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OIDC BUILDS MOMENTUM AHEAD OF SECOND ROUND

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MUSCAT PHOTOS

Sultan Haitham City issues 3 new construction tenders

MUSCAT: Sultan Haitham City is witnessing a significant acceleration in the implementation of infrastructure and primary facility packages. This progress coincides with the issuance of three new construction tenders within Package Nine of the city’s works, covering streetscaping and aesthetic landscaping for main roads, the execution of the Central Park and Wadi, and the construction of the Rehabilitation Complex for Persons with Disabilities.

These tenders are part of an advanced executive track, following

Sultan Haitham City is witnessing a significant acceleration in the implementation of its infrastructure and primary facility packages.

the award of eight infrastructure construction packages with an investment value of RO 205 million, as work advances across residential neighbourhoods and vital city facilities.

The newly-issued tenders include Package (9-A) for streetscaping and aesthetic landscaping of main roads, covering afforestation, pavement treatments, decorative elements and urban facades for the city’s primary movement axes.

Package (9-B) focuses on the construction of the Central Park and Wadi, including all construction

and infrastructure works to develop the city’s primary green space across 1.64 million square metres.

This area will feature a network of pedestrian paths, bridges, event zones, water features and open natural spaces, positioning it as a hub for daily life, recreation and community activities.

Eng Amal al Zaidi, Urban Planner and Landscape Engineer at the Executive Office for Future Cities Projects at the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning, said that Sultan Haitham City was designed to be inclusive. **TURN TO P2**

INBRIEF

OIL EXPORTS SURPASS 307 MILLION BARRELS

The Sultanate of Oman’s oil exports recorded a slight fall of 0.1 per cent by the end of December 2025, reaching 307 million barrels compared to 308 million barrels during the same period in 2024, according to preliminary statistics issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI). The average price of oil recorded a 12.1-per cent decline, standing at \$71 per barrel by the end of December 2025, compared to \$80.8 per barrel during the same period in 2024.

INDIA, EU REACH LANDMARK DEAL

India and the European Union announced on Tuesday the “mother of all deals”, a huge trade pact to create a market of two billion people, reached after two decades of negotiations. The agreement will cut or eliminate tariffs on almost 97 per cent of European exports, saving up to 4 billion euros (\$4.75 billion) annually in duties, the 27-nation bloc said. “A mother of all deals,” Modi said in the capital New Delhi, where he met with European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and European Council President Antonio Costa. “This deal will bring many opportunities for people on both sides,” Modi said.

Tourism’s contribution to GDP rises to 2.7 per cent

Oman welcomes 3.9 million visitors by end of 2025

THE

Ministry of Heritage and Tourism confirmed during its annual media briefing held on Tuesday that the Sultanate of Oman’s tourism sector continues to achieve rapid growth and positive results.

These figures reflect the effectiveness of approved policies and programmes, as well as the sector’s growing role in supporting economic diversification and increasing its contribution to the gross domestic product (GDP).

Sayyid Ibrahim bin Said al Busaidy, Minister of Heritage and Tourism, stated that the event comes within the framework of supporting the heritage and tourism sectors as key pillars of economic diversification policies.

He noted that the tourism sector’s contribution to the GDP rose from approximately 1.6 per cent in 2020 to about 2.7 per cent by the end of 2024. He added that the Tenth Five-Year Plan witnessed tourism investments estimated at RO 2.6 billion upon the completion of all stages within the current plan. This is in addition to ongoing investments in more than 12 Integrated Tourism Complexes (ITCs), enhancing

Sayyid Ibrahim bin Said al Busaidy, Minister of Heritage and Tourism, addressing the media on Tuesday.

The Tenth Five-Year Plan witnessed tourism investments estimated at RO 2.6 billion upon the completion of all stages within the current plan, which is in addition to other investments

Oman’s attractiveness as a premier destination for tourism and investment.

In the field of heritage, the minister pointed out that qualitative achievements included the inclusion of five cultural sites on the World Heritage List and seven cultural and natural sites on the Tentative List. Furthermore, several historical monuments were restored and 50 scientific publications were issued documenting Oman’s civilisational contributions.

Azzan bin Qasim al Busaidy,

Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism for Tourism, said that Oman welcomed approximately 3.9 million visitors from around the world by the end of 2025. He emphasised that the significant diversity in source markets reflects the success of efforts to avoid reliance on specific traditional markets. Promotional efforts implemented by the ministry contributed to direct returns exceeding RO 69.8 million, in addition to recording more than 325,000 hotel nights during 2025.

The under-secretary highlighted progress in developing specialised tourism patterns, including cruise ships, charter flights, adventure tourism, wedding tourism, culinary arts and MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions) tourism.

He noted that by the end of November 2025, 71 cruise ships visited Oman carrying 112,556 passengers, generating financial returns of over RO 2.363 million. He also noted that 15 Integrated Tourism Complexes were licensed between 2020 and 2025 with a total value of RO 2.8 billion, alongside 533 approvals for hotel establishments providing 7,923 hotel rooms.

TURN TO P3

Oman condoles with France as 3 tourists die in boat accident

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, JAN 27

The Sultanate of Oman expressed its sincere condolences and deepest sympathy to the government and people of the French Republic, and to the families of the victims, following the capsizing of a tourist boat in the Wilayat of Muttrah, Muscat Governorate. Oman also wished for the speedy recovery of the injured.

In a statement issued by the Foreign Ministry, the Sultanate of Oman expressed its appreciation for the efforts exerted by

rescue and ambulance teams in responding to this tragic incident. The ministry further confirmed that investigations are currently underway to determine the circumstances surrounding the accident.

Earlier, the Royal Oman Police (ROP) has announced the death of three tourists and confirmed that two others sustained minor injuries after a boat carrying a group of 25 French nationals, along with a tour guide and the boat captain, capsized, according to preliminary information. Authorities confirmed that emergency response teams

The incident happened some 3 km off Muttrah on Tuesday morning, the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority said.

from the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority (CDAA) managed the incident at the scene. An investigation is underway to determine the full circumstances surrounding the incident.

The incident happened some 3 km off Muttrah on Tuesday morning, the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority said.

The deceased are identified as a French couple and another lady who were part of a 23-member tourist group which set out from Bandar al Rowdha for dolphin watching. The captain and the tourist guide are safe, while other tourists were sent

to the hotel. The incident happened around 9 am. Several boats belonging to the private tourist firm rushed to the scene of the tragedy along with the rescue boats of CDAA.

Speaking to the Observer, representatives from Sidab Tours, the tour operator, said that the boat had a capacity of 28 people, including the crew and that the sea turned rough and the boat capsized a few minutes after the tour began.

The CDAA advises all seagoers to be watchful of the sea conditions and to take precautions while setting sail during adverse weather conditions.



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SHORT TAKES



Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy with Dr Robert Floyd in Muscat on Tuesday.

OMAN, CTBTO PANEL DISCUSS AREAS OF COOPERATION

MUSCAT: Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, received on Tuesday Dr Robert Floyd, Executive Secretary of the Preparatory Commission for the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO).

During the meeting, they reviewed the existing aspects of cooperation between Oman and the CTBTO Preparatory Commission. They emphasised the importance of international cooperation and multilateralism in strengthening and supporting the disarmament and non-proliferation regime. Furthermore, they underscored the consolidation of an approach based on dialogue and diplomacy as a fundamental choice for achieving international peace and security.

They also exchanged views on the importance of technical cooperation and capacity building in the fields of monitoring and verification, as well as combating radioactive leakage and its resulting damage. They additionally discussed several issues of common interest.

The meeting was attended by Shaikh Mohammed bin Abdullah al Qatbi, Head of the International Organisations Department at the Foreign Ministry, and several officials from both sides. — ONA

SAYYID BADR AND HUNGARY OFFICIAL HOLD TALKS



Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy with Dr Anikó Raisz in Muscat on Tuesday.

MUSCAT: Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, received on Tuesday Dr Anikó Raisz, State Secretary for Environmental Affairs at the Ministry of Energy of Hungary.

During the meeting, they discussed ways to enhance cooperation in water resources management, climate change, pollution control and waste recycling. They also explored strengthening connectivity through expertise and knowledge exchange programmes and cooperation in international environmental forums, in addition to reviving several joint initiatives in this regard.

They further addressed the friendship and cooperation between the two countries across various political, economic and cultural fields. They commended the current level of coordination, the achievements realised, and the tangible convergence in the policies and directions of both nations in many areas.

The meeting was attended by Dr Abdullah bin Ali al Amri, Chairman of the Environment Authority, and Shaikh Mohammed bin Abdullah al Qatbi, Head of the International Organisations Department at the Foreign Ministry, and several officials. — ONA

Rehabilitation Complex for Persons with Disabilities

FROM PAGE 1

She emphasised that public spaces are a fundamental pillar in building a balanced city that serves various segments of society, noting that the Central Park and Wadi form the vital heart of this vision.

She said that the 1.64-million-square-metre space will serve the residents and visitors of Muscat Governorate at large, providing a green urban sanctuary for daily use through a connected network of paths, recreation zones and activity facilities. She added that the design enhances connectivity between neighbourhoods and vital facilities through the wadi and natural paths, contributing to improved quality of life, public health and social interaction within a human-centric urban model.

The tenders also cover the construction of the Rehabilitation Complex for Persons with Disabilities, in collaboration with the Ministry of Social Development. This project presents an advanced



Ongoing construction at one of the project sites in Sultan Haitham City.

national model for care and rehabilitation through five specialised tracks in a single facility with a capacity for 360 cases.

The complex will house specialised facilities, including flexible therapeutic spaces, sensory environments for autism spectrum disorder, physical therapy and motor rehabilitation zones, vocational training halls, and therapeutic gardens. It also includes community facilities accessible after working hours,

such as a gymnasium and a theatre. The centre is being built on an area exceeding 10,000 square metres, with a total built-up area of 16,000 square metres.

Eng Ma'ather al Nabhani, Urban Planner and Architectural Designer at the Executive Office for Future Cities Projects, said that the rehabilitation centre was designed to consolidate early intervention services, autism rehabilitation, mental and physical disability care, and vocational training within a

supportive human environment that prioritises accessibility and service quality. She added that the centre provides flexible spaces to enhance social integration, with facilities serving the community after hours. This partnership with the Ministry of Social Development ensures integrated roles, sustainable operations, and high-quality services aligned with national goals for social inclusion and support for persons with disabilities. — ONA

Art Group strengthens UK-Oman cultural exchange

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 27

The British Omani Society (BOS) marked the opening of its Golden Jubilee year with the successful launch of the 2026 Art Group project. Between January 16 and 24, British artists Lucy Corbett and Michelle McCullagh travelled to Oman to conduct workshops with a group of talented Omani artists.

Following the workshops, the British Embassy in Muscat will host an exhibition showcasing the collaborative work produced by both the British and Omani



The British Embassy in Muscat will host expo of collaborative works.

artists. The collaboration celebrates the enduring partnership between Oman and the United Kingdom, through artistic exchange, creative development and cultural dialogue. The programme

opened at the British Embassy in Muscat, where participants explored the art of landscape painting.

The session was honoured by the presence of the United Kingdom Chargé d'Affaires, Simon Smart, who praised the initiative's role in fostering creative exchange. On the second day, workshops moved to the Saheel Equestrian Ranch in Sifah, giving artists the chance to sketch and paint horses in motion. The final day was spent at the Al Falaj Camel Track, where the group drew inspiration from the vibrant

cultural atmosphere.

The artists then travelled to Rimal Al Sharqiya, staying at Al Badri Bedouin camp. Surrounded by the desert's natural beauty, they sketched and painted their surroundings while engaging with local Omani artists. Michelle McCullagh, a British artist, said, "This was a fantastic opportunity to work with another culture and to be inspired by local landscapes and culture. It was fascinating to learn from the artists and their different techniques. The biggest joy was seeing the variety of work produced."

Children’s Choir makes debut with Puccini’s Tosca

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
MUSCAT, JAN 27

The Royal Opera House Muscat (ROHM) opens Giacomo Puccini's much-loved opera Tosca this week in a visually striking production staged by Davide Livermore. Featuring the Orchestra and Chorus of the Azerbaijan State Academic Opera and Ballet Theatre and conducted by Fabio Mastrangelo, performances take place on Thursday at 7:00pm and Saturday at 7:00pm.

Umberto Fanni, Director-General of the Royal Opera House Muscat, said: "We are pleased to welcome this production of Tosca to Muscat. It reflects our commitment to artistic excellence while supporting learning, participation, and access for our community. ROHM continues to grow as a place where audiences of all ages can experience the power of live performance."



Tosca is the perfect Italian opera. It talks about power and love. The story is set in Rome 1800. The French revolutionary armies, led by Napoleon Bonaparte, are at war with the rest of Europe

DAVIDE LIVERMORE

At the press conference held on Monday, the director Davide Livermore said it is a great honour to be in Oman for this incredible masterpiece.

"Tosca is the perfect Italian opera. It talks about power and love. The story is set in Rome 1800. The French revolutionary armies, led by Napoleon Bonaparte, are at war with the rest of Europe," he said.

Set in Rome at a time of political tension, Tosca tells a compelling story shaped by love, loyalty, and moral choice. Carmen Giannattasio appears as the passionate singer Floria Tosca, alongside Yusif Eyvazov as the painter Mario Cavaradossi. Ambrogio Maestri takes on the role of Baron Scarpia, whose presence drives the drama. Together, the cast brings Puccini's expressive score to life in a production that appeals to audiences both locally and from around the world.

The conductor is Fabio Mastrangelo, Russia's most sought-after Italian-born conductor.

Speaking to the Observer, he said, "This is my second visit to Oman. It is a great feeling to be in this theatre because first of all, architecturally speaking it is wonderful and secondly, it is really a chance to unite people of diverse origins and show the world that we can all live together in peace."

This production also marks the debut of the ROHM Children's Choir, which includes 32 young singers, 16 of whom are from Oman. Their participation highlights the opera house's commitment to education and artistic development, reflecting ROHM's broader mission to nurture future generations.

Ahead of opening night, ROHM's Education and Outreach Department has continued to engage audiences beyond the main stage.

SHORT TAKES



TechOman supports the Sultanate of Oman's transition towards a knowledge-based, innovation-led economy. — **This is an AI image**

TECHNOLOGY
COMMUNITY
PLATFORM OPENS

MUSCAT: TechOman, a new community-driven national technology platform, has officially launched with the objective of connecting technology solution providers directly with society while empowering Omani youth through practical digital skills, career pathways and innovation-focused initiatives.

Aligned with Oman Vision 2040, TechOman supports the Sultanate of Oman's transition towards a knowledge-based, innovation-led economy by bringing together students, academia, technology providers, startups and industry under a single collaborative platform. The initiative aims to bridge long-standing gaps between education, innovation and real-world market needs.

Founded by Tariq bin Hilal al Barwani, TechOman places strong emphasis on youth empowerment and academic engagement. The platform will work closely with colleges and universities to deliver hands-on learning experiences, including hackathons, innovation challenges and competitions designed to equip students with market-relevant skills.

Oman, Kuwait Fund sign
RO 12.4m pact for Duqm

THE Sultanate of Oman on Tuesday signed a financing agreement with the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development to contribute to the financing of the second phase of the internal roads project in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD).

The agreement was signed by Sultan bin Salim al Habsi, Minister of Finance, and Waleed Shamlan al Bahar, Acting Director-General of the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development.

The project aims to support economic and social development efforts in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm, develop residential schemes, and provide associated facilities and amenities to facilitate transport movement within the plots designated for citizens.

The scope of the project includes the development of main and secondary road networks through the paving of internal roads in the First and Second Residential Areas and the Industrial Area. Additionally, the project encompasses the implementation of associated infrastructure, such as stormwater drainage systems and traffic safety equipment, as well as consultancy services and the relocation of existing utilities.

The implementation of this project is part of a broader effort to enhance the transport system within SEZAD, ensure smooth transit between residential and industrial areas, and create an advanced urban environment that keeps pace with the rapid economic



Sultan al Habsi and Waleed al Bahar after signing the agreement in Muscat on Tuesday. — **ONA**

growth, in line with the strategic objectives of Oman Vision 2040. Eng Ahmed bin Hassan al Dheeb, Deputy Chairman of the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones, stated that the agreement pertains to financing the second phase of the internal roads project in Sai.

He confirmed that the Authority has completed all project components, including the preparation of plans and tendering methods, and that technical analysis is

currently underway for the bids submitted to execute the project.

Al Bahar said that the financing for the implementation of the second phase of the internal roads project in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm amounts to approximately RO 12.4 million. The signing ceremony was attended by Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Chairman of the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones. — **ONA**

Contribution to GDP rises to 2.7%

FROM PAGE 1

Eng Ibrahim bin Said al Kharousi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism for Heritage, detailed qualitative achievements in preserving Omani cultural heritage from 2021 to 2025.

Key projects include the Oman Cultural Heritage Registry, which features a smartphone application, a website and an integrated database of cultural properties.

He added that efforts also included documenting 90 historical landmarks using 3D virtual tour technology and completing over 100 restoration projects for castles, forts and monuments.

Regarding international and regional projects, the restoration of the House of Wonders in Zanzibar reached 55 per cent completion, while the visitor centre at the Dibba



archaeological site in Musandam reached 96 per cent. Visitor centres for the Ancient City of Qalhat, as well as the Bat, Al Khutm and Al Ayn sites, reached 40 per cent completion.

He noted that Oman ranks first globally in documenting meteorite samples, possessing 5.6 per cent of the world's known meteorites with over 7,000 pieces. He added that detailed drawings

for the Maritime History Museum are underway, and construction tender documents are being prepared for the Natural History Museum.

