

INBRIEF

HM GREET'S IRAN
PRESIDENT, VATICAN

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Dr Masoud Pezeshkian of the Islamic Republic of Iran, on his country's National Day. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sentiments and best wishes of success to President Pezeshkian to realise aspirations of growth, prosperity and stability for the people of Iran. His Majesty also wished the relations of cooperation between the two countries further progress. His Majesty the Sultan has also sent a similar cable of greetings to Pope Francis, Head of State of Vatican City, on his country's National Day. In his cable, His Majesty expressed his sincere sentiments and best wishes to Pope Francis and the people of the Vatican.

CONDOLENCES: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of condolences to President Nangolo Mbumba of the Republic of Namibia, on the death of former president of Namibia Sam Nujoma.

HEALTH CENTRE IN
AL HALLANIYAT

The Ministry of Health on Monday celebrated the opening of the Al Hallaniyat Health Centre in the Wilayat of Shaleem and Al Hallaniyat Islands in Dhofar Governorate under the auspices of Dr Ahmed bin Mohsen al Ghassani, Head of Dhofar Municipality. The total cost of the project exceeds RO 1.3 million. The centre, built on a total area of 8,000 square metres with a building area of 861 square metres, includes two general clinics providing primary healthcare services and medical examinations. It also features an examination and consultation room equipped with modern tools for accurate diagnosis and appropriate treatment, an observation room with a medical bed for emergency cases, as well as radiology and sterilisation rooms. **DETAILS ON P3**

GAUDU OUTSPRINTS
YATES TO TAKE RED

Groupama – FDJ's David Gaudu and defending champion Adam Yates of UAE Team Emirates climbed up the ladder in Tour of Oman 2025 to take the top two spots in the overall classification after finishing in the same positions in the mountain stage on Monday. The French rider outsprinted the British cyclist by one second to win the 180.8-km Stage 3 in four hours, 16 minutes and 10 seconds. Yates was second (04:16:11), as Australia's Damien Howson (Q36.5 Pro Cycling Team) claimed third in 04:16:15.

DETAILS ON P12



Tenth plan success at 93%

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, FEB 10

THE MINISTRY of Economy has announced that the 10th Five-Year Plan has reached an impressive 93 per cent implementation rate of its strategic programmes as it enters the fourth year. This strong execution underscores the nation's commitment to fulfilling the priorities outlined in Oman Vision 2040, positioning Oman as a regional leader in sustainable development and economic diversification.

According to the ministry's latest data,

significant progress has been made across the plan's core pillars. The overall execution rate has exceeded expectations, with 416 initiatives completed against a target of 388. Individual sector performance is equally commendable - Human and Community Pillar: 92 per cent execution; Economy and Development Pillar: 99 per cent execution; Sustainable Environment Pillar: 88 per cent execution; and Governance and Institutional Performance Pillar: 88 per cent execution.

Detailed analysis reveals substantial advancements across various areas, reflecting a robust performance framework. Notable achievements include Social and

Cultural Sectors: Education, Learning, and Research: 73 initiatives completed (63 targeted); Health: All six targeted initiatives completed; Citizenship and Heritage: 45 initiatives completed (43 targeted); Social Welfare and Protection: 26 initiatives completed (25 targeted); Youth Development: All three targeted initiatives completed.

Economic and Administrative Sectors: Economic Diversification and Financial Sustainability: 61 initiatives completed (60 targeted); Private Sector Development and International Cooperation: 17 initiatives completed and Labour Market and Employment: All 17 initiatives completed.

In a New Step to Enhance Its Commercial Services

Oman Arab Bank Launches a New Suite of Digital Commercial Banking Services



As part of its ongoing efforts to lead the banking sector, Oman Arab Bank (OAB) unveiled a new suite of banking e-services for small and medium enterprises (SMEs), corporate clients and government entities on Sunday, February 9. The launch took place at a special event hosted by the bank under the patronage of H.E. Dr. Said bin Mohammed bin Ahmed Al-Saqri, Minister of Economy, with the presence of more than 800 bank clients and high-profile guests.

The newly introduced digital commercial banking solutions from OAB provide businesses with seamless, real-time access to their financial transactions, enabling them to process payments, authorise transactions and manage payroll efficiently. The new e-services include:

- Mobile Commercial Banking Application:**
 - This will allow the bank's valued customers to manage their banking accounts and conduct business transactions such as payments,

payroll and transaction approvals at any time and from any location.

- Host-to-Host Payment Solutions:**
 - A direct connection system linking the clients' systems with the bank's payment system, incorporating the latest developments in this field, significantly saving time and effort while reducing banking transaction costs.
- Global "SWIFTNet" System:**
 - A global system that offers simplified connectivity for securely, quickly and efficiently transferring messages and financial transactions from the client to the bank.

By leveraging these advanced technologies, OAB empowers businesses with greater financial control, operational efficiency and a future-ready digital banking experience.

Speaking about the bank's vision for innovation in banking solutions, Sulaiman Hamed Al Harthi,

CEO of Oman Arab Bank, stated, "In light of the rapid technological developments in banking, Oman Arab Bank continues its diligent efforts to adopt and localise the latest technologies, exploring the best digital solutions and utilising them. Its focus is serving the nation and supporting its development journey, setting an example of excellence and leadership in the banking sector. From this perspective, we have been eager to provide innovative banking services that cater to the needs of various sectors, beginning with micro-enterprises and progressing to small and medium-sized enterprises, which form the backbone of the national economy and are an essential part of the vital resources in advancing this generous nation and extending to large companies and public and private institutions that play a role in driving development."

Meanwhile, Sulaiman Ali Al Hinai, Chief Wholesale Banking Officer, commented, "These solutions have been meticulously designed

following comprehensive studies to offer you the highest levels of security, flexibility and ease in managing your businesses, thereby enhancing your capacity to grow and evolve in a world facing shifts in needs and accelerating challenges. The launch of these solutions reaffirms our continued leadership in digital commercial banking services, where we do not merely keep pace with trends but consistently strive to be at the forefront of innovation, elevating the standards in delivering this type of service and becoming the model to emulate and the reference point to acknowledge."

OAB is recognised for its strong commitment to leading the banking sector through ongoing investment in cutting-edge technology and efforts to meet and exceed customer expectations.

For more information about the bank's products and services for individuals and businesses, please visit the official website: [www.oman-arabbank.com](#)

OMAN



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SHORT TAKES



IRANIAN EMBASSY MARKS 46TH NATIONAL DAY

MUSCAT: The Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Muscat held a reception on Monday evening to celebrate the 46th National Day of the Republic. The event took place at the Crowne Plaza Hotel and was attended by several officials from the Sultanate of Oman, heads of diplomatic missions accredited to the Sultanate of Oman, and officials from the Foreign Ministry. — ONA

OMANI-BRUNEI PANEL EXPLORES BOOSTING TIES



MUSCAT: The Omani-Brunei Joint Committee held its fourth meeting in Muscat on Monday to discuss means of enhancing cooperation between the two countries in the economic, investment and cultural fields.

The Omani side was chaired by Dr Saleh bin Said Masan, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion for Commerce and Industry, while the Brunei side was chaired by Dr Hajah May Fa'ezah binti Haji Ahmad Ariffin, Permanent Secretary (Economy) at the Ministry of Finance and Economy, Brunei Darussalam.

The meeting reviewed the trade and investment relations between the two countries and means of promoting them in sectors of common interest. These include the exchange of expertise in best practices in writing and developing curricula, mechanisms for drafting school books, and career guidance programmes in both countries, in addition to enhancing cooperation in student guidance programmes, health awareness initiatives, studying labour market trends and future needs. — ONA

OMAN, CANADA EXCHANGE VIEWPOINTS



MUSCAT: Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthy, Under-Secretary of the Foreign Ministry for Political Affairs, received on Monday Dr Martin Larose, Director-General of the Middle East Bureau at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Canada. — ONA

MAJLIS ASH’SHURA APPROVES DRAFT TELECOM LAW

KHALID AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, FEB 10

The Majlis Ash’shura approved the draft telecommunications and information technology regulatory law which was referred by the government, on Monday.

The draft telecommunications regulation law includes 10 chapters and 56 articles aiming to regulate the telecommunications sector in the related services.

The Majlis also reviewed the vision of the Public Services and Utilities Committee regarding a number of draft agreements. These included a draft agreement between the government of the Sultanate of Oman and the Government of the Republic of South Africa in the



The Majlis also reviewed the vision of the Public Services and Utilities Committee regarding a number of draft agreements.

field of maritime transport as well as a draft cooperation agreement between the government of the Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of Tunisia also in the field of maritime transport.

Also discussed at the meeting

were two reports prepared by the Media, Tourism and Culture Committee that aim at maximising the economic revenues from some archaeological sites listed on the World Heritage List. The Majlis reviewed a proposal for establishing personal communication channels by the Ministry of Information.

Regarding the draft telecommunications regulation law, Dr Hamoud al Yahyai, head of the Public Services and Utilities Committee of Majlis Ash’shura, said that the committee studied the law in collaboration with specialists working in the field and a comparison was made with other laws in developed countries to reach the best formula that serves the sector. He stressed that the new

law reflects the latest legislative developments in this field and aims to upgrade the telecommunications sector in the Sultanate of Oman.

Al Yahyai pointed out that the Majlis approved the vision of the Public Services and Utilities Committee regarding the two maritime transport agreements between the Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of South Africa and the Republic of Tunisia, which aim to regulate maritime transport and enhance economic and maritime cooperation between the Sultanate of Oman and these two countries.

Al Yahyai explained that these agreements will enable the Omani ports to benefit from shipping lines with these countries, thus spurring economic and tourism activities.

Companies sign \$12m worth pacts in Riyadh

ON the second day of Oman's participation in LEAP 2025, which is being held in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, from February 9 to 12, nine cooperation agreements were signed between Omani startup tech companies and international firms, with a total value exceeding \$10 million.

The agreements were signed at the Oman Pavilion in the presence of Dr Ali bin Amer al Shaithani, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology for Communications and Information Technology, along with several CEOs from participating public and private sector companies, as well as representatives from Omani and Saudi firms involved in the agreements.

Global Semiconductor & Microelectronics (GSME), a company established in Oman through an international partnership, signed an agreement worth approximately \$10 million with the Saudi company e-Photonics. The agreement aims to foster cooperation, knowledge exchange, research and services in semiconductors, electronics, and 3D computer vision solutions.

The Omani company DataMining signed an agreement worth approximately \$1



The agreements were signed at the Oman Pavilion in the presence of Dr Ali bin Amer al Shaithani, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology for Communications and Information Technology. — ONA

million with the Saudi company AlJazeera Falcons. The agreement focuses on software development, artificial intelligence, and the production of electronic products for the Saudi market.

In a move reflecting the expansion of Omani tech startups into international markets, several companies under the Oman Information and Communications Technology Group (ITHCA Group) successfully signed agreements with

international firms.

Mubasher, a company specialising in digital advertising screen solutions, signed an agreement worth approximately \$1 million with the Saudi company OOMCO.

Meanwhile, Osos, one of ITHCA Group's companies, signed six agreements with international companies in the fields of software solutions, artificial intelligence, cloud computing, applications, and technical support. — ONA

Oman marks International Day of Arabian Leopard

MUSCAT: Represented by the Environment Authority (EA), the Sultanate of Oman marked the “International Day of the Arabian Leopard”, which falls on 10 February every year.

The event seeks to raise public awareness about the importance of the Arabian Leopard, considered a “critically endangered creature”, according to the classification of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). It also aims to enhance efforts to protect biodiversity and wildlife.

Dr Mohammed bin Mahad al Maashani, from the Environment Authority, said that, thanks to the Arabian leopard project in the mountains of Dhofar Governorate, efforts made to protect the species



The event seeks to raise public awareness about the Arabian Leopard. — ONA

achieved remarkable progress evidenced by new births of leopards in the wild.

These new births instil hope for the sustained presence of

the Arabian leopard in open landscapes and contribute to maintaining the ecological balance in the region, he added.

Al Maashani explained

that the Arabian leopard, scientifically known as “Panthera pardusnimr”, is one of the smallest and rarest species of leopard. Studies showed that the Arabian leopard suffers from the loss of its natural habitat and a decline in the volume of prey, in addition to other threats like illegal trafficking.

He pointed out that Oman serves as one of the few places where this species still survives, and that the Environment Authority is keeping track of the Arabian leopard in several sites in the Dhofar Mountains.

The Environment Authority collects data and analyses environmental indicators to help improve the living conditions of the Arabian leopard, he explained. — ONA

SHORT TAKES



French International School students visit Observer premises

Students of the French International School Muscat visited the offices of Oman Arabic Daily and Oman Observer Daily on Monday. A total of 18 students from Grade 6, accompanied by two teachers, were introduced to the various sections of newspaper production by Sultan al Sulaimani. Sharifa al Rissi and Omar al Waili, the accompanying teachers, said the visit was part of the school's programmes to provide students with hands-on experience in different facets of society.

11th Interior Design, Décor, and Furnishing Expo kicks off



His Highness Sayyid Azzan bin Qais al Said inaugurates IDF in Muscat on Monday.

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, FEB 10

The 11th edition of the Interior Design, Décor, and Furnishing (IDF) Expo began on Wednesday, under the auspices of His Highness Sayyid Azzan bin Qais al Said, Co-founder and CEO of NASCOM, in Muscat. The three-day event, organised by Al Nimr Expo, showcases over 200 participants from various countries. The exhibition serves as a significant platform for interior designers, architects, and furniture manufacturers to showcase the latest trends and innovations.

