

O M A N
عُضَائِد
D A I L Y

Observer

VOL. 45, NO. 31
PAGES 20 BAISAS 200

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PRAYER TIMINGS

FAJR 05:20 AM

DHUHR 12:06 PM

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MAGHRIB 05:27 PM

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AL RAHBA
RACECOURSE HOSTS
THE 8TH HORSE
RACING EVENT

INBRIEF

RO 100,000 CASH
PRIZE FOR SULTAN
QABOOS AWARD
WINNERS

MUSCAT: Assigned by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, Dr Mohammed bin Said al Maamari, Minister of Awqaf and Religious Affairs, will preside over the award ceremony of the 12th edition of the Sultan Qaboos Award for Culture, Arts, and Literature which will be held on Wednesday.

The winners of this year’s award are: the Assilah Forum Foundation in the field of private cultural institutions (Culture category), Essam Mohammed Said Darwish in the field of sculpture (Arts category), Hikmat Al Sabbagh, also known as Yumna Al Eid, in the field of autobiography (Literature category).

The winners will receive the Sultan Qaboos Medal for Culture, Science, Arts and Literature, in addition to a cash prize of RO 100,000. The Minister of Awqaf and Religious Affairs will announce the categories for the thirteenth edition of the Sultan Qaboos Award for Culture, Arts and Literature, which will be dedicated for Omanis only. — ONA

Authorities warn of Gaza
humanitarian disaster

AUTHORITIES IN THE Gaza Strip on Saturday warned of a “complex humanitarian disaster” in the war-torn coastal region after rainstorms caused widespread flooding and at least 11 deaths so far. The media office affiliated with Hamas also reported that 13 houses collapsed as a result of the torrential rainfall.

More than 53,000 tents were damaged, destroyed or washed away. Around 250,000 of the 1.5 million people living in tents or temporary shelters as a result of the Gaza war were affected, the office said. The information could not be independently verified. More than two million Palestinians live in the Gaza Strip, which is approximately 41



Palestinians inspect the site of an Israeli strike on a car in Gaza City. — Reuters

kilometres long and between 6 and 12 kilometres wide.

Meanwhile, the Israeli military struck a car in Gaza City on Saturday carrying senior Hamas commander Raed Saed, one of the architects of the October 7, 2023, attacks on Israel, according to an Israeli defence official and Israeli media. The strike killed four people, according to Gaza health authorities.

There was no immediate confirmation from Hamas or medics whether Saed was among the dead. The Israeli military said it had targeted a senior Hamas commander in Gaza City, without giving a name or further details. If Saed was killed, it would be the highest-profile assassination of a senior Hamas figure since a ceasefire deal came into effect in October. The Israeli defence official described Saed as the head of Hamas’ weapons manufacturing force.

Hamas sources have also described him as the second-in-command of the group’s armed wing, after Izz eldeen Al Hadad. Saed used to head Hamas’ Gaza City battalion, one of the group’s largest and best-equipped, those sources said. —Agencies

TWO US SOLDIERS, ONE INTERPRETER KILLED IN SYRIA: PENTAGON



WASHINGTON: Two US Army soldiers and a civilian interpreter were killed in an Islamic State attack on Saturday in Palmyra, Syria, where they were supporting counterterrorism operations, the Pentagon said. Three others were wounded, Pentagon spokesman Sean Parnell said. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth said the attacker was killed by partner forces. — Reuters

Humanity and nature can
flourish together: Oman

NAIROBI: The 7th Session of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA-7), held in Nairobi, Kenya, under the chairmanship of Dr Abdullah bin Ali al Amri, Chairman of the Environment Authority, and President of the Seventh Session, concluded, on Saturday. The session adopted an ambitious ministerial declaration promoting sustainable solutions for a resilient planet.

The session came up with groundbreaking resolutions addressing the three environmental crises. It focused on three main themes namely strengthening cooperation among multilateral environmental agreements, fostering the link between resilience and justice, and renewing confidence in the UNEP’s ability to implement its strategy. In his address, the chairman of the Environment Authority and president of the seventh session, expressed his satisfaction with the success of the seventh session and



Dr Abdullah bin Ali al Amri at the UNEA-7 in Nairobi, Kenya.

the collaborative work of the participating delegations, the Executive Bureau, the Standing Committee of Representatives, and the United Nations Environment Programme team throughout the session.

Al Amri noted that the vision of Oman, which it championed during its presidency of the session, is based on the belief that humanity and nature can flourish together, and that sustainability is a bridge connecting wisdom and heritage on the one hand, and innovation and the future on the other hand.

He underscored that responsibility does not end with the conclusion of meetings, but rather begins with the implementation phase and the transformation of decisions into tangible impacts reflected in ecosystems and societies.

The seventh session, with broad participation from countries around the world, international organisations, and experts concerned with environmental and sustainability issues, marked a significant milestone in the path of global environmental governance. Oman played a great role in leading the negotiations and managing the sessions with high efficiency and consensus.

The negotiations week demonstrated an active Omani presence in shaping international environmental decisions through meetings that discussed progress on climate change, biodiversity loss, pollution and waste. It also explored ways to enhance cooperation among multilateral environmental agreements. — ONA

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OMAN

SHORT TAKES



The symposium featured two academic sessions and several research papers.

SYMPOSIUM HIGHLIGHTS JUDGE AL KINDI’S LEGACY

NAKHAL: A scientific symposium titled ‘The Legacy of Sulayman’, organised by the Omani Society for Writers and Authors, was held at Nakhal Castle, shedding light on the life and contributions of Shaikh, Judge, and jurist Suleiman bin Ali al Kindi, one of the eminent scholars of the Wilayat of Nakhal.

The symposium was held under the auspices of Abdulsalam bin Mohammed al Murshidi, Chairman of Oman Investment Authority. It featured two academic sessions and several research papers, with the participation of researchers and writers from across Oman.

In his address, Shaikh Hilal bin Ali al Kindi, General Supervisor of the symposium, highlighted key aspects of Shaikh Suleiman al Kindi’s life, including his role in the judiciary, education, and social reform. He also spoke about the Sheikh’s upbringing, his move to and settlement in Nakhal, and his pursuit of knowledge under the guidance of distinguished scholars.

The scientific sessions explored the formative stages of Shaikh Qadhi Suleiman bin Ali al Kindi’s life, reviewing his early intellectual environment and the scholars from whom he acquired knowledge. The discussions also examined his stature as a jurist and judge, his literary and educational contributions, an analytical reading of his letters and poetry, and his role in education, guidance, and the moral and educational values he instilled in his students and community.

An accompanying exhibition of documents, manuscripts, and scholarly heritage was inaugurated during the symposium in cooperation with the Records and Archives Authority. — ONA

JUSOOR HOSTS ‘MIRSAT JUSOOR’ MEDIA GATHERING



The event showcased outcomes of Jusoor’s 2025 strategy and its community.

SUHAR: Jusoor Foundation organised the ‘Mirsat Jusoor’ media gathering aimed at strengthening dialogue and communication with its media partners. The event highlighted key outcomes of Jusoor’s 2025 strategy and its community engagement programmes, with the participation of journalists, content creators and representatives of supporting entities.

The gathering served as an open platform for dialogue, reinforcing Jusoor’s strategic relationship with the media sector, while showcasing the impact of its programmes and initiatives across the wilayats of Al Batinah North Governorate. It also highlighted achievements realised throughout the Foundation’s social investment journey.

A presentation was delivered on the results of implementing Jusoor’s 2025–2029 strategy, focusing on institutional development, improved community project management methodologies, and the expansion of partnerships with public and private sector entities. Jusoor also showcased its flagship social projects and community initiatives, underlining their positive impact in strengthening community participation and empowering various social groups. Commenting on the occasion, Jaber bin Suleiman al Busaidy, Executive Manager of Jusoor Foundation, said that the Foundation has implemented 62 social projects across several wilayats in Al Batinah North Governorate, with three additional projects currently under way. He noted that Jusoor’s total social investment has exceeded RO 14 million.

He added that in the next phase, Jusoor aims to expand its partnership ecosystem through three operating models: providing social investment project management services; attracting partners to support high-impact community projects; and onboarding a founding partner to enhance the long-term sustainability of the Foundation and its programmes.

OMAN SENDS 22 TRUCKS OF WINTER AID TO GAZA

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, DEC 13

As many as 22 trucks carrying essential supplies for people in Gaza affected by extreme winter conditions and floods are set to leave Oman on Sunday, the Oman Charitable Organisation (OCO) announced.

The trucks, bearing the Omani flag, are part of a land bridge initiative to transport thousands of tents donated by the Sultanate of Oman to the people of Gaza. Officials from OCO confirmed that the convoy is scheduled to depart for the Rafah crossing at the Egypt-Gaza border on Sunday.

“We at the Oman Charitable Organisation (OCO) announced last week the readiness of the land bridge to transport thousands of tents to the Gaza Strip, and we are all set



The winter aid is expected to reach Gaza within three days

to begin the journey on Sunday,” said Badr bin Mohammed al Zaabi, Acting CEO of OCO. He confirmed that the aid is expected to reach Gaza within three days.

Al Zaabi added that the organisation is directly overseeing the manufacturing, loading, and transportation of the supplies to ensure they reach the intended recipients with maximum accuracy and monitoring.

The Egypt-Gaza border, approximately 12 kilometres long, is the closest and most viable entry point for aid, as other major Egyptian routes to Gaza are significantly longer.

“These efforts reflect the Sultanate of Oman’s humanitarian mission and steadfast commitment to providing relief to those affected. We continue to strengthen our relief and humanitarian support to the people of Gaza during these exceptional circumstances,” Al Zaabi said.

Oman has been providing humanitarian financial aid to Gaza through international bodies such as Unicef and UNRWA, as well as directly via the OCO. The organisation’s Jood Donation Portal also allows the public to contribute, supporting Palestinian orphans and other forms of assistance.

Al Dakhiliyah honours entrepreneurship winners

AMAL AL RIYAMI
NIZWA, DEC 13

THE Governorate of Al Dakhiliyah celebrated the conclusion of the 2025 Entrepreneurship and Innovation Award at a special ceremony in Nizwa.

The event was held under the auspices of Shaikh Hilal bin Said al Hajri, Governor of Al Dakhiliyah, that reflected a governorate where history meets innovation and the passion of its youth continues to shape ideas into impactful ventures. From this land rich in talent and ambition, ideas are transforming into real projects that contribute to a promising knowledge economy.

Shaikh Hilal bin Said al Hajri said, “There is no doubt that the Al Dakhiliyah Entrepreneurship and Innovation Award was created to endure and continue. What we have witnessed — from the preparation stages to today’s announcement— clearly indicates that the youth of this governorate are creative and passionate about entrepreneurship and innovation.”

The award, launched by the Office of the Governor of Al Dakhiliyah, aims to empower youth and foster an environment of innovation, supporting the local economy and aligning with the aspirations of Oman Vision 2040.

Khadija bint Said al Khiyariyah, Director of the Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Office in Al Dakhiliyah, explained: “The award provided a valuable platform to nurture entrepreneurial ideas and transform them into creative economic projects that support the governorate’s development. The award journey moved through six integrated stages, from the official launch to registration, evaluation, final judging,



The ceremony featured visual presentations documenting the award’s journey.

results announcement, and the crowning moment of honouring the most promising projects.”

The ceremony featured visual presentations documenting the award’s journey, highlighting participants’ efforts, training programmes, evaluation stages and related activities conducted throughout the award period. The Award Winners are: Best Entrepreneur: Ibn Saif Al Zuhaymi Enterprise

Best Female Entrepreneur: National Dental Centre, Best Small Enterprise: Ibn Al Mansouj Enterprise (1st), Al Sudda Enterprise (2nd), Best Small Industrial Enterprise: Five Oceans, Best Service Enterprise: Nizwa Medical Services, Best Tourism Enterprise: Ru’at Al Amkina United – Bait Fanja Heritage House, Best Medium Enterprise: Salasel Electrical Services, Student Category: ‘Wudk’ (Aisha bint Talha School, 1st), ‘2Geco’ (Bilal bin Rabah School, 2nd) University Category: ‘Sharfa’ (1st), ‘Green Drop’ (2nd), Best Supporting Government Entity: Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning, Best Financial Institution:

Development Bank and in the Non-Profit Sector: Zakat and Charity Committee in Samayil (1st), Manah Charity Team (2nd)

Among the winners, Azhar bint Ibrahim al Hinaiyah from Aisha bint Talha School expressed her joy: “I am very happy with this achievement. It came after much effort and strong support from my family and school. Our project transforms slaughter waste into healthy products suitable for daily human consumption, with potential for easy marketing. This win is a significant milestone for us.”

Khadija al Khiyari highlighted that winners were selected based on precise criteria to ensure excellence, emphasising that future editions of the award will continue to expand participation. She added that even projects that did not win carried promising ideas deserving of support and development. Al Dakhiliyah closed a day filled with creativity, where ideas turned into action, passion became achievement, and the award reaffirmed its role as a platform for shaping a pioneering future led by the governorate’s youth.

Maintenance of 4 Muscat dams completed at RO 242,000

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources announced the completion of major maintenance work on four key dams in Muscat Governorate, namely Al Khoudh Dam, Upper Al Sareen Dam (1), Lower Al Sareen Dam (2) and the Al Amerat protection dam (B15) — at a total cost of RO 242,159.

The comprehensive work aimed to restore the dams’ storage capacity of 13.39 million cubic metres, strengthen groundwater recharge, and safeguard villages, farms and infrastructure



The work aimed to restore the dams’ storage capacity of 13.39 million cubic metres

affected by past climatic conditions. Tasks included removing silt and trees, repairing structural damage,

installing valves and monitoring equipment, cleaning drainage gates, and adding educational and warning signs, all

carried out according to the highest technical standards. Eng Yousef bin Masoud al Mundhiri, Director of the Dams

Department, emphasised that periodic maintenance is vital for water security, flood protection, sustainable agriculture and community safety.

He also noted that the dams serve as tourist attractions, showcasing Oman’s commitment to preserving its natural and cultural heritage.

The ministry continues its mission to optimise water resources across Oman, ensuring reliable, sustainable access to water while protecting communities and promoting development. — ONA

SHORT TAKES



The centre features digital screens with comprehensive information on local attractions.

AL BURAIMI GATE
OPENS NEW TOURIST
INFORMATION
CENTRE

AL BURAIMI: The Tourist Information Centre at Al Buraimi Gate officially opened, serving as a reception and guidance hub to highlight the governorate’s identity and tourism potential. The centre features a souvenir and gift shop, children’s play area, digital screens with comprehensive information on local attractions, and a modern cafe. Its technology is integrated with the National Museum to provide an interactive cultural and historical experience. Eng Obaid bin Salem al Kaabi, Director of the Projects Department, said the centre supports tourism development in Al Buraimi by enhancing visitor experience and guidance through modern, interactive facilities. — ONA

HERITAGE CRAFTS
EXHIBITION OPENS IN
AL SHUWAIMIYAH



The exhibition aims to support craftswomen and enhance the visibility of heritage and traditional industries.

