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PRAYER TIMINGS
FAJR 05:30 AM
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WOOD HITS HAT-TRICK AS FLYING FOREST THRASH BRIGHTON 7-0

INBRIEF

HM CONDOLENCES TO GERMAN PRESIDENT

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of condolences to President Frank-Walter Steinmeier of the Federal Republic of Germany on the death of Former German president Horst Köhler. His Majesty expressed his sincere condolences and sympathy to the German president, friendly people of Germany and the deceased’s family.

3 EXPATS DIE IN ROAD HAIMA COLLISION

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabiyousef

Three people lost their lives and eight others sustained injuries in a collision of vehicles in Haima in Al Wusta Governorate on Saturday. According to the Royal Oman Police sources, the deceased were identified as Kamlesh Berja (46yers old), Hema Rani (54) and Ishan Desh Bandhu (31), who are natives of India’s Uttar Pradesh state. Manoj, his daughter Diksha, Ram Mohan, his daughter Priyanka and Kamlesh’s mother Radharani, were admitted to Haima Hospital with injuries.

The sources further confirmed that three people are in serious condition. The accident happened while the vehicle carrying the group was returning to Muscat from Salalah collided with a truck from the opposite direction. The preliminary conclusion is the driver of the vehicle may have fallen asleep at the wheel as the cause of the accident. The Royal Oman Police (ROP) have registered a case and launched an investigation.

RUSSIA IN OMAN



The National Museum on Saturday launched the ‘Russian Cultural Seasons’ in the Sultanate of Oman. It also opened expo “Gifts of the Princes of Bukhara and the Khans of Central Asia to the Russian Tsarist Court”. **SEE P2**



SEE YOU SOON

Muscat Nights, the 40-day-long cultural extravaganza that received more than a million visitors in its seven venues, came to a close on Sunday. These venues hosted an array of activities, fun and frolic, a wide range of food, fireworks, laser shows attracting a steady stream of individuals and families.

Realty fee changes to help more citizens buy homes

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, FEB 1

CITIZENS and businesses have welcomed the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning’s streamlining and revision of some real estate service fees. The amendments merged fees of 47 services, cancelled the fees of 11 services, reduced the fees of 8 services and introduced 14 new services to boost value addition and foster transparency.

The move gives citizens a better opportunity to own residential properties, especially young Omani families. At the same time, these reforms enhance the competitiveness of the real estate companies sector by attracting investment.

Abdullah al Farsi, a citizen, says: “Obtaining a home in Oman was a major challenge due to the high fees and complex procedures. The announcement of the reduction in fees will help many young people buy homes.” Many real estate investors believe that these amendments open up opportunities for new projects.

Hassan al Hanai, director of a real estate company, said: “The recent amendments to fees and procedures represent an important step towards opening new horizons for real estate investment in Oman. In the past, financial and administrative obstacles were a major challenge, but with these changes, it has



Many real estate investors believe that these amendments open up opportunities for new projects.

“Obtaining a home in Oman was a major challenge due to the high fees and complex procedures. The announcement of the reduction in fees will help many young people buy homes

ABDULLAH AL FARSI

become easier for us to develop new residential and commercial projects that meet the needs of the market.” This will also help real estate investment funds to pump in more investments into the real estate market. Reducing fees on real estate projects will contribute to making these funds more attractive to investors, allowing them the opportunity to expand the scope of their investments and develop new real estate projects that meet the needs of society. Banks and real estate finance companies will be able to provide real estate loans at competitive

prices to citizens and companies. Through these changes, the government seeks to create a more competitive real estate environment that is in line with global developments, while at the same time providing citizens with better economic opportunities. It has indicated that it will continue to work on improving the legislative and regulatory framework for the real estate sector, which will contribute to achieving economic sustainability and increasing the attractiveness of Oman as a major destination for real estate investment in the Gulf region.

Five Arab countries reject forced displacement of Palestinians

CAIRO: Top diplomats from Egypt, Jordan, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia and Qatar rejected any forcible displacement of Palestinians during a meeting in Cairo on Saturday, according to a joint statement. The meeting came after US President Donald Trump floated an idea to relocate Palestinians from the Gaza Strip to Egypt and Jordan. The foreign ministers rejected any “infringement of the inalienable

rights” of Palestinians, whether by “settlement, expulsion, home demolitions, annexation, depopulation of the land of its people through displacement, encouraged transfer or the uprooting of Palestinians from their land”. Both Egypt and Jordan — key US allies in the region — have repeatedly rejected Trump’s proposal to “clean out” the Gaza Strip. Egyptian President Abdel Fattah



A freed Palestinian prisoner is greeted after being released from an Israeli jail in Ramallah on Saturday. — **Reuters**

al Sisi said on Wednesday that the “displacement of the Palestinian people from their land is an injustice that we cannot take part in”. The foreign ministers added on Saturday that they “look forward to working with the administration of US President Donald Trump to achieve a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East, in accordance with the two-state solution”. The meeting included Arab

League secretary general Ahmed Aboul Gheit and Hussein al Sheikh, secretary general of the executive committee of the Palestine Liberation Organisation. Two days after Israel severed all ties with the UN’s main aid agency for Palestinians, UNRWA, the ministers also affirmed the “pivotal, indispensable and irreplaceable role” of the agency, “categorically rejecting any attempts to bypass it or limit its role”. — **AFP**

OMAN



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SHORT TAKES

OVER 450 STUDENTS AT EMR21 REGIONAL MEETING ON FEB 6

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman will host the 21st regional meeting of the Eastern Mediterranean Medical Students' Associations (EMR21) on February 6, on Thursday with the participation of over 450 students representing more than 18 countries. Dr Hind bint Yousef al Balushiyyah, head of the meeting's organising committee, said that



DR HIND BINT YOUSEF AL BALUSHIYAH

hosting this event by the Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Medical Students' Community (MedSCO Oman), came after a tough competition involving many countries. The meeting is an opportunity for enhancing the Sultanate of Oman's position as a leading destination in the medical field at the

regional and global levels.

She added that the event represents an opportunity to exchange ideas and share experiences, enhance health cooperation and a pivotal platform for youth empowerment as it inspires a new generation of leaders in the health field and enhances their participation in formulating sustainable solutions to local and international health challenges. — ONA

‘Russian Seasons’ unveiled

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
MUSCAT, FEB 1

ON Saturday, the National Museum inaugurated the ‘Russian Seasons’ programme, marking a significant cultural collaboration between the Sultanate of Oman and the Russian Federation. This international cultural project, under the auspices of the Russian Ministry of Culture, aims to showcase Russia's rich heritage while fostering global cultural exchange.

As part of the launch, the State Hermitage Museum's Corner was unveiled at the National Museum, highlighting the enduring ties between Russia and the East. The exhibition, titled ‘Gifts of Bukharan and Central Asian Emirs to the Russian Imperial Court,’ displays extraordinary artefacts, including exquisite gifts presented to the Russian Tsars by the rulers of Bukhara, Khiva and Kokand.

The event was graced by Olga Lyubimova, the Russian Minister of Culture, alongside various dignitaries, cultural experts and media representatives. Jamal bin Hassan al Mousawi, Secretary-General of the National Museum, emphasised the significance of this collaboration, stating, “Today, we celebrate the inauguration of the ‘Russian Seasons’ and the opening of the second exhibition, which



The State Hermitage Museum's Corner being unveiled at the National Museum

highlights our shared history and cultural legacy.”

The Russian Minister expressed her hopes that the “Russian Seasons” would leave lasting impressions on the people of Oman, further strengthening ties between the two nations. This programme, which spans multiple cultural fields, is aligned with the 40th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Oman and Russia.

In response to a question from Observer during the press conference, Lyubimova noted that the upcoming ‘Russian Seasons’

events would focus on programmes for children, as well as music. She highlighted that musical performances and events would be hosted at various locations across Oman throughout the year, adding a lively dimension to the initiative.

Al Mousawi added that the exhibition marks the second collaboration between the National Museum and Russia, following the success of the previous exhibition, which spotlighted masterpieces of Islamic civilisation in Russia. This latest exhibition coincides with the ongoing “Oman Gallery” exhibition at the State Hermitage Museum, titled “The Omani Empire Between Asia and Africa.” This parallel exhibition, running until February 16, 2025, emphasises Oman's historical role as a cultural and economic bridge between the Arabian Peninsula, West Asia and East Africa.

The exhibition showcased remarkable artefacts such as a Persian knife with Central Asian craftsmanship, a Bukhara aigrette adorned with precious stones, a Bukhara enamel tray and a 1910 Bukhara samovar, reflecting the lavish exchanges between Central Asia and Imperial Russia.

The partnership between the National Museum and Russia also includes plans to exhibit Omani modern art in Russia, fostering cultural diplomacy through art and exhibitions.



TANMIA GCC Diversified Equity Fund (TATHMEER)

Board of Director Report For the Year ended December 31st, 2024.

Dear Unitholders,

On behalf of the board, I am pleased to present the results of TANMIA GCC Diversified Equity Fund (TATHMEER) for the Year ended December 31st, 2024.

Period	Fund Performance	Benchmark Performance
Full Year 2024	-0.30%	2.02%
Full Year 2023	9.84%	6.19% *
Full Year 2022	-4.73%	-6.84% *
Full Year 2021	32.90%	31.45% *

* Customized Index

In 2024, the fund's performance was notably affected by market volatility stemming from geopolitical uncertainties in the Middle East. While most GCC markets exhibited lackluster performance by the year's end, the Dubai market stood out as an exception. Despite these challenges, the fund has maintained a strong track record since inception, consistently outperforming its benchmark by 2.08%. This highlights the fund's ability to generate superior long-term returns relative to its benchmark. Also, the fund has delivered 42.2% returns in the last 5 Years.

Global and GCC Markets Performance

Global equity markets ended 2024 with strong gains for the second year in a row, driven by double-digit increases in key developed markets. GCC markets recorded modest gains, with the MSCI GCC Index rising 0.7%. Regional performance was influenced by geopolitical tensions in Gaza, Lebanon, and Syria, as well as Red Sea attacks. Globally, the Russia-Ukraine war and China's slowing economy also affected market sentiment.

The S&P GCC Index recorded a 2.0% gain in 2024, with most GCC markets ending the year in positive territory except for Qatar and Abu Dhabi. Dubai led the region with a remarkable 27.1% surge, followed by Kuwait with an 8.0% increase. Oman, Bahrain, and Saudi Arabia posted modest gains of 1.4%, 0.7%, and 0.6%, respectively. In contrast, Qatar and Abu Dhabi saw declines of 2.4% and 1.7%, respectively. Despite long term mega projects and prospects, KSA the largest market in the region failed to deliver market returns and hence restricted our performance due to our higher allocation in KSA.

Brief Summary of Accounts

Particulars	31 st Dec 2024 USD	31 st Dec 2023 USD
Revenue	655,773	2,762,680
Total Comprehensive Income	(92,795)	2,105,889
Net Asset Value	22,408,737	23,320,844
Fund Capital	18,740,457	18,508,452
NAV per unit	1.19	1.26

Outlook

The outlook for GCC markets remains positive, supported by higher oil prices, Mega project investment, global oil demand and lower interest rates. Oil prices are expected to stabilize between \$70-\$80 per barrel, supporting fiscal budgets across the GCC. Regional GDP growth is forecasted to average 3.4%, with Saudi Arabia and UAE leading at 3.9% and 3.3% respectively. Investment in non-oil sectors and a conducive environment for private-sector growth are expected to sustain momentum in 2025. Lower interest rates are likely to provide additional support, particularly for borrowing-sensitive industries across Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Qatar. However, the global economy might face uncertainty and potential disruption following President-elect Trump's victory. Trump's proposed policies, which could lead to inflationary pressures in the U.S. and global economic realignment. Therefore, we maintain a cautious view on the markets and believe our approach of stock selection and portfolio management shall ensure steady and positive returns over the medium to long term.

Expressions of Gratitude

On behalf of myself and the members of the Board of Directors of the Fund, it is an honor to extend our highest gratitude and appreciation to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tank Al Said, may Allah preserve and protect him, for his inspiring leadership and insightful vision, as well as his sincere and dedicated efforts toward the progress and prosperity of Oman. I also extend my thanks to the regulatory authorities and our valued unitholders for their continuous support, with gratitude also extended to the Fund Management Company.

Said Hilal Al Habsi
Chairperson

Statement of financial position as at 31 December 2024

31 Dec 2023 RO	31 Dec 2024 RO	31 Dec 2024 US\$	31 Dec 2023 US\$
ASSETS			
Current assets			
8,377,092	8,196,022	Investments at fair value through profit or loss	21,288,365
479,065	154,329	Receivables	400,855
167,587	322,356	Cash and cash equivalents	837,288
9,023,744	8,672,707	Total assets	22,528,509
UNIT HOLDERS' FUNDS			
7,125,754	7,215,076	Fund capital	18,740,457
1,852,771	1,412,288	Retained earnings	3,668,280
8,978,525	8,627,364	Total Unit holders' funds	22,408,737
LIABILITIES			
Current liabilities			
7,745	7,333	Accruals and other payables	19,046
37,474	38,010	Amount due to a related party	98,726
45,219	45,343	Total liabilities	117,772
9,023,744	8,672,707	Total unit holders' funds and liabilities	22,528,509
0.485	0.460	Net asset value per unit	1.196

Managed By:
Oman National Investment Development Company SAOC
P.O.Box 3028, Postal Code 112, Ilbm, Sultanate of Oman, Tel +968 22 300 400 Fax +968 22 300 420
[www.tanmia.om](#)

Statement of profit or loss and other comprehensive income for the year ended 31 December 2024

2023 RO	2024 RO	2024 US\$	2023 US\$
INCOME			
275,501	284,158	Dividend income on investments at fair value through profit or loss	738,072
325,236	(88,858)	Realised (loss)/gain on sale of investments at fair value through profit or loss	(230,800)
450,097	68,138	Unrealised gain on investments at fair value through profit or loss	176,981
(9,988)	(17,359)	Foreign exchange loss	(45,087)
22,785	6,394	Finance income	16,607
1,063,631	252,473		655,773
EXPENSES			
(152,453)	(158,679)	Management and custodian fees	(412,153)
(100,411)	(129,520)	General and administrative expenses	(336,415)
(252,864)	(288,199)		(748,568)
810,767	(35,726)	Net (loss)/profit for the year	(92,795)
0.042	(0.002)	(Loss)/earnings per unit	(0.005)

تنمية TANMIA
الشركة الوطنية للتنمية والاستثمار
Oman National Investment Development Company



817 OMANI STUDENTS GRADUATE AT NUST

MUSCAT: As many as 817 graduates of different programmes in Medicine, Pharmacy, Engineering and Maritime studies have been conferred with the titles of their programmes at a ceremony organised by the National University of Science and Technology (NUST) under the auspices of Dr Mohammed bin Said al Maamari, Minister of Awqaf and Religious Affairs at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC) on Thursday.

Jewel of Arabia Expedition ends

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH
SALALAH, FEB 1

The Jewel of Arabia expedition which started on January 6 from Al Suwaih beach in the wilayat of Jaalan Bani Bu Ali in Al Sharqiyah South Governorate, concluded in Salalah on Saturday. The journey, undertaken by a team of explorers from Oman and the United Kingdom, successfully retraced the historic routes of renowned British explorer Bertram Thomas.

The expedition spanned the breathtaking landscapes of Al Sharqiyah North, Al Wusta, and Dhofar governorates, covering vast distances through traditional and modern means of transportation, including camel caravans, trekking on foot and four-wheel-drive vehicles.

The diverse terrain and changing climates tested the endurance and adaptability of the participants, echoing the challenges faced by Thomas in the early 20th century.

A key objective of the expedition was to strengthen historical ties between Oman and the United Kingdom, fostering cultural exchange and mutual appreciation.

The initiative also sought to highlight Oman's cultural and natural heritage while promoting environmental sustainability. Participants immersed themselves in local



The Jewel of Arabia expedition team members share their experiences about the rich heritage and culture of Oman.

traditions, experiencing the warmth of Omani hospitality in remote villages and witnessing the country's rich biodiversity, from the golden dunes of the Empty Quarter to the verdant landscapes of Dhofar.

One of the expedition's most remarkable aspects was its dedication to historical accuracy, following the memoirs of Bertram Thomas, who, with the guidance of Omani leader Shaikh Saleh bin Kalut, became the first European to cross the formidable Rub al Khali desert in 1930-1931.

The team honoured Thomas' legacy by documenting their journey extensively through media coverage, a dedicated book and promotional materials that will serve to elevate Oman's reputation as a prime destination for cultural and adventure tourism.

SHORT TAKES



OMAN PUSHES FOR SMARTER, GREENER TAXI SERVICES

VINOD NAIR
MUSCAT, FEB 1

The government is committed to enhancing taxi services in Oman, ensuring all taxis are metred and integrated into ride-hailing apps, according to Eng Khamis bin Mohammed al Shammakhi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology for Transport (MoTCIT).

Speaking to Observer, Al Shammakhi highlighted ongoing efforts to streamline the sector, with eight app-based taxi operators now in service.

Harith al Maqbali, CEO of OTaxi, Oman’s first app-based taxi operator, noted steady growth since its launch, despite initial challenges, including the pandemic. With over 5,000 drivers, OTaxi operates across Muscat, Musandam, Al Batinah, Al Sharqiyah and Salalah.

Competition among ride-hailing services has led to improved customer experience, with waiting times in Muscat now as short as three to five minutes.

