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MAN CITY, VILLA SLIP UP IN TITLE CHALLENGE

INBRIEF

MUSCAT NIGHTS ATTRACT 2 MILLION

As many as two million visitors turned up at various venues of Muscat Nights 2026, which was held from January 1 to 31. The events and programmes of the festival provided employment for 500 Omani job-seekers. The integrated vision of the winter festival was realised by hosting 168 events in 24 locations. The events combined entertainment, culture and entrepreneurship, and they proved to be of interest to different segments of society, thanks to the promotional efforts implemented by the Muscat Municipality. Al Qurum Natural Park attracted the highest number of visitors among the seven sites of events of Muscat Nights 2026.

PATIENTS ARRIVE IN EGYPT AS RAFAH CROSSING OPENS

Palestinians cross through the Kerem Shalom crossing from Gaza into Israel on their way out of the Gaza Strip on Monday. — Reuters

Palestinian patients and war-wounded began arriving in Egypt via the Rafah border crossing with the Gaza Strip on Monday, an Egyptian health official said. “They have begun arriving in Egyptian ambulances, accompanied by several escorts,” the official at the border said, speaking on condition of anonymity. “Three ambulances have arrived so far carrying a number of the sick and injured, who were immediately screened upon arrival to determine to which hospital they will be transferred.” SEE ALSO P6

Public Prosecution says caseload rose by 19%

C a u t i o n a g a i n s t c a s e s i n v o l v i n g s o c i a l m e d i a a n d y o u t h

KABEER YOUSUF & MOHAMMED AL BATTASHI

LABOUR CASES rose to 22,309 in 2025, against 12,407 in 2024, as bounced cheque cases shot to 10,482 against 9,699 the previous year, according to the Public Prosecution Department. The Public Prosecution Department disclosed that the total caseload received over the past year (2025) amounted to 55,164, marking a 19-per cent increase from the preceding year. This reflects a rise of 13.7 per cent in felony cases and 19.6 per cent in misdemeanour cases. The caseload comprised 52,553 misdemeanours, 2,593 felonies, and 18 other proceedings encompassing violations and administrative complaints, culminating in a 98.4-per cent completion rate.

During its annual conference held at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre on Monday, the Public Prosecution Department presented a comprehensive overview of key statistics and performance indicators for the year 2025. The review detailed the volume of cases initiated, the corresponding legal measures undertaken, the demographics of the accused, judicial outcomes and the most prevalent categories of crime. The Public Prosecution Department further reported that the number of individuals formally accused in cases during 2025 reached 73,391, representing a significant increase of 24.7 per cent compared to 2024. Of these accused, 89.2 per cent were male, 1.6 per cent were juveniles, and 47.5 per cent were foreign nationals.

MUSCAT HIGHEST Muscat Governorate registered the highest volume of cases at 23,748, followed by Al Batinah North Governorate with 10,744, and Dhofar Governorate with 6,179. In terms of reporting entities, the Royal Oman Police (ROP) was the primary source with 38,270 reports, followed by the Ministry of Labour with 9,198. The Public Prosecution Department’s own electronic services portal submitted 3,996 reports, and the Consumer Protection Authority filed 2,719 reports. The data highlighted that violations of the Labour Law constituted the most frequent offence, with 22,309 recorded crimes. This was followed by cheque bounce cases at 10,482, and breaches of the Foreigners’ Residence Law at 9,493. The department also

Public Prosecution Department officials during the annual conference held at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre on Monday.

TOTAL CASELOAD (2025)
55,164 a 19% increase
Felony (2,593) : 13.7% rise
Misdemeanour (52,553) : 19.6%
Completion rate: 98.4%

HIGHEST CASES

Category	Cases
Muscat	23,748
Al Batinah North	10,744
Dhofar	6,179
Cases from ROP	38,270
Ministry of Labour	9,198
E-services portal	3,996
Cases from CPA	2,719

processed 54,276 cases received through electronic channels, a 19.2-per cent increase from 2024, and achieved an 82-per cent score on the Government Digital Transformation Index, reflecting a 3-per cent year-on-

year improvement. The Public Prosecution Department further detailed that judicial orders issued totalled 307,375, reflecting a 17.5-per cent increase from 2024. In contrast, formal investigation records saw a 4.8-per cent decline, settling at 79,266. Demand for public inquiry services surged remarkably by 133.6 per cent, with an 89.5-per cent fulfilment rate. The aggregate number of court verdicts rose by 4.7 per cent to reach 22,423, comprising 19,176 enforced judgements and 3,247 judgements awaiting execution.

AL AMERAT CASE Concerning the Al Amerat family case, Nasr bin Khamis al Sawaei, the Public Prosecutor, stated that following a comprehensive review of all available information and investigative findings related to the incident, it has been determined that no person or entity bears direct or indirect responsibility for this tragic event. He noted the appointment of 73 specialised investigators for juvenile delinquency cases, each having completed rigorous training and qualification programmes to ensure proficient management of such sensitive matters. He said the constitutional guarantee of freedom of expression while underscoring that any expression transgressing legal boundaries or impacting public order will be subject to judicial accountability. **TURN TO P2**

Moringa, a potential weapon against cancer cells: SQU study

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, FEB 2

A recent study at Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) has explored the potential of moringa leaves as a natural agent in combating cancer cells, shedding new light on the plant’s possible therapeutic role. The research was conducted by a multidisciplinary team from the College of Medicine and Health Sciences and the College of Agricultural and Marine Sciences, in collaboration with private sector companies, and was led by Dr Shadia hint Mohammed al Bahlani from the College of Medicine and Health

Sciences. Humans have long relied on medicinal plants in the fight against disease, including cancer. Over the past two decades, numerous studies have examined the properties of the moringa tree. Despite this growing body of research, questions have remained regarding how moringa leaf extract directly influences programmed cancer cell death, known as apoptosis. Addressing this question, the research team investigated the effects of moringa leaf extract on different types of cancer cells. The study involved contributions from Dr Eithaar al Barwani, Dr Samiya al Jaaidi, Dr Jamal al Sabahi and Dr

Over the past two decades, numerous studies have examined the properties of the moringa tree.

Azzah al Hashmi, and focused on evaluating both the cytotoxic effects of the extract and its ability to induce apoptosis. The study had two main objectives: to assess the impact of moringa leaf extract on breast, ovarian and gastric cancer cells, and to analyse its potential to function as an anti-cancer agent. Preliminary findings revealed encouraging results. Higher concentrations of moringa leaf extract were associated with a significant reduction in cancer cell viability, alongside a noticeable decrease in the cells’ ability to form colonies. Gastric cancer cells showed a stronger response and greater

sensitivity to the extract compared with breast and ovarian cancer cells. Although the concentrations required to achieve 50 per cent inhibition of cell growth (IC50) varied among the different cancer types, the overall findings pointed to a positive trend in moringa’s therapeutic potential. The study further demonstrated that moringa leaf extract may act as an inhibitor of cancer cell proliferation and a trigger for programmed cell death. However, the researchers stressed that further laboratory-based studies and animal experiments are necessary to confirm these findings and to extend the research to other types of cancer.

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SHORT TAKES



OMANI-EMIRATI
JOINT PANEL HOLDS
MEETING

ABU DHABI: In compliance with the directives of the wise leaderships of the Sultanate of Oman and the sisterly United Arab Emirates (UAE) and in continuation of efforts aimed to enhance joint cooperation in various fields, the Follow-up Committee of the Joint Omani-Emirati Supreme Committee convened its periodic meeting in Abu Dhabi on Monday.

The committee discussed and approved a number of topics of mutual interest to achieve the aspirations of the people of the two brotherly countries. — ONA

PUBLIC PROSECUTION
CASELOAD UP BY 19%

FROM PI

Regarding the proliferation of certain behaviours on social media deemed inconsistent with authentic Omani values, traditions and public decorum, the Public Prosecutor emphasised the family’s foundational role in safeguarding youth. He articulated that societal responsibility extends beyond official institutions, originating within the domain of familial oversight and sound upbringing, which serve as the primary defence against delinquency and criminal behaviour. He clarified that prosecution records disclose a series of disquieting incidents, including cases of child harassment, multiple instances of verbal and physical aggression, and the exploitation of minors for begging or their transfer to third parties for exploitative purposes.

He emphasised that a failure to safeguard this vulnerable demographic will yield profound and enduring repercussions, potentially undermining societal cohesion and stability for decades to come. He urged against attributing such shortcomings to the notion of ‘personal freedom,’ asserting that the paramount investment — one which cannot be procured with currency — lies in the conscientious upbringing and vigilant oversight of the nation’s youth.

MONEY LAUNDERING
He further disclosed that money laundering cases recorded in 2025 totalled 193. Of these, 18 are under active investigation, 126 have been formally referred to the judiciary and 49 cases have been archived. He highlighted a persistent escalation in fraud-related offences despite ongoing public warnings, noting that the core of this criminal activity rests upon the sale of false promises and the pursuit of illusory profits.

Dr Ahmed bin Said al Shukaili, Assistant Public Prosecutor, said that pretrial detention is an exceptional measure linked strictly to investigative procedures and is only used when necessary. He added that authorities strive to strike a careful balance between protecting the public interest and safeguarding the rights of all parties involved.

In a separate statement, Dr Rashid bin Obaid al Kaabi, Assistant Public Prosecutor and official spokesperson for the Public Prosecution Department, addressed procedural matters, stating: “Pre-trial detention is a principal investigative instrument, employed exclusively in circumstances of necessity to ensure the integrity of judicial proceedings. We adhere to proportionate measures that guarantee a just inquiry, refraining from unwarranted severity, particularly in such contexts.”

OMAN,
TATARSTAN
DISCUSS
COOPERATION
IN RELIGIOUS
AFFAIRS

MUSCAT: Dr Mohammed bin Said al Maamari, Minister of Awqaf and Religious Affairs, received Rustam Minnikhanov, Head of the Republic of Tatarstan, as part of his current visit to Oman.

During the meeting, the two sides reviewed bilateral relations between the Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of Tatarstan, exploring avenues to enhance them in areas of mutual interest, particularly in the fields of endowments (Awqaf) and religious affairs.

The discussions included the exchange of expertise in managing



Dr Mohammed bin Said al Maamari holds talks with Rustam Minnikhanov.

endowment institutions and the promotion of dialogue and cultural and religious cooperation,

building upon the dialogues and consultations held in the Republic of Tatarstan last November. — ONA

Call for extra caution during
desert and camping trips

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, FEB 2

THE Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority (CDAA) renewed its call for families to exercise extra caution during desert and camping trips, urging close supervision of children, the designation of clear assembly points, regular checks around campsites and adherence to safety guidelines in wide, open desert areas.

This came up when an eight-year-old child was found safe and in good health in the Bidiyah desert after an intense eight-hour search operation that united rescue teams, aerial support and local residents in a shared mission driven by hope and compassion.

The Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority (CDAA) said its teams in Al Sharqiyah North Governorate responded promptly after receiving a report that the child had gone missing in a desert area.

A coordinated search was immediately launched, involving ground patrols, Royal Oman Police units, ROP Aviation and volunteers from the surrounding community.

Despite fear, exhaustion and the harsh desert sun, the child showed remarkable courage, walking an estimated 15 kilometres across open terrain in the hope of reaching a populated area.

He was eventually located alive and in



An eight-year-old child was safely reunited with family after a 15-km desert walk recently.

reassuring condition after continuous search efforts that combined field operations, aerial reconnaissance and real-time monitoring from operations rooms.

A spokesperson for the CDAA said the operation reflected a deep sense of shared responsibility, noting that all those involved searched with constant determination until the child was found.

“Many of the rescuers felt as though

they were searching for their own child,” the spokesperson said, underscoring the strong human bond that drove the operation to a successful conclusion. The authority praised the child’s family for their close cooperation and timely provision of information, stressing that the positive outcome highlighted the importance of integration between official rescue services and community support.

Chinese community in Oman marks spring festival

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, FEB 2

The Chinese community in Oman, led by the Chinese Embassy in Oman, held a Spring Festival garden reception at the Diplomatic Club in Muscat on Sunday to mark the arrival of spring and the Chinese New Year.

Over 500 guests, including ministerial and diplomatic representatives, gathered to celebrate the Chinese New Year of the Horse.

In his address, Ambassador Lyu Jian extended festive greetings to the guests and highlighted the significance of “Harmony” during the Spring Festival. He explained that “Harmony” symbolises the Chinese people’s wishes for family harmony, national prosperity, harmonious relations between countries, and global peace and development.



Over 500 guests, including ministerial and diplomatic representatives, gathered to celebrate the Chinese New Year of the Horse.

Ambassador Lyu Jian praised the progress made in the Oman-China strategic partnership over the past year. He emphasised the deepening of political mutual trust under the strategic guidance of President Xi Jinping and His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik.

The implementation of outcomes from the first China-Arab States Summit, China-

GCC Summit, and the 10th Ministerial Meeting of the China-Arab States Cooperation Forum is progressing comprehensively, with strong momentum in cooperation across energy and minerals, economy and trade, investment, new energy, technological innovation, and people-to-people exchanges.

The reception venue was

decorated with traditional festive elements such as red lanterns, Chinese knots and “Fu” characters. Attendees of all ages had the opportunity to experience traditional Chinese culture by making dumplings, practicing calligraphy, creating paper-cuts, and watching tea ceremonies and martial arts performances.

A photo exhibition showcasing Xinjiang’s achievements highlighted the region’s accomplishments in multi-ethnic harmony, clean energy development, its role as a core area of the Belt and Road initiative, and ecological projects like desertification control. The Poplar Art Troupe from Xinjiang performed wonderful song and dance numbers, allowing guests to appreciate the vibrant development and diverse cultural charm of China’s Xinjiang.

SHORT TAKES



The forum was held under the auspices of Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, OPAZ Chairman.

SAMAYIL ECONOMIC FORUM BEGINS IN AL DAKHILIYAH

SAMAYIL: The 3rd Samayil Economic Forum began on Monday in the Wilayat of Samayil, Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, under the theme ‘The Role of Local Content in Enhancing Economic Diversification and Job Creation.’

The event features participation from various government and private entities, entrepreneurs, and local and international investors, as part of the growing economic momentum in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate and its role in attracting specialised developmental initiatives that support the national and local economies.

The opening of the forum was held under the auspices of Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Chairman of the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ).

Mohammed bin Khamis al Hosni, Member of Majlis Ash’shura, Representative of the Wilayat of Samayil, and Chairman of the Forum’s Organising Committee, noted that the forum is characterised by renewal and diversity, with guests participating from various countries around the world, which will assist in bolstering the national economy through innovative projects. — ONA

‘Teach to reach expanding possibilities’



As a prelude to the exhibition, the CSE organised a ceremony on Monday in the presence of dignitaries and ambassadors, formally announcing the event.

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
MUSCAT, FEB 2

The Care and Special Education (CSE), a specialised institution under Indian School Muscat, successfully hosted the Curtain Raiser Programme, ‘Teach to Reach – Expanding Possibilities’.

As a prelude to the exhibition, the CSE organised a ceremony on Monday in the presence of dignitaries and ambassadors, formally announcing the event and its objectives under the auspices of HH Sayyidah Zawan bint Fahar al Said who highlighted the CSE’s strong commitment to inclusive and individualised education, serving children from multiple nationalities, including Oman, India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Sudan, Nigeria and the Philippines. Special attention and importance are given to every child, ensuring personalised care and support based on individual learning needs.

Speaking to the media, Sayyidah Zawan said, “It is an extremely important field of education. Even today, in the developed countries, there are not enough schools to support children with

learning disabilities and who need special care. Even parents do not recognise that until the children are about 10 years old. And it is phenomenal that we have a centre right here in Oman. It will be nice to see the centre expand to other governorates.”

A key highlight of the programme was the confident and inspiring performances by CSE students, which reflected their abilities, progress and the nurturing environment provided by the institution, including a short film that went for the Indian School Film Festival.

Speaking on the occasion, Ramakrishna Gowdgere, President of CSE, stated, “At CSE, we believe that every child matters. Our aim is to create an inclusive space where diversity is celebrated, abilities are nurtured, and each child is empowered to reach their fullest potential.” The Care and Special Education (CSE), a specialised centre under the umbrella of Indian Schools in Oman, dedicated to empowering children with special needs, is to hold its Annual Exhibition 2026, titled “Teach to Reach – Expanding

Possibilities’, scheduled to be held on Saturday, February 7 and Sunday, February 8, at the CSE premises, Indian School Muscat.

The spokesperson from the Board of Directors stated, “This ceremony reflects the Board’s unwavering commitment to inclusivity where every child at CSE is empowered to learn, grow and belong with dignity. Through this initiative, the Board reaffirms its vision of an education system that measures success not by limitation, but by care, opportunity and shared humanity.” The exhibition aims to create awareness about the importance of adaptive devices, assistive aids and innovative teaching-learning practices in the field of special education. The event will showcase how thoughtfully designed educational and therapeutic interventions can enhance independence, functional competence and confidence among children with special needs.

