

O M A N
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INBRIEF

HM ISSUES TWO ROYAL DECREES

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Tuesday issued two Royal Decrees, reading as follows: Royal Decree No 109/2025 on ratifying the air services agreement between the government of the Sultanate of Oman and the government of the Dominican Republic, signed in Punta Cana on November 10, 2025. Article (1) ratifies the aforementioned agreement in accordance with the version attached to this decree. Article (2) says that this decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from its date of issue. Royal Decree No 110/2025 on ratifying the air services agreement between the government of the Sultanate of Oman and the government of the Republic of Costa Rica, signed in Punta Cana on November 10, 2025. Article (1) ratifies the aforementioned agreement in accordance with the version attached to this decree. Article (2) says that this decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from its date of issue. — ONA

FM, COUNTERPARTS DISCUSS REGION

A telephone conversation was held between Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, and Dr Abbas Araghchi, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Iran. The discussions focused on bilateral relations between the two countries, alongside an exchange of views on several regional and international developments of shared concern. Separately, in a telephone call with Dr Badr Abdel Aati, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Egypt, Sayyid Badr discussed a set of regional developments. Both sides affirmed the alignment of their positions on regional and international issues and stressed the importance of fostering constructive dialogue, enhancing bilateral cooperation, and building upon the progress made in their bilateral relations. — ONA

HAPPY PLANET 2026

People enjoy a walk among New Year decorations in the form of planets in central Saint Petersburg on Tuesday. — AFP

Oman supports peaceful solutions in Yemen

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman said it is closely monitoring the developments taking place in the Republic of Yemen and reaffirmed its continued call for restraint and prioritising wisdom by addressing all issues amicably

through dialogue to achieve the desired consensus and fraternal understanding that serves the security and interests of the Republic of Yemen and the national security of neighbouring countries. In a statement issued by the

Foreign Ministry on Tuesday, the Sultanate of Oman voiced support for calls to de-escalate and contain the crisis, addressing its root causes, and respecting the sovereignty, security, and stability of the Republic of Yemen and the

will of its people. In the statement, the Sultanate of Oman underscored the importance of reaching consensual political solutions that contribute to achieving peace and harmony for all. — ONA

UN raps Israel’s moves against refugee agency

HUMANITARIAN SITUATION IN GAZA HAS WORSENE D AGAIN

THE UNITED NATIONS warned on Tuesday that recent actions by Israel against the UN agency for Palestinian refugees risked depriving millions of people of basic services such as education and healthcare. Israel’s parliament passed new legislation on Monday formally stripping the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) of diplomatic immunity and barring Israeli companies from providing water or electricity to the agency’s institutions. According to UNRWA, the legislation also grants the Israeli government the authority to expropriate the agency’s properties in East Jerusalem, including its headquarters and main vocational training centre. UNRWA chief Philippe Lazzarini condemned the legislation as “outrageous”, decrying it on social media as “part of an ongoing, systematic campaign to discredit UNRWA and thereby obstruct the core role that the agency plays providing human-development assistance and services to Palestine refugees”.

Filippo Grandi, the outgoing head of the UN refugee agency, UNHCR, and a former UNRWA chief, also criticised the move as “very unfortunate”. In an interview with AFP, he highlighted that UNRWA, unlike other UN agencies, provides basic public services such as education and healthcare to the millions of registered Palestinian refugees it serves across Gaza and the West Bank, as well as in Lebanon, Jordan

Fifteen-year-old displaced Palestinian Sarah Saada, who fled Beit Lahia in the northern Gaza Strip during Israeli bombardment, paints on her tent in Gaza City on Tuesday. — AFP

and Syria. “If you deprive those people of those services... then you had better find a substitute,” he said, warning: “I think it would be very difficult.” “At the moment, there is a great risk that millions of people will be deprived of basic services if UNRWA is further deprived of space to work, and resources to work.” Israel has been ratcheting up pressure on UNRWA over the past two years. It has accused the agency

of providing cover for Hamas fighters, claiming that some UNRWA employees took part in the militant group’s October 7, 2023 assault on Israel, which sparked the war in Gaza. A series of UN-linked internal and external investigations found some “neutrality-related issues” at UNRWA, but stressed Israel had not provided conclusive evidence for its headline allegation. Britain, Canada, France, and others said in a joint

statement on Tuesday that the humanitarian situation in Gaza has worsened again and is of serious concern, and called on Israel to take urgent action. The statement, published online by the British Foreign Office, said Israel should allow non-governmental organisations to work in Israel in a sustained and predictable way, and ensure the UN could continue its work in the Palestinian enclave. — Agencies

MoHT implements ‘Dolphins in Prehistoric Oman’ project

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MoHT) is implementing a project titled “Dolphins in Prehistoric Oman (DEXPO)”, aimed at enhancing the understanding of the relationship between humans and the marine environment in the Sultanate of Oman during prehistoric times. This is achieved through the systematic study and documentation of faunal remains discovered at various archaeological sites.

The project is a specialised research initiative in zooarchaeology, focusing on the study of exploitation patterns of both marine and terrestrial mammals by ancient coastal communities. It specifically targets the analysis of archaeological mammal remains at several key sites, including Ras Al Hadd and Ras Al Jinz in the Wilayat of Sur. The objective is to study the hunting, processing and consumption methods

utilised by these societies to secure protein from red meat, while integrating osteological and metric analyses with environmental data and museum comparative collections. This project will contribute to developing knowledge regarding human-sea interactions from the Neolithic period through to the late Iron Age. It highlights the economic and cultural roles played by large mammals in coastal lifestyles, reflecting

the depth of the Sultanate of Oman’s maritime and civilisational history. It is noteworthy that the project receives support from several Italian and international institutions, including the University of Bologna, and is funded by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, the International Association for Mediterranean and Oriental Studies, and the Society of Antiquaries of London. — ONA

OMAN

SHORT TAKES



AL SHARQIYAH NORTH MONITORS EDUCATIONAL PROJECTS

IBRA: The Municipal Council of Al Sharqiyah North Governorate held its tenth meeting of 2025 on Tuesday to discuss the latest updates regarding educational projects and community programmes across the governorate.

The meeting was chaired by Muhana bin Mohammed al Fazari, Vice-Chairman of the Municipal Council.

The Council addressed the mechanism for distributing animal farm plots, highlighting the main challenges faced by citizens and reviewing proposals submitted by the Governorate Development and Improvement Committee to streamline the process.

Members also reviewed a detailed statement on the key indicators for the education sector in Al Sharqiyah North. This included a comprehensive look at educational plans, construction projects and specialised programmes scheduled for the 2024-2026 period. — ONA

AL BURAIMI COUNCIL REVIEWS DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS



AL BURAIMI: The Municipal Council of Al Buraimi Governorate held its tenth meeting of 2025, chaired by Sayyid Dr Hamad bin Ahmed al Busaidy, Governor of Al Buraimi.

The session focused on the latest progress of development and service projects currently being implemented across the governorate’s wilayats, alongside discussions on strategic plans to enhance public services.

A significant portion of the meeting was dedicated to the road maintenance plan for the period 2026-2030. The Council reviewed the status of damaged roads and the technical treatments being applied to ensure structural integrity and improve traffic safety. Members also celebrated the progress of the “Al Buraimi Oasis” project in the city centre, noting that its completion rate has exceeded 99 per cent, with an official opening scheduled for the coming days. — ONA

‘Mustad’ camp seeks to qualify youth to enter labour market

SAUD AL ANSARI
MUSCAT, DEC 30

The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth celebrated the conclusion of the fourth edition of the ‘Mustad’ youth camp in the presence of Mohsin bin Hamad al Hadhrami, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, representatives from the private sector, youth development specialists and participating Omani youth.

The ‘Mustad’ camp aims not only at training, but also at building a conscious and qualified generation ready to enter the labour market, equipped with knowledge, initiative and strong work ethics. ‘Mustad’ embodies a generation that embraces challenges rather than waits, reflects the national framework for future skills, and contributes to achieving the ‘Human and Society’ pillar of Oman Vision 2040.

Eng Mohammed bin Ali al

Aghbari, Director of External Affairs, Government Relations and Communications at Petroleum Development Oman Company (PDO), stated during the closing ceremony that youth empowerment programmes reflect Oman’s national vision by placing youth at the centre of development. He noted that the company has made youth empowerment a core part of its strategy, with employees under the age of 35 representing more than 50 per cent of its workforce. The company has also provided training and employment opportunities to over 17,000 Omani youth through its major oil and gas projects.

He added that supporting the ‘Mustad’ camp, in partnership with the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth and Outward Bound Oman, underscores the company’s commitment to developing youth skills and preparing them for a promising future, emphasising the



‘Mustad’ embodies a generation that embraces ‘Human and Society’ pillar of Oman Vision 2040.

importance of such initiatives in achieving national development goals.

Shorouq al Hinai, a participant in the fourth edition of ‘Mustad’, described the camp as a transformative experience that positively impacted her life. She explained that she learned wilderness survival skills, how to set up a tent and how to use resources efficiently during the programme.

She added that the experience helped her become more self-reliant, boosted her confidence, enhanced her communication skills and allowed her to connect with a new group of participants, making the challenge more manageable and rewarding.

Mohammed al Amri, another participant, stated that the camp significantly enhanced both his personal and professional skills.

He noted that ‘Mustad’ helped him discover new aspects of himself, increase his self-confidence, and foster initiative and responsibility. On the professional side, he developed teamwork, communication, decision-making under pressure, leadership and critical thinking skills. He emphasised that the experience was highly enriching, leaving him with greater maturity, awareness and a clearer vision for his future.

Amjad al Zaidi, a participant in the 2023 edition, added that the camp helped him develop his skills and confidence, particularly through his first experience away from home and mobile phones. He mentioned that he went on to establish his own company, join another as an administrative member, publish several articles, and that the programme played a key role in securing his current position as a marketer at one of Muscat’s leading companies.

PLASTIC BAGS BAN ENTERS PHASE FOUR

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, DEC 30

The fourth phase of the ban on plastic shopping bags will take effect on January 1, 2026, the Environment Authority announced on Tuesday. This is part of the National Programme to Reduce Plastic Pollution and Promote Sustainable Consumption Practices in the Sultanate of Oman.

The first phase targeted shopping bags in pharmacies, hospitals and



The fourth phase includes ban in a number of commercial and service establishments.

clinics. The second phase included several commercial establishments, such as fabric, textile, clothing and Masar, tailors, opticians; mobile phone sales and repair shops, watch sales and repair shops, furniture and furnishings shops and household goods stores. The third phase encompassed shopping malls and large establishments.

The fourth phase includes a ban on the use of plastic shopping bags in a number of commercial and service establishments including

building and construction materials, kitchenware stores, feed, grain, agricultural supplies, pesticide stores, ice cream, corn, sweets and nuts stores, juice shops, kebab shops, mills, honey shops, date shops, water filter sales, repair shops, water pump sales and maintenance shops, car pump sales and maintenance shops, modern irrigation system stores, bird, fish, pet and related food stores as well as nurseries and agricultural supply stores.

Muscat receives rainfall as air trough affects Oman

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, DEC 30

ON Tuesday, the northern parts of the Sultanate of Oman were affected by a low-pressure air trough, bringing rainfall of varying intensity to several areas, including the Governorate of Muscat.

Parts of the capital received light to moderate rains, providing relief after a prolonged dry spell. The rainfall led to a drop in temperatures and improved atmospheric conditions.

The air trough also influenced weather conditions across multiple northern governorates, resulting in increased cloud cover and intermittent rainfall. The Governorate of Musandam was particularly affected, experiencing moderate to heavy rain that caused wadis to overflow.

Authorities have advised motorists to be cautious while driving in rainy conditions and recommended the public to stay updated on official weather forecasts, especially in low-lying areas and near wadis. According to predictions, weather conditions are expected to remain partly cloudy in some areas, with scattered rain likely to continue as the air trough lingers over Oman. Additionally, a cold wave is set to impact the Sultanate of Oman starting on Tuesday, December 30, leading to a noticeable temperature drop across most governorates, as reported by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA). The CAA mentioned that minimum temperatures are expected to significantly decrease, accompanied by increased northwesterly winds



The Sultanate of Oman will continue to experience a cold air mass until Thursday.

across much of the country. This impact is expected to persist in the coming days.

Satellite images and surface station observations have shown northwest winds affecting most governorates, with gusts reaching up to 29 knots, leading to dust rising and reduced horizontal visibility.

These active northwest winds have caused temperatures to drop. The lowest temperature was recorded in Jabal Shams at 0.6 degrees Celsius, while Saham recorded the highest temperature at 30.6 degrees. The Sultanate of Oman will continue to experience a cold air mass until Thursday, according to the National Multi-Hazard Early Warning Centre.

The flow of clouds has brought intermittent light to moderate rainfall to parts of Muscat, Al Batinah South, Al Dakhiliyah and Al Dhahirah governorates.

On Tuesday morning, clouds intensified over Al Hajar Mountains and the coasts of the Sea of Oman and the Arabian Sea, resulting in scattered rains.

The National Multi-Hazard Early Warning Centre predicts that northwesterly wind activity will persist until Thursday, affecting most governorates of the Sultanate of Oman.

This could lead to high sea waves along the coasts of the Sultanate of Oman, reaching a maximum height of 3 metres.

SHORT TAKES



The event will see the participation of more than 120 participants. — ONA

FORUM FOR THE BLIND FROM JANUARY 4 TO 7

SUHAR: Al Noor Association for the Blind in Al Batinah North Governorate revealed the details of the First Gulf Forum for the Blind, which will be held in the governorate from January 4 to 7.

The event will see the participation of more than 120 participants, including visually impaired individuals and their companions from across the GCC countries.

During the press conference, Mohammed bin Ismail al Balushi, Chairman of Al Noor Association for the Blind in Al Batinah North and General Supervisor of the forum, noted that the event will officially open on Sunday.

He explained that hosting the forum in Al Batinah North reflects the integration between the Association and various government and private sector institutions, enhancing the Association's role in coordination with associations for the blind across the GCC. He expressed hope that the forum would be held biennially, with future editions evolving to focus on specialised fields that showcase the creative talents of the blind in literature, culture, arts, and beyond. — ONA

OMAN MARKS GULF WILDLIFE DAY



The occasion serves to reaffirm the commitment of the Sultanate of Oman and the GCC countries to protecting biodiversity. — ONA

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Environment Authority, marked the Gulf Wildlife Day, which falls on December 30 each year. This year's celebration is held under the theme: 'A Society in Harmony with Nature for Sustainable Wildlife'. The occasion serves to reaffirm the commitment of the Sultanate of Oman and the GCC countries to protecting biodiversity, conserving natural resources and ensuring their sustainability for future generations.

The theme embodies the importance of fostering a balanced relationship between humans and the environment. — ONA

‘ME AND MY CHILD’ INITIATIVE SEEKS TO EMPOWER CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, DEC 30

In an effort to support children with disabilities, the Ministry of Social Development has launched the 'Me and My Child' initiative, specifically designed for children, babies from birth to three years old, as well as their families. The goal of the initiative is to empower children with disabilities at a young age by offering family counselling, psychological support and home-based rehabilitation services based on internationally recognised practices in early childhood development. This helps bridge the developmental gap between these children and their peers, while also emphasising the crucial role of families as key partners in the early



intervention process.

The ministry has announced that the current phase of the initiative is targeting 30 children with disabilities and their families. It is anticipated that this initiative will enhance the quality of life for these families, facilitate their acceptance of their child's condition, reduce the psychological stress associated with diagnosis, and prepare children to fully benefit from rehabilitation and educational inclusion services

in the future. Various programmes are included in the initiative, such as introductory meetings for families, providing a toolkit for early intervention in special education, conducting regular home visits, and offering family counselling sessions and continuous training for parents to monitor their children's skill development and establish new rehabilitation goals to work on at home.

The launch of this initiative demonstrates the ministry's dedication to strengthening early intervention programmes and enhancing rehabilitation services for this vulnerable age group. It also aligns with Oman Vision 2040, the Social Work Strategy and the Sustainable Development Goals 2030.

Workshop highlights rights of persons with disabilities

MOHAMED AL BATTASHI
MUSCAT, DEC 30

AN awareness workshop on the Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities was held at the National Autism Centre, under the patronage of the Ministry of Social Development. The workshop aimed to raise awareness about the new law, explain its main features, and highlight its role in protecting and empowering persons with disabilities.

During the workshop, it was confirmed that the law applies to Omani and non-Omani residents in Oman, reflecting Oman's commitment to inclusiveness and the protection of rights without discrimination.

The law also provides for the establishment of a National Register for Persons with Disabilities, which will help organise data and improve access to services. Registration will be mandatory, and an official card will be issued to registered persons with disabilities to be used in official dealings.

Amal al Kalbani, Head of the Family and Child Cases Department, said that the law provides clear legal and criminal protection for persons with disabilities. She noted that the Public Prosecution ensures respect for their dignity and privacy during investigations, including the use of sign language interpreters, social workers and psychologists when needed.

Zayana al Ya'arabi, Director of Qualitative Activities at the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, said the law represents a major shift, as its implementation is now mandatory for all institutions. She stressed the importance of preparing facilities and staff and supporting the empowerment of persons with disabilities, especially in sports and community activities. The workshop



The session addressed the rehabilitation of persons with disabilities and the role of the National Committee for Persons with Disabilities.

aims to strengthen public awareness of the law and promote shared responsibility in supporting the rights and inclusion of persons with disabilities.

The workshop was delivered by Hamoud bin Mirdad al Shubaibi, Adviser to the Minister of Social Development for Planning, and Dr Ali bin Hamad al Adawi, Adviser at the Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs. The programme was divided into two main sessions.

The first session focused on introducing the law and its general provisions, as well as the rights of persons with disabilities. These rights include civil, educational, health, social, cultural, sports and economic rights, in addition to the right to work. The law aims to ensure equality and equal opportunities for persons with disabilities in all areas of life.

