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Observer

VOL. 45, NO. 25
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INBRIEF

DECREE RATIFIES
AGREEMENT WITH
WORLD BANK GROUP

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Sunday issued Royal Decree No 102/2025 on the ratification of an agreement to establish an Office for the World Bank Group in the Sultanate of Oman. The agreement, signed in Washington, DC on October 14, 2025, is between the Government of the Sultanate of Oman and the following World Bank Group institutions: The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, the International Development Association, the International Finance Corporation, and the Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency. Article (1) ratifies the aforementioned agreement in accordance with the version attached to this decree. Article (2) says that this decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from its date of issue. — ONA

HM’S GREETINGS TO
TUNISIA PRESIDENT



President Kais Saied of the Republic of Tunisia received Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, at the Carthage Palace in the Tunisian capital. The meeting took place in the context of the minister’s participation in the Omani-Tunisian Economic Forum. During the meeting, the minister conveyed the greetings of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and his best wishes of good health and happiness to the Tunisian President. His Majesty also wished the people of Tunisia further progress and prosperity. In his turn, the Tunisian President asked the minister to convey his greetings and appreciation to His Majesty the Sultan.

OMAN, TANZANIA
DISCUSS RELATIONS

Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, held a phone call with Mahmoud Thabit Kombo, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the United Republic of Tanzania. During the call, they underlined the strength of the historical ties between the Sultanate of Oman and Tanzania and the shared keenness to continue developing them and investing in cooperation prospects in a manner that serves the common interests of the two peoples. The call also addressed the current developments in Tanzania, as the two ministers affirmed support for all efforts aimed at enhancing security and stability within its territories.

Filipinos visiting Oman exempted from tourist visa

MUSCAT: A spokesperson for the Consular Department at the Foreign Ministry affirmed that the Republic of the Philippines will be added to the list of countries exempt from tourist visa requirements starting next year.

This step reflects Oman’s commitment to enhancing international relations and diversifying economic partnerships. Under this measure, the number of countries covered by the exemption rises to 105

worldwide, enhancing the Sultanate of Oman’s position as an open and attractive international destination.

QUALITY TOURISM
According to informed diplomatic sources, the decision comes within the context of the evolving relations between Muscat and Manila, aiming to develop the traditional pattern of relations associated with the labour file towards a broader partnership that includes investments, industry and



This step reflects Oman’s commitment to enhancing international relations and diversifying economic partnerships.

quality tourism. The sources clarified that concerns regarding this measure are limited due to the stringent procedures imposed by the Philippines on its citizens prior to departure, including proof of health fitness, financial solvency, flight and hotel bookings, along with other requirements ensuring compliance with laws. Oman similarly appreciates these procedures and takes them into account for visitors, residents and those

coming to work from various nationalities. Meanwhile, Oman Visa and Medical Check-up Centre in Manila, which was inaugurated in July in the presence of Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, and Dr Mahad bin Said Baowain, Minister of Labour, serves as an integrated facility to facilitate and regulate work visa procedures in accordance with employment contracts approved under the Omani Labour Law. — ONA

LEBANESE PRESIDENT ARRIVES ON TUESDAY

TWO - DAY OFFICIAL VISIT TO ENHANCE JOINT COOPERATION

GENERAL JOSEPH AOUN, President of the Lebanese Republic, will pay an official two-day visit to the Sultanate of Oman from Tuesday.

A statement by this effect was issued by the Diwan of Royal Court, reading as follows: “In a manifestation of the distinguished fraternal relations binding the Sultanate of Oman and the Lebanese Republic, General Joseph Aoun, President of the Lebanese Republic, will pay an official visit to the Sultanate of Oman on Tuesday and Wednesday, December 9-10. The visit comes within the context of enhancing the joint cooperation between Oman and Lebanon in a manner that achieves further progress and prosperity to serve the common interests of the two countries and meet their aspirations. “During the visit, the two leaderships will exchange views on several matters that promote the joint Arab action,



General Joseph Aoun, President of the Lebanese Republic

in addition to discussing a set of regional and international developments. “May the Almighty Allah grant the two countries’ leaderships success to realise

further progress and welfare for their peoples and the Arab nation!” The Sultanate of Oman and the Lebanese Republic are keen to enhance bilateral cooperation

in various political, security, economic, and cultural fields, paving the way for building a new stage of strategic and economic partnership between the two countries. The upcoming official visit of President General Joseph Aoun to Oman and his meeting with His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik hold special importance in affirming the keenness of the two countries’ leaderships on promoting the bilateral relations and pushing them towards wider horizons. The relations between Oman and Lebanon have been distinguished, since the opening of Oman’s first embassy in Beirut in 1972, by their strength and robustness, rooted in Arab and historical ties. Two countries pay great attention to enhancing political and economic partnerships with Arab nations in terms of sustainable development and economic integration, as outlined in Oman Vision 2040 which focuses on strengthening partnerships with Arab countries. SEE ALSO P4

Forum calls for strengthening decentralisation

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, DEC 7

The ‘Local Administration Forum: Decentralisation and Empowering Governorates – Prospects for Comprehensive and Sustainable Development’ was launched on Sunday under the auspices of Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidy, Minister of Interior. The forum aims to establish the foundations and principles of decentralisation and explore ways to enhance its implementation in the governorates. The two-day forum targets more than 150 participants representing national leadership, governors, heads of the municipalities of Muscat and Dhofar, and people in sectors related to the forum’s themes, in addition to members of municipal councils, and offices



The forum was launched on Sunday under the auspices of Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidy, Minister of Interior.

following up on the implementation of the Oman Vision 2040 in the governorates and municipalities. The forum also saw the presence of international experts, reflecting global confidence in the strategic directions of the Sultanate of

Oman and confirming that governorates have become part of an international community with advanced models of development solutions. The forum is being organised in line with the directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham

bin Tarik, aimed at strengthening the decentralisation approach and empowering governorates across to lead their development priorities, in accordance with the strategic objectives of Oman Vision 2040. This also seeks to consolidate the principles of modern local governance and enhance institutional integration at the governorate level. Speaking on the occasion, Sayyid Khalifa bin Al Murradas al Busaidy, Secretary-General of Governorates Affairs at the Ministry of Interior, emphasised that this forum embodies Oman’s commitment to establishing decentralisation as a fundamental approach to enhancing the efficiency of government performance, improving the quality of services, and supporting sustainable development in all governorates. TURN TO P2

OMAN

FORUM CALLS FOR STRENGTHENING DECENTRALISATION

FROM P1

He stated that the forum represents an important platform for exchanging national and international expertise, exploring the future of local governance and developing an integrated model based on participation, accountability, and effective governance.

Dr Ali bin Qasim al Lawati, President of the Royal Academy of Administration, stated: “The shift towards decentralisation and empowering the governorates in Oman is not merely a redistribution of powers, but rather an alignment with the strategic vision of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, which transforms the concept of centralised service management into one of local leadership for development.”

Dr Al Lawati pointed out that decentralisation is not simply a measure to alleviate the burdens on the central government, but a means to amplify the nation’s strength and economic growth.

He added: “This forum is not merely a platform for dialogue, but a bridge to global knowledge through urban diplomacy, connecting the governorates with international best practices by offering practical and applicable solutions.”

The forum aims to promote social and economic development in support of comprehensive and sustainable local growth and development, while activating the role of the governorates in creating job opportunities and leveraging their competitive advantages, comparative advantages, and economic potential.

This event will also explore the role of municipalities in the local governance system, empower national talent and capabilities, and enhance institutional capacities through tailored panel discussions and workshops aligned with the forum’s main themes.

Dr Ahmed bin Mohsen al Ghasani, Chairman of Dhofar Municipality, said in a statement that the forum aims to exchange experiences among the participating experts, which contributes to developing the work of local administration within the framework of a plan by the Ministry of Interior and the Royal Academy of Administration to develop a more ambitious vision for the technical aspects of local administration in Oman.

Dr Yahya bin Badr al Maawali, Governor of Al Sharqiyah South, stated: “The forum’s four themes are supported by legislative, administrative, financial, and coordination requirements and enablers. What’s significant about this forum is that it has brought together a range of experiences from across the region and the world.

Annual forum honours research excellence

MOHAMED AL BATTASHI
MUSCAT, DEC 7

THE 12th Annual Research Forum 2025 was held on Sunday at Al Bustan Palace under the theme ‘Publishing Research, Realising Visions’, bringing together researchers, academics and officials in a celebration of scientific excellence. The event took place under the auspices of HH Sayyidah Meyyan bint Shihab al Said.

In her opening address, Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, underscored Oman’s ongoing progress in research and innovation. She highlighted efforts to enhance research quality, strengthen scientific publishing and empower young innovators, all in alignment with Oman Vision 2040.

The forum also featured remarks by Prof Abdelmajid Ben Amara, Secretary-General of the Federation of Arab Scientific Research Councils (FASRC), who noted the forum’s alignment with FASRC’s International Green Innovation Forum, reflecting a broader regional focus on sustainable research and development.

A highlight of the event was the announcement of the 12th National Research Award winners, recognising outstanding research across two categories: projects led by PhD holders and projects conducted by young researchers without doctoral degrees.

Among the laureates was Prof Haider bin Ahmed al Lawati of Sultan Qaboos University, honoured for developing an innovative



Outstanding researchers across two categories were honoured on the occasion.

paper-based microfluidic device to analyse phenolic compounds in olive oil from Al Jabal Al Akhdhar.

Speaking to the Observer, he said, “The award is not the goal... it is the outcome of true passion for research.” He added that his work aids in identifying high-quality olive varieties, supporting future agricultural advancements.

Another winner, Dr Muhammad Zakarya from Sohar University, was recognised for ApMove, a project that enables autonomous vehicles to seamlessly transfer digital services as they move between communication stations. Reflecting on his achievement, he said the award represents “a meaningful moment in my career... and a strong incentive to continue.”

The forum also saw the signing of agreements for key national research programmes, including the Strategic Research Programme, the Block Funding Programme, and the Innovation and Technology Transfer Centres Support Programme. In addition, the Oman Innovates platform unveiled its new visual identity, marking a step towards connecting innovators with opportunities and strengthening the national innovation ecosystem. Throughout the day, presentations and panel discussions focused on strategies to enhance research quality, improve scientific publishing practices and align academic output with national priorities.

With strong participation from Oman’s research community, the Annual Research Forum continues to nurture a vibrant culture of innovation, empowering local talent.

SEARCH AND RESCUE TEAM UNDERGOES ASSESSMENT

MUSCAT: The events for the international evaluation of the National Search and Rescue Team commenced on Sunday.

This step reflects the commitment of the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority (CDAA) to developing the national response system in accordance with international standards. The events took place at the Authority’s headquarters under the auspices of Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health.

The opening ceremony included a documentary film about the Authority and a special film about the Search and Rescue Team, highlighting its field efforts locally, its efficiency in dealing with incidents, and its international participation in relief missions, including the Nepal earthquake in 2015 and the Türkiye earthquake in 2023, affirming its professionalism and adherence to international standards. The event featured an introductory tour of the laboratories and classrooms.

— ONA





As we celebrate 30 remarkable years of excellence, we look back with pride and move forward with purpose. We honor the people and moments that brought us here.

We honour the journey that has shaped us and embrace the future we are ready to build.



We live by the values of **Care**, **Share**, **Invest**, and **Grow**. They influence how we decide, how we act, and who we strive to be.

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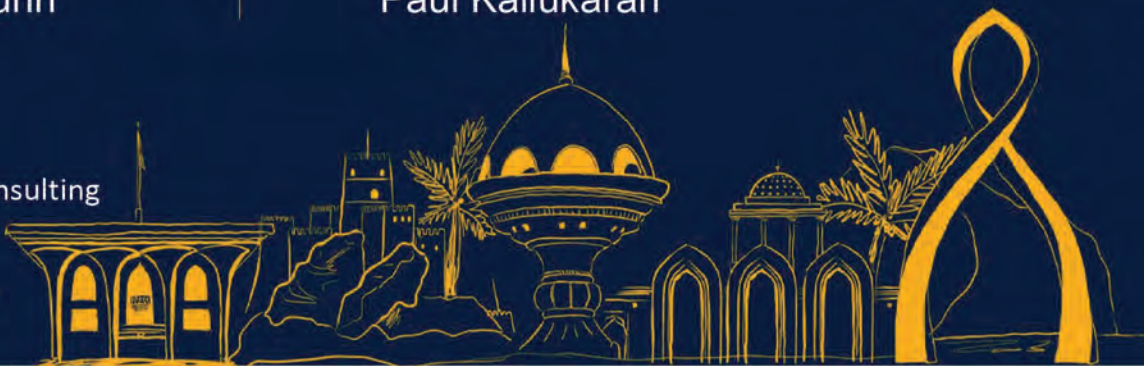
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SHORT TAKES



The two-day forum opened under the auspices of Dr Mahad bin Said Baowain.

6TH ARAB FORUM ON PROFESSIONAL QUALIFICATION OPENS

MUSCAT: The 6th Arab Forum for Professional Qualification and Accreditation began on Sunday in Muscat under the theme 'Towards Sustainable Professionalism and Accredited Standards'. The opening of the two-day forum was held under the auspices of Dr Mahad bin Said Baowain, Minister of Labour, with the attendance of a number of officials from the public and private sectors working in the engineering field, both from inside and outside the Sultanate of Oman. This edition of the forum aims to develop the system of professional accreditation and qualification according to the best international practices and standards, enhance integration among Arab bodies. — ONA

MUSCAT AIRPORT RELOCATES TAXI SERVICES TO LEVEL 0

MUSCAT: Taxi services at Muscat International Airport have been moved to Level 0, effective from Sunday, Oman Airports announced. Travellers can follow updated signs to the Taxi Services Counter and the new taxi station. Previously, taxis operated from the area outside the main terminal on Level 1, providing transport to destinations across Muscat and other cities. Public buses, managed by Mwasalat Transport Company, remain available at the bus station on the ground floor (Level 0) outside the airport building.

FORMER INDIAN SOCIAL CLUB CHIEF DR SATHEESH LAID TO REST

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, DEC 7

Dr Satheesh Nambiar, who served the Indian Social Club (ISC) for over three decades, was cremated on Sunday in Mangaluru, Karnataka, India, following a brief illness.



DR SATHEESH NAMBIAR

A medical doctor by profession, Dr Nambiar guided the welfare and social initiatives of the Indian expatriate community in Oman. P M Jabir, former Community Welfare head at ISC, described him as a fatherly figure, a true leader, and a guiding force behind the club's growth into a hub for the community's socio-cultural activities. Wilson George, former Chairman of the Board of Directors of Indian Schools in Oman, called Dr Nambiar a mentor and elder brother, praising his invaluable contributions to the Indian community. C M Najeed, educationist and industrialist in Oman, extended heartfelt condolences, noting that the Indian diaspora in Oman will deeply miss his leadership, guidance, and human touch.

NATIONAL AVIATION STRATEGY 2040 APPROVED

MUSCAT: The Civil Aviation Authority approved the National Aviation Strategy 2040, as part of its celebration of International Civil Aviation Day. This took place in a ceremony held in Muscat Governorate under the auspices of Shaikh Al Fadhl bin Mohammed al Harthy, Secretary-General of the Council of Ministers, in the presence of some strategic



partners in the civil aviation sector. During the event, the chief guest launched

the logo of the strategy. This launch represents a prominent strategic milestone in the journey

of developing the aviation sector across several key areas. These include legislation and governance, airport infrastructure, safety and security, air navigation services, business development and investment, general aviation and drones, national competency development, in addition to sustainability and innovation. — ONA

Dialogue highlights legal, social support for women

AMAL AL RIYAMI
NIZWA, DEC 7

THE Directorate-General of Social Development in Al Dakhiliyah hosted an open discussion that explored the reality of national legislations and mechanisms supporting women. The event was held as part of the sixth edition of the 'Qarri Ayna' (Rest Assured) awareness campaign, aligned with the global 16 days of activism against gender based violence. The event, organised by the Directorate-General of Social Development, brought together a diverse group of women from across the governorate, creating a dynamic and engaging space to examine the legal frameworks that safeguard women's rights and strengthen their participation in social and economic development. The session featured presentation by Marwa bint Hassan al Balushiyyah, legal researcher at the Family Protection Department. She highlighted Oman's longstanding efforts to elevate the status of women



The event brought together a diverse group of women, creating an engaging space to examine legal frameworks.

and ensure a secure and empowering environment. She emphasised how national strategies particularly Oman Vision 2040 have incorporated clear policies and programmes that protect women's rights and enhance their role in sustainable development. Marwa also shed light on the social empowerment programmes launched by the

Ministry of Social Development, explaining how these initiatives have introduced legislations and policies support women across various life circumstances. She pointed to the ministry's ongoing work in providing legal and social protection that ensures women's integration into national development efforts. One of the participants, Laila al Harthy, said: "Sessions like this help us understand the laws that protect us more deeply. Many women are unaware of the legal tools available to them. Today we leave with greater awareness and confidence and that is empowerment in itself." The event comes as part of the continued collaboration between the Women's Affairs Department and the Family Development Department within the Directorate General of Social Development in Al Dakhiliyah. The aim is to increase community awareness of the national legislative framework dedicated to empowering and protecting women, while opening channels of dialogue between specialists and community members. Through such initiatives, the Directorate reaffirms its commitment to strengthening women's rights and promoting awareness.

