

O M A N
عمان
D A I L Y

Observer

SUNRISE 06:37 AM

PRAYER TIMINGS

FAJR 05:17 AM

DHUHR 12:04 PM

ASR 03:06 PM

MAGHRIB 05:26 PM

ISHA 06:41 PM

2010000387405

WINTER HEAT

HIDDEN DANGER

4

INBRIEF

HM’S GREETINGS TO SYRIAN PRESIDENT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Ahmed al Sharaa, President of the Syrian Arab Republic, on the occasion of Liberation Day. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere greetings and best wishes, wishing the President continued health and happiness, and the brotherly Syrian people the fulfilment of their aspirations to consolidate security and stability, preserve the unity of Syrian lands, and achieve further progress and prosperity.

HM INVITED TO RIYADH EXPO 2030

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has received a written message from Prince Mohammed bin Salman al Saud, Crown Prince and Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The message pertains to an invitation for the Sultanate of Oman to participate in the Riyadh Expo 2030, which will be hosted by the Kingdom from October 1, 2030, to March 31, 2031, under the theme ‘Foresights for Tomorrow.’ The message was handed over to Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, when he received at the General Diwan of the ministry Ibrahim bin Saad bin Bishan, Ambassador of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to the Sultanate of Oman. SEE ALSO P2

CELEBRATING A CENTURY!

The Ministry of Energy and Minerals on Monday commemorated the centenary of the discovery of oil and gas in the Sultanate of Oman. The ceremony was held under the auspices of HH Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, at the Royal Opera House Muscat. The event highlighted the historical milestones of the energy sector since the signing of the first exploration concession in 1925. It reviewed the major transformations that have contributed to building the national economy and establishing an integrated infrastructure for the oil and gas industry, culminating in the Sultanate of Oman’s future strategic directions in renewable energy and green hydrogen. DETAILS ON P13

LEBANESE PRESIDENT ARRIVES TODAY

TWO LEADERSHIPS TO EXCHANGE MATTERS RELATED TO JOINT ARAB ACTION

GENERAL JOSEPH AOUN, President of the Lebanese Republic, will arrive today on an official two-day visit to the Sultanate of Oman. A statement to this effect was issued by the Diwan of Royal Court, reading as follows: “In a manifestation of the distinguished fraternal relations binding the Sultanate of Oman and the Lebanese Republic, General Joseph Aoun, President of the Lebanese Republic, will pay an official visit to the Sultanate of Oman on Tuesday and Wednesday December 9-10. The visit comes within the context of enhancing the joint cooperation between Oman and Lebanon in a manner that achieves further progress and prosperity to serve the common interests of the two countries and meet their aspirations. During the visit, the two leaderships will exchange views on several matters that promote the joint Arab action, in addition to

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik

discussing a set of regional and international developments.” The official visit of President General Joseph Aoun and his meeting with His Majesty Sultan

General Joseph Aoun

Haitham bin Tarik hold special importance in affirming the keenness of the two countries’ leaderships on promoting the bilateral relations and pushing

them towards wider horizons. The relations between Oman and Lebanon have been distinguished, since the opening of Oman’s first embassy in Beirut in 1972, by their strength and robustness, rooted in Arab and historical ties. Oman’s embassy in Lebanon serves as a link between government bodies in both countries to serve common interests. It works to activate economic diplomacy by encouraging investments, facilitating communication between the two sides, visits by economic delegations, and supporting companies’ participation in joint exhibitions and events. Oman and Lebanon have enjoyed solid trade relations since ancient times. These commercial links have contributed to enhancing cultural, intellectual and historical exchange between the Omani and Lebanese peoples, creating an environment of cooperation and communication across ages. — ONA

Honourable Lady visits Al Dhahirah

IBRI: Her Highness the Honourable Lady Assayida Ahd Abdullah Hamed al Busaidi, Spouse of the Sultan of Oman, visited Al Dhahirah Governorate on Monday afternoon. Her Highness the Honourable Lady visited Al Muhallab bin Abi Sufrah Hall in the governorate, where she reviewed a comprehensive exhibition of governmental, community and student-led projects and initiatives in the fields of applied sciences, economics, artificial intelligence, digital transformation and innovation. The exhibition serves as a testament to the pivotal role of community engagement in driving sustainable development. Her Highness listened to a briefing from Najeeb bin Ali al Rawas, Governor of Al Dhahirah, on the governorate’s strategic vision and completed projects.

She also listened to presentations from several speakers detailing ongoing initiatives and future developmental opportunities. Her Highness the Honourable Lady further observed a series of visual presentations that highlighted key developmental indicators and prospects for the governorate, including presentations by Al Dhahirah National Company, the Ibri Charity Team and Al Wafa Social Centre. Her Highness graciously held an audience with a distinguished delegation of women’s representatives from Al Dhahirah Governorate. The warm and cordial meeting reflected the deep affection and profound esteem in which her presence is held by the people of the governorate. As part of the visit, Her Highness the Honourable Lady toured the historic Ibri Fort,

acquainting herself with its most prominent architectural and historical landmarks. She also went on tour of a special exhibition featuring initiatives from various sectors, including products from productive families and women entrepreneurs. The exhibition displayed a collection of archaeological artefacts excavated from the Bat archaeological site — a Unesco World Heritage location — alongside traditional artisan crafts and cultural displays that portray the rich Bedouin and urban heritage of Al Dhahirah Governorate. Her Highness commended the exceptional heritage value of the fort, emphasising the importance of its preservation and its continued role as a cultural and tourist destination that educates future generations on the history and ancient legacy of the Wilayat of Ibri.

Following the tour, Najeeb bin Ali al Rawas, Governor of Al Dhahirah, presented Her Highness the Honourable Lady with a commemorative gift. In return, Her Highness graciously penned a commemorative note to mark the occasion of her visit. This visit to Al Dhahirah Governorate forms part of Her Highness’s ongoing tour of the various governorates of the Sultanate of Oman. It underscores her steadfast support for the empowerment of women and youth, reinforces the framework of sustainable developmental partnership and reflects her commitment to engaging with community-led projects and initiatives, all within the overarching context of the renewed renaissance ushered in under the leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik. — ONA

Oman’s credit rating upgraded to investment grade

NEW YORK: Fitch Ratings has upgraded the Sultanate of Oman’s credit rating in its report issued today from ‘BB+’ to the investment grade level of ‘BBB-’ with a stable outlook. This upgrade results from the continued improvement in the state’s public finance indicators, external financial position, and Fitch’s growing confidence in Oman’s ability to continue adhering to prudent fiscal policies that enable it to deal with oil price volatility, maintain a moderate budget deficit, and stable public debt levels. In its report, the Fitch indicated that Oman has successfully entrenched fiscal discipline, managing to significantly reduce the volume of public debt to

approximately 36 per cent of GDP in 2025, compared to around 68 per cent in 2020. Fitch expects the state’s general budget deficit to remain at safe levels, close to one per cent of GDP during 2026–2027, assuming an average Brent crude price of \$63 per barrel. Meanwhile, the fiscal break-even oil price is estimated at around \$67 per barrel for the same period. Regarding economic growth, Fitch projected GDP growth of approximately 4 per cent in 2025, compared to about 1.6 per cent in 2024, supported by strong non-oil sector growth of around 3.8 per cent, alongside an acceleration in oil sector growth due to the easing

Fitch projected GDP growth of approximately **4%** in 2025, compared to about 1.6% in 2024, supported by strong growth in non-oil sector of around **3.8%**

of production constraints by the Opec+ group. Domestic spending, foreign direct investment inflows, and growing tourism activity are likely to continue supporting non-oil growth to remain above 3.5 per cent over the next two years, 2026-2027. The report highlighted the qualitative shift in Oman’s external financial position to a positive indicator, as it became a net creditor in 2024 at 2 per cent of GDP. This marks a significant shift compared to its status as a net debtor in 2021, resulting from government efforts to repay due debts, reduce public corporate indebtedness, the growth of external assets, and the improved

soundness of the external financial position due to reserve growth. Fitch confirmed that Oman’s credit rating could rise further in the future if the general budget’s ability to withstand oil price fluctuations is enhanced by broadening non-oil revenue sources, and if the financial position continues to improve through ongoing public debt reduction and repayment of dues, in addition to increasing the strength of external reserves and the growing size of assets in the sovereign wealth fund. It is noteworthy that Oman’s credit rating has been upgraded to investment grade by all credit rating agencies. — ONA

OMAN

SHORT TAKES



Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, with Ibrahim bin Saad bin Bishan, Ambassador of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to the Sultanate of Oman.

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YOUNG LEADERS PROGRAMME FOR SAI BEGINS



The programme includes a series of working sessions focused on developing leadership skills.

MUSCAT: The fourth edition of the Young Leaders Program for Supreme Audit Institutions begins in Muscat and will run until December 12.

The State Financial and Administrative Audit Authority organises the programme, in cooperation with the INTOSAI Development Initiative (IDI).

The programme is part of the State Financial and Administrative Audit Authority’s commitment to hosting and delivering international events in the field of financial and administrative audit, and in support of knowledge exchange and global best practices.

The programme is considered one of the most prominent global initiatives aimed at empowering young leaders within Supreme Audit Institutions, launched by the INTOSAI Development Initiative (IDI). It seeks to drive positive change and development among the staff of audit institutions by equipping them with modern tools needed to enhance performance.

Civil society institutions forum reviews sustainability in volunteering

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Social Development organised the Civil Society Institutions Forum. The forum aims to qualify and empower civil society institutions by providing them with the skills and knowledge that enable them to manage their resources, qualify their members, and develop their institutional performance, and will continue for two days.

The forum, whose opening was held under the auspices of Shaikh Rashid bin Ahmed al Shamsi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Social Development, and attended by representatives of volunteer teams,



The forum’s programme includes a series of scientific and dialogue sessions that discussed several topics related to sustainability and empowerment in the civil society sector. — ONA

professional associations, and charitable societies, also aims to exchange experiences and successful practices in the fields of social responsibility, investment and empowerment.

The forum’s programme includes a series of scientific and dialogue sessions that discussed several topics related to sustainability and empowerment in the civil society sector. The

first session discussed the concept of sustainability in volunteer work and its role in community development and enhancing the impact of volunteer initiatives.

The second session focused

on the theme of Social Responsibility and Sustainable Investment, which reviewed mechanisms for benefiting from the social responsibility programmes of private sector companies in the Sultanate of Oman. It also presented successful models in financial sustainability and sustainable investment, including the Imam Jabir bin Zaid Foundation, Manah Volunteer Team, and Al Rahmah Association for Motherhood and Childhood Care.

The forum continues its sessions on its second day by discussing the topic of Empowerment in the Civil Society sector, through presenting a number of

practical experiences. It will also address the category of self-employed workers and those similarly situated, in addition to reviewing successful models of economic empowerment projects, including the experience of the Yanqul Volunteer Team and the Omani Women’s Association in the Wilayat of Al Seeb.

The forum activities will conclude with a session discussing the identity of civil society institutions in light of e-marketing and Artificial Intelligence (AI), along with introducing participants to the Joud platform for charity work and the Ayadi platform for volunteer work. — ONA

SAF CHIEF OF STAFF RECEIVES TURKISH MILITARY OFFICIAL

MUSCAT: Vice Admiral Abdullah bin Khamis al Raisi, Chief of Staff of the Sultan’s Armed Forces (SAF), on Monday, received in his office at Muaskar Al Murtafaa Air Chief Marshal Ziya Cemal Kadioğlu, Commander of the Turkish Air Force, and his accompanying military delegation.

The SAF Chief of Staff welcomed the Commander of the Turkish Air Force and in their meeting exchanged views and discussed topics of mutual interest.

Air Vice Marshal Khamis bin Hammad al Ghafri, Commander of the Royal Air Force of Oman (RAFO), attended the occasion.

Air Vice Marshal Khamis bin Hammad al Ghafri also received in



Vice Admiral Abdullah bin Khamis al Raisi receives Air Chief Marshal Ziya Cemal Kadioğlu.

his office at Muaskar Al Murtafaa Air Chief Marshal Ziya Cemal Kadioğlu, and his accompanying military delegation.

The RAFO Commander welcomed the guest and his accompanying military delegation. The two sides



The Turkish Air Force and military delegation during a visit to the Military Technological College.

exchanged views on a number of military topics of mutual interest.

Furthermore, Air Chief Marshal Ziya Cemal Kadioğlu, and his accompanying military delegation, accompanied by Air Vice Marshal Khamis bin Hammad al Ghafri,

visited the Maritime Security Centre (MSC). The Acting Head of the MSC received them upon arrival at the Center’s headquarters.

During the visit, the guest listened to a briefing on the MSC’s roles and its efforts in preserving the security and safety of the environment and navigation in Oman’s maritime areas. He also toured the Centre’s facilities and reviewed the modern technologies and systems it is equipped with.

Meanwhile, Air Chief Marshal Ziya Cemal Kadioğlu, and his accompanying military delegation, accompanied by Air Vice Marshal Khamis bin Hammad al Ghafri, visited the Military Technological College (MTC). — ONA

Arab Region unites to drive green innovation

MOHAMED AL BATTASHI
MUSCAT, DEC 8

GREEN innovation has become ‘an essential tool to confront the world’s accelerating environmental challenges,’ affirmed Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, as she inaugurated the International Forum on Green Innovation on Monday at Al Bustan Palace in Muscat.

She noted that innovation “offers more efficient ways to use natural resources while reducing negative impacts on the environment,” stressing that scientific research, entrepreneurship, and technology must work together to drive sustainable development.

Held under her auspices, the forum brought together leading experts, researchers, and innovators from across the Arab region to explore pathways for environmental sustainability and the transition toward a circular economy.

Dr Rahma stressed that green innovation has become indispensable in addressing the world’s accelerating environmental challenges.

Prof Abdelmajid Ben Amara, Secretary-General of the Federation of Arab Scientific Research Councils (FASRC), highlighted the growing need to translate scientific research into real-world applications. He explained that while many Arab countries have built strong research foundations, the next critical step is converting findings into practical innovations. It is no longer sufficient, he said, “to produce publications that



The International Forum on Green Innovation began in Muscat on Monday.

never reach application.”

The forum also featured a presentation by Buthaina al Wahaibi, Innovation and Sustainability Acting Manager at Nama Water Services, who shared Oman’s experience in implementing circular economy practices.

She outlined how treated wastewater is being repurposed for agriculture and development projects, describing it as a solution that “gives water a second life and reduces pressure on desalination.” She also highlighted efforts to recover resources from waste, including converting sludge into organic fertiliser and exploring waste-to-energy technologies as part of a national push to minimise waste and maximise resource efficiency.

Throughout the day, the forum hosted three scientific sessions. The

first examined green innovation in tackling environmental and agricultural challenges, the second discussed renewable energy, the circular economy, and regional integration, while the third focused on innovative waste management and advancing circular solutions. Collectively, the sessions underscored how green innovation bridges scientific research with practical sustainability goals, strengthening environmental resilience and supporting long-term economic growth.

With wide regional participation, the forum served as a platform for idea exchange and collaboration. It reflected the Arab region’s growing commitment to circular economy practices, empowering young innovators, and advancing sustainability through practical, science-driven solutions.

**WINTER
HEAT**

HIDDEN DANGER



SHORT TAKES



WORK BEGINS ON AL SHASR-BAITHNAH-AL HASHMAN ROAD

SALALAH: The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology began the construction of the Al Shasr-Baithnah-Al Hashman road project in the Wilayat of Thamrait, Governorate of Dhofar. The construction of the 86-km road will cost about RO 9.5 million.

The implementation of the project reflects the ministry's efforts to expand the road network, develop aspects of tourism, economic and social activity in the wilayats of Dhofar Governorate and support transport services in Al Najd agricultural area.

The project forms part of the ministry's plan to establish a safe and efficient road network that meets the objectives of Oman Vision 2040. — ONA



UTAS Al Musannah, Al Rustaq College to honour 837 graduates

AL MUSANNAH: The University of Technology and Applied Sciences – Al Musannah Branch, together with Al Rustaq College of Education, is set to hold the graduation ceremony for the Class of 2025 on Wednesday, December 10, at Al Rustaq Sports Complex in Al Batinah South Governorate. A total of 837 graduates will be honoured, including 590 from UTAS–Al Musannah and 247 from Al Rustaq College of Education.

The ceremony will be held under the auspices of HH Sayyid Dr Faris bin Turki al Said and will be attended by Dr Said bin Hamed al Rubaie, Vice-Chancellor of UTAS, members of the State Council, officials



The graduates exemplify the university's strong academic programmes and its ability to integrate theoretical knowledge with practical skills.

from Al Batinah North and Al Batinah South, and families of the graduates.