The second session addressed the rehabilitation of persons with disabilities

and the role of the National Committee for Persons with Disabilities. The committee is responsible for preparing the general plan for persons with disabilities, developing national strategies and programmes, improving service levels, and supporting awareness and prevention efforts. The session also reviewed the penalties stated in the law for violations.

Speakers explained that one of the main reasons for issuing the new law is that the previous law was not aligned with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, as it was issued before Oman joined the convention. The old law included only 22 articles, while the new law includes 77 articles. The new law also addresses gaps in the previous legislation and reflects a shift from a care-based approach to a modern development-based approach focused on empowerment, partnership, equality and inclusion.

Winners of Tawasul Youth Short Film Award felicitated

SAUD AL ANSARI
MUSCAT, DEC 30

The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, represented by the General Directorate of Youth, announced the winners of the Tawasul Youth Short Film Award in its third edition in 2025. The announcement took place during a ceremony held on Tuesday, under the auspices of Basil bin Ahmed al Rawas, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth for Sports and Youth, at VOX Cinema, Oman Mall.

This year's edition saw a significant increase in participation, with 46 films submitted compared to 24 films in the previous edition. Ten films qualified for the competition for the top positions. The jury panel, composed of Dr Abdullah bin Habib al Maini (Chairman), Qaisar al Hinai, Muzna al Balushi and Laura al Siyabi, awarded five winners for



Malak al Ghafri, the winner of first place, attributed the achievement to a collective work that lasted over two months and was produced with a zero budget through the voluntary efforts of the team.

the top places and provided special recognition certificates for four additional films.

The film 'Hiss Al Ard' (sound of the earth) claimed first place, followed by 'Forbidden Roses' in second, 'The 25th Hour' in third, 'Dialogue with the Past' in fourth and 'Ranna' in fifth place.

Wadha al Farsi, Director of the Youth Communication and Dialogue Department, emphasised the ministry's dedication to supporting talented Omani youth in short film-making and enhancing their creative skills.

Abdullah Habib, Chairman of the Jury of the Tawasul Youth Short Film Award, praised the notable

development in both quantity and quality in the third edition of the award. He commended the competing films for their advanced cinematic awareness and ability to address sensitive humanitarian and social issues through a responsible artistic approach.

Muzna al Balushi, a member of the judging panel, lauded the remarkable creativity and distinguished Omani films in terms of ideas and execution. She highlighted that all works were produced by Omani individuals and selected after thorough professional discussions within the jury to ensure fairness for all participants.

Malak al Ghafri, the winner of first place (Hiss Al Ard film), expressed pride in the achievement, attributing it to dedicated collective work that lasted over two months and was produced with a zero budget through the voluntary efforts of the team. She explained that the film was inspired

by Taghribat Al Qaffer by Dr Zahran al Qasmi, transforming the concept of 'qafir' from water scarcity to impact tracing, while showcasing the traditional profession of searching for missing people and livestock known in Oman in the past.

Alia al Shukri, winner of second place, described the film as a beautiful and meaningful work that reflects the team's dedication and effort. She appreciated the commitment behind the project, noting that the time and passion devoted to the film were evident on screen.

Mahmood al Rawahi, winner of third place, expressed his pleasure in participating alongside fellow film-makers. He described the film's storyline about a young man who finds a watch in the desert capable of stopping time for one hour, which unexpectedly extends to 25 hours, leading to a series of challenges throughout the story.

OMAN

SHORT TAKES



The introductory meeting covered the festival’s main events. — ONA

DETAILS OF AL DHAHIRAH TOURISM FESTIVAL UNVEILED

IBRI: Al Dhahirah Governorate on Tuesday announced the details and events of Al Dhahirah Tourism Festival 2026, which will be held from January 8 to February 6, 2026.

The announcement event was held in the presence of Najeeb bin Ali al Rawas, Governor of Al Dhahirah and General Supervisor of the festival.

Ahmed bin Rashid al Marshoudi, Director of the Communication and Media Department at the Governor’s Office, reviewed the features of the festival’s new edition, which will be held under the slogan “Something Different.” He underlined the governorate’s keenness to present a renewed tourism and entertainment experience that meets the aspirations of various segments of society and reflects the governorate’s tourism and cultural assets.

The introductory meeting covered the festival’s main events, which range from international entertainment shows, artistic concerts, and poetry evenings to cultural and heritage events, children’s activities, a heritage village, a consumer market, and a hall for international restaurants and cafes. This enhances the festival’s standing as a family destination during the winter season.

The developmental aspects of the festival were also reviewed during the event. These included diversifying events, expanding the scope of participation and attracting international performances being held for the first time in Al Dhahirah Governorate, such as the Monte Carlo International shows. Additionally, a daily global carnival featuring giant robot displays and mobile entertainment performances within the festival site will be held, along with daily international folkloric performances. Furthermore, the festival’s new visual identity was highlighted to align with audience expectations. — ONA

Muscat Nights: Venues all set to welcome visitors

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, DEC 30

AS THE world welcomes the new year with hopes and aspirations, Oman is prepared to kick off Muscat Nights. The event will take place at various venues and shopping malls throughout the country.

The festival will be held at locations such as Al Qurum Natural Park, Al Amerat Public Park, Al Naseem Public Park, the Royal Opera House Muscat (ROHM), Oman Automobile Association, Oman Convention and Exhibition Center (OCEC), Al Hail Beach, Wadi Al Khoud, as well as several cultural centres and shopping malls.

The family festival, which will run until January 31, will feature a dedicated area for over 700 small and medium enterprises and productive families. Organisers have arranged for over 500 volunteers who speak different languages to help manage the event, making it the largest of its kind in the capital and welcoming visitors from around the world.

Dr Shawqi bin Abdurahiman al Zadjali, Head of Marketing and Promotions at Muscat Nights, explained that the chosen locations were selected for accessibility to residents and visitors across different areas of the capital.

“We are all set to host the one-month-long-family-festival called Muscat Nights 2026 from Thursday where over 700 Small and Medium Enterprises, along with highly creative families, are participating presenting their products and services to the visitors. This provides not only an opportunity for these companies to showcase their offerings to the nearly one million anticipated visitors but also makes a complete family festival,” he said.

The festival will offer a variety of activities, food, fireworks, laser



“We are all set to host the one-month-long-family-festival called Muscat Nights 2026 from Thursday where over 700 Small and Medium Enterprises, along with highly creative families, are participating presenting their products and services to the visitors.”

DR SHAWQI BIN ABDURAHIMAN AL ZADJALI



shows, and entertainment for children, including rides, games, and sports activities. Additionally, there will be new and innovative programmes, performances, and attractions to entertain families from around the world.

Traditional art, culture, and music will be celebrated, with performances by the Miami band and musicians from all governorates showcasing traditional Omani music forms. Visitors can also enjoy a wide range of shopping and entertainment activities, including traditional handicrafts and artefacts from various countries.

Muscat Nights will be open to the public every day from 4pm to 11pm, with extended hours on weekends. Some days will be reserved for families and women to enjoy the festivities.



وزارة الإعلام
Ministry of Information



INTERNATIONAL TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

3. The Ministry has the right to:

1) Add or Cancell some works in the tender if necessary.

2) Cancellation of the tender without giving reasons.

For clarifications you may contact via:

Telephone : 24943785, 24943177, Email: (Moi.Tenders@omaninfo.om)

Muscat to welcome ‘Miami Band’, the beloved music group, on January 9

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, DEC 30

‘Miami Band’, the beloved music group from the 90s that captured the hearts of teenagers then, is coming to Oman for a live show at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC) as part of Muscat Nights, a month-long festival for families.

The exciting performance is scheduled for January 9, 2026, and tickets can be purchased online or at selected outlets.

Miami Band has been popular for decades, with songs that have been the soundtrack to road trips, house parties, and late-night singalongs, instantly transporting listeners back to their younger years.

Organisers of Muscat Nights, the Muscat Municipality representatives, are hopeful that Miami Band will bring the same energy to Muscat after performing to sold-out crowds across the GCC and lighting up Dubai on January 3.

“The Band’s shows are all about familiar hits, great vibes, and a



crowd that knows every word, so that everyone can travel in time to their past, making this one of the most exciting music events in Oman to kick off 2026,” said the Muscat Municipality representatives.

The Band’s shows are known for familiar hits, great vibes, and a crowd

that knows every word, allowing everyone to relive their past and making it one of the most anticipated music events in Oman to start off 2026.

This concert promises to be a standout event in Oman, offering a night of singing along, high energy, and a celebratory atmosphere. “If you’ve

ever been to a Miami Band concert, you already know the vibe: non-stop energy, hit after hit, and a crowd that sings along from the first song to the last. And if you haven’t? This is your sign,” said a septaugenarian.

Miami Band, a beloved name in Gulf music since their debut in 1991, is known for their energetic performances and popular songs like ‘Bastans,’ ‘Ya Omre Ana,’ ‘Ya Helwakom,’ and ‘Gharamak Shay Ajeeb,’ which have brought generations together.

There are age and dress code restrictions for the concert. The minimum age to attend is 6 years old, and the dress code is smart casual or formal attire. Sportswear and inappropriate clothing are strictly prohibited, and entry will be denied for non-compliance. Additionally, professional cameras are not allowed inside the event.

Organisers advise purchasing tickets only from authorised sellers, as they will not be responsible for tickets bought from unauthorised sources.



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

إعلان مناقصة
Tender Notice

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

TENDER NUMBER	TENDER NAME	DATE OF PUBLISHING	LAST DATE TO PURCHASE TENDER DOCUMENT	SUBMISSION DATE	COMPANIES WHO SHOULD PARTICIPATE IN THIS TENDER	DOCUMENT PRICE
219/2025/MTCTIT	CONSULTANCY SERVICES FOR SUPERVISION OF DESIGN AND BUILD SLOPE PROTECTION IN LOCATION 10 MADHA HAJR BANI HAMID ROAD	29-12-2025	12-1-2026	17-1-2026	EXPERIENCED COMPANIES AND REGISTERED WITH THE SECRETARIAT GENERAL OF TENDER BOARD (FIRST CLASS)	(48/700) فORTY EIGHT OMANI RIALS, AND SEVEN HUNDRED BAISA (LOCAL, REGIONAL) (10/-) TEN OMANI RIAL FOR SME NON-REFUNDABLE

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

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NATIONAL HEART CENTRE REDUCES WAITING LISTS

Enhances efficiency

THE National Heart Centre at the Royal Hospital has achieved a notable national milestone in developing cardiac imaging services. It implemented a sustainable model combining investment in national cadres, unification of professional standards and enhancement of operational efficiency. This has contributed to improving service quality and reducing waiting lists, reaching a “zero level” by the end of 2025.

The indicators showed a remarkable improvement in productivity during the period (2023–2025). The number of cardiac computed tomography (CT) scans increased from 1,953 scans in 2023 to 2,671 scans in 2025, achieving a growth rate of 36 per cent. The number of cardiac magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scans doubled from 458 scans to 920 scans during the same period, with a growth rate of 100 per cent.

These efforts were supported by focused campaigns targeting the reduction of waiting lists. These included the implementation of four campaigns for cardiac CT imaging, during which 673



The indicators showed a remarkable improvement in productivity during the period (2023–2025). — ONA

scans were performed, and two campaigns for cardiac MRI imaging, during which 177 scans were conducted. This directly contributed to accelerating the delivery of treatment services to patients.

Dr Najib bin Zahran al Rawahi, Director of the National Heart Centre, affirmed that the achievements made during 2023–2025 represent a practical model for transforming operational challenges into opportunities for sustainable development, focusing on three pillars: qualifying cadres, unifying regulatory frameworks

and enhancing resource efficiency.

He added that this approach has yielded a tangible improvement in service quality and positively impacted the speed at which patients receive medical care, while ensuring adherence to global safety standards. He indicated that this achievement represents a cornerstone for enhancing integration and elevating cardiac care services throughout the Sultanate of Oman.

This integrated approach was reflected in a radical processing of accumulated referrals. — ONA



وزارة التنمية الاجتماعية
Ministry of Social Development



Tender Announcement

The Internal Tender committee of **Ministry of Social Development** hereby announces the following tender:-

Tender No.	Tender Subject	Grade	Last date for obtainment of Tender Document	Last date for Tender Submission	Tender Document Price (non-retundable)	
					Small and Medium Companies	Local Companies
695/2025	Providing cleaning services for the Ministry's General Office building, the Juvenile Affairs Department building, the Family Guidance and Counseling Department, the Family Protection Department at Al-Khoud, the warehouse buildings, and the maintenance team	Companies specialized in the field of hygiene, washing and pest control services Registered with the Projects, Tenders and Local Content Authority in the excellent, first, second, third or fourth degree	Friday 09-01-2026 02:00 PM	Sunday 25-01-2026 10:00 AM	10 R.O	25 R.O
696/2025	Providing cleaning services for the Social Development Directorate building at Muscat Governorate and the buildings of its affiliated departments and centers	Companies specialized in the field of hygiene, washing and pest control services Registered with the Projects, Tenders and Local Content Authority in the excellent, first, second, third or fourth degree	Friday 09-01-2026 02:00 PM	Sunday 25-01-2026 10:00 AM	10 R.O	25 R.O
697/2025	Providing cleaning services for the building of the Directorate of Affairs of Persons with Disabilities and the buildings of its affiliated departments and centers at Al-Khoud	Companies specialized in the field of hygiene, washing and pest control services Registered with the Projects, Tenders and Local Content Authority in the excellent, first, second, third or fourth degree	Friday 09-01-2026 02:00 PM	Sunday 25-01-2026 10:00 AM	10 R.O	25 R.O
698/2025	Providing a trainer to train National Autism Center staff to obtain QASP-S certification	Companies specialized in the field of Education, training and human resources development services Registered with the Projects, Tenders and Local Content Authority in the excellent, first, second, third or fourth degree	Friday 09-01-2026 02:00 PM	Sunday 25-01-2026 10:00 AM	10 R.O	25 R.O

❖ Specialized Companies, registered with the **Tender Board** may obtain the Tender documents at the Tender Board e-tendering digital portal link (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>) On **Wednesday 31/12/2025**.

❖ For Inquiry, please contact though the e-tendering website (reg@tenderboard.gov.om) tel. (24402200).

“ The lowest or any other tender shall not be binding to the Ministry”

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WORLD

SHORT TAKES



IRAN’S PRESIDENT OFFERS DIALOGUE WITH PROTESTERS

TEHRAN: Iran’s president urged his government to listen to the “legitimate demands” of protesters, state media reported on Tuesday, a day after demonstrations by shopkeepers in Tehran over economic hardship. Monday’s protest took place mainly in central Tehran’s shopping districts. On Tuesday morning, most shops and cafes were open as usual, along the vast Vali-asr Avenue which runs 18 kilometres from north to south through Tehran. Riot police were, nonetheless, monitoring the main squares in the city centre.

On Wednesday, schools, banks and businesses will be closed in Tehran and several other regions in the north and centre of the country to save energy amid severe winter cold, state media reported. It was into this atmosphere that President Masoud Pezeshkian made his statement. “I have asked the interior minister to listen to the legitimate demands of the protesters by engaging in dialogue with their representatives so that the government can do everything in its power to resolve the problems and act responsibly,” he said, in a social media post. — **AFP**

BANGLADESH DECLARES MOURNING FOR EX-PM ZIA



Supporters of Bangladesh’s former prime minister Khaleda Zia mourn her death in Dhaka. — **AFP**

DHAKA: Bangladesh has declared three days of state mourning for former prime minister Khaleda Zia, with her funeral to be held on Wednesday.

Zia, aged 80, died in hospital on Tuesday morning. Interim leader Muhammad Yunus, in a television broadcast to the nation, appealed for calm. “I humbly appeal to everyone to maintain discipline while observing all forms of mourning, including the funeral prayers. I know you are all deeply emotional at this time,” Yunus said. “I hope that during this difficult period, you will show utmost patience and support one another in carrying out her last rites, including the funeral.”

Asif Nazrul, who holds the law portfolio in the interim government, said the funeral prayers would be held in front of parliament after midday prayers, and that Zia would then be buried alongside her late husband, Ziaur Rahman. The nation of 170 million people has been in political turmoil since a student-led revolt overthrew Sheikh Hasina as prime minister in August 2024, ending her 15-year autocratic rule. Despite years of ill health and imprisonment, Zia vowed in November to campaign as a candidate for her Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) in elections set for February 2026. — **AFP**

POLICE OPERATIONS

Türkiye detains 357 IS suspects nationwide



Turkish police detained 357 suspects in a nationwide operation against IS, a day after three police officers and six militants were killed. Interior Minister Ali Yerlikaya said authorities carried out raids in 21 provinces across the country. “Just as we have never given an opportunity to those who try to bring this country to its knees with terrorism, we will never give them an opportunity in the future either,” he said. — **Reuters**

MANDATORY CANING

Scammers face up to 24 strokes in Singapore



Scammers in Singapore face mandatory caning of up to 24 strokes for serious cases as a law authorising the punishment came into effect. The city-state has doubled down on syndicates following record-high scam losses, with the Ministry of Home Affairs saying that “fighting scams is a top national priority”. Singapore lost \$2.8 billion through scams from 2020 up to the first half of 2025. Around 190,000 cases had been reported over that time period. — **AFP**

HIGHWAY CRASH

Joshua ‘stable’ after fatal road accident



Former world heavyweight boxing champion Anthony Joshua was in a “stable condition” in hospital after a car accident in Nigeria that killed two close friends and associates. Matchroom confirmed police reports that he was involved in the smash, which happened on Monday morning on a main road linking Lagos and Ibadan in the southwest of the country. “He is in a stable condition and will remain there for observation,” a statement read. — **AFP**

ASEAN TO ASSESS DEVELOPMENTS IN MYANMAR AFTER POLLS

KUALA LUMPUR: Asean will assess developments in Myanmar following the first phase of elections and avoid actions that would “confer premature legitimacy” to any party, Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim said. His comments came as Myanmar’s dominant pro-military party claimed an overwhelming victory in the first phase of the elections after democracy watchdogs warned the junta-run poll would only entrench military rule.

