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PAGES 20 | BAISAS 210

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INBRIEF

HM CONGRATULATES JAPANESE PREMIER

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of congratulations to Sanae Takaichi, Prime Minister of Japan, on winning the elections. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his heartfelt congratulations and best wishes of success to the Prime Minister in leading her country's government and people towards further progress. His Majesty also wished the partnership and cooperation relations between Oman and Japan further prosperity.

IRONMAN OMAN 70.3 FROM FEB 13 TO 14



The Sultanate of Oman is all set to host the Middle East Championship 'Experience Oman — Ironman 70.3 Muscat' from February 13 to 14. The event seeks to highlight Oman as a major adventure destination and a leading hub for sports tourism in the region. The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism is organising the championship in cooperation with the Middle East International Events Foundation. The event forms part of the Ironman 70.3 World Series of races under the banner of IRONMAN Group, being one of the most prominent triathlon races in the region. It offers qualifiers an opportunity to compete in the 70.3 World Championships.

OMAN, RUSSIA REVIEW BILATERAL COOPERATION

Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, had a phone call with Sergey Lavrov, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. During the call, the two ministers reviewed the bilateral relations between the two countries and means of enhancing them. They also exchanged views on several regional and international issues. Both ministers affirmed the importance of supporting pathways of dialogue and diplomacy in a bid to bolster security and stability.

Dialogue, a firm national approach to share ideas

Together Forward forum concludes with focus on growth and jobs

AHMED AL KAABI AND IDRIS AL BALUSHI MUSCAT, FEB 9

HH SAYYID THEYAZIN BIN HAITHAM AL SAID, Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs, affirmed that the open dialogue session comes within the framework of an approach based on transparency and accountability, reflecting a firm belief in dialogue as a well-established national path for exchanging views and ideas and listening to diverse perspectives in a way that supports the nation's development journey. In a special dialogue session of the 'Together Forward' forum, HH Sayyid Theyazin stated: "We meet in an open space of transparency and responsibility, stemming from a belief in the importance of dialogue as a firm national approach to listen, converse, and share visions and ideas." He said, "In previous editions of the forum, we have consistently held dialogue sessions to listen to various proposals presented by participants. With our assignment in the recent ministerial restructure to oversee the economic portfolio, we affirm that this event will continue as an open platform for exchanging views, visions and ideas on issues



HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs, said that the economic system is built on institutional integration.

that concern you." He added, "Your insights are important, and your experiences and aspirations constitute real inputs for the continuous development of policies and procedures. With you and through you, we progress." HH Sayyid Theyazin pointed out that among the key tasks of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs is the general supervision of public policies and strategies for economic development in cooperation with the Ministry of Economy, other ministries and relevant bodies, and ensuring policy alignment and unified efforts among all related parties to achieve national goals. He noted that the economic work system is based on the principle of institutional integration, where policies are formulated based on precise scientific analyses and implemented within a government framework characterised by harmony and effectiveness. HH Sayyid Theyazin further pointed out that the economic system is built on institutional integration, with policies developed on scientific foundations and precise analyses, and implemented within a coordinated and effective government framework, positively reflected in improved performance and faster delivery. TURN TO P2

Iran will dilute enriched uranium if sanctions lifted

TEHRAN: Iran could agree to dilute its most highly enriched uranium in exchange for all financial sanctions being lifted, its atomic chief said on Monday, one of the most direct indications so far of its position at talks with Washington. US and Iranian diplomats held talks in the Sultanate of Oman last week in an effort to revive diplomacy, after US President Donald Trump positioned a naval flotilla in the region, raising fears of new military action. Washington has demanded Iran relinquish its stockpile - estimated last year by the UN nuclear agency at more than 440 kg - of uranium enriched to up to 60 per cent fissile purity, a small step away from the 90 per cent that is considered weapons grade. The head of Iran's Atomic Energy Organization, Mohammad Eslami, said on Monday: "The possibility of diluting 60 per cent enriched uranium... depends on whether, in return, all sanctions are lifted or not". Eslami, whose remarks were reported by Iran's ISNA news agency, said however that another proposal, sending Iran's highly enriched uranium abroad to another country, had not been discussed at the talks with US officials. The date and venue of the next round of talks have yet to be announced. Iran's President Masoud Pezeshkian said on Monday that a new round of talks would be "an appropriate opportunity for a fair and balanced resolution of this case," and that a desired outcome could be reached if the US avoids maximalist positions and respects its commitments. Iran would continue to demand the lifting of sanctions and insist on its nuclear rights, including enrichment, he said. Iran and the US held five rounds of talks last year on curbing Tehran's nuclear programme, with the process breaking down mainly due to disputes over uranium enrichment inside Iran. — AFP

Arab states criticise Israel as it expands powers in West Bank

RAMALLAH: Saudi Arabia, Jordan and the United Arab Emirates led regional states on Monday in condemning Israel's move to ease settlement expansion and widen its powers in the West Bank, a step critics said went in the direction of annexing occupied land. Sunday's decisions by Israel's security cabinet will make it easier for Jewish settlers to buy land in the West Bank and give Israeli authorities more power to act in areas supposedly under full Palestinian control, two senior Israeli ministers said. One of them, Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, said in

announcing the decisions that the government would "continue to kill the idea of a Palestinian state". A joint statement by foreign ministers of Middle Eastern and some other Muslim countries, including Egypt and Türkiye, denounced the decisions as a violation of international law that would undermine the vision of a two-state solution as well as stability in the region. They said the moves were meant to entrench Israeli settlement of the West Bank, displacing Palestinians and imposing unlawful Israeli sovereignty there. Annexing the territory has long been a priority of far-right parties in Netanyahu's



Displaced Palestinians at a tent camp in Gaza City on Monday. — Reuters

coalition. Most nations have long backed the creation of a Palestinian state alongside Israel as the best way to resolve the generations-old conflict and see the West Bank, which Israel has occupied since 1967, as the largest part of that future state. Israeli Defence Minister Israel Katz and Smotrich issued a joint statement explaining the decisions of the five-member security cabinet, which were not published in full. The security cabinet decided to repeal a law dating from Jordan's control of the West Bank before 1967 to make land registries public rather than confidential, and to remove a requirement for a permit

from a civil administration office. They said these moves would make it easier for Jews to purchase land in the West Bank. Hagit Ofra from the Israeli settlement watchdog group Peace Now said the decision was barred by international law and represented a step towards annexation of the West Bank. "The decision to allow every Israeli the right to buy land in the West Bank without government approval, without inspection, is also another way of saying it's normal life. It's not occupied territories, it's like part of Israel," she said. SEE ALSO P6

‘TOGETHER FORWARD’ FORUM FOCUSES ON ENHANCING SERVICES

AHMED AL KAABI AND
IDRIS AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, FEB 9

THE ‘Together Forward’ forum concluded its activities on Monday at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre, following a programme that featured dialogue sessions addressing the enhancement of government services and the strengthening of productivity and competitiveness, empowering freelancing and entrepreneurship to build a productive national economy and a sustainable labour market.

The first session of the second day of the ‘Together Forward’ forum focused on enhancing government services and the impact of digital transformation on improving efficiency, strengthening competitiveness, and achieving beneficiary satisfaction. The session brought together several ministers and senior officials from sectors including communications, energy, water and investment.

Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, stated that the directives of His Majesty the Sultan emphasise integration among government entities, greater transparency and faster performance, supported by clear measurement and empowerment tools at both individual and institutional levels.

He explained that digital government indicators show continuous improvement in beneficiary satisfaction, with overall satisfaction at around 80 per cent. The use of digital services has increased by 400 per cent since 2022, while growth in 2025 alone exceeded 80 per cent. He added that approximately 1,540 government employees are working within digital transformation teams across various entities, operating under implementation plans that are continuously monitored and evaluated.

Meanwhile, Dr Mansour bin Talib al Hinai, Chairman of the Authority for Public Services Regulation (APSR) and Head of the Basic Services Sector, reviewed the scale of investments in the sectors regulated by the authority, including electricity, water, wastewater, gas transmission and solid waste.

He noted that investments in electricity generation amount to approximately RO 3 billion, with increasing efforts to diversify energy sources. Recently, two wind power plants and one solar power plant were awarded, alongside new gas-fired plants, with plans also underway to introduce electricity generation using hydrogen. Investments in electricity transmission and distribution networks have reached nearly RO 1.5 billion to ensure delivery capacity to end consumers.

In the water sector, desalination and production investments total around RO 350 million, while network investments are close to RO 1.5 billion, in addition to about RO 300 million for wastewater projects. Gas transmission investments stand



The first session of the second day of the ‘Together Forward’ forum focused on enhancing government services and the impact of digital transformation on improving efficiency, strengthening competitiveness, and achieving beneficiary satisfaction.

at around RO 200 million, bringing total investments across these sectors to between RO 6 and RO 7 billion.

He emphasised that these projects aim to improve service quality, enhance beneficiary satisfaction, support economic expansion, improve energy efficiency and reduce the carbon footprint in line with Net-Zero targets by 2050.

For his part, Dr Ali bin Amer al Shaithani, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology for Communications and Information Technology, said that the government’s digital transformation programme has achieved significant legislative, regulatory and technical milestones over the past five years. These include updating the Electronic Transactions Law, issuing the National Records Law, adopting the Digital Transformation Regulation, and implementing policies related to cloud computing and the unification of government platforms.

He added that the number of digital transformation projects has reached around 1,600 across 57 government entities, with nearly 75 per cent completed, overseen by specialised teams comprising approximately 1,500 employees. Electronic transactions increased by 77 per cent, while data exchange

through the government integration platform rose by 400 per cent. The number of data-providing entities grew from 30 in 2021 to 50 in 2025, and beneficiary entities increased from 60 to 80. Around 300 API connections link government institutions, and 217 digital service platforms have been launched over four years.

ECONOMIC DIVERSIFICATION

In the exports support segment, Ibtisam bint Ahmed al Farooji, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion for Investment Promotion, stated that Omani exports represent a key pillar of economic diversification. She noted that nearly 200 companies export consistently, with small and medium enterprises playing a growing role.

She added that the value of non-oil exports recorded positive growth exceeding half a billion Omani rials between 2020 and 2025, highlighting the importance of digital tools to ensure continuous promotion amid global challenges. She also highlighted the “Oman Exports” platform, which provides market data and export opportunities, along with a system for tracking challenges through a dedicated contact centre. The AI-powered virtual assistant “Nebras” has

handled around 2,000 inquiries since the platform’s launch. The platform also includes virtual networking rooms, with 451 companies registered from inside and outside Oman. It has already facilitated the completion of two deals, while nine additional deals are currently under negotiation with partners in several countries.

The second dialogue session focused on freelance work and entrepreneurship as key drivers of a productive national economy and a sustainable labour market. Discussions highlighted entrepreneurship as a central pillar of economic diversification and job creation. Halima bint Rashid al Zari, Chairperson of the Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development (ASMED), emphasised that entrepreneurship is now a core component of the national economy. She outlined the Authority’s support for SMEs through financing, training, marketing, exhibitions and franchising programmes, noting that home-based businesses and freelance work serve as important entry points for economic participation and social stability.

Al Zari also addressed the Entrepreneurship Card, stressing that while it provides incentives to entrepreneurs, it is subject to ongoing review to prevent misuse and ensure fair competition, with coordination across government entities to regulate the market effectively. Much of the discussion centred on the role of entrepreneurship as a long-term driver of economic diversification and employment creation. She stressed that entrepreneurship is no longer a marginal activity but a core pillar of the national economy.

Al Zari highlighted the range of support mechanisms available to entrepreneurs, including financing, marketing, training, local and international exhibitions, and franchising programmes implemented in partnership with relevant institutions. She noted that home-based businesses and freelance activities have become important entry points to economic participation.

FORUM MOST PROMINENT COMMUNICATION PLATFORM



DR ABDULLAH
BIN NASSER AL
HARRASI

Dr Abdullah bin Nasser al Harrasi, Minister of Information, said in an exclusive statement to Oman Observer that the ‘Together

Forward’ forum is among the most prominent communication platforms that bring the government and society together. He noted that the forum embodies an open dialogue approach based on transparency and partnership in addressing national issues, fostering a culture of direct engagement and strengthening trust in government action.

He explained that the forum has addressed a range of vital topics, foremost among them economic priorities and the level of services provided to the community, alongside efforts to empower freelance work and entrepreneurship and expand opportunities in the labour market.

He added that the sessions featured direct discussions between officials and members of the public, reflecting a shared awareness of the importance of exchanging views, listening to feedback and proposals, and transforming them into practical inputs to support policy development.

Dr Abdullah al Harrasi stressed that these dialogues serve as an important channel for bringing perspectives closer together and providing decision-makers with realistic insights from the field.

This, he said, contributes to enhancing government performance efficiency and improving services in line with citizens’ aspirations. He added that the continuation of such meetings reflects the state’s commitment to reinforcing community partnership as a pillar of progress.



SAYYID THEYAZIN HONOURS WINNING TEAMS IN ‘ IDEAS MAKERS – HAMAT ’ PROGRAMME

HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs, honoured the winning teams of the ‘Ideas Makers - Hamat’ programme, an initiative of the Oman Investment Authority. The ceremony took place during the ‘Together Forward’ forum. — ONA



Tajawob transforms 156,000 citizen requests

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, FEB 9

Since its launch in February 2025, the National Platform for Suggestions, Complaints and Reports (Tajawob) has continued to enhance community participation in shaping government services through a unified national digital channel.

The platform strengthens institutional communication with beneficiaries and supports the improvement of government performance.

Cumulative data shows that Tajawob has recorded over 1.7 million visits and 629,000 active users.

As of January 2026, more than 156,000 requests have been submitted, including over 63,000 complaints, around 53,000 reports, more than 12,000 suggestions and over 27,000 inquiries.

In September 2025, the platform launched a mobile application to broaden access for all segments of society.

The app has achieved more than 40,000 downloads and a rating of 4.4 out of 5, reflecting strong public engagement.

Through a unified operational framework, the platform enables government institutions to systematically address suggestions, complaints, reports and inquiries, turning citizen input into practical improvements.

Currently, 54 government institutions actively process requests using clear methodologies, resulting in enhanced response efficiency and service quality.

The platform’s impact is evident across multiple sectors. The Ministry of Education, for instance, introduced student absence notifications on the

parent application and issued a health guide for schools.

Muscat Municipality implemented measures to regulate traffic flow near Al Hail Street exit in Al Seeb, reducing congestion.

The National Centre for Statistics and Information developed an instant electronic verification service for survey permits, improving transparency and data access.

Other examples include the Ministry of Information classifying children’s educational content by age on the Ain platform, the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology launching the Oman Maritime Portal, and upgrading the Saara border crossing in Al Buraimi Governorate for better traffic management.

The Royal Oman Police also introduced updates in its

mobile app to facilitate access to official documents and family sponsorship information.

These success stories are documented on a dedicated section of the Tajawob website, highlighting the platform’s commitment to citizen engagement and responsive governance.

Looking ahead, the platform plans to introduce new features, including voice recording for broader accessibility and reclassification of requests, which will streamline processing and enhance efficiency. Tajawob’s continuous development of technical, operational and communication systems underscores its role in strengthening community engagement.

This is in addition to improving public service quality, ultimately increasing beneficiary satisfaction across Oman.

DIALOGUE, A FIRM NATIONAL APPROACH TO SHARE IDEAS

FROM PAGE 1

To enhance direct engagement, he said that several heads of government units are participating in the session to listen to interventions and respond, emphasising that views, experiences, and aspirations represent valuable inputs for the continuous development of policies and procedures.

He reaffirmed that progress is achieved through partnership with society, inviting participants to begin raising their questions and contributions.

These remarks were made during the launch of the open dialogue session as part of the ‘Together Forward’ forum.

DIALOGUE SESSION

Interventions during the open dialogue session covered a range of economic and social issues, with participants calling for greater support for small and medium enterprises and the empowerment of local projects, particularly in the governorates.

They also emphasised the need to strengthen complementary roles between funding entities and supervising bodies to ensure the sustainability of these initiatives.

Under the social protection theme, proposals were discussed to reduce the years of service required for women’s retirement.

Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals, explained the financial implications of early retirement, noting that the cost could reach approximately RO 60,000 per case when retirement occurs five years early.

