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IN BRIEF

HM CONDOLENCES
TO SAUDI, TÜRKIYE

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of condolences to the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, on the death of Prince Abdulaziz Mishal Abdulaziz al Saud.

In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sympathies, praying to Allah the Almighty to rest the deceased's soul in peace in paradise and grant his family patience.

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has also sent a cable of condolences to President Recep Tayyip Erdogan of the Republic of Türkiye on the victims of the fire at a ski resort in Bolu Province.

In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sentiments to President Erdogan, families of the victims and the Turkish people. His Majesty also prayed to the Almighty Allah to rest the deceased souls in peace in paradise and grant their families solitude, wishing the injured a speedy recovery. — ONA

GED, EQUIVALENT
EXAMS FROM TODAY



The 2024-2025 Academic Year's first-term exams of the First Semester — for students sitting for the General Education Diploma (GED) and equivalent qualifications — will begin on Thursday and continue till February 6. As many as 61,257 students (male and female) will take the exams at the levels of government schools, private schools, special education schools and the ongoing education scheme. **DETAILS ON P3**



SHOWCASING OMAN 'S BEAUTY

The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, is participating in the activities of the International Tourism Exhibition 'Fitur 2025' in Madrid, showcasing its distinguished tourism assets and enhancing cooperation with international partners in this field.

UN THANKS OMAN FOR SECURING RELEASE OF GALAXY CREW

NEW YORK: The UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy for Yemen Hans Grundberg has expressed his gratitude to the Sultanate of Oman for its extensive efforts that lead to the release of the crew of the Galaxy Leader ship. Grundberg deeply valued Oman's steadfast support in this regard.

"The release of the crew of Galaxy Leader is good news that constitutes a step in the right direction," said Grundberg, who urged Ansar Allah group to keep up such positive initiatives in all outstanding issues.

Grundberg stressed that "such measures are necessary to open up space for mediation, which will, in the long term, facilitate



The released crew arrived in Muscat, in preparation for their repatriation.

the resumption of the Yemeni political process that is long awaited by millions of Yemenis".

As part of the Sultanate of Oman's ongoing humanitarian efforts regarding the situation of the Galaxy Leader ship crew in Yemen, the crew, consisting of 25 individuals (Filipino, Bulgarian, Mexican, Ukrainian and Romanian nationalities), were released on Wednesday and transported from Sanaa to Muscat aboard a Royal Air Force of Oman aircraft, in preparation for their repatriation.

The Sultanate of Oman values the cooperation extended by the parties concerned in facilitating and completing this process. — ONA

RO 800M PROJECTS
PLANNED THIS YEAR

ROADS TO BE THE
CORNERSTONE
OF OMAN'S
INFRASTRUCTURE

INVESTMENTS WORTH
RO 2.5 BILLION IN
TRANSPORT, IT SECTORS

GOVERNMENT
VEHICLES TO BE
REPLACED WITH EVS



Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali

REMODELLING OF
BURJ AL SAHWA
TO EASE MUSCAT
TRAFFIC

WORKING ON PLAN
TO ESTABLISH FIRST
HYDROGEN STATION

STUDY ON MUSCAT
METRO PROJECT IS
TO BEGIN THIS YEAR

VINOD NAIR
@vinoth_nair

THE Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology reviewed its executive plan for 2025 with a special focus on some strategic roads linking various governorates.

Speaking at the 12th annual media briefing, Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MoTCIT), said that the total value of road construction, rehabilitation and maintenance projects for 2020-2024 has been more than RO 1 billion.

In 2025, the minister said it will implement 30 projects worth more than RO 800 million spread over a total length of around 700 km.

These projects include the dualisation of the Raysut-Al Mughsail road, dualisation of Sultan Said bin Taimur road (Adam-Haima-Thamrait) for the third, fourth and fifth parts, through a strategic Omani-Saudi partnership and the dualisation of the Izki-Nizwa road, among others.

Speaking to the Observer, the minister said, "There are a lot of road projects coming up in 2025, including the expansion of Muscat Expressway, remodelling of Burj al Sahwa and the expansion of the November 18 road."

The minister said the contribution of the logistics, communications and information technology sectors to the GDP was more than RO 2 billion, at a rate of 8 per cent, while the volume of investment in communications, information technology and logistics sectors amounted to RO 2.5 billion by the end of 2024.

The year 2024 witnessed the opening of traffic on the main road, Rusayl-Nizwa road, the first phase, starting from Rusayl bridge to Bidbid intersection, with a length of 27 km, the opening of roads linking the Khazaen Economic City with Al Batinah Expressway, with a length of about 7 km and the opening of Al Khabourah dual carriage road.

Works are also under way on several strategic road projects, including the Sultan Faisal bin Turki Road Project (Dibba- Lima- Khasab) in Musandam Governorate with a completion rate of 33 per cent, the Sultan Taimur bin Faisal Road Project (Al Batinah Coastal Road Phase 1) with a completion rate of 5 per cent, in addition to the completion of the Sultan Turki bin Said Road Project (Al Sharqiyah Expressway Part Two) with a completion rate of 25 per cent. **TURN TO P2**

Trump tells Putin to make Ukraine deal ‘now’ or face sanctions

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump told his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin on Wednesday to make a deal to end the grinding Ukraine war “now” or face tariff hikes and more sanctions.

“If we don’t make a ‘deal,’ and soon, I have no other choice but to put high levels of Taxes, Tariffs and Sanctions on anything being sold by Russia to the United States, and various other participating countries,” Trump said on his Truth Social network.

Trump said he was “not looking to hurt Russia” and had “always had a very good relationship with President Putin,” a leader for whom he has expressed admiration in the past.

“All of that being said, I’m going to do Russia, whose Economy is failing, and President Putin, a very big FAVOUR. Settle now, and STOP this ridiculous War! IT’S ONLY GOING TO GET WORSE.”

Trump was taking a harder line than he had during a White House



US President Donald Trump

press conference on Tuesday, when he said it “sounds likely” that he would apply additional sanctions if Putin did not come to the table.

The US president also declined to say whether he would continue his predecessor Joe Biden’s policy of sending weapons to Ukraine to fight off Russia’s war, launched in February 2022.

“We’re looking at that,” he said at the press conference. “We’re talking to (Ukrainian President Volodymyr) Zelensky, we’re going to be talking to

President Putin very soon.”

Prior to his inauguration on Monday, Trump had vowed to end the Ukraine war before even taking office, raising expectations he would leverage aid to force Kyiv to make concessions to Moscow.

In unusually critical remarks of Putin on Monday, Trump said the Russian president was “destroying Russia by not making a deal.”

Trump added that Zelensky had told him he wanted a peace agreement to end the war. — Reuters

OMAN

SHORT TAKES



Sayyid Badr receives credentials copy of Pakistan’s Ambassador

MUSCAT: Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister today received a copy of credentials of Syed Naveed Safdar Bokhari, Ambassador-designate of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan to the Sultanate of Oman. Sayyid Badr wished the ambassador success in carrying out his duties and the bilateral relations between Oman and Pakistan further development and growth. The meeting was attended by several officials from the Foreign Ministry. — ONA

Foreign minister receives Yemeni counterpart

MUSCAT: Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister on Wednesday received Dr Shaya Mohsin Zindani, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates of the Republic of Yemen. During the meeting, the two sides underscored the depth of fraternal relations between Oman and Yemen. They also underlined the two countries’ keenness to enhance cooperation in various fields that serve joint interests. The two ministers exchanged views on several regional and international issues of mutual concern, namely developments related to the Yemeni crises and the efforts exerted to achieve peace and stability in Yemen. Sayyid Badr reiterated Oman’s constant backing of peaceful efforts in Yemen. He also underscored the importance of dialogue and negotiations as a means to achieve sustainable solutions and to end the humanitarian suffering of the Yemeni people. On his turn, the Yemeni minister expressed his appreciation for the efforts of the Sultanate of Oman in backing the stability of Yemen and its continuous support of the Yemeni people. — ONA

RO 800 million projects planned this year

FROM PAGE 1

The ministry is also working on several road projects in Dhofar Governorate. Total expenditure for development projects amounted to RO 989 million, of which 93 per cent was for the road network and the number of change orders decreased by 42 per cent compared to 2020. The minister pointed out that the Omanisation rate in the logistics sector has increased to 21 per cent and the Omanisation rate in the communications and information technology sector has increased to 38 per cent. The volume of general, liquid and bulk cargo handled through Omani ports exceeded 107 million tonnes, while the number of containers handled by various Omani ports exceeded 4 million standard containers and more than 3 million heads of livestock were handled. The number of ships arriving at these ports exceeded 10,000 and Omani ports received more than 325,000 passengers. During the current year, the ministry is also working to establish the first hydrogen station in the Sultanate of Oman and a unified platform for electric chargers, in addition to replacing government vehicles with electric vehicles or EVs in phases. A detailed study on Muscat Metro project is to begin this year, the minister announced. Plans to launch the first phase of the Omani language model, Artificial Intelligence Studio (first phase) and the national open data platform, in addition to operating the Fourth Industrial Revolution Centre are also in the pipeline.

Numani receives Yemeni official

MUSCAT: Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office received on Wednesday Dr Shaya Mohsin Zindani, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates of the Republic of Yemen, who is currently on an official visit to the Sultanate of Oman. During the meeting, the two sides reviewed



bilateral relations and partnerships between the two countries. They also highlighted developments in Yemen and the efforts exerted by all parties in a bid to achieve security and stability for the Yemeni people. The meeting was attended by Ambassador of the Yemeni Republic to the Sultanate of Oman. — ONA

Oman witnesses strong growth in space sector

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, JAN 22

THE number of companies in the space sector has increased by 90 per cent, according to Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology. Speaking at the Ministry’s annual media briefing on Wednesday, Al Maawali noted that the number of jobs in the sector increased by 100 per cent, while the volume of investments grew by 30 per cent. However, the exact investment inflows were not revealed, but the Sultanate of Oman is understood to have attracted around RO 20 million in space sector investments from 2023-2024 based on figures shared previously by Dr Ali bin Amer al Shaithani, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology for Communications and Information Technology. Furthermore, the minister highlighted the launch of the first rocket from the region’s first spaceport at Duqm earlier this year. “A notable achievement this year was the launch of the first Duqm-1 rocket. NASCOM, the company behind the rocket, has received strong support from the government, including the Ministry and our colleagues at the Oman Investment Authority, who are closely collaborating with them to help them grow,” Al Maawali said. Additionally, the ministry marked a notable milestone by becoming a member of the International Astronautical



Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology noted that the number of jobs in the space sector increased by 100 %.

Federation, an international space advocacy organisation aimed to foster dialogue and knowledge transfer between members. According to the ministry, the sector’s goals for 2025 include execution of the second phase of the Space Accelerators Programme, which aims to support entrepreneurs and local startups in the sector by providing resources, funding, and guidance to startups and small and medium-sized enterprises. Also lined up this year is the second phase of the National Capacity Building programme, which aims to build competent space capacities to meet the needs of the sector. The ministry unveiled the National Space Policy and Executive Programme in 2023 with the goal of increasing the digital economy’s share of the local GDP from 2 per cent presently to 5 per cent by 2030 and 10 per cent by 2040.

Citizens hail MoL’s part-time work norms

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, JAN 22

Many students and job seekers have welcomed the decision of Dr Mahad bin Said Baowain, Minister of Labour (MoL), establishing guidelines for part-time work as it would enhance employment prospects and accommodate the needs of jobseekers. Mohammed al Hanai, a job seeker, described the decision as a “new window of hope.” He said: “Working part-time helps graduates like us to gain practical experience that increases the value of our CVs. Instead of waiting for long periods to get a full-time job, we can take advantage of these opportunities to enhance our skills.” Saeed al Habsi, another job seeker, said, “The decision represents a temporary solution through which we can improve our income. Under the current economic conditions, every job opportunity, no matter how partial, contributes to improving our living conditions and alleviating financial burdens.” The part-time work experience provides job seekers with an opportunity to develop



The new system sets the hourly wage for part-time workers at RO 3

communication and teamwork skills, which are essential skills in any work environment. For students, the decision comes at an ideal time to support them in their educational and professional journey. Part-time work gives students the opportunity to gain early practical experience without compromising their studies, enabling them to achieve a balance between their studies and work life. Maha al Balushi, a final year student at University of Nizwa, expressed her happiness with the new decision. “I am excited about the idea of working part-time, as I can use this opportunity to gain experience in my field and get to know the real work environment, without having to give up my studies.” Part-time work also allows students additional income to help them cover some of their personal expenses. Ahmed al Kindi, a student

at Sultan Qaboos University, said; “Part-time work gives us, as students, the opportunity to achieve early financial independence. I can rely on myself to cover some expenses, such as buying books or paying transportation costs, which reduces the burden on my family.” The decision provides students with an invaluable opportunity to gain early practical experience in soft skills, which are vital for any future job. Noura al Kharousi, a student at the Modern College of Business and Science, said; “Part-time work helps us build early professional networks and learn about the requirements of the labour market. This experience gives us a competitive advantage when we graduate and look for permanent jobs.” MoL stipulates that part-time workers must work a minimum of four hours per day and no more than 25 hours per week. The new system also sets the hourly wage for part-time workers at RO 3, though a lower wage can be negotiated with prior approval from the Ministry of Labour (MoL).

SHORT TAKES



The General Education Diploma exams will start on Thursday and continue until February 6.

61,257 STUDENTS TO FACE GED EXAMS IN 366 CENTERS

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JAN 22

The General Education Diploma exams will start on Thursday and continue until February 6. A total of 61,257 students from government schools, private schools, special education schools and continuing education will face the tests in 366 exam centres across governorates. Approximately 6,200 teachers have been assigned to correct students’ answer books in four centres in two periods, morning and evening. The Ministry of Education said the centres have been set up to help students take the tests in an atmosphere of comfort and calm. Students must arrive early to the examination centre to verify the hall tickets and follow rules. The Ministry of Education has formed committees to follow up on all examination work, including the Preparation and Arrangement Committee. The committee is formed at the level of the educational governorates represented by the Educational Measurement and Evaluation Departments, and at the level of the ministry, represented by the Educational Measurement and Evaluation Centre. Its main task is to prepare for the educational evaluation work for the academic year. Furthermore, the Examinations Management Committee in the educational governorates has been formed to carry out the tasks of managing the work of the General Education Diploma exams. It will supervise the correction of answer sheets.

Oman artists take part in Doha forum

DOHA: Several Omani artists took part in the 4th GCC Visual Arts Forum in Doha. The forum is organised by the Cultural Village ‘KATARA’. The forum aimed to exchange expertise and innovative ideas among artists, in a way that enhances cooperation and enriches the artistic scene in the region. The event included a seminar and a workshop, in addition to an exhibition showcasing several works. — ONA



Student startups annual forum held

MANAH: The first annual student startups forum for the academic year 2024/2025 kicked off at Oman Across Ages Museum in the Wilayat of Manah, Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, on Wednesday. Organised under the slogan “Empowerment and Sustainability”, the forum saw the participation of 24 student companies representing various branches of the University of Technology and Applied Sciences (UTAS). The two-day forum aims to highlight the role of youth in the field of entrepreneurship and enhance their innovative talents. The opening ceremony of the forum was held under the auspices

of HH Sayyid Loay bin Khalid al Said and attended by Shaikh Hilal bin Said al Hajri, Governor of Al Dakhiliyah. The first day’s programme included three visual presentations, the first of which outlined UTAS role in providing necessary support for student startups; the second was a self-explanatory presentation, titled “Experiences that build the Future”, while the third presentation showcased innovative student projects covering various sectors. An elite group of experts and entrepreneurs from Oman and abroad participated in the forum.

They offered inspiring visions on the future of sustainability of startups. Towards the end of the ceremony, HH Sayyid Loay felicitated the sponsoring companies and institutions and the participants. Then, he opened an exhibition of student startups that covered the fields of artificial intelligence (AI), renewable energy, the Internet of Things (IoT), agriculture, environment, industry, education, health, sports, community service, oil and gas. The exhibition also included 45 research posters and a special gallery for Muscat Innovation Complex. — ONA

COUNCIL CHAIRMAN RECEIVES BRITISH AMBASSADOR



Shaikh Abdulmalik bin Abdullah al Khalili, Chairman of the State Council, received Dr Liane Saunders, British Ambassador to the Sultanate of Oman, in his office on Wednesday. During the meeting, they reviewed bilateral relations between the two countries and exchanged views on matters of common interest. Shaikh Abdulmalik expressed his aspiration to enhance contribution to developing relations in various fields between the two countries, and open new paths for joint cooperation, under the wise leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik. The Ambassador praised the strong historical bilateral relations between the two countries, wishing Oman further development, progress and prosperity.

Employers to face fine for salary delay under WPS

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, JAN 22

EMPLOYERS who don’t pay salaries on time will soon face fines, a member of the Wage Protection System (WPS) team at the Ministry of Labour (MoL) said. On violation of WPS rules, the employer will face a penalty of RO 50 per worker.

