

OMAN
Observer
DAILY

VOL. 44, NO. 88
PAGES 20 | BAISAS 200

SUNRISE 06:43 AM
PRAYER TIMINGS
FAJR 05:26 AM
DHUHR 12:26 PM
ASR 03:40 PM
MAGHRIB 06:04 PM
ISHA 07:16 PM

2010000387405

10

VERVAEKE
PUNCHES
TO STAGE 2
VICTORY

INBRIEF

OMAN’S SOLIDARITY WITH SAUDI ARABIA

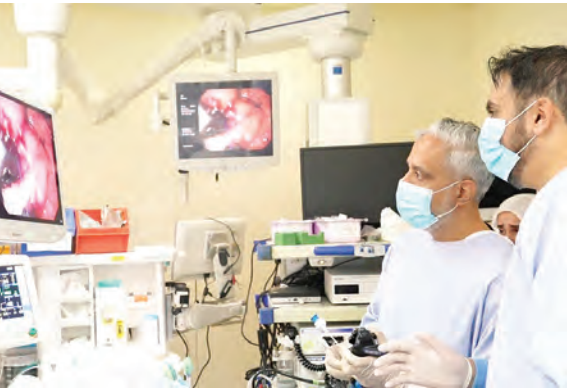
The Sultanate of Oman has expressed its full solidarity with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and its rejection of the statements made by the Israeli Prime Minister against the Kingdom and its territorial integrity.

In a statement issued by the Foreign Ministry, Oman reiterated its unwavering and supportive position for the establishment of an independent Palestinian state on all its sovereign lands in Palestine, with East Al Quds as its capital, on the 1967 borders, in accordance with international resolutions and the principles of international law, and in a manner that ensures the achievement of permanent stability in the region.

Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia and other Arab countries condemned the remarks by Israel’s prime minister.

Benjamin Netanyahu’s remarks, which some Israeli media characterised as a joke, came with the region already on edge after US President Donald Trump proposed taking over the territory and displacing Gazans abroad.

‘GASTRIC PLICATION’ AT ROYAL HOSPITAL



Acting in cooperation with the Anaesthesia Department and Obesity Treatment Unit at the National Diabetes Centre, a specialised medical team from the Royal Hospital has performed the first laparoscopic gastric sleeve operation without surgery. The operation, medically known as “gastric folding or gastric plication”, is aimed at helping obese patients lose weight in a safe and effective manner. The operation was a step forward in the Royal Hospital’s strategy to provide the best medical treatments and keep pace with rapid developments in the field of simple surgical interventions.

203,629 VISITED AL JABAL AL AKHDHAR



The Wilayat of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate received 203,629 visitors last year, according to statistics issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information. Statistics show that the number of Omani citizens who visited Al Jabal Al Akhdhar during the past year stood at 96,856, Saudi tourists was 12,007, Emirati visitors was 1,175, Bahrainis was 612, Kuwaitis was 1,083, and Qatari visitors was 653 visitors.



HIS MAJESTY LEAVES ON PRIVATE VISIT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik left the homeland on Sunday in a private visit lasting several days. May the Almighty Allah protect His Majesty the Sultan in his journeys and grant him success! — ONA

Industrial sector provides 26,000 jobs

MUSCAT: Deals have been signed for 100 new projects with an investment volume of nearly RO 1.5 billion in the renewable energy, food and medical industries, air conditioning equipment industries, construction and building, metals and plastics industries, and in several industrial, economic and free zones. This was revealed during the celebration of Oman Industry Day, which falls on February 9 every year, represented by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion.

The slogan this year is “Oman at the Centre of Global Supply Chains”. It reflects the Royal interest attached to this sector due to its vital role in enhancing diversification and spurring economic growth.

The ceremony was held under the auspices of HH Sayyid Dr Fahad bin Al Julanda al Said, Vice-Chancellor of Sultan Qaboos University (SQU), in the presence of Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, and some under-secretaries. A number of officials and businessmen from the industrial sector and Omani companies also attended the ceremony.

Dr Saleh bin Said Masan, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion for Commerce and Industry, said that the latest data issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NC SI) indicate an increase in the output of the converting sector by 8.5 per cent to reach RO 2.686 billion by the end of September 2024 at constant prices compared

‘AHL OMAN’ TO BOOST INVESTMENT

The Unified Promotional Identity Unit, in collaboration with the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP), officially launched Oman’s unified promotional identity under the slogan “Ahl Oman” during a ceremony.

The event was held under the auspices of Sultan bin Salim al Habsi, Minister of Finance, and attended by Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, along with a distinguished gathering of ministers, high-ranking officials, esteemed guests, and executives from various government and private sectors. **DETAILS ON P5**

to the same period in 2023.

He said that the Global Competitive Industrial Performance Report issued by the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO) indicates that the Sultanate of Oman achieved third place in the Arab world and 53rd globally, which reflects the acceleration of industrial competitiveness capabilities over the past years.

He said that the industrial sector has managed to achieve the targets of the

Industrial Strategy 2040 during 2022 and 2023, as RO 3.44 billion was set as a target contribution for converting industries to the GDP for the year 2022. The contribution of this sector witnessed a growth of 19 per cent between 2020 and 2023, reflecting the continuous progress towards achieving the goals of the strategy, thanks to the joint cooperation between the public and private sectors, he added. The industrial sector also provided around 26,000 jobs for Omanis since 2020, achieving a growth rate of 79 per cent compared to 2020, reflecting its prominent role in supporting the national workforce, said Dr Saleh.

Dr Saleh pointed out that non-oil commodity exports recorded a remarkable increase, reaching about RO 7.5 billion by the end of 2023, compared to RO 3.4 billion by the end of 2020, reflecting the accelerated growth in the industrial performance of the Sultanate of Oman.

Faisal bin Abdullah al Rawas, Chairman of the Board of Directors of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), affirmed that the industrial sector enjoys tremendous opportunities for growth, sustainability and empowerment of the private sector in the Sultanate of Oman.

He pointed out that the OCCI supports the empowerment of the private sector by anticipating challenges and attracting investments, in addition to empowering the Omani product and raising its competitiveness in local and foreign markets. **SEE ALSO P13**

Law lays out conditions for Omani citizenship

VINOD NAIR
MUSCAT, FEB 9

The Omani Nationality Law issued last week by Royal Decree No 17/2025 lays out conditions for granting citizenship to foreigners, including non-Omani spouses of foreigners, and factors that may lead to revocation or withdrawal of citizenship. The law also specifies penalties if citizenship is misused.

The law, in Article 3, states that applications related to nationality issues shall be submitted to the Ministry of

Interior, which may reject them without giving reasons. Article 4 of the law states that courts do not have jurisdiction to consider matters of nationality and related disputes.

It is also not permissible to combine Omani nationality with any other nationality except by a Royal Decree, based on the minister’s recommendation.

The law is divided into articles and here are some of its main provisions.

Article 17 states that a foreigner may apply for Omani citizenship if he/she meets the conditions, including that



applicants must have had lawful and continuous residence in the Sultanate of Oman for not less than 15 years, and his absence during one year for a period not exceeding 90 days shall not prevent his residence from being considered continuous.

The applicant must be fluent in reading and writing Arabic, have good conduct and behaviour, and must not have been previously sentenced to a final penalty for a felony or a crime that violates honour or trust, even if their reputation has been restored.

DETAILS ON P2

OMAN



burjeel
hospital
By Burjeel Holdings

  24399777



**Your Heart Deserves the Best:
Expert Care from Our Cardiologist!**

Dr. Mujeeb Ahamed
Specialist Cardiologist
Burjeel Hospital, Al Khuwair



www.burjeelhospitaloman.com

MOH 3347973/2025

SHORT TAKES



Public prosecutors took the oath of office at the Supreme Judicial Council

15 public prosecutors take oath of office

MUSCAT: Fifteen second-class public prosecutors, comprising the ‘Development Batch’, took the oath of office at the Supreme Judicial Council on Sunday before Sayyid Mohammed bin Sultan al Busaidy, Deputy Chairman of the Supreme Judiciary Council. The ceremony was attended by Attorney General Nasr bin Khamis al Sawa’ee. The oath of office is taken in implementation of Article (11) of the Public Prosecution Law issued under Royal Decree No (99/92). It grants the due permission to officially commence judicial action and join the Public Prosecution Corps. According to Article (10) of the Public Prosecution Law, completing the Postgraduate Diploma in Judicial Sciences at the Higher Judicial Institute requires two years of study.



The meeting discussed the Council’s mandate to supervise courts, judges and the Public Prosecution Department. — ONA

Council to improve quality of services

MUSCAT: The Supreme Judiciary Council on Sunday held its third meeting of the year 2025 under the chairmanship of Sayyid Mohammed bin Sultan al Busaidy, Deputy Chairman of the Supreme Judiciary Council. The meeting discussed several topics on the agenda in accordance with the Council’s mandate to supervise courts, judges and the Public Prosecution Department. The overall aim is to improve the quality of judicial services and develop the digital infrastructure of the judicial sector to support the implementation of prompt justice and enhance transparency. — ONA

Shura approves draft laws on trafficking

MUSCAT: The Majlis Ash’shura approved the draft law on combating human trafficking and the draft law on real estate regulation and referred them to the State Council. Dr Ahmed bin Ali al Saadi, Chairman of the Legislativ e and Legal Committee of Majlis Ash’shura, and its rapporteur at the session, read out the committee’s report on the draft law on combating human trafficking, indicating that the law provides more legal protection for victims and curbs crimes related to human trafficking in the Sultanate of Oman. Majlis Ash’shura also approved the draft Real Estate Regulation Law referred by the government after extensive deliberations during which the Majlis members expressed their opinions and suggestions on the report of the Public Services and Utilities Committee. The committee’s report was read by Dr Hamoud bin Ahmed al Yahyaiei, Chairman of the Public Services and Utilities Committee and its rapporteur at the session. — ONA

Nationality Law lays out citizenship conditions

VINOD NAIR
MUSCAT, FEB 9

THE Omani Nationality Law issued last week by Royal Decree 17/2025 lays out conditions for granting citizenship to foreigners, including non-Omani spouses of foreigners, and factors that may lead to revocation or withdrawal of citizenship. The law also specifies penalties if citizenship is misused. The law, in Article 3, states that applications related to nationality issues shall be submitted to the Ministry of Interior, which may reject them without giving reasons. Article 4 of the law states that courts do not have jurisdiction to consider matters of nationality and related disputes. It is also not permissible to combine Omani nationality with any other nationality except by a Royal Decree, based on the minister’s recommendation. The law is divided into articles and here are some of its main provisions.

CITIZENSHIP FOR FOREIGNERS Article 17 states that a foreigner may apply for Omani citizenship if he meets the conditions, including that applicants must have had lawful and continuous residence in the Sultanate of Oman for no less than 15 years, and his absence during one year for a period not exceeding 90 days shall not prevent his residence from being considered continuous. The applicant must be fluent in reading and writing Arabic, have good conduct and behaviour, and must not have been previously sentenced to a final penalty for a felony or a crime that violates honour or trust, even if their reputation has been restored. The applicants must be in good health and free from infectious diseases, as specified in the regulations, and should have a legitimate source of income that provides them with enough to meet their needs, including the dependents. The applicant must declare in writing his desire to renounce the nationality of the country of which he holds nationality, and that he does not hold the nationality of another country other than the country of which he will renounce nationality.

Minor children acquire Omani nationality according to their father if they were born in the Sultanate of Oman or their normal residence is in it.

CITIZENSHIP TO THE HUSBAND OF AN OMANI Article 18 states that a foreigner who is the husband of an Omani woman may apply for Omani citizenship if he meets the following conditions, including that he has been married to an Omani woman and has resided with her in the Sultanate of Oman for a period of not less than 10 years, and his residence shall not be considered continuous if he is absent during one year for a period not exceeding 90 days. He must have a child from his Omani wife, must be fluent in



reading and writing Arabic, have good conduct and behaviour, must not have been previously sentenced to a final penalty for a felony or a crime that violates honour or trust, even if his reputation has been restored, must be in good health and free from infectious diseases, as specified in the regulations, must have a legitimate source of income that provides him with enough to meet his needs and the needs of those he supports. He must declare in writing his desire to renounce the nationality of the country of which he holds nationality, and that he does not hold the nationality of another country other than the country of which he will renounce nationality.

CITIZENSHIP TO THE WIFE OF AN OMANI Article 19 states that a foreign woman who is the wife of an Omani man may apply for citizenship if she meets the following conditions, including that she has been married to an Omani and has resided with him in the Sultanate of Oman for a period of no less than 8 years, and her absence during one year for a period not exceeding 90 days does not prevent her residence from being considered continuous. She has a child from her Omani husband and must be fluent in spoken Arabic. She must have good conduct and behaviour and must not have been previously sentenced to a final penalty for a felony or a crime that violates honour or trust unless her reputation has been restored. She must declare in writing her desire to renounce the nationality of the country of which she holds nationality, and that she does not hold the nationality of another country other than the country of which she will renounce nationality.

FOREIGN WIDOW OF AN OMANI Article 20 states a foreign widow of an Omani may apply for Omani citizenship if she meets the following conditions, including she has been widowed and has resided in the Sultanate of Oman for not less than 6 years, and her absence during one year for a period not exceeding 90 days shall not prevent her residence from being considered continuous. She has a child from her Omani husband and must not be married to a non-Omani. She must be fluent in spoken Arabic, have good conduct and behaviour, not have been previously sentenced to a final penalty for a felony or a crime unless her reputation has been restored, must be in good health

and free from infectious diseases, and should declare in writing her desire to renounce the nationality of the country of which she holds nationality, and that she does not hold the nationality of another country other than the country of which she will renounce nationality.

FOREIGN DIVORCED WOMAN Article 21 states that a foreign woman divorced from an Omani man may apply for Omani citizenship if she has been married to an Omani and has resided with him in the Sultanate of Oman for no less than eight years, before the divorce. Her residence shall not be considered continuous if she is absent for one year for a period not exceeding 90 days. She has a child from her Omani husband and must not be married to a non-Omani. She must be fluent in spoken Arabic, have good conduct and behaviour, must not have been previously sentenced to a final penalty for a felony or a crime that violates honour or trust, even if her reputation has been restored, must be in good health and free from infectious diseases, and must have a legitimate source of income that provides her with enough to meet her needs and the needs of those she supports. She should declare in writing her desire to renounce the nationality of the country of which she holds nationality, and that she does not hold the nationality of another country other than the country of which she will renounce nationality.

A CHILD BORN TO AN OMANI MOTHER AND HER FOREIGN HUSBAND Article 22 states that Omani citizenship may be granted to a minor child born to an Omani mother and her foreign husband, if the mother is a widow or divorced, provided that 5 years have passed since the widowhood or divorce, or that her husband has been absent from her or has abandoned her for an unknown reason for no less than ten 10 consecutive years, and this absence or abandonment shall be proven by a court ruling. The mother has custody of the child, under a court ruling, the child must have resided in the Sultanate of Oman for a period of not less than five years if his mother is a widow or divorced, and ten years if her husband has been absent from her or abandoned her. In both cases, his absence for one year, not exceeding ninety days, shall not prevent his residence from being considered continuous. There should be written consent from the minor’s guardian—if any—for obtaining Omani citizenship, and the child must not hold the citizenship of another country, other than the country whose citizenship he will renounce.

LOSS OF CITIZENSHIP OR WITHDRAWAL OF NATIONALITY Article 23 states that an Omani shall lose his Omani nationality by operation of law if he acquires the nationality of another country in violation of the provisions of this law.

SHORTTAKES

EMR MEDICAL STUDENTS’ MEETING CONCLUDES TODAY

MUSCAT: The 21st Regional Meeting of the Eastern Mediterranean Medical Students’ Associations (EMR21) of the International Federation of Medical Students’ Associations (IFMSA) commenced in Muscat, with over



HIND BINT YOUSEF AL BALUSHIYAH

Chairperson of the Organising Committee

450 students from 18 countries participating. The event concludes today, February 10. The opening ceremony was held under the auspices of Azzan bin Qasim al Busaidy, Under-Secretary, Ministry of Heritage and Tourism for Tourism. Hind bint Yousef Al Balushiya, Chairperson of the Organising Committee, emphasised that the meeting highlights the significant role of medical students. She noted, “The Middle East is a region woven with diverse cultures, history and challenges, but our shared passion for medicine unites us in striving for a better future.”

Dr John Jabbour, WHO Representative in Oman, highlighted the essential role of youth in improving health outcomes and supporting health efforts. Mahmoud Abdel Naeem, Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean at IFMSA, shared the vision of young people in advancing healthcare, emphasising that youth involvement is vital for a sustainable future in public health. The meeting further solidifies Oman’s standing as a prominent leader in the medical field both regionally and globally. — ONA



The Programme is designed to enhance local governance and economic decentralisation across Oman

RAM LAUNCHES MUNICIPAL MEMBERS PROGRAMME

MUSCAT: The Royal Academy of Management (RAM), in collaboration with the Ministry of Interior, has launched the Municipal Council Members Programme, a specialised initiative designed to enhance local governance and advance administrative and economic decentralisation across Oman.

