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18 TEAMS
TO BATTLE IT
OUT IN TOUR OF
OMAN 2026

INBRIEF

OMAN CONDEMNS
TERROR BOMBING IN
AFGHAN CAPITAL



The Sultanate of Oman voiced its condemnation and denunciation of the terrorist bombing that took place in Kabul, Afghanistan, leaving many Afghan and Chinese citizens dead or injured. Oman expressed its sincere condolences and heartfelt commiserations to Afghanistan and the People’s Republic of China. Oman also extended its sympathies to the families of the victims, wishing the injured a speedy recovery. In a statement issued on Wednesday, the Foreign Ministry affirmed the Sultanate of Oman’s steadfast stance against all forms of violence and terrorism, irrespective of their motives or causes.

AL BASHAYER CAMEL
RACING FESTIVAL

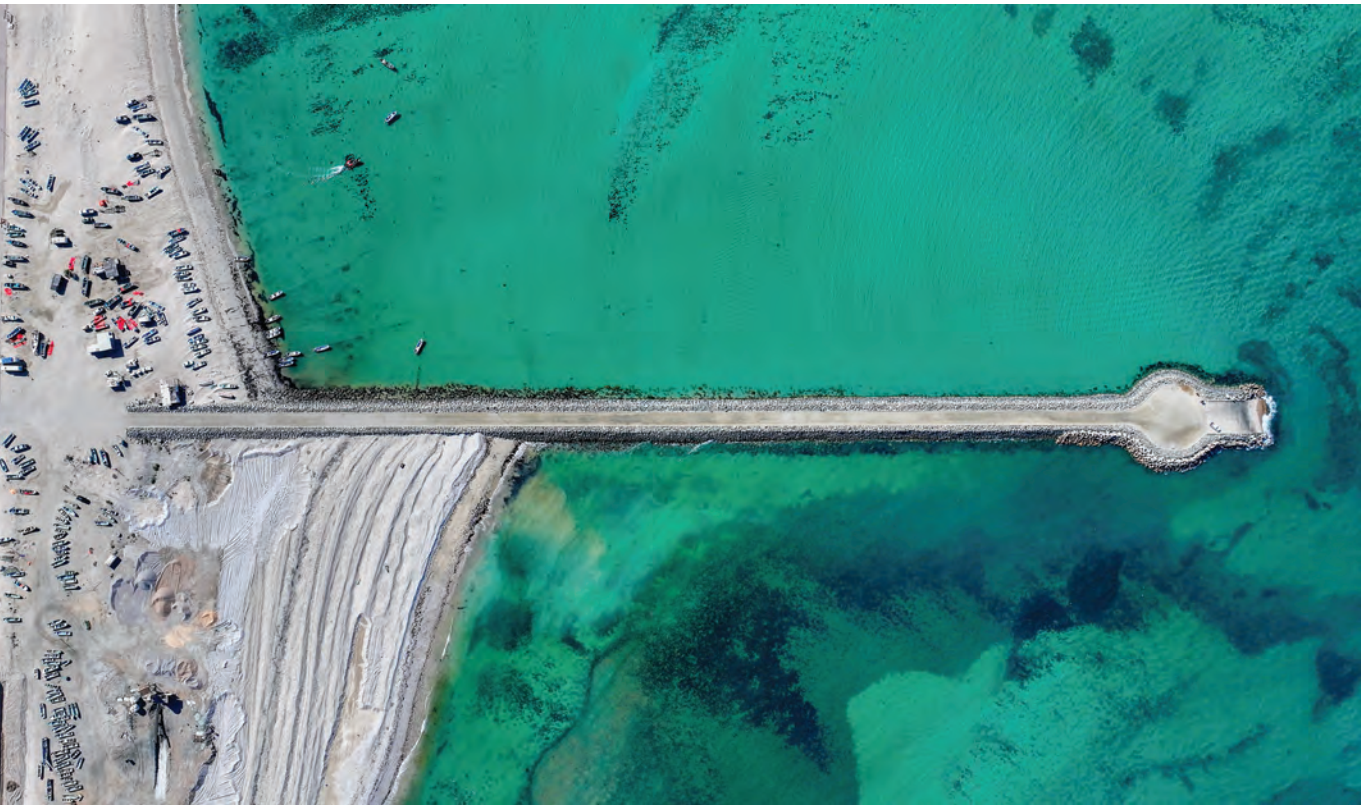
The activities of the 9th Annual Al Bashayer Camel Racing Festival will kick off on February 2 at Al Bashayer Camel Racetrack in the Wilayat of Adam, Al Dakhiliyah Governorate. The 6-day festival will see broad participation of camel owners from the Sultanate of Oman and the GCC countries. HH Sayyid Asaad bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs, Personal Representative of His Majesty the Sultan, affirmed that the festival enjoys the support of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik — who accords camel racing his utmost patronage and care as it represents an Omani heritage cherished by ancestors.

A NEW MILESTONE
FOR ROYAL HOSPITAL

The Royal Hospital has launched endoscopy and microdissection service for layers of the digestive system. The service constitutes a milestone that adds momentum to the Sultanate of Oman’s record of medical achievements. It reflects an ongoing trend to enhance the quality of healthcare, improve specialised services and attract the latest advanced medical technologies in the treatment of digestive system diseases. The event included the handling of two medical cases using modern technologies. The first was the removal of a tumour in the rectum using an endoscopes-enhanced microdissection technique. **DETAILS ON P3**

TWO NEW HARBOURS TO
COME UP IN SADAH

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources is constructing two fishing harbours in Hasik and Hadbin in the Wilayat of Sadah, Dhofar Governorate, at a total cost of RO 5.8 million. These projects are part of the ministry’s efforts to develop fishing ports across the various governorates of the Sultanate of Oman. This initiative aims to create an attractive investment environment and maximise the utilisation of fish resources, while providing a suite of public and private services within the ports to increase the fisheries sector’s contribution to the GDP. **DETAILS ON P13**



OMAN TARGETS 50,000
JOBS IN PRIVATE SECTOR

Number of job-seekers at 74,000 until November-end

SAUD AL ANSARI
MUSCAT, JAN 21

THE number of job-seekers until the end of last November reached 74,000, and the Ministry of Labour, through the ‘Sahim’ initiative, accommodated the majority of them by giving permanent contracts, while the rest are awaiting the availability of financial grades.

This was revealed by the Ministry of Labour during a media conference held on Wednesday to review the key achievements and initiatives accomplished during the year. It also discussed future approaches in the labour and human resource development sectors in alignment with the national vision and sustainable development requirements.

Speaking on the occasion, Dr Mahad bin Said Baowain, Minister of Labour, said that the communication with the media forms part of the ministry’s ongoing efforts to enhance communication tools and strengthen transparency, noting that the labour sector affects all segments of society and involves diverse expectations and needs.

He said that the ministry seeks to balance labour market



Dr Mahad bin Said Baowain, Minister of Labour, during the media conference in Muscat on Wednesday.

supply and demand by building accurate databases for employers and job-seekers, contributing to market stability and improved efficiency. He highlighted that digital transformation and direct engagement through electronic platforms and field meetings form key pillars in knowledge dissemination and service delivery.

He said that improvement in the work environment is achieved through an integrated legislative and regulatory framework, including the Labour Law and related regulations and decisions, which have contributed to enhancing the attractiveness of the

work environment and achieving greater balance in labour relations.

Speaking at the media conference, Khalid bin Salim al Ghammari, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Labour for Labour, indicated that 50,000 jobs targeted in the private sector during 2026 will be distributed across two categories, including part of them for replacement in the oil, gas, logistics and tourism sectors, and the second will be provided directly or through wage support or training. He noted that in 2025, as many as 2,000 citizens from low-income families and people with disabilities were employed in the private sector, in addition to providing initiatives with financial grades in the government sector for people with disabilities for the current year.

NATIONAL TRAINING

In 2026, as many as 60,000 job opportunities will be provided, represented by 10,000 opportunities in the government sector, 33,000 in the private sector, and 17,000 through national training and qualification programmes.

Over 31,000 workers were caught during 15,000 inspection visits by labour welfare teams for violating various provisions of the Labour Law, the ministry said. **TURN TO P2**

Visual style of Al Buraimi Central Market preserves identity

AL BURAIMI: Al Buraimi Municipality on Wednesday launched the visual style of Al Buraimi Central Market. The step reflects the municipality’s approach towards developing traditional markets in a manner that preserves their historical identity and enhances their urban presence and economic impact.

The launch of the visual style of Al Buraimi Central Market stems from an integrated vision aimed

at improving the urban landscape and raising the quality of public facilities. It seeks to establish a more organised and attractive commercial environment that embodies the spirit of the place and its historical depth, while at the same time meeting the aspirations of the community and visitors.

The new visual style of the market, inspired by the architectural and cultural heritage of Al Buraimi Governorate, features visual



The new visual style of the market is inspired by the architectural and cultural heritage.

elements derived from Omani castles and forts, traditional wooden door engravings. It also depicts geometric decorations rooted in local architecture. The visual style of the market also evokes the features of the surrounding natural environment like oases, palm trees and aflaj (water channels) that have historically formed the lifeblood of the region and served as a cornerstone of economic and social activity. — ONA

OMAN

SHORT TAKES



The partnership reflects Credit Oman's ongoing commitment to improving access to finance. — ONA

CREDIT OMAN SIGNS AGREEMENT TO FINANCE SMES

MUSCAT: Credit Oman, the national institution specialised in credit insurance, signed a strategic agreement with Hal Capital — a Sharia-compliant fintech company operating in the Sultanate of Oman and licensed by the Central Bank of Oman. The agreement aims to enhance the ability of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) to access financing and achieve sustainable economic growth.

The agreement was signed by Haitham bin Abdullah al Yaqoubi, Acting CEO of Credit Oman, and Aziz Diab, CEO of Hal Capital. This partnership embodies the shared vision of both parties to bolster the financial services available to SMEs, which are considered a fundamental pillar of the Omani economy.

Under the terms of this agreement, Credit Oman will provide credit insurance coverage for the financing provided by Hal Capital to Omani SMEs. This partnership aims to enable these enterprises to obtain secure financing, thereby enhancing their ability to trade with confidence in both local and international markets. The move reflects an understanding of the challenges faced by SMEs, such as lack of funding. — ONA

OMAN PARTICIPATES IN ‘FITUR 2026’ FROM JAN 21 TO 25



Through FITUR 2026, the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism aims to strengthen Oman's presence in travel and tourism exhibitions. — ONA

MADRID: The Sultanate of Oman participated on Wednesday in the International Tourism Trade Fair, FITUR 2026, held in the Spanish capital, Madrid, from January 21 to 25.

The Omani delegation includes a number of institutions and companies operating in the travel and tourism sector, hotel establishments, and several strategic partners.

Through its participation in FITUR 2026, the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism aims to strengthen Oman's presence in one of the world's largest travel and tourism exhibitions. It seeks to highlight Oman as a sustainable global tourist destination that offers diverse, innovative tourism patterns and luxury experiences. — ONA

OMAN PARTICIPATES IN WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM ‘DAVOS 2026’

DAVOS: The Sultanate of Oman is participating in the Annual Meeting of the World Economic Forum (WEF) 'Davos 2026', with a delegation led by the Ministry of Economy.

The event, held from January 19 to 23, 2026, is themed 'A Spirit of Dialogue', bringing together global leaders from various sectors to discuss common challenges and anticipate the impact of advanced technological transformations.

The forum is addressing five key global challenges, including: building trust and enhancing collective action; identifying new drivers for sustainable



The event, held from January 19 to 23, 2026, is themed 'A Spirit of Dialogue'. — ONA

economic growth; focusing on skill development and investment in human capital; ensuring the responsible use of technology and innovation; and integrating

environmental sustainability into economic growth models. Additionally, the forum is exploring issues related to Artificial Intelligence (AI), digital transformation, and cybersecurity, along with their effects on industries and societies.

During its participation, the Sultanate of Oman is showcasing progress achieved in several priority sectors, including clean energy, logistics, digital transformation and human capital development. These presentations reflect the objectives of Oman Vision 2040 and the nation's trajectory towards economic diversification and long-term sustainability. — ONA

‘Free and fair trial basic right of every individual’

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, JAN 21

THE right to a fair and free trial is the fundamental right of every individual, regardless of their differences, as stated by the Omani Basic Law, according to the Omani Lawyers Association (OLA). This was emphasised during a workshop organised by the OLA to educate the general public on the principles and structure of a fair trial. The workshop featured Dr Mohamed Bahaa El Din Abu Shaqqa, a Professor of Criminal Law and a lawyer before the Court of Cassation.

Entitled 'The Foundations and Guarantees of a Fair Trial', and held in collaboration with the Institute of Law for Legal Training, this specialised legal event is part of the Association's ongoing efforts to elevate the legal profession, raise awareness of legal rights and guarantees, and uphold the principles of justice and the rule of law.

Dr Shaqqa's lecture covered the legal foundations and essential guarantees of a fair trial, focusing on practical and applied



The workshop featured Dr Mohamed Bahaa El Din Abu Shaqqa, a Professor of Criminal Law and a lawyer before the Court of Cassation.

aspects to enhance legal knowledge and stimulate professional discussions among participants.

The event also aimed to address the significant challenges related to trial procedures, increase legal awareness among legal professionals, and promote a culture of

justice, in alignment with the national goals in the Sultanate of Oman to establish a state of institutions and the rule of law.

Speaking to the Observer, Dr Hamad bin Hamdan al Rubaie, Chairman of the the Omani Lawyers Association, stated that this event reflects the Association's dedication to offering high-quality programmes that enhance the skills of lawyers and legal practitioners, deepen their understanding of the fundamental guarantees of a fair trial, and keep them updated on legislative and judicial developments.

Turki bin Said al Maamari, Member of the Board of Directors of the OLA and Head of the Public Relations and Media Committee, explained that this event is part of the committee's plan to showcase the Association's scientific and professional activities.

He added that the Association is committed to delivering its media message in a professional manner that reflects its status and role in promoting legal awareness and societal understanding of the importance of justice and its guarantees.

Oman targets 50,000 jobs in private sector

FROM PAGE 1

The meeting included a visual presentation on the performance of the labour and human resource development sectors and the Eleventh Five-Year Plan of the Ministry of Labour.

Ammar bin Salim al Saadi, Director-General of Labour at the Ministry of Labour, pointed out that 36,413 employment opportunities and 15,069 jobs through training, coupled with employment and replacement, were provided in 2025. He also announced that the sectoral committee in the field of employment governance announced the provision of 13,000 jobs. In the self-employment system, 2,300

professions were registered, and more than 4,000 Omanis were replaced in technical and leadership positions.

TERMINATIONS

He said that in the field of negotiation efforts, the ministry's Economic Committee in 2025, regarding cases of terminated services, succeeded in retaining 713 cases. In the field of following up on employment and terminated services, contracts for 2,146 individuals were renewed. In the field of negotiations, 4,388 cases were retained. The number of beneficiaries of the employment security scheme reached 660. He noted that more than 141,000 establishments are registered in

the Wage Protection System.

For his part, Salim bin Hamoud al Jabri, Director-General of Regulation and Job Classification at the Ministry of Labour, pointed out that the improvement rate in performance results for the safety of applying the individual proficiency system in the human resource development sector reached 95 per cent.

EJADA MATRIX

He pointed out that 300 employees obtained the Thomas certificate as certified assessors, and 89 per cent of administrative apparatus units determined patterns for analysing personal and leadership traits within the Ejada matrix for human resource

management. Meanwhile, Abdullah al Malahi, Assistant Director-General for Planning and Labour Policies, focused in his visual presentation on the ministry's qualitative outputs, programmes that confirm the impact and the priority of the state's administrative apparatus, while following up on beneficiaries' experiences through field visits to monitor their satisfaction and identify improvement opportunities.

The presentation included efforts to complete the electronic transformation of services, activate linkage with government entities, and develop comprehensive digital systems and programmes to provide an accurate database.

Tourism security a strategic investment to strengthen visitor confidence

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 21

Oman has underscored the role of tourism security as a strategic investment essential to protecting the national economy and strengthening visitor confidence, as the First Annual Symposium on the Security of Tourist Facilities concluded in the capital.

Organised by Security and Safety Services in partnership with the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, the two-day symposium brought together more than 100 specialists from Oman's tourism and

hospitality sector, alongside international experts in facility security and crisis management.

Discussions focused on enhancing safety standards in tourist and hotel facilities, adopting international best practices and strengthening public-private partnerships to support sustainable tourism in line with Oman Vision 2040.

Addressing the opening session, Brigadier General Eng Said al Asmi, Chief Executive Officer of Security and Safety Services, said security in tourist facilities should be viewed not merely



The two-day symposium brought together more than 100 specialists from Oman's tourism and hospitality sector.

as a preventive measure but as a long-term investment.

"Tourism security protects the national economy and reinforces Oman's reputation

as a safe global destination," he said, stressing that coordinated efforts among hotels, security teams, authorities and tour guides

are essential to ensuring visitor safety and confidence.

Al Asmi noted that tour guides play a dual role as cultural and security ambassadors, helping visitors navigate safe routes while projecting a positive image of Oman.

The importance of institutional cooperation was echoed by Yusuf bin Rashid al Mafraji, Director of Human Resources at the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, who said hotel security depends on integrated planning, effective response mechanisms and preparedness for crisis

recovery. He highlighted the need for cybersecurity measures to protect visitor data, risk and crisis management frameworks, evacuation planning and continuous training of national cadres, adding that improved security enhances guest experience and supports economic stability.