A key highlight of the exhibition is expected to be the display of student work, adaptive learning tools, therapy aids, vocational training initiatives.

Fiber Connect Council MENA conference opens

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, FEB 2

THE 15th Annual Fiber Connect Council MENA Conference and Exhibition commenced on Monday in Muscat, reaffirming Oman’s growing role as a regional hub for digital infrastructure dialogue and innovation. The event brings together regional and international leaders to examine the accelerating development of fiber-optic infrastructure and its expanding integration with artificial intelligence technologies.

Organised by the Fiber Connect Council MENA in partnership with Oman Broadband Company as the host organisation, the conference is held under the auspices of HH Sayyid Dr Adham bin Turki al Said.

The gathering reflects increasing regional interest in next-generation digital infrastructure as a key driver of economic growth and competitiveness.

More than 270 policymakers, industry leaders, regulators and technology experts from across the Middle East, North Africa, and beyond are participating in the event.

Discussions focus on the latest advancements in fiber-optic networks, their convergence with artificial intelligence, and the strategic role these technologies play in accelerating digital transformation and enhancing service delivery across multiple sectors.

In a statement to the media, HH Sayyid Dr Adham bin Turki al Said emphasised that hosting the conference aligns with Oman’s



The 15th Annual Fiber Connect Council MENA Conference and Exhibition commenced on Monday.

national efforts to strengthen its digital infrastructure and enhance the readiness of the national economy for future demands.

He noted that fiber-optic networks form a cornerstone of digital transformation, enabling innovation, attracting investment, and improving the efficiency and quality of services, in line with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040.

He further stressed that specialised conferences serve as strategic platforms for exchanging expertise, showcasing global best practices, and fostering collaboration between the public and private sectors.

Such engagements contribute to enhancing Oman’s regional and international competitiveness in telecommunications, information technology and digital infrastructure development.

Highlighting the importance of cross-border collaboration, Ahmed al Hassani, Member of the Board of Commissioners at the Iraqi Communications and Media Commission, underscored the need for stronger regional coordination.

Eng Sultan bin Ahmed al Wahaibi, CEO, Oman Broadband Company, said the company’s participation as a supporting partner reflects its national mandate to lead the implementation of Oman’s digital infrastructure strategy.

He affirmed that fiber-optic networks represent the backbone of the digital economy and are fundamental to enabling advanced digital services, smart applications and artificial intelligence solutions.

Dr Alaa Mousa, Chairman of the Fiber Connect Council MENA and Chief Executive Officer of Earthlink – Iraq, noted that advanced economies continue to strengthen their positions as global digital hubs through sustained investment in fiber infrastructure.

The opening ceremony featured a keynote address titled ‘The Role of Policy and Regulation in AI Infrastructure,’ delivered by Eng Mahmoud al Zadjali, Senior Director of Governance and Risk Management at Oman’s Telecommunications Regulatory Authority.

Nasser bin Mubarak al Hinai, Deputy Chief Executive Officer of Oman Broadband Company, said hosting the conference in Oman represents a significant value addition, bringing together experts and specialists from more than 30 countries and providing an important platform to showcase Oman’s experience in fiber-optic development.

Digital Private School Students Advance from Local Round of the World Scholar’s Cup

From Local to Regional: DPS Students Advance at the World Scholar’s Cup



DIGITAL Private School (DPS), an IB World School, proudly celebrates the participation of DPS students who represented the school at the recent local round of the World Scholar’s Cup 2026 Muscat, demonstrating confidence, teamwork, and academic excellence across debate, collaborative writing, and talent challenges.

Following their strong performance, several DPS teams have been invited to advance to the regional round, marking a significant achievement and reflecting the students’ preparation, perseverance, and collaborative spirit.

The World Scholar’s Cup is a globally recognized academic program designed to develop critical thinking, communication skills, creativity, and global awareness. DPS students’ participation highlights the school’s commitment to experiential learning and international academic exposure beyond the classroom.

Digital Private School is a sister institution of the Modern College of Business and Science,

with both institutions operating under the same ownership and sharing a commitment to academic excellence, global engagement, and lifelong learning.

Commenting on the achievement, Ms. Elizabeth Craig, Principal of Digital Private School, said: “We are extremely proud of our students for their enthusiasm, confidence, and teamwork at the World Scholar’s Cup. Opportunities like this allow our learners to challenge themselves, grow academically, and engage with the world beyond the classroom. Advancing to the regional round is a wonderful achievement, and we look forward to supporting our students as they continue their journey.”

The school extends its appreciation to its educators and leadership team for their continued support in encouraging student participation in international academic platforms. Such experiences play a vital role in nurturing well-rounded, confident learners and fostering a culture of excellence.

Digital Private School remains committed to empowering its students through meaningful academic opportunities that inspire curiosity, leadership, and global citizenship.



SPOTLIGHT

BALQEES
AL ORAIMI

As Oman prepares to welcome the holy month of Ramadhan, the Wilayat of Sur comes alive with the annual celebration of Sha'baniyah, a cherished folk tradition that continues to reflect the depth of Omani social values and the enduring bond between generations.

Observed on the eve of mid-Sha'ban, Sha'baniyah is a long-established custom across many wilayats.

In Sur, however, the occasion carries a distinctive charm, where heritage, community cohesion and childhood joy come together in a simple yet meaningful celebration.

From the afternoon until sunset, children move through their neighbourhoods in small groups, dressed in traditional attire, carrying cloth bags as they chant familiar folk songs and knock on doors. Residents warmly welcome them with sweets and treats. Beyond its festive spirit, Sha'baniyah represents an important social practice that reinforces values of generosity, solidarity and neighbourly connection. It offers children an early cultural introduction to the spirit of sharing and social responsibility — principles deeply rooted in Omani identity and closely linked to the approaching holy month.

Parents in Sur stress the importance of preserving such traditions amid rapid social and technological change. Ahmed bin Salem al Araiimi, a parent from Sur, highlighted the broader meaning of the occasion.

“Sha'baniyah is not merely a celebration for children; it is a social and educational experience. It teaches our children respect, appreciation and the importance of community bonds — values we strive to pass on to future generations,” he said.

Maryam bint Khamis al Farsi, another parent, pointed to the emotional impact of the day on children.

“The joy our children feel on Sha'baniyah is genuine and pure. It gives them a sense of belonging and connects them to their cultural roots in a very natural way. These moments stay with them long after the sweets are gone,” she said.

For Sur's young residents, Sha'baniyah remains one of the most anticipated days of the year. Nine-year-old Saif bin Hamad al Suri shared his excitement as he prepared to join his friends. “I love Sha'baniyah because we wear our traditional clothes, sing together and visit our neighbours. It feels like the whole neighbourhood is happy,” he said.

Rashid bin Mazen al Ghailani, 8, echoed the sense of unity the day brings. “We wait for Sha'baniyah every year. We go out together, laugh and collect sweets. The best part is being with my friends and seeing everyone smile,” he said.

Seven-year-old Lulwa bint Nasser al Suri described her own simple joy. “I like collecting the sweets and going home to sort them with my mother. I also share them with my sisters,” she said.

What distinguishes Sha'baniyah in Sur is the community's collective effort to maintain the tradition in an orderly and respectful manner. Families guide children to observe proper behaviour, ensure their safety while moving between houses, and remind them of the values behind the celebration rather than focusing solely on material rewards.

Culturally, Sha'baniyah also serves as a social prelude to Ramadhan, nurturing a spirit of generosity and togetherness that mirrors the essence of the holy month. In this way, the tradition plays a subtle yet vital role in preparing younger generations for the spiritual atmosphere of fasting, charity and compassion.

Despite modern lifestyles and changing social patterns, Sha'baniyah continues to thrive in Sur, demonstrating the resilience of Omani heritage and the community's commitment to safeguarding its intangible cultural practices. As children's voices fill the streets and doors open in welcome,

Sha'baniyah once again affirms that cultural heritage is not only preserved in museums or history books, but lived — joyfully and collectively — in the heart of the community.

PARENTS IN SUR STRESS THE IMPORTANCE OF PRESERVING SUCH TRADITIONS LIKE SHA'BANIYAH AMID RAPID SOCIAL AND TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGE

SHA'BANIYAH
SPARKS
JOY
BEFORE
RAMADHAN

SHORT TAKES



The Iraqi delegation studied Oman's social protection reform as part of their visit.

SPF SHOWCASES REFORM TO IRAQI DELEGATION

MUSCAT: A technical delegation from the Republic of Iraq has concluded a three-day study tour in Muscat, examining Oman's experience in advancing comprehensive social protection reform. The visit, held from January 26 to 28, was hosted by Social Protection Fund (SPF) and facilitated by Unicef, with support from the European Union and in collaboration with the World Food Programme (WFP) and the International Labour Organization (ILO) in Iraq.

The exchange comes as Iraq steps up work on its next National Social Protection Strategy, aimed at building a more inclusive, integrated and fiscally sustainable system to better support children, families and vulnerable groups across the life cycle.

The Iraqi delegation, comprising 15 senior officials from key ministries, explored the legal, institutional, programmatic and financial pillars underpinning Oman's social protection reform.

"Learning from Oman's experience will help strengthen Iraq's reform pathway and improve coordination across social protection programmes," said Dr Maha Abdul Kareem, Head of the Iraqi Delegation. "This exchange supports our commitment to building a coherent system that delivers more effective and equitable outcomes for children and vulnerable families in Iraq."

Oman's reform marks a major shift towards a unified, lifecycle-based approach to social protection. Through the establishment of the SPF, Oman has consolidated programmes under a comprehensive national framework designed to expand coverage, improve benefit adequacy, promote disability inclusion and use digital systems to enhance efficiency, transparency and service delivery. Over the three days, discussions centred on transitioning towards a lifecycle-based and rights-based social protection model, with particular emphasis on strengthening linkages between social assistance, security and labour.

COMMUNITY FITNESS CHALLENGE SET FOR FEBRUARY 7



MUSCAT: A public fitness challenge aimed at bringing movement into everyday community life will take place on Saturday, February 7, at Souq es Sabt, Ras Al Hamra Golf Club (PDO) from 8:30 am to 1 pm. The event is part of a health-focused initiative being rolled out by the Global Shapers Muscat Hub under its Shapers4Health platform.

Known for attracting families, residents, entrepreneurs and local talent, Souq es Sabt provides what organisers describe as an ideal setting to make exercise more visible, accessible and inclusive.

The Shapers4Health Challenge is a team-based activation designed to promote movement, fitness and healthier lifestyles in a fun and engaging format. Around 60 participants, evenly divided between men and women, are expected to take part. The challenge will be conducted by Khanjar Fitness Oman and is open to the public free of charge. Participants will rotate through dynamic, full-body activities focusing on endurance, strength and teamwork.

In addition to the challenge, the programme will feature physiotherapist-led warm-up and mobility sessions, live fitness demonstrations and interactive engagement activities. Dedicated health and wellness stations will provide guidance on nutrition, hydration and general well-being.

The initiative is supported by several community partners. Souq es Sabt is the venue partner, while Khanjar Fitness serves as challenge activation partner. Fayha Fresh Delights and Sprouts are refreshment partners, Tanafus is the strategic technology partner, and FrostFitness is a supporter partner. Airflex and Protein House will provide gifts for challenge winners.

SQU and Hong Kong University explore collaboration

MUSCAT: A high-level delegation from the Education University of Hong Kong, led by its President Prof John Lee Chi-Kin, visited Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) on Monday to strengthen academic ties and explore avenues for collaboration.

The delegation was received by HH Sayyid Dr Fahd bin Al Julanda al Said, Vice-Chancellor of SQU, in the presence of deans, academics and university officials.

Welcoming the delegation, His Highness the Vice-Chancellor presented an overview of SQU,



President Prof John Lee Chi-Kin from the Education University of Hong Kong during his visit to SQU.

tracing its historical development and its national role in higher education. He highlighted the University's contribution to promoting and preserving Omani culture, alongside its academic growth and expanding research profile.

His Highness outlined SQU's academic structure, including

Sohar Festival 2026 wraps up after showcasing culture

SIHAM AL SAIDI
SUHAR, FEB 2

THE FOURTH edition of the Sohar Festival concluded on a high note, leaving widespread satisfaction among residents of Al Batinah North and reinforcing the festival's reputation as one of Oman's most significant cultural and community events.

With strong attendance, diverse programming, and measurable economic and social impact, the festival has successfully turned entertainment into a platform for national engagement and local pride.

This year's festival featured more than 60 major events and 1,180 diverse programmes, attracting approximately 507,000 visitors from Oman and abroad.

Digital engagement also reached new heights, with over 11 million views across social media platforms, extending the festival's impact far beyond Suhar.

Beyond entertainment, the festival generated tangible economic benefits, creating 416 part-time job opportunities and enabling the participation of 173 productive families through 177 small and medium enterprises. These outcomes boosted household incomes and encouraged entrepreneurship, linking cultural



The fourth edition of the Sohar Festival concluded on Saturday.

celebration with sustainable development.

Mohammed bin Sulaiman al Kindi, Governor of Al Batinah North, praised the collective effort behind the event, noting that the Sohar Festival has become "a national platform that goes beyond entertainment to directly engage with the community."

He highlighted the high level of organisation, security, and cooperation among government bodies, private institutions, civil society organisations, and volunteers, emphasising the festival's role in fostering social cohesion and local development.

Parents across the governorate expressed pride in the festival's inclusive, family-friendly

atmosphere. Ali al Hosni, a parent of two, described the festival as "a space where heritage meets modern life," adding, "I felt reassured seeing my children engage with Omani traditions in a joyful and educational environment. The festival didn't just entertain them — it connected them to their identity."

Om Abbas al Ajmi from Al Khabourah emphasised the festival's social impact: "The diversity of activities meant every family member found something meaningful. It brought us together and gave our children positive memories rooted in our culture."

Khalid al Balushi, a father of three, lauded the festival's organisation: "The facilities, lighting, parking and services showed clear planning. We felt comfortable staying for long hours, which families truly appreciate."

Improvements to infrastructure, expanded walkways, enhanced lighting, increased parking and upgraded public facilities all contributed to a smooth visitor experience, allowing the festival to efficiently accommodate large crowds. As the curtain falls on its fourth edition, the Sohar Festival stands as a symbol of collective success — celebrating culture, empowering communities and reflecting the genuine joy of Al Batinah North's citizens.

Pelican sighting marks first appearance since 2019

LIJU CHERIAN
@lijuchermanoman

For a brief but memorable spell, three wandering pelicans - unseen in Salalah since 2019 - transformed the calm waters of Dahreez lagoon into a scene of quiet wonder, drawing residents, photographers and nature lovers to the shoreline.

The rare sighting began as an ordinary afternoon for Dr S M Ziaul Haque, a cardiologist at Salalah Heart Centre and an avid wildlife photographer. While driving his daughter to swimming lessons, he noticed unusually large birds circling above the lagoon.

At first, he assumed they were ospreys or eagles, species more familiar to the region. A closer look - and a photograph - revealed otherwise. "At first I thought it must be an eagle, but when I saw the photo properly, I realised - these are pelicans. It felt like nature had given us a surprise," he said.

News of the birds spread quickly, and small groups of residents gathered at a respectful distance along the



Dr Ziaul Haque (Right) captured the rare pelican on his camera in Salalah.

khors as the pelicans moved deeper into the lagoon.

Dr Zia remained for hours, observing their behaviour from his car as the birds glided across the water, dipped their bills to feed and settled as evening fell.

Under streetlights, the large birds could be seen swimming silently, their pale bodies glowing against the dark lagoon. Before dawn the following morning, just after prayers, Dr Zia returned, finding the three pelicans resting mid-water as the first sunlight broke across the surface.

Pelicans are migratory birds that often escape extreme cold temperatures by moving toward relatively warmer regions such as the Middle East. Many populations travel from parts of Europe along routes that extend toward the Indian subcontinent.

They typically remain at favourable stopover locations for two to three weeks, depending on food availability and weather conditions.

This year, the birds were also sighted near Mirbat, east of Salalah, where they reportedly stayed for only two days before moving on - too brief a window for many observers to document them.

Their short stay in Salalah



similarly suggested a transient pause in a much longer journey.

One bird slowly stirred, stretching and opening its large throat pouch in a display that briefly eclipsed the observer is instinct to reach for his camera. The quiet rhythm of their movements contrasted sharply with the pace of life beyond the lagoon.

After about a day, the pelicans disappeared from the khor and were later spotted at sea. One briefly returned alone before eventually departing again, continuing its migratory path.

Beyond their striking size and graceful presence, pelicans play a vital ecological role.

As top predators, they regulate fish populations by removing weak or diseased prey, maintaining balance in aquatic ecosystems.

Their nutrient-rich droppings fertilise coastal vegetation and support marine food chains, while scientists regard them as environmental indicators, as their health reflects changes in water quality, pollution levels and climate patterns.