SHALEEM AND AL HALLANIYAT ISLANDS: The marketing exhibition for heritage and craft industries opened on Thursday in the Niyabat of Al Shuwaimiyah in the Wilayat of Shaleem and Al Hallaniyat Islands. The exhibition is organised by the Department of Small and Medium Enterprises Development in the Governorate of Dhofar and will continue until Sunday, December 14. The exhibition aims to support craftswomen and productive families, enhance the visibility of heritage and traditional industries as an integral part of Omani cultural identity, and provide a marketing platform that enables participants to showcase their products and engage directly with visitors and members of the community. Around 60 craftswomen are taking part in the exhibition, which features a wide range of sections covering traditional handicrafts, handmade products and artistic works, in addition to a dedicated section for Omani cuisine. The initiative forms part of ongoing efforts to support productive families, encourage home-based businesses and create sustainable income opportunities. The exhibition also contributes to highlighting the creativity and skills of Omani women, strengthening the role of traditional industries in supporting the local economy, preserving craft heritage and ensuring its transmission to future generations. — ONA

OMANI
PRODUCTS
DRAW HUGE
INTEREST AT
BAHRAIN’S
MARA’I
EXHIBITION

MANAMA: The Small and Medium Enterprises Committee of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) has concluded its participation in the Bahrain International Exhibition for Agricultural and Livestock Production (Mara’i) with an agreement to expand Omani participation in future editions of the exhibition, both in terms of institutions and the diversity of sectors represented. Shaikh Ahmed bin Amer al Muslihi, Chairman of the Small and Medium Enterprises Committee at OCCI, confirmed



22 institutions from Oman participated in the Bahrain exhibition.

that Omani products attracted strong interest from consumers and residents in Bahrain during the exhibition. In a statement to ONA,

Al Muslihi said the committee’s participation in Gulf exhibitions aims to showcase the diversity and high quality of Omani products, particularly Omani dates, which have achieved advanced standards in production and packaging. He noted that this reflects the chamber’s vision of promoting entrepreneurship and strengthening external economic relations. He also stressed the importance of deepening economic partnerships and enhancing communication between the chambers of commerce in Oman and Bahrain. — ONA

Youth initiatives highlight
community impact in Nizwa

AMAL AL RIYAMI
NIZWA, DEC 13

THE Youth Initiatives Forum concluded in Harat Al Aqur in Nizwa after four days of activities held from December 6 to 9. The forum was organised by the General Directorate of Youth at the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth. The event brought together a distinguished group of young innovators from across Oman, showcasing 31 youth-led initiatives focused on community service and the promotion of volunteer work. The initiatives reflected the ability of Omani youth to transform creative ideas into impactful and sustainable projects. The forum atmosphere was vibrant and welcoming, with young participants and visitors interacting in a dynamic space that blended culture, creativity and innovation. The historic setting of Harat Al Aqur added a distinctive charm, enhancing the experience as visitors moved between various initiative corners to explore educational and creative presentations delivered by the youth. The initiatives covered a wide range of social, educational and cultural fields. Several projects focused on preparing university students and young job-seekers through educational programmes, workshops and skills development camps aimed at improving employability. Specialised activities were also organised for people with hearing and speech impairments, including sign language workshops and interactive exercises designed to enhance communication. Other initiatives supported cancer patients by raising awareness and offering psychological and social support,



The event brought together innovators who showcased 31 youth-led initiatives focused on community service.

reinforcing the message that a diagnosis does not mark the end of the journey. Additional projects addressed financial literacy, legal awareness, environmental sustainability, green spaces and first aid, underscoring the broad societal role of youth initiatives. Abdulrahman bin Abdullah al Mazrouei, representing the ‘Jahez’ initiative, said the programme focuses on young job-seekers and university students. “Our main goal is to prepare them through educational programmes, workshops and training camps so they are ready to enter the job market,” he said. Said al Hosani, a visitor from Nizwa, described the forum as an enriching experience. “Harat Al Aqur felt alive, and every corner carried an inspiring message. Seeing young people present initiatives that

serve the community made me feel proud and optimistic about the future of Oman,” he said. In addition to the exhibition, the forum featured a comprehensive programme that included workshops and dialogue sessions on creativity in designing volunteer activities. The national exhibition of youth initiatives also provided a platform for exchanging experiences and forming new partnerships, contributing to stronger and more effective community engagement. Participants and visitors agreed that the forum stood as a living example of the capabilities of Omani youth in supporting national development, strengthening social responsibility, and transforming Harat Al Aqur into a vibrant hub of culture, creativity and innovation.

Study links sustainability at OCEC to visitor satisfaction

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, DEC 13

The Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC) continues to gain recognition for combining world-class facilities with strong sustainability credentials, with new research confirming that its eco-friendly operations play a key role in enhancing visitor satisfaction. A study conducted by Jalal Hassan Zeaiter and Najla bint Ali al Sheidiyah of Oman Tourism College (OTC) found a clear positive relationship between sustainable event management practices at OCEC and increased visitor satisfaction. The research highlights how the integration of sustainability into convention and exhibition operations influences visitor experience as well as strategic decision-making. Sustainability has become an increasingly important focus across the tourism, hospitality and event management sectors due to growing socioeconomic and environmental concerns. Convention and exhibition centres, such as OCEC, play



The research positions OCEC as a benchmark for sustainable event management.

a vital role in generating economic activity while meeting visitor expectations. By adopting measures including efficient waste management, energy conservation and environmentally conscious design, such venues address environmental challenges while attracting visitors drawn to eco-friendly operations. The study found that OCEC’s use of sustainable materials contributes significantly to green building design, enhancing the Centre’s overall sustainability performance. It also noted the venue’s active engagement

with local communities through partnerships with neighbourhood organisations, which have supported the expansion of recycling initiatives. Among the most influential factors driving visitor satisfaction was the Centre’s extensive renewable energy infrastructure, particularly its more than 8,000 solar panels that support energy efficiency. The installation of electric vehicle charging stations, in collaboration with local organisations, was also identified as enhancing sustainable transportation options. Visitor awareness

of these efforts is high, with around 76 per cent of survey respondents indicating familiarity with OCEC’s sustainability practices. The research found that these factors strongly influenced decisions to attend events, intentions for repeat visits and recommendations to others. Additional initiatives, including strategic landscaping and a 4.6-megawatt rooftop solar power system, have contributed to water conservation, while energy-saving measures were identified as having the greatest impact on visitor satisfaction. Although some visitors suggested the introduction of a complete no-plastic zone, the overall findings indicate that OCEC’s sustainability efforts have significantly enhanced the guest experience and reinforced Oman’s appeal as a destination. The study also outlined potential areas for further improvement, including the adoption of intelligent power management systems and expanded use of digital documentation to reduce paper consumption.

OMAN

SHORT TAKES



RGO band to display a variety of musical formations and performances.

ROYAL GUARD BAND TO PERFORM AT DOHA FESTIVAL

DOHA: The Royal Guard of Oman Music Band will participate in the Doha International Music and Performing Arts Festival 2025, held at Katara Cultural Village in Qatar from December 16–20. The band will display a variety of musical formations and performances, highlighting Oman’s artistic and musical excellence, discipline, and the signature precision of its military music. The festival, also known as Doha Tattoo, marks its first edition and will feature military and artistic musical groups from around the world, offering an exceptional platform for international cultural exchange. — ONA

SINAW HEALTH FORUM FOCUSES ON OBESITY, DIABETES



The forum was held under the auspices of Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti.

SINAW: The Health Committee in the Wilayat of Sinaw, Al Sharqiyah North Governorate, organised the Sinaw Health Forum under the slogan ‘Your Mind and Body are a Trust’. The forum was held under the auspices of Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health, as part of the health efforts undertaken by the committee to address health issues and shed light on challenges and solutions. The forum’s activities included the presentation of working papers on: Obesity and Diabetes; Strokes; Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (Aids) and the Human Papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine. This reflects the Ministry of Health’s interest in enhancing health awareness and integrating efforts in confronting health and behavioural challenges. In addition, the accompanying exhibition was opened, featuring corners on prevention of drugs and psychotropic substances, pre-marital screening, hereditary blood diseases, patient experience, disease vector control and healthy lifestyles. The Sinaw Health Forum is aligned with the directions of the Ministry of Health aimed at enhancing prevention programmes, health empowerment of the community, raising the efficiency of health awareness, and developing health services in line with scientific developments and changing societal needs. The forum also embodies alignment with the goals of Oman Vision 2040, which made health, well-being and quality of life one of its main axes, focusing on building a community with high degrees of health awareness, developing a health system capable of responding to challenges, and strengthening partnerships among various sectors to achieve sustainable development. — ONA



NOTICE

This is to inform all concerned that **Mr. Balakrishnan Nair Sreekumar** worked as a Land transport Manager **holder of Indian Passport No. V1854212 & Resident Card No. 61453623** is no longer employed with us.

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ISWK STUDENTS ACHIEVE GLOBAL, NATIONAL HONOURS

MUSCAT: Indian School Wadi Kabir (Cambridge) (ISWK) has once again demonstrated exceptional performance in the Outstanding Cambridge Learner Awards for the June 2025 examination series. Learners secured the ‘Top in the World’ distinction alongside multiple ‘Top in Oman’ and ‘Best Across’ awards, recognising the highest achievers both globally and nationally. Leading the global success is

Saikarthik Sitaraman Balaji, who earned the Top in the World award for Cambridge IGCSE Mathematics, marking ISWK’s prominence on the international academic stage. Other notable achievers include: Ruchit Devraj Karnik: Top in Oman – Cambridge International A Level Mathematics, First Place in Oman – Best Across Three, High Achievement – Accounting & Economics. ADITYA SONI: Top in Oman

– Cambridge International AS Level English General Paper, First Place in Oman – Best Across Five and Raga Aswitha Gunda: First Place in Oman – Best Across Nine (Cambridge IGCSE) The results underscore ISWK’s commitment to academic excellence, reflecting a nurturing environment where passionate educators and supportive parents enable learners to thrive at the highest levels.

Suhar Festival returns with culture, innovation

SIHAM AL SAIDI
SUHAR, DEC 13

IN A PRESS briefing at Suhar Bazaar Centre, organisers of the fourth Suhar Festival unveiled the full programme for the 2025–2026 edition, running from December 22 to January 31, 2026. The announcement was made in the presence of Mohammed bin Sulaiman al Kindi, Governor of Al Batinah North and Chairman of the Festival’s Main Committee, alongside officials, partners and media representatives. Al Kindi emphasised that the festival has become a seasonal highlight for the governorate, evolving to reflect Suhar’s cultural, economic and social aspirations, with timing aligned to school holidays to encourage family and



The festival offered an interactive platform for visitors to engage with Suhar’s identity.

The Suhar Festival introduces a strong environmental focus, promoting eco-awareness and sustainable habits

youth participation. Eng Nasser al Maamari, Head of Events, explained that this edition connects tourism, entrepreneurship, cultural heritage, social well-being and modern innovation, offering an interactive platform for visitors to engage with

Suhar’s identity. Flagship attractions include the AI-powered ‘Omniya Museum’, daily carnival shows, an international photography competition, a traditional Omani village, karting, kite-flying, theatre programmes for families and the Suhar Rally. This year introduces a strong environmental focus, promoting eco-awareness and sustainable habits, while also providing employment opportunities for about 200 job-seekers and dedicated spaces for home-based businesses. Organisers confirmed strict safety checks for all attractions and set entry tickets at 500 baisas, with optional paid experiences. Strong private-sector participation highlights the festival’s growing economic impact and its role in celebrating Suhar’s culture, innovation and community spirit.

‘Winter Gate’ cultural festival concludes in Dhofar

MAQSHIN: The Wilayat of Maqshin in Dhofar Governorate witnessed the activities of the Mandar Al Dhihyan Cultural Heritage Forum under the slogan ‘Winter Gate’. The forum included a rich programme of cultural, heritage and artistic activities. The forum was organised by the Office of the Governor of Maqshin in cooperation with the General Directorate of Culture, Sports and Youth in the governorate, along with several government and private institutions. It aims to revitalise winter tourism, enhance economic returns for the local community and highlight traditional arts and crafts associated with the desert environment. Activities included the Frankincense Caravan, poetry evenings, performances of the



The forum promoted Maqshin as a growing winter tourism destination.

traditional art of Al Mankous, and exhibitions of handicrafts and heritage models reflecting the details of Bedouin life. The programme also featured

folk games, cultural segments, milking and beauty contests, and an accompanying exhibition for productive families.

Awad bin Salem Masan, Deputy Governor of Maqshin, said the forum seeks to showcase the heritage, cultural and tourism assets of the area, known for its sand dunes, Bedouin heritage and distinctive winter atmosphere. He noted that government efforts continue to develop the sandy areas through an extensive road network. He added that the forum is supported by the Office of the Governor of Dhofar, the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism and Dhofar Municipality, in addition to several public and private institutions, contributing to its success and to promoting Maqshin as a growing winter tourism destination that has seen increasing interest from visitors from Europe, Asia and the US. — ONA

Oman, Korea sign MoU for cooperation in environment field

NAIROBI: The Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of Korea signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to enhance bilateral relations between the two countries and develop cooperation in the fields of environment, climate change and sustainable development. The signing took place on the sidelines of the Seventh Session of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA-7) in the Kenyan capital, Nairobi. The MoU aims to establish a long-term partnership based on the principles of equality and mutual



The MoU was signed on the Omani side by Dr Abdullah bin Ali al Amri and on the Korean side by Kum Hanseung.

