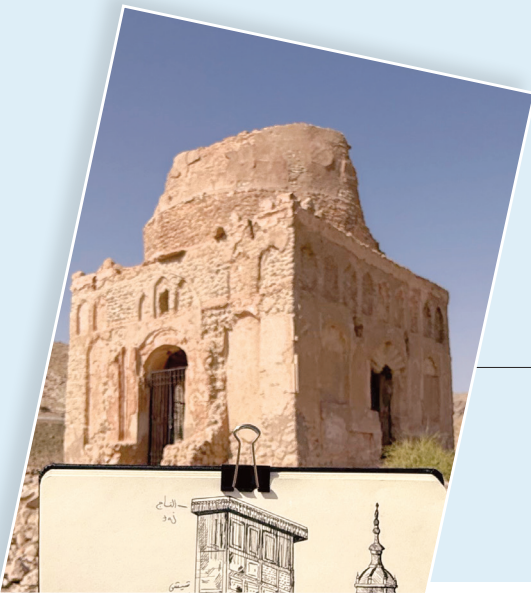


OMAN

دولة عمان

DAILY

Observer



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SUNRISE 06:49 AM
PRAYER TIMINGS
FAJR 05:28 AM
DHUHR 12:15 PM
ASR 03:16 PM
MAGHRIB 05:36 PM
ISHA 06:51 PM

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20 INSIDE ISSA
AL NAIRI'S
SKETCHBOOK

HM visits Cyber Defence Centre



HIS Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, the Supreme Commander, paid a Royal visit on Wednesday to the Cyber Defence Centre in the Governorate of Muscat. During the visit, His Majesty was briefed on the Centre's principal responsibilities and the roles it performs to protect Oman's cyberspace.

Upon the arrival of His Majesty's motorcade, he was greeted by Lt Gen Said bin Ali al Hilali, Head of the Internal Security Service (ISS), alongside some senior ISS officers.

His Majesty the Sultan then proceeded on an inspection tour of the Centre's facilities, where he examined its advanced systems and operational capabilities, observed the incident response mechanisms for cybersecurity threats, and took note of plans for developing and upskilling national cadres in this field.

His Majesty, the Supreme Commander, gave his directives to continuously align with technological advancements across all relevant disciplines. At the end of the visit, His Majesty took a commemorative photo with the personnel of the Centre. — ONA **SEE ALSO** P2

INBRIEF

HM CONDOLES
BANGLADESH

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of condolences to President Mohammed Shahabuddin of the People's Republic of Bangladesh on the death of Khaleda Zia, former prime minister of Bangladesh. In the cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his heartfelt sympathies to President Mohammed, the family of the deceased and the people of Bangladesh.

HM GREET'S SUDAN
COUNCIL CHAIRMAN

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to Gen Abdul Fattah al Burhan, Chairman of the Transitional Sovereignty Council in the Republic of Sudan, on his country's Independence Anniversary. In the cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his heartfelt sentiments and best wishes of continuous stability, progress and national harmony for Sudan.

HIS MAJESTY GREET'S
PRESIDENT OF CUBA

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Miguel Díaz-Canel of the Republic of Cuba on his country's National Day. In the cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his heartfelt sentiments and best wishes to President Miguel. His Majesty also wished the people of Cuba further progress and growth.

Decree makes premarital checkup must

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Wednesday issued Royal Decree No 111/2025 on Regulation of Premarital Medical Examination. Article (1) states that every Omani wishing to marry - even if the other party is non-Omani - must undergo a medical examination, along with the other party, prior to the conclusion of the marriage contract, whether the contract is concluded inside or outside the Sultanate of Oman. This shall be in accordance with the regulations and procedures to be issued by a decision from the Minister of Health.

Article (2) instructs the health institution to conduct the premarital medical examination in accordance

**VIOLATIONS
PUNISHED BY
IMPRISONMENT
FOR 6 MONTHS,
AND/OR BY A FINE
OF NOT OVER
RO 1,000.**

**NO MARRIAGE
CONTRACT
WITHOUT
THE MEDICAL
CERTIFICATE**

with scientific and technical standards. It must notify both parties intending to marry of the result of each party's examination and provide the necessary medical counselling if required in light of the medical examination results. It is prohibited to disclose the examination results to any third party.

Article (3) says that the health institution shall issue to the parties intending to marry a certificate proving they have undergone the medical examination stipulated in Article 2 of this decree, in accordance with the regulations and procedures to be issued by a decision from the Minister of Health.

Article (4) stipulates that the marriage officiants must not conclude the marriage contract until the two parties to the contract have presented the certificate stipulated in Article 3 of this decree.

Article (5) states that anyone who violates the provisions of this decree shall be punished by imprisonment for a period of no less than 10 days and not exceeding 6 months, and/or by a fine of no less than RO 100 and not exceeding RO 1,000.

Article (6) cancels all that contradicts this decree or contravenes its provisions. Article (7) says that this decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from January 1, 2026. — ONA **SEE ALSO** P4

Over 51,000 jobs provided in 2025

MUSCAT: A total of 51,482 jobs were provided to citizens in 2025, a 114-per cent increase over the annual target for employment and training of 45,000.

The Ministry of Labour explained that this achievement reflects integration between the public and the private sectors in supporting the national employment strategy.

The ministry said that its quality programmes and initiatives included replacement plans, work-related training,



This achievement reflects integration between the public and the private sectors.

enhancing the skills of job-seekers as well as close cooperation with private sector establishments to open up broader horizons for sustainable job opportunities.

The ministry indicated that first-time employment and replacement in the public sector accounted for 11,206 opportunities, well above a target of 10,000, while the private sector recorded 25,207 opportunities, surpassing the target of 24,000.

As for training, qualification and on-the-job training, the public sector recorded 2,588 opportunities, while the private sector recorded 12,481.

The ministry affirmed its continued commitment to developing initiatives and projects aimed at enhancing the work environment and increasing employment rates in line with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040. — ONA

HM inspects Cyber Defence Centre



MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, the Supreme Commander, paid a Royal visit on Wednesday to the Cyber Defence Centre in the Governorate of Muscat. During the visit, His Majesty was briefed on the Centre's principal responsibilities and the roles it performs to protect Oman's cyberspace. — ONA





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SHORTTAKES



The list covers a wide range of sectors.

TENDER BOARD AWARDS RO 363 MILLION PROJECTS

MUSCAT: The Tender Board on Wednesday approved a major portfolio of government contracts and project amendments valued at more than RO 363 million during its fourth meeting of the year 2025.

The meeting was chaired by Dr Said bin Mohammed al Saqri, Minister of Economy and Chairman of the Tender Board.

The list covers a wide range of sectors, with the single largest allocation designated for the procurement of pharmaceuticals, vaccines, and sera for government units, amounting to RO 201.8 million. — ONA

MUNICIPAL COUNCIL ELECTIONS LOGO LAUNCHED

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Interior has launched the logo for the fourth term of the Municipal Council elections for the year 2026. The logo's design incorporates several verbal and artistic connotations related to the objectives of the electoral process. The logo centres on the word “Bader” (Initiate), which embodies a direct call to citizens for active participation in the elections. This reflects a sense of national responsibility and promotes a positive contribution. The logo was designed with a modern visual style that merges artistic elements reflecting the national identity. — ONA



SAYYID BADR, SAUDI COUNTERPART REVIEW DEVELOPMENTS IN YEMEN

RIYADH: Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, met with Prince Faisal bin Farhan al Saud, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), in Riyadh on Wednesday.

The discussions focused on the latest developments in Yemen and their repercussions for regional security and stability.

The meeting addressed



The meeting addressed ongoing efforts to de-escalate tensions and explored avenues to bolster the political process. — ONA

ongoing efforts to de-escalate tensions and explored avenues to bolster the political process. Both ministers emphasised the need for

a comprehensive and enduring resolution that addresses the underlying causes of the conflict. Such a settlement, they concurred, must safeguard Yemen's sovereignty, stability and security, while also accommodating the aspirations of the Yemeni people and upholding the vital national security interests of neighbouring states and the wider region. — ONA

Muscat Nights begins today

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, DEC 31

CURTAINS will rise for a month-long extravaganza of culture, heritage, infotainment, cuisines from across the world, and fun and frolic that will enliven the nights of the new year starting today. All roads will lead to the major venues of Muscat Nights.

Along with families, citizens, expatriates, women, and children, tourists and other visitors will have their own reasons to be joyful and engaged as the venues come alive with activities suitable for everyone at major locations around the governorate.

Some of the major happening places include Al Qurum Natural Park, Al Amerat Public Park, the Oman Automobile Association, the Royal Opera House Muscat, Al Seeb Beach (Sur Al Hadid), Qurayat and Wadi Al Khoudh. Additionally, several shopping malls have joined hands with the Muscat Municipality, the organisers of Muscat Nights, to be part of the celebrations.



The wide range of activities is crafted with the youth in mind, with a number of mind-blowing activities lined up for them.

Muscat Nights received more than a million visitors in the last edition, and the organisers are quite optimistic about receiving more than 2 million visitors to the venues this year as international interest in the celebrations has increased in recent editions.

“We are hopeful of receiving more than

2 million visitors to the major venues of Muscat Nights starting on January 1, as inquiries and bookings from abroad have risen substantially, resulting in a surge in inbound tourism to the Sultanate of Oman,” a member of the organising body told the Observer.

The wide range of activities is crafted with the youth in mind, with a number of mind-blowing activities lined up for them. The Oman Automobile Association and Wadi Al Khoudh will host a range of youth-oriented activities that combine challenge and action. These include drift car shows featuring professional demonstrations of advanced driving skills, as well as adventure activities such as zip-lining and interactive outdoor experiences in a safe and organised environment.

With a gamut of avenues for fun, entertainment and gastronomic delights, Muscat Nights 2026 is all set to offer a complete family experience at the dawn of the new year. Muscat will open its doors to an exceptional season that will reshape the city's urban landscape.



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AL HUSN
MUSCAT

DoubleTree by Hilton Muscat Al Waha

Hilton Muscat Al Bandar

Al Husn Hotel Muscat







OMAN

SHORT TAKE



MANDATORY
PREMARITAL
EXAMINATION
FROM TODAY

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Health will embark on the implementation of the mandatory premarital medical examination for all Omanis preparing to get married, in accordance with Royal Decree No 111/2025, starting on January 1, 2026.

The medical examination includes cases of non-Omani spouses which take place inside or outside the Sultanate of Oman. The examination is a prerequisite to proceed with a marriage contract.

The Ministry of Health on Monday clarified that the implementation of the premarital medical examination aims to detect whether a person carries the genes for certain hereditary blood disorders, namely sickle cell anaemia and thalassaemia, or whether they are infected with one of the infectious diseases targeted by the examination, namely hepatitis B, hepatitis C and HIV/AIDS.

The ministry stressed that the decision is a preventive measure to limit the spread of genetic, hereditary and infectious diseases in society. Early detection of these diseases reduces the birth of children with hereditary blood disorders, thus sparing families and those affected health, social, psychological and financial problems. It also reduces the burden on healthcare institutions and blood banks resulting from treating patients, and prevents the transmission of infectious diseases between spouses and from mother to fetus in the future. The ministry explained that the premarital medical examinations had been voluntary since 1999 and making it mandatory aims to increase the percentage of people undergoing the examination, which registered only 42 per cent in 2025.

Therefore, it was crucial to take steps to support efforts aimed at promoting family health and ensuring a society free from these diseases. — ONA

STATE COUNCIL
OFFICE HOLDS
2ND MEETING
OF THIRD
ORDINARY
SESSION

MUSCAT: The Office of the State Council held its second meeting for the third ordinary session of the eighth term on Wednesday. The meeting was chaired by Shaikh Abdulmalik bin Abdullah al Khalili, Chairman of the State Council.

During the meeting, the Office discussed a study prepared by the committee regarding the enhancement of financial sustainability for civil society institutions, highlighting the findings and recommendations



aimed at ensuring the long-term viability of this vital sector.

The session also focused on proposals submitted by the Council's permanent committees concerning topics designated for study during

the third ordinary session of the eighth term. These efforts are designed to enhance legislative efficiency and ensure alignment with the implementation of national development plans, as well as studies that help consolidate the authentic values of Omani society and preserve its achievements.

Additionally, the Office reviewed reports submitted by Council members regarding their participation in regional and international. — ONA

Meeting seeks proactive
gov't communication

SAUD AL ANSARI
MUSCAT, DEC 31

THE Government Communication Centre on Wednesday held its 30th meeting titled 'Proactive Communication Among Government Units'. It was attended by directors and representatives of communication and media departments in government units.

The meeting aimed to boost the preparedness of communication and media departments, enhance their readiness to manage government decisions and draw out a uniform understanding of approved methodologies, prior to the announcement of government decisions.

Ibrahim bin Salim al Salmi, Director-General and Editor-in-Chief of Oman News Agency, in charge of the Government Communication Centre, said in a speech that the meeting was in pursuance of the Centre's ongoing approach to enhance the quality of communication within government units and to underline professional practices that contribute to supporting decision-making and its implementation.