British security consultant Kate Ansley told participants that hotel security has evolved into a comprehensive risk management function aligned with international standards such as ISO 31000 and ISO 45001.

SHORT TAKES



Organisers said the fair reflects a shared commitment to youth development.

OMAN INTERNSHIP FAIR
2026 SET FOR JAN 26

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 21

The Oman Internship Fair 2026 will be held on January 26 at the Diplomatic Club, bringing together students, universities and employers in a major initiative aimed at strengthening the link between academic learning and industry experience.

Presented by Europcar Oman and powered by AmCham Oman and the Diplomatic Club, the fair is supported by the British Business Forum Oman, INMECC and Crowe Oman. The event will run from 9 am to 2 pm.

More than 65 companies from across key economic sectors are expected to participate, offering students and fresh graduates direct access to internship opportunities and employer engagement.

Organisers said over 500 interns have already registered for the fair, with more than 200 internship positions available for placement through participating companies, making it the largest internship-focused platform of its kind in Oman.

Four leading academic institutions are partnering in the initiative: Arab Open University, the German University of Technology in Oman, Majan University College and the National University of Science and Technology.

DIGITAL MOMENTUM
IN GOVERNMENT
TRANSFORMATION

IBRA: Al Sharqiyah North Governorate continues to make steady progress on the path of government digital transformation, achieving tangible and qualitative advancements throughout 2025. This progress is reflected in a specialised package of digital projects and initiatives, alongside a systematic expansion in service automation.

These efforts align with the objectives of the National Programme for Government Digital Transformation (Tahawul) and the strategic directions of Oman Vision 2040 towards an integrated digital government that meets community aspirations and supports comprehensive development.

Dr Badr bin Saif al Hatmi, Head of the Digital Transformation Team in Al Sharqiyah North Governorate, explained that the number of transactions completed through the governorate’s digital channels reached 21,555 during the period from January to November 2025. Digitisation efforts contributed to converting 14 external services and 11 internal services. — ONA

ROYAL
HOSPITAL
LAUNCHES
ENDOSCOPY
SERVICE

MUSCAT: The Royal Hospital has launched endoscopy and microdissection service for layers of the digestive system.

The service constitutes a milestone that adds momentum to the Sultanate of Oman’s record of medical achievements. It reflects an ongoing trend to enhance the quality of healthcare, improve specialised services and attract the latest advanced medical technologies in the treatment of digestive system diseases.

The event included the handling of two medical cases using modern technologies. The first was the removal of a tumour in the rectum



using an endoscopes-enhanced microdissection technique. The second case involved conducting a Peroral Endoscopic Myotomy (POEM) procedure to treat achalasia.

The service was launched in the presence of Abed Allehibi,

Consultant Gastroenterologist, Head of the Gastroenterology Department at King Fahad Specialist Hospital in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

The launch of the service was the outcome of scientific cooperation, exchange of expertise and joint support for advanced clinical practices. Dr Hisham bin Abdullah al Dhahab, Senior Consultant of Gastroenterology and Advanced Interventional Endoscopy at the Royal Hospital, said, “The launch of this service affirms the hospital’s commitment to adopt precise and safe technologies that keep pace with the best global practices.” — ONA

Forum seeks funding to
turn ideas into solutions

MOHAMED AL BATTASHI
MUSCAT, JAN 21

THE Fourth EJAAD Leaders Forum officially opened on Wednesday under the theme ‘Together We Create Impact’, under the auspices of Dr Saif bin Abdullah al Haddabi, Chairman of the Research and Innovation Authority. The event brought together 200 executive leaders, academics and decision-makers from government, private and academic sectors.

The primary objectives of the forum were to enhance private sector involvement in funding research and innovation, elevate Oman’s global ranking in indicators, streamline the national research ecosystem through the unified EJAAD platform and activate applied industrial research projects that contribute to a knowledge-based economy in alignment with Oman Vision 2040.

Najah al Rashdi, Director-General of the Innovation Centre at the Research and Innovation Authority, emphasised the importance of the private sector as a strategic partner in translating research outcomes into practical applications, commercial solutions and sustainable economic opportunities.

She highlighted the forum’s significance, especially with the establishment of the Research and Innovation Authority, underscoring the Authority’s commitment to fostering national partnerships and advancing the research and innovation landscape.

Hajar al Balushi, EJAAD Director, underscored the programme’s pivotal role in bridging academia and the private sector to convert research ideas into tangible projects that generate economic value and support Oman’s transition to a knowledge-based economy.

For the first time, the forum introduced the EJAAD Shield for Research and



The event brought together 200 executive leaders, academics and decision-makers.

Innovation Leadership, recognising leading industrial and academic institutions for their contributions to the national research and innovation ecosystem and their role in translating knowledge into impactful applications. The event featured a panel discussion on the industrial sector’s role in leading scientific research and innovation.

Additionally, the forum showcased several applied research and innovation projects that have reached advanced levels of Technology Readiness Levels (TRL) through the “Souq Al Furas” (Opportunity Market).

This market serves as a strategic platform

to link scientific research outputs with the specific needs of Oman’s economic and industrial sectors.

The forum also included the Opportunities Market, a platform connecting research and innovation outputs with the requirements of Oman’s economic and industrial sectors.

The market showcased applied research projects at advanced technology readiness levels and addressed priority industrial challenges, fostering partnerships, commercial readiness, technology localisation and sustainable economic impact.

Masirah Winter Festival promotes national identity, tourism

MASIRAH: The Wilayat of Masirah in Al Sharqiyah South Governorate is currently celebrating the Masirah Winter Festival 2026, held under the theme ‘Masirah Gathers Us’. The event brings together traditional maritime arts, sports activities, entertainment performances, productive families, artisanal crafts, traditional cuisine and various competitions.

The Masirah Winter Festival showcases artistic and cultural displays that represent an integrated developmental and cultural model. This model aims to strengthen national identity, stimulate domestic tourism and support the local economy.

The Wilayat of Masirah is distinguished by its intangible cultural heritage, particularly in the fields of diverse ancient traditional handicrafts. Most notable among these are the spinning and weaving industries and the manufacture of traditional



The festival showcases artistic and cultural displays that represent an integrated developmental and cultural model. — ONA

kohl. These crafts contribute significantly to documenting and preserving traditional cultures while encouraging creative Omani skills.

The spinning and weaving industry, which continues to be practiced today, relies on animal hides and wool.

The process of hand-weaving textiles takes approximately 14 days, beginning with shearing wool

from goats and sheep, followed by washing and spreading the wool. This is followed by the twisting and spinning process; some threads may require dyeing in different colours to decorate and shape the textiles with vibrant hues.

The festival’s organising committee was keen to allocate sections for productive families and small and medium enterprises



(SMEs). This highlights the vital role undertaken by the SMEs Development Authority “Riyada” in Al Sharqiyah South in supporting entrepreneurs, empowering their projects, marketing their products, and creating sustainable economic opportunities that contribute to professional stability and local income.

Total participation in the festival

reached 113 participants, including 53 male and female artisans, in addition to 20 home-based business licences.

These figures reflect the high level of community engagement and confirm the festival’s positive impact in enhancing the participation of business owners in national events and revitalising local commercial activity. — ONA



FESTIVAL VENUES: PLATFORM FOR ALL

THE MONTH-LONG FESTIVAL, MUSCAT NIGHTS, HAS LESS THAN 10 DAYS LEFT FOR VISITORS TO EXPLORE ITS VENUES



depending on the details and size of the jewellery piece,” she explained. Azra Aleem is at the Pakistan Social Club booth and has been meeting hundreds of guests, and she makes it entertaining for all by conducting a quiz and if the answer is right, the participant walks away with a gift. “We arrive at the venue around 3 pm and leave by 12 am,” she said.

Azra expressed gratitude to the Government of Oman for offering all resident communities the opportunity to highlight their culture. Since the festival’s inauguration on January 1, 2024, Pakistan’s pavilion has drawn significant attention with its diverse cultural and culinary displays.

The Pakistan pavilion features traditional cuisine such as samosas, chaat, dahi bhalle, halwa, gulab jamun, laddoos, rasgullas, gol gappay, biryani and kulf.

Interactive experiences include a photo studio decorated with images of Pakistan’s landmarks, cultural props for visitors, and competitions including “Colour and Win” for children and “One Question, One Prize” quizzes for women.

Daily performances of folk music and dance, along with the spectacular drone show, have further enriched the festival atmosphere.

“Pakistani artists visiting Oman have also praised the hospitality and organisation of Muscat Nights,” she noted.

On Saturday, January 24, 2024, at 7:00 p.m., the Pakistan Social Club Oman will host a grand Qawwali evening at the Layali Muscat stage. Renowned qawwals Fareed Ayaz and Abu Muhammad, accompanied by their ensemble, will present soulful Sufi renditions.

The Al Amerat Public Park has all the cultural elements of Oman featured, including the heritage through crafts and cuisine, and not to forget folk music and dance.



Pictures by KHALEEN AL RUZAIKI

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
MUSCAT, JAN 21

THE month-long festival, Muscat Nights, has less than 10 days left for visitors to explore all its venues — Al Qurum Natural Park, Al Amerat Public Park, Oman Automobile Association, Seeb Beach, Wadi al Khoudh, Qurayat, and Bausher Sands.

The festival has been offering diverse cultural, entertainment, and sports activities across multiple venues, featuring fireworks, drone shows, heritage zones, concerts, adventure activities, SME markets and family fun, transforming the capital into a major winter destination with a strong local economic focus.

Seeb Beach activities have been a major attraction with the youth because they have water sports, beach volleyball, and sandcastle-building competitions to choose from. The location has been a hit with families, and food vendors have been doing a brisk business.

The Muscat Nights have been an ideal platform for SMEs. The SMEs have been benefiting from “live marketing,” allowing direct customer interaction and immediate product experience. There are designated areas for SMEs, especially at Al Qurum Nature Park and Al Amerat Public Park. Some of them have their shops, but being part of Muscat Nights has

been doing wonders for the small businesses.

One such individual is Jamal bin Juma al Balushi, an antique dealer who buys, sells and appraises old, valuable items like furniture, art, jewellery and books. Amongst his many collections are gramophones, cameras and a typewriter. People come to him and get stuck in time as they explore memories. When he played the record on the gramophone, although the record was scratched, the sound it produced was pure nostalgia for the ones who had gathered around him.

“I deal with antiques, silver, jewellery, stones and so on. And lately I have started with toys too because it is nice to see children happy. Sometimes they may not buy the antiques, but they come and look. I see they become very happy. Everyone is happy here,” said Jamal who is at the Heritage Zone at Al Qurum Nature Park.

The international communities in Oman have also found a true representation through Muscat Nights to showcase their culture and talent. “My name is Mary Wangoing Chugia. I come from Nairobi, Kenya. The business is fantastic,” said a vendor at the Kenyan pavilion. She has a collection of bead jewellery consisting of bracelets, necklaces and earrings. “I normally do it in my free time. It normally takes time. One necklace can take about three to four hours. Some others can take even three days to a week,

OMNEX2026



An introductory briefing outlined the event’s objectives, accompanying programme and the key sectors it aims to target.

FORUM AND EXHIBITION SET TO BEGIN ON FEB 2

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, JAN 21

The Oman International Exhibition and Forum (OMNEX 2026) is set to take place this February in Muscat, with the Republic of Türkiye named Guest of Honour.

An introductory briefing held at the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) on Wednesday, January 21, outlined the event’s objectives, accompanying programme and the key sectors it aims to target. The expo and forum will be held from February 2 to 4, 2026, at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre, with broad local and international participation and high-level official attendance.

Shaikh Salem bin Abdullah al Rawas, Head of the Omani side of the Omani-Turkish Joint Business Council, said the forum is being held “in line with the current directions towards strengthening economic partnerships and attracting high-quality investments with added value — consistent with the targets of Oman Vision 2040 in diversifying sources of income, supporting economic growth and building a responsible economy.”

He added that “OMNEX 2026 represents a strategic milestone that brings together investment dialogue and specialised exhibitions, and provides a direct opportunity for communication between decision-makers, government entities, business owners and investors,” noting that it “contributes to creating real investment opportunities in sectors and activities that form the foundation of the national economy.”

Yunus Atta, Head of the Turkish side of the Omani-Turkish Joint Business Council, described OMNEX 2026 as “an important milestone in the trajectory of economic relations between the Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of Türkiye, reflecting the shared will to elevate bilateral cooperation to broader and more diversified horizons.” He added that selecting Türkiye as the Guest of Honour underscores the strength of the partnership, creating wider space for exchanging ideas and expertise, and building strategic business-to-business ties between the two countries.

SQU TO LAUNCH OMANI CULTURE PROGRAMME ON SUNDAY

MUSCAT: As part of its efforts to enhance international academic cooperation and support student exchange programmes, the International Cooperation Office at Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) will launch the third edition of the Arabic Language and Omani Culture Programme on Sunday, with the participation of students from a number of countries, including the Russian Federation, the Republic of China, the Republic of South Korea and the Republic of Estonia.

The programme reflects SQU’s commitment to promoting the Arabic language and introducing



Omani culture through short, specialised courses in Arabic language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing), alongside an integrated cultural programme featuring a range of activities and field visits to key cultural and tourist landmarks in the Sultanate of Oman.

In its third edition, the programme is scheduled to host

84 students from January 25 to February 22. Participants will receive intensive language instruction designed to enhance their linguistic proficiency, enabling them to engage directly with the local community and gain first-hand insight into Omani customs and traditions.

The programme aims to provide international students with a comprehensive educational and cultural experience that combines academic and practical components, while offering a stimulating learning environment that fosters cultural understanding and strengthens bridges of communication between peoples.

Nizwa magazine rethinks sustainability and vision

IDRIS AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JAN 21

AS cultural magazines across the Arab world grapple with shrinking readerships and rapid digital change, Nizwa magazine has chosen reflection over retreat. At a workshop titled ‘Sustainability of the Project and Updating the Vision’, the Omani cultural magazine opened its long-running experience to dialogue, critique and renewal.

Introducing the workshop, Nizwa’s Managing Editor, Huda Hamed, framed the moment as both a milestone and a question. “Nizwa was launched in 1994 and has now completed more than thirty years of continuous publication,” she said. “It reached readers across the Gulf, the Arab world, and even major libraries in Britain and France. But after three decades of solidity and seriousness, we felt it was necessary to pause and listen.”

Speaking to the Observer, Huda explained that the motivation behind the workshop stemmed from a generational shift in readership and changing modes of cultural consumption.

“We are facing a new generation that is different from the one that followed the magazine in its early years,” she noted. “Through this workshop, we wanted to engage with writers, intellectuals, visual designers and people interested in technology, to ask: how can we make this project closer to both the old reader and the new one?”



The workshop brought together researchers, writers, artists, designers and university students to review the magazine’s journey.

“We are facing a new generation that is different from the one that followed the magazine in its early years

HUDA HAMED

The workshop brought together researchers, writers, artists, designers and university students to review the magazine’s journey and explore ways to develop its content, visual identity and digital presence. Discussions were structured around four main themes: the magazine’s cultural content, Nizwa’s writers, visual identity development and digital platforms.

Sustainability emerged as the central concern. Huda addressed the issue directly, pointing to the closure of many well-established newspapers and magazines worldwide. “The core question of this workshop is how we can ensure our continuity in the face of fast changes,” she said.

“Today’s reader often prefers quick, accessible content, podcasts, short videos, listening while driving, rather than long texts. So we asked ourselves honestly: should we remain exactly as we are, or should we change and move closer to new reading habits?” Importantly, she stressed that any change would not come at the expense of the magazine’s identity. “We are open to development, but without compromising Nizwa’s core values and cultural depth,” she said.

Ayoub al Yarubi, a student at Middle East College, described the workshop as “rich and inspiring”, highlighting discussions around digital identity, logo development and magazine covers.

وزارة الصحة
Ministry of Health

Announcement

The Ministry of Health (Ibri Regional Hospital) invites specialized companies to participate in following Tender :-

Tender Ref:	Description	Last Date for Collection of Tender Document	Closing Time/ Day/Date	Eligibility	Tender Fee (Non Refundable)
2805	SUPPLY, INSTALLATION, TESTEING, COMMISSIONING AND TRAINING OF STERILIZER MACHINE WITH COMPACT WATER SOFTNER IN THE OT AT IBRI REGIONAL HOSPITAL	12/02/2026	Before 9.00 Am on Wednesday 11/03/2026	Specialized Companies registered with Tender Board	• SME: 10 R.O • LO: 25 R.O

Notes :-

- All Specialized and interested Companies registered with Tender Board may obtain Tender documents from the E.Tendering website : <http://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om> against non-refundable payment as mentioned above for each set of document.
- Regional Ibri Hospital is not bound to accept the lowest tender and reserves the right to accept or reject any tender.

