiasm with proper planning in carrying out the business with an objective to yield attractive returns to the shareholders.

On behalf of the Shareholders and Board of Directors, It gives us great honor to express our sincere gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq bin Taimour Al Said for his continued support to the private sector and I pray to the Almighty Allah to shower His everlasting blessings on His Majesty. Furthermore, we would extend our gratitude to His Majesty's government for their co-operation and assistance with special mention for the Ministry of Commerce & Industry, Muscat Securities Market and Financial Services Authority.

I would like to conclude the report by thanking our company Management Team, my fellow Directors, the Service Provider, Petroleum Development of Oman, our clients and all those who participated in the successful conduct of our Company's business, for their relentless efforts and valuable contribution.

For and on behalf of the Board of Directors of
SAHARA HOSPITALITY CO. (S.A.O.G)

TALAL BIN QAIS AL ZAWAWI
CHAIRMAN

Statement of financial position (audited) as at 30 th November 2025		
	2025 RO	2024 RO
ASSETS		
Non-current assets		
Property, plant and equipment	13,429,178	14,643,078
Right-of-use assets	-	20,634
Total non-current assets	13,429,178	14,663,712
Current assets		
Inventories	31,364	39,411
Amount due from a related party	21,091	41,091
Trade and other receivables	6,068,525	6,200,903
Short Term Deposits	11,527,573	9,299,131
Bank balances and cash	2,286,683	2,068,792
Total current assets	19,935,236	17,649,328
Total assets	33,364,414	32,313,040
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES		
Equity		
Share capital	7,923,300	7,923,300
Legal reserve	2,641,100	2,641,100
Retained earnings	18,820,229	18,077,561
Total Equity	29,384,629	28,641,961
LIABILITIES		
Non-current liabilities		
Deferred tax liability	395,396	388,745
Employees' end of service benefits	26,406	23,706
Total non-current liabilities	421,802	412,451
Current liabilities		
Current portion of lease liabilities	-	23,347
Trade and other payables	692,385	590,350
Amounts due to related parties	2,392,110	2,341,012
Taxation	473,488	303,919
Total current liabilities	3,557,983	3,258,628
Total liabilities	3,979,785	3,671,079
Total Equity and liabilities	33,364,414	32,313,040
Net assets per share	3.709	3.615

Statement of comprehensive income (audited) for the year ended 30 th November 2025		
	2025 RO	2024 RO
Revenue from contract with customers	13,982,980	13,326,453
Direct costs	(10,665,247)	(9,856,480)
Gross profit	3,317,733	3,469,973
Other income	471,255	460,497
	3,788,988	3,930,470
EXPENSES		
General and Administration	579,408	523,374
Finance charges	5,948	7,138
	585,356	530,512
Profit before taxation	3,203,632	3,399,958
Taxation	(480,139)	(509,758)
Net profit and total comprehensive income for the year	2,723,493	2,890,200

The complete accounts in either Arabic or English will be delivered to any shareholder within 7 days of receipt of the request. Such request may be sent to the Board Secretary, Sahara Hospitality Co. (S.A.O.G.), P.O.Box: 311, Postal Code: 100, Muscat.

WORLD

SHORT TAKES



Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni

ITALY RECALLS SWISS ENVOY OVER SUSPECT RELEASE

ROME: Italy formally protested on Saturday the release on bail of the owner of a Swiss club engulfed in a deadly New Year’s Day fire and recalled its ambassador to Switzerland, as the court’s decision came under criticism in both countries. Jacques Moretti and his wife Jessica are under investigation for negligent homicide and other crimes linked to the blaze that killed 40 people and injured more than 100, many of them teenagers. Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni overnight called Moretti’s release “an affront to the memory of the victims... and an insult to their families”. Six of those killed in the blaze were Italian as were 10 of the injured. A government statement on Saturday said Meloni and Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani instructed Italy’s ambassador to immediately contact Beatrice Pilloud, the chief prosecutor in Switzerland’s Valais canton, to convey Italy’s “strong indignation” over Moretti’s release. It added that the court had taken the decision despite the seriousness of the alleged crime, the risk of flight and the possibility of evidence being compromised. — AFP

MACRON VOWS TO SPEED UP SOCIAL MEDIA BAN



French President Emmanuel Macron

PARIS: French President Emmanuel Macron on Saturday vowed to speed up the legislative process for a social media ban on under-15s, with the goal of enacting it in September this year. “I have asked the government to activate the accelerated procedure so it can go as quickly as possible,” he said in a self-recorded video broadcast on BFM Television. He said he wanted it to be “applied from the start of the next school year”, in September. French lawmakers have been debating the bill for such a ban, following in the footsteps of Australia, which last month became the first country to prohibit children under the age of 16 using such popular — and addictive — platforms as Instagram, TikTok and YouTube. Their draft legislation is to be submitted to the French parliament on Monday. Macron said that, on top of a ban on children under 15 accessing social media, he also backed a ban on students having on mobile phones in schools. “The brains of our children and our adolescents are not for sale or for manipulating, not by US platforms, not by Chinese algorithms,” the president said. — AFP

EUROPE AND INDIA SEEK CLOSER TIES WITH ‘MOTHER OF ALL DEALS’

BRUSSELS: India and Europe hope to strike the “mother of all deals” when EU chiefs meet Prime Minister Narendra Modi in New Delhi next week, as the two economic behemoths seek to forge closer ties. Facing challenges from China and the United States, India and the European Union have been negotiating a massive free trade pact — and talks, first launched about two decades ago, are nearing the finishing line. “We are on the cusp of a historic trade agreement,” European

Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said this week. Von der Leyen and European Council president Antonio Costa will attend Republic Day celebrations on Monday before an EU-India summit on Tuesday, where they hope to shake hands on the accord. Securing a pact described by India’s Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal as “the mother of all deals”, would be a major win for Brussels and New Delhi as both seek to open up new markets. “The EU and India are moving closer together

at the time when the rules-based international order is under unprecedented pressure through wars, coercion and economic fragmentation,” the EU’s top diplomat, Kaja Kallas said. “The EU eyes the Indian market and aims to steer a rising power like India away from Russia, while India seeks to diversify its partnerships, doubling down on its strategy of multi-alignment at a time when its relations with the US have taken a downward turn,” he said. — AFP

Russian air strikes pound Ukraine amid peace talks

UKRAINIAN and Russian negotiators began a second day of US-brokered talks in Abu Dhabi on Saturday after an overnight wave of Russian air strikes that knocked out power for millions of people amid freezing winter temperatures. The strikes by hundreds of Russian drones and missiles on Kyiv and Ukraine’s second largest city Kharkiv prompted Foreign Minister Andrii Sybiha - who was not present at the talks - to accuse Russian President Vladimir Putin of acting “cynically”. “This... attack once again proves that Putin’s place is not at (US President Donald Trump’s) Board of Peace, but in the dock of the special tribunal,” Sybiha wrote on X.

A source familiar with the situation said that the talks - which Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said were the first trilateral meetings under the US-mediated peace process - had resumed on Saturday morning. Kyiv is under mounting Trump administration pressure to make concessions to reach a peace deal in the war triggered by Russia’s attack in February 2022. Zelensky had said on Friday that it was too early to draw conclusions from the first day of meetings in Abu Dhabi, and he had urged Russia to show it was ready to end the war. Senior representatives from Ukraine’s armed forces and military intelligence were due to join the talks. Although US peace envoy Steve Witkoff struck an upbeat tone at the annual World Economic Forum in



Firefighters work at the site of a Russian drone and missile strike, in Kyiv. — Reuters

The strikes by hundreds of Russian drones and missiles on Kyiv and Ukraine’s second largest city Kharkiv prompted Foreign Minister Andrii Sybiha to accuse Russian President Vladimir Putin of acting “cynically”

Davos this week, saying that only one sticking point remained in the talks, Russian officials have sounded more sceptical. Ahead of the discussions, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said on Friday Russia had not dropped its insistence on Ukraine yielding all of its eastern area of Donbas, Ukraine’s industrial heartland, grouping the regions of Donetsk and Luhansk. Putin’s demand that Ukraine surrender the 20% it still holds of Donetsk — about 5,000 sq km — has proven a major stumbling block to any deal. Zelensky refuses to give up land that Russia has not been able to capture in four years of grinding, attritional warfare. Polls show little appetite among Ukrainians for any territorial

concessions. Russia says it wants a diplomatic solution but will keep working to achieve its goals by military means as long as a negotiated solution remains elusive. Rustem Umerov, Secretary of Ukraine’s National Security and Defence Council and the head of its delegation, said in a statement late on Friday that the first day of talks had discussed parameters for ending the war and the “further logic of the negotiation process.” Ukraine’s air force said Russia had launched 375 drones and 21 missiles in the overnight salvo, which once again targeted energy infrastructure, knocking out power and heat for large parts of Kyiv, the capital. At least one person was killed and 23 injured. Before Saturday’s bombardment, Kyiv had already endured two mass overnight attacks since the New Year that knocked out power and heating to hundreds of residential buildings. Ukraine’s deputy prime minister said on Saturday that 800,000 people in Kyiv, where temperatures were around -10 Celsius, had been left without power after the latest Russian assault. Zelensky said on Saturday that Russia’s heavy overnight strikes showed that agreements on further air defence support made with Trump in Davos this week must be “fully implemented”. Both leaders described their talks on the sidelines of the Davos gathering of the world’s political and business elite on Thursday as positive but declined to provide further details. — Reuters

SNOW, HEAVY RAIN KILL 61 IN AFGHANISTAN

KABUL: Snow and heavy rain have killed 61 people in Afghanistan in the past three days, disaster officials said on Saturday, with a major road and power also cut in several provinces. The deaths occurred mainly in central and northern provinces, according to a map released by Afghanistan’s disaster management authority (ANDMA). The “initial figures of casualties and destruction” also include 110 injured people and 458 houses that were either partially or fully destroyed, ANDMA said. A total of 360 families were affected, said a spokesman who asked people in a video message to avoid unnecessary travel on snowy roads. The spokesman also said that most of the casualties were caused by roof collapses and avalanches, while many also died from frostbite in sub-zero temperatures. The emergency department in the southern province of Kandahar said six children were killed when the roof of their home collapsed in strong winds and heavy rain. — AFP

DISASTROUS FLOODS

Indonesia landslide kills 8, over 80 missing



A landslide killed at least eight people and left more than 80 missing on Indonesia’s main island of Java. Triggered by heavy rainfall, it struck villages in Java’s West Bandung region in the early hours and buried residential areas. West Bandung’s mayor Jeje Ritchie Ismail told reporters that the military, police and volunteers were assisting in the search. However, he warned the terrain was extremely difficult and the ground remained unstable. — AFP

FACING ILLEGAL MIGRATION

Greece to toughen punishment for trafficking



Greece’s migration ministry said it had submitted a new bill to parliament aimed at toughening penalties for migrant trafficking, including life sentences. “Penalties for the illegal trafficking of migrants will be toughened at all levels,” the ministry said in a statement. Sentences of up to life imprisonment are envisaged for smugglers, and migrants convicted of offences may be directly expelled. 56 NGOs called for the immediate withdrawal of several articles. — AFP

POLITICAL UNREST

Venezuela says over 600 prisoners released



Venezuela’s interim president Delcy Rodriguez said that over 600 inmates have been released, far more than estimated by rights groups, who are demanding the liberation of all political prisoners. The government undertook to release a “large number” of the hundreds of opponents. Rodriguez said 626 prisoners have been released since December and said she would ask the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights to verify the number. — AFP

What Europe learned from the Greenland crisis



STEVEN ERLANGER

The author is the chief diplomatic correspondent, covering Europe

AS if the Europeans needed another wake-up call about the contempt in which President Donald Trump holds them, his mocking antipathy at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, was a good reminder. But Davos presented another lesson to Europe. Standing together on the principle of territorial integrity and sovereignty, while warning of severe economic countermeasures, the Europeans achieved an apparent retreat from Trump over Greenland.

Sovereignty and the inviolability of borders are fundamental tenets of the European project, built out of the ruins of World War II, when the aggressive imperialism of big powers led to millions of deaths. The lesson was clear: Defending borders collectively is the only way small states are protected from the predations of larger ones.

Now Europe finds itself again confronted by big powers with expansionist goals. Russia continues its effort to conquer Ukraine, whose sovereignty it had recognised in numerous treaties. And the United States has been demanding that Denmark, an EU and Nato ally, hand over Greenland. But preserving territorial integrity and sovereignty is the red line, expressed both in the European Union, a collective of 27 nations, and in Nato, a military alliance of 32 nations. It can seem quixotic in the current world to be defending international law, the UN Charter and the Helsinki Accords, which all insist on the inviolability of borders, but in a sense, that is Europe's fate.

"That borders can be challenged by force,

and the threat of force threatens the core tenets of European security and aspirations since the end of World War II," said Ian Lesser, the head of the Brussels office of the German Marshall Fund. "The war in Ukraine brought it to the fore," he continued, "but the idea that the United States, the principal guarantor of European security, should be challenging the concept of sovereignty and territorial integrity is a serious concern."

Mark Leonard, the director of the European Council on Foreign Relations, argued that the Continent has been rediscovering the importance of sovereignty in the face of challenges from the "great powers" of China, Russia and the United States. "Most of European history since World War II has been about taming sovereignty and pooling it" in multilateral institutions, he said. But the new world is "fundamentally changing the nature of the EU," he said.