The programme was inaugurated under the auspices of Sayyid Khalifa bin Al Murdas al Busaidy, Secretary-General of Governorates Affairs at the Ministry of Interior, and aligns with His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik’s vision to cultivate national leadership and equip future-ready leaders to drive Oman Vision 2040. Fathiya al Rashdi, Vice-President for Programme Affairs at the Royal Academy of Management, highlighted the programme’s significance in empowering Municipal Council members with the skills and knowledge needed to foster local development. She stated, “The programme focuses on best practices in local governance, aiming to enhance the competitiveness of Oman’s governorates while promoting sustainable development through efficient resource utilisation.”

BALQEES AL ORAIMI

MUSCAT, FEB 9 The Sultanate of Oman celebrated Oman Industry Day under the slogan “Oman at the heart of global supply chains”, highlighting the pivotal role played by Oman in strengthening its industrial position regionally and internationally. Al Sharqiyah South Governorate stands out as a prominent industrial centre in Oman,

combining rich natural resources, a strategic location, and advanced infrastructure that enhance its participation in global supply chains. This governorate, with its vital industrial sectors, exemplifies Oman’s ability to diversify its economy and achieve sustainability in the industrial sector. It contributes to the national economy through investments in energy, petrochemicals, fisheries, food

SMEDA unveils 2025 strategy for SME growth

AFRAH AL BALUSHI

MUSCAT, FEB 9 THE Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority (SMEDA) held its annual media meeting to review its achievements for 2024 and outline its strategic vision for 2025, reinforcing its commitment to sustainable empowerment. For 2025, SMEDA has developed 481 initiatives across eight strategic axes, focusing on policies and programmes that support and enable SMEs. Halima Al Zar’i, Chairman of the Authority, highlighted a notable increase in key indicators aligned with Oman Vision 2040, emphasising the Authority’s participatory approach with economic sectors and entrepreneurs. A series of incentives were announced to boost SME growth, including: Allocating at least 10 per cent of government tenders to SMEs. Exempting SMEs from temporary insurance (1 per cent) in tenders. Reducing registration fees for SMEs at the Tender Board by 50 per cent. Paying SME invoices within 15 to 28 days



Halima Al Zar’i, Chairman, SMEDA, addressing the press conference

for government projects. Providing financing programs up to RO 500,000 without guarantees. Expanding international marketing and e-commerce support. The SME sector has seen rapid expansion, with registered enterprises reaching 145,750 by the end of 2024, employing 192,714 workers. The number of active Entrepreneurship Cards issued stood at 26,948, granting SMEs access to business advantages across various industries. SMEDA continues to implement training

and funding initiatives, including the Entrepreneur Readiness Programme, which benefitted 5,222 participants last year. Additionally, 877 land usufruct plans were made available for SME projects, and a new export financing program was launched to help businesses expand into regional and global markets. The Authority also emphasised its role in developing the creative handicraft sector by introducing modern technologies, supporting home businesses, and establishing a National Center for Creative Crafts Industries within Sultan Haitham Creative City. As part of its investment drive, SMEDA aims to finance at least 300 institutions in 2025, following the approval of 400 loans worth RO 37.69 million under the Azm lending portfolio. The Omani startup ecosystem has also witnessed significant growth, with 146 startups employing 549 workers and achieving a market value of RO 343 million. With a clear vision for 2025, SMEDA is set to drive economic diversification, strengthen SME competitiveness, and enhance Oman’s position as a hub for entrepreneurship and innovation.

National Museum hosts Italian fashion jewellery exhibition

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

MUSCAT, FEB 9 Visitors to the National Museum in Muscat were in for a special treat on Sunday as the museum, in collaboration with the Italian Embassy in Oman, launched the exhibition titled ‘Diva! Italian Glamour in Fashion Jewellery.’ This exceptional showcase celebrates the beauty and creativity of Italian fashion, featuring over 100 pieces of exquisite jewellery that span decades – from the 1950s to the present day. The exhibition offers a fascinating journey through the decades, with each piece reflecting the trends, materials, and cultural shifts of its time. The opening ceremony was graced under the auspices of Her Highness Sayyidah Dr Mona bint Fahd al Said, Assistant Vice-Chancellor for International Cooperation at SQU and Vice-Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the National Museum. The exhibition is set to run until March 9 and was curated by Prof Alba Cappellieri, a leading figure in jewellery design from Politecnico di Milano and the Director of the Vicenza Museum of Jewellery. The exhibition provides a deep insight into the evolution of modern Italian jewellery, highlighting how societal changes and technological advances in jewellery-making have influenced the designs over the years. It explores the boldness and conspicuousness of jewellery by top Italian fashion brands, showcasing daring designs that come in an array of vibrant colours, including bright red, intense green, and hues rarely seen in traditional jewellery. The exhibition also highlights the use of unusual materials such as plastic, horn, shell, and



Launch of Italian exhibition ‘Diva! Italian Glamour in Fashion Jewellery’ at National Museum of Oman

fabric, which have become integral in the creation of innovative jewellery pieces. Italian Ambassador Pierluigi D’Elia Oman spoke at the event, noting that the exhibition embodies the essence of Italian creativity, craftsmanship, and beauty. He stated, “This exhibition celebrates beauty, creativity, and Italian craftsmanship, showcasing how art transcends borders and forms a global language that speaks of culture, harmony, innovation and beauty.” He expressed pride in collaborating with the National Museum and Professor Alba Cappellieri to present this unique cultural experience to Oman. Jamal bin Hassan al Mousawi, Secretary-General of the National Museum, emphasised the importance of the exhibition as a bridge for cultural exchange between Italy and Oman. He said, “The exhibition

embodies Italian beauty and creativity in the jewellery-making industry, craftsmanship and the extraordinary blend of tradition with modernity. It offers a unique opportunity to experience the essence of Italian beauty, which we hope will inspire Omani artisans and enhance their understanding of Italian jewellery’s profound influence on global culture.” Prof Cappellieri highlighted the transformation of modern jewellery, noting that it is no longer just an accessory, but a piece of art that reflects the identity of a rapidly evolving society. The exhibition, sponsored by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, underscores the cultural dialogue between the Italian Republic and the Sultanate of Oman, strengthening their bond of mutual cooperation.

Al Sharqiyah South stands out as a prominent industrial centre

BALQEES AL ORAIMI

MUSCAT, FEB 9 The Sultanate of Oman celebrated Oman Industry Day under the slogan “Oman at the heart of global supply chains”, highlighting the pivotal role played by Oman in strengthening its industrial position regionally and internationally. Al Sharqiyah South Governorate stands out as a prominent industrial centre in Oman,



This governorate, with its vital industrial sectors, exemplifies Oman’s ability to diversify its economy and achieve sustainability in the industrial sector.

industries, and traditional industries reflecting Omani heritage. Al Sharqiyah South Governorate’s unique geographical location connects Asian, African, and European markets, making it a focal point in global supply chains. With a modern road network and advanced seaports like Sur Port and Sur Industrial Area, the governorate significantly enhances trade and industry. In recent years, the governorate

has seen remarkable expansion in industrial projects, playing a major role in developing the national economy. The governorate office stated that Al Sharqiyah South Governorate is the heart of Omani industry, combining natural resources, a strategic location, and advanced infrastructure to integrate into global supply chains. Investments in heavy, fisheries, manufacturing, and food industries continue to enhance these sectors.

SPOTLIGHT



MUSCAT MARKETS THRIVE ON ATTIRE DEMAND

AHMED AL KAABI

AS THE HOLY MONTH OF RAMADHAN approaches, Muscat’s markets are witnessing a surge in activity, with citizens and residents rushing to purchase essentials and prepare for Eid al Fitr. The demand for traditional clothing—particularly tailored garments for both men and women—has soared, prompting many tailoring shops to stop accepting new orders due to overwhelming demand. Women, in particular, are actively seeking luxurious fabrics to have traditional outfits, such as the Omani thobe, custom-made in preparation for Eid. Many prefer locally tailored clothing for its superior quality and precision, adding to the pressure on tailors during this busy period. Zaher, a tailor shop owner in Muttrah Souq, described the overwhelming demand:

“We started seeing heavy footfall since the beginning of Shaaban, with customers coming in non-stop for tailored dishdashas. Initially, we tried to accommodate all orders, but due to the sheer volume, we had to stop taking new ones over a week ago. Ramadhan and Eid are peak seasons for us, meaning long nights and sometimes even 24-hour operations.”

Meanwhile, Mohammed al Harthy, a shopper at the market, shared his struggle to find a tailor:

“I usually get my clothes tailored well in advance, but this year, I was late due to a busy schedule. As a result, I had trouble finding a tailor who could take my order. Many shops turned me away as their waiting lists were full. I finally found one that agreed to tailor a single piece, but since it’s my first time using them,

I’m unsure about the quality.” He also noted the bustling atmosphere in Muttrah Souq during this season:

“The market is alive with activity—people searching for the finest fabrics and designs, shops filled with eager customers. Due to the high demand, some tailors have even raised their prices significantly.” Beyond tailoring, traditional accessories are also in high demand. Salim al Rawahi, owner of a shop specialising in kuma (Omani caps) and men’s accessories, highlighted this seasonal spike in sales:

“This is the busiest time of the year for us. The Omani kuma is an essential part of men’s attire, and many prefer to buy new ones for Eid. The demand isn’t just from Omanis—visitors from other nationalities also purchase hand-embroidered kuma, either as gifts or as cultural keepsakes.” Al Rawahi explained that kuma comes in two main types: hand-embroidered, which take weeks to craft and are prized for their quality, and machine-made, which are more affordable and favoured by younger buyers. He emphasised the challenge of stocking enough handmade kuma due to their labour-intensive production, urging customers to shop early:

“The closer we get to Eid, the more crowded the markets become, and options become limited. I always advise customers to check the embroidery quality carefully, especially with handmade kuma, as craftsmanship varies significantly.” With the increasing demand for tailored traditional clothing and accessories, early planning is essential to avoid last-minute rushes. As Ramadhan and Eid draw closer, tailors’ schedules fill up, making timely orders crucial. Muscat’s historic markets—Muttrah Souq, Al Seeb Souq and others—see remarkable activity during Ramadhan, as people gather to purchase both festive attire and Ramadhan necessities, reflecting the Sultanate of Oman’s deep-rooted traditions and cultural heritage.



Ramadhan and Eid are peak seasons for us, meaning long nights and sometimes even 24-hour operations

ZAHER,
A tailor in Muttrah Souq

THE DEMAND FOR TRADITIONAL CLOTHING—PARTICULARLY TAILORED GARMENTS FOR BOTH MEN AND WOMEN—HAS SOARED

SHORT TAKES



Over 300 participants are attending the MoI course with importance for digital media and techniques

GCC COURSE ON MEDIA MONITORING, TECHNIQUES BEGINS

MUSCAT: Acting in cooperation with the Ministry of Information, the GCC Radio and Television Corporation is organising, in Muscat, a five-day course titled ‘Media Monitoring and Analysis Techniques and Methods’.

The course, which kicked off on Sunday, seeks to provide skill-based empowerment for participants in using advanced monitoring and analysis platforms with the prime objective of improving the environment of media action and institutional decision-making. It targets information personnel operating in the fields of public relations, media and journalism.

The course highlights the importance of digital media, its types and its role in building digital identity of websites. It offers deep insights into monitoring techniques and tools, editing digital content, managing digital websites; and measuring and developing content performance, in addition to practical applications.

More than 300 participants are participating in the course through in-person attendance and video conferencing. — ONA



EFFORTS TO TACKLE DECLINING COCONUT PRODUCTION

SALALAH: The Directorate General of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources in Dhofar Governorate is working tirelessly to address the declining coconut production in Salalah and Taqah. The decline has been monitored by field teams, in cooperation with the Consumer Protection Authority and other agencies.

Eng Muslim bin Salem Rafeet, Acting Director General of the Directorate General of Agricultural Wealth, Fisheries and Water Resources in Dhofar Governorate, highlighted that coconut production has been facing a significant decline over the past decade. Several factors have contributed to this issue, including increased internal transportation of coconuts between governorates, incorrect agricultural practices, and the impact of pests like the coconut fruit mite and the coconut leaf beetle. Furthermore, low productivity during the winter months due to cold weather and the shrinking of agricultural areas due to land use changes have compounded the problem. — ONA

Digital transformation for sustainable growth

MUSCAT: Digital transformation and technological advancements play a key role in realising sustainable development and strengthening the digital economy in the Sultanate of Oman, aligning with the goals of Oman Vision 2040.

Dr Ali bin Amer al Shaithani, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology for Communications and Information Technology, highlighted in a press interview with ONA that digital transformation is central to enhancing government efficiency, improving services and boosting the business environment through advanced technologies such as artificial intelligence, the Internet of Things and blockchain.

Dr Al Shaithani emphasised the development of a comprehensive road map for government digital transformation from 2021 to 2025. The initiative aims to digitise government services, simplify procedures and improve digital governance. Over the past three years, these efforts have successfully digitised more than 1,700 government services and streamlined 2,199 procedures, accelerating transactions and improving user experiences.

The Ministry is also focused on developing digital infrastructure to attract foreign investments and foster the growth of emerging companies. Notable partnerships include collaborations with global giants such as Amazon Web Services (AWS), Google, Bitmain and Yandex,

among others. In addition to artificial intelligence and open data, blockchain and the Internet of Things are key areas the Ministry is investing in to support the digital economy.

Community awareness of digital transformation is a priority for the Ministry, which has launched initiatives like the ‘Governorates Ambassadors for Digital Transformation’ to spread digital culture.

The Ministry is also empowering Omani youth through programmes such as the ‘Makin’ initiative, which aims to build digital capabilities in fields like AI, cybersecurity and IoT. By the end of 2024, over 8,000 individuals will have benefitted from these training programmes, with plans to reach 10,000 by 2025. — ONA



The agenda comprises six key discussion sessions addressing national priorities.

‘Together We Progress’ Forum on Feb 26, 27

MUSCAT: The General-Secretariat of the Council of Ministers has finalised the selection process for citizens registered in the third edition of the ‘Together We Progress’ Forum, set to take place on Wednesday and Thursday, February 26 and 27.

Selected participants have been

notified via text messages, with a request to confirm attendance through the provided link to complete participation procedures.

The forum has garnered significant interest, with over 7,500 citizens registering. The selection process adhered to a structured methodology, ensuring

a balanced representation of governorates, professional sectors, and educational backgrounds. This diversity aims to enrich discussions and foster inclusive dialogue.

The agenda comprises six key discussion sessions addressing national priorities. The opening day features a main session on

the economy and development, followed by an evening session on governorate development.

Day two will explore the future of professions, the retirement system, culture, sports, and youth, culminating in an evening dialogue with CEOs of various government companies. — ONA

Identity ‘Ahl Oman’ to strengthen positioning

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, FEB 9

THE UNIFIED Promotional Identity Unit, in collaboration with the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP), officially launched Oman’s unified promotional identity under the slogan ‘Ahl Oman’ during a grand ceremony on Sunday evening. The event was held under the auspices of Sultan al Habsi, Minister of Finance, and attended by Qais al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, along with a distinguished gathering of ministers, high-ranking officials, esteemed guests, and executives from various government and private sectors.

The promotional identity aims to strengthen Oman’s regional and international positioning by highlighting its economic, tourism, and investment potential. The initiative aligns with Oman’s future vision and its growing role across various sectors. Additionally, the project seeks to enhance collaboration among stakeholders and unify promotional messages to increase Oman’s appeal to investors and tourists while showcasing the authentic values of Omani society.

The initiative marks a



milestone in reinforcing Oman’s national identity and promoting the country as a leading economic, tourism, and investment destination, leveraging its cultural heritage and unique societal values.

Sayyid Faris bin Turki al Said, a member of the technical team for the national identity project, emphasised that the initiative represents a comprehensive vision to enhance Oman’s global image through a unified promotional identity. He explained that the project took 12 months to develop, involving the selection of an international consultancy firm and a local company, working in collaboration with the technical team and Nazdaher.

The development process began with an assessment of the

current landscape, which was followed by workshops to define the central theme that would support national strategies. This was then translated into a comprehensive visual identity with a structured administrative framework, drawing on international best practices to ensure seamless integration between the public and private sectors.

Sayyid Faris emphasised that the project was designed to involve Omani citizens as ambassadors of the identity. The first phase was based on both local and international studies, including feedback from 5,500 respondents outside Oman. It also included keyword analysis of digital platforms and public opinion surveys across different segments of Omani society.

The core concept of the identity revolves around “Connectivity,” reflecting Oman’s deep-rooted traditions and its dynamic economic, environmental, and humanitarian engagements. Key activation strategies include participation in global events and conferences, such as integrating Oman’s national branding with international golf championships and enhancing the country’s presence on the global stage.

