

Times

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HEALTHCARE

# Royal Hospital localises colorectal cancer tests for the first time

**MUSCAT:** The Royal Hospital succeeded in localising molecular tests for colorectal cancer (KRAS, NRAS, BRAF) as part of efforts made by the hospital's Department of Medical Laboratories, Section of Tissues and Cells.

The tests will be conducted for the first time in the Sultanate of Oman within a period of just one working day.

Earlier, the tests were carried out abroad with a waiting time of more than three weeks.

The accomplishment represents a milestone in the field of tumor diagnosis. Besides the acceleration of target treatments, the tests augment the efficiency of decision-making and improve the quality of healthcare provided to cancer patients.

The progress is in pursuance of efforts undertaken by the Ministry of Health to develop specialized diagnostic services and promote precision medicine in line with the goals of Oman Vision 2040, which focuses on localising advanced medical technologies

and establishing a sustainable health system based on innovation.

Dr. Mohammed Al Masqari, Head of the Section of Tissues and Cells at the Royal Hospital's Department of Medical Laboratories, said, "Localising molecular tests constitutes a strategic step in supporting the system of cancer treatment. The prompt results of the tests will offer physicians an opportunity to make

accurate treatment decisions in a timely manner and contribute to improved patient wellbeing."

Al Masqari added that this achievement reflects the preparedness of medical laboratories and the efficiency of the national staff.

He affirmed the readiness of specialists to introduce more advanced tests that keep pace with the highest international standards. **>A1**

REGIONAL ISSUES

# Sayyid Badr holds talks on phone

Times News Service

**MUSCAT:** Foreign Minister Sayyid Badr bin Hamad Al Busaidi held a telephone call with Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

The call discussed regional developments and included an exchange of views on a number of issues of mutual interest.

A telephone call also took place between Sayyid Badr bin Hamad Al Busaidi and Ayman Safadi, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates of the Jordan.

They discussed regional developments and exchanged views on challenges and ways to address them.

TOP THREE INSIDE STORIES

## OMAN Omani adventurer carves his mark

**1** Driven by an early passion for nature, sports, and mountains, Omani adventurer Sulaiman Hamoud Al Naabi has carved his mark in the world of mountaineering. He has achieved milestones by raising the Omani flag atop the world's highest peaks, notably reaching the Mount Everest summit. **>A2**

## OMAN Oman organises human rights event

**2** Oman Human Rights Commission (OHRC) organised a side event at the Palais des Nations in Geneva to showcase the Omani experience, highlight its roles in promoting and protecting human rights. **>A3**

## WORLD Northern lights dazzle US and Europe

**3** An intense geomagnetic storm triggered the possibility of northern lights being sighted across Canada and the northern half of the United States on Monday night. **>B4**

# OMAN TARGETS 70,000 VISITORS FROM SPAIN

The promotional campaign aims to strengthen Oman's presence in the European market

Times News Service

**MUSCAT:** The Sultanate of Oman has launched a major tourism promotional campaign in Spain, targeting approximately 70,000 people, ahead of its participation in the International Tourism Trade Fair, FITUR 2026, which begins on Wednesday in Madrid. The campaign aims to strengthen Oman's presence in the European market and showcase the country as a year-round tourism destination.

The multi-platform initiative will cover social media channels, tourism websites, and international promotional platforms, ensuring that Oman's unique attractions reach a broad and diverse audience. The campaign places special emphasis on niche

tourism sectors that have growing appeal among Spanish travelers, including marine tourism, adventure tourism, golf tourism, wedding tourism, cruise tourism, wellness tourism, and cultural and heritage tourism.

To complement the promotional efforts, the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism is organising familiarisation trips for Spanish travel companies to Oman, providing firsthand experience of the country's tourism offerings.

Regular training sessions are also being conducted for tourism company representatives, helping them gain in-depth knowledge of Oman's diverse destinations, experiences, and hospitality services.

According to the Tourism Representation Office in Spain, the campaign will employ 58 promotional mediums, with an average of 185 displays and repetitions, ensuring consistent visibility

among the target audience. Officials hope that these efforts will strengthen bilateral tourism relations, increase tourist arrivals from Spain, and enhance Oman's reputation as a premium travel destination in Europe.

In November 2025, the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MHT) conducted a promotional campaign in London coinciding with Oman's participation in World Travel Market (WTM), one of the world's leading international travel and tourism exhibitions.

The promotion highlighted Oman's diverse natural, cultural and historical attractions, showcasing the Sultanate as a distinctive and authentic travel destination on the global tourism map.

As part of the promotion, MHT rolled out a public transport advertising campaign across London, featuring captivating visuals of Oman's most iconic landmarks – including its mountains, wadis, beaches and historic forts – in addition to promoting Omani hospitality and adventure tourism experiences.

These promotions reflected the ministry's continued efforts to raise awareness on Oman's tourism potential in key European markets, which remains one of the most important source markets for visitors to the Sultanate.

COLD WAVE

# Sub-zero temperature at Jebel Shams, people feel chill across Oman

Times News Service

**MUSCAT:** A strong cold wave swept across the Sultanate, pushing temperatures sharply downward and bringing sub-zero conditions at Jebel Shams, where the mercury dropped to minus 0.1 degrees Celsius, according to data released by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA).

The below-freezing temperature was recorded on Tuesday, January 20, 2026, marking one of the coldest nights this winter and highlighting the intensity of the cold air mass affecting large parts of the country.

Temperatures at high-altitude locations dropped significantly due to persistent northerly winds and clear skies, which allowed heat to escape rapidly during the night.

Residents living in elevated areas said the cold was noticeably

harsher than usual. On January 18, temperatures at Jebel Shams had already fallen to minus 0.8 degrees Celsius, signalling the build-up of the cold spell. "We woke up to freezing air," said Salim Al Harthy, a resident of Jebel Shams.

Another citizen, Khalid Al Abri, who frequently travels to the mountain from Muscat, described the conditions as particularly challenging. "The wind was very strong at night, and the temperature dropped suddenly. Even with heavy clothing, it was difficult to stay outside for long," he said.

Across interior regions, temperatures also fell to near winter lows. Saiq recorded 4.8°C, while Yanqul dropped to 9.5°C.

Nizwa registered 11.5°C, with similar readings reported in Fahud (11.5°C) and Muqshin (11.3°C). Haima recorded 11.0°C, while As Sunainah stood at 11.6°C.

Meanwhile, the Civil Aviation Authority has issued a weather alert warning of active northerly and northwesterly winds expected to affect most governorates starting from Tuesday evening, January 20, 2026.

According to the CAA, the windy

conditions are likely to continue for several days and may lead to multiple weather impacts across the country. "The expected wind activity may result in rising dust and sand over desert and open areas, which could lead to reduced horizontal visibility," the authority

said in a statement. The CAA also warned of rough sea conditions, noting that wave heights along Oman's coastline could reach up to 2.5 metres, posing potential risks to small boats and maritime activities.

"Fishermen and sea-goers are advised to exercise caution during this period due to the expected high waves," the statement added.

The authority further indicated that the prevailing weather system is expected to contribute to a continued drop in temperatures, particularly during nighttime and early morning hours, due to the ongoing influence of northerly air currents.

For many residents, the cold was felt most strongly during the early morning. "The cold this morning was exceptional. Even indoors, heaters were needed," said Suraj Kumar, an Indian expatriate.

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MUSCAT

# Adventurer Sulaiman Hamoud Al Naabi recounts his expeditions

Al-Naabi’s accomplishments include summiting Mount Everest as the first Omani and second Arab to do so, as well as completing the prestigious Seven Summits Programme

**MUSCAT:** Driven by an early passion for nature, sports, and mountains, Omani adventurer Sulaiman Hamoud Al Naabi has carved his mark in the world of mountaineering.

He has achieved milestones by raising the Omani flag atop the world’s highest peaks, most notably reaching the summit of Mount Everest as the first Omani and second Arab to do so, while also completing the Seven Summits programme.

In an interview with Oman News Agency (ONA), Al Naabi reflected on his beginnings: “In 2015, I participated in an official educational trip to climb Mount Kilimanjaro without prior knowledge of the Seven Summits programme.

“After reaching the peak, the expedition leader introduced me to the programme as one of the world’s greatest mountaineering challenges. That moment was the turning point that launched my professional career in high-altitude climbing.”

He noted that transitioning from a hobbyist to a professional was a



gradual process requiring physical and mental preparation.

Al Naabi moved from passion-driven climbs to disciplined, professional training programmes and risk management, ensuring his representation of Oman at international forums met global standards.

Al Naabi explained that the Seven Summits challenge involves climbing the highest peak on each of the seven continents. It is considered one of the most grueling global challenges due to the diverse climatic and geographical environments.

When combined with reaching both the North and South Poles, it forms the Grand Slam Explorer programme—one of the rarest and most dangerous exploration feats in the world.

He said that on 30 September



erest (the world’s highest peak), while on 12 May he climbed Mount Lhotse (the world’s fourth-highest) less than 24 hours later.

Al Naabi noted that in December 2022 he reached Mount Vinson (Antarctica) and visited the South Pole. On 23 April 2023, he said that he scaled the highest peak in the Svalbard Archipelago (Arctic), while on 28 February 2025 he scaled Carstensz Pyramid (Oceania), officially becoming the first Omani to complete the Seven Summits and reach both Poles.

Al Naabi described the challenges as not only physical but also mental. He faced temperatures as low as -60°C, gale-force winds, avalanche risks, and oxygen depletion at high altitudes. “On a psychological level, the isolation and long durations of missions were significant challenges, made even harder by witnessing other climbers lose their lives on certain routes,” he shared.

He also highlighted the transition from being a physics teacher at the Ministry of Education to having his services transferred to the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, which allowed him to focus professionally on his missions.

Beyond individual records, Al Naabi’s experience has created a lasting social impact. As a member of the National Youth Commission and head of the “Young Traveller” project, he trains youth in safe adventure culture.

He also contributes to developing adventure sports in Oman through his membership in the Oman Adventure Committee.

Concluding his remarks, Al Naabi emphasised that his recent decoration with the Order of Commendation is a national honor that motivates him to continue turning his experiences into a sustainable legacy for Omani youth and strengthening Oman’s presence on the global stage. -ONA

## ENTERTAINMENT DESTINATION

### Big turnout of visitors to Muscat Nights events in Wadi Al Khoudh



Times News Service

**MUSCAT:** The vibrant events and activities of Muscat Nights 2026 at Wadi Al Khoudh in the Wilayat of Seeb are witnessing a strong turnout from visitors of all age groups, reflecting the festival’s appeal as a major family and entertainment destination.

Eng. Marwan Mohammed Al Houti, Supervisor of Muscat Nights events in Wadi Al Khoudh, said that the site features a wide range of social and recreational activities aimed at

boosting domestic tourism and offering an integrated experience that blends entertainment, entrepreneurship, and community participation in an open, family-friendly environment.

He explained that the events will continue until January 31, running daily from 5:00 pm until midnight, and include a diverse programme of activities such as family play areas, live entertainment shows, food stalls, and outlets for small and medium enterprises, as well as interactive spaces designed for



Times News Service

children and youth.

Al-Houti added that the site offers action-packed and exciting experiences, including wall climbing, challenge trails, physical games, and exploration activities that encourage teamwork and a spirit of adventure.

He noted that the venue has been designed as a key destination for thrill-seekers and enthusiasts of unconventional experiences, while maintaining high safety standards and professional organisation.

Meanwhile, visual artist Munir

bin Musa Al-Balushi, supervisor of the visual arts corner at the Wadi Al Khoudh site, said that the section showcases a variety of artworks by participants, including sculpture and carving, photography, engravings, and distinctive drawings on pottery vessels commonly kept in homes.

He explained that the visual arts corner aims to discover and highlight creative talents, express local identity and Omani culture, and promote communication, interaction, and engagement with the community.

## ISLAMIC VALUES

### Egyptian President meets Minister of Endowments



**CAIRO:** President Abdul Fattah el Sisi of the Arab Republic of Egypt met with Dr. Mohammed Said Al Ma'amari, Minister of Endowments and Religious Affairs.

This took place during President el Sisi’s meeting with the Ministers, Muftis of countries, and Heads of Islamic Councils and Bodies participating in the 36th International Conference of the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs, hosted by the Arab Republic of Egypt.

The meeting discussed the es-

tablished Islamic values in various aspects of life, their interaction with modern developments, and their contribution to building human beings and the development journey.

**Unified strategies**

President el Sisi expressed his wishes for the success of the conference in achieving its goals through formulating unified strategies that enhance the stability of societies. -ONA

## MINISTRY OF HERITAGE AND TOURISM

### Beads and bone remains found in survey of sites in Nizwa

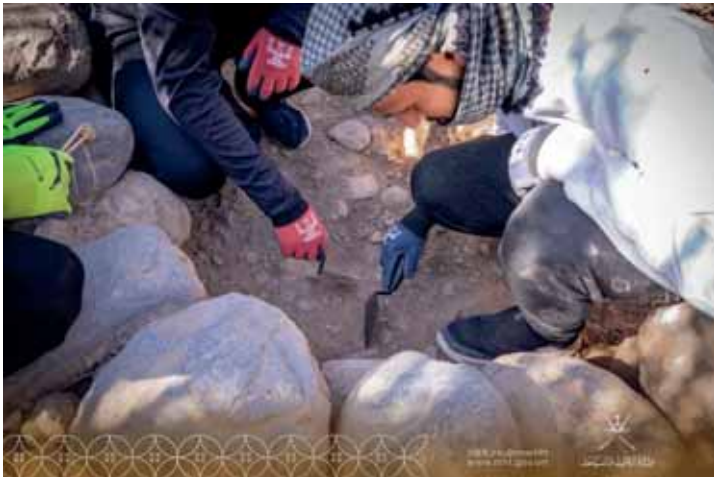
Times News Service

**MUSCAT:** The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, in cooperation with Japanese archaeological missions from the National Institutes for the Humanities and Research, has concluded a series of archaeological surveys and excavations at the Wadi Tanuf and Al-Ghabrah sites in the Wilayat of Nizwa.

The fieldwork resulted in the discovery of a collection of beads and bone remains, along with the documentation of inscriptions written in the South Arabian script and several rock carvings, providing valuable in-

sights into the historical and cultural significance of the sites. As part of the project, a lecture titled “The Latest Archaeological Discoveries from the Wadi Tanuf Archaeological Site” was delivered, highlighting the most significant findings from the survey and excavation works and discussing their archaeological implications.

This collaboration underscores the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism’s ongoing efforts to strengthen international research partnerships and preserve Oman’s rich archaeological heritage through scientific documentation and systematic field exploration.



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FOR MORE

# Oman organises event to highlight its roles in promoting human rights

The OHRC held an introductory exhibition of its publications, showcasing a range of specialised prints and awareness materials, annual reports, and various human rights manuals and booklets

**GENEVA:** Oman Human Rights Commission (OHRC) organised a side event at the Palais des Nations in Geneva to showcase the Omani experience, highlight its roles in promoting and protecting human rights, open horizons for dialogue with international partners, and exchange best practices with international institutions and bodies concerned with human rights.

The event was organised in cooperation with the Permanent Mission of the Sultanate of Oman to the United Nations and other International Organisations in Geneva.

It aimed to highlight the Commission's institutional role, enhance international cooperation, and exchange expertise. It also presented the features of the Commission's experience and priorities, provided a concise and reliable overview of its work, and highlighted national efforts in various fields—including labor



rights—while introducing the Commission's awareness programs and tools.

