

O M A N
عُـمـان
D A I L Y

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INBRIEF

‘STREET VIEW’ TO COVER 27,000 KM

The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, in cooperation with the National Survey and Geospatial Information Authority (NSGIA) and Google, launched the second phase of the ‘Street View’ feature project. This enables users inside and outside the Sultanate of Oman to explore natural landscapes, historical landmarks and modern infrastructure through 360-degree panoramic images via the Street View feature on Google Maps. The new coverage includes various governorates and the targeted coverage distance for this phase reached 27,000 km, with images captured using special ‘Trekker’ devices developed by Google. It is worth noting that the first phase included a selected group of sites, among them Khor Rori, which is listed as a Unesco World Heritage Site.

A BRIDGE BETWEEN CRAFTS AND BUYERS

The Craftsmen’s Souq at Al Amerat Public Park is one of the most prominent attractions of Muscat Nights, as it provides a dedicated space for authentic Omani craftsmanship, where artisans stand proudly in front of their shops, immersed in the craft they have honed since childhood. The souq witnesses remarkable popularity during the Muscat Nights, reflecting concerted efforts to promote and develop handicrafts while maintaining high standards. These efforts aim to equip artisans with the skills needed to present and market Omani crafts professionally. Promoting handicrafts remains a vital field that relies on accumulated expertise, increased visibility of handcrafted products, and recognition of handicrafts as an integral part of Omani life and identity. **DETAILS ON P4**

V I S I T T O S T R E N G T H E N C O O P E R A T I O N I N V A R I O U S S E C T O R S

Italian Prime Minister arrives on visit today

GEORGIA

Meloni, Prime Minister of the Italian Republic, will arrive in the Sultanate of Oman on Wednesday on an official visit during which she will conduct official talks with His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik. During the visit, the Prime Minister will be accompanied by an official delegation comprising some officials at the Italian government. Omani-Italian relations are entering a new chapter of economic cooperation, as the visit of Georgia Meloni represents a step towards maximising this cooperation for a more diverse and sustainable partnership. Over the recent years, Muscat and Rome have strengthened political coordination and supported the foundations of economic cooperation. This momentum was embodied in the meeting held last December between His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and Georgia Meloni, Prime Minister of the Italian Republic, on the sidelines of the GCC Summit. The two sides discussed cooperation and explored ways to expand the partnership across multiple sectors. Data issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information indicates that the volume of trade exchange between the Sultanate of Oman and the Italian Republic in 2025 reached about RO 184.3 million. This included RO 33.6 million in

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik

Georgia Meloni

total Omani exports to Italy and RO 150.7 million in total Omani imports from Italy. The most important Omani exports to Italy consist of metals and their products, plastics and rubber, machinery and mechanical appliances, electrical equipment, vehicles, and transport equipment. Meanwhile, the most

important Omani imports from Italy include chemical industry products, food industry products, machinery, appliances and electrical equipment. The number of visitors arriving from the Italian Republic to the Sultanate of Oman until the end of December 2025 reached about 80,607. **SEE ALSO P3**

Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) has expressed its appreciation for the Royal Decree issued by

His Majesty
Sultan Haitham bin Tarik

— May Allah protect and preserve him —

Establishing the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs and appointing

HH Sayyid
Theyazin bin Haitham al Said

As Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs. The Chamber affirmed that this step reflects the wise leadership’s vision in consolidating economic governance and strengthening institutional integration.

HE Sheikh Faisal bin Abdullah Al Rawas
Commends the Royal Decree
Establishing the Office of the Deputy
Prime Minister for Economic Affairs



“

HE Sheikh Faisal bin Abdullah Al Rawas, Chairman of the Board of Directors of OCCI, stated that the establishment of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs embodies the wise leadership’s vision in entrenching economic governance and enhancing integration among fiscal, investment, and development policies, in line with the requirements of the current stage of the renewed renaissance, and contributing to accelerating the implementation of the objectives of Oman Vision 2040.

He added that the private sector views this step with great optimism, given its role in providing direct support to economic diversification pathways, stimulating entrepreneurial initiatives, facilitating procedures, and strengthening partnership between the public and private sectors, in a manner that positively reflects on business growth, job creation, and the achievement of sustainable development.

HE further affirmed that the OCCI will continue, in cooperation with government entities, to support ambitious national directions and to work hand in hand with the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs, in a way that serves the interests of the business community and enhances the Sultanate of Oman’s position as a promising economic and investment hub at both the regional and international levels.

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OMAN CHAMBER OF COMMERCE & INDUSTRY



غرفة تجارة
وصناعة عُمان

Omanchamber



OMAN

HONOURABLE LADY HOSTS DINNER TO MARK ACCESSION DAY



KHASAB: Her Highness The Honourable Lady Assayida Ahd Abdullah Hamed al Busaidi, Spouse of the Sultan of Oman, hosted a dinner in Musandam Governorate, on the occasion of His Majesty the Sultan's accession to power anniversary (Accession Day).

The event was attended by a number of prominent women from Musandam Governorate.

The celebration of this auspicious national occasion embodies the values of pride and loyalty, reinforces social values and reflects the enduring significance of this auspicious occasion in the blessed Renaissance.

During the ceremony, The Honourable Lady received congratulations and wishes on this cherished national occasion with well-wishers praying to Allah the Almighty to preserve the Sultanate of Oman in peace and security, and to perpetuate the blessings of safety and stability under the wise leadership of His Majesty the Sultan and to grant Her Highness success in all that is good and to protect her with His gracious care.

— ONA





Announcement

The Tax Authority would like to draw the attention of taxpayers to file their VAT and Excise Tax returns for the fourth quarter of the year 2025 in accordance with the tax return form which is available on e-service portal:

www.taxoman.gov.om

And attach all required documents to it no later than:

30 January 2026.

We hope all taxpayers comply with the deadline.

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Military Medical City organises public health seminar

MUSCAT: The Medical City for Military and Security Services organised a 'Public Health' seminar on Tuesday, under the auspices of Brigadier Abdulmalik bin Suleiman al Kharousi, Assistant Chairman of the Medical City for Supplies and Support Affairs.

The seminar, held at the Medical City Hospital for Military and Security Services – Muscat, featured a visual presentation highlighting the importance of the event and its various themes regarding public health. The programme included several lectures addressing the



An exhibition was also held on the sidelines of the symposium. — ONA

significance of public health and the reduction of chronic diseases, in addition to discussing the concept of occupational burnout and how to manage it.

An exhibition was also held on the sidelines of the symposium.

The symposium aims to focus on non-communicable diseases, which represent one of the most prominent health challenges with deep economic dimensions, due to the direct and indirect impacts they have on individuals, communities and national economies. — ONA

Hackathon explores youth ideas

SAMAYIL: In a step reflecting the growing awareness among Omani youth regarding the importance of sustainability and their role in protecting the environment and creating future solutions, the third Samayil Economic Forum kicks off its activities on Wednesday by organising the first Samayil Environmental Hackathon.

The hackathon comes as the culmination of a registration phase that lasted from January 4 to 11. The names of the teams qualified to participate in the competitions, which will take place from January 20 to 22, will be announced.

The first Samayil Environmental Hackathon targets various segments of society interested in environmental issues and the green economy, ranging from male and female students in schools and academic institutions to job-seekers and entrepreneurs. This



The event is held under the theme of engaging the community in innovating practical solutions for environmental and sustainable development issues. — ONA

interactive experience aims to transform environmental challenges into innovative developmental opportunities, contributing to building a sustainable and livable environment in the Wilayat of Samayil.

The hackathon is based on two main tracks designed to cover the three dimensions of sustainability: environment, society and economy, in line with the initiative's goals to promote local sustainable development. The first track involves designing a sustainable ecotourism model using the Suroor Oasis as a case study. This model seeks to achieve a balance between protecting natural resources and supporting economic development, with a focus on maximising the benefits of environmental assets and local content, engaging the local community, and promoting green tourism concepts in the Wilayat of Samayil.

The second track addresses the issue of the dense spread of the "Reeds" plant (Phragmites) in the valleys of the Wilayat of Samayil. This plant poses environmental and societal challenges. — ONA



His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and Giorgia Meloni, Prime Minister of Italy, in Manama. — **File photo**

OMAN-ITALY TIES ENTER NEW CHAPTER



OMANI-ITALIAN

relations are entering a new chapter of economic cooperation, as the visit of Giorgia Meloni, Prime Minister of Italy, to Oman represents a step towards maximising this cooperation for a more diverse and sustainable partnership.

Over recent years, Muscat and Rome have strengthened political coordination and supported the foundations of economic cooperation. This momentum was embodied in the meeting held last December between His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq and PM Meloni on the sidelines of the GCC Summit in Manama. The two sides discussed cooperation and explored ways to expand the partnership across multiple sectors.

TRADE EXCHANGE

Data issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information indicates that the volume of trade exchange between Oman and Italy in 2025 reached about RO 184.3 million. This included RO 33.6 million in total Omani exports to Italy and RO 150.7 million in total Omani imports from Italy.

The most important Omani exports to Italy consist of metals and their products, plastics and rubber, machinery and mechanical appliances, electrical equipment, vehicles, and transport equipment. Meanwhile, the most important Omani imports from Italy include chemical industry products, food industry products, machinery, appliances and electrical equipment.

The number of visitors arriving from Italy to Oman until the end of December 2025 reached about 80,607.

Faisal bin Abdullah al Rawas, Chairman of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), stated that economic relations between Oman and Italy are witnessing an advanced stage of qualitative development, driven by the convergence of strategic and economic visions between the two countries. This, he said, reflects the shift in the nature of international partnerships from traditional trade relations to investment partnerships based on value-added, knowledge transfer and integration in production chains.

He added that this momentum comes at a highly important time, coinciding with the implementation of the goals of Oman Vision 2040, which places economic diversification, private sector empowerment and sustainability at the forefront of its priorities, alongside the Italian approach to enhance its international economic presence and expand its partnerships in promising markets.

Al Rawas clarified that bilateral trade between the two countries represents a solid foundation to build upon. However, the next phase requires moving from a focus on trade exchange to deepening joint investments and establishing long-term partnerships in productive and service sectors. This, he affirmed, contributes to improving the trade balance and enhancing national economic competitiveness, while simultaneously supporting the presence of Italian companies in the region.

He pointed out that investment opportunities available to the private sector in the two countries are broad and diverse. They are particularly prominent in the energy and green transition sector, where Oman



**FAISAL BIN
ABDULLAH
AL RAWAS**
OCCI Chairman

The volume of trade exchange between Oman and Italy in 2025 reached about RO 184.3 million. RO 33.6 million in exports to Italy and RO 150.7 million in imports from Italy

Oman's exports consist of metals, plastics and rubber, machinery and mechanical appliances, electrical equipment, vehicles, and transport equipment. Imports from Italy include chemical industry products, food industry products, machinery, appliances and electrical equipment

The number of visitors arriving from Italy to Oman until the end of December 2025 reached about 80,607

represents a promising regional hub for renewable energy and green hydrogen projects, benefiting from its geographical location and natural potential. This, he added, aligns with advanced Italian expertise in clean technologies and sustainable solutions. He further noted that the opportunities also include the industrial sector, especially value-added manufacturing industries and advanced industrial technologies, alongside technology and innovation in areas of digital transformation, smart technologies and the circular economy.

AREAS OF TIES

He added that the agriculture and food industries sector represents one of the promising areas for cooperation, particularly in light of Oman's approach towards enhancing food security and investing in modern agricultural technologies. This, he said, opens the door for qualitative partnerships with Italian companies experienced in this field.

He affirmed that business meetings and bilateral economic forums constitute a pivotal tool in transforming these potentials into tangible projects by facilitating direct communication between investors, exchanging experiences and building trust between the business communities in both countries.

In this context, he explained that the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry plays a strategic role in preparing the institutional environment supporting this cooperation. This is done through organising and hosting delegations and forums, coordinating bilateral business meetings, promoting investment opportunities, and providing effective communication channels between the private sector and relevant authorities.

TOURISM KEY DRIVER

Salma al Hashmi, Vice-President of Marketing at The Wave, Muscat, Board Member and Executive Chair of the Oman-Italy Friendship Association, said that the bilateral relationship between the two countries is supported by steady

trade flows, reflecting a positive trajectory in trade exchange. She explained that tourism has become a clear indicator of deepening ties between the two friendly peoples, reinforcing the importance of Italy as a European market, and that direct flights to Rome have contributed to increasing the number of arrivals from Italy.

She pointed out that the upcoming visit of the Italian Prime Minister to Oman constitutes an opportunity to transform diplomatic relations and trade exchange into investment plans and sector-based partnerships.

This, she affirmed, enables knowledge exchange and supports sustainable growth in priority sectors.

She clarified that the Association organised the Omani-Italian Investment Business Forum and held bilateral meetings between Italian business people and investors and their counterparts from the Sultanate of Oman, aiming to establish commercial partnerships.

She affirmed that there is ongoing cooperation and discussions to further enhance tourism and archaeological heritage, reflecting long-term Italian contributions and the potential for Italian companies to support Oman Vision 2040 in tourism initiatives.

She said that the energy sector in Oman remains a key bridge as new partnership areas expand towards renewable energy, green hydrogen and industrial cooperation related to sustainability, pointing to the cooperation between Oman Oil Company Exploration and Production and its partner Eni in Block 47.

She indicated that such official visits by high-level delegations will increase market access opportunities, enhance relationships between investors and operators, and broaden the scope of investment beyond traditional sectors towards renewable energy, advanced logistics, tourism assets, industrial supply chains, and high-value services, in alignment with Oman Vision 2040. — ONA





A BRIDGE BETWEEN CRAFTS AND BUYERS



AFRAH AL BALUSHI

THE Craftsmen's Souq at Al Amerat Public Park has emerged as one of the most popular attractions of the Muscat Nights events, drawing visitors eager to explore traditional Omani crafts and industries.

The souq offers a dedicated space where artisans proudly display skills passed down through generations, working in front of their shops on crafts they have mastered since childhood.

Witnessing remarkable popularity during Muscat Nights, the Craftsmen's Souq reflects sustained efforts to preserve, promote and develop traditional handicrafts while maintaining high standards of quality.

These efforts aim to equip artisans with the skills needed to present and market Omani crafts professionally, enabling them to reach wider local and international audiences.

Promoting handicrafts remains a vital field that relies on accumulated expertise, increased visibility

The Craftsmen's Souq showcases living Omani traditions and provides a direct platform for artisans to market their work. The souq attracts strong interest from locals, expatriates and tourists



of handcrafted products, and recognition of handicrafts as an integral part of Omani life and identity.

Saleh bin Nasser al Shraiqi, a participant from the Wilayat of Bahla, shared that he has been practicing pottery since the age of 12, having inherited the craft from his father and grandfather. Today, his sons also work alongside him in the trade. Al Shraiqi has taken part in numerous local and international exhibitions, including events across the Gulf and in European countries such as Spain. He also conducts workshops in schools, producing traditional items such as water jugs, incense burners and other pottery products.

Praising Muscat Nights, he highlighted its role in connecting artisans with wider markets and noted a growing interest among young people in learning traditional crafts, driven by increased awareness of their cultural and economic value.

Similarly, Murr bin Hamid al Rawahi from the Wilayat of Al Mudhaibi, spoke of his lifelong engagement in palm frond crafts, a skill he has practiced since childhood and continues at the age of 75. Using palm fronds and acacia wood, he creates traditional products that have become a sustainable source of income for his family.

Al Rawahi also noted his participation in both local and international exhibitions and praised the strong demand from Omanis and expatriates alike during Muscat Nights.

Renowned for their beauty and authenticity, Omani handicrafts continue to attract wide attention.

The Craftsmen's Souq features pottery, palm frond products, wooden items and traditional household tools, serving both as a cultural landmark and a dynamic marketing platform for artisans.

With its economic, social and cultural significance, the souq — supported by the Heritage Village at Al Amerat Public Park — offers artisans a unique opportunity to showcase their work, interact with the public, exchange experiences and attract new customers, ensuring that Omani craftsmanship remains vibrant and enduring.