Conference seeks to restore Sur's historical standing

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, DEC 7

Sur International Conference (Historical and Cultural Dimension) commenced its four-day proceedings on Sunday, under the auspices of Shaikh Dr Hilal bin Ali al Habsi, Wali of Sur. It aims to highlight the historical and cultural role of the Wilayat of Sur, deepen research into its maritime and cultural heritage, and enhance its scholarly presence within the historical studies landscape of the region. The conference serves as a national and academic platform seeking to restore the established historical and cultural standing of the Wilayat of Sur by exploring its deep historical roots, its cultural and social heritage, its archaeological and architectural landmarks, and its geopolitical role in its regional and international environment throughout history. Shaikh Dr Hilal bin Ali al Habsi, Chairman of the Main Organising Committee, emphasised the importance of the conference and its role



The conference serves as a national and academic platform seeking to restore the established historical and cultural standing of the Wilayat of Sur.

and he stated. "This conference aims to present an advanced scientific vision based on sound research methodologies. It combines historical presentation with cultural analysis and relies on academic research tools to document the contributions of the Wilayat of Sur in the fields of navigation, shipbuilding, international relations commercial and cultural interaction, and its role in forming one of the most prominent centres of cultural exchange in the Indian Ocean," he said. He added that historical documents and oral traditions indicate that Omani ports and

the port of Sur in particular were key stations on the frankincense and myrrh trade route, and that the people of Sur were pioneers of the seas who carried science, knowledge, and culture to other peoples. Studying this heritage is an urgent necessity, not only to understand the past, but also to understand how this city contributed to shaping the Omani character throughout the ages. 34 research papers were presented across seven scientific sessions, highlighting the historical and cultural role of Sur and enhancing its scientific presence within the

map of historical studies in the region. The first day includes a field trip for participants from outside the Sultanate of Oman to visit the Al Ayyah Lighthouse and the Ras Al Hadd Science Center. Visits will continue over the following days to archaeological and historical sites in Qalhat, Tiwi, and Wadi Al Shab, culminating in a boat trip to conclude the conference. The conference seeks to document Sur's maritime, commercial, and cultural legacy, showcasing its role in shaping Omani identity and solidifying its historical presence on the shipping and trade routes of the Indian Ocean and the Arabian Gulf. It also aims to shed light on Sur's pioneering role in traditional shipbuilding and its impact on regional and international trade, while simultaneously promoting multidisciplinary academic output, establishing Sur's position on the global research and tourism map, and opening avenues for deeper scholarly dialogue on the history and cultural depth of the region.



OMAN-LEBANON RELATIONS

Relations set to expand with

PRESIDENTIAL VISIT

DR AHMED AL SAIDI
Ambassador of Oman to the Lebanese Republic



OMAN AND Lebanon are keen to enhance bilateral cooperation in various political, security, economic, and cultural fields, paving the way for building a new stage of strategic and economic partnership between the two countries.

The official visit of President General Joseph Aoun of the Lebanese Republic to Oman on Tuesday and his meeting with His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik hold special importance in affirming the keenness of the two countries' leaderships on promoting the bilateral relations and pushing them towards wider horizons.

In this context, Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Saidi, Ambassador of Oman to the Lebanese Republic, stated that the relations between Oman and Lebanon have been distinguished, since the opening of the first embassy in Beirut in 1972, by their strength and robustness, rooted in Arab and historical ties.

He added that the two countries pay great attention to enhancing political and economic partnerships with Arab nations in terms of sustainable development and economic integration, as outlined in Oman Vision 2040 which focuses on strengthening partnerships with Arab countries, and similarly in the Lebanese President's oath speech which emphasised solidifying strategic relations.

Based on this convergence of approach, it is hoped this visit will contribute to further activating the partnership between the two countries, especially in economic, commercial, tourism, agricultural and educational fields.

There are memoranda of understanding under consideration that will be signed during the meeting of the Omani-Lebanese Joint Committee in the first half of next year. The Ambassador noted that the visit embodies and reinforces the solid relations linking the two countries; both countries possess economic components and a strategic location attractive for investment.

On the political front, he underlined Oman's firm and steadfast position in backing the sovereignty of Lebanon and its national unity. He also

stressed Oman's complete rejection of any violations of Lebanon's sovereignty and territories. Oman, the Ambassador said, will also continue to support diplomatic and political efforts aimed at achieving political and economic stability that serves Lebanon and its people.

He explained that Oman's embassy in Lebanon serves as a link between government bodies in both countries to serve common interests. It works to activate economic diplomacy by encouraging investments, facilitating communication between the two sides, visits by economic delegations, and supporting companies' participation in joint exhibitions and events.

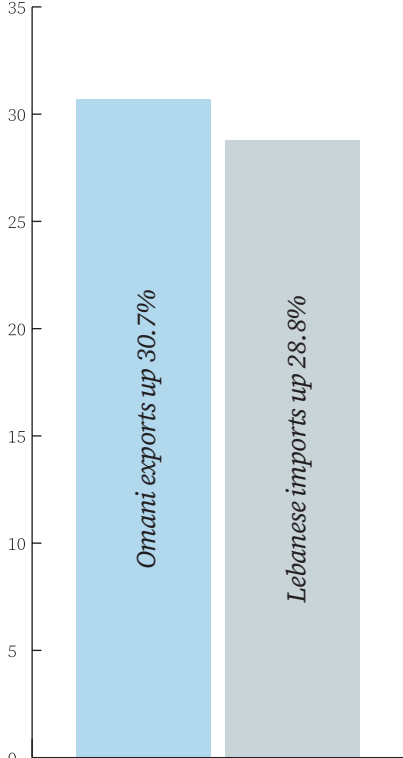
The embassy also introduces and explores investment opportunities in Oman by holding discussions with economic bodies and investors, and exploring ways to enhance bilateral relations in this field with Lebanese officials.

PROMISING ACTIVITY
Bilateral relations between the two countries have witnessed promising activity to explore partnership horizons in recent months. This included the meeting between the Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion of Oman and the Lebanese Minister of Economy and Trade at the Omani-Lebanese Forum to explore investment horizons last September, and the meeting between the Minister of Education of Oman and the Lebanese Minister of Education and Higher Education last November. On the economic front, Oman and Lebanon have enjoyed solid trade relations since ancient times.

These commercial links have contributed to enhancing cultural, intellectual, and historical exchange between the Omani and Lebanese peoples, creating an environment of cooperation and communication across ages.

The governments of both countries seek to provide facilities, incentives, and enablers that empower the private sector to contribute to achieving prosperity and sustainable growth.

The volume of trade exchange between Oman and Lebanon during the first half of 2025 saw a growth of 29.4 per cent, reaching approximately RO 8.5 million



Exports & Imports

from both countries in diverse sectors such as industry, food, tourism, and logistics, in addition to bilateral meetings between Omani and Lebanese business owners.

In this context, Faisal bin Abdullah al Rawas, Chairman of the Board of Directors of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, affirmed that the economic and trade relations between Oman and Lebanon represent an advanced model of Arab cooperation built on mutual respect and a sincere desire to enhance developmental partnerships.

He pointed out that these relations, which extend over long decades, have witnessed remarkable growth in trade exchange and joint investment, reflecting the solid trust between the two sides.

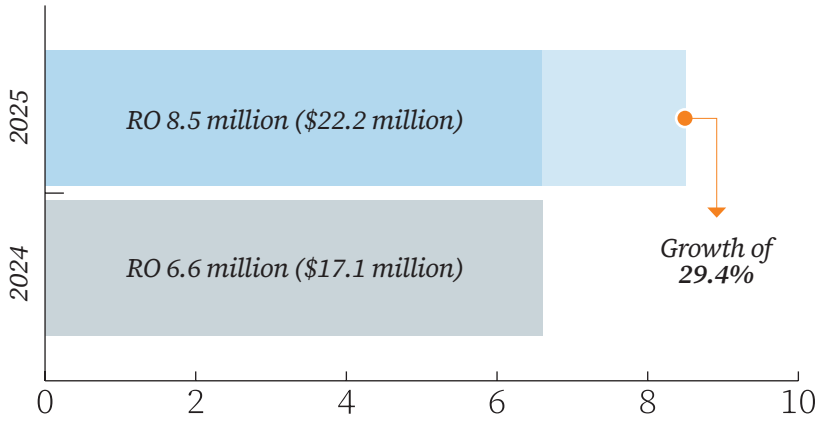
He added that the current phase opens wide horizons for developing economic cooperation, especially given Oman's attractive business environment, developed logistical infrastructure, and investment-incentivising legislation, alongside Lebanon's qualitative expertise in service sectors, technology, food industries and creative industries, making the two countries partners in value-added projects.

Al Rawas affirmed that OCCI is pressing ahead with enhancing communication channels between business owners in both countries by organising bilateral meetings, joint economic committees, trade delegations, providing information, and facilitating access to qualitative investment opportunities.

For his part, Rashid bin Amer al Muselhi, First Vice-Chairman of the Board of Directors of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, clarified that the economic relations between Oman and Lebanon are witnessing an advanced stage of coordination and partnership, driven by a clear vision from both countries to open new paths for cooperation suitable for changes in the regional and international economy. He noted that Lebanon possesses numerous expertise in service sectors, the financial sector, media communication, and cultural industries. These are fields that represent added value and can align with economic diversification approaches in Oman amidst ongoing expansion in free and economic zones and growing opportunities in technology, logistics, and inter-trade. — ONA



The volume of trade exchange



Growth of 29.4%

The number of Lebanese companies registered in Oman reached more than

1,035

A total invested capital estimated at

RO 191.5 M

(\$22.2 million), compared to RO 6.6 million (\$17.1 million) during the same period in 2024, according to statistics from the National Centre for Statistics and Information.

The statistics indicated that Omani exports to Lebanon recorded noticeable growth of 30.7 per cent in the first half of this year, with a value of approximately RO 2.8 million.

Meanwhile, the value of Lebanese imports to Oman reached RO 5.7 million, representing a growth rate of 28.8 per cent compared to the same period in 2024.

The number of Lebanese companies registered in Oman reached more than 1,035 by September 2025, with a total invested capital estimated at RO 191.5 million, with the Lebanese

LEBANESE PRESIDENT AOUN'S VISIT WILL STRENGTHEN BILATERAL COOPERATION IN POLITICAL, ECONOMIC, SECURITY, AND CULTURAL FIELDS

RECENT ECONOMIC FORUMS AND UPCOMING MEMORANDA OF UNDERSTANDING AIM TO ENHANCE INDUSTRIAL, TRADE, TOURISM, AGRICULTURAL AND EDUCATIONAL COOPERATION

BOTH COUNTRIES ARE PROMOTING JOINT INVESTMENT PROJECTS, LEVERAGING OMAN'S BUSINESS-FRIENDLY ENVIRONMENT

contribution forming about 80 per cent, according to data from the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion. Most investments are concentrated in the trade and retail, construction, manufacturing, transportation, and food services sectors.

The two sides organised the Omani-Lebanese Economic Forum in Muscat in October 2025. It aimed at enhancing economic relations and expanding areas of trade, industrial, and investment cooperation between the two countries.

It included discussion sessions on investment and partnership opportunities and a parallel exhibition featuring products and services from more than 100 companies and institutions

SHORT TAKES



Ambassador Dornath Aryal accepts letter from NRN Social Club.

WEEKEND WELFARE, AWARENESS PROGRAMME FOR COMMUNITY HELD

MUSCAT: The Embassy of Nepal in Muscat organised a special weekend outreach programme on Friday, December 5, at Nepal House, Muscat. The event brought together labour awareness and financial literacy sessions, an interactive forum with the Ambassador, along with passport-consular services and free health check-up camp.

Ambassador Dornath Aryal chaired the 11th Development Diplomacy Meeting with representatives of Nepali organisations in Oman. Discussions focused on the Embassy’s role, diaspora contributions toward policy reforms and worker welfare, and collaborative efforts to promote Nepal in tourism, investment, trade, and employment.

Suresh Khadka, President of NRN Social Club Oman, submitted a letter containing policy review suggestions.

The Ambassador addressed committee queries and gathered feedback to enhance service delivery and responsiveness.

A series of informative presentations followed, offering practical guidance to Nepali workers. Key topics included the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in daily life, maintaining physical and mental well-being while abroad, the Social Security Fund, ‘Do’s and Don’ts’ in Oman, labour rights, and financial literacy.

Presentations were delivered by Bishesh Kumar Sah, First Secretary; Damodar Gnawali, Labour Attaché; Dr Kamal Aryal; and NRN Social Club Oman members Shyam Bhattarai and Binod Kumar Das.

The Embassy also organised a dedicated Passport and Consular Service Camp. A free Health Camp was also conducted by a six-member medical team from Badr Al Samaa Hospital, offering basic health screenings.

HEALTH AWARENESS DAY IN KHASAB HIGHLIGHTS HPV, HIV PREVENTION

KHASAB: The Ministry of Health organised a health awareness day on human papillomavirus (HPV) and HIV at the Khasab Sports and Cultural Club on Sunday, under the auspices of Dr Ahmed bin Salim al Mandhari, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Health for Planning and Health Regulation.

The two-day event featured specialised lectures, interactive activities, a health awareness exhibition, and presentations on community initiatives implemented

by the General Directorate of Health Services in Musandam Governorate.

Ali bin Abdullah al Shehhi, Director General of Health Services in Musandam, highlighted the Ministry’s commitment to combating infectious diseases through prevention, early diagnosis, and appropriate treatment, emphasising the importance of collaboration between governmental and private sectors to enhance public health awareness.

Dr Sultan bin Mohammed al

Lawati, Consultant of Internal Medicine and Infectious Diseases at Al Rustaq Hospital, addressed the burden of HPV and its link to cancers such as cervical and oral cancer, noting the protective role of the vaccine recently added to the national immunisation programme.

Dr Aisha bint Sulaiman al Shehhiyah, Senior Consultant in Family Medicine at Dibba Hospital, presented insights on HIV transmission. — ONA

Interactive dashboard to boost transparency

SIHAM AL SAIDI
SUHAR, DEC 7

THE Al Batinah North Governor’s Office has introduced a new interactive electronic dashboard, giving residents timely and comprehensive access to information on development projects across the governorate’s wilayats.

Launched through the official website, the initiative underscores the growing commitment to open data and improved communication between local authorities and the community.

The dashboard offers a monthly interactive summary of ongoing projects across multiple sectors, enabling users to explore detailed information with ease. Residents can view the total number of projects, their costs, progress percentages, and the implementing entities.

Each project is colour-coded—green for on-schedule, yellow for delayed, and red for significantly behind schedule—allowing for quick and clear status identification.

Officials noted that the platform aims to empower citizens by providing transparent and accessible data, ensuring the



The platform enhances transparency, and public engagement by providing up-to-date data across various sectors.

The online dashboard offering residents real-time insights into development projects across the governorate

community remains well-informed about development progress.

The tool also strengthens accountability by offering real-time indicators that help residents and decision-makers monitor performance and identify areas needing attention.

Featuring visual charts, interactive filters, and detailed breakdowns by sector and wilayat, the dashboard provides a holistic view of the governorate’s development landscape.

Ali al Saeedi, a resident of Al Khabourah, praised the initiative:

“Now we can easily observe progress — from infrastructure and municipal services to community facilities. The system displays information in a user-friendly format that supports transparent governance, which means a lot to us as citizens.”

Citizens have welcomed the move, emphasising the importance of such tools in building trust and encouraging active community involvement. The Al Batinah North Municipality highlighted that the initiative aligns with Oman’s broader digital transformation efforts and Vision 2040 objectives, which prioritise efficiency, innovation, and open government practices.

By establishing a clear and transparent mechanism for sharing information, the Al Batinah North Governorate continues to champion inclusive local governance. Residents can track the progress of development projects by visiting the governorate’s website, where the full interactive summary is available.

This digital advancement marks a key step toward strengthening public confidence and ensuring that the governorate’s development journey remains visible, measurable, and aligned with community expectations.

Al Dhahirah health services boosted by development, digital initiatives

IBRI: The Ministry of Health (MoH) is advancing a series of development projects and service programmes in Al Dhahirah Governorate to improve healthcare quality and expand services for citizens, supporting the goals of ‘Oman Vision 2040’ for a sustainable and responsive health system.

Dr Ahmed bin Saeed al Kalbani, Director General of Health Services in Al Dhahirah Governorate, highlighted that these initiatives enhance health institution readiness



There has been a qualitative leap in the health services system in Al Dhahirah Governorate.

and patient experience through modern infrastructure, high-quality services, and innovative digital solutions that boost performance efficiency and deliver comprehensive care.

Key achievements this year include the establishment of a kidney dialysis unit in the Wilayat of Dhank, the opening of Al Dariz Health Centre in Ibri, and the expansion of the emergency department at Ibri Referral Hospital in collaboration with Petroleum

Development Oman and Daleel Company.

A peritoneal dialysis unit was also launched to broaden treatment options for kidney failure patients. New medical services, including plasma therapy and ultrasound services, have been introduced, alongside 24/7 laboratory and radiology services at Ibri Health Complex and Yanqul Hospital, improving accessibility and response times. On the digital front, the Directorate has implemented three major initiatives. — ONA

Oman Film Society takes part in IFFA

CANBERRA: Oman Film Society participated in the International Film Festival of Australia (IFFA). The aim is to deepen cinematic cooperation ties with international festivals, particularly IFFA, and to open new horizons for Omani films to participate in global platforms and in cinematic forums with wide influence.

Through its presence at this festival, Oman Film Society sought to open channels for future cooperation in the field of co-production, in



OFS participation aims to enhance Omani presence in the global cinematic scene.

addition to exploring opportunities for training, development, and the exchange of experiences

between Omani film-makers and their counterparts from various world countries.

The participation

also aimed to enhance the Omani presence in the global cinematic scene and enable film-makers to access new experiences that enrich their work and contribute to developing the industry locally.