The armed forces snatched power in a 2021 coup that triggered civil war, but on Sunday, opened voting

in a phased, month-long election they pledged would return power to the people.

Anwar — whose country holds the rotating chair of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) until the end of the year — said leaders from the 11-nation regional bloc which includes Myanmar would continue to “consider developments with care, including steps underway relating to the political process” in Myanmar. “Any assessment will proceed in a sequenced manner, guided by the need to reduce violence, avoid actions that could deepen divisions

or confer premature legitimacy, and preserve the possibility of an inclusive and credible pathway forward,” he told reporters.

Campaigners, Western diplomats and the United Nations’ rights chief condemned the vote, citing a crackdown on dissent and a candidate list stacked with military allies likely to prolong the armed forces’ rule.

Pro-democracy guerrillas and ethnic minority armies opposing the military have pledged to block the election from the patchwork territories they have carved out in the war. — **AFP**

Truce holds despite Thai delay to free Cambodians



Chinese FM Wang Yi meets with Thailand’s FM Sihasak Phuangketkeow and Cambodian Deputy PM Prak Sokhonn in Yuxi, Yunnan province. — **Reuters**

The Southeast Asian neighbours agreed on a ceasefire that took effect at noon on Saturday, halting 20 days of fighting that killed at least 101 people and displaced more than half a million on both sides, and included fighter-jet sorties, exchanges of rocket fire and artillery barrages

strongly rejected the accusation of using drones and issued an order prohibiting the use of drones across the country late on Monday. “There has been no reaction yet; it is being monitored,” said Pen Bona, a spokesperson for the Cambodian government, when asked about the delay to the soldiers’ release.

The Thai Foreign Ministry also sent a formal protest to Cambodia after a Thai soldier lost a limb on Monday in a landmine blast at a border area. Landmine incidents were a catalyst for the renewed clashes. China’s Foreign Minister hosted two days of talks with his Thai and Cambodian counterparts, reaching an agreement on Monday that the two countries would work to rebuild mutual trust and gradually consolidate the ceasefire.

Earlier on Tuesday, Thai Foreign Minister Sihasak Phuangketkeow

said the ceasefire was fragile and needed both sides to ensure that it was sustained and that bilateral relations were gradually repaired. “The ceasefire has only just been agreed so there is fragility,” Sihasak told reporters. “We should avoid instigation or things that could diminish the ceasefire,” he said.

Thailand and Cambodia plan to rebuild mutual trust and gradually consolidate a ceasefire after weeks of border clashes, Beijing said in a communique with the two countries following talks in southwestern China. Thailand and Cambodia’s top diplomats travelled to the Chinese province of Yunnan for trilateral talks with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi to discuss the border situation on Sunday and Monday. In a meeting with his Thai and Cambodian counterparts, Wang called the ceasefire “hard-won”, and urged the two nations not to abandon it halfway or allow fighting to resume. Thailand and Cambodia will “rebuild political mutual trust, achieve a turnaround in relations and maintain regional peace,” according to a joint communique released by the Chinese ministry.

Thai and Cambodian defence officials joined the talks in China, with diplomats and defence officials from the two countries holding a number of bilateral meetings. Cambodian Foreign Minister Prak Sokhonn told local media after the talks in China that there would be “open communication” between foreign and defence ministers “to rebuild trust”. — **Reuters**



SYRIA IMPOSES NIGHT CURFEW ON LATAKIA

DAMASCUS: Syrian authorities imposed an overnight curfew in the port city of Latakia on Tuesday after attacks in neighbourhoods the day before. The interior ministry announced a “curfew in Latakia city, effective from 5:00 pm on Tuesday, December 30, 2025, until 6:00 am on Wednesday, December 31, 2025”. Individuals attacked neighbourhoods on Monday, damaging cars and vandalising shops.

The attacks came a day after three people were killed during mass protests by the minority community that followed a bombing in Homs. One of them was a member of Syria’s security forces, according to a security source. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights monitor reported that a young man was killed on Monday night in Latakia “by being shot directly inside his car after being chased” by “three young men”.

Syrian authorities on Monday said security forces reinforced their deployment in Latakia, and interior ministry spokesman Nureddine al Baba said Syria rejects “any acts of sabotage or attacks that affect the dignity of citizens or their property... and the necessary legal measures will be taken against their perpetrators”. — **AFP**

SHORT TAKES



This combination shows (L) China’s President Xi Jinping and (R) South Korea’s President Lee Jae Myung. — AFP

S KOREAN PRESIDENT LEE TO VISIT CHINA NEXT WEEK

SEOUL: South Korean President Lee Jae Myung will visit China from Sunday to meet counterpart Xi Jinping and deepen cooperation, Seoul and Beijing said. Lee and Xi last met in November on the sidelines of the APEC summit in the South Korean city of Gyeongju. Lee’s visit will be the first by a South Korean leader to China since 2019. The South Korean leader will take part in a summit and a state dinner with Xi in the Chinese capital Beijing from Sunday to Tuesday, his office said. The two leaders will work to “solidify the full restoration of the strategic cooperative partnership”, a spokesperson added. And they will seek to deepen cooperation in “supply chains, investment, the digital economy, combating transnational crime and the environment”. Lee will then head to economic powerhouse Shanghai for two days. The South Korean leader has sought a reset in relations with China after years of fraught ties under his predecessor Yoon Suk Yeol. Last month, Lee pitched the Chinese leader as a partner in Seoul’s efforts to rekindle frayed ties with the North. — AFP

BELARUS PARDONS POLITICAL PRISONERS



Belarus’s leader Alexander Lukashenko pardoned 20 political prisoners on Tuesday, in an amnesty ahead of the New Year. The press service of Lukashenko’s office said 22 people had been pardoned the term Belarus uses for political cases. Fifteen women and seven men were released, it said, adding that Lukashenko had acted “in the interest of their families”. Earlier this month, Minsk freed more than 100 political prisoners — including protest leader Maria Kolesnikova and dissident Ales Bialiatski — in exchange for the lifting of some US sanctions. They were pardoned and deported through Lithuania and Ukraine. — AFP

FRANCE PUSHES BACK PLASTIC CUP BAN BY FOUR YEARS

PARIS: The French government postponed a ban on plastic throwaway cups by four years to 2030 because of difficulties finding alternatives. The ban was meant to start on January 1. But the ministry for ecological transition said that results from a recent review into the “technical feasibility of eliminating plastic from cups” justified pushing back the deadline. It said in an official decree that a new review would be carried out in 2028 of “progress made in replacing single-use plastic cups”. It

added that the ban would now start January 1, 2030, when companies would have 12 months to get rid of their stock. France has gradually rolled out bans on single-use plastic products over the past decade as environmental campaigners step up warnings about their impact on rivers and oceans. A 2020 law set a deadline of 2040 to eliminate all single-use plastics. A ban on plastic bags for loads of less than 1.5 kilogrammes (3.3 pounds) of 30 fruit and vegetables was introduced in 2022 and has dramatically changed supermarket

habits. The postponement marks “yet another step backwards in the fight against plastic pollution, under pressure from lobby groups,” said Manon Richert, a spokeswoman for the environmental group Zero Waste France. She said “the argument put forward about technical feasibility is shaky” because solutions exist but haven’t been widely adopted due a lack of investment and an inadequate regulatory framework. Environmental campaigners say the phase out of single-use plastics has been too slow. — AFP

Kyiv says no evidence for Putin residence attack

KYIV said on Tuesday there was no “plausible” evidence it launched a drone attack on one of Vladimir Putin’s residences, accusing Moscow of peddling false claims to try to manipulate talks on ending its attack. President Volodymyr Zelensky warned a day earlier Russia was preparing the ground for an attack on Kyiv, calling on residents of the capital to be on alert. Moscow on Monday said Ukraine had launched drones at Putin’s secluded home in the Novgorod region, between Moscow and Saint Petersburg.

The Kremlin said on Tuesday it considered it a “terrorist act” and a “personal attack against Putin” -- but added it could not provide evidence for its claim as the drones were “all shot down”. It also said the Russian army had chosen “how, when and where” to retaliate against Ukraine. Russia has hit Ukraine with an almost daily barrage of drones and missiles for almost four years, killing thousands. The Kremlin also said it would now “toughen” its negotiating position in talks to end Europe’s worst conflict since WWII. Kyiv stressed Moscow had provided no evidence, despite almost 24 hours transpiring since Russia made the claim. “Almost a day passed and Russia still hasn’t provided any plausible evidence,” its foreign minister Andriy Sybiga said on social media. “And they won’t. Because there’s none. No such attack happened.” European leaders rallied around Zelensky following Moscow’s allegation and — according to Poland — were set to discuss the war later on Tuesday. “We are moving the peace process forward. Transparency and honesty are now required from everyone - including Russia,” German Chancellor Friedrich Merz said on social media. US President Donald Trump — who spoke to Putin on Monday — directed criticism at Kyiv on Monday, despite Ukraine calling the incident a Russian fabrication. “You know who told me about it? President Putin, early in the morning, he said he was attacked. It’s no good,” Trump said. “It’s one thing to be offensive because they’re offensive. It’s another thing to attack his house,” the US leader said. Russia has not said where



A man visits a makeshift memorial with the names of fallen service members, in Kyiv. — Reuters

Putin was at the time. The longtime Russian leader’s residences are shrouded in secrecy in Russia — as is much of his private life. The late Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny, who died in an Arctic prison last year, had published investigations into Putin’s luxury lake-side residence in the Novgorod region. Putin had increasingly used the residency since the Ukraine war began, as it was more secluded and better protected by air defence installations. Russia’s claim came after Zelensky held talks with Trump in Florida, with the Ukrainian leader saying it was a “fabrication” intended to sabotage diplomatic progress made by the US and Kyiv. Moscow’s allegation comes at a pivotal moment for diplomacy to end the war. Ukraine has said it has agreed to 90 percent of a US-drafted peace plan, but Russia has been hesitant to accept a deal that does not meet its maximalist demands. Putin has repeatedly said that Russia intends to seize the rest of Ukrainian land he has proclaimed as Russian if diplomacy fails. Russia’s advance in eastern Ukraine

picked up pace in autumn, with Moscow’s troops seizing more villages with every week since. Ukraine on Tuesday also ordered the mandatory evacuation of several villages in the northern Chernigiv region, which borders Moscow-allied Belarus, due to intense Russian shelling. Meanwhile, Russia attacked infrastructure in Ukraine’s Odesa region on Tuesday, damaging a civilian ship and facilities in the Black Sea ports of Pivdennyi and Chornomorsk, Deputy Prime Minister Oleksiy Kuleba said. Kuleba said a civilian Panama-flagged ship loaded with grains was damaged, and that oil storage tanks were also hit. One person was wounded, he said on the Telegram app. “This is yet another targeted attack by Russia on civilian port infrastructure. The enemy is trying to disrupt logistics and complicate shipping,” Kuleba said. Despite the attacks, both ports continued to operate, he said. Odesa and the wider nearby region are home to the Black Sea ports that are crucial for Ukraine’s foreign trade and the survival of its wartime economy. — Agencies

Fresh US strikes destroy docking area for Venezuela drug boats

PALM BEACH: The United States hit and destroyed a docking area for alleged Venezuela drug boats, President Donald Trump said on Monday, in what could amount to the first land strike of the military campaign against trafficking from Latin America. The US leader’s confirmation of the incident comes as he ramps up a pressure campaign against Venezuela’s leftist President Nicolas Maduro, who has accused Trump of seeking regime change. “There was a major explosion in the dock area where they load the boats up with drugs,” he told reporters at his Mar-a-Lago resort in Florida as he hosted Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. “So we hit all the boats and now we hit the area, it’s the implementation area, that’s where they implement. And that is no longer around.” Trump would not say if it was a military or CIA operation or where the strike occurred, noting only that

it was “along the shore.” Sources familiar with the operation told CNN and the New York Times that the CIA had carried out a drone strike on a port facility. The strike was believed to be targeting the Venezuelan gang Tren de Aragua, though no one was present at the time of the operation and there were no casualties, the US media outlets reported. There has been no official comment from the Venezuelan government. The Pentagon earlier referred questions to the White House. The White House did not respond to requests for comment. Asked on Monday if he had spoken to Maduro recently, Trump said they had talked “pretty recently” but that “nothing much comes out of it.” Trump revealed details of the operation after being asked to elaborate on comments he made in a radio interview broadcast on Friday that seemed to mention a land strike for the first time.



A US Air Force MC-130 Hercules aircraft taxis at Rafael Hernandez Airport in Aguadilla, Puerto Rico. — AFP

“They have a big plant or a big facility where they send, you know, where the ships come from,” Trump told billionaire supporter John Catsimatidis on the WABC radio station in New York. “Two nights ago, we knocked that out. So we hit them very hard.” Trump did not say

in the interview where the facility was located or give any other details. Trump has been threatening for weeks that ground strikes on drug cartels in the region would start “soon,” but this is the first apparent example. US forces have also carried out numerous strikes in both the

Caribbean Sea and eastern Pacific Ocean since September, targeting what Washington says are drug-smuggling boats. The administration has provided no evidence that the targeted boats were involved in drug trafficking, however, prompting debate about the legality of these operations. International law experts and rights groups say the strikes likely amount to extrajudicial killings, a charge that Washington denies. After Trump spoke on Monday, the US military announced on social media that it had carried out another strike on a boat in the Eastern Pacific, killing two and bringing the total killed in the maritime campaign to at least 107. It did not specify where exactly the strike took place. The Trump administration has been ramping up pressure on Maduro, accusing the Venezuelan leader of running a drug cartel himself and imposing an oil tanker blockade. — AFP

OPINION

The quiet inventory we take when a year ends



HYESHA BARRETT

The writer is a Master Life Coach and Positive Parent Specialist

As the year draws to a close, something subtle begins to happen beneath the noise of celebrations, resolutions, and neatly packaged reviews. We start to take an internal inventory. Not of achievements or milestones, but of moments that linger. The conversations that changed us. The losses we did not fully grieve. The versions of ourselves we outgrew without realising at the time, often quietly and without ceremony. End-of-year reflection is often framed as an exercise in productivity. What did you accomplish? What goals did you meet? What will you do better next year? Yet, the most meaningful reflections rarely live in lists or numbers. They live in the quiet acknowledgements we make, when no one is asking us to perform progress or prove growth publicly. This past year likely asked more of you than you expected. Not always in obvious ways. Sometimes growth looked like staying when it would have been easier to leave. Sometimes it looked like leaving when staying had begun to cost you your sense

of self and inner steadiness. There were moments you held yourself together without applause, days you showed up carrying emotions no one else could see, and nights you questioned parts of yourself that once felt certain. Reflection invites honesty without judgement. It asks not only what you did, but who you became while doing it. Where did you soften? Where did you harden? What patterns repeated themselves, and which ones quietly loosened their grip over time? These questions are not meant to shame nor motivate. They are meant to bring you closer to yourself with compassion and greater self-awareness. The end of a year often stirs grief alongside gratitude. Even good years carry endings. Relationships shift. Roles change. Dreams evolve or dissolve. There are versions of you that belong only to this year, and it is natural to feel the weight of letting them go gently. Reflection allows us to honour what was, without clinging to it or rushing to replace it too quickly. There is also wisdom in noticing what

Reflection is not about closing a phase perfectly. It is about acknowledging the truth of what you lived. When you allow yourself that honesty, you step into the new year not as someone who needs fixing, but as someone who has already grown

drained you. Not as a failure, but as information. Fatigue often points toward misalignment, overextension, or unmet needs. The body keeps score, which the mind tries to overlook. Paying attention now can be an act of care, rather than critique or self-blame. As you look ahead, gentleness matters more than grand intention. The most sustainable changes rarely come from pressure. They come from clarity. From recognising what you no longer want to carry forward. From giving yourself permission to enter the next chapters in 2026, less guarded, less performative, more real and more emotionally present. 2025 does not end with a clean line. It folds into the next one, carrying lessons, scars, strengths, and quiet resilience. Reflection is not about closing a phase perfectly. It is about acknowledging the truth of what you lived. When you allow yourself that honesty, you step into the new year not as someone who needs fixing, but as someone who has already grown. Happy New Year 2026!