Dr Nasser bin Salem al Bimani, Assistant Vice-Chancellor for UTAS–Al Musannah, highlighted that graduates from the Colleges of Engineering & Technology, Economics & Business Administration, and Computing & Information Sciences, as well as Al Rustaq College of Education students specialising in Science, Mathematics and English, will receive Bachelor's, Advanced Diploma and Diploma degrees.

He added that this year's graduates exemplify the university's strong academic programmes and its ability to integrate theoretical knowledge with practical skills aligned with labour-market needs.

SQU to host global translation conference on Dec 10

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman will host the 8th conference of the International Association for Translation and Intercultural Studies (IATIS), themed 'Sustainable Translation in the Age of Knowledge Extraction, Generation and Reproduction'.

The 4-day conference will kick off tomorrow at Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) under the auspices of the Ministry of Information and the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth.

Oman was chosen to host the conference's 8th edition due to the country's global reputation as an advocate of peace and a guardian of dialogue, international understanding and coexistence. The event gains impetus amid the current global and regional



The conference will feature an intensive media programme to be held in cooperation with the Ministry of Information.

circumstances.

By hosting the event, the SQU seeks to promote international dialogue through translation studies, intercultural communication and research — the common areas that currently witness remarkable global activity.

The conference will be attended by a select group of scholars, researchers, experts, teaching staff and students

from 61 countries.

The conference provides a platform for dialogue and the exchange of expertise. It offers opportunities for exploring the latest trends, theories and practices in this field of knowledge. It will focus on its applications in real-life situations like the conservation of heritage, the settlement of peace and the promotion of international understanding.

The prospects also include transferring knowledge in the fields of medicine and public health, establishing the values of justice in legal spheres, as well as related applications in the areas of tourism, information, international relations and the concept of soft power in bridging country-to-country relations.

— ONA

Media training on child rights opens in Muscat

IDRIS AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, DEC 8

THE training programme for media professionals on child rights, under the slogan 'Child-Friendly Media', began on Monday. The four-day programme is organised by the Ministry of Social Development in coordination with the Media Training Centre at the Ministry of Information.

The programme aims to strengthen media capacities and deepen awareness of children's rights within a clear rights-based framework. With regional and local experts contributing, the training seeks to establish sound methodologies for how media institutions, communities and children themselves can engage more responsibly with child-related content.

A central objective is to help participants create safe, high-quality media that reflects the principles of child protection, supports cognitive development and encourages creativity. The training also focuses on improving the quality of visual, audio and print messages intended for children, ensuring alignment with national, regional and international standards. Another major goal is preparing a group of Omani journalists to serve as national ambassadors in rights-based childhood media.

The content of the programme is structured around three main pillars: The rights-based pillar highlights the integration of children's rights into media coverage to promote a stronger culture of rights in journalism.



The programme aims to strengthen media capacities and deepen awareness of children's rights within a clear rights-based framework. - Photo by Shamsa al Harthi

The knowledge pillar explores regional and global developments, including digital transformation and artificial intelligence, and examines their impact on children. Lastly, the professional pillar focuses on equipping media practitioners with the skills needed to address child-related issues accurately, sensitively and ethically.

The opening session, led by the Arab Council for Childhood and Development, introduced key concepts related to children's rights in media and emphasised the role of media institutions in fostering child-friendly environments.

In the second session, Prof Abdullah bin Khamis al Kindi, Head of the Department of Mass Communication at Sultan Qaboos University, presented "Enablers for Maximising Benefits and Strategies for Minimising Harm in the Digital Age." He

shared findings from a recent study on how children in Oman use social media and noted that today's digital realities require innovative approaches. He stressed that ensuring a child-friendly media ecosystem demands coordinated national and regional efforts across institutions, legislation and social initiatives. The third session, delivered by child-rights expert Rita Karam, examined children and digital media, outlining emerging challenges and opportunities.

Noura al Subhi, Director of the Department of Child Affairs, said the programme reflects Oman's commitment to children's rights, rooted in Islamic values and supported by national and international obligations. She emphasised that professional, ethical media is essential for raising awareness and strengthening cooperation among child-protection stakeholders.



وزارة التنمية الاجتماعية
Ministry of Social Development



رؤية عمان 2040
Moving Forward with Confidence



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-refundable)	
					Small and Medium Companies	Local Companies
658/2025	General maintenance work for the vocational rehabilitation hall at Al-Wafaa Center for the Rehabilitation of People with Disabilities at Al-Buraimi	Companies specializing in building contracting and registered with the Projects and Tenders Authority and local content at the third or fourth degree	Monday 29-12-2025 02:00 PM	Tuesday 20-01-2026 10:00 AM	10 R.O	25 R.O
659/2025	General maintenance works for the Al-Wafaa Center building for the rehabilitation of persons with disabilities at Ibra	Companies specialized in the field of building contracting and registered with the Projects and Tenders Authority and primarily in local content at the first degree	Monday 29-12-2025 02:00 PM	Tuesday 20-01-2026 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 **Tuesday 09/12/2025**.

❖ 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"

www.mosd.gov.om

WORLD

SHORT TAKES



An abandoned school bus stands in front of empty classrooms in Minna, Nigeria. — Reuters

NIGERIA RESCUES 100 CHILDREN ABDUCTED FROM SCHOOL

ABUJA: Nigeria’s government has rescued 100 schoolchildren who were abducted last month from St Mary’s Catholic School in central Nigeria in one of the country’s biggest mass kidnappings to date, a Christian group said on Monday. Nigerian authorities have yet to comment publicly on the rescue, and it was unclear whether the children were freed through negotiations with their captors or in a security raid.

The Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) spokesperson in Niger state, Daniel Atori, said the St Mary’s Catholic School rescue had been confirmed by government officials earlier on Monday. More than 300 children and 12 school staff had been kidnapped on November 21 by gunmen at the Catholic boarding school in Papiri, a remote hamlet in Niger state.

Fifty pupils escaped in the following hours, but until Monday, there had been no update on the whereabouts or condition of the other children. Some of those abducted were as young as 6, and the incident sparked nationwide outrage over worsening insecurity in northern Nigeria, where armed gangs frequently target schools for mass kidnappings to extract ransom payments.

— Reuters

OVER 100 KILLED IN SUDAN ATTACKS, SAYS WHO

GENEVA: More than 100 people, including dozens of children, were killed in attacks on a kindergarten in Sudan that continued even as parents and caretakers rushed the wounded to a nearby hospital, the World Health Organization said on Monday. Health facilities in Sudan have repeatedly come under attack near the frontlines of the country’s 2-1/2-year civil war. A massacre also occurred in October in the city of al Fashir, Reuters reported.

The latest attacks on December 4 began with repeated strikes on a kindergarten in South Kordofan state, WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said on X. “Disturbingly, paramedics and responders came under attack as they tried to move the injured from the kindergarten to the hospital,” he said. Sudan’s Foreign Ministry condemned the attacks that it said were carried out by the Rapid Support Forces using drones.

The WHO database said heavy weapons were used and that 114 people, including 63 children, were killed and 35 wounded. A WHO spokesperson said the toll combines casualties from the kindergarten strikes, the transfer of patients to the adjacent rural hospital, and attacks at the facility itself. Most children were killed in the initial strike, while parents and medics were later among the victims, he added.

Sudan’s paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) said on Monday it had taken control of the strategic Heglig oilfield in the South Kordofan province. Heglig, which lies along Sudan’s southern border, houses the main processing facility for South Sudanese oil, which makes up much of the revenue for South Sudan’s government.

— Reuters

INVESTIGATING CORRUPTION

Nepal anti-graft body charges 5 ex-officials



Nepal’s anti-graft commission has filed charges against five former officials in a case alleging multi-million-dollar corruption in a major airport construction project. The charges come three months after anti-corruption protesters overthrew the government and set parliament on fire. Documents released by the Commission for the Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA) said that “the public servants involved in the project, knowingly and maliciously, increased the cost estimate” of Pokhara airport project.

— AFP

INDONESIA SUFFERS FOOD, MEDICAL SHORTAGES AS FLOOD TOLLS RISE

JAKARTA: Regions hit by floods that killed hundreds in Indonesia were suffering from food and medical shortages, authorities said, as elephants pitched in on Monday to help clear up debris. “Everything is lacking, especially medical personnel. We are short on doctors,” Muzakir Manaf, the governor of Indonesia’s Aceh province, said. Indonesia’s national disaster mitigation agency (BNPB) said 961 people in Aceh, North Sumatra and West Sumatra had been killed,

while 293 were missing. More than a million people were displaced, the agency said.

In Pidie Jaya, a district in Indonesia’s Aceh badly affected by the floods, four elephants from a nearby training centre picked up large pieces of rubble with their trunks and helped shift stuck vehicles. “We brought four elephants to clear the debris from the houses of the communities that were swept away by the flood,” Hadi Sofyan, the head of a local conservation

agency, said. “Our target is to clean the debris near the residents’ houses so they can access their homes,” he said, adding the elephants would be used for the rest of the week.

The downpours and subsequent landslides throughout western Indonesia have injured at least 5,000 people and devastated infrastructure, schools and hospitals. In Banda Aceh, long queues formed for drinking water, and prices of basic commodities were skyrocketing.

— AFP

Thailand-Cambodia clashes reignite, killing civilians

THAILAND

LAUNCHED air strikes on Monday on Cambodia, with both sides trading blame for renewed fighting on their disputed border that has killed four Cambodian civilians and a Thai soldier. Around 35,000 people in Thailand have been evacuated from border areas, the country’s Second Army Region said. Five days of combat between Thailand and Cambodia this summer killed 43 people and displaced around 300,000 on both sides of the border before a truce took effect. But last month Thailand paused a follow-on deal backed by US President Donald Trump to wind down hostilities, saying a landmine blast at the border had wounded several soldiers.



An injured soldier is transferred to a hospital after border clash in Sisaket Province, Thailand. — Reuters

Since then, Cambodian and Thai officials have reported sporadic skirmishes along their frontier, which reignited on Sunday and Monday. Cambodia’s information minister Neth Pheaktra said that at least four Cambodian civilians were killed by Thai shelling on Monday in the border provinces of Preah Vihear and Oddar Meanchey. Around 10 other civilians were wounded, including a Cambodian journalist who was hit by shrapnel from a Thai rocket, Neth Pheaktra said.

The Thai army said one soldier was killed and 18 others were wounded since fresh fighting began on Sunday. Farmer Pannarat Woratham, who lives just a few kilometres from the border in Thailand’s Surin province, said she fled Sunday afternoon to a temple

Cambodia’s information minister Neth Pheaktra said that at least four Cambodian civilians were killed by Thai shelling in the border provinces of Preah Vihear and Oddar Meanchey. Around 10 other civilians were wounded, including a Cambodian journalist

sheltering the displaced. It was the second time the 59-year-old had evacuated since late July when open combat was waged with fighter jets, missile strikes and ground troops, killing both civilians and soldiers. “Of course, many of us thought the conflict was finally over. It shouldn’t have happened again like this,” Pannarat said.

On the other side of the border, Cambodian Hul Malis said the Thai military entered the border village of Prey Chan, in northwestern Banteay Meanchey province, on Monday afternoon just 20 minutes after she fled. Prey Chan was the site of a stand-off in September between several hundred Cambodian demonstrators and Thai forces who fired rubber bullets and tear gas at them. Both countries claim the area as their

own territory. Neth Pheaktra, the minister, told reporters at least 1,157 families had evacuated to safety in Oddar Meanchey alone. The conflict centres on a century-old disagreement over borders mapped during France’s colonial rule in the region, with both sides claiming a smattering of boundary temples.

Both sides reported a brief skirmish on Sunday, which Thailand’s military had said left two soldiers wounded. But the fighting escalated early Monday morning. Thai army spokesman Winthai Suvarree said it had launched air strikes against Cambodia in an act of self-defence. “The Thai air power is being used only against Cambodian military targets,” Winthai said at a press conference. “The air strikes are highly precise and aimed solely at military objectives along the clash line, with no impact on civilians.”

Cambodia’s defence ministry spokeswoman Maly Socheata, however, said Thai forces had attacked Cambodian troops in Preah Vihear and Oddar Meanchey early Monday, accusing Thailand of “firing multiple shots with tanks” near centuries-old temples. Maly Socheata later told reporters that the Thai military attacked Cambodian forces in Preah Vihear with an F-16 jet.

In an evening press briefing, she said the Thai military had not ceased their attack and expanded the battle along the border. She maintained that Cambodia has not retaliated. The Thai army has accused Cambodian forces of firing BM-21 rockets towards civilian areas in Buriram province.

— AFP

SYRIA 'S SHARAA CALLS FOR UNITED EFFORTS



DAMASCUS: President Ahmed al Sharaa on Monday urged Syrians to work together to rebuild their country, still marred by insecurity and divisions, as they marked a year since the ousting of longtime ruler Bashar al Assad. The atmosphere in Damascus was jubilant as thousands of people took to the streets of the capital, correspondents said, after mosques in the Old City began the day broadcasting celebratory prayers at dawn.

Since then, Sharaa has managed to restore Syria’s international standing and has won sanctions relief, but he faces major challenges in guaranteeing security, rebuilding crumbling institutions, regaining Syrians’ trust and keeping his fractured country united. “The current phase requires the unification of efforts by all citizens to build a strong Syria, consolidate its stability, safeguard its sovereignty, and achieve a future befitting the sacrifices of its people,” Sharaa said following dawn prayers at Damascus’s famous Umayyad Mosque. He was wearing military garb as he did when he entered the capital a year ago.

— AFP

HEALTH CRISIS

Congo battles worst cholera outbreak



The Democratic Republic of the Congo is battling its worst cholera outbreak in 25 years which has killed almost 2,000 people since January, the UN children’s agency said. “Congolese children should not be so gravely affected by what is a wholly preventable disease,” Unicef spokesperson John Agbor said. Conflict and a lack of access to clean water were exacerbating the crisis, and more funding was needed for sanitation, hygiene and health services.

— Reuters

COURT ANNOUNCEMENT

Beijing orders compensation for flight families



A Beijing court said it had ordered Malaysia Airlines to pay compensation to the families of eight passengers from flight MH370, more than a decade after the plane disappeared. The Chaoyang District People’s Court said in a statement that 47 other lawsuits had been withdrawn, after the families settled outside of court with Malaysia Airlines. The court said that the compensation was to cover funeral expenses, emotional distress, and other losses.

— AFP

HUMANITARIANCRISIS



Tom Fletcher holds a copy of the Global Humanitarian overview after a press conference in Geneva. — Reuters

UN SLAMS WORLD’S ‘APATHY’ IN 2026 AID APPEAL

UNITED NATIONS: The United Nations on Monday hit out at global “apathy” over widespread suffering as it launched its 2026 appeal for humanitarian assistance, which is limited in scope as aid operations confront major funding cuts. “This is a time of brutality, impunity and indifference,” UN humanitarian chief Tom Fletcher told reporters, condemning “the ferocity and the intensity of the killing, the complete disregard for international law, horrific levels of physical violence” he had seen on the ground in 2025. “This is a time when the rules are in retreat, when the scaffolding of coexistence is under sustained attack, when our survival antennae have been numbed by distraction and corroded by apathy,” he said.

He said it was also a time “when politicians boast of cutting aid,” as he unveiled a streamlined plan to raise at least \$23 billion to help 87 million people in the world’s most dangerous places such as Gaza, Ukraine, Sudan, Haiti and Myanmar. The United Nations would like to ultimately raise \$33 billion to help 135 million people in 2026 — but is painfully aware that its overall goal may be difficult to reach, given US President Donald Trump’s slashing of foreign aid.

Fletcher said the “highly prioritised appeal” was “based on excruciating life-and-death choices,” adding that he hoped Washington would see the choices made, and the reforms undertaken to improve aid efficiency, and choose to “renew that commitment” to help.

The world body estimates that 240 million people in conflict zones, suffering from epidemics, or victims of natural disasters and climate change are in need of emergency aid.

In 2025, the UN’s appeal for more than \$45 billion was only funded to the \$12 billion mark — the lowest in a decade, the world body said.

That only allowed it to help 98 million people, 25 million fewer than the year before. According to UN data, the United States remains the top humanitarian aid donor in the world, but that amount fell dramatically in 2025 to \$2.7 billion, down from \$11 billion in 2024. Atop the list of priorities for 2026 are Gaza and the West Bank.