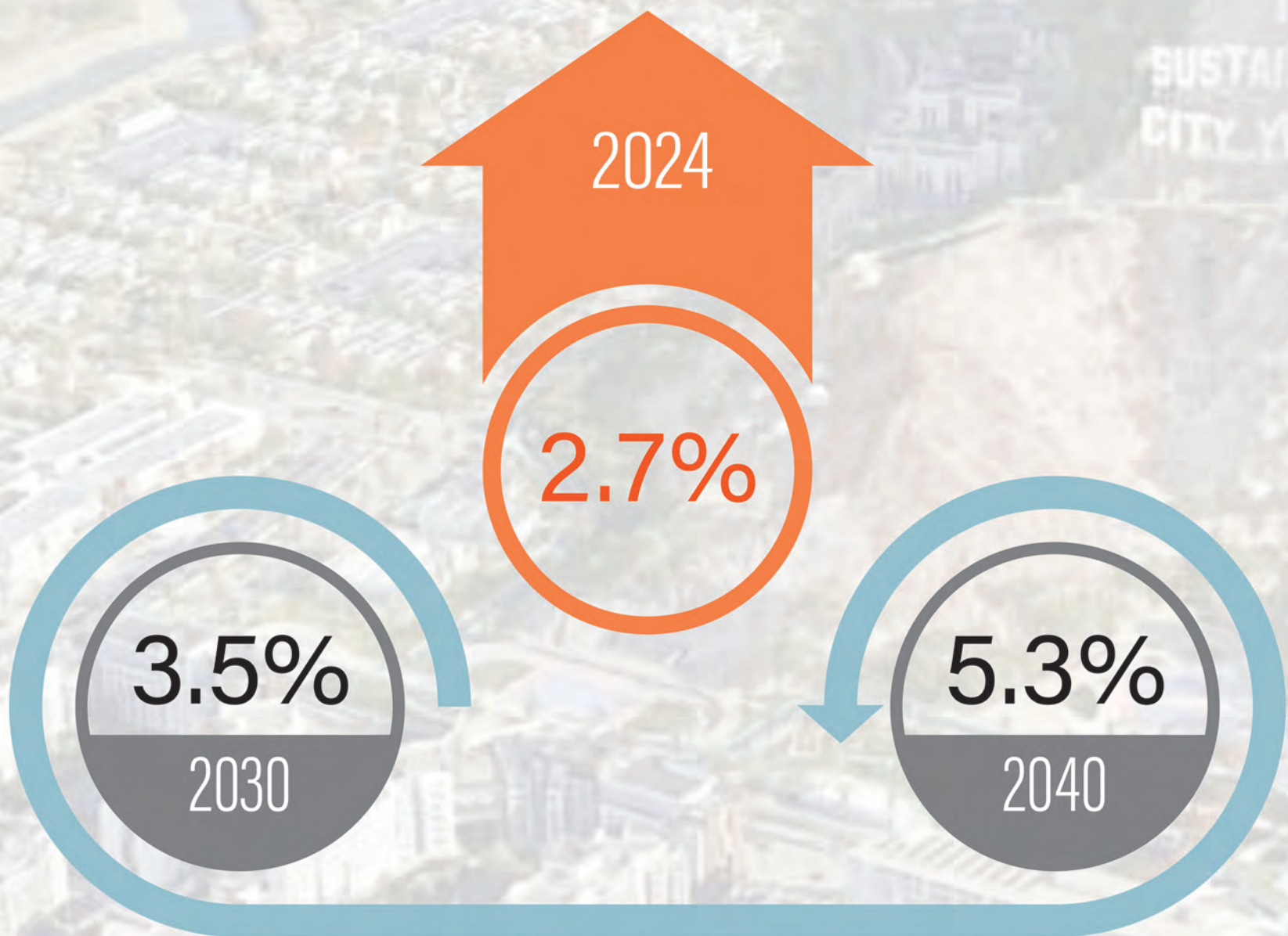
interests, which contributes to protecting the environment and ensuring the well-being of current and future generations. It also focuses on joint action, both bilaterally

and multilaterally, to confront escalating global environmental challenges, reflecting the two sides’ commitment to elevating the environmental partnership and

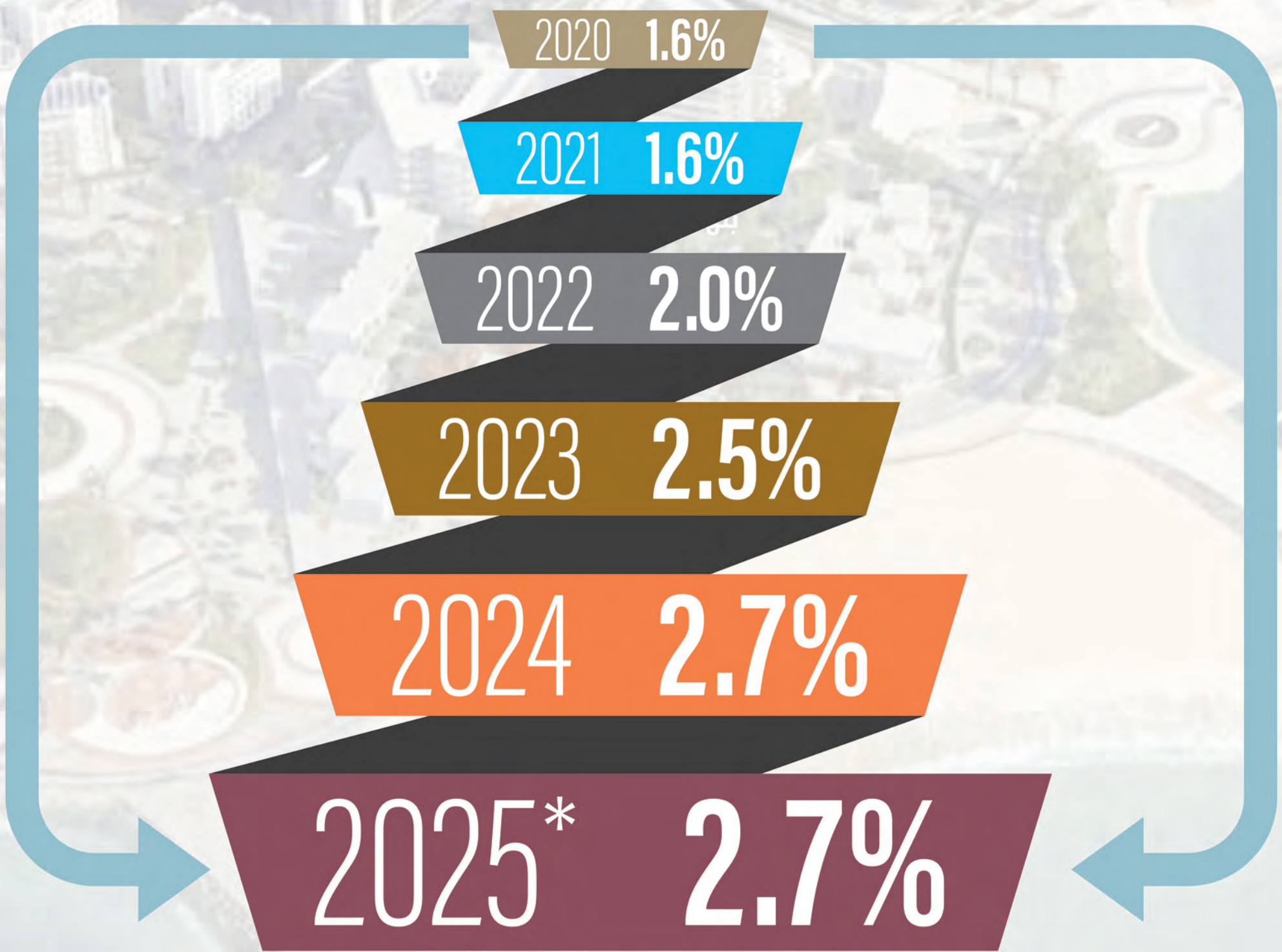
activating areas of joint cooperation. The MoU was signed on the Omani side by Dr Abdullah bin Ali al Amri, Chairman of the Environment Authority, and on the Korean side by Kum Hanseung, Vice-Minister of Climate, Energy and Environment. The MoU includes several key areas of cooperation, notably air quality management, water resource management and pollution, protecting biodiversity and combating desertification and halting land degradation, promoting the circular economy and waste

management and recycling, developing responses to climate change, including carbon reduction technologies and adaptation infrastructure, and supporting the transition towards the green economy, including hydrogen and green buildings. The MoU outlines forms of cooperation, including the exchange of information and experts, staff training, development of joint projects, and organisation of seminars and workshops, which will enhance the exchange of expertise between the two countries. — ONA

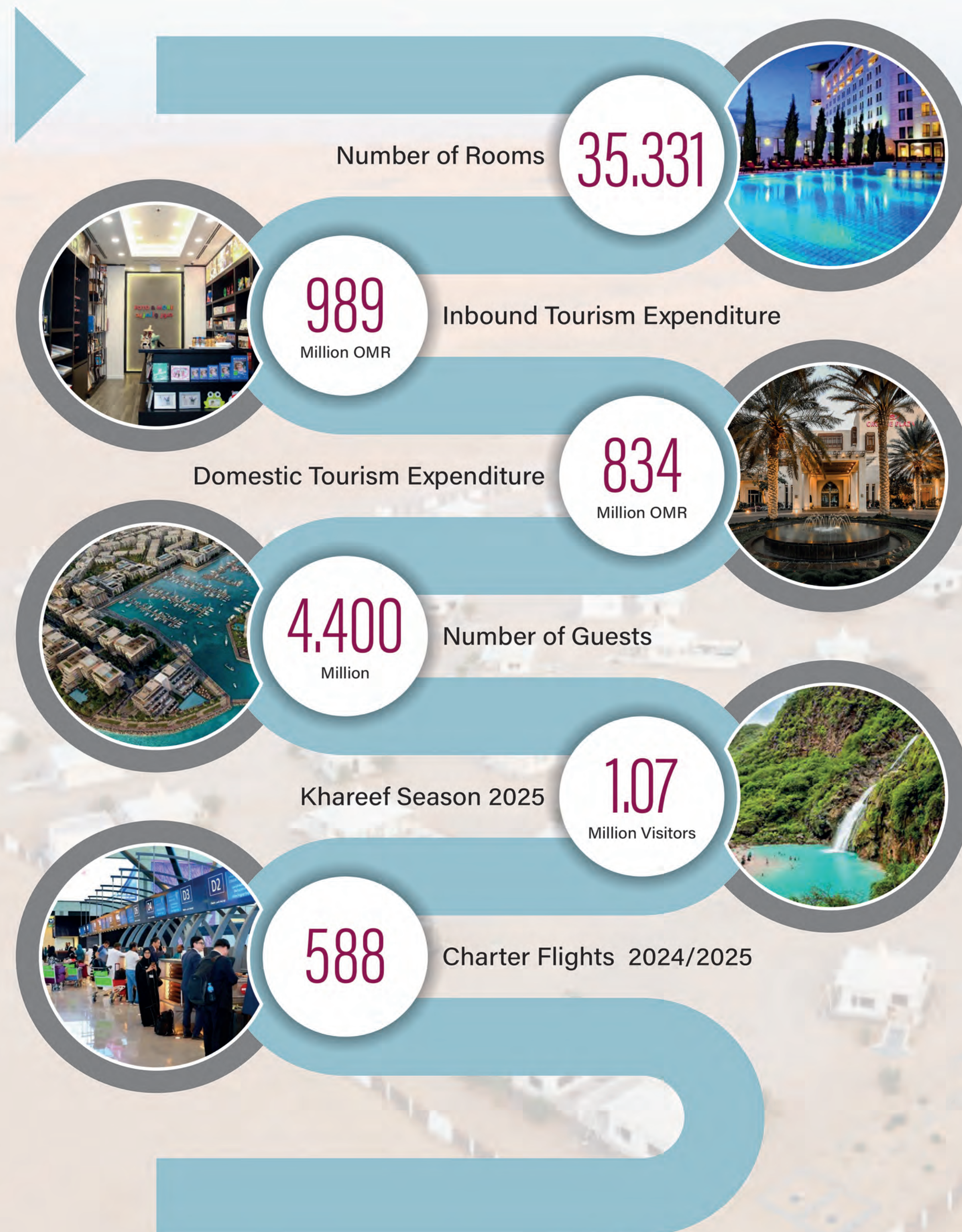
Heritage and Tourism Indicators



Tourism Sector's Contribution to National GDP



*Preliminary data issued by the NCSI for the first quarter of 2025



Number of Integrated Tourism Complexes

17

Muscat Governorate



1

North Al Batinah Governorate



4

South Al Batinah Governorate



3

South Al Sharqiyah Governorate



2

Musandam Governorate



5

Dhofar Governorate



PEACEDEMANDS



A view of a damaged residential building following a drone attack in Tver. — AFP

US ENVOY TO MEET ZELENSKY, EUROPE LEADERS IN BERLIN

KYIV: US President Donald Trump’s special envoy will meet with Volodymyr Zelensky and other European leaders in Berlin this weekend, the White House said, as Washington presses for a plan to end Russia’s war with Ukraine. Ahead of the meetings, Zelensky warned on Saturday that Russia “still aims to destroy” Ukraine, as Kyiv said “massive” Russian strikes on energy facilities overnight had left thousands without power across the country. Russia said it had hit Ukrainian facilities with hypersonic ballistic missiles, in what it called retaliation for Ukrainian attacks.

“It is important that everyone now sees what Russia is doing — every step they take in terror against our people... for this is clearly not about ending the war. They still aim to destroy our state and inflict maximum pain on our people,” the Ukrainian president said on X. An 80-year-old woman was killed when a Russian shell hit a residential building in Ukraine’s northeastern Sumy region, said the regional governor.

Trump has been stepping up pressure on Kyiv to reach an agreement since revealing a plan to end the war last month that was criticised as echoing Moscow’s demands, including Ukraine ceding crucial territory. The 28-point proposal has triggered a flurry of diplomacy between the United States and Ukraine’s European allies, with Kyiv officials recently saying they had sent Washington a revised version. Full details on the updated plan have not been released. A White House official confirmed on Friday that Trump’s envoy Steve Witkoff will meet with Zelensky and European leaders over the weekend to discuss the status of peace negotiations.

Germany’s government has said Berlin will host the leaders, including the heads of the European Union and Nato, next Monday in the hours after Zelensky attends a German-Ukrainian business forum with Chancellor Friedrich Merz. The idea of a speedy accession by Ukraine into the European Union — a move opposed by Moscow — is included in the latest version of the US-led plan. Europeans and Ukrainians are also asking the United States to provide them with “security guarantees” before Ukraine negotiates any territorial concessions, France said Friday.

Under the latest US plan, Ukraine would join the EU as early as January 2027, a senior official familiar with the matter said on condition of anonymity. The complicated EU accession process usually takes years and requires a unanimous vote from all 27 members of the bloc.

Some countries, notably Hungary, have consistently voiced opposition to Ukraine joining. Trump can use “various levers of influence” to convince leaders opposed to Ukraine’s membership to change their stance, Zelensky told journalists on Thursday. Kyiv has long striven for EU membership, but has struggled to eradicate endemic corruption — a core prerequisite for joining the bloc.

Moscow indicated it was suspicious of efforts to amend the US plan, for which it has signalled support. “We have an impression that this version... will be worsened,” Kremlin foreign policy aide Yuri Ushakov told the Kommersant business daily. “It’ll be a long process,” he added. — AFP

US RELEASES WARRANT FOR TANKER SEIZED OFF VENEZUELAN COAST

WASHINGTON: A US court released a heavily redacted warrant that had authorised the seizure of an oil tanker off the coast of Venezuela, a move Caracas decried as an act of “international piracy” and “blatant theft”. US President Donald Trump’s administration has been piling pressure on Venezuela for months, with a major naval buildup in the region accompanied by deadly strikes on alleged drug-trafficking boats that have killed nearly 90 people.

In a dramatic raid that Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem said was aimed at Venezuela President Nicolas Maduro’s “regime,” Washington took control of the tanker with US forces rappelling down from a helicopter onto the vessel. The US Coast Guard carried out the warrant, signed by a magistrate judge on November 26, just as it was set to expire, according to the 32-page document that has more than half of its contents redacted.

