

OMAN
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PRAYER TIMINGS
FAJR 05:31 AM
DHUHR 12:25 PM
ASR 03:34 PM
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NEYMAR,
AL HILAL
AGREE TO END
CONTRACT

LEADERS REVIEW BILATERAL RELATIONS BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES

HM, Qatar Emir hold official talks

HIS MAJESTY
LEADS
WELCOMING
PARTY FOR QATAR
EMIR

SHAIKH TAMIM
GETS POPULAR
AND OFFICIAL
RECEPTION

HM AND
SHAIKH TAMIM
TALKS REVIEW
COOPERATION



TWO LEADERS
DISCUSS
PARTNERSHIP
AND INVESTMENT

FOCUS ON
OPENING WIDER
HORIZONS IN
VARIOUS SPHERES

LEADERS
EXCHANGE
VIEWS ON
CURRENT WORLD
SITUATION

HIS MAJESTY SULTAN
HAITHAM BIN TARIQ
and SHAIKH TAMIM BIN
HAMAD AL THANI, Emir
of the State of Qatar, held
an official session of talks at Al Alam
Palace on Tuesday. At the outset of
the session, His Majesty the Sultan
reiterated his welcome to Shaikh
Tamim and his accompanying
delegation.

His Majesty expressed his delight
over this visit, wishing him and his
accompanying delegation a pleasant
stay in Oman. On his turn, Shaikh
Tamim expressed his utmost thanks
and appreciation to His Majesty the
Sultan for the warm welcome and
hospitality.

The session reviewed relations
of cooperation, understanding
and fraternity between the two
countries, in addition to areas of
partnership and investment, and the
available opportunities to promote

them and open wider horizons in
various spheres in a manner that
boosts the economy of the two
countries and meets the aspirations
of their peoples.

The two leaders also exchanged
views on the current situation in the
world and its future repercussions
on the region, as well as exploring
paths of regional and international
peace, security and stability.

The official session of talks was
attended from the Omani side by
HH Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmood al
Said, Deputy Prime Minister for the
Council of Ministers, HH Sayyid

Asaad bin Tariq al Said, Deputy
Prime Minister for International
Relations and Cooperation Affairs,
Personal Representative of His
Majesty the Sultan, HH Sayyid
Shihab bin Tariq al Said, Deputy
Prime Minister for Defence Affairs,
HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham
al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports
and Youth, Sayyid Khalid bin Hilal
al Busaidy, Minister of the Diwan
of Royal Court, Gen Sultan bin
Mohammed al Numani, Minister of
the Royal Office, Sayyid Hamoud
bin Faisal al Busaidy, Minister of
Interior, Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al

Busaidy, Foreign Minister, Sultan bin
Salim al Habsi, Minister of Finance,
Dr Hamed bin Said al Aufi, Head
of Private Office of His Majesty the
Sultan, Abdulsalam bin Mohammed
al Murshidi, Chairman of Oman
Investment Authority, and Sayyid
Ammar bin Abdullah al Busaidy,
Ambassador of Oman to Qatar.

Meanwhile, it was attended from
the Qatari side by Shaikh Saud bin
Abdulrahman al Thani, Deputy
Prime Minister and Minister of State
for Defence Affairs, Shaikh Joaan
bin Hamad al Thani, President of
Qatar Olympic Committee, Abdullah

bin Mohammed al Khulaifi, Chief
of the Amiri Diwan, Ali bin Ahmed
al Kuwari, Minister of Finance and
Head of the Omani-Qatari Joint
Committee, Shaikh Abdulrahman
bin Hamad al Thani, Minister of
Culture, Shaikh Hamad bin Khalifa
al Thani, Minister of Sports and
Youth, Shaikh Faisal bin Thani
al Thani, Minister of Commerce
and Industry, Dr Mohammed bin
Abdulaziz al Khulaifi, Minister of
State at the Ministry of Foreign
Affairs, Saad bin Nasser al Kaabi,
Director of the Department of
Studies and Research at the Amiri
Diwan, Mohammed bin Saif al
Sowaidi, Chief Executive Officer
of Qatar Investment Authority,
Shaikh Mubarak bin Fahad al Thani,
Ambassador of Qatar to Oman,
and Ambassador Abdulla bin Saif
al Mansouri, Director of the GCC
Affairs Department at the Ministry
of Foreign Affairs.

— ONA

His Majesty hosts dinner in honour of Emir of Qatar

HIS MAJESTY SULTAN HAITHAM BIN TARIQ hosted an official dinner at Al Alam Palace guesthouse on Tuesday evening in honour of Shaikh Tamim bin Hamad al Thani, Emir of the State of Qatar.

The dinner was attended by some members of the Royal Family, ministers, commanders of the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF) and the Royal Oman Police, as well as ambassadors of Arab and friendly countries, members of the Council of Oman, under-secretaries, some ambassadors at the Foreign Ministry and CEOs.

Prior to the dinner, the two leaders exchanged commemorative gifts, in a manifestation of fraternal ties binding the two countries. — ONA



Qatar Emir arrives



HM hosts dinner in honour of Emir of Qatar



HIS MAJESTY SULTAN HAITHAM BIN TARIK hosted an official dinner at Al Alam Palace guesthouse on Tuesday evening in honour of Shaikh Tamim bin

Hamad al Thani, Emir of the State of Qatar. The dinner was attended by some members of the Royal Family, ministers, commanders of the Sultan's Armed Forces

(SAF) and the Royal Oman Police, as well as ambassadors of Arab and friendly countries, members of the Council of Oman, under-secretaries, some ambassadors at

the Foreign Ministry and CEOs. Prior to the dinner, the two leaders exchanged commemorative gifts, in a manifestation of fraternal ties binding the two countries. — ONA

SHAIKH Tamim bin Hamad al Thani, Emir of the State of Qatar arrived on Tuesday on a two-day state visit to the Sultanate of Oman. His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq led the welcoming party for Shaikh Tamim.

When the jet touched ground at the Royal Airport, His Majesty the Sultan met the guest at the foot of the ramp, welcoming him and wishing him and his accompanying delegation a pleasant stay in Oman.

Along with His Majesty the Sultan, Shaikh Tamim was received by HH Sayyid Shihab bin Tariq al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, Sayyid Khalid bin Hilal al Busaidy, Minister of the Diwan of Royal Court, Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office, Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidy, Minister of Interior, Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister (Head of the Mission of Honour), Sayyid Ammar bin Abdullah al Busaidy, Ambassador of Oman to Qatar, Shaikh Mubarak bin Fahad al Thani, Ambassador of Qatar to Oman, members of the mission of honour and members of the Qatari Embassy in Muscat.

When the guest's jet entered the Omani airspace, it was escorted by a squadron of military aircraft of the Royal Air Force of Oman till its arrival at the Royal Airport, in a manifestation of warm welcome.

Then, His Majesty the Sultan and Shaikh Tamim headed to the hall, flanked by two rows of the guard of honour of the Royal Guard of Oman (RGO).

After a short break, the motorcade of the two leaders left the Royal Airport, heading to Al Alam Palace for the popular and official reception.

As the motorcade of the two leaders passed Muscat Gate, a group of Royal Camel Corps lined both sides of the road, welcoming the guest. Then, a cavalcade from the Royal Cavalry and the RGO Cavalry escorted the official motorcade to the National Museum's building, to the accompaniment of a mounted military music band.

Upon the arrival of the motorcade at the yard leading to Al Alam Palace, a popular reception was held, with the participation of a cluster of folklore bands that lined the passage, chanting lyrics in a manifestation of warm welcome to the guest. After that, the artillery fired a twenty-one-gun salute for the guest.

Upon the arrival of the motorcade at the courtyard of Al Alam Palace, a welcoming tune was played in an atmosphere of fanfare and ambiance.

After that, His Majesty the Sultan accompanied Shaikh Tamim to the Dais of Honour where the National Anthem of the State of Qatar was played.

Then, His Majesty the Sultan shook hands with members of the official delegation accompanying the Emir, wishing them a pleasant stay and a successful visit. On his turn, Shaikh Tamim shook hands with some members of the Royal Family, chairmen of the State Council and Majlis Ash'shura, ministers, advisers and commanders of the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF).

The Emir of Qatar is accompanied during the visit by an official delegation comprising Shaikh Saud bin Abdulrahman al Thani, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Defense Affairs, Shaikh Joaan bin Hamad al Thani, President of Qatar Olympic Committee, Abdullah bin Mohammed al Khulaifi, Chief of the Amiri Diwan, Ali bin Ahmed al Kuwari, Minister of Finance and Head of the Omani-Qatari Joint Committee, Shaikh Abdulrahman bin Hamad al Thani, Minister of Culture, Shaikh Hamad bin Khalifa al Thani, Minister of Sports and Youth, Shaikh Faisal bin Thani al Thani, Minister of Commerce and Industry, Dr Mohammed bin Abdulaziz al Khulaifi, Minister of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Saad bin Nasser al Kaabi, Director of the Department of Studies and Research at the Amiri Diwan, Mohammed bin Saif al Sowaidi, Chief Executive Officer of Qatar Investment Authority, Shaikh Mubarak bin Fahad al Thani, Ambassador of Qatar to Oman and Ambassador Abdulla bin Saif Al Mansouri, Director of the GCC Affairs Department at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

on 2-day state visit



His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik led the welcoming party for Shaikh Tamim. Along with His Majesty the Sultan, Shaikh Tamim was received by HH Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, Sayyid Khalid bin Hilal al Busaidy, Minister of the Diwan of Royal Court, Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office, Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidy, Minister of Interior, Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister (Head of the Mission of Honour), Sayyid Ammar bin Abdullah al Busaidy, Ambassador of Oman to Qatar, and Shaikh Mubarak bin Fahad al Thani, Ambassador of Qatar to Oman

EMIR OF QATAR ACCORDED ROYAL WELCOME



MUSCAT: Shaikh Tamim bin Hamad al Thani, Emir of the State of Qatar, arrived on Tuesday on a two-day state visit to the Sultanate of Oman. His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik led the welcoming party for Shaikh Tamim. When the jet touched ground at the Royal Airport, His Majesty the Sultan met the guest at the foot of the ramp, welcoming him and wishing him and his accompanying delegation a pleasant stay in Oman. — ONA



HM GREETES CHINESE PRESIDENT

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik sent a cable of greetings to President Xi Jinping of the People’s Republic of China on the occasion of the Lunar New Year. His Majesty the Sultan expressed his best wishes to President Xi Jinping and the people of the People’s Republic of China on this auspicious occasion, hoping that it would be a year of goodness, achievements and progress. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan commended the deep-rooted relations and fruitful cooperation between the two countries. — ONA

AL NUMANI RECEIVES SAUDI AMBASSADOR



Gen Al Numani during a meeting with Saad Bishan, Ambassador of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to Oman. — ONA

MUSCAT: Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office, on Tuesday received Ibrahim Saad Bishan, Ambassador of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to the Sultanate of Oman. Al Numani wished the ambassador success in carrying out his duties. He also touched on the bilateral relations between the Sultanate of Oman and Saudi Arabia. On his turn, the Saudi ambassador expressed his keenness to work on enhancing bilateral relations and joint cooperation in all fields. — ONA

FRIDAY THE FIRST DAY OF SHAABAN



MUSCAT: The Main Moonsighting Committee announced that Thursday, January 30, 2025, will be the last day of the month of Rajab 1446 AH, and that Friday, January 31, will mark the first day of the month of Shaaban 1446 AH. Astronomy confirms that the moon’s descent on Wednesday, 29 Rajab 1446 AH (January 29, 2025), will occur before sunset in all regions of the Sultanate of Oman, making it impossible to sight the new moon of Shaaban on that day. — ONA

NOTICE CALLING THE AGM

Members are hereby notified that the Annual General Body Meeting of the Indian Social Club, Oman is scheduled on Friday, 28th February 2025, at 6.00 p.m. at the Indian Social Club hall, Darsait.

The following will be the agenda for the meeting:

1. Reading of notice calling the meeting by the General Secretary.
2. Opening address by the Chairperson.
3. Approval of the minutes of the previous Annual General Meeting.
4. General Secretary's Report.
5. Discussion and approval of audited accounts for the year 2024 and appoint auditors for the year 2025.
6. Election of the Managing Committee for the year 2025 and 2026.
7. Any other points raised by the members with the permission of the Chair.

Only members whose name appear in the Voter's list, are eligible to attend the meeting.

**GENERAL SECRETARY
INDIAN SOCIAL CLUB OMAN**



SAYYID ASAAD RECEIVES INDIAN MINISTER

HH Sayyid Asaad bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs, Personal Representative of His Majesty the Sultan, received in his office on Tuesday Piyush Goyal, Minister of Commerce and Industry of India. The meeting reviewed means of enhancing the strategic and economic partnership between Oman and India. The meeting was attended by Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, Shaikh Khalifa bin Hamad al Badi, Secretary-General at the Office of HH Sayyid Asaad, Saif bin Ahmed al Sawafi, Adviser at the Office of HH Sayyid Asaad, Issa bin Saleh al Shibani, Ambassador of Oman to India. — ONA

Workshops on buildings requirements conclude

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, JAN 28

THE Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning (MoHUP) recently concluded a series of technical workshops. The goal of these workshops was to develop a guide for building requirements and conditions in Oman, ensuring standardised building practices that align with global standards while considering the environmental and social aspects specific to the country. Eng Khalfan bin Masoud al Naabi, Director-General of Urban Planning at MoHUP, emphasised the importance of the building requirements guide in construction sector. He stated



The goal of these workshops was to develop a guide for buildings requirements and conditions.

that this guide plays a crucial role in improving the quality of urban projects and ensuring compliance with international standards. The ministry is currently collaborating with professional bodies to develop an executive plan for the effective implementation of these guides, aiming to enhance coordination between

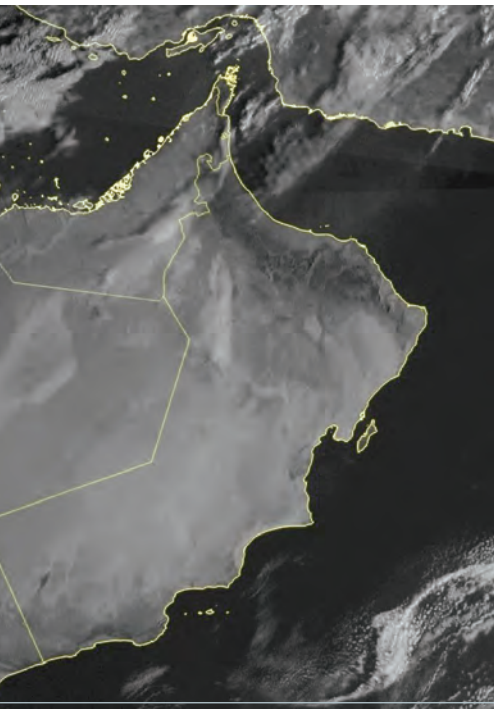
government and private entities in line with Oman Vision 2040 goals. The Building Requirements Guide is part of a comprehensive set of six technical guides being developed in partnership with the International Code Council (ICC). The objective is to standardise construction practices, enhance urban project quality, and promote sustainable building environments in alignment with Oman Vision 2040's sustainable development goals. MoHUP architect Hafsa al Balushi highlighted ongoing efforts to implement the Building Requirements Guide through a coordinated approach with various entities. An integrated training program

for Omani engineers in both government and private sectors, as well as municipal employees, is being developed to ensure efficient application of these standards. Al Balushi mentioned plans for awareness campaigns targeting engineers, government agencies, and the community to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the guide's contents and application in construction projects. These initiatives are essential for achieving Oman Vision 2040 sustainable development goals. The workshops also addressed the Energy Efficiency and Sustainability Guide, focusing on modern technologies to enhance energy efficiency in buildings.