<http://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>
Any Clarification you may contact via
Telephone : 24402200
Email id etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om

وزارة النقل والاتصالات وتقنية المعلومات
Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology

إعلان مناقصة
Tender Notice

The Internal Tenders Committee at the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology invites for the Following Tender:

TENDER NUMBER	TENDER NAME	DATE OF PUBLISHING	LAST DATE TO PURCHASE TENDER DOCUMENT	SUBMISSION DATE	COMPANIES WHO SHOULD PARTICIPATE IN THIS TENDER	DOCUMENT PRICE
10/2026/ MTCIT	VEHICLE SERVICING AND MAINTENANCE OF MINISTRY OF TRANSPORT, COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY 2026	21-1-2026	4-2-2026	25-2-2026	EXPERIENCED COMPANIES AND REGISTERED WITH THE SECRETARIAT GENERAL OF PROJECTS, TENDERS AND LOCAL CONTENT AUTHORITY FOR ALL CLASSES	(25/-) TWENTY FIVE OMANI RIAL FOR (REGIONAL & LOCAL COMPANIES) (10 /-) TEN OMANI RIAL FOR (SMEs) NON-REFUNDABLE

Interested Companies registered with the Projects, Tenders and Local Content Authority may obtain Tender documents from the E-Tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om> against non-refundable payment as mentioned above for each set of documents. Tenders should be submitted online on given website

CORRESPONDANCE:

- Tender Inquiry: All correspondence pertaining to the TENDER Inquiry must be online at e-Tendering System. (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>)
- E-Tendering System Inquiry: All correspondence pertaining to the e-Tendering System technical support must be directed to the following helpdesk email address and phone number:
Tel: +968 24402200, e-mail: etenderhd@ptlc.gov.om

INTERNAL TENDERS COMMITTEE

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WORLD

SHORT TAKES



Rifaat al Assad

SYRIA’S RIFAAT AL ASSAD, ‘BUTCHER OF HAMA’, DIES AGED 88

DAMASCUS: Rifaat al Assad, uncle of deposed Syrian ruler Bashar al Assad and dubbed the “Butcher of Hama” for suppressing an uprising in the 1980s, has died aged 88, two sources close to the family said on Wednesday.

Once a pillar of the Assad family’s dynastic rule, Rifaat “died after suffering from influenza for around a week”, one source who worked in Syria’s presidential palace for over three decades said.

A second source, an ex-officer of Syria’s army in the Assad era, confirmed the death, saying Rifaat had moved to the United Arab Emirates after his nephew’s government was toppled by rebels in December 2024, without specifying if he died there.

Rifaat’s role in a February 1982 massacre as part of a crackdown on an armed revolt by the Brotherhood earned him the nickname “the Butcher of Hama”, referring to the central Syrian city.

His brother Hafez al Assad, who ruled Syria at the time, launched the campaign, which government forces carried out under the command of Rifaat, who was the head of the elite “Defence Brigades”.

The death toll from 27 days of violence, which took place under a media blackout, has never been formally established, though estimates range from 10,000 to 40,000. Swiss prosecutors had accused Rifaat of a long list of crimes, including ordering “murders, acts of torture, inhumane treatment and illegal detentions” while an officer in the Syrian army. — AFP

OVER 300 JOURNOS BEHIND BARS FOR 5TH STRAIGHT YEAR

NEW YORK: The number of journalists imprisoned worldwide for their work was 330 in the final month of 2025, the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) said on Wednesday, the fifth consecutive year the count has exceeded 300.

China held 50 prisoners as of December 1, followed by Myanmar with 30 and then Israel, which detained 29 Palestinian journalists, the press freedom watchdog said in its annual report.

Next was Russia with 27 prisoners, of which five were Ukrainian, then Belarus with 25 and Azerbaijan with 24, the CPJ said.

It is the third highest total recorded by the CPJ since its census began in 1992 and just short of the record 384 journalists in prison for their work at the end of 2024.

“These record-setting numbers reflect growing authoritarianism and escalating numbers of armed conflicts worldwide,” the CPJ said in its report.

The New York-based NGO said that almost half of the imprisoned journalists had not been convicted of a crime.

Nearly a third of the detained journalists had experienced “mistreatment,” the CPJ said, including 20 per cent with claims of torture or beatings.

In 2025, Asia remained the region with the highest number of imprisoned journalists at 110. Beyond China and Myanmar, Vietnam held at least 16, Bangladesh four, India three and the Philippines one. — AFP

TÜRKIYE, SAUDI, PAKISTAN, EGYPT TO JOIN GAZA BOARD

ISLAMABAD: Saudi Arabia, Türkiye, Egypt, Jordan, Indonesia, Pakistan and Qatar have accepted invitations to join US President Donald Trump’s “Board of Peace”, the Saudi foreign ministry said in a joint statement that also included the United Arab Emirates.

The announcement came after Pakistani army chief Field Marshal Asim Munir flew to Davos, three

Pakistani officials said. Munir, along with Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, is likely to see Trump, they said. They spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorised to disclose the information to the media.

Pakistan army’s public relations wing did not respond to a Reuters request for comment. The board, set up late last year under Trump’s

Gaza plan, is aimed at resolving global conflicts.

Some countries have reacted with caution to the initiative, although the US has said that over 20 countries have agreed to join so far. Pope Leo is among world leaders invited to “Board of Peace”, Cardinal Pietro Parolin, the Vatican’s top diplomatic official, said on Wednesday. — Reuters

Israeli fire kills 11 Gazans; including 2 kids, 3 journos

ISRAELI

fire killed 11 Palestinians, including two boys and three journalists, in Gaza on Wednesday, local medics said. The Israeli military said it had “eliminated” a Palestinian militant who posed a threat to soldiers.

In the latest violence disrupting a brittle, three-month-old ceasefire, Palestinian health officials said an Israeli air strike killed three Palestinian journalists travelling in a car in the central Gaza Strip.

The three were on an assignment sponsored by the Egyptian Committee, which supervises Egypt’s relief work in Gaza, to film tent encampments built by Egypt for displaced Palestinians, other local journalists said.

An Egyptian security source confirmed the vehicle belonged to the committee but gave no further details. The Israeli military did not immediately respond to a request for comment.



Mourners react during the funeral of Palestinians who were killed by Israeli strikes in Khan Yunis on Wednesday. — AFP

Israel and Hamas have traded blame for many breaches of the October ceasefire after two years of war that devastated Gaza and caused a humanitarian disaster, and remain at odds over the next steps in US President Donald Trump’s 20-point peace plan.

Palestinian medics said three people, including a 10-year-old boy, were killed as a result of Israeli tank shelling east of Deir Al Balah in the central Gaza Strip.

Two others, a boy, 13, and a woman, were killed in two separate Israeli shooting incidents in eastern Khan Yunis in Gaza’s south, they said.

Residents said the two incidents occurred in Palestinian-controlled areas. The ceasefire led to a partial Israeli military withdrawal, leaving Israeli forces holding about 53% of the enclave, but they have been gradually expanding their presence in recent weeks, leading to further displacement of Palestinian families, residents said.

The Israeli military did not immediately respond to requests for comment on the two incidents.

Earlier on Wednesday, it said in a statement that Israeli forces killed a “terrorist” who crossed into an area under their control, posing an imminent threat to soldiers operating there.

The US-brokered October deal has not progressed beyond the first-phase ceasefire, under which major fighting stopped, some Israeli forces pulled back, and Hamas freed hostages in return for Palestinian detainees and convicted prisoners.

Under future phases whose details have yet to be hammered out, Hamas is supposed to disarm, Israeli forces withdraw further and an internationally backed administration installed to rebuild the ruined, densely populated territory.

But no timetable has been set to implement the plan.

Trump was due on Thursday to preside

over a ceremony celebrating the Board of Peace, a group he formed with the stated goal of redeveloping the coastal enclave.

Israel says it can only move into the last hostage and searched for it but in vain, blaming what it called Israeli military obstruction. More than 460 Palestinians and three Israeli soldiers have been reported killed in clashes since the ceasefire took effect. Israel launched its air and ground war in Gaza after a Hamas-led cross-border attack on October 7, 2023 that killed 1,200 people, according to Israeli tallies. Israel’s assault has killed 71,000 Palestinians, Gaza’s health authorities say. — Reuters



THE TRAIL OF PROTESTS

A photograph taken during a tour for foreign media shows media representatives walking past the parked buses that were burnt at a depot during recent public protests, in Tehran on Wednesday. Demonstrations sparked in late December by anger over economic hardship exploded into protests widely seen as the biggest challenge to the Iranian leadership in years. Limited Internet access briefly returned in Iran before dropping again, 10 days into a communications blackout that rights groups said aimed to mask a protest crackdown that killed thousands. — AFP

SENTENCE AFTER 3 YEARS

Life term for killer of Japan ex-PM Abe



NARA: The gunman charged with killing Japan’s former prime minister Shinzo Abe was found guilty on Wednesday and jailed for life, as the judge declared the broad-daylight assassination “despicable and extremely malicious”. The shooting more than three years ago forced a reckoning in a country with little experience of gun violence, and ignited scrutiny of alleged ties between prominent conservative lawmakers and the Unification Church.

PRIVACY LAWSUIT

‘Mail made wife Meghan’s life a misery’



LONDON: Prince Harry held back tears as he said the Daily Mail had made his wife Meghan’s life “an absolute misery” during his appearance in the witness box on Wednesday at London’s High Court in his privacy lawsuit against the paper’s publisher. The Duke of Sussex, 41, and six other claimants including singer Elton John are suing the Mail’s publisher Associated Newspapers for violations of their privacy from the early 1990s until the 2010s.

COUP HELP

South Korea’s ex-PM gets 23 years jail



Seoul: South Korea’s former prime minister Han Duck-soo was sentenced to 23 years in prison on Wednesday for his key role in a coup in December 2024, the Seoul Central District Court ruled. Han supported then president Yoon Suk Yeol in imposing martial law, the court found. This initial verdict was significantly higher than the 15 years requested by prosecutors. Han, 76, said he would “humbly accept” the decision, the broadcaster TV Chosun reported.

SHORT TAKE



An aerial view of Tokyo Electric Power Company Kashiwazaki-Kariwa Nuclear Power Plant in Kashiwazaki City, Niigata Prefecture. — AFP

JAPAN RESTARTS WORLD’S BIGGEST NUCLEAR PLANT

KARIWA: The world’s biggest nuclear power plant was restarted on Wednesday for the first time since the 2011 Fukushima disaster, its Japanese operator said, despite persistent safety concerns among residents.

The plant was “started at 19:02” (10:02 GMT), Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO) spokesman Tatsuya Matoba said of the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant in Niigata prefecture.

The regional governor approved the resumption last month, although public opinion remains sharply divided.

On Tuesday, a few dozen protesters — mostly elderly — braved freezing temperatures to demonstrate in the snow near the plant’s entrance, whose buildings line the Sea of Japan coast.

“It’s Tokyo’s electricity that is produced in Kashiwazaki, so why should the people here be put at risk? That makes no sense,” Yumiko Abe, a 73-year old resident, said.

Around 60 per cent of residents oppose the restart, while 37 per cent support it, according to a survey conducted in September.

The facility was taken offline when Japan pulled the plug on nuclear power after a colossal earthquake and tsunami sent three reactors at the Fukushima atomic plant into meltdown in 2011.

However, resource-poor Japan now wants to revive atomic energy to reduce its reliance on fossil fuels, achieve carbon neutrality by 2050 and meet growing energy needs from artificial intelligence.

Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi has voiced support for the energy source.

Fourteen reactors, mostly in western and southern Japan, have resumed operation since the post-Fukushima shutdown under strict safety rules, with 13 running as of mid-January.

Kashiwazaki-Kariwa is the first TEPCO-run unit to restart since 2011. The company also operates the stricken Fukushima Daiichi plant, now being decommissioned.

Nearly 15 years after the disaster, “the situation is still not under control in Fukushima, and TEPCO wants to revive a plant? For me, that’s absolutely unacceptable”, said Keisuke Abe, an 81-year old demonstrator.

The vast Kashiwazaki-Kariwa complex has been fitted with a 15-metre-high tsunami wall, elevated emergency power systems and other safety upgrades.

However, residents raised concerns about the risk of a serious accident, citing frequent cover-up scandals, minor accidents and evacuation plans they say are inadequate. — Reuters

OVER HALF OF KYIV STILL LACKS POWER AFTER STRIKES, ZELENSKY SAYS

KYIV: Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said on Wednesday that around 4,000 buildings in Kyiv were still without heating and most of the capital was cut off from electricity after Russian strikes earlier in the week.

Russia has hit Ukrainian energy infrastructure throughout the nearly four-year war, but Kyiv says this winter has been the toughest yet, with hundreds of Russian drones and missiles overwhelming air defences during particularly

fierce frosts. “As of this morning, about 4,000 buildings in Kyiv are still without heat, and nearly 60 per cent of the capital is without electricity,” Zelensky said.

The situation also remained difficult across the country, including in the Sumy, Chernigiv, Dnipro and Kharkiv regions, he added. Zelensky announced a “state of emergency” in the country’s energy sector last week, with Kyiv schools remaining closed, street lights dimmed and roughly

half a million residents leaving the capital.

Shops and restaurants in Kyiv are closed due to the outages, out-of-order traffic lights, and public lighting shut off at night in parts of the capital.

Over 1,000 Ukrainians have been taken to hospital with frostbite and hypothermia over the past 30 days, the health ministry said, adding that the situation could “become threatening if temperatures drop or weather conditions worsen”. — AFP

‘ Hamas must give up arms’

US PRESIDENT TELLS DAVOS MEETING HE WON’T USE FORCE TO TAKE GREENLAND

US President Donald Trump on Wednesday said it should be known within three weeks whether Hamas will agree to give up its weapons, and threatened action if the group does not.

“That’s what they agreed to. They’ve got to do it. And we’re going to know ... over the next two or three days — certainly over the next three weeks — whether or not they’re going to do it,” Trump said in a question and answer session following his speech at the World Economic Forum in Davos.

Trump said he “won’t use force” to take control of Greenland, but he wants “immediate negotiations” over a US acquisition. “People thought I would use force, but I don’t have to use force,” the US president told the forum — and many in the rest of the world watching the live stream from the Swiss resort. “I don’t want to use force. I won’t use force.”

European leaders had been on edge after repeated Trump statements insisting the Arctic island, which is part of Denmark, become part of the United States for national and global security reasons. Previously Trump had refused to say whether he would rule out sending the US military to fulfil his demand.

In Davos he said he was “seeking immediate negotiations to once again discuss the acquisition of Greenland by the United States.”

Ministers from Denmark, Greenland and the US along with US Vice-President JD Vance already met in Washington on the issue, but those talks yielded little results.

The Danes said a working group was being set up to find a way forward. US troops are already stationed in Greenland.

Trump, who spent most of his career in New York real estate, insisted again that the US needs ownership of the large Arctic



US President Donald Trump speaks during the WEF annual meeting in Davos on Wednesday. — AFP

“People thought I would use force, but I don’t have to use force. I don’t want to use force. I won’t use force.”

DONALD TRUMP

territory for the sake of setting up a missile defence system and international security.

“You can’t defend it on a lease,” Trump said.

Only the US “is in any position to be able to secure Greenland,” he told the audience in Davos.

The European Parliament has decided to suspend its work on the European Union’s trade deal with the United States in protest at Trump’s demands to acquire Greenland and threats of tariffs on European allies who oppose his plan.

The EU assembly has been debating legislative proposals to remove many EU import duties on US goods, a key part of the agreement struck in Turnberry,

Scotland, at the end of July, as well as to continue zero duties for US lobsters, initially agreed with Trump in 2020.

Trump mocked French President Emmanuel Macron on Wednesday for the aviator sunglasses he was wearing during his own speech at Davos the day before.

“I watched him yesterday, with those beautiful sunglasses. What the hell happened?” Trump said, speaking to global elites at the annual World Economic Forum in the Swiss mountain resort.

Macron’s office has said the choice to wear the dark, reflective sunglasses during his speech, which took place indoors, was to protect his eyes because of a burst blood vessel. — Agencies

Railway safety questioned as Spain reels from twin train disasters

MADRID: Spain’s railway system was under scrutiny on Wednesday after a commuter train crashed near Barcelona, just days after at least 42 people died in a collision between two high-speed trains.

A train driver died and 37 people were injured — several seriously — late on Tuesday when the commuter train hit a retaining wall that fell onto the tracks in Gelida near Barcelona, regional officials said. Spain’s railway operator Adif said the wall likely collapsed due to heavy rainfall that swept across Spain’s northeastern region of Catalonia in recent days.

Spain was already reeling from Sunday’s collision in the southern region of Andalusia, which was the country’s deadliest rail accident in

more than a decade.

A minute’s silence for the victims was held on Wednesday at the opening of Madrid’s annual international tourism trade fair.

“This is too much,” the head of the main opposition Popular Party (PP), Alberto Nunez Feijoo, wrote on X as his formation demanded an “immediate clarification” of the state of the nation’s railways. Speaking to reporters on Tuesday before the Barcelona-area crash, far-right party Vox’s spokeswoman Pepa Millan said that Spaniards were now “afraid to get on a train”.

Services across Catalonia’s main commuter rail network have been suspended completely while safety checks are carried out and officials say they will



Police and firefighters inspect the scene of a commuter train derailment in Gelida, near Barcelona on Wednesday. — Reuters

not resume until lines are considered safe. Adif has imposed a temporary 160 km per hour speed limit on parts of the high-speed line between Madrid and Barcelona after train drivers reported bumps.

Spanish train drivers’ union Semaf has called a

strike because of the two deadly crashes. “This situation of constant deterioration of the railway is unacceptable,” the union said in a statement.