The UN is asking for \$4.1 billion for the occupied Palestinian territories, in order to provide assistance to three million people. Another country with urgent need is Sudan, where deadly conflict has displaced millions: the UN is hoping to collect \$2.9 billion to help 20 million people. — AFP

EU TO WEAKEN MORE ENVIRONMENT REPORTING RULES

BRUSSELS: The European Commission has drafted proposals to cut back more EU environment laws, targeting requirements for industries to report on their pollution and waste, a draft EU document showed. The draft proposal, due to be published on Wednesday, is the latest part of the European Union’s “omnibus” effort to reduce bureaucracy for businesses and cut regulations that industries say hurt their profitability. Europe’s environmental regulations are among the world’s strictest, covering such things as CO2 emissions, water quality and bans on harmful chemicals. The Commission, the EU executive body, will propose ending an EU requirement for individual industrial facilities and livestock farms to have an “environmental management system” (EMS) detailing their actions to reduce pollution and waste, the draft document said. Instead, a company will be allowed to do one slimmed-down EMS covering all its sites and this will scrap some existing EMS requirements - for example, to disclose the use of hazardous chemicals at facilities. The proposal would also scrap a requirement for industrial facilities to have a “transformation plan” to

align them with climate goals, and livestock and fish farms would no longer have to report their water and energy use. Other parts of the proposal would simplify environmental assessments for industrial and energy projects. “This simplification package... aims to ensure that the environmental goals of the European Union are achieved in a more efficient, less costly and smarter way,” the draft said. A Commission spokesperson declined comment on the draft. Proposals to change EU laws would require approval from EU countries and governments. — Reuters

EU leaders urge action on Ukraine reparations loan

LEADERS

FROM seven EU member states urged the EU on Monday to move ahead quickly with a proposal to use frozen Russian assets to provide financing to Ukraine. “Supporting Ukraine in their fight for freedom and independence is not only a moral obligation - it is also in our own self-interest,” the leaders from Estonia, Finland, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Sweden said in a letter to EU Council President Antonio Costa and EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen. “We must therefore move ahead quickly on the Commission’s proposals to use the cash balances from Russia’s immobilised assets for a reparations loan to Ukraine.”

Legal concerns by Belgium have delayed a decision on the European Commission’s proposal for an unprecedented use of frozen Russian assets or international borrowing to raise 90 billion euros (\$105 billion) for Ukraine. “Discussions will continue up until the European Council next week, where the aim is to have a final decision,” Commission spokesperson Paula Pinho said on Monday. Pinho declined to give details about a meeting European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, German Chancellor Friedrich Merz and Belgian Prime Minister Bart De Wever had on Friday to discuss the concerns.

She repeated the Commission’s stance that the proposals are in line with international law and address the concerns raised about the use of immobilised assets. “Whenever we put our legal proposal on the table, we are sure that it is court-proof and it meets the requirements and concerns, including in this case financial markets,” she told reporters in Brussels. “So we are reassuring on that front, because obviously these issues have been looked into.”

British Prime Minister Keir Starmer said on Monday matters for Ukraine should be decided by Ukraine as he met President Volodymyr Zelensky with French and



British PM Keir Starmer, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy, French President Emmanuel Macron, and German Chancellor Friedrich Merz meet at 10 Downing Street, in London. — Reuters

German leaders in London on Monday. The meeting was aimed at rallying allies for support as the United States increases pressure on Kyiv to agree to a proposed peace deal with Russia. Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni spoke by phone with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy ahead of his planned visits to London, Brussels and Rome for talks on the peace process, her office said. Meloni reaffirmed Italy’s solidarity after what she called a fresh wave of “indiscriminate” Russian strikes on civilian targets and announced the dispatch of emergency supplies to support Ukraine’s energy infrastructure and population.

Meanwhile, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said negotiators remain split over territorial concessions in a US-brokered peace plan, Bloomberg News reported on Monday, citing a phone interview with Zelensky. Elements of the US proposal require further discussion on “sensitive issues,” including security guarantees for Ukraine and control of its eastern territories, according to the report. “There are visions of the US, Russia and Ukraine - and we don’t have a unified view on Donbas,” Zelensky told Bloomberg News early Monday. He added that Kyiv is seeking a separate pact on security guarantees from

Western allies, particularly the US, the report said. US officials said they are close to finalising the agreement, though neither Ukraine nor Russia has shown willingness to sign the deal drafted by Trump’s team. Separately, at least seven people were injured when Russian drones struck an apartment block in the northeastern Ukrainian city of Okhtyrka in the Sumy region, Governor Oleh Hryhorov said on Monday. The Sumy region, which borders Russia, has faced near-daily shelling and drone attacks since Moscow launched its full-scale attack of Ukraine in February 2022, a war now nearing its fourth year. Hryhorov said in a post on the Telegram messaging app that those injured had been taken to hospital, where two of them were admitted. The others received treatment and were discharged. The multi-storey building sustained extensive damage, Hryhorov said, adding that some residents managed to reach the basement after air-raid warnings while emergency crews rescued others from upper floors. There was no immediate comment from Moscow about the attack. Both sides deny targeting civilians, but thousands have died in the conflict, the vast majority of them Ukrainian. — Reuters

Nigeria dispatches jets, troops to quash Benin coup bid

LAGOS: Nigerian fighter jets and ground troops moved on Monday to help restore order after a foiled coup attempt in Benin, aiming to head off a political crisis in a country that is battling gunmen and serves as a key trade corridor in West Africa. In its first foreign military intervention in nearly a decade, Nigeria was motivated by fears of an unfriendly military regime taking charge in its backyard, potentially allowing violence to spill across its borders, analysts said.

President Bola Tinubu sent fighter jets to assert control over Benin’s airspace on Sunday as his close ally, Benin President Patrice Talon, tried to put down the coup attempt by what officials described as a small group of soldiers. Tinubu’s office said the operation included surveillance and rapid intervention missions coordinated with Benin. It was expected to be supplemented by the deployment of troops from

Sierra Leone, Ivory Coast and Ghana under the West African bloc ECOWAS.

Nigeria last intervened abroad in 2017 when Gambian President Yahya Jammeh refused to step down after losing an election. It has responded far less aggressively to recent coups in Mali, Burkina Faso and neighbouring Niger. But the prospect of a hostile military-led government taking over in Benin, which borders Nigerian territory targeted by jihadist groups, was too much to stomach, said Mucahid Durmaz, senior Africa analyst at risk intelligence group Verisk Maplecroft. “Benin and Nigeria share a long, porous border and extensive economic interdependence,” Durmaz said. “For Nigeria, a military coup and potential collapse of state order in Benin risk triggering cross-border insecurity, illicit trade and arms trafficking, potentially destabilising



Soldiers patrol in front of the headquarters of Benin’s radio and television station, in Cotonou, Benin. — Reuters

the southwest region, which the Nigerian economy is heavily reliant on.” Northern Benin has suffered repeated jihadist attacks, including major assaults in January and April that killed dozens of soldiers. The coup plotters cited insecurity

in the north as a justification for attempting the putsch, but for Nigeria a change of power in Benin raised fears of being “surrounded by hostile and unpredictable neighbours,” Durmaz added. Benin’s proximity also made it easier for Nigeria to intervene quickly, said

Vincent Foucher, senior research fellow at the National Centre for Scientific Research in France. At least eight soldiers, several holding weapons, had appeared on state television on Sunday morning to announce that a military committee led by Colonel Tigri Pascal was dissolving national institutions, suspending the constitution and closing air, land and maritime borders. “The army solemnly commits to give the Beninese people the hope of a truly new era, where fraternity, justice and work prevail,” the soldiers’ statement said. Details of Nigeria’s military operations were still emerging on Monday. Tinubu’s office said they involved dislodging coup plotters from the state television channel, where soldiers claimed on Sunday morning to have toppled Talon, and from a military camp in Benin’s largest city Cotonou. — Reuters

OPINION

Oman-Lebanon economic ties set to grow further



THE two-day visit of Lebanese President Joseph Aoun to the Sultanate of Oman, which begins on Tuesday, aims to strengthen the fraternal relations and joint cooperation between the two nations. The visit is expected to foster a new phase of strategic and economic partnership, with discussions focusing on political, security, economic and cultural fields.

Both countries are keen on enhancing partnerships in sustainable development and economic integration, aligning with Oman Vision 2040 and Lebanon's strategic goals. Key areas of cooperation to be activated include economic, trade, tourism, agriculture and education, with several memoranda of understanding being under review for signing during the Omani-Lebanese Joint Committee meeting in the first half of next year. Economically, trade between Oman and Lebanon saw significant growth in the first half of 2025, increasing by 29.4 per cent to approximately RO 8.5 million. Omani exports to Lebanon rose by 30.7 per cent, while Lebanese imports to Oman grew by 28.8 per cent. By September 2025, over 1,035 Lebanese companies were registered in Oman, with a total invested capital of RO 191.5 million, primarily in trade, retail, construction, manufacturing, transportation and food services.

The Omani-Lebanese Economic Forum brought together over 100 companies and institutions to discuss investment, trade and partnership opportunities.

The economic and trade relations

between Oman and Lebanon represent an advanced model of Arab cooperation built on mutual respect and a sincere desire to enhance developmental partnerships. These relations, which extend over long decades, have witnessed remarkable growth in trade exchange and joint investment, reflecting the solid trust between the two sides.

The current phase opens wide horizons for developing economic cooperation, especially given Oman's attractive business environment, developed logistical infrastructure and investment-incentivising legislation, alongside Lebanon's qualitative expertise in service sectors, technology, food industries, and creative industries, making the two countries partners in value-added projects. The visit of President Aoun is expected to open new avenues for investment and encourage joint projects between Omani and Lebanese companies, particularly in industrial, tourism, technological, renewable energy and free zone sectors.

The economic relations between Oman and Lebanon are witnessing an advanced stage of coordination and partnership, driven by a clear vision from both countries to open new paths for cooperation suitable for changes in the regional and international economy. As Lebanon possesses numerous expertise in service sectors, the financial sector, media communication and cultural industries, such fields represent added value and can align with economic diversification approaches in Oman amidst ongoing expansion in free and economic zones and growing opportunities in

Key areas of cooperation to be activated include economic, trade, tourism, agriculture and education, with several memoranda of understanding being under review for signing during the Omani-Lebanese Joint Committee meeting in the first half of next year.

technology, logistics and inter-trade. On the other hand, there are real opportunities for Lebanese investors to invest in Oman across various industrial, tourism, technological, renewable energy sectors, and special and free economic zones. In turn, there are opportunities available for Omani companies to enter into partnerships with their Lebanese counterparts in innovation, entrepreneurship and specialised services.

On the political front, Oman maintains a firm stance in supporting Lebanon's sovereignty and national unity, rejecting any violations of its territorial integrity. The visit will also involve consultations and coordination on strengthening joint Arab action and discussing regional and international developments. This includes Lebanon's ongoing efforts to achieve stability and disarm non-state groups, as expressed by President Aoun to a United Nations Security Council delegation. Lebanon has emphasised its desire to avoid war with Israel and is pursuing diplomatic solutions, despite challenges with non-state actors.

The relations between Oman and Lebanon have been distinguished, since the opening of the first embassy in Beirut in 1972, by their strength and robustness, rooted in Arab and historical ties. The two countries pay great attention to enhancing political and economic partnerships with Arab nations in terms of sustainable development and economic integration, as outlined in Oman Vision 2040 which focuses on strengthening partnerships with Arab countries.

SUDAN’S OIL-RICH SOUTH FACES FIERCEST FIGHTING YET: WHAT WE KNOW

Emboldened by their capture of the Darfur regional hub of El Fasher, Sudan’s paramilitary Rapid Support Forces have set their sights on oil- and gold-rich Kordofan, waging intense battles with the army there in recent weeks. The RSF — at war with the military since April 2023 — have deployed fighters, drones and allied militias to the fertile region, where analysts say they seek to punch through the military’s defences around central Sudan, paving the way to recapturing Khartoum.

Communications blackouts and conflicting accounts from both sides make independent verification extremely difficult, but local officials, aid groups and the UN have reported escalating drone strikes, heavy shelling and mass displacement, warning of possible atrocities akin to those seen in El Fasher.

Here is what we know about Kordofan, a region that has become a major battleground in a conflict that has killed tens of thousands of people and displaced nearly 12 million.

Kordofan — a vast agricultural region split into three states — lies between RSF-controlled Darfur in the west and army-held areas in Sudan’s north, east and centre.

Its position is important for maintaining supply lines and moving troops.

The army hopes to hold onto key cities to slow the RSF’s post-El Fasher momentum, while the paramilitary forces are seeking to open up a route to encircling central Sudan and squeezing remaining army strongholds. Economically, Kordofan is vital: major agricultural zones produce, sesame, sorghum, millet and groundnuts, alongside extensive livestock farming.

It also hosts major oil facilities, including Heglig and Balila, both of which have come under repeated attack.

Balila was forced to shut down after being captured by the RSF early in the war, while Heglig remained operational until Monday, when it was reportedly seized by the RSF, according to an engineer at the facility.

Sudan’s energy and petroleum ministry did not immediately respond to a request for comment on the report. — AFP

Digital life: Pay attention to how you pay attention

“ATTENTION IS not neutral,” Antón Barba-Kay, a philosopher at the University of California, San Diego, writes in “A Web of Our Own Making: The Nature of Digital Formation.” “It is the act by which we confer meaning on things and by which we discover that they are meaningful, the act through which we bind facts into cares.” When we cede control of our attention, we cede more than what we are looking at now. We cede, to some degree, control over what we will care about tomorrow.

The politics of attention are on my mind because a recent court case has sharpened the need to describe what, exactly, has gone wrong in our digital lives. In 2020, the Federal Trade Commission sued Meta for creating an illegal monopoly in the personal social networking market. Last month, a US District Court in Washington ruled in Meta’s favour. If Meta wanted to know what I want to see, it could ask me. The technology has long existed for users to shape their own recommendations.

Attention is sometimes an act. But it is first an instinct. This is why even the most basic attempt at mindfulness — watching 10 breaths go by, without your attention wandering — requires such concentration. Algorithmic media companies exploit the difference between our attentional instincts and aspirations. In so doing, they make it harder for us to become who we might wish to be.

Max Read, a technology critic, wrote an insightful essay in his Substack newsletter arguing that ideas I’m circling here are best



EZRA KLEIN

The author is the host of the podcast “The Ezra Klein Show” of The New York Times and the author of “Why We’re Polarized” and, with Derek Thompson

Seeing these companies as seeking a form of control over our attention reveals, I think, the inadequacy of antitrust law for this particular task.

understood as a modern temperance movement, “positioning the rise of social media and the platform giants as something between a public-health scare and a spiritual threat, rather than (solely) a problem of political economy or market design,” he writes. This approach, he goes on to say, is “distinctly not ‘populist’... so much as progressive in the original sense, a reform ideology rooted in middle-class concerns for general social welfare in the wake of sweeping technological change.”

I think there’s truth in all of that. TikTok’s effects on our wallets matter less to me than its effect on our souls. But I don’t see the division here as between populists and progressives — groups that substantially overlap anyway. The FTC lost the Meta case because it is limited in its mission and its tools, but at least it was trying to do something about the power these platforms exert over our society. Where was everyone else?

The division I see here is between progressivism and liberalism as we now understand it. Modern liberalism is built around the idea that the government should make it possible for people to pursue their happiness as they see fit, so long as they are not harming others. It has much to say about individual rights and little to say about the common — or even the individual — good.

Liberalism carries, at its core, a trust that social experimentation will lead to better forms of social organisation. That has freed it — and freed us — from the shackles of repressive traditions. But it can be confounded when adults are freely making decisions that don’t harm others but perhaps harm themselves.

And it has created a loophole that algorithmic media companies have driven a truck through: We’re just giving people what they want, they say. Who are you to judge what they want? It’s not an easy question to answer. But it feels to me like the outlines of an agenda — or at least ideas worth debating and trying — are coming more clearly into focus. Much of it revolves around two ideas: First, children should be more insulated from the ubiquity of digital temptations. Second, companies that want to shape so much human attention need to take on more responsibility and liability for what might go wrong.

None of us knows how it will change adults to fall into intimate relationships with AIs, to say nothing of what it will mean for children to grow up in a world where AI companionship is omnipresent. It could be better than today’s opaque algorithms, offering us the ability to ask for what we want and actually get it. And what happens when corporations find it is more profitable to have the AIs we treat as friends manipulate what we want to better serve their bottom lines? Which is why, in the end, I don’t believe it will be possible for society to remain neutral on what it means to live our digital lives well.

