

OMAN

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SUNRISE 06:42 AM

PRAYER TIMINGS

FAJR 05:22 AM

DHUHR 12:08 PM

ASR 03:08 PM

MAGHRIB 05:28 PM

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THE SECOND SHOT, WHEN A MOMENT IS SEEN AGAIN

INBRIEF

HM’S GREETINGS TO KING OF BHUTAN

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck of the Kingdom of Bhutan on his country’s National Day. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his heartfelt sentiments and best wishes to King Jigme and the people of his country further progress and prosperity.

MUSCAT-SINGAPORE FLIGHTS SOON

Oman Air has announced the launch of direct flights between Muscat and Singapore, commencing from July 2, 2026. The new service marks the airline’s latest link to Southeast Asia, increasing accessibility between the two regions. Guests will be able to fly direct from Muscat to Singapore four days a week - Thursdays, Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays. With Oman Air recently joining the oneworld Alliance, the new route also taps into key traffic flows via member airlines, including Australia, Japan and Hong Kong, offering guests smooth connections. “We’re excited to launch this new route, which enhances our growing network and strengthens the connection between Oman and Singapore,” said Con Korfiatis, Chief Executive Officer of Oman Air.

WHITE COAT CEREMONY FOR 184 FUTURE DOCTORS



Represented by the College of Medicine and Health Sciences in Suhar, the National University of Science and Technology (NUST) on Tuesday held the White Coat Ceremony for its 21st batch of future doctors, a total of 184 medical students. The ceremony was held under the auspices of Dr Ahmed bin Salim al Mandhari, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Health for Planning and Health Regulation. Dr Ali bin Saud al Bimani, Vice-Chancellor of the National University of Science and Technology, said that the university is committed to establishing an advanced educational environment, in close cooperation with the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, the Ministry of Health, and other government and private institutions. SEE ALSO P3

Prime Minister of India arrives today on visit

TO CONDUCT OFFICIAL TALKS WITH HIS MAJESTY SULTAN HAITHAM BIN TARIK



NARENDRA MODI, Prime Minister of the Republic of India, will arrive in Muscat on Wednesday on an official two-day visit to the Sultanate of Oman, during which he will conduct official talks with His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik.

During the visit, the Prime Minister will be accompanied by an official delegation comprising some officials at the Indian Government.

The Omani-Indian relations are witnessing remarkable growth across various fields, particularly in the domain

of economic integration, which stands as a fundamental pillar aligning with the ambitions and shared aspirations of the two nations.

In this context, the visit of Narendra Modi, Prime Minister of the Republic of India, to the Sultanate of Oman marks an important milestone in the course of the historical relations between the two friendly countries, rooted in centuries of economic, cultural, and commercial ties between the Omani and Indian peoples.

India is the sixth-largest trading partner

with the Sultanate of Oman in terms of total exports. The volume of trade exchange between the Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of India reached approximately RO 1 billion by the end of last September.

According to statistics released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information, the value of Omani exports to the Republic of India reached approximately RO 528.7 million by the end of last September, while total Omani imports from India amounted to about RO 1,076.9 million. SEE ALSO P2

PATH TO UKRAINE PEACE NOT ‘STRAIGHT LINE’, SAYS STARMER



Britain's Prime Minister Keir Starmer

LONDON: British Prime Minister Keir Starmer has cautioned that the path to peace in Ukraine was “not an entirely straight line” after “productive” talks in Berlin.

Starmer and other European leaders set out conditions for any peace deal with Russia after a Monday meeting in the German capital, with security guarantees backed by the US.

The British government said setting out the UK’s contribution

to a Europe-led multinational force in Ukraine - a proposal forming part of the new package of security guarantees - was “a few steps away yet”.

Starmer, updating his Cabinet on the Berlin discussions on Tuesday, said progress had been made. “The Prime Minister said we were making progress, including on security guarantees,” according to a readout issued by his office. — dpa

Trump says Gaza stabilisation force is already running

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump said the International Stabilisation Force for Gaza is already running and that more countries would be added.

“I think that, in a form, it’s already running,” Trump said in the Oval Office. “More and more countries are coming into it. They’re already in, but they’ll send any number of troops that I ask them to send.”

Meanwhile, the Israeli military shot dead a 16-year-old Palestinian during a raid on the town of Tuqu’, the Palestinian health ministry said, the latest deadly incident in a recent surge of violence in the Israeli-

occupied West Bank.

The boy was shot after Israeli military forces gathered in the centre of town late on Monday and began firing “indiscriminately”, according to a report by Palestinian state news agency WAFA citing the head of the Tuqu’ town council.

The military shot the teenager, Ammar Yaser Sabbah, with a live round to the chest, the report said. He was rushed to the hospital but did not survive.

Violence has surged in the West Bank this year, and since the start of the two-year war in Gaza in October 2023. Israeli settler attacks



A man watches as members of the Palestinian Civil Defence participate in a search and rescue operation at the site of a house that was partially destroyed during the war and collapsed on Tuesday, at Shati refugee camp in Gaza. — Reuters

on Palestinians have risen sharply, while the military has tightened restrictions on movement and carried out sweeping raids in several cities.

More than a thousand Palestinians have been killed in the West Bank between October 7, 2023, and November 14, 2025, according to the United Nations.

Those killed by Israeli forces in the West Bank this year include 53 Palestinian minors, according to official Palestinian statistics.

Most world powers deem Israel’s settlements - on land it captured in a 1967 war - illegal, and numerous UN

Security Council resolutions have called on Israel to halt all settlement activity.

Israel denies the illegality of the settlements, citing biblical and historical connections to the land.

Israeli forces have cleared out refugee camps, forcing thousands of Palestinians from their homes and maintaining their longest presence in some West Bank cities for decades.

Human Rights Watch accused Israel in November of war crimes and crimes against humanity over what it said were forced expulsions in the West Bank. — Agencies

NEWERA

PARTNERS
IN PROGRESS

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, DEC 16

The bilateral relations between the Sultanate of Oman and India, which are celebrating their 70th anniversary, have been established for over 5,000 years, according to historians.

Even before India became a strategic partner of Oman, an important interlocutor in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), Arab League and Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), the two countries have been linked by geography, history and culture, enjoying warm and cordial relations.

Late Prof Maurizio Tosi, an internationally renowned palaeontologist who spent many years in Oman leading archaeological digs, documented historical studies that suggest relations existed even before the prehistoric era between the Indian port of Kutch and the Qalhat region in Magan (Oman). These relations have evolved into meaningful people-to-people connections that have influenced both cultures.

Maintaining steady diplomatic contact through high-level engagements, Oman has become a crucial pillar of India's West Asia Policy, serving as its oldest regional strategic partner. This has transformed the historical India-Oman bilateral ties into a strategic partnership since November 2008.

G V Srinivas, Indian Ambassador to Oman, said, "There are over 6,000 India-Oman joint ventures in Oman, contributing an estimated \$7.5 billion to Oman's economy through total capital investment over an extended period. This includes not only formal outward direct investments of \$675 million but also the total value of all capital committed to joint ventures in various sectors and third-country investments made into Oman by Indian investors."

Key imports from India to Oman in 2024 included light oils, aluminium oxide, rice, boilers, machinery, mechanical appliances, and their parts. India also exported airplanes, electrical machinery, beauty products, plastics, iron, steel and ceramic products.

On the other hand, Oman's main exports to India in 2024 included crude petroleum oil, liquefied natural gas, urea, organic chemicals, ammonia and sulfur. India also imported earth, stone, plastering materials, lime, plastics, airplanes, iron ore and non-agglomerated concentrates.

With 676,781 Indians living and working in the Sultanate of Oman, people-to-people relations have always been a focal point of bilateral relations. This skilled and semi-skilled workforce has been integral to Oman's nation-building process for many decades.

The visit carries a clear message signifying Oman's commitment to a long-term strategic partnership based on mutual respect

The Omani business sector views this visit as a promising opportunity to enhance the strategic partnership and open new horizons for investment

India is the sixth-largest trading partner with the Sultanate of Oman in terms of total exports

The volume of trade exchange between the Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of India reached approximately RO 1 billion by the end of last September

Omani-Indian relations are distinguished by historical depth and a renewed strategic vision, having witnessed a qualitative shift in recent years

Omani-Indian relations are a model for fruitful cooperation, with India being one of Oman's largest trading partners

Work is ongoing to continuously expand the scope of cooperation to align with the priorities of Oman Vision 2040 and global economic transformations

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
MUSCAT, DEC 16

The visit of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Oman is expected to further strengthen the strategic partnership between the two countries in the landmark 70th year of diplomatic relations. The visit is anticipated to enhance bilateral cooperation and create new opportunities for engagement.

Speaking to the Observer, G V Srinivas, Indian Ambassador to the Sultanate of Oman, said, "The two leaders have articulated a joint mission document that essentially aligns Oman's Economic Vision under His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik with Prime Minister Modi's vision of elevating India to the status of a developed nation by 2047."

"Building upon the historic state visit of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to India in 2023, the



forthcoming visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Oman is expected to further strengthen the strategic partnership between the two countries," the ambassador said.

During the press conference on Tuesday, the ambassador mentioned that there have been agreements on energy, agriculture, food security, health, defence,

security, technology and culture. "Bilateral trade has increased, and investments between the two countries have been robust. Several joint ventures are operating in both countries. In recent years, both countries have worked closely to enhance maritime security in the Indian Ocean region," the ambassador stated.

Oman has a vibrant Indian community of over 675,000, who consider Oman their second home and have made meaningful contributions to the nation's development.

During the visit, the Prime Minister will engage in comprehensive discussions with His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, reviewing the entire spectrum of the bilateral relationship and exchanging views on regional and international issues of mutual interest. The Prime Minister is also expected to address business leaders from both countries at a business forum and interact with the Indian community in Oman. A number of bilateral documents are expected to be signed during the visit.

These agreements are currently under negotiation and preparation, and details will be shared once they are concluded at an appropriate time during the visit.

Oman, India forge path
for economic integration



ISSA BIN SALEH AL
SHAIBANI



FAISAL BIN
ABDULLAH AL
RAWAS



LUJAINA MOHSIN
DARWISH

THE OMANI-INDIAN relations are witnessing remarkable growth across various fields, particularly in the domain of economic integration, which stands as a fundamental pillar aligning with the ambitions and shared aspirations of the two nations.

In this context, the upcoming visit of Narendra Modi, Prime Minister of the Republic of India, to the Sultanate of Oman marks an important milestone in the course of the historical relations between the two friendly countries, rooted in centuries of economic, cultural, and commercial ties between the Omani

and Indian peoples.

The Republic of India is the sixth-largest trading partner with the Sultanate of Oman in terms of total exports. The volume of trade exchange between the Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of India reached approximately RO 1 billion by the end of last September.

According to statistics released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information, the value of Omani exports to the Republic of India reached approximately RO 528.7 million by the end of last September, while total Omani imports from the Republic of India amounted to about RO 1,076.9 million.

The volume of direct Indian investment in the Sultanate of Oman reached RO 268.4 million by the end of the second quarter of this year. Meanwhile, the volume of direct Omani investments in the Republic of India by the end of 2024 was about RO 5.5 million. The number of establishments with investment from the Republic of India in the Sultanate of Oman till 2024 reached approximately 61, while the number of Indian visitors till November 2025 was about 609,789.

Issa bin Saleh al Shaibani, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the Republic of India, stated that Omani-Indian relations are distinguished by historical depth and a renewed strategic vision, having witnessed a qualitative shift in recent years. Key highlights include the visit of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to India in



December 2023, the issuance of the "Shared Vision" document, and the enhancement of defence and security cooperation, with the Sultanate of Oman being the first Gulf state to conduct joint exercises with various branches of the Indian forces, he added.

"On the economic front, the Omani market includes over 6,000 joint projects with investments exceeding \$7.5 billion. Furthermore, Oman's participation as a guest of honour at the G20 Summit in India was recognition of its balanced and positive role on the regional and international stages," said Al Shaibani.

The ambassador pointed out that the visit of the Indian Prime Minister to the Sultanate of Oman comes at a strategic time to enhance political coordination and exchange viewpoints on regional and international issues. It also constitutes an opportunity to push towards signing the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), which would contribute to supporting economic diversification efforts and stimulating investment in line with Oman Vision 2040, he further added.

He explained that Oman and India share a clear vision in strategic sectors. For example, in the energy field, there is growing cooperation in green hydrogen and ammonia projects, leveraging Omani resources and Indian expertise. In the ports and logistics sector, Oman is working to develop maritime connectivity with India through the ports of Sohar, Duqm and Salalah, aiming to position Oman as a centre for regional trade and reduce supply chain costs.

He clarified that Oman and India share ambitious priorities in the field of clean

energy, having launched joint industrial investments for the production of green hydrogen and ammonia. Oman's strategic location also makes it an ideal logistical hub connecting Asian markets with the region, with a shared interest in developing ports and linking supply chains, he affirmed.

The ambassador explained that this visit carries a clear message signifying Oman's commitment to a long-term strategic partnership based on mutual respect. He said: "It affirms the desire of both countries to expand areas of cooperation, especially in the digital economy, clean energy, food security and healthcare. It also emphasises the importance of intensifying institutional work to implement bilateral initiatives, serving the aspirations of the two friendly peoples." On his turn, Faisal bin Abdullah al Rawas, Chairman of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), said: "Omani-Indian relations are a model for fruitful cooperation, with India being one of Oman's largest trading partners. Work is ongoing to continuously expand the scope of cooperation to align with the priorities of Oman Vision 2040 and global economic transformations." He added that this visit will open wider horizons for cooperation in promising fields, including renewable energy and green hydrogen, digital technologies, food security and pharmaceutical industries, in addition to enhancing the role of small and medium enterprises in building direct partnerships between the two sides.

For her part, Lujaina Mohsin Darwish, Honorary Chairperson of the Omani-Indian Friendship Association, clarified that this visit represents a strong boost to the trajectory of economic relations between the two countries. The Omani business sector views this visit as a promising opportunity to enhance the strategic partnership and open new horizons for investment, she pointed out.

She said that business leaders hope this visit will contribute to simplifying procedures, facilitating visas and developing logistical connectivity, which would support trade movement and increase the attractiveness of joint investment. The private sector also anticipates the visit will yield new economic initiatives, particularly in technology, renewable energy and manufacturing industries, she added.

She affirmed that the visit represents an opportunity to pave the way for joint projects between Omani and Indian companies, in addition to opening wider marketing outlets for products from both countries and enhancing industrial and commercial cooperation. This, she said, would positively reflect on the business ecosystem and strengthen Oman's position as a regional centre for trade and investment. — ONA

SHORT TAKES



The two sides discussed the exchange of investments and cultural cooperation. — ONA

OMAN, THAILAND HOLD POLITICAL TALKS SESSION

MUSCAT: The second session of political talks between the Sultanate of Oman and the Kingdom of Thailand was held on Tuesday at the headquarters of the Foreign Ministry.

The Omani side was headed by Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthy, Under-Secretary of the Foreign Ministry for Political Affairs. The Thai side was headed by Sirilak Niyom, Deputy Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

During the session, the bilateral relations between the two friendly countries were discussed in the fields of logistics, the health sector and energy.

In addition, the two sides discussed the exchange of investments and cultural cooperation.

The session was attended by Shaikh Abdulaziz bin Mohammed al Hosni, Head of the Asia and Pacific Department at the Foreign Ministry, Warunee Pan Krajang, Ambassador of the Kingdom of Thailand to the Sultanate of Oman, and a number of officials from both sides. — ONA

CONFERENCE EXPLORES ANTI-CORRUPTION MEASURES

DOHA: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the State Financial and Administrative Audit Authority, is participating in the 11th Session of the Conference of the States Parties to the United Nations Convention against Corruption, hosted by the Administrative Control and Transparency Authority in Qatar. The session is held during the period from December 15 to 19, 2025.

The Omani delegation is headed by Shaikh Ghosn bin Hilal al Alawi, Chairman of the State Audit Institution (SAI), accompanied by a number of officials and specialists from the Authority. The conference will see broad international participation from the heads of anti-corruption agencies and bodies, international organisations, international community institutions, universities, professional institutions and researchers.

The conference is one of the most important events dedicated to combating corruption and promoting integrity at the international level, bringing together all 192 signatory states to the United Nations Convention against Corruption.

Shaikh Ghosn bin Hilal al Alawi, Chairman of the State Audit Institution (SAI), delivered the Sultanate of Oman's statement at the conference, affirming Oman's keenness to actively participate with the international community in the areas of promoting integrity and combating corruption. — ONA

MORE RAIN EXPECTED IN THE COMING DAYS

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
MUSCAT, DEC 15

Musandam is expected to continue experiencing intermittent rains of varying intensity with the influx of rainy clouds on Wednesday. While Muscat had active winds on Tuesday, the northern governorates are expected to receive rain from Thursday through Saturday.

A low-pressure system is currently affecting the Gulf countries, and according to weather experts, the active northwesterly



There is a possibility of flash floods and active downdrafts.

wind could bring a noticeable drop in temperatures, especially in the mountainous and desert areas. On Wednesday, there could

be cloud formation and rainfall of varying intensity, with thunderstorms at times, over Musandam (10-30 mm) and Al

Batinah North (5-15 mm). This may extend to parts of Al Batinah South, Al Buraimi, and Al Hajar Mountains. There is a possibility of flash floods and active downdrafts.

By Thursday, the weather is expected to expand over the northern governorates of the Sultanate of Oman and parts of the Arabian Sea coast. The lowest temperature was recorded in Saiq at 5.2 degrees Celsius, while the highest temperature was experienced in Al Amerat with a high of 29.6 degrees Celsius.

