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PAGES 20 | BAISAS 210

SUNRISE 06:49 AM
PRAYER TIMINGS
FAJR 05:31 AM
DHUHR 12:25 PM
ASR 03:34 PM
MAGHRIB 05:56 PM
ISHA 07:09 PM

12

PEGULA AND RYBAKINA POST STRAIGHT-SET WINS IN QUARTERS

INBRIEF

OMAN, AUSTRIA
SIGN DOUBLE
TAXATION DEAL

Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, received on Wednesday Beate Meinl-Reisinger, Federal Minister for European and International Affairs of the Republic of Austria. During the meeting, the two sides discussed ways to enhance bilateral cooperation between the two countries in various political, economic and cultural fields. They also exchanged views on regional and international issues of common interest. On the sidelines of the meeting, the two ministers signed an agreement between the Government of the Sultanate of Oman and the Government of the Republic of Austria on the Avoidance of Double Taxation and the Prevention of Financial Evasion with Respect to Taxes on Income and Capital.

EDO ISSUES 10-YEAR
\$650 MILLION SUKUK

Energy Development Oman (EDO) has announced the successful issuance of a US dollar 10-year sukuk of RO 250 million (\$650 million), maturing in January 2036. This transaction is part of EDO's ongoing financing strategy to support a portion of its annual capital expenditure requirements, diversify its funding sources and optimise its capital structure. **DETAILS ON P13**

Royal Hospital conducts 14,446 surgeries

MUSCAT: The Royal Hospital reinforced its position as a national reference institution through key operational figures. During the past year, it performed 14,446 surgical procedures, received over 213,000 outpatients, handled 55,611 emergency cases, in addition to receiving 72,122 referred cases from various health institutions, practically embodying the integration of the healthcare system across the Sultanate of Oman. Dr Amed bin Khamis al Araimi, Director-General of the Royal Hospital, affirmed that the hospital embodied an advanced model in providing specialised healthcare throughout 2025, emphasising its role as a national reference institution steadily progressing towards achieving goals of health sustainability, innovation, and service quality, in alignment with national approaches and Oman Vision 2040.

The Royal Hospital reinforced its position as a national reference institution through key operational figures.

He added that in diagnostic services, as many as 82,004 radiological examinations were performed, including 1,316 cases referred from other health institutions, alongside conducting 4,437,964 laboratory tests, which included 224,621 samples referred from outside the hospital, bolstering the hospital's standing as a national support centre for accurate diagnosis. Endoscopy services saw 7,621 procedures performed, in addition to 17,580 day-case procedures, contributing to expedited service and improved patient experience. He noted that the hospital maintained its pioneering performance in the field of organ transplants by conducting 52 transplant operations, including 32 kidney transplants and 20 liver transplants, within an integrated medical system adhering to the highest international standards. **TURN TO P2**

ME space conference calls
for legislative framework

THE MIDDLE EAST Space Conference 2026, which concluded on Wednesday in Muscat, issued a set of strategic recommendations reflecting the importance of the next phase in developing the space sector. These recommendations resulted from discussions and dialogue sessions that brought together a distinguished group of experts and executives from the government and private sectors, as well as academic institutions. The conference called for the establishment of clear and transparent institutional governance for the space sector to help build confidence and enhance investment attractiveness. It also advocated for the development of a flexible and stimulating legislative and regulatory framework that keeps pace with the rapid advancements in space technologies and modern business models. Furthermore, the conference emphasised the need for continued investment in building national capabilities and localising knowledge and technology through training and qualification programmes and the transfer of expertise, while expanding strategic regional and international partnerships based on the integration of technology, capital and knowledge. The conference also underscored the importance of activating the government's role in supporting market growth, particularly through government procurement policies for space services and applications provided by national companies. This would enable these companies to develop their solutions and build a competitive track record, alongside employing space applications to serve national priorities in urban planning, food and water security, disaster management, the environment, transportation, and smart cities.

Transformation in Action: Oman Air Reports Strong Growth and Improved Commercial Performance in 2025

- Oman Air carried almost **6 million** passengers in **2025**, an increase of **8%** vs. **2024** and **57%** vs. **2022**
- 64%** of passengers were point-to-point (coming directly into Oman), an unprecedented **34%** year-on-year increase
- The airline's total capacity increased by **6%** points in **2025** vs. **2024** and **26%** points vs. **2022**, rising to **82%**
- Oman Air increased its capacity between Muscat and Salalah by **17%** in **2025** vs. **2024**, while welcoming **19%** more passengers on the route



Oman Air has recorded strong commercial performance in 2025, marking an important milestone in the airline's ongoing transformation programme and underscoring the impact of initiatives introduced to drive efficiency, sustainable growth, and an enhanced guest experience. The airline carried 5.8 million passengers in 2025, representing an 8% increase compared to 2024 and a 57% increase compared to 2022, significantly outpacing overall market growth. Of these, 64% were point-to-point (visitors flying directly into Oman), a segment that recorded an unprecedented 34% year-on-year increase.

Reflecting stronger capacity utilisation and more disciplined network and revenue management, the airline's capacity also saw strong growth, rising by 6% year-on-year, from 76% in 2024

to 82% in 2025 (a 26% increase vs. 2022).

During the year, Oman Air also expanded and strengthened its network through the launch of several new routes, increased frequencies and codeshare partnerships. Joining the oneworld Alliance in mid-2025 instantly expanded the airline's global reach to 900 destinations, while the introduction of direct services to Amsterdam, Taif, Singapore, Baghdad and Copenhagen, significantly enhancing Oman's global connectivity and bilateral ties.

Con Korfiatis, Oman Air's CEO, said, "These results highlight the tangible progress made through Oman Air's transformation strategy, which has prioritised commercial optimisation, smarter deployment of resources and a sharper focus on customer experience. They show that

we're not only attracting more passengers, but also generating higher quality revenue, delivering long-term benefits for both the airline and for Oman as we build a more agile, customer-centric and financially resilient business that reflects the pride, ambition and potential of Oman."

Initiated in 2023, Oman Air's transformation programme spans the entire business with an overarching objective to achieve financial breakeven, which the airline is on track to reach in record time, while equally focusing on improving efficiency and service quality in line with global standards. As the programme continues, Oman Air remains focused on sustaining performance improvements, enhancing the end-to-end customer journey and delivering long-term value for passengers, partners and stakeholders.



Serving Oman

Oman Air prioritises affordability and access for the domestic market, maintaining fixed fares with capped pricing for Omani citizens between Muscat and Salalah year-round, including reduced pricing during the peak khareef season, and adding capacity during periods of high demand.

Supporting the growth of domestic tourism, the airline continues to increase international connectivity directly into Salalah, which is projected to attract up to 580,000 additional visitors by 2030 and generate more than OMR 320 million in tourism revenue.

Salalah Highlights 2025

- Oman Air added **17%** more seats on the **Muscat-Salalah** service in 2025 vs 2024 and **19%** more vs 2022
- The airline flew **19%** more passengers to Salalah in 2025 vs 2024 and **36%** more vs. 2022
- In 2025, Oman Air launched its **first ever direct charter** service between **Moscow** and **Salalah**. The airline plans to expand to additional Russian cities during 2026 and extend to further Europe markets from 2027.

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SHORT TAKES



Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani with Nikolai Patrushev and Lt Gen Ahmed Fathy Khalifa (bottom) in Muscat on Wednesday



ROYAL OFFICE
MINISTER RECEIVES
RUSSIAN OFFICIAL,
EGYPT ARMY CHIEF

MUSCAT: Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office, received Nikolai Patrushev, Aide to the Russian President and Chairman of the Maritime Board of the Russian Federation, and his accompanying delegation in Muscat on Wednesday.

During the meeting, they reviewed the progress of relations binding the Sultanate of Oman and the Russian Federation across all fields and ways to develop them to achieve the interests of the two countries. The guest expressed his gratitude to the Sultanate of Oman and its constant efforts to resolve regional and international issues.

During the meeting, a number of matters of common interest were also discussed. Gen Al Numani also received Lt Gen Ahmed Fathy Khalifa, Chief of Staff of the Egyptian Armed Forces. He emphasised the depth of bilateral relations between Oman and Egypt.

The guest expressed his appreciation for Oman's positions regarding numerous regional and international files and its active roles in bridging perspectives. During the meeting, cordial conversations were exchanged, joint cooperation fields were reviewed and a number of matters of interest were discussed. — ONA

PANEL DISCUSSION
ON PIONEERING
OMANI, EMIRATI
YOUTH EXPERIENCES

MUSCAT: A youth panel discussion titled “Emirati-Omani Footprint: Success Stories Inspiring a Future Entrepreneurial Generation” was held in Muscat on Wednesday.

The event was attended by officials and entrepreneurs from Oman and the UAE. Organised by the Federal Youth Authority of the United Arab Emirates in cooperation with the UAE Embassy in the Sultanate of Oman, the session aimed to highlight inspiring models of young Omani and Emirati talents who have made a tangible impact on the development process. It further emphasised the importance of strengthening cooperation and the exchange of expertise among Gulf youth to prepare a generation capable of innovation and leading change.

The panel addressed four main themes, including the leadership's vision in empowering youth and creating success stories, and the role of Omani institutions in shaping the entrepreneurial identity of youth. Additionally, the session reviewed inspiring Gulf youth models in the fields of innovation and entrepreneurship, while discussing the challenges facing young people and ways to transform them into opportunities. — ONA

Oman leads in adoption
of educational technology

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JAN 28

THE 2026 Inoxera Global Summit, themed “The Future of Innovation in Smart Education and Training”, kicked off on Tuesday under the auspices of Majid bin Said al Bahri, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Education for Administrative and Financial Affairs. This event reaffirms Oman's role as a leading regional destination in adopting modern educational technology and building a sustainable knowledge-based society.

Dr Sultan bin Mohammed al Kindi, Director-General of Vocational and Technical Education at the Ministry of Education, said the ministry's sponsorship of this summit for the second consecutive year embodies Oman's unwavering commitment to achieving digital educational leadership that



The events also showcased several digital transformation projects within the Ministry of Education, most notably the success story of the Noor project.

places teachers and learners at the heart of technological transformation. He noted that the Sultanate of Oman is currently shaping a flexible and sustainable educational future that aligns with the

objectives of Oman Vision 2040. Mohammed al Madani, CEO of Classera, stated that the Inoxera Summit in Muscat has become a cornerstone of innovation in the region. He expressed the company's pride

in its fruitful collaboration with the Ministry of Education to deliver a new generation of smart technologies that harness technology to serve human creativity, making the Omani experience an inspiring model to be emulated globally.

The summit also featured distinguished participation in the dialogue sessions from representatives of ministries and educational bodies from outside Oman, such as Dr Fatima Ibrahim Ruwais, Deputy Director-General of the Unesco Regional Centre for Quality and Excellence, and representatives from the Islamic World Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ICESCO), as well as other experts, thinkers and researchers in the fields addressed by the summit.

This second edition of the summit complements and builds upon the efforts undertaken by the ministry in partnership with Classera.

Royal Hospital conducts 14,446 surgeries in 2025

From P1

He stated that the past year witnessed a series of unprecedented qualitative achievements, most notably performing the first endoscopic sleeve gastrectomy, the first separation of conjoined twins, the first human heart transplant and the first artificial heart implant, in addition to live-streaming an aortic valve

transplant procedure during the GIS Valve conference in Dubai.

The first service using locally produced 18F-PSMA molecular imaging was also launched, and ThermoFisher technology was introduced for the first time in the Sultanate of Oman to treat endometriosis without traditional surgery, alongside performing the first implantation of a wireless, catheter-based dual-chamber

pacemaker, he added.

He clarified that the Royal Hospital succeeded in localising molecular testing for colorectal cancer (KRAS, NRAS, BRAF), as part of the efforts of the Medical Laboratories Department and the Histopathology and Cytology Unit, to be performed for the first time inside the Sultanate of Oman after previously being conducted externally with a wait time exceeding three

weeks.

He reported that the hospital recorded notable humanitarian and medical achievements, including the removal of a rare and malignant cancerous tumour from the liver of a three-year-old child, performing the region's first remote surgery (Telesurgery) between Muscat and Kuwait, in addition to introducing the surgical robot and enhancing advanced surgeries. — ONA

RCA employee discovers two new asteroids

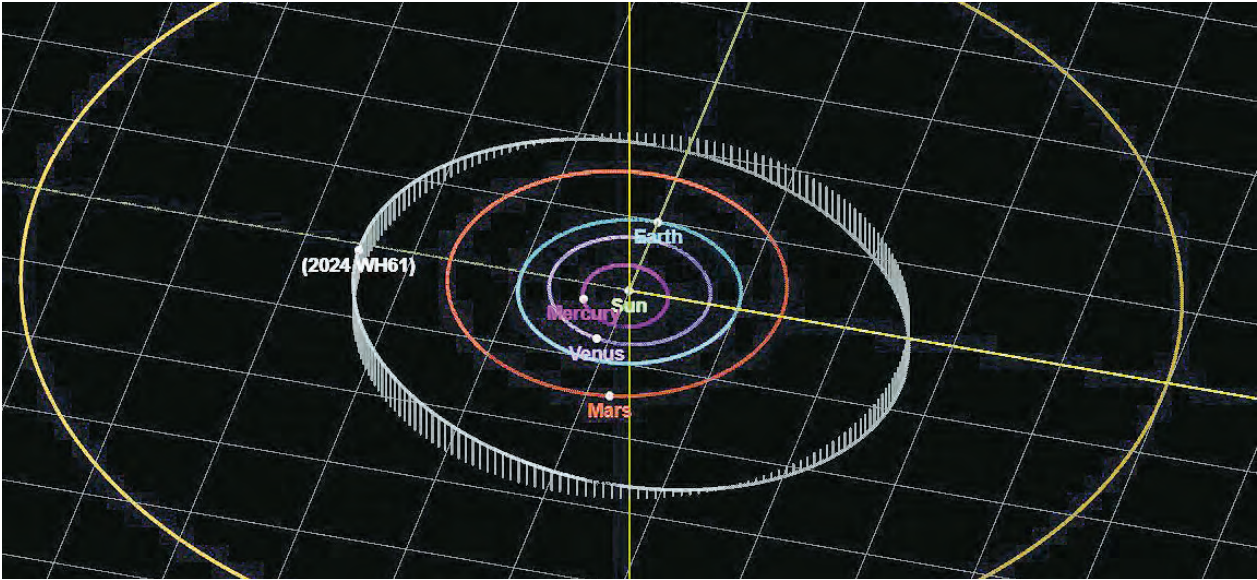
STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 28

An employee of the Royal Court Affairs Astronomical Observatory discovered two asteroids located in the asteroid belt of the solar system. The discovery was officially recognised and won certificates from the International Astronomical Search Collaboration (IASC) initiative which is sponsored by Nasa.

Abdullah bin Mohammed al Haji analysed images captured by the Pan-STARRS 2 telescope at the Haleakala Observatory in Hawaii, the US.

The telescope is equipped with an astronomical camera fitted with one of the largest digital astronomical sensors available. Al Haji used the Astrometrica software, required for such discoveries, to analyse the images. He analysed four images of the same location in the sky taken sequentially.

After the images were analysed and studied by the organisation, the discovery of the two asteroids, 2024 WH61 and 2024 WP61, has been confirmed. Al Haji received



ABDULLAH BIN
MOHAMMED
AL HAJI

initial discovery certificates for the two asteroids. They will retain these codes for several years until they are thoroughly observed to accurately determine their orbits. Afterward, each asteroid will be given a permanent name, and the discoverer will be officially recognised by the International Astronomical Union, which will then request that he name the two asteroids.

Al Haji stated that he made the discovery while taking part in observations conducted at international observatories as part of a public project involving members of astronomical organisations and institutions as well as school and university students.

The project aims to promote astronomy and support astronomers to make astronomical contributions.

SHORT TAKES

FOREIGN MINISTER RECEIVES COPIES OF CREDENTIALS FROM AMBASSADORS

MUSCAT: Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, received on Wednesday, separately, copies of the credentials of Wijesinghe Arachchige De Alwis, Ambassador-designate of Sri Lanka to the Sultanate of Oman, and Noralyn Jubaira Baja, Ambassador-designate of the Philippines to the Sultanate of Oman.

During the meeting, the minister wished the ambassadors success in performing their duties, and further progress and prosperity for the bilateral relations with their respective countries.

The meetings were attended by Najeeb bin Yahya al Balushi, Head of the Protocol Department at the Foreign Ministry, and several officials from the ministry. — ONA



Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy with Wijesinghe Arachchige De Alwis.



Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy with Noralyn Jubaira Baja.

SHURA OFFICE REVIEWS MINISTERIAL RESPONSES

MUSCAT: The Majlis Ash’shura Office reviewed during its meeting on Wednesday the agenda for the upcoming regular sessions of the Council scheduled for next February, and the joint session with the State Council. The sessions aim to discuss the articles of dispute in a number of draft laws referred by the government, within the framework of both Councils’ keenness to enhance and refine the legislative structure to ensure sustainable development across various sectors. This took place during the Office’s eighth regular meeting for the third ordinary session of the tenth term (2023-2027), which was presided over by Khalid bin Hilal al Maawali, Chairman of Majlis Ash’shura. The meeting reviewed a set of ministerial responses to a number of follow-up instruments submitted by the members of the Council. — ONA



SAYYID BADR RECEIVES AUSTRIAN MINISTER

MUSCAT: Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, received Beate Meinel-Reisinger, Federal Minister for European and International Affairs of Austria, in Muscat on Wednesday.