The discussion also addressed the eligibility mechanism for the ‘Senior Citizens Benefit’, with more than 270,000 beneficiaries, and clarified that setting the income ceiling at RO 1,250 aims to redirect support to those most in need, alongside increasing the child benefit from RO 10 to RO 20.

DIGITAL PLATFORM

For his part, Dr Mahad bin Said Baowain, Minister of Labour, highlighted the launch of a national talents and skills system that allows citizens to register and update their competencies through an integrated digital platform, helping align qualifications with job opportunities.

He reaffirmed the government’s continued efforts to expand the economy and create employment, noting that more than 210,000 job-seekers have entered the labour market over the past five years, averaging over 40,000 jobs annually, with the current Five-Year Plan raising the target to 60,000 opportunities per year.

MINERAL EXPORTS

On the investment front, interventions highlighted the readiness of economic zones and the importance of maximising the use of national resources.

Authorities also announced plans to regulate mineral exports, including banning the export of chrome ore with a concentration below 36 per cent starting mid-year, while noting that foreign direct investment has grown by more than 71 per cent compared to 2021, reaching approximately RO 31 billion.

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SHORTTAKES

620 GRADUATE IN 41ST COHORT CEREMONY



MOHAMED AL BATTASHI
MUSCAT, FEB 9

Under the auspices of Eng Odai bin Hilal al Maawali, Chairman of the Medical City for Military and Security Services, Oman Health Sciences College celebrated the graduation of 620 students from its 41st cohort on Sunday at Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre.

The ceremony brought together senior officials, academic leaders, families and guests to mark the achievement of graduates from bachelor’s and diploma programmes in nursing, pharmacy, medical laboratory sciences, medical imaging, physiotherapy and health information management. With this cohort, the college’s total number of graduates has reached nearly 22,000, underscoring its growing contribution to Oman’s national healthcare system. Proceedings opened with recitation from the Holy Quran, followed by a formal presentation highlighting the importance of knowledge in shaping society.

Dr Fahad bin Mahmoud al Zadjali, Dean of Oman Health Sciences College, said in his address that 2025 had been a milestone year for the institution, marked by strong academic achievements, expanded partnerships at local, regional and international levels, and the launch of new programmes aligned with labour-market needs and the country’s health transformation plans. He noted that the establishment of the college in 2018 represented a major step forward in university-level health education, building on a journey that began in 1959 with Oman’s first nursing training programme.

Today, he added, the college stands as a national centre for preparing qualified professionals guided by the principle of ‘people first’. Graduates then took the Health Professions Oath, pledging to uphold ethical standards, protect human dignity and deliver care with responsibility and compassion. Speaking on behalf of the graduating class, Saif bin Khalifa al Yaqubi expressed pride in the achievement and gratitude to parents, faculty and administrators for their constant support, affirming the graduates’ commitment to serving the nation across all health fields.

Book on Oman’s military heritage released

MUSCAT: Acting in cooperation with the National Museum, Oman Historical Association launched a new book titled “Oman’s History and Military Heritage”, authored by Falih bin Saif al Maamari.

The ceremony was held under the auspices of Eng Ibrahim bin Said al Kharousi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism for Heritage.

The book serves as a comprehensive scholarly study of Oman’s history and its military



The book serves as a comprehensive scholarly study of Oman’s history and its military heritage. — ONA

heritage, spanning a broad range of time, right from the 4th millennium BC to the Renewed Renaissance Era led by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik.

The book lays emphasis on the study of wars and highlights the development of weapons, armies, fortifications and military tactics and strategies used throughout the ages.

The book quotes a variety of sources, including discourse on archaeological discoveries,

written evidence, rock inscriptions, manuscripts and historical documents, in addition to references in Omani, Arab and foreign publications.

The book launch reflects the efforts undertaken by Oman Historical Association and the National Museum to document Oman’s national history, preserve its cultural memory and raise public awareness about the importance of military heritage as a pillar of Omani identity. — ONA

Oman hosts Oman-Cebu Investment Forum

THE SULTANATE OF OMAN hosted the Oman-Cebu Investment Forum on Monday, with the participation of officials and business sector representatives from both Oman and the Republic of the Philippines. The forum was held as part of ongoing efforts to strengthen economic and investment relations between the two nations. The forum was inaugurated under the auspices of Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, in the presence of Theresa Lazaro, Secretary of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of the Philippines, and in cooperation with the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

In his opening remarks, the Foreign Minister emphasised that convening the second edition of the forum reflects the shared commitment of both countries to build upon the outcomes of the inaugural forum held in Cebu City last year. He noted that the forum serves as an effective platform for expanding cooperation in several



The forum serves as an effective platform for expanding cooperation in several vital sectors. — ONA

vital sectors, including trade, investment, tourism, logistics, renewable energy and education, as well as innovation and modern technologies.

Furthermore, he praised the positive role undertaken by the Philippine community in the Sultanate of Oman, estimated at approximately 50,000 people, and their contributions to various sectors, affirming Oman’s aspiration to enhance partnerships and attract professional competencies for mutual benefit. For her part, Theresa Lazaro, Secretary of

Foreign Affairs of the Republic of the Philippines, underscored the significance of the long-standing bilateral relations between the two countries.

She lauded the vital role of the Philippine community in Oman as a fundamental pillar for fostering trust and joint cooperation. She expressed her country’s desire to elevate the economic partnership with the Sultanate of Oman in the fields of investment, trade, tourism, renewable energy and the maritime economy.

She confirmed the Philippines’

readiness to provide an attractive investment environment and invited Omani companies to capitalise on promising opportunities in the Philippines, particularly in light of its current chairmanship of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Eng Hamoud bin Salim al Saadi, Second Vice-Chairman of the Board of Directors of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, explained that the forum reflects the growing development of economic relations between the Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of the Philippines. He emphasised the private sector’s dedication in both countries to enhancing dialogue and building sustainable partnerships that serve common interests.

The forum concluded with a reaffirmation of the commitment to continue strengthening economic and investment cooperation, supporting the role of the private sector, and building on the forum’s outcomes to achieve the mutual interests of the two friendly nations. — ONA

Recall

Commodity's Picture
Recall Date: 10/02/2026

Commodity's
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Brand of Commodity	Year of Production	Number of Affected Commodities
Suzuki Grand Vitara YKL / YLL 1.5L Hatchback	2025-2024	79

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OMAN MOURNS LOSS OF PLASTIC SURGERY PIONEER

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, FEB 9

The Sultanate of Oman and its medical community are mourning the passing of Dr C Thomas, Oman’s first plastic surgeon, whose pioneering work shaped the nation’s healthcare sector for over five decades. He was 84. Dr Thomas had been undergoing treatment for age-related medical issues after falling ill recently at his Muscat home.

Dr Mizun Tufail Rahman, who studied under him, recalled, “He was a professor par excellence and a pioneer in cleft lip and palate repair. His lessons left a lasting impact on all his students.”

Born in Kaipattoor, Konni, Pathanamthitta, Kerala, Dr Thomas earned a BSc from Changanassery SB College and an MBBS from Thiruvananthapuram Medical College, followed by postgraduate training in surgery. He arrived in Oman in 1971, beginning his career at the American Hospital before pursuing advanced studies at Oxford University in the UK.

Invited back to Oman by the then Health Minister, Dr Thomas made lasting contributions to Oman’s medical landscape. In recognition of his service, the late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos



Public viewing of Dr Thomas at Ruwi Orthodox Church on Tuesday.

awarded him the Order of Oman and granted him Omani citizenship in 1991, making him the first Indian to receive the honour voluntarily.

Dr Rohil Raghavan, CEO of the former Atlas and Burjeel Hospitals, said, “Dr Thomas was an extraordinary plastic surgeon. There was never any doubt about his surgical outcomes, and I have never met a single patient of his with a complaint. He was jovial, practical and a true gentleman — a life well lived.”

Dr Thomas established Oman’s first plastic surgery department, later accredited by the University of Edinburgh, which became a leading centre in the Middle East under his leadership. He also worked briefly in the United States, Italy, Japan, and Australia before returning to Oman to join Khoula Hospital.

He retired as Director over a decade ago but continued to serve as a visiting consultant at Aster Hospital.

Dr Dilip Kumar Singvi, Internal Medicine Specialist at Burjeel Hospital, said, “He leaves a huge vacuum in Oman’s medical fraternity. May he rest in peace.”

Dr Thomas had also served as the Board President and Board Member of Indian Schools in Oman and has received numerous awards and honours. He was a founding member of the Indian Orthodox Church in Oman and had published an autobiography titled ‘Legacy of a Plastic Surgeon’, which highlights his life’s contributions to the field of medical care. This book is a compilation of his experiences in the medical service he provided in Kerala and Muscat.

He is survived by wife Shantha Thomas, and sons Dr Tenni John Thomas, Dr Teji Mathew Thomas in the US. After completing the formalities, the body will be taken to his native Kaipattu following a public viewing at the Orthodox church in Ruwi from 5 pm to 7 pm on Tuesday. The funeral will be held on February 13, Friday in his hometown, family members informed.

SHORT TAKES



28 women benefited from the wilayats of Al Batinah South.

WOMEN RECEIVE PRODUCTION EQUIPMENT

AL RUSTAQ: The Directorate-General of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources in Al Batinah South Governorate recently implemented a project to provide rural working people with advanced equipment to raise their output from converting industries. The project benefited 28 women from the wilayats of the governorate.

The project aims to empower rural women economically, improve their living standards (by introducing modern technologies into production operations), utilise the surplus of production from agriculture and livestock resources to provide added local value and ensure the sustainability of such resources throughout the year.

The project included the distribution of a complete set of modern equipment, such as spice and coffee grinding machines, natural oil pressing machines, electric honey extractors, vacuum and date packaging machines, egg incubators, cow milking machines, butter sorting devices and nut butter extraction machines.

The equipment and machines are envisaged to contribute to raising the efficiency of production, improving the quality of final products and cutting down operating costs. The project is also expected to extend the shelf life of products through modern packaging technologies. — ONA

17 SCHOOLS TAKE PART IN FOURTH TALENT FORUM



The forum featured a collection of student talents and distinguished creative models.

AL RUSTAQ: The General Directorate of Education in the Al Batinah South Governorate organised the Fourth Talent Forum for female students on Monday, with the participation of 17 schools from girls' schools across the governorate's wilayats.

The forum featured a collection of student talents and distinguished creative models in various fields.

The forum aimed to nurture outstanding student talents and showcase their achievements, contributing to boosting self-confidence and developing students' creative abilities.

It also sought to motivate them towards creativity, innovation, and active participation, enhance cooperation and the exchange of expertise and experiences among participants, and activate community partnership to support student innovations. — ONA

NDC ORGANISES SEMINAR ON STRATEGIC ISSUES

MUSCAT: The National Defence College (NDC) at the Academy for Strategic and Defence Studies commenced on Monday its annual strategic issues seminar titled 'Youth and National Decision-Making: From Empowerment to Impact.'

The event opened under the auspices of Rear Admiral Saif bin Nasser al Rahbi, Commander of the Royal Navy of Oman (RNO).

A number of government entities are participating in the seminar as part of the curriculum for the college's thirteenth course, with activities scheduled to continue until February 12. The seminar covers several key themes, most notably participation and decision-



Rear Admiral Saif bin Nasser al Rahbi, RNO Chief, led the seminar.

making, citizenship and belonging, creativity and innovation, and sustainable digital empowerment.

The seminar aims to strengthen the pivotal role of youth in formulating national initiatives and integrating their visions and

aspirations into the national decision-making process. It also seeks to deepen the values of belonging and active citizenship by engaging youth in strategic national issues.

Furthermore, the seminar aims to enhance the sustainability of national decisions and policies by incorporating the voices of the youth into the design of future policies to ensure they meet the aspirations of coming generations.

Additionally, the event focuses on stimulating youthful energies for creativity and innovation and harnessing them to find practical solutions and innovative initiatives.

— ONA

Oman welcomes 3.9m as tourism boosts economy

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, FEB 9

OMAN'S tourism sector continues to demonstrate steady recovery and sustained growth, reinforcing its expanding role in national development.

Recent 2025 estimates indicate that international tourist arrivals have reached approximately 3.9 million, surpassing the 3.5 million recorded in 2019.

The figures reflect renewed global confidence in the Sultanate of Oman as a competitive regional and international destination, underscoring the sector's resilience in overcoming global challenges.

This upward trajectory aligns with the government's strategic drive to enhance tourism's contribution to the national economy.

Through infrastructure development, targeted investment incentives, and diversification of tourism offerings rooted in Oman's rich environmental and cultural heritage, the Sultanate of Oman is steadily positioning tourism as a pillar of economic diversification under Oman Vision 2040.

An official at the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism stated that the growth in international arrivals reflects increasing global confidence in Oman's tourism product.

He emphasised that the progress is the result of coordinated efforts between government entities and the private sector to deliver a high-quality, sustainable tourism experience that prioritises value over volume.

The ministry is currently focused on expanding source markets and promoting cultural, heritage and nature-based tourism segments.

Domestic tourism has also recorded strong momentum. Projections suggest that domestic



Oman's tourism is on the rise, reflecting growing travel trends.

Tourism aligned with Oman Vision 2040 economic diversification goals while strong boost to SMEs, local employment, and regional development was reported.

tourist trips could reach nearly 14 million in 2025, reflecting growing public engagement with local destinations and improved services across the governorates.

Seasonal events, national initiatives and promotional campaigns have played a key role in stimulating internal travel, thereby boosting local economic activity.

The Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry highlighted that domestic tourism has become a central driver for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

Increased tourism flows within governorates have generated both direct and indirect employment opportunities, particularly in accommodation, transportation, hospitality services and traditional crafts.

Strengthening domestic tourism, the Chamber noted, ensures a more balanced distribution of economic benefits and supports grassroots development.

At the investment level, the positive impact is equally evident. Salim bin Nasser al Harthy, a tourism investor in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, explained that rising domestic travel has encouraged local investors to expand into accommodation facilities, restaurants and complementary services.

"Enhanced tourism infrastructure and diversified events have improved occupancy rates and strengthened the economic viability of tourism projects," he said, adding that tourism is increasingly viewed as a stable and sustainable investment avenue.

Beyond visitor numbers, tourism continues to stimulate interconnected sectors, including aviation, land transport, hospitality, food services and cultural industries.

This multiplier effect enhances value creation across the economy and supports ongoing efforts to reduce reliance on traditional revenue streams.

From an economic perspective, Dr Khalid bin Hamad bin Abdullah al Rawahi, an economic analyst, stressed that the next phase must prioritise qualitative growth.

"The challenge is not merely to increase tourist arrivals, but to raise per capita spending, extend average length of stay, and develop competitive, high-value tourism products," he noted.

He added that Oman's strong positioning in sustainable tourism aligns well with global demand trends and Oman's environmental commitments.

Experts agree that maintaining this momentum will require stronger coordination among stakeholders, continued investment in national talent, and sustained improvements in service standards.

Ensuring a safe, seamless and culturally authentic tourism experience will be essential in meeting the expectations of both domestic and international visitors.

With tourism numbers surpassing pre-pandemic benchmarks and domestic travel on the rise, Oman's tourism sector is steadily consolidating its position as a key contributor to economic diversification and local development, strengthening the Sultanate of Oman's standing on the global tourism map.

Volunteers from dental clinic clean up Al Hail beach

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, FEB 9

Staff from Harub Dental Surgery's Al Mawaleh and Al Qurum branches rolled up their sleeves to clean Al Hail North beach on Monday.

The team of 25, including dentists, cleaners, receptionists, nurses and technicians, collected almost a tonne of trash, with 80-90 kg weighed and more unweighed items.

"We are very proud of what we achieved. Every little help makes a difference," said Dr Laila Harub from Harub Dental Surgery.

"This is part of corporate social



The team of 25, including dentists, cleaners, receptionists, nurses and technicians, collected almost a tonne of trash.

responsibility, and we wanted to do something that requires time, effort and real involvement, not just giving money," she added.

The team found mostly plastic bottles, cans, shoes and other harmful items, an experience Dr Laila described as "eye-opening and emotional".

"We hope that 2026 will be a year of awareness, mindfulness and responsibility, not only in a corporate sense, but also as individuals," she added, encouraging other companies to follow suit and help protect the Sultanate of Oman's 1,700 kilometres of coastline.