This participation represents an important step in supporting Omani talents and enabling them to access international markets and festivals, which will positively reflect on the film industry in the Sultanate of Oman. — ONA

وزارة الصحة
Ministry of Health

Announcement

The Ministry of Health invites specialized companies to participate in the following Tender:-

Tender Ref:	Description	Last Date for Collection of Tender Document	Closing Time/ Day/Date	Eligibility	Grade	Tender Fee (Non Refundable)
4706/2025/ MOH/ DGHSMU-5	Providing a service of Renting & Managing of Photocopy Machines for the General Directorate of Health Service in Musandam Governorate and it is Health Institutions	22/12/2025	Before 9 am on Thursday 01/01/2026	Specialized Companies registered with Tender Board		- SME: 10.000 - LO: 25.000 - RE: 25.000

- Tenders should be submitted **online** on the given website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>
- Ministry is not bound to accept the lowest tender and reserves the right to accepts or reject any tender.
- For any inquiries in regard to the tender, please contact through the information below:
(<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>)
Any Clarification, you may contact via
Telephone: 24402200
Email id etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om

WORLD

HORRIFIC VIOLATION



A Sudanese woman stands at a camp for displaced people, North Darfur. — Reuters file photo

DRONE STRIKES ON SUDAN HOSPITAL KILL DOZENS

PORT SUDAN: A recent paramilitary drone attack on the army-held town of Kalogi in Sudan’s South Kordofan state hit a kindergarten and a hospital, killing dozens of civilians including children. The attack involved three strikes, “first a kindergarten, then a hospital and a third time as people tried to rescue the children”, Essam al-Din al-Sayed, head of the Kalogi administrative unit, said using a Starlink satellite internet connection. He blamed the assault on the Rapid Support Forces and their ally, the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement-North faction (SPLM-N) led by Abdelaziz al-Hilu, which controls much of South Kordofan and parts of Blue Nile state.

Since April 2023, the army and the paramilitary RSF have been locked in a conflict that has killed tens of thousands and displaced nearly 12 million. Independent verification in Kordofan remains difficult due to spotty communications, restricted access and ongoing insecurity. The exact death toll from the Kalogi attack remains unclear. The local official reported at least 80 dead including 40 children, while the army-aligned foreign ministry gave a lower toll of 79. The African Union said the death toll exceeded 100.

The UN children’s agency meanwhile said the attack killed more than 10 children aged between five and seven. “Killing children in their school is a horrific violation of children’s rights,” UNICEF Representative for Sudan Sheldon Yett, said in a statement on Friday, urging all sides to stop their attacks and allow humanitarian aid. In a statement shared on X on Sunday, African Union chairperson Mahmoud Ali Youssouf condemned “in the strongest possible terms the horrific reported attacks” in Kalogi. He said he was “appalled by the repeated and escalating atrocities committed against civilians in the region”.

Following their late-October capture of El-Fasher — the army’s last stronghold in western Sudan — the RSF has pushed eastward into the oil-rich Kordofan region, divided into three states. Reports of mass killings, physical violence, looting and abductions followed El-Fasher’s fall.

UN Human Rights commissioner Volker Turk said on Thursday he “feared another wave of atrocities in Sudan amid a surge in fierce fighting” in Kordofan. “It is truly shocking to see history repeating itself in Kordofan so soon after the horrific events in El Fasher.” Last week, a drone strike by the army in Kauda — the SPLM-N faction stronghold in South Kordofan — killed at least 48 people, according to the UN. More than 40,000 people have fled Kordofan in the past month alone, UN data showed. Analysts say the RSF offensive aims to break the army’s final defensive arc around central Sudan and set the stage for attempts to retake major cities.

The World Food Programme reported an attack on one of its trucks near the town of Hamra El-Sheikh in North Darfur. The truck, part of a 39-vehicle convoy delivering food to families displaced from El-Fasher to Tawila, about 70 kilometres west, had its cabin destroyed while the driver was seriously injured. US envoy for Africa Massad Boulos condemned the attack, urging both sides to “cease hostilities and allow unhindered humanitarian access”. — AFP

SRI LANKA ISSUES LANDSLIDE WARNINGS AS CYCLONE TOLL HITS 627

COLOMBO: Sri Lankan authorities issued fresh landslide warnings on Sunday with rains lashing areas already devastated by a powerful cyclone, as the death toll rose to 627.

A chain of tropical storms and monsoon rains has battered Southeast and South Asia, setting off landslides, flooding vast tracts and cutting off communities from Sumatra island’s rainforests to the highland plantations of Sri Lanka.

At least 1,826 people have been killed in the natural disasters rolling across Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam over the past two weeks.

More than two million people in Sri Lanka have been affected by last week’s floods and landslides triggered by Cyclone Ditwah, the worst on the island this century. The Disaster Management Centre (DMC) said monsoon storms were adding more rain and making hillsides unstable, including in the central mountainous region and the northwestern midlands.

Helicopters and planes were being used on Sunday to supply communities cut off by landslides in the centre of the country. The Sri Lanka Air Force said it had received a planeload of relief supplies from Myanmar on Sunday.

The number of people in state-run camps had dropped to 90,000 from a peak of 225,000 as floodwaters receded across the island. Over 80,000 homes were damaged, including close to 5,000 that were destroyed. — AFP

Benin govt says armed forces foil coup attempt

BENIN’S Government said on Sunday its armed forces had foiled a coup attempt after a group of soldiers in the West African nation claimed on national television to have seized power. The attempted coup was the latest threat to democratic rule in the region, where the military have in recent years seized power in Benin’s neighbours Niger and Burkina Faso, as well as Mali, Guinea and, only last month, Guinea-Bissau.

At least eight soldiers, several holding weapons, went on state television on Sunday morning to announce that a military committee led by Colonel Tigri Pascal had taken over and was dissolving national institutions, suspending the constitution and closing air, land and maritime borders. “The army solemnly commits to give the Beninese people the hope of a truly new era, where fraternity, justice and work prevail,” said a statement read by one of the soldiers.

A few hours later, Interior Minister Alassane Seidou said the West African country’s armed forces had thwarted the attempted coup. “Therefore, the government urges the population to go about their business as usual,” he said. Foreign Minister Olushegun Adjadi Bakari had earlier told Reuters that “a small group” of soldiers had attempted to overthrow the government but that forces loyal to President Patrice Talon were working to restore order. He said the coup plotters had only managed to take control of state television, which was cut after the soldiers read out their statement.



A long line of trucks stands still in Cotonou following rumors of a possible coup in the country. — AFP

The French embassy said gunfire had been reported near Talon’s residence in Cotonou and urged citizens to stay at home. By early afternoon, police were deployed at major intersections in the city centre and the gunfire had died down

It resumed broadcasting shortly afterwards, allowing the interior minister to read his statement saying the coup bid had been foiled.

West Africa’s regional bloc ECOWAS and the African Union condemned the coup attempt.

Gunfire could be heard earlier on Sunday in several neighbourhoods of Cotonou, the country’s largest city and economic hub, as residents were trying to make their way to church early on Sunday morning. The French embassy said gunfire had been reported near Talon’s residence in Cotonou and urged citizens to stay at home. By early afternoon, police were deployed at major intersections in the city centre and the gunfire had died down, witnesses said.

Narcisse, a furniture salesman in Cotonou who gave only his first name for safety reasons, said he first

heard gunshots at 8:00 am and soon saw police officers speeding past. “I got scared and brought my sofas inside and closed. It’s a bit calmer now, which is why I reopened,” he said.

The coup attempt came as Benin was preparing for a presidential election in April that would mark the end of the tenure of incumbent Talon, in power since 2016.

In their TV statement, the soldiers mentioned the deteriorating security situation in northern Benin “coupled with the disregard and neglect of our fallen brothers-in-arms.” Talon has been credited with reviving the economy, but the country has also seen an increase in attacks by militants that have wreaked havoc in Mali and Burkina Faso. In April, the government said that 54 soldiers were killed in an attack in the north. — Reuters

SEA VICTIMS

17 found dead in migrant vessel off Crete



Seventeen men were found dead after a migrant vessel was found drifting off the Greek island of Crete, a coastguard spokeswoman said. “Two survivors in critical condition have been hospitalised,” the spokeswoman added. “Autopsies have to be carried out as the circumstances of the sinking are not known.” Greek state television said the bodies had been found inside the vessel, which was taking on water and partly deflated. — AFP

IDENTIFICATION MISSION

Bangladesh begins exhuming mass grave



Bangladeshi police began exhuming a mass grave believed to contain around 114 unidentified victims of a mass uprising that toppled autocratic former prime minister Sheikh Hasina. The bodies were buried at the Rayerbazar Graveyard in Dhaka by the volunteer group Anjuman Mufidul Islam, which said it handled 80 unclaimed bodies in July and another 34 in August 2024 — all people reported to have been killed during weeks of deadly protests. — AFP

BLOCKING RADIATION

IAEA calls for repair work on Chernobyl



The UN nuclear watchdog has said that the protective structure surrounding the exploded reactor at Chernobyl can no longer perform its main function of blocking radiation. IAEA Director-General Rafael Grossi added: “Limited temporary repairs have been carried out on the roof but timely and comprehensive restoration remains essential to prevent further degradation.” Further repairs would take place in 2026. — AFP

SHORT TAKES



French President Emmanuel Macron

MACRON VOWS STRONGER RELATIONS WITH NIGERIA

PARIS: French President Emmanuel Macron said that France will step up cooperation with Nigeria after speaking with his counterpart, as the West African country faces a surge in abductions. Nigeria has been wracked by a wave of kidnappings in recent weeks, including the capture of over 300 school children two weeks ago that shook Africa's most populous country, already weary from chronic violence.

Macron wrote on X that the move came at Nigerian President Bola Tinubu's request, saying France "will strengthen our partnership with the authorities and our support for the affected populations", while urging other countries to "step up their engagement". "No one can remain a spectator" to what is happening in Nigeria, the French president said.

Nigeria has drawn heightened attention from Washington in recent weeks, after US President Donald Trump said in November that the United States was prepared to take military action there to counter the killing of Christians. US officials, while not contradicting Trump, have since instead emphasised other US actions on Nigeria including security cooperation with the government and the prospect of targeted sanctions. — **AFP**

7.0 QUAKE SHAKES ALASKA REMOTE AREA



A powerful 7.0-magnitude earthquake shook a mountainous, sparsely populated area straddling the border of the US state of Alaska and Canada's Yukon territory, seismologists said. The temblor at 2041 GMT was followed by more than 30 aftershocks ranging from magnitude 5.1 to 3.3 over the next three hours, according to the US Geological Survey. The epicenter was about 155 miles (248 kilometres) west of Whitehorse, the capital of Canada's Yukon, and 230 miles northwest of Alaska's capital Juneau. In Yakutat, police chief Theo Capes said that there were no injuries or damages reported from the quake that "lasted surprisingly long, 15 to 20 seconds." — **AFP**

VENEZUELA SWEARS IN 5,600 TROOPS AFTER US MILITARY BUILD-UP

CARACAS: The Venezuelan army swore in 5,600 soldiers, as the United States cranks up military pressure on the oil-producing country. President Nicolas Maduro has called for stepped-up military recruitment after the United States deployed a fleet of warships and the world's largest aircraft carrier to the Caribbean under the pretext of combating drug trafficking. American forces have carried out deadly strikes on more than 20 vessels, killing at least 87.

"Under no circumstances will we allow an invasion by an imperialist force," Colonel Gabriel Rendon said during a ceremony at Fuerte Tiuna, Venezuela's largest military complex, in Caracas. According to official figures, Venezuela has around 200,000 troops and an additional 200,000 police officers. Meanwhile, Türkiye's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan spoke by phone with his Venezuelan counterpart Nicolas Maduro, urging him to "keep dialogue open"

with Washington amid mounting fears of US military action. "It is important to keep channels of dialogue open between the US and Venezuela," Erdogan told him, according to a statement from his office on X, expressing hope that "the tension will ease as soon as possible". Erdogan said that Türkiye was closely following the developments in the region and believed that "problems can be solved through dialogue". — **AFP**

Ukraine peace deal nears as Moscow demands changes

US President Donald Trump's outgoing Ukraine envoy said a deal to end the Ukraine war was "really close" and depended on resolving just two major issues but the Kremlin said there had to be radical changes to some of the US proposals. Trump, who says he wants to be remembered as a "peacemaker" president, says that ending Europe's deadliest conflict since World War Two has so far been the most elusive foreign policy aim of his presidency. Russia attacked Ukraine in February 2022 after eight years of fighting between Russian-backed separatists and Ukrainian troops in the Donbas, which is made up of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions. US Special Envoy for Ukraine Keith Kellogg, who is due to step down in January, told the Reagan National Defense Forum that efforts to resolve the conflict were in "the last 10 metres", which he said was always the hardest.

The two main outstanding issues, Kellogg said, were on territory - primarily the future of the Donbas - and the future of Ukraine's Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant, Europe's largest, which is under Russian control. "If we get those two issues settled, I think the rest of the things will work out fairly well," Kellogg said on Saturday at the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum in Simi Valley, California. "We're almost there." "We're really, really close," said Kellogg. After President Vladimir Putin held four hours of Kremlin talks last week with Trump's special envoy, Steve Witkoff, and Trump's son-in-law, Jared Kushner, Putin's top foreign policy aide, Yuri Ushakov, said "territorial problems" were discussed. That is Kremlin shorthand for Russian claims to the whole of Donbas, though Ukraine is still in control of at least 5,000 square km of the area. Almost all countries recognise Donbas as part of Ukraine.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has said that handing over the rest of Donetsk would be illegal without a referendum and would give Russia a platform to launch assaults deeper into Ukraine in the future. Ushakov was quoted by Russian media on Sunday as saying that the United States would have to "make serious, I would say, radical changes to their



People mourn at the graves of Ukrainian servicemen at the Lychakiv cemetery, in Lviv. — **AFP**

papers" on Ukraine. He did not clarify what changes Moscow wanted Washington to make. Zelensky said that he had had a long and "substantive" phone call with Witkoff and Kushner. The Kremlin has said it expects Kushner to be doing the main work on drafting a possible deal.

Kellogg, a retired lieutenant general who served in Vietnam, Panama and Iraq, said the scale of the death and injuries caused by the Ukraine war was "horrific" and unprecedented in terms of a regional war. Kellogg said that, together, Russia and Ukraine have suffered more than 2 million casualties, including dead and wounded since the war began. Neither Russia nor Ukraine disclose credible estimates of their losses.

Russia currently controls 19.2% of Ukraine, including Crimea, which it annexed in 2014, all of Luhansk, more than 80% of Donetsk, about 75% of Kherson and Zaporizhzhia, and slivers of the Kharkiv, Sumy, Mykolaiv and Dnipropetrovsk regions. A leaked set of 28 U.S. draft peace proposals emerged last month, alarming Ukrainian and European officials who said it bowed to

Moscow's main demands on Nato, Russian control of a fifth of Ukraine and restrictions on Ukraine's army.

Meanwhile, Russian forces took control of the villages of Kucherivka in Ukraine's northern Kharkiv region and Rivne in the eastern Donetsk region, the Defence Ministry said on Sunday. Moscow carried out group strikes on Ukrainian transport infrastructure, fuel and energy facilities, military airfields and long-range drone complexes, the ministry added.

Russia's air defences destroyed 77 Ukrainian drones launched overnight, Russia's defence ministry said on Sunday, as both sides continue cross-border air attacks in the nearly four-year-old war.

The drones were downed over seven regions in southern and central Russia and over Russian-annexed Crimea, the ministry said in a statement on the Telegram messaging app. A power transmission tower was damaged in the Rostov region bordering Ukraine about 1,000 km south of Moscow, leaving residents without electricity, Rostov Governor Yuri Slyusar said, adding that no one was injured. — **Reuters**

Mexico's Sheinbaum holds huge rally following major protests

MEXICO CITY: Hundreds of thousands of people gathered in Mexico's capital to support President Claudia Sheinbaum, as the leftist leader sought to demonstrate her continued popularity following a month of political pushback and major protests. "Let no one be mistaken," Sheinbaum told the huge crowd, many of whom had arrived by bus from across the country. "The vast majority of young people support the transformation" of public life in Mexico, she stressed. Authorities said around 600,000 people gathered in Mexico City's Zocalo, the main square home to the National Palace where Sheinbaum lives and works. They chanted "You are not alone!" and "Claudia, listen, the people are in the fight!"

The killing of mayor Carlos Manzo in restive Michoacan state had sparked two days of demonstrations in November, with protesters setting fire to public buildings. Weeks later, thousands marched through the streets of Mexico City to protest drug violence and the government's security policies. That was followed by the abrupt departure of the country's attorney general, Alejandro Gertz, in late November over reported disagreements with Sheinbaum's administration on crime policy. At the rally, 24-year-old Jose Perez, a craftsman of Otomi descent, said he came out to support Sheinbaum because he feels Indigenous people "are more visible" under her government.

Sheinbaum took office in



Mexico's President Claudia Sheinbaum gestures on arrival for the rally, in Mexico City. — **AFP**

2024 following the six-year tenure of Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, with both leaders representing the left-wing Morena party. Though Sheinbaum has earned high

approval ratings in her first year, they dipped slightly in recent months -- from 74 per cent in October to 71 per cent in early December, according to the Polls MX survey

summary. Analysts said that the president faces scrutiny not only from her political opponents and members of the public, but from within her own party.

The rally is an "attempt at internal support, to reshape the narrative, to call for unity," said political analyst Pablo Majluf. Political columnist Hernan Gomez Bruera said that Sheinbaum is "an incredibly efficient president" who likes to be in control and demands a lot from her team. But she is also "very thin-skinned" and "has difficulty dealing with dissent," he added.