SHORT TAKES

CRUISE TOURISM TRIES TO WEATHER POLITICAL STORM

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, JAN 13

Cruise tourism has been affected by the current geopolitical developments for several months and the number of vessels which were scheduled to call at Oman ports would be less this year, according to the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MoHT).

Speaking to the Observer, Khalid al Azri, Head of Cruise, Golf, Wedding and Charter at the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MoHT),



KHALID AL AZRI

said that the region as a whole is affected owing to the present political scenario prevailing in some of the countries where the tourists were expected to make voyages from. "Due to the current geo-political scenario, we are expecting a low

number of cruise liners this year and the same goes with the rest of the region," he said, adding that efforts are on to find a solution to the impact on tourism. However, these liners have been encouraged to focus on the local destinations inside the Sultanate of Oman and to promote local cruise tourism.

"We have devised many ways to face this present scenario, such as an 'Oman only itinerary' which will be an exclusive package for cruise liners from all markets. Additionally, seafaring from local ports such as Muttrah, Duqm, Salalah, and the like, as Oman boasts of having 11 ports across the length and breadth of the country, thus supporting and promoting the local cruise tourism. We have identified that there is an interest among the visitors and a desire to travel by sea. We are attempting to tap on the diversity of each governorate which has its own character and features," he added. He said that with the increased incentives offered by the country, there has been an increasing demand for Oman as the first choice destination for weddings.

"Oman has recently added more offers in order to promote wedding tourism, such as ease of getting a visa, customs clearance, emigration, counters, and user-friendly destinations and this has generated wide interest for Oman as a preferred choice and more marriages are happening these days," he said.

PUBLIC NOTICE

Niiar Real Estate Services SPC announces the termination of services for **Mr. Abdullah Issa Saleh**, a Lebanese national (whose photograph is shown in this advertisement), as of **December 22, 2025**.

He no longer represents the company in any dealings related to the company or its owner. Anyone who deals with him bears full responsibility for such dealings.

NIIAR REAL ESTATE SERVICES SPC
P.O. Box: 2709, Postal Code: 133, Ghala, Sultanate of Oman
Tel: +968 2249 6909, info@niiar.com, www.niiar.com

ISG INTL SECURES TOP HONOURS IN CAMBRIDGE LEARNER AWARDS

MUSCAT: ISG International has once again reaffirmed its reputation for academic excellence by earning top honours at the Outstanding Cambridge Learner Awards for the June 2025 Cambridge Examination Series. Presented by Cambridge International Education, the awards recognise exceptional learner achievements across more than 40 countries worldwide. Setting an impressive benchmark, nine learners from ISG International delivered outstanding performances across multiple levels

and subjects in the latest Cambridge examinations, placing the school among the leading academic institutions in Oman. In the Cambridge IGCSE category, Asmi Sameer Raniga delivered an exceptional performance by securing Second Place in Oman for Best Across Seven Subjects, positioning her among the country's highest achievers. Further enhancing her achievement, she also received a High Achievement Award in Coordinated Sciences (Double Award), highlighting

her strong scientific aptitude and academic versatility. At the Cambridge International AS Level, Devansh Paresk Kumar Navin Shah emerged as a national topper, earning First Place in Oman for Best Across Four Subjects. His academic excellence was further recognised with a High Achievement Award in Economics, reflecting his strong analytical skills and subject mastery. Adding to the school's success, Muhammed Abrar secured Top in Oman in Economics at the Cambridge IGCSE level.

FOUNDATION STONE LAID FOR NEW NU CAMPUS

THE National University (NU) of Science and Technology celebrated the laying of the foundation stone for its new university campus at Sultan Haitham City in the Wilayat of Al Seeb, Muscat Governorate. The ceremony was held under the auspices of Dr Khalfan bin Said al Shueili, Minister of Housing and Urban Planning. The project represents a qualitative addition to the higher education system in the Sultanate of Oman, aligning with national strategic directions aimed at developing education and enhancing its role in supporting a knowledge- and innovation-based economy.

Spanning a total land area of 31,890 square metres with a built-up area of 31,200 square metres, the project has a capacity to accommodate 2,435 students. It will house the College of Advanced Technology and the College of Engineering, alongside integrated academic, administrative and research facilities. The project features a modern architectural design that blends Omani authenticity with contemporary global trends, reflecting the university's identity and its vision for academic leadership and institutional excellence. It provides an advanced educational infrastructure capable of accommodating future academic growth. In his speech, Dr P Mohamed Ali, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the National University of Science and Technology, said: "Laying the foundation stone for the new university building represents a pivotal milestone in the university's journey. It embodies our commitment to investing in smart infrastructure and providing



The project features a modern architectural design that blends Omani authenticity with contemporary global trends. — ONA

This reflects the integration between urban planning and educational development and reinforces the city's status as an integrated environment for living, learning and innovation.

advanced academic programmes that contribute to preparing national competencies capable of competing locally, regionally and globally." For his part, Dr Ali bin Saud al Bimani, Vice-Chancellor of the National University of Science and Technology, emphasised that establishing an integrated university campus in Sultan Haitham City is a strategic project that keeps pace with Oman's drive towards building smart cities. These cities enhance the education and innovation ecosystem through their promising urban and developmental dimensions. He explained that the new building will provide high-quality education in cooperation with prestigious universities, in addition to hosting specialised research centres and incubators for innovation and entrepreneurship, thereby contributing to linking educational outcomes with development requirements and the labour market. Following the speeches, the

Minister of Housing and Urban Planning, the chief guest of the event, laid the foundation stone and unveiled a 3D model of the new university building and a commemorative plaque, marking the commencement of the project's implementation. The ceremony also included the opening of an accompanying exhibition that showcased the project's stages and future facilities. Dr Salim bin Khamis al Araiimi, Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Academic Affairs and Scientific Research, said: "The new university campus will be a smart, integrated facility housing the colleges of Advanced Technology and Engineering, as well as the university's administration building. It aims to provide a modern, stimulating educational environment that supports creativity and scientific research, contributing to the preparation of national cadres equipped with the skills necessary to keep pace with future requirements." — ONA

GUTECH MARKS GRADUATION OF 514

MUSCAT: The German University of Technology in Oman (GUTech) celebrated the graduation of its 14th cohort, with 514 students completing Bachelor's and Master's programmes, in the presence of distinguished guests, members of the Board of Trustees, academic leaders and proud families. Prof Dr Michael Braun, Rector of GUTech, described the graduates as the true stars of the occasion and the source of its joy. He noted that the graduation marks the beginning of a new chapter — one that calls for independent thinking.

وزارة الصحة
Ministry of Health

Announcement

The Ministry of Health (Al Buraimi Hospital) invites specialized companies to participate in the following Tender:

Tender Ref:	Description	Last Date for Collection of Bidding Document	Last Date for Submission of Tenders	Eligibility	Tender Fee (Non Refundable)
115/2026	Testing and Calibration Devices for Biomedical Equipment (Buraimi Hospital)	Before 2 PM On 24/02/2026	Before 10AM On 01/03/2026	Specialized companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Projects, Tenders and Local Content Authority	10 R.O Small & Medium Enterprises 25 R.O Local Companies

Please note the following:

- Companies wishing to participate in the Tender can purchase the tender documents electronically through the website (etendering.tenderboard.gov.om), provided that they are registered in the system.
- Companies must submit their bids electronically via the above-mentioned website, provided that a **Bid Commitment Declaration**, and bids received without the required Declaration will not be considered.
- The ministry is not obligated to accept the lowest bid or any other bid.
- For inquiries related to the above tender, please contact through the website of the Esnad system for electronic tendering: (etendering.tenderboard.gov.om)

الروبيان الطبيعي للإستزراع السمكي ش.م.م
Natural Shrimp Aquaculture L.L.C

الروبيان الشرقي للإستزراع السمكي ش.م.م
Oriental Shrimp Aquaculture L.L.C

ANNOUNCEMENT OF TENDER

Natural Shrimp Aquaculture LLC and Oriental Shrimp Aquaculture are subsidiaries of Fisheries Development Oman (FDO) inviting you to share offers for the below table.

Tender No.	Description	Last Date to Collect the Tender	Last Date of Submission	Tender Fee
NSA/ORA/T/001/2026	استيراد أعلاف الروبيان Supply of Shrimp Feed	22 Jan 2026	3 Feb 2026	-

Please note:

- All proposals should be submitted via email to bidopening_osara@nsa.om. Failure to submit the bid to this email address will automatically disqualify the submission, and no further correspondence will be entertained.
- Any inquiries regarding the RFP should be directed to osara.tenders@nsa.om. Responses to queries will be provided in writing and shared with all suppliers approached for this RFP.

WORLD

SHORT TAKES



A woman holds a portrait of former president Yoon Suk Yeol, in Seoul. — Reuters

PROSECUTORS DEMAND DEATH PENALTY FOR EX-LEADER YOON

SEOUL: South Korean prosecutors called on Tuesday for the death penalty to be handed down to former president Yoon Suk Yeol for his December 2024 declaration of martial law, which plunged the country into chaos. Yoon’s criminal trial for insurrection, abuse of power and other offences linked to the declaration drew to a close on Tuesday after 11 hours of proceedings.

In closing remarks, prosecutors accused him of being the ringleader of an “insurrection” motivated by a “lust for power aimed at dictatorship and long-term rule”. They accused Yoon of showing “no remorse” for actions which threatened “constitutional order and democracy”. “The greatest victims of the insurrection in this case are the people of this country,” they said. “There are no mitigating circumstances to be considered in sentencing, and instead a severe punishment must be imposed.”

Yoon’s defence team, meanwhile, have made theatrical arguments in a bid to help him and his alleged accomplices. On Tuesday, they compared the disgraced former leader to great historical figures like Italian scholars Galileo Galilei and Giordano Bruno, who were wrongfully condemned.

“The majority does not always reveal the truth,” they said. Prosecutors also asked that former defence minister Kim Yong-hyun be sentenced to life imprisonment. Proceedings were expected to wrap up last Friday, but were postponed after 15 hours of deliberation — it took eight hours to examine evidence alone for Kim. — AFP

AFGHAN TALIBAN ENVOY POSTED TO INDIAN CAPITAL

NEW DELHI: Afghanistan’s Taliban government has appointed the first senior official in India since the group returned to power in 2021, charged with leading its embassy in Delhi. India has not officially recognised the Taliban government, but the move signals a deepening engagement.

Noor Ahmad Noor, a Taliban foreign ministry official, assumed responsibility as charge d’affaires, and has already held meetings with Indian officials, the embassy said in a statement.

“Both sides emphasised the importance of strengthening Afghanistan-India relations,” the Afghan Embassy said in a post on X late on Monday.

India has not commented, but the Afghan Embassy posted a photograph of Noor with senior Indian foreign ministry official Anand Prakash.

The appointment is significant for the Taliban, which has sought to reclaim control over Afghanistan’s overseas diplomatic missions as part of a broader push for international legitimacy. In October, India said it would upgrade its technical mission in Afghanistan to a full embassy. Russia is the only country to officially recognise the Afghan Taliban government. — AFP

POWER GAINS

Myanmar party claims most seats in election



Myanmar’s dominant pro-military party on Tuesday claimed a majority of elected lower house seats in the country’s junta-run polls. The junta is overseeing a staggered election it pledges will return power to the people after the third and final phase of voting on January 25. A USDP official — speaking anonymously because they were not authorised to disclose results — said that they “won 87 seats out of 100” in Sunday’s second phase of the vote. — AFP

SUDAN ‘LOST ALL SOURCES OF REVENUE’ IN THE WAR

PORT SUDAN: Widespread destruction, massive military spending and plummeting oil and gold revenues have left Sudan’s economy in “very difficult times”, army-aligned finance minister Gibril Ibrahim said, nearly three years into the army’s war with rival paramilitary forces. In an interview from his office in Port Sudan, Ibrahim said the government is eyeing deals for Red Sea ports and private investment to help rebuild infrastructure.

This week, Sudan’s prime minister announced the government’s official return to Khartoum, recaptured last year, but Ibrahim’s ministry is among those yet to fully return. The former leader said Sudan, already one of the world’s poorest countries before the war, “lost all sources of state revenue in the beginning of the war”.

“Most of the industry, most of the big companies and all of the economic activity was concentrated

in the centre,” he said, saying the heartland had accounted for some 80 per cent of state revenue. Ibrahim’s ex-group the Justice and Equality Movement once battled Khartoum’s government but it has fought on the army’s side as part of the Joint Forces coalition of armed groups.

Sudan, rich in oil and arable land, is currently suffering the world’s largest humanitarian crisis, with over half of its population in need of aid to survive. — AFP

Gazans struggle to hold ground in torrential rain

A RAINSTORM

swept across the Gaza Strip on Tuesday, flooding hundreds of tents, collapsing homes sheltering families displaced by two years of war and killing at least six people, local health officials said. Medics said five people, including two women and a girl, died when homes collapsed near Gaza City’s beach, while a one-year-old boy died of extreme cold in a tent in Deir Al Balah in central Gaza. Tents were torn from their stakes, some flying dozens of metres before crashing to the ground. Others lay crumpled in muddy pools as families scrambled to salvage what they could. Residents tried to resecure remaining shelters, hammering in loosened pegs and stacking sandbags around the edges to keep floodwaters from pouring inside.

“We didn’t realise what was happening until the wall started collapsing - an eight-metre-high wall, a strong concrete wall. Because of the speed and force of the wind, the wall fell on top of us, onto three tents,” said Bassel Hamuda, a displaced man in Gaza. “The elderly man, 73 years old, was martyred. His son’s wife was killed, and his son’s daughter was killed,” he said. Three months since a ceasefire halted major combat, Israeli forces have ordered the near-total depopulation of nearly two-thirds of Gaza, forcing its more than 2 million people into a narrow strip near the coast where most live either in makeshift tents or damaged buildings.

Dozens of relatives gathered at



A displaced Palestinian man fixes a tent shelter set up along the shore in Gaza City. — AFP

Medics said five people, including two women and a girl, died when homes collapsed near Gaza City’s beach, while a one-year-old boy died of extreme cold in a tent in Deir Al Balah in central Gaza

a hospital morgue on Tuesday for special prayers over bodies laid on medical stretchers before the funerals. The Gaza government media office said at least 31 Palestinians had died since the start of the winter season from exposure to cold or the collapse of unsafe buildings damaged by previous Israeli strikes. It said about 7,000 tents were damaged in the past 48 hours, most of whose occupants have no alternative shelter.

Municipal and civil defence officials said they were unable to cope with the storm because of fuel shortages and damaged equipment. During the war, Israel had destroyed hundreds of vehicles needed to respond to the weather emergency, including bulldozers and water pumps. In December, a UN report said 761 displacement sites hosting

about 850,000 people were at high risk of flooding, and thousands had moved in anticipation of heavy rain.

UN and Palestinian officials said at least 300,000 new tents were urgently needed for the roughly 1.5 million people still displaced. Most existing shelters are worn out or made of thin plastic and cloth sheeting. “In Gaza, winter weather is adding to the suffering of families already pushed to the brink by over two years of war,” UNRWA, the UN Palestinian refugee agency, said in a post on X on Tuesday. “Flooding, cold temperatures and damaged shelters are exposing displaced people to new risks, while humanitarian access remains severely constrained,” it added.

In a statement, Hamas urged mediators of the Gaza ceasefire deal that began in October to compel Israel to allow the unconditional flow of aid, shelter and rebuilding materials. Israel says hundreds of trucks enter Gaza daily carrying food, medical supplies and shelter equipment. International aid organisations say the supplies are still insufficient.

Separately, the UN children’s agency said on Tuesday that over 100 children have been killed in Gaza since the October ceasefire. “More than 100 children have been killed in Gaza since the ceasefire of early October,” Unicef spokesperson James Elder told reporters at a UN briefing by video link from Gaza. “Survival remains conditional, whilst the bombings and the shootings have slowed, have reduced during the ceasefire, they have not stopped.” — Reuters

UGANDA TO SHUT DOWN INTERNET AHEAD OF ELECTION

KAMPALA: Uganda ordered an Internet blackout on Tuesday, two days ahead of elections in which President Yoweri Museveni is seeking to extend his 40-year rule. “This measure is necessary to mitigate the rapid spread of online misinformation, disinformation, electoral fraud and related risks, as well as preventing incitement to violence that could affect public confidence and national security during the election period,” the Uganda Communications Commission said in a letter to Internet providers, verified by government officials.