White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt told journalists on Thursday that the seized tanker “will go to a US port and the United States does intend to seize the oil.” “We’re not going to stand by and watch sanctioned vessels sail the seas with black-market oil, the proceeds of which will fuel narco-terrorism of rogue and illegitimate regimes around the world.” The tanker was expected to dock in Galveston, Texas, two unnamed US officials told NBC News. — AFP

Cambodia shuts Thailand crossings over fighting

CAMBODIA Shut its border crossings with Thailand, after Bangkok denied US President Donald Trump’s claim that a truce had been agreed to end days of deadly fighting. Violence between the Southeast Asian neighbours, which stems from a long-running dispute over the colonial-era demarcation of their 800-kilometre border, has displaced around half a million people on both sides. At least 25 people have died this week, including four Thai soldiers the defence ministry said were killed in the border area on Saturday.

The latest fatalities were followed by Phnom Penh announcing it would immediately “suspend all entry and exit movements at all Cambodia-Thailand border crossings”, the interior ministry said. Each side blamed the other for reigniting the conflict, before Trump said a truce had been agreed. Thai Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul said Trump “didn’t mention whether we should make a ceasefire” during their Friday phone call. The two leaders “didn’t discuss” the issue, Anutin told journalists on Saturday.

Trump had hailed his “very good conversation” with Anutin and Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Manet on Friday. “They have agreed to CEASE all shooting effective this evening, and go back to the original Peace Accord” agreed in July, Trump wrote on his Truth Social platform. The United States, China and Malaysia, as chair of the regional bloc ASEAN, brokered a ceasefire in July after an initial five-

Violence between the Southeast Asian neighbours has displaced around half a million people on both sides. At least 25 people have died this week, including four Thai soldiers the defence ministry said were killed in the border



A boy holding a supply stands among people waiting to collect supplies at Batthkak refugee camp, Cambodia. — Reuters

day spate of violence. In October, Trump backed a follow-on joint declaration between Thailand and Cambodia, touting new trade deals after they agreed to prolong their truce. But Thailand suspended the agreement the following month after Thai soldiers were wounded by landmines at the border. In Thailand, evacuee Kanyapat Saopria said she doesn’t “trust Cambodia anymore”. “The last round of peace efforts didn’t work out... I don’t know if this one will either,” the 39-year-old said. Across the border, a Cambodian evacuee said she was “sad” the fighting hadn’t stopped despite Trump’s intervention. “I am not happy with brutal acts,” said Vy Rina, 43.

Bangkok and Phnom Penh have traded accusations of attacks

against civilians, with the Thai army reporting six wounded on Saturday by Cambodian rockets. Cambodia’s information minister, Neth Pheaktra, meanwhile said Thai forces had “expanded their attacks to include civilian infrastructure and Cambodian civilians”. A Thai navy spokesman said the air force “successfully destroyed” two Cambodian bridges used to transport weapons to the conflict zone.

Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim on Saturday urged both sides to “cease all forms of hostilities and refrain from any further military actions”. Thailand has reported 14 soldiers killed and seven civilian deaths, while Cambodia said four civilians were killed earlier this week. — AFP



INDONESIA FLOOD DEATH TOLL PASSES 1,000

JAKARTA: Devastating floods and landslides have killed 1,003 people in Indonesia, rescuers said on Saturday as the Southeast Asian nation grapples with relief efforts. The disaster, which has hit the northwestern island of Sumatra over the past fortnight, has also injured more than 5,400, the National Disaster Mitigation Agency said in its latest toll.

The deadly torrential rains are one of the worst recent disasters to strike Sumatra which lies at the northern tip of the island. President Prabowo Subianto said on Saturday the situation has improved, with several areas now accessible. “Here and there, due to natural and physical conditions, there have been slight delays, but I checked all the evacuation sites: their conditions are good, services for them are adequate, and food supplies are sufficient,” Prabowo said after visiting Langkat in North Sumatra province. — AFP

SUPPORTERS GATHERING

Ousted Nepal PM’s party holds biggest rally



Tens of thousands rallied for the party of Nepal’s ousted prime minister, KP Sharma Oli, on Saturday, in the largest gathering in the Himalayan country since youth-led anti-graft protests forced him out three months ago. Police estimated 70,000 attended the rally in Bhaktapur near the capital Kathmandu to launch a three-day convention of the Communist Party of Nepal. Organisers had said before the rally they would bring out 300,000 people. — Reuters

HIGHLY CONTAGIOUS DISEASE

France to vaccinate cattle for lumpy skin



France will vaccinate 1 million head of cattle in the coming weeks against lumpy skin disease, Agriculture Minister Annie Genevard said. This comes after several outbreaks of the highly contagious disease prompted authorities to order the culling of entire herds, sparking demonstrations by farmers who consider the measure excessive. Lumpy skin disease is a virus spread by insects that affects cattle and buffalo, causing blisters and reducing milk production. — Reuters

BRUTAL RAIDS

Series of Israeli strikes hit southern Lebanon



A series of Israeli strikes hit south and east Lebanon. Lebanon’s state-run National News Agency (NNA) reported strikes in around a dozen locations, including up to around 30 kilometres from the Israeli border, citing at times “heavy raids”. Israel has kept up strikes on Lebanon despite a November 2024 ceasefire that was supposed to end more than a year of hostilities, and has also kept troops in five areas it deems strategic. — AFP

OPINION

The perpetual debate: Knowledge or skills?



RAY PETERSEN

The writer is a media consultant

I Saw a brilliant post on my Facebook page the other day. It went like this... “Another day has passed, and I haven’t used this: (a+b)²=a²+2ab+b²”. And it got me to thinking... How many of us use, in our ‘real’ lives, much of the stuff we have rammed down our throats at school?

I am absolutely convinced about the merits of learning and being able to use our language effectively, so we can converse and communicate effectively, sharing ideas and information.

We need arithmetic to be able to function effectively in societies that rely so much on our ability to know figures, whether for our daily shopping, household and personal budgeting, borrowing, bank account and cash management, home loans, and maybe even investments. Beyond those, even as an educator, I’m uncertain we are treading the correct pathways.

Cooking skills, once labelled as home economics, were invaluable to earlier generations, with simple culinary and cooking tasks of yesterday still relevant today. Being able to make sandwiches, to prepare salads, to scramble, boil and fry eggs or make omelettes, to make curries, stews, roasts and casseroles, to cook simple pasta and rice dishes, and to understand the roles of natural versus processed foods in our diets for our future health and wellbeing.

These are all essential in an environment

where ‘fast’ foods and ‘energy’ drinks do us no favours at all, yet healthier alternatives are rarely taught today. I’m also convinced that ‘soft’ skills need to be a part of today’s educational experiences, such as communication, including effective listening, conversational cues and conflict resolution. Whether the interactions are familial, social, platonic, romantic, or professional, employment-related, communication is the glue that holds our relationships together.

Personal hygiene too has the potential to be almost a ‘forgotten’ skill, or a sensitive, almost ‘taboo’ topic, yet bad teeth, bad breath, coughing and sneezing management, smelly armpits and stinky feet, even yawning inappropriately, or inattentiveness can appear offensive, and significantly affect how others see us and respond to us.

Some see the manual skills of woodwork and engineering as redundant today, but how valuable is learning to use a measuring tape, a square, a hammer, a saw, a drill, a hacksaw, a file, and to respect the heavier, floor-mounted machinery such as lathes and pillar drills, to solder and weld metals? You learned the golden rule of those workshops, to “measure twice and cut once,” to rewire plugs, change tyres, fixing leaking or blocked pipes, bleed radiators, or replace door locks, among hundreds of similar ‘jobs’. You would not believe how often these skills come in handy ‘around the house’.

Resilience, today, particularly in social media, can be brutal in its dynamism, can catch its victims so unaware as to be incredibly harmful and even life-threatening.

Critical thinking is defined as the process of interpreting, analysing, synthesising and evaluating information to reach supportable conclusions, the need for us all to determine right from wrong a thousand times a day, while we are manipulated by advertising, media, politicians and governments. In this, we will realise artificial intelligence isn’t always friendly, often antagonistic, selling fallacies to insidiously shape our future thoughts and behaviours, our very futures. We dare not let this happen!

Finally, schools must educate students how to face challenges and to understand the role of resilience in responding to those myriad challenges. Resilience, today, particularly in social media, can be brutal in its dynamism, can catch its victims so unaware as to be incredibly harmful and even life-threatening. Social media comes softly, yet with the complexity of the two faces of Janus, the deceit and malice that the faceless one’s treasure, so the younger, outwardly naïve generation, needs the reassurance, the relative comfort and security that resilience offers, and manifests itself as strength.

In the cold light of day, I’m less convinced about education prioritising science and mathematics, seeing it as a waste of teaching and learning, unless they have scientific or technological ambitions. We may even find that much of school is not only wasted time but wasted opportunity.

THAILAND’S SNAP POLL BOOSTS PM ANUTIN’S ODDS

DEVJYOT GHOSHAL & PANARAT THEPGUMPANAT

Thailand’s Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul looks set to tap burgeoning nationalism over a border conflict with Cambodia to boost his appeal in a general election stemming from his dissolution of parliament after less than 100 days in power.

The political manoeuvring came after fierce border clashes erupted again this week, following five days of fighting in July, hurling Southeast Asia’s second-largest economy immediately into election mode.

The election is likely by early February, as polls must follow within 45 to 60 days of the dissolution, but no party is expected to secure a clear majority, which analysts warned could prompt more horse-trading and tumult.

A key reason for dissolving parliament is an escalation of nationalism from the border clashes that stands to benefit Anutin’s Bhumjaithai party, said Titipol Phakdeewanich, a professor of political science at Ubon Ratchathani University.

“This is one of the main motivations because it is good timing,” he said.

Provinces in northeastern Thailand, some near the fighting, are a rich vote bank for Bhumjaithai, while Anutin also has strong allies to deliver constituencies from other regions riding on the wave of patriotism.

In September, 27 per cent of respondents in a nationwide poll said they were undecided on a prime ministerial candidate, while 23 per cent backed the leader of the People’s Party, now the largest bloc in parliament, and 20 per cent supported Anutin.

With the border issue front and centre in voters’ minds, prevailing public sentiment should fuel Anutin’s popularity, said Stithorn Thananithichot, who teaches political science at Chulalongkorn University. “If Bhumjaithai wins the election, a new government should be formed by April,” he said. Anutin has been unequivocal in his backing of the military, which most Thais overwhelmingly trust over politicians in securing the country’s national interest.

The opposition People’s Party backed Anutin, 59, to take power in September after he walked out of a ruling coalition led by the Pheu Thai party.

In a deal with the People’s Party, he agreed to push for constitutional amendments sought by the opposition group and call for elections within four months of taking office. — Reuters

Living alongside a person with early dementia

JUST recently, I found out that one of my closest friends had been diagnosed with early-stage dementia and it hit me hard. He’s someone I’ve always admired for his intelligence, wit and sharp mind and to see him facing something so life-changing was deeply upsetting.

The diagnosis came as a shock to him, and he’s now having to come to terms with the reality that his memory isn’t what it used to be and will most likely worsen. At this early stage, he’s still able to manage his day-to-day life, but there are definite changes. He sometimes forgets recent conversations, and every so often, I notice a bit of confusion, especially if something unexpected happens. It’s tough to witness, especially knowing how much pride he’s always taken in his independence and mental agility.

For someone who has always relied on his intellect, realising that something as fundamental as memory could slip away has been a heavy blow. Dementia itself is a generic term used to describe a range of conditions that affect memory, thinking and behaviour.

It isn’t a single disease but rather a group of related disorders. The most common type is Alzheimer’s disease. The name Alzheimer’s disease comes from Dr Alois Alzheimer, a German psychiatrist and neuropathologist.

In 1906, he described the case of a woman named Auguste Deter who had experienced memory loss, confusion and unpredictable behaviour. After her death, Dr Alzheimer examined her brain under a microscope and discovered some abnormalities, the same that are now recognised



KARIM EASTERBROOK

Former Cambridge School Principal and Author

Just showing up, offering a listening ear and letting them know you’re there for both the good days and the bad really does make a difference



Dementia itself is a generic term used to describe a range of conditions that affect memory, thinking and behaviour.

as hallmarks of Alzheimer’s disease.

The next most common form is vascular dementia, which is linked to problems with blood flow in the brain. Other forms include Lewy Body dementia, which can cause movement and visual disturbances, and frontotemporal dementia, which often affects personality and language. Each type progresses differently, but all gradually interfere with daily life and independence. In England and Wales, dementia has now become the leading cause of death, surpassing heart disease.

This shift is largely because people are living longer, and age is the greatest risk factor for developing dementia. Better diagnosis and more accurate recording on death certificates have also contributed to the recorded increase.

While some drug and non-drug treatments can sometimes help manage symptoms, there is currently no cure, and the condition eventually affects the body’s ability to function.

I’ve learned that what matters most right now is simply being there for my friend. I don’t make a fuss

or treat him any differently, but I do make a point of listening more and being patient when he repeats himself or loses track of what he was saying. We will still do the things we’ve always enjoyed together, and I will make sure to keep our routines familiar and easy.

Small things like gentle reminders or sticking to plans seem to help sufferers cope, but above all, for my relationship with my friend, it’s giving him the reassurance that our friendship hasn’t changed, which means the most. It’s natural to feel at a loss when someone you care about receives this kind of news. I’ve realised that you don’t need to have all the answers.

Just showing up, offering a listening ear and letting them know you’re there for both the good days and the bad really does make a difference. My friend has told me how much he appreciates my understanding, and that’s something I hold on to.

Even though dementia is now so common, each person’s story is unique, and every bit of kindness and understanding truly counts.

SPORTS

SHORTTAKES



Al Amerat secured a tough 2-1 victory over Masirah.

AL AMERAT EXTEND UNBEATEN RUN IN BEACH SOCCER

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, DEC 13

Defending champions Al Amerat continued their impressive and unbeaten run in the 2025/2026 Oman Beach Soccer League after securing a tough 2-1 victory over Masirah in the eighth round of league matches. The encounter which was played at the Sands Court of the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex, highlighted Al Amerat’s tactical discipline as they once again delivered when it mattered most. The closely contested match began cautiously, with both sides focusing on defensive organisation in the opening set, which ended in a goalless draw. Al Amerat gradually increased the tempo in the second set and were rewarded through Oman national team player Khalid al Orami who broke the deadlock with a well-taken goal, giving his side a crucial advantage. Masirah responded with greater urgency in the final set, applying pressure in search of an equaliser. However, Al Amerat doubled their lead through Abdullah al Souti, strengthening their grip on the match. Masirah managed to pull one goal back late in the game through Yousef al Zadjali, setting up a tense finish, but the defending champions held firm to secure another valuable win and extend their unbeaten streak.