Sayyid Faris stressed that media will play a pivotal role in ensuring a unified promotional narrative for Oman globally. The strategy includes enhancing digital presence, developing an integrated online platform for the promotional identity, and introducing an AI-driven system to support both government and private sector institutions. He noted that the performance of the promotional identity will be monitored through digital tracking dashboards and annual research studies to evaluate Oman’s global perception and branding progress. Sayyid Faris emphasised that the promotional identity is not just a slogan but a strategic initiative aimed at elevating Oman’s global standing. He revealed that upcoming projects will include 68 initiatives designed to build a consistent and positive image of Oman on the world stage.

SALE OF VEHICLE / EQUIPMENT

Leading Construction Company in Oman intends to dispose off their used vehicles and equipment in ‘as is where is’ condition. The items identified are presently located at their Barka Khazaen Yard and will be offered for inspection to the public on 12/02/2025, 13/02/2025 and 16/02/2025 between 08:00 am to 12:00 pm and 03:00 pm to 05:00 pm.

Last date for submission of closed tender is 16/02/2025 at 05:00 pm at their Khazaen office.

Interested parties may contact at
Tel: (+968) 26983777 / 26983767
Mobile: (+968) 91354151

WORLD

SHORT TAKES



Displaced Palestinians make their way to the northern parts of the Gaza Strip. — AFP

EGYPT WILL HOST EMERGENCY ARAB SUMMIT

CAIRO: Egypt will host a summit of Arab nations on February 27 to discuss “the latest serious developments” concerning the Palestinian territories, its foreign ministry said in a statement on Sunday. The “emergency Arab summit” comes as Egypt has been rallying regional support against US President Donald Trump’s plan to relocate Palestinians from the Gaza Strip to Egypt and Jordan while establishing US control over the coastal territory. Sunday’s statement said the gathering was called “after extensive consultations by Egypt at the highest levels with Arab countries in recent days, including Palestine, which requested the summit, to address the latest serious developments regarding the Palestinian cause”. That included coordination with Bahrain, which currently chairs the Arab League, the statement said. On Friday, Egyptian Foreign Minister Badr Abdelatty spoke with regional partners to shore up opposition to any forced displacement of Palestinians from their land. Last week, Trump floated the idea of US administration over Gaza, envisioning rebuilding the devastated territory into the “Riviera of the Middle East” after resettling Palestinians elsewhere, namely Egypt and Jordan. — AFP



A military officer stands guard at a polling station during the presidential election in Guayaquil, Ecuador. — AFP

VIOLENCE-HIT ECUADOR CHOOSES NEXT PRESIDENT

QUITO: Some 14 million Ecuadorans began voting under tight security on Sunday, choosing who will lead their violence-wracked Andean nation through its worst crisis in half a century. Sixteen candidates are vying to become president for a four-year term, including hawkish young incumbent Daniel Noboa and his leftist rival Luisa Gonzalez. The campaigns have been dominated by concerns about a moribund economy and cartel turf wars that have transformed Ecuador from one of the safest countries in the world into one of the most dangerous. Heavily armed soldiers stood watch at polling stations across the country as state emergency services cited “grave warnings” of an unspecified “possible attack against democracy” and election officials. On the campaign trail both main candidates were shadowed by a phalanx of special forces and bodyguards, hoping to avoid a repeat of the 2023 election when a leading candidate was assassinated. The former lawmaker will have to dramatically outperform pre-election polls to beat Noboa — the son of a banana billionaire who himself ran for president five times without success. — AFP

ROAD TRAGEDY

Accident in Mexico leaves many dead



A collision involving a bus and a truck left several people dead in southern Mexico, though local authorities have not yet given an official toll. The accident occurred in the town of Escarcega when a bus collided with a truck when it came into its lane. Authorities said nine people were injured and being treated in different hospitals, while local media reported at least 30 killed, showing images of the bus engulfed in flames. — AFP

MALI ARMY VOWS TO PURSUE ‘TERRORISTS’ BEHIND DEADLY CONVOY ATTACK

BAMAKO: Mali’s army vowed to track down the “terrorists” responsible for a deadly attack on a large convoy en route to a gold mine. Soldiers and Wagner mercenaries were escorting a group of mainly foreign civilians to the mine in northern Mali when they were ambushed on Friday by armed assailants, according to local officials. The attackers struck when the convoy of several dozen vehicles was making its way through the village of Kobe in a region where

Al-Qaeda and Islamic State affiliates are known to operate and several attacks have taken place in recent months. “During the fighting, the terrorists deliberately targeted civilian passengers,” the Malian army general staff said, adding that it would “pursue the terrorists responsible”. A local politician who spoke on condition of anonymity put the death toll at “32 civilians and soldiers”. According to the Malian Armed Forces’ statement, 25

civilians were killed, and 13 others, “mostly young, foreign gold miners” were wounded. It said the bodies of 19 attackers were also recovered from the site. Another local official said the civilian victims were mainly foreigners travelling to a mine in Intahaka. Military leaders across the Sahel have pledged to claw back sovereignty over their countries’ natural resources, which they say have been unfairly sold off to foreign operators. — AFP

Israeli forces carry on killing civilians in the WB

THE Palestinian health ministry said Israeli forces in the occupied West Bank shot dead two women on Sunday, including one who was eight months pregnant, with the military claiming it had hit targets in a raid. Israeli forces launched an operation in the Nur Shams refugee camp, on the outskirts of Tulkarem in the northern West Bank, at dawn on Sunday, as part of an ongoing offensive in nearby camps, the military said.

The Palestinian health ministry said 23-year-old Sundus Jamal Muhammad Shalabi was killed in a pre-dawn incident, with her husband Yazan Abu Shola critically injured. The mother-to-be was dead when she arrived at a local hospital, the ministry said. “Medical teams were unable to save the baby’s life due to the (Israeli) occupation preventing the transfer of the injured to the hospital,” it added. Murad Alyan, a member of the popular committee in the Nur Shams camp, said that the couple “were trying to leave the camp before the occupation forces advanced into it. They were shot while they were inside their car.”

The Palestinian foreign ministry condemned what it described as “a crime of execution committed by the occupation forces”, accusing Israeli forces of “deliberately targeting defenceless civilians”. The health ministry later said a second woman, 21-year-old Rahaf Fouad Abdullah al Ashqar was killed in a separate incident in Nur Shams. A source in the camp’s popular committee said she was killed



Smoke billows after an explosion during an Israeli raid in the Nur Shams refugee camp near Tulkarem. — AFP

The Palestinian foreign ministry condemned what it described as “a crime of execution committed by the occupation forces”, accusing Israeli forces of “deliberately targeting defenceless civilians”. Footage showed army bulldozers clearing a path in front of what appeared to be empty buildings in the densely packed camp

and her father wounded when the “Israeli forces used explosives to open the door of their family house”. Footage from Nur Shams showed army bulldozers clearing a path in front of what appeared to be empty buildings in the densely packed camp, which is home to about 13,000 people. The Israeli military earlier said its forces were “expanding the operation in northern Samaria”, using the biblical term for the north of the West Bank, which Israel has occupied since 1967. “The combat team of the Ephraim Brigade began operations in Nur Shams,” the military said in a statement, adding that soldiers had “targeted several fighters and arrested additional individuals in the area”. The Palestinian health ministry has said at least 70 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli fire in the West

Bank this year. Violence there has escalated since the October 2023 outbreak of war in the Gaza Strip, which is separated from the Gaza Strip by Israeli territory. According to the Palestinian health ministry, at least 886 Palestinians including militants have been killed by Israeli forces or settlers in the West Bank since the Gaza war began. At least 32 Israelis, including some soldiers, have been killed in Palestinian attacks or confrontations during Israeli operations in the West Bank over the same period, according to official Israeli figures. Meanwhile, a Hamas official said Israeli troops completed their withdrawal on Sunday from a strategic road cutting through the Gaza Strip, part of a fragile truce deal that Israel said it was implementing. — AFP

DOZENS MISSING IN CHINA LANDSLIDE

SHANGHAI: A landslide in China’s southwestern Sichuan province triggered by heavy rain has killed at least one person. The landslide hit Jinping village in the city of Yibin at around 11:50 am. As of Sunday morning, “one person has been killed and 28 people are missing”, state news agency Xinhua said. More than 900 rescuers are attempting to find the rest of the missing people. “A preliminary study shows this disaster occurred due to the influence of recent prolonged rainfall and geological factors”. President Xi Jinping ordered authorities to do “everything possible to search for missing people, minimise casualties, and properly handle the aftermath”. — AFP



MASS GRAVE

Bodies of migrants recovered in Libya



Libya’s security authorities recovered at least 28 bodies of migrants from a mass grave in the desert in southeast Libya, the country’s attorney general said on Sunday. The bodies were found north of Kufra city while 76 migrants were freed “from forced detention.” “There was a gang whose members deliberately deprived illegal migrants of their freedom, tortured them and subjected them to cruel, humiliating and inhumane treatment,” the attorney general added. — Reuters

FREEZING TEMPERATURES

Iranian schools, offices shut as cold bites



Authorities in Iran ordered schools and offices in at least 10 provinces to close on Sunday to conserve energy amid a severe cold snap and heavy snowfall. Freezing temperatures have gripped the northern half of the country over the past few days, causing a spike in energy consumption. “All government offices and schools are closed on Sunday, and remote learning has been arranged for students,” the state news agency IRNA announced. — AFP

SHORT TAKES



France’s President Emmanuel Macron waves at the Elysee Palace in Paris. — AFP

MACRON USES HIS DEEPPAKE VIDEOS TO PROMOTE AI SUMMIT

PARIS: French President Emmanuel Macron has posted artificial intelligence-generated fake videos that he features in as he promoted a technology summit that opens in Paris today. “Nicely done,” the real Macron, who sported a suit and tie, said in the video. “It’s pretty well done, it made me laugh,” Macron added, referring to the videos created over the years and featured in his Instagram post. “More seriously, with artificial intelligence, we can do some very big things: change healthcare, energy, life in our society”, the 47-year-old president said. “France and Europe must be at the heart of this revolution to seize every opportunity and also to promote our principles,” he added. On Monday and Tuesday, Macron will host the AI Action Summit in Paris, gathering heads of state and government. India will co-chair the event. The clip ends with one of the most famous parodies in which Macron is depicted as US television action hero MacGyver, known for his looks and resourcefulness.”There, that’s definitely me,” quipped Macron. — AFP

TSUNAMI WARNING CANCELED



A Tsunami warning was canceled in the Caribbean Sea after the region’s most powerful earthquake in four years struck in the sea north of Honduras on Saturday. The US Geological Survey (USGS) reported the quake’s magnitude as 7.6, while the German Research Center for Geosciences reported a 7.5 magnitude, both at a depth of 10 km. The US Tsunami Warning System had initially forecast waves of up to 3 meters for Cuba and between 0.3 and 1 meter for Honduras and the Cayman Islands but later said the threat had passed. — Reuters

BALTIC STATES ‘SUCCESSFULLY’ LINK WITH EUROPEAN POWER GRID

BRUSSELS: Lithuanian President Gitanas Nauseda on Sunday announced that the three Baltic states had “successfully” joined the European power grid after severing ties with the Russian network. Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania have been working on making the change since Russia attacked Ukraine in 2022. The small Baltic countries fear that they too could be targeted. The staunch Ukraine supporters are also worried that Russia would blackmail them using electricity

supplies. “Moments ago, I received great news. The synchronisation of the Baltic states’ electricity system with the continental European system has been successfully completed,” Nauseda told reporters in Vilnius. “This is a historic moment marking the end of a long journey ... We have achieved full energy independence. The period of political pressure and blackmail is finally over,” he said. He spoke alongside his Estonian and Latvian counterparts as well as European

Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and Poland’s president. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen on Sunday said ending Baltic power links to Russia marked “freedom from threats and blackmail” as Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania joined the EU power grid. “Today we connect the Baltic states to the continental European electricity grid. We’re cutting the last remaining links with Russia. Freedom from threats and blackmail, at last. — AFP

Trump speaks to Putin about ending the war

US President Donald Trump said he has spoken to Russian President Vladimir Putin by phone about ending the war in Ukraine, the New York Post reported, the first known direct conversation between Putin and a US president since early 2022. Trump, who has promised to end the war in Ukraine but not yet set out in public how he would do so, said last week that the war was a bloodbath and that his team had had “some very good talks”. In an interview aboard Air Force One on Friday Trump told the New York Post that he had “better not say,” when asked how many times he and Putin had spoken. “He (Putin) wants to see people stop dying,” Trump told the New York Post. The White House did not respond to a request for comment outside normal business hours. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told the TASS state news agency that “many different communications are emerging”. “These communications are conducted through different channels,” Peskov said when asked by TASS to comment directly on the New York Post report. “I personally may not know something, be unaware of something. Therefore, in this case, I can neither confirm nor deny it.” The conflict in eastern Ukraine began in 2014 after a pro-Russian president was toppled in Ukraine’s Maidan Revolution and Russia annexed Crimea, with Russian-backed forces fighting Ukraine’s armed forces. Putin sent thousands of troops into Ukraine in 2022, calling it a “special military operation” to protect Russian speakers in Ukraine and counter what he said was a grave threat to Russia from potential Ukrainian membership of Nato. Ukraine and its Western backers, led by the United States, said the invasion was an imperial style land grab and vowed to defeat Russian forces. Moscow controls a chunk of Ukraine about the size of the American state of Virginia and is advancing at the fastest pace since the early days of the 2022 attack. Trump, author of the 1987 book “Trump: the Art of the Deal”, has repeatedly said he wants to end the war and that he will meet Putin to discuss it, though the date or venue



People carry out repair works in the courtyard of a damaged multi-storey residential building following recent shelling, in Makiivka, a Russian controlled region of Ukraine. — Reuters

for a summit is still not publicly known. Journalists reported in November that Putin is open to discussing a Ukraine peace deal with Trump but rules out making any major territorial concessions and insists Kyiv abandon ambitions to join Nato. The Kremlin has repeatedly urged caution over speculation about contacts with the Trump team over a possible peace deal. Leonid Slutsky, head of the Russian parliament’s international affairs committee, was cited by the state RIA news agency as saying that preparations for such a meeting were at “an advanced stage” and that it could take place in February or March. Putin last spoke to former US President Joe Biden in February 2022, shortly before Putin ordered thousands of troops into Ukraine.

The two leaders spoke for about an hour then, the Kremlin said. Asked if that were true in an interview to Bloomberg last year, Trump said: “If I did, it’s a smart thing.” The Kremlin denied Woodward’s report. On Friday, Trump said he would probably meet Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy next week to discuss ending the war. Trump told the New York Post that he has “always had a good relationship with Putin” and that he has a concrete plan to end the war. But he did not disclose further details. “I hope it’s fast,” Trump said. “Everyday people are dying. This war is so bad in Ukraine. I want to end this damn thing.” — AFP

Kosovo heads to election clouded by tensions with Serbia

PRISTINA: Polls opened in Kosovo on Sunday after a combative election campaign in which opposition candidates clashed with Prime Minister Albin Kurti over the economy, corruption and relations with the country’s old foe and neighbour Serbia. Kurti, a leftist and Albanian nationalist, came to power in the small Balkan country in 2021 when a coalition run by his Vetevendosje party received more than 50 per cent of votes and secured a seven-seat majority in the 120-seat parliament. Political analysts say his popularity has been bolstered by moves to extend government control in Kosovo’s ethnic Serb-majority north. But critics say he has failed to deliver on education and health, and his policies have distanced Kosovo from its traditional allies, the European Union and the United States. “It is a new day. I thank all the citizens who have already cast their vote and I encourage every citizen

to vote,” Kurti said after casting his ballot. The EU placed economic curbs on the country in 2023 for its role in stoking tensions with ethnic Serbs, cutting at least 150 million euros (\$155 million) in funding, Reuters has found. A drop below 50 per cent of the votes for Kurti’s party could prompt coalition talks after the election. Opposition parties include the centre-right Democratic League of Kosovo which has campaigned on restoring relations with the United States and the EU, and joining NATO; and the Democratic Party of Kosovo, also centre-right, founded by former guerrilla fighters of the Kosovo Liberation Army. “I am optimistic. It was long campaign,” said Bedri Hamza, Democratic Party of Kosovo candidate for prime minister. Kosovo, Europe’s newest country, gained independence from Serbia in 2008 with backing from the United



Kosovo’s prime minister Albin Kurti speaks to the media after voting during the parliamentary elections in Pristina. — Reuters

States after a 78-day Nato bombing campaign against Serbian forces in 1999. Kurti says his policies in the north, which include reducing the autonomy of Serbs living in Kosovo, are helping to bring ethnic Serbs and Albanians together under one system of government. But his rhetoric worries centrist politicians.