Saif bin Salem al Zaabi, a member of the WPS team, said the system came in response to cases of delayed salaries in the private sector. “Some companies do not transfer salaries to employees on time. Our goal from this system is to guarantee the rights of workers and enhance transparency in the labour market.” Al Zaabi added that the next stage will witness the application of fines on companies that violate the system, as a fine of RO 50 will be imposed for each worker. He said MoL received many complaints of delayed salaries. He cited cases of an Omani employee who has not received his salary for more than a year and an expatriate who has not received salary for

“Some companies do not transfer salaries to employees on time. Our goal from this system is to guarantee the rights of workers and enhance transparency in the labour market

SAIF AL ZAABI
Member of the WPS team, MoL

over two years. These cases reveal the importance of government intervention to protect their rights. Citizens welcomed measures against companies that delay the salaries of its workers as they see it guarantees the rights of workers. Salem al Harthy, a private sector employee, said: “Delaying salaries affects our daily lives. WPS is an important step to guarantee our rights and maintain our financial stability. I personally know some cases where employees were denied salaries for several months. This decision gives us hope that violators will be held accountable.” A number of expats echoed similar sentiments, stressing that wage protection will ensure job security. Mohammed Khan from India, said: “I faced a delay in salary for more than three months. Now, with the implementation of the wage protection system, I feel confident that my rights will be preserved. When we know that our rights are protected, we can better focus on performing our work.” Maryam al Balushi, a human resources expert, said: “WPS reflects the government’s commitment to improving the

work environment and ensuring workers’ rights. This step will contribute to enhancing trust between the concerned parties, leading to increased productivity and stability in the labour market.” These measures come at a time when Oman is seeking to improve the work climate and enhance the business environment to attract foreign investments. Dr Abdullah al Khadouri, an expert in economic affairs, explained: “Achieving transparency and preserving workers’ rights contribute to enhancing the investment climate in Oman. When the work environment is stable and fair, it attracts more investments and contributes to enhancing economic growth.” But some companies have expressed concerns about the challenges on WPS. Khalid al Maamari, director of an SME, said: “We support the idea of wage protection, but we need sufficient time to adapt our internal systems to the requirements of the decision. We hope that the ministry will provide the necessary support to small companies to ensure full compliance with the system.”

عُمان
تختفل

مهرجان التخفيضات والعروض
Festival of Discounts and Offers

أيام تسوق ضخمة
Grab your savings
before the Month Ends!

MEGA
SHOPPING
DAYS

العرض ساري من تاريخ ٢٢ يناير ٢٠٢٥ إلى ٢٧ يناير ٢٠٢٥
متوفر في نستو هايبر ماركت
المبعدة الوادي الكبير
المبعدة الحداد حياي
القبائل الحبل الجنوبية روي العمارات
بركاء صحم خضراء ناد فويل

Seara Chicken 10x900Gm
8.650 OMR
دجاج سيارا ١٠ × ٩٠٠ جم

Arz Basmati 35kg
24.990 OMR
ارز بسمتي فاخر عيران
٣٥ كغ
Zaffran Premium 35kg
19.900 OMR

Minara 2Lx1.5Lx500ml
2.290 OMR
زيت الطهي والفاني المنارة
٢ لتر ١.٥ لتر ٥٠٠ مل

Bahar Dish Wash Liquid 2X700M+400Ml Asstd
0.990 OMR
سائل غسيل الأطباق بحر
٢ × ٧٠٠ مل + ٤٠٠ مل

Creme 21 Soap Asstd 3X125Gm
0.500 OMR
صابون كريم ٢١
٣ × ١٢٥ جم

Del Monte Golden Sweet Corn 4x410gm
1.000 OMR
ذرة حلوة ذهبية دبل
٤ × ٤١٠ جم

Orange Navel Egypt Per Kg
0.345 OMR
برتقال أبو سرة مصر بالكيلو

Al Ameen Omani White Medium Egg 30's
1.790 OMR
بيض عماني البيض الامين ٣٠ قطعة

Almond Raw Per Kg
3.500 OMR
لوز خام كبير بالكيلو

Mix Nut Per Kg
2.990 OMR
مكسرات مختلطة بالكيلو

PREMIUM XXXL 35kg
20.368%
24.990 OMR
ارز بسمتي فاخر عيران
٣٥ كغ

Minara 2Lx1.5Lx500ml
35.897%
1.000 OMR
زيت الطهي والفاني المنارة
٢ لتر ١.٥ لتر ٥٠٠ مل

Arz Basmati 35kg
60.000%
0.250 OMR
ارز بسمتي فاخر عيران
٣٥ كغ

Sairat 21 Soap Asstd 3X125Gm
50% OFF
0.500 OMR
صابون سيرات ٢١
٣ × ١٢٥ جم

Del Monte Golden Sweet Corn 4x410gm
63.14%
0.890 OMR
ذرة حلوة ذهبية دبل
٤ × ٤١٠ جم

HYPERMARKETS | SUPERMARKETS | DEPARTMENT STORES

OMANI | SAHAMI | SAUDI ARABIA | KUWAIT | U.A.E | JORDAN



AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, JAN 22

DESPITE the variety of activities, the abundance of restaurants and the high number of visitors at the Muscat Nights Festival, cleanliness remains a prominent feature across all venues, thanks to the tireless efforts of cleaning workers who work relentlessly to maintain the cleanliness and beauty of the locations.

Hundreds of cleaning workers are distributed across various festival sites, such as Al Qurum Natural Park, Al Naseem Public Park, Al Amerat Public Park and the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre. They operate according to precise schedules around the clock to ensure that facilities remain clean and safe for visitors.

Their work includes waste collection, cleaning pathways and continuously sanitising public areas. Additionally, strategically placed waste bins are provided to facilitate proper waste disposal.

Many visitors expressed their admiration for the high level of cleanliness and organisation at the event, praising the tremendous efforts of the cleaning teams in ensuring a comfortable and safe environment for everyone. Visitors also commended the swift response of the teams in addressing any cleanliness related concerns, reflecting a high level of professionalism in event management.

In this context, Fatma al Harthy, one of the attendees, stated, “Despite the large number of visitors and the numerous food stalls offering a variety of foods and drinks, the place is completely free of scattered waste.” She also noted the continuous presence of cleaning teams patrolling the area and promptly dealing with any litter, reflecting Muscat Municipality’s great attention to maintaining cleanliness and providing an enjoyable and safe experience for visitors.

UNSUNG HEROES



The cleaning workers deserve all the appreciation and respect for their continuous efforts despite the crowds and numerous events. Despite the large number of visitors and the numerous stalls, the festival locations are completely free of scattered waste.

Fatma added, “The strategic placement of trash bins and their easy accessibility significantly contributed to keeping the area clean. I did not feel any crowding or chaos; the organisation was meticulous, starting from the parking areas to the arrangement of booths, making the experience smoother and more comfortable.” Rashid al Shehhi, another festival visitor, praised the organisation and cleanliness at the event, saying, “I was amazed by the level of organisation and the precise distribution of facilities and services, in addition to the remarkable cleanliness throughout the venue. This paints a bright image and encourages visitors to attend the festival annually, especially with such great attention to providing a comfortable and safe environment for visitors of all ages.” Al Shehhi added, “The cleaning workers deserve all the appreciation

and respect for their continuous efforts despite the crowds and numerous events. I noticed their constant presence across the festival grounds, promptly handling any waste, reflecting their commitment to maintaining cleanliness and offering the best experience for visitors.” He also emphasised the importance of visitor cooperation with these efforts, stating, “It is our collective responsibility to ease the burden on the cleaning teams by disposing of waste in the numerous trash bins spread throughout the venue, which have been thoughtfully placed for everyone’s convenience. Through this cooperation, we preserve the beauty of the festival and contribute to the sustainability of these distinguished events that reflect Oman’s culture and heritage.” It is worth noting that Muscat Municipality intensified its efforts during the festival by increasing the number of cleaning teams and distributing equipment to ensure swift and efficient performance. This has significantly contributed to creating a clean and safe environment for everyone. These efforts reflect Oman’s commitment to sustainability and environmental preservation, even during major events, affirming that the success of any festival is incomplete without the contribution of these unsung heroes working behind the scenes to create exceptional atmospheres.

SHORT TAKES



Several officials of the Muscat Governorate visited the work site on Monday.

WORK GATHERS SPEED ON MUTTRAH CABLE CAR PROJECT

VINOD NAIR
@vinoth_nair

The groundwork on the Muttrah cable car project is progressing in full swing, with several officials of the Muscat Governorate visiting the work site. Currently, earthworks are underway at one of the project sites, and access is restricted, the contractors told the Oman Daily Observer.

The cable car will have three stations: starting at the fish market (near Port Sultan Qaboos), the mountain top near Riyam Park, and ending at Al Khabou Park. When completed, it will be the largest cable car project over the sea in the region. On Monday, the Deputy Wali of Muttrah visited the cable car project and the museum adjacent to Muttrah Fort to follow up on the progress. The cable car will provide stunning views of the sea and waterfront, while the museum will present the area's rich history to visitors. Rakaez Investments is the main civil contractor for the project, specialising in site surveying, assessing the topography, soil conditions and potential obstacles for the route, as well as setting up steel or concrete towers to support the cable lines, laying the cable lines across the towers, among other tasks.

Bartholet will be responsible for designing and engineering aspects of the project.

Each of the three cable car stations will have facilities for entertainment and refreshments, among others. The project will offer different entertainment elements for families, tourists, residents, and citizens. There is also a simultaneous plan to develop parking and other related infrastructure by concerned government agencies and government companies.

Oman to open tourism office in Spain

OMAN TAKES PART IN INTERNATIONAL EXHIBITION IN MADRID

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 22

REPRESENTED by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, the Sultanate of Oman is taking part in the International Tourism Exhibition 'FITUR 2025', which began in Madrid on Wednesday. It will continue until January 26, with the participation of 156 countries from around the world.

This year's FITUR exhibition focuses on global tourism trends, the latest technological developments and innovation in the tourism industry. It offers an ideal opportunity to promote the tourism assets that distinguish the Sultanate of Oman and enhance cooperation with international partners in this field.

The Sultanate of Oman's delegation to the exhibition is headed by Salim bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism. Al Mahrouqi said that Oman's participation assumes significance as an opportunity to highlight the country's distinctive tourist destination and allow meeting with international tourism companies.

He added in a press statement that steps are underway to appoint a Tourism Representation Office for the Sultanate of Oman in the Kingdom of Spain with the aim of augmenting tourism flow from the Spanish market, thus opening up new vistas for global tourism growth.

On the sidelines of its participation in the event, Oman organised a promotional campaign that included the installation of data panels about tourism and heritage sites in the country.

The data is also propagated in the exposition's halls, on buses and in tourist attractions in Madrid. FITUR exhibition also saw the launch of a digital campaign undertaken by the national travel operator and Destinia (a digital travel agency) to



Oman's delegation is headed by Salim bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism.

promote Omani tourism products.

The Sultanate of Oman's pavilion in the exhibition comprises 9 tourism institutions, companies and hotel facilities.

Organisers expect 250,000 visitors to attend over the four days. This includes 150,000 professionals participating in business and marketing sessions, while approximately 100,000 general attendees are anticipated during the weekend.

The event features 9,500 companies and 884 main exhibitors, marking a 10 per cent increase compared to 2024. Participants are spread across nine pavilions, including a prominent stand from Argentina, located in Pavilion 3.

OMAN TO MARK EDUCATION DAY ON FRIDAY



MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Education (MoE) will join the world on Friday in marking the International Day of the Education, which falls on January 24 every year. The celebration comes in line with supporting efforts aimed at achieving the 4th SDG to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. — ONA

Ministry takes part in London expo

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JAN 22

The Ministry of Education is participating in the Education Technology Exhibition (Bett London 2025) from January 22 to 24 at the Excel London Centre in the United Kingdom.

The ministry's pavilion includes a display of a number of pioneering projects that reflect the ministry's digital transformation and artificial intelligence efforts. These projects include the Noor project, which provides an integrated digital educational environment that supports e-learning; the virtual science labs project, which provides students with an interactive scientific experience through simulation technologies; a display



The delegation includes educators, school principals and teachers

of the digital atlas project, which enhances the use of data and interactive geographic maps; the digital schools project, which aims to develop the technical infrastructure

of schools; the curricula digitisation project to provide interactive educational books; a display of the vision and efforts of the new digital transformation project; and the ministry's artificial intelligence initiatives, which represent a comprehensive qualitative shift in the management and development of the educational process.

Dr Faisal bin Ali al Busaidy, Director General of the Directorate General of Information Technology and Head of the participating delegation, said: "Our participation in the Education Technology Exhibition is a translation of the Ministry of Education's vision to enhance digital transformation and employ artificial intelligence to improve the quality of education and develop its environment."



Sultanate of Oman سلطنة عُمان
وزارة التراث والسياحة
Ministry of Heritage and Tourism

Announcement of an International Tender

Tender No.	19/2025/MHT/HQ-5	Tender Name	Appointing a Company as the Tourism Representative of the Sultanate of Oman in the Kingdom of Spain & Latin-Speaking countries for the year 2025 (Tourism Representation office).
Fees of Tender Documents (Non-refundable)	25 O.R		
Tender Document Sales End Date	12/2/2025		
Last Date for Bid Submission	5/3/2025		
Grade	International		
E-Tendering Portal	https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om		

Interested Companies registered with Tender Board (in the mentioned Grade) may obtain Tender documents from the E.Tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>, against non-refundable payment as mentioned above for each set of documents.

Bids are submitted that fulfill the technical conditions and specifications, accompanied by a tender bond from a local or international bank has branch in Sultanate not less than (1%) of the bid value, valid for (90) days from the date of its submission.

The Ministry shall not be obligated to accept the lowest or any other bids

The bid submission period starts after the end of the inquiry period shown in the e-tendering system, until the last date for submitting bids before (10:00 am, Oman time).

Support and inquiries

For more information, related to the tender, kindly communicate through the website of the e-tendering system: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>
For inquiries related to the technical support for the e-tendering system, kindly communicate through etenderhd@gstb.gov.om or 24402200

For further information

Email : sotc@mht.gov.om
Phones : 22088348 - 22088085

WORLD

SHORT TAKES



German Chancellor Olaf Scholz (L) and French President Emmanuel Macron address a joint statement at the Elysee Palace in Paris. — AFP

French, German leaders say must act for ‘strong’ Europe

PARIS: The leaders of France and Germany agree that both countries must act for a “strong” Europe, President Emmanuel Macron said after meeting Chancellor Olaf Scholz in Paris. At a joint news briefing with Macron at the Elysee palace, Scholz said that the new US leader “will be, and so much is already clear, a challenge”. He added: “Europe will not cower and hide, but instead be a constructive and assertive partner.”

This stance, Scholz said, will be “the basis for good cooperation with the new American president”. He said Europe and US are linked by “a long history of friendship and partnership” which he called “a stable foundation” for future relations. Trump, he said, had already announced a number of policy measures “which we will, of course, analyse in detail together with our European partners”, Scholz said. Macron and Scholz both underlined the role of their countries’ close cooperation for European unity. “Europe must be strong and resilient in world that is, to put it mildly, in motion,” said Scholz. — AFP

Prince Harry hails legal win over newspapers



Prince Harry at the Royal Courts of Justice, Britain’s High Court, in central London. — AFP file photo

LONDON: Prince Harry claimed a “monumental” victory over Rupert Murdoch’s UK newspaper group on Wednesday after the publisher settled his lawsuit, admitting unlawful actions at its Sun tabloid for the first time and paying substantial damages. Harry had been suing News Group Newspapers (NGN), publisher of The Sun and the now-defunct News of the World, at the High Court in London, alleging the papers had illegally obtained private information about him from 1996 till 2011.

NGN also admitted it had intruded into the private life of Harry’s late mother, Princess Diana. A source familiar with the settlement said the damages involved an eight-figure sum. “In a monumental victory today, News UK have admitted that The Sun, the flagship title for Rupert Murdoch’s UK media empire, has indeed engaged in illegal practices,” Harry and his co-claimant Tom Watson said in a statement. “Today the lies are laid bare. Today, the cover-ups are exposed. And today proves that no one stands above the law,” said the statement. — Reuters

RELEASED UPON TRUCE

Yemenis say freed detained ship’s crew



Yemenis group said on Wednesday they had released the detained crew of the ship Galaxy Leader, held since November 2023, after the Gaza ceasefire came into effect. The supreme council “has announced the freeing of the crew of the Galaxy Leader, who were arrested on November 19, 2023 during the campaign in solidarity with Gaza”, the Saba news agency said. Seventeen of the Galaxy Leader’s crew are from the Philippines. — AFP

PANAMA COMPLAINS TO UN OVER TRUMP CANAL THREAT, STARTS AUDIT

PANAMA CITY: Panama has complained to the United Nations over US President Donald Trump’s “worrying” threat to seize the Panama Canal, even as it launched an audit of the Hong Kong-linked operator of two ports on the inter-oceanic waterway. In a letter to UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, the government in Panama City referred to an article of the UN Charter precluding any member from “the threat or use of force” against the territorial

integrity or political independence of another. The missive, distributed to reporters on Tuesday, urges Guterres to refer the matter to the UN Security Council, without asking for a meeting to be convened.

Panama’s President Jose Raul Mulino hit back that the canal was not a gift from the United States during a panel at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland.