The event targeted a wide range of stakeholders in Geneva, including diplomatic missions accredited to the UN, international organizations, relevant UN agencies, National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs), civil society organizations, and human rights enthusiasts, as well as researchers and media professionals.

The event featured three specialised working papers. The first paper addressed "Business and Human Rights" as a growing field linking economic development with human rights standards, highlighting the Commission's methodology through assessment tools, recommendations, and follow-up, and reviewing its qualitative initiatives, such as the preparation of guiding manuals.

The second paper focused on the promotion and protection of labor rights through field monitoring of working conditions, housing, and occupational safety, as well as mechanisms for receiving, verifying, and following up on complaints with competent

authorities.

The third paper presented an overview of parallel reports and awareness programmes, explaining the methodology for preparing shadow reports in accordance with UN guidelines and the importance of these reports in enhancing transparency and expanding international participation and cooperation in human rights files.

On the sidelines of the event, the OHRC held an introductory exhibition of its publications, showcasing a range of specialised prints and awareness materials, printed annual reports, and various human rights manuals and booklets. Attendees were introduced to the Commission's experience in printed publications and its reporting methodology.

The meeting witnessed active engagement from participants through discussions addressing opportunities for cooperation, partnership-building, and exchange of expertise, accompanied by commendations of the Oman Human Rights Commission's role and institutional approach to monitoring, awareness-raising, and reporting.



the system includes clear provisions regulating the purpose of the Commission's establishment, the mechanism for electing the chairman and deputy, membership terms, and meeting procedures to ensure regularity and efficiency, precisely outlining the competencies entrusted to the Commission according to its national responsibilities.

In his speech, he highlighted the "Accessibility of the Institution to the People" as one of the most important indicators of the maturity of NHRIs.

He noted that the Commission has developed a system for receiving reports and complaints and introduced multiple channels ensuring access for various groups while maintaining privacy and procedural clarity.

He stated that in recent years, the Commission has begun receiving, monitoring, and dealing with more than 1,000 reports annually.

He considered this an indicator of the volume of work on one hand, and of rising community trust in national mechanisms and growing awareness that rights are protected through specialized institutions on the other.

The Chairman also discussed "Human Rights Indicators" as a scientific tool that transforms values into measurable standards and

supports evidence-based policy-making.

Regarding field monitoring, the Chairman affirmed the continuation of visits to prisons, detention facilities, hospitals, labor gatherings, industrial zones, labor accommodations, and social care institutions to verify service levels, ensure alignment with national and international standards, confirm respect for human rights, and enhance prevention through early monitoring and practical recommendations. In the context of future planning, he highlighted the Commission's work, in cooperation with relevant national entities, on preparing the National Human Rights Strategy as a comprehensive framework that defines priorities and links obligations to implementable programs subject to monitoring and evaluation based on precise indicators and clear international benchmarks, with aspirations to launch it during the current year.

He noted that specialised workshops were held to produce a human rights indicator manual for Oman, emphasising that the Sultanate of Oman's presence in the international human rights system has been strengthened, as it is now an active member of 8 out of the 9 core international human rights treaties. -ONA

RESEARCH TEAM

## SQU project leads to commercial production of spirulina algae

**MUSCAT:** The Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) has made a new scientific milestone by producing spirulina algae in commercial quantities for the first time in its history.

The achievement reflects the development of research and innovation aimed at supporting national trends in a knowledge-based and sustainable economy.

A research team from the SQU and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources takes credit for the project, which was funded by the Agriculture and Fisheries Development Fund (AFDF). The project aims to import strains of spirulina that are more adaptive to the climate of the Sultanate of Oman and more productive.

The breeds are studied for their nutritional content, notably the protein content of the cultivated species with optimal economic production. It culminates in composing and manufacturing spirulina-enhanced animal and fish feeds and testing the same in accordance with scientific principles.

The research project, led by Dr. Hafez Ali Al Mahrouqi, Supervisor of the Algae Unit at the Agricultural Experiment Station of the SQU, received a grant of OMR80,000 from the AFDF.

It affirms the role of the SQU in converting research into applied projects that generate economic



and developmental impact. The project supports the trends of sustainability and food security in the Sultanate of Oman in line with Oman Vision 2040.

Due to its high nutritional value, spirulina serves as one of the most widely cultivated microalgae in the world.

It consists of between 60 and 65 percent protein mass. This makes the species an important nutritional supplement for humans and animals. Its mass production

will contribute to the growth of the sector of aquaculture and animal farming.

This type of algae is distinguished for its ability to adapt to local environmental conditions and its aptitude to grow in salt water that has seawater salinity.

The research opens up broad prospects for optimising the use of seawater and lands in the vicinity of the Arabian Sea that are unsuitable for traditional agriculture. -ONA

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# Musandam Hiking: A passion becomes a community and tourism platform



The Musandam Hiking Team was officially established on October 1, 2017 and its first mountain trail was carried out on January 13, 2018

**KHASAB:** What began as a youthful passion for mountain hiking and exploration has evolved into an organised community initiative that promotes health, environmental awareness, and tourism in the Musandam Governorate.

The Musandam Hiking Team was officially established on October 1, 2017. Its first mountain trail was carried out on January 13, 2018, followed by a second on March 2 of the same year. Since then, the team's activities have continued to expand locally and nationally.

Ismail Ali Al Shehhi, head of the Musandam Hiking Team, said the initiative aims to channel young people's energy into positive activities that serve the community and promote public health.

He noted that the team also seeks to highlight Musandam's tourist and strategic sites, contrib-

uting to attracting visitors from around the world and introducing the region's natural diversity to new audiences.

Since its establishment, the team has organised numerous mountain trails, attracting dozens of hiking enthusiasts from various age groups and helping to broaden participation in the sport across the governorate.

The team regularly organises activities in cooperation with government entities and community organisations on occasions such as Mountain Activity Day, World Diabetes Day, and International Mountain Day.

It also takes part in Musandam's winter season events and collaborates with Khasab Sports and Cultural Club to host gatherings of hiking teams from within and outside the Sultanate of Oman.

Regarding route selection, Al Shehhi explained that the team relies largely on old mountain paths historically used by ancestors to travel between villages. These routes are updated and marked with signage to facilitate access to natural landmarks. The team also develops new routes to showcase lesser-known tourist sites.

Routes vary in difficulty to accommodate different experience levels, with options suitable for beginners to ensure inclusive participation and encourage wider interest in hiking.

Safety remains a top priority. Participants' readiness is assessed before each hike, including wearing appropriate clothing and

footwear and ensuring they are free from chronic conditions that could affect their safety. Participants are also warned against approaching hazardous areas.

Each trip includes a first aid kit, and route data and locations are registered through the "Nidaa" application of the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority to enable rapid response in emergencies.

The team also plays an environmental awareness role by organising beach and trail clean-up campaigns and encouraging hikers to avoid littering and to collect waste along mountain paths.

Al Shehhi highlighted the physical, mental, and social benefits of hiking, noting its role in strengthening social bonds and fostering values of cooperation and discipline. He added that adventure tourism is witnessing growing demand in Musandam due to its unique geography and scenic landscapes.

The Musandam Hiking Team receives support from Khasab Cultural and Sports Club and several official bodies. Among the main challenges, Al Shehhi pointed to limited acceptance of some routes by certain segments of society, underscoring the need for greater community awareness.

Looking ahead, the team aspires to establish a tourism office dedicated to supporting hiking activities and to continue documenting new routes across the governorate. These efforts aim to strengthen adventure tourism and support sustainable tourism development in the Sultanate of Oman. -ONA



NATIONAL DIRECTIONS

RAM launches programme on economic decentralisation

**MUSCAT:** The Royal Academy of Management (RAM) has launched The Executive Programme on Local Administration.

This come in line with national directions to strengthen administrative and economic decentralisation and empower local leaders and competencies across the governorates.

The initiative is designed to enhance the leadership and administrative capacities of local administration professionals, improve institutional performance, and contribute to sustainable local development by enhancing the ability to respond effectively to local needs.

Designed for 25 participants, the programme reflects RAM's ongoing commitment to preparing local leaders to address the requirements of the emerging developmental phase.

Participants will gain practical and integrated knowledge and skills in modern local administration, development planning, project management, and local investment, while strengthening their leadership competencies and adopting effective management



practices.

The programme enables participants to apply best practices in local administration, develop strategic plans that support national priorities outlined in Oman Vision 2040, and identify viable projects and manage projects efficiently.

It also strengthens their capacity to foster community partnerships, build effective stakeholder relationships and community

partnerships, and adopt innovative solutions that promote digital transformation and enhance local administrative performance.

Dr. Fathiya Abdullah Al Rashdi, Vice President for Programme Affairs at RAM, stated that the Executive Programme in Local Administration focuses on developing practical capabilities that enable local administration leaders to plan, implement, and monitor ini-

tiatives efficiently.

She emphasised that the programme adopts an applied methodology that combines theoretical knowledge with practical, real-world case studies from the local work environment, thereby enhancing institutional coordination and fostering innovative developmental solutions.

Sheikha Al Maskari, Programme Supervisor, highlighted that the

programme provides an integrated learning experience, enabling participants to apply modern administrative tools within the local work environment, efficiently monitor the implementation of initiatives and projects.

Participants will also benefit from having access to a platform for exchanging expertise and developing practical solutions that enhance operational processes and improve performance efficiency in local administrations.

The Executive Programme in Local Administration includes a number of bespoke, carefully designed modules aimed at building both theoretical foundations and practical skills.

These include Development Planning and Project Management, Leadership Skills and Effective Management, Sustainable Development and Local Investment, Innovation and Modern Technologies, Partnerships and Stakeholder Management; and The Fundamentals Of Local Administration.

The last module will feature a dialogue session entitled 'Governorate Development: Opportunities and Challenges', which will

address several key themes. These include the strategic directions for achieving administrative and economic decentralisation in governorates in line with Oman Vision 2040; enablers that contribute to achieving economic and social development across governorates; and the key economic sectors and future opportunities that support local economic development based on the comparative advantages of each governorate.

The tailored programme is designed for employees holding leadership positions in local administrations and can accommodate up to 25 competitively selected participants, ensuring high-quality outcomes and the effective achievement of its training objectives.

Through this and other bespoke executive leadership programmes, RAM continues to contribute to the development of national capacities across key sectors, supporting the implementation of Oman Vision 2040, enhancing institutional performance, and embedding modern and sustainable administrative practices at the governorate level. -ONA

Oman and Spain review bilateral, regional issues

The Omani side was chaired by Sheikh Khalifa Ali Al Harthy, Undersecretary of the Foreign Ministry for Political Affairs, while the Spanish side was chaired by Diego Martínez Belío, State Secretary for Foreign and Global Affairs



sion in Muscat.

The Omani side was chaired by Sheikh Khalifa Ali Al Harthy, Undersecretary of the Foreign Ministry for Political Affairs, while the Spanish side was chaired by Diego Martínez Belío, State Secretary for Foreign and Global Affairs. During the session, the two sides reviewed bilateral relations between the two countries.

They affirmed their keenness to continue developing cooperation

in the fields of trade exchanges, investment, energy, and culture.

Furthermore, they exchanged views on a set of regional issues and developments on the international arena.

The session was attended by Ambassador Munthir Mahfoudh Al Manthri, Head of the Europe Department, Francisco Javier deIsturiz, Ambassador of Spain to Oman and a number of officials from both sides. -ONA

ARRAY OF TOURNAMENTS

ORSC announces calendar for 2026, global participation



**MUSCAT:** Dr. Abdulrahim Musallam Al Darwashi, Chairman of the Oman Racket Sports Committee (ORSC), stated that the current year features a wide array of tournaments, competitions, partnerships, and programmes for badminton and squash in the Sultanate of Oman.

He noted that the busy local and international agenda, along with ambitious developmental programs, is based on realistic data and rapid growth achieved in a short period since the committee's establishment.

In a statement to Oman News Agency (ONA), Al Darwashi said the committee has set an integrated calendar for 2026.

This includes organising several local and international badminton and squash championships, alongside continued support for youth categories through accredited training centres in Muscat.

He also announced a geographical expansion with the opening of two new training centers in two other governorates, a move aimed at broadening the practice base and cultivating a new generation of players.

He explained that the agenda extends beyond competitions



to include specialised community initiatives, most notably the "Women's Badminton" and "AirBadminton" (outdoor) programmes.

These efforts are accompanied by an increase in coaching and officiating courses to qualify national cadres for regional and international levels, with special attention given to national team players through external participations and both internal and external training camps.

Regarding the spread of racket sports, Al Darwashi pointed out that the Board of Directors has operated under a clear plan from the start, focusing first on schools through badminton dissemination programs, then moving to

public parks, beaches, and parks. This strategy has helped the sports reach broader social segments.

He added that the committee activated its presence in summer programs through initiatives like "Summer of Squash," as well as programs implemented in partnership with the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth across various governorates.

He noted that the coming stage will see badminton and squash included in the calendars of other government and private institutions, with the continued organization of age-group championships based on deliberate technical classifications over the next two years. -ONA

CONFERENCE

Digital, operational solutions reshaping future of healthcare

**MUSCAT:** The Medical City for Military and Security Services today concluded the International Conference on Technology and Innovation in the Health Sector, which brought together an elite group of experts, specialists, and health leaders from within and outside the Sultanate of Oman.

The conference included a series of discussion sessions and specialised workshops, in addition to an exhibition of modern health technologies showcasing the latest digital and operational solutions that are reshaping the future of healthcare and hospitals.

It saw participation from global technology companies, academic institutions, researchers, health leaders, and medical and administrative personnel.

The conference concluded with a number of important recommendations for developing the health sector, including: strengthening the infrastructure and health services to ensure comprehensive and effective care; empowering medical and administrative personnel by training them in the use of modern technologies; utilising advanced technical equipment and devices in diagnosis and treatment; improving the quality of health services through the adoption of quality standards and performance indicators and enhancing partner-



ships between the public and private sectors and academic institutions to support innovation and knowledge transfer.

The success of the conference reflects the Sultanate of Oman's commitment to promoting inno-

vation and digital transformation in the health sector and delivering high-quality, sustainable healthcare to citizens and residents, contributing to building an advanced digital healthcare sector. -ONA



Ministry of Defence

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| 1  | SUPPLY OF HYGIENE AND INSECTICIDES ITEMS FOR THE PERIOD OF THREE YEARS | 02/2026       | 23/02/2026              | 02/03/2026               | 887.800 RO                |

2. Tenders terms and documents may be obtained through MOD TABSEET e-Services portal at the following link: <https://eservices.tabseet.gov.om>

3. Organisation compliance certificate (Issued by Ministry of Labor) with a validity period not exceeding one month from the date of issuance must be submitted when purchasing tender's document.

4. Tender fees must be paid electronically via the aforementioned portal for each respective tender.

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# OMAN/WORLD

## ECONOMIC IMPACT

### Samail environmental hackathon starts

**SAMAIL:** The wilayat of Samail's first environmental hackathon kicked off on Tuesday at Samail Industrial City in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate.

The hackathon, which seeks to support environmental innovation and entrepreneurship, focuses on enhancing youth participation in providing practical solutions to environmental and developmental challenges.

The hackathon, being held as part of the 3rd Samail Economic Forum, saw the presentation of

260 projects and initiatives, of which 12 qualified for the final stage.

The competing projects were submitted by young people eager to contribute to developing applicable environmental solutions that generate economic impact for the local community and upgrade the tourist experience in the area.