To support Oman’s sustainability goals, OTaxi is also testing electric vehicles (EVs), starting with two Teslas. However, Al Maqbali emphasised the need for more charging stations every 2–3 km to encourage EV adoption.

Recently, OTaxi secured investment from the Yango super-app, signalling further expansion and innovation in Oman’s taxi sector.

NIZWA TO HOST CONFERENCE ON HERITAGE, TOURISM



NIZWA: The University of Nizwa, in collaboration with the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, and the International Federation of Historians, has announced the International Conference on Heritage, Tourism and Culture: Renewed Visions for Urban Development. The event, set for February 3–5, marks the beginning of the university’s 20th cultural season under the theme ‘Towards Fruitful Tourism — Leadership and Sustainability.’

The organisers at a press conference at the University of Nizwa outlined key aspects of the conference, including 80 working papers presented by 200 researchers and experts from Oman and abroad. Dr Suleiman bin Salem al Hussaini, supervisor of the conference’s technical committee, emphasised that the event aims to bridge heritage, tourism and culture while promoting sustainable heritage resource management. Dr Mohammed bin Ahmed al Habsi, a tourism expert, MoHT highlighted the conference’s alignment with Oman Vision 2040, which positions tourism as a key driver of the national economy. — ONA

SOHAR UNIVERSITY STRENGTHENS GLOBAL TIES AT QS SUMMIT

SOHAR: Sohar University participated as a Silver Sponsor at the QS Summit in Goa, India, from January 27 to 29, reinforcing its commitment to global academic and research collaborations.

The university delegation, led by Vice Chancellor Dr Hamdan bin Sulaiman al Fazari, signed multiple MoUs with prestigious Indian institutions and engaged in discussions with universities from the UK, Australia, Brazil, Malaysia,



Sohar University V-C Dr Hamdan signed MoUs with Indian institutions

Indonesia and the Arab world. These agreements aim to enhance research cooperation, faculty and student exchange programmes and the organisation of joint conferences, workshops and consultancy projects.

Through such strategic partnerships, Sohar University continues to position itself as a leading institution, aligning national aspirations with global academic excellence.

Al Tahaim Winter Nights festival dazzle visitors

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
JAALAN BANI BU HASSAN, FEB 1

THE Al Tahaim Winter Nights festival in the Wilayat of Jaalan Bani Bu Hassan continues to captivate visitors for the third consecutive day. Thousands of attendees from across Oman and beyond are drawn to this grand celebration, which seamlessly blends heritage, sports and entertainment, making it one of the most anticipated winter events in the region.

A standout highlight of the festival is the camel races at the Al Saih Al Khadher track. Over 12 intense rounds, camel owners competed fiercely for prestigious titles and valuable prizes, with spectators cheering enthusiastically from the sidelines. Saeed al Hashemi, a visitor from Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, shared his excitement: “Attending camel races here is a unique experience. This sport is deeply rooted in our Gulf heritage and the electrifying atmosphere makes me want to return every year.”

The festival is also a celebration of Oman’s rich cultural traditions. The heritage village has become a hub of artistic and musical expression, where visitors are immersed in

The Sands Theatre provided a literary and artistic retreat, hosting an enchanting evening featuring some of the region’s most renowned poets



A highlight of the festival is the camel races at the Al Saih Al Khadher track

authentic performances. Saeed bin Ali al Owaisi’s masterful rababa playing mesmerised onlookers, while the rhythmic beats of the Razha performances filled the air, bringing together young and old in a spirited display of national pride.

For Yousef al Kindi, a first-time attendee, witnessing the Razha performance was a revelation:

“I have never seen Razha art up close before, but today I saw how it beautifully blends rhythm and social unity. It’s a true reflection of Omani heritage and I feel privileged to be part of this experience.”

The Sands Theatre provided a literary and artistic retreat, hosting an enchanting evening featuring some of the region’s most renowned poets. The lineup included Saudi poet Abdullah al Sarahid and Omani poets Nasser al Ghailani and Nasser al Shahimi, who captivated the audience with verses on pride, love and patriotism. Adding to the atmosphere, singer Bandar al Aweer’s performances resonated deeply with attendees, who responded with applause and cheers.

Mustafa Saeed, an Egyptian visitor from Muscat, was impressed by the festival’s diverse offerings: “The fusion of sports and entertainment makes this festival truly unique. The matches were competitive and the organisation was exceptional and an event I wouldn’t want to miss next year.”

The Sands Theatre transformed into a spectacle of wonder with a mesmerising bubble art show that combined music, optical illusions and theatrical performances, enchanting audiences of all ages.

40 bn seeds planted to save pastures in Dhofar

SALALAH: The ongoing efforts to combat the harmful spread of the Parthenium plant in Dhofar Governorate have made substantial progress, with research studies and field initiatives revealing both the severity of the problem and the effectiveness of various strategies in mitigating its impact.

Recent findings from a study on the effect of Parthenium on natural pastures in the Khareef region of Dhofar revealed alarming trends. The study showed that natural pastures in the area, once yielding an average of 3,935 kilogrammes per hectare, have suffered sharp declines in productivity.

In areas infected by the Parthenium plant, dry mass productivity has dropped drastically, sometimes even reaching zero, raising serious

Research and field efforts for sustainable solutions towards combating the spread of Parthenium in Dhofar Governorate



concerns about the future sustainability of these vital resources. The significance of these natural pastures cannot be overstated. According to scientific data from Dhofar University, the average pastoral productivity of dry grasses in various ecosystems such as dry plateaus, mountains and plains is estimated at 208,000 tonnes annually. This pastoral yield is a critical source of nutrition for livestock in the region, but the

spread of Parthenium, coupled with early grazing practices, is putting this crucial resource at risk.

The Steering Committee for Dealing with Parthenium, chaired by Dr Ahmed bin Mohsen al Ghassani, has undertaken a series of important initiatives aimed at restoring the affected ecosystems and ensuring the future health of the region’s natural pastures. Dr Al Ghassani shared with ONA that the committee has made significant strides in its efforts, including the sowing of more than 40 billion seeds of perennial pastoral grasses during the previous season. In addition, over 68 million seeds of local trees and shrubs have been planted and the committee has distributed more than 3 million seed balls with plans for an additional 10 million in the near future. — ONA

Oman-Bahrain Friendship Society fosters bilateral relations

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabiyousef

The Oman-Bahrain Friendship Society, a key platform for fostering diplomatic, trade and cultural ties between Oman and Bahrain, has received royal recognition for its outstanding contributions to bilateral relations.

In a gesture of appreciation, King Hamad bin Isa al Khalifa of Bahrain sent a letter of thanks to Rudeina

bint Amer al Hajriyah, President of the Society, acknowledging its pivotal role in strengthening the enduring bond between the two nations.

Speaking to Observer, Rudeina emphasised that Oman and Bahrain share deep-rooted historical ties, enriched by mutual respect, cultural affinity and strategic collaboration. She highlighted that the Society’s initiatives have led to numerous successes across both



Dr Juma bin Ahmed al Kaabi presents the letter to Rudeina bint Amer al Hajriyah

government and private sectors.

“The Omani-Bahraini relationship stands as a distinguished model of international cooperation. This recognition reflects our unwavering commitment to nurturing these ties,” she said.

Established to enhance cooperation across cultural, social, economic and scientific spheres, the Society actively promotes youth and sports initiatives, organises

cultural and literary events, and facilitates artistic and academic exchanges.

It also engages with media through publications, exhibitions and broadcasting collaborations to strengthen public awareness of Oman-Bahrain relations.

The Royal letter was formally presented by Dr Juma bin Ahmed al Kaabi, Bahrain’s Ambassador to Oman, during an official ceremony last Thursday.

SPOTLIGHT



SIHAM AL SAIDI

AS global influences increasingly shape young minds, the need to strengthen Arab identity and citizenship among children has never been greater. While school curricula aim to foster such values, parents and educators believe they alone are insufficient.

A true understanding of heritage and citizenship, they argue, requires real-life experiences that extend beyond classroom walls. Wafa al Saidi, a teacher of identity and culture, recalls a surprising moment in her classroom: “We were discussing traditional Omani architecture, and one student asked, ‘But teacher, why does this matter today?’ I realised then that textbooks alone cannot ignite pride in heritage, even when supported by extracurricular activities. Children need to see, touch and experience their culture in authentic contexts to truly connect with it and explain it to others.”

Parents echo similar sentiments. Amal Yasser, a mother of two, emphasises the importance of cultural exposure: “When my children attended a local heritage festival, they were captivated by the traditional crafts and the stories of our ancient heritage shared by elders. That one day taught them more about our culture than weeks of lessons could.”

Museums, national celebrations and heritage festivals provide meaningful opportunities for children to engage with their identity. Walking through the halls of the National Museum or watching a camel race during a festival allows them to experience their heritage, making it relatable and memorable.

Event organisers also highlight the role of national gatherings in fostering unity and pride. A coordinator of the Sohar Cultural Festival, which runs for about a month, shared, “These events bring history to life. They’re not just about

FOSTERING CULTURAL PRIDE IN CHILDREN

Museums, national celebrations, and heritage festivals provide meaningful opportunities for children to engage with their identity



Every time we attend a cultural festival, my children refuse to leave because they want to try everything in the traditional villages. They enjoy sitting with the elders, asking curious questions about our customs and traditions

ISSA AL SHAMMAKHI
A father of four

entertainment. Our goal is to create a sense of belonging and pride in our shared identity. It’s also an excellent opportunity to showcase our cultural aspects abroad.”

Issa al Shammakhi, a father of four, agrees: “Cultural events are rich journeys for my children. Every time we attend a festival, they refuse to leave because they want to try everything in the traditional villages. They enjoy sitting with the elders, asking curious questions about our customs and traditions.”

The path to raising children with a strong sense of identity and citizenship lies in a holistic approach. While school curricula lay the foundation, experiential learning through cultural events, museum visits and national celebrations builds the emotional and personal connections needed to internalise these values.

By integrating these opportunities into children’s lives, we ensure they grow up not only aware of their heritage but deeply proud of it. This pride empowers them to carry their identity forward as responsible and engaged citizens, even creating digital content to share their culture abroad and ensure its sustainability.



SHORT TAKES



Afshan Patel felicitated by ISC Oman Chairman

ISC Oman hosts workshop on finance, retirement planning

MUSCAT: Indian Social Club (ISC), Oman, hosted a workshop on Investment, Succession Planning and Carefree Retirement on January 25. The session, conducted by Ms Afshan Patel, offered valuable insights into navigating financial complexities and preparing for a rewarding future. The workshop covered investment fundamentals, succession planning and retirement strategies. Attendees learned about various investment classes — bonds, shares, mutual funds, real estate and gold — highlighting their features, risks and returns. The importance of identifying individual risk profiles was emphasised for successful investing. She underlined the challenge of initiating the process and stressed the value of timely, organised planning to ensure a smooth transition of assets in line with one’s wishes.

Study shows increase in Peregrine Falcons in Oman

MUSCAT: A field study conducted by the Environment Conservation Office at the Environment Authority has confirmed an increase in the number of Peregrine Falcons on an island located north of the Sultanate of Oman. In 2024, 32 black falcons were monitored, compared to 21 in 2023. The study, carried out by a research team, focused on monitoring the Peregrine Falcon (Falco concolor), an endangered species and its nesting sites on one of the northern islands. The survey was conducted from August 13 to 20 and from September 22 to October 3, 2024. Taimur bin Abdullah al Said, Director of Environmental Affairs at the Environment Conservation Office, explained that the aim of the survey was to update data on the condition of the Peregrine Falcon and its nesting sites, as well as to train human resources and prepare a report on the findings. The team plans to publish the results in scientific journals. The Peregrine Falcon is listed as endangered on the International Union for Conservation of Nature’s (IUCN) Red List due



Peregrine Falcons in Oman

to its declining numbers worldwide. This medium-sized falcon breeds in the Middle East and northeastern Africa and migrates to the southeastern coast of Africa and Madagascar for the winter. The islands in Muscat and Al Batinah Governorates are recognised as key breeding sites for this species. The study team also tracked the migration of a young falcon from Oman to Madagascar using satellite tracking devices. The migration took approximately 50 days and efforts will be made to track the falcon’s return to Oman in the summer months. — ONA

Omani maritime heritage shines at Islamic Arts Biennale

JEDDAH: The National Museum of Oman is proudly participating in the second edition of the Islamic Arts Biennale, titled ‘And What’s Between,’ hosted at the Western Haj Terminal, King Abdulaziz International Airport, Jeddah, from January 25 to May 25. This prestigious event brings together over 20 artists and 30 institutions worldwide to celebrate Islamic art and culture. The National Museum’s pavilion highlights Oman’s significant contributions to global maritime history, focusing on the pioneering role of Omani sailors such as Ahmed bin Majid al Saadi, famously known as the ‘Lion of the Seas.’ His legacy includes groundbreaking works on navigation and the development of the Kamal instrument, used to measure the height of stars for accurate navigation. The pavilion also pays tribute to Omani scholars like Saeed bin Salem bin Saeed Al Jami’i, author of ‘Nabhat Al Ghafil fi Ma’rifat Hisbat Al Manazil,’ and Nasser bin Ali al Khadouri, author of ‘Ma’dan Al Asrar fi Ilm Al Bahr.’ These contributions underscore Oman’s enduring role in advancing navigational sciences. Among the fascinating exhibits is the Sinaw Treasure, a collection of nearly a thousand silver coins from various historical periods,



The National Museum’s pavilion highlights Oman’s significant contributions to global maritime history

including Sassanian and Abbasid eras, illustrating the evolution of monetary systems across the Indian Ocean. Navigational tools, such as the Kamal, rare manuscripts like ‘The Metal of Secrets in the Science of Seas,’ and other artefacts, provide a comprehensive glimpse into Oman’s maritime legacy. The Islamic Arts Biennale serves as an international platform to celebrate Islamic arts and foster cultural and intellectual dialogue. — ONA

Farmers group to celebrate annual harvest festival

KABEER YOUSUF @kabiyousef

A GROUP of passionate farmers, who have nurtured their favourite crops, will celebrate their hard work at a grand event on Friday, February 7, at the Gulf College Auditorium in Al Maabala. Nearly 5,000 men and women, united under the name ‘Oman Krishikkootam’ (Farmers’ Group), are set to host the 11th edition of their annual harvest festival, a vibrant celebration of farming and community. The festival will feature Anish Ravi, a celebrity in the farming world, renowned Malayalam TV anchor, actor and recipient of the Kerala State Award in 2005, as a key guest. One of the event’s highlights is the presentation of the prestigious ‘Mathruka Karshakan/Karshaka Award’ (Model Farmer Award), which honours exceptional



‘Oman Krishikkootam’ has grown from a small group into a thriving network of over 5,000 members

The highlight is the presentation of the Model Farmer Award, which honours exceptional contributions to farming across various categories

The award serves as an inspiration, motivating the farming community through recognition of innovation and dedication. Founded in 2014 with the goal of empowering individuals to grow vegetables for household consumption, ‘Oman

Krishikkootam’ has grown from a small WhatsApp group into a thriving network of over 5,000 members. The highly anticipated festival is expected to draw more than 1,000 expatriates and families, offering a rich celebration of farming, culture and community spirit. In addition to its focus on farming, the group leads impactful initiatives such as the annual school farming programme at Indian School Al Buraimi, where students learn to cultivate small farmlands. A similar initiative was successfully implemented at Indian School Darsait. The group also runs a seed bank, offering free seeds to encourage year-round farming and promoting a healthier lifestyle through organic agriculture. The festival will also feature various entertainment programmes designed for members and their families, ensuring a fun and memorable experience for everyone.