Furthermore, 22 private museums and heritage houses were licensed in 2025. Construction has also begun on the RO 3 million Wadi Dawkah visitor centre in Dhofar, and is expected to be ready by the third quarter of 2027. — **ONA**

Modern College of Business and Science
Three Decades of Transforming
Education in Oman



FOR three decades, the Modern College of Business and Science MCBS has played a defining role in shaping Oman's higher education landscape. More than an academic institution, MCBS has consistently focused on developing human capital, strengthening graduate employability, and supporting national development priorities.

Since its establishment, MCBS has pursued a clear and forward-looking vision aligned with Oman Vision 2040 delivering quality education, fostering innovation, and preparing graduates who contribute effectively to a diversified, knowledge-based economy. While many institutions relied on conventional models, MCBS invested early in applied learning, industry engagement, and outcomes-based education, recognising the importance of relevance, quality, and accountability.

Today, the results of this approach are reflected in both national and international recognition. MCBS has earned acknowledgement through the QS World University Rankings Arab Region 2026 and the Times Higher Education Impact Rankings. These recognitions reflect external evaluation against global benchmarks in teaching, governance, research impact, and societal

contribution, reinforcing the College's commitment to continuous improvement and quality assurance in line with OAAAQA standards.

As Dr Moosa Al Kindi, Dean of the Modern College of Business and Science, notes "For thirty years, Modern College of Business and Science has remained committed to delivering quality education that serves Oman's national priorities. Our focus has always been on preparing graduates who are competent, ethical, and capable of contributing meaningfully to a diversified, knowledge-based economy in line with Oman Vision 2040."

At the institutional level, MCBS has embedded innovation and sustainability into its academic and operational framework. Through its Innovation X Hub and Sustainability Centers, students engage in entrepreneurship, applied research, and community-based initiatives that address real economic, social, and environmental challenges. This practical orientation directly supports Oman Vision 2040 pillars related to education quality, innovation, sustainability, and private sector growth.

MCBS graduates contribute across key sectors critical to national development, including finance, technology, healthcare, logistics, aviation,

education, and public service. Equipped with strong academic foundations, digital competencies, and ethical leadership skills, alumni are well positioned to support workforce nationalisation, productivity, and institutional effectiveness.

"Thirty years of consistent quality, innovation, and graduate impact contributing to Oman's human capital and national development."

As MCBS marks three decades of service, its progress reflects steady institutional development rather than short term expansion. The College's journey has been shaped by investment in qualified faculty, robust academic governance, student centered learning, and continuous alignment with national accreditation and quality frameworks.

This is higher education with purpose where international benchmarks reinforce national priorities, where academic quality supports Oman Vision 2040, and where graduates are prepared not only for employment, but for responsible leadership and lifelong contribution.

MCBS continues to advance its mission with a clear focus on quality assurance, institutional sustainability, and meaningful impact supporting Oman's long-term aspirations through education, innovation, and human capital development.

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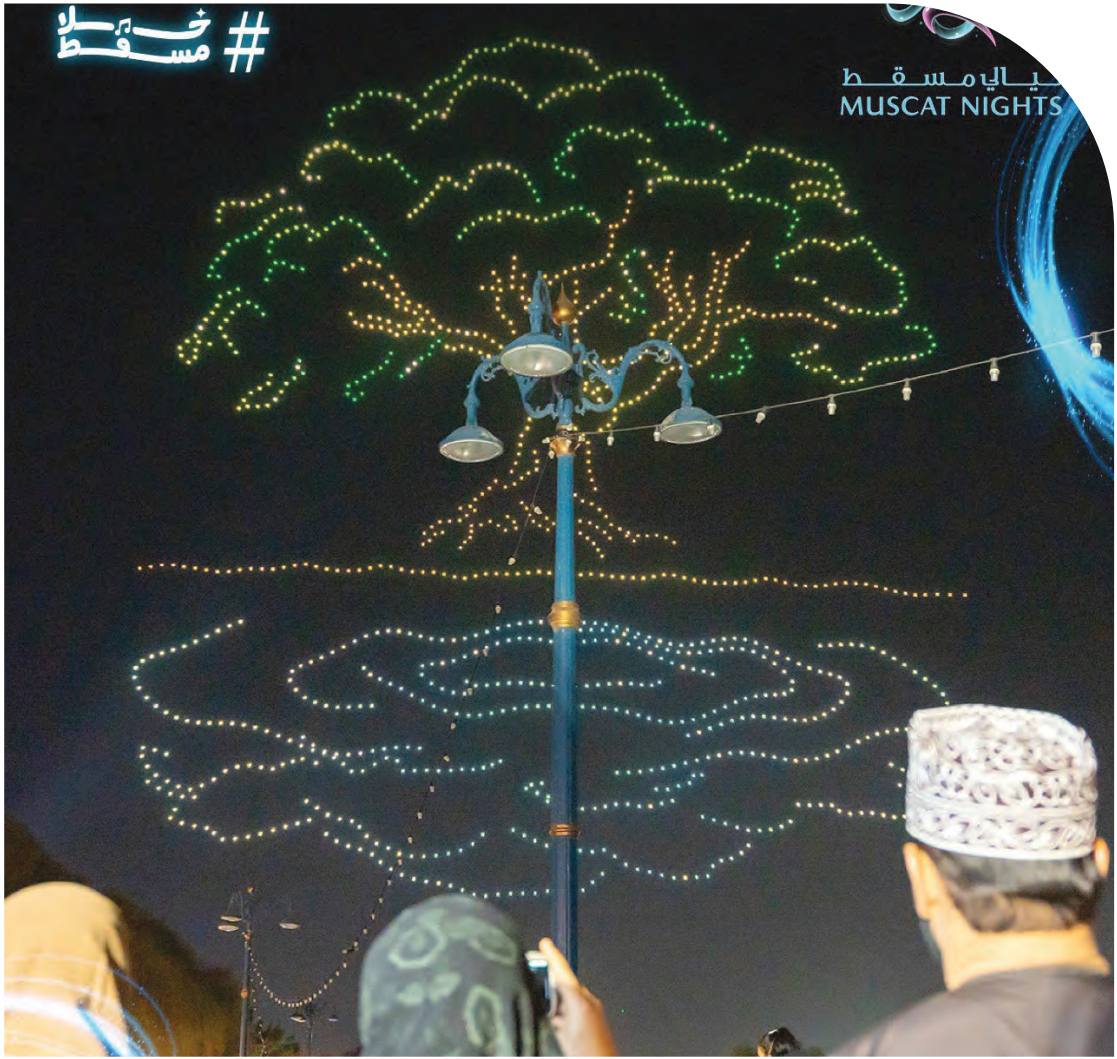
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THE STORIES ARE TOLD BY **1,500 DRONES** UNDER FIVE THEMES; MUSCAT: HISTORY AND IDENTITY; MUSCAT TODAY AND ITS ACHIEVEMENTS; PEOPLE AT THE HEART OF THE CITY; VALUES AND COMMUNITY SPIRIT; AND MUSCAT OF TOMORROW AND THE FUTURE VISION

DRONES PAINT STORIES IN SKIES



SAUD AL ANSARI
MUSCAT, JAN 27

THE drone show over Al Qurum Natural Park has become one of the most striking visual highlights of the Muscat Nights 2026, offering a sequence of aerial tableaux unified by a narrative reflecting the identity, values, and transformation of Muscat Governorate.

Combining advanced technology with artistic symbolism, the performances attracted large crowds of visitors of different ages and nationalities.

Presented within a cohesive storytelling framework, the show relied on a seamless progression of aerial scenes synchronised with sound effects and music, creating an immersive viewing experience. Through a contemporary visual language, the performances portrayed Muscat’s landmarks and achievements in a way that resonated with the cultural diversity of visitors and appealed to all segments of society.

The aerial formations narrated

key chapters of Oman’s history, beginning with its ancient past when it was known as “Majan” and “Mazoon,” moving through the advent of Islam and long- standing trade relations, and culminating in the stages of building the modern state. The show highlighted the achievements of the Renaissance era under the late Sultan Qaboos bin Said, the transition of leadership to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, and concluded with a forward- looking vision for the future of the Sultanate of Oman.

Jaber bin Amir al Mahrazi, Project Director, explained that the drone show was designed as an integrated visual storytelling experience, delivered through harmonious aerial scenes supported by sound and musical effects. He noted that this approach enables national and humanitarian messages to be communicated in an elegant and accessible visual style, blending advanced technology with meaningful content.

The show is structured around five main themes forming the overall framework of the visual experience. The first, “Muscat: History and Identity,” highlights

the city’s origins and symbolic landmarks, emphasising Omani identity and national belonging. The second theme, “Muscat Today and Its Achievements,” showcases urban organisation, infrastructure, and advanced municipal services, reflecting ongoing efforts to enhance quality of life. The third theme, “People at the Heart of the City,” focuses on the Omani citizen as the cornerstone of development. The fourth, “Values and Community Spirit,” presents religious occasions and spiritual values as an integral part of Omani society. The show concludes with “Muscat of Tomorrow and the Future Vision,” highlighting sustainability, environmental stewardship, technology, and future projects aligned with Oman Vision 2040.

The execution of the show relies on an advanced operational system managed through a ground control station equipped with modern communication devices and high-precision positioning systems. The drones follow carefully calculated flight paths, with simulations conducted in advance to ensure safety and accuracy.

The performances are operated

entirely by a 100 per cent Omani crew from Afaaq Oman, reflecting the capability of national competencies to deliver advanced technical shows according to the highest safety standards.

The drone show is presented daily through two main performances using a total of 1,500 drones.

The first show lasts 16 to 17 minutes and includes around 300 drones dedicated to fireworks effects, while the second runs for 7 to 8 minutes using approximately 200 drones.

The displays extend over the lake at the centre of Al Qurum Natural Park, harmonising with lighting effects, dancing fountains, and water features, symbolically depicting the human, sea, and land elements. Several visitors praised the drone show for adding a distinctive aesthetic and technological dimension to Muscat Nights. Marwan al Saadi described it as extremely beautiful and well organised, while Ahmed al Jawad, visiting the event for the first time since 2008, noted the remarkable transformation of the activities and described the drone show as leaving a strong positive impression.

SHORT TAKES

COUNCIL, SHURA AGREE ON DRAFT SPORTS BODIES LAW

MUSCAT: The joint committee of the State Council and Majlis Ash’shura held a meeting to discuss the points of contention between the two councils regarding the draft law on sports bodies which was referred from the Council of Ministers, on Tuesday.

The meeting was attended by the members of both councils, along with the Secretary-General of the State Council, the Secretary-General of Majlis Ash’shura and specialists from the secretariats of both councils.

There were seven disputed articles between the two councils, including articles from the original draft law as well as new articles added by Majlis Ash’shura.

The committee came out with a consensus on all the disputed articles and will submit its report to the joint sessions of the State Council and Majlis Ash’shura for further discussion and approval of the draft law.

BSM STUDENT SECURES FIRST POSITION IN OMAN



Mohammad Iqbal, Chairman of the Board of Directors of Bangladesh School Muscat, honours Kazi Afra in Muscat.

MUSCAT: A student of Bangladesh School Muscat (BSM) secured the first position by scoring the highest marks in Oman in the last Edexcel-Pearson International Advanced Subsidiary examination in October 2025. Kazi Afra Afreen, a student of the commerce stream of the school, was given a special certificate, ‘Outstanding Pearson Learner Awards’ by Edexcel-Pearson, for scoring the highest marks in Economics in Oman. Kazi Afra, the topper in the Edexcel-Pearson country ranking, with 170 out of 200 UMS (Uniform Mark Scale) marks, got a record 97 per cent marks in Economics unit-2.

On the occasion of the 54th Victory Day of Bangladesh, BSM organised a special event to celebrate the outstanding performance of Afra, daughter of Kazi Emdad Hossain, former chairman of Bangladesh Schools in Oman. She was given an academic excellence award by the school, handed over by Major Mohammad Raful Islam, Labour Counsellor of the Bangladesh Embassy in the Sultanate of Oman.



TEST OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Education, in cooperation with the SMEs Development Authority ‘Riyada’, concluded the “Future Pioneers School Challenge” for schools in the Muscat Governorate. The competition, which targeted students in grades 7 to 9, was held as part of ongoing efforts to foster a culture of entrepreneurship and innovation during early educational stages.

The challenge aimed to develop students’ skills in innovation and creativity, qualifying them to establish entrepreneurial projects that align with labour market requirements. It also introduced the fundamentals of marketing, value creation, smart financial management concepts, the preparation of simplified business models and preliminary feasibility studies.

A total of 105 students and supervisors representing 15 schools in Muscat Governorate participated in the competition, resulting in the submission of 20 entrepreneurial projects across several sectors.

ILO seeks investments in upskilling and reskilling

SHADDAD AL MUSALMY
RIYADH, JAN 27

THERE is a technological divide widening between wealthier and lower-income countries, and within countries between different regions, according to the chief of the International Labour Organization. One job in four is exposed to AI, while 3.3 per cent of jobs are considered extremely exposed. He added that some sectors are particularly vulnerable, especially roles associated with white-collar work.

“At the same time, AI should not be viewed only through the lens of risk. AI can expand inclusion, including by enabling tools such as speech-to-text, and that AI-related advances can support persons with disabilities,” said Gilbert F Houngbo, Director-General of ILO, on the second day of the Global Labour Market Conference (GLMC) in Riyadh on Tuesday.

He also underscored a gender dimension to AI exposure, noting that women are overrepresented in administrative occupations, which can increase vulnerability. He stated that in Arab regions, women are three times more exposed than men.

Houngbo said upskilling and reskilling efforts are progressing, but emphasised the need to go further. “ILO is calling for increased investment from governments in upskilling and reskilling to sup-



AI should not be viewed only through the lens of risk. AI can expand inclusion, including by enabling tools such as speech-to-text, and that AI-related advances can support persons with disabilities

GILBERT F
HOUNGBO
Director-General
of ILO



Global Labour Market Conference delegates in Riyadh on Tuesday.

port workforce adaptation,” he said. Houngbo said the ILO has seen increasing requests from member states for guidance on leveraging AI. He referenced interest in using AI to support objectives such as poverty reduction and training young workers.

Joanne Wright, Senior Vice-President of Transformation and Operations at IBM, shared the company’s experience in adopting AI at scale by becoming its own ‘client zero’, using its technologies to test and re-engineer workflows across functions.

Speakers highlighted real-world examples from healthcare, retail, hiring and education, noting that organisations and governments face an intentional choice between inclusive transformation and widening inequality.

Venkataramani Suresh,

Co-founder and Global CEO, VeriKlick, said, “AI is not replacing jobs so much as it is replacing tasks, and whether that shift becomes inclusive or exclusive is ultimately an intentional choice made by leaders. If people are not upskilling and reskilling, some jobs will disappear — it’s as simple as that.”

Dr Julien Malaurent, Dean of Post-Experience Programmes and Executive Vice-President, ESSEC Business School, stated, “We are shifting from doing to orchestrating. The future skill is not just using AI, but supervising it, judging its outputs and remaining accountable for decisions.”

Stefano Scarpetta, Director for Employment, Labour and Social Affairs, OECD, said, “AI’s productivity gains do not automatically translate into shared opportunity.”

Musandam hikers turn their passion into community tourism

KHASAB: The Musandam Hiking team emerged from a youthful passion for mountain trekking and a love for exploration. What began as a simple initiative bringing together nature enthusiasts and mountain trail explorers in Musandam Governorate has evolved into an organised team dedicated to promoting a healthy lifestyle, deepening environmental awareness, and showcasing the governorate’s unique natural and tourism potential.

Ismail Ali al Shehhi, Chairman of the Musandam Hiking team, stated that the team was officially established on October 1, 2017. Their inaugural mountain trek was conducted on January 13, 2018, followed by a second trek on March 2 of the same year.

Since then, the team’s activities have continued

to grow, expanding their participation at both the local and national levels. He added that the team’s primary goal is to direct youth energy toward positive activities that serve the community and enhance public health.

Furthermore, the team aims to highlight strategic and tourist sites within Musandam, directly contributing to attracting international visitors and introducing the region to segments of the public previously unaware of its natural diversity.

Al Shehhi noted that since its inception, the team has organised numerous mountain treks involving dozens of hiking enthusiasts from various age groups, thereby expanding the base of practitioners for this sport within the governorate.

The chairman pointed



The aim is to promote a healthy lifestyle and showcasing Musandam’s unique natural and tourism potential.

out that the team organises several activities in collaboration with government agencies and community institutions on specific occasions, such as Mountain Activity Day, World Diabetes Day, and International Mountain Day. Additionally, the team is

an active participant in the Musandam Winter Season events. In coordination with the Khasab Sports and Cultural Club, the team also organises special events that include gatherings for hiking groups from both within and outside Oman.

Regarding the selection of

routes, Al Shehhi explained that the team primarily relies on ancient mountain paths used by ancestors to travel between neighboring villages and regions. These paths have been marked with instructional signs to facilitate access to natural landmarks.

The team also develops new trails to highlight previously unknown tourist sites. He mentioned that the trails vary in difficulty; while it is preferred that participants have prior experience, the team provides suitable routes for beginners to ensure inclusivity and broaden the sport’s appeal.

Safety measures are a top priority for the team. Al Shehhi emphasized that participant readiness is verified before any trek, including adherence to

wearing appropriate clothing and footwear.

Furthermore, the details and locations of the trails are registered in the ‘Nida’ application, managed by the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority, to facilitate handling any advanced emergency cases.

Touching upon the benefits of hiking, he described it as an ideal opportunity to enhance physical and mental health, build positive social relationships, and instill values of cooperation and discipline.

He observed that adventure tourism is seeing increasing demand in Musandam due to its distinct geographical nature and unique vistas. Al Shehhi explained that the team receives support from the Khasab Sports and Cultural Club and various official bodies. — ONA

WORLD

SHORT TAKES



Philippine Coast Guard personnel assist survivors, in Basilan. — Reuters

PHILIPPINES STOPS FERRY FLEET AFTER DEADLY SINKING

MANILA: The Philippines said it had grounded the passenger fleet of a local shipping line on Tuesday pending an investigation, as rescuers scoured the ocean for survivors of a ferry sinking that killed at least 18 people. Transportation secretary Giovanni Lopez said on Tuesday that the company’s passenger fleet would be kept at port pending an investigation. “As of now, the entire passenger fleet of Aleson Shipping Company (is) grounded,” he said, adding that the country’s maritime regulator and coast guard would conduct a safety audit over the next 10 days.