Activities of the first day of the hackathon included field visits—for the participating teams—to Wadi Samail and the village of Suroor. **-ONA**



## POWER CUT

### Russian attack cuts off power in Kyiv

**KYIV:** Russia carried out an aerial attack on Kyiv on Monday night, severing power and water supplies for thousands of residential buildings in the Ukrainian capital amid a temperature of -14 degrees Celsius (6.8 degrees Fahrenheit), the city's mayor said on Tuesday.

The drone and missile strikes hit the east bank of the Dnipro River on the night of Monday to Tuesday, Vitali Klitschko said.

#### Homes in Kyiv without power, heating

The attack by Russian forces has left a total of 5,635 residential buildings in Kyiv without heating, mayor Klitschko said in a statement posted on Telegram.

He added that municipal and energy services are working to restore heating, water, and electricity in the city's homes.

Energy company DTEK said over 335,000 Kyiv residents were left without electricity after the overnight Russian strikes.



The latest Russian offensive comes only 10 days after Moscow mounted the worst attack on Kyiv's energy grid since the start of its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

The attack on January 9 cut off power for many of the capital's residents for days.

Around 80% of the buildings affected in the latest strikes were those where the heat supply was being restored from the previous attack, Klitschko said.

#### Zelenskyy appeals to world leaders

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Russian forces fired "a significant number of ballistic and cruise missiles" along with "more than 300 attack drones."

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Andriy Sybiga said fresh strikes on energy infrastructure should be a top priority for world leaders.

"War criminal Putin continues to wage a genocidal war against women, children and elderly," Sy-

biga wrote on social media, referring to Russian President Vladimir Putin.

He said the latest attack underscored the urgency of international support.

"Putin's barbaric strike this morning is a wake up call to world leaders gathering in Davos: support for the Ukrainian people is urgent; there will be no peace in Europe without a lasting peace for Ukraine," Sybiga added.

Deputy Foreign Minister Mariana Betsa said the impact on the capital was severe. "Almost half of Kyiv is in blackout right now," she said.

A 50-year-old man reportedly died in the attack, according to Kyiv regional governor Mykola Kalashnyk. The strikes also damaged two fuel stations, he added.

An energy infrastructure facility also suffered damage in a Russian strike on Ukraine's Odesa in the south, the region's Governor, Oleh Kiper, said. **-DW**



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## INNER MONGOLIA

### Two killed, 84 injured in China factory blast



**BELJING:** Two people died, eight missing and 84 injured due to an explosion at a factory in north China's Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, local authorities said.

The explosion occurred at a plate plant of Baogang United Steel in western Baotou City, caused by the blast of a 650-cubic-meter saturated water and steam spherical tank. The incident resulted in a total of 84 injured people being treated in

hospitals, and five in serious condition, executive vice mayor of Baotou said. The government has suspended production of the accident-hit plant and initiated city-wide safety overhaul of industrial and trade enterprises.

Investigations into the blast's environmental impact are ongoing. Monitoring by environmental protection departments has so far detected no adverse effects on the surrounding air or soil quality. **-ONA**

# EU Commission chief says on 'cusp of historic trade deal with India'

The President of the European Commission said she will travel to India next weekend

**DAVOS:** European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen on Tuesday stated the European Union is close to finalising a Free Trade Agreement with India and noted that some describe it "the mother of all deals".

Addressing the World Economic Forum in Davos, she stressed Europe's intent to expand trade and international cooperation.

She also referred to the scale of



the proposed trade deal with India.

"There is still work to do. But we are on the cusp of a historic trade agreement. Some call it the mother of all deals. One that would create

a market of 2 billion people, accounting for almost a quarter of global GDP," von der Leyen said.

The President of the European Commission said she will travel to

India next weekend.

She said the visit is aimed at taking forward work on the proposed trade agreement and added that there is important work to be done to strengthen economic relations and deepen cooperation between Europe and India.

Placing the proposed India agreement in Europe's larger global trade approach, von der Leyen said Europe remains open to doing business with partners worldwide.

"Europe will always choose the world, and the world is ready to choose Europe," she said.

She said Europe's focus is on building a stable, well-regulated environment that encourages investment, boosts trade, and supports sustainable economic growth.

Along with trade and investment, von der Leyen identified energy as a major pillar of Europe's growth agenda, saying Europe intends to build an energy union that

can deliver homegrown, reliable and cheaper energy to support economic expansion. She added that Europe needs an "urgency mindset" to address energy challenges and ensure a sustainable future.

Speaking on wider strategic priorities, von der Leyen said Europe has achieved more in defence in the past year than in the decades earlier, with member states increasing investments to record levels.

She also noted that three leading European defence technology startups have reached unicorn status, reflecting Europe's growing innovation and strength in the defence sector.

President of the European Council Antonio Luis Santos da Costa and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen will be Chief Guests at India's 77th Republic Day celebrations.

The two EU leaders will undertake a three-day State Visit to In-

dia from January 25.

During the visit, the leaders will also co-chair the 16th India-EU Summit on January 27.

President Costa and President von der Leyen are scheduled to meet President Droupadi Murmu and will hold restricted as well as delegation-level talks with Prime Minister Modi.

An India-EU Business Forum is also expected to be organised on the sidelines of the India-EU Summit.

India and the European Union have been strategic partners since 2004 and the 15th India-EU Summit was held virtually on July 15, 2020.

The Ministry of External Affairs had said in a release that India-EU bilateral engagement has expanded and deepened across a wide range of areas, particularly after the historic visit of the EU College of Commissioners to India in February last year. **-ANI**

## JENIN GOVERNORATE

### Israeli forces arrest 10 Palestinians in West Bank

**OCCUPIED JERUSALEM:** The Israeli occupation forces (IOF) arrested on Tuesday 10 Palestinian civilians in Jenin governorate, north of the occupied West Bank.

Palestinian Prisoner's Society (PPS) said in a statement that the IOF arrested ten civilians in the town of Burqin, north of Jenin governorate, after having raided and searched their homes.

In a related context, the IOF stormed the towns of Beit 'Awwa and Deir Samit, west of Al-Khalil city, and seized several vehicles.

The cities, towns, and refugee camps of the occupied West Bank and Occupied Jerusalem (Al-Quds) are subjected to daily raids and incursions into villages and towns by the IOF and colonists, accompanied by confrontations, arrests, and the firing of live and rubber bullets and toxic tear gas canisters at Palestinian youth.

Israeli occupation forces demolished a Palestinian house in the southern area of the occupied West bank city of Hebron.

The head of the Birin village council, Farid Barqan, told WAFA that Israeli troops, who have



tightened their military control over the southern part of the city, demolished a 250-square-metre house in Khirbet al-Aida, owned by Karama Jaber. The 10 residents were forced to leave without being able to take their belongings.

For the second consecutive day, soldiers have continued to deploy large military reinforcements in the area for the second consec-

utive day. The escalation included the closure of most main and secondary roads, separating neighborhoods with earth mounds and concrete blocks, and carrying out widespread raids and searches of homes and shops.

Dozens of residents were also subjected to field interrogations, while significant damage was inflicted on the area's infrastructure

#### Gaza death toll surges to 71,551

The death toll from the Israeli ongoing aggression has risen to 71,551 Palestinians, with 171,372 reported wounded, since the beginning of the offensive on October 7, 2023, according to medical sources.

They affirmed that one new fatality was received at Gaza hospi-

tals over the past 24 hours, along with seven new injuries.

A number of victims remain trapped under rubble or lying in the streets, as ambulance and civil defense crews are still unable to reach them due to the massive destruction and the absence of supplies.

Since the ceasefire came into effect on October 11, the number of fatalities has increased to 466, with 1,294 injuries, while 713 bodies have been recovered from beneath the rubble.

#### Palestinian child injured

A Palestinian child was injured on Tuesday by a rubber-coated metal bullet during confrontations with Israeli forces in Qalandiya refugee camp, north of occupied Jerusalem.

The Palestinian Red Crescent Society (PRCS) said that its crews transported a 15-year-old boy with an eye injury to the hospital.

Israeli forces have continued their raids on Qalandiya camp and Kafr Aqab, firing tear gas and stun grenades. **-Agencies**

## INVASIVE PLANT SPECIES

### Texas warns of rising unsolicited seed mailings

**TEXAS:** Texas agricultural authorities issued new alerts on January 15 after hundreds of residents reported receiving unidentified seeds through the mail that they had not ordered, according to a report by The Epoch Times (TET).

During the first 15 days of the year alone, officials collected 126 bags of unsolicited seeds that appeared in mailboxes across Texas, the Texas Department of Agriculture said. The state had already logged more than 1,100 bags of such unsolicited seeds over the previous year.

"These packages are arriving faster and spreading wider than ever," Texas Agriculture Commissioner Sid Miller said in a January 15 statement. Officials fear that seeds delivered through the mail could be invasive plant species or could carry pests and diseases that threaten native crops and livestock. "They might seem harmless, but the risk is serious," Miller said. "A single invasive species, pest, or pathogen could severely damage Texas farms, ranches." **ANI**

REBUILDING GAZA STRIP

Germany cautiously thankful for US ‘Board of Peace’ invite

**BERLIN:** Germany late on Monday thanked US President Donald Trump for extending Berlin an invitation to take up a seat on his so-called “Board of Peace.”

German government spokesman Steffen Cornelius said: “We are thankful for this invitation. We share the aim of pursuing peace in the world. It is in Germany’s core interest to end the conflict in Gaza for good.” Originally intended as a mechanism for rebuilding the devastated Gaza Strip, Trump has since framed the body as engaged in bringing about “enduring peace” worldwide.

“The Board of Peace is an international organisation that seeks to promote stability, restore dependable and lawful governance, and secure enduring peace in areas affected or threatened by conflict,” the board’s charter reads.

Trump has now asked dozens of nations to join, saying that those who put up \$1 billion (€860 million) in the board’s first year will be allowed to remain a member beyond that time.

Among those invited by Trump — who appointed himself chairman of the proposed organization as well as dictating that he alone has the power to invite new members to it — are Russian President Vladimir Putin, Belarus President Alexander Lukashenko, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban and numerous other heads of state.

Germany, like other invited nations, took care to reiterate its faith in the United Nations as the ultimate international arbiter of peace when it comes to conflict resolution.

Trump, who recently announced that the US would withdraw from 66 international treaties and bodies — many of them tied to the UN — appears to see the new body as a potential replacement for the UN, urging invitees to have “the courage to depart from approaches and institutions that have too often failed.” — **DW**

# EU vows ‘unflinching’ response to Trump’s Greenland tariff

Plunging us into a downward spiral would only aid the very adversaries we are both so committed to keeping out of the strategic landscape. So our response will be unflinching, united and proportional, European Commission President said

**DAVOS:** European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen has told the World Economic Forum in Davos that Europe will give a strong response to US President Donald Trump’s threats to take over Greenland and impose new tariffs on those countries that oppose him.

“Plunging us into a downward spiral would only aid the very adversaries we are both so committed to keeping out of the strategic landscape. So our response will be unflinching, united and proportional,” von der Leyen said in a keynote speech.

She called the threatened tariffs a “mistake.”

“The proposed additional tariffs are a mistake, especially between long-standing allies,” von der Leyen said.

“The European Union and the



United States have agreed to a trade deal last July. And in politics as in business — a deal is a deal. And when friends shake hands, it must mean something,” she said.

At the same time, however, von der Leyen said the EU was prepared to help the US and other partners to maintain security in the Arctic, one of the main reasons cited by Trump as grounds for Washington to take over Greenland.

“We are working on a massive European investment surge in Greenland,” she said. “We will work with the United States and all partners on wider Arctic security. This is clearly in our shared interest.”

**‘There can be no going back,’ Trump says as he agrees to**

**Greenland meeting in Davos** US President Donald Trump said on Tuesday he had agreed to a meeting attended by “various parties” in Davos, Switzerland, to discuss his intention to take over Greenland.

“As I expressed to everyone, very plainly, Greenland is imperative for National and World Security. There can be no going back — On that, everyone agrees!” he added in a post on his Truth Social platform.

In a separate post, Trump showed an AI-generated image of himself holding a US flag next to a sign reading “Greenland — US territory est. 2026.” The image also features Vice President JD Vance and Secretary of State Marco Rubio.

Another AI-image shared by the

president shows world leaders at a meeting where he presents a map with the American flag covering the United States, Canada, Greenland and Venezuela.

His threats to take Greenland have gained more prominence since US forces captured Venezuela’s President Nicolas Maduro.

Trump has also vowed to annex Canada, frequently referring to the US’ neighbour as the 51st US state.

**Macron proposes G7 summit with Denmark, Russia in Paris**

In a “private message” to US President Donald Trump, which was made public by the US leader, French President Emmanuel Macron has proposed organising a G7 summit on Thursday in Paris, with Denmark, Ukraine, Syria and, on the sidelines, Russia among the invitees.

The authenticity of the message, which Trump posted on his Truth Social network, has been confirmed by Macron’s presidential entourage.

“I can organise a G7 meeting in Paris on Thursday afternoon after Davos,” Macron wrote, referring to the World Economic Forum in Switzerland where Trump is also expected to put in an appearance.

“I can invite the Ukrainians, the Danes, the Syrians and the

Russians on the sidelines” of the meeting, he added.

While Macron said France was in agreement with the US on flash-points such as Syria and Iran, he said “I don’t understand what you are doing” with regard to Trump’s plans to take over Greenland.

**US Treasury Secretary urges calm as Trump tariffs rattle Europe**

The US Treasury Secretary, Scott Bessent, has said US-Europe relations remain strong and urged allies to stay calm as new tariff threats from President Donald Trump fuel tensions over Greenland.

Speaking on Tuesday on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum in Davos, Bessent said the relationship with Europe “has never been closer” and dismissed talk of a trade war as overblown.

Trump announced tariffs on Saturday targeting imports from European allies that oppose US plans to take over Greenland.

European governments say the move would violate a trade deal struck with Trump last year and have scheduled an emergency EU summit in Brussels on Thursday to discuss possible countermeasures.

One option under consideration is a package of tariffs on €93 billion (\$108 billion) worth of US imports that could automatically take effect on February 6 after a six-month suspension.

Bessent said the dispute had only just emerged and insisted a solution would be found that safeguards national security on both sides of the Atlantic.

“It’s been 48 hours. As I said, sit back, relax,” he told reporters, adding he was confident leaders would avoid escalation.

Asked about the risk of a prolonged trade war, Bessent pushed back sharply.

“Why are we jumping there? Why are you taking it to the worst case? Calm down the hysteria. Take a deep breath,” he said.

— **DW**

FROM JANAKPUR AHEAD OF MARCH POLLS

## Nepal’s rapper-turned-mayor Balen Shah begins PM campaign

**JANAKPUR:** Nepal’s rapper-turned-mayor Balen Shah, who is vying for the post of Prime Minister after the March polls, on Monday started his election campaign from Janakpur.

The senior leader of the Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP), Balen (Balendra) Shah, was cheered by a sea of followers who chanted “Ab ki baar Balen Sarkar”, translated as “This time Balen Government.”

Addressing the gathering, the prime ministerial candidate from the RSP promised to strengthen federalism by empowering provincial structures.

“Isn’t Janakpur the (Madhesh) provincial capital? Then why do you need to go to Kathmandu? Why can’t all (the administrative) works be done here? We will make the province stronger. Kathmandu need not be visited; all the required works will be done here only. Kathmandu should not be a place to demand rights; it should be a place to visit Pashupati and Swayambhunath,” Balen said while speaking in Maithili.

Shah urged voters to support the RSP not on the basis of identity but competence.