There was no statement from the government on the shutdown. The officials said the authorities did not want to “own” the decision. The government repeatedly promised that the Internet would not be shut down during the election, stating in a post on X on January 5 that “claims suggesting otherwise are false, misleading, and intended to cause unnecessary fear and tension among the public.” The suspension was due to take effect at 6:00 pm local time and remain in force “until a restoration notice is issued”, the UCC said. — AFP

DOCUMENTARY EDIT CASE

BBC to ask court to dismiss Trump’s lawsuit



The BBC intends to ask a US federal court in Florida to dismiss a \$10-billion lawsuit brought by President Donald Trump against the British broadcaster. In papers filed in federal court in Miami, lawyers for the British broadcaster said they will “move to dismiss the complaint” due to the court lacking “personal jurisdiction”. They will argue Trump “will not be able to prove” that the documentary “caused him any cognizable injury”. — AFP

GUNFIRE INCIDENT

Judge shot at Istanbul courthouse



A judge was shot at an Istanbul courthouse by her public prosecutor ex-husband, who was prevented from firing a second shot by a day-release prisoner serving tea. The incident took place inside a courthouse on the Asian side of Istanbul. Judge Asli Kahraman sustained serious injuries when her ex-husband, Muhammet Cagatay Kilicaslan, opened fire, hitting her in the groin. Kahraman received first aid at the scene before being rushed to hospital. — AFP

SHORT TAKES



Candles, flowers and signs are placed at a makeshift memorial honoring Renee Nicole Good, in Minneapolis. — AFP

UN DEMANDS SWIFT PROBE INTO MINNEAPOLIS KILLING

GENEVA: The United Nations demanded on Tuesday an independent investigation after a federal immigration officer fatally shot a protester in the US city of Minneapolis last week. The UN rights office voiced deep concern at the killing of 37-year old Renee Nicole Good, who was shot dead in her car by an Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agent in the Midwestern city.

“Under international human rights law, the intentional use of lethal force is only permissible as a measure of last resort against an individual representing an imminent threat to life,” UN rights office spokesman Jeremy Laurence told reporters in Geneva. “We take note of the FBI investigation and insist on the need for prompt, independent and transparent investigation into the killing,” he said.

Laurence also urged “all authorities to take measures to de-escalate tensions and refrain from incitement to violence”. Good’s killing has sparked widespread anger at the use of force in the Trump administration’s immigration crackdown, sparking nationwide protests. Protesters have demanded a full investigation into the circumstances of the deadly encounter. — AFP

FREEZING RAIN HAMPERS TRANSPORT



Freezing rain led to travel disruptions in Central Europe on Tuesday, including flights being temporarily suspended at several airports. Snow and freezing temperatures buffeted Europe last week, with gale-force winds and storms claiming some 15 lives, causing travel mayhem, shutting schools, and cutting power to hundreds of thousands. A thick layer of ice on the Vienna airport runways led to a temporary shutdown, with flights gradually resuming around midday on Tuesday. Trains and flights were also experiencing delays, while authorities reported drift ice on the Danube and the Tisza rivers, where icebreakers have been put on alert. — AFP

HUNGARY TO VOTE IN APRIL, WITH THREAT TO ORBAN’S RULE

BUDAPEST: Hungary will hold a general election on April 12, its president said on Tuesday, with the EU’s longest serving current leader, Prime Minister Viktor Orban, facing an unprecedented challenge. The nationalist — a close ally of the US under President Donald Trump, China, Russia, and a thorn in the EU’s side -- has been in power for 16 straight years. But the party of former-government-insider-turned-critic Peter Magyar is seen ahead in opinion polls, against a backdrop

of a stagnating economy, growing discontent with public services and some high-profile scandals shaking confidence in the government.

“Voting will take place on Sunday, April 12, 2026,” President Tamas Sulyok said in a statement. Campaigning is already underway, with Magyar criss-crossing the country to hold rallies, while Orban has also made high-profile visits to Washington and Moscow. Aiming to win a fifth consecutive term, Orban pitches himself as a “safe

choice”, accusing the EU of fuelling the war in neighbouring Ukraine by supporting Kyiv’s fight against Russia’s invasion. He has also rolled out a slew of welfare measures in recent months benefiting first-time home buyers, mothers with at least two children and pensioners.

Magyar promises a system change, vowing to clamp down on what he says is widespread corruption, improve “failing” public services and unlock billions of euros in funds the EU has frozen. — AFP

Unidentified drone strikes hit 3 tankers in Black Sea

THREE Greek-managed oil tankers were hit by unidentified drones in the Black Sea on Tuesday as they were on their way to load crude at a terminal on Russia’s coast. The attacks come as Kazakhstan’s oil production, most of which is exported via the terminal, cratered in early January. It was not immediately clear who was behind Tuesday’s strikes. Ukraine did not immediately comment. The Caspian Pipeline Consortium, which operates the terminal where the tankers were due to take on board cargoes, declined to comment on the attack.

Two Suezmax tankers and one Aframax tanker were hit on their way to the Yuzhnaya Ozereyevka terminal, a loading point for around 80 per cent of Kazakh crude destined for international markets, according to eight sources, who spoke to Reuters on condition of anonymity due to the sensitivity of the situation. A Ukrainian drone hit one of three main CPC moorings at the terminal, located near the port of Novorossiysk, on November 29.



Facilities of the Caspian Pipeline Consortium’s (CPC) Marine Terminal in Yuzhnaya Ozereyevka near the Black Sea port of Novorossiysk, Russia. — Reuters file photo

Oil and gas condensate output in Kazakhstan plunged by 35 per cent between January 1 and January 12 compared to December’s average, a source familiar with the data told Reuters, adding that the drop was mainly due to export constraints via the Black Sea terminal. Kazakhstan’s energy ministry said on Tuesday that CPC was continuing to export oil via one mooring.

Attacks on tankers in the Black Sea could increase both shipping and insurance costs for those seeking to load oil at Russian terminals on the Black Sea, which handle more than 2 per cent of global crude. One of the tankers, the Delta Harmony, is managed by Greece’s Delta Tankers, LSEG data showed. According to the sources, it was expected to load Kazakh-produced oil from Tengizchevroil, a unit of US oil major Chevron.

The Delta Supreme, also managed by Delta Tankers, was attacked as well. Delta Tankers did not immediately respond to Reuters’ requests for comment. The third vessel, Matilda, chartered by a subsidiary of Kazakhstan’s state-owned KazMunayGas (KMG) and managed by Greece’s

Thenamaris, was expected to load Kazakh oil from Karachaganak when it was struck, the sources added.

A Thenamaris official confirmed that Matilda was hit by two drones while waiting in ballast condition 48 km off CPC’s moorings. KMG also confirmed the attack. “There were no injuries and the ship suffered minor damage to deck structures according to an initial assessment, which is fully repairable. The ship, seaworthy as it is, is now sailing away from the area,” the Thenamaris official said. Two sources in maritime security said that a fire reportedly broke out on board Matilda and was quickly extinguished. A fourth vessel, the Freud, managed by Greece’s TMS, was also initially believed to have been attacked. But TMS later denied that it had been hit. Shareholders in CPC’s 1,500-km pipeline include KazMunayGas, units of Chevron, Russia’s Lukoil and ExxonMobil.

Meanwhile, Russia struck cities across Ukraine with missiles and drones overnight in one of its biggest attacks of the New Year so far, killing at least four people and knocking out heat and power, exposing millions to dangerous winter cold. President

Volodymyr Zelensky said Russia had launched nearly 300 drones, 18 ballistic missiles, and seven cruise missiles during overnight attacks on eight Ukrainian regions.

The main targets were energy-generation facilities and substations, Zelensky said in a post on the Telegram app. “Every such strike against life is a reminder that support for Ukraine cannot be stopped. Missiles for air defence systems are needed everyday, and especially during winter.” Ukrainian air defence units shot down 247 drones and seven missiles, the air force said. It also said on the Telegram app that missiles and drones caused damage at 24 sites.

Emergency power cuts were introduced in the capital Kyiv and also in the Chernihiv, Odesa, Kharkiv, Dnipropetrovsk, Zaporizhzhia and Donetsk regions, the Energy Ministry said. DTEK, the country’s largest private energy company, said the Russian attack heavily damaged equipment at one of its thermal power plants. Russia has relentlessly targeted Ukraine’s energy system throughout the conflict, claiming attacks on civil infrastructure are justified to impair Ukraine’s war effort. — Reuters

Farmers roll hundreds of tractors into Paris in fresh protests

PARIS: Around 350 tractors rolled into Paris on Tuesday, driving down the Champs-Elysees avenue and setting up camp near the parliament building, as farmers protested a litany of woes including a trade deal the European Union has struck with four South American countries. The protests reflect a deep sense of malaise afflicting France’s agricultural sector, with the planned signing of an accord between the European Union and the Mercosur bloc seen as the last straw.

French farmers have complained of climate and economic uncertainties and have since December staged protests and set up roadblocks over the government’s handling of a lumpy skin disease outbreak. “We’re at the end of our tether,” said one of the activists, Guillaume Moret, 56. “We haven’t made any money from our farms for three years. Politicians are incapable of giving us any direction,” said the

head of the FNSEA union for the region of Ile-de-France around Paris.

The FNSEA, France’s leading agricultural union, and another union, Jeunes Agriculteurs, are demanding “concrete and immediate action” from the government. Arriving from towns around Paris but also from the Hauts-de-France region of northern France, the protesters parked their tractors not far from parliament’s lower house, the National Assembly, in central Paris. “The peasant revolt continues,” read a banner unfurled in front of the legislature.

In an apparent attempt to pacify the protesters, Prime Minister Sebastien Lecornu has allowed the activists to set up camp near the National Assembly building, a source close to the matter said. Government spokesperson Maud Bregeon told broadcaster TF1 that “dialogue” with farmers continued.

The first convoy of about fifteen



Tractors are parked along the Seine river as farmers protest, in Paris. — AFP

tractors rolled into the French capital shortly before 6:00 am (05:00 GMT). Joined by dozens of others, they drove down the Champs-Elysees honking their horns. “We won’t leave without measures that allow us to catch our breath a little,” said another protester, Guillaume

Moret. Some, equipped with trailers, had brought mattresses and duvets.

Several days before the planned signing of the EU-Mercosur agreement in Paraguay, the FNSEA union reiterated its opposition to the deal and also listed several national “priorities” to be defended

on Tuesday. The union is calling on the government to address a number of issues including wolf predation and the use of fertilisers. French police said some 400 protesters had gathered near the building housing the National Assembly.

Most of the European Union’s 27 nations back the Mercosur trade deal, which supporters argue is crucial to boost exports, help the continent’s ailing economy and foster diplomatic ties at a time of global uncertainty. The deal would create one of the world’s largest free-trade areas, boosting commerce between the EU and the Mercosur bloc comprising Brazil, Paraguay, Argentina and Uruguay.

Thousands of farmers in France and Ireland staged protests over the weekend. In France, politicians across the divide have also been up in arms against the deal, which they view as an assault on the country’s influential farming sector. — AFP

OPINION

When motivation fades: Understanding Quitter’s Day



HYESHA BARRETT

The writer is a Master Life Coach and Positive Parent Specialist

EVERY January follows a familiar emotional rhythm. The year begins with great intention. Motivation feels accessible and plans feel possible. The idea of who we might become begins to shape our thoughts and conversations. Then, somewhere between the second and third week, the energy subtly shifts. Momentum slows, doubt creeps in and effort feels heavier. This moment has been named Quitter’s Day, but the label itself misunderstands what is truly happening. People do not quit because they lack discipline or desire. They quit because the way they approached change asked too much and too fast, from systems that needed safety, not force. Quitter’s Day is not a failure of character. It is a misalignment between intention and capacity. Most resolutions are created cognitively. They are built in the mind, shaped by ideals, expectations and comparisons. We decide who we should be and then demand that the body and emotions comply: Wake up earlier. Do more. Push harder. Yet, the nervous system does not respond to logic alone. It responds to perceived threat and safety. Sudden change, even positive change, introduces uncertainty, which in turn activates protection. When motivation fades, it is often because the body feels overwhelmed, not because

the goal lacks meaning. Old habits persist not because they are healthy, but because they are familiar. Familiarity signals safety. Breaking a pattern requires more than willpower - It requires trust. Quitter’s Day also exposes the quiet role of perfectionism. Many people approach the new year with an all-or-nothing mindset. If the routine is broken once, it feels broken entirely. A missed day becomes evidence of personal failure. Shame enters quickly, and once shame is present, avoidance follows. We step away not because we do not care, but because continuing feels emotionally unsafe. Another reason resolutions dissolve is disconnection from values. Goals focused solely on outcomes rely on constant motivation, which is unsustainable. When progress slows or results are delayed, the reason for persisting becomes unclear. Without meaning, effort begins to feel hollow. Avoiding Quitter’s Day does not mean pushing harder. It means shifting how we relate to change itself. The first shift is redefining success. Progress is not uninterrupted consistency. Progress is the ability to return without punishment. The most resilient people are not those who never falter, but those who do not abandon themselves when they do. The second shift is pace. Sustainable change respects the body’s limits. Small, repeatable actions build safety. When change

When you choose compassion over criticism and patience over pressure, you remain in relationship with yourself.

feels manageable, the nervous system remains engaged rather than defensive. Momentum grows quietly, not through pressure, but through trust. It also helps to anchor change in identity rather than achievement. Instead of measuring success by perfection, ask whether your actions align with the person you are becoming. Identity-based change does not demand constant motivation. It builds coherence between intention and behaviour. Most importantly, expect resistance. Motivation will fluctuate. Doubt will surface. Old patterns will reappear. None of this means you are failing. It means you are human, learning to move differently. Change that lasts is rarely dramatic. It is relational. It asks for patience, curiosity and self-respect. Quitter’s Day does not need to mark an ending. It can mark a recalibration. A moment to soften the grip of expectation and return to self-understanding. When you stop trying to conquer yourself and start working with yourself, change stops feeling like a battle. Quitter’s Day reminds us that the real work is not starting again, but staying present when enthusiasm fades. When you choose compassion over criticism and patience over pressure, you remain in relationship with yourself. That relationship, more than motivation, is what carries you forward.

HORN OF AFRICA TERRITORY AT HEART OF GEOPOLITICAL SCRAMBLE

JORIS FIORITI

Since Israel recognised Somaliland last month, the self-declared republic on the Gulf of Aden has become central to a struggle over military access, ports and regional influence across the Red Sea corridor. Somaliland sits astride one of the world’s most strategic maritime choke points, flanked by multiple conflicts in the Horn of Africa and the Middle East. It declared independence from Somalia in 1991 but had never been recognised internationally until Israel’s move. Israel’s recognition was fiercely opposed by the Somali government as an attack on its territorial unity — a position backed by most African and Arab leaders. But Somaliland’s assets — most crucially the port and airfield at Berbera, which have been developed by the UAE since 2016 to be capable of hosting large naval and air assets — outweighed any potential concern about the diplomatic fall-out. A Somaliland official said new buildings and an airbase facility were recently completed at Berbera by the UAE, which has a 25-year concession to build a military base. Türkiye has sided with Somalia, its key strategic partner in the region — host of its largest international military base, a planned space-port and imminent oil-drilling projects. The fragmentation of Somalia “could jeopardise Türkiye’s progress and interests in the country”, said Scott Romaniuk, a researcher at Budapest’s Corvinus University. Meanwhile, Somaliland is the only African territory, besides the tiny state of Eswatini, to recognise Taiwan — enough to attract the ire of China, which also has significant investments in Somalia. Washington defended what it said was its Israeli ally’s right to recognise Somaliland, although President Donald Trump said he was unlikely to follow suit, despite pressure from some within his Republican party. Lost in the geopolitical scramble is any assessment of Somaliland’s own case for independence. It has run its own affairs since 1991 and been far more stable and democratic than the rest of Somalia, but those are secondary considerations for its partners. “It’s sad because the merits of Somaliland aren’t discussed,” Marchal said. “What Somaliland has achieved, what it has failed at, is completely ignored.” — AFP

Dignity through policy

A NEW year has begun with a flurry of restructuring, new appointments and policy initiatives. It is natural to look at a collection of new Decrees, and after perhaps congratulating someone on an appointment, simply shrug our shoulders and say “we’ll see”. Reshuffles and announcements are not always interesting to the average person but there is a lot to dig into this time. What has caught my eye most is the raft of new social development policies designed to ease the burden on citizens with lower incomes. Having worked in more than one government economic initiative, I do sometimes feel scepticism about bold new plans with magical solutions. But one thing I do believe in – credit to the late great J M Keynes, is that economic progress comes via the ordinary person’s pocket. That is a simplification and inflation, debt ratios etc. are real economic considerations. However, the basic reality is that people need to have money to spend in order to spend it.