WORLD

SHORT TAKES



Thailand’s caretaker PM Anutin Charnvirakul arrives for a press conference, in Bangkok. — Reuters

THAILAND’S RULING PARTY READIES FOR COALITION TALKS

BANGKOK: Thailand faced a realignment of conservative politics, with coalition talks expected to start soon after Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul’s party clinched a stronger-than-expected general election victory. With 94% of votes counted, the ruling Bhumjaithai was way ahead of its rivals after Sunday’s vote, securing 193 of the 500 seats in parliament.

“We need a strong government,” Anutin said in a news broadcast, adding that he wanted to form an administration with a strong majority but was waiting for the final results. The result drove stocks up 4% in Southeast Asia’s second-largest economy, to their highest level in over a year.

The left-leaning People’s Party, which led most opinion polls in the run-up to the vote, trailed with 118 seats, marking a setback for a party whose forerunner, Move Forward, won the 2023 election before it was blocked from forming a government. Anutin said the outcome was “a victory for all Thais”. He called the election in December after less than 100 days in office, seeking to ride a wave of nationalism generated by Thailand’s three-week conflict with Cambodia in December, enabling him to consolidate the conservative vote. — Reuters

JAPAN RESTARTS WORLD’S BIGGEST NUCLEAR PLANT

TOKYO: Japan switched on the world’s biggest nuclear power plant again on Monday, its operator said, after an earlier attempt was quickly suspended due to a minor glitch. A problem with a monitoring alarm in January forced the suspension of its first restart since the 2011 Fukushima disaster. The Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant in the Niigata region restarted at 2:00 pm (0500 GMT), the Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO) said in a statement.

The facility had been offline since Japan pulled the plug on nuclear power after a colossal earthquake and tsunami sent three reactors at the Fukushima atomic plant into meltdown. But now Japan is turning to atomic energy to reduce its reliance on fossil fuels, achieve carbon neutrality by 2050 and meet growing energy needs from artificial intelligence.

Conservative Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi, who pulled off a thumping election victory on Sunday, has promoted nuclear power to energise the Asian economic giant. TEPCO initially moved to start one of seven reactors at the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant on January 21 but shut it off the following day after a monitoring system alarm sounded.

The alarm had picked up slight changes to the electrical current in one cable, even though these were still within a range considered safe. TEPCO officials told a news conference last week. The firm has changed the alarm’s settings as the reactor is safe to operate. Commercial operations will commence on or after March 18, after another comprehensive inspection, according to TEPCO officials. Kashiwazaki-Kariwa is the world’s biggest nuclear power plant by potential capacity, although just one reactor of seven was restarted. — AFP

ERITREA REJECTS CLAIMS OF TROOPS INSIDE ETHIOPIAN TERRITORY

ADDIS ABABA: Eritrea on Monday denounced accusations by Ethiopia that Eritrean troops were present inside the country as “false and fabricated”. Relations between the two Horn of Africa countries have long been fraught but in recent months, Addis Ababa has accused Eritrea of supporting insurgents on Ethiopian soil — allegations Asmara denies. Ethiopia demanded that Eritrea “withdraw its troops from Ethiopian territory”.

“The patently false and fabricated

accusations against Eritrea... are astounding in tone and substance, underlying motivation and overarching objective,” said Eritrean Information Minister Yemane Gebremeskel in a statement. “Sadly, it constitutes yet another deplorable act in a pattern and spiral of hostile campaigns against Eritrea for more than two years now,” he said. He added that Eritrea had “no appetite for, or desire to, engage in meaningless acrimony to add fuel and exacerbate the situation”.

Addis Ababa also accused Asmara of collaborating with rebel groups fighting federal forces, particularly in the Amhara region, labelling them not “just provocations but acts of outright aggression”. The two governments cooperated against rebels from Ethiopia’s Tigray region during the 2020-2022 conflict but fell out over the peace accord, from which Eritrea was excluded, and which stipulated the withdrawal of foreign soldiers. — AFP

Israel takes ‘illegal’ West Bank control measures

SAUDI

ARABIA and seven other Muslim-majority countries condemned new Israeli measures to tighten control of the West Bank and pave the way for more settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory. Also, the European Union on Monday condemned new Israeli measures to tighten control of the West Bank and pave the way for more settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory.

“The European Union condemns recent decisions by Israel’s security cabinet to expand Israeli control in the West Bank. This move is another step in the wrong direction,” EU spokesman Anouar El Anouni told journalists. Israel approved the measures, announced by Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich and Defence Minister Israel Katz, on Sunday. They include allowing Israelis to buy West Bank land, a joint statement from the ministers said.

The foreign ministers of Saudi Arabia, Jordan, the UAE, Qatar, Indonesia, Pakistan, Egypt and Türkiye “condemned in the strongest terms the illegal Israeli decisions and measures aimed at imposing unlawful Israeli sovereignty”, a Saudi statement said. They are an attempt at “entrenching settlement activity, and enforcing a new legal and administrative reality in the occupied West Bank, thereby accelerating attempts at its illegal annexation and the displacement of the Palestinian people”, the foreign ministry statement added.

The Israeli measures also envisage transferring authority over building permits for settlements in parts



Palestinian men sit on the rubble as others console each other, in Ramallah. — AFP

They are an attempt at entrenching settlement activity, and enforcing a new legal and administrative reality in the occupied West Bank, thereby accelerating attempts at its illegal annexation and the displacement of the Palestinian people

of Palestinian cities, including Hebron, from the Palestinian Authority’s municipalities to Israel. Smotrich said the move was aimed at “deepening our roots in all regions of the Land of Israel and burying the idea of a Palestinian state”. The Palestinian presidency in Ramallah, which exercises limited control over some discontiguous areas of the West Bank, also condemned the decision, saying it was aimed at “deepening attempts to annex the occupied West Bank”.

The announcement comes days ahead of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s visit to the United States, where he is due to meet President Donald Trump, who has upheld US opposition to Israeli annexation of the West Bank. More than 500,000 Israelis live in settlements and outposts in the West Bank, which are illegal under

international law. Around three million Palestinians live in the territory. Another 200,000 Israelis live in Israeli-annexed east Jerusalem, which the UN says is part of the Palestinian territories.

Meanwhile, in Gaza, Israel’s military said it had killed four Palestinians who attacked its troops as they emerged from a tunnel in southern Gaza, accusing the suspects of a “blatant violation” of the ceasefire. Despite a US-brokered truce entering its second phase last month, violence has continued in the Palestinian territory, with Israel and Hamas trading accusations of ceasefire violations. It said none of its troops had been injured in the attack, which it called a “blatant violation of the ceasefire agreement”.

Hamas said in late November that dozens of its fighters were holed up in southern Gaza’s tunnels, beneath areas controlled by the Israeli military. This was a sticking point in the early days of the ceasefire, with Israel insisting the militants posed a security threat, while Hamas sought safe passage for them.

Since then, many of the fighters have been killed in clashes with Israeli troops during operations targeting tunnels near Rafah, according to the military.

Rafah lies in an area held by Israeli forces following their withdrawal behind a so-called “Yellow Line” under the terms of the US-brokered ceasefire, in effect since October 10. Israeli troops still control more than half of Gaza. The Israeli military has in recent weeks launched waves of strikes on Gaza over what it says are violations of the fragile truce. — AFP

LEBANON’S TRIPOLI BUILDING COLLAPSE KILLS 15



BEIRUT: The death toll from the collapse of residential buildings in the Lebanese city of Tripoli rose to 15 after search and rescue operations ended, Lebanon’s National News Agency said on Monday, citing the civil defence chief. Civil defence director-general Imad Khreiss said rescue teams rescued eight people from the rubble of the collapsed buildings in the northern city’s Bab al Tabbaneh neighbourhood. Officials said that two adjoining buildings had collapsed.

Lebanon’s civil defence rescue

service said the two buildings were home to 22 residents. A number of aging residential buildings have collapsed in Tripoli, Lebanon’s second-largest city, in recent weeks, highlighting deteriorating infrastructure and years of neglect, state media reported, citing municipal officials.

Authorities have begun providing temporary shelter to displaced families, while Lebanon’s Higher Relief Committee is offering housing allowances. — Reuters

CAPSIZE TRAGEDY

53 migrants missing in shipwreck off Libya



The UN migration agency on Monday said 53 people were dead or missing after a boat capsized in the Mediterranean Sea off the Libyan coast. Only two survivors were rescued. “Only two Nigerian women were rescued during a search-and-rescue operation by Libyan authorities,” the IOM said in a statement, adding that one of the survivors said she lost her husband and the other said “she lost her two babies in the tragedy”. — AFP

RESUMING MEMBERSHIP

Sudan returns to east African bloc IGAD



Sudan on Monday announced it was returning to east African bloc IGAD, two years after freezing its membership. “The government of the Republic of Sudan will resume its full activity in the membership” in the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), the foreign ministry said in a statement. The decision to rejoin IGAD follows a meeting in January between the bloc’s executive secretary, Workneh Gebeyehu, and Sudan’s PM Kamil Idris. — AFP

POLITICAL COMPLAINT

Duterte third impeachment case filed



Members of the Philippine clergy filed an impeachment complaint against Sara Duterte, the third to hit the country’s vice-president in just over a week. Monday’s filing — brought by some of those behind the former complaint — accuses Duterte of bilking taxpayers of at least \$10 million while serving as vice-president and as secretary of education. Last week, Philippine members of a left-wing coalition filed separate, similar impeachment complaints. — AFP

SHORT TAKES



SpaceX founder Elon Musk

SPACEX SHIFTS FOCUS FROM MARS TO MOON

WASHINGTON: SpaceX is putting its longstanding focus of sending humans to Mars on the backburner to prioritise establishing a settlement on the Moon, founder Elon Musk said. The South Africa-born billionaire’s space company has found massive success as a Nasa contractor, but critics have for years panned Musk’s Mars colonisation plans as overambitious. The move also puts Musk in alignment with US President Donald Trump’s shift away from sending Americans to Mars.

“For those unaware, SpaceX has already shifted focus to building a self-growing city on the Moon, as we can potentially achieve that in less than 10 years, whereas Mars would take 20+ years,” Musk said in a post on X, the social media platform he bought in 2022. Difficulties in reaching Mars include the fact that “it is only possible to travel to Mars when the planets align every 26 months.”

“We can launch to the Moon every 10 days,” he added. Musk has blown through several previous estimates on when he could feasibly put man on the Red Planet. Americans are currently scheduled to return to the Moon’s surface in mid-2027 on the Artemis 3 mission, but the timeline has been repeatedly pushed back. — AFP

SPANISH TRAIN DRIVERS STRIKE



Spanish train drivers began a three-day strike, demanding greater safety for their profession after two accidents claimed 47 lives last month, leaving thousands of passengers stranded. The back-to-back disasters rocked the transportation sector and raised doubts about the safety of train travel in Spain. Unions called the February 9-11 strike accusing the authorities of ignoring warnings about the safety of infrastructure and failing to invest enough in the network. Under minimum service requirements, 73 per cent of long-distance services and 65 per cent of regional trains are due to run, according to state railway company Renfe. — AFP

WAR CRIMES PROSECUTORS SEEK 45 YEARS’ PRISON FOR KOSOVO EX-PRESIDENT

THE HAGUE: International war crimes prosecutors said on Monday Kosovo’s former president Hashim Thaci controlled ethnic Albanian guerrillas and should be convicted of war crimes and sentenced to 45 years in prison. Thaci and three other ex-Kosovo Liberation Army commanders are charged with persecution, murder, torture and forced disappearances of people during and shortly after the 1998-99 uprising that eventually

brought independence for the Albanian majority region from Serbia.

“The accused committed crimes against their perceived opponents to take control over Kosovo,” prosecutor Kimberly West told the court in The Hague. “This case is about the four accused’s goal to gain and exercise control over all of Kosovo,” West said near the end of a nearly three-year trial at the special Kosovo war crimes court in The Hague.

Thaci, 57, who served as prime minister, foreign minister and president of independent Kosovo between 2008 and 2020, and his co-accused deny all the charges. Lawyers for Thaci, expected to give their closing statements on Wednesday, earlier argued that Thaci had no real authority over the KLA and its military commanders during the uprising and its aftermath and had to defer to local zone commanders. — Reuters

Russian drone attacks hit energy sites in Ukraine

RUSSIAN attacks damaged production sites of Ukraine’s state-run oil and gas company Naftogaz in the Poltava and Sumy regions, the company’s CEO said on Monday. The facilities in the Poltava region came under attack for a second day in a row, Sergii Koretskyi said on Facebook, adding it was the 20th attack on the company’s infrastructure since the start of the year.

Separately, Russian overnight drone attacks across Ukraine killed at least four people, including a mother and her 10-year-old son, and knocked out power for tens of thousands of people, Ukrainian officials said on Monday. The boy and his mother were killed in the attack on a residential area in the town of Bohodukhiv in the eastern Kharkiv region, the regional prosecutor’s office said. It said six people had been hurt in the attack on the region, which has been a frequent target of attacks in the nearly four-year war that started with Russia’s full-scale attack on February 24, 2022.

Ukraine’s Air Force said Russia had launched 11 ballistic missiles and 149 drones against Ukraine overnight. Of these, 116 drones were shot down or neutralised and some missiles were intercepted and did not reach their targets, it said. The attacks on Ukraine have continued despite ongoing US-brokered peace talks with Russia. President Volodymyr Zelensky has said the Trump administration wants Moscow and Kyiv to find a solution on how to end the war before the summer. A “massive” Russian drone attack on the southern port city of Odesa killed one and injured two others, regional governor Oleh Kiper said. Residential infrastructure and a gas pipeline were also damaged, Kiper added on the Telegram messaging app.

A drone attack in the northern Chernihiv region killed a 71-year old man and injured at least four others, its governor, Viacheslav Chaus, said.

“People were asleep,” Chaus said, adding that the attack had destroyed some buildings completely and damaged others. Nine people, including a 13-year-old girl,



A resident walks near a building hit by a Russian drone strike, in Odesa. — Reuters

were also injured in a drone attack in the southeastern Dnipropetrovsk region, its governor, Oleksandr Hanzha, said.

Russia damaged a high-voltage substation near the city of Novovolynsk in the western Volyn region that borders Nato member Poland, local mayor Borys Karpus said, leaving more than 80,000 consumers without power. Critical infrastructure in the city is now running off generators as workers try to restore electricity supplies, he said. Since autumn 2025, Moscow has intensified its attacks on the Ukrainian power grid and other energy infrastructure, leaving millions without power and heating in freezing temperatures. There were also new attacks overnight on railway infrastructure in the Sumy and Chernihiv regions, Ukrainian National Railways said.

Separately, Russia’s Federal Security Service said on Monday that the men suspected of shooting one of the country’s most senior military intelligence officer had confessed that they were carrying out orders from the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU). Ukraine has denied any involvement in Friday’s attempted assassination of Lieutenant General Vladimir Alexeyev, deputy head of Russia’s GRU military intelligence service. Alexeyev has regained consciousness after surgery.

Russia said that the suspected shooter, a Ukrainian-born Russian citizen named by Moscow as Lyubomir Korba, had been questioned after he was extradited from Dubai. A suspected accomplice, Viktor Vasin, has also been questioned. The FSB said in a statement that both Korba and Vasin had “confessed their guilt” and given details of the shooting which they said was “committed on behalf of the Security Service of Ukraine.”

Meanwhile, German Foreign Minister Johann Wadephul will meet his counterparts from Central Asian countries in Berlin on Wednesday, said a ministry spokesperson, with themes including energy and Russian sanctions circumvention on the agenda. The 20th EU sanctions package against Russia for its attack on Ukraine could see measures imposed on Central Asian states such as Kyrgyzstan for the first time, as companies from some of these countries are accused of systematically purchasing goods from the bloc and then reselling them to Russia. As a result, Germany’s trade volume with countries such as Kyrgyzstan has significantly increased since the 2022 attack.

Wadephul will meet with the foreign ministers from Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, the spokesperson said on Monday. — Reuters

Machado ally is kidnapped in Venezuela hours after prison release

CARACAS: A prominent Venezuelan opposition politician was kidnapped in Caracas on Sunday night just hours after his release from jail, according to his son and Nobel Peace Prize winner Maria Corina Machado, casting uncertainty over government vows to free political prisoners. Juan Pablo Guanipa, a close ally of opposition leader Machado, was freed earlier on Sunday after more than eight months in jail on accusations of leading a terrorist plot, after months in hiding. His release followed promises by Venezuela’s government to pass an amnesty law and release more prisoners, as US pressure mounts a month after the Trump administration captured and deposed long-time leader Nicolas Maduro.