Oman appreciates ILO's role in labour systems

SAYYID Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, received on Tuesday Gilbert Houngho, Director-General of the International Labour Organization (ILO), at the headquarters of the Foreign Ministry.

During the meeting, mutual emphasis was placed on the cooperation relations between the Sultanate of Oman and the international organisation and the continuation of work programmes and constructive consultation between the two sides.

The Foreign Minister expressed the appreciation of the Government of the Sultanate of Oman for the pivotal role of the ILO in assisting member states to develop their labour systems in line with the best international practices and standards. He highlighted Oman's interest in its positive and beneficial relations in this context and the tangible role of the Director-General in developing relevant frameworks and concepts.

For his part, the Director-General commended the development and achievements realised by the Sultanate of Oman in the field of labour policies, labour market development and the relationship between the parties of production. He expressed the ILO's commitment to continuing constructive cooperation and



Sayyid Badr received on Tuesday Gilbert Houngho, Director-General of ILO. — ONA

positive partnership with the Sultanate of Oman in various related aspects and areas of mutual interest, especially in the areas of skills development and capacity building, and supporting training and employment programmes, consistent with national development priorities and the goals of Oman Vision 2040.

During the meeting, the two sides discussed prospects for cooperation and ways to maximise benefit from the

organisation and its specialised programmes aimed at continuing the development of labour legislation, and enhancing labour market efficiency and institutional capabilities.

The meeting was attended by Khalid bin Salim al Ghammari, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Labour for Labour, Dr Ruba Jaradat, Regional Director for Arab States at the ILO, and a number of officials from both sides. — ONA

EMBASSY MARKS BAHRAIN NATIONAL DAY

The Embassy of Bahrain in Muscat held a reception on Tuesday to celebrate the National Day of the Kingdom of Bahrain. The ceremony was attended by a number of senior officials from the Sultanate of Oman, top diplomats and several officials from the Foreign Ministry. The reception was attended by HH Sayyid Taimour bin Asaad al Said, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Central Bank of Oman. The reception reflected the depth of the fraternal relations between the Sultanate of Oman and the Kingdom of Bahrain, and the strong bonds of cooperation and mutual respect that continue to characterise relations between the two brotherly countries across various fields. — ONA



National University holds White Coat Ceremony for 184 doctors

SUHAR: Represented by the College of Medicine and Health Sciences in Suhar, the National University of Science and Technology (NUST) on Tuesday held the White Coat Ceremony for its 21st batch of future doctors, a total of 184 medical students.

The ceremony was held under the auspices of Dr Ahmed bin Salim al Mandhari, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Health for Planning and Health Regulation.

Dr Ali bin Saud al Bimani, Vice-Chancellor of National University of Science and Technology, affirmed the university's commitment to



The White Coat is a symbol of confidence, humility and responsibility. - ONA

establish an advanced educational environment, coupled with strong cooperation with the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and

Innovation, the Ministry of Health and peer government and private institutions. Al Bimani added that such cooperation has contributed

to grooming a generation of world-class doctors who are capable of providing the highest levels of healthcare to their community.

For his part, Prof Mohammed bin Ali al Shaf'ee, Dean of the College of Medicine and Health Sciences, said that the annual White Coat Ceremony constitutes a global tradition that symbolises the start of clinical training. The ceremony, he observed, paves the way for the realisation of professional ethical values and introduces the batch to a noble humanitarian mission lying ahead.

Al Shaf'ee added that the White

Coat is a symbol of confidence, humility and responsibility. Along with the performance of the Medical Oath, the White Coat incarnates a pledge to adhere to medical ethics when serving patients, the community and humanity at large.

At the conclusion of the ceremony, the chief guest felicitated a number of public health institutions and doctors in appreciation for their cooperation in the clinical training of students of the College of Medicine and Health Sciences.

Then, he presented the White Coat to the future doctors. — ONA

OMAN

SHORT TAKES

CERTIFICATES OF COMMENDATION



MUSCAT: Rear Admiral Saif bin Nasser al Rahbi, Commander of the Royal Navy of Oman (RNO), on Tuesday, presented certificates of commendation to a number of RNO personnel, in appreciation for their sincere efforts in performing their duties. Rear Admiral Al Rahbi congratulated the honoured personnel and encouraged them to maintain their standards of excellence in the tasks entrusted to them. He wished all success in their future missions. — ONA



OMAN PARTICIPATES IN ARAB SCOUT COMMITTEE MEETING IN CAIRO



The meeting discussed the enhancement of educational and community roles. — ONA

CAIRO: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Education, participated in the 184th Arab Scout Committee meeting, which discussed the development of scouting work and the enhancement of its educational and community role, in line with the aspirations and future vision of the Arab Scout Movement.

The meeting, held at the Arab International Scout Center in the Arab Republic of Egypt, also reviewed the decisions of the 31st Arab Scout Conference, alongside the triennial scouting plan and the operational framework for the years (2025–2028).

The session reviewed the minutes of the 183rd Arab Scout Committee meeting, examined the status of the Arab International Scout Center and the Arab Scout Funding Fund, and discussed the mechanisms for awarding the 2025 Excellence in Scouting Medal (Al Hudhud) in recognition of distinguished scouting efforts across the Arab world. — ONA

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, DEC 16

As the result of the achievement of intensified efforts to develop the education system, Abdullah bin Ali al Fouri, Director-General of the Directorate-General of Education in Al Sharqiyah South Governorate, received the certificate of Sur City’s membership in the UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities.

The receipt certificate of membership took place during a ceremony organised by the Omani National Commission for Education, Culture and Science, under the auspices of Dr Madeeha bint Ahmed al Shaibaniyah, Minister of Education.

The Governor of Al Sharqiyah South announced that this



The receipt certificate of membership took place during a ceremony organised by the Omani National Commission for Education, Culture and Science, under the auspices of Dr Madeeha bint Ahmed al Shaibaniyah, Minister of Education.

achievement is the result of intensified efforts to develop the education system and enhance the role of continuous and lifelong learning as a fundamental pillar of comprehensive and sustainable development. It was in addition, to working towards achieving the goals of learning cities according to approved international standards.

Earlier this month, UNESCO announced the membership of

Forum sheds light on role of technology in charity

SAUD AL ANSARI
MUSCAT, DEC 16

In its pursuit to keep pace with digital transformation and enhance the efficiency and sustainability of charitable work, Dar Al Ata’a Society organised the Charitable Teams Forum, ‘Techno Ata’a’, highlighting the role of technology and digitalisation in developing the charitable and voluntary work system, and on creating innovative solutions that meet the changing needs of society and the aspirations of the Omani community.

The opening ceremony was attended by Shaikh Rashid bin Ahmed al Shamsi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Social Development, along with Maryam bint Essa al Zadjaliyah, Founder and Chairperson of Dar Al Ata’a Society, and representatives from 45 charitable teams across Oman.

The forum showcased the best digital practices in charitable work, discussed the latest fundraising methods, digital marketing techniques, and highlighted ethical and media standards in promoting humanitarian cases to preserve beneficiaries’ dignity and enhance donor confidence.

During the forum, Dar Al-Ata’a Society launched the Ethical Charter for Charitable Media Work. Dr Shamsa bint Hamad al Harthy, CEO of the society, explained that the charter aims to establish a professional and ethical framework that preserves the dignity of humanitarian cases,



The forum showcased the best digital practices in charitable work and highlighted ethical and media standards in promoting humanitarian cases.

protects their privacy and data confidentiality, and enhances credibility and transparency when sharing the stories of the needy or requesting donations via media and social platforms.

She said that the charter also empowers charitable workers to perform their media roles professionally, maintaining public trust and protecting beneficiaries’ rights. Dr Shamsa emphasised that the ‘Techno Ata’a’ forum brings together charitable teams from all governorates of Oman and highlights the use of modern technologies in charitable and voluntary work.

Eng Majid bin Fayel al Amri from Thawani platform presented a paper on digital transformation and its impact on improving the efficiency of charitable institutions and

the use of smart systems, enabling the presentation of cases digitally in a professional manner without defamation, while considering design quality, angles and engaging elements.

The media role in presenting humanitarian cases was further highlighted by social media influencer Mohammed al Mukhaini, who presented a paper on methods of presenting cases through media and social platforms.

He stressed that cases should be shared under licensed platforms to maintain their dignity and ensure prompt response to resolve their crises.

Media professional Moath al Nadabi from Dar Al Ata’a Society presented a paper on producing visual content, whether video clips, photos or designs,

emphasising the importance of choosing proper angles and avoiding filming children or families in a way that could harm them rather than assist them.

The Civil Aviation Authority also participated, with Abdullah al Khadouri, Director-General of Meteorology, presenting a paper on disaster management and early warning systems, highlighting the importance of voluntary work in reducing risks and ensuring the integrated success of humanitarian efforts.

Maryam al Zadjali praised the active participation of a large number of charitable teams from across Oman, noting their role as essential partners in studying cases, collecting data, and presenting innovative ideas to accelerate charitable work in the community.

Rashid al Hashimi of Jaalan Bani Bu Ali Voluntary Team said that the forum allowed the team to explore the latest technologies and best practices to implement within their work. Salem al Harithy, Head of Al Qabil Charity Team, noted the positive impact of the forum in sharing knowledge on interacting with society, humanitarian cases and disasters, as well as keeping up with technological developments in charitable work.

Zaid al Shehi, Vice-President of Dibba Charity Team, highlighted the importance of such gatherings in exchanging experiences and building relationships that strengthen charitable work and follow modern developments.

Emergency panel reviews readiness to address incidents



AL RUSTAQ: The sub-committee tasked with emergency management in the Al Batinah South Governorate on Tuesday reviewed the preparedness of its sectors to deal with any incidents.

The discussion took place during the committee’s meeting chaired by Brigadier Mohammed bin Awadh al Shanfari, Commander of Al Batinah South Governorate’s Police, Chairman of the Governorate’s Emergency Sub-Committee.

The meeting was attended by representatives of supporting committees from other sectors.

The meeting affirmed the readiness of all key sectors, including the Aid and Relief Sector, the Basic Services Sector and the Medical Response Sector. — ONA

Sur becomes member of UNESCO global network of learning cities

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, DEC 16

As the result of the achievement of intensified efforts to develop the education system, Abdullah bin Ali al Fouri, Director-General of the Directorate-General of Education in Al Sharqiyah South Governorate, received the certificate of Sur City’s membership in the UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities.

The receipt certificate of membership took place during a ceremony organised by the Omani National Commission for Education, Culture and Science, under the auspices of Dr Madeeha bint Ahmed al Shaibaniyah, Minister of Education.

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achievement is the result of intensified efforts to develop the education system and enhance the role of continuous and lifelong learning as a fundamental pillar of comprehensive and sustainable development. It was in addition, to working towards achieving the goals of learning cities according to approved international standards.

Earlier this month, UNESCO announced the membership of

72 cities from 46 countries in the UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities, in recognition of their exceptional commitment to realising the right to lifelong learning for all at the local level. The city of Sur joined the UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities on February 14th of last year, becoming one of three Omani cities to be included in the network. This aligns with the Sultanate of Oman’s efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, promote social justice, and build a sustainable knowledge society.

Partners in the education, community, and private sectors in Sur have played an active role in adopting best regional and global practices, promoting a culture of lifelong learning, and providing

a competitive environment that supports the launch and implementation of high-quality initiatives and projects that contribute to improving the quality of education and life in general.

UNESCO classifies listed learning cities as vibrant communities where learning is an integral part of daily life, taking place in schools, workplaces, libraries, homes and public spaces. These cities offer opportunities for all, developing and updating skills to keep pace with changes in the labour market, organising literacy programmes for those who missed out on education in their early years, enabling citizens of all ages to understand and shape the era of artificial intelligence, and fostering innovative and entrepreneurial mindsets.

SHORT TAKES



A key highlight of the event was the AI-themed skit, 'A Day with Robo-Friends'.

ISWK MARKS 37TH FOUNDERS' DAY WITH CULTURAL EVENTS

MUSCAT: Indian School Wadi Kabir (ISWK), Preparatory and Foundation Stages, celebrated its 37th Founders' Day with grandeur and creative brilliance.

The celebration commenced with the arrival of the chief guest, HH Sayyid Mohammed bin Salim al Said, who was welcomed with an impressive fanfare — marking a moment of immense honour for the school. He was accompanied by the Guests of Honour, Dr Nasser al Tai, scholar, educator and composer, and Ali al Ajmi, Investment Section Researcher and International School Specialist from the Ministry of Education, along with Chief Patron Kiran Asher, Executive Director Rajendra Ved, Assistant Executive Director Alkesh Joshi, Honorary President Sachin Ravindra Toprani, and esteemed members of the School Management Committee.

The programme officially began with the lighting of the ceremonial lamp, followed by the rendition of the national anthems of Oman and India. A vibrant welcome dance by the Foundation Stage students and creative performances by the Preparatory Stage beautifully brought the evening's theme to life. The Honorary President's address, along with the Annual Report jointly presented by Principal D N Rao and Vice-Principal Ernst Schwan, highlighted the school's milestones, achievements and future aspirations.

A key highlight of the event was the AI-themed skit "A Day with Robo-Friends" which captivated the audience with its imaginative portrayal of human-AI collaboration. This was followed by the felicitation of long-serving staff members completing 10, 15, 20 and 25 years of dedicated service, along with special honours for distinguished educators Vanessa Varela Travas and Roxanna Ann Rafferty. The school also proudly recognised Shifas P Bava, bronze medalist at the World Masters Games in Taiwan, as well as exceptional student achievers who excelled at national and international levels in academics, sports and co-scholastic domains.

MILITARY, SECURITY SERVICES MEDICAL CITY MARKS DAY OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

MUSCAT: The Medical City for Military and Security Services organised a ceremony on Monday marking the International Day of Persons with Disabilities, which falls on December 3 of every year.

The event was held under the auspices of Brigadier Dr Nasser bin Salim al Hinai, Director-General of Medical Services for Military and Security Services and Acting Director-General of the Medical City for Military and Security Services Hospital - Al Khoudh.

The event took place at the Occupational Therapy and Rehabilitation Centre at the Medical City for Military and Security Services. He affirmed



Distinguished personnel were honoured during the occasion.

the appreciation and pride in the journey of persons with disabilities who are retired personnel of the Ministry of Defence and the Sultan's Armed Forces. He noted that they have

left their mark in the memory of time and place and are a source of inspiration and an example to be followed that embodies the finest images of determination and persistence, wishing them all success and happiness.

The chief guest and attendees toured the accompanying exhibition, which included a diverse range of recreational, cultural and sports activities. The chief guest then inaugurated the Hydrotherapy Unit affiliated with the Al Amal Centre for Occupational Therapy and Rehabilitation.

He felicitated the participants in the International Day of Persons with Disabilities and the organisers. — ONA

Discussion on retrieval of Oman's cultural artefacts

MOHAMED AL BATTASHI
MUSCAT, DEC 16

THE National Museum, in collaboration with a number of government institutions, on Tuesday organised the National Symposium on the Repatriation of Omani Cultural Property Abroad, under the auspices of Eng Ibrahim bin Said al Kharousi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism for Heritage.

The symposium aimed to raise national awareness on the importance of Omani cultural property as a core pillar of national identity and the historical memory of the community. It also sought to shed light on the legal and international aspects associated with cultural property repatriation operations, particularly relevant international conventions and charters, including the Omani Cultural Heritage Law and the 1970 Unesco Convention.

Dr Fatima al Balushi, Adviser to the Secretary-General for Museum Affairs at the National Museum and Head of the Team for Repatriation of Omani Cultural Property Abroad, reviewed the pivotal status of cultural heritage as one of the essential components of peoples' identities and historical memory, and its role in documenting their civilisational journey and humanitarian contributions



The symposium recommended protection and recovery of Omani cultural heritage.

The symposium also sought to shed light on the legal and international aspects associated with artefact repatriation operations, particularly relevant international conventions and charters, including the Omani Cultural Heritage Law and the 1970 Unesco Convention

throughout the ages.

She indicated that Omani cultural property, including artefacts, manuscripts, archaeological pieces and historical possessions, represents authentic evidence of the depth of Omani civilisation and its historical role in cultural and commercial exchange. She affirmed that the repatriation of these properties is a strategic choice that

integrates with the goals of Oman Vision 2040, which places great emphasis on preserving cultural heritage and reinforcing national identity.

The symposium concluded with a number of recommendations aimed at enhancing integration between national bodies and supporting the protection and recovery of Omani cultural heritage. The most prominent recommendations included: intensifying cooperation and awareness to strengthen the role of national institutions in documenting cultural property, and urging institutions and individuals to register cultural property in the Cultural Heritage Register to facilitate its documentation, proof of ownership and future claim.

The recommendations also stressed the importance of reporting missing Omani cultural property to the relevant authorities, and working to prepare a national list of lost properties to facilitate their local and international identification and curb the transfer of their ownership to others.

وزارة الصحة
Ministry of Health

(Auction No. 2/2025)

The Ministry of Health announces a public Auction for the sale of medical equipment.

Interested Companies and establishments may collect the documents and specifications of this Auction from the Directorate of Purchase & Tenders at General Directorate of Financial Affairs at the Ministry's headquarters, ground floor in Al Khuwair. The fee for the documents is 25 O.R. and can be collected during official working hours (8:30 AM - 12:30 PM) until Tuesday 23/12/2025. Companies must present proof of registration with the Authority for Projects, Tenders and Local Content when purchasing the tender documents.