They discussed ways to enhance bilateral cooperation in various political, economic and cultural fields. They also exchanged views on issues of common interest, aiming to develop and expand existing relations, explore further partnership and trade opportunities, develop investment and tourism initiatives, and encourage people-to-people communication. The Foreign

Minister emphasised Oman’s keenness to deepen cooperation with Austria in priority fields, while the Austrian Minister praised the existing cooperation between the two nations and expressed her desire to broaden its future horizons.

The ministers signed an agreement between Oman and Austria on the Avoidance of Double Taxation and the Prevention of Financial Evasion with Respect to Taxes on Income and Capital. This comes within the framework of enhancing tax cooperation, supporting the partnership and facilitating a mutual investment environment. — ONA

RO 3m Raysut fishing port project nears completion

THE completion rate of the development project for the fishing port in Raysut, Wilayat of Salalah, has reached approximately 81 per cent, with a total cost of nearly RO 3 million. This project is part of the efforts led by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources to enhance the efficiency and development of fishing ports.

Abdul Nasser bin Aubad Ghawas, Director of the Fisheries Department in Dhofar Governorate, said that the ministry is continuing the construction work according to the approved schedule, with completion expected in the first quarter of 2026. He noted that the port’s development aims to support local fishermen and bolster fishing activities in the Wilayat of Salalah.

He explained that the rehabilitation works include the construction of a 610-metre breakwater and a 60-metre fixed wharf, alongside the creation of a 250-metre rock groyne to provide primary protection against sand and silt encroachment into the port. He added that the project also involves the construction of a boat ramp and the paving of a one-kilometre internal road connecting the existing road to the fixed wharf, in addition to installing lighting, implementing rainwater drainage systems, deepening approximately 100,000 cubic metres of sand within the port basin, and reclaiming 30,000 square metres of land adjacent to the fixed wharf.

Furthermore, he pointed out that four future projects are planned for Dhofar Governorate within the ministry’s project matrix, categorised by priority. These include the development of the



The fishing port in Raysut, Wilayat of Salalah, is being built with a total cost of nearly RO 3 million.

The rehabilitation works include the construction of a 610-metre breakwater and a 60-metre fixed wharf, alongside the creation of a 250-metre rock groyne to provide primary protection against sand and silt encroachment into the port

fishing port in the Wilayat of Mirbat, the establishment of fishing ports in the centres of the wilayats of Sadah and Rakhyyout, and a project to establish a fishing port in Al Shuwaymiyah in the Wilayat of Shaleem and Al Hallaniyat Islands.

The ministry is also implementing projects to construct two fishing harbours in Hasik and Hadbeen in the Wilayat of Sadah, Dhofar Governorate, at a total cost of RO 5.8 million.

These projects are part of the ministry’s efforts to develop fishing ports across the various governorates of the Sultanate of Oman. This initiative aims to create an attractive investment environment and maximise the utilisation of fish resources, while providing a suite of public and private services within the ports to increase the fisheries sector’s

contribution to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

The completion rate for the Hasik harbour has reached 34 per cent, while the project in the Hadbeen area has reached 50 per cent completion.

It is worth noting that fishing ports are a fundamental pillar of the fisheries sector and its associated activities. They contribute to the social and economic development of coastal wilayats and enhance the sector’s contribution to the GDP by accommodating increased catch volumes, providing necessary facilities and enabling the use of modern fishing gear. Furthermore, they offer investment opportunities in port services, fulfil requirements for landing, marketing and handling operations, and provide maintenance services for ships and boats. — ONA

‘Workplace well-being is now being looked up as a strategy’

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
MUSCAT, JAN 28

Well-being at Work summit hosted at Oman Tel headquarters on Tuesday looked at various aspects of work — financial, professional, physical, mental, social and nutritional health.

Currently, five generations can be found at workplace — traditionalists, baby boomers, Gen X, millennials and Gen Z. Saif al Abri is the General Manager, People Experience at Oman Tel, and according to him, it is important to have open communication between the generations.

“I think one of the challenges that we can see today is the chemistry

between generations because if we speak about Gen Z, for example, they have high expectations. They cannot wait, and it is different than the other generations. So establishing a culture that has full chemistry between the generations has become one of the challenges. But of course, we are working towards overcoming that. In fact, we had introduced some programs last year towards the engagement between generationst. So I think with these programmes we will be able to overcome these types of challenges, and this is one of the focuses that we plan to have in 2026,” said Al Abri.

“We focus on employee well-being and mental health. Engagement from the



Well-being at Work summit looked at various aspects of work — financial, professional, physical, mental, social and nutritional health.

workforce is very important because there is a high level of disengagement in places like the Middle East, Europe and the Far East. Well-being at the workplace today is a critical investment and decision for organisations and companies

that want to attract and retain talent,” explained Mark Rix, CEO, Sonas Events, Well-being at Work.

Dr Hamed al Sinawi, Head of Behavioural Medicine, University Medical City, said that more than one

billion people worldwide suffer from mental health conditions. There are rising rates of anxiety and depression globally across all age groups and there is an increased healthcare burden as depression is linked to heart health. And most importantly stigma remains a major reason people do not seek help. “Common mental health stressors are excessive workload and unrealistic deadlines, lack of job control and job insecurity, poor leadership and poor communication, workplace harassment and bullying, improper shift work and fatigue, and lack of proper recognition and purpose.”

Dr Reem al Hashar, Member of the Health

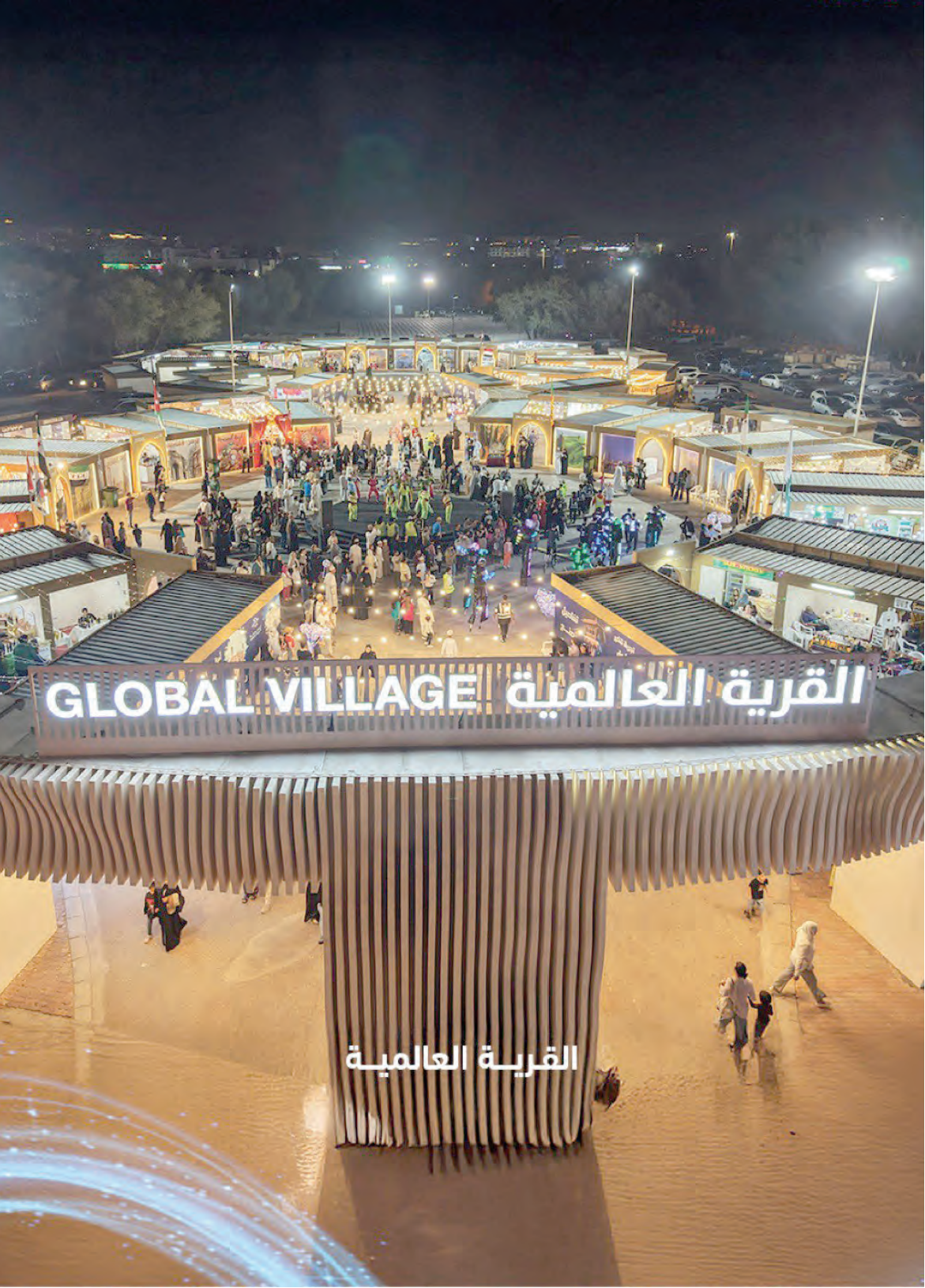
Committee at OCCI, said, “In Oman, we always think of people first and businesses are full of people. So when we talk about well-being at work, we are talking about the health of our Manpower. So we are looking at their physical, psychological, financial and social health. So we have to tackle all the risks of your employees. You are at a place where you are sustaining your productivity and performance of your Manpower.” Replacing an employee typically costs 33 per cent of the base salary, where as a 5 per cent increase in employee engagement can translate to 3-4 per cent boost in productivity, pointed out Mohammed Husary, Founder and CEO, Viewell.



GLOBAL VILLAGE

WHERE THE WORLD IS ONE FAMILY

The month-long festival comes to a close on Saturday



KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, JAN 28

WITH DOZENS of countries represented with their cultures, authentic cuisines, the Muscat Nights, which is due to get over by January 31, is depicting a global village with all its vivacity. Buoyed by the success of the Muscat Nights 2025 version that attracted 1.7 million people, the 2026 edition that has been aiming at attracting more than 2 million people from across the continents, the one-month long Nights represents a strategic alignment with Oman Vision 2040, positioning Muscat as a vibrant tourism and cultural hub on the global stage. The expansion to eight distinct venues ensures that every visitor—whether you're a culture enthusiast, adventure seeker, family traveller, or gastronomy lover—will find experiences tailored to your interests. The Global Village at Al Qurum Natural Park offers an authentic

journey through some of the world's best stories of the past and allows the visitors to wander through recreated traditional markets where vendors demonstrate centuries-old crafts—silver-work, pottery, weaving, and the intricate art of creating their traditionally valued objects. The host country, the Sultanate of Oman, is showcasing the best kept secrets of the land that make it unique. The ceremonial Omani daggers and the aroma of frankincense that mingles with freshly ground Arabic coffee as storytellers share tales of ancient maritime trade routes that once made Oman the gateway between East and West. India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal, Iran, Iraq, Syria, Egypt, Türkiye, Tanzania, the Philippines, Thailand, Palestine, Sudan, Kenya, Lebanon, Georgia, France, the Netherlands and the US are some of the countries that are represented at the Muscat Nights. Each country is hosting their own traditional festivals for a



week or more with all its hues and attractions. The Royal Thai Embassy in Muscat recently organised a 'Thai Festival in Oman 2026', at a garden by the lake of Al Qurum Natural Park in collaboration with Muscat Nights, Ministry of Culture of Thailand, Tourism Authority of Thailand where the visitors were allowed to experience the essence of Thainess, art and culture along with the business potentials. "The Muscat Nights venues for showcasing our tradition and culture as well as the cuisines, has been a great platform for the nation as it gives us a global view to the country as well as its distinct features," said a Thai Embassy representative. **THAI IDENTITY** The festival brought together the beauty of Thai arts and culture, performances showcasing Thai identity by artists from the country where its exquisite cuisine, products such as green halal products, food and beverages, spa products and cosmetics, jewellery, handicraft and

textiles were featured. With every country in the limelight that features its true identity to the world, the venues of Muscat Nights are the mirrors kept against the world transforming itself into a hotspot of diverse tradition and cultures. Drone Championship Muscat Municipality has announced the Muscat Nights Drone Championship to be held from January 29 to 31 at Mall of Muscat, as part of Muscat Nights 2026. It will feature competitive races and aerial demonstrations, bringing together professional pilots and drone enthusiasts in a high-energy setting that highlights precision, speed and advanced control skills. The drone championship complements Muscat Nights 2026, which also features large-scale drone shows. According to the civic body, up to 2,000 drones take to the skies each evening to deliver choreographed displays that narrate the identity, values and transformations of Muscat governorate.

SHORT TAKES



The opening ceremony was held under the auspices of HH Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar.

HUAWEI ICT ACADEMY OPENS IN SALALAH

SALALAH: Huawei ICT Academy was opened on Wednesday in the Wilayat of Salalah, in coordination with the University of Technology and Applied Sciences (UTAS) in Salalah.

The opening ceremony was held under the auspices of HH Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar.

Dr Ahmed bin Ali al Shahri, Assistant Vice-Chancellor of the University in Salalah, said in a speech that Huawei ICT Academy was established as part of a strategic cooperation aimed to achieve the objectives of Oman Vision 2040, namely in building future digital skills and enhancing integration between education outputs and industry needs.

Al Shahri pointed out that Huawei ICT Academy will open up vistas for practical training, enable students to obtain internationally recognised certificates, enhance their readiness to join the labour market and grant them confidence to compete in their career path. He added that the Academy serves as the first Huawei-accredited training centre for obtaining the “Huawei Certified ICT Associate” (HCIA) certificate in Dhofar Governorate. Mazin bin Salim al Hinai, Director of Public Relations at Huawei in the Sultanate of Oman, said that the Academy’s programme offers training opportunities for students in major technical fields, including networks, cloud computing, Artificial Intelligence (AI), cybersecurity and software development.

The opening programme included a visual presentation on relations between the Sultanate of Oman and the People’s Republic of China. — ONA

Forum to present Suhar as investment destination

SIHAM AL SAIDI
SUHAR, JAN 28

AS global investors shift their focus from isolated incentives to fully integrated business ecosystems, Suhar is positioning itself as one of Oman’s most compelling investment destinations — a trend highlighted by the launch of the Sohar Investment Forum on February 3-4, expected to attract participants from more than 30 countries.

Said al Abri, Chairman of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) in Al Batinah North, said Suhar’s competitive edge lies in its holistic investment environment rather than standalone advantages.

“Today’s investor is not looking for incentives alone,” Al Abri noted. “Al Batinah North offers a fully integrated ecosystem, supported by robust legislation, streamlined regulations and a city designed for quality living — with strong healthcare, education, recreation and efficient access to target markets.” This integrated model has helped position Suhar as a distinctive investment system, backed by close coordination among government entities, economic zone authorities, and regulators operating through a one-stop-shop approach that simplifies procedures and reduces operational friction.

Geography remains a decisive strength. Suhar’s strategic location, advanced infrastructure, partnerships with free zones, proximity to an international airport, and access to Gulf, Iranian, and Pakistani markets provide investors with seamless regional and global connectivity.

“The presence of large-scale manufacturing facilities enables



Today’s investor is not looking for incentives alone. Al Batinah North offers a fully integrated ecosystem, supported by robust legislation, streamlined regulations and a city designed for quality living — with strong healthcare, education, recreation and efficient access to target markets.

SAID AL ABRI
OCCI Chairman,
Al Batinah North



Suhar’s competitive edge lies in its holistic investment environment rather than standalone advantages.

downstream and conversion industries, strengthening the industrial sector, which remains the governorate’s most prominent pillar,” Al Abri added, pointing also to opportunities in logistics, tourism, mining, services and trade.

Human capital forms another cornerstone of Suhar’s investment narrative. Al Abri highlighted strong coordination between OCCI, government bodies and academic institutions to align educational outputs with labour market needs.

“Omani youth have demonstrated their ability to lead industrial and export-oriented operations. Some companies now operate with nearly 100 per cent national workforce, producing goods that compete in global markets,” he said.

Suhar’s transformation from a logistics corridor into a hub for value-added industries is increasingly evident. Competitive energy prices, abundant raw materials, free trade agreements and efficient supply chains have already attracted investments

exceeding \$35 billion, with further growth anticipated. In a region marked by intense competition for capital, timing is crucial, Al Abri stressed. “Suhar recorded 37 per cent growth in the first half of 2025 compared to the previous period. Investors entering Suhar today benefit from strong momentum, cost competitiveness and stability.”

He acknowledged that expanding infrastructure capacity — including electricity, gas and transport links — remains a priority to sustain growth, particularly with future rail connectivity to Abu Dhabi.

Looking ahead to 2026, Al Abri expressed strong optimism. “With Oman Vision 2040, private-sector empowerment and national stability, the outlook for international investment is exceptionally promising.”