Prime Minister Mark Carney of Canada won praise for a speech in Davos in which he said that the old international order was dead. "Middle powers" like Canada and Europe, he said, must form new alliances as the great powers abandon postwar international norms and treaties and rely instead on "economic integration as weapons, tariffs as leverage, financial infrastructure as coercion, supply chains as vulnerabilities to be exploited." There is a rupture in the old order, Carney said: "When the rules no longer protect you, you must protect yourself."

Europeans have resisted Trump's demands that Ukraine hand over to Russia territory that Moscow has not conquered. And the

Sovereignty and the inviolability of borders are fundamental tenets of the European project, built out of the ruins of World War II, when the aggressive imperialism of big powers led to millions of deaths

Europeans have insisted that even if a peace deal left Russian troops occupying 20% of Ukraine, the occupation would never be recognised as permanent, not even in Crimea. The Europeans have come up with more money and military aid for Ukraine than the United States, and they have largely picked up the slack after Trump cut off funding for Ukraine. They recently agreed to another 90 billion euros (\$106 billion) in economic and military aid to Kyiv.

The second Trump presidency has taught Europe that its initial policy of flattering Trump has been a failure, and that standing up for core principles is vital, said a senior European official, speaking anonymously given the sensitivity of the US-European relationship. In essence, he agreed, Europe has learned that a little flattery is fine, so long as you have a gun in your pocket.

That was the case with Denmark and Greenland. For many weeks, European leaders and officials hoped that Trump would back down over his intention to take Greenland "the easy way" or "the hard way." Instead, he threatened even more punitive tariffs. So the European Union scheduled an emergency summit meeting right after Davos.

After the EU summit meeting early on Friday, Ursula von der Leyen, the president of the European Commission, the bloc's executive arm, said the latest tariff threats offered a tactical lesson for dealing with the United States. "Firmness, outreach, preparedness and unity" had been effective, she said. "So, going forward we should maintain this very approach."

Rallies flood Minneapolis streets to protest ICE, businesses close



CHRIS HIPPENSTEEL

The writer is a reporter for The New York Times

THOUSANDS of protesters shut down parts of Minneapolis and St. Paul as hundreds of businesses closed their doors, and workers and students stayed home to demand an end to the sweeping immigration crackdown that has roiled the Twin Cities for weeks. The action on Friday, which unfolded in subzero temperatures, was the most widespread and organised demonstration since federal agents arrived in Minneapolis more than six weeks ago. It was aimed at pressuring the federal government to pull thousands of its agents from the streets.

The day of protests followed weeks of clashes between Minnesotans and federal agents, mostly in the Minneapolis and St. Paul areas. The immigration operation, which started late last year, has led to some 3,000 arrests, at least two shootings in Minneapolis and chaotic scenes on the streets. Calls for the ouster of federal agents have grown from residents and local officials, especially after a US Immigration and Customs Enforcement agent fatally shot Renee Good, an American citizen, in Minneapolis on January 7. Protesters and state officials have also filed lawsuits to restrict the agents' conduct and to block the surge.

The largest of the protests on Friday descended on downtown Minneapolis from late afternoon into the early evening, as thousands marched to the Target Center, the home arena of the state's two professional basketball teams. Protesters carried signs and chanted over and over for ICE to leave the city. Those in the crowd cited different indignities that drove them to the streets.

"I got emotional," said Butchy Austin, a founder of Brass Solidarity, a racial justice activist street band, as he looked at the crowd of thousands. "There's resistance and a level of fight, but it's a fight stemming from love for our neighbours." Austin said the group, which formed after the murder of George Floyd in 2020, came out to the Target Center on Friday afternoon because they have seen "how music can bring resistance and joy, and a message of hope and change."

Randi Weingarten, president of the American Federation of Teachers, delivered an impassioned speech at the Target Center, praising Minnesotans for taking a day away from their typical activities to make their voices heard. "We are meeting ICE violence with nonviolence," she said.

Hundreds demonstrated at the Minneapolis-

The day of protests followed weeks of clashes between Minnesotans and federal agents, mostly in the Minneapolis and St. Paul areas. The immigration operation, which started late last year, has led to some 3,000 arrests, at least two shootings in Minneapolis and chaotic scenes on the streets



Demonstrators march to protest the Trump administration's immigration crackdown in Minneapolis.

St. Paul Airport earlier on Friday, some from as far away as New York, flitting in and out of one of its terminals to stay warm. Inside, protesters shared hot chocolate and hand warmers, and compared the layers of clothes they used to brave the bitter cold. After warming up enough to face the elements, they returned to the sidewalk, while police officers warned them to stay out of the street or they would face arrest.

At one point, a group of clergy stepped off the curb, knelt on the pavement and began to pray. "Everybody's got a right to live and before this campaign fails, we'll all go down to jail," they sang. Protesters, many wearing snowsuits and ski goggles, cheered as police arrested a few dozen of the clergy and loaded them onto buses.

The protests on Friday were part of a general strike organised by residents, faith leaders and labour unions. The purpose, according to organisers, was to demonstrate the resolve of residents.

In neighbourhoods around Minneapolis, many businesses and shops sat empty, with some posting signs in their windows expressing solidarity. In St. Paul, Roots Roasting had an orange sign announcing their closing. "General strike," it read. "No work, no school, no shopping, ICE out." Down the street, Spyhouse Coffee, part of a local chain, had a handwritten sign announcing its closure to "stand in solidarity with our community and other businesses." The same was true for just

about every coffee mainstay in the Twin Cities.

Word of Friday's strike and protests spread "like a wildfire" in the preceding days, said Jake Anderson, an executive board member with the St. Paul Federation of Educators, a union representing teachers and educational support professionals. Hundreds of businesses, mostly in Minneapolis and St. Paul, said they would close. On Friday, it seemed as if many followed through on that promise.

On Thursday, Vice-President JD Vance said the Trump administration wanted to "turn down the temperature" in Minneapolis. Vance, who said he had travelled to the city to understand the tensions, called protesters "far-left agitators" who had harassed federal agents. He also said a "failure of cooperation" by state and local officials was to blame for the situation getting "out of hand."

In an email on Thursday, a Department of Homeland Security official called the strike "beyond insane," asking, "Why would these labour bosses not want these public safety threats out of their communities?" The official then included a list of immigrants lacking legal status who had apparently been convicted of serious crimes. Minnesota has 17 Fortune 500 companies. But they have not spoken publicly about the federal immigration activity, and none of Minnesota's 15 biggest employers, including Target, UnitedHealth Group and Xcel Energy, responded to requests for comment this week.



MAIA COLEMAN

The writer is reporting criminal justice



TALYA MINSBERG

The writer is reporting breaking, developing news

OPINION

Why we like some people at our first meeting



DR HAMED
AL SINAWI

The writer is a senior consultant psychiatrist at SQU Hospital

LAST weekend, I had a virtual friend visiting from abroad, accompanied by his friend “let’s call him Mr A” whom I had never met before. After being introduced, Mr A and I started talking as if we had known each other for years. Our conversation moved smoothly from shared interests to places we had visited, and even ranting about social media influencers who don’t seem to influence anyone. By the end of the evening, I felt certain that Mr A and I would become friends. We simply had so much in common.

Most of us have experienced this instant connection. One shared joke, a familiar hobby, or even a mutual irritation can make a stranger feel strangely familiar. Psychologists call this the similarity – attraction effect – our natural tendency to like people who resemble us in some way. This can be understood through three ideas: proximity, resonance and similarity.

Proximity suggests that we tend to connect with people we encounter often, even by chance. Resonance refers to that feeling of being “on the same wave length,” when conversation flows effortlessly. Similarity, perhaps the strongest factor, describes

sharing elements of background or identity – for example, two people who both studied abroad and slip naturally between Arabic and English because it feels easier to express certain ideas that way.

A recent study from Boston University offers a deeper explanation for why these fast friendships form – and why we sometimes distance ourselves from people just as quickly. Researchers propose a concept called self-essentialist reasoning, the belief that each of us has a deep inner “core” that defines our values, interests and personality. When we see ourselves this way, we often assume that others are shaped by similar inner qualities.

The study found that when people believe in this inner essence, they are more likely to think that a single shared interest reflects a deeper similarity. If someone enjoys the same music, shares the same opinion, or even guesses the same number of dots on a page, we may subconsciously conclude, “They’re like me.” This sparks trust, warmth and an immediate sense of connection.

The reverse is also true. If someone disagrees with us – about politics, a book, a movie, or even a trivial preference – we may quickly assume they are fundamentally

Proximity is when you are sharing the same space and are open to building a connection with people around you. This usually happens when you meet people

different, incompatible, or unlikable. What’s more surprising is that the effect held even when the similarity was meaningless. In one experiment, participants were simply asked to estimate how many blue dots appeared on a screen. Even in this trivial task, people who believed in an inner essence felt more connected to someone whose estimate matched theirs.

This research suggests that our instinctive judgements – positive or negative – may be based on very little information. A single comment, shared hobby, or moment of disagreement can lead us to sweeping assumptions about who someone is at their core. In a world where polarisation and quick judgements are becoming more common, this serves as an important reminder. Shared interests help us bond, but they do not define the entirety of a person. And one disagreement does not reveal someone’s whole worldview.

Perhaps the next time we meet someone who isn’t “like us,” we can pause before rushing to conclusions. First impressions matter – but they are not the whole story. People are far more complex, layered and surprising than a single conversation – or a single similarity – can ever reveal.

PLASTICS EVERYWHERE, AND THE MYTH THAT MADE IT POSSIBLE

ISSAM AHMED

If there’s one material that defines modern life more than any other, it’s plastic: present from the moment we’re born in newborn stool, in product packaging, in the soil beneath our feet and the air we breathe.

Hard as it is to imagine, it wasn’t always thus – and doesn’t have to remain this way, argues Judith Enck in her new book, “The Problem with Plastics.” “Half of all plastic ever produced was since 2007,” the year the iPhone debuted, she said in an interview.

“We have a fighting chance to reduce plastics because it’s very much a contemporary issue.” Enck, a former senior environment official under Barack Obama, is clear-eyed about the challenges posed by the “rabidly anti-environmental” President Donald Trump.

Last year, the administration helped derail a global plastics treaty and reversed a phase-out of single-use plastics in national parks.

Nevertheless, she sees momentum building at the state and local level – hailing, for example, New Jersey’s “Skip the Stuff” law enacted this week, which requires restaurants to provide single-use cutlery only upon request, a measure shown to significantly reduce waste.

Enck’s book traces the history of plastic: from its earliest incarnation in 1909, when Belgian chemist Leo Baekeland invented Bakelite, through the “myth” of plastic recycling promoted by industry from the mid-20th century onward.

Along the way, Enck argues that responsibility for the crisis has been systematically shifted onto consumers, even as production continues to soar.

“In the United States, only five to six per cent of plastics actually get recycled,” she notes. Unlike metal, paper or glass, consumer plastics are made up of thousands of different types, or polymers, making large-scale recycling unviable.

Early advertising campaigns helped popularise terms like “litterbug,” while today the focus has shifted to “chemical recycling,” promoted by industry as a way to break plastics down into their basic building blocks.

Dig deeper, though, and this too is a “false solution,” Enck said: a report by the Beyond Plastics nonprofit she leads found just 11 such facilities handling about one per cent of US plastic waste – three of which have since shut down.

Around 33 billion pounds of plastic enter the ocean every year, “the equivalent of two large garbage trucks filled with plastic being dumped into the ocean every minute.” — AFP

Happiness does not come from wealth or success



KARIM
EASTERBROOK

The writer is a former Cambridge School Principal and Author



When I travel into the interior of Oman and meet families living simpler lives, I see this clearly. They have chosen not to join the modern rat race and they appear happier because of it.

I grew up as a small boy in England, living in a caravan in the Oxfordshire countryside. By modern standards, many would assume this was a deprived childhood. There was no running water, no electricity, no indoor toilet or shower and the space was cramped, shared with my mother, sisters and brother.

To many people today, such a life might seem unacceptable. Yet that judgement often reflects their own biases and upbringing rather than the lived reality of the child. We collected water from a public tap shared by dozens of other caravan families and used communal outdoor toilets. We, children, bathed one after the other in a long metal container with tepid water heated by the use of a gas bottle - our only source of power.

There was no television, no telephone and none of the digital distractions that now dominate daily life. I had no awareness of global anxieties or too rapid AI or technological developments. Instead, my world revolved around friends from neighbouring caravans, walking to school together, laughing and enjoying free school meals. Evenings and weekends were spent wandering the surrounding fields and woods with my small dog.

Nature became my classroom. I learned to recognise birds, collected newts, snakes and lizards and felt a freedom that is rare today. My mother worked as a cleaner and money was always tight, but I never felt deprived. We ate vegetables grown in our garden and eggs from our chickens. Fast food did not exist for us and happiness was not something to be bought. My clothes were hand-me-downs or carefully repaired, made to last rather than impress. Those years were, without question, the happiest of my life. Much of what followed was less

One of the greatest and most overlooked sources of happiness is kindness itself. Being compassionate towards others has a profound effect on your own sense of peace.

so. I came to believe that material success would bring fulfilment: large houses, fine food, expensive cars and worldly success. That belief shaped many of my choices and, in hindsight, it was a mistake.