Sheinbaum's party has advocated for social justice through policies to aid the underprivileged, but prominent party members have been involved in

overspending scandals. Despite the recent slip in poll numbers, Mexico's first woman president is still benefiting from a decline in poverty levels that began under her predecessor. Sheinbaum has also won praise among her supporters for keeping at bay US President Donald Trump's threats of high trade tariffs and military action on Mexican soil against drug cartels. "She has been very prudent" in her relationship with Trump, said Ana Laura Jacome, a 42-year-old housewife who attended Saturday's rally, using a cane to walk with fellow supporters. Sheinbaum met with Trump and Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney in Washington on Friday to discuss trade. — **AFP**

OPINION

Rial symbol strengthens cultural and economic identity



SANDHYA RAO MEHTA

The writer is an Associate Professor, Sultan Qaboos University

WE now have a brand new symbol for the Omani Rial, inspired by the Arabic script and calligraphy. This move supports the internationalisation of financial services, and also serves to preserve heritage and identity. Effectively, a currency symbol is a visual representation of a country’s identity, and acts as its brand ambassador. Having an internationally recognised monetary symbol helps in many ways. It ensures visual consistency across all domains and has the recognition value. The CBO itself states that the symbol will “allow for its immediate recognition, facilitate international exchange operations, and deepen global acknowledgement of it as a strong and stable currency”. Having a globally recognised symbol is not just a passing idea. In fact, the British pound symbol is one of the oldest continuously used currency symbols in the world. It originated from the Latin Libra, meaning weight. This symbol, going back to the 17th century, has long been associated with British pride. Similarly, the dollar sign owes its existence to the abbreviation of the ‘p’ and ‘s’ for

pesos, the Spanish currency long used in the Americas. The Indian rupee symbol also uses the Devanagri script and the Roman ‘r’. All currency symbols leverage their roots but also use them to make a statement about their past, as well as their aspirations in the current global economy. It enhances economic sovereignty and confidence, while also building brand identity. A currency symbol makes its identification easier, more standardised and is accurate in digitised formats. It is thus future ready, while also being a reminder of heritage and traditions. Having an easily recognised brand also boosts efficiency in business transactions, encouraging and facilitating international commerce. In the digital age, using a standardised and recognised currency symbol becomes essential as all financial platforms work seamlessly with formats which are established globally. This makes the adoption of cashless systems easier and more convenient across all spectrums. The adoption of a currency symbol, of

Using a standardised and recognised currency symbol becomes essential as all financial platforms work seamlessly with formats which are established globally

course, also helps to support tourism and international relations. It helps visitors to engage more easily with the financial system of the country through a well recognised symbol. It enhances tourism potential by simplifying transactions across all platforms. The Omani currency symbol, however, is not only a statement of financial strength. It also reflects Oman’s cultural depth. As with other countries, inserting historical symbolism through calligraphy creates a link between past and present. It also supports social identity which is so important to long-term continuity and development. We often tend to overlook, or take for granted, the symbolism that is commonly seen around us. Currency is one of them. An essential part of our daily lives, we tend to overlook its importance. But closer inspection of these moves makes it clear to us that symbols are often more than that: they are ways in which we understand ourselves, and our communities, better. There are also ways in which a vision for the future is outlined and declared.

PALESTINIAN COACH FINDS HOPE FROM MUM IN GAZA

BASSEM RAWASS

Coach Ehab Abu Jazar is guiding a national team that carries on its shoulders all the hopes and sorrows of Palestinian football, but it is his mother, forced by war to live in a Gaza tent, who is his main inspiration and motivation. The war put an end to Palestinian league matches, and left athletes in exile fearing for their loved ones in Gaza. But Abu Jazar’s mother refuses to let the conflict overshadow the sporting dreams of her son, to whom she feeds tactical advice from the rubble of the Palestinian territory by phone. “She talks to me about nothing but the team. She wants the focus to remain solely on the tournament,” the 45-year-old manager said. “My mother asks me about the players, who will play as starters and who will be absent, about the tactics, the morale of the players and the circumstances surrounding them.” The manager, himself a former left-back, says he wants his players to convey the spirit of his mother and Gazans like her. “We always say that we are a small Palestinian family representing the larger family,” he said. “Undoubtedly, it puts pressure on us, but it’s positive pressure.” The Palestinian team is 96th in the FIFA rankings, and their hope of playing in their first World Cup vanished this summer. But the squad, most of whom have never set foot in Gaza, is within reach of the Arab Cup quarter-finals, keeping their message of resilience alive. He said progress would show the world that the Palestinians, if given the right conditions, can “excel in all fields”. Abu Jazar finished his playing career in 2017 before managing the Palestinian U-23 team and eventually taking the top job last year. After the war broke out, his family’s home was destroyed, displacing his mother in Gaza, like most of the territory’s population during the height of the conflict. He now feels pressure to deliver for them after witnessing from exile the horrors of the war, which came to a halt in October thanks to a fragile US-backed ceasefire. “At one point, it was a burden, especially at the beginning of the war,” he said. “We couldn’t comprehend what was happening. But we possess the genes of resilience. “If we surrender and give in to these matters, we as a people will vanish.” In her maternal advisory role, Abu Jazar’s mum, is only contactable when she has power and signal. But she works around the clock to find a way to watch the team’s matches from Al Mawasi camp. — AFP

Trump’s Ukraine approach is a real estate mistake

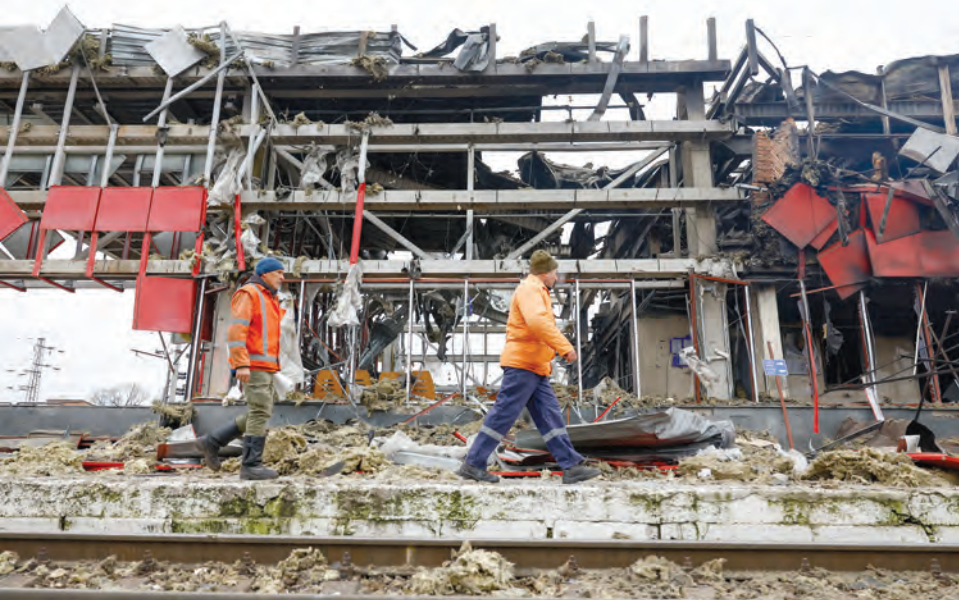


THOMAS L FRIEDMAN

The writer is a author and NYT columnist

I am sure President Donald Trump and his envoys to Russia, Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner, sincerely want to stop the killing in Ukraine, but they are failing and will continue to fail as long as they persist in their naive view that this is just a big real estate deal and that their backgrounds in real estate give them an advantage. It is utter nonsense on multiple levels. For starters, yes, you could say that Russian President Vladimir Putin is in the real estate business in Ukraine, but not in the way Trump or Witkoff or Kushner have been in the business. Putin is in the real estate business in Ukraine the same way Adolf Hitler was in the real estate business in Poland. Hitler coveted territory not to build a hotel or housing for profit to benefit the local residents. He, instead, coveted real estate to fulfil a nationalist fantasy. Ditto Putin. He has shown no interest in the welfare of Ukraine’s people. In that kind of situation, having a bunch of “real estate deal guys” as America’s negotiators is a liability, not an advantage. You want a Henry Kissinger or James Baker-type statesman who understands the difference between real estate and war and peace. Real estate is a positive-sum game: Both sides can profit from a well-struck transaction. And that is the goal. In war and peace, when one side holds fascist views and is the clear aggressor, and the other side holds democratic views and is the clear victim, you are in a zero-sum game. Or as Ronald Reagan famously put it when asked how the Cold War should end, “We win, they lose.” Reagan understood that real estate deals are purely over value (price per square foot) and interest rates. He understood that war-and-peace deals are about advancing and preserving moral values and strategic interests. And you don’t compromise on

I can think of no other American president who would have acted as if America’s values and interests dictated that we now be a neutral arbiter between Russia and Ukraine and, an arbiter who tries to make a profit from each side in the process



Railway employees walk next to a railway station building hit during an overnight Russian missile and drone strikes in the town of Fastiv, in Kyiv region, Ukraine. — Reuters

those with a fascist aggressor. We waged three wars, including the Cold War, alongside our allies in Europe to preserve the spread of our shared democratic values and our shared interests — namely, that no major power in Europe that did not share those values could be allowed to dominate the Continent. I can think of no other American president who would have acted as if America’s values and interests dictated that we now be a neutral arbiter between Russia and Ukraine and, on top of that, an arbiter who tries to make a profit from each side in the process — as Trump has done. I also can think of no other US foreign policy leader who would have said about Putin what Witkoff said about this dictator whose political rivals often end up dead, who engages in vast corruption for himself and his cronies and who does everything he can to undermine free and fair elections in America and the West: “I don’t regard Putin as a bad guy.” I have written since the first weeks of this war, and repeatedly thereafter, that it is only going to end in, at best, a “dirty deal.” Russia is too big compared with Ukraine, and its willingness to fight on dictates that ending the war will require Ukraine to make concessions. Sad but true — and most Ukrainians will tell you the same today. But as I wrote last month, there is a huge difference between a “filthy deal” that maximises Putin’s interests, profits and ability to restart the war at any point of his choosing, and a “dirty deal.” A dirty deal would allow Putin to keep the territory he’s already stolen, but with Western military forces on the ground inside Ukraine that ensure he could never restart the war, except by going to war with all of the West. It would ensure that Putin’s ill-gotten gains were never blessed with formal diplomatic recognition that would reward the acquisition of territory by force; and it would ensure that Ukraine could maintain whatever size army it needed to defend itself and could become a member of the European Union whenever it was ready. — The New York Times

When life closes a door, charity opens a window



ABDULAZIZ
AL JAHDHAMI

The writer is author, translator and communications professional

ONE moment, you are walking to work with purpose. The next day, the carpet is pulled out from under your feet; a sudden dismissal, and a future that unexpectedly feels ambiguous. It might begin with a knock at the door, a surprising email, or a phone call you never saw coming.

Immediately, your world turns upside down. The job you relied on, the routine you trusted, the security you counted on — it’s all gone! Bills pile up, loan deadlines come closer, and the horizon appears dark. For many, joblessness is more than a financial shock; it is a test of spirit.

Losing a job is more than losing a paycheck. It is the collapse of routine, identity and emotional stability. Experiencing dismissal can feel like stepping into an unfamiliar territory, where uncertainty and self-doubt become constant companions.

Job loss can feel like the world has reached a dead end, leaving people aimless in fear, worry and doubt. That is why, in times of uncertainty, charitable organisations must emerge as true heroes offering hands that lift, shoulders that support, and voices that remind people they are not alone.

In fact, in the immediate aftermath of job loss, charities should play a crucial role. In the shadow of hardship, these organisations must build lifelines, guiding people towards hope and new beginnings. For those facing sudden challenges, charities can offer a vital support system.

Emergency cash grants, food packages, and essential supplies, to name a few needs, give individuals the breathing room they need to rise again, even when the weight of bills and obligations becomes overwhelming. And often, the support doesn’t end there; it grows into a hand extended towards redevelopment.

The efforts of charities to support people in crisis are highly needed. However, charitable associations must continue to expand and innovate. Beyond food parcels and financial assistance, they can become mentors, guides, and counsellors. Through career counselling, job-placement programmes, and skill-building workshops, individuals can rediscover their strengths, refine their talents, and navigate the path towards new opportunities.

Because job loss can be isolating — shaking confidence and dimming hope — charities must also nurture people’s emotional well-being. Emotional support is essential too. Social connection and community engagement are equally critical for restoring one’s confidence and purpose.

For example, counselling sessions, support groups, and mentorship programmes create safe spaces where individuals can be heard, understood, encouraged, and guided. In these moments, people gain not only advice, but renewed belief in themselves and the courage to move forward.

Charities can also equip people for a rapidly changing world. Vocational training,

In fact, in the immediate aftermath of job loss, charities should play a crucial role. In the shadow of hardship, these organisations must build lifelines, guiding people towards hope and new beginnings

online courses, and entrepreneurial workshops open doors to new industries and creative paths. This support is not just about securing the next job, it is about finding purpose, reclaiming independence, and dreaming bigger than before.

When charities walk alongside those who have lost their jobs, they become true lifelines. In their hands, job loss transforms from an ending into a beginning. They turn uncertainty into opportunity, struggle into strength, and fear into hope. They show that even when one door closes, another can open — and sometimes the new path leads to a life richer, wiser, and more fulfilling than one ever imagined.

Though joblessness is a challenge and a turning point, it also marks a chance to rewrite one’s story and pursue a future once unimaginable. In every story of job loss, charities help write a story of hope. Through compassion, guidance, and empowerment, they show that even when life closes a door, a window of possibility is waiting — sometimes in places we never thought to look.

This is where the critical role of charity associations and community support groups truly matters. They should stand at the crossroads where people feel lost, offering guidance, reassurance, and practical help. They should be warm shelters in the storm — providing career advice, emotional support, financial breathing room, and the comforting sense that no one must navigate this new world alone.

HAMAS EARLY DISARMAMENT ‘NEITHER REALISTIC NOR DOABLE’

SAMIA NAKHOUL

Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan said that not advancing the US-backed Gaza ceasefire plan to its next stage would be a “huge failure” for the world and Washington, noting that President Donald Trump had personally led the push.

In an interview on the sidelines of the Doha Forum, Fidan said a credible Palestinian civil administration and a vetted, trained police force needed to be in place to allow Hamas to disarm, and that the group was prepared to hand over control of the enclave.

“First of all, we need to see that the Palestinian committee of technical people are taking over the administration of Gaza, then we need to see that the police force is being formed to police Gaza - again, by the Palestinians, not Hamas.”

Nato member Türkiye has been one of the most vocal critics of Israel’s assault on Gaza. It played a key role in brokering the ceasefire deal, signing the agreement as a guarantor. It has repeatedly expressed its willingness to join efforts to monitor the accord’s implementation, a move Israel strongly opposes.

Talks to advance the next phase of President Trump’s plan to end the two-year conflict in Gaza are continuing. The plan envisages an interim technocratic Palestinian administration in the enclave, overseen by an international “board of peace” and supported by a multinational security force. Negotiations over the composition and mandate of that force have proven particularly difficult. Fidan said the Gaza police force would be backed by the international stabilisation force. He added that Washington was pressing Israel over Türkiye’s bid to join the force, to which it has voiced readiness to deploy troops if needed.

Asked about a landmark deal in March in which the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces and Damascus agreed that the SDF would be integrated into Syria’s state structures, Fidan said signals from the SDF showed it had “no intention” of honouring the accord, and was instead seeking to sidestep it. Ankara, which considers the SDF a terrorist organisation, has threatened military action if it does not comply, setting a deadline of the end of the year.

“I think they (SDF) should understand that the command and control should come from one place,” Fidan added. “There can be no two armies in any given country. So there can only be one army, one command structure... But in local administration, they can reach a different settlement and different understandings.”

Almost a year after the fall of president Bashar al Assad, Fidan said some issues of minority rights were unresolved, insisting that Türkiye’s backing of the new Syrian government was not a “blank cheque” to oppress any groups. — Reuters

Race for critical minerals putting the planet at risk

THE environmental and human toll of mineral extraction is becoming clearer – and more alarming – by the day. Roughly 60 per cent of Ghana’s waterways are now heavily polluted due to gold mining along riverbanks. In Peru, many communities have lost access to safe drinking water after environmental protections were weakened and regulatory controls were suspended to facilitate new mining projects, contaminating even the Rímac River, which supplies water to the capital, Lima.

These environmental crises are exacerbated by deepening inequality and social divides in many mining-dependent countries. The Global Atlas of Envirnsamachikwankaonmental Justice has documented more than 900 mining-related conflicts around the world, about 85 per cent of which involve the use or pollution of rivers, lakes, and groundwater.

Against this backdrop, major economies are rapidly reshaping resource geopolitics. The United States, while attempting to stabilise the fossil-fuel-based global economy, is also scrambling to secure the minerals it needs for electric vehicles, renewable energy, weapons systems, digital infrastructure, and construction, often through coercion and aggressive negotiating tactics. In its quest to reduce dependence on China, which dominates the processing of rare-earth elements, environmental and humanitarian considerations are increasingly brushed aside.

Saudi Arabia is likewise positioning itself as a rising power in the minerals sector as part of its efforts to diversify away from oil, forging new partnerships – including with the US – and hosting a high-profile mining conference.

In Europe, industry groups are lobbying for further deregulation, with fossil-fuel companies like ExxonMobil, TotalEnergies, and Siemens using misleading tactics



The environmental crises are exacerbated by deepening inequality and social divides in many mining-dependent countries.



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to undermine newly established mechanisms designed to protect the rights of communities in resource-producing regions. We should be worried that the companies and countries which helped drive global warming, environmental degradation, and human-rights abuses now seek to dominate the mineral sector. Allowing them to do so will put all of humanity, not just vulnerable populations, at risk.

Governments must not remain passive. They must reclaim responsibility for steering the primary driver of mining expansion: demand. Reducing material consumption, especially in developed countries, remains the most effective way to protect vital ecosystems and prevent the long-term harms that extraction inevitably causes.

Yet despite overwhelming evidence that ramping up resource extraction threatens water supplies and public safety, governments around the world are weakening environmental protections in a bid to lure foreign investment, thereby endangering the very ecosystems that sustain all life on Earth. From an economic perspective, this approach is profoundly short-sighted. In fact, recent research shows that responsible practices

are not just morally right but economically sound. A new report by the UN Development Programme, based on five years of data from 235 multinationals, shows that companies that strengthen their human-rights record tend to perform better over the long run. Governments should therefore be wary of industry claims that profitability requires rolling back environmental regulations or ignoring human rights.

When people cannot trust political leaders to protect their rights, they are highly likely to resist, with the resulting social conflict causing investment to falter. The backlash against Rio Tinto’s Jadar lithium-mining project in Serbia is a prime example. Many Serbians believed their government was putting corporate interests first by pushing ahead with the project despite its failure to meet even basic sustainability standards. The public outcry halted development and left the company facing steep losses.