“The president has ordered a full-blown investigation, so all the angles will be looked at to determine what really happened,” he said. “If it turns out the shipowners were deficient, they will expect the full force of the law,” Lopez told reporters. He added that there had been 32 recorded safety “incidents” at sea involving the company but offered no specifics. The coast guard’s Gavan said that ongoing search-and-rescue efforts remained the immediate priority. “The most important thing at this point is lives”. — AFP

NORTH KOREA FIRES MISSILES TOWARDS SEA OF JAPAN



People sit in front of a television screen showing file footage of a N Korean missile test, in Seoul. — AFP

SEOUL: North Korea fired at least two ballistic missiles towards the Sea of Japan on Tuesday, Tokyo and Seoul said, a day after a visiting US official hailed Washington’s “model ally” in the South. The Japanese coast guard, citing the defence ministry, said it had detected two ballistic missiles fired towards the Sea of Japan. Japanese news agency Jiji Press reported the two missiles had landed outside of the country’s Exclusive Economic Zone, citing defence ministry sources.

South Korea’s Joint Chiefs of Staff also said it had detected several ballistic missiles fired by the North towards what Seoul calls the East Sea. The test is Pyongyang’s second of the month, following a salvo of missiles fired hours before South Korea’s leader headed to China for a summit. It comes a day after a high-level visit to Seoul by the Pentagon’s number three official Elbridge Colby, who hailed South Korea as a “model ally”. North Korean leader Kim Jong Un last month bashed Seoul’s push to develop its own nuclear-powered submarines with the United States, calling it a “threat” that “must be countered”. — AFP

WATER CRISIS

Kenya’s severe drought wipes out livestock



In drought-hit northeastern Kenya, villagers have been forced to drag their dead livestock to distant fields for burning to keep the stench of death and scavenging hyenas away from their homes. Mandera county along Kenya’s borders with Ethiopia and Somalia has seen no rain since May and is now on the point of a water emergency. In the nearby town of Baniissa, the watering hole that once held 60,000 cubic metres of water is dry. — AFP

XI SAYS CHINA SEEKS TO UPHOLD UN-BASED WORLD ORDER

BEIJING: President Xi Jinping said that China seeks to uphold the UN-based world order, in remarks as he met Finnish Prime Minister Petteri Orpo in Beijing. His comments come after Donald Trump unveiled plans for his new “Board of Peace” this month, which has sparked concerns the US president wants to create a rival to the United Nations.

Xi told Orpo in the opulent Great Hall of the People that “China is willing to work with Finland to firmly uphold the international system with the United Nations at

its core”, according to a readout by state broadcaster CCTV. While China has been invited to join Trump’s new grouping, it has not confirmed participation, and Xi has since stressed the importance of a UN-centred international order.

Orpo meanwhile said he looked forward to discussing “international issues” and topics on “bilateral cooperation” with Xi. Orpo, on a four-day visit, joins a string of Western leaders who have recently courted Beijing, as Trump’s mercurial policies prompt a pivot

from his allies. Canadian and French leaders Mark Carney and Emmanuel Macron visited Beijing in the past weeks, while British Prime Minister Keir Starmer is due to land on Wednesday.

Despite the warm overtures, Beijing and Helsinki do not see eye-to-eye on thorny issues, including Russia’s war in Ukraine and an international jostling for influence over the Arctic region. China has said it takes a neutral stance on the war and has never condemned Moscow’s attack. — AFP

UN push to get children across Gaza back to school

THE United Nations announced on Tuesday a major push to get hundreds of thousands of children across the war-scarred Gaza Strip back to school. Since the start of the war sparked by the October 2023 attack on Israel, nearly 90 per cent of schools in Gaza have been damaged or destroyed and more than 700,000 school-aged children have been left unable to access formal education, according to the UN children’s agency Unicef. “Almost two and a half years of attacks on Gaza’s schooling have left an entire generation at risk,” agency spokesman James Elder told reporters in Geneva.



Displaced Palestinian children shelter at a tent camp in Gaza City. — Reuters

as well as clean toilets and places to wash hands — “something too many children in shelters simply don’t have”.

The push to scale up access to education comes as aid groups have managed to bring more supplies into the besieged territory since a fragile US-backed ceasefire took effect last October. Unicef said that it had managed to bring in more than 4,400 recreational kits and 240 School-in-a-Carton kits, containing things like pencils, pens, chalk, exercise books and geometry sets. And it said it expected the total number of kits brought in to surpass 11,000 by the end of the week, with nearly 7,000 others in the pipeline for the coming weeks.

Israel said on Monday it would only allow pedestrians to travel through the Rafah crossing between Gaza and Egypt as part of its “limited reopening” once it has recovered the remains of the last hostage in the Palestinian territory. Reopening Rafah, a vital entry point for aid into Gaza, forms part of a truce framework announced by US President Donald Trump in October, but the crossing has remained closed since Israeli forces took control of it during the war in the Palestinian territory. Visiting US envoys had reportedly pressed Israeli officials to reopen the crossing during talks in Tel Aviv over the weekend. World leaders and aid agencies have repeatedly pushed for more humanitarian convoys to be able to access Gaza, which has been left devastated by more than two years of war. — AFP

Unicef was now dramatically scaling up its education initiative in the Palestinian territory. The organisation currently supports more than 135,400 children receiving education at over 110 learning spaces in Gaza — many of them in tents, he said. But it now aims to more than double that number to include more than 336,000 children by the end of this year, and to get all school-age children back in in-person learning in 2027.

Unicef is working on the project with the Palestinian education ministry and the UN agency supporting Palestinian refugees, UNRWA, which before the war was providing schooling to around half of Gaza’s children. Unicef would need \$86 million for its education programme in Gaza this year — “roughly what the world spends on coffee in an hour or two”, Elder pointed out.

Getting children back to school “is not a ‘nice to have’. It is an emergency”, he insisted. He highlighted that “before this war, Palestinians in Gaza had some of the highest literacy rates in the world”. “Today that legacy is under attack: schools, universities, and libraries have been destroyed, and years of progress erased,” he said. Elder also stressed that learning in Gaza was “lifesaving”. “These centres provide safe spaces in a territory that is often inaccessible and dangerous,” he pointed out, adding that they also connect children to health, nutrition and protection services,



JAPAN 'S ELECTION CAMPAIGN KICKS OFF

TOKYO: Official campaigning began in Japan on Tuesday ahead of a snap election on February 8. Candidates’ posters are up, vans topped with loudspeakers are cruising the streets, and PM Takaichi held her first rally on Tuesday in central Tokyo, where dozens of people gathered to listen to her speak. The lower house of parliament was officially dissolved on Friday, 16 days before the vote — the shortest window between the two in the postwar era.

Appointed in October as Japan’s first woman prime minister, Takaichi is banking on strong poll numbers to boost her unpopular Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), which holds only a slim majority in the powerful lower house. Takaichi has staked her political future on the vote, saying she will resign immediately if her coalition fails to win a majority. — AFP

CANDIDATE NOMINATION

Iraq’s parliament delays presidential vote



Iraq’s parliament postponed the election of the country’s president to allow Kurdish parties to agree on a candidate. The speaker, Haibat al Halbussi, received requests from Iraq’s Kurdish parties, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), to postpone the vote to “allow both parties more time” to reach a deal. Under an agreement between the parties, a PUK member holds the Iraqi presidency. — AFP

ABDUCTED RELEASE

Nigerian army rescues 11 kidnap victims



The Nigerian army said it had rescued 11 kidnapping victims during a late-night operation along the Kaduna-Abuja highway, thwarting an attempt by armed militants to move the captives through a forested area under the cover of darkness. The five men, three women and three children had been held for 92 days after being abducted in Kaduna state in October. Troops from Doka detected the group using long-range surveillance equipment. — Reuters

SHORT TAKES



A person walks at the premises of a biscuit factory, following a fire, near Trikala, Greece. — Reuters

GREECE PROBES FACTORY FIRE AS FIFTH VICTIM FOUND

ATHENS: Greek investigators were looking into the causes of a fire that killed five workers at a biscuit factory in the country’s worst industrial accident in years. The explosion early on Monday ripped through an entire section of the Violanta factory near the central Greek city of Trikala. “The case will be investigated to the end... possibly, even today, we may have an initial picture of what caused the fire,” Civil Protection Minister Giannis Kefalogiannis said.

Four of the victims were found soon after the blast but the fifth was only recovered on Tuesday morning as pockets of fire made the operation difficult, the fire department said. A fire department officer said that a gas leak may have caused the fire but they “cannot rule out another possibility” yet. “It is too early to have a detailed report,” the officer said.

A source in the Trikala prosecutor’s office said the department was supervising the investigation. “The case file will include possible criminal responsibility over security failures at the factory,” they said. The deaths have shocked local communities around Trikala, which provide much of the company’s workforce. — AFP

AMERICA’S MONSTER STORM KILLS 30



More than half a million Americans woke up without power on Tuesday, as freezing temperatures gripped swathes of the country in a monster storm that has killed at least 30 people. Forecasters warned that much of the northern half of the country will see temperatures that are “continuously below freezing through February 1,” the National Weather Service said in an X post. It added that “record low temperatures” hit southern states, which are unaccustomed to intense winter weather. Relentless snowfall in the northeast meant parts of Connecticut saw over 56 cm of snow, with more than 40.6 cm recorded in Boston, Massachusetts. — AFP

Minneapolis mayor says ‘some’ ICE agents to leave city

MINNEAPOLIS: Some federal immigration agents will leave Minneapolis on Tuesday, the city’s mayor said, as US President Donald Trump struck a conciliatory note after nationwide outrage over the killings of two American citizens. Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey said in a post on social media platform X that “some federal agents” will begin leaving the city, but did not provide specifics of how many. “I will continue pushing for the rest involved in this operation to go,” Frey added. Frey said he spoke with Trump on Monday, adding: “The president agreed the present situation can’t continue.”

The White House was scrambling as video of the latest shooting went viral, prompting street protests,

criticism from former presidents Bill Clinton and Barack Obama and, increasingly, from within Trump’s Republican Party. In a marked change of tone, Trump said he had sent his top border enforcer Tom Homan — whom the president described as “tough but fair” — to Minneapolis on Monday. Homan “will report directly to me,” Trump wrote on his TruthSocial platform.

Homan’s appointment came as US media reported that controversial Border Patrol commander Gregory Bovino will be leaving Minneapolis, though the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has vehemently denied he has been “relieved of his duties,” DHS assistant secretary Tricia McLaughlin posted on X. McLaughlin added that



Mourners gather at a makeshift memorial in the area where Alex Pretti was shot dead, in Minneapolis. — AFP

Bovino “is a key part of the President’s team and a great American.” White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt said “nobody in the White

House, including President Trump, wants to see people getting hurt or killed.” She also expressed sorrow over the death of Alex Pretti, an intensive care unit nurse

who was gunned down on Saturday at point blank range by immigration officers, while protesting in Minneapolis. Earlier, the White House and Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem portrayed Pretti’s killing as an act of self-defence, initially claiming that he approached agents brandishing a handgun, intent on a “massacre.” The New York Times reported that Trump held an almost two-hour meeting on Monday evening with Noem, who has favoured aggressive immigration raids.

At a demonstration in Minneapolis on Monday, locals expressed relief that Immigrations and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents were leaving. “It’s a vindication to some degree. We have a lot of fear around what kind of violence and

reprisals might come as they leave,” protester Kyle Wagner said. “Our neighbourhoods and communities have been brutalised by them, so any decrease in the numbers and the severity is just a huge relief to the community that’s been suffering for months now.”

Trump said he had sent his top border enforcer Tom Homan to Minneapolis on Monday, saying that he “will report directly to me.”

Despite his recent moves, there was no sign Trump was retreating from the broader, hardline policy of sending heavily armed, masked and unidentified ICE agents into Democratic-run cities. There remain “hundreds of thousands” of “the worst illegal aliens” left to deport, Leavitt said. — AFP

Spain to regularise 500,000 undocumented migrants

MADRID: Spain’s left-wing government approved a plan to regularise around 500,000 undocumented migrants by decree, the country’s latest break with harsher policies elsewhere in Europe. Migration Minister Elma Saiz the beneficiaries would be able to work “in any sector, in any part of the country”, and extolled “the positive impact” of migration. “We are talking about estimations,

probably more or less the figures may be around half a million people,” she told public broadcaster RTVE.

Saiz said at a news conference after Tuesday’s cabinet meeting that “we are strengthening a migration model based on human rights, integration, coexistence, and compatible with economic growth and social cohesion”. The measure will affect those living

in Spain for at least five months and who applied for international protection before December 31, 2025. Applicants must have a clean criminal record. The regularisation will also apply to their children who already live in Spain. The application period is expected to open in April and continue until the end of June.

The plan will be passed through a decree that will not need

approval in parliament, where the Socialist-led coalition lacks a majority. The conservative and far-right opposition lashed out at the government, saying the regularisation would encourage more illegal immigration.

Alberto Nunez Feijoo, head of the Popular Party, the main opposition group, wrote on X that the “ludicrous” plan would “overwhelm our public services”. — AFP

Russian strikes hit Odesa, knock out power in Kharkiv

RUSSIAN missiles and drones hammered two Ukrainian cities overnight, officials said on Tuesday, killing at least two and wounding 23 in the Black Sea hub of Odesa and knocking out power in much of Kharkiv, Ukraine’s second-largest city. The separate attacks were the latest in Moscow’s winter campaign of air strikes on Ukrainian energy infrastructure, with Kyiv under pressure to agree to a US-backed peace deal to end the nearly four-year war.

Ukraine’s President Volodymyr Zelensky said Russia had launched more than 50 drones at Odesa in what he described as a “brutal” attack on the city, as Ukrainian and Russian negotiators prepare for new talks on Sunday. “Every such Russian strike erodes the diplomacy that is still ongoing and undermines the efforts of partners who are helping to end this war,” Zelensky wrote on X.

The head of Odesa’s military administration, Serhiy Lysak, posted images on the Telegram app of the two separate apartment buildings where residents were killed. One depicted a mangled facade marked by shattered windows. In the other, the building was ripped open across most of its length. The governor of the Odesa region, Oleh Kiper, said two children and a pregnant woman were among the 23 wounded, and that several apartments in multi-storey buildings, a church, a kindergarten and a high school were damaged.

The attack also led to the “colossal destruction” of an energy facility in the city, leading private power provider DTEK said in a statement. In Kharkiv, Governor Oleh Syniehubov said late on Monday that a combined Russian missile and drone attack had knocked out power to about 80 per cent of the city and the surrounding region. In comments to Ukrainian television on Tuesday, Kharkiv’s mayor, Ihor Terekhov, said about 40 per cent of consumers had no electricity. Ukraine’s air force said Russian troops had launched 165 drones overnight



Rescuers place in a bag the body of a person found under debris in Odesa, Ukraine. — Reuters

- 135 of them neutralised by Ukrainian air defences.

In western Ukraine’s Lviv region, which borders Nato-member Poland, an infrastructure facility also came under Russian attack in the city of Brody, local officials said. The city council reported heavy smoke and an unpleasant smell due to burning oil products. Classes in schools were cancelled, the council said, and it asked people to stay indoors and to seal doors and windows.

Separately, Ukrainian state oil and gas firm Naftogaz said a Russian strike had targeted one of its facilities in a western region in the 15th deliberate attack on its infrastructure in this month alone.

Russian and Ukrainian officials are expected to hold another round of US-brokered talks on Sunday after meeting last weekend

in Abu Dhabi. Writing on X, Zelensky urged Kyiv’s allies to step up pressure on Moscow, which has demanded Ukraine give up land

that Russian forces have been unable to conquer before it stops fighting. “We expect the United States, Europe, and other partners

not to remain silent about this and to remember that achieving real peace requires pressure precisely on Moscow.”

Meanwhile, the Trump administration has signalled to Ukraine that US security guarantees depend on Kyiv agreeing to a peace deal likely requiring it to cede the Donbas region to Russia, the Financial Times reported on Tuesday, citing eight people familiar with the talks. Washington has also indicated it could offer Ukraine more weapons to strengthen its peacetime army if Kyiv agreed to withdraw forces from the parts of the eastern region it controls, the newspaper said.

The White House did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said that a US document on security guarantees for Ukraine was “100 per cent ready” and Kyiv is now awaiting a time and place for it to be signed. Zelensky has consistently said that Ukraine’s territorial integrity must be upheld in any peace deal to end the war.

Separately, Poland and Ukraine have agreed to raise the capacity of gas supplies sent to Ukraine via Poland, energy minister Denys Shmyhal said on Tuesday. — Reuters

OPINION

The mirror effect: when our calm becomes their calm



HYESHA BARRETT

The writer is a Parent Coach and Master Life Coach

CHILDREN are not soothed by what we say to them. They are soothed by how we are with them. Many parents come to me asking how to help their child calm down: how to stop the meltdowns, the defiance, the emotional storms that seem to arrive without warning. Parents want strategies, phrases, techniques.

What often surprises them is this: children do not learn calm through instruction. They learn it through resonance. This is known as the mirror effect.

From birth, children are biologically wired to attune to the nervous systems around them. Long before language develops, the child’s brain learns safety by reading facial expressions, tone of voice, breath, posture and emotional energy. A regulated adult nervous system sends a powerful, wordless message: you are safe. A dysregulated one sends the opposite, even when our words are kind. This is why telling a child to “calm down” rarely works. Their nervous system cannot calm itself in isolation. It needs a regulated adult to borrow calm from.