He said: "Experience proved that the success of any government decision does not depend solely on the content of the decision, but rather it is closely linked to how such a decision is presented to society, the time of unveiling the decision and the standard of communication readiness that accompanies



The meeting aimed to enhance readiness to manage government decisions.

the announcement of the decision. These factors underscore the importance of proactive communication as a fundamental factor in enhancing confidence and mutual understanding between the government and society."

The meeting also sought to establish consistent government discourse and ensure the issuance of accurate and balanced messages. In addition, it offered an opportunity to highlight successful experiences in proactive communication among government units.

Zamzam al Hinai, Director of the Media Agenda and Integration Department at the Government Communication Centre, said, "Such meetings constitute an opportunity to exchange knowledge and showcase experiences in the field of government

communication. The meetings have significantly contributed to promoting the adoption of best practices in communicating with the public." Abdulaziz bin Darwish al Zadjali, Director of the Communication and Media Department at the Ministry of Labour, gave a visual presentation in which he outlined the experience of proactive communication in the run-up to the Labour Law.

Osama bin Salim al Shukaili, Digital Communication and Marketing Analyst at the Tax Authority, gave a visual presentation on proactive communication with the context of the Personal Income Tax Law. He reviewed key practices and mechanisms used in preparing the public, including delivering communication messages related to the decision.

Conference discusses tech, AI in legal field

MOHAMED AL BATTASHI
MUSCAT, DEC 31

The law and life conference titled 'Technology and Artificial Intelligence in Support of the Rule of Law', was held on Wednesday, bringing together legal experts, professionals, and interested participants to discuss how modern technology can support justice, legal systems, and public trust.

The conference was organised by Law and Life Library and aimed to highlight the role of digital tools and artificial intelligence in strengthening the rule of law, while maintaining ethical standards and professional responsibility. The programme began with registration and reception, followed by the signing of a partnership MoU with Oman Observer to launch a new legal podcast titled 'All Rise'.

The podcast aims to promote legal awareness and encourage public discussion on legal and public policy issues.

Maimuna al Sulaimani, legal consultant and founder of Law and Life, encouraged participants to engage actively with the sessions and discussions.



The conference aimed to highlight the role of digital tools in strengthening the rule of law.

She explained that the podcast will feature a series of legal and public policy conversations with experts from different fields, recorded in English with Arabic subtitles. She stressed that the rule of law is not limited to legal professionals alone, but is a shared responsibility across society.

The first session focused on artificial intelligence and the rule of law and was delivered by Omaima al Sulaimani, who also led a workshop on Artificial Intelligence in Legal Practice. She explained how AI can support legal research, organise ideas, improve legal drafting and enhance work efficiency, while emphasising that legal judgement, decision-making, and professional

responsibility must always remain with the lawyer and cannot be replaced by technology.

Following a lunch break and the launch of the book 'LEGAL INSIDER', Dr Said bin Mohammed al Maqbali, an Omani lawyer and legal consultant, presented a session titled "Cyber Security and Legal Data Protection". He highlighted the importance of protecting personal data and reviewed whether current legal frameworks are ready to keep pace with rapid digital developments. He also discussed challenges related to specialised skills and financial resources, and the need for practical solutions to address emerging risks. Another session was delivered by

Dr Mohammed al Badi, Director of the Legal Department at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion. His session, titled "Digital Transformation in the Omani Judicial System", explored how digital systems can improve efficiency, transparency and access to justice, while supporting economic stability and investment growth. The conference concluded with a future-focused dialogue session, the reading of recommendations from the Fifth Omani Law Conference, and closing remarks, highlighting the importance of using technology responsibly to support justice and strengthen the rule of law in the digital age.

INTERNATIONAL TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

The Internal Tender Committee at Ministry of Information announces its Tender for the following work:

Tender No.	Tender Name	Class & Grade	Last Date For Collection	Submission Date	Purchase Fees (R.O.)
7/2025 (454/2025) at E-Tendering	TECHNICAL FIT-OUT OF A NEW FM TRANSMITTING STATION IN DABA-MUSANDAM	Excellent First	17/1/2026	18/2/2026	25/-

1. All specialized companies in the field of the tender shown above and are registered with the Tender Board to the degree indicated above, may obtain tender documents, against non-refundable fees, from the website through the following link: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>

2. Companies and institutions are exempted from providing a temporary insurance of 1% when submitting their bid, provided that they sign a document committing themselves to the submitted bid for a period determined when the bidding strategy is approved in accordance with the document attached to the Isnad platform. As for international companies that do not have a headquarters in the Sultanate of Oman, they are required to provide temporary insurance of 1%.

(For more information, please see the original circular issued by the Tender Board on the Isnaad platform.)

Note that the last date for accepting bids as mentioned above is before 10:00 am. Any bid received after the time and date mentioned in the submission date will be rejected automatically.

You are requested to provide 2 hard copies for your offer after the submission in Projects Department at Ministry of Information.

3. The Ministry has the right to:

- 1) Add or Cancell some works in the tender if necessary.
- 2) Cancellation of the tender without giving reasons.

For clarifications you may contact via:
Telephone : 24943785, 24943177, Email: (Moi.Tenders@omaninfo.om)

A QUICK LOOK BACK AT THE EVENTS



JANUARY

❖ Under the Royal auspices of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq, Oman's Promotional Brand was launched at Al Barakah Palace on January 8. The choice of the slogan "Partnership" goes hand in hand with the Sultanate of Oman's approach to strategic relations with the world. This approach stems from the principle of mutual trust when establishing economic and strategic partnerships with Arab and friendly countries. It is based on the view that the Sultanate of Oman represents a point of contact between the East and the West.

❖ The Sultanate of Oman celebrated on January 11 the fifth anniversary of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq's Accession Day in the country, which falls on January 11 annually. As many as 8,000 participants from the governorates of the Sultanate of Oman took part in the festival.

APRIL

❖ His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq has issued his Royal directives on April 2 to allocate RO 7 million for the establishment of the Autism Spectrum Disorder Care and Rehabilitation Centre in Muscat Governorate, which will operate under the National Autism Centre. The centre building will be 26,000 sqm and located in the Wilayat of Al Seeb to handle 150 cases per day.

❖ Oman and the Netherlands signed three agreements during the state visit of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq to the Netherlands from April 14 to 16. The Joint Development Agreement (JDA) for the liquefied hydrogen corridor aims to establish the world's first commercial export route for liquefied hydrogen, linking Oman, the Netherlands and Germany. His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq made a two-day state visit to Russia from April 21 to 22, meeting with President Vladimir Putin to strengthen bilateral ties, discuss regional issues like Gaza and sign several agreements. Citizens of both Oman and Russia received a mutual visa exemption. Joint Economic Committee: A new Joint Economic Committee was established to boost economic ties. The visit emphasised strengthening the "advanced relations" between the two nations, marking 40 years of strong ties.

THAT SHAPED THE NATION IN 2025

JULY

❖ The World Bank Group has opened a permanent office in Muscat to provide advisory services and monitor projects financed by the World Bank (WB) and its private sector affiliates. By hosting the WB office, the Sultanate of Oman seeks to better tap the services offered by the World Bank Group and its affiliate organisations that support economic growth and social, urban, commercial and private sector development. The step fits with the goals of Oman Vision 2040.

SEPTEMBER

❖ In line with the Sultanate of Oman's efforts to establish itself as a regional and global hub for clean and renewable energy solutions, and to attract international expertise and investments, Oman Investment Authority (OIA) announced the launch of the Energy Transition Fund, a joint initiative between Future Fund Oman and Templewater, a leading alternative asset management firm in Asia. This initiative marks a significant step towards accelerating the global shift to clean energy and strengthening strategic cooperation between Oman, the GCC and China.

OCTOBER

❖ The Court of Investment and Commerce was established by Royal Decree on October 1. This specialised court provides a swifter, more professional framework for resolving commercial and investment disputes, increasing investor confidence.

NOVEMBER

❖ As per the Royal orders of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq, the project known as the Oman Cultural Complex shall be named as Sayyid Tariq bin Taimour Cultural Complex. This designation emanates from the profound wisdom of His Majesty the Sultan in his commitment to immortalise the noble legacy and distinguished contributions of eminent Omani figures who have played a pivotal role throughout the Sultanate of Oman's journey of prosperity and progress.

❖ The Sultanate of Oman and the Kingdom of Spain signed four memoranda of understanding (MoUs) in the fields of green methanol, liquefied natural gas (LNG), water and wastewater management, and economic cooperation to develop trade and investment relations between the business communities of the two countries. The signings took place in Madrid during the state visit of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq to the Kingdom of Spain.

❖ The Central Bank of Oman (CBO) has announced the approved fee structure for the national payment card "Maal" consumer Debit and Prepaid card on November 18. The move reflects the Sultanate of Oman's ongoing efforts to establish a more efficient national payment ecosystem. The initiative aims to strengthen the national payments framework by reducing costs for banks, merchants and payment service providers (PSPs), while expanding the use of digital payment methods across various economic sectors.

❖ The Central Bank of Oman (CBO) has officially launched the symbol for the local currency, the Omani Rial, on November 19. This achievement marks a significant national milestone that embodies the Omani identity and enhances the currency's standing in global markets. The new symbol will help solidify the presence of the Omani Rial on financial, commercial and digital platforms worldwide.

❖ The Al Busaid State Foundation Day was marked on November 20. It laid the foundations of national unity and delineated the contours of national sovereignty. Since that time, the Al Busaid State has remained at the forefront of steering the state's course, preserving its internal balance and confronting external challenges.



Oman's tallest flagpole, which stands at 126 meters (413 feet) in Al Khuwair Square, Muscat, was inaugurated on May 23 as a symbol of national pride and a significant landmark, towering as high as a 40-storey building and featuring a massive Omani flag.

DECEMBER

❖ The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) unveiled the official logo of the National Aviation Strategy 2040 as part of its celebration of International Civil Aviation Day. Held under the auspices of Shaikh Al Fadhl bin Mohammed al Harthy, Secretary-General of the Council of Ministers, the event brought together key strategic partners from across the civil aviation sector. The launch marks a major milestone in the development of Oman's aviation industry, covering legislation and governance, airport infrastructure, safety and security, air navigation services, business development and investment, general civil aviation and unmanned aircraft, national talent development, and sustainability and innovation.

❖ His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq and Narendra Modi, Prime Minister of the Republic of India, graced the signing of the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) between the Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of India.

❖ The Central Bank of Oman (CBO) has announced the issuance of a RO 1 Polymer Commemorative Banknote on December 21, which will enter circulation on January 11, 2026. This special edition banknote is crafted from polymer, a material known for its



The Central Bank of Oman (CBO) has announced the issuance of a RO 1 Polymer Commemorative Banknote on December 21, which will enter circulation on January 11, 2026.

enhanced durability and advanced security features, distinguishing it from the current cotton-based banknotes in circulation. Measuring 145 x 76 mm, the banknote features a distinctive design that celebrates Omani national heritage.

The front showcases the Oman Botanic Garden, while the reverse side highlights the Sayyid Tariq bin Taimour Cultural Complex along with the Duqm Port and Refinery,

collectively symbolising Oman's national identity.

The note incorporates several sophisticated security elements, including a large transparent window inspired by the arched windows of the Oman Botanic Garden. It also features a colour-changing stamp depicting the frankincense tree on the front, and the Central Bank of Oman's visual identity rendered in colour-changing ink on the back.

WORLD

SHORT TAKES



Cambodian people welcome soldiers as a bus passes by in Phnom Penh. — AFP

THAILAND RELEASES CAMBODIAN SOLDIERS HELD SINCE JULY

PHNOM PENH: Eighteen Cambodian soldiers received a hero's welcome home on Wednesday, after Thailand released them as part of a truce deal that ended weeks of deadly fighting along their contested frontier. Some of the 18 soldiers — who were captured by Thailand and held for five months as prisoners of war — smiled, waved and gestured with their palms pressed together to cheering crowds through bus windows in the border province of Pailin, and later in Phnom Penh.

Hundreds of well-wishers lined the streets of the capital, hollering and waving national flags, as a caravan of mini-buses shuttled the returned men and teary-eyed relatives through the city, video from Cambodian state television showed, ahead of an expected meeting with Prime Minister Hun Manet.

Cambodia's defence ministry said the 18 soldiers were "released and safely returned to the motherland" through a border crossing on Wednesday morning after being detained for 155 days. Thailand's foreign ministry said they were repatriated "as a demonstration of goodwill and confidence-building", according to a statement. Phnom Penh said it was hopeful their release would contribute to "building mutual trust".

— AFP

FINLAND DETAINS SHIP SUSPECTED OF DAMAGING CABLE

HELSINKI: Finnish police on Wednesday seized a ship suspected of damaging an undersea telecoms cable running from Helsinki to Estonia's capital Tallinn across the Gulf of Finland, an area hit by suspected sabotage incidents in recent years. "Finnish authorities have taken control of the vessel as part of a joint operation," the police said, adding they were investigating the case as aggravated criminal damage.