“A Madhesi’s son is becoming the Prime Minister because the right person is coming into leadership, so vote in Ghanti (Bell). The right time has come for you to vote in the Ghanti to make a right choice, to choose the right government,” Shah called on the supporters.

He further said the RSP prioritises the protection of temples, ponds and land in Madhesh, urging voters to support the party for the development of both the region and the country.

“In the whole nation, a total of one million tourists arrive on an



annual basis. In Ayodhya alone, 10 crore tourists visit every year. Our Janaki Mata alone has that capacity to bring in one crore tourists on an annual basis,” the prime ministerial candidate said.

Balendra Shah, the former mayor of Kathmandu, who formally entered politics by resigning from Kathmandu Metropolitan City on Sunday, is set to file his nomination from Jhapa on Tuesday. Shah will be challenging former Nepali Prime Minister and Chairman of the CPN-UML (Communist Party of Nepal- Unified Marxist Leninist) KP Sharma Oli in his hometown.

The former rapper, who won the local election of 2022 from the Nepali capital, struck a deal on December 28 with the Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP), under which it was agreed that he would be the party’s prime ministerial candidate.

As per the seven-point agreement, RSP Chair Rabi Lamichhane will continue as the party’s central chairman, while Shah will be presented as the party’s parliamentary leader after the elections and its prime ministerial candidate. — **ANI**

JOINT STATEMENT

## India and UAE to explore possibility of establishing ‘Digital Embassies’

**NEW DELHI:** India and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) on Monday agreed to explore the possibility of establishing ‘Digital Embassies’ under mutually recognised sovereignty arrangements, according to a joint statement issued following the visit of UAE President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan.

On the concept of digital embassies, Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri said during a media briefing that the initiative involves creating a secure repository for data that a country considers strategically important and of national significance.

He noted that only a few countries worldwide have successfully implemented such a model, and both nations will establish a regulatory framework for the matter.

“It’s an interesting new concept. It relates to a country’s effort to establish a safe harbour for data it considers of national importance and strategic value. There are not many successful examples of this concept being executed in many places around the world, but there are a few. It is a new concept for us as well,” Misri said.

“We may have to work out a regulatory framework for getting into this, but it is an interesting area in which the UAE has expressed some interest, and we are willing



to work with them and see how we can set this up while, of course, respecting the fact that data has certain sovereignty-related issues attached to it. We will work through these issues,” he added.

According to the Data Security Council of India, a Digital Embassy or Data Embassy is an approach that ensures digital continuity for nation-states by extending a country’s cloud infrastructure through state-owned servers located outside its physical borders.

These embassies provide pro-

tection against cyber and physical threats while maintaining immunity from the host country’s local laws. Given current geopolitical developments, data embassies are expected to become increasingly important in shaping diplomatic relations between nations.

According to the Joint Statement, both sides also decided to strengthen cooperation in science, technology, and innovation, with a particular focus on artificial intelligence (AI) and emerging technologies.

The statement also highlighted collaboration to establish a supercomputing cluster in India and the potential for setting up data centres in the country.

“The two leaders decided to strengthen collaboration in science and technology and innovation, especially in the areas of artificial intelligence (AI) and emerging technologies. Welcoming the decision to collaborate on establishing a supercomputing cluster in India, they also agreed to explore cooperation in setting up data centres in India. The two leaders directed their teams to explore the possibility of establishing ‘Digital Embassies’ between the UAE and India, under mutually recognised sovereignty arrangements,” the statement read.

UAE President also expressed support for India’s upcoming AI Impact Summit, scheduled to be hosted in February 2026.

This comes following the official visit of the President of the UAE, Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, to India earlier in the day.

This was Sheikh Mohamed’s third official visit to India since assuming office as President of the United Arab Emirates, and his fifth in the past decade, reflecting the frequency and intensity of high-level engagement between New Delhi and Abu Dhabi. — **ANI**

COUNTRY’S SOUTH-CENTRAL REGION

## Chile wildfire death toll increases to 18

**SANTIAGO:** Chilean President Gabriel Boric said that the death toll from wildfires ravaging the country’s south-central region has reached 18 and is expected to rise further. “Today we have a confirmed number of 18 fatalities, but unfortunately we are certain that this figure will rise,” Boric told reporters in Concepcion in the Biobio region, about 500 km south of Santiago.

He said preliminary estimates indicate around 300 homes have been destroyed in Biobio alone, warning that the final number could exceed 1,000. Authorities imposed curfews starting Saturday evening in the municipalities of Penco, Nacimiento and Laja, while in Lirquen, one of the hardest-hit areas, a curfew had begun earlier and remains indefinite after fires affected about 80 percent

of the locality. According to the National Forestry Corporation, Chile currently has 14 active wildfires under red alert, with more than 24,000 hectares burned nationwide. The largest blaze is in Concepcion, which has affected over 10,600 hectares.

Boric has declared a state of catastrophe in the regions of Nuble and Biobio to address the emergency. — **Xinhua**



# Late crash dashes Al Zubair's podium hopes at Dubai 24H

Omani star displayed blistering pace in Al-Manar by Dragon Racing Ferrari before the accident ruined the team's chances

*Times News Service*

**MUSCAT:** Oman's Al Faisal Al Zubair came agonisingly close to a podium finish in the Michelin 24H Dubai at Dubai Autodrome, only for a late accident to halt the Al-Manar by Dragon Racing Ferrari's push for glory.

Al Zubair, alongside Zimbabwean Axcil Jeffries, American Dustin Blattner, and German Dennis Marschall, had shown blistering pace throughout the 24-hour endurance race.

The quartet led on multiple occasions and were holding fourth overall in their Ferrari 296 GT3 after 504 laps when Al Zubair was involved in a crash just over three



and a half hours from the chequered flag. The Omani was taken for protocol medical checks and later released. Despite the incident, he remained upbeat.

Speaking after the race, Al Zubair said: "It was a great race weekend and my first time racing the Ferrari here [in Dubai]. Our line-up was extremely strong, and we were in the top five at times.

“The race started near the back of the grid, and we quickly climbed into the top 15 in the first hour. We had a really strong pace. Unfortu-

nately, around 21 hours in, I hit the wall and suffered a minor fracture in the spine. Just a bit bruised up. This is part of motorsport - these things happen. I'm looking forward to recovery and feeling better soon."

The race itself had been a rollercoaster for the team. Marshall took the opening stint, starting with the early lead claimed by Team WRT's Kelvin van der Linde. After an initial drop to 16th, Marshall clawed back positions, reaching 12th by the end of the first hour. A masterful pit stop under

a Code 60 saw Blattner take the wheel and momentarily lead the field, with Herberth Motorsport's Max Moritz in the Porsche 911 GT3 R trailing in second.

Strategic stops and driver rotations kept the Al-Manar Ferrari in contention. After four hours, Al Zubair returned to the cockpit in 17th and quickly began climbing through the night. By the five-and-a-half-hour mark, he had moved up to sixth, briefly reaching third before a later pit stop dropped the team back to 14th.



Marshall resumed driving with just over 14 hours to go, holding 10th, while Jeffries and Al Zubair's night stints propelled the Ferrari back into the top four by the halfway point. With nine hours remaining, the team was still in strong contention, maintaining pace through daybreak.

Tragically, the late accident dashed the team's hopes, with Al-Manar classified 47th in the final results. The podium was completed by Team WRT BMW M4s in first and second, with the Win-

ward Racing Mercedes-AMG GT3 Evo finishing third.

Al-Manar by Dragon Racing had demonstrated its competitive form from the start. Friday morning free practice saw Al-Manar's Ferrari logged a 1min 58.777/sec lap over 48 laps, placing 15th of 34 GT3 entrants. In qualifying, the team improved steadily: 8th in Q1, 3rd in Q2, and 7th in Q3, combining for a strong starting position behind the Winward Racing Mercedes duo and the Saintéloc Racing Junior Team Audi R8.

OMAN INTERNATIONAL RALLY 2026

## Recently crowned Dakar champion Al Attiyah leads star-studded field

*Times News Service*

**MUSCAT:** Recently crowned Dakar Rally champion Nasser Saleh Al Attiyah will bring his winning momentum to Sohar this week as the Oman International Rally kicks off the 2026 FIA Middle East Rally Championship (MERC) on January 22.

The rally, which will conclude on January 24, will be held on the gravel tracks around Sohar.

The six-time Dakar champion, teamed with Spanish co-driver Candido Carrera, leads a competitive FIA entry of 17 crews from 11 countries, while 17 local teams will compete in the Oman National

Rally. This combined field reflects the sport's growing popularity in the region.

Crews began reconnaissance on Tuesday, tackling 13 special stages that cover 215.44km of competitive racing within a total route of 661.76km. Minor route revisions this year add fresh challenges, ensuring a true test of speed and skill.

The rally's new operational hub at the National University of Science and Technology will manage administration and media, while the Sohlar Entertainment Centre returns as the service park, a venue praised by teams last year.

Local hero and two-time winner Abdullah Al Rawahi wheels



out a new Škoda Fabia RS, and the national ranks feature a diverse lineup including Salim Al Touqi in a Mitsubishi Lancer Evolution VII, Mitsubishi's, a Subaru, seven Cam-Mavericks, a Kia Rio, and three Toyota Yaris cars.

Top Omani drivers to watch include Haitham Soomar, Hamood Al Touqi, Zakariya Al Aufi, Ghaith Al Qassmi, Faisal Al Rashdi, and Waheeb Al-Kharusi, among others. The ceremonial start is set for 15:15 on Thursday at the Sohar Entertainment Centre, with dry, dusty conditions and mid-20s°C temperatures forecast - perfect for a thrilling opening to the 2026 MERC season.

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# On 25 MY models, the Big Savings amount are being directly adjusted in the price of the vehicle whereas in 26MY the savings amount of R0 300 are adjusted in Cash Gift as a part of down payment. The Big Savings amount is in addition to the normal Cash Gift offer applicable on the models. \* Total applicable Service benefit will be from 3 Years / 30,000 Kms whichever is earlier. 30,000Kms / 3 years' Service, on all Models (except Tasman). The Service benefit applicable to EV vehicles is 60,000 kms / 4 years, whichever is earlier. \* 1st year comprehensive insurance is applicable on all 25MY available models in stock. On 26MY models, 1st year's insurance is applicable on all models (except Picanto, Pegar, Carnival, Sportage 2.0 RVC and Tasman). Registration available on all models except Tasman and EVs. All the above benefits are not applicable on Ministry, Bulk fleet, Corporate & RAC deals. Scheme Period: 23/11/2025 to 22/01/2026 Vehicles may also include some Dealer Installed Accessories. Pictures & Colours are indicative. For further details, please visit your nearest Kia showroom.

**OMAN CRUDE PRICE FALLS**  
The price of Oman oil has decreased, with prices for delivery by March 2026 reaching \$62.22, said Dubai Mercantile Exchange (DME). The DME statement said that the price of Oman oil fell by 8 cents from the price of Monday, which was which was \$62.30. -**ONA**

# MARKET

## BUSINESS & FINANCE



**MSX INDEX ENDS HIGHER**  
The MSX index closed at 6,246.39 points, up by 0.21% from previous close. The Sharia Index ended up by 0.95% at 578.85 points. Oman Fisheries, up 24.14%, was the top gainer while, Salalah Mills, down 4.76%, was the top loser.

# Omani firms eye Arab markets with GAFTA opportunities

The workshop titled ‘Promoting the Advantages Granted under the Framework of the Greater Arab Free Trade Area (GAFTA)’ sought to empower the private sector to leverage this agreement to expand exports, develop its regional commercial presence, stimulate inter-Arab investments, and enhance economic integration among Arab countries



Free Trade Area (GAFTA).”  
The workshop aimed to introduce the advantages and facilities offered by GAFTA to Omani companies. It sought to empower the private sector to leverage this agreement to expand exports, develop its regional commercial presence, stimulate inter-Arab investments, and enhance economic integration among Arab countries. Saleh Juma Al Balushi, Assistant Director General for Board Affairs at the OCCI, stated that the workshop comes within the Chamber's ongoing efforts to empower the Omani private sector and enhance its ability to benefit from regional economic and trade agreements. He noted that organizing this session reflects the Chamber's conviction in the importance of moving from theoretical knowledge to a practical and applied understanding of GAFTA's advantages.



ages. This contributes to enhancing the access of Omani products to Arab markets, benefiting from customs exemptions, and understanding the rules of origin and dispute settlement mechanisms, thereby supporting the competitiveness of national exports and regional trade exchange. He explained that this workshop is driven by the OCCI's strategic directions, which prioritise representing the interests of the private sector and equipping it with tools for growth and expansion. This is achieved by providing specialized knowledge platforms, building bridges of communication between business owners and relevant authorities, and contributing to addressing challenges facing local exporters. Through such events, the Chamber is keen to support economic diversification efforts, enhance Arab trade integration, and empower Omani companies. The workshop was held in the

presence of Sheikh Rashid Amer Al Muselhi, First Vice Chairman of the OCCI Board of Directors, and was attended by several business owners and representatives from the public and private sectors. The first working paper reviewed opportunities for entering Arab markets. The paper addressed the advantages granted under Arab trade agreements, the primary objectives of GAFTA, the region's most significant gains, exempted goods, and customs exemptions. It also detailed how to obtain the benefits provided under Arab agreements, compliance requirements for entering Arab markets, and agreements related to facilitating Arab trade exchange. The second working paper focused on Arab rules of origin. The paper reviewed the general provisions of Arab rules of origin, criteria for acquiring origin status, data collection mechanisms, and common errors that may lead to the rejection of exemptions. -**ONA**

### RESEARCH AND INNOVATION AUTHORITY



## Qualifiers to represent Oman at Geneva International Exhibition of Inventions announced

**MUSCAT:** The Research and Innovation Authority announced the Omani innovative projects qualified to represent the Sultanate of Oman at the Geneva International Exhibition of Inventions in its 51st edition. The announcement was made during a ceremony held yesterday at the German University of Technology in Muscat. The ceremony was held under the patronage of Dr. Saif Abdullah Al Haddabi, Chairman of the Research and Innovation Authority, in the presence of Dr. Hussein Suleiman Al Salmi, Vice-Dean for Financial and Administrative Affairs at the German University of Technology, along with a number of officials, academics, and innovators. This announcement comes within the framework of national efforts to enhance the research and innovation ecosystem, translating the objectives of Oman Vision 2040 aimed at building a knowledge-based economy, empowering national competencies, and supporting innovation as a main pillar for sustainable development. The ceremony featured a presentation of the distinguished in-

novative projects that passed the evaluation stages by a specialized judging committee. A total of 118 innovative projects were submitted, of which 20 projects qualified for the final stage. The results led to the selection of 4 projects to represent the Sultanate of Oman at the Geneva International Exhibition of Inventions, which will be hosted by the Swiss city of Geneva in this March. These projects are: the Doppler Blood Flow Sensor project by Hussein Ali Al Nu'amani, the 4S Sponge project by Maytha Said Al Hindasi, the Super Calc project by Abdulaziz Salim Al Ka'abi, and the Spray Tech project by Mohammed Al Murr Al Salmi. The Geneva International Exhibition of Inventions is a global platform showcasing over a thousand innovations from about 40 countries, covering diverse fields including engineering, energy, health, environment, technology, artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, transportation, and life sciences. It provides innovators with broad opportunities for learning, skill development, and building effective international relationships. -**ONA**