When a child is overwhelmed, their brain shifts into survival mode. The thinking brain goes offline, and the emotional brain takes over. Logic, reasoning and consequences are inaccessible in these moments. What the

child is scanning for instead is safety. Safety is not found in explanations. It is found in presence.

Parents often feel frustrated by this reality because they are already trying so hard. They may be exhausted, overstimulated, or carrying their own emotional load. When a child escalates, the parent’s nervous system often escalates too. Voices rise, bodies tense, patience thins. Not because the parent is failing, but because nervous systems speak to each other constantly. This is the mirror effect in action.

Children mirror our internal state far more accurately than our external behaviour. We can smile through gritted teeth and speak calmly while our body is tight with urgency or fear. Children feel that mismatch. They sense when calm is being performed rather than embodied. True calm cannot be forced. It must be felt.

When a parent slows their breath, softens their shoulders, and grounds themselves emotionally, the child’s nervous system begins to settle in response. This happens beneath conscious awareness. The child’s body receives the message that the threat has passed, even if the emotion has not yet fully moved through.

This does not mean parents must always be calm. That expectation is unrealistic and unfair. It means that when we prioritise

Children do not need perfect parents. They need regulated ones, adults who are willing to pause, repair and return to connection.

our own regulation, we give our children the greatest gift possible: a safe emotional anchor.

Over time, children internalise this experience. A child who repeatedly feels soothed by a regulated adult learns how to soothe themselves. Their nervous system builds capacity. Their emotional storms shorten. Their trust deepens. Not because they were controlled, but because they were co-regulated.

The mirror effect also asks something deeper of parents. It invites us to look inward. If a child’s big emotions consistently dysregulate us, it often points to parts of ourselves that were never met with calm when we needed it. Parenting has a way of revealing our unfinished emotional stories, not to shame us, but to heal us.

When we learn to meet ourselves with compassion instead of criticism, our parenting naturally shifts. We respond rather than react. We stay present instead of escalating. We become the calm we once needed.

Children do not need perfect parents. They need regulated ones, adults who are willing to pause, repair and return to connection. Calm is not something we teach children to do. It is something we show them how to be. In that quiet, powerful exchange, healing moves forward: one nervous system at a time.

JAPAN’S BELOVED LAST PANDAS LEAVE THE COUNTRY

Hundreds gathered to say farewell to two popular pandas departing Tokyo for China, leaving Japan without any of the beloved bears for the first time in 50 years as ties between the Asian neighbours fray. Panda twins Lei Lei and Xiao Xiao were transported by truck out of Ueno Zoological Gardens, their birthplace, disappointing many Japanese fans who have grown attached to the furry four-year-olds.

The pandas’ abrupt return was announced last month during a diplomatic spat that began when Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi hinted that Tokyo could intervene militarily in the event of an attack on Taiwan. Her comment provoked the ire of Beijing, which regards the island as its own territory. The distinctive black-and-white animals, loaned out as part of China’s “panda diplomacy” programme, have symbolised friendship between Beijing and Tokyo since they normalised ties in 1972.

Their repatriation comes a month before their loan period expires in February, according to the Tokyo Metropolitan Government, which operates Ueno Zoo. “According to the relevant agreement between China and Japan, the giant pandas who were living in Japan, Xiao Xiao and Lei Lei, today began their return trip to China,” said Guo Jiakun, China’s foreign ministry spokesman. “As always, we welcome the Japanese public to come see giant pandas in China.”

Japan has reportedly been seeking the loan of a new pair of pandas. However, a weekend poll by the liberal Asahi Shimbun newspaper showed that 70 per cent of those surveyed do not think the government should negotiate with China on the lease of new pandas, while 26 per cent would like them to. On Sunday, Ueno Zoo invited some 4,400 lucky winners of an online lottery to see the pandas for the last time.

Well-wishers wearing panda-themed clothes, hats and badges waited for hours on the streets lining the zoo two days later to say their final goodbyes. They called out to the animals as the windowless truck left the gates. “It’s so sad,” said Daisaku Hirota, a 37-year-old shop worker who said he tried to visit the pandas as often as he could on his days off. “I lost one part of my heart,” he said.

Lei Lei and Xiao Xiao were delivered in 2021 by their mother Shin Shin, who arrived in 2011 and was returned to China in 2024 because of declining health. Since late last year, China has discouraged its nationals from travelling to Japan, citing deteriorating public security. — AFP

Stifling the ‘Spirit of Dialogue’ at Davos

US President Donald Trump rose to power partly by positioning himself as a foil to global elites. But last week, he attended the World Economic Forum (WEF) – the quintessential gathering of the world’s wealthiest and most powerful people – in Davos as the star guest. With the largest-ever US delegation in tow, Trump took his aggressive protectionism and transactional diplomacy to the global stage, shifting the debate and, in the process, increasing the risk of irreversible changes to the Earth system.

Instead of discussing issues such as fair taxation, sustainability, social justice, and the energy transition, as delegates have done in the past, they kowtowed to Trump. But Trump’s remarks at Davos should erase any remaining doubt that normalising his extreme policies and strident positions only encourages him to double down on the geopolitical chaos and uncertainty he is causing.

In the last month alone, Trump has withdrawn the United States from 66 international organisations, including two of the world’s most important and oldest climate institutions – the 34-year-old UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), which serves as the primary forum for climate negotiations, and the UN’s 38-year-old Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, which leads the science related to climate change. And just days before his trip to Davos, Trump stunned European leaders by threatening to impose punitive tariffs on allies that oppose his plan to seize Greenland from Denmark. After more than a year of such wanton destruction and excessive use of unilateral measures to advance his “America



In the last month alone, Trump has withdrawn the United States from 66 international organisations.



HIPPOLYTE FOFACK

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First” agenda, trust – the lifeblood of multilateralism – has eroded, raising the risk of fragmentation and fuelling instability. To mitigate these effects, sustain global growth, and promote shared prosperity, the WEF chose “A Spirit of Dialogue” as the theme for this year’s meeting. It may be one of the best-attended yet, with more than 3,000 delegates from over 130 countries, including 64 heads of state and government.

Dialogue, of course, is essential to resolve disputes, prevent conflict escalation – especially in our great-power-rivalry world of heightening geopolitical tensions – and prepare for risks. According to the WEF’s pre-Davos survey, the most severe risks over the next decade all relate to the climate emergency. But, to secure Trump’s participation, the WEF agreed to avoid “woke” topics, including the energy transition and climate change. So much for a spirit of dialogue.

The agenda instead focused on, among other things, improving cooperation in a more contested world, unlocking new sources of growth, investing in people, responsibly deploying innovation at scale, and building prosperity within planetary boundaries.

Technology – particularly how AI, quantum computing, and next-generation biotech and energy systems can drive economic and societal transformation – was a prominent theme.

The silence on climate change is as cynical as it is unsurprising. One of Trump’s first acts in his second term was to withdraw the US from the Paris climate agreement. His administration later launched a major campaign to reverse US climate policy and expand fossil-fuel production. This has included halting the construction of offshore wind farms, slashing funding for renewable-energy projects, and working to repeal federal limits on greenhouse-gas emissions from power plants and vehicles.

Following Trump’s “drill, baby, drill” mantra, the administration has declared a “national energy emergency” and authorised the expansion of domestic fossil-fuel production. This policy could reverse progress in the transition to renewable energy, which contributed about one-third of global electricity generation in 2024. It also brings the world closer to a climate catastrophe, especially after scientists revealed earlier this month that the goal of limiting global warming to 1.5°C is now on track to be breached by 2030, more than a decade earlier than expected at the time of the 2015 Paris Agreement. As the world’s largest historical and current emitter, the US economy’s continued reliance on fossil fuels has repercussions for everyone else. It will cause trillions of dollars in damage, disproportionately affecting poorer countries, and could push global warming above the 1.5°C target set by the Paris climate agreement.

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What makes high quality of life in a nation



SAMUEL KUTTY

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

WHAT determines the quality of life across different nations and individuals? Is it a thriving economy, excellent healthcare, or the capacity to inspire adventure and creativity? Studies evaluating the influence of our living environment on emotions have shown a significant increase in interest in assessing quality of life in recent years. Typically, quality of life in a country is measured using metrics such as income, health statistics, education levels, and environmental quality. The World Health Organisation defines quality of life as an individual's perception of their position in life within the context of the culture and value systems in which they live, and in relation to their goals, expectations, standards, and concerns. According to Britannica, the term “quality of life” is inherently ambiguous because it can refer both to an individual's personal experience of their own life and to the living conditions in which individuals find themselves. “Quality of life refers to the extent to which a person is healthy, comfortable, and able to engage in or enjoy life experiences,” states the General Knowledge Encyclopedia. Significantly, the 2026 Quality of Life Index by Numbeo has revealed new insights, with the Sultanate of Oman emerging as the top destination for quality of life on the Asian continent, surpassing many developed countries in the world. With a score of 207.6, Oman reached the

helm with a combination of exceptional safety, high purchasing power, affordable housing, and low pollution, although the healthcare scores remained in a mild range. This means the nation offers a high level of daily comfort to its citizens, residents, and visitors. The Numbeo Global Quality of Life Index is the world's largest database that counts the volume of user participation as a measure to assess living conditions in cities and countries around the world. The ranking was based on the assessments of the populations within the countries listed in the global platform. Other Asian countries listed in top of the index in Asia are Japan, Singapore, South Korea, Malaysia, Qatar, and the UAE. The top 10 globally include the Netherlands, Denmark, Luxembourg, and Switzerland. These countries combine high safety, purchasing power, strong healthcare, and manageable living costs. The recognition by Numbeo, a website that gathers information from real people through surveys and user inputs, underscores Oman's commitment to improving the quality of life for its people and enhancing its global standing as an attractive destination for both residents and visitors. Living in Oman is highly recommended for many reasons. The country is known for its political and economic stability, making it an ideal destination for individuals and families seeking a secure and peaceful environment. This ranking, along with other accolades

The new ranking, along with other accolades that Oman has in its cap, is expected to positively impact the nation's global image, enhancing its appeal as a destination for tourism, investment, and residency

that Oman has in its cap, is expected to positively impact the nation's global image, enhancing its appeal as a destination for tourism, investment, and residency. This achievement also serves as a testament to the success of Vision 2040, which aims to achieve sustainable development and improve the living standards of citizens. Oman provides a serene and welcoming environment that enhances the quality of life for its citizens, residents, and visitors. The country boasts well-developed infrastructure in healthcare, education, sanitation, and transportation, ensuring a high standard of comfort and convenience. According to the Gallup 2025 Global Safety Report, over 94 per cent of people in Oman feel safe walking alone at night, making it one of the safest countries in the world. The Gallup findings rank Oman alongside global leaders such as Singapore, China, and Saudi Arabia, highlighting the Sultanate of Oman's strong institutions, reliable infrastructure, and cohesive communities. The Sultanate of Oman's strong social fabric, characterised by cultural norms of respect, civility, and collective responsibility, plays a crucial role in fostering supportive communities in both urban and rural areas. What is clear from these definitive rankings is that high income alone does not guarantee top positions. Factors such as health, education, cost of living, cleanliness, and purchasing power play critical roles. It is no surprise that a stable and consistent country like Oman tops the list!

CAN THE US HALT MILITANT VIOLENCE IN NIGERIA?

NICHOLAS ROLL

Just over a week after the United States launched strikes targeting militants in Nigeria on Christmas Day, a roadside bomb ripped through an armoured troop carrier, killing at least eight Nigerian soldiers. Then, days ahead of a high-profile US-Nigeria security meeting in Abuja last week, armed gangs kidnapped more than 170 churchgoers in Nigeria's northern Kaduna state. Elsewhere, a suicide bomber hit a military convoy killing half a dozen troops. Violence has continued unabated despite US President Donald Trump's stated goal of stemming the alleged mass killing of Christians in Africa's most populous nation. Security analysts say this is unsurprising. “It would take a lot more than... a couple of bombardments to address Nigeria's security challenges,” said Kabir Adamu of Beacon Security and Intelligence, calling for “a holistic approach” addressing “mass poverty”, “weak state governance structures” and militant financing networks. The United States hit Nigeria's northwest Sokoto state on Christmas Day in jointly coordinated strikes against IS militants, the first direct action by Washington in the country. Going forward, the United States will provide intelligence from aerial reconnaissance flights to aid Nigerian air strikes. How much of a game changer that will be remains to be seen. US support since Nigeria's 2009 militant uprising has not stopped the bloodshed. A \$346 million weapons sale last year was met with concern from advocates worried about the Nigerian military's grim rights record - which had at times held up previous US arms sales. US military efforts in the wider Sahel have failed to halt insurgency across Burkina Faso, Niger and Mali although the security situation has deteriorated since US and French troops left the region. Nigerian national security adviser Nuhu Ribadu said increased collaboration with the US had “resulted in the neutralisation of several hundreds of terrorists.” AFP was unable to confirm those numbers as Nigeria's front lines are spread across vast swathes of unsecured rural terrain. Lately, the military has been claiming that dozens of militants were killed in anti-terror operations. Neither the US nor Nigeria has released details of how many militants were killed in the Christmas Day strikes. “Regardless of how many IS members were killed, it allowed the Nigerian security forces the opportunity to hit more transitory targets” as the insurgents fled, Lieutenant General John Brennan, deputy commander of the United States Africa Command, said. — AFP

Trump’s Board of Peace and undermining of UN

DONALD Trump's creation of a so-called Board of Peace has been framed by the White House as a new mechanism to address global conflicts, beginning with Gaza and potentially extending far beyond. “Once this board is completely formed, we can do pretty much whatever we want to do. And we'll do it in conjunction with the United Nations,” Trump said, also adding that the UN's potential wasn't being fully utilised. Yet the concept, the composition of the board and the reactions it has provoked reveal something far more troubling: it could be a bid to sideline the established international system and reshape global governance in ways that favour US strategic priorities and political allies. At first glance, the Board of Peace appears to be another multilateral effort, a new United Nations-style body designed to mediate conflict, stabilise war-torn regions and promote reconstruction. It was launched this month at the World Economic Forum in Davos with a charter signing and a handful of member states, and introduced as an effort for extending the fragile October 2025 Gaza ceasefire and supporting reconstruction efforts. But beneath the official rhetoric lies a less reassuring reality. The initiative was described by local media as raising concern because it could rival or sidestep the UN Security Council's traditional role in world affairs, a deeply problematic development for a global system already under strain. Rather than strengthening existing peacekeeping and humanitarian frameworks, the Board of Peace risks fragmenting them and relegating established institutions like the United Nations to the sidelines. That concern is not abstract. The UN remains the core international organisation tasked with maintaining international peace and security, conflict resolution, climate action and humanitarian protection.



Displaced Palestinian children look out of a shelter in a tent camp on a rainy day in Khan Yunis, southern Gaza Strip. — Reuters file photo



OMAN AL YAHYAI

The writer is a multilingual writer and media professional based in Paris. She specialises in human rights and immigration

Undermining its role undermines the norms and mechanisms that have governed international relations since World War II. If powerful nations are free to create parallel bodies to “do pretty much whatever we want,” as Trump put it, then global governance shifts from a rules-based order to one shaped by narrow power interests and transactional deals. A board led by an outgoing US president whose foreign policy record is defined by transactional alliances and prioritising domestic interests is unlikely to prioritise the perspectives of populations most affected by conflicts that the board claims to address. Concerns about the board's composition are well-founded. The executive leadership includes figures such as Jared Kushner, Trump's son-in-law and senior adviser, and Marco Rubio, the US Secretary of State with strong pro-Israeli credentials. This alignment raises legitimate questions about neutrality, independence and whose interests are truly being advanced. That scrutiny is shown by the involvement of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who has agreed to join the board despite

leading a government and military campaign that has committed grave human rights violations against Palestinians in Gaza. Netanyahu's participation in a body claiming to foster “peace” strikes as emblematic of deeper contradictions: a group seemingly created to secure stability and reconstruction includes leaders seen as contributors to ongoing violence and displacement. It is especially worrying given the circumstances under which the board was conceived. The October 2025 ceasefire in Gaza was supposed to end one of the deadliest chapters in the region's decades-long conflict. Yet that ceasefire and the board's first task of supervising reconstruction, rests on a tragic paradox: the United States supplied weapons, money and political backing that enabled that conflict's scale and duration, and now claims a central role in “resolving” its aftermath. This raises uncomfortable questions about accountability and whether the board's leadership is positioned to foster genuine peace or to shape post-conflict outcomes in ways that entrench existing power imbalances. Moreover, reactions from around the world reflect scepticism. Several traditional US allies including France, Sweden and Norway have declined to participate, citing concerns that the board could replace or undercut the UN rather than complement it. European reluctance to join reflects not only doubts about the initiative's mandate but also anxiety over what it represents politically: a US-centric alternative to international cooperation on peace and security. Even proponents of the Board of Peace acknowledge its beginnings are tied to Gaza, not a global agenda. But the expansion of its stated scope suggests an ambition not merely to assist with a ceasefire and reconstruction, but to establish a new axis of influence in international affairs.

SPORTS

13 SAILORS



Action during the Arab Sailing Championship Oman 2022.

OMAN’S NATIONAL TEAMS HEAD TO EGYPT FOR 2026 ARAB SAILING IN SOMA BAY

MUSCAT: Thirteen of Oman’s young sailors are preparing to compete at the 2026 Arab Sailing Championships in Soma Bay, Egypt. Racing begins on January 28 with a trial race and runs through until February 1, where Oman will be represented in Optimist, ILCA 4, ILCA 6, ILCA 7, windsurfing and kitefoil featuring many medal winners from the recent 2026 Winter Cup.

Mohammed al Qasmi, Khalid al Sarihi, Al Khalil al Fori and Mohammed al Balushi form the Optimist team. Al Qasmi and Al Sarihi recently won gold and silver at the 2026 Winter Cup and will be looking to continue this good form on the Red Sea. The team will be coached by Sultan al Zadjali, Oman Sail’s Optimist coach.