Today I live a comfortable life. I have a wonderful Omani wife and children of whom I am immensely proud. Because of my success in business, my children never experienced the hardships I did. They attended private schools, grew up in comfortable homes in England and speak with accents far removed from my working-class roots. Guided largely by their mother’s values and faith, which I also embraced, they are kind, compassionate people. They belong to both England and Oman and are close to family in each. They spend time in Oman regularly and recognise, as I do, that it is one of the friendliest and most civilised places in the world in terms of how people treat one another.

If I have passed anything meaningful on to them, I hope it

is the understanding that money can be a useful servant but a poor master. Happiness, in my experience, does not come from the pursuit of wealth or what is commonly called success. Not having to worry about money can certainly enhance life, especially later on. It brings security, comfort and access to good healthcare. But it should never be mistaken for the basis of lasting happiness. The endless pursuit of wealth is far more likely to leave you restless and dissatisfied. True contentment comes from good health, strong family relationships and friendships built on mutual support.

One of the greatest and most overlooked sources of happiness is kindness itself. Being compassionate towards others has a profound effect on your own sense of peace. When I travel into the interior of Oman and meet families living simpler, less materialistic lives, I see this clearly. They have chosen not to join the modern rat race and they appear happier because of it.

Shape your teen’s lives... take their phones away!



RAY PETERSEN

The writer is a media consultant

HAVING always enjoyed reading, I consider myself incredibly fortunate, as it has allowed me to pursue careers in journalism and education, and specifically instruction, teaching and lecturing. The burgeoning online news, literature and social media sector has certainly not done me, or I guess anyone else with an enthusiasm for reading, any harm either. In fact, it has probably made reading itself, on any topic, easier to access and more affordable. Book platforms such as Kindle are, by comparison with buying books, much less expensive, and much more convenient than having to go to bookshops, and even libraries.

The online ‘library’ is huge! Kindle is huge, and I’m not touting for it, but the diversity of subjects, fiction and non-fiction means every genre can be accessed, and when combined with the myriads of online study resources, it means analysis of exam topic novels and poetry is an absolute ‘walk in the park.’

Whether it’s a classic like ‘MacBeth,’ or a new age novel like ‘Boys Don’t Cry,’ the characters, themes, key moments and language are all examined to the ‘nth’ degree, and on so many different levels, that understanding that literature is no longer something likely to hurt your head, but something you can learn, understand and

know, much more easily than in the past.

All it needs is for the student to do the work. I’ve worked through the online process with so many students who, though having read the story, heard someone read it aloud, and having completed more than enough Q&A and gap fill sheets should know all there is on the subject, still cannot connect the dots, and KNOW the story. Then, only weeks or days out from the exams, they realise they don’t know, because they never committed to it, and then ‘freak out.’

Their juvenile and teen distractions would have been unimportant, yet still occupied their thoughts at the time. Teenage angst is the most distracting. Whether someone ‘likes’ them or not, what someone else had said about them, which is always lies or part truths. Maybe what they will be doing tonight, tomorrow, or at the weekend, about their football team, or even what they will have for lunch.

It’s meaningless, yet harmful, because they haven’t learned to switch on and off their attention mode at the right times. We can blame the pandemic, the parents, teachers, schools, uniforms, buses, lunches, global warming, the weather, anything at all, but they will make the same mistakes when it comes to study and learning.

So fixes are required, because you can’t learn for them, and even if they work in

Their juvenile and teen distractions would have been unimportant yet still occupied their thoughts at the time. Teenage angst is the most distracting

class, they must still layer that learning outside the class. Call it homework, revision, self-study, whatever, they must develop an understanding of their learning. They must know and understand ‘stuff,’ and they can’t discipline themselves enough to do so effectively, with their phones distracting them. So, parents... take their phones away.

It’s a bit weird really, but done properly, that’s when personality takes over, and they form opinions, contribute their own ‘two cents worth’ instead of regurgitating someone else’s opinion, and that’s when you’ve got them! In drawing their own conclusions, even small ones, you will have awakened critical thinking, the most precious of all the educational skills their future needs, and certainly the most effective life and work skill they can ever know.

Acknowledged, even rewarded appropriately, critical thinking grows exponentially, and should be huge in terms of learning and their growth. It is the primary quality in learning that teachers search for, elusive as it is. However, in this highly technological age, parents, you are much better placed to work the oracle than teachers, because you can TAKE THEIR PHONES AWAY while they study...

It’s not a fun discussion to have, but will probably, positively, shape their lives... So now, it’s up to you.

‘JOBS, JOBS, JOBS’ THE AI MANTRA IN DAVOS

JEFFREY DASTIN

Biting cold, political tensions and doubts about artificial intelligence did nothing to curb the enthusiasm of business leaders in Davos over technology’s ability to create jobs.

Top executives at the World Economic Forum’s annual meeting said that while jobs would disappear, new ones would spring up, with two saying that AI would be used as an excuse by companies which were planning layoffs anyway.

Flag bearers of AI’s trillion-dollar expansion, including chip titan Jensen Huang, said the technology heralded higher pay and more jobs for plumbers, electricians and steelworkers.

“Energy is creating jobs. Chips industry is creating jobs. The infrastructure layer is creating jobs,” the Nvidia CEO told the meeting in the Swiss mountain resort. “Jobs, jobs, jobs,” added Huang.

That optimism contrasted with a potential trade row that had reverberated through Davos until US President Donald Trump struck a deal to call off tariffs and avert a security decoupling with Europe over Greenland. But scepticism over AI simmered below the surface. Delegates discussed how chatbots could lead consumers to psychosis and suicide, while labour union leaders questioned the cost of recent technology gains.

“AI is being sold as a productivity tool, which often means doing more with fewer workers,” said Christy Hoffman, general secretary of the 20-million-strong UNI Global Union.

Matthew Prince, CEO of Internet security company Cloudflare, said during an interview with Reuters that AI would keep advancing and that scrappy developers could overcome market or funding blips. Prince, who said he sticks to six-minute chair-lift meetings rather than windowless conference rooms during Davos, warned that AI could become so dominant in the future that small businesses are eviscerated while autonomous agents handle consumers’ shopping requests. In recent years, businesses have griped about how to go beyond ill-fated AI pilots and capitalise on an AI craze started by ChatGPT in 2022.

Rob Thomas, IBM’s chief commercial officer, said AI has reached a stage where there can be a return on investment. “You can truly start to automate tasks and business processes,” he said.

However, PwC said only one in eight CEOs recently surveyed by the advisory firm believed AI was lowering costs and delivering more elusive revenue. And questions remain about what business model can make up for AI’s enormous expenses. Cathinka Wahlstrom, chief commercial officer at BNY, said AI has paid off by shortening the amount of research time for onboarding a new client from two days to 10 minutes.

And in the past month and a half, projects that networking company Cisco had viewed as too tedious to take on — requiring 19 man-years of work — were now getting done in a couple of weeks, its President Jeetu Patel said. “The way in which we code actually was rethought,” said Patel, adding that software developers should embrace AI not just for productivity but to “be relevant” in the long run. — Reuters

President Trump has abandoned the world

ON January 27, US President Donald Trump’s second withdrawal from the Paris climate agreement will finally take effect.

This follows his announcement on January 7 that the United States would leave an additional 66 international organisations, including 31 United Nations entities and 35 non-UN bodies, now deemed unacceptable to the administration.

Never has a national leader so comprehensively severed ties with the international community in a single month. Nor has a leader blatantly declared, “I don’t need international law,” as Trump did in an interview with the New York Times a few weeks ago. He went on to assert that he alone would be the arbiter of when such constraints apply to the US, and that his power would be limited only by his “own morality.”

Greenland has rightly become a focus of concern over US threats to seize it. But this overlooks the fact that lives are already being lost because of America’s brutality. Over the past year, the Trump administration has slashed funding for global humanitarian assistance and health programmes, which, according to the Center for Global Development, will likely result in roughly one million additional deaths per year. A study by the Barcelona Institute for Global Health and other organisations found that US and European aid cuts could together cause up to 22.6 million additional deaths – including 5.4 million children under the age of five – in developing countries by 2030. Given that recent developments imply further deep cuts in international support, these figures will surely need to be revised upward.

Of course, we were already aware that the administration would target global institutions like Unesco, the World Health Organization, the UN Refugee Agency, the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, and the UN Population Fund (UNFPA). But now we know that America will become the first country to abandon the very framework for reaching



US President Donald Trump attends a reception with business leaders during the 56th annual World Economic Forum (WEF), in Davos, Switzerland, on Wednesday. — Reuters



GORDON BROWN

The writer is a former prime minister of the United Kingdom, is World Health Organisation Ambassador for Global Health Financing

agreements on climate change, the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, which it will leave one year from now.

At the same time, no one should doubt that the remit of Trump’s new Board of Peace will have major implications. This attempt to provide an alternative to the UN’s peacemaking and peacekeeping efforts, which have persistently been underfunded, represents a momentous shift in longstanding US policy. The attack on agencies committed to the international rule of law from which America has long benefited – including the International Law Commission, the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe, the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, and the International Institute for Justice and the Rule of Law – augurs badly for the legality of future US actions. It also seems far removed from the official explanation that the goal is to cut waste and counter the “woke” agenda. Leaving the agencies that support women’s equality and the protection of girls’ and women’s rights can hardly be justified by labelling them “ideological programmes” at odds with US sovereignty, as the official statement does. One has to ask how an agency like UN Women can be considered “unnecessary” and “wasteful” when it has helped more than 80 countries

deliver gender-responsive budgets, and when its sister agency, UNFPA, supports maternal health.

And the decision to withdraw from entities within the UN system that are focused on supporting girls and women who are victims of civil wars, climate change, and other crises veers into vindictiveness. These include Education Cannot Wait (which I used to chair), a fund that provides access to education to millions of refugee and displaced children. If these organisations are not adequately funded, some of the world’s most vulnerable women and girls will be at a heightened risk of violence and maternal mortality.

“It is no longer acceptable to be sending these institutions the blood, sweat, and treasure of the American people, with little to nothing to show for it,” explained US Secretary of State Marco Rubio. But to claim that American citizens are the ones suffering at the hands of agencies focused on alleviating girls’ and women’s suffering in low-income countries is wholly disingenuous. It suggests that the Declaration of Independence’s recognition of “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness” as inalienable rights still applies only to men.

These agencies – OSRSG-SVC and UN Women – fund shelters, offer legal aid and give psychosocial support to vulnerable women. In many of the world’s conflict zones, displaced women will now lose access to safe spaces, at a time when reports show that conflict-related violence increased by 25 per cent from 2023 to 2024.

Viewing child protection as crucial to achieving the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals by 2030, SRSG-VAC works alongside the WHO to improve health outcomes for women and children. Similarly, UNFPA and the WHO fund initiatives that aim to reduce the transmission of HIV. This assault on rights extends beyond protecting women’s safety and health. The education of girls will take one of the biggest and most severe hits. The number of girls out of school – already at 122 million worldwide – will rise, triggering cascading effects.

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SPORTS

SHORT TAKES



A fierce battle at the basket heats up.
PHOTO BY **AMMAR AL MUSAFIR**

ACTION CONTINUES AT MUSCAT 3×3 BASKETBALL TOURNEY

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, JAN 24

The Muscat Nights International 3×3 Basketball Tournament continued at Al Araiimi Boulevard with another day of high-tempo action and competitive matchups, as teams from Oman and across Asia delivered energetic performances that highlighted the speed, intensity and skill of the 3×3 format.

PHILIPPINES SECURE OPENING WIN
The Philippines started their campaign strongly with a convincing 14–6 victory over India’s KSK Ballers. Elijah Calara led the charge with an early scoring burst, helping his side establish control from the opening minutes. Supported by Alarcon and Macaliano, the Filipino team maintained steady offensive pressure and widened the gap despite India’s attempts to fight back, eventually sealing a comfortable win.

OMANI DERBY GOES TO OMAN (B)
In an all-Omani clash, Oman (B) edged Oman (A) 18–12 in a highly competitive derby. Oman (A) made a brighter start through Abdulrahman al Shaaibi, who scored three early points to give his team the advantage. However, Oman (B) responded quickly, with Ahmed al Sinani and Abdulrahman al Maamari leading the comeback. The match turned into an end-to-end battle with both sides trading baskets, but Oman (B) capitalised in the final minute with decisive shots and defensive stops to pull away and secure the victory.

OMAN (A) BOUNCE BACK AGAINST THE PHILIPPINES
Oman (A) quickly regained momentum with an impressive 18–12 win over the Philippines in a balanced encounter. The game remained level for much of the first half before Oman took control midway through, thanks to key contributions from Mishal and Ahmed al Halhali, who converted crucial free throws and fast-break opportunities. The hosts maintained their composure late on to close out the match.