They gave no details of the name or nationality of the ship, or regarding the crew. Eight Nato states border the Baltic Sea, which also borders Russia. They have been on high alert after a string of outages of power cables, telecoms links and gas pipelines that run along the relatively shallow seabed since Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022. Nato has boosted its presence in the Baltic with frigates, aircraft and naval drones in recent years. A spokesperson for the military alliance declined to comment on Wednesday's incident. The vessel suspected of causing the latest damage was dragging its anchor in the sea, and was directed to Finnish territorial waters, the police and Finland's Border Guard said. The cable belongs to Finnish telecoms group Elisa. "At this stage, the police are investigating the incident as aggravated criminal damage, attempted aggravated criminal damage, and aggravated interference with telecommunications," the police said. Estonia's justice ministry said a second telecoms cable connecting the country to Finland had also suffered an outage on Wednesday. — Reuters

TRUMP ISSUES VETOES FOR FIRST TIME IN HIS SECOND TERM

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump scrapped two bills this week, exercising his veto power for the first time during his second term to reject a water pipeline and the expansion of a Native American reservation. Trump vetoed the bipartisan-backed bills on Monday, the White House announced on social media. Both the Senate and the House would need to pass the bills again by a two-thirds majority to override the president.

One of the bills, "Finish the

Arkansas Valley Conduit Act," aimed to complete a decades-long plan to pipe clean water to Colorado's Eastern Plains. In his letter to Congress explaining the veto, Trump argued it would cost too much, and said he was "preventing American taxpayers from funding expensive and unreliable policies." The pipeline was initially proposed during John F Kennedy's presidency in the 1960s, and the vetoed bill had received unanimous support from both

houses of Congress. It was backed by Colorado's two Democratic Senators and by Republican Representatives Lauren Boebert and Jeff Hurd. "This isn't over," Boebert posted on social media after Trump's veto.

Trump had also recently vowed to take "harsh measures" against Colorado officials over an imprisoned GOP election official whom he tried to pardon. The White House said Trump also vetoed the "Miccousukee Reserved Area Amendments Act". — AFP

Russia shows Ukraine's attack at Putin residence

RUSSIA'S Defence ministry published a video on Wednesday of a downed drone that it said Ukraine launched at President Vladimir Putin's residence in northwest Russia this week — a claim Kyiv has branded a "lie". Moscow made the allegation shortly after Ukraine's leader Volodymyr Zelensky held talks with US President Donald Trump in Florida and Kyiv has called it a "fabrication" intended to "manipulate" the peace process.

The European Union also said the video was an attempt to "derail" peace efforts. But Russia has called it a "terrorist attack" and a "personal attack" against Putin, saying it will toughen its negotiation stance in Ukraine war talks. The video, shot at night in the dark, showed a damaged drone lying in snow in a forested area. The ministry said the alleged attack was "targeted, carefully planned and carried out in stages".

Russia has not said where Putin was at the time, claiming the attack was launched on the night of December 28-29 at Putin's home in the Novgorod region. His residences are normally kept a close secret. The defence ministry said the attack started around 7:00 pm on December 28 and was a "mass" drone launch at Putin's residence, but said the longtime leader's home was not damaged. It also published a video with a man it called a witness, saying he was a local villager from the settlement of Roshchino.

The US-based Institute for the Study of War (ISW), which documents the Ukraine-Russia conflict, said on Tuesday it had not seen any "footage or reporting that typically follows Ukrainian deep strikes to corroborate the Kremlin's claims of Ukrainian strikes threatening Putin's residence in Novgorod Oblast". Russian officials have rallied around Putin since the claim. The Russian leader, in power since



A woman stands on the balcony of a damaged residential building following an attack, in Odesa. — AFP

December 1999, has told Russians in recent weeks that Moscow intends to seize the rest of Ukrainian land he has proclaimed as Russian by force if diplomacy fails. "Kremlin officials are using the alleged Ukrainian strike against Novgorod Oblast to justify Russia's continued insistence that both Ukraine and the West capitulate to Russia's original demands from 2021 and 2022," the ISW said this week.

Meanwhile, Russian strikes wounded six people in Odesa including three children, the Ukrainian city's military administration said on Wednesday. "Drones attacked the residential, logistical, and energy infrastructure of our region," Odesa's military administration regional head Oleg Kiper said on Telegram. Two children aged eight and 14 were wounded in the attack, as well as a seven-month-old baby, Sergiy Lysak, head of the city's military administration, said in a separate Telegram post.

Elsewhere Russian drones wounded two men in the Dnipropetrovsk region, its military administration head Vladyslav Gaivanenko said on Telegram.

In Russia meanwhile, two people were wounded in a drone attack on Tuapse in the Krasnodar Krai region, municipal leader Sergei Boiko said in a Telegram post. The attack damaged a port berth and equipment at an oil refinery as well as homes. Munitions strikes left three people wounded in the Belgorod region, its governor Vyacheslav Gladkov said on Telegram.

Russian President Vladimir Putin said his country believed it would win in Ukraine, where Moscow has led an almost four-year offensive, in his New Year's Eve address on Wednesday. Putin's traditional speech was first aired in the far-eastern Kamchatka peninsula — the first Russian region to enter 2026. He called on Russians to "support our heroes" fighting in Ukraine, saying: "We believe in you and our victory." — AFP

ISRAEL TO BAN AID GROUPS OPERATING IN GAZA

GAZA: Israel has said 37 aid organisations will be banned from operating in Gaza from Thursday unless they comply with guidelines requiring detailed information on Palestinian staff, drawing criticism from the United Nations and the European Union. Several NGOs have said that the new rules will have a major impact on food and medical shipments to Gaza, at a time when humanitarian organisations say the amount of aid getting in is inadequate to the devastated territory's needs.

On Wednesday, the United Nations rights chief Volker Turk described Israel's decision as "outrageous", calling on states to urgently insist Israel shift course. "Israel's suspension of numerous aid agencies from Gaza is outrageous," he said in a statement, warning that "such arbitrary suspensions make an already intolerable situation even worse for the people of Gaza". The European Union also warned that Israel's decision would block "life-saving" assistance from reaching Gazans. — AFP

AMBITIOUS AGENDA

Mamdani to take over as New York mayor



Zohran Mamdani was readying on Wednesday to take over as New York mayor for a term sure to see him cross swords with President Donald Trump. Mamdani will take his oath of office at an abandoned subway stop, taking the helm of the United States' largest city. His office says the understated venue for the oath-taking reflects his commitment to working people, after the 34-year old Democrat campaigned on promises to address the soaring cost of living. — AFP

IMPORTANT MILESTONE

Bulgaria heads to step into the eurozone



Bulgaria will become the 21st country to switch to the euro when it enters the New Year on Thursday, amid concerns the move could usher in higher prices and add to political instability rattling the Balkan country. European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen said that Bulgaria's move into the eurozone marked "an important milestone for the country, for the history of the euro, and for the EU as a whole." — AFP

SPONTANEOUS PROTESTS

Iran govt building attacked amid protests



A government building in southern Iran was attacked on Wednesday as the country's top prosecutor warned of a "decisive response" to any attempt to create instability after days of economic protests. "A portion of the provincial governors' office door and its glass were destroyed in an attack by a number of people," said Hamed Ostovar, the head of the judiciary in the city of Fasa, as quoted by the justice ministry's Mizan agency. — AFP

What the boxes cannot hold



RUMAITHA AL BUSAIDI

The writer is environmental strategist and advocate for sustainable development

JANUARY 1 has a particular pull. The light looks newly rinsed, and even ordinary surfaces take on a crispness that makes reinvention feel plausible. We reach for lists because they feel like a form of order, which feels like safety, especially when we want to believe that effort will translate cleanly into results. We write resolutions as though the year is a linear path and progress is a tidy series of boxes, each awaiting our signature. Even when we know better, there is something soothing about naming the goals and convincing ourselves that discipline will keep life predictable.

Yet life rarely moves in straight lines. It moves in currents, takes turns we did not plan for, opens doors we did not know existed, and closes others while we are still reaching for the handle. Some of the most beautiful shifts arrive as surprises we never accounted for, and some of the hardest arrive in ways that leave the body reacting before the mind has found a sentence. This is what we forget when we treat systems, organisations, and even personal growth as if they can be managed through checkboxes.

This week, many Omanis grieved Nasser al Kindi. Those who knew him spoke of

humility, kindness and a presence that stayed with people. His passing revealed a truth we often avoid: decisions made in a boardroom still arrive in the nervous system, and occasionally they arrive with a force that changes everything, bringing a deeper question beyond one case, one company and one moment. When we design change, whether in workplaces, institutions or national systems, do we account for impact and how it lands differently depending on who receives it? The same decision can be an inconvenience to one person and a collapse to another. When leaders speak only in the language of efficiency, they risk creating a system that appears strong on paper while pushing the heaviest weight onto those with the least runway.

This is why the idea of a just transition exists and belongs far beyond climate. The world adopted that language because decarbonisation exposed an uncomfortable reality: progress can look successful in aggregate while still producing pockets of loss, dislocation, and resentment if pathways are not built for people to move with change. The principle is simple: any transition that ignores uneven impact becomes brittle. Any transition that treats human lives as interchangeable units produces damage that

Strong systems do something else: they anticipate shock, create buffers, communicate with dignity and build pathways that give people time, options and agency.

rarely stays contained. Social sustainability is not a softer add-on to the real work; it is the condition allowing it to last.

Resilience is also part of this conversation; while we often discuss climate resilience, we tend to overlook that it includes all other aspects as well. After all, resilience is a muscle, and muscles develop through training, recovery, and supportive conditions, not through pressure alone. If resilience becomes a slogan that organisations use to outsource adaptation onto individuals, it turns into another way of refusing responsibility. Strong systems do something else: they anticipate shock, create buffers, communicate with dignity, and build pathways that give people time, options, and agency.

So as the year begins, I am less interested in perfect resolutions and more interested in capacity, in how we lead, how we design change, how we speak to people when their lives are about to shift, and how we measure success in a way that still sees the human being. A year will always bring what it brings. The choice remaining within reach is whether our systems are built to protect dignity when the ground moves and whether our leadership can hold consequence and compassion in the same breath.

Global ‘fragmentation’ fuelling world’s crises: UN refugee chief

NINA LARSON

The outgoing United Nations refugee chief fears an increasingly fragmented world is fuelling global conflicts and crises, and inflaming hostility towards people desperately fleeing for safety.

Reflecting on his decade at the helm of the UNHCR, Filippo Grandi said that one of the most worrying developments had been how divisions had left the world seemingly incapable of resolving conflicts — and increasingly unwilling to deal with the repercussions.

“This fragmentation of geopolitics that has caused the emergence of so many crises is perhaps the most worrying thing,” the Italian diplomat said. Grandi, meanwhile, lamented a “race to the bottom” in terms of countries tightening laws and practices to keep asylum seekers and refugees out.

He noted “a growing hostility, a rhetoric by the populist politicians targeting and scapegoating people on the move”.

Speaking at UNHCR’s Geneva headquarters a day before the end of his tenure, Grandi said he had been inspired over the past decade by how regular people worldwide showed kindness and hospitality to people on the move.

“In spite of all the politics, in spite of the real challenges that these movements represent,” he said, there is still a “deeply entrenched sense that if somebody flees from danger, one has the responsibility to help.” He also highlighted inspiring moments, including in 2021 when he witnessed former Colombian president Ivan Duque grant legal status to 1.7 million Venezuelans.

And more recently, “at the border between Lebanon and Syria and talking to people who had made the choice to go back just a few weeks after the fall of the Assad regime.”

But the exhilaration felt in such moments had been matched by the “anger and profound sadness” felt in others.

“The worst is always when you witness an exodus that is caused by the most horrifying violations of human rights,” he said, pointing to Myanmar and Sudan.

On Thursday, Grandi, 68, will be handing over the UNHCR reins to Barham Salih, 65, Iraq’s president from 2018 to 2022, who was once a refugee himself.

“He will be an excellent leader for this organisation,” Grandi said, adding though that he had warned Salih: “It will be tough.”

The UNHCR, like many other UN agencies, has been clobbered by international aid cuts since US President Donald Trump returned to office in January, and numerous other leading donors have also tightened their purse-strings. — AFP

Representation, oversight amid demands of new era

LAST Week’s meeting between His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and the executive bureaus of the State Council and the Majlis Ash’shura was more than a formal audience. It was a moment of institutional signalling — one that spoke to expectations about how Oman’s consultative bodies should evolve in a changing political, social and economic landscape.

His Majesty’s remarks rightly emphasised the need for both chambers to strengthen their engagement with society, enhance cooperation with the executive branch, and improve public communication around government plans, priorities, and objectives.

In a context shaped by ambitious national strategies and increasingly complex policy choices, such guidance is understandable. Yet this guidance will only succeed if enhanced cooperation and public communication are matched by a sustained strengthening of independent oversight and representative responsiveness, without which engagement risks becoming performative rather than substantive. Oman’s bicameral structure — the elected Majlis Ash’shura and the appointed State Council — together forming the Council of Oman, was designed to balance experience with popular representation, deliberation with accountability. Within this architecture, the councils are entrusted with three interrelated roles: consultation, representation and oversight. These roles are complementary, not interchangeable and none should be diluted in favour of the others.