Absent some view of what human flourishing is, we will have no way to judge whether it is being helped or harmed.

This line from Barba-Kay might be corny, but it has the virtue of being true: “If the present technological age has a lasting gift for us, it is to urge as decisive the question of what human beings are for.”

Shopping for gifts... choosing the right one



LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

The writer is a senior editor of Observer

IT IS the time of the year when people are busy shopping for gifts. Choosing the right gift is an art. Some people seem to have the instinct to secure the right gift. Shopping with a youngster can be an experience that can be quite challenging at times. A four-year-old came running to the aisle, looked at the school bags, and ran back to his mom, screaming, “Mommy, look what I have found!”

Soon, the mother followed and looked at the bags. She didn’t approve them and the next thing she said was, “These are not for you, these are for girls.” I met them near the payment counter and the child was now desperately seeking chocolates.

As we grow older, we learn to choose wisely. Things to keep in mind while avoiding being a spendthrift, although shopping is also known as retail therapy.

Retail therapy is basically the idea of shopping to lift your mood. They say that buying something new can feel comforting, empowering, or exciting — especially after a stressful day. I would also add by saying that it gives an element of hope because it makes one look forward to another day or a particular event.

So why does it make you feel good? Experts say it is the sense of control and choice. A small dopamine boost from something new, and in addition, there is a change of environment, such as malls, markets, and shops. It is definitely considered

a distraction from stress or overthinking. However, there is a flip side to watch out for, say the experts, and this is why, ‘Impulse spending you may regret later.’

In other words, the end result could be short-term comfort and long-term guilt. Using shopping as the only coping mechanism could end up being an expensive ordeal.

A healthier way to approach it would be to set a spending limit before you step out.

How many times have you bought things you would actually use, not just “feel good” buys?

Now, have you tried window shopping — same mood boost, less cost. It gives you an update on the latest trends. Now, if you add in a bit of walking, music, coffee with friends - you have got a perfect outing even though some might still prefer a nature trail.

They say think of retail therapy like sugar: okay in small doses, not great as a daily solution.

But buying gifts on special occasions is a social habit.

Now, here are some of the tips I came across - think about the person, not the price. A thoughtful small gift almost always beats an expensive but random one.

We have to take a moment to think, ‘What do they enjoy? What do they use a lot?’

We have to match the gift to the occasion, whether it is a birthday, a farewell, a festival, or a thank-you gift. They all call for different

Retail therapy is basically the idea of shopping to lift your mood. They say that buying something new can feel comforting, empowering, or exciting — especially after a stressful day.

tones — fun, sentimental, practical, or symbolic.

No matter what the occasion is, the personal touches matter much more than the gift for most people.

Personal touch could come in various forms such as personalised items, favourite colours, inside jokes, or even a handwritten note can instantly elevate a gift.

One of the major decisions other than price of the gift would be the nature of the gift, whether it is practical or sentimental. Finding the balance is significant because some people love useful gifts like bags, books, gadgets, others prefer emotional ones such as photos, letters, keepsakes.

Some people enjoy the process of gifting they plan extensively. They think of gifting experiences.

Experiences can be gifted through tickets, workshops, a day out, or even a planned activity can be more memorable than physical objects. Memories can be forever compared to a materialistic gift. Whatever the gift, the quality of the gift is what matters the most.

Understanding the culture and respecting the sentiments of the recipients is important too.

How you say it makes all the difference, similarly how you present the gift makes the first impression.

The biggest joy is in the intention and for them to know they are in your mind.

INDIGO CRISIS EXPOSES RISKS IN INDIAN AVIATION

ABHIJITH GANAPAVARAM

A wave of flight cancellations by IndiGo, India’s largest airline, sparked a week of chaos and grounded tens of thousands of passengers, laying bare the risks of having a duopoly-like situation in the world’s fastest-growing aviation market.

For years, IndiGo with a 65 per cent domestic market share has helped Indians realise their dreams of flying - an aspiration shared by Prime Minister Narendra Modi who once said those “in slippers should also be seen in aircraft”.

The airline became the poster child of the nation’s aviation boom in recent years, with its promise of low fares and on-time performance.

But last week changed it all: IndiGo cancelled at least 2,000 flights because of a shortage of pilots after it failed to plan adequately for new rules limiting how many hours they work. That upended vacation plans, weddings and flooded social media with photos and videos of luggage piling up at terminals - scenes never witnessed in India’s aviation history.

IndiGo’s woes come at a critical time for the airline and the industry. Rival Air India, which commands a 27 per cent market share and was owned by the government until 2022, has for years faced complaints of an ageing fleet and poor service, and is battling tighter scrutiny since a June crash killed 260 people.

IndiGo has said it hopes to return to normalcy in the coming days, but its troubles have drawn warnings from both politicians and aviation experts. The crisis has raised concerns about the risks of over reliance on a single carrier and whether the airline is really too big to fail.

The government stepped in swiftly, relaxing rules on pilot fatigue management to ease the disruptions. IndiGo has repeatedly apologised but has not disclosed financial losses from the crisis.

“IndiGo’s size has grown to the point where operational setbacks pose systemic risk,” said Harsh Vardhan, chairman of Starair Consulting.

If IndiGo or Air India get into “trouble, there will be mayhem in Indian aviation... the government needs to reduce jet fuel taxes and encourage more competition,” he added.

Airline duopolies exist in a few countries, such as Australia and Canada. Even China, the world’s second most-populous nation, has three state-owned carriers, and several private ones.

India’s aviation market is not a duopoly in the strictest sense but analysts say that 92 per cent market share of IndiGo and Air India - including its low-cost Air India Express - means it is a duopoly-like situation and creates vulnerabilities.

On many routes connecting smaller towns, IndiGo holds a monopoly.

“A country cannot grow robustly with duopolies, or effective monopolies, in any sector,” G R Gopinath, founder of now-defunct low-cost airline Air Deccan, wrote in a weekend editorial in the Economic Times newspaper. — Reuters

Transformative power of childhood education

THE leaders’ declaration adopted at the end of the recent G20 summit in South Africa reaffirmed the group’s commitment to tackling some of the world’s most pressing challenges, from inequality and long-running conflicts to AI and climate change. It also marked a historic milestone: for the first time, the G20 identified education as one of its top global priorities.

The declaration went on to highlight the urgent need to invest in children’s early development, pledging to “advance a comprehensive approach” that recognises investment in early childhood care and education (ECCE) as “vital... for a country’s social and economic future.”

This recognition is long overdue. In a world marked by economic volatility, the most effective investments are those made in people, and few yield greater returns than supporting children in their first five or six years of life, when they develop the skills that underpin long-term growth, social cohesion, and peace.

Today, we are failing far too many children before they even reach school age. Globally, more than 40 per cent of preschool children – roughly 350 million – lack access to quality care. The result is a vast loss of human potential that holds back communities, economies, and societies.

Early childhood, when 90 per cent of brain development occurs, is a unique window for establishing the foundations of lifelong learning, health, and well-being. Decades of evidence show that every dollar invested in ECCE generates up to \$17 in economic returns, helping to break cycles of poverty and reduce inequality. Expanding access to childcare also enables more women to enter and stay in the workforce, strengthening households and national economies alike.

The United Nations already recognised the importance of investing in ECCE when it adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015. This was reaffirmed



Globally, more than 40 per cent of preschool children – roughly 350 million – lack access to quality care.



PIA REBELLO BRITTO

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in Unesco’s 2022 Tashkent Declaration, with more than 150 countries pledging to provide at least one year of free, compulsory pre-primary education for all children and to allocate at least 10 per cent of their education budgets to preschool programmes.

Despite these commitments, funding for early education remains woefully inadequate. In low- and middle-income countries, 180 million three- and four-year-olds still lack access to basic early-childhood services.

International aid to preschool programs accounts for less than 2 per cent of total education aid, and many low-income countries devote less than 2 per cent of their education budgets to ECCE.

Against this discouraging backdrop, momentum for change is building, driven largely by major emerging economies within and beyond the G20. Early-childhood support was central to Brazil’s social-inclusion agenda during its G20 presidency, while the launch of the Global Alliance Against Hunger and Poverty in late 2024 signalled a broader push to tackle intergenerational inequities.

Brazil has also introduced ambitious domestic measures. Earlier this year, it launched its National Integrated Policy for Early Childhood, which established a single national database to track

children’s needs and support a unified strategy across all of the country’s 5,568 municipalities, featuring a massive data platform covering daycare availability, vaccination records, and developmental milestones.

The recent G20 summit in Johannesburg – the first to be held in Africa – brought the scale and urgency of the problem into sharp focus. Childhood mortality rates across the continent remain 14 times higher than in high-income countries, and only one in four children in sub-Saharan Africa attends preschool. South Africa, which views investment in ECCE as a national priority, recently launched the largest early-years education program in its history. President Cyril Ramaphosa has also used South Africa’s G20 presidency to frame early-childhood education as a global imperative and urge governments worldwide to invest in their youngest citizens.

Mobilising the political will and financing needed to transform ECCE will require a sustained, coordinated multilateral effort. Over the past two years, Theirworld has championed this agenda through its Act for Early Years campaign, and the recent announcement of the world’s first international gathering devoted specifically to funding pre-primary education – initiated by a coalition of stakeholders from both the Global South and North – indicates that early childhood is finally receiving the attention it deserves.

Looking ahead, the International Finance Summit for Early Childhood in 2027 offers a rare opportunity to raise new funding, redirect domestic investment, and unlock private capital. Crucially, it could demonstrate that investing in preschool education is not a secondary concern but a precondition for achieving the SDGs.

One principle should guide the policy debates that will inevitably follow: putting children first is the surest route to a more prosperous, peaceful, and stable world.

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SPORTS

BEACH SOCCER LEAGUE



Defending champions Al Amerat secured a thrilling 7-6 victory over Al Oruba.

AL AMERAT STRENGTHEN LEAD WITH VICTORY OVER AL ORUBA

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, DEC 8

Defending champions Al Amerat continued their dominant march towards retaining the 2025-26 Oman Beach Soccer League title after securing a thrilling 7-6 victory over Al Oruba in the top clash of the seventh round. The highly anticipated encounter, played at the Sands Court of the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex, lived up to expectations as both teams showcased top-level attacking quality from both sides.

Al Amerat's offensive power was on full display, led by a stunning hat-trick from Sami al Balushi, followed by a brace from Oman national team player Khalid al Oraimi, while Nooh al Zadjali and Abdullah al Souti added one goal each. The champions' depth and precision in the final third proved decisive in securing full points from a competitive encounter. On the other side, Al Oruba, who entered the match as one of the closest challengers to Al Amerat this season, fought hard until the final whistle. Their goals were scored by Musallam al Oraimi, Omar al Farsi, Majid al Ghafri and Sameer al Saadi. Despite the loss, Al Oruba remained strong contenders in the league order. The victory further strengthens Al Amerat's impressive campaign to 18 points in the first place which has seen them maintain remarkable form across recent rounds.

The victory further strengthens Al Amerat's impressive campaign to 18 points in the first place which has seen them maintain remarkable form across recent rounds. Prior to the seventh round, they delivered a commanding 12-1 win against Mirbat, followed by a 5-2 win over Salalah and earlier a convincing 9-1 triumph over Taqah.

MASIRAH, MIRBAT WIN

In another seventh-round fixture, Masirah edged Saham 2-1 in a tightly contested match at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex. Masirah's discipline and improved defensive structure helped them secure three vital points as they continued their climb up the standings after mixed results earlier in the season.

Meanwhile in Salalah, Mirbat clinched a dramatic 5-4 victory over Taqah, earning a much-needed win to keep their campaign on track. The high-scoring encounter reflected the fierce competition among mid-table teams battling to improve their league positions. Taqah, despite showing improvement in offensive play, remained in search of consistency after suffering several losses this season.

The 2025-26 Oman Beach Soccer League, featured seven participating clubs including: Al Amerat, Al Oruba, Mirbat, Saham, Masirah, Taqah and Salalah. All the teams will continue to deliver top show encounters in order to vie for this season's beach soccer league title.

Saeed takes opening honours in OCA League

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OMANI RIDER Saeed al Rahbi of Elite Team clinched the opening honours of Oman Cycling Association (OCA) 2025-26 League road races at the weekend.

Al Rahbi claimed the top spot in two hours 19 minutes and 55 seconds in the 97 km race at the Al Sawadi Beach area on Friday. It

CycleKom's Mohammed al Wahibi (2:19:55) took the second position while another Omani cyclist Munther al Hassani (2:20:27) finished third to make a double podium for Elite Team.

CycleKom's Daniel Baldwin of Great Britain (2:20:27) came in fourth place while another British rider David Hynes of Vikings (2:21:39) finished fifth.

Elite Team's Mazin al Riyami (2:21:39) was sixth, Talal al Maskari (2: 21:42) of Adventure Box Team came in seventh and Christopher Keyes (2:21:42) of Vikings finished eighth.

HAZAA TOPS U23 SECTION

Hazaa al Habsi of Fulltank Team (2:21:56) and Assad al Habsi of Elite Team (2:21:56) ended in ninth and tenth positions respectively.

Hazaa al Habsi also became the top rider in the Under-23 section.

A total of 46 riders took part in the opening race of the OCA League while three cyclists didn't finish.

In the Under-23 section, Hazaa topped the standings followed by Amjad al Tooqi (2:21:56) of Adventure Box Team and Riyadh al Sheyadi (2:21:56) of Brothers Team.

In the M40+ category, Daniel Baldwin (CycleKom), David Hynes (Vikings) and French rider Jan-Jap Gerrards (2:21:56) of Wave Rider/Qurum Cyclists occupied the top three positions.

In the team category after the first race, Elite Team were in front with 295 points. CycleKom were second with 240 points and Vikings were third with 150 points.

Adventure Box Team (146), Wave Riders/Qurum Cyclists (99), Fulltank (84), Izki Club (71), Fullgaz Team (51) and Brothers Team (33 points) were the other six teams' in the race.



A total of 46 riders took part in the first race of the OCA League at Al Sawadi Beach area while three cyclists didn't finish.



In the Women's League, the opening race for 80 km was won by Joanna Buchholtz of Great Britain.



In the M40+ category, Daniel Baldwin (CycleKom), David Hynes (Vikings) and French rider Jan-Jap Gerrards (2:21:56) of Wave Rider/Qurum Cyclists occupied the top three positions.



In the Under-23 section, Hazaa al Habsi topped the standings followed by Amjad al Tooqi of Adventure Box Team and Riyadh al Sheyadi of Brothers Team.

JOANNA WINS WOMEN'S RACE

In the Women's League, the opening race for 80 km was won by Joanna Buchholtz of Great Britain (1:35:10). Reem al Harthy of Oman (1:54:37) claimed second spot while Jelena Walker (2:24:24) of Canada finished third ahead of fourth rider in the competition, Samantha Cole of the USA (2:24:23).

In the Junior League, Muayad al Hasani (1:58:42) came first in the 80 km race followed by Anas Awlad Ahmed and Abdullah al Durai in the second and third positions with the same time.

In the Cadets League race for 32 km, Ahmed al Kulaibi (00:57:54) emerged winner with Zulfqar al Shizawi and Mohammed al Wahibi taking second and third spots respectively in the same time.

The next race of the OCA League will be a 96 km contest in Wakan.

Al Bashayer thrash Masirah in Basketball League

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, DEC 8

Al Bashayer Club secured a massive victory over Masirah with a 124-33 win in the match held at the secondary hall of Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher, as part of the 2025-2026 General Basketball League. With this result, Al Bashayer raised their tally to six points after delivering an outstanding performance that showcased their high readiness.

Al Bashayer players displayed clear superiority throughout the game, fully controlling the contest in both defence and attack, with a strong team effort led by Noah al Mahrouqi, Saeed al Saadi, Hadeed Bait Bakhit, Osama al Riyami and Mahmood al Souli — who all played key roles in widening the gap and scoring a large number of points. On the other hand, Masirah relied mainly on Mohammed al Mehrami and Jalal al Musallami in their scoring attempts.

The match began with force



Al Bashayer and Masirah players fight for the ball. — Ammar al Musafir

from Al Bashayer, who quickly took the lead through accurate shots by Noah al Mahrouqi. Although Masirah managed to come back and level the score at 5-5 through Mohammed al Mashri, Al Bashayer soon regained control and pushed forward with confidence. A brilliant three-pointer from Al Mahrouqi restored the lead to 8-5 before the team completely took charge of the quarter,

adding points successively through Mahmood al Souli, Mohammed al Wahaibi and Al Mahrouqi, ending the first quarter with a commanding 35-7 advantage.

