

OMAN
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SUNRISE 06:39 AM
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MAGHRIB 06:08 PM
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19

MOUNTAIN
TREASURE
WAITING TO BE
DISCOVERED

INBRIEF

DECREE RATIFIES
OMAN-INDIA CEPA

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Sunday issued Royal Decree No 30/2026 on the ratification of the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) between the Government of the Sultanate of Oman and the Government of the Republic of India, signed in Muscat on December 18, 2025. Article (1) ratifies the aforesaid agreement as per the version attached to this decree. Article (2) says that this decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from its date of issue.

22,000 GET DIRECT
SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

The Majlis Ash'shura hosted Dr Laila bint Ahmed al Najjar, Minister of Social Development, for an extensive deliberation on the ministry's statement across six principal themes. The minister unveiled statistics demonstrating the far-reaching impact of social protection programmes, with over 22,000 individuals receiving direct social assistance totalling more than RO 17 million, complementing benefits extended through the Social Protection Fund. Social development committees and volunteer teams have contributed an additional RO 12 million to 350,000 families. **SEE P3**

40 PER CENT ADULTS
HAVE HIGH BP

The Ministry of Health announced the results of the 2025 National Survey on Noncommunicable Diseases (NCDs) and their associated risk factors. Regarding hypertension, the findings revealed that one in three adults has high blood pressure, yet only about 30% of those affected were previously aware of their diagnosis. Among adults aged 35 and above, approximately 40% are affected by hypertension. **DETAILS ON P4**

TALKS FOCUS ON BILATERAL COOPERATION

H M G I V E S A U D I E N C E T O C R O W N P R I N C E O F B A H R A I N



His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik gave an audience at the Al Barakah Palace on Sunday to His Royal Highness Prince Salman bin Hamad al Khalifa, Crown Prince and Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Bahrain.

HIS MAJESTY SULTAN HAITHAM BIN TARIK gave an audience at the Al Barakah Palace on Sunday to His Royal Highness Prince Salman bin Hamad al Khalifa, Crown Prince and Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Bahrain.

At the outset of the audience, His Majesty the Sultan welcomed His Royal Highness the guest, expressing his delight at this

gracious visit. For his part, the guest expressed his sincere greetings and appreciation to His Majesty the Sultan for the warm welcome and generous hospitality.

His Royal Highness the Crown Prince also conveyed the greetings of King Hamad bin Issa al Khalifa of the Kingdom of Bahrain, to His Majesty the

Sultan, along with his best wishes for good health and happiness to His Majesty. The King of Bahrain also wished the Omani people further progress and prosperity.

On his turn, His Majesty the Sultan asked His Royal Highness the guest to convey his greetings and best wishes to the King of Bahrain. His Majesty wished

the people of Bahrain further progress and prosperity.

The audience reviewed aspects of cooperation and partnership between Oman and Bahrain, and means of promoting them to serve the joint interests, in addition to exchanging views on a set of regional and international developments. **TURN TO P2**



III
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BEACH RESIDENCES
IV

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HIS MAJESTY GIVES AUDIENCE TO CROWN PRINCE OF BAHRAIN



MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik gave an audience at Al Barakah Palace on Sunday to His Royal Highness Prince Salman bin Hamad al Khalifa, Crown Prince and Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Bahrain. — ONA

FROM PAGE 1

The audience was attended from the Omani side by HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs, Sayyid Khalid bin Hilal al Busaidy, Minister of the Diwan of Royal Court, Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidy, Minister of

Interior, Sultan bin Salim al Habsi, Minister of Finance, Dr Hamed bin Said al Aufi, Head of Private Office of His Majesty the Sultan, Shaikh Al Fadhl bin Mohammed al Harthy, Secretary-General of the Council of Ministers, Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health, and Anwar bin Hilal al Jabri, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion.

Meanwhile, it was attended from the Bahraini side by Shaikh Khalid bin Abdullah al Khalifa, Deputy Prime Minister, Shaikh Issa bin Salman al Khalifa, Minister of the Prime Minister's Court, Shaikh Salman bin Khalifa al Khalifa, Minister of Finance and National Economy, Yasser bin Ibrahim Humaidan, Minister of Electricity and Water Affairs, Dr

Jalila bint al Sayed Jawad Hassan, Minister of Health, Hamad bin Faisal al Malki, Minister of Cabinet Affairs, Abdullah bin Adel Fakhro, Minister of Industry and Commerce, Shaikh Salman bin Ahmed al Khalifa, President of the Court of the Crown Prince, and Dr Juma bin Ahmed al Kaabi, Ambassador of the Kingdom of Bahrain to the Sultanate of Oman. — ONA

Bahrain Crown Prince concludes visit



MUSCAT: His Royal Highness Prince Salman bin Hamad al Khalifa, Crown Prince and Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Bahrain

left Muscat, following a short private visit to the Sultanate of Oman. He was seen off at the Royal Airport by HH Sayyid

Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs, and some officials. — ONA



هيئة الخدمات المالية
FINANCIAL SERVICES AUTHORITY



Tender Announcement

Financial Services Authority announces the following tender :-

Tender name	Tender Number	Release the RFP	Last date for Purchase of RFP	Last date of Submitting the proposal	Tender fees in OMR
Preparing a business continuity management plan for the Financial Services Authority	FSA 003/2026	16 February 2026	25 February 2026 03:00 PM	5 March 2026 02:00 PM	25  Non Refundable

- Specialized companies interested in participating in the above tender must deposit the tender fee into bank account, and submit payment receipt of the tender along with a copy of the commercial registration certificate and the contact details of the authorized person to the Services & Public Relations Department e-mail : Admin@fsa.gov.om, hence, we shall provide you with Tender document by e-mail.
- All participating companies must provide a bank guarantee, issued by locally registered bank not less than 2 % of the tender value addressed to FSA , the bond shall be valid for 90 days from the submission of the proposal.
- All bids shall be submitted in tender box at the headquarters of the Financial Services Authority, located in Airport Heights.
- FSA is not obliged to accept the lowest bid or any other bid without any justifiable reasons.

Bank account information :-

Name of beneficiary : Financial Services Authority

Account no : 0423019706330018

Bank : Bank Muscat- Corporate Branch- CBD

SWIFT code : BMUSOMRXXX

Please attach a copy of the deposit receipt

For inquiries, please contact :-

E-mail : Tenders@fsa.gov.om

Telephone Number : 24823299, 24823133

Timing : 8:00 am to 3:00 pm

Workdays : Sunday to Thursday.



To view



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SHORT TAKES

HIS MAJESTY
GREETES PRESIDENT
OF LITHUANIA

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Dr Gitanas Nausėda of the Republic of Lithuania on his country’s National Day.

In the cable, His Majesty expressed his sincere sentiments to President Dr Gitanas, wishing him success in leading his country and achieving the aspirations of its people for a prosperous and stable life. His Majesty also expressed his wishes for the development of bilateral relations towards further partnerships and investments across various sectors. — ONA

REDUCED HOURS TO
EMPOWER PERSONS
WITH DISABILITIES



To apply for this right, a disability certificate must be obtained through the electronic self-service portal.

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, FEB 15

The Ministry of Social Development clarified that an employee or worker with a disability, or an employee or worker without a disability who is the primary caregiver of a relative (father, mother, wife, husband, son or daughter) with a moderate or severe disability, is entitled to a two-hour reduction in daily working hours with full pay.

Nada bint Malallah al Sadiqi, Director of the Department of Empowering Persons with Disabilities in MoSD, stated, “Reducing the daily working hours for employees with disabilities, as well as those who care for them, falls within the framework of the rights guaranteed by the Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, along with a package of rights stipulated by the law to empower them and ensure their full participation in society.”

She emphasised that this right embodies the Sultanate of Oman’s commitment to providing a flexible and supportive work environment that considers the needs of persons with disabilities and enables them to perform their job duties efficiently and stably, thus contributing to achieving a balance between work requirements and their health and social needs.

To apply for this right, a disability certificate must be obtained through the electronic self-service portal of the Ministry (<https://portal.mosd.gov.om>), which is issued only once to the person with a disability or their caregiver. The ministry notes that the certificate proving the level of disability is a supporting document for the card of a person with a disability, and it is used after it is submitted to the employer to approve the reduction of hours.

AL RUSTAQ HOSPITAL
CONDUCTS OVER
7,000 OPERATIONS



AL RUSTAQ: Al Rustaq Hospital in the Al Batinah South Governorate performed more than 7,000 surgical operations during 2025. Over the past year, the hospital received more than 180,000 patients in outpatient clinics and emergency units, while the number of inpatients grew to 23,000. The hospital also conducted half a million blood tests and 45,000 X-ray tests.

Dr Mahmoud bin Salim al Subhi, Director of Al Rustaq Hospital, said in a statement to ONA that the hospital obtained an international accreditation certificate from the World Health Organization (WHO) in the field of healthcare and patient safety. The hospital also received accreditation as a mother-and-child friendly hospital. — ONA

Majlis Ash’shura reviews
social protection benefits

MOHAMED AL BATTASHI
MUSCAT, FEB 15

THE Majlis Ash’shura reviewed the Ministry of Social Development’s plans to strengthen social protection and expand empowerment programmes during its tenth regular session of the third annual sitting (2023–2027), held on Sunday. The session focused on enhancing family stability, supporting vulnerable groups and building a sustainable social protection system aligned with Oman Vision 2040.

Chaired by Khalid bin Hilal al Maawali, Chairman of Majlis Ash’shura, in the presence of council members and Shaikh Ahmed bin Mohammed al Nadabi, Secretary-General of the Majlis Ash’shura, the session underscored the importance of cooperation between the legislative and executive branches to ensure effective policies that serve the public interest.

Delivering the ministry’s statement, Dr Laila bint Ahmed al Najjar, Minister of Social Development, affirmed that the ministry’s approach places people at the centre of development.

She said the ministry has transitioned from traditional welfare models to empowerment and sustainability, aiming to transform beneficiaries into productive contributors to the economy while strengthening family cohesion.

According to ministry data, more than 98,000 beneficiaries received social assistance



Dr Laila bint Ahmed al Najjar delivered the ministry’s statement.

in 2024. Over 22,000 cases were granted direct social aid amounting to more than RO 17 million, in addition to benefits provided through the Social Protection Fund.

Social development committees and volunteer teams contributed a further RO 12 million, benefiting more than 350,000 families.

The ‘Fak Kurbah’ (Relief from Distress) initiative supported over 10,000 individuals facing hardship. Between 2022 and mid-2025, more than 10,000 productive families were economically empowered.

In 2025 alone, over 100 beneficiaries were enabled through empowerment programmes, while more than 660 productive families

participated in local and international exhibitions to enhance market access.

In the disability sector, more than 8,000 individuals were registered under the Persons with Disabilities Card system in 2025. A network of 145 government, private and civil rehabilitation centres across Oman serves over 9,800 beneficiaries, while more than 10,000 individuals received assistive devices during the year.

Licensed nurseries have surpassed 300 facilities nationwide, and over 3,900 family guidance and counselling services were delivered to strengthen family stability.

The minister also addressed rising juvenile delinquency cases, which increased from 282 cases in 2021 to 563 in 2024. She noted that preventive programmes, early intervention strategies and rehabilitation initiatives are being implemented to reduce risks and reintegrate youth into society.

Majlis Ash’shura members raised questions on improving access to social protection, accelerating service delivery, enhancing employment opportunities for beneficiaries and strengthening coordination among relevant entities. They also emphasised the need to expand research, improve digital monitoring systems and support community-based initiatives. Reaffirming the ministry’s commitment, Dr Laila stressed that social development remains a shared national responsibility and a key pillar in achieving Oman Vision 2040 and sustainable national progress.

5.15% return on orphans’ funds recorded

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
MUSCAT, FEB 15

The Department of Orphans’ and Minors’ Funds at the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs (MoARA) reported strong financial and investment performance in 2025, underscoring efficient fund management and prudent investment policies aligned with the goals of Oman Vision 2040.

Talib bin Ali al Hinai, Assistant Director-General for Orphans’ and Minors’ Affairs at MoARA, said the total return on investment reached 5.15 per cent — a stable and sound rate considering the department’s

focus on low-risk investment instruments. He explained that the process begins with competent courts transferring inherited assets of orphaned minors to the ministry. The department then assumes responsibility for safeguarding the inheritance, ensuring its growth through diversified investments across projects in Oman, while fully protecting beneficiaries’ rights.

Al Hinai noted that an income diversification strategy has strengthened financial stability, with revenues split between real estate investments (53 per cent) and investment agencies (47 per cent).

Real estate investments posted



MoARA reported strong financial and investment performance in 2025.

solid net returns, supported by an income-generating asset portfolio and healthy profit margins after operating expenses. Meanwhile, investment agencies — particularly bank deposits and sukuk — delivered

steady, low-risk returns, enhancing liquidity to meet the needs of orphans referred by the courts.

By the end of 2025, the number of registered orphans and minors under the department’s care had reached approximately 19,000, reaffirming the ministry’s commitment to safeguarding and developing their funds within a comprehensive framework of governance, regulatory controls and approved procedures.

In parallel, the ministry is implementing qualitative initiatives aimed at equipping orphans with essential financial management skills.

MoARA supports 31,642 families in 2025

KABEER YOUSUF & SAUD AL ANSARI
MUSCAT, FEB 15

The Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs (MoARA) has managed an investment portfolio exceeding RO123 million for orphans’ and minors’ funds while supporting 31,642 families through 66 community zakat committees in 2025, officials announced during the ministry’s annual media briefing.

Dr Mohammed bin Said al Maamari, Minister of Awqaf and Religious Affairs, said the orphan and minors’ fund recorded an investment return of 5.15 per cent, reflecting prudent financial management and strengthened governance frameworks.

He noted that the ministry’s performance aligns with the directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to enhance transparency and keep the public informed about institutional achievements in line with Oman Vision 2040.

“The achievements realised reflect the deep trust between the government and society and demonstrate the effectiveness



Dr Mohammed bin Said al Maamari is addressing the annual press conference.

of religious and endowment programmes in strengthening values and supporting sustainable development,” Al Maamari said.

The ministry operates under four key pillars: contributing to sustainable development goals, strengthening community partnerships, investing in religious resources, and promoting moderation and responsible citizenship. In 2025, beneficiaries of religious activities and fatwa services exceeded 10 million, surpassing targets, while revenues from endowments and zakat recorded notable growth.

Digital transformation remained a major focus, with 95 per cent of services now

fully digitised and beneficiary satisfaction reaching the same level. The Government Institutions Performance Measurement Unit rated the ministry ‘Excellent’ in 35 out of 68 evaluated indicators.

During the year, 167 new endowment assets valued at over RO 50 million were registered, and contracts worth approximately RO 6 million were signed for 16 new investment projects.

The ministry also expanded investments through the Ishraq and Ghiras Endowment Funds, alongside diversified ventures in technology, tourism and space-related initiatives.

Community partnerships continued to play a central

role. A total of 339 projects for the reconstruction of mosques and Quranic schools were implemented at a cost exceeding RO 32 million. The ministry has also sponsored temporary employment contracts in more than 400 religious positions and, over the years, spent around RO 16 million supporting employment for over 2,550 members and volunteers.

Looking ahead, 2026 has been designated the ‘Year of Mastery,’ focusing on enhancing service quality, operational efficiency and expanding social impact.

Among key upcoming initiatives is the launch of the Prophet’s Biography Museum, which will highlight the historical relationship between Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and the people of Oman.

Further plans include expanding digital services, introducing a unified services application, strengthening zakat governance, developing selected historic mosques, and improving the Haj experience for Omani pilgrims through continued coordination with Saudi authorities.

OMAN

ASDS CHAIRMAN RECEIVES US DELEGATION



MUSCAT: Maj Gen Hamid bin Ahmed Sakroon, Chairman of the Academy for Strategic and Defence Studies (ASDS), received in his office at Bait Al Falaj on Sunday a delegation from the CAPSTONE course at the US National Defence University, headed by retired Vice Admiral Kurt W Tidd. — ONA

AL HAMRA REVIEWS URBAN RENEWAL DEVELOPMENT



AL HAMRA: The latest developments of the urban renewal project for Al Hamra Neighbourhood were reviewed in the Wilayat of Al Hamra, Al Dakhiliyah Governorate. The session covered mechanisms for providing essential supporting services, including water, sewage and electricity networks, as well as technical coordination among relevant authorities to ensure the integration of works according to a clear timeline. This took place during a meeting held in the wilayat between Shaikh Sulaiman bin Said al Azri, Wali of Al Hamra, and several officials and specialists from relevant government entities. Eng Noor al Hanaiah from the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning delivered a presentation on the urban design guidelines for Al Hamra neighbourhood, addressing the project's vision, planning objectives, implementation stages, and proposed development concepts that preserve the authentic architectural character of Al Hamra. The meeting also discussed the executive action plan and technical challenges associated with infrastructure. — ONA

High BP, obesity among top concerns in NCD survey

THE Ministry of Health on Sunday announced the results of the 2025 National Survey on Noncommunicable Diseases (NCDs) and their associated risk factors.