### MINISTRY OF COMMERCE

## Workshop discusses governance, mechanisms for designating measurement, calibration laboratories

**MUSCAT:** The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MOCIIP), in cooperation with the GCC Standardization Organization (GSO), organised a workshop on the designation of measurement and calibration laboratories. The event saw participation from relevant entities across the industrial, health, service, and regulatory sectors, as part of the Ministry's efforts to strengthen national partnerships and develop the metrological infrastructure in the Sultanate of Oman. Imad Khamis Al Shukaili, Director General of Standards and Metrology at the Ministry, emphasized that the workshop aims to highlight the responsibilities of relevant laboratories and the services they provide in disseminating International System of Units (SI). He noted that the session serves as a continuation of the achievements realised in 2025, during which 970 devices and equipment were calibrated at the



National Laboratory for Measurement and Calibration. Additionally, more than 2,300 scales and liquid fuel pumps were verified, generating a total revenue of OMR16,500. In his speech, Al Shukaili explained that the workshop represents a qualitative leap in developing national technical capabilities and investing available resources to serve economic development goals. He pointed out that these efforts enhance the competitiveness

of Omani products and services in regional and international markets, protect consumers, and ensure measurement quality according to the highest global standards. This, in turn, bolsters international community confidence in the national metrological infrastructure and solidifies Oman's presence on the global stage as an active partner in the international metrological system. The workshop discussed the governance and mechanisms for

designating measurement and calibration laboratories within the framework of International Mutual Recognition. This framework enables the Sultanate of Oman to participate effectively in the global metrological community and establishes its position as a leading country in this vital field. The session was held within the context of implementing the Law of Measurement and Calibration (17/2013) and activating the role of the National Centre for Measurement and Calibration - under the Directorate General of Standards and Metrology - in completing the International System of Units. These efforts contribute to building a reliable and internationally recognised national metrological infrastructure, reinforcing the Ministry's commitment to instilling the concepts of measurement and calibration and providing high-reliability services across various sectors. -**ONA**

### BOOSTED EXPECTATIONS

## Oil prices gain on upbeat China data



**SINGAPORE:** Oil prices rose during yesterday's trading, supported by Chinese economic data that boosted expectations of improved demand. Brent crude futures climbed 19 cents, or 0.3 percent, to \$64.13 a barrel, while US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude futures for February — which expire today, Tuesday — rose 25 cents, or 0.4 percent. The more actively traded WTI March contract edged up 0.08 cents, or 0.13 percent, to \$59.42 a barrel. **Gold hits record high** Gold traded near record highs

yesterday, as US President Donald Trump's threats to acquire Greenland soured global sentiment and sparked a rush into safe-haven assets. Spot gold hit a new record high of \$4,700.28 per ounce, while US gold futures for February delivery climbed 1.8% to \$4,676.80 per ounce. Spot silver fell 1.2% to \$93.53 an ounce, after hitting a record high of \$94.72 earlier in the session. In other precious metals, spot platinum fell 0.6% to \$2,359.45 per ounce, while palladium dropped 1.3% to \$1,817.44. -**ONA**

MARKET

MSX index ends higher

Oman Fisheries, up 24.14%, was the top gainer while, Salalah Mills, down 4.76%, was the top loser



**MUSCAT:** The MSX index closed at 6,246.39 points, up by 0.21% from previous close. The Sharia Index ended up by 0.95% at 578.85 points. Oman Fisheries, up 24.14%, was the top gainer while, Salalah Mills, down 4.76%, was the top loser. Shares of Sohar International Bank were the most active in terms of number of shares traded as well as in terms of turnover.

A total number of 5566 trades were executed during the day's trading session, generating turnover of RO 24.46 million, with more than 108.62 million shares changing hands.

Out of 70 traded securities, 42 advanced, 10 declined, and 18 remained unchanged. At the session close, domestic investors were net sellers for RO 887K while GCC & Arab investors were net buyers for RO 576K, followed by foreign investors for RO 311K worth of shares.

Financial Index closed at 10,768.17 points, up 1.13%. Prices of United Finance, Financial Ser-

vices, Muscat Finance, Takaful Oman, Oman & Emirates Investment were up by 9.21%, 8.82%, 8.33%, 5.95%, 3.70% respectively. Prices of Oman United Insurance, Oman Qatar Insurance, DIDIC, Bank Muscat were down by 2.06%, 1.08%, 0.77%, 0.28% respectively.

Industrial Index closed at 8,613.86 points, up 0.24%. Prices of Oman Fisheries, Dhofar Cattle Feed, Gulf International Chemicals, Al Anwar Ceramics, A'Saffa Foods were up by 24.14%, 9.92%, 4.00%, 3.63%, 1.61% respectively. Prices of Salalah Mills, Jazeera Steel Products, Oman Cables Industry were down by 4.76%, 2.25%, 2.22% respectively.

Services Index was up by 0.47% before closing at 2,535.77 points. Prices of Shell Oman Marketing, Abraj Energy, Al Jazeera Services, SMN Power Holding, Oman National Engineering were up by 3.82%, 1.97%, 1.56%, 1.40%, 1.33% respectively. Prices of Sombcorp Salalah were down by 0.46% respectively. — **United Securities**

MUSCAT STOCK EXCHANGE

| Trading Summary |            |        |                |    |      |       |             |  |  |
|-----------------|------------|--------|----------------|----|------|-------|-------------|--|--|
| Volume          | Turnover   | Trades | Market Cap     | Up | Down | Equal | Sec. Traded |  |  |
| 108,629,866     | 24,458,168 | 5,566  | 33,322,743,001 | 42 | 10   | 18    | 70          |  |  |

SHARE PRICE BULLETIN FOR TUESDAY, JANUARY 20

| ISIN           | SECURITY NAME                  | VOLUME     | TURNOVER   | TRADES | OPEN PRICE | HIGH  | LOW   | CLOSE PR | PREV. CLOSE | DIFF (PR) | DIFF % | LAST PR | LAST BID | LAST OFFER | PUR VALUE | MARKET CAP    |
|----------------|--------------------------------|------------|------------|--------|------------|-------|-------|----------|-------------|-----------|--------|---------|----------|------------|-----------|---------------|
| REGULAR MARKET |                                |            |            |        |            |       |       |          |             |           |        |         |          |            |           |               |
| OM0000002374   | UNITED FINANCE                 | 6,028,555  | 481,277    | 236    | 0.076      | 0.083 | 0.076 | 0.083    | 0.076       | 0.007     | 9.211  | 0.083   | 0.083    | 0.083      | 0.100     | 29,558,566    |
| OM0000002168   | AL ANWAR CERAMIC               | 1,036,878  | 204,638    | 57     | 0.195      | 0.200 | 0.195 | 0.200    | 0.193       | 0.007     | 3.627  | 0.200   | 0.199    | 0.200      | 0.100     | 44,000,000    |
| OM0000004768   | MADINA TAKAFUL                 | 5,311,985  | 684,286    | 212    | 0.128      | 0.132 | 0.127 | 0.133    | 0.004       | 3.252     | 0.127  | 0.127   | 0.127    | 0.127      | 0.100     | 22,225,000    |
| OM0000003125   | GLOBAL FINANCIAL INVESTMENT HO | 220,380    | 51,021     | 22     | 0.230      | 0.235 | 0.230 | 0.235    | 0.230       | 0.005     | 2.174  | 0.235   | 0.230    | 0.236      | 0.100     | 47,000,000    |
| OM0000008934   | ABRAJ ENERGY SERVICES          | 5,030,883  | 1,814,883  | 586    | 0.356      | 0.363 | 0.355 | 0.363    | 0.356       | 0.007     | 1.966  | 0.363   | 0.363    | 0.363      | 0.100     | 279,582,600   |
| OM0000002440   | AL SHARQIYA INVESTMENT HO      | 1,143,201  | 128,011    | 67     | 0.111      | 0.114 | 0.111 | 0.112    | 0.110       | 0.002     | 1.818  | 0.112   | 0.112    | 0.113      | 0.100     | 10,080,000    |
| OM0000002804   | ASAFFA FOODS                   | 66,485     | 41,607     | 11     | 0.625      | 0.650 | 0.625 | 0.650    | 0.620       | 0.010     | 1.613  | 0.650   | 0.600    | 0.650      | 0.100     | 75,600,000    |
| OM0000002226   | ALJAZEERA SERVICES             | 45,100     | 8,803      | 9      | 0.193      | 0.196 | 0.193 | 0.195    | 0.192       | 0.003     | 1.563  | 0.195   | 0.195    | 0.195      | 0.100     | 8,354,383     |
| OM0000003968   | OREDOO                         | 695,989    | 205,393    | 45     | 0.286      | 0.296 | 0.294 | 0.294    | 0.292       | 0.002     | 0.685  | 0.294   | 0.294    | 0.294      | 0.100     | 191,377,504   |
| OM0000004853   | AL SUWADI POWER                | 94,000     | 15,598     | 14     | 0.165      | 0.168 | 0.165 | 0.168    | 0.165       | 0.003     | 0.908  | 0.168   | 0.166    | 0.166      | 0.100     | 118,591,453   |
| OM0000004925   | ALBATHNAH POWER                | 3,000      | 500        | 4      | 0.165      | 0.168 | 0.165 | 0.168    | 0.167       | 0.001     | 0.599  | 0.168   | 0.167    | 0.168      | 0.100     | 113,381,088   |
| OM0000001533   | OMINVEST                       | 97,514     | 35,090     | 13     | 0.359      | 0.360 | 0.359 | 0.360    | 0.358       | 0.002     | 0.599  | 0.360   | 0.350    | 0.360      | 0.100     | 336,856,175   |
| OM0000009072   | QG GAS NETWORKS                | 6,754,498  | 1,393,985  | 629    | 0.205      | 0.208 | 0.205 | 0.206    | 0.205       | 0.001     | 0.488  | 0.206   | 0.205    | 0.209      | 0.100     | 892,108,528   |
| OM0000003661   | VOLTAMP ENERGY                 | 53,235     | 74,873     | 34     | 1.397      | 1.440 | 1.397 | 1.400    | 1.396       | 0.004     | 0.287  | 1.400   | 1.270    | 1.405      | 0.100     | 131,058,427   |
| OM0000003026   | OMAN TELECOM                   | 2,417,157  | 2,655,991  | 73     | 1.098      | 1.100 | 1.098 | 1.100    | 1.099       | 0.001     | 0.091  | 1.100   | 1.100    | 1.100      | 0.100     | 825,000,000   |
| OM0000001483   | NATIONAL BANK OMAN             | 101,248    | 40,198     | 41     | 0.398      | 0.398 | 0.397 | 0.397    | 0.397       | 0.000     | 0.000  | 0.397   | 0.397    | 0.398      | 0.100     | 645,500,703   |
| OM0000003224   | RENAISSANCE SERVICES           | 20,000     | 4,500      | 5      | 0.325      | 0.325 | 0.325 | 0.325    | 0.325       | 0.000     | 0.000  | 0.325   | 0.322    | 0.325      | 0.100     | 76,833,250    |
| OM0000003389   | SCHAH INTERNATIONAL BANK       | 27,973,695 | 4,601,972  | 512    | 0.164      | 0.166 | 0.163 | 0.164    | 0.164       | 0.000     | 0.000  | 0.164   | 0.164    | 0.164      | 0.100     | 1,085,228,388 |
| OM0000004420   | BANK NIZWA                     | 204,172    | 24,288     | 20     | 0.119      | 0.119 | 0.118 | 0.119    | 0.119       | 0.000     | 0.000  | 0.119   | 0.118    | 0.119      | 0.100     | 266,197,411   |
| OM0000002796   | BANK MUSCAT                    | 8,161,190  | 2,906,518  | 456    | 0.356      | 0.358 | 0.354 | 0.355    | 0.356       | -0.001    | -0.281 | 0.355   | 0.355    | 0.357      | 0.100     | 2,664,770,957 |
| OM0000001087   | OMAN UNITED INSURANCE          | 15,011     | 5,697      | 6      | 0.388      | 0.388 | 0.350 | 0.380    | 0.388       | -0.008    | -2.062 | 0.380   | 0.380    | 0.380      | 0.100     | 38,000,000    |
| OM0000001707   | OMAN CABLES INDUSTRY           | 2,000      | 5,280      | 1      | 2.640      | 2.640 | 2.640 | 2.640    | 2.700       | -0.060    | -2.222 | 2.640   | 2.500    | 2.700      | 0.100     | 236,808,000   |
| OM0000002176   | JAZEERA STEEL PRODUCTS         | 38,964     | 33,876     | 6      | 0.870      | 0.870 | 0.869 | 0.870    | 0.880       | -0.020    | -2.247 | 0.870   | 0.810    | 0.870      | 0.100     | 108,661,225   |
| Total          | 23                             | 65,515,140 | 15,420,295 | 3,059  |            |       |       |          |             |           |        |         |          |            |           |               |