The second quarter saw no change to the match's direction, as Al Bashayer continued their dominance offensively and defensively. Hadeed Bait Bakhit and Mahmood al Souli added

more points to make it 39-7, followed by a series of fast-break attacks and solid defence that further widened the gap, thanks to contributions from Abdulridha al Battashi, Saif al Toobi and Saeed al Saadi. The first half concluded with Al Bashayer comfortably ahead 62-9.

The momentum remained entirely in Al Bashayer's favour in the third quarter, as the team maintained their pace and control over the court while Masirah struggled to overcome the strong defensive wall. Al Bashayer added 29 points, while Masirah only managed 8, ending the third quarter 91-17 for Al Bashayer.

The final quarter followed the same script, with Al Bashayer continuing to score and further increasing the margin, adding 33 more points, while Masirah scored 16, sealing a deserved and dominant victory for Al Bashayer with a final score of 124-33, after an outstanding performance across all four quarters.

NBALEAGUE



Los Angeles Lakers guard Luka Doncic (77) shoots against Philadelphia 76ers forward Paul George (8). — **Imagn Images**

JAMES AND DONCIC LEAD LAKERS OVER SIXERS, THUNDER WIN 15TH STRAIGHT

LOS ANGELES: Luka Doncic returned with a triple-double and LeBron James came up big in the clutch to lead the Los Angeles Lakers to a 112-108 NBA victory over the Philadelphia 76ers on Sunday.

Doncic, who missed two games as he travelled to Slovenia to welcome the birth of his second daughter, scored 31 points with 15 rebounds and 11 assists, throwing in two blocked shots for good measure.

James, who will turn 41 later this month, scored 12 of his 29 points in the fourth quarter, drilling a three-pointer and a jump shot to put Los Angeles up by five with 27.4 seconds remaining after the 76ers had knotted it at 105-105. Doncic added a pair of free-throws and James came up with a steal with three seconds left to seal the win.

James, who missed the first 14 games of his unprecedented 23rd season with sciatica, said he felt fresh on a night when he knew Doncic was likely feeling the effects of travel and teammate Austin Reaves was weary after carrying the offensive load in Doncic’s absence.

“The end of a road trip, there can be a lot of tired legs,” James said. “I felt great... I had the opportunity with some pretty good legs to try to assert myself a little offensively.”

Tyrese Maxey led the 76ers with 28 points as Joel Embiid, James’s teammate on the United States Olympic gold medal-winning team in Paris, connected on just four of 21 shots on the way to 16 points.

There was no late drama at Utah, where the NBA Champion Oklahoma City Thunder cruised to their 15th straight victory, 131-101 over the Jazz despite the absence of Most Valuable Player Shai Gilgeous-Alexander with elbow bursitis.

Jalen Williams and Chet Holmgren scored 25 points apiece and the Thunder led by as many as 42 on the way to equalling the longest winning streak in franchise history.

Denver’s Jamal Murray scored 23 of his 34 points in the first quarter and the Nuggets held on to beat the Hornets 115-106 in Charlotte.

Three-time MVP Nikola Jokic came up just shy of a triple-double with 28 points, nine rebounds and 11 assists to help the Nuggets post a third straight win. Despite the red-hot start from Murray, who had poured in 52 points in a win over Indiana on Wednesday, the Nuggets trailed 58-57 at half-time. But Jokic asserted himself after the break, scoring 18 points in the second half as Denver pulled away.

Boston’s Jaylen Brown scored 30 points and Derrick White added 27 as the Celtics held on for a nervy 121-113 win over the Raptors in Toronto.

The Celtics led by 23 early in the third quarter but the Raptors roared back to take their first lead of the game early in the fourth.

Toronto were up by three when White and Payton Pritchard made back-to-back three-pointers to put Boston up for good. — **AFP**

Australia crush England by 8 wickets for 2-0 Ashes lead

AUSTRALIA cruised to an emphatic eight-wicket win over England in the day-night second Ashes Test in Brisbane on Sunday for an ominous 2-0 lead in the series.

Set a paltry target of 65 for victory, Australia captain Steve Smith pulled Gus Atkinson for a huge six over square leg to get the job done in style.

Although not as humiliating as the two-day loss in the first Test at Perth, England were comprehensively outplayed in every department.

Australia are now overwhelming favourites to retain the Ashes with matches in Adelaide, Melbourne and Sydney to follow.

“Great day. First two days were pretty even, game turned when we were able to extend to get the new ball under lights, that was crucial for us,” said Smith, who clashed verbally with England bowler Jofra Archer as the hosts raced to victory.

“It can be tricky with the pink ball, it changes really quickly and you have to adapt.”

For England it was more misery. Their batting, apart from Joe Root and Zak Crawley in the first innings and captain Ben Stokes and Will Jacks in the second, was just as rash as in Perth.

They gave their wickets away with poor strokes on the bouncy Gabba surface.

They also bowled poorly, pitching too short and wasting the new pink ball, in stark contrast to an Australian attack missing spearheads Pat Cummins and Josh Hazlewood.

To make matters worse England dropped five catches in the first innings, whereas Australia’s fielders caught everything that came their way.

Josh Inglis’s brilliant run-out of Stokes in the first innings changed the course of the match.

“Obviously very disappointing,” said Stokes.

“I think a lot of it comes down to not being able to stand up to the pressure of this game, this format, when the game is on the line.”

England were behind the game once they let Australia’s tail help the home side post 511 on Saturday, an overall lead of 177.

They then lost six second-innings wickets under lights to end the third day 134-6, still 43 runs behind the Australian total.

While many expected England to surrender meekly on Sunday, Stokes and all-rounder Jacks led a fighting rearguard action to ensure Australia had to bat a second time.

Stokes and Jacks defied the Australian pace attack on a fiercely hot day to edge their way past the initial deficit target and begin to set Australia something to chase.



Australia’s Steve Smith in action. — **Reuters**

FLICKER OF RESISTANCE

England batting coach Marcus Trescothick said Saturday his batsmen would not change their aggressive approach, despite a clatter of wickets from poor shots.

But Stokes and Jacks were patient during the first session Sunday.

They left balls they didn’t need to play and seemed happy to take their runs in singles rather than expansive boundary shots.

They scored just 28 runs in the first hour and passed the 43-run deficit 96 minutes into the session, scoring only 59 runs in the two hours.

The Australian bowlers, who ran rampant under lights on Saturday with the pink ball, were far more ineffective on Sunday, despite the wicket beginning to play some tricks.

The English offered only one chance when Scott Boland squared up Stokes, who got a thick edge over the slips cordon.

They continued to frustrate the

Australians in the second session until just before the drinks break Jacks got an edge to Michael Neser and Smith snared a breath-taking catch at slip, diving full length to his left and catching it low to the ground.

Neser struck again in the next over when Stokes nibbled at a ball outside the off-stump and got a fine edge to keeper Alex Carey to leave England 227-8, a lead of exactly 50.

Atkinson, Brydon Carse and Archer offered no real resistance as Neser recorded career-best figures of 5-42.

Sixty-five was never going to be enough and although Australia lost Travis Head and Marnus Labuschagne in the chase, Smith and Jake Weatherald guided the home side to an easy win.

“A great game of cricket, very clinical,” said Inglis, who was born in England.

“Timing is a big thing in pink-ball cricket, when you’re batting and bowling.” — **AFP**

Suryakumar declares Gill and Pandya fit for T20 series against SA

MUMBAI: Top-order batter Shubman Gill and all-rounder Hardik Pandya are fit and available for Tuesday’s T20 series opener against South Africa, India captain Suryakumar Yadav said on the eve of the match.

Gill, who had been thrown out of action with a neck injury sustained during the opening test against the Proteas, was included in the T20 squad for the five-match series subject to his fitness.

Pandya, who has been active in

domestic cricket, is set to return to action after suffering a quadriceps injury in September.

“Both are looking healthy and fit,” Suryakumar told reporters in Cuttack on Monday.

Pandya’s availability gave the team flexibility in terms of team combination, he said.

“What you saw in the Asia Cup also, when he was bowling with the new ball, he opened up a lot of options, combinations for us with respect to the playing eleven,”



Suryakumar said.

“That’s what he brings to the table. His experience, the way he has done well in all big games... I think that experience will count a lot and his presence will definitely give a good balance to the side.”

With Gill back in the top order, wicketkeeper-batter Sanju Samson looks locked in a battle with Jitesh Sharma for a middle-order slot.

“Sanju, when he came into the circuit, he batted higher up the order,” Suryakumar said.

“Now the thing is, other than the openers, everyone has to be flexible. He did really well when he opened the innings but Shubman had played before him in the Sri Lanka series, so he deserves to take that spot. But we gave Sanju opportunities. He was ready to bat at any number... Both (Samson and Jitesh) are in the scheme of things... both can do all the roles. It’s an asset to the team and a good headache to have,” the Indian T20 skipper said. — **Reuters**

SPORTS

FINAL COUNTDOWN



The 120 km women’s field includes defending Himam champion Maite Mayora (Spain) alongside Wenfei Xie (China).

4,500 RUNNERS TO COMPETE AS HIMAM TRAIL RUN RACE SET FOR DEC 11

MUSCAT: The Himam Trail Run Race 2025 has entered its final countdown, with organisers confirming operational readiness for the three-day event scheduled from December 11 to 13. This edition will be the largest since the race’s inception, bringing together 4,500 runners from 68 countries — a reflection of the event’s growing international profile and its place among the region’s prominent trail-running competitions.

Preparations have involved months of fieldwork across the Al Hajar Mountains, including course refinement, safety planning, medical coordination, and multi-agency support to ensure the event runs smoothly across all categories.

The races begin on December 11, with the flagship Al Hajar Ultra 120 km, the most demanding distance of the series. Starting in Al Hamra, the route ascends through historic mountain pathways towards the elevated plateaus of Jabal Akhdar before descending into Birkat Al Mouz. The course is recognised for its sharp elevation changes, technical single-track sections, narrow rocky corridors, and heritage farming trails.

On Friday, the programme continues with Skyward Canyon 60 km from Izki, featuring canyon paths, stepped climbs and exposed ridge lines characteristic of the central Hajar range. The day also includes the Old Capital Trail 35 km in Nizwa. Later in the afternoon, the Scenic Sprint 20 km departs from Birkat Al Mouz, taking runners through vantage points overlooking date-palm oases, terraced fields and traditional village routes.

According to the official elite list, the 120 km men’s field features global names such as Rachid El Morabity (Morocco) — one of the world’s most dominant desert ultrarunners and multiple Marathon des Sables champion; Theo Detienne (France) — a rising European ultra-distance champion; Mohammad Reza Jelodar (Iran); Clement Deffrenne (France), returning after a strong performance in Himam 2024; regional endurance legend Salameh al Agra (Jordan); and Omar El Sawi (Egypt).

The 120 km women’s field includes defending Himam champion Maite Mayora (Spain), known for podium finishes at Transgrancanaria and Val d’Aran by UTMB, alongside Wenfei Xie (China).

In the 60 km category, elite contenders include Vlad Ixel (Australia), with podiums at KAT100 by UTMB, Ultra-Trail Australia and TransLantau, as well as Navil Shaimukhametov (Russia), a rising figure in mid-distance mountain racing.

The 120 km field includes top Omani ultra-athletes: Hamdan al Khatiri, Khalid al Farsi, Khalid al Hatmi, Saleh al Saidi and Sami al Saidi.



Celta Vigo’s Romanian goalkeeper #13 Ionut Andrei Radu (L) punches the ball during the Spanish league match between Real Madrid CF and RC Celta de Vigo. — AFP

Two sent off for Real Madrid in Celta defeat

LONG INJURY LIST HAMPERS REAL BEFORE MAN CITY CLASH

ALONSO’S RELATIONSHIP WITH PLAYERS UNDER SCRUTINY AFTER POOR LEAGUE RUN

COACH REMAINS OPTIMISTIC DESPITE CRITICISM FROM SPANISH SPORTS PRESS

REAL MADRID crashed to a damaging 2-0 home defeat by Celta Vigo on Sunday in La Liga, finishing the game with nine men after red cards for Fran Garcia and Alvaro Carreras. Williot Swedberg struck twice in the second half for Celta, with Madrid’s second league defeat of the season leaving rivals Barcelona four points clear at the top of La Liga.

Xabi Alonso’s side, second, also lost defender Eder Militao to injury on a difficult night in the Spanish capital.

Madrid were playing their first match at home following six on the road across all competitions after hosting an NFL match at the Bernabeu, coinciding with a poor run of form, having now won just one of their last five league games.

“(This was) tremendous... we read the game very well, we had some luck in the chances that we had, but we did well,” Celta striker Borja Iglesias told Movistar.

“With the team they have and their quality, it’s hard to equal them, but we read it well, we had the ball, we played in their half, we played a great game.”

With a juicy Champions League clash against Manchester City and Erling Haaland approaching on Wednesday, Alonso chose to rest centre-back Antonio Rudiger, starting with Carreras in the heart of defence.

Rudiger’s break did not last long, with the German defender coming on midway through the first half after Militao pulled up injured.

Raul Asencio started at right-back, after Trent Alexander-Arnold was sidelined for two months with a thigh injury, continuing a tough start to life in the Spanish capital for the former Liverpool defender.

Celta Vigo goalkeeper Ionut Radu made a handful of good saves in the first half, keeping out a Jude Bellingham header and Arda Guler’s drive from range.

Madrid were struggling to create serious danger as Celta set up in a tough-to-crack low defensive block, denying dangerous forwards Kylian Mbappe and Vinicius Junior space.

Guler missed Madrid’s best chance of the first half, with the Turkish playmaker sending a shot wide on the swivel after Mbappe teed him up.

Radu also thwarted Vinicius after Aurelien Tchouameni chopped a ball in behind the defence for the Brazilian to run onto, a rare crack in Celta’s armour.

Celta’s Romanian goalkeeper turned away a fierce Fede Valverde effort from distance early in the second half, before Celta stunned the hosts.

Bryan Zaragoza crossed from the left for Swedberg, who produced a gorgeous flicked finish to beat Thibaut Courtois to send the Galicians ahead.

LOSING HEADS

Madrid were wounded, literally in the case of Bellingham, with blood running down his face from a cut sustained in a tussle with Celta target man Iglesias.

Adding insult to injury Fran Garcia earned two yellow cards inside a minute, the second for a clumsy foul on Swedberg, to leave Los Blancos with 10 men for the final third of the match.

Mbappe sent a lob over Radu but down onto the roof of the net and substitute Gonzalo Garcia headed just wide as Madrid searched for an equaliser, which did not come.

Carreras was dismissed in stoppage time as Madrid lost their heads, for dissent as he protested a decision by referee Alejandro Quintero.

With Madrid down to nine and in disarray, Celta wrapped up their win as Swedberg rounded Courtois and ran the ball home.

Espanyol continued their superb start to the season with a 1-0 win over Rayo Vallecano to climb up to fifth.

Roberto Fernandez netted a first-half penalty for Manolo Gonzalez’s team at the RCDE Stadium in Cornellà as they won a third straight league game.

Espanyol trail fourth-place Atletico Madrid by four points, having played one game fewer than Diego Simeone’s team.

Rayo midfielder Unai Lopez was sent off after the break for a second yellow card, and the hosts spurned several opportunities to expand their lead.

Both teams finished the match with 10 men after Espanyol’s English winger Tyrhys Dolan picked up a second yellow card in the final stages. — AFP

Matsuyama tops Noren in playoff to win Hero World Challenge

MIAMI: Former Masters champion Hideki Matsuyama birdied the first hole of a sudden death playoff to beat Alex Noren in the Hero World Challenge in the Bahamas on Sunday.

Japan’s Matsuyama claimed his second victory in the unofficial 20-man event hosted by Tiger Woods, which he also won in 2016.

He sealed it with an impressive birdie at the first playoff hole, sticking his second shot within three feet of the pin and calmly rolling it in after Noren was unable to get his own longer birdie attempt to fall.

“It was perfect distance for me,” Matsuyama said of his approach in

the playoff. “Earlier (at 18) I missed it a little right, so I was going right at it and was able to hit a great shot.”

Matsuyama opened the 2025 PGA Tour season with a victory in The Sentry tournament in Hawaii back in January, but he hadn’t managed another top 10 finish on the US circuit all year.

He produced a bogey-free final round at Albany Golf Club in Nassau, highlighted by a hole out for eagle from 116 yards out in the fairway at the 10th.