Guanipa’s son Ramon Guanipa said in a video on social media his father was ambushed by 10 heavily armed, unidentified men who he called “officials.” “My father has

again been kidnapped,” he said. “I demand proof of life immediately.”

Venezuela’s government did not immediately reply to a request for comment about Guanipa’s disappearance following his release. Machado, who won the Nobel for her efforts to unseat Maduro, also urged Guanipa’s release. “Heavily armed men dressed in civilian clothes arrived in four vehicles and took him away by force,” she said in a post on X, noting the incident took place in the Los Chorrores area of the capital Caracas.

Just hours before, the elder Guanipa had posted videos to social media in which he spoke to journalists and a crowd of cheering supporters. He urged the release of other political prisoners and called the current administration illegitimate. Maduro’s re-election in 2024 was widely seen as rigged and a number of countries, including the US, do not recognise his



Venezuelan opposition politician Juan Pablo Guanipa greets relatives outside the Helicoide detention center, in Caracas. — Reuters

government’s legitimacy. Guanipa said in an interview with a local online outlet that he spoke briefly with Machado after being let go, and hoped to speak with her further the

next day.

Venezuela’s opposition and human rights groups have said for years that the country’s socialist government uses detentions to

stamp out dissent. The government denies holding political prisoners and says those jailed have committed crimes. Officials say nearly 900 of these people have been released, but they have not been clear about the timeline and appear to be including releases from previous years. The government has not provided an official list of how many prisoners will be released or revealed their identities.

Rights group Foro Penal has said 383 political prisoners had been let go since the Venezuelan government announced on January 8 that it would begin a new series of releases. It counted another 35 releases on Sunday, including opposition politician Freddy Superlano and lawyer Perkins Rocha, also close allies of Machado. The group’s director Alfredo Romero said on social media they did not yet have clear information about who took Guanipa. — Reuters

OPINION

‘Together Forward’ forum a milestone towards progress



THE RECENT ‘Together Forward’ forum marked a significant milestone in the Sultanate of Oman’s journey towards progress and development. The event, which brought together stakeholders from various sectors, underscored the importance of collaboration and collective effort in driving the nation’s growth.

The open dialogue sessions come within the framework of an approach based on transparency and accountability, reflecting a firm belief in dialogue as a well-established national path for exchanging views and ideas and listening to diverse perspectives in a way that supports the nation’s development journey.

As Oman Vision 2040 aims to diversify the economy, promote private sector growth, and enhance the quality of life for citizens, the ‘Together Forward’ forum was a testament to the country’s commitment to achieving these goals. By fostering dialogue and partnerships, Oman is creating an environment conducive to innovation, entrepreneurship, and sustainable development.

The forum’s focus on key sectors such as tourism, logistics, and the digital economy highlights Oman’s potential for growth. With its strategic location and rich resources, Oman is poised to become a major player in the region.

The ‘Together Forward’ forum has consistently provided direct spaces for discussion between the community and government officials throughout its previous editions. To enhance direct engagement, several heads of government units participated in the sessions to listen

to interventions and respond to views and experiences. These inputs are valuable for the continuous development of policies and procedures.

Interventions during the open dialogue sessions covered a range of economic and social issues, with participants calling for greater support for small and medium enterprises and the empowerment of local projects, particularly in the governorates. They also emphasised the need to strengthen complementary roles between funding entities and supervising bodies to ensure the sustainability of these initiatives.

However, the path to progress is not without challenges. Oman faces stiff competition from neighbouring countries, and the global economic landscape is increasingly complex. But with a clear vision and collective effort, Oman can overcome these hurdles.

The ‘Together Forward’ forum sent a strong message: Oman is open for business and ready to move forward. The government’s emphasis on public-private partnerships and investment in infrastructure will undoubtedly yield positive results.

As Oman moves forward, it is essential to prioritise sustainability, inclusivity, and innovation. By doing so, the country can ensure that its progress benefits all citizens and sets a model for regional development.

Building on the momentum of the ‘Together Forward’ forum, it is clear Oman is on the right track. The event showcased the government’s proactive approach to engaging stakeholders and fostering partnerships.

The ‘Together Forward’ forum was a call to action. Stakeholders must continue to collaborate, innovate and invest in Oman’s future. With sustained momentum, the nation can achieve its Oman Vision 2040 goals and become a model for sustainable development.

The focus on sustainability is particularly commendable. Oman can leverage its natural resources to drive eco-tourism and renewable energy projects, creating jobs and stimulating local economies. Digital economy initiatives can also bridge gaps in education and healthcare, enhancing citizen well-being.

Inclusivity is equally crucial. Ensuring women and youth are integral to Oman’s growth story will require targeted policies and programmes. Investing in skills development and entrepreneurship support can unlock their potential, driving innovation and economic diversification.

Oman’s strategic location offers opportunities in logistics and trade. Developing world-class infrastructure and simplifying regulations can make the country a regional hub, attracting investment and creating jobs.

The ‘Together Forward’ forum was a call to action. Stakeholders must continue to collaborate, innovate, and invest in Oman’s future. With sustained momentum, the nation can achieve its Oman Vision 2040 goals and become a model for sustainable development.

As the country moves forward, it will undoubtedly face new challenges, but with unity and vision, it will overcome them. The ‘Together Forward’ forum was a significant step, and with continued collaboration, Oman is poised for greatness.

The future looks bright, and Oman is ready to seize opportunities. By prioritising sustainability, inclusivity and innovation, the country can ensure its progress benefits all citizens and sets a regional benchmark.

DISINFORMATION SURGE BEFORE BANGLADESH POLL

EYAMIN SAJID & SUMIT DUBEY

Voters in Bangladesh elect a new government on February 12, but analysts warn their choice is threatened by a coordinated surge of disinformation.

The nation of around 170 million people is preparing for its first election since a 2024 student-led uprising toppled Sheikh Hasina who fled to neighbouring India. Authorities say the scale of online manipulation — including sophisticated AI-generated images — has become so severe that a special unit has been created to curb false content.

Interim leader and Nobel Peace Prize winner Muhammad Yunus said in January that there had been a “flood of misinformation surrounding the elections” when he called UN rights chief Volker Turk seeking help. “It is coming from both foreign media and local sources,” he said.

According to police figures released in January, out of 645 incidents involving members of minority groups in 2025 — only 12 per cent were classified as having a sectarian motive.

The US-based Center for the Study of Organised Hate said it had tracked more than 700,000 posts — generated by more than 170,000 accounts on X, that made claims of a ‘genocide’ between August 2024 and January 2026. “We have tracked coordinated Indian disinformation online, falsely alleging large-scale violence against Hindus in Bangladesh,” said Raqib Naik, head of the think tank. “More than 90 per cent of this content originated from India, with the remainder linked to associated nationalist networks in the UK, US, and Canada,” he said.

Examples debunked by AFP Fact Check, some of them shared tens of thousands of times, include an AI-created video of a woman who had lost her arm, appealing not to vote for the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), seen by many as a frontrunner. In another computer-generated video, a woman alleges that people who follow the same religion have been told to vote for Jamaat-e-Islami, the key party, or they will be exiled to India.

Of the hundreds of AI-generated videos documented by AFP Fact Check teams on social media platforms few are marked with an AI disclaimer. The surge has also come after years of repression under Hasina, when opposition was crushed and outspoken voices silenced. — AFP

An elegy for my WaPo

HOVERING AMONG the song lyrics, sports scores and movie quotes that clutter up my brain, there are a few key texts that I have committed to memory. The Gettysburg Address, for one. Psalm 23.

And there’s another manifesto rattling around up there, one that I learned some 21 years ago, when I began working at The Washington Post. It is less well known to the world, but no less vital to my worldview.

It is called “The Seven Principles for the Conduct of a Newspaper.”

These principles, about 150 words in total, were the work of Eugene Meyer, the former Federal Reserve chair who bought the Post at auction in 1933 and whose family would run the paper for four generations. On March 5, 1935, the Post’s new owner issued his seven principles, which addressed the newspaper’s mission, its style, its leadership, its independence — in all, its spirit.

Now, The Washington Post is in crisis: Its newsroom is being decimated and its coverage ambitions curtailed, and all this after its proud, tireless journalists were reduced to the indignity of publicly pleading for their jobs, only to be ignored by an unfathomably wealthy owner. I grieve for the Post, and part of my grief is personal. I worked in its newsroom for many years and forged deep friendships there, and, as a longtime resident of the Washington area, I remain a devoted Washington Post reader.

But I also grieve for the ideals and beliefs and priorities that have sustained the institution and that are embodied in Meyer’s principles. They make up the animating ethic of The Washington Post and, to me, of the practice of journalism. And they



CARLOS EDUARDO LOZADA

The writer is a Peruvian-American journalist and author

I hope that the Post will endure, even thrive, as a business, but I worry that it may do so at the cost of its essence, its heart, its core.

are at risk.

After Donald Graham, the beloved Post chair (and Meyer’s grandson), sold the Post to Jeff Bezos in 2013 and the newsroom moved to a sleek location on K Street, the Meyer principles followed us there, a reminder of the Post’s culture and traditions.

Journalism, I must admit, is a romanticised and self-congratulatory profession. My colleagues and I love to go on about our importance to the survival of the Republic, about our “craft” (that’s what we call reporting, writing and editing) and especially about our past. There is always some golden age of journalism that we look back upon with longing, that we hope to recover and that the best among us so obviously represent.

I realise that pining for the Meyer principles may seem like more wistfulness for bygone times. But what I admire about the list is precisely how straightforward it is, how shorn of embellishment and self-aggrandisement, and, despite its nine decades and counting, how relevant it remains to the goals of modern journalism.

Principle No. 1: The first mission of a newspaper is to tell the truth as nearly as the truth may be ascertained.

Principle No. 2: The newspaper shall tell ALL the truth so far as it can learn it, concerning the important affairs of America and the world.

Principle No. 3: As a disseminator of the news, the paper shall observe the decencies that are obligatory upon a private gentleman.

Principle No. 4: What it prints shall be fit reading for the young as well as for the old.

When I read the fourth principle, I think of my own children. I did not have kids when I joined the

Post; now I have three. Will I make them proud with what I write and how I work? Will my journalism be relevant to their challenges, their lives? That relevance can make something “fit reading,” too.

No. 5: The newspaper’s duty is to its readers and to the public at large, and not to the private interests of its owners.

No. 6: In the pursuit of truth, the newspaper shall be prepared to make sacrifices of its material fortunes, if such a course be necessary for the public good.

Principle No. 7: The newspaper shall not be the ally of any special interest, but shall be fair and free and wholesome in its outlook on public affairs and public men.

Just days before the 2024 presidential election, Bezos chose to cancel a planned endorsement of Kamala Harris, the Democratic nominee. The decision, according to Will Lewis, the Post publisher, was “a statement in support of our readers’ ability to make up their own minds.”

Yes, I suppose one could interpret the move as an affirmation of this final Meyer principle, an effort to keep the paper independent. But that conclusion becomes less tenable given Bezos’ support for President Donald Trump, including a \$1 million donation to his inauguration fund, Amazon’s presence among the donors to the White House ballroom project and Bezos’ own prominent perch at Trump’s swearing-in at the Capitol Rotunda on Jan. 20, 2025. Whether out of conviction or convenience, Bezos’ favourable outlook on this one public man is quite clear.

I hope that the Post will endure, even thrive, as a business, but I worry that it may do so at the cost of its essence, its heart, its core.

— The New York Times

To the warrior parents, teachers and therapists



LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

The writer is senior editor of Observer

SHE COUNSELS the parents, she said. When other children are achieving milestones and are ready for graduation, parents of special needs children go through their own emotional journey. The question is not about comparisons. The concern is, “What after us?” They worry about social exclusion and try hard to ensure their children gain as much as they can to catch up with the real world. The experts define special needs children as individuals requiring tailored support due to physical, developmental, behavioural, or emotional conditions that affect their learning, mobility or daily functioning. These conditions, which may be permanent or temporary, range from autism and ADHD to cerebral palsy and sensory impairments. They might require specialised education (IEPs), therapies, and accommodations to reach their full potential. Sometimes parents feel guilty and wonder if they are to blame, and at times they are made to feel that way. Their experience is complex, featuring profound love, pride, sadness, frustration, exhaustion and most importantly, resilience. The parents have to navigate through two worlds. Their child’s world and the reality — the one in which they belong and they work hard to build a bridge. The special education schools are trying to build a bridge of inclusivity in society. The emotional landscape is deep because many parents experience chronic sorrow.

There can be recurring grief. The parents become lifelong caregivers in some cases. The parents of a child with special needs are always on alert. They have to be teachers, nurses, therapists, administrators and so on. They have to learn the rights of children with special needs. The recently-issued law on the rights of persons with disabilities provides equal opportunities in education, healthcare, employment, and social participation, guaranteeing inclusion and equality. The law guarantees all persons with disabilities the right to education without discrimination. It is clearly stated that educational institutions are required to provide appropriate learning environments, specialised services, and trained staff to support students according to their physical, mental, and sensory abilities. In addition, it also mandates that curricula be adapted to suit the individual needs of learners, ensuring inclusive education at all levels. The law states that a specific percentage of scholarships and study grants, both within Oman and abroad, will be allocated to students with disabilities, in coordination with the Ministry of Education and other competent authorities. The legislation also calls for the creation of policies and programmes for the educational inclusion of persons between four and 22, supported by rehabilitation and training services. Parents must be relieved that there is a

The parents of a child with special needs are always on alert. They have to be teachers, nurses, therapists, administrators, and so on. They have to learn the rights of children with special needs

mechanism in place and their child is not alone. Oman’s law also looks into social welfare in addition to health care. One constant worry for the parents is about the future. According to the new law, employment provisions oblige public institutions to reserve at least 5 per cent of job vacancies for qualified persons with disabilities. Private employers with more than 40 employees are also required to meet the same quota. “Workers appointed under these provisions are entitled to equal pay, benefits, and reasonable workplace adjustments.” One has to have qualifications to secure jobs. Here the law further grants persons with disabilities access to vocational training, financial support, and entrepreneurship programmes. The law also provides the concession of reduced working hours for employees who have a disability or care for a family member with one. All these facilities guarantee a life of independence. The law requires authorities to provide medical and psychological rehabilitation and preventive and therapeutic services and to equip homes with suitable medical facilities when necessary. Socially, the law guarantees the right to marriage and family life on an equal basis with others. It requires the provision of accessible housing and community support for those unable to. After all, well-being is not just about maintenance and survival but about growth and development.