The offers must be enclosed in sealed envelopes duly signed and stamped in the original form shall be addressed to H.E. the Chairperson of the Tender Committee, clearly stating the title: (Auction No. 2/2025) for Selling medical equipment (X-ray machines). The offers must be valid for 90 days. Envelopes shall not bear any sign that refers to bidder's name or identity.

The Offers shall be submitted at the Purchase and Tender Department in Directorate of Financial Affairs by 10:00 am on Wednesday, 07/01/2026. Offers submitted after the deadline will not be considered.

The Ministry reserves the right to reject any bids without providing reasons.

AL MUDHAIBI HEALTH CITY INKS MoU WITH UTAS-IBRA



The MoU integrates efforts of Al Mudhaibi Health City and UTAS-Ibra.

AL MUDHAIBI: Al Mudhaibi Healthy City in Al Sharqiyah North Governorate signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the University of Technology and Applied Sciences (UTAS) to exchange expertise and scientific knowledge. The memorandum stems from an accord between the World Health Organization (WHO) and Al Mudhaibi Healthy City. The MoU was signed by Shaikh Saud bin Mohammed al Hinai, Wali of Al Mudhaibi and Chairman of the Health Committee and Chairman of Al Mudhaibi Health City, and Dr Hafeedh bin Said al Rahbi, Assistant Vice-Chancellor of UTAS-Ibra. The MoU, which embodies the importance of integrating the efforts of Al Mudhaibi Health City and UTAS-Ibra.

وزارة التنمية الاجتماعية
Ministry of Social Development

Tender Announcement

The Internal Tender committee of Ministry of Social Development hereby announces the following tender:-

Tender No.	Tender Subject	Grade	Last date for obtaining of Tender Document	Last date for Tender Submission	Tender Document Price (non-retundable)	
					Small and Medium Companies	Local Companies
672/2025	Maintenance of two computers, a central computer, a backup, and a Unix backup system	Companies specialized in designing, installing and maintaining information programs and systems /equipping information data centers registered with the Projects, Tenders and Local Content Authority in the excellent, first, second, third or fourth class	Thursday 25-12-2025 02:00 PM	Sunday 04-01-2026 10:00 AM	10 R.O	25 R.O

❖ Specialized Companies, registered with the **Tender Board** may obtain the Tender documents at the Tender Board e-tendering digital portal link (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>). On Wednesday 17/12/2025.

❖ For Inquiry, please contact though the e-tendering website (reg@tenderboard.gov.om) tel. (24402200).

The lowest or any other tender shall not be binding to the Ministry

www.mosd.gov.om

WORLD

SHORT TAKES



The authorities of the capital, Khartoum, are deploying thousands of soldiers to support the Sudanese army. — AFP

SUDAN’S GENERAL READY TO TALK TO TRUMP FOR PEACE

PORT SUDAN: Sudan’s leader, General Abdel Fattah al Burhan, is ready to work with US President Donald Trump to resolve the conflict splitting his country, the foreign ministry said on Tuesday. The ministry released a statement after the army chief visited Riyadh as a guest of Saudi Arabia’s Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, who recently presented Trump with a proposed Sudan peace plan during a Washington visit.

According to Sudan’s statement, Burhan hailed Trump’s “determination to engage in efforts to achieve peace and end the war in the country, with the participation of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. “He affirmed Sudan’s keenness to work with President Trump, his secretary of state, and his envoy for peace in Sudan to achieve this unquestionably noble goal,” it said, referring to Marco Rubio and US envoy Massad Boulos.

International peace efforts led by mediators from the United States, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates have been at a standstill since Burhan rejected Boulos’s last suggested framework. For the moment, no new date has been announced for talks. — AFP

M23 GROUP TO PULL OUT OF KEY DR CONGO CITY



A patrol car of the M23 group patrols in Uvira. — AFP

GOMA: The M23 armed group said that it would withdraw from the key city of Uvira in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo at the request of Washington, which vowed “action” over the “clear violation” of a US-brokered peace accord. The group seized the strategic city near the border with Burundi last Wednesday, days after the Congolese and Rwandan governments signed the peace deal in Washington — an agreement US President Donald Trump had hailed as a “great miracle”.

The M23’s advance has thrown the future of the peace process into doubt and raised fears of a wider regional war. Its capture of Uvira — a city of several hundred thousand people — allowed it to control the land border with Burundi and cut the DRC off from military support from its neighbour.

Leader of the M23’s political branch Corneille Nangaa announced in a statement that the group would “unilaterally withdraw its forces from the city of Uvira, as requested by the US mediators”. The group called for “adequate measures” to be put in place to manage the city, including “demilitarisation, protecting its population and infrastructure and monitoring the ceasefire with a neutral force”. — AFP

AFGHAN HUNGER CRISIS DEEPENS AS AID FUNDING FALLS SHORT

KABUL: The UN World Food Programme (WFP) is unable for the first time in decades to provide effective aid to millions of Afghans suffering from malnutrition, with deaths, especially among children, likely to rise this winter, the WFP said on Tuesday.

International aid to war-torn Afghanistan has dwindled significantly since 2021, when US-led forces exited the country and the Taliban regained power. The crisis has been compounded by multiple natural calamities such as earthquakes.

“For the first time in decades,

WFP cannot launch a significant winter response, while also scaling up emergency and nutrition support nationwide,” the UN agency said in a statement, adding that it needed over \$460 million to deliver food assistance to six million of the most vulnerable Afghans.

“With child malnutrition already at its highest level in decades, and unprecedented reductions in (international) funding for agencies providing essential services, access to treatment is increasingly scarce,” it said. Child deaths are likely to rise during Afghanistan’s freezing winter months when food is

scarcest, it said.

The WFP estimates that 17 million people face hunger, up about 3 million from last year, a rise driven in part by millions of Afghans deported from neighbouring Iran and Pakistan under programmes to send back migrants and refugees. Humanitarian agencies have warned that Afghanistan lacks the infrastructure to absorb a sudden influx of returnees.

“We are only 12% funded. This is an obstacle,” Jean-Martin Bauer, WFP Director of Food Security and Nutrition Analysis, told a press briefing in Geneva. — Reuters

Thailand to repatriate citizens stuck at border

THAILAND is working out how to repatriate up to 6,000 citizens unable to return home through a major border crossing in Cambodia closed as fighting along the contested border extended into a second week, authorities said on Tuesday.

The militaries of the Southeast Asian neighbours are clashing at several locations on their 817-km land border, both have said, with no signs of abatement, despite international efforts to negotiate a ceasefire.

Cambodia’s closure of its checkpoint in the city of Poipet has prevented the return of thousands of Thai workers gathered there amid fighting that has displaced more than half a million people and killed nearly 40 on both sides since last Monday.

Hun Sen, Cambodia’s influential former leader, has said the closure aimed to protect civilians from what he called indiscriminate firing by Thai forces in the area. But checkpoints were open in areas free of fighting and air travel was unrestricted, he added.

In Bangkok on Tuesday, the foreign ministry said Thais in Poipet could seek help to arrange air travel home from the consulate in the city of Siem Reap, the gateway to the Angkor Wat temple complex. It urged others still in Cambodia to contact officials if they needed to leave. Efforts to end the fighting



Displaced people eat dinner at a temporary shelter along a disputed border area, in Buriram province. — Reuters

Cambodia’s closure of its checkpoint in the city of Poipet has prevented the return of thousands of Thai workers gathered there amid fighting that has displaced more than half a million people and killed nearly 40 on both sides

have included calls from US President Donald Trump, who also brokered a halt to a five-day conflict in July by using trade negotiations as leverage. “The army said there has been continuous fighting across the border line. The situation is still in flux,” said Surasant Kongsiri, a spokesman of the Thai defence ministry, with fighting reported in eight border provinces.

Cambodia’s forces would “continue to stand strong, brave and steadfast in their fight against the aggressor,” its defence ministry said.

There was no international pressure for a ceasefire, Thai Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul told journalists in response to a question. “No one is pressuring us. Who is

pressuring whom? I don’t know,” he said, but did not answer a query whether Trump was using the threat of tariff measures to pressure Thailand to stop the conflict.

Thailand is now preparing plans to cut off shipments of fuel into Cambodia, defence ministry spokesman Surasant said. It is tasking maritime enforcement authorities with controlling Thai-registered vessels that might be delivering gasoline and even weapons to support Cambodia’s armed forces, as an issue of “primary concern” for the Thai public, he added.

The neighbours have long disputed sections of the frontier, but the scale and intensity of the latest clashes, stretching from forested inland areas near the Laos border to coastal provinces, are unprecedented in recent history. Each side blames the other for starting the fighting. Malaysia will host a special meeting of Southeast Asian foreign ministers next week as the regional bloc tries to re-establish the ceasefire.

Thailand’s military said on Monday that it has stopped fuel shipments passing through a border checkpoint with Laos because of fears they were being diverted to Cambodia, with which it is fighting a fierce border conflict. Thailand and Cambodia accuse each other of moves that led to a breakdown of July’s Trump-brokered truce, which was expanded into a wider agreement. — Reuters



ICC REJECTS ISRAELI ATTEMPT TO BLOCK PROBE

THE HAGUE: The International Criminal Court (ICC) rejected a challenge from Israel, which had argued that the court’s investigation into crimes committed in the Gaza Strip was invalid. The tribunal, in its ruling, also upheld ICC arrest warrants for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and former defence minister Yoav Gallant in November 2024, to face accusations of war crimes and crimes against humanity. The ICC commenced an investigation in the Palestinian territory in 2021, and with the ruling against Israel’s challenge, it will now be able to resume it. Monday’s 44-page ruling upholds the decision to investigate alleged war crimes committed by Israel in the Palestinian territory. Israel’s foreign affairs spokesperson Oren Marmorstein said in an X post that Israel “rejects” the decision, and accused the ICC of “politicisation”. The court is currently examining another Israeli challenge to its jurisdiction, as well as a request to disqualify prosecutor Karim Khan over physical abuse allegations — claims he vigorously denies. — AFP

STATE SECURITY

Benin jails around 30 over coup attempt



Benin jailed on Tuesday around 30 people accused of links to a thwarted coup attempt, while several mutineers are still on the run. Soldiers appeared on national television on December 7 to announce President Patrice Talon had been deposed. Several people were killed and the alleged coup leader, Lieutenant-Colonel Pascal Tigri, and other mutinous soldiers remain on the run. They are being prosecuted for “treason”, “murder” and “endangering state security”. — AFP

RARE WARNING

Japan lifts megaquake advisory



Japan lifted a rare warning for a potential megaquake a week after a magnitude-7.5 tremor struck off its northern coast, the country’s weather agency said. JMA official Issei Suganuma said that the “special warning period for residents had expired at midnight”. “But it doesn’t mean that quakes will not happen again, so we’d like residents to remain vigilant,” Suganuma added. A heightened risk of a megaquake is occurring off the northern coast. — AFP

TAKEN INTO CUSTODY

India arrests owners over club blaze



Indian police said on Tuesday that they had arrested the owners of a club where 25 people died in a blaze in the tourist hub of Goa, after they were extradited from Thailand. Brothers Saurabh and Gaurav Luthra fled on a flight to Phuket in Thailand soon after the incident, before police raided their residence. Goa Police said in a statement they had “taken custody of the absconding accused” upon their arrival in New Delhi. — AFP

IMMINENT LITIGATION



The logo of British broadcaster BBC is pictured at the entrance to their offices in London. — AFP

BBC TO FIGHT TRUMP’S \$10BN DEFAMATION LAWSUIT

LONDON: The BBC said that it would fight a \$10-billion lawsuit brought by US President Donald Trump against the British broadcaster over a documentary that edited his 2021 speech ahead of the US Capitol riot. “As we have made clear previously, we will be defending this case,” a BBC spokesperson said in a statement sent to AFP, adding the company would not be making “further comment on ongoing legal proceedings.”

The lawsuit, filed in federal court in Miami, seeks “damages in an amount not less than \$5,000,000,000” for each of two counts against the British broadcaster, for alleged defamation and violation of the Florida Deceptive and Unfair Trade Practices Act. The video that triggered the lawsuit spliced together two separate sections of Trump’s speech on January 6, 2021 in a way that made it appear he explicitly urged supporters to attack the Capitol, where lawmakers were certifying Joe Biden’s 2020 election win. The lawsuit comes as the UK government on Tuesday launched the politically sensitive review of the BBC’s Royal Charter, which outlines the corporation’s funding and governance and needs to be renewed in 2027.

As part of the review, it launched a public consultation on issues including the role of “accuracy” in the BBC’s mission and contentious reforms to the corporation’s funding model, which currently relies on a mandatory fee for anyone in the country who watches television. Minister Stephen Kinnock stressed after the lawsuit was filed that the UK government “is a massive supporter of the BBC”. The BBC has “been very clear that there is no case to answer in terms of Mr Trump’s accusation on the broader point of libel or defamation. I think it’s right the BBC stands firm on that point,” Kinnock told Sky News on Tuesday. Trump, 79, had said the lawsuit was imminent, claiming the BBC had “put words in my mouth”, even positing that “they used AI or something.” The documentary at issue aired last year before the 2024 election, on the BBC’s “Panorama” flagship current affairs programme.

“The formerly respected and now disgraced BBC defamed President Trump by intentionally, maliciously, and deceptively doctoring his speech in a brazen attempt to interfere in the 2024 Presidential Election,” a spokesperson for Trump’s legal team said in a statement. — AFP

US KILLS 8 IN EASTERN PACIFIC STRIKES ON ALLEGED DRUG BOATS

WASHINGTON: Strikes on three alleged drug-trafficking vessels in the eastern Pacific Ocean killed eight people, according to the US military, the latest in a controversial campaign that has killed dozens of people. Since early September, the US military under Pentagon chief Pete Hegseth has targeted alleged drug-smuggling boats in the Caribbean Sea and eastern Pacific Ocean, destroying at least 26 vessels and killing at least 95 people.

The US Southern Command announced the latest three strikes on X, saying the eight men killed had been involved in drug trafficking, without providing evidence.

The post included video footage of three separate boats floating in water before they are each hit by strikes. “Intelligence confirmed that the vessels were transiting along known narco-trafficking routes in the Eastern Pacific and were engaged in narco-trafficking,”

it said. The strikes killed three men in the first vessel, two in the second and another three in the third, the US Southern Command added.

The strikes have drawn intense scrutiny from human rights advocates and Democratic lawmakers, with the United Nations’s human rights chief warning last month they could violate international law. The US administration has labelled those killed as “unlawful combatants”. — AFP

Europe set to launch global claim for Ukraine damages

LEADERS

including Ukraine’s Volodymyr Zelensky arrived in The Hague on Tuesday to launch an International Claims Commission to compensate Kyiv for hundreds of billions of dollars in damage from Russian attacks and alleged war crimes. Dozens of senior figures from Europe and beyond, including European Union foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas, were attending a one-day conference co-hosted by the Netherlands and the 46-nation Council of Europe, the continent’s largest rights group.

The gathering coincided with a US-orchestrated diplomatic push to end the war in Ukraine that was triggered by Russia’s full-scale attack in February 2022. Dutch Foreign Minister David van Weel stressed the importance of reparations for Ukrainian victims. “Without accountability, a conflict cannot be fully resolved. And part of that accountability is also paying damages that have been done,” he told reporters. “So I think it’s a big step today that we now are establishing a claims commission, that we’re signing a treaty on that.”



Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky (L) and Dutch PM Dick Schoof address a joint press conference at the Catshuis in The Hague. — AFP

Details on how any damages awarded by the commission, to be based in the Netherlands, would be paid still need to be worked out. But early discussions have touched on using Russian assets frozen by the EU, supplemented by member contributions. “The goal is to have validated claims that will ultimately be paid by Russia. It will really have to be paid by Russia, this commission offers no guarantee for the damages,” Van Weel said. The two-year-old Register of Damage, which will become part of the claims commission, has received more than 80,000 claims submitted by individuals, organisations and public bodies in Ukraine under a wide range of categories. “That’s exactly where the real path to peace begins,” President Zelensky said. “It’s not enough to force Russia into a deal. It’s not enough to make it stop killing. We must make Russia accept that there are rules in the world.”

Russian officials were not immediately reachable to comment on the commission. The Kremlin denies accusations of war crimes by Russian forces in Ukraine. It

has also described the EU’s proposal to use immobilised Russian assets to finance Ukraine’s defence and budget needs as illegal and threatened retaliation.

Plans to compensate victims of abuses in Ukraine, ranging from physical violence and child deportations to the destruction of religious sites, could be complicated by the inclusion of an amnesty for wartime atrocities in any peace deal, earlier proposed by US President Donald Trump’s administration. More than 50 states and the EU have drafted a Council of Europe convention to establish the commission, which will take force after it has been ratified by 25 signatories, as long as sufficient funds have been secured to finance its activity.

Over 35 nations have already indicated support for the commission and were expected to sign the convention at Tuesday’s meeting, a source familiar with the discussions said. The commission — the second part of an international compensation mechanism for Ukraine — will review, assess and decide on claims

submitted to the Register of Damage for Ukraine, which was created by the Council of Europe in 2023, and determine compensation awards on a case-by-case basis. Claims can be filed for damage, loss or injury caused by Russian acts committed in or against Ukraine upon or after the February 24, 2022 attack. The claims, which cover violations of international law, can be brought by affected individuals, companies or the Ukrainian state, a draft of the proposal said.