He described the Sohar Investment Forum as one of Oman’s key national platforms for investment promotion, reflecting rising confidence among partners, institutions and investors alike.

Oman seeks global investors in food sector, localisation of projects

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 28

The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the supervisory team for promoting Omani products “OPEX”, continues its participation in Gulfood 2026 in Dubai with a broad national representation of government and private sector bodies. Through Oman’s pavilion, the representatives are highlighting the competitive investment opportunities in the food sector,

aimed at attracting and localising new projects within the industrial cities, free zones, and economic zones across Oman, supported by integrated incentives and services.

Hamood al Balushi, Assistant Director-General of Al Suwaiq Industrial City, stated that Gulfood represents an ideal platform to highlight the advantages of one of Madayn’s newest industrial cities, recently announced in Al Batinah North Governorate. He noted growing interest among investors



Oman’s pavilion aims at attracting and localising new projects within the industrial cities, free zones and economic zones across the country.

and business owners visiting Gulfood in learning about Oman’s investment environment and its rich experience in localising businesses by benefiting from competitive incentives and well-developed infrastructure across Madayn’s industrial cities.

He added that representatives from Al Suwaiq, Suhar, Al Buraimi and Mahas Industrial Cities are engaging with potential investors at the exhibition to highlight the investment environment, facilities,

and services offered by Madayn within areas dedicated to food industries.

Ahlam al Amri, Director of In-Country Value at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, said the ministry is presenting promising investment opportunities in the food sector through its participation at Gulfood, aiming to attract investments, support the localisation objectives of the ‘Second Billion’ initiative and increase self-sufficiency rates.

وزارة الصحة
Ministry of Health

Announcement

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

Tender Ref:	Description	Last Date for Collection of Tender Document	Bid Submission Closing Date on/ Before 11:00 am Thursday	Eligibility	Tender Fee (Non-Refundable)
250/2026/ MOH/ NIZH-2	REPLACEMENT AND INSTALLATION OF INTERNAL LIGHT FITTINGS IN NIZWA HOSPITAL (PHASE 2)	05/FEB/2026	05/MAR/2026	Specialized Companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board	R.O 25.000 Per set R.O 10.000 for SME

- Tenders should be submitted online on <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om> enclose **Electronic Bank Guarantee** issued by a Local bank for not less than One percent (1%) for the Tender value validity for (90) days from the Tender Submission date, addressed to The Chairman of the Tender Committee.
- Ministry is not bound to accept the lowest tender and reserves the right to accepts or reject any tender.
- For any Clarification, you may contact via Telephone: 24402200, Email id etenderhd@ita.gov.om

وزارة الصحة
Ministry of Health

Announcement

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

Tender Ref:	Description	Last Date for Collection of Tender Document	Bid Submission Closing Date on/ Before 10:00 am Thursday	Eligibility	Tender Fee (Non-Refundable)
276/2026/ MOH/ NIZH-3	Replacement, Supply, Installation, Testing and Commissioning of Multimedia Filter and Activated Carbon Filter with Accessories for Reverse Osmosis Plant at Nizwa Hospital	05/Feb/2026	05/Mar/2026	Specialized Companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board	R.O 25.000 Per set

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

WORLD

SHORT TAKES



Russian President Vladimir Putin (L) shakes hands with Syrian President Ahmed al Sharaa, at the Kremlin in Moscow. — Reuters

PUTIN PRAISES SHARAA EFFORTS IN KEEPING INTEGRITY

MOSCOW: Russian President Vladimir Putin praised Syrian President Ahmed al Sharaa on Wednesday for increasing momentum towards restoring the territorial integrity of Syria after Syrian troops took swathes of territory from Kurdish forces. “I want to congratulate you on the fact that the process of restoring the territorial integrity of Syria is gaining momentum,” Putin told Sharaa in the Kremlin. Sharaa, who is making his second visit to Russia since ousting long-time Moscow ally Bashar al Assad in 2024, thanked Putin for help in stabilising the situation in Syria and the wider region. Moscow has been working to build relations with him and ensure a continued military presence in the country, which serves to bolster its influence in the Mideast. Russia is withdrawing forces from Qamishli airport in northeast Syria, although it is expected to maintain its larger air base and naval facility on Syria’s Mediterranean coast. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters the two leaders would discuss economic cooperation and the situation in the region. — Reuters

PLANE CRASH KILLS INDIAN DEPUTY STATE LEADER



Rescue personnel and onlookers gather around the wreckage of the aircraft, in India’s Maharashtra state. — AFP

MUMBAI: An Indian state’s deputy leader was killed along with four other people on Wednesday after their chartered aircraft crashed in the country’s west, officials said. The plane carrying Ajit Pawar, Maharashtra’s deputy chief minister, crashed in an open field at about 8:44 am while landing at the state’s Baramati airport, the civil aviation ministry said in a statement. The 66-year-old, a key political figure in Maharashtra which is home to India’s financial hub Mumbai, was travelling in a Bombardier Learjet 45 aircraft, operated by private firm VSR Aviation. Pawar’s personal security officer and an assistant as well as two crew members were also on board at the time of the crash, the Directorate-General of Civil Aviation said in a statement. VSR Aviation owner V K Singh said the aircraft was “very well maintained”, ruling out any technical failure. “There was absolutely no problem in the aircraft. There was no technical failure as far as we know,” he told reporters. — AFP

BALLOONING POPULATION

Thailand uses vaccine to limit elephant



Thailand has given a contraceptive vaccine to wild elephants for the first time in an effort to control their ballooning population. Wildlife authorities and a veterinary team administered the shots to three female elephants in southeastern Trat province. The aim was to manage the wild elephant population, as the mammal’s birth rate in five provinces of eastern Thailand rises about eight per cent yearly compared to other regions. — AFP

TÜRKIYE URGES US TO START NUCLEAR TALKS WITH IRAN

ISTANBUL: Türkiye’s top diplomat urged Washington to start nuclear talks with Iran on Wednesday, as US warships arrived in the region amid fears of a strike over Tehran’s protest crackdown. “It’s wrong to attack Iran. It’s wrong to start the war again. Iran is ready to negotiate on the nuclear file again,” Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan said. “My advice has always been to our American friends: close the files one by one with the Iranians. Start with the nuclear issue and close it. Then

move on to the others.” Fidan’s comments came after a US naval force led by an aircraft carrier took up position in Middle Eastern waters, US Central Command said on Monday, without revealing its precise location. Washington has not ruled out a new military intervention against Tehran over its harsh response this month to protests which according to rights groups has left thousands dead. Nato member Türkiye, which shares a 530-kilometre border with

Iran, has often expressed opposition to military operations targeting the Islamic Republic. Last week, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan described the unrest in Iran as a “new test” for Tehran, pledging Türkiye would “stand against any initiative” that would drag the region into chaos. In a phone call, Fidan and Iran’s Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi evaluated “efforts to reduce tensions in light of recent developments in the region”, a Turkish diplomatic source said. — AFP

Israel expands evictions of Palestinians in West Bank

IN Silwan, south of the Al Aqsa Mosque, Kayed Rajabi and his neighbours have been handed eviction orders in favour of an Israeli settler organisation which has already taken over parts of the Palestinian district. Rajabi’s home is surrounded by buildings that have raised large Israeli flags - a sign they are owned by settlers, who he said began buying homes in 2004, and have obtained about 40 buildings in Silwan now, many via forced evictions. He said he was among 32 families in the neighbourhood who have now been ordered to leave, with him and his brothers given until the end of Ramadhan - mid-March - to depart under an order from Israel’s Supreme Court. “They want to force me out of the house I was born in, where my eyes first opened to life,” said Rajabi. Daniel Luria, the executive director of Ateret Cohanim, called Palestinians in Silwan “illegal squatters”, saying the land was owned by Jews before 1929 and that moving back was rectifying a historical injustice. Rajabi said that account was untrue. The Supreme Court did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Palestinians seek East Jerusalem, which Israel captured in a 1967 war, for a future state and say that leaving their homes there could put an end to their hopes forever. Settler incursions, sometimes violent, have ramped up since the attack on Israel in October 2023 triggered the Gaza war. Palestinians in Gaza, shattered by two years of



Mourners weep during a funeral of a Palestinian youth, killed by the Israeli forces, in the Al Dahriya village. — AFP

32 Palestinian families in Silwan neighbourhood have now been ordered to leave, given until the end of Ramadhan — mid-March — to depart under an order from Israel’s Supreme Court

Israeli attacks in the enclave, have long faced restrictions on their movement and monitoring of their online activity and phone calls by Israeli surveillance agencies. Nearly all of Gaza’s 2 million people have been forced into a narrow coastal strip from which Israeli forces withdrew under the ceasefire and where Hamas has retained control. Trump’s plan for Gaza, now in its second phase, calls for Gaza’s reconstruction to start in Rafah and for Hamas to lay down its arms in exchange for further Israeli troop withdrawals from the territory. Silwan is particularly contentious due to its proximity to the Al Aqsa

Mosque, a longtime flashpoint of Israeli-Palestinian tensions. Luria said that Ateret Cohanim had offered Silwan residents compensation for leaving. Numerous UN Security Council resolutions have called on Israel to halt all settlement activity, but successive Israeli governments have said settlements are critical to the country’s security. If Palestinians refuse orders to leave, armed police go in to evict them and diggers demolish their homes. Rajabi said that with the high prices for rent in Jerusalem, he does not know where he and his family will go. “People will live in the streets,” he said. — Reuters



INDONESIA LANDSLIDE DEATH TOLL RISES TO 38

JAKARTA: The death toll from a landslide in Indonesia climbed to 38 with dozens still missing, authorities said, days after a torrent of debris crashed through a mountain village. Heavy rain triggered the landslide that barrelled through Pasirlangu on Saturday, wrecking dozens of homes and displacing hundreds. A total of 38 victims had been identified by 6:30 pm on Wednesday, Ade Dian Permana, head of the Bandung Search and Rescue Agency, said in a statement. Rescuers have been scouring the unstable area in Java island’s West Bandung region by hand and using heavy equipment. But they are treading carefully for fear of more landslides due to severe weather. The navy said that 23 troops, who were training in the area ahead of a deployment to Indonesia’s border with Papua New Guinea, were among those caught in the landslide. The disaster seriously damaged more than 50 houses and displaced more than 650 people. — AFP

POLITICAL FAVOURS

South Korea court jails former first lady



A South Korean court sentenced former first lady Kim Keon Hee to 20 months in jail for accepting bags and a diamond pendant from Unification Church officials in return for providing political favours. The wife of ex-President Yoon Suk Yeol, who was ousted from office last year, was cleared on other charges of stock price manipulation and violating the Political Funds Act. Prosecutors will appeal against the not-guilty verdicts. — Reuters

NATIONWIDE PROGRESS

Nepal says election preparations on track



Nepal’s Election Commission said that it is ready to hold elections as planned, despite concerns over weather conditions in Himalayan regions when the vote takes place on March 5. The poll follows deadly protests in September that toppled the previous government, prompting an accelerated election schedule. “As of today, we are prepared to conduct the election in all locations,” the commission’s assistant spokesman, Prakash Nyaupane, said. — AFP

SHORT TAKES



A resident walks to throw away debris from her apartment, in Zaporizhzhia. — Reuters

TALKS BETWEEN RUSSIA, UKRAINE AND US TO RESUME

MOSCOW: Trilateral negotiations between Russia, Ukraine and the United States to reach a resolution on the war in Ukraine are set to resume in Abu Dhabi on February 1, Russia’s Interfax news agency cited the Kremlin as saying on Wednesday.

Russia pounded Ukraine with drones and a missile overnight, killing a couple near the capital Kyiv a day after five people died in an attack on a passenger train.

Officials said four people, including two children, sought medical attention after the attack. The latest attack came as Ukraine was still reeling from Tuesday’s drone strike on a passenger train in the northeast that killed five people, an assault President Volodymyr Zelensky denounced as “terrorism.” Both Moscow and Kyiv deny they are targeting civilians in the war, which is approaching its four-year mark on February 24.

Ukraine’s air force said Russia launched an Iskander-M ballistic missile and 146 drones overnight, of which 103 were downed.

In Kyiv, a 17-storey residential building was hit, causing minor damage to the roof and shattering windows on the upper floors, the emergency services said. — Reuters

ACAI, BRAZIL’S A NATIONAL FRUIT



Brazil has declared the acai berry a national fruit, a move to stamp its ownership on the popular “superfood” as concerns grow about foreign companies staking claims to the Amazon’s biological riches. Acai has been a savoury staple in the Amazon for centuries, eaten as a thick paste alongside fish and manioc flour. Brazil’s agriculture ministry said that the measure helps showcase acai as a “genuinely Brazilian product” that generates income for thousands of Amazonian families. However, experts say the law is largely symbolic and aimed at highlighting the challenge of growing international interest in a wide range of fruits native to the Amazon. — AFP

VENEZUELA’S ACTING PRESIDENT SAYS US UNFREEZING SANCTIONED FUNDS

CARACAS: The United States has started unblocking Venezuelan funds that were frozen under sanctions, the South American country’s interim president said on Tuesday in the latest sign of rapprochement between long-term foes.

Caracas has been under US sanctions, including an oil embargo, since 2019, following Nicolas Maduro’s first disputed claim to re-election the previous year. During his first term, US

President Donald Trump also froze Venezuelan funds in international accounts, which Maduro estimated in 2022 amounted to some \$30 billion.

“We are unfreezing resources from Venezuela that belong to the Venezuelan people,” Delcy Rodriguez, acting as president since Maduro’s toppling in a deadly US military operation on January 3, said on state TV.

“This will allow us to invest significant resources in equipment

for hospitals”.

On Rodriguez’s watch, various agreements have been struck between Washington and the interim Venezuelan regime.

“I reaffirm what President Donald Trump has said: that we have established channels of communication marked by respect and courtesy, both with the President of the United States and with Secretary (Marco) Rubio, with whom we are establishing a work agenda,” Rodriguez said. — AFP

Greenland dispute ‘strategic wake-up call,’ says Macron

FRENCH

President Emmanuel Macron said on Wednesday a standoff with the United States over Greenland was “a strategic wake-up call for all of Europe”, speaking alongside the leaders of Denmark and the Danish autonomous territory. European powers have sought to join forces to show they can stand on their own feet after US President Donald Trump has roiled the transatlantic alliance by threatening to seize Greenland.

Speaking alongside the prime ministers of Denmark and Greenland, Mette Frederiksen and Jens-Frederik Nielsen, Macron said the “awakening” must focus “on asserting our European sovereignty, on our contribution to Arctic security, on the fight against foreign interference and disinformation, and on the fight against global warming.” He reaffirmed to Frederiksen and Nielsen France’s solidarity and “its commitment to your sovereignty and territorial integrity.” “France will continue to defend these principles in accordance with the United Nations Charter,” he added, expressing his support for increased Nato engagement in the Arctic.

Macron said some words in the Indigenous Greenlandic language, and then switching to the Danish language told the premier France would “be side-by-side” with the “Kingdom of Denmark”. After European pushback, Trump backed down on the threat to take Greenland by military force. Speaking in Paris earlier on Wednesday, Frederiksen said that Europe needed to improve its defences “now” to become less reliant on the United States for military protection.

On Monday, Nato chief Mark Rutte told EU lawmakers to “keep on dreaming” if they thought Europe could defend itself without the US. In response to Rutte’s comments, Frederiksen conceded it would be “extremely difficult” for Europe to defend itself right now. “Because when you look at intelligence, nuclear weapons, and so on, we depend on the US,” she said at Sciences Po university. “But I think we’re able to do more than what is being said publicly right now.”



French President Emmanuel Macron (C) Denmark PM Mette Frederiksen (R) and Greenland PM Jens-Frederik Nielsen (L) give a press conference at the Elysee Palace. — AFP

As for a 2035 target to ramp up spending on Nato, she said: “I’m sorry to say it would be too late.” “I think rearming ourselves now is the most important thing.”

Nato members committed to raising defence and security spending last year to five per cent of their economic output, following on from an earlier target of two per cent by 2024, after pressure from the US government. Fredriksen said Europe had made a “big mistake” by cutting military budgets in the past. Nato members committed to raising defence and security spending last year to 5 per cent of their economic output, following on from an earlier target of 2 per cent by 2024, after pressure from the US government.

Europe must step up efforts on defence and play a bigger role in Nato as US President Donald Trump has “shaken the transatlantic relationship to its foundation”, EU top diplomat Kaja Kallas said on Wednesday. Trump rocked European allies this month by threatening to seize Greenland from Nato and EU member Denmark — before eventually backing off.

The crisis — the latest to buffet ties since his return to power a year ago — has reinforced calls for the continent to cut its decades-long reliance on Nato’s dominant military superpower for protection. “Let me

be clear: we want strong transatlantic ties. The US will remain Europe’s partner and ally. But Europe needs to adapt to the new realities. Europe is no longer Washington’s primary centre of gravity,” Kallas told a defence conference in Brussels. “This shift has been ongoing for a while. It is structural, not temporary. It means that Europe must step up — no great power in history has outsourced its survival and survived.”

Kallas remained clear-eyed that Nato remains the bedrock of European security. She said EU efforts should “remain complementary” to those of the alliance, but insisted Europe needed to play a bigger role. “Especially now, as the US is setting its sights beyond Europe, Nato needs to become more European to maintain its strength,” she said. “For this, Europe must act.”