“We reject in its entirety

everything that Mr Trump has said. First because it is false and second because the Panama Canal belongs to Panama and will continue to belong to Panama,” Mulino said on Wednesday.

The president has previously denied that any other nation was interfering in the canal, which he said was operated on a principle of neutrality. Asked on Wednesday about the spat, Beijing denied it had ever “interfered” in the canal.

— AFP

Israel raids in Jenin go on with shootings, explosions

GUNFIRE and explosions

rocked the occupied West Bank’s Jenin area on Wednesday, a Palestinian official and a reporter said, as the Israeli military pressed on for a second day with a large-scale raid.

The operation, launched just days after a ceasefire paused fighting in Gaza, has left at least 10 Palestinians dead, according to Palestinian health authorities. Israeli officials have said the raid is part of a broader campaign against militants in the occupied West Bank, citing thousands of attack attempts since the war in Gaza between Israel and Hamas began in October 2023.

“The situation is very difficult,” Kamal Abu al-Rub, the governor of Jenin, told AFP. “The occupation army has bulldozed all the roads leading to the Jenin camp and leading to the Jenin Governmental Hospital... There is shooting and explosions,” he added, referring to the Israeli military.

Israeli forces have detained around 20 people from villages around Jenin since the operation began on Tuesday, the official said. A correspondent reported that gunfire and explosions could be heard coming from Jenin refugee camp, a hotbed of militancy where Israeli forces have regularly carried out raids. In December, security forces from the Ramallah-based Palestinian Authority were also involved in similar clashes with the militants in and around Jenin.

The Israeli military on Wednesday said it was continuing on with the



An Israeli military vehicle operates during an Israeli raid in Jenin. — Reuters

The operation, launched just days after a ceasefire paused fighting in Gaza, has left at least 10 Palestinians dead. Israeli officials have said the raid is part of a broader campaign against militants in the occupied West Bank

operation, dubbed “Iron Wall”, adding that they have “neutralised over 10 people.” Additionally, aerial strikes on terror infrastructure sites were conducted and numerous explosives planted on the routes were dismantled,” it said in a statement. The raid in Jenin aims to counter “hundreds of attacks, both in Judea and Samaria and the rest of Israel,” military spokesman Nadav Shoshani said at a press briefing, referring to the biblical name that Israel uses for the Palestinian territory it has occupied since 1967. He said that since the start of the war in Gaza, Israel saw “over 2,000 attack attempts” from the West Bank, adding that the army had

“eliminated around 800 people”. Shoshani said the explosive devices planted along roads had recently killed a soldier in the area. Defence Minister Israel Katz vowed to continue the raid in Jenin.

“It is a decisive operation aimed at eliminating gunmen in the camp,” Katz said in a statement on Wednesday, adding that the military would not allow a “terror front” to be established there. “It is a key lesson learned from Gaza... we do not want groups to recur in the camp once the operation ends,” he said, referring to how the military had to return to several areas in Gaza that were previously declared clear of militants. — AFP



INDONESIA RESCUERS SEARCH FOR SURVIVORS

PEKALONGAN: Hundreds of rescuers were searching through thick mud and debris to find survivors on Wednesday after a rain-triggered landslide in Indonesia killed at least 19 people and left seven missing. Intense rainfall in a mountainous area near Pekalongan city in Central Java province sparked the landslide on Monday, collapsing bridges and burying cars and houses. The worst hit area was Kasimpar village according to a local official, with survivors recounting the horror of the landslide crashing into a coffee shop where people were sheltering from the rain. Rescuers found two bodies on Wednesday morning, raising the toll to 19, said Abdul Muhari, a spokesman for the National Disaster Mitigation Agency (BNPB). Search and rescue agency Basarnas said in a statement that 13 people were also injured. — AFP

PUBLIC OUTRAGE

Protestors in Serbia call for general strike



Student organisers in Serbia called for a general strike this week in the latest move to increase pressure on officials over the fatal collapse of a train station roof last year. The announcement called for Serbians to engage in “general civil disobedience” on Friday and to avoid going to work, shopping and engaging in other normal daily life activities. “Let’s take freedom into our own hands! Your participation makes a difference,” it said. — AFP

SAFETY IMPROVEMENTS

Seoul to overhaul airports after Jeju crash



South Korean authorities said they will change the concrete barriers used for navigation at some airports after the Jeju Air crash that left 179 people dead. The Ministry of Land said that “a special safety inspection revealed that improvements are needed for localisers at seven airports around the country”. These include Muan and Jeju. The measures include “relocating the foundations underground and replacing them with steel structures”. — AFP

Social media: balancing regulation, security and user freedom

NASSER AL ABRI

AS January 2025 begins, major developments in the realm of social media are already making headlines. Meta, under the leadership of Mark Zuckerberg, has announced a significant shift in its content management strategy, aiming for a more open approach. This includes reducing restrictions on misleading content and removing third-party content reviewers. On the other hand, the US Supreme Court has unanimously upheld a decision to ban TikTok nationwide.

These events highlight the ever-evolving challenges digital platforms face in navigating content regulation, national security, and user freedom.

Community Notes

Meta's decision to introduce "Community Notes" grants users the ability to add clarifications and corrections to posts, mirroring a similar feature launched by X. This approach shifts the responsibility for fact-checking and editorial oversight to the users themselves, sparking debates about its potential to combat or exacerbate misinformation. Critics argue that without stringent safeguards, the programme could empower influential users or bad actors to dominate narratives, further polarising the public. Proponents, however, view it as a bold step towards democratising content moderation and addressing concerns about social media

companies' biases. The announcement also reignites discussions about the role of social media in shaping public opinion. As platforms like Meta relinquish some control over content, questions arise about the implications of allowing users to self-moderate in environments already rife with disinformation. Without robust systems in place, such initiatives could inadvertently amplify harmful content, undermining the original intent of fostering transparency and accuracy.

TikTok's uncertain future

Meanwhile, TikTok finds itself at the centre of a heated legal and political battle. On January 17, the Supreme Court upheld a law requiring ByteDance to sell the US operations of TikTok or face a nationwide ban. The ruling follows years of scrutiny over TikTok's alleged ties to the Chinese government, with critics arguing that the app poses a national security threat. Chief Justice John Roberts succinctly summarised the matter: "Congress doesn't care about what's on TikTok. They care about Chinese control over TikTok."

While the ruling has not yet taken effect, President Biden deferred its implementation to the Trump administration. Trump has stated his intent to review the situation, leaving TikTok's 170 million American users in uncertainty. Among the prominent potential buyers are Elon Musk, Frank McCourt, Sam Altman, Bobby Kotick (former CEO of Activision Blizzard), and Kevin

Companies must navigate not only technological innovation but also heightened scrutiny from governments and users. The future of digital platforms lies in finding a delicate balance between fostering free expression and addressing the ethical, political, and security challenges of an interconnected world

O'Leary, who has reportedly submitted an offer ranging from \$20 billion to \$30 billion for the platform. Musk stands out as a strong contender, given his ties to Trump and his vision to transform digital platforms into multifunctional ecosystems similar to WeChat. However, any acquisition faces significant hurdles due to Chinese export restrictions, which prohibit the sale of critical software algorithms. This may compel the new owner to either negotiate with Chinese authorities or rebuild the platform's core algorithms from scratch, making the process highly complex.

Growing challenges

These two cases underscore the growing complexities facing digital companies in balancing content regulation, national security, and user freedom. Meta's shift to user-driven moderation reflects a move towards greater openness but also raises concerns about misinformation and accountability. Meanwhile, TikTok's legal battle highlights the geopolitical entanglements that digital platforms face in an increasingly divided world.

The implications are profound: companies must navigate not only technological innovation but also heightened scrutiny from governments and users. The future of digital platforms lies in finding a delicate balance between fostering free expression and addressing the ethical, political, and security challenges of an interconnected world.

TRAIN STUDENTS IN SOFT SKILLS TO FACE LIFE

Why do students leave school unprepared for their university studies or to even deal with life's challenges after education? As societies grow and the demand for new skills increases, questions arise about whether educational systems are truly effective in paving the way for learners to achieve success in life, both professionally and socially.

With the increasing need for societies to adopt more effective approaches to adapt to the rapid and unpredictable changes of life, success has become highly dependent on skills like decision-making, critical thinking, and problem-solving, as well as communication skills. It is crucial for the educational system to keep up with today's fast-changing world and meet the needs of modern societies for adaptability and analytical abilities to handle crises and pressing issues effectively.

This requires specialised training that enhances students' creativity and prepares them to independently identify and solve any problems they encounter in their professional, family, or social lives. For these reasons, traditional approaches to education and instruction have come under fire in recent years.

Traditional, teacher-centred approaches, which are prevalent in many educational institutions, despite slogans of change to student-centred approaches, have proven ineffective in preparing students to foster essential skills like critical thinking and problem-solving. This is often referred to as "spoon-feeding education," where educators provide excessive instruction and help, leading students to become highly dependent. In contrast, active-learning teaching approaches focus on training students to master problem-solving skills.

These skills help students in their university studies and continue to benefit them later in life by enabling them to apply the knowledge they gain to various academic, professional, and social contexts. Educational institutions must integrate interactive teaching methods, such as discussion-based education, student-oriented learning, collaborative learning, and active training.

It is evident that many of the problems currently affecting the world stem from people losing faith in the power of dialogue and lacking training in systematically addressing, analysing, and solving problems. An educational system that adopts discussion and problem-solving approaches is very likely to produce generations of open-minded graduates who will ultimately contribute to peace and harmony on this planet.



SUAAD ABDULAZIZ AL BALUSHI

Transform uncertainty into an opportunity for growth

THE modern world is navigating rapid technological advancements, shifting geopolitical landscapes, climate change, population growth and intricate socio-political interactions. These factors have generated a range of complex, pressing challenges in a world marked by instability and uncertainty. Alongside economic and technological conflicts, such conditions demand not only awareness but also proactive measures to address these risks or turn them into opportunities.

The World Economic Forum's Global Risks Report 2025 identifies this year's challenges as stemming from escalating political and economic conflicts, extreme weather events driven by climate change, deep societal and political divides, and the consequences of accelerating technological development.

Among these are the proliferation of misinformation, which has widened global divisions and exacerbated conflicts. Misinformation has created a more fraught geopolitical environment, amplifying economic tensions. The report highlights this issue as one of the most significant risks by 2027, as major powers exploit false narratives to influence public opinion and distort facts.

This trend threatens not only societal and moral values but also economic and service structures. Concerns over artificial intelligence (AI) applications that generate misleading content are particularly acute, alongside the risks associated with advancing biotechnology.

The report warns of the potential rise of "bioterrorism," a threat expected to grow in the coming decade. Social inequalities, particularly disparities in wealth and income distribution, are also flagged as critical risks. Many societies remain plagued



AISHA AL DARMAKI

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by injustices, weakened social cohesion, and limited opportunities for their citizens.

Migration pressures have further eroded human rights and stability, leading to fragile communities unable to provide security or equity for their populations. These issues are compounded by economic crises, including inflation, debt, and contractions, which contribute to instability. Ageing populations and demographic imbalances in some regions further exacerbate these challenges.

The report also points to the realignment of global relations, where emerging powers such as China, India and Gulf states are likely to reshape international cooperation and economic frameworks. Multilateralism will play a vital role in addressing shared challenges, potentially leading to a rebalancing of economic and political power.

These global risks have local implications. No country is immune to the economic, environmental, and societal transformations shaping the world. The Sultanate of Oman, for instance, has incorporated these global challenges into its development strategies, recognising them as critical factors in planning and growth.

The country's initiatives emphasise economic diversification, innovation, and the strengthening of partnerships at both regional and international levels. Oman's approach is guided by a vision of sustainable development that integrates awareness of global risks with local opportunities. A robust network of ports, free zones, and economic hubs positions the nation as a key link in the global economy.

Investments in entrepreneurship, innovation and youth empowerment further aim to make Oman an attractive destination within the global economic system. As His Majesty Sultan Haitham

bin Tarik noted, these efforts are designed to transform Oman into a thriving centre for investment and economic growth. Turning global risks into opportunities requires resilience and creativity.

His Majesty's call for the Omani people to view challenges as drivers for progress resonates strongly in this context. By understanding the societal and economic shifts occurring worldwide, Oman can adapt and leverage these changes for its benefit.

This includes embracing technological developments, fostering international partnerships, and ensuring that innovation aligns with ethical principles and societal values. Education, social and cultural institutions have a critical role to play in mitigating the risks posed by global changes. Collaborative programmes and initiatives can raise awareness, promote shared responsibility, and reinforce moral values. The concept of "technological citizenship" is particularly important in this regard. This involves equipping individuals with the knowledge to navigate and manage technological advancements ethically, ensuring that digital content aligns with societal norms and maintains credibility.

The risks outlined in the Global Risks Report are not new but are growing in scale and complexity. Overcoming them is a collective responsibility, as emphasised by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik. It demands coordinated efforts to adapt to an evolving world and maximise the benefits of positive citizenship.

By doing so, societies can transform uncertainty into an opportunity for growth and resilience.

Translated by Badr al Dhafari
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OPINION

Are we the luckiest generation or the most forgetful?



RUMAITHA AL BUSAIDI
Follow her on X @rumaithabusaidi

The writer is environmental strategist and advocate for sustainable development

I remember sitting beside my grandmother, the scent of frankincense lingering in the air, her hands gently resting in her lap—hands that had seen a life I could barely fathom. It was one of our last conversations before she passed away when I was seventeen, and even then, I did not fully grasp the depth of the stories she shared.

She spoke of a time before the Sultanate of Oman had riches, before the roads were paved, before electricity lit up the nights. She told me how they lived by the rhythms of nature, how the seasons dictated what they ate, how water had to be fetched from distant wells, and how homes were built to keep cool without the hum of air conditioners. Her world was one of scarcity but also of resilience, of hardships but also of deep gratitude.

I contrasted it with my own life, where I travelled the world, had access to every modern convenience, and could dream beyond just survival. If she were alive today, would she think I was lucky? Or would she wonder if, despite everything we have gained, we have also lost something far more valuable? The transformation of societies across history has shown that prosperity is

never guaranteed. Wealth and progress can elevate nations, but they can also be fleeting. Progress is not just about economic growth or technological advancement but about the choices made when entrusted with wealth.

These choices determine whether prosperity endures or fades. During my time at Harvard, I had the opportunity to engage in a dialogue with Daron Acemoglu, Nobel Prize recipient in Economics, whose research highlights that nations fail when power and wealth remain concentrated, when progress benefits only a few, and when innovation is stifled.

They succeed when they create systems that empower people, invest in education, and ensure that growth is both inclusive and sustainable. Oman Vision 2040 is a step in that direction, aiming to shape a more resilient and diversified future, but true progress should not be measured in GDP alone.

It lies in how well a society preserves its values, its culture, and its environment. As I grow older, I realise that the wisdom of my grandmother’s generation holds the key to the sustainability we are desperately trying to rediscover. Omani communities had a way of living that wasted nothing. They built

Modernity and tradition do not have to be at odds; they can merge to create a future that is both innovative and deeply rooted in the wisdom of those who came before us.

homes with natural cooling and consumed only what the land could offer.

They did not need sustainability plans. Sustainability was simply the way of life. Today, we find ourselves in a paradox. We have more wealth, more technology, and more convenience than ever before. Yet we struggle with environmental degradation, food insecurity, and a disconnection from the land. Our homes are dependent on artificial cooling.

Our food is largely imported. Our oceans and lands bear the weight of modern excess. The irony is glaring. We are the luckiest generation in history, but we take so much for granted.

The challenge is not just preserving wealth but ensuring it is used wisely. The past offers lessons that are more relevant than ever, not as relics of a bygone era but as guiding principles for the future. Modernity and tradition do not have to be at odds; they can merge to create a future that is both innovative and deeply rooted in the wisdom of those who came before us. Perhaps, as we shape Oman’s future, the real question is not just whether we are lucky but whether we are wise enough to preserve the things that made us strong in the first place.

Sudan ‘political’ banknote switch causes cash crunch

MENNA FAROUK

Sudan’s army-aligned government has issued new banknotes in areas it controls, reportedly aimed at undermining its paramilitary rivals but causing long queues at banks, disrupting trade and entrenching division. In a country already grappling with war and famine, the swap replaced 500 and 1,000 Sudanese pound banknotes (worth around \$0.25 and \$0.50 respectively) with new ones in seven states. The government justified the move as necessary to “protect the national economy and combat criminal counterfeiters”. But for many Sudanese, it just caused problems. In Port Sudan, now the de facto capital, frustration boiled over as banks failed to provide enough new notes. One 37-year-old woman spent days unsuccessfully trying to get the new money. “I’ve been going to the bank four or five times a week to get the new currency. But there is none.” Grocers, rickshaw drivers, petrol stations, and small shop owners are refusing to accept the old currency, preventing many transactions in a country reliant on cash. “We cannot buy small things from street vendors any more or transport around the city because they refuse the old currency,” the woman said.

The currency shift comes 21 months into a war that has devastated the northeast African country’s economy and infrastructure, caused famine in some areas, uprooted millions of people, and seen the Sudanese pound plunge.

Finance Minister Gibril Ibrahim defended the switch, saying it aims to “move money into the banking system, ensure the monetary mass enters formal channels as well as prevent counterfeiting and looted funds”.