Ministry of Health

Announcement

The Ministry of Health invites specialized companies to participate in the following Tenders:-

Tender Ref.	Description	Last date for Collection of Tender Document	Bid Submission Closing Date on/Before 10:00 am Wednesday	Eligibility	Tender Fee (Non-Refundable) Per set
180/2025/MOH/HQ-21	Supply of Surgical Items (Dental)	13-02-2025	26-02-2025	Specialized Companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board	• SME: 10 • LO: 25
181/ 2025/MOH/ HQ-22	Supply of Surgical items (Orthopedic)	13-02-2025	26-02-2025	Specialized Companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board	• SME: 29 • LO: 145
182/2025/MOH/HQ-23	Supply of Surgical Items (INSTRUMENTS)	13-02-2025	26-02-2025	Specialized Companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board	• SME: 10 • LO: 25
209/2025/MOH/HQ-24	Supply of Medical Linen and Uniforms for Various Health Institution	06-02-2025	05-03-2025	Specialized Companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board	• SME: 10 • LO: 30
233/2025/MOH/HQ-25	Provision of IT Infrastructure Monitoring Solution for MOH	06-02-2025	05-03-2025	Specialized Companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board in Excellent,First,Second	• SME: 10 • LO: 25
247/2025/MOH/HQ-26	Supply of Laboratory Items	20-02-2025	05-03-2025	Specialized Companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board	• SME: 10 • LO: 25
248/2025/MOH/HQ-27	Supply of Laboratory Items for CPHL	20-02-2025	05-03-2025	Specialized Companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board	• SME: 10 • LO: 25
249/2025/MOH/HQ-28	Replacement and Upgrade the Telephone System at Ibra Hospital in North Al Sharqiyah Governorate	06-02-2025	05-03-2025	Specialized Companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board in Excellent	• SME: 10 • LO: 25
250/2025/MOH/HQ-29	Modification and Expansion Works of Open Cars Parking at the Higher Institute of Health Specialties in Muscat Governorate	06-02-2025	05-03-2025	Specialized Companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board in Fourth	• SME: 10 • LO: 25
251/2025/MOH/HQ-30	Provision for Consultancy Engineering Services (Design and Supervision) for Jebel Akhdar Hospital at Al Dhakliyah Governorate	09-02-2025	05-03-2028	Specialized Companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board in First,Second	• SME: 10 • LO: 37.5
311/2025/MOH/HQ-31	Supply of Pharmaceutical for Royal Hospital	13-2-2025	5-3-2025	Specialized Companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board	• SME: 10 • LO: 25
312/2025/MOH/HQ-32	Supply of Surgical Items for Royal Hospital (LIVER TRANSPLAN)	13-2-2025	12-3-2025	Specialized Companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board	• SME: 10 • LO: 25
313/2025/MOH/HQ-33	Supply of Surgical Items for Royal Hospital (Intervention Radiology)	13-2-2025	12-3-2025	Specialized Companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board	• SME: 10 • LO: 25
314/2025/MOH/HQ-34	Supply of Surgical Items (Pediatric Cath lab) for The Royal Hospital	13-2-2025	5-3-2025	Specialized Companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board	• SME: 10 • LO: 25

- Tenders should be submitted on line on <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>.
- Ministry is not bound to accept the lowest tender and reserves the right to accepts or reject any tender.
- For any Clarification, you may contact via Telephone: 24402200, Email id etenderhd@ita.gov.om

WORLD

SHORT TAKES



Venezuela's President Nicolas Maduro and US President's envoy Richard Grenell shake hands at the Miraflores Palace, in Caracas. — Reuters

MADURO FREES
DETAINEES AFTER
MEETING US ENVOY

CARACAS: Six Americans detained in Venezuela were released and returned to the United States with President Donald Trump's special envoy, following his meeting with President Nicolas Maduro who called for a "new beginning" in ties with Washington. "We are wheels up and headed home with these 6 American citizens. They just spoke to @realDonaldTrump and they couldn't stop thanking him," Richard Grenell, an outspoken Trump ally who serves in a broad role as envoy for special missions, posted on X.

The six men, who were not identified, were photographed smiling on a plane alongside Grenell. "Just been informed that we are bringing six hostages home from Venezuela. Thank you to Ric Grenell and my entire staff. Great job!" Trump posted on his Truth Social platform. Grenell had traveled to Caracas to demand that Maduro's government accept the unconditional return of Venezuelans deported from the United States or face consequences. He and Maduro met at the Miraflores presidential palace in one of the first known meetings by the second Trump administration with a government it considers hostile. — AFP



Members of the M23 armed group gather in front of the empty area, in Goma. —AFP

BURUNDI WARNS
DRC CONFLICT OF
REGIONAL WAR

NAIROBI: The conflict in eastern DR Congo risks escalating into a broader regional war, Burundi's president said on Saturday, as Africa's top health agency warned the fighting could spark new outbreaks of serious diseases. The Rwanda-backed armed group M23 has vowed to march on the capital Kinshasa after capturing eastern DR Congo's biggest city of Goma earlier this week. The lightning offensive is the latest to scar the mineral-rich region, which has seen relentless conflict involving dozens of armed groups kill an estimated six million people over three decades. The fall of Goma has rattled the continent, prompting international condemnation, fears of a humanitarian crisis and warnings that the conflict could spiral into a wider conflagration affecting more countries.

"If it continues like this, war risks becoming widespread in the region," Burundi's President Evariste Ndayishimiye said. "It is not only Burundi, it is Tanzania, Uganda, Kenya — it is the whole region, it is a threat," he said in an official video posted to YouTube on Saturday. — AFP

BRUTAL CONFLICT

Deadly shelling kills 54 at Sudan market



Paramilitary shelling killed 54 people at a market in the Sudanese capital's twin city of Omdurman on Saturday. "The shells fell in the middle of the vegetable market, that's why the victims and the wounded are so many," one survivor said. A volunteer at Al-Nao Hospital said that they were in dire need of "shrouds, blood donors and stretchers to transport the wounded". The hospital is one of the last medical facilities operating. — AFP

PHILADELPHIA
PLANE CRASH
MARKS A
SECOND US
AVIATION
DISASTER

PHILADELPHIA: A medical jet with six Mexican nationals onboard crashed into a busy Philadelphia neighbourhood on Friday, authorities said, marking another US aviation disaster after a passenger plane and a military helicopter collided midair in Washington. Video footage appeared to show the twin-engine plane descending at a sharp angle towards a residential area, sparking a huge fireball upon impact and showering wreckage over homes

and vehicles. The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) said the aircraft was a Learjet 55 — an American-French business jet — that had taken off shortly before from Northeast Philadelphia Airport bound for Branson, Missouri. The crash happened just after 6:00 pm. "The patient had received care from Shriners Children's Philadelphia and was being transported back to her home country in Mexico on a contracted

air ambulance when the crash happened," said Mel Bower, a spokesman for Shriners Children's. All six of those onboard were Mexican citizens, the country's foreign ministry said in a statement. "The airline company... confirmed to the consulate that six people of Mexican nationality were travelling on the aircraft," the ministry wrote on X. Dozens of emergency workers were on the scene outside Roosevelt Mall, a strip mall in Northeast Philadelphia. — AFP

Hamas-Israel complete
fourth Gaza truce swap

FREED Palestinian inmates were greeted by a cheering crowd in the occupied West Bank city of Ramallah on Saturday, after Hamas released three Israeli hostages from the Gaza Strip in the fourth exchange under the group's ceasefire deal with Israel. Three other buses carrying freed Palestinians also arrived in the southern Gaza city of Khan Yunis, with the inmates in grey prison uniforms met by hundreds of well-wishers. In Ramallah, the bus carrying the inmates struggled to make its way through the jubilant throng of supporters as it arrived from the Israeli-run Ofer Prison. Several of the freed inmates were hoisted onto the crowd's shoulders, including an elderly man who raised his crutches over his head in a triumphant pose.

Earlier in Gaza, hostages Ofer Kalderon and Yarden Bibas were paraded on stage by Hamas fighters before being handed over to the Red Cross in the southern city of Khan Yunis. American-Israeli Keith Siegel was freed shortly thereafter in a similar ceremony at Gaza City's port in the north. Israel's military later confirmed that all three were back in Israel. Israeli campaign group the Hostages and Missing Families Forum hailed the release as "a ray of light in the darkness".

After holding the hostages for more than 15 months, Palestinians in Gaza began releasing them on January 19 under the terms of the ceasefire deal with Israel. Hamas and Islamic Jihad groups have so far handed over 18 hostages to the



A released Palestinian prisoner is cheered upon his arrival in Ramallah. — AFP

After Saturday's hostage release, Gaza's key Rafah border crossing was reopened, with the health ministry in the Hamas-run territory saying 50 Palestinian patients had gone through the crossing to Egypt. Video showed the first evacuees, including a child with an autoimmune disease, crossing into Egypt

International Committee of the Red Cross in exchange for hundreds of Palestinian prisoners, many of them women and minors. The Palestinian Prisoners' Club advocacy group had said Israel would free 183 prisoners on Saturday. Hamas sources said a fifth hostage-prisoner exchange would take place next Saturday. Hundreds had gathered in Tel Aviv's "Hostage Square" to watch the live broadcast of the latest hostage releases. Sighs of relief ran through the crowd as the three were freed and handed over to the Red Cross, though the mood was mostly sombre. Ahead of both exchanges in Khan Yunis and Gaza City, scores of masked Hamas fighters stood sentry, apparently to control onlookers, and large crowds were mostly absent.

After Saturday's hostage release, Gaza's key Rafah border crossing

was reopened, with the health ministry in the Hamas-run territory saying 50 Palestinian patients had gone through the crossing to Egypt. Egyptian state-linked channel Al Qahera News showed footage of the first evacuees, including a child with an autoimmune disease, crossing into Egypt to receive treatment. Muhammad Zaqout, director for Gaza hospitals, said he hoped the number would increase. "We now have 6,000 cases ready to be transferred, and more than 12,000 cases that are in dire need of treatment," he said.

Rafah was a vital Gaza aid entry point before the Israeli military seized the Palestinian side of the crossing in May. The fragile ceasefire's 42-day first phase hinges on the release of 33 hostages in exchange for around 1,900 people held in Israeli jails. — AFP



UTMOST EFFORTS

Rescuers build slope in Japan sinkhole



Japanese rescuers completed building a slope to reach a truck driver stuck in a sinkhole four days after his vehicle was swallowed by the cavity now 40 metres wide. "We have just completed the work on the ramp," Saitama regional governor Motohiro Ono said. Rescuers will use the 30-metre slope to send heavy equipment into the hole. "We are going to clear the debris and rescue the driver as soon as possible,". — AFP

BLOCKED TRANSFER

Migrants leave Albania after court ruling



Dozens of migrants left Albania in Italian custody, after a ruling by judges in Rome struck a fresh blow to Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni's embattled migration centres. An Italian boat carrying 43 migrants departed from the Albanian port of Shengjin just after midday on Saturday. Rome's Court of Appeals referred the case to the European Court of Justice (ECJ), meaning the 43 migrants in Albania had to be transferred to Italy. — AFP

The New York Times

Inside a new plan to bring electricity to 300 m in Africa



MAX BEARAK

The author is covering energy politics, global climate

THE leaders of more than half of Africa's nations gathered this week in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania's sprawling seaside metropolis, to commit to the biggest burst of spending on electric-power generation in Africa's history. The World Bank, African Development Bank and others are pledging at least \$35 billion to expand electricity across a continent where more than a half-billion people still don't have it. About half of the money will go toward solar "minigrids" that serve individual communities. The loans will come at below-market interest rates, a crucial stipulation as global lenders usually charge much higher rates in Africa, citing higher risks. In an interview, Ajay Banga, the president of the World Bank, cast the initiative in sweeping terms where economic development met societal stability and basic human rights. "Without electricity, we can't get jobs, health care, skills," he said. The success of electrification, he said, is "foundational to everything."

The summit's promise is to get half of Africa's 600 million unelectrified people powered up in just six years. That averages out to 5 million people a month. Banga said the World Bank, on its own, had not yet even passed the 1-million-a-month mark. Despite the unusually strong statements of political will, many people, particularly in Africa's beleaguered power sector, expressed

deep scepticism. In fact, some noted that one need not look further than the host country, Tanzania, to find a cautionary tale. Recently the world's biggest developer of solar minigrids, Colorado-based Husk Power Systems, closed up shop in Tanzania.

Tanzania's energy minister, Doto Biteko, said in an interview that some minigrid operators charged artificially high prices, which resulted in inflation. "We are not trying to give anyone a hard time," he said. "But it is the government's role to decide what is reasonable." Lenders are trying to address this issue head on. The loans from the World Bank and the African Development Bank put into place this week are contingent on the regulatory overhauls that, in many cases, allow for private electricity providers to compete more freely with state-run utilities. Tanzania is one of 12 countries signing such "compacts" at the summit meeting. In the coming months, 18 more are expected.

In addition to solar minigrids, a roughly equal amount of money will go toward extending traditional, existing power grids, which are mostly supplied by hydropower and fossil fuels. But it is the plummeting cost of building solar power, driven by China's breakneck growth as a producer of inexpensive, high-quality solar panels, that would be the mission's main enabling factor. Not only has solar power become more affordable, it takes far less time to deploy

The mission's funders say they have been clear with governments that money alone cannot solve the problem and that regulatory change is what might attract even more investment beyond the \$35 billion

than building a dam or power plant and has the added benefit of not emitting greenhouse gases.

The mission's funders say they have been clear with governments that money alone cannot solve the problem and that regulatory change is what might attract even more investment beyond the \$35 billion. Multilateral funding is never 100 per cent assured, and not just because of concerns about the countries receiving aid. A new administration in Washington that is openly hostile to both renewable energy and foreign aid has caused uncertainty over the World Bank's core funding, if only because the United States is the World Bank's biggest contributor and holds outsize sway over who runs the institution. For now, the bank has enough money in its development aid pot to fund its electrification mission, in part because of last-minute decisions made by the outgoing Biden administration.

While lenders and presidents rubbed shoulders in Dar es Salaam, however, Congo also offered a reminder of the volatility that threatens progress. Lenders know they are still up against the same underlying issues that have so limited investment in African infrastructure and left many countries economically hobbled. But lack of electricity is more than just a drag on economies. It's a drag, period, to not have electricity in a world where more than 90 per cent of people do.

DEVASTATING LA WILDFIRES ARE FULLY CONTAINED



JESUS JIMÉNEZ

The author is a reporter for The New York Times based in Los Angeles

More than three weeks after the devastating Eaton and Palisades fires broke out in Southern California, state officials on Friday evening said that firefighters had fully contained both fires, meaning that the perimeters of the fires were completely under control. Evacuation orders had already been lifted, and for more than a week the fires have not posed a major threat.

But their full containment closed a chapter on two fires that raged for days, killed at least 29 people, displaced thousands of residents and ravaged many neighbourhoods. Cal Fire, the state's firefighting agency, updated the data for both fires on Friday night to show 100 per cent containment.

The Palisades fire destroyed more than 6,800 structures, mostly in the Pacific Palisades neighbourhood of Los Angeles and Malibu, and burned 23,448 acres, according to the agency. The Eaton fire destroyed more than 9,400 structures, mostly in the Altadena community in Los Angeles County, and burned 14,021 acres. While the threat from those fires is effectively over, their impact will last for months and years. In the short term, at least 14 people are still missing because of the fires — two from the Palisades fire and 12 from the Eaton fire.

Beyond that is a lengthy road ahead to rebuilding, at a cost that could be in the hundreds of billions. Concerns linger about the potential long-term health effects from days of dangerous air quality, and the psyche of an entire region is damaged. Firefighters began to gain ground on the fires only after several bouts of Santa Ana winds threatened to whip up flames and burn homes. Light rain arrived last weekend, causing minor mudslides but helping calm the fires. With evacuation orders lifted, many residents of the Altadena area and the Palisades have been returning to see the damage for themselves and search for any belongings that might have survived. This past week was the first time that most Pacific Palisades residents were able to see what was left of their homes.

Rebuilding could take years. The first step toward recovery began for many this week as Environmental Protection Agency crews began processing hazardous debris from areas affected by the fires. Kathryn Barger, chair of the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors, commended the firefighters and other emergency personnel for their work. She called for a focus on rebuilding and recovery, as well as on readiness for future disasters. The Eaton fire, she said in a statement, "has taught us all that we must remain vigilant and prepare for the unimaginable."

Trump officials fire Jan 6 prosecutors, plan FBI purge

THE Trump administration plans to scrutinise thousands of FBI agents involved in January 6 investigations, setting the stage for a possible purge that goes far beyond the bureau's leaders to target rank-and-file agents, according to internal documents and people familiar with the matter. The proposal came on a day that more than a dozen prosecutors at the US attorney's office in Washington who had worked on cases involving the January 6, 2021, Capitol riot were told that they were being terminated. The moves were a powerful indication that President Donald Trump has few qualms deploying the colossal might of federal law enforcement to punish perceived political enemies, even as his Cabinet nominees offered sober assurances they would abide by the rule of law. Forcing out both agents and prosecutors who worked on January 6 cases would amount to a wide-scale assault on the Justice Department.

On Friday, interim leaders at the department instructed the FBI to notify more than a half-dozen high-ranking career officials that they faced termination, according to a copy of an internal memo obtained by The New York Times. The acting deputy attorney general, Emil Bove, also instructed the acting leadership of the FBI to compile a list of all agents and FBI staff "assigned at any time to investigations and/or prosecutions" relating to the events at the Capitol on January 6, 2021 — the day a mob of Trump supporters stormed through the halls of Congress. In issuing his directive, Bove, who has overseen an opening volley of threats, firings and forced transfers since the inauguration, cited Trump's executive order vowing to end "the weaponisation of the federal government." Under President Joe Biden, the government waged a "systematic campaign against its perceived political opponents," including by deploying law enforcement to pursue its rivals, he said.

The office of the deputy attorney general "will commence a review process to determine whether any



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Pro-Trump rioters climb the Capitol walls in Washington, Jan. 6, 2021.

additional personnel actions are necessary" against those FBI agents, analysts, and staff, according to the memo, which was addressed to Brian Driscoll, the acting FBI director. In an email to FBI employees on Friday night, Driscoll noted that he was among the agents who would be on such a list. The FBI has been told to submit the list of names by Tuesday.

"We understand that this request encompasses thousands of employees across the country who have supported these investigative efforts," Driscoll wrote, adding that he and his deputy "are going to follow the law, follow FBI policy, and do what's in the best interest of the workforce and the American people — always." Later, the FBI's counterterrorism division sent an email to field offices around the country with instructions about filling a database with bureau personnel who worked on the cases — a number likely to be about 6,000.

People familiar with the internal discussions said that some Trump administration officials are moving to force scores, or possibly hundreds, of agents out of the FBI in the coming days and weeks. Officials have discussed notifying

a large number of agents that they face possible termination, demotion, or transfer. At the US attorney's office in Washington, more than a dozen prosecutors who had worked on January 6-related cases were told that they were being terminated, according to people familiar with the notices. Those informed of their dismissals had been hired as the office struggled to manage what became the largest prosecution in the department's history.

In a statement, the FBI Agents Association said that if true, "these outrageous actions by acting officials are fundamentally at odds with the law enforcement objectives outlined by President Trump." "Dismissing potentially hundreds of agents would severely weaken the bureau's ability to protect the country from national security and criminal threats," the statement continued.