Project Director at Al Nimr Expo, Mustafa Al Qurashi, emphasised the continuous growth of the expo, “IDF Expo is one of the largest interior design exhibitions in the region, and this is our 11th edition. It is bigger than last year’s, growing steadily each year. We have more than 200 participants this year from India, Egypt, Iran, Italy, and other countries.”

Al Qurashi highlighted the rising trend of artificial intelligence and smart solutions integration in interior design and furniture. “A major trend we’re seeing is the incorporation of AI-driven intelligent solutions in interior design and furniture. This is why we have created the ‘Design Talk’ platform, where we host discussions with renowned architects and industry experts who are utilising these new technologies.”

RO 1.3M AL HALLANIYAT HEALTH CENTRE OPENS



The Ministry of Health (MoH) on Monday celebrated the opening of the Al Hallaniyat Health Centre in the Wilayat of Shaleem and Al Hallaniyat Islands in Dhofar Governorate under the auspices of Dr Ahmed bin Mohsin al Ghassani, Head of Dhofar Municipality. The total cost of the project exceeds RO 1.3 million. The Centre, which spans a total area of 8,000 sqm with a building area of 861 sqm, includes two general clinics providing primary healthcare services and medical examinations. It also features an examination and consultation room equipped with modern tools for accurate diagnosis and appropriate treatment, an observation room with a medical bed for emergency cases, as well as radiology and sterilisation rooms. In addition, a dental clinic is available for oral and dental care.

The Centre also includes a maternity unit to ensure safe care for mothers and newborns, as well as a fully equipped maternal and child health ward to support women’s and children’s health on the island.

Additional facilities at the Centre include a medical laboratory, pharmacy, a medicine storage room, reception areas, and waiting rooms for both men and women.

It is worth mentioning that the opening of this Centre comes in response to the challenges faced by the local population and to meet their daily healthcare needs. The residents previously struggled to access integrated healthcare services due to geographical isolation, making the provision of modern medical facilities essential to ensure a better quality of life for the community. — ONA

Job training for disabled

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, FEB 10

The Ministry of Social Development celebrated the graduation of 60 male and female graduates from the second batch of the ‘Be with Us for Them’ initiative to rehabilitate people with disabilities. Dr Laila bint Ahmed al Najjar, Minister of Social Development, was the chief guest.

The initiative is in line with Oman Vision 2040 to empower people with disabilities. Awatif bint Muharib al Salman, Chairwoman of the Specialised Human Development Center, said: “The initiative seeks to provide advanced social services and create an integrated institutional community partnership system that enhances identity, citizenship, cohesion and social solidarity.” The initiative included training in customer service, office management, printing and copying documents and digital archiving. The training was held at the University of Technology and Applied Sciences in Suhar



Dr Laila bint Ahmed al Najjar, Minister of Social Development, gives a certificate to one of the trainees of ‘Be with Us for Them’ in Muscat on Monday.

and Mohammed Al Barwani Training Institute in Muscat.

Of the total beneficiaries, 22 were employed in Muscat and 8 in Suhar in public and private sectors.

“The initiative reflects the shared vision of empowering people with disabilities and enhancing their role in society, not only as recipients of support but also as active partners in development who have the ability to contribute and make change. True empowerment begins with creating an inclusive environment that provides everyone with fair opportunities, regardless of the challenges they face. It is not just a moral or social obligation but rather an essential element for achieving sustainable development based on the principles of justice and fairness,” Dina al Khalili, General Manager of Al Jisr Charity Foundation, said.

Eman bint Mohammed al Barwaniyah, CEO of Mohammed Al Barwani Charity Foundation, said if creative young people with disabilities get training, they will be ready to compete in the labour market. ‘Be with Us for Them’ began in September 2022 with 84 male and female graduates. The first batch’s 52 graduates have gained jobs in 13 private sector entities. The initiative aims to train 500 beneficiaries by 2027.

OMAN AND INDIA TO BOOST COOPERATION IN ARCHIVES

NEW DELHI: The National Records and Archives Authority (NRAA) of Oman and the National Archives of India have signed an executive cooperation programme. This agreement underscores the shared commitment of both countries to preserving historical records and fostering deeper archival ties. The programme aims to facilitate the exchange of historical records and manuscripts, enhance joint research and publication efforts, and promote training programmes and expertise sharing in the field of archival management. Additionally, both institutions plan to collaborate on international conferences and



exhibitions dedicated to historical documentation. The agreement was signed by Dr Hamad bin Mohammed al Dhawyani, Chairman of the NRAA, and Arun Singhal, Director-General

of the National Archives of India. Issa bin Saleh al Shaibani, Oman’s Ambassador to India, also attended the ceremony, emphasising the strategic importance of this initiative in reinforcing cultural and historical ties between the two countries.

As global interest in the preservation of historical records grows, this initiative highlights the vital role of archival diplomacy in fostering mutual understanding and cooperation. Through this partnership, both Oman and India aim to safeguard their shared heritage and support scholarly research on historical relations between the two countries.

‘Share the Change’ initiative aims for a healthy community

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, FEB 10

The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth launched the Sports Projects Competition Labs, titled ‘Share the Change’, for the teams that qualified in the first round of the second edition. A total of 25 projects and 100 participants from various governorates of the Sultanate of Oman are taking part.

The competition will run until February 14 at the Mercure Hotel in Al Khuwair, with the final rounds taking place at the Crowne Plaza Hotel, attended by a distinguished group of experts and specialists in the sports and health fields. This initiative aligns with Oman Vision 2040, which aims to build a community with sustainable health and reinforce the

concept that ‘health is everyone’s responsibility’. It highlights the importance of adopting physical activity as a healthy lifestyle. Dr Khalifa al Junaidi, a member of the judging panel, explained that the competition will be evaluated based on a set of rigorous criteria.

These include the project’s methodology and its alignment with national values, traditions and strategic plans, as well as the efficiency of its management in terms of implementation, marketing and financial plans.

The evaluation will also focus on creativity and innovation, assessing how modern technologies are utilised, the uniqueness of the idea and its potential for development. Other criteria include the added value of the project in terms of solving a health problem, engaging



This initiative aims to reinforce the concept that ‘health is everyone’s responsibility’.

small enterprises or offering environmentally friendly initiatives, as well as its sustainability and future plans.

The social impact will also be assessed based on the project’s acceptance by the community, its target beneficiaries and its potential for expansion and widespread use.

Dr Nawal al Rashdi, a consultant in family medicine and Director of the Audit and Health Awareness Programmes Department at the Ministry of Health, as well as a judging panel member, delivered a presentation on health promotion as a means of empowering individuals to take control of and improve their health through healthy lifestyles.

She highlighted the Sultanate

of Oman’s efforts to combat non-communicable diseases through initiatives such as Oman Vision 2040, the National Committee for the Prevention of Non-Communicable Diseases and awareness campaigns like “Wiqaya” (Prevention), “Himtak Ma’ana” (Your Effort with Us) and “Ghaytak Nqlil” (Our Goal: Reduction).

She emphasised the role of the “Share the Change” competition in promoting healthy behaviours through innovation and linking technology with physical activity. Dr Amal al Siyabi, a public health specialist at the Ministry of Health, presented an overview of the campaign to promote physical activity, titled “Health Starts with a Step”. This campaign ran from 2017 to 2020 and addressed chronic disease challenges.

SPOTLIGHT

LEARN TO LOVE LIFE UNFILTERED

Excessive reliance on social media’s digital photo filters will break one’s confidence and self esteem

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, FEB 10



SALEM WAS EXCITED to meet the family of the girl he had always dreamed of marrying. He had prepared well, put on his best clothes and went with confidence, expecting that they had already seen him through the photos he shared with them on Snapchat. But he was disappointed when the response came later. “We apologise... Your face in reality does not resemble your photos on Snapchat!” But the story is not about Salem alone. It is about a generation that lives in two versions: the real version and the filtered digital version.

Snapchat and Instagram filters are no longer just tools to improve lighting or modify colours, but have become a means to completely change the features of the face. These filters can give you flawless skin, wide eyes, a thinner face and a brighter smile. With each edited photo, the difference between the real and digital appearance becomes greater, until the person begins to feel that his/her natural appearance is not good enough.

Here lies the real problem: What happens when a person begins to prefer his digital image over his real image? Dr Ahmed al Kharousi, a consultant psychiatrist, says: “Excessive reliance on digital filters creates what is called ‘self-image distortion disorder’, where the person begins to see his/her natural appearance as unacceptable. Over time, he or she avoids taking real photos and then avoids appearing in social gatherings without effects. Some cases reach depression and social anxiety, especially when the person faces ‘reality shock’ when meeting others face to face.” When we spoke to some youths, the answers were alarming. Many said they feel more confident when posting photos with filters while others admitted they avoid taking photos without filters.

Zamzam, a 26-year-old, says “Every time I take a photo without a filter, I feel like I look tired or pale. I no longer like seeing myself in the mirror as I am. Filters make me feel more beautiful, but when people see me in real life, I notice their different looks, as if they expect someone else.” Majed, a 30-year-old, admits that filters have made him live a double life. “On social media, I appear to be a confident and attractive person, but when I go out in real life, I feel much less so. It’s as if I live with two different personalities.” The effects of digital filters are not limited to people’s self-confidence, but have also begun to extend to social and emotional relationships. Salem al Wahaibi says some people have become afraid to appear without filters to the point that they prefer to communicate via text messages instead of video calls.

Dr Ahmed al Salmi says, “When a person relies excessively on filters, they begin to lose confidence in their real appearance and this creates social fears. This can lead to isolation, or frustration when receiving unexpected reactions from others.”

Khaled al Saadi believes that there is a fine line between improvement and fakery. “Everyone wants to look their best and this is not wrong. But when filters become a means of changing the real identity, it becomes a problem. In the end, strong relationships are built on honesty, not on modified images.” Prof Adel al Hussaini, an expert in social relations, warns of the impact of filters on romantic relationships. “If a person starts a relationship based on an unreal image, s/he may later face challenges in gaining a partner’s trust. Successful relationships are based on realism and acceptance, not ideal expectations.”

How can we prevent social media from negatively affecting our self-confidence? *Here are some tips according to psychological experts:* 1. Filters can be used in moderation, but avoid exaggerated changes to your features 2. Learn to love your natural appearance, as it is part of your identity 3. Most of the photos you see on social media are edited, so avoid comparison 4. If you are looking for a real relationship, make your real image part of it



SHORT TAKES



The first day featured a session on earning from the internet, led by Saudi e-commerce specialist Mahmoud al Fajal

‘Personal Signature’ training to enhance skills ends in Salalah

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, FEB 10

The training programme for the “Personal Signature” initiative wrapped up on Sunday at the Sultan Qaboos Complex for Culture, Sports and Entertainment in Salalah. Organised by the General Directorate of Culture, Sports and Youth in Dhofar. The initiative ran from February 6 to 9, focusing on skill development and professional branding for young Omanis.

The event opened with an overview of the initiative’s objectives, emphasising its role in equipping young people with the tools needed to market themselves professionally.

Noor bint Mohammed al Awaidiyah, a key speaker, highlighted that the programme aims to provide participants with personal branding skills to enhance their presence in the job market. It also seeks to create a competitive learning environment that fosters professional growth.

The first day featured a session on earning from the internet, led by Saudi e-commerce specialist Mahmoud al Fajal, who discussed strategies for self-marketing in the digital economy. Abdulaziz al Hadhrami followed with insights into entrepreneurial success, drawing from his personal career journey.

A hands-on mobile photography workshop by Noor al Huda Hussein trained participants in professional smartphone photography techniques.

The second day saw Noor al Awaidi delivering a session on content creation for Instagram, exploring effective content strategies, scheduling and digital marketing tools. Meanwhile, Badriya Shajnaa conducted a workshop on artificial intelligence applications, under the Tamkeen programme by the General Directorate of Social Development in Dhofar.



OMAN CANCER ASSOCIATION SUCCESSFULLY CONCLUDES SYMPOSIUM

MUSCAT: The Oman Cancer Association (OCA) successfully concluded its symposium, “Advances in Oncology: A Multidisciplinary Approach,” in collaboration with Global Treatment Services and Fortis Hospitals held recently at the Crownne Plaza Muscat.

The event saw the participation of over 170 healthcare professionals and researchers, marking a significant step forward in cancer awareness and treatment

discussions.

As part of OCA’s 25th-anniversary celebrations, the symposium provided a vital platform for leading experts in Medical Oncology, Surgical Oncology, Haematology, Bone Marrow Transplantation (BMT) and Radioecology to discuss the latest advancements and best practices in cancer treatment.

Dr Wahid al Kharousi, President of OCA, emphasised the importance of multidisciplinary

collaboration in oncology, stating, “This symposium represents a key milestone in advancing cancer care in Oman by highlighting cutting-edge research and innovative medical practices.”

The event featured interactive discussions and presentations on innovative treatments in oncology and haematology and bone marrow transplantation and their role in patient recovery. Radioecology and the effects of radiation in cancer treatment.

Conference explores innovation, medical tech

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, FEB 10

THE Medical Education Conference 2025, organised by Sultan Qaboos University at the Kempinski Al Mouj Hotel, commenced on Monday, under the auspices of HH Sayyid Dr Fahd bin Al Julanda al Said, Vice-Chancellor of SQU.