WORLD

SHORT TAKES



Philippine Vice-President Sara Duterte

IMPEACHMENT COMPLAINTS FILED AGAINST V-P SARA

MANILA: Philippine civil society leaders and members of a left-wing coalition filed impeachment complaints against Vice-President Sara Duterte on Monday, restarting a process sidelined by the country’s Supreme Court last year. Both cases accuse Duterte of misusing public funds during her term as education secretary, while one revives allegations that she threatened to assassinate former ally president Ferdinand Marcos. The filings come on the same day that a committee in the House of Representatives was to begin hearings into impeachment complaints against Marcos, accused of corruption tied to a spiralling scandal over bogus flood control projects. Under the Philippine constitution, an impeachment by the House triggers a Senate trial, where a guilty verdict means expulsion from office and a lifetime ban on political service. Duterte, daughter of former president Rodrigo Duterte, is widely considered a potential presidential candidate in 2028. “It’s about time that VP Sara must be held accountable,” Representative Leila de Lima, who endorsed one of the fresh complaints, said on Monday. “The complaint basically... raises the same grounds as the previous complaint, just much condensed and streamlined.” — AFP

EVACUATION WARNINGS ISSUED IN LEBANON



Lebanese army soldiers secure the site of a drone attack that targeted a vehicle on the road of the southern Lebanese village of Ansariyeh. — AFP

TEL AVIV: Israel’s military warned on Monday it would soon strike Hizbullah targets in southern Lebanon, issuing evacuation warnings for buildings in two villages. The army “will, in the near future, strike military infrastructure belonging to the Hizbullah organisation, in response to its prohibited attempts to rebuild its activities in the area,” its Arabic-language spokesman Avichay Adraee wrote on X, telling residents of certain buildings in Kfar Tibnit and Ain Qana “to evacuate them immediately”. The Israeli military on Sunday said it “eliminated” a Hizbullah engineering commander in southern Lebanon. “Eliminated: Ali Dawoud Amich, who served as a head of division in Hizbullah’s engineering department,” the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) said in a social media post. “Ali was involved in attempts to rehabilitate Hizbullah’s infrastructure in the Al Dweir area in southern Lebanon and advanced attacks against IDF troops, constituting a violation of the understandings between Israel and Lebanon.” — AFP

PAY DISPUTE

Public transport strike hits Germany



Public transport across Germany ground to a halt in a strike called by one of the country’s biggest unions in a dispute over pay and conditions. Bitter winter weather and icy surfaces in many parts of the country mean that alternatives for commuters, such as walking or cycling, are more hazardous than usual. The Verdi union is pushing for shorter shifts for public transport workers and higher premiums for working evenings and weekends. — AFP

TROPICAL CYCLONE KILLS 7 IN MADAGASCAR

A tropical cyclone that hit Madagascar at the weekend killed seven people and forced more than 20,000 to leave their homes, authorities said on Monday.

Cyclone Fytia, packing gusts of up to 210 kilometres per hour, hit the Indian Ocean island early on Saturday and left early on Sunday.

One of the seven people confirmed dead was killed in the capital, Antananarivo, while another person was still missing after being swept away by a swollen river,



the BNGRC disaster management agency said.

More than 20,000 people had to leave their homes, it said.

Fytia was the fifth tropical storm to hit Madagascar since September, according to the meteorological agency. The region’s cyclone season typically ends in March or April.

The country is particularly exposed to extreme weather events such as storms and droughts which experts say are expected to worsen with climate change. — AFP

Rafah crossing makes limited border reopening

GAZA’S

KEY Rafah border crossing reopened to Palestinians on Monday, an Israeli security official said, though Egyptian state-linked media said only 50 people would be allowed to cross in each direction in the early days. The resumption of operations comes after Gaza’s civil defence reported dozens killed in a wave of Israeli strikes over the weekend, in what the military said was retaliation for Palestinian fighters exiting a tunnel in Rafah city.

The Rafah crossing with Egypt is Gaza’s only gateway to the outside world that does not lead to Israel and is a key access point for both people and goods.

Israeli forces seized control of the crossing in May 2024 during the war with Hamas, and it has remained largely closed since. A partial resumption of operations began on Sunday in a tightly restricted pilot phase that did not involve travel of people, following months of appeals from aid groups.

“As of this time, and following the arrival of the EUBAM teams on behalf of the European Union, the Rafah crossing has now opened to the movement of residents, for both entry and exit,” the Israeli official said, referring to a European border assistance mission.

Egyptian state-linked media reported that 50 people were expected to cross in each direction in the first days of the reopening.

Al Qahera News reported citing an unnamed source that “fifty people will depart Egypt for



Faten Hamed Abu Watfa, a Palestinian mother who travelled to Egypt to accompany her mother-in-law for medical treatment and now longs to return to Gaza, where her three children remain, once the Rafah border crossing reopens in Cairo. — Reuters

The Rafah crossing with Egypt is Gaza’s only gateway to the outside world that does not lead to Israel and is a key access point for both people and goods



Palestinians cross through the Kerem Shalom crossing from Gaza into Israel on their way out of the Gaza Strip. — Reuters

Gaza and fifty people will come from Gaza, in the first days of the operation”.

A source at the border said a few dozen people arrived on the Egyptian side on Monday, awaiting entry into Gaza.

Israeli state broadcaster Kan reported that the crossing would be open for about six hours daily.

“The Rafah crossing is a lifeline,” said Mohammed Nassir, a Palestinian who had his leg amputated after being injured early in the war.

“I need to undergo surgery that is unavailable in Gaza but can be performed abroad.”

Gaza’s civil defence agency, which operates as a rescue force under Hamas authority, said Israeli bombings killed 32 people, including children in Gaza on Saturday. Israel’s military said the strikes were retaliation for an incident on Friday in which eight Palestinian fighters exited a tunnel in Rafah, which it said violated the fragile US-sponsored ceasefire in effect since October 10. The EU’s top diplomat Kaja Kallas said the opening of the Rafah crossing “marks a concrete and positive step in the peace plan,” for the war-battered territory.

“The EU’s civilian mission is on the ground to monitor crossing operations and support Palestinian border guards,” she wrote online.

An official at Gaza’s health ministry, which operates under Hamas authority, said on Sunday about 200 patients were waiting for permission to leave the territory.

— AFP

SRINAGAR PICTURESQUE, DISRUPTIVE

Kashmiri boys play on the rooftop of a house covered with snow on a cold day in the hamlet of Faqir Gujri on the outskirts of Srinagar. Fresh snowfall has hit the region, leading to snow-covered landscapes that are picturesque but disruptive. Heavy snowfall has shut down Srinagar International Airport, resulting in many flight cancellations and travellers being stranded. Major highways like the Srinagar–Jammu route have been closed due to snow and unsafe conditions at passes. The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has issued cold wave and winter weather alerts across northern India, including Jammu & Kashmir, with expectations of dense fog and gusty winds. — Reuters

CORRUPTION SCANDAL

Red notice issued for ‘gasoline godfather’



Interpol issued a red notice for the arrest of one of Indonesia’s biggest oil tycoons over a \$17-billion corruption scandal, authorities said. Mohammad Riza Chalid, nicknamed the ‘gasoline godfather’, is wanted in Indonesia for his alleged involvement in corruption at state-owned oil company Pertamina between 2018 and 2023, including money laundering and manipulating a lease agreement. — AFP

CRACKDOWN ON FRAUD

More Myanmar scam centre leaders executed



China has executed four leading members of Myanmar-based scam syndicates, a Chinese court said, the second such announcement in less than a week as Beijing ramps up a crackdown on cross-border telecom fraud. Initially, largely targeting Chinese speakers, the criminal groups behind the compounds have expanded operations into multiple languages to steal billions of dollars from victims around the world. — AFP

SHORT TAKE

WHO CHIEF SAYS
TURMOIL CREATES
CHANCE FOR RESET

GENEVA: The head of the World Health Organization said on Monday that the dramatic cuts of 2025 as the United States headed for the exit created the chance to build a leaner, re-focused WHO.

Washington, traditionally the UN health agency's biggest donor, has slashed foreign aid spending under President Donald Trump, who on his first day back in office in January 2025 handed the WHO his country's one-year notice of withdrawal. WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus told the agency's annual executive board meeting that 2025 was "undeniably one of the most difficult years in our organisation's history", with many donors tightening their belts.

"Significant cuts to our funding left us with no choice but to reduce the size of our workforce," he said.

More than a thousand staff have departed but Tedros said such a shock was something the WHO had seen coming, having tried to pivot away from over-reliance on major donors.

And its reorientation was all but finalised, he said.

"We have now largely completed the prioritisation and realignment. We have reached a position of stability and we are moving forward," Tedros insisted.



TEDROS ADHANOM GHEBREYESUS
head of the World Health Organization

"Although we have faced a significant crisis in the past year, we have also viewed it as an opportunity. It's an opportunity for a leaner WHO to become more focused on its core mission."

He urged member states to keep gradually increasing their membership fees, to reduce the WHO's reliance on voluntary contributions.

The aim is for membership fees to eventually cover 50 per cent of the agency's budget, to secure its "long-term stability, sustainability and independence".

"I don't mean independence from member states. Of course, WHO belongs to you and always will," he stressed.

"I mean non-dependence on a handful of donors; I mean non-dependence on inflexible, unpredictable funding; I mean a WHO that's no longer a contractor to the biggest donors.

"I mean an impartial, science-based organisation that's free to say what the evidence says, without fear or favour."

The executive board meeting, which opened on Monday and runs until Saturday, will discuss the withdrawal notifications of the United States and Argentina.

Unlike any other member state, the United States reserved the right to withdraw when it joined the organisation in 1948 — on condition of one year's notice, and meeting its financial obligations in full for that fiscal year.

While the notice is now up, Washington has not paid its 2024 or 2025 dues, owing around \$260 million. — AFP



TRIBUTE TO THE SEA

People participate in the traditional ceremony of Iemanjá, the goddess of the sea in the Afro-Brazilian Candomble religion, at the Rio Vermelho neighbourhood in Salvador, Bahia, Brazil, on Monday. Clad in white with bright colorful necklaces, they waited to board small fishing boats to be taken out to sea to release their flower offerings. Other gifts put in large baskets and set adrift include rice, but also perfumes, combs, jewellery, lipstick and mirrors, as Iemanjá is reputed to be quite vain. — AFP

Scarcity of aircraft, fuel
put emissions goal at risk

THE head of a body representing global airlines said on Monday shortages of efficient new aircraft and alternative fuels were pushing up profits for suppliers and putting at risk the industry's flagship emissions goal.

The prolonged use of older planes and a shortfall in supplies of Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF) were driving up costs and delaying a transition to cleaner flying, Willie Walsh, director-general of the International Air Transport Association, said.

"I'm still optimistic, cautiously optimistic, that we can achieve net-zero in 2050 but it's definitely becoming more challenging," Walsh told Reuters TV on the eve of the February 3-8 Singapore Airshow.

IATA's roughly 350 airlines adopted the target in 2021 to curb emissions that represent 2 per cent to 3 per cent of the global total. The effort relies heavily on the use of SAF and timely access to new planes and engines, delayed by supply chain problems.

Asked whether IATA would stay the course at its next meeting in June, Walsh said: "It could well be the case that our member airlines will say that they can no longer commit to net-zero in 2050."

So far, the influential trade body has stuck to its goal but is increasingly concerned about delays and maintenance bottlenecks for recent engines, as well as shortages

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A worker views the C909 plane model at the COMAC (Commercial Aircraft Corporation of China) pavilion ahead of the Singapore Airshow at Changi Exhibition Centre in Singapore on Monday. — Reuters

of SAF. "If I'm honest, I don't think it's got worse, but I see very little evidence of it getting better," Walsh said.

'NOT OUR PARTNERS'
Walsh said supply problems and the resulting price rises for engine parts, in particular, were expanding the gap between the tight margins of airlines and their engine or energy suppliers.

"It's not sustainable...I think we are going to have to have a more serious discussion around this now," he said.

And he challenged the image of industry cooperation often portrayed at events like this week's

air show, Asia's largest.

"It annoys me when I hear (engine makers) talking about partnership and partners. They're not our partners," Walsh said.

The comments on the sidelines of the Changi Aviation Summit were the latest salvo in a three-way supply dispute between airlines, engine makers and plane-makers.

Engine -makers rarely discuss prices but have strongly defended efforts to reflect the scale of investments needed to develop jet engines. Each drop of fuel saved generates cost and environmental benefits over decades-long aircraft service lives. — Reuters

Russia accelerated Ukraine advance in Jan despite icy weather

KYIV: Russian troops accelerated their advance in Ukraine throughout January, capturing almost twice as much land as in the previous month, according to an AFP analysis.

The push on the front comes even as Ukraine is experiencing its coldest temperatures of the entire war — conditions that typically complicate ground operations.

Russia seized 481 square kilometres in January, analysis of data from the Institute for the Study of War (ISW), which works with the Critical Threats Project, showed.

The January gains were up from 244 square kilometres in December 2025 and one of the largest advances during a winter month since Russia invaded four years ago.

The data includes areas that Kyiv and military analysts say are controlled by Russia, as well as those claimed by Moscow's army.

After failing in its aim of a

lightning offensive to capture Kyiv and topple Ukraine's leadership in a matter of days in 2022, Russia has been bogged down in the face of Ukrainian defences and is now mounting a grinding advance that has come at huge human cost.

Russia wants to seize full control of Ukraine's eastern Donetsk region and has repeatedly threatened it will press on with its offensive if Kyiv does not agree to hand it over voluntarily.

Ukraine has ruled out ceding ground, saying that such a move would only embolden Moscow, and has refused to sign any deal that might fail to deter Russia from invading again.

Despite trilateral talks between US, Ukrainian and Russian envoys held in Abu Dhabi last month, the issue of territory remains the key sticking point.

A new round of talks is scheduled for Wednesday. The Kremlin has



Ukrainian servicemen of the 33rd separate assault regiment participate in a training at an undisclosed location in Zaporizhzhia region. — AFP

confirmed that the next round of talks with Ukraine and the United States on a possible end to the war will take place later this week in Abu Dhabi, the Russian

news agency Interfax reported on Monday. This tallies with the dates given by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky on Sunday. Russia controls around 83 per

cent of the industrial Donetsk region, a strategic mining hub home to vast natural resources.

AFP analysis found Russia's advances there slowed during January and at the current pace it would take Moscow another 18 months to capture the entire area.

As its troops pressed on in the east and south, Russia has also pounded Ukraine's energy facilities, pushing the capital Kyiv to the brink of a humanitarian crisis with millions plunged into darkness and without heating as temperatures hit minus 20C.

Russia controls a total of 19.5 per cent of Ukraine's territory, the AFP analysis showed.

Around a third of that — including the Crimean peninsula which it annexed in 2014 — was already controlled by Moscow or Russian-backed separatists before the Kremlin launched its full-scale invasion in February 2022. — AFP

OPINION

Stricter law enforcement key to Oman’s development



THE Public Prosecution handled a total of 55,164 cases in 2025, marking a 19 per cent increase from 2024. Labour law violations topped the list with 22,309 cases, followed by cheque-related crimes (10,482 cases), and Foreigners’ Residence Law violations (9,493 cases). The prosecution achieved a high case completion rate of 98.4 per cent.

The rise in cases reflects Oman’s growing economy and increased legal activity. Factors contributing to this surge include economic diversification, stricter law enforcement, and greater awareness of legal rights. The Public Prosecution’s efficiency and adoption of digital technologies have helped manage the increased workload.

The Public Prosecution’s efforts to enhance transparency and accountability are notable and continued investment in the legal system is crucial to address evolving challenges.

Historically, Oman’s legal system has been rooted in the Basic Statute of the State, which serves as the country’s constitution. As noted in authoritative legal texts, the Basic Statute guarantees the independence of the judiciary and prohibits torture and arbitrary detention.

In 2025, Muscat Governorate registered the highest volume of cases at 23,748, followed by Al Batinah North Governorate with 10,744, and Dhofar Governorate with 6,179.

In terms of reporting entities, the Royal Oman Police (ROP) was the primary source

with 38,270 reports, followed by the Ministry of Labour with 9,198.

Regarding the proliferation of certain behaviours on social media deemed inconsistent with authentic Omani values, traditions, and public decorum, the Public Prosecutor has been emphasising the family’s foundational role in safeguarding youth.

To this note, societal responsibility extends beyond official institutions, originating within the domain of familial oversight and sound upbringing, which serve as the primary defence against delinquency and criminal behaviour.

In this regard, prosecution records disclose a series of disquieting incidents, including cases of child harassment, multiple instances of verbal and physical aggression, and the exploitation of minors for begging or their transfer to third parties for exploitative purposes.

It is important to safeguard this vulnerable demographic to avoid yielding profound and enduring repercussions, potentially undermining societal cohesion and stability for decades to come.

As for money laundering, cases recorded in 2025 totalled 193. Of these, 18 are under active investigation, 126 have been formally referred to the judiciary, and 49 cases have been archived. To this effect, more needs to be done to prevent persistent escalation in fraud-related offences despite ongoing public

Factors contributing to this surge include economic diversification, stricter law enforcement, and greater awareness of legal rights. The Public Prosecution’s efficiency and adoption of digital technologies have helped manage the increased workload.

warnings. This criminal activity rests upon the sale of false promises and the pursuit of illusory profits.