If the administration follows through, it would be a singular moment in the FBI's history, and fly in the face of decades worth of civil service laws that are meant to protect the integrity and professionalism of the government workforce.

OPINION

How to resolve conflicts in healthcare



DR HAMED
AL SINAWI

The writer is a senior consultant psychiatrist at Sultan Qaboos University Hospital

A few months ago, I conducted a workshop on conflict resolution in healthcare for a group of doctors and nurses. During the workshop, it was interesting to hear that healthcare workers almost share similar types of conflicts, which often go unresolved. These unresolved conflicts can compromise patient care, lead to burnout, and diminish job satisfaction. Conflict can occur from miscommunication, unclear roles and responsibilities, and variations in knowledge, power, and control. A few years ago, the term ‘Canada Syndrome,’ was popular in some organisation to refer to colleagues who had received postgraduate training in Canada. These individuals often repeated phrases like “When I was in Canada...” when facing challenging clinical situations. While initially meant as a joke, the term highlighted an underlying issue: how repeatedly emphasising overseas training could unintentionally undermine the experiences and skills of colleagues trained locally. Such behaviour often breeds resentment and damages team cohesion, ultimately affecting collaboration and patient outcomes. Conflict can also raise from personality clashes between team members which can be particularly challenging to resolve. These conflicts tend to escalate when each

party insists on being right all the time, creating a standoff that prevents constructive dialogue. Personality clashes may stem from differences in communication styles, work ethics, or even personal values. Without effective conflict resolution mechanisms, these disagreements can create a toxic work environment. During the workshop, many participants shared personal anecdotes about how minor misunderstandings snowballed into larger issues due to poor communication or a lack of timely intervention. For example, one nurse spoke about how a seemingly trivial disagreement over scheduling appointments became a source of ongoing friction, affecting her ability to collaborate effectively with her colleagues. Such situations underline the importance of addressing conflicts early, before they spiral out of control. In the workshop, we explored models of conflict resolution that healthcare professionals can adopt. While there are many frameworks available, they share some common elements. The first step is identifying the source of the conflict using active listening and open communication. It’s essential to focus on behaviours rather than individuals, avoiding personal blame to keep discussions respectful and constructive. Both parties should work together to develop potential solutions, agree on implementing

Conflict can occur from miscommunication, unclear roles and responsibilities, and variations in knowledge, power, and control

them, and monitor their effectiveness over time. Even with the best intentions, resolving conflicts can be challenging without organisational support. Leadership plays a critical role in fostering a culture of respect and collaboration. Organisations can help by providing mediation services, offering emotional support to staff, and creating opportunities for team members to learn conflict management skills by conducting training courses on effective communication, negotiation, and emotional intelligence. Another important aspect of conflict resolution is recognising the role of empathy in healthcare settings. By understanding each other’s perspectives and appreciating the pressures that each team member faces, healthcare workers can build stronger relationships and reduce the likelihood of conflict. Sometimes a simple act of acknowledging a colleague’s workload and offering support would help significantly diffuse a potentially tense situation. In my opinion , conflict resolution is not about avoiding disagreements altogether but about managing them in a way that promotes mutual understanding and cooperation. By addressing conflicts constructively and proactively, healthcare teams can ensure better outcomes for both patients and staff.

UMM KULTHUM IS STILL THE VOICE OF THE ARAB WORLD

MENNA FAROUK & CHRISTY-BELLE GEHA

Half a century after her death, Umm Kulthum’s singular voice still echoes through busy streets in Egypt, across time-worn cafes in Iraq, and in millions of homes from Morocco to Oman. “As long as people listen to music, there will be Umm Kulthum,” said Abu Ahmed, the manager of a Cairo cafe named after the Arab world’s most revered singer. “She still lives in every song and every note,” he said, adjusting the volume on an antique recorder as visitors to the historic bazaar the cafe is housed in peered in from outside. Sepia-toned photographs of the icon adorn the walls of Abu Ahmed’s cafe, alongside posters from her concerts. As her voice in her most famous ballad, “Enta Omri” (You’re My Life), rose to a crescendo, conversation around a nearby table fell to a hush. “Umm Kulthum is the voice of the nation,” Aya Khamis, 36, whispered as she sipped her tea. On a wooden stall just outside, a vendor laid out tiny figurines of Umm Kulthum and her orchestra. Each piece was carefully crafted – musicians in sharp suits, miniature renditions of classical instruments the qanun and the oud, and Umm Kulthum herself, with her signature scarf and sunglasses. “These are my bestsellers,” said Shadi Said, 37, holding up a figurine of the singer. More than 1,000 kilometres away, the same music poured out of Baghdad’s own Umm Kulthum cafe – open since 1970, five years before the singer’s death at 76 plunged the Arab world into mourning. Far away from her state funeral in Cairo, the cafe in Baghdad held its own ceremony for bereaved fans like Iraqi engineer Youssef Hamad. Now 77 and retired, Hamad said he still comes to the same cafe every day to listen to Umm Kulthum’s hours-long concerts. Another cafe-goer, Khazaal Abu Ali, struggled to put his love for her into words. “She once sang ‘if a day passes without seeing you, it can’t count towards my lifetime’. That is how I feel,” the 83-year-old said, his eyes tearing up. “A day without her voice is a day that is lost.” Born in 1898 in a small Nile Delta village, Umm Kulthum rose from humble beginnings to become the most celebrated voice in the Arab world. Her father, an imam, recognised her talent early on, but fearing the ire of early 20th-century Egyptian society, disguised her as a boy so she could perform in public. — AFP

Why preparation makes or breaks your interview

FOR 25 years, while serving as Principal of two schools in Cambridge, I also ran the Careers Department. Aside from helping my students craft strong CVs, complete application forms and choose the best universities or career paths, I also provided them with interview practice. I started these practice interviews nice and gentle, like a friendly chat over coffee. Then, just as they got comfortable, I hit them with the hard questions. One minute we were talking about their hobbies, the next I was asking how they’d handle a full-scale office meltdown with only a stapler and sheer determination. Of course both my students and I knew this wasn’t the real thing, so even if they completely blew the practice interview, it wasn’t a disaster. But I was always amazed by how, in the first couple of practice sessions, many of my students gave answers that would guarantee rejection from any university admissions tutor or potential employer. Here are just a couple of examples. I once asked a student applying to study Medicine at King’s College, Cambridge, what is perhaps the most crucial question of all: “why do you want to become a doctor?” He launched into an in-depth discussion about how the sewage disposal system in his country was outdated and causing widespread disease – then explained how it could be improved. Admirable? Perhaps. Relevant? Absolutely not. No mention of a fascination with medical science, the human body or a passion for alleviating suffering. Not a word about how medicine is a challenging and ever-evolving field that excites him more than any other subject.



KARIM
EASTERBROOK

The writer is a former Cambridge School Principal and an Interview Skills Advisor

Interviews are oral exams and just like written exams, the more you prepare, the less anxious you’ll feel and the more likely you are to succeed

On another occasion I asked a student why he hadn’t performed as well in one of his school subjects. A simple answer – such as admitting he focused too much on subjects he enjoyed and now regretted it – would have sufficed. Instead he blamed a bad teacher, a school transfer following a fight and, to top it all off. Job and university interviews are the perfect opportunity to impress or, for many young people, to completely wreck their chances within the first five minutes. There’s something about being asked “tell me about yourself” that makes some young candidates panic and blurt out their worst qualities. Why does this happen? Why, when given the chance to shine, do so many young people say things like “I’m always late, but I make up for it by running everywhere” or “I get bored easily, so I’m hoping this job is, like, fun?” or worse still “I don’t actually know what this company does, but I really need a job for the money.” It’s as if their brain prepares a solid answer but then suddenly decides “nope, let’s go with chaos instead.” I came to the conclusion that lack of preparation is the main culprit which makes them panic and consequently fail. I have and I remember the anxiety and the feeling of panic. Interviews, whether for a job or a university place, are oral exams and just like written exams, the more you prepare, the less anxious you’ll feel and the more likely you are to succeed. Nerves do strange things to people. Some sweat. Some forget how to use their own hands. And some, apparently, think the best way to secure a job is radical honesty. Take the classic “what’s your greatest weakness?” question. But for some reason, young candidates

treat formal interviews like a confessional booth and sometimes respond with “I have no attention to detail, which is why I almost sent my last essay to my landlord instead of my teacher” or “I get really defensive when people criticise me” or “Deadlines freak me out, so I tend to leave things until the absolute last second.” Another common question is “Why are you applying for this job/university?” This is your chance to show you’ve done your research, highlight what impresses you about the company or university course and explain why you’d be a great fit. However some candidates seem to have been injected with a truth serum moments before the interview and respond with answers like. At the end of the interview, you get a golden opportunity to ask them a question. Ask something that demonstrates genuine interest, such as “can you tell me more about the team I’d be working with?” or “what do you enjoy most about working here?” or “do you have any concerns about my application that I can address now?” However not everyone ruins an interview with brutal honesty. Some try way too hard to sound professional and end up sounding like a malfunctioning robot They might say: “As a highly motivated individual, I am committed to leveraging my skill set to drive results in a synergistic manner” or “I thrive in dynamic work environments that prioritise key performance indicators.” In my experience, most young people fail interviews not because they aren’t good enough but because they aren’t prepared. So if you’ve failed an interview don’t take it personally. Instead learn from your mistakes and prepare for the next one in more detail.

Gandhi or Genghis: Peace or war?



RAY PETERSEN
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THANK goodness for peace in Gaza. It may be fragile and it may be only for some moments in time, offering some relief, both humanitarian in terms of medical aid and physical, offering some quiet and some normality. Hopefully the prospects for continued peace are greater and that a genuine will for resolution emerges from the debris.

The Russia-Ukraine continues, simmering more than explosive, with a new dynamic emerging in the wake of Donald Trump's inauguration as President. Having boasted that he could bring a peaceful resolution "in a single day," the world, the Ukraine and Russia await his intervention. The BBC reported this week that a spokesman for Russia's President Putin, Dmitry Peskov announced they were "waiting for signals," from the Americans and that they were, "ready for an equal dialogue, a mutually respectful dialogue." Ukraine's President Zelensky however remains wary, even cynical just last week saying "Russia does not respect state borders," while telling Europe that 'Putin is coming for you as well.' So, its fingers crossed then for a speedy intervention by America's leader, though his recent sabre-rattling is concerning. During Trump's volatile presidency to date, we have seen pronouncements that he will offer Canada statehood, because it's "costing \$200 billion a year in subsidies and too many illegals are coming from there." He will "take back, the Panama Canal because "China's military controls it," and just take Greenland,

because of the threat from "recent Russian and Chinese Arctic military development." Maybe more Genghis than Gandhi though and hardly the perspective for peace methinks.

The US intentions for Greenland, appear a priority and being in Russia's Arctic backyard, at least unsettling and at worst, alarming. Trump's assertion this week that it is an, "absolute necessity," for international security, that "We're going to have it, because "the people want to be with us." He continued, in rebuttal of Denmark's protective responsibility for the colony, saying it would be an "unfriendly act" by Denmark to not relinquish their ownership status because, "We can provide freedom. They can't."

Though it is composed mainly of ice (80 per cent), Greenland has valuable mineral resources of uranium, iron and more significantly, rare earth metals used in so many of today's digital devices, Greenland would appear to be a tasty commercial morsel. Greenland is home to only 56,000 inhabitants, mostly native Inuits, with fishing as its only significant industry. It survives economically due to massive subsidies from Denmark. These are drawn on the historical basis that, during 1953, it was made a part of the Kingdom of Denmark, giving them Danish citizenship.

Then, in 1979, the Inuits re-asserted their self-determination, although still ceding foreign policy and defence responsibility to their former protectors, Denmark, which still

Hopefully the prospects for continued peace are greater and that a genuine will for resolution emerges from the debris.

applies today.

America has long held an important security presence in Greenland in the form of the Thule Air Base, now the Pituffik Space Base, as providing a buffer against inter-continental missile threats. An Arctic Institute paper, supported by Danish Foreign Minister Lars Lokke Rasmussen, in fact called upon the US to "develop its presence in the Arctic to counter its rivals, due to its legitimate regional interests," as China and Russia continue to develop their military capabilities.

Interestingly, the US has long been covetous of Greenland, with earlier negotiations in 1867, shortly after purchasing Alaska from Russia, being rejected 'off-hand,' by the Danes. Ironically, during Woodrow Wilson's presidency he rejected an offer from Denmark for their protectorate, saying, "It's worthless, just ice. No, I don't want it!" Later in 1946, the Danes reportedly rejected \$100 million as being, 'insufficient,' and more recently, during Trump's earlier term in 2019, Denmark again rejected America for the third time saying, "Greenland is not for sale."

Despite these earlier abortive attempts, President Trump still has a yen (?) for the Arctic colony, however, an obscure piece of legislation from 1917, between Denmark and the United Kingdom that effectively gives the UK first refusal on Greenland.

Effectively, for now it would appear, scuppering the immediate spectre of the Stars and Stripes and McDonald's Golden Arches, over its capital city, Nuuk.

A 'city-killer' asteroid might hit Earth — how worried should we be?

ISSAM AHMED

A colossal explosion in the sky, unleashing energy hundreds of times greater than the Hiroshima bomb. A blinding flash nearly as bright as the Sun. Shock waves powerful enough to flatten everything for miles. It may sound apocalyptic, but a newly detected asteroid nearly the size of a football field now has a greater than one per cent chance of colliding with Earth in about eight years.

Scientists aren't panicking yet, but they are watching closely.

"At this point, it's 'Let's pay a lot of attention, let's get as many assets as we can observing it,'" Bruce Betts, chief scientist of The Planetary Society, said. Dubbed 2024 YR4, the asteroid was first spotted on December 27, 2024, by the El Sauce Observatory in Chile. Based on its brightness, astronomers estimate it is between 130 and 300 feet wide.

2024 YR4 follows a highly elliptical, four-year orbit, swinging through the inner planets before shooting past Mars and out toward Jupiter.

For now, it's zooming away from Earth — its next close pass won't come until 2028.

A similar scenario unfolded in 2004 with Apophis, an asteroid initially projected to have a 2.7 per cent chance of striking Earth in 2029. Further observations ruled out an impact.

The most infamous asteroid impact occurred 66 million years ago, when a six-mile-wide space rock triggered a global winter, wiping out the dinosaurs and 75 per cent of all species.

By contrast, 2024 YR4 falls into the "city killer" category. "If you put it over Paris or London or New York, you basically wipe out the whole city and some of the environs," said Betts.

The best modern comparison is the 1908 Tunguska Event, when an asteroid or comet fragment measuring 30-50 metres exploded over Siberia, flattening 80 million trees across 2,000 square km.

The good news, experts stress, is that we have plenty of time to prepare.

Rivkin led the investigation for NASA's 2022 DART mission, which successfully nudged an asteroid off its course using a spacecraft — a strategy known as a "kinetic impactor." The target asteroid posed no threat to Earth, making it an ideal test subject.

"I don't see why it wouldn't work" again, he said. The bigger question is whether major nations would fund such a mission if their own territory wasn't under threat.

Other, more experimental ideas exist.

Lasers could vaporise part of the asteroid to create a thrust effect, pushing it off course. A "gravity tractor," a large spacecraft that slowly tugs the asteroid away using its own gravitational pull, has also been theorised. — AFP

In Oman, family first line of defence against drugs

DRUGS have become the plague of our times. The spread of drugs to almost every part of the world has become one of the main concerns for governments and societies alike. In the 1990s, drugs were not a major societal issue in Oman. But drugs have become now widely prevalent and more likely to be damaging to individuals and society as a whole.

Oman has long considered the family as the basic unit in society, which traditionally consists of parents rearing their children. The Omani society hinges hope on the family to fight against the spread of such social evils like drugs.

Omani families traditionally follow noble ideals and morals in bringing up their children. Children are taught to adopt and practice good manners, values conforming to accepted standards of conduct and morally excellent behaviour. But what happens nowadays is that the role of family in such rapidly changing ways has slowly begun to give up its traditional role to the control and influence of modern tendencies, along with a gradual shift away from its long established and commonly practiced function.

If we just look back at the hallmarks and distinguishing characteristics of the Omani culture and traditions that were present in the past, we will find that the core values of bringing up children entail that they should possess traits such as fairness and straightforwardness of conduct, kind deeds, generous heart characterised by a noble and kindly spirit, expressions of high and special regard and deference, the capacity and habit of being patient, and firm adherence to moral codes and values.

If such traits are still cultivated since early childhood and have been the case from the very beginning of children's life, there is no doubt that they serve as the early influences and characteristics against bad habits such as drugs



Children must be guided away from bad influences, and habits contrary to tradition and values.



DR MUSALLAM AL MA'ANI

The writer is Dean of Al Zahra College for Women

and other acquired modes of bad behaviour that have become nearly or completely involuntary in our society. Another very important foundational part within the Omani society is religion. As a Muslim country, the role of the family is to bring up children acting in accord with divine and moral law. Islam exhorts its adherents to raise children with strong moral rectitude and integrity. Young people should be taught to live according to ethical and religious values.

Islam often warns its followers against committing any acts that may result in both physical and spiritual harm to one's own, as narrated Surah Al-Baqarah (Verse:195), which clearly says "do not cast yourselves into harm's way". Islam further urges its adherents to

bring up righteous children, without any moral or social decay.

In Islam, parents are responsible for their offspring. If children are morally upright and well-behaved, and adhere to religious and ethical values, they would not become drawn towards drugs or other traits of corruption nor do they get swept away by negative societal habits.