Only robust legal frameworks, backed by effective enforcement, can create the conditions for stable and rights-respecting development. That means safeguarding Indigenous rights; ensuring the free, prior, and informed consent of all affected communities; protecting water resources; undertaking spatial planning, establishing no-go zones; and conducting independent, participatory, and transparent social and environmental impact assessments. Given today’s heightened geopolitical tensions, multilateral forums such as COP and the UNEA remain essential for countering global fragmentation and advancing shared solutions. Mineral-rich countries should work together to raise their environmental standards, just as oil-producing countries jointly influence global prices. Through collective action, they can prevent a destructive race to the bottom and ensure that local communities, particularly Indigenous peoples and other rights holders, are heard. ©Project Syndicate, 2025

SPORTS

SHORT TAKES



The coaching staff dedicated significant time to improving finishing accuracy and decision-making in the final third.

OMAN CHASE VICTORY AGAINST COMOROS

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, DEC 7

Oman will look to keep their Fifa Arab Cup campaign hopes alive when they will face Comoros on Monday night in the decisive final round of Group B fixtures. The must-win encounter, will take place at 9:00 pm (Oman time) at Stadium 974 in Doha. This is a critical moment for the Red Warriors, who need a convincing victory potentially by three goals to strengthen their chances of advancing. At the same time, all eyes will be on Lusail Stadium, where group leaders Saudi Arabia will meet Morocco in a clash that will directly influence Oman's qualification hopes.

Oman currently have one point from two matches after a narrow 2-1 defeat to Saudi Arabia in the opener and a spirited goalless draw against Morocco on Friday. Although the team missed an early opportunity to secure a stronger position in the standings, their fate is not yet sealed. A win over Comoros, combined with a favourable result in the Saudi Arabia Morocco match, could propel Oman into the next round.

FOCUSED PREPARATIONS

Under the guidance of head coach Carlos Queiroz, Oman completed their pre-match training sessions with an emphasis on refining attacking movements and solidifying defensive balance. The coaching staff dedicated significant time to improving finishing accuracy and decision-making in the final third as these key areas that cost Oman valuable points in previous matches.

Queiroz is expected to retain a similar lineup to the one used in earlier games, relying on experienced names such as goalkeeper Ibrahim al Mukhaini, defenders Thani al Rushaidi and Musab al Shaqsi, midfield orchestrator Harib al Saadi and Ali al Busaidy beside attacking line Abdullah Fawaz and Essam al Subhi. Their cohesion and familiarity will be crucial in what is effectively a knockout match for the Sultanate of Oman's team.

STRONG PERFORMANCE

Oman head coach Carlos Queiroz expressed his confidence and determination ahead of Monday's crucial clash. Reflecting on the team's strong performance against Morocco, the Portuguese tactician praised the players' intensity and discipline but emphasised the need for sharper finishing. "The competition in the group is still open and nothing is over yet," Queiroz said. "Comoros are an organised and disciplined team, and their results in the past two rounds do not reflect their true level. We must be fully focused and reach the highest level of readiness if we want to achieve the desired result."

Queiroz stressed that football at this level demands constant balance and unity: "There is no attack without defence and no defence without attack. Every player must work with full commitment in both phases. We need to believe in ourselves and fight for every moment in the match."

Addressing the issue of player absences due to injuries, the coach highlighted the importance of depth within the squad. "We need ready substitutes who can step in with confidence. Unfortunately, Fifa rules limit certain replacement options, but the team must adapt and push forward." Goalkeeper Fayez al Rushaidi, voiced confidently ahead of the match as he reaffirmed the squad's collective determination. "Our goal is clear to claim the three points. The chance to qualify is still alive, and every player must give his maximum effort on the pitch. We must stay focused and take our opportunities."

WORLD SAILING RACES CONCLUDE TODAY



The ceremony will mark the culmination of eight days of racing and side events that have strengthened Oman's position as a global leader in inclusive sailing.

THE THIRD DAY of the 2025 World Sailing Inclusion Championships concluded today in the Sultanate of Oman amid rising competitive momentum and the approach of the championship's decisive moments. Organised by Oman Sail, the first edition of this new global event brings together an exceptional lineup of elite sailors from around the world who are all demonstrating exceptional skill and tactical brilliance on the water.

On Monday, the championship will conclude its inaugural edition with an official closing ceremony held under the auspices of Dr Laila bint Ahmed al Najjar, Minister of Social Development, and attended by senior representatives from World Sailing, Dr Khamis bin Salem al Jabri, CEO of Oman Sail, strategic partners, and participating teams.

The ceremony will mark the culmination of eight days of racing and side events that have strengthened Oman's position as a global leader in inclusive sailing, affirming the nation's commitment to Oman Vision 2040—particularly in human empowerment, sports development, and sustainable tourism.

Day Three proved to be a turning point, with notable shifts in the standings across several classes. Off the water, multiple initiatives echoed the championship's pillars of inclusion, community engagement, and environmental sustainability, most prominently a beach-cleaning campaign involving sailors and volunteers from various nations.

Sailors are competing across four internationally recognised classes: One Person Keelboat (Hansa 303), Two Person Keelboat (RS Venture Connect), Intellectual Impairment (ILCA 6), and Visually Impaired (FarEast 28R).

The third day of the championship saw continued strong competition across all four categories, with most leaders maintaining their positions as the final day approaches. In the One Person Keelboat (Hansa 303), Britain's Rory McKinna kept his lead, followed by Japan's Takumi Niwa and Portugal's João Pinto, while Oman's Malik al Qurtubi advanced to 11th.



Day Three proved to be a turning point, with notable shifts in the standings across several classes.

In the Intellectual Impairment (ILCA 6) event, Britain's Murray Macdonald remained dominant, with Hong Kong's Tsz Hin Cheung in second and the UAE's Marwan Suloom holding third.

In the Two Person Keelboat (RS Venture Connect), team Poland, featuring Piotr Cichocki and Olga Gornas-Grudzien stayed on top, Portugal represented by Pedro Cândia REIS and Guilherme Ribeiro moved into second, and Greece represented by Vasilis Christoforou and Thodoris Alexas placed third, while Oman's Zaher al Atbi and Hassan al Lawati ranked 14th. In the Visually Impaired (FarEast 28R) category, the Great Britain team led by Lucy Hodges continued to lead the fleet, followed by Spain's Daniel Anglada Pich in second place, while the British team led by Karl Haines slipped to third.

Marwan Suloom (UAE - ILCA 6) expressed his delight at reaching third place: "The competition is incredibly strong. Today's results reflect our preparation and determination. We aim to deliver an even stronger performance in the final race day and proudly represent the UAE and Special Olympics UAE." Zaida Pérez Bugueño (Chile - Hansa 303) shared how meaningful the championship has been despite flight disruptions and a long journey: "The organisation, facilities, and accommodation is exceptional and perfectly suited for athletes' needs. Omani hospitality is unique. I'm here to enjoy the experience—sailing for me is therapeutic, and on the water, differences

disappear." Rory McKinna (Great Britain - Hansa 303) praised the event's message: "This championship truly embodies inclusivity. The facilities are excellent and easy to access, and my performance has been improving race by race."

Murray Macdonald (Great Britain - ILCA 6) described the day's challenges: "The light winds and sea conditions made the racing demanding. I won the first race and recovered from a slow start in the second to take third. Focus is essential until the very last moment." Oman is competing in the RS Venture Connect and Hansa 303 classes through Oman Sail's SailFree programme, joining a field that reflects the rapid global growth of inclusive sailing.

As the final races approach, teams and spectators await the announcement of the first-ever world champions in this landmark edition—a historic moment for inclusive sailing worldwide.

The championship features broad international representation, with teams from across Asia—including Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, India, Hong Kong China, Japan, Korea, Timor-Leste, Indonesia, and host nation Oman—and strong participation from Europe, such as Austria, the Czech Republic, Spain, France, the UK, Germany, Greece, Italy, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Switzerland, and Sweden.

The Americas are represented by Canada, the USA, Chile, Uruguay, and Trinidad and Tobago, while Australia represents Oceania. This remarkable geographic diversity underscores the championship's role as a truly global platform, uniting athletes under the shared values of equality, inclusion, and empowerment.

The championships are powered by Oman Sail and Oman Maritime Sports Committee and supported by World Sailing's global partners Musto and Kuehne+Nagel; Strategic Partners the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, Experience Oman, and the Al Batinah South Governorate; and Bronze Partners Barceló Mussanah Resort, OXY Oman, Visit Oman, Tanuf, and Mazoon Dairy.

SHORT TAKES



Seeb opened the game with high pressure, relying on quick movement and effective passing inside the paint.

SEEB CRUISE TO BIG WIN OVER SALALAH

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, DEC 7

Seeb Club continued their impressive run in the 2025–2026 General Basketball League after securing a dominant 125–48 victory over Salalah, in the match hosted at the secondary hall of the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher.

Seeb controlled the game from start to finish, capitalising on the outstanding performance of several key players who played a major role in widening the gap. The scoring was led by Rashid al Zuhaybi, Abdulrahman al Shaibi, Al Waqqas al Hinai, Ahmed al Sinani, Azzan al Ajmi, and Ahmed al Maamari, while Salalah relied on efforts from Mehab al Balushi and Qaiser al Balushi to stay in the contest.

Seeb opened the game with high pressure, relying on quick movement and effective passing inside the paint. Abdulrahman al Shaibi opened the scoring with successful shots, followed by Marwan al Hadeedi to extend the lead. Despite Salalah’s attempts to respond through fast breaks, Seeb’s solid defence forced multiple turnovers, allowing them to close the first quarter ahead 27–12 with a well-balanced offence and defence.

The momentum continued in the second quarter as Al Waqqas al Hinai made a strong impact with decisive drives to the basket, while Ahmed al Sinani added long-range shots from beyond the arc. Although Salalah attempted individual solutions through Mehab al Balushi and Qaiser al Balushi, Seeb’s organised defence prevented any significant comeback. Seeb scored 33 points against 10 for Salalah in this quarter, ending the first half with a commanding 60–22 advantage.

Seeb demonstrated clear technical and physical superiority in the third quarter, taking advantage of Salalah’s fatigue by increasing pressure on their basket from all angles.

Rashid al Zuhaybi, Azzan al Ajmi, and Ahmed al Maamari rotated in scoring with quick transitions and ball steals from mid-court. This dominance allowed Seeb to add 34 points, while Salalah managed only 13, finishing the period 94–35 in Seeb’s favour.

With a firm lead heading into the final quarter, Seeb remained determined to stretch the difference and elevate their scoring tally. Their fast tempo and sharp penetrations continued, while Salalah’s defence struggled under constant pressure and quick ball circulation. Seeb added 31 more points compared to 13 for Salalah, sealing a massive 125–48 victory.

The match was officiated by Rashid al Mushaifri as crew chief, Ali al Sulaimani as the second referee, and Taher al Amri as the third referee. On the scorer’s table were Maryam al Zadjali, Aisha al Balushi, and Moosa al Siyabi.



Final day of the Tent Pegging Championship in Russia.

Tent Pegging World Cup: qualifiers kick off in Egypt

SPORT REPORTER
MUSCAT, DEC 7

JORDAN WILL host the Tent Pegging World Cup “Jordan 2026”, whose first qualifying round kicks off today (Monday) in Egypt, running from December 8–12, with seven nations participating: Egypt, Canada, Bahrain, Libya, the UAE, Yemen, and Australia. This opening round launches a four-stage global qualification pathway leading to the sport’s most prestigious tournament.

The second qualifier will be hosted by Jordan from January 28–31, featuring eight participating countries: Jordan, India, Indonesia, Germany, Kuwait, Norway, Saudi Arabia and Algeria.

Oman will stage the third qualifying championship from March 29 to April 2, welcoming teams from Oman, Pakistan, Qatar, Great Britain, the US, Uzbekistan, and Iran. The qualification journey will conclude in Russia from August 11–14, with teams representing Russia, Iraq, Malaysia, Belarus, South Africa, Sudan and Kazakhstan.

Tent pegging’s rapid global rise has placed the International Tent Pegging Federation at a pivotal moment, with major competitions leading to the 2026 World Cup and expanding qualifiers making its development efforts more vital than ever.

Tent pegging is closer than ever to Olympic recognition, supported by growing global participation and strengthened regulations, with a proposed partnership with the International Horseback Archery



Freeze-frame from the Tent Pegging Championship competitions

Federation further boosting its international visibility. Mohammed bin Issa al Fairooz, President of the International Tent Pegging Federation, outlined the Federation’s strategic vision for the coming years, covering competition structures, Olympic ambitions, international partnerships, and the sport’s expanding global road map.

Al Fairooz stated that “We now have 49 national federations, supported by organised annual championships and clear professional regulations, this solid foundation strengthens our confidence in the sport’s future.”

“We have introduced technical changes to competition formats and committees, in addition to an enhanced media and production strategy that will elevate the championship into a true global spectacle. The event must reflect the real value and heritage of tent pegging and stand as a model for major international championships.”



“Host countries were selected based on rigorous criteria covering field quality, infrastructure, logistics, safety, and readiness of technical and refereeing teams. Success depends not only on operations but also on audience reach and media impact.”

On the potential collaboration with the International Horseback Archery Federation, he noted: “This initiative is a strategic step to promote traditional equestrian sports worldwide. A main committee supported by joint technical teams is already in place to explore avenues of cooperation.”

Al Fairooz concluded, “We have made tangible progress with the International Olympic Committee. Outlining requirements such as expanding the number of participating countries, regular continental championships, continued rule development, and strengthened anti-doping programme.”

Iraq sink Oman 2–0 as Reds bow out of Gulf U-23 Cup

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, DEC 7

The Oman Olympic national football team suffered a 2–0 defeat against Iraq in the match played at Aspire Zone Pitch 1, as part of the Gulf U-23 Cup currently hosted by Qatar from December 4 to 16.

The match began with Iraq dominating possession and dictating the play, while Oman relied on compact positioning in midfield and quick counters from the flanks. Despite the early Iraqi pressure, Oman’s defence and goalkeeper Ibrahim al Kindi stood firm, preventing any real danger on goal.

Oman’s first attacking attempt came in the 8th minute through a shot by Bashar al Maharrabi.

Iraq responded moments later with a dangerous cross to Ayman Abdulhassan, but al Kindi saved the effort superbly.

Toward the end of the first half, Oman moved forward and created good chances, as Ghassan al Masroori almost scored in the 39th minute after a precise cross from Al Maharrabi, but his volley passed just wide of the left post. In the 44th minute, Yousuf al Shabibi fired a powerful shot over the bar. The half concluded with a 0–0 draw.

IRAQ TAKE THE LEAD

At the start of the second half, Oman tried to increase their attacking presence, but without taking advantage of the opportunities. Soon after, Iraq were awarded a penalty



Oman and Iraq players in action.

following a foul committed by Jawad al Azzi, and Ammouri Faisal converted it in the 49th minute to put Iraq in front.

Oman pushed forward in search of an equaliser and earned four consecutive corner kicks, but none were utilised properly. In the 69th minute, Ghassan al Masroori broke into the Iraqi box and took a strong shot, but the Iraqi defense cleared it at the last moment.

Head coach Badr al Maimani made attacking substitutions to add fresh energy, introducing Ammar al Sharqi in place of Yousuf al Shabibi, and Ahmed al Shanfari instead of Al Masroori. Oman came close again from a powerful free kick by Masoud al Bahri in the 78th minute, but Iraqi goalkeeper Kimi Lateef denied it

brilliantly, before another attempt from Masoud went narrowly wide in the 80th minute.

From a fast counterattack, Iraq doubled their lead through Ayman Luay in the 82nd minute. Oman continued to fight to reduce the deficit, but luck was not on their side as the match ended 2–0 in favor of Iraq.

EARLY EXIT

Following this defeat, Oman become the first team eliminated from Group B after suffering two losses. In the other group match, the UAE defeated Yemen 3–1 to lead the standings with six points, followed by Iraq and Yemen with three points each, while Oman remain at the bottom with no points.

SPORTS

SHORT TAKES



Al Seeb and Al Bashayer players in action.

AL BASHAYER
CLAIM CRUCIAL
WIN OVER TITLE
HOLDERS AL SEEB

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, DEC 7

Al Bashayer claimed a valuable victory against Al Seeb in one of the most thrilling matches of the final qualifiers stage, securing a 3-2 win on Saturday evening, in the First Division Volleyball League.

The match began with a strong start from Al Bashayer, entering with clear attacking focus through powerful spikes from the wings, while Al Seeb relied more on quick attacks through the middle. Points were exchanged evenly until the closing moments, but Al Bashayer’s calm execution on high balls sealed the set 26-24.

In the second set, Al Seeb raised their level of organisation and showed greater effectiveness in blocking, successfully shutting down several attacks. Their strong, targeted serving also disrupted Al Bashayer’s reception, helping Al Seeb take control and win the set 25-21.

The third set saw Al Bashayer regain control of the rhythm through rapid transitions from defence to attack, and smart ball distribution by the setter, placing hitters in comfortable striking positions. Meanwhile, Al Seeb struggled in reception, allowing Al Bashayer to close out the set 25-21.

A strong response came from Al Seeb in the fourth set, delivering their best performance of the match. They read Al Bashayer’s attacking movements well and scored repeatedly through their blocking, while also capitalising on the opponent’s attacking errors. This forced a tie-break set after Al Seeb won the set 25-18.

In the decisive tie-break, Al Bashayer started ahead, but Al Seeb quickly caught up amid rising tension in the stands. The two teams traded points in a dramatic finish until the score reached 13-13. In those crucial final moments, Al Bashayer showed greater mental composure, scoring the final two winning points through quick attacks that extinguished Al Seeb’s hopes of a comeback, ending the set 15-13.

Al Bashayer led the match in total scoring with 108 points compared to 105 for Al Seeb, despite Seeb’s superiority in blocking with 15 block points against 9.

In serving, Al Seeb recorded 3 aces compared to 1 for Al Bashayer, while committing 16 serve errors against 10 by Al Bashayer. Total errors also impacted the outcome, with Al Bashayer making 37 errors compared to 29 by Al Seeb.