But analysts say it is less about economics and more about gaining the upper hand in the war between army chief Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and his former deputy Mohamed Hamdan Daglo, who leads the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF).

“The army is trying to weaken the RSF by having a more dominant currency,” Matthew Sterling Benson at the London School of Economics and Political Science said. After the RSF looted banks, the army “wants to control the flow of money” and deprive them of resources, he said.

The RSF has banned the new notes in areas it controls and accused the army of orchestrating a “conspiracy to divide the country”.

Sudan is already fragmented: the army holds the north and east, and the RSF dominates the western Darfur region and parts of the south and centre. For Sudan’s population, the move has only compounded their suffering. — AFP

When it comes to choosing a career, passion matters

SCHOOL

students are encouraged to make their own higher education choices but also need some support. With so many degrees, institutions, and study destinations to choose from and amidst a lot of hearsay about this topic, it is important to gently nudge young people towards making informed decisions based on comprehensive and reliable information.

During one of our conversations, Dr Jamil Salmi, an education economist who used to work for the World Bank, once mentioned that school students must ideally be able to choose their future degree subject with “full awareness of the employment prospects for various programmes.” However, education economists like him also often emphasise that economies continue to evolve and are usually subject to changes and that, therefore, the matching or alignment of higher education courses with the needs of a job market is not and cannot be an exact science.

Dr Salmi also explained that young people are expected to always benefit from taking courses at learning institutions that can help them acquire and strengthen the “complex transversal competencies and skills” needed for most, if not all, of the 21st-century jobs. He mentioned critical thinking, collaboration, communication, curiosity, creativity, and the ability to continue to learn, unlearn, and relearn new knowledge and skills.

Plus, not all careers require a professional degree pathway. Sure, if one wants to become a doctor, lawyer, or engineer, one will need to pursue a specific degree.



BREGJE VAN BAAREN

The writer used to work for the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation. Bregje also contributed to the national ‘Your Decision, Your Future’ Campaign to support Omani school students

Still, many other professions can be based on more generic degrees, which is why many CEOs, managers, entrepreneurs, and civil servants pursued higher education courses which, subject-wise, did not always directly relate to their profession but helped shape their analytical thinking and problem-solving skills, and other transversal skills they have been able to apply in various work environments.

As they say, “A manager cannot become an engineer unless they have pursued a specific degree, but an engineer can become an excellent manager thanks to their way of thinking.” Dr Salmi also encourages students to, perhaps above all else, choose a career they are passionate about and explore various courses they feel intrinsically motivated to take.

The education economist is convinced that when people love what they study or do, they are more likely to become good students and hardworking professionals.

Students will also find the entire higher education decision-making process considerably easier if they start by choosing the subject they want to study and then look at different types of institutions and scholarships that offer and cover this subject. All in all, choosing a preferred subject degree should be based on a holistic approach; other than the increased possibility of successful job prospects and contributing to the nation’s economic requirements, one also must take into consideration one’s passion. After all, our intrinsic interests drive us and usually allow us to go the extra mile during our studies and careers and turn our talents into meaningful career options.

Representatives from the



It is important to gently nudge young people towards making informed decisions based on comprehensive and reliable information.

reputed University of St Andrews in Scotland once explained to Omani students who wanted to pursue their Medicine degree programme that an “excellent effort in school is only one part of being considered a potentially successful candidate.” To them, it is not about statements like, “I want to become a doctor because of job security and reputation while I excelled in Chemistry at school.”

They explained that choosing Medicine as a degree subject is also about attitude, learning styles, and an intrinsic interest in their programme based on wanting to help people. For this reason, the university advised students to “link their abilities and interests to the qualities they think a doctor would need.”

The same approach should be applied by students choosing any other course or career at any learning institution.

On this note, another important factor in higher education decision-making is one’s learning abilities and styles, which I will focus on in my next column.

An antidote to our amnesia or a time to heal



SONIA AMBROSIO

The writer is journalist, academic and researcher in media studies

THE International Holocaust Remembrance Day, observed on January 27, honours the memories of victims from concentration camps during World War 2. The 2005 United Nations General Assembly resolution urges all member nations to commemorate the victims’ memories and encourage educational programmes about Holocaust history to help prevent future genocides.

Lately, we have witnessed the genocide of entire communities, particularly women and children. The deliberate targeting of mosques, monuments, medical facilities, or heritage sites provides evidence of genocidal intent in the form of physical destruction. Genocides vary greatly in their implementation. It would appear that no lessons have been learned from history and no educational efforts to help prevent acts of genocide have been particularly effective. The pledge not to let the horrors of the Holocaust happen again slip into obscurity.

The Holocaust shows the dangers of unchecked prejudice, discrimination and dehumanisation. It also reveals the range of human responses.

An Amnesty International report issued last month determined that Israel had perpetrated and continues to commit genocide against Palestinians in the occupied Gaza Strip. According to the report, ‘You Feel Like You Are Subhuman: Israel’s Genocide Against Palestinians in Gaza,’ Israel has committed acts prohibited by the Genocide

Convention, such as killings, causing major bodily or mental harm and deliberately inflicting conditions of life that will result in their physical destruction.

According to the report, Israel has continued to perpetrate genocide while knowing full well the catastrophic devastation it was causing. The findings suggest that nothing has been learned from the Holocaust.

A genocide has recently been declared in Sudan. Ethnically motivated killings have intensified in western Darfur, echoing the pattern of targeted killings that typifies genocide. Over 11 million people have been displaced in Sudan. Those unable to flee are confined in Darfur’s Zanzam camp, where a famine was declared in December.

The topic of 2025’s Human Rights Day, observed in December, is ‘Holocaust Remembrance for Dignity and Human Rights.’ It is difficult to understand Holocaust Remembrance Day and this year’s Human Rights guiding theme, which focuses on dignity when states are more concerned with defending their international agendas than stopping the slaughter of civilians.

Genocide is the deliberate destruction of national, ethnic, racial, or religious groups. Public humiliation and psychological intimidation are methods used against opponents through a combination of publicity and secrecy. People choose to commit genocide, despite the international community’s continuous affirmation of ‘the dignity and worth of human beings.’

An Amnesty International report issued last month determined that Israel had perpetrated and continues to commit genocide against Palestinians in the occupied Gaza Strip

Major states, leaders, and institutions have either failed to understand how to prevent genocide or have chosen to do nothing. Some fuel it with a steady supply of arms, ammunition and replacement parts.

Then comes the question of dignity and its relationship to human rights. In academia, dignity is defined as a key value of status that underpins fundamental moral duties or rights. It is the inviolable worth of every human being regardless of background, circumstances, or abilities.

We see humiliation and a violation of human dignity. Where is the dignity of millions of children and adolescents out of school? Where is the dignity of children raised in poverty or without access to essential survival and living resources?

The veneer of civilisation is already thin and fragile; the memory of the Holocaust is fading and in some ways, the stench of destruction fills the air.

Holocaust Remembrance offers insights on social justice, human rights and genocide awareness. These moral issues require careful consideration, particularly when remaining silent, apathetic, or indifferent to the oppression of others can breed xenophobia and hatred. One of the most touching comments from Elie Wiesel, a Nobel Peace Prize winner and Holocaust survivor, was: “When human lives are endangered, when human dignity is threatened, national borders and sensitivities become irrelevant.” However, political and moral blind spots allow atrocities to persist.

ITALY’S MELONI NAVIGATES A HIGH-STAKES RELATIONSHIP

CRISPIAN BALMER

He hails a fantastic woman sweeping all before her in Europe. She praises a strong and shrewd defender of the West. Donald Trump and Giorgia Meloni are fast forging a new transatlantic “special relationship”.

Italian Prime Minister Meloni was the sole European leader at Trump’s presidential inauguration on Monday, an honour that came barely two weeks after she flew to Florida to meet him at his Mar-a-Lago retreat and propelled her into pole position to become Washington’s new go-to ally in Europe.

“Trump has chosen her for credibility, reliability and for the stability of our government as the preferred interlocutor in the EU,” Italian Deputy Foreign Minister Edmondo Cirielli, a member of Meloni’s Brothers of Italy party, said.

“This is useful for Italy and will also be useful for the EU.”

Indeed, in theory, Meloni has much to benefit by being in Trump’s good books. Nato member Italy has a big trade surplus with the United States and a diminished defence budget, putting her on a collision course with the new administration, unless she can leverage her ties with the president to deflect this. But aligning herself too closely with the mercurial American commander-in-chief also carries potential dangers. Meloni has worked hard to convince Brussels she is a reliable partner and could undermine her standing if she blatantly promotes Italian interests at the expense of the rest of the 27-nation bloc. “Meloni is actually in a very awkward position,” said Francesco Galletti, founder of political risk firm Policy Sonar.

“She hopes that having Trump’s ear will prove valuable, but she risks isolating herself in Europe, while having no guarantees that she can shield Italy from threatened American tariffs or blowback for the underwhelming defence spending.”

In less than 10 years, Meloni has gone from being the leader of a marginalised, ultranationalist party, to head of one of the most stable governments in post-war Italian history, serving as a bridge between far-right and conservative factions in Europe.

The election of Trump, a natural ideological partner, has given her the opportunity to play a similar role on a much bigger stage — one that has seen the emergence of powerful personal alliances between leaders such as Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan in the 1980s who cemented what is widely termed the “special relationship” between Britain and America. Despite Meloni’s move away from her far-right roots, some analysts who have followed her meteoric rise believe her deep-rooted eurosceptic instincts will prevail. — Reuters

National identity in the face of digital globalisation

NATIONAL identity stands at a critical intersection with swift

expansion of digital technology, which has effectively turned the global community into a virtual network linking diverse populations across previously insurmountable boundaries.

This transformation raises essential questions about how well cultures can sustain their inherited authenticity, traditions and deeply rooted connections in an era defined by the rapid transmission of information and omnipresent digital influence.

The overarching concern is whether the relentless march of digital globalisation might supplant the loyalty people once felt towards their native homelands, substituting or overriding it with newly emerging allegiances shaped by online platforms and boundary-defying digital communities.

Historically, personal identity and collective belonging were firmly anchored in shared values, linguistic traditions and cultural memories. Before the rise of modern digital innovations, loyalty was intimately tied to the homeland as a tangible space, a source of heritage and a repository of meaningful communal narratives.

Yet the Internet has now rendered these traditional boundaries permeable, allowing individuals to form new attachments that bypass geography. Online forums, social media groups and transnational digital circles bring together people with similar interests, enabling them to forge virtual identities partially detached from their ancestral roots. This new dynamic poses a paradox: can one effectively maintain cultural identity while actively participating in digital networks transcending nation-states, languages and long-standing customs?

Among the most visible hallmarks of digital globalisation



DR MUAMAR BIN ALI AL TOBI

The writer is an academic and researcher

is its profound impact on social life, particularly for younger generations. Many youth embrace the digital realm with enthusiasm, finding there an adaptable arena for personal expression, networking and the exchange of ideas. Conversely, older demographics may struggle to adapt to evolving patterns of communication, information access and cultural engagement, sometimes fueling a cultural rift within one nation. On one side are those who defend a clear and stable sense of national identity; on the other, a generation that seamlessly navigates digital platforms unconstrained by political or geographical frontiers. Such divergence can undermine national cohesion, weakening shared cultural references and eroding the concept of a unified homeland.

Beyond mere engagement with global networks, “digital loyalty” can lead individuals to adopt new norms, values and even worldviews that might conflict with long-standing national principles. The persuasive power of dominant tech corporations, online influencers and targeted marketing algorithms intensifies this phenomenon, gradually shifting loyalty from heritage-based ties to abstract digital affiliations. In extreme cases, citizens may become so immersed in foreign content and discourse that their connection to their homeland diminishes, altering their sense of who they are and what they represent.

From a philosophical standpoint, loyalty to national identity is more than nostalgic sentiment; it is linked to a broader cultural memory with deep historical roots. A homeland embodies continuity, anchoring people in narratives passed down through generations. Surrendering that connection in favor of a purely digital existence carries profound existential implications. Yet digital technology itself is not inherently detrimental.

It can serve as a conduit for cross-cultural dialogue, broadening

horizons and expanding social networks. Some observers view it as liberating, creating a global stage for cultural diversity and collaboration. Still, the concern remains that national identities may fade within an unregulated digital environment, raising the question of whether people should simply submit to what their screens dictate.

A balanced approach is thus required, one that safeguards national identity while preserving the substantial benefits of digital connectivity. Rather than impeding digital globalisation, national identity can act as a stabilising force ensuring diversity and richness in human experiences. Several practical measures can nurture this equilibrium. First, incorporating digital literacy into educational curricula can reinforce core national values and highlight the importance of cultural heritage. Second, adopting strategic digital policies encourages homegrown platforms that celebrate local narratives and respect societal values. Third, reviving national symbols through digital archives and technology helps sustain a living connection between past and present. Lastly, fostering philosophical and academic dialogue about the meaning of national identity in the digital age spurs adaptive thinking, allowing cultures to reconcile tradition with innovation.

Overall, national identity and digital globalisation need not be opposing forces. Thoughtful integration of technology can preserve historical continuity while embracing new forms of expression. As societies craft policies and educational programmes that reinforce both cultural rootedness and global participation, individuals gain the best of both worlds. The challenge, therefore, lies in shaping digital tools to complement rather than supplant collective memory, ensuring that modern progress does not strip away the cultural tapestry binding communities across time.

SPORTS

DHOFARSTAR



Dhofar's AbdulSalam Amer during the HM Cup quarterfinal match against Seeb.

OMAN FORMER DEFENDER ABDULSALAM AMER PASSES AWAY

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JAN 22

The man who celebrated last week with his club Dhofar after lifting the OFA Super Cup at Al Rustaq Sports Complex is no more. Dhofar defender and Oman national team former player, Abdulsalam Amer, passed away on Tuesday night in Salalah at the age of 37. According to some sources, the reason of Abdulsalam death was a heart attack as he was at his residence in Salalah.

The last statement of the late Abdulsalam Amer to media was on Tuesday (14th January 2025) as he dedicated Dhofar's triumph in the Super Cup to his family including his father, mother and his kids. The Dhofar defender assisted his team in the last match against Seeb to win the match by 3-2 and emerged champions of 2024-2025 Super Cup.

Amer served Oman national football team since 2008 and his last presence with the national team was back to 2019 in the 24th edition of Gulf Cup in Qatar. He had played with domestic several clubs including Al Oruba and Dhofar besides his impressive stints with the regional clubs including Saudi Arabia's Al Raed Club, Baniyas Club of the UAE and the Kuwait Club.

The late Dhofar defender's last appearance on the ground was on Sunday as he played with Dhofar in the quarterfinal of the HM Cup Championship against Al Nasr as the latter won the match by 1-0.

Abdulsalam's best appearance with the national team was in 2014 when French coach Paul Le Guen was the head coach of the team. He was one of the main defenders in the team besides teammate Mohammed al Musallami as both of them created a strong defending line for the Red Warriors.

The Oman football fraternity was in deep shock following the untimely death of the experienced Dhofar player. The Oman Football Association officials and the football family in the Sultanate of Oman mourned the sudden death of the former Oman national football team player.

Dhofar club announced on Wednesday to suspend all the sports and cultural events at the club during the upcoming three days. Many of the team players headed by Ali bin Salim al Nahar went to Sur on Wednesday to deliver their condolences to his family and seeking the Almighty God to protect him with his mercy and granting the family patience and solace.

MOHAMMED, AZIZA CLAIM 10TH OMAN DESERT MARATHON CROWNS

ANUROOP ATHIPARAMBATH
@anuroop_ath

MOHAMMED EL MORABITY rounded off his brilliant run at the 10th Oman Desert Marathon (ODM) by grabbing the overall title after the 21 km fifth and final stage in Bidiyah on Wednesday.

The Moroccan runner came better of his illustrious brother Rachid El Morabity, who is a seven-time champion of the ODM, by 12 minutes and 23 seconds to claim his second ODM title.

Mohammed (15:44:25) has registered four stage wins out of five, missing out only in the fourth night stage to Rachid.

Rachid, won his solo stage in the fourth, consolidating his second overall position (15:56:48).

Oman's Saleh al Saidi (16:02:47) achieved a creditable third place in overall general classification after taking second spot in the fifth stage. Saleh also took third place in the 30 km night stage competed by 30 runners.

The Oman Army runner had come close to win some stages with his consistent performances during the tenth edition of



Oman Desert Marathon.

Other local runners also made impressive final standings with Ghaith al Saeedi (16:48:37) taking fourth ahead of Hani al Saidi (18:09:57) in fifth, Khalid al Farsi (18:33:49) in sixth and Khalid Said al Jabri (19:19:01) in seventh spot.

Russia's Anton Zyrianov (20:02:17) claimed eighth spot ahead of Omanis Malik al Mufarji (21:04:52) in ninth and Ibrahim al Mufarji (22:35:59) in tenth position.

AZIZA BAGS WOMEN'S TITLE

Star marathoner Aziza Raji (22:39:17) took the women's title after claiming an impressive 11th in overall classification.

Great British women runners Lydia Oldham (25:56:30) and Sally Ford (27:49:20) capped their brilliant Oman outing with second and third spots, followed by fellow female German runner Tanja Schoenenborn (28:05:41) in fourth.