The conference is held under the theme ‘Innovation and Modern Technologies Opportunities and Challenges’ and aims to provide a specialised educational platform bringing together academics and healthcare practitioners to discuss the latest developments in medical education, with a focus on innovation and modern technologies in teaching, assessment, and mentoring.

It also seeks to enhance leadership skills, support professional development, promote research and scholarships, and build a network of committed medical educators striving for academic excellence.

This year’s conference holds special significance as it coincides with the 38th Meeting of the Committee of Deans of Medical Colleges in the Gulf Cooperation

The conference will address a range of critical topics, featuring 70 scientific papers, 3 keynote lectures, and 8 workshops, all focusing on shaping the future of medical education in the region



The conference is held under the theme ‘Innovation and Modern Technologies Opportunities and Challenges’. - Photo by Khalfan al Ruzaiki

Council (GCC) countries, offering a valuable opportunity to strengthen academic cooperation and exchange expertise among medical education institutions in the region.

Dr Rashid al Abri, Chair of the Conference, highlighted the importance of the event, given the rapid advancements in the field of medical education. He emphasised that its alignment with the meeting of Gulf medical college deans enhances academic collaboration and contributes to unifying efforts to improve the quality of medical education.

He added that medical education today faces increasing challenges, necessitating curriculum development, the enhancement of scientific research, and the

adoption of the latest teaching and clinical training methods to ensure the preparation of highly qualified medical professionals capable of delivering outstanding healthcare.

The conference will address a range of critical topics, featuring 70 scientific papers, 3 keynote lectures, and 8 workshops, all focusing on shaping the future of medical education in the region.

Meanwhile, Professor Dr Abdel Halim Deifallah, Secretary-General of the Committee of Deans of Medical Colleges in the GCC and Dean of the College of Medicine at the Arabian Gulf University, emphasised that the conference serves as a platform to enhance collaboration among medical colleges in the Gulf.

Sohar University, Unesco hosts AI conference

SUHAR: Sohar University officially inaugurated the Artificial Intelligence Conference: Navigating Digital Skills and Decent Work; and the Sohar University Research Conference (SURC8) on Sunday, at its campus. The conferences are organised in collaboration with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (Unesco) — Doha Regional Office and the National Commission for Education, Culture, and Science, under the auspices of Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah,



Sohar University inaugurated an Artificial Intelligence Conference at their campus on Sunday

Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation.

These two significant events aim to enhance research and innovation in artificial intelligence (AI) and various academic disciplines, providing a platform for students and researchers to showcase their innovations.

The first day began with an address from Dr Hamdan al Fazari, Vice Chancellor of Sohar University, who emphasised the university’s commitment to equipping students with the skills needed to meet market

demands in the AI era. He highlighted Sohar University’s integration of AI technologies into its educational and administrative processes, including AI-powered chatbots for student support, virtual classrooms for remote learning and predictive analytics for identifying at-risk students. .

In addition to the local experts, the event featured international keynote speakers from Australia, Finland, China, US, Lebanon and Qatar. These speakers covered a range of topics, including AI ethics.



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NOTICE TO CUSTOMERS

Further to earlier announcement on 03rd Oct, 2024, this is to bring to your kind notice that **Bank of Baroda, Oman Operations ("BOB Oman")** will be acquired by **Bank Dhofar SAOG** hereinafter called this transaction as **"Business Acquisition"**. This Business Acquisition is scheduled to take effect on later date which will be announced subsequently.

We assure you that we are committed to ensuring a smooth transition of all our customer accounts/relationships to acquiring bank and we believe that this step is in the best interests of our clients and staff. We express our sincere gratitude for your valuable support and wish you a mutually beneficial relationship with Bank Dhofar. Should you have any questions or require assistance, please contact your BOB Relationship Manager or the BOB Client Services team at [+968] 71760013 (WhatsApp) [+968] 24817563, [+968] 24817373 (Ext-228), email: mktg.oman@bankofbaroda.com

Chief Executive
Bank of Baroda, Oman Ops

Contest to find best biriyani chef

KABEER YOUSUF
[@kabiyousef](#)

A mega biryani cooking competition with thousands of Omani Rials for winners will be held this week, according to the organisers.

The event titled the ‘Dum Dum Biryani Fest’2025’ is organised in association with the Omani authorities by ‘MeFriend,’ the digital platform of Gulf Madhyamam.

Organisers said they have received over 1,000 applications. The semifinal featuring top 50 contestants will take place on February 14. The finals will be held on on February 21 at the Muscat Bausher Football Club.

The jury panel comprises eminent chefs like Suresh Pillai, Abida Rasheed, and TV anchor Raj Kalesh. “The ‘Dum Dum Biryani Fest’ presents a golden opportunity to showcase the unique taste of our homemade biryani to the world,” Afzal Ahamed, Shaiju Salahudeen, Badar Muneer, Waseem Ashraf and P Afzal, organisers of the event added.

To add excitement to the grand finale night, there will be musical performances by popular singers Akbar Khan and Dana Rasik, along with a variety of entertainment activities such as game shows and food stalls offering chat, Kannur delicacies and much more.

SALE OF VEHICLE / EQUIPMENT

Leading Construction Company in Oman intends to dispose off their used vehicles and equipment in 'as is where is' condition. The items identified are presently located at their Barka Khazaen Yard and will be offered for inspection to the public on **12/02/2025, 13/02/2025 and 16/02/2025 between 08:00 am to 12:00 pm and 03:00 pm to 05:00 pm.**

Last date for submission of closed tender is **16/02/2025 at 05:00 pm** at their Khazaen office.

Interested parties may contact at
Tel: (+968) 26983777 / 26983767
Mobile: (+968) 91354151

WORLD

SHORT TAKES



A general view shows damaged walls at a court after pro-Yoon supporters stormed the building, in Seoul. — Reuters

SEOUL PROSECUTORS INDICT 63 OVER COURT RAMPAGE

SEOUL: South Korean prosecutors indicted on Monday 63 people for their role in storming a court building last month to protest the detention of impeached President Yoon Suk Yeol, with some facing charges carrying up to a seven-year jail term, an official said. Hundreds of angry Yoon supporters stormed the Seoul Western District Court in the pre-dawn hours of January 19, destroying property and trespassing into judges’ chambers as some live-streamed the incident. They broke through a police cordon at the court after a judge approved a warrant to extend the detention of Yoon.

Of the 63 people indicted on charges that include aggravated obstruction of official duty, destruction of official property, attempted arson and assault, 62 remain in detention, the prosecution official said by telephone. Conviction on a charge of aggravated obstruction of official duty carries a maximum prison sentence of seven years, according to court sentencing guidelines. Yoon is also under a separate Constitutional Court trial reviewing parliament’s impeachment accusing him of violating his constitutional duty as president. — Reuters

ECUADOR FACES ELECTION A SECOND ROUND RUN-OFF



Ecuador’s presidential candidate Luisa Gonzalez (C) holds a press conference, in Quito. — Reuters

QUITO: Incumbent President Daniel Noboa on Monday clutched onto a razor-thin lead in violence-hit Ecuador’s election, after a stronger-than-expected leftist challenger looked set to force a second-round run-off. With more than 90 per cent of the ballots counted, Noboa had 44.3 per cent and rival Luisa Gonzalez 43.8 per cent, official results showed. Gonzalez, a 47-year-old lawyer and single mother of two, told elated supporters in Quito that they had achieved a “great victory” by forcing what she called a “statistical tie”. “We have won,” she said. The telegenic lawmaker had trailed heavily in pre-election surveys.

Some exit polls had even predicted that Noboa would garner the 50 per cent of votes needed to avoid a head-to-head contest in April. But the election was seen by many as a referendum on the country’s stalled economy and on Noboa’s headline security response. More than ten million votes have been counted so far, but it could be some hours before the full tally is known. Still, Noboa’s supporters were in a jubilant mood, lighting fireworks in Quito and Guayaquil, the country’s two largest cities. — AFP

NATIONAL SCHEME

Indonesia launches free health programme



Thousands of Indonesians received a free health check-up as the government launched an annual screening programme, an effort to improve preventative care and uphold a key election promise of President Prabowo Subianto. Indonesians of all ages are now eligible to receive annual check-ups aimed at early detection of cardiovascular diseases, congenital disorders in children and other ailments, health officials said. The scheme is among several social welfare pledges from Prabowo. — AFP

COLOMBIA IN CRISIS AFTER PRESIDENT CALLS FOR CABINET RESIGNATION

BOGOTA: Colombian President Gustavo Petro called for his ministers and other senior officials to step down as tensions soared in the government, days after he lambasted his team on live television. The demand came after Petro on Tuesday subjected his cabinet to a five-hour public dressing-down on state TV, in which he said the government had been underperforming. He accused several officials, including his trade, education and health ministers, of

falling behind on the delivery of key projects.

“I have requested the resignation of ministers and directors of administrative departments,” Petro posted on social media platform X. “There will be some changes in the cabinet to achieve greater compliance with the programme ordered by the people.”

As of Sunday night, three ministers and two senior officials had resigned since the meeting. Not long after Petro’s announcement,

Labour Minister Gloria Ramirez announced her resignation on social media platform X. “Politics must proceed without sectarianism and without ambiguities,” she said.

Earlier, Colombia’s Environment Minister Susana Muhamad had become the second cabinet member in a week to step down after the contentious meeting. Several ministers had complained about the presence at the meeting of Armando Benedetti, one of Petro’s closest aides. — AFP

Hamas says Gaza plan ‘doomed’ as talks resume

HAMAS’

Gaza chief Khalil al-Hayya said on Monday that the plans of the West, the United States and US President Donald Trump for the Gaza Strip were “doomed.” “We will bring them down as we brought down the projects before them,” he said during a commemoration in Tehran. Trump said on Sunday he was committed to buying and owning Gaza, but could allow sections of the war-ravaged land to be rebuilt by other states in the Middle East.

Meanwhile, an Israeli delegation that flew to Doha for talks on the next phase of the Gaza ceasefire at the weekend has returned, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s office said on Monday, amid growing doubts over the Egyptian and Qatari-brokered process to end the war in Gaza. There were no immediate details on the reason for the return from the talks, which are intended to agree on the basis for a second stage of a multi-phase ceasefire agreement and hostage-for-prisoner exchange reached last month. But a Palestinian official close to the discussions said progress was being held up by a lack of confidence between the two sides, which have accused each other of breaching the terms of the ceasefire.

US President Donald Trump’s statements that Palestinians should be moved out of Gaza, leaving the coastal enclave to be developed as a waterfront real estate project under US control have upended expectations for the postwar future.



People ride in a horse-drawn cart as they approach the concrete barriers of the Netzarim corridor between Gaza City and Nuseirat. — AFP

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Netanyahu endorsed Trump’s comments when he returned from a visit to Washington at the weekend, causing irritation in Egypt, where security sources said Israel was “putting up roadblocks” to the smooth progress of the ceasefire deal, including delays to withdrawal of its troops and continuing aerial surveillance.

The Kremlin said on Monday it was waiting for more details on US President Donald Trump’s plan to buy the Gaza Strip, an idea which has sparked condemnation from many countries. Asked whether Trump’s plan was acceptable for Moscow, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov noted that 1.2 million people lived in Gaza. “It’s worth waiting for some details here if we’re talking about a coherent plan of action. We are talking about almost

1.2 million Palestinians who live there, and this is probably the main issue,” Peskov told a conference call. “These are the people who were promised a two-state solution to the Middle East problem by the relevant Security Council resolutions, and so on and so forth. There are a lot of questions like that. We don’t know the details yet, so we have to be patient,” said Peskov.

Halfway through the 42-day ceasefire that started on January 19, both sides have already accused the other of violating the agreement, which was to see 33 Israeli hostages exchanged for hundreds of Palestinian prisoners. Talks on a second stage, to agree the release of the remaining hostages and a full withdrawal of Israeli forces began last week but have shown little sign of serious progress. — Reuters



THOUSANDS FLEE VILLAGE AFTER ATTACK

PORT SUDAN: Thousands of families have fled a village in Sudan’s North Darfur state, the United Nations said on Monday, after an attack blamed on the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces. An estimated “8,000 households were displaced from Saloma village and the surrounding area” south of state capital El-Fasher on Friday and Saturday, said the UN’s International Organization for Migration.

The RSF attacked Saloma, said Ahmed Rejal, spokesman for civil society group the Darfur General Coordination of Camps for the Displaced and Refugees. In Saloma, “village homes were burned” during the fighting, Rejal said. — AFP

SPECIAL OPERATION

Bangladesh arrests 1,300 in a crackdown



Bangladeshi police said more than 1,300 people have been arrested in a sweeping crackdown dubbed “Operation Devil Hunt”, targeting gangs allegedly connected to the ousted regime of Sheikh Hasina. Police spokesman Inamul Haque Sagar said that “1,308 people were arrested across the country”. The security operations come after widespread unrest earlier this month. The government had tasked a special “command centre” team to “oversee the efforts of the law agencies”. — AFP

HIGHWAY DISASTER

Dozens die in Guatemala bus accident



A bus veered off a highway bridge into a polluted ravine in Guatemala City on Monday, killing at least 30 people and trapping survivors, fire department said. The bus was travelling on a busy route in and out of the city when it plunged approximately 20 meters from Puente Belice. Guatemalan President Bernardo Arevalo declared three days of national mourning and deployed the country’s army and disaster agency to assist response efforts. — Reuters

SHORT TAKES



Kosovo's PM and leader of the ruling Vetevendosje party Albin Kurti addresses supporters, in Pristina, Kosovo. — Reuters

KOSOVO'S PARTY WINS ELECTION, LOSES MAJORITY

PRISTINA: Kosovo's ruling Vetevendosje party came first in parliamentary election, but fell short of an outright majority needed to rule without coalition partners, preliminary results showed on Monday. Despite a drop in support from a 2021 vote, the result sets up Prime Minister Albin Kurti to lead the next government in the small Balkan country where politics are dominated by the relationship with neighbouring Serbia and Serbs within its borders.