The event was held under the auspices of Sayyid Dr Sultan bin Ya'arub bin Qahtan al Busaidy, Adviser in the Private Office. Dr Ahmed bin Salim al Mandhari, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Health for Planning and Health Regulation, in his speech, emphasised that the survey was conducted in response to a pressing national need.

It aims to provide up-to-date and accurate data reflecting the health status of the country's population, thereby supporting evidence-based planning and guiding policies and programmes in alignment with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040.

This, he added, meets regional and international targets, most notably the targets of the third goal of the Sustainable Development Goals, which seeks to reduce premature mortality from noncommunicable diseases.

Dr Hanan Balkhy, Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean, in her recorded address from the World Health Organization, emphasised the significance of the survey results and their role in supporting health policies in Oman, in addition to contributing to regional efforts to combat noncommunicable diseases.

Dr Shatha bint Saud al Raisi, Director of the Noncommunicable Diseases Department, Ministry of Health, presented the key findings of the survey, providing a comprehensive overview of the prevalence of risk factors, patterns of health behaviour, future challenges, and opportunities for intervention and prevention.

The survey results regarding tobacco use, both smoked and smokeless, indicated that one in six males currently uses tobacco. Nearly 40 per cent of smokers attempted to quit smoking over the past year. The most commonly consumed forms of smoked



MoH announced results of the 2025 NCDs and their associated risk factors.

tobacco are manufactured cigarettes, pipes, and shisha, while approximately 2 per cent of adult males use electronic cigarettes.

The results also showed that approximately 2 per cent of adult males use smokeless tobacco. Nearly 16 per cent of adults are exposed to secondhand smoke at home, while around 20 per cent are exposed in the workplace. About 90 per cent of Omanis support increasing taxes on tobacco products and roughly 90 per cent also favour prohibiting smoking in open public spaces.

Regarding dietary habits, the survey results indicated that more than 60 per cent of adults do not consume the recommended daily intake of five servings of fruits and vegetables. Over 90 per cent of adults recognise the importance of reducing salt and sugar in their diet, and more than 90 per cent are aware of the health risks associated with high salt and sugar consumption. Approximately 70 per cent of adults use unsaturated oils in food preparation.

The survey results on physical activity indicated that over 25 per cent of adults do not engage in sufficient physical activity, and more than 50 per cent do not participate in recreational exercise.

Regarding hypertension, the findings revealed that one in three adults has high blood pressure, yet only about 30 per cent of those affected were previously aware of their diagnosis.

Of those previously diagnosed, over 80 per cent are taking medication for treatment. Among adults aged 35 and above, approximately 40 per cent are affected by hypertension; two out of every five adults in this age group have hypertension, and similarly, four out of every ten adults aged 35 and above are affected.

The survey results on elevated blood glucose showed that one in seven adults has high blood sugar. Only about 60 per cent of adults with elevated blood glucose were previously aware of their diagnosis, and more than 95 per cent of those previously diagnosed are taking medication for treatment. Among adults aged 35 and above, approximately 20 per cent are affected by high blood glucose; one in five adults in this age group has elevated blood sugar, and two out of every ten adults aged 35 and above are affected. The survey results on elevated blood cholesterol indicated that one in three adults has high cholesterol. Only about 20 per cent of adults with elevated cholesterol were previously aware of their condition, and approximately 60 per cent of those previously diagnosed are taking medication.

Among adults aged 35 and above, around 30 per cent are affected by high cholesterol, three out of every ten adults in this age group.

Furthermore, nearly 40 per cent of adults over 40 have elevated cholesterol. — ONA

UTAS unveils 2026-2030 strategy to drive sustainable transformation

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, FEB 15

The University of Technology and Applied Sciences (UTAS) officially launched its 2026-2030 Strategic Plan during a formal ceremony held at the St Regis Muscat under the auspices of Shaikh Ghosn bin Hilal al Alawi, Chairman of the State Financial and Administrative Audit Institution (SAI).

The new strategy signals a transition from foundational development to impact maximisation, underscoring that higher education today is measured not merely by the number of

programmes or graduates, but by its tangible contribution to national development, workforce readiness and the alignment of knowledge with labour market needs. The plan aligns closely with Oman Vision 2040 and its aspiration to build a competitive, innovation-driven knowledge economy.

Dr Said bin Hamad al Rubaie, Vice-Chancellor of UTAS, described the strategy as a long-term institutional commitment to transformation, placing people at the centre of the educational process while strengthening applied education, challenge-driven research and cross-sector



Shaikh Ghosn bin Hilal al Alawi, SAI Chairman, officially launched the Strategic Plan.

partnerships. He noted that the plan redefines the university's role as both an

academic institution and a national platform for translating technical knowledge into practical solutions that directly benefit students, society and industry.

UTAS's mission under the new framework focuses on preparing future-ready, competitive capabilities through an enabling learning environment, inclusive education, impactful research and transformative partnerships that foster creativity and innovation. Its vision is to become a globally recognised university in technology and applied sciences, contributing to a sustainable, knowledge-based future.

The strategy is the outcome of an extensive institutional development process involving comprehensive analyses, workshops and consultations with 2,579 stakeholders, including students, academics, administrative staff and partners. Dr Sara bint Mohammed al Bahlani, Dean of the College of Education in Al Rustaq and Chair of the Strategic Plan Review and Evaluation Team, said the plan emerged from a rigorous assessment of technological and educational transformations. It translates the aspirations of students and society into clear, measurable and actionable pathways.

Tender Notice for the sale of used and unused Cables

Tender No. AW/T/PH2/01/2026

Al Watanyiah United Engineering and Contracting Co. LLC hereby announce a Tender for the sale of used and unused Cables, as described in the table below, on an “as is, where is” basis. Those wishing to submit a Bid must obtain the Tender documents from the Company’s Head Office (HO) in Ghala Industrial Area after paying the specified Tender Fee in the Company’s Bank Dhofar account: 01040605344006 (IBAN NO: OM080250001040605344006).

S. No.	Tender for the Sale of	Location	Tender Fee (RO)	Earnest Money Deposit (RO)	Period for purchase of Tender	Last date for submission of offer
1	Used and unused High Tension (HT) and Low Voltage (LV) armored and unarmored cables, instrumentation cables, fiber optic cables, earth cables, and wires of various sizes and lengths.	Ghala	300/-	10% of the Total Bid Value	16/02/2026 To 01/03/2026	11/03/2026 5.00 PM

- The last date for submission of Bids accompanied by an Earnest Money Deposit (EMD) issued by any local bank in Oman (equivalent to 10%) of the total Bid value is on Wednesday, 11th March, 5 PM, detailed date on the above table.
- The EMD must be valid for 30 days from the last date of submission of the Bid and the original EMD along with the Bid must be submitted in the tender box at the reception of our Head Office at Ghala, Muscat, Oman on or before the date and time mentioned above.
- Contact details: 2450 2581 / 82 - Extn. 149 / 150. GSM: 9294 7637 / 7722 8166

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Project Brief: BGP company is currently seeking to lease a office facility.

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Requirements at a Glance

Location: Al Athaiba or Ghala.

Size: Approximately 650 sqm.

Type: Open plan or semi-partitioned commercial space.

Timeline

Announcement Date: February 16, 2026

Deadline for Submission: February 27, 2026

Jumabgp@gmail.com

SHORT TAKES



Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali honoured the winners and sponsors during the ceremony.

OMAN AI-ENHANCED DRONE CONTEST CONCLUDES AT SQU

MUSCAT: The second edition of the Oman AI-Enhanced Drone Competition concluded at the Cultural Centre of Sultan Qaboos University under the auspices of Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, and in the presence of HH Sayyid Dr Fahd bin Al Julanda al Said, Vice-Chancellor of SQU, along with senior officials, academics and industry representatives.

Launched in June 2025, the programme ran through February 2026, culminating in final rounds held at the Grand Hall across two tracks: manual remote-control and AI-enhanced autonomous control.

The closing ceremony featured an educational and entertainment exhibition with the participation of nine local companies specialising in drone technologies, artificial intelligence and 3D printing.

Highlights included a drone photography showcase, an FPV pilots’ challenge, prize draws for drones, short theatrical performances, and film screenings combining drone cinematography with AI applications. Winners and sponsors were honoured during the ceremony.

The competition forms part of national efforts to raise awareness about the applications and economic potential of drone technologies, empower Omani youth to develop innovative technological solutions, and support the creation of a promising market with new employment opportunities. Participants received both theoretical and practical training in drone construction, calibration, operation and programming, as well as in integrating AI technologies for autonomous flight — preparing them for regional and international competitions.

STUDENTS LAUNCH VISUAL ARTS SOCIETY WITH CHARITY ART



The expo highlighted the vital role of youth in shaping Oman’s future.

MUSCAT: The Visual Arts Society (VAS) recently hosted its first student-led art event in Oman, providing a dynamic platform for young creatives to showcase their talents while supporting a meaningful social cause.

The event held at ABA Oman International School was organised and curated by students Burhanuddin Dairkee and Ismaiel Dairkee. The initiative brought together students, artists, teachers, parents and members of the wider community to explore visual arts beyond the classroom and strengthen creative engagement.

Held under the theme “The Future Is Now,” the showcase highlighted the vital role of youth in shaping Oman’s future. The exhibition featured diverse artistic expressions and encouraged dialogue between aspiring student artists and established professionals.

The event was attended by chief guests Mohammed al Attar and Waleed al Rajhi from the University of Nizwa, who commended the students for their leadership and vision.

The event also supported a charitable cause, raising over RO 125 for the Maeen Endowment Foundation in support of students at the University of Nizwa.

“We created Visual Arts Society as an NGO with the aim of giving students a platform to express themselves creatively beyond academics, in a supportive and non-competitive environment, while also contributing positively to local communities and charities in Oman,” said Burhanuddin, Founder of the Visual Arts Society.

YOUNG INNOVATORS TO REPRESENT OMAN AT GLOBAL ROBOFEST FINALS

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, FEB 15

Young innovators from Oman will represent the Sultanate of Oman at the prestigious Robofest Global Finals, to be held from May 14 to 16, at Lawrence Technological University in Southfield, Michigan, US.

The students from Indian School Muscat secured first place in the Junior RoboMed category at Robofest Oman 2026 — a specialised healthcare robotics competition and the first event of its kind in the

Sultanate of Oman. The competition was organised by STEAM Leaders Oman in collaboration with Lawrence Technological University.

Competing under the name Team Artilink, Nusrat Mohiuddin (12), Mithun Karthikeyan (13), Muhammed Narmawala (13) and Sriram Ganesh (14), under the mentorship of Ubaid Ahmed, developed an autonomous medical assistant robot designed to enhance patient safety and emergency response.

Their project, titled Artilink, is a smart healthcare companion system

combining a wearable health-monitoring bracelet, an assistive robot and an automated medicine dispenser. The bracelet tracks vital signs such as heart rate and blood oxygen levels, while detecting falls and abnormal movements.

In case of an emergency, the robot moves toward the patient, activates an audible alert to attract caregivers and sends an SMS notification to designated contacts. The integrated medication dispenser ensures timely and accurate medicine intake, supporting safer independent living. Participation in the global

finals will provide the students with international exposure and opportunities to engage with peers and experts in robotics and healthcare technology.

The competition aligns with the goals of Oman Vision 2040, which emphasises innovation, digital transformation and knowledge-based development. The students’ achievement reflects the growing momentum of STEM education in Oman and highlights the role of youth innovation in advancing healthcare and emerging technologies.

CPA ensures availability of goods ahead of Ramadhan

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, FEB 15

AS part of early preparations for Ramadhan, the Consumer Protection Authority (CPA) has stepped up regulatory and field efforts to ensure market stability and the availability of essential commodities at fair prices.

The move reflects the Authority’s continued commitment to safeguarding consumer rights and promoting a stable and sustainable consumption environment during a period that typically witnesses a surge in demand for food products and consumer goods.

In this context, the CPA convened a coordination meeting with suppliers in Muscat Governorate. The meeting was attended by Dr Ahmed bin Obaid al Saeedi, Acting Director-General of the General-Directorate for Market Regulation, along with several officials. Discussions focused on readiness plans for the upcoming Ramadhan season and mechanisms to maintain price stability.

The Authority stressed the importance of strict adherence to market regulations, underscoring that seasonal demand must not be exploited to impose unjustified price increases. It affirmed that inspection teams will adopt a firm approach toward any practices that disrupt market balance or undermine consumer rights.

Suppliers outlined their strategies to secure adequate stock levels of essential commodities, particularly high-demand Ramadhan items. Pricing mechanisms and promotional campaigns were also



The CPA warns against misleading advertisements and the need for clear price displays on all goods.

Inspection teams will adopt a firm approach toward any practices that disrupt market balance or undermine consumer rights

reviewed to ensure transparency and clarity for consumers.

Salim bin Rashid al Harthy, Director of a food supply company in Muscat Governorate, said preparations began weeks in advance to guarantee sufficient inventory. “We are in continuous coordination with international suppliers and local producers to secure strategic stock that meets market needs throughout Ramadhan,” he said, adding that fair pricing remains a priority for national companies.

Mohammed bin Saif al Balushi, owner of a shop in Muscat, highlighted the private sector’s responsibility during peak seasons. “We are introducing well-planned promotional offers that ensure consumer benefit without compromising reasonable profit margins,” he said, noting the importance of price transparency and regular updates reflecting actual cost changes.

The CPA reiterated the

requirement for clear price displays on all goods and warned against misleading advertisements or promotional tactics. Inspection campaigns will be intensified across markets and shopping centres in the coming weeks, with special focus on Ramadhan-related commodities. Field teams will monitor product safety, verify commercial data accuracy and ensure compliance with approved regulations.

While emphasising that its objective is not merely punitive, the Authority said it seeks to foster a culture of voluntary compliance and a balanced market that protects all stakeholders. However, it warned that legal action — including fines and referral to the Public Prosecution in serious cases — will be taken against violators of consumer protection laws.

The CPA’s proactive approach reflects its awareness of economic variables and supply chain challenges. It continues to monitor market indicators and coordinate with relevant entities to ensure the smooth flow of goods. Consumers are encouraged to report violations through official communication channels, with swift response to complaints remaining a priority.

Beyond regulatory oversight, the Authority also called on consumers to practise responsible purchasing during Ramadhan by rationalising spending, avoiding excessive buying and planning needs in advance to reduce food waste and ease pressure on markets.

Observers note that such coordination meetings represent a preventive strategy aimed at addressing potential imbalances before they escalate.

628 children compete at National Brainobrain

MUSCAT: Around 628 children aged between 5 and 14 participated in the 7th National Brainobrain Fest held at the Middle East College Student Hub, marking one of the largest mental math gatherings in the city.

Organised by Brainobrain, an international skills development programme focused on enhancing memory and concentration among young learners, the event brought together students from across Oman for a day of competition and celebration of cognitive excellence.

Participants competed in multiple categories, including Champions, Gold Toppers and Silver Toppers, demonstrating speed, accuracy and remarkable mental agility. The competition tested calculation skills, memory power and



The Brainobrain Fest marked one of the largest mental math gatherings.

concentration, offering children a platform to showcase their abilities in a structured and encouraging environment.

The event commenced with an inaugural ceremony presided over by Arul Subramaniam, Managing Director of Brainobrain International.

Parents, faculty members and invited guests attended the

programme, lending further significance to the occasion.

Beyond the competition, the fest featured cultural performances and interactive discussions on education and parenting, creating a holistic learning atmosphere. Young participants also displayed stage confidence through performances and

presentations, adding vibrancy to the day-long programme.

The prize-distribution ceremony formed the highlight of the event, with winners honoured by the chief guest, Mazin bin Zaher al Sulaimani, alongside Arul Subramaniam. Faculty members were also recognised for their contribution to organising and mentoring the participants.