European countries have already ramped up defence budgets since Russia invaded Ukraine, and agreed last year to massively hike Nato’s spending target under pressure from Trump. The EU last year also launched a raft of initiatives that it says could see its members plough an additional 800 billion euros into defence. Washington meanwhile has said it wants European allies to take over more responsibility for the conventional defence of the continent as US focus switches to other threats. — AFP

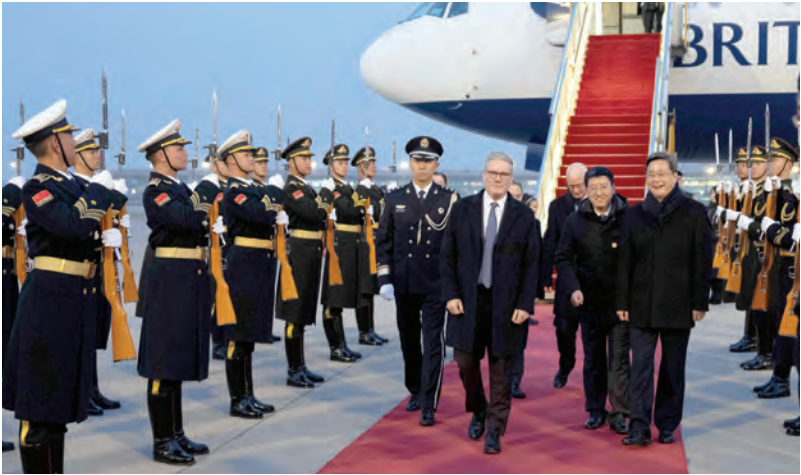
UK’s Starmer arrives in China to defend ‘pragmatic’ partnership

BEIJING: British Prime Minister Keir Starmer arrived in Beijing on Wednesday to meet with Chinese leader Xi Jinping, hoping to restore long-fraught relations. It is the first visit to China by a UK prime minister since 2018 and follows a string of Western leaders courting Beijing in recent weeks, pivoting from a mercurial United States. Starmer, who is also expected to visit Shanghai on Friday, will later make a brief stop in Japan to meet with Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi.

For Xi, the trip is an opportunity to show Beijing can be a reliable partner at a time when President Donald Trump’s policies have rattled historic ties between Washington and its Western allies. Starmer is battling

record low popularity polls and hopes the visit can boost Britain’s beleaguered economy. The trip has been lauded by Downing Street as a chance to boost trade and investment ties while raising thorny issues such as national security and human rights. Starmer will meet with Xi for lunch on Thursday, followed by a meeting with Premier Li Qiang.

The British leader said on Wednesday ties visit to China was “going to be a really important trip for us”, vowing to make “some real progress”. There are “opportunities” to deepen bilateral relations, Starmer told reporters travelling with him on the plane to China. “It doesn’t make sense to stick our head in the ground and bury in the sand when it comes to



Britain’s PM Keir Starmer is welcomed upon his arrival at an airport in Beijing. — AFP

China, it’s in our interests to engage and not compromise on national security,” he added. China, for its part, “is willing to take this visit as an opportunity to enhance political mutual trust”,

foreign ministry spokesman Guo Jiakun reiterated on Wednesday during a news briefing. Starmer is the latest Western leader to be hosted by Beijing in recent months, following visits by Canadian

Prime Minister Mark Carney and French President Emmanuel Macron.

UK-China relations plummeted in 2020 after Beijing imposed a sweeping national security law on Hong Kong, which severely curtailed freedoms in the former British colony. They soured further since with both powers exchanging accusations of spying. Starmer, however, was quick to deny fresh claims of Chinese spying after the Telegraph newspaper reported on Monday that China had hacked the mobile phones of senior officials in Downing Street for several years. “There’s no evidence of that. We’ve got robust schemes, security measures in place as you’d expect,” he told reporters on Wednesday.

Since taking the helm in 2024, Starmer has been at pains to reset ties with the world’s second-largest economy and Britain’s third-biggest trade partner. In China, he will be accompanied by around 60 business leaders from the finance, pharmaceutical, automobile and other sectors, and cultural representatives as he tries to balance attracting vital investment and appearing firm on national security concerns. The Labour leader also spoke to Xi on the sidelines of the G20 summit in Brazil in November 2024.

The prime minister is also expected to raise the case of Hong Kong media mogul Jimmy Lai, 78, a British national facing years in prison. — AFP

OPINION

Burnout has a climate



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

I noticed it in the smallest place first. The way my attention started stuttering, like a car misfiring on a familiar road. The way rest stopped feeling like rest, and became a guilty pause between demands. Then, on the same week, I read about another ecosystem reaching a tipping point, and felt something land with clarity: we have taught ourselves to live as if replenishment is optional.

Burnout, in a person, has a tell. Sleep thins out. Patience shortens. The mind turns foggy in rooms that once felt easy. The body holds tension like it has nowhere else to put it. You can still show up and still deliver, and yet something inside you begins to ration itself. Creativity goes first. Then curiosity. Then tenderness. The inner world shifts into power-saving mode. Environmental burnout has a tell, too. Rivers run lower and warmer. Soil loses its life and becomes a medium for inputs. Coral turns pale, then brittle, then absent. Heat arrives earlier and stays longer, changing what can grow and what can endure. A season stops behaving like a season. A coastline stops holding.

We treat these as separate stories. Personal wellbeing on one side, climate on the other. Yet the symptoms rhyme because the design

is similar. In both cases, we normalise extraction, then call endurance a virtue.

Consider the modern calendar. It is engineered for output, measured in deliverables and visible momentum. Recovery gets pushed into leftover hours and framed as indulgence. Even the language betrays us. Optimise. Maximise. Leverage. Scale. A body begins to feel like a machine whose purpose is production.

Now consider our relationship with the environment. Land becomes a site. Water becomes a supply. Forest becomes an asset. We ask nature to keep absorbing the strain, then act surprised when it begins to fail. In Bangladesh, the Sundarbans has lost nearly 200 square kilometres since 2000, even as it protects millions from storm surges. We log what shields us, then wonder why the floods arrive harder.

Today offered a counterpoint. I spent time with young minds who asked sharp questions and listened with full attention. A room like that resets something in you. It proves that energy returns when purpose is shared, when people feel their presence matters.

The environment needs that same nourishment. Younger minds need to be involved early, trusted with complexity, and

The response cannot be motivation or slogans. It has to be redesigned. Work that honours limits. Policies that reward regeneration. Systems where recovery stops being treated like a luxury.

invited into stewardship as a practice rather than a slogan. Regeneration asks for decision making that makes room for imagination alongside finance and engineering. It asks for systems that reward restoration, because restoration is a form of national strength.

The most dangerous stage of burnout is the one that still looks functional. A person can keep performing long after they have begun to fragment internally. An ecosystem can keep producing for a while after its foundations have started to collapse. There is a lag between depletion and visible failure, and that lag is where denial settles in.

Burnout is information. In the body, it is the nervous system saying the pace is unsafe. In the environment, it is the living world saying the load is too heavy. The response cannot be motivation or slogans. It has to be redesigned. Work that honours limits. Policies that reward regeneration. Systems where recovery stops being treated like a luxury.

Renewal begins when curiosity is protected, when people are trusted early, when the future is treated as a stakeholder. The question is not whether we can afford to redesign. The question is whether we can afford not to.

CERN UPBEAT ON FUNDING FOR NEW PARTICLE COLLIDER

AGNÈS PEDRERO

Mark Thomson, the new head of Europe’s physics laboratory CERN, voiced confidence on Tuesday about raising the billions of dollars needed to build by far the world’s biggest particle accelerator.

CERN, the European Organization for Nuclear Research, seeks to unravel what the universe is made of and how it works.

The planned Future Circular Collider (FCC) would be a proton-smashing ring with a circumference of 91 km and an average depth of 200 metres.

Scientists believe that ordinary matter — such as stars, gases, dust, planets and everything on them — accounts for just five per cent of the universe.

The FCC will try to reveal what makes up the other 95 per cent, the so-called dark matter and dark energy that scientists have yet to observe directly. “That project would start operation in the second half of the 2040s,” Thomson told reporters.

The British particle physicist took over as CERN’s director-general on January 1. He said the gigantic collider would cost around \$19.5 billion.

“About half of that comes out of the existing ongoing budget, and we have to find the resources for the other half,” he said. “I’m very optimistic personally, but it’s not going to be straightforward.” In December, in a first for the laboratory, private donors pledged \$1 billion towards the construction of the FCC.

“They’re not expecting anything in return. This is really for the good of science,” said Thomson.

Based in the outskirts of Geneva, CERN has 25 member states and its council is set to make a decision in 2028 on whether to go ahead with the FCC. For now, CERN’s Large Hadron Collider (LHC) is currently the world’s biggest particle accelerator, whizzing particles into each other at phenomenal speeds. The 27-kilometre proton-smashing ring, running about 100 metres below France and Switzerland, has, among other things, been used to prove the existence of the Higgs boson.

Dubbed “the God particle”, its discovery in 2012 broadened science’s understanding of how particles acquire mass and earned physicists Peter Higgs and Francois Englert the 2013 Nobel Prize for Physics.

The LHC is expected to have fully run its course by around 2040.

It is set to resume operations in February after a winter break, before shutting down again in June.

It will then undergo upgrades, including more powerful focusing magnets and new optics, becoming the High Luminosity LHC (HL-LHC), aimed at conducting more detailed studies thanks to an increased number of collisions. — AFP

The Board of Peace without consent and Pax Judaica

If there is one word global elites have repeatedly used, and abused, in recent years, it is “peace.” In January 2026, at the World Economic Forum in Davos, US President Donald Trump convened a select coalition of political leaders, financiers, and billionaires under the banner of what was branded as a “Board of Peace.”

While some interpreted this moment as an alternative to a weakened United Nations, it is more accurately understood as an attempt to transition global order from Pax Americana to what can be described as Pax Judaica. Historically, the term Pax, Latin for peace, has never meant the absence of violence. It has referred to periods in which a dominant power imposed order across regions through overwhelming military, economic, and ideological force. Pax Romana (roughly 27 BCE–180 CE) lasted about two centuries. Pax Islamica, under successive caliphates, spanned several centuries with shifting centres of power, starting in 7th century AD and ending formally in the early 20th century. Pax Britannica dominated the 19th century until its erosion after World War II, formally ending with the Suez Crisis in 1956. Pax Americana, emerging in 1945, has now lasted around 80 years, longer than many expected, but increasingly unstable.

Each of these “peaceful” orders was sustained by alliances among rulers, armies, financiers, merchants and religious or moral authorities. Each also carried deep contradictions and dark chapters. What distinguishes the attempted Pax Judaica is not merely its ambitions but its point of departure.

This project has unfolded amid one of the most visible and contested atrocities of the digital age. Since October 2023, the genocide in the UN-designated Palestinian Occupied Territories has been documented



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Those genuinely committed to peace must organise, speak clearly, and resist any order that deepens chaos while borrowing the language of stability. History is unforgiving to empires that mistake dominance for consent.

in real time and streamed globally. Regardless of political alignment, the scale of destruction and civilian suffering has shattered the credibility of any order claiming moral authority while normalising collective punishment. No previous Pax was launched under such universal exposure and contestation.

Politically, this emerging order relies on a narrow coalition of US and EU policymakers, regional financiers, and technology billionaires, with Jerusalem positioned as a symbolic and operational centre. The “Board of Peace” narrative seeks to impose order across five dimensions.

Militarily, deterrence is asserted through overwhelming force and exemplary punishment, sending signals not only to states but to societies.

Economically, there are early attempts to reshape financial infrastructure, including experiments with digital currencies, such as the Digital Shekel, and payment systems tied to the Israeli regime and allied technology ecosystems.

Technologically, the Israeli regime has become a global hub for surveillance, cybersecurity, and AI. Major technology firms have invested heavily: Google and Amazon’s Project Nimbus alone committed almost one billion Omani Riyals to cloud infrastructure; Intel has invested tens of billions in Israeli regime’s manufacturing over decades; Microsoft, Meta, Oracle, Nvidia, and Palantir all maintain significant R&D or operational footprints. These investments are not symbolic, they integrate military, civilian, and data ecosystems.

Logistically, the Israeli regime and its partners have sought influence over critical trade corridors and infrastructure across the Eastern Mediterranean, Red Sea, and parts of Africa, intersecting with energy,

minerals and shipping routes.

Culturally, this order advances a narrative where resistance is delegitimised and compliance is reframed as pragmatism—particularly in the Global South and the Arab and Muslim worlds, often through education, media, and aid conditionalities.

Yet this project is far from coherent or universally accepted. Major European powers increasingly resist a model that reduces them to secondary consumers and buffer zones in great-power competition. Meanwhile, China, India, Brazil, and Russia are actively working to insulate themselves from sanctions regimes and tariff weaponisation, tools that have inflicted long-term suffering on civilian populations, notably in Iran, without delivering stability.

Even within the US, the erratic and personalised manner in which this order is being advanced is generating constitutional strain, economic uncertainty, and global unpredictability. A hegemonic order imposed like a bull in a china shop rarely endures. If we apply the KNIFE framework, the conclusion becomes clearer. Knowledge: The narrative of peace collapses when confronted with historical patterns and present data. Narrative: A peace imposed through fear cannot sustain legitimacy. Impact: Civilian suffering, economic fragmentation, and institutional erosion outweigh any short-term gains. Framework: Durable order requires inclusion, predictability, and shared rules, not ad-hoc coalitions. Elevation: True peace elevates humanity; it does not demand submission.

Those genuinely committed to peace must organise, speak clearly, and resist any order that deepens chaos while borrowing the language of stability. History is unforgiving to empires that mistake dominance for consent.

The maritime domain is the next battlefield



SONIA AMBROSIO

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

It is interesting to observe how the mainstream media has been silent regarding the US military’s confiscation of Venezuelan oil tankers and the destruction of fishing boats, which are allegedly used for drug trafficking in the Caribbean Sea, since September 2025. This silence persists despite over 30 strikes on these ‘narco-boats’ in the last four months, which have allegedly resulted in numerous fatalities.

The United States’ maritime operations in the Caribbean Sea and Atlantic Ocean to seize tankers linked to the Venezuelan oil trade and to disrupt alleged drug trafficking are part of a broader crackdown by the Trump administration following the capture of Venezuelan leader Nicolás Maduro. While other countries have denounced the seizure and destruction of fishing boats as violations of maritime law, the United States justifies these measures as enforcing sanctions against illegal activities.

Should we categorise this as piracy, armed robbery, or aggressive bullying?

While there is a sentiment that mainstream media provides inadequate coverage of maritime operations, specialised shipping news sources, including Maritime Executive, Lloyd’s List, and international bodies like IMB, consistently report on these incidents.

There is, though, some controversy over terminology. Are these strikes and seizures by the US military forces considered ‘maritime piracy’, and how does that compare

to when Ansar Allah attacks in the Red Sea? It is about definitions!

The contrasting approaches of the United States and Ansar Allah forces, for example, showcase the vast difference between a global superpower and a non-state actor that utilises guerrilla-style combat. The US reportedly intends to weaken the Ansar Allah’s abilities, while the Ansar Allah aims to inflict economic damage on Israel, the US, and their partners.

Maritime operations can function as political tools. These are employed by both governmental and non-governmental actors to project power, apply economic leverage, deter threats, exert influence, and shape international relations. These operations frequently occur in critical strategic locations such as the Red Sea, the South China Sea, and, more recently, the Caribbean Sea.

The perception of oceans has shifted from being a universal space for navigation to also serving as crucial arenas of economic interdependence and power competition. Over 90 per cent of global trade by volume is carried out by sea.

So far, I have merely scratched the surface. The undersea realm is undergoing profound changes, presenting a critical vulnerability. The ocean floor itself has emerged as a strategic asset. An unseen yet crucial infrastructure exists, and its security is as vital as safeguarding airspace or cyberspace.

Beneath the surface lie millions of

The contrasting approaches of the United States and Ansar Allah forces, for example, showcase the vast difference between a global superpower and a non-state actor that utilises guerrilla-style combat

kilometres of fibre optic cables for the global Internet; the backbone of energy interconnectors, the expanding infrastructure of the offshore wind industry, and an emerging layer of autonomous sensors and resident underwater vehicles.

Accidents, sabotage, acts of war, or conflicts on the seabed, even those employing relatively simple means, can lead to substantial damage.

The impact and consequences of maritime operations, on the surface or seabed, point to geopolitical shifts that intensify rivalries and force new alliances. It heightens economic volatility with increasing shipping costs, insurance premiums, financial market instability, and trade finance risks. It also erodes maritime order because attacks, strikes, or underwater ‘accidents’ challenge rules and norms.

As the ‘next geopolitical battleground’, the ocean is now a multi-domain arena — spanning from the surface to the deep sea and the seabed below — where nations compete for strategic leverage, secure economic supply chains, and race to secure critical minerals for green technology. The ocean is no longer just a space for transit; it is a contested domain where security, economics, and law collide. The existing framework of maritime rules and norms is signalling its inability to adapt to new challenges. Maritime domains thus become one of the principal arenas for power politics.