Vetevendosje won 41.3% of votes with 88% of ballots counted, down from more than 50% in the 2021 poll that brought a Vetevendosje-led coalition to power, results from the election commission showed. The opposition Democratic Party of Kosovo was second with 21.8% and the Democratic League of Kosovo party had 17.8%.

"Preliminary results show one true, exact and clear thing, and this is that the Vetevendosje movement has won the elections of February 9, 2025," Kurti told supporters in the capital Pristina as crowds let off fireworks, banged drums and waved Albanian flags. — Reuters

SWEDEN CAMPUS SHOOTER NAMED



Henrik Dahlstroem, commander and responsible for the special event speaks in Orebro. The identity of the suspected gunman in Sweden's worst ever mass shooting has been confirmed, Swedish prosecutors said on Monday without naming the suspect. "The prosecutor has handed over the investigation of the school shooting in Orebro to the police," the Swedish Prosecution Authority said. Speaking to newspaper Expressen, prosecutor Elisabeth Anderson confirmed that it was Rickard Andersson. — AFP

ROMANIA PRESIDENT IOHANNIS RESIGNS BEFORE ELECTION RE-RUN

BUCHAREST: Romanian President Klaus Iohannis on Monday announced he would resign following pressure for him to step down ahead of the re-run of an election that was voided over allegations of Russian interference. Pressure had been growing on pro-European Iohannis, leader of liberals who had said he would remain in office until his successor is elected in May. Romania's top court decided to cancel the presidential elections in December amid

allegations of Russian meddling and after a previously little-known, far-right candidate won a surprise first-round victory.

"In order to spare Romania and the Romanian citizens from crisis... I resign from the office of president of Romania," Iohannis said, adding that he would officially stand down on Wednesday. MPs on Monday launched a procedure to suspend Iohannis, following two previous attempts by the opposition to start the process. "In a few days, the

Romanian Parliament will vote on my suspension and Romania will go into crisis.... This whole endeavour will have effects internally and unfortunately also externally," Iohannis said. Far-right AUR party leader George Simion welcomed Iohannis's resignation.

Senate president and liberal leader, Ilie Bolojan, is expected to replace Iohannis. The decision -- rare in the EU -- plunged the eastern European country bordering war-torn Ukraine into crisis. — AFP

Paris AI summit draws world for lighter laws

WORLD leaders and tech executives convened in Paris on Monday to announce new investments in artificial intelligence and discuss how to safely embrace AI at a time of mounting resistance to red tape that businesses say stifles innovation. Eagerness to rein in AI has waned since previous summits in Britain and South Korea that focused world powers' attention on the technology's risks after ChatGPT's viral launch in 2022. As US President Donald Trump tears up his predecessor's AI guardrails to promote US competitiveness, pressure has built on the European Union to pursue a lighter-touch approach to AI to help keep European firms in the tech race.

"If we want growth, jobs and progress, we must allow innovators to innovate, builders to build and developers to develop," OpenAI CEO Sam Altman said in an op-ed in Le Monde newspaper ahead of the summit.

Some EU leaders including the summit's host, French President Emmanuel Macron, also hope flexibility will be applied to the bloc's new AI Act to help home-grown startups. "There's a risk some decide to have no rules and that's dangerous. But there's also the opposite risk, if Europe gives itself too many rules," Macron told regional French newspapers. "We should not be afraid of innovation," he said. Trump's early moves on AI underscored how far the strategies to regulate AI in the United States, China and EU have diverged. European lawmakers last year approved the bloc's AI Act, the world's first comprehensive set of rules governing the technology. Tech giants and some capitals are pushing for it to be enforced leniently.

One outcome from the summit was the launch of Current AI, a partnership of countries such as France and Germany and industry players including Google and Salesforce. With an initial \$400 million in investment, the partnership will spearhead public-interest projects such as making high-quality data for AI available and investing in open-source tools. It is aiming for up to \$2.5 billion in capital over five years. Current AI founder Martin Tisné told Reuters a public-



the Artificial Intelligence (AI) Action Summit at the Grand Palais in Paris, France. — Reuters

interest focus was necessary to avoid AI having downsides like social media. "We have to have learned the lessons," he said.

Separately, France will announce private sector investments totalling some 109 billion euros (\$113 billion) during the summit, Macron said on Sunday.

"The size of this 100 billion euro investment reassured us, in a way, that there's going to be ambitious enough projects in France," said Clem Delangue, the CEO of Hugging Face, a US company with French co-founders that is a hub for open-source AI online.

Delangue said his company would double its investment in France to hire more staff and focus on technology including robotics, but he declined to say how much that would amount to.

Delegations are discussing non-binding statements about the stewardship of AI and about managing AI's massive energy needs

as the planet gets hotter.

Not everyone in Paris agreed with taking a lighter-touch approach to AI regulation. In terms of regulation, "it's sort of a night and day difference, between the US and the EU right now," said Brian Chen, policy director at Data & Society, a US-based nonprofit which researches the social implications of AI.

"What I worry about is that... there will be pressures from the US and elsewhere to weaken the EU's AI Act and weaken those existing protections," he said.

Labour leaders expressed concerns on the impact of AI on workers, including what happens to workers whose jobs are taken over by AI and are pushed into new jobs. "There is a risk of those jobs being much less paid and sometimes with much less protection," said Gilbert F. Houngbo, director-general of the International Labour Organization. — Reuters

Zelensky to attend Munich meet ahead of 3rd war anniversary

BERLIN: Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky is expected at the Munich Security Conference, where the war with Russia and how to end it will be high on the agenda, organisers said on Monday. Senior representatives from US President Donald Trump's new administration will also be at the gathering in the southern German city from Friday to Sunday. The US delegation would include Vice-President JD Vance, Secretary of State Marco Rubio and presidential envoy on the Ukraine-Russia war Keith Kellogg, MSC chair Christoph Heusgen told a Berlin press conference.

Zelensky is expected to attend in person, allowing for potential talks with representatives of Kyiv's key allies, Heusgen said. "We hope that Munich will be used -- and we have signs that it will -- to make progress with regard to peace in Ukraine," the former diplomat said. "We assume that talks will take place

on the sidelines. I will leave it open whether a plan will be announced at the conference. "What I am certain of is that the conference will be used to see the contours of such a plan." Heusgen added that "I hope we will make progress in Munich... the fact that the person responsible for this, Kellogg, will attend is an indication of this for me."

President Donald Trump -- pushing his "America First" agenda -- has questioned US security commitments in Europe and called on allies to drastically boost their defence spending, while his administration has been largely quiet so far on his plans for future Ukraine aid. Washington gave Kyiv tens of billions of dollars in military assistance under president Joe Biden, but Trump's administration has yet to provide additional aid despite several billion dollars in remaining authority carrying over from his predecessor's time in office.



Firefighters work at a site of a Russian missile strike, in the town of Kramatorsk, Donetsk region Ukraine. — Reuters

The high-level security meeting in Munich comes shortly before the three-year anniversary of Russia's full-scale attack of Ukraine. The conference could be one of the first opportunities for senior US officials to speak directly with representatives from Ukraine since

Trump returned to the White House last month. During his campaign, Trump promised a quick end to the war but provided few details on how he hoped to achieve that goal. Vance was expected to give a speech on Friday in Munich, Heusgen said, adding that no official

representatives of the Russian government would be there. "No one has expressed a desire for official Russians... to come," he said. By contrast, organisers had "invited Russians from non-governmental organisations, from the opposition, both from Russia and from exile".

Pentagon chief Pete Hegseth will meanwhile visit the headquarters of two US military commands in Germany before attending a meeting of Nato defence ministers and a gathering of Ukraine's international supporters in Belgium, then travel to Poland for talks with its leaders. Hegseth's first trip as defence secretary was to the southern US border. In Brussels, Hegseth "will engage with Nato allies and partners to discuss the need to boost allied defence spending, increase European leadership, and expand defence industrial base capacity on both sides of the Atlantic," the Pentagon said. — AFP

OPINION

Oman against any attempts to displace Palestinians



In response to US President Donald Trump's proposal to take over the Gaza Strip and forcibly relocate Palestinians, Oman expressed strong solidarity with the Palestinian people, affirming its steadfast position against any attempts to displace residents of Gaza and the occupied Palestinian territories. This stance is rooted in the belief that such actions violate international law and undermine regional stability. There is a necessity to respect the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, particularly their right to establish an independent state on their land. Any plans aimed at relocating Palestinians from their homeland are a blatant violation of international law and United Nations resolutions. This perspective aligns with broader Arab sentiments, which reject any form of ethnic cleansing or forced displacement. Oman's reaction is part of a larger wave of condemnation from various Arab nations that have collectively denounced Trump's remarks as serious violations of international law. Peace and stability in the region cannot be achieved without recognising Palestinian rights and establishing a sovereign

Palestinian state. The legal framework surrounding this issue is significant. International law, particularly through various United Nations resolutions, supports the rights of Palestinians to self-determination and opposes forced displacement, and Oman's rejection of Trump's proposal highlights its commitment to these principles and its support for a peaceful resolution based on mutual respect for rights. Oman stands firmly against Trump's proposal regarding Gaza, advocating for the rights of Palestinians and emphasising adherence to international law. This position reflects a broader regional consensus that seeks to protect Palestinian sovereignty and promote stability in the Middle East. Also, Oman has expressed strong solidarity with the Palestinian people in response to remarks made by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, which suggested the establishment of a Palestinian state in Saudi Arabia. Such statements undermine the sovereignty of nations and contribute to regional instability. Oman reiterated its unwavering support for the establishment of an independent Palestinian state based on

Oman stands firmly against any attempts to displace Palestinians or undermine their rights. The collective response from Oman and other Arab nations highlights a unified stance against what they perceive as aggressive policies from Israel and dismissive rhetoric from leaders like Trump and Netanyahu regarding Palestinian sovereignty

the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital. This position aligns with the broader Arab consensus that any normalisation of relations between Israel and Arab states should be contingent upon addressing Palestinian statehood. In addition to Oman, other Arab countries have also condemned Netanyahu's statements, with the Saudi Foreign Ministry issuing a categorical rejection of his rhetoric, asserting that Palestinians are not intruders or immigrants who can be expelled at will. Also, the Qatari Foreign Ministry described Netanyahu's comments as a violation of international law and expressed solidarity with Saudi Arabia. Jordan's Foreign Ministry echoed similar sentiments, emphasising that such provocative statements threaten peace and stability in the region. Overall, Oman stands firmly against any attempts to displace Palestinians or undermine their rights. The collective response from Oman and other Arab nations highlights a unified stance against what they perceive as aggressive policies from Israel and dismissive rhetoric from leaders like Trump and Netanyahu regarding Palestinian sovereignty.

SENEGAL INTRODUCES ENGLISH IN NURSERY SCHOOLS

MALICK ROKHY BA

“Good morning, teacher!” a chorus of Senegalese five-year-olds responded at a school where English has been introduced alongside the official language of French. The pupils at the nursery school near central Dakar repeated the English words out loud. “They’re interested in the lesson, and they start a conversation with ‘how are you?’” teacher Absa Ndiaye said. Hers is one of more than 600 classes in Senegal that have been testing a new programme of teaching English in nursery and primary schools since mid-January in a push for better connectivity with the wider world. The developing country, which has seen a massive youth boom but also an exodus of young people searching for a better life, has recently become an oil and gas producer. Senegal is a member of the Francophonie group of French-speaking nations and uses French in public schools and in administration. Students also learn Arabic and the country’s national languages. Until recently, English was only taught in public high schools and universities, although it is sometimes taught from nursery school onwards in the private sector. Despite seven years of teaching, “students can barely communicate properly in English,” lamented Aissatou Sarr Cisse, who is in charge of the education ministry’s English programme. In the pilot schools, English is taught every Tuesday and Thursday — two lessons of 25 minutes each in nursery and two 30-minute lessons in primary schools. The subjects taught include family, colours, everyday greetings, the environment and the weather. Teacher Mamadou Kama listens to a conversation in English between two 13-year-olds in his class of around 60 at a primary school in Dakar’s working-class Medina neighbourhood. “I can see that the students are motivated. Some of them are asking for English lessons to be (taught) every day,” Kama, who has a degree in English, said. Most of the teachers have not yet received the digital teaching materials the ministry is meant to provide, but Kama has tablets, video projectors and USB sticks given by the school’s management. Opponents of the scheme have criticised a shortfall in teachers. “On these grounds alone, introducing English at nursery and primary school levels is a pipe dream, it’s impossible,” former member of parliament and retired teacher Samba Dioulde Thiam wrote in an opinion column. — AFP