With this result, Al Amerat are leading the league order with strong teamwork, and a balanced blend of experienced national team players and emerging talent. Their ability to control tight matches has once again underlined why they remain the benchmark of beach soccer in Oman. In another match of the eighth round, Salalah delivered a confident performance to defeat Mirbat 6-3 at the Sultan Qaboos Youth Complex for Culture and Recreation. Salalah showed sharp attacking play and improved coordination across all three sets. Mirbat, despite moments of resistance, were unable to match Salalah’s attacking rhythm in the decisive phases of the match. At the same venue, Al Oruba claimed a crucial 6-3 victory over Taqah, strengthening their position among the league’s top contenders.

National Day Endurance Cup sees exciting finish

RIYADH AL BALUSHI
BARKA, DEC 13

THE National Day Local Endurance Cup over a distance of 100 kilometres for the 2025-2026 season concluded at Al Mahamid Endurance Village in the Wilayat of Barka, under the organisation of the Oman Equestrian Federation and Racing. The event was held under the auspices of Azzan bin Qasim al Busaidy, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism for Tourism, and attended by Sayyid Mundhir bin Saif bin Hamad al Busaidy, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Oman Equestrian Federation and Racing, along with officials, horse owners, trainers, veterinarians and endurance racing enthusiasts.

The competition, which was contested over three demanding phases, witnessed strong rivalry among participating horses and riders, reflecting the growing standards of endurance racing in the Sultanate of Oman. Huboob Muscat secured the gold medal and first place, delivering an outstanding performance for owner Hala Al Turki, ridden by jockey Mahmoud bin Said al Saeedi and trained by Hamad bin Said al Saeedi, demonstrating excellent stamina and tactical discipline throughout the race.

Commenting on the technical and veterinary aspects of the competition, Dr Ahmed al Jassasi, the event’s attending veterinarian, highlighted the high level of preparedness of the horses, stating that “the participating horses met the required veterinary standards and showed strong recovery rates during the inspection stages, which reflects the professionalism of the trainers and the effectiveness of the



Winners in the top positions were officially crowned, and individuals who contributed to the success of the race were honoured. — Pictures by Rashid al Touqi

health and welfare protocols applied during the race.” Finishing in second place and claiming the silver medal was Splendacrest Nolapur, owned by Mundhir bin Taghlab al Barwani, ridden by Hood bin Ghalib al Fauri and trained by Saleh bin Salem al Balushi, Trainer Saleh al Balushi owner of BLUE STABLE expressed his satisfaction with the result, noting that the horse delivered a consistent performance across all phases, added that the race provided valuable experience and confirmed the team’s readiness for future endurance events. Jockey Hood al Fouri also praised the organisation and course design, explaining that the race required careful pacing and strategic decision making, emphasised that finishing on the podium in a National Day event was a significant achievement and motivation for upcoming competitions. The bronze medal and third place went to Fayjab, owned by Murbat Al Sultanate, ridden by Khalid bin Abdulrahman al Zadjali, and trained by Mohannad bin Ibrahim al Balushi. Mohannad al Balushi described the result as a positive outcome, stating that the horse showed



The competition, which was contested over three demanding phases, witnessed strong rivalry among participating horses and riders.

promising endurance and responsiveness and that the experience would contribute to further development in future races. In addition to the main 100 km competition, the event included the qualification of several horses over 40 km and 80 km distances, as part of the Federation’s ongoing efforts to prepare horses and riders according to international endurance standards. At the conclusion of the event, winners in the top positions were officially crowned, and individuals who contributed to the success of the race and course organisation at Al Mahamid Endurance Village were honoured,

including Said bin Matar al Saeedi and Mohammed bin Salim al Maliki, Several sponsoring companies were also recognised, notably Al Said Stables, Al Saadi Stable, Taterunk Middle East, and Al Ain Al Mutatawira Company. The ceremony concluded with Sayyid Mundhir bin Saif al Busaidy, Chairman of the Board of the Oman Equestrian Federation and Racing, presenting a commemorative gift to the patron of the event, reaffirming the Federation’s commitment to advancing endurance racing and promoting equestrian sports in line with the significance of National Day celebrations in the Sultanate of Oman.

Al Amerat and Nizwa advance to Junior Basketball League final

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, DEC 13

Nizwa and Al Amerat clubs have advanced to the final of the Junior Basketball League for the current season after successfully overcoming the semifinal stage in two matches held at the auxiliary hall of the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher. In the first matchup, Al Amerat secured their place in the final with a clear 73-40 victory over Al Seeb. Al Amerat imposed their dominance from the early periods of the game thanks to strong organisation, quick ball movement, and a clear superiority on both the offensive and defensive ends. The game began at a fast pace, with Al Seeb opening the scoring with a three-pointer before Al Amerat quickly

responded to close the gap and gradually take control through a basket by Noah Brink and points from Sultan al Sulaimani to lead 6-5. Al Amerat continued their offensive pressure, capitalising on Al Seeb’s mistakes, as Mohammed al Battashi, Sami al Busaidy, and Sultan al Sinani added consecutive points, along with a successful three-pointer by Sami al Busaidy, to extend the lead. Despite attempts by Al Seeb through Abdulrahman al Kamshki and Daniel al Balushi, the first quarter ended with Al Amerat leading 23-12. In the second quarter, Al Seeb tried to reduce the deficit by scoring early, but Al Amerat responded with another three-pointer by Sultan al Sinani and continued to widen the gap through solid defence and effective fast breaks, ending



Al Amerat imposed their dominance from the early periods of the game. — Moosa al Balushi

the first half ahead 43-18. At the start of the third quarter, Al Amerat maintained its advantage, with both teams exchanging baskets in the opening minutes before Al Amerat once again imposed its rhythm. Their players competed in scoring to

further extend the margin, ending the third quarter with a commanding 64-27 lead. In the fourth quarter, Al Amerat continued their overall superiority despite a relative improvement from Al Seeb, and the match concluded with a deserved 73-40 win for Al Amerat.

The match was officiated by Ali al Salmani as first referee and Al Mahdi al Alawi as second referee, with Ameema al Hajari, Salim al Jadidi, and Majid al Akhzami at the scorer’s table. NIZWA CLINCH THE SEMIFINAL AND BOOK A FINAL DATE In the second semifinal, Nizwa qualified for the final after defeating Qurayat 56-42 in a strong and competitive encounter. Nizwa dominated the first half, while Qurayat mounted a strong comeback in the second half that proved insufficient to overturn the result. Nizwa started the game strongly, winning the first quarter 29-8, and continued their dominance in the second quarter, which they finished 17-9, to end the

first half with a comfortable lead. In the third quarter, Qurayat showed improvement on both offence and defence, scoring 9 points compared to 6 for Nizwa. In the fourth quarter, Qurayat continued to push and managed to score 16 points, while Nizwa added 4 points. However, the large margin built by Nizwa early in the game was enough to secure qualification as they closed the match with a 56-42 victory. Several Nizwa players stood out, led by Mulhim al Obaidani with 16 points, followed by Adam al Hinai with 11 points, and Elyas al Obaidani with 10 points. For Qurayat, Khamis al Sinani was the game’s top scorer with 24 points, alongside Mumtaz al Sinani, who added 9 points. The match was officiated by referees Taha al Amri and Thabit al Hinai.

SPORTS

SHORT TAKES



SALALAH, MASIRAH AND IBRI IMPRESS AT JUNIOR BADMINTON TOURNAMENT

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, DEC 13

The Oman Junior Badminton Championship for Clubs concluded recently at the Oasis Badminton Academy in Bausher. The one-day event, organised by the Oman Racket Sports Committee (ORSC) featured wide participation from nine clubs representing various governorates of the Sultanate of Oman, with players competing across three age categories: Under-13, Under-15, and Under-17. Salalah, Masirah and Ibri clubs delivered an outstanding show as top positions across the age categories were shared among these three clubs. In the Under-17 category, Shihab al Hinai of Masirah Club claimed first place after delivering a strong performance throughout the championship. Said al Shibli of Salalah Club secured second place, while Ziyad al Hinai of Salalah and Abdulaziz al Hinai of Ibri finished third and fourth respectively.

The Under-15 category saw Ahmed al Shibli of Salalah Club crowned champion following a series of impressive victories. Odai al Hinai of Ibri Club claimed second place, while Zakaria al Hinai of Salalah and Mohammed al Hinai of Masirah finished third and fourth after intense and competitive matches. In the youngest category, Under-13, Khalid al Shibli of Salalah Club delivered a standout performance to secure first place. Anwar al Hinai of Masirah Club finished second, while Abdullah al Owaidi of Masirah and Adam al Qassabi of Qurayat Club claimed third and fourth respectively, highlighting the emergence of a promising new generation of junior players.

The championship was part of ORSC’s ongoing efforts to expand the base of badminton participation, identify and develop promising junior talents, and provide a competitive platform that supports clubs in enhancing the technical and physical abilities of their players. Matches throughout the tournament were marked by a high level of technical performance, strong competitiveness, and enthusiasm, reflecting the growing attention clubs are giving to structured junior development programmes.

Dr Abdulrahim al Droushi expressed his satisfaction with the advanced technical level displayed by the players. “Thanks to all the participated clubs as they made strong and top efforts in recent years to nurture badminton talent. The importance of such championships during this phase, as ORSC focuses strongly on junior age groups as part of a long-term vision to build a competitive generation capable of representing Oman regionally and internationally over the next eight years. I reaffirmed the committee’s continued full support for junior development programmes,” he added. Masirah Club coach Sulaiman al Hinai described the championship as a clear reflection of the technical and physical progress of junior players.



The event drew a large crowd of horse owners, trainers, jockeys and racing enthusiasts and featured strong competition across eight races. — Photos by Mohammed al Balushi, Asaad al Badri

Al Rahba races showcase Oman’s equestrian talent

RIYADH AL BALUSHI
BARKA, DEC 13

AL RAHBA Horse Racing Track in the Wilayat of Barka hosted the eighth race meeting of the season, organised under the supervision of the Head of Horse Racing, Retired Brigadier First Class Abdulrazzaq bin Abdulqader al Shuhourzi. The event drew a large crowd of horse owners, trainers, jockeys and racing enthusiasts and featured strong competition across eight races, highlighting the continued progress of horse racing in the Sultanate of Oman.

The meeting opened with an impressive performance in the first race, where the filly Bantoot EZ claimed victory under jockey Mohammed bin Mahmoud al Farsi, trained by Ashraf bin Darwish al Hammadi, Najm Ibri finished second, followed by Azzam ME in third.

The second race saw Al Dastour deliver a commanding run to secure first place with jockey Ahmed bin Salem al Siyabi, trained by Mohammed bin Abdulrahman al Balushi, Following the race, Al Balushi expressed his satisfaction with the result, stating that the win was “the outcome of consistent preparation and careful training over the past period,” adding that the horse responded perfectly to the race plan, Zelzal finished second, while Ghawash al Shahania came in third.

Reflecting on the overall standard of the event, a participating horse owner praised



At the end of the race, the patron of the event crowned the winners.

the organisation and level of competition, noting that Al Rahba Racecourse “has become a key venue for horse racing, offering competitive races that motivate owners and stables to continuously improve performance.”

FIRST PLACE
In the third race, Dhiban captured first place under jockey Al Mutasim bin Said al Balushi, trained by Badr bin Mohammed al Hajri. Al Mutasim highlighted the importance of teamwork in achieving the victory, explaining that the horse showed strong form throughout the race and that the success came from “excellent coordination between the trainer, the stable and the jockey.” Classic Medal finished second, while

Yukon Star secured third place. The fourth race was won by the mare Yasrah, ridden by Mohammed bin Mahmoud al Farsi and trained by Mohammed bin Issa al Balushi, ahead of Jadal in second and AGS Burkan in third. In the fifth race, Majd Bisyah claimed the top spot with jockey Mazen bin Mubarak al Yahyai and trainer Habib bin Ahmed al Balushi, followed by Al Aasif SB in second and Hader in third. The sixth race featured a strong showing by the mare Al Taghrouda, who crossed the line first under jockey Wathab bin Said al Balushi, trained by Mohammed bin Said al Saeedi, Saadat Muscat finished second, while Iram placed third.

In the seventh race, Rajeh Muscat secured victory with jockey Hamad bin Abdullah al Balushi and trainer Mohammed bin Saeed al Saeedi, ahead of Subat in second and Al Shalli SB in third. The meeting concluded with the eighth race, where Dibawi Sand claimed first place under jockey Abdulrahman bin Talib al Farsi, trained by Othman Rashid al Hashmi, Prima Summer finished second, followed by Last Tradition in third. The eighth race meeting at Al Rahba Racecourse successfully combined competitive racing with professional organisation, reinforcing its position as an important platform for the development of horse racing and the discovery of emerging talent across the Sultanate of Oman.

Seeb edge Sohar in thrilling first division volleyball clash

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, DEC 13

Seeb Club secured an important and thrilling victory over Sohar Club, winning three sets to two in the match held at the main hall of the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher, as part of the First Division Volleyball League. The encounter was marked by intensity and competitiveness, with major swings in performance and scorelines, despite Sohar entering the match at the bottom of the standings. The match unfolded contrary to expectations, as Seeb, the defending champions and one of the leading contenders for the top spot, faced fierce resistance from Sohar’s players, who delivered an impressive performance and showed strong fighting spirit. Their display confirmed that their position in the standings does not truly reflect their

real capabilities on the court. Sohar managed to trouble Seeb in more than one set, forcing them into a demanding battle that lasted until the final points. The match began with clear caution from both sides before Seeb narrowly claimed the first set 27–25, capitalising on their experience in decisive moments. Sohar, however, were not affected by the loss and came back strongly in the second set, imposing their rhythm on the game and taking advantage of some reception errors by Seeb to win the set 26–24. Sohar’s relative superiority continued in the third set, as their players performed with great confidence and succeeded in unsettling Seeb’s defence while limiting their attacking effectiveness, allowing Sohar to take the set 25–22 in a surprise that ignited the atmosphere in the hall and placed Seeb under real pressure. At the start of the fourth set, Seeb



The encounter was marked by intensity and competitiveness, with major swings in performance and scorelines.

demonstrated the mentality of champions and the experience of their players in handling difficult situations. They raised the tempo, applied heavy pressure through powerful serves and an effective blocking wall, and dominated the set with a convincing 25–14 win to level the match. In the decisive fifth set, Seeb asserted their superiority clearly, benefiting from their physical edge and extensive experience, closing the set 15–9 to claim a valuable victory after a tough contest against an opponent who fought until the very end.

2ND DIVISION RACE HEATS UP
In the Second Division Volleyball League, the same round witnessed strong competition within Group Two, resulting in significant changes at the top of the standings. In the headline match of the round, Al Hamra Club earned a valuable

victory over Dhank Club, winning three sets to one in a match full of intensity and excitement. Al Hamra managed to assert their dominance in the decisive sets, confirming their strong presence this season and sharing the top spot with Dhank after raising their tally to nine points, while Dhank suffered their first defeat following a series of positive results. In another match, Bahla Club continued their upward performances and secured their first win of the season by defeating Samayil Club in straight sets. Bahla appeared in a completely different form compared to previous rounds, controlling the course of the match and winning the sets by clear margins, earning their first three points and boosting their chances of improving their position in the standings, while Samayil continued to struggle at the bottom without any points.