Transport Minister Oscar Puente said the government would “sit down and talk” with the union to try to avoid the strike. He also stressed

during an interview with television station Telecinco that the two accidents were “completely unrelated”, with the Barcelona-area one linked to weather conditions.

Spanish media reported that the probe into the accident in Andalusia is focusing on a crack more than 30 centimetres (12 inches) long in the track at the site of the accident.

The crack may have resulted from “a poor weld or a weld that deteriorated due to train traffic or weather”, daily newspaper El Mundo said, citing unidentified technicians with access to the inquiry. Puente has said investigators were looking to see if a broken section of rail was “the cause or the result” of the derailment.

The section of track

where the disaster happened had been renovated in May, making the accident “extremely strange”, he added earlier this week.

Some unions have accused the Socialist government of using low-cost materials, a charge Puente called “outrageous”.

“All proper materials were used. The results of the investigation will confirm this,” he told Telecinco.

The head of state rail operator Renfe, Alvaro Fernandez Heredia, said human error has “been practically ruled out” and both trains were travelling well under the speed limit of 250 kph.

Opened in 1992, Spain’s high-speed rail network is the second largest in the world after China. — AFP

OPINION

Insurance as the Gulf’s early warning system



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The writer is an environmental strategist advancing Middle East climate action and women's leadership

EVERY year, I read the World Economic Forum Global Risks Report as if it were a weather map for the next decade. Coffee in hand, I skim the rankings, then I reread the parts that make the page feel heavier. In 2026, extreme weather still tops the ten-year horizon. What catches me is the neighbourhood it sits in: misinformation and disinformation and cyber insecurity, risks that do not merely coexist, they multiply each other. I used to treat it as an annual exercise in anxiety. Now I read it to notice what changes, before it becomes expensive, before it becomes unavoidable.

This is how shocks become expensive. A storm is never only a storm. It swells electricity demand, strains water systems, delays transport, and drags public services into triage. Then information disorder arrives, speeding up certainty and slowing down trust. Add cyber disruption and the weak points line up. Compounding risk changes the bill, and it changes who receives it.

Insurance is where the spreadsheet becomes personal. Markets translate volatility into premiums, deductibles, exclusions, and terms. When coverage narrows, risk does not disappear. It moves.

It moves into a family deciding whether to repair now or later. It moves into a small business that cannot afford downtime. It moves into a ministry budget that suddenly contains a new category called recovery.

The Gulf saw that movement clearly in April 2024. Reports estimated insured losses from the floods at roughly \$2.9 billion to \$3.4 billion, while total losses were far higher, and that difference is the protection gap in plain clothes. It is savings drained, loans extended, projects delayed, and public funds diverted. Other reports also note that reinsurers no longer treat the Gulf as a low catastrophe region, and that pricing is increasingly driven by forward looking models rather than by historical experience alone.

This month, Oman responded in a way that feels like a policy sentence with a hidden thesis. A few days ago, the Financial Services Authority approved automatic natural disaster and climatic event cover for motor insurance, including compulsory third party policies. In other words, what used to be optional has been folded into the baseline. Climate volatility has entered the definition of normal, and the cost of protection is being shared more widely across the market.

A strategic choice sits underneath this. If insurability is shifting, then it belongs in

A few days ago, the Financial Services Authority approved automatic natural disaster and climatic event cover for motor insurance, including compulsory third party policies. In other words, what used to be optional has been folded into the baseline. Climate volatility has entered the definition of normal, and the cost of protection is being shared more widely across the market

the room early, while we are still drawing the lines. Urban planning, building codes, drainage standards, and maintenance regimes all write the loss curve that insurers eventually price. Data does too. Flood maps, asset registers, and disclosure practices determine whether pricing feels legible or arbitrary. Weak signals invite sudden repricing. Strong signals attract capital with fewer surprises.

The agency looks like anticipating that adjustment. It looks like building standards that reduce losses, and regulatory clarity that reduces uncertainty. It looks like treating risk finance as part of competitiveness, protecting households from surprise cost migration, protecting firms from repeated shocks, and protecting public budgets from becoming the insurer of last resort by default. It also looks like talking about insurance in rooms that usually treat it as paperwork, because paperwork is where the future arrives first.

The report will be published again next year, and extreme weather will likely stay near the top. The real question sits behind every chart: which risks remain insurable, at what price, and for whom. Markets that answer early will design differently, and that difference will show up in what gets built, what gets financed, and what survives the next season.

DAZZLING CHINESE AI DEBUTS MASK GROWING PAINS

TOMMY WANG

Investor confidence in Chinese AI startups is riding high, but obstacles to their long-term success range from US export controls to the puzzle of how to become profitable.

This month, two leading players in China’s artificial intelligence industry, Zhipu AI and MiniMax, made dazzling debuts on the Hong Kong stock exchange.

The pair is part of a wave of rapidly growing Chinese “AI tigers” spurred by another startup, DeepSeek, whose low-cost AI model, on par with US rivals, stunned the world a year ago. But Zhipu AI’s co-founder Tang Jie warned later that despite the achievements of Chinese companies in large open-source AI models, the gap with the United States “may actually be widening”.

DeepSeek and other top Chinese AI providers have focused on free, open-source technology — a strategy that can attract users fast but brings in less cash than private, closed systems.

“Large-scale models in the US are still mostly closed-source... we need to acknowledge challenges and gaps we face,” Tang said at a conference in Beijing. Geopolitical struggles could also hold Chinese AI back.

US export sanctions on advanced microchips used to train and run AI systems, as well as precision chipmaking equipment, have been cited as a key constraint by top industry figures. “The challenge isn’t just technology,” Nick Patience, practice lead for AI at tech research group Futurum, said.

“It’s the high cost of computing under sanctions and the delicate balance of innovating within a strict regulatory framework.”

Shares in Zhipu AI, a major provider of chatbot tools to Chinese businesses, have soared 80 per cent since it went public.

MiniMax, which targets the consumer market with its multimedia AI tools, has seen even stronger gains. Their IPOs came ahead of any such move from OpenAI, the San Francisco-based startup behind the phenomenally popular ChatGPT. Although OpenAI’s value has ballooned in funding rounds to a staggering \$500 billion, it does not expect to be profitable before 2029 owing to huge outlays to build the computing infrastructure it relies on. Zhipu AI and Minimax are also logging increasing losses while costs, including for training new AI models, rise.

Both are “burning cash faster than they can generate sustainable revenue streams”, analyst Poe Zhao, founder of Hello China Tech, said. — **AFP**

Oman’s coming of age as a charming destination

LET me be honest. I have been critical for a long time about Oman’s aspirations to grow the economy around tourism. Around eight years ago, I wrote a long paper on the subject that I can summarise in three points: one, the statistics used to measure tourism were leading to some delusional thinking. Two, Oman was not really making progress in terms of facilities. And three, the best opportunities to grow this sector lay with regional tourism, especially to Salalah.

To a degree, the first and third points still count. How statistics are used in planning is important, and the good statistics available are only useful if they are measuring what we think they are measuring. As for target markets, the continued growth of the Khareef festival and the beautiful resorts now available in Salalah are making good use of Oman’s geography. Neighbouring countries have a great place to visit without visas, long flights or language barriers.

But on the question of Oman’s overall progress as a tourist destination, there has been a significant step up over the last few years. It’s easy to become jaded and sceptical when you live in a country for a long time. After a while, you take things for granted – scenery, history, a general sense of peace and pleasantness. You think first of small bureaucratic annoyances, traffic issues and any normal irritations of daily life. If you’re not careful, you start to define where you live by small problems and forget how fortunate you are as part of the big picture. Two things happened last year to wake me up to Oman’s genuine charms as a visitor destination.

A couple of months ago, I was asked to contribute to a feature on Oman in a leading travel magazine.



ALEX BROWN

The author is a strategic policy consultant and a former diplomat



On the question of Oman’s overall progress as a tourist destination, there has been a significant step up over the last few years

Unfortunately, I wasn’t the lucky one being paid to try out fancy hotels and restaurants, but instead I had to look over the available activities, culture and natural charms of the country as someone who knows it well. It was an eye-opening exercise to really think about what a visitor with an open mind can do in this country. Walking a via ferrata across the sheer cliffs of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar, hot air ballooning in the Sharqiya sands, every kind of maritime adventure... and of course all the shiny new hotels to rest in. Oman has come a long way.

What really reset my understanding of how Oman looks was having visitors of my own. Friends from the UK visited early in the year, and although they have been here before, they were full of enthusiasm for the things we no longer notice: a clean, modern airport that took minutes to pass through. Wide roads, gleaming shopping malls, and - most of all - friendly people. Nakhal was a great example of the simple things that make a difference. Many years ago, I remember talking to a tourism official about the need to put basic infrastructure into these beautiful sites. Tourist need need clean bathrooms, somewhere to get a drink and a snack and a souvenir. These are small investments that

pay for themselves and create local jobs. Now, Nakhal Fort has proper facilities including a coffee shop inside the fort itself and a sympathetically-designed bathroom outside. The Omani staff are multi-lingual and friendly, from the guides to the gardener and available all day.

Small things representing big progress! In the last few months, I’ve also been to Nizwa with my grown up son, again with modern facilities. The souq is fun, and we met some impressive young Omanis selling khanjars and handicrafts with great skill and expertise – in salesmanship as well as technical knowledge! I’ve also visited the brilliantly-refurbished Al Mirani Fort. Sitting outside with drinks from the cafe on a quiet Ramadhan evening was just beautiful. On a more practical note, I was really impressed with the efforts made to make it accessible – lifts, ramps and an accessible bathroom are there for visitors with mobility limitations (or a baby buggy in my case).

In a competitive global tourist industry, you cannot stand still. But it’s a credit to the tourism stakeholders in Oman that the efforts of the last few years are starting to show. Those of us who live here should also make the best of it – we might not know what we’ve been missing!

Journalism’s evolving environment and prospects



SONIA AMBROSIO

The writer is a journalist, academic and researcher in media studies

THE job of a journalist is no longer to publish information. In today’s rapidly changing media landscape, journalism’s primary role is to help the public make sense of a complex world by interpreting, filtering, and verifying information.

The shift is towards dialogic communication. Journalists are expected to act more as moderators and curators within community-driven platforms like WhatsApp and Discord. Modern reporting takes greater consideration of the audience. The types of stories that capture people’s attention — whether they choose to read, watch, or listen — as well as how long they engage with them, are evolving. Audiences, especially younger individuals, are increasingly turning away from traditional news sources in favour of content created by individuals who offer explanations of current events. Because of news avoidance and fatigue, slow journalism and solution-oriented reporting may be on the horizon. Data journalism has significantly streamlined investigative reporting, allowing journalists to collect, analyse, and process information with greater speed and precision. Open-Source Intelligence (OSINT) is also a new form of modern journalism, alongside podcasts and scrollytelling, that has shifted toward more in-depth narrative journalism. While artificial intelligence, the most impactful change in journalism, poses a threat, it has the potential to enhance journalism.

Algorithms represent another significant

transformation. When we employ external LLMs (such as those from OpenAI, Google, Anthropic, and others) for automation, we lose control over these algorithms. This is particularly concerning, as they are trained on users’ input. We have had to adjust to User-Generated Content (UGC). We observed the emergence of computer-assisted reporting and the growth of fact-checking, alongside the pollution and weaponisation of the public sphere. Though trust in journalism is declining and often political actors brand critical journalism as an enemy, tech companies benefit from the content journalists create without fair compensation, and AI systems modify and reuse journalistic work. In media and technology, we are witnessing a digital cold war, characterised by various countries employing trolls and sock puppets to undermine their opponents. Some individuals remain unaware of or even ignore that the content they share may not be authentic. ‘Sock puppet’ is a term referring to an online alias used to praise, manipulate, or comment anonymously, acting as a digital extension of the creator’s identity.

Significant changes have also occurred in Arab Gulf journalism, mostly due to technological progress and shifting dynamics with state control; moving from a state monopolised landscape to a more complex ‘hybrid media system’, where state-controlled, privately owned, and digital-first platforms coexist. However, this reality presents a “watered-down” hybridity, in which digital and print methods

Arab Gulf countries are showing signs of rising interest in quality journalism, largely because the countries are making substantial efforts to draw in international investment

are used together but not fully combined. While technology has advanced, the overall regulatory environment remains a mix of liberalisation and state control.

Nonetheless, Arab Gulf countries are showing signs of rising interest in quality journalism, largely because the countries are making substantial efforts to draw in international investment, a pursuit which is driven by a desire for economic advancement, job opportunities and access to new technologies. Presenting a model of state-led modernisation, Gulf nations use sports, media, and cultural events to project an international image of modernity, tolerance, and forward rationale that draws investment and tourists. As scholars Carola Richter and Claudia Khozman wrote in Global Communications OpenBook: ‘Arab media matters globally because they reflect a range of often distinct but specific political approaches and understandings of publics and the public sphere. These approaches are potentially shaping media practices beyond the Arab world, incorporated by migrant audiences, transnational journalists, or international investing companies.’

Strong journalism is more important now than ever before. This refers to journalism that interprets and explains instead of reactive reporting or nation-branding—although both can provide strategic advantages. In an information environment saturated with synthetic content, we will be transitioning from platform reliance to direct engagement with audiences.

WITH MONITORS AND LAWSUITS, PAKISTANIS FIGHT FOR CLEAN AIR

JULIETTE MANSOUR

With pollution in Pakistan hitting record highs in recent years, citizens clutching air monitors and legal papers are taking the fight for clean air into their own hands. More than a decade ago, engineer Abid Omar had a “sneaking suspicion” that what the government described as seasonal fog was actually a new phenomenon.

“It wasn’t there in my childhood” in Lahore, said the 45-year-old who now lives in coastal Karachi, where the sea breeze no longer saves residents from smog.

With no official data available at the time, Omar asked himself: “If the government is not fulfilling its mandate to monitor air pollution, why don’t I do that for myself?”

His association, the Pakistan Air Quality Initiative (PAQI), installed its first monitor in 2016 and now has around 150 nationwide.

The data feeds into the monitoring organisation IQAir, which in 2024 classified Pakistan as the third most-polluted country in the world.

Levels of cancer-causing PM2.5 microparticles were, on average, 14 times the World Health Organization’s recommended daily maximum.

Schools are often shut for millions of children and hospitals fill up when the smog is at its worst, caused by a dangerous combination of poor-quality diesel, agricultural burning and winter weather. PAQI data has already played a key role in the adoption of pollution policies, serving as evidence during a 2017 case at Lahore’s high court to have smog recognised as air pollution that is a danger to public health. Using one of their air monitors, PAQI demonstrated that “the air quality was hazardous inside the courtroom”, Omar said.

The court then ordered the regional government of Punjab to deploy its own monitoring stations - now 44 across the province - and make the data public. But the government also says private monitors are unreliable and cause panic.

Researchers say, however, that these devices are essential to supplement official data that they view as fragmented and insufficiently independent.

“They got alarmed and shut down some stations when the air pollution went up,” Omar said. Officials have overhauled the management of brick kilns, a major source of black carbon emissions, and taken other measures such as fining drivers of high-emission vehicles and incentivising farmers to stop agricultural burning.

Worried about their community in Islamabad, academics Umair Shahid and Taha Ali established the Curious Friends of Clean Air organisation.

In three years, they have deployed a dozen plug-sized devices, made with a 3D printer at a cost of around \$50 each, which clock air quality every three minutes. — AFP

Rethinking education’s life cycle in Oman

ONE of the most promising signals in recent education reforms in the Sultanate of Oman is the decision to bring general education and higher education under a single ministerial vision. This move should be welcomed not as an administrative adjustment, but as a conceptual breakthrough. Now, education can be treated not as a series of disconnected stages, but as a continuous life cycle — accompanying individuals from early childhood through adulthood, reskilling, and lifelong learning.

Advanced nations organise education around people, not institutions. They recognise learning as cumulative and developmental, where early foundations shape later outcomes and transitions are managed rather than improvised. A unified education ministry gives Oman the opportunity to align curricula, pedagogy, assessment, and skills development across the entire journey — closing the gaps that often appear between school, university, and the labour market.

Yet institutional alignment alone will not suffice. The deeper dilemmas facing education in Oman are structural.

The first is the dilemma of purpose. The system continues to oscillate between education as certification and education as formation. Students quickly learn that navigating requirements often matters more than mastering ideas. Degrees multiply, but judgement, adaptability, and intellectual confidence lag behind. Employers complain about readiness; graduates complain about relevance. This is not a generational failure — it is a systemic one, rooted in misaligned incentives and unclear educational ends. Across OECD countries, employment rates are higher among those with vocational qualifications than general ones (83 per cent vs 73 per cent for 25–34-year-olds), showing that skills delivery — not just credentials — matters for economic outcomes.



AHMED AL MUKHAINI

The author is a policy analyst

Oman’s aspiration to educate in a global language is understandable; English opens doors to science, technology, and international exchange. But educating large segments of the population in a non-native language creates hidden disadvantages

A second dilemma lies in how knowledge is taught as opposed to transferred. Curricula remain dense with content but thin on method. Students are rewarded for recall rather than reasoning, for compliance rather than curiosity.

Critical thinking features prominently in policy language but far less in classroom practice and assessment. Advanced systems teach students how to think under uncertainty, how to test assumptions, and how to revise conclusions. Too often, our teachers teach students how to perform under certainty in artificial conditions.

The language dilemma may be the most under-acknowledged — and the most consequential. Oman’s aspiration to educate in a global language is understandable; English opens doors to science, technology, and international exchange. But educating large segments of the population in a non-native language creates hidden disadvantages.