The accession of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik came with a perfect storm of challenges: accumulated problems that were overdue for attention, a lower oil price slashing budgets, and then the cataclysm of the Covid-19 pandemic. Oman had to make tough decisions, hurry through painful measures like pension reform, phasing out subsidies and freezing public sector job hires. At the same time, Oman was entering an unfamiliar international debt market for the first time in generations and taking on onerous borrowing commitments. Businesses suffered and closed, and many people wondered whether happier times would return. The austerity of the last few years has been tough even with the pandemic long passed and the oil



ALEX BROWN

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There will be hundreds of thousands of people and families feeling relief as the new measures come into force. Optimism goes a long way in business, and this is a sound business.



The new benefits announced for longer-term job seekers are just as important as the planned creation of 60,000 jobs.

price in comfortable territory. The more expensive borrowing needed to be dealt with promptly, the books balanced and fiscal order restored. I have always advocated stimulus as the route out of economic hardship, but even I believe that these decisions had to be taken. The Omani Government needed to clean house, and it is painful in the short term. In reality, economics is about people. Jobs created and lost are lives liberated or turned upside down. Infrastructure investments are life upgrades for millions and financial opportunities for companies of all sizes – and the people they employ and the families they support. Now that more headline projects are underway in Oman, there is hope for better growth this year. But hope is for tomorrow, and if you’re unable to pay your bills or feed your children today, it rings hollow. There is nothing more humiliating than being unable to sustain yourself and your family. The new benefits announced for longer-term job seekers are just as important as the planned

creation of 60,000 jobs. Even more important are the social benefit payments for low income families and some retired people, and the additional support for education to over seventy thousand citizens. The announcement of a major social housing building programme gives hope to many who could not afford to buy or build, as well as providing a direct stimulus in the construction sector. Not all business people and economists can reconcile the paradox of giving away money to make money, and the practice has its limits! But taking away the fear of not being able to meet the basic needs of a family is a moral duty for any government and one that Oman is addressing. More than that, it will allow more people the freedom to get what they need, keep small businesses afloat with their custom, and float Oman’s economy from the bottom while the big investments try to pull from the top. There will be hundreds of thousands of people and families feeling relief as the new measures come into force. Optimism goes a long way in business, and this is a sound business.

Celebrating a journey towards a resilient future



SAMUEL KUTTY

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

THE landscape in the Sultanate of Oman during the second week of January reflects a blend of emotions, as jubilant people celebrate the Accession Day of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on January 11.

The legacy of the late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos, who shaped modern Oman, includes significant advancements in infrastructure, education, healthcare and culture, as well as his influence on regional geopolitics. His leadership was inclusive and characterised by a strong willingness to consider the needs and concerns of his team.

On his part, through new regulations, projects, and sustainability initiatives, His Majesty has honoured the legacy established by late Sultan Qaboos, and persists in guiding the nation proactively, offering his citizens the appropriate channels and platforms to collaborate with the government in achieving the goals outlined in Oman Vision 2040.

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has established a novel doctrine that focuses on wealth generation, enhancing educational standards, guaranteeing social security norms, advancing civil liberties, and fostering stronger relationships with neighbouring countries.

“The 11th of January represents a moment of pride and honour for every Omani and resident on this benevolent land, as well as an occasion to renew loyalty and gratitude to the leader of the march,” the Oman News

Agency said in its report marking the sixth anniversary of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik’s accession to the throne.

Oman’s steady progress under Oman Vision 2040 serves as a blueprint for transforming the country into a developed, self-reliant, and globally significant economy.

From virtual pathways to funding channels, the Oman Vision 2040 is reshaping the present to build a more resilient future. It represents the latest phase of strategic development that has defined modern Oman.

Under the astute guidance of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, the foreign policy of the Sultanate of Oman is founded on a clear set of steadfast principles that form the core of Omani diplomatic strategy.

Leading among these principles are respect for state sovereignty, non-intervention in domestic affairs, maintaining good relations with neighbouring countries, reinforcing the principles of peace and coexistence, and promoting dialogue and mutual understanding to resolve disagreements and disputes. To further strengthen social stability, His Majesty issued several Royal orders, reaffirming his commitment to the prosperity and well-being of the Omani people. The state news agency stated, “These measures are part of a larger initiative to address critical social and economic issues, including employment, housing, education, and social welfare.”

His Majesty directed the allocation of RO

His Majesty has established a novel doctrine that focuses on wealth generation, enhancing educational standards, guaranteeing social security norms, advancing civil liberties, and fostering stronger relationships with neighbouring countries

100 million to support Oman’s Social Housing Programme for 2026 and 2027, ensuring improved access to secure housing for eligible families.

In addition, issued directives for several Social Protection schemes that aim to directly benefit low-income families, raising the number receiving family income support to more than 57,000 families, while the total number of beneficiaries across all social protection programmes is expected to reach around 1.6 million in 2026.

The directives also include extending the Job Security Allowance payment period from six months to one year for eligible insured individuals, providing additional financial security for those facing employment transition.

In the education sector, more than 73,000 students will receive financial support throughout the two academic semesters. This support will be provided through the National Social Protection System of the Royal Oman Police, with funding doubled from the allocations of the Social Protection Fund.

Definitely, the Sultanate of Oman is a country that many others seek to emulate — whether in its commitment to sustainability in industry, food security, the environment, health, or education. Truth, justice, cooperation, peace, security, and similar values have established the nation as a dependable reliable for regionally and globally.

AI HELPS FUEL NEW ERA OF MEDICAL SELF-TESTING

THOMAS URBAIN

Beyond smart watches and rings, artificial intelligence is being used to make self-testing for major diseases more readily available - from headsets that detect early signs of Alzheimer’s to an iris-scanning app that helps spot cancer.

“The reason preventive medicine doesn’t work right now is because you don’t want to go to the doctor all the time to get things tested,” says Ramses Alcaide, co-founder and CEO of startup Neurable. “But what about if you knew when you needed to go to the doctor?”

Connected rings, bracelets and watches - which were everywhere at last week’s Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas - can already monitor heart rate, blood pressure and glucose levels, with varying degrees of accuracy.

These gadgets are in high demand from consumers. A recent study published by OpenAI showed that more than 200 million Internet users check ChatGPT every week for information on health topics. Last Wednesday, OpenAI even launched a chatbot that can draw on a user’s medical records and other data collected by wearable devices, with their consent, to inform its responses. Using electroencephalogram (EEG) technology, Neurable has developed a headset that records and deciphers brain activity.

The linked app compares data with the user’s medical history to check for any deviation, a possible sign of a problem, said Alcaide.

“Apple Watch can pick up Parkinson’s, but it can only pick it up once you have a tremor,” Alcaide said. “Your brain has been fighting that Parkinson’s for over 10 years.”

With EEG technology, “you can pick these things up before you actually see physical symptoms of them. And this is just one example.”

Some people have reservations about the capabilities of such devices. “I don’t think that wearable EEG devices are reliable enough,” said Anna Wexler, a University of Pennsylvania professor who studies consumer detection products, although she acknowledges that “AI has expanded the possibilities of these devices.”

While Neurable’s product cannot provide an actual diagnosis, it does offer a warning. It can also detect signs of depression and early development of Alzheimer’s disease.

Neurable is working with the Ukrainian military to evaluate the mental health of soldiers on the front lines of the war with Russia, as well as former prisoners of war, in order to detect post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

French startup NAOX meanwhile has developed EEG earbuds linked to a small box that can help patients with epilepsy. Rather than detect seizures, which are “very rare,” the device recognises “spikes” - quick, abnormal electrical shocks in the brain that are “much more difficult to see,” said NAOX’s chief of innovation Marc Vaillaud, a doctor by training. — AFP

Why Greenland’s future is not for US to decide

THE recent push by the United States to assert control over Greenland, a vast Arctic territory rich in rare minerals and strategic position, has reignited old anxieties about colonial extraction and resource-driven geopolitics. Greenland, an autonomous territory of the Kingdom of Denmark, was colonised in the early 1700s and continues to be tied to the European nation. Yet its Indigenous Inuit population is making one thing absolutely clear: control of their future is not up for negotiation. In the face of aggressive rhetoric from Washington, their stance exposes deeper global patterns of resource control dressed up as security threats.

President Donald Trump has repeated that the United States will pursue control of Greenland, even hinting at force. “We are going to do something on Greenland whether they like it or not,” Trump said in public remarks, framing the island’s fate as a matter of US strategic imperative. “We don’t want Russia or China going to Greenland, which if we don’t take Greenland, you can have Russia or China as your next door neighbour. That’s not going to happen,” Trump added, tying Greenland’s future to great-power rivalry rather than to Greenlanders themselves.

For its part, Greenland has made its own position unmistakably clear. “We don’t want to be Americans, we don’t want to be Danish, we want to be Greenlanders,” the leaders of five parties in Greenland’s parliament said in a joint statement. “The future of Greenland must be decided by Greenlanders,” they added. “No other country can meddle in this. We must decide our country’s future ourselves — without pressure to make a hasty decision, without procrastination, and without interference from other countries.” These are not peripheral objections but assertions of sovereign identity and democratic self-determination.

The irony of this moment is stark. A powerful state purports to act to secure a territory against rival



A 3D printed miniature of US President Donald Trump and Greenland flag are seen in this illustration. — Reuters



OMAN AL YAHYAI

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powers when, in fact, it is advancing tactics that resemble the very colonial practices that Greenlanders are seeking to move beyond. Instead of supporting pathways towards true independence, the United States threatens coercion, referencing its own security concerns while treating other people’s land as if it were up for grabs.

This is not the first time resource wealth has been used to justify coercive foreign policy. The modern record is filled with examples where powerful nations have targeted regions with valuable natural endowments under the excuse of national security, democracy promotion or humanitarian intervention. Venezuela’s oil reserves have been a persistent factor in Washington’s fraught relationship with Caracas. Iraq’s oil fields were a known strategic prize even before the 2003 invasion. In the contemporary context of Middle East politics, the genocide in Gaza is often viewed through lenses that include territorial control and resource leverage. The pattern is consistent: When natural wealth is at stake, powerful nations deploy their might with disproportionate force.

Beyond the instrumental value of minerals and location, there is a profound moral question at stake: whose voices matter in

decisions about land and future? For centuries, Indigenous communities around the world have seen their territories exploited by external powers in pursuit of natural wealth. Greenland, whose population is predominantly Inuit and whose cultural identity is distinct from both Denmark and the United States, has its own history of external governance. Its people long sought greater autonomy from Denmark, culminating in expanded self-government in the 21st century. But true independence is difficult when economic and defence pressures persist, and when geopolitical giants see your land as their next strategic prize.

The response from Greenland’s political leaders underscores this point. Their insistence that Greenlanders decide their own future is not a slogan; it is a rejection of imposed destinies. It speaks to a universal principle: indigenous peoples and smaller nations must be masters of their own political and economic paths. External interest in their resources from the West should never trump that fundamental right.

Washington’s approach to Greenland also threatens to undermine long-standing alliances. Greenland is part of the Kingdom of Denmark, a Nato ally. Any US attempt to assert control against the will of Denmark and Greenland could fracture the transatlantic alliance. European leaders have expressed concern that such actions would have profound repercussions for collective security cooperation in the North Atlantic and beyond.

Ultimately, Greenland’s mineral wealth ought to be a source of empowerment and opportunity for its people, not leverage for external domination.

The international community should support equitable and democratic pathways for Greenland’s development and sovereignty. That means respecting the will of Greenlanders, not threatening them with unilateral action disguised as national security.

SPORTS

SHORTTAKES



Mark Anthony of the Philippines was crowned champion of the seventh edition of the Oman Open Billiards Championship.

ANTHONY CROWNED OMAN OPEN CHAMPION, MOHAMMED SECOND

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, JAN 13

Filipino player Mark Anthony was crowned champion of the seventh edition of the Oman Open Billiards Championship, which concluded on Tuesday at Active Oman Arena, while Omani player Mohammed al Balushi finished as runner-up. The tournament featured a strong international turnout with 64 players from around the world, delivering high technical standards and intense competition throughout. The championship brought together a distinguished group of international stars, led by Mark Anthony, Mehran Ershadi, Qadir Abbas and Nadeem Gul, alongside players from various nationalities, giving the event a strong technical edge and raising the level of excitement across all stages.

Omani players also made a strong impression, with Khalid al Shabibi, Mohammed al Hasani, Fahd al Maqbali and Nasser al Hinai qualifying for the Round of 16, reflecting the steady development of local players and their growing ability to compete with international professionals. In the final, Mark Anthony claimed the title after defeating Mohammed al Balushi by 13–2, in a match that highlighted the technical gap between the two players. Despite the loss, Al Balushi delivered an impressive run to reach the final. The Oman Billiards and Snooker Committee stated that the organisation of the Oman Open forms part of its ongoing strategy to develop the sport, enhance players’ technical exposure, and attract international participation, contributing to the overall growth of billiards in Oman.

INTERNATIONAL BILLIARDS AND SNOOKER BEGINS TODAY
The Committee also praised the management of Arena Active Oman for their excellent hosting and organisation of the event, and commended all players, officials, referees, and media representatives for their efforts in ensuring the tournament’s success. The event came at a key time, coinciding with the launch of the Muscat Nights International Billiards and Snooker Championship, further reinforcing Muscat’s growing reputation as a regional and international hub for cue sports. In a related development, the Muscat Nights International Billiards and Snooker Championship kicks off on Wednesday, featuring 125 male and female players from 18 countries competing for a total prize pool of RO 6,770 — RO 3,420 for snooker and RO 3,350 for billiards. The tournament runs from January 14 to 18 under international professional formats, including group stages and knockout rounds through to the finals, reflecting high organisational standards and a strong level of competition.



Oman’s Mohammed al Balushi finished as runner-up after losing to Mark Anthony in the final.

Seeb fight back to beat Saham in HM Cup quarters



Seeb and Saham players fight for the ball during the HM’s Cup quarterfinal second-leg match at the Sohar Sports Complex..

RIYADH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JAN 13

SEEB Club produced a memorable comeback victory after defeating Saham Club 3–2 at Sohar Sports Complex in the second leg of the quarterfinals of His Majesty’s Football Cup, sealing their place in the semifinals following a dramatic and high-quality encounter. The match kicked off with a strong and confident start from Seeb, who entered the game as the favourites and immediately imposed their style through controlled possession and attacking intent. Despite their early dominance, Seeb struggled to create clear cut chances, as Saham maintained good defensive organisation and gradually began to grow into the match. As the first half progressed, Saham capitalised on defensive errors to take control of the scoreline, in the 25th minute, Marwan al Ghafri opened the scoring for Saham after meeting a well-delivered corner kick. Taking advantage of a defensive lapse inside the penalty area, Al Ghafri finished confidently to give his side the lead. Shock followed almost immediately, as Saham doubled their advantage just one minute later, team captain Mohsin Jawhar capitalised on a costly mistake by Seeb defender Ahmed al Khamisi, intercepting the ball before calmly slotting it past the goalkeeper to make it 2–0 and put Saham firmly in control.