His six birdies included a 29-footer at the eighth and a chip-in at the ninth, before he rolled in a 30-footer at the 13th for his last



birdie of the day. Matsuyama led by as many as two strokes, but Noren piled up five of his nine birdies on the back nine to post a 64 of his own. He forced the playoff with an 18-foot birdie putt at the final hole of regulation to join Matsuyama on 22-under 266. Austrian Sepp Straka, who started the day with a one-stroke lead over two-time defending champion Scottie Schffler, was third, carding a 68 for 267.

World number one Scheffler had an eagle, five birdies and three bogeys in a four-under 68 and was tied for fourth with US Open champion J J Spaun on 20-under.

“I played better than my score,

for sure,” Scheffler said. “Didn’t hole as many putts today. I felt like I hit some good ones that didn’t fall, and I got a couple of poor breaks on the back nine.” Scheffler said there was “a little rust” in his first start since the Ryder Cup in September, but he said there were good omens for the coming season.

“It’s nice to come down here, kind of gauge where I’m at,” he said. “Very optimistic — did a lot of good things.”

Tournament host Woods, a 15-time major champion, is not playing in the event, saying on Tuesday that the recovery from his latest back surgery is “not as fast as I’d like it to be”. — AFP

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SHORTTAKES



Growth was driven primarily by a sharp rise in associated gas production, which surged by 10.9 per cent to 10.6 billion cubic metres.

GAS OUTPUT RISES AS DEMAND FOR POWER GROWS

MUSCAT: Oman’s total natural gas production, including domestic output and imports, increased by 0.8 per cent to 47.5 billion cubic metres by the end of October 2025, compared with 47.1 billion cubic metres during the same period last year, according to figures issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

Growth was driven primarily by a sharp rise in associated gas production, which surged by 10.9 per cent to 10.6 billion cubic metres, reflecting higher output linked to oil production activities. In contrast, non-associated gas production, including imports, declined by 1.7 per cent to 36.9 billion cubic metres.

On the consumption side, gas usage across sectors showed mixed trends. Consumption by industrial projects fell by 3.5 per cent to 23.24 billion cubic metres, while gas demand from power generation plants increased by 1.6 per cent to 13.13 billion cubic metres, highlighting steady growth in electricity demand.

Gas consumption in oil fields, including industrial areas and major companies such as Oman Mining Company and Oman Cement Company, rose by 10.3 per cent to 10.91 billion cubic metres. Meanwhile, usage in other industrial areas, including institutions such as Sultan Qaboos University and the Ministry of Defence, increased by 12.6 per cent to 234.5 million cubic metres. The figures underline natural gas’s central role in supporting Oman’s power generation, industrial activity and broader economic development. — ONA

Oman celebrates 100 years of oil and gas discovery

THE Ministry of Energy and Minerals on Monday commemorated the centenary of the discovery of oil and gas in the Sultanate of Oman. The ceremony was held under the patronage of HH Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, at the Royal Opera House Muscat, on Monday

The event highlighted the historical milestones of the energy sector since the signing of the first exploration concession in 1925. It reviewed the major transformations that have contributed to building the national economy and establishing an integrated infrastructure for the oil and gas industry, culminating in the Sultanate of Oman’s future strategic directions in renewable energy and green hydrogen.

In his address, Eng. Salim Nasser Al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals, stated that the completion of a full century since the first practical step in oil exploration represents a defining historical milestone. This achievement embodies the efforts of successive generations who overcame formidable challenges and limited capabilities to establish a sector that now stands as one of the most vital pillars of the national economy and a key driver of sustainable development.

He noted that the journey began with the signing of the first concession agreement with the D’Arcy Exploration Company on 18 May 1925. This was followed by the foundational phase, marked by the drilling of the “Dauka-1” well in 1955, before the sector underwent a significant transformational leap in the “Fahud” region. The first shipment of Omani crude was exported from Mina Al Fahl port in 1967, with an average initial production of 5,000 barrels per day (bpd). Today, the sector produces



HH Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, at the ceremony to mark the centenary of oil and gas discovery. — ONA

The journey began with the signing of the first concession agreement with the D’Arcy Exploration Company on 18 May 1925. This was followed by the foundational phase, marked by the drilling of the “Dauka-1” well in 1955, before the sector underwent a significant transformational leap in the “Fahud” region

nearly one million bpd, reflecting the accumulated expertise and the advanced development of the Sultanate of Oman’s operational, administrative, and technical systems.

Al Aufi affirmed that Oman’s enduring political stability has been instrumental in cementing investor confidence and attracting international partnerships. He emphasized that such regional and international collaborations have been a fundamental pillar of the sector’s growth, citing the Duqm Refinery and Petrochemical Industries project—launched last year with an investment exceeding RO 3.5 billion—as a prime example.

He reviewed the evolution of concession area management, which now encompasses 58 areas, including 34 operational blocks, with 16 companies developing fields and production under the highest governance standards. Current oil reserves are estimated at approximately 4.8 billion barrels, while natural

gas production reaches about 150 million cubic meters per day, supported by an extensive infrastructure network spanning thousands of kilometers of pipelines.

Regarding In-Country Value (ICV), the minister confirmed that sector expenditure over the past decade amounted to RO 11 billion, with RO 700 million directed specifically to Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) last year alone. In 2024, the Ministry launched the “Majd” ICV program, which awarded its first accreditation certificate in the energy and minerals sector to Abraj Energy Services.

Al Aufi highlighted that the human element remains the sector’s most valuable asset, with nearly 20,000 employees in operating companies achieving an Omanization rate of 93 per cent. The sector also recorded 285.5 million working hours without a Lost Time Injury (LTI) in 2024, underscoring its deeply ingrained culture of safety. — ONA

Oman unveils integrated clean-energy platform

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, DEC 8

NEW state-backed, integrated renewable energy company has emerged in Oman with a mandate to localise wind-power manufacturing, drive green technology innovation — including battery energy storage — and develop gigawatt-scale clean energy projects across Oman and the wider Middle East and North Africa.

O-Green, an affiliate of the Oman Investment Authority (OIA), first surfaced publicly last month during the official visit of Abdulsalam bin Mohammed al Murshidi, Chairman of Oman Investment Authority (OIA) to the Republic of Botswana.



MUSTAFA MOHAMMED AL HINAI
CEO, O-Green

During the visit, O-Green signed a landmark agreement with Botswana’s Ministry of Minerals and Energy to help establish integrated solar, wind and battery-storage projects with a planned capacity of up to 3 GW.

The agreement was signed on behalf of O-Green by its CEO, Mustafa bin Mohammed al Hinai.

In a recent statement, Al Hinai noted that O-Green brings together a cluster of specialised subsidiaries positioned at the forefront of Oman’s energy-transition efforts.

“O-Green unites the expertise of specialised companies, each focused on a key pillar of renewable energy”, he said.

According to the company’s website, O-Green was founded in 2025

to accelerate the energy transition by creating an integrated clean-energy platform covering the full value chain — from concept and design to construction, operation, long-term maintenance and green-technology development — while also enhancing in-country value and national capabilities.

RENEWABLE ENERGY

At the core of O-Green’s portfolio is Naqaa Sustainable Energy, which leads the development and execution of large-scale renewable energy projects.

Naqaa operates as a vertically integrated green-energy provider encompassing development, EPC, generation, transmission, R&D and

logistics.

Another pillar is Mawarid Green Technologies, which is establishing the GCC’s first wind-turbine manufacturing complex, engineered for harsh desert conditions and aligned with Oman’s clean-energy ambitions.

Phase 1 of the facility — spanning 550,000 m² in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm — represents an investment of about RO 70 million. Its annual manufacturing capacity is expected to reach around 1,100 MW, centred on 6.25 MW and 9.6 MW turbine models developed under licence from Shanghai Electric Group.

Mawarid will also supply domestically produced Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) solutions.

ADVERTORIALS

SHORTTAKES



Families and travellers are welcomed into a season filled with meaningful experiences.

The St Regis al Mouj Muscat Resort welcomes the holiday season with curated festivities

MUSCAT: The festive season has arrived at The St Regis Al Mouj Muscat Resort, where refined beauty, warm hospitality and timeless traditions blend to create an atmosphere of celebration. The resort transforms into a House of Celebration, centred around the enchanting lighting of its modern cone-shaped Christmas tree, a radiant symbol of the season’s spirit.

The ceremony was elevated by a special performance from the American British Academy’s student choir, whose joyful carols added a heartwarming touch to the evening, inviting guests to gather and embrace the magic of the holidays.

Families and travellers are welcomed into a season filled with meaningful experiences. The Lobby Lounge hosts the Festive Afternoon Tea, featuring delicate pastries and artisanal teas, while the whimsical Tiny Afternoon Tea delights the resort’s youngest guests. For those celebrating at home, the culinary team offers the seasonal Turkey to Go, a festive centrepiece crafted in true St Regis style and available until December 28.

Guests can savour authentic Greek flavours at Zorba, where festive menus and live music create a vibrant dining experience for Christmas Eve Dinner and Christmas Lunch. At Karibu, holiday creativity flourishes with gingerbread classes (December 20th — 27th) and cupcake decorating sessions (December 20th — 24th) guided by the resort’s culinary artisans, offering children the chance to learn, discover and create lasting memories.

The season’s spirit continues at Karibu with Christmas Eve and Christmas Day Dinner buffets, rich in global flavours, traditional favourites and live music.

Evening brings the refined traditions of The St Regis Evening Rituals, where the artistry of Sabrage at The Stage adds ceremony to festive gatherings. Novikov Café presents a contemporary Christmas set menu (December 24th and 25th), while COYA offers a vibrant four-course family lunch throughout Christmas week. Roberto’s celebrates with a refined Christmas Eve dinner and a convivial family-style lunch on Christmas Day, honouring the spirit of Italian hospitality.

As the year draws to a close, the resort becomes Muscat’s most sought-after destination for New Year’s Eve celebrations. Zorba hosts an outdoor gathering under the stars, complete with live music and a festive countdown, while The Stage sets the tone for an energetic evening with à la carte dining and a lively after-party led by a DJ Novikov Café, COYA, Hakkasan and Em Sherif each curate elevated dining experiences blending bold flavours, refined settings and captivating entertainment to welcome the new year in style.

MUSCAT: Reinforcing its commitment to financial inclusion, Sohar International announced the official opening of its new Sohar International branch and Sohar Islamic service centre in the Wilayat of Bidiyah in Al Sharqiyah North Governorate.

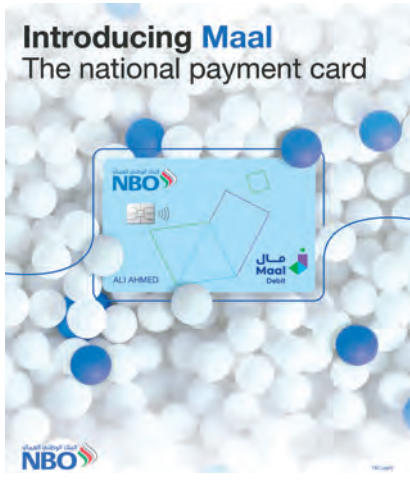
The inauguration ceremony was held under the auspices of Sayyid Majid bin Saif al Busaidy, Wali of Bidiyah and attended by Abdulwahid bin Mohamed al Murshidi, Chief Executive Officer of Sohar International, alongside senior executives and community representatives.

The official inauguration of the new service points reflects the bank’s ongoing organic expansion strategy aimed at

NBO LAUNCHES “MAAL” TO STRENGTHEN NATIONAL PAYMENTS ECOSYSTEM

MUSCAT: The National Bank of Oman (NBO) has announced the soft launch of the National Payment Card “Maal” in alignment with the Central Bank of Oman’s (CBO) initiative to strengthen the national payments ecosystem and support the development of a secure and inclusive digital economy.

Issued and processed locally, the Maal Card provides customers with a seamless and secure transaction and data protection. It eliminates the dependence on international schemes, while strengthening the



local financial sovereignty.

Maha bint Saud al Raisiyah, Assistant General Manager and Head of Product at NBO said: “The introduction of Maal Card represents a significant step towards reinforcing Oman’s financial independence. It demonstrates our collective national commitment to create payment systems that are secure, resilient and accessible for everyone. We are also dedicated to support CBO in shaping a robust and inclusive digital infrastructure that will serve the country for years to come.”

Promoting financial literacy and innovation

AS part of its ongoing commitment to supporting community development, investing in the potential of future generations and enhancing their skills in financial literacy, entrepreneurship and innovation, Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, held the “Maliyat Academy Challenge” in the Wilayat of Suhar, Al Batinah North Governorate.

The event was held in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and targeted 9th and 10th grade students from various schools across the governorate.

In an atmosphere filled with engagement, constructive competition and innovative learning experiences, the challenge brought together approximately 80 students who had previously taken part in the Bank’s Maliyat Academy initiative. By the end of the



The event was held in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and targeted 9th and 10th grade students from various schools across the governorate.

challenge, the winning teams were honoured for their projects based on criteria comprising feasibility, market need; and social and economic value.

Bringing the first edition of the challenge in the Al Batinah North Governorate, the event builds on the Bank’s effort to

implement the Maliyat Academy initiative which aims to instil and strengthen the principles of financial literacy among school students across Oman.

The Maliyat Academy Challenge seeks to equip participants with a broad knowledge base in personal

financial education and entrepreneurship, helping prepare a generation capable of managing its resources responsibly and effectively.

The challenge also aims to reinforce creativity, entrepreneurial fundamentals and community contribution among students.

Through a series of interactive educational activities, participants were introduced to business concepts, financing models, budget management, understanding target audiences and successful marketing practices.

The initiative provided young participants an opportunity to enhance creative thinking, encouraging them to innovate and work collaboratively to address various financial challenges.

Students were invited to develop project ideas with tangible economic impact, fostering early awareness on entrepreneurship.

BankDhofar draws strong demand for RO 100m Tier 2 debt

MUSCAT: BankDhofar announced that it has successfully raised RO 100 million of Basel III–compliant Tier 2 Subordinated Debt.

Issued in multiple tranches with a maturity of 66 months, the instrument qualifies as regulatory Tier 2 capital, further strengthening the Bank’s capital base and enhancing its capacity to support future growth.

The issuance, which attracted robust demand from a diverse set of local investors, was fully placed and generated a high-quality order book, reflecting strong confidence in BankDhofar’s credit profile and long-term strategy. K



Gopakumar, Acting Chief Executive Officer of BankDhofar, said: “We are very pleased with the outcome of this issuance. It has met our expectations in terms of size, pricing and investor diversification.

Strengthening our capital base through this Tier 2 issue allows us to further optimise our capital structure and reinforces our ability to support Omani businesses and the broader economy.

The strong demand is a clear endorsement of investors’ confidence in BankDhofar, our prudent risk management and resilient business model. We would like to express our sincere

appreciation to the Central Bank of Oman for its continued guidance and support”.

As at September 30, 2025, BankDhofar’s Capital Adequacy Ratio stood at 16.75%, comfortably above the regulatory minimum, underscoring the Bank’s strong capital position.

BankDhofar strives to be the most trusted, innovative and inclusive financial partner in the Sultanate of Oman, in addition to providing easy, flexible banking services that keep pace with digital transformation, all within a human-centric approach built on trust.

Sohar International inaugurates new branch in Bidiyah



The inauguration of the new service points reflects the bank’s ongoing organic expansion strategy.

strengthening financial inclusion, enhancing service accessibility and supporting the economic and social development of communities across Oman

Strategically located to serve Bidiyah and surrounding areas, the new Sohar International branch and Sohar Islamic service centre offer a premium banking environment featuring spacious facilities and convenient access.

The branch is equipped with a 24-hour digital lobby comprising fully enabled ATMs and CDMs to ensure seamless banking at all times.

Commenting on the significance of this expansion, Abdulwahid bin Mohamed al Murshidi, Chief Executive Officer of Sohar International, stated: “Opening the

new Sohar International branch and Sohar Islamic service centre in Bidiyah represents a significant step forward in our strategic ambition to expand accessible, high-quality banking services across the Sultanate of Oman. As we continue to strengthen our national footprint, our focus remains on enabling greater financial inclusion, supporting local economic activity and delivering a seamless banking experience that meets the evolving needs of individuals, businesses and communities. This expansion reflects our long-term commitment to driving sustainable growth, empowering customers in every wilayat and contributing meaningfully to Oman’s broader development journey”.

SHORTTAKES



The agreement was formalised by Khalid al Kayed, CEO of Bank Nizwa and Hussain Ali al Lawati, CEO of Development Bank.