Time to rethink the purpose of malls

THE struggle of several malls to stay afloat offers important lessons in urban development. Building large malls without considering the purchasing power and shopping habits of residents leads to unsustainable growth. Developers and officials must conduct thorough market research and feasibility studies before launching such projects. One of the primary reasons for the decline of most malls in Muscat is the limited purchasing power of the population. Oman has a relatively small middle class compared to the scale of commercial infrastructure being developed. Additionally, the size of the foreign expatriate population—which once contributed significantly to the retail sector—has dwindled over the last five years due to economic shifts and changing labour policies. Another factor contributing to the decline is the growing boycott by Omanis of companies that align with Israel. This has notably affected major retailers, which have seen a drop in customers. Since these large retailers are often anchor stores in malls, their decline has had a ripple effect, further reducing foot traffic and sales in these commercial spaces. While the vision of transforming Muscat into a modern metropolis with multiple shopping centres was ambitious, it failed to account for actual demand. Many Omani citizens and residents do not have the disposable income to support the high number of malls, leading to oversaturation in the market. The decline of some malls also emphasises the importance of adapting to technological advancements and changing consumer behaviours. The convenience of online shopping has significantly impacted foot traffic in physical stores. Malls that fail to integrate digital strategies, such



DR NAJMA AL ZIDJALY

The writer is Associate Professor, Sultan Qaboos University

Rather than building large, single-purpose spaces, there is a growing need for spaces that serve multiple roles and also support local businesses and products. This approach not only attracts more visitors but also builds a stronger sense of community and national pride.

as online platforms for retailers or interactive customer engagement through social media, risk becoming obsolete. Developing e-commerce platforms for local retailers would bridge the gap between physical and online shopping, creating an integrated experience for customers. The failure of several malls in Muscat further illustrates the problem of focusing solely on shopping while overlooking the need for entertainment, cultural engagement, and community-centred experiences. These struggles highlight the need for developers and planners to rethink the purpose of malls. Rather than building large, single-purpose spaces, there is a growing need for spaces that serve multiple roles and support local businesses and products. This approach not only attracts more visitors but also builds a stronger sense of community and national pride. Another key lesson from the decline of some malls in Muscat is the importance of quality over quantity. The city’s rapid expansion led to an oversupply of retail spaces, many of which lacked the uniqueness and sustainability needed to attract and retain customers. Additionally, much of the merchandise offered has failed to align with the preferences and needs of the local community. Rather than continuing to build more malls, resources should be redirected towards improving existing centres, enhancing the shopping experience, and focusing on the long-term viability of these spaces. By investing in upgrades and creating memorable, high-quality experiences, existing malls can continue to thrive while avoiding market oversaturation. Muscat’s mall struggles highlight the risks of unchecked commercial expansion without understanding local economic conditions. The success of a few malls amid others’ challenges underscores the need



The convenience of online shopping has significantly impacted foot traffic in physical stores.

for thoughtful, strategic planning that prioritises sustainability and community engagement. As Muscat continues to grow, these lessons can guide future urban development, ensuring a more balanced and resilient landscape. This balanced and resilient landscape can be achieved through a combination of factors: malls must offer a sensible mix of retail, dining, and entertainment options that cater to a wide demographic. A mall’s strategic location, ample parking, and consistent marketing efforts can also play a crucial role in maintaining its appeal. Most importantly, featuring shops run by Omanis and showcasing Omani merchandise, including locally owned cafés, will resonate with the community and attract loyal customers. In other words, malls need to focus on creating experiences—rather than just retail opportunities—tailored to attract families and young people alike.

Habits are hard to die...



LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

The writer is senior editor of Observer

HABITS are hard to form, but they are harder to overcome. Why do we need to overcome habits? For a simple reason— not all habits are good or beneficial. Smoking is one thing that pops into mind instantly. Would you believe there was a time when the driver used to smoke in the car or a co-passenger on the flight used to smoke? Come to think of it, many people might have carried the symptoms of passive smoking. They say it is not a good practice to pick up your mobile phone as soon as you wake up. Sometimes it almost becomes part of a reflexive action, it seems. That state is not ideal because we have not had a quiet moment to reflect before we start the day. According to experts, it becomes an ingrained conditioning. So, could it be phone addiction? Do you remember the term nomophobia? The Internet overuse problem is still lingering. And the demographics are expanding. The reasons could be many. Children are losing contact with each other and family members because they find contentment in playing games. They are almost losing communication skills. Is their motivation misplaced? They want to win in the games, but their virtual reality

takes up so much of their time that they are missing out on real life. Their minds are filled with images from the games. Then there is social media. One has no idea who is going to be their role model. All this is when they are at home. There is another group addicted to their mobile phones, and they are all above 18. This is because they are the ones with driving licences. Now, maybe driving can fall into the category of automatic actions. It is a skill that becomes second nature because people drive almost every day. When we learn to drive, the instructor teaches us to hold the wheel in position— either at 10 to 2 or quarter to 3. But after a few months, it becomes an art, and soon there is an element of ease and a bit of overconfidence. Then we slip into the habit of answering calls. For a person who has had a road mishap, there is never enough emphasis on the importance of concentrating on the road. It is better to be a defensive driver than to regret later. Expecting the worst might sound like negative thinking. The reality is one might be an efficient driver, but others on the road might not be. Out of curiosity, I started observing drivers one afternoon. There was

They say it is not a good practice to pick up your mobile phone as soon as you wake up. Sometimes it almost becomes part of a reflexive action, it seems

not much traffic because of the odd time, but in a stretch of almost 13 km, I came across at least 10 people using their mobile phones while driving. This meant that one of their hands was occupied with a phone. In the midst of their conversations, some were changing lanes and overtaking. Worse still, some were checking text messages. Reading messages means their eyes had shifted focus from the road to a small screen—reading, comprehending and formulating a reply. The road and its happenings had taken a back seat. Lives are precious, and each day is a gift for us to unwrap. That is not all; there are others who depend on you. That second or minute we take to check a message could be detrimental to our safety and our future. Mute the notifications. Our minds already have enough thoughts to process, let alone someone else's messages. It might be important, but it can wait. Nothing is as important as life. We have lived in an era without mobile phones, and we were just fine. And if we must answer, then we must park and do so. But even that takes patience. The urge to change must come from within, and a motivation could be the thought of family.

SUMMIT GRAPPLES WITH REAL-WORLD IMPACT OF AI

TOM BARFIELD AND DAXIA ROJAS

Artificial intelligence (AI) risks reinforcing gender disparities rather than immediate widespread job destruction, the International Labour Organisation chief said as a summit of national leaders and tech bosses opened in Paris. Co-hosted by French President Emmanuel Macron and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the Paris summit aims to lay the groundwork for governing the nascent sector, as global powers race to play leading roles in the fast-developing technology. At present, AI is mostly replacing humans in clerical jobs disproportionately held by women, International Labour Organisation (ILO) head Gilbert Houngbo told an audience in the French capital's opulent Grand Palais. "The category of jobs that will be automated and hence be lost could contribute to deepen the gender gap" in pay between men and women, he added. Looking at the wider picture, "we're not too much worried (about) a massive job loss" despite widespread fears Houngbo added. While "there will be millions of jobs that will be lost", many more will be created thanks to AI, he predicted based on current "quite positive" trends. Nevertheless, "there is a risk of those new jobs being paid less and sometimes with much less protection" for employees, as has happened with much "gig economy" work, Houngbo said. Political leaders, including US Vice President JD Vance and Chinese Vice Premier Zhang Guoqing, are set to rub shoulders with the likes of OpenAI boss Sam Altman and Google chief Sundar Pichai. A largely suit-wearing crowd of men and women speaking languages from all over the world gathered under the glass-and-steel dome of the great hall, built for the 1900 Universal Exhibition and now decked out with screens and geodesic domes. Two years on from the emergence of OpenAI's ChatGPT chatbot, "artificial intelligence fuels both immense hopes and, at times, exaggerated fear," Macron's AI envoy Anne Bouverot told guests as she opened the summit. She promised a "turning point" that would bring more countries on board with AI, as well as more "sustainable development" of the resource- and energy-hungry technology. Macron had on Sunday trumpeted the economic benefits of artificial intelligence, saying 109 billion euros (\$113 billion) would be invested in French AI in the coming years. That was "the equivalent for France of what the US has announced with 'Stargate'," the \$500-billion US programme led by ChatGPT maker OpenAI, he added. The technical challenges and price of entry for nations hoping to keep abreast in the AI race have become clearer in recent weeks. Around the same time Stargate was announced, Chinese startup DeepSeek stunned Silicon Valley heavyweights with its low-cost, high-performance AI models. In the US-China face-off, "Europe has to find a way to take a position, take some initiative and take back control," said Sylvain Duranton of the Boston Consulting Group. — AFP

How not to respond to Trump's tariffs

BY wielding the threat of imposing across-the-board tariffs against Canada, Mexico and China for no justifiable reason, US President Donald Trump has demonstrated that he is a major risk for America and its trade partners. But how other countries respond to Trump's reckless policies will ultimately determine how much damage the global economy will sustain. America's trade partners need to keep their cool and resist the temptation to magnify the insanity. Most analysts seem to believe that responding in kind is the right thing to do. As expected, Canada and Mexico both threatened retaliation and eventually reached deals with Trump to avert the tariffs temporarily. But it is not clear why retaliation should be regarded as normal and desirable when the tariffs that trigger them are viewed (correctly) as crazy. Policymakers elsewhere must not lose sight of the truth that Trump has chosen to disregard: the costs of tariffs are borne mainly at home. The instinct to retaliate is natural. To deter a schoolyard bully, one must confront him with determined opposition. But far from dissuading Trump, other countries' tariffs will further feed his misplaced grievances. More importantly, the logic of retaliation fails in this instance. The tit-for-tat model works to ensure cooperation in certain circumstances, such as the prisoners' dilemma. In this scenario, each actor benefits from their own unilateral move but is made worse off when the other actor responds in kind. Trump's tariffs do not fit this characterisation. Contrary to what Trump claims, US tariffs are paid mostly by American consumers and firms that use imported inputs. Thus, the "optimum tariff" argument, by which a country could gain by exercising monopoly power on world markets, does not seem to apply. Selective trade protection can occasionally play a positive role as part of a broader agenda for development or greener growth. But across-the-board tariffs hurt the US economy, and more so than they do other economies. Trump's America is a prisoner entirely of its own making.



US tariffs are paid mostly by American consumers and firms that use imported inputs.



DANI RODRIK

The writer is Professor of International Political Economy at Harvard Kennedy School, is President of the International Economic Association and the author of Straight Talk on Trade: Ideas for a Sane World Economy

Likewise, retaliatory tariffs imposed by Canada and Mexico would mainly harm their own economies. As smaller players in world trade, they have even less ability to pass the costs of tariffs on to the United States. The presence of supply chains in North American trade (as in auto manufacturing) magnifies the costs of disruption but does not alter the fact that the costs of import tariffs are essentially domestic. In the language of game theory, retaliation through import tariffs is not a "best response." Returning to the schoolyard bully analogy, imagine that you face an aggressor who is attacking you for no good reason. He seems mad, hitting himself with each wild swing of his arm. What should you do? You could respond in kind and mimic what he is doing, but that would be equally mad, since you would be hurting yourself even more in the process. The best strategy, then, is to minimise the damage by staying as far from the bully as you can and waiting for him to punch himself out and crumple in a corner. To be sure, Canada, Mexico, China, and other countries that will bear the brunt of Trump's trade actions do not have the luxury of insulating themselves from the US. They will undoubtedly feel some pain. However, they should not worsen their own economic situations by "pulling a Trump" on

their own economies. Some targeted retaliation against industries that support Trump politically may be unavoidable for domestic political reasons. Still, common sense and moderation should prevail for the sake of their own countries and the global economy on which they depend. Some worry that Trump might feel vindicated if others do not mount a strong response. However, the surest way to undermine him is to downplay his threats and treat him as weak. The most effective message America's trade partners can send is: "You are free to destroy your own economy; we do not plan to do the same. Instead, we will turn to other, more reliable trade partners. Thank you very much." Moreover, America's trade partners—even the smaller ones—are not entirely powerless against the US. They have tools beyond trade policy at their disposal. For example, they could impose profit taxes on domestic subsidiaries of specific American multinational corporations. Gabriel Zucman of the Paris School of Economics has suggested that Canada and Mexico implement a wealth tax on Elon Musk and make Tesla's access to the Canadian market conditional on compliance. This approach has the advantage of potentially generating direct fiscal benefits at home. ©Project Syndicate, 2025

SPORTS

PODIUM POSITIONS



OMANI RUNNERS ACHIEVE BRONZE MEDALS AT RIYADH MARATHON 2025

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, FEB 10

Omani runners Saleh al Saidi, Waddah al Fulaiti, and Hanan al Jahmani have achieved a remarkable sporting feat at the Riyadh Marathon 2025, securing top positions in various races amidst fierce competition from over 40,000 participants representing 100 countries.

Saleh al Saidi clinched third place in the full marathon (42.2 km) men's category, while Waddah al Fulaiti secured third place in the half marathon (21.1 km) men's category. Meanwhile, Hanan al Jahmani also earned third place in the 10 km women's race.

SIGNIFICANCE OF PARTICIPATION

Samira al Shukaili, head of the Omani delegation, highlighted that the participation in the Riyadh International Marathon 2025 came upon an invitation from the Saudi Sports for All Federation. The selection of Omani runners was coordinated with the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, ensuring that the most qualified athletes represented the Sultanate of Oman.

She explained that the selection process was based on the results of runners who excelled in Governorate Marathons and the Al Mouj Muscat Marathon, with the Oman Athletics Association conducting a technical evaluation before officially approving the selected athletes.

Al Shukaili emphasised the strategic importance of this participation, stating, “We were keen to take part in this marathon for several reasons. Firstly, it aligns with Oman’s sports strategy, which aims to promote community sports as part of the ‘Sports and Society’ pillar. Additionally, the event is one of the world’s most prestigious international marathons, offering our runners an invaluable opportunity to compete against elite athletes, thereby enhancing their technical skills and gaining international exposure.”