PARTS OF OMAN TO BE AFFECTED BY LOW PRESSURE

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 28

The latest weather maps and numerical models indicate that parts of Oman are likely to be affected by a low-pressure system on Sunday and Monday, February 2–3, according to the Oman Meteorology Office. Forecasters said this system will bring cloud formation and scattered rainfall, particularly over the governorates of Musandam and Al Batinah North, as well as some coastal areas along the Sea of Oman. Furthermore, there is a possibility of cloud development over parts of the Al Hajar Mountains, with chances of scattered showers. In addition, weather experts note that the system will be accompanied by fog formation over mountain peaks, a noticeable drop in temperatures, a rise in sea levels, and occasional fresh winds. The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) advises residents to stay informed through official channels for the latest weather updates.



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شركة ضيافة الصحراء س م ع

Sahara Hospitality Co. (S.A.O.G.)

P.O. Box 311, Muscat, Postal Code 100, Sultanate of Oman.

DIRECTORS' REPORT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30TH NOVEMBER 2024

On behalf of the Board of Directors, it is my pleasure to present the Annual Report on the business and operations of Sahara Hospitality Company S.A.O.G. (hereinafter referred to as "SHC") for the financial year ended November 30, 2024.

FINANCIAL RESULTS

The financial results achieved during the financial year ended November 30, 2024, are as follows:

Key Financial Indicators	Year ended November 30, 2024 R.O. 000's	Year ended November 30, 2023 R.O. 000's
Turnover	13,326	11,814
Gross Profit	3,470	3,241

The Net Profit after tax for the year was RO 2,890,200 as against RO 2,562,467 in the year 2023.

As previously mentioned, the company's operations are predominantly reliant on PDO activities and availability of contractors' staff where our Permanent Accommodation for Contractors (PAC) are located. During the year under review, we are pleased to report that:

- 1) The occupancy levels at Fahud, Nimr and Rima were 89%, 88% and 99% respectively.
- 2) The net asset value per share has improved from RO 3.500 in 2023 to RO 3.615 in 2024 financial year.
- 3) The basic earnings per share in 2024 stood at RO 0.365 compared to RO 0.323 in 2023.

The Board of Directors is pleased to recommend distribution of cash dividend of 25% (250 Baizas per equity share) on the paid up share capital subject to shareholders approval at the Annual General Meeting (AGM).

Your Company has been adhering to the principles of good Corporate Governance over the years and the Board of Directors supports the broad principles of Corporate Governance as issued by FSA. In addition to the basic governance issues, the Board lays great emphasis on transparency, accountability and integrity and are pleased to state that a report on Code of Corporate Governance including the relevant auditor's certificate regarding compliance with conditions of Corporate Governance as stipulated by FSA is provided in Annexure II.

Once again, the Board of Directors and Management Team would reaffirm their commitment and enthusiasm with proper planning in carrying out the business with an objective to yield attractive returns to the shareholders.

On behalf of the Shareholders and Board of Directors, it gives us great honor to express our sincere gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq bin Taimour Al Said for his continued support to the private sector and I pray to the Almighty Allah to shower His everlasting blessings on His Majesty. Furthermore, we would extend our gratitude to His Majesty's government for their co-operation and assistance with special mention for the Ministry of Commerce & Industry, Muscat Securities Market and Financial Services Authority.

I would like to conclude the report by thanking our company Management Team, my fellow Directors, the Service Provider, Petroleum Development of Oman, our clients and all those who participated in the successful conduct of our Company's business, for their relentless efforts and valuable contribution.

For and on behalf of the Board of Directors of
SAHARA HOSPITALITY CO. (S.A.O.G.)

TALAL BIN QAIS AL ZAWAWI
CHAIRMAN

Statement of financial position (audited) as at 30th November 2024

	2024 RO	2023 RO
ASSETS		
Non-current assets		
Property, plant and equipment	14,643,078	15,111,532
Right-of-use assets	20,634	41,250
Total non-current assets	14,663,712	15,152,782
Current assets		
Inventories	39,411	28,573
Amount due from a related party	41,091	70,967
Trade and other receivables	6,200,903	5,036,901
Short Term Deposits	9,299,131	7,000,000
Bank balances and cash	2,068,792	3,806,532
Total current assets	17,649,328	15,942,973
Total assets	32,313,040	31,095,755
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES		
Equity		
Share capital	7,923,300	7,923,300
Legal reserve	2,641,100	2,641,100
Retained earnings	18,077,561	17,168,186
Total Equity	28,641,961	27,732,586
LIABILITIES		
Non-current liabilities		
Non-current portion of lease liabilities		23,347
Deferred tax liability	388,745	182,906
Employees' end of service benefits	23,706	19,259
Total non-current liabilities	412,451	225,512
Current liabilities		
Current portion of lease liabilities	23,347	22,182
Trade and other payables	590,350	645,778
Amounts due to related parties	2,341,012	2,051,040
Taxation	303,919	418,657
Total current liabilities	3,258,628	3,137,657
Total liabilities	3,671,079	3,363,169
Total Equity and liabilities	32,313,040	31,095,755

Statement of comprehensive income (audited) for the year ended 30th November 2024

	2024 RO	2023 RO
Revenue from contract with customers	13,326,453	11,814,025
Direct costs	(9,856,480)	(8,572,818)
Gross profit	3,469,973	3,241,207
Other income	460,497	285,845
	3,930,470	3,527,052
EXPENSES		
General and Administration	523,374	504,009
Finance charges	7,138	8,456
	530,512	512,465
Profit before taxation	3,399,958	3,014,587
Taxation	(509,758)	(452,120)
Net profit and total comprehensive income for the year	2,890,200	2,562,467

The complete accounts in either Arabic or English will be delivered to any shareholder within 7 days of receipt of the request. Such request may be sent to the Board Secretary, Sahara Hospitality Co. (S.A.O.G.), P.O.Box: 311, Postal Code: 100, Muscat.

OMAN

SHORT TAKES



Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Piyush Goyal and Amit Narang at the Embassy of India in Muscat premises on Tuesday.

Embassy marks 76th Republic Day of India

MUSCAT: Embassy of India hosted a grand reception to celebrate the 76th Republic Day of India at its premises on Monday. The event witnessed an enthusiastic participation of over 1,000 attendees, including distinguished Ambassadors, Defense Attachés, Diplomats, and esteemed members of the Omani and Indian community.

Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry, and Investment Promotion of Oman, graced the occasion as the Chief Guest. He was accompanied by an official high-level delegation from the Sultanate of Oman. Piyush Goyal, Minister of Commerce and Industry, Government of India, was the Special Guest for the occasion. Goyal is on an official visit to Oman to co-chair the 11th India-Oman Joint Commission Meeting with Al Yousef.

Goyal, in his remarks, spoke about India’s extraordinary progress under the visionary leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. He emphasised India’s growing global stature and highlighted the partnership between India and Oman as a shining example of collaboration.

In his address, Amit Narang, Ambassador of India to Oman, highlighted the remarkable progress in India-Oman relations post-pandemic. He referred to the landmark visit of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to India, Oman’s active participation in the G20 under India’s Presidency, and the rapid growth in bilateral trade, defense cooperation, cultural collaboration, and people-to-people ties.

The cultural highlight of the evening was a unique musical performance titled ‘Sur Sandook’, a vibrant India-Oman jukebox. This performance featured the skilled Omani violinist Nasser al Kindi alongside the Team Melam Muscat, whose energetic Chenda Melam celebrated Kerala’s cultural richness. Together, they delivered enthralling renditions of popular Indian songs, leaving the audience captivated.

A specially designed selfie zone featuring life-sized replicas of India’s iconic landmarks like the Konark Wheel and Hawa Mahal offered the participants an opportunity to capture the spirit of India’s rich heritage.



Violinist Nasser al Kindi performs at the function

STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT, JAN 28

Participants in the exploratory journey ‘Oman: Jewel of Arabia’ have confirmed that this initiative provides a unique opportunity to showcase Oman’s tourism.

The journey features Omani youth and British enthusiasts, employing traditional methods of transportation such as camels and walking, alongside modern means such as four-wheel-drive vehicles.

The initiative aims to strengthen the historical ties between Oman

and the United Kingdom, highlight Oman’s cultural and natural heritage, raise global awareness of environmental sustainability issues, and underscore Oman’s status as a tourist destination blending cultural and natural heritage. It also seeks to develop youth skills in exploration and the preservation of cultural and natural heritage.

Mark Evans, the team leader, stated that the journey ‘Oman: Jewel of Arabia’ aims to spotlight Oman’s rich biodiversity and innovations in sustainability. The journey also celebrates the talented Omani youth

State Council and Shura discuss six draft laws

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JAN 28

THE State Council and Majlis Ash’shura held a first joint session on Tuesday to discuss under the chairmanship of Shaikh Abdulmalik bin Abdullah al Khalili, Chairman of the State Council. The session was attended by Khalid bin Hilal al Maawali, Chairman of Majlis Ash’shura, members of the State Council and Majlis Ash’shura, the Secretary-Generals of the State Council and Majlis Ash’shura

The joint session comes in line with the provisions of Article (49) of the Council of Oman Law, which deals with disagreement in the draft laws referred by the government in preparation for submitting to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik.

The meeting discussed six draft laws covering electronic transactions, public health, transplant of human organs and tissues, finance, individual income, special economic zones and free zones.

Shaikh Abdulmalik stated at the opening of the first joint session, that there were different opinions on a number of articles in the draft laws. These were discussed so that they could vote on them during the joint session.

Dr Salem bin Sultan al Raziqi, Deputy Chairman of the Technology Committee of the Majlis Ash’shura, stated that there is 100 per cent agreement between the two councils on the draft law on electronic transactions and agreement was reached on all articles that had some discrepancy in the joint committees. Talal bin Saeed al Maharbi, a Majlis Ash’shura member, said: “In the electronic transactions law, there are some articles that were subject to disagreement, which necessitates the formation of a joint committee. This report will be discussed, and then the draft law will be approved in its final form.”

Mohammed bin Saeed al Hajri, Chairman of the Social and Cultural Committee of the State Council, said: “The draft public health law represents the frame of reference for all parties concerned with health issues, whether those directly concerned with human health, or those concerned with



Shaikh Abdulmalik bin Abdullah al Khalili and Khalid bin Hilal al Maawali at the joint session in Muscat on Tuesday

	Draft personal income tax law approved
	Joint session of State Council and Majlis Ash'shura discuss six draft laws
	The draft law on transplantation of human organs and tissues includes 36 articles
	All but five articles of the draft law have been approved
	Income tax exemption limit has been raised to RO 50,000 to protect the middle class. The rate has been reduced to 5 per cent.
	It has been agreed not to calculate the end-of-service bonus and grants as a source of income.
	The members opined that it is important to put off the law, however if it is passed, the two councils recommended raising the minimum income and reducing the tax rate, among other recommendations.

environmental health, environmental safety, food safety, drug safety and work environment safety. This draft law also attaches great importance to the rules and procedures regulating dealing with emergency cases of pandemics and epidemics.”

Ohoud bint Saeed al Balushiyyah, Vice Chairman of the Social and Cultural Committee of the State Council, stated that the draft law on the transfer and transplantation of human organs and tissues comes in 36 articles distributed over five chapters that regulate the work of the National Committee for the Transfer and Transplantation of Organs, in addition to controls for donation whether during life or after death, as well as controls for licensing health institutions working in this field, and also penalties associated with any errors or violations. However, during the work of the joint committee, an agreement was reached with the Majlis Ash’shura on all of these articles.



Oman Design Week ends on a high note

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabiyousef

The five-day Oman Design Week ended at the Al Irfan Boulevard Garden in the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC) on a high note on Tuesday.

Artist Mahra al Raisi said, “Taking part in Oman Design Week has been an incredible journey. It allowed me to present my artistic vision to a diverse and engaged audience. The conversations I had with visitors were especially enriching, offering new perspectives that deepened my connection to the artwork and its audience.”

Ahmed al Maqbali, who led a



The Oman Design Week showcased the work of more than 40 local and international artists and designers

workshop on urban design for Madinat Al Irfan, reflected on the importance of sustainable approaches in modern urban planning. “My workshop

focused on embedding sustainability as a key pillar of future city development.”

Visitors also expressed their enthusiasm for the event’s

impact. Joao Pereira remarked: “Oman Design Week changed the way I view design. I learned how it transcends aesthetics to become a tool for problem-solving and enhancing everyday life. This event made me realize how design can truly transform how we live and interact with the world around us.”