Despite the setback, Seeb showed resilience and determination, continuing to press forward in search of a goal that could revive their hopes. Their efforts were rewarded in stoppage time at the end of the first half, when Marwan Toaib reduced the deficit, the goal came from an excellent cross by Nasser al Rawahi, allowing Seeb to go into the break trailing 2–1 and keeping the contest wide open. The second half belonged entirely to Seeb, who returned with renewed intensity and clear attacking purpose. Five minutes after the restart, Zahir al Aghbari scored the equaliser in the 50th minute, once again finishing from a



Oman Club advanced to the semifinals thanks to their 1–0 victory in the first leg against Dhofar.

precise cross delivered by the influential Nasser al Rawahi. Momentum continued to swing decisively in Seeb’s favour, and in the 54th minute, Marwan Taib completed the comeback by scoring his second goal of the match, giving Seeb a 3–2 lead and completing a remarkable ‘remontada’ that ignited celebrations among their supporters. Following the third goal, Seeb demonstrated tactical discipline and defensive solidity, successfully neutralising Saham’s attempts to respond and preserving their advantage until the final whistle. The victory secured Seeb’s

qualification to the semifinals based on the aggregate result of the two legged tie. **OMAN CLUB IN SEMIS**
In another quarter final match played on the same day, Oman Club and Dhofar Club played out a goalless draw, Oman Club advanced to the semifinals thanks to their 1–0 victory in the first leg, with Majed al Balushi scoring the decisive goal. With the semifinal lineup taking shape, His Majesty’s Cup continues to deliver excitement and drama, reaffirming its status as the most prestigious football competition in the Sultanate.

FORMERMIDFIELDER



Middlesbrough manager Michael Carrick reacts during the EPL match against Coventry City. — Reuters

MAN UTD ‘REACH DEAL’ TO APPOINT CARRICK AS INTERIM MANAGER

LONDON: Manchester United have reached an agreement in principle to appoint Michael Carrick as interim manager until the end of the season, reports said on Tuesday.

The former midfielder was pictured arriving at the club's Carrington training ground, with his appointment likely to be confirmed later in the day.

Carrick previously had an unbeaten three-game stint as caretaker boss at Old Trafford in 2021.

The 44-year-old, who won 12 major trophies in his 12-year playing career at United, was appointed manager of Middlesbrough in October 2022.

Carrick guided Middlesbrough to the Championship play-offs in his first season in charge but was dismissed in June after the club finished 10th in the second tier.

United had also been in discussions with former player and boss Ole Gunnar Solskjaer about a potential return to the club.

The Red Devils dismissed Ruben Amorim last week after a dismal 14-month stint under the Portuguese coach.

Caretaker boss Darren Fletcher oversaw a 2-2 draw against lowly Burnley in the Premier League and a 2-1 defeat to Brighton in the FA Cup.

United's exit from both domestic cup competitions at the first hurdle, plus a lack of European football, means they will play only 40 matches this season — their lowest number since the 1914-1915 campaign.

The 20-time English champions are seventh in the Premier League, but just three points outside the top four and one point behind fifth-placed Brentford.

A top-four finish would guarantee a return to the lucrative Champions League and top five is likely to be enough thanks to the strong performance of English sides in European competition so far this season.

United host local rivals Manchester City on Saturday in what is likely to be Carrick's first game in charge. — AFP



Seeb earned their place in the last eight after producing a commanding performance against Algeria's Tadjenanet.

Seeb face ES Sahel today in Arab Club quarters

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, JAN 13

SEEB Club of Oman meets Tunisian side Etoile Sportive du Sahel on Wednesday, in the quarterfinals of the 44th Arab Clubs Men's Volleyball Championship, currently being held in Tunis, Tunisia. In other quarterfinal ties, Esperance Sportive de Tunis take on Police SC (Qatar), Al Ittihad (Libya) face Al Swehly SC (Libya), and Qatar SC plays Al Muharraq (Bahrain).

Seeb earned their place in the last eight after producing a commanding performance against Algeria's Tadjenanet, securing a straight-set victory (25-15, 25-14, 25-21) and showcasing their quality and ambition in the competition.

From the outset, Seeb dominated with organised performance, solid defence and swift attacking play. They wrapped up the first set comfortably (25-15), maintained their edge in the second (25-14) with coordinated offence and constant pressure, and then closed out the third set (25-21) despite a spirited comeback attempt from Tadjenanet, demonstrating composure in the crucial points to clinch a well-deserved win and boost morale ahead of the quarterfinal clash.

The result confirmed Seeb's qualification from Group 1, which finished with ES Tunis at the top on eight points, followed by Qatar SC and Al Swehly SC with six points each, while Seeb placed fourth with four points ahead of



Seeb dominated with organised performance, solid defence and swift attacking play.

Tadjenanet, who finished without a point.

MAJEES OUT Meanwhile, Majees Club bowed out of the championship following a thrilling five-set defeat to Libya's Al Ittihad in the group stage, one of the most competitive matches of the tournament. Both teams traded control early on. Al Ittihad captured the first set (25-18), Majees responded in the second (25-18), and the teams continued trading sets through the third and fourth, forcing a decisive fifth.

In the final set, small margins made the difference, and Al Ittihad edged the contest 15-13.

Majees depart with heads held high after a valiant display that reflected the competitive spirit of Omani volleyball on the Arab stage.

Group 2 standings saw ES Sahel finish top with a perfect 12 points, followed by Al Ittihad with eight points, Al Muharraq of Bahrain and Police SC of Qatar on six points each, Majees on four points and the Palestinian Forces club without a point.

Australia captain Alyssa Healy to retire from cricket in March

MELBOURNE: Australia captain Alyssa Healy said on Tuesday she will retire from cricket in March after the team's home series with India, ending a storied career.

The 35-year-old wicketkeeper-batter has been playing for her country for 15 years, making her debut as a teenager.

She has played almost 300 matches across all formats, blasting more than 7,000 runs and taking 275 dismissals. "It's with mixed emotions that the upcoming India series will be my last for Australia," said Healy, whose husband is Australia pace spearhead Mitchell Starc. "I'm still passionate about playing for Australia, but I've somewhat lost that competitive edge that's kept me driven since the



ALYSSA HEALY

It's with mixed emotions that the upcoming India series will be my last for Australia. I'm still passionate about playing for Australia, but I've somewhat lost that competitive edge that's kept me driven since the start, so the time feels right to call it a day.



start, so the time feels right to call it a day."

"Representing my country has been an incredible honour and I'm grateful for one last series in the green and gold."

Taking over as full-time Australian captain in 2023 from Meg



Lanning, Healy famously led the side to a historic 16-0 whitewash of England. One of the most destructive batters and finest wicketkeepers in world cricket, she has been part of eight World Cup titles.

"Alyssa is one of the all-time greats of the game and has made an

immeasurable contribution both on and off the field over her 15-year career," said Cricket Australia chief Todd Greenberg. "On behalf of Australian cricket, I'd like to thank Alyssa and congratulate her on an incredible career that has inspired so many and changed the game for the better."

Healy, the niece of Australian Test great Ian Healy, was in the commentary box during the Australian men's recent 4-1 Ashes thumping of England and is expected to transition to a broadcasting career.

The February-March series with India features three T20s, two one-dayers and a one-off Test in Perth.

Healy will only play the ODIs and the Test. — AFP

SPORTS

DUBAI24H



AL ZUBAIR’S
AL MANAR RACING
TEAM UP WITH
DRAGON RACING

MUSCAT: Al Manar Racing has teamed up with Dubai-based Dragon Racing to try and win the prestigious Michelin Dubai 24H race at the Dubai Autodrome for a second successive season. The race takes place this weekend (January 17-18) with 33 GT3 crews included in a massive quality field of 65 cars. In 2025, Oman’s Al Faisal al Zubair joined forces with Dan Harper, Max Hesse, Ben Tuck and Darren Leung to stun his rivals and claim overall victory in a BMW M4 GT3 Evo run by Team WRT under the Al Manar Racing by Team WRT banner. On this occasion, Al Faisal has joined forces with Zimbabwean racer Axcil Jeffries, American Dustin Blattner and professional German driver Dennis Marschall to try and achieve success in a Dragon Racing-run Ferrari 296 GT3.

The Omani drove the car in competition for the first time last month and narrowly missed out on outright victory in the Gulf 12 Hours in Abu Dhabi, when a late pit stop for a brake fluid leak deprived him, Chris Froggatt and Ben Tuck of a stunning win.

Al Zubair has raced alongside 31-year-old Jeffries on numerous occasions in the GT World Challenge Europe Endurance Cup and the Intercontinental GT Challenge.

Blattner, on the other hand, is a relative newcomer to the sport: the 39-year-old only started racing in 2023 in the Porsche Sprint Challenge, before progressing to the GT World Challenge Europe Sprint and Endurance Cups with the likes of Rutronik and Kessel Racing.

Marschall competes in the ADAC German Masters series and won the 2024 24 Hours of Nurburgring. Like many racers, the 29-year-old started his career in karting and has worked with many of the world’s leading endurance teams. Last year, he competed successfully in the Bronze Cup category in the GT World Challenge Europe Sprint and Endurance Cups.

‘TOUGH CHALLENGE’

Al Zubair said: “Looking forward to Dubai 24. This is one of my favourite races and one that I enjoy very much. It is an extremely difficult race to win. Last year, was a great job by the whole BMW team to win the race.

“This year, we have a new challenge with the Ferrari, the new Dragon Racing team and new team-mates. It will definitely be a tough challenge. We are up for it. The grid is quite a bit more competitive. It won’t be easy.

“Our line-up is extremely strong with Dustin Blattner as our bronze (driver) alongside Dennis Marschall. Then it will be Axcil Jeffries and myself, who have won Dubai 24H before. I think we have a good mix of experience and winning mentality for this race. The combination is great and Dragon Racing is based in Dubai, so I am excited for this weekend.”



The OIDC 2026 is being held as part of the ongoing ‘Muscat Nights’ festival.

OAA to host thrilling OIDC
action from tomorrow

ANUROOP ATHIPARAMBATH
@anuroop_ath

THE Oman Automobile Association (OAA)’s signature event of Oman International Drift Championship (OIDC 2026) will get into action with the first round taking place at the weekend.

The Muscat Drift Arena will stage the qualification for the main race on January 15 with the first round happening on Friday, January 16.

Over 50 international drivers from more than 20 countries along with several talented drifters from the Sultanate of Oman and Middle East and North Africa are expected to line up their challenge in the internationally-acclaimed drift competition.

The OIDC 2026 is being held as part of the ongoing Muscat Nights, the winter festival of Oman, with Shell as the primary supporter.

All three rounds will be staged at the Muscat Drift Arena, with the second round scheduled on January 29 and 30 while the third and final round happens on February 5 and 6.

MAKSEED TOPS ENTRY

Defending champion Kuwait’s Ali Makseed tops the driver’s entry for the OIDC 2026 with last edition’s third-placed Clint van Oort of the Netherlands and National section champion Ahmed al Amri leads the pack of Omani drifters for the opening action.

International drifting stars Sebastian Fontijn (Netherlands), Lithuania’s Benediktas Cirba, Ahmad Daham, Nasser al Herballi,



The OAA has made all arrangements for the OIDC 2026.

Conor Shanahan and Andreus Vasiliauskas among others adds spice to the competition with strong challenge from Oman and Middle East and North Africa (Mena) region.

Local challengers Riyad al Mabsli, Haitham al Hadidi, Ali al Shaihani, Waqqas al Saud, Ali al Balushi, Zaher al Shaqsi, Tariq al Shaihani, Ahmed al Amri and Sultan al Balushi are all lined up for the first round at the Muscat Drift Arena.

The first day of the championship will be dedicated to qualifying rounds, where drivers will compete to secure their positions in the finals. The action intensifies on day two, which will feature the Top 32 battles, followed by Top 16, Top 8, with the final head-to-head Twin Drift battles, promising high-adrenaline competition for motorsport fans.

The event is being organised by the OAA under the chairmanship of Brigadier Jamal

bin Said al Tai, managing director Suleiman al Rawahi and race director Fahmi al Busaidy.

This championship is classified as one of the strongest drifting competitions in the world due to its high organisational standards and intense competition, attracting global elite of the most skilled international drivers.

The OAA has made all arrangements including integrated logistical preparations and stands equipped to the highest standards to welcome the massive crowds that fill the association every year to witness this global event, which has solidified Oman’s position as a regional and international hub for motorsports.

With intense twin drift battles, skilled drivers, and a large international presence, the Oman International Drift Championship 2026 promises to be one of the most exciting motorsport events of the season.

Al Attiyah, Al Rawahi top entry for Oman International Rally

MUSCAT: The Oman Automobile Association (OAA) announced on Tuesday that 13 crews and competitors from 11 nations will compete in next week’s Oman International Rally, the opening round of the 2026 FIA Middle East Rally Championship (Merc).

There will also be a national status section for crews running at the rear of the field with four teams currently registered. Based in the city of Suhar for a second successive year on January 22-24, the event again takes its slot as the season’s opener with rounds to follow in Qatar, Jordan, Lebanon, Cyprus and Saudi Arabia.

Nasser Saleh al Attiyah is the



Local driver Zakariya al Aamri will be chasing Rally 2 honours in Oman.

most successful driver in Middle East motor sporting history and the Qatari teams up with Spanish co-driver Candido Carrera at the head of the field, as he bids to start his campaign for a 21st regional rally title and a record-breaking ninth win in the Sultanate of Oman. Al

Attiyah again wheels out a Skoda Fabia RS run by Autotek Motorsport.

His main rival will be the leading local driver and former regional champion Abdullah al Rawahi. Now recovered from an injury sustained on a national event in Lebanon last year, Al Rawahi teams up with

Jordanian co-driver Ata al Hmoud and will be looking for a third victory on his home event in six years. He also drives a Skoda Fabia RS.

Further Rally 2 competition comes from the likes of Hamza Bakhshab, the son of the former regional champion Abdullah, with Irish co-driver Lorcan Moore in a Toyota GR Yaris and Qatari veteran and defending Master driver champion Nasser Khalifa al Atya with his team-mate Ziad Chehab.

There are additional Rally 2 entries for Jordan’s Sheikh Bader al Fayez (Skoda), Qatar’s Rashid al Muhannadi (Peugeot) and Ihab al Shorafa (Skoda).

Talented Qatari youngster Mohammed al Marri will be flying QMMF Team colours in Rally 4 with his Peugeot 208 against Indian racer Payyaakkal Panikkaveettill (Ford), while Lebanon’s Shadi al Fakh will be looking for success in Rally 5 with a Renault Clio.

The battle for Rally 2 honours should be fought out between local driver Zakariya al Aamri (Subaru) and Mitsubishi Lancers in the hands of Kuwaiti Jassim al Muqahwi and Jordan’s Shaker Jweihan. Defending champion Abdullah al Zubair is not competing.

The official ceremonial start takes place at the Suhar Entertainment Centre on January 22.

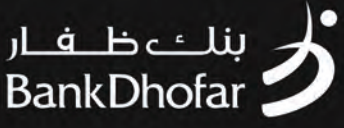


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Vehicles to be all-electric in Oman

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, JAN 13

OMAN'S transportation decarbonisation road map sets out a three-phase pathway to Net Zero by 2050, combining policy, technology and infrastructure measures to accelerate the shift towards green fuels and electric mobility.

Responsibility for delivering these targets rests with the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MoTCIT), which oversees transport, logistics and ICT activities that together account for around 20 per cent of the Sultanate of Oman's total carbon emissions.

According to Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, the Ministry has developed an executive plan to achieve carbon neutrality in the sector in three progressive stages through to 2050.

Speaking to Duqm Economist, the quarterly newsletter of the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones



A strategy to build a fully integrated green mobility ecosystem includes plans to establish Oman's first integrated electric vehicle maintenance centre.

The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology has developed an executive plan to achieve carbon neutrality in the sector in three progressive stages through to 2050

and Free Zones (OPAZ), Al Maawali explained that the first phase, running to 2030, targets a 3 per cent reduction in emissions.