FAMILY MATTERS... THAKSIN’S PARTY DOWN, MAYBE NOT OUT

CHAYANIT ITTHIPONGMAETEE AND SALLY JENSEN

Thailand’s most successful party of the 21st century just had its worst election result ever, raising questions about the future of the political machine built by jailed ex-prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra. Pheu Thai, the latest incarnation of the organisation founded by telecom billionaire Thaksin, came a distant third in Sunday’s vote, according to preliminary election commission figures. Its vote share in the party-list section of the election plunged by more than half, they showed. Multiple factors combined to undermine it, analysts say - the conviction of its founder for corruption, his daughter Paetongtarn’s mishandling of the border conflict with Cambodia, and not least the domination of the party by its founding family. The Shinawatras have produced no fewer than four Thai prime ministers this century, and Pheu Thai’s latest nominee for the position, biomedical engineering professor Yodchanan Wongsawat, was Thaksin’s nephew. Bangkok retiree Pipat Saeteaw, 72, used to be a staunch supporter of Pheu Thai and the Shinawatras, but no longer. “I liked Thaksin. I really liked his government’s 30-baht universal healthcare scheme that I still use today,” he said on Monday. “But why did Thaksin flee and not return to face legal punishment? Now he brings his child and nephew into politics. I don’t agree with that. “I don’t vote for the Pheu Thai party anymore.” The party was devastated in Thaksin’s home province of Chiang Mai, one of its traditional strongholds, where for the first time ever it lost every constituency, party officials acknowledged. It is a remarkable fall from electoral grace after Thaksin broke the mould of Thai politics in the 2000s - the first prime minister to serve a full term, the first to be re-elected at the ballot box, and the first to win an overall majority. Yodchanan did not attend a press conference at his party’s headquarters late on Sunday where the party leader conceded defeat. “It’s the voice of the people we have to respect. So we accept the result,” Julapun Amornvivat told reporters. Some are asking whether this could mark the end of the long-standing Shinawatra dynasty - but Pheu Thai may yet end up as part of the ruling coalition, which would give it a chance at a political comeback. “For the next few years, Thaksin is done,” Paul Chambers, an associate senior fellow at ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute in Singapore, said. But he cautioned: “Nothing is ever ‘over’ in Thailand.” — AFP

Trump voters urge him to focus on domestic issues

JOYCE KENNEY is even happier with Donald Trump today than when she voted for him in 2024. “I would gladly vote for him any time,” said the 74-year-old retiree in Prescott Valley, Arizona. As Trump heads into the second year of his presidency, Kenney hopes he continues his crusade against government waste and fraud, cuts costs for senior citizens, and deports more criminal immigrants - but also makes it easier for law-abiding immigrants to stay in the US, even those who entered illegally. “He needs to find a gentler way on the illegal aliens, not to just say everything’s black or white, because there is a lot of grey in everything,” she said. “We need to show a lot more humanity to people that are not Americans as well.” With Trump confronting nationwide protests against his immigration policies, mounting cost-of-living complaints, and tensions with countries from Denmark to Colombia, Kenney and 19 other Trump voters spoke to Reuters about what they want him to accomplish in the year ahead. Almost all of them praised his first-year performance. They backed policies that polls show have alarmed many Americans - surging immigration enforcement in US cities, tariffs on trading partners, deep cuts to the federal workforce and capturing Venezuela’s president. The voters - whom Reuters has spoken with monthly for the past year - said they hoped the president would deliver further change in the months ahead, as pressure builds to help his fellow Republicans keep control of Congress in November’s midterm elections. Six of the voters had virtually no criticism of Trump’s presidency to date, while three were highly dissatisfied with his performance last year. The remaining 11 voters were more mixed in their appraisals, though none of them



JULIA HARTE

The writer is National Affairs Correspondent at Reuters News

The voters said they hoped the president would deliver further change in the months ahead, as pressure builds to help his fellow Republicans keep control of Congress in November’s midterm elections



Robert Billups, a self-employed accountant who voted for Donald Trump in the November 2024 election and participated in a Reuters/Ipsos poll about his previous political decisions, poses for a photo in Bremerton, Washington. — Reuters file photo

said they regretted their vote. The most common objectives were immigration reform and a sharper focus on domestic issues - healthcare reform, cutting fraud in public programmes and lowering the national debt - over foreign policy. Fourteen said they were disappointed by the president’s recent rhetoric about annexing foreign countries and his tendency to inflame divisions through social media posts. “I would like him to really focus way more on America,” said Robert Billups, 34, an unemployed accountant in Washington state. Billups voted for Trump hoping for cheaper healthcare and more transparent government spending. Although he sees little improvement on those fronts, Billups maintains Trump was still “probably the best option” in the 2024 election. Asked for comment, White House spokesman Kush Desai said in a statement: “The Trump administration remains laser-focused on continuing to cool inflation, accelerate economic growth, secure our border, and mass

deport criminal illegal aliens.” Trump’s tariffs, disdain for US judges and officials with whom he disagrees, and recent “saber-rattling” about taking over Greenland and other countries - earned the president a “failing grade” from Steve Egan, 65, a promotional product distributor in Tampa. Egan said his main hope for 2026 was that Trump would “stay in his lane” and not trigger a constitutional crisis. “When Trump’s out of office, I’m sorry, I can’t vote Democratic generally, but if there’s a Democrat that talks more sense than Trump’s doing, then I’ll probably vote for him,” said Egan. The voters’ top ask for this year was a clearer pathway to legal status for law-abiding immigrants who are already contributing to the US economy. Trump backed some such measures in his first term, but has not done so since retaking office. Last spring, 14 of the voters said they wanted Trump to ease legalisation for deserving foreigners. In January, eight of the voters said immigration reform should be a second-year priority. Juan Rivera, a 26-year-old content creator near San Diego who has some relatives seeking legal residency in the US and others who work for Border Patrol, said he was “a little disappointed” that Trump had not pursued it. Rivera, who does Latino outreach for California’s Republican Party, said prioritising immigration reform would help the party in November’s midterm elections. “Latino voters, Asian-American voters who voted for the president, they voted because they wanted to see immigration reform,” Rivera said. “I don’t think all Republicans realise that the president would not have won if it wasn’t for those voters.” Across the country, Pennsylvania state corrections worker and former National Guardsman Brandon Neumeister, 36, also wants the president to focus on immigration reform this year.

SPORTS

CRUNCHTIE



Andrea Jasmins, head coach of Al Nahda with his side at the press conference.

Al Nahda, Al Shabab ready for Gulf CL second-leg match

RIYADH AL BALUSHI
@riyadhbaluch

A press conference was held on Monday evening at Al Seeb Club ahead of the second-leg match of the Gulf Club Champions League, which will see Oman's Al Nahda Club face Saudi Arabia's Al Shabab, scheduled to take place on Tuesday at the Seeb Stadium. The first leg ended in a draw, adding further importance and intensity to the return encounter.

The press conference was attended by the head coaches of both teams, with both sides confirming their full technical and physical readiness for what is expected to be a decisive and highly competitive clash. Al Shabab head coach Imanol Alguacil stressed that his team is well prepared to cope with the anticipated strong home support at the Seeb Stadium, noting that his players are accustomed to performing under pressure.

"We respect the Omani fans and know they will strongly support Al Nahda, but our players are used to playing in front of large crowds and under pressure. We aim to turn that pressure into a positive factor on the pitch," Alguacil said.

Speaking about away matches in Gulf competitions, he said: "Playing away in Gulf tournaments is different from domestic competitions in terms of atmosphere, travel and the nature of the contest. However, we approach these matches with the same level of focus and tactical discipline, always aiming for a balanced performance and a positive result."

HIGH MORALE

On the other hand, Andrea Jasmins, head coach of Al Nahda, confirmed that his team will enter the second leg with high morale, emphasising that preparations have gone well following the first leg draw.

Regarding possible tactical changes, Jasmins said: "There will be no major changes compared to previous matches, but we have worked on some tactical details that could make the difference in a match of this magnitude."

Commenting on the recent domestic league defeat against Bahla, the Al Nahda coach explained that the team has moved on from that result, stating: "The league defeat is behind us now. The players are fully aware of the importance of this match. Gulf competitions have their own character, and we are mentally and technically ready."

SOHAR, SUR SHARE POINTS WITH 1-1 DRAW

Al Nasr edge past Saham to climb second in JL

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, FEB 9

AL NASR'S strengthened their presence near the top of the Jindal League standings after securing a valuable 1-0 victory over hosts Saham at Al Saada Sports Complex, in Round 13 of the 2025-26 season.

The match began cautiously from both sides before the balance gradually tilted in Al Nasr's favour during the first half, as they controlled possession without creating clear-cut threats. Fahad Adel nearly opened the scoring early in the fifth minute with a counterattack, firing a powerful shot just wide of goalkeeper Muhannad al Maamari's post. continued their pressure, and in the 25th minute Mohammed Abdulhakim tested the keeper with a firm strike, but Al Maamari reacted brilliantly to keep the scores level at half-time.

The tempo increased after the break, with both teams improving their performance. Saham looked more dangerous in their attempts to reach Ibrahim Al Rajhi's goal. In the 61st minute, Al Nasr missed a golden chance on the counter as Beninese professional Abdul Fadel Swanoun headed Yazid al Maashani's cross narrowly past the post. Al Maamari once again stood out, denying Yousef al Khalili in the 64th minute and tipping substitute Khalid al Salmi's header away in the 71st, before producing another save from a powerful effort by Al Maashani in the 82nd minute.

Al Nasr finally broke the deadlock late in the game. In the 86th minute, Hussain al Shihri rose highest to meet Turki Abdullah's precise cross and headed the ball into Saham's net, earning his side three precious points. The exchanges continued until the final whistle confirmed Al Nasr's narrow win.

The victory lifted Al Nasr to 28 points, temporarily moving them up to second place with Al Shabab and Al Nahda's match postponed, while Saham remained eighth with 16 points.

SOHAR, SUR SHARE POINTS

Elsewhere in the same round, Sohar and Sur shared the spoils in a 1-1 draw at Sohar Sports Complex.

The match delivered a moderate technical level, with Sur enjoying a brighter start as they searched for an early goal. In the second minute, Abdulaziz al Ghailani struck a direct free kick that goalkeeper Majdi Shaaban pushed away for a corner. Moments later, Waleed al



Al Nasr and Saham players in action.

Saadi rose to meet a corner kick but failed to convert a promising chance.

Sohar relied on wing play and central penetration to create opportunities, producing several attempts that carried some danger but lacked a finishing touch. Just before half-time, deep into stoppage time (47'), Sohar opened the scoring through Ammar al Rashdi, who finished off a well-worked move following a precise cross from Owen inside the penalty area.

Sur returned with greater determination

in the second half, pressing continuously through crosses and set pieces that unsettled Sohar's defence. Despite the hosts' efforts to slow the tempo, Sur's pressure paid off in dramatic fashion when Waleed al Saadi netted the equaliser in the 92nd minute, converting a corner with a close-range finish past Shaaban.

The draw earned each side a point, taking Sohar to 26 points in fourth place, while Sur moved to nine points, remaining second from bottom in the standings.

Oman's Ali all set for World Athletics Indoor Championships in Poland

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, FEB 9

Oman's leading sprinter Ali bin Anwar al Balushi completed a highly successful European indoor season and now will turn his full focus towards the World Athletics Indoor Championships which is scheduled to take place in Poland from March 20 to 22.

Al Balushi delivered a series of impressive performances across elite indoor competitions in Europe over the 60 metres, recording personal bests and multiple podium finishes that highlight his rapid technical development and growing stature on the international athletics stage.

The Muscat-based sprinter concluded his European tour



Ali al Balushi claimed a gold-medal finish at the Madrid Indoor Meeting in Spain.

with a strong performance at the Karlsruhe Indoor Meeting in Germany, part of the World Athletics Indoor Tour Gold series, where he secured second place after clocking 6.54 in the final, having posted 6.58 in the semifinal.

Earlier, Al Balushi claimed a gold-medal finish at the Madrid Indoor Meeting in Spain, another World Athletics Indoor Tour Gold event. He advanced from the semifinals with a time of 6.55 seconds before powering to victory in the final in 6.53 seconds, confirming his readiness to compete at the highest level.

SOLID SHOW

His European campaign also featured solid showings in Silver-level events. At the Bauhaus Indoor

Meeting in Sweden, Al Balushi finished fifth in the final with a time of 6.60 seconds after running 6.62 seconds in the semifinals. He produced one of his standout performances at the Paris Indoor Meeting in France, another World Athletics Indoor Tour Silver event. He clocked 6.63 seconds in the semifinals before improving to 6.58 seconds in the final, underlining his ability to sustain top-level performance across successive competitions.

Maintaining his consistency, Al Balushi went on to claim second place at the Miramas Indoor Meeting in France, another World Athletics Indoor Tour Silver event. He clocked 6.63 seconds in the semifinals before improving to 6.58 seconds in the final, underlining his ability to sustain top-level performance across successive competitions.

These European events formed a crucial phase in Al Balushi's preparations for the global championships. Following his return to Oman, the sprinter is set to embark on a further overseas training programme in Germany and Türkiye during March 4 to 17 as part of the final stages of his build-up to the World Indoor Championships.

Al Balushi's results reflect steady progression and competitive confidence, reinforcing his readiness to challenge the world's elite in Poland. The Oman Athletics Association will continue to play a central role in supporting his development by providing high-level training environments, international competition exposure and preparation programmes.

DISAPPOINTING START



Oman's Vinayak Shukla (R) plays a shot during the 2026 ICC Men's T20 Cricket World Cup group stage match against Zimbabwe in Colombo. — AFP

OMAN LOSE TO ZIMBABWE BY EIGHT WICKETS IN OPENER

COLOMBO: Oman endured a disappointing start to their ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2026 campaign, going down to Zimbabwe by eight wickets in their Group B match at the Sinhalese Sports Club in Colombo, Sri Lanka, on Monday.

After being bundled out for 103, courtesy of a relentless pace display from Blessing Muzarabani, Richard Ngarava and Brad Evans, Oman never truly recovered as Sikandar Raza's men cruised to 106-2 in just 13.3 overs, sealing victory with 39 balls to spare.

Chasing a modest target of 104, Zimbabwe began briskly. Brian Bennett anchored the innings with an unbeaten 48, while Tadiwanashe Marumani (21) provided early impetus as the pair raced to 30 inside three overs.

Oman briefly threatened a fightback when Sufyan Mehmood struck twice in an over, dismissing Marumani and Dion Myers to spark a glimmer of hope.

However, with little scoreboard pressure, the experienced Brendan Taylor joined Bennett to steady the chase. The duo added 68 runs before Taylor retired hurt on 31 off 30 balls. Raza then partnered Bennett to complete the formalities as Zimbabwe wrapped up a comfortable win.

Earlier, Oman's innings had unravelled under a blazing Colombo sun, losing four wickets inside the first four overs to derail any hopes of building on their warm-up win over Zimbabwe last week.

With a gentle breeze aiding movement, Zimbabwe's new-ball pair of Muzarabani and Ngarava, later supported by Evans, exploited the conditions superbly. The pace trio shared nine wickets between them, claiming three apiece as Oman were dismissed for 103 in 19.5 overs.

The towering Muzarabani struck early, breaching the defence of Oman skipper Jatinder Singh with a searing delivery that crashed through the gate. Jatinder had shown early promise with a boundary off Ngarava in the opening over, but his dismissal triggered the slide.

Ngarava soon tightened the screws. In his second over, he induced a mistimed pull from Hammad Mirza that was gloved behind, completing a wicket maiden, the only runs coming via leg byes. Oman were immediately on the back foot with runs hard to come by. The decisive blow came in Muzarabani's fourth over. He removed Aamir Kaleem and Karan Sonavale within three deliveries to leave Oman reeling at 17-4.

Brief scores: Oman 103 in 19.5 overs (Vinayak Shukla 28, Sufyan Mehmood 25, Nadeem Khan 20; Blessing Muzarabani 3/16, Richard Ngarava 3/17, Brad Evans 3/18) lost to Zimbabwe 106-2 in 13.3 overs (Brian Bennett 48*, Tadiwanashe Marumani 21, Brendan Taylor 31 ret'd hurt; Sufyan Mehmood 2/12).



Action during the Oman International Drift Championship (OIDC) 2026 Round 3 at the Muscat Drift Arena.

Kiely clinches OIDC 2026 overall championship

ANUROOP ATHIPARAMBATH
@anuroop_ath

IRISH drifter Tommy Kiely clinched the top honours while Shanahan brothers Jack and Conor completed an Irish sweep of the overall championships in second and third respectively as the Oman International Drift Championship (OIDC) 2026 made a grand conclusion at the weekend.

Jack Shanahan claimed the top spot in the third and final round at the Muscat Drift Arena to come close for the overall title but Kiely edged Jack by one point. After three rounds, Kiely had 232 points while Jack ended second with 231 points. Conor Shanahan claimed third spot with 221 points.

Kiely made it to the Top 8 in the last round to secure enough points for the day.

In the third round, Egyptian Karim Rashed took second spot, while Salim al Saraf of Kuwait was third.

Karim Rashed topped the overall standings in Mena section, followed by Khalifa al Falasi of the United Arab Emirates and Abdullah Hamada of Jordan.

In the national category, Haitham al Hadidi took the top spot, while Ahmed al Amri was second and Tariq al Shaihani finished third.

In the third round, Al Hadidi finished third in Mena section and topped the national section with Ali al Balushi and Ahmed al Amri taking the second and third spots respectively.

The third round Mena section was topped



Top three winners on the podium.

by Karim Rashed with Salim al Saraf in second.

Karim was fourth in overall standings with 150 points and Khalifa al Falasi completed the top five with 147 points.

OMANIS IMPRESS

Five Omanis made to the Top 32 in the last round including Haitham al Hadidi, Ali al Balushi, Riyadh al Mabsali, Tariq al Shaihani and Ahmed al Amri to cap an impressive performance of the local drivers in OIDC 2026.

The Round 1 on January 15 and 16, was won by Ahmed Daham of Jordan with Kiely second and Conor third.

Kiely won the title in the Round 2 on

January 28 and 29. Conor was second Abdullah Hamada finished third.