What we should teach our children is to remain firm in belief, determination and adherence to their morals and values. They should also be taught to keep away from bad influences, environments conflicting with generally and traditionally held moral principles, and other destructive tendencies and manners of bad behaviour, while avoiding actions that may lead to moral and ethical compromises.

SPORTS

SHORT TAKES



OMAN ALL SET TO HOST FIH HOCKEY MEN’S NATIONS CUP 2

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, FEB 1

The Oman Hockey Association (OHA) is gearing up to host the FIH Hockey Men’s Nations Cup 2 Oman 2025, which will be staged from February 17 to 23 at the state-of-the-art Oman Hockey Stadium.

With less than 17 days to go, the inaugural edition of the tournament is set to begin in Muscat, marking a significant milestone for emerging hockey nations. This event presents a fresh opportunity for eight ambitious teams, ranked below those competing in the FIH Hockey Nations Cup, to make their mark on the international stage.

The first edition of the championship will feature eight teams vying for the title and promotion to the FIH Hockey Nations Cup in 2026. Pool A comprises Egypt, Chile, China and Poland, while Pool B features the hosts Oman, Austria, Scotland and the United States.

The tournament will commence with group-stage matches, with the top two teams from each group progressing to the semi-finals. The knockout stage will follow, leading to the grand final on February 23, where the first-ever FIH Hockey Men’s Nations Cup 2 champion will be crowned.

This event will serve as a pathway for the participating teams to ascend to the FIH Hockey Nations Cup and ultimately to the FIH Hockey Pro League, offering them the chance to test their skills against some of the best teams in the sport.

FIH awarded Oman the rights to host this inaugural edition of the event, recognising the Sultanate of Oman’s strong hockey infrastructure and development.

The Sultanate of Oman, represented by OHA, has successfully hosted several regional and international hockey events, including the FIH Hockey Olympic Qualifiers and the inaugural edition of the FIH Hockey5s World Cup in 2024, making it an ideal venue for such a prestigious competition.

FIH President Tayyab Ikram affirmed that the FIH Hockey Nations Cup 2 will provide a unique opportunity for teams ranked just below the FIH Hockey Nations Cup to showcase their talent on a global stage.

“This new event enables us to further promote growth and competitiveness within the sport as we bring international exposure to more and more countries around the world. I am sure their performances will not only highlight the skill and talent they possess but also set a new benchmark for future editions of the competition,” he said.

“On behalf of FIH, I would like to express our sincerest gratitude to the Sultanate of Oman, and in particular His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, as well as the Local Organising Committee led by the Oman Hockey Association Chairman, Dr Marwan bin Juma al Juma, for welcoming us once more to their beautiful country,” he added.

On the other hand, Dr Marwan bin Juma al Juma, Chairman of OHA, stated that hosting the FIH Hockey Nations Cup 2 in the Sultanate of Oman is an exceptional opportunity to showcase the nation’s organisational capabilities on the international stage.

“We have demonstrated our ability to organise global sporting events with a high level of professionalism and excellence through our successful hosting of previous tournaments, including the FIH Hockey Olympic Qualifiers and the inaugural edition of the FIH Hockey5s World Cup in 2024.

These tournaments are not just sporting events but also opportunities to highlight the rich tourism, economic and cultural assets that our country enjoys, in addition to contributing to strengthening the position of the Sultanate of Oman as a global sports destination,” he ended.

Abdullah Al Zubair ready for ME rally in Qatar

ANUROOP ATHIPARAMBATH
MUSCAT, FEB 1

OMANI rally driver Abdullah al Zubair will participate in high spirits when he attends the second round of the Middle East Rally Championship hosted in Qatar this weekend. Champion Abdullah al Zubair’s eyes are directed towards the front positions in this round after he and his Omani navigator Taha Soomar were able to score a distinguished result. Abdullah ranked first in the Merc 2 category (Group N) previously.

Abdullah al Zubair will be behind the wheel of a Subaru Impreza (N14), which he drove in the first round in Oman, where he also won the Best Omani Driver award.

Al Zubair had previously announced his participation in all rounds of this season, starting with the first round in Oman and the second in Qatar.

Then, in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for the first time next May, followed by his participation in the fourth round in Jordan, in which he had previously competed.

Al Zubair said, “We have decided to participate in the Qatar International Rally. We have ample information about it and we have the ambition to provide a good race in this rally. We gained additional experience in the Oman



Abdullah al Zubair

International Rally through the stages of the Suhar Rally after a period of non-participation in the races. We also faced some problems there, but we are trying, first and foremost, to reach the finish line safely, and we hope to succeed in eventually reaching the podium if possible. I have a distinguished navigator who has previously participated in many races, and we wish the rest of the competitors success. I thank ARA Petroleum for their support and hope to work to be in the front lines, as I said before.”

Quarterfinals kick off in football eights tournament

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, FEB 1

The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth’s 2025 Government Institutions Football Eights Tournament continues this evening with the quarterfinal matches, featuring four intense clashes. The first match will see Muscat Municipality face Royal Court Affairs, while the second match will bring together the Ministry of Agricultural, Fisheries and Water Resources and the Ministry of Education. In the third match, the State Audit Institution will go up against the Diwan of Royal Court, while the fourth match will feature the Ministry of Labour against the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology. Matches will take place at Al Amal Sports Club Stadium.

ROUND OF 16 RESULTS

The Round of 16 witnessed thrilling encounters, with Muscat Municipality securing a victory over the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion through a 3-2 penalty shootout.

Meanwhile, the Supreme Judicial Council defeated the Ministry of Agricultural, Fisheries and Water Resources 2-1. Royal Court Affairs advanced after winning 3-2 in a penalty shootout against the Central Bank of Oman, while the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Economy



The Round of 16 witnessed thrilling encounters.

triumphed with a 2-0 victory. Additionally, the State Audit Institution overcame the Ministry of Energy and Minerals 2-1, while the Ministry of Labour dominated the Consumer Protection Authority with a 3-0 win.

The Diwan of Royal Court secured their quarterfinal spot after defeating the Ministry of Information in a 4-3 penalty shootout. In the final match, the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology

emerged victorious over the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs in a 4-2 penalty shootout. Commenting on the tournament, Sameer al Azri, a player from Muscat Municipality, stated, “The Football Eights Tournament for Government Institutions has become a prestigious event that fosters fair competition between government entities. It provides employees with a unique sporting atmosphere that enhances interaction and strengthens

relationships among participating institutions. Our qualification for the quarterfinals reflects our team’s strong performance, especially considering the fierce competition we have encountered.

The first-round groups were highly competitive, with only slight differences determining qualification. Moreover, many teams featured experienced players who have previously represented Omani clubs and the national team, which added intensity and excitement to the matches.” Al Azri also highlighted that Muscat Municipality’s ambition aligns with that of all competing teams — to achieve the best possible results and reach the final. He praised the support of the Muscat Municipality President and the continuous encouragement from the Chairman of the Sports Activities Committee, noting that their backing has played a significant role in boosting the team’s morale.

TOP SCORERS

Following the Round of 16, Murshid al Balushi from the Ministry of Labour leads the tournament’s top scorers with five goals, followed by Jassim al Hinai from the Supreme Judicial Council with four goals. In third place is Abdullah al Balushi from the Ministry of Labour, also with four goals.

SHORT TAKES



ALI MAKHSEED
CLINCHES TOP SPOT
IN OI​DC FIRST ROUND

ANUROOP ATHIPARAMBATH
@anuroop_ath

MUSCAT: Former overall winner Ali Makhseed of Kuwait claimed the opening victory of Oman International Drift Championship 2025 when he beat local hope Ahmed al Amri in the first round on Friday night.

At the Oman Automobile Association's (OAA) Muscat Drift Arena, intense twin drift competitions marked the knockout rounds in front of a capacity crowd.

Dutch driver Clint van Oort finished third to make a strong start in the OI​DC 2025.

Ali Makhseed and Ahmed al Amri repeated their one-two spots in the Middle East and North Africa (Mena) section while Omani driver Haitham al Hadidi claimed the third position.

In the National category for Omani drivers, Ahmed al Amri came on top followed by Haitham al Hadidi and Tariq al Shaihani in second and third spots respectively.

As many as 56 drivers from 18 countries competed in the qualifying round for the first round on Thursday. Among them, the top 32 drivers made it to the knockout round on Friday.

The globally recognised drift championship, which began in 2018, will shift action to Suhar for its second and third rounds.

The second round of OI​DC 2025 will be held on February 13 and 14 while the concluding third round will happen on February 20 and 21 at Suhar Drift Arena.

The overall winners in various categories will be crowned after the third round.

The event is being organised by the OAA under the chairmanship of Brigadier Jamal bin Said al Tai, managing director Suleiman al Rawahi and race director Fahmi al Busaidy.



Rana celebrates the wicket of England's Jamie. — Reuters

India clinch T20 series
against England

FAST bowler Harshit Rana came in as a controversial concussion substitute for his T20 debut and returned figures of 3-33 to help India clinch the series against England on Friday.

Hardik Pandya and Shivam Dube, a left-hand batsman, put on 87 for the sixth wicket to lift India from a precarious 79-5 to 181-9 after being invited to bat first in the fourth match in Pune.

Rana and leg-spinner Ravi Bishnoi then took three wickets each as India bowled out England for 166 to win by 15 runs for an unbeatable 3-1 lead in the five-match series.

"Three wickets in one over was too much," India captain Suryakumar Yadav said on his team's early wobble. "But the positivity, and the way Dube and Pandya showed their experience in the middle was great."

India extended their unbeaten T20 series record to 17 at home since 2019.

But Rana dominated TV discussion between commentators when he took the field for Dube, who was hit on the helmet by Jamie Overton in the penultimate ball of the Indian batting innings.

Rana made his T20 debut but his substitution, which was not like-for-like with Dube a batting all-rounder, did not amuse the visitors with cricketer-turned-commentator Kevin Pietersen slamming the move on air.

"It is still a dream debut for me," said Rana. "When Dube came back, after two overs I was informed I will be the concussion



substitute." Rana was instrumental in sending Jos Buttler back when he caught the skipper at short third man off Bishnoi and later got his first T20 wicket for India in Liam Livingstone.

Rana also dismissed Jacob Bethel and played a key bowling role alongside spinners Bishnoi (3-28) and Varun Chakravarthi (2-28).

MAHMOOD'S BOWLING BLITZ
Phil Salt and Ben Duckett set up the chase in a quick-fire opening stand of 62 in 36 balls but their departure raised India's hopes.

Harry Brook smashed 51 off 26 balls

to revive the chase but his dismissal off Chakravarthi, who took another wicket in the over, once again put India ahead.

The rest of the England batting wilted as spinners and Rana combined to pack them off in 19.4 overs.

Earlier England bowled first and speedster Saqib Mahmood, who was added in place of Mark Wood, made an instant impact when he had Sanju Samson caught for 12 with his first ball.

He struck again with the wicket of Tilak Varma to be on a hat-trick, although Indian skipper Suryakumar Yadav managed to avoid it. Yadav, however, lasted only four balls before being dismissed by Mahmood for a duck.

Rinku Singh, who made 30, and Abhishek Sharma, with 29, both attempted to counter-attack with a flurry of boundaries but leg-spinner Adil Rashid broke through with Abhishek's wicket.

Brydon Carse took down Rinku but Dube, who was dropped on zero by Buttler at slip and went on to be named man of the match, and Pandya took on the Indian attack.

"Disappointing, we did some good things," said Buttler. "I dropped a catch and Dube played a really good innings. We were in a fantastic position with the bat, then lost wickets together."

Pandya smashed four fours and four sixes in his 30-ball blitz before being dismissed by Overton and Dube was run out on the final ball. The final match is on Sunday in Mumbai. — AFP

Argentina down Ruud's Norway in Davis Cup qualifying

Paris: Argentina edged Casper Ruud's Norway 3-2 to seal their passage into the second round of Davis Cup qualifying on Friday.

In a tense tie in Oslo which had begun on Thursday world number five Ruud won both his singles matches but Mariano Navone's 4-6, 6-3, 6-4 defeat of Nicolai Budkov Kjaer late into the night knocked Norway out of the competition.

Over in Stockholm world number eight Alex de Minaur helped Australia to a 2-0 lead over Sweden.

De Minaur, a beaten quarter-finalist in the Australian Open, felled Mikael Ymer 7-5, 6-1 before Aleksandar Vukic got the better of Leo Borg, son of 11-time Grand Slam winner Bjorn Borg, 6-4, 6-4.

In Taiwan, the United States



Casper Ruud

claimed both the opening day singles thanks to wins from Marcos Giron and Alex Michelson.

Britain and Japan are all square at 1-1 after day one in Miki. Davis Cup debutant Jacob Fearnley defeated former world number four Kei Nishikori 6-3 6-3 to level the tie after

the home side's Yoshihito Nishioka's 7-5 6-1 victory against Billy Harris.

Germany are on target for the next round, leading Israel 2-0 in their match which is being played in Vilnius, Lithuania and Austria go into day two in control over Finland by the same margin.

Serbia, missing injured Novak Djokovic, are 2-0 up against Denmark and the Czech Republic are also sitting pretty 2-0 in South Korea. Croatia are also 2-0 up against Slovakia. The ties between Brazil v France, Chile v Belgium, Switzerland v Spain and Canada v Hungary, begin on Saturday.

Jannick Sinner's Italy are the two-time defending champions having won the eight-team men's event in Spain in 2023 and last year.

As a result Italy get a free pass to the final in Bologna in November.

The defending champions are taking over hosting duties from Malaga.

The 2024 runners-up the Netherlands get a bye to the second round of qualifying in September.

This weekend's first round features 26 teams competing in 13 ties.

Each tie consists of two singles matches on day one and a doubles match followed by two singles matches on day two.

The 13 winners will advance to the second round.

The Davis Cup was first held in 1900 making it the longest running international men's team event in sport. — AFP



HITS HAT-TRICK AS FLYING FOREST THRASH BRIGHTON 7-0

CHRIS WOOD netted a hat-trick as Nottingham Forest thrashed Brighton 7-0 to reignite their charge towards next season's Champions League at the City Ground on Saturday.

Morgan Gibbs-White, Neco Williams and Jota Silva were also on target after Lewis Dunk's own goal opened the scoring in an astonishing performance from Nuno Espirito Santo's men as they bounced back from a 5-0 defeat at Bournemouth last weekend.

Victory takes Forest level on points with second-placed Arsenal and opens up a seven-point cushion on sixth-placed Chelsea.

Fifth place in the Premier League this season is almost certain to be enough for Champions League qualification due to a strong start by English clubs in European competitions.

Two-time European Cup winners in 1979 and 1980 during the club's heyday under Brian Clough, Forest last played in Europe back in 1996.

But a run of 10 wins from their last 12 games has put them well on course to end that two-decade wait for continental competition.

Brighton boss Fabian Hürzeler set out with a bold selection that included five forwards in his starting 11.

However, that backfired

Victory takes Forest level on points with second-placed Arsenal and opens up a seven-point cushion on sixth-placed Chelsea.



Gibbs-White celebrates scoring second goal. — Reuters

massively as the Seagulls were wide open and punished by Forest's frightening pace and precision going forward.

Dunk gave the hosts a helping hand they did not need after just 12 minutes as he turned Gibbs-White's dangerous low cross into his own net.

On his 100th Forest appearance, Gibbs-White then rose highest to power in a header from Anthony Elanga's corner.

Manchester United will wonder about what they let go in Elanga as the Swedish international cut Brighton open at will down Forest's right side.

His pinpoint cross on the half hour mark left Wood with the simple task to head in his 15th Premier League goal of the season to set his own personal best ever tally for a season in the English top flight.

Two more were to come for the New Zealander, who is enjoying the best spell of his career at 33, after the break.

Elanga was again the creator for the fourth as he dashed towards the by-line and squared for Wood to tap in from point-blank range.

Gibbs-White was then man-handled to the floor by Tariq Lamptey from a corner, allowing Wood the chance to complete his hat-trick from the penalty spot.

Wood is now closing in on Stan Collymore's record of 24 goals as Forest's top scorer for a single season in the Premier League era.

Brighton remain in ninth after a damaging day for their own European ambitions. After a bright start to Hürzeler's reign, the 31-year-old has won just two of his last 11 league games.

It went from bad to worse for the visitors in the closing stages as Williams smashed in from close range. Brighton goalkeeper Bart Verbruggen compounded a miserable day for his side in stoppage time as his pass was intercepted by Jota Silva, who surged forward and fired past the Dutch international. — AFP

BUSINESS



THE DIFFERENCE...