Globally, legislative bodies are experiencing what many analysts describe as a recession in law-making power, as executive authority expands in response to economic volatility, geopolitical uncertainty, and technological



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If the Council of Oman succeed in this task — strengthening their interrogative capacity while remaining connected to the public they serve — they will not only fulfil His Majesty’s vision but also reinforce the foundations of participatory governance suited to the demands of the twenty-first century.

change. In such conditions, the vitality of parliaments is increasingly measured not by the volume of legislation they initiate, but by the quality of their scrutiny and the authenticity of their connection to the public. This is reflected in international benchmarks articulated by bodies such as the Inter-Parliamentary Union, which defines parliaments fit for the twenty-first century as those that are representative, transparent, accessible and effective in holding governments to account.

Against this backdrop, the Shura’s growing use of oversight tools — parliamentary questions, committee inquiries, ministerial briefings, and field visits—represents a positive institutional trajectory. Oversight, when exercised professionally and evidence-based, does not weaken governance; it strengthens it by improving policy quality, identifying implementation gaps, and reinforcing public trust.

At the same time, representation must be understood as more than electoral legitimacy alone. Genuine representation requires sustained engagement with citizens’ lived realities—economic pressures, regional disparities, youth aspirations, and social transformation. Councillors must not only listen but translate societal concerns into structured institutional action, ensuring that public voices shape policy deliberation rather than merely react to it. Here, a subtle but consequential risk must be stated plainly. In an era of rapid information flows and sophisticated strategic communication, representative institutions can gradually slide into the role of explainers of executive policy rather than interrogators of its assumptions, design, and outcomes. When councils become conduits for government narratives primarily — however well-intentioned — they

risk narrowing their constitutional purpose. Oversight, by its nature, requires structured scepticism: the capacity to ask difficult questions, to demand clarity, to assess trade-offs, and to surface unintended consequences. Communication with the public should therefore be the product of scrutiny, not its substitute. This distinction matters. A council that explains policies without first rigorously examining them may succeed in informing the public, but it fails in representing them. Conversely, a council that interrogates policy thoroughly before communicating it enhances both legitimacy and trust, demonstrating that national plans have been tested, debated, and refined through institutional processes rather than merely transmitted. None of this implies adversarialism or institutional friction for its own sake. On the contrary, constructive oversight is a form of partnership — one that respects executive authority while recognising that accountability is essential to long-term policy success. Cooperation between branches of government is most effective when it is grounded in clarity of roles, not their convergence.

HM’s call for deeper engagement and clearer communication should therefore be read as an invitation to institutional maturity rather than functional realignment. For Oman’s councils, the challenge is not simply to modernise their tools or expand their outreach, but to preserve the delicate equilibrium between consultation, representation and oversight.

If the councils succeed in this task—strengthening their interrogative capacity while remaining connected to the public they serve — they will not only fulfil HM’s vision but also reinforce the foundations of participatory governance suited to the demands of the twenty-first century.

SPORTS

FEE TROUBLE



A transfer ban on Brazil’s Botafogo came into effect on December 31, 2025 due to debts incurred from the signing of Argentine Thiago Almada in 2024 from Atlanta United in the US, Fifa said. — AFP

BRAZIL’S BOTAFOGO HIT WITH FIFA TRANSFER BAN OVER UNPAID ALMADA FEE

RIO DE JANEIRO: Brazilian club Botafogo were hit with a three-window transfer ban by Fifa on Wednesday for a debt relating to the signing of Argentinian international Thiago Almada from MLS club Atlanta United.

The US club filed a complaint with Fifa, claiming \$21 million in unpaid transfer fees owed by Botafogo, who signed the World Cup winner in 2024.

The sanction was posted on Fifa’s Registration Ban list and takes effect on December 31, 2025.

Almada, 24, won the Brazilian championship and Copa Libertadores with the Rio de Janeiro club, which then loaned him to French club Lyon in January 2025, before selling him to Atletico Madrid in July.

Botafogo, a club purchased by US businessman John Textor in 2022, said in a statement that they are in contact with Atlanta United to try and reach an agreement. “Talks have been put on hold due to the holiday season and will resume soon,” the club wrote, saying they hoped to resolve the situation “before the opening or at the start of the next transfer window” in January.

Textor owns both Botafogo and Lyon through his Eagle Football Holdings conglomerate, which also held a minority stake in Premier League club Crystal Palace until earlier this year.

Botafogo and Lyon are both embroiled in legal issues related to debts. Palace were demoted from the Europa League to the Europa Conference League this season due to Textor’s involvement with both them and Lyon. — AFP

Second-place race heats up in Beach Soccer League



Mirbat, who sit in fifth place with six points, face fourth-placed Saham in Salalah.

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, DEC 31

EXCITEMENT continues on Thursday in the 2025–2026 Beach Soccer League as the 12th round gets underway, in what is considered one of the most crucial rounds of the season, with the competition nearing its conclusion and the battle intensifying for the top positions, whether in the race for the runners-up spot or for improving standings in the league table.

The round opens with a highly anticipated clash between Al Oruba and Masirah at the sandy pitch of the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bousher, in a match that carries great competitive significance as it represents a direct battle for second place.

Al Oruba entered the match in third

place with 21 points, determined to secure a victory that would allow them to reclaim the runners-up position and finish their season on a positive note. The team has produced a series of strong performances in recent rounds, standing out for their solid defensive organisation and quick attacking transitions, which have proven to be a decisive factor in many matches.

Masirah, on the other hand, comes into the fixture sitting in second place with 22 points, aiming to protect their position ahead of the final round, which would give them a major psychological advantage in the battle for second place. The team relies on its experience in handling big matches and the strength of its attacking line, which has shown its ability to decide games in critical moments, making this encounter wide open in terms of outcome.

The second match will take place at the sandy pitch of the Sultan Qaboos Youth Complex for Culture and Entertainment

in Salalah, where Mirbat face Saham in a clash in which each side is pursuing different objectives.

Saham go into the match in fourth place with 15 points, looking to claim all three points to move closer to third place and boost their chances of improving their final league position. The team is counting on its technical stability and the strong fighting spirit shown by its players in recent rounds.

Meanwhile, Mirbat, who sit in fifth place with six points, will be seeking a positive result to increase their points tally and gain a morale boost before the season draws to a close, as they aim to deliver a respectable performance that reflects their growing development.

Both matches are expected to produce a high technical level and plenty of excitement, with all four teams eager to achieve the best possible finish to their league campaigns.

Sufyan in prime form for Twenty20 World Cup with hat-trick

ANUROOP ATHIPARAMBATH
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OMAN national cricket team’s medium pacer Sufyan Mehmood has geared up for his third World Cup appearance with his second career hat-trick in Oman Cricket’s domestic Twenty20 tournament.

Sufyan, who also featured for Oman in their impressive Asia Cup outing in the United Arab Emirates in September, achieved the feat for his team Renaissance Challengers during the Oman Cricket’s D20 match against Yallah Shabab.

The Renaissance captain extracted seam and swing as he took the hat-trick in the 17th over at the Oman Cricket Academy pitch on December 27. Sufyan castled Kerala state player Anfal with an inswinging delivery that knocked the off stump for the first wicket. Two brilliant outswingers claimed the next consecutive wickets of Oman national team players Zakariya Islam and Jay Odedra as Sufyan celebrated his hat-trick.



Sufyan Mehmood ended up as the second best wicket taker for Oman at the Twenty20 World Cup Qualifiers.

Sufyan’s heroics didn’t help his team as Yallah Shabab won the match by eight runs. Sufyan took four wickets for 16 runs in his four overs.

The all-rounder repeated his four-wicket feat in the next match as Renaissance Challengers won by 12 runs against IAS Invincibles. Sufyan hit a nine-ball 19 as the skipper earned the man of the match award in the match.

Looking ahead to the Twenty20 World Cup, Sufyan said he is looking forward to the challenge.

“It is a big task at the World Cup. I will do my best with the ball and bat for the Oman side. Most of the players in the side know their role and we hope to make a impact at the World Cup.”

The 20-team tournament will be co-hosted by India and Sri Lanka from February 7 to March 8.

Oman begin their campaign against Zimbabwe on February 9 in the Sri Lankan capital of Colombo and then meet hosts Sri Lanka (Kandy) on February 12 followed by

a match against Ireland (Colombo) on February 14. Duleep Mendis-coached Oman will conclude their group assignment with a game against heavyweights Australia in Kandy on February 20.

Oman will play warm-up matches against Zimbabwe on February 3 and against Sri Lanka A on February 6 in Colombo.

Sufyan recalled his experience in the recent Asia Cup.

“It was a great experience to lock horns with some of the top players in the world. I played against Pakistan and it was a good exposure for me.”

Sufyan Mehmood made an impactful performance at the T20 World Cup Qualifiers.

“I came back to Oman and played the T20 World Cup Qualifiers. I ended up as the second best wicket taker for Oman and fourth best in the tournament.”

“I feel good confidence and form ahead of the World Cup and I hope to do well in the global showpiece tournament,” Sufyan added.

SHORTTAKES

SPINNER RASHID TO LEAD AFGHANISTAN IN TWENTY20 WORLD CUP

KABUL: Ace spinner Rashid Khan will lead a strong Afghanistan squad announced on Wednesday for next year's Twenty20 World Cup.

Rashid's spin partner Mujeeb Ur Rahman and fast bowler Fazalhaq Farooqi have also been recalled to the 15-member squad for the tournament in India and Sri Lanka.



Khan said the team can improve on their semi-final finish in the last World Cup in the United States and West Indies two years ago.

"Afghanistan had a terrific run in the previous T20I World Cup and we hope for even better results this year, which will be played in Asian conditions," Naseeb said in a statement.

Afghanistan beat New Zealand, West Indies, Australia and Bangladesh on their way to the semi-finals two years ago. They will play West Indies in a three-match T20I lead-up series in the United Arab Emirates ahead of the World Cup.

Rashid's side is placed in Group D alongside New Zealand, South Africa, the UAE and Canada in the 20-team tournament that starts in India and Sri Lanka from February 7.

Afghanistan start their campaign against New Zealand in Chennai on February 8. — AFP
SQUAD: Rashid Khan (captain), Ibrahim Zadran, Rahmanullah Gurbaz, Mohammad Ishaq, Sediqullah Atal, Darwish Rasooli, Shahidullah Kamal, Azmatullah Omarzai, Gulbadin Naib, Mohammad Nabi, Noor Ahmad, Mujeeb Ur Rahman, Naveen-ul-Haq, Fazalhaq Farooqi, Abdullah Ahmadzai.

AUSTRALIAN CRICKET GREAT DAMIEN MARTYN 'IN INDUCED COMA'



Damien Martyn

SYDNEY: Former Australian Test batsman Damien Martyn has been rushed to hospital in an induced coma after being diagnosed with meningitis, media reports said on Wednesday.

The 54 year old, who played 67 Tests between 1992 and 2006 and 208 one day internationals, was admitted on Boxing Day last week after falling ill while lying down.

Australian media said he was being treated for meningitis, which can be deadly.

Meningitis is an inflammation of the membranes surrounding the brain and spinal cord.

"He is getting the best of treatment," Test great and close friend Adam Gilchrist told The Australian newspaper.

"Amanda (his partner) and his family know that a lot of people are sending their prayers and best wishes."

Former Australian coach Darren Lehmann, a long-time teammate of Martyn's, also sent support.

"Lots of love and prayers... keep strong and fighting, legend. Love to the family," wrote on X.

Known as one of the game's great strokemakers, Martyn became a key figure in Steve Waugh's all powerful Australian side, hitting 13 centuries and averaging 46.37. He was also part of the Australia team that won the 2003 ODI World Cup, cracking 88 not out in the final against India in a match-winning partnership with Ricky Ponting.

Martyn retired in 2006 during the Ashes series and had kept a low-profile since. — AFP



Detroit Pistons' Cade Cunningham (2) shoots ahead of Los Angeles Lakers' Luka Doncic (77) at Crypto.com Arena. — Imagn Images

Pistons pound Lakers to spoil James birthday party

CADE CUNNINGHAM scored 27 points as the Detroit Pistons spoiled LeBron James' 41st birthday with a 128-106 drubbing of the depleted Los Angeles Lakers on Tuesday.

The Lakers' final home game of the year got under way in a festive atmosphere, with the Crypto.com Arena hoping to salute James as he celebrated his birthday.

But the Lakers, missing the injured Austin Reaves and Gabe Vincent, were always chasing the game against a Pistons line-up who led for most of the contest. The home side threatened to haul themselves back into contention after tying the game at 79-79 midway through the third quarter.

That though was the cue for Detroit to crank up their offense, and the Eastern Conference leaders outscored Los Angeles 49-27 down the stretch to cruise home.

The Lakers' attempts to generate any kind of offensive momentum ended up being hamstrung by a string of errors. The Pistons scored 30 points off 20 Lakers turnovers.

"The turnovers, the fast break points - just killed us tonight," said Lakers coach JJ Redick, adding that injuries have hampered his attempts to build a competitive team.