Parallel Market

|              |                                 |            |            |           |       |       |       |       |       |        |        |       |       |       |       |               |
|--------------|---------------------------------|------------|------------|-----------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|--------|--------|-------|-------|-------|-------|---------------|
| OM0000001301 | DHOFAR FOODS AND INVESTMENT     | 12,200     | 1,623      | 4         | 0.133 | 0.133 | 0.133 | 0.133 | 0.121 | 0.012  | 9.917  | 0.133 | 0.109 | 0.133 | 0.100 | 26,291,031    |
| OM0000001384 | FINANCIAL SERVICES              | 217,721    | 15,473     | 31        | 0.068 | 0.074 | 0.068 | 0.074 | 0.068 | 0.006  | 8.824  | 0.074 | 0.074 | 0.074 | 0.073 | 1,480,000     |
| OM0000001590 | MUSCAT FINANCE                  | 2,319,672  | 146,478    | 102       | 0.061 | 0.065 | 0.060 | 0.065 | 0.060 | 0.005  | 8.333  | 0.065 | 0.064 | 0.065 | 0.100 | 19,964,511    |
| OM0000004776 | TAKAFUL OMAN                    | 1,548,256  | 136,947    | 82        | 0.089 | 0.090 | 0.087 | 0.089 | 0.084 | 0.005  | 5.952  | 0.089 | 0.087 | 0.089 | 0.100 | 22,250,000    |
| OM0000003028 | GULF INTERNATIONAL CHEMICALS    | 1,174,345  | 90,982     | 100       | 0.078 | 0.078 | 0.076 | 0.078 | 0.075 | 0.003  | 4.000  | 0.078 | 0.077 | 0.078 | 0.100 | 1,638,000     |
| OM0000008447 | OMAN REIT FUND                  | 205,778    | 21,540     | 37        | 0.102 | 0.108 | 0.102 | 0.105 | 0.101 | 0.004  | 3.960  | 0.105 | 0.104 | 0.106 | 0.100 | 68,101,983    |
| OM0000002275 | SHELL OMAN MARKETING            | 127        | 100        | 1         | 0.789 | 0.789 | 0.789 | 0.789 | 0.780 | 0.029  | 3.816  | 0.789 | 0.760 | 0.830 | 0.100 | 74,965,000    |
| OM0000001681 | OMAN EMIRATES HO                | 574,192    | 64,848     | 51        | 0.108 | 0.114 | 0.108 | 0.112 | 0.108 | 0.004  | 3.704  | 0.110 | 0.110 | 0.110 | 0.100 | 13,650,000    |
| OM0000002200 | AHLI BANK                       | 2,251      | 414        | 6         | 0.188 | 0.188 | 0.183 | 0.188 | 0.183 | 0.005  | 2.732  | 0.188 | 0.180 | 0.188 | 0.100 | 508,878,461   |
| OM0000001962 | AL MADINA INVESTMENT HOLDING    | 68,700     | 2,789      | 11        | 0.040 | 0.041 | 0.040 | 0.041 | 0.040 | 0.001  | 2.500  | 0.041 | 0.041 | 0.041 | 0.100 | 3,485,000     |
| OM0000003281 | TAAGEER FINANCE                 | 206,822    | 26,614     | 12        | 0.129 | 0.129 | 0.128 | 0.129 | 0.127 | 0.002  | 1.575  | 0.129 | 0.128 | 0.129 | 0.100 | 36,019,794    |
| OM0000004248 | SMN POWER HOLDING               | 6,860      | 1,498      | 6         | 0.220 | 0.220 | 0.216 | 0.218 | 0.215 | 0.003  | 1.395  | 0.218 | 0.218 | 0.236 | 0.100 | 43,520,561    |
| OM0000001152 | OMAN NATIONAL ENGG & INVESTMENT | 44,754     | 6,743      | 7         | 0.150 | 0.152 | 0.150 | 0.152 | 0.150 | 0.002  | 1.333  | 0.152 | 0.147 | 0.152 | 0.100 | 22,800,000    |
| OM0000002267 | GULF MUSHROOM PRODUCTS          | 28,067     | 10,603     | 11        | 0.380 | 0.380 | 0.376 | 0.380 | 0.375 | 0.005  | 1.333  | 0.380 | 0.372 | 0.380 | 0.100 | 17,391,003    |
| OM0000001749 | OMAN CEMENT                     | 200        | 99         | 1         | 0.497 | 0.497 | 0.497 | 0.497 | 0.491 | 0.006  | 1.222  | 0.497 | 0.480 | 0.495 | 0.100 | 164,443,737   |
| OM0000002648 | NATIONAL FINANCE                | 41,000     | 7,227      | 6         | 0.175 | 0.177 | 0.175 | 0.177 | 0.175 | 0.002  | 1.143  | 0.177 | 0.175 | 0.177 | 0.100 | 107,638,397   |
| OM0000005260 | OMAN ARAB BANK                  | 19,004     | 3,421      | 4         | 0.180 | 0.180 | 0.180 | 0.180 | 0.178 | 0.002  | 1.124  | 0.180 | 0.176 | 0.180 | 0.100 | 360,493,800   |
| OM0000001160 | NATIONAL GAS                    | 206,373    | 19,000     | 27        | 0.092 | 0.093 | 0.092 | 0.092 | 0.091 | 0.001  | 1.099  | 0.092 | 0.092 | 0.095 | 0.100 | 7,820,000     |
| OM0000001772 | ALANWAR INVESTMENT              | 283,241    | 37,451     | 21        | 0.129 | 0.135 | 0.129 | 0.132 | 0.131 | 0.001  | 0.763  | 0.132 | 0.132 | 0.132 | 0.100 | 39,408,987    |
| OM0000002549 | BANK DHOFAR                     | 3,779,626  | 665,080    | 385       | 0.177 | 0.178 | 0.175 | 0.178 | 0.177 | 0.001  | 0.565  | 0.178 | 0.176 | 0.178 | 0.100 | 541,084,139   |
| OM0000001020 | ASTAD SHIPPING                  | 10,718,088 | 2,099,444  | 544       | 0.196 | 0.197 | 0.195 | 0.195 | 0.194 | 0.001  | 0.515  | 0.195 | 0.193 | 0.195 | 0.000 | 1,015,705,133 |
| OM0000003000 | AL MAHA PETROLEUM PRODS MARKTG  | 30,170     | 32,775     | 14        | 0.085 | 0.100 | 0.075 | 0.105 | 0.070 | 0.005  | 0.467  | 0.075 | 0.076 | 0.075 | 0.100 | 74,175,000    |
| OM0000009759 | QG EXPLORATION AND PRODUCTION   | 9,492,447  | 3,679,395  | 204       | 0.387 | 0.388 | 0.386 | 0.388 | 0.387 | 0.001  | 0.258  | 0.388 | 0.388 | 0.388 | 0.100 | 825,000,000   |
| OM0000002572 | OMAN OIL MARKETING              | 100        | 88         | 1         | 0.880 | 0.880 | 0.880 | 0.880 | 0.879 | 0.001  | 0.114  | 0.880 | 0.843 | 0.878 | 0.100 | 53,922,000    |
| OM0000001400 | OMAN FLOUR MILLS                | 3,150      | 1,512      | 1         | 0.480 | 0.480 | 0.480 | 0.480 | 0.480 | 0.000  | 0.000  | 0.480 | 0.480 | 0.505 | 0.100 | 79,380,000    |
| OM0000001606 | MUSCAT INSURANCE                | 904        | 213        | 1         | 0.700 | 0.700 | 0.700 | 0.700 | 0.700 | 0.000  | 0.000  | 0.700 | 0.690 | 0.700 | 1.000 | 771,532       |
| OM0000002077 | AL OMANIYA FINANCIAL SERVICES   | 10,000     | 1,500      | 1         | 0.150 | 0.150 | 0.150 | 0.150 | 0.150 | 0.000  | 0.000  | 0.150 | 0.000 | 0.150 | 0.100 | 47,312,550    |
| OM0000003141 | BANKA WATER AND POWER           | 6,676      | 1,166      | 3         | 0.175 | 0.175 | 0.173 | 0.173 | 0.173 | 0.000  | 0.000  | 0.174 | 0.174 | 0.174 | 0.100 | 27,680,000    |
| OM0000005963 | PHOENIX POWER                   | 168,357    | 28,396     | 20        | 0.168 | 0.170 | 0.168 | 0.168 | 0.168 | 0.000  | 0.000  | 0.168 | 0.168 | 0.168 | 0.100 | 245,717,045   |
| OM0000007407 | DHOFAR GENERATING               | 108,000    | 9,275      | 8         | 0.085 | 0.086 | 0.085 | 0.085 | 0.085 | 0.000  | 0.000  | 0.085 | 0.080 | 0.086 | 0.100 | 18,890,400    |
| OM0000007811 | MUSANDAM POWER                  | 3,000      | 945        | 1         | 0.315 | 0.315 | 0.315 | 0.315 | 0.315 | 0.000  | 0.000  | 0.315 | 0.286 | 0.315 | 0.100 | 22,172,850    |
| OM0000009569 | JABAL REIF                      | 59,198     | 5,979      | 5         | 0.101 | 0.101 | 0.101 | 0.101 | 0.101 | 0.000  | 0.000  | 0.101 | 0.100 | 0.110 | 0.100 | 17,574,000    |
| OM0000009908 | QCB BASE INDUSTRIES (SF2)       | 9,202,858  | 1,731,343  | 598       | 0.189 | 0.189 | 0.187 | 0.188 | 0.188 | 0.000  | 0.000  | 0.188 | 0.188 | 0.193 | 0.040 | 850,384,280   |
| OM0000004735 | SEBMCORP SALALAH                | 25,200     | 5,454      | 8         | 0.217 | 0.217 | 0.216 | 0.216 | 0.217 | -0.001 | -0.461 | 0.216 | 0.200 | 0.217 | 0.100 | 206,187,541   |
| OM0000001509 | DHOFAR INTL DEV & INVESTMENT    | 1,400      | 361        | 1         | 0.258 | 0.258 | 0.258 | 0.258 | 0.260 | -0.002 | -0.769 | 0.258 | 0.259 | 0.285 | 0.100 | 127,982,480   |
| OM0000008868 | THE PEARL REEF                  | 154,800    | 29,205     | 13        | 0.191 | 0.191 | 0.188 | 0.188 | 0.190 | -0.002 | -1.053 | 0.188 | 0.189 | 0.190 | 0.100 | 111,190,133   |
| OM0000008979 | OMAN QATAR INSURANCE            | 4,400      | 813        | 2         | 0.186 | 0.186 | 0.184 | 0.184 | 0.186 | -0.002 | -1.075 | 0.184 | 0.184 | 0.200 | 0.100 | 29,664,211    |
| OM0000007084 | MUSCAT CITY DESALINATION        | 219,128    | 18,758     | 25        | 0.062 | 0.062 | 0.060 | 0.061 | 0.062 | -0.001 | -1.087 | 0.061 | 0.060 | 0.091 | 0.100 | 14,155,088    |
| OM0000001889 | SALALAH MILLS                   | 10,229     | 4,312      | 3         | 0.422 | 0.422 | 0.420 | 0.420 | 0.420 | -0.020 | -4.762 | 0.420 | 0.400 | 0.424 | 0.100 | 24,985,220    |
| Total        |                                 | 39         | 40,957,692 | 8,910,853 | 2,358 |       |       |       |       |        |        |       |       |       |       |               |



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KCNA REPORT



## North Korea’s Kim fires vice premier

**PYONGYANG:** North Korea’s Kim Jong Un announced the sacking of a vice premier during a speech in which the top leader called out “irresponsible, rude and incompetent leading officials,” the state-run Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) reported on Tuesday.

Vice Premier Yang Sung Ho — who oversaw the ostracised nation’s machine-building industry — was booted out “on the spot” for causing “unnecessary man-made confusion,” Kim said in an address on Monday to mark the completion of a first-stage modernisation project at the north-east Ryongsong Machine Complex.

“Please, Comrade Vice Premier, resign by yourself when you can do it on your own before it is too late,” Kim reportedly said.

During a tour of the new machine complex, Kim said that the project had suffered “not a small amount of economic loss” because of incompetent cadres.

He railed against officials who for “too long been accustomed to defeatism, irresponsibility and passiveness.”

The North Korean leader said he had censured Yang during a party meeting and watched him closely, KCNA reported.

Yang was “unfit to be entrusted with heavy duties,” the agency quoted Kim as saying.

“Put simply, it was like hitching a cart to a goat — an accidental mistake in our cadre appointment process,” Kim said.

“After all, it is an ox that pulls a cart, not a goat.”

### North Korea’s economic woes

North Korea — one of the poorest countries in the world — took a major economic hit during the coronavirus pandemic.

In his attempts to address the economy, Kim has at times publicly scolded or dismissed his senior officials, blaming them for policy fiascos.

According to South Korea’s central bank, North Korea’s economy grew 3.7 % in 2024.

However, analysts say that it would be difficult for Pyongyang to see rapid economic growth, because the country’s scarce resources are earmarked for weapons programs, a highly centralized economy and long-standing international sanctions.

In the coming weeks, North Korea is set to hold the first congress of its ruling party in five years.

Economic policy is expected to be high on the docket, along with defence and military planning.

Meanwhile on Tuesday, South Korean President Lee Jae Myung said that there seemed to be a loophole in Seoul’s monitoring system to detect drones operated by civilians flying across the border into North Korea.

Lee cautioned that such incidents could fan tensions between the two Koreas and were “akin to starting a war.”

“It should not happen for a civilian to send a drone to North Korea for an illegal purpose,” Lee said at a cabinet meeting which was televised. — **dw**

# Northern lights dazzle US and Europe amid intense solar storm

A geomagnetic storm is a major disturbance in Earth’s magnetic field due to a solar storm. Monday night’s storm was “very rare,” US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration said



**TEXAS:** An intense geomagnetic storm triggered the possibility of northern lights being sighted across Canada and the northern half of the United States on Monday night, along with parts of Europe, including Germany, Switzerland and Ukraine.

The solar storm — which is the largest in over two decades — is the outcome of a mass eruption of charged particles that left the sun on Sunday and are forecasted to arrive Monday and Tuesday, according to the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

A geomagnetic storm is a major disturbance in Earth’s magnetic field due to a solar storm. Monday night’s storm was “very rare,” NOAA said.

The geostorm acquired G4 conditions at 7:38 p.m. GMT (1938 GMT) on Monday, putting it in the second-highest category, the agency added.

Spaceweather, an astronomy platform, reported that the ejection cloud covered the distance from the sun to the Earth in nearly 25 hours. Usually, a similar cloud would take three to four days to

make the journey.

Shawn Dahl, a service coordinator at NOAA’s Space Weather Prediction Centre, said that the last solar radiation storm of this magnitude hit the Earth in 2003.

Solar radiation storms can risk affecting objects in space and satellite operations. The phenomenon could also cause issues with voltage.

### Where were the Northern lights visible?

On Monday Night, the northern lights — also known as aurora borealis — graced the skies in several parts of Germany, the German Weather Service (DWD) said.

The storm’s strength led to the hues of Auroras being visible as far south as the Alps.

Meanwhile, in the US, the NOAA said those in northern and central states of the continental US “can look for the aurora if at night and should weather conditions permit.”

The green, red and purple hues of the rare lights could also be visible as far south as Alabama to northern California, the agency added. — **dw**

WHAT’S AT STAKE

## Africa’s key elections to watch in 2026

**PRETORIA:** As several African countries head to the polls in 2026, election outcomes will directly shape leadership, policy priorities, and democratic credibility at home, while also influencing regional alliances and global security cooperation.

DW takes a look at key votes scheduled across Africa in 2026 and what’s at stake.

### January: Benin — tensions after a foiled coup

Parliamentary elections took place on January 11 in Benin against the uneasy backdrop of a coup d’etat, which was foiled just five weeks prior to the vote.

With military juntas also being at the helm in two of Benin’s immediate neighbors to the north, Burkina Faso and Niger, little to no change is expected in the composition of the 109 seats in the National Assembly after pro-government parties won nearly all of them.

Presidential elections are scheduled for April 12.

### January: Uganda — contested continuity

President Yoweri Museveni managed to secure a seventh term in office, with the official result claiming that the octogenarian leader clinched over 71% of the vote in Uganda. His main rival, Bobi Wine, received about 24.7% and rejected the outcome as fraudulent. Museveni will now be in charge of the country until 2031.

While election observers reported no evidence of any notable interference in the actual vote, the country’s long history of intimidation, arrests and abductions of opposition voices has long instilled a sense of “fear and eroded public trust in the electoral process,” as observed by former Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan, who represented a delegation of election observers from the African Union (AU).

Reports of significant repression against opposition candidate Bob Wine amid an internet blackout during the ballot paint a rather troubled picture for the future, raising questions, once more,



about the legitimacy of the vote.

### March: Republic of the Congo — incumbent advantage

The Republic of Congo will hold presidential elections on March 22, with longtime incumbent leader Denis Sassou Nguesso expected to hold onto power.

Nguesso, who has been in power since 1997, will face candidates from several opposition groups. However, the US-based think tank Freedom House says that dissident groups face severe repression in the country, giving the nation a remarkably low performance score on its overall political rights and democratic principles.

### April: Djibouti — stability amid strategic stakes around the Red Sea

Presidential elections are due to be held by April 2026 in Djibouti, with little change expected in the country located in the Horn of Africa.

The country’s 78-year-old incumbent President Ismail Omar Guelleh is running for a sixth term.

The country’s political stability is closely watched by many Western and Asian powers, due to their strategic military bases and geopolitical location near the Red Sea.

### April & October: Cape Verde — democratic role model

In April, parliamentary elections are expected to be held in Cape

Verde, followed by presidential elections in October 2026.

The small nation consisting of ten volcanic islands in the Atlantic is known for its strong democratic leadership and is ranked the most democratic nation in Africa and scores higher than many countries worldwide.

### June: Ethiopia — fragile election environment

On June 1, Ethiopians will go to the polls for the first time since the end of the Tigray war between the Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF) and the Ethiopian National Defence Force (ENDF) in late 2022.

Ethiopia remains challenged by conflict and tensions, particularly in the Amhara and Oromia regions, complicating efforts to hold credible and inclusive elections.

### August: Zambia — reforms and continuity?

On August 12, Zambia will elect a new president and legislature.