The three-strong ILCA 7 team is made up of all three medal winners: Hussein al Jabri, Ahmed al Balushi and Abdullatif al Qasmi. Ahmed al Wahaibi is the coach.

The three medal winners: Hussein al Jabri, Ahmed al Balushi and Abdullatif al Qasmi. Ahmed al Wahaibi, Oman Sail’s ILCA coach, will be assisting the team throughout.

Oman will also be competing in the men’s iQFOiL windsurfing with Omar al Qartoobi and in the men’s kitefoil with Al Makhtar al Mujaini both hoping for strong winds to propel them forward. Hashim al Rashdi, Team Lead and Oman Sail’s Head Coach Performance, said, “The Arab Sailing Championships is an exciting opportunity for our sailors to represent the nation against their peers from across the region. With the Winter Cup and the training cup so fresh in the memories of our team we are hopeful of a good performance and for our medalists to carry their impressive form into competition at Soma Bay.”

Sultan al Zadjali, Optimist team coach, added, “This is a great experience for the entire team across all classes. We are focused on the long-term development of our team with opportunities to represent Oman, become accustomed to high level regattas and compete for medals all valuable learning experiences for the sailors to develop as athletes and as individuals.”

The 2026 Arab Sailing Championship is organised by the Egyptian Sailing and Water Ski Federation in cooperation with the Arab Sailing Federation. After a trial race and the opening ceremony on January 28, competition begins the following day with the finals series and closing ceremony on February 2.

Following the conclusion of the regatta, the Optimist team will return home to prepare for the Inter School Regatta during February 12-13 and 2026 Optimist European Championship during July 24-31 in Gdynia, Poland.

OIDC builds momentum ahead of second round

MOHAMED AL BATTASHI
MUSCAT, JAN 27

THE Oman International Drift Championship (OIDC 2026) opened in spectacular fashion at the Muscat Drift Arena, delivering a thrilling first round that reinforced its reputation as one of the world’s most competitive drifting series. Held as part of the Muscat Nights winter festival and organised by the Oman Automobile Association (OAA), the opening battles brought together more than 50 drivers from over 20 countries, alongside leading competitors from Oman and across the Middle East and North Africa.

Qualifying sessions took place on January 15, followed by intense head-to-head racing on January 16, where international stars and local challengers pushed their machines to the limit in dramatic Twin Drift showdowns. Defending champion Ali Makseed of Kuwait led the field, joined by Dutch racer Clint van Oort and national champion Ahmed al Amri, while several global drifting figures added further excitement to the weekend.

Large crowds packed the venue as drivers progressed through the Top 32, Top 16 and Top 8 elimination stages before the final duels crowned a thrilling opening round. Motor enthusiasts praised the smooth logistics and world-class facilities that once again underlined Oman’s growing status as a motorsports destination.

With momentum building after the season-opening action, attention is now firmly turning to the much-anticipated second round, which is set to take place on Thursday and Friday, January 29 and 30, at the Muscat Drift Arena under the Muscat Nights banner.

Qualifying runs will be held on Thursday, January 29, followed by the finals on Friday, January 30. More than 50 elite drivers representing over 20 nations are again expected to line up on the grid, promising another weekend of tyre smoking battles and high-precision



Large crowds packed the venue as drivers progressed through the Top 32, Top 16 and Top 8 elimination stages before the final duels crowned a thrilling opening round.

driving for fans. Social media activist Mohammed al Aرامي highlighted the scale and significance of the championship, describing it as among the strongest drifting competitions in the world and praised Muscat Nights for hosting standout sporting spectacles each year. He also commended the Oman Automobile Association, the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, and Muscat Municipality for their role in staging the event. Spectators are equally eager for the next chapter of the championship. Marwan al Battashi, who attended the opening round, captured the excitement in the stands. “The energy in the arena was incredible,” he said. “Every run brought cheers, and the Twin Drift battles kept everyone on the edge of their seats. The mix of international champions and

local drivers made the competition even more thrilling. Events like this are exactly what make Muscat Nights so special for motorsport fans.” Organisers expect Round 2 to build on the success of the opener, with preparations in place to welcome large crowds and deliver another high-octane weekend of racing. The championship continues to attract elite global talent thanks to its strong organisational standards, competitive format and growing international profile. As Muscat Nights enters another action-packed weekend, the second round of the Oman International Drift Championship is shaping up to be a must-see attraction, offering spectators a front-row seat to world-class drifting and confirming Oman’s position on the global motorsport calendar.

Athletes preparation bowlers camp in Malaysia

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, JAN 27

Players from the Athletes Preparation Centre for Bowling are currently participating in an overseas training camp in Malaysia from January 24 to 30, as part of an approved preparation plan aimed at enhancing their technical and physical performance and raising their competitive readiness ahead of upcoming local and international commitments.

The camp forms part of the Centre’s development programmes designed to provide players with valuable international exposure, diversify training methods, and closely evaluate their technical standards, contributing to the overall refinement of their skills and competitive performance.

The delegation includes eight male players: Al Yaman al Hadrami, Noah al Zadjali, Hatim al Rahbi, Luai al Ghafri, Ali al Kharousi, Mishaal al Balushi, Adam al Harthy and Elyas al Maimani.

Six female players are also participating: Basma al Ismaili,



The camp is supervised by coaches Lee Honbyo and Ismail al Zadjali.

Al Anood al Hajri, Shaikha al Jahdhami, Noor al Balushi, Talia al Shabibi and Rafidah al Hadidi. The camp is supervised by coaches Lee Honbyo and Ismail al Zadjali, supported by the administrative team comprising Shaima al Hashmi and Ayman al Jahdhami. The programme features intensive training sessions and continuous technical assessments to monitor players’ progress. Shaima al Hashmi, Board Member of the Oman Bowling Committee, emphasised that the overseas training camp represents an important step in the national preparation

pathway, aiming to elevate the technical, physical, and mental readiness of all participants in preparation for the 2026 local and international competitions. She explained that the daily programme runs in two sessions, morning and evening, combining specialised technical drills with mental and tactical development sessions. Players also benefit from direct exposure to teams and athletes of varying standards, providing valuable competitive experience and realistic performance evaluation. The camp is held in cooperation with the Megalan Bowling Centre, one of

Malaysia’s leading specialised facilities known for organising professional training camps and youth development programmes. The centre offers modern equipment and a high-performance environment that supports skill enhancement and athletic growth. The programme also includes joint training sessions with Megalan’s youth teams and Malaysian national players, in addition to mini tournaments designed to measure competitive levels and apply the techniques learned during training. Following the camp, players will participate in upcoming domestic competitions across various age categories, with the most prepared athletes to be selected to represent Oman in international events later this year. Al Hashmi added that Malaysia was chosen due to its advanced bowling facilities, professional training environment, efficient organisation, and the diversity of playing standards, which provide beneficial competitive exposure that helps develop both technical and mental capabilities.

53-RUN VICTORY



England's captain Harry Brook celebrates after scoring a century with Joe Root during the third one-day international against Sri Lanka at the R Premadasa International Cricket Stadium in Colombo on Tuesday. — AFP

BROOK, ROOT HIT TONS AS ENGLAND SEAL ODI SERIES IN SRI LANKA

COLOMBO: Contrasting centuries from Joe Root and Harry Brook powered England to a 53-run victory over Sri Lanka in Colombo on Tuesday to secure a 2-1 victory in their one-day international series.

After choosing to bat, England were on the back foot when Ben Duckett (7) and Rehan Ahmed (24) fell inside the opening 11 overs.

But Root and Jacob Bethell stepped in to steady the innings, compiling a controlled 126-run stand for the third wicket.

Bethell's assured 65 came to an end when Jeffrey Vandersay struck, but Root found a perfect partner in captain Brook as the pair shifted the innings into a higher gear. Their unbeaten 191-run stand from 113 balls turned England's total from competitive to imposing.

Brook plundered an ODI career-best 136 off 66 deliveries, smashing 11 fours and nine sixes, as Root made a composed unbeaten 111 off 108 balls to guide England to a commanding 357-3.

Sri Lanka began their chase with intent. Kamil Mishara contributed 22, and Pathum Nissanka hammered five fours and three sixes in a 24-ball fifty before his dismissal by Jamie Overton checked the momentum.

Captain Charith Asalanka (13) and Janith Liyanage (22) fell cheaply as England applied sustained pressure with disciplined bowling.

The hosts slipped to 202-6 in the 32nd over, and although Pavan Rathnayake (121) kept Sri Lanka afloat with a composed maiden ODI century, wickets continued to fall around him.

Rathnayake's resistance ended when Sam Curran breached his defence with a full delivery that knocked back his leg stump, and Sri Lanka were bowled out for 304.

Sri Lanka had won the first ODI by 19 runs before England levelled the series with a five-wicket victory.

The sides will now turn their attention to a three-match Twenty20 series starting on Friday.

— Reuters



Oman's Abdullah al Rawahi is the second seed in Qatar next weekend.

Al Attiyah, Al Rawahi top entry for Qatar Rally

DEFENDING champion Nasser Saleh al Attiyah headlines a 22-car field with competitors from a dozen nations announced on Tuesday by the Qatar Motor and Motorcycle Federation (QMMF) for next weekend's Qatar International Rally.

The second round of the 2026 FIA Middle East Rally Championship (Merc) follows hot on the heels of last weekend's season opener in Oman and takes place on February 4-7.

Al Attiyah and his Spanish navigator stormed to victory in Sohar just four days ago and top a field that includes five Rally2 machines, six crews fighting for honours in the FIA Merc2 category, an impressive half a dozen machines in FIA Merc4, a Rally5 entrant and four visiting teams with SSVs.

Former regional champion Abdullah al Rawahi and the 2012 event winner Abdulaziz al Kuwari should be Al Attiyah's closest challengers. Like the top seed, they wheel out a pair of Skoda Fabia RS machines.

Talented local driver Mohammed al Marri has made the transition from Rally4 to the premier Rally2 category and will drive a Citroen C3 for the first time, while defending FIA Master Driver champion Nasser Khalifa al Atya rounds off the Rally2 field in his Ford Fiesta.

Jordanian Shaker Jweihan was the runaway winner of the Merc2 section in Oman last weekend and tops the field in his Mitsubishi Lancer Evolution X with co-driver



Nasser Saleh al Attiyah tops the entry list for next weekend's Qatar International Rally.

Mustafa Juma. He faces 'showroom' category competition from fellow countryman Sami Fleifel, Kuwait's Jassim al Muqahwi, Omani Zakariya al Aamri, Indian Mohamed Mansoor Parol and Lebanese driver Charbel Chebly.

The QMMF launched its Qatar Academy Stars programme a couple of years ago and the federation is keen to continue the promotion of local talent and young drivers. Al Marri is one of the success stories from the project and drives a Rally2 machine on this occasion, while six teams will battle it out for Merc4 success in a quintet of Peugeot 208s and a solitary Ford Fiesta.

Academy member Rashid al Muhannadi is the defending FIA Merc4 champion and teams up with Irishman Gary McElhinney in the first of the Peugeots. He will face

fierce resistance from the experienced trio of Ahmed al Kuwari, Khalifa Saleh al Attiyah and Nouef al Sowaidi and their respective co-drivers, Baptiste Cerrato, Aisvydas Paliukenas and Laos Savvas. Ahmad al Mohannadi and Taha al Zadjali crew the fifth 208.

The Indian duo of Payyaakkal Panikkaveettil and Musa Sherif will be hoping to break down the French manufacturer's stranglehold on the category in a Ford Fiesta.

SSVs are also eligible to score points in the Merc and a Qatari driver and three Italians will battle it out for honours. Mohammed al Atteya and Mirko Carrara have a pair of Can-Am Mavericks, while Mario Marotta and regular Qatar Rally entrant Christiano Gabbarrini wheel out Yamaha YXZ 1000 RS built by Quaddy Racing.

The Lebanese duo of Shadi El Fakih and Joseph Kmeid overcame first stage fuel pump woes in Oman last weekend to round off the finishers and they will again be competing in a Renault Clio RS Rally 5 at the rear of the field.

Engine issues in Oman last weekend forced Jordan's Sheikh Bader al Fayez to miss the event in Qatar and an accident also made it impossible for Ihab al Shorafa to continue his Merc campaign from Lusail.

The event will be held under the chairmanship of QMMF President Abdulrahman al Mannai, senior committee member Abdulrazaq al Kuwari and the QMMF's Executive Director Amro al Hamad.

Administration checks will take place on February 3 at the Lusail International Circuit.

Doncic magic sparks Lakers over Bulls, Celtics bounce back

LOS ANGELES: Luka Doncic produced a 46-point masterpiece as the Los Angeles Lakers snapped the Chicago Bulls' four-game winning streak with a 129-118 victory on the road on Monday.

Doncic rattled in eight three pointers on 15-of-25 shooting from the field and finished with seven rebounds and 11 assists to lead an impressive Lakers effort at the United Center.

LeBron James chipped in with 24 points, five rebounds and three assists, while Rui Hachimura delivered an eye-catching cameo off the bench with 23 points from 9-of-11 shooting.

The win was another encouraging result for the Lakers after a 116-110 defeat of the Dallas Mavericks on

Saturday. "We did a great job in the first half, kind of relaxed in the third quarter — we've got to work on the third quarters — but overall, a great game by everybody," Doncic said after a win that lifts the Lakers to 28-17 in the Western Conference.

Coby White led the scoring for Chicago with 23 points, while Ayo Dosunmu had 20 off the bench.

The Lakers now head to Ohio to face the Cleveland Cavaliers for the next stop on their road trip on Wednesday.

The Cavaliers warmed up for that encounter with a 114-98 defeat of the Orlando Magic thanks to Donovan Mitchell's 45-point display. Evan Mobley backed Mitchell with 20 points while Paolo Banchero led the Orlando scoring with 37 points.



Los Angeles Lakers' Luka Doncic (77) goes to the basket against Chicago Bulls' Josh Giddey (3) at United Center. — Imagn Images

In the Eastern Conference, the Boston Celtics led from start to finish in a 102-94 defeat of the Portland Trail Blazers. Payton Pritchard (23 points) and Jaylen Brown (20) led the Celtics scoring as second-placed Boston improved to 29-17 to remain in pursuit of conference leaders Detroit (33-11).

In other games on Monday, Brandon Miller scored 30 points and grabbed eight rebounds to lead Charlotte's 130-93 blowout of Philadelphia as severe weather forced early starts for two NBA games. Opening tipoffs were moved to the afternoon for the Hornets' home victory and Atlanta's 132-116 triumph over visiting Indiana after a severe winter storm on Sunday that dumped ice and snow over most of

the United States. The Hornets, 19-28, stretched their win streak to three games while the 76ers fell to 24-21.

Miller made 9-of-12 shots from the floor, including 6-of-9 from three-point range, and was 6-of-6 from the free throw line to lead the Hawks, who had seven other double-figure scorers but none over 13 points.

Kelly Oubre Jr led the Sixers with 17 points with Tyrese Maxey — third in NBA scoring with 29.9 points a game — managing only six points on 3-of-12 shooting.

In Atlanta, CJ McCollum came off the bench to produce 23 points, eight rebounds, seven assists and three steals to spark the Hawks. Dyson Daniels added 22 points and nine assists while Nickeil Alexander-Walker had 21 points for Atlanta. — AFP

SPORTS

21CHAMPIONSHIPS



OMAN UNIVERSITY
SPORTS COMMITTEE
UNVEILS LARGEST
EVER 2026 CALENDAR

RIYADH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JAN 26

The Oman University Sports Committee (OUSC) has officially unveiled its 2026 sports calendar, marking the largest and most comprehensive season in the history of university sports in the Sultanate of Oman. The calendar features 21 championships across 12 different sports, with the participation of more than 20,000 male and female students representing 30 higher education institutions from across Oman.

The expanded calendar reflects the committee’s strategic vision to strengthen university sports as a key platform for talent identification, youth development and sustainable sports growth within academic institutions, in line with the objectives of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth.

Dr Ali bin Salam al Yaarubi, OUSC Chairman, stated that the 2026 season represents a major milestone in the development of university sports over the past five years. He noted that five new sports have been added to the committee’s programmes during this period, alongside the introduction of five new university championships, significantly expanding participation and competitive opportunities.

Al Yaarubi revealed that the OUSC is currently working on enhancing incentive schemes for student-athletes, extending beyond financial rewards to include academic incentives. These initiatives include providing scholarships for outstanding athletes to continue their higher education, whether at the bachelor’s level for diploma holders or through postgraduate studies such as master’s programmes, linking athletic excellence with academic advancement.

He emphasised that these initiatives align with Oman Vision 2040, which prioritises investment in human capital, capacity building and the integration of sports into youth development frameworks. The committee chairman praised the continued support of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, describing it as a cornerstone of the committee’s success, highlighted that the ministry’s support extends beyond funding to include policy development, institutional coordination and enhanced collaboration between educational institutions and sports federations.

YEAR ROUND PROGRAMME
The 2026 season will kick off in January with the Padel Championship, followed in February by esports competitions, beach volleyball, women’s bowling and the ‘Korathon’ event in partnership with the Oman Logistics Academy, continuing through March.

March will also host the popular 3x3 Basketball Championship, while April will feature swimming and athletics championships, in addition to the Women’s Individual Sports Festival. Competitions will continue throughout the year in volleyball, football, basketball, table tennis, chess, shooting and challenge events, with the season concluding in December with the Handball Championship.

Dr Nasser bin Ali al Jahwari, OUSC Vice-Chairman, stated that “the 2026 University Sports Calendar represents a qualitative leap in the development of sports activities across higher education institutions.”

He also noted that “this expansion reflects the level of institutional effort and integration between academic and sporting aspects. He said the OUSC places great importance on leveraging electronic systems and student services to facilitate student participation.”