The Oman Automobile Association (OAA) organised OIDC 2026 completed the third round in front of a packed house as 65 drifters entered the qualifying round on February 5 at the Muscat Drift Arena.

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

The event was supported by comprehensive logistical preparations and world-class spectator facilities, ensuring an exceptional experience for the large crowds that flocked to the OAA facility.

Ghazi Ramadhan fest launched in Sur with community presence

RIYADH AL BALUSHI
@riyadhbaluch

The Ghazi Ramadhan Festival was officially launched on Sunday evening in the Wilayat of Sur during a formal ceremony held at Wyndham Garden Hotel, Muscat, under the auspices of Eng Ibrahim bin Said al Kharousi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism for Heritage. The event was attended by senior officials, representatives of government and private institutions, along with sports figures, media professionals and community stakeholders.

The launch marked the beginning of a new edition of one of Oman's longest running Ramadhan community events, which has maintained its presence for more than two decades as a platform combining competitive sports, cultural activities and

The launch marked the beginning of a new edition of one of Oman's longest running Ramadhan community events, which has maintained its presence for more than two decades as a platform combining competitive sports, cultural activities and community initiatives.

community initiatives, reinforcing the role of sports in social development.

The ceremony featured the unveiling of the new visual identity of the Ghazi Ramadhan Festival, inspired by the maritime and historical character of the city of Sur, in addition to presenting the festival's overall programme, conducting the draw for the football tournament and honouring sponsors and supporting partners.

Mohammed bin Jumaa al Mukhaini, Director-General of Communications and Community Affairs at Oman LNG, said that the Ghazi Ramadhan Festival represents a successful model of institutional community partnership, noting that the company has supported the tournament since its inception in 2003.

Explained that the festival has witnessed significant development



over the years in both organisation and diversity of competitions, expanding from football to include futsal and women's tournaments, alongside various cultural and social activities, added that the return on investment clearly reflects the success and sustainability of the event.

Said bin Khamis al Araiimi, Deputy

Chairman of the Organising Committee of the Ghazi Ramadhan Tournament, stated that the current edition comes with a renewed organisational vision and a new visual identity that reflects the uniqueness of the Wilayat of Sur and keeps pace with the continuous development of the festival.

He noted that this season's football tournament features 24 teams, divided into eight groups, with the top two teams from each group advancing to the knockout stages, ensuring strong competition and balanced opportunities.

Meanwhile, Adil bin Khamis al Ghailani, Head of Educational Activities at the Al Sharqiyah South Education Directorate, affirmed that the Ghazi Ramadhan Festival enjoys wide community follow up due to its positive social impact.

SPORTS

SWISS RIDER
LEADS TOUR OF OMAN
OVERALL STANDINGS

SCHMID RIDES INTO CONTENTION WITH STAGE 3 WIN



ANUROOP ATHIPARAMBATH
@anuroop_ath

MUSCAT

CLASSIC WINNER Mauro Schmid of Team Jayco AlUla rode himself into contention in Tour of Oman 2026 with a promising win in the Stage 3 on Monday. The Swiss rider completed the challenging 191.5 Km stage in a timing of 4 hours, 13 minutes and 17 seconds on Monday. Christian Scaroni of XDS Astana Team came second in same time while Martin Tjøtta (04:13:20) of Uno-X Mobility finished third. Stage three began from Al Fayhaa Rest House in Wilayat of Samayil and concluded at Misfat Al Abriyeen in the Eastern Mountain, featuring a demanding route that tested riders with long distances, varied terrain, and a decisive uphill finish. Schmid's well-timed effort on the final climb ahead of Scaroni allowed him to secure the stage victory and claim the

red jersey. The green jersey for the points classification went to French rider Baptiste Veistroffer of Lotto-Intermarche while Polish rider Patryk Goszczurny of Team Visma | Lease a Bike earned the golden jersey as the most aggressive rider. The white jersey for best young rider (under-23) was claimed by Norwegian rider Martin Tjøtta. Chief guest Shaikh Sulaiman bin Said al Azri, Wali of Al Hamra, gave away the awards at the presentation ceremony. Speaking after the race, stage winner Mauro Schmid described the stage as one of the toughest of the Tour. "It was a really hard race as it was harder than we expected," Schmid said. "The pace was high throughout but my team supported me perfectly especially at the bottom of the climb. They protected me well, controlled the race and gave me everything I needed," he added. "In the final, I was not in the best position but the team helped

TOUR OF OMAN STAGE 3 RESULTS

(Read as rank, rider, country, team, time)

1. Mauro Schmid (SWI) – Team Jayco AlUla – 04:13:17
2. Christian Scaroni (ITA) – XDS Astana Team – 04:13:17
3. Martin Tjøtta (NOR) – Uno-X Mobility – 04:13:20
4. Sebastian Berwick (AUS) – Caja Rural-Seguros RGA – 04:13:20
5. Thomas Bonnet (FRA) – TotalEnergies – 04:13:24
6. Fernando Diego Pascador Castro – Movistar Team – 04:13:24
7. Cristian Rodriguez (ESP) – XDS Astana Team – 04:13:28
8. Christopher Harper (AUS) – Pinarello-Q36.5 Pro CT – 04:13:28
9. Paul Double (UK) – Team Jayco AlUla – 04:13:32
10. Diego Ulissi (ITA) – XDS Astana Team – 04:13:35

me a lot and I am happy with this result. There is still a long way to go. Tomorrow (Tuesday) should be easier but stage five will be very tough and the priority now is to stay safe and be ready to defend in the final days," the Swiss cyclist said. White jersey holder Martin Tjøtta expressed his delight at competing in Oman. "This is my first time in Oman and I am really grateful for the opportunity," he said. "It is a strong team and for me as a young rider, it is special to be team captain. The climb suited me well as it was long, not too short and in the final, I was among the strongest. Tomorrow should be quite safe but the final stage at Green Mountain will be extremely tough. I believe I can deliver a good performance." **EARLY ATTACKS** The third stage was marked by numerous early attacks, largely initiated by Stage 2 winner Baptiste Veistroffer, who once again found himself in the breakaway as part of

a seven-rider group. This move was eventually neutralised by the peloton, with the top climbers battling it out on the final 3.8-km ascent on the slopes of Eastern Mountain in Misfat Al Abriyeen. Valentin Paret-Peintre and Adam Yates returned to action after crashes at 8 km and 6 km from the finish respectively but could not make a desired impact on the results. Following the withdrawals of Marcos Freire (UAE Emirates XRG), Sepp Kuss (Visma-Lease a Bike), Joshua Kench (Groupama-FDJ United) and Alberto Bettiol (XDS Astana), the peloton set off on Stage 3 with 115 riders. The Tour of Oman will continue on Tuesday with Stage 4 as it will cover 146.8 km from Al Sawadi Park in Barka to the Sohar Corniche. The stage is expected to be one of the fastest and most tactical of the race, featuring a coastal route that will demand precise wind reading, strong team coordination, and high physical and mental readiness until the final metres.



50 YEARS

TOYOTA'S

BIGGEST

EXCITEMENT

1

GRAND RAFFLE



SUPRA GR

5

RAFFLE



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VAT

ON US

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FOR 3 YEARS

SERVICE

10 YEARS / 100,000 KMS

5 YEARS / 50,000 KMS

INSURANCE

1 YEAR

THIQAH LOYALTY

POINTS WORTH RO 50

REGISTRATION

1 YEAR



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BUSINESS

SHORT TAKES



JBS is one of the world's largest meat producers.

New Oman–Brazil JV to set up major meat production hub

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, FEB 9

Brazilian meat giant JBS, the world's largest protein producer, has announced a \$150 million investment in Oman — a deal that positions the Sultanate of Oman as a strategic production base for poultry, beef and lamb.

The investment comes through the acquisition of an 80% stake in a new joint venture food entity set up in Oman in partnership with Oman Food Capital (OFC), the food and agribusiness arm of the Oman Investment Authority (OIA). Oman Food Capital — the result of the merger and consolidation of Oman Food Investment Holding Company (Nitaq) and Fisheries Development Oman (FDO) — retains the remaining 20% equity in the venture.

The new JV consolidates two major food industry assets in Oman: a poultry facility in Ibri, which is expected to be completed and operational within about 12 months; and a beef and lamb processing plant in Thamrait, set to restart production in roughly six months.

Once both units reach full operational capacity, the combined platform is projected to achieve an annual processing capacity exceeding 300,000 tonnes, handling up to 600,000 chickens, 1,000 cattle and 5,000 lambs per day.

JBS CEO Gilberto Tomazoni was quoted as saying that the move is part of a broader strategy to diversify geographically and strengthen local supply chains in key markets with high consumption potential, notably the Middle East.

The Oman project expands JBS's footprint in the Gulf alongside existing operations in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

Founded in 1953, JBS operates production facilities and distribution networks across the Americas, Europe, Asia and the Middle East.

The company supplies fresh and processed protein products to retail, foodservice and industrial customers in more than 100 countries, and is also active in value-added foods, leather and by-products. For fiscal 2024, JBS reported \$77.2 billion in total net revenue.

Boosting value creation in Oman's mineral sector

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, FEB 9

OMAN is moving to tighten control over mineral exports and redirect more raw materials towards local industry, Energy and Minerals Minister Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi said at the fourth edition of Together Forward forum in Muscat, signalling a firmer approach to what he described as market distortions and low-grade shipments.

Eng Al Aufi told participants that stronger export governance is needed to prevent what he called significant “distortion” in the way resources are marketed and shipped abroad.

He argued that increasing ore concentration raises its value, and said Oman wants more material upgraded and supplied to domestic processing and manufacturing rather than leaving the country in low-value form.

A central pillar of the new approach is routing exports through Oman Minerals Trading Company, which is tasked with organising marketing and exports in order to raise in-country value from natural resources and strengthen Omani bargaining power in global markets.

The framework gives priority to meeting local demand for key raw materials before any exports are approved. It also tightens controls on gypsum and chromite exports, including a requirement that exported chromite ore must have a minimum concentration of 36 per cent. Processed chromite may be exported at any concentration,



Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals, speaking at the 'Together Forward' forum.

A central pillar of the new approach is routing exports through Oman Minerals Trading Company, which is tasked with organising marketing and exports in order to raise in-country value from natural resources and strengthen Omani bargaining power in global markets.

subject to approval by the Ministry of Energy and Minerals.

Officials say the move responds to long-running structural challenges in the minerals market, including the proliferation of intermediaries and the absence of specialised marketing mechanisms — factors that have weighed on realised prices despite higher production.

According to official figures, Oman had 15 active gypsum mining licences and produced around 14 million tonnes in 2024. Chromite had 29 active licences, with production of about 300,000 tonnes in the same year.

Policymakers say the numbers underline both the scale of resources and the need for unified, institutional management to maximise national returns.

The new trading model is expected to centralise export management, unify contracts and specifications, and negotiate with international buyers on more professional terms.

The government also expects

it to curb price manipulation, improve transport and export efficiency, raise transparency, and expand opportunities for local processing, employment and SME participation across supply chains.

A one-year transition period has been set to allow companies to conclude existing contracts and adapt to the new marketing mechanism. The ministry also plans awareness sessions and training for stakeholders, alongside developing specialised commercial capabilities for sales and negotiation within the new framework.

Eng Al Aufi also highlighted a gap in accurate data on the presence of rare minerals, saying clearer geological information is needed before entering partnerships or opening the market more widely.

He indicated that specialised national exploration work should come first, and that broader market opening should follow only once the resource base is properly.

17.5 MILLION
TREASURY
BILLS ISSUED
IN OMAN

MUSCAT: Government treasury bills worth 17.48 million were allocated this week, according to the Central Bank of Oman.

Of the total, 13.18 million was issued in 28-day bills at an average yield of 3.75 per cent, while 3.7 million was

allocated in 91-day bills yielding 3.85 per cent.

Another 0.6 million was issued in 182-day bills with a 3.57 per cent yield.

The Central Bank of Oman set the repo rate on treasury bills at 4.25 per cent and the discount rate at 4.75 per cent.

Treasury bills provide short-term funding for government spending while offering licensed commercial banks a secure, liquid investment instrument that also serves as a benchmark for short-term interest rates in the domestic financial market. — ONA

Manufacturing strategy to strengthen Oman's non-oil economy

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, FEB 9

The Sultanate of Oman continues its journey towards economic diversification, driven by a strategic focus on the manufacturing sector.

This aligns with the country's long-term development goals and aims to enhance the contribution of non-oil sectors to the GDP — an objective reiterated by officials at the 'Together Forward' forum currently underway in Muscat.

The manufacturing sector, which produces goods in Oman and exports them to countries worldwide, helped boost non-oil exports to 4.421 billion by the end of August 2025.

Its contribution to the GDP, estimated at 4 billion, comes from 412 industrial establishments across 17 different sectors, including 166 establishments holding the National Product Identity and



The manufacturing sector is one of the largest sectors, contributing 10% to the GDP, while non-oil sectors grew by 8.3%.

5,056 Omani products bearing the “Made in Oman” label.

Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Chairman of the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ), stated that the approved manufacturing plan is built upon the Sultanate of Oman's

competitive and comparative advantages.

The manufacturing sector is one of the largest sectors, contributing 10% to the GDP, while non-oil sectors grew by 8.3%, confirming that the manufacturing sector ranks second only to the oil and

gas sector in attracting investors, he noted.

With the launch of the Eleventh Five-Year Plan, Oman Investment Authority is launching strategic projects in the manufacturing sector to serve as an economic engine supporting growth, enhancing local content, contributing to the localisation of supply chains and opening up broader horizons for Omani talent.

Experts have confirmed that manufacturing contributes positively to increasing the added value of natural resources, creating quality job opportunities for Omani youth, supporting local supply chains and boosting national exports to regional and global markets.

This sector also contributes to reducing reliance on raw material exports by transforming them into finished products with higher economic returns.

The Omani government launched a long-term

manufacturing strategy within Oman Vision 2040 to support manufacturing, improve the business environment and expand local production chains. Initiatives also included supporting local content, providing incentives for manufacturers and facilitating investment procedures.

The most prominent manufacturing sectors in the Sultanate of Oman, which are experiencing significant growth, include: petroleum and petrochemicals, refining and basic chemicals, food products, metals (aluminium and steel), plastics manufacturing and renewable energy products.

Industry is no longer limited to heavy industries but now includes advanced manufacturing and renewable energy, making Oman a growing industrial hub in the region. Furthermore, new factories are targeting Gulf and global markets, boosting non-oil exports.

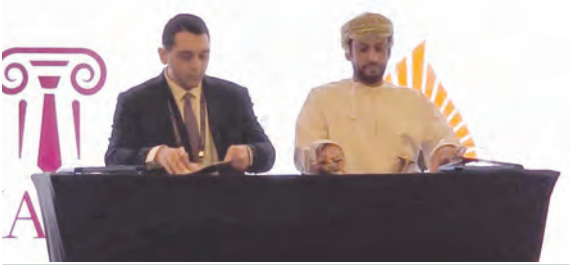
BUSINESS FEATURE

OMAN:
AN EMERGING
REGIONAL
HUB FOR

INVESTMENTS



SHORTTAKES



The pact marks a step towards developing locally aligned legal-technology solutions for institutions in Oman.

PACT SIGNED TO ADVANCE LEGAL AI IN OMAN

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 9

Specialised legal artificial intelligence tailored to regional legal systems is set to advance in Oman following a partnership between Oman National Engineering and Investment Company (ONEIC) and HAQQ Inc, announced during the Oman Legal Tech Summit 2026.

The agreement was signed by Dr Rashid bin Mohammed bin Jumaa al Ghailani, CEO of ONEIC; Antoine Kanaan, CEO of HAQQ Inc; and Abbas Kabalan, Chief Legal Officer and Co-Founder of HAQQ Inc, marking a step towards developing locally aligned legal-technology solutions for institutions in the Sultanate of Oman and the wider region.

The signing coincided with Kabalan’s keynote presentation, titled “AI in Law: From Disruption to Regulation Attention”, where he highlighted the growing need for specialised legal AI platforms built on regional legal frameworks rather than relying solely on general-purpose global systems.

Kabalan warned that the dominance of “general AI” models — often trained primarily on Western legal datasets — can fail to capture the legal, cultural and procedural nuances of Arab jurisdictions. According to him, this mismatch risks producing standardised outputs that do not adequately reflect local legal realities.