40,000 RUNNERS

Al Shukaili underscored the highly competitive nature of the marathon, with over 40,000 runners from 100 countries participating. Despite the strong competition, the Omani runners managed to secure top positions, marking a significant achievement for Omani sports.

She concluded by stating, “These achievements play a vital role in the overall development of Omani sports, strengthening the country’s standing in marathon races while motivating athletes to participate in more international competitions in the future.”

The Riyadh International Marathon is one of the most prominent annual sporting events, attracting athletes from around the world with a primary focus on promoting health and fitness. The marathon features four main races catering to different skill levels: Full Marathon (42.2 km) — for professional runners; Half Marathon (21.1 km) — for intermediate-level athletes; 10 km Race — for running enthusiasts; and 4 km Race — designed for families and beginners.

These achievements mark a significant step forward in boosting long-distance running and marathon culture in Oman.

The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth (MoCSY) remains committed to supporting Omani runners, providing opportunities for them to compete in international championships, thereby enhancing their competitiveness and reinforcing Oman’s presence in global races.

‘Ameera’ clinches cup, ‘Najd’ claims gun at Al Bashayer camel festival

WALEED AL JAHWARI
ADAM, FEB 10

AMEERA, owned by Mohammed al Habsi, claimed the Al Bashayer cup and a car, while ‘Najd’, owned by Sulaiman bin Ali al Wahibi, snatched the gun and the car during the opening day of the eighth edition of the Al Bashayer Annual Festival for Arabian Camel Racing in the Wilayat of Adam from February 10 to 15.

‘Baynoonah’, owned by Ateeq bin Matar al Qubaisi, ‘Fal’, owned by Rashid bin Salim al Zarai, ‘Mulfat’, owned by Mohammed bin Shteib al Habsi, and ‘Al Azoum’, owned by Ghasi al Mashaykhi, won cars in the afternoon competitions.

‘Al Shababiyah’, owned by the Royal Camel Corps, won the first and main round in the morning competitions under coach Jasim bin Mohammed al Amri.

The first day, February 10, was for the ‘Hagayeg’ category, two years old, for 4 km. The 24 rounds of races were held in the morning instead of 19 rounds, increased due to the large number of participants, where all 24 rounds offered cash prizes for the top ten. In the afternoon, there were eight main races with cars, a cup, and a gun as prizes for the winners, along with cash prizes for the top 10.

The second day, February 11, will be for the ‘Lagaya’ category, three years old, for 5 km, divided into 15 races in the morning with cash prizes for the top 10. Seven main races will start in the afternoon, with five cars, two cups, and a gun for the winners, plus cash prizes up to the 10th place.

THE MORNING ROUNDS RESULTS:
Read as: Round, Winning Camel, Owner, Timing

1. Al Shababiyah / Royal Camel Corps / 5:54:88
2. Ashaaq / Mohammed bin Hamad al Jahafi / 5:59:63
3. Shawahin / Ahmed bin Said al Harsoosi / 6:04:17
4. Maazzah / Salem bin Al Abed al Wahibi / 5:58:99
5. Rahee / Saud bin Ali al Habsi / 6:06:63
6. Aram / Badr bin Obaid al Junaibi / 6:07:51



‘Al Shababiyah’, owned by Royal Camel Corps, won the first and main round in the morning competitions under coach Jasim bin Mohammed al Amri.

7. Tam / Hayab bin Salim al Junaibi / 6:06:75
8. Majd / Hamad bin Mohammed al Maliki / 6:08:21
9. Amjad / Abdullah bin Ali Amer / 6:11:89
10. Rahee / Al Hamdi bin Salim al Daree / 6:06:97
11. Seyoof / Al Hamdi bin Salim al Daree / 6:11:61
12. Shaheen / Ali bin Salim al Maliki / 6:11:45
13. Azayeeem / Mohammed bin Ali al Wahibi / 6:12:69
14. Raddad / Abdullah bin Ghudair al Wahibi / 6:11:05
15. Hajamah / Hamad bin Mohammed al Wahibi / 6:13:82
16. Qamari / Mahna bin Mabkhut Masn / 6:08:85
17. Af’aal / Hamad bin Salim al Daree / 6:05:13
18. Mukram / Ali bin Mohammed al Wahibi / 6:14:35
19. Funoon / Obaid bin Al Abed al Ghafili / 6:14:39
20. Mulhim / Mohammed bin Mubarak al Saidi / 6:10:89

21. Al Obour / Mohammed bin Said al Mashaykhi / 6:07:11
22. Yathrib / Saud bin Youssef Ahli / 6:10:61
23. Al Thabi / Youssef bin Ali al Mugheiri / 6:13:27
24. Shawahin / Zaid bin Suleiman al Qunubi / 6:10:99

AFTERNOON ROUNDS RESULTS:
Read as: Round, Winning Camel, Owner, Timing, Prize

1. Ameera / Mohammed al Habsi / 6:00.92 / cup and a car
2. Najd / Sulaiman bin Ali al Wahibi / 6:03.11 / gun and car
3. Baynoonah / Ateeq bin Matar al Qubaisi / 6:03.59 / car
4. Fal / Rashid bin Salim al Zarai / 6:00.25 / car
5. Mulfat / Mohammed bin Shteib al Habsi / 6:03.09 / car
6. Al Azoum / Ghasi bin Salim al Mashaykhi / 6:06.45 / car
7. Fazah / Saud bin Ali al Habsi / 6:14.77 / cash
8. Muwafaq / Hamad bin Salim al Farsi / 6:11.77 / cash

Oman Club all set to host 41st Gulf Club Handball

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, FEB 10

The Sultanate of Oman, represented by Oman Club, is all set to host the 41st Gulf Club Handball Championship, which will begin on Saturday, February 10, and run until February 24 at the indoor hall of Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex. The details of the Gulf event were unveiled during a press conference held on Monday at the headquarters of the Oman Olympic Committee in the presence of Jihad bin Abdullah al Shaikh, Chairman of the Organising Committee; Moosa bin Khamis al Balushi, Chairman of the Oman Handball Association (OHA); Fareed Ramadhan, Treasurer at Oman Club; and officials of the tournament, alongside media representatives.

Oman will participate in this tournament through two local clubs, including Oman Club and



The details of the Gulf event were unveiled during a press conference held on Monday at the headquarters of the Oman Olympic Committee.

Seeb Club. Oman Club will compete in Group B against Kuwait SC (Kuwait), Dibba Al Hisn (UAE), and Al Arabi (Qatar), while Seeb is grouped with Al Rayyan (Qatar), Al Najma (Bahrain), and Al Noor (Saudi Arabia) in Group A. Jihad al Shaikh said, “Oman Club, in collaboration with other stakeholders including

the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth (MoCSY) and OHA, has completed all necessary preparations for the event, including accommodation, venue arrangements, transportation, and essential logistical requirements. The Gulf Technical Committee will oversee the technical aspects of the tournament, ensuring compliance with all necessary regulations.”

He added, “Thanks to the media for their presence and for playing a crucial role in ensuring the success of the championship in Oman. Hosting such events highlights the nation’s strong commitment to sports and its ability to organise major regional tournaments. Oman’s bid was among other bids to secure the rights to host this event. We are pleased that this event is happening in Oman, and this will be a great opportunity for the players and organising committee to showcase their top performance

in this field.” The opening match will be between Kuwait SC and Qatar’s Al Arabi, which will kick off at 6:30 pm, followed by Oman Club and Dibba Al Hisn at 6:30 pm on Saturday. The opening ceremony will take place on Saturday at 6:00 pm under the auspices of HH Sayyid Mohammed bin Salim al Said.

UAE’s Dibba Al Hisn arrived in Muscat as the first team and will hold a short camp ahead of the tournament. “The team is currently holding a training camp in Muscat and has scheduled several friendly matches in preparation for the competition. On the other hand, Oman Club is currently in Bahrain for an external camp in Manama. The club will play a few friendly matches before the tournament begins in Muscat on Friday,” he said. “As the organising committee, we have made a few changes at the indoor hall to meet international and Asian standards.”

HITMAN RETURNS



India's Rohit Sharma in action. — Reuters

INDIA HAILS ROHIT'S HUNDRED AHEAD OF CHAMPIONS TROPHY

CUTTACK, INDIA: India on Monday celebrated captain Rohit Sharma's return to form after a match-winning ODI century against England on the eve of the Champions Trophy.

Rohit slammed his 32nd one-day ton to lead India to a series-clinching victory in the second match against the visitors on Sunday following months of speculation over his future.

"The Hitman Returns," the Times of India newspaper triumphantly declared.

The 37-year-old opener struggled in the 3-1 Test loss in Australia last month and was not involved in the final match because of poor form.

He got out for two in the ODI opener but regained his mojo in Cuttack to hit 119 off 90 balls in a knock of 12 fours and seven sixes.

"The good thing is that before an important tournament like the Champions Trophy, scoring a hundred is a huge boost," spinner Ravindra Jadeja said after the four-wicket win over England.

"It's great for the team, and obviously, he himself knows his game well."

India will begin their Champions Trophy campaign against Bangladesh on February 20 before a blockbuster clash against arch-rivals Pakistan in Dubai three days later.

The captain displayed an array of strokes with flicks, drives and his trademark pull to steer India's chase of 305, won with 33 balls to spare.

Rohit scored just 31 runs in three Tests against Australia and averaged 10.37 across formats in his previous 16 innings before the current series.

He quit T20 internationals after leading India to World Cup glory last year but the lean patch raised doubts over his future in ODIs and Tests.

"Every time I walk on the pitch I want to try and do well," Rohit said in a video posted on the Indian cricket board's website.

"Sometimes it happens, sometimes it may not happen."

He added: "That mindset of how to get runs, how to score runs sounds very simple, but it is quite difficult."

Rohit is 13 short of 11,000 ODI runs ahead of Wednesday's final match against England in Ahmedabad.

Star batsman Virat Kohli has also been under fire for underperforming and after missing the series opener due to a sore right knee, got out for five on Sunday. — AFP

Williamson's ton guides New Zealand into final



New Zealand's Kane Williamson plays a shot during the Tri-Nation series second one-day international match between New Zealand and South Africa at the Gaddafi Stadium in Lahore. — AFP

STAR CRICKETER Kane Williamson hit a brilliant century to take New Zealand into the tri-series final with a thumping six-wicket win on Monday, overshadowing South African opener Matthew Breetzke's record score on debut.

Breetzke scored 150 — the highest score by any batter in his first one-day international — to lift South Africa to 304-6 but Williamson's unbeaten 133 proved match winning at Gaddafi Stadium in Lahore.

The tri-series is a warm-up event before the eight-nation Champions Trophy starting February 19 in Pakistan and the United Arab Emirates.

Pakistan, the third team in the tri-series, will play South Africa on Wednesday in Karachi to decide who meets New Zealand in the final at the same venue on Friday.

Williamson hit his first ODI century in nearly five years on Monday and was ably supported by opener Devon Conway who missed his century by just three runs.

The pair added a solid 187 runs for the second wicket after Will Young was dismissed for 19, steadily setting New Zealand's second win in as many games in the tri-series.

"You need partnerships to chase targets and it was an outstanding knock from Conway and that partnership between him and Kane that led us to the win," said New Zealand skipper Mitchell Santner.

Williamson was so assured of finishing the game that the loss of Daryl Mitchell (10) and Tom Latham (nought) did not deter him as he hit the winning boundary to seal the win in 48.4 overs.

Meanwhile a new record for the highest ODI score on debut was clinched by Breetzke, who smacked 11 fours and five sixes, topping the 148 scored by Desmond Haynes for West Indies against Australia in Antigua in 1978.

South Africa's skipper Temba Bavuma said the record was among "some positives" in the match.

Breetzke hit New Zealand pacer Will O'Rourke for a boundary to reach three figures off 128 balls, becoming the fourth player from his country to hit a century on ODI debut.

South Africa were forced to give four debuts in this match as their top players were either active in a Twenty20 league back home or recovering from injuries.

New Zealand brought in Conway for Rachin Ravindra who got injured in team's 78-run win over Pakistan in Lahore on Saturday. — AFP

BRIEF SCORES:
South Africa 304-6 in 50 overs (M. Breetzke 150, W. Mulder 64; M. Henry 2-59, W. O'Rourke 2-72)
New Zealand 308-4 in 48.4 overs (K. Williamson 133 not out; D. Conway 97)

RESULT: New Zealand won by six wickets
NEXT MATCH: Pakistan vs South Africa, February 12, Karachi

Namibia defeat Oman by 23 runs in low-scoring thriller

MUSCAT: Oman's four-match winning streak at home in the ICC Men's Cricket World Cup League (WCL) 2 came to a halt on Monday as Namibia defeated the hosts by 23 runs in a low-scoring thriller at the Oman Cricket Academy ground Al Amerat.

This was Oman's first defeat in five WCL2 games at home, leaving them with 14 points from 13 matches, while Namibia's win closed the gap with Oman to just two points, with 12 points from 14 matches.

Oman's chase of Namibia's modest score of 169 faltered early with the dismissal of opener Aamir Kaleem (15). Skipper Jatinder Singh (25) and Ashish Odedara (11) couldn't build a lasting partnership either, leaving Oman at 58/4 with Wasim Ali out

for a duck. ODI debutant Hashir Dafedar (15) and experienced Sufyan Mehmood (11) were then dismissed in quick succession by Gerhard Erasmus, and the Omani middle order found it difficult to cope with the pressure from Namibia's spin attack.