Organisers reiterated the value of the abacus-based methodology, which continues to gain popularity for its effectiveness in strengthening memory, concentration and analytical thinking skills among children.

Through initiatives such as the National Brainobrain Fest, the organisation aims to foster academic confidence and cognitive development at an early age.

WORLD

SHORT TAKES



Rickshaw pullers pass in front of Bangladesh's Election Commission (EC) building in Dhaka. — AFP

BANGLADESH’S COALITION SUBMITS POLL COMPLAINTS

DHAKA: Bangladesh’s coalition, which lost its chance to form the country’s next government in this week’s polls, submitted complaints to the Election Commission on Sunday, challenging results in 32 constituencies. The Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), led by Tarique Rahman celebrated a sweeping victory in the South Asian nation of 170 million after general elections on Thursday.

The BNP alliance won 212 seats, compared with 77 for the Jamaat-e-Islami-led alliance, according to the Election Commission.

Jamaat chief Shafiqur Rahman conceded on Saturday, saying his party would “serve as a vigilant, principled, and peaceful opposition”.

Newly elected lawmakers are expected to be sworn in on Tuesday, after which Rahman is set to become the country’s next prime minister.

But on Sunday, Jamaat officials submitted their complaints.

“We have identified 32 constituencies where our candidates were unfairly defeated,” said senior Jamaat official Hamidur Rahman Azad. “The election day began smoothly, but the ending was not what we had expected. Fake votes, the circulation of black money (bribes), threats, assaults, and attacks marred the atmosphere.” — AFP

SYRIA HAS TAKEN OVER ANOTHER BASE FROM US FORCES

DAMASCUS: Syria’s defence ministry said it had taken over the Al Shadadi base in the northeast from US forces, days after assuming control of a facility near the Jordan-Iraq borders. “The forces of the Syrian Arab Army have taken over the Al Shadadi military base in the Hasakeh countryside following coordination with the American side,” a ministry statement said.

US forces operating as part of the international coalition against the IS group had been stationed at the base outside the town of the same name. The town housed a prison where Kurdish forces detained members of the extremist organisation, before government forces advanced into the area last month.

Sunday’s announcement follows US confirmation on Thursday that its forces had vacated Al Tanf base near Syria’s borders with Jordan and Iraq. The Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) were a major partner of the US-led international coalition against IS, and were instrumental in the group’s territorial defeat in Syria in 2019.

But following the fall in December 2024 of longtime ruler Bashar al-Assad, the United States has drawn closer to the new government in Damascus. Despite IS’s territorial defeat, the group remains active, however. On Saturday, the US Central Command said its forces had struck more than 30 IS targets in Syria this month.

Secretary of State Marco Rubio said on Sunday that the United States is pleased with the “trajectory” in Syria amid talks with Kurdish minority groups, despite troubles. “There have been some days that have been very concerning, but we like the trajectory,” Rubio said. — AFP

IRAN SAYS READY FOR NUCLEAR COMPROMISE IF US LIFTS SANCTIONS

TEHRAN: Iran is ready to compromise on its stockpile of highly enriched uranium in exchange for US sanctions being lifted, its deputy foreign minister said. Majid Takht-Ravanchi’s remarks followed a resumption of nuclear talks between Iran and the United States on February 6. Switzerland on Saturday announced that a new round of talks would take place in Geneva next week, but without specifying which day. Iran has not yet officially

confirmed the new round of talks, but Takht-Ravanchi said they would be on Tuesday.

Western countries, led by the United States as well as by Israel, Iran’s arch-enemy and considered by experts to be the only nuclear power in the Middle East, accuse the Islamic republic of seeking to acquire nuclear weapons.

Iran is ready to compromise to reach an agreement with the United States including diluting its highly enriched uranium, but

Washington must lift its sanctions which are crippling Iran’s economy, Takht-Ravanchi said. “If we see the sincerity on their (American) part, I am sure we will be on a road to have an agreement,” he said, speaking in English. He was also questioned about the possibility of Tehran agreeing to ship its stockpile of more than 400 kilos of highly enriched uranium out of the country and did not rule out a compromise, saying “it is too early to say” what will happen at the talks. — AFP

Fresh Israeli air strikes kill 12 in devastated Gaza

ISRAEL

fired air strikes across the Gaza Strip on Sunday, killing at least 12 Palestinians, Palestinian officials said, in what the military called a response to ceasefire violations by Palestinian group Hamas. Gaza medics said an Israeli air strike on a tent encampment housing displaced families killed at least four people, while health officials said another strike killed five in Khan Younis in the south and another person was shot dead in the north. Air strikes also targeted what was thought to be a commander of the Islamic Jihad group, an ally of Hamas, in the Tel Al-Hawa neighbourhood in Gaza City.

Hazem Qassem, Hamas spokesperson in Gaza, accused Israel of committing a new “massacre” against displaced Palestinians, calling it a serious breach of the ceasefire days before the first meeting of US President Donald Trump’s Board of Peace.

Israel has unilaterally moved the yellow line deeper into Gaza even though Israeli withdrawals are part of the ceasefire deal, and Hamas has so far rejected demands to lay down its weapons, also envisaged in the plan. Qassem urged those attending the first meeting of Trump’s new international Board of Peace for Gaza on Thursday to pressure Israel to stop violating the truce and implement the agreement without delay.

The Israeli military said it continued to destroy underground tunnels in the northern Gaza Strip in accordance with the agreement



Displaced Palestinians gather at the site of an overnight Israeli strike, in the southern Gaza Strip. — AFP

and that its aircraft had attacked a building east of the Yellow line after seeing militants emerging from a tunnel and killed at least two of them. Gaza officials had no information on those reported casualties. The Gaza health ministry says that at least 600 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli fire since the Gaza deal began. Israel says four soldiers have been killed by militants in Gaza over the same period.

Meanwhile, Medecins Sans Frontieres has halted “non-critical” medical activities at a major hospital in southern Gaza following reports from patients and its own staff of armed men inside the facility and concerns over the movement of weapons within it. MSF’s statement

The Gaza health ministry says that at least 600 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli fire since the Gaza deal began. Israel says four soldiers have been killed by militants in Gaza over the same period

appeared to mark the first time that an international humanitarian group in Gaza has publicly reported the presence of armed men in a hospital or the possible use of such a facility for moving weapons. The Geneva-based medical charity said non-essential operations at Nasser Hospital in Khan Younis were suspended on January 20 over concerns with the “management of the structure, the safeguarding of its neutrality, and security breaches.”

In recent months, patients and personnel had “seen armed men, some masked,” in areas of the hospital compound, MSF said. The Interior Ministry said in a statement it was committed to preventing any armed presence inside hospitals, and that legal action would be taken against violators. It suggested that armed members of certain Gazan families had recently entered hospitals, but did not identify those involved.

“MSF teams have reported a pattern of unacceptable acts, including the presence of armed men, intimidation, arbitrary arrests of patients, and a recent situation of suspicion of movement of weapons,” it said.

According to Gaza’s Health Ministry, more than 590 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli troops in the territory since the ceasefire began, while Palestinian militants have killed four Israeli soldiers in the same period. MSF, also known as Doctors Without Borders, disclosed the Nasser Hospital suspension in a “frequently asked questions” section on its website about its work in Gaza. — Reuters

JAPAN’S LAKE WARNS OF CREEPING CLIMATE CHANGE

SUWA: The Japanese priest and his parishioners gathered before dawn, hoping that climate change had not robbed them of the chance to experience an increasingly rare communion with the sacred. The few dozen men, most in their sixties, were headed to Nagano’s Lake Suwa in search of a phenomenon called “God’s Crossing” that has gone from reliable to elusive in recent decades.

Known as “miwatari” in Japanese, it occurs when a crack opens up in the frozen lake surface, allowing shards of thinner ice to break through and form a ridge where local deities are believed to cross. For centuries, the priest of the nearby Yatsurugi Shrine has led an annual watch for the crossing, contributing to a unique record of a changing climate.

This year’s watch began on January 5, with Kiyoshi Miyasaka leading the flock. Miyasaka’s predecessors noted when the entire lake surface froze, and when the miwatari appeared. More recently, priests have added temperature readings and ice thickness. Consecutive records date all the way back to 1443, though the shrine’s priests only took over the job in 1683. — AFP



MOUNTAIN ACCIDENT

Deadly avalanche near Italy’s Courmayeur



Two off-piste skiers were killed and another was in serious condition after an avalanche struck a slope near Courmayeur, Italy’s alpine rescue said. Italy’s central alpine rescue service (CNSAS) said the two victims and injured person were a woman and two men, and were “probably” French. The avalanche hit a stretch of the Canale dei Vesses west of Courmayeur in the Val Veny area at the foot of the Mont Blanc. Fifteen rescuers participated in the search. — AFP

FURTHER FACILITATION

China confirms visa-free for Canada, UK



China confirmed that Canadian and British citizens will be able to visit the country visa-free, after the two countries’ leaders had announced such agreements following official trips to Beijing. Beijing’s foreign ministry confirmed these agreements. “Holders of ordinary passports from these countries can enter China without a visa for business, tourism, visiting relatives and friends, exchanges, or transit for a period not exceeding 30 days,” it said in a statement. — AFP

SURGE IN PRICES

9 Nigerian children freed after kidnapping



Nine children abducted at gunpoint from a church in central Nigeria have been freed. “The rescued children, comprising six girls and three boys, are receiving care and support,” Solomon Iorpey, an adviser to Benue state governor, said. “The governor, who received the news of the rescue in high spirits, appreciated the effective collaboration between the conventional security and the local vigilante groups that ensured the safe return of the victims,” Iorpey added. — AFP

SHORT TAKES



Chinese FM Wang Yi speaks on stage during the 62nd Munich Security Conference (MSC), in Munich. — AFP

CHINA’S FM WANG MEETS CANADIAN COUNTERPART

MUNICH: China’s foreign minister Wang Yi told his Canadian counterpart Anita Anand their two countries should work to “eliminate interference”, as they met on the sidelines of a security conference. Wang has been eager to paint Beijing as a more stable partner compared to the increasingly unpredictable United States. Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney, who took office last year, visited China in January as part of his global effort to broaden Canada’s export markets and decrease trade reliance on the United States.

Under a preliminary trade deal announced, Beijing is expected to reduce tariffs on Canadian canola imports and grant Canadians visa-free travel to China. But the United States has threatened to impose 100 per cent tariffs on Canadian products if the deal were to go ahead, saying it would allow China to “dump goods”.

Beijing’s top diplomat Wang told his Canadian counterpart Anita Anand on Saturday that their countries should jointly counter “interference”, without naming the United States. — AFP

FACTORY OWNER FACING LIFE SENTENCE



The owner of a top Greek food company has been formally arrested and faces a life sentence after a deadly explosion killed five workers at his factory last month. Constantinos Tziortziotis, 52, was arrested on Saturday and will testify next week over Greece’s worst industrial accident in decades. Tziortziotis is accused of failing to act on signs of a long-running propane leak at the Violanta company’s flagship factory near Trikala, central Greece. An investigator handling the case on Saturday charged Tziortziotis with arson and explosion with possible intent, for which he could face up to life imprisonment. — AFP

MACRON URGES CALM AFTER ACTIVIST’S DEATH SPARKS POLITICAL CLASH

PARIS: French President Emmanuel Macron urged calm and restraint at the weekend after an activist died from injuries sustained during a beating, an incident that has become a political flashpoint. The 23-year-old died on Saturday, having fallen into a coma after being violently beaten on Thursday outside a conference given by Rima Hassan, a far-left member of the European Parliament. Hassan called for an investigation and for the perpetrators to be brought to justice,

a call that Macron repeated late on Saturday, after a wave of mutual recriminations around the beating. “It is essential that the perpetrators of this ignominy be prosecuted, brought to justice and convicted. Hatred that kills has no place among us. I call for calm, restraint and respect,” Macron said on X. The activist, whose name the government has given only as Quentin, had been present to help protect members of the anti-immigration feminist association

Nemesis, which was protesting against the event, the group said in a statement. Le Monde newspaper quoted prosecutors as saying they had opened an investigation for aggravated manslaughter but that the perpetrators had not been identified. Politicians quickly weighed in. Bruno Retailleau, head of the conservative Republicans party and a declared candidate for the 2027 presidential election, blamed the far left. — Reuters

Rubio visits eastern Europe countries to bolster ties

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio began a two-day trip to eastern Europe on Sunday to bolster ties with Slovakia and Hungary, whose conservative leaders, often at odds with other European Union countries, have warm ties with President Donald Trump. Rubio will use the trip to discuss energy cooperation and bilateral issues, including Nato commitments, the State Department said in an announcement last week. “These are countries that are very strong with us, very cooperative with the United States, work very closely with us,” Rubio told reporters before departing for Europe on Thursday.

Rubio, who in his dual role also serves as Trump’s national security adviser, met Slovak President Peter Pellegrini on Sunday on his arrival in Bratislava, the first visit by a US secretary of state in seven years, and discussed energy and defence. “An important topic of the talks was... defence cooperation and the fulfilment of commitments arising from Nato summits,” Pellegrini’s office said in a statement. Rubio later met Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico, who visited Trump in Florida last month. The US diplomat’s trip follows his attendance at the Munich Security Conference over the last few days.

On Monday, Rubio is expected to meet Hungarian leader Viktor Orban, who is trailing in most polls ahead of an election in April when he could be voted out of power. “President (Trump) said he’s very supportive of him, and so are we,” Rubio said ahead of his trip. “But obviously we were going to do that visit as a bilateral visit.” Orban, one of Trump’s closest allies in Europe, is considered by many on the American hard-right as a model for the US president’s tough policies on immigration and support for families and Christian conservatism. Budapest has repeatedly hosted Conservative Political Action Conference events, which bring together conservative activists and leaders, with another due in March.

Both Fico and Orban have clashed with EU institutions over probes into backsliding on democratic rules. They have also maintained



US Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Slovakia’s PM Robert Fico shake hands, in Bratislava. — Reuters

ties with Moscow, criticised and at times delayed the imposition of EU sanctions on Russia and opposed sending military aid to Ukraine. Even as other European Union countries have secured alternative energy supplies after Moscow invaded Ukraine in 2022, including by buying US natural gas, Slovakia and Hungary have continued to buy Russian gas and oil, a practice the US has criticised.

Rubio said this would be discussed during his brief tour, but did not give any details. Fico, who has described the European Union as an institution that is in “deep crisis”, has showered Trump with praise saying he would bring peace back to Europe. But Fico criticised the US capture of Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro in early January.

Hungary and Slovakia have also so far diverged from Trump’s request for all Nato members to significantly increase their military spending to 5 per cent of GDP, and have raised defence spending to Nato’s minimum threshold of 2 per cent, a lower level than some other Nato members. On nuclear cooperation, Slovakia signed an agreement with the United States last month and Fico has said US-based Westinghouse was likely to build a new nuclear power plant.

Rubio cast the United States as the “child of Europe” in a message of unity on Saturday, offering some reassurance as well as levelling more criticism at allies after a year of turmoil in transatlantic relations. Rubio was addressing the annual Munich Security Conference, where Europe’s leading powers have tried to project their own independence and strength while straining to keep a long-time alliance with the US under President Donald Trump alive.

The speech delivered a degree of respite to European countries who fear being left in the lurch on anything from the war in Ukraine to international trade ructions in a rapidly shifting global order. But it was short on concrete commitments and made no mention of Russia, raising questions about whether Rubio’s tone, more emollient than that of Vice President JD Vance at the same event a year ago, would change the underlying dynamics. “In a time of headlines heralding the end of the transatlantic era, let it be known and clear to all that this is neither our goal nor our wish, because for us Americans, our home may be in the Western Hemisphere, but we will always be a child of Europe,” Rubio said. — Reuters

UK eyes Russia sanctions after Navalny poisoning findings

LONDON: Britain will consider “increasing sanctions” against Russia following findings from five European states that opposition leader Alexei Navalny was killed by dart-frog toxin in a Russian prison, UK foreign minister Yvette Cooper said on Sunday. “We continue to look at coordinated action, including increasing sanctions on the Russian regime,” Cooper told the BBC from the Munich Security Conference, where the UK, France, Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden announced findings that the Russian state was a prime suspect for poisoning Navalny two years ago. Navalny, a staunch critic of President Vladimir Putin, died in a Russian prison in mysterious conditions on February 16, 2024, while serving a 19-year sentence.