SHOOTING COMPETITION ADDED
Among the key additions to the 2026 calendar is the introduction of a Shooting Championship in October, organised in cooperation with specialised entities and in accordance with approved technical and safety standards.

The committee also announced the release of a comprehensive University Sports Regulations Manual, designed to standardise organisational procedures, technical requirements, officiating protocols, safety measures and event management processes across all institutions.



Spain’s Carlos Alcaraz in action during his Australian Open quarterfinal match against Australia’s Alex De Minaur at Melbourne Park. — Reuters

Alcaraz sweeps into
maiden AO semis

CARLOS ALCARAZ warned he was improving all the time as he swept into his maiden Australian Open semifinal on Tuesday and a clash with Alexander Zverev, while Ukraine’s Elina Svitolina faces Aryna Sabalenka in the last four.

Spanish world number one Alcaraz silenced a partisan Melbourne crowd in brushing aside home hope Alex de Minaur 7-5, 6-2, 6-1 at Rod Laver Arena.

The 22-year-old Alcaraz is yet to drop a set as he arrows in on a first Australian Open crown.

“I’m just really happy how I’m playing every match, each round my level is increasing,” he said, in a warning to his rivals.

“Today I felt really comfortable, playing great tennis that I am really proud of,” added Alcaraz, who had never previously gone beyond the quarterfinals in Australia in four previous visits.

The Australian Open is the only Grand Slam that Alcaraz has not won.

Should he beat Zverev and then win Sunday’s final, he would surpass compatriot and legend Rafael Nadal as the youngest man to win all four majors.

Nadal was 24 when he did it.

In a statement of his own, Zverev said he was playing without pain for the first time in 12 months after last year’s runner-up blasted past young American Learner Tien.

Zverev sent down 24 aces in a 6-3, 6-7 (5/7), 6-1, 7-6 (7/3) victory.

World number three Zverev is desperate to finally win a Grand Slam at age 28, having lost three major finals including being well beaten in last year’s title decider by Jannik Sinner.

The German’s 2025 season fell away after that, winning just one title in an injury-hit campaign and he also struggled with his mental health, taking a one-month break after losing in the first round at Wimbledon.

“The last 10 days I felt healthy, which is very nice, and pain-free, which I haven’t felt in a long time. Probably in 12 months,” he said after dismantling Tien.

GAUFF’S EPIC RACQUET SMASH
Coco Gauff folded in 59 error-strewn minutes as Svitolina set up a semifinal against Sabalenka.

Belarusian world number one Sabalenka tamed 18-year-old American Iva Jovic 6-3, 6-0 in 38C temperatures on Rod Laver Arena.

In the evening, with the roof on because of the suffocating heat, 12th seed Svitolina stunned third seed Gauff 6-1, 6-2.

Television images showed Gauff repeatedly smashing her racquet in the



Ukraine’s Elina Svitolina plays a shot during her quarterfinal against Coco Gauff of the US. — Reuters

bowels of the stadium afterwards.

The Ukrainian, who is on a 10-match win streak after a title-winning run at Auckland this month, added: “It means the world to me.”

Svitolina said she hopes her stunning upset will bring “a little light” to her fellow Ukrainians during a bitter winter under attack by Russia.

For two-time Grand Slam winner Gauff, a decade younger at 21, it was more Melbourne misery.

She has still never gone beyond the semi-finals and the nature of the loss will sting.

Gauff’s serve deserted her, broken four times in the first set and twice in the second to leave her title aspirations in tatters.

She was not amused to learn that her epic racquet smash was caught by television cameras.

“I tried to go somewhere where they wouldn’t broadcast it, but obviously they did,” she said.

“So maybe some conversations can be had because I feel like at this tournament the only private place we have is the locker room.”

In the first action of the day, Sabalenka closed in on a third Melbourne crown in just four years.

Having been stunned in last year’s final by the American Madison Keys, the hard-hitting Belarusian said it was “trophy or nothing” after muscling past the supremely talented Jovic.

The quarterfinals conclude on Wednesday, with 10-time Melbourne champion Novak Djokovic and title-holder Jannik Sinner in action.

Djokovic faces Italian fifth seed Lorenzo Musetti and Sinner plays Ben Shelton of the United States.

In the women’s draw, Jessica Pegula and Amanda Anisimova meet in an all-American affair and second seed Iga Swiatek faces fifth seed Elena Rybakina.

Temperatures are scheduled to be considerably cooler. — AFP

**AUSTRALIAN OPEN DAY 10 RESULTS
MEN (QUARTERFINALS)**
Alexander Zverev (GER x3) bt Learner Tien (USA x25) 6-3, 6-7 (5/7), 6-1, 7-6 (7/3); Carlos Alcaraz (ESP x1) bt Alex De Minaur (AUS x6) 7-5, 6-2, 6-1

WOMEN (QUARTERFINALS)
Aryna Sabalenka (BLR x1) bt Iva Jovic (USA x29) 6-3, 6-0; Elina Svitolina (UKR x12) bt Coco Gauff (USA x3) 6-1, 6-2



MUSCAT
STOCK
EXCHANGE
6,271.428

CRUDE OIL
OMAN \$62.85
BRENT \$65.01
LIGHT \$60.92



BUSINESS

SHORTTAKES

OMAN-UAE SPACE PARTNERSHIP SETS REGIONAL MODEL

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, JAN 27

Space cooperation between the Sultanate of Oman and the United Arab Emirates serves as a living model of regional partnerships, according to astronaut and UAE Minister of State for Youth Affairs, Dr Sultan Saif al Neyadi.



DR SULTAN SAIF
AL NEYADI

UAE Minister of
State for Youth
Affairs

Speaking during the second edition of the Middle East Space Conference in Muscat, Dr Al Neyadi highlighted the strategic and economic significance of regional collaboration in the space sector.

“Space cooperation between the Sultanate of Oman and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) holds particular importance, serving as a living model of regional partnerships that build

capabilities and open new horizons for scientific research and advanced technology”.

He said cooperation between the two countries extends beyond policy alignment to practical joint initiatives that strengthen long-term sustainability in the sector.

“This cooperation includes the exchange of expertise and training, as well as joint projects in satellites and remote sensing, strengthening both countries’ roles in developing a sustainable space sector that serves the region and the world.

In this context, I am pleased to extend my sincere congratulations to the Sultanate of Oman on the occasion of its accession to the Artemis Accords — a step that reflects its commitment to enhancing international cooperation in the field of space and continuing the journey of exploration to the Moon and beyond, in service of humanity’s future”.

He emphasised that progress in the space sector is closely linked to innovation, people and strong partnerships.

“These achievements demonstrate that success in the space sector is only realised through innovation, investment in human capital; and strong international and regional partnerships.

Engineers, scientists and astronauts are the cornerstone of any progress and supporting youth and providing opportunities is the path to developing a dynamic space sector — an investment in the future and a means for our region to embody global competitiveness”.

Dr Al Neyadi also underlined the growing economic role of space-related activities and their relevance to the digital economy. “Space has become more than scientific exploration.”

Oman’s MB Group eyes over \$200 million in space investments

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, JAN 27

Oman’s Mohammed Al Barwani Group is moving beyond satellite ground-station services to owning dedicated satellite capacity, its Chief Executive Officer said, framing the step as a strategic bet on data connectivity and greater control over critical communications infrastructure.

“We started with the idea of ground services”, Said bin Saleh al Jabri, CEO of Mohammed Al Barwani LLC, said.

“But when we went deeper, we asked: why stop there? Why not own the satellite itself?”.

His remarks follow a January 26 announcement that MB Group has signed an agreement with San Francisco-based Astranis to deliver the Sultanate of Oman’s first dedicated MicroGEO communications satellite, contracted under Astranis’ Block 3 launch with SpaceX later in 2026.

Services are expected to commence by early 2027, according to the companies.

Al Jabri said the project reflects a wider shift for a conglomerate best known in Oman for oil and gas. The group has expanded into other sectors in recent years



Here... if we own the entire satellite, it becomes easier to allocate a specific portion, including for security use, without any third party entering the picture.

SAID BIN SALEH
AL JABRI

CEO of
Mohammed
Al Barwani LLC

and has now adjusted its strategy towards technology, he said, arguing that future growth will be driven by connectivity and the use of data across industries.

The entry path began with ground infrastructure.

Al Jabri said MB Group studied options from last year, drawing on exposure to space-related capabilities through other providers, particularly in military and security applications. That led to a focus on “ground service”, including acquiring a stake in a business operating in that segment.

But, he said, the group concluded

that owning the space asset itself would be a faster and more decisive route to building a long-term position in satellite communications.

The move carries risk, he acknowledged. “Many specialists... told us we were taking a big risk”, Al Jabri said. Yet he argued the market opportunity is growing and that the investment is designed as a platform — not a one-off purchase.

On the economics, Al Jabri said the satellite alone represents an investment of more than \$100 million, excluding related spending such as ground infrastructure and other supporting systems.

He added that MB Group expects its space investments to exceed \$200 million within a few years, aligning with the programme figure cited in the announcement, which covers the dedicated satellite, ground stations and additional digital infrastructure.

While the satellite is dedicated to Oman, Al Jabri suggested the business model will be regional. Oman, he indicated, will not necessarily consume the full capacity, with the remainder marketed to customers across nearby markets. He said the group’s initial

strengthening regional interconnections in electricity, gas and hydrogen, viewing them as key pillars of energy security and economic integration in the Gulf”, Al Hadhrami said. “Interconnection improves efficiency and

enables the exchange of reserve capacity, while also paving the way for Oman to export surplus electricity and green hydrogen to regional and global markets”, he added in a recent interview with The Energy Year.

Spearheading the development of the 400-km hydrogen pipeline network is OQ Gas Networks (OQGN), according to the official. In addition to linking green hydrogen production sites in Al Duqm and Salalah to industrial hubs and export

ports, the company is also planning dedicated carbon dioxide pipelines to support the country’s Carbon Capture, Utilisation and Storage (CCUS) strategy.

“These efforts fall within the regulatory and financial frameworks established to support an orderly transition to clean energy and carbon neutrality by 2050, while reinforcing regional cooperation in renewable energy and infrastructure development”, he said.

Oman continues to advance its green hydrogen ambitions, with a portfolio of seven major projects moving forward that target a combined production of around 1 million tonnes annually by 2030.

commercial focus is Oman, Iraq and Saudi Arabia.

Astranis positions MicroGEO satellites as smaller, high-orbit spacecraft designed to deliver dedicated broadband capacity to a single customer rather than shared throughput across multiple users.

The MB Group–Astranis agreement describes the arrangement as providing Oman with a dedicated network model and full control over its digital infrastructure.

Al Jabri also linked full ownership to operational flexibility, particularly for critical users. In shared-capacity models, he said, customers may only access a portion of capacity alongside other parties.

“Here... if we own the entire satellite, it becomes easier to allocate a specific portion, including for security use, without any third party entering the picture”, he said.

He said the group expects the rocket launch before the end of 2026, with the satellite targeted to be operational in the first quarter of 2027 following commissioning in orbit.

He also signalled follow-on missions — referring to second and third satellites — as the group builds experience in the sector.

\$550 million PTA–PET complex set for SOHAR

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 27



Port and Freezone has signed two land-mark

agreements with subsidiaries of MAK Germany, alongside OQ Refineries and Petroleum Industries Company, to develop an integrated industrial complex for the production of Purified Terephthalic Acid (PTA) and Polyethylene Terephthalate (PET).

The project further cements SOHAR’s position as a globally competitive hub for petrochemicals and downstream manufacturing.

The agreements were signed with Sohar Petrochemicals, a Freezone company, and Sohar International Minerachem, covering the development of a fully integrated PTA and PET platform spanning both SOHAR Port and the SOHAR Freezone. Valued at approximately \$550 million, the project will be developed across 11.9 hectares within SOHAR Port and 53.6 hectares in the SOHAR Freezone.

The investment follows a strategic decision by MAK Germany to relocate



The project further cements SOHAR’s position as a globally competitive hub for petrochemicals and downstream manufacturing.

an existing PTA and PET production facility from the Port of Rotterdam to Oman. The move reflects growing confidence in Oman’s industrial environment and in SOHAR Port and Freezone’s ability to host large-scale, complex industrial operations with long-term efficiency and stability.

Under the integrated structure of the project, the SOHAR Freezone will host the core PTA and PET production units, while SOHAR Port will support bulk storage, feedstock handling and pipeline interfaces. This dual-location model is designed

to ensure seamless material flows, high safety standards and sustained operational efficiency over the long term.

The development is governed by a suite of coordinated agreements, including a Sub-Usufruct Agreement at SOHAR Port, a Land Lease Agreement at the SOHAR Freezone and a Product Supply Agreement with OQ to secure long-term feedstock availability.

Together, these agreements create a single, end-to-end industrial platform that links port infrastructure, logistics services and downstream manufacturing.

Hojat Mohammadi Imir, CEO and shareholder of MAK Germany, described the project as a major strategic milestone for the group.

“Relocating our PTA and PET production platform to SOHAR Port and Freezone reflects our confidence in Oman’s industrial ecosystem and in SOHAR as a world-class destination for complex petrochemical investments,” he said. He added that the facility will have a combined production capacity of 1.5 million tonnes of PTA and PET polymers, supported by an integrated logistics and infrastructure model tailored to the company’s global growth ambitions.

Emile Hoogsteden, CEO of SOHAR Port, said the project highlights the importance of operating environments capable of supporting sophisticated industrial activity.

“SOHAR Port and Freezone brings together infrastructure, logistics and industrial manufacturing within a single ecosystem. This integrated framework is increasingly a decisive factor for global investors considering relocation or expansion,” he noted.

ADVERTORIALS

SHORTTAKES



A sensory journey into Omani heritage and contemporary artistry, expressed through the art of fragrance.

AMOUAGE DEBUTS IN SEOUL WITH ITS FIRST EPHEMERAL BOUTIQUE

AMOUAGE, the independent Omani high perfumery house, has unveiled its first ephemeral boutique in Seoul, located steps from Dosan Park in the city’s Apgujeong district. This opening marks an important chapter for the House as it brings its world of craftsmanship, artistry and storytelling to South Korea, a market defined by creativity, cultural curiosity and a deep engagement with beauty.

Recognised worldwide for its ability to bridge heritage with contemporary expression, Amouage invites visitors to discover its olfactory universe within a multi-sensory space.

Conceived as an immersive journey, the boutique presents the House’s signature collections alongside some of its most emblematic creations, encouraging exploration, dialogue and emotional connection.

The space has been conceived as a contemporary interpretation of Oman’s landscapes, architecture and cultural narratives. Sculptural lines echo mountain ridges and flowing aflaj, while warm tones of orange, copper and gold recall the light of the Omani desert at sunset. Stone textures and reinterpreted Arabic geometric motifs shape an environment where permanence and transience coexist.

Designed as an intimate sanctuary for discovery, the boutique balances calm exploration with strong visual presence. Bespoke services, including fragrance engraving and refined luxury gift wrapping, further personalise the experience, allowing each visit to unfold at a human pace.

Renaud Salmon, Chief Creative Officer of Amouage, commented: “Over the years, I have fallen in love with Seoul through my many visits. Its creative energy, cultural confidence and the dynamism of its beauty industry make it a deeply inspiring place.

Dosan Park felt immediately right for Amouage. It is a location where high luxury, history and the natural beauty of the park coexist, changing character from day to night. I was also deeply drawn to the building itself. Its architecture and presence are striking and its history as a gallery space made it feel like a natural home for a House that believes fragrance is a cultural and artistic medium. Opening our first immersive space here is both a personal and creative milestone”.

NBO LAUNCHES MOTOR INSURANCE SERVICES ON THE NBO APP

MUSCAT: As part of its ongoing commitment to digital innovation, the National Bank of Oman (NBO) has introduced motor insurance services on the NBO app. Customers across Oman can now apply for, renew and manage their motor insurance policies directly through the app, offering convenience, accessibility and control.

The app enables users to access real-time insurance quotes, complete secure payments and view or download their policy documents instantly. The platform also provides timely alerts through



in-app notifications and SMS, reminding customers about

upcoming renewals and policy expirations.

Dr Ali Salim al Shekaili, Assistant General Manager & Head of Digital and E-Channels at NBO, said, “We consider digital transformation not as a collection of features, but as a shift in how banking supports people’s everyday lives.

By embedding essential services like motor insurance into the NBO app, we are creating a platform that anticipates customer needs, simplifies decision-making and redefines convenience in financial services”.

Kospet Smartwatches launched in Oman

KOSPET, a globally recognised innovator in rugged and lifestyle smartwatches, officially announced its entry into the Omani market with the grand launch of Kospet Smartwatches in the Sultanate of Oman.

The landmark occasion also marked the formal appointment of Al Seeb Technical Establishment (SARCO) LLC as the exclusive distributor for Kospet in Oman.

The announcement was made during an extravagant launch event January 25, 2026 at the Crowne Plaza, Al Qurum, Muscat, attended by key stakeholders, industry leaders, retail partners, media representatives and influencers.

The evening showcased Kospet’s cutting-edge smartwatch portfolio, featuring models designed for adventure enthusiasts, fitness-focused users and everyday lifestyle consumers.

Speaking at the event, Mr Young, Global Sales Director, Kospet, highlighted the brand’s



The occasion also marked the formal appointment of SARCO LLC as the exclusive distributor for Kospet in Oman.

commitment to innovation, durability and smart technology, emphasising their confidence in the Omani market and their strategic partnership with SARCO.

“SARCO’s strong retail presence, market expertise and proven track record in building global brands in Oman make them the ideal partner for Kospet’s growth journey in the Sultanate of Oman”, said a Kospet spokesperson.

SARCO, a leading distributor

and retailer of consumer electronics, watches and lifestyle brands in Oman, brings decades of market leadership and an extensive retail and service network across the country. With this exclusive distributorship, SARCO will be responsible for the import, marketing, retail distribution, after-sales service and brand development of Kospet Smartwatches across Oman.