Vinayak Shukla (17), one of the three ODI debutants of Oman, along with Hassnain Shah (16*) did hold on to offer some resistance along with the last batter, Shakeel Ahmed (13) but the hosts were eventually bowled out for 146 in 37.2 overs to lose by 23 runs. Spinners Bernard Scholtz (2/26) and Jan Nicol Loftie-Eaton (2/18) led the way with the ball, while another tweaker Gerhard Erasmus (2/42) and Ruben Trumpelmann (2/32) supported well.

Earlier, Namibia, put to bat first,



Malan Kruger of Namibia with his Man of the Match trophy.

found themselves in early trouble as Oman's spinners ran riot on a slow pitch. Despite a slow start, managing just 24 runs in the first 10 overs, Namibia lost wickets at regular intervals after the mandatory powerplay. Zane Green (21) was run out, but JP Kotze (29) provided some resistance before being sent back by Sufyan Mehmood. Captain Gerhard Erasmus (0) fell cheaply, the first of Samay Shrivastava's four victims, followed by Jan Frylinck (16).

The Omani spin trio of Shrivastav (4/56), Shakeel Ahmed (2/26), and Jay Odedra (1/26) ensured that Namibia couldn't build partnerships. Man of the match Malan Kruger added some resistance with a brisk 39 off 34 balls, including two sixes, but once he fell to Odedra, the lower order crumbled.

Jan Nicol Loftie-Eaton (12), Jan-Izak de Villiers (2), JJ Smit (4), and Ruben Trumpelmann (1) all fell cheaply. Namibia's ODI debutant Jan Balt's unbeaten 35 off 50 balls helped the team cross the 150-mark before the team was bowled out for 169 in 46.3 overs.

Oman will now hope to bounce back from the setback in their next game against the USA on Wednesday.

Brief scores: Namibia 169 all out in 46.3 overs (Malan Kruger 39, Zane Green 21, JP Kotze 29, Jan Balt 35*); Samay Shrivastava 4/56, Shakeel Ahmed 2/26, Jay Odedra 1/26, Sufyan Mehmood 2/15) beat Oman 146 all out in 37.2 overs (Jatinder Singh 25, Vinayak Shukla 17, Hassnain Shah 16*, Shakeel Ahmed 13; Bernard Scholtz 2/26, Jan Nicol Loftie-Eaton 2/18, Gerhard Erasmus 2/42, Ruben Trumpelmann 2/32).

SPORTS

GAUDU OUTSPRINTS YATES TO TAKE RED

ANUROOP ATHIPARAMBATH
@anuroop_ath

GROUPAMA – FDJ’s David Gaudu and defending champion Adam Yates of UAE Team Emirates climbed up the ladder in Tour of Oman 2025 to take the top two spots in the overall classification after finishing in the same positions in the mountain stage on Monday. The French rider outsprinted the British cyclist by one second to win the 180.8-kilometre Stage 3 in four hours, 16 minutes and 10 seconds. Yates was second (04:16:11), as Australia’s Damien Howson (Q36.5 Pro Cycling Team) claimed third in 04:16:15. Soudal Quick-Step’s Valentin Paret-Peintre (04:16:23) came fourth with his best young rider jersey ahead of Tudor’s Marco Brenner (04:16:23).

Valentin’s teammate Louis Vervaeke, who started the day in the red jersey, fought valiantly but ceded the lead when he was dropped in the final 3km.

In the first of Tour of Oman’s two summit finishes, the climbers went head to head on Eastern Mountain (1,016 metres), under the gaze of Jabal Sham (3,018 metres), the highest peak in Oman.

Gaudu proved strongest in the long-awaited duel against Yates after firing off multiple attacks within the last few hundred metres of the final ascent (4.8 km at 8.5%). Gaudu has 6 seconds in hand over Yates and 12 over Howson going into the last two stages.

“We are already focused on Green Mountain. We will try to keep the red jersey and maybe win a second stage,” he said.

The French cyclist thanked his team. “I am grateful for the team’s work. I have never won a general classification, and we will try to maintain this lead until the end.”

In Fanja, 117 riders who had reached Yitti Hills on Sunday were at the start line. Six men made an early move: Nicolas Vinokourov (XDS Astana), Rayan Boulahoite (TotalEnergies), Nur Amirull Mazuki (Terengganu), Andreas Miltiadis (Roojai Insurance) and the Omani national team members Said al Rahbi and Mohamed al Wahibi. It was Soudal Quick-Step that set the pace in the bunch to keep the gap below three minutes after it peaked at 3’20”. UAE Team Emirates XRG soon arrived to defend the interests of Adam Yates.

CARNAGE
Meanwhile, utter carnage unfolded in the breakaway, with Al Rahbi, Miltiadis and Mazuki cracking at 118, 111 and 102 km to go, respectively, leaving Vinokourov Jr and Boulahoite alone at the front for the final 100 km. Unperturbed, the two men kept going and went through the first intermediate sprint at Birkat Al Mouz (58 km to go) with a 2-minute advantage. Vinokourov took top points, while Kevin Vermaerke (Picnic PostNL) led the peloton across the line and picked up a bonus second.

Vinokourov got caught 2.7 km from the line, around the time that Vervaeke got separated from the main group after working at the front of the peloton. Groupama-FDJ took over from there. Clement Braz Afonso put in a mammoth shift to set up his leader Gaudu for an attack.

Despite repeated attempts, the French rider was unable to open up a gap, with Yates close on his wheel. Nevertheless, Gaudu kept his nose ahead in a fiercely contested sprint for the stage win, which also raised him to the top of the leaderboard.



Groupama-FDJ’s French rider David Gaudu celebrates while crossing the finish line to win the third stage of the Tour of Oman from Fanja to Eastern Mountain. — AFP

TOUR OF OMAN STAGE 3 RESULTS				
RANK	RIDER	COUNTRY	TEAM	TIME
1	David Gaudu	France	Groupama-FDJ	04:16:10
2	Adam Yates	Great Britain	UAE Team Emirates – XRG	04:16:11
3	Damien Craig Howson	Australia	Q36.5 Pro Cycling Team	04:16:15
4	Valentin Paret Peintre	France	Soudal Quick-Step	04:16:23
5	Marco Brenner	Germany	Tudor Pro Cycling Team	04:16:23
6	Cian Uijtdebroeks	Belgiu	Team Visma Lease A Bike	04:16:26
7	Chris Harper,	Australia	Team Jayco AlUla	04:16:26
8	Diego Ulissi	Italy	XDS Astana Team	04:16:33
9	Ruben Guerreiro	Portugal	Movistar Team	04:16:33
10	Wout Poels	Netherlands	XDS Astana Team	04:16:33

BUSINESS

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OPAZ develops new industrial cities

THE Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) has launched a major initiative to develop new industrial cities across Oman, aiming to attract investments, strengthen the country’s industrial sector and generate job opportunities for Omani youth.

As part of this strategy, OPAZ is working closely with the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn) to establish several new industrial areas.

Key projects include the Mahas Industrial City in Khasab, Musandam Governorate, where a road and infrastructure development agreement was signed in October last year.

Additionally, Al Mudhaibi Industrial City has seen the localisation of its first investment projects, with the tender for its first-phase infrastructure work open to companies from both Oman and Saudi Arabia.

Further progress has been made on other industrial zones:

- Thamrait Industrial City in Dhofar Governorate has completed consultancy services for design and construction supervision.
- Seeh Al Sarya Industrial City has finalised its master plan.
- Madha Industrial City (Seih Al Wasat) has awarded a consultancy services contract for its master plan and detailed design.
- Al Suwaiq Industrial City has a consultancy tender in progress, while plans



The development of new industrial cities comes amid significant activity in special economic and free zones.

for Al Wadi Al Kabir Industrial City are under review.

- Land allocation discussions for Shinas Industrial City are also ongoing.

INDUSTRIAL GROWTH ON THE RISE

The development of new industrial cities comes at a time of strong growth in Oman’s special economic zones and free zones.

By the end of 2024, industrial licenses had surged to 183, with 125 licenses issued in industrial cities alone, accounting for 68 per cent of the total under OPAZ’s supervision.

This reflects Oman’s increasing focus on industrial expansion, supported by

government incentives and investment-friendly policies.

The Industrial Strategy 2040, approved by the Council of Ministers, aims to diversify the economy, enhance the quality of Omani industrial products and build a modern manufacturing sector driven by technology.

Oman’s special economic zones and free zones offer investment-ready land, access to natural gas, tax and customs exemptions, and connectivity to ports and airports, enabling easy import of raw materials and export of finished goods.

These zones cater to heavy, medium and light industries, providing world-class

infrastructure and incentives that have attracted both local and international investors.

STRENGTHENING LOCAL INDUSTRY

Currently, 2,012 industrial establishments operate across OPAZ-supervised zones, covering a diverse range of sectors, including food production, bus manufacturing, pharmaceuticals, textiles, ceramics, petrochemicals and metal industries.

Micro-enterprises make up 65 per cent of all establishments, while total employment in the sector exceeds 42,000 workers, with 24 per cent Omanisation.

Several key industrial zones continue to drive investment:

- Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD) hosts major projects such as the Duqm Refinery, crude oil storage terminal, and emerging green industries.
- Al Mazunah Free Zone, near Yemen, focuses on import-export activities, food industries and packaging.
- Salalah Free Zone has attracted investments in pharmaceuticals, petrochemicals and mining.
- Sohar Free Zone has become a hub for mining, veterinary products, ceramics and construction materials.

Madayn continues to play a key role in developing Oman’s industrial sector, attracting investments in building materials, food industries, chemicals, pharmaceuticals and plastic manufacturing across its various industrial cities.

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Pact inked for Oman’s biggest solar rooftop project

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, FEB 10

OMAN NATIONAL Engineering & Investment Co (ONEIC), a publicly traded electrical and renewable energy contractor, has announced the signing of a contract for the implementation of what is billed as Oman’s largest solar rooftop project to date.

It centres on the installation of a 3.5 MW capacity solar rooftop system atop the sprawling food canning plant of International Sea Food Company SAOC (Simak) at Duqm SEZ in Al Wusta Governorate.

Announcing the project in a post, Ahmed Al Hajri, General Manager — ONEIC, said: “In a groundbreaking move to advance renewable energy solutions in Oman, Simak (ISFC) and ONEIC (Oman National Engineering and Investment Company) signed a strategic agreement to execute the Sultanate of Oman’s largest solar rooftop project.

The project is signed on a Design, Build, Operate and Transfer (DBOT) basis for a capacity of 3.5 MW on-grid solar power plant system for the ISFC Seafood Canning Factory.”

Simak — a subsidiary of Fisheries Development Oman (FDO), the fisheries investment arm of Oman Investment Authority (OIA) — commenced operations at Duqm last March, but was formally inaugurated in November.

It is currently ranked among the largest fish processing plants in the



Representatives of ONEIC and Simak at the agreement signing.

Gulf region, boasting a processing capacity of an impressive 30,000 tonnes per annum. The plant is equipped to churn out over 100 million cans of processed seafood annually, which is equivalent to around 16,000 tonnes of premium-grade products.

Significantly, the Design, Build, Operate and Transfer (DBOT) model allows for industrial and other large consumers to switch to renewable power without incurring the sizable upfront capital cost of solar rooftop installation.

That initial cost will be borne by the Energy Services Company (ESCO) in question — ONEIC in this particular case — which takes responsibility for designing, financing, building and operating the system over an extended time-frame, typically spanning 15 — 20 years.

The industrial consumer, in

turn, agrees to pay a monthly fee, which is competitive in comparison with prevailing Cost Reflective Tariffs (CRT) for large consumers, while also buttressing the company’s green credentials.

ONEIC’s Al Hajri explained: “Beyond installation, ONEIC will manage the operational phase for 25 years, ensuring the project delivers consistent and reliable energy to support ISFC’s operations.”

“As the local energy developer, ONEIC plays a pivotal role in this initiative, leveraging its expertise in renewable energy.

With a proven track record in delivering innovative energy projects, ONEIC will oversee the design, engineering and construction of the solar power system while ensuring compliance with the highest standards of efficiency and sustainability,” he further added.

ADVERTORIALS

SUSTAINABLEPROJECT



The endowment building aims to enhance and ensure the sustainability of the activities of Takaful Suhar Charity Team.

LAUNCH OF TAKAFUL’S
ENDOWMENT
BUILDING
CELEBRATED

SUHAS: Sohar Aluminium (SA) and Takaful Endowment Foundation celebrated the official launch of Endowment Building of Takaful Suhar Charity Team, established in the Wilayat of Suhar, Al Batinah North Governorate. The building is funded by Sohar Aluminium as one of its sustainable social investment projects.

The official launch was held under the auspices of Mahmood bin Abdullah al Awaini, Secretary-General of the Ministry of Finance and attended by Shaikh Ahmed bin Mohammed al Balushi, Deputy Wali of Suhar, members of Majlis Ash'shura and Municipal Councils, Executive Management of Sohar Aluminium and other dignitaries.

Establishing this endowment building aims to enhance and ensure the sustainability of the activities of Takaful Suhar Charity Team, which serves the community in the Wilayat of Suhar. The proceeds of this endowment building will support funding the team's various social and charitable activities that are conducted by the team since inception to achieve its goals.

The endowment building is a 4-storey residential and commercial building with a total built-up area of approximately 406 sqm. It consists of residential apartments and commercial units that are designed with high modern standards.