Development Bank unveils new corporate financing guarantee programme

MUSCAT: Development Bank has announced a partnership with Bank Nizwa to launch the Financing Guarantee Scheme, designed to help creditworthy Omani corporates (mainly SMEs) secure bank finance by providing guarantees starting at 50% of eligible finances. Depending on the nature and potential of the project, the guarantee can reach up to 80% on a case-by-case basis.

The initiative is designed to advance Oman's economic diversification by backing firms that create jobs, raise non-oil exports and deepen in-country value with an initial focus on manufacturing, renewable energy, logistics, tourism, agriculture and fisheries. The agreement was formalised by Khalid al Kayed, Chief Executive Officer of Bank Nizwa and Hussain Ali al Lawati, Chief Executive Officer of Development Bank.

This launch builds on Development Bank's growing support for local enterprise. In the first half of 2025, the Development Bank approved RO 109.5 million (\$283.6 million) across 3,716 loans, up year-on-year in both value and volume with notable momentum in service businesses and tourism-linked projects.

Working-capital approvals also increased, reflecting demand from smaller firms across the regions as they invest, hire and expand capacity. That foundation underpins today's announcement and provides a pipeline for early transactions through Bank Nizwa.

Hussain al Lawati, CEO, Development Bank, said: "This is about confidence — confidence for entrepreneurs to invest, for banks to lend and for Oman to accelerate private-sector growth. By standing behind up to 80% of qualifying corporate Financing Opportunities, we are widening access to finance not only for exporters but for the enterprises that train young Omanis, buy locally and build resilient supply chains."

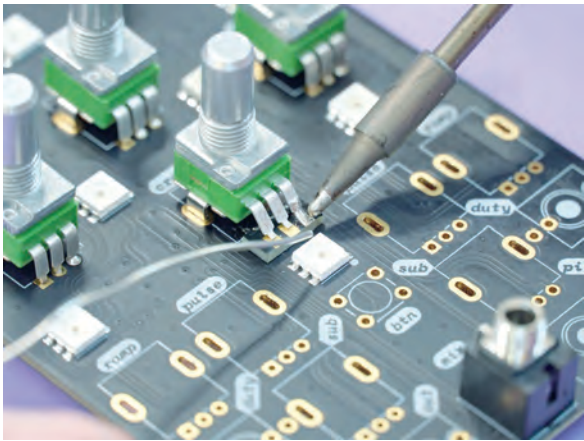
Oman to host global executive semiconductor summit today

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, DEC 8

THE Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, is set to host the World Summit for Executives in Semiconductor and Electronic Chips on Tuesday.

The three-day event will be held under the auspices of Dr Khamis bin Saif al Jabri, Chairman of Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit.

It is organised in collaboration with the International Semiconductor Executive Summits and will include a total of 40 speakers, in addition to 25 working papers focused on building an integrated semiconductor industry ecosystem in the Middle East and North Africa



The 3-day summit aligns with Oman's efforts to diversify its economy by supporting the growth of a knowledge-based economy.

ENERGY TRADE

India will continue to buy Russian oil



The Kremlin said India would continue purchasing Russian oil wherever it remained viable, despite mounting US pressure. Washington recently doubled tariffs on Indian goods to 50 per cent, citing New Delhi's oil purchases from Moscow as indirectly funding Russia's war in Ukraine. Spokesman Dmitry Peskov said India would pursue energy imports aligned with its interests, adding that Russia stood ready to supply uninterrupted fuel. — Reuters

OIL MARKETS

Oil steadies near two-week highs



Oil prices hovered near two-week highs as investors anticipated a potential US interest rate cut that could support economic growth and fuel demand. Brent crude slipped slightly to \$63.26 a barrel, while US crude eased to \$59.59. Markets also tracked risks, including uncertainty over Russian and Venezuelan supplies. Analysts said prices could face downward pressure if progress is made on Ukraine peace talks. — Reuters

MEDIA REGULATION

Trump flags Netflix-Warner deal review



US President Donald Trump said he would be personally involved in reviewing the proposed \$72 billion merger between Netflix and Warner Bros Discovery, citing possible market concentration concerns. Speaking to reporters, President Donald Trump said the combined group's market share warranted scrutiny. Netflix agreed last week to acquire Warner Bros Discovery's film, television studios and streaming business. — Reuters

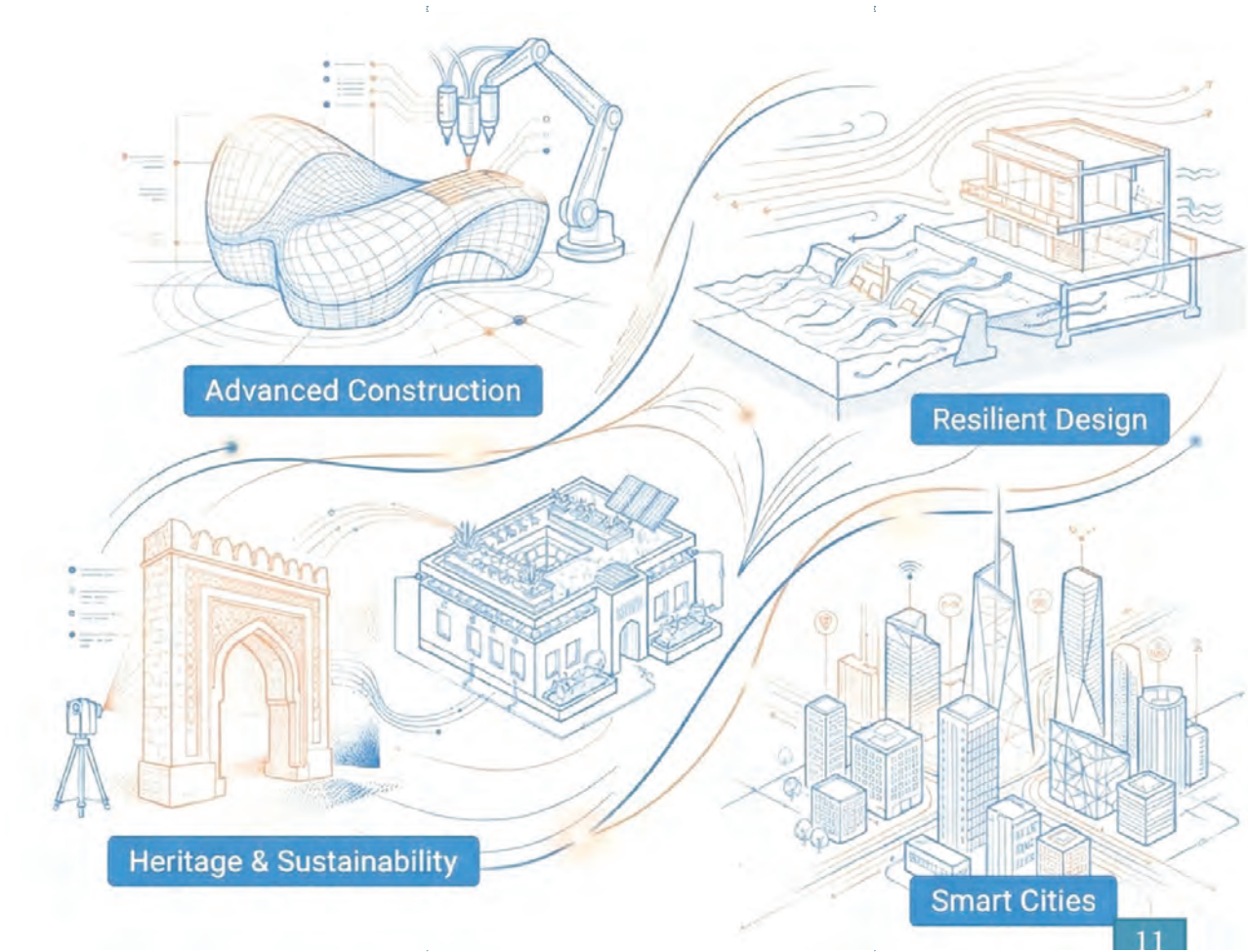
Building code to redefine construction standards

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, DEC 8

Oman's construction sector is embarking on a profound transformation with the imminent implementation of the Oman Building Code (OBC), a landmark national framework designed to unify technical specifications, substantially enhance public safety, and embed sustainability across the Sultanate of Oman's built environment.

This comprehensive system is set to establish a singular, modern set of requirements for developers, consultants, and contractors across all governorates. According to a presentation made by Eng Sara al Hinai, Urban Project Engineer, Ministry of Housing & Urban Planning on "An insight into The Oman Building Code" during the Green Build Oman Summit, the code represents a crucial step in transforming Oman's urban development paradigm, guiding safer, higher-quality, and future-ready cities in line with national development ambitions.

The new Code is a strategic pillar for achieving the goals of Oman Vision 2040, providing the regulatory foundation required for a resilient and economically robust construction ecosystem. It has been meticulously tailored for the Sultanate of Oman, taking the globally respected 2021 International Building Code (I-Code) as its foundation and rigorously localising it. This localisation process has integrated national data on specific hazards, including seismic, wind, and flood loads, alongside detailed feedback from ministries, academia, and private industry stakeholders, ensuring the standards are effective and appropriate for Oman's unique climate and cultural context. "The Code is more than a set of technical specifications; it



is the first national framework that unifies construction requirements across all governorates, fundamentally strengthening safety and quality in alignment with the ambitious goals of Oman Vision 2040," she stated during the summit.

A key commercial component is the Energy Efficiency & Sustainability Code (OEESC), which is expected to revolutionise property operating expenditure. This requires a significant shift in construction practices, mandating improved thermal envelopes, and, notably, pre-wiring for electric vehicle charging in new homes with garages.

The unified standards are set to streamline the historically complex permitting and inspection processes, fostering a more reliable environment for both domestic and foreign direct investment. Furthermore, the code is designed to embrace technological progress, acting as

a stable platform that supports advanced construction techniques such as 3D printing. Finally, the Code addresses the critical need to preserve the nation's identity through the Existing & Historical Buildings Code (OEHBC).

Al Hinai noted, "Critically, the Code provides a stable platform

that encourages advanced construction techniques and investment, while the dedicated Historical Buildings Code ensures we protect Omani buildings unique authenticity by allowing flexible pathways for preservation while maintaining essential safety standards".

The Ministry has outlined a clear path to implementation, beginning with a voluntary trial period for all building types across all governorates from 2026 to 2027. This will be followed by a phased rollout post-2027, culminating in the Full National Mandate by 2030, when compliance will become mandatory for all applicable new construction projects across Oman. The Code, therefore, is not merely regulation; it is an economic tool shaping a safer, more sustainable, and more competitive future for Oman.



SARA AL HINAI
Urban Project Engineer, Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning

OPINION

Misinformation is disastrous: How to combat it



TARIQ
AL BARWANI

The writer is strategic adviser, businessman and motivational speaker.

THE reactions I received to my last week’s article, ie, “facts vs forwards”, via the various platforms, be it on social media networks or directly from readers, were very interesting.

While some agreed on the principle (how misinformation works), especially with the reaction from the society about the tragedy in Al Amerat, others did not necessarily agree (that it is misinformation), which made me think that it is clear that we need more than just awareness of accurate “information” sharing and avoiding misleading/ misinformation and the disastrous “disinformation”.

I’ve decided to focus this article on what happens after misinformation spreads and specifically how it shapes public perception, influences trust and sometimes becomes almost impossible to revert or undo per se.

Normally, the misinformation (as defined last week) starts small, from a forwarded message, a screenshot, or a social-media post. But once it spreads, the implications grow fast. People begin to treat rumours (unverified information) as facts (leading to misinformation).

Sympathies or even outrage form around details that might not be true and the emotional weight makes it harder for facts to take hold. For example, in the few days and weeks following that Al Amerat tragedy, I noticed people sharing their own theories and speculation about the causes. Though none of that information was

confirmed by the official media/coverage, yet the speculations stuck in the minds of people (till date, in fact). Some blamed “negligence” and others stated “poisoning”, while a few thought of various explanations which were still unverified.

This pattern, where unverified information and claims go viral, unfortunately leads to a deeper problem, ie, erosion of trust. When people see headlines based on shaky information, they begin to doubt all news, even the verified ones.

And a public that doubts everything becomes vulnerable. Later, when real problems occur, who would take legitimate and official media news seriously? You see where I am coming from. If misinformation teaches us that “everything could be a lie”, then real alerts risk being ignored as a result.

This isn’t just about one false message; it’s, in fact, about the shifting baseline of what we consider believable.

Furthermore, misinformation and disinformation don’t just vanish once corrected. Memories remain. Even if a correction appears, many people would still reference the “theories”; the example is in the pudding with the present Al Amerat tragedy.

That’s the danger as it becomes part of collective memory and unfortunately shapes gossip, influences opinions and sets precedents for how we interpret future events. Question: what can we do collectively as a society (or individually as a start) to combat misinformation and disinformation? First, do not share information you receive

Normally, the misinformation starts small, from a forwarded message, a screenshot, or a social-media post. But once it spreads, the implications grow fast. People begin to treat rumours as facts (leading to misinformation).

from unofficial channels/sources (social media networks being prime), especially if something sounds shocking, unbelievable, or too convenient. Second, ensure you verify the source, ie, is it from a trusted organisation

Is it from their official website? And whoever shared the information, are they well-known experts and are they reliable?

Also, check the dates of the information shared. Is it old news? Sometimes you will be surprised that despite shared information being legitimate, it is actually old. I have personally noticed that old news, when it resurfaces, spreads quickly as if it happened today.

Another thing you could also do is to check multiple credible sources; this will help confirm whether something is real. By following these basic steps, one could verify if information is correct and also combat misinformation and disinformation as a result.

To conclude my article this week, I would like to emphasise that the cost of silence can be as big as the cost of a false message, because when forwards become accepted as fact, the real casualty isn’t just truth but rather our collective trust.

And once that’s lost, rebuilding it takes far more than a correction post. Therefore, working as a collective society, let’s ensure starting today any information we get, we pause, verify and act accordingly. Nothing damages a society like ignorance. Until we catch up again next week, stay informed right away.

INDIA FLIES INTO AIRLINE TURBULENCE OF OWN MAKING

UJJAINI DUTTA

The chaos at India’s airports stems from more than just IndiGo. The number of flights the airline has been cancelling a day surpassed 1,000 on Friday after executives neglected to plan for tighter pilot rest rules that came into effect at the start of November. The root cause, though, is that the carrier, operated by \$23 billion InterGlobe Aviation, controls some 65% of the skies. That’s a problem in any market, let alone one as large as India’s — and it comes from a failure to foster enough competition.

So far, New Delhi’s response to the crisis has been to put a few measures on hold and grant IndiGo some two-month exemptions — as well as to cap industry air fares while the disruption continues.

airports and hosts the seventh-busiest route in the world between Mumbai and Delhi. IndiGo has built a reputation for running a tight ship with a low-cost model, boasting on-time performance. Its revenue grew 17% in the year to March and it’s the only profitable airline in the country.

All airlines had nearly two years’ notice of the new rules for pilots, which include more weekly rest and capping the number of night landings. Rivals rejigged rosters; IndiGo did not. Instead, it froze hiring, which it has now lifted. Its response has raised suspicions that it was less a planning lapse and more a wager it could force the regulator’s hand.

So far, New Delhi’s response to the crisis has been to put a few measures on hold and grant IndiGo some two-month exemptions — as well as to cap industry air fares while the disruption continues.

None of that deals with IndiGo’s market dominance, which accelerated after Jet Airways’ collapse in 2019 and GoAir’s 2023 bankruptcy. Tata group’s Air India and Vistara merged last year, giving it a roughly 27% market share. SpiceJet is struggling with debt and Akasa Air is new and small.

New Delhi’s key goal now ought to be fixing the system. Charging smaller airlines lower airport fees and fuel taxes; and dealing with dollar-heavy leasing costs would help.

As would speeding up the bankruptcy process, so that any carrier affected would be able to continue operating while restructuring. That would all aid flying through airline turbulence that is of India’s own making. — Reuters

How Oman can link India, China and the CIS

THE Gulf has proved a simple truth: when you connect ports, borders and markets with reliable “corridors”, trade and investment scale up. For Oman, the opportunity is to fuse our historic Indian Ocean trading role with today’s multimodal links — by sea, rail, road and data — to become the trusted southern gateway for the region. Businesses increasingly seek predictability, speed and transparent rules — and corridors deliver all three. What follows are proven GCC examples and three priority plays for Oman with India, China and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). Together, they show how to turn location into competitiveness, even as global supply chains are rewired and capital becomes choosier about where to land.