Al Bashayer’s star Ayman Khan delivered an outstanding performance, scoring 28 points, including 26 attacking points at a 45 per cent success rate, and played a decisive role in the final set despite committing 5 errors.

On the other side, Bogdan stood out for Al Seeb with 17 points, including 4 block points at a 34 per cent attacking success rate, though his efforts were not enough to overturn the result.

With this win, Al Bashayer rose to 11 points, equal with Al Seeb, but the defending champions retained the top position on set difference. Meanwhile, Al Bashayer strengthened their hold on second place as they continue to chase the lead in the upcoming rounds, with Majees remaining third on 6 points, and Sohar still in fourth place without a win and on 2 points.



McLaren’s Lando Norris celebrates on the podium with the trophy after becoming the 2025 Formula One World Champion. — Reuters

Norris takes F1 title as
Verstappen wins race

LANDO NORRIS claimed his maiden drivers’ championship on Sunday to complete McLaren’s first title double since 1998 with a perfectly-judged drive to finish third behind Red Bull’s winner Max Verstappen and team-mate Oscar Piastri.

A tearful Norris won the title by two points ahead of Verstappen, who relinquished his crown after four consecutive years, in a tense and emotional season-ending Abu Dhabi Grand Prix dominated by strategy and tactics.

After crossing the line his team engineer told him: “That’s it mate, you are world champion, world champion!”

“Thank you guys, you made a kid’s dream come true,” he replied.

“I haven’t cried in a while, I didn’t think I would cry but I did,” Norris said on the podium in the desert night at the floodlit Yas Marina circuit.

“I want to thank my mum, my dad, they’ve supported me since the beginning.

“It feels amazing, I know now what Max feels like a little bit. I want to congratulate both Max and Oscar, I’ve enjoyed it, it’s been a long year!” he added.

McLaren, headed by team principal Andrea Stella and CEO Zak Brown, secured back-to-back constructors’ titles in Singapore last month.

“That was exciting, a little too exciting, awesome,” said Brown.

“What an effort, Lando and Oscar, what a fantastic season!” added the American.

“I’m so proud of our drivers, we let them race to the end. It’s been a dream with these two guys, as that Max guy is hard to beat so what an accomplishment.”

Norris becomes Britain’s first world champion since Lewis Hamilton in 2020 with this 13th drivers’ crown for McLaren.

The 26-year-old’s success comes over half a century after Emerson

NORRIS ENDS
VERSTAPPEN’S
FOUR-YEAR REIGN
WITH 3RD PLACE

VERSTAPPEN WINS
RACE, PIASTR
SECOND

MCLAREN
CELEBRATE FIRST
TITLE DOUBLE
SINCE 1998

Fittipaldi claimed the British marque’s first drivers’ title in 1974.

A galaxy of F1 greats followed - James Hunt (1976), Niki Lauda (1984), Alain Prost (1985, 1986, 1989), Ayrton Senna (1988, 1990, 1991), Mikka Hakkinen (1998, 1999) and Hamilton in 2008.

Assessing his path to glory Norris added: “As we’ve seen many times, anything can happen. So I just kept pushing. I wanted to fight to the end. (Verstappen and Piastri) certainly did not

make my life easy this year. But I am happy!

“It has been a long journey with McLaren, I’ve been with them for nine years.

“For me to bring something back to them, I feel like I did my part for the team this year so I’m proud of myself.”

Piastri, who had led the championship for much of the season before being overtaken by Norris in Mexico, finished third in the standings.

Sunday’s season-closer was the first time the title was decided by a contest involving more than two drivers since a four-way scrap at the final race in Abu Dhabi in 2010.

NEVER GIVE UP

Norris showed great discipline and patience as he executed his race under extreme pressure knowing that any error could gift the title to an unforgiving and relentless Verstappen or Piastri, who led the championship for 15 Grands Prix this year.

“I’m definitely not

disappointed,” said Verstappen.

“I am proud of everyone. We never give up.”

It was Verstappen’s fifth win in Abu Dhabi and extended the Yas Marina Circuit’s record in producing 11 consecutive winners from pole position as he came home 12.594 seconds clear of Piastri with Norris third, 3.9sec further adrift.

Charles Leclerc, who was pressing Norris for much of the race, came fourth for a revitalised Ferrari, ahead of Mercedes’ George Russell, Fernando Alonso of Aston Martin and Esteban Ocon of Haas.

Seven-time champion Lewis Hamilton finished a solid eighth for Ferrari, after starting 16th, ahead of Oliver Bearman of Haas and Nico Hulkenberg, in his 250th Grand Prix, of Audi-bound Sauber.

It was Verstappen’s eighth win of the year and the 71st of his career and one of his most controlled. — AFP

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SHORT TAKES



Net electricity production rose by 5.3 per cent to 43,532.7 GWh, up from 41,335.1 GWh recorded at the end of October 2024.

OMAN ELECTRICITY OUTPUT UP 6.1% BY OCTOBER

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman recorded a 6.1-per cent rise in total electricity production by the end of October 2025, reaching 44,814.7 gigawatt-hours (GWh), compared with 42,255.8 GWh in the same period last year, according to preliminary figures released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information. The increase reflects sustained growth in power demand across various sectors of the economy.

Net electricity production, which includes purchases by the Oman Power and Water Procurement Company and the Rural Areas Electricity Company, also rose by 5.3 per cent to 43,532.7 GWh, up from 41,335.1 GWh recorded at the end of October 2024.

The data point to continued expansion in electricity generation capacity and improved system performance nationwide.

In contrast, total water production in Oman posted a marginal decline of 0.8 per cent during the same period, falling to around 431,102.5 cubic metres from 434,563.2 cubic metres a year earlier.

The figures highlight differing trends across utilities, influenced by regional demand patterns and operational factors.

Muscat saw an 11.7-per cent drop in water production, amounting to 171,676.0 cubic metres compared to 194,432.6 cubic metres in the corresponding period of 2024. Meanwhile, Dhofar Governorate recorded an increase of 3.4 per cent, with output reaching 63,796.5 cubic metres, up from 61,727.4 cubic metres.

Water production in the remaining governorates rose by 9.7 per cent to 195,630.1 cubic metres, compared with 178,403.2 cubic metres in the same period last year, indicating stronger performance.

Oman, Tunisia deepen trade and investment ties

THE Sultanate of Oman and Tunisia have renewed their commitment to strengthening bilateral economic and investment relations following the Omani-Tunisian Economic Forum held recently in Tunis.

The high-level forum underscored the shared desire of both countries to expand trade, stimulate joint investment and build long-term partnerships that support economic diversification and sustainable growth.

The Omani delegation was led by Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion. It included Hilal bin Abdullah al Sinani, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to Tunisia, Rashid bin Amer al Muselhi, First Vice-Chairman of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, as well as officials and private sector representatives.

The forum provided a platform for direct engagement between policymakers and business leaders from both sides, aimed at translating political goodwill into tangible economic cooperation.

Several memoranda of understanding were signed during the forum to strengthen commercial ties.

These included a partnership agreement between Al Zaytouna Oils Company and Karim & Nawaf Trading Company, in addition to an agreement to establish a joint Omani-Tunisian company focusing on business development and investment in tourism, industry, food security and other sectors aligned with diversification priorities.

The agreements are expected to support the creation of joint ventures and facilitate the exchange of expertise between



The high-level forum underscored the shared desire of both countries to expand trade, stimulate joint investment and build long-term partnerships.

Tunisian investment in the Sultanate of Oman also rose from RO 4.9 million in 2023 to RO 7.2 million by the end of 2024. Al Yousef highlighted renewable energy, manufacturing, technology, logistics and agriculture as promising sectors for future cooperation, stressing the alignment between Tunisia's reform programme and Oman Vision 2040

companies in both countries.

The visit sought to increase bilateral trade and expand joint investments, with discussions highlighting opportunities in industry, logistics, food processing and pharmaceuticals.

The delegation held meetings with senior Tunisian officials, including Samir Obeid, Minister of Trade and Export Development, where mechanisms to facilitate market access and boost exports were explored.

Talks also focused on enabling Omani products to enter Tunisian markets while enhancing the presence of Tunisian goods in Oman.

Further discussions were held with Samir Abdelhafidh, Minister of Economy and Planning, on Tunisia's economic reform agenda and investment promotion strategies, as well as with Fatma Thabet Chiboub, Minister of Industry, Mines and

Energy, to identify opportunities in manufacturing, mining and renewable energy. These engagements reflected a shared interest in developing value-added sectors and establishing industrial partnerships that benefit both economies.

Speaking at the forum, Al Yousef said economic relations between Oman and Tunisia are experiencing sustained growth.

He noted that the volume of trade exchange reached RO 5.19 million in the first half of 2025, compared to RO 3.21 million during the same period in 2024, representing an increase of more than 61 per cent.

Tunisian investment in the Sultanate of Oman also rose from RO 4.9 million in 2023 to RO 7.2 million by the end of 2024. Al Yousef highlighted renewable energy, manufacturing, technology, logistics and agriculture as promising sectors for future cooperation, stressing the alignment between Tunisia's reform programme and Oman Vision 2040.

The programme also included meetings with key private sector institutions, including the Tunisian Union of Industry, Trade and Handicrafts and the Arab Institute of Business Leaders, as well as field visits to industrial and pharmaceutical facilities.

These visits offered the Omani delegation insights into Tunisia's industrial capabilities and investment environment, reinforcing the potential for deeper economic integration.

Both sides expressed confidence that the forum marks a new phase in Omani-Tunisian economic relations, paving the way for stronger, mutually beneficial partnerships in the years ahead. — **ONA**

Gas allocations subject to tender under Oman’s new gas framework

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, DEC 7

A COMPETITIVE bidding process now applies to all requests for natural gas allocations above a certain threshold under a new framework adopted by the Integrated Gas Company (IGC), the sole aggregator and supplier of natural gas in the Sultanate of Oman.

According to IGC Chief Executive Officer Eng Abdul Rahman al Yahyaie, the framework aligns the wholly state-owned company with its mandate to maximise government revenue, support economic diversification, enhance efficiency and decarbonisation, drive job creation, generate in-country value (ICV) and foster market development.



ENG ABDUL
RAHMAN
AL YAHYAEI
IGC CEO

confidence among industrial end users and investors, he noted in an interview with The Energy Year, a UK-based global news platform.

“Any allocation exceeding 1 mcm (35.3 MMcf) per day over five years must now go through a competitive tendering and bidding process,” Eng Al Yahyaie

Crucially, the new framework also introduces, for the first time, a transparent and rational basis for gas pricing — an approach that has boosted

said. “IGC has already conducted two tenders: the first for green steel production, resulting in conditional allocations to Jindal Steel Duqm, Mitsui, Kobe Steel and Meranti Green Steel — a consortium producing DRI in Al Duqm.

“The second tender, for fertilisers, led to a conditional allocation to Al Shaafi Holding. These tenders have provided valuable insights into price points and term preferences across applicants.”

The new bidding mechanism stems from a series of reforms undertaken by IGC beginning in 2024. These reforms enabled the launch of Oman’s first gas spot market in 2024 and introduced new terms to natural gas sales agreements (NGSAs), including take-or-pay clauses, excess-gas

pricing and other revenue-protection measures.

IGC has also completed a comprehensive price-indexation study covering the fertiliser, methanol, cement and steel industries to determine minimum and cap pricing levels, alongside advancing several digitalisation initiatives.

Supporting economic growth and diversification, IGC recently signed agreements allocating gas to the fertiliser, petrochemical, pharmaceutical, food-processing and mining sectors — effectively doubling the volume of gas dedicated to Oman’s industrial development.

In total, the company has concluded 19 agreements comprising three gas purchase agreements with producers, 14 NGSAs with industrial end

users and two MoUs with key stakeholders, collectively accounting for around 27 mcm (953 MMcf) per day.

Asked how IGC balances supply between traditional consumers and emerging industrial clusters at Al Duqm, Suhar and Salalah, the CEO said the company prioritises ensuring uninterrupted supply to existing businesses.

At the same time, he emphasised that IGC evaluates and supports new industries based on gas efficiency and their alignment with energy-transition goals.

“The objective is to attract and enable industries that consume less gas, operate with lower emissions, and can progressively transition to alternative energy sources such as green hydrogen and other cleaner fuels,” he stated.

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DHOFAR ISLAMIC LAUNCHES NATIONAL PAYMENT CARD ‘MAAL’

MUSCAT: Dhofar Islamic, the Islamic banking window of BankDhofar, in partnership with the Central Bank of Oman (CBO), has soft-launched a nationwide campaign to support the rollout of ‘Maal’, the Sultanate of Oman’s first exclusive national payment card. The strategic initiative reflects Oman’s ongoing digital transformation agenda and the vision to build a secure, efficient and self-reliant national payment infrastructure. Spearheaded by the CBO, Maal will be issued by local banks, including Dhofar Islamic serve as the foundation for domestic electronic transactions.

Integrated with the OmanNet payment gateway, the card will enable payments across ATMs, cash deposit machines (CDMs), point-of-sale (POS) terminals, e-commerce platforms, and online government services.

Iman al Amri, Acting AGM Wealth Management, Cards & Bancassurance at BankDhofar, commented: “The soft launch of Maal represents a defining moment for Oman’s payments landscape. It not only empowers our customers with a secure and cost-effective way to transact locally, but also reinforces national self-reliance in the digital payments ecosystem.

“Moreover, this transformative initiative brings the convenience of modern banking closer to every community across the Sultanate of Oman.”

By establishing a unified and locally managed payment channel, the new card reduces reliance on international networks for domestic transactions, thereby lowering costs for banks, merchants and consumers. At the same time, it enhances financial inclusion by making digital payments more accessible across Oman, particularly for communities in remote areas.

With advanced features introduced under the supervision of the CBO, Maal ensures robust security, data localisation and compliance with international best practices.

Customers will benefit from safer and more convenient domestic payments, faster processing, and potentially lower fees. The soft launch of Maal is a key milestone in the nation’s transition towards a cashless society, aligning with the digital economy goals of Oman Vision 2040.

By strengthening the domestic payments system, enhancing resilience and fostering fintech innovation, the initiative supports Oman’s broader objectives of economic diversification, financial sustainability and technological leadership.

Dhofar Islamic is playing an active role in driving the adoption of the new card. It has launched a comprehensive awareness campaign across all customer touch points – including ATMs, CDMs and POS terminals – featuring CBO-approved branding and messaging.

Dhofar Islamic customers will soon be able to access the new card for their daily financial needs, with the assurance of reliability and security.

OIH SUCCESSFULLY PERFORMS FOUR COMPLEX SCOLIOSIS SURGERIES

MUSCAT: Oman International Hospital (OIH) is pleased to announce the successful completion of four complex scoliosis surgeries, led by world-renowned spine specialists Professor Henry Halm and Dr Steffan Haug.

These surgeries mark an important milestone for the hospital, reinforcing its position as a trusted destination for advanced spinal deformity correction in the region.

The surgeries were conducted over the past week, with patients travelling from outside Oman specifically to receive treatment



from Professor Halm and Dr Haug, whose expertise in scoliosis and spinal deformity correction is internationally recognised.

Their collaboration with OIH’s multidisciplinary spine, anaesthesia and rehabilitation teams ensured comprehensive, seamless care — from pre-operative evaluation through post-operative recovery.

Professor Henry Halm highlighted the significance of the collaboration, stating: “It has been an honour to work with the dedicated team at Oman International Hospital.

These surgeries demonstrate what can be achieved when world-class expertise meets a patient-centred, technologically advanced environment.

IGC approves BP Ghazeer pipeline transfer to OQGN

THE Integrated Gas Company (IGC) has approved the transfer of the BP Block 61 Ghazeer Gas Export Pipeline (Phase 2) to OQ Gas Networks (OQGN), following a comprehensive technical and commercial review of the proposal submitted by OQGN.

As Oman’s designated gas aggregator and shipper for the national gas pipeline infrastructure, IGC is mandated to review and endorse asset transfers involving the country’s gas network. Acting in coordination with the Ministry of Energy and Minerals and the Ministry of Finance, IGC confirmed that the transaction aligns with the approved regulatory framework and that the asset valuation of RO 39.991 million reflects the parameters set under



IGC is mandated to review and endorse asset transfers involving the country’s gas network.

the regulated system. IGC affirmed that the approval is consistent with its core

mandate to ensure transparent governance, fair valuation and the long-term sustainability of

Oman’s gas infrastructure. The decision further underscores the company’s commitment to maintaining coherence across the national gas transmission network and supporting the Sultanate of Oman’s broader energy strategy in full compliance with regulatory requirements.

The transfer of the 65-kilometre strategic pipeline is expected to strengthen the national gas grid, enhance operational efficiency and improve reliability and connectivity across Oman’s energy system.

An IGC spokesperson stated that the approval reinforces IGC’s continuing role in ensuring sound valuation, regulatory compliance, and operational coordination as part of its responsibility as the sole gas aggregator and the Shipper of Oman’s natural gas pipeline infrastructure.

Himmah concludes the year with social initiatives

MUSCAT: Reaffirming its commitment to community progress and social responsibility, National Finance, the Sultanate of Oman’s leading finance company, in recognition of International Volunteer Day, celebrated globally on December 5, honoured the spirit of volunteerism and celebrated the remarkable achievements of its Himmah Volunteer Team.

In 2025 alone, the team dedicated 507 volunteer hours to a range of impactful initiatives across the Sultanate of Oman. The occasion highlighted the company’s long-standing commitment to civic solidarity and environmental stewardship, reinforcing its dedication to



In 2025 alone, the team dedicated 507 volunteer hours to a range of impactful initiatives across Oman.

creating meaningful and lasting impact.

Himmah — Arabic for

determination— was launched in 2024 under National Finance’s social responsibility arm, Imtidad, to channel the collective passion and enthusiasm of its employees into initiatives that create lasting value for Omani society.

The distinctive Himmah logo, featuring three intertwined circles, reflects the team’s core values of unity, solidarity and collaboration, with each circle representing continuity, shared purpose and an unwavering commitment to sustainable impact. Since its launch, Himmah has led community programmes that support vulnerable groups, protect the environment and strengthen

societal cohesion across Oman.