The World Bank has estimated the cost of reconstruction in the coming decade at \$524 billion, or nearly three times Ukraine’s economic output in 2024. But that figure is through December 2024 only and does not include damage caused this year, when Russian drone and missile strikes escalated in a campaign targeting utilities, transport and civilian infrastructure. The Council of Europe was founded in 1949, four years after the end of World War Two, to promote democracy, human rights and the rule of law across the continent and is its oldest intergovernmental organisation. — Reuters

Australian PM says ‘IS ideology’ drove Bondi Beach gunmen

SYDNEY: A father and son were driven by “IS ideology” when they fired on crowds at Bondi Beach in one of Australia’s deadliest mass shootings, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said on Tuesday.

Sajid Akram and his son Naveed opened fire on people thronging the famous beach for the Jewish festival of Hanukkah on Sunday evening, killing 15 people and wounding dozens more.

Authorities said the attack was designed to sow panic among the nation’s Jews, but have so far given little detail about the gunmen’s deeper motivations.

Albanese gave one of the first hints that the pair had been radicalised by an “ideology of hate”. “It would appear that this was motivated by IS ideology,” Albanese told national broadcaster ABC. The pair travelled to the Philippines before the shootings and authorities are investigating

whether they met extremists during the trip, Australian media reported. Manila’s immigration department confirmed that the pair spent almost all of November in the Philippines, with their final destination listed as Davao.

The province, on the southern island of Mindanao, has a long history of insurgencies against central government rule.

Indian police said that Sajid was an Indian citizen, who had left his city of Hyderabad in the southern state of Telangana in 1998, saying in a statement that he had had “limited contact with his family” since. His son Naveed is an Australian citizen, Indian police said.

Indian Foreign Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, visiting Israel on Tuesday, offered his “very sincere, deep condolences” and said New Delhi condemns the attack “in the strongest possible terms”.

Police found a car registered to



Mourners embrace near tributes piled together in memory of the victims of a shooting at Bondi Beach, in Sydney. — AFP

Naveed Akram parked near the beach, with improvised bombs and two “homemade” IS group flags inside, New South Wales Police Commissioner Mal Lanyon said. Authorities are also facing mounting questions over whether they could have acted earlier to foil the attack.

Albanese said Naveed Akram, reportedly an unemployed bricklayer, had come to the attention of Australia’s intelligence agency in 2019 but was not considered an imminent threat at the time.

“They interviewed him, they interviewed his family members, they interviewed people around him,” Albanese said.

“He was not seen at that time to be a person of interest.” Naveed reportedly told his mother on the day of the attack that he was heading out of the city on a fishing trip. Instead, authorities believe that he was holed up in a rental apartment with his father. — AFP

Oman-India friendship indispensable alliance



EDITORIAL

THE enduring relationship between the Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of India is a testament to the powerful forces of geography, history and shared culture. It is a strategic partnership forged not by distant diplomacy, but by a mere stretch of water separating the western shores of India from the Omani coasts — a proximity that has nurtured centuries of cordial relations. The visit of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Oman is a strategic opportunity arriving at a pivotal moment.

This visit is critical for enhancing political coordination, facilitating a candid exchange of views on pressing international issues, and, most notably, accelerating the path toward signing the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA). This agreement promises to be a powerful catalyst, supporting Oman’s economic diversification and investment goals, entirely aligned with the ambitious Oman Vision 2040. Oman and India share a remarkably clear, forward-looking vision in several strategic sectors. Energy stands out as a core area, with a growing collaboration focusing on green hydrogen and ammonia projects, leveraging Oman’s natural resources alongside India’s advanced technological expertise.

Furthermore, the partnership is aggressively strengthening ports and logistics. Oman is strategically enhancing maritime connectivity with India through its

key ports — Suhar, Duqm and Salalah. This initiative not only positions Oman as a vital regional trade hub but is also instrumental in reducing supply chain costs, cementing its role in global commerce.

The strength of this bond is perhaps most visible in the vibrant people-to-people ties. Oman hosts a sizeable community of Indian nationals who are deeply integrated into the fabric of the Omani community. They contribute significantly as skilled employees in Omani-owned enterprises and, crucially, as investors who actively offer employment opportunities for a large number of Omanis. This contribution is high-value; thousands of Indians serve as top-level professionals, particularly in the critical health sector.

The economic and cultural synergy extends to tourism. Statistics from the National Centre for Statistics and Information reveal that Indians, numbering 534,612, topped the inbound tourists to the country, second only to those from the UAE.

In the Gulf region, Oman is unequivocally India’s closest defence partner, making defence cooperation a non-negotiable cornerstone of the strategic relationship. Oman holds the distinction of being the first Gulf country with which all three wings of India’s defence forces hold joint exercises—a profound demonstration of trust and interoperability.

The visit of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to India in 2023 was a landmark event that institutionalised future cooperation

The Oman-India partnership is built on a bedrock of history, fortified by defence cooperation, and propelled by a shared economic vision for the future

through the signing of several key MoUs. India remains a significant economic partner, standing as the sixth-largest trading partner of the Sultanate of Oman in terms of total exports.

The volume of trade exchange reached RO 1.627 billion by the end of last September. Omani exports to India amounted to about RO 17.182 million, while total Omani imports from India stood at RO 13.187 million by the end of last September. Crucially, India’s direct investment in Oman reached a substantial RO 268.4 million by the end of the second quarter of the current year. Though Omani direct investment in India is currently lower, at about RO 5.5 million by the end of 2024, the presence of 61 Indian-invested establishments in Oman by 2024 shows clear confidence in the Omani market.

As a mark of special friendship and recognition of Oman’s pivotal regional role, India extended an invitation to the Sultanate of Oman to participate in the G20 Summit and meetings as a guest country during India’s Presidency in 2023. Oman was represented at the highest level by HH Sayyid Asaad bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs, Personal Representative of His Majesty the Sultan, at the 2023 Summit. The Oman-India partnership is comprehensive and multifaceted. It is built on a bedrock of history, fortified by defence cooperation, and propelled by a shared economic vision for the future.

WILL OPENAI BE THE NEXT TECH GIANT OR NEXT NETSCAPE?

THOMAS URBAIN

Three years after ChatGPT made OpenAI the leader in artificial intelligence and a household name, rivals have closed the gap and some investors are wondering if the sensation has the wherewithal to stay dominant.

Investor Michael Burry, made famous in the film “The Big Short,” recently likened OpenAI to Netscape, which ruled the web browser market in the mid-1990s only to lose to Microsoft’s Internet Explorer.

“OpenAI is the next Netscape, doomed and hemorrhaging cash,” Burry said recently in a post on X. Researcher Gary Marcus, known for being sceptical of AI hype, sees OpenAI as having lost the lead it captured with the launch of ChatGPT in November 2022.

The startup is “burning billions of dollars a month,” Marcus said of OpenAI.

Yet ChatGPT was a tech launch like no other, breaking all consumer product growth records and now boasting more than 800 million — paid subscription and unpaid — weekly users.

OpenAI’s valuation has soared to \$500 billion in funding rounds, higher than any other private company. But the ChatGPT maker will end this year with a loss of several billion dollars and does not expect to be profitable before 2029, an eternity in the fast-moving and uncertain world of AI.

Nonetheless, the startup has committed to paying more than \$1.4 trillion to computer chip makers and data centre builders to build infrastructure it needs for AI.

The fierce cash burn is raising questions, especially since Google claims some 650 million people use its Gemini AI monthly and the tech giant has massive online ad revenue to back its spending on technology.

Rivals Amazon, Meta and OpenAI-investor Microsoft have deep pockets the ChatGPT-maker cannot match. A charismatic salesman, OpenAI chief executive Sam Altman flashed rare annoyance when asked about the startup’s multi-trillion-dollar contracts in early November.

A few days later, he warned internally that the startup is likely to face a “turbulent environment” and an “unfavourable economic climate,” particularly given competitive pressure from Google. — AFP

Not new cold war, Trump wants a civilisational war

EVERY few years, I am reminded of one of my cardinal rules of journalism: Whenever you see elephants flying, don’t laugh, take notes. Because if you see elephants flying, something very different is going on that you don’t understand but you and your readers need to.

I bring that up today in response to the Trump administration’s 33-page National Security Strategy, released last week. It has been widely noted that at a time when our geopolitical rivalry with Russia and China is more heated than at any other time since the Cold War — and Moscow and Beijing are more and more closely aligned against America — the Trump 2025 national security doctrine barely mentions these two geopolitical challengers.

Indeed, the strategy paper warns, unless our European allies elect more “patriotic” nationalist parties, committed to stemming immigration, Europe will face “civilisational erasure.” Unstated but implied is that we will judge you not by the quality of your democracy but by the stringency by which you stem the migration flow from Muslim countries to Europe’s south.

That is a flying elephant no one should ignore. It is a language unlike any previous US national security survey, and to my mind it reveals a deep truth about this second Trump administration: how much it came to Washington to fight America’s third civil war, not to fight the West’s new Cold War.

Yes, in my view, we are in a new civil war over a place called home. Humans have an enduring, structural need for home, not



THOMAS L. FRIEDMAN

The writer is reporter, author and NYT columnist

Trump is, in my view, interested in fighting the civilisational war over what is the American “home” and what is the European “home,” with an emphasis on race and Christian-Judeo faith — and who is an ally in that war and who is not

only as a physical shelter, but as a psychological anchor and moral compass, too. That is why Dorothy in “The Wizard of Oz” (my favourite movie) got it exactly right: “There’s no place like home.” And when people lose that sense of home — whether by war, rapid economic change, cultural change, demographic change, climate change or technological change — they tend to lose their centre of gravity. They may feel as if they are being hurtled around in a tornado, grabbing desperately for anything stable enough to hold onto — and that can include any leader who seems strong enough to reattach them to that place called home, however fraudulent that leader is or unrealistic the prospect.

On another front are Black Americans still struggling against those who would raise new walls to keep them from a place called home. Then there are Americans of every background trying to steady themselves amid cultural currents that seem to shift by the week: new expectations about issues like identity, bathrooms and even a typeface, as well as how we acknowledge one another in the public square.

On yet another front, the gale-force winds of technological change, propelled now by artificial intelligence, are sweeping through workplaces faster than people can plant their feet. And on a fifth front, young Americans of every race, creed and colour are straining to afford even a modest home — the physical and psychological harbour that has long anchored the American dream.

When Donald Trump made

building a wall along the Mexican border the central motif of his first campaign, he instinctively chose a word that did double duty for millions of Americans. “Wall” meant a physical barrier against uncontrolled immigration that was accelerating our transition to a minority-majority-led America. But it also meant a wall against the pace and scope of change: the cultural, digital and generational whirlwinds reshaping daily life. That, to me, is the deep backdrop to Trump’s National Security Strategy. He is not interested in refighting the Cold War to defend and expand the frontiers of democracy. He is, in my view, interested in fighting the civilisational war over what is the American “home” and what is the European “home,” with an emphasis on race and Christian-Judeo faith — and who is an ally in that war and who is not.

In other words, when protecting “Western civilisation” — with a focus on race and faith — becomes the centrepiece of US national security, the biggest threat becomes uncontrolled immigration into America and Western Europe — not Russia or China. And “protecting American culture, ‘spiritual health’ and ‘traditional families’ are framed as core national security requirements,” as defence analyst Rick Landgraf pointed out on the defence website “War on the Rocks.” And that’s why the Trump National Security Strategy paper is no accident or the work of a few low-level ideologues. It is, in fact, the Rosetta Stone explaining what really animates this administration at home and abroad.

— The New York Times

Focus on present and envision what the future holds



SAMUEL KUTTY

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

WITH only a few days left to get through 2025, we find ourselves surrounded by a familiar blend of sparkle and pressure. As fairy lights illuminate buildings and Christmas and New Year markets open, many of us also feel the quiet weight of the year settling on our shoulders.

For millennia, individuals have contemplated the brevity of existence. However, writing about it is one thing; experiencing it is quite another. Time progresses at a constant rate, but our perception of it changes as we grow older.

To live our best lives, we must be purposeful, reflecting on our past, present, and future.

Robert Frost, one of America’s most popular 20th-century poets, was often described as flinty and moody, yet plainspoken and profound. He famously said, “In three words I can sum up everything I’ve learned about life: it goes on.”

With each year passing swiftly, like a dream that fades at dawn, I realise that what truly endure are the emotions we experience and the insights we acquire. Indeed, for some individuals, the end of this year marks the conclusion of one chapter in their lives and the beginning of another.

For some, the only difference is the change of the date on the calendar. However, we don’t always immediately recognise the end of something because, ultimately, every ending marks the beginning of something new.

This is life: we achieve, stumble, rise again, and try once more. This cycle defines our humanity. However, as individuals, we must also strategise to create opportunities for new achievements and to experience success.

I am someone who enjoys acquiring knowledge, but I often take on too much at once. I have many ideas that come to me, yet I am unable to realise them all. But when I review the list later, I often recognise that I lack the time or motivation to accomplish everything.

To lead a fulfilling life, one must plan and act with intention—simple in theory but often challenging in practice. However, it need not be as difficult as we sometimes make it. This is your life and, therefore, your only opportunity to live it fully. Approach it sincerely, and the rewards will be significant.

We should believe what Albert Einstein, who revolutionised our understanding of the universe with his groundbreaking theories of special and general relativity, said: “With each choice you make, you create your life.”

Most of our days are filled with choices, both big and small, and they all matter —

I am someone who enjoys acquiring knowledge, but I often take on too much at once. I have many ideas that come to me, yet I am unable to realise them all. But when I review the list later, I often recognise that I lack the time or motivation to accomplish everything

even when we aren’t consciously making any. We grow by recognising our mistakes, understanding where we went wrong, and making adjustments to avoid repeating them.

Carrying regrets and dwelling on the past can make life difficult and cause anxiety about the future. Learn from the past, and then let it go. Be your own best friend: embrace who you are and forgive yourself when necessary.

Focus on the present and envision what lies ahead. Understand that fear serves as a warning. Acknowledge it, but do not let it control you. If life is unjust, then create justice. You hold the reins of your life and your future.

You need to choose what is best for yourself. Avoid making assumptions and focus on the facts. Do not depend on others, as individuals cannot always be relied upon. Feelings are fleeting and unreliable — avoid making decisions based solely on emotions.

I believe we can make good choices when we carefully weigh the consequences and possibilities, stay true to our morals and values, and ensure that fears and doubts do not influence our decisions. Let us welcome the future with positivity, determination, and gratitude.

I wish you all for the upcoming year to be abundant.

US DANGLES SECURITY GUARANTEES FOR UKRAINE

ANDREAS RINKE, TOM BALMFORTH AND STEVE HOLLAND

US negotiators have offered to provide Nato-style security guarantees for Kyiv as US and European negotiators reported progress in talks on Monday to end the war with Russia, but a deal on territorial concessions remained elusive.

Envoys sent by US President Donald Trump made the unprecedented offer at talks with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky in Berlin, US officials said, but warned such a deal would not be on the table forever.

The talks in the German capital have sparked some optimism from European leaders on a path to end Europe’s deadliest conflict since World War Two. However, Moscow is yet to agree to any of the changes discussed in Germany and has not indicated any willingness to do so. The US is also leaning on Ukraine to withdraw its forces from the eastern Donetsk region, an official familiar with the matter said, in what would be a massive concession that could cause a ferocious backlash in Ukraine.

Calling the issue of territorial concessions “painful”, Zelensky told reporters later: “Frankly speaking, we still have different positions.” But he said he believed US mediators would help find a compromise.

Kyiv’s negotiators will continue consultations with US counterparts, he said, adding that Ukraine needed a concrete understanding on security guarantees, including the monitoring of a ceasefire, before making any decisions related to the war’s front lines.

“I do not think that the (US) has demanded anything,” Zelensky said.

“I see us as strategic partners, so I would say that we have heard about the issue of territories in relation to Russia’s vision or Russia’s demands from the US. We see this as demands from the Russian Federation.”

US officials told reporters by conference call they had secured agreement on 90 per cent of the issues. Though longstanding territorial issues remain, one said, “we’ve got multiple different solutions to bridge the gap that we are suggesting to them”.

Ukraine has said previously it would not cede territory to Russia, which has taken almost 20 per cent of the country in its east and south since its full-scale February 2022 war.

A European source briefed on the latest talks said Russia had not yet budged on its territorial demands. “The atmosphere is good but the goals remain quite far apart on the core.”

Zelensky has been holding talks in Berlin with US envoy Steve Witkoff and President Donald Trump’s son-in-law Jared Kushner as well as European leaders. Kyiv is under intense pressure from Trump to make concessions to Russia.

“For the first time since the war began, the possibility of a ceasefire is conceivable,” said German Chancellor Friedrich Merz, who hosted the meetings, in a post on X. — Reuters

The post-neoliberal consensus is here

THE post-neoliberal consensus is here, but don’t look for it in US President Donald Trump’s policies. After a decade of backlash, it is time to accept not only that neoliberalism is dead but also that a new consensus is taking its place. Remarkably, significant segments of the left and the right in the United States have come to agree on the broad outlines of economic policy. Discussions in universities and think tanks are driven today by a common understanding that departs significantly from the neoliberal orthodoxy of the last 50 years.

The first element of the new consensus is a recognition that the concentration of economic power has become excessive. The concern is expressed in different forms by different groups. Some complain directly about inequality in income and wealth and its corrosive effects on politics. Others worry about market power and the adverse implications for competition. For yet others, the key problem is financialisation and the distortion of economic and social priorities that it produces.