WOMEN’S COMPETITION
In the women’s matches, India’s Mazaa Ahmedabad defeated Oman (A) 14–6 after taking control early with a series of quick baskets. Despite efforts from Shams Al Doha and Roba al Kalbani to reduce the deficit, the Indian side maintained its rhythm and finished strongly. Meanwhile, Iran claimed an 18–10 victory over Oman (B). Led by Elina and Shadi, the Iranian team built an early lead and controlled the tempo throughout the contest. Oman showed determination through Ghadeer, Sarah and Malak, but Iran’s experience proved decisive. Rodrigo Desiatco, Team Manager of the Philippines, praised the tournament’s organisation and the hospitality of the Oman Basketball Association. He described the event as an important opportunity for international competition and affirmed that his team arrived in Muscat aiming to compete seriously and challenge for top positions. He added that 3×3 basketball demands speed, focus and intensity in every possession, making the tournament both challenging and exciting for all participating teams.

Indian players stand out at Muscat Nights Chess

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, JAN 24

THE Muscat Nights International Chess Championship 2026 concluded yesterday evening at the Al Amal Club Hall, after 10 days of high-level competition from January 14 to 24, attracting 270 male and female players from 36 countries. The tournament marked one of the largest and strongest editions in terms of participation and technical standards, with Indian players dominating the podium across multiple categories. The closing ceremony was held under the auspices of Al Muatasim al Siyabi, Deputy Wali of Al Seeb, in the presence of Ahmed al Balushi, Chairman of the Oman Chess Committee, along with officials and chess enthusiasts. Winners of the classical and blitz events were crowned, while outstanding Omani players were also honoured.

OVER 2000 CATEGORY
In the Open Over 2000 rating category, India’s Leon Luke claimed first place with 6.5 points. His compatriot Pranesh M finished second, while Bulgaria’s Arkadi Naiditsch secured third place. Russia’s Mikhail Mozharov placed fourth, followed by India’s Mayank Chakraborty in fifth and Egypt’s Ahmed Adly in sixth. Iran’s Radin Yadegar came seventh, with Türkiye’s Umut Ata Akbas finishing eighth.

UNDER 2000 CATEGORY
In the Under 2000 category, India’s Raghav Srivathsav captured the title with 8 points. The UAE’s Humaidan al Zaabi finished second with 7.5 points, tied with Syria’s Laith Malham in third place. Sudan’s Asim Ali placed fourth, Iraq’s Ali Mahdi fifth, Iran’s Seyed Emadeddin sixth, and Oman’s Salim al Mashikhi seventh.

BLITZ CHAMPIONSHIP
In the Blitz Chess Championship, India’s Mayank Chakraborty secured the title. Egypt’s Adham Fawzy finished second, Pranesh M took third, and Iran’s Radin Yadegar came fourth.

OMANI HONOURS
Among Omani players, Mohammed al Mashikhi won the award for Best Omani



India’s Raghav Srivathsav captured the title.



India’s Leon Luke claimed first.
PHOTOS BY **SALEH AL SHARGI**



Picture shows the overall winners of the competiton.

Player (Over 2000), with Salem al Amri finishing as second-best in the same category. In the Under 2000 division, Mohammed al Riyami was named Best Omani Player, while Ana Al Esayi received the Best Omani Female Player award. Several youth players were also honoured: Anas al Lamki (Under 10), Ilyas al Hinai (Under 12), Said al Riyami (Under 14), and Shihab al Shibli (Under 16). Meanwhile, Ali al Habsi received the tournament’s encouragement award. Ahmed al Balushi, Chairman of the Oman Chess Committee, confirmed that the second edition achieved major organisational and technical success, noting that the growing number of participants and countries reflects the championship’s rising

status across Asia. He added that the diversity of categories and increased prize funds helped attract a strong lineup of international masters. The committee also plans to host more regional and international tournaments across various governorates, with continued support from Muscat Municipality, reinforcing Oman’s position as an emerging sports destination. Champion Leon Luke expressed his delight at winning the title, stating that the competition was tough and decided only in the final rounds, while praising the excellent organisation. Under-2000 champion Raghav Srivathsav described his victory as a special and unforgettable experience, commending the tournament’s professional atmosphere.

Huboob Muscat tops Sohar Endurance Festival standings

RIYADH AL BALUSHI
SUHAR, JAN 24

The rider Mahmoud bin Said al Saeedi clinched first place in the Sohar Endurance Festival Local Endurance Race over 100 kilometres for the 2025-2026 season, organised by the Oman Equestrian and Racing Federation (OERF) with the support of the Office of the Governor of Al Batinah North. Al Saeedi successfully defended his title for the second consecutive year, reaffirming his strong presence on the national endurance racing scene. Al Saeedi secured the gold medal riding Huboob Muscat, owned by Hala bint Mohammed al Turki and trained by Hamad bin Said al Saeedi, after delivering a consistent and composed performance across the four demanding stages of the race. Second place and the silver medal went to rider Yazan bin Khalid al Harthy aboard



Al Saeedi clinches top spot at the Sohar Endurance Festival

Mahasin, owned by Hamad bin Mohammed al Balushi and trained by Mohammed bin Ali al Balushi, while third place and the bronze medal were claimed by Mohammed bin Sulaiman al Balushi riding Atta Allah Jamal, owned and trained by Ali bin Marhoon al Hasani. The competition was hosted in Wilayat Sohar and featured the participation of 49 horses, creating a highly competitive and spirited atmosphere. Prior to the start, all horses

underwent mandatory veterinary inspections to ensure their fitness and readiness, conducted in line with the federation’s strict safety and welfare regulations. The race witnessed intense competition and strong enthusiasm among riders, with several horses eliminated during the course due to technical or veterinary reasons, while a select group successfully completed all four stages. The 100-kilometre race was divided into four

phases: the first and second stages covered 27 kilometres each and were designated the white loop, while the third and fourth stages covered 23 kilometres each and were marked as the yellow loop. Following his victory, Al Saeedi expressed his delight with the achievement, stating: “This win is the result of thorough preparation, discipline, and excellent teamwork with the trainer and the horse’s owner, The competition was strong and winning at the Sohar Festival carries special significance. This title motivates me to continue working hard and striving for further success in upcoming competitions.” At the conclusion of the event, Shaikh Ahmed bin Mohammed bin Shihab al Balushi, Deputy Wali of Sohar, officiated the awards ceremony, honouring the top finishers and recognising the supporting institutions and individuals.

S P O R T S C O M P L E X E S

NATIONAL ASSETS YET
TO BE FULLY UTILISED



ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JAN 24

THE sports infrastructure in Oman extends far beyond match days and tournaments. Stadiums, sports complexes and indoor halls represent strategic national assets with the capacity to generate economic value, create jobs, empower youth and support the growth of sports tourism if fully utilised. Over the past few years, the Sultanate of Oman has made notable progress in developing its sports infrastructure through strategic programmes led by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth. These efforts have resulted in the construction and upgrading of facilities across the governorates, strengthening Oman's sporting landscape.

Official data and statistics show that Oman currently owned 68 government sports facilities, serving sports associations, clubs, committees and both public and private institutions. Sports clubs account for the largest share with 44 facilities, followed by 13 sports centres and 11 sports complexes distributed nationwide. Despite their modern infrastructure and wide geographical coverage, many of these facilities remain underutilised, operating mainly during official competitions and remaining closed or idle for extended periods throughout the year.



As a result, assets designed to serve the community and stimulate economic activity have increasingly become high-cost facilities, generating limited financial or social returns compared to their maintenance and operational expenses.

MISSED OPPORTUNITIES
The *Oman Observer* investigation highlights several practical approaches, including transforming stadiums and sports complexes into multi-purpose venues, opening greater opportunities for private sector and SME investment, adopting public-private partnership (PPP)

models, drawing lessons from successful national experiences in tourism and heritage management, and ensuring long-term financial sustainability without compromising the core sporting mission.

INVESTMENT TO SUSTAIN
Kahflan al Touqi, Economic analyst and writer, affirmed that strategic thinking must begin at an early stage when planning sports infrastructure investment. "Oman possesses high-quality sports complexes capable of generating sustainable income if managed through modern commercial frameworks. Structured cooperation with the private sector,



“Oman’s sports facilities remain largely inactive outside official events, despite the scale of investment involved.”

RETIRED COLONEL ABDULWAHAB BIN ABDULKARIM AL BALUSHI
Training and development expert



“Many sports facilities in Oman are used only seasonally, despite their strong infrastructure.”

ISHAQ AL HASANI
Owner of Blue Wave Swimming Academy



“Transforming these facilities into year-round activity hubs allows them to host exhibitions, events, training camps and educational programmes.”

DR REEMA BINT SADIQ AL SAJWANI
Founder and CEO of Reema Integrated Projects



“Oman possesses high-quality sports complexes capable of generating sustainable income if managed through modern commercial frameworks.”

KAHFLAN AL TOUQI
Economic analyst and writer

including leasing and joint-operation models, can help facilities generate revenue while reducing the financial burden on government entities,” Al Touqi said.

“These revenues can then be reinvested into upgrading and maintaining facilities in line with evolving requirements.”

He cited successful national examples such as Nizwa Fort and Muttrah Fort, which transitioned from direct government management to private-sector operation while maintaining public oversight through revenue-sharing arrangements.

“Similar models can be adapted for sports facilities, particularly indoor halls, starting in Muscat and gradually expanding to other governorates,” he added.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT
Dr Reema bint Sadiq al Sajwani, Founder and CEO of Reema Integrated Projects and a member of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, described the extended use of sports facilities as both economically and socially valuable.

“Transforming these facilities into year-round activity hubs allows them to host exhibitions, events, training camps and educational programmes,” she said. “This not only generates additional income but also supports sports tourism, public health and community well-being.”

She highlighted the importance of summer programmes for students, capacity-building initiatives and women-focused sports activities, noting that such programmes create employment opportunities and enhance community participation.

Dr Al Sajwani also emphasised the need for partnerships with event management companies and private investors, alongside upgrading safety systems and service infrastructure to ensure facilities are equipped for diverse uses.

VALUABLE ASSETS
Retired Colonel Abdulwahab bin Abdulkarim al Balushi, Training and development expert, said that many of Oman's sports facilities remain largely inactive outside official events, despite the scale of investment involved. “Leaving facilities idle leads to high maintenance costs without corresponding financial returns, while missing opportunities to stimulate the local economy,” he said.

According to Al Balushi, many stadiums and complexes are well-located and fully equipped to host community and cultural events, conferences, exhibitions, seasonal markets and youth training camps.

He called for the adoption of proven regional models such as long-term management contracts and investment partnerships, including PPP and BOT models, which have delivered strong results in neighbouring Gulf countries.

UNLOCKING OFF-PEAK POTENTIAL
From an operational perspective, Ishaq al Hasani, Owner of Blue Wave Swimming Academy, said that many sports facilities in Oman are used only seasonally, despite their strong infrastructure.

“Based on my experience in sports training, investing in off-peak hours including mornings, evenings and non-competition periods can generate strong returns while serving wider segments of society, particularly children and youth,” he said.

“There is a need for flexible regulations, specialised operators and incentive-based investment frameworks. Also, it is essential to have a centralised booking and investment platform managed by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth to improve accessibility, transparency and efficiency,” he concluded.

With the above modern management approaches, structured partnerships and phased implementation, Oman's sports facilities can transition from cost centres into sustainable engines of economic and social development by delivering long-term returns for the sports sector and the nation as a whole.

SPORTS

SHORT TAKES



Official draw held at the Muscat Steel office.

EIGHT TEAMS
SET FOR MUSCAT
FOOTBALL LEAGUE

SPORTS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 24

The Muscat Steel Football Co-League 2026, the new edition of the corporate football league organised by Sports Mania in collaboration with the Oman Football Association, will kick off on Monday with the participation of eight teams. The technical committee conducted the official draw at the Muscat Steel offices, the league’s official sponsor, in the presence of representatives from all participating teams, organisers, and committee members. The draw resulted in the following group allocations:

Group A features OQ Exploration & Production (OQEP), Security & Safety Services (SSS), Takaful Oman and Hotpack, while Group B includes Muscat Steel, DHL Express Services, JCDecaux and Dhofar Insurance. The tournament will follow a single round-robin league format within each group, where teams compete against one another to determine standings based on points earned. Following the group stage, teams will be ranked according to points earned, with all teams progressing to the knockout phase. Fixtures will follow a seeded format, with the group leaders facing fourth-placed teams, while second place meets third.

The competition will be played in a 6-a-side format, with five outfield players plus a goalkeeper for each team. All matches will take place at Nawras North Court in the Seeb area. The league is expected to witness strong competition given the teams’ level of preparation. In addition to trophies and medals, the champions and runners-up will receive cash prizes.