COMEBACK PUTS MALIKI IN TRUMP’S CROSSHAIRS

AHMED RASHEED AND MICHAEL GEORGY

Former Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al Maliki, who appeared poised for a remarkable comeback despite accusations he stoked sectarian strife and allowed the rise of IS, now finds himself in US President Donald Trump’s crosshairs.

In his latest direct intervention in another country’s politics, Trump on Tuesday warned Iraq that if it picked Maliki as its prime minister again Washington would no longer help the major oil producer and close US ally.

“Last time Maliki was in power, the country descended into poverty and total chaos. That should not be allowed to happen again,” Trump wrote, citing what he called Maliki’s “insane policies and ideologies”.

Maliki dismissed Trump’s threat. “We categorically reject blatant US interference in Iraq’s internal affairs, and consider it a violation of Iraq’s sovereignty,” he said in a post on X.

“Dialogue between states is the only viable political option in dealing with such matters, rather than resorting to the language of dictates and threats,” he added. Trump’s comments are the starkest example yet of his campaign to curb the influence of groups in Iraq, which has long walked a tightrope between its two closest allies, Washington and Tehran. They came after Iraq’s main alliance of political blocs, which holds a majority in parliament, picked Maliki - Iraq’s first elected prime minister after a US-led invasion toppled Saddam Hussein in 2003 - as its nominee for the post following an election.

That came as a surprise for many Iraqis who have accused Maliki of pursuing sectarian policies favouring the majority, and of driving others into the arms of IS militants who seized a third of Iraq as security forces crumbled.

A senior figure in the Dawa Party, Maliki previously served two terms as prime minister from 2006 to 2014, a period marked by sectarian violence, a power struggle with rivals, growing tensions with the US and poor public services and graft.

Maliki was pressured to step down in 2014 by an unusually broad array of critics after IS’s rapid territorial gains.

In 2015, an Iraqi parliamentary panel called for Maliki and dozens of other top officials to stand trial over the fall of the northern city of Mosul to IS. But Maliki, who is in his mid-70s, remained an influential political player, leading the State of Law coalition and maintaining close ties with powerful factions.

He used shrewd political skills to quietly build influence through ties to armed militias, the security services and the judiciary, analysts say.

Sentenced to death under Saddam for his role in the outlawed Dawa, Maliki spent nearly 25 years in exile, mostly in Syria and Iran, agitating for Saddam’s downfall. Like many exiles, he came back to Iraq after Saddam’s fall. — Reuters

Where does Europe go from here?

At the World Economic Forum’s annual gathering in Davos this month, the global elite witnessed firsthand what some have called US President Donald Trump’s “neo-royalist” style of government. But the week offered more than an over-the-top spectacle (more Game of Thrones than Versailles). It also revealed deeper, structural changes that will shape political and business leaders’ decision-making for a long time to come.

Although the crisis over Trump’s demand that Denmark hand over Greenland to the United States appears to have been defused for now, the idea of a united West has been dealt a fatal blow. Even if Trump keeps his promise to refrain from using force against a Nato ally, his (and all his advisers’) boorish behaviour in the run-up to Davos and at the conference has raised lasting doubts about America’s reliability, even in the minds of some of the most committed Atlanticists.

These doubts formed the essence of Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney’s now-famous speech, in which he spoke of a “rupture in the world order.” The same sentiment also showed up in my own organisation’s latest poll, which finds that a mere 16 per cent of Europeans see America as an ally, whereas almost twice as many in countries such as France, Germany, and Spain see it as a rival or even an enemy.

Equally important, as one European leader put it to me in private, the lurching unpredictability of US foreign policy under Trump reflects American weakness rather than strength. Again, our polling bears this out. One year into his second term, Trump’s greatest achievement has been to make China great again. Around the world, respondents expect China to become the world’s biggest power, and they predict that their own countries will develop closer links with it rather than with the United States.

What lessons should Europeans



The doubts formed the essence of Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney’s speech, in which he spoke of a “rupture in the world order.”



MARK LEONARD

The writer is a Director of the European Council on Foreign Relations, is the author of The Age of Unpeace: How Connectivity Causes Conflict

draw from this moment? The first takeaway concerns the exercise of power. The Greenland resolution that Trump announced on Truth Social on January 21 appears to have been the product of tireless diplomacy by Nato Secretary-General Mark Rutte, Finnish President Alexander Stubb, and Norwegian Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Store. But more importantly, these “Trump whisperers” succeeded because Europe had shown unusual resolve in drawing red lines and signalling its willingness to defend them.

To be sure, European leaders had to manage the usual divisions within their own ranks (for example, Poland’s right-wing nationalist president, Karol Nawrocki, dismissed the Greenland crisis as a bilateral problem between Denmark and the US). But unlike Europe’s feeble and ultimately unsuccessful response to Trump’s “Liberation Day” tariffs, the assertion of European sovereignty in recent weeks has been forceful and credible. It included troop deployments to the Arctic and a threat to introduce €93 billion (\$110 billion) worth of retaliatory tariffs and to use the EU’s so-called “trade bazooka.”

This response was enough to spook US markets, Congress, and the American public. Trump was forced to change course, just as he did when China called his bluff on tariffs last year. Europeans showed not only that they had “cards” and

were willing to play them, but also that they were prepared to engage in Trumpian power politics on their own terms. The question now is whether Europeans will accelerate efforts to insulate themselves from America’s volatile politics and identify the cards they can play in the next transatlantic contretemps.

That brings us to a second lesson: now is the time to prepare for a post-Western world by building wider relationships beyond the Atlantic. Carney prepared the ground for this by conceding that much of the world has always seen the liberal international order as hypocritical. And in their speeches, French President Emmanuel Macron, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, and German Chancellor Friedrich Merz all made a point of reaching out to the rest of the world.

Such overtures are prudent. Davos attendees from India, Africa, and South America told me that they are eager to find cooperative ways of resisting lawlessness and unfettered power politics. But, again, there are questions about whether Europeans will rise to the occasion. After all, messy intra-European politics remain a persistent obstacle. While European leaders were offering paeans to multilateralism in Davos, the European Parliament was busy trying to block implementation of a landmark EU-Mercosur trade deal that had been signed to much fanfare just the previous week. Equally, European leaders have long struggled to find the right tone when engaging with countries outside the West, as evidenced by their failure to create a global alliance in support of Ukraine. Finally, Europeans should remember that although this moment may feel unprecedented, it really is not. One of the most interesting discussions I attended in Davos focused on the lessons from the 1920s. That decade, too, was characterised by a discrepancy between technological optimism (following the advent of electrification and mass production) and geopolitical crises.

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SPORTS

BRAVINGRAIN



Four-time Dutch world champion Max Verstappen also drove for Red Bull and set the fastest time of the day in dry conditions, more than a second ahead of Charles Leclerc.

RED BULL, FERRARI DEFY RAIN AS F1 TESTING CONTINUES

BARCELONA: Formula One endured a rainy second day of private testing in Barcelona on Tuesday, with only Red Bull and Ferrari braving the wet conditions.

According to several media outlets, Frenchman Isack Hadjar of Red Bull, who had set the fastest time on Monday, was involved in a minor off-track incident at the end of the day, slightly damaging the rear of his car.

Ferrari took to the track for the first time this week with Monegasque driver Charles Leclerc, who racked up 64 laps in the morning despite the rain, before handing over the wheel to seven-time world champion Lewis Hamilton, who put in a sturdy 57-lap stint.

“For now it’s all about trying to understand if everything is working properly, which it kind of did,” Leclerc said.

“It’s not the best conditions because it has been a little bit raining this morning but actually we did our programme anyway because we are not focused on performance whatsoever.”

Four-time Dutch world champion Max Verstappen also drove for Red Bull and set the fastest time of the day in dry conditions, more than a second ahead of Leclerc.

McLaren, the two-time defending constructors’ champion, preferred to fine-tune their settings on Tuesday and confirmed that their car would take to the track on Wednesday and is also expected to run on Thursday and Friday.

Aston Martin announced on Monday that they would not be running until Thursday, losing one of their three authorised days of testing, while Williams decided not to take part in this session in Spain due to delays in the development of their car.

On Monday, seven of the 11 Formula One teams took to the Circuit de Barcelona-Catalunya for the first day of private testing, held behind closed doors without spectators or journalists — they were Alpine, Audi, the new American team Cadillac, Haas, Mercedes, Racing Bulls and Red Bull. — AFP

Seeb win fourth straight volleyball league title



Seeb players celebrate with the Oman First Division Volleyball League shield. — Abdulwahid al Hamadani

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, JAN 28

SEEB Club tightened their grip on the First Division Volleyball League title after defeating Al Bashayer in straight sets in the final, held at the main hall of Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher amid a large crowd and festive atmosphere.

The victory secured Seeb's fourth consecutive league title, underlining the team's technical superiority and consistency in recent seasons. Al Bashayer settled for second place, while Majees claimed third, as the league concluded under the auspices of Eng Hamad bin Ali al Nazwani, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning for Housing.

AL BASHAYER TAKE EARLY LEAD

The first set began evenly, with Al Bashayer taking an early lead through a solid block by Mohammed al Saifi followed by a successful attack from their Iranian professional Daniel. However, Seeb quickly responded through a powerful serve from Ismail al Haidi and a service error by Falah al Jaradi.

As rallies intensified, Seeb imposed their attacking rhythm. Adam al Jalboobi scored smartly through a precise setting, while Russian professional Bogdan delivered consecutive spikes to stretch the lead to 10–



Players pose with their individual awards.

5. Despite attempts from Osama al Maamari to bring Al Bashayer back into the contest, Seeb maintained control through the efforts of Saud al Maamari to take the set 25–19.

Al Bashayer entered the second set aggressively, racing ahead with a strong serve from Russian player Evgenis Tern and a quick point by Yousef al Abri to open a 7–2 advantage. But Seeb's experience gradually showed. Al Haidi reduced the gap with a series of powerful hits, while Saud al Maamari and Younis al Ameri restored balance.

With the score tied at 21–21, Seeb handled the decisive moments better, as Al Ameri struck a crucial point followed by another from Al Haidi to seal a thrilling set 26–24. The third set followed a similar script of intensity and close competition, with both teams trading the lead until the score was level at 20–20. However, Seeb's experience once again proved decisive in

the crucial moments, as they closed out the set 25–22 to seal the championship in deserved fashion.

MAJEES BEAT SOHAR

In the third-place playoff, Majees defeated Sohar in straight sets to claim the bronze medal.

During the closing ceremony, several individual awards were presented. Abdullah al Maqbali (Seeb) became the best libero, Adam al Jalboobi got best setter award, Saud al Maamari and Majees' Hamad al Maamari became best middle blockers (Position 3), from Al Bashayer, Falah al Jaradi and Hood al Jalboubi claimed best outside hitters (Position 4), Seeb's Ismail al Haidi was best opposite spiker (Position 2), while Younis al Ameri was named as the best all-round player.

Al Bashayer coach Sulaiman al Toobi attributed the loss to his players' lack of experience in finals, noting that tension affected their concentration during key moments. He stressed that the experience would serve as an important lesson for future seasons.

Meanwhile, Seeb coach Jamal al Maamari described the title as the result of collective teamwork and tactical discipline, praising his players' focus and ability to handle pressure, while highlighting the importance of administrative stability and support behind the team's continued success.

Seeb open Ministry’s Shield campaign with win over Nizwa

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, JAN 28

Seeb Club opened their 2026 Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth Basketball Shield campaign with a well-deserved 82–60 victory over Nizwa Club in a match held at the secondary hall of the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher on Tuesday, marking a strong start that underlined their readiness to compete for the title.

The encounter was competitive and entertaining, but Seeb asserted their dominance early through organised defence and quick offensive transitions, allowing them to control the first three quarters.

Scoring duties for Seeb were shared by Jawad Atkoya, Mazin al Hadidi, Mamadou Badji, Abdulrahman al Shueibi and Rashid al Zuhaiibi, while Nizwa relied on professional Ajassil Tonyon alongside Mohammed al Anqoodi, Adam al Hinai and Kingsley.

Seeb began aggressively and struck first with two points, before Nizwa responded quickly with a three-pointer from Ajassil to edge ahead 3–2. Rashid al Zuhaiibi levelled the score, but Nizwa briefly regained the lead through Qasim al Qasimi. The tempo soon intensified as Seeb regained control, extending their advantage through baskets from Mamadou, Zakariya al Wahaibi and Al Zuhaiibi to move ahead 12–5.

The momentum continued with end-to-end action. Mamadou added further points, while Nizwa scored from the free-throw line through Basil al Subhi. Hassan al Faraji then widened the gap for Seeb as both teams traded baskets, before Seeb closed the first quarter comfortably ahead at 28–13.

Seeb maintained their superiority in the second quarter, opening with five straight points from Mazin al Hadidi.

Mamadou followed with a three-pointer, capitalising on Nizwa's defensive struggles to stretch



Seeb and Nizwa players in action during the Ministry's Shield match. — Ammar al Musafir

the lead further. Despite Nizwa's attempts to reduce the deficit, Seeb headed into halftime with a commanding 55–26 advantage.

Nizwa showed improvement in the third quarter, tightening both defence and attack to score 14 points. However, Seeb remained composed offensively, adding 15 points to keep the gap intact and finish the quarter ahead 69–40.

In the final period, Nizwa displayed a strong fighting spirit and delivered their best scoring run with 20 points, compared to Seeb's 12. Nevertheless, the earlier deficit proved too large to overcome, and Seeb comfortably secured the win at 82–60.

The match was officiated by international referee Rashid al Mushaifri as the first referee, Mazin al Hilali as the second referee and Taha al Amri as the third referee.

The scoring table included Maryam al Zadjali, Aisha al Balushi and Hafiz Awlad Ahmed, with Eng Younis al Zadjali serving as technical supervisor.

BOARD ELECTION



Abdullah bin Mohammed Bamkhalaf and Dr Marwan bin Juma al Juma participated in the 46th General Assembly of the Olympic Council of Asia in Tashkent.

OOC ATTENDS ASIAN OLYMPIC COUNCIL GA IN TASHKENT

MUSCAT: Abdullah bin Mohammed Bamkhalaf, Secretary-General of Oman Olympic Committee, and Dr Marwan bin Juma al Juma, Board Member, participated in the 46th General Assembly of the Olympic Council of Asia, held on Monday, in the Uzbek capital, Tashkent.

The assembly witnessed the election of Shaikh Joaan bin Hamad al Thani as President of the Olympic Council of Asia, becoming the 22nd president of the Olympic movement in the continent since the first multi-sport Asian Games were held in 1913.

The election was attended by all representatives of the Asian National Olympic Committees and included the presence of Shavkat Mirziyoyev, President of the Republic of Uzbekistan.

In his speech, Shaikh Joaan emphasised that Asia is the largest and most diverse continent, noting that this diversity represents one of the greatest sources of strength, which requires working with a spirit of unity and mutual respect.

He also highlighted the importance of empowering National Olympic Committees and providing young athletes with a platform to excel on the international sports stage.

During the assembly, it was also approved that Qatar will host the 47th General Assembly of the Olympic Council of Asia next year, with the date to be announced later.

The assembly witnessed the signing of hosting agreements for the Asian Youth Games in 2029 in Tashkent and in 2031 in Cambodia, in addition to reviewing the preparatory reports for upcoming events, including the Asian Beach Games in Sanya, China 2026, the Asian Indoor and Martial Arts Games in Saudi Arabia and the 20th Asian Games in Aichi-Nagoya, Japan.



The assembly witnessed the election of Shaikh Joaan bin Hamad al Thani as President of the Olympic Council of Asia, becoming the 22nd president of the Olympic movement in the continent.



As many as 62 drivers from over 20 countries will lock horns in the second round of the Oman International Drift Championship 2026 in Muscat.

Daham to keep fine form as top drifters eye comeback

ANUROOP ATHIPARAMBATH
@anuroop_ath

ROUND One winner Ahmed Daham of Jordan is poised to keep his fine form as Oman International Drift Championship (OIDC) will hold the Round 2 on Thursday and Friday. Daham was crowned winner in the opening round at the Oman Automobile Association's (OAA) Muscat Drift Arena on January 15 and 16. Tommy Kiely claimed the second spot while Jack Shanahan finished third in the international category.

In the Middle East & North Africa (Mena) category, Ahmed Daham was on top followed by local driver Ahmed al Amri in second and Khalifa al Falasi in third. Ahmed al Amri was first on the national category with Tariq al Shaihani second and Ali al Balushi finishing third.

As many as 62 drivers from over 20 countries will lock horns in the second round in the drifting spectacle organised by the OAA as part of the Muscat Nights Festival 2026.

Former champion Ali Maksheed of Kuwait will look to



The top three drifters of the first round on the podium.

bounce back in the second round after he lost to the Tommy Kiely in the Twin Drift battles of last 32 in the first round.

Last edition's third-placed Clint van Oort of the Netherlands, Sebastian Fontijn (Netherlands), Lithuania's Benediktas Cirba, Nasser al Herbali, Conor Shanahan and Andreus Vasiliauskas among others adds spice to the competition with strong challenge from Oman and Middle East and North Africa (Mena) region. Three Omanis – Ahmed al Amri, Ali al Balushi and Tariq al Shaihani – qualified

for the last 32 in the first round. Seven local drifters are in the entry list for the second round including Haitham al Hadidi, Ali al Shaihani, Waqqas al Saud, Ali al Balushi, Tariq al Shaihani, Ahmed al Amri and Sultan al Balushi.