Electoral reforms introduced last year expanded the National Assembly and incorporated elements of proportional representation to enhance pluralism.

Incumbent President Hakainde Hichilema is seeking a second term, though observers and critics continue to debate aspects of democratic practice under his leadership.

### November: South Africa — local ballot as national barometer

South Africa’s municipal elections in November 2026 will gauge public sentiment on the government of national unity (GNU) under President Cyril Ramaphosa.

The elections would be the first local polls since the formation of the multi-party coalition government in 2024.

### December: The Gambia — presidential contest

The Gambia is due to hold its presidential elections on December 5, with incumbent President Adama Barrow seeking a third term.

Barrow faces widespread disapproval rates nationwide, but opposition fragmentation and growing voter disillusionment are likely to work to the incumbent leader’s advantage at the polls. Parliamentary elections are due to follow next year.

### December: South Sudan — will it pull off its first general election?

With a history of repeatedly deferred elections, it is uncertain whether South Sudan will hold its first-ever general elections, which are scheduled for December 22.

The world’s youngest is facing some of the worst economic crises since its independence in 2011, as the ongoing civil war to its north in Sudan continues to block off major revenue streams, such as the full operation of its oil pipelines.

The treason trial of former Vice President and opposition figure Riek Machar has further put a strain on the country’s fragile peace deal, with Machar’s supporters labelling the case “politically motivated.”

### Somaliland — elections amid changing status

The autonomous region of Somaliland is also due to hold parliamentary and municipal elections in 2026.

The territory has recently made headlines after being recognised as an independent state by Israel last month, eliciting strong reactions throughout the region and beyond. — **dw**

NEWS SOUTH WALES

## Australia hit by 4 shark attacks in two days

**SYDNEY:** Beaches in Sydney, Australia, remained closed indefinitely on Tuesday after four shark attacks were reported in the state of News South Wales over a 48-hour period.

A surfer suffered minor leg injuries after a shark attack Tuesday morning on the NSW coast, several hundred kilometres north of Sydney.

In a separate attack on Monday evening, another surfer suffered serious injuries and went into cardiac arrest at Manly Beach in Sydney.

Earlier, a teenager was sent to intensive care following a shark attack inside Sydney Harbour on Sunday.

The sharks involved haven’t yet been identified, but experts point to bull sharks as likely behind the attacks

### What do we know about the latest shark attack in NSW?

In the latest attack on Tuesday morning, a surfer was knocked off his board by a shark in the state of New South Wales in Australia’s east.

The surfer was “knocked off his board, his board has been bitten, there were multiple sharks in the water according to reports from other surfers in the water,” Steven Pearce, the head of Surf Live Saving NSW, the peak body for water safety in the state, told Sydney’s 2GB radio.

The attack took place at Point Plomer in Limeburners Creek National Park, about 450 kilometres (280 miles) north of Sydney. Point Plomer was “known for a bit of shark activity,” Pearce added.

The man was taken to hospital “with minor injuries just to his leg,” Pearce said. “I believe it’s just grazes or minor cuts, so he’s extremely fortunate.”

This is the fourth shark attack on the NSW coast in 48 hours.

On Monday evening local time, a 27-year-old man suffered serious leg injuries after being bitten by a shark at North Steyne Beach in Manly in Sydney’s Northern Beaches.



The surfer was pulled from the water by members of the public who commenced first aid before the arrival of emergency services, police said in a statement.

One eyewitness said another surfer had kept the man alive using his surfboard’s leg rope as a makeshift tourniquet to stem the bleeding.

“He was breathing, but he was unconscious, and we just... tried to keep him awake, as well as all the other people around us. Everyone was involved,” the eyewitness told Australian broadcaster ABC.

The surfer was suffering cardiac arrest and lost a significant amount of blood by the time paramedics arrived, NSW Ambulance Christie Marks said on Tuesday.

“The patient received 13 units of blood on the way to hospital,” she said.

Local authorities closed a 30-kilometre stretch of coastline in Sydney on Tuesday and Wednesday following the Monday evening attack.

It’s thought a bull shark was responsible for that attack.

### Young surfer has lucky escape after shark bites board

Earlier on Monday, an 11-year-old boy escaped injury after a shark repeatedly bit his surf board off Dee Why beach, which is near Manly.

Pictures published by the Manly Observer show a chunk of about 15 centimetres (6 inches missing from the board. Several small bites are also visible on the board.

He walked away from the encounter on Monday morning unharmed, Surf Live Saving NSW said. — **dw**



LIFESTYLE

# ARE MOSQUITOES THE MOST DANGEROUS INSECTS IN THE WORLD?

Malaria, dengue, Zika virus and West Nile fever are all diseases that can be spread by mosquitoes. Hundreds of thousands of people die from such infections every year.



It all started one day in June 2007, with a sudden fever and severe vomiting, said David Hancock. He should have gone to hospital, immediately. But he didn't — he thought: If this is a common infection, I'll get over it.

**Then he realised it wasn't a common infection.**

But it still took 10 days for doctors to make a reliable diagnosis. During these 10 days the then 49-year-old fell into a coma and suffered heart failure — multiple times. His lungs filled with fluid, and his brain became inflamed.

"I was on the other side, with one foot in the other world, so to speak," said David of the experience, when we spoke in 2025.

David had contracted West Nile virus from a mosquito bite on his very own doorstep in Glendale, a city near Phoenix, in the US state of Arizona.

**A perfect pair: Mosquitoes and West Nile fever**

Unlike malaria, dengue, yellow fever or the Zika virus, West Nile virus (WNV) is not transmitted by invasive mosquitoes that have traveled north from the Tropics. WNV is mainly transmitted by native mosquitoes of the genus Culex.

But WNV does originate from the Tropics. It was first detected in 1937 in the West Nile region of northern Uganda and named after that place where it was found.

Migratory birds then brought WNV to Europe and the US, where it was first recorded in 1999. Today, it is the main cause of mosquito-borne diseases in the US.

Tropical WNV is transmitted by Culex pipiens, a common mosquito. It is a European and North American native and a particularly good "vector" for virus.

If, for example, a mosquito bites a bird that is infected with WNV, and the mosquito gets infected itself, the virus will replicate in the mosquito, and the mosquito will then pass on the virus to another animal when it takes a blood meal. That can be another bird or a horse. Or a human, as it was in David's case.

WNV infection can go unnoticed — it is an asymptomatic infection — but an average of 1,300 people in the USA fall seriously ill with WNV every year. And 130 of them die.

An electron microscopic image of West Nile virus looks like a cluster of yellow-golden balls against a purple background.

**Irony of David's fate: His brother Bob is a mosquito researcher**

In addition to fever and vomiting, David eventually became unable to swallow. Finally, his wife, Teri, resolved to take him to hospital. Big mistake.

"What we should have done is call an ambulance and have them take me, so I would have moved to the head of the triage line, but I went to the emergency room, where I waited hours and hours and hours to be admitted, and it almost cost me my life," said David.

At some point, Teri went home to feed their dog. When she returned to the hospital, she learned that David's heart had stopped twice, and that he was now on a ventilator in intensive care.

David's fever was so high that the temperature in the room was chilling. His doctors expected him to die.

So, Teri got the whole family together: her par-

ents, David's parents, and his brother Bob.

Bob Hancock is a biologist and — ironically — has been researching the behavior of mosquitoes for decades.

"When the news got around that David had contracted West Nile, everyone asked: 'Are you sure it's David?'" said Bob. Because, after all, it was Bob who was always surrounded by mosquitoes in a South American jungle.

"I do really admire my subject," said Bob. "I don't study [mosquitoes] because I want to destroy them. I'm interested in them."

**Climate change: Better conditions for mosquitoes and viruses to thrive**

Most mosquito bites are harmless. It's only the clinical cases that get counted — "that is, when someone has to go to the doctor or hospital," said Bob — or if an infection becomes fatal. Those are the cases we know about. The number of unreported cases — of those people who become infected without realising it — is probably quite high. Those cases don't get recorded.

But the dangers of infection are very real. David's illness was a traumatic experience both for both him and his wife, Teri. Teri still cries when she recalls the days she thought her husband was about to die.

Bob's life also changed after his brother's illness.

"I would have been happy, just to be this fun-loving mosquito lover, who was only interested in jungle mosquitoes that fly around and do cool things," he said.

But since his brother's infection, Bob's interests have turned to mosquito-borne disease transmission. "I've matured into the medical entomologist I am today," he told DW.

These days, Bob keeps a close eye on developments in the US. Climate change is providing tropical mosquitoes and viruses with ever better living conditions in northern climes now.

For instance, it will have taken 10 years for the Aedes species of mosquito to migrate from Southern California to San Francisco — a distance of about 643 kilometres (400 miles).

Aedes mosquitoes, which originally come from the tropics, are potent carriers of disease, including dengue, yellow fever and Zika.

"There's no reason for us to believe that the mosquitoes are going to come and the disease is not," said Bob.

**Mosquitoes are not dangerous, viruses are**

David's life has changed since his infection.

When he woke up from his coma, he could neither breathe nor speak on his own. He was emaciated and couldn't walk. It took him nine months before he could walk again. He is still unable to swallow without help.

Teri says David has become introverted, unlike the man she married. He is different. They assume the virus left damage in David's brain.

But one thing hasn't changed: David still gets bitten by mosquitoes. The only thing that helps is mosquito spray, and lots of it.

"I absolutely hate [mosquitoes]," said David. And Teri hates them, too. Who can blame the couple?

**And what about Bob?**

"I still love mosquitoes. They're just trying to get a meal and raise a family," he said. "I do hate the virus, though. I mean, I could hate the birds, too, right? Because the mosquito that gave it to my brother got it from a bird." — *DW*

# Defending champions Sinner, Keys advance in Melbourne



The Italian reigning champion will face Australian James Duckworth for a place in the third round

**MELBOURNE:** Defending Australian Open champions Jannik Sinner and Madison Keys advanced in contrasting styles Melbourne on Tuesday. Men's world No. 2 Sinner advanced to the second round after his French opponent Hugo Gaston retired after two sets while trailing 6-2 6-1. Gaston was in tears after he told Sinner he could not continue, with the Italian second seed consoling him. Sinner, who will next face Australian James Duckworth for a place in the third round, said: "I've put in many, many long days in the

off-season trying to become a better tennis player. "But at the end of the day the most important part is to go on court and to enjoy, no? It's very special to start the season in a night-session match here in a Grand Slam, the packed stadium, just trying to do your best." Sinner spent just one hour and eight minutes on Rod Laver Arena. In the second round, he will take on Australia's James Duckworth, who beat Croatian starlet Dino Prizmic 7-6(4), 3-6, 1-6, 7-5, 6-3. Keys' Australian Open women's singles title defence threatened to turn into a nightmare as she found herself 4-0 down in the first set before recovering to win. The American claimed a long-sought-after maiden Grand Slam victory here 12 months ago, beating Iga Swiatek and Aryna Sabalenka on Rod Laver Arena, but returning to the same court against Ukrainian debutante Oleksandra Oliynykova threatened to exit. Keys lost the opening four games, clawed her way back to a tie-break and had to save two set

points before finally relaxing and pulling away to win 7-6 (8-6) 6-1. "The moment they say, 'Ready, play', it kind of all hits you in a way that I don't think you can ever really explain to someone," said a relieved Keys afterwards. "But, as nerve-racking and as stressful as that can be, I'm still reminding myself of just how few people get to be in that moment, and being able to walk out today and have the crowd be as welcoming as they were, I'll take the stress any day." Although she could not pull off the upset, it was a moment of immense pride for 25-year-old Oliynykova, who made her mark for more than just her temporary facial tattoos. She has risen rapidly up the rankings and revealed she takes inspiration from her father, who is fighting for Ukraine in the country's war with Russia. "I'm so proud of him," she said. "Actually, this is something that is keeping me motivated even more. After he joined the military, I did progress for over 200 (ranking)

positions, because I know it was his dream to see me on this court." Unlike most of her compatriots, Oliynykova still lives and trains in Ukraine, with all the dangers that currently brings. "During the preparations, I was hearing the explosions," she said. "There was a couple of massive attacks the last night I spent in Ukraine before the trip here. Also on Tuesday, four-time Grand Slam champion Naomi Osaka of Japan survived a potential first-round exit. The two-time Australian Open champion didn't make it easy for herself at all as she struggled to overcome a gritty Croatian Antonia Ruzic, winning 6-3, 3-6, 6-4. After the match, Osaka said: "This is one of my favourite tournaments and just to start the year off, it makes me very happy. I'm so grateful you [the crowd] stuck it out because we were the second night match and I hope you enjoyed the match. I think I served pretty well. She is an amazing player, I've never played her before and if we meet again I am pretty sure

we will keep playing some really great matches." Former finalist Elena Rybakina warned on Tuesday that if her serve was firing, she would be a threat at the Australian Open, after reinforcing her title credentials with a comfortable first-round victory. The fifth seed, who lost the 2023 final in three tough sets to Aryna Sabalenka, sent Slovenia's Kaja Juvan packing 6-4, 6-3 with her serve proving a potent weapon. Rybakina, who won Wimbledon in 2022, faces France's Varvara Gracheva next. Great Britain's Katie Boulter exited the Australian Open after being outclassed by Belinda Bencic in a straight-set first-round loss. Bencic, a two-time major semifinalist, completed a 6-0, 7-5 win and will meet Australia's Daria Kasatkina or Czech teenager Nikola Bartunkova next. **Shelton overpowers Humbert** Eighth seed Ben Shelton of USA relied on his power and tiebreak

prowess to beat Frenchman Ugo Humbert 6-3, 7-6(2), 7-6(5) in an engrossing battle of lefthanders at Rod Laver Arena on Tuesday to reach the second round. Roger Federer said before the Australian Open that the "sky's the limit" for exciting Brazilian teenager Joao Fonseca, but he was brought back to earth on Tuesday with a first-round exit. The 28th seed, who won titles in Basel and Buenos Aires last season to signal his potential, crashed out 6-4, 2-6, 6-1, 6-2 after struggling physically against American Eliot Spizzirri. The 19-year-old has been dealing with a back issue, which forced him to pull out of warm-up events in Brisbane and Adelaide. "I don't regret a thing," he said of coming to Melbourne despite not being fully fit. "I wasn't playing 100 percent, but at the same time it gives me maturity to keep going, to understand my body, to understand my limits. "Hopefully I'm still young and I'm still getting experience from that." - Agencies

## WORLD NO. 59

## Indonesian Tjen creates history

**MELBOURNE:** Janice Tjen called it "special" after she pulled off an upset to become the first Indonesian to win a match at the Australian Open in 28 years on Tuesday. Unseeded Tjen stunned Canadian 22nd seed Leylah Fernandez 6-2, 7-6(1) to surge into the second round in Melbourne and add to her growing list of milestones. Tjen, who this time last year was ranked 413 but is now the world No.59, is the first Indonesian to win a match at the major since Yayuk Basuki in 1998. "I'm very happy to be a part of history and be able to get a win here for Indonesia," said the 23-year-old. "It was special, especially being able to do it in front of my family here and there were a lot of Indonesians, and my close friends are also here." Asked how her life had changed off court since a breakthrough in 2025, she said: "I get recognised a little bit here and there and I think it's nice, it's a nice feeling to be recognised." In front of the vocal Indonesia fans, Tjen made a lightning start,



sealing the first set in 36 minutes to leave her higher-ranked opponent from Canada reeling. **Tjen's career took off in 2025** She pulled off another surprise in upsetting Russian 24th seed Veronika Kudermetova as a qualifier at the U.S. Open. In New York, she was the first Indonesian to play in the main singles draw of a Grand Slam since

2004. The Jakarta native lifted the title in Chennai last year - the first Indonesian to win a WTA Tour singles crown since 2002. Reflecting on the support in Melbourne of Indonesia fans waving their red and white flag and chanting, Tjen said: "It's something special and feels a little bit like home. "Knowing that a lot of Indonesians came out to support me today means a lot." - Agencies

## AUSTRALIAN OPEN

## Father-to-be Ruud ready to leave Melbourne early

**MELBOURNE:** Casper Ruud is targeting a fourth Grand Slam final at the Australian Open, but he is ready to pull the pin and make a mad dash home if he gets a call from his heavily pregnant wife. The 12th-seeded Norwegian is into the second round at Melbourne Park but admits his focus is not entirely on the tournament. Wife Maria is expecting their first child any day and he is prepared to drop everything to be with her for the birth. "I have to thank Maria for letting me go in the first place. I know she's at home resting, getting ready," said Ruud, who has made finals twice at the French Open and once at the US Open. "Except for when I'm playing a match, the ringer (on my phone) is on all hours of the day just in case. "If she goes into labour I probably won't be here the next day," he added. "But that's the way it goes. There's more to life than just ten-



nis, but I'm going to be here for as long as I can and as long as Maria lets me." Ruud has travelled with his family for years, and his father Christian, a former player, is his coach. "I know for a fact that if everything goes well, the next time I'll leave my house I will have another person at home," Ruud told the ATP Tour website.