Sanjeev Awasthi, CEO, SARCO said, “We are proud to introduce

Kospet Smartwatches to Oman and to be appointed as the brand’s exclusive distributor. Kospet’s product range perfectly aligns with the evolving lifestyle and fitness needs of today’s consumers. This partnership reinforces SARCO’s commitment to bringing innovative and high-quality global brands to the Omani market”.

The launch event featured live product demonstrations, experience zones and an immersive brand presentation, offering guests a firsthand look at Kospet’s advanced features such as rugged durability, long battery life, advanced health monitoring, multi-sport modes and smart connectivity.

Kospet Smartwatches will be made available across SARCO’s authorised retail outlets and leading electronics retailers nationwide, as well as through select e-commerce platforms.

The initial product lineup includes a range of rugged outdoor smartwatches and sleek lifestyle models, catering to diverse consumer preferences and usage needs.

Ominvest marks strategic participation at Davos

MUSCAT: Oman International Development and Investment Company SAOG (Ominvest), a leading investment company in the region, has concluded its successful participation in the World Economic Forum (WEF) Annual Meeting 2026 (Davos 2026), held from January 19 to 23 in Davos-Klosters, Switzerland, reaffirming its commitment to constructive global economic dialogue and to advancing sustainable, long-term growth in Oman and the Gulf region.

Held under the theme “A Spirit of Dialogue”, the Annual



Meeting brought together leaders from government, business, civil society and academia to address shared global challenges and advance

collaborative approaches that enhance economic and societal resilience.

Ominvest’s participation reflected its conviction that open dialogue is a vital enabler for aligning perspectives, exchanging expertise and shaping future-ready economic and investment models.

A defining milestone of Ominvest’s participation this year was the publishing of an article within the World Economic Forum’s official Annual Meeting 2026 agenda — marking a first for the

Group. Titled ‘The GCC Model of Cooperation’, the article presents Ominvest’s perspective on the strategic value of regional cooperation frameworks within the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and their relevance to broader global economic integration.

The article examines how the GCC’s experience in fostering cross-border collaboration, aligning policy priorities and strengthening public-private partnerships has contributed to economic resilience and long-term value creation.

Malabar Gold & Diamonds opens new showroom in Abu Dhabi

MUSCAT: Malabar Gold & Diamonds, the 5th largest jewellery retailer globally with over 420 showrooms across 14 countries, has unveiled its flagship new concept showroom in Abu Dhabi at Hamdan Street.

The showroom was formally inaugurated by Bollywood actress and brand ambassador of Malabar Gold & Diamonds, Kareena Kapoor Khan, in the presence of Abdul Salam KP, Vice Chairman of Malabar Group; Shamlal Ahamed, MD-International Operations, Malabar Gold & Diamonds; Nishad AK, Malabar Group Executive Director; Faisal AK, Head of Manufacturing at Malabar Gold & Diamonds; Ameer CMC, Director of Finance & Admin



The showroom was formally inaugurated by Bollywood actress and brand ambassador of Malabar Gold & Diamonds, Kareena Kapoor Khan.

at Malabar Gold & Diamonds; Sakkeer P, Head of Merchandising & SCM (Gold) at Malabar Gold & Diamonds; Shaji Kakkodi, Malabar Group Chief Digital Officer, other senior management team members, customers and well-wishers.

Kareena Kapoor Khan’s much anticipated appearance drew large crowds to Hamdan Street, reaffirming its stature as one of Abu Dhabi’s most strategic and prominent jewellery destinations.

The newly launched outlet marks Malabar Gold & Diamonds’ 17th showroom in the Abu Dhabi-Al Ain region and its 3rd showroom on Hamdan Street, further strengthening the brand’s footprint

in one of the city’s most important jewellery hubs.

Designed as the brand’s flagship showroom in Abu Dhabi, the space reflects Malabar Gold & Diamonds evolved retail philosophy, offering a refined and immersive jewellery shopping experience through contemporary design, personalised service and an extensive portfolio of exquisite collections.

Spanning 4,000+ sqft, the new houses over 30,000 meticulously crafted designs across 18K & 22K gold, diamond and precious gemstone jewellery, featuring Malabar Gold & Diamonds’ exclusive brands including Mine, Era, Viraa, Precia, Ethnix and Divine.

SHORTTAKES

TEJARAH TALKS TO FOCUS ON ‘PARTNERSHIPS THAT DELIVER’

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 28



SHABIB AL MAAMARI
Managing Director, Visit Oman

Partnerships are easy to sign. The real test is whether they make it easier to trade, invest and grow; and whether they help sectors such as tourism turn interest into arrivals, spending and repeat visits. Tejarah Talks will host International Partnerships That Deliver at OCEC, on Tuesday, February 3, at

11 am. The session will look at partnerships in their practical terms focusing on Agreements that reduce uncertainty for exporters and investors, commercial relationships that open routes to market and financial connections that help Omani businesses scale. In tourism, delivery is just as tangible, stronger airline connectivity, effective overseas promotion, distribution through travel trade partners and the service standards that encourage visitors to return. Oman’s latest trade figures show why this focus matters. Between January and October 2025, non-oil exports reached RO 5.6 billion up 9.9% year-on-year. Over the same period, oil and gas exports were RO 12.1 billion taking total merchandise exports to RO 19.3 billion (\$50 billion). The discussion will highlight the common points where deals slow down for SMEs, from documentation and standards requirements to payment terms and access to trade finance. For tourism businesses, it will also look at how partnerships shape demand and visitor experience, from working with international operators and platforms to aligning service and product standards with target markets. Moderated by Jamal al Asmi, Creative Growth Director, Mubashir, the discussion brings together Pankaj Kanaksi Gokaldas Khimji, Adviser for External Trade and International Cooperation at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion; Faisal al Nabhani, Managing Director and Head of Oman and Qatar, State Street Bank; Rebecca Olson, CEO, AMCham and Shabib al Maamari, Managing Director, Visit Oman.

Oman as a gateway for space applications

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, JAN 27

THE Sultanate of Oman is carving out a distinct role in the regional space economy, positioning itself not as a launch-heavy power but as a gateway for space-enabled applications, with a sharp focus on downstream services, private-sector leadership and rapid execution. Speaking at the Middle East Space Conference in Muscat, Dr Ali bin Amer al Shaithani, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology for Communications and Information Technology, outlined a pragmatic vision centred on economic impact rather than prestige missions. “Our vision is very clear”, Dr Al Shaithani said. “We see Oman becoming a gateway for space applications, particularly in the downstream industry, where the real economic value lies”. Rather than competing directly with established spacefaring nations on upstream activities such as launch vehicles or deep-space missions, Oman is prioritising data-driven services, satellite-enabled solutions and commercial applications aligned with national needs — ranging from logistics and environmental monitoring to food security and urban planning. This strategy is anchored in the National Space Policy and Executive Programme, which includes more than 15 projects, many of which have already been initiated. The immediate priorities, according to Al Shaithani, are capacity building, infrastructure development and talent formation.



Dr Ali bin Amer al Shaithani, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology for Communications and Information Technology.

“Our main focus today is building capabilities — upskilling youth, developing infrastructure and creating the right ecosystem to support the space economy”, he said. “The numbers we are seeing are encouraging, but our ambition goes further”. A central pillar of Oman’s approach is the belief that the private sector should lead, with government acting as an enabler rather than an operator. Al Shaithani cited the Oman Space Accelerator Programme as a key example of how policy clarity can unlock market participation. “The Space Accelerator opened the market to new companies and guided them towards real opportunities in the space sector”, he said. “This is how we translate policy into action”. Among the flagship initiatives is OmanSat, a national satellite

communications project designed not only to provide sovereign capability but also to catalyse broader knowledge transfer, infrastructure development and downstream services. “OmanSat is not just about having a satellite”, Dr Al Shaithani explained. “It is about building national expertise, exchanging knowledge and creating value-added services that benefit the wider economy”. One of the most tangible demonstrations of Oman’s investment logic, he noted, was the spaceport initiative, which showcased how private-sector-led projects — supported by government facilitation — can attract capital and accelerate execution. “The spaceport was a clear example of what is possible”, he said. “It was driven by the private sector, with government support and it showed decision-

Oman is prioritising data-driven services, satellite-enabled solutions and commercial applications aligned with national needs — ranging from logistics and environmental monitoring to food security and urban planning.

makers that space investments can deliver visible outcomes”. Speed of execution, Dr Al Shaithani argued, is Oman’s competitive advantage. “What really distinguishes Oman is execution speed”, he said. “Government entities are aligned, decisions are made quickly and there is a shared belief that experimentation is necessary”. This clarity, he added, has already translated into new services that did not exist in Oman just a few years ago, including Earth observation, health monitoring and remote-sensing applications delivered by emerging private firms. International partnerships also remain a cornerstone of Oman’s space ambitions. On the sidelines of the conference, Oman signed new coordination frameworks aimed at deepening cooperation with global space actors. “International partnership is essential in the space sector”, Dr Al Shaithani said. “We do not have all the skills locally yet, so we must work with experienced partners to accelerate learning and delivery”. With a clear policy framework, growing private-sector participation and a disciplined focus on downstream value, Oman’s space strategy reflects a broader economic philosophy: measured ambition, commercial relevance and execution over spectacle.

Al Duqm shaping up as Oman’s green manufacturing hub

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JAN 27

Usufruct agreements signed on Monday for the establishment of a major wind turbine manufacturing plant at the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD) underscore Al Duqm’s growing importance as a destination for investments in the emerging clean energy industry, according to Eng Ahmed bin Ali Akaak, CEO — SEZAD. Taking part in the signings were top officials representing the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) and Mawarid Turbine, which is investing in the country’s first-ever wind turbine manufacturing plant. Speaking at the event, Eng Akaak described the initiative as one of several strategic investments that will position Al Duqm as a



SEZAD is leading the shift towards clean energy, with a strategy aiming to achieve 30% clean energy within the next five years and work towards carbon neutrality by 2050.

strategic hub for clean and renewable energy industries, attesting to the zone’s robust investment environment. The wind turbine manufacturing plant project, he noted, ushers Duqm into the era of wind energy manufacturing, contributing to the localisation of sustainable industries and the establishment of a national industrial base capable of energy transition in which this supports the goals of Oman Vision 2040. SEZAD is leading the shift towards clean energy, with a strategy aiming to achieve 30% clean energy within the next five years and work towards carbon neutrality by 2050. Adding to Al Duqm’s investment appeal is the availability of vast swathes of land, and abundant wind and solar energy resources, coupled with its strategic location on global shipping routes and world-class infrastructure, all of which contribute to reducing

energy costs and enhancing the region’s competitiveness, the official stated. Phase 1 of the plant was launched in April 2025. Total investment in the project is RO 70 million in this phase. This will serve as the region’s first hub for wind turbine manufacturing and the localisation of renewable energy technologies, while also providing job opportunities for job seekers. The factory also aims to supply materials to ongoing wind energy projects. Moreover, the project will contribute to reducing costs and logistical expenses, providing highly efficient products for local and global markets, opening up broad horizons for exporting Omani knowledge and products, creating direct and indirect job opportunities, enhancing local content and increasing added value.

AUTO MARKETS

Europe car sales accelerate



European new car sales rose 5.8 per cent in December, up from 2.1 per cent growth in November, according to the European Automobile Manufacturers Association. Electric vehicles led the expansion, with battery EV sales surging 51 per cent year-on-year and plug-in hybrids up 36.7 per cent. In contrast, petrol and diesel sales fell sharply. Germany and Italy posted gains, while France and Spain declined. — AFP

AVIATION

Boeing reports first profit since 2018



Boeing reported its first annual profit since 2018 Tuesday on gains from an asset sale, as it eyes increased plane production while pointing to progress emerging from a lengthy slump. Full-year 2025 profits were \$1.9 billion, Boeing reported, compared with a loss of \$11.9 billion in 2024. Boeing has faced heavy regulatory scrutiny following fatal 2018 and 2019 crashes. — AFP

SAFE HAVENS

Gold breaks \$5,100 record



Gold prices surged past \$5,100 an ounce to record highs as investors sought safety amidst heightened geopolitical and economic uncertainty. Spot gold climbed about 2%, with futures settling higher, while silver and platinum also hit records. Analysts said strong central bank buying, driven by reserve diversification away from the US dollar, continues to underpin bullion prices. — Reuters

OPINION

Building the future: Trends driving the construction sector



MOHAMED AMER

The writer is Managing Director, ICC MENA

AS the construction sector advances through 2025, it is setting the foundation for a pivotal transformation in 2026. Across the GCC, sustainability, climate-resilient design and advanced technology are evolving from emerging priorities into industry standards.

The choices made today will determine how effectively the region's built environment can respond to climate challenges, meet decarbonisation targets and support long-term economic growth.

Key trends and predictions for the construction industry in 2026 point to a sector increasingly shaped by sustainability, climate-resilient design and advanced technology.

Widespread adoption of green building standards, innovative approaches that strengthen climate resilience and AI-driven automation transforming code-compliance processes are expected to define the next phase of development.

FROM TRADITIONAL CONCRETE TO NEXT-GENERATION LOW-CARBON MATERIALS
Concrete has long been the backbone of construction across the GCC. While its performance and durability remain essential, its environmental impact has driven significant innovation in recent years.

Throughout 2025, the industry made measurable progress in reducing embodied carbon through the use of alternative cements and improved production methods.

By 2026, low-carbon materials are expected to move beyond early adoption towards

broader standardisation. Advanced concrete admixtures that enhance strength, longevity and performance will increasingly be paired with alternative binders to reduce emissions without compromising safety or quality. As sustainability benchmarks tighten, material innovation will remain a critical enabler of low-carbon construction.

DESIGNING FOR EXTREME CLIMATES: SMARTER, MORE EFFICIENT BUILDINGS
The GCC's extreme climate continues to influence how buildings are designed and operated. In 2025, passive cooling strategies, high-performance insulation and energy-efficient envelopes gained traction as effective tools to reduce cooling demand.

Looking ahead to 2026, these solutions are expected to become integral to mainstream design rather than optional enhancements.

HVAC systems responsible for up to 70% of a building's energy use in the region will increasingly be optimised through smart controls and predictive technologies. This shift will result in buildings that consume less energy, operate more efficiently and are better equipped to adapt to rising temperatures and climate volatility.

FASTER, CLEANER DELIVERY THROUGH INDUSTRIALISED CONSTRUCTION METHODS
Industrialised construction methods, including modular and prefabricated systems, continued to demonstrate their value in 2025 by reducing waste, improving build quality and accelerating project delivery.

Widespread adoption of green building standards, innovative approaches that strengthen climate resilience and AI-driven automation transforming code-compliance processes are expected to define the next phase of development.

In 2026, their adoption is expected to expand further as developers seek faster, more predictable and more sustainable construction models.

Off-site fabrication enables parallel workflows, allowing site preparation and module production to occur simultaneously.

This approach improves quality control, enhances inventory management and minimises material waste. The GCC, particularly the UAE, is also expected to maintain its global leadership in construction-scale 3D printing, with additive manufacturing playing a growing role in sustainable and efficient project delivery.

AI, DIGITAL TWINS AND THE RISE OF INTELLIGENT BUILDINGS
Digital transformation is reshaping every stage of the construction lifecycle. Building Information Modeling (BIM) has already enabled more accurate planning and pre-construction simulations and in 2026 its integration with artificial intelligence is expected to deliver even greater efficiencies.

Following project completion, IoT sensors will continue to generate vast amounts of real-time data, enabling the creation of increasingly sophisticated digital twins.

Supported by AI, these systems can monitor performance, detect deviations, run simulations and autonomously intervene for example, adjusting lighting and air conditioning when spaces are unoccupied.

AI-driven tools are also expected to transform code-compliance processes, making them faster, more consistent and more reliable.

US ENERGY DOMINANCE WOULD MAKE FOR A CLUMSY WEAPON

ROBERT CYRAN

Greenland deal or no, the international order is fraying. As the Trump administration ramped up — before stepping back from — brazen territorial claims, Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney captured the mood at the World Economic Forum in Davos: “Great powers have begun using economic integration as weapons”.

The global linkage most vulnerable to disruption, from the 1970s oil shock to Russia’s aggression in Europe, has been energy. The United States controls enviable supplies. The possibility of weaponising them, though, is ebbing. While Uncle Sam is the world’s largest oil producer, churning out over 13 million barrels daily, it also consumes most of what it makes.

That leaves just over 2 million barrels of net exports, about 2% of global consumption. Where it dominates is sales of liquefied natural gas.

It sold 111 million metric tonnes last year, roughly a quarter of all exports, according to LSEG data.

Nations are frenziedly building facilities to handle shipments as the United States tracks towards roughly doubling export capacity by 2030.

The reason is simple. Domestic gas production surged nearly 50% over the past decade, largely thanks to a boom in hydraulic fracturing. That subdued local prices.

The Henry Hub benchmark, despite a recent cold-snap-induced spike above \$5 per million BTU, probably will spend most of this year below \$4, judging by futures pricing.

In post-Ukraine-offensive Europe, prices are substantially higher, around \$13 per million BTUs for March, based on the Dutch TTF benchmark.

As the European Union sought to wean itself off Russian fuel, the United States has become the supplier of over 60% of its LNG, about a quarter of total gas supplies

This especially matters during winter doldrums, when renewable power generation falls and nations deplete their storage reserves. However, this overstates Europe’s bind. Germany could not switch to a different supplier to fill Russian pipelines. Any ship could supply an LNG terminal.

— Reuters

South Korea reassures on US investment pledge

BY JIHOON LEE, KYU-SEOK SHIM & ANDREA SHALAL

SOUTH Korea scrambled on Tuesday to assure the US it remained committed to implementing a trade deal after US President Donald Trump said he would hike tariffs on autos and other imports from its ally, blaming a delay in enacting the pact agreed last year.