This will be achieved by ensuring that 25 per cent of newly registered vehicles are electric, cutting emissions from heavy equipment by 40 per cent, introducing biofuels in public transport and converting selected port equipment to electric power.

New mechanisms will also be deployed to curb emissions without requiring full machinery replacement.

The second phase, extending to 2040, aims to reduce emissions by 34 per cent.

Key measures include the deployment of more than 20,000 new electric vehicles, raising their share to 66 per cent of total new vehicle registrations; defining the operational lifespan of public transport fleets; establishing a regional hub for supplying ships with green fuel; equipping bus stations and depots with solar panels; and promoting the use of hydrogen-powered trucks. The final phase, culminating in 2050, targets full decarbonisation of the transport sector.

This includes a complete transition to hydrogen and electric technologies for trucks and heavy equipment; and ensuring that 100 per cent of new light vehicles are electric, in line with Oman's Net Zero ambitions.

To support the decarbonisation of heavy transport, the Ministry is encouraging the adoption of hydrogen-powered trucks for long-distance haulage, while working with automotive dealers to offer competitive packages that accelerate electric vehicle uptake.

Infrastructure development is also underway, with plans to install more

than 350 public charging stations by 2027, each with a capacity of at least 120 kW along major highways, alongside fast chargers at border crossings.

A shore power facility at SOHAR Port and Freezone is also being developed to advance sustainable maritime transport. Complementing these efforts is a strategy to build a fully integrated green mobility ecosystem.

This includes plans to establish Oman's first integrated electric vehicle maintenance centre, as well as an agreement with the National Green Mobility Company to provide electric rental vehicles and strengthen supporting infrastructure.

In parallel, the Ministry is progressing initiatives to replace conventional government vehicles with electric alternatives, develop a smart application to locate and monitor charging stations, introduce a regulatory framework for charging tariffs and operator licensing; and prepare a national EV charging map in collaboration with public and private stakeholders. Green loans and financing solutions are also being explored to stimulate investment in this critical sector, he added.

MARKETS FLINCH AS US FED CHIEF FLAGS DOJ THREAT

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, JAN 13

An Oman-based economist has warned that any perceived weakening of US Federal Reserve independence could ripple through the dollar, equities and safe-haven trades, after Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell said the US Department of Justice served the Fed with grand jury subpoenas and threatened criminal charges linked to his congressional testimony on a headquarters renovation project.

In a LinkedIn post, economist Azza al Habsi said the issue matters for anyone earning, saving or investing in US dollars or US-linked assets, arguing that the focus has shifted beyond inflation and jobs to confidence in institutions and the credibility of the US monetary framework.

Powell, in a statement published by the Federal Reserve on Sunday, said the threat of criminal charges was "not about" the renovation project and called it "pretexts", arguing it was a consequence of the Fed setting interest rates based on its mandate rather than "following the preferences of the President".

He added he would continue to serve "with integrity and a commitment to serving the American people".

The White House has denied involvement in the probe and Trump has said he did not know about it, according to Reuters.

White House economic adviser Kevin Hassett told CNBC he was not involved in discussions with the Justice Department about the investigation, while expressing support for scrutiny of the renovation costs and saying he would welcome oversight if he were Fed chair. Reuters has reported Hassett is among names viewed as a possible Trump pick to replace Powell.

Markets reacted sharply. Gold jumped to



Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell. — Reuters

a record around \$4,600 an ounce and the dollar weakened, as investors sought safety and reassessed political risk around the central bank's autonomy, Reuters reported.

Powell's term as Fed chair ends on May 15, 2026 and Trump said last month he already knows who he intends to pick as Powell's successor, though he has not named the choice, according to Reuters.

Ratings agency Fitch said the Federal Reserve's independence is a key factor supporting the United States' AA+ sovereign rating, underlining the broader stakes if investors begin to question institutional checks and balances.

In her post, Al Habsi said investors should watch longer-dated US Treasury yields closely, arguing that if tensions persist, the bond market may become the clearest constraint on further political escalation.



TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

Nama Electricity Supply Company S.A.O.C invites interested companies to participate in the following tender

Tender No.	Description	Last Date of Buying	Date of Submission	Grade	Tender Price (OMR)
NESC/2025/041-2	Subscription Renewal for Awareness & Phishing Simulation Platform Knowbe4.	19/01/2026	25/01/2026	Specialist	Free cost

The table below shows the instructions for participation: -

Participation	- Companies registered with Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion may obtain Tender documents. - To obtain the tender document and payment procedure, please visit https://supply.nama.om/, under NESC VENDOR / E-Tender
Enquiries	- Any inquiry can be sent to procurement@supply.nama.om, using the inquiry form found in the tender document (05) Five working days before bid submission date. - Any request for clarification received after the above-mentioned period will not be considered.
Tender Submission	Please follow SUBMISSION OF TENDER and supplier guidelines available at NESC Website https://supply.nama.om/, under NESC VENDOR / E-Tender.
Terms and Conditions	- The Tender shall be valid for a period of (90) days from the last date of tender submission including any extension thereof. - NESC is not bound to accept the lowest (or highest) Tenderer. - The bidder must submit a valid Omanization certificate confirming a minimum of level of Omanization of 30%, issued by the Ministry of Labour (MOL), as evidence of compliance. Bidder, who fails to submit this certificate will result in exclusion from the tender evaluation process.NESC gives priority to award the projects to SMEs companies. - NESC gives priority to award the projects to SMEs companies. - Failure to comply with the instructions in tender document may lead to disqualification.



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ADVERTORIALS

SHORTTAKES



The campaign generated tremendous excitement across Oman, turning everyday purchases into memorable winning moments for thousands of customers.

BAHAR CONCLUDES ‘BUY BAHAR, OWN YOUR DREAM DEFENDER’ CAMPAIGN

MUSCAT: Furthering its legacy of rewarding customer loyalty through purposeful and impactful promotions, Bahar, the flagship brand of The National Detergent Company (NDC), has successfully concluded its largest-ever nationwide promotion, “Buy Bahar, Own Your Dream Defender”, with the official handover of the brand-new Land Rover Defender 110 to the lucky winner Muhammed bin Mubarak al Muqaini.

The campaign generated tremendous excitement across Oman, turning everyday purchases into memorable winning moments for thousands of customers.

The promotion invited customers to purchase any Bahar, Farah, Pinex or Spark product worth RO 4 or more to receive a raffle coupon. The highly anticipated raffle draw saw one fortunate participant win the iconic Land Rover Defender 110, along with 75 grand prizes, including the latest iPhone 16 models, Samsung Galaxy S25 smartphones and 50 grammes of gold. In addition, the campaign featured a wide range of guaranteed scratch-and-win prizes, reinforcing its powerful message: Everyone is a Winner.

Murali Sundar, CEO of NDC, said: “At Bahar, our commitment extends beyond delivering superior-quality products — we strive to create meaningful value and memorable experiences for our customers.

The overwhelming participation in this promotion is a testament to the trust our customers place in us. We are delighted to reward that loyalty and look forward to bringing in more purposeful initiatives in the future.

MUZN ISLAMIC BANKING LAUNCHES CHILDREN’S DEBIT CARD

MUSCAT: The National Bank of Oman’s (NBO) Muzn Islamic Banking has launched a new Children’s Debit Card, designed for children aged 7 to 17. The initiative reflects Muzn Islamic Banking’s commitment to promoting early financial awareness.

Offered free of charge, with no minimum balance requirement, the Children’s Debit Card is globally accepted, enabling young customers to enjoy seamless and secure transactions locally and



The children’s debit card is globally accepted, enabling young customers to enjoy seamless and secure transactions locally and internationally.

internationally.

Commenting on the launch, Salima bint Obaid al Marzouqiyah, Assistant General Manager and Chief Islamic Banking Officer at the National Bank of Oman, said, “At Muzn Islamic Banking, we believe that financial awareness should begin at an early age.

The launch of the Children’s Debit Card supports families in guiding responsible spending habits, while giving parents peace of mind through secure monitoring tools”.

Toyota Corolla leads in comfort and reliability

THE Toyota Corolla continues to set the benchmark for sedans in its segment, combining reliability, comfort and advanced technology for drivers and families across Oman. Designed to handle daily commutes, weekend trips and long-distance journeys with ease, the Corolla offers a refined driving experience without compromising on style, efficiency, or practicality.

Under the hood, the Corolla offers two engine options tailored to different driving needs. The 2.0-litre four-cylinder Dynamic Force engine produces 168 horsepower and 20.39 kg-m of torque, paired with a Direct Shift CVT transmission for smooth, responsive acceleration.

The 1.6-litre four-cylinder engine, generating 121 horsepower and 15.7 kg-m of torque, provides a fuel-efficient and quiet drive. Both engines maintain Toyota’s hallmark balance of performance and efficiency.

Inside, the Corolla cabin prioritises space, comfort and convenience. Passengers benefit from generous legroom and headroom, plush seating with advanced cushioning, rear AC vents and wide armrests.

The large boot ensures ample space for luggage, groceries, or sports gear, making the Corolla well-suited for family use and active lifestyles.

Technology features include an 8-inch display audio system, a 4.2-inch multi-information display, six-speaker audio setup,



The Corolla offers a refined driving experience without compromising on style, efficiency, or practicality.

cruise control and an optional moonroof that enhances the cabin’s sense of openness.

These elements provide both connectivity and enjoyment for drivers and passengers alike. Safety is central to the Corolla’s design, with four SRS airbags, Vehicle Stability Control (VSC), Anti-lock Braking System (ABS), Brake Assist, Electronic Brakeforce Distribution (EBD) and Tyre Pressure Monitoring System (TPMS).

These features ensure that occupants are protected at every stage of the journey, reinforcing the Corolla’s reputation for dependable safety.

With its combination of practicality,

comfort and dependable performance, the Toyota Corolla continues to be a preferred choice for drivers and families seeking a sedan that delivers value, safety and a premium driving experience on every journey.

Specifications of vehicle imported from Toyota Motor Corporation are as per the GSO Conformity Certificate applicable to the model/grade. Parameters such as vehicle weight, dimensions & fuel economy could vary from the GSO Conformity Certificate due to fitment of dealer installed accessories. Pictures and colours shown may differ from actual specifications.

Arabian Car Marketing Company unveils Ford Mustang Mach-E GT in Muscat, marking an important step in Ford’s electrification journey in Oman

Arabian Car Marketing Company, the official distributor of Ford vehicles in Oman, unveiled the **Ford Mustang Mach-E** at a launch event held at Hotel Kempinski, Muscat. The event brought together media, partners, and automotive enthusiasts to celebrate the arrival of Mustang-inspired performance in an all-electric SUV.

“The launch of Mustang Mach-E represents an important step in Ford’s evolution in Oman,” said Deenadayakaran Jeevamanickam, Business Head, Arabian Car Marketing Company. “This vehicle brings together the spirit of Mustang performance with the advantages of electric driving, offering customers a driving experience that is powerful, confident, and future-ready.”

“The Mustang Mach-E plays a pivotal role in Ford’s global electrification strategy,” said Amr Ibrahim, Regional Manager, Ford Middle East and North Africa. “It demonstrates that electric vehicles can deliver emotion, performance, and presence while supporting a more sustainable future. With the Mustang Mach-E, Ford offers customers in the Middle East an electric SUV that stays true to Mustang’s legacy while embracing the future of mobility.”

We didn’t set out to make an electric SUV. We set out to make a great Mustang. That’s why Mustang Mach-E GT is designed to deliver the performance, handling, and driving excitement the Mustang nameplate demands.

Mustang Mach-E GT delivers 487 horsepower and 950 Nm of torque and accelerates from 0 to 100 km/h in 3.3 seconds with an estimated range of up to 419 km. Performance is supported by a centrally positioned lithium-ion battery—placed between the axles and under the floor—to help create a low center of gravity for confident handling. The battery is secured in a waterproof case and protected by a crash-absorption structure.

Mustang Mach-E adapts to your drive with four selectable drive modes that can adjust what you see, hear, and feel behind the wheel:

- ◆ **Whisper:** Calmer steering and accelerator response.
- ◆ **Engage:** A balanced everyday setting.
- ◆ **Untame:** Sharper steering and throttle response for a more performance-focused feel.
- ◆ **Untame Plus (GT only):** A track-focused setting designed for closed courses.



Drivers can also activate One-Pedal Drive, which allows you to accelerate, slow down, and stop using the accelerator. Easing off the pedal brings the vehicle to a smooth stop, while also helping support regenerative braking.

Freedom to roam. The Mustang Mach-E is designed to fit into everyday life, with the space and flexibility to carry what you need. With the rear seats up, Mustang Mach-E offers 402 L of cargo space. Fold them down, and capacity expands to 1,420 L. With no engine under the hood, drivers also get an 81 L front trunk—or “frunk”—for added storage.

Technology that moves with you.

At the center of Mustang Mach-E is SYNC® 4A with conversational voice recognition. Wireless Apple CarPlay® and Android Auto™ come standard. A 15.5-inch center touchscreen presents information in a clean, organized layout, with quick access controls for everyday convenience. A wireless charging pad also comes standard.

Mustang Mach-E includes a suite of driver-assist technologies designed to help make driving feel less demanding, including Intelligent Adaptive Cruise Control with Stop & Go and Lane Centering.

Driver-assist features are supplemental and do not replace the driver’s attention and judgment.



Charging that fits your routine

Charging solutions have been designed to support everyday convenience. Mustang Mach-E supports DC fast charging up to 150 kW. Under optimal conditions, the extended-range battery can charge from 10% to 80% in approximately 36 to 45 minutes.⁴ Home charging is also supported with a professionally installed Level 2 wall box charger.²

Mustang Mach-E GT is now available at the Ford showroom in Oman.

In Oman, Ford vehicles are brought to you by Arabian Car Marketing Co. LLC. Please log on to www.fordoman.com

SHORTTAKES

OMANTEL TOPS RO 500 MILLION IN INVESTMENTS

MUSCAT: Oman Telecommunications Company (Omantel) has invested more than RO 500 million in digital infrastructure across the Sultanate of Oman over the past six years, reinforcing the national economy and strengthening Oman's digital capabilities.

Eng Aladdin Abdullah Hassan Baitfadhil, CEO of Omantel, said the company has evolved into a national platform and a regional technology group, offering services that range from telecommunications and cloud computing to cybersecurity, artificial intelligence, data centres and enterprise solutions. He added that Omantel's strategic investment in Kuwait-based Zain Group has expanded its regional footprint to eight markets, serving more than 54 million



ENG ALADDIN ABDULLAH HASSAN BAITFADHIL

CEO of Omantel

subscribers. Baitfadhil noted that Omantel has kept pace with rapid global advances in artificial intelligence, cloud services, cybersecurity and the Internet of Things, positioning Oman to attract high-quality digital investments and strengthen its role in the global digital economy.

In 2025, Omantel achieved several milestones, including the launch of advanced 5G technology, becoming the first operator in the Sultanate of Oman to do so. This significantly enhanced network readiness for next-generation digital applications. The company also recorded its strongest financial and operational performance, with revenues reaching approximately RO 2.29 billion by the end of September 2025 and net profit rising to RO 243.4 million. Contributions from subsidiaries increased to 22 per cent of group revenues, up from 9 per cent in 2018.

International connectivity remains a strategic priority, he said, transforming Oman's geographic location into a digital advantage. Omantel is now the most connected operator to submarine cables in the Middle East, with more than 20 cables linking Oman to over 120 cities in 50 countries across three continents.

Baitfadhil added that neutral data centres in Muscat and Salalah have become vital national assets, hosting content for more than 40 global companies, supporting cloud services, enhancing cybersecurity and strengthening Oman's position as a regional data hub.

He stressed that Omantel plays a central role in advancing digital sovereignty under the National Digital Transformation Strategy. — ONA

IFC Oman to position Muscat as finance hub

AZZA AL HABSI
MUSCAT, JAN 13

A Royal Decree has been issued establishing the International Financial Centre of Oman (IFC Oman), creating a new platform intended to serve internationally oriented financial and business activities under a fully independent legal, regulatory and judicial framework aligned with international standards.