The remedies on offer also vary, from wealth taxes to vigorous antitrust enforcement to campaign-finance reform. But the desire to curb the economic and political power of corporate, financial, and tech elites is widespread, uniting progressive supporters of US Senator Bernie Sanders with populists like the podcast host and former Trump adviser Steve Bannon.

The second element of the new consensus is the importance of restoring dignity to people and regions that neoliberalism left behind. Good jobs are essential to this agenda. Jobs are not just a means of providing income. They are also a source of identity and social recognition. Good jobs are what underpin a robust middle class, which is the foundation of social cohesion and a sustainable democracy.

Dislocation is inevitable in a world of economic change. Until the 1990s, plenty of safeguards – job protections, trade restrictions,



The concentration of economic power has become excessive.



DANI RODRIK

The writer is Professor of International Political Economy at Harvard Kennedy School, is Past President of the International Economic Association and the author of Shared Prosperity in a Fractured World: A New Economics for the Middle Class, the Global Poor, and Our Climate

price controls, and regulations that kept finance in check – limited the impact on workers and communities. For neoliberals, these safeguards were inefficiencies that had to be removed. They overlooked the economic and social distress that job losses arising from technological change, globalisation, or economic liberalisation would produce.

The third component of the emerging consensus is that government has an active role to play in shaping the economic transformation that is needed. Markets on their own cannot be trusted to produce economic resilience, national security, innovation for advanced technologies, clean energy, or good jobs in distressed regions. Government must prod, twist arms, and subsidise. Industrial policy has moved from the disreputable fringe of economic discussion to its very centre. Taken together, these three tenets provide a new understanding of the goals and instruments of economic policy that is both novel and, on the whole, laudable. But the devil is always in the details. Actual outcomes will be determined by specific policies that are chosen and implemented.

Consider the good-jobs objective. Here, the left and the right seem to have reached a consensus on the desirability of reshoring and reinvigorating manufacturing.

Historically, the industrial labour force played a pivotal role in producing equitable, middle-class societies. But automation and other technological forces have turned manufacturing into a labour-shedding sector. Even China has been losing manufacturing employment by the millions in recent years. So, even if manufacturing investment and output is revived in the US and Europe, the impact on employment is likely to be minuscule.

Whether we like it or not, the future of employment lies in services – care, retail, hospitality, logistics, the gig economy, and so on. Any approach to good jobs that does not focus on organisational and technological innovations in these services will necessarily disappoint.

There are, of course, other important reasons for supporting manufacturing. Advanced manufacturing, along with the digital economy, plays an outsized role in innovation and national security. It makes sense to deploy industrial policies that focus on these economic activities, in addition to policies that focus on labour-absorbing services. But here, too, the “how” matters as much as the “what.”

Caveats apply to industrial policies as well. These can go badly wrong when they foster corruption or serve narrow corporate interests.

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SPORTS

NEXTROUND



Mirbat will be aiming to return to winning ways and strengthen their chances of qualifying for the second round.

MIRBAT TAKE ON AL MUSANNAH TODAY IN SECOND DIVISION HANDBALL LEAGUE

RIYADH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, DEC 16

The Second Division Handball League for the 2025-2026 season continues on Wednesday with a single match bringing together Mirbat Club and Al Musannah Club at the main indoor hall of the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher.

The encounter is of great importance to both sides. Mirbat will be aiming to return to winning ways and strengthen their chances of qualifying for the second round after suffering a recent defeat against Al Amerat, which left them second in the standings with four points. A victory would see a significant step forward in their campaign.

On the other hand, Al Musannah enter the match seeking to bounce back from their opening defeat to Al Amerat by 37-18, as the technical staff looks to correct the team's course and secure a positive result that would revive their ambitions in the competition.

In the previous round, Al Amerat recorded a convincing 40-26 victory over Mirbat at the same venue, extending their lead at the top of the table with six points, Al Amerat dominated the match from the outset, finishing the first half ahead 26-11, before maintaining control in the second half through a mix of experienced players and promising young talent.

The Second Division League action will resume on Friday, with two matches scheduled. Al Amerat will face Al Suwaiq at the indoor hall of Al Rustaq Sports Complex, while Masirah will take on Al Musannah at the same time at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher.

Oman to host GCC age group golf championship

RIYADH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, DEC 16

THE Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Oman Golf Association (OGA), will host the GCC Age Group Golf Championship at Ghala Golf Club from December 21 to 24, featuring national teams from GCC countries in the under-13 boys, under-16 boys and under-16 girls categories. The tournament will bring together some of the most promising young golf talents in the region.

Faiz bin Mohammed Riyadh, OGA Vice-Chairman, stated that hosting the championship represents a key milestone in the development of golf in Oman, emphasising that age group competitions form the true foundation for building future achievements and nurturing the champions of tomorrow. "The OGA continues its ambitious efforts to strengthen Oman's presence on the regional and international golf map by hosting high profile regional events."

Riyadh explained that the championship carries significant technical, developmental and tourism value, supporting Oman's golf development programmes, providing young players with valuable competitive exposure and reinforcing Oman's reputation as a reliable host capable of delivering events to the highest organisational and technical standards.

The support provided by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth (MoCSY), along with various government entities and private sector partners was crucial, he said noting that institutional partnerships are essential to the success of major championships.

In the championship, all GCC countries will participate with full national teams, ensuring a high level of competition and reflecting the rapid growth of golf across the region.

Riyadh highlighted that the OGA has built on its accumulated experience from hosting previous GCC and international tournaments, further enhancing organisational mechanisms and services for participating delegations. "The championship serves as an ideal platform for identifying emerging talents and integrating them into long-term development pathways through



The tournament will bring together some of the most promising young golf talents in the region.



FAIZ BIN MOHAMMED RIYADH
Oman Golf Association Vice-Chairman

academies, school programmes and national teams."

"The OGA has adopted a multiyear development strategy aimed at expanding the grassroots base, increasing international exposure and strengthening Oman's presence in regional, continental and global competitions. A strong competition with GCC teams accelerates both technical and mental development for young players."

WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION

The OGA official confirmed that Oman's boys and girls national teams have undergone intensive training programmes at Ghala Golf Club under qualified coaches to ensure peak physical, technical and mental readiness for the event. He also emphasised the OGA's commitment to promoting golf within the community, particularly among youth, through schools, outreach initiatives and open days, while continuing to expand opportunities for girls through dedicated tournaments and training programmes.

He noted that golf plays a direct role in boosting sports tourism, attracting high value visitors,

supporting the national economy and showcasing Oman's natural and tourism assets, in line with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040.

Riyadh said all facilities have been fully prepared in cooperation with Ghala Golf Club, including course evaluations, practice areas and specialised logistics, technical and officiating teams.

He highlighted that the Ghala Golf Club, established in 1971, is the oldest golf club in Oman and has evolved from a renowned sand course into a full 18 hole grass course in the heart of Muscat, equipped with modern training facilities that have contributed to the development of generations of players.

Concluding his remarks, Faiz Mohammed Riyadh stressed that Oman's golf ambitions extend beyond GCC participation toward building a generation capable of competing at Asian and world levels, affirmed that nurturing young talent remains the cornerstone of a bright future for Omani golf, with the upcoming GCC Championship marking a significant step toward hosting major Asian and international tournaments in the years ahead.

Al Bashayer defeat Nizwa to stay top of basketball league

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, DEC 16

Al Bashayer Club continued their impressive run in Oman Basketball League 2025-26 season after securing a 91-51 victory over Nizwa Club. The match was held at the auxiliary hall of the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher on Monday. With this win, Al Bashayer raised their tally to six points, remaining at the top of the standings with a game in hand over Seeb Club.

The match was played at a fast pace, with Al Bashayer asserting control from the opening minutes through strong defensive

organisation, quick offensive transitions, and efficient shooting from different areas of the court. Several Al Bashayer players delivered standout performances, led by foreign professional Jmour Jorg, alongside Said al Saadi, Noah al Mahrouqi, Osama al Riyami, Ahmed al Halhali and Mahmoud al Souli. For Nizwa, the most notable performers were foreign professional Nikola Dakvis, his team-mate King Serry as well as Mohammed al Anquodi and Basel al Subhi.

Al Bashayer made a strong start, applying high defensive pressure that disrupted Nizwa's rhythm and forced turnovers, while



Al Bashayer continued their impressive run in Oman Basketball League with a 91-51 victory over Nizwa. — Mousa al Balushi

capitalising on fast breaks. Despite Nizwa's attempts to respond, Al Bashayer closed the quarter with a clear 24-13 advantage.

Al Bashayer maintained their dominance through effective ball movement and teamwork, exploiting defensive gaps to add 16 points. Nizwa relied on individual efforts to score 11 points, as the first half ended with Al Bashayer leading 40-24.

The third quarter saw Al Bashayer further extend their lead, mixing inside penetration with perimeter shooting. Their disciplined defence limited Nizwa to nine points, while Al Bashayer added 24, ending the quarter

ahead at 64-33.

With a comfortable lead, Al Bashayer continued to control the game, allowing multiple players to contribute offensively. They scored 27 points, while Nizwa added 12, sealing a convincing 91-51 victory.

The match was officiated by an international refereeing crew led by Issam al Siyabi as the first referee, Rashid al Mushaifri as the second referee and Wafaa al Samari as the third referee. The scorers' table included Maryam al Zadjali, Yaqoub al Nadhabi and Majid al Akhzami, with Younis al Zadjali serving as technical supervisor.

SHORTTAKES



The World No 1’s six-win year included major victories at the PGA Championship and Open Championship.

SCHEFFLER WINS
FOURTH STRAIGHT
POY AWARD

LOS ANGELES: Scottie Scheffler won the 2025 Jack Nicklaus Award as PGA Tour Player of the Year on Monday to become the first golfer since Tiger Woods (1999-2003) to earn the honour in four consecutive seasons. The World No 1’s six-win year included major victories at the PGA Championship and Open Championship.

Scheffler also won the CJ Cup Byron Nelson at McKinney, Texas, in May; the Memorial Tournament at Dublin, Ohio, in June; the BMW Championship at Owings Mills, Md, in August; and the Procore Championship at Napa, Calif, in September.

Scheffler finished in the top 10 of all four major tournaments. He was fourth at the Masters and tied for seventh at the US Open in addition to his triumphs in the PGA Championship at Charlotte, North Carolina, and the Open Championship in Northern Ireland.

He also was a member of the United States’ Ryder Cup team that lost 15-13 to Team Europe at Farmingdale, New York in September. Scheffler dropped all four of his matches over the first two days before winning his Sunday singles match. Opponents nominated for Player of the Year were Tommy Fleetwood, Rory McIlroy and Ben Griffin.

As accomplished as he is on the course, Scheffler made waves during a press conference before the Open Championship when he said that rising to the top of the sport has not been as fulfilling as it would seem for the family man with a wife and young son.

“To get to live out your dreams is very special, but at the end of the day, I’m not out here to inspire the next generation of golfers,” Scheffler said at the time. “I’m not out here to inspire someone to be the best player in the world, because what’s the point?”

“This is not a fulfilling life. It’s fulfilling from the sense of accomplishment, but it’s not fulfilling from a sense of the deepest places of your heart.”

South Africa’s Aldrich Potgieter was named the Arnold Palmer Award winner as PGA Tour Rookie of the Year after winning the Rocket Classic in June at Detroit. Potgieter’s victory at Detroit made him the ninth youngest winner of a PGA Tour event (since 1983) at 20 years, 289 days. — Reuters

ICC T20 WORLD CUP
TROPHY TOUR IN
MUSCAT TODAY



Amerat from 6-9 pm.

Oman are one of 20 participating countries at the championship which will be co-hosted by India and Sri Lanka and begin from February 7, 2026.

Coached by Duleep Mendis, Oman have qualified for the global showpiece for the fourth time and have made it twice in a row with their previous participation at the 2024 World Cup, co-hosted by the USA and the West Indies.

MUSCAT: The ICC Men’s T20 World Cup trophy will be on display in Muscat.

Come 17th December, Wednesday, the coveted trophy will be open for public viewing at the Oman Avenues Mall from 3 pm to 4.30 pm and then at Oman Cricket Academy ground in Al



The event will be organised as part of the sports activities of Muscat Nights Festival in cooperation with Muscat Municipality and MoCSY.

Muscat to host Int’l Open
Bowling Championships

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, DEC 16

THE OMAN Bowling Committee (OBC) will host the second edition of Muscat International Open Bowling Championships 2026 which will take place from January 13 to 19, 2026, at Seeb Bowling Center. The event will be organised as part of the sports activities of Muscat Nights Festival in cooperation with Muscat Municipality and Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth (MoCSY).

The seven-day championship is expected to attract an elite line-up of bowlers from across the globe, including top players from West Asia, the Gulf countries and other leading bowling nations. Muscat city will once again take centre stage on the international bowling calendar and this event will reinforce Oman’s growing

reputation as a regional hub for international sporting events. The tournament will bring together professionals and highly ranked amateurs, promising a week of high-quality competition and exciting performances.

Saif al Fari, member at OBC, said that Muscat International Bowling Championship (MIBC) established itself as one of the most prominent annual bowling events in the Sultanate of Oman.

“The previous edition which was held in January 2025, witnessed outstanding participation and memorable performances. Muscat International Open Bowling Championships aligns with OBC’s strategic vision to promote bowling locally, provide international exposure for Omani athletes, and strengthen Oman’s position as a destination for global sports events.”

“In this year’s edition, we will aim to raise the bar further in terms of competition level, organisation, and international reach.

The championship will be conducted in accordance with the rules and regulations of the Asian Bowling Federation (ABF) and is sanctioned as an international event, recognised by bodies such as the International Bowling Federation (IBF) and the ABF. This ensures global standards in officiating, lane conditions and competition format. The event will take place at Seeb Bowling Center which has facilities and challenging lane conditions, will once again serve as the official venue. The centre has a proven track record of hosting major events and is well-equipped to meet the technical demands of top-level international bowling,” he added.

Oman’s star Musab al Adawi had emerged as the tournament’s standout winner in the last edition. His success highlighted the steady progress of Omani bowlers on the international stage and inspired strong local interest in the sport.

Crowe beat EY to clinch Auditor’s Cup 2025

MUSCAT: The 23rd edition of the Auditor’s Cup 2025 concluded in spectacular fashion at the Al Amerat Cricket Grounds in Oman, with Crowe securing the prestigious title after a gripping final against EY. The tournament brought together eight competitive teams, delivering excitement, emotion and standout performances especially during the matches held between December 1 and 3.

This year’s edition saw new entrants BAF Oman impress the crowd and competitors alike. Despite being newcomers, they powered their way into the eliminator round and ultimately finished as second runners-up, marking one of the tournament’s most remarkable storylines.

In the championship match, EY won the toss and elected to bat first, posting a competitive 59 runs in 6 overs for the loss of five wickets. Issa al Balushi stood out as EY’s top performer with a resilient 21 runs.

Crowe’s chase began shakily with the early dismissal of star all-rounder Balakrishnan Nair. But Ivan Manjila stepped up



Champions Crowe with the Auditors Cup 2025.

magnificently, anchoring the innings with a match-winning 28 runs off 18 balls, earning him recognition as the tournament’s best batter. Supporting the effort, all-rounder Nasfatullah delivered a power-packed cameo, striking at a 200 strike rate, smashing two sixes and contributing a crucial wicket with the ball.

Crowe sealed victory in 5.4 overs, claiming the title for

the third time, a testament to their continued excellence and competitive dominance.

INDIVIDUAL HONOURS

A series of individual honours highlighted the exceptional talent on display, with the player of the tournament hitting twice as many sixes as the player with the second-most sixes.

The awards are as follows: Player of the Tournament:

Omar Sarfraz (EY); Best Bowler: Pankaj Gupta (BAF); Best Batter: Ivan Manjila (Crowe); Best Wicketkeeper: Prakshit (BAF); Maximum 6s – Omar Sarfraz (EY); Best Dressed Team: Moore Oman and Special Recognition: Farid Sheikh (Deloitte) for being the most friendly and supportive participant.

The tournament’s atmosphere was further elevated by an energizing DJ A&A performance, while guests enjoyed hot and delicious cuisine curated by Beyond Kitchen & Pakistan Palace Restaurant. The smooth execution of the event was made possible by the professional coordination of Jazz Boys Sports.

With spirited competition, memorable individual displays and enthusiastic participation from players and guests alike, the Auditor’s Cup 2025 secured its reputation as one of the most eagerly anticipated sporting events in Oman’s corporate cricket calendar. The tournament lived up to its reputation with outstanding performances across the board and an atmosphere of sportsmanship.

SPORTS

IPLAUCTION



Australia's Cameron Green in action during the second Ashes Test between Australia and England at the Gabba, Brisbane, Australia. — Reuters

GREEN BECOMES MOST EXPENSIVE OVERSEAS PLAYER

ABU DHABI: Australia all-rounder Cameron Green became the most expensive overseas player in the Indian Premier League (IPL), after Kolkata Knight Riders signed him for 252 million Indian rupees (\$2.77 million) at the player auction for the 2026 season in Abu Dhabi on Tuesday.

Green, who was initially registered as a batsman due to an error, was the subject of intense bidding between Kolkata and Chennai Super Kings before being purchased by the three-time champions. The 26-year-old is the third most expensive player in IPL history, after India's Rishabh Pant (270 million Indian rupees) and Shreyas Iyer (267.5 million). "We are very happy. This is something that we were really focused on... I think he adds a lot to our team," Kolkata CEO Venky Mysore said.