“When you have a bad neighbour, then you have to keep your morale high and your rifle full,” he said in a campaign speech near the Serbian border this week. Kurti’s government has overseen some gains. Unemployment has shrunk from 30 per cent to around 10 per cent, the minimum wage is up and last year the economy grew faster than the Western Balkans average. “It has never been better for us than right now (with this government). I hope there will be more of such a good days,” said Kumrije Prekaj, 44, who voted in Pristina. The election campaign has been acrimonious. The Elections Complaints and Appeals Panel, which monitors party and candidates’ complaints, has issued more than 650,000 euros in fines to parties this election season, three times the 2021 tally, data from NGO Democracy in Action show. — Reuters

OPINION

AI can merge creativity with efficiency



SANDHYA
RAO MEHTA

The writer is
Associate Professor,
Sultan Qaboos
University

WHILE conventional wisdom is that the rapid growth of Artificial Intelligence (AI) platforms will stifle creative industries, studies are showing that it is not such a simple equation. If anything, AI is facilitating creativity and offering opportunities to everybody. The caveat is, as always, that it has to be used in the right way. AI is now being used across all creative industries including fashion, architecture, interior design, physical design of products as well as graphic design. Generative AI is pitched at becoming a \$1.3 trillion industry by 2030, according to Bloomberg. What happened to the initial fear of AI taking away jobs in creative industries? So far, these fears seem to be mislaid. In fact, there are many examples that explore the fusion between AI and creative arts. The Harvard Business Review, for example, says that “Generative AI tools can solve an important challenge faced in idea contests: combining or merging a large number of ideas to produce much stronger ones”. What they mean is, for example, that there

may be many ideas for a particular design, but using AI unifies the divergent ideas to create new designs at a faster pace. Their example of a T-shirt designer who could experiment with multiple versions before finalising on a final product within a single day testifies to the way that creativity and efficiency can merge. Another angle proposed by the HBR is to leverage Large Language Models to generate business ideas by linking seemingly unconnected nouns to create new entrepreneurial paths. The example given by them is to insert the words ‘airline’ and ‘chair’ with ‘university’ to an AI platform. ChatGPT then provided a business idea of creating a seamless educational experience for teachers to travel for conferences, even suggesting the name ‘edu-fly’. The job of AI in this case is to provide suggestions whose implementation and feasibility are then taken up by human initiative. Such a procedure leads to challenging established ideas and push the limits of human thought and innovation. A simple noun given to an AI platform could provide many pictures in an image

The benefits of using AI in generating ideas and following through the entire process from conception to final production are immense

generator but their uses are then left for the designers to develop. An important and time saving contribution of generative AI tools for creative designers is to provide quick feedback. Depending on the prompt, these tools can provide information on feasibility, novelty, cost efficiency and competition, making it easier to adapt a product to a local market. Such uses also encourage collaboration between designers and consumers. By sharing ideas on public platforms, there are increased opportunities to get feedback in real time and tweak the designs even before they go into production, thus saving immense amount of capital. The benefits of using AI in generating ideas and following through the entire process from conception to final production are immense. But as with all technology, there are issues and challenges. These include issues of copyright and ownership. Ultimately, humans are going to continue to be responsible for the products they bring to the market or share with their clients. Education on the responsible use of emerging AI tools is imperative in this context.

AIRBUS, BOEING
EYE INDIA’S
‘SOARING SKIES’

JULIE FRAYSSE

Air traffic is booming in India, even though only a tiny fraction of its people fly each year and manufacturers are seeking lucrative deals at the flagship Aero India exhibition from Monday. The International Air Transport Association (IATA) will also hold its annual general meeting in June in New Delhi, the capital of the world’s fifth-largest economy, another clear sign of India’s market punch. The sustained growth of its economy and middle class have made India and its 1.4 billion people the third-largest air market in the world, after the US and China. “India is the rising star of global aerospace,” said Remi Maillard, Airbus India and South Asia chief. “It is the fastest-growing commercial aviation market in the world — and it will remain so for the next 20 years.” Airbus rival Boeing, which will also take part in the five-day Aero India show in Bengaluru for global aero vendors organised by the defence ministry, is equally enthusiastic. “It’s the most dynamic market on the planet — and certainly the most exciting,” Boeing India head Salil Gupta said. India’s civil aviation ministry boasts of “soaring skies” in a sector “experiencing a meteoric rise”. That growth should lead to an increase in traffic in South Asia, mainly in India, of more than seven per cent per year until 2043, according to Boeing’s forecasts. “Per capita air travel remains low in India at a mere 0.12, compared to 0.46 in China”, Maillard said, calling it a “telling comment on the potential of the Indian aviation market”. Railways remain hugely popular but travelling by trains crisscrossing a country about three-quarters the area of the European Union is often slow and chaotic. Boeing estimates that it would take around two per cent of the 18 million daily train users — compared with 430,000 air passengers — to switch to flying for the air market to double. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has made the development of the air sector a priority since coming to power in 2014. Modi, who has said he wants to “bring air travel to the common people”, began a plan in 2016 to boost air links between small towns and the country’s megacities. “A common man who travels in slippers should also be seen in the aircraft — this is my dream,” Modi was quoted as saying by the aviation ministry. The number of airports has more than doubled in the past decade — from 74 in 2014 to 157 in 2024, according to ministry figures. The government is pouring in millions of dollars and is promising to increase the numbers to between 350 and 400 by 2047, the centenary of India’s independence. — AFP

A diary of devastation,
and a new tomorrow

I had been waiting for nearly 16 months to get back to Gaza City. As a journalist, I had been in southern Gaza covering the bombing, when the occupation army had cut off the road between the north and south of Gaza on the 13th day of the war. The waiting would finally come to an end on the seventh day of the Hamas-Israel ceasefire and prisoner exchange agreement when Israel allowed the displaced people to return to the north on foot via the coastal Rashid Street. Vehicles were allowed to head only northward through Salah al Din Street after inspection. After Israel’s delays and procrastination, and the intervention of Egyptian and Qatari mediators, the Israeli leadership decided to proceed with implementing the terms of the agreement and open the road on January 27. At midnight, Israel announced its approval. I contacted friends and colleagues to arrange what we would do in the morning. I don’t mean returning to my home, but our news coverage. We left early that day, around 6:30 am. We headed to the western Gaza Valley Bridge on the sea road, not knowing what would await us. A human stream in front of us; children, women, the elderly and young people, entire families carrying their belongings and walking over the narrow bridge to Gaza City and the northern part of the Strip. The area around us was virtually completely destroyed by the Israeli military’s ground operations and the relentless aerial bombardment. I was overwhelmed. I wanted to stop working and join the returnees in sharing the experience of heading home. I stood on a high sand hill next to the Gaza Valley Bridge, and took some pictures and videos. I had back tears, and tried hard to focus on work, but the destruction I was seeing continued to occupy my thinking. I worked for four hours,



Devastation in Gaza City on Friday, February 7. — The New York Times

interviewing other Gazans along the same journey. We turned out to be wise to have chosen to travel by foot, after seeing the long lines of vehicles extending on Salah al Din Street for more than five kilometers. Egyptian and American security firms were supervising the inspection of all vehicles. We had chosen to go by foot on the road parallel to the beach. Night fell as we were still walking. There was no lighting, and many families lost their relatives. We began to hear the voices of people shouting: “Hind, where are you, Hind”, “Mahmoud”, “Hussien”. Thousands of people are still walking, turning on the flashlight of their phones to help them navigate the road, as the shouting for the lost people continued. With three friends and colleagues, we finally arrived at the edge of Gaza City. We couldn’t believe the destruction we saw, even if we had seen so many photographs. It’s all so much different through your own eyes. Here is the café where my friends and I used to spend the evenings. Here is my relatives’ summer house on the beach, and

there is a tourist resort for other relatives that I loved to visit. Then there are rows of residential buildings and towers that were inhabited by so many acquaintances and relatives. All of it is now nothing — nothing but completely destroyed concrete blocks. Destruction as far as the eye can see. Still, somehow it was a mix of feelings: joy for finally returning home, and sadness for what we saw. I stopped many times on the road, recalling all the Gazans I’ve known who have been killed while trying to flee the bombing, dozens of young men who tried to return and were killed by Israeli forces, their bodies were thrown on the road side. And yes, we saw skeletons on our way back. Once inside the city, I wanted to go to my house. I had learned a month before the ceasefire that it had been destroyed by Israeli shelling. I did not want to see the destruction at night, prepared to examine every stone in it during the day. So we spent the night at my friend’s house that had somehow survived the rockets and shells.



SALEM
AL RAYYES

The writer is
a Palestinian
journalist based in
the Gaza Strip

Evaluating quality, but valuing quantity



ABDULAZIZ
AL JAHDHAMI

The writer is an author, translator and communications professional

QUALITY is a concern for everyone in everything we care about: products, properties, services, and other aspects of our daily business interactions. It holds significant value for all of us, but are we paying enough attention to quality when it comes to our work or what others do for us? Let us take a moment to reflect on how seriously and adequately we approach our work. Are we managing tasks the way they should be handled? Are we serving customers or clients in a way that would satisfy us if we were in their shoes?

People need to realise the importance of self-responsibility and honesty in their actions. At work, for example, it is not just about making a living from what employees do, but about doing it professionally and conscientiously. Clear standards of quality should always be set for employees to follow while carrying out their duties. Without such standards, tasks might be completed simply to finish them, without regard for quality or sufficiency.

Employees are the core factor for running a successful business where quality comes as a priority and customers are valued. If quality assurance is important to employers, a performance evaluation system must be implemented to monitor employees' productivity and proficiency. As the previous year has been wrapped up, some of you may be preparing for the year-end performance evaluation season, if you haven't completed it already. Conducting performance evaluations is crucial to your organisation's ability to address

both business and individual challenges.

To ensure objectivity in the evaluation process, employees should be involved in setting their own objectives at the beginning for year and when preparing for the year-end performance review. Mutual understanding and trust between managers and employees are essential to create a healthy and motivating work environment.

A positive working atmosphere fosters trust and dedication between employees and their employers, motivating employees to bring their best quality and expertise to their work. Regular evaluations are valuable as they help all employees identify their strengths and weaknesses, regardless of their performance levels.

This practice plays a significant role in creating a workforce that is engaged, productive, and loyal. Research shows that employees have three primary needs: interesting work, recognition for doing a good job, and being informed about what is happening around them.

Though evaluation systems may vary between the government and private sectors, they all serve the same purposes of measuring business success, employee performance, and identifying areas for improvement. Typically, employees are assessed twice a year through mid-year and year-end evaluations. Based on their performance, employees are rated and rewarded accordingly.

Evaluating employees' performance is vital to ensuring the quality of their work and output. It helps distinguish hard workers

Employees are the core factor for running a successful business where quality comes as a priority and customers are valued. If quality assurance is important to employers, a performance evaluation system must be implemented to monitor employees' productivity and proficiency

and rewards them for their dedication and excellence. Recognising outstanding contributions and performance reflects an employee's value to the team, department, and organisation overall. That is why feedback from evaluations can motivate employees by acknowledging their achievements and providing constructive feedback, which fosters a sense of value and encourages engagement.

While quality is of utmost importance, a balanced evaluation approach combines both qualitative and quantitative measures. Relying only on numbers can overlook essential aspects such as creativity, teamwork, and problem-solving skills. On the other hand, focusing only on qualitative feedback may miss concrete achievements and impact metrics.

Employees who understand how their individual contributions contribute to the success and growth of the organisation are more likely to feel invested in their work. Being consistently rewarded for good performance motivates employees not only to maintain their standards but to continuously improve. Performance evaluations highlight growth opportunities, helping employees advance in their careers through training, mentoring, and promotions.

While rewards and compensation are important, the objectives of performance evaluations should also include feedback that helps employees grow and develop in their roles. Constructive evaluations offer opportunities for learning, development, and alignment with organisational goals, ultimately leading to better overall performance.

US AID HALT HITS GLOBAL EFFORTS TO RELIEVE HUNGER

JAIMI DOWDELL AND LENA MASRI

The Trump administration's effort to slash and reshape American foreign aid is crippling the intricate global system that aims to prevent and respond to famine.

Struggling to manage hunger crises sweeping the developing world even before US President Donald Trump returned to the White House, the international famine monitoring and relief system has suffered multiple blows from a sudden cessation of US foreign aid.

The spending freeze, which Trump ordered upon taking office January 20, is supposed to last 90 days while his administration reviews all foreign-aid programmes. Secretary of State Marco Rubio has said an exception allows emergency food assistance to continue.

But much of that emergency aid is at least temporarily halted as humanitarian organisations seek clarity about what relief programmes are allowed to continue. Compounding the problem is Trump's move last week to shut the US government's top relief provider, the US Agency for International Development (USAID).

About 500,000 metric tonnes of food worth \$340 million is in limbo, in transit or storage, as humanitarian organisations wait for US State Department approval to distribute it, said Marcia Wong, a former senior USAID official who has been briefed on the situation.

US-provided cash assistance intended to help people buy food and other necessities in Sudan and Gaza also has been halted, aid workers said. So has funding for volunteer-run community kitchens, an American-supported effort in Sudan to help feed people in areas inaccessible to traditional aid, these people said. Humanitarian organisations have hit roadblocks in getting paid for emergency food operations. Questions about what programmes have permission to continue have gone unanswered, because the people who normally field such inquiries - officials at USAID - have been placed on leave, at least six sources said.

The Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET), the US entity that produced regular food security alerts meant to prevent famine, also has been shut down. Its loss leaves aid organisations without a key source of guidance on where and how to deploy humanitarian relief.

And the US government issued stop-work orders to two major manufacturers of nutritional supplements, diminishing the supply of life-saving food for severely malnourished children around the world. "We are the one thing that nearly everyone agrees on - that little children who are starving and need emergency aid need help," said Mark Moore, chief executive officer of Mana Nutrition of Georgia, one of the two suppliers ordered to stop producing supplements. — Reuters

‘America First’ in action

DONALD Trump has wasted no time clarifying what “America First” – the dominant idea driving his election campaign – means in practice. So far, it means a 90-day freeze on most foreign aid spending, as well as the withdrawal of the United States from the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Paris climate agreement.

The ostensible purpose of the foreign aid freeze is to review the efficacy of US programmes. I am a strong advocate for getting the best value for every dollar available to assist people in poverty. I founded The Life You Can Save to promote that idea and enable individual donors to find the most cost-effective charities combating extreme poverty.

But reviewing aid programmes takes time and expertise. It is not possible to conduct an adequate review of all the aid programmes that the US funds in three months, and to freeze spending while waiting for the review to be completed is an irresponsible way to manage aid that is often life-saving.

The freeze has already disrupted programmes that prevent deaths from Aids, tuberculosis, and malaria in many poor countries. Thousands of healthcare and aid workers have been placed on leave without pay. Many will have to find other work to support themselves, so even if programs survive the review and funds are restored, their expertise may be lost.

Ongoing clinical trials have had to stop, which means that months or even years of work have been wasted. An administration that had any real concern for the well-being of those assisted by US aid would have left funding in place, pending the outcomes of the reviews.

It is not as if there was an urgent need to cut official US foreign aid for fiscal reasons. When Americans are asked what proportion of US government spending goes to foreign aid, the average answer is 25 per cent, and when asked what they think an appropriate level would be, they say 10 per cent. The truth is that official foreign aid amounts to only around 1 per cent of the US budget.



The freeze has already disrupted programmes that prevent deaths from Aids, tuberculosis, and malaria in many poor countries.



PETER
SINGER

The writer is Emeritus Professor of Bioethics at Princeton University and Visiting Professor at the Centre for Biomedical Ethics at the National University of Singapore, is co-host of the podcast Lives Well Lived, Co-founder of the charity The Life You Can Save

The United Nations' target for wealthy countries' official foreign-aid spending is 0.7 per cent of gross national income (GNI), or 70 cents of every \$100 that the country earns. In 2023, the most recent year for which data are available, only Norway, Luxembourg, Sweden, Germany, and Denmark surpassed that figure. The US gave only 0.24 per cent of its GNI in official aid, below several less affluent countries, including the United Kingdom, Japan, and Poland.

Likewise, withdrawing from the WHO will save very little money. The WHO's annual expenditure is roughly half that of the health department of the US state of Rhode Island, which has a population of 1.1 million, and US contributions amount to only 15 per cent of the WHO budget.

The US withdrawal will significantly reduce international cooperation on health issues, and will deprive US health authorities of information about disease prevalence abroad, which could mean that Americans are less informed about risks when they travel. But pharmaceutical companies outside the US may benefit, because withdrawal will remove America's voice from

discussions within the WHO on evidence and quality standards for new drugs – a voice that American pharmaceutical companies have previously used to give themselves a competitive edge over international rivals.