Trump said on Monday that South Korea’s parliament was not living up to its side of the deal by swiftly enacting the agreement he reached with President Lee Jae Myung to make huge investments in US business projects in return for tariff cuts.

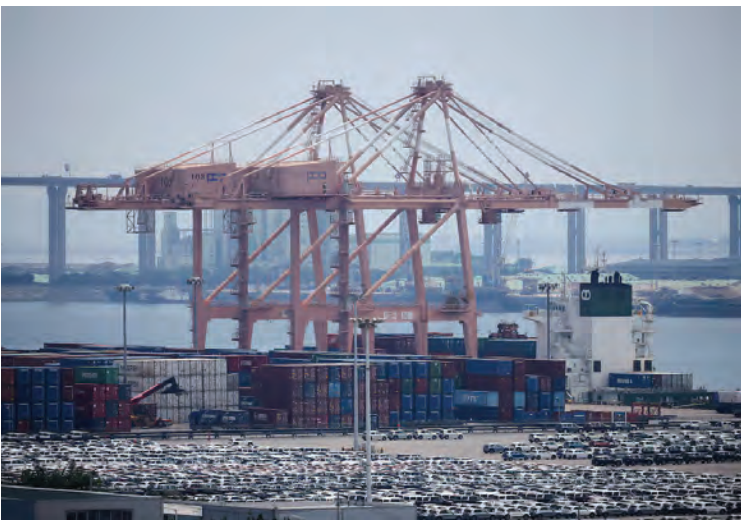
For South Korea, the decision, which officials in Seoul said caught them by surprise, is the latest setback as it tries to navigate the alliance and trade partnership amidst potential challenges to its security and financial stability posed by Trump’s demands.

Trump and Lee struck a deal in principle last July for Seoul to make \$350 billion of investments in the US, despite concerns over the impact of such a large outflow from Asia’s fourth-largest economy.

“President Lee and I reached a Great Deal for both Countries on July 30, 2025 and we reaffirmed these terms while I was in Korea on October 29, 2025”, Trump wrote on social media.

Trump said South Korea’s legislature had not enacted the deal and as a result: “I am hereby increasing South Korean TARIFFS on Autos, Lumber, Pharma and all other Reciprocal TARIFFS, from 15% to 25%”.

CURRENCY CONCERNS
Under the deal struck last year, South Korea committed to pay \$200 billion of the \$350 billion in cash in phased installments capped at \$20 billion a year in an effort to



Motors’ vehicles are parked to be exported, at a port in Pyeongtaek, South Korea. — Reuters

Trump said on Monday that South Korea’s parliament was not living up to its side of the deal by swiftly enacting the agreement he reached with President Lee Jae Myung to make huge investments in US business projects in return for tariff cuts.

maintain won stability.

Earlier this month, South Korea’s Finance Minister Koo Yun-cheol said the government planned to implement the investment package as soon as possible, while noting that uncertainty over a US Supreme Court ruling on Trump’s tariffs expected soon could affect the process.

But highlighting how the timeline may be stretched, he said the planned investment of \$350 billion was unlikely to kick off in the first half of 2026, given the weakness in the won.

The prospect of large currency outflows has caused headaches for authorities in Seoul at a time when the won has slumped to levels unseen since the global financial crisis from 2007 to 2009.

TRUMP ANNOUNCEMENT PUZZLES SOUTH KOREA

It was not immediately clear when the hike would take effect. A source familiar with internal discussions between the countries said Trump may have been prompted by recent Korean regulatory actions against Coupang, a US-listed company that has said the moves are unfair and discriminatory.

“The countries have been in talks

to address Washington’s concerns about regulations on US tech firms as part of the trade deal.

South Korea’s presidential Blue House said it was committed to implementing the deal and would continue to take the required steps to finalise it.

Lee’s chief policy aide convened an emergency meeting with officials and the industry minister, currently in Canada, would visit the US soon and meet Secretary of Commerce Howard Lutnick, the Blue House said. A top trade envoy will also visit Washington soon to meet US Trade Representative Jamieson Greer, it added.

South Korea’s ruling Democratic Party said five bills that would enact the US investment are pending committee review and with backing from the opposition, parliament should be able to speed up their passage, potentially in February.

Trump’s social media post left South Korean officials battling to explain how they appeared to be wrongfooted.

“Minister for Trade Yeo just met USTR Greer in Davos but he didn’t hear a word of complaint”, Chairman Lee Chul-gyu of parliament’s trade committee told reporters after meeting the trade envoy.

South Korea’s benchmark KOSPI index fell 1.19% before rebounding to close up 2.73%, while the won weakened 0.5% against the dollar.

Trump has upended global trade by imposing tariffs on imports from nearly every country since beginning his second term in office in 2025.

In some cases, he has threatened tariff hikes and delayed them or not followed through.

Choi Seok-young, a former South Korean trade negotiator, said Trump’s tariff hike threat could be “a political move in which the United States is exerting maximum pressure... to force concessions during the ongoing negotiations over non-tariff barriers”. — Reuters

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ART/LIFE



TRACING OMAN’S HIDDEN HOT SPRINGS

> 20

BRITISH SHORTLIST

‘ONE BATTLE AFTER ANOTHER’, ‘SINNERS’ TOP BAFTA NODS



Leonardo DiCaprio

LONDON: “One Battle After Another” and “Sinners” led the shortlist on Tuesday of films competing at Britain’s BAFTA awards next month, ahead of the Oscars in mid-March in which both also dominate the nominations.

“One Battle After Another”, an offbeat thriller set against a wild backdrop of radical violence, immigration raids and white supremacists, earned 14 BAFTA nods, including for the coveted best film award. Vampire period music-infused horror film “Sinners” followed close behind with 13 and will also vie for best film, less than a week after it smashed the all-time Oscars record for nominations with 16 selections.

“One Battle After Another” enters the Oscars best film race in second place after it garnered 13 nods in the Academy shortlist for the March 15 awards to be held in Hollywood.

The BAFTAs, the highlight of the annual British film calendar, will be held in London on February 22, three weeks before the Oscars.

This year’s selection process stood out for “bold storytelling and unique takes” on everything from the geopolitical landscape to more personal stories, BAFTA CEO Jane Millichip, told AFP.

“A lot of filmmakers have not pulled their punches on quite big subjects,” she said, noting in particular “Sinners”, “One Battle After Another” and “Bugonia”. But she also commended “a group of really intimate, and personal films” including “Hamnet”, “I Swear” and “Sentimental Value”.

“Hamnet”, a period drama in which William Shakespeare and his wife struggle to cope with the loss of their son in plague-ravaged Elizabethan England, secured 11 BAFTA nominations and will also compete for best film.

Timothee Chalamet’s ping-pong drama “Marty Supreme” also snagged 11 nods, including in the best film category, while Norwegian dramedy “Sentimental Value” bagged eight nominations and is the final of the five BAFTA best film contenders.

Although “Sinners” topped the Oscars nominations, “One Battle” was still strongly favoured in this year’s awards season, having won almost every precursor prize so far this awards season. It reigned supreme at the Golden Globes earlier this month, winning best comedy, best director, best screenplay and best supporting actress, while “Hamnet” sprung a surprise by taking best drama film, beating out “Sinners”.

At the BAFTAs, Yorgos Lanthimos (“Bugonia”), Chloe Zhao (“Hamnet”), Josh Safdie (“Marty Supreme”), Paul Thomas Anderson (“One Battle After Another”), Joachim Trier (“Sentimental Value”) and Ryan Coogler (“Sinners”) will compete for best director.

The leading actor shortlist features Leonardo DiCaprio (“One Battle After Another”), Michael B. Jordan (“Sinners”), Chalamet (“Marty Supreme”), Ethan Hawke (“Blue Moon”), Jesse Plemons (“Bugonia”) and Robert Aramayo (“I Swear”).— AFP

QUICK FEATURES



FASHION

A model presents a creation by designer Jonathan Anderson as part of his Haute Couture Spring/Summer 2026 collection show for fashion house Dior in Paris. — Reuters



CARNIVAL TRADITION

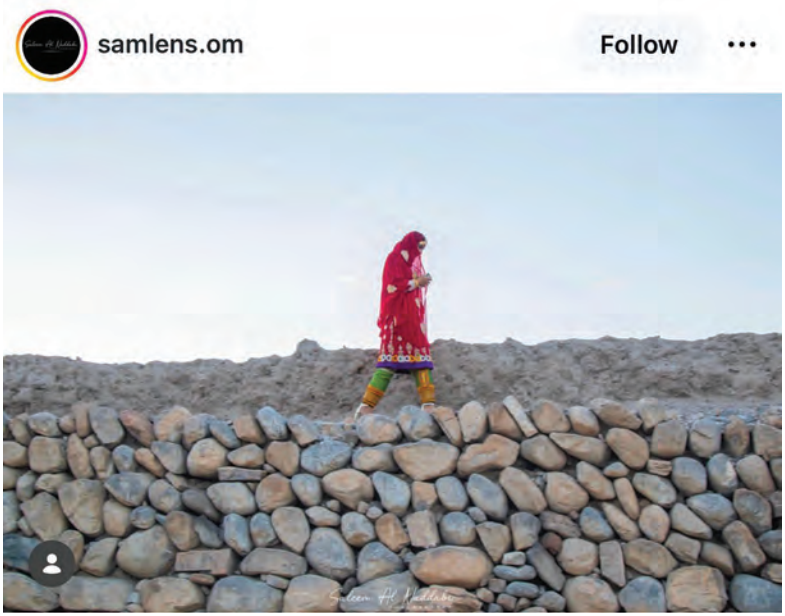
A masked reveller takes part in the traditional carnival of Ituren in the northern Spanish province of Navarre. — AFP



GASTRONOMY

Plated food in the kitchen at Dumfries House, headquarters of the King’s Foundation near Cumnock, south of Glasgow, Scotland. — AFP

INSTA PICKS



The beauty of the traditional Omani dress



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SPECTACULAR 1,400-YEAR-OLD TOMB DISCOVERED IN MEXICO



A Spectacular 1,400-year-old tomb belonging to the Zapotec civilisation has been discovered in Mexico.

“This is the most significant archaeological discovery of the last decade in Mexico”, President Claudia Sheinbaum said on Friday.

The well-preserved tomb with murals, friezes and calendar inscriptions was found in San Pablo Huitzo in the southern state of Oaxaca.

Mexico’s National Institute of Anthropology and History released more details of the tomb. An owl, which symbolises night and death for the Zapotecs, adorns the entrance to the antechamber.

Its beak covers the face of a Zapotec figure, made of painted stucco, to whom the complex was probably dedicated.

Stone sculptures and murals

represent power and death. On the walls of the burial chamber, a procession of people painted in shades of ochre, white, green, red and blue can be seen.

Culture Minister Claudia Curiel spoke of an “extraordinary discovery” because the tomb is well preserved and reveals a great deal of information about Zapotec culture.

It offers, she said, insights into “their social organisation, their burial rituals and their world view, which have been preserved in the architecture and murals”.

The Zapotec civilisation reached its peak between 300 and 900 in southern Mexico. Its capital, Monte Albán, which had a population of around 35,000 at its height, was added to the Unesco World Heritage List in 1987. — *dpa*

Paris fashion doyenne Nichanian bows out at Hermes after 37 years



FRANCE'S Veronique Nichanian received a standing ovation at her final Hermes runway show on Saturday, marking the end of her 37-year tenure as chief menswear designer at the family-run luxury house. Singer Usher, rapper Travis Scott, and “Gossip Girl” actor Ed Westwick watched as Nichanian presented a nostalgia-tinged Fall-Winter 2026 collection at Paris’ historic stock market building.

“I’m feeling emotional, it’s my decision to stop and do something else”, the 71-year-old said. “It’s the right moment for me and for the house”.

Her departure comes amidst a wave of leadership changes across luxury fashion, following promotions of a younger generation at Chanel, Dior and Gucci.

Nichanian, Paris-born and trained at L’Ecole de la Chambre Syndicale de la Couture Parisienne, took over Hermes menswear in 1988 with instructions from then-boss Jean-Louis Dumas to run it “like your small company”.

Over decades, she transformed Hermes from a niche brand known for scarves and leather goods into a global menswear powerhouse, with sales estimated at several billion euros annually.

Her design philosophy reflects her discreet personality, prioritising quality and comfort through subtle evolution rather than flashy



reinvention. Her final collection revisited designs from the 1990s and early 2000s, underlining her belief in the timelessness of Hermes clothing.

She will be succeeded by London designer Grace Wales Bonner, whose Afro-Caribbean heritage and British tailoring introduce a generational and stylistic shift. “Hermes has chosen someone who will bring not only quality, but also an image and a point of view”, said fashion journalist Marie Ottavi.

Nichanian cited the frenetic pace of fashion as a reason for stepping back.

“There’s so much change, it loses something magic, the something that makes people happy”, she said, though she will remain in charge of men’s accessories and silk. Early in her career with Nino Cerruti, she noted she had to “work harder” as a woman in a “pretty macho milieu”.

Her attention to small, luxurious details — like lambskin-lined pockets — has been a signature of her work.

Elsewhere at Paris Men’s Fashion Week, KidSuper founder Colm Dillane staged an eccentric show featuring Vincent Cassel in a short film, concluding with models seated at café tables.

His collection included faux fur coats, patchwork bombers and patterned trenches in autumnal greens, browns and ochre. Men’s Fashion Week concludes on Sunday with Jacquemus, ahead of Haute Couture Week. — *AFP*

FEATURES

YERU EBUEN

HOT springs have long existed at the intersection of nature and civilisation. For centuries, societies have built rituals, architecture and healing traditions around geothermal waters. Today, that legacy is being reinterpreted through the lens of modern wellness tourism.

In Japan, the onsen is not merely a bath but a social and spiritual practice. In Iceland, the Blue Lagoon merges geothermal science with luxury design, attracting more visitors each year than the country’s population. In Türkiye and Jordan, mineral springs have long been associated with therapeutic treatments for skin conditions and overall wellbeing. Quietly, almost unnoticed, Oman is emerging as one of the world’s most compelling yet underexplored thermal landscapes.

Science partly explains the allure. Mineral-rich thermal waters are linked to improved circulation, muscle relaxation, skin health and enhanced sleep quality. Heat exposure promotes vasodilation, allowing oxygen to reach tissues more effectively, while minerals such as sulphur, calcium and magnesium contribute to immune and dermatological benefits. Beyond physiology, however, hot springs offer something less measurable: psychological restoration. Wellness research consistently links thermal bathing with stress reduction, mood enhancement and a heightened sense of wellbeing. Perhaps this is why hot springs have become magnets for modern travellers seeking authenticity in an era of curated experiences.

This winter, instead of another café crawl or road trip to familiar spots, consider something different.

WHERE TO BEGIN

Unlike Japan or Iceland, Oman has never marketed itself as a hot spring destination. Yet beneath its mountains, wadis and desert plains lies a network of geothermal waters that rival more famous counterparts.

Oman’s hot springs are scattered across diverse landscapes, tucked into mountain villages, emerging beside falaj irrigation channels, or hidden within wadis where steam rises against limestone cliffs. They are rarely signposted and many are known only to locals, making them both alluring and elusive. In Al Rustaq, Ain Al Kasfa is one of Oman’s most recognised hot springs. Warm sulphur water rises from the earth and collects in shallow pools near the historic town. Locals often stop by for short dips, while travellers combine the visit with nearby forts and villages. The water is hot, the setting simple and the atmosphere unhurried.

Further north in Nakhal, Ain Al Thawarah offers a different experience. Here, warm water flows through a palm-lined wadi, forming small pools along the stream. Visitors often remark that the deeper one walks into the valley, the quieter it becomes. What begins as a popular stop gradually transforms into a peaceful retreat, where nature takes centre stage.

These springs are among the most familiar to visitors, frequently appearing in travel itineraries and social media posts. Yet they represent only a fraction of Oman’s thermal landscape.

BEYOND THE GUIDEBOOKS

Away from the main tourist routes, lesser-known springs reveal a more local side of Oman.

In Fanja, hot water flows through a village environment shaped by falaj



TRACING OMAN’S HIDDEN

HOT SPRINGS



irrigation systems and date palm groves. Unlike more developed sites, the springs here are woven into daily life. Locals use the warm water casually and the area feels less like a destination and more like a living community. Nearby, the Al Hinn sulphur spring stands out for its striking turquoise hue. Mineral-rich water forms pools that appear almost unreal against the surrounding rock. Despite its visual impact, the site remains relatively quiet, known mainly through local knowledge and social media. In Samayil, Ain Seyaa is another spring that exists largely outside mainstream tourism. Tucked within the mountains, it is often described online as a “hidden gem”. Visitors are drawn not only by its colour but by the calm atmosphere that surrounds it.

Further north, in the mountains near Suhar, Ain Sahban is known for its turquoise sulphur pools. The water emerges warm from the rocks and cools as it flows downstream. Visitors often mention the distinctive mineral scent and the contrast between rugged terrain and vibrant water.

Even Muscat hides its own thermal secrets. In areas such as Bausher and Ghala, springs like Ain Al Hammam and Ain Ghala rise through rocky wadis on the city’s outskirts. These sites are less about soaking and more about witnessing nature’s raw energy, where hot water breaks through stone in unexpected places.

A NEW WAY TO EXPLORE OMAN

Hot spring hopping is not about ticking off locations on a list; it is about following the flow of water across landscapes and communities.

As travellers increasingly seek experiences that feel ancient rather than engineered, hot springs offer a rare authenticity. They are not built attractions but geological stories unfolding over millennia.

Oman’s springs, untouched by mass tourism and embedded within dramatic landscapes, embody a form of quiet luxury that aligns perfectly with contemporary travel values: privacy, nature and meaning.

To soak in an Omani hot spring is not merely to relax, it is to witness the country’s hidden rhythms, where heat rises from the earth and time slows to the pace of water.