Tariq bin Suleiman al Farsi, Chief Executive Officer of National Finance, said: “Volunteering goes beyond an act of kindness; it is a strategic reflection of our shared vision for thriving communities. Through the Himmah volunteers, we are fostering a culture where purpose meets contribution.

“By channelling the passion and compassion of our people into structured community initiatives, we emphasise the vital role volunteers play — not only in supporting those in need, but also in strengthening the resilience and competitiveness of our economy”.

Sohar International sponsors Muscat Arbitration Days 2025

MUSCAT: Sohar International is proud to serve as the Main Sponsor of the inaugural Muscat Arbitration Days 2025, organised by the Oman Commercial Arbitration Centre (OCAC). The three-day conference, to be held on December 2-4, 2025, at St. Regis Al Mouj Muscat, convenes local and international experts to discuss arbitration, alternative dispute resolution (ADR), and emerging trends shaping the legal and commercial landscape.

The opening session was held under the auspices of Abdulsalam bin Mohammed al Murshidi, Chairman of Oman Investment Authority (OIA). As part of its



The opening session was held under the auspices of Abdulsalam bin Mohammed al Murshidi, Chairman of Oman Investment Authority (OIA).

strategic engagement, Elsamawal Abdulhadi Idris Mohammed, Chief Legal and Governance Officer at Sohar International, participated as a keynote speaker, offering insights on arbitration challenges and opportunities across key sectors — including oil and gas, maritime, finance, and insurance — alongside perspectives on AI-driven innovations in dispute resolution.

As main sponsors of the event, Abdulwahid bin Mohammed al Murshidi, Chief Executive Officer of Sohar International, commented: “Muscat Arbitration Days serves as a strategic platform to advance knowledge, shape

thought leadership and elevate Oman’s stature as a leading regional hub for arbitration. Sohar International’s involvement reflects our commitment to driving initiatives that strengthen the national commercial ecosystem, foster innovation and uphold the highest standards of professionalism.

“By supporting landmark platforms such as this, we reinforce our role in national development and contribute meaningfully to Oman’s strategic priorities for economic diversification, sustainable growth, and global competitiveness.”

SHORT TAKES



Policies that enhance resilience and accelerate diversification are essential for the GCC’s stability.

GCC REMAINS RESILIENT, BUT DEEPER REFORMS NEEDED: IMF

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, DEC 7

THE Gulf Cooperation Council economies continue to demonstrate resilience despite a challenging global environment, according to a new regional assessment published by the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The Fund notes that although external balances have narrowed due to oil production cuts and rising imports, overall conditions across the GCC “remain strong,” supported by robust non-hydrocarbon activity and firm domestic demand.

In its Enhancing Resilience to Global Shocks report, the IMF underscores that the regional outlook is becoming increasingly uncertain. “The economic outlook remains favourable but risks are tilted to the downside,” it stated, highlighting the impact of global uncertainty. The report adds that medium-term risks are shaped by “ongoing global structural shifts,” which create “two-sided risks for the GCC economies.”

A central message in the Fund’s assessment is the urgency of advancing reforms that strengthen resilience beyond the oil cycle. The IMF notes that countries should “focus on building resilience and accelerating economic diversification irrespective of oil prices.” The report also points out that many GCC economies benefit from sizable fiscal buffers that support reform implementation and help navigate external shocks.

On monetary and financial policy, the IMF describes existing frameworks as having “served the GCC well,” while emphasising the need to continue strengthening policy transmission and financial market depth. The banking sector remains on a solid footing, but the Fund cautions that amid global volatility, authorities should remain attentive to evolving risks through macroprudential oversight.

CEOTALK

Steering SGC with steady vision and quiet strength

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, DEC 7

IN the middle of Oman’s vast interior, where desert roads shape both the landscape and the people who work there, Abdullah bin Ghadeer al Junaibi built a leadership philosophy defined by clarity, discipline and resilience.

Today, as CEO of Saih Al Rawl Gas Company (SGC), he leads an Omani enterprise that has grown quietly but steadily into a key player supporting the gas and industrial ecosystem across Al Wusta.

Behind the large-scale operations that power Oman’s energy and industrial activities, SGC provides LPG, industrial gases, refined salt and vital chemicals to oil fields, industrial zones and community users. It is a company whose presence is felt more than seen — and its leadership story is rooted in the desert itself.

Al Junaibi’s journey into the sector began with a simple curiosity about how energy moves from remote desert fields to the factories, homes and ships that depend on it.

Early in his career, he worked in demanding field environments where heat, distance and long hours shaped his understanding of reliability and safety. He often reflects on how those early years taught him lessons that no classroom could match, and those lessons continue to guide his decisions today.

SGC was founded on March 21, 2001, during a period when Oman’s gas infrastructure was still developing, and Al Wusta Governorate lacked essential facilities. The company established the governorate’s first LPG plant, then added an industrial gas plant after detailed studies revealed a need among operators in the



The company’s strength lies in its people, who approach every task — from major deliveries to remote field operations — with equal commitment.

ABDULLAH BIN GHADEER AL JUNAIBI
CEO, Saih Al Rawl Gas Company

area. Further studies showed that oil fields required refined industrial salt, prompting SGC to build another facility dedicated to meeting that demand. This steady, problem-solving approach is still the company’s hallmark under Al Junaibi’s leadership.

Today, SGC supports upstream operators, logistics corridors, industrial clusters and community-level gas users, reflecting a philosophy of evolving with the country’s needs.

Working in central Oman has always required resilience. The terrain is harsh, weather conditions can change abruptly and logistical routes are long and demanding. Al Junaibi believes that even the smallest oversight in such an environment can quickly become a major issue.

Under his leadership, safety is placed before speed and planning before execution. At the same time, he has guided the company through the economic fluctuations that affect demand for industrial gases and chemicals. By managing inventory carefully and building strong client relationships, SGC maintained stability during changing market conditions. For Al Junaibi, the company’s strength lies in its people, who approach every task — from major deliveries to remote field operations — with equal commitment.

To him, Oman Vision 2040 provides a clear direction for strengthening the local industry. He emphasises the need for skilled Omani technicians and engineers who understand real industrial environments, stronger partnerships between national operators and local companies, and supportive policies for manufacturing, certification and technology transfer. These factors, he believes, are essential for building an industrial base that is

both self-reliant and competitive.

Al Junaibi sees gas as the backbone of Oman’s economy. It supports power generation, LNG, petrochemicals, metals, logistics, food processing and healthcare.

Industrial gases such as nitrogen, oxygen, carbon dioxide and argon play an equally crucial role, acting as the invisible infrastructure that keeps factories running. As Oman diversifies, he believes the need for these products will continue to grow, giving SGC an even greater responsibility.

He also observes a shift across the region, with companies seeking dependable local suppliers, embracing digital tools and demanding cleaner, safer industrial solutions.

Free zones, logistics hubs and food industries are expanding, increasing demand for industrial gases, while recent global disruptions have placed a new focus on supply-chain resilience.

At the heart of his leadership is a belief in clarity and responsibility. Al Junaibi strives to ensure his team understands why each task matters and feels supported, trusted and accountable. In a sector where safety cannot be compromised, this culture is essential.

Looking ahead, SGC is upgrading its tools, enhancing gas operations and adopting digital platforms to ensure greater efficiency and traceability. The company is also exploring opportunities for expansion that align with the growth of Oman’s industrial and logistics zones.

Despite the challenges of desert operations and shifting markets, Al Junaibi hopes SGC will be remembered as an Omani company that stood firm, worked quietly and upheld safety and quality every day. For him, that would be a legacy worth leaving.

Shinas shrimp farm nears completion

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, DEC 7

CONSTRUCTION is progressing well on a major shrimp farming project in Shinas, highlighting Oman’s growing focus on aquaculture as a strategic pillar for food security and economic diversification. The project, led by Singapore-based Blue Aqua International in partnership with Omani investors, is shaping up to be one of the country’s most advanced shrimp production facilities.

According to Dr Farshad Shishehchian, Group Executive Chairman and Founder of Blue Aqua International, the integrated shrimp farm, hatchery and broodstock centre, with a planned capacity of 1,800 metric tonnes, is on schedule to be fully operational by February 2026.

He said the Shinas facility is being developed as a modern, technology-driven farm that prioritises biosecurity, efficiency



The project, led by Singapore-based Blue Aqua International in partnership with Omani investors, is shaping up to be one of the country’s most advanced shrimp production facilities.

and environmental responsibility.

“This facility is designed to deliver consistent shrimp production while meeting the highest standards of sustainability and

disease control,” Dr Shishehchian said, adding that the project will help strengthen seafood supply in Oman and the wider region.

The shrimp farm forms part of a wider 22-hectare aquaculture development announced in 2023 in collaboration with Bahwan Services and Trading LLC and Muscat Investment House. The broader project is intended to support the production of white shrimp, Rainbow Trout and aquafeed, reflecting an integrated approach aimed at building a complete aquaculture value chain within Oman.

From the outset, the Shinas development has been positioned as a long-term investment rather than a standalone farm. Advanced water management systems are being installed to maximise efficiency, while waste treatment and recycling measures aim to reduce environmental impact. Strict biosecurity protocols are also central to the design, addressing one of the key risks facing global

shrimp farming — disease outbreaks.

Beyond its contribution to seafood production, the project is expected to have a meaningful economic impact at the local and national levels. Once operational, the farm will create employment opportunities across multiple segments, including hatchery operations, grow-out farming, processing, logistics and technical support services. This is particularly significant for Al Batinah North Governorate, where the project is located.

The Shinas shrimp farm also fits within Blue Aqua International’s broader regional strategy. In parallel with the shrimp project, the company is advancing plans for a 5,000-metric-tonne land-based trout farm, targeted for completion in 2027. This trout project is expected to rely on Recirculating Aquaculture System (RAS) technology, a method that allows fish to be grown in controlled, land-based environments using significantly less water than conventional systems.

ENERGY POLICY

India sets coal cap post-2035



India has no immediate plans to add coal-fired power capacity beyond 2035, according to a senior power ministry official.

Pankaj Agarwal said India aims to secure its energy needs with a coal capacity of about 307 gigawatts by 2035. The plan aligns with proposals to raise coal capacity by 46 per cent while doubling non-fossil fuel capacity to 500 GW by 2030, in line with demand. — Reuters

WORKFORCE RESTRUCTURING

UBS faces further job cuts



UBS may cut up to 10,000 additional jobs by 2027, SonntagsBlick reported, citing unnamed sources. The bank declined to confirm the figure, saying it would keep job losses in Switzerland and globally as low as possible.

UBS said reductions would occur gradually through natural attrition, early retirement and internal mobility as it continues integrating Credit Suisse, acquired in 2023. — Reuters

AUTO STRATEGY

Tesla unveils cheaper Model 3



Tesla has launched a lower-priced Model 3 variant in Europe, seeking to revive sales amid slowing demand and rising competition. The new version removes some premium features but offers a driving range exceeding 300 miles.

The move follows falling registrations as buyers turn to rivals such as Volkswagen and BYD. Tesla said deliveries of the model are expected to begin in the first quarter of 2026. — Reuters

OPINION

Machines mirror humanity: The inherent bias of AI



DR MYTHILI KOLLURU

The writer is an assistant professor at the marketing and management department of the College of Banking and Financial Studies.



K V CH MADHU SUDHANA RAO

The writer is AI researcher based in the USA.

ARTIFICIAL Intelligence was once hailed as the dawn of impartiality, a tool capable of removing human prejudice from decision-making. From global corporations to national policies, AI promised to bring logic where emotion once ruled.

However, today, minor and major decisions are made by machines, and increasingly, algorithms decide who gets the loan, gets promoted, and which patient receives care. One reality that we all need to acknowledge and accept is that AI inherits our biases. The term “inherent bias” does not imply that machines have opinions; it means bias is built into their foundations.

Every AI model is trained on data generated by humans, reflecting our behaviour, inequalities and historical prejudices. In essence, the machine learns from us, and we, as a society, are not neutral. Global studies have shown that facial recognition systems often misidentify women and people of colour at far higher rates than others.

This is not deceit or malice but an imbalance. Male faces with lighter skin tones predominate the data used in these algorithm trainings. Disparity subtly transforms into prejudice when it is applied to millions of

users. Similarly, hiring algorithms trained on decades of corporate data may unconsciously favour male-coded resumes, credit-scoring systems may downgrade applicants from specific neighbourhoods, and in healthcare, AI trained essentially on Western datasets may misdiagnose patients from other ethnic backgrounds.

These systems discriminate based on inheritance, not intent. AI’s inherent bias is not a technical flaw; it’s a societal mirror. These systems reflect humanity, magnifying both our strengths and our shortcomings.

The solution lies not in abandoning AI, but in designing it consciously. It means implementing AI ethics boards, conducting regular bias audits, and ensuring that developers, policymakers and users understand not only what the AI predicts, but why.

Global authorities, including the European Union, are enacting legislation to categorise and oversee “high-risk AI systems.” The ultimate objective is to develop responsible algorithms rather than flawless ones. The actual test will be whether cultures decide to acknowledge and address bias, which will always exist in some form.

From a regional perspective, Oman, under Vision 2040, is rapidly embracing artificial Intelligence to power its healthcare systems, logistics networks, and innovative

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governance. As a basis for the future, the National AI and Advanced Technologies Strategy places a strong emphasis on innovation, digital skills and local data sovereignty.

However, the debate now centres on how Oman should utilise AI responsibly rather than whether it should be used at all, as AI becomes a significant factor in national decision-making. The generated algorithms may not accurately represent Omani reality if the source data comes from areas with distinct social norms or demographics.

A recruiting system may overlook regionally appropriate qualifications; an educational AI would misread cultural learning patterns; and a forecasting algorithm might overestimate a local company’s success.

To combat this, Oman must ensure that every AI project is based on local data, ethics and governance. In addition to performing effectively, AI should be trained to do so with respect, considering cultural nuances and upholding equity and transparency. While developing policies in line with their own national and artistic ideals, Oman and its GCC allies may expand on these international initiatives.

“If AI is the mirror of our civilisation, then fairness in algorithms begins with fairness in society itself.”

NETFLIX SUBMITS TO WARNER BROS SIREN SONG

JENNIFER SABA

NETFLIX has officially entered the Upside Down, the dark alternate dimension of its hit show “Stranger Things.” Co-CEO Ted Sarandos abruptly reversed three decades of building instead of buying and agreed to pay \$83 billion, including debt, for the Warner Bros film studio and rival HBO.

The deal is fraught from political, regulatory and financial perspectives, putting the streaming titan in a curiously defensive light.

The three-way bidding war for the businesses behind everything from “The Wizard of Oz” to “Game of Thrones” featured plenty of drama, and there may yet be more to come.

Netflix emerged victorious on Friday over David Ellison’s Paramount Skydance and cable operator Comcast by offering Warner Bros Discovery shareholders \$23.25 in cash and \$4.50 in Netflix stock conditional on fluctuations.

Netflix emerged victorious on Friday over David Ellison’s Paramount Skydance and cable operator Comcast by offering Warner Bros Discovery shareholders \$23.25 in cash and \$4.50 in Netflix stock conditional on fluctuations. Straight-shooting Sarandos uncharacteristically used M&A clichés like “one plus one equals three or four” and the ability to “give audiences more of what they love” to justify the acquisition.

He and co-CEO Greg Peters are promising between \$2 billion and \$3 billion of annual savings from the deal.

Even then, the price tag fails to stack up. Warner Bros and HBO are expected to generate a combined \$1.8 billion in operating income next year, according to Visible Alpha estimates.

Add the midpoint of the estimated Netflix cost-cutting range, tax the sum at the standard 21% corporate rate, and the implied return on investment is just 4%. It would take more than twice as much of a synergistic uplift to reach a respectable 8% return.

The decision also plunges Netflix into unfamiliar territory. There probably will be tough regulatory reviews around the world, a risk reflected in the \$5.8 billion fee, a hefty 7% of the purchase price, Netflix agreed to fork over to WBD if the deal collapses.

Politics will be a factor, too. Ellison’s father, Larry, the founder of technology supplier Oracle, is cozy with President Donald Trump. Moreover, Paramount wanted all of WBD, including the cable networks now slated to be cleaved into a separate company, and offered \$30 a share, CNBC reported.

It won’t go quietly and neither will potentially aggrieved shareholders. — Reuters

Was the government right to strip the SRA’s powers?

THE decision of the UK government to transfer oversight of anti-money laundering and counter-terrorism financing supervision to the FCA (Financial Conduct Authority) has raised concerns within the professional services sector.

The Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA) served as a Professional Body Supervisor (PBS) for AMLCT (Anti money laundering counter terrorism) for law firms across England and Wales while for the accountancy sector, the HMRC plays the supervisory role.

The government believes that having the watchdog (FCA) oversee professional services firms is the most effective approach. The FCA was chosen for its existing expertise, as it already supervises financial institutions on anti-money laundering and counter terrorism financing.

Minister, Lucy Rigby MP explained: “This change will align the supervision of professional services with other similar parts of the economy which already have a public sector supervisor.”

The government initiated a consultation in 2023 to reform the system and align it with its Economic Crime Plan. After two years, the decision is to create a Single Professional Services Supervisor (SPSS), with the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) taking on this new role.

However, the move to transfer power to the FCA has been met with disappointment from the legal sector, as well as the accountancy sector, including CIMA and ICAEW.

A spokesperson for the SRA said: “We have made significant progress in recent years, increasing and improving our approach to anti-money-laundering supervision, making sure we are proactive and targeted, while supporting compliance. We are disappointed we won’t be able to build on that work.”

The Law Society expressed concern that the government had opted for a system that comes with challenges. It notes solicitors will face significant change following the move, as the role of the SRA



ANDY JALIL
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The writer is our foreign correspondent based in the UK.

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A general view of the Bank of England building in London, Britain. — Reuters

“will be significantly reduced.”