The five European countries

on Saturday said that a deadly toxin known as epibatidine, found in Ecuadorian dart frogs, was found on laboratory analyses of samples from his body. Cooper told Sky News that the toxin can also be produced synthetically. “We do know that the Russian regime has had possession of this particular chemical,” the British foreign minister said. “Russia claimed that Navalny died of natural causes. But given the toxicity of epibatidine and reported symptoms, poisoning was highly likely the cause of his death,” the European countries said in a joint statement on Saturday.

Britain’s foreign office said separately that “only the Russian state had the means, motive and opportunity to deploy this lethal toxin”. It added: “We hold it (Russia) responsible for his death.” UK



A mourner visits the grave of Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny at the Borisovo cemetery in Moscow. — AFP

Prime Minister Keir Starmer hailed Navalny’s “courage in the face of tyranny” in a social media post, slamming “Putin’s murderous intent”.

Russia’s foreign ministry spokeswoman and Moscow’s embassy in London dismissed the Western report. The Kremlin has never given a

full explanation for Navalny’s death, only saying he fell ill and died suddenly after taking a walk in his prison colony. Putin said in 2024 that Navalny had “passed away”. The opposition leader died shortly before a presidential election in Russia.

On Saturday, Navalny’s

widow, Yulia Navalny, said it was now “science-proven” that the Kremlin opponent had been murdered, two years after his death was announced during the same annual conference in Germany. Navalny last September said that laboratory analysis of smuggled biological samples found that her husband was killed by poisoning. French Foreign Minister Jean-Noel Barrot paid “tribute” to Navalny after the findings. “We now know that Vladimir Putin is prepared to use biological weapons against his own people to remain in power,” Barrot said in a post on X.

Separately, Russia will not end the militarisation of its economy after fighting in Ukraine ends, the head of Latvia’s intelligence agency said on the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference which ends on Sunday. “The

potential aggressiveness of Russia when the Ukraine war stops will depend of many factors: How the war ends, if it’s frozen or not, and if the sanctions remain,” Egils Zviedris, director of the Latvian intelligence service SAB, said.

Some believe that Russia has embraced a war economy and full military mobilisation that it will be difficult for it to reverse course, and that this could push Moscow to launch further offensives against European territories. Zviedris said that lifting current sanctions “would allow Russia to develop its military capacities” more quickly. He acknowledged that Russia has drawn up military plans to potentially attack Latvia and its Baltic neighbours, but also said that “Russia does not pose a military threat to Latvia at the moment”. — AFP

OPINION

Living museums offer experiential heritage learning



SANDHYA RAO MEHTA

The writer is Associate Professor, Sultan Qaboos University

THE RECENT news that the Oman National Museum will implement a Historic Muscat Rehabilitation Project is a very exciting one for tourists, visitors, locals, as well as academics specialising in diverse areas like history, sociology and other related fields. It will make the area along historic Muscat resemble a living museum. While traditional museums have themselves been transformed from passively exhibiting historical objects to becoming interactive spaces of learning, living museums offer a whole different way of understanding our past. Effectively, a living museum recreates historical settings in real time to simulate a specific time period. This offers visitors experiences to show how life was lived, the languages spoken, as well as the challenges faced by a community within a given time frame. This allows spectators to understand a culture within a natural environment and in a specific historical period. Living museums hold a unique and invaluable place today. There are a number of examples of living museums around the world. One of the

earliest examples was in the town of Skansen in Stockholm which was opened in 1891 by Artur Hazelius to recreate life in pre-industrial Sweden. Colonial Williamsburg in the United States also showcases life in an 18th-century town, with public squares, blacksmiths and a market with ‘locals’ conversing in old English, as well as trained historians strolling around to answer questions about colonial America. The Beamish Museum in England offers a peek into the life of ordinary workers in Durham. It contains objects of everyday use that visitors can touch and feel, giving a sense of life in Northern England in the early 19th century. Such museums offer spaces for experiential learning. In fact, even traditional museums today are collaborating with local communities, as well as researchers and students, to create alternative ways of learning about the past. Part of this learning process is to include participatory archaeology, giving an opportunity to aspiring or amateur historians to literally get their hands dirty, digging for old and hidden objects. There are also

Museums are more than silent storehouses of past glory and are active arenas for learning and re-creation

opportunities for role play in traditional costumes. Today, digital tools like augmented reality and virtual reality devices are used to further enhance and complement the human experience in such living museums to further improve our understanding of the past. While skeptics regard living museum spaces as encouraging nostalgia, there is no doubt that they serve a much broader purpose. Open-air museums offer important emotional connections that traditional museums cannot. By engaging stakeholders in dialogue with the past, they make history become real, relevant and immediate. While history has always been an important way of understanding the present and our future, making history come alive to a digital generation continues to be challenging. Creating spaces that point to a rich and vibrant past by providing experiential learning opportunities will create rich opportunities to showcase the past in ways that are vibrant and animated. Museums are more than silent storehouses of past glory. They are active arenas for learning and recreation. Today, they also offer opportunities for immersive learning and engagement.

STUDY: HUMAN NOISE DISRUPTS BIRD BREEDING

Noise pollution is affecting bird behaviour across the globe, disrupting everything from courtship songs to the ability to find food and avoid predators, a large-scale new analysis showed on Wednesday.

Researchers reviewed nearly four decades of scientific work and found that noises made by humans were interfering with the lives of birds on six continents and having “strong negative effects” on reproduction success.

Previous research on individual species has shown that single sources of anthropogenic noise - such as planes, traffic and construction - can affect birds as it does other wildlife.

But for this study, the team performed a wider analysis by pooling data published since 1990 across 160 bird species to see if any broader trends could be established.

The study, published in the journal Proceedings of the Royal Society B, found clear evidence of a “pervasive” impact of noise pollution on birds worldwide.

“We found that noise significantly impacts communication risk behaviours, foraging, aggression and physiology and had a strong effect on habitat use and a negative impact on reproduction,” it said.

This is because birds rely on acoustic information to survive, making them particularly vulnerable to the modern din produced by cars, machinery and urban life.

“They use song to find mates, calls to warn of predators, and chicks make begging calls to let their parents know they’re hungry,” Natalie Madden, who led the research while at the University of Michigan, said in a statement.

“So if there’s loud noise in the environment, can they still hear signals from their own species?”

The study included many common species such as European robins and starlings, house sparrows, and great tits.

The response varied between species, with birds that nest close to the ground suffering greater reproductive harm, while those using open nests experienced stronger effects on growth.

Birds living in urban areas, meanwhile, tended to have higher levels of stress hormones than those outside of cities.

Some 61 per cent of the world’s bird species have declining populations, mostly due to habitat loss driven by expanding agriculture and logging, the International Union for Conservation of Nature said in October.

The study authors said that noise pollution was an “underappreciated consequence” of humanity’s impact on nature, especially compared to biodiversity loss and climate change. — AFP

The invisible strength of social protection

SOCIAL PROTECTION is often reduced to a single question about how much money the government gives. Many people judge it by the size of a payment, while overlooking the wider systems that quietly reduce worry, protect daily life and create stability long before cash is ever needed. People talk about prices, jobs, schools and health, but rarely stop to say, “This is social protection.” Social protection sits quietly behind many of the things that help daily life run smoothly. It is there when worry does not turn into panic, when a temporary problem does not become a lasting one, and when people feel that life, even with its surprises, remains manageable. It shows itself in small, familiar moments. A pension arriving on time. A family staying calm during a period of lower income because support exists. A young person between jobs, feeling pressure, but not panic. This is not policy language. This is peace of mind. Social protection is not always visible, but its absence is felt immediately. That is why it matters more than we often realise. Across many societies, social protection has become more organised and reliable. Support is no longer scattered but shaped as a framework that follows people through different stages of life. Not everyone needs the same help at the same time, but people feel safer knowing it exists. At its centre is income security. A pension that supports dignity in old age. Help for persons with disabilities and for widows and dependants that prevents short-term hardship from becoming permanent. Family income support fills gaps when salaries fall short. This is not dependence but balance. Work, health and education all play a quiet role in protection.



DR KHALFAN HAMED ALHARRASI

The author is an academic and researcher

Social protection is not always visible, but its absence is felt immediately. Across many societies, social protection has become more organised and reliable



Social protection sits quietly behind many of the things that help daily life run smoothly.

Support does not begin only when a job is lost. It starts while people are still working, through wage linked insurance, shared contributions and protection against injury, illness, or sudden loss of income. Sick leave and time to manage family matters help people face real life without immediate fear. Health protection works in a similar way. Knowing that care is available eases pressure during difficult moments, whether through maternal care, child health services, long-term treatment, or mental health support. Education also protects. Free schooling, learning materials, transport support and help for families under strain allow children to focus on learning instead of worrying. Education becomes a path forward, not a burden. There is also a quieter side to social protection. The kind people notice only when it disappears. Housing support that helps families stay settled. Utilities that remain manageable. Daily essentials that stay within reach. No money arrives in an envelope, yet households breathe easier. Public choices around fees, taxes and targeted relief can ease pressure

on family budgets without drawing attention. Strong public services do the same. Roads, transport, emergency response and sanitation may not sound exciting, but daily life depends on them. Family life sits at the heart of all this. Support for maternity, childcare and child protection reflects a simple truth. Families carry society. When families struggle, everything feels heavier. For persons with disabilities, protection means access. Access to healthcare, to education, work and public spaces. Not sympathy. Participation. Older people also need more than a pension slip. Community services, home support, healthcare access and legal safeguards send a clear message. Age does not reduce value. It increases it. In the end, social protection helps people feel steady. It gives families time to adjust, space to recover and confidence to move forward. When support is clear and trusted, people plan better, work with less fear and look ahead with more hope. This quiet sense of stability is one of the foundations that support everyday life in any society.

When progress becomes a shared responsibility



ABDULAZIZ
AL JAHDHAMI

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SOME GATHERINGS leave you informed; others leave you inspired. The ‘Together Forward’ forum, presided over by HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs, was undoubtedly a source of inspiration for all who participated in the forum. It highlighted the importance of unity in addressing today’s complex challenges and reaffirmed that meaningful progress is built on collaboration.

The phrase ‘Together Forward’ may seem simple, yet it carries a powerful message. It reflects a profound truth that progress is never achieved in isolation. In other words, no society moves forward by accident, and none advances alone. The forum brought together leaders, thinkers and community members under a shared vision — that sustainable development is rooted in cooperation, inclusivity and collective responsibility.

The forum reminded us that progress flourishes when people believe in one another. True progress is not about moving faster alone, but about moving forward together — with purpose, compassion and shared commitment. It emphasised that progress is a collective journey requiring unity of vision, trust in leadership and confidence in collaboration.

In today’s world, progress is often framed as competition — who grows faster, innovates first and leads the narrative. It is frequently measured in numbers of growth rates,

targets and milestones. Yet at the ‘Together Forward’ forum, progress revealed a different dimension. It appeared not merely as statistics, but as a shared story shaped by people and strengthened by unity.

The presence of HH Sayyid Theyazin lent the gathering a strong sense of conviction and hope. It reflected a model of leadership that understands progress is measured not only by outcomes, but by inclusion. Leadership that listens, empowers and inspires confidence in a shared journey towards a better future.

HH Sayyid Theyazin’s engagement set the tone for the forum’s discussions. It demonstrated leadership that is engaged rather than distant, visionary rather than reactive. Leadership, as reflected in the forum, is not simply about authority, but it is about stewardship. It is about guiding society forward while ensuring that no one is left behind.

The discussions also underscored the importance of forward-looking strategies, innovation and human-centred development. There was a clear commitment to building a future that benefits all segments of society, especially the next generation.

What distinguished the ‘Together Forward’ forum was its emphasis on responsibility alongside opportunity. Progress was not presented as an abstract idea, but as a practical commitment. Innovation, education, social development and economic empowerment were explored not as separate goals, but as interconnected pillars of a

The forum carried
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thriving society. The message was clear that sustainable progress must be inclusive.

Rather than viewing development as the responsibility of a single institution or sector, the forum reinforced that true progress emerges when government, private sector and community move forward together. This spirit of partnership was reflected not only in the forum’s theme, but also in the diversity of voices represented throughout the sessions.

The forum carried a forward-looking spirit that was both motivating and inspiring. It conveyed that the future is not something to wait for, but something to shape collectively. Participants were encouraged to reflect on their roles in this journey, recognising that progress begins with action, however small, aligned with a shared vision.

Beyond policies and strategies, the forum radiated optimism. It replaced narratives of limitation with narratives of possibility. It reminded us that progress is strongest when it is shared, purposeful and guided by a common commitment to the future.

As the message resonated clearly, we do not advance alone; we advance together. Inspired by visionary leadership and guided by collective will, the path forward becomes clearer. We move ahead not as individuals competing for space, but as a community shaping a common future. The true legacy of the forum lies not only in the discussions it sparked, but in the actions it will inspire. Participants left with a renewed sense of responsibility to contribute, to collaborate and to continue advancing together.

WORLD COPPER RUSH PROMISES NEW RICHES FOR ZAMBIA

HILLARY ORINDE

Five years after becoming Africa’s first Covid-era debt defaulter, Zambia is seeing a dramatic turnaround in fortunes as major powers vie for access to its vast reserves of copper.

Surging demand from the artificial intelligence, green energy and defence sectors has exponentially boosted demand for the workhorse metal that underpins power grids, data centres and electric vehicles. The scramble for copper exposes geopolitical rivalries as industrial heavyweights — including China, the United States, Canada, Europe, India and Gulf states — compete to secure supplies. “We have the investors back,” President Hakainde Hichilema told delegates at the African Mining Indaba conference on Monday, saying that more than \$12 billion had flowed into the sector since 2022.

The politically stable country is Africa’s second-largest copper producer, after the conflict-ridden Democratic Republic of Congo, and the world’s eighth, according to the US Geological Survey.

The metal, needed for solar panels and wind turbines, generates about 15 per cent of Zambia’s GDP and more than 70 per cent of export earnings. Output rose eight per cent last year to more than 890,000 metric tonnes and the government aims to triple production within a decade.

Mining is driving growth that is forecast by the International Monetary Fund to reach 5.2 per cent in 2025 and 5.8 per cent this year, which places Zambia among the continent’s faster-growing economies. “The seeds are sprouting and the harvest is coming,” Hichilema said, touting a planned nationwide geological survey to map untapped deposits.

But the rapid expansion of the heavily polluting industry has also led to warnings about risks to local communities and concerns of “pit-to-port” extraction, in which raw copper is shipped directly abroad with little domestic refining.

“We need to be aware of the potential for history to repeat itself,” said Daniel Litvin, founder of the Resource Resolutions group that promotes sustainable development, referring to the colonial-era scramble for Africa’s resources.

There is a risk that elites will be enriched at the expense of the broader population, while “narratives of partnership” offered by major powers can mask underlying self-interest, he said.

Chinese firms have long dominated the sector in Zambia and control major stakes in key mines and smelters, cementing Beijing’s early-mover advantage. Another major player is Canada’s First Quantum Minerals, Zambia’s largest corporate taxpayer. Investors from India and the Gulf are expanding their footprint, and the United States is returning to the market after largely pulling out decades ago. — AFP

Interpol warriors fight AI ‘cyber criminals’

FROM PERFECTLY spelled phishing emails to fake videos of government officials, artificial intelligence is changing the game for Interpol’s cat-and-mouse fight against cybercrime at its high-tech war rooms in Singapore.

Their foe: crime syndicates, structured like multinational firms, which are exploiting the fast-evolving technology to target individuals, states and corporations for billions of dollars.

“I consider the weaponisation of AI by cybercriminals... as the biggest threat we’re seeing,” Neal Jetton, Interpol’s Singapore-based director of cybercrime, said.

“They are using it in whatever way they can,” added Jetton, who is seconded to Interpol from the US Secret Service, the federal agency in charge of presidential protection.

AFP was granted a look inside the global organisation’s multi-pronged cybercrime facility, where specialists pore through massive amounts of data in a bid to prevent the next big ransomware attack or impersonation scam. Jetton said the “sheer volume” of cyber attacks worries him the most. “It’s going to only expand, and so you just need to get the word out to people,” so they understand “how often they’re going to be targeted”, he said. AI technology is allowing criminals around the world to create sophisticated voice and video copies of well-known figures to endorse scam investments, and helping make dodgy online messages appear more genuine. Jetton warned that even low-skilled criminals can purchase ready-made hacking and scamming tools on the dark web - and anyone with a smartphone can be a target.

The facility is part of the Interpol Global Complex for Innovation, not far from the Singapore Botanic Gardens.