Australian Mitchell Starc, the previous most expensive foreign player in the competition, attracted a bid of 247.5 million Indian rupees in 2024 from Kolkata, who have made three of the five most expensive buys in IPL history. Green, who missed the IPL this year as he was recovering from back surgery, is set to play in the third Ashes test against England starting on Wednesday.

Kolkata also spent big on Sri Lankan seamer Matheesha Pathirana and Bangladesh's Mustafizur Rahman. Five-time champions Chennai splurged 142 million Indian rupees each on wicketkeeper-batter Kartik Sharma, who has hit 16 sixes in this season's Ranji Trophy, and all-rounder Prashant Veer, making them the most expensive uncapped signings in IPL history.

Delhi Capitals bought England batter Ben Duckett and South Africa's David Miller for 20 million Indian rupees each.

The 19th edition of the IPL begins on March 26, after India co-hosts the Twenty20 World Cup starting in February. — Reuters



Boston Celtics' Hugo Gonzalez goes for a basket past Detroit Pistons' Cade Cunningham. — Reuters

CUNNINGHAM LIFTS PISTONS PAST CELTICS

LOS ANGELES: Cade Cunningham scored 32 points as the Detroit Pistons held off the Boston Celtics 112-105 to extend their lead at the top of the Eastern Conference standings on Monday.

Pistons point guard Cunningham produced another potent offensive display in a back-and-forth duel that saw the lead change hands 15 times before Detroit pulled away in the final minutes.

Cunningham, averaging just under 27 points this season, rattled in six three-pointers in 11-of-21 shooting from the field to help Detroit improve to 21-5 in the Eastern Conference.

But Detroit were made to work hard for their fourth straight win after a dogged performance from Boston, who led by as many as 12 points in the second quarter before being reeled in.

"We love games like this that are tough, muddy," Cunningham said. "I think the game getting that way turns us up a little bit more."

Detroit's starters were backed by 47 points from the bench, with Caris LeVert coming on to add 13 points in 19 minutes on court. The Denver Nuggets battled past the Houston Rockets 128-125 in overtime to extend their winning streak to five games in a duel between the second and third-placed teams in the Western Conference. — AFP

Man United held 4-4 by Bournemouth in thriller



Manchester United's Bruno Fernandes celebrates scoring their third goal with Luke Shaw at Old Trafford. — Reuters

MANCHESTER UNITED blew the lead three times to miss out on moving up to fifth in the Premier League as Bournemouth would not be beaten in a thrilling 4-4 draw at Old Trafford.

United have lost just once in their last 10 games but Ruben Amorim will be frustrated as more points at home were frittered away despite arguably the best attacking display of his reign in charge.

Amad Diallo and Casemiro gave the hosts a half-time lead either side of Antoine Semenyo's equaliser.

Two Bournemouth goals from Evanilson and Marcus Tavernier in seven minutes at the start of the second period turned the game around.

The Red Devils roared back through a brilliant Bruno Fernandes free-kick and Matheus Cunha's second goal for the club.

However, after failing to beat 10-man Everton and struggling West Ham at home in recent weeks, United let another two points slip away.

Eli Junior Kroupi's fine finish secured a point for Bournemouth, who should have even snatched victory in stoppage time as David Brooks was twice denied by Senne Lammens.

"It was a fun game for everyone at home," said Amorim.

"When you win away you should win at home. The performance today was different from the last two at home.

"The result is the same, it is frustrating but the performance is different."

Bournemouth's winless run stretches to seven games but a point edges them up to 13th. United move ahead of Liverpool on goal difference into sixth.

DIFFICULT TO EXPLAIN

Despite the disappointment, Amorim will be heartened by the sight of his expensively assembled forward line beginning to come good.

The home side's bright start was rewarded on 13 minutes when Diallo nodded into an empty net after Petrovic could only get a hand to Cunha's header.

Going forward United looked as good as they have all season.

But at the back they badly missed the presence and experience of the injured Harry Maguire and Matthijs de Ligt.

Bournemouth levelled against the run of play on 40 minutes.

Luke Shaw was easily barged off the ball, allowing Semenyo to gallop into the box and fire low and hard across Lammens for his first goal since October 3.

United restored their lead in five minutes of added time at the end of the first half, thanks in large part to Petrovic.

Casemiro headed Fernandes' corner goalwards, but the former Chelsea goalkeeper should have easily collected the Brazilian's header. But all the Red Devils good first half work was undone within seven minutes of the second.

Evanilson pounced on Tavernier's pass to slot into the far corner just 37 seconds after the restart for his first goal since August.

Tavernier then drilled a free-kick from the edge of the area past the despairing dive of Lammens. Once United restored their composure, chances began to flow again for Amorim's men.

POINT-BLANK

Mbeumo blasted over from point-blank range before Petrovic unconvincingly parried away Cunha's powerful effort.

Not since May 1984 have United lost a home league game that they were leading at half-time.

They at least continued that run as Fernandes' brilliant free-kick found the top corner before Cunha swept home when Adam Smith failed to clear Benjamin Sesko's cross.

Amorim looked exasperated on the touchline even as his side led 4-3.

The Portuguese's mood was soured even more six minutes from time when Eli Junior Kroupi swept in.

And only two great saves from Lammens deep into stoppage time prevented David Brooks from snatching Bournemouth victory on a madcap Monday in Manchester.

"It's very difficult to explain because so much happened," said Bournemouth boss Andoni Iraola.

"I suppose it was entertaining for everyone. Two teams that attacked much better than we defended." — AFP



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SHORTTAKES



The initiative represents a major step in empowering the private sector and enhancing SME readiness.

TAMKEEN INITIATIVE TO READY SMES FOR PUBLIC TENDERS

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, DEC 16

THE Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) has launched the “Tamkeen” initiative, a nationwide programme designed to prepare small and medium enterprises (SMEs) to compete more effectively for government procurement and tenders. The initiative was unveiled on December 16 at the Chamber’s headquarters in Muscat, in cooperation with the Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit, the Projects, Tenders and Local Content Authority, and the SMEs Development Authority (Riyada).

The launch was attended by Shaikh Faisal bin Abdullah al Rawas, Chairman of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry; Eng Badr bin Salim al Maamari, Chairman of the Projects, Tenders and Local Content Authority; members of the OCCI board; and business owners.

Tamkeen is a key outcome of OCCI’s strategic directions workshop and aligns with three core pillars: improving the business environment, expanding economic diversification and strengthening partnerships to support development across the governorates. The initiative will deliver two structured training programmes during 2025 and 2026 across the Sultanate of Oman, with the aim of enabling SMEs to better utilise the 10% share allocated to them from government procurement and tenders.

Al Rawas said the initiative represents a major step in empowering the private sector and enhancing SME readiness in an increasingly competitive business environment.

ITHCA launches venture fund and accelerator

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, DEC 16

ITHCA Group — the technology investment arm of the Oman Investment Authority (OIA) — has announced on Tuesday, December 16, 2025, the launch of an accelerator programme and a venture investment initiative aimed at strengthening Omani–Saudi technology cooperation.

First to be unveiled was ‘Bawabat’, an accelerator designed to enable Omani technology startups to enter and scale within the Saudi market.

The accelerator is the result of a collaboration between ITHCA Group, Omani technology company Al Jabr and the National Technology Development Programme (NTDP) in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

The six-month programme aims to connect Omani startups with investors while supporting their entry into the Saudi market.

Participating startups are eligible to receive exclusive investment of up to \$100,000 from the OTF SCALE Fund. In addition to funding, the accelerator offers business development support, cross-border relationship building and hands-on support in localisation, product testing and validating market readiness.

Mohammed bin Salem al Wahaibi, Chief Executive Officer of Al Jabr Company, said: “Bawabat is not merely a support programme, but a practical bridge and an integrated pathway that shortens the journey for Omani startups entering the Saudi market in



ITHCA’s initiatives unlock opportunities for tech entrepreneurs to scale regionally, with Saudi Arabia as a key target.

In addition to funding, the accelerator offers business development support, cross-border relationship building and hands-on support in localisation, product testing and validating market readiness.

a structured and well-studied manner”. He added: “True expansion is achieved through trusted cross-border relationships, on-the-ground validation of product readiness and operational and investment partnerships built on clear market needs and sound business models”.

Ibrahim Nimas, Chief Executive Officer of the National Technology Development Programme (NTDP), highlighted the shared regional vision behind the initiative. “Saudi Arabia and the Sultanate of Oman, alongside other GCC countries, share a clear vision to support technology entrepreneurship and strengthen startup growth across the region”, he said.

“Through this collaboration, Omani and Saudi companies will be able to enter new regional markets, connect with investors and partners; and seize growth opportunities within the regional ecosystem”, he added.

Moreover, ITHCA Group announced the signing of an investment agreement with Vision Ventures, a Saudi Arabia-based venture capital fund recognised

for its active role in financing early-stage technology startups across the region. The agreement was signed by Eng Said bin Abdullah al Mandhari, Chief Executive Officer of ITHCA Group and Qais al Issa, Co-founder and Chief Executive Officer of Vision Ventures.

“We are proud of this partnership with ITHCA Group, which represents a strategic step in supporting Omani technology companies and linking them to the regional investment ecosystem”, Al Issa said.

“Through this collaboration, we look forward to accelerating growth pathways and opening high-quality funding and partnership opportunities that translate into sustainable economic impact”.

During the event, ITHCA Group also announced the rebranding of the ‘Idea Stage’ fund to ‘OTF SCALE’. Managed by ITHCA Group in partnership with Al Jabr Company, the fund has completed 36 investments since its establishment, with 11 per cent of portfolio companies securing follow-on funding within a period of no more than 15 months.

Maha bint Mohammed al Balushiyah, Director General of Venture Capital Funds Management at ITHCA Group, said: “The OTF SCALE brand combines the legacy of the Oman Technology Fund with a forward-looking vision focused on scale and impact”.

She added: “It reflects our mission of elevating ideas, empowering entrepreneurs and accelerating project growth towards tangible economic and regional impact”.

Fitch upgrades Omani energy entities EDO and OQ to investment-grade ‘BBB-’

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, DEC 16

FOLLOWING the landmark upgrade of Oman’s sovereign credit rating to investment-grade ‘BBB-’ earlier this month, international ratings agency Fitch Ratings has carried out similar rating actions on two key state-owned energy sector entities — Energy Development Oman SAOC (EDO) and OQ SAOC.

In separate but concurrent actions on December 15, 2025, Fitch upgraded the Long-Term Issuer Default Ratings (IDRs) of both EDO and OQ to ‘BBB-’ from ‘BB+’, while affirming a Stable Outlook for each entity.

Earlier this month, Fitch upgraded Oman’s sovereign rating to investment grade, citing Oman’s strengthened public finances, lower government debt ratios and an improved external position.

The agency highlighted



Both EDO and OQ are cornerstone entities in Oman’s economy.

sustained fiscal discipline, a significant reduction in government debt to around 36% of GDP, and prudent macroeconomic management as key drivers underpinning the upgrade and reinforcing investor confidence in Oman’s economic resilience and long-term stability.

Both EDO and OQ are cornerstone entities in Oman’s

economy, underpinning revenue generation, value creation, GDP growth and long-term economic development.

EDO, affiliated with the Ministry of Finance, owns 60% of the Block 6 petroleum concession operated by Petroleum Development Oman (PDO), 100% of Block 6’s non-associated gas concession and 100% of Hydrogen Oman (Hydrom), the master planner of the Sultanate of Oman’s green hydrogen industry.

Fitch said its rating assessment of EDO is driven primarily by its very strong linkages to the Omani sovereign, which constrain the company’s rating and underpin a high Government-Related Entity (GRE) support score of 55 out of 60.

EDO benefits from very strong government decision-making and oversight, reflecting full state ownership, government-appointed directors, regulated gas pricing and the strategic importance of

its Block 6 concessions to the domestic economy.

“EDO is the largest oil and gas producer in Oman through its interest in Petroleum Development Oman (PDO). PDO operates the onshore Block 6 oil and gas concessions, which comprise over 24% of Oman’s land acreage and have more than 50 years of production history.

This slightly mitigates EDO’s focus on a single country of operations. We expect average output of over 800 thousand barrels of oil equivalent per day (kboe/d) until 2028 in our rating case”, Fitch noted.

OQ SAOC, meanwhile, is fully owned by the state through the Oman Investment Authority (OIA) and mandated to strengthen and centralise the country’s oil and gas sector. OQ’s strategic importance, Fitch said, stems from its role as Oman’s main downstream company, the owner

of all domestic refining assets, the exclusive operator of the country’s natural gas transportation infrastructure and the national champion for renewable energy.

While leverage fell to near zero in 2024 following IPO proceeds and debt repayments, Fitch expects gearing to rise gradually as OQ invests in upstream growth, gas networks, decarbonisation and an expanding clean energy and green hydrogen pipeline.

The agency highlighted the role of wholly owned subsidiary OQ Alternative Energy (OQAE) as the national champion for clean energy and green hydrogen; and the main developer of Oman’s alternative energy projects.

OQAE has established a renewable energy pipeline of up to 7 GW across Oman, including wind and solar projects; and is currently advancing five wind and two solar projects totalling 1.8 GW, Fitch added.

ADVERTORIALS

SHORTTAKES



The ceremony serves as a testament to Bank Muscat’s steadfast commitment to nurturing and developing its human capital.

BANK MUSCAT
HONOURS LONG-
SERVING STAFF
AND HIGHLIGHTS
DEVELOPMENT OF
NATIONAL TALENTS

MUSCAT: Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, celebrated the recognition of 116 employees who have completed between 20 and 40 years of service with the Bank. The ceremony, held recently at the Hormuz Grand Muscat Hotel, was attended by members of the executive management along with the honoured employees, marking a remarkable occasion dedicated to acknowledging their long-standing dedication.

This initiative reflects Bank Muscat’s deep appreciation for the tremendous efforts and commitment demonstrated by its employees throughout their years of service. It also underscores their pivotal role of supporting the growth and progress throughout the Bank’s journey.

The ceremony serves as a testament to Bank Muscat’s steadfast commitment to nurturing and developing its human capital and strengthening investment in its people, considered the key contributor for institutional excellence. Through this approach, the Bank continues to reinforce its position as a supportive and motivating workplace that empowers individuals as key drivers of success and sustainable development.

The Bank firmly believes that its employees are true partners in its journey of leadership and that their dedication over the years has been integral to enhancing the Bank’s presence, fostering innovation and delivering best-in-class banking services and facilities to both individual and institutional customers.

On this occasion, Sheikha bint Yousuf al Farsiyyah, Deputy Chief Executive Officer of Operations, Bank Muscat, congratulated all the honoured employees for their valued contributions and distinguished performance over the years, which have played a vital role in the Bank’s progress, growth and achievements across various fields.

She stated: “Awarding our distinguished employees is a clear reflection of our appreciation for the contribution they have made over the years. Through their commitment and exceptional performance, the Bank has been able to achieve major accomplishments across multiple areas.

I encourage all employees to continue their dedication and hard work to achieve further success and maintain our leadership in the financial sector by providing the best services and facilities to all our customers. We reaffirm Bank Muscat’s continued commitment to developing human resources.

AWASR
HOSTS
“DIGITAL
HORIZONS
2025” B2B
FORUM

MUSCAT: Awasr successfully hosted its B2B forum, Digital Horizons 2025, at W Muscat, under the auspices of Ahmed bin Mohammed al Humaidi, Chairman of Muscat Municipality. The forum brought together a distinguished audience of ambassadors, technology and telecommunications experts, along with senior representatives from both the government and private sectors.

During the forum, Eng Adnan bin Mohammed al Alawi, CEO of



Awasr, delivered a keynote speech that highlighted the company’s key achievements, current projects and strategic plans, reaffirming

Awasr’s commitment to developing advanced digital infrastructure across the Sultanate of Oman.

The event included a presentation by Eugen Comendant, Chief Commercial Officer at Awasr. He introduced the company’s enterprise products and services designed for government and private-sector clients.

He also showed how these solutions help businesses improve efficiency, performance and sustainable growth.

BYD ATTO 8 officially
launched in Oman

A new chapter in performance-inspired electrified mobility unfolded in Oman, as World Auto Business, the official distributor for BYD in Oman unveiled the all-new BYD ATTO 8 at a high energy launch event hosted at the BYD showroom in Al Wattayah.

The gathering drew automotive enthusiasts, technology followers and distinguished guests who witnessed the arrival of a premium SUV designed to redefine what modern, intelligent and sustainable performance can be. As BYD’s first premium seven-seat luxury SUV, the ATTO 8 stands out for its remarkable versatility, generous spaciousness and premium sensibility shaped around family life, making it an ideal choice for customers who value advanced technology without compromising comfort or convenience.

Marking a significant step forward for BYD in Oman, the debut of the ATTO 8 introduces a large, seven-seater plug-in hybrid SUV that blends dynamic capability with sophisticated luxury — aimed at drivers who seek space, power and progressive technology in equal measure.

Created for those who demand a space that reflects their needs and a journey shaped by their own voice, the ATTO 8 arrives as a bold expression of modern mobility in Oman. The grand event opened with a welcome address by Dr Harish Babu,



The ATTO 8 stands out for its remarkable versatility, generous spaciousness and premium sensibility.

General Manager — BYD Oman, who spoke about the strong and growing partnership between BYD and World Auto Business.

He spoke about their shared commitment to innovation, customer trust and delivering world-leading new energy solutions to the Sultanate of Oman.