Al Attiyah secures record
ninth Oman Rally win

QATAR'S NASSER SALEH AL ATTIYAH stormed to a comfortable victory in the 29th Oman International Rally on Saturday. Partnered by Spanish navigator Candido Carrera who sealed his sixth MERC victory alongside the Qatari Al Attiyah won 10 of the event’s 13 gravel stages on his way to a 92nd career MERC win and a record-breaking ninth success in Oman to follow his sensational sixth Dakar Rally success just seven days ago. His Autotek Škoda Fabia RS suffered three slow punctures during the course of the three-day Sohar-based opening round of the FIA Middle East Rally Championship (MERC) through the awe inspiring Al Hajar Mountains. But time-consuming flat tyres for his Omani rival Abdullah al Rawahi gave Al Attiyah a winning margin of 2min 08.8sec. Al Attiyah said, “Another record. I hope there will be a lot of records. We are very happy to be here in Oman and to help the Middle East Championship and to continue. We did a great race without any mistakes. We saved the tyres on the first two stages this afternoon to push on the Power Stage.” A delighted Carrera added, “I am happy with this win. Every time here we win, only missing in Lebanon last year. The feeling with Nasser is amazing. I loved this rally and I really like these stages. It was a very good week and a good start to the year.” Al Rawahi and his Jordanian co driver Ata Al Hmoud won the third, 11th and 12th stages and pushed Al Attiyah close on several other speed tests, despite the two



Nasser bin Saleh al Attiyah congratulated by Autotek Motorsport’s team principal Ken Skidmore.

time event winner being out of the sport for over half a year through injury. Three costly punctures ruined the Omani’s challenge but he managed to finish as runner-up. Al Rawahi said, “I think we had a good pace. We didn’t have much time to prepare for the new car and, coming back from injury, I wasn’t quite ready. I didn’t want to miss this rally. I’m quite disappointed to lose time with punctures but we can be satisfied with the comeback.” Veteran Nasser bin Khalifa al Atya is attempting to defend his FIA MERC Master Driver title. He and co-driver Ziad Chehab got their campaign off to the perfect start with the final place on the podium in a Motortune Ford Fiesta. Jordan’s Shaker Jweihan and Mustafa Juma finished fourth and dominated the MERC2 category in a Mitsubishi Lancer Evolution

X. They finished 11min 16.5sec in front of the fifth placed Kuwaiti crew of Jassim al Muqahwi and Sulaiman al Helal. The Jordanian pairing of Sami Fleifel and Ibrahim Ali was sixth and second of the registered MERC2 crews. Mohammed al Shorafa and Yazan Juma completed all 13 stages to earn seventh. Hamza Bakhshab returned to action under the Rally2 ruling on Saturday. He and his Irish team mate Lorcan Moore set competitive times on the final day after crashing and breaking the suspension on the Toyota GR Yaris on Friday. The Saudi said, “The goal was to finish and learn as much as possible. It was a nice rally. The stages were amazing. A lot of very high speed and technical, a mix of both. It was a very good opportunity to learn here.” Shadi El Fakih had suffered fuel pump problems on the opening super special, missed the rest of the opening leg and returned with Joseph Kmeid in his Renault Clio to make the finish in a distant ninth. Overnight leader Zakariya al Aufi stopped in the first stage of the morning and his demise lifted Saif al Harthy into the lead in the Oman National Rally. The Can Am Maverick driver held on to earn a flattering winning margin of 7min 07.sec over Salim Al Touqi’s Mitsubishi. Fahad al Balushi rounded off the podium finishers in a Can Am. The event ran with invaluable support from the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, the Al Batinah North Governorate and Toyota Oman. Action in the MERC resumes with the Qatar International Rally on February 4th to 7th.

Seeb, Al Bashayer storm into Ministry Shield Volleyball final

AHMED AL AKAAB
MUSCAT, JAN 24

Seeb and Al Bashayer secured their places in the final of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth Volleyball Shield after overcoming tough semi-final challenges in an action-packed evening at the auxiliary hall of the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher. A strong crowd turnout reflected the high technical quality of the matches and the fierce competition among the four contenders. Seeb booked their spot following a marathon encounter against Majees that was decided in a dramatic tie-break, while Al Bashayer maintained their impressive form with a straight-sets victory over Sohar, setting up a highly anticipated final scheduled for February 23.

A BATTLE DECIDED IN THE FINAL MOMENTS Seeb entered their clash against Majees with clear determination, applying early attacking pressure to take control of the opening exchanges. However, Majees quickly regrouped and capitalised on defensive lapses to turn the tide and claim the first set 25–21. Seeb responded strongly in the second set after tactical adjustments, with Khamis al Jabri’s introduction adding balance and momentum. Strong performances from Saud al Maamari, Adam al Jilboobi, Ismail al Hadi, and Russian professional Bogdan helped restore control as Seeb levelled the match with a 25–19 win. The third set remained tightly contested, with both sides trading



Fierce battle between the players.
Photo by **SALEH AL SHARGI**

points before Seeb’s effective blocking and quick attacks made the difference, securing a 25–22 advantage. Majees, however, refused to back down and dominated the fourth set, exploiting Seeb’s loss of focus to win comfortably 25–15 and force a decisive fifth set. The tie-break delivered peak drama, with the teams exchanging leads until the closing stages. Seeb’s experience proved decisive at the crucial moments, edging the set 18–16 to seal victory and spark celebrations among their supporters. **AL BASHAYER CRUISE IN STRAIGHT SETS** In the other semi-final, Al Bashayer delivered a composed and disciplined performance to

defeat Sohar 3–0, showcasing strong defensive organisation and attacking efficiency. The first set was evenly balanced before Al Bashayer stepped up at key moments to take it 25–20. The second set turned into a fierce battle that extended into extra points, with Al Bashayer’s mental strength and experience carrying them through 35–33. With Sohar showing signs of physical fatigue in the third, Al Bashayer maintained control to close it out 25–21 and complete a clean sweep. With this result, Al Bashayer continue their steady march toward the title and now prepare for a high-stakes final against Seeb — a showdown expected to deliver intensity and quality, given the experience and big-match pedigree of both sides.

BUSINESS



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SHORTTAKES



The increase was driven by a 12.2% rise in narrow money and a 4.1% increase in quasi-money.

BROAD MONEY SUPPLY RISES 6.4%

MUSCAT: Broad money supply in the Sultanate of Oman rose by 6.4 per cent year-on-year to reach RO 26.4 billion by the end of November 2025.

The increase was driven by a 12.2 per cent rise in narrow money and a 4.1 per cent increase in quasi-money, which includes savings and time deposits in Rials Omani, certificates of deposit issued by banks, margin accounts and all foreign currency deposits held by the banking sector.

During the same period, currency in circulation increased by 1.9 per cent, while demand deposits rose by 14.1 per cent.

In terms of interest rates at conventional commercial banks, the weighted average rate on Rial Omani deposits declined from 2.733 per cent in November 2024 to 2.498 per cent in November 2025. — ONA

ISLAMIC BANKING ASSETS IN OMAN REACH RO 9.3 BILLION

MUSCAT: Total assets of Islamic banks and windows in the Sultanate of Oman reached approximately RO 9.3 billion by the end of November 2025, accounting for 19.4 per cent of total banking sector assets. This represents a 12.3 per cent increase compared with the same period in 2024.

Figures released by the Central Bank of Oman showed that total outstanding financing provided by Islamic banks and windows rose by 10.3 per cent to around RO 7.5 billion. Deposits held by Islamic banks and windows also increased by 10.9 per cent, reaching approximately RO 7.3 billion by the end of November 2025. — ONA

Oman named emerging tourism destination

THE Sultanate of Oman has won the Emerging Tourism Destination Award 2026, presented by Spanish travel magazine Viajar, during a ceremony attended by representatives from Spain's travel, tourism and media sectors.

The award recognises destinations that offer distinctive tourism initiatives and innovative experiences that attract the interest of the Spanish travel market.

Oman was selected for the diversity of its tourism offerings, the range of experiences available and its balanced blend of historical heritage, cultural richness and varied landscapes, alongside its strong commitment to a sustainable tourism model that preserves national identity and delivers authentic visitor experiences.

The Sultanate of Oman is also recognised for its diverse and innovative tourism products that cater to different interests and align with global travel trends, positioning it as an ideal destination for relaxation, leisure, cultural and historical exploration, adventure tourism and cruise travel.

Haitham bin Mohammed al Ghassani, Director General of Tourism Promotion at the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, said Oman's selection reflects the suitability of its tourism products and experiences for the Spanish market and their ability to meet visitor expectations.

He attributed the recognition to improving tourism performance indicators, innovative plans targeting different segments and intensified promotional

Oman was selected for the diversity of its tourism offerings, the range of experiences available and its balanced blend of historical heritage, cultural richness and varied landscapes, alongside its strong commitment to a sustainable tourism model that preserves national identity and delivers authentic visitor experiences.



The award recognises destinations that offer distinctive tourism initiatives and innovative experiences that attract the interest of the Spanish travel market.

campaigns highlighting Oman's unique assets and diverse offerings.

He added that the ministry aims to benefit from global best practices and strengthen cooperation to keep pace with developments in international tourism markets. This includes targeting non-traditional markets such as Spain, in collaboration with airlines, travel agencies and tourism partners.

The ministry seeks to provide facilities that create an attractive tourism environment for all visitors, while leveraging the Sultanate of Oman's unique seasonal diversity across governorates to showcase their individual potential. This is complemented by exclusive tourism packages and offers from Omani tourism companies and institutions.

Separately, the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism held

meetings with leading Spanish tourism companies to enhance cooperation and build strategic partnerships to promote Omani tourism products and expand their reach in target markets.

The meetings reviewed a wide range of tourism experiences, specialised programmes and products offered by Oman's tourism sector, highlighting the rich heritage, cultural assets and natural attractions across the governorates. This diversity enhances Oman's competitiveness as a comprehensive tourism destination at both regional and international levels.

The ministry also stressed the importance of partnerships with tourism institutions in supporting promotional efforts and opening new avenues of cooperation with global markets, particularly Europe, to attract more visitors and increase tourism flows sustainably. — ONA

Qatar ramps up investment in Oman's power sector

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, JAN 24

Qatari energy company Nebras Energy has strengthened its footprint in Oman's power sector by acquiring substantial stakes in two major gas-fired projects awarded by Omani authorities over the weekend.

Doha-headquartered Nebras Energy — recently rebranded from Qatar Electricity & Water Company (QEWCo) — holds a 49% stake in the 1,700 MW Misfah Power Project in Muscat Governorate and 30% in the 877 MW Duqm Power Project in Al Wusta Governorate.

Both projects, awarded by Nama Power and Water Procurement Company, Oman's single buyer of electricity and water, are based on combined-cycle gas turbine (CCGT) technology and will be designed to be hydrogen-ready for the first time in Oman's power



Both gas-powered plants at Misfah and Duqm will be designed to be hydrogen-ready for the first time in Oman's power sector (Picture for illustration only).

sector. Total investment across the two schemes is estimated at around RO 1 billion.

In the Misfah Power Project consortium, partners include Emirates Water and Electricity

Company (44%) and Oman-based Bahwan Infrastructure Group (7%).

The Duqm Power Project consortium comprises Emirates Water and Electricity Company (30%), Korean Western Power Co Ltd (35%) and Bahwan Infrastructure Services (5%), alongside Nebras Energy.

With these acquisitions, Nebras Energy's investment portfolio in Oman's power sector has expanded significantly.

Through its wholly owned international investment arm, Nebras Power, the company also owns a 9.9% stake in Amin Renewable Energy Company (AREC), which operates the Project Amin solar plant in Petroleum Development Oman's concession.

Earlier this month, the firm acquired a 9.75% stake in Phoenix Power Company, owner of the 2,000 MW Sur IPP.

Established in 1990, Nebras Energy oversees a diversified asset base of over 10.6 GW of generating capacity and 541 million gallons per day of desalinated water in Qatar.

Its international arm, Nebras Power, manages a portfolio of energy assets across the Middle East, Asia, Africa and Latin America, spanning power generation, renewables and water infrastructure.

Meanwhile, UAE-based Etihad Water and Electricity (EtihadWE) is making its debut in Oman's power sector with significant stakes in the Misfah and Duqm projects.

Wholly owned by the Emirates Investment Authority, EtihadWE has historically focused on the Northern Emirates but has recently expanded into Saudi Arabia and Oman as part of its regional growth strategy.

ADVERTORIALS

SHORTTAKES



Meethaq was selected for this prestigious recognition through a comprehensive consumer survey.

MEETHAQ WINS OMAN’S MOST TRUSTED BRAND AWARD FOR ISLAMIC BANKING

MUSCAT: Meethaq Islamic banking from Bank Muscat has been awarded Oman’s Most Trusted Brand Award in the Islamic Bank category for 2025 by Apex Media.

This accolade was presented at a distinguished ceremony held under the auspices of Pankaj Kanaksi Gokaldas Khimji, Adviser for External Trade and International Cooperation at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion.

The award was received by Ali bin Ahmed al Lawati, Assistant General Manager, Meethaq Corporate Banking, in the presence of representatives from institutions across various sectors.

Meethaq was selected for this prestigious recognition through a comprehensive consumer survey conducted by Apex Media. This survey is carried out annually and serves as a benchmark of public confidence across a wide range of brands. Each year, the award is presented to the winning brands in Oman that the public identifies as the most trusted ones.

Commenting on the achievement, Ali bin Ahmed al Lawati, Assistant General Manager, Meethaq Corporate Banking, said: “We are honoured to receive the prestigious Oman’s Most Trusted Brand Award, a recognition that reflects Meethaq’s leading position and pioneering role in the Islamic Banking sector in the Sultanate of Oman.

At Meethaq Islamic Banking, we remain committed to delivering innovative Sharia-compliant products and services through a strong customer-centric approach, while actively supporting community-driven initiatives across Oman.

This continued focus has contributed to our sustained growth over the past decade. We extend our sincere appreciation to our valued customers for their ongoing trust and confidence in Meethaq’s services and offerings”.