“Our participation in the Oman Design Week has been a great source of optimism for the years ahead, reflecting the growing support for creative industries in Oman,” said Safa al Buraiki, representing Tur Jewellery, a local small business that participated in the designer market.

‘Oman: Jewel of Arabia’ journey showcases tourism



The journey began at Al Suwaih Beach in the Wilayat of Jaalan Bani Bu Ali, passing through the Al Sharqiyah North and Al Wusta Governorates and concludes at Dhofar Governorate.

working in sustainability fields, such as the transition to green hydrogen. Participants will explore natural reserves, encounter wildlife and learn about the finest types of Omani frankincense unique to Dhofar.

The journey involves six participants, including Thekra al Mawali, the first certified Omani explorer by National Geographic and a trainer at the National Training Centre (Outward Bound Oman); Nigel Haring, an expert in expedition risk management and helicopter rescue; Anna Maria from

Switzerland, an internationally recognised professional photographer; Ibrahim al Hasani, a trainer at the National Training Centre (Outward Bound Oman); and Alby from the Bader Foundation.

From his perspective, Ibrahim bin Mohammed al Hasani, a youth skills development trainer at Outward Bound Oman and one of the journey’s participants, remarked: “Undoubtedly, the journey is challenging, with numerous obstacles such as rugged terrain, mountainous landscapes and sea navigation.”

SHORT TAKES



Serbian Prime Minister Milos Vucevic speaks during a press conference, in Belgrade, Serbia. — Reuters

SERBIAN PRIME MINISTER QUILTS AS PROTESTS PERSIST

BELGRADE: Serbian Prime Minister Milos Vucevic resigned on Tuesday, becoming the highest-ranking official to step down amid a wave of anti-corruption protests that have spread across the country. The anti-government demonstrations sprang up in the wake of the roof collapsing at a railway station in the city of Novi Sad, killing 15 people and leading to calls for Vucevic to quit. “I opted for this step in order to defuse tensions”, Vucevic told a news conference on Tuesday, announcing his resignation. “With this we have met all demands of the most radical protesters.” The protests, which included students putting up a blockade at a main junction in Belgrade this week, have been largely peaceful.

Vucevic said an investigation is underway. He blamed foreign interference for stoking the protests, without providing evidence. The focus for many analysts now is how much this will affect the president, whose party easily won a snap election in 2023 but who has come under increasing pressure. — Reuters



Congolese refugees appear fleeing ongoing clashes in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo. — AFP

GUNFIRE CRACKLES IN GOMA, EMBASSIES ATTACKED

GOMA: Dead bodies lay in the streets, gunfire rang out and hospitals were overwhelmed in east Congo’s largest city Goma where M23 fighters backed by Rwanda faced pockets of resistance on Tuesday from army and pro-government groups. Protesters in the capital attacked a UN compound and embassies including those of Rwanda, France and the United States, expressing anger at what they said was foreign interference. Goma is a major hub for people displaced by fighting elsewhere in eastern Congo and aid groups seeking to assist them. Now the fighting has sent thousands of people streaming out of the city - some had recently sought refuge there from M23’s offensive since the start of the year. Democratic Republic of Congo’s government and the head of UN peacekeeping have said Rwandan troops were present in Goma, backing up their M23 allies. Goma residents and UN sources said dozens of troops had surrendered, but some soldiers and pro-government militiamen were holding out. People in several neighbourhoods reported small arms fire and some loud explosions. — Reuters

CALIFORNIA DENIES TRUMP CLAIM US MILITARY TURNED ON WATER IN STATE

WASHINGTON: California on Tuesday denied President Donald Trump’s claim that the US military entered the state to release more water in the wake of deadly wildfires. In a Truth Social post late on Monday, Trump wrote: “The United States Military just entered the Great State of California and, under Emergency Powers, TURNED ON THE WATER flowing abundantly from the Pacific Northwest, and beyond.” California’s Department of

Water Resources responded hours later. “The military did not enter California. The federal government restarted federal water pumps after they were offline for maintenance for three days. State water supplies in Southern California remain plentiful,” the agency said.. Trump ordered the federal government to override the state of California’s water-management practices to bolster firefighting efforts. The order directed the US Bureau of Reclamation to deliver

more water and hydro-power through the Central Valley Project, a network of dams, canals and other infrastructure. A spokesperson for Newsom said that move would not have made a difference in the state’s firefighting efforts as the Los Angeles region gets most of its water from other sources. Hydrants in the LA area ran dry during the height of the wildfires, but officials say that was because they were not designed to deal with such a massive disaster. — Reuters

Denmark PM seeks EU support over Greenland

DANISH

Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen sought to drum up support on Tuesday from European leaders over US President Donald Trump’s threats to take over Greenland, with visits to Berlin, Paris and Brussels. Trump has signalled his desire for the Arctic island, which is believed to hold large untapped mineral and oil reserves, to become part of the United States. Trump has talked for years about a possible deal to take over the Danish autonomous territory, and told reporters he believed the United States would “get Greenland”. He has insisted his country needs Greenland for “international security”.

Frederiksen met with German Chancellor Olaf Scholz in Berlin on Tuesday. After speaking about Russia’s war in Ukraine, Scholz stressed that “borders must not be moved by force” and added the English-language phrase: “To whom it may concern.” The chancellor said “the times we live in are challenging” and require a strong Europe and Nato. He stressed that “Denmark and Germany are strong partners and close friends”. In Paris, Frederiksen met with French President Emmanuel Macron, before heading to Brussels later in the day to see Nato Secretary General Mark Rutte. Tuesday’s visits followed a weekend Nordic summit where leaders all “shared the gravity of the situation”, Frederiksen said. Denmark announced on Monday that it would spend \$2 billion to bolster security in the strategic



German Chancellor Olaf Scholz and Denmark’s Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen give press statements prior talks at the Chancellery, in Berlin. — AFP

Trump has signalled his desire for the Arctic island, which is believed to hold large untapped mineral and oil reserves, to become part of the United States. Trump has talked for years about a possible deal to take over the Danish autonomous territory

Arctic region. It said it would send three new frigates to the region, as well as long-distance drones equipped with advanced imaging capabilities. It would also reinforce its satellite capabilities. Greenland lies between the United States and Europe, a region of increasing strategic value as the melting of Arctic sea ice opens up new shipping routes. Officials in the territory, which depends heavily on Denmark for subsidies, have long been pushing for independence but have said they are open to doing business with the US. A day after Trump was sworn in as president, Greenland Prime Minister Mute Egede insisted Greenlanders “don’t want to be American”. In mid-January, Frederiksen reportedly spoke to

Trump by telephone, stressing that it was up to Greenland to determine its future. According to European sources cited by the Financial Times, Danish officials described the conversation as “horrendous”, and that Trump’s interest in Greenland was “serious, and potentially very dangerous”. Greenland’s trade and justice minister Naaja Nathanielsen said that the Greenlandic people were living through a “worrying time” and were “concerned” about Trump’s statements. “As a government our job is not to panic and figure out what the actual demands are,” Nathanielsen said. “If it is about military presence, the US has been here for 80 years, we are not opposed to that. If it is about the minerals, it is an open market,” she added. — AFP



GAZA TRUCE MEDIATORS LOOK AHEAD

GAZA: By late on Monday, Gaza’s Hamas authorities said more than 300,000 people, or almost half of those displaced from the north during the war, had crossed into Gaza City and the north edge of the enclave from areas in the south. Tens of thousands were still moving north as mediators began preliminary work on the second stage of ceasefire negotiations due to begin next week. Three more Israeli hostages are due to be handed over on Thursday by Hamas with another three expected on Saturday, in exchange for scores of Palestinian prisoners set for release from Israeli jails, some of whom will go into exile. — Reuters

LEGAL CONTEST

Migrants on Italian ship reach Albania



An Italian navy ship carrying 49 migrants picked up in international waters arrived in Albania on Tuesday, amid a new attempt by Italy to push ahead with a legally contested plan to relocate migrants to the neighbouring country. The navy ship Cassiopea with the migrants reached the Albanian port of Shengjin early on Tuesday. They will be identified at a facility there and then moved to a detention centre some 20 km away. — Reuters

STRENGTHENING TIES

Russian diplomats make first Syria visit



The first Russian official delegation to visit Syria since the toppling of long-term Moscow ally Bashar al Assad has arrived in Damascus, Russian news agencies reported. The Russian delegation due to meet the new leadership of the country included deputy foreign minister Mikhail Bogdanov, who is also Putin’s special envoy on the Middle East and Africa, as well as Alexander Lavrentyev, the special envoy on Syria. — AFP

ENERGY COOPERATION

Poland, Canada sign nuclear power deal



Poland and Canada have signed an agreement that provides a framework for intensive cooperation on nuclear power, Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk said after meeting his Canadian Justin Trudeau. “Canada is the main provider of technology for Poland’s first nuclear plant,” Tusk said. “Cooperation on small nuclear reactors (SMR) is also very important,” Tusk said that Poland needs new sources to become a leader in new technologies. — Reuters

OPINION

Live a life with integrity, even when no one is watching



HYESHA BARRETT

The author is a Master Life Coach and NLP Practitioner based in Muscat

INTEGRITY is a very powerful vibration that keeps us in check and in alignment with our moral compass, our values. Living a life with deep integrity, even when no one is watching, is a principle that resonates deeply with the essence of our character and ideologies. At its core, integrity is about doing the right thing, adhering to our moral and ethical principles, regardless of external circumstances. It is focusing more on our own internal validation fuelling our happiness, rather than external validation driving our intrinsic needs. It's very easy to say one thing and execute another. No one will know. However, overtime the non-doing will feel misaligned, creating disaccord within our nervous system. Conversely, the constant upholding of doing what we say we will, regardless of circumstance and situation will consistently accentuate the importance of keeping to our word. This inner strength and commitment to our beliefs will shape our truth and legitimacy. As integrity is grounded in

honesty and transparency, it requires us to be truthful, not only in our interactions with others, but also in our self-reflection. When we unfailingly choose to act with integrity, we cultivate trust within ourselves. This conviction fosters a sense of self-respect and confidence, allowing us to navigate life with clarity and fulfilled purpose. In a world where actions are often dictated by social acceptance or the fear of judgment, staying true to ourselves can be challenging. In times of difficulty, when maintaining integrity might seem burdensome, it is essential to remember the long-term benefits of this discipline. It is precisely in these moments, when we think that no one is watching that our true character is revealed. The challenge of choosing the path of integrity might require making difficult decisions or facing uncomfortable truths. However, advocating for what is right, even when it's hard, defines our character while building resilience and fostering a sense of inner peace. Consider the everyday decisions that often go unnoticed. Whether it's returning extra change received by mistake, maintaining

Though we may falter and stray, what matters is our willingness to acknowledge our missteps and realign with our principles.

confidentiality even when it would be easy to share or adhering to commitments made to ourselves, these choices are significant. Each and every time we act with integrity, we reinforce our commitment to a value system that prioritises honesty, respect and responsibility. Long term, the accumulation of these acts heavily influence our habitual behaviour, while strengthening our moral code. Though we may falter and stray, what matters is our willingness to acknowledge our missteps and realign with our principles. This process of reflection and growth not only enhances our self-awareness, but also enriches our moral compass. This connection with our true selves enhances our emotional intelligence and empathy, equipping us for better relationships with others. Living a life of integrity, especially when no one is watching, is a powerful commitment. As it encourages strength and self-discipline, it fosters a sense of truthfulness, self-respect and accuracy of character, while contributing positively to our surroundings. This journey may not always be easy, but it is undeniably worthwhile.

UK’s first AI classroom without teachers sparks debate

AKSHATA KAPOOR

Britain’s first teacherless AI classroom may be an “outlier”, but it underlines the potential benefits and risks of a UK government drive to rollout artificial intelligence in education, experts say. David Game College, a private school in central London, is nearly six months into a trial in which students are taught core curriculum subjects for the GCSE state exams sat by 16-year-olds by AI platforms. “Teaching and education will be transformed by AI. There is no doubt about that, and AI is not going to go away,” said co-principal John Dalton, urging people to become “agile and adopt it”. The AI systems “monitor” how the students respond to course material and provide the school with “feedback information about their learning habits”, he explained. Prime Minister Keir Starmer this month laid out a vision to harness the power of artificial intelligence and pledged to make Britain an “AI superpower”. The government says the technology could help educators with lesson planning and correction, and has developed its own AI lesson assistant called “Aila” aligned with the UK’s national curriculum. Instead of teachers, the class at David Game College has real life “learning coaches”, who are qualified as teachers but do not necessarily know the content of subjects and instead guide students through using the AI systems. They also mentor them in soft skills like debating and financial literacy. However, Rose Luckin, a professor at University College London (UCL) who researches AI in education, said AI was an “outlier” with an uncertain future in British classrooms.