Nepal political alliance challenges traditional party dominance

An emerging political bloc in Nepal has gained another heavyweight, with a third key figure joining the new alliance ahead of next year’s election, a party member said on Tuesday. Two of Nepal’s most popular political leaders, television host Rabi Lamichhane of the Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP) and Kathmandu mayor Balendra Shah, agreed on Sunday to unite their parties for the March 5, 2026, polls. They pledged to address the demands of younger “Gen Z” protesters following deadly anti-corruption demonstrations in September that ousted the government. Kulman Ghising of the Ujyalo Nepal Party, who is the energy minister in the interim government, also agreed to join the new alliance late on Monday. “This agreement... has brought an alternative force into the political mainstream,” said Sanjiv Ballav Bhattarai, a former Ujyalo Nepal committee member, who has now joined Lamichhane’s RSP. Ghising, 55, won significant public support when he led the Nepal Electricity Authority in tackling the Himalayan country’s load-shedding crisis. At least 77 people were killed during the youth-led September 8-9 uprising. Protests began under the loose umbrella title of Gen Z, triggered by a brief government ban on social media. The demonstrations tapped into wider public anger at economic stagnation and political corruption in the country of 30 million people. The agreement said the new alliance embraces “the spirit of the Gen Z movement against corruption and bad governance”. Prominent Gen Z protest figures, including Sudan Gurung, played a role in bringing the leaders together for talks. Nepal became a federal republic in 2008 after a decade-long civil war and a peace deal that saw former Maoist insurgents brought into government and the abolishment of the monarchy. A revolving door of ageing prime ministers and a culture of horse-trading between three dominant parties fuelled public perceptions that the government was out of touch. Lamichhane’s RSP emerged as a political surprise in the 2022 general election, when it became the fourth-largest party in parliament. However, Lamichhane has since been embroiled in cases of cooperative fraud and organised crime and was recently released on bail. Meanwhile, Nepal’s former interior minister Ramesh Lekhak gave evidence on Monday before an inquiry investigating the deadly crackdown during the September uprising that toppled the government. Seventy-seven people were killed during the September 8-9 youth-led uprising triggered by a brief government ban on social media, building on public frustration after years of economic stagnation and allegations of entrenched political corruption. — AFP

The shift from ideology to economics in governance

FROM Napoleon Bonaparte’s French campaign in the early nineteenth century — when the Ottoman Empire had entered its phase of decline — until its formal dissolution in 1924 and the birth of the modern Turkish state, the Muslim world was confronted with Europe’s profound transformation. This encounter generated two parallel responses: the modernisation of state institutions in countries such as Türkiye, Egypt and Iran, and attempts to renew Islamic thought, beginning in the Indian subcontinent and later crystallising in Egypt through reformist movements. These responses planted the seeds of religious ideology. Some Muslims reacted defensively, rejecting Western modernity that arrived through colonial violence, economic exploitation and cultural domination. Others pursued reform, seeking revival and renewal from within Islamic tradition itself. Paradoxically, the colonial shock — despite its brutality — awakened a stagnant world, pushing Muslim societies into a new phase of intellectual and political mobilisation during the twentieth century. Initially, Western powers, particularly Britain, supported Arab movements seeking liberation from Ottoman rule. Yet once colonial intentions became clear, Arabs realised that independence required resistance not only to Ottoman authority but also to Western domination. Two dominant ideologies emerged in response: Arab nationalism and political Islam. Arab nationalism declined early, effectively ending in 1970 with the death of Gamal Abdel Nasser, while Baathism collapsed tragically — first in Iraq in 2003 and later in Syria in 2024. xPolitical Islam, which evolved



KHAMIS AL ADAWI

The writer is author of ‘The Road to Jerusalem’

There is no perfect city and no flawless human. Ignoring religion, identity and social realities risks storing future crises beneath the surface

from reformist beginnings into violent expressions in some cases, became the most widespread ideological force. The Brotherhood represented its broadest manifestation, while Iran’s political model proved the most successful in attaining power. Yet political Islam, too, has now exhausted its historical function. Alongside these ideologies stood a third force: communism. Following the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, communism expanded across the Soviet Union and China and reached parts of the Arab world through coups and elections. Its proximity to Arab oil resources alarmed Western powers, prompting strategies that strengthened regional allies and supported political Islam to counter both communism and Arab nationalism. This strategy succeeded. Arab nationalism faded after 1970, and communism collapsed with the Soviet Union in 1990. One of the tools used in this confrontation was the mobilisation of Muslim youth against Soviet forces in Afghanistan during the 1980s. These overlapping struggles plunged the region into prolonged sectarian conflict, claiming countless lives and eventually reaching the United States through attacks on its global interests. Washington responded by advancing a “new world order” centred on Western democracy. Yet this project encountered deep resistance. Political Islam largely rejected Western democratic models, while authoritarian regimes feared that democratic transformation would threaten their survival. Western practices—from colonial rule to economic coercion and destructive wars—further eroded the credibility of liberal democracy. The conflict intensified until it culminated in the attacks of September 11, 2001, followed by the devastation of Afghanistan and Iraq.

Subsequent revelations suggested broader objectives: spreading fear across the region. Continued pressure, coupled with media agitation, helped trigger the Arab uprisings of 2010, which reshaped not only political systems but demographic realities as well, dismantling long-standing social structures. Out of this turmoil emerged a decisive shift: ideology gave way to economics. Regional regimes and Western powers increasingly converged on economic priorities, visible in massive financial deals and investment strategies. Economics has become the new organising principle of governance, promising stability after decades of ideological destruction. Yet economics itself now functions as an ideology. It is no longer merely exchange or development, but a global system dominated by multinational corporations, reducing human beings to consumers rather than active participants. The dollar has become its weapon, drawing societies into a soft but relentless global struggle. This shift offers the region material recovery and relative stability. After decades of ideological devastation, people seek normal lives: secure income, housing, education and healthcare. But history offers a warning. There is no perfect city and no flawless human. Ignoring religion, identity and social realities risks storing future crises beneath the surface. Human beings are not numbers or appetites alone. They are thinking minds and moral agents. Excluding them from decision-making only drives ideas underground — often with consequences that are neither predictable nor benign. Translated by Badr al Dhafari The original version of this article was published in Oman Arabic newspaper on December 30, 2025

Enter the new year with a positive mindset



SAMUEL KUTTY

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

THE end of the calendar year is the ideal time for self-reflection. Taking time to reflect on the past year not only promotes personal growth but also provides valuable insights that can guide future decisions.

Certainly, always move on from the past. Focus solely on the enjoyable moments and the insights gained from your experiences. I'm not suggesting you dismiss unpleasant thoughts; rather, find effective ways to address them.

Indeed, in today's fast-paced world, where many of us are constantly busy and the boundaries between home and work often blur, it is essential to pause and quietly reflect during moments of peace.

I believe many of you reading this have already compiled an ambitious list of goals for the upcoming year. Several of you may have also pledged to correct past mistakes and improve yourselves.

To achieve your primary New Year's goals, combine self-awareness, accountability, a growth-oriented mindset, and a clear, actionable plan. This approach creates a genuine opportunity for success and helps sustain your desired changes long after the celebrations have ended.

Acknowledge what you appreciate and take pride in, and then find a way to express it again. The future ahead is ours; everything

that happens from this moment forward belongs to us. We are the creators of our lives, our successes, our happiness, our relationships, and our careers.

At the same time, we cannot satisfy everyone or be liked by all.

As this marks my final post of the year, I cannot conclude without paying tributes to members of my journalist fraternity who lost their lives in the exercise of their profession worldwide.

Journalists do not simply die while performing their professional duties—they are murdered. The number of slain journalists has risen once again due to the criminal activities of military groups, both regular and paramilitary, as well as organised crime.

The year 2025 became the deadliest for journalists since the start of the century, following 2024. According to the Press Emblem Campaign, 161 journalists lost their lives across 31 countries. In 2024, a total of 179 journalists died in various incidents.

"Killings and imprisonments of journalists are increasing in 2025, and it is profoundly disgraceful to observe the minimal actions taken by governments worldwide to protect them and uphold fundamental principles of press freedom," stated International Federation of Journalists President Dominique Pradalié.

As this marks my final post of the year, I cannot conclude without paying homage to members of my journalist fraternity who lost their lives in the exercise of their profession worldwide

The Gaza conflict has consistently been identified as the deadliest region for media professionals, with some reports indicating that nearly half of all journalist fatalities worldwide in 2025 were linked to it. Additionally, various organisations have described the Israeli military as the "greatest threat to journalists".

These statistics emphasise the high risk in conflict areas and reinforce the "necessity to enhance the safety of media personnel and to hold accountable those who murder journalists."

Now, I return to the point where I began as we transition from the final moments of 2025 into a new realm that encourages us to strive for greatness. Remember, true abundance in life comes from delving deeper into what truly matters, rather than spreading yourself too thin.

Paulo Coelho, through his compelling narratives that offer insight into the essence of a fulfilling life, states, "The suffering of the past is the power of the present."

New Year's Day symbolises happiness, resilience, and hope for a better tomorrow. It fosters a sense of renewal and unity, bringing together people from diverse cultures and nations. I wish every Observer reader a joyful New Year 2026. May all your aspirations be fulfilled with fresh blessings and bursts of joy! Farewell, 2025—see you in 2026.

Loss and laughter: war medics heal in west Ukraine mountains

BARBARA WOJAZER

Ukrainian war medic Roma Zukh has learned a hard rule during the Russian attack — don't get too close to your colleagues. They could be killed at any moment.

Since Russia attacked in February 2022, the former truck driver, with light blue eyes and a ginger beard, had lost too many people to see any new friends suffer the same fate.

"You remember each one... the ones you were wounded with, the ones that enlisted at the same time — those you definitely won't forget," the 37-year-old said.

"Now I try to keep my distance, as I get very attached," he said, having recently joined a new battalion. "I don't sit at the same table for lunch, for example." The gruesome toll of the war is a daily reality for Ukraine's hundreds of combat medics — with the sights, sounds and smells of the front weighing heavily on their mental health.

Over 1,000 km away from the battlefield at a 10-day mountain retreat, designed to help them recover, Roma's rule was being put to the test.

Taking place in wooden chalets in the Carpathians, the RePower programme was much like a children's holiday camp, featuring pottery classes, hikes and even sushi-making lessons.

For some, the relief is instant. When the car carrying Dmytro Kunytskyi started climbing into the mountains, bright with autumnal orange and green trees, the 20-year-old medic was struck by a long-forgotten feeling.

"We opened the windows and the air filled with the smell of pine," he said. Kunytskyi was often on the phone, delegating tasks to his team on the front. He has been serving for two years in a role that requires him to retrieve and examine the corpses of comrades killed in battle.

"I get flashbacks. Times when the smell of blood is so sweet that you feel poisoned, when you don't have any chance to immediately wash it off. And with every breath you take, you smell blood."

"But deaths, smells. That's just nothing compared to having to lose so many friends," he said, his eyes rimmed in dark, red circles.

The psychologists working with the medics at the camp say they face a difficult challenge. "To delve into trauma, we need time to stabilise people," Andrii Anpleiev, a doctor, said.

They also created spaces where people could feel safe, for once. At a "sound-healing" experience, a dozen medics lay on yoga mats, relaxing to the sound of waves lapping on a beach and forests filled with chirping birds. Suddenly, a growling snore threatened to break the tranquillity.

Zukh had fallen asleep. Lying tucked in blankets, the others suppressed smiles, trying to stay in the moment. Within just a few days, the medics had grown tight, forming a WhatsApp group to stay connected once they returned to the front. Zukh pledged to stay in contact too, even if he couldn't shake his concern.

"How could I not worry about them? Of course I worry, but they'll be fine. I hope." — AFP

Searching for hope in a tough year; let's do better

THIS is the season when I customarily argue that the year just ending has been the best in human history. So I dutifully sat at my laptop and tried to write something along the lines of: Sure, democracy is eroding, politics are toxic, wars are raging, America is losing allies, the planet is burning, and young people will never afford homes. But other than that ... I've done these "best year ever" columns annually, irritating Eeyores. But now I just can't. The year 2025 was a setback for humanity — and unfortunately, the United States is a reason for the retreat. Maybe the worst calamity to strike an adult is to lose a child. That has become increasingly rare, but in 2025, for the first time in this century, the number of children worldwide dying before the age of 5 is believed to have risen, by about 200,000, according to the Gates Foundation.

"That means more than 5,000 classrooms of children, gone before they ever learn to write their name or tie their shoes," Bill Gates noted. Children are dying in increasing numbers in part because the Trump administration slashed humanitarian aid. I've been reporting around the world on the impact of the aid cuts, and I've seen too many children dying to write a "best year ever" column about 2025.

Yet perhaps because I've seen so many children suffering unnecessarily, I feel a need to read something reassuring — and it seems the only way I'll read such a piece is if I write it. So here goes.

A starting point is to gain perspective and acknowledge that in the arc of human history, we're still in good shape.

While 2025 wasn't the best year in human history, measured by child mortality, it was one of the five best years ever. Fewer than half as many children died in 2025 as in 2000. It also seems likely that the positive trajectories will resume after slippage in 2025 and 2026.

The Gates Foundation forecasts that while the trend of declining child deaths will be slowed, deaths will at least drop in the coming years. Similarly, the share of



NICHOLAS D KRISTOF

The writer is an American journalist and political commentator of The New York Times

Measured by child mortality, education, nutrition or women's rights, we humans are probably in the best decade in the past 300,000 years — plus we can glimpse a path forward that would leave Earth worth bequeathing to babies born today.

children stunted by malnutrition will most likely be lower in 2030 than it is now, the foundation suggests, but perhaps not as low as if aid funding had been sustained.

Until around 1970, a majority of adults had always been illiterate. Now we're at 88 per cent adult literacy, in part because of increasing numbers of girls going to school — and those educated women transform families, economies and societies. Despite the mess in the political world, some important trends are encouraging.

Drug abuse has been one of the great scourges of modern times, with more than half a million Americans dying of overdoses since 2020 — but the worst may be over.

While drug deaths are still far too high and not nearly enough is being done about them, incomplete statistics suggest that roughly 30 per cent fewer Americans will have died of overdoses in 2025 than in 2023.

Scientific breakthroughs also offer hope. A drug called lenacapavir is emerging as a more potent weapon to prevent HIV/AIDS; it can be taken by injection once every six months and virtually eliminates the risk of getting HIV.

Then there's the gene editing tool CRISPR, which is revolutionising care for sickle cell anaemia and other diseases. Scientists are studying how salamanders regenerate lost limbs and are making progress. They might eventually be able to grow you a new arm.

Another area that inspires me with its progress is clean energy. Climate change is still an enormous challenge, but energy economics have turned upside down and now offer a path forward — if we are willing to take it. My old college buddy Bill McKibben, who perhaps has done more than anyone else to raise alarms about climate change and who often as a result sounded rather bleak, is now surprisingly upbeat.

In his terrific new book, "Here Comes the Sun," about the revolution of solar energy, Bill acknowledges all the challenges, but adds, "We're also potentially on the edge of one of those rare

and enormous transformations in human history — something akin to the moment a few hundred years ago when we learned to burn coal and gas and oil, triggering the Industrial Revolution and hence modernity."

It took 68 years from the invention of the solar cell in 1954 to install the first terawatt of solar power on the planet, in 2022. It took two years to get the second.

This is because solar is increasingly cheap and simple — balcony solar systems are common in parts of Europe — and because batteries are making immense strides. Remember the line in "The Graduate" about the bright future to be found in "one word," "plastics"? Today that one word might be "batteries." Will the United States have the savvy to embrace these technologies and help avert a climate disaster? I don't know. But a decade ago it was hard to see how we wouldn't cook our planet, while now there's a ray of hope.

So there you have it. This wasn't the best year in human history. So much went wrong; so many lives lost needlessly, from the Gaza Strip to Sudan to Ukraine; so much betrayal of our own values here in America. But still, measured by child mortality, education, nutrition or women's rights, we humans are probably in the best decade in the past 300,000 years — plus we can glimpse a path forward that would leave Earth worth bequeathing to babies born today. We all need a bit of reassurance. So take a nanosecond to commemorate our good fortune in living together in one of the best times ever to be a human being. Now, onward, so we can try to do better in 2026.

I'm announcing my 2026 win-a-trip contest. For two decades, I've held this annual contest to choose a university student to accompany me on a reporting trip, with the chance to write for The Times. In 2025, the winner and I traveled through Sierra Leone and Liberia; I'm not sure where we'll go in 2026. To learn more or apply, visit nytimes.com/winatrip — and please share this with any undergraduate or graduate students who might be interested.

SPORTS

HIS MAJESTY’S CUP



Al Nahda booked their place in the HM Cup quarterfinals after a 3–1 victory over Al Musannah.

AL NAHDA CRUISE PAST AL MUSANNAH, SEEB ADVANCE

RIYADH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, DEC 30

Al Nahda booked their place in the quarterfinals of the His Majesty’s Cup football after a convincing 3–1 victory over Al Musannah in their Round of 16 clash, played at the Al Rustaq Sports Complex on Monday under the knockout format.

The match began at an even tempo, with both sides creating early opportunities without posing significant danger, Al Nahda soon took control and opened the scoring through Hamad al Habsi, who converted a chance inside the penalty area to give his side the lead.

Al Nahda continued to press and doubled their advantage when Azzan al Tamimi struck from a swift counter-attack, exploiting space behind the Al Musannah defence. Just before the break, Misoki Berri added a third goal, capping a dominant first half display and sending Al Nahda into half-time with a commanding three-goal cushion.

Al Musannah emerged with renewed determination in the second half, pushing forward and creating several scoring chances. Their efforts were eventually rewarded when Musab al Lamki found the net, scoring the only goal of the second half for Al Musannah and briefly reviving hopes of a comeback.

However, Al Nahda managed the remainder of the match with composure, maintaining defensive discipline and seeing out the contest to secure a deserved 3–1 win and progression to the next round of the prestigious competition.

SEEB BLANK JAALAN

In another Round of 16 fixture on Monday at the Seeb Sports Stadium, Seeb also advanced after defeating Jaalan 2–0. Nasser al Rawahi opened the scoring for Seeb, while the second goal came through a defensive error resulting in an own-goal by Jaalan, sealing a comfortable victory.

With these results, Al Nahda and Seeb joined the list of teams moving on to the quarterfinal stage, as the His Majesty’s Cup continues to deliver competitive and high stakes encounters.



Seeb advanced to the HM Cup quarterfinals after defeating Jaalan 2–0.

Al Hamra defeat Dhank to emerge champions



Al Hamra Club players pose with the Second Division Volleyball League shield along with officials. — Pics by Ahmed al Maamari

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, DEC 30

AL HAMRA Club were crowned champions of the Second Division Volleyball League 2025-26 after a 3–1 victory over Dhank Club in the final at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher on Monday night. The game was played under the auspices of Khalid bin Salem al Midalawi, Chairman of the Board of Directors of Sur Club, in front of a large crowd.

The final was highly competitive with both teams exchanging control in the early sets before Al Hamra asserted their superiority in the decisive moments through tactical discipline, defensive solidity and capitalising on their opponents’ mistakes. Al Hamra took the opening set 25–19, then extended their lead by winning an exciting second set 28–26 after a long battle for points. Dhank fought back strongly in the third set, reducing the gap by winning 25–22 and pushing the match into a fourth set.

In the final set, Al Hamra took control from the start, benefiting from service errors and strong blocking to take a 5–2 lead through their foreign players Maxim Kossa and Russian Miguel Rafel. They extended their advantage to 11–5 and 15–6 thanks to high concentration and attacking efficiency. Despite Dhank’s attempts to fight back through Ahmed al Yahyai and Nasser al Saadi, Al Hamra maintained their dominance and closed the set 25–15 to secure the championship.

AL ITTIHAD FINISH THIRD

In the third-place playoff, Al Ittihad Club claimed the bronze medal after defeating Mirbat 3–0 (25–13, 25–22, 26–24) in a match characterised by competitiveness and a strong desire from both teams to finish the season in a high position.