"We've really tried to play the right way every night and have the right intent, but the flow of lineups and rotations — all of that has been challenging for everybody," Redick said. "It's a challenge for everybody — and building an identity is difficult."

James meanwhile saluted the performance of Cunningham and the Pistons.

FAST, EXPLOSIVE

"Cade is playing like the number one draft pick he was drafted as and as a franchise player on a very good team," James said of Cunningham. "Give them a lot of credit. They're a fast, explosive team."

"We haven't had a full team all year. We've got some very important guys out. It's very hard to get a rhythm on the floor. But the better team tonight won."

The Pistons improved to 25-8 to extend their lead at the top of the Eastern Conference while the Lakers fell to 20-11.

Cunningham was one of five Detroit players to crack double figures, with Marcus Sasser adding 19 off the bench.

James was limited to 17 points, with Luka Doncic providing the main offensive threat for the Lakers with 30 points, 11 assists and five rebounds.

In other games on Tuesday, Joel Embiid and Tyrese Maxey scored 34 points apiece as



Los Angeles' Clippers Kobe Sanders (4) is defended by Sacramento Kings' forward Keegan Murray (13) as he drives to the basket at Intuit Dome. — Imagn Images



Los Angeles' Clippers center Yanic Konan Niederhauser (14) reaches in front of Sacramento Kings forward Drew Eubanks (19) for a rebound at Intuit Dome. — Imagn Images

the Philadelphia 76ers defeated the Memphis Grizzlies 139-136 in an overtime thriller.

VJ Edgecombe's 25-foot three-pointer with 1.7 seconds remaining sealed victory for the Sixers, who improved to 17-14 to remain in fifth place in the Eastern Conference standings.

Edgecombe's game-winner was one of five three-pointers he drained in a 25-point haul for Philadelphia.

Ja Morant led the Grizzlies scoring with 40 points while Cedric Coward added 28 points

with 16 rebounds and four assists.

The third-placed Boston Celtics improved to 20-12 with a 129-119 victory over the struggling Utah Jazz (12-20) in Salt Lake City.

Derrick White steered the Celtics to victory, draining 13 of his 27 points in the fourth quarter to get Boston over the line.

White also hauled down seven rebounds and made seven blocks in a commanding all-round performance. Jaylen Brown added 23 points while Anfernee Simons scored 20 from the bench. — AFP

SPORTS

AFCON LAST-16



DR Congo's #15 Rocky Bushiri and Botswana's #12 Mothusi Johnson vie during the Africa Cup of Nations Group D match in Rabat. — AFP

SENEGAL TOP GROUP
AHEAD OF DR CONGO,
TANZANIA MAKE
HISTORY

RABAT: Senegal advanced to the Africa Cup of Nations last 16 as winners of their group on Tuesday, leaving the Democratic Republic of Congo facing a heavyweight tie against Algeria while Tanzania reached the knockout stage for the first time.

Sadio Mane's Senegal, African champions in 2022, defeated Benin 3-0 in Tangier to top Group D on goal difference ahead of the Leopards, who won by the same margin against Botswana in Rabat.

Abdoulaye Seck and Habib Diallo scored either side of half-time for the Lions of Teranga before skipper Kalidou Koulibaly was sent off. Cherif Ndiaye converted a penalty deep in injury time.

Ex-Chelsea playmaker Gael Kakuta, now based in Turkey, was in outstanding form with two goals and an assist as DR Congo saw off already-eliminated Botswana.

His backheel set up Nathanael Mbuku for the opener at Al Medina Stadium in Morocco's capital, and Kakuta then converted a penalty late in the first half.

Kakuta got his second and his team's third on the hour mark and the Leopards then had a fourth goal scored by Fiston Mayele ruled out by VAR for a handball.

It looked at one point as though Senegal and DR Congo might end the group stage with identical records, leaving open the possibility of a drawing of lots to decide their final positions.

In the end both finish with seven points from three games with Senegal on top by a difference of just two goals. Pape Thiaw's team now have a kinder draw as they remain in Tangier for a last-16 tie on Saturday against the third-place finisher in Group E, either Burkina Faso or Sudan.

The Leopards, in contrast, must play 2019 champions Algeria next Tuesday with the winner of that potentially having to face Nigeria in the quarterfinals.

Benin's three points are enough for them to go through as one of the best third-placed teams.

It will be just their second appearance in the Afcon knockout stages, with their reward a tie against Mohamed Salah's Egypt on Monday.

NIGERIA STAY PERFECT

Tanzania made history in progressing from their group for the first time, 45 years after their maiden Afcon appearance, by drawing 1-1 with fellow qualifiers Tunisia in Rabat.

Ismael Gharbi converted a penalty just before half-time for Tunisia and Feisal Salum levelled early in the second half.

Tanzania have still to win in 12 matches spanning four Afcon appearances. They squeezed into the round of 16 after two draws and one loss.

Tunisia finished second in Group C with four points, five behind table-toppers Nigeria. Tanzania pipped Angola on goals scored for one of four places reserved for third-placed teams.

Raphael Onyedika scored twice as already qualified Nigeria overcame 10-man Uganda 3-1 in the other Group C match to maintain a 100 percent record after the group stage.

Paul Onuachu had given Nigeria the lead in the first half in Fes and Uganda suffered a huge blow on 56 minutes when goalkeeper Salim Magoola — on as a substitute — was red-carded for handling outside the area.

Onyedika then scored his two goals before Rogers Mato got a consolation for Uganda as they head home. — AFP

Africa Cup of Nations results in Morocco:
Group C: In Rabat: Tanzania 1 (Salum 48)
Tunisia 1 (Gharbi 43-pen)

In Fes: Uganda 1 (Mato 75) Nigeria 3 (Onuachu 28, Onyedika 62, 67)

Group D: In Tangier

Benin 0 Senegal 3 (Seck 38, Diallo 62, C. Ndiaye 90+7-pen)

In Rabat: Botswana 0 Democratic Republic of Congo 3 (Mbuku 31, Kakuta 41-pen, 60)



Arsenal's Gabriel Jesus celebrates scoring their fourth goal with Leandro Trossard and Martin Zubimendi. — Reuters

Arsenal snap Villa's run;
Man Utd, Chelsea stumble

ARSENAL snapped Aston Villa's 11-game winning run with a dominant 4-1 win to open up a five-point Premier League lead as Chelsea and Manchester United wasted the chance to climb into the top four.

Wolves picked up just their third point of the season in a 1-1 draw at Old Trafford, while Chelsea have won once in seven league games after being held 2-2 by Bournemouth.

Arsenal avenged their only defeat in the last 25 games in all competitions earlier this month at Villa Park to take a firm grip of the title race.

"It is a beautiful evening," said Arsenal boss Mikel Arteta. "The way we started the second half was amazing, we really turned things up and were efficient in everything that we did."

Doubts over Villa's ability to live with Arsenal and Manchester City over 38 games were realised as Unai Emery's men were blown away in the second half at the Emirates.

After a tightly-contested first 45 minutes in which Villa had their chances through Ollie Watkins, Arsenal cut loose.

Arteta's men could rely on a set-piece once more to break the deadlock when Gabriel Magalhaes outmuscled Emi Martinez to score on his return to the starting line-up from a hamstring injury.

Martin Odegaard's fine through ball then teed up Martin Zubimendi to quickly double the Gunners' lead.

Two quality strikes rubbed salt in the visitors' wounds as Leandro Trossard and Gabriel Jesus fired in from outside the box.

Watkins netted a consolation but third-placed Villa fall six points behind the leaders.

City can cut the gap at the top back to two points when they travel to Sunderland on January 1.

WOLVES SNAP LOSING STREAK

United wasted another chance at Old Trafford to boost their chances of a return to the Champions League next season.

Joshua Zirkzee's deflected effort gave the Red Devils the lead, but Ladislav Krejci's header snapped

ENGLISH
PREMIER
LEAGUE
RESULTS ON
TUESDAY:

ARSENAL 4
(Magalhaes 48,
Zubimendi 52,
Trossard 69, Jesus
78) Aston Villa 1
(Watkins 90+4)

BURNLEY 1
(Laurent 23)
Newcastle
3 (Joelinton
2, Wissa 7,
Guimaraes 90+3)

CHELSEA 2
(Palmer 15-pen,
Fernandez 23)
Bournemouth
2 (Brooks 6,
Kluivert 27)

**MANCHESTER
United 1** (Zirkzee
27) Wolves 1
(Krejci 45)

NOTTINGHAM
Forest 0 Everton 2
(Garner 19, Barry
79)

WEST HAM
2 (Bowen 10,
Paqueta 45+4-
pen) Brighton 2
(Welbeck 32-pen,
Veltman 61)



Chelsea's Enzo Fernandez celebrates scoring their second goal with Alejandro Garnacho. — Reuters

Wolves' 12-game losing streak.

Ruben Amorim's men remain in sixth, two points outside the top four, after failing to win for the fourth time in their last five home games. "We were struggling the whole game. We had a lack of creativity," said Amorim. "We need to work on that because it's not the first time. The fluidity of the game was not there."

Chelsea failed to lift the gloom at Stamford Bridge as Enzo Maresca's decision to substitute Cole Palmer was booed by the frustrated home fans.

David Brooks gave the Cherries the perfect start but Bournemouth quickly showed why they have conceded more goals on the road than any other side in the English top flight.

Palmer equalised from the penalty spot before Enzo Fernandez was afforded acres of space to fire into the top corner, but Chelsea failed to deal with a long throw for the second time in the opening 27 minutes when Justin Kluivert turned in Antoine Semenyo's delivery at the back post.

The home fans made clear their frustration at Maresca's decision

to replace Palmer with Joao Pedro just after the hour mark as the Blues remain in fifth.

Newcastle secured just a second away league win of the season but were made to sweat after a dream start to beat lowly Burnley 3-1.

Goals from Joelinton and Yoane Wissa had the Magpies 2-0 up inside seven minutes.

Josh Laurent halved the arrears midway through the first half and Burnley hit the woodwork twice in the closing stages in their push for an equaliser before Bruno Guimaraes sealed victory for Eddie Howe's men.

A depleted Everton climbed into the top half of the table by getting the better of former boss Sean Dyche for the second time in a month to win 2-0 at Nottingham Forest.

The Toffees had not scored since their 3-0 win over Forest on December 6 but struck through James Garner and Thierno Barry to leave Dyche's men just four points above the relegation zone.

It could have been worse for Forest had West Ham not blown the lead twice to draw 2-2 at home to Brighton. — AFP

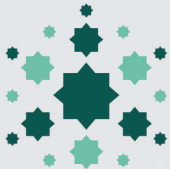


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SHORTTAKES



Tourism supported by aviation represents a major share of this impact, contributing \$710 million to GDP and employing approximately 18,000 people.

AVIATION SECTOR
CONTRIBUTES
\$1.8 BILLION TO
OMAN’S GDP

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, DEC 31

The aviation sector in Oman contributes an estimated \$1.8 billion to the GDP and supports 42,000 jobs across the wider economy, according to a recent report by the International Air Transport Association (IATA).

Direct aviation activities including airlines, airport operators, air navigation service providers and on-site businesses employ around 17,000 people in the Sultanate of Oman, generating \$629.5 million in economic output, equivalent to 0.6 per cent of national GDP. When wider supply chain effects, employee spending and tourism activity are included, the sector’s total contribution rises to 1.7 per cent of GDP.

Tourism supported by aviation represents a major share of this impact, contributing \$710 million to GDP and employing approximately 18,000 people. International visitors arriving by air are estimated to inject \$2.9 billion annually into the Omani economy through spending on accommodation, transport, retail and local services.

Passenger traffic data highlights the international orientation of Oman’s aviation market. In 2023, international air travel accounted for 80 per cent of total origin destination departures, equivalent to 3.8 million passenger departures.

Asia Pacific emerged as the largest international market, with nearly 1.8 million passengers, representing 48 per cent of total international departures.

Policies foster Oman’s
economic resilience

SAEED AL MASHARFI
MUSCAT, DEC 31

THE Omani Economic Association organised the 29th Economic Council on Tuesday under the theme “Oman’s Economic Performance 2020–2025”.

The event took place in Madinat Al Irfan, Muscat, featuring Dr Said bin Mohammed al Saqri, Minister of Economy, as the guest speaker.

Dr Al Saqri delivered a visual presentation that explored three key pillars: global economic outlook and trends, the performance of Oman’s national economy and the Eleventh Five-Year Development Plan (2026–2030).

At the global level, he explained that the world economy is entering a period of slower growth, with forecasts suggesting rates of around 3.1%–3.8% by 2026.

This outlook is shaped by rising geopolitical tensions, stricter trade policies and global debt climbing to nearly 324% of GDP.

He noted a clear shift in the balance of economic power, as emerging markets gain ground while several advanced economies lose momentum, all while climate change continues to affect supply chains and raise production costs.

On the other hand, Oman has made progress in keeping inflation at 0.76% between January and August 2025 — a sign that national policies are helping the country remain resilient in a more uncertain global environment, he said.

According to Dr Al Saqri, Oman’s public debt reached RO



The Eleventh Five-Year Development Plan is designed to deliver real developmental results and ensure broad community participation in its preparation: Dr Al Saqri

14.1 billion during the first half of the current year.