Student Massa Aldalate, 15, has been won over to AI learning. “I was unsure at the beginning... And then after actually being with it for a long time now, you can see the evidence right in front of you,” she said, sitting on a swivelling chair surrounded by computers. Does she miss a traditional classroom? “Not really,” she replied, adding people attach “sentimental value” to the idea of a classroom. National Education Union last week said it was “pleased to see the focus on training for teachers in the use of digital tools” by the government. But Daniel Kebede, general secretary of the NEU, warned the government’s ambitions must be “matched by significant investment in technology and IT infrastructure for schools”. She also voiced concerns about whether there is “sufficient social learning” for students, although the college says pupils have plenty of time with classmates. But with an eye-watering annual cost of £27,000 (\$32,900) — over £10,000 higher than average UK private school fees — the model is an “elite” one, said Luckin. — AFP

Qatar a small nation with global impact

ON January 15, Shaikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Al Thani, Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Qatar, announced an official ceasefire in Gaza. This significant development aims to halt the Zionist entity's aggression and massacres in the region, which have persisted for over 15 months. The violence has resulted in over 60,000 Palestinian martyrs, including both the deceased and missing, in addition to more than 112,000 wounded, thousands detained, and near-total destruction of Gaza’s infrastructure and daily life. This announcement, made with the active participation of Egypt and the involvement of an American mediator representing the Biden administration, underscores the crucial contributions of Qatari diplomacy. The exact role of the American mediator remains unclear, but Qatar's efforts over 470 days of mediation exemplify its dedication. Despite the criminal actions of PM Benjamin Netanyahu who consistently undermined mediation efforts while falsely accusing Hamas of doing so, Qatar has persisted in its efforts. Western powers, including the American administration, often echoed Netanyahu's claims despite knowing the truth. Yet, Qatar continued its diplomatic mission with resilience, adding another achievement to its record. Since Shaikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani assumed power on June 27, 1995, Qatar has established itself as a significant player in global political and economic arenas. The nation has elevated its gross domestic product and its citizens’ standard of living. By 2012, Qatar had retained the title of the world’s highest per capita income for the third consecutive year, surpassing Luxembourg for the first time in 2010. This success has been carried forward by Shaikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, who took over leadership on June 25, 2013. Under



With an area of just 11,571 square km and a population of approximately 3.12 million, Qatar’s ambitious leadership has ensured its name resonates across global capitals



KHALED AL MARHOON

The writer is a specialist in international law and political affairs.

his guidance, Qatar has become a key mediator in resolving numerous regional and international conflicts. Qatar’s ability to mediate effectively stems from its reputation as a neutral, honest, and reliable entity, maintaining equal distance from conflicting parties. This approach mirrors the diplomatic efforts of other GCC nations, such as Oman, which also play significant roles in regional stability. The success of any GCC nation in these efforts is shared success, highlighting the interconnectedness of the Gulf Cooperation Council. Qatari diplomacy has garnered notable achievements in recent years. These include mediating the Doha Agreement in 2008, which resolved an 18-month political crisis in Lebanon, and hosting peace talks for Sudan between 2008 and 2013. The latter resulted in agreements involving the Sudanese government and various parties, including the Justice and Equality Movement in Darfur. In 2020, Qatar facilitated a landmark agreement between the United States and the Taliban,

ending years of war. Its efforts extend to Yemen in 2008, the Sudan-Chad peace agreement in 2010, and the ceasefire between Djibouti and Eritrea the same year. Qatar also mediated between Afghan factions in 2013 and helped resume diplomatic relations between Kenya and Somalia, culminating in the Somali-Kenyan border agreement in May 2021. Moreover, Qatar has consistently played a role in brokering ceasefires between Hamas and the Zionist entity in Gaza during various escalations. Qatar’s regional and international mediation successes are too numerous to list comprehensively. However, these efforts demonstrate that a nation’s influence is not dictated by its size or population. With an area of just 11,571 square km and a population of approximately 3.12 million, Qatar’s ambitious leadership has ensured its name resonates across global capitals. Translated by Badr al Dhafari. The original version of this article was published in Oman Arabic newspaper on January 28.

From calls to meetings, all are becoming fakes!



SAMUEL KUTTY

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

NOTWITHSTANDING that, the Internet and social media platforms have become almost an inevitable part of our society, ‘fakes’ also have witnessed an alarming growth simultaneously along with them. Nothing is more dangerous than spreading them!

If word-of-mouth was the primary way misinformation spread in the early days of human life, what is new today is that it blows out to millions almost instantaneously with the single click of a button, without even having to speak to another person.

A study conducted by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology found that falsehood diffuses significantly farther, faster, deeper, and more broadly than the truth in all categories of information, and many times, by an order of magnitude.

According to a recent Unesco report, 85 per cent of people are worried about the influence of fake news on their fellow citizens, and 87 per cent say disinformation is a threat to politics in their country.

The survey also found that social media is now people’s main source of news globally, with 56 per cent of people getting their stories from these platforms. However, there is little trust in social media, with 68 per cent saying it carries the most disinformation of all outlets.

With everyone using technology, it will become even more sophisticated with the passage of time. As a result, we will ever know if anything and everything we see or

hear is real!

This may be a reason misinformation and disinformation remained a top issue for the second consecutive year in a row in the World Economic Forum (WEF) meeting, underscoring their persistent threat to societal cohesion and governance, and exacerbating divisions within and between nations.

“The rise of fake news, the decline of fact-checking on social media, and the growth of deep fakes generated by artificial intelligence (AI) threaten to erode trust and deepen divisions between countries,” WEF said in a report just before its January 24 meeting in Davos.

Artificial intelligence automates the creation of fake news, generates web content by mimicking factual articles, and spreads misinformation about natural disasters, events such as elections, and crises like wars.

No doubt, from calls to meetings, all are becoming fakes now! How do we know that the person who is calling you to give you orders is your real boss? Deepfakes are now taking calls to a level of clumsiness, raising a question of whether the callers are genuine.

It’s not long ago that a British company confirmed it was the victim of a deepfake fraud after an employee was duped into sending \$200 million (nearly £20 million) to fraudsters by an artificial intelligence-generated video call.

Earlier, an executive with a leading cryptocurrency exchange had revealed that fraudsters had used a sophisticated

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deepfake “hologram” of him to scam several of its projects. We cannot forget how some European mayors were initially fooled by a deepfake video call purporting to be with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

According to research by fact-checking organisations like Google, fake images churned out by AI are now spreading at an alarming rate, nearly matching the prevalence of those altered by traditional methods like Photoshop.

The WEF Davos meeting warned that as the computing power available to governments and technology companies continues to rise, there is a risk of greater surveillance on citizens by governments and businesses, posing risks to privacy.

“It is becoming increasingly difficult for people, governments, and companies to identify trustworthy information as more people rely on social media and the internet for information,” WEF said in the 100-page report.

However, the world forum is optimistic. If managed responsibly, the collection of data about citizens can provide better public services, but without effective legal safeguards in place, there is a risk data will be misused.

“Citizens are often unaware of how their data is collected, used and stored, limiting their ability to make informed decisions,” it said. And it will not be an exaggeration if someone says, “This is going to be like phishing scams on steroids. We’re living in strange times.”

EUROPE COULD SEE 2.3 MILLION MORE HEAT DEATHS: STUDY

EMILY BEAMENT

Rising deaths from extreme heat will “far exceed” reductions in numbers dying from cold temperatures in Europe with climate change, researchers suggest.

A study modelling the change in deaths related to high and low temperatures found that there could be more than 2.3 million excess deaths across hundreds of European cities by the end of the century if urgent action is not taken to cut emissions. While efforts to adapt cities to rising temperatures would not be enough to curb increased health risks due to exposure to heat, up to 70 per cent of the excess deaths could be avoided if climate change was limited, the researchers said.

The study found that in some parts of the continent, such as the UK and Ireland, there would be a net reduction in deaths, as a fall in people dying in cold weather outstripped a rise in mortality due to extreme heat.

London would see 27,455 fewer deaths by the century’s end in the face of climate change, according to the analysis led by the Environment and Health Modelling (EHM) Lab at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM).

But the study warned that the lower death toll in some parts of Europe would be massively outweighed by the increase in the rest of the continent — with the Mediterranean, central Europe and the Balkans particularly vulnerable. Barcelona, Rome, Naples and Madrid would be among the cities with the highest death tolls from rising temperatures by the end of the century, the modelling found, while many other smaller cities in Malta, Spain and Italy would also be badly affected. The study, published in the journal Nature Medicine, looked at how climate change could affect future heat-related and cold-related deaths in 854 European urban areas and their demographics, under different climate-warming scenarios. In a scenario with low efforts to curb global warming and low adaptation efforts, deaths could increase by 50 per cent, leading to a cumulative 2,345,410 deaths due to climate change between 2015 and 2099.

But there are regional differences across Europe, with a slight net decrease in deaths in Northern Europe alongside high vulnerability for Mediterranean and Eastern European countries. Away from the Mediterranean, cities such as Paris would see smaller, but significant increase in temperature-related deaths overall.

The study said net mortality across Europe would increase “even under the mildest climate change scenario” but the health burden increases substantially under more extreme warming and it would require “implausibly strong levels of adaptation” in cities to reverse the trend. — **dpa**

Donald Trump at Davos

Is Donald Trump’s world now. Nowhere was this more obvious than at the World Economic Forum’s latest annual gathering in Davos. Since the 1970s, the WEF has been an integral part of the liberal international order that emerged from the ashes of World War II. It is where the world’s political and economic elites come together to discuss global risks and explore solutions to collective challenges such as climate change, rising inequality and the rise of artificial intelligence. In this sense, the 55th Davos summit was a continuation of a longer-running tradition.

And yet, nothing about this year’s gathering was normal, because it coincided exactly with Trump’s second inauguration as president of the United States. Trump’s return to the White House marks the start of an anti-Davos age. Gone is any sense of a global order in which countries pursue joint solutions to shared problems. We are entering a “polyworld” governed by polycentrism, polycrisis and polysemy (when a word or symbol has multiple meanings).

A polycentric world lacks not only a single order but also any desire to create one. America’s new secretary of state, Marco Rubio, made the administration’s position clear in his confirmation hearing: “The postwar global order is not just obsolete; it is now a weapon being used against us.” And notwithstanding what Chinese leaders tell global gatherings, they are not in the order-building business either. When Chinese President Xi Jinping speaks of “great changes unseen in a century,” he is not referring to the emergence of a Chinese-led world. Rather, he is instructing Chinese society to prepare for a long period of chaos and disruption.

Moreover, Trump’s desire to upend the global order is surprisingly popular around the world. The European Council on Foreign Relations has just conducted a poll showing that most people around the world welcome Trump with open arms. They believe he will be good for America, good for their own countries and conducive to world peace. They like the idea of



Donald Trump’s desire to upend the global order is surprisingly popular around the world.

the US becoming a “normal power.”

No longer can we expect middle powers such as India, Brazil, Türkiye, Indonesia, or South Africa to shore up a single US-centred order. In the polycentric world, each of them thinks of itself as a serious power — as a centre, rather than as part of the periphery. The only countries that are nervous about Trump are America’s closest allies in Europe and Asia, since they have long based their own security and prosperity on the notion of American exceptionalism.

The second feature of the moment is the polycrisis. Climate change, new technologies, demographic trends and the shifting nature of capitalism will create continuous disruptions. But unlike single acute crises (like a financial collapse), the polycrisis will not foster unity or a desire for common rules.

Instead, the multitude of simultaneous challenges will generate competition for attention; climate will have to compete with migration, Gaza with Ukraine and so forth.

The upshot is a fragmented world of different tribes with different priorities. As the crises worsen, each will inevitably be weaponised in ways that lead to further fragmentation. Since the

first thing that happens in a crisis is a suspension of rules, the rule-based order will give way to a perpetual state of exception.

The third feature is polysemy. The new crises are taking us into unknown territory, not least because they are interacting with one another in complex and unpredictable ways. Everyone will believe what they want to believe. How can we agree on rules and norms when we no longer agree on basic facts?

The defining global challenge is no longer to combat disorder, because a state of disorder implies some common agreement on what order should look like. What we have instead is “unorder”: the very idea of order has been overtaken by events. In a private meeting at Davos, I heard one political leader advise others to “chill out” and not feel obliged to respond to all of Trump’s talk of tariffs and territorial expansion. Rather than organising the global resistance to Trump, most are looking for ways to advance the WEF’s globalist goals in the context of the new polycentric world. But now that Trump is starting to implement his policies in earnest, we will see if the Global South’s enthusiasm for his presidency lasts.

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SPORTS

TECHNICALASPECTS



File photo from 2024 Winter Cup.

OMAN SAIL HOSTS WINTER TRAINING CAMP FOR 21 SAILORS

MUSCAT: Oman Sail is hosting its first training camp of the year, bringing together sailors from the Musannah, Al Mouj Muscat, and Sur Sailing Schools in Musannah from January 26 to February 13. The winter training camp unites sailors in the Optimist, ILCA 4, ILCA 6, ILCA 7, and 29er classes, focusing on tactical and technical aspects of sailing, guided by Oman Sail’s expert coaches. The training camp is led by Sultan al Zadjali, Oman Sail’s Optimist Coach, alongside Munther al Kindi and Ahmed al Wahaibi, coaches of the ILCA class. Over the two-week camp, the coaches aim to ensure the sailors are in peak physical and mental condition in preparation for upcoming regattas.



SULTAN AL ZADJALI
Oman Sail’s Optimist Coach

The most impressive ILCA 4 and ILCA 6 sailors will also have the chance to join the Asyad Sailing Team for this year’s sailing events, which include the Winter Cup, GCC Beach Games, Oman Sailing Championship and Musannah Race Week. Sultan al Zadjali said: “The winter training camp is an opportunity early in the year to gather our most promising sailors in all classes together for two weeks of focused sailing tuition in an encouraging environment at our world-class venue at the Musannah Sailing School. “We head into a busy year with optimism, and the chance for our sailors to be part of the Asyad Sailing Team for the season is an excellent opportunity to develop at a high level. We look forward to seeing our talented young sailors out on the water in Musannah and guiding them towards reaching their undoubted potential,” he added. Following the conclusion of the training camp, Oman Sail’s Optimist squad will travel to Thailand to compete in the Admiral’s Cup before heading to Doha for the 2025 Qatar International Optimist Regatta in February. Later in the year, Oman Sail will host the 2025 IODA Optimist Asian & Oceanian Championship in Musannah from October 25 to November 1.

Amjad, Amani snatch golden daggers in Suhar

WALEED AL JAHWARI
MUSCAT, JAN 28

AMJAD, owned by the Royal Camel Corps, and Amani, owned by UAE’s Ali bin Khalifa al Rumaithi, claimed golden daggers and cars on the fourth day of the Annual Camel Race in Suhar on Tuesday.

Muheith, owned by Mohammed al Mashaikhi, and Humaid bin Hamad al Amri won the cars.

The race, held from January 25 to 30 at the Wilayat of Suhar camel race track, is supported by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, represented by the Oman Camel Racing Federation (OCRF).

The event is one of the 23 events set for the 22nd edition of the annual camel races for the 2024-2025 season.

The six-day competition will feature 100 rounds, with participation from camels representing the Sultanate of Oman and the GCC. This year’s event will award over 1,000 prizes, including 24 cars, 15 daggers, 6 icons, silver and golden swords, and cash prizes for the top ten winners.