BUSINESS



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UN hails Oman’s high-tech push

THE Sultanate of Oman has earned strong international recognition for accelerating the localisation of high-tech industries and strengthening its manufacturing base, according to the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation’s (Unido) 2026 report, which ranks Oman among the world’s emerging industrial economies.

The report highlights the country’s rapid progress despite its relatively recent entry into advanced industrial production.

Unido noted that Oman has made significant strides in building integrated industrial value chains linked to advanced technologies, particularly in renewable energy manufacturing.

The country has established a solid industrial foundation in photovoltaic industries by attracting high-quality investments, implementing incentive-driven government procurement policies and fostering a business environment supportive



Unido noted that Oman has made significant strides in building integrated industrial value chains linked to advanced technologies, particularly in renewable energy manufacturing.

of modern technologies.

Among the flagship projects cited is the United Solar Polysilicon facility under development at the SOHAR Port and Freezone.

Described as one of the most important

industrial projects in the region, the plant is designed to produce 100,000 tonnes of polysilicon annually, meeting rising regional demand for solar energy solutions while enhancing Oman’s role in global supply chains.

The report also underlined Oman’s structural advantages, including abundant high-quality silica sand, strong solar and wind resources throughout the year and a strategic location along major international shipping routes.

These factors, combined with government incentives such as tax exemptions and full foreign ownership, position Oman as a competitive destination for advanced manufacturing investments.

In this context, Sheida Industries has begun construction of its first solar panel factory, covering 11,250 square metres and has signed an agreement with China’s JA Solar to establish a manufacturing complex with a capacity of 6 gigawatts for solar cells and 3 gigawatts for solar panels.

The \$564 million investment will primarily serve Gulf and African markets.

The company has also announced the Mawarid Turbine Company project in Al Duqm to manufacture wind turbines, with an estimated investment of \$181.8 million, alongside plans to establish an electrolyser assembly plant for green hydrogen technologies in partnership with China’s Sungrow.

Engineer Khalid bin Salim al Qasabi, Director General of Industry at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, said the progress reflects the adoption of proactive industrial policies and targeted initiatives aimed at attracting high-quality, technology-driven industries.

He noted that the ministry has focused on streamlining investor procedures, enhancing the readiness of free and economic zones; and offering incentives such as flexible regulations, tax and customs exemptions and simplified licensing to boost local added value. — ONA

Oman upgrades national quality framework

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, DEC 13

THE Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) and the Directorate General of Standards and Metrology (DGSM), continues its concerted efforts to develop the national standards and metrology system in line with the goals of the 10th Five-Year Development Plan and Oman Vision 2040.

These efforts aim to strengthen the national quality infrastructure and enhance the competitiveness of the national economy at both regional and international levels.

This project forms part of an integrated package of initiatives that includes regulating precious metals and valuable stones in local markets, developing the conformity assessment system, activating the role of standards in supporting development sectors through the Omani Standards Store, enhancing technical capabilities in the field of metrology, establishing the Oman Accreditation Centre, further developing the Omani Quality Mark, preparing a national strategy for standardisation and quality for the period 2026 to 2030, and implementing a quality management system in accordance with the international standard ISO 9001.

Imad al Shukaili, Director General of DGSM, stated that the current year marked a significant milestone in the strategic achievements for the period 2025 to 2028. The Sultanate of Oman successfully signed memoranda of understanding with Bahrain, India, Belarus and Tunisia to enhance mutual recognition in the fields of precious metals and conformity assessment.

The Sultanate of Oman has also strengthened its international presence by intensifying its participation in global standardisation organisations, notably the International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO), the International Organisation of Legal Metrology and the Arab Industrial Development, Standardisation and Mining Organisation.

This engagement reinforces Oman’s effective integration into the global quality system and strengthens its international



Nine new national standards were approved under the 2025 plan, alongside the adoption of 1,009 unified GCC standards

standing.

In the area of standards development, Al Shukaili confirmed that the DGSM completed five new national projects covering traditional Omani vessels, frankincense products, cosmetics, energy efficiency for lighting products and smart water metre.

Nine new national standards were approved under the 2025 plan, alongside the adoption of 1,009 unified GCC standards, including 196 standards prepared by the Sultanate of Oman within the same plan.

Key examples include standards for traditional Omani vessels, frankincense products, cosmetics, energy efficient lighting, smart water metres, smart electricity metres, smart water systems, sustainable building materials, packaged food safety and basic medical devices.

These efforts have strengthened Oman’s presence within the Gulf standardisation system, with the number of Omani representatives in Gulf technical committees rising to 170 members, enhancing Oman’s role in shaping and developing unified regional standards.

Regarding conformity assessment, Al Shukaili noted that the Conformity Department continues to streamline procedures for importers and manufacturers. Over 135,000 e-certificates of conformity were issued during the year, in addition to 79 national conformity certificates and 68 ‘To Whom It May Concern’ certificates. — ONA



TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

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

Tender No.	Description	Last Date of Buying	Date of Submission	Grade	Tender Price (OMR)	Bid Bond
NESC/ 2025/038	Provide legal services for Nama Electricity Supply Company & Nama Electricity Distribution for a period of five years.	23/12/2025	05/01/2026	Specialized Companies	525	5000 OMR

The table below shows the instructions for participation: -

Participation	- Companies registered with Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion may obtain Tender documents. - The amount specified above is including 5% VAT. - The amount specified above is Non-Refundable payment (Terms and Condition apply) - To obtain the tender document and payment procedure, please visit https://supply.nama.om, under NESC vendor / E Tender
Enquiries	- Any inquiry can be sent to Tender@supply.nama.om, using the inquiry form found in the tender document (05) Five working days before bid submission date. - Any request for clarification received after the above-mentioned period will not be considered.
Tender Submission	Please follow SUBMISSION OF TENDER and supplier guidelines available at NESC Website https://supply.nama.om, under NESC vendor / E Tender
Guarantee	- The Tender should enclose a bank guarantee or a certified cheque issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman Unconditional and irrevocable and shall be disbursement as soon as it is submitted valid for a period of at least ninety (90) days from the last date of tender submission and addressed to the CHAIRMAN OF MINOR TENDER COMMITTEE, Nama Electricity Supply Company S.A.O.C. - The hard copy of the bid bond should be deposited in the Tender Box at the Nama Electricity Supply Company Main Office at Wilayat Al Seeb, before 10:00 AM on the day specified for bid submission or any extended deadline. - Any tender not accompanied by a Tender Bond shall be rejected.
Terms and Conditions	- The Tender shall be valid for a period of (90) days from the last date of tender submission including any extension thereof. - If the submission date extended, the bank guarantee or a certified cheque shall be extended in accordance with the bid extension date. - NESC is not bound to accept the lowest (or highest) Tenderer. - A certificate confirming a minimum Omanization level of 30% within the organization is obligatory , bidder who fails to submit this certificate will result in exclusion from the tender evaluation process. - Preference of awarding the tender will be given to those bidders who achieved a high percentage of purchasing from Local Products and have a High-level percentage of Omanization - NESC gives priority to award the projects to SMEs companies. - Failure to comply with the instructions in tender document may lead to disqualification.
Incentives and exemptions	- Riyada card holders from Small and Medium Enterprises, are exempted from Tender fees - Riyada card holders from Small and Medium Enterprises, are exempted from bid bond requirements. - Riyada card holders from Small and Medium Enterprises, are exempted from registration fees on business opportunities platform and supplier registration with Nama Group.



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SUPPLY

Nama Electricity Supply Company SAOC
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SHORT TAKES



The event transformed into an exceptional platform that underscores the bank's dedication to its social role, highlighting media as an active partner.

AHLIBANK HOSTS SECOND EDITION OF ITS ANNUAL MEDIA GATHERING

MUSCAT: As part of its commitment to fostering partnerships with the media as a prominent tool for societal development and a key partner in excellence, ahlibank recently hosted its second edition of the annual media gathering at its Head Office in Al Wattayah, welcoming journalists, media outlets and representatives from across Oman.

In this edition, the event transformed into an exceptional platform that underscores the bank's dedication to its social role, highlighting media as an active partner contributing to positive community initiatives with tangible and sustainable impact.

The gathering opened with remarks from Jumana al Hashmi, AGM and Head of Marketing & Corporate Communications, who warmly welcomed the attendees and expressed the bank's pride in its ongoing partnership with the media as a cornerstone for conveying the bank's messages and community initiatives to the public.

Al Hashmi emphasised that the media is not merely a transmitter of information, but a strategic partner that helps shape the banking experience in a dynamic and transparent manner, amplifying the impact of community initiatives on individuals and society as a whole. She also highlighted the pivotal role of media in supporting innovation and encouraging projects based on trust and shared responsibility to build a prosperous and sustainable society.

The event featured a keynote session titled "How One Project Can Build an Entire Creative Economy" delivered by Mohammed al Jabri, CEO of Zamakan Company, who discussed the importance of entrepreneurial projects in driving innovation and building a knowledge-based economy, contributing to the creation of new opportunities and promoting economic and social growth.

As part of the open dialogue, a panel discussion titled "The Role of Media in Enhancing Social Responsibility" was held, featuring Sana bint Abdulrahman al Khanjariyah, Chairperson of Board of Directors of Al Rahma Association; Khalid al Rawahi, Director of the Omar bin Al Khattab Institute for the Blind; Salim al Amri, General Manager of Al Wisal FM; Mohammed al Jabri, CEO of Zamakan Company; and Khalid al Awad, Chief Marketing Officer at Mubashir.

Malabar Gold & Diamonds announces offers for Mine Diamond Festival

MUSCAT: Malabar Gold & Diamonds, the 5th largest jewellery retailer globally with over 415 showrooms across 14 countries, has unveiled exclusive offers as part of their much-awaited Mine Diamond Festival.

As part of the festival, customers can get free cash vouchers on the purchase of diamond or precious gem jewellery.

The limited period offer can be availed across all Malabar Gold & Diamonds showrooms in Oman from December 11, 2025 to January 3, 2026.

As part of the Mine Diamond Festival, customers will be eligible for a free instant cash voucher worth RO 10 for every diamond or precious gem worth RO 300.

The mesmerising collection of diamond jewellery from the Mine brand, crafted



As part of the Mine Diamond Festival, customers will be eligible for a free instant cash voucher worth RO 10 for every diamond or precious gem worth RO 300.

Crowe Oman launches guide on doing business

Crowe Oman's, 'Doing Business in Oman' guide, designed in collaboration with Invest Oman, was launched by Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion on December 8, at a grand ceremony held at the Crowne Plaza Hotel, Al Qurum last Monday.

'Doing Business in Oman' is a comprehensive guide, to support investors and enterprises seeking opportunities within the Sultanate of Oman's rapidly expanding market now in its 12th revised edition.

One of the leading accounting and consulting firms in the Sultanate of Oman, Crowe Oman marked a major milestone as it celebrated its 30th Anniversary of building lasting relationship with clients, regulators, communities and with Oman itself.

The event brought together an eminent gathering of Dignitaries, Ambassadors, Business Leaders, Clients, Partners and alongside the firm's own team, to honour three decades of trust, innovation and sustained progress. Earlier welcoming the dignitaries and guests, Dr Davis Kallukaran expressed deep pride in the firm's remarkable journey, thanking the Government and people of Oman for their trust and support over three decades. He extended his appreciation to clients, partners and employees for their commitment and reaffirmed Crowe Oman's pledge to pursue excellence, innovation and impactful contributions in the years ahead.

The celebration was highlighted by the distinguished presence of Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of



The celebration was highlighted by the distinguished presence of Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, as the Chief Guest and HH Sayyid Hamoud bin Qais Bin Tarik al Said, as the Guest of Honour.

Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, as the Chief Guest and HH Sayyid Hamoud bin Qais Bin Tarik al Said, as the Guest of Honour. The ceremony also featured a heartfelt tribute to the firm's roots through a 'Founders Recognition Ceremony, honouring the visionaries who laid the foundation of the firm.

Long Service Awards' were also bestowed on several team members who have served more than 20 years, reflecting the culture of loyalty and continuity that defines Crowe Oman. Zayd Maniar, Managing Partner, Crowe UAE and Muna al Ghazali, Founding Partner of Crowe Mak Ghazali, also shared their reflections on the milestone. Both expressed gratitude for the enduring

partnerships that have shaped the firm's regional success and emphasised their commitment to enhancing collaboration and amplifying value for clients across the GCC. Antony Kallukaran, Partner tax advisory, proposed the vote of thanks. Established in 1995, Crowe Oman began its journey under the wise leadership of Dr Davis Kallukaran, Muna al Ghazaali and Dr Khalid Maniar. From its modest beginnings, the firm has evolved into a powerhouse with 10 partners and over 100 professionals, offering deep expertise across Audit & Assurance, Taxation, Risk Advisory, Corporate Finance, Technology & Forensic Audits, Telecom, Sustainability, ESG, Hospitality, Travel and Leisure.

National Finance, Divers Planet sign strategic agreement

MUSCAT: National Finance, the Sultanate of Oman's leading finance company, has signed a strategic agreement with Divers Planet, a pioneering provider of eco-friendly boats powered by fuel derived from recycled cooking oil.

The agreement was signed by Jandal bin Hobees al Jandal, Head of FinTech and Impact Financing at National Finance and Yahya al Hooti, Founder and CEO of Divers Planet.

This partnership aims to promote sustainable marine solutions and support customers in accessing flexible financing options for Divers Planet's eco-friendly boats.

The collaboration reflects National Finance's commitment to responsible financing practices that contribute to Oman's transition towards a more resource-efficient and environmentally conscious future, in line with Oman Vision 2040. Commenting on the partnership, Tariq bin



This partnership aims to promote sustainable marine solutions and support customers.

Sulaiman al Farsi, Chief Executive Officer of National Finance, stated: "As global awareness

around environmental responsibility continues to deepen, institutions are increasingly called upon to contribute meaningfully to sustainable progress.

At National Finance, we regard environmental consciousness not as an isolated priority, but as a fundamental principle that shapes how we build long-term value for our stakeholders and the communities we serve.

This agreement demonstrates our belief in partnering with organisations whose purpose and innovations align with our commitment to long-term environmental stewardship. By collaborating with companies such as Divers Planet, whose solutions address real-world ecological challenges, we reaffirm our dedication to supporting initiatives that balance economic advancement with forward-thinking sustainability".

SHORTTAKES



Non-oil merchandise exports rose by 10.3 per cent to RO 5.002 billion, up from RO 4.534 billion.