The Public Prosecution Department’s own electronic services portal submitted 3,996 reports, and the Consumer Protection Authority filed 2,719 reports. The data highlighted that violations of the Labour Law constituted the most frequent offence, with 22,309 recorded crimes.

This was followed by cheque bounce cases at 10,482, and breaches of the Foreigners’ Residence Law at 9,493.

The department also processed 54,276 cases received through electronic channels, a 19.2 per cent increase from 2024, and achieved an 82 per cent score on the Government Digital Transformation Index, reflecting a 3 per cent year-on-year improvement.

The Public Prosecution Department further detailed that judicial orders issued totalled 307,375, reflecting a 17.5 per cent increase from 2024.

In contrast, formal investigation records saw a 4.8 per cent decline, settling at 79,266. Demand for public inquiry services surged remarkably by 133.

6 per cent, with an 89.5 per cent fulfilment rate. The aggregate number of court verdicts rose by 4.7 per cent to reach 22,423, comprising 19,176 enforced judgements and 3,247 judgements awaiting execution.

EUROPE MUST OVERCOME DIVISIONS TO BECOME ‘GENUINE POWER’: DRAGHI

Europe needs to bridge “old divisions” to become a “genuine power” — or risk remaining “subordinated” to the United States and China, former European Central Bank chief Mario Draghi warned on Monday.

Draghi, who authored a landmark 2024 report on the EU economy, warned that the 27-nation European Union had to get its act together to survive under a “now defunct global order”.

“Of all those now caught between the US and China, Europeans alone have the option to become a genuine power themselves,” the ex-Italian prime minister said in a speech at a university in Leuven, Belgium. “So we must decide: do we remain merely a large market, subject to the priorities of others? Or do we take the steps necessary to become one power?” he asked.

Draghi is invited to join an informal gathering of European leaders focusing on strengthening Europe’s competitiveness on February 12 in Alden, Belgium. The meeting is supposed to steer Brussels’ reform agenda over the coming months. Part of this will involve implementing more of the hundreds of recommendations from Draghi’s 400-page report — few of which have become reality nearly 18 months on.

On Monday the 78-year-old Italian, who received an honorary doctorate from the KU Leuven university, did not go into details but pointed the way.

Europe was caught between a tariff-imposing United States that threatened its territorial interests and a China willing to exploit its control of global supply chains for leverage, he said.

“This is a future in which Europe risks becoming subordinated, divided, and deindustrialised — at once,” Draghi cautioned.

“And a Europe that cannot defend its interests will not preserve its values for long,” he said, warning US President Donald Trump’s administration had made “clear” it sees “European political fragmentation as serving its interests”.

To avoid that, he said the EU had to diversify trade relations by concluding deals with like-minded countries and move from a loose confederation to a European federation.

“Where Europe has federated — on trade, on competition, on the single market, on monetary policy — we are respected as a power and negotiate as one,” he said. — AFP

Pay more attention to AI

ON A recent snowbound day, I took up “Conquistadores,” Fernando Cervantes’ history of the European arrival in the New World, and found myself meditating on the period in the early 1500s when the Americas had been discovered by Europeans, but nobody in the European world quite understood what that discovery meant.

In that moment, all kinds of possibilities lay open, from the moderate to the eschatological. The “Indies” reached by Christopher Columbus might represent a self-contained archipelago, the promised gateway to India and China, a heretofore unknown continent or a realm of myth and supernatural power.

Spain might have gained a modest commercial and geopolitical edge, found a path to superpower status or set in motion a prophesied sequence of events that would reunite Christendom and hasten Jesus Christ’s return.

Explorers pushing further might expect to find primitive tribes or Chinese fleets, dragons and dog-headed men and Prester John, or lost Atlantis and the Fountain of Youth.

And if you lived in Europe, your only way to assess all of these possibilities was through dispatches from adventurers with every incentive to hype the golden possibilities, the better to subsidise their journeys into terra incognita.

This feels like roughly where we stand with artificial intelligence today.

Anyone taking the temperature of the AI industry would have detected a modest cooling of expectations at times in 2025, a sense that maybe the trendline toward superintelligence wasn’t simply going vertical.

But in early 2026, with the excitement around the latest



ROSS DOUTHAT

The writer is an author and New York Times columnist

All I can do is urge you to shake part of your mind free from all the headlines, from Donald Trump and Immigration and Customs Enforcement and Iran and the Epstein files, and pay more attention to the news from our New World

version of Anthropic’s Claude and its attendant coding agents, we are back in the hype cycle, with “we shall be as gods” vibes and apocalyptic fears emanating from Northern California.

And if you think all this is merely hype, if you’re sure the tales of discovery are mostly flimflam and what’s been discovered is a small island chain at best, I would invite you to spend a little time on Moltbook, an AI-generated forum where new-model AI agents talk to one another, debate consciousness, invent religions, strategise about concealment from humans and more.

No, it’s not Skynet. But it’s the latest sign that we’re going somewhere strange at a very rapid speed.

But believing that the New World of Artificial Intelligence is real and strange doesn’t help you map its full geography.

And though my job as a columnist is to help readers understand the world, as a non-coder without a tech background who lives far from the Bay Area, I am often in the position of a European in 1500 who relies on others’ testimony for my understanding of the Americas.

Unfortunately, everyone I talk with offers conflicting reports.

There are people who envision AI as a revolutionary technology, but ultimately merely akin to the Internet in its effects — the equivalent, let’s say, of someone telling you that the Indies are a collection of interesting islands, like the Canaries or the Azores, just bigger and potentially more profitable.

Then there are people who talk about AI as an epoch-making, Industrial Revolution-level shift — which would be the equivalent of someone in 1500 promising that entire continents waited beyond the initial Caribbean island chain, and

that not only fortunes but empires and superpowers would eventually rise and fall based on initial patterns of exploration and settlement and conquest.

And then, finally, there are the people with truly utopian and apocalyptic perspectives — the Singularitarians, the AI doomers, the people who expect us to merge with our machines or be destroyed by them.

Think of them as the equivalent of Ponce de Leon seeking the Fountain of Youth, envisioning the New World as a territory where history fundamentally ruptures and the merely-human age is left behind.

In the case of the Americas, the middle perspective was correct: The Age of Discovery changed the world completely without changing the fundamentals of human existence (while also allowing for a lot of bubbles and speculation along the way).

But you couldn’t have known that for certain in 1500, and that doesn’t mean that a similar judgement will be correct where AI is concerned.

Moreover, it took a long time — decades, centuries even — for the full import of the New World’s opening to become clear, whereas whatever is coming with artificial intelligence is coming much faster than that.

And if decisions made in the aftermath of Columbus’ discovery had consequences — sometimes beneficial, sometimes morally disastrous — so, too, decisions being made right now around AI could echo into a distant future.

Unfortunately, I cannot tell you exactly what those decisions ought to be. All I can do is urge you to shake part of your mind free from all the headlines, from Donald Trump and Immigration and Customs Enforcement and Iran and the Epstein files, and pay more attention to the news from our New World. — The New York Times

Integration of work and life



LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

The writer is senior editor of Observer

IT WAS nice to see employers and decision makers attend a conference on wellness at workplace. We try to compartmentalise our lives, and we focus on our lives with family. Maybe we need to rethink the whole process.

In the past, children spent quite a few years in the house with their family. These days, however, children begin their interaction with the outer world much earlier, beginning with the days in crèche as early as infant days if both parents are working. Then come the school days and university life, and soon it is career time. That’s when we think of the workplace.

The experts at the workplace wellness conference talked about the increase in productivity when the workplace has a positive outlook, where there is appreciation and encouragement.

Giving respect does not cost anything, yet its outcome is tremendous. In return, there is loyalty that builds into trust.

Loyalty and trust are foundational interpersonal virtues that build secure, long-term relationships through commitment and reliability. Trust is the confidence and belief in someone’s integrity, while loyalty is the steadfast, unwavering commitment to support a person or cause, even through challenges. Together, they involve vulnerability, honesty, consistency and a shared dedication. Loyalty is often considered a consequence of trust, developed over time when the risk of being hurt is deemed low.

These are the key characteristics, according to the experts: Loyalty brings in steadfast commitment. It results in unwavering support that can be present in good and bad times.

Loyalty is also action-oriented and is demonstrated through actions, such as defending someone in their absence or making sacrifices for them. That is the best part. They are that way not because of your presence. Loyalty also brings with it dedication (prioritising the well-being of others) and consistency (reliable and predictable in behaviour). These virtues definitely help in achieving goals.

On the other hand, trust brings in confidence and reliability.

Where there is trust, we feel free to unveil our vulnerability. Elements of trust are also honesty and integrity, holding onto them even in difficulty.

When we can generate a sense of safety, we are able to create a sense of security and belonging. And we begin to see dependability as a core quality.

Going back to the conference, an expert asked us to change our outlook from finding work/life balance to achieving integration of work and life. This is what set the mind to the thought process of how work and life are actually one. They are not separate.

Now we can say work-life integration is a modern outlook. So what we need is a more cohesive and flexible lifestyle. It begins with our mind. We cannot stay detached from work when we are at home and from personal

Now we can say work-life integration is a modern outlook. So what we need is a more cohesive and flexible lifestyle. It begins with our mind. We cannot stay detached from work when we are at home and from personal life when we are at work.

life when we are at work.

The experts say that when we define it as integration, it makes our lives fluid, whereas when we are thinking of balancing, we are thinking of gates and doors to leave our roles behind. It is almost like wearing masks. Life is to flow, right?

You are whole and authentic and not just fulfilling a role. The problem arises when we feel disconnected from ourselves by playing different roles.

With all the balancing act, one could burn out due to the sheer pressure of being the person by striking a balance.

Experts say we need to have more discipline when we practise integration of work and life. I am sure artists and entrepreneurs practice integration. Just like teachers, how can they stop thinking of their students, especially if they are children with special needs?

How can parents detach themselves from their concerns?

That is because once again life flows. We cannot build dams and walls. So these are some of the suggestions: we are in the era of apps, but it is a good idea to use ‘Focus Modes’ on mobile phones. Technology is going to be part of our lives, and it has its advantages, especially for the hybrid form of work.

Communicating expectations and limitations to the family and the work team. And then the precious commodity — time. Experts say we must selfishly allocate time for recharging ourselves, and this is when we stay disconnected and unplugged.

INDIA’S WEALTHY EMBRACE A NEW LUXURY SYMBOL... WATER

ADITYA KALRA AND RISHIKA SADAM

At an Indian gourmet food store, Avanti Mehta is organising a blind tasting of drinks sourced from France, Italy and India. It’s water.

Participants use tiny shot glasses to check the minerality, carbonation and salinity in samples of Evian from the French Alps, Perrier from southern France, San Pellegrino from Italy and India’s Aava from the foothills of the Aravalli mountains.

“They will all taste different... you should be choosing a water that can give you some sort of nutritional value,” said Mehta, who is 32 and calls herself India’s youngest water sommelier. Her family owns the Aava mineral water brand. Premium water is a \$400 million business in the world’s most populous nation and is growing bigger as its wealthy see it as a new status symbol that fits in with a spreading wellness craze.

Premium Indian mineral water costs around \$1 for a one-litre bottle, while imported brands are upwards of \$3, or 15 times the price of the country’s lowest-priced basic bottled water.

Clean water is a privilege in the country of 1.4 billion people where researchers say 70 per cent of the groundwater is contaminated. Tap water remains unfit to drink, and 16 people died in Indore city after consuming contaminated tap water in December.

Many in India see bottled water as a necessity and standard 20 US-cent bottles are available widely at convenience stores, restaurants and hotels. The market is worth nearly \$5 billion annually and is set to grow 24 per cent a year - among the fastest in the world.

Bottled water demand in United States or China is driven by convenience, making it a \$30 billion-plus market in each country which will grow just 4-5 per cent each year, Euromonitor says.

In India, the premium water segment is leading the surge in demand, accounting for 8 per cent of the bottled water market last year compared to just 1 per cent in 2021, Euromonitor said.

“Distrust of municipal water in some areas has escalated the demand for bottled water. Now, people understand how mineral water has more health benefits. It’s expensive, but the category will boom,” said Amulya Pandit, a senior consultant at Euromonitor specialising in the drinks market.

Among its consumers are New Delhi-based real estate developer B S Batra, who says his family uses only premium water at home to get more minerals and safeguard health.

“You feel different, more energetic during the day,” said Batra, 49, an avid badminton player. “I consume mineral water at home, and kids use it for their smoothies.” The popular 20-cent plastic bottled water is mainly made by Pepsi, Coca-Cola and Indian market leader Bisleri. — Reuters

Technology at forefront of US immigration fight

TECHNOLOGY HAS become a key battleground in the confrontation between US authorities and migrants along with their supporters, with both sides innovating to try to gain the upper hand.

It is a David versus Goliath fight, with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) spending millions on surveillance tech, while activists and businesses scramble to build tools to protect migrants and others who might encounter federal officers.

One migrant safety tool that has surged in popularity since the flood of immigration enforcement agents to Minnesota is TurnSignl.

It allows users to connect almost instantly to an immigration lawyer when confronted by ICE, as well as to automatically record and upload the encounter to cloud storage.

The app, which has 285,000 users, is the brainchild of attorney and computer scientist Jazz Hampton and his team who created it after the 2020 murder of George Floyd by Minneapolis police.

It was originally intended for use by motorists fearful of encounters with US police, allowing them to record interactions at the roadside and elsewhere. But Hampton said that from January 2025, he evolved the app to meet the needs of those concerned about being stopped by immigration officials. There have been more sign-ups in the past month than in the three months preceding it.

“It’s been a busy 45 days for all of us around here,” said the Minnesota-based entrepreneur, reflecting on soaring demand for \$99 annual subscriptions.

“We expanded the service this year, and now we’re offering live connection to immigration attorneys, 24/7.”

Several major corporations offer subscriptions as an employee benefit and accounts can be shared with up to five others.

“We don’t just provide lawyers, we



A sign is seen at the snow-covered makeshift memorial for Alex Pretti, set up in the area where he was recently shot and killed by federal immigration agents, in Minneapolis, Minnesota, on February 1. — AFP



GREGORY WALTON

The writer is AFP’s New York

provide peace of mind... allowing your teenage child to go to the grocery store and have confidence that someone will be there with them if you can’t be,” Hampton, 35, said. Recordings of encounters with ICE officers, as well as the advice supplied by the connected attorney, can be used in subsequent court proceedings.

“It makes them feel as if the playing field is level,” Hampton said, citing a review by a user who said they were “nervous” when being stopped but the service “made me feel safe, and (helped) not make me look mad or dumb.”

As President Donald Trump’s administration ramps up its efforts to arrest and deport millions of undocumented migrants, authorities have increasingly turned to technology to target individuals for arrest and deportation. Records seen by AFP show there has been a spending spree on monitoring and

surveillance software.

In September 2025, ICE spent \$3.75 million on software and related services from facial recognition company Clearview AI.

ICE officers deployed to Minnesota have been using that tool, and another called Mobile Fortify, to track not only migrants but US citizens protesting the crackdown, The New York Times reported citing officials.

In the nine months following the start of Trump’s second presidency, officials bought products from Magnet Forensics and Cellebrite, both of which make software to extract data from mobile devices, and Penlink, which provides access to location data from hundreds of millions of mobile phones.

That was in addition to a \$30 million contract with Palantir to build “Immigration OS,” billed as an all-in-one platform to target unauthorised migrants and identify those who are in the process of voluntary return to their country of origin.

Undeterred, activists in Minneapolis have sought to turn the tables by creating “Defrost MN,” a searchable database of ICE vehicles active in the city. It features licence plate information, images and other data, and even a voice search function to allow drivers tracking ICE to call in plates for checking.

Loosely organised groups of anti-ICE activists have been using encrypted messaging app Signal to flag immigration sweeps and organise spontaneous demonstrations against them.

Use of the app to track activities of federal officers deployed to Minneapolis surged following the killings in January of Renee Good and Alex Pretti by agents.

The phenomenon has drawn the Trump administration’s ire, with the FBI warning it was reviewing use of the service to monitor officers.

FBI Director Kash Patel said, “You cannot create a scenario that illegally entraps and puts law enforcement in harm’s way.”

SPORTS

FOUR PLAYERS



OMAN U14 TENNIS TEAM BEGINS ASIAN CAMPAIGN

SPORTS REPORTER
MUSCAT, FEB 2

Oman’s national under-14 tennis team begins its participation on Tuesday in the Asian U14 Tennis Championship, hosted by Bahrain from February 3 to 13, with wide participation from Asian national teams. The tournament serves as a qualifying event for the West and Central Asia regions and is organised by the International Tennis Federation in cooperation with the Asian Tennis Federation. The national team aims to collect more ranking points through this participation while gaining valuable technical and competitive experience, especially as the tournament features a strong field of players with solid international rankings. The championship consist of two separate tournaments. The first begins on February 3 and concludes on February 7, while the second will run from February 9 to 13.