“The government must carefully manage the cost implications of implementing an SPSS model and avoid increasing regulatory burdens that could undermine the competitiveness of our world-beating legal services sector, especially given the extensive changes required,” said Mark Evans, President of the Law Society.

Over the years, the SRA’s interest in AML cases increased as its enforcement had surged. Its annual report, published in November 2024, revealed that while the number of reports of potential AML breaches (235 reports in 2017/18 and 227 reports in 2023/24), the number of AMI related matters determined by the Authority over the same period increased sevenfold, from ten cases 2017/18 to 74 in 2023/24.

Colette Best, Director of Kingsley Napley, said: “The FCA is not a natural supervisor for legal services and there are a lot of questions to be answered.” While Simon Morris, Partner at CMS, highlighted: “Handing the FCA another 60,000 firms to oversee more than doubles its remit, dwarfing the flawed transfer a decade ago of consumer

credit regulation from the Office of Fair Trading (OFT) to the FCA.”

“This is a welcome step if there is a disciplined transition,” said Ali Ishaq, Partner, Reed Smith.

He stressed: “We need an FCA legal-sector AML strategy with measurable metrics and thematic priorities as well as embedded legal specialists, practitioner panels to shape guidance, analytics to identify network risks, and feedback loops with law enforcement on suspicious activity reports and joint operations.”

Lloyd Hatton, Member of the APPG Anti-Corruption and Responsible Tax and of the Public Accounts Committee, also stated: “To ensure that this reform drives higher standards in our professional services, we must ensure that the FCA is given the resources and the powers to crack down on wrongdoing.”

The implementation is still subject to the passage of enabling legislation, and the Treasury will publish a separate consultation on the new supervisor’s powers. But the coming months will be crucial as the sector seeks clarity on the future of AML supervision.

Forum highlights smart agriculture

MUSCAT: The five-day 5G Agriculture Entrepreneurship Forum opened in Muscat, bringing together policymakers, experts and entrepreneurs to showcase the role of advanced technologies in developing a smarter and more sustainable agricultural sector.

The event features applications of 5G-enabled technologies, including artificial intelligence, the Internet of Things and drones, aimed at empowering entrepreneurs and strengthening innovation in agriculture.

The forum is jointly organised by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources and the Arab Organisation for Agricultural Development, and was inaugurated by Dr Ahmed bin



The event features applications of 5G-enabled technologies aimed at empowering entrepreneurs and strengthening innovation in agriculture.

Nasser al Bakri, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources for Agriculture. In his address, Dr Salem bin Ali al Khatri, Director-

General of Agricultural and Animal Research at the ministry, said the agricultural sector is undergoing rapid regional and global transformation driven by modern technologies such as AI, IoT, drones, big data analytics and green solutions.

He noted that Oman is keeping pace by building a digital and enabling infrastructure that supports food security, encourages innovation and opens new opportunities for Omani entrepreneurs in technology-based agriculture.

He explained that the forum aims to enhance the capabilities of mentors and consultants in agricultural entrepreneurship, while developing an enabling

environment that aligns with digital transformation requirements and improves the readiness of emerging projects.

The programme also highlights the use of artificial intelligence and drones as tools to boost efficiency and optimise resource management. Dr Al Khatri stressed the importance of stimulating public-private partnerships to support agricultural innovation and expand investment opportunities in advanced technologies.

He added that discussions will address challenges facing agricultural entrepreneurship and propose solutions to facilitate the growth of food security projects, alongside practical training on

drones and smart systems to empower farmers and youth.

Meanwhile, Dr Osama Rais, Head of Entrepreneurship at the Arab Organization for Agricultural Development, underscored the need to balance increased food production with environmental protection. He said technology now plays a critical role in improving quality, reducing waste and losses, and delivering food using fewer resources and with lower environmental impact.

Held alongside the forum is an exhibition showcasing AI applications and technological demonstrations, as well as specialised training programmes for agricultural entrepreneurship consultants. — ONA

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HOLLYWOOD

AVATAR 3 AIMS TO BECOME END-OF-YEAR BLOCKBUSTER



'Avatar: Fire and Ash' film premier, in Los Angeles.

The third film in the Avatar series, which will hit cinemas this month, is hoping to extend the success of one of the highest-grossing franchises in history with another environment-themed visual thriller.

"Avatar: Fire and Ashes", directed by James Cameron, 16 years after he first enthralled fans with his blue-coloured Na'vi people, will release in major markets from December 17 ahead of the holiday season.

The first Avatar made a record \$2.9 billion at the global box office, while 2022's follow-up "The Way of Water" scored around \$2.3 billion despite the post-COVID slump in cinemas, according to figures from The Hollywood Reporter.

Here is what you need to know about the new film, which premiered in Hollywood and Paris this week:

Artificial intelligence

Filming for the second and third Avatar films took place between 2017 and 2018 over 18 months, well before the rise of generative artificial intelligence.

Another two instalments are in production to be released later this decade.

"I'm not negative about generative AI. I just wanted to point out we don't use it on the Avatar films. We don't replace actors," Cameron told US website ComicBook.com.

The director has defended his "performance capture" technique, which he devised and which sees actors' movements captured and then transferred onto the features of the Na'vi on screen.

Critical reaction

Reaction has been limited but broadly positive so far, with critics unable to publish full reviews until closer to the release.

Some US reviewers have been allowed to publish short opinions on social media, with most of them agreeing Cameron had delivered another gut-wrenching visual feast.

The main criticism has been about the script and the reprisal of familiar themes from the first two films.

"I've only ever had about five good ideas in my life. I just keep repackaging them," Cameron joked. — AFP



'Avatar: Fire and Ash' film premier, in Los Angeles

QUICK FEATURES

ENTERTAINMENT

Ana de Armas, Cuban-Spanish actress, arriving at the "Women In Cinema" gala dinner, at the 5th edition of the Red Sea Film Festival in Jeddah. — AFP



CULTURE

Workers carry a wrapped Christmas tree at the Trinity Tree Company-Avery Farms in the small town of Newland. — AFP

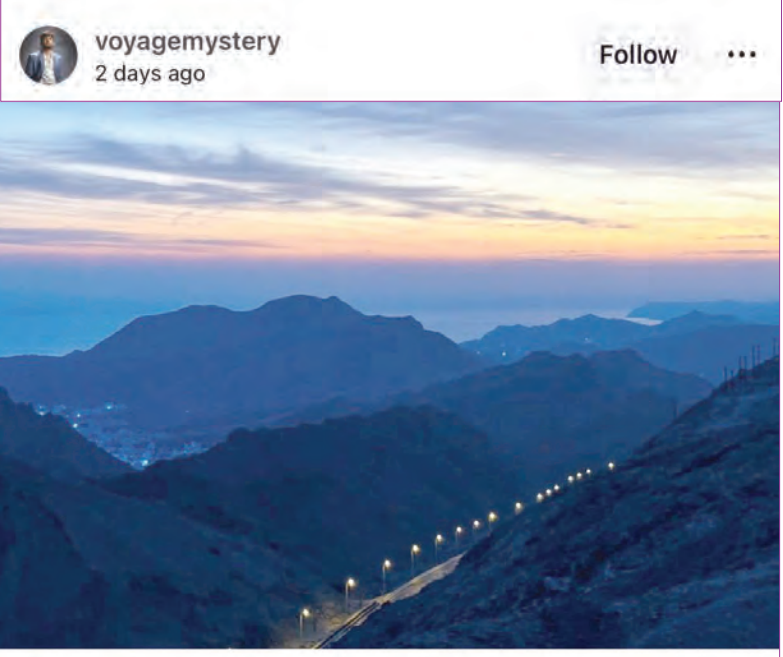


TRIBUTE

Frank Gehry, master visionary with a flair for drama and the most celebrated architect of his time, died at 96



INSTA PICKS



The soft glow of Oman's sunrise.



An ever-so majestic owl in Salalah.
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‘AMAZING’ FIGURINES FOUND IN EGYPTIAN TOMB SOLVE MYSTERY

A treasure trove of 225 funerary figurines has been discovered inside a tomb in the ancient Egyptian capital of Tanis in the Nile Delta, a rare find that has also solved a long-running mystery.

“Finding figurines in place inside a royal tomb has not happened in the Tanis necropolis since 1946,” French Egyptologist Frederic Payraudeau told reporters in Paris on Friday.

Such a find has also never happened before further south in Egypt’s Valley of the Kings near modern Luxor - apart from the tomb of the famous boy king Tutankhamun in 1922 - because most such sites have been looted throughout history, he added.

Payraudeau, who leads the French Tanis excavation mission, said the remarkable discovery was made on the morning of October 9.

The team had already excavated the other three corners of a narrow tomb occupied by an imposing, unnamed sarcophagus.

“When we saw three or four figurines together, we knew right away it was going to be amazing,” Payraudeau said.

“I ran out to tell my colleagues and the officials. After that, it was a real struggle. It was the day before the weekend -



This photograph shows a funerary statuette found in the royal necropolis of Tanis. — AFP

normally, we stop at 2 pm. We thought: ‘This is not possible.’”

The team then set up lights to work through the night.

It took 10 days to carefully extract all of the 225 small green figurines.

Located in the Nile Delta, Tanis was founded around 1050 BC as the capital of the Egyptian kingdom during the 21st dynasty.

At the time, the Valley of the Kings - which had been looted during the reign of pharaohs including Ramses - was abandoned and the royal necropolis was moved to Tanis, Payraudeau said.

— AFP



RARE ORCAS MAKE A SPLASH IN OMAN WATERS

NAJAH AL RIYAMI

WHEN orcas are spotted off Oman's coast, the moment feels almost mythic. Their tall dorsal fins and stark black-and-white forms break the surface with a presence that is both powerful and strangely calm. Orcas are not regular inhabitants of Omani waters, and every sighting carries a sense of significance that lingers long after they vanish into the blue.

Oman's coastline is already known for its extraordinary marine life. Most remarkable among them is the Arabian Sea humpback whale, a genetically distinct and non-migratory subspecies found nowhere else on Earth. These whales have lived in isolation for tens of thousands of years, surviving entirely within the Arabian Sea. Dolphins, sea turtles and rich coral systems complete a picture of vibrant and evolving marine biodiversity. But the sudden appearance of orcas belongs to a different category of wonder. Their presence signals ecological connections that extend far beyond the Sea of Oman and the Arabian Sea, linking Oman to vast oceanic networks that span continents.

Scientists know that orcas occasionally pass through the region, but the reasons behind these rare visits remain uncertain. Orcas travel in close-knit matrilineal families, communicate in dialects unique to each pod and adapt their hunting techniques to the environments they explore. Some specialise in fish, others in squid or marine mammals. Whether the orcas seen in Oman were following prey, caught in shifting currents or simply travelling through a wider migratory route is still unknown, but each sighting offers a valuable clue into the complexities of ocean life.



The sightings reminds us that our seas still hold mysteries, and that even familiar coastlines can surprise us. At a time when environmental conversations often focus on loss, the appearance of these giants feels like a quiet reminder of resilience and possibility.

For Oman, these encounters are more than fleeting moments. They invite reflection on the country's place within a larger marine narrative. The Arabian Sea has long been a sanctuary for unique species, yet it exists within a dynamic system shaped by climate, monsoon cycles and changing ocean conditions. The presence of orcas reminds us that the sea is constantly in motion, carrying with it stories from far beyond our horizon. It pushes us to consider how global ocean health, shifting ecosystems and human activity intertwine in ways we are only beginning to understand.

There is also an increasing need for mindful stewardship. As more people take to the water for tourism, recreation and exploration, encounters with large marine animals become more delicate. Orcas

depend heavily on sound to communicate, navigate and hunt, making them extremely sensitive to disturbance. Maintaining respectful distances and reducing noise are simple choices that help protect these rare visits from becoming harmful interactions.

Above all, an orca sighting in Oman restores a sense of wonder that is easy to lose in a fast-moving world. It reminds us that our seas still hold mysteries, and that even familiar coastlines can surprise us.

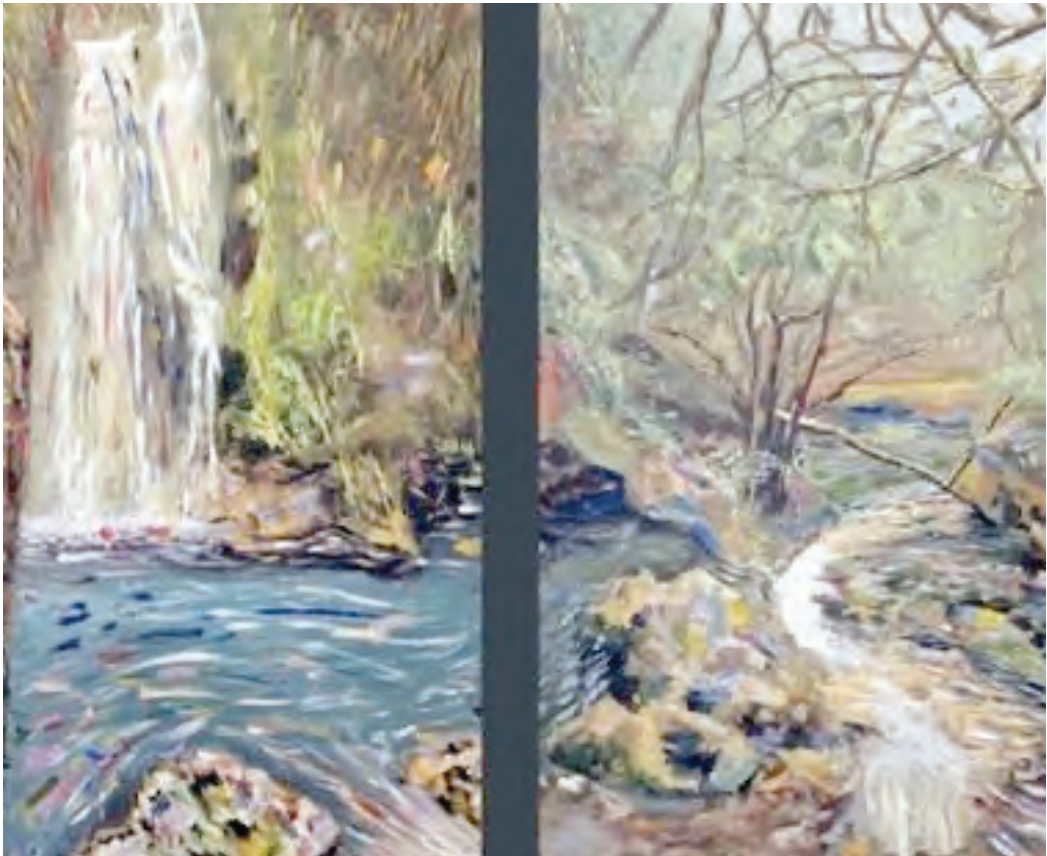
At a time when environmental conversations often focus on loss, the appearance of these giants feels like a quiet reminder of resilience and possibility.

It encourages curiosity, humility and a renewed commitment to safeguarding the waters that continue to amaze us.

FEATURES



TALENT
DOESN'T
NEED AGE TO
FLOURISH



ARWA AL HASHIMI

In a quiet corner of a simple Omani home, a four-year-old girl dipped her tiny fingers into paint and pressed them onto paper as if discovering the world for the very first time. She didn't know then that this colourful, random print would become the beginning of a long artistic journey. That little girl is Anwar Anwar al Jabri, now a sixth-grade student, who in just a few years proved that talent doesn't need age to flourish, only a sincere heart that knows how to see beauty.

From her earliest days, Anwar drew everywhere, as if the paper couldn't contain the colours inside her. She experimented on her siblings' old notebooks, and with every drawing, her confidence grew. Her first real step into the art world came during a school carnival in third grade, when she displayed her paintings for the first time. It wasn't just a child showing two drawings; it was a young artist presenting the beginning of her voice. The following year, she joined a school event supporting Gaza, sold some of her artworks, and donated the money to the children there, a gesture that revealed a deep sense of compassion matching the beauty of her art.

Anwar's journey continued quickly. At just nine years old, she participated in Muscat Art for the first time, then took part in the Book Fair the next year, and this year she proudly returned to participate in Muscat Art 4. Standing in front of her artworks, wearing the innocence of childhood and the spirit of an artist, she felt something beyond words. Seeing her own paintings hanging on the wall filled her with joy and excitement. "These are my drawings... I made them!" she whispered to herself, smiling at the colours she brought to life.

Anwar prefers working with oil paints because they give her the freedom to

blend colours smoothly and express details with depth. She chooses her style and palette based on the soul of each painting, letting the artwork itself guide her hand. Among all her pieces, her dearest are the two paintings she presented in Muscat Art 3: 'Harat Al Sebani' and 'Imti Village'. These weren't just scenes captured on canvas, they were emotional reflections. In Al Sebani, she felt the warmth of old alleys and the scent of memories hiding in the walls. In Imti, she found serenity, nature, light and the peaceful charm of the place, even the cafe she loved there found its way into her colours.

Behind this young artist stand parents who saw her gift when she was only four. They noticed her insistence on completing her drawings without letting anyone change them. They created a special art corner for her, a small world filled with paints, brushes and canvases, where she could grow freely. They enrolled her in various workshops, encouraged her progress and taught her that mistakes are part of learning. With time, they watched her talent transform into passion.

Today, Anwar dreams big. She hopes to one day have her own art studio, a space where her creativity can breathe freely. She wants to open a gallery that carries her name, a place where people can meet her art and experience it in a new light. One of her most heartfelt dreams is to create a cafe and restaurant with a purely artistic atmosphere, where every corner is inspired by her work, a place where visitors feel the beauty and comfort she pours into her paintings.

Anwar is not just a child who draws; she is a small story about passion blooming early, about art finding a pure heart to live in. She is a message that creativity has no age, and that eyes which see beauty will always find a way to paint it.

And so, Anwar continues her journey with a small brush, big dreams and a heart that knows art is the most beautiful way to say what words cannot.

Anwar Anwar al Jabri is a testament to the fact that creativity has no age and that eyes that see beauty will always find a way to paint it.