The opening day on Saturday morning witnessed 15 rounds dedicated to the ‘Hagayeg’ category—two-year-old camels racing over a distance of 4 km—with cash prizes for the top ten winners.

On the second day, 15 rounds were held in the morning session for the same category, followed by 8 rounds in the afternoon. Prizes for the afternoon rounds included 8 cars, 3 daggers, and 2 icons.

The third day, Monday, witnessed 18 rounds with cash prizes for the ‘Laqaya’ category, for three-year-old camels over a distance of 5 km, while in the afternoon the category concluded with 7 rounds, offering 7 car prizes, three daggers, and two icons.

The fourth day, Tuesday, witnessed 13 rounds for the ‘Al Ythaa’ category, with four-year-old camels racing over 6 km, while the main rounds kicked off in the afternoon with 5 rounds featuring four cars, two daggers, and two icons.

The fifth day competitions continue with 12 rounds over a distance of 8 km; six rounds will be for the ‘Al Thanaya’ category, five years old with two daggers, and six rounds allocated for the ‘Al Hawl’ category with two daggers as prizes.

In addition to the one round for human riders over a distance of 2 km for daggers, all rounds will have cash prizes for



the top ten finishers. The Oman Camel Racing Federation announced certain participation conditions, which are limited to purebred camels, with the use of blood stimulants, stimulating substances, or electric shocks strictly prohibited. Shaikh Said bin Saud al Ghafili, Chairman of the Oman Camel Racing Federation, said: “Camel racing represents an Omani heritage that is passed down from generation to generation and enjoys great interest and support from all segments of society. Camel owners and trainers compete to participate and win various prizes, in addition to the economic benefits derived from buying and selling camels in Oman and globally.”

FOURTH DAY MORNING RACES (CASH PRIZES) RESULTS:

Round No	Camel name	Owner	Time
1.	Deyma / Abdullah bin Twairish al Wahaibi		9:50:21
2.	Tanbeeh / Al Hamdi bin Salim al Deree		10:02:65
3.	Meyas / Hamoud bin Hamad al Wahaibi		10:01:53
4.	Ghara / Hamoud bin Sultan al Ghafili		10:03:39
6.	Khayrah / Mohammed bin Said al Deree		9:59:15
7.	Al Kayed / Saad bin Ali al Hamidi		9:57:51
8.	Fal / Mubarak bin Amer al Habsi		10:01:49
9.	Al Wasmiyah / Saqr bin Hadoob al Amri		10:01:49
10.	Al Qumah / Masoud bin Nasser al Yahmadi		10:05:85
11.	Al Tayari / Muhanna bin Makhbout al Kathiri		10:03:49
12.	Shaqra / Nasser bin Ali al Deree		10:01:09

4TH DAY AFTERNOON RACES RESULTS: Round No | Camel name | Owner | Time | Prize

1.	Amjad / Royal Camel Corps		9:33:45 / dagger + car
2.	Amani / Ali bin Khalifa al Rumaithi		9:36:29 / dagger + car
3.	Muheith / Mohammed al Mashaikhi		9:33:59 / icon + car
4.	Bayan / Humaid bin Hamad al Amri		9:38:21 / car
5.	Al Nadir / Abdullah bin Twairish al Wahaibi		9:48:79 / icon

Man City will embrace Brugge ‘challenge’ in must-win CL clash

MANCHESTER: Pep Guardiola says Manchester City will embrace the “challenge” of Wednesday’s must-win Champions League clash against Club Brugge and is confident they will make the knockout stages.

The Premier League champions must beat last season’s Belgian league winners at the Etihad to progress to the play-off stage, involving teams ranked from ninth to 24th in the league phase.

The top eight teams automatically qualify for the round of 16, which takes place in March.

City endured a horrific run of just one win in 13 games in all competitions from October to December, which threatened to completely derail their season.

Guardiola’s men appear to have turned a corner in the Premier League, winning four of their past five games to climb back into the top four.



Manchester City’s Spanish manager Pep Guardiola reacts during a press conference in Manchester on the eve of their match against Club Brugge. — AFP

But lingering problems were exposed last week as Paris Saint-Germain battled back from 2-0 down to inflict a damaging 4-2 defeat on the 2023 European champions.

Guardiola has never failed to reach the Champions League knockout stages in his career as a manager and he said Tuesday

he was confident his side would progress.

“It’s not a problem, it’s an opportunity, a challenge, and we will face it,” he told his pre-match press conference.

He added: “I expect a tough opponent. When a team is 20 games unbeaten (the run is 21) it is because they are good. There are no secrets about that.

“They beat Aston Villa, (against) Juventus, Milan they played good. Celtic... they did really well. Different variations in the build-up. We have to read well what we have to do.

“But every team — Manchester City included — has weaknesses. You have to find them and punish them.”

Guardiola appeared frustrated when quizzed on the potential consequences of an early exit from the Champions League.

City are presently 25th in the league table after just two wins in

their seven games.

“Of course, I’m not naive enough to know how important it is financially for the club to go through in this competition, but sometimes it happens, sometimes it doesn’t,” he said.

“But, of course, we want to try to go through, especially for sporting reasons.”

The 54-year-old Catalan said he had faith the pressure of the situation would bring out the best in his players.

“I know they want it, I know how focused they are, and I don’t have doubts that we will perform what we have to do to go through, but with football, you never know,” he said.

Norway midfielder Oscar Bobb is in contention to feature against Club Brugge for the first time since August but new signings Omar Marmoush, Vitor Reis and Abdukodir Khusanov are all ineligible. — AFP

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE 2024-2025
8th matchday
JANUARY 29
EUROPE
Sporting Portugal - Bologna
PSV Eindhoven - Liverpool
Young Boys - Red Star Belgrade
Stuttgart - Paris Saint-Germain
Sturm Graz - RB Leipzig
Manchester City - Club Brugge
Bayern Munich - Slovan Bratislava
Inter Milan - Monaco
Dortmund - Shakhtar Donetsk
Barcelona - Atalanta
Bayer Leverkusen - Sparta Prague
Juventus - Benfica
Dinamo Zagreb - AC Milan
Salzburg - Atletico Madrid
Lille - Feyenoord
Aston Villa - Celtic
Girona - Arsenal
Brest - Real Madrid

SEASONONE



MTCL JOINS HANDS WITH BRAVEHEART TO HOST PREMIER LEAGUE TOURNAMENT

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabiyousef

Muscat Tennis Cricket League (MTCL) has joined hands with Braveheart to host MTCL Premier League Tournament Season 1 which will be held at the Oman Cricket Academy Ground in Al Amerat on February 21 and 22, under the auspices of Hamoud al Wahaibi, associate partner of the event.

The Muscat Tennis Cricket Premier League Tournament (MTCL) Season 1, is touted to be one of its kind for the cricket lovers and is aimed to creating new history in Muscat’s tennis ball cricket.

The tournament, which offers the highest prize money in Oman, will also feature top tennis ball cricketers from countries like India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and others as guest stars.

The winners will be given a cash prize of RO 2,000, while the runner-ups will receive RO 1,000 and the third and fourth place teams will receive 250 rials each. In addition, players will also receive cash prizes for individual achievements.

As many as 24 leading teams in Oman are expected to compete in the tournament. Each team can field two foreign players as guest players. The player auction, modelled after the IPL, was held a few days ago in Muscat in the presence of three prominent figures in the Indian cricket players auction scene.

Many teams have acquired top players through an exciting auction from the registered players. In this tournament, Taimur Mirza, who is called the king of Pakistani tennis ball cricket, will come out to show his magic with the bat on the soil of Muscat.

In addition to this, many players from India, including Thomas Dias, who is also the brand ambassador of T10 cricket in Dubai, will add to the star power of the tournament. In addition to the umpires, team officials, scorers, curators and observers who have experience in officiating international matches, there will also be an online live telecast of the tournament.

The current office-bearers of Oman Cricket have made great efforts to establish cricket in a land where only football reigns. Inspired by the high-level support to tennis ball cricket in Oman, the MTCL officials also have come on this path years ago.

Currently, about 300 teams are participating in the three ongoing leagues. MTCL is active in many parts of Oman, including Salalah, with tournaments.

Speaking to Oman Observer during a press conference at the Cumin Catering Hall, the organisers said that it is expected that Oman would be recorded in international tennis ball cricket when this tournament is completed.

They added that, here forth, there is a plan to form an Oman international tennis ball cricket team, organise the Gulf Cup, Asia Cup, and later the Tennis Ball Cricket World Cup by incorporating international tennis ball cricket teams from other countries.

“When we submitted this plan to the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, we received great support and we are currently trying to find a place for it. The group members are moving forward with unity, mutual help and support,” Shaheer KC, Founder and Chairman, said.

Santhosh Braveheart, Title Sponsor, Liju Memana, Secretary, Anuraj Rajan and Muhammed Rafi along with the other organising officials were present at the press conference.

High-flying Rockets edge Celtics, Davis lifts Lakers

AMEN Thompson drove for the game-winner with 1.3 seconds left to lift the Houston Rockets to a gritty 114-112 victory over the NBA champion Boston Celtics on Monday.

After two victories over Eastern Conference leaders Cleveland last week, the Rockets held on to topple another Eastern power, surrendering an early 11-point advantage but clawing back after the Celtics took a 12-point lead early in the fourth quarter.

Dillon Brooks scored 36 points and Thompson added a career-high 33 points with 10 rebounds, four assists, one steal and a key late block for the Rockets.

A three-pointer from Brooks ignited a 13-0 Rockets run capped by two baskets from Thompson that put Houston up 102-101.

Jaylen Brown scored 28 points to lead the Celtics. Jayson Tatum scored all 19 of his in the second half but his late surge couldn’t get Boston over the hump.

After four more lead changes, the Celtics had tied it 112-112 on Tatum’s layup with 5.3 seconds left. But Thompson, the fourth overall pick in the 2023 draft, got loose on an inbounds play and drove for the game-winner.

“That felt great,” Thompson said. “That’s my first game-winner. I feel like Kobe (Bryant)!”

Elsewhere, the Cavaliers snapped their first three-game losing streak of the season with a 110-91 home victory over Detroit while the Los Angeles Lakers — fuelled by a monster game from Anthony Davis — notched a fourth consecutive victory 112-107 over the Charlotte Hornets.

Davis scored 42 points and pulled down 23 rebounds and the Lakers led by as many as 23 points on the way to victory.

Davis set the tone early, scoring 21 points with 11 rebounds in the first quarter alone, when he connected on nine of his 12 attempts from the field.

“Teammates did their job setting me up,” Davis said. “It’s the entire team, not just me I think. It’s the way we’ve been playing, moving the basketball, playing for each other, not caring who scores as long as we score — things have just been able to open up for me.”

LeBron James added 22 points, seven rebounds and eight assists and Austin Reaves chipped in 17 points for the Lakers.

Miles Bridges scored 26 points to pace the Hornets, but Charlotte saw star guard LaMelo Ball exit in the first half with an ankle injury.

KNICKS TOP GRIZZLIES

In Miami, the Heat shook off the latest drama surrounding star Jimmy Butler to beat the Orlando Magic 125-119 in double overtime.

Tyler Herro scored 30 points and handed out 12 assists, Bam Adebayo added 26 points and six Heat players scored in double figures.

Hours earlier Butler — reportedly miffed to be told he would be coming off the bench — walked out of the morning shoot-around and was suspended by the team for the third time this month.

The New York Knicks brought the Memphis Grizzlies’ six-game winning streak to an emphatic end with a 143-106 triumph at Madison Square Garden.

Mikal Bridges scored 28 points to lead seven Knicks players in double figures and New York held Memphis star Ja Morant to 10 points on the way to their fourth straight win.

Karl-Anthony Towns scored 24 points and grabbed 11 rebounds for the Knicks, who put up 143 points



Houston Rockets’ Dillon Brooks (9) shoots the ball against Boston Celtics’ Kristaps Porzingis (8) in the second half at TD Garden in Boston, Massachusetts, USA. — **Imagn Images**



Los Angeles Lakers’ Anthony Davis (3) shoots a jumper over Charlotte Hornets’ Mark Williams (5) during the second quarter at the Spectrum Center in Charlotte, North Carolina, USA. — **Imagn Images**

The New York Knicks brought the Memphis Grizzlies’ six-game winning streak to an emphatic end with a 143-106 triumph at Madison Square Garden. Mikal Bridges scored 28 points to lead seven Knicks players in double figures.

for the second straight game. The Chicago Bulls withstood a 33-point triple-double from Denver’s NBA Most Valuable Player Nikola Jokic to beat the Nuggets 129-121. Zach LaVine scored 21 points and Nikola Vucevic added 20 points,

10 rebounds and six assists for the Bulls, who connected on 24 of 53 three-point attempts. Denver led by one going into the fourth quarter, but Chicago opened the period on a 13-0 scoring run to seize control for good. — **AFP**



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NEW FACILITY



The project aims to achieve self-sufficiency in veterinary vaccines.

PACT SIGNED TO ESTABLISH ANIMAL VACCINE FACTORY IN KHAZAEN

MUSCAT: A groundbreaking agreement has been signed to establish a state-of-the-art animal vaccine production factory in Khazaen Economic City, South Al Batinah Governorate.

The Technology Company for Medical and Educational Supplies will spearhead the project, with an investment exceeding RO 15 million. Eng Salem bin Sulaiman al Dhahli, CEO of Khazaen Economic City, and Dr Mamdouh Aqeed, CEO of the company, formalised the agreement, which allocates 10,000 square meters for the facility.

The factory is expected to produce two billion vaccines annually, bolstering Oman's food security system and enhancing biosecurity programs for animal health.

The project aims to achieve self-sufficiency in veterinary vaccines, reduce reliance on imports, and position Oman as a global player in vaccine production. It will cater to local demand while exporting to international markets, contributing to sustainable economic growth.

This strategic investment underscores Oman's commitment to food security and innovation in veterinary health. — ONA

1.1 million jobs near public transport in Muscat by 2040

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, JAN 28

A shift away from car-centric urban planning, coupled with a greater emphasis on public modes of transportation, are among key policy directions at the heart of the Greater Muscat Structure Plan (GMSP) currently under development by Oman's Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning.