The targeted average annual growth rate for the period 2021–2024 was around 5.0%, while non-oil activities accounted for 73% of Oman’s economy at constant prices in 2024, reflecting ongoing progress in economic diversification.

Per the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Oman’s economy is expected to grow by 4% in 2026, compared to 2.9% in 2025. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Economy forecasts growth of 2.6% in 2026, compared to 2.2% in 2025, indicating steady momentum supported by national development plans.

The Minister explained that the Eleventh Five-Year Development Plan is designed to deliver real developmental results and ensure broad community participation in its preparation.

The goal, he noted, is to align the work of government institutions and connect long-term targets under Oman Vision 2040 with medium-term planning for 2026–2030 through a set of programmes that support these objectives and define clear targets for each.

He added that the plan uses economic modelling and results-based planning, in line with Oman’s move towards a performance and programme-based budget.

This approach makes it possible to track progress, measure outcomes and assess impact through smart performance indicators.

Furthermore, he stressed that the plan takes into account changing global and regional dynamics; and will adopt scenario planning to anticipate different future possibilities and respond effectively.

Mazaya initiative launched to boost governorate-led growth

NIZWA: The Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) has launched the “Mazaya” initiative, a nationwide programme aimed at strengthening economic diversification and improving the investment climate across all governorates of the Sultanate of Oman.

Unveiled in the Wilayat of Nizwa under the auspices of Shaikh Hilal bin Said al Hajri, Governor of Al Dakhiliyah, the initiative will roll out a series of discussion sessions in every governorate.

These sessions will review existing investment incentives, propose new development incentives aligned with each governorate’s comparative advantages and support efforts to enhance competitiveness at both local and national levels.

Mazaya is a key outcome of OCCI’s strategic development



Mazaya is a key outcome of development workshop focused on serving the private sector.

workshop focused on serving the private sector.

It is built on three core pillars: improving the business environment, expanding economic diversification and strengthening partnerships in governorate-level economic development.

Faisal bin Abdullah al Rawas, Chairman of OCCI’s Board of Directors, said the initiative reflects a spirit of integration between the public and private sectors.

He noted that supporting the unique strengths of each governorate is central to Oman’s decentralisation approach and is fully aligned with Oman Vision 2040, which places governorates at the heart of development and prioritises a diversified economy.

Al Rawas added that OCCI is committed to transforming local potential into concrete investment opportunities led by the private sector, backed by enabling policies and effective partnerships.

He said the Chamber has worked closely with stakeholders to develop economic and development projects based on opportunity analysis in each governorate, ensuring alignment

with national economic priorities while strengthening local content and added value.

Zakaria bin Abdullah al Saadi, CEO of OCCI, said the executive management has translated the Board’s vision into clear and practical plans through defined strategic directions.

He stressed that Mazaya responds to the need for updated legislation and incentive packages that enhance the competitiveness of the Omani economy and broaden the base of economic diversification, supporting sustainable business growth across the governorates.

The launch event included a discussion session outlining the initiative’s objectives, implementation mechanisms and its role in offering competitive advantages and high-quality services to business owners.

ADVERTORIALS

SHORTTAKES



Under the agreement, OAB will provide Genacom with a comprehensive suite of payment solutions.

OAB EXPANDS DIGITAL PAYMENTS ECOSYSTEM WITH GENACOM

MUSCAT: Oman Arab Bank (OAB) has entered into a strategic collaboration with Genacom Shipping and Delivery, marking an important step in strengthening digital payment acceptance and supporting the evolving needs of Oman's logistics and delivery sector.

Under the agreement, Oman Arab Bank will provide Genacom with a comprehensive suite of payment solutions, including the OAB Payment Gateway, Point of Sale terminals and Soft POS services. These solutions are designed to enable secure, reliable and efficient acceptance of electronic payments across multiple channels, supporting both local and international card transactions.

The collaboration reflects Oman Arab Bank's continued commitment to enabling businesses with advanced financial infrastructure that enhances operational efficiency, improves cash flow management and delivers a seamless experience for end customers.

By adopting OAB's payment solutions, Genacom will benefit from end-of-day transaction settlement, competitive transaction pricing and the waiver of one-time and recurring service fees, allowing the company to focus on scaling its operations and service excellence.

Commenting on the partnership, Juma al Fulaiti, Deputy Head of Retail Banking in Oman Arab Bank, said, "This collaboration with Genacom underscores our commitment to empowering businesses with dependable and future-ready payment solutions.

Oman Arab Bank recognises the critical role that secure and uninterrupted payment systems play in supporting operational resilience, particularly in fast-growing sectors such as logistics and delivery.

Through this partnership, we are proud to support Genacom's growth journey while contributing to the broader digital transformation of Oman's economy".

OAB's payment gateway and POS solutions are widely recognised in the market for their stability, security and ability to perform consistently. The bank's focus on innovation and customer-centric solutions has positioned it as a trusted partner for businesses seeking to modernise their payment infrastructure.

The agreement also aligns with Oman Arab Bank's strategic vision to expand digital banking capabilities and promote cashless transactions across the Sultanate of Oman, in line with national economic and digitalisation objectives.

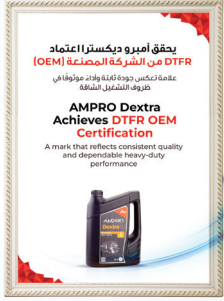
By combining Genacom's operational expertise in shipping and delivery with Oman Arab Bank's robust payment ecosystem, the partnership is set to create meaningful value for both organisations while enhancing the overall customer experience. This collaboration reinforces Oman Arab Bank's role as a key enabler of business growth, offering solutions that are secure, efficient and tailored to the needs of today's dynamic commercial environment.

AL MAHA PETROLEUM SECURES DAIMLER TRUCK OEM APPROVAL

MUSCAT: Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing Co SAOG has announced that its heavy-duty diesel engine oil, AMPRO Dextra 15W40 CI-4, has obtained DTFR approval from Daimler Truck, confirming its official OEM approval for use in Mercedes-Benz Trucks.

This approval reflects AMPRO Dextra's compliance with the highest technical and operational standards imposed by Daimler Truck on operating fluids.

Such approvals are granted



يحقق أمبرو ديكسترا الاعتماد DTFR من الشركة المصنعة (OEM) طبقه التشغيل المثالية

AMPRO Dextra Achieves DTFR OEM Certification

A mark that reflects consistent quality and dependable heavy-duty performance

exclusively after passing comprehensive and stringent

testing procedures, making them a reliable indicator of product quality, performance consistency and formulation stability under real operating conditions.

The approval further enhances confidence among customers and fleet operators in using AMPRO Dextra 15W40 CI-4 in approved Mercedes-Benz truck engines, as it delivers effective engine protection, extended engine life and dependable performance across various operating environments and demanding working conditions.

Bank Muscat manages RO 200m sukuk issuance

BANK MUSCAT, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, announced that it successfully managed series 10 of the Sovereign Sukuk Issuance launched by the Oman Sovereign Sukuk Company, with a total value of RO 200 million. The sukuk carries a 7-year maturity and offers an annual profit rate of 4.15%.

Bank Muscat was appointed as the issue manager and collecting bank for the subscription by Ministry of Finance, in collaboration with other local financial institutions.

This mandate reinforces the bank's leadership in executing major investment transactions within the Sultanate of Oman and across GCC capital markets.

The subscription window for the sukuk issuance opened from December 17 to 22, 2025, with the sukuk settlement scheduled for Thursday, December 25, 2025. The sukuk was priced within a competitive yield range, with an average yield of 4.11%, a minimum yield of 4.07% and a maximum yield of 4.15%, reflecting strong investor confidence and market stability.

The sukuk payouts will be made semi-



Bank Muscat was appointed as the issue manager and collecting bank for the subscription by Ministry of Finance.

annually on June 25 and December 25 each year until maturity on December 25, 2032. The issuance witnessed participation from different categories of investors, retail as well as institutional.

The sukuk is structured in accordance with Sharia-compliant principles and is fully tradable on the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) at prevailing market prices. All allocation details and investor records will

be maintained and administered by Muscat Clearing and Depository Company, as the central registrar and depository for the sukuk. Commenting on the occasion, Khalifa bin Abdullah al Hatmi, Deputy General Manager, Investment Banking and Capital Markets at Bank Muscat, expressed pride in collaborating with the team at Oman Sovereign Sukuk Company and the Ministry of Finance, Sultanate of Oman for this successful issuance.

He noted: "The Bank's appointment as the issue manager for the sukuk issuance is a testament to Ministry of Finance's trust in Bank Muscat's capabilities and leadership in managing major investment transactions for a range of corporate and institutional clients.

The Bank, represented through its Investment Banking and Capital Markets division, has extensive experience in structuring and executing large-scale capital market deals, both on debt as well as equity side and its specialised team is well-equipped to navigate evolving market dynamics and complexities.

Bank Muscat is committed to supporting the growth of local financial markets by offering a comprehensive suite of banking and financial solutions tailored to institutional and retail customers alike".

First raffle draw held for Noor Gazal-LuLu contest

MUSCAT: The first raffle draw of the Noor Gazal-LuLu promotional contest was successfully held on December 27 at LuLu Hypermarket, Suhar.

The raffle draw was conducted in the esteemed presence of Shaikh Abdullah bin Salim al Maamari, Assistant Director General, Ministry of Social Development — Al Batinah North Governorate.

Also present at the event were Abdullah bin Rashid al Awadi, Chairman, Noor Gazal Foods & Spices; Haslin Saleem, Managing Director, Noor Gazal Foods & Spices; Usman, General Manager, LuLu Hypermarket — Suhar; and Azim PK, Sales Manager, Noor Gazal Foods & Spices. Winners



The raffle contest offers customers a chance to win exciting rewards.

of the first raffle draw are Nurul Afser — iPhone 17 Pro; Abdullah — Samsung TV; Ameen Nisthar — gold

coin; Srinivasan Ellappan — gold coin. Twenty additional winners received LuLu gift vouchers.

The draw marked the beginning of an exciting customer engagement initiative jointly organised by Noor Gazal Foods & Spices and LuLu Hypermarket, aimed at rewarding loyal customers with attractive prizes.

The Noor Gazal-LuLu raffle contest, currently running across all LuLu Hypermarkets in Oman, offers customers a chance to win exciting rewards by purchasing Noor Gazal products worth RO 2. Winners can receive monthly iPhone 17 Pro prizes, Samsung TVs, gold coins and LuLu gift vouchers, with the promotion valid until March 28 and raffle draws will be conducted in the last week of January and the first week of March.

EDC and Oman Oasis enhance applied learning for students

MUSCAT: As part of a strategic partnership aimed at strengthening the integration of academic education with practical experience, Zubair Enterprise Development Centre (Zubair EDC), in collaboration with Oman Oasis, has implemented a series of applied educational initiatives for students of Majan University College.

This initiative builds on the successful collaboration between the three entities, which has consistently delivered practical learning experiences that enhance students' skills and bridge theoretical knowledge with real-world application.

The partnership reflects Zubair EDC's commitment to providing



The programme was designed to enrich the student experience by linking academic curricula with real-world business practices.

comprehensive educational content that supports students both academically and professionally, alongside Oman Oasis' role in delivering hands-on industry knowledge aligned with market needs.

The programme was designed to enrich the student experience by linking academic curricula with real-world business practices and fostering an interactive learning environment that deepens students' understanding of the professional landscape.

It included a series of dual lectures conducted at Oman Oasis' offices and factory, offering students insights into the company's financial and

operational frameworks while reinforcing the principles of sustainability.

A dedicated session focused on sustainability fundamentals and key corporate sustainability practices aligned with international standards and Oman Vision 2040 was facilitated by the sustainability team from The Zubair Corporation.

The initiative also featured visits by two groups of business students to Oman Oasis' administrative centre, where they explored financial and operational management models, followed by a guided factory tour showcasing production processes, quality control procedures and laboratory operations.

SHORTTAKES



Average daily production stood at 999,800 barrels.

OMAN OIL OUTPUT EDGES UP DESPITE LOWER PRICES

MUSCAT: Oman's oil production rose by 0.4 per cent by the end of November 2025, reaching about 333.94 million barrels, compared to 332.69 million barrels during the same period in 2024, according to preliminary data.

Figures released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information showed that average daily production stood at 999,800 barrels per day, up from 993,100 barrels per day a year earlier. However, the average oil price fell to around \$71.6 per barrel, down 12.4 per cent from \$81.8 per barrel during the same period last year.

Oil exports also recorded a marginal increase of 0.1 per cent, rising to 282.34 million barrels by the end of November 2025, compared with 282.19 million barrels in the corresponding period of 2024. — ONA

MSX EDGES HIGHER



Market capitalisation rose to RO 32.01 billion.

MUSCAT: The Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) 30 Index closed higher on Wednesday, gaining 6.4 points to end at 5,866.80, an increase of 0.11 per cent from the previous close of 5,860.38.

Trading value declined by 6.9 per cent to RO 32.74 million, compared with RO 35.18 million in the previous session. Market capitalisation rose by 0.069 per cent to about RO 32.01 billion.