Al Hamra and Dhank had both reached the final after Al Hamra defeated Mirbat and Dhank overcame Al Ittihad in the semifinals, confirming both clubs’ promotion to the First Division for the 2026-27 season.

Following the match, Khalid bin Salem al Midalawi presented the awards. Al Hamra received the championship trophy and gold medals, Dhank finished second with silver medals, while Al Ittihad secured third place and the bronze medals.

Al Hamra head coach Mohammed bin Abdullah al Qamshoui expressed his



Dhank Club players pose with their runner-up medals.



Al Hamra Club beat Dhank Club 3–1 in the final of the Second Division Volleyball League 2025-26.



great happiness with the achievement, describing it as a historic milestone for the club in its first participation since its establishment. He said the title did not come by chance, but was the result of strong preparation, significant

administrative support, and continuous efforts by the technical staff and players throughout the season.

He added that this season’s Second Division was highly competitive, with teams closely matched, making every match difficult and decisive. He noted that the final against Dhank was especially tough due to the quality of their players.

Al Hamra relied mainly on local players before bringing in foreign professionals in the later stages, which required time for team chemistry, but the squad ultimately succeeded in achieving its goal.

Meanwhile, Dhank assistant coach Qais bin Saleh al Toubi said that reaching the final in the club’s first Second Division campaign was an important achievement and a major step forward. He congratulated Al Hamra on their deserved title, adding that the experience gave Dhank players valuable exposure against strong teams, which will benefit them in the First Division.

Al Toubi also pointed out that the short league duration was one of the main challenges, as it does not allow teams enough time for physical and technical preparation compared to longer Gulf leagues. He noted that the group system and travel between governorates added further pressure. He also criticised the large number of foreign players in some teams, saying it limits the development of local players and affects national teams, even though he acknowledged that Al Hamra’s professionals were decisive in the crucial moments.

RICH EXPERIENCE



Asian Beach Games 2026

ABDULMUNIM TO OFFICIATE AT ASIAN BEACH GAMES IN CHINA’S SANYA

SPORTS REPORTER
MUSCAT, DEC 30

At the invitation of the Asian Aquatics, Oman’s international open water swimming referee, Abdulmunim bin Khamis al Alawi, who holds a gold card in refereeing according to the World Athletics classification, will officiate the open water swimming competition at the sixth Asian Beach Games, to be held in Sanya, Hainan Province, China, from April 22 to 30, 2026.

Abdulmunim al Alawi possesses extensive experience spanning approximately 40 years in swimming refereeing, enabling him to officiate in various international and world championships. He began his swimming refereeing career in 1986, during which he completed numerous training and technical courses in the field of swimming refereeing, which contributed to honing his skills and preparing him to represent the Sultanate of Oman.

Al Alawi has previously managed many open water swimming competitions during the beach games at the regional and international levels. He was the technical director for the swimming competition at the second Asian Beach Games held in Muscat in 2010, and also served as the technical director for the swimming competition at the first World Beach Games held in Doha in 2019. He was the general referee for the swimming competition at the Asian Games held in Hangzhou (China) in 2022. In addition, he officiated open water swimming at three Olympic Games, Rio 2016, Tokyo 2020 and Paris 2024, as well as open water swimming races at the World Aquatics Championships from 2007 in Melbourne (Australia) to the 2025 World Championship held in Singapore.



Abdulmunim al Alawi holds a gold card in swimming refereeing.



The squad includes five changes from the 17-member team that featured in the Asia Cup earlier in September.

Oman name 15-member squad for ICC T20 WC

OMAN Cricket (OC) has announced a 15-member squad for the 2026 ICC Men's T20 World Cup, with Jatinder Singh set to lead the side as the nation prepares for its fourth appearance at the global event. The squad includes five changes from the 17-member team that featured in the Asia Cup earlier in September. Aamir Kaleem, Sufyan Yousuf, Aryan Bisht, Zikria Islam and Mohammed Imran have been dropped from the Asia Cup squad.

The three players who have been recalled into the World Cup side are Wasim Ali, Jay Odedra and Karan Sonavale.

The 20-team tournament will be co-hosted by India and Sri Lanka across 29 days and eight venues (five in India and three in Sri Lanka) and will be played from February 7-March 8.

Oman begin their campaign against Zimbabwe on February 9 in the Sri Lankan capital of Colombo and then meet hosts Sri Lanka (Kandy) on February 12 followed by a match against Ireland (Colombo) on February 14. Duleep Mendis-coached Oman will conclude their group assignment with a game against heavyweights Australia in Kandy on February 20.

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

Speaking after the squad announcement, Duleep Mendis, head coach, said: “We have a good combination and mix of players. Majority of the players will be getting their maiden World Cup experience but this will be good for them. The players know that this is our fourth World Cup and it is time for Oman to make their presence felt as mere participation is not enough. It is time for us to get some positive results this time.”

Alkesh Joshi, OC treasurer and team manager, underlined the intent behind the selection, stressing that the team is



Jatinder Singh

determined to compete with purpose.

“This is our fourth appearance at the World Cup, and our objective this time is to make an impact,” Joshi said.

“We have made very careful selection decisions keeping that objective in mind.” Joshi added that the final 15 was chosen for its ability to perform under pressure and contribute to match-winning moments.

“We have selected fifteen

Jatinder Singh will lead Oman in fourth World Cup appearance at the global showpiece, jointly hosted by India and Sri Lanka, beginning on February 7

players who, in their own capacity, are capable of winning matches for us. We want to go into this World Cup with a positive and winning mindset, challenge strong teams and come back with a couple of victories.”

Oman are set to face a demanding assignment in the group stage, having been drawn in Group B alongside four Test-playing nations – Australia, hosts Sri Lanka, Zimbabwe and Ireland.

While acknowledging the challenge, Joshi expressed confidence in the squad’s belief. “It is a tough group, but we are extremely confident in the squad and in the team that we have selected.

The players are highly motivated and eager to go out and make a mark for themselves in this World Cup.”

A notable feature of the squad is its

youthful makeup. A total of 11 of the 15 players will be playing in a World Cup for the first time, bringing freshness and fearlessness to the team. “These young players come without any baggage of the past,” Joshi explained. “Along with the players who have played in a previous World Cup, it creates a very good combination of youth and experience. This balance gives us confidence that this could be one of the strongest squads Oman have taken to a World Cup.”

The belief in the squad is reinforced by the team’s performances over the last six months, during which players have shown steady improvement and competitive consistency.

OC Secretary and Chef-de-Mission Madhu Jesrani said: “This will be our fourth time participating in the World Cup, and it is a matter of great pride and honour. The boys have worked extremely hard and have done well during qualification. We are proud of the way they have represented Oman.”

Jesrani also acknowledged the efforts of the players, coaching staff and support personnel in preparing the team for the tournament.

Joshi said that the OC board was thankful to the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth for their continued support, describing it as a key factor in Oman’s World Cup journey.

OMAN SQUAD: Jatinder Singh (captain), Vinayak Shukla (vice-captain), Mohammed Nadeem, Shakeel Ahmad, Hammad Mirza, Wasim Ali, Karan Sonavale, Faisal Shah, Nadeem Khan, Sufyan Mehmood, Hassnain Ali Shah, Shafiq Jan, Jay Odedra, Jiten Ramanandi, and Ashish Odedara. Support Staff: Madhu Jesrani (Chef-de-Mission), Alkesh Joshi (team manager), Duleep Mendis (head coach), Sulakshan Kulkarni (deputy head coach), Dr. Ashish Awasthi (physio), Shiva Manhas (trainer), Mazher Khan (assistant coach), Zeeshan Siddiqui (analyst), Shreyash Kankal (logistics/media), and Bashir Ahmad (masseur).

Al Amerat thrash Salalah to clinch Beach Soccer League title

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, DEC 30

Al Amerat Club were crowned champions of the 2025–26 Beach Soccer League after a commanding 9–1 victory over Salalah Club in their Round 11 encounter at the sandy pitch of the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher on Monday.

The result secured Al Amerat the title with one round remaining in the season.

Al Amerat entered the match determined to seal the title early, and that intent was clear from the opening minutes as they imposed strong control over the game.

Yaqdhan al Hindasi opened the scoring in the sixth minute after a well-worked attacking move, finishing powerfully into the net.



An Al Amerat player in action against Salalah.

Just one minute later, the same player struck again, capitalising on defensive confusion to double his side’s lead and give Al Amerat

a strong early advantage in both scoreline and performance. Salalah attempted to respond through individual efforts and

counter-attacks, but Al Amerat’s solid defence and alert goalkeeper prevented any reduction in the deficit, and the first period ended with Al Amerat leading 2–0.

At the start of the second period, Al Amerat maintained their high pressing and dominance.

Al Hindasi completed his hat-trick by scoring the third goal, continuing his outstanding performance. The attacking pressure continued, allowing Salem al Araimi to add the fourth goal with a close-range finish. Salalah were unable to reorganise or stem the attacking flow, and Al Hindasi struck again to make it five amid a clear defensive collapse.

Khalid al Araimi then added the sixth goal, followed by Ahmed al Owaisi, who made it seven, before Yahya al Muraiki scored the eighth.

Salalah managed to score their only goal during this period, but Al Amerat ended the second period with a commanding 8–1 lead.

In the third period, Al Amerat continued to dominate despite a slight drop in tempo after the result was virtually assured. Badr al Nasri added the ninth goal, confirming Al Amerat’s complete control of the match. Salalah tried to take advantage of the slower pace and attempted to narrow the gap, with Mohammed Shemmass coming closest by scoring Salalah’s only goal, but the final score remained a convincing 9–1 in favour of Al Amerat. With this emphatic victory, Al Amerat raised their tally to 33 points and mathematically secured the 2025–26 Beach Soccer League title with one round still to play.

SPORTS

NBALEAGUE



Golden State Warriors' Gary Payton II (0) dunks against Brooklyn Nets' Day'Ron Sharpe (20) at Barclays Center. — **Imagn Images**

NUGGETS REEL FROM JOKIC INJURY, THUNDER ROUT ATLANTA HAWKS

LOS ANGELES: Nikola Jokic suffered a “gut-wrenching” knee injury as the Denver Nuggets crashed to a heavy 147-123 defeat against the Miami Heat in the NBA on Monday.

Three-time NBA Most Valuable Player Jokic exited in the final seconds of the first half of Denver’s loss in Miami after an accidental collision with team-mate Spencer Jones.

The 30-year-old Serbian superstar collapsed to the court in agony after his left leg appeared to buckle after Jones stepped on his foot while attempting to defend a drive. Jokic, who had scored 21 points, did not reappear for the second half and Miami capitalised to outscore the Nuggets 84-60 after the break to cruise to victory.

Nuggets coach David Adelman said the team had yet to determine the severity of Jokic’s injury. The center will undergo an MRI scan on Tuesday.

“All I know is that Jokic has a left knee injury and he needs to go through the process. I watched it at half-time and it looked like he got his feet tangled up. He knew immediately something was wrong,” Adelman said. “This is part of the NBA. Anyone who gets hurt, it’s gut-wrenching. Especially someone as special as he is. We’ll find out more tomorrow and move on as a team. “I’m more concerned about him as a person and the disappointment of going through something like that. It’s unfortunate and we’re hoping for the best... it sucks, but hoping for the best tomorrow.”

THUNDER ROUT, SPURS LOSE

The Nuggets are already dealing with an injury crisis that has left them deprived of regular starters Aaron Gordon and Christian Braun. The issue of player injuries in the NBA has been in the spotlight this season, with players such as San Antonio’s Victor Wembanyama and Milwaukee’s Giannis Antetokounmpo spending significant time on the sidelines. Some coaches and players have argued that the relentless grind of the NBA’s 82-game regular season has contributed to the injury toll, although league commissioner Adam Silver said earlier this month there was no statistical basis indicating scheduling was to blame.

In other NBA games on Monday, the Oklahoma City Thunder romped to a 140-129 win over the Atlanta Hawks to extend their lead at the top of the Western Conference.

The reigning NBA champions recovered from an early 10-point deficit in the second quarter thanks to 39 points from Shai Gilgeous-Alexander.

Chet Holmgren added 24 points and Jalen Williams 20 points on a night when six Thunder players finished in double figures.

Oklahoma City improved to 28-5 with the victory and lead the West by 4.5 games from the second-placed San Antonio Spurs, who suffered their second straight defeat on Monday in a 113-101 home reverse to the Cleveland Cavaliers.

French prodigy Wembanyama led the Spurs scoring with 26 points, but San Antonio were left frustrated after Cleveland poured in 37 fourth quarter points to clinch victory. Jarrett Allen led the Cleveland scorers with 27 points.

Elsewhere on Monday, Stephen Curry scored 27 points and Jimmy Butler added 21 as the Golden State Warriors overcame the Brooklyn Nets 120-107. — **AFP**



Oklahoma City Thunder's Alex Caruso (9) goes up for a basket in front of Atlanta Hawks' Nickeil Alexander-Walker (7). — **Imagn Images**



Morocco's Ayoub El Kaabi celebrates scoring their third goal against Zambia with teammates. — **Reuters**

South Africa reach Afcon last 16, Morocco cruise

AYOUB El Kaabi's brace helped Morocco to a 3-0 win over Zambia on Monday as the Africa Cup of Nations hosts cruised into the last 16 while South Africa beat Zimbabwe 3-2 to also secure a berth in the knockout phase.

African player of the year Achraf Hakimi made his comeback from almost two months out injured for Morocco as Mali also qualified for the next round and Mohamed Salah was rested for Egypt's 0-0 draw against Angola.

Morocco are the tournament favourites as the host nation and Africa's top-ranked team but they were booed off by supporters following a 1-1 draw against Mali in their last outing.

Nevertheless, Walid Regragui's team knew a win against Zambia at the Prince Moulay Abdellah Stadium in capital Rabat would guarantee their progress to the next round in first place in Group A and they outclassed their opponents.

Olympiakos striker El Kaabi nodded in an early opener and scored an overhead kick shortly after half-time, with both of his goals set up by the outstanding Azzedine Ounahi.

In between, Real Madrid attacking midfielder Brahim Diaz swept home Morocco's second goal on 27 minutes at the end of a fine team move, again involving Ounahi.

Diaz has found the net in all three of Morocco's games so far and he and El Kaabi join Algeria captain Riyad Mahrez on three goals at the top of the Cup of Nations scoring charts.

Captain Hakimi came off the bench in the 64th minute for his first appearance since suffering an ankle injury in action for Paris Saint-Germain at the beginning of November.

Morocco will stay in Rabat for a last-16 tie in the same stadium on Sunday against one of the best third-place finishers.

“Scoring early on changes everything,” said Regragui. “We need to continue like this but not get carried away and keep our feet on the ground.”

Zambia go out and have now failed to win any of their 12 Afcon matches across four tournament appearances since lifting the trophy in 2012.

Mali go through in second place after a 0-0 draw with Comoros in Casablanca, a game they ended with 10 men after Amadou Haidara was sent off.

It was a third stalemate in as many matches for the Eagles, who will remain in Morocco's largest city for a last-16 tie on Saturday.



Morocco's forward #20 Ayoub El Kaabi (L) celebrates scoring his team's third goal with Morocco's forward #10 Brahim Diaz (R) during the Africa Cup of Nations (CAN) group stage match between Zambia and Morocco at Prince Moulay Abdellah Stadium. — **AFP**



South Africa's midfielder #07 Oswin Appollis celebrates scoring the team's third goal from a penalty during the Africa Cup of Nations Group B match against Zimbabwe. — **AFP**

SALAH RESTED BY EGYPT

Earlier, Oswin Appollis converted a late penalty to give South Africa victory against Zimbabwe in Marrakesh as Bafana Bafana qualified for the knockout stage.

Rising star Tshepang Moremi gave South Africa an early lead with a deflected effort. However, falling behind motivated

AFRICA CUP OF NATIONS RESULTS IN MOROCCO ON MONDAY:	Zimbabwe 3 0 1 2 4 6 1
GROUP B	GROUP A
In Agadir	In Rabat
Angola 0 Egypt 0	Zambia 0 Morocco 3 (El Kaabi 9, 50, Diaz 27)
In Marrakesh	In Casablanca
Zimbabwe 2 (Maswanhise 19, Modiba 73-og) South Africa 3 (Moremi 7, Foster 50, Appollis 82-pen)	Comoros 0 Mali 0
Final standings (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points)	Final standings
Egypt 3 2 1 0 3 17 - qualified	Morocco 3 2 1 0 6 17 - qualified
S Africa 3 2 0 1 5 4 6 - qualified	Mali 3 0 3 0 2 2 3 - qualified
Angola 3 0 2 1 2 3 2	Comoros 3 0 2 1 0 2 2
	Zambia 3 0 2 1 1 4 2
	Note: Group winners and runners-up and four highest-ranked third-placed teams qualify for round of 16

Zimbabwe and they deservedly levelled on 19 minutes thanks to the individual brilliance of Tawanda Maswanhise from Scottish Premiership club Motherwell.

Maswanhise gained possession inside the South African half, dribbled past two opponents and fired the ball wide of goalkeeper Ronwen Williams into the far corner.

South Africa began the second period aggressively and regained the lead on 50 minutes through Burnley striker Lyle Foster, for whom it was a second goal of the tournament.

Zimbabwe brought it back to 2-2 on 73 minutes when Aubrey Modiba conceded an own goal, but Appollis then netted from an 82nd-minute penalty to give Bafana the lead for the third time, which they retained.

“Once again we fell asleep after a good start. We continuously lost possession,” said 73-year-old South Africa coach Hugo Broos.

“Our passing was bad at times and we should have concentrated on retaining possession in the closing minutes instead of seeking a fourth goal. We have to work on controlling games.”

Egypt, who rested stars like captain Salah with first place already assured, topped Group B with seven points after their draw against Angola in Agadir. South Africa finished with six points, Angola two and Zimbabwe one.