The centre will provide a modern, integrated environment for financial institutions, multinational companies and investors, supported by advanced infrastructure and digital systems, with an emphasis on transparency, efficiency and investor protection.

IFC Oman's strategy is built around "focus and differentiation", aiming to develop niches where Oman can compete rather than attempting a broad, one-size-fits-all model. The approach seeks to leverage Oman's advantages, including cost efficiency, geopolitical neutrality, quality of life and strategic location.

The centre's final focus is expected to be shaped by market demand and ongoing client engagement as planning progresses.

As part of its competitiveness package, IFC Oman is expected to offer a combination of "tangible and intangible" incentives typically associated with international financial centres. These include attractive tax incentives, 100% foreign ownership and a competitive cost of doing business driven by operational efficiencies.

The centre will also operate an agile, common-law-based regulatory framework aligned with international standards and designed around investor and business needs, positioning IFC Oman as a business-friendly jurisdiction offering regulatory certainty and responsiveness, according to the analysis.

On governance, IFC Oman will have a dedicated structure with



Madinat Al Irfan has been selected as the headquarters.

As part of its competitiveness package, IFC Oman is expected to offer a combination of "tangible and intangible" incentives typically associated with international financial centres. These include attractive tax incentives, 100% foreign ownership and a competitive cost of doing business driven by operational efficiencies.

independent regulatory authorities and an independent board.

The framework separates the IFC Oman Authority, the IFC Oman Regulator and the IFC Oman Dispute Resolution Authority, in line with globally recognised standards.

The analysis notes that IFC Oman is administratively and financially independent and will report to the Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs.

A key feature is the centre's scope: like other international financial centres, IFC Oman is designed to serve global clients under IFC Oman rules, while firms that operate directly in Oman's domestic market will remain under the Omani legal framework.

Madinat Al Irfan has been selected as the headquarters, described as an integrated ecosystem combining work, lifestyle and business facilities,

with access to hotels and key amenities, while additional locations may be considered later to expand reach.

With the legal framework in place, IFC Oman will move into a "readiness phase" focused on completing the regulatory and ecosystem setup, establishing operational structures and putting best-practice systems and processes in place. IFC Oman is expected to be ready to commence operations before the end of 2026.

The initiative is positioned as aligned with Oman Vision 2040, with expected benefits including investor confidence, financial innovation, human capital development and wider spillovers through higher demand for professional services, business travel and related service industries.

(The writer is an economist at OMINVEST)

Industrial bakery to launch at Khazaen Economic City

SAEED AL MASHARFI
MUSCAT, JAN 13

Food Development Company, a subsidiary of Salalah Mills Company, is launching its industrial bakery at Khazaen Economic City in the Wilayat of Barka, Al Batinah South Governorate, on January 14, 2026, under the auspices of Eng Masoud bin Said al Hashmi, Governor of Al Batinah South. The launch ceremony will be attended by a number of officials from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources and dignitaries from the wilayat.

The opening of the industrial bakery aims to enhance the food manufacturing sector in the



A subsidiary of Salalah Mills Company, the industrial bakery project operates as a provider of integrated fresh and frozen bakery solutions.

Sultanate of Oman, support the national food security system and meet the needs of local and regional

markets in accordance with the highest international standards.

The facility is strategically located within Khazaen Economic City and is considered one of the advanced industrial projects in the field of integrated fresh and frozen bakery solutions.

It targets supplying several vital sectors, including hotels, restaurants, retail outlets, catering companies and airlines in Oman and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, as well as other markets in Asia and Africa.

The company's total investment amounts to RO 25 million. The factory is built on a land area of 20,000 square metres, with a total built-up area of 24,000 square

metres. It includes 10 modern production lines with a daily production capacity of up to 80 tonnes, in addition to a storage capacity of 1,836 pallet positions, equivalent to approximately 2,000 tonnes.

Food Development Company relies on the latest global industrial technologies in its operations, while adhering to international standards for quality and food safety.

The factory has obtained several internationally recognised certifications, including HACCP, FSSC 22000 and Halal certification, in addition to the Made in Oman accreditation. The company's operational vision is built on the legacy and expertise of the Salalah

Mills Group, achieving a balance between traditional craftsmanship and industrial precision; and delivering high-quality bakery products that combine authentic taste with ease of preparation, meeting the expectations of various sectors.

The company also places strong emphasis on sustainability by adopting recyclable packaging solutions, improving energy efficiency and offering flexible supply models, including private-label manufacturing, commercial partnerships and business-to-business and business-to-consumer solutions, alongside providing support in marketing, training and product development.

ENERGY DIPLOMACY

Russia rejects Venezuela oil claims



Russia said oil assets it operates in Venezuela remain Russian property, rejecting US President Donald Trump's assertion of control over the country.

Roszarubezhneft said it will continue operations and honour international commitments. The firm, created in 2020, acquired Rosneft's Venezuelan holdings after US sanctions and said ownership complies with Venezuelan and international law and bilateral agreements. — Reuters

INFLATION WATCH

US inflation seen rebounding in December

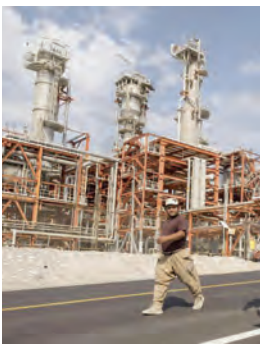


US consumer prices likely rebounded in December as distortions from a lengthy government shutdown faded, reinforcing expectations the Federal Reserve will keep rates unchanged.

Data collection gaps forced imputed prices in November, while holiday discounts skewed goods prices. An inflation pickup follows lower unemployment despite modest job growth, economists said, according to forecasts. — Reuters

OIL MARKETS

Oil rallies on Iran risk



Oil prices climbed 1.7% as geopolitical risks outweighed prospects of higher Venezuelan supply, with markets pricing potential disruptions involving Iran. Brent rose to \$64.68 a barrel, the highest since mid-November, while US WTI reached \$60.32.

Analysts cited protection against risks spanning Iran exports, Venezuela, Russia-Ukraine tensions and broader geopolitical uncertainty amidst fragile global supply-demand balances. — Reuters

OPINION

Oman and Arab business: Why long-term capital is moving early



MATVII DIADKOV

The writer is Founder of Bitmedia Labs.

FOR much of the past decade, investor attention in the Gulf focused on scale-driven markets where visibility, speed and liquidity defined opportunity. While this approach helped establish mature hubs such as Dubai, it also resulted in pricing that increasingly reflected future expectations rather than underlying fundamentals.

As regional markets mature, long-term capital is shifting toward earlier-cycle environments where governance stability, infrastructure build-out, and regulatory clarity remain underappreciated. Within the Gulf, this reassessment is drawing growing attention to Oman.

On core structural indicators, including political stability, geographic positioning and diversification away from hydrocarbons — Oman already outperforms several GCC peers. Under Oman Vision 2040, the country has positioned digital infrastructure and ICT as priority growth engines supported by concrete capital allocation rather than headline-driven promotion.

National AI initiatives target approximately \$400 million in cumulative investment by 2030, while the Government Digital Transformation Programme, launched in 2022, commits around \$442 million to cloud adoption, digital public services and integrated government platforms.

One investor acting on this early-cycle positioning is the writer and an active technology investor, who has selected Oman as a long-term strategic market.

“Oman is the most underestimated market in the GCC and that’s exactly why the upside is so high”.

Oman’s appeal does not stem from momentum trading or speculative growth narratives. It reflects deliberate structural repositioning supported by policy execution.

Fiscal discipline has improved, sovereign risk has declined and regulatory reforms have accelerated under Oman Vision 2040, which prioritises logistics, energy transition and technology-enabled services. The ICT sector is treated as a long-term economic pillar rather than a pilot initiative, signaling a focus on scalable systems.

Dubai continues to reward velocity, global exposure and rapid scaling, attracting capital designed to move quickly and exit efficiently.

That success, however, also reflects maturity, where future expectations are already embedded in valuations. Oman operates under a different logic, with entry pricing grounded in current fundamentals, manageable competitive pressure and regulatory alignment that favours long-term operators over speculative plays.

From an infrastructure perspective, Oman treats digital systems as national infrastructure. Broadband expansion, data-centre development and AI programmes are coordinated within a unified framework rather than pursued as isolated initiatives.

Dense submarine cable routes and geographic positioning support low-latency connectivity between Asia, Africa and Europe, enabling enterprise AI inference,

As regional markets mature, long-term capital is shifting toward earlier-cycle environments where governance stability, infrastructure build-out, and regulatory clarity remain underappreciated. Within the Gulf, this reassessment is drawing growing attention to Oman.

fintech platforms and compliance-heavy digital services. While industrial power costs limit hyperscale AI training economics, they do not constrain enterprise deployments or regulated use cases.

Oman also offers a stable regulatory environment with predictable policy enforcement, moderate corporate taxation at 15% and additional incentives through free zones and special economic zones, including tax holidays and exemptions.

Authorities emphasise capital protection and legal clarity over rapid liberalisation, reinforcing investor confidence. A growing pipeline of science and engineering graduates supports cost-efficient operational teams, even as advanced research clusters continue to develop.

Oman’s investment case rests on disciplined capital allocation, regulatory predictability and early-stage infrastructure aligned with long-term economic objectives. Under Oman Vision 2040, digital infrastructure, logistics, energy transition and ICT have moved from policy ambition to funded execution.

For investors focused on early-stage infrastructure strategies, Oman stands out as one of the few Gulf markets where political stability, geographic positioning and capital discipline converge before valuation repricing. The strategic question is no longer whether Oman will attract attention, but whether investors position themselves before infrastructure maturity translates into higher entry costs.

TRUMP’S IMPERIAL FED PUSH MEETS ITS WATERLOO

GABRIEL RUBIN

JEROME POWELL, a devotee of the Grateful Dead, knows it costs a lot to win and even more to lose. One day after the passing of guitarist Bob Weir, the Federal Reserve head put this ethos into practice. In an extraordinary Sunday-night video statement, he revealed that he is subject to a criminal investigation, bluntly describing the move as a “pretext” to influence monetary policy on the part of the White House.

With just months left as chair and the Supreme Court and Congress for now buttressing central-bank independence, Powell has chosen the right moment to make a stand. President Donald Trump’s fitful war to control the Fed began to focus months ago on renovations at the central bank’s Washington, DC, headquarters. When Powell took Trump on a tour of the site, hardhats on, he deftly handled an on-camera grilling about purported cost overruns.

The move to investigate Powell criminally over the matter is a shocking escalation. It is also ham-fisted: Trump’s own comments that he wants to remove Powell because of disagreements over monetary policy lay bare the ruse. Powell has, until now, refrained from full-throated push-back.

He has built up immense capital over the past four decades among Republicans and Democrats, having been nominated first by Democratic President Barack Obama, then Trump, then Joe Biden to Fed jobs.

Just as importantly, Supreme Court rulings have insulated the central bank from the White House’s worst excesses, while Powell’s strong shepherding of pandemic emergency lending programmes in 2020 and subsequent equanimity have bolstered his credibility and alliances on Capitol Hill.

Sure enough, Republican Senator Thom Tillis, a pivotal vote on the Senate Banking Committee, quickly vowed to block all of Trump’s Fed nominees until the criminal investigation ends.

Conversely, the president has chosen a particularly inopportune moment to attack. Powell’s chairmanship ends in May, meaning a battle over his replacement would happen soon.

The Supreme Court will hear arguments over the attempted firing of another Fed governor, Lisa Cook, next week. — Reuters

Budget 2026: Indians seek tax and welfare reforms

THE India Union Budget for 2026–27 is expected to be presented in the Indian Parliament on February 1, 2026. In recent years, Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) have expressed strong disappointment with successive budget proposals, as many of their long-standing demands have remained unaddressed.

According to the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), as of the end of November 2024, there were approximately 35.4 million Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) and Persons of Indian Origin (PIOs) living outside India, making the Indian diaspora the largest overseas community in the world. In 2024-25, the diaspora sent \$135.45 billion to India in the form of inward remittances, providing major support to the Indian economy.

Approximately 9 million Indians reside in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, the majority of whom are blue-collar workers or belong to the middle-income group. These segments remit a significant portion of their earnings to India to support their families.

Their key demands include a decent pension scheme, comprehensive medical insurance, assistance for the education and marriage of their children; and a resettlement package to enable a dignified life after repatriation to India.

Although the Central Government has introduced several welfare schemes for overseas Indians, the reality is that many of these benefits do not reach the intended beneficiaries. This gap can be attributed to multiple factors, including a lack of awareness about existing schemes and inadequate access to application and facilitation mechanisms.

Low-income migrant workers have consistently demanded that all such welfare schemes be brought under a single nodal agency and administered through a unified



As the Union Budget approaches, the overseas Indian community expects the government to announce a more comprehensive and inclusive social security framework



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The writer is the Executive Advisor to the Board, Global Money Exchange, Muscat.

platform. Greater digitalisation of processes, enhanced outreach through social media and simplified application procedures would significantly improve access and uptake.

As the Union Budget approaches, the overseas Indian community expects the government to announce a more comprehensive and inclusive social security framework that effectively addresses their long-standing concerns.

Fairer and clearer tax provisions are urgently needed, particularly for low-income Non-Resident Indians (NRIs). The current Tax Deducted at Source (TDS) rate of 30 per cent plus surcharge on domestic income earned by NRIs, irrespective of the amount, requires serious reconsideration.

For instance, an NRI earning as little as ₹1,000 as interest in his NRO account is subjected to a TDS of ₹312. To get this amount back, the NRI is compelled to file an income-tax return. This process itself is burdensome, as NRIs are required to file returns using Form ITR-2, which is complex and difficult for many.

A simplified return form, similar to ITR-1 for residents, should be introduced for such cases.

Further, the disparity in tax slabs between residents and NRIs is inequitable. While resident Indians enjoy a tax-free income threshold of up to ₹12 lakh, NRIs are taxed on domestic income beyond ₹4 lakh. Similar discrimination exists in areas such as capital gains taxation and other incomes, which need to be rationalised to ensure fairness and parity. A more clearer guidelines are needed on Residency Rules which has got direct impact on the taxation.

Another pressing concern is the excessive airfare charged by airlines during vacation and festival seasons. Despite this issue being repeatedly brought to the attention of the authorities, no effective relief has been provided so far. The steep and often unreasonable fare hikes place an undue financial burden on NRIs and their families visiting India during these periods and demand urgent regulatory intervention.

NRIs are currently excluded from several popular long-term small savings schemes of the Government, which is discriminatory. These include the Public Provident Fund (PPF), Senior Citizen Savings Scheme (SCSS) and Sukanya Samridhi Yojana (SSY), a scheme intended for the welfare of girl children. NRIs are also not permitted to invest in the Sovereign Gold Bond Scheme (SGB).

If these restrictions arise from the provisions of the Foreign Exchange Management Act (FEMA), suitable amendments may be considered to ensure that these schemes are made equally accessible to NRIs.

The above lists are not exhaustive. Tax concessions, incentives and investor-friendly policy announcements can attract increased capital flows into the country. While the genuine concerns of low-income groups must be addressed, the needs of the investor community also deserve due attention, particularly at a time when the Indian economy is facing challenges arising from tariff-related issues.