He highlighted how the ATTO 8 stands as BYD’s latest milestone in premium hybrid engineering, bringing global excellence to

Oman. Celebrating BYD’s first anniversary in Oman, he extended heartfelt gratitude to customers for their confidence and support during this remarkable year of growth.

He reaffirmed BYD Oman’s promise to continue offering exceptional experiences, advanced technology and unwavering service — ensuring that every customer remains at the heart of their journey into the future of electric mobility.

BankDhofar opens new branch in Al Rusayl Industrial City

MUSCAT: In line with its strategic expansion plans, BankDhofar has inaugurated a new branch in Al Rusayl Industrial City, under the auspices of Eng Dawood bin Salim al Haddabi, CEO of the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn).

The new branch reinforces BankDhofar’s presence in the local market and enhances its ability to deliver advanced banking services tailored to the needs of individuals and businesses.

Equipped with modern technologies and efficient service solutions, the branch



The new branch reinforces BankDhofar’s presence in the local market and enhances its ability to deliver advanced banking services.

will also support the financial requirements of employees and companies operating within the industrial zone.

Ghada bint Mohammed al Raisiyah, Acting Assistant General Manager and Head of Capital Branches and Contact Centre, stated: “The opening of our new branch in Al Rusayl Industrial City marks an important milestone in our expansion strategy and our commitment to serving customers more effectively.

We continuously strive to keep our branches close to our customers, meeting their needs with innovative solutions that

simplify daily banking”.

She added: “We are dedicated to delivering the highest standards of service quality. Our goal is to ensure that every branch exemplifies progress, innovation and customer-centricity within the banking sector”.

BankDhofar is today the second-largest bank in Oman in terms of branch network, operating more than 140 branches. Each branch is equipped with state-of-the-art technology and supported by skilled professionals to provide customers with an exceptional banking experience.

Sohar International, Sohar Islamic introduce home check-in with Transom

MUSCAT: In a continued effort to redefine premium banking experiences and elevate the standards of modern banking, Sohar International and Sohar Islamic recently signed a strategic Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Transom Handling (Oman Ground Handling).

The partnership introduces a suite of bespoke airport services exclusively for the bank’s Signature and Infinite cardholders.

Under the agreement, premium credit cardholders travelling on local airlines will benefit from a more seamless and efficient travel experience, including Home Check-In, Fast Track Access through



Under the agreement, premium credit cardholders travelling on local airlines will benefit from a more seamless and efficient travel experience.

immigration and security, and the Land and Leave service for

expedited arrivals.
Signed at Oman Airports, the MoU

represents a significant milestone in enriching customer journeys and establishes a first-of-its-kind premium travel proposition within Oman’s banking sector.

The partnership was formalised on behalf of the bank by Abdul Qadir al Sumali, Chief Retail & Premier Banking Officer and Sayyid Nasr al Busaidy as Executive Director at Transom Handling, underscoring Sohar International’s continued focus on expanding exclusive privileges for its distinguished clientele.

Speaking on the occasion, Abdul Qader bin Ahmed al Sumali stated, “Innovative thinking, thoughtful consideration and a

deep understanding of our clientele guide every enhancement we introduce.

For us, designing premium banking solutions begins with attentive listening, observing evolving lifestyle patterns and anticipating what will elevate the customer experience. Our premier banking clients, in particular, value refined, high-touch services that complement their distinct travel routines.

This collaboration with Transom reflects our drive to offer greater ease, sophistication and meaningful value — qualities that shape the standard we continually aim to deliver”.

SHORTTAKES



The workshop aims to support Oman's efforts to develop and update its National Air Navigation Plan in line with global and regional frameworks.

CAA HOSTS ICAO AIR NAVIGATION PLANNING WORKSHOP

MUSCAT: The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) of the Sultanate of Oman is hosting a specialised workshop on the Global Air Navigation Plan (National Plan) from December 15 to 18, 2025, in cooperation with the Middle East Regional Office of the International Civil Aviation Organisation.

The workshop aims to support Oman's efforts to develop and update its National Air Navigation Plan in line with global and regional frameworks, while ensuring alignment with international best practices and recognised aviation standards.

Aviation specialists and experts from across the Middle East are taking part, alongside representatives from air navigation service providers, airport operators, national airlines and relevant government entities. The programme is designed to encourage the exchange of expertise and strengthen institutional coordination within the aviation sector.

Discussions and technical presentations during the workshop focus on the strategic framework for air navigation planning and the role of national plans in improving operational efficiency. Key themes include enhancing aviation safety and security, promoting environmental sustainability and increasing airspace capacity to meet the rising demands of global air traffic.

The Civil Aviation Authority stated that the workshop forms part of its ongoing efforts to modernise Oman's air navigation system and strengthen long-term strategic planning for the civil aviation sector.

The initiative also supports national sustainable development objectives and reinforces the Sultanate of Oman's position as a reliable regional hub for aviation and air navigation services.

Nama Water operates 1.41m m³/day capacity

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, DEC 16

NAMA Water Services (NWS) is reinforcing operational efficiency and system resilience across a total installed water production capacity of approximately 1.41 million cubic metres per day, supported by a comprehensive operations and maintenance (O&M) programme spanning water and wastewater infrastructure nationwide.

The scale of capacity under management positions O&M performance as a central pillar in sustaining water security, service reliability and cost efficiency.

The update was presented by Yousuf al Siyabi during the Water Majlis 2025 organised by the Oman-German Friendship Association (OGFA), in collaboration with Nama Water Services, with support from the German Water Partnership and IntercityHotel Muscat.

The Water Majlis 2025 was held under the auspices of HH Sayyid Tarik bin Shabib al Said, Chairman of OGFA and brought together senior government officials, utilities and private-sector stakeholders to examine operational performance and investment priorities in Oman's water sector.

NWS's presentation highlighted how disciplined O&M execution underpins the effective utilisation of national water production capacity.

According to the data shared, the 1.41 million m³/day capacity is supported by 61 desalination plants, alongside 115 pumping stations, 922 reservoirs and tanks, 475 tanker filling stations and 865 wells. These assets



The 1.41 million m³/day capacity is supported by 61 desalination plants, alongside 115 pumping stations, 922 reservoirs and tanks, 475 tanker filling stations and 865 wells.

form the backbone of Oman's potable water supply and require continuous monitoring and preventive maintenance to ensure uninterrupted operations.

Delivering this capacity to end users is a nationwide network extending more than 26,200 kilometres, including 4,135 km of transmission pipelines and 17,250 km of distribution lines.

The system is structured into 416 district metred areas (DMAs), enabling tighter pressure management, improved monitoring and more targeted operational interventions.

NWS currently serves approximately 754,000 water customers and 226,000 wastewater customers, reflecting the breadth of service coverage across urban centres and remote communities.

On the wastewater side, the company operates 58 sewage treatment plants, 78 pumping and lifting stations, nearly 4,900 km of sewer networks, treated effluent infrastructure and a composting facility.

In total, NWS manages more than 2,400 operational assets, underscoring the complexity of its O&M mandate.

The company's O&M framework is built around five strategic pillars: operational efficiency, non-revenue water reduction, SCADA and automation, systems resilience and water quality management.

Priority initiatives include performance-based contracts, energy optimisation, pressure management, asset rehabilitation, condition monitoring and technical workforce development.

Field teams are equipped with advanced technologies such as correlators, noise loggers, flow and pressure data loggers, helium gas detectors and specialised software to support rapid fault detection and repair.

Digital integration plays a central role in maximising the value of installed capacity.

Platforms including SCADA, GIS, AMR, CMMS and Qlik Sense feed into real-time performance dashboards and automated technical reporting, supporting faster response times, improved customer service and more informed maintenance planning.

This integrated approach has contributed to steady performance improvements, with water losses declining from 47 per cent in 2021 to around 33 per cent by 2024-2025.

NWS has set clear efficiency milestones to further optimise its 1.41 million m³/day capacity, targeting water losses of 21 per cent by 2030 and 10 per cent by 2040. The trajectory highlights how robust O&M practices are becoming a cornerstone of Oman's long-term water resilience and infrastructure sustainability.

ILO Director-General commends GFOW's efforts

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, DEC 16

NABHAN bin Ahmed al Battashi, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the General Federation of Oman Workers (GFOW), received Gilbert Houngho, Director-General of the ILO, as part of his weeklong visit to the Sultanate of Oman.

The meeting took place within the framework of the strategic partnership between the GFOW and the ILO, aiming to review the GFOW's experience and Oman's trade union system.

It reaffirmed the GFOW's role in defending workers' rights, promoting social justice and strengthening legislation to support trade union rights, paving the way for Oman to ratify relevant ILO conventions".



GFOW board members meeting with the ILO Director General on Tuesday.

During the meeting, ways of enhancing the existing cooperation between the GFOW and the ILO were discussed, as well as developing future areas of partnership between the two sides, reflecting the level of progress in dialogue and partnership among the tripartite

partners in Oman.

The meeting also addressed legislative amendments, namely Labour Law and Social Protection Law, mechanisms for implementing the priorities and pillars contained in National Decent Work Programme in Oman and joint activities with the ILO in this regard.

In addition, the efforts of the GFOW to strengthen social dialogue among the tripartite partners in line with international labour standards were discussed.

A presentation highlighted the trade union structures in Oman, the number of trade unions and sectoral unions and their distribution, as well as the most prominent activities, programmes and awareness-raising campaigns recently implemented by the GFOW.

It also covered women's

participation in trade union work, key legislative developments contained in Labour Law and Social Protection Law, the latest national legislation related to the protection of the rights of non-Omani workers, the GFOW's main memberships in relevant national committees, its memberships in international labour organisations and the most significant international cooperation programmes currently being implemented.

During the meeting, the Director-General of the ILO commended the efforts of the GFOW and the development of trade union roles, which are regarded as a leading model in the region, affirming his readiness to strengthen existing avenues of cooperation between the GFOW and the ILO in line with the requirements of the current stage.

ENERGY MARKETS

Oil slides below \$60 mark



Oil prices slid more than \$1 on Tuesday, pushing Brent below \$60 a barrel for the first time since May, as optimism over possible Russia-Ukraine peace talks fuelled expectations of looser sanctions and added supply.

Brent fell 1.8% to \$59.61, while US WTI dropped nearly 2% to \$55.75, with analysts warning of potential oversupply pressures amidst weak Chinese economic data dampening demand sentiment. — Reuters

INSURANCE RISK

Insured disaster losses hit \$107 billion



Global insured losses from natural catastrophes are projected to reach \$107 billion in 2025, driven by Los Angeles wildfires and severe convective storms in the United States, a Swiss Re Institute report said.

The US accounted for 83% of losses, marking the sixth year above \$100 billion and prompting tighter underwriting, higher premiums and renewed scrutiny of risk models. — Reuters

TECH OUTLOOK

Chip costs weigh on shipments



Global smartphone shipments are forecast to fall 2.1% in 2026 as rising chip costs squeeze demand, Counterpoint said.

Shortages of legacy memory chips have lifted bill-of-materials costs by 20% to 30%, hitting phones priced below \$200 hardest.

Manufacturers' pivot to AI-focused semiconductors is straining supply chains and pressuring margins across the lower end of the market worldwide, particularly among budget-focused brands. — Reuters

OPINION

I am worried about our future — no thanks to AI



**TARIQ
AL BARWANI**

The writer is strategic adviser, businessman and motivational speaker.

EVERYONE today is talking about how amazing Artificial Intelligence (AI) is. Academic institutions — be they schools, colleges or universities — are rushing to integrate AI into classrooms. Companies are racing to become the first to jump on the bandwagon by showcasing AI-powered tools and apps. Governments are proudly announcing AI strategies, programmes and initiatives. Virtually every conference I attend features keynote addresses that mention AI, with some even promising smarter systems, faster decisions and unprecedented efficiency because of it.

In a nutshell, AI is being sold as the ultimate solution to nearly every problem we face. There is far too much excitement and celebration around it. To be honest, I am genuinely concerned. That is why I decided to write and share my worries about the future — no thanks to AI.

As a technologist who has not only explored but also worked on different solutions, I can confidently explain the benefits that technology can deliver. Digital transformation, on many fronts, is proof in the pudding. If I were to elaborate on that, I would end up writing a book.

AI, however, as an innovative technology, is different — not because of what it can do, but because of what we, as humans, may

become because of it. This, specifically, is what worries me most.

Most technology-powered solutions promise efficiency, scale and optimisation. AI may do the same — I do not doubt that — but it does so not only by changing how we work, but also how we think, whether fortunately or unfortunately. People will increasingly use it to think and work for them.

As a result, AI will not merely assist humans, as many believe, but replace them entirely, judging by current patterns. Why need a human if a smart computer powered by AI can do the job cheaper, faster and even smarter? Think about that.

Studies show that heavy reliance on AI reduces critical thinking. Research by leading academic institutions and technology organisations, including Microsoft and Carnegie Mellon University, indicates that users who trust AI outputs without scrutiny engage less in analytical reasoning.

Furthermore, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development has warned that unchecked automation erodes foundational cognitive skills. What does this mean? The more we delegate our thinking, the worse we become at it. Period.

We all know that our muscles weaken when unused. Our attention spans shrink when overstimulated and our memory fades when everything is stored externally. Why should our thinking be any different? Do you see where my concern about the future

Most technology-powered solutions promise efficiency, scale and optimisation. AI may do the same — I do not doubt that — but it does so not only by changing how we work, but also how we think, whether fortunately or unfortunately.

comes from? The advancement of AI itself is the least of my worries. What we, as humans, will become is what truly concerns me.

Let us be honest: when decision-making is automated, curiosity declines. When creativity is generated through AI, originality fades. When judgement is outsourced, accountability disappears. When everything depends on and is powered by AI, disaster is what I fear could be the outcome.

Again, as an experienced technologist, I see the benefits when AI is used correctly. Yet today, I often see it being used to avoid thinking, which makes many people lazy and, ultimately, less capable. We are training a generation to be operators of intelligence rather than owners of it.

Am I trying to persuade you not to use AI? No. Do I recognise the value that AI brings to the table? Absolutely. What I am trying to share is my concern based on what I observe — among children in schools and professionals in organisations alike. Many tools come and go, but this one is different. It has the potential to reshape human intelligence itself.

We need to pause, reflect and ask hard questions about dependency, effort and what it truly means to think. That is what I hope to shed light on and to explore further in future articles. Until then, do not be overly reliant or dependent on AI. Give your mind a workout to keep it strong, just as you exercise your muscles to keep your body healthy.

THE BOJ WILL WIN
TAKAICHI’S GAME
OF FISCAL CHICKEN

HUDSON LOCKETT

SANAE TAKAICHI took office vowing to tackle rampant inflation, even though her fiscal ambitions look more likely to hasten price rises if successful. Concerns that Japan’s new prime minister could pressure Bank of Japan (BoJ) Governor Kazuo Ueda to slow his push to normalise rates after years of ultra-loose policy were already weighing on the yen before she took office.

In the looming game of fiscal chicken, the central bank is likely to win. Inflation is the central issue faced by Japanese households and the driver of recent electoral losses by Takaichi’s ruling Liberal Democratic Party.

Even core-core inflation, which strips out both energy and fresh food costs, averaged 3% in the first nine months of 2025.

And while the prime minister and Ueda agree both sides must align on economic policy, the government has yet to test whether the central bank will follow its lead.

This elaborate policy dance would take the form of the BoJ slowing or even halting rate increases, enabling the government to issue more to pay for the expansionary policy Takaichi hopes can ease Japan’s inflationary pain.

Assuming she succeeds, the sale of more government bonds will serve to push up yields, raising borrowing costs, which then threaten to drag down growth and result in a weaker yen.

Even if the BoJ resists, there may still be room for more government spending.

Marcel Thieliand of Capital Economics expects a surge in revenue will result in Japan reporting a surplus for the fiscal year to the end of March, the first since 1992.

While that revenue rise is expected to dissipate next year, Thieliand expects the surplus will “make a strong argument” for a looser fiscal policy in the near term. This increased spending would probably weaken the yen.

Whichever the driver, a sagging currency will add to the cost of foreign goods and net energy imports, the latter of which account for 87% of Japan’s annual supply, according to the International Energy Agency. Higher fuel costs would likely feed through to other goods, worsening inflation rather than helping rein it in.

Thus the probable upshot for success in the prime minister’s monetary and fiscal ambitions is a surge in prices. — Reuters

Italy’s gold gambit

ITALY’S government has proposed an amendment to the 2026 budget law stating that the gold held by the Bank of Italy “belongs to the Italian people”, rather than to the “state”.

The line might seem harmless — who would claim otherwise? — yet it has triggered a flurry of anxious speculation, as well as calls from the European Central Bank to drop the provision.

Legally, the amendment is meaningless. The ownership and governance of the gold reserves on the Italian central bank’s balance sheet are already precisely defined.

The Bank of Italy is fully integrated into the European System of Central Banks, which is governed by European Union Treaties, the Statute of the ESCB and Italian law.

These frameworks both guarantee the operational independence of member states’ central banks and prevent national governments from appropriating monetary reserves.

In other words, with or without the new amendment, Italy could not use its gold reserves to finance public spending or reduce debt unless the ECB consented, which it would not.

But in the eurozone’s evolving institutional context, symbolic gestures carry political weight. Italy’s ruling party appears increasingly to be aligning itself with the nationalist worldview espoused by US President Donald Trump’s administration, including in its latest National Security Strategy (NSS), which depicts the EU as a blight on “political liberty and sovereignty”.

By declaring that the gold “belongs to the people”, Italy’s government is sending a message to voters who regard the euro as an externally imposed constraint and the ECB as insufficiently accountable: the EU does not own us and the nation still comes first.