The last round of group games continues on Tuesday, with Tanzania playing Tunisia and Nigeria facing Uganda in Group C. Senegal take on Benin and the Democratic Republic of Congo play Botswana in Group D. — **AFP**



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Oman advances clean energy, EV tech

DR Saleh bin Said Masan, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion for Commerce and Industry, carried out a field visit to several leading factories in the People's Republic of China.

The visit forms part of ongoing efforts to attract industrial investment, in line with the Sultanate of Oman's strategy to develop integrated industrial clusters and shift national industry towards high-value, innovation-driven and technology-based activities.

The tour included a visit to JA Solar, a global leader in solar energy solutions, where Dr Masan met senior executives.

The delegation was briefed on the latest technologies in smart solar cell and panel manufacturing and reviewed progress on the company's factory project at SOHAR Port and Freezone.

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion had earlier signed a memorandum of understanding with JA Solar to establish an integrated solar cell and module manufacturing plant at SOHAR Port and Freezone, with an estimated investment of about \$564 million.

During the visit, Dr Masan confirmed that construction



The visit forms part of ongoing efforts to attract investment for Oman.

of the plant is advancing according to schedule, reinforcing Oman's ambition to position itself as a regional hub for clean energy technologies and supporting its commitment to achieving net-zero carbon emissions by 2050.

The visit also included a stop at the headquarters of BAIC

Automotive, where the delegation was introduced to the latest developments in electric and smart vehicles, as well as advanced transportation systems.

Dr Masan outlined to company officials the range of incentives and enablers offered by the Sultanate of Oman to attract investment into the electromechanical and transport sectors.

He affirmed the Ministry's readiness to provide all required facilities to support the establishment of high-quality industrial projects, including joint ventures for the assembly and manufacture of automotive components.

Such initiatives aim to diversify the industrial base and create quality employment opportunities for Omanis in engineering and digital technology, in line with Industrial Strategy 2040.

Concluding the tour, Dr Masan said the visits reflect the Ministry's focus on a qualitative shift towards technology- and capital-intensive industries.

He noted that integrating renewable energy projects with JA Solar and localising vehicle technologies with BAIC would raise manufacturing's contribution to GDP and strengthen the competitiveness of national products under the "Made in Oman" brand. — ONA



Engineer Sultan bin Ahmed AlWahaibi Chief Executive Officer of Oman Broadband Company

926,884 units covered by the fiber-optic network across the Sultanate's governorates.

326,406 active subscribers on the fiber-optic network confirm the success of digital transformation.

9 million Omani Rials to support SMEs in 2025.

39% of the company's purchases are from small and medium enterprises to promote local content of the national workforce directly.

The Omanization rate of national workforce at the company has exceeded 99%.

How does Oman Broadband contribute to developing the digital infrastructure and supporting digital transformation in the Sultanate?

Oman Broadband is one of the key enablers of digital transformation in the Sultanate of Oman through its ambitious projects to expand the digital infrastructure and extend the fiber-optic network across various governorates and wilayat's, including rural areas. The company strives to connect more homes and institutions to high-speed internet in accordance with international standards, contributing to the empowerment of the digital economy and the enhancement of quality of life and public services in education, health, business, and government sectors.

Expansion of the Fiber-Optic Network

With the continued successes achieved by Oman Broadband, what is the total number of units covered by the fiber-optic network? And what is your expansion plan for the coming period?

Thanks to Allah, the company has achieved positive indicators in the recent period. The total number of units covered by the fiber-optic network reached **926,884 units** across the Sultanate's governorates as of the end of November 2025, including **415,792 units in Muscat Governorate** and **511,092 units outside Muscat**.

The total number of subscribers has reached **326,406 active subscribers**, surpassing the 320,000-subscriber milestone for the first time since the company's establishment—clear evidence of the success of the expansion strategy and the quality of services provided.

The company continues to focus on expanding the coverage of its fiber-optic network. Coverage in **Muscat Governorate has exceeded 87% of units**, while coverage **outside Muscat has reached approximately 56% of total units across the Sultanate in 2025**. As part of its ambitious plan, the company aims to **connect one million residential units to the fiber-optic network over the next three years**, while strengthening investment in core infrastructure and expanding partnerships with various stakeholders to ensure the successful achievement of this target.

It is worth noting that the company's total investments and transferred assets have exceeded **327 million Omani rials** since its establishment in 2014, reflecting its ongoing commitment to developing the telecommunications sector and strengthening the digital infrastructure in the Sultanate.

The network expansion also included **Musandam Governorate**, covering the wilayats of **Bukha and Dibba during 2025**, while **Khasab and Madha** had already been covered as part of projects implemented in earlier phases.

Oman has witnessed remarkable progress in communications infrastructure in recent years, which is evident in the significant growth in subscriber numbers and the expansion of the fiber-optic network—contributing to the digital economy and improving quality of life and public services across various sectors.

926,884	Total number of covered units / Home Pass Muscat
415,792	Total number of units in Muscat / Home Pass Muscat
511,092	Total number of units outside Muscat / Home Pass Outside Muscat
87%	Coverage rate in Muscat Currently/ Coverage
56%	Coverage rate outside Muscat Currently/ Coverage
326,406	Total number of active subscribers / Active Subscribers

Partnerships and Agreements

What are the key partnerships the company is working on, and how do they contribute to developing the broadband infrastructure in the Sultanate of Oman?

Oman Broadband is currently implementing a set of strategic partnerships with government entities, telecommunications service providers, and real estate developers, with the goal of building an integrated digital infrastructure that supports the objectives of Oman Vision 2040 and enhances digital transformation across various sectors.

Among the most prominent of these partnerships:

- **Collaboration with the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology** to improve the efficiency of fiber-optic coverage in new residential areas.
- **Partnerships with telecommunications operators** to provide flexible, high-capacity solutions for service providers and end users.
- **Collaboration with major real estate developers** to provide integrated broadband infrastructure in modern projects, with agreements signed for major developments such as Al Thuraya City, Al Bandar Project, the Blue City, Al Mouj Muscat Project and others, ensuring that fiber-optic infrastructure is incorporated from the earliest stages of project implementation.

Recently, a cooperation agreement was signed between Oman Broadband and Bawariq Nizwa Company to provide fiber-optic connectivity and support smart solutions in the Wilayat of Nizwa, including Souq Al-Aqr.

- **Coverage was also expanded to several wilayats during 2025**, including **Sinaw, Yanqul, Bidbid, Samad Al-Shan, Taqah, Mirbat, Al Hamra, Al Mudhaili, Al Kamil Wai Wafi, Dhank, Adam, Bukha, and Khasab, Seeb, Al Amerat, Barka, Bidiyah, Manah, Quriyat, Salalah, Al Suwailq, Sohar, Al Masnaah, Al Khaburah, Bahla, Nizwa, Barka Al-Mawz.**

These partnerships emphasize the company's commitment to supporting modern urban planning efforts and ensuring the integration of smart digital infrastructure in new real estate developments. This contributes to enhancing quality of life and providing advanced digital services to citizens and residents across the Sultanate.

Sultan Haitham City Project and Al Khuwair Downtown

What is new regarding the fiber-optic network in the Sultan Haitham City Project and Al Khuwair Downtown?

Oman Broadband gives special attention to major national projects that represent advanced models of smart urban planning, most notably the Sultan Haitham City project and the Al Khuwair Downtown project, among others.

In **Sultan Haitham City**, the company has completed the preliminary designs for the fiber-optic network infrastructure, which aims to cover all residential, commercial, educational, and service facilities in the city to ensure technological readiness from the earliest stages of development. These designs follow the latest global standards in smart-network planning to ensure service sustainability, ease of future expansion, and the provision of high speeds and reliable connectivity that support the city's digital transformation.

As for **Al Khuwair Downtown**, the company is currently designing and providing smart digital-infrastructure solutions that align with the smart-city concept. This design enables the operation of Internet-of-Things applications, smart facility and public-service management systems, and advanced connectivity solutions for businesses and residents.

Both projects represent leading urban models, reflecting the integration of digital infrastructure with urban development. They contribute to enhancing quality of life and establishing an advanced digital environment that supports innovation and economic growth in the Sultanate of Oman.

Omanization and Employment

How does Oman Broadband enhance Omanization and develop national talent?

Oman Broadband places great importance on supporting employment policies, increasing Omanization rates, developing national competencies, and creating quality and sustainable job opportunities. This aligns with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040 in developing human capital and empowering Omani talent across various fields.

The company has achieved a remarkable milestone in this regard, with Omanization rate of national workforce at the company has exceeded 99%. The presence of national talents—who form the backbone of the company's technical, administrative, and technological operations—reflects the company's success in building a strong and qualified national base capable of supporting business sustainability and advancing the digital sector in the Sultanate.

Tamkeen Program

The number of graduates and beneficiaries of the **Tamkeen** program and the company's internal training programs at **Oman Broadband Company** is expected to reach approximately **802** by the end of 2025, with over **50%** of the beneficiaries employed within the company, externally, or through contractors.

The program is announced twice a year to expand the number of beneficiaries and covers a wide range of engineering disciplines, including **Electronics, Mechanical Engineering, Operations Engineering, and Urban Planning, as well as administrative fields** such as Project Management, Business Administration, Supply Chain, Communication and Marketing, and Human Resources. The program aims to meet local market needs and support the development of national talent.

Local Content

How does Oman Broadband contribute to enhancing local content and empowering small and medium enterprises?

Oman Broadband gives significant attention to enhancing local content and supporting small and medium enterprises, considering them one of the vital pillars of the national economy.

In 2025 alone, the total value of contracts awarded to small and medium enterprises SME amounted to approximately **nine million Omani rials**, representing **39 %** of the company's total direct procurement. The indirect allocation to these companies amounted to about **six million Omani rials**, representing **41 %** of the total works awarded to major companies. These figures reflect a firm commitment to empowering national companies and enhancing their presence in local projects, both directly and indirectly through broadband contractors.

Within the framework of supporting this vital sector, the company has adopted a package of clear policies aimed at strengthening the competitiveness of small and medium enterprises, most notably:

- Awarding all contracts less than **10,000 Omani rials** exclusively to these enterprises, except in special exemption cases.
- For tenders exceeding 10,000 Omani rials, SMEs are granted a **10% preference** when evaluating their bids.
- A **10% preference** is given to locally manufactured products (Made in Oman) in all company purchases.

Additionally, during this year, the company has implemented several quality initiatives supporting local content, including:

- Assigning all fiber optic network projects with an estimated cost of less than **half a million Omani rials** exclusively to SMEs to enable them to expand and compete in larger projects.
- Supporting and qualifying several companies to obtain international accreditations ISO, to enhance their readiness and ability to expand in the local and regional market. Last year (2024) Oman Broadband qualified **four** SMEs at its own expense, while it is currently working on qualifying another **four** more companies.

This approach has had a tangible impact on the company's institutional performance indicators, as the **ICV Index** increased by **6%** in 2025; while **The SME Index additionally** increased by **5%**. This indices confirm Oman Broadband success in achieving its national goals and enhancing local content in infrastructure and the digital economy projects.

Social Investment Initiatives

- **How does The Oman Broadband Company contribute to supporting social investment and promoting sustainable development?**

Building on its commitment to supporting social investment initiatives and promoting sustainable development, The Oman

Broadband Company continues to play its national role in serving the community by implementing high-quality programs and projects that focus on innovation and technology, education, health and sports, youth empowerment, and improving quality of life.

The company continues its efforts to support the digital infrastructure of smart cities by implementing innovative projects that enhance the quality of public services. For example, it has carried out a project connecting traffic signals to the Muscat Municipality Data Center, which contributes to improving public safety and increasing the efficiency of traffic management.

The company has also implemented initiatives to support the education sector by providing schools across various governorates in the Sultanate of Oman with **high-speed fiber optic network services** and essential digital infrastructure. This reduces the digital divide and enables students to acquire future-ready skills. The initiative is expected to cover approximately **682 schools** with fiber optics by the end of 2025.

In the field of developing public service infrastructure, The Oman Broadband Company contributed to Smart Shuttle Bus Project in partnership with "Mada'ayn" & Mwasaalat and relevant authorities to provide modern and safe bus stops and shelters in the Knowledge Oasis, enhancing service quality and ensuring a better experience for citizens and residents.

Sponsorships and youth Empowerment

The Oman Broadband Company continues to support community and development initiatives through various programs that promote social investment and youth empowerment. The company supported the production of health awareness content using artificial intelligence in collaboration with the Directorate General of Health Services in Muscat Governorate. Oman Broadband also participated in the International Day of Persons with Disabilities event, alongside supporting child protection and post-care programs in collaboration with the Ministry of Social Development.

Oman Broadband has implemented sustainable environmental initiatives, including the recycling of fiber-optic wooden drums to support small and medium enterprises, promote the circular economy, and enhance environmental sustainability. Additionally, the company's Data Center Solar Initiative involves installing solar panels and upgrading batteries and energy-efficient infrastructure at selected sites such as Bahja, Sah Roll, and Tharwa, supporting environmental sustainability and strengthening operational readiness.

In supporting national events related to technology, innovation, and youth empowerment, the company sponsored several events, including: the Oman Broadband Bridges Forum for Empowering Persons with Disabilities, and the Global Social Innovation Summit under the theme "Empowering Youth," with participation from representatives of the GCC and Arab countries. It also supported the International Conference on Advances in Engineering, Science, and Technology to promote scientific and technological innovation in areas such as artificial intelligence, smart cities, green technology, cybersecurity, medical engineering, and more.

The company also continued to support sports and social initiatives by organizing the Oman Broadband Marathon in partnership with the Ministry of Culture, Sports.

Furthermore, the company supported the North Al Batinah Festival initiative in partnership with the Governor of North Al Batinah. This initiative aims to support social and economic development in the governorate, benefiting many job seekers and small family-run businesses through training programs, marketing, and employment opportunities. These efforts help participants acquire skills, achieve sustainable income, and enhance their participation in the local economy.

The Oman Broadband Company also provided support for the National Training Marina Program in collaboration with Fourth Innovation Company and in partnership with the Ministry of Labor and the University of Technology and Applied Sciences in Muscat. Dozens of Omani youth seeking employment benefit from specialized training programs in emerging technologies and digital creativity, followed by clear career pathways, enhancing participants' readiness to enter the labor market and the digital economy.

ADVERTORIALS

SHORTTAKES

OETC POWERS AHEAD WITH GRID EXPANSION AND GREEN GROWTH



ENG HISHAM BIN ABDULLAH AL RIYAMI

Acting CEO, OETC

MUSCAT: The Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC) closed 2025 with a strong set of operational, financial and sustainability milestones, underscoring its central role in supporting national development and advancing Oman Vision 2040.

During the year, OETC made solid progress across 35 strategic projects aimed

at expanding and strengthening the national electricity transmission network, with investments exceeding RO 250 million.

Key achievements included more than 60 percent completion of the second phase of the Strategic Interconnection Project (Rabt), valued at around RO 295 million and over 90 per cent completion of network expansion works in Dhofar Governorate at a cost of about RO 65 million.

Among the landmark initiatives was the Masirah Island connection project, Oman's first of its kind, which reached over 50 per cent completion using advanced transmission technologies, with a total investment of RO 70 million.

OETC also commissioned the Fault Current Limitation System for the 132 kV network to enhance system protection and reliability; and energised the main grid station serving the polysilicon plant in Suhar.

By the end of 2025, the number of grid stations had reached 116, compared to just 29 in 2005, while transmission line length exceeded 10,400 kilometres.

During the year, OETC awarded nine new projects worth more than RO 250 million, supporting the integration of three wind farms with a combined capacity of 1,220 MW and a 500 MW solar project, contributing to annual carbon emission reductions of over 1.9 million tonnes.

Renewable energy accounted for 9.46 per cent of electricity supplied to the grid by the end of November 2025, equivalent to more than 4.26 million MWh, sourced from major solar and wind projects including Ibri, Manah 1 and 2 and the Dhofar Wind Farm. This marks a sharp rise from just 0.71 per cent in 2019.

Network reliability reached 99.9999 per cent, despite rising demand. Peak load on the Main Interconnected System climbed to 8,059 MW in 2025, compared to 2,495 MW in 2005. OETC also recorded more than 67 million safe working hours without a lost-time injury.

Financially, the company maintained strong credit ratings from Moody's and Fitch, completed full repayment of \$1 billion in bonds, launched its Green Financing Framework and became the first Omani entity to issue Green Sukuk, raising \$750 million. Its asset base expanded to RO 1.8 billion.

OETC continued to invest heavily in human capital, achieving an Omanisation rate of 97 per cent, delivering over 8,300 training programmes and supporting local companies through contracts exceeding RO 259 million.

The year also saw the company receive several national awards for ESG practices, smart technology and clean energy leadership, reinforcing its position as a key enabler of Oman's sustainable energy future.

OCCI COMMITTEE DISCUSSES IMPORTANCE OF AGRICULTURAL INSURANCE

MUSCAT: The OCCI food security committee discussed the importance of agricultural insurance in light of challenges related to climatic conditions and epidemics; and the risks they impose on agricultural activity.

The committee stressed the need to develop suitable insurance products with flexible terms that contribute to protecting farmers, ensuring the continuity and sustainability of production; and strengthening food security. This



came during the committee's meeting, chaired by Eng Saleh bin Mohammed al Shanfari, Chairman of the committee, in the presence of a number of its members, at the Chamber's headquarters in Muscat. The committee recommended

organising a specialised seminar on agricultural insurance in cooperation with a number of relevant entities, as well as holding a public session on entrepreneurship in the agricultural sector.

The committee also reviewed various models of agricultural insurance products, with reference to the role of food and agricultural associations in facilitating insurance procedures and contributing to the organisation of suitable compensation mechanisms.

New World Autos launches Chery Barka showroom

NEW World Autos marked another significant milestone in its partnership with Chery with the grand opening of a state-of-the-art Chery showroom in Barka. Strategically located to serve customers in one of Oman's rapidly growing regions, the new facility further expands Chery's footprint and reinforces the brand's commitment to delivering exceptional automotive experiences.