Meethaq Islamic Banking upholds its position as the preferred provider of Sharia-compliant financial solutions in Oman. It offers a comprehensive suite of Sharia-compliant retail, corporate and wholesale banking products and services tailored to meet diverse customer needs.

ABRAJ ENERGY SERVICES WINS OPAL EXCELLENCE AWARD

MUSCAT: Abraj Energy Services, Oman’s leading oil and gas services provider, has been recognised with the Environmental and Sustainable Energy Excellence Award at the 2026 OPAL Best Practice Awards.

The prestigious recognition was presented under the auspices of Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals.

The award recognises Abraj’s pioneering initiative to integrate smart digital guidance tools into drilling operations. By leveraging



real-time data and innovation, the project optimises energy consumption and significantly reduces the environmental footprint of field operations

without compromising safety or performance.

This achievement directly supports Abraj’s commitment to operational excellence and its strategic alignment with Oman Vision 2040 and the national drive towards a sustainable energy future.

Since its deployment in mid-2024, the digital toolset has delivered consistent, measurable reductions in fuel consumption across diverse operating environments.

BYD Seal 7 DM-i advances performance for Oman

BYD continues to elevate the driving experience in the Sultanate of Oman with the BYD Seal 7 DM-i, a premium plug-in hybrid sedan designed to meet the expectations of modern motorists in Oman.

Combining advanced technology, refined comfort and confident performance, the Seal 7 DM-i reflects BYD’s commitment to delivering smart, sustainable mobility without compromising on driving pleasure.

Customers are invited to visit the BYD showroom from January 25 to 27 and take advantage of a limited three-day flash sale featuring irresistible deals.

Engineered with BYD’s latest DM-i 4.0 plug-in hybrid technology, the Seal 7 DM-i delivers a powerful yet efficient drive suited to both city commuting and long-distance travel. With an output of combined 265 horsepower and a 0–100 km/h acceleration time of 7.9 seconds, the sedan offers responsive performance while achieving an impressive driving range of up to 850 km, providing reassurance for journeys across Oman.

The vehicle is powered by a 1.5L Turbo Plug-in Hybrid paired with an advanced EHS system that ensures seamless switching between electric and hybrid modes.



The Seal 7 DM-i delivers a powerful yet efficient drive suited to both city commuting and long-distance travel.

Exceptional efficiency remains a key highlight.

A 7kW onboard charger enables faster charging, improved heat dissipation and enhanced safety during extended drives. Design plays a central role in the Seal 7 DM-i’s appeal. Inspired by the ocean, the interior features ripple-patterned seats that echo the movement and serenity of waves,

creating a calming and contemporary cabin environment.

This distinctive design approach introduces a new sense of elegance to the premium sedan segment. Tailored for today’s connected lifestyles, the Seal 7 DM-i offers a smart and intuitive cockpit equipped with advanced comfort and infotainment features.

Nissan celebrates over 40 years of NISMO

MUSCAT: Nissan continues to celebrate more than four decades of the NISMO brand, with a growing focus on key Middle East markets, particularly across the GCC, including Oman, which remains a key destination for high-performance vehicles.

In September 1984, NISMO was founded in Omori, Tokyo, born from the merger of Nissan’s Advertising Division in Omori and the Special Car Testing Division in Oppama. The goal was to consolidate Nissan’s racing capabilities.

Yasuharu Namba, the brand’s first president, established the philosophy that guides the division to this day: “The technology developed through motorsports needs to be fed back into production cars”.

In 1985, NISMO tuned Nissan’s VG30 turbo engine into a powerful 3.0-litre V-6. This powerplant led to a historic victory



In 1985, NISMO tuned Nissan’s VG30 turbo engine into a powerful 3.0-litre V-6.

at the WEC-JAPAN race — the first-ever win for a Japanese engine and driver (Kazuyoshi Hoshino) in the World Endurance Championship.

By 1986, NISMO entered the 24 Hours of

Le Mans, laying the groundwork for future endurance success. The early 1990s saw NISMO achieve victory at the Spa 24 Hours (1991) and the Bathurst 1000 with the R32 Skyline GT-R. In 1992, the R91 CP secured the overall title at the Daytona 24 Hours.

As the Group C era concluded, NISMO leveraged its expertise to create high-performance components for street cars like the S13 Silvia and R32 GT-R. This era birthed the NISMO 270R and the globally renowned NISMO 400R in 1996.

The 400R featured a heavily modified 2.8-liter RB26DETT engine delivering 400 horsepower. NISMO’s first official volume road car arrived in 2007 with the Fairlady Z Version NISMO. This paved the way for a portfolio of performance vehicles including the GT-R NISMO and the JDM Fairlady Z Version NISMO Type 380RS.

Vodafone Oman launches new BLACK postpaid membership plans

MUSCAT: Across Oman’s postpaid market, customers are increasingly choosing services that offer predictability, built-in value and a seamless experience. Recognising this shift, Vodafone Oman has launched its new BLACK Postpaid Membership Plans for Prime and Pioneer customers, introducing a 12-month subscription that offers greater consistency, simplicity and value.

“BLACK Postpaid Membership Plans are about doing postpaid differently”, said Usama al Saifi, Head of Brand and Communication. “We’ve taken what matters most to our Prime and Pioneer customers; value that lasts, benefits that stay on and recognition that’s consistent and built a structure that reflects those



Vodafone Oman introduces a 12-month subscription that offers greater consistency, simplicity and value.

priorities over time. It’s a smarter, simpler way to stay on BLACK and one that puts everyday experience

ahead of constant change”.

Designed around long-term usage patterns, the plans offer a

structured, uninterrupted model that eliminates the need for frequent adjustments or short-term incentives.

Each plan is packed with benefits that remain active across the full contract period from Take Your Home Tariff Abroad and data rollover to uninterrupted entertainment access and ongoing eligibility for device instalments and upgrades.

With BLACK Postpaid Membership Plans, Prime and Pioneer customers unlock higher data allowances built into the monthly experience, delivering up to four times more bonus data.

Pioneer membership includes 140 GB at RO 24 per month, while Prime membership includes 200 GB at RO

30 per month, offering customers up to 15% savings as part of a long-term structure designed around real usage.

Beyond connectivity, BLACK Postpaid Membership Plans recognise long-term commitment through Wafi, Vodafone Oman’s new loyalty programme. Moving beyond the occasional rewards, Wafi provides continuous recognition across lifestyle and everyday experiences, underscoring that loyalty truly matters.

The introduction of BLACK Postpaid Membership Plans marks a clear step forward in Vodafone Oman’s postpaid journey, bringing lasting value, clarity and control to the forefront of the customer experience.

SHORTTAKES



The ceremony underscored the growing national focus on women's leadership, civic engagement and youth empowerment.

SIDRAH 4.0 GRADUATES RECORD COHORT

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 24

Sidrah, the leadership programme for young Omani women, has graduated its largest cohort to date, with 90 participants completing its fourth edition. The closing ceremony, held under the auspices of HH Sayyidah Hujaija bint Jaifer al Said, Chairperson of the Association for Children with Disabilities, underscored the growing national focus on women's leadership, civic engagement and youth empowerment.

Delivered by Lahunna Oman in partnership with Outward Bound Oman, Sidrah 4.0 combined outdoor experiential learning, mentoring, professional coaching, online courses and knowledge-sharing sessions over five months for women aged 20–35.

Participants also volunteered with more than 20 community organisations, supporting initiatives spanning education, entrepreneurship, wellness, youth development and environmental responsibility.

Abdulahid bin Mohamed al Murshidi, CEO of Sohar International, said empowering young Omani women represents an investment in societal resilience and long-term economic vitality. “When women lead with confidence, integrity and purpose, the impact extends far beyond individual careers to communities and the national economy”, he noted.

Shatha bint Salim al Maskiry, Founder of Lahunna Oman, said the programme equips participants with the mindset and conviction to drive lasting social change, while Eng Ali al Lawati, Chief People & Technology Officer at OQ, described Sidrah as aligned with Oman Vision 2040 through its focus on developing national talent, particularly women leaders.

OQRPI records landmark operating year in 2025

OQ Refineries and Petroleum Industries (OQRPI), a subsidiary of OQ, Oman's global energy investment group, delivered exceptional operational performance in 2025, achieving a series of record results in crude oil refining, processing rates and petrochemical production, marking a defining milestone in the company's industrial journey.

The company recorded its highest-ever crude oil refining volume of 93 million barrels. In December 2025, it also achieved a record monthly processing rate of 8.37 million barrels, reflecting the efficiency and reliability of its refining operations.

In petrochemicals, annual polypropylene production reached around 317,000 metric tonnes, the highest output since commissioning, with December 2025 marking the strongest monthly performance.

Production at the OQ Polymer Complex exceeded one million tonnes during the year, surpassing the planned target of 870,000 tonnes. This was attributed to early completion of scheduled maintenance, improved asset management and enhanced operational readiness.

These results highlight the pivotal role of OQ Refineries and Petroleum Industries within the integrated OQ ecosystem, acting as a key link between upstream energy production and downstream industries.

Beyond refining crude oil, the company converts its outputs into petrochemical products that support packaging, construction and consumer goods industries. This enhances



The company recorded its highest-ever crude oil refining volume of 93 million barrels.

the value of each barrel and supports the transition from crude exports to higher-value-added manufacturing.

The approach strengthens the local manufacturing base by supplying stable, competitive industrial inputs, attracting new investment, supporting small and medium-sized enterprises and increasing local added value in line with Oman Vision 2040.

Commercially, OQ has expanded its global footprint, exporting products to more than 80 countries and building a network of over 3,000 business partners across energy, trading and manufacturing.

This reflects international confidence in product quality and operational reliability, boosts the competitiveness of Omani exports and supports foreign revenue inflows into the national economy.

In 2025, OQ Refineries and Petrochemicals recorded its first-ever profit, reflecting strong financial performance, asset efficiency and the success of its strategy to maximise value from natural resources.

This achievement represents a qualitative shift in the company's business model and reinforces its role in supporting downstream industries, marking a turning point in its path towards long-term financial sustainability.

CEO Kamil bin Bakheet al Shanfari said the results demonstrate the company's commitment to executing operational plans and improving asset efficiency. During 2025, OQ focused on enhancing operational reliability and proactive maintenance, enabling it to achieve record production levels and exceed targets, strengthening its contribution to Oman's energy and downstream sectors.

He added that the company produces a wide range of strategic products serving local, regional and global markets, including fuels, LPG, naphtha, jet fuel, diesel, fuel oils and petrochemicals, notably polypropylene used in packaging, piping, medical and consumer goods industries. This strengthens Oman's role in global supply chains and enhances export competitiveness.

Al Shanfari said these efforts are complemented by initiatives to enable downstream investment, particularly the Plastics Programme, which aims to attract investors to establish manufacturing facilities using OQ products. — ONA

Oman to host 2nd Middle East Space Conference

MUSCAT: The second Middle East Space Conference, organised by the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology in partnership with Novaspace, will open this Monday at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre and continue for three days.

The conference will be inaugurated by HH Sayyid Dr Kamil bin Fahd bin Mahmood al Said, Secretary-General of the General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers.

Dr Ali bin Amer al Shaithani, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology for Communications and Information Technology, said the second edition builds on the success of the inaugural event.

The conference is expected



The conference is expected to attract more than 450 senior decision-makers representing over 190 entities from more than 20 countries.

to attract more than 450 senior decision-makers representing over 190 entities from more than 20 countries.

Al Shaithani said the conference will bring together government leaders, space agencies, senior industry executives, investors, innovators and academic institutions to help shape the next phase of growth for the Middle East's space sector.

He noted that the event serves as a high-level platform for strategic dialogue and partnership-building, reinforcing the Sultanate of Oman's position as a key gateway for space applications, infrastructure development and regional investment.

He explained that the programme is designed to address strategic, operational and enabling aspects of space sector development.

Sessions will cover national space policies, agency strategies, satellite programmes, ground systems, financing mechanisms and international cooperation frameworks, while highlighting Oman's evolving space landscape.

Al Shaithani said the programme will also focus on practical applications of space technologies, particularly satellite communications and Earth observation; and their role in supporting connectivity, urban development, energy, climate resilience, environmental sustainability and critical infrastructure protection.

Al Shaithani added that by bringing together public and private sector stakeholders, the conference aims to accelerate cooperation, stimulate investment and support the development of sustainable

space capabilities aligned with regional priorities and global market trends.

The event also reflects Oman's ambition to play an active role in the regional space economy, while reinforcing its position as a neutral, forward-looking platform for international cooperation.

An accompanying exhibition will be held alongside the conference, featuring government entities; and local and international private companies operating in the space sector.

The exhibition aims to connect service providers and users on a single platform, facilitate knowledge exchange, build partnerships across the supply chain, showcase the latest technologies and innovations, attract investment opportunities and raise awareness of advances in the space industry. — ONA

LEGAL CLASH

Trump files \$5 billion JPMorgan lawsuit



US President Donald Trump has filed a \$5 billion lawsuit against American multinational banking institution JPMorgan Chase and CEO Jamie Dimon (pictured), alleging the bank “debanked” him for political reasons. Filed in a Florida state court, the suit claims policy violations.