Indeed, by 2040, the Plan will ensure that more than 1.1 million jobs will be within walking distance of a public transport stop, say experts associated with the landmark initiative.

Leading Italian mobility and transportation specialist MIC-HUB has been tapped to develop mobility strategies as part of the Greater Muscat Structure Plan, currently being undertaken by a multidisciplinary team led by F&M Middle East Engineering Consultancy and Broadway Malayan, a UK-based global urbanism practice.

According to Milan-based MIC-HUB, the GMSP strategy seeks to address, among other urban planning challenges, the capital city's unsustainable dependence on private vehicles for transportation.

Daily motorized journeys, which averaged 3.7 million in 2022, are projected to nearly double to 6.2 million by 2040, unless effective mobility solutions are implemented, it warned in a recent post.

"The aim of the GMSP (spanning the 2022 – 2040 timeframe) is to provide a more focused spatial development strategy for the metropolitan region.

This interdisciplinary project has evolved from the National and Regional spatial strategies to focus on how the largest city of Oman can solve key challenges and create a more sustainable and liveable future for its inhabitants," the mobility solutions specialist pointed out.

"Population growth, urban sprawl and a high degree of car dependency contribute

A robust public transportation system is proposed to cover 80 per cent of Muscat City's population by 2040.

towards increasing challenges for everyday urban mobility, where transportation infrastructure becomes a bottleneck of social and economic life within the whole area," it stated.

To address mobility-related challenges, the Greater Muscat Plan espouses five key policy directions: Promoting public transport; Improving network access; Enhancing cargo logistics; Supporting soft mobility; and Leveraging transport technology.

According to MIC-HUB, public transportation services – anticipated to cover 80 per cent of the population by 2040 – will contribute to a more productive economy.

Citing its study, it noted that more than 1.1 million jobs will be located within a short walking distance of a public transport stop by 2040, once the Greater Muscat Plan is fully implemented.

Furthermore, in a bid to bolster network access to inhabitants of the capital city, more than 900 kilometres of the estimated 1,431 kilometres of new proposed road projects

will be designed for modes of transport other than cars.

Additionally, in line with a policy direction to enhance cargo accessibility across the city, a system of logistics corridors and hubs is proposed with the ultimate goal of 'greening' the Muscat's logistics infrastructure.

At the same time, access to major gateways and industrial areas will be guaranteed under this policy direction.

Crucially, the Greater Muscat Plan champions the adoption of soft mobility modes, chiefly walking and cycling, particularly as 5 per cent of all trips in the future will be under 1km and 24 per cent under 5 km.

Finally, the Plan envisions the establishment of a high-tech Traffic Control Centre in support of its Policy Direction on the exploitation of transport technology.

The centre will enable the rollout of Mobility-as-a-Service (MaaS) and Logistics-as-a-Service (Laas) – both cutting edge technologies – across the city.

Oman and India commit to joint fund for sustainable infra

FAISAL AL AJMI
MUSCAT, JAN 28

The 11th meeting of the Oman-India Joint Committee was held here on Tuesday, January 28, 2025, under the leadership of Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Oman's Minister of Commerce, Industry, and Investment Promotion, and Piyush Goyal, India's Minister of Commerce and Industry.

The meeting was attended by senior officials from both sides.

The committee discussed strengthening trade and investment relations, focusing on mutual interests in renewable energy, technology, healthcare, and tourism. Both sides highlighted the importance of their strategic partnership, further solidified by the historic visit of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to India in December 2023.

Al Yousef noted that bilateral trade reached RO 2.05 billion in 2023 and emphasized Oman's

Strengthening ties: Oman and India commit to expanding cooperation in trade, investment, and renewable energy.

Vision 2040, focusing on sustainable growth, economic diversification, and renewable energy, particularly green hydrogen. He expressed

confidence that expanding cooperation across sectors will create new investment opportunities and strengthen the economic partnership between

Oman and India.

The committee also explored avenues to enhance investment collaboration. Indian companies have invested over \$750 million in Oman as of December 2023, while the cumulative flow of Omani investment into India has reached approximately \$600 million from 2000 to 2024.

The Indian delegation presented several key initiatives, such as "Make in India" and "Digital India," aimed at attracting more Omani investments to India.

The meeting saw extensive discussions on a variety of crucial sectors.

In energy, both sides reaffirmed the importance of collaboration in renewable energy, with a particular focus on green hydrogen and green ammonia.

In agriculture and food security, the committee agreed to intensify cooperation in agricultural investment and technology transfer, with an emphasis

on agricultural and fisheries products. Further, cooperation in the healthcare sector, education, special economic zones, transport, and logistics was also discussed.

The meeting resulted in an agreement to establish a joint investment fund for sustainable infrastructure, focusing on renewable energy transport.

The two countries also discussed expanding banking cooperation, resolving tariff issues, and facilitating trade in agricultural products like basmati rice and Omani dates.

Looking towards the future, both sides are committed to strengthening cooperation in environmental and climate change initiatives, including investments in the circular economy and green projects.

The two nations also expressed their intention to promote tourism cooperation through joint exhibitions and the exchange of expertise.

ADVERTORIALS

SHORTTAKES



These institutions are also one of the tributaries of employment in the private sector.

BANKDHOFAR
LAUNCHES NEW SME
PRO ACCOUNT WITH
GREAT BENEFITS

MUSCAT: Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) is one of the important sectors in the Sultanate of Oman to bring a qualitative shift in the national economy and contribute to the gross domestic product, in line with Oman Vision 2040. These institutions are also one of the tributaries of employment in the private sector.

BankDhofar is one of the most important financial institutions in the Sultanate of Oman that continuously supports the various government trends and initiatives for the small and medium enterprises sector by providing many great benefits that contribute to the growth and expansion of these institutions.

Based on the importance of the role of these institutions, BankDhofar — the second largest bank in the Sultanate of Oman in terms of branches network — announces the launch of new banking Account specialised in small and medium enterprises — “SME Pro”, to meet the unique needs of these institutions and providing exclusive benefits. With this new specialised account — “SME Pro”, owners of small and medium enterprises can obtain unique benefits and various services, provided that the average monthly balance is more than RO 5,000.

The benefits of this account include waiver of annual maintenance charge, one cheque book free every year, fee waiver in the first year for the credit card, obtaining a free debit card, exemption of transfer fees during the first local and international transfer and every third transfer thereafter; and free 6 WPS salary transfers in the 1st year.

AHLIBANK HONOURS
EMPLOYEES
GRADUATING FROM
ETIMAD PROGRAMME



MUSCAT: As part of its pledge to develop Oman’s national workforce, ahlibank recently announced the graduation of the third batch of its employees from the National Leadership Programme to Upskill and Empower the Potential Omanis for Middle and Senior Management Positions in the Private Sector “Etimad”.

This milestone underscores the bank’s continued commitment to upskilling national talent, enhancing leadership capabilities and preparing the next generation of professionals to drive the nation’s socio-economic success.

The graduation ceremony, held at ahlibank’s headquarters, was graced by the presence of ahlibank’s Executive Management. The event celebrated the graduation of 4 exceptional employees who successfully completed the rigorous programme, demonstrating their unwavering commitment to growth, innovation and leadership. Their dedication to excellence reflects the bank’s overarching vision of empowering Omani professionals and creating a future-ready workforce that is equipped to lead Oman’s economic transformation.

The Etimad Programme is part of a comprehensive suite of programmes created in partnership with international and local institutions that aim to empower the country’s youth and future leaders under The Royal Academy of Management.

Kia K5: The stylish and
innovative mid-size sedan

THE Kia K5 is a fastback evolution of Kia’s best-selling sedan, combining a striking new design with a driver-focused interior, cutting-edge technologies and a high-performance powertrain.

Achieve a confidence-inspiring experience with the K5, now available with a 2.5-litre GDI engine delivering 191 horsepower at 6100 rpm mated to an 8-speed transmission delivering a smooth and efficient acceleration.

One of Kia’s sportiest cars, the K5 caters to the youthful & trendy segments of society.

The K5 is your perfect companion for a road trip with friends and family. Its lengthy wheelbase of 2,850 mm makes it longer, lower and wider than ever, enabling greater on-road stability, maximising driver’s engagement.

Kia’s innovative modern designs and integrated technologies seamlessly complement each other. The K5 is a timeless yet modern blend of innovation characterised by an evolution of Kia’s ‘tiger nose,’ integrating its LED headlamps into the grille. The daytime running light signature gives a muscular futuristic appeal, adding to the stunning exteriors.

Immerse into your next adventure as the K5 is a fun to drive sedan with its cockpit styled driver’s seat, ventilated seats, leather wrapped steering wheel and smart key system for easy access.

Feel welcomed by the mood lighting system, emitting soft



One of Kia’s sportiest cars, the K5 caters to the youthful & trendy segments of society.

The K5 is your perfect companion for a road trip with friends and family. Its lengthy wheelbase of 2,850 mm makes it longer, lower and wider than ever, enabling greater on-road stability, maximising driver’s engagement.

ambient light from panels in the doors and crash pad that create a captivating ride experience.

Whereas the premium 12-speaker BOSE surround-sound audio system with connectivity through Apple Car Play and Android Auto to provide the ultimate immersive in-car listening experience.

The dashboard consists of Kia’s latest infotainment systems, with a wide 4” TFT Cluster + 12.3” Navigation, providing information for the driver’s convenience by displaying information consisting of the speedometer, oil pressure monitor, indicator display and tyre pressure monitoring system.

Other notable vehicle specifications include the Parking

Collision-avoidance Blind-spot View Monitor (BVM) with Surround View Monitor (SVM) and Blind-spot Collision Warning (BCW) Auto Cruise Control (ACC), Rearview monitor (RVM) with reverse parking collision-avoidance assist (PCA), rear cross-traffic collision-avoidance assist (RCCA) among other useful features.

Moreover, Kia offers state-of-the-art service and spare parts facilitation centres to avoid inconvenience.

Visit your nearest Kia showroom to get a first-hand experience and start your journey with Kia with our professional sales staff, who will guide throughout your buying journey.

Al Jenaibi Automobiles launches BMW M5 in Oman

MUSCAT: Oman’s car aficionados, get ready. The highly anticipated BMW M5 has officially arrived in the Sultanate of Oman.

Al Jenaibi International Automobiles, the exclusive importer of BMW Group vehicles in Oman, has brought the seventh generation of the iconic M5 series which seamlessly blends breathtaking performance with ultimate luxury. From its roots on the racetrack to its evolution as a modern-day powerhouse, the BMW M5 continues to set new standards for excellence, now accessible to brand aficionados in Oman.

At the core of the BMW M5’s dominance is its M Hybrid Powertrain — a revolutionary combination of a high-revving 4.4-litre V8 engine with M TwinPower Turbo technology and an electric motor. Together, they deliver



BMW M5 continues to set new standards for excellence, now accessible to brand aficionados.

a staggering 535 kW (727 hp) and 1,000 Nm of torque. Whether on the open road or a demanding track, this sedan can reach up to 305 km/h when equipped with the optional

M Driver’s Package and it is capable of going from zero to 100 km/h in a jaw-dropping 3.5 seconds.

The M Hybrid technology used in the BMW M5 draws inspiration from the endurance racing BMW M Hybrid V8, bringing a racing DNA to everyday driving. This innovative system ensures smooth, instantaneous power delivery, making every journey both thrilling and efficient.

Design-wise, the BMW M5 presents bold proportions and an unmistakable athleticism. The flared wheel arches, M Carbon rear spoiler and M kidney grille with BMW Iconic Glow are just a few bold exterior features that capture its race-inspired DNA, making it as visually captivating as it is dynamic.

Pact signed to redefine 5G connectivity across Mena

MUSCAT: Omantel, the leading telecommunication services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, has formed a multi-year strategic partnership with Airgain Inc, a global front-runner in wireless connectivity solutions, to redefine 5G connectivity across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region.

The rapid expansion of 5G has brought new challenges for telecom operators, particularly in balancing cost-effectiveness with network performance.

Traditional infrastructure solutions often fall short when it comes to extending coverage to hard-to-reach areas such as remote locations, large indoor spaces and urban areas with signal congestion. This impacts both individuals and businesses, as connectivity is now an essential enabler of daily



The rapid expansion of 5G has brought new challenges for telecom operators.

life and operations. Omantel’s partnership with Airgain addresses these challenges through Airgain’s Lighthouse, a groundbreaking smart network repeater. This advanced solution amplifies and extends 5G signals, ensuring consistent, high-speed connectivity in areas where coverage is traditionally weak or unavailable. For

example, homeowners can enjoy uninterrupted streaming across every corner of their homes, while businesses in sprawling office complexes or remote industrial zones can maintain reliable connections to power operations and applications. What makes this partnership unique is that it extends beyond the traditional

vendor-operator relationship. Omantel and Airgain are collaborating on research, development and innovation to create solutions that are specifically designed to meet the needs of the MENA region.

This strategic alignment ensures that the partnership delivers both immediate and long-term benefits, with scalable and energy-efficient solutions that address local connectivity challenges. “We look forward to our collaboration with Airgain as part of our commitment to advancing innovation in the telecommunications and technology sectors,” said Talal al Mamari, CEO of Omantel.

“Airgain’s solutions will enhance 5G performance across various environments with scalable, energy-efficient connectivity and unmatched speeds.

BUSINESS

SHORTTAKES



The graduating batch consisted of 26 startups specialising in sectors such as tourism, real estate, health and food security.

OMAN CELEBRATES
STARTUP
ACCELERATOR
GRADUATION

MUSCAT: The Promising Omani Startups Accelerator marked the graduation of its latest cohort in a ceremony held on January 28, 2025. The programme, run in partnership with the Authority for SME Development and Madayn’s Industrial Innovation Academy, supports young entrepreneurs in scaling their businesses.

Abdulsalam bin Mohammed al Murshidi, Chairman of Oman Investment Authority, inaugurated the event, emphasising the importance of youth-driven innovations in bolstering Oman’s digital economy and contributing to GDP growth. He noted that several projects have reached export-level maturity.