“We are witnessing a shift from experimentation to real utility in AI, but the legal profession cannot rely on systems that ignore local legal ontology and institutional context”, Kabalan said. “What we need is Legal AI that strengthens professional judgment rather than replacing it”.

He added that artificial intelligence should function as an enabling tool that accelerates research, organises legal knowledge and analyses evidence, while leaving decision-making in the hands of legal professionals.

Legal summit charts path for AI in the courtroom

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, FEB 9

AS the Sultanate of Oman accelerates its digital transformation under Oman Vision 2040, the integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into the judicial system has moved from a futuristic concept to a regulatory priority.

This shift took centre stage at the Oman Legal Tech Summit 2026, where industry leaders and policymakers gathered to discuss the delicate balance between technological speed and human justice.

In a keynote presentation titled “Regulations for the Use of Artificial Intelligence in Judicial Work”, Dr Mohammed Abdallah Said al Jahwari, Senior Legal Researcher at the Supreme Judicial Council and Visiting Professor of Public Law, provided a comprehensive analysis of how Oman is navigating this “algorithmic frontier”.

The presentation compared Omani strategies with international frameworks, including Unesco’s 2025 guidelines and the UK’s judicial AI protocols.

THE “SMART JUDGE” DILEMMA

According to Dr Al Jahwari, the core challenge is not the capability of the technology, but its governance. He posed a fundamental question to the delegation of over 500 legal professionals: Can we build a “Smart Judge” that harmonises the speed of a machine with the nuanced wisdom of a human?

“Is AI a foundation for collective efficiency and a power for swift justice, or is it a nightmare of manipulation and legal loopholes?” Dr Al Jahwari remarked during his address.

He emphasised that while AI can drastically improve Oman’s global standing in the AI Government Readiness Index (where Oman



Dr Mohammed Abdallah Said al Jahwari delivers his keynote presentation during the Oman Legal Tech Summit 2026.

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currently ranks in the mid-50s), it must not come at the cost of judicial integrity.

ALIGNING WITH OMAN VISION 2040

The summit, presented by Haqq in strategic partnership with the Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs and the Oman Lawyers Association, underscored that judicial modernisation is a pillar of the national road map.

The Supreme Judicial Council’s operational plan (2024–2030) already includes AI-enabled digital libraries and virtual court proceedings.

However, Dr Al Jahwari noted that the current national AI policy issued by the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MoTCIT) is a “general framework”.

He called for a specialised Judicial Ethical Charter to address the unique risks of the legal sector.

LESSONS FROM GLOBAL MODELS

Dr Al Jahwari highlighted the Unesco 2025 Guidelines, which offer 15 principles for AI in courts, specifically the “Human-in-the-loop” requirement. He also referenced the UK’s updated 2025 judicial guidance, which warns against

“AI hallucinations” — statistically probable but factually incorrect information.

“AI is a prediction engine, not a fact engine. It produces words that are likely, not necessarily truths”, Dr Al Jahwari cautioned, referencing international cases where AI-generated fake precedents led to sanctions.

THE FUTURE OF HUMAN OVERSIGHT

The keynote concluded with a firm stance on accountability. While AI can assist in case prediction, documentation and judgment drafting, the “Human Character” of the judge remains irreplaceable, particularly in criminal law where context and empathy are paramount.

“The judicial logic must remain protected... the human character of the judge, their understanding of circumstances and nuances, is what prevents the ‘logic corruption’ that purely mechanical systems might introduce”, he stated.

As Oman moves towards the end of its National Programme for AI (2024-2026), the summit’s message was clear: Technology will support the judge, but it will not replace the bench.

Al Ahly Sabbour commences construction works at Wadi Zaha

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, FEB 9

Al Ahly Sabbour Developments has officially laid the foundation stone and commenced construction works for Wadi Zaha, marking the transition from vision to on-ground execution for the company’s first development in the Sultanate of Oman.

The project has achieved 101% of its 2025 sales target, reflecting strong market confidence, with total investments reaching **ﷵ115** million. The official groundbreaking ceremony was held under the auspices of Dr Khalfan bin Said al Shueili, Minister of Housing and Urban Planning and attended by Eng Ahmed Sabbour, Chairman and Managing Director of Al Ahly Sabbour Developments, alongside senior officials, investors and



The project has achieved 101% of its sales target, reflecting strong market confidence.

business leaders. Commenting on the milestone, Eng Ahmed Sabbour stated: “Commencing construction at Wadi Zaha represents a key milestone and a clear message of our commitment to the Omani market. At Al Ahly Sabbour, we move forward through disciplined execution, clear timelines and developments built to last”.

Construction works for Phase One, comprising villas and townhouses, have commenced in partnership with Delta Contracting as the project’s executive contractor, building on a long-standing

successful partnership across multiple landmark developments in Egypt and supported by Delta’s proven regional expertise in the Gulf, reflecting a shared vision for quality, efficiency and disciplined execution.

Strategically located within Sultan Haitham City, Wadi Zaha forms part of Al Ahly Sabbour’s long-term expansion strategy in Oman, aligned with Oman Vision 2040.

Backed by over 30 years of development experience and a portfolio of more than 65 delivered projects, the company aims to deliver integrated, future-ready communities that add lasting value to the urban landscape.

Beyond residential living, Wadi Zaha offers foreign investors the opportunity to apply for residency in the Sultanate of Oman, subject to the payment of at least 30% of the unit

value, in accordance with applicable regulations — positioning the project as both a lifestyle destination and a compelling long-term investment opportunity.

Wadi Zaha represents the first of three integrated developments: (Wadi Zaha, Wadi Safa, Wadi Tala), planned by Al Ahly Sabbour within Sultan Haitham City, marking the beginning of a broader, long-term investment vision in the Sultanate of Oman.

The commencement of construction underscores the company’s commitment to delivering on announced plans, not as a one-off project, but as part of a sustained development strategy aimed at contributing to the city’s growth, enhancing quality of life and building future-ready communities aligned with Oman’s long-term urban ambitions.

MARKET OUTLOOK

US IPO boom forecast



Goldman Sachs expects US initial public offering (IPO) proceeds to quadruple to a record \$160 billion in 2026, with listings potentially doubling to about 120 deals.

Stronger equity markets, improving growth and easier financial conditions are reviving dealmaking appetite. Prospective listings from major firms such as SpaceX, OpenAI and Anthropic could further boost issuance. — Reuters

CRYPTO REGULATION

South Korea seeks tougher crypto



South Korea’s Financial Supervisory Service called for tighter cryptocurrency regulations after exchange Bithumb mistakenly distributed over \$40 billion worth of bitcoin as promotional rewards, triggering a selloff.

Authorities said the incident exposed structural vulnerabilities in digital assets and will be reviewed to introduce legislation for the sector. — Reuters

METALS RALLY

Precious metals extend gains



Gold and silver advanced in spot trading as a weaker dollar lifted demand ahead of a key US jobs report. Gold rose 1.4% to about \$5,029 an ounce, while silver climbed 2.5% after a strong previous session.

As for other metals, platinum rose 1.8 per cent to \$2,134.18 an ounce in spot trading, while palladium also rose 1.8 per cent to \$1,737.75. — ONA

OPINION

I am worried about my grandchildren’s future



TARIQ
AL BARWANI

The writer is
strategic adviser,
businessman and
motivational
speaker.

YESTERDAY, I had a bad dream, not a nightmare, but an experience based on what is really happening today (slowly but gradually) and an experience I do not wish for the future generation. In the dream, I was older. My hair was grey, my movements were slower, but my heart was calm (alhamdulillah). I was sitting in a garden, surrounded by my grandchildren.

I was carrying on my habit of reading a personal development book when one of my grandchildren asked a simple question about the sky. Before I could answer, another child pulled up a smartphone and said, “Let me ask AI”. Another grandchild wanted to tell a story but stopped midway and said, “Wait, the AI can finish it better”.

I remember smiling in the dream, trying to enjoy the moment with my grandchildren. Nevertheless, something felt wrong inside of me. It wasn’t about how impressive the technology was or how careless and dependent my grandchildren were, but rather how their minds were no longer needed. That was unpleasant, to be honest and that is the basis of my article today.

I am concerned about the future of my grandchildren (and the entire generation, to be precise). When I woke up (later in the same day), I shared the dream with Daniya (my daughter). I expected her to reassure me or tell me I was overthinking things. Instead,

she paused and then agreed. She told me that what I described doesn’t feel like the future to her; it feels like the present. She explained that she, along with almost every friend and classmate she knows, uses AI for almost everything: studying, writing, understanding lessons, preparing assignments and even figuring out how to phrase messages.

Not because they are lazy, but because it has become normal. Her feedback on my dream made me realise that the future is getting closer and at an unfortunately rapid speed. The shift isn’t coming; the shift is almost here.

I am a technologist. I believe deeply in innovation and progress. I understand artificial intelligence, its architecture, its capabilities and its limitations. I have seen how AI can transform industries, accelerate research and improve lives.

That is precisely why my worry is not reactionary or emotional. It is informed. My concern is not that AI will turn against us, replace humanity, or reduce/eliminate jobs. Not really! My concern is more about what happens to a generation that grows up never needing to think deeply, struggle patiently, or imagine freely. Every generation has benefitted from tools that made life easier. Calculators reduced mental math. Search engines replaced memorisation. GPS weakened our sense of direction. But AI crosses a new line. For the first time, technology doesn’t just assist thinking;

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it in fact performs it too. Children today can ask AI to solve problems, write essays, summarise books, generate ideas and even decide what the “best” answer is. The danger is not using AI. The danger is using it first, always and without reflection. In my dream, my grandchildren weren’t lazy but were very dependent on AI for almost everything.

One of the greatest risks AI introduces is the illusion of intelligence. When an AI produces fluent, confident answers, it feels like understanding. The person receiving it mostly doesn’t process, question, or verify it, yet believes everything that AI produces as a response to the input (question) given.

Over time, constant reliance weakens critical thinking, curiosity and independent problem-solving. Mental muscles, like physical ones, deteriorate when they are no longer used. If my grandchildren grow up in a world where answers are instant and effort is optional, will they know how to cope when life doesn’t provide a prompt?

To conclude my article for this week, let me emphasise that I am not against AI’s revolution. AI is one of the most powerful tools humanity has ever created.

However, it must be introduced with intention, boundaries and responsibility, especially if we want a bright future for the younger generations. We must teach and encourage them to think, struggle, ask questions, make mistakes and not be totally reliant on machines.

EU CAN GAIN BY
MOVING RUSSIA’S
FROZEN FUNDS

HUGO DIXON

Frozen Russian assets are a trump card for the European Union. But the bloc has so far failed to play it boldly because most of the 210 billion euros (\$250 billion) of sovereign funds are stuck in Brussels-based custodian Euroclear. Shifting the cash will open lots of strategic options.

Belgium was so terrified of Russian bullying that it torpedoed a plan to use the immobilised assets to back a “reparations loan” to Ukraine in December. The idea was to tie the use of Moscow’s funds to its obligation under international law to pay reparations for its illegal war four years ago.

The obvious solution to this impasse is to move the entire Russian account to a new EU-controlled custodian. That would take Belgium out of the line of fire. Frozen Russian accounts elsewhere in the bloc could also be moved to the new custodian.

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terrified of Russian
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December.

The EU would
then be free to use the
assets to help Ukraine
defend itself — in
accordance, of course,

with international law. EU leaders, who meet later this week for an informal retreat, may think they can forget about the Russian assets. The bloc froze them indefinitely in December.

Moreover, when it could not agree on using Moscow’s funds, it decided to borrow 90 billion euros itself to support Ukraine. The European Parliament is expected soon to approve the transaction. So Kyiv has avoided an immediate cash crunch.

But the EU should have learned by now that it needs to take bolder actions to protect its vital interests. Russia continues to edge forward on the battlefield. If it wins the war, Europe’s own security will be under threat.

Meanwhile, no European leader can trust Donald Trump following his threat last month to Seize Greenland, which is part of Denmark, an EU member. The US president, who has a strange liking for his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin, could pull the rug from under Ukraine at any moment.

The United States has also proposed using some of the assets as part of a peace plan where it would keep half the profits.

While the EU’s new €90 billion euros loan has good parts, it is unlikely to be a game-changer. Since it will cover only two-thirds of Kyiv’s financial needs for two years, it is unlikely to disabuse Putin of his notion that he can win a war of attrition.

It may not change Trump’s view that Europe is full of weak leaders. It probably will not boost Ukrainian morale much either. — Reuters

Turning economic zones
into value creation



Policy alignment is a major part of the value equation.



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adviser & business
transformation
mentor.

The real question is
not whether Oman
can move cargo
safely; it is how
quickly Oman can
convert logistics
strength into
industrial value.

IN a world where trade routes can change overnight, investors are no longer chasing the cheapest address. They are chasing the most reliable one. When risk rises — through shipping disruptions, insurance spikes and delivery uncertainty — capital flows to places that can keep production supplied and customers served.

Industrial maps are being redrawn around resilience; and reliability is becoming a product that markets will pay a premium for.

Oman is built for this moment. Its open-ocean position outside the Strait of Hormuz is a credibility advantage in a nervous trading system. But geography alone does not create prosperity. Prosperity comes when a country turns movement into transformation — processing, manufacturing, assembly and export-ready services that capture margin and create skilled jobs.

The real question is not whether Oman can move cargo safely; it is how quickly Oman can convert logistics strength into industrial value.

That is where the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) sits at the heart of national value creation.

Established in 2020, OPAZ brings Oman’s Special Economic Zones, Free Zones and Industrial Estates under one national platform.

It oversees 23 zones spanning more than 2,200 square kilometres, with total investment volumes across affiliated zones estimated at \$54.5 billion (as of December 2024).

These are not just industrial plots; they are the physical and regulatory backbone of ecosystems that can convert trade flows into higher-value exports, better jobs and deeper local supplier bases.

Value is not created by land and infrastructure alone. It is created by predictable rules, fast decisions, shared services and clusters where suppliers and customers can co-locate with confidence. OPAZ’s strategic role is to make that system work: unify policy, reduce friction and shorten “time-to-operate” compared with competing locations.

materialise. Border-adjacent development is another lever for value creation and OPAZ is leaning into it. Al Rawdah Special Economic Zone in the Wilayat of Mahadha, Al Buraimi Governorate, signals an intent to build for corridors, not only cities.

In May 2025, OPAZ signed an agreement with Mahdah Development Company — represented by DP World—to develop and operate the first phase. A global zone operator brings more than buildings; it brings operating discipline, tenant pipelines and customer relationships that can accelerate occupancy and international credibility.

Strategically, the message to businesses is clear: design products, packaging and distribution with the GCC market in mind from day one, then scale outward.

Connectivity turns strategy into daily reality. Hafeet Rail’s main route between Sohar and Abu Dhabi is widely reported as 238 kilometres, linking Sohar to the UAE rail network via Al Ain. This is not only transport; it is a new pricing of distance. Reliable rail makes “twin-plant” strategies practical — energy- and land-intensive processing in Oman, with finishing, branding and distribution closer to end markets.

It also diversifies national risk: when maritime freight rates swing or schedules wobble, overland capacity can help keep factories running and shelves stocked. In a decade defined by volatility, continuity becomes a sellable advantage.

Then come the industrial anchors that can shift Oman from transit to production. One example is United Solar Polysilicon in SOHAR Port and Freezone, designed for 100,000 tonnes per year of high-purity polysilicon, with late-2025 coverage estimating investment above \$1.6 billion.

A single upstream anchor like this can pull an ecosystem behind it — specialised maintenance, testing, packaging, logistics and eventually downstream manufacturing — because industrial firms prefer to cluster near critical inputs.

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15+ experience in building material, project sales & Trade market, deal with corporate project customers, looking for a suitable job. Contact 78384283

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ART/LIFE



QUIET BLOOM IN THE DESERT > 20

ARTISTIC FORMS

SEA RHYTHMS ECHO A LIVING MARITIME HERITAGE



Musical rhythms in the cities of southern Iran stand as a vibrant cultural expression shaped by centuries of interaction between people and the sea. This enduring relationship has influenced not only livelihoods and maritime traditions, but also artistic forms deeply embedded in the identity of coastal communities.

Stretching along Iran’s southern coastline — from Bushehr Province to Bandar Abbas and across the ports and islands of Hormozgan — music has long been intertwined with daily life. Rather than existing as a separate artistic pursuit, it forms an essential part of maritime work and social gatherings, reflecting the climate, geography and historical memory of the region.