It is the organisation’s second headquarters after Lyon in France, and houses the Cyber Fusion Centre, a nerve centre for sharing intelligence of online threats among



Analysts working at the Interpol cybercrime intelligence unit at the facility in Singapore. — AFP



MARTIN
ABUGAO

The writer is Senior
Correspondent for
Agence France-
Presse (AFP)
Singapore

196 members.

Another office in the complex studies emerging online threats, while a digital forensics lab extracts and analyses data from electronic devices like laptops, phones and even cars. A command-and-coordination centre, like a mini space mission control with staff facing big screens, monitors global developments in real time during Asian hours.

Intelligence analysts scrutinise millions of data points - from web addresses and malware variants to hacker code names - that could provide leads in active investigations.

Christian Heggen, coordinator of the Cyber Intelligence Unit, said they are up against a “large ecosystem of cyber criminals” who use “a number of different attack vectors”.

“They get quite creative. It’s a whole black market of spying and selling stolen data, buying and selling malware. We have to understand that ecosystem,” he said.

To strengthen its capabilities, Interpol partners with private firms in finance, cybersecurity and cryptocurrency analysis.

“It’s always a cat-and-mouse game, always continually developing. That’s why a department like this

is quite important, because we can provide the latest intelligence and information,” Heggen said.

Last year, Interpol’s cybercrime directorate coordinated “Operation Secure” in Asia, which saw 26 countries work together to dismantle more than 20,000 malicious IP addresses and domains linked to syndicates to steal data.

Another anti-cybercrime operation across Africa, called “Operation Serengeti 2.0” coordinated from Singapore, saw authorities arrest 1,209 cybercriminals who targeted nearly 88,000 victims. More than \$97 million was recovered and 11,432 malicious infrastructures were dismantled. Jetton said Interpol supported the crackdown on the online scam centres in Southeast Asia through intelligence-sharing and resource development. The Innovation Centre’s head, Toshinobu Yasuhira, a Japanese officer seconded from the National Police Agency, said advances in deepfake technology have become a growing concern, but one of his deeper worries lies ahead: AI acting beyond human control.

“Should we arrest people who programme the AI, or who utilise AI, or should we arrest the AI itself?” he said in an interview.

“It’s kind of very difficult because AI doesn’t have any soul, heart.”

Paulo Noronha, a digital forensics expert from Brazil’s Federal Police, demonstrated some of the lab’s high-tech tools designed to keep investigators a step ahead.

Experts at the lab are working on the further use of virtual reality, augmented reality and quantum technology against cybercriminals.

“It’s up to us to stay ahead of criminals,” he said. “That’s why we have systems like these.”

For Jetton and his colleagues, the fight rarely enters the public eye, but is vital to global security.

“We try to be as confidential as we can,” one intelligence analyst said.

“We’re providing key support for operations and investigations around the world.”

SPORTS

SHORT TAKES



The course comes amid the rapid transformations witnessed globally in the sports industry.



The programme focuses on creating a qualitative shift in training methodologies.

OOA ORGANISES AI SPORTS TRAINING COURSE

SPORT REPORTER
MUSCAT, FEB 15

The Technology and Artificial Intelligence in Sports Training course, organised by Oman Olympic Academy (OOA) affiliated with Oman Olympic Committee in cooperation with Olympic Solidarity, commenced yesterday. The course runs from February 15 to 17 at the Academy's headquarters, with the participation of nominees from various sectors related to sports affairs. It is held as part of ongoing efforts to develop national competencies and enhance professional qualification standards within the sports sector.

The course comes amid the rapid transformations witnessed globally in the sports industry, where technology and artificial intelligence have become fundamental components of modern sports preparation systems — whether in planning training programmes, monitoring performance, analysing data, or deriving indicators that support informed decision-making. In this context, Oman Olympic Academy seeks to equip coaches and professionals working in sports institutions with advanced knowledge and practical tools that enhance training efficiency and align with internationally recognised best practices.

The course is delivered by Professor Majid bin Said al Busafi, Professor of Sports Training at the Department of Physical Education and Sports Sciences, College of Education, Sultan Qaboos University, and Director of Humanities Research Centre at the university. The course ultimately aims to enable participants to design and implement technology-based training programmes, analyse sports data systematically, and utilise analytical outcomes to develop more efficient and effective training decisions that improve performance levels and strengthen prospects for achievement in various competitions.

The programme focuses on creating a qualitative shift in training methodologies by introducing participants to the concepts of technology and artificial intelligence within the sports context, while presenting practical applications in physical and technical performance analysis, monitoring training loads, and measuring performance indicators to ensure the development of more precise and effective training programmes. It also promotes a culture of data-driven decision-making to reduce reliance on subjective judgement and enhance objectivity in performance evaluation.

The course also highlights mechanisms for linking analytical results to training plans and developing innovative, technology-driven training approaches in a systematic and well-structured manner.

Hosting this course reflects the commitment of Oman Olympic Academy to strengthening cooperation with international institutions—foremost among them Olympic Solidarity—to support the implementation of high-quality programmes, expand developmental initiatives, and provide national cadres with specialised training opportunities, in line with broader efforts to advance the sports system and elevate performance and achievement standards.

Khanjar crowned Oman Ice Hockey champions

Bahrain finishes runners-up, Al Maha comes third

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, FEB 15

KHANJAR were crowned champions of the 6th Oman Ice Hockey Championship 2026 after a campaign marked by strength and discipline, lifting the trophy in deserved fashion. Bahrain finished second, Al Maha claimed third place, and Majan came fourth as the tournament concluded. The tournament was organised by the Omani Skating Sports Committee from February 12 to 14 at Fun Zone Hall in Al Qurum.

On the individual awards front, Fares al Aufi (Khanjar) was named Best Player in recognition of his outstanding performances, while Rashid al Mutlaq (Bahrain) received the Best Goalkeeper award.

THRILLING FINAL SEALED BY KHANJAR
The final saw Khanjar enjoy the greater share of possession and attacking pressure, while Bahrain relied on defensive organisation and counterattacks. Bahrain opened the scoring through Ibrahim in the 15th minute, before Khanjar equalised three minutes later via Ibrahim al Muhammadi to end the first period level at 1–1.

Early in the second period, Bahrain applied significant pressure, but Khanjar gradually regained control and re-imposed their rhythm. Ahmed Al Lawati netted the go-ahead goal in the 11th minute. Bahrain pushed hard in the final five minutes in search of an equaliser, yet Khanjar managed the decisive moments effectively and added a third goal through Ibrahim al Muhammadi in the 17th minute to seal a 3–1 victory and officially secure the title.

Saud al Aufi, Chairman of the Omani Skating Sports Committee, stated that the Oman Ice Hockey Championship represents an important annual fixture on the committee's calendar and a cornerstone in the local development of the sport. He emphasised that the primary



A fierce battle on the ice as Khanjar and Bahrain contest the final of the Oman Ice Hockey Championship 2026. Pictures by **Abdulwahid al Hamadani**



Crowning the winners of the tournament.

objective is to raise the technical standard and enhance competitive exposure in an environment that refines skills and builds player character.

He added that organising the tournament provides players with a platform to showcase their abilities, supporting the selection of top talents to represent the national team in upcoming regional and international competitions.

The continuity of the championship reflects organisational stability and growing ambition to expand the player base, particularly amid increasing youth participation.

Al Aufi also noted that Bahrain's participation added a valuable competitive dimension and elevated the overall technical standard, highlighting that the discipline and sportsmanship displayed throughout the matches reflect the growing maturity of the sport in Oman and its steady progress toward wider regional recognition.

Khanjar player Ibrahim al Muhammadi said the sixth edition reflected the sport's progress in Oman, highlighting an intense final against Bahrain that ended 3–1 in Khanjar's favour. He noted the tournament helps grow ice hockey by giving players regular match experience, adding that youth participation boosted competitive exposure and revealed promising talents. Al Muhammadi also praised the smooth organisation and reaffirmed Khanjar's ambition to represent Oman regionally and internationally.

Security & Safety crowned Muscat Steel champions

SPORT REPORTER
MUSCAT, FEB 15

Muscat Steel Corporate League 2026 crowned Security & Safety Services as champions after a commanding 4–1 victory over JC Decaux in the final, bringing three weeks of competitive football, teamwork and outstanding sportsmanship to a successful close. Organised by Oman Football Association in collaboration with the Sports Mania, the tournament concluded on a high during a final day attended by players, company management, partners and enthusiastic supporters.

Earlier in the day, DHL secured third place with a 6–3 win over Takaful Oman in the playoff match, setting the stage for an exciting finale. The closing and awards ceremony was held immediately after the final in the presence of Al Harith bin Juma al Juma, General Manager of Muscat Steel Group and the league's



Security and Safety Services players celebrate with the trophy of the Muscat Steel League for Companies 2026.

official sponsor, and Captain Saif bin Hamad al Shamli, Director of Guarding and Cash Services at Security & Safety Services, as medals were presented to the top three teams and the championship trophy was awarded to the winners. The final standings saw DHL take third place, JC Decaux finish runners-up, and

Security & Safety Services lift the title.

Individual excellence was also recognised during the ceremony, with Faisal bin Khalifa al Hadi of Security & Safety Services named Best Player of the tournament, Bashar bin Talib al Maharbi of Security & Safety Services winning the Best Scorer award,

Al Baraa bin Mohammed al Raqadi of JC Decaux receiving Best Goalkeeper honours, and Security & Safety coach Shabib bin Zaher al Ruqaishi awarded Best Coach.

In appreciation of its support, Sports Mania presented a commemorative shield to Muscat Steel, thanking the sponsor for its role in delivering a successful and well-organised edition.

Played in a 6-a-side format featuring five outfield players and a goalkeeper, the Muscat Steel Corporate League 2026 brought together eight corporate teams — OQ Exploration & Production (OQEP), Muscat Steel, DHL, Security & Safety Services (SSS), Takaful Oman, Hotpack, JCDecaux and Dhofar Insurance — who competed through a group stage before progressing to knockout rounds that produced closely contested fixtures and a fitting conclusion to one of Oman's leading corporate sporting events.

SHORTTAKES

OMAN STRENGTHENS PRESENCE AT GCC HANDBALL CHAMPIONSHIP

RIYADH AL BALUSHI
@riyadhbaluch

The Oman Handball Federation has reaffirmed its strong administrative and officiating presence on the regional stage after nominating Ayad bin Salim al Shanfari, Board Member of the Federation, to serve on the Technical Committee of the 42nd GCC Clubs Cup Winners' Handball Championship, scheduled to take place in the Kingdom of Bahrain from March 23 to April 4.



AYAD BIN SALIM AL SHANFARI

Board Member of the Federation

The nomination reflects the growing recognition of Omani expertise in Gulf competitions and highlights the trust placed in national cadres at both technical and administrative levels

The nomination reflects the growing recognition of Omani expertise in Gulf competitions and highlights the trust placed in national cadres at both technical and administrative levels. Oman Club will represent the Sultanate of Oman in the championship as winners of the First Division League and the Ministry Shield for the 2024/2025 season. The team will be aiming for a strong showing in this prestigious regional tournament. The previous edition of the championship was hosted in Muscat by Oman Club, with Al Arabi of Qatar lifting the title.

In addition, the Federation has nominated Bashir bin Al Dhib al Busaidy as technical delegate for the tournament. Continental referees Sultan al Siyabi and Salem al Siyabi have also been appointed to officiate several matches during the competition, further underlining the Gulf-wide confidence in Omani refereeing standards.

The championship is expected to feature leading Gulf clubs, including Oman Club, defending champions Al Arabi (Qatar), Al Rayyan (Qatar), Kuwait SC, Al Ahli (Bahrain), as well as a representative from the United Arab Emirates, another Bahraini club, and a Saudi club to be confirmed.

The GCC Clubs Cup Winners' Championship holds significant stature within Gulf handball circles due to the intensity of competition and its long-standing role in showcasing top talents. It also serves as a vital platform for technical exchange and professional development for clubs, administrators and match officials across the region.

Oman's representation in both competitive and administrative capacities once again underscores the structured efforts of the Oman Handball Federation in strengthening its regional and continental presence.



Hamed al Wahabi's participation in the second round of the Cross Country World Cup.

Al Wahaibi extends lead in FIA World Baja Challenger

SPORT REPORTER
MUSCAT, FEB 15

OMANI hero Hamed al Wahaibi continued his winning streak in the 2026 FIA World Baja Cup by consolidating his lead in the Challenger category after finishing the Jordan International Baja in second place in class and seventh overall.

Al Wahaibi previously claimed first place in the Challenger category at the Saudi Baja in Ha'il last month driving a Can-Am Maverick R Challenger, which he used for the first time in the Ha'il round with the RX Sport team.

Despite some damage to his car parts caused by heat from the exhaust system, the Omani driver showed immense speed across all stages to finish seventh in the overall standings.

This result comes amid continued harmony between Al Wahaibi and his Polish co-driver Maciej Gienmza, following their successful collaboration in Ha'il which continued in Jordan.

This participation is part of ongoing preparations for the challenges of the Dakar Rally, which will be hosted by the Kingdom of

1 For the second consecutive round of the 2026 FIA World Baja Cup, Hamed al Wahaibi leads the overall standings in the "Challenger" category

2 Omani champion secured second place in the Challenger class and seventh place in the general classification at the Jordan Baja

3 He participated with the RX Sport team under the supervision of former Emirati champion Rashid al Ketbi.



Hamed al Wahaibi crowned runner-up in the Cross Country World Cup.

Saudi Arabia next year.

The competition in the Jordan Baja lasted for three days, starting from the Aqaba region, with contestants traversing diverse terrain in southern Jordan over a total distance of 821.69 kilometres, including 472.19 kilometres of timed competitive stages.

After crossing the finish line, Al Wahaibi expressed his happiness with this result and stressed that the priority was to collect as many points as possible in the World Cup for the Challenger and Masters categories, which he successfully

achieved.

He said: "We proved to everyone what our true capabilities are, that all our decisions in cooperation with the team were correct, and that the choice of car was also correct."

He added: "Everything went well. I am happy to achieve first place among the World Cup qualifiers. I must thank everyone who supported and sponsored me, and I also thank the organisers for this wonderful event, as well as my support team whom I have backing me step by step, led by champion Rashid al Ketbi."

Aamir sets record as Oman endures heavy T20 World Cup defeat

SPORTS REPORTER
COLOMBO, FEB 15

Oman may have endured a bruising campaign at the ICC Men's T20 World Cup, co-hosted by India and Sri Lanka, suffering three heavy defeats, the latest a 96-run loss to Ireland at the Sinhalese Sports Club in Colombo on Saturday.

Amid the disappointment, one defining highlight emerged: a fighting half-century from veteran all-rounder Aamir Kaleem, who etched his name into the record books as the oldest player to score a T20 World Cup fifty.

At 44 years and 86 days, Kaleem surpassed the previous mark held by team-mate Mohammad Nadeem (43 years and 161 days), set earlier in the tournament against Sri Lanka in Pallekele.

Kaleem's record-setting resistance briefly lifted the gloom, but his message carried greater weight

than the milestone itself: Associate nations cannot bridge the gap without sustained, meaningful competition against Test-playing opposition.

Chasing 235 - the highest target of this edition - Oman began with intent. Kaleem's measured aggression kept the required rate within reach through the powerplay before a steep bounce and a flurry of wickets derailed the pursuit.

"As a bowling unit we are not able to execute our plan and we were giving too many bad balls," Kaleem said after the match. "Two hundred and twenty-odd runs was too much. That was the reason."

He maintained the chase remained alive while he and Hammad Mirza shared the crease. "We were going at nine or 10 an over and staying positive. If Hammad or I had batted another three or four overs, things could have been different," he said.



His half-century stood out for its composure against both pace and spin, offering rare control in an otherwise testing innings for Oman.

Kaleem framed the defeat as part of a broader structural challenge facing Associate teams.

"As an Associate team, we are not playing that kind of cricket regularly," he said. "If we play consistently against higher-ranked teams like Ireland or Zimbabwe, definitely we will improve."

The Colombo surface exposed that gap. Oman's batters struggled with bounce, while the seamers found little margin at the death. "We are not able to handle the bounce... we have quality fast bowlers, but we don't have that kind of platform," he added, calling for greater exposure abroad.

The veteran also paid tribute to head coach Duleep Mendis for Oman's rise. "Mendis Sir gives

everything, his experience and understanding of conditions," Kaleem said. "He is a legend who has contributed a lot to Oman cricket. Because of his guidance we are here. The only thing is that we, the players, must perform and handle the pressure in the middle."