For many students, English becomes an obstacle rather than a medium of thought. Cognitive effort shifts from understanding ideas to decoding language. Talent is filtered not by intelligence or creativity, but by linguistic privilege — often correlated with socio-economic background or early exposure. At the same time, Arabic is frequently underdeveloped as a language of analysis and inquiry, reduced to formality rather than intellectual depth. The result is a silent exclusion of capable students whose potential is constrained not by ability, but by the language architecture of the system.

Advanced nations confront this dilemma honestly. They invest in strong mother-tongue cognitive foundations, introduce second languages strategically, and ensure that language empowers rather than excludes.

Until Oman treats language policy as a question of equity and cognition, not merely internationalisation, educational outcomes will remain uneven.

Equally pressing is the dilemma of teachers. No reform survives weak teacher empowerment. Yet teachers operate within tightly prescribed systems that limit professional discretion and intellectual renewal. Training often emphasises compliance over mastery, coverage over impact. In advanced systems, teachers are trusted professionals—designers of learning and mentors of judgement. Without elevating their status, autonomy, and intellectual life, reform will stall.

Last, but not least, is the dilemma of pathways and hierarchy. Academic tracks continue to enjoy cultural prestige, while vocational and technical routes are framed as second choices. This hierarchy is economically irrational and socially damaging.

Advanced economies dissolve false binaries between thinking and doing, and design permeable systems that allow individuals to move fluidly between academic, vocational, and technical pathways over their lives. Learning is recognised as non-linear; skills are respected and mobile. Oman, by contrast, still channels students into rigid tracks that are difficult to exit or re-enter, producing credentials misaligned with labour-market needs while industries struggle to find technical talent.

The merger of education portfolios offers a rare opportunity to think systemically. But success will depend on whether structural integration is matched by conceptual courage — the willingness to confront uncomfortable truths about purpose, language, pedagogy, and power. Education is not merely a sector. It is the country’s operating system. With around 63 per cent of the population under 30 and a youth unemployment rate still significant, the mismatch between education and employment outcomes carries real economic risk. If Oman wishes to compete among advanced nations, it must design that system around the full life cycle of its people — clearly, equitably and without illusion.

SPORTS

TIGHTRACE



The 2026 Muscat Nights International Chess Championship concluded Round 6.

ROUND 6 KEEPS MUSCAT NIGHTS CHESS WIDE OPEN

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, JAN 21

The 2026 Muscat Nights International Chess Championship continued to deliver high technical standards and growing excitement as Round 6 concluded, featuring strong clashes on the top boards in both the Over 2000 and Under 2000 open categories. Close point margins marked the round among a group of leading international players.

The Over 2000 category witnessed intense battles among elite international players, particularly across the first five boards. On the top board, Indian Grandmaster Pranesh M secured a crucial victory over Turkish International Master Adar Tarhan, moving to five points and maintaining his strong position at the top of the standings.

On board two, India’s Iniyan Pa drew with Egyptian Grandmaster Adham Fawzy, leaving both players on 4.5 points. A similar result was recorded on board three, where Egyptian Grandmaster Ahmed Adly drew with Iranian Fide Master Radin Yadegar in a high-quality game that kept both players firmly in contention for the leading places.

Russian Grandmaster Mikhail Mozharov strengthened his challenge with a convincing win over Syrian Fide Master Aram Sheikh Khadr on board four, also reaching five points. Meanwhile, on board five, Indian International Master Mayank Chakraborty continued his impressive run by defeating Turkish Grandmaster Umut Ata Akbas, bringing his tally to five points and confirming his status as a serious title contender.

Following the conclusion of Round Six, five players emerged at the top of the Over 2000 category. Indian GM Pranesh M led the standings, followed by GM Mikhail Mozharov, then Indian GM Mayank Chakraborty. Egyptian GM Ahmed Adly occupied fourth place, while Egyptian Fide Master Adham Fawzy sat fifth with 4.5 points, reflecting the intensity of the competition and the close level among the elite contenders.

STRONG ARAB, ASIAN PRESENCE

Competition in the Open B category remained equally intense. Emirati player Humaid al Zaabi topped the standings with 5.5 points from six rounds, demonstrating consistency and composure. He was closely followed by Sudanese Candidate Master Asim Eloheid, also on 5.5 points, while Egypt’s Medhat Magdy claimed third place with the same score.

Uzbek player Shakhnoza Sabirova delivered a standout performance to take fourth place on 5.5 points, highlighting the strong presence of women competitors in the tournament. Syria’s Laith Mulhem followed in fifth place with five points after a series of positive results.

Beyond the competition hall, the Oman Chess Committee organised a cultural tour for participating players, featuring visits to Muttrah Souq, Al Alam Palace Square, the National Museum and the Royal Opera House Muscat. The initiative aimed to introduce participants to Oman’s rich cultural heritage while adding a distinctive dimension to the championship.

In addition, friendly football matches were held at the outdoor artificial pitch of the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher after daily rounds, fostering camaraderie and interaction among players in a relaxed and social setting away from the chessboards.

Sohar, Al Bashayer power to Ministry’s Shield semis

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, JAN 21

THE quarterfinal matches of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth Volleyball Shield were marked by strong competition, as Sohar secured a semifinal berth after a thrilling 3-2 victory over Dhank in a match that went to a decisive tie-break and featured clear momentum shifts throughout. In the other quarterfinal, Al Bashayer confirmed their strong presence by defeating Al Hamra in straight sets, with experience proving decisive in settling the contest.

In the Sohar-Dhank encounter, Sohar entered the match with high focus and imposed their rhythm from the opening points, benefiting from a well-organised attacking build-up and effective finishing to take the first set 25-21. The second set was more evenly contested, with both teams exchanging the lead in a back-and-forth battle, before Dhank managed to edge it 25-23 to level the match.

Sohar responded strongly in the third set, raising their performance level and asserting clearer control, capitalising on a dip in Dhank’s attacking efficiency to win the set 25-16. However, Dhank came back with determination in the fourth set, applying early pressure and building a comfortable lead before closing it out 25-20, sending the match to a deciding fifth set.

In the tie-break, Sohar showed strong character and composure at key moments, gradually extending the gap to claim the set 15-9 and seal a deserved victory in one of the tournament’s most exciting matches.

CONVINCING DISPLAY

In the second quarterfinal, Al Bashayer produced a convincing display to defeat Al Hamra 3-0 in a match with notable technical dimensions, particularly as Al Hamra were led by their new coach, Mohammed al Qamshoui, the former Al Bashayer coach. The opening set was closely fought, with Al Hamra appearing



Sohar secured a semifinal berth after a thrilling 3-2 victory over Dhank. — *Khalfan al Ruzaiqi*

well-organised and competitive for long spells, before Al Bashayer’s experience proved decisive in the crucial points to take the set 25-23.

Al Bashayer then imposed their tempo more clearly in the second set, showing marked improvement in blocking and defensive organisation, which gradually limited Al Hamra’s attacking effectiveness, allowing them to win the set 25-16. The third set saw Al Bashayer maintain their advantage with greater confidence and technical stability, while Al Hamra showed signs of physical decline as the match progressed. Despite renewed efforts to stay in contention, Al Bashayer’s experience and efficiency in finishing decisive attacks

saw them close the set 25-22 and complete a straight-set victory.

The result reflected the difference in experience and match management, as Al Bashayer absorbed Al Hamra’s early enthusiasm before gradually asserting control and confirming their qualification. Al Hamra, meanwhile, exited with a positive competitive performance that highlighted the early impact of their new coaching direction.

Al Bashayer will face Sohar in the semifinals on Friday at the auxiliary hall of the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher at 7 pm, preceded by the semifinal clash between Seeb and Majees at 5 pm on the same court.

Muscat likely to host HM’s Cup football final

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JAN 21

The final match of the His Majesty’s Cup football is likely to take place at Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher, according to some reliable sources. The match, most probably will be held in February and ahead of the holy month of Ramadhan.

The decision, which will be finalised in coming few days to be announced officially by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, might bring the prestigious domestic football final back to the iconic venue, renowned for hosting landmark matches in Omani football history.

The Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex has long been associated with major finals and memorable moments making it a fitting stage for the season’s showpiece encounter.

Four clubs have secured their places in the semifinals of the competition: Seeb, Al Nasr, Oman Club, and Al Nahda, underlining the competitive nature of this year’s edition.

The first leg matches of the semifinals concluded on Tuesday night as Oman Club



The first leg matches of the semifinals concluded on Tuesday as Oman Club beat Al Nasr 2-0 at Seeb Stadium while Seeb edged Al Nahda 1-0 at the same venue.

defeated Al Nasr by 2-0 at Seeb Stadium while Seeb edged Al Nahda by 1-0 at the same venue. The return legs are scheduled for January 29.

Al Nahda will host Seeb at the Al Buraimi Sports Complex, while Al Nasr will welcome Oman Club at Al Sadaa Stadium with both ties expected to draw significant attention as the teams battle

for a place in the final.

The Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex last hosted the His Majesty’s Cup final in 2023, when Al Nahda faced Seeb in a historic encounter. Al Nahda emerged victorious to claim their first-ever title and marking a milestone moment in the club’s history.

In recent years, the final has travelled across the

Sultanate of Oman, reflecting the competition’s nationwide appeal.

In 2025, the final was held at the Ibra Sports Complex, where Al Shabab secured their maiden title with a 1-0 victory over Seeb.

In 2024, Khasab Sports Complex hosted the final, as Dhofar defeated Al Nahda 2-0 to lift their 11th title. Earlier editions saw Al Rustaq Sports Complex host the 2020 final, where Dhofar edged Al Oruba on penalties after a goalless draw, while Sur Sports Complex staged the 2015 final, won by Al Oruba with a 2-0 victory over Sur.

Historically, Dhofar Club remained the most successful side in the competition, topping the honours list with 11 titles, followed closely by Fanja with nine. Al Nasr and Ahli Sidab have each lifted the trophy five times, while Sur, Al Oruba and Seeb have claimed four titles apiece.

Al Suwaiq have won the cup three times, with Oman Club and Saham sharing two titles each. Muscat, Al Talea, Al Nahda and Al Shabab have each won the coveted trophy once.

OMIFCO TIE-UP



OMAN CRICKET BOLSTERS T20 WORLD CUP PREPARATIONS

MUSCAT: Oman Cricket (OC) on Wednesday announced a landmark partnership with Oman India Fertiliser Company SAOC (OMIFCO) for 2026, after the latter became the Principal Partner of the Oman men's and women's national teams. The collaboration comes as Oman continues to strengthen its presence on the global cricket stage ahead of the ICC Men's T20 World Cup. Welcoming the partnership, Pankaj Khimji, Chairman of Oman Cricket, said: "We are delighted to welcome OMIFCO as the Principal Partner of Oman Cricket for 2026. Their continued support reflects a shared vision for the growth of cricket in the Sultanate of Oman and reinforces the strong link between sport, national pride, and community development."

"As Oman prepares to compete on the world stage for the ICC Men's T20 World Cup, this partnership provides a significant boost to our men's national team. We are grateful for OMIFCO's commitment to excellence and for standing alongside Oman Cricket as we strive to inspire the next generation and further elevate the profile of Omani cricket internationally. We also appreciate the support extended to the Oman women's national team and its long-term development." Commenting on the partnership, Said bin Salim bin Mohammed al Salmi, GM – People & Culture, OMIFCO, said: "Cricket has emerged as a strong ambassador for Oman on the global sporting stage, and the men's national team's participation in the ICC Men's T20 World Cup is a moment of immense pride for the nation."

"Sports play a vital role in inspiring youth and strengthening national identity. As Oman's national teams prepare to compete against the world's best, OMIFCO is proud to support their journey, ambitions, and pursuit of excellence, while contributing to the continued growth and development of cricket across the Sultanate of Oman."

MUSCAT: For Oman, the ICC Men's T20 World Cup has become familiar territory. For captain Jatinder Singh, however, this edition carries a meaning that goes far beyond qualification. As Oman team prepares to depart on Thursday morning for Sri Lanka for a pre-World Cup camp followed by participation in their fourth Men's T20 World Cup, co-hosted by Sri Lanka and India from February 7, Jatinder spoke with a sense of pride rooted in history and responsibility shaped by the present. No Asian Associate nation has appeared more times on this stage, and Oman's place among the game's global contenders is no longer a novelty. "This is a big moment of pride for Oman," Jatinder said. "To play the World Cup for the fourth time, the maximum by an Asian Associate nation, means a lot to all of us." This will be Jatinder's third T20 World Cup, having missed the previous edition, and his first as captain. Leading the national side at the sport's biggest event, he admitted, is a deeply personal honour. "It is a huge honour to lead Oman," said the 36-year-old batter. "Every World Cup is special, and to do this as captain is something I am really proud of." Nearly 10 years after Oman's famous



Oman captain Jatinder Singh

The 36-year-old skipper embraces pride and responsibility ahead of the ICC Men's T20 World Cup as team set to depart for Sri Lanka on Thursday

debut victory over Ireland in 2016, Jatinder remains the lone survivor from that historic night in the North Indian city of Dharamsala. The memory still fuels him, particularly as Oman once again share a group with Ireland - along with former champions Australia, hosts Sri Lanka, and Zimbabwe. A WORLD CUP OF FIRSTS What sets this campaign apart is the scale of transition within the squad. Eleven players in the 15-member team will be making their T20 World Cup debut, a reality Jatinder viewed as an opportunity rather than a risk. "It is a great feeling to lead a side where 11 players are playing their first



The Oman Golf Association honoured the players of the Oman national golf teams in recognition of their outstanding achievements at the Gulf Golf Championship for Girls and Age Categories.

OGA honours national players after Gulf success

RIYADH AL BALUSHI MUSCAT, JAN 21 THE Oman Golf Association (OGA) held a special ceremony to honour the players of the national golf teams in recognition of their outstanding achievements at the Gulf Golf Championship for Girls and Age Categories, which was recently hosted by the Sultanate of Oman at Ghala Golf Club. The ceremony was held under the auspices of Fayeze bin Mohammed Riyadh, OGA Vice-Chairman and was attended by Ahmed bin Faisal al Jahdhami, OGA Secretary-General, along with members of the Board of Directors. In his address, the vice-chairman expressed his pride in the national team players and praised the medals achieved, which reflected the dedication, discipline and commitment demonstrated throughout the championship. He emphasised that representing the Sultanate of Oman is both an honour and a responsibility, noting that wearing the national colours and competing internationally is a source of pride for every athlete. Fayeze also added that while victory is an important objective, participation and learning from competition are equally vital components of athletic development. Fayeze highlighted the achievements of the Under 13 team, composed of Yousef



bin Azzan al Rumhy, Taimour bin Ghalib al Busaidy and Ibrahim bin Fayeze Mohammed Riyadh, who claimed gold and silver medals. The overall medal tally included a gold medal in the youth category, a gold medal in the Under 13 individual event won by Yousef al Rumhy, a silver medal for the Under 13 team and a bronze medal in the individual competition achieved by Moheeb bin Jameel al Kathiri. MOTIVATION Speaking on behalf of the players, Yousef al Rumhy expressed his gratitude to the OGA for the recognition, describing the initiative as a major motivational boost that encourages athletes to continue striving for excellence. He said that such recognition reinforces a sense of responsibility among

players and pushes them to work harder in order to sustain success and achieve even better results in future competitions. Meanwhile, Ibrahim bin Fayeze Mohammed Riyadh stressed that the Gulf achievement was the result of collective effort and strong technical preparation, highlighting the effectiveness of the OGA's training programmes and intensive camps. Taimour al Busaidy echoed these sentiments, noting that Gulf competitions provide a valuable platform to showcase emerging talent and gain competitive experience, adding that maintaining the same professional approach will be essential moving forward. Moheeb al Kathiri described the honour as a significant morale booster, emphasising that age group tournaments form the true foundation for developing future champions, adding that the OGA's support plays a vital role in raising performance levels and instilling a culture of achievement and consistency. Female national team players Wafa al Hadhrami, Merali Simpet and Yasmeen bint Jameel al Kathiri also expressed their pride in the recognition, affirming that it reflects the association's strong commitment to supporting women's golf. They noted that such encouragement motivates them to continue working hard, improving their technical and physical readiness.

On a mission, not just a journey, says World Cup-bound Jatinder

World Cup," he said. "For many of them, this is a huge moment in their careers." Inexperience, he felt, could actually ease the mental burden of the occasion. "The boys are hungry for success," Jatinder said. "They may lack experience, but they will also carry less pressure of playing a World Cup. That freedom can help." Oman head into the tournament after a promising showing at the Asia Cup in Dubai in September last year, followed by their qualification in the Asia-EAP Qualifier at home in October and participation in the ACC Emerging Teams Asia Cup, before deciding their final 15. Jatinder said the group now has the right blend. "We have skilful and experienced players, and overall the mindset of the team is in a good space," he said. Preparation, he stressed, has been intense and purposeful. "We trained very hard under chief coach Duleep Mendis and his deputy Sulakshan Kulkarni," he said. "The support staff has been excellent, and we are really looking forward to the World Cup." Group B presents Oman with no margin for comfort, but Jatinder saw value in the challenge ahead. "We will get a good measure of ourselves playing against the heavyweights," he said. "We

are ready for that challenge." Facing teams like Australia, Sri Lanka, Zimbabwe and Ireland, all Test-playing nations is not something the captain shies away from. "It is a big opportunity to play against the best in the world and against far more experienced teams," he said. "These are the matches you want to be part of." Oman's T20 World Cup history includes just one win, achieved against Ireland on March 9, 2016. Jatinder, the only member of the current squad to have featured in that match, is keen to ensure the team's story does not remain frozen in the past. "This is our fourth World Cup, and the only win came way back in 2016," he said. "We are eyeing our second win and more. We are charged up." The message within the camp, he added, is clear. "We are not going just to turn up and make numbers," he said. "We are here on a mission." Only two players of the current squad — Mohammad Nadeem and Shakeel Ahmad — featured in the 2024 World Cup in West Indies, where Oman were also grouped with Australia. Alongside Jatinder, Sufyan Mehmood brings additional World Cup experience from the 2016 squad in the current set-up.