In an interview, Iranian cultural heritage researcher Reyhaneh Mousavi explained that southern Iran’s sea rhythms emerge from lived human experience rather than abstract musical theory. “Work merges with song, and movement blends with sound,” she said, describing the sea as a comprehensive cultural framework that has shaped collective memory and social behaviour.

Rhythm occupies a central role in this musical tradition. The steady beating of drums is designed less for performance spectacle and more to create collective harmony among workers. On boats or along the shore, rhythm regulates effort, synchronizes movement and fosters a sense of unity and continuity. Though structurally simple, these rhythms carry layered meanings, built on repetition, clear pulses and a tempo that mirrors the cadence of maritime labour.

Percussion instruments — particularly large drums that anchor the base rhythm — dominate the musical landscape, supported by smaller instruments that enrich the overall sound. Singing complements rather than competes with rhythm. Performances typically follow a call-and-response pattern, where a lead singer introduces a phrase and the group responds collectively. This structure reflects a social fabric rooted in cooperation and shared responsibility.

Lyrically, the songs revolve around themes of the sea, travel, endurance, longing and prayer, expressed in local dialects that align closely with musical cadence rather than classical poetic forms.

The open-air settings — harbours, seaside squares and coastal spaces — demand strong tones and clear projection, often accompanied by coordinated physical movement that reinforces the beat.

From a heritage perspective, Mousavi noted, these rhythms serve as an unwritten archive of southern Iran’s maritime history — transforming labour into melody and the sea into a lasting source of cultural inspiration.

— ONA

QUICK FEATURES



FESTIVAL

A man hangs lantern decorations ahead of Spring Festival, the week-long holiday that marks the beginning of the Lunar New Year, at a market in Shenyang, China. — AFP



PREMIERE

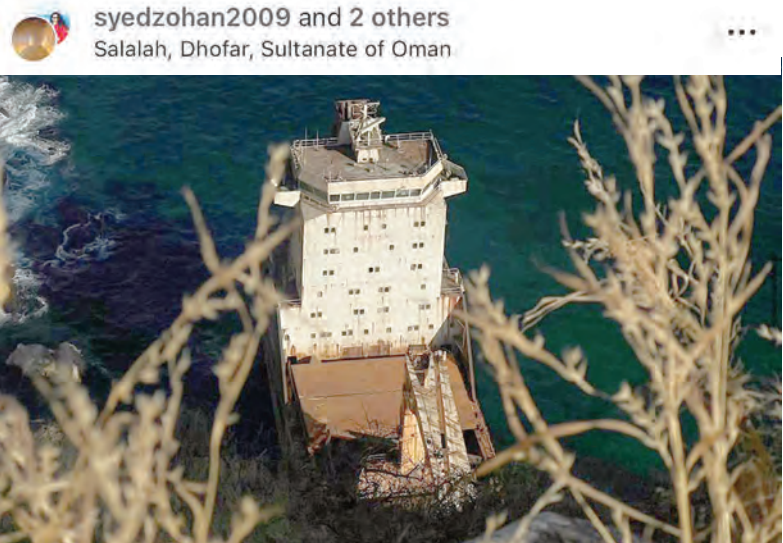
Patricia Arquette attends a premiere for the film Dracula in Los Angeles, California, US. — Reuters



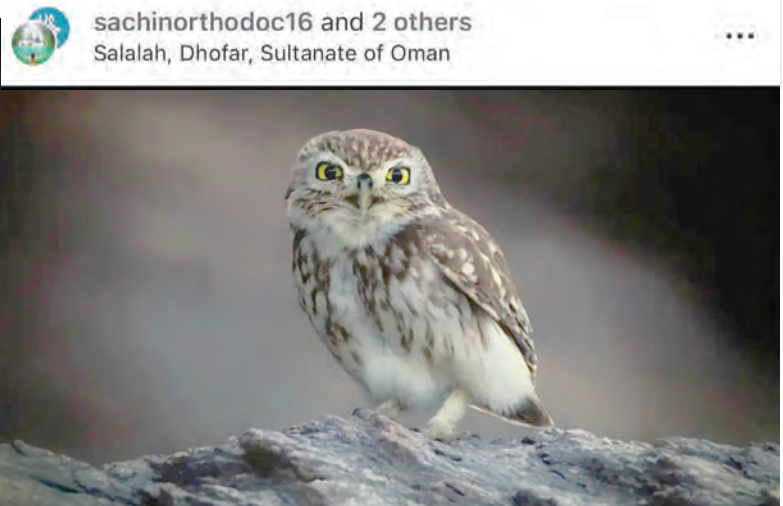
MUSIC

Palestinian musical instrument maker Shehada Shalalda poses with a newly-made violin at his workshop in Ramallah in the occupied West Bank. — AFP

INSTA PICKS



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‘MONA’S EYES’: HOW AN OBSCURE FRENCH ART HISTORIAN SWEEPED THE GLOBE

French art historian Thomas Schlessler is still adapting to life as a best-selling global author having written one of the break-out hits of the last year in “Mona’s Eyes”.

For a man more used to university lecture halls or the dry world of academic publishing, becoming a literary phenomenon, particularly in the United States, was unexpected.

“I was very surprised that the book achieved such success in France and abroad,” Schlessler said in an interview in Paris to promote his next work. “The United States is an incredibly tough market since Americans read English-language authors,” he added. “It goes without saying that I’m very happy, and very proud, but at the same time astonished.”

The English translation of “Mona’s Eyes” peaked at number four in The New York Times best-selling hard-back fiction chart shortly before Christmas and has sold an estimated 250,000 copies there. Book-selling behemoth Barnes and Noble named it its book of the year. Worldwide, it has been translated into 37 languages and has sold a million copies, around half of them in home market France where Schlessler has become a literary celebrity.

SUCCESS FORMULA
It tells the story of a grandfather who educates his granddaughter Mona about the beauty of art after she is told by doctors she risks going blind.

The pair visit the most famous museums in Paris — the Louvre, the Musee d’Orsay and the Pompidou Centre



— where Mona learns about everything from Renaissance work to abstractism. Paris and its cultural heritage are a winning literary combination — from The Hunchback of Notre Dame by Victor Hugo to The Da Vinci Code by Dan Brown — but Schlessler thinks he hit a chord for other reasons.

“There’s a passion for the arts, but what I feel above all is universal sensitivity to the bonds around transmission between generations, between a grandfather and a granddaughter.

“And there’s another very important thing, particularly among Americans I sensed, it’s that ‘Mona’s Eyes’ is a book that addresses the subject of disability,” he added. Fundamentally Schlessler believes there is a “resurgence of poetry among younger generations”.

Having helped popularise art and museum-going, he is hoping to have the same effect on the written word.

A reviewer in Britain’s Guardian newspaper sniffed that “an undeniable strain of sentimentalism runs throughout” the book and its prose. Schlessler, the tousle-haired son of a writer, is about to publish a follow-up of sorts called the “The Gardener’s Cat”, which focuses on the healing power of poetry. — AFP



WHERE MOUNTAINS HOLD MEMORY

NAJAH AL RIYAMI

AN evocative exhibition at Stal Gallery in Muscat is bringing together art, archival material and mountain history to reflect on the early development of trekking tourism in the Sultanate of Oman.

Titled ‘Silent Markings in Oman: Where the Mountain Remembers Reinhard Siegl’, and presented in collaboration with the Austrian Embassy to Oman, the exhibition explores the intersection of landscape, lived experience and cultural memory through the work of artist and curator Marjan Habibian and the legacy of her late husband, Reinhard Siegl.

The exhibition presents 54 works, including an installation and two video pieces. Habibian’s paintings, drawings and prints are shown alongside 19 photographs and artworks by Siegl dating back to 1983. This offers insight into a formative period in Oman’s outdoor heritage.

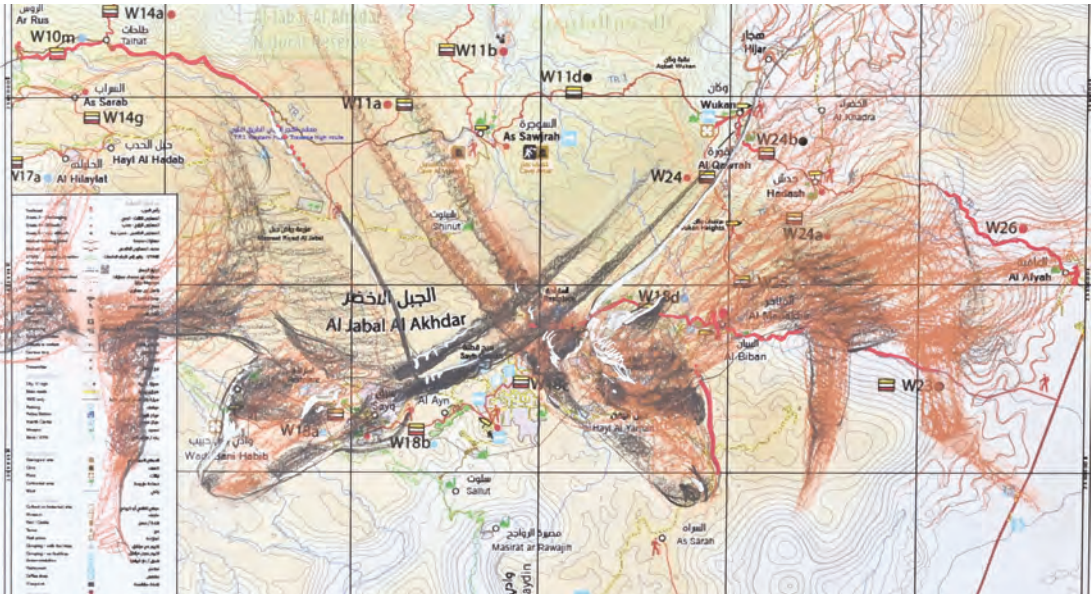
Over more than 28 years, Siegl charted hundreds of kilometres of trekking routes across Oman’s mountainous regions and established the country’s first via ferrata, playing a pioneering role in organising mountain tourism.

He also worked with young Omanis in trekking development and collaborated with the Oman Youth Organisation. His sudden passing in March 2025 lends the exhibition its commemorative depth.

Among the most striking works is a twelve-part painting series created directly on printed maps and photographs of Oman’s mountain terrain.

By transforming cartographic documents into painterly surfaces, Habibian turns geographical records into vessels of personal and shared memory.

Several works are painted on maps marking trekking routes, including As Sawjrah, the 500-year old village in Al Jabal Al Akhdhar, reinforcing the connection between place and lived experience.



Honouring the legacy of trekking pioneer Reinhard Siegl, an exhibition at Stal Gallery in Muscat explores the early history of mountain tourism in Oman through art, archival material and personal memory

Themes of loss are further explored in pieces created on radiology film combined with gold leaf. An installation composed of Siegl’s working tools and personal belongings anchors the exhibition in tangible history, blending everyday objects with symbolic reflection.

Art researcher and gallerist Volodymyra Sobolevska situates Siegl’s contribution within a broader historical framework. “From a historical perspective, Reinhard Siegl’s work represents an early phase in the development of mountain tourism in Oman,” she notes.

“His long-term fieldwork contributed to the transition of mountainous terrain from unexplored space into an organised cultural landscape.”

She also highlights the influence of Siegl’s Austrian upbringing in the Weiz region, where mountaineering culture is deeply embedded in social history.

The alpine traditions of the nineteenth century — including trail systems and via ferrata routes — shaped his understanding of how mountains can be integrated into public life.

Habibian frequently accompanied Siegl on his expeditions and later translated those shared journeys into visual narratives. Many of the works are created on printed photographs of the terrain where they worked together, capturing what Sobolevska describes as the “memory of

place.” Siegl’s early photographs add historical resonance to the exhibition. Images of Al Athaiba fishermen and scenes from Nizwa taken in 1986 document communities and environments at a moment preceding significant social and infrastructural change.

Today, these photographs preserve architectural details and working life that have since evolved.

Beyond its documentary value, Sobolevska describes the exhibition as a form of cultural preservation. “This exhibition functions as an alternative archive,” she says. “It preserves not only facts, but values — care, endurance, responsibility.”

In regions where environmental history is still being written, art becomes a means of safeguarding memory before it fades. Silent Markings in Oman is ultimately not only about remembering one man, but about recognising how cultural and touristic identity is shaped — through individuals, shared journeys and an ethical relationship with place.

The exhibition was inaugurated on January 20 by Ambassador Christophe Ceska, with a ribbon-cutting ceremony attended by Consul Gernot Widener, Hassan Al Meer and Volodymyra Sobolevska of Stal Gallery.

Alongside the exhibition, Marjan Habibian also led a painting and drawing masterclass on January 27 and 28. The exhibition remains open to the public until February 15, on Sunday.

FEATURES

YERU EBUEN

IN the Wilayat of Bidiyah, Al Sharqiyah North Governorate, far from the country's malls, mountains and mainstream tourist routes, a garden has been quietly rewriting how people experience nature.

Known simply as The Secret Garden, the space has emerged as one of Oman's most talked-about lifestyle discoveries — fuelled not by official tourism campaigns, but by Instagram posts, Arabic captions and word-of-mouth fascination. Its digital presence, curated through the account @tsg.oman, has turned a relatively discreet location into a growing cultural conversation.

Unlike traditional parks or botanical institutions, The Secret Garden does not present itself as a public landmark. Instead, it operates in a grey area between private project, curated experience and aesthetic destination.

On social media, it is framed as a place where seasons are “created rather than followed”, a phrase that has become central to its identity.

The rise of The Secret Garden reflects a broader shift in Oman's leisure culture. Historically, the country's tourism narrative has focused on dramatic geography: deserts, wadis, mountains and coastlines.

Gardens, by contrast, have rarely occupied centre stage.

Yet in recent years, there has been growing interest in softer, more immersive encounters with nature, spaces that offer calm, visual beauty and a sense of escape from urban routines. The Secret Garden fits precisely into this emerging niche.

Its Instagram content showcases seasonal flowers, curated pathways and carefully framed scenes of colour against Oman's arid backdrop. Arabic captions often emphasise emotion and atmosphere rather than location, describing flowers as sources of serenity, renewal and light. English-language posts, meanwhile, lean towards aesthetic storytelling, positioning the garden as a rare and almost accidental discovery.

For many visitors, the appeal lies in contrast. “You don't expect to see this kind of greenery in Oman”, one recurring sentiment suggests. Another common reaction is surprise at the scale and diversity of flowers, particularly during winter months, when the surrounding landscape can feel stark.

Social media has played a decisive role in shaping the garden's reputation. While official information about the project remains limited, user-generated content has effectively become its primary narrative.

Commentary across Arabic and English posts reveals a consistent pattern. Visitors describe the garden as peaceful, visually striking and emotionally restorative. Some compare it to European or Asian gardens, noting its unexpected aesthetic in a Gulf context. Others frame it as a “hidden gem”, a term repeatedly echoed across posts and comments.

At the same time, there are hints of scepticism. A small number of commentators question whether the garden's appeal is driven more by visual branding than by substantive experience.

This tension mirrors a global debate about “Instagrammable” destinations, where aesthetic value sometimes overshadows cultural or ecological significance.

Nevertheless, the overall sentiment remains overwhelmingly positive. The Secret Garden has become less a place than a symbol — of discovery, of curated nature and of a slower rhythm of life.

The popularity of The Secret Garden is not an isolated phenomenon. Across Oman and the wider Gulf, there is growing appetite for curated lifestyle spaces — concept cafés, art installations, boutique farms and wellness retreats. These spaces respond to a demographic increasingly driven by aesthetics, storytelling and shareable experiences.

The Secret Garden sits comfortably within this trend, yet it also stands apart. Its appeal is quieter, less overtly commercial and more rooted in nature.

For younger audiences, it offers a visual language suited to social media. For older visitors, it offers nostalgia and calm.

For the broader public, it offers something rare in the region: a space that feels intentionally slow.

Whether The Secret Garden will evolve into a formal tourist attraction or remain a semi-hidden cultural phenomenon remains unclear. What is certain is that it has tapped into a collective desire for beauty, intimacy and surprise.

In a country celebrated for its grand



QUIET BLOOM IN THE DESERT



landscapes, The Secret Garden has proven that small, carefully curated spaces can generate equally powerful fascination. And perhaps that is its most significant achievement not simply growing flowers in the desert, but cultivating a new way of seeing it.