The inauguration event was attended by distinguished guests and representatives from various sectors, reflecting the growing interest in Chery vehicles across the Sultanate of Oman.

Speaking at the event, a New World Autos representative said: "Chery's success in Oman reflects its strong focus on quality, advanced engineering and dependable performance, offering customers exceptional value for money. We are proud to strengthen our partnership with Chery and bring its innovative range closer to our valued customers in Barka".

SHOWROOM HIGHLIGHTS

The new Barka showroom offers customers an immersive experience with modern facilities, interactive product displays; and a dedicated sales and marketing team committed to delivering a seamless and personalised service.

Guests at the launch event explored



The new facility further expands Chery's footprint in Oman.

Chery's popular models, known for their refined build quality, innovative technologies and advanced safety features. The current model range in Oman includes:

- Arrizo 5 — A stylish sedan offering comfort, efficiency and smart features for everyday driving.
- Arrizo 6 — A sophisticated sedan featuring premium interiors and advanced safety systems for a refined driving experience.
- Arrizo 8 — A flagship sedan combining luxury, cutting-edge technology

and superior performance.

- Tiggo 4 — A compact SUV designed for dynamic performance and urban versatility.
- Tiggo 7 — A mid-size SUV delivering a balance of power, comfort and advanced connectivity.
- Tiggo 8 — A premium SUV offering superior comfort, subtle ambient lighting and impressive fuel efficiency.
- Tiggo 9 — A top-tier SUV featuring bold design, advanced technology and exceptional driving comfort.

BANK NIZWA CLOSES RO 200 MILLION SOVEREIGN SUKUK ISSUE

MUSCAT: As the leading and most trusted Islamic bank in the Sultanate of Oman, Bank Nizwa has successfully acted as Joint Issue Manager and Collecting Bank for the 10th Series of local currency sovereign sukuk, issued by the Government of the Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Finance.

This achievement highlights Bank Nizwa's expertise and leadership in Islamic finance and investment banking; and its ongoing commitment to offering innovative, Sharia-compliant financial solutions.

The Government of the Sultanate of Oman, through the Ministry of



Finance, announced the completion of the sukuk issuance on December 25 with a total size of RO 200 million.

The 10th series sukuk was launched on December 17 with a total issuance size of RO 150 million, with returns ranging between a minimum of 4.07% and

a maximum of 4.15% with the Green Shoe option of up to RO 50 million.

The subscription closed on December 22 and the issue was heavily oversubscribed by 1.8 times with total demand exceeding RO 277 million.

The strong demand and oversubscription helped in increasing the issue size to RO 200 million. Structured as Ijara sukuk, the certificates offer a competitive profit rate over a seven-year period, with profits distributed semi-annually in June and December.

The sukuk are also listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange, enhancing liquidity and market accessibility.

Muhammed Ahsan, Senior Head Global Markets and Investment Banking at Bank Nizwa, said: "As pioneers in Oman's Islamic banking sector, Bank Nizwa, with its deep industry knowledge, extensive capital market experience and strict adherence to regulatory and Sharia standards, has achieved significant milestones in debt issuance and capital raising.

This new sukuk issuance from the Government of Oman meets the growing demand for Sharia-compliant financial solutions and reflects our commitment to providing innovative and rewarding investment opportunities that serve the market's needs."

OAB wins Best Corporate Engagement Event at TOMI Awards

MUSCAT: Oman Arab Bank (OAB) is proud to announce its recognition as a winner at the second edition of The Oman Marketing Impact Awards, TOMI, which was organised by the Muscat Media Group. The event is widely regarded as Oman's foremost celebration of marketing creativity and strategic impact.

The Bank clinched the prestigious "Best Corporate Engagement Event" award, highlighting its exceptional efforts in driving meaningful connections with stakeholders across the Sultanate of Oman.

The TOMI Awards, held for the second consecutive year, showcase the most prominent campaigns, events and pioneering initiatives



Oman Arab Bank Triumphs at TOMI Awards with Best Corporate Engagement Event Win

that reflect creativity and strategic innovation while delivering a tangible impact.

With over 35 categories covering digital marketing, experiential marketing, branding, public relations and more, these awards serve as a national platform to honour the boldest and most influential ideas within Oman's growing marketing landscape.

Furthermore, this past November, Oman Arab Bank hosted its annual CEO Summit 2025 at the St Regis Al Mouj Muscat Resort. The event brought together their highnesses and excellencies, CEOs, decision-makers, global thought leaders and business innovators. Organised

in collaboration with Crossroads by Harvard Business School, the summit served as a strategic platform for dialogue on leadership, economic transformation and the future of the business environment in Oman and the region.

Sulaiman al Harthy, Chief Executive Officer of Oman Arab Bank, said, "We are deeply honoured to receive the Best Corporate Engagement Event award at this year's TOMI Awards. This recognition reflects our team's strong dedication to creating impactful experiences that bring people together, cultivate trust and elevate the way we connect with our stakeholders."

SHORTTAKES



The company is targeting the connection of one million residential units to its fibre-optic network over the next three years.

OMAN BROADBAND DRIVES DIGITAL EXPANSION

MUSCAT: Oman Broadband Company (OBC) continues to record steady progress in expanding the Sultanate of Oman’s digital infrastructure, reinforcing its role as a key enabler of the digital economy and smart services nationwide. The company is targeting the connection of one million residential units to its fibre-optic network over the next three years, under a strategy focused on coverage expansion, service quality and long-term sustainability.

Engineer Sultan bin Ahmed al Wahaibi, CEO of Oman Broadband Company, said the total number of residential units covered by the fibre-optic network reached 926,884 by the end of November 2025. Of this total, 415,792 units are located in Muscat Governorate, while 511,092 units are spread across other governorates, reflecting balanced growth beyond the capital.

Active subscriptions climbed to 326,406, surpassing the 320,000 mark for the first time since the company’s establishment. Al Wahaibi said this milestone highlights the effectiveness of OBC’s expansion strategy and its continued focus on delivering reliable, high-quality services to customers across the country.

Coverage levels have also improved significantly. Fibre-optic connectivity in Muscat Governorate now exceeds 87 per cent of total units, while coverage outside Muscat stands at around 56 per cent by 2025. These figures, he noted, demonstrate the company’s commitment to extending advanced digital infrastructure to all parts of the Sultanate of Oman, including less densely populated areas.

OBC is also playing a central role in developing next-generation urban projects. Digital networks are being implemented in Sultan Haitham City, Al Khuwair Downtown and the A’Thuraya City project in line with smart city standards. — *ONA*

Oman mulls ‘Unified Gas Buyer’ for power sector

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, DEC 30

THE Ministry of Energy and Minerals has revealed that it is studying the establishment of a ‘Unified Gas Buyer’ for Oman’s electricity sector, a move aimed at supporting the optimal and strategic use of the Sultanate of Oman’s natural gas resources as the energy transition gathers pace.

Natural gas currently accounts for around 90 per cent of Oman’s electricity generation, with renewables — primarily solar and wind — contributing the remaining 10 per cent. The renewable share is expected to rise to 30 per cent by 2030, in line with national decarbonisation targets, while Net Zero emissions are targeted by 2050.

To enable the efficient and sustainable integration of renewables into a system dominated by gas-fired generation, the Ministry is evaluating a suite of reforms designed to optimise gas use.

The combined deployment of gas, solar and wind enhances power system flexibility and reduces overall reliance on fossil fuels, according to the Ministry.

In this context, “the establishment of a unified gas buyer for the electricity sector is being studied to improve planning and control of gas quantities allocated for generation, contributing to demand curve optimisation, gas consumption rationalisation and improved operational efficiency across the national system”, the Ministry said in its newly published newsletter, Wealth.

Energy experts describe



The Ministry is examining a suite of reforms to optimise gas use in conjunction with the integration of renewable energy resources into the power grid.

the proposal as a potentially significant shift in market design.

Currently, gas allocations to power producers are largely governed by long-term arrangements that can encourage baseload operation even when renewable generation is available.

A unified gas buyer would centralise procurement and allocation, enabling more efficient dispatch, prioritising higher-efficiency plants and reducing gas burn during periods when solar, wind and storage can meet demand — particularly during evening peak hours.

Centralised gas procurement would also help curb inefficient consumption in the power sector, reduce exposure to excess take-or-pay

commitments and potentially free up gas for higher-value uses such as industry, LNG, petrochemicals or export.

In doing so, it would reinforce Oman’s broader energy transition objectives by ensuring gas is deployed in a more deliberate and economically strategic manner.

Beyond market reform, the Ministry has also highlighted parallel efforts to refine the gas demand curve for electricity production while prioritising land allocation for renewable energy projects based on rigorous technical and environmental criteria.

Measures are also under way to optimise daily and seasonal gas demand by integrating energy storage into renewable plants, allowing the grid to be supported during peak periods

and reducing reliance on gas-fired generation in the evenings.

Significantly, Oman is also exploring natural gas storage as part of its resource optimisation strategy.

“Suitable geological formations are being assessed for underground gas storage to ensure supply flexibility and energy security during peak or emergency periods”, the Ministry said, adding that such an approach would enhance grid stability and reduce exposure to volatility in global gas markets.

To support innovation and ensure system readiness for advanced technologies, the Ministry is developing a regulatory sandbox that will allow controlled testing of solutions such as battery storage, pumped hydro and flexible loads ahead of commercial deployment. This framework is intended to strengthen market preparedness, encourage local innovation and accelerate the development of Omani capabilities in smart grids and energy storage.

“The integration of energy sources, improvements in gas efficiency, deployment of storage technologies and support for innovation together form a comprehensive system driving Oman’s transition towards a low-carbon future”, the Ministry concluded.

“This transformation is not only an environmental imperative, but also an economic and strategic opportunity to build a more efficient, competitive and sustainable economy, positioning the Sultanate of Oman as a regional model in energy mix management and sustainability solutions”.

OQBI funds five food innovation projects in Oman

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, DEC 30

OQ Base Industries (OQBI) has funded five industrial projects in Dhofar Governorate as part of an initiative to develop innovative food products in collaboration with the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn) represented by the Industrial Innovation Academy.

The programme was launched on Tuesday, December 30, 2025, under the auspices of Musallam bin Mohammed Bakhit al Shahri, Head of the Operations Sector.

The programme is in line with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040 to enhance industrial innovation, support small and medium enterprises; and increase local value addition.

Five SMEs from Dhofar Governorate have benefitted from the programme, enhancing their potential to successfully access local and regional markets; and reaffirming the vital role of partnerships between the public and private



Products targeted for development include frankincense tea, yoghurt, coconut juice and frankincense coffee.

sectors in empowering entrepreneurs and advancing industrial innovation.

The initiative support SMEs by developing innovative, value-added food products, enhancing industrial innovation and the quality of local food products; and preparing

new products for entry into local and regional markets.

A comprehensive support package is provided in the Dhofar laboratories, including evaluating existing products, improving formulations and manufacturing processes, implementing research and development plans, enhancing quality, conducting food safety tests, developing brand identity and packaging design; all of which increase product readiness for marketing and sustainability.

Products targeted for development include: Frankincense Tea, Yoghurt, Coconut Juice and Frankincense Coffee, in addition to the services of Dhofar laboratories, which support enterprises in improving product quality and continuing innovation, with a focus on delivering high-quality, value-added products capable of competing in local and regional markets.

The launch ceremony featured an introductory presentation on the stages of

project implementation and the achieved results, in addition to a visual showcase highlighting key accomplishments in the five products and services, the joint efforts between consultants, factories and supporting entities; and the impact of the partnership in transforming innovative ideas into marketable products with tangible economic value.

Ahmed bin Abdullah Muqaibal, CEO for Human Resources and Technology at OQBI, affirmed that the project embodies an effective model of partnership between the public and private sectors, reflecting the company’s commitment to supporting initiatives that contribute to developing local products, enabling SMEs to build sustainable competitive capabilities and enhancing local content in a way that positively impacts the national economy.

The event concluded with the honouring of project participants and a tour of the exhibition showcasing the newly developed products.

TECH POLICY

China sets domestic chip gear rule



China is requiring chipmakers to ensure at least 50% of equipment used in new or expanded capacity is domestically made, sources said. Authorities have conveyed the rule during approval processes, asking firms to demonstrate compliance through tenders.

The move accelerates Beijing’s drive for semiconductor self-sufficiency amidst tightened US export curbs on advanced chips and tools. — *Reuters*

PRECIOUS METALS

Gold rebounds after year-end selloff



Gold prices rebounded after slipping to a two-week low, as year-end profit-taking eased. Spot gold rose 1% to \$4,374.83 an ounce, while US futures gained 0.8%.

Despite volatility, gold is up about 66% in 2025, supported by low interest rates, expected US Federal Reserve cuts, geopolitical risks, central bank buying and strong ETF demand through the year globally. — *ONA*

ENERGY MARKETS

Oil steady amidst geopolitical uncertainty



Oil prices were steady as investors weighed fading hopes for Russia-Ukraine peace talks against rising Middle East tensions. Brent crude edged up to about \$61.6 a barrel, while US WTI hovered near \$58.3.

Prices rose more than 2% previously after Saudi air strikes in Yemen and Moscow accused Kyiv of targeting President Vladimir Putin’s residence this week. — *Reuters*

OPINION

Why haven't Trump's tariffs crashed the US economy?



JEFFREY FRANKEL

The writer, a Professor of Capital Formation and Growth at Harvard University, served as a member of President Bill Clinton's Council of Economic Advisers.

WHEN US President Donald Trump took office last January, most economists feared what would happen if he raised tariffs. The expectation was that, as the new duties drove up prices of consumer goods and inputs — affecting households and firms, respectively — surging inflation and falling real incomes would follow. This would be a supply shock, so the US Federal Reserve could not do much to counteract it.

Trump did raise tariffs to shocking levels, violating international agreements and blowing up the Republican Party's oft-professed commitment to free trade. In terms of severity and disruptiveness, Trump's 2025 tariffs went far beyond the already-harmful tariffs of his first term and even beyond the infamous Smoot-Hawley Act of 1930.

According to the Yale Budget Lab, the average effective tariff on US imports rose from 2% to 18%, the highest level since the 1930s, this year.

Add to that the uncertainty caused by frequent and inexplicable policy changes; and large adverse effects on inflation, employment and real incomes appeared all but inevitable. But things did not turn out as anticipated.

It is possible that consumer price inflation (CPI) did not rise at all: the most recently reported rate, for the 12 months ending in

November, is 2.7% — the same level as in the closing months of 2024. (Of course, the price level is higher, contrary to Trump's claims).

The unemployment rate rose only a little, from 4.1% at the end of 2024 to 4.6% in November. Economic growth probably slowed towards the end of the year, but the situation remains unclear, because a US government shutdown delayed data collection.

In any case, it is pretty safe to say that the economic damage caused during Trump's first year back in office has been smaller than predicted. There are four reasons why his tariffs' biggest effects were limited or delayed in 2025.

First, US economic statistics are unusually vulnerable to measurement problems, owing to the government shutdown, which stretched from October 1 to November 12. Some CPI information is missing because the Bureau of Labour Statistics could not collect data as usual, particularly for October.

Even in November, there is reason to doubt that housing cost inflation amounted to zero, as reported. If true, this would bias the overall CPI estimate downward.

GDP releases by the Bureau of Economic Analysis are way behind schedule, with the release of third-quarter GDP data having been postponed. The second reason we have seen less damage from Trump's tariffs than

Trump did raise tariffs to shocking levels, violating international agreements and blowing up the Republican Party's oft-professed commitment to free trade. In terms of severity and disruptiveness, Trump's 2025 tariffs went far beyond the already-harmful tariffs of his first term and even beyond the infamous Smoot-Hawley Act of 1930.

expected is that many of the highest ones are not fully in effect. Trump has postponed some tariffs repeatedly. He rolled back others on November 14, because they were driving up grocery prices.

Moreover, Trump introduced major tariff exceptions for some countries. For example, the integrated North American auto industry would have been devastated if he hadn't decided on March 6 to exempt goods from Mexico and Canada from the 25% levy that had gone into effect two days earlier. Goods from these countries now face no penalty if they are imported under the US-Mexico-Canada Agreement.

This softening was predictable. US business would have suffered enormously if Trump had fully implemented the tariffs he had announced, let alone threatened, so it was never likely that he would persist with the worst of them. Trump regularly stakes out extreme negotiating positions, only to back down when the heat is on, even if he hasn't gotten what he demanded from the other side.

In fact, investors' assumption that "Trump always chickens out" — known as TACO — has become a taunt. But when a madman threatens Armageddon, it is foolhardy to goad him into following through. The tariffs Trump has implemented are still very high.

— © Project Syndicate 2025

TOKENISATION BOOM WILL STALL IN BANK BACK OFFICES

JENNIFER JOHNSON

Between high-profile fraud convictions and price crashes, it's easy to forget there was a utopian ideal at the heart of the crypto movement: building financial services on decentralised infrastructure, which cuts out banks and other fee-seeking middlemen.

Yet, despite years of hype, cryptocurrencies and the blockchain ledgers they live on have not been widely adopted. Tokenisation, the process of logging real-world assets on blockchains, could change that — but banks and their clients are the most likely beneficiaries.

The argument for registering asset ownership on crypto rails essentially boils down to speed and convenience. Because public blockchains operate around the clock, there would be no set trading hours and settlement could be near-instantaneous.

Advocates also argue it's easier to trade costly, illiquid holdings — like real estate — if they're

fractionalised, or broken up into smaller units.

Tokenisation makes it theoretically possible to own a tiny portion of, say, a commercial building. Growth projections are heady, to say the least.

Analysts at Standard Chartered have predicted that the market value of all tokenised real-world assets (RWAs) will hit \$2 trillion by 2028. That's not including stablecoins, cryptocurrencies pegged to the price of an existing currency. Vlad Tenev, the chief executive of brokerage app Robinhood Markets, told Bloomberg in October that tokenisation is a "freight train, and it'll eat the entire financial system".