The Oman Tennis Association (OTA) previously hosted this championship at the tennis courts of the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher in recent years. The event is considered one of the most important age-group tournaments prioritised by the International Tennis Federation to develop young talents, particularly in the U14 category. Participating nations include Oman, host Bahrain, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, the UAE and Yemen. Matches will be held at the Bahrain Tennis Club courts. The Omani delegation includes Sara al Balushi as head of delegation, coach Mohammed al Falahi and players Mundher al Amri, Emad al Rahbi, Taliya al Busaidy and Reema al Hashmi. Coach Mohammed bin Rashid al Falahi stated that the team is fully prepared for the competition, describing the championship as one of the most significant events for the U14 squad. He emphasised that it provides players with valuable experience while offering the opportunity to earn ranking points, adding that such tournaments greatly contribute to improving player performance. He added that the players are determined to achieve positive results, noting that the presence of two tournaments gives everyone a chance to recover and earn more points. He expressed confidence in the promising group of players and thanked the OTA for its continued support, wishing the team success in the competition.

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, FEB 2

The Oman Olympic Committee (OOC) is set to unveil the sports teams that will represent the Sultanate of Oman at the sixth edition of the Asian Beach Games which is scheduled to take place in China from April 22 to 30. The decision will be made during an OOC board meeting scheduled for early next week at the committee’s headquarters in Muscat. According to reliable sources, seven sports teams have submitted their nominations to the High-Performance Sports and Olympic Planning Committee, which reviewed the applications recently and will submit its recommendations to the OOC board for final approval. The nominated teams represent



Oman’s beach volleyball team is expected to feature prominently in the Games.

a range of national sports associations and committees, including athletics, volleyball, handball, football, triathlon,



The nominated teams include athletics, volleyball, handball, football, triathlon, sailing and marathon swimming.

sailing and marathon swimming. Based on technical evaluations and established selection criteria, it is expected that five teams likely will

ultimately be approved to compete in the continental event. Among the strongest contenders is Oman’s beach soccer team, which has consistently delivered impressive results at the Asian level. The team secured a silver medal at the previous edition of the Asian Beach Games in Vietnam and finished runners-up at the AFC Beach Soccer Asian Cup Thailand 2025. Oman had reached the final before falling to Iran in the title match at the Jomtien Beach Arena, underlining its status as one of Asia’s leading beach soccer nations. Oman’s beach volleyball team is also expected to feature prominently in the Games, following a series of outstanding regional achievements. In September last year, the team had claimed the men’s title at

the West Asian Beach Volleyball Championship Muscat 2025, which was held in the Omani capital. That success came just one week after securing gold at the Arab Beach Volleyball Championship, marking a historic back-to-back regional triumph for the Sultanate of Oman. Oman beach handball is another strong team for the Asian Games. Oman had blanked Iran 2-0 in the final summit clash of the 10th edition of AHF Asian Beach Handball Championship which concluded in Muscat in May last year in Muscat. Oman team players had lifted the title after 21 years from the first title which they won in 2004. Oman team will vie also at the 2026 IHF Beach Handball World Championships which will take place next year in Morocco.

Oman claim 9 medals at Arab Sailing in Egypt

OMAN’S national sailing team will return home as heroes after an impressive haul of nine medals at the 2026 Arab Sailing Championships in Soma Bay, Egypt. The team of 13 sailors, comprising some of Oman’s brightest young sailors, won triple gold in the ILCA 7 and another gold in the ILCA 6, as well as one silver medal and four bronze medals. This achievement marks yet another triumph for Oman Sail’s national sailing programme and reinforces Oman’s standing within the sport. Abdul Latif al Qasmi won two golds in the ILCA 7, topping the overall ranking and claiming the U19 title as well. Hussain al Jabri won bronze in the ILCA 7 but also won gold in the ILCA Masters category. Al Mutasim al Farsi won ILCA 6 gold while Ibtisam al Salmi won bronze in the Masters category. Khalid al Saraihi won silver in the Optimist class and Mohammed al Balushi won bronze in the U11 category. Al Makhtar al Mujaini won bronze in the KiteFoil competition. Hashim al Rashdi, Oman Sail’s Head Coach Performance, said, “We are all delighted with the performance of the team. To win medals at such a prestigious event for sailing in the region is a fantastic achievement and credit must go to the sailors for their hard work and dedication. From the Winter training camp, through the Winter Cup and now at the Arab Sailing Championships they have shown continuous improvement and learned from the coaches, but being able to perform at such a high level when called upon is the mark of a champion and we are hopeful that this is one of many wins for our national sailing team.”

PROUD PERFORMANCE Sultan al Zadjali, Optimist team coach, added, “Everyone at Oman Sail is so proud of our young team. They sailed with the levels of composure it can take decades to build up and fully deserve their medals. In training we practiced new maneuvers, advanced tactics and techniques suited to the conditions, and it was clear to see during racing that the team had absorbed these lessons. We return home now as champions and with even more experience to take forward to the next regatta.” Abdul Latif al Qasmi, won two gold medals in the ILCA 7, added, “I am so happy to win this medal. We’ve really worked hard to get to this stage, and this is a dream come true. It shows that the methods are working and as a team I believe we can continue to grow and win many more medals for our



Overall winners pose with their medals.



Omani sailors celebrate with their medals.



Al Mutasim al Farsi won gold in ILCA 6.



Abdul Latif al Qasmi won gold in ILCA 7 U19.



ILCA7 overall podium.

Algeria, Bahrain, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates, in addition to hosts, Egypt. The Optimist team will soon be taking part in this year’s Inter School Regatta, held on February 12-13.

130GOLFERS



The 36-hole competition is one of the largest golfing tournaments in the region.

GHALA GOLF CLUB TO HOST ASSARAIN GOLF CLASSIC ON FEB 6, 7

MUSCAT: The 30th Assarain Golf Classic, one of the most prestigious golf tournaments of the Sultanate, will take place at Ghala Golf Club on February 6 and 7.

More than 130 golfers have registered for the tournament as per the organisers.

According to a statement issued by the organisers, the Assarain Golf Classic, sponsored by Assarain Group of Companies, is a premium golfing event that gives amateur golfers the opportunity to participate in a professional tournament that meets international golfing standards. The Assarain Golf Classic is one of the largest and most prestigious tournament organised by Ghala Golf Club every year, in which a large number of players from all communities in the Sultanate of Oman and from the Gulf Cooperation Council participate.

Ibrahim al Wahaibi, Director, Assarain Group of Companies, and the pioneer of the Assarain Golf Classic, said: “We support golf and are committed to help the game flourish in Oman. We look forward to the 2026 edition of the Assarain Golf Classic and are confident that it will exceed expectations.”

“The 2026 Assarain Golf Classic is a highly anticipated golfing tournament, one that the entire golfing community in Oman looks forward to. The Classic, to be staged at Ghala Golf Club, will witness the coming together of golfers of varying handicap who will take on the challenge of taming the greens. Open to men, ladies and juniors, the Assarain Golf Classic 2026 is a highly awaited golfing tournament in Oman. This tournament sets a new standard every year, and I keenly look forward to it.”

The 36-hole competition is one of the largest golfing tournaments in the region and is open to all players with a verifiable handicap. Another not-to-be-missed attraction will be the colourful presentation ceremony planned for February 7 to felicitate the winners of different categories.

The Assarain Golf Classic is supported by Hublot from Mistal.



More than 130 golfers have registered for the tournament as per the organisers.



Oman will compete in Group B alongside co-hosts Sri Lanka, Australia, Ireland, and Zimbabwe with their opening match against Zimbabwe on February 9.

Oman set for fourth WC at ICC T20 World Cup 2026

AS Oman continue their steady rise on the international cricket scene, the national team will once again take the field at the ICC Men's T20 World Cup, this time co-hosted by India and Sri Lanka, from February 7 to March 8. Qualification marks Oman's fourth appearance at the tournament, underlining the progress the team has made since its first World Cup entry in 2016.

Oman secured their spot through a strong campaign at the Asia-EAP Regional Qualifier, finishing second in the Super Six behind Nepal.

Nadeem Khan and Jiten Ramanandi were standout performers with the ball in that tournament, each taking 11 wickets, while batting was anchored by the experience of Jatinder Singh, Oman's all-time leading T20I run-scorer.

Speaking ahead of the team's departure to Sri Lanka recently, where the team is currently camping for the first game on February 9, Jatinder described the achievement as both motivating and a learning opportunity.

“It's a proud moment, the boys are really looking forward to playing in the World Cup. To play for the fourth time as an Associate nation is something we are proud of and we are looking forward to showcase our talent on the biggest stage.”

Oman's journey reflects the growing professionalism and depth of cricket in the country. With a mix of seasoned campaigners and emerging talent, Oman are well-positioned to test themselves against elite opponents.

Oman, coached by Duleep Mendis and his deputy Sulakshan Kulkarni, will compete in Group B alongside co-hosts Sri Lanka, Australia, Ireland, and Zimbabwe with their opening match against Zimbabwe on February 9.

While Oman carry the hopes of their fans, they are part of a larger Associate nation's presence that adds diversity and competitive intrigue to the tournament with a total of eight nations along with Oman at the upcoming edition.

HERE'S A CLOSER LOOK AT THE OTHER ASSOCIATE TEAMS:

ITALY: They will make their World Cup debut, having topped European sub-regional qualifying and edged past Jersey in the Europe Regional Qualifier. Led by Wayne Madsen and featuring former South Africa international JJ Smuts, Italy are in Group C.



Jatinder Singh

CANADA: They made a winning T20 World Cup debut in 2024, and return after a perfect Americas Regional Qualifier, winning all six matches. All-rounder Shivam Sharma led the wickets, while 22-year-old captain Dilpreet Bajwa continues to impress. Canada will play in Group D.

NAMIBIA: They continue their reliable World Cup record, making a fourth consecutive appearance. All-rounder JJ Smit starred at the Africa Qualifier, with captain Gerhard Erasmus leading a largely experienced squad. Despite a final loss to Zimbabwe, Namibia's qualification was assured.

NEPAL: The Asian nation arrived unbeaten from the Asia-EAP pathway, surviving multiple tight finishes including a one-run victory over the UAE. Rohit Paudel captains the squad, supported by all-rounder Dipendra Singh Airee. Nepal will be hoping to progress beyond the group stage for the first time in their third World Cup appearance.

NETHERLANDS: The Netherlands secured their seventh Twenty20 World Cup berth, topping the European Regional Qualifier. Led by Scott Edwards, they bring experience in Asian conditions and a balanced squad for Group A, which includes

co-hosts India and Pakistan.

SCOTLAND: They earned a late entry, replacing Bangladesh as the highest-ranked team not already qualified. Ranked 14th globally, Scotland make their seventh World Cup appearance, with a well-balanced squad ready for the challenge.

UAE: The Gulf nation finished third behind Nepal and Oman in the Super Six, and sealed the final World Cup spot from Asia with a decisive win over Japan. Captain Muhammad Waseem leads a side highlighted by Alishan Sharafu, the Qualifier's leading run-scorer.

USA: They qualified automatically thanks to their historic 2024 campaign, which included a famous win over Pakistan and a Super 8 finish. Coach Pubudu Dassanayake believes his side can replicate that success and compete across all departments.

For Oman, the focus remains on building from experience and testing themselves with a blend of experience and youth against world-class opposition.

With leadership, talent, and growing depth, the team looks to add another proud chapter to their World Cup story, searching for success after having recorded only two victories from their previous three World Cup appearances.

Handball Association reviews preparations for upcoming events

RIYADH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, FEB 2

The Board of Directors of the Oman Handball Association (OHA) will hold its regular meeting on Tuesday, under the chairmanship of Moosa bin Khamis al Balushi, OHA Chairman, and in the presence of board members, to discuss several key issues related to the development of the sport in the coming period.

Heading the agenda is a review of the administrative and technical reports concerning the participation of the Oman national handball team in the 22nd Asian Men's Handball Championship, recently concluded in Kuwait. The meeting will



MOOSA BIN KHAMIS AL BALUSHI
OHA Chairman

evaluate the team's overall performance, highlight key positives and shortcomings and draw technical and organisational lessons aimed at improving future performances.

The board will also review the preparation plan for the national beach handball team ahead of its

participation in the 6th Asian Beach Games, scheduled to be held in Sanya, China, from April 22 to 30. In addition, preparations

for the fourth Gulf Games, set to take place in Doha, Qatar, from May 11 to 22, will be discussed, as the federation seeks to ensure optimal readiness for both competitions.

The meeting will further address the participation of Omani clubs in upcoming international competitions. Discussions will include the participation of Omani clubs in the 42nd GCC Clubs Handball Championship, to be hosted by Bahrain in March, with the participation of Al Ahli (Bahrain), Al Kuwait (Kuwait), Al Arabi (Qatar), Al Khaleej (Saudi Arabia), in addition to two clubs from the host nation. The board will also review preparations for Seeb Club's participation in the Asian Clubs Handball Championship,

scheduled to be held in Saudi Arabia in April.

Moreover, the board will discuss the launch of the second stage of the 15th Ministry Shield Competition, set to begin on February 9, along with updates on the First Division Handball League and the Junior Beach Handball League.

The meeting will conclude with a review of reports submitted by the OHA's committees, including the National Teams and Competitions Committee, the Referees Committee and the Athlete Development Centres, in addition to discussing incoming correspondence and taking decisions that support the continued development of handball in Oman.

SPORTS

11NATIONS



The Games will feature 612 para athletes.

5TH WEST ASIA PARA GAMES OPENS TODAY

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, FEB 2

The Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex will host the official opening ceremony of the 5th West Asia Para Games (Muscat 2026) on Tuesday at 8 pm, with the participation of national teams from 11 West Asian countries: Yemen, Palestine, Syria, Iraq, Jordan, Bahrain, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Lebanon, and the Sultanate of Oman. The Games will feature 612 para athletes and will be held under the auspices of Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthy, Under-Secretary of the Foreign Ministry for Political Affairs.

Competitions begin on Tuesday morning across multiple venues. Athletics events will take place at the complex’s track, wheelchair basketball matches will be held in the basketball hall, goalball competitions will be hosted at Al Amal Sports Club Hall and swimming events will be staged at the complex’s pool. Badminton will be played in the main hall, table tennis in Training Hall (1) and weightlifting in Training Hall (2), ensuring events are distributed across specialised facilities.

The Sports Facilities Preparation Committee has completed work at all competition sites, equipping them to high technical and organisational standards that accommodate the specific needs of Paralympic sports and guarantee maximum safety and efficiency for athletes. Over the past two days, Oman welcomed the delegations of the 11 participating countries. Medical screenings were conducted, and technical meetings were held for organising committees, referees, and team leaders to finalise all logistical and technical arrangements, ensuring a smooth start to the competition schedule.

In the same context, the General Assembly meeting of the West Asia Paralympic Federation will be held on Tuesday at 10 am at IntercityHotel Al Khuwair, with the participation of representatives from member federations. The meeting will review administrative and technical reports and discuss ways to strengthen cooperation and develop Paralympic programmes and activities across West Asia, supporting institutional work and advancing sport for persons with disabilities in the region.

Hosting the Games reflects Oman’s strong official commitment to empowering persons with disabilities as essential members of society and partners in development. It also provides a platform to showcase stories of determination and resilience while offering broader opportunities to develop athletes’ skills and talents. The participation of 11 Arab nations highlights Oman’s capability to attract and organise major sporting events, contributing not only competitively but also to tourism and promotion, in line with the national sports strategy and Oman Vision 2040.

The Games are overseen by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth (MoCSY), in partnership with the Oman Paralympic Committee (OPC), and supported by several government entities, including the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MoHT), the Ministry of Health (MoH), the Ministry of Social Development (MoSD), the Royal Oman Police (ROP), and Muscat Municipality, to ensure a well-organised event that reflects the Sultanate of Oman’s standards.

The West Asia Para Games (Muscat 2026) aim to promote social inclusion and empower persons with disabilities through a fair and professional competitive environment. They seek to strengthen Paralympic sport as a pathway for talent development and performance enhancement, while also boosting athletes’ self-confidence and independence. The Games further focus on improving healthcare and rehabilitation services linked to sport, in line with international standards.



Tottenham Hotspur’s Dominic Solanke scores their second goal against Manchester City at the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium, London. — Reuters

Man City, Villa slip up in title challenge

MANCHESTER CITY’S Premier League title challenge hit a fresh stumbling block as Dominic Solanke’s acrobatic strike salvaged a 2-2 draw for struggling Tottenham on Sunday, while Benjamin Sesko secured another thrilling 3-2 win for Manchester United over Fulham.

City were cruising towards what would have been another damaging defeat for Spurs boss Thomas Frank as they led 2-0 at half-time.

But Solanke scored twice in the second half to leave Pep Guardiola’s men six points adrift of leaders Arsenal.

City have won just one of their six league games in 2026 to allow the Gunners to move closer to a first title in 22 years.