Of all the decisions made by Trump thus far, the most catastrophic are likely to be those related to climate change, including pushing for more oil and gas production (even allowing this to override the Endangered Species Act); removing tax credits for electric vehicles; and, above all, withdrawal from the Paris agreement. US per capita greenhouse-gas emissions are 50 per cent higher than China's, and almost seven times those of India. Those countries' leaders will now be able to argue that there is no reason why their own, less affluent, economies should forego fossil fuels if the US is not going to be bound by the targets it accepted in Paris and at subsequent international climate conferences. Other, smaller countries will then say that their emissions are insignificant compared to those of the US, China, and India. Why should they do what the world's largest emitters are not doing?

©Project Syndicate, 2025

SPORTS

SHORTTAKES



NIZWA AND AHLI SIDAB REACH MOCSY BASKETBALL SEMIFINALS

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, FEB 9

NIZWA and Ahli Sidab secured their spots in the semifinals of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth (MoCSY) Basketball Shield Championship for the 2024-2025 season. Nizwa dominated Salalah with a score of 118-60, while Ahli Sidab triumphed over Al Nasr 70-38 in the matches hosted at the secondary hall of Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher.

Nizwa overpowers Salalah with a sweeping victory

Nizwa entered their match against Salalah with strength, imposing full control over the game’s proceedings. They dominated all four quarters, sealing the match with a massive win. Leading Nizwa’s offensive charge were Mohammed al Anqoudi, Saif al Toubi, Abdulrahman al Sanani, Adam al Hinai and Musab al Wahaiibi. On the other hand, Mishaal Kafkaf and Moheeb al Balushi stood out as Salalah’s key scorers. The first quarter saw Nizwa make a strong start, scoring 34 points against Salalah’s 13, signalling their intent to claim victory. In the second quarter, Nizwa continued their dominance, adding 35 points while Salalah managed 18, ending the first half with a comfortable lead of 69-31. The third quarter followed the same pattern, with Nizwa maintaining offensive pressure, scoring 22 points compared to Salalah’s 14, extending the lead to 91-45. In the final quarter, Nizwa kept up their commanding performance, netting 27 points while Salalah managed 15, sealing the match with an overwhelming score of 118-60.

The match was officiated by international referee Rashid al Mushaifri as the first referee, international referee Ahmed al Khasibi as the second referee and Ali al Salmani as the third referee. The scorer’s table was managed by Munira al Numani, Mousa al Siyabi and Juma al Hinai.

Ahli Sidab secures a semifinal spot with a solid performance against Al Nasr

In the second match, Ahli Sidab booked their place in the semifinals with a 70-38 victory over Al Nasr, dominating all four quarters. Leading the charge for Ahli Sidab were Hamyar al Hassani, Suhail al Busaidy and Sami al Ghailani, while Basim al Musallami and Abdulaziz al Balushi were the key scorers for Al Nasr.

The match began evenly in the first quarter, with Ahli Sidab securing a narrow one-point lead of 18-17. However, they extended their advantage in the second quarter, scoring 14 points against Al Nasr’s 9, finishing the first half ahead 32-26.

Ahli Sidab showcased clear superiority in the third quarter, excelling both defensively and offensively, conceding only 3 points while scoring 17, further stretching their lead to 49-29. They maintained their dominance in the final quarter, adding 21 points against Al Nasr’s 9, cementing their victory with a commanding 70-38 scoreline.

The match was officiated by international referee Issam al Siyabi as the first referee, Mazin al Hilali as the second referee and Taha al Ameri as the third referee. The scorer’s table was managed by Omaima al Hajri, Mahmoud al Ajmi and Fatima al Harthy.

VERVAEKE PUNCHES TO STAGE 2 VICTORY



ANUROOP ATHIPARAMBATH
@anuroop_ath

LOUIS VERVAEKE of Soudal Quick-Step grabbed his maiden professional win as the Belgian rider punched ahead with a timing of four hours 45 minutes and six seconds in the 203 km second stage of Tour of Oman on Sunday.

Vervaeke triumphed atop the Yitti Hills to claim the red jersey for the overall leader, beating his teammate Valentin Paret-Peintre (+ 2”) and Sean Flynn (+2”) of Picnic PostNL.

Germans Felix Engelhardt of Team Jayco AlUla and Marco Brenner of Tudor completed the top five with 30 riders making a last-gasp finish behind the top three in 04:45:08.

The stage, longest of the Tour of Oman, began at the scenic Al Rustaq Fort. The five riders in the early breakaway

pushed their advantage to five minutes at the foot of Bausher-Al Amerat, where the going got tough. Louis Vervaeke (Soudal Quick-Step) and Mikel Azparren (Q36.5 Pro Cycling Team) managed to bridge the gap near the halfway point. The Belgian and the Spaniard soon upped the pace with Magnus Kulset (Uno-X Mobility) in tow.

Although the new three-man lead group still enjoyed a five-minute buffer going into the last 30 km, it melted to just over a minute with 10 km to go, when Vervaeke went for broke. The 31-year-old puncheur grabbed his first professional win, crossing the finish line with just two seconds to spare over the peloton in a crash-marred finale.

CHAOS AT FINISH

The Belgian rider rode clear of his three-man breakaway in the final 10 km — attacking over the Al Jissah climb ahead of an undulating final 10 km in the race.

Attacks came from the main group,

including a major move by David Gaudu (Groupama-FDJ) to bridge the narrow gap to the Belgian solo rider, but the moves were brought back within the final 5 km, when the bunch began to aggressively chip into Vervaeke’s one-minute lead.

However, despite an animated chase, the peloton was left only metres behind the Belgian on the finish line in Yitti Hills, as crosswinds and chaos in the sprint saw multiple riders crash in the final 300m.

Vervaeke continued his punch, two seconds ahead of his teammate Valentin Paret-Peintre, who sprinted to second past Flynn.

The stage win delivered Vervaeke into the overall race lead, ahead of Paret-Peintre in second place at a gap of 6 seconds and Flynn in third at a margin of 8 seconds.

On Monday, the cyclists will tackle a mountainous 180.8 km route from Fanja to the Eastern Mountain in the third stage of Tour of Oman.

SHORTTAKES



Spain's Alcaraz celebrates after winning semi-final. — Reuters

ALCARAZ SETS UP ROTTERDAM FINAL AGAINST DE MINAUR

ROTTERDAM, Netherlands: Carlos Alcaraz scrapped his way into the final of the Rotterdam Open on Saturday with a hard-fought and entertaining three-set win over Hubert Hurkacz. Superior court coverage and retrieving from the Spanish world number three overcame stubborn resistance from the Pole for a 6-4, 6-7 (5/7), 6-3 win to set up a clash with Australia's Alex de Minaur in Sunday's final.

"It was a very tight first set. I think he had chances to make it 6-0 so I just tried to fight every ball, every point," said Alcaraz.

"I just tried to stay in there, keep fighting all the time and it paid off," he added.

Alcaraz got off to a slow start, broken to love in his very first service game and allowing Hurkacz to race into a 3-0 lead in the first set.

He faced another break point in his next service game but saved it with a glorious crosscourt forehand and managed to hold onto serve.

Alcaraz survived another three break points and then fought his way back into the match with a break of his own, seizing the game with a forehand smash after a lengthy rally.

The momentum shifted in the Spaniard's favour and a double-fault from Hurkacz gave the top seed the opportunity to serve out the set.

Again Hurkacz had the opportunity to break, but Alcaraz held firm and sealed the set with a forehand drive volley winner.

After the topsy-turvy first set, the second proceeded more conventionally, on serve until the tie-break.

The tie-break was also nip and tuck, both players squandering chances to seize the advantage.

But a double-fault from Alcaraz at 5-4 up gave Hurkacz an opportunity, and the Pole needed no second invitation, taking the set as the Spaniard netted a simple backhand groundstroke.

The decisive set started the same way as the first, with an early break of serve -- this time to Alcaraz who brought the crowd to its feet. — AFP



Australia's Alex De Minaur. — AFP

Al Amri finishes top, Al Rawahi claims 3rd place



Al Rawahi at stage in the Qatar International Rally.

RALLY champion Abdullah al Rawahi recorded a successful return to the podium in the Middle East Rally Championship in its second round, finishing third in the Qatar International Rally.

Meanwhile, rally driver Zakaria al Amri secured victory in the Merc 2 class (Group N). Abdullah al Zubair was unfortunate this time, withdrawing on the second day after leading the Merc 2 class on the first day and the morning stages of the second day due to gearbox issues.

Drivers competing in the Qatar International Rally, the second round of the Middle East Rally Championship, faced challenging stages, with frequent tyre punctures caused by the terrain and the presence of small rocks. Omani drivers Al Rawahi, Al Zubair and Al Amri all suffered from these difficulties during the first and second days.

At the end of the race, Nasser al Attiyah secured the rally title after intense competition with Finnish racer Mads Ostberg, Omani Abdullah al Rawahi and Qatari Abdulaziz al Kuwari. Abdullah al Rawahi was a strong contender among the front-runners, recording the second-fastest times in several stages behind Al Attiyah or Ostberg.

He initially finished fourth behind Al Kuwari, but the championship organising committee imposed an additional time penalty on Al Kuwari, ensuring Al Rawahi



Al Zubair in action



Zakaria in stage

earned a well-deserved third place after his distinguished performance.

Meanwhile, Zakaria al Amri, alongside his well-known navigator, Mohammed al Mazroui, secured the lead in the Merc 2 category after finishing first in his class

and tenth overall.

With this victory, Al Amri remains at the top of the championship standings heading into the next round in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Abdullah al Zubair and his co-driver, Taha Soomar, demonstrated strong race pace on the first day, leading the Merc 2 category. He continued to perform well on the second day, particularly in the morning stages, but a sudden mechanical failure in the gearbox forced him to withdraw.

He said, "We had a clear strategy, and on the first day, we topped the category. However, we faced a gearbox problem in the second period of the second day, leaving us no choice but to withdraw from the rally. I want to congratulate my colleague Zakaria al Amri for topping the category."

Champion Abdullah al Rawahi expressed his happiness at securing third place and returning to the podium for the second consecutive year in the Qatar Rally. He explained that the race was challenging due to the intensity of competition, the difficult stages and the frequent tyre punctures.

However, he was pleased with his result, thanked everyone for their support, and looked forward to competing in the Saudi Rally. Zakaria al Amri also expressed his joy at leading the category, stating that he will continue to approach the championship with the same determination.

Mbappe secures Real Madrid derby draw against Atletico

MADRID: Kylian Mbappe secured Real Madrid a 1-1 draw against rivals Atletico Madrid which kept Los Blancos top of La Liga on Saturday.

Julian Alvarez dinked home a controversial first half penalty for Atletico but Mbappe was in the right place at the right time to bundle home early in the second half on his first appearance in the tense derby clash.

Reigning champions Real Madrid lead second-place Atletico by a single point, with Barcelona, third, given the chance to cut the gap on the top two when they face Sevilla on Sunday.

Atletico shaded a close first half but were left holding on in the second period as the hosts stepped up a gear at the Santiago Bernabeu.

"The team is disappointed because they think they deserved more... but we're happy because we're still leaders," Real Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti told reporters.

"In the second half we had total control, we had a lot of chances."

Ancelotti opted to deploy his four key attacking players in Mbappe, Vinicius Junior, Jude Bellingham and Rodrygo Goes, in lieu of a more conservative approach.

The star names got stuck in, not always a given in a defensive sense, and the first half was a hard-fought, intense battle with few clear openings for either side.

Atletico were upset when Real Madrid midfielder Dani Ceballos was only booked for an ugly challenge on Pablo Barrios, but it



Real Madrid's Mbappe celebrates with Vinicius after first goal. — Reuters

was the hosts who were left raging when referee Cesar Soto Grado pointed to the penalty spot.

Aurelien Tchouameni, covering at centre-back for Madrid with Antonio Rudiger and Eder Militao out among others, clumsily trod on Samuel Lino's foot in the box.

After a VAR review Soto Grado awarded a controversial penalty to Madrid's frustration, with the incident happening after the ball had run past the duo.

Los Blancos attacked Spanish refereeing earlier in the week after they were upset by a decision in a shock defeat last weekend, bringing heavy scrutiny on the officials ahead of the derby.

Alvarez took the penalty, the first given against Madrid in La Liga this

season, and cheekily executed a Panenka down the middle.

"I can't say I wasn't a bit nervous (with the penalty), but I was sure, I knew what I would do, and it was a great goal for the team," Alvarez told Movistar.

"Corruption in the federation," chanted Real Madrid fans in response to falling behind, buying into their club's stance.

Ancelotti refused to talk about the refereeing but appeared exasperated on the sideline as Soto Grado pointed to the spot.

Madrid battle back

Madrid pulled level early in the second half when Rodrygo broke loose on the right of the box and crossed for Bellingham.

Reviving Architecture Initiative

20–22 February 2025
Oman Across Ages Museum



What if this is the start of your architectural journey?

Discover the answer in the Reviving Architecture initiative
More details on the website
bha.om





MUSCAT
STOCK
EXCHANGE
4,550.636

BUSINESS



Ladies
Account



Empowering you
more than ever!



Dhofar.islamic

 Dhofar_islamic

 2477 5777

 [www.dhofarislamicbank.com](#)





Key agreements signed to support Industry 4.0, automation in Oman

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, FEB 9

THE Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP), celebrated Omani Industry Day, February 9, under the auspices of HH Sayyid Dr Fahd bin Al Julanda al Said, Vice-Chancellor of Sultan Qaboos University in Muscat.

The event, themed “Oman at the Heart of Global Supply Chains”, was attended by the Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, along with several dignitaries and business leaders from the industrial sector.

The celebration included the signing of three Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs).

The first of which was signed with the Singapore International Centre for Industrial Transformation to facilitate Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) technologies (Industry 4.0) adoption in factories in Oman.

The second was signed with the Gulf Organisation for

The event, themed “Oman at the Heart of Global Supply Chains”, was attended by the Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, along with several dignitaries and business leaders from the industrial sector.

Industrial Consulting (GOIC) to provide consultancy services to establish the recently inaugurated Advanced Automation Centre, which aims to enhance industrial capabilities and improve production efficiency.

And the third was with the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (Unido) to establish a strategic partnership to support Oman's Industrial Strategy 2040.

The Ministry also launched several services and initiatives during the event. Including the launch of the National Product

“The industrial sector is a fundamental pillar for achieving comprehensive development in the Sultanate of Oman, serving as a key axis that integrates with other economic sectors and intersects harmoniously to drive growth and progress forward.

Identity Certificate Service within the “Made in Oman” platform.

And the Certified Evaluators Qualification Programme which aims to train evaluators to assess factories’ readiness for digital transformation.

In addition to the Professional Certification Verification Programme, which aims to serve as

a reliable platform to verify academic and professional documents.

And the Industrial Sector Enablers Guide, which will act as an identifying guide for opportunities within the sector.

Earlier, in his keynote address, Dr Saleh bin Said Masan, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion for Commerce and Industry, highlighted the significance of the industrial sector in Oman.

“The industrial sector is a fundamental pillar for achieving comprehensive development in the Sultanate of Oman, serving as a key axis that integrates with other economic sectors and intersects harmoniously to drive growth and progress forward.

According to the latest data issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information, the output of the manufacturing sector increased by 8.5 per cent to reach RO 2.686 billion by the end of September 2024 at constant prices, compared to the same period in 2023.

Non-oil exports amounted to RO 5.642 billion November 2024.”

Dr Masan further added: “The Global Competitive Industrial Performance Report, issued by the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO), ranks Oman third in the Arab world and 53rd globally, reflecting the acceleration of industrial competitiveness in

recent years.

Additionally, agreements have been signed for 100 new industrial projects with a total investment of approximately RO 1.5 billion across renewable energy industries, food and medical industries, air-conditioning equipment manufacturing, construction materials, metals and plastics.

These investments are spread across various industrial, economic and free zones; and are expected to increase in the coming period through further development and stimulation of the industrial sector.

This will enhance its contribution to the gross domestic product (GDP), solidifying Oman's global position as a key manufacturing hub.”

The Under-Secretary also highlighted the significant role supply chains play in the sector, stating, “The stability of supply chains in the industrial sector is one of the fundamental pillars for ensuring the continuity of production processes and achieving operational efficiency.

This requires meticulous planning and effective coordination among all stakeholders, from suppliers to end customers.

It also involves the ability to anticipate and manage risks effectively, such as demand fluctuations, price volatility and global crises that may affect the flow of raw materials.”

VISIT THE DESIGN SHOW



11th Interior Design Furnishing Expo

APPROVED BY 

TITLE SPONSOR 

10.11.12 FEBRUARY 2025

Oman Convention & Exhibition Centre

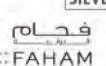
HALL 3,4,5 11 AM - 9 PM

SCAN THE QR CODE TO REGISTER 

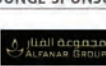
COLOR SPONSOR 

INNOVATIVE SPONSOR 

DIAMOND SPONSORS 

SILVER SPONSORS 

ART SPACE SPONSOR 

LOUNGE SPONSOR 

MEDIA PARTNER 

ORGANIZED BY 

 /idfoman

 @idfoman

 @alnimrevents

 alnimrexpo

 #idfoman

Development Bank finances 1,318 projects

MUSCAT: Oman's industrial sector received a major boost in 2024, with the Development Bank financing 1,318 industrial projects across the country with loans totalling RO 91.2 million.