Dubai’s logistics corridor shows what integration can achieve. Inside one bonded ecosystem, Jebel Ali Port, the Jebel Ali Free Zone (JAFZA) and Al Maktoum International Airport work as a single platform, making routine sea-air transfers and one-stop clearances the norm. Scale is the result: Jebel Ali handled 15.5 million TEUs in 2024, its highest since 2015 and a full 1 million TEUs more than the previous year. JAFZA’s company base has also expanded, crossing 10,800 firms by the end of 2024. The lesson is not abstract: when processes are stitched together and service standards are public, shippers commit capacity and investors commit capital. Oman can match this with our own port-zone–rail combinations in Suhar, Al Duqm and Salalah.

Rail is the second GCC lesson. Etihad Rail’s national freight network — about 900 km from the Saudi border at Ghawaifat to Fujairah — entered service in 2023 and now links the UAE’s main industrial and maritime hubs on predictable timetables. Each long train removes hundreds of trucks from highways, cuts emissions and, crucially, provides certainty to manufacturers that raw materials and finished goods will move on



For Oman, the opportunity is to fuse our historic Indian Ocean trading role with today’s multimodal links — by sea, rail, road and data.



DR YOUSUF
HAMED
AL BALUSHI

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The writer is founder and CEO - Smart Investment Gateway, economists, board adviser & business transformation mentor.

schedule. That reliability is exactly what cross-border cargo owners prize. For Oman, the point is clear: completing and integrating the Oman–UAE Hafeet Rail connection to Suhar does not just save hours; it de-risks entire supply chains and makes our free zones more bankable for long-term projects.

Frictionless land and sea links also multiply demand. The Saudi–Bahrain King Fahd Causeway alone carried around 30 million travellers in 2024, with roughly 13 million vehicles — numbers made possible by larger processing areas and digital border systems.

On the maritime side, Qatar’s Hamad Port handled about 1.421 million TEUs in 2024, with transshipment volumes jumping 23% year-on-year as the terminal deepened its role as a regional relay. Put simply: where corridors work, flows follow. These figures reflect a wider Gulf reality — well-run gateways are pulling cargo and investment despite global trade headwinds — and they offer practical benchmarks for our own corridor design and service levels.

Oman–India is the first priority corridor. Negotiations for an India–Oman Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) have been concluded, with signing pending. India remains the fastest-growing major economy, with the IMF projecting growth around the mid-6% range for 2025–26 and World Bank data showing a 2024 nominal GDP near \$3.9–4.0 trillion. Bilateral merchandise

trade has already reached about \$8.95 billion in FY 2023–24. The commercial play is straightforward: pair CEPA market access with a “one-timetable” sea-rail product via Suhar and Jebel Ali once Hafeet Rail opens, then anchor Omani value-added in metals, petrochemicals, food processing and pharmaceuticals using clear rules of origin and trusted-trader lanes. Time saved will become contracts won. Oman–China is the second corridor. Energy ties remain strong. A binding term sheet with UNIEC provides for around 1 million tonnes per year of LNG from 2025, while Oman LNG and other partners have signed multi-year offtake agreements with leading buyers. At the same time, Al Duqm is scaling up: a \$550 million port expansion announced in May 2025 will deepen capacity and strengthen green-industry readiness alongside the China–Oman Industrial Park.

For manufacturers and logistics players, that combination — bankable long-term offtake and a deep-water platform with room to grow — offers exactly the certainty needed to place processing lines, distribution centres and repair facilities in Oman for Chinese-linked value chains.

Oman–CIS is the third corridor. Oman is party to the Ashgabat Agreement and can plug into the International North–South Transport Corridor (INSTC) sea leg to Iran’s southern ports, then onwards by rail and road into Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. Routing via Suhar or Salalah to Chabahar/Bandar Abbas and northwards shortens Gulf-to-Eurasia transit for fertilisers, metals, fish and FMCG — provided we pair it with predictable customs windows and mutual recognition of AEO status. Sanctions policy around Chabahar shifted in late 2025; India subsequently announced a six-month US waiver extension.

That volatility argues for careful compliance design, but it does not remove the commercial logic of a tested Oman–CIS bridge for compliant cargoes.

Green Build Oman Forum drives low-carbon construction

MUSCAT: The Green Build Oman Forum 2025 opened in Muscat under the organisation of Petroleum Development Oman (PDO), positioning itself as a key platform for advancing sustainable construction practices in Oman.

The forum focuses on practical solutions to enhance construction quality through the adoption of environmentally friendly materials, improved energy efficiency and more sustainable project implementation methods.

The two-day event was inaugurated by Dr Saeed bin Hamad al Rubaie, Vice-Chancellor, University of Technology and Applied Sciences (UTAS) and brings together policymakers, industry leaders, engineers and sustainability experts



The event was inaugurated by Dr Saeed bin Hamad al Rubaie, Vice-Chancellor, University of Technology and Applied Sciences (UTAS).

to exchange knowledge and experiences supporting Oman's urban development transition. Discussions centre on accelerating the shift towards a low-emission

built environment by promoting green materials, energy-efficient design, circular economy principles and the use of modern digital technologies.

A dedicated panel examined the challenges facing the adoption of environmentally friendly materials, including the need to update technical specifications and align them with evolving sustainability standards.

The forum also featured a presentation on the Oman Building Code, highlighting its role in guiding sustainable construction.

Participants explored the latest innovations in low-carbon building materials, alongside technical sessions on energy efficiency encompassing digitally driven architectural design, thermal energy storage solutions and air-conditioning technologies tailored for Gulf climatic conditions.

On the second day, attention shifts to implementation efficiency and the circular economy, with panels addressing best practices in project execution, construction recycling solutions and the role of advanced technologies in strengthening infrastructure sustainability. The forum coincides with a period of rapid infrastructure expansion in Oman, as sustainability standards are increasingly integrated into national development plans.

An accompanying exhibition showcases low-emission construction materials, recycling technologies and circular economy initiatives, underscoring the growing momentum behind green building across the Sultanate of Oman. — ONA

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INDIAN male, 10+ years GCC experience in Catering, Accommodation, Building Supervision, Admin, Sales & Rent-a-Car. Valid Oman D/L. Ready to join immediately. Contact: 92275471.

INDIAN male, international MBA graduate from Australia, valid Omani D/L, seeking job opportunities, presently in Oman. contact 77424205 Email: aj.internationalrelations@gmail.com

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ART/LIFE



FLORAL TRIUMPH

OMAN SHINES ON THE GLOBAL FLORAL STAGE



Devyani Sampat during the fashion show at the World Floral Summit in Shenzhen

The Sultanate of Oman made a stunning impression at the inaugural World Floral Summit, held from November 24–27 at the Art Design Centre in Shenzhen, southern China’s Guangdong Province.

Representing her country with pride, Devyani Sampat showcased Omani artistry to an international audience, taking part in the summit organised by the World Floral Culture Designers Association.

Nearly 200 top floral designers from over 20 countries, including Hong Kong, China, South Korea, Japan, Singapore, Malaysia, Pakistan, India and Hungary, participated in this global celebration of floral art and culture.

The summit featured live demonstrations by champion designers, an international forum discussing industry trends, certified competitions, educational workshops, and exhibitions, including master floral art displays, unique body floral art performances and a vibrant catwalk show.

For the International Floral Masters live demonstrations, Devyani created a striking 6-foot by 3-foot floral installation titled ‘Sunshine Oman’. Using locally sourced materials from Oman, such as Dead Sea pods, coconut leaves, areca pan carvings, and shells, she highlighted the country’s natural beauty.

Under the mentorship of a Hungarian design master, Devyani’s work earned high praise from the organisers.

She also participated in a floral fashion show, wearing a pink dress complemented with headgear and a fresh chrysanthemum flower umbrella, blending creativity and tradition on the ramp.

Devyani’s contribution was recognised with a certificate signed by Sylvia Yim, International Chairman of the World Floral Summit, acknowledging her role in this landmark international event.

A devoted practitioner of Ikebana — the refined Japanese art of flower arrangement — Devyani has been part of Muscat’s artistic circles for over five decades.

For more than 20 years, she has translated emotion and inspiration into floral compositions that go beyond mere bouquets, creating meaningful expressions of life, rhythm and culture.

QUICK FEATURES



FASHION

Models pose for backstage photos before the final show of the Dakar Fashion Week, which takes place aboard pirogues, in Ngor Bay, Senegal. — **AFP**



SCIENCE

Nobel Prize in Chemistry 2025 laureate US-Jordanian chemist Omar M Yaghi poses with the Nobel Chair at the Nobel Museum in Stockholm. — **AFP**



TOURISM

Tourists crowd the historic Charles bridge in Prague every day at dusk during Advent by the 37 historic gas lamps on the medieval Charles Bridge. — **AFP**

INSTA PICKS



Fruity fare



Fight for food

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GAME AWARDS BUZZ IS ‘CHERRY ON TOP’ FOR ‘CLAIR OBSCUR’ MAKER



Indie hit “Clair Obscur: Expedition 33” is favourite for Game of the Year at next week’s Game Awards — the video gaming industry’s equivalent of the Oscars — marking the “cherry on top” of a blockbuster year for chief developer Guillaume Broche.

The co-founder of studio Sandfall Interactive in the southern French city Montpellier has been on an “emotional rollercoaster” thanks to the role-playing game’s reception.

AFP caught up with the 33-year-old days before the Los Angeles award ceremony where “Clair Obscur” has been nominated in 12 categories — an industry record.

How did you feel when you learned about your record number of nominations at the Game Awards?

In the moment we were happy, but we don’t put too much weight on it. Of course it’s gratifying to feel supported both by players and by industry. What’s really rewarding are all the messages of support that we’ve received. It’s so far beyond anything we hoped for. The Game Awards are kind of the

cherry on top.

Why do you think the game was so successful?

People found something unique and original in what we were offering and felt like they were playing a game that spoke directly to them, not necessarily a product made to please them. The story, art direction and game system combine to give it a truly unique personality that a lot of people enjoyed.

It’s also a strong case of survivorship bias. There are a lot of backstories like ours around the world that don’t necessarily lead to success. We’ve been very lucky to make it, but there’s always risk involved.

You said there would be more content released for ‘Clair Obscur’. When can we expect to see it and are you working on a sequel?

It will come out when we’re ready. As for the next game, we’ve made a bit of a start but it’s still very early. We’re not going to get any bigger, though. Our game worked because it was sincere and authentic; and also because it was made by a small team.

There’s no reason for us to change. — AFP



This Friday, QIRTAAS invites artists using paper as their medium — through drawing, writing, music, or performance — to showcase their work and freely express themselves

MUSCAT’S NEW NIGHT OF ART & EXPRESSION



HIBBA AL KINDI

A vibrant new creative experience is coming to Muscat on Friday December 12, as Studio 22 launches QIRTAAS, an event inviting artists of all kinds to showcase their work and express themselves.

Held at Al Mouj Golf from 6 pm — 11 pm, the debut edition aims to unite creatives in a welcoming, communal setting.

Speaking to Observer, Studio 22’s CEO and Co-Founder Fatma Mirza explained:

“QIRTAAS, which means paper in Arabic, is an



event for people who use paper as a medium for art in any form — songs, comedy, drawing, plays, poetry and more”.

She added that the event is rooted in inclusivity. “Our goal is to give artists a space where they feel welcome, whether they

are newcomers, seasoned performers, or simply seeking a place to be heard”. The organisers highlighted their deep connection to Oman’s artist community as inspiration.

“We are a team of artists and understand the challenges creatives face in Oman. Every event we create is for our community. With QIRTAAS, we look forward to welcoming all written and paper art artists to share their hearts freely”.

Attendees can expect a night filled with emotion and authenticity.

“You’ll see performers be vulnerable, true to themselves and experience

art in fresh ways. There will be incredible voices, laughter and unmatched vibes. The open grass-field venue allows everyone to sit comfortably, enjoy good drinks or food and simply soak in the show”.

The organisers emphasise that QIRTAAS provides “a safe and cosy space where anyone can share visual or written art, fostering belonging and community”.

Studio 22, made up of artists and art enthusiasts, seeks to build a sustainable creative hub, hosting regular events and initiatives to nurture community growth, connection and opportunities for artists.

FEATURES



ROHM DAZZLES WITH ASTANA OPERA 'S ' COPPELIA '

Astana Opera’s Ballet Company and Orchestra Kazakhstan captivated audiences at the Royal Opera House Muscat with a dazzling performance of Delibes’ Coppélia, featuring virtuosic dancing, rich orchestral music and brilliant comedic flair

GEORGINA BENISON

The grand doors of the Royal Opera House Muscat opened at the weekend for a magnificent production of Delibes’ ballet, ‘Coppélia’. ‘Astana Opera’ Ballet Company and Orchestra Kazakhstan performed their 2019 production of French choreographer Roland Petit’s 1970 re-imagining of this Ballet Comique – and highly amusing it was too! It featured a 64-strong orchestra in the pit, 30 Corps de Ballet, three lead characters and started bang on time, with no latecomers admitted.

The young accomplished Ruslan Baimurzin conducted Léo Delibes’ lush, romantic 1870 score, so full of famous and memorable tunes. The Overture opened with a nostalgic pre-recorded barrel organ playing one of Delibes’ iconic waltzes.

The white half-curtain withdrew to reveal an imposing, stark grey facade – a barracks – in a 19th century French town square. Two loafing cleaners introduced Franz, performed by Principal Dancer since 2011, Bakhtiyar Adhamzhan.

Franz is a flirt who cheats on his girlfriend Swanilda and has a crush on a mysterious woman (Coppélia), who sits motionless on her balcony dressed in a sparkly black dress, hiding behind her fan. A magical moment occurred as dancers appeared in the lighted windows of the austere stone building: six women in traditional white tutus and men in pale pink and grey costumes, looking for the entire world like the French Gendarmerie!

Enter Dr Coppelius, an elegant and sophisticated inventor-cum-magician. He loves Swanilda obsessively and created a life-size doll that looks exactly like her. Principal Dancer, Rustem Seitbekov, dandy and youthful in a brown dress-coat, played this complicated role hilariously with comic gesture as caricature.

A mimic sequence led to the entrance of the ‘Corps de Ballet’ women in 19th century dresses with white faces. Their toy-ish partners parodied their movements in a blue-grey wash of colour in a perfectly synchronised, rousing Mazurka, enhanced by strong and powerful brass and percussion.

Swanilda and Franz have their first ‘Pas de deux’, a comical conversation; she wiggling ‘twist’ hips in a 1960s parody, he still transfixed



Photos by Khalid Al Busaidi



by Coppélia on her neon pedestal. Her six girlfriends imitate her moves, shaking their hips and shoulders with enough allure to make Roland Petit proud, while the men provided comedic backup. Adhamzhan showed his agility in his response by launching into stunning air-spins, impressive leaps and clean landings.

Twelve soldiers dance a slow Czardas pastiche, the women join them – with Franz at the centre – spinning and performing breathtaking pirouettes until the company exit with exaggerated gesture.

Act 2 began with another well-known waltz-overture as a golden half-curtain opened to the brown interior of Coppélius’ house. Swanilda appears with her six friends. They play and dance like dolls, with wooden, stylised movements in, “Jeux avec les automates”. A curtain reveals an illuminated, animated cupboard full of mechanical doll parts (original set designer, Ezio Frigerio). Coppélius dances with his beloved doll in pure bliss as if she were real. The dance moves are hilarious, verging on the burlesque and the final spin brought rapturous applause for Seitbekov.

The Act ends on a poignant note: to prove her deception, Swanilda brings out the naked rag-doll before escaping with Franz. Coppélius is devastated as he realises he has been tricked.

Act 3 opened with a reprise of the pre-recorded barrel organ circus waltz as they prepare for the Wedding-Finale. The Corps de Ballet performed humorous moves in sheer buffoonery, imitating the style of the Music Hall, the Can-Can of the Moulin Rouge and Cossack-style Mazurka. Central to this preamble was a tour de force from Adhamzhan. He stunned the audience with his gymnastic prowess in gravity-defying leaps, heel-clicks in mid-air, double air spins and lengthy pirouettes. In the final ‘Grand Pas de Deux’, his virtuoso technique was unquestioned, tossing Swanilda into the air twice, spinning her sideways and catching her with ease. Adepkhan’s wedding solo was dazzling with perfection, performing lengthy pirouettes to the utter amazement and awe of the audience.

There is a bitter-sweet ending to the ballet, contrasting the gaiety of the music and wedding confetti for the happy young couple with Coppélius’ heart-breaking grief, left alone on the empty stage with his beloved Coppélia broken into pieces.