Oman Army 'A' runner Saleh al Saidi topped the local section. Teammate Ghaith al Saeedi was second in the section ahead of Hani al

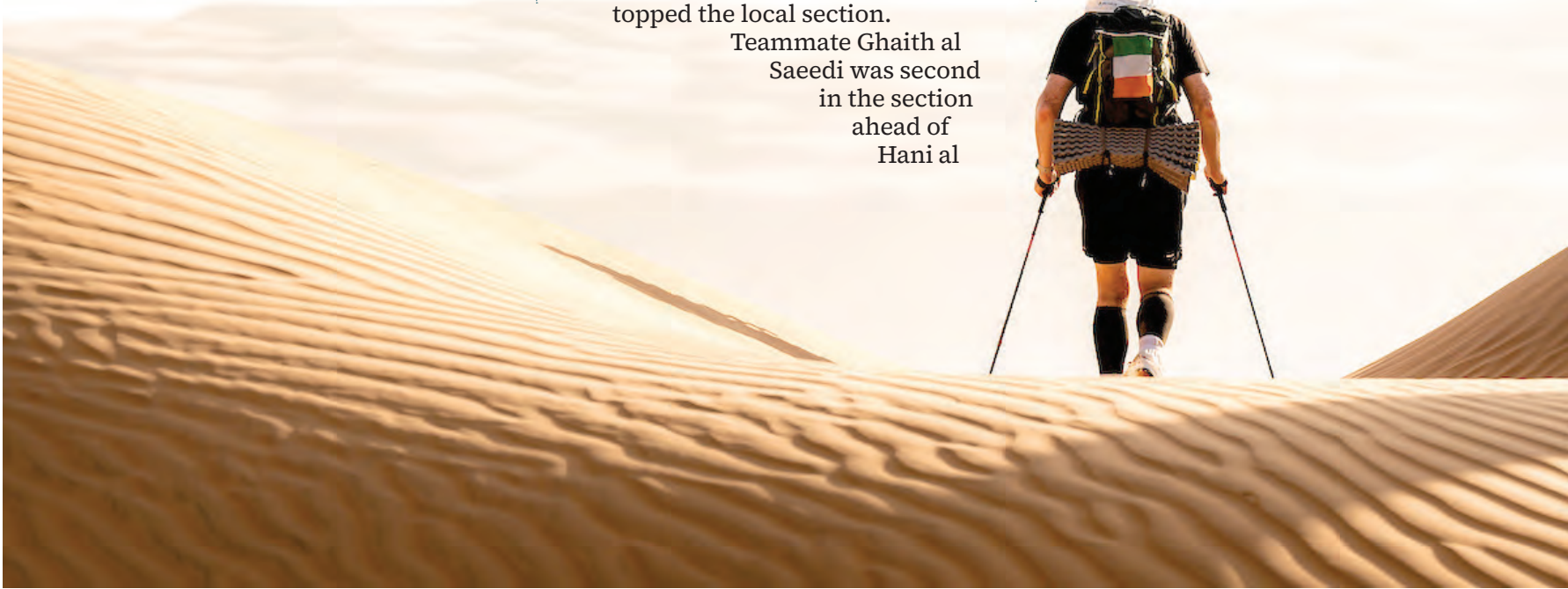
Saidi of Oman Army 'B' in third. Khalid al Farsi of Oman Flour Mills Company 'A' and Khalid Said al Jabri of Oman Army 'B' completed the top five Omani list.

In the team section, Oman Army 'A' took top spot ahead of Oman Army 'B' and Oman Flour Mills Company 'A'. Oman Flour Mills Company 'B' and Jabel Team were the other teams in fray.

In the individual classification, Mohammed and Rachid took the top two spots and Russia's Anton Zyrianov came third.

Great Britain's Patrick Wiltshire (24:48:38) was fifth overall, followed by Shane McShera (25:06:50) of Ireland in sixth and GBR's Mohammed Ashraf Abdin (25:31:41) in seventh.

Women runners Lydia, Sally and Tanja completed the top 10 respectively.



10-DAYEVENT

U14 ASIAN, ITF CHAMPIONSHIPS CONCLUDE TODAY

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, JAN 22

The Asian and International Tennis Federation Under-14 Championships, organised by the Oman Tennis Association (OTA) over the past several days, come to an end on Thursday. The event featured two tournaments for international ranking points and saw participation from 13 countries competing over 10 days to accumulate ranking points. The closing ceremony will be held under the auspices of OTA Chairman Moatasem bin Hamoud al Zadjali.

The tournament was characterised by excellent organisation and intense competition among players. The Omani national women's team

performed admirably, with Arin al Azqawi securing third place in the first tournament, though she was unable to compete in the second.

The singles boys' final will take place today at 2:30 pm, featuring a match between Syria's Mohammed Aya and Iraq's Hassan Ali Hatim for the title. Mohammed Aya advanced to the final after defeating Saudi Arabia's Ahmed Bahaa 6-1, 6-1, while Hassan Ali Hatim qualified by overcoming Yemen's Mohammed al Awadhi 6-4, 6-0.

In the singles girls' category, Jovsina from Kyrgyzstan advanced to the final after defeating Oman's Talia al Busaidy 6-0, 6-1. Sara Maizeva also reached the final by beating Lebanon's Lina Samad 6-2, 6-3.

The Kyrgyzstan girls' doubles team secured the doubles title, with players Ivua and Sara defeating the Lebanese duo of Lina Samad and

Lama Naaman 6-2, 6-4.

Ahmed al Balushi, the tournament director, praised the success of the event, highlighting the positive feedback received from participating delegations and the tournament's head referee. "The organisation met all the required standards for hosting tournaments of this level for junior categories," he said. Al Balushi also emphasised the commitment of the Oman Tennis Association's board of directors to ensuring the tournament was conducted in an ideal manner.

He added, "the participation was excellent, benefiting both players and organisers. This was my first experience as a tournament director and I am grateful for the success we achieved as a team in delivering a well-organized and enjoyable event. Today marks the conclusion of ten days of thrilling and exciting competition. We wish all participants success and hope they gained valuable technical experience and ranking points."



IRAQ'S
HASSAN
ALI HATIM



SYRIA'S
MOHAMMED
AYA



AHMED
AL BALUSHI



Rashid al Muhannadi tests his new Peugeot 208 near Suhar this week.

Oman International Rally to kickstart in Suhar today

THE Oman International Rally kickstarts another season of Middle East rallying when it gets underway from the Suhar Entertainment Centre (SEC) on Thursday afternoon.

Organised by the Oman Automobile Association (OAA), the opening round of the 2025 FIA Middle East Rally Championship (Merc) has attracted a field of 16 teams and competitors from nine countries, in addition to six crews competing in the Oman National Championship.

The event is being run under the chairmanship of Brigadier Jamal Said al Tai, organising panel member Suleiman al Rawahi and Rally Director Anwar al Zadjali. Three recent Middle East champions head a star-studded regional field, who will tackle 13 special stages and 232.39 competitive kilometres over the coming three days.

The Merc event has moved to the Al Batinah North Governorate and the city of Suhar for the first time, although a national event did stages in the region 12 years ago. All six gravel stages to the west of Suhar are brand new but have not lost the legendary fast and flowing nature of the stunning terrain on offer in the Sultanate of Oman.

As Chris Hodgson, the Chairman of the Organising Committee, explained: "This is a completely new route but it is very typically Oman, with wadis, hills and loose gravel. The stages are located half way between Muscat and Dubai."

"The stages may look easy but they aren't.



Rakan al Rashed

There are a lot of places that could catch people out. In places, it is quite narrow and punctures are always a risk out there. We are the Oman Automobile Association and not the Muscat Automobile Association and we wanted to take the sport to the people.

"The Suhar Municipality have been massively supportive and have done everything they can to make it happen. We have worked closely with them and called upon their support for the supply of around 2,500 tonnes of recycled gravel for stage grading."

Top seed Abdulaziz al Kuwari finished his first ever Dakar Rally in fourth place in the Challenger category last week, but the defending regional champion will need to revert to special stage mode quickly this

weekend. He wheels out a QMMF-backed Citroen C3 and has recruited the services of Irish co-driver Lorcan Moore. Likewise, Nasser Saleh al Attiyah took part in the Dakar Rally and finished fourth with his French navigator Edouard Boulanger. The pair retain their partnership for the Qatari's quest for a record eighth win in Oman in an Autotek Motorsport-run Skoda Fabia RS Boulanger is making his Merc debut.

AL RAWAHI ON TRACK

Oman's Abdullah al Rawahi and his Jordanian co-driver Ata-Hmoud are also running an Autotek Skoda, as the 2023 regional champion attempts to complete a hat-trick of wins on his home rally.

The QMMF has also supported an entry for Rashed al Muhannadi and he runs a Peugeot 208 Rally 4 with backing from the Qatar Motorsports Academy. Irishman Gary Mcelhinney has competed in countries as diverse as the USA, Spain, Tanzania, Zambia and Barbados and will read the pace notes for the Qatari for the first time.

Rakan al Rashed is one of the leading rally drivers in the Middle East but has carved his recent reputation away from the Merc. The 35-year-old Saudi teams up with Portugal's Hugo Magalhaes in a new Toyota GR Yaris Rally 2, as he tries to upset the regular contenders in the series on his return to regional action. In 2024, the duo tackled rallies in Sweden, Portugal, Finland and Latvia and won the Finnish Jari-Pekka Ralli outright in their Printsport Toyota.

Abhishek, bowlers help India thrash England in T20 opener

KOLKATA: Inspired bowling and a 34-ball 79 by opener Abhishek Sharma helped India to a crushing seven-wicket win over England in the first T20 international on Wednesday.

Spinner Varun Chakravarthy and fast bowler Arshdeep Singh shared five wickets between them as India bowled out England for 132 after the hosts elected to field first in Kolkata.

Left-hander Sharma then came out firing and despite losing two of his partners smashed a 20-ball fifty and ended with eight sixes and five fours to steer the team to victory in 12.5 overs and a 1-0 lead in the five-match series.

The T20 series, followed by three ODIs, between the two teams

serve as a warm-up for the 50-over Champions Trophy next month.

England skipper Jos Buttler smashed 68 off 44 balls but the rest of the line-up failed to get going.

Phil Salt fell for a duck on the third ball of the match, with a leading edge off his bat sending the ball high and into the gloves of wicketkeeper Sanju Samson.

Arshdeep dismissed Ben Duckett for four in the third over, with Rinku Singh taking a stunning backward running catch from the covers.

Buttler hit back with four boundaries off Hardik Pandya as he attempted to rebuild in a 48-run third-wicket partnership with his new deputy Harry Brook, who scored 17.



India's Abhishek Sharma walks past Hardik Pandya after losing his wicket, caught by England's Harry Brook off the bowling of Adil Rashid. — Reuters

CHAKRAVARTHY SHINES

Chakravarthy bowled Brook with a googly and sent back Liam Livingstone for a duck as the ball darted into the stumps once again.

Buttler reached his fifty in 34 balls but wickets kept tumbling and in an attempt to push the scoring the skipper finally fell to Chakravarthy, who returned figures of 3-23, the ball after hitting the bowler for six.

Arshdeep, Axar Patel and Pandya took two wickets each and a run out from the last ball saw England all out in 20 overs.

India raced to 41 in 4.1 overs before fast bowler Jofra Archer took down Sanju Samson, for 26, and skipper Suryakumar Yadav, for a duck, in the space of four

deliveries. But opener Abhishek Sharma kept up the batting blitz to take the steam out of the England bowling.

The 24-year-old Sharma finally fell to Adil Rashid but not after a show that entertained the raucous home crowd.

It was a disappointing start for England's new white-ball coach Brendon McCullum, who was previously only in charge of the Test side.

India surprisingly left out Mohammed Shami after the fast bowler returned to the squad following a heel injury that kept him away from competitive cricket for over a year.

The second T20 is on Saturday in Chennai. — AFP

SPORTS

AUSTRALIAN OPEN



Jannik Sinner celebrates after winning his quarterfinal against Alex de Minaur. — Reuters

SINNER RACES INTO SEMIS AS SWIATEK CLOSES ON FIRST CROWN



Iga Swiatek celebrates winning her quarterfinal against Emma Navarro of the US. — Reuters

MELBOURNE: Defending champion Jannik Sinner raced into the Australian Open semifinals on Wednesday in imperious fashion after Iga Swiatek was equally ruthless to close on a first Melbourne crown.

Italian world number one Sinner swept aside an out-classed home hope Alex de Minaur 6-3, 6-2, 6-1 to silence Rod Laver Arena and set up a meeting with 21st seed Ben Shelton.

The other semifinal is between 10-time Australian Open champion Novak Djokovic and world number two Alexander Zverev, with both taking place on Friday. Sinner had dizzy spells in the scorching heat of the afternoon during his four-set win against Holger Rune on Monday.

But in much cooler evening conditions the 23-year-old was back to his brilliant best against eighth seed De Minaur, who has still never beaten Sinner in 10 matches. “Today I felt like I was feeling everything,” said Sinner.

Sinner is bidding to defend a Grand Slam title for the first time after beating Daniil Medvedev in the final last year. He also won the US Open last year.

The 22-year-old American Shelton booked his place in the semi-finals in Melbourne for the first time with a battling 6-4, 7-5, 4-6, 7-6 (7/4) win over unseeded Italian Lorenzo Sonego.

Left-hander Shelton put in an all-action display to match his best performance at a major, having reached the US Open semifinals in 2023.

Shelton unleashed the joint-fastest serve of the tournament, a monster ace clocked at 232 kph and afterwards turned his fire on the post-match televised interviews that the winners do on court.

Five-time Grand Slam champion Swiatek edged closer to a first Australian Open crown with an emphatic 6-1, 6-2 victory over American eighth seed Emma Navarro on a gusty Rod Laver Arena.

The 23-year-old world number two, who is building up a head of steam, plays American 19th seed Madison Keys in the women’s semifinals, which both take place on Thursday.

Two-time defending champion and top-ranked Aryna Sabalenka plays Spain’s 11th seed Paula Badosa for the other final berth. — AFP

AUSTRALIAN OPEN RESULTS

Men (quarterfinals)

Jannik Sinner (ITA x1) bt Alex De Minaur (AUS x8) 6-3, 6-2, 6-1; Ben Shelton (USA x21) bt Lorenzo Sonego (ITA) 6-4, 7-5, 4-6, 7-6 (7/4)

Women (quarterfinals)

Madison Keys (USA x19) bt Elina Svitolina (UKR x28) 3-6, 6-3, 6-4
Iga Swiatek (POL x2) bt Emma Navarro (USA x8) 6-1, 6-2

Liverpool clinch last-16 berth, Barca win epic

LIVERPOOL beat Lille 2-1 on Tuesday to maintain

their perfect record in this season’s Champions League and clinch qualification for the last 16, while Barcelona produced a stunning comeback to beat Benfica 5-4 in a classic to secure their own place.

The Anfield side are the only team with a maximum 21 points from seven matches in this new, expanded Champions League and they now know they will skip next month’s play-offs and head straight to the last 16 in March.

Mohamed Salah ran clear to give Liverpool the lead at home to a Lille team who have also impressed this season and the visitors appeared in trouble when they had Aissa Mandi sent off just before the hour mark.

Jonathan David swept in an equaliser for Lille, but Harvey Elliott’s shot took a wicked deflection on its way in to give Liverpool the points.

“We’re happy that we are top eight. That’s the only thing that tells me something, because this league table doesn’t tell you anything,” said Slot when asked about being through to the last 16.

The biggest drama on the night, however, came in the rain in Lisbon, where Barcelona trailed 4-2 with 12 minutes of the 90 remaining, but somehow recovered to win 5-4.

Greek striker Vangelis Pavlidis scored a hat-trick in the first half-hour for Benfica, including a penalty, while Robert Lewandowski netted from the spot for Barca, who were 3-1 down at the interval.

Raphinha pulled it back to 3-2 when a clearance by the goalkeeper ricocheted back off the Brazilian’s head and in, but a Ronald Araujo own goal midway through the second half appeared to have secured the win for the Portuguese side.

However, another Lewandowski penalty on 78 minutes gave Barcelona renewed hope, and Eric Garcia headed in the equaliser on 86 minutes, before Raphinha ran away to settle an incredible game.

“The mentality of the team, they always believe in themselves and this was unbelievable to see,” said Barcelona coach Hansi Flick.

The Catalans are second with six wins out of seven and will finish in the top eight to go straight to the last 16. Benfica, with 10 points, must still sweat to reach the play-off round.

ALVAREZ BRACE GIVES ATLETICO VICTORY

Elsewhere, Atletico Madrid are third on 15 points and certain to at least be in the play-offs after a Julian Alvarez brace secured a 2-1 home victory over Bayer Leverkusen in a game both teams finished with 10 men.

Atletico had Pablo Barrios sent off midway through the first half, and Piero Hincapie then put Leverkusen ahead just before the break.

Argentina star Alvarez levelled seven minutes into the second half, and Hincapie was sent off for the Germans before another Alvarez goal won it for the home side in the last minute as they climbed above Leverkusen.

Last season’s Europa League winners Atalanta are also guaranteed at least a play-off place after crushing Sturm Graz of Austria 5-0.