Non-Omani purchases stood at RO 3.20 million, accounting for 9.76 per cent of total buys, while sales reached RO 3.39 million, or 10.34 per cent. Net non-Omani investment fell by RO 192,000, down 0.59 per cent. — ONA

Oman-Tsingshan advance green steel plans

BEIJING: Oman is deepening industrial cooperation with China's Tsingshan Group to accelerate the localisation of green steel and downstream industries, in line with Industrial Strategy 2040.

Dr Saleh bin Said Masan, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion for Commerce and Industry, led a field visit to Tsingshan's industrial complexes in China to activate a cooperation programme signed in October 2025 and fast-track plans for Oman's first integrated green steel project.

The visit included tours of Tsingshan's lithium battery and energy storage facilities, showcasing advanced smart production lines supplying global renewable energy markets. The focus underscores Oman's push to localise



The visit included tours of Tsingshan's lithium battery and energy storage facilities, showcasing advanced smart production lines supplying global renewable energy markets.

MANUFACTURING PULSE

China factory activity briefly rebounds



China's factory activity unexpectedly returned to growth in December, ending an eight-month contraction as pre-holiday stockpiling lifted orders. The official PMI rose to 50.1 from 49.2 in November, beating forecasts.

Economists cautioned the rebound may be short-lived, driven by fiscal spending, with property sector weakness and industrial overcapacity expected to persist into 2026. — Reuters

ENERGY MARKETS

Oil extends multi-year losses



Oil prices edged lower, putting Brent on track for its longest annual losing streak, down about 18% in 2025 amidst oversupply concerns. Analysts expect further near-term weakness as US shale output remains resilient despite falling prices.

Brent could dip to \$55 before stabilising in 2026, while demand growth remains subdued and supply normalises. — Reuters

CURRENCY TRENDS

Dollar slides as rivals gain



The US dollar steadied but was headed for its biggest annual drop since 2017, pressured by rate cuts, fiscal concerns and trade policy uncertainty.

Weakness may persist into 2026, supporting gains in the euro and sterling.

Concerns over Federal Reserve independence and an impending leadership change have further weighed on dollar sentiment. — Reuters

30 clean energy sectors to power Oman's growth

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, DEC 31

A new report by the Majan Council, a Muscat-based think tank focused on regional development and advancement, has identified 30 clean energy-related sectors with strong potential to drive Oman's industrial and economic growth.

Titled Foresight for Resilience:

The Oman Clean Energy Strategic Outlook, the study is described as one of three "milestone projects" shaping the future of Oman's clean energy economy and workforce.

All three reports were developed in collaboration with the Oman Energy Association (OPAL), with sponsorship support from the Ministry of Energy and Minerals and the Ministry of Labour.

The 30 high-potential sectors are organised into three broad categories: Energy Development and Services, Manufacturing and Final Products.

Energy Development and Services encompasses both emerging and established fields, including advanced bioenergy, artificial intelligence and Web 3.0, renewable energy technologies such as solar, wind, ocean and geothermal power, hydrogen production and infrastructure, electric vehicle infrastructure, data centres, building energy efficiency; and minerals and metals extraction.

The Manufacturing category focuses on the industrial backbone of the energy transition, covering battery and electrolyser



Already under development in Oman are the core building blocks of a clean energy manufacturing sector.

Energy Development and Services encompasses both emerging and established fields, including advanced bioenergy, artificial intelligence and Web 3.0, renewable energy technologies such as solar, wind, ocean and geothermal power, hydrogen production and infrastructure, electric vehicle infrastructure, data centres, building energy efficiency; and minerals and metals extraction.

manufacturing, carbon capture technologies, fuel cells, heat pumps, inverters, variable speed drives, mechanical storage systems, water filtration membranes, solar PV panels, wind turbines; and minerals and metals processing.

Final Products highlight downstream, value-added industries, including clean cement and concrete, clean steel and aluminium, hydrogen-based fuels and

non-conventional construction materials.

According to the Majan Council, these sectors were selected based on domestic and export market viability, robustness and predictability, socioeconomic and innovation potential, access to investment and capital, macroeconomic resilience benefits; and their ability to integrate into Oman's existing industrial and economic fabric.

Commenting on the report, Dawud Ansari, President of the Majan Council and lead author, said it combines strategic foresight, structured sectoral analysis and applied policy research to address critical questions around Oman's future energy economy, the external forces shaping it, priority sectors; and the institutional and policy levers needed to enable industrial development.

The report, he added, offers practical guidance on industrial policy design and institutional frameworks that allow new sectors to emerge and scale. "While some sectors

are more promising than others, the key message is that successful industrialisation depends on developing sectors holistically — by building integrated industrial ecosystems that strengthen resilience, stimulate local demand and foster a domestic knowledge economy", Ansari noted.

Already under development are the core building blocks of a clean energy manufacturing sector in the Sultanate of Oman, with substantial investments spanning the solar value chain.

A flagship initiative is the United Solar Polysilicon facility in SOHAR Port and Freezone, a state-of-the-art plant designed to produce up to 100,000 tonnes of high-purity polysilicon annually — an essential input for solar PV manufacturing.

Complementing this upstream investment, Chinese photovoltaic major JA Solar is investing in a solar cell and module manufacturing facility in Suhar, with planned capacities of 6 GW of solar cells and 3 GW of modules per year.

In the wind sector, state-backed Mawarid Turbine is developing a dedicated wind turbine manufacturing facility in the Duqm Special Economic Zone, positioning Oman to meet domestic demand while serving regional markets.

Meanwhile, in the Salalah Free Zone, a battery materials and production project valued at approximately \$488 million aims to establish lithium battery component manufacturing for electric vehicles and energy storage systems, with phased capacity expected to reach up to 100 GWh.

OPINION

Strengthening Oman’s position on the global tourism map



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

FOR several decades, the government has been making strenuous efforts to develop the tourism sector and expand its reach to include all Omani governorates. However, the sector’s contribution to the GDP remains modest, reaching only 2.7% last year. Authorities aim to increase this percentage to 3.5% by 2030 and to 5.3% according to the Oman Vision 2040.

Tourism indicators from the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism show that the total tourism output last year reached RO 2.1 billion (\$5.4 billion), while the total direct added value of tourism reached RO 1.1 billion during the same year. Total tourism investments during the Tenth Five-Year Plan amounted to RO 2.6 billion.

The data also shows that the tourism infrastructure is constantly developing, with an increasing number of hotels, rooms, tourist accommodations, hotel apartments and other facilities. The number of hotel guests reached 4.4 million, in addition to the 1.07 million visitors expected for the Khareef Dhofar Season (monsoon season) in Salalah in 2025.

On the heritage front, Oman boasts numerous historical and archaeological sites that are actively developed alongside tourism. Furthermore, several heritage and natural sites are inscribed on the World

Heritage List. These sites undoubtedly include numerous castles, walls, forts, mosques, gates, towers, traditional houses and other historical landmarks.

Domestic tourism also witnessed significant growth, with the number of local visitors reaching approximately 13.6 million last year, reflecting the strong preference of Omanis and residents for domestic tourism.

In light of this activity, the government is working to enhance the country’s position on the global tourism map through its active participation in international tourism exhibitions that be held in the region and in Asian and European countries. The aim is to promote and market Omani tourist, with developing tourism infrastructure and services.

It can be said that Oman has become a promising tourist destination, not only within the region but also by striving to establish its presence on the global tourism map. It is working to boost visitor numbers, revenues and investments; and to promote its attractions internationally, all of which are positive indicators.

Meanwhile, relevant authorities are working to address the challenges facing tourism in Oman and to enhance the growth of this sector and increase its contribution to the GDP. As we know, Oman relies heavily on Gulf and regional markets to attract

Oman boasts numerous historical and archaeological sites that are actively developed alongside tourism. Furthermore, several heritage and natural sites are inscribed on the World Heritage List. These sites undoubtedly include numerous castles, walls, forts, mosques, gates, towers, traditional houses and other historical landmarks.

tourism, as many visitors are from GCC countries or neighbouring nations, making tourism vulnerable to economic and political fluctuations in the region.

The sector’s focus is also on attracting the “high-end tourism” segment or securing revenue from 3- to 5-star hotels, which, according to some analysts, makes Oman expensive compared to other countries in the region that offer greater diversity to attract a wider range of tourists.

Some believe that the infrastructure and tourism services in certain Omani regions are inadequate and require continuous improvement and development, particularly in rural or natural destinations. This includes developing and improving transportation, providing more guide services and enhancing media messaging, promotion and advertising in various foreign languages.

Everyone knows there is regional and international competition in the tourism sector, both within the region and beyond.

This necessitates diversifying tourism destinations and products so that tourists can access Oman’s diverse natural landscapes.

All of this requires concerted efforts to develop and market these attractions by diversifying target markets, appealing to nature and adventure enthusiasts; and continuing international marketing through digital campaigns in multiple languages.

WHY A US INVESTMENT IN BOEING WOULD MAKE SENSE

PRANAV KIRAN

For Uncle Sam’s foray into state capitalism, the sky’s the limit. President Donald Trump’s administration has cut a string of deals to take stakes in companies key to national security and the supply chain. In 2026, the White House will settle on its obvious next target: plane-maker Boeing.

The United States government is the ultimate strategic investor. Trump has leaned on its vast regulatory and financial might to negotiate governance agreements or outright take stakes in the steel, semiconductor, rare earth mineral, lithium and nuclear power industries. The frenzy of negotiations ramped up after China began blocking key mineral exports. Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent is signalling that there’s plenty of dry powder left.

A 9.9% stake in chipmaker Intel signifies the importance of the closest thing the country has to a cutting-edge semiconductor maker. Its long-ailing status as it slips behind rival Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Co (TSMC) puts it squarely in the White House’s crosshairs. The same logic readily applies to Boeing. It is one half of a global commercial-aircraft duopoly, a massive supplier to the military and the nation’s single largest exporter. It is also reeling from a long series of setbacks related to deadly faults in its aircraft.

Those woes would give the former-banker duo of Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick and lieutenant Michael Grimes plenty of leverage.

The Federal Aviation Administration imposes a limit on how many 737 MAX planes Boeing can make and determines its autonomy in conducting inspections. Roughly a third of the company’s revenue comes from its defence, space and security segment, which depends on government contracts.

If the White House wants to snag a return to justify the investment, now is an attractive time to move. Wall Street analysts’ price targets over the next 12 months point to a 38% rise in Boeing’s battered stock, according to Visible Alpha data at the end of November 2025.

If that happens, the company’s market value would rise by over \$50 billion. Better yet, it’s set to return to generating cash flow — and potentially paying dividends — after a heavy round of investment. — Reuters

Businesses in Ireland confident into 2026

IRISH businesses in the European Union expect tariffs to have an impact on the wider economy in 2026, but very few see them as a direct threat to their own operations.

A survey by the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA) found that while 84 per cent of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) anticipate tariffs will affect the broader business environment, just 2 per cent cited them as a specific risk to their own organisation.

Instead, firms pointed to more immediate domestic pressures, with the cost of doing business cited as the top risk to growth by 40 per cent of respondents.

However, despite these perceived challenges the overall outlook among Irish SMEs remains upbeat. Almost nine in ten businesses said they are either as confident or more confident about the year ahead compared with the same time last year.

This confidence is reflected in employment expectations as only 3 per cent of businesses said they anticipate job losses in the year ahead. Almost every business surveyed (97 per cent) expects employment levels to either increase or remain stable through 2026, pointing to a steady labour market across the SME sector.

Investment plans for businesses look to be taking a cautious approach as nearly three in ten SMEs expect to increase investment over the coming year, while a further 65 per cent said they anticipate investment will remain broadly in line with current levels.

Growth remains the main priority for 30 per cent of businesses as they noted expanding operations as their top focus for the year ahead. Upskilling staff is emerging as a key area, particularly in digital capabilities. Almost a quarter of residents said that training employees in artificial intelligence (AI) is a priority.

This move reflects the increasing role of the evolving technology across sectors. While global factors



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The writer is our foreign correspondent based in the UK.

Investment plans for businesses look to be taking a cautious approach as nearly three in ten SMEs expect to increase investment over the coming year, while a further 65 per cent said they anticipate investment will remain broadly in line with current levels.



A man walks out of a general supply shop, in Dublin, Ireland. — Reuters

such as tariffs are on the radar, the survey suggests Irish SMEs are more immediately concerned with managing costs and keeping their businesses competitive at home, it said.

“That the vast majority of businesses expect stable or increased employment, alongside sustained investment levels, is a strong signal of underlying confidence in the domestic economy”, said Stephen Noonan, the head of ACCA Ireland.

“While challenges remain, particularly around costs and the pace of digital change, businesses are clearly focused on growth and on equipping their people with the skills they need, including in emerging areas such as AI”, he said.

In the UK the picture is quite different in business confidence with initial jitters causing drops in key metrics like growth and investment intentions, though some December surveys hinted at minor upticks, partly from budget-related tax compromises, but overall sentiment stayed cautious amidst ongoing economic concerns.