SPORTS



TOUR OF OMAN 2026 STAGES

MUSCAT CLASSIC	STAGE 1	STAGE 2	STAGE 3	STAGE 4	STAGE 5
179.2	174.8	193.4	194.9	151.3	159.3
KILOMETRES	KILOMETRES	KILOMETRES	KILOMETRES	KILOMETRES	KILOMETRES
AL MOUJ TO AL BUSTAN	FLAG POLE IN MUSCAT TO HAWIYAT NAJM IN QURAYAT	AL FAYHAA, SAMAYIL, TO AL JABAL AL SHARQI IN AL HAMRA	RUSTAQ FORT TO YITTI HEIGHTS	AL SAWADI BEACH IN BARKA TO SUHAR	NIZWA TO AL JABAL AL AKHDHAR
FEB 6	FEB 7	FEB 8	FEB 9	FEB 10	FEB 11

18 TEAMS

WTT - UCI WORLD TEAMS (11) Alpecin - Deceuninck EF Education-EasyPost Groupama-FDJ Movistar Team Team Jayco AlUla	Team Visma Lease a Bike UAE Team Emirates-XRG Soudal Quick-Step XDS Astana Team Lotto-Intermarche Uno-X Mobility	PRT - UCI PROTEAMS (6) Cofidis Pinarello-Q36.5 Pro Cycling Team TotalEnergies Tudor Pro Cycling Team	Caja Rural-Seguros RGA Burgos Burpellet BH NATIONAL SIDE (1) Oman National Team
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ANUROOP ATHIPARAMBATH
@anuroop_ath

WORLD'S top cyclists from 18 teams will compete for the honours in the 15th edition of Tour of Oman, which will begin with the one-day Muscat Classic race on February 6.

The Muscat Classic race, which precedes the Tour of Oman, has been upgraded to the ProSeries category in its fourth and upcoming edition. A new UCI points system will be applied to the ranking of the biggest one-day race on the Asian continent, placing it on a par with the Japan Cup.

The Tour of Oman 2026 will run its five stages from February 7 to 11, Saif bin Saba'a al Rashidi, Member of the UCI Management Committee and Chairman of Oman Cycling Association (OCA), said while unveiling the details of the 15th edition of the cycling.

The cycling world body, UCI's calendar event is organised by the OCA in cooperation with the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth (MoCSY).

The peloton will include 18 teams, among them 11 World Teams, two more than in 2025, highlighting the growing prestige of the event.

From the coastal road of Al Mouj to the demanding ascent of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar (Green Mountain), riders will be tested across a diverse and challenging course that spans desert landscape and Oman's most iconic peaks.

The press conference at the Grand Hormuz Hotel was attended by Hisham bin Juma al Sinani, Director General of Sports Sponsorship and Development at MoCSY.

Saif al Rashidi, who is also the director of the Tour, stated that the Tour of Oman was launched in 2010 and has witnessed remarkable growth over the years, becoming one of the most prominent cycling

18 TEAMS TO BATTLE IT OUT IN TOUR OF OMAN 2026

MUSCAT CLASSIC TO KICK START 15TH EDITION OF TOUR FROM FEBRUARY 6



The officials unveil the details of Tour of Oman 2026 in Muscat.

races worldwide. He noted that the race has secured a leading position on the UCI calendar.

The 2026 edition will feature the participation of 18 international teams, namely: Alpecin–Deceuninck, EF Education–EasyPost, Groupama–FDJ, Movistar Team, Team Jayco AlUla, Team Visma–Lease a Bike, UAE Team Emirates–XRG, Soudal Quick-Step, XDS Astana

Team, Lotto–Intermarche, Uno-X Mobility, Cofidis, Q36.5 Pro Cycling Team, TotalEnergies, Tudor Pro Cycling Team, Caja Rural–Seguros RGA, Burgos BH, in addition to the Omani National Team.

TOUR STAGES
Al Rashidi explained that the race stages have been officially approved, beginning with the Muscat Classic,

which will run from Al Mouj to Al Bustan over a distance of 179.17 kilometres.

The first stage of the Tour will start from the Flag Pole in Muscat Governorate to Hawiyat Najm in Qurayat, covering 174.84 km.

The second stage will begin in Al Fayhaa, Wilayat of Samayil, and finish at Al Jabal Al Sharqi in Al Hamra, spanning 193.44 km.

The third stage will start from in front of Al Rustaq Fort and conclude at the Yitti Heights, with a distance of 194.97 km.

The fourth stage will run from Al Sawadi beach in the Wilayat of Barka to Sohar, covering 151.26 km.

The final stage will start from Nizwa and finish at Al Jabal Al Akhdhar, over a distance of 159.27 km.

GLOBAL PLATFORM
Al Rashidi emphasised that the Tour of Oman is not merely a sporting event, but also a global platform for promoting tourism and culture through extensive media coverage across television, radio and social media. He noted that the race now reaches audiences across five continents, reflecting Oman's rich tourism and cultural diversity.

"The race routes were carefully selected to highlight the beauty and diversity of Oman's governorates as the Tour of Oman has become a focal point for professional cyclists worldwide. This reflects the significant achievements the event has made since its inception and its esteemed position on the UCI calendar, particularly within Asia."

Al Rashidi further explained that the transition of several Tour of Oman riders to representing the national team is a clear indication of the event's sustainability and its success in achieving one of its key objectives — supplying national teams with talented cyclists capable of competing at regional and international levels.

He also announced that the Muscat Classic is one of the most

significant outcomes of the Tour of Oman, having been classified this year by the UCI as one of Asia's top cycling races, ranking immediately after the Japan Cup. It is the only one-day race of its kind on the continent. "Elevating the race's classification will make the Muscat Classic a key stop on the calendar of the world's top cyclists and champions, further enhancing Oman's international presence."

TOURISM SHOWCASE
For his part, Hisham al Sinani affirmed that the Tour of Oman 2026 builds on the accumulated successes achieved over previous years.

"Oman's hosting of this global sporting spectacle, with the participation of 18 elite international teams, reflects the high level of confidence placed in the Sultanate of Oman by international federations and teams, and underscores Oman's strong organisational capabilities and the expertise of Omani youth in managing major sporting events to the highest professional standards."

Al Sinani added that the Tour extends beyond its sporting dimension to serve as a vital window for tourism and economic promotion. The race routes pass through carefully selected paths that showcase Oman's geographic and environmental diversity — from coastlines and mountains to oases and historic cities — offering global audiences a comprehensive image of Oman as a safe and attractive year-round tourism destination.

Shaikh Mansour bin Suleiman al Nabhan, Director of Events and Awareness at Muscat Municipality, described the Tour of Oman as one of the Sultanate of Oman's most successful global sporting events since its inception in 2010. "The rapid technical and organisational development and reaffirmed Muscat Municipality's commitment to supporting the event and highlighting the cultural and natural beauty of Oman through its diverse race routes," he added.



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SHORTTAKES



The projects involve the construction of fishing ports in the Hasik district and the Hadbin area.

RO 5.8 MILLION FISHING PORTS BOOST SADAH SECTOR

SALALAH: The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources is implementing two fishing port projects in the Wilayat of Sadah, Dhofar Governorate, at a total cost of RO 5.8 million, as part of efforts to strengthen the fisheries sector and support coastal communities.

The projects involve the construction of fishing ports in the Hasik district and the Hadbin area, aimed at enhancing the utilisation of fisheries resources, improving services for fishermen and creating an attractive environment for investment in port-related activities.

Eng Abdul Nasser bin Awbad Ghawas, Director of the Fisheries Department, said that construction is progressing steadily, with the Hasik project 34 per cent complete and the Hadbin project reaching 50 per cent completion.

Each port includes the development of breakwaters and floating docks, alongside essential infrastructure such as internal roads, lighting and public facilities designed to support fishermen and improve operational efficiency.

Looking ahead, Eng Ghawas noted that four additional fisheries projects are planned in Dhofar under the Ministry’s project matrix. These include the development of the fishing port in the Wilayat of Mirbat, as well as the construction of new ports in central Sadah, the Wilayat of Rakhyout; and the Niabat of Al Shuwaimiyah in the Wilayat of Shaleem and Al Hallaniyat Islands. — ONA

Oman maps 6 GW solar expansion for 2030-31

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, JAN 21

AS many as six mega solar Independent Power Projects (IPPs), with an aggregate capacity of around 6 GW, are envisaged to be brought into operation over the 2030–31 timeframe — an exponential jump designed to take the share of renewable energy to well over the nationally targeted 30 per cent mark.

According to details shared by Nama Power and Water Procurement Company (Nama PWP), the single buyer of electricity and water in the Sultanate of Oman, the six utility-scale solar PV schemes — provisionally branded Solar PV IPP I 2030, Solar PV IPP II 2030, Solar PV IPP III 2030, Solar PV IPP I 2031, Solar PV IPP II 2031 and Solar PV IPP III 2031 — will each boast a capacity of around 1,000 MW.

However, project capacities may be adjusted based on site allocation and the results of detailed resource assessments, Nama PWP said, adding that Scheduled Commercial Operation Dates (SCODs) will be finalised accordingly.

Citing policy direction issued by the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, Nama PWP noted that national renewable-energy targets aim to achieve 30–40 per cent of total electricity generation by 2030, increasing to approximately 60–70 per cent by 2040.

“A key objective of this target is



Nama PWP’s renewable energy pipeline for delivery through to 2030–31 envisions a total of 24 solar and wind projects, as well as a single waste-to-energy scheme.

A key objective of this target is to release domestic gas committed to the power sector, making it available to stimulate industrial and economic development and contribute towards achieving Oman’s net-zero target by 2050.

to release domestic gas committed to the power sector, making it available to stimulate industrial and economic development and contribute towards achieving Oman’s net-zero target by 2050.

PWP has embraced this target and expects to reach 30 per cent renewable energy generation within the sector by 2030, as low costs are now driving renewable energy development on economic merits alone. Solar and wind projects are non-firm resources to the extent that their energy output is intermittent and non-dispatchable”, the procurer stated.

Nama PWP’s renewable energy pipeline for delivery through to

2030–31 envisions a total of 24 solar and wind projects, as well as a single waste-to-energy scheme. Of these projects, Dhofar Wind I, Ibri II Solar, Manah I Solar and Manah II Solar are currently in operation, while three others — Ibri III Solar, Dhofar Wind II and JBB Solar — are under implementation.

A number of renewable energy projects are scheduled to come on stream between 2027 and 2029. The Duqm II Wind IPP (300 MW) and Sadah Wind IPP (120 MW) are both targeted for commissioning in Q4 2027, alongside the Dhofar II Wind IPP (132 MW) in Q3 2027 and the Al Kamil Solar IPP (400 MW) in Q2 2027.

In early 2028, the Mahout Wind IPP — with a planned capacity of 800 MW — and the Marsa Solar IPP (280 MW) are expected to reach commercial operation in Q1 2028, followed by the Sinaw Solar IPP (400 MW) in Q2 2028.

Looking further ahead, Solar IPP 2029, a large-scale 1,000 MW project, is scheduled for Q1 2029, while a trio of wind projects — the Shaleem Wind IPP (100 MW), Al Jazir Wind IPP (100 MW) and Duqm III Wind IPP (300 MW) — are all slated for commissioning in Q2 2029.

An exponential 6 GW increase in renewable capacity — mainly solar-based utility schemes — is envisaged during 2030–31, lifting Oman’s total renewable capacity to 12,182 MW. Rounding off the list is a 95 MW waste-to-energy project scheduled to come into operation at Barka in 2031.

SOHAR Port and Freezone emerges as a pillar of Oman’s diversification drive

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 21

SOHAR Port and Freezone hosted its annual Business Reception, bringing together senior government officials, investors and partners at a time that reflects six years of economic restructuring under the leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and the steady translation of Oman Vision 2040 from policy into execution.

Over this period, SOHAR has emerged as one of the clearest operational expressions of that national shift. As a fully integrated port and freezone, it sits at the intersection of trade, industrial policy and investment reform, serving as a national platform for diversification, connectivity and in local content creation.

Since 2019, the port’s performance has closely mirrored Oman’s broader reform trajectory. SOHAR’s annual throughput increased from 62 million metric tonnes to 72 million metric tonnes by the end of 2025, reflecting



For SOHAR’s leadership, the past six years mark a structural rather than cyclical shift.

higher trade volumes, deeper integration into global supply chains and growing confidence among international shipping lines and industrial operators. Vessel calls increased from 3,144 to 3,427, reinforcing SOHAR’s position as a reliable regional and international gateway.

Investment flows have followed a similar pattern. In 2025 alone, SOHAR secured \$968 million in new commitments across eight agreements, leasing 76 hectares of land within the port and freezone.



SOHAR has emerged as one of the clearest operational expressions of that national shift.

The projects are long-term in nature, export-oriented and aligned with national priorities around industrial diversification.

For SOHAR’s leadership, the past six years mark a structural rather than cyclical shift. Emile Hoogsteden, CEO of SOHAR Port, said “SOHAR Port and Freezone continues to build an integrated logistics and industrial ecosystem that supports trade and industrial development, while strengthening the long-term resilience of supply chains. This growth reflects

strategic planning and sustained investment in infrastructure, with a clear focus on reliability and sustainability. As we move forward with our expansion, our responsibility grows to ensure safe and balanced growth; and to prepare for more complex supply chains, cleaner energy and higher-value industries that contribute to lasting national value.

That alignment has become increasingly visible in Oman’s macroeconomic indicators. In 2025, SOHAR Freezone ranked

third globally in fDi Intelligence’s free zone index, while Oman regained investment-grade status.

Beyond trade and capital, SOHAR has sought to anchor its growth locally. Its corporate social responsibility programmes reached nearly 50,000 beneficiaries in 2025, spanning education, skills development, healthcare support and environmental initiatives, an attempt to embed industrial growth within surrounding communities.

Eng Raid al Rubaiey, CEO of SOHAR Freezone and Deputy CEO of SOHAR Port, said, “The investment flowing into SOHAR reflects confidence in Oman’s reform trajectory and institutional stability under Oman Vision 2040.

The projects choosing to locate here are long-term and aligned with national priorities around diversification, exports and in-country value. SOHAR operates as a national platform for inclusive and future-ready growth, built through close partnership between government, industry and the wider community”.

ADVERTORIALS

SHORTTAKES



The initiative forms part of Bank Muscat's community partnership programmes.

BANK MUSCAT AND MUSCAT MUNICIPALITY LAUNCH MASAR BAUSHER FOOD TRUCKS INITIATIVE

MUSCAT: Muscat Municipality, in partnership with Bank Muscat, announced the launch of the Masar Food Trucks initiative aimed at supporting small businesses in the Wilayat of Bausher, Muscat Governorate. The initiative is implemented pursuant to a memorandum of cooperation previously signed between Muscat Municipality and Bank Muscat, with the support of the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority.

The Food Trucks initiative highlights the vital role played by both Muscat Municipality and Bank Muscat in empowering entrepreneurs by creating a supportive environment that enables business owners to develop their projects and encourages them to enter the field of entrepreneurship.

Muscat Municipality has prepared and equipped the designated site to meet the operational needs of food truck businesses, including the provision of essential facilities and parking spaces. The Municipality will also oversee and monitor operations to ensure smooth implementation and full compliance with approved health and professional standards.

The initiative forms part of Bank Muscat's community partnership programmes, reflecting its commitment to supporting small Omani businesses through the provision of modern food trucks designed to meet safety and operational requirements.

These food trucks provide a dynamic platform for business owners to showcase their culinary offerings, contributing to an enhanced experience for residents and visitors to the area. The initiative also offers business owners a valuable opportunity to manage small businesses, support the local community and improve their income.

On the occasion of the launch, Muscat Municipality emphasised that the initiative represents an important step in supporting entrepreneurs by enabling them to develop and expand their businesses, while also contributing to local community development.

DHOFAR ISLAMIC SIGNS PACT TO FACILITATE HAJ AND UMRAH SERVICES

MUSCAT: Dhofar Islamic, the Islamic banking window of BankDhofar, has signed a strategic cooperation agreement with the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs during the second Haj and Umrah Exhibition.

The agreement marks a key step in strengthening institutional collaboration and providing value-added services that ensure the comfort of pilgrims while enriching their spiritual journey through innovative, Sharia-compliant



financial solutions. It also aligns with national initiatives aimed at enhancing partnerships between public and private sectors to improve the overall Haj and Umrah experience.

Under the agreement, Dhofar Islamic will provide a range of Islamic financial services — including accessible financing options, simplified procedures and advanced digital solutions — to support pilgrims and service providers.