Mateo Retegui, Mario Pasalic, Charles De Ketelaere, Ademola Lookman and Marco Brescianini all scored for the Italians.

Monaco got back to winning ways after some disappointing results had seen their campaign stall, as



Liverpool’s Egyptian striker #11 Mohamed Salah (front) and Hungarian midfielder #08 Dominik Szoboszlai (rear) celebrate at the end of the Uefa Champions League match against Lille at Anfield in Liverpool. — AFP



FC Barcelona’s Raphinha celebrates scoring their fifth goal. — Reuters

Wilfried Singo’s early goal proved enough for them to beat Aston Villa 1-0. Both teams are set to progress to the knockout phase and both could still finish in the top eight.

Last season’s runners-up Borussia Dortmund should also be fine despite a 2-1 defeat away to Bologna, as substitutes Thijs Dallinga and Samuel Iling-Junior scored a minute apart in the second half after Serhou Guirassy’s early penalty had put the Germans in front.

Club Brugge held Juventus to a 0-0 draw in Belgium as that duo both look set to go through to the play-

offs at least, while PSV Eindhoven are poised to advance following a 3-2 win at Red Star Belgrade.

PSV led 3-0 at the break thanks to a Luuk de Jong double and a Ryan Flamingo strike, but the latter was sent off early in the second half and Red Star pulled goals back courtesy of Cherif Ndiaye and Nasser Djiga.

VfB Stuttgart maintained their hopes of reaching the play-offs with a 3-1 win away to Slovan Bratislava, who have lost every game.

Jamie Leweling bagged a brace for Stuttgart and Fabian Rieder sealed their victory after Idjessi Metsoko had pulled one back. — AFP

UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE RESULTS

Atalanta (ITA) 5 (Retegui 12, Pasalic 58, De Ketelaere 63, Lookman 90, Brescianini 90+5) Sturm Graz (AUT) 0
Monaco (FRA) 1 (Singo 8) Aston Villa (ENG) 0
Slovan Bratislava (SVK) 1 (Metsoko 85) Stuttgart (GER) 3 (Leweling 11, 36, Rieder 87)
Club Brugge (BEL) 0 Juventus (ITA) 0
Atletico Madrid (ESP) 2 (Alvarez 52, 90) Bayer Leverkusen (GER) 1 (Hincapie 45+1)
Benfica (POR) 4 (Pavlidis 2, 22, 30-pen, Araujo 68-og) Barcelona (ESP) 5 (Lewandowski 13-pen, 78-pen, Raphinha 64, 90+6, Garcia 87)
Liverpool (ENG) 2 (Salah 34, Elliott 67) Lille (FRA) 1 (David 62)
Bologna (ITA) 2 (Dallinga 71, Iling-Junior 72) Borussia Dortmund (GER) 1 (Guirassy 15-pen)
Red Star Belgrade (SRB) 2 (Ndiaye 71, Djiga 77) PSV Eindhoven (NED) 3 (de Jong 17, 24, Flamingo 43)

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Oman to launch hydrogen fuel taxis

HIBBA AL KINDI & CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, JAN 22

A first-ever taxi service operating on hydrogen-powered cars will be launched in the Sultanate of Oman during the current year, Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, announced here on Wednesday. Addressing the annual media briefing, Al Maawali said the new service – featuring an initial fleet of 15 vehicles – will operate from Muscat International Airport. Importantly, the initiative will be rolled

out in conjunction with the opening of the first hydrogen fuel station, currently under construction in the proximity of the airport, with the support of the Ministry of Energy and Minerals and the Civil Aviation Authority. Both launches are a key part of the Transport ministry’s green mobility strategy, espousing the progressive adoption of zero-carbon or other sustainable fuels for transportation purposes in the Sultanate of Oman, the minister said. Green mobility options encompass not only hydrogen fuel powered vehicles, but also Electric Vehicles, and other types of



Representatives of Oman Shell and Saudi-contractor Hydrogen Systems pictured during a recent visit to the site of Oman’s first hydrogen refueling station under construction at Muscat International Airport (Picture credit: Hydrogen Systems)



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Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC) announces the following tenders:

SR. NO.	TENDER NO.	TENDER NAME	FLOATING DATE	LAST DATE FOR OBTAINING THE DOCUMENTS	BID SUBMISSION DATE	REQUIREMENTS FROM PARTICIPATORS	TENDER DOCUMENT'S FEES (INCLUDING VAT) (RO)
1	02/ 2025	Supply of Equipment's and Accessories for 132 kV Overhead Line Maintenance in Dhofar Governorate.	23/01/2025	06/02/2025	04/03/2025	Local Companies with Experience in Same Field, Have a Valid Commercial Registration.	26/250
2	03/ 2025	Supply, Installation & Commissioning of Replacement HVAC Package Units, along with the Supply and Installation of New 5-Ton Standalone Air Conditioners, and a 24-Month AMC for Grid Stations in the Muscat Governorate.	23/01/2025	06/02/2025	04/03/2025	Local Companies with Experience in Same Field, Have a Valid Commercial Registration.	52/500
3	04/ 2025	Supply, Installation & Commissioning of 2.5-Ton Split Air Conditioning Units for Grid Stations in the South and North Al Batinah Governorates.	23/01/2025	06/02/2025	04/03/2025	Local Companies with Experience in Same Field, Have a Valid Commercial Registration.	26/250
4	05/ 2025	Replacement & Maintenance of the Firefighting System in Grid Stations within the Muscat Governorate.	23/01/2025	06/02/2025	04/03/2025	Local Companies with Experience in Same Field, Have a Valid Commercial Registration.	52/500
5	06/ 2025	Supply, Installation & Commissioning of 2.5-Ton Split Air Conditioning Units for Grid Stations in the South and North Al Sharqiyah Governorates.	23/01/2025	06/02/2025	04/03/2025	Local Companies with Experience in Same Field, Have a Valid Commercial Registration.	26/250

Participation	Interested Companies may obtain Tender Document with the necessity Apply on E-tendering.
Buying the Tender	By E-Tendering System.
Fees	Against non-refundable payment as mentioned above against each set of document. (Payment Through Bank Transfer), SMEs are exempted from tender's fees.
The deadline for clarification	Before (21) Days from bid submission date.
Submission	The submission of hard copy will be only for Bid Bond & other documents by E-Tendering
Terms and conditions	- Specifying the name of the Company or whatever refers to in the Bid Guarantee Envelope. - The bid should be valid for not less than (90) days from bid submission date. - The Tenderer should enclose a bank guarantee issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman for the value of 1% of the bid value and should be valid for (90) days from bid submission date, addressed to Oman Electricity Transmission Company (SAOC). Small & Medium Enterprises are exempted from the submission of 1% of the bid bond. - Any bid not comply with the required guarantee, will not be accepted. - OETC is not bound to accept the lowest or any other offers.
Offer	The bid bond should be submitted in Tender Box No. (1) at the company's building before 11:00 am on the assigned date for submission of the Tenders.
Company Address	Muscat - Al Mawaleh Road No: 2153 - Building No. 423 0 Block No: 321 - Contact Details: 93515198 , 92217856 , 91491551
Email Website	tenders@omangrid.com www.omangrid.com / link of E-Tendering System https://www.omangrid.com/en/Pages/Services.aspx

Oman awards concessions to boost minerals sector

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 22

OMAN’S Ministry of Energy and Minerals has signed two major mining concession agreements aimed at expanding the country’s resource base and driving economic diversification. According to officials, the first deal, signed with Al Hadeetha Resources, grants mining rights in Concession Area 22-B, a 1,448 square kilometre site in Al Sharqiyah North Governorate. The project will focus on copper mining at the Washihi-Mazzaza site in the Wilayat of Al Mudhaibi, where 16 million tonnes of copper have been discovered, including over 10 million tonnes deemed mineable. Under the agreement, Al Hadeetha Resources will carry out a three-year exploration phase involving surveys, geological mapping, and the drilling of 27 boreholes totalling 4,000 metres. The second agreement, with Al Baraka Salt Petrochemical Company, covers Concession Area 62-A in Al Wusta Governorate. The project, located in Al Lakbi, plans to produce 4 million tonnes of salt annually through seawater evaporation, with an investment of \$29 million. The initiative includes establishing facilities for refining industrial and edible salt and producing magnesium, bromine, lithium, and sodium sulphate compounds. “These agreements represent an important step in utilising local resources to support sustainable development and the national economy,” said Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals. Oman has signed 21 mining concession deals and two seawater salt



Eng Salim al Aufi (right), Minister of Energy and Minerals, signing the concession agreements.

production agreements in recent years, with exploration investments totalling \$86 million. The ministry has also opened six new concession areas via its digital platform “Taqa,” targeting key minerals like copper, chromium, nickel, silica and kaolin. The deals are part of Oman’s broader strategy to integrate upstream and downstream industries, supporting sectors such as manufacturing, logistics, and trade, while creating jobs and opportunities for local businesses, the ministry said. “This is about building a sustainable future by maximising resource potential and supporting Omanis with skills and opportunities,” Al Aufi added.

ADVERTORIALS

DEBUTMARK



In its maiden role as Issue Manager, BankDhofar showcased exceptional professionalism and expertise, ensuring a seamless and impactful IPO experience.

BANKDHOFAR MARKS MILESTONE AS ISSUE MANAGER IN OQBI’S IPO

MUSCAT: BankDhofar has achieved a significant milestone with its skilful execution of a successfully subscribed Initial Public Offering (IPO) for OQ Base Industries (OQBI), marking its debut as an Issue Manager. The accomplishment underscores the bank’s readiness to play a pivotal role in Oman’s dynamic and evolving capital market.

OQBI, Oman’s sole integrated producer of methanol, ammonia, and LPG, celebrated its listing on the Muscat Stock Exchange on 15th December 2024. The IPO saw 1.69 billion ordinary shares, equivalent to 49 per cent of the company’s issued share capital, offered to institutional and retail investors.

The offering was oversubscribed 2.1 times, with demand reaching an impressive RO 387 million, reflecting strong market confidence.

“Our goal is to evolve into a comprehensive solutions provider for our diverse client base,” commented K Gopakumar, Acting CEO - BankDhofar.

“With the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) poised for growth and multiple IPOs anticipated in 2025, BankDhofar is well-positioned to play a transformative role in this burgeoning market,” he further added.

In its maiden role as Issue Manager, BankDhofar showcased exceptional professionalism and expertise, ensuring a seamless and impactful IPO experience. By leveraging its multidisciplinary capabilities in corporate finance advisory, equity structuring and pricing, regulatory compliance, and due diligence, the bank effectively articulated OQBI’s value proposition to the market.

Notable was the contribution of the bank’s Corporate Finance Advisory Business Unit, a team with a robust blend of local and international talent. Supplemented by its overall institutional strengths, BankDhofar executed this mandate with outstanding results, cementing its reputation as a trusted partner for capital market transactions.

Beyond its role as Issue Manager, BankDhofar played a comprehensive part in the IPO process. It acted as Joint Global Coordinator alongside two prominent international banks, ensuring smooth transaction execution and management.

The bank also served as Collection Agent and facilitated coordination with the Islamic Sharia Supervisory Board to secure a fatwa on the IPO’s sharia-compliant nature, enabling wider participation from Islamic investors.

Additionally, the production of a pre-IPO research report provided valuable insights to the market, empowering investors with early information to guide their decisions.

MALAYSIAN HEALTHCARE WEEK KICKS OFF IN OMAN

MUSCAT: The Malaysian Health Week for healthcare kicked off yesterday, Wednesday, at Mall of Oman. The event was organised by the Malaysian Healthcare Travel Council (MHTC) and will be until January 25, 2025, under the patronage of Dr Siham bint Ahmed al Harthiyah, a board member of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry and Chairwoman of the Tourism Committee at the Chamber.

Prominent medical centres and hospitals participated in the Malaysian Health Week, including Prince Court Medical Centre, KPJ Healthcare, PERKESO Rehabilitation Centre, and Cengild G.I medical centre.

During a press conference held at the Hilton Hotel, Dr Muhammad Ali Abu Bakar, CEO of the Malaysian Healthcare Travel Council, expressed his delight at starting the new year 2025 with the first Malaysian healthcare tourism



The event aims to showcase the medical services provided by Malaysian hospitals in specialised fields.

week in Oman.

The event aims to showcase the medical services provided by Malaysian hospitals in specialised fields such as cardiology and cardiac surgery, rehabilitation, joint replacement, spinal surgery, comprehensive cosmetic surgery, bone marrow transplantation,

cancer diagnosis, chemotherapy, and cerebral palsy treatment.

In addition, Malaysia’s integrated health approach, which includes preventive medicine, traditional medicine, and complementary therapies, will be highlighted. Free medical consultations will also be offered to

patients, along with information about Malaysian medical services and promotional packages.

This initiative seeks to expand Malaysian healthcare services and collaborations in Oman, strengthening Malaysia’s position as a premier destination for medical tourism while reflecting Malaysian culture in its holistic healthcare system.

Dr Muhammad Ali emphasised the advanced medical services provided by Malaysian hospitals, which are internationally accredited, equipped with cutting-edge technologies, and offer high-quality services at affordable costs. This enables accurate medical diagnoses and comprehensive care.

“This event provides a strategic opportunity to bring Malaysia’s comprehensive healthcare services closer to Omani patients, offering them personalised medical care in their second home, Malaysia,” Dr Muhammad Ali stated.

Meet luxury and thrill with a Lexus NX

BOOST your on-road experience with Lexus’ luxury crossover, the Lexus NX. Experience the stunning innovation, donning the acclaimed F Sport badge, which brings power with speed.

Lexus’ eye for luxury and details is visually represented in the NX’s gorgeous exterior featuring a subtle chrome-plated finish and bold contours with Lexus’ hallmark spindle grille.

Made to impress, the front design features 3-eye LED headlights incorporating Lexus’ first slim Adaptive High-beam System (AHS).

The L-shaped daytime running lights feature a fade-in function when the driver activates the indicators creating ease for both the driver and the one on the road.

Powerfully equipped with two powertrain options, the 4-cylinder, 2.4 L turbocharged engine produces 275 hp, 430 nm torque and is mated to an 8-speed Direct-Shift automatic transmission (8AT).

The second trim has hybrid-electric capabilities based on a 2.5-litre petrol engine and two electric motors producing 240 hp mated to a Direct Shift Continuously Variable Transmission (CVT). Choose the option that best fits your needs, the NX offers flexibility with an uncompromising attitude toward quality.

The sophisticated leather interiors feature the crisp 14-inch touchscreen multimedia system that is compatible with Apple CarPlay and Android Auto, a 7-inch colour multi-information display (MID), a wireless charging system for smartphones, a dual zone AC to adjust the inside temperature and ventilated seats.

For an enhanced experience, the NX also



Lexus’ eye for luxury and details is visually represented in the NX’s gorgeous exterior featuring a subtle chrome-plated finish and bold contours with Lexus’ hallmark spindle grille.

offers SmartAccess with a push-button start, a 10-speaker premium surround sound system, a panoramic roof and a power tailgate option for easy luggage storage.

Safety is Lexus’ top priority, thanks to the innovative Lexus Safety System+, the advanced technologies give drivers immense control over various aspects of driving.

The system includes a new Pre-Collision System (PCS) with an expanded detection range, Automatic Emergency Braking (AEB), Emergency Steering Assist (ESA), and Daytime Pedestrian Detection (DPD), the new Dynamic Radar Cruise Control (DRCC) and the Curve Speed Reduction (CSR).

Drivers also benefit from Lane Tracing Alert (LTA), Lane Departure Alert (LDA), Advanced Driver Assistance (ADAS), and Adaptive High-beam System (AHB) among others. One noteworthy feature that takes safety up a notch is the new Safe Exit Assist.

A feature that uses an e-latch system combined with a Blind Spot Monitor (BSM) to help prevent accidents and other standard comprehensive safety features. Delve into unbeatable luxury and experience power performance, at your nearest Lexus Oman showroom. Get a first-hand experience and request a test drive to experience the dynamic lineup.

Sohar International and Sohar Islamic: Key sponsors at finance forum

MUSCAT: Recognising the finance sector’s critical role in driving economic growth, Sohar International and Sohar Islamic proudly served as Strategic Sponsors at the Second Finance and Insurance Forum. The Forum was organised by the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), Al Batinah North Governorate branch, on January 20–21, 2025.

Held under the auspices of HH Sayyid Mohammed bin Salim al Said, the forum convened industry leaders to address challenges and explore opportunities in finance and insurance, aligning with Oman’s vision for sustainable economic progress.

The forum featured high-level



The forum featured high-level discussions that delved into critical themes within finance and insurance, offering actionable insights to fortify these essential sectors.

discussions that delved into critical themes within finance and insurance, offering actionable insights to fortify these essential sectors.

Abdulwahid bin Mohammed al Murshidi, Acting Chief Executive Officer of Sohar International, contributed to a high-level panel discussion titled “The Legislative Environment of the Financial System and its Role in Enabling Institutions and Businesses.”