The initiative aligns with the government's push for economic diversification, self-sufficiency and increased local manufacturing capacity.

The industrial sector accounted for 18 per cent of the bank's total financing, with 7,398 loans granted across multiple sectors, amounting to RO 235 million. These loans supported industries such as food production, petroleum products, pharmaceuticals and manufacturing, reinforcing Oman's commitment to strengthening its industrial base.

“The Development Bank plays a vital role in empowering local industries, supporting SMEs and driving innovation,” a bank official stated. “Our focus is on sustainable financing that enhances economic value and supports national priorities.”

According to the bank's latest data, its funding facilitated the establishment of 14 food security projects, four foreign direct investment ventures and 13 self-sufficiency initiatives.

Additionally, nine projects received funding to boost Omani exports. The financed projects created 1,330 job opportunities, with an Omanisation rate of 43 per cent.

Al Batinah North and South Governorates emerged as the top recipients of industrial loans, securing 369 loans worth RO 45.8 million, followed by Muscat Governorate with 156 loans amounting to RO 22.6 million.

The Al Sharqiyah North and South Governorates received 313 loans valued at RO 6.9 million.

This aligns with the government's push for diversification, self-sufficiency and increased local manufacturing capacity.

The food products industry received the highest funding, exceeding RO 12 million across 259 loans. The petroleum products sector followed with RO 11.7 million in funding, while mineral and metal product manufacturers secured RO 11.3 million.

The pharmaceutical sector also received RO 11 million in financing, supporting the growth of Oman's medical production capabilities.

The bank's efforts align with Oman Vision 2040, which prioritises economic diversification and industrial growth. “By providing targeted financing, we are not only strengthening local industries but also attracting foreign investments and enhancing Oman's global competitiveness,” the official added.

With continued support for manufacturing, SMEs and large enterprises, the Development Bank remains a key driver of industrial expansion, contributing to Oman's long-term economic sustainability. — ONA

ADVERTORIALS

LOVECELEBRATION



The resort promises an unforgettable celebration of love.

ENCHANTING ROMANCE AWAITS THIS VALENTINE’S DAY AT THE ST REGIS AL MOUJ MUSCAT

MUSCAT: This Valentine’s Day, The St Regis Al Mouj Muscat Resort invites couples to immerse themselves in a realm of elegance and intimacy, featuring thoughtfully curated experiences designed to create unforgettable moments together. With exclusive offerings ranging from private suite getaways to enchanting beachside dinners, the resort promises an unforgettable celebration of love.

The ultimate romantic escape awaits at the Pearl Suite, where breathtaking views and a sophisticated ambiance set the stage for an intimate one-day romantic retreat. As the sun sets, couples will be treated to a private balcony dinner, with every detail, from the gourmet menu to the candlelit setting, meticulously curated for an intimate evening under the stars.

Zorba invites guests to embrace a one-of-a-kind beachfront transformation creating a sanctuary of love and serenity, which presents two captivating options. The Valentine’s Day Beachside Cabana Dinner provides a dreamy setting with soft lantern glow, live entertainment and a curated menu for two in an idyllic secluded beach location.

Alternatively, guests can savor a specially crafted Valentine’s Set Menu Dinner at Zorba, where exquisite flavors and an enchanting beachfront atmosphere come together to create a truly magical dining experience.

Couples can immerse themselves in a journey of relaxation and connection at the renowned Guerlain Spa with a serene Valentine’s experience. Indulge in a 90-minute rejuvenating couple’s massage followed by a 30-minute romantic bath ritual designed to relax and refresh the senses.

For those seeking an elevated offering, the Guerlain Spa has collaborated with Novikov Café to offer a seamless blend of wellness and culinary delight.

After the soothing treatments, couples can enjoy a sharing-style set menu paired with a refreshing beverage of their choice at Novikov Café. Available throughout February, this combination promises to rejuvenate the body and soul while creating cherished memories.

The resort’s acclaimed dining venues also offer exceptional culinary delights for Valentine’s Day. At Roberto’s, couples can indulge in an elegant five-course set menu crafted for love, while COYA offers a vibrant dining atmosphere infused with Peruvian flair through its specially curated set menu.

Novikov Café provides both lunch and dinner options throughout February, offering couples the perfect opportunity to celebrate their love in an atmosphere that suits their preference.

At Hakkasan, romance unfolds with two exquisite dining journeys. Discover the art of Cantonese cuisine with a specially crafted Valentine’s Day Set Menu, a symphony of flavors designed to delight. Alternatively, explore the depths of Hakkasan’s renowned à la carte menu, where innovative dishes meet timeless tradition, all set against the restaurant’s opulent and immersive environment.

OMAN POST AND AL MADINA TAKAFUL SIGN AGREEMENT

MUSCAT: Oman Post, the national postal operator and Al Madina Insurance Company (Al Madina Takaful) signed an agreement to enhance service accessibility by offering Al Madina Takaful’s insurance services through the Oman Post’s website.

The agreement was signed by Shaikh Ibrahim bin Sultan al Hosni, Acting CEO of Oman Post and Shakaib Mahmood, Deputy Chief Executive Officer of Al Madina Insurance Company, at Oman Post



headquarters.

This strategic agreement facilitates customer access to a comprehensive suite of insurance products, encompassing both personal and corporate through

Oman Post’s website.

The initiative is aligned with the government’s overarching vision of modernising service delivery through the expansion of electronic service offerings.

Commenting on the agreement, Sayyid Nasr bin Badr al Busaidy, Postmaster at Oman Post said: “Oman Post is committed to expanding its portfolio of services offered to customers through various channels in order to meet diverse needs.”

Enjoy luxury experiences in Lincoln Navigator

DISCOVER

a realm where sophistication meets innovation — the Lincoln Navigator, a masterstroke of design and engineering tailored for discerning families who seek more than just a drive. It is a statement of elegance, comfort and extraordinary experiences, redefining what it means to journey in a luxury SUV.

The Lincoln Navigator captivates with its imposing presence and meticulous craftsmanship. Its adaptive pixel projector LED headlamps, complete with predictive curve illumination and sign-based lighting, ensure unparalleled visibility in any condition.



It is a statement of elegance, comfort and extraordinary experiences, redefining what it means to journey in a luxury SUV.

The Lincoln Navigator captivates with its imposing presence and meticulous craftsmanship. Its adaptive pixel projector LED headlamps, complete with predictive curve illumination and sign-based lighting, ensure unparalleled visibility in any condition.

SelectShift paddle activation, ensuring smooth, responsive handling. Whether navigating urban landscapes or exploring rugged terrains, the Navigator offers a driving experience that is both thrilling and refined — a true testament to its engineering prowess.

Step inside the Lincoln Navigator and immerse yourself in an oasis of tranquillity and advanced technology. The plush seating, designed with meticulous attention to detail, includes first-row passenger seat memory and a versatile third-row PowerFold 60/40

split bench with power recline. Ambient LED lighting and enhanced active noise control create a serene environment, while wireless charging adds a layer of modern convenience.

The 12-inch configurable LCD instrument cluster and head-up display provide intuitive access to essential driving information. The standard SYNC 4 system integrates audio, navigation and communication controls seamlessly through a user-friendly touchscreen or steering wheel-mounted controls. For an unparalleled auditory journey, the available Revel Ultima 3D audio system, with 28 strategically positioned speakers, envelops passengers in concert-quality sound.

Safety is paramount in the Lincoln Navigator, with cutting-edge technologies designed to protect you and your loved ones. Adaptive cruise control with stop-and-go, lane centering assist, blind-spot information with cross-traffic alert and evasive steering assist provide peace of mind on every journey. Additional features like auto high beams, pre-collision assist and trailer coverage enhance confidence, whether embarking on a cross-country adventure or navigating city streets.

BANK MUSCAT TO RECEIVE GREEN SPORTS APPLICATIONS UNTIL FEB 15

MUSCAT: Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, is still accepting submissions from local sports teams for the 14th edition of its landmark CSR programme “Green Sports” until February 15, 2025.

Teams can complete the application form electronically through: <https://www.bankmuscat.com/greensports/>. In case of any queries or doubts on the submission process, teams may email GreenSports@bankmuscat.com, or call 24801200/24801625 for more details. The scope of Green Sports support for sports teams include greening of football fields with natural



The Bank has encouraged all interested teams to commence the process at the earliest and ensure that applications are submitted well ahead of the deadline.

or synthetic turf, floodlights or water desalination equipment in areas facing problems of water salinity. The Bank has encouraged all interested teams to commence the process at

the earliest and ensure that applications are submitted well ahead of the deadline. Local sports teams play a vital role in engaging young people of all ages. The landmark Green

Sports Programme is one of Bank Muscat’s CSR initiatives, which draws from the values of leadership and partnership so as to create a positive impact on Omani society. The programme aims to develop and provide a sustainable infrastructure for sports fields in Oman.

The facilities developed as part of the programme are often used as a venue for other social activities by local communities, leading to stronger social bonding and positive behaviour among young people. It is a matter of great encouragement that Bank Muscat’s Green Sports programme has so far benefitted 203 teams with over 70,000 team members across the Sultanate of Oman since its launch in 2012.

Secure the next generation’s future with Dhofar Islamic’s minor savings account

MUSCAT: Dhofar Islamic’s Minor Savings Account is designed to help the next generation achieve financial stability through a comprehensive set of benefits that provide a strong foundation for a secure financial future. The initiative underscores Dhofar Islamic’s commitment to raising financial literacy awareness among young people and fostering responsible money management from an early age. “The Minor Savings Account provides young

people with the tools and resources they need to make informed financial decisions, helping them achieve their goals and dreams and ultimately enabling them to attain financial independence,” said Amer bin Said Mohammed al Amri, DGM & Head of Retail Banking at Dhofar Islamic.

A fully Sharia-compliant solution based on Mudarabah principles, the Minor Savings Account is specifically tailored to meet the financial needs of minors aged between 13 and 18



years. It offers a safe and accessible platform for young individuals to manage their funds while learning key principles of financial responsibility.

With no minimum balance requirement and competitive profit payments calculated on the monthly average balance, the account ensures steady financial growth for young savers.

Additionally, it provides flexibility in adjusting withdrawal limits upon

the request of the father or legal guardian, along with a customised debit card to facilitate secure transactions.

Beyond financial security, the Minor Savings Account also aligns with the social protection programme, ensuring eligible minors receive monthly financial assistance. The role of the father or legal guardian is integral, allowing them to actively participate in their child’s financial journey.

BUSINESS

NEWCOMMITMENT



The weeklong workshop seeks to highlight the Chamber’s ongoing efforts to enhance the business environment and drive economic growth.

OCCI WORKSHOP
UNDERScores
DRIVE TO IMPROVE
BUSINESS
ENVIRONMENT

FAISAL AL AJMI
MUSCAT, FEB 9

The Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), in cooperation with the Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit, hosted a workshop on Sunday, February 9, 2025, highlighting their commitment to improving the business environment and promoting sustainable economic growth. OCCI Chairman Shaikh Faisal bin Abdullah al Rawas, joined by other senior officials, attended the launch at Mövenpick Hotel Muscat.

The weeklong Strategic Development Workshop brings together 20 government and private entities to support OCCI’s strategic goals in line with Oman Vision 2040. It focuses on improving the business environment, fostering provincial economic partnerships and expanding economic diversification, aiming to establish clear frameworks for OCCI’s development strategy through targeted initiatives.

Zakariya bin Abdullah al Saadi, CEO of OCCI, highlighted the Chamber’s commitment to strengthening national sector strategies through over 120 days of collaboration with more than 180 employees. This effort shaped priorities to enhance the business environment, promote provincial partnerships, and diversify the economy. Al Saadi also emphasised the strategic partnership with the Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit, which enhances OCCI’s efficiency by integrating ideas from specialists and stakeholders to achieve goals of excellence and innovation.

The workshop aims to develop actionable programmes and initiatives that will enable the private sector to play a leading role in driving economic growth. Al Saadi reiterated that the Chamber looks forward to the outcomes contributing to the development of strategies that will significantly impact Oman’s economic future.

Khalfan bin Suleiman al Bahri, Director of the Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit, said the workshop is part of a strategy to improve the Chamber’s role in the private sector. After three months of preparation, it brings together experts and private sector representatives to exchange ideas and explore solutions, enhancing support for entrepreneurs and investors.

One of the workshop’s key focuses is strengthening cooperation between different economic sectors and institutions, both public and private. Al Bahri pointed out that through the exchange of knowledge and practices, effective policies and mechanisms can be developed to support businesses and enable sustainable growth.

Said bin Hamad al Shamsi, Head of the Economic Diversification Expansion Pillar, reiterated the Chamber’s focus on enhancing economic diversification as a core pillar of financial sustainability. He stated that through the workshop, the Chamber aims to create initiatives that promote investment opportunities in Oman and maximise the benefits of trade delegations and exhibitions at both local and international levels.

CEO TALK

Driven by a passion to
deliver value to customers

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, FEB 9

STRONG leadership is about inspiring teams, fostering innovation and driving sustainable growth, says Shadli Thabit Zahran al Abdul Salam, CEO of Friendi Mobile Oman. In an exclusive interview with the Observer, he shared insights on his leadership journey, the challenges he has navigated and his ambitious vision for the company’s digital transformation.

“As a leader, my role is to cultivate an environment where innovation thrives and employees feel empowered,” Al Abdul Salam said. “Leadership is not just about decision-making; it’s about building strong teams and creating a culture of continuous learning.”

A JOURNEY FUELLED BY PASSION AND DETERMINATION Al Abdul Salam’s path to leadership began in sales before he transitioned into product management, gaining hands-on experience in the telecom industry.

His rise to CEO was driven by a passion for delivering value to customers and businesses alike.

“My career has been shaped by the belief that leadership is about more than just strategy — it’s about resilience, adaptability and inspiring



“My career has been shaped by the belief that leadership is about more than just strategy — it’s about resilience, adaptability and inspiring those around you. Each role I took on prepared me for the complexities of leading an organisation.”

SHADLI THABIT
ZAHRAN
AL ABDUL
SALAM
CEO of Friendi
Mobile Oman

those around you,” he said. “Each role I took on prepared me for the complexities of leading an organisation.”

OVERCOMING CHALLENGES THROUGH STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP Under his leadership, Friendi Mobile Oman has navigated significant transitions, including a successful migration to a new wholesale partnership, record-breaking customer retention rates and an expansion of digital services. These milestones reflect the company’s ability to evolve in a competitive market.

“The telecom industry is dynamic and adaptability is key,” Al Abdul Salam explained. “Our ability to embrace change and leverage new opportunities has been crucial to our success.”

One of his biggest challenges was managing regulatory complexities during a major operational shift.

He emphasised that transparent communication, strategic planning and teamwork were instrumental in overcoming these hurdles.

“Regulatory compliance is challenging, but with the right mindset and collaboration, obstacles become opportunities to strengthen our business,” he noted.

TURNING A CRISIS INTO A SUCCESS STORY Al Abdul Salam’s proudest

achievement as CEO was leading Friendi Mobile Oman through a difficult period of intense market challenges and successfully turning the company around.

“We faced significant headwinds, but instead of retreating, we adjusted our strategy and focused on execution,” he said. “That experience reinforced my belief that resilience and strategic alignment are the foundations of long-term success.”

A VISION FOR THE FUTURE Looking ahead, Al Abdul Salam envisions Friendi Mobile Oman evolving into a fully digital operator, integrating telecom with fintech and other digital services. He believes the future of the industry will be shaped by innovation, sustainability and collaboration across sectors.

“Our goal is to create a seamless digital ecosystem where customers can access telecom, financial services and more,” he said. “With the support of Beyond One, our group company, we are committed to leading this transformation.”

For aspiring leaders, his advice is simple: “Stay curious, embrace challenges and always lead with integrity. Success is about more than reaching goals — it’s about how you achieve them. Build strong, diverse teams, foster a culture of learning and keep the customer at the heart of every decision.”

FIRST BATCH OF OMANI EV BRAND MAYS CARS SET FOR DISTRIBUTION

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, FEB 9

OMANI electric car maker Mays EV has announced that its plans to shortly distribute the first batch of indigenously produced electric cars to institutional customers in the Sultanate of Oman.

Haider Adnan al Zaabi, founder of Mays Motors, said in a post that the maiden deliveries will coincide with the launch of Mays Motors’ exclusive showroom in Muscat, planned within the next three weeks.

“The moment we worked hard for, the dream we chased, becomes a reality today — this is a proud moment for Mays Oman and all those who believed in us,” Al Zaabi stated in the post. Retail prices of the Omani EV



HAIDER ADNAN
AL ZAABI
Founder of Mays
Motors

brand, which comes with a remarkable 615 km range per single charge, have been revised to bring the vehicle within the reach of a wider segment of motorists, he said.