The message certainly resonates. Italy has long romanticised its substantial gold reserves — the world’s third largest, totalling 2,452 metric tonnes — as a kind of sovereignty backstop.

For a state that has long struggled with fiscal fragility, the idea that a hidden asset is capable of guaranteeing autonomy and



A secure room inside the Bank of Italy's gold vault is filled with stacked gold bars stored along the corridor and behind metal security cages in this undated handout picture, in Rome, Italy.

— Reuters



LUCREZIA
REICHLIN

The writer, a former director of research at the European Central Bank, is Professor of Economics at the London Business School.

independence in times of crisis is politically potent. As long as Italy is a member of the eurozone, this fantasy will clash with operational reality.

Whenever Italian politicians have suggested using gold to reduce debt or backstop the economy, they have run up against treaty-based limits.

But if Italy were to leave the eurozone, whether on its own or amidst a broader fragmentation, the country’s gold reserves would anchor a new national currency, serve as collateral to stabilise financial markets and become a symbol of restored economic sovereignty.

This might be the point of the budget law amendment: to gesture towards a future where gold could backstop Italy’s sovereignty — still an extremely remote possibility — without provoking institutional confrontation. Why hint, however faintly, at such a future? And why now? Three possible explanations stand out.

The first is that the amendment is a domestic political manoeuvre. Italy’s ruling coalition, led by Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, includes parties with longstanding Euroskeptic tendencies. As Italy enters a period of tense negotiations over fiscal rules, budget targets and access to EU recovery funds, a nod to national sovereignty is a cost-free way to ease internal pressures, without altering Italy’s policy commitments.

Second, the amendment might be meant to send a subtle message to European officials. Italy remains a large, systemically important eurozone member and its economic stability is tied to that of the monetary union.

By highlighting its substantial gold reserves, the government might be seeking to remind the EU institutions and the ECB that fiscal negotiations should account for political realities. In a system that depends on mutual trust, symbolic gestures can be a form of bargaining.

Finally, Italy might be hedging its bets in a rapidly shifting geopolitical environment. Meloni has taken a noticeably warmer stance towards Trump than most other European leaders, who resent his lack of commitment to the transatlantic alliance and concerted efforts to deepen Europe’s strategic uncertainty.

With the budget law amendment, perhaps Meloni is seeking to ensure that hers is viewed as one of the “patriotic European parties” whose “growing influence” is touted by the Trump administration’s NSS.

None of this means that Italy is contemplating an exit from the euro — an economically disastrous proposition. Nonetheless, Italy’s indulgence of nationalist narratives and assertions of monetary autonomy might carry higher costs than Meloni’s government seems to recognise.

By underscoring the people’s ownership of Italy’s gold reserves, the government is essentially highlighting its contingency plan for a major crisis — in particular, a eurozone exit or breakup. At a time of weak growth, geopolitical upheaval, strategic uncertainty and declining confidence in European institutions, that is the last thing the eurozone needs.

After all, a monetary union is held together as much by political commitments as by legal frameworks. Casting doubt on those commitments, even subtly, can shake its foundations.

Italy’s gold remains safely locked away in its central bank’s vaults. But Europe would be unwise to dismiss narratives that can generate considerable uncertainty about whether it will stay there. — ©Project Syndicate, 2025

Oman maps future power mix for AI economy

MUSCAT: Oman's Ministry of Energy and Minerals and AtkinsRéalis convened the "Powering the Future: Oman Electricity Innovation Showcase", bringing together senior leaders from government, utilities, regulators and industry to address the country's rising electricity demand driven by AI-led economic growth.

The event examined how Oman can meet future power needs through a balanced mix of nuclear energy, renewables, advanced grids and energy storage, while remaining aligned with its net-zero emissions target by 2050.

Mohsin bin Hamad al Hadhrami, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, said a secure and sustainable power system



The event examined how Oman can meet future power needs through a balanced mix of nuclear energy, renewables, advanced grids and energy storage.

is central to Oman's industrial strategy, including initiatives such as the Oman Digital Triangle, which envisages gigawatt-scale AI superclusters under the National Digital Infrastructure Roadmap.

He said the collaboration highlights technologies and delivery models that can diversify the energy mix, strengthen grid resilience and accelerate progress towards national goals.

The showcase featured sessions on decarbonisation pathways, grid resilience for AI intensive economies and the complementary roles of nuclear energy and intermittent renewables. Expert talks covered regional grid interconnections, hydrogen, finance and advanced grid technologies, while panel discussions explored integration, policy frameworks and investment sequencing.

Delegates also participated in interactive simulations on managing grid operations with

diversified supply mixes.

Todd Smith, Vice President of Marketing and Business Development at CANDU Energy Inc, said reliable, clean baseload power is essential for a modern, data-driven economy. He noted that nuclear energy provides dispatchable, low-carbon capacity that enables countries to scale renewables without compromising grid stability or affordability.

The discussions come at a critical time, with Oman's electricity demand growing at an annual rate of 6.1% and regional consumption projected to rise sharply by 2035. Rapid expansion of data centres, rising cooling needs and wider electrification are placing added pressure on power systems across the Gulf.

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ART/LIFE

THE SECOND SHOT WHEN A MOMENT IS SEEN AGAIN

> 20



Al-Amaliah Museum, Sultan Qaboos Cultural Centre, Muscat
Palm, Oman: The image shows a woman weaving a basket of palm leaves. The image is a black and white photograph of a woman weaving a basket of palm leaves. The image is a black and white photograph of a woman weaving a basket of palm leaves.

Dr. Faisal Fozzali
Al-Amaliah Museum, Sultan Qaboos Cultural Centre, Muscat
Palm, Oman: The image shows a woman weaving a basket of palm leaves. The image is a black and white photograph of a woman weaving a basket of palm leaves.

FASHION EVENTS

BEYONCE, VENUS WILLIAMS, NICOLE KIDMAN TO CO-CHAIR 2026 MET GALA



(From top L clockwise) Beyonce, Nicole Kidman, Vogue editor-in-chief Anna Wintour and Venus Williams

Music powerhouse Beyonce, tennis legend Venus Williams and Oscar-winning actress Nicole Kidman will co-chair the 2026 Met Gala on May 4 alongside Vogue’s Anna Wintour, the Metropolitan Museum of Art announced on Wednesday in New York.

The annual Met Gala, traditionally held on the first Monday in May, was first organised in 1948 and for decades was reserved for New York high society.

Wintour, the high priestess of US fashion, took over the show in the 1990s, transforming the party into a catwalk for the rich and famous.

The gala is a fundraiser for the Met’s Costume Institute, but it is also a social media extravaganza that sees stars don over-the-top looks, vying to create the greatest spectacle. The dress code has not yet been revealed but it will dovetail with the “Costume Art” exhibition, which opens on May 10 at the venerable museum in Manhattan and will seek to explore the “dressed body” in artworks across the centuries.

The co-chairs are power players in their fields: music, sports and film.

The gala will mark the first time in a decade that Beyonce has attended and fashionistas will be holding their breath waiting to see what look — or looks — she unveils. She was an honorary co-chair in 2013.

Williams, 45, is the winner of seven Grand Slam titles. She is still competing on the WTA Tour. Her sister Serena — who has retired from tennis — co-hosted the event in 2019. Kidman, who co-chaired the event in 2003 and in 2005, has several projects in the works for 2026, including “Practical Magic 2,” a sequel to the popular 1998 film about a family of witches and “Scarpetta”, a series based on Patricia Cornwell’s crime novel heroine.

The Met also announced a gala “host committee” led by Saint Laurent designer Anthony Vaccarello and actress Zoe Kravitz. Also on the committee are singers Sabrina Carpenter and Doja Cat, retired ballet superstar Misty Copeland and WNBA champion A’ja Wilson. — AFP

QUICK FEATURES



ANIMAL PLANET

The four-year-old giant panda Lei eats bamboo at Ueno Zoo, a day after news broke that Japan will return two giant pandas to China. — Reuters



ENTERTAINMENT

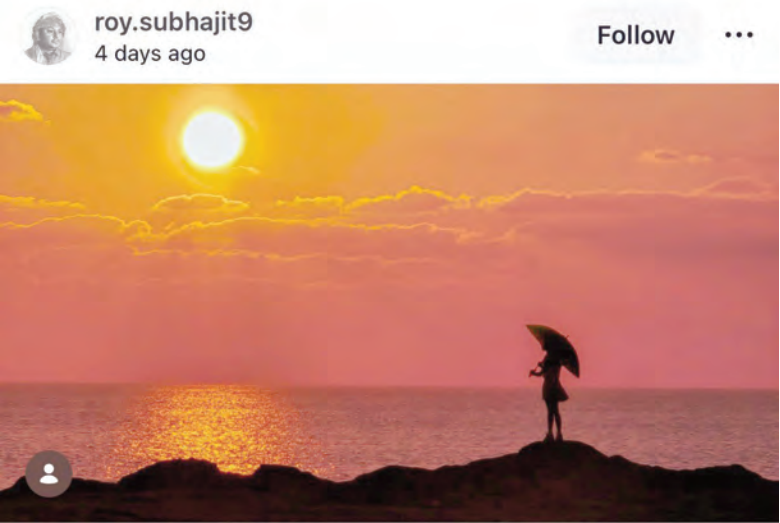
US actress Sydney Sweeney takes selfies with fans as she attends the LA premiere of Lionsgate’s “The Housemaid” at the TCL Chinese theatre. — AFP



TRIBUTE

Flowers are left at US actor and director Rob Reiner’s star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame after the news of his heinous murder. — AFP

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Make your own AI Mickey Mouse — Disney embraces new technology



Walt Disney and OpenAI announced a three-year licensing deal on Thursday that will allow users to create short videos featuring beloved Disney characters through artificial intelligence.

The deal marks the first time a major entertainment company has embraced generative AI at this scale, licensing its fiercely protected characters — from Mickey Mouse to Marvel superheroes and Star Wars’s Darth Vader — for AI content creation.

The partnership represents a dramatic shift for an industry that has largely been battling AI companies in court.

Disney and other creative industry giants had been suing AI firms like OpenAI, Perplexity and Anthropic, accusing them of illegally using their content to train their technology.

The entertainment giant continued that legal campaign on Wednesday, separately

sending a cease and desist letter to Google over the illegal use of its intellectual property to train the search engine giant’s AI models.

For OpenAI, the deal comes at a sensitive time as it faces increasing questions about the sustainability of its business model, with costs skyrocketing far faster than revenue despite nearing one billion daily users worldwide.

Under the agreement, fans will be able to produce and share AI-generated content featuring more than 200 characters from Disney, Marvel, Pixar and Star Wars franchises on OpenAI’s Sora video generation platform and ChatGPT.

In a joint interview with OpenAI CEO Sam Altman on CNBC, it was insisted that the deal only includes videos no longer than 30 seconds and that the technology wouldn’t be used for longer form productions.

— AFP



A woman waits to receive privately donated aid in an area affected by a flash flood about three weeks ago in Aceh Tamiang, Northern Sumatra. — AFP

Nowhere to pray as logs choke flood-hit Indonesian mosque

ALMOST two weeks on from devastating floods, Muslim worshippers in Indonesia’s Sumatra who gathered at their local mosque on Friday for prayers were blocked from entering by a huge pile of thousands of uprooted trees.

The deadly torrential rains had inundated vast tracts of rainforest nearby, leaving residents of the Darul Mukhlisin mosque and Islamic boarding school to search elsewhere for places of worship that had been less damaged.

“We have no idea where all this wood came from”, said Angga, 37, from the nearby village of Tanjung Karang.

Before the disaster, the mosque bustled with worshippers — locals and students alike — attending daily and Friday prayers.

“Now it’s impossible to use. The mosque used to stand near a river”, said Angga. “But the river is gone — it’s turned into dead land”.



An aerial view shows piles of uprooted trees swept away by a flash flood about three weeks ago at Darul Mukhlisin Islamic Boarding School and the mosque attached to the school in Aceh Tamiang, Northern Sumatra. — AFP

Village residents said the structure likely absorbed much of the impact of trees and logs carried by the torrents, preventing even greater destruction downstream.

When AFP visited the site, the mosque was still encircled by a massive heap of timber — a mix of uprooted trees and felled logs, likely from nearby forests.

By Friday, the death toll from one of northern Sumatra’s worst recent disasters — including in Aceh, where a tsunami wreaked havoc in 2004 — had reached 995 people, with 226 still missing and almost 890,000 displaced, according to the National Disaster Mitigation Agency.

Authorities have blamed the scale of devastation partly on uncontrolled logging.

Environmentalists say widespread forest loss has worsened floods and landslides, stripping the land of tree cover that normally stabilises soil and absorbs rainfall.

Indonesia consistently ranks among the countries with the highest annual deforestation rates.

President Prabowo Subianto, visiting Aceh Tamiang district on Friday, assured victims the government was working to restore normalcy.

“We know conditions are

difficult, but we will overcome them together”, he said, urging residents to “stay alert and be careful”.

“I apologise for any shortcomings (but) we are working hard”, he said.

Addressing environmental concerns, Prabowo called for better forest protection.

“Trees must not be cut down indiscriminately”, he said.

“I ask local governments to stay vigilant, to monitor and safeguard our nature as best as possible”.

But frustrations were growing, with flood victims complaining

about the pace of relief efforts.

Costs to rebuild after the disaster could run up to 51.82 trillion rupiah (\$3.1 billion) and the Indonesian government has so far shrugged off suggestions that it call for international assistance.

Back in nearby Babo Village, Khairi Ramadhan, 37, said he planned to seek out another mosque for prayers.

“I’ll find one that wasn’t hit by the flood”, he said. “Maybe some have already been cleaned. I don’t want to dwell on sorrow anymore”. — AFP



A middle school student who came with her teacher from Medang closes her eyes at a muddy corridor as piles of uprooted trees swept away by a flash flood remain at Darul Mukhlisin Islamic Boarding School and its attached mosque in Aceh Tamiang. — AFP



An aerial view shows piles of uprooted trees swept away by a flash flood about three weeks ago at Darul Mukhlisin Islamic Boarding School and the mosque attached to the school in Aceh Tamiang, Northern Sumatra. — AFP

FEATURES



THE SECOND SHOT

WHEN A MOMENT IS SEEN AGAIN



IDRIS AL BALUSHI

AT Gallery Sarah in Bait Al Zubair Museum, the camera returns not to repeat, but to rediscover. The Second Shot (Al Laqta Al Thaniya) comes as a natural continuation of the success of The First Shot (Al Laqta Al Oula), which first brought together the photographic talents of Majan University College students and introduced their early creative visions. This second edition moves further, offering a more mature, confident and reflective visual experience.

The exhibition aims to elevate photography beyond documentation into emotional storytelling. It provides a wider platform for images that express inner struggles, feelings and human states, captured with greater technical awareness and artistic depth. At the same time, it highlights student creativity, grants young photographers the opportunity to exhibit in a respected cultural institution like Bait Al Zubair, encourages visual expression and skill development; and reinforces Majan University College's role in supporting arts and culture.

Its message is clear and poetic, every image carries a story. The Second Shot is not a repetition, but an act of rediscovery. It invites viewers to return to overlooked details, to slow down and to see meaning emerge when a moment is captured again with intention and awareness.

The exhibition is supervised by Yasser al Hasani, whose vision for the Photography Group at Majan University College is rooted in inspiration and community. "I see the group as a platform that brings together young talents and encourages them to explore the world through a different lens", notes Al Hasani. His goal is to build a visual community capable of transforming simple moments into artworks, while cultivating creativity through activities, exhibitions and practical experiences that enhance students' artistic sensitivity and aesthetic awareness.

This vision is clearly reflected in the works on display. The photographs are diverse yet united by a strong sense of Omani identity and emotional depth. In "Discipline of the Spirit" by Waleed bin Yahya al Hasani,



PHOTOS BY ABDULLAH AL AMOORI

men perform a traditional art with strict discipline and precision. The image captures seriousness and devotion, turning movement into a symbol of commitment to heritage. It preserves a visual memory that reflects respect for tradition and collective identity.

"The Marina" by Sara bint Nouh al Salmiyah presents an Omani man standing before the gate of Nizwa Fort, illuminated by the warm light of late afternoon. The photograph balances past and present, embodying pride, continuity and the quiet strength of Omani identity.

A softer emotional tone appears in "My Grandmother's Fingerprint" by Tasneem Saif. The image reflects the transfer of Omani heritage across generations through a grandmother's loving touch and a child's smile. It speaks of identity not as something declared, but as something lived in everyday gestures.

Student voices add another layer to the exhibition. Umaina al Farsi, participating for the second time, recalls her first experience during her early college years. She reflects on how workshops, guidance and institutional support helped shape the group's growth. Exhibiting again at Gallery Sarah. "This experience is a major achievement and a step towards greater opportunities" Al Farsi asserts. She emphasises the clear strength of the images this year and expresses pride in the visible development of both new and returning participants.

For Mohammed bin Khalifa al Masrouri, a participating student at MUC, the exhibition is both artistic and empowering. It offers photographers a chance to present and even sell professional work, while gaining valuable experience. His own nature photograph, which he describes as a connection between the soul and nature, was captured by chance on a cold winter night under starlight, without artificial lighting or filters, using only a phone camera. The simplicity of the process reflects the sincerity of the result.

The Second Shot ultimately proves that growth can be quiet and deliberate. Within Gallery Sarah, these young photographers show that when we pause, observe and look again, the world reveals stories waiting to be seen.