Our History with you

Banking that is proudly human



Oman’s trade surplus exceeds RO 7bn

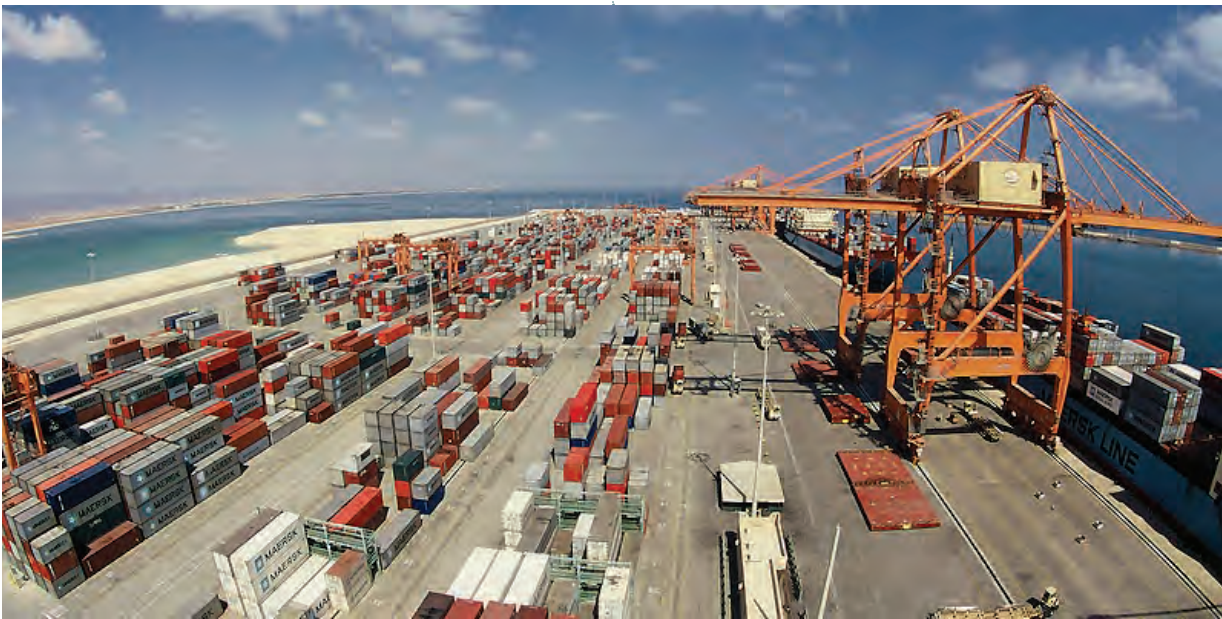
THE Sultanate of Oman recorded a trade surplus of RO 7.14 billion by the end of November 2024, reflecting an increase from RO 6.99 billion in the same period of 2023, according to preliminary data from the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

The total value of commodity exports rose to RO 22.23 billion, marking a 7.7% growth compared to RO 20.64 billion in November 2023. Meanwhile, commodity imports saw an increase of 10.6%, reaching RO 15.09 billion, up from RO 13.64 billion in the previous year.

The growth in exports was primarily driven by oil and gas, which totaled RO 14.99 billion, an increase of 19.7% from RO 12.53 billion in 2023. Crude oil exports increased by 2.5%, reaching RO 9.13 billion, while refined oil exports saw a remarkable 174.9% surge to RO 3.57 billion.

However, exports of liquefied natural gas (LNG) experienced a slight decline of 1.1%, amounting to RO 2.30 billion.

In contrast, non-oil commodity exports recorded a decline of 16.6%, amounting to RO 5.64 billion, down from RO 6.77 billion in



Commodity exports rose to RO 22.23 billion, marking a 7.7% growth compared to RO 20.64 billion in November 2023.

the same period of 2023. Mineral products accounted for the highest share of non-oil exports, reaching RO 1.62 billion, though this represented a 35.2% decrease compared to the previous year.

Metal products and their derivatives followed with exports totaling RO 1.20 billion, reflecting a 1.1% decline.

The export of plastic and rubber products, however, increased by 10.1%, reaching RO 896 million.

The chemical industry sector experienced a 22% drop in exports, totaling RO 725 million, while exports of live animals and animal products declined by 12.3% to RO 320 million. Other products accounted for RO 883 million in exports.

Re-exports from Oman showed positive growth, rising by 18.3% to reach RO 1.59 billion. The re-export of transportation equipment stood at RO 385 million, marking a 2.1% increase.

The re-export of machinery, electrical appliances, and related equipment declined by 4.1% to RO 346 million, while food, beverage, and liquid industry products saw

a 30.2% increase, reaching RO 168 million.

Mineral products recorded a significant 43.1% growth, amounting to RO 119 million in re-exports. Meanwhile, live animals and animal products saw a 13.3% decline, reaching RO 89 million, while other re-exports totaled RO 483 million.

Oman's commodity imports amounted to RO 15.09 billion, with mineral products leading at RO 4.21 billion, representing a 9.5% increase. Machinery, electrical appliances, and related equipment followed, with imports totaling RO 2.61 billion, reflecting a 26% growth.

Imports of metals and their derivatives reached RO 1.45 billion, showing a slight decline of 1.2%.

The chemical industry sector saw imports increase by 2.7%, reaching RO 1.40 billion, while transportation equipment imports rose by 13.1% to RO 1.35 billion. Imports of other products amounted to RO 4.07 billion.

The United Arab Emirates remained Oman's largest trade partner for non-oil exports, reaching RO 935 million, an increase of 8.1% over the previous year. It also led in re-exports, amounting to RO 526 million, and was Oman's top source of imports, with a value of RO 3.60 billion.

Saudi Arabia ranked second in non-oil exports to Oman, with a total of RO 764 million, followed by South Korea at RO 611 million.

Iran ranked second in re-exports, with a value of RO 335 million, followed by Kuwait at RO 110 million. In terms of imports, China ranked as Oman's second-largest supplier, with imports totaling RO 1.62 billion, followed by Kuwait at RO 1.49 billion.

These figures highlight Oman's expanding trade activity, driven by strong oil exports, increased imports, and a growing re-export sector. — **ONA**

Oman’s natural gas production rises

MUSCAT: Oman's total natural gas production and imports reached 56.54 billion cubic metres by the end of December 2024, reflecting a 4.9% increase from the 53.93 billion cubic metres recorded in the previous year.

Industrial projects remained the largest consumers, accounting for 51.3% of gas usage,



The production reflects a 4.9% increase from the previous year.

totaling 29.05 billion cubic metres. Other key sectors

included oil fields (12.13 billion cubic metres), power generation (15.11 billion cubic metres), and industrial zones (251.4 million cubic metres).

Non-associated gas production, including imports, stood at 44.93 billion cubic metres, while associated gas production reached 11.62 billion cubic metres. — **ONA**

Inma opens SME financing applications

MUSCAT: The Small and Medium Enterprises Development Fund (Inma) has started accepting new financing applications for 2025, offering a total allocation of RO 25 million across its branches in Muscat, Suhar and Salalah.

Yahya bin Saleh al Siyabi, Inma's Marketing Director, confirmed that the fund will maintain its existing financing procedures, with repayment periods extended to 8 years for most products.

Loans range from RO 50,000 to RO 500,000, with large companies eligible for financing up to RO 1 million under Islamic financing principles.

Priority sectors for funding this year include tourism, services, infrastructure, transport, oil and gas, industry and



Inma Fund offers a total allocation of RO 25 million across its branches in Muscat, Suhar and Salalah.

trade. Inma also offers on-site business monitoring, accounting support, and financial advisory services to help SMEs succeed. — **ONA**



Al Kawthar Islamic Shariah Compliant Fund

"Winner of the Best Sharia-Compliant Investment Award for the year 2024."

Board of Director Report For the Year ended December 31st, 2024.

Dear Unitholders,

On behalf of the board, I am pleased to present the results of Al Kawthar Fund (Shariah Compliant) for the For the Year ended December 31st, 2024.

In 2024, the fund's performance was notably affected by market volatility stemming from geopolitical uncertainties in the Middle East. While most GCC markets exhibited lackluster performance by the year's end, the Dubai market stood out as an exception. Despite these challenges, the fund has maintained a strong track record in the last 3 years, consistently outperforming its benchmark by 3.81%. This highlights the fund's ability to generate superior long-term returns relative to its benchmark.

Period	Fund Performance	Benchmark Performance
Full Year 2024	-0.09%	3.27%
Full Year 2023	10.09%	5.71% *
Full Year 2022	-7.10%	-6.78% *
Full Year 2021	30.62%	30.02% *

* Customized Index

Global and GCC Markets Performance

Global equity markets ended 2024 with strong gains for the second year in a row, driven by double-digit increases in key developed markets. GCC markets recorded modest gains, with the MSCI GCC Index rising 0.7%. Regional performance was influenced by geopolitical tensions in Gaza, Lebanon, and Syria, as well as Red Sea attacks. Globally, the Russia-Ukraine war and China's slowing economy also affected market sentiment.

The S&P GCC Index recorded a 2.0% gain in 2024, with most GCC markets ending the year in positive territory except for Qatar and Abu Dhabi. Dubai led the region with a remarkable 27.1% surge, followed by Kuwait with an 8.0% increase. Oman, Bahrain, and Saudi Arabia posted modest gains of 1.4%, 0.7%, and 0.6%, respectively. In contrast, Qatar and Abu Dhabi saw declines of 2.4% and 1.7%, respectively. Despite long term mega projects and prospects, KSA the largest market in the region failed to deliver market returns and hence restricted our performance due to our higher allocation in KSA.

Brief Summary of Accounts

Particulars	31 st Dec 2024 RO	31 st Dec 2023 RO
Revenues	248,355	795,646
Total Comprehensive Income	25,701	570,733
Net Asset Value	5,901,240	5,891,369
Fund Capital	5,331,240	5,091,592
NAV per unit	1.107	1.157

Outlook

The outlook for GCC markets remains positive, supported by higher oil prices, Mega project investment, global oil demand and lower interest rates. Oil prices are expected to stabilize between \$70-\$80 per barrel, supporting fiscal budgets across the GCC. Regional GDP growth is forecasted to average 3.4%, with Saudi Arabia and UAE leading at 3.9% and 3.3% respectively. Investment in non-oil sectors and a conducive environment for private-sector growth are expected to sustain momentum in 2025. Lower interest rates are likely to provide additional support, particularly for borrowing-sensitive industries across Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Qatar. However, the global economy might face uncertainty and potential disruption following President-elect Trump's victory. Trump's proposed policies, which could lead to inflationary pressures in the U.S. and global economic realignment. Therefore, we maintain a cautious view of the markets and believe our approach to stock selection and portfolio management shall ensure steady and positive returns over the medium to long term.

Expressions of Gratitude

On behalf of myself and the members of the Board of Directors of the Fund, it is an honor to extend our highest gratitude and appreciation to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik Al Said, may Allah preserve and protect him, for his inspiring leadership and insightful vision, as well as his sincere and dedicated efforts toward the progress and prosperity of Oman. I also extend my thanks to the regulatory authorities and our valued unitholders for their continuous support, with gratitude also extended to the Fund Management Company.

Rashid Al Musalhi
Chairperson

Audited statement of financial position as at 31 December 2024 (Omani Riials)

	31 December 2024 Audited	31 December 2023 Audited
ASSETS		
Current assets		
Investments at fair value through profit or loss	5,761,377	5,750,576
Receivables	44,147	132,652
Cash and cash equivalents	193,755	329,132
Total assets	5,999,279	6,212,360
UNITHOLDERS' FUNDS		
Fund capital	5,331,687	5,091,592
Retained earnings	569,554	799,777
Total Unitholders' funds	5,901,241	5,891,369
LIABILITIES		
Current liabilities		
Redemption payable	0	232,420
Accruals and other payables	98,038	88,571
Total liabilities	98,038	320,991
TOTAL UNITHOLDERS' FUNDS AND LIABILITIES	5,999,279	6,212,360
Net asset value per unit	1.107	1.157

Audited statement of profit or loss and other comprehensive income for the year ended 31 December 2024 (Omani Riials)

	31-Dec-24 Audited	31-Dec-23 Audited
INCOME		
Dividend income from financial assets at fair value through profit or loss	194,084	209,146
Realised gain on sale of financial assets at fair value through profit or loss	26,027	255,456
Unrealised gain on financial assets at fair value through profit or loss	29,489	331,821
Foreign exchange gain	(1,245)	(777)
	248,355	795,646
EXPENSES		
Management, performance, custodian and fund administration fees	(124,701)	(127,574)
General and administrative expenses	(97,952)	(97,339)
	(222,653)	(224,913)
Net profit for the period	25,702	570,733
Earnings per unit	0.005	0.104

Managed By:
Oman National Investment Development Company SAOC
P.O.Box 3028, Postal Code 112, Riwai, Sultanate of Oman, Tel +968 22 300 400 Fax +968 22 300 420
www.tanmia.om

**تنمية TANMIA**
الشركة العمانية للتنمية والاستثمارات الوطنية
Oman National Investments Development Company

ADVERTORIALS

NEWBENEFIT



The cashback is capped at RO 50 per customer, which includes both primary and supplementary cardholders.

NBO OFFERS 20% CASHBACK FOR CREDIT CARD HOLDERS AT SHARAF DG

MUSCAT: The National Bank of Oman (NBO) is delighted to announce an exclusive 20% cashback promotion in collaboration with Sharaf DG from February 2-8, 2025. The promotional campaign allows NBO retail Visa Credit Card holders to enjoy substantial rewards while shopping for electronics at Sharaf DG stores across Oman.

Commenting on this campaign, Maha Saud al Raisi, Assistant General Manager and Head of Product at NBO, said: “ We are excited to partner with Sharaf DG to offer our valued customers an exclusive chance to be rewarded for their purchases.

This collaboration reflects our consistent efforts to enhance the value of NBO retail VISA Credit Cards and provide greater benefits to our customers.

This promotion offers NBO Credit Card holders the chance to earn valuable rewards while shopping for electronics during the campaign. We invite our customers to visit Sharaf DG stores in Oman during the offer period to take advantage of this limited-time promotion and enjoy the exciting cashback rewards.”

Customers making purchases on Easy Payment Plan (EPP) transactions at Sharaf DG stores during the promotional period will receive 20% cashback in the form of NBO Reward Points.

The cashback is capped at RO 50 per customer, which includes both primary and supplementary cardholders. This offer is applicable only on EPP transactions made at Sharaf DG stores in Oman, and it excludes any cancelled or reversed transactions.

Reward points will be credited to customers’ reward accounts within 30 days following the conclusion of the offer period. The cashback offer is exclusive to NBO retail VISA Credit Cards, making it an ideal opportunity for customers to enjoy substantial savings on their electronics purchases.

Rawasi Road Services chooses 4x4 Ford Everest

FORD Oman recently announced that Rawasi Road Services LLC has made a strategic decision to elevate its fleet operations by adding a number of diesel variants of the Ford Everest 4x4 SUV.

This decision highlights Rawasi Road Services’ unwavering commitment to delivering high levels of service and care to its customers by leveraging Ford’s renowned legacy of reliability, power, safety, and efficiency to meet its rigorous business demands.

The Ford Everest 4x4 diesel variant is built to impress, offering a remarkable blend of power, capability, and efficiency for both on-road and off-road adventures. Equipped with a robust turbocharged diesel engine, it delivers an exceptional combination of torque and fuel economy, making it the ideal choice for businesses operating in diverse and demanding environments.

Its intelligent 4x4 system, advanced Terrain Management System, and high ground clearance ensure outstanding performance across all terrains, making it a dependable asset for any enterprise.

Fadi Antoun, PMV & Facilities Manager of Rawasi Road Services, stated, “We are delighted to welcome the Ford Everest 4x4 SUVs to our fleet. The Everest’s remarkable power, cutting-edge safety features and fuel efficiency align seamlessly with our operational needs. Its spacious interior and state-of-the-art technology provide our team with the comfort and confidence they need, whether navigating busy city streets or rugged countryside terrains.”

He further praised Arabian Car Marketing Company, the official distributor of Ford



The Ford Everest 4x4 diesel variant is built to impress, offering a remarkable blend of power, capability and efficiency for both on-road and off-road adventures.

in Oman, saying, “The sales and after-sales teams at Arabian Car Marketing Company have been incredibly supportive and knowledgeable. They took the time to patiently explain and demonstrate the numerous advantages of the Ford Everest 4x4, ensuring we made an informed decision. Their industry-leading after-sales support and care truly enhance our ownership experience, making it an absolute pleasure to own a Ford.”

The Ford Everest 4x4 SUV is a game-changer for businesses seeking versatility and durability. Its robust body-on-frame construction, intelligent driver-assist technologies, and impressive towing capacity make it an exceptional choice for businesses requiring heavy-duty capabilities.

It is equipped with a 296 HP 420 NM, 2.3 L EcoBoost engine that is paired to a 10-Speed SelectShift AT.

Inside, the Ford Everest offers an oasis of comfort and convenience. The full-width coast-to-coast instrument panel, meticulously crafted center console with dual cup-holder recesses, and dash-mounted pop-out cup holders for front seats cater to every need.

Adding to the convenience are integrated wireless charging, a premium leather-trimmed e-Shifter, and an electric parking brake. Rear passengers benefit from improved access to the third row with easy sliding second-row seats, ample storage spaces, and charging outlets for all three rows.

OMAN HOSTED VISION ONE SPC BY TREND MICRO AT OMAN DATA PARK

MUSCAT: In a significant move to fortify Oman’s cybersecurity landscape, Tawasol Integrated Telecom and Oman Data Park (ODP) have entered into a strategic agreement to deliver Trend Vision One SPC (V1SPC), a cutting-edge cybersecurity solution equipped with advanced features, including extended detection and response (XDR).

The signing and launch ceremony took place at the Mandarin Oriental, Muscat. This landmark event celebrated a pivotal milestone in Oman’s digital transformation journey, bringing together key industry leaders to share compelling case studies, success stories and forward-thinking insights.

Mohammed Hassan at Tawasol stated, “In alignment with Oman Vision 2040, this initiative underscores our unwavering commitment to driving digital transformation and strengthening the nation’s technological infrastructure. Through strategic partnerships



The gathering served as a vital networking platform for fostering collaboration and driving innovation within Oman’s expanding cybersecurity ecosystem.

and the adoption of cutting-edge technologies, ODP is empowering organisations to enhance their security maturity while effectively navigating the complexities of the digital landscape.