OMAN POSTS
RO 3.885 BILLION
TRADE BALANCE
BY SEPTEMBER

MUSCAT: Oman's trade balance recorded a surplus of RO 3.885 billion by the end of September 2025, marking a decline of 42 per cent compared to RO 6.743 billion during the same period in 2024, according to preliminary data from the National Centre for Statistics and Information.

Total merchandise exports fell by 9.1 per cent year-on-year to RO 17.182 billion. The decline was largely driven by a 16.5 per cent drop in oil and gas exports, which decreased to RO 10.913 billion from RO 13.071 billion a year earlier.

In contrast, non-oil merchandise exports rose by 10.3 per cent to RO 5.002 billion, up from RO 4.534 billion, highlighting continued progress in economic diversification. Re-exports, however, edged down by 2.6 per cent to RO 1.266 billion.

Merchandise imports increased by 9.3 per cent to RO 13.297 billion by the end of September 2025, compared to RO 12.163 billion in the same period last year, reflecting stronger domestic demand.

The United Arab Emirates remained Oman's top re-export destination, with goods valued at RO 945 million, representing growth of 28.3 per cent.

The UAE also ranked first as a source of re-exports at RO 484 million and as the leading exporter to Oman, with imports worth RO 3.071 billion.

Saudi Arabia ranked second among destinations for Omani non-oil exports at RO 837 million, followed by India at RO 529 million. In re-exports, Iran came second with RO 225 million, followed by Saudi Arabia with RO 113 million. China ranked second among exporters to Oman, with imports valued at RO 1.348 billion, followed by Kuwait at RO 1.151 billion. — ONA

Tourism sector on track
to meet RO 2.6 bn target

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, DEC 13

OMAN'S tourism sector is surging, powered by significant public and private investment and ambitious diversification goals under Oman Vision 2040. The nation's deliberate focus on high-value, sustainable tourism is translating into robust growth in visitor numbers and capital expenditure, cementing its status as a key pillar for future economic stability.

According to the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, the sector's contribution to the national Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is demonstrating a healthy upward trend, hitting 2.7% in 2024 and projected to maintain this level into 2025 (based on preliminary Q1 data).

This momentum builds on a foundation that saw the contribution increase from 1.6% in the years 2020 and 2021; and 2.0% in 2022.

The Sultanate of Oman is aggressively pursuing a target of reaching a 3.5% GDP contribution by 2030, with a longer-term aspiration of 5.3% by 2040. The current forecast for the overall total tourism output is estimated to reach RO 2.1 billion, with the total direct tourism value added estimated at RO 1.1 billion.

The core of this growth is underpinned by massive capital spending, with the total tourism investments during the current Tenth Five-Year Plan (2021–2025) planned to



The sector's contribution to the national GDP is demonstrating a healthy upward trend, hitting 2.7% in 2024.

reach RO 2.6 billion, signalling a strong commitment from the government to transform the industry.

This injection of capital is directly linked to expanding the nation's capacity and appeal. The Sultanate of Oman now boasts an inventory of 1,022 hotels offering a total of 35,331 rooms.

Crucially, a major portion of development is concentrated within Integrated Tourism Complexes (ITCs), which serve as strategic anchors for growth.

Muscat Governorate is the clear leader with 17 ITCs, while the Dhofar Governorate, a major seasonal destination, holds 5. The intentional spread of these large-scale projects is evident in the Al Batinah South Governorate

with 4, Al Sharqiyah South Governorate with 3 and even in geographically important areas like Musandam Governorate and Al Batinah North Governorate, with 2 and 1 ITC respectively.

This targeted, dispersed approach aims to unlock the unique tourism potential of various regions, ensuring a more inclusive economic benefit across the country.

The data on visitor flow highlights the market's dual strength, appealing to both international tourists and a powerful domestic audience. The country is estimated to have attracted 3.9 million Inbound Visitors in 2024, resulting in Inbound Tourism Expenditure of RO 989 million. However, the sheer volume of local travel cannot be

overlooked, with 13.6 million local visitors contributing domestic tourism expenditure of RO 834 million.

The popularity of the Khareef Dhofar Season in Dhofar Governorate remains a strong seasonal driver, recording 1.07 million visitors in the Khareef Dhofar Season 2025. The total number of guests across all accommodation categories reached 4.400 million, reflecting the sector's swift rebound and expansion following global events.

Furthermore, accessibility has seen marked improvement, with 588 charter flights recorded for the 2024/2025 period, facilitating increased direct access, particularly from key European source markets.

Amnah Energy to supply green hydrogen to Oman steel project

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, DEC 13

FOLLOWING through on its pledge to allocate part of its green hydrogen production to hard-to-abate industrial investments — most notably green steel — in Oman, the Amnah Energy consortium, which is developing a gigawatt-scale hydrogen project in Al Duqm, has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Meranti Green Steel, the promoter of a low-carbon iron project at Al Duqm, to collaborate on the supply of clean energy to the latter's investment at the Special Economic Zone.

The pact marks a significant boost to Oman's efforts to localise industries that will benefit from the expected availability of large volumes of green hydrogen in Al Duqm from around 2030.

The Amnah consortium, comprising Copenhagen Infrastructure Partners (CIP), Blue Power Partners and Al Khadra (Hind Bahwan Group), has been awarded the 320 km² land block Z1-01 in Al Duqm to develop 200,000 tonnes of green hydrogen per year, powered by



The proposed offtake solution will align with Oman's green hydrogen infrastructure framework, overseen by Hydrom.

around 4.5 GW of renewable energy.

The concession was secured as part of Oman's first public auction round for integrated hydrogen projects.

Singapore-based Meranti, which plans to develop a 2.5 million tonnes per annum Hot Briquetted Iron (HBI) plant at Al Duqm,

announced on Friday that the two parties will collaborate on a green hydrogen supply-offtake solution.

"Both parties share the objective of designing the most reliable and competitive solution and are strongly aligned on the vision for long-term partnership and decarbonisation of the steel industry", Meranti noted in its announcement.

Andrew Fang, VP Projects & Sustainability at Meranti Green Steel, commented: "Our partnership with Amnah marks an important step in leveraging green hydrogen supply for the production of low-carbon HBI. By progressing both sides of the value chain, we aim to create the scale and certainty required to advance our phased decarbonisation strategy and support Oman's growing green hydrogen ecosystem".

Emily Sykes, Director, CIP Energy Transition Fund, added: "CIP and the Amnah project are committed to enabling Oman's vision for large-scale green hydrogen production.

The collaboration with Meranti is an important step towards building an

integrated value chain that connects world-class renewable resources with industrial decarbonisation at scale.

By supplying green hydrogen for low-carbon HBI and ultimately steel production, we aim to accelerate the global energy transition, create significant economic opportunities and employment; and demonstrate how Oman can become a cornerstone of sustainable industry for decades to come".

The proposed offtake solution, Meranti explained, will align with Oman's green hydrogen infrastructure framework, overseen by Hydrom (the orchestrator of the hydrogen sector), OQ Gas Networks (OQGN) and other national utilities.

By integrating green hydrogen production with committed, long-term onshore industrial offtake, the partnership between Meranti and Amnah Energy helps overcome the challenge of synchronising new hydrogen supply with emerging industrial demand.

The collaboration also advances Meranti's goal of producing cost-competitive, low-carbon HBI for global markets.

FUEL POLICY

Iran lifts fuel prices carefully



Iran has raised the price of subsidised petrol for most users as it seeks to rein in consumption and curb smuggling without fuelling public anger.

From Saturday, most vehicles except ambulances must buy fuel at 50,000 rials per litre, still among the world's cheapest rates. The move revives a long-delayed reform after 2019 price hikes triggered nationwide protests, officials said on state television. — Reuters

CHIP SUPPLY

Nvidia weighs H200 output expansion



Nvidia is considering expanding production of its H200 artificial intelligence chips after demand from Chinese customers exceeded current output. The review follows US decision to allow exports of the processors to China while imposing a 25% levy.

Nvidia said managing its supply chain would ensure China sales do not affect deliveries to US customers, amidst tight global capacity. — Reuters

FARM OUTPUT

China sets new grain record



China's grain output is expected to exceed 714 million tonnes in 2025, setting a new record, official data showed. Production reached 714.88 million tonnes, up 1.2% from a year earlier, supported by larger planted areas and higher yields.

Sown area expanded for a sixth year beyond 119 million hectares, while yields rose 1.1%, according to the National Bureau of Statistics. — ONA

OPINION

The role of CSR in supporting society in Oman



**DR HILAL
AL SAWAI**

The writer is local content, sustainability and innovation expert.

CORPORATE Social Responsibility (CSR) has recently become a vital component in Oman's sustainable development. As Oman diversifies its economy and invests in human development, CSR activities increasingly influence the meeting of social demands, community welfare and Oman Vision 2040 goals.

Today, Public Sector, Private Sector and Voluntary Sector Partnerships work to ensure CSR goes beyond philanthropy to become a socially responsible investment to Oman's future.

Perhaps the most obvious and visible benefit of CSR in Oman is in the area of education and the empowerment of the young. Omani companies, particularly in the energy, banking and telecommunications, sponsor educational scholarship programmes and provide training workshops and support innovation challenges.

These programmes provide students with updated skills for today's job market, including digital skills, entrepreneurial skills and vocational training. Enhanced educational opportunities offered through CSR are directed to the development of a properly and self confident generation who are able to actively participate in the development of the country.

As with education, CSR community impact and support community development and social welfare. Many businesses support

public health, sponsor hospital medical equipment and promote lifestyle disease awareness.

Some businesses also support the construction of housing and community centres, as well as the centres for the physically challenged, for the targeted inclusion of the disadvantaged in the country's development. Such actions enhance the community's social cohesion and solidarity; and improve and social support welfare of the community.

Environmental protection is another important area of CSR. Oman is a country with diverse ecosystems; mountains and wadis and rich sea ecosystems. Many private businesses, as part of their social responsibility and in line with Oman Vision 2040, support and sponsor conservation projects, which include cleaning the beaches, planting trees; and waste reduction and public education.

CSR in Oman has a positive impact and encourages the intelligent and responsible use of resources. This supports the balance of ecosystems and the proper development of tourism in Oman.

CSR activities have also had an impact on the economic empowerment of small and medium enterprises (SMEs). Numerous organisations have extended financial assistance and mentorship and incubation programmes for young business people. They strengthen the aspiring business owner's skill set around marketing, financial administration and invention.

Perhaps the most obvious and visible benefit of CSR in Oman is in the area of education and the empowerment of the young. Omani companies, particularly in the energy, banking and telecommunications, sponsor educational scholarship programmes and provide training workshops and support innovation challenges.

Supporting the SME sector diversifies the economy of the country, and also offers employment opportunities and self-employment for Omani youth.

On top of that, developed economies, civil societies and the marketplace also ascribe direct workplace development to such programmes.

Productivity improvement and the adoption of high positive workplace behaviours are achieved through the safe and ethical construction and engineering of positive workplace environments, coupled with collaboration on employee training.

This internal dimension of CSR anticipates and responds to the need for the competencies to drive the economy to be developed internally.

Most importantly, Oman's government has also provided guiding hands in the efforts of CSR. To obtain measurable effects, Oman encourages companies to embrace their national priorities, as defined in the regulations and national strategies.

Companies are more willing to disclose and report CSR performance, building public confidence and inspiring other companies to responsible behaviours, which is a positive development.

To sum up, CSR has greatly impacted the evolution of the Omani society. Omani society owes the development and sustainability of the Omani society to the active participation of the CSR initiatives in the national growth, education, health, environment, economic empowerment and community welfare.

New materials could boost energy efficiency of microelectronics



**NAJAH
AL RIYAMI**

The writer is a Media and Communication Master's graduate.

MASSACHUSETTS Institute of Technology (MIT) researchers have unveiled a new materials and chip-fabrication approach that could dramatically improve the energy efficiency of future microelectronic devices.

The breakthrough tackles one of computing's chronic problems: the enormous amount of energy wasted as data moves back and forth between logic and

memory components on a chip.

In modern processors, these units are typically placed side-by-side, forcing electrical signals to travel long distances. That journey wastes power as heat and slows performance, especially in data-heavy tasks like artificial intelligence and machine learning.

The MIT team developed a low-temperature method that allows new electronic components to be built directly on top of already-fabricated circuits, enabling true vertical stacking.

This is possible thanks to a new channel material, amorphous indium oxide, which can form high-quality, ultra-thin transistor layers at around 150 °C — a temperature low enough to avoid damaging the silicon circuitry beneath. By stacking components in this way, the distance that signals travel shrinks dramatically, cutting energy losses and boosting overall efficiency.

The researchers also demonstrated memory transistors using a second material, ferroelectric hafnium-zirconium oxide, creating compact devices only about 20 nanometres wide.

These memory elements can switch states in roughly 10 nanoseconds while consuming far less power than comparable technologies. Combining logic and memory so closely in a vertical structure opens the door to “compute-in-memory” architectures, where data can be processed and stored in the same location rather than constantly shuttling across the chip.

As global demand for computing continues to soar, especially from AI, cloud platforms and edge devices, energy use has become a critical bottleneck. Data centres already consume staggering amounts of electricity and without new materials and architectures, the energy cost of computation will become increasingly unsustainable.

According to lead researcher Yanjie Shao, reducing this footprint requires more than incremental improvements; it demands new fabrication platforms that rethink how electronic components are arranged and how they interact.

Predictability has become Oman's new power

COUNTRIES today behave much like investors: they examine data, assess risks and search for opportunities, yet beneath all these calculations lies a deeper concern — whether the partner on the other side behaves predictably. Market size and tariff reductions still matter, but they matter far less than the reliability of a country's economic direction.

This is exactly why Oman's upgrade to investment-grade credit status is more than a financial achievement; it is a public signal that the Sultanate of Oman plans carefully, acts consistently and honours its commitments.

In an era of uncertainty, this is becoming one of the rarest and most valuable traits in global trade.

Free trade agreements are often understood as documents about customs and market access, but in reality, they are long-term agreements of trust.

Governments quietly ask themselves the same questions before signing any deal: Will this partner change its laws suddenly? Will its fiscal policy remain coherent? Can investors commit for ten or twenty years without fear of abrupt shifts? And will the state genuinely uphold what it promises?



Confidence in Oman as a logistics and industrial hub is strengthening and progress on technology and energy-related trade negotiations is accelerating.



**QASIM
AL MAASHANI**

The author is the head of the Business and Politics department at Oman Observer.

unmistakable message that Oman avoids sudden policy swings, manages its finances carefully and completes the reforms it begins. In a world crowded with volatility, such reliability is increasingly rare.

This behavioural consistency has a direct impact on Oman's trade ambitions.

Free trade negotiations tend to favour countries that demonstrate stable fiscal management and long-term vision.

With its new credit standing, Oman enters these discussions from a position of greater credibility. Partners across Asia, Europe and North America will read the upgrade as proof that the Sultanate of Oman will maintain steady policies, offer a predictable regulatory environment and provide a safe foundation for industrial and technological investments.

As global supply chains shift and nations search for stable hubs, Oman's reliability becomes a strategic advantage. Global markets no longer reward unpredictability; they reward discipline.