The first day of the championship on January 28, will be dedicated to qualifying rounds, where drivers will compete to secure their positions in the finals. The action intensifies on day two (January 29), which will feature the Top 32 battles, followed by Top 16, Top 8, with the final head-to-head

Twin Drift battles, promising high-adrenaline competition for motorsport fans.

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

The upcoming round follows the remarkable success of the first round, which witnessed a historic and unprecedented global moment with the landing of a winged aircraft inside the drift arena – an extraordinary spectacle that occurred for the first time in the history of motorsports worldwide. This iconic moment captured widespread international attention and coincided with a complete sell-out of all event tickets, reflecting the massive public interest and enthusiasm.

The event will be supported by comprehensive logistical preparations and world-class spectator facilities, ensuring an exceptional experience for the large crowds that attend annually. These events continue to reinforce Oman's position as a leading regional and international hub for motorsports.

Markram powers South Africa to 9-wicket win over West Indies

PAARL, South Africa: Aiden Markram powered South Africa to a nine-wicket win in the first Twenty20 international against the West Indies at Boland Park on Tuesday.

The South African captain hit nine fours and three sixes in a career-best 86 not out off 47 balls as the hosts chased down a competitive West Indian total of 173 for seven with 13 balls to spare.

An opening partnership (also) of 83 off 47 balls with Lhuan-dre Pretorius (44)

set the tone before Ryan Rickelton joined Markram and made 40 not out in an unbeaten second-wicket stand of 93 off 62 balls.

The three-match series is the final preparation for both teams before the T20 World Cup in India and Sri Lanka next month.

South Africa rested several players who were involved in the SA20 franchise final on Sunday, including first-choice opening batsman Quinton de Kock.

Pretorius, who is not in the



South Africa's Ryan Rickelton (R) and Aiden Markram (L) run between the wickets during the first Twenty20 at Boland Park in Paarl. — AFP

World Cup squad, opened in De Kock's absence. Markram said he was pleased with the depth in his squad.

"There are a few guys not here tonight who are good players. It's taken a few years to get where we are now. There are a lot of guys putting their hands up and it's a good space to be in."

Shimron Hetmyer hit 48 off 32 balls for the West Indies but no other batsman reached 30 in what captain Roston Chase said was a below-par total.

"We didn't have big

partnerships. Players got in but didn't go on to make 60 or 70. Then we were poor with the ball in the powerplay," said Chase, who was standing in for tour captain Shai Hope, who had suffered a blow on a knee.

South African left-arm spinner George Linde was named man of the match. He took three for 25, sharing the new ball and then bowling the last over of the innings when he dismissed Hetmyer and Jason Holder and conceded only five runs. — AFP

SPORTS

NBALEAGUE



Oklahoma City Thunder guard Shai Gilgeous-Alexander (2) passes as New Orleans Pelicans forward Herbert Jones (2) defends during the second quarter at Paycom Center. — **Imagn Images**

PISTONS ESCAPE
NUGGETS RALLY,
THUNDER ROLL
PELICANS

LOS ANGELES: Cade Cunningham finished with 22 points as the Detroit Pistons held off a late rally from the depleted Denver Nuggets to hang on for a 109-107 road victory on Tuesday.

Detroit, who improved to 34-11 to extend their lead at the top of the Eastern Conference standings, appeared to be cruising towards a comfortable win after opening up an 18-point lead early in the second quarter.

But a Denver line-up missing four key starters, including Nikola Jokic, refused to roll over and gradually chipped away at the Detroit lead, getting to within one point of the Pistons at 107-106 with four seconds remaining in the final quarter.

Denver star Jamal Murray could have forced overtime after being awarded three free throws with one second remaining and Detroit leading 109-106.

However, Murray missed his second and third free throws and the Pistons escaped.

In other games on Tuesday, Shai Gilgeous-Alexander extended his incredible 20-point scoring streak to 118 consecutive games as the Oklahoma City Thunder improved to 38-10 with a 104-95 defeat of the New Orleans Pelicans.

Reigning NBA Most Valuable Player Gilgeous-Alexander finished with 29 points, six rebounds and four assists as he edged closer to Wilt Chamberlain’s mark of 126 straight 20-point performances, a record set between 1961 and 1963.

Chet Holmgren added 20 points and Isaiah Joe bagged 17 off the bench to provide Gilgeous-Alexander with scoring support.

Tempers flared after the final buzzer when a confrontation between the Thunder’s Lu Dort and New Orleans’ Jeremiah Fears triggered a melee involving multiple players from both teams.

Oklahoma City coach Mark Daigneault said the post-game skirmish was the result of lax officiating.

“Good guys, good crew, but I thought they lost control of the game in the final minutes,” Daigneault said.

76ERS BLEW PAST BUCKS

In Philadelphia, Joel Embiid and Paul George combined for 61 points as the 76ers blew past the Milwaukee Bucks 139-122.

George put on a long-range shooting clinic, bagging nine three-pointers en route to 32 points, while Embiid added 29 and Tyrese Maxey 22. The Sixers improved to 25-21 while Milwaukee fell to 18-27 after their third straight loss.

Embiid, who has struggled with injuries in recent seasons, meanwhile took encouragement from another solid outing which followed a 38-point against the New York Knicks on Saturday.

“Every single time I step on the floor I get emotional because the last few years have been extremely tough, what I’ve been through,” Embiid said. — **AFP**



Detroit Pistons guard Cade Cunningham (2) controls the ball in the second half against the Denver Nuggets at Ball Arena. — **Imagn Images**



Italy's Lorenzo Musetti with Serbia's Novak Djokovic after retiring from his quarterfinal match. — **Reuters**



Italy's Sinner celebrates after winning his quarterfinal match against Ben Shelton of the US. — **Reuters**

Lucky Djokovic sets up
Sinner semifinal

P e g u l a , R y b a k i n a p o s t s t r a i g h t - s e t w i n s i n q u a r t e r s

NOVAK DJOKOVIC admitted he got lucky after opponent Lorenzo Musetti retired hurt on Wednesday to send the Serbian great into his 13th Australian Open semifinal and a showdown with reigning champion Jannik Sinner.

Earlier on day 11 in Melbourne, Jessica Pegula and Elena Rybakina both won in straight sets and will meet for a place in the final.

The 38-year-old Djokovic, chasing an all-time record 25th Grand Slam crown, has the tennis gods smiling on him.

His last-16 opponent Jakub Mensik pulled out without a ball being hit and Musetti was forced to retire with the Italian leading 6-4, 6-3, 1-3 on Rod Laver Arena.

The fifth-seeded Musetti was well on top when he needed treatment on his upper right leg, and with his movement badly impeded, was forced to reluctantly throw in the towel.

“I feel really sorry for him, he was the far better player, I was on my way home tonight,” said Djokovic, who had been uncharacteristically error strewn and staring down the barrel.

“It has happened to me a few times. He was in full control.

“So unfortunate, I don’t know what else to say.

“He should have been the winner today no doubt. I am extremely lucky to get through this one today.”

Djokovic has been trying to move past Margaret Court and clinch the landmark 25 since his last major title at the US Open in 2023.

It has proved increasingly difficult with the emergence of Sinner and world number one Carlos Alcaraz.

Djokovic, who needed treatment during the match for a gruesome blister, added: “I am going to double my prayers and gratitude tonight to God for giving me this opportunity again.”

Italian second seed Sinner was sublime in sweeping past big-serving American Ben Shelton 6-3, 6-4, 6-4.

Sinner holds a 6-4 win-loss record over Djokovic and has won their last five encounters.

Despite that, Sinner said Djokovic still sets the standard for professionalism.

“Me, as a 24-year-old, I’m lucky to have someone like him in front of my eyes, and I



Jessica Pegula of the US celebrates after winning her quarterfinal match against Amanda Anisimova of the US at Melbourne Park. — **Reuters**



Kazakhstan's Elena Rybakina celebrates after winning her quarterfinal match against Poland's Iga Swiatek — **Reuters**

can hopefully learn something,” said Sinner, who together with Alcaraz has dominated the last eight majors.

“He’s an inspiration for all of us and especially the young players,” he added.

Alcaraz plays third seed Alexander

Zverev in the other semifinal.

PEGULA TO MEET RYBAKINA

Moscow-born Kazakh Rybakina, the 2022 Wimbledon champion, stunned second seed Iga Swiatek 7-5, 6-1 to book her spot in the last four.

Pegula swept aside Amanda Anisimova 6-2, 7-6 (7/1) in an all-American affair.

Two-time champion Aryna Sabalenka takes on Ukrainian 12th seed Elina Svitolina in the other semifinal.

Rybakina has made the Melbourne final once before, in 2023 when she lost in three tough sets to Sabalenka.

The 26-year-old fifth seed took her latest victory in her stride, saying a calmer mindset helped in the heat of battle.

“In the beginning, when it’s the first final and you go so far in a tournament, of course you are more emotional,” said Rybakina.

“Now I feel like I’m just doing my job, trying to improve each day. So it’s kind of another day, another match.”

Defeat denied Swiatek in her latest bid for a career Grand Slam of all four majors, having already won Wimbledon, the French Open and the US Open.

Sixth seed Pegula and Rybakina have shared three wins each in their six matches so far.

Pegula is arrowing in on her first major crown at the age of 31, and like Rybakina, is yet to drop a set.

“It’s awesome,” Pegula said of reaching her first Australian semifinal, having beaten defending champion Madison Keys in the previous round.

She was helped by an error-riddled display from fourth seed Anisimova, who racked up 44 unforced errors to Pegula’s 21.

Her frustrations boiled over at the end as her hopes of reaching a third major final in a row melted away in a blur of mistakes.

— **AFP**

AUSTRALIAN OPEN RESULTS

MEN (QUARTERFINALS)

Novak Djokovic (SRB x4) bt Lorenzo Musetti (ITA x5) 4-6, 3-6, 3-1 ret

Jannik Sinner (ITA x2) bt Ben Shelton (USA x8) 6-3, 6-4, 6-4

WOMEN (QUARTERFINALS)

Jessica Pegula (USA x6) bt Amanda Anisimova (USA x4) 6-2, 7-6 (7/1)

Elena Rybakina (KAZ x5) bt Iga Swiatek (POL x2) 7-5, 6-1

MUSCAT
STOCK
EXCHANGE
6,361.448

BUSINESS

CRUDE OIL
OMAN \$64.61
BRENT \$66.25
LIGHT \$62.19



SHORTTAKES

OMAN’S SPACE SECTOR MOVES TO MARKET-BUILDING PHASE

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, JAN 28

The Omani space sector is moving from the establishment phase towards a market-building phase, according to Dr Saoud al Shoaيلي, Head of the National Space Programme at the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology.

Speaking during the 2nd Middle East Space Conference, the Programme Head shared the following, “Since the launch of the National Space Sector Policy in 2023 and over the past three years, the space sector in the Sultanate of Oman has moved from the establishment phase to the market-building phase”.

He added, “The space market in Oman has grown, with the number of companies increasing from 11 in 2023 to 25 by the end of 2025. These companies have created around 400 direct and indirect or supporting job opportunities in the space sector.

Head of the National Space Programme at the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology

In addition, more than 300 participants have benefitted from various capacity-building and training programmes. Overall, investments in the space sector have grown by more than 200 per cent”.

According to Al Shoaيلي, these figures extend beyond sectoral growth. “These figures do not only reflect the growth of the space sector itself, but also the emergence of a new economic sector in the Sultanate of Oman.

Since the launch of the policy, partnerships in Oman’s space sector have been distributed across five main areas: launch services, satellite communications services, remote sensing services, drone and aerial applications, as well as consulting, training and capacity-building services”.

To further strengthen these partnerships, the Ministry is working to regulate the sector through legislation and governance, enhance its attractiveness and build a national ecosystem of companies led by the private sector and enabled by the government — represented by the Ministry — to facilitate growth, create job opportunities and contribute to the national economy.

Al Shoaيلي highlighted some of the key projects in the sector. “In November of last year and under Royal directives, the Sultanate of Oman signed its first sovereign space project — the national satellite project. This project is not only intended to provide communications services; it represents a platform for enhancing digital sovereignty, a driver for building national capabilities and a gateway for Oman to enter global satellite communications markets”.

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 28

A strategic workshop on the theme, ‘Integration and Partnership with Omani Embassies Abroad’, organised by Invest Oman in collaboration with the Foreign Ministry, brought together a number of ambassadors to strengthen Oman’s investment and export promotion efforts.

The workshop reflects ongoing efforts to strengthen institutional coordination and activate the role of diplomatic missions as strategic partners in advancing Oman’s national economic objectives, in line with Oman Vision 2040.

The workshop discussed

a number of key themes, including the importance of integration and partnership between investment-related entities and Omani embassies abroad, as well as areas and mechanisms of cooperation.

It also introduced Invest Oman and the services it provides, in addition to showcasing its work teams and their role in supporting investors and facilitating their investment journey.

The workshop underscored that integration and partnership between Invest Oman and Omani embassies abroad constitute a fundamental pillar for strengthening the Sultanate of Oman’s efforts to attract high-quality



The workshop brought together a number of ambassadors to strengthen Oman’s investment and export promotion efforts.

investments, open direct channels for investment opportunities and promote exports, thereby achieving sustainable economic value and supporting economic diversification priorities.

In this context, Hawra al Wahibi, Director of the

External Offices Affairs Department at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, stated that the workshop comes as part of broader efforts to enhance institutional integration with Omani embassies abroad and unify

Madayn attracts RO 272m in food investments

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 28

THE Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn) has recorded investments exceeding RO 272 million in the food sector, reflecting the growing strength of food manufacturing as a pillar of Oman’s industrial and food security strategy.

Khalid al Salehi, Director General of Marketing and Commercial Affairs at Madayn, said Madayn’s industrial cities currently host 121 food-sector projects, underscoring the sector’s strategic importance.

He added that 28 new food projects were localised in 2025 alone, highlighting sustained investor confidence and the sector’s role in reinforcing national food security.

Al Salehi noted that Madayn continues to work on enhancing integration between industrial and agricultural activities. In this context, he highlighted the launch of the ‘Madayn Agriculture’ Initiative, implemented in cooperation with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources.

The initiative aims to introduce greenhouse projects within selected industrial cities, supporting local production, increasing export capacity and strengthening food security.

Innovation and sustainability were key themes in discussions on improving efficiency across food supply chains, particularly in reducing waste.

Lamya al Habsi, Marketing Director at ZabonEx, shared the company’s



The discussions and networking engagements were held during Madayn’s participation in Gulfood 2026.

experience in applying artificial intelligence to supply chain management through its B2B SaaS platform.

She explained that, according to FAO data and international research, nearly 40 per cent of food products are wasted at the retail and distribution stages. ZabonEx’s AI-driven platform analyses inventory and sales data to forecast actual demand at the store level, optimising supply volumes, reducing losses and improving operational efficiency.

“The platform enables businesses to make data-driven decisions that significantly cut waste while improving profitability”, Al Habsi said, adding that such solutions support global sustainability goals and the transition towards a circular economy.

The event also featured a panel discussion moderated by Dr Ayman al

Fudhaili, CEO of the Industrial Innovation Academy. Panelists included Ahmed al Ghafri, Chief Corporate Communication Officer at Mazoon Dairy; Ayman al Hasani, Board Member of Al Khamayil; Zain Akhtar, Associate Director of Business Development at NielsenIQ; and Ron van den Dungen, Chief Commercial Officer at BRS Green.

The discussion focused on brand trust, Oman’s competitive investment environment in the food sector and the increasing role of modern agricultural and industrial technologies. Panelists stressed the importance of closer coordination between policymakers and industry leaders to foster innovation and build a more resilient food ecosystem.

The discussions and networking engagements were held during Madayn’s participation in Gulfood 2026 in Dubai.

EDO issues \$650 million 10-year sukuk

MUSCAT: Energy Development Oman (EDO) has announced the successful issuance of a \$650 million (RO 250 million) 10-year sukuk, maturing in January 2036.

This transaction is part of EDO’s ongoing financing strategy to support a portion of its annual capital expenditure requirements, diversify its funding sources and optimise its capital structure.

Priced at a profit rate of 5.14%, the sukuk achieved a credit spread of 100 basis points over the 10-year US Treasury benchmark, representing the tightest pricing ever secured by an Omani government-related

entity (GRE). This success follows the recent upgrade of both EDO and the Sultanate of Oman to investment grade (BBB-) by Fitch, matching that from S&P.

This marks EDO’s third US dollar sukuk issuance, building on the company’s earlier transactions in 2023 and 2024.

The 5.14% profit rate compares favourably to the 5.875% achieved for EDO’s debut 10-year Sukuk and the 5.662% secured for the 7-year issuance in 2024, underscoring a strong pricing outcome, particularly in light of lower oil prices and increased geopolitical uncertainty.

The decision to move swiftly in early January allowed EDO to take advantage of a constructive window in the market and secure a portion of its 2026 financing early in the year.

Citi, JP Morgan and Standard Chartered acted as Global Coordinators on the transaction, while DIB, HSBC, Mashreq and Sohar International joined as Joint Bookrunners.