The graduating batch consisted of 26 startups specialising in sectors such as tourism, real estate, health and food security. Over four months, participants received 290 hours of training on entrepreneurship, marketing, investment readiness and product development. Eight products from the idea track and 13 from the pre-seed track were developed to market-ready standards.

Halima bint Rashid al Zariyah, Chairperson of the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority, affirmed continued support for startups and announced plans to expand the programme to multiple governorates with specialised accelerators.

The accelerator’s achievements reflect Oman’s strategic focus on fostering innovation, creating jobs and driving economic diversification. — ONA

MUSCAT STOCK
EXCHANGE GAINS
0.11 PER CENT

MUSCAT: The Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) 30 Index closed on Tuesday, January 28, 2025, at 4,565.88 points, registering a gain of 4.8 points or 0.11% from the previous session’s 4,561.07 points. The trading value rose to RO 2.92 million, a 27% increase from RO 2.29 million in the last session.

However, the market value edged down by 0.132%, settling at approximately RO 27.60 billion, according to an MSX report.

Non-Omani investments showed mixed activity, with purchases amounting to RO 138,000 (4.74% of total trades) and sales reaching RO 444,000 (15.23%). This resulted in a net outflow of RO 306,000, representing a 10.50% drop in non-Omani investment.

The session reflected steady trading activity, highlighting sustained investor engagement despite slight fluctuations in market value. — ONA

OMAN STEPS
UP EFFORTS
TO BOOST
EXHIBITIONS
SECTOR

MUSCAT: The Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry’s (OCCI) Exhibitions, Conferences and Events Committee convened its first meeting of the year to discuss ongoing developments in regulating the exhibitions sector. The initiative aims to enhance this vital industry and foster an environment conducive to its growth.

Chaired by Salem bin Omar al Hashemi, the meeting was held at the Chamber’s headquarters and



attended by committee members. The committee also reviewed plans for the “Arab Forum for Events,” an upcoming collaboration between Oman and the Arab Union for International Exhibitions and Conferences.

The forum aims to strengthen communication and cooperation

among Arab nations in the exhibitions and events sector. Al Hashemi emphasised the importance of collaborative efforts among stakeholders to advance the sector.

He highlighted the need for innovation, stating that growth hinges not only on regulatory improvements but also on hosting major international exhibitions and conferences that showcase Oman’s capacity to deliver world-class events. — ONA

Oman-India forum boosts
trade and investment ties

THE Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), in partnership with the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, hosted the Omani-Indian Business Forum on January 28, 2025. The event aimed to forge sustainable cooperation, foster innovation and explore joint investment opportunities by leveraging the economic strengths of Oman and India.

Key sectors highlighted during the forum included chemicals, power electronics, engineering, manufacturing, IT services, solar energy, health, agriculture, food security, infrastructure, tourism and consumer goods.

Faisal bin Abdullah al Rawas, Chairman of OCCI, described the forum as a strategic platform for business leaders and investors to deepen ties and unlock growth opportunities. He reaffirmed OCCI’s commitment to strengthening private-sector partnerships between Oman and India, emphasising the vital role of the Omani-Indian Joint Business Council in facilitating economic collaboration through events, conferences and trade missions.

Harsha Vardhan Agarwal, Chairman of the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry, highlighted the forum as a pivotal step towards expanding bilateral trade and investment. He identified various promising sectors for cooperation, emphasising mutual economic benefits.

Dr Abdullah bin Masoud al Harthy, OCCI



The event aimed to forge sustainable cooperation, foster innovation and explore joint investment opportunities by leveraging the economic strengths of Oman and India.

Board Member, underscored the forum’s alignment with Oman Vision 2040 and India’s Vision 2047. He noted that the economic ties between the two countries have flourished, with bilateral trade reaching \$5.085 billion by October 2024.

The forum featured presentations on investment opportunities, including “Economic Partnership between Oman and India,” “Invest in Oman,” and “Invest in India.” Business leaders from both nations also held bilateral meetings to discuss

potential collaborations in targeted sectors. The event was attended by high-ranking officials, including Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Oman’s Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, and Piyush Goyal, India’s Minister of Commerce and Industry.

The forum served as a testament to the enduring economic partnership between Oman and India, paving the way for innovation-driven, sustainable growth. — ONA

Oman launches asset registry expansion

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Finance has launched the fourth phase of the National Registry of Government Assets Project (Osool), aiming to centralise asset management across 40 government agencies.

The inaugural meeting, attended by representatives from various entities, outlined the scope of the registry, which tracks assets such as real estate, machinery and intangible properties.

Abdullah bin Salim al Harthy, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Finance, emphasised that the initiative seeks



The project aims to centralise asset management across 40 government agencies.

to optimise asset utilisation, improve management efficiency and generate additional revenue for the state budget.

Since its inception, Osool has registered over 467,000 assets, including lands, buildings and equipment. The project’s next phase will further integrate government units, ensuring a unified approach to asset management and maximising economic returns.

This initiative underscores Oman’s commitment to fiscal responsibility and sustainable development. — ONA

Jindal Shadeed highlights steel slag in road construction

SUHAR: Jindal Shadeed Iron and Steel (JSIS) hosted an event at its SOHAR Port and Freezone facility on Tuesday, January 28, 2025, showcasing the potential use of steel slag as a sustainable alternative in commercial construction, notably road construction and infrastructure projects.

The event highlighted the use of steel slag — a byproduct of steel production — as an eco-friendly alternative to natural stone aggregates, thereby driving the nation’s transition towards a circular economy. Notably, steel slag roads have been implemented in countries like the USA, Germany and Japan, where the technology has been tested and approved for use commercially.

Using steel slag aggregates in

place of natural aggregates in road construction has a number of environmental and cost benefits. It contributes to savings in water use per kilometre of road construction, reduction of CO2 emissions and high compressive stress.

Shaikh Mohammed bin Sulaiman al Kindi, Governor of Al Batinah North, said, “Environmental sustainability is one of Oman’s top priorities and serves as a fundamental pillar of Oman Vision 2040. Implementing strategic environmental programmes is among the most vital means to achieve various developmental objectives, particularly in the industrial sectors. The Sultanate reaffirms its commitment to strengthening responsible environmental practices in



Dignitaries and guests at the launch of a road constructed by Jindal Shadeed with steel slag.

alignment with global sustainability goals and the United Nations 2030 Agenda.”

Al Kindi further emphasised the importance of adopting innovative solutions to minimise environmental impact, stating: “For instance, utilising steel slag not only helps in reducing long-term

environmental impact but also accelerates the transition towards more efficient and sustainable resource utilisation.”

Harssha Shetty, CEO of JSIS, emphasised the role of steel slag in supporting Oman’s environmental objectives, stating, “With growing global environmental concerns, it is imperative for industries to embrace sustainable practices in resource management and production.

The construction sector, in particular, must prioritise eco-friendly solutions to address the environmental impact of traditional methods. At JSIS, we are at the forefront of these developments, leveraging innovative approaches to optimise resource utilisation while delivering high-quality products that support greener practices. Through

initiatives like these, JSIS is proud to contribute to building a cleaner future for Oman while driving sustainability across varied sectors.”

Prakash Chaudhari, COO of JSIS, added, “Steel slag offers a viable and environmentally sound alternative to natural aggregates while providing a steady supply of high-quality materials for infrastructure projects.

Globally, steel slag has been proven effective in preserving ecosystems and reducing the environmental footprint of construction. By championing such innovative solutions, JSIS not only addresses critical environmental challenges but also strengthens its position as a forward-thinking contributor to Oman’s sustainable development goals.”

OPINION

Tax hikes send business confidence to two year low



ANDY JALIL

The author is our foreign correspondent based in the UK

BUSINESS confidence among firms in the UK in the services sector, fell to its lowest level in nearly two years following the October Budget, a new survey shows. S&P's purchasing managers' index (PMI) for the services sector showed that business expectations for the year ahead were at their lowest level since December 2022.

“This was overwhelmingly linked to worries about higher pay-role costs and subsequent declines in business investment,” the survey said.

The fall in business confidence comes shortly after the government hiked employers’ national insurance in the Budget, a move which many business groups argue will hit growth as businesses deal with extra costs.

Economics director at S&P Global Market Intelligence, Tim Moore, noted: “Forthcoming rises in employers’ National Insurance contributions weighed heavily on staff recruitment”.

The overall PMI reading fell to 50.8 in November, down from 52.0 in October and the lowest reading for 13 months.

A research by US investment bank, Goldman Sachs, said that tax hikes

introduced by the chancellor, Rachel Reeves, could have a bigger impact on employment and inflation than official estimates suggest.

The research is the latest attempt to get to grips with the likely impact of the tax changes. Reeves pushed up the rate of employer national insurance by 1.2 percentage points to 15 per cent, while cutting the threshold at which firms start paying the levy from £9,100 to £5,000.

Forecasts from the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) suggested that workers would end up bearing most of the cost of the tax rise through lower real wages, as firms cut wages and increased prices. The fiscal watchdog said the tax hike would end up reducing labour supply by 50,000 average-hours equivalent.

Analysts at Goldman Sachs said it was “reasonable” that most of the tax rise would be past on through lower real wages, but warned that the risks to employment were “skewed to the upside”, meaning that they will be felt more acutely than is currently being predicted.

There has been a record rise in UK businesses in severe financial distress as companies find it “almost impossible to navigate the challenges they face”, according to an insolvency specialist.

A research by US investment bank, Goldman Sachs, said that tax hikes introduced by the chancellor, Rachel Reeves, could have a bigger impact on employment and inflation than official estimates suggest.

The number of businesses showing signs of critical stress rose by 50.2 per cent quarter-on-quarter to 46.853 in the final three months of 2024, Begbies Traynor said. Its “red flag” alerts showed that construction companies were facing the most significant challenges, with 6,830 businesses showing signs of critical distress.

Consumer sectors also reported significant increases in distress, with a jump of 76 per cent in financial distress for the leisure sector and 48 per cent in general retailing. There were a number of high-profile collapses in the sector in 2024, resulting in substantial losses of jobs.

Executive chairman of Begbies Traynor, Ric Traynor, said the figures showed it was “clear that many distressed UK businesses are finding it almost impossible to navigate the challenges they face as we start 2025.”

He added: “For many businesses, which were already dealing with weak consumer confidence and higher borrowing costs, the increase in national insurance contributions and the national minimum wage, announced at the last budget, could be the last straw.”

The research analysed indicators of financial pressures including county court judgements for non-payment of suppliers and winding-up petitions.

EUROPE WILL HAVE TO ACCOMMODATE TRUMP FOR NOW

HUGO DIXON

If Europe was strong, it could hit back hard against any bullying from Donald Trump. Brussels and the United Kingdom would be able to match any tariffs on their goods with taxes on US imports. They could add extra duties on carbon-intensive trade to punish the new US president for pulling out of the Paris climate change pact.

In that scenario, Europe might tax US multinationals because Trump nixed a global deal setting a minimum corporate levy. It could fine Big Tech companies that abuse their power to stitch up the market or interfere with European politics. Europe might even find common cause with China on trade and green energy, potentially even ganging up on America.

Dream on. Europe is weak, economically and militarily. The leaders of both Germany and France, Olaf Scholz and Emmanuel Macron, are lame ducks — and many of the region’s increasingly powerful far-right populist politicians oppose European unity.

In that scenario, Europe might tax US multinationals because Trump nixed a global deal setting a minimum corporate levy. It could fine Big Tech companies that abuse their power to stitch up the market or interfere with European politics.

What is more, Russia has been munching through territory in Ukraine. Europe cannot for now do without Trump’s military protection. Taking action that the new president considers aggressive could see him undermine the bloc’s security.

In the first instance, Trump could stop supporting Ukraine — and Europe cannot protect Kyiv on its own. If Russia wins the war, the rest of Europe will be vulnerable to intimidation from Moscow.

So it would be a mistake for Europe to antagonise Trump. Instead, it will have to go out of its way to cut deals with him, while building up its strength as fast as possible.

DEFENCE PRIORITY

If Europe was only economically vulnerable, it might be able to stand up to Trump. But it failed to invest enough in defence after Russia occupied Crimea 11 years ago. Brexit further weakened the European Union by making it harder for Britain, probably western Europe’s strongest military power, to work closely with the bloc.

Still, the region’s position is not hopeless. For a start, it can tell Trump that it will find the cash to buy US arms for Ukraine, something Nato chief Mark Rutte said last week that the bloc would do.

Given budget constraints, the easiest source of funding would be to mobilise the \$300 billion of Russian assets, the bulk of which are in Europe, for Ukraine’s benefit. If the region does not want to confiscate these reserves, it could make what I have called a reparation loan. — Reuters

DeepSeek: Could this be a turning point for US Tech?

DEEPSEEK, a Chinese artificial intelligence (AI) startup, has recently emerged as a significant player in the AI landscape, drawing considerable attention from global investors and industry leaders. Founded in 2023, DeepSeek has rapidly developed advanced AI models that rival those of established US tech giants.

DeepSeek unveiled a free, open-source large-language model in late December that it says took only two months and less than \$6 million to build, using reduced-capability chips from Nvidia called H800s.

DeepSeek’s app is now one of the most downloaded app on Apple’s App Store and Bloomberg searches for “DeepSeek” have surged, reflecting heightened global interest and investor focus. This has raised a few pertinent questions, such as:

SUSTAINABILITY OF US TECH DOMINANCE

DeepSeek’s AI models, like the DeepSeek-R1, have demonstrated superior performance compared to prominent US models such as OpenAI’s GPT-4 and Meta’s LLaMA 3.1. These achievements span across various benchmarks, including complex problem-solving, mathematics and coding, positioning DeepSeek as a key player in the global AI arena.

Even if DeepSeek does not maintain its current level of popularity, this development serves as a reminder that competition in the global AI arena is intensifying, and Nvidia may not be in the pole position forever.

THE COST DEBATE: DOES MORE SPENDING EQUAL BETTER AI?

By developing cutting-edge AI models with less advanced and more cost-efficient hardware, DeepSeek challenges the heavy investments US tech companies are pouring into high-cost AI infrastructure.