Oman now turn to their final fixture against Australia in Pallekele on February 20, seeking a response that reflects Kaleem's defiance. Encouraging outings against Sri Lanka A and Zimbabwe during the World Cup warm-up games have offered glimpses of potential, but Kaleem's conclusion was unequivocal: sustained progress demands consistent exposure at the highest level.

"This is the highest stage," he said. "We have to think as a unit, correct our mistakes and come back strongly. With more support and more cricket against top teams, we will improve."

SPORTS



India's Jasprit Bumrah delivers a ball during the 2026 ICC Men's T20 Cricket World Cup. — AFP



India's Tilak Varma celebrates with captain Suryakumar Yadav after taking the wicket of Pakistan's Shadab Khan during the 2026 ICC Men's T20 Cricket World Cup group stage match. — AFP



Axar Patel celebrates dismissing Pakistan's Usman Khan. — Reuters

INDIA ROUT PAKISTAN BY 61 RUNS AT T20 WORLD CUP

DEFENDING champions India thumped Pakistan by 61 runs in a grudge Group A match of the Twenty20 World Cup to secure their place in the Super Eight stage of the tournament on Sunday.

Ishan Kishan's breakneck 77 powered India to 175-7 at the R Premadasa Stadium where Pakistan's spin-heavy attack managed to apply the brakes to an extent after the opener's exit.

The tournament co-hosts returned to bundle out Pakistan for 114 in 18 overs to register their third win in a row.

The match went ahead after Pakistan earlier reversed their decision to boycott the game in solidarity with Bangladesh, who refused to tour India over safety concerns and were replaced by Scotland.

Salman and his India counterpart

Suryakumar Yadav did not shake hands at the toss, though.

India were reinforced by the return of Abhishek Sharma, who missed the first two matches with a stomach infection, but the opener could not make it count.

Pakistan captain Salman sprang a surprise by opening the attack himself and the move paid off as the spinner trapped Abhishek lbw to remove the reigning number one batter in T20 Internationals.

Pakistan used three spinners in the powerplay to try and stem boundary flow and India's score of 52-1 after six overs suggested the ploy worked to an extent.

Kishan could not be contained though and the diminutive southpaw tore into the Pakistan attack with his take-no-prisoners batting.

Saim Ayub ended Kishan's 40-ball blitz but India were 92-2 at the halfway stage of their innings.

Ayub (3-25) dismissed Tilak Varma



India's Hardik Pandya celebrates with Ishan Kishan after taking the wicket of Pakistan's Sahibzada Farhan during the 2026 ICC Men's T20 Cricket World Cup. — AFP

(25) and Hardik with successive deliveries to turn the heat back on India. Suryakumar (32) and Shivam Dube (27) could not quite provide the late flourish that could take India past the 200-mark that had looked well within their reach at one stage.

Pakistan became the first team to employ six spinners in a T20 World Cup match but the joy of having restricted India under 200 evaporated soon as they slumped to 13-3 in two overs in their chase.

Pandya removed Pakistan's in-form opener Sahibzada Farhan for a duck and Jasprit Bumrah dismissed Ayub and Salman in the same over to pin down Pakistan.

Babar Azam (five) did not last long either and Pakistan were gasping at 38-4 after the six powerplay overs.

Usman Khan (44) defied India for a while but Axar Patel lured him out to be stumped to effectively snuff out Pakistan's chances of an unlikely victory. — Reuters

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MUSCAT
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7,128.521

BUSINESS

1.5 billion projects unveiled

THE Projects, Tenders and Local Content Authority has unveiled a development pipeline exceeding RO 1.5 billion during the Government Projects Forum 2026 held at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre, outlining around 10,000 tenders planned across 57 government entities.

Eng Bader bin Salem al Maamari, Chairman of the Authority, said the projects include more than RO 475 million in approved developments and over RO 1 billion in projects currently under study, highlighting the breadth of investment opportunities available to local companies.

He noted that the initiative reflects the scale of ongoing development programmes and reinforces the government's commitment to strengthening private sector participation.

Opportunities allocated to national companies and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) exceed RO 90 million in approved projects and more than RO 203 million in projects under study, supporting local supply chains and increasing domestic economic value.

Key sectors expected to generate the largest tendering activity

Opportunities allocated to national companies and SMEs exceed RO 90 million in approved projects and more than RO 203 million in projects under study, supporting local supply chains and increasing domestic economic value.



The forum also featured specialised dialogue sessions covering construction, procurement, public services and information technology sectors, addressing future project pipelines, tendering procedures, evaluation standards and sustainability considerations.

include construction, procurement, public services, information technology, electromechanical contracting and consultancy services, ensuring broad sectoral and geographic participation across the Sultanate of Oman's governorates.

The Authority also presented a detailed overview of infrastructure projects, including ports, roads, dams, public

buildings, utilities, pipeline networks and well-drilling works, along with tender schedules and project readiness status to help companies plan early participation.

Muscat Governorate recorded the highest number of tenders under study at 413, followed by Al Batinah South Governorate (129) and Al Batinah North Governorate (101). For approved tenders, Muscat Governorate again

led with 314, followed by Al Sharqiyah South Governorate (111) and Dhofar Governorate (69).

Engineer Saeed bin Hamad al Amri, Director General of Tenders, noted that contracts awarded through the Tender Board exceeded RO 1.7 billion in 2025, underscoring the accelerating pace of development spending.

He encouraged companies to enhance bid quality, promote fair competition and strengthen local content through the use of national products, localisation of expertise and SME partnerships.

Infrastructure projects accounted for the largest share of approved project values at more than 58 per cent, followed by supplies, services and construction-related activities, indicating continued government emphasis on strategic infrastructure expansion.

The forum also featured specialised dialogue sessions covering construction, procurement, public services and information technology sectors, addressing future project pipelines, tendering procedures, evaluation standards and sustainability considerations.

During the event, the Authority launched the "Esnad" mobile application, enabling companies to track tenders, access procurement data and manage procedures digitally, reinforcing transparency, governance and efficiency across the national tendering system.

— ONA

Industry Day showcases global competitiveness of local products



Abdulsalam bin Mohammed al Murshidi, Chairman of Oman Investment Authority (OIA), presided over the Omani Industry Day celebrations on February 15, 2026.

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, FEB 15

With broad participation from the industrial and investment sectors, the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion celebrated Omani Industry Day yesterday, February 15, 2025, under the theme: "From Oman to the World: Competitive Industry and a Global Vision". The event underscored the pivotal role of industrial exports in enhancing Oman's economic presence regionally and internationally.

The celebration was held under the auspices of Abdulsalam bin Mohammed al Murshidi, Chairman of Oman Investment Authority (OIA) and in the presence of Anwar bin Hilal al Jabri, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion.

It highlighted the quality and competitiveness of Omani products in global markets and aimed to strengthen coordination between government entities, manufacturers and exporters, while leveraging outcomes from Omani Industry Day 2025 to inform future policies and initiatives. In his address, Eng Khalid bin Salim al Qasabi, Director General of Industry, reaffirmed the Ministry's commitment to Industrial Strategy 2040,

which seeks to build a sophisticated industrial base focused on innovation and value creation. Key initiatives aim to increase the sector's contribution to GDP, in line with Oman Vision 2040 priorities.

By 2025, the manufacturing sector contributed approximately RO 3.879 billion to GDP, growing 7.2% from 2024. Foreign investment in the sector reached RO 3.490 billion, a 24.6% increase, while non-oil exports rose to RO 6.885 billion, up 10.5% from the previous year. Employment in the industrial sector grew to 248,000, a 3% increase from 2024.

Additionally, 166 industrial establishments obtained the National Product Identity and 439 exemption applications were approved, reflecting the effectiveness of incentives and support measures.

Dr Hilal bin Abdullah al Hinai, Chairman of the Omani Manufacturers Association, emphasised the need to shift from export volume to deeper production knowledge and higher product complexity.

The Association plans targeted capacity-building initiatives, including an Economic Complexity Performance Card, establishing a standards support fund to help 30 factories obtain international accreditations, and addressing the precision manufacturing gap through specialised partnerships.

Faisal bin Abdullah al Rawas, Chairman of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), highlighted the sector's rapid growth as a reflection of economic strength and investor confidence.

The Chamber continues to support private sector empowerment and partnerships to enhance competitiveness and expand international presence, contributing to Oman Vision 2040.

The event also featured the launch of the Industrial Observatory, designed to support industrial sector indicators and strengthen its position as a data-driven economic force.

Engagement with industrial

establishments will enhance integration, align expectations and encourage information sharing among stakeholders.

An expert committee was also formed to coordinate public-private efforts, align industry needs with education and training outputs; and prepare national talent for future demands.

Several strategic programmes and agreements were signed, including the "Kafa'a" Lean Manufacturing Programme, which aims to transfer and localise lean manufacturing methodologies and a partnership with the Ithca Group to support the Advanced Automation Centre.



TENDER NOTICE

Oman Water & Wastewater Services Company (Nama Water Services) hereby announces the following Tender:

Tender No.	Description of Project	Eligibility	Tender Fee (RO)	Last Date of Distribution of Tender Documents	Bid Submission Date
T/2758194/2026	General Legal Services for 2 years	Local Companies registered with Projects, Tenders and Local Content Authority specialized in the works mentioned	R.O 50/- (Plus 5% VAT) Non-refundable	01/03/2026	16/03/2026

The tender documents can be obtained from the e-tendering page (Supplier Login) from this announcement date. The applicants shall pay the tender fee by logging into their (I-supplier Page).

Applicants who are not registered shall register through the following link: <https://nws.nama.om/Business-with-Us/Vendor-Registration> in order to receive the login credentials of the Supplier portal.

All applicants who have paid the tender fee shall have access to the Tender Documents through Nama Water Services e-tendering page (Supplier Login <https://nws.nama.om/en-us/Business-with-Us/Supplierlogin>). All participating companies shall submit a Bid Bond of 1% of the bid value in a sealed envelope. Bid Bonds must be obtained from a local Bank registered in the Sultanate of Oman addressed to Oman Water and Wastewater Services Company (Nama Water Services) Chairman of Tender Committee not later than 2:00 pm on the bid submission date.

The bid along with all required documents shall be uploaded through Oman Water and Wastewater Services Company (Nama Water Services) e-tendering page not later than 2:00 pm on the date specified above. For more details refer to Tender Page of our website www.nws.nama.om & in case of general queries you may contact us through the email ID of tender@owwsc.nama.om

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SHORT TAKES



The Grand Ballroom is transformed into an opulent indoor majlis where tradition meets contemporary elegance for an unforgettable season of togetherness.

MARJANAH RETURNS FOR RAMADHAN AT ST REGIS AL MOUJ MUSCAT RESORT

MUSCAT: This Ramadhan, The St Regis Al Mouj Muscat Resort, Muscat’s best address, invites guests to gather, reflect and celebrate in an atmosphere of refined hospitality with the return of ‘Marjanah’, its signature Ramadhan experience. Inspired by the beauty of the sea and the luminous glow of coral, the Grand Ballroom is transformed into an opulent indoor majlis where tradition meets contemporary elegance for an unforgettable season of togetherness.

At the heart of the experience is the Marjanah Iftar Buffet, served daily from sunset to 8:30 pm for RO 28 per person. Guests can enjoy a lavish spread of traditional Arabic specialties, enhanced by live cooking stations and signature culinary corners from Nozomi and Hakkasan. The setting is designed to encourage shared moments, warm connections and the gracious hospitality that defines the St Regis experience. “For us, Marjanah is about much more than dining”, said Manuel Levonian, General Manager of The St Regis Al Mouj Muscat Resort. “It brings families, friends and colleagues together in a setting that honours the spirit of Ramadhan through thoughtful details, exceptional cuisine and the refined hospitality our guests expect from The St Regis”.

For intimate gatherings and corporate celebrations, curated group Iftar experiences are also available, featuring refined Arabic menus and personalised service, with early bird privileges offered for a limited time on advance bookings. Beyond the ballroom, Ramadhan unfolds across the resort’s award-winning dining venues. COYA presents a Latin-inspired Iftar experience and Em Sherif offers a set menu celebrating authentic Lebanese flavours, while Novikov Café welcomes guests for à la carte Iftar dining with a special saving on all desserts throughout the holy month. Entrecôte Café de Paris completes the culinary offering with classic French favourites served in an elegant evening setting. As the night progresses, Suhoor is elevated through a series of late-evening experiences. The Lobby Lounge hosts a curated Suhoor set menu of Middle Eastern specialties in a tranquil setting from 8:30 pm until 2:00 am for RO 15 per person.

Saud Bahwan Automotive honours skills champions

SAUD Bahwan Automotive recently celebrated a double milestone in its commitment to service leadership by conducting the National Skills Contest alongside the Omotenashi Champion Award Event. These prestigious annual initiatives are designed to identify and reward the “best of the best” among the service workforce in Oman. By highlighting both technical mastery and heartfelt hospitality, the Group continues to reinforce its unwavering corporate philosophy of “Customer Satisfaction Number One”. The National Skills Contest saw over 450 members of the service workforce participating in rigorous preliminary rounds. Top finalists competed across various categories, including Service Advisors, Customer Relations and Technicians (General, Body, & Paint). The competition was meticulously structured to evaluate participants through written tests, practical assessments, on-vehicle troubleshooting and unit measurement tests. Each contestant demonstrated a wealth of hands-on expertise, representing the pinnacle of Toyota’s global standards in fault-rectification and customer care. Parallel to the technical competition, the Omotenashi Champion Award Event celebrated the spirit of authentic Japanese hospitality. Omotenashi is a deep-rooted concept that goes beyond standard service; it is about emotional connection, trust and genuine care. This ceremony recognised Service Advisors who excelled in delivering “Service



The initiatives are designed to identify and reward the “best of the best” among the service workforce in Oman.

from the Heart”, transforming every customer interaction into a personalised experience where the customer’s happiness is placed at the centre of the journey with SBA. The Omotenashi awards followed a comprehensive evaluation held from July to November 2025. Service Advisors were assessed on four key parameters: Google

Reviews, Customer Surveys measuring the “Five Omotenashi Essentials” (Greeting, Expression, Appearance, Behaviour and Speaking), Monthly Service Advisor Initiatives and Innovative Omotenashi Ideas. This transparent process ensured that the champions were those who consistently demonstrated sincerity and a proactive effort to enhance the guest experience.

Sohar International opens new branch in Al Mouj

MUSCAT: Reaffirming its commitment to strengthening customer proximity and supporting Oman’s evolving economic landscape, Sohar International has commenced operations at its new branch in Al Mouj — one of the Sultanate of Oman’s most prominent residential and commercial destinations. The branch is strategically located within Al Mouj Walk, positioning the bank at the heart of a vibrant lifestyle and commercial hub. This forms part of the bank’s ongoing network optimisation strategy. The



The branch is strategically located within Al Mouj Walk, positioning the bank at the heart of a vibrant lifestyle and commercial hub.

Al Mouj branch represents a strategic enhancement to Sohar International’s physical presence, reinforcing its focus on accessibility, relationship-led banking and service excellence in high-growth, mixed-use communities. As customer expectations continue to evolve alongside digital transformation, the bank remains committed to maintaining a balanced model that integrates digital capability with meaningful in-person engagement. Commenting on the branch opening, Abdul Qadir al Sumali, Chief

Retail and Premier Banking Officer at Sohar International, said: “While digital banking continues to reshape how customers interact with financial services, proximity and personalised engagement remain fundamental to building trust and long-term relationships. Our presence in Al Mouj reflects a deliberate and data-driven approach to network expansion — positioning our services within vibrant communities where lifestyle, commerce and economic activity converge.