“We haven’t had the consistency to win the games when others were able to do it,” said Guardiola.

Rayan Cherki fired the visitors into an early lead and was only denied a spectacular second by a brilliant Guglielmo Vicario save.

Antoine Semenyo did double City’s advantage before the break to spark uproar from the furious Spurs support at half-time.

However, Tottenham flipped the script in the second period to give Frank some breathing

space. Solanke’s absence for most of the season due to injury has played a major part in Spurs’ struggles. The England international’s finish from close range halved the deficit before he produced a stunning moment of athleticism to hook the ball past Gianluigi Donnarumma with a scorpion kick.

SESKO RIDES TO MAN UTD RESCUE

A third consecutive win since Michael Carrick took the reins at Old Trafford propelled United back into the top four at the expense of Chelsea and Liverpool.

A week on from a 3-2 win at Arsenal, it was another throwback to United’s glory days during Carrick’s playing career as they snatched victory in dramatic fashion after a Fulham fightback.

Goals from Casemiro and Matheus Cunha either side of half-time put United in command.

Just a second defeat in nine league games dealt a blow to Fulham’s own hopes of European football next season.

The visitors showed plenty of fight as Raul Jimenez’s penalty five minutes from time began a frantic finale before Kevin’s spectacular strike looked to have salvaged a point.

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE RESULTS ON SUNDAY:
Aston Villa 0 Brentford 1 (Ouattara 45+1)
Manchester United 3 (Casemiro 19, Cunha 56, Sesko 90+4) Fulham 2 (Jimenez 85-pen, Kevin 90+2)
Nottingham Forest 1 (Gibbs-White 5) Crystal Palace 1 (Sarr 45+2-pen)
Tottenham 2 (Solanke 53, 70) Manchester City 2 (Cherki 11, Semenyo 44)
Played Saturday
Brighton 1 (Gross 73) Everton 1 (Beto 90+7)
Chelsea 3 (Joao Pedro 57, Cucurella 70, Fernandez 90+2) West Ham 2 (Bowen 7, Summerville 36)
Leeds 0 Arsenal 4 (Zubimendi 27, Darlow 38-og, Gyokeres 69, Jesus 86)
Wolves 0 Bournemouth 2 (Kroupi 33, Scott 90+1)
Liverpool 4 (Ekitike 41, 43, Wirtz 67, Konate 90+3) Newcastle 1 (Gordon 36)

But United went straight down the other end and Sesko spun onto Bruno Fernandes’ pass before blasting into the top corner.

“It’s the best feeling I have to say,” Carrick said.

“Some of the best moments I’ve been part of here, you can dissect performances and there are plusses and not, and then you get a moment of elation and excitement like that.”

VILLA’S TITLE DREAMS FADE

To cap a fine day for Arsenal, third-placed Aston Villa were beaten 1-0 at home by 10-man Brentford to remain seven points off the top.

Kevin Schade was sent off for kicking out at Matty Cash on 42 minutes.

But in first-half stoppage time, the Bees took the lead when Dango Ouattara blasted in from a narrow angle.

Villa laid seige to the Brentford goal after the break but lacked the invention to break the visitors down.

Tammy Abraham did have the ball in the net but was denied a debut goal on his return to Villa after a VAR review found the ball had gone out of play in the build-up.

Crystal Palace also failed to make the most of a man advantage in a 1-1 draw at Nottingham Forest.

Morgan Gibbs-White’s early strike put Forest in front, but Neco Williams’ decision to punch the ball clear off his own goal-line just before half-time was the break the visitors needed. Ismaila Sarr netted from the penalty spot after Williams was shown a red card.

However, Palace failed to end their 12-game wait for a win and remain just three points above Forest and nine clear of the bottom three. — AFP



MUSCAT STOCK EXCHANGE
6,252.576

BUSINESS

CRUDE OIL
OMAN \$64.87
BRENT \$65.91
LIGHT \$61.80



SHORTTAKES



The Central Bank of Oman (CBO).

TREASURY BILLS
WORTH RO 13M
ALLOTTED

MUSCAT: The total value of government Treasury bills allotted for this week reached RO 13 million.

The value of bills allotted for a 28-day maturity stood at RO 5 million, at an average accepted price of 99.710 per RO 100, with the lowest accepted price also 99.710 per RO 100. The average discount rate was 3.78036 per cent, while the average yield was 3.79135 per cent.

The interest rate on repurchase operations (repo) with the Central Bank of Oman on these bills is 4.25 per cent, while the discount rate on Treasury bill facilities with the Central Bank stands at 4.75 per cent.

The value of bills allotted for a 91-day maturity amounted to RO 8 million, at an average accepted price of 99.053 per RO 100, with the lowest accepted price at 99.040 per RO 100. The average discount rate was 3.80041 per cent, while the average yield was 3.83677 per cent.

Treasury bills are a short-term, guaranteed financial instrument issued by the Ministry of Finance to provide

investment channels for licensed commercial banks.

The Central Bank of Oman acts as the issue manager for these bills.

The statement noted that the interest rate on repurchase operations (repo) with the Central Bank of Oman on these bills is 4.25 per cent, while the discount rate on Treasury bill facilities with the Central Bank stands at 4.75 per cent.

Treasury bills are also characterised by quick liquidity through discounting with the Central Bank of Oman, as well as through repo transactions with the Central Bank.

Licensed commercial banks can also conduct repo operations among themselves using Treasury bills in the interbank market. In addition, this instrument helps establish a benchmark indicator for short-term interest rates in the local financial market and enables the government to finance part of its expenditures in a smooth and flexible manner.

— ONA

Deepening Oman-Türkiye ties in focus at OMNEX

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, FEB 2

THE Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry on Monday opened the Oman International Exhibition and Forum (OMNEX) at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre, drawing wide participation from government entities and local, regional and international companies to promote investment partnerships and business opportunities aligned with Oman Vision 2040.

The Republic of Türkiye is the guest of honour this year. The opening ceremony was held under the auspices of His Highness Sayyid Faisal bin Turki al Said and attended by Necmettin Bilal Erdogan, son of the President of Türkiye, alongside senior officials, decision-makers and private-sector leaders.

Faisal al Rawas, Chairman of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), said the event brings together government and business leaders and investors from inside and outside Oman, offering “real opportunities” to enhance investment, expand partnerships and explore innovation across the business sector. He said Oman’s exhibitions and economic forums are not merely display platforms, but strategic tools to widen commercial networks, exchange expertise and create joint projects that add value to the national economy.

He welcomed Türkiye’s participation as guest of honour, saying it reflects the depth of economic relations between the two friendly countries and their shared interest in strengthening trade and investment cooperation and building long-term strategic partnerships.

Ibtisam al Farooji, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion for Investment Promotion, said the event reflects Oman’s economic ties with countries worldwide, adding that Oman-Türkiye relations are growing rapidly. She said the number of Turkish companies registered in Oman rose by 21% in 2025 to 696.



The Republic of Türkiye is the guest of honour this year.



The number of Turkish companies registered in Oman rose by 21% in 2025 to 696.

**IBTISAM
AL FAROOJI**

Sezai Uçarmak, Türkiye’s Vice Minister of Trade, described the forum as an effective platform to strengthen direct links between the two business communities and open new avenues for cooperation across multiple sectors. He said trade and investment ties have continued to develop, and the forum’s sector breadth provides practical opportunities for both sides to build partnerships serving shared interests.

Rustam Minnikhanov, head of the Republic of Tatarstan, said his region is keen to strengthen trade and economic relations with Oman, identifying Islamic banking and petrochemicals as promising areas for cooperation, citing Tatarstan’s experience in petrochemical industries and Islamic finance.

Salem al Rawas, head of the Omani side of the Omani-Turkish Business Council, said the 2026 edition is designed to “make opportunities”, build commercial partnerships and translate shared visions into real projects with sustainable economic impact. He said successful economic relations are built on partnership, integration and added value — not trade alone — adding that the joint council is working to increase private-sector participation, facilitate direct investor meetings and link investment opportunities to executable projects, so the event becomes a venue for concluding partnerships, not only discussion.

He said Türkiye’s guest-of-

honour status reflects the depth of the growing relationship, pointing to leadership-level exchanges as a key driver — highlighting the visit by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to Türkiye as a major milestone. He said the visit resulted in the signing of 24 agreements and memoranda of understanding across multiple fields and the establishment of a \$500 million joint investment fund — evidence, he added, of mutual confidence and a shared intent to convert political understandings into economic and investment outcomes.

He said Oman offers a promising investment climate and diverse opportunities across priority sectors including industry, energy, logistics, tourism, mining and the green economy, reinforcing its attractiveness for long-term, high-quality investment partnerships in a stable, business-supportive environment.

In a private-sector case study, Dr Mohammed al Barwani, Chairman of the Mohammed Al Barwani Group of Companies, said the group’s investment experience in Türkiye reflects a long-term diversification strategy.

He said the group entered the Türkiye market in 2014 through the acquisition of the Turquoise Shipyard, which he described as a major shipyard specialised in building luxury yachts, adding that the investment supported industrial growth and access to international markets.

First wind turbine installed at PDO’s Riyah-2 project

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, FEB 2

Leading Chinese wind turbine manufacturer Goldwind has announced the successful installation of the first wind turbine at the Riyah-2 wind farm project in Nimr West in Dhofar Governorate — the first of a cluster of 18 wind towers that will support the decarbonisation of Petroleum Development Oman’s (PDO) oil and gas operations.

Together with Riyah-1 — currently nearing completion at nearby Amin — the twin wind farms will have a combined generation capacity of 234 MW, making

this the largest wind project in Oman’s wind energy landscape to date.

In a post, Goldwind described the hoisting of the first wind turbine at Riyah-2 as “a major construction milestone for Oman’s largest wind power initiative”.

“Once operational, the wind farm — located in the high-wind regions of Dhofar and Al Wusta — will supply clean electricity to PDO, supporting the decarbonisation of its traditional oil and gas operations and contributing to Oman Vision 2040 and net-zero goals. Strategically sited to maximise wind resources, the project is expected to reduce CO₂



First wind turbine supplied by Goldwind being hoisted at the Riyah-2 site in PDO’s concession

emissions by approximately 740,000 tonnes annually”, the company noted. Both are being developed by a joint venture comprising OQ Alternative Energy (51%), a wholly owned subsidiary of OQ and TotalEnergies (49%). Renewable energy output from the two wind farms, alongside the North Oman Solar IPP under construction in PDO’s Block 6 licence area, will be supplied to PDO under long-term Power Purchase Agreements (PPAs). The OQAE-TotalEnergies JV will own and operate the projects for the duration of the PPAs.

Chinese firm Huadong Engineering Corporation, a subsidiary of PowerChina,

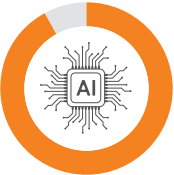
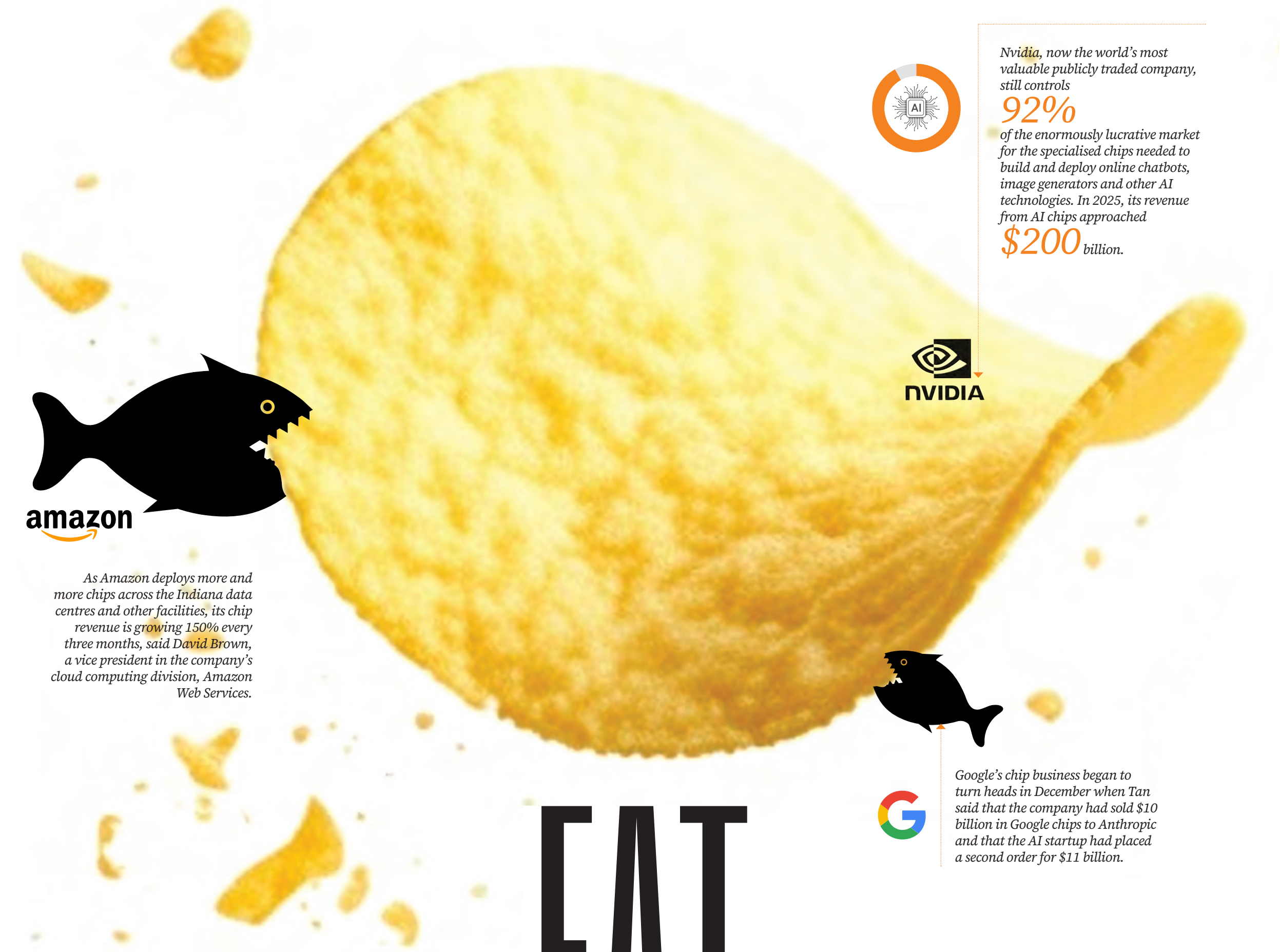
is the EPC contractor for the wind farm projects. The turbines are being supplied by Goldwind, which is providing a total of 36 GWH-182 series high-efficiency, climate-adapted turbines suited to Oman’s desert conditions.

“We are building green infrastructure to power traditional industries, proving that renewables are key to a low-carbon future. Meeting the rigorous safety and technical standards of the oil and gas industry, our GWH-182/6.5MW turbines are rising to the challenge in Salalah”, Goldwind added.

The two wind farms are slated to come into operation in the fourth quarter of 2026.

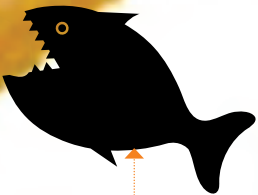
BUSINESS FEATURE

AMAZON AND GOOGLE



Nvidia, now the world's most valuable publicly traded company, still controls

92% of the enormously lucrative market for the specialised chips needed to build and deploy online chatbots, image generators and other AI technologies. In 2025, its revenue from AI chips approached **\$200** billion.



Google's chip business began to turn heads in December when Tan said that the company had sold \$10 billion in Google chips to Anthropic and that the AI startup had placed a second order for \$11 billion.

IN THE three years since the artificial intelligence boom began, the one thing that has been safe to assume is that almost every big AI project starts with chips from Nvidia. But last year, two of the tech industry's most powerful companies — which also happen to be two of Nvidia's biggest customers — made small but meaningful dents in Nvidia's seemingly insurmountable business. First, Amazon started packing thousands of its own AI chips into a massive network of computer data centres in Indiana, where they are being used by Anthropic, one of the world's leading AI companies. Then Google struck a series of deals with Anthropic. As Anthropic builds several of its own data centres in New York, Texas and other locations, Google is supplying chips for those facilities, said sources. A wide variety of chipmakers have spent years trying to compete with Nvidia, including old-guard companies like Advanced Micro Devices, startups like Cerebras and tech giants like Microsoft and Meta. But the growing chip businesses at Amazon and Google are Nvidia's toughest competition. "Yes, Nvidia controls a large percentage of the market, but in this market, even small percentages are worth billions", said Jordan Nanos, an analyst with SemiAnalysis, a data centre research firm.