JPMorgan rejected the accusations, saying it does not close accounts for political or religious reasons. — Reuters

MARKET FRENZY

Silver breaks \$100 amidst speculation

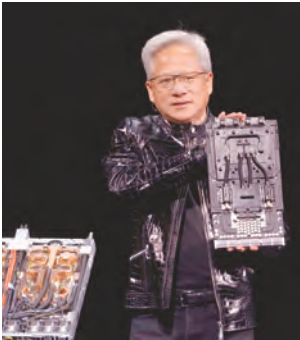


Silver surged above \$100 an ounce, extending a sharp rally driven by retail and momentum-led buying amid tight physical supplies. Analysts and precious metal enthusiasts warn the rapid gains mirror speculative excess, raising the risk of a correction.

While buoyed by gold's strength and geopolitical risks around the globe, some say warning signs are flashing across the market. — Reuters

TECH DIPLOMACY

Nvidia CEO visits China operations



Nvidia CEO Jensen Huang (pictured) is in Shanghai as the chipmaker navigates intense competition and regulatory scrutiny in China. The visit, tied to staff engagements, includes stops in Beijing and Shenzhen.

Chinese authorities have told customs agents that the H200 chip was not permitted to enter China. It was not clear whether this constituted a formal ban or a temporary measure. — Reuters

OPINION

Oman 2026 outlook: Modest growth, fiscal sustainability



DR HILAL
AL SAWAI

The writer is local content, sustainability and innovation expert.

In early 2026, Oman has a more positive macroeconomic position for the first time in a while: better public finances, improving credit ratings and a diversification strategy that is starting to be more pronounced in policy and investment priorities.

The primary narrative for 2026 is moderate, broad-based growth, with non-oil sectors driving growth.

This is likely to be due to continued fiscal discipline and controlled spending aimed at sustaining diversification, while the primary global oil prices and demand remain the key unknowns.

GROWTH OUTLOOK

Most forecasts point to mid-single-digit, or high 2% growth, depending on the assumptions regarding oil output and the rate of expansion of the non-oil sector.

According to the IMF country page, Oman's 2026 projected real GDP growth is 2.9%, with projected inflation of 0.9%, indicating price stability.

At the same time, Oman's planning authorities indicated a range: the Ministry of Finance's 2020-2025 performance report cites IMF projections of 4% growth by 2026, while the Ministry of Economy's projection is 2.6%. These disparities are due to the oil/non-oil composition and the speed of reforms impacting private sector activity.

Either way, the overall direction is positive. Construction, manufacturing, logistics and services are expected to continue to play a leading role, especially with respect to the priorities of Oman Vision 2040.

DISCIPLINED FISCAL POLICY

Oman's State Budget 2026 indicates that the government is still prioritising fiscal sustainability after years of consolidation, while allowing some room for targeted developmental expenditures.

According to official budget reports, revenue stands above RO 11.4 billion, primarily due to increased net oil revenue.

In external budget reports, there appears to be greater oil revenue conservatism than in previous years, indicating an attempt to lower exposure to oil-price shocks.

Investors will look for three features in 2026: (1) the continued growth of non-oil revenue, (2) the private sector response to government fiscal outlays and the corresponding job growth; and (3) sustained positive trends in debt level, which is critical for the average rating and the cost of borrowing.

CONFIDENCE RATINGS

Oman's positive trajectory in credit rating upgrades will be a positive factor in 2026. In December 2025, Fitch Ratings upgraded Oman's credit to BBB- with a stable outlook, which is a positive sign for investor confidence and will likely lower the cost of financing in the economy. KPMG budget commentary notes that Moody's upgraded Oman's credit to Baa3 with a stable outlook in July 2025 and S&P reaffirmed Oman's credit to BBB- with a stable outlook in 2025. (KPMG) These upgrades reflect, in general, an improved fiscal position, a decline in risk exposure, and improved articulation of medium-term policy objectives.

Oman's planning authorities indicated a range: the Ministry of Finance's 2020-2025 performance report cites IMF projections of 4% growth by 2026, while the Ministry of Economy's projection is 2.6%. These disparities are due to the oil/non-oil composition and the speed of reforms impacting private sector activity.

REFORM AGENDA

The business environment in 2026 will likely be influenced by two policy changes. First, Oman has approved a plan to build an international financial centre with separate regulatory and administrative frameworks.

This is part of Oman's investments to deepen the financial sector. Second, there is a January 2026 planned restriction concerning labour market policies. There is a report on the "Omanisation" of the labour market, which means restrictions on expatriates for a number of positions.

This, in case it is implemented seamlessly, will generate an increase in domestic employment. In case there is insufficient staffing in some service sectors, it may lead to short-term employment disruptions.

BOTTOM-LINE FOR 2026

Steady growth and improving resilience are the best words to describe Oman's outlook for 2026. The upside potential is attributable to the diversification of the economy and investor confidence which is macro level attributed to the rating stabilisation and the access to the financial markets. Institutional frameworks diversifying access to the capital markets may also be a potential upside.

The challenges remain the same, capturing the volatility of the oil market, uncertainty related to macroeconomic growth and the difficulty of capturing value from the structural changes which is reflected in the productivity of the private sector and the levels of employment.

OFFSHORE WIND IN A CHANGING GLOBAL ENERGY LANDSCAPE



NAJAH
AL RIYAMI

The writer is a Media and Communication Master's graduate.

Offshore wind energy has grown from an experimental concept into a major force in the global renewable energy transition, driven by technological advances, falling costs and rising demand for clean and reliable power.

Once constrained by shallow waters and high construction costs, offshore wind is now reshaping national energy strategies across Europe, Asia and North America.

The earliest offshore wind projects were developed in the early 1990s off the coast of Denmark. These initial installations were small and located close to shore, using modest turbines and simple foundations.

Developers faced major challenges, including corrosion from saltwater, difficult marine conditions and limited installation technology. As a result, offshore wind grew slowly in its early years, trailing behind onshore wind and solar power.

Progress accelerated in the early 2000s as countries such as the United Kingdom, Germany and Denmark invested heavily in offshore wind to strengthen energy security and meet climate targets.

Improvements in turbine design allowed for larger blades and taller towers, significantly increasing electricity output. Advances in marine engineering and specialised installation vessels also helped reduce costs and improve reliability.

By the 2010s and early 2020s, offshore wind had moved firmly into the mainstream. Turbines producing eight megawatts or more became standard and wind farms were built farther from shore to access stronger and more consistent winds.

China emerged as a global leader, rapidly expanding offshore capacity and demonstrating the technology's scalability at national level.

At the same time, competitive auctions and supply chain maturity helped drive costs down, making offshore wind increasingly competitive with fossil fuels.

Recent projects have pushed the boundaries even further. Turbines exceeding 15 megawatts are now being deployed, each capable of powering tens of thousands of homes.

Major offshore wind farms are under construction or planned in the North Sea, the Baltic Sea, the South China Sea and along the eastern coast of the United States.

Davos: Oman's advantage is speed, not slogans

DAVOS

season always produces a familiar soundtrack: diversification, sustainability, digital transformation, human capital.

The phrases are not wrong. They are simply no longer rare. What is rare — and increasingly valuable — is speed. Not the noisy speed of announcements, but the quiet speed of execution: decision, permitting, tendering, financing, construction, operation.

This is why Oman's engagement at the World Economic Forum this year should be read differently. The world is not short of strategies. It is short of economies that can deliver under pressure — with fast timelines, consistent decisions and low administrative friction. In 2026, speed is not a detail. It is a national asset.

The window for clean energy and green hydrogen will not stay open forever. Logistics, too, is a race measured in hours and reliability. Digital transformation is moving at the pace of technology cycles, not government cycles.

And labour markets are changing faster than education systems. In each case, countries that move slowly do not merely lose opportunities; they lose relevance.

Oman is rightly focusing on clean energy, logistics, digital transformation and human capital — a coherent portfolio aligned with Oman Vision 2040.

But the real test is whether these pillars are connected by one operating principle: compress the time between intention and impact.

Take clean energy and hydrogen. What separates leaders from followers is not the size of their ambition, but the speed at which projects become bankable and buildable. Timelines matter.

Sequencing matters. Infrastructure readiness matters — grid integration, port capability, land access, water solutions,



Dr Said bin Mohammed al Saqri, Economic Adviser at the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs and the Head of the Omani delegation to the World Economic Forum (WEF), meets with Paul Chan Mo-po, Financial Secretary of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, on the sidelines of the Davos forum.



QASIM
AL MAASHANI

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

When everyone sells vision, the winners sell tempo — the ability to turn dialogue into delivery before the window closes.

standards and certification pathways.

A country can have excellent resources and still miss the market because it cannot move from plan to production at pace. Now look at logistics and economic zones.

The competitive question is simple: how long does it take a firm to set up, import inputs, hire staff, start production and export? This "time-to-operate" is the real KPI.

If Oman wants its zones to become engines of diversification, speed must be visible in the everyday experience of investors: predictable approvals, rapid utility connections, efficient customs and

consistent regulatory interpretation.

Digital transformation faces the same reality. The world is shifting towards AI-enabled production, data-driven logistics and automated services.

Countries that want to host these systems must be able to deploy technology quickly while keeping cybersecurity and governance tight.

Fast does not mean reckless; it means clear standards, stable rules and competent implementation. Human capital may be the most important arena of all.

The quickest economies are those that link training to real demand — not generic courses.

Apprenticeships, industry-designed certifications and "train-to-hire" pathways tied to actual projects can shrink the time between education and productive work.

Without that, Oman risks a familiar trap: investments arrive, but the local skills pipeline lags.

Speed, however, does not happen by motivation. It happens by design. It requires reducing three kinds of friction: overlapping mandates, slow processes and inconsistent information.

The strongest reform is not necessarily a new initiative; it is a cleaner system — fewer handoffs, clearer authority, published timelines and performance tracking that makes delay expensive.

The world will always applaud well-written plans in Davos. But applause is not competitiveness. Oman's differentiator will be what happens after the meetings: how quickly dialogue becomes milestones and milestones become operating assets.

If Oman can become the region's quickest "decision-to-delivery" economy, it will have something that cannot be copied by branding alone.

In the coming decade, speed will be the strategy that turns Oman Vision 2040 from aspiration into outcome.

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ART/LIFE



BEST OF WORST

‘SNOW WHITE’ AND ‘WAR OF THE WORLDS’ LEAD RAZZIE NOMINATIONS



Golden Raspberry Awards are an annual Oscar spoof that spotlights what voters deem Hollywood’s worst performances

With Oscar nominations a day away, Hollywood’s annual reckoning with its film failures took shape on Wednesday as Disney’s live-action “Snow White” and the remake “War of the Worlds” tied for six nods for the Golden Raspberry Awards.

Popularly known as the Razzies, the awards are an annual Oscar spoof that spotlights what voters deem Hollywood’s worst performances. The 46th Golden Raspberry Awards are set for March 14, the day before the Oscar awards.

Disney’s “Snow White”, a 2025 remake of the 1937 animated classic, scored a worst picture nod along with nominations for worst remake, director and screenplay. The fantasy film stars Rachel Zegler as Snow White and Gal Gadot as the Evil Queen and its seven computer-generated dwarf characters were also cited for both worst supporting actors and screen combo.

Tying with “Snow White”, the 2025 science fiction film “War of the Worlds”, starring rapper Ice Cube and actor Eva Longoria, based on H G Wells’ 1898 novel, also scored six nominations, including worst picture, actors, remake, director, screenplay and screen combo.

Other nominees include the psychological thriller “Hurry Up Tomorrow”, science fiction film “Star Trek: Section 31” and the action-adventure Netflix film “The Electric State”, starring “Stranger Things” lead Millie Bobby Brown.

The Razzies are a tongue-in-cheek awards show that ‘honours’ the worst films, performances and cinematic achievements of the year, as voted on by members of the Golden Raspberry Foundation, a group of film critics, journalists and movie lovers from around the world.

Winners traditionally receive a small, gold spray-painted raspberry trophy (\$4.97) as a humorous contrast to prestigious statues like Oscars.

Other films nominated for Worst Picture include: The Electric State, Hurry Up Tomorrow and Star Trek: Section 31. Unique and quirky nominations include ‘All Seven Artificial Dwarfs’ from Snow White in the Worst Screen Combo category.

The Razzies operate as a satirical counterpoint to traditional awards like the Oscars, celebrating cinematic missteps and often targeting big-budget films that missed the mark critically or commercially.

The event has a playful reputation and sometimes draws reactions from nominees — with some stars choosing to embrace the humour of their Razzie nods.

More than 1,100 Razzie members from across the United States and about two dozen other countries vote on the awards, according to the Razzie website.

Voters are members of the Golden Raspberry Foundation that consists of film critics and movie experts. — Reuters

QUICK FEATURES



CULTURE

A Reog Ponorogo dancer performs during an earth alms ceremony at a park in Surabaya, Indonesia. — AFP



LIFESTYLE

Women wearing traditional costumes pose for photographs at Yu Garden in Shanghai. — AFP



FESTIVAL

A light installation depicting a horse at the 32nd Zigong International Lantern Festival ahead of the Chinese Lunar New Year, which will welcome the Year of the Horse, Sichuan province. — Reuters

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China’s first big feature film focused on contemporary national security is being released for Lunar New Year box office crowds as the government looks to ramp up awareness of the risks of foreign espionage.