Bank Muscat named best private bank in Oman by The Banker

MUSCAT: Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, was recently named the “Best Private Bank in Oman” by The Banker. This recognition underscores Bank Muscat’s contributions to the industry by offering the best banking solutions and products that cater to the diverse requirements of our customers, in alignment with the Bank’s customer-centric vision “To serve you



This recognition underscores Bank Muscat’s contributions to the industry by offering the best banking solutions and products.

better every day”. On this occasion, Abdulnassir al Raisi, General Manager of Personal Banking at Bank Muscat, said: “We take pride in this prestigious recognition, which underscores the Bank’s leading role in providing a full suite of distinguished banking services and solutions that aim to cater to the various needs of its valued Private Banking customers. These services include banking and wealth management solutions,

backed with an experienced team of relationship managers. We would like to thank our customers for their continued confidence and support over the years, as we continue to strive to bring the best banking experience to all of them. The Bank will maintain its commitment to offering the best banking services and products to enhance the banking experience for all its customers”. Bank Muscat has an exclusive Private Banking

branch at the Bank’s Head Office at Airport Heights and dedicated Private Banking lounges at Madinat Al Sultan Qaboos branch, Al Athaiba 18th November Street branch and Sohar mega branch in Al Batinah North Governorate. These desks are equipped with the latest technologies to offer an exceptional banking experience to Private Banking customers, aligned with the best banking standards in the Sultanate of Oman and internationally.

SHORTTAKES



The event brought together Nepali business leaders, entrepreneurs and community representatives.

NEPAL EMBASSY
HOSTS TRADE,
INVESTMENT
PROMOTION MEET

MUSCAT: The Embassy of Nepal in Muscat successfully organised a programme promoting export, trade and investment opportunities between Nepal and Oman on February 13, at Nepal House, Muscat. The event brought together Nepali business leaders, entrepreneurs and community representatives for presentations, experience-sharing and interactive discussions, followed by networking opportunities.

Dornath Aryal, Ambassador of Nepal to Oman, who inaugurated the event, underscored the importance of trade and investment in strengthening bilateral ties between Nepal and Oman. He encouraged participants to explore emerging business prospects in both countries and outlined the Government of Nepal’s priorities in attracting foreign investment.

On the occasion, Dornath also expressed appreciation to the NRN Nepali Social Club, Nepali organisations, businesspersons and artists for their active participation in the Muscat Night Festivals held in January.

The programme featured presentations and insights from prominent community members, including Suresh Khadka, D B Chhetri, Bikal Jha, Gautam Shrestha, Jeevan Karki, Yubaraj Acharya and Subhash Kafle. Speakers shared practical experiences, success stories and challenges in trade and investment across various sectors in Nepal and Oman. Gautam Shrestha delivered a focused presentation on stock market investment, encouraging Nepalis to explore opportunities in both Nepal and Oman.

The Embassy reaffirmed its commitment to facilitating business linkages and promoting trade and investment through similar initiatives in the future. Bishesh Kumar Sah, First Secretary at the Embassy moderated the programme.

Petronas deal boosts
Oman offshore goals

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, FEB 15

LAST week’s landmark concession agreement between the Ministry of Energy and Minerals and Malaysian state-owned energy giant Petronas to explore hydrocarbons in Block 18 off Oman’s Al Batinah coast marks a major boost for the Sultanate of Oman’s ongoing strategy of attracting international players to unlock and sustain hydrocarbon production — a critical pillar of the national economy.

By bringing in Petronas, Oman gains not only a financially and technically capable partner to develop Block 18’s oil and gas potential but also access to advanced technology and knowledge transfer, given the largely greenfield nature of the concession.

A key beneficiary is national upstream group OQ Exploration & Production (OQEP), whose wholly owned Batinah Offshore LLC holds a 30% non-operating interest, while Petronas’ wholly owned subsidiary, PC Oman Ventures Ltd (PCOVL), has a 70% operating stake.

Block 18 is located in the North Sohar Basin, between the Al Batinah Coast and the Makran Accretionary Prism, covering 21,140 sq km with water depths ranging from 30 to 3,000 metres.

Approximately 10,000 km of 2D and 2,048 sq km of 3D seismic have already been acquired and three wells drilled by previous operators identified multiple plays. The block was previously operated by Reliance



Boding well for Block 18’s prospects is Petronas’ strong exploration track record, particularly offshore.

Industries Ltd (via Reliance Exploration and Production DMCC), awarded the concession in 2005. OOCEP held a 30% farm-in interest under a 2009 farm-out agreement.

Reliance conducted seismic studies and at least one drilling campaign, but results were not commercially successful and it withdrew in 2011.

Although no commercial discoveries have yet been declared, the new concession agreement is expected to trigger advanced seismic and geophysical surveys, technical studies and exploratory drilling to assess hydrocarbon potential.

Success in Block 18 could expand Oman’s offshore production base, which is currently dominated by established onshore and shallow-water fields.

Oman’s offshore track record includes Block 52, a 90,000 sq km deepwater concession awarded in 2017 to Eni, with partners Qatar Petroleum and OOCEP.

Eni drilled Oman’s first deepwater well there, but no commercial hydrocarbons were found and by 2024 the operators signaled their intention to relinquish the area.

Block 50 (the Masirah Block), by contrast, remains one of the few offshore successes, with the Yumna Field achieving first oil in February 2020 and producing over 9 million stock tank barrels of oil by end 2024.

Boding well for Block 18’s prospects is Petronas’ strong exploration track record, particularly offshore.

Internationally, it has delivered material discoveries in Suriname (Block 52) and is active in deepwater exploration in Suriname’s Guyana Basin (Block 66), where it holds an 80% operating interest under a production-sharing contract and plans multiple exploratory wells.

Ranked among the top 20 largest oil and gas companies globally, Petronas reported \$110-115 billion in revenue and over \$10 billion net profit in 2025, positioning it as a financially robust NOC capable of pursuing large-scale frontier projects.

Oman Flour Mills moves to boost food subsidiary stake

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, FEB 15

Oman Flour Mills Company SAOG (OFM) has taken a significant step to strengthen its position in Oman’s food manufacturing sector after announcing the signing of a share purchase agreement that will substantially increase its ownership in Arabian Food Production Company SAOC.

In a disclosure on Sunday to the Muscat Stock Exchange and the Financial Services Authority, the company stated that its wholly-owned subsidiary, Atyab Investments LLC, on February 13, 2026 entered into an agreement to acquire the entire 33.34 per cent shareholding held by Gulf Japan Poultry Farm in Arabian Food Production Company.

Atyab Investments currently holds 33.33 per cent of the issued share capital of the food producer.

Upon completion of the transaction and subject to the fulfilment of agreed conditions, its stake will rise to 66.67 per cent, giving the OFM group a controlling interest in the



The move marks another step in OFM’s broader strategy of strengthening vertical integration across the food value chain.

company.

OFM noted that any material developments regarding completion of the transaction will be disclosed in accordance with regulatory requirements.

The acquisition marks another step in OFM’s broader strategy of strengthening vertical integration across the food value chain

and enhancing domestic food production capabilities in support of Oman’s long-term food security objectives.

OFM is among the largest integrated food groups in Oman and operates under the umbrella of the newly restructured and rebranded Oman Food Capital [formed by the merger of Oman Food Investment Holding Company (Nitaj) and Fisheries Development Oman], an affiliate of the Oman Investment Authority.

In recent years, OFM has expanded its investment portfolio both domestically and internationally to secure grain supplies, diversify sourcing channels and improve supply-chain resilience.

Key initiatives include the establishment of Oman-Australia Limited, which works directly with farmers in Australia to secure wheat shipments and reinforce Oman’s strategic grain reserves.

The company has also launched Atyab International Services in Uzbekistan, providing laboratory testing and quality assurance services to support import controls

and regional food exports.

These investments are part of a long-term strategy aimed at strengthening food product quality, expanding global sourcing networks and supporting the national economy by ensuring reliable access to essential commodities.

OFM has also invested in feed milling operations and frozen bakery production, while exploring opportunities for further regional expansion, including bakery operations in Saudi Arabia and potential agricultural collaboration projects overseas.

Industry observers note that the planned acquisition of additional shares in Arabian Food Production Company will allow OFM to deepen operational coordination within its food manufacturing ecosystem, potentially improving production efficiency and strengthening market competitiveness.

Greater ownership control could also enable the company to accelerate new product development and expand capacity in high-demand segments of the domestic food market.

TRADE POLICY

China grants zero-tariff access



China announces that it will implement a full tariff exemption regime from May 1 on all products imported from 53 African countries with diplomatic ties to Beijing. The move, according to Chinese President Xi Jinping, aims to deepen economic cooperation, fast-track trade agreements and ease market access by streamlining customs procedures and expanding “green channel” facilities for African exports. — ONA

MONETARY POLICY

ECB expands euro liquidity backstop



The European Central Bank (ECB) will widen and permanently globalise access to its euro liquidity backstop, allowing more central banks to tap repo funding during market stress.

The initiative is designed to reinforce financial stability, strengthen the euro’s international standing and prepare the bloc for heightened volatility in global markets, ECB President Christine Lagarde said. — Reuters

ENERGY POLICY

US eases Venezuela energy curbs



The United States has relaxed sanctions on Venezuela’s energy sector, granting general licences that allow major international oil companies to operate projects and negotiate fresh investments. The move, since US forces captured and removed President Nicolas Maduro, marks a significant policy shift, enabling broader participation in the OPEC member’s oil and gas industry and supporting efforts to revive production. — Reuters

OPINION

When past success blocks future growth



KAMLA AL RAHBI

The writer is a leadership and business strategist focused on decision-making, organisational clarity, and cognitive frameworks in complex environments.

In leadership and institutional development, past success is often treated as an asset a mark of wisdom, maturity and proven strategy. Yet the same achievements that built a leader's reputation or an organisation's credibility can quietly become the very reason progress stalls. Success has a shadow.

And in economies aiming for agility, innovation and sustainable competitiveness, that shadow can be long and obstructive. The problem is not the success itself, but the mindset it fosters. Leaders who once made bold decisions are subtly encouraged to become preservers of the past, not architects of the future.

The very systems, structures and habits that delivered earlier victories are institutionalised, formalised and protected even when conditions have changed. This is especially common in organisations where performance is linked to predictability. Success creates a pattern and patterns breed expectations.

Stakeholders expect continuity. Boards expect consistent KPIs. Teams expect the next decision to look like the last one that worked. In this environment, experimentation feels like risk and innovation feels like threat.

Gradually, responsiveness gives way to routine. In economic sectors under transformation such as logistics, energy, infrastructure, or public utilities the cost of

this attachment to past success is amplified. Markets shift faster than planning cycles. Technologies disrupt business models before boards even meet. Citizens and consumers demand services shaped by digital behaviour, not traditional hierarchies. Yet some leaders still apply yesterday's frameworks to tomorrow's problems. Why? Because the logic of success is seductive. If something worked once, surely it will work again.

This belief becomes institutional doctrine. But economic systems do not repeat themselves. A successful strategy under one regulatory environment, political climate, or demographic demand may fail under new conditions.

Treating past success as a template, rather than a case study, turns strategic intelligence into strategic rigidity.

Moreover, organisations rarely challenge success. Internal voices that question legacy approaches are often dismissed as inexperienced, disloyal, or disruptive. The culture begins to equate loyalty with alignment and alignment with silence.

Over time, fewer decisions are debated and fewer assumptions are examined. Strategic discussions shrink into operational routines. Momentum is maintained, but direction is lost. This does not mean leaders should ignore their experience.

On the contrary, experience is vital but only when it is processed critically, not

The very systems, structures and habits that delivered earlier victories are institutionalised, formalised and protected even when conditions have changed. This is especially common in organisations where performance is linked to predictability.

preserved unconditionally. Leadership in complex systems demands a mindset that honours what worked, without worshipping it. It means asking: "Is this still true?" rather than saying, "It worked before".

Economic resilience requires leaders to distinguish between legacy and inertia. Legacy is what you build upon. Inertia is what holds you back. When past success becomes an anchor, the organisation may appear stable while drifting further from relevance.

Some of the most transformative moments in leadership occur not in crisis, but in quiet moments of reflection when a leader chooses to re-examine a model that still delivers results, simply because the context around it has shifted. That takes discipline.

It takes the courage to unlearn. And most importantly, it takes the humility to accept that what made you succeed yesterday might not be what sustains you tomorrow.

Oman's economic vision like many forward-facing national strategies depends not only on bold investments, but on bold re-evaluations.

It requires institutions and leaders willing to challenge their own legacies, not just defend them. The question is not whether your past decisions were right. The question is whether they are still right. Progress is not built on abandoning history. It's built on outgrowing it.

WORLD CUP OFFERS EUROPE’S AIRLINES BRIEF LIFT

OLIVER TASLIC

Having a major sporting event in your backyard might sound ideal for an airline. The reality is more nuanced: Air France-KLM tab took a 200-million-euro revenue hit as tourists avoided Paris during the 2024 Olympics.

This year’s soccer World Cup in the US, Canada and Mexico is a chance for Europe’s carriers to cash in. But the event could prove to be the airline equivalent of a corner kick: potentially lucrative, but unlikely to be game-changing.

On the face of it, there’s much to celebrate for Air France-KLM, Deutsche Lufthansa and British Airways owner IAG. Local teams including England, Spain, Germany and France have qualified for the tournament.

Airbnb highlighted strong interest from international Gen Z travellers in particular, while organiser Fifa’s president has proclaimed “absolutely crazy” demand.

Any unexpected runs into the later stages of the competition by local countries could trigger a deluge of lucrative last-minute bookings.

Even low-cost carrier Wizz Air is trying to get in on the action, though its application to operate flights to the US is for charters rather than scheduled passenger service, its CEO said.

North America is a handy place for it, too. Transatlantic routes are typically more profitable for European carriers, helped by strong premium demand and limited seating capacity.

RBC analysts forecast capacity on North Atlantic routes to rise 2.6% this summer, compared to a 3.9% increase in demand, implying pricing power.

Any unexpected runs into the later stages of the competition by local countries could trigger a deluge of lucrative last-minute bookings.

Time, then, for airline executives to take their shirts off and twirl them over their heads, football-style? Probably not.

Bank of America analysts say American travellers accounted for 60% of all transatlantic passengers between the US and Europe in 2025, meaning the financial health of US citizens, particularly the wealthier ones that populate European airlines’ premium seats, will still be crucial. Moreover, the raw numbers are small.

Tourism Economics projected in November that the World Cup could bring 742,000 incremental international visitors to the US, meaning trips that wouldn’t have happened otherwise.

Raise that to, say, 900,000 to account for the fact that the US is only hosting three-quarters of the matches and the pool of extra European fliers would be in the hundreds of thousands, compared to the over 100 million passengers IAG transported in 2024. — Reuters

Indian Union Budget: Highlights and insights

The Indian economy is characterised by strong, sustained growth, moderate inflation and improved macroeconomic stability, yet it stands at a global crossroads amidst trade wars and tariffs.

The Indian finance minister, Nirmala Sitharaman, designed the budget as a short-term measure amidst volatility and outlined a long-term road map for India's economic future.

The budget highlights were: first, to accelerate growth and make the economy more resilient to global shocks; second, to support and sustain every Indian citizen in fulfilling their potential through education, innovation and job creation; third, to ensure every individual, family, community, region and sector has access to inclusive growth, resources, amenities and opportunities for meaningful participation.

The finance minister increased the capital expenditure to ₹12.2 lakh crores. This reflects a 9 per cent increase from last year. Capital expenditure is the investment in long-term assets, such as railways, airports, roads, bridges and hospitals, to create jobs and drive economic growth.

India Semiconductor Mission 2.0 was introduced to expand the semiconductor sector's capabilities to produce equipment and materials and strengthen supply chains.

The budget also signaled a push towards electronics manufacturing, a significant step forward both economically and geopolitically.

Today, the semiconductor market is dominated by China, which holds a strong position, while the USA and Taiwan dominate chip design.

India aims to be self-reliant in both manufacturing and design to reduce dependence, upskill workers and secure safe supply chains A substantial investment has been proposed to develop rare-earth corridors.

To build an alternative supply chain, the budget proposes establishing dedicated rare earth corridors in Orissa, Kerala, Andhra



India's Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman holds a folder bearing the Government of India's emblem, as she poses with her officials while leaving her office to present the annual federal budget in parliament, in New Delhi, India. — Reuters



DR MYTHILI KOLLURU

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

Pradesh and Tamil Nadu to promote mining, processing, manufacturing and research. These states are mineral-rich, so these corridors will protect and insulate India from global supply chain disruptions or geopolitical escalations, given that China controls a large share of global rare-earth supply.

To improve connectivity, seven high-speed corridors have been proposed: Mumbai-Pune, Pune-Hyderabad, Hyderabad-Bangalore, Hyderabad-Chennai, Chennai-Bangalore, Delhi-Varanasi and Varanasi-Chhattisgarh.

These 'growth connectors' will link urban economic centres with smaller towns and improved transport will be a trade driver. The budget places a special focus on SMEs; a ₹10,000-crore fund has been announced.