The issuance attracted strong and diversified participation from investors across Asia, Europe, the GCC, the UK and the US.

With this latest transaction, EDO extends the average tenor of its debt

Invest Oman strengthens partnership with Oman’s embassies worldwide

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 28

portfolio while further optimising its overall cost of funding.

Eng Sultan al Mamari, Chief Financial Officer at EDO, said: “EDO is delighted with the success of our latest USD Sukuk, which set a new benchmark for attractive pricing by an Omani GRE. We are pleased to have locked in a significant portion of our financing requirements early in 2026, given the uncertain global outlook.

The success of this transaction reflects the improvement in EDO’s and Oman’s credit standing, as well as investor endorsement of EDO’s business strategy”.

ADVERTORIALS

SHORTTAKES



BankDhofar has embedded responsible lending principles into its corporate philosophy.

BANKDHOFAR
POSITIONS
RESPONSIBLE CREDIT
AT THE HEART OF
SUSTAINABLE GROWTH

MUSCAT: As Oman advances its economic reform agenda under Oman Vision 2040, addressing household indebtedness has emerged as a critical policy and societal priority. Rising consumer awareness, regulatory focus and changing economic conditions are converging to reshape how credit is extended, managed and repaid.

Against this backdrop, BankDhofar is positioning responsible lending not merely as a compliance obligation, but as a core pillar of sustainable banking and long-term economic resilience.

At the heart of the challenge is the need to balance access to finance with financial stability. Credit remains essential for home ownership, education, entrepreneurship and consumption, yet unmanaged borrowing can strain households and undermine economic confidence.

Recognising this, BankDhofar has embedded responsible lending principles into its corporate philosophy, aligning commercial objectives with broader national ambitions to promote financial wellbeing.

Central to this approach is the bank’s emphasis on affordability-based lending. BankDhofar applies rigorous income assessment, debt-burden analysis and stress testing across its retail and SME portfolios to ensure that customers can comfortably service their obligations over time.

Rather than maximising short-term loan volumes, the bank prioritises long-term customer sustainability, helping borrowers avoid overextension in an environment of prices and living costs.

Beyond underwriting discipline, BankDhofar has been proactive in product innovation aimed at easing repayment pressures. Flexible repayment structures, loan rescheduling options and consolidation solutions allow customers to better manage existing obligations. These tools are particularly relevant for salaried individuals and SMEs navigating cyclical income patterns, providing breathing space while maintaining credit quality.

Digitalisation has further strengthened the bank’s financial wellness agenda. Through its digital banking platforms, customers can track outstanding balances, repayment schedules and cash flows in real time, improving transparency and budgeting discipline. Enhanced alerts and personalised insights help customers stay informed and proactive about their financial commitments, reducing the risk of missed payments or unintended debt accumulation.

NOOR GAZAL —
LULU CONTEST
SECOND
RAFFLE DRAW
HELD AT LULU
NIZWA

MUSCAT: The second raffle draw of the Noor Gazal — LuLu promotional contest was successfully held on January 24 at LuLu Hypermarket, Nizwa.

The raffle draw was conducted in the esteemed presence of Shaikh Salim bin Saleem al Junaibi, Member of the State Council and Saif bin Hamad al Nabhani, Director of Social Protection in Al Dhahirah Governorate. Also present at the event were Abdulla Rashid al Awadi, Chairman,



Noor Gazal Foods & Spices; Haslin Saleem, Managing Director, Noor Gazal Foods & Spices; Rahul, Shop Manager, LuLu Hypermarket

— Nizwa; and Azim PK, Sales Manager, Noor Gazal Foods & Spices. The Noor Gazal–LuLu raffle contest, currently running across all LuLu Hypermarkets in Oman, offers customers a chance to win exciting rewards by purchasing Noor Gazal products worth RO 2.

Winners can receive monthly iPhone 17 Pro prizes, Samsung TVs, gold coins and LuLu gift vouchers, with the promotion valid until March 28 and the last raffle draw will be held on 1st week of March.

Tiggo 9 PHEV sets new benchmarks in Oman

THE Tiggo 9 PHEV continues to strengthen its presence on Oman’s roads, earning recognition as a flagship SUV that seamlessly blends advanced technology, powerful performance and refined comfort.

As the newest and most advanced member of the Tiggo family, it reflects Chery’s long-standing philosophy of “Conquer with you, Guard for love”, delivering a driving experience that supports ambition while prioritising family wellbeing and peace of mind.

From the first glance, the Tiggo 9 PHEV commands attention. Its bold octagonal front grille and 20 inch multi-spoke alloy wheels project a confident, modern stance befitting its flagship status. Designed to excel across the diverse landscapes of the Sultanate of Oman, the Tiggo 9 PHEV stands out not only for its visual presence but also for its thoughtful engineering.

Inside, the cabin embodies comfort, intelligence and sophistication. A 15.6 inch 2.5K HD centre touchscreen serves as the hub of connectivity, complemented by premium 3D stitched seating that enhances long distance travel comfort.

The spacious, family-oriented interior is crafted to create a warm, tech forward environment that transforms every journey, whether a weekday commute or a weekend



The Tiggo 9 PHEV stands out not only for its visual presence but also for its thoughtful engineering.

escape, into a refined private experience.

At the heart of the Tiggo 9 PHEV lies its new high efficiency hybrid powertrain. The combination of a 1.5T high-performance engine with two powerful electric motors and a Dedicated Hybrid Transmission (3DHT) produces an impressive 423 HP of combined power and 580 Nm of combined torque. Despite this level of performance, the SUV maintains remarkable efficiency, achieving just 1.9 L/100 km (WLTC), making it one of the most economical choices in its

category. Drivers in Oman also benefit from exceptional long range capability. Thanks to its Super Hybrid DHT system, the Tiggo 9 PHEV delivers a combined driving range of up to 1,050 km, enabling effortless travel across the country’s expansive highways with fewer stops and greater overall convenience.

This balance of power, intelligence, comfort and efficiency makes the Tiggo 9 PHEV a truly future ready companion for families and professionals alike.

Salalah Mills unveils new corporate identity

MUSCAT: Salalah Mills Group has announced its participation in Gulfood 2026 in Dubai as one of the event’s official sponsors — an engagement that reflects the Group’s growing presence in the regional food industry and its ongoing role in enhancing the sector’s competitiveness.

The participation coincides with the launch of the Group’s new corporate identity under the slogan “Forging tomorrow with hope and impact”, a message that embodies the Group’s forward-looking vision and its transformation into a fully integrated food enterprise operating to international



Salalah Mills Group has announced its participation in Gulfood 2026 in Dubai.

production standards.

The Group emphasised that its sponsorship of Gulfood aligns with a broader strategy aimed at strengthening the global positioning of Omani food products across international supply chains.

This strategy is supported by the Group’s substantial production capabilities, reaching 1,500 tonnes per day and storage facilities exceeding 142,000 tonnes, in addition to its strategic proximity to the Port of Salalah, which offers a strong competitive advantage in exporting to the Gulf, the Horn of Africa and Asian markets.

Salalah Mills Group will showcase its latest expansion through the Food Development Company, a project delivering advanced frozen and chilled bakery solutions produced using state-of-the-art European technologies, catering to the hospitality, aviation and foodservice sectors.

The Group affirmed that the launch of its new identity marks the beginning of a more ambitious phase — one focused on driving innovation, strengthening food security and expanding Oman’s presence within the regional and international food landscape.

SOHAR celebrates completion of Volunteer Passport Programme

SUHAR: Under the auspices of Shaikh Haitham bin Hamood al Shehi, Deputy Wali of Liwa, SOHAR Port and Freezone, in partnership with the Oman Volunteers Network (Taawon), successfully concluded the Volunteer Passport Programme, marking the completion of a structured five-month youth development programme designed to build national capabilities and strengthen community engagement in Al Batinah North Governorate.

This youth programme equipped 125 young men and women from Al Batinah North Governorate with specialised training in leadership, teamwork and project management, enabling them to establish sustainable volunteer teams that



This youth programme equipped 125 young men and women.

address local community needs.

Participants were awarded official “Volunteer Passports” following rigorous evaluations of their training performance, project proposals and peer leadership demonstrations,

certifying their readiness to independently lead volunteer teams and drive impactful community development initiatives.

“The Volunteer Passport Programme represents a qualitative

step forward in empowering youth with practical leadership and project management capabilities that enable them to lead impactful volunteer initiatives”, said Habib bin Salman al Lawati, Leader of training at Oman Volunteers Network (Taawon).

“Our partnership with SOHAR Port and Freezone reflects a shared commitment to structured volunteerism and the development of sustainable community-led solutions”.

The programme supports the Oman Vision 2040 ‘People and Society’ pillar by cultivating national skills through hands-on training in project design, stakeholder engagement and sustainable impact measurement, enabling youth to

contribute effectively to economic diversification and social progress.

The initiative also aligns with SOHAR Port and Freezone’s ESG and CSR strategies, with a strong focus on social sustainability.

“At SOHAR, investing in people is central to our strategy. The Volunteer Passport Programme reflects our commitment to developing future-ready capabilities and enabling youth to lead sustainable, community-driven initiatives”, said Rashad al Wahaibi, Communication Advisor at SOHAR Port and Freezone.

“Through this programme, youth are positioned as active contributors to Al Batinah North Governorate’s long-term social development”.

SHORTTAKES



Participants reviewed the findings of a study analysing food imports in selected African markets.

OMAN EYES AFRICAN FOOD MARKETS

MUSCAT: A dialogue session highlighting investment and trade opportunities in Africa’s food market was organised by the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones, in cooperation with the National Programme for Private Sector Development and Foreign Trade, (Nazdaher).

The session forms part of national efforts to promote the products of factories operating in special economic zones, free zones and industrial cities, while expanding trade exchange between the Sultanate of Oman and African countries and opening new markets for the Omani private sector.

Participants reviewed the findings of a specialised study analysing food imports in selected African markets and identifying products where Oman has strong potential to expand exports and trade flows.

The initiative provides Omani manufacturers, entrepreneurs and investors in the food sector with insights into high-demand products and market entry opportunities across Africa, helping them better position their offerings in regional and international markets.

The session saw wide participation from both public and private sector entities, Nazdaher, the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion — represented by Oman Exports — the Centre for Strategic Partnerships and Foreign Trade and the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry. — ONA

Empowerment is key to sustainable livelihoods

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JAN 28

THE Sultanate of Oman is striving to find innovative solutions to support self-employed individuals through initiatives and projects focused on empowering citizens in the labour market. These efforts include providing specialised training programmes and freelance platforms, in addition to financing facilities to encourage young Omanis to start their own businesses.

Experts indicate that Oman is working to reduce the gap between the number of job seekers and available employment opportunities, which contributes to achieving sustainable economic growth and a competitive work environment.

Eng Azhar al Kindi, Technical Director of the National Employment Programme (NEP), explained that the “Masirah” initiative from the Development Bank is one of the factors supporting self-employed individuals and that the initiative is part of the National Employment Programme.

He also praised the entrepreneurial nature of young Omanis, which is evidenced by the continuous increase in the number of young self-employed individuals.

According to the Ministry of Labour, self-employment is a key employment pathway for citizens. Supporting Omani entrepreneurs is a crucial factor in advancing the labour market and regulating this sector and providing appropriate financing can help entrepreneurs succeed.

It is well-known that financing challenges are among the obstacles facing entrepreneurs, but if the necessary funding is available and cooperation is fostered among all economic entities, Omani entrepreneurs will be able to become



Oman is witnessing a continuous increase in the number of young self-employed individuals.

business owners and create new job opportunities.

The Development Bank provides financing for self-employment projects and offers licensed services to holders of self-employment licences who require funding or development.

The objectives of self-employment financing are to empower individuals and help them diversify their income sources, as well as to promote a culture of self-employment within the community. Furthermore, the Oman Business Platform has opened new horizons for young people to start their own businesses in an organised and legal manner.

This initiative comes within the framework of the government’s efforts to

support the local economy and promote a culture of self-employment by creating new job opportunities and enabling skilled individuals to transform their abilities into a sustainable source of income.

The Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority offers loans as the leading source of diverse and comprehensive financing programmes specifically designed to meet the needs of a wide range of projects and businesses.

The SME Leadership Executive Plan for the period 2026–2030 includes a package of high-quality programmes and initiatives targeting various stages of SME growth. These include programmes to enhance readiness for expansion and export, integrated financing programmes, initiatives supporting handicrafts and the creative economy, and the development of a network of entrepreneurship centres across the governorates.

SMEDA affirms that the implementation of this plan will contribute to strengthening the sustainability of SMEs, creating quality job opportunities and empowering entrepreneurs to build viable and scalable businesses.

This, in turn, will enhance the competitiveness of the national economy and align with the aspirations of the next phase. In recent years, Oman has also witnessed a significant shift in work culture, with young people increasingly turning to self-employment and the growing reliance on the digital economy.

The online freelance sector in the Sultanate of Oman has witnessed rapid growth, driven by changes in the global labour market and the trends of the digital economy and supported by national initiatives aimed at empowering youth and providing sustainable income opportunities across various digital platforms.

Middle East space programmes shift from prestige to performance

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, JAN 28

The Middle East’s space sector is undergoing a quiet but decisive transformation — from headline-grabbing missions to economically grounded programmes focused on sustainability, private investment and downstream impact.

That shift was evident during a high-level panel at the Middle East Space Conference in Muscat, where senior officials from Oman, the UAE and Egypt outlined how regional space strategies are being recalibrated to deliver tangible economic and social returns.

For the UAE, the evolution has been deliberate. Eng Salem Al Qubaisi, Director General of the UAE Space Agency, said the country has moved beyond broad-based support towards a more targeted “new space” approach.

“Our strategy now focuses on enabling innovators, attracting international investors and ensuring that companies can grow — not just survive — within the UAE”, Al Qubaisi said. Central to this shift is a robust legislative and regulatory framework designed



The UAE’s investment priorities increasingly lie in Earth observation, geospatial intelligence and downstream applications.

to reduce friction for both start-ups and established players. Licencing processes that once took months have been digitised and compressed, while regular reviews ensure regulations keep pace with technological change.

“The ease of doing business is critical”, he said. “If companies can license, operate and scale quickly, the ecosystem grows naturally”.

The UAE’s investment priorities increasingly lie in Earth observation, geospatial intelligence and downstream applications, particularly those linked to food security, water management and climate resilience. These are areas where space-derived data can directly support national policy goals.

In Egypt, the emphasis has

similarly turned towards applied outcomes.

Dr Maged Ismail, CEO of the Egyptian Space Agency, highlighted human capital, Earth observation and public-private partnerships as the backbone of Egypt’s space investments.

“Space applications today directly affect economic growth”, Ismail said. “From agriculture to urban planning, the value is no longer theoretical — it is measurable”.

Across the region, one recurring challenge remains: long-term investment discipline. Space programmes require sustained funding, often without immediate financial returns. Convincing governments to maintain year-on-year investment, speakers agreed, depends on demonstrating visible impact.

“When decision-makers see clear outcomes, future investment becomes easier”, Ismail noted.

Another shared priority is human capital development. The UAE’s astronaut programme, for example, has had a demonstrable effect on student interest in science and engineering disciplines. “Role models matter”, Al

Qubaisi said. “When young people see nationals reaching space, it changes aspirations across an entire generation”.

International partnerships were also cited as indispensable. None of the panellists viewed space as a sovereign-only endeavour. Instead, cooperation — whether in technology transfer, joint missions or accelerator programmes — was framed as essential to accelerating regional maturity.

“International cooperation is not optional in space”, said Ismail. “No country can build a complete ecosystem alone”.

Perhaps the most telling signal of change is the region’s growing emphasis on downstream markets — where satellites, data and analytics intersect with real-world demand

This pivot reflects a broader understanding that the future of space in the Middle East will be judged less by launches and more by economic relevance.

As regional programmes mature, the competitive edge will increasingly lie not in ambition alone, but in execution, regulation and the ability to translate orbital assets into ground-level value.

TECH LAYOFFS

Amazon trims jobs, pivots to AI



Amazon will cut 16,000 jobs worldwide in a second layoff round in three months, reversing pandemic-era over-hiring as it accelerates artificial intelligence adoption. Media reported the move follows plans to eliminate about 30,000 corporate roles, hitting AWS, retail, Prime Video and HR.

CEO Andy Jassy said trimming layers would curb bureaucracy and reduce managers. — Reuters

CURRENCY POLICY

Japan pauses yen intervention



Japan may refrain from intervening in currency markets for now as coordination with the United States helps curb a one-sided yen slide, said Atsushi Takeuchi, a former BOJ official.

Rare rate checks by the New York Fed signalled Washington’s resolve to cooperate. Authorities aim to halt sharp, one-way moves, focusing on pace rather than specific yen levels, he said Wednesday. — Reuters

PRECIOUS METALS

Gold hits record as dollar dips



Gold surged to record highs above \$5,300 an ounce as the US dollar weakened and concerns grew over Federal Reserve independence.

Spot prices jumped 1.7% to \$5,275.68 after touching \$5,311.31, following gains of more than 3% a day earlier. US futures rose 3.7%. Analysts said shifting confidence in the global monetary-fiscal order is lifting safe-haven demand amidst currency volatility. — Reuters

OCCI plays vital role in supporting public-private partnerships



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

ECONOMIC partnership between government institutions and the private sector is carried out through a number of organisations, foremost among them the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), which witnessed last year a package of initiatives and programmes for this purpose.