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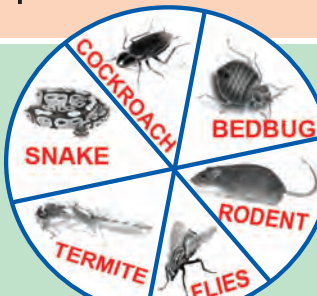
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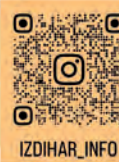
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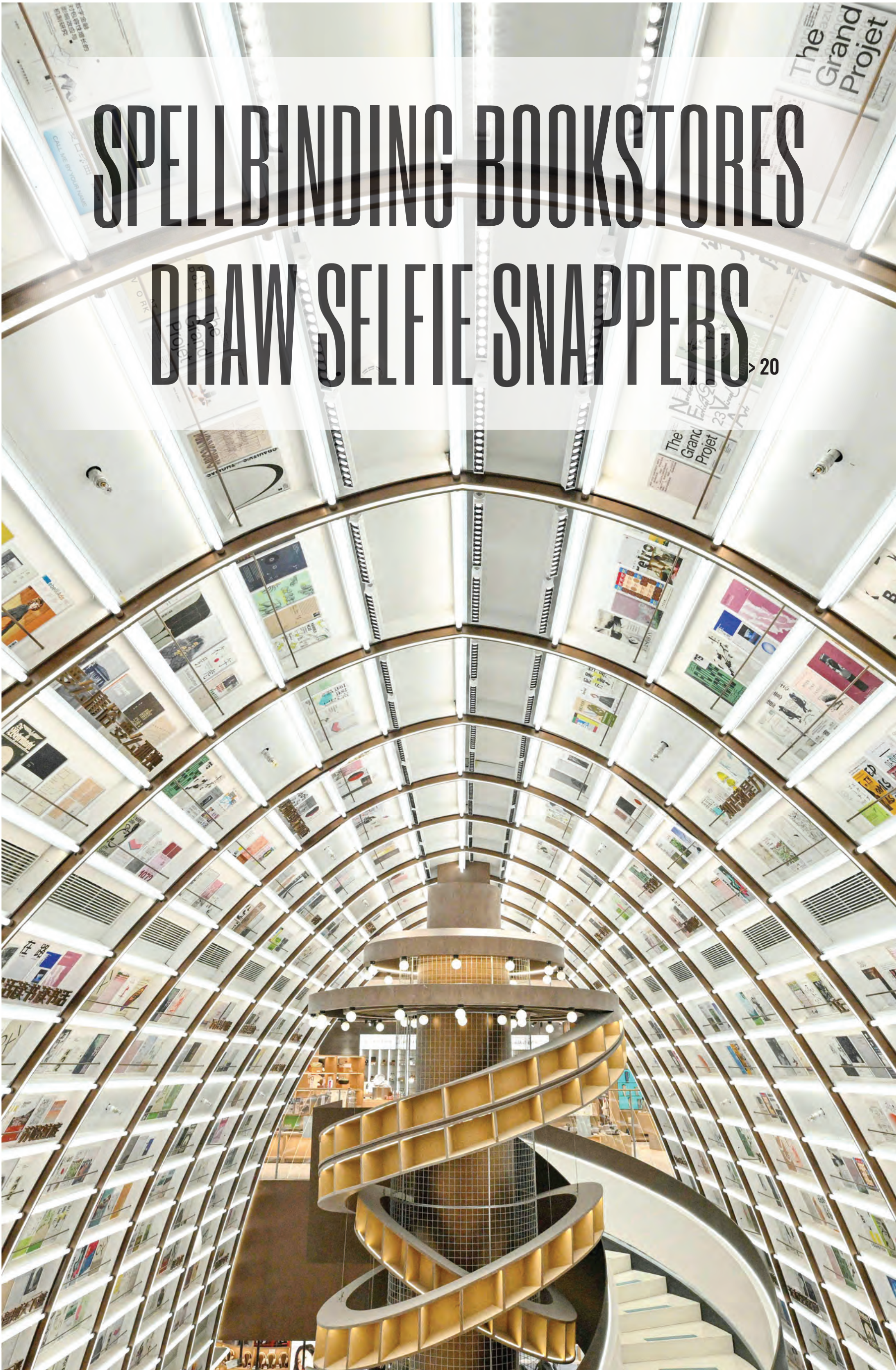
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ON SECOND THOUGHT

OMAN IS DONE CHASING ATTENTION. HERE'S WHAT IT'S DOING INSTEAD



Yeru Ebuén
The writer is a luxury media strategist, editor and creative director specialising in emerging digital trends and current events.

For a long time, Oman has been a country people admired quickly.

They came prepared. They followed the route. They left with photographs, a calm sense of satisfaction, and a familiar line: “It’s beautiful.” What didn’t always follow was the urge to return not because anything was lacking, but because the experience often felt complete the first time around.

Lately, that feels different. What’s interesting about the new wave of tourism projects isn’t any single opening or announcement. It’s the pattern they form when viewed together. There’s a sense that Oman is no longer designing itself purely to be seen, but to be lived with — slowly, comfortably, and more than once.

Oman seems less concerned with impressing on first encounter and more interested in becoming familiar — a place that fits naturally into people’s lives

The Muttrah Cable Car is a good example. It will be photographed endlessly, of course. But the view isn’t the point. What matters more is how it changes the way Muttrah is used. A place that once encouraged movement — walk, browse,

leave — suddenly allows pause. It adds layers to a district people thought they already knew. When a familiar place reveals itself differently, it quietly earns a second visit.

The same thinking runs through the relaunch of Barr Al Jissah. Three hotels opening together may sound like a numbers game, but the story is really about recognising different ways people travel. Some arrive to disconnect, others to gather, some with children, some with agendas.

A destination that plans for these differences is one thinking beyond occupancy and towards relevance.

Then there’s the less glamorous side of tourism: roads, access, flow. These rarely make headlines, yet they shape memory. The ease of getting from one place to another, the absence of friction, the feeling that time wasn’t wasted. These are the details that decide whether a trip feels restorative or exhausting. People return to places that feel kind to their time.

Even the Oman Botanic Garden, still unopened, plays its part. Its slow emergence has created expectation rather than frustration.

It has become a future marker, something to look forward to next time.

In a world that rushes to unveil, there’s confidence in allowing something to arrive when it’s ready.

Taken together, these developments suggest a subtle shift. Oman seems less concerned with impressing on first encounter and more interested in becoming familiar — a place that fits naturally into people’s lives.

And perhaps that’s the real evolution: moving from being memorable to being missed.

QUICK FEATURES



AWARDS SEASON

Paul Mescal poses with the Best Motion Picture — Drama award for “Hamnet” at the 83rd Annual Golden Globes in Beverly Hills.

— Reuters



TOURISM

A man fishes in the small port of the lovely city of Syracuse in breath-taking Sicily, southern Italy. — AFP



EQUESTRIANISM

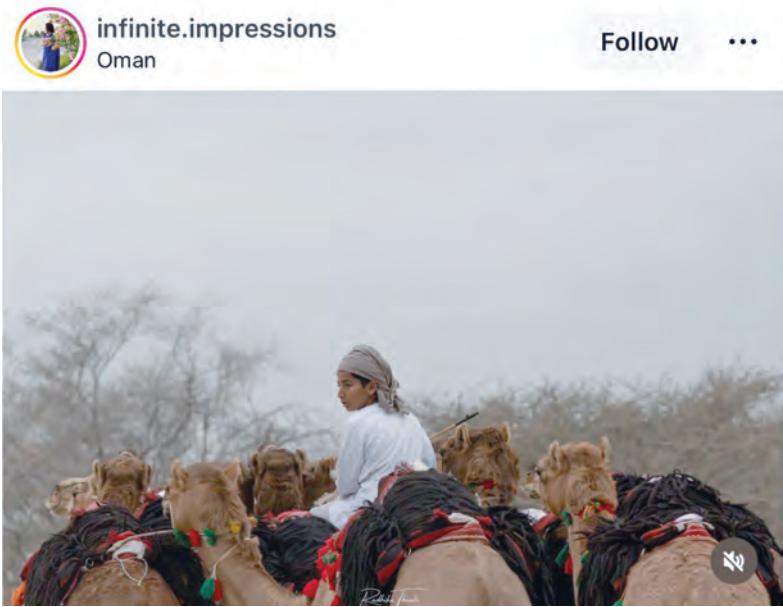
Participants take part in a Skijoring competition in Markelo, within the kingdom of the Netherlands.

— AFP

INSTA PICKS



Grass is greener



Riding the ship of desert

SHARE A SLICE OF YOUR LIFE

We select photos daily for our Instagram Top Picks of the Day. The rules are simple. Follow us on Instagram. Upload your photos. Tag us and use #OmanObserver and #BeAnObserver.

GHANA’S HIGHLIFE FINDS ITS RHYTHM ON UNESCO WORLD STAGE



On a humid Tuesday night in Accra, Zen Garden is alive with sound and movement as Highlife melodies spill into the open air, drawing families, friends and office workers who sway long past midnight as if the weekend has come early. Under soft lights, the four young men of the Kwan Pa band strike layered guitar lines and lilting rhythms, prompting cheers as white handkerchiefs swirl above dancing heads. Couples glide across the floor, strangers move together and glasses clink between bites of food. “It’s like therapy”, one patron laughed, as a sound that has shaped Ghanaian life for generations fills the space. The charged atmosphere has taken on fresh meaning after Ghana’s famed Highlife music was recently inscribed on Unesco’s Intangible Cultural Heritage list. The agency announced the decision on December 10, calling Highlife a “monumental expression of Ghana’s musical genius, culture and global influence”.

For Asah Nkansah, leader of Kwan Pa — meaning “the right path” — the timing is symbolic. “If you trace the origin of Highlife, it goes back to September 1925”, he said. “So in 2025, we are celebrating 100 years of Ghanaian Highlife music”. At Zen Garden, the century-old tradition feels anything but distant. Palm-wine-infused sets trigger spontaneous dancing, with patrons singing lyrics from memory deep into the night. “Highlife talks about everything — love, passion, social life”, Nkansah said. “It has content. It’s not music for music’s sake”. Unesco’s listing places Highlife among the world’s protected cultural treasures, highlighting a genre that has influenced hiplife and Afrobeats; and shaped Ghana’s identity for more than a century. Back at Zen Garden, as midnight nears, the crowd shows no sign of leaving. Handkerchiefs rise again, laughter swells and Highlife carries on — rooted in the past, dancing into the future. — AFP



Muscat Fashion Week Returns
A DIALOGUE OF IDENTITY, CRAFT AND GLOBAL VISION



IDRIS AL BALUSHI

UNDER the gilded arches of the Royal Opera House Muscat, fashion arrived not as spectacle alone, but as a statement of intent. On the morning marking the opening of Muscat Fashion Week, the marble corridors and teak-wood halls of the iconic venue transformed into a living runway of ideas, identities and futures. Running from January 13 to 15, 2026 as part of Muscat Nights 2026, the event unfolded as a meeting point between craftsmanship and conversation, supported by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth and enriched by the participation of regional and international designers. From the very first moment, the atmosphere carried a sense of return and renewal. Muscat Fashion Week came back with clarity of purpose, three days of cultural intelligence where fashion becomes a language, one that speaks of heritage without nostalgia, innovation without erasure and global dialogue rooted firmly in place. The Royal Opera House, with its balance of Omani architectural heritage and contemporary elegance, offered more than a venue, it became a symbol of what this fashion week set out to achieve. In her opening address, Fatma bint Khamis al Fazariyah, Head of the Planning and Project Management Department at Muscat Governorate, framed the week as part of a broader national narrative. She spoke of Muscat as a nurturing city for creativity, one that embraces experimentation while remaining grounded in cultural memory. Her speech emphasised that fashion is no longer peripheral, but a vital contributor to the creative economy,



aligned with Oman Vision 2040 and its focus on knowledge-based industries, sustainable development and cultural identity. The revival of Muscat Fashion Week, she noted, reflects confidence in Omani talent and a belief in fashion as a bridge between local authenticity and global relevance. That bridge was further articulated by Amal al Raisi, Founder of Amal al Raisi Fashion House and Founder of this year’s Muscat Fashion Week, whose words carried both personal conviction and collective ambition. For Al Raisi, the return of Muscat Fashion Week was not a seasonal celebration, but an announcement of a new phase, one in which fashion stands as an economic engine, a cultural voice and a platform for youth. She described fashion as a refined language capable of dialogue with the world, contemporary yet deeply rooted and highlighted the importance of cross-sector collaboration between culture, tourism, media and the creative industries. Her message was clear, Oman is not only a source of inspiration, but an active participant in shaping the global fashion conversation. That vision materialised on the runway, where the works of designers including Amal al Raisi, Muna al Kaabi of Moonlight Concept, Faiza al Balushi of Bait Al Fanar, Buthaina al Zadjali of Bthaina, Ahmed Talfit and Elio Abu Faisal walked beneath the Opera House lights. Each collection told a distinct story, of material, silhouette, memory and modernity, yet together they formed a collective narrative of diversity and shared purpose. Beyond the runway, the opening day positioned Muscat Fashion Week as a space for dialogue. The first panel, “Navigating the Middle Eastern Market, Fashion

as an Economic Engine”, brought together Bilal al Arabi, Marnix Quint of Brunello Cucinelli Middle East, Aram Kabbani of Chalhoub Group and Reda Keddaji of Tryano. The discussion explored how new generations are reshaping fashion consumption in the region, developing their own visual language through digital platforms and emerging trends. Panelists emphasised the abundance of talent across the GCC and challenged outdated perceptions of fashion as a secondary industry, stressing its essential role in tourism, retail and economic growth. Subsequent panels expanded the conversation. “Media’s Role in Shaping Fashion Trends in the Middle East”, moderated by Ahmed al Busaidy, examined how storytelling, editorial vision and strategy influence taste and visibility, with insights from Ylias Nacer and Nora al Beshar of Hia Magazine. “Fashion as Cultural Diplomacy” reframed design as a soft power tool, capable of building bridges and expressing shared values across borders. The day concluded with “The Future of Fashion Weeks in the Middle East”, a forward looking discussion on evolving formats and regional collaboration. As the opening day drew to a close, Muscat Fashion Week revealed itself not merely as an event, but as a cultural proposition. Between heritage and the future, the local and the global, Muscat stood confidently, dressed in intention, creativity and possibility. Running from January 13 to 15, 2026 as part of Muscat Nights 2026, Muscat Fashion Week comes back with clarity of purpose, three days of cultural intelligence where fashion becomes a language, one that speaks of heritage and expressiveness.

FEATURES

TOWERING accordion steps and a fantastical spiral staircase greet visitors to a massive bookstore in northern China's Tianjin, where its striking interior is a bigger draw for selfie snappers than scholars.

Sales of hard-copy books across the country have failed to bounce back to pre-pandemic levels, data shows, despite authorities' efforts to boost domestic consumption and an e-commerce boom. Yet in recent years the number of physical bookshops has "maintained steady growth", the head of a publishing industry group said last January.

"A wave of bookstores with unique characteristics" has emerged, Ai Limin said. Tianjin's Zhongshuge, which opened in September 2024, on social media draws comparisons to Harry Potter's gothic Hogwarts.

"The photos come out looking really beautiful", said graduate student Li Mengting, who stepped inside to snap some pictures when visiting the city with a friend.

But the 24-year-old, wearing a fuzzy cropped parka and a matching shoulder bag, struggled to find the perfect spot because there were "truly a lot of people inside", she said.

Tourists wielding selfie sticks and tripods thronged the central cobalt-coloured stairs, which extend into massive three-storey columns that arch onto the ceiling.

Faded prints that read "The Best Spot for Photos" were plastered on the ground. Renewed Shelf Life

Some bookstores in China now invest in creating interiors meant to be photographed, said Beijing-based architect Zheng Shiwei.

"This has become relatively mainstream", Zheng, whose firm the China Architecture Design and Research Group is also involved in bookstore projects, said.

But, he warned, "that might lead to a lot of people going not just for the purpose of reading, which may result in some unintended consequences".

Last June, a bookstore in the eastern city of Nanjing that had become a tourist hotspot posted a notice banning flash photography, tripods, loitering and photoshoots staged without permission.

The nonstop pictures at Librairie Avant-Garde "interfered with reading", said finance worker Yuan Jia, who is from Nanjing and an avid reader.

But Zheng, the architect, said bookstores curating photo-taking spaces should be encouraged.

"At least people are 'punching in' at bookstores, right? Instead of doing that elsewhere", Zheng said.

At a bookstore in the heart of Beijing converted from a former Taoist temple, dozens of tourists strolled in to browse tables of trinkets and order tea.

"Books bring in relatively low profit", said founder Juli Hu, who opened the store in 2024.

She said she welcomes people who take photos to post online and frequently sets up new cultural displays.

"Selling books definitely cannot be the core of what sustains an entire bookstore", Hu said. — AFP



SPELLBINDING
BOOKSTORES DRAW
SELFIE SNAPPERS