Reports suggest that DeepSeek-R1’s API costs just \$0.55 per million input tokens and \$2.19 per million output tokens, compared to OpenAI’s API, which costs \$15



Founded in 2023, DeepSeek has rapidly developed advanced AI models that rival those of established US tech giants.



CHARU CHANANA

The writer is Chief Investment Strategist at Saxo Bank

and \$60, respectively. This raises critical questions about whether the traditional capital-intensive approaches are sustainable in the long run.

OPEN SOURCE: THE INNOVATION MULTIPLIER

Taking a different path from many US companies that tightly guard their AI models, DeepSeek has adopted an open-source strategy, openly sharing its code and training methodologies.

This approach could drive faster innovation and broader adoption globally, potentially diminishing the competitive advantage of US firms reliant on proprietary systems such as OpenAI’s GPT-4 or Google’s Bard. Yann LeCun, Meta’s chief AI scientist, remarked that DeepSeek’s success underscores the potential of open-source models to surpass proprietary ones.

HIGH VALUATIONS: THE CONSTANT PAIN POINT FOR US BIG TECH

US tech companies are trading at premium valuations, with major AI players like Nvidia, Microsoft, and Alphabet commanding forward P/E multiples far above historical averages. With these stocks

priced for perfection, even minor disruptions, such as DeepSeek proving advanced AI can be built without top-tier chips, could weigh heavily on share prices. For Nvidia, in particular, its role as a key supplier of AI chips makes it vulnerable if demand for its high-end products wanes.

In contrast, Chinese tech companies, including new entrants like DeepSeek, are trading at significant discounts due to geopolitical concerns and weaker global demand. DeepSeek’s rise could spark renewed investor interest in undervalued Chinese AI companies, providing an alternative growth story.

GEOPOLITICAL CHESS: BEATING CHIP RESTRICTIONS

DeepSeek’s success raises another pressing question: how did they do it despite US export controls?

The Biden administration’s semiconductor restrictions were designed to limit China’s access to high-powered chips like Nvidia’s H100s.

Yet DeepSeek has managed to thrive, suggesting either a workaround or that these controls aren’t as restrictive as intended.

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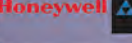
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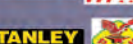
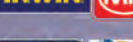
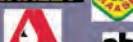
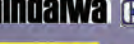
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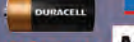
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ART/LIFE



L I F E H A C K S

UNIQUE CANDLE CREATIONS MERGE GREEK INSPIRATION WITH OMANI ARTISTRY > 20

ENTERTAINMENT

Elton John warns AI plans ‘threaten’ artist earnings, backs McCartney



ELTON JOHN has warned that artificial intelligence (AI) poses a significant threat to the earnings of young artists, aligning himself with Paul McCartney in critiquing proposed changes to UK copyright law.

The UK government has embarked on a consultation regarding the utilisation of copyrighted material for training AI models. This initiative seeks to establish how artists can license their work and receive compensation, while also fostering collaboration between the creative and AI sectors.

In an interview with *The Sunday Times*, 77-year-old John expressed concern that “wheels are in motion” to enable AI firms to bypass traditional copyright protections that safeguard artists’ livelihoods. He asserted that this would allow major tech companies unrestricted access to artists’ work, enabling them to train their AI and produce competing music. “This will dilute and threaten young artists’ earnings even further,” he stated, emphasising the music community’s strong rejection of these changes.

John, a multi-award-winning artist, highlighted the increasing difficulty for new musicians to sustain a viable career due to financial challenges, including rising touring costs. He warned, “Without robust copyright protection that ensures artists earn a fair wage from their music, the UK’s position as a leader in the arts is at serious risk. This is the cornerstone of artistic prosperity.”

The consultation may permit AI companies to access media content unless organisations specifically opt-out. Appearances by McCartney, 82, on BBC One’s *Sunday With Laura Kuennsberg* underscored concerns over young artists losing ownership of their creations. “Young musicians write beautiful songs and do not own them,” he lamented.

McCartney called on the government to safeguard creativity, insisting they must protect the creators, or risk losing them altogether. He has also recently released the final Beatles song, “Now And Then,” which used technology to enhance John Lennon’s original track while including band-mates Harrison and Starr.

A government spokesman reaffirmed the commitment to ensuring strong copyright protections for artists within the evolving landscape of AI. — PA Media/dpa

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



FESTIVAL

Berlinale director Tricia Tuttle addresses journalists during a press conference for the upcoming International Film Festival Berlinale in Berlin. — AFP



EVENTS

Moroccan football player Achraf Hakimi poses ahead of the Sacai Menswear Ready-to-wear Fall-Winter 2025/2026 collection as part of the Paris Fashion Week, in Paris. — AFP



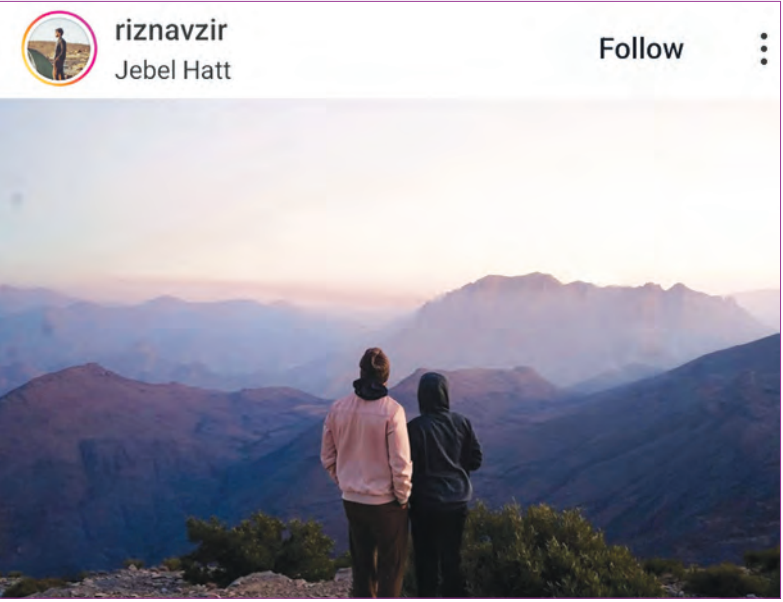
LIFESTYLE

Boys sit with a hooded falcon during the Qatar International Falconry and Hunting Festival at Sabkhat Marmi in Sealine, south of Doha. — AFP

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Instruments from classic Beatles album ‘Sgt Pepper’s’ go on display



FRENCH HORNS used to create the sound of one of The Beatles’ most acclaimed albums have gone on display.

The brass instruments can be heard on “Sgt Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band,” which was released by the group in 1967 and was number one in the UK charts for 23 straight weeks.

Two of the four French horns used on the album have been exhibited at Liverpool Beatles Museum.

Sian Kenrick, whose late father Tony Randall played the horn, got in touch with the museum in December.

After officials confirmed they would like to put the instrument on display, Randall’s family got in touch with the relatives of John Burden, another of the four French horn players on the album. Museum owner Roag Best said: “He was the guy Paul McCartney stood next to and, because Paul couldn’t transcribe music, he would hum the tune and say ‘can you write that down?’”

“He would have to write the music for the other French horn players.”

Before he died, Burden remembered the session saying: “They didn’t really know what they wanted. I wrote out phrases for them based on what Paul McCartney was humming to us and George Martin.

“All four Beatles were there but only Paul took an active interest in our overdub.”

Families of both musicians flew in from Ireland and New York to be at the museum on Thursday to see the items unveiled, with members of Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra providing music.

Best said: “None of the instruments from the album have ever appeared and it is an iconic album.

“One of the horns is in immaculate condition and the other one has had a lot of repair work and panels have been welded on to it, but by all accounts it still worked. — PA Media/dpa



Louvre opens first fashion exhibition after shock memo about decay

THE LOUVRE in Paris opened its first-ever fashion exhibition on Friday, seeking to draw new, younger audiences amid national concern about conditions inside the landmark art destination.

The show, called “Louvre Couture”, welcomed its first visitors a day after a shock memo from the museum’s director about water leaks, building problems and

fashion exhibitions hosted by New York’s Metropolitan Museum of Art and London’s Victoria and Albert in recent years.

A major 2017 retrospective about Christian Dior at the Museum of Decorative Arts, which occupies a wing of the Louvre Palace, led to huge queues and drew a string of A-listers.

deaf and blind to the risks affecting the museum today,” an aide said.

The head of state is expected to inspect the galleries personally, having hosted a state dinner there in July for other world leaders on the eve of the Paris Olympics.

The Louvre received 96 million euros (\$101 million) in public subsidies in 2024. It is hoping for an extra 100 million to cover



overcrowding made headlines internationally.

The exhibition features around a hundred items of clothing by 45 top designers, placed alongside objects from the Louvre’s vast collection of decorative artworks, from chests of drawers to armour.

In one instance, a Dolce & Gabbana wool dress printed with a mosaic and embroidered with crystals, stones and sequins echoes the patterns of an 11th-century Italian mosaic from Torcello, near Venice.

Louvre director Laurence des Cars said the show demonstrated “a subtle and precise dialogue between creations from the 1960s to today and the collections of the decorative arts department, highlighting the deep connection between art and designers.”

The world’s most-visited museum is hoping to emulate the success of

— ‘NOT GOOD ENOUGH’ —

The Paris landmark has become a national subject of concern after the revelation on Thursday of a confidential memo written by des Cars to Culture Minister Rachida Dati warning about the “proliferation of damage in museum spaces.”

Des Cars wrote that the museum suffered from leaks and extreme temperatures and was a “physical ordeal” for some visitors because of a lack of relaxation areas.

“Food options and restroom facilities are insufficient in volume, falling well below international standards,” she added.

In a sign of the importance of a building that is a “source of French pride”, President Emmanuel Macron announced a visit to the national monument next Tuesday.

“It would be wrong to remain

renovations, a source close the institution said to AFP on condition of anonymity.

It welcomed 8.7 million people last year — around twice the number it was designed for.

Asked about conditions inside on Thursday, Culture Minister Dati said she wanted to increase prices for non-European visitors to help increase funding.

“The visiting and working conditions are not good enough for... the biggest museum in the world,” she said. “We need to be innovative, including with financing.”

The Louvre is set to host a fundraising gala during Paris Women’s Fashion Week in March when around 30 tables have been offered for sale, with more than one million euros raised already.

“Louvre Couture” runs until July 21. — AFP

UNIQUE CANDLE CREATIONS MERGE GREEK INSPIRATION WITH OMANI ARTISTRY



BY MAZOUN AL GHAILANI

VISITING the studio where she creates her candles, one will easily notice the air filled with the warm, rich scents of natural wax and fragrant oils. With each lovingly crafted piece, she breathes life into ancient traditions while creating something uniquely modern.

In recent years, Omani artisans have embraced the candle-making craft as a form of expression, often drawing inspiration from the country's rich history, natural landscapes and traditional customs. Many local artisans, including Afrah al Abri, have innovated this ancient craft by using eco-friendly materials and incorporating artistic designs, making their products not only functional but also decorative.

The candle-making art scene in Oman has been gaining traction as artisans tap into both cultural heritage and contemporary design. This increase in popularity can be attributed to a blend of traditional practices and modern influences, resulting in unique, handcrafted candles that resonate with both locals and tourists.

"I have always been a fan of Greek art. I read about it through historical books that described the stunning details, where candles were the basic home décor essentials for lighting, dining tables and ceremony decorations," Afrah said.

During the Roman Empire, Sicily was home to majestic Greek and Roman art preserved in statues, artefacts, and paintings that spoke of ancient myths and legendary tales. Its rich history and culture found their way into everything, even into the art of candle-making. With her creative touch, Afrah reflects the spirit of Greek art in beautiful candles, carrying the essence of Sicily's ancient heritage into the modern world through her "Sicilian Art" project.

The language of candles brings balance to our lives, symbolising warmth and relaxation. They serve as companions for those who cherish moments of reading and solitude, infusing the atmosphere with delicate, poetic fragrances. With a strong commitment to producing eco-friendly candles, Afrah merges her passion for Greek art with the creation of innovative shapes, all enhanced by her boundless creativity.

"The candle-making process begins with selecting the type of wax. Natural soy wax is ideal for creating safe, defect-free candles. Choosing the appropriate wax mould to shape the candle is also a critical initial step. Next, the wax is melted in a container over heat at a specific temperature. Following this, the desired fragrance is selected and added in precise amounts to the melted wax, along with the chosen colour. Subsequently, a wick that suits the candle's shape and size is selected and properly secured in the mould. The final step involves pouring the scented wax into the mould, waiting for it to harden and preparing the candle for use," she explained.



The Omani candle-making scene is known for its use of natural elements. Artisans frequently utilise locally sourced materials, such as beeswax and essential oils derived from Oman's flora, to create environmentally friendly candles. This approach aligns with the global trend towards sustainability and reflects a growing awareness of environmental responsibilities among consumers.

Afrah prioritises using wax free from harmful chemicals and petroleum additives that can lead to respiratory issues. She also incorporates natural aromatic oils and eco-friendly wicks that ensure safe burning. "I place great emphasis on the safety and health of consumers. My aim is to provide high-quality, environmentally friendly candles, along with a unique and artistic line of decorative products," she stated.

Her artistic approach extends beyond merely shaping candles; she introduces innovation and creativity, which can take her anywhere from thirty minutes to three hours to achieve. This quest for excellence

and diversity aims to appeal to all candle enthusiasts while transforming the perception of candle-making from a simple craft into a decorative art form suitable for decor and gifting. "Recently, candles have become a distinctive choice for gifts due to their beauty, variety and the intricate details of their scents, colours and shapes," she noted.

Al Abri has turned her passion for candle-making into a medium for extraordinary expression. Recently, she created a Halwa-shaped candle to celebrate the rich Gulf heritage.

"Inspired by Bahraini heritage, I crafted a candle resembling the famous Bahraini halwa, marking my first official production as a gift for His Excellency the Ambassador of Bahrain to the Sultanate of Oman during the 53rd Bahraini National Day celebrations at the Sheraton Muscat Hotel," she shared.

"My ambition is to make the Sicilian Art project global and to compete with well-established candle manufacturing companies in this field," she added.