By Tawasol’s investment and integration of

advanced cyber threat intelligence proposed by Trend Micro, we are improving the sophistication, efficiency and consistency of security strategies. This collaboration not only accelerates threat detection and response capabilities but also fosters a culture of continuous improvement and resilience, reinforcing the nation’s ability to counter even the most advanced and complex cyber threats.”

Eng Maqbool al Wahaibi, CEO of Oman Data Park, remarked, “At Oman Data Park, our mission has always been to play a pivotal role in advancing Oman’s technological landscape by aligning the latest innovations with the nation’s strategic priorities.

The launch of V1SPC is a testament to the power of collective expertise and a shared vision for safeguarding Oman’s digital future. By addressing key challenges, this initiative enables organisations to operate with confidence in an increasingly complex digital landscape.

Oman AI Summit 2025 witnesses record-breaking attendance

MUSCAT: With over 3,000 attendees, 100 exhibitors, and more than 70 international speakers from more than 40 countries, the 2nd edition of the Oman AI Summit, which took place at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC) on January 27–28, 2025, saw record-breaking attendance.

The summit established its status as one of the most significant AI and technology events in the region, with over ten foreign institutions participating.

Under the auspices of HH Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar, and with Strategic Partners including the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MoTCIT) and the Telecommunication Regulatory Authority (TRA), the summit aligned with Oman’s ambitious goals outlined in Oman Vision 2040.



The summit established its status as one of the most significant AI and technology events.

With “Sustainable Digital Investment towards Oman Vision 2040” as its topic, the summit focused on how artificial intelligence could revolutionise sectors and economies in the future. Together, industry pioneers, experts, and thought leaders explored AI-driven solutions that enhanced Oman’s

goal of a knowledge-based, diverse economy. Innovative developments, the application of AI in an ethical manner, and the significance of digital transformation to sustainable development were the key subjects covered in the sessions.

Key agenda topics discussed at the summit included:

- **The Future of AI in Oman:** This session focuses on how AI can help advance important industries like healthcare, education, and energy while aligning with Oman Vision 2040 objectives.
- **AI for Economic Diversification:** Discussion about how AI can support sectors like manufacturing, logistics, and tourism to assist Oman’s economy become more diversified.
- **AI and Sustainability:** Discussed how resource optimisation and the development of green energy solutions are two ways AI may support environmental

sustainability.

- **Ethical AI:** Stressed the significance of developing impartial, transparent and equitable AI systems to guarantee trust and inclusivity.
- **AI as a Job Creator:** Examined how AI might open new career paths in a variety of industries and the necessity of educating workers in AI skills.

The success of the Oman AI Summit 2025 was bolstered by the support of prominent sponsors and partners, including: Exceed IT Services, Huawei, SenseTime MEA, Lufthansa, Omantel, CloudianInc, Oxford Insights, OSHRM and many more from across the globe.

These collaborations were crucial in promoting thought-provoking conversations, exhibiting state-of-the-art AI solutions, and strengthening linkages between business leaders, governmental organisations and educational institutions.

BUSINESS

SHORTTAKES



China remained Oman's top oil importer, receiving 289.22 million barrels.

OMAN’S OIL EXPORTS SURPASS 308 MILLION BARRELS

MUSCAT: Oman’s oil exports totalled 308.42 million barrels by the end of December 2024, with an average price of \$81.2 per barrel, according to data from the National Centre for Statistics and Information.

Oil exports accounted for 84.9% of the total 363.29 million barrels produced, although total exports saw a slight 0.6% decline from 310.33 million barrels in 2023.

Crude oil production fell 6.5% to 278.02 million barrels, while condensate production reached 85.27 million barrels. Daily oil output averaged 992,600 barrels.

China remained Oman’s top oil importer, receiving 289.22 million barrels (1.3% increase), followed by South Korea (5.77 million barrels, +10.6%), Japan (5.66 million barrels, -39.7%), and India (3.00 million barrels, +10.6%).

— ONA

SYMPOSIUM TO BOOST SME GROWTH IN OMAN

MUSCAT: The Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), through its Small and Medium Enterprises (SME) Committee, is set to host the Symposium on Small and Medium Enterprises in the Prosperous Era – “Tamkeen and His Highness” on February 5 at its headquarters, in collaboration with Rima Integrated Foundation.

Shaikh Ahmed bin Amer al Maslahi, Chairman of the SME Committee at OCCI, stated that the symposium aims to empower SMEs by addressing key challenges and opportunities in the local market. The discussions will also focus on financing options and the role of local content programmes in fostering SME growth.

An exhibition showcasing SME products and services will be held alongside the event, providing a platform for entrepreneurs to market their offerings, expand their customer base, and network with investors and supporting institutions. — ONA

AI’s transformative impact on Oman’s banking sector

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, FEB 1

ARTIFICIAL intelligence (AI) is revolutionising Oman’s banking industry, bringing sweeping changes to fraud detection, anti-money laundering (AML) compliance, and operational efficiency.

However, financial institutions must navigate data governance challenges, regulatory compliance, and ethical AI use to fully harness AI’s potential, according to Dr Jihad bin Rashid al Wahshi, Head of Data Management at the Central Bank of Oman (CBO).

In an interview with *Observer* on the sidelines of the Oman AI Summit 2025, Dr Al Wahshi emphasised that AI-driven systems are transforming the fight against financial crime by enabling real-time fraud detection and predictive analytics.

“Traditional fraud detection systems often struggle to keep up with evolving threats, leading to high volumes of false positives,” he said.

“AI, particularly machine learning, can analyse vast amounts of data to identify subtle anomalies, allowing banks to act proactively rather than reactively.” However, he noted that the effectiveness of AI models depends on high-quality data, regulatory alignment, and continuous adaptation to emerging threats.

“Fraudsters are becoming more sophisticated, even using adversarial AI to manipulate models,” he warned. “This requires a multi-layered approach that combines robust data governance, continuous model training, and strict compliance frameworks.”

AI ENHANCING ANTI-MONEY LAUNDERING COMPLIANCE

AI is also proving to be a game-changer in AML compliance, streamlining processes that have traditionally been labour-intensive and prone to inefficiencies.

Dr Al Wahshi highlighted that conventional rule-based AML systems



“Traditional fraud detection systems often struggle to keep up with evolving threats, leading to high volumes of false positives. AI, particularly machine learning, can analyse vast amounts of data to identify subtle anomalies, allowing banks to act proactively rather than reactively.”

DR JIHAD BIN RASHID AL WAHSHI
Head of Data Management, CBO

the importance of explainability and accountability in AI-driven compliance.

AI systems must be transparent and auditable,”Dr Al Wahshi noted.

“Financial institutions must ensure that automated decisions can be explained to regulators, auditors and customers.”

INNOVATION, SECURITY AND THE FUTURE OF BANKING

The integration of emerging technologies such as AI, blockchain, and cloud computing is essential to fostering a secure and efficient financial ecosystem in Oman.

AI enhances risk management and decision-making, while blockchain ensures

generate excessive false positives, overwhelming compliance teams.

“AI-driven AML solutions enable dynamic transaction monitoring and intelligent risk scoring,” he explained.

“They assess transactional data in real time, identifying patterns that indicate potential money laundering activities.”

However, he stressed that AI’s effectiveness in AML hinges on strong data governance.

“Data silos and inconsistent formats hinder AI’s ability to generate accurate insights,” he said.

“Ensuring data integrity, traceability, and security is paramount for both compliance and customer trust.”

Regulatory bodies are increasingly emphasising

transparency in cross-border transactions and digital identity verification. Cloud computing, meanwhile, facilitates the scalability of AI-driven solutions.

“To fully leverage these technologies, Oman’s financial sector must adopt a collaborative approach involving regulatory authorities, financial institutions, and technology providers,” Dr Al Wahshi said.

“Regulatory frameworks should evolve to support innovation while maintaining stringent security and data protection standards.”

He also underscored the importance of workforce upskilling, as AI adoption requires specialised expertise.

“The talent gap in AI and data science remains a challenge,” he noted. “Investing in training programmes and fostering partnerships with universities can help bridge this gap.”

OVERCOMING AI ADOPTION CHALLENGES IN BANKING

While AI presents immense opportunities, several hurdles must be addressed to ensure its successful adoption in Oman’s banking sector. These include:

Data Quality and Integration: Many banks operate in siloed data environments, limiting AI’s ability to generate accurate insights. A strong enterprise-wide data governance framework is necessary to address this issue.

Legacy IT Systems: Outdated banking infrastructure is not optimised for AI-driven solutions. A phased digital transformation strategy, including cloud adoption, can help integrate AI seamlessly.

Regulatory Uncertainty: AI adoption in banking is still evolving within Oman’s regulatory landscape. Financial institutions must engage with regulators proactively to shape policies that ensure compliance without stifling innovation.

Dr Al Wahshi also highlighted the importance of ethical AI governance. “AI must be deployed responsibly,” he stated. “Banks should establish internal AI ethics committees to oversee compliance with regulatory guidelines and ethical standards.”

OMAN’S MONEY SUPPLY REACHES RO 24.8 BILLION

MUSCAT: Oman’s broad money supply grew 11% year-on-year to reach RO 24.8 billion by the end of November 2024, driven by a 22.1% rise in narrow money and a 7.1% increase in quasi-money.

Data from the Central Bank of Oman indicated an 8% drop in cash

held by the public, while demand deposits surged 30.1%.

Deposit interest rates on Omani rials increased from 2.603% in November 2023 to 2.733% in November 2024, while lending rates rose from 5.485% to 5.667%.

Interbank overnight lending rates

declined to 4.563% from 5.459%, reflecting the impact of US Federal Reserve policies.

The Central Bank of Oman also noted a decrease in the weighted average repurchase rate, which fell to 5.308% from 6% in the same period last year. — ONA

\$100m credit facility to power Advario’s liquid logistics services in Oman

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, FEB 1

A \$100 million credit facility, signed recently by liquid logistics specialist Advario Terminals with a consortium of banks, will help secure the capital financing needs of its Oman operations, as well as fund its future growth ambitions, according to key company executives.

In exclusive remarks to the *Observer*, Hazza al Raisi, Finance Director, and Mark Geilenkirchen, Vice-President Growth Middle-East, described the strategic financing as not only a testament to the company’s robust fundamentals, but also its ability to sustain value creation for its many stakeholders, comprising a mix of local and international public and private sector entities.

“The financing package demonstrates the confidence of lender institutions in Advario Oman’s performance, its business model and future prospects as a leading liquid logistics services provider in the



High-level officials of Advario Terminals Oman with representatives of lenders pictured at the credit facility signing.

Sultanate of Oman,” commented Geilenkirchen. The financing will contribute to increasing capital flexibility and optimising the company’s balance-sheet.”

Al Raisi described the credit facility as a club deal with a consortium of leading two local banks – Bank Muscat and National

Bank of Oman - and two regional banks – Mashreq Bank and Abu Dhabi Commercial Bank. The 7-year tenor of the credit facility builds on Advario’s roughly two decades-long relationship with the local banks, while fostering new relationships with the regional banks, he noted.

Advario – a carve-out of Oiltanking Terminals – operates a major terminal at Sohar Port that provides bulk liquid logistics services to tenants, as well as customers and traders from around the global energy sector.

With a storage capacity of nearly 1.4 million cubic metres and a wide range of tank types and sizes, the terminal is equipped to offer liquid bulk handling, terminating, storage, blending and other such services to clients.

Tanks ranging in capacities from 2,000 cubic metres to 55,000 cubic metres handle a variety of petroleum products, notably gasoline, gasoil and naphtha, but also a range of chemical products as well.

Commenting on the terminal’s operational performance during 2024, Al Raisi said it broadly mirrored the 2023 performance in terms of liquid throughput volumes and handling activities.

Advario’s Sohar facility consistently attracts international clients due to its exceptional customer service, characterised by

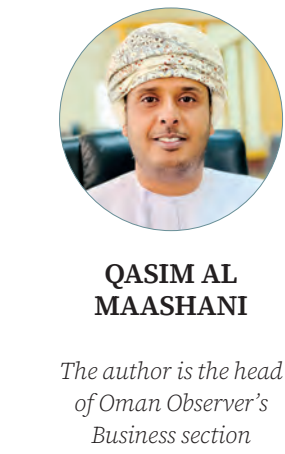
minimal wait times and efficient service delivery, he said.

During a high-visit to Oman last September, top officials from Advario’s Rotterdam headquarters pledged to support Oman’s sustainable development and its broader energy transition. Represented by Bas Verkooijen, CEO, and Douglas Van Der Wiel, Chief Commercial Officer, the executives also discussed a possible role for the company in supporting the country’s Net-Zero strategy.

During meetings with Omani energy sector officials, Advario pledged to offer its expertise in the development of integrated cryogenic storage and logistics infrastructure to help Oman in the design, construction and safe operation of such infrastructure necessary to position the country as a leading exporter of low-carbon products.

Advario Oman’s joint venture partners include OQ, the Omani state-owned integrated energy group, Star Energy (Abu Dhabi) and Seven Seas (Oman).

Oman investment court: Pioneering legal reform to attract investor



AS Oman marches toward Oman Vision 2040 goals of economic diversification and sustainability, the establishment of an Investment and Commercial Court marks a turning point. This specialised judicial body is designed to resolve disputes efficiently, ensuring transparency and investor confidence. While Oman is no stranger to modernising its economy, this move underscores its intent to compete on a global scale. Specialised courts have become the gold standard for countries aiming to attract foreign direct investment (FDI). Qatar's Investment and Trade Court and the Dubai International Financial Centre (DIFC) Courts are prime examples of how targeted legal reform can boost investor confidence. Oman's initiative draws on such successful models while tailoring the approach to its unique legal and economic landscape. The court's primary mandate is threefold: resolve disputes swiftly, enhance investor trust, and create a fair playing field for

international and domestic businesses. Delays in commercial litigation are often a significant deterrent for global investors. Oman's new court, equipped with specialised judges and a streamlined process, is poised to eliminate this hurdle. This reform also comes with a clear digital vision. Embracing cutting-edge technologies will accelerate case management, reduce procedural inefficiencies, and ensure accessibility for investors worldwide. In an era where businesses demand speed and accuracy, Oman is positioning itself as a responsive and forward-thinking destination. The move is especially timely as the Middle East pivots toward non-oil sectors. Oman, with its strategic location at the nexus of global trade routes, is a natural hub for logistics, technology, and renewable energy industries. A robust legal framework will be critical to fostering growth in these sectors. The question for global investors now is

This specialised judicial body is designed to resolve disputes efficiently, ensuring transparency and investor confidence. While Oman is no stranger to modernising its economy, this move underscores its intent to compete on a global scale.

not whether Oman is ready to embrace its potential—it's whether they are ready to seize the opportunity Oman offers. The court's establishment sends a clear message: Oman is open for business, and its doors are wide open to those seeking a stable, transparent and investor-friendly environment. While challenges remain—such as the need to educate international stakeholders on Oman's legal advancements—this bold step signifies the country's determination to align its judiciary with its economic ambitions. As Oman integrates global best practices into its legal system, it reaffirms its commitment to becoming a competitive global investment hub. Oman's Investment and Commercial Court is more than just a legal reform; it is a gateway to a future where the rule of law supports sustainable growth, fostering trust among investors and businesses alike. It's not just a win for Oman; it's a signal for global markets to take notice.

DONALD TRUMP TRUSTBUSTERS FLASH A CLEAR M&A SIGNAL

BY JONATHAN GUILFORD

EVERYONE from the boss of Goldman Sachs to starry-eyed investors expects corporate match-makers to enjoy a renaissance under President Donald Trump. After all, his predecessor's trustbusters subjected mergers to extraordinary scrutiny, attempting to block them for novel, difficult-to-predict reasons. Yet not even two weeks into the new administration, the Department of Justice sued to stop Hewlett Packard Enterprise's \$14 billion acquisition of Juniper Networks. While new leadership is not yet in place, the fact it happened signals at least some continuity. Compared to, say, arguments over oddball theories of harm, this case is straightforward. HPE is a goliath in providing technical gear and services to big businesses. Among those is wirelessly connecting computers and equipment like printers. Juniper is an insurgent, breaking through with an artificial intelligence-infused offering dubbed Mist that helps companies keep networks running smoothly. By 2023's end, just before the deal was announced, revenue from Mist and its associated products was growing by nearly 70% annually. It looks like an entrenched incumbent is stomping out nascent competition. A quoted email from one HPE sales executive sums it up. Both companies are much smaller than Cisco Systems, which has roughly 42% of the market, according to consultancy IDC. But a combined HPE-Juniper would be a solid second, resulting in a duopoly with over 70% per cent of the US market, according to the complaint. Investors were caught flat-footed by reports of a possible lawsuit after lifting Juniper's stock towards the \$40 per share offered by HPE. Perhaps they should have expected a blast from the past: deal reviews are run by staff that will still largely be in place. The department is led by acting head Omeed Assafi until Trump's permanent nominee Gail Slater secures confirmation. Still, Assefi served in Trump's last DOJ and told staff not to expect any "relaxation" of enforcement, Bloomberg reported. Besides, the last time Republicans held the White House, it was not quite a laissez-faire, anything-goes era. The rate of deal challenges held roughly steady compared to the Obama administration. Caveats are warranted given Trump is hardly afraid to break violently with the past such as freezing civil rights litigation or trying to stop federal spending. Things will change – but maybe not quite as much as bankers might hope. — Reuters

Industry's contribution to the Omani economy

AS with many countries, the industrial sector of Oman has important benefits as well as plays a key role in the growth and development of the economy. In the end, the government has made significant progress in building the strong industrial base of the Sultanate of Oman. Internally, industries create new jobs, earn foreign exchange, stimulate investment and innovation, and contribute to the nationality of the country. This article discusses the development of the Omani industry economy and the local economy including its role in economic diversification, employment creation, foreign investment, and development sustainability.