The Institute of Directors (IoD)

reported confidence near record lows even after the budget, while the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) noted weak private sector activity and hiring intentions in December.

Business sentiment remained subdued following the November Budget, with leaders expressing concern over weak growth prospects and hesitant to invest or hire, even as the holiday season brought mixed signals for retailers.

Businesses were struggling with rising costs, tightened funding and economic uncertainty are making it harder to plan, invest and grow with confidence.

The IoD’s monthly survey indicated bosses were fearing for the worst. Growth predictions were also downgraded across the entire forecast period, which is likely to keep businesses on edge about their prospects.

In its headline metric, overall business confidence about the UK economy in a snap poll after the Budget barely changed, inching up by one point from -73 to -72, demonstrating the sense of peril directors are left in.

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ART/LIFE



Between lines and landmarks^{> 20}

CHANGING WORLD

EMBRACING NEW YEAR WITH POSITIVITY, OPTIMISM



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

AS WE welcome 2026, Oman is filled with optimism and excitement under the wise leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik.

The past five years have seen significant progress, with His Majesty driving a quiet revolution, blending tradition with modernity and steering the nation towards a brighter future.

His Majesty's focus on economic diversification has yielded impressive results, with the non-oil sector thriving and GDP growth reaching 3.4 per cent in 2025.

Oman has implemented fiscal reforms, introduced VAT and established the Oman Future Fund to support promising projects in sectors like logistics, manufacturing, tourism and green hydrogen.

Oman's social landscape is also transforming, with significant investments in education, healthcare and social welfare. The country has achieved 99 per cent childhood vaccination coverage; and new hospitals and schools are being built.

The Social Protection Law has provided integrated support to vulnerable families, benefitting 63.6 per cent of the target population.

As we celebrate the start of 2026, Oman is well-positioned for sustained growth and development under His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik. The country's tourism sector is poised for continued expansion. With over 36,000 hotel rooms in operation and 1,000 more on the way, Oman's hospitality industry is set for another record-breaking year.

His Majesty's leadership has been instrumental in shaping Oman's future. His state visits across the Gulf, Europe and Asia have strengthened international partnerships and showcased Oman's commitment to diplomacy and cooperation.

As we look ahead to 2026, Oman is ready to welcome the world with open arms. With its vibrant culture, stunning landscapes and warm hospitality, the country is poised to become a top destination for travellers and investors alike.

The nation's resilience and adaptability will continue to drive progress, making 2026 a year of exciting opportunities.

Till next, Happy New Year!

As we celebrate the start of 2026, Oman is well-positioned for sustained growth and development under His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik

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



EXOTIC CULTURE

A girl poses with her bearskin costume in the village of Asau as she prepares to take part in the traditional "Dance of the Bears" parade in the nearby city of Comanesti, Romania. — **AFP**



PHILANTHROPY

Actor George Clooney and Amal Clooney host their annual fundraiser 'The Albie Awards' in London, Britain. — **Reuters**



NEW YEAR FETE

Children walk behind a sand sculpture by artist Yazed Abo Jarad of the coming year as Displaced Palestinians prepare to usher in the New Year in Deir Al Balah. — **AFP**

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Rio receives Guinness record for biggest New Year’s bash



People watch the traditional New Year’s fireworks at Copacabana Beach in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. — AFP

Rio de Janeiro has been awarded the Guinness world record for the largest-ever New Year’s Eve celebration hosted by a city, for an hours-long free concert that gathered 2.5 million people on Copacabana beach last year.

Rio Mayor Eduardo Paes received a plaque on Tuesday from a Guinness World Records representative on the main stage prepared for this year’s installment, also on Copacabana, that will feature legendary Brazilian singer Gilberto Gil.

“This title was awarded... taking into account the record number of participants, the scope of the artistic programme, the territorial reach of the event and its cultural relevance”, the mayor’s office said of the award.

Drone footage had

confirmed the participation of a record 2.5 million people in last year’s celebrations.

Paes described the award as an honour and said “no other city in the world organises events that bring together so many people with such consistency”.

Each New Year, Copacabana draws legions of revellers who traditionally dress in white.

For this year’s event, organisers have planned 12 minutes of fireworks and 1,200 drones to light up the sky.

Thirteen stages have been erected for free concerts to be held across the city, including three in Copacabana where 3,500 police officers will be deployed.

Rio de Janeiro welcomed nearly two million foreign visitors from January to November, a record. — AFP



ROHM lines up dazzling events in January

THE Royal Opera House Muscat (ROHM) announced that 2026 opens with a rich and varied programme, inviting audiences to begin the new year with performances and events that celebrate artistic excellence, cultural exchange and shared experiences for all ages.

The month begins with Cinderella on Ice at ROHM on January 1 and January 2 at 7:00 pm and January 3 at 4:00 pm. This family-friendly production reimagines the classic fairytale through expressive ice skating and storytelling, offering an engaging start to the season. It brings the classic fairytale to life with dazzling choreography, stunning costumes and breathtaking ice-skating performances. Perfect for audiences of all ages, this enchanting production combines the grace of figure skating with magical storytelling, set to a captivating musical score. Watch as Cinderella overcomes adversity, finds her prince and glides into the happily-ever-after. With heartwarming moments, exciting sequences and sparkling special effects, Cinderella on Ice offers an unforgettable theatrical experience for the entire family.

On January 8 and 9 at 7:00 pm, the Folk Music Festival takes place at ROHM Maidan. Outdoor performances from Oman, Bahrain, Kazakhstan, Mexico and Hungary celebrate global traditions and highlight the role of music and dance in fostering international understanding. Join us for a magical two-night celebration under the stars at the Folk Music Festival, an open-air concert that brings the world to your doorstep.

Experience the rich cultural rhythms and captivating performances from special guest artists representing Kazakhstan, Mexico and Hungary. This vibrant musical journey will showcase traditional folk melodies, colourful costumes and energetic dance, creating a lively and unforgettable atmosphere for all ages. Bring your friends and family, enjoy the festive spirit and be part of this unique cultural exchange through the universal language of music.

Educational and community focused events continue throughout the month. Let’s Read! takes place on January 24 at the ROHM Music Library, introducing young audiences to the journeys of Ibn



Battuta through storytelling that encourages curiosity and cultural awareness. Later the same day at 12:30 pm, Lunch Music in the Opera Galleria offers a free midday concert featuring excerpts from Puccini’s Tosca.

Opera audiences can further engage with Opera Talk on January 28 at ROHM, led by musicologist Gaston Fournier, ahead of the exciting performance of the opera Tosca, presented at ROHM on January 29 and January 31 at 7:00 pm. The production is led by Fabio Mastrangelo and features an international cast.

The month concludes with Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony in Liszt’s two piano version on January 30 at 7:00 pm, performed by pianists Hélène Mercier and Louis Lortie with soloists and choir.

In this concert, Beethoven’s Ninth

Symphony is presented in a special arrangement of Liszt’s version, for two pianos and choir. Mercier and Lortie, known for their long-standing partnership, bring this demanding work to life with exceptional skill. As the iconic Ode to Joy resounds, audiences will experience a powerful fusion of choral and piano mastery. This breathtaking performance pays tribute to musical innovation and promises an unforgettable experience for all lovers of classical music.

January’s programme reflects the opera house’s commitment to artistic quality, global cultural dialogue and audience opportunity. Looking ahead, February will continue this momentum with two exciting family productions designed to inspire young audiences and bring families together through music and storytelling. — ONA

FEATURES

IDRIS AL BALUSHI

In the margins of a modest journal, worlds quietly unfold. Some pages hold buildings caught mid-light, others trace mountain lines, passing streets, or faces borrowed from film. For Issa bin Saif al Nairi, drawing is not an announcement, it is a habit of noticing. By profession, he works as an electrical technician, a role defined by structure and routine. But beyond his workday, he returns to pen and paper, where observation replaces urgency and the ordinary becomes worth keeping.

Issa's relationship with drawing began without intention. There was no plan, no imagined audience and no pressure to produce something polished. His journal started as a personal space for release, a place to empty thoughts visually and make sense of what surrounded him. At first, it was simply a notebook filled with ideas and visual notes. Over time, it transformed into a living record of daily life, documenting whatever caught his attention, whether significant or fleeting.

As the pages accumulated, places began to take shape more clearly. Issa found himself drawn to landmarks, not because they were famous, but because they carried quiet stories. Oman, as he sees it, is rich with details that are often overlooked, details that are calm, subtle and visually underused. Sketching these spaces became a way of preserving visual memory, especially historic areas such as Muttrah, where architecture, history and identity intersect. In his drawings, forts, streets and buildings are not presented as static icons, but as lived spaces shaped by time.

When Issa visits a new location, it is rarely a single object that prompts him to draw. The spark usually comes from the overall feeling of a place. Atmosphere leads, details follow. Sometimes it is nature that demands attention, sometimes it is a brief moment that might otherwise disappear. His sketches feel instinctive, guided by emotion rather than strict composition. The page becomes a response to being present, rather than an attempt to capture everything.

Alongside landscapes and landmarks, cinema plays a subtle but meaningful role in Issa's work. Film is part of his artistic world, just like drawing. Certain characters or scenes leave an impression that stays with him and when that happens, he translates that feeling into a sketch. These drawings are not copies, but personal interpretations. They reflect what a scene stirred within him, allowing fictional characters to coexist with real places inside the same journal. Together, they form a layered portrait of his interests and inner life.

Issa describes his style as free documentation. It sits somewhere between realism and personal perspective, shaped by how he experiences life rather than how things are expected to look. His style was not something he set out to define. It emerged gradually through consistency and time. With every page, his lines became more confident, his compositions more mature, reflecting his own growing clarity and connection to his surroundings.

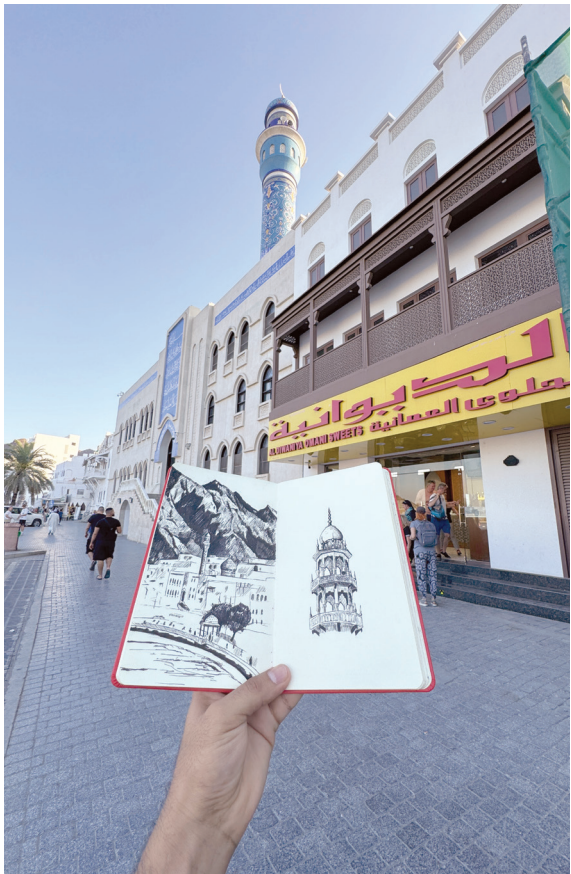
The journal itself plays a central role in his daily life. It is his constant companion, especially during travel. He returns to it whenever he wants, sometimes treating it as a second memory, one that stores places, feelings and moments that words cannot fully hold. Flipping through its pages reveals not just drawings, but a timeline of experiences, each one anchored in observation.

When Issa first began sharing his sketches publicly, he did so casually. His account functioned as a personal archive, a visual diary shared without expectation. Over time, people began to connect with the sketches. They felt honest and unfiltered; and viewers saw them as an extension of



BETWEEN LINES AND LANDMARKS

INSIDE ISSA AL NAIRI 'S SKETCHBOOK



who he was. With continued sharing came growing support, even from companies. That encouragement led Issa to take a step forward, treating his art as professional work rather than a private hobby.

At the heart of his drawings is a desire to communicate the beauty of Oman in all its diversity. He speaks of its cultural, architectural and geological richness, of Islamic architecture that shifts from one wilayat to another, of forts in Muttrah, the vast stretch of the Al Hajar Mountains and the contrast between coastlines and inland terrain. Simply driving between regions, he believes, is enough to inspire, even for those who do not consider themselves artists. To him, Oman feels like a small continent, complete in its variety.

This belief eventually led to the creation of sketch'd, a brand born from a simple request by friends to turn a drawing of the Al Hajar Mountains into a printed design. What followed was not driven purely by profit, but by a desire to create a modern Omani brand with an authentic identity. Through sketch'd, Issa extends his drawings beyond the page, creating products for hikers, campers and those drawn to the outdoors, people who want to wear something that reflects who they are.

Looking ahead, he hopes sketch'd will become a leading name in hiking and camping products. His vision goes beyond clothing, towards building a brand that belongs naturally in the landscape. For Issa, every sketch remains a quiet act of presence, a way of paying attention to the world and leaving behind a trace of how it once felt.