Grab your Kia before the big savings offer ends

KIA, globally recognised for its commitment to design excellence and innovative technology, invites everyone to experience the joy of driving the favourite Kia models before time runs out. Kia Oman has announced the final countdown for its Big Savings campaign, which will officially conclude on January 22, 2026.

The Big Savings offer is well received by customers & hence Kia is making a last call on the offer. Visitors to any Kia showroom will find exceptional rewards tailored to different segments, ensuring that the value of the Big Savings campaign reaches every corner of the Kia range.

These additional benefits are part of Kia's ongoing mission to provide convenience, peace of mind and unmatched quality to every driver in the Sultanate of Oman.

The campaign highlights the Big Savings available across Kia's most sought-after models, offering unbelievable value for those looking to upgrade.

Customers can enjoy significant savings of RO 1,700 — 2,700 on the Sportage L, while the executive K8 sedan and the stylish Sonet are available with savings of RO 1,500 and RO 1,300 respectively.

The Kia K4 also remains a key highlight of this offer, providing a seamless blend of



Big Savings offer is well received by customers & hence Kia is making a last call on the offer.

performance and modern features.

Most purchases during this window are further enhanced with 3 years or 30,000 km of complimentary service, along with 1-year insurance and registration, delivering a truly rewarding ownership experience.

For those ready to embrace the future of mobility, the all-electric Kia EV6 serves as a centrepiece of this final call. This innovative crossover AWD is available with massive

savings ranging from RO 4,200 to RO 4,800. Built on Kia's advanced Electric-Global Modular Platform, the EV6 offers ultra-fast charging that can add 100 km of range in just 4.5 minutes

To ensure a worry-free transition to electric, every EV6 purchase includes an extensive 4-year or 60,000 km service package and comprehensive insurance coverage.

SOTC Travel announces 2026 holiday carnival

MUSCAT: SOTC Travel, a leading omnichannel Travel and Tourism Company, announced its Holiday Carnival in Oman, featuring a wide-ranging portfolio of international holidays along with attractive, limited-period offers for Summer 2026.

The holiday carnival will be held on Friday, January 24, 2026, at Khimji's House of Travel, next to the Oman Air Office, Ruwi, Muscat. As part of the holiday carnival, SOTC Travel has unveiled compelling offers across its most popular long-haul destinations. Travellers



The holiday carnival will be held on Friday at Khimji's House of Travel.

booking Europe holidays for 2026 can avail either a FREE 3–4 nights cruise or land stay, or enjoy discounts of up to \$400 per

adult, delivering enhanced value and immersive experiences.

For USA holidays, customers can benefit from a cash discount of \$500 per family (2 adults & 1 child — no bed), along with a FREE 5-night holiday and a complimentary upgrade to a balcony cabin on a Bahamas cruise, making summer travel to the USA more rewarding.

In addition to Europe and the USA, the holiday carnival will also showcase SOTC Travel's diverse global holiday portfolio, including tours to South East Asia, Japan, China, Africa, Australia and New Zealand.

IHE hosts special open day in Suhar Industrial Area

MUSCAT: International Heavy Equipment LLC (IHE), a leading provider of heavy equipment, trucks, spare parts and industrial solutions in the Sultanate of Oman, hosted a special Open Day at its facility in the Suhar Industrial Area on January 20, 2026.

The event showcased IHE's ongoing commitment to strengthening engagement with clients, partners and key stakeholders across the industrial and infrastructure sectors.

It also served as a high-level networking platform bringing together senior management from IHE alongside representatives from leading construction, logistics, manufacturing and industrial companies operating in Suhar and surrounding areas.



The event showcased IHE's ongoing commitment to strengthening engagement with clients, partners and key stakeholders.

Designed to give stakeholders a hands-on look at IHE's latest portfolio, the event provided opportunities for direct interaction and knowledge exchange, while strengthening professional relationships within the industrial sector. Attendees were introduced to IHE's extensive range of heavy-duty trucks, construction and

industrial equipment, as well as its comprehensive after-sales services and spare parts support.

They were also familiarised with the company's bespoke equipment packages that are tailored for high-intensity demands of the Suhar Industrial Zone.

Commenting on the event's success, Sohraab Hasnain, General Manager of IHE, pointed out that the Open Day underscores the company's focus on building long-term partnerships through direct engagement and transparency. He noted that such initiatives enable IHE to better understand client needs while demonstrating its capabilities and commitment to delivering dependable solutions aligned with international standards.

He further added that IHE, a key entity within The Zubair Corporation's Mobility & Equipment sector, is continuously investing in its operational capacity to ensure it remains the most reliable partner for the nation's large-scale development projects.

"Customer-centric initiatives such as open days play a vital role in fostering trust, encouraging dialogue and reinforcing the company's position as a reliable market partner", he stated. The event witnessed strong engagement from attendees who toured the facility and gained firsthand insight into IHE's equipment range, service capabilities and customised solutions aimed at improving efficiency, safety and operational continuity across various industries.

SHORTTAKES



The exhibition reflects strong momentum in Oman's perfume and luxury goods market.

OMAN PERFUME EXPO OPENS WITH OVER 200 BRANDS

MUSCAT: The sixth edition of the Oman Perfume Exhibition opened today at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre, bringing together more than 200 exhibitors from local, regional and international markets, highlighting the Sultanate of Oman's growing stature in the global perfume industry.

The opening ceremony was held under the auspices of HH Sayyida Basma bint Fakhri bin Taimur al Said. Running until January 28, the exhibition reflects strong momentum in Oman's perfume and luxury goods market, driven by rising demand for premium products and the expanding presence of international brands.

Positioned as a specialised marketing and investment platform, the exhibition supports business and shopping tourism by attracting visitors and delegations from abroad, boosting hotel occupancy and stimulating activity across the hospitality, services and restaurant sectors.

Visitors can explore exclusive product launches and signature fragrances through an immersive experience that blends heritage with modern design, craftsmanship and innovation. The event attracts perfume enthusiasts, high-end consumers, retail professionals and commercial buyers, creating a vibrant meeting point for commerce, culture and the art of perfumery. — ONA

Insurance amendments boost financial inclusion

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JAN 21

RECENT amendments to regulations governing the motor insurance segment are expected to catalyse tangible improvements that will benefit all stakeholders, as well as propel the economy towards new and promising horizons.

This will be achieved by including regulatory provisions in the policy that contribute to enhancing financial inclusion through streamlined procedures and improved insurance services.

The improvements will be facilitated by enhanced governance of regulatory procedures between policyholders and insurance companies, according to the Financial Services Authority — the sector's regulator.

The new amendments to the motor insurance sector aim to reduce complaints and disputes among parties involved in the insurance relationship, while simultaneously increasing confidence in the motor insurance sector in the Sultanate of Oman.

Most notable is the update to the unified policy to enhance consumer protection. These amendments include a package of features and benefits aimed at expanding the insurance



The new amendments aim to reduce complaints and disputes among parties, while simultaneously increasing confidence in the motor insurance sector in Oman. Image for illustration only.

protection system for motor insurance policyholders and improving the quality of services provided.

Abdullah bin Salim al Salmi, Executive President of the Financial Services Authority, affirmed that the amendments will contribute to achieving a number of economic and social benefits, most notably strengthening the national social protection system, part of which is financed by insurance companies.

The amendments will contribute to raising the level of community preparedness to face climate risks, enhancing the capacity to recover after natural disasters and supporting the financial stability and economic sustainability of individuals and institutions.

Abdulaziz bin Saif al Wahshi, Senior Customer Service Quality Specialist, stated that natural disaster coverage will

be included for the first time in third-party insurance.

He noted that 70% of insured vehicles in Oman are covered by third-party insurance and most of the vehicles affected by the weather events were also third-party insured.

Therefore, it became imperative to find solutions that guarantee financial and economic stability and prevent individuals and companies from incurring further losses, he stressed.

According to the National Centre for Statistics and Information, total compensation paid by insurance companies operating in the vehicle insurance sector reached RO 95.4 million, marking a 27.6% increase compared to 2023.

Total direct vehicle insurance premiums reached RO 118.2 million in 2024, reflecting a 6.4% increase compared to 2023.

The insurance sector in the Sultanate of Oman witnessed a significant improvement during 2025, with companies listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange recording total net profits after tax of approximately RO 27.1 million in the third quarter of 2025.

This improvement was supported by the sector's stability and continued growth in insurance revenues, particularly in the motor and health insurance sectors, despite ongoing intense market competition.

First inter-school hackathon to focus on Oman Vision 2040 challenges

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, JAN 21

Oman's first inter-school hackathon, aimed at tackling challenges linked to Oman Vision 2040, will take place on Sunday, January 25, in Muscat. The one-day event, titled Youth Innovate 2026, will be hosted by the RIPS Hack Club at Al Raneem International School in Al Amerat.

The RIPS Hack Club is a chapter of Hack Club, an international non-profit network supporting student-led coding and innovation clubs worldwide. Youth Innovate 2026 is organised by the RIPS Hack Club and led by a student committee, with participants expected to design solutions in the form of an app, website, or game and pitch them to judges.

Speaking to the *Observer*, chief organiser Alisha Afaq Ali said the event is built around nationally relevant problem areas. "It's designing solutions to local problems that we got from Oman Vision 2040", Alisha said, adding that the themes include "promoting sustainability, youth empowerment, culture, heritage and economic



The RIPS Hack Club is a chapter of Hack Club, an international non-profit network supporting student-led coding and innovation clubs worldwide.

growth for Oman".

According to Alisha, the hackathon is open to students from schools across the Sultanate of Oman. "The criteria is very simple. It's open to students across Oman, in any school across Oman", she said, adding that it targets students from Grade 6 to 12, with possible exceptions for outstanding younger participants.

She noted that early engagement from schools has been encouraging. "We have reached out to all major schools in Oman", Alisha said.

"We have received a positive response from around eight of them currently". Mostafa Saudi, Head of Academics at Al Raneem International School and supervisor of the RIPS Hack Club, said the initiative reflects the school's focus on applied learning and youth leadership.

"Youth Innovate 2026 is important because it gives young people a real platform to think critically, collaborate and design solutions to real-world challenges", he said.

"At Al Raneem International

School, we strongly believe that learning should go beyond the classroom and this event reflects that belief", he added.

He emphasised that the hackathon is driven by students through the school's Hack Club. "What makes Youth Innovate especially meaningful is that it is fully led by our School Hack Club students. They are the planners, organisers and visionaries behind the event, while the school provides guidance and support", he said.

"Hosting this initiative reflects Al Raneem's commitment to student leadership, innovation and empowering youth to take ownership of impactful projects", he added. The supervisor said connecting hackathon challenges to Oman Vision 2040 was a deliberate step to ensure student innovation is rooted in national priorities.

"Linking the challenges to Oman Vision 2040 was a very intentional decision", he said. "We want students to understand that innovation is most powerful when it is rooted in national priorities and real societal needs".

He added that working on Oman

Vision 2040 linked topics helps build student awareness and purpose. "By working on challenges aligned with Oman Vision 2040, students gain a deeper sense of responsibility, civic awareness and purpose", he said.

"They learn how their ideas, skills and creativity can contribute to Oman's future in areas such as sustainability, technology, education and economic development", he added. "More importantly, they begin to see themselves as active contributors, not just learners".

Looking ahead, he said the event is expected to grow beyond its first edition.

"Youth Innovate is not intended to be a one-time event. Our vision is for it to become an annual, student-led innovation platform, growing stronger each year".

"We also hope to expand participation to include more schools across Oman, creating a wider ecosystem of young innovators who collaborate, share ideas and learn from one another."

Registrations for Youth Innovate 2026 are still open. Students can register through: (<https://forms.gle/3EYjE4pbjzcuaXeA>).

TRADE PULSE

South Korea exports jump on chips



South Korea's exports jumped 14.9% year on year in the first 20 days of January, driven by a sharp rebound in semiconductor shipments, official data showed.

Export value reached \$36.36 billion, while imports rose 4.2%, leaving a \$600 million deficit. Semiconductor exports surged 70.2%. Average daily shipments rose, with petroleum and steel exports posting gains. — ONA

FISCAL WATCH

Fitch sees Japan deficits contained



Fitch Ratings expects Japan to keep fiscal deficits manageable after next month's election, despite bond market jitters over proposed tax cuts.

Fitch reaffirmed Japan's A rating with a stable outlook, noting expansionary policies were already factored in forecasts. Analysts will assess any new measures, including a food tax suspension, following recent yield volatility in markets. — Reuters

ENERGY OUTLOOK

LNG supply surges to cap prices



Global Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) supply is set to surge in 2026, easing post-Ukraine war tightness and pressuring prices, analysts say.

A wave of new projects through 2029 could spur demand, especially in emerging markets.

At least 35 million tonnes of capacity, mainly from the United States and Qatar, may lift global supply by up to 10% year on year. — Reuters

The importance of taxes in financing public services



HAIDER AL LAWATI
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The writer is a Muscat-based economic analyst who previously worked for CBO and OCCI

TAXES constitute a main item in the annual financial budgets of many countries around the world in order to finance public services such as education, healthcare, infrastructure improvement, security provision and the payment of public-sector salaries, in addition to supporting social affairs.

In today’s world, many countries cannot survive without imposing taxes on institutions and individuals. In some countries, taxes may account for between 60% and 90% of total state revenues.

However, a small number of countries are able to dispense with taxes due to their possession of other sources of income such as oil, gas and minerals, or because they have massive sovereign wealth funds.

Nevertheless, in all cases — even in those countries — various forms of taxes or indirect fees are usually imposed, such as corporate taxes, value-added tax and kinds of sustain to their financial and economic policies.

This is what has prompted the Omani government today to consider imposing an income tax on individuals with substantial wealth, starting from the beginning of 2028, after the issue was raised by the relevant authorities. Accordingly, the government’s move to impose income tax on citizens and expatriates with high monthly incomes

has become a necessity to keep pace with citizens’ aspirations and to provide more services and projects for them across various government institutions and the private sector.

If people were to stop paying taxes on a large scale, governments could face difficulties at both institutional and individual levels resulting in a significant shortfall in revenues, deterioration in public services and budget deficits, not to mention rising public debt.

For several years, the Omani government has imposed an income tax on companies at a rate of 15% of their annual profits. However, a new law was issued last year under Royal Decree No 56/2025 to implement an income tax on individuals starting from January 1, 2028.

This will apply to those whose annual income exceeds RO 42,000 (approximately \$109,000), who will be subject to a tax rate of 5% on taxable income. The tax system will take into account deductions and exemptions for certain items such as housing costs, housing loans, health and education expenses, insurance, amounts paid for zakat, as well as donations and some other types of expenditures.

According to many analyses, this change will target a small segment of Omani society, perhaps up to 1% of the total population,

The government’s move to impose income tax on citizens and expatriates with high monthly incomes has become a necessity to keep pace with citizens’ aspirations and to provide more services and projects for them across various government institutions and the private sector.

while about 99% will not be affected by the individual income tax.

The purpose of imposing income tax is to diversification of public revenue sources and the reduction of dependence on oil revenues, within the framework of Oman Vision 2040 for economic development. This upcoming tax will help establish a more comprehensive tax system and greater fiscal sustainability in the country.

In general, the individual income tax will have some negative impact, but it will not necessarily lead to a decline in foreign investment for several reasons and considerations. The foreign investors are usually more concerned with corporate tax laws, which remain at around 15%.

At the same time, Oman continues to offer incentives to attract foreign investment, grants 100% foreign ownership in many sectors, provides various facilitation measures, grants customs exemptions for certain equipment and machinery, maintains freedom of profit repatriation and offers investment guarantees.

This matter requires further awareness-raising to avoid concern among some investors who may view this change unrealistically and to eliminate any administrative burdens and to operate in accordance with standards of governance, transparency, digitisation.

JAPAN’S PM IS ENTERING SELF-MADE FISCAL TRAP

HUDSON LOCKETT

Sanae Takaichi likes to compare herself to ‘Iron Lady’ Margaret Thatcher, but since taking power the Japanese premier has more frequently been likened to Liz Truss, the UK’s shortest-serving prime minister.

Now her snap election seeking a mandate for debt-fuelled growth and tax cuts has triggered bond market tumult.

With her political platform on the line, she can’t drop her spending pitch to voters now. And as with Truss, it’s an entirely self-made trap.

Yields on 40-year Japanese government bonds shot above the 4% threshold on Tuesday for the first time since the ultra-long maturity’s debut

in 2007. Yields on 10- and 20-year bonds also surged amidst concerns that Takaichi’s snap election, slated for February 8, will secure a parliamentary majority that delivers a mandate for lower taxes and greater government spending in the developed world’s most indebted economy.

Such concerns — along with the prime minister’s denials Japan could experience a “Truss shock” in which expansionary fiscal policy triggers loss of market confidence — have been around since she took office, promising to counterintuitively tackle inflation by reviving the reflationary agenda of her late predecessor, Shinzo Abe.

But her Liberal Democratic Party’s weak hold on parliament’s powerful lower house kept bond market worries in check even as it pushed through a \$135 billion stimulus in December.

But since her October victory in the LDP’s leadership contest, the yen has been creeping lower and is now down more than 7% against the dollar — despite the prospect of higher rates from the Bank of Japan this year — on anticipation of more government debt sales to finance bigger stimulus.