Banks, however, are in a prime position to devour the lion's share of the cost savings from this new system first. For instance, a bank could tokenise a corporate client's deposits, thereby allowing it to move money between its various global accounts in seconds. Citigroup currently offers a service like this to certain institutional customers, as does HSBC.

Meanwhile, e-commerce giant Alibaba has revealed plans to launch a tokenised global payment network using technology developed by JPMorgan. Kuo Zhang, president of Alibaba.com, said that the group will launch a stablecoin-like system to speed up international business-to-business transactions.

A cynic might say that lenders are only developing these products to offset the competitive threat from stablecoins. If clients used cryptocurrencies as they do cash, it would pull money out of the banking system. This would add further pressure to lenders that are facing lower revenue as interest rates decline in key markets.

— Reuters

Tariffs, China, dollar: Wall Street got wrong in 2025

THIS was one of the most topsy-turvy years in living memory for financial markets, as US President Donald Trump tore up the economic playbook that has shaped the multilateral, globalised world for decades.

The president's strategy may have been well telegraphed, but its impact on markets, growth and policymaking turned out to be very different from what most Wall Street analysts had expected.

The global trade war of 2025 should not have come as a surprise. Trump campaigned on making American manufacturing great again. "I love tariffs", Trump said at a rally in Las Vegas two weeks before the election. "I can make anybody do anything through the use of tariffs". Trump said he would force countries around the world to pay for "ripping off" the US with "unfair" trade practices — and he did just that on April 2, so-called "Liberation Day".

Despite months of warning, analysts and investors were still caught flat-footed by the chaotic rollout of a host of sky-high tariffs.

The S&P 500 lost nearly 15% in the three days after Liberation Day, only to recoup most of that in the next few days once Trump delayed some of the more extreme elements of his flagship policy.

Yet even after Trump's partial rollback, the trade landscape has been transformed. The effective US tariff rate on imports at the end of last year was around 2.5%. It is now nearly 17%, according to The Budget Lab at Yale, the highest since 1935.

What is perhaps most surprising is how little most markets seem to care. The S&P 500 was expected to end this year at 6,500 points, according to the consensus forecast in Reuters' 2024 year-end poll. That implied a rise of around 9%.

The index is on track to gain twice as much, making a push for 7,000 points.

DOLLAR'S HISTORIC SLUMP

Want to find the biggest forecasting flub of the year? Look no further



Want to find the biggest forecasting flub of the year? Look no further than the US dollar.



JAMIE MCGEEVER

The writer is a financial journalist at Thomson Reuters.

than the US dollar. The greenback plunged 12% against a basket of major currencies in the first six months of 2025, its worst start to a year since President Richard Nixon took the US off the gold standard and began the era of free-floating exchange rates more than half a century ago.

That wasn't supposed to happen. Trump's protectionist tariffs and onshoring were expected to be inflationary and thus liable to keep monetary policy relatively tight.

That, in turn, would support foreign inflows into the US and strengthen the dollar, or so the consensus view held. But the rally never materialised, in large part because many global investors balked at Trump's controversial policy agenda and trimmed their dollar exposure.

Foreign investors still wanted exposure to the US tech boom and artificial intelligence revolution, so they piled into US equities, but — in a break from the recent past — they hedged the currency risk.

As a result, this year featured a rare phenomenon: a Wall Street boom and a dollar slide.

THE YUAN ALSO RISES

The Chinese yuan — and, in many ways, China itself — was another major forecasting miss.

Analysts' consensus view early in the year was that Beijing would retaliate against Washington's tariffs by depreciating the yuan to boost exports, especially given the deflationary pressures bearing down on China's economy.

But the yuan moved in the opposite direction, at least against the dollar. China's currency is set to end this year at its strongest level against the greenback in 14 months, a whisker away from the all-important 7.00 yuan per dollar level.

This appreciation hasn't tanked China's export market, however. While the country's shipments to the US have dropped nearly 20% this year, exports to the rest of the world have more than made up for this, pushing China's 2025 trade surplus above \$1 trillion and disproving yet another economic rule of thumb. Rather than focus on boosting domestic demand, China appears as wedded as ever to an export-led growth model.

TRUMP'S SHADOW

Last but not least, there is the Federal Reserve. A year ago, futures markets were pricing in only one full quarter-point interest rate cut in 2025, but the Fed delivered three, all coming in the last four months of the year.

Cynics might put this dovishness down to the intense political pressure bearing down on Chair Jerome Powell from the White House. Yet, if political interference is to blame, markets didn't appear overly concerned.

Fed independence is supposedly the cornerstone of the US financial system, but Trump's actions have elicited barely a peep from investors, barring some ructions in May when Trump indicated that he might fire Powell.

Indeed, US equities, the dollar and 10-year Treasuries all rose in the second half of the year even as the president's shadow over the Fed lengthened. — Reuters

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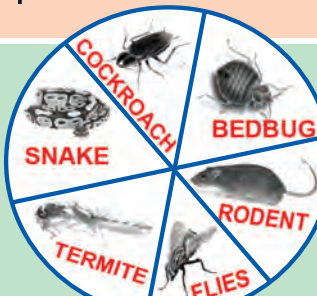
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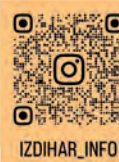
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ART/LIFE



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BEYONCE DECLARED A BILLIONAIRE BY FORBES MAGAZINE



US singer Beyoncé has officially reached billionaire status, according to Forbes magazine, which announced the milestone on Monday. With this achievement, she becomes only the fifth musician in history to cross the billion-dollar mark, a rare distinction in the global music industry.

At 44 years old, the internationally celebrated entertainer now joins an elite group of artists whose fortunes extend beyond music alone.

This exclusive circle includes her husband, rapper Jay-Z, as well as fellow global stars Taylor Swift, Bruce Springsteen and Rihanna, Forbes reported.

The publication is widely known for its annual rankings of the world's wealthiest individuals and influential figures.

Beyoncé reached this financial landmark following several exceptionally profitable years marked by major creative and commercial success.

In 2023, her Renaissance World Tour proved to be a massive global hit, generating close to \$600 million in total revenue and reinforcing her status as one of the most powerful touring artists in the world.

She continued to evolve her artistic direction in 2024 by reinventing her musical profile with the release of Cowboy Carter, a country-inspired album that went on to win a Grammy Award.

This creative shift was followed by another major triumph when she staged the world's highest-grossing tour of 2025, further strengthening her financial standing.

When these touring earnings are combined with income from her extensive music catalog and various business agreements, Forbes estimated that Beyoncé earned \$148 million in 2025 alone, before taxes.

This figure placed her as the third highest-paid musician globally for that year.

Despite confirming her billionaire status, Forbes did not release a precise estimate of the net worth of the former Destiny's Child member.

Beyoncé founded Parkwood Entertainment to oversee her career and creative productions, maintaining significant control over her professional ventures.

According to the publication, while Beyoncé has expanded her business empire through initiatives such as a hair care brand, a beverage label and a fashion line, the majority of her personal wealth continues to stem from her music.

Her global tours and ownership of the rights to her back catalog remain the central pillars of her financial success. — AFP

QUICK FEATURES



NEW YEAR FESTIVITIES

Eager audience watch as organisers of the upcoming ball drop on New Year's Eve perform a confetti test in Times Square, New York. — Reuters



MUSICAL PERFORMANCE

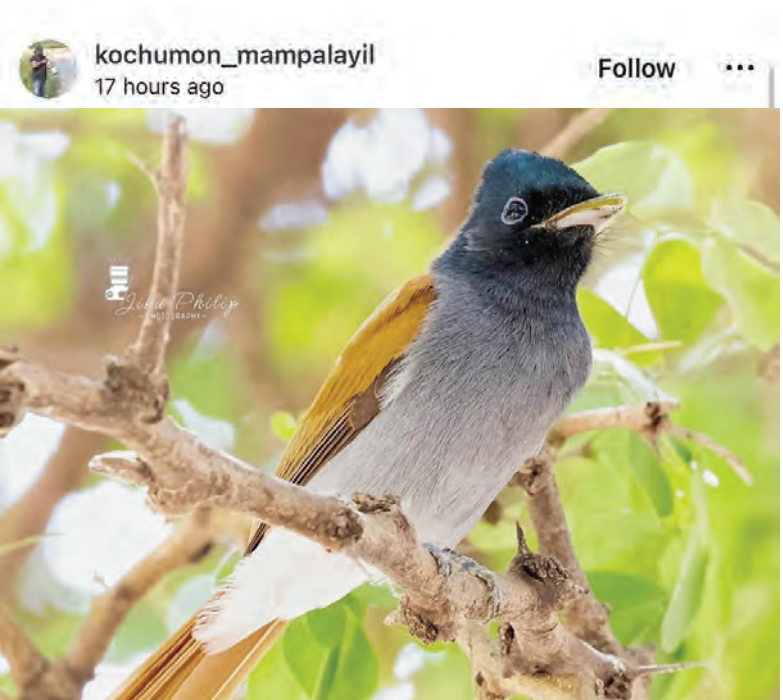
Canadian conductor Yannick conducts the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra during a rehearsal for the 2026 New Year's Concert, in Vienna, Austria. — AFP



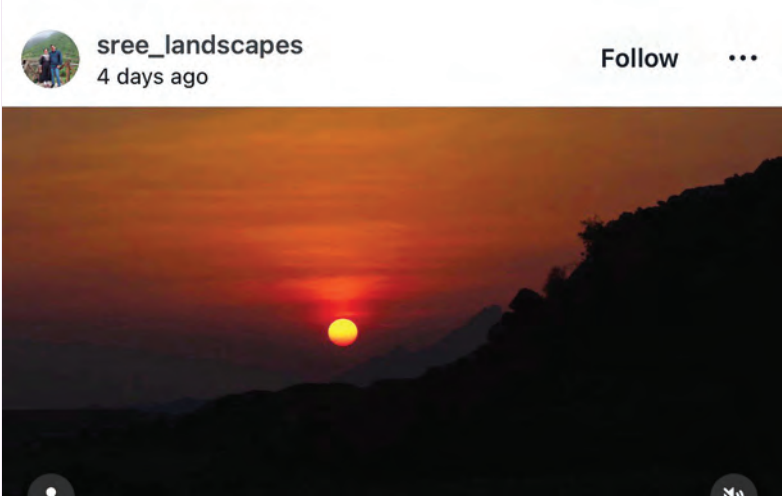
ENTERTAINMENT

Bollywood actor Tiger Shroff attends the screening of the upcoming Indian Hindi-language biographical war drama film 'Tkkis' in Mumbai. — AFP

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Olympics-Italian pianist Dardust to provide soundtrack for Milano Cortina



DARDUST

An Italian pianist, songwriter and producer whose music is seen as blurring the boundaries between contemporary and classical genres.

Italian artist Dardust will provide the music that will feature as the official soundtrack of the Milano Cortina Winter Olympics, local organisers said on Monday.

The work, called “Italian Fantasia”, drew inspiration from the soundscapes of the city of Milan and the mountains that will host the Games from February 6-22.

Dardust — real name Dario Faini — is an Italian pianist, songwriter and

producer whose music is seen as blurring the boundaries between contemporary and classical genres.

His work has featured in the NFL Super Bowl and the NBA All-Star Game; and he provided the music for the Olympic flag handover ceremony at the end of the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics.

Dardust co-wrote the song “Soldi” by Mahmood, which won Italy’s Sanremo Music Festival in 2019 and came second in the Eurovision Song Contest.

He also worked on “La Noia” by Angelina Mango, the 2024 winner of Sanremo, a fixture in the Italian music calendar.

Dardust said he felt a huge responsibility in providing the musical theme for the Games.

“My goal was to leave a lasting emotion, a note that, 10 years from now, will bring to mind the start of a race, a victory, an applause”, he said.

— Reuters



Hooked on the claw: how crane games conquered Japan’s arcades

AS school and work wrap up, crowds fill Tokyo’s many bustling arcade halls — not to battle it out in fighting games, but to snag plush toys from claw machines.

In one of these gaming hubs in the Japanese capital’s Ikebukuro district, aisles of crane games stretch as far as the eye can see.

The crown jewels of the arcade industry, they occupy the building’s first two floors, relegating video games to the basement and upper levels.

“Crane games are keeping the sector afloat”, said Morihiro Shigihara, an industry expert and former arcade manager.

“Arcade operators, machine manufacturers, and even prize suppliers depend on this business”, he said.

Some 80 per cent of the 22,000 arcades Japan had in 1989 have shut down, but revenues have held up thanks to claw machines, according to the Japan Amusement Industry Association.

Their share of revenue has climbed since 1993 from 20 per cent to more than 60 per cent, the association said.

Suzuna Nogi, a 20-year-old student, visits these arcades at least twice a week in search of “big plushies” on which she can spend up to 3,000 yen (\$19) at 100 yen per try.

“What I like best is the sense of accomplishment”, she said, even though there is no guarantee of success.

Nogi added that she enjoys “the thrill of not knowing whether you’ll manage to grab something or not”.

The sensitivity of the claw arms is adjusted by operators “based on the cost of the prizes and revenue targets”, Shigihara said.

“You can also make the game easier to compete with a nearby arcade.”

Transformation

The success of claw games also feeds on Japan’s booming fan culture of “oshikatsu”, with many people devoting more and more time and money to supporting their favourite idol.

Part of asserting their fan identity involves collecting character merchandise.

“I love Pokemon, so I often come looking for plush toys and merch from the franchise”, said professional



Pokemon card player Akira Kurasaki, showing off nails decorated with his most beloved characters.

Arcade operators have taken this enthusiasm to heart, tailoring their prize selections to the demographics of their neighbourhood and organising events around certain characters.

“New prizes are introduced almost every day”, said Sasaya, the Sega executive.

The hegemony of claw machines has also gone hand in hand with a gradual transformation of urban hangouts.

Arcades — seen in the 1970s and 1980s as dark, male-dominated places linked to crime — “tried to attract a new audience” of women and families, Bottos said.

“The crane game is emblematic of that transformation”. — AFP



FEATURES

FLAMINGO LAKE, QURAYYAT

FROM HIDDEN HAVEN TO VIRAL ECO-DESTINATION



IDRIS AL BALUSHI

WHAT began as a quiet natural corner in Qurayat has now become one of Oman’s most talked-about destinations on social media. In recent months, Flamingo Lake has turned into a viral trend, filling timelines with soft pink reflections, synchronised flocks and serene landscapes that many Omanis never imagined existed so close to home. Through short videos and photographs, the lake emerged not only as a location, but as a shared moment of collective wonder.

For Ahmed bin Abdul Latif al Zadjali, a social activist and social media influencer, the attention surrounding the lake feels both exciting and deeply personal. His connection to the site goes back to childhood, long before it appeared on screens across the country. “My first visits were when I was young”, he says. “But returning recently, what truly caught my attention was seeing environmental inspectors actively protecting the birds and the diversity of species present, especially in the last year”. Watching birds fly, land and feed by the water, combined with fresh sea air and open space, created what he describes as visual nourishment and a sense of calm. “It was a breathtaking scene”. The astonishment expressed online reflects how little was previously known about the lake’s natural richness. Many were unaware that Qurayat held such biodiversity. According to Ahmed, the lake contains clean water, lush vegetation and a variety of migratory and resident birds, all within an atmosphere of quiet and renewal. Visitors often speak about the mental comfort they feel there, as if the lake offers a pause from daily pressures.

What makes Flamingo Lake especially striking is its geography. It is a meeting point of land, sea, mountain and plain, forming a wide and balanced landscape. The lake itself is expansive, framed by green plant cover and filled with clear blue water that shifts with the light. “At times, it looks like a painted artwork”, Ahmed says. The area hosts many water birds, including flamingos, ducks, herons and other species, turning it into a seasonal ecological destination. Flamingos arrive during winter migration and remain for nearly five months, drawn by the lake’s rich food sources and fertile environment, making it one of their most reliable annual stops in Oman.

Social media played a defining role in bringing this hidden ecosystem into the public eye. Platforms such as TikTok and Instagram collapsed distance, allowing people to experience the lake almost instantly. “Social media became the main tool for awareness and promotion”, Ahmed explains. One particular video he filmed, showing an unexpectedly large number of flamingos moving together across the water, became a defining moment. “Even I did not expect that scene”, he admits. “It was rare and unforgettable”. With popularity came responsibility. Increased visits revealed environmental challenges, particularly waste. During frequent visits with friends who share his interest in nature, Ahmed noticed plastic



and other debris polluting the lake. “These materials threaten wildlife and affect the visitor experience”, he says. This led to a volunteer clean-up campaign coordinated with Qurayat Municipality and specialists from the Environment Authority. The initiative succeeded through cooperation and became a reminder that environmental protection is a shared duty.

Ahmed bin Salem al Siyabi, an employee at the Environment Authority, stresses the importance of community involvement. “Qurayat thrives through its youth and its people”, he says. He notes several concerning behaviours observed at the site, including littering, approaching birds too closely for photos, entering protected areas on foot or by vehicle, damaging vegetation and using drones without permits. Such actions disturb wildlife and violate environmental regulations.

Achieving balance between tourism and conservation remains essential. Promotion, Ahmed believes, must be matched with protection to ensure the lake’s ecological resilience. When managed responsibly, Flamingo Lake stands as a strong model for eco-tourism in Oman. In a relatively short time, it attracted an estimated 70,000 visitors, highlighting both its appeal and the urgency of safeguarding it.

For local resident Abdullah al Ameri, the lake has become a sanctuary. “It is one of the most peaceful places for us”, he says. Early mornings bring still water, fresh air and soft reflections of the sky, while sunsets bathe the lake in warm light and quiet magic. In winter, the cool breeze and open space transform it into a natural escape for families.

Visitors echo this sentiment. Azza al Busaidi from Nizwa says she discovered the lake through TikTok and felt compelled to see it herself. “I never expected to find such a serene, picture-book place in Oman”, she says. “Now I hope to return every year when the flamingos arrive”.

The message from those closest to Flamingo Lake is clear. It is not just a trend, but a living ecosystem. Preserving its beauty requires awareness, respect and care, so that what is shared online continues to reflect a place that remains balanced, protected and alive for generations to come.