ECONOMIC DIVERSIFICATION AND INDUSTRIAL GROWTH Expanding the economy is one of the critical areas of focus on the strategic plan of Oman Vision 2040. Rotary diversification comes hand in hand with the expansion of oil revenues, therefore, the government is also targeting sectoral industrialisation for expansion of manufacturing, petrochemical, mining and logistics. Additionally, the industrial growth results in economic contributions in output in the form of increase in GDP. It also strengthens the national economy competitive resilience to oil price volatility.

There is a wide range of consumables in which the Omani industry is engaged in and one of such major sub sectors is manufacturing. It includes production of steel, cement, food items, chemicals, etc. The manufacturing sector has grown as a result of the establishment of export processing zones such as Sohar Industrial City, Rusayl Industrial City, and Salalah Free Zone, which have increased exports and reduced imports. Oman has managed to develop a dynamic petrochemical industry by utilising the natural resources of the country. The main players in developing this particular industrial sector are the Sohar Refinery and Duqm Refinery, which refine crude oil into usable products, like plastics, fertilisers and synthetic materials. These industries allow for increased exports while also



Industries create new jobs, earn foreign exchange, stimulate investment and innovation, and contribute to the nationality of the country.

assisting in the growth of other related industries, which strengthens the trade balance.

EMPLOYMENT CREATION AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT The industrial sector is a great contributor to job growth and provides numerous direct and even more indirect employment opportunities.

While encouraging the growth of industries, the government's Omanisation strategy is putting measures to increase employment of locals while reducing strain of expat labour.

Oman has put more effort in creating training centres and technical institutes both for the support of the growing industrial workforce and for the Omani people to acquire these skills.

The collaboration between industries and educational institutions assists in ameliorating the skill set for the employment opportunities that await in the fields of manufacturing, engineering and logistics.

ENCOURAGEMENT OF FOREIGN INVESTMENT Investment from foreign countries presents numerous opportunities for Oman. Hence, Oman is also focusing on attracting foreign direct investment (FDI) in the industrial sector. Similarly, Oman has added economic zones and free trade

agreements which serve as an attraction for foreign investment businesses to open operations in Oman for the benefit of the economy and transfer of technology. Duqm Special Economic Zone (SEZAD) and Salalah Free Zone are some of the important economic areas that offer tax breaks along with help in infrastructure and basic rules regarding doing business in Oman. These areas are meant to be industrial centres to encourage trade and manufacturing for better exports and job opportunities. With the right import and export policies in place, Oman can improve its trade balance. In view of the need to strengthen the economy, Oman will focus on their industrial exports which include petrochemicals, aluminium, steel and food products. With the increase in available manufactured goods for sale in international markets, Oman can competitively become involved in trade and gain a strong position globally. As industries grow, sustainability is prioritised. Oman's policies seek to promote industries that are environmentally friendly, strive to lessen carbon footprints, and make resources more efficient. Renewable energy projects, as well as green manufacturing, are vital for ensuring that industrial development is not at the expense of the natural environment.



DR HILAL AL SAWAI

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A R T

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FOR ECONOMIC GROWTH > 20

ENTERTAINMENT

Beyonce leads Grammys pack at gala backdropped by deadly fires



MUSIC'S biggest stars including Beyonce and Taylor Swift will vie for top awards at Sunday's Grammys gala, a glitzy ceremony proceeding despite devastating wildfires in Los Angeles.

The shell-shocked entertainment capital is still reeling after the deadly blazes razed entire neighbourhoods, leaving the music and film industries — vital to the city's economy — grappling with how to navigate the coming awards season.

Many annual Grammy week functions were scrapped, including prominent parties organised by top labels and companies like Spotify.

But Harvey Mason Jr, the head of the Recording Academy behind the Grammys, said the gala would go on as planned at Crypto.com Arena "in close coordination with local authorities" — and with an eye towards raising money for wildfire relief.

Beyonce and her groundbreaking "Cowboy Carter" album that vaunted Black cowboy culture lead this year's Grammy hopefuls, with 11 chances at a prize. The megastar is already the most nominated and most decorated Grammy winner, but also the most conspicuously snubbed: she's never won the gala's most prestigious Album and Record of the Year trophies.

"Cowboy Carter" is her fifth studio album vying for the top prize (she also was shortlisted as a featured artist on Lady Gaga's "The Fame Monster"), with Swift — who has won it a record four times — among her rivals.

Though her sprawling double album "The Tortured Poets Department" left critics wanting, Swift — who just wrapped her record-setting Eras Tour — enters the night with six chances at Grammys gold. Eilish, another perennial contender, has seven nominations, while a buzzy group of artists including pop sensations Charli XCX (eight nods), Sabrina Carpenter (six) and Chappell Roan (six) are all in the running for major prizes. Hip-hop laureate Kendrick Lamar — whose dig-heavy rap battle with Drake spawned "Now Like Us," one of the year's most viral songs — scored seven nods, and the shapeshifter Post Malone, who recently worked with both Beyonce and Swift, scored eight. Both are featured in the top categories. — AFP

QUICK FEATURES



FESTIVAL

French chef Paul Marcon (L) celebrates with his team after winning the 2025 Bocuse d'Or cooking competition in the Eurexpo exhibition hall in Chassieu, near Lyon, central-eastern France. —AFP



EVENTS

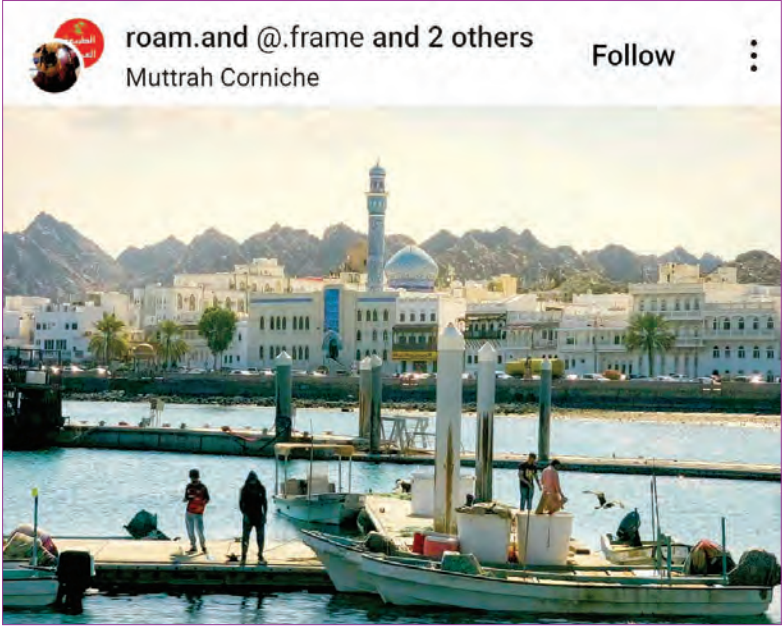
Italian-French former model and singer Carla Bruni arrives to attend the presentation of creation for Valentino during the Women's Haute-Couture Spring/Summer 2025 Fashion Week, in Paris. —AFP



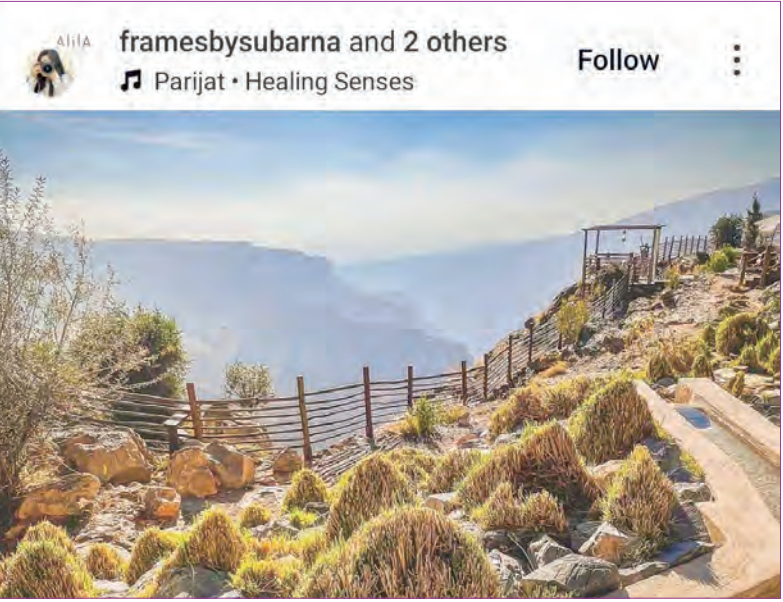
LIFESTYLE

Members of the Up Helly Aa 'Jarl Squad' use torches to set fire to their Viking longship, in Lerwick, Shetland Islands. Up to 1,000 'guizers' (men in costume) joined the festival. —AFP

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Chanel unveils light and colourful haute couture collection



FRENCH FASHION house Chanel unveiled a light and colourful Spring-Summer 2025 haute couture collection last week in Paris, crafted by its creative studio rather than new artistic director Matthieu Blazy. Celebrities including Kylie Jenner and Pamela Anderson watched the show at the Grand Palais, a vast glass-roofed exhibition space where models strutted on a structure shaped like the brand's double-C logo. Chanel's studio took on creative duties following the sudden departure of Virginie Viard as artistic director in June. Blazy was appointed last month but will not debut his first creations until September. The French fashion house

said in a statement the show was conceived as scenario of colours "starting at dawn and beginning again after nightfall". The show began with tweed suits in white, pastel yellow, aqua green or lilac before transitioning into brighter hues and ending with evening gowns in dark blue and black. Suits were reimagined and modernised, while the dresses were lightweight, crafted from muslin or satin, sometimes adorned with sequins, and ranging from short to long. A striking sky-blue cape worn over a short sequined dress evoked the style of a fairy-tale princess. The collection was paired with strappy shoes —flat and heeled — in sky blue, lilac, white, or cream, all featuring a black pointed toe. —AFP



Opera Masterpieces leave ROHMA audience spellbound

BY GEORGINA BENISON
PHOTOS KHALID AL BUSAIDI

THE Mariinsky Theatre orchestra and soloists from St Petersburg graced the Royal Opera House of Musical Arts last Friday evening with an extraordinary concert titled "Opera Masterpieces," featuring the dynamic musical directorship of Valery Gergiev. This event unfolded between their impressive performances of "Simon Boccanegra" and comprised an enthralling 90-minute recital, expertly showcasing Russian and Italian compositions. The evening began with the Mariinsky Orchestra, under the spirited leadership of Concert Master Lorenz Nasturica-Herschcowiski, performing Glinka's renowned "Ruslan and Ludmila" Overture. Gergiev's brisk interpretation highlighted the orchestra's crisp accuracy and the lush warmth of the cellos. Vladislav Kuprijanov captivated the audience with Tchaikovsky's aria "Ya vas lyublyu" from "Queen of Spades," showcasing his rich baritone and minimalist stage presence that conveyed a proud yet nuanced performance. Conversely, Vladislav Sulimsky delivered a light-hearted rendition of "Tomskey's Ballade" with his expressive bel canto style, humorously supported by a small chorus. Gleb Perjazez, the evening's sole bass, enchanted with Borodin's "Ni sna ne otdykha" from "Prince Igor," matched perfectly by the warm orchestral colours, including harp and horns. His dramatic interpretation left a lasting impression. Tenor Sergei Skorokhodov presented a moving rendition of Lensky's Aria, "Kuda vi udalilis," from Tchaikovsky's "Eugene Onegin," enriched by the delicate woodwind and cello accompaniment. Alexander Mikhailov's robust performance of Rossini's "Si, ritrovarla io giuro" from "Cinderella" demonstrated impressive agility through intricate bel canto passages. Later, Tatyana Serjan, dressed elegantly, delivered



"Io son l'umile ancella" from Cilea's "Adrian Lecouvreur" with a warm mezzo-soprano tone that beautifully intertwined with the first violinist before culminating in a rich orchestral swell. The programme continued with the stirring Overture to Verdi's "La Forza del Destino," featuring a haunting oboe melody, atmospheric strings, and a dramatic crescendo that set a powerful tone. Sulimsky returned for a commanding performance of "Cortigiani, vil razza dannata" from "Rigoletto," which maintained a strong sense of foreboding alongside a duet with first cellist Oleg Sendetsky. A highlight came with Anzhelika Minasova's performance of "Un bel Di Vedremo" from Puccini's "Madama Butterfly." Her expansive, emotional range emphatically captured her character's heartbreak, transitioning from youthfulness to poignant sadness. Minasova continued with Gleb Perjazez in



Mozart's "La ci darem la mano," their chemistry evident in the charming interplay of their voices. Roman Burdenko delivered a formidable portrayal of Verdi's Macbeth in "Perfidi! All'Anglo contro me v'unite!", showcasing a rich timbre and dynamic presence that effectively contrasted the aria's lyrical passages. His strong finish included a perfectly executed a capella cadenza, earning significant applause. The evening reached its pinnacle with Sergei Skorokhodov's riveting performance of Puccini's iconic "Nessun Dorma" from "Turandot." His execution transcended the familiar benchmarks set by past performances, culminating in a breathtaking high note. As the concert concluded, an ethereal off-stage ladies' chorus sent the audience into the night with angelic harmonies, highlighting the exceptional talent present throughout the night.

FEATURES

OMAN
DESIGN WEEK,
A GREAT
START FOR
WHAT COULD
BECOME A
CATALYST FOR
ECONOMIC
GROWTH

BY YERU EBUEN

OMAN, a nation famed for its harmonious blend of tradition and modernity, has embarked on an inspiring journey with the inaugural Oman Design Week.

This event not only amplifies Oman's burgeoning creative industry but also serves as a vibrant platform for designers, artists, and art enthusiasts to celebrate the transformative power of design.

Featuring ten remarkable installations, Oman Design Week showcased a wealth of talent, underscoring the profound potential of Omani artistry. Among these installations, the debut of Mays—the first car designed in Oman—stands as a symbol of innovation and local craftsmanship, deserving of recognition and support as it strives towards future acclaim.

As visitors traversed the exhibitions, they were captivated by the stunning Shining Mountain installation, which artfully combined mirrors to reflect Oman's beautiful mountainous landscape.

This piece beautifully encapsulates the essence of both Oman's topography and its unique inspiration, creating a compelling visual dialogue with nature. Further enchanting the audience was the Golden Rain installation, composed of delicate golden threads with amber-like droplets, evoking the ethereal beauty of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar rain.

These works speak volumes about the potential of Omani and Oman-based artists to create not just artworks but cultural narratives that resonate with both local and global audiences.

Events like Oman Design Week are vital not only for artistic expression but also for economic prosperity, as they foster an environment ripe for innovation and collaboration.

Similar to prominent design weeks around the globe—such as Milan Design Week, New York Design Week, and London Design Festival—Oman Design Week brings together a world of creativity, showcasing diverse talents and ideas that can generate substantial economic benefits. Milan, for instance, positions itself as a global design capital, attracting millions of visitors and boosting the local economy through design-centric tourism and exhibitions.

Likewise, New York Design Week integrates commercial and artistic interests, facilitating dialogues that advance the design profession and elevate contemporary artistic expressions.

The blend of art, commerce, and sustainability discussed at Oman Design Week reflects a growing trend in the global design landscape. Local designers were not just displaying their work; they were engaging in discussions around sustainability and the evolution of design practices that honour both tradition and innovation. Workshops throughout the event empowered Omani youth, providing them



with hands-on experiences that are essential for nurturing the next generation of creative thinkers and makers.

Moreover, the economic implications of such events cannot be overstated. When carefully curated, they can draw significant tourism to the region, enhance the visibility of local crafts, and create opportunities for partnerships with international designers, thereby establishing a robust creative economy.

Just as Dubai Design Week brings together a myriad of professionals—from artists to furniture and interior designers—Oman Design Week holds the potential to mirror this success by offering a comprehensive showcase of Omani creativity that can attract diverse audiences and industry stakeholders. Such synergy between established and emerging talents can lead to sustainable ventures that benefit both individuals and the wider community.

As we reflect on the achievements of the inaugural Oman Design Week, it is evident that this event marks a pivotal moment in the nation's cultural timeline. The collaborations fostered by this initiative illustrate the comprehensive potential of

Omani artistry and its capacity to thrive on the world stage. However, for Oman Design Week to evolve further, it needs stronger support from both the government and the private sector. By investing in this creative ecosystem, stakeholders can help cultivate a sustainable platform for innovation that resonates beyond Oman's borders.

To ensure the future success of Oman Design Week, it is vital for the organisers to understand that effective communication of its value is vital. By harnessing the power of media and strategic marketing, the event can cultivate cultural exchange and solidify its status as an emerging hub for design and innovation in the region. This approach not only elevates the event but also showcases creativity as a powerful driver for economic growth and social cohesion in Oman.

Increased media presence can inspire visitors, artists, and industry professionals to engage with the event, creating a ripple effect that fosters tourism and collaboration. This influx will result in tangible benefits, such as heightened economic activity, new business opportunities for local designers, and enhanced reputation for Oman as a vibrant cultural destination.