Per these new prices, retail customers can own this homegrown automotive icon

for around RO 12,000, while institutional customers are charged RO 11,000 per unit.

Furthermore, in keeping with the company’s commitment to offering motorists an international class brand, the

Mays EV car has been equipped with CALB lithium batteries, as well as engines from Bosch.

Additionally, the new model leverages AI technology to provide drivers with an enhanced motoring experience, he said, adding that the company plans to prepare the brand for the global market with funding of \$1.5 million provided by a Shanghai-based investor.

Mays derives its name from the legendary Omani horse named Maysoor that is understood to have enjoyed an unbeaten record on the racetrack.

The brand is expected to benefit from the Omani government’s drive to support the adoption of electric and non-fossil fuel powered cars in line with its national energy transition strategy.

FSA DE-REGISTERS
THREE AUDIT
FIRMS

MUSCAT: The Financial Services Authority’s Professional Decisions Committee has issued decisions to de-register three audit firms — Al Hamadani Accounts Auditing and Consultants; Al Hamadani Golden Accounts Auditing and Consultants; and Al Bayan Auditing and Reviewing — while also warning a fourth firm, Adhwaa Al Batinah Accounts Auditing, for various regulatory breaches. “The decisions were issued because the firms

violated the provisions of the applicable legislations in the accounting and audit profession as it was established the firms failed to carry out actual audit as well as failing to maintain evidence and working papers of the audit process and failure on the part of the licensee to sign audit reports issued by the firm and non-compliance with international auditing standards. The move came after comprehensive and accurate review by regulatory teams of the works of the firms,” the Authority said.

Oman-India economic ties strengthened through investment dialogue

NEW DELHI: A high-level delegation from the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) visited India to enhance economic cooperation and explore investment opportunities between the Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of India. Led by Eng Ahmed bin Hassan al Dheeb, Deputy Chairman of the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones, the delegation engaged with key Indian industries and

institutions to foster bilateral trade and knowledge exchange. During their visit, the delegation toured major industrial hubs, including Jindal Iron and Steel Group’s facilities in Angul, where they observed advanced steel production processes.

They also visited OP Jindal International University to explore academic programmes, research centres and industry collaborations that could support Oman’s human



Led by Eng Ahmed bin Hassan al Dheeb, Deputy Chairman of OPAZ, the delegation engaged with key Indian industries and institutions to foster bilateral trade and knowledge exchange.

capital development. As part of the visit, OPAZ co-organised a business forum with the Embassy of Oman in India, coinciding with the 70th anniversary of diplomatic relations between the two nations. The event attracted more than 80 Indian companies from sectors such as pharmaceuticals, food, medical products and energy.

Speaking at the forum, Al Dheeb emphasised India’s strategic role as a key investment partner for

Oman. “Special economic zones and free zones are critical in driving investment and strengthening economic ties between our nations,” he stated. “This visit is an opportunity to showcase Oman’s investment potential and attract new business partnerships.”

The Omani delegation presented investment opportunities across OPAZ-managed zones, highlighting incentives available to foreign investors. — ONA

OPINION

AI’s civil war will force investors to pick sides



FELIX MARTIN

The writer is an economist, fund manager and author.

IN their satirical history of the United Kingdom, “1066 And All That”, the authors W C Sellar and R J Yeatman cast the English civil war of the 17th century as a conflict between the “Wrong but Romantic” Cavaliers and the “Right but Revolting” Roundheads. The aftermath of the release last month of Chinese startup DeepSeek’s R1 artificial intelligence model, which matches or outperforms existing offerings from US technology titans at a fraction of the cost, has exposed a similar divide among the world’s leading innovators in the field of machine learning.

On one side are those who strive for artificial general intelligence (AGI), the point where machines match or surpass human capabilities. Let’s call them AI Cavaliers. Facing them are AI Roundheads who are focused on the more mundane goal of solving specific problems as efficiently as possible. Deciding which side to back in this AI civil war will be a defining decision for investors in the world’s hottest technology.

The AI revolution that has gripped global stock markets for the past two years is driven by three epochal trends. The first is the generation of vast volumes of machine-readable data by the digitisation of almost every aspect of daily life.

The second is the collapse in cost of

computing power prompted by ever more efficient chips. The third is a dramatic improvement in machine learning algorithms — the software that computers use to extract the signal from the noise in data sets. Together these developments have sparked a step-change in the accuracy of predictive modelling.

Every technologist agrees that this revolution is a momentous shift for the world. Where they diverge is on the question of where it can be most valuably applied. DeepSeek’s dramatic intervention has thrown the differences between two visions for AI into stark relief.

The AI Cavaliers have a romantic vision of what the new machine learning algorithms can achieve. They see it as the royal road to the creation of thinking machines empowered with AGI. Their champions are well-known chatbots such as OpenAI’s ChatGPT and Anthropic’s Claude.

Their weapon of choice is the large language model (LLM), which uses AI’s prodigious powers of pattern recognition to predict the next word in a string of text, with mind-bogglingly coherent results. The data they aspire to crunch is no less than the totality of human knowledge — or at least, everything that can be scraped from the internet.

The AI revolution that has gripped global stock markets for the past two years is driven by three epochal trends. The first is the generation of vast volumes of machine-readable data by the digitisation of almost every aspect of daily life.

Their appetite for computing power is therefore similarly vast. Indeed, in principle, it’s limitless.

This intoxicating vision is the stuff of science fiction. So it’s no surprise that the launch of ChatGPT’s original iteration in November 2022 seized the public imagination and ignited a stock market boom. Yet it is haunted by three big questions.

The first is the fiercely disputed technical conundrum of whether LLMs can achieve AGI. The second is the commercial dilemma over whether the models have any enduring competitive advantage. Finally, there is the great financial unknown of how much capital spending these ventures will require in the form of semiconductors, data centres and energy.

The release of DeepSeek’s model amplified all these doubts. Shares in Nvidia, the leading AI chip producer, dropped 17% in a day, wiping out a record of \$600 billion of market value. Energy companies whose stocks had risen on forecasts of galloping electricity demand for AI training also took a hit. In the fortnight since, shares in both Microsoft and Google owner Alphabet sank following trading updates which cast doubt on their vast investments in computing capex. Put bluntly, DeepSeek has cast doubt on the return on investment in AGI. — Reuters

NEW ITALY BANK M&A MAY YET BE MORE THAN A SIDESHOW

Another day, another chunky Italian bank merger. On the face of it, Thursday’s decision by \$9 billion BPER to lob in a \$4.5 billion all-share bid, for domestic peer Banca Popolare di Sondrio (BPSO) merely represents the latest iteration of a wider saga in which other deals — like UniCredit’s \$10 billion euro swoop for Banco BPM and Banca Monte dei Paschi di Siena’s (MPS) 13 billion euro pitch for Mediobanca — are more eye-catching. Yet BPER Chief Executive Gianni Franco Papa’s gambit also inserts him in the conversation should these other deals unravel.

The three Italian bank M&A situations share certain characteristics. UniCredit boss Andrea Orcel gave BPM shareholders only a 0.5% premium and MPS offered a 5% uplift. Now BPER is proposing a mere 6.6% bump to its target’s investors relative to its share price on Wednesday. The flipside in each case is the chance to share in the chunky synergies you’d expect in a domestic merger. BPER’s 190 million euros of cost savings should be worth 1.3 billion euros taxed and capitalised and Jefferies analysts see the targeted level as conservative.

The deals have another thing in common: minority shareholders in the acquirers don’t seem to like them. UniCredit shares fell after Orcel announced his pitch for BPM in November.

MPS shares are off so much since the unveiling of its deal last month that Mediobanca’s small premium has now reversed to a tangible discount. Meanwhile, BPER shares fell 8% on Friday morning.

BPER investors’ gripes may be because the bank trades on a lower multiple than BPSO. But strategically, the tie-up makes more sense than combining MPS with Mediobanca. It lets BPER expand in BPSO’s northern Italian market and become Italy’s third biggest lender.

As things stand, the most likely scenario is that all these deals go through. The presence of big investors like Francesco Gaetano Caltagirone on both Mediobanca and MPS share registers, plus the apparent support of the Italian government, may be enough. The same goes for BPM, where Orcel could sweeten his bid with cash. BPER and BPSO will probably follow suit assuming Italian insurer Unipol, which has about 20% of each, gives the nod.

That said, Papa’s decision to expand now may yet have a second benefit. If Mediobanca investors find a way to stop the deal happening, or if Orcel is too busy trying to buy Commerzbank, MPS or BPM might come loose. A newly enlarged BPER might be well placed to bulk up further. — Reuters

Trade war 2.0: How USA tariffs upend global trade

THE Trump administration has issued three Executive Orders (EOs) that have ushered substantial tariffs on Mexico, Canada and China. The order states that effective February 4, 2025, the US will impose a 25% tariff generally on all imports from Mexico and Canada, a 10% tariff on energy resources from Canada and a 10% tariff on all imports from China.

The White House claims these tariff impositions are justified on national security concerns of illegal immigration, drug trafficking and economic dependence on foreign supply chains. The use of the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA) is rare. The closest it was used was in 1971 during Nixon’s presidency, in response to a monetary crisis and now, the Trump administration has resorted to the unprecedented use of IEEPA.

How members of Congress will meet this is yet to be seen. The Trump administration also plans to impose tariffs on steel, aluminium and copper from EU and European oil and liquefied natural gas.

The US government has also indicated that tariffs will be imposed on semiconductors, pharmaceuticals and medical supplies to reduce reliance on foreign supply chains and boost domestic production.

The significant shift in US trade policy will inject turbulence into the global economic landscape, trigger immediate repercussions within the United States and strain diplomatic relationships with key trading partners.

Canada, Mexico, China and the EU have stated that they will implement retaliatory tariffs on US goods, expressing their intent to protect and defend their economic interests. Canadian President Justin Trudeau has introduced a 25% retaliatory tariff on US goods worth \$155 billion, especially targeting goods like fruits, alcohol, furniture and clothing. President Claudia Sheinbaum of Mexico has imposed retaliatory tariffs on specific US goods.

China may also escalate the issue to the World Trade Organization (WTO). It has also stated that



Shipping containers are unloaded from ships at a container terminal at the Port of Long Beach-Port in Los Angeles, California. — Reuters

countermeasures will be taken in response.

The taxes imposed on Canadian energy products; and Mexican and Chinese goods will increase costs for US consumers and business people; some economists predict the tariffs could reduce US GDP growth by up to 1.5% points in 2025.

Hike-up prices, fuel inflation and stagflation could trigger a combination of slower economic growth and rising inflation. Automobile manufacturing, agriculture and energy sectors are particularly vulnerable as they rely heavily on cross-border supply chains.

The cost of parts imported from China and Mexico will increase for automobile manufacturers and the farmers will struggle with reduced export opportunities due to retaliatory tariffs from other countries.

Under the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA), tariffs on goods from member countries are generally prohibited as the agreement establishes a free trade zone with zero tariffs on most goods. The Trump administration has invoked the essential security exception. Article 32.2 of the USMCA allows them to take necessary action to protect themselves for security reasons.

The imposition of tariffs raises

questions on legal and diplomatic issues related to the provisions of USMCA. The three countries have deep integrated economies and supply chains worth an estimated \$2 billion of manufactured goods crossing the borders daily.

The imposition of tariffs, irrespective of the USMCA agreement, creates increased trade tensions in North America, threatening North American economic integration and disrupting cross-border supply chains.

The latest developments show that tariffs on Mexico are postponed for a month as President Claudia Sheinbaum of Mexico has promised to deploy 10,000 troops to curb migration and drug trafficking. The tariffs on China and Canada will be effective from the February 4, 2025. Fears of stagflation and supply chain disruptions underpin the Trump administration’s actions.

The retaliatory measures of Canada, Mexico and China could begin the Domino effect of disruptions and spiral into a global economic slowdown. The US protectionist tariffs will shift global trade alliances and strengthen regional agreements. Whether the US strategy will alleviate or exacerbate existing challenges for the USA and its trading partners remains to be seen.



DR MYTHILI KOLLURU

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

CLASSIFIEDS

ALL SEASON AYURVEDA CLINIC
The most efficient and authentic Ayurvedic Treatment & Medicine, Panchakarma, Yoga, Kalari, Massage Dhara etc.... Rehabilitation, Marma Therapy & Post Delivery Care
Zaher Building, 1st Floor, Flat 8A, Al Khuwair Service Road, Near Al Zawawi Mosque & Burger-King
Tel: 24475280, GSM: 95371664, 92504980, Website: www.siddhayur.com

Auditors & Accountants
• Audit & Accounting • CFO Services • Secondment
• VAT & Tax Return Filing • VAT Refund Assistance
Contact: 92182750 • Email: contact@umpauditors.com

OMAN OBSERVER
www.omanobserver.om

PEST CONTROL OMAN CO. L.L.C.
Supply of Pesticides, Gel (crocoraches), Public Health chemicals, Agriculture chemicals, Snake repellent, Rodent baits and other insect repellent from UK & USA

PROFESSIONALS in Pest Control Service, Bedbug Treatment, Rodent Treatment, Snake Treatment and Termite Treatment [Pre & Post Construction]
Tel: 24787606, 24787503
Direct Line: 24786077
GSM: 99382355, 99172309
pcomctom@omantel.net.om
P.O. Box 565, Al Wadi Al Kabir 117, Sultanate of Oman

HOTEL FOR RENT/SALE
PRIME LOCATION IN QURUM HEIGHTS
LUXURY HOTEL

CONTACT NOS:
99643760 / 92192020

7 STORIED BUILDING WITH 44 SUITES, BREAKFAST AREA RESTAURANT & OTHER FACILITIES.

Driving School
Special offers for those wishing to learn driving in (Aziba - Khwair Qurum - Ruwi Al Amirat)
Contact No: 99074072

WJ Towell Group Company
Quality car rentals at competitive prices.
Muscat 9014 6672, 9679 0684
Sohar 9731 6218 Salalah 9429 9325
www.orbit-oman.com

- Fleet of 2,000 vehicles
- Choose from a wide range of brands & models
- PDO, OXY and BP spec vehicles available
- Attractive rates for short-term & long-term lease

SIT. WANTED

Seeking a new Job / Logistics & supply chain professional with 10-plus years experienced in Export & Import of Sea, Land & Air transport modes (Email: nouchimp1986@gmail.com, Mob: 79820286)

B. COM. 35 years of experience in accounts, sales coordinator, admin, HR, personal assistant, document controller with Oman D/L, looking for a job.
Contact: 92558734

Indian male MBA , 20 years experience in Oman & GCC in Project sales/ Dealer market in All construction materials including Cables & Accessories having D/L looking for the post of Sales Manager/Assistant Manager.
Contact : 00968 78099493

ACCOUNTANT with overs 6 years of experience Detail-Oriented Financial Professional: Expert in Accounting, Audit Prep and Expense Management.
Contact: +968 78320801, Ready to join immediately.

Finance Manager, CA,CPA,20 years experience (Oman& India). Financial reporting, Budgeting, Taxation, Financial modelling, Feasibility, Valuation. Available to join immediately.
92148608

ACCOUNTS/ Finance: Indian male (MBA Fin) having more than 19 years of experience in Oman accounts & finance looking for suitable placement, NOC available and can join immediately.
Contact: 92076716

ACCOUNTANT with 5 years expertise in Accounts Payable, Receivables, Financial Reporting, VAT, Payroll, and Bank & Cash Reconciliation. Actively looking for new opportunities.
Contact: 79791746
Email: Ibrahimsaw52@gmail.com

INDIAN Female, M-Tech in Environmental Engineering, B-Tech in Civil Engineering. 7 years of Teaching experience as Asst. Professor, 2 years of professional experience in civil construction and soil investigation. Seeking suitable job, now in Muscat.
Contact: 95136664, 79620397
Email: mayakrish.1804@gmail.com

SENIOR accountant - Indian male above 11 years' experience (9years in Oman) NOC & D/L available.
Contact: 78109909.
Email: shinsjohn@gmail.com

Indian Male, Storekeeper / Document Controller 2+ yrs of experience in GCC, Completed BCA, ready to join immediately. Email: swamierzhasouth@gmail.com
GSM: +968 71818173

A SUDANESE resident in Salalah, BSc of administrative sciences with 21 years of experience in the fields of (sales/ management/ logistics and fleet).
Contact: +968 98510880.