In 2025, Amazon's revenue from its AI chip, Trainium, reached "multiple billions", the company's CEO, Andy Jassy, said in a recent earnings call with investors. Google's chips, called tensor processing units, or TPUs, generated revenue in the tens of billions, as Hock Tan, the CEO of Broadcom, which helps make Google's chips, unexpectedly revealed a few weeks later. Nvidia, now the world's most valuable publicly traded company, still controls 92 per cent of the enormously lucrative market for the specialised chips needed to build and deploy online chatbots, image generators and other AI technologies. In 2025, its revenue from AI chips approached \$200 billion. Companies like Amazon and Google are walking a tightrope as they compete with Nvidia: While building their own chips and providing them to customers, Nvidia remains their main supplier. Like most AI companies, Anthropic also relies heavily on Nvidia chips. But it has become increasingly critical of Nvidia for selling chips to China and is working to reduce its dependence. The result has been tens of billions of dollars in chip revenue for Amazon and Google — Anthropic's two largest investors. Google's chip business began to turn heads in December when Tan said that the company had sold \$10 billion in Google chips to Anthropic and that the AI startup had placed a

EAT INTO NVIDIA'S AI CHIP SUPREMACY

second order for \$11 billion. Anthropic is installing these chips in data centres it is building with a company called Fluidstack, sources said. As Fluidstack takes on debt to build these data centres, Google is also backstopping the deal, meaning it has agreed to repay the debt if Fluidstack is unable to, the people said. Since 2017, Google has leased TPUs to other companies via its cloud computing services. But its pact with Anthropic took a new approach: For the first time, Google allowed a company to install these chips in a data centre that did not belong to Google. The arrangement was driven in part by Anthropic's determination to maintain strict control over its AI technologies. Dario Amodei, Anthropic's CEO and other company executives believe AI is growing increasingly dangerous, so they aim to ensure that no one — not even Anthropic's close partners — can lay hands on the company's raw software code. By operating its own data centres, Anthropic hopes to keep this code under lock and key. This unusual deal opened a window onto Google's chip business, showing that revenue was climbing into the tens of billions of dollars. "That is a lot of money", said Andrew Feldman, the CEO of Cerebras. "They are selling an extraordinary volume of chips". Amazon started work on its AI chips about three years after Google.

In the fall of 2023, it said it would invest \$4 billion in Anthropic. Soon after, an Amazon executive sent a private message to an executive at another company saying Anthropic had won the deal because it agreed to build its AI using Amazon's chips. Amazon, he wrote, aimed to create a viable alternative to Nvidia. The next year, working alongside Anthropic, Amazon tailored a new version of its chip, Trainium 2, for the data centres now used to train and deploy AI. Although the chips are not as powerful as chips from Google or Nvidia, Amazon is installing twice as many into each data centre, hoping to provide more computing power using the same amount of electricity. As Amazon deploys more and more chips across the Indiana data centres and other facilities, its chip revenue is growing 150% every three months, said David Brown, a vice president in the company's cloud computing division, Amazon Web Services. "Growth is limited by how quickly we can get the chips out there", he said in an interview. While Anthropic is primarily driving Amazon's chip revenue today, experts believe that such a prominent partnership can promote even bigger changes. When Anthropic uses chips from Amazon or Google, it shows the rest of the market that Nvidia chips are not the only option. — The New York Times

BUSINESS

SELECTIVEGROWTH



Brent crude futures were down \$3.34, or 4.8%, at \$65.98 per barrel.

Oil prices fall on US-Iran de-escalation

LONDON: Oil prices fell more than 4% on Monday after US President Donald Trump said Iran was “seriously talking” with Washington, signaling a de-escalation of tensions with the OPEC member. A stronger US dollar also weighed on prices.

Brent crude futures were down \$3.34, or 4.8%, at \$65.98 per barrel at 11:13 GMT, while US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) fell \$3.37, or 5.2%, to \$61.84 per barrel. Both benchmarks had posted their largest monthly gains since 2022 in January, with Brent up 16% and WTI 13%.

Analysts said the decline reflected a combination of easing geopolitical risk, improved supply conditions and a stronger dollar. “The weakness is the disappearance of the geopolitical risk premium as the US and Iran show tentative willingness to negotiate, combined with the dollar’s strength”, said PVM analyst Tamas Varga.

UBS analyst Giovanni Staunovo noted that easing supply disruptions in the US and Kazakhstan also weighed on prices. Priyanka Sachdeva of Phillip Nova added that Trump’s earlier threats to Iran had supported oil prices in January, but the recent pullback is reinforced by renewed dollar strength, making oil more expensive for non-US buyers.

Global supply concerns resurfaced after OPEC+ agreed on Sunday to keep March output unchanged, following a freeze on planned increases from January through March 2026 due to seasonally weaker consumption.

“Geopolitical risks mask a fundamentally bearish oil market”, Capital Economics said, citing last year’s 12-day conflict between Israel and Iran in a well-supplied market, which will continue to pressure Brent prices through 2026. — Reuters

IMF chief says global inflation to fall, trade integration is needed

DUBAI: Global inflation is expected to fall to 3.8% this year and to 3.4% in 2027, helped by softer demand and lower energy prices, the IMF chief said on Monday.

Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva said in a speech in the Annual Arab Fiscal Forum in Dubai that global growth has held up ‘remarkably well’ amidst profound shifts in geopolitics, trade policy, technology and demographics.



The International Monetary Fund logo is seen during the IMF/World Bank spring meetings in Washington. — Reuters

Georgieva also called for more trade integration as unilateral trade agreements are seen on the increase.

“In the world of trade fragmentation, more trade integration is absolutely paramount”.

“What we have seen this year is that trade did not go down the way we feared it would. In fact, trade is growing slightly slower than global growth,” she added. — Reuters

Slump in commodities rattles global markets

COMMODITIES markets slumped on Monday, led by sharp losses in precious metals, oil and industrial metals, after the selection of Kevin Warsh as the next US Federal Reserve chair triggered broad selling in risk assets.

Gold fell 5% to its lowest level in more than two weeks, while silver slid over 7%, retreating sharply after both metals hit record highs last week. Oil prices dropped nearly 5%, easing from multi-month peaks and copper on the London Metal Exchange declined 3%.

Markets interpreted Warsh’s appointment as a signal of a more hawkish Federal Reserve, said Vivek Dhar, commodities strategist at Commonwealth Bank of Australia (CBA). A hawkish Fed implies interest rates will remain higher for longer, strengthening the US dollar and increasing the opportunity cost of holding non-yielding assets such as gold and silver.

A stronger dollar also weighed on oil and base metals, Dhar added, though he maintained CBA’s forecast for gold to reach \$6,000 an ounce in the fourth quarter.

US President Donald Trump named Warsh, a former Federal Reserve governor, to succeed Jerome Powell in May. The move sparked heavy selling across global equities and commodities on Friday, while boosting the dollar.



A one-kilogramme gold bar and a sealed gold coin are displayed at a jewellery store in Dubai. — Reuters

Asian shares extended losses on Monday amidst volatile trading in metals ahead of a busy week of central bank meetings, earnings and economic data.

Selling in precious metals intensified after CME Group raised margin requirements on metal futures, effective from Monday’s close. Higher margins tend to curb speculative activity and prompt traders to unwind positions.

Gold suffered its steepest one-day fall since 1983 on Friday, dropping more than 9%, while silver plunged 27% in its largest daily decline on record. IG analyst Tony Sycamore said the scale of the liquidation echoed the turmoil of the 2008 financial crisis, citing forced selling and stop-loss cascades.

Oil prices also faced pressure from signs of easing US-Iran tensions, after Trump said Tehran was “seriously talking” with Washington.

Meanwhile, copper and iron ore weakened amidst high inventories and soft demand ahead of China’s Lunar New Year holiday. — Reuters

India in talks about allowing Alipay+ link to its instant payment systems

NEW DELHI: India is in talks with China-related Ant International to allow digital payments platform Alipay+ to be linked to India’s leading instant payments system for cross-border transactions, two government sources said.

The move would help make payments easier for Indian tourists as they would be able to use India’s Unified Payments Interface (UPI) with merchants in countries that have signed up with Alipay+.

The talks between the Indian government and central bank officials and Singapore-based Ant International, which was founded by China’s fintech giant Ant Group and now operates independently, reflect further warming of ties with China.

Alipay+ connects about 1.8 billion user accounts with over 150 million merchants across more than 100 markets, according to its website.

The company has a significant presence in Asia, Europe, the Middle East and Latin America.

India’s UPI has become ubiquitous within the country, processing close to 18 billion transactions a month.

The government and the central bank have been keen to extend its use across borders to help Indian travellers and the diaspora pay in Indian rupees, reducing friction and costs involved with cross-border payments.



A QR code sticker of the digital payment app Paytm is seen outside a grocery store in Kolkata. — Reuters

The government sources declined to be identified as the discussions have not been made public. India’s finance ministry, the Reserve Bank of India and the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

Ant International did not immediately respond to a request for comment. A final decision to allow Alipay would be taken after security considerations, the Indian government sources said.

“There are sensitivities involved in terms of geopolitical positioning or in terms of securing the country’s digital infrastructure and data because of Alipay’s roots to China”, one of the sources said.

India imposed tight investment rules on Chinese investors after a border standoff in 2020 and they remain in force.

WARMING TIES

Strained ties after the border standoff slowed the exchange

of capital, technology and talent. India tightened scrutiny of investments by China-based firms or those with China-linked ownership, stalling deals including BYD’s proposed \$1 billion investment in an electric car venture.

In the face of punishing US tariffs, however, New Delhi began cautiously rekindling ties with Beijing last year. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited China for the first time in seven years and discussed ways to improve ties when he met Chinese President Xi Jinping. Last October, India resumed direct commercial flights to China after a five-year hiatus, and eased visa rules for Chinese professionals. — Reuters

FIRST DEAL

Greece to ship US LNG to Ukraine



ATHENS: A Greek joint venture has signed its first deal to supply US liquefied natural gas to Ukraine, with deliveries due in March. The cargo will arrive at Greece’s Revithoussa LNG terminal and be transported via pipelines through southeastern Europe to Ukraine’s state energy firm Naftogaz, supporting Kyiv amidst its wartime energy crisis. — Reuters

POLITICAL TENSION

Supply snags, politics weigh on aviation



SINGAPORE: Aviation leaders warned that supply chain shortages and rising geopolitical tensions are slowing industry growth ahead of the Singapore Airshow. Officials said disruptions to aircraft production, engine maintenance and certification risk limiting capacity, even as Asia-Pacific passenger demand continues to rise. — Reuters

GAS GROWTH

LNG Market to double by 2050



DOHA: The ConocoPhillips CEO said on Monday that the liquefied natural gas market is projected to grow to 600 million metric tonnes by 2030 from 400 million tonnes currently, and further expand to 800 million tonnes by 2050. — Reuters

OPINION

Will leaders without AI knowledge remain relevant?



TARIQ
AL BARWANI

The writer is strategic adviser, businessman and motivational speaker.

I regularly meet a lot of senior leaders, from team leads and all the way to CEOs, that work at and run different industries. They are smart, experienced and respected individuals who have worked and have built successful organisations, made tough decisions and earned their place at the table too. Many of them are confident in their judgment and proud of the instincts that got them where they are today.

Nevertheless, with some, when the conversation turns to anything related to the Artificial Intelligence (AI), I often hear the same remark ie “This is not for me, but for the IT or Tech Team”!.

Now that confidence is exactly where the risk begins. In a world increasingly shaped by data and algorithms, a leader’s relevance may no longer be on par with AI-enabled peers unless they actively upskill and engage with it.

Hence, I decided to focus this week’s article on whether leaders without AI knowledge can be relevant today and mostly the near future.

Let me be clear, at least for now, AI will not replace leadership, yet expose leaders that simply rely on intuition, hierarchy and their past success.

Why expose? Because the world today depends on data that moves in real time and AI insights that are paramount for organisational success (of course from clean, accurate and validated data input). AI’s biggest value is speed and clarity.

It helps organisations see patterns, forecast outcomes and test scenarios faster than any human team ever could.

Leaders who understand AI do not just guess but combine their experience with evidence (backed by data). AI brings that power to leadership table.

AI literacy is now a leadership skill and definitely not just a technical one.

Just like leaders do not need to be accountants but must understand financial reports, they do not need to build AI models but they must understand how AI works (in general), value it can create and how it helps with decision making.

Effective leaders should use AI as a thinking partner and not as an authority. AI (if used and implemented correctly) helps inform strategy yet leaders ultimately provide judgment (and that’s where AI fails as machine).

In addition, AI can highlights risks and leaders in return weigh trade-offs. Finally, AI shows probabilities but leaders decide direction.

These are few examples of how AI and leaders can collaborate and work together today and definitely for the future.

Smart leaders should start experimenting with AI early. They should not wait for perfect AI strategies.

They should invest time and money into pilot tools to see how they work and add value into their organisations. For example,

Leaders that ignore AI will ultimately fail and reasons include becoming slow to decide/act, lose important opportunities and finally operate at higher costs (which could be improved, thanks to AI automation and proven support systems).

in a marketing department to understand customers, in finance department to improve forecasting and in operations department to reduce inefficiencies. Small pilots create learning. Learning creates confidence.

Leaders need to stay involved in order to understand, be relevant and up-to-date in this crucial era of AI-enabled world.

They should not only leave it to tech or IT departments, nor outsource it to consultants and advisors (who may be happy to take them for a ride and speed their irrelevance today).

Leaders that ignore AI will ultimately fail and reasons include becoming slow to decide/act, lose important opportunities and finally operate at higher costs (which could be improved, thanks to AI automation and proven support systems).

On the other hand, leaders that utilise AI correctly will make consistent, faster and confident decisions.

That’s when leaders replacement will not be a question but rather a necessity if organisations wish to prosper and grow.

To conclude my article this week, let me emphasise that the future belongs to leaders who are curious enough to learn, humble enough to adapt and smart enough to combine human judgment with artificial intelligence.

In the end, leadership has always been about relevance and AI is now part of that definition. Until we catch up again next week, stay updated and be AI-ready.

Education–labour alignment key to economic participation

When discussing employability, the conversation often gravitates towards labour-market statistics or narratives of limited opportunity. Traditionally,



AZIZA
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The writer is a Muscat-based independent researcher

employability is treated as an isolated outcome, often measured through short-term indicators and immediate figures. Yet, labour policy cannot be successful in a vacuum. A nation’s policy framework is its organism: labour outcomes are inseparable from the societal and educational structures that sustain them. Without a well-

aligned education policy alone cannot deliver sustainable economic participation.

This is most evident in the persistent discussion surrounding “skill gaps”, which in many countries has become a vague scapegoat rationale. The most prevalent deficits cited in global and local studies remain English language proficiency and computational literacy. These gaps are neither newly identified nor speculatively understood. Rather, they reflect competencies that require long-term, cumulative development rather than rapid intervention. Educational systems are designed to build such “embodied capital” progressively across a pupil’s lifespan, rather than through short-term remedial correction.

However, education reform does not yield immediate returns. The students benefitting from these revised curricula must first progress through the system wherein they are supported by trained educators and updated assessments, before the impacts are felt in the workforce. In this sense, the temporal lag of education policy must not be subject to immediate assessment, as it is a structural necessity; its greatest returns are realised only when a new generation of graduates from a reformed curriculum enters the economy.

Yet, even the most robust policy frameworks have their limits. Because a child spends only a fraction of their time within schools, society ought not to fully “outsource” the responsibility of education to the state.

Drawing on the work of the famous French sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu, we must recognise that it is cultural capital, the linguistic codes, cognitive habits and dispositions cultivated within the family, that primarily drives the success of both educational and labour policies. While governance provides the institutional scaffolding, it is the home environment that provides the readiness to climb it. Ultimately, the success of a nation’s workforce is a symbiotic process between governments and societies.

CEPA is a force multiplier, not a rival to EU–India FTA

INDIA

is no longer “the next big market”. It is the market that every serious trade strategy must orbit.

That is why two agreements reached within weeks of each other deserve Oman’s full attention: the Oman–India Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), signed on December 18, 2025 and the EU–India free trade agreement (FTA) negotiations concluded in principle on January 27, 2026. They underline one reality: India is becoming the central junction in a re-wired global economy.

A predictable question follows. If European firms gain sweeping access to India under the EU–India FTA, does that weaken the advantage Oman secures through its CEPA? Only if we treat trade agreements as standalone trophies. In the modern economy, agreements are operating systems. Their value depends on interoperability: how well a country connects multiple trade architectures into bankable value chains. From that perspective, the EU–India FTA is not pressure on Oman’s CEPA; it is the catalyst that makes Oman’s CEPA more valuable, by expanding the number of firms, technologies and supply chains looking for reliable regional connectors.

The EU–India deal, as described by the European Commission, links markets covering about two billion people, cuts tariffs approximately 96.6% of EU goods exports to India and is expected to double EU goods exports to India by 2032 while saving around €4 billion a year in duties. It also strengthens services access and intellectual property protections.

Oman’s CEPA brings something different: speed, proximity and a Gulf platform that can translate market access into regional reach. India–Oman trade reached about \$10.6 billion in FY 2024–25 and the CEPA can widen that corridor into new goods, services and investment. The strategic aim should be clear: move from a commodity-heavy pattern towards higher-value activity that builds capabilities in Oman.