Some resource-rich or large economies continue to struggle with advanced trade agreements because their policies fluctuate or their institutions lack coherence.

Wealth alone is no longer a guarantee of credibility. Oman, however, has taken a different path.

Through consistent reforms and steady policymaking, it has shown that stability is a deliberate choice, not an accident.

This makes the Sultanate of Oman an attractive destination for digital trade frameworks, hydrogen partnerships, industrial cooperation and investment protection agreements that require multi-decade commitments.

The benefits of Oman's improved credit standing are already visible. More countries are showing interest in broader trade partnerships, foreign investment in ports and free zones is rising, confidence in Oman as a logistics and industrial hub is strengthening and progress on technology and energy-related trade negotiations is accelerating.

Most importantly, Oman is increasingly being recognised as a country that others can build long-term strategies with — a powerful currency in today's uncertain international landscape.

In a world shaped by disruptions, predictability itself has become a form of power. Trade today is driven not only by price or geography, but by the reliability of the partner across the table.

Khazaen Dry Port strengthens trade connectivity in Oman

MUSCAT: Khazaen Dry Port, operated by Asyad Group in partnership with the private sector, has signed a strategic agreement with SSC Consolidation, a leading global provider of less-than-container-load (LCL) and non-operating marine shipping services, to establish an integrated LCL consolidation and distribution centre.

The move strengthens Oman's position as a regional and global logistics hub.

Under the agreement, the customs warehouse at Khazaen Dry Port will serve as a primary hub for unloading and redistributing LCL shipments across the Sultanate of Oman.

This is expected to speed up customs clearance, lower transportation costs and improve supply chain efficiency, while offering businesses more flexible and responsive logistics solutions.

The partnership supports Oman's role as a key trade gateway linking regional



The partnership supports Oman's role as a key trade gateway linking regional and international markets and aligns with Oman Vision 2040 objectives.

and international markets and aligns with Oman Vision 2040 objectives of economic diversification and enhancing supply chain competitiveness for national companies.

SSC Consolidation will expand cargo movement within the local market through direct weekly shipping services connecting Khazaen Dry Port with ports in the UAE, Germany, the United States, Belgium and India.

These connections will provide importers and exporters with more competitive shipping options and broaden Oman's trade network.

As part of the agreement, Khazaen Dry Port will be designated as a final destination on SSC Consolidation's bills of lading within Oman, integrating the port into the company's global logistics network. This is expected to support re-export activity and open new growth opportunities for the national logistics sector.

SSC Consolidation will also leverage Asyad Group's integrated logistics services, including transportation, handling, warehousing and supply chain management,

to implement its operations.

The partnership reflects confidence in Asyad's capabilities and provides efficient access to regional and global markets through Khazaen's modern infrastructure and connectivity to ports, free zones and economic areas.

Al Khattab bin Salem al Maani, Vice President of Commercial Affairs at Asyad Ports and Freezones, said the agreement reinforces Asyad Group's commitment to strengthening Oman's position as a global logistics hub by delivering innovative solutions that enhance supply chain efficiency.

Sheikh Morazuiddin, Sales Director for Asia and the Mediterranean at SSC Consolidation, said the partnership marks a significant step in expanding LCL services to Oman, improving last-mile connectivity and reinforcing the company's global trade network. — ONA

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ART/LIFE



JOYOUS WINTER CONCERT BY MUSCAT SINGERS > 20

HERITAGETALE



MASKAD: OMAN’S HISTORY COMES ALIVE

ARWA AL HASHIMI

In Maskad, Tariq al Mandhari offers readers a journey across time, where Oman’s rich history intersects with human emotion. Far from a conventional historical novel, it immerses readers in late 19th-century Oman, a period of profound shifts following Sultan Said bin Sultan’s death and about the empire between its African and Arabian domains. The novel opens at a pivotal moment in Oman’s history and skillfully moves back in time, revealing the causes and consequences of these transformations.

Through a vivid cast of characters — from historical figures like Saleh bin Ali al Harthy, Shaikh Said bin Khalfan al Khalili and Imam Azan bin Qais, to the everyman Amer bin Jumaa — readers experience the aspirations, struggles and resilience of Omanis navigating a changing world.

What sets Maskad apart is how it brings history to life. The multi-voiced narrative allows each chapter to serve as a window into a character’s world, creating a mosaic that portrays Oman before it became a modern state.

From Suhar to Al Rustaq and from Maskad to Al Buraimi, readers are not just observers — they are participants in the nation’s evolution, feeling the politics, ambitions and intimate human moments that shaped its course.

Critics and readers alike have praised the novel for balancing historical depth with emotional resonance. Maskad is more than a recounting of events; it is a story of courage, loss, loyalty and hope, connecting the past and present.

For anyone seeking to understand Oman’s identity and heritage, it is a literary journey well worth taking.



QUICK FEATURES



MUSEUM
An actor performs during the reopening ceremony of the National Museum housed at the historic Red Castle in Tripoli. — AFP



PREMIERE
An Avatar sign is lit in flames outside the Embassy Theatre during the Australasian premiere of Avatar: Fire and Ash in Wellington. — AFP



CHARITY
Cyclists dressed in festive-themed costumes gather for an annual charity ride called ‘Santa Cruise’, to raise funds for Evelina Children’s Hospital Heart Organisation in London. — Reuters

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



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WHEN YOUR MOUTH TALKS TO YOUR STOMACH



DR MEHATAZ MAQBOOL KHAN,

The writer is a general dentist

We’ve all heard phrases like ‘butterflies in my stomach’ or ‘gut feeling’, but what if your mouth and stomach were truly in constant conversation? As a dentist in Oman, I’ve seen firsthand how oral health reflects — and affects — digestive health.

When you think about or anticipate food, your stomach starts preparing to digest. Conversely, eating while stressed or rushing meals can disrupt digestion. This intricate communication, known as the oral-gut axis, is primarily mediated by the Vagus nerve.

Harmful oral microbes linked to gum disease can travel to the gut, upsetting the delicate microbiome and triggering inflammation, which may worsen chronic digestive conditions. It’s a two-way street: an unbalanced gut can impair nutrient absorption, affecting teeth and gums. Conditions like IBS and GERD may cause mouth ulcers, dry mouth, bad breath, or enamel damage. Oral hygiene is more than cosmetic — it’s a cornerstone of overall health. Regular brushing, flossing, gum care and professional cleaning reduce systemic inflammation and lower chronic disease risk.

Diet also matters. Chew mindfully, eat slowly, avoid high-sugar and processed foods, stay hydrated and include fiber-rich, fermented, or probiotic foods to support both oral and gut health.

Finally, healthcare professionals — dentists, gastroenterologists and general physicians — must recognise the mouth-gut connection. Prioritise oral health as a gateway to your body’s internal wellness: maintain hygiene, monitor gum health, eat mindfully and don’t ignore persistent oral or digestive symptoms.

This can help reduce discomfort and promote better digestion. Stay hydrated and avoid high-sugar or processed foods.

Conversely, diets rich in fiber, as well as fermented or probiotic foods, can nurture beneficial microbes in both the mouth and gut, helping to maintain overall balance.

Dentists, gastroenterologists, and general physicians alike should recognise that oral and gut health are closely linked. As a general dentist, I encourage all to prioritise oral health as a gateway to your body’s internal wellness.



Sicilian cannoli are served at Pasticceria Cappello. — AFP

Italy’s pride grows with Unesco tag

GISELDA VAGNONI

ITALIANS HAILED Unesco’s recognition of their cuisine as a win for cultural diplomacy but critics warned it could backfire by turning popular dishes into bland tourist fare.

The listing could deliver further economic benefits to a country already renowned for its cooking and where the agri-food supply chain accounts for about 15 per cent of the national GDP.

It could also bring some relief to traditional family-run restaurants, long the backbone of Italian dining, which are facing a harsh economic climate in a market increasingly polarised between premium and budget options.

Neapolitan pizza-making’s 2017 Unesco listing drove a 284 per cent jump in professional courses, according to a study by Rome’s Unitelma Sapienza University, while agritourism in the southern Italian island of Pantelleria grew 500% over a decade after its vine cultivation was inscribed in the Unesco list.

“I’m truly happy about this recognition”, said Manuela Menegoni, who runs Trattoria Bianca and Osteria Fernanda in Rome with her chef husband Davide Del Duca.

Industry groups estimate Unesco recognition could boost tourism by up to 8 per cent in two years, adding 18 million overnight stays.

However, researchers warn that such gains often come with overtourism pressures, as seen in Venice and the Prosecco hills in the northeast, where Unesco status has drawn crowds beyond local capacity.

Italy’s historic city centres are increasingly at risk of becoming what critics call gastronomic theme parks. “Bologna has become a ‘mangificio’ (food factory). Checkered tablecloths and straw chairs are everywhere, in an invention of tradition for the benefit of external consumers”, said Alberto Grandi, a food historian and author.

In an interview with Reuters he shared his concern about the risk of food gentrification, a process where traditional, affordable and culturally rooted foods or food practices are transformed into upscale, trendy and often expensive versions.

“If the goal is to save Italian gastronomic culture, it will be the exact opposite”, he said.

“This is a marketing ploy that sells a standardised vision of Italian cuisine linked to a dozen dishes that



A view of pasta dish spaghetti alla carbonara. — AFP



A waiter grates truffle on an egg. — AFP



A chef prepares a traditional pasta Carbonara dish. — Reuters

must be offered everywhere because tourists expect them. This is to the detriment of a deeper understanding of Italian culinary history, which is being lost”, he added.

Restaurant owner Menegoni said that the challenge now is ensuring the accolade strengthens everyday practices rather than feeding into low-budget mass tourism — sandwiches and pizza slices of the kind proliferating during the 2025 Jubilee in Rome.

“There is no single Italian cuisine,



A pizza maker prepares a Pizza Margherita.

but a mosaic of local expressive diversities”, the government said.

From Lombardy’s ossobuco — braised veal shanks with gremolata, to Puglia’s orecchiette con cime di rapa — ear-shaped pasta with turnip greens, each region showcases Italian biodiversity and creativity, it said. Not everyone in Italy supports the bid to join Unesco lists, which already feature almost 800 items including Italian opera singing and truffle hunting.

Alberto Grandi, a food historian, called the Unesco candidacy “just a marketing operation” in an interview with website Mantovauno last month.

In his 2024 book ‘La cucina italiana non esiste’ (‘Italian cuisine doesn’t exist’), Grandi argued that many dishes considered traditional, including pasta alla carbonara, are relatively modern inventions influenced by foreign cultures.

Grandi’s remarks have sparked a backlash from farmers’ association Coldiretti, which called his claims “surreal attacks on national culinary tradition”. — Reuters

FEATURES



JOYOUS WINTER CONCERT BY MUSCAT SINGERS

GEORGINA BENISON

THE MUSCAT SINGERS, now 51-years-old, presented their annual winter concert recently at The Bosch Centre for Performing Arts.

Entitled, 'Joy to the World – A Seasonal Celebration' it surely brought joy to all who packed the auditorium in Ghala to listen to the choir at its very best. The Singers – nearly 60 men and women of diverse backgrounds, ages and musical experience – have gone from strength to strength in recent years. The quality and control of their sound has never been better.

The programme started with Vivaldi's 'Magnificat RV610', a stalwart of the Baroque repertoire in nine movements, conducted by Musical Director, Peter Hawksworth.

The impact of their combined voices in their beautiful rounded sound and excellent intonation was arresting from the beginning. 'Et Exultavit' focused on a trio of voices: soprano Julia Ferloni-Grandval with tenor Arun Alexander and alto Ibtisam Hamed, filling the huge hall.

'Et Misericordia' boasted some tuneful string playing from the Cheltenham Muscat Violin Trio with Tomasz Gniatek creating a solid bassoon continuo.

In quiet sections the choir sang almost acapella, men shining through with tricky chromatic phrases. It led seamlessly to a strong, powerful delivery of the 'Fecit Potentiam' and well-pitched contrapuntal singing in, 'Deposuit Potentes'.

Most sublime was the soprano duet of Elayne Looker and Joanna Brown in the ethereal 'Esurientes'. Accompanied by bassoon with pianist Aline El Khoury during some stunning dry recitative, it was a highlight of the 'Magnificat'.

'Suscepit Israel' was a return to a strident and clear tutti followed by another trio treat: Soprano Ruth Mabry, alto Linda Samadi and bass Peter Hawksworth sung a sweetly blended



'Sicut Locutus Est'. 'Gloria Patri' concluded the work with a slow, chordal section then lovely contrapuntal part-singing, with the altos shining out in the final tutti.

To vary the programme, the violin students performed Mozart's challenging, 'Eine Kleine Nachtmusik' with great aplomb while Clara Schumann's mellow, romantic 'Sommerlust' had some lovely lyrical ensemble playing. Percy Grainger's light, English folksong arrangement of 'Country Gardens' concluded the set with amusing pizzicato passages, reflecting the festive spirit.

The Choir returned on stage for Benjamin Britten's 'Hymn to the Virgin' – at least most did. An Octet of voices echoed this wonderful unaccompanied song from the back of the theatre, creating a delightful acoustic spatial effect.

It was strong with excellent intonation and well-balanced voices. They achieved a warm tonal quality and dynamic contrasts – from poignant 'pianissimo' to huge, dramatic swells – worthy of any professional choir.

'Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas' conducted by Musical Director Rachel Halliday, with its sumptuous jazz harmony, formed the highlight – and conclusion – to Part One.

Tenor soloist, Christoph Mhowdawalla, brought a subtly poignant clarity throughout the song. Peter Warlock's slow unaccompanied 1927 Carol, 'Bethlehem Down' uses melancholic modal harmony

with clashing chromatic inflections.

It was sensitively sung with haunting, breath-taking lyricism. 'Carol of the Bells' – that favourite chestnut – brought out dynamic variation and vocal precision. The rich jazz harmony in Irving Berlin's 'White Christmas' was emphasised under Halliday's baton, allowing the sopranos to shine in the tuneful arrangement.

Bach's unaccompanied Violin Sonata BWV 1001 provided a contrast of timbre, accomplished by the brave Pouya Kamalian. The choir resumed with Robinson's contemporary arrangement of 'In Dulce Jubilo' with its irregular, cross-rhythms bringing passionate interpretations from each section.

Bob Chilcott's 20th century setting of 'Mid Winter' was typical of his inventive style. It was beautifully sung with tender phrasing and attention to its wide dynamic range. 'Christmas Fanfare' by Joseph Martin rung in the festive spirit, rejoicing with this fast, jubilant song.

A surprise syncopated quote of 'Hark the Herald' with running piano bass was followed by an off-beat imperative to 'Rejoice', bringing the formal part of the evening to an end.

The audience was invited to join in three traditional Carols; although the choir is splendid rendition with soprano descant was stunning enough. With such accolades, Muscat Singers' next 'Summer Concert' will be eagerly awaited with baited breath.