Speaking on the occasion, Abdulwahid bin Mohammed al Murshidi said, “At Sohar International, we believe that effective dialogue is a catalyst for sustainable development. Our sponsorship and participation in this

forum reflect our commitment to driving innovation and supporting Oman’s vision for a diversified economy. Events of this scale provide valuable opportunities to address systemic challenges, explore groundbreaking solutions, and unite key stakeholders from the financial and insurance sectors.

By engaging in these critical discussions, we reaffirm our role as a strategic partner in shaping a resilient economic future for the nation.

Through these discussions, we also gain unique perspectives that allow us to refine our services and develop tailored solutions that align with the aspirations of businesses, entrepreneurs and individuals.”

BUSINESS

KEYSECTORS



Trade between Oman and Singapore has surpassed the RO 500 million mark.

OMANI-SINGAPORE FORUM HIGHLIGHTS POTENTIAL FOR ENHANCED TRADE TIES

FAISAL AL AJMI
MUSCAT, JAN 22

THE Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) hosted the Omani-Singapore Business Forum on Wednesday, January 22, 2025 with the aim of strengthening trade and economic relations between the Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of Singapore.

The event, held in Sheraton Hotel Muscat, was attended by Shaikh Faisal bin Abdullah al Rawas, Chairman of OCCI, Dr Shehzad Naseem, Head of the Singaporean Trade Delegation, and a number of board members and business leaders from both countries.

The forum focused on enhancing bilateral co-operation across several key sectors, including oil and gas, renewable energy, logistics, technology, infrastructure, and urban planning.

Discussions centred on identifying potential trade and investment opportunities and exploring projects that could drive sustainable economic growth.

The forum also explored how the public and private sectors could collaborate more effectively to foster partnerships in critical areas.

Speaking at the event, Al Rawas stated, “This cooperation, built on a longstanding friendship, has opened doors to strong commercial and investment partnerships. Trade between Oman and Singapore has grown in recent years, with further expansion expected to drive continued growth in bilateral trade.”

The Chairman further noted that trade between Oman and Singapore had reached approximately RO 511.1 million by the end of October 2024. He expressed optimism that there were ample opportunities to further expand this trade by diversifying the range of products exchanged, taking advantage of the complementary strengths of both nations.

Dr Shehzad Naseem, Vice-Chairman of the India and South Asia Business Group and CEO of Maynard Group, underlined the importance of a sustainable partnership between Oman and Singapore, founded on trust, respect, and shared aspirations.

He highlighted that Singapore’s exports to Oman in 2023 included refined petroleum products and machinery, while Oman’s exports to Singapore consisted of ammonia and iron. Dr Naseem also pointed out that these trade flows reflected the substantial potential for collaboration in sectors such as infrastructure, renewable energy and technology.

ASYAD SHIPPING TO FLOAT 20% STAKE ON MSX

MUSCAT: Asyad Group SAOC, a leading global provider of integrated logistics solutions, has announced its intention to list Asyad Shipping Company SAOG (under transformation) on the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) through an Initial Public Offering (IPO). The offering will involve at least 20% of Asyad Shipping’s issued share capital.

The move aligns with Asyad Group’s vision to drive sustainable growth, diversify its portfolio, and enhance its long-term operational strength. By the end of 2023, the Group had achieved an impressive compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 21% in revenue and 73% in net profit. Operating across 90 markets worldwide, including key economies such as China, India, the United States, and the GCC, Asyad Group has firmly established itself as a global logistics leader.



Operating across 90 markets worldwide, Asyad Group has firmly established itself as a global logistics leader.

With a workforce exceeding 10,000, Asyad Group’s success is fuelled by its ability to address global market needs through innovation and integrated logistics solutions. Its focus on delivering customer-centric services has been instrumental in propelling its

growth and market leadership. Asyad Shipping, founded in 2003, is one of the largest diversified maritime companies globally. The company operates 89 multi-purpose vessels serving over 60 countries and connects Omani and international ports. Its services cater to high-

growth markets, including Asia, the Middle East, North Africa, Europe, and the Americas, offering reliable and competitive solutions across key industrial sectors.

Strategic partnerships with major global clients have cemented Asyad Shipping’s position as a leader in the maritime industry. Fully owned by Asyad Group, the company benefits from the Group’s extensive infrastructure, including ports and free zones, enabling seamless cargo handling and reduced port waiting times. This integration enhances the company’s competitiveness and supports its sustainable expansion in global markets.

The IPO marks a pivotal step in Asyad Group’s journey, underscoring its commitment to innovation, growth, and creating value for stakeholders while reinforcing Oman’s position as a key player in global logistics.

Investments in Oman’s AI sector top RO 60 million

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, JAN 22

THE volume of investments inflows into Oman’s Artificial Intelligence (AI) sector amounted to RO 60 million in 2024, according to Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology.

Speaking at the ministry’s annual media gathering, Al Maawali reviewed the Ministry’s achievements in the field in 2024. Notable was the launch of the National Programme for Artificial Intelligence and Advanced Digital Technologies - an executive programme under Oman Vision 2040’s digital economy strategy.

Furthermore, the Minster unveiled the signing of agreement with the World Economic Forum to establish a Fourth Industrial Revolution Center in Oman, making it the 22nd globally and the 6th of its kind in the region.

Additionally, an AI Ethics Research Chair was inaugurated at the University of Technology and Applied Sciences in collaboration with the ministry and the Islamic World Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ICESCO).

The Minister unveiled various plans for the upcoming year, including the development of Oman’s first AI language model.

“For 2025, there are major targets, including the first phase of developing a large-scale Omani language model. This



Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology at the ministry’s media gathering event in Muscat.

is being done in collaboration with the Oman Investment Authority, represented by ITHCA leading this initiative,” said Al Maawali.

Additionally, he announced the establishment of the AI Studio in collaboration with ITHCA.

“The AI studio will be government-funded and accessible to everyone. It will help government entities, private companies, and even individuals to work with developers and understand how AI can serve them. It might even help develop new or

existing solutions for their institutions,” he said.

Furthermore, the Minister announced the launch of an open data platform this year.

“The launch of the National Open Data Platform is another crucial step, as AI relies heavily on data. The more data is available, the greater the opportunity to showcase Oman’s efforts and achievements in both the government and private sectors. This year, there will be a significant focus on data,” Al Maawali added.

New opportunities for Sanad Centres unveiled

NASRULAH AL AJMI
MUSCAT, JAN 22

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry, and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) has announced the availability of new licences for Sanad Service Centres as part of its efforts to improve service accessibility and create economic opportunities in the Sultanate of Oman.

The initiative aims to address the growing demand for government and business-related services while generating employment for Omanis in key governorates.

Applications for these licences are open from January 22 to February 4, 2025, and interested individuals can apply by scanning the provided QR code or visiting their nearest Sanad Service Centre.

Sanad Service Centres play a vital role in providing a range of



The centres play a vital role in providing a range of essential services to communities.

essential services to communities, including government transactions and private sector facilitation. The decision to expand these centres follows a detailed study that evaluated population density and economic activity in various regions. The ministry has identified specific governorates that require additional centres to meet demand

and enhance service delivery. To ensure fairness and eligibility, strict criteria have been established for applicants. Only Omani nationals aged between 18 and 50 years are eligible to apply, and they must reside in the governorate where the centre will be established. Applicants are required to hold at least a general education

diploma or equivalent and must possess three years of experience in IT or business management.

Furthermore, applicants should not be employed in the government or private sector, nor should they own or manage any other commercial activity.

Priority will be given to those who have been registered on the ministry’s e-portal for at least four months.

Individuals who applied in the last two years but were not selected may reapply without resubmitting their documents.

The ministry has allocated the new licences across several governorates to address local needs. These include one licence in Musandam Governorate (the Wilayat of Khasab), one in Dhofar Governorate (the Wilayat of Salalah), two in Al Wusta Governorate (the wilayats of Al Jazer and Haima), two

in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate (the wilayats of Bahla and Jabrin), one in Al Buraimi Governorate (the Wilayat of Al Buraimi), one in Al Batinah North Governorate (the Wilayat of Suhar), and one in Al Batinah South (the Wilayat of Barka). Successful applicants must operate their centres at the designated locations, as centres cannot be relocated.

The ministry has emphasised that all applications will undergo a thorough review to ensure compliance with the outlined conditions. Applications submitted after the deadline or those failing to meet the criteria will not be considered.

This initiative highlights the government’s commitment to improving public services, supporting economic growth and empowering Omani citizens by providing meaningful employment opportunities.

OPINION

The importance of CEPA between Oman and India



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

Official visits between the representatives of Oman and India are frequent with the aim of enhancing various economic aspects between the two countries, which have long-standing trade relations. Both countries initiated discussions on a joint vision to conclude a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), which aims to facilitate business and promote joint investments to build economic projects in various vital fields. It is expected to contribute to increase the volume of trade exchange between Oman and India, encouraging mutual investments, and facilitating the movement of business and services between the two countries. The proposed agreement will also reflect the two countries' common desire to expand their economic cooperation, while India has expressed a strong desire to work in several areas and locations within the framework of strengthening this economic cooperation to include in the future the establishment of infrastructure projects and the development of new projects. Omani-Indian relations were strengthened following the official visit of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to India in December 2023, which received great

attention from the Indian media and the keenness of the two countries to enhance existing aspects of cooperation in various fields and ways to develop them to serve common interests. Oman is India's 29th trading partner, while the agreement is expected to improve financial stability and economic diversification in the country, and contribute to increasing Omani exports. Officials in both countries believe that the agreement will enhance the Sultanate's position as a promising regional manufacturing center, and provide an opportunity for small, medium and emerging companies to enhance cooperation between them and develop the Omani economy. Data reported by some Indian newspapers indicate that bilateral trade between Oman and India has witnessed strong growth. India hopes that the agreement will be able to open doors for India in the Middle East and strengthen economic and strategic relations in the region, which is of great importance, while the Omani government is working to enhance economic openness within the framework of the rapid changes that the world is witnessing. The volume of trade exchange between the two countries amounted to more than \$8 billion in 2022, and the volume of Omani

The proposed agreement will also reflect the two countries' common desire to expand their economic cooperation, while India has expressed a strong desire to work in several areas and locations within the framework of strengthening this economic cooperation to include in the future the establishment of infrastructure projects and the development of new projects.

exports to India increased by 62 per cent compared to 2021. The volume of imports from India also increased by 60.8 per cent over the same period, while the number of Indian companies operating in Oman reached 6,000 companies by the beginning of this year. According to a report by "The Economic Times" newspaper, the Omani market is of great importance to India due to its location in the region, while India wants to reduce customs duties on some exports to Oman and facilitate the access of Indian professionals such as doctors, nurses, engineers and other workers. However, this issue is a concern among Omanis due to the presence of about 2.5 million expatriates in the country, as India ranks first in sending its workers to Oman, which reduces job opportunities for Omanis. In addition, the trend of Indian companies to open large commercial centers in the country has led to the closure of many small commercial establishments owned by citizens over more than two decades, which has led to an increase in the number of job seekers in the country. This is what must be realized so that the benefits accrue to the people of the country from any trade or economic agreement signed with a foreign country.

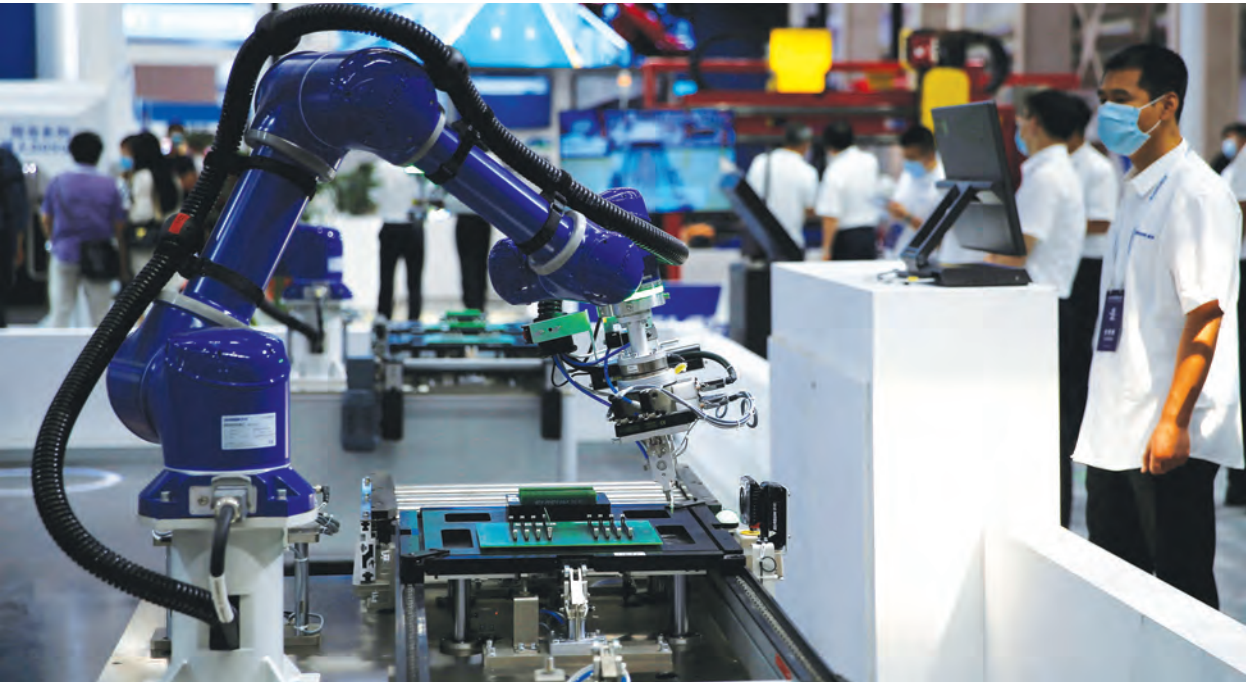
A TIKTOK DEAL MAY BE GOOD FOR US-CHINA TRADE

ROBYN MAK

It's becoming clear that everything may be up for negotiation with President Donald Trump. That might not be a bad thing for China. The US leader warned the People's Republic could face tariffs of up to 100% if Beijing does not approve a sale of TikTok, the video app owned by Chinese firm ByteDance. How such a deal would look is unclear, but it would be an easy way for both sides to show goodwill ahead of negotiations on thornier issues like trade. On Monday, Trump signed an executive order - one of dozens - aiming to delay the Jan 19 deadline imposed on ByteDance to sell its US operations or face a ban. TikTok is supposed to go offline in the United States, where it boasts 170 million users, after the Supreme Court upheld legislation deeming the popular video app a national security threat. The Republican president further suggested the United States should be "entitled to get half of TikTok" and that he could put tariffs on China if it rejected a deal, which he described would be a "hostile act". This may sound like the usual Trump bluster. After all, he repeatedly threatened 60% tariffs on all Chinese goods throughout his re-election campaign. Though he did not immediately follow through on his first day, he did say his administration is discussing a 10% punitive duty on the People's Republic as soon as February 1, citing the country's role in the illegal fentanyl trade. Still, now that the US president has made explicit his involvement in TikTok's fate and linked it to tariffs and trade, the Chinese government will have an incentive to engage. Following Trump's remarks on Monday, the Chinese Foreign Ministry, which previously stated it would block a forced sale, responded by saying companies can make their own decisions - the first indication that Beijing would be open to a US deal. Earlier this month, Bloomberg reported that Chinese officials were "evaluating a potential option" that involves Elon Musk acquiring TikTok - an option Trump said he was open to. The enterprise could be worth more than \$100 billion, Breakingviews calculates. A compromise on TikTok might pave the way for smoother trade talks. China wields a weaker hand this time around: the economy is sputtering and the country's failure to honour a promise to buy an extra \$200 billion of American goods and services in 2020 means Beijing can use some goodwill ahead of negotiations. — Reuters

Will artificial intelligence replace our jobs?