Indian male (Mechanical Engineering) with 3 years experience in Diesel engine works (Gensets/ Engines), 2 years in Machine Maintenance, seeks job.
Contact: 78022420

SRI LANKAN Male — (CGMA ACMA+ CPA+BBA) Asst. Finance Manager/ Chief Accountant, 12+ Experience in Oman & GCC, Expert in Finan. Reporting (MIS), VAT, Audit, Cashflow, Budget, AR AP Recon, IFRS, Payroll, Banking.
Contact: 78773250.
Email: ali.mohamedown@gmail.com

Indian Male /CPA, CMA, CA Finalist & BCOM/ 10+ years of Experience/ Currently Working as Finance Manager, Looking for Senior Management Roles in Finance.
Contact: 78611653.
Email: jobcpacma@gmail.com

PLANNING Engineer, PMP. Indian male 11 years experience in Construction Projects. Well versed with Primavera P6 Software, strong communication skills, Interpersonal skills, EDT Claims, Recovery schedules, project control. Having Omani Driving Licence.
Contact: 78002582
Email: engineer4planning@gmail.com

29 years old Indian female, MBA holder with 2 years experience. Seeking a suitable position. Currently in Muscat on visit visa.
Contact: 78641071, shazashakeel@gmail.com

INDIAN male 14 years experience light/ heavy driver. Looking for suitable opening currently in Oman.
Contact: 77050986/ 91280205, email: kokkadmou@gmail.com

FOR RENT

IN Ruwi, 2 bedrooms, 2 bathrooms, hall, kitchen, with car parking. RO 150 monthly only.
Tel: 94402003.

SIT. VACANT

Sales executive Male With driving License
Contact sangita@dhiyahilal.com +968 93559800

Looking for **Cyber Security Information Officer** (Omani national)

Key Responsibilities:

- Develop cybersecurity strategies & policies
- Oversee Incident Response, Vulnerability Assessments & Operations
- Compliance with regulatory guidelines
- Conduct security awareness training program
- Collaborate with external agencies

Qualifications:

- Bachelor's in Information Security
- Bachelor's in Information Technology /Computer Science
- CISSP or CISA certification
- Omani National with 3+ years experience in Cyber Security

To Apply

Send your resume to careers.oman@unimoni.com with the subject line "Cyber Security Information Officer" or visit our career page for more details

Customer Care: 8007 2242
customercare.oman@unimoni.com

PTC Rent A Car
Travel & Tours

Daily, Weekly, Monthly Car Rental Available
9345 3444

OMAN DAILY

Observer

FREE* CLASSIFIEDS

SITUATION WANTED

* NOW FREE CLASSIFIED IN OMAN DAILY OBSERVER ON THE ABOVE CATEGORIES ONLY

Send your advertisement (Only one per coupon & no photocopies), either by mail or in person, with your local identity.

To advertise please contact:
Tel: 71455532/ 71455531/ 71455530
Email: adv@omaninfo.om

To advertise in Ministry of Information channels



To advertise

71455532- 71455531- 71455530
adv@omaninfo.om
izdihar_info izdihar.info

ازديهار
izdihar



ART/LIFE

CULTURE

BESPOKE MUSSAR HIGHLIGHTS BEAUTY OF MATERIAL AND RICH CULTURE OF OMAN_{> 20}

ENTERTAINMENT

Demi Moore wins at Critics Choice with disgraced rival Gascon absent



DEMI MOORE won best actress at the Critics Choice Awards on Friday, confirming her status as favorite for the Oscars in a week that saw scandal envelop her “Emilia Perez” rival Karla Sofia Gascon.

Nineties megastar Moore’s horror film “The Substance” also won best original screenplay at a glitzy Los Angeles gala held by North America’s largest critics’ group, which crowned “Anora” as the year’s best picture.

Moore’s win follows her victory at the Golden Globes in January, and puts her on track to cap a remarkable career renaissance at next month’s Oscars.

“This has been such a wild ride,” said Moore, 62, who made a string of hit films in the 1990s, but came to be known as much for her love life as her acting in subsequent decades. That has changed with “The Substance,” a body-horror flick about an aging celebrity who injects a serum to temporarily live again in her younger body.

Nodding to the film’s frequently bloody and horrifying depictions of warped bodies, Moore thanked critics for rewarding “this genre of horror films, that are overlooked and not seen for the profundity that they can hold.”

Moore’s win came at the expense of Gascon, the Spanish transgender star of narco-musical “Emilia Perez” whose Oscar campaign collapsed in spectacular fashion over the past week.

Social media messages posted years ago by Gascon resurfaced in which she made derogatory and racist remarks about Muslims, China and even the Oscars themselves. The film’s distributor Netflix has since dropped Gascon from its Oscars campaign, and director Jacques Audiard disavowed his lead actor for her “absolutely hateful” and “inexcusable” comments.

Gascon was notably absent at the Critics Choice Awards, and when her name was read out among the nominees, the usually celebratory Hollywood audience fell conspicuously silent.

Friday’s ceremony provided a major boost for “Anora,” the Cannes festival Palme d’Or winner, about a young New York dance performer who marries the young son of a Russian billionaire in an ill-fated whirlwind romance. Several other contenders also picked up key wins Friday.

“The Brutalist” star Adrien Brody won best actor, “Conclave” won best adapted screenplay and best acting ensemble, and Broadway adaptation “Wicked” earned best director for Jon M. Chu. —AFP

QUICK FEATURES

FASHION

A model walks the runway during the Prabal Gurung Fall/Winter 2025 show at New York Fashion Week. — AFP

FILM

US actress Jane Fonda attends the 36th Annual PGA Awards (Producers Guild of America) at the Fairmont Century Plaza Century City in Los Angeles. — AFP

LIFESTYLE

A visitor takes pictures of illuminated cherry blossom trees during a festival in Taipei. — AFP

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS

aj_views_365

Björk, Omar Souleyman Group *...

Follow

Appreciating Local Culture

anisa.metaj92

Nizwa,Oman

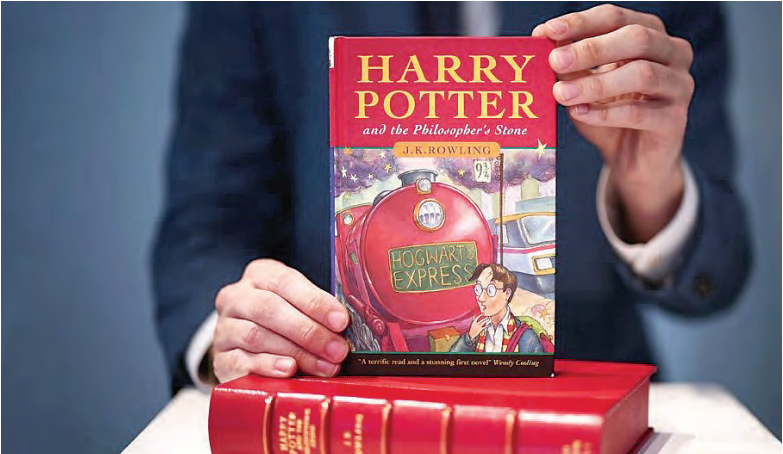
Follow

Visiting a Living Museum

SHARE A SLICE OF YOUR LIFE

We select photos daily for our Instagram Top Picks of the Day. To be selected, follow us on Instagram and every time you upload or share your photos, make sure to tag us and use #OmanObserver and #BeAnObserver.

Rare first edition
Harry Potter sells for
£18,000 at auction



A FIRST edition of JK Rowling’s debut Harry Potter novel has sold for £18,000 (\$22,329) after going under the hammer.

The copy of “Harry Potter And The Philosopher’s Stone,” which was one of the first 500 printed in 1997, was sold on Saturday by NLB Auctions based in Paignton, Devon.

It features a spelling error of “Philosopher’s” on the rear cover and ”1 wand” is listed twice in a list of equipment on page 53.

The novel, which was predicted to fetch between £20,000-£30,000, sold for £18,000.

The book was described by auctioneers as being a “good example of an extremely scarce first edition first issue” with light wear and tear.

It was one of the 300 library editions as it has a

library stamp on its title page and signs of a previous library slip card. Another early paperback edition of the novel, which featured some damage to the spine and cover, was sold for £1,300.

Upon its release, publishers produced only a small number of copies because of uncertainty about whether or not the book would prove popular.

The series, which includes seven books that were adapted into blockbuster movies, went on to become one of the most popular in the world.

A first edition of “Harry Potter And The Philosopher’s Stone” was auctioned for £45,201 in June last year while a pristine first edition copy sold for £69,000 in March 2022.

— PA Media/dpa



Hong Kong
scientists fight
to save fragrant
incense trees

GENETICIST ZHANG Huarong walks through the forest near his Hong Kong research lab, gesturing towards a rotting incense tree stump that is one of over a dozen illegally felled for the valuable wood inside.

A stone’s throw from the city’s urban centre are forests home to trees that produce fragrant — and valuable — agarwood, used in a number of high-end products from incense and perfume to traditional Chinese medicine.

Environmentalists say illegal incense tree felling is on the rise in Hong Kong, fuelled by black market demand. Scientists like Zhang are fighting back by taking DNA samples from each plant and creating a database that can help authorities crack down — as well as offer insights into how the trees can be better conserved.

“In one night, over 20 trees had been cut down by poachers,” Zhang, a researcher at Kadoorie Farm and Botanic Garden, said.

“We have to take action.”

Hong Kong has long been a hub for sweet-smelling aromatic products. The city’s name — translating to “fragrant harbour” — is commonly linked to the area’s history of incense production and sale.

Agarwood is created when incense trees are cut, which causes the plant to produce a dark resin to prevent infection. The product then takes the form of fragrant resinous wood.

— ‘BLACK GOLD’ —

Hong Kong authorities say that illegal incense tree felling soared

twelve fold in 2023 compared to the previous year.

Often described as “black gold”, the highest-grade products can fetch up to \$10,000 per kilo.

International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) has labelled Chinese Agarwood as “vulnerable” — blaming logging and wood harvesting for the population decline. Aiming to reverse that, Zhang and other field researchers hiked for hours through swathes of Hong Kong’s dense jungle to access remote populations of incense trees.

Rural communities keen to protect the forests near their homes also assisted in developing the incense tree database, he said.

“We have communications with those villages and they share information with us about the remaining trees and we also share our findings with them,” he said.

The database serves a joint purpose: assisting authorities in stopping illegal incense tree felling and helping researchers understand the species’ evolutionary potential.

Zhang said this research has identified unique genetic groups located in different areas of Hong Kong — diversity that could be key to cultivating a resilient wild population of the vulnerable species.

Larger genetic diversity protects populations from environmental changes, Zhang explained.

For Hong Kong’s incense trees, that includes the effects of climate change and surges in logging activity. This information lets conservationists know where to

transplant certain incense trees from nurseries into the wild.

Authorities can then use this genetic data to cross-reference seized agarwood and check if it was taken from protected incense trees.

Hong Kong shop owner Aaron Tang sells wares that attest to the many uses of agarwood, from carved jewellery to oils and hand-rolled joss sticks. To help protect the wild agarwood population, he said he verifies with raw material suppliers that their product comes from cultivated trees.

And when he teaches a class on making joss sticks, he warns his students against buying wild stock, or falling for illegally gotten products.

“The name of Hong Kong is because of agarwood so I want to keep this culture,” he said.

— ‘GONE COMPLETELY’ —

Unlike sustainable agarwood producers, the illegal ones create deep cuts on the tree in a bid to make it produce agarwood more quickly.

Then “they chop down the whole tree” for harvesting, Chinese University of Hong Kong scientist David Lau said, pointing to a preserved incense tree trunk on campus.

A spokesperson for the city said they have set up patrols at “specific locations with important incense tree populations”.

They also insisted that illegal felling has decreased since measures implemented in 2018, including metal cages and surveillance around the most accessible trees.

But horticulturist Paul Melsom attributes the fall to there being “less trees to poach”.

And the illegal trade has continued to thrive despite government efforts. Last year, Hong Kong’s customs department said it seized a tonne of agarwood in a single operation — its largest haul in two decades.

Authorities estimated it was worth about \$2.3 million.

“The trees have been cut down and gone completely in many forests in Hong Kong,” Melsom said, adding he’s been planting incense trees in secret locations for over a decade in response.

“I’ve seen many incense trees disappear,” he said. — AFP

FEATURES

BY KABEER YOUSUF
@kabiyousef

MUSSAR, the traditional Omani male headgear, is much more than just an accessory; it symbolises national pride and reflects individual identity. This beautifully crafted square of finely woven wool, pashmina, or cotton is expertly wrapped into a turban, representing the rich cultural diversity and identity of the Sultanate of Oman.

Typically worn beneath the Mussar is the 'Komma', an intricately embroidered cap that forms part of the official Omani attire. While Mussar is largely reserved for formal occasions, the Komma is often worn at informal gatherings and family events. It's noteworthy that Omanis often don some of the most exquisite Mussars and Kommas found anywhere in the world.

For Sameer al Zadjali, an Omani citizen deeply devoted to Mussar, this headgear represents a journey of self-discovery. His passion has captured the hearts of both the younger generation and the elders within his community, thanks to his exceptional craftsmanship.

What started as a hobby blossomed into a fervent passion and a successful business for Sameer, an airline professional enchanted by the intricate designs of Mussar. Today, he is regarded in his community as a visionary entrepreneur and the first Omani to secure copyrights for his Mussar designs, proudly launching the brand 'Paradise Muscat' LLC.

From a young age, Sameer was fascinated by the intricate detailing of Mussar but never tied one himself, relying on his brother for help until a pivotal moment in his late teens. After his brother refused to assist him one day, Sameer resolved to master this art form himself, determined that the stunning designs should not go unseen when worn. Experimenting with plain cloth, he and his mother discovered how much of the design was obscured when tied.

In 2000, Sameer took the plunge to craft his first Mussar, collaborating with his mother and sister. He immersed himself in research about the fabric, its crafting process and its historical significance, driven by his desire to elevate Oman's heritage through his craft.

"I was inspired by the global success of Amouage perfumes and wanted to put Oman on the map with my work. My aim was to create Mussars that truly stand out, drawing inspiration from the colours and moods of nature throughout the seasons," Sameer explains.

After countless trials to create designs that showcased their beauty when worn, he ventured to Kashmir, the home of 'pashmina'. There, he learned first-hand from local artisans about the delicate process of Mussar production. His educational background in Pune allowed him to reconnect with weavers in India, strengthening his bond with the craft.

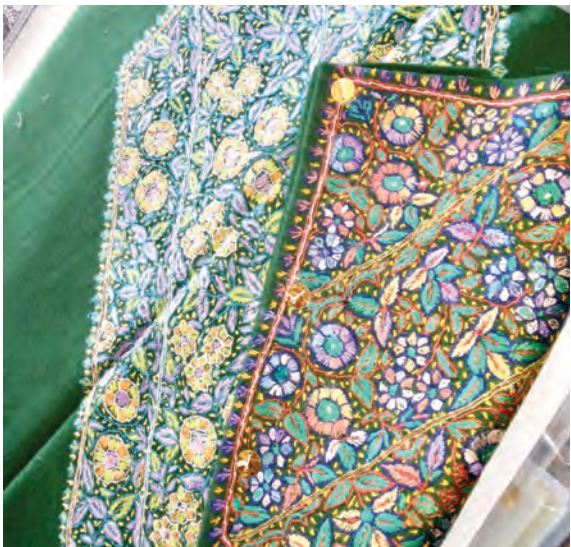
Every piece Sameer creates is unique — bespoke Mussars that cannot be duplicated elsewhere. "I'm in the process of developing a new collection specifically for the Royal Family, tailored for different occasions and preferences," he shares.

Through his explorations, Sameer also discovered the fascinating legacy of Sultan Zain al Abidin, who established Kashmir's shawl industry over 700 years ago, sharing this artistry with the local community. The Mussars are primarily made from Pashmina, which comes from the 'Hircus Capra' goat, while the luxurious 'Shatoosh' shawl originates from a short-haired goat that thrives in frigid mountain climates.

Funding his project through personal savings, Sameer actively participates in promotional exhibitions for small enterprises and training workshops. His distinctive designs include the Saidi Mussar featuring a Saidi pattern, the Diwani Mussar and various multi-design Mussars — his Kommas crafted by talented local women.



BESPOKE MUSSAR HIGHLIGHTS BEAUTY OF MATERIAL AND RICH CULTURE OF OMAN



Unlike the common Kashmiri Mussars, Sameer's designs are exclusive to Oman and some have found their way to the National Museum, showcasing his contribution to national heritage.

Looking Ahead

Al Zadjali envisions a Heritage Gallery in Muscat, dedicated to showcasing the art of crafting the Omani turban along with other traditional crafts. This gallery will serve as a mini-museum, allowing visitors to observe Omani artisans at work creating items such as daggers, handmade kommas, weaving, and pottery, providing insight into Oman's cultural heritage.

Those who wear Sameer al Zadjali's Mussars from 'Paradise Muscat' experience something truly special; these are not just garments but living pieces of art — expressions of the artisan's dedication and a celebration of rich cultural narratives.

Each piece is a vivid tapestry of colours, telling stories from centuries gone by, where the shades of maroon, ochre, indigo and violet weave a narrative of their own. These hues represent more than mere colours; they embody emotions, symbols and philosophies, carefully crafted to evoke admiration while honouring the pride and heritage of Oman.