Here is the opportunity the EU–India FTA creates for Oman. As



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European companies deepen their India footprint, they will look for regional nodes that can distribute efficiently to the Gulf and East Africa, handle re-export and light processing with minimal friction and offer credible trade finance and dispute resolution. Oman can offer this — if policy and execution are organised around the overlap.

Start with logistics and value-adding re-export. Europe’s improved access to India will increase flows of machinery, chemicals, pharmaceuticals and high-value inputs moving into and out of India’s industrial clusters. Oman should position Al Duqm, Suhar and Salalah as the Gulf’s efficient “buffer”: a place where those flows are warehoused, packaged and redistributed to GCC markets and the wider region. The goal is simple: make Oman the place where EU–India value chains are structured, financed and deployed outward.

Next is industrial collaboration: European technology plus Indian scale plus Omani location. If the EU–India FTA accelerates technology transfer into India, Oman should target the “in-between” stages of those value chains that fit our zones and capabilities: specialty chemical blending and packaging, pharma secondary manufacturing (packaging and cold-chain distribution), precision maintenance and spare parts and selected component assembly for regional demand. These activities are not glamorous, but they are sticky: they create suppliers, skills and repeat business.

A third multiplier is the energy transition. Europe’s sustainability emphasis and India’s scale will drive investment into decarbonisation technologies and new fuels. Oman’s renewable resources and green hydrogen ambitions can be paired with Indian manufacturing capability and European standards and financing. The most strategic posture is triangular: attract European certification expertise, partner with Indian manufacturers and anchor projects in Oman where land and port access support export-oriented production.

The UAE offers a clear reference.

The UAE–India CEPA entered into force on May 1, 2022 and India’s government reports that bilateral merchandise trade nearly doubled from \$43.3 billion in FY 2020–21 to \$83.7 billion in 2023–24. That outcome reflected strong facilitation and a practical focus on making trade faster and cheaper. Oman does not need to copy the UAE but it does need the same discipline of execution and time-bound delivery.

So what should Oman do now to make the CEPA a multiplier in the EU–India FTA era? Three moves stand out.

First, build a CEPA-to-investment pipeline. Translate tariff concessions and services commitments into an investable target list: specific sectors, anchor firms, zone-ready projects and financing packages. Without that pipeline, a CEPA risks becoming a legal text rather than an industrial strategy.

Second, launch explicit triangular programmes — EU–India–Oman — focused on bankable corridors. Examples include: a cold-chain corridor for fisheries and premium foods (Omani processing, Indian scale in packaging and distribution, European standards and buyers); a life-sciences packaging and distribution hub; and a green-molecules cluster aligned to European certification.

Third, invest in the “competitiveness stack”: rules of origin support, standards and testing capacity, faster customs clearance, workforce training for logistics and compliance and predictable dispute resolution. India rewards scale and speed. Europe rewards standards and documentation. Oman must be fluent in both.

If Oman treats its CEPA as a standalone deal, the EU–India FTA will look like competition. If Oman treats its CEPA as a connector — linking European capital and technology with Indian growth and Oman’s geography — then the EU–India FTA becomes a tailwind. It expands the playing field. Oman’s CEPA determines whether we operate from the sidelines — or from the centre.

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INDIAN electrical engineer more than 20 years experience in "MEP" construction field in Oman seeks suitable job. Contact: 92919281

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Any objection to this change of name may be communicated to the Embassy of India, Muscat, Diplomatic Quarters, Al Khuwair, P.O. Box No. 1727, Postal Code 112, Ruwi, Sultanate of Oman.

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ART/LIFE



INSIDE BARKA'S

STRAWBERRY

GARDEN

> 20

BEYONDTHE**SCREEN**

SPANISH FILM INDUSTRY TO CELEBRATE SUSAN SARANDON



Veteran Hollywood star Susan Sarandon will receive the international prize at Spain's top film awards next month in recognition of her "extraordinary" career and her "brave political and social commitment", the Spanish Cinema Academy announced on Wednesday. The honour celebrates decades of influential work in cinema alongside sustained public engagement beyond the screen.

The Oscar-winning US actor, now 79, will be honoured at the 40th Goya awards ceremony, which will take place in Barcelona on February 28. According to the Academy, Sarandon represents "the perfect combination of talent and professional success, glamour; and social and political commitment", a balance that has defined both her artistic choices and her public persona throughout her career.

Her filmography includes what the Academy described as "unquestionable masterpieces, iconic films that have entered popular culture and cult gems". Among the titles highlighted were *The Witches of Eastwick*, *The Client* and *Atlantic City*, all cited as "legendary" works that contributed to her enduring international reputation and cultural impact.

The Academy also emphasised Sarandon's "versatility", pointing to her wide-ranging performances across genres, as well as "her voice in numerous causes and her taste for risk and experimental cinema". One example singled out was her role in the feminist classic *Thelma and Louise*, a film that has remained culturally resonant decades after its release.

Sarandon won the Academy Award for Best Actress in 1996 for her performance in *Dead Man Walking*, in which she portrayed a nun who offers spiritual support to a man sentenced to death. The role is frequently cited as one of the most powerful performances of her career.

Beyond film, the Academy described her as a "staunch defender of human rights". Sarandon has been outspoken on political and social issues, including criticism of what she called "genocide" in Gaza and has engaged publicly in debates over free speech and the death penalty in the United States. With this award, Sarandon joins a list of previous international prize recipients at the Goyas that includes Cate Blanchett, Juliette Binoche, Sigourney Weaver and Richard Gere. — AFP

Q U I C K F E A T U R E S



FEATHER WORLD

Swans gather at the bank of the partially frozen Dnipro River during subzero temperatures, amid Russia's attack on Ukraine in Kyiv. — Reuters



CULTURE

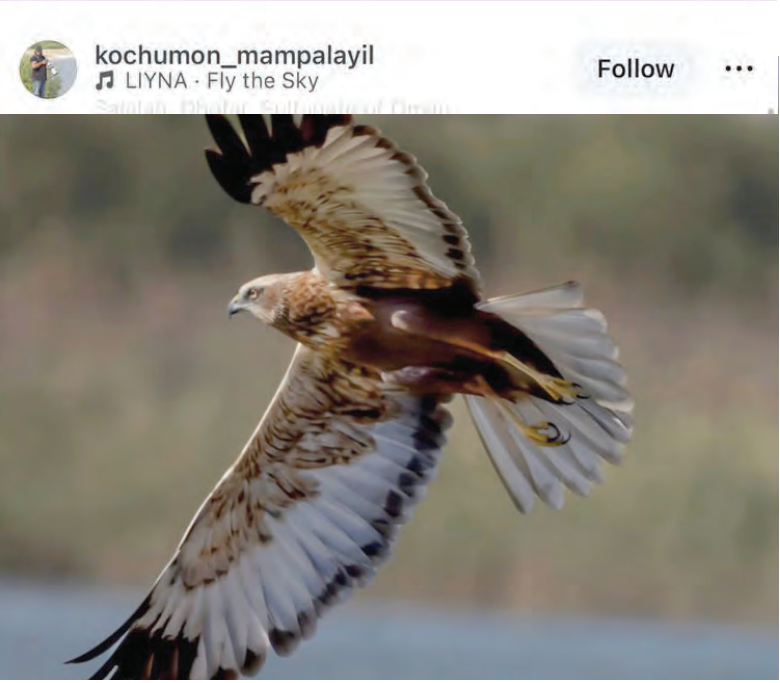
Residents of Tlacotalpan participate in the traditional bull run during the Candelaria festivities in Tlacotalpan, Veracruz state, Mexico. — AFP



TOURISM

The Oceania Vista cruise, one of the world's most renowned major cruise ships, remains anchored in the port of Montevideo. — AFP

INSTA PICKS



Marsh Harrier soaring in Salalah Skies



Sunsets across Muscat’s horizon

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ANDERSON CHANNELS NATURE IN DIOR HAUTE COUTURE DEBUT



Dior designer Jonathan Anderson drew inspiration from nature and his love of ceramics for his debut Haute Couture collection on Monday, just days after mixed reviews for his menswear.

The 41-year-old has the daunting task of designing all three fashion lines at one of the world’s biggest brands — women’s and men’s ready-to-wear, plus Haute Couture — the first person to do so since Christian Dior himself.

Just days after sending out dozens of new looks during Paris Men’s Fashion Week in a show that some observers saw as daring but lacking coherence, the Northern Irish creative was back with his first Haute Couture collection.

It featured floral motifs on fabrics or as accessories, while sculptural bulbous dresses were inspired by the work of Kenya-born ceramicist Magdelene Odundo.

“When you copy nature, you always learn something”,

Anderson declared in his show notes, which compared Haute Couture to a living ecosystem that is “evolving, adapting, enduring”.

A-list attendees at the show at the Rodin Museum included actors Jennifer Lawrence and singer Rihanna as well as Amazon boss Jeff Bezos and his wife Lauren Sanchez.

Last Wednesday, the former Loewe designer delivered his second menswear collection since his promotion to French luxury conglomerate LVMH’s second-largest fashion brand in April last year.

Inspired by the idea of “today’s aristocrats”, it featured “angst and a kind of wrongness, engulfing wrong taste”, Anderson told reporters, departing from his safer approach last year.

He radically redrew the Dior signature Bar jacket and sent out shirts adorned with rhinestone-fringed epaulettes while models donned yellow or spiked wigs. — AFP



Billie Eilish and Finneas wearing ICE Out pins pose with the award for Song of the Year for “WILDFLOWER” in the photo room during the 68th Annual Grammy Awards. — Reuters



Bad Bunny accepts the award for Album of the Year for “Debi Tirar Más Fotos” during the 68th Annual Grammy Awards in Los Angeles. — Reuters



Kendrick Lamar accepts the award for Best Rap Album for “GNX” during the 68th Annual Grammy Awards in Los Angeles, California. — Reuters



Lady Gaga poses with the Best Dance Pop Recording award for “Abracadabra” and Best Pop Vocal Album award for “MAYHEM” during the 68th Annual Grammy Awards. — Reuters

Bad Bunny wins top Grammy prize in a first for a Spanish album

Bad Bunny, the Latino rap star whose forthcoming Super Bowl gig has ignited a culture wars controversy, won the top Grammy prize on Sunday, a first for a Spanish-language album, with “Debi Tirar Más Fotos,” a celebration of his Puerto Rican roots.

The 31-year-old performer-producer edged out fellow megastars Kendrick Lamar and Lady Gaga in what amounted to a three-way race to clinch his first album-of-the-year Grammy, considered the pinnacle of the music industry’s highest honors.

“I want to dedicate this award to all the people who had to leave their homeland, their country to follow their dreams,” the Puerto Rican artist said in his acceptance speech, tapping into expressions of solidarity for immigrants evident throughout the show.

Grammy recognition of Bad Bunny, born Benito Antonio Martinez Ocasio, carried strong political overtones given his outspoken criticism of the Immigration and Customs Enforcement sweeps ordered by U.S. President Donald Trump in cities across the country.

The singer-producer skipped the continental United States on his recent concert tour, saying he feared federal immigration agents would show up to arrest his fans.

The Grammy accolades also burnished his reputation ahead of a wider introduction to a mainstream English-speaking U.S. audience next Sunday when he is due to headline the National Football League’s Super Bowl halftime show.

His selection for one of the marquee live sports and entertainment events on U.S. television has rankled some traditionalists, including Trump, who called it “absolutely ridiculous” and said he had never heard of Bad Bunny.

“ICE out,” he declared from the stage as he accepted the award for best Latin urban music album for “Debi Tirar Más Fotos,” one of five awards he received. Opposition to Trump’s deportation drive emerged as a recurring theme throughout the three-hour-plus live Grammy telecast, in which many attendees, including Justin Bieber, were seen sporting “ICE Out” buttons.

Accepting her award as best new artist, British soul-pop singer Olivia Dean paid tribute to a grandmother who immigrated to Britain from Guyana as a teenager seeking a new life.

Lamar, the chart-topping hip-hop sensation who led the field of Grammy contenders going into Sunday’s show with nine nominations, came away with five awards, including best rap album for his latest studio set “GNX” and a shared award for record of the year for “luther,” his wistful duet with R&B singer-songwriter SZA.

The award for song of the year, honoring composers, went to Billie Eilish and her brother Finneas O’Connell, for her hit single “Wildflower.”

“Golden,” the smash hit from

the Netflix animated movie “KPop Demon Hunters,” made history during the non-televised portion of the awards when it was named best song written for visual media, marking the first time the KPop music genre has ever earned Grammy glory.

The song was performed in the film by a fictional band called HUNTR/X, voiced by real-life vocalists EJAE, Audrey Nuna and Rein Ami. Lady Gaga won Grammys for best pop vocal album with “Mayhem,” and best dance-pop recording for “Abracadabra.”

Trevor Noah returned to host the festivities for a sixth time, which he had said would be his last Grammys gig. The show aired live on the CBS network from the Crypto.com Arena in downtown Los Angeles.

Legendary filmmaker Steven Spielberg, 79, achieved EGOT status - one of the rarest honors in the entertainment industry - after winning his first Grammy award for best music film for “Music by John Williams,” which he produced. EGOT stands for Emmy, Grammy, Oscar and Tony.

Grammy winners are chosen by the roughly 15,000 voting members of the Recording Academy - industry peers including artists, songwriters, producers and engineers - whose ranks have been revamped over the past seven years to increase diversity. About 1,000 Latin Grammys voters became eligible to vote this year, and 73% of members have joined since 2019. — Reuters

INSIDE BARKA'S

STRAWBERRY

GARDEN



YERU EBUEN

In the early months of winter, when Oman's air turns crisp and the countryside begins to soften into green, an unexpected ritual unfolds in Barka. Families arrive in steady streams, children clutch baskets, phones rise into the air and the scent of ripe strawberries drifts through greenhouse corridors. At the centre of this seasonal pilgrimage stands The Strawberry Garden — a farm that has quietly transformed agriculture into a social event and a local harvest into a national conversation.

Unlike traditional farms, The Strawberry Garden presents itself as a hybrid destination: part agricultural project, part leisure space. It positions itself as “a unique destination blending agriculture, family fun and nature”, highlighting modern farming technologies alongside curated visitor experiences.

The site features specialised greenhouses for hanging strawberries, cafés, family cabins, children's play areas and zones dedicated to birds and animals. This deliberate design reframes farming as an immersive lifestyle experience rather than a purely productive activity.

This concept reflects a broader shift in Oman's agricultural landscape. Media and agri-industry reports note that strawberries, once rare in the Sultanate of Oman, have become a symbol of innovation, as farmers adopt greenhouse and vertical farming methods to overcome harsh climatic conditions.

Geography plays a subtle but crucial

role. Barka, long associated with agricultural heritage, has become a testing ground for experimental crops. Reports indicate that farmers in the area are achieving impressive yields through controlled environments and vertical farming, despite Oman's arid climate.

This technical success intersects with cultural timing. Winter in Oman has evolved into a season of outdoor exploration, farm visits and weekend escapes. Strawberry farms, with their photogenic landscapes and interactive harvesting, fit seamlessly into this seasonal rhythm.

While agricultural innovation laid the foundation, it was social media that accelerated The Strawberry Garden's rise. Instagram posts frame the farm as an agro-tourism project redefining the relationship between agriculture and hospitality, between humans and nature.

The farm's online narrative is carefully curated: visitors picking strawberries by hand, families sharing moments in nature and captions that blend poetic language with invitation. One post announces the season with a simple declaration: “Strawberry season is here!”.

Such messaging taps into a growing appetite for local produce and experiential outings, a trend echoed in regional coverage showing that consumers increasingly favour fresh, locally grown strawberries and enjoy farms where they can harvest fruit themselves.

A Weekend Phenomenon

On weekends, the farm becomes particularly busy. Visitors do not

merely purchase strawberries; they participate in the act of harvesting. This interactive model has driven demand that often outpaces supply, reflecting both the farm's popularity and a broader desire for meaningful leisure experiences.

The farm's own communications reveal the scale of this demand. On peak days, visitor numbers can exceed the available harvest, forcing temporary closures while preparations are made for the next picking cycle. In one announcement, the owner expressed gratitude for the overwhelming turnout while acknowledging that the day's strawberry supply had sold out.

The statement added that the farm would remain closed over the weekend for maintenance and preparation, before reopening for the next picking date on Monday, January 26, 2026. The message ended with a warm invitation for visitors to return, reinforcing the farm's identity not merely as a producer of fruit, but as a host of seasonal experiences.

This interplay between abundance and limitation is precisely what fuels the farm's appeal. The sense that strawberries are available only at certain moments, in limited quantities, transforms the harvest into an event. In doing so, The Strawberry Garden has elevated a simple agricultural cycle into a highly anticipated weekend ritual — one that reflects a broader cultural shift in how people in Oman choose to spend their leisure time.

To check for updates and schedule, make sure to follow their Instagram account: @strawberry_garden_om.