As the textile industry faces pressure from global tariffs and trade tensions, a five-part integrated scheme has been introduced to bolster the labour-intensive sector. To promote India's

biopharmaceutical sector, the budget proposes a ₹10,000-crore, five-year outlay to support vaccines, gene therapy and cutting-edge cancer treatments.

In this budget, emphasis was laid on the orange economy, animation, visual effects and the comics sector.

It is a growing sector with a potential requirement of 2 million professionals by 2030. To support growth, Animation Visual Effects Gaming and Comics (AVGC) labs have been approved for 15,000 secondary schools and 500 colleges.

The finance minister, Nirmala Sitharaman, repeatedly mentioned artificial intelligence during her budget speech, stating its prominence in the budget's vision.

Foreign cloud and data centre companies, as well as those operating through Indian sellers, will enjoy a tax holiday until 2047.

Funding has been announced for the India AI mission, the India quantum mission and Bharat Vistar, a multilingual platform. To enhance nuclear power capacity, customs duty exemptions for goods required by nuclear power plants were announced till 2035.

The current nuclear power production capacity is 8.8 gigawatts. India aims to increase it to 100 gigawatts by 2047.

The budget proposes to gradually reduce the fiscal deficit to around 4 per cent of GDP while maintaining substantial outlays for major projects. The sustainability of this plan depends heavily on high growth and buoyant tax receipts.

The budget proposes long-term investments and offers limited direct relief for lower- and middle-income families struggling with food, jobs, or basic expenses. For better employment outcomes, stronger support is needed for labour-intensive sectors.

The Budget outlines a long-term growth story through high public investment, strategic industrial policy, climate-tech spending and progress towards a simpler tax regime. However, less attention is paid to the immediate concerns about demand, employment and inequality in an uneven economy.

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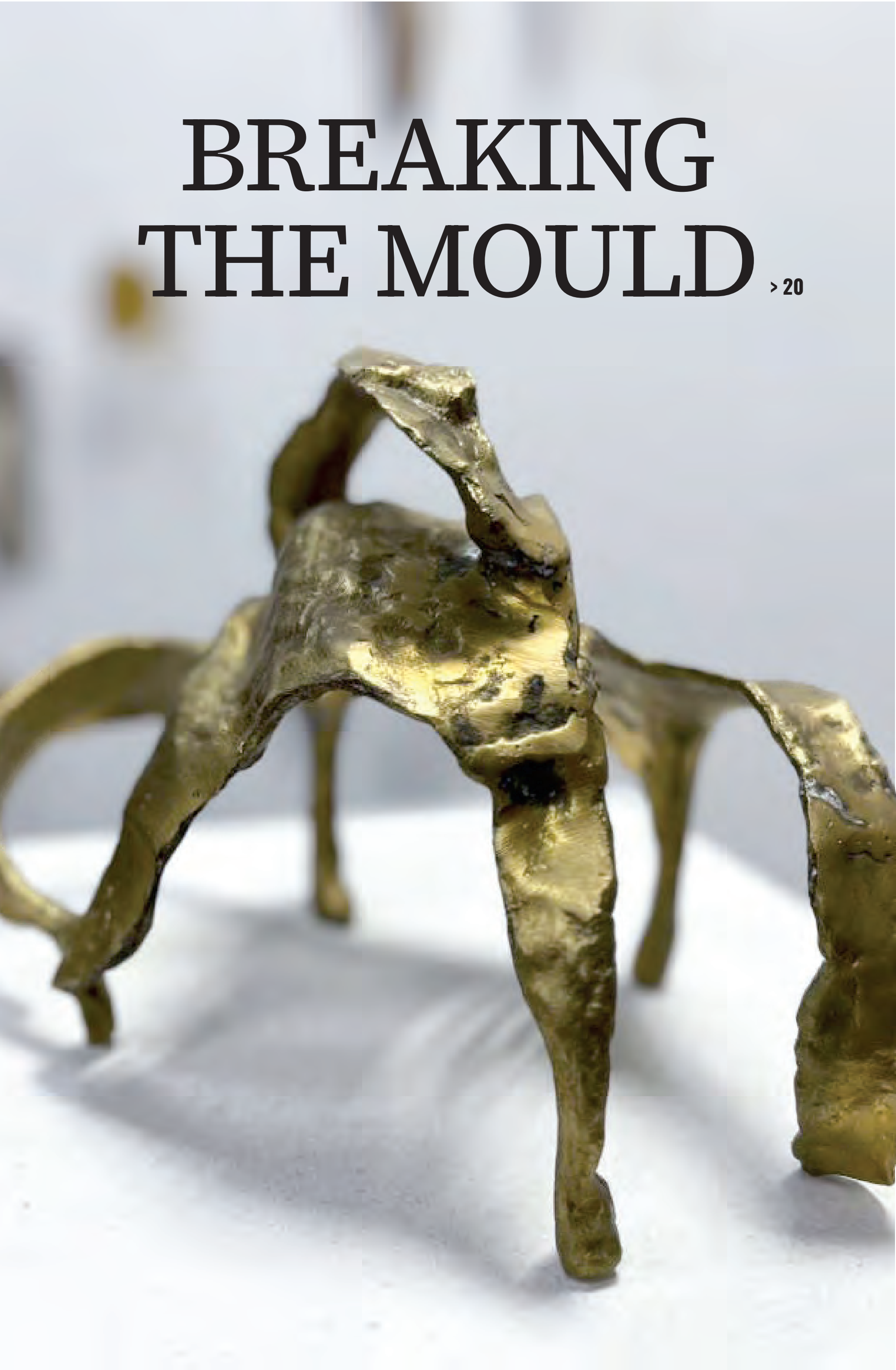
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ART/LIFE



BREAKING THE MOULD > 20

SNEAKPEEK

HARRY STYLES ANNOUNCES PRE-RELEASE LISTENING PARTIES FOR NEXT ALBUM



Former One Direction star Harry Styles has announced listening parties for his new album, with events to be held internationally across 40 cities, including London and Dublin.

The 32-year-old singer will release his fourth record on March 6.

In a post on Instagram on Thursday, Styles revealed listening parties will start from February 18, more than two weeks before the release date.

Styles posted a photo of himself with his eyes closed, wearing a black jumper with a smiley face cut out of the fabric, and on the image text read: "Hear the album in full."

In the caption, he wrote: "We wanna dance with all our friends. KATTDO listening parties, February 2026."

London, Dublin, Los Angeles, Hong Kong, Sydney and Paris are among the host cities.

Fans can sign up through a link on Styles' website, which takes them to a page where they have to answer the question: "What do you think listening to the album will feel like?"

The website says that invitations and further information will be sent on February 16.

US singers Taylor Swift and Sabrina Carpenter have hosted listening parties and played their albums exclusively for fans in-person ahead of their official releases.

Last month, Styles sent fans into a frenzy when "Aperture," his first single in almost four years, rocketed to number one on the UK Official Singles Chart.

The Grammy-winner also announced his global tour, with dates in London, Amsterdam, New York, Sao Paulo, Mexico City, Melbourne and Sydney from May.

Styles launched his solo career after he and fellow One Direction members Niall Horan, Liam Payne and Louis Tomlinson went on hiatus in 2016, almost a year after Zayn Malik left the group.

The Worcestershire-born star released his self-titled debut solo album in 2017, followed by "Fine Line" in 2019, and "Harry's House" (2022) - with the first and third releases reaching number one in the UK charts.

Styles has had three UK number one singles as a solo artist with "As It Was," "Sign Of The Times" and "Aperture," and won multiple Grammy and Brit awards. — dpa

QUICK FEATURES



FASHION

A model presents a creation at the LaQuan Smith Fall and Winter 2026 show during New York Fashion Week in New York City, US.

— Reuters



EVENTS

Cast member Glen Powell attends a special screening for the film "How to Make a Killing" in Los Angeles, California, US.

— Reuters



NATURE

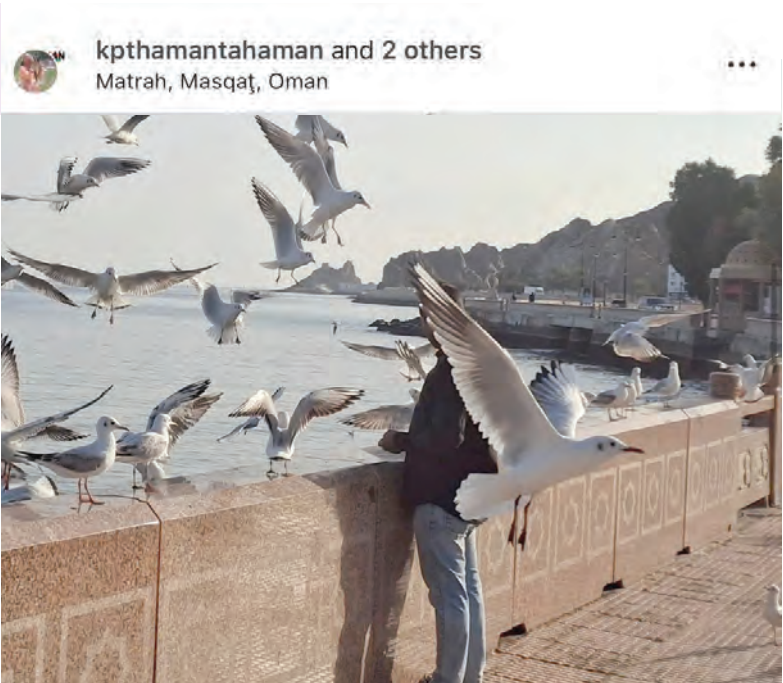
An Iraqi man pets a camel, one of a herd in the Samawa desert, midway between the Iraqi capital Baghdad and the southern city of Basra.

— AFP

INSTA PICKS



Glimpse of warm hope



Birds and visitors

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HORROR FABLE NIGHTBORN EXPLORES PARENTS’ EMOTIONAL HARDSHIPS



Finnish director Hanna Bergholm knew from very early on she wanted her horror film *Nightborn* to tell a story about difficult emotions that arise when you become a parent and to break taboos that still exist around motherhood.

“I knew that I wanted to tell a story about difficult emotions that appear when you are a parent, mother, or a father, and how to face your emotions and yourself,” she said at the Berlin Film Festival, where the film - original title *Yön Lapsi* - is featured as part of the Competition section.

This Nordic tale of mythological influences follows *Saga* (Seidi Haarla) and her British husband, Jon, played by Harry Potter star Rupert Grint, as they retreat to the seclusion of Finland’s forests and excitedly embark on their new journey as parents.

Once the baby is born, however, their joy fades quickly as his appearance and behaviour raise suspicions in *Saga* that something is terribly wrong.

“It was very important that it feels like everything comes

from real emotions of these characters,” Bergholm said. *Saga* is the central character and the film tells things from her perspective.

It is then up to the audience to decide how much of what is happening is real or not, she said. Grint said the film, which came after he had just found out he’d be having a baby, resonated with him. “(Being a parent) is such a scary experience.”

Bergholm also wanted to show the kind of physicality which is often left out of conversations.

“I wanted to show the birth of people and the blood in that,” she said.

“And you know, these everyday life things, we all got it and a female body can break in childbirth in various ways and it’s something we never talk about (...) And it’s just human, it’s natural.” When asked about whether she took inspiration from Roman Polanski’s “*Rosemary’s Baby*,” Bergholm answered: “when we wrote this with *Ilja* (Rautsi) we kind of joked that this film starts where *Rosemary’s Baby* ends.”

— Reuters



A MOUNTAIN TREASURE UNVEILED

ZUWAINA AL SULAIMANI

NESTLED among towering peaks in Nakhal, Al Batinah South, Al Faiq Village remains one of Oman’s most enchanting yet largely undiscovered treasures.

Rich in natural beauty and historical character, the mountain settlement presents a rare blend of tranquillity, heritage and authenticity.

Photographer Ahmed al Jabri, who recently documented the village, recalls being struck by its profound sense of calm from the moment he arrived.

“The quiet harmony between nature and traditional architecture makes the place feel untouched by the fast pace of modern life,” he says, explaining that his visit was driven purely by a spirit of exploration.

The journey to Al Faiq unfolds through dramatic mountain landscapes, where rugged rock formations give way to unexpected greenery and traditional stone houses. Hidden between rocky peaks, the village reveals a breathtaking panorama that surprises visitors with its lush fields and timeless charm. For Al Jabri, the experience raised an important question: how has a place of such beauty remained unknown to so many?

Reaching the village currently requires navigating an unpaved dirt road stretching nearly 10 kilometres. While the rough track adds a sense of adventure, Al Jabri believes improved infrastructure



Photos by Ahmed al Jabri

Al Faiq Village offers serenity, heritage and untouched natural beauty — a destination with the potential to become one of Oman’s most captivating eco-tourism escapes

would make the destination more accessible without compromising its natural character.

Among the village’s most striking features are its agricultural terraces, historic fortress, traditional homes and ancient aflaj irrigation systems — living testaments to the ingenuity of generations who adapted to life in the mountains.

Together, these elements create what Al Jabri describes as a “living museum,” reflecting a community deeply rooted in sustainability and cultural preservation.

Agriculture remains central to daily life in Al Faiq, with residents

maintaining a strong bond with the land. Equally memorable, Al Jabri notes, is the hospitality of the villagers. Their warmth and openness towards visitors add a human dimension that enhances the village’s appeal.

With thoughtful planning, strategic infrastructure development and careful preservation, Al Faiq holds significant promise as a destination for eco-tourism and heritage tourism.

For travellers seeking authenticity, serenity and connection with nature, this hidden mountain village may soon emerge as one of Oman’s most compelling escapes.

FEATURES



BREAKING THE MOULD

NAJAH AL RIYAMI

MUSCAT'S contemporary art scene opens a new chapter this week with FORMA 2026: Beyond the End, a major sculpture exhibition that brings together abstract, organic forms and experimental structures under a theme centred on transformation and renewal. Organised by Matti Sirvio Art Galleria and curated by Anetta Szabo, the exhibition runs till March 17 at the gallery in Jawharat Shatti, Qurum.

Now in its fifth edition, the annual FORMA exhibition has established itself as a dedicated platform for abstract sculpture in Oman. This year's concept, Beyond the End, looks at endings not as closure but as catalysts for change. The curatorial framework draws on natural processes of metamorphosis, such as a seed breaking down to enable growth or a caterpillar dissolving before emerging as a butterfly, guiding artists toward works that examine cycles, rupture, and renewal through material and form.

The exhibition gathers thirteen Omani and resident artists working across a range of sculptural approaches. Participating artists include Rayan Salam Bilkhair, Dana

Al Jouder, Saleem Sakhi, Maryam al Sadery, Jamil al Yaqoubi, Faisal al Abri, Shima Amia, Yaseen al Saif, Matti Sirvia, James Wagstaff, Anetta Szabo, Kim Seopyeong and Elena Dragunova. Their works span abstract and organic vocabularies and often merge craft based practices with contemporary sculptural language.

Curator Anetta Szabo, also a university lecturer, positions FORMA as a bridge between art education and professional practice. Through sustained mentorship and exhibition opportunities, the project encourages emerging and mid career artists to push beyond conventional representation and experiment with structure, texture, and spatial relationships. The curatorial direction emphasises process as much as outcome and invites audiences to read sculptural surfaces and volumes as records of transformation.

Matti Sirvio Art Galleria, an artist run space, has built a reputation for consistent support of the local creative community through monthly events, exhibitions, and international networking opportunities. Its programmes have helped connect Omani artists with audiences and collectors abroad, contributing to broader cultural visibility and the growth of art

The fifth edition of FORMA exhibition has established itself as a dedicated platform for abstract sculpture in Oman. This year's concept, Beyond the End, looks at endings not as closure but as catalysts for change. The curatorial framework draws on natural processes of metamorphosis, such as a seed breaking down to enable growth or a caterpillar dissolving before emerging as a butterfly, guiding artists toward works that examine cycles, rupture, and renewal through material and form



driven tourism. Within that mission, FORMA functions as a recurring anchor event focused specifically on three dimensional and material led practices.

The opening reception welcomed the public to engage directly with the artists and curatorial team. Sponsored in part by Jotun, the exhibition continues the gallery's

model of cross sector collaboration to sustain independent cultural initiatives.

Visitors are encouraged to experience FORMA 2026: Beyond the End before it closes on March 17. Art audiences, collectors, students, and creatives are invited to attend and engage with the works in person at Matti Sirvio Art Galleria in Muscat.