In the film “Jingzhe Wusheng”, known in English as “Scare Out”, information about China’s latest fighter jet is leaked, prompting a thrilling cat-and-mouse game that pits national security officers against a spy.

Filmed mainly in China’s booming tech hub of Shenzhen, the movie is being promoted in Chinese media as the country’s first feature film to focus on contemporary national security.

Guided by China’s Ministry of State Security (MSS), the fictional plot aims to push issues such as counter-espionage and secrecy into mainstream popular culture, China’s Central Television (CCTV) said.

MSS has previously produced

CHINA ESPIONAGE THRILLER TO FOCUS FILMGOERS ON NATIONAL SECURITY

or influenced television dramas and documentaries on national security, but this is the first potential blockbuster with a Lunar New Year release.

That is the peak movie-going season that typically produces record-setting revenues and draws families and young people to cinemas in large numbers.

Directed by internationally acclaimed film director Zhang Yimou and starring local celebrities Yi Yangqianxi and Zhu Yilong, the film showcases a tense spy-hunting operation against the backdrop of Shenzhen’s futuristic skyline.

The framing and narrative of the movie fit into China’s broader soft power strategy of using cinema to promote national security narratives in a modern and urban setting.

Official news agency Xinhua said that in recent years foreign espionage has been active frequently and counter-espionage is “no longer a distant topic”. — Reuters



SCIENTISTS EXTRACT WOOLLY RHINO DNA FROM ANCIENT WOLF

14,000 years ago, a weeks-old wolf puppy ate its last meal — meat from a woolly rhinoceros — shortly before dying on the harsh Ice Age landscape of northeastern Siberia.

In a first, researchers have extracted DNA and recovered the rhino’s genome from a chunk of undigested meat from the stomach contents found in the puppy’s remains, discovered in permafrost near the village of Tumat.

These genome findings provided insight into the fate of this impressive cold-adapted horned herbivore species once common in northern Europe and Asia.

The researchers compared this rhino’s genome to those of two other individuals from the same species that lived thousands of years earlier — about 18,000 and 49,000 years ago — to examine genetic changes over time.

In doing so, they learned that the woolly rhinoceros as a species remained genetically healthy until the end of the Ice Age before apparently suffering a rapid population collapse, probably because the warming climate erased their preferred steppe-tundra environment.

For instance, the newly recovered genome showed no evidence of inbreeding suggestive of population decline. Other research has indicated that the woolly rhinoceros disappeared about 14,000 years ago, just a few hundred years after this individual lived.

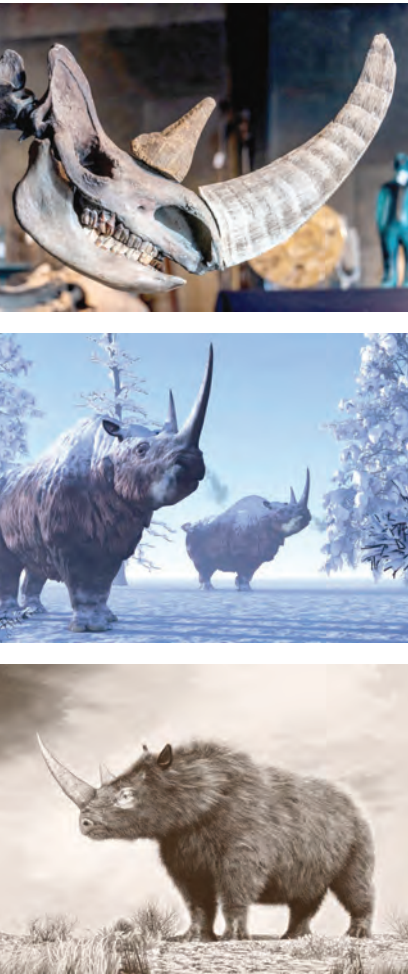
“With this research we demonstrate that it is possible to recover a high-quality genome from poorly preserved material dating to a crucial time in the life history of a species”, said evolutionary geneticist Solveig Gudjonsdottir, lead author of the study published on Wednesday in the journal Genome Biology and Evolution.

“It is a very cool achievement”, said evolutionary geneticist and study co-senior author Love Dalén of the Centre for Palaeogenetics, a collaboration between Stockholm University and the Swedish Museum of Natural History.

The woolly rhinoceros,



These genome findings provided insight into the fate of this impressive cold-adapted horned herbivore species once common in northern Europe and Asia



whose species name is *Coelodonta antiquitatis*, first appears in the fossil record about 600,000 years ago.

It became one of the many large mammals to go extinct around the end of the last Ice Age, along with such species as woolly mammoths, saber-toothed cats, mastodons and giant ground sloths, all of which faced ominous environmental changes as the climate warmed, as well as pressure from human hunting.

“The woolly rhinoceros was a large animal, reaching up to around 2 metres tall and was covered in thick, long fur”, said Gudjonsdottir, who worked on the study while a master’s student at Stockholm University.

“It had two horns, a large hump on its back, a stocky build and relatively short legs. The species was primarily a grazer, feeding on grass and low vegetation adapted to cold, dry environments”, Gudjonsdottir added.

It was much bigger than its closest living relative, the Sumatran rhino.

The rhino lacked the kind of genomic signature that would be caused by the inbreeding likely to occur with a slow population decline, as was observed in the last-known woolly

mammoths that lived thousands of years later.

“The main finding is that we see no change in genetic diversity and inbreeding levels through the last several tens of thousands of years leading up to the woolly rhino’s extinction”, Dalén said.

This, Dalén added, suggests that “whatever caused the extinction, it was rapid”.

“Since humans had already been present in the region for about 15,000 years prior to the extinction, without causing a decline in the population, we think that the well-known climate warming at about 14,000 years ago is a more likely explanation for the extinction”, Dalén said.

“We can’t rule out that humans contributed to the final extinction of the woolly rhinoceros, particularly towards the very end.

However, there is limited archaeological evidence for widespread or intensified hunting”, Gudjonsdottir mentioned.

The naturally mummified remains of two female grey wolf puppies, each around seven to nine weeks old, were found during the 2010s near Tumat in an excellent state of preservation.

— Reuters



ART ROOTED IN HERITAGE AND ARCHITECTURE

IDRIS AL BALUSHI

At first glance, Hiba al Yahmadi's paintings feel anchored, grounded in arches, shadows and geometry that echo Islamic architecture. But behind that sense of visual certainty is a journey shaped by curiosity, discipline hard-earned and a deep belief that art is meant to be shared.

Hiba's relationship with art began so early that its starting point has blurred with memory. What remains clear, however, is her mother's role in recognising and nurturing that spark. During her primary school years, her childhood drawings stood out enough for her mother to take a decisive step and enroll her in the studio of a professional artist. It was there that Hiba's talent found structure and her free time transformed into a space for intentional growth rather than idle distraction. Art, from the beginning, was not a hobby, it was something to be built carefully.

That foundation expanded significantly when Hiba chose to study art academically at Sultan Qaboos University. The experience marked a turning point. After years of experimenting across styles without a clear destination, formal study helped her define her artistic direction. Just as importantly, it brought her into close contact with Oman's art community. Workshops, collaborations and encounters with established artists sharpened her awareness of where she stood and where she wanted to go.

Technically, the intensity of academic training accelerated her

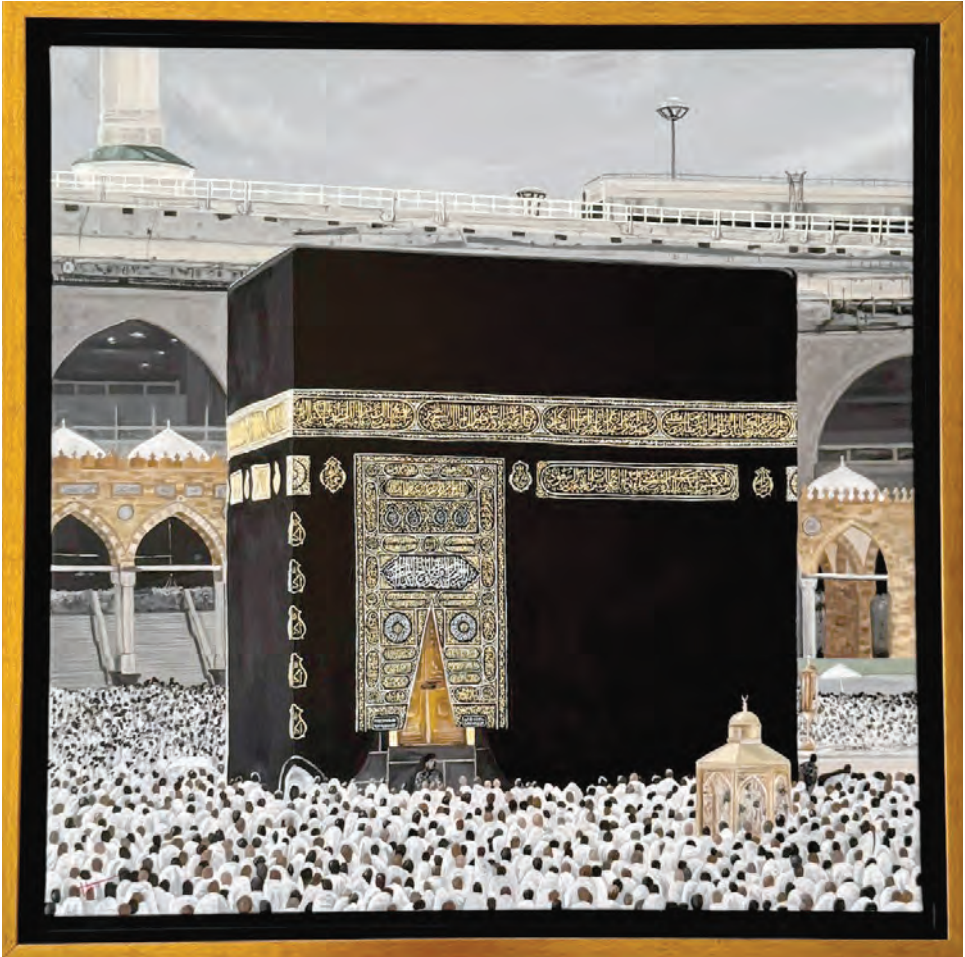


development. Moving between painting, drawing, printmaking, sculpture and other disciplines strengthened her versatility and efficiency. Over time, she learned to complete artworks to a high standard within limited timeframes, whether for personal expression or university assignments. Emotionally, her connection to art deepened. Museums and exhibitions became spaces of contemplation rather than observation, places where she could sense the psychological and philosophical layers behind each work. She admits that purely functional, aesthetically barren spaces now leave her uneasy.

Today, Hiba's work leans towards contemporary realism, with a strong thematic focus on Islamic architecture, particularly its Omani expressions. This sense of artistic stability is relatively recent,



Deeply rooted in Islamic culture, **HIBA AL YAHMADI** sees her heritage not as limitation but as an endless source of inspiration. She has little interest in producing work detached from her identity, believing that culture gives her art meaning and direction.



emerging after years of exploration during her studies. Still, she allows herself moments of departure. A scene that stirs her emotionally or the striking beauty of horses during a visit to the stables can pull her briefly away from architectural forms and into more instinctive subjects.

Central to Hiba's practice is her openness with people. She believes art is one of the most honest ways to connect, which is why she shares not only her successes but also her struggles and creative processes. The feedback she receives from diverse audiences fuels her motivation and strengthens her confidence, helping her better understand her place within the artistic landscape.

Discipline, however, did not come easily. For a long time, she found herself producing work only under pressure. Searching for a solution, she encountered an idea that reshaped her routine while reading Atomic Habits by James Clear. If habits build identity, she realised, then becoming an artist meant practicing art daily. Inspired by online creative challenges, she committed to consistency and the results followed. Discipline became lighter and creativity more accessible.

Like all artists, she faces days of creative heaviness. On such days, she lowers expectations rather than abandoning practice altogether. Instead of working on a large piece, she turns to simple sketches in her sketchbook, small acts that preserve momentum and keep the artistic connection alive.

While social media plays an important role in her career, Hiba refuses to let content creation

overshadow expressive work. She shares selectively, posting when conditions allow, or sometimes keeping pieces private and revealing only the final result. Still, she views platforms like Instagram as modern galleries and living portfolios that have connected her with fellow artists and opened doors to exhibitions and cultural events.

Despite this digital reach, physical exhibitions remain her preferred way of sharing art. Witnessing audiences engage with her work in person creates a feeling she describes as unmatched. Whether visitors arrive specifically to see her work or encounter it for the first time, their reactions affirm the value and emotional impact of what she creates.

Deeply rooted in Islamic culture, Hiba sees her heritage not as limitation but as an endless source of inspiration. She has little interest in producing work detached from her identity, believing that culture gives her art meaning and direction.

Balancing the demands of studying art education presents its own challenges. The programme prepares her both as a visual artist and as a future art teacher, requiring discipline, time management and perseverance. While demanding, this dual path aligns with her ambitions.

Looking ahead, Hiba envisions a future filled with impactful works that resonate locally and globally. Art, she believes, will remain her lifelong companion, something to create, share and teach. To keep art unseen, she says, would be the greatest loss of all.