Takaichi confirmed markets’ fears when she vowed during her election announcement to end Japan’s “excessive drift toward austerity” and promised to axe Japan’s food levy for two years, which would deliver an estimated 5 trillion yen (\$31.6 billion) hit to annual government revenues.

Yet even if Japan’s premier wanted to swing a U-turn, she has put herself in a situation where that has become untenable: the entirety of Takaichi’s political project has now been staked on Japan’s economy outgrowing inflation.

Backing down now would be an admission of policy incoherence and leave her party without a banner mid-campaign. — Reuters

The hidden cost of familiar decisions

In many organisations, the most expensive decisions are not the ones that fail loudly. They are the ones that succeed quietly for too long. Familiar decisions often feel safe.

They are backed by experience, validated by past outcomes and reinforced by organisational routines. Because they once worked, they continue to be repeated sometimes long after the conditions that made them effective have changed.

This repetition creates an illusion of stability, but beneath the surface, it carries a cost that rarely appears in financial statements or performance dashboards. The danger of familiar decisions is not incompetence. On the contrary, they are usually made by capable leaders who rely on proven judgment.

The issue is that familiarity slowly replaces evaluation. Decisions become defaults rather than deliberate choices and over time, organisations stop asking whether their current approach is still the most appropriate one.

In stable environments, this tendency is even stronger. When markets are predictable and operations run smoothly, decision patterns harden.

What was once a strategic choice becomes a habit. The organisation continues to perform adequately, but adaptability declines. By the time external pressure forces reconsideration, the gap between where the organisation is and where it should be has already widened. This hidden cost often appears as a missed opportunity rather than a visible failure.

Companies may retain market share but lose momentum. Processes remain efficient, yet innovation slows. Talent stays, but engagement weakens. None of these signals are dramatic enough to trigger immediate alarm, which is precisely why they are so dangerous. Consider organisations that continue investing in the same business models, governance structures, or leadership approaches because they have historically delivered results.

While competitors experiment, restructure, or adopt new operating



KAMLA AL RAHBI

The writer is a leadership and business strategist focused on decision-making, organisational clarity, and cognitive frameworks in complex environments.

The issue is that familiarity slowly replaces evaluation. Decisions become defaults rather than deliberate choices and over time, organisations stop asking whether their current approach is still the most appropriate one. In stable environments, this tendency is even stronger



Human resources are developed for roles that may soon become less relevant.

assumptions, these organisations prioritise continuity.

The rationale sounds responsible: avoiding disruption, protecting culture and preserving proven systems. In reality, this comfort delays strategic correction. From an economic perspective, delayed correction is costly. Decisions that are not revisited accumulate risk over time. Capital is allocated based on outdated assumptions.

Assets are optimised for yesterday’s strategy. Human resources are developed for roles that may soon become less relevant.

The organisation remains operationally busy but strategically stagnant. What makes familiar decisions particularly resilient is that they rarely trigger accountability.

When outcomes are “acceptable”, leaders can justify maintaining the status quo. Performance reviews focus on execution rather than judgment.

Strategy discussions revolve around refinement instead of reassessment. The organisation becomes efficient at doing the wrong things well. This pattern is often misinterpreted as prudence. In reality, it reflects a subtle shift in decision-making logic from asking, “What is needed now?” What has worked before?

The latter feels safer, especially in environments where failure carries reputational or political consequences. Over time, risk avoidance becomes embedded

in the decision culture, even as external risk increases. The cost of this mindset is rarely immediate, but it compounds. By the time familiar decisions visibly fail, recovery becomes more expensive. Organisations must then absorb not only the cost of change but also the cost of delay.

Competitors who adjusted earlier gain structural advantages that are difficult to reverse. In today’s economic climate shaped by technological acceleration, shifting workforce expectations and tightening capital conditions — this hidden cost is becoming harder to ignore. Stability is no longer a neutral position.

In many sectors, it is a competitive disadvantage. The challenge for leaders is not to abandon experience but to prevent it from becoming unquestioned authority.

Experience should inform judgment, not replace it. Familiarity should be a reference point, not a decision rule.

Organisations that periodically examine why they continue to decide the same way rather than simply whether those decisions still deliver results retain strategic flexibility.

Those that do not risk becoming increasingly efficient at sustaining choices that no longer serve their long-term position. The most dangerous decisions are not the bold ones that fail, but the familiar ones that quietly stop working.

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ART/LIFE



WHEN HERITAGE BECOMES A MEANINGFUL TOURISM > 20

CHANGING WORLD OLDER GENERATION EMBRACING AI TO STAY RELEVANT



**SHADDAD
AL MUSALMY**
The writer is a
Senior Editor at
Oman Daily Observer.

In Oman, a remarkable trend is unfolding. Individuals with 40 years of age and above are embracing Artificial Intelligence (AI) to stay connected with the rapidly changing world. And being one of them, I am motivated by a desire to remain relevant and engaged, while defying age stereotypes and diving into AI learning.

Driven by curiosity and a willingness to adapt, we are enrolling in AI courses, attending workshops and joining online forums. This shift is largely driven by the need to stay connected with tech-savvy family members and remain active in the workforce.

By combining the expertise with new skills, we are creating a unique blend of traditional knowledge and modern technology as Oman accelerates its AI adoption. I have full faith that this generation's efforts will be crucial in bridging the digital divide and fostering a culture of lifelong learning given that Oman is rapidly embracing Artificial Intelligence (AI) across various sectors, marking a significant shift in its approach to technological innovation.

As part of its Oman Vision 2040 strategy, the Sultanate of Oman is investing heavily in AI to drive economic diversification, enhance efficiency and position itself as a leader in the digital age.

One of the key areas where AI is making a significant impact is in healthcare. Oman's healthcare sector is leveraging AI-powered diagnostic tools to improve patient outcomes and streamline medical processes.

For instance, new AI-driven diagnostic systems to detect diseases like cancer more accurately and at an early stage have been introduced. This not only enhances patient care but also reduces the burden on healthcare professionals.

In the education sector, AI is being used to personalise learning experiences for students. The Ministry of Education has been working on initiatives to integrate AI-powered learning platforms, enabling students to learn at their own pace and explore subjects in a more interactive way. This approach is expected to improve learning outcomes and equip students with the skills needed to thrive in a rapidly changing world.

Oman's transportation sector is also benefitting from AI, with the introduction of smart traffic management systems. These systems use AI to optimise traffic flow, reduce congestion and improve road safety.

Oman's commitment to AI is evident in its participation in global AI forums and its collaboration with international organisations to develop AI capabilities. The country is also focusing on developing a skilled workforce, with initiatives to upskill and reskill professionals in AI and related fields.

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



ENTERTAINMENT

Paris Hilton attends a premiere for the documentary "Infinite Icon: A Visual Memoir" in Los Angeles, California, US.
— Reuters



LIGHTWORKS

Aurora Borealis, or Northern Lights, are seen above der Wenzel church (Wenzelskirche) in Wartberg ob der Aist, Upper Austria. — AFP



HOLLYWOOD

Canadian actress Rachel McAdams poses on her just unveiled Hollywood Walk of Fame star during a ceremony in Hollywood.
— AFP

INSTA PICKS



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‘SENTIMENTAL VALUE’ BAGS EUROPEAN FILM AWARD FOR BEST FILM

The drama “Sentimental Value” by Norwegian director Joachim Trier about a father-daughter relationship won the European Film Award for Best Film. The work tells the story of a filmmaker who seeks to cast his semi-estranged daughter in the lead role of his most personal project to date.

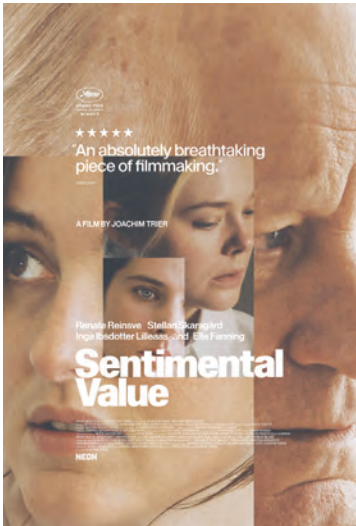
The lead actors — Sweden’s Stellan Skarsgård and Norway’s Renate Reinsve — both won acting awards and Trier was also honoured for Best Director.

Five awards went to the road movie “Sirât” by French director Oliver Laxe, in which a father and his son set out into the desert in search of their missing daughter.

The European Film Awards, presented alternately in Berlin and another city, were held for the 38th time, with approximately 5,400 members of the European Film Academy able to vote for a series of winners. They elected “Fiume o Morte!” as Best Documentary Film, a Croatian work by Igor Bezginovi about the ultranationalist 1919 occupation of Fiume, now Rijeka, Croatia.

It combines historical reenactments with reflections on memory, fascism and the city’s identity. The Lifetime Achievement Award went to Norwegian actress and director Liv Ullmann, known for “Scenes from a Marriage” among other works.

PANAHI’S APPEAL



Iranian filmmaker Jafar Panahi made an urgent appeal at the outset of the awards, concerning the dramatic situation in his home country.

“If the world does not react to this blatant violence today, not only Iran, but the entire world is at risk”, he said. “Violence when left unanswered, becomes normalised. And when it becomes normalised, it will spread. It becomes contagious”.

What began as protests against the country’s sustained economic woes turned into the worst unrest seen in the country in years, with security forces responding with a brutal crackdown to the anti-government demonstrations.

Calling on filmmakers to raise their voices, Panahi said, “When the truth is crushed in one place... no-one is safe anywhere in the world. Not in Iran. Not in Europe, not in America. Not anywhere on this planet”. — dpa



Berlinalde director Tricia Tuttle poses with Berlinalde merchandise products in Berlin. — AFP

Berlin fest to feature anime, family sagas

MIRANDA MURRAY

TWENTY two films, from a reflection on ageing starring Juliette Binoche to a Japanese anime feature and a historical drama with German indie actor Sandra Hueller, are among the diverse contenders for the Berlin Film Festival’s top prize next month.

The 76th iteration of the Berlin Film Festival, which last year welcomed more than 450,000 audience members, will run from February 12 to 22 this year.

The competition section features productions from 28 countries, including the anime feature debut by Yoshitoshi Shinomiya, “A New Dawn”, as well as an American documentary by Anna Fitch and Banker White about female friendship called “YO Love is a Rebellious Bird.”

FAMILY FOCUS

Family stories are particularly well-represented, with Rupert Grint of Harry Potter fame in the dark fairy tale “Nightborn”, while “Josephine” is a psychological thriller with Channing Tatum, about a family whose sense of safety has been shattered. The Amy Adams-anchored “At the Sea” is about a woman returning home after rehab.

French actor Binoche will star in “Queen at Sea” while Hueller, who starred in Oscar-winning “Anatomy of a Fall” and “Zone of Interest”, will lead the black-and-white drama “Rose”, set at the end of the Thirty Years’ War.

New this year is a program targeting young people aged 18 to 25, with tickets costing only 6 euros (\$7.04).

“We are in a battle for this art form that we love so dearly,” said festival director Tricia Tuttle at a press conference on Tuesday. “It’s a battle to ensure that cinema culture can retain its breadth.”

CELEBRITIES MAKE A BEELINE

Celebrities and big Hollywood names will descend upon the cold German capital, including Oscar winner Michelle Yeoh, who will pick up an honorary Golden Bear prize at the opening ceremony for her



A person works on a Berlin Bear award statuette at the Noack Foundry, during a media tour, ahead of the 76th Berlinalde International Film Festival in Berlin. — Reuters

work in films such as “Everything Everywhere All At Once” and “Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon.”

Afghan filmmaker Shahrbanoo Sadat will open this year’s festival with “No Good Men” about the country’s deeply patriarchal society. “It’s a film that has a really important thing to say about the world, to remind us all of our share of humanity and our responsibility,” said Tuttle.

Veteran German director Wim Wenders, 80, will head the international jury that hands out the festival’s Golden Bear top prize.

“We couldn’t believe that he hasn’t done it before,” said Tuttle.

The competition for the Golden Bear - won in 2025 by Norwegian director Dag Johan Haugerud’s “Dreams” - include s”Rosebush Pruning” by Brazilian director Karim Ainouz, starring Anderson alongside Elle Fanning, Callum Turner and Elvis Presley’s granddaughter, Riley Keough. Famed German actress Hüller appears in Austrian filmmaker MarkusSchleinzer’s “Rose.” Three films by German directors are included on the list: “Yellow Letters” by Ilker Çatak, “My Wife Cries” by Angela Schanelec and “Something Very Special” by Eva Trobisch.

Actress Michelle Yeoh set to

receive the Honorary Golden Bear for lifetime achievement and composer Max Richter to be honoured with the Berlinalde Camera award.

Senegalese helmer Alain Gomis, who won the Silver Bear in 2017 with “Felicité,” returns with “Dao,” which is set between France and Guinea Bissau, weaving themes of family and heritage.

German director Eva Trobisch, whose 2024 movie “Ivo” played in the Encounters section in 2024, will present “Etwas ganz Besonderes” (“Home Stories”), which boasts a “multi-layered script and an excellent ensemble of actors who embody this tale of a fractured German family torn between East and West,” Tuttle said.

Perspectives, Berlinalde’s section celebrating debut features, will bring 13 films — with a 14th potentially being announced soon — including the first helmed by “Adolescence” star Ashley Walters.

Titled “Animol,” the cast list includes his “Adolescence” co-star Stephen Graham and follows boys at a young offender institution. Also of interest is Dara Van Dusen’s “A Prayer for the Dying,” a Western starring Johnny Flynn and John C. Reilly as a Civil War veteran and sheriff fighting to save their small town amid an epidemic. — AFP

FEATURES



WHEN

HERITAGE

BECOMES MEANINGFUL TOURISM



ARWA AL HASHIMI

In the far north of Oman, where the rugged mountains of Musandam rise dramatically above the blue waters of the sea, a distinctive cultural experience is taking shape, one that moves beyond simply visiting a place to truly living it. In Khasab, the Zaree Khasab stands out as a cultural and tourism initiative that brings together heritage preservation and community empowerment, offering visitors an authentic window into Musandam's deeply rooted identity.

Zaree Khasab is not a conventional tourism project. Rather, it is an interactive space that invites visitors to explore traditional handicrafts, handmade products, heritage clothing, local cuisine and oral storytelling passed down through generations. The project takes its name from the zaree, the shimmering threads traditionally used in Omani embroidery, symbolising authenticity, precision and fine craftsmanship. Just as the zaree enhances traditional attire with its distinctive beauty, Zaree Khasab adds a unique touch to the visitor experience, highlighting the richness of Musandam's cultural heritage.

Launched in 2012, the project was established in Khasab due to the strategic importance of the Khasab

In Khasab, the Zaree Khasab project stands out as a cultural and tourism initiative that brings together heritage preservation and community empowerment, offering visitors an authentic window into Musandam's deeply rooted identity.

Port as a major stop for international cruise ships. This growing influx of tourists created a genuine need for cultural experiences that foster direct interaction between visitors and the local community, allowing travellers to gain deeper insight into everyday life, traditions and values. Zaree Khasab emerged to meet this need, combining cultural promotion with economic empowerment.

In its early stages, the initiative began as a social project with a strong focus on utilising and developing women's traditional skills.

Over time, it evolved into an economically sustainable and well-structured venture, driven by a clear vision to provide participating women with stable income opportunities. This transition was supported by a strong commitment to quality, authenticity and continuous development.

The project's emphasis on excellence enabled it to expand its presence beyond local boundaries. Zaree Khasab has participated in several prominent international exhibitions, including the France Maritime Exhibition and the Arabian Travel Market, as well as events held in Abu Dhabi, Riyadh, Cairo and Dubai. Adhering to the standards of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism and obtaining official licences as tour guides further enhanced the project's credibility,

positioning it as a distinguished heritage experience representing Oman on international platforms. Women's empowerment remains at the heart of Zaree Khasab.

The project provides stable employment for women artisans, along with training in production, management and marketing. It also offers them opportunities to showcase their talents locally and internationally, contributing to financial independence and improved living standards. As such, Zaree Khasab has become a pioneering model in Musandam for community-based projects with tangible social and economic impact.

Like many grassroots initiatives, the project faced several challenges in its early years, including limited resources and low public awareness of cultural tourism. These obstacles were overcome through self-reliance, a strong focus on craftsmanship and active participation in exhibitions and events. Challenges related to operating across multiple locations were addressed through clear team organisation and task distribution, ensuring efficiency and continuity. Authenticity remains a cornerstone of the experience offered.

Elderly women with long-standing expertise in traditional crafts actively participate in demonstrations, while local artisans

use traditional tools and materials. Visitors are able to observe the crafting process as it is genuinely practiced, rather than as a staged performance.

Traditional Omani dishes and customs are also integrated into the experience, providing an honest and immersive portrayal of life in Musandam.

Since its inception, the project has benefitted from strong institutional support. It began as a corporate social responsibility programme by Omran in 2012, which included training 50 local women in hospitality, entrepreneurship and foreign languages. Additional support from OQ contributed to the establishment of a permanent heritage tent at the Khasab Port to welcome cruise visitors. The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism was among the first entities to select Zaree Khasab to represent Oman internationally, alongside ongoing support from the Office of the Governor of Musandam.

Today, Zaree Khasab is more than a destination; it is a message that heritage, when presented with sincerity and respect, can become a source of cultural pride and economic strength. It stands as a living example of how a small idea, built on belief and craftsmanship, can grow into an internationally recognised project without losing its local roots.