This partnership seeks to achieve several national objectives that the government has been working towards for decades, including enhancing the business environment, attracting local and foreign investments and expanding the base of economic diversification in line with the targets of Oman Vision 2040.

Over the past year, the Chamber introduced many programmes to enhance the business environment across the Omani governorates, leaving a tangible impact on the country's credit rating as well and all economic sector indicators recorded positive growth.

The Chamber also works to support these sectors under the new five-year plan (2026-2030), enabling the government to achieve economic growth of 4% at constant prices and to realise several economic and social goals, while maintaining efficiency, sustainability, competitiveness, financial sustainability and economic diversification.

In addition, the Chamber addresses challenges facing the private sector and

supports government efforts to generate more job opportunities for citizens in this regard to strength integration between the public and private sectors; and improving the attractiveness of the investment environment.

The Chamber continues to coordinate and work with its active members through its activities and programmes, facilitating traders' tasks in commercial affairs.

It also continues its efforts by activating the work of 20 sectoral committees, distributing roles among them, adopting their recommendations and submitting them to the relevant authorities to correct the course of these sectors.

All of this takes place as the Chamber focuses on expanding the base of economic diversification through participation in international exhibitions and organising visits for delegations of Omani businesspeople abroad to keep abreast of the latest developments in manufacturing and production processes.

This is coupled with its continued provision of studies and consultations through its ten branches, support for the establishment of community-based companies, empowerment of local investment and tangible progress in digital transformation to serve the aspirations of the coming phase.

The developments taking place in the Sultanate of Oman and the expansion of the country's economic ecosystem require the Chamber and its representatives to play

Over the past year, the Chamber introduced many programmes to enhance the business environment across the Omani governorates, leaving a tangible impact on the country's credit rating as well and all economic sector indicators recorded positive growth.

a greater role in the next phase as part of efforts to achieve economic diversification.

The most prominent strategic directions of the Sultanate of Oman lie in improving the business environment to attract local and foreign investment and expanding the base of economic diversification by supporting non-oil sectors and encouraging the growth of small and medium-sized enterprises through training and qualification of their leaders.

The country is set to engage in the coming phase with the issuance of a decision to establish the Oman International Financial Centre, which represents a strategic step towards creating an attractive investment environment and strengthening the role of commercial banks

Economic partnership between public and private institutions cannot be fully realised in an investment-adverse environment.

Private sector stakeholders seek incentives and facilitation to enable them to establish their projects without obstacles or challenges, particularly in areas related to employing national and foreign labour to carry out business transactions, as well as mechanisms for addressing unproductive labour.

This requires a clear understanding of these issues, alongside combating bureaucracy within public institutions so that companies do not face disruptions in production processes or daily operations, which could otherwise lead to liquidation or bankruptcy.

EUROPE SCORES TENTATIVE TRADE DEAL WIN OVER INDIA

SHRITAMA BOSE

Adversity sometimes moves things along like nothing else. Under pressure from the threat of Washington's tariffs, India and the European Union on Tuesday agreed the contours of a trade deal after muddling through stop-start negotiations for nearly 19 years.

The deal could significantly ease market access for both partners sharing a 180 billion euro (\$214 billion) trade relationship.

Yet the handicaps that the South Asian country is trying to overcome by easing protectionism are precisely what skews the terms in Brussels' favour.

India agreed to lower duties on high-end cars and drinks, which could improve the presence of European companies from Volkswagen to Renault that have so far found the world's fifth largest economy difficult to tap.

In exchange, it secured in one shot a major market for goods from shrimps to textiles that might get locked

out of the US due to a punitive 50% tariff.

Indian services firms will also gain steadier access to sectors from information technology to education.

The benefits seem lopsided, though. Most Indian goods only faced an average EU duty of only 3.3%, data by the World Trade Organisation shows.

Also, Brussels hasn't acceded to easing its carbon tax rules. By contrast, European industries were subject to tariffs above 10% on average, with machinery and car makers facing duties of 44% and 110%, respectively. Those will now be slashed to zero and 10%.

The EU's overall gains are still small, but the comparison with the less advantageous trade deal that Britain signed with India last year drives home the importance of having a big domestic market.

Brussels could sell small concessions as big boons because it only exports 2% of its goods to India, while being home to 18% of Indian sales.

To be sure, New Delhi takes on limited risks. Indian farmers and dairy producers will remain protected even as import levies on less sensitive goods like olive oil and fruit juices gradually drop to zero. — Reuters

Global economy 'more resilient than expected'

THE global economy has been 'markedly more resilient than expected' against a hostile backdrop of geopolitical and trade uncertainty, according to the World Bank which has upgraded its growth forecast for 2026.

In its biannual assessment of the international economic outlook, the world's prominent financial body said that the "limited" pass-through of tariffs onto prices and the artificial intelligence investment splurge helped economies largely shrug off predictions of a slowdown in growth.

The bank predicts global economic growth to edge down to 2.6 per cent in 2026 from 2.7 per cent the previous year. But the projection is far higher than the 2.3 per cent growth for the coming twelve months forecast by the bank's economists in June, as the worst of Donald Trump's tariff threats were largely avoided and businesses raced to invest and roll out AI.

"The global economy has shown greater-than-expected resilience to major shifts in the trading system, heightened policy uncertainty and geopolitical tensions", authors of the World Bank's flagship Global Economic Prospects report said: "In part, this reflects short term support for activity last year that stemmed from the stock piling of traded goods".

Meanwhile, a separate issue which has been causing concern in the UK is the unemployment situation.

Employers are preparing to lay off more staff as higher payroll costs from taxes and red tape are hitting headcount expectations, an industry survey has found.

The Institute of Director's (IoD) monthly business confidence survey showed that headcount expectations dropped in December after the chancellor Rachel Reeves' Budget unveiled a salary sacrifice cap and higher taxes on airports and pubs.

The net reading dropped from -7 to -21, setting the scene for another



ANDY JALIL
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The writer is our foreign correspondent based in the UK.

Researchers at the top industry body said strengthened workers' rights in the Employment Rights bill, which is set to kick into effect this year and the ripple effects of higher payroll taxes would force employers to think twice about taking on more staff.



People cross Waterloo Bridge during the evening rush-hour with skyscrapers of the City of London financial district seen behind in London, Britain. — Reuters

year of rising unemployment and falling vacancy numbers.

Researchers at the top industry body said strengthened workers' rights in the Employment Rights bill, which is set to kick into effect this year and the ripple effects of higher payroll taxes would force employers to think twice about taking on more staff.

"Hiring freezes remain widespread, amidst concern over further cost increases in the latest Budget and the direction of travel for the Employment Rights Bill", said Anna Leach, chief economist at the IoD.

When asked about the factors that would have the greatest impact on business confidence in 2026, top of the list were a lower tax burden and scaling back the proposed changes to employment law.

"More promisingly, improvements in regulation, trade deals with the European Union, lower tax complexity and lower business costs were also high up the list — areas where the government has stated ambitions and where tangible progress could begin to rebuild confidence".

The IoD's survey has showed investment intentions falling while export and revenue forecasts across firms were little changed.

The headline figure for business confidence in the survey measuring directors' confidence in the UK economy went to a score of -66 from a pre-Budget reading of -73.

Business leaders' confidence in their own organisations hit a reading of -5. Leach warned that the readings remained around the "record lows" seen during the pandemic.

Prime Minister Starmer has singled out areas of economic policymaking that he believes could reverse the UK's economic fortunes: planning, trade with the EU and welfare.

The latest set of figures may bring some relief to Labour government officials, who have made growing the UK economy their number one mission.

Starmer suggested joining the EU's customs union would undermine trade deals with the US and India. Instead, he said the UK should look for "closer alignment" on the single market.

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THE OMANI WEDDING

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CHANGING WORLD

THE COMFORT OF MY BED: WHY I CAN'T SLEEP WELL ELSEWHERE



SHADDAD AL MUSALMY

The writer is a Senior Editor at Oman Daily Observer.

This week, I happen to be out of the country and away from home. As I lay in this unfamiliar hotel bed, surrounded by unfamiliar sounds and smells, this time too I find myself yearning for the comfort of my own home.

It is not just always the mattress and the beddings. It is the entire ecosystem of my bedroom, the one place where I can truly relax and let my guard down.

When I am at home, I can sleep like a baby. I know exactly how to position myself on the mattress, which pillow to use and when to kick off the blankets.

But take me out of my element and I am a different person. The hotel room bed feels too firm, the pillows too flat, the air too stale.

Every little noise is amplified, every creak and groan a jolt to my system. I toss and turn, trying to get comfortable, but it is just not happening.

At home, I know where everything is, I know what to expect and I feel in control. Away from home, everything is uncertain and my brain is on high alert, scanning for potential threats throughout the nights.

It is not just about the physical comfort, though. It is about the emotional security of being in my own space.

At home, I know where everything is, I know what to expect and I feel in control. Away from home, everything is uncertain and my brain is on high alert, scanning for potential threats throughout the nights.

I know I am not alone in this. Many people struggle to sleep well in new environments, whether it is a hotel room, a friend's house, or a camping tent. It is like our brains are hardwired to associate sleep with a specific set of circumstances and when those circumstances change, our sleep suffers.

So what is the solution? For me, it's about recreating the comforts of home, even when I am away. Bringing a familiar pillow or blanket, using earplugs and an eye mask and trying to establish a consistent bedtime routine can all help.

It is funny how our brains latch onto these tiny details, isn't it? Maybe I will try bringing a familiar pillow next time I am away because by bringing a piece of home can ease the transition.

Hotel pillows can be a real sleep-killer. I find them having a different firmness, material, or loft that can be jarring to your neck and head.

Also, there is always lack of personal touch. Your pillow at home is, well, yours. You've got it just right and hotel pillows just can't compete. You might be a side-sleeper at home, but the hotel pillow's design might not accommodate that.

But honestly — nothing beats my own bed, in my own home, with my own pillows and blankets.

Until I can get back home soon, I will just have to suffer through these sleepless nights, dreaming of the comforts

QUICK FEATURES



ANCIENT TRADITIONS

Lynden Nicolson poses for a photograph after parading through the streets for the Up Helly Aa festival which celebrates the influence of the Scandinavian Vikings in the Shetland Islands.

— AFP



FILM AWARDS

British actors David Jonsson and Aimee Lou Wood pose for a picture at the announcement of the British Academy Film Awards (BAFTA) nominations in central London.

— AFP



TOURISM

A man looks at the city skyline as he visits the observation deck of the Varso Tower, one of Europe's tallest skyscrapers, in Warsaw.

— AFP

INSTA PICKS



Cultural scenes from Oman



A Black-winged Kite in Salalah

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AMERICAN DAREDEVIL FREE-CLIMBS TAIWAN’S TALLEST BUILDING



American climber Alex Honnold stunned crowds on Sunday by scaling Taiwan’s tallest building, Taipei 101, without ropes or safety gear, in a dramatic ascent that drew hundreds of spectators to the base of the tower and many more viewers online via a live Netflix broadcast.

Honnold, 40, rose to global fame in 2017 after free-solo climbing Yosemite’s El Capitan, a feat widely regarded as one of the most technically demanding climbs in the world. On Sunday, he turned his attention to Taipei 101, a 1,667-foot (508 metres), 101-storey glass-and-steel skyscraper in the heart of the Taiwanese capital.

He became the first person to free-solo the building, though not the first to climb it. Spectators gathered below to cheer him on, while others watched from inside the tower. “It was a once-in-a-lifetime experience”, said Richard Bode, 34. Another onlooker, Benson, 24, described the climb as “incredibly brave”, while Lin

Chia-jou, 54, said she found it “terrifying” but admired the effort behind it.

The challenge, titled Skyscraper Live, was originally scheduled to air on Netflix on Saturday but was postponed due to bad weather. In a promotional video, Honnold described the climb as a “lifelong dream”, calling it the “biggest urban free-solo climb” ever attempted.

Dressed in a red T-shirt and custom-made yellow climbing shoes, Honnold moved steadily up the building’s southeast face in clear weather. Midway through the ascent, he paused on a platform to wave at fans below, while people inside the tower watched in awe as he passed the glass observation deck on the 89th floor.

The climb took around one and a half hours. Upon reaching the top, Honnold raised his arms as he looked down at the crowd. In 2004, French climber Alain Robert became the first to scale Taipei 101, using safety ropes during rainy conditions. — AFP



THE EVENING THAT SHOWERED QAWWALI RAINS



KABEER YOUSUF

THE Al Qurum Natural Park venue of the ongoing Muscat Nights witnessed dews of Qawwali music being showered on the packed crowd that braved the cold chill recently.

The Sufi devotional music, which traces its origins to the Indian subcontinent, evoked divine love and ecstasy as it featured intense vocals, harmoniums, tabla and rhythmic clapping.

Organised by the Pakistan Social Club in collaboration with the Embassy of Pakistan, the soul-stirring Qawwali Night at the Open Theatre of the Muscat Nights Festival received an overwhelming response, with an audience of over 4,000 people, making it one of the most memorable and highly attended cultural evenings in the history of Muscat Nights.

The evening was spiritually uplifting and culturally enriching, featuring mesmerising performances by renowned Qawwals

Ustad Fareed Ayaz and Janab Abu Muhammad, along with their brothers, whose magical renditions of classical Qawwali kept the audience captivated throughout the programme.

The performance created an atmosphere filled with devotion, harmony and cultural pride. The programme, which commenced at 8 pm and concluded at 10.30 pm, received standing ovation and appreciation from the audience, reflecting the tremendous success of the event.

“We are thankful to the Management of Muscat Nights, especially Dr Eng Nasser bin Salim al Sadi and his dedicated team, for providing the esteemed platform to showcase Pakistan’s rich spiritual and cultural heritage at Oman’s premier cultural festival.

Their cooperation, professionalism and support were instrumental in the flawless execution of the event”, said the organisers.

The organisers of the event held under the auspices of Syed Fayyaz

Ali Shah included Mohammad Nadeem Azeemi, Chairman; Zahid Shakoor, Vice Chairman; Imran Toor, Finance Director; Kashif Ahmed Zaeem, General Secretary; Mohammad Kaleem Akhtar, Joint Secretary; Shaandar Bokhari, Director; and Azra Aleem, Director, along with other committed volunteers whose collective efforts ensured seamless coordination.

The sponsors, who made the Qawwali event possible included Haseena Jewellers, Friendi Mobile, Ravi Restaurant, Pizza Modo, Riyal Tikka and Mian Riaz; and Partner and the singers appreciated their continued support in promoting cultural activities and community engagement in the Sultanate of Oman.

This Qawwali Night has been described by the audience as a historic and landmark cultural event in the history of Muscat Nights that celebrates unity, spirituality and the rich cultural traditions of the participating countries, while strengthening cultural ties between communities in Oman.

FEATURES

SIHAM AL SAIDI

AT Suhar Festival, the past did not arrive as a distant memory, it arrived alive, breathing and full of sound. Through the reenactment of the traditional Omani wedding, visitors were invited into a world where joy was shared, time moved gently and celebration belonged to the entire community.

Long before wedding halls and dramatic private ceremonies, the Omani wedding was a social event that unfolded over days, sometimes weeks. It was built on simplicity, cooperation and an unspoken agreement that happiness was never carried alone. From engagement rituals to marriage contracts and wedding preparations, every step reflected values that shaped Omani society which are respect, solidarity and deep family ties.

The Suhar Festival presentation recreated these moments with striking authenticity. The rhythmic beats of Al Razha and the proud chants of Al Azi filled the space, not merely as performances, but as echoes of collective memory. These traditional arts once announced joy, strengthened unity and reminded communities of their shared identity.

“As I watched the scene, I felt as if I was seeing my parents’ stories come to life”, said Aasem al Maamari, who attended the festival with his children. “We grow up hearing about weddings where everyone helped, everyone celebrated. In fact, it is everyone’s wedding. This reminded us of who we are”.

One of the most touching moments was the portrayal of the bride's preparation. Days before the wedding, she would be perfumed with sandalwood, adorned with handmade embroidered garments and surrounded by women who shared advice, laughter, and blessings. The Dehen Alarous ceremony was not just about beauty, well it was about care, belonging and emotional support.

For children, the experience became a window into a world they had never known. “I liked how everyone was together”, said 12-year-old Noora Habeeb. “The clothes and songs felt warm, like a story from my grandmother”.

Parents observed their children watching closely, asking questions and connecting emotionally. “When heritage is shown this way, children don’t just learn, it stays in their hearts”, said Zainab al Ajmi. “They understand that these traditions carry love and meaning, not just rituals”.

More than a cultural display, the Omani wedding at Suhar Festival became a gentle reminder of what once defined community life. It showed that weddings were not measured by extravagance, but by connection and not by appearance, but by participation.

In reviving this tradition, the festival did more than preserve heritage, it gave it a voice that speaks to today’s generation. In a fast-paced world, the Omani wedding stood as a quiet call to remember, to belong and to celebrate together, just as Omanis always have.



THE OMANI WEDDING

COMES ALIVE AT SUHAR FESTIVAL