"She'll be very little and small, but she'll be there, and I hope to bring her and my wife Maria to the tournaments together and be a happy family travelling around. "I'm not just doing this for myself any more. I have someone extra to play for." Former world No.2 Ruud plays Spain's Jaume Munar in the second round. - Agencies

## PREMIER LEAGUE

## Man City signs Crystal Palace defender Guehi

**LONDON:** Manchester City on Monday announced the signing of Crystal Palace defender Marc Guehi on a five-and-a-half-year deal. The club took to social media to confirm the signing with the defender putting pen to paper until June 2031. The England defender, 25, captained Palace to FA Cup success in May against City and has won 26 England caps. City boss Pep Guardiola, whose team is second in the Premier

League, seven points behind Arsenal, said the team was desperately short of defensive options. "Without John (Stones), without Ruben (Dias), without Josko (Gvardiol), we are in a difficult situation for not one game but a long, long period," he said before the arrival of Guehi was announced. "It's a difficult situation. Ruben will be back soon. Josko, no. John, hopefully we'll see." - Agencies

## AFCON 2025

## Senegal, Morocco achieve new highs in latest FIFA rankings



**LONDON:** After their second title in the last three editions of the African Cup of Nations (AFCON), Senegal have moved up seven spots to reach their FIFA highest-ever ranking of 12th on Monday. Morocco have also achieved their highest FIFA men's world ranking, rising to eighth, despite losing the final to Senegal. Morocco moved up three spots in the January ranking. The 2022 World Cup semifinalist's previous best was 10th in April 1998. The highest ranking achieved by an African team was Nigeria's fifth

in April 1994, while Egypt posted the best ranking among Arab nations when they reached ninth in July 2010. Senegal moved up seven spots to reach their highest-ever ranking. Their previous best was 17th, achieved in 2024. Egypt, who reached AFCON semifinals, climbed four places to 31st, three spots behind Algeria. European champion Spain kept top spot, ahead of Argentina. France are third, followed by England, Brazil, Portugal and the Netherlands, with no change in the ranking of the top seven teams. - Agencies

# Kuwait's Al Kandari strikes gold

160 bowlers from 19 countries took part in the Muscat Nights International Bowling Championship at the Seeb Bowling Centre

Times News Service

**MUSCAT:** Kuwait's Nasser Al Kandari delivered a masterclass in composure and consistency to win the Muscat Nights International Open Bowling Championship, clinching the title after a high-quality stepladder final at the Seeb Bowling Centre on Monday night.

Al Kandari emerged on top of a strong field of 160 bowlers from 19 countries, confirming his status as one of the region's elite performers in a tournament marked by tight margins, demanding lane conditions and sustained pressure.

After advancing as the top qualifier from the semifinals, Al



he said. "I enjoyed my time here and hope to return next year. My next stop will be an international event in the United States." Omani bowler Al Adawi highlighted the value of such international exposure. "This championship featured elite-level competition and different lane conditions, which are important for developing experience and confidence," he said.

Al Kandari claimed the top prize of OMR 8,500, while Robinson earned OMR 4,300 for second place. Third-placed Tommi Kihok received OMR 3,000, with prize money awarded to all bowlers finishing inside the top 32 from a total prize fund of OMR30,000.

Kandari faced Britain's Ben Robinson in the championship match. Showing excellent lane management and shot execution, the Kuwaiti star closed out the final in style, rolling a superb 245 to Robinson's 217 to secure the title.

The stepladder finals provided intense competition throughout. Finland's Tommi Kihok progressed from the single-game play-off with 224 pins, while Oman's defending champion Musab Al Adawi finished fourth overall after scoring 210. Malaysia's Mohammad Syazlur placed fifth with 219.

In the semifinal, Robinson produced a strong performance to de-



feat Kihok 238-217, setting up the decisive clash with Al Kandari.

"I am very happy with this triumph. It is the result of continuous effort and teamwork under the guidance of the technical staff," said Al Kandari. "The tournament was organised to a very high standard and the competition was extremely strong. This victory gives me a big motivational boost ahead of the World Championship in June."

Robinson, competing in Muscat for the first time, praised both the event and the competitive atmosphere. "This was a very well-run tournament with tough conditions that really tested our game,"

FORMULA ONE

## Owen to leave role as Mercedes chief designer

**LONDON:** Mercedes chief designer John Owen is to leave the team later this year.

The 52-year-old has been with the team since 2007, when it was Honda, and been a key figure in championships won under the name Brawn in 2009 and Mercedes from 2010.

The team won the drivers' and constructors' titles as Brawn and then seven drivers' and eight constructors' championships as Mercedes from 2014-21.

A Mercedes statement said Owen would leave "after assuring

the transition to his successor" and then have a period of gardening leave.

There was no information on what his next career step might be. Engineering director Giacomo Tortora will become director of car design, a group overseen by deputy technical director Simone Resta, the team said.

Owen worked at the Swiss Sauber team, where he became senior aerodynamicist in 2004 before his move to Honda. He started his career at the now-defunct racing-car manufacturer Reynard. - Agencies



MUSCAT NIGHTS INTERNATIONAL CHESS CHAMPIONSHIP



## India's Chakraborty wins blitz title

Times News Service

**MUSCAT:** India's Mayank Chakraborty emerged victorious at the Muscat Nights International Blitz Chess Championship on Monday, outpacing a fiercely competitive field to claim the title with 10 points in a high-speed, 11-round showdown.

In a tournament where every second mattered, Chakraborty's calm under pressure and lightning-quick calculation proved decisive.

"Blitz is about focus, speed, and staying calm even when the clock is running down," Chakraborty said after the win.

"I tried to stay consistent, take calculated risks, and capitalize on opportunities - and it paid off."

Trailing closely behind were Egypt's Adham Fawzy and India's



Pranesh M, each scoring 9 points, while Iran's Radin Yadegar also tallied 9 points. Tie-breaks ultimately separated the top four, underscoring how every move and every second counted in this

razor-thin race for the title.

Fawzy secured second place while Pranesh M finished third and Yadegar followed in fourth spot. The middle of the pack was no less intense. India's Iniyan Pa claimed fifth with 8.5 points, followed by Iran's Poormosavi, Seyed Kian and Samimi, Armin, also on 8.5 points. In positions eight through eleven, Turkey's Umut Ata Akbas, Russia's Matfey Rogov, Iran's Koorosh Biglari-fard, and Syria's Talab Rami all finished on 8 points, demonstrating the high level of competition and tight margins throughout the standings.

Khalid Al Malki, a board member of the Oman Chess Committee, described it as "a tournament that tested not only skill but nerves, precision, and tactical awareness under extreme time

pressure." Al Malki highlighted the rapid growth of the Muscat Nights International Chess Championship.

"From 200 players representing 26 countries last year, we've grown to approximately 270 players from 35 nations this year," he said.

"This shows the increasing international confidence in Oman as a competitive chess hub."

Players and spectators alike praised the tournament's organisation and smooth execution.

"The level of discipline, the pace of the rounds, and the overall professionalism have been outstanding," Al Malki added.

"The feedback from delegations and participants has been overwhelmingly positive, which is incredibly encouraging for future editions."

VF26 OFFERS FIRST GLIMPSE

## Haas unveil first car of Formula One's radical 2026 era

**LONDON:** Haas have become the first team to reveal the look of their new Formula 1 car for a season in which the sport is introducing its biggest rule change for decades.

Digital renders of the new Haas VF26 were released on Monday, showing a number of features of the new 2026 cars.

These are smaller and narrower than the previous designs and are constructed to rules with a different aerodynamic philosophy.

The most obvious changes on the Haas are the narrower front wing and fin on the engine cover.

The car produced by the new Cadillac team which ran for the first time at Silverstone on Friday in a private test also featured an engine-cover fin.

Cadillac released photographs of their car running on track, but these were deliberately framed so as not to reveal too much about the car, either shot from a distance or in a blurred panning shot.

Red Bull launched their new engine partnership with Ford in Detroit on Thursday but the car on display there in the team's new livery was a show car that bore almost no resemblance to their 2026 car. The new rules for 2026 change both the cars and power-units (PU). The engines remain 1.6-litre V6 turbo hybrids, but the electri-



cal components of the engine now have a much greater importance in overall performance, with significantly increased energy management around a lap and over a race, and the engines must run on fully sustainable fuel produced from either waste biomass or industrial synthetic processes.

The teams will reveal their cars individually in a series of on-

line launches over the next three weeks, before the first public pre-season test in Bahrain from 11-13 February, which is followed by a second on 18-20 February.

There is a first test in Barcelona in the last week of January but this is private, with no independent media allowed.

The first race of the season is the Australian Grand Prix in Mel-

bourne on 6-8 March.

Team principal Ayao Komatsu said the extent of the regulation changes was a major challenge for Haas as F1's smallest team.

"I don't think any team, even the biggest, is going to say they're fully equipped to tackle this. However, for us, the challenge is bigger," he said.

"There's going to be huge varia-

tion between teams because of two elements. "First is the PU, with the teams using the same provider presumably bunched up, so Mercedes providing four teams, Ferrari providing three, Red Bull two, Audi and Honda providing one.

"Then on the aerodynamic side, it's completely open, and development will happen fast.

"A pecking order may get estab-

lished in the first four races pretty quickly, but I think it's going to be a very dynamic season. What you see in race one and race two, I expect will be totally different when we come to the final races of the year."

Komatsu said working out the complexities of energy management would be a large focus of the first weeks of work.

The car's revised livery is a reflection of Haas' enhanced relationship with Japanese car giant Toyota, whose corporate colours of white and red predominate in the design.

British driver Oliver Bearman, who partners Frenchman Esteban Ocon again for his second season in F1, said: "I feel these changes are the biggest in the history of Formula 1, so with that is a huge deal of excitement for me.

"It's impossible to gauge where we're going to be right now. Everything I'm seeing from the team is positive, but we don't know how we stack up, and we won't know until qualifying in Australia. "Even then, I feel like in the first few races reliability is going to be playing a big factor. There are going to be teams and people making mistakes with these new regulations. It's going to be tough to establish a true pecking order." - Agencies

FEATURE

# ‘Sentimental Value’ sweeps European Film Awards

The quietly devastating Norwegian melodrama won the so-called “big five,” taking best film, best director for Trier, both best acting honours — for Stellan Skarsgard and Renate Reinsve, for playing an estranged father and daughter — as well best screenplay and best score



Joachim Trier’s “Sentimental Value,” probably the most spectacularly European film of the past year, has, quite appropriately, swept the 38th European Film Awards (EFA), held in Berlin recently.

The quietly devastating Norwegian melodrama won the so-called “big five,” taking best film, best director for Trier, both best acting honours — for Stellan Skarsgard and Renate Reinsve, for playing an estranged father and daughter — as well best screenplay and best score.

Joachim Trier (l) and script co-author Eskil Vogt winning the best script award at the European Film Awards

Skarsgard plays Gustav Borg, an aging, once-great film director who left his wife and two children in pursuit of artistic glory. Returning home, he tries to reconnect. But he has an ulterior motive.

His oldest daughter, Nora (Reinsve), is now a famous actress. He’s written a script for her and hopes her fame will help get the movie financed.

He based her character on his own mother, who committed suicide when he was a child. Nora herself is severely depressed.

Gustav and Nora barely talk — she’s never forgiven him for walking out on the family — but they are both artists. Gustav hopes art and cinema can help them connect. No spoilers except to say it doesn’t go as planned.

#### A love letter to European film history

Critics have compared the movie to the work of Ingmar Bergman and Federico Fellini.

Put “Sentimental Value” on a shelf next to the films of those European masters, and it wouldn’t look out of place.

Visually, Trier evokes the history of cinema. Flashback scenes tracing the history of the Borg family are shot using old lenses and film stock; 16 mm, hand-cranked black-and-white footage for 1920s scenes gives way to the hand-held jitters of New Hollywood for the 1970s before moving in later scenes to the lush painterly gloss of 90s prestige movies.



It’s easy to understand why the 5,400 members of the European Film Academy went mad for the movie.

Trier’s film is superb on all

levels; technically and artistically the work of a director in full control of his talents. And this movie feels “European” to its core. No one would mistake it

for a Hollywood studio production. The work explores issues of European history and art, grounded in subtly emotional performances that leave space for inter-

pretation and mystery.

#### A publicity boost ahead of Oscar season

By backing “Sentimental Value,”

the European Film Awards also hope the film will play a bigger role in the international awards conversation.

Traditionally, the European awards have been held in December. Coming months after the Oscars, the EFAs felt like something of an afterthought. By shifting the event to January, smack in the middle of “awards season” (a week after the Golden Globes, a week before the Oscar nominations), the European Film Academy is looking to boost the buzz for its favored films.

“Sentimental Value” is already an Oscar frontrunner. A nomination for best international feature looks a lock.

Many pundits are predicting acting nominations for Skarsgard and Reinsve (Skarsgard is running in the best supporting actor category, which he won at the Golden Globes). A best picture nomination is a strong possibility. By anointing its champion before the Oscars, the European Film Academy gets bragging rights should Trier go all the way.

So it makes perfect sense that the Academy picked “Sentimental Value.” But by going all in on Trier, they did miss an opportunity to recognise the full breadth and variety of European cinema from last year.

#### ‘Sirat’: Oliver Laxe’s desert odyssey

The Academy appeared to acknowledge this with its crafts wins, with five trophies — cinematography, editing, production, sound design and best casting — for “Sirat,” a mind-bending surreal road movie from Spanish director Oliver Laxe.

Spain’s Oscar contender, the film defies genre categories. It starts at an underground rave in the middle of the Moroccan desert.

A father and son arrive, looking for their daughter/sister. Then the military show up. Something has happened — a new world war, an environmental collapse, we are never told — and “Sirat” takes a sharp turn into dystopian territory.

The father and his son join a group of raver nomads on a road trip through the wastelands. But Laxe isn’t through surprising us. “Sirat” takes several shocking twists, changing not just the story but the film’s genre conventions, to end in a place we could have never imagined. -**EW**

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