"Will the artificial intelligence (AI) take over all our jobs and replace us all with smart computers and robots ultimately?" was an interesting question I received last weekend from Sulieman, who was worried about the progress of AI. I know this and many more similar questions are wandering over many people's minds lately, especially with the advancement of AI in many fronts and fields. My article today will shed some light on why I humbly believe that human intelligence will still prevail, as the difference between the two is still significant— least to the various research I have gone through on the difference between the two, i.e., human and artificial intelligence. Let's look at a practical example today post Generative Artificial Intelligence (Gen-AI). You may be required to invest a lot of time to prepare for a quality presentation to deliver: be it for an office meeting, workshop, training, or a conference per se. This would include everything from thinking about a topic, drafting a description, conducting research, gathering information, formatting the slides, preparing to present, etc. Depending on the type of the presentation, you may be also required to analyse a lot of data from different sources and as validate the same. This specific task may also involve more than one person to support (for example, a creative designer). Today, thanks to Gen AI, that all can probably take you a few minutes (or hours) but certainly not days (especially if it is new content that you are creating). AI will easily process huge amounts of data from different sources, analysing trends, creating slides, and formatting it to your liking, style, and theme—all that without requiring any other resource but some very well-crafted input from you. Pretty amazing, right? The responsiveness of the system (computer, robot, etc.) is definitely something that humans cannot match (again, in my humble opinion). AI can process huge amounts of information/data in



A robotic arm by Siasun operates for display at the Beijing World Robot Conference in Beijing, China, in this illustration photo. — Reuters



TARIQ AL
BARWANI

The author is the founder of Knowledge Oman

seconds (it is designed that way). We humans would get tired, let aside utilising our emotion, experience, and intuition when analysing or processing simple information, and that from a single source as well. This itself is proof in the pudding of how fast computers (AI systems) are, as opposed to humans (by design). "They are fast, which means they could get jobs done much better than what we could do as humans, was the feedback I received from Sulieman after I shared the difference. My response was simply, "No, AI is just a tool, yet a very smart one, though." They can turn raw data from various sources and databases (stored by us humans) into valuable insights, yet faster. They are as good as the humans who have created them (and thus the advancements and continuous upgrades, e.g., ChatGPT v1, v2, v3, etc.). They don't have qualities that humans possess, i.e., emotions, intuition, empathy, experience, etc. They are just a smart tool and very much a great companion or a partner, but not a replacement per se. They can't compete with you but can surely work with another human to produce profound results

together. They need humans to feed information, continue guiding, and improving them. And we humans definitely need them to support us in getting things faster (beyond our human capabilities). We need to rest, sleep, and also spend non-work quality time with family. They don't; they just work for us (practically).. To conclude my article today, I would like to share my final response to Sulieman's question, i.e., "No, AI will not replace all our jobs, but many of those that don't require qualities of humans that machines cannot imitate today". I shared those qualities in the article. AI will only help and act as a partner/companion by lifting heavy weight activities such as analysing various data, automating tasks and processes, and more 24/7—something that humans lack and cannot match computers on, obviously. True, AI will replace many jobs, yet it will also create new ones as well. We should really focus on how we can utilise AI as a tool to get our things done faster, instead of being worried when and how it will replace us. They are not our competitors; they are our partners. Until we catch up again next week, stay upbeat.

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CELEBRATION

Lanterns light up southern Chinese city ahead of Lunar New Year



DOZENS OF giant lanterns in the shape of mythical creatures, flowers and legendary characters light up the night sky in southern China -- a dreamlike spectacle to mark the upcoming Lunar New Year holidays.

As night falls in the southern Chinese city of Fuzhou, lanterns -- some of them 10 metres high -- transform Hongguang Lake Park into a fantastical land of orange dragons, majestic sailboats, fish with sparkling turquoise scales and goddesses with angelic faces.

"Aren't these lanterns cool?" Lei Haoxin, a 17-year-old tourist wrapped up in a parka due to the cool weather, said.

"Super beautiful, right? We found the place thanks to Douyin," he explained, referring to China's version of TikTok.

"Usually, when we spot something interesting via the app, we try to go there," he explained.

Fuzhou is the capital of Fujian province, known throughout China for keeping many traditional New Year events alive.

Many lanterns are drawn from traditional folklore -- one features the likeness of Mazu, a sea deity popular across southern China, Taiwan and among the diaspora across Southeast Asia.

"This lantern is exquisitely made and looks even better than in the pictures," tourist Luo Meiling said.

Also making an appearance is the mythical Monkey King, Sun Wukong, from the Chinese literary classic "Journey to the West".

Lanterns date back to a thousand-year-old tradition in China and are a common sight in the country, especially around the Lunar New Year, when millions flock to public spaces to take in their bright lights and vivid colours.

And with Chinese people around the world set to herald in the Year of the Snake on January 29, artistic lantern displays in all shapes and sizes have sprung up in towns and cities across the vast nation.

"We feel more of the New Year atmosphere in recent years," Qi, a 42-year-old resident of Fuzhou, who visited the park with her young son, said.

"Mentalities are changing and people are making their children do more outdoor activities now," she explained.

"Many families come here to enjoy the fireworks and the entertainment." --AFP

Q U I C K F E A T U R E S



ENTERTAINMENT

Chinese singer Jackson Wang arrives ahead of the Louis Vuitton Menswear Ready-to-wear Fall-Winter 2025/2026 collection as part of the Paris Fashion Week, in Paris. —AFP



FILM

The US film industry's first big gathering since fires devastated Los Angeles will begin January 23 at the Sundance festival, where highlights include a glitzy new Jennifer Lopez musical and a dark Benedict Cumberbatch drama. —AFP



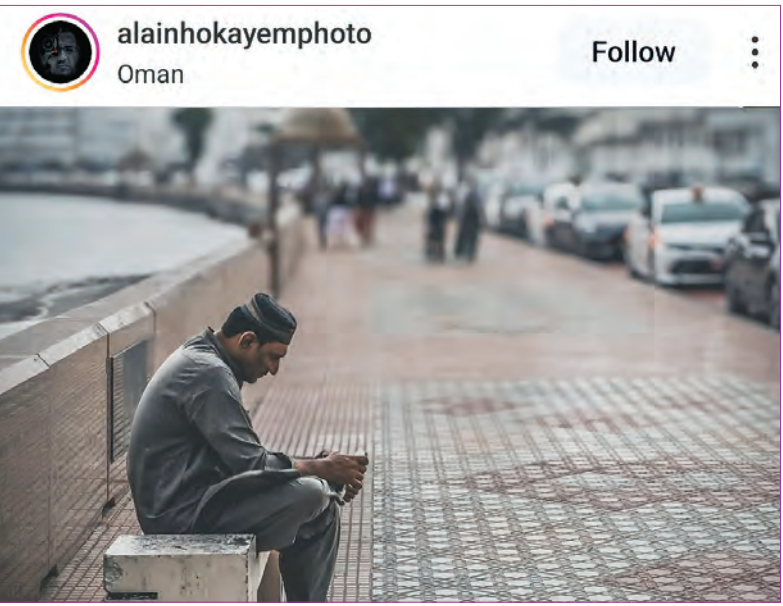
CULTURE

France's Minister of Culture Rachida Dati (C), Moulin Rouge director Jean-Victor Clerico (R) and Moulin Rouge brand director Virginie Clerico (L) tour a feather workshop during a visit to the Moulin Rouge cabaret in Paris. —AFP

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



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‘Parasite’ director Bong Joon-ho to show new film at Berlin festival



SOUTH KOREAN director Bong Joon-ho will present his new film “Mickey 17” out of competition in Berlin next month, the city’s film festival announced on Thursday.

Six years ago, Bong won the Palme d’Or at Cannes then an Oscar for best picture for “Parasite” – the first not in English to do so at the Academy Awards.

Bong Joon-ho is known for his distinctive storytelling and genre-blending films. His films often explore social themes and human relationships with a unique visual style.

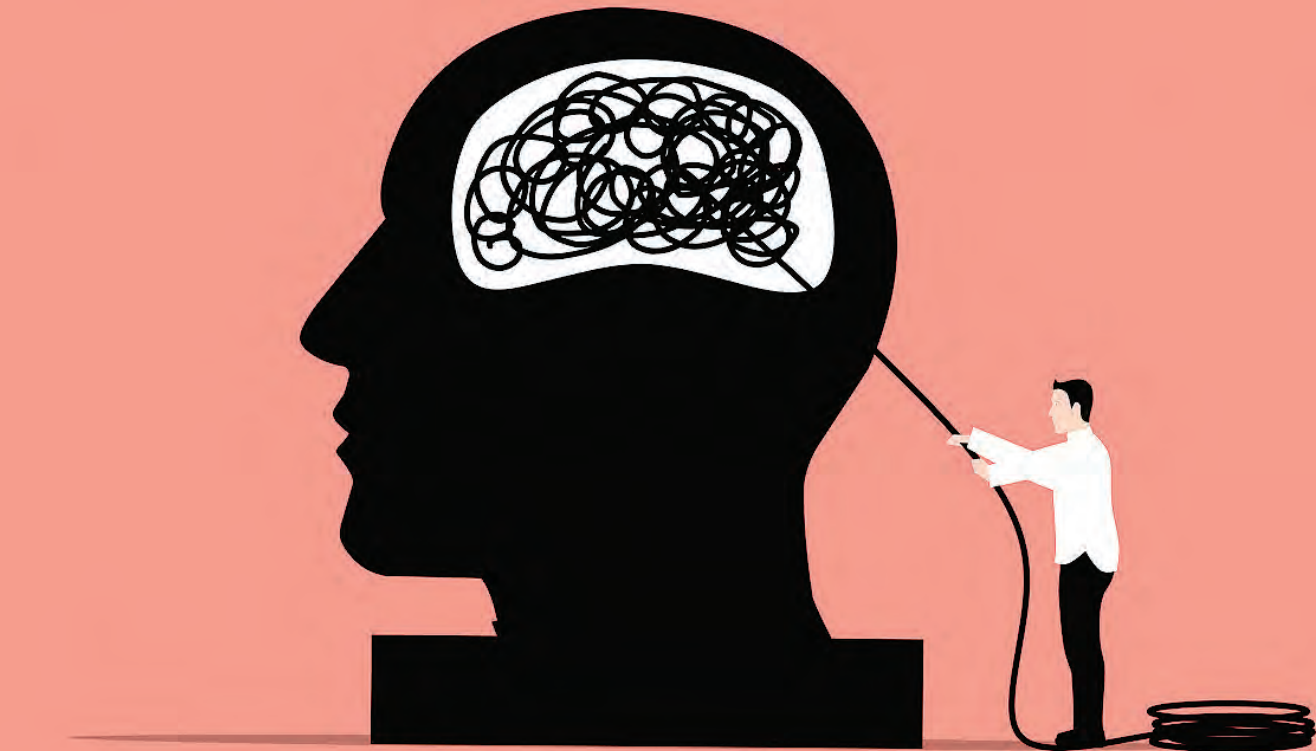
Science fiction black comedy “Mickey 17” stars Robert Pattinson as Mickey, who has volunteered in a programme in which cloning allows him to have multiple successive lives to the point where “dying is a habit”.

The Berlinale is the first major European film event of the year. The festival has also announced that it will give a lifetime achievement award to British actor Tilda Swinton, who has also collaborated with Bong in the past.

The festival opens with the latest offering from German film-maker Tom Tykwer, who made his name with “Run, Lola, Run” in 1998.

The 75th edition of the Berlinale runs from February 13 to 23. The full programme and films in the running for the Golden Bear are due to be announced on January 21.

Last year, French-Senegalese director Mati Diop’s “Dahomey”, a documentary examining Europe’s return of looted antiquities to Africa, took the prestigious prize. —AFP



Psychological Decluttering:
Planning for
a Purposeful
Year Ahead

BY MAZOUN AL GHAILANI

AS THE new year unfolds, many of us find our minds overflowing with thoughts and distractions. This psychological clutter can obstruct our path to achieving our goals, making the planning process feel overwhelming. We may enter the year with enthusiasm, joy, and hope; however, as days pass, that initial spark often dwindles, leading to frustration and unfulfilled plans.

Enter Misk Reza, a specialist in psychological decluttering and life coaching, who describes herself as “a soul on this earth on a passionate journey to seek wisdom.” Misk offers guidance on how to clear the mental fog that can hinder our planning efforts.

Life’s distractions can prevent us from organising our lives effectively. In the pursuit of calm, Misk urges us to take a step back. “To arrange your psychological clutter and elevate your quality of life, find a tranquil space and allow yourself to reflect. Release your feelings and thoughts through crying, writing, or physical movement. Contemplate questions such as: Who am I? What do I truly desire? What emotions and thoughts am I experiencing? What do I wish to avoid, and why?”

As Misk explains, increased self-awareness helps us organise our inner thoughts, conserving our mental, emotional, and practical energy in the process.

Many individuals struggle to follow through on their

annual plans for various reasons. Setting unrealistic goals can stifle motivation and often lead to disappointment. If our aspirations are merely attempts to satisfy the expectations of others or those curated by social media influencers, they are unlikely to succeed. Furthermore, if our goals are overshadowed by past frustrations, helplessness and accumulated emotional baggage, these obstacles will impede our ability to stay committed to new plans.

Misk’s own journey of self-discovery began when she experienced the overwhelming demands of adulthood at a young age. “At 17, after marrying, I felt burdened by responsibilities as a wife, mother, and caregiver, along with societal expectations. In time, I lost sight of myself and my confidence,” she reflects. This turning point prompted her to embark on a journey of self-coaching, allowing her to reset and reorganise her inner life.

“I can attest that nurturing our inner world fosters balance, peace, and self-confidence, ultimately enhancing our productivity through inner harmony,” says Misk.

Creating a healthy routine from simple habits can yield remarkable results in all areas of life. To effectively plan for the year, begin with three key steps. First, list your achievements from the previous year to boost your confidence. Second, create two separate lists: one of what you wish to invite into your life this year and another of what you want to avoid—considering feelings, habits, aspirations, locations, and relationships.

Finally, condense these lists into clear goals, prioritising three key objectives for the year, and outline detailed action steps to achieve them, specifying timelines, locations, and scales of execution.

Misk relies on three vital principles to help those who have struggled with organisation: gradualism, clarity, and precision. Striving for drastic changes—such as jumping from hardly reading to consuming fifty books in a year without a structured approach—often leads to chaos.

“Our inner selves resemble a neglected drawer that beckons to be tidied. We often avoid it until we’re forced to confront the disarray,” Misk notes. Without defining clear goals, we risk floating aimlessly, much like a dust-covered drawer masking our true ambitions.

Clarity in our aspirations must be accompanied by precision. Rather than simply vowing to exercise regularly for health, specify the details: for instance, commit to walking for ten minutes, three times a week after 7 PM. Such specifics create a manageable routine that avoids overwhelm and distraction.

Writing serves as the magic touch that transforms internal chaos into tangible clarity. By documenting daily, monthly, or yearly plans, we shape our existence, providing ourselves with draw to action when we feel discouraged. Coach Misk advises embracing the unexpected chaos we encounter: “I’ve come to understand that chaos is not inherently negative; rather, it is an invitation to rearrange our inner selves.”

FEATURES

OMAN IMPRESSES DIGITAL CREATOR FOR COUNTRY’S MEANINGFUL TRAVEL EXPERIENCES

BY LIJU CHERIAN
@lijucherianoman

AS ONE of the leading digital creators with over 66 countries explored and nearly 100k followers on Instagram, Lauren Carey’s journey is one of inspiring storytelling and breathtaking photography.

Known for her account @girlgoneabroad, Lauren has spent over a decade living abroad, travelling solo, and immersing herself in cultures around the world. But her recent trip to Oman has left a mark like no other, placing the Sultanate of Oman among her top travel experiences.

In her words, “In a very short time, Oman left a lasting impression on me - so much so that it’s now one of my favourite countries I’ve ever visited!” The country, famous for its landscapes, diverse terrains, and rich heritage, quickly captured her heart.

“I was amazed by the sheer variety Oman offers - cities, beaches, deserts, and stunning mountains - all within just a few days.”

This vast diversity became one of the most striking aspects of her six-day journey. Oman’s untouched beauty, free from heavy tourism, felt like a hidden gem waiting to be discovered. A true photographer’s paradise, Lauren captured around 1,100 photos during her trip. From the stunning architecture of Muscat to the vibrant souq stalls, every shot seemed to narrate its own story. One particularly memorable moment was her time at the Birkat Al Mouz Viewpoint, where locals helped her capture the incredible mountain backdrop.

While Oman’s landscapes wowed her, the experiences were equally unforgettable. Snorkelling with turtles at sunrise at Shangri-La Barr Al Jissah was a moment Lauren calls “unforgettable.”

Her adventures also took her to the majestic mountains of Jebel Shams and Alila Jabal Akhdar Resort, where she tackled the Via Ferrata, a thrilling cliffside experience. “Weaving through dramatic cliffs and canyons in the early morning light was an experience I’ll never forget,” she shares.

Oman’s desert added yet another layer of charm. Lauren spent her first night in the desert at the Thousand Nights Camp, feeling a deep connection to the land. “It was truly a stay to remember,” she recalls. With Khimji’s House of Travel (KHoT) meticulously organising her trip, she had no trouble navigating Oman’s rugged terrains. Her advice to future travellers? Be prepared for 4WD adventures, especially when exploring the more remote areas.

Lauren’s journey to Oman had been a long time coming. Photos she had come across



on social media inspired the idea, and when the opportunity arose to collaborate with Khimji’s House of Travel and Lufthansa City Center, it became the perfect chance to tick Oman off her travel bucket list.

Lauren’s travel account, @girlgoneabroad, was born over a decade ago during her time in Thailand. “I was a girl, going abroad, and thought it was catchy,” she explains. The name stuck, and since then, it has become synonymous with Lauren’s vibrant travel content that inspires her growing global audience.

Today, Lauren’s approach to travel has evolved. “I’ve slowed down compared to my earlier years, but I’m still passionate about meaningful travel experiences,” she says. Now based in Amsterdam, she continues to share her global adventures and her life in the Netherlands through both her Instagram accounts, @girlgoneabroad and @girlgonenl.

Lauren has plans to expand her creative pursuits, including writing a book inspired by her travels. She also aims to collaborate with tourism boards and hotels to create authentic content that displays unique destinations.

When not travelling, Lauren enjoys Amsterdam’s vibrant culture, savouring new dining experiences, and capturing daily life through her lens. Her love for fiction books, especially those set in places she has visited, provides her with an escape when at home.

Lauren’s journey exemplifies the power of travel, photography, and storytelling. Through her lens, Oman is not just a destination but also an adventure, a place of beauty, and a reminder of how travel can transform the way we see the world.