Ahmed bin Mohammed bin Nasser al Kharousi, General Manager of HR and Corporate Affairs at Sohar Aluminium, pointed out that Sohar Aluminium's support to establish this endowment building came is aimed to provide a tributary that supports financial sustainability and enhances the team's societal impact, as well as to sustain the teams' charitable activities and initiatives for the community.

Therefore, this project marks a testament to the successful cooperation and partnership in enhancing the role of the private sector in shouldering its responsibility of contributing to the development of society.

Abdulumunim bin Mohammed al Murshidi, Chairman of Takaful Endowment Foundation, highly valued the role of Sohar Aluminium, being one of the first supporters of Takaful Suhar Charity Team since 12 years ago, where the company supported building the Team's administrative structure. As well, today, it stands as the first company to support the construction of an endowment building for Takaful Endowment Foundation.

Three agreements were signed between Takaful Endowment Foundation, Razaz Engineering Consultancy, Dr Mohammed bin Abdullah al Farsi & Partners Lawyers and Legal Consultants, and Rawabet Real Estate Company.

OAB unveils new suite of digital commercial banking services

MUSCAT: As part of its ongoing efforts to lead the banking sector, Oman Arab Bank (OAB) unveiled a new suite of banking e-services for small and medium enterprises (SMEs), corporate clients and government entities on Sunday, February 9.

The launch took place at a special event hosted by the bank under the auspices of Dr Said bin Mohammed al Saqri, Minister of Economy (MoE), with the presence of more than 800 bank clients and high-profile guests.

The newly introduced digital commercial banking solutions from OAB provide businesses with seamless, real-time access to their financial transactions, enabling them to process payments, authorise transactions and manage payroll efficiently.

The new e-services include:



The newly introduced digital commercial banking solutions provide businesses with seamless, real-time access to their financial transactions.

1. **Mobile Commercial Banking Application:** This will allow the bank's valued customers to manage their banking accounts and conduct business transactions such as payments, payroll and transaction
- approvals at any time and from any location.

2. **Host-to-Host Payment Solutions:** A direct connection system linking the clients' systems with the bank's payment

system, incorporating the latest developments in this field, significantly saving time and effort while reducing banking transaction costs.

3. **Global “SWIFTNet” System:** A global system that offers simplified connectivity for securely, quickly and efficiently transferring messages and financial transactions from the client to the bank.

By leveraging these advanced technologies, OAB empowers businesses with greater financial control, operational efficiency and a future-ready digital banking experience.

Speaking about the bank's vision for innovation in banking solutions, Sulaiman Hamed al Harthi, CEO of Oman Arab Bank, stated, “In light of the rapid technological developments in banking, Oman

Arab Bank continues its diligent efforts to adopt and localise the latest technologies, exploring the best digital solutions and utilising them.

Its focus is serving the nation and supporting its development journey, setting an example of excellence and leadership in the banking sector.

From this perspective, we have been eager to provide innovative banking services that cater to the needs of various sectors, beginning with micro-enterprises and progressing to small and medium-sized enterprises, which form the backbone of the national economy and are an essential part of the vital resources in advancing this generous nation and extending to large companies and public and private institutions that play a role in driving development.”

BANKDHOFAR ENGAGES WITH AL RIADAH CUSTOMERS IN AL WUSTA

MUSCAT: BankDhofar, the second-largest bank in the Sultanate of Oman by branch network size, hosted an exclusive reception for its premier banking customers in the Wilayat of Al Duqm, Al Wusta Governorate. The event was held under the auspices of Shaikh Bader bin Nasser al Farsi, Wali of Al Duqm and was attended by senior bank officials, representatives from local government agencies and key executives from major companies in Oman.

As the first event of its kind in Al Wusta Governorate, this gathering aimed to build stronger connections with BankDhofar's elite clientele and corporate executives. Attendees were introduced to the bank's suite of tailored financial solutions, particularly its newly launched Private Banking Services division, which is dedicated to helping premium customers



and their families manage their wealth with confidence and expertise. Amjad Iqbal bin Hassan al Lawati, Chief Retail Banking Officer at BankDhofar, commented: “BankDhofar is committed to deepening relationships with our valued customers by engaging with them directly, understanding their needs and incorporating

their feedback into our service offerings. This meeting with our esteemed clients in Al Wusta, particularly in the Wilayat of Al Duqm, reflects our dedication to customer satisfaction.”

Attendees were also introduced to the exclusive benefits of BankDhofar's Al Riadah Privilege Banking Account, designed to complement their modern and fast-paced lifestyle. Features include attractive monthly interest rates on high-yield savings accounts, a variety of loan and deposit products, a robust rewards programme and seamless banking through the mobile applicationBankDhofar offers Al Riadah customers a range of premium financial services, including the Visa Infinite Debit Card, Visa Signature Debit Card, Visa Signature Credit Card, Visa Infinite Credit Card and MasterCard World Credit Card.

Kia Sonet 2025: The smart
urban compact SUV

THE 2025 Kia Sonet PE combines modern design and functionality, making it an ideal choice for urban use and for small families alike. This compact SUV offers a sleek exterior, advanced technological features, bold and distinctive design based on Kia's 'Opposites United' philosophy, the Sonet is built for spirited, young-at-heart consumers and offers a fulfilling driving experience, catering to a wide range of lifestyles and needs.



The Sonet is built for spirited, young-at-heart consumers and offers a fulfilling driving experience, catering to a wide range of lifestyles and needs.

In keeping with Kia's trendy, bold and youthful brand persona, the Sonet's driving experience has been designed to provide a pleasurable yet sporty journey for all passengers.

Customer safety is a top priority for Kia, thanks to an array of safety measures including, anti-lock braking system with Electronic Stability Programme, Break Assist

System, rear parking sensors and ISOFIX child-seat anchoring points to name a few.

The Sonet is offered with a versatile Smart stream 1.5-liter four-cylinder engine, producing 114 hp at 6300 rpm.

Paired with a Kia's revolutionary Intelligent Variable Transmission (IVT). The drive train system offers a fuel coverage of 17.5 km/ltr as

per GSMO standards.

Keeping the comfort of the driver and passengers in mind, the Sonet's interior offers a modern, dynamic and bold design. It intelligently incorporates convenience, with plenty of legroom, headroom and shoulder room for all passengers, along with a luggage capacity of 392 litres.

The newly redesigned center panel with a sophisticated design, the TFT cluster offers more High-Tech image, & 8-inch Audio touchscreen with infotainment options such as Android Auto and Apple Car Play.

Aiming to create the perfect atmosphere inside, the Sonet creates a concert-like ambiance with a high-end features like front and second-row USB chargers with AC vents & Auto Cruise Control (ACC).

For added convenience, Kia has incorporated a Smart Key system with a button start.

MEETHAQ ISLAMIC BANKING LAUNCHES OFFER FOR CREDIT CARDS HOLDERS

MUSCAT: In line with its strategy to provide special benefits to its customers and credit card holders, Meethaq Islamic Banking from Bank Muscat, has announced the launch of a special offer on its credit cards. The offer includes an annual fee reversal for the first year valid until March 31, 2025.

The offer has been introduced to further reinforce Meethaq's commitment to providing outstanding banking offerings for customers.

To avail this offer, customers need



to activate their credit cards within 90 days of issuance and use the card at any of their preferred shopping destinations for transactions.

Meethaq Islamic Banking provides a diverse range of credit cards to cater to the various needs of its customers.

These include the Meethaq Lulu Credit Card, Visa Platinum Credit Card, Visa Gold Credit Card and Hafawa Visa Signature Credit Card.

Customers can get the privilege of paying for their purchases over a period of 12 months at 0 per cent

interest with the Easy Payment Plan.

Additional features include free issuance of supplementary cards for family members, secured online shopping and global acceptance, allowing customers to access a world of offers and many other benefits.

On this occasion, Sami Bait Rashid, Assistant General Manager — Meethaq Personal Banking, said: “The introduction of this offer was met with great enthusiasm last year, reflecting the value and benefits Meethaq's credit cards provide.”

BUSINESS

HISTORICINAUGURATION



This milestone underscores OQ8’s commitment to driving growth, sustainability and operational efficiency in the energy sector.

OQ8 CELEBRATES ‘OQ8 DAY’ WITH 110% REFINING MILESTONE

MUSCAT: Duqm Refinery and Petrochemical Industries Company (OQ8) proudly marks the first anniversary of its historic inauguration with OQ8 Day, celebrating a year of remarkable achievements and industry leadership. Since taking over operations, OQ8 has demonstrated exceptional resilience and operational excellence, expanding its refining capacity from 230,000 to 255,000 barrels per day, achieving 110% nameplate capacity. This milestone underscores OQ8’s commitment to driving growth, sustainability and operational efficiency in the energy sector.

David Bird, CEO of OQ8, stated, “Since taking control from the project, OQ8 has demonstrated resilience, strategic foresight and operational excellence. Our growth reflects the dedication of our team, the strength of our partnerships and the unwavering support of our shareholders, OQ and KPI, as well as our suppliers & offtakers, OQT and KPCT.

This milestone could not have been achieved without their ongoing commitment. As we celebrate this success, we remain focused on driving innovation, sustainability and long-term value for Oman, Kuwait and the broader global energy landscape.”

A key highlight of OQ8’s journey has been the successful completion of the Lender Reliability Test (LRT) just 10 months after mechanical completion, reinforcing the refinery’s technical prowess, business readiness and operational reliability.

Furthermore, OQ8 stands as the first merchant refinery in the Middle East, showcasing its expertise in sourcing and processing diverse crude & feedstock types and demonstrating its flexibility and commercial strength in a dynamic global market. OQ8 has also made significant strides in workforce development, achieving a 68% nationalisation rate, up from 60% at the time of operational launch.

This milestone reflects OQ8’s dedication to nurturing national talent and supporting Oman’s broader workforce development goals.

OQ8’s achievements extend beyond operational success and is positioning itself as a reliable partner and a catalyst for economic growth in the region. Since assuming full operational control, OQ8 has maintained safe, reliable and efficient performance, contributing to regional energy security and reinforcing Oman’s role as a global energy hub.

As OQ8 continues to build upon its safe, consistent and reliable operations, the company’s future outlook remains focused on sustainable growth, technological innovation and enhancing its commercial resilience in a dynamic & increasing volatile market.

Oman’s first oral care factory set to open

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, FEB 10

IN a significant development for Oman’s manufacturing sector, molecules — 100% Omani factory — is set to launch the country’s first specialised oral care production facility. The initiative, which aligns with Oman Vision 2040’s economic diversification goals, aims to reduce dependency on imports and position Oman as a regional hub for oral hygiene products.

In an interview with the Observer, Tariq bin Mohammed al Balushi, CEO of molecules, highlighted the strategic vision behind the project.

“Oral care is a fundamental part of personal hygiene, yet a significant portion of products in Oman and the region are imported. We identified an opportunity to localise production, ensuring that high-quality oral care products are available at competitive prices while reducing dependency on imports,” he said.

GOVERNMENT SUPPORT AND ECONOMIC DIVERSIFICATION molecules has received strong backing from Omani authorities, reinforcing the country’s push for self-sufficiency in essential consumer goods.

“The Omani government has been instrumental in fostering local manufacturing initiatives and we have received valuable support from various government entities.

This includes assistance in regulatory approvals, access to industrial zones and incentives aimed at encouraging local



molecules has invested heavily in advanced formulations and modern manufacturing processes.

production,” Al Balushi noted.

Key institutions, including the Authority for SME Development (Riyada) and the Development Bank, have played a critical role in facilitating the project’s success.

“Their financial assistance, advisory services and SME-focused programmes have helped us overcome challenges and accelerate the establishment of this factory,” he added.

QUALITY AND INNOVATION AT THE CORE

Setting itself apart from international competitors, molecules has invested heavily in advanced formulations and modern manufacturing processes.



“We identified an opportunity to localise production, ensuring that high-quality oral care products are available at competitive prices while reducing dependency on imports.

TARIQ BIN MOHAMMED AL BALUSHI
CEO of molecules

The company’s commitment to quality ensures that its toothpaste and mouthwash products meet international standards.

“Our formulations are developed in collaboration with industry experts, incorporating scientifically proven ingredients.

Additionally, being locally based allows us to respond swiftly to market demands and customise products to suit regional preferences,” said Al Balushi.

This agility, he explained, provides a competitive advantage over imported brands,

which often do not cater specifically to the needs and preferences of Omani

consumers.

REGIONAL EXPANSION ON THE HORIZON

With its state-of-the-art facility now operational, molecules is already looking beyond Oman’s borders for growth. The company has identified significant opportunities in the GCC and beyond.

“Our vision extends beyond Oman and we are actively exploring opportunities to expand into the GCC and broader international markets

The high quality of our products and our competitive pricing strategy position us well for exports,” Al Balushi stated.

Initial discussions with potential distributors in neighbouring countries are already underway, reinforcing molecules’ ambition to become a trusted name in the oral care sector across the region.

A MILESTONE FOR OMANI INDUSTRY

The launch of this factory marks a turning point for Oman’s industrial landscape, demonstrating the potential of local manufacturing in previously import-dependent sectors. With strong government support, a commitment to quality and clear expansion plans, molecules is poised to redefine oral care in Oman and beyond.

As Al Balushi summed up, “With this project, we confirm our commitment to providing local products with global standards, reflecting the Sultanate of Oman’s ability to lead in various sectors.”

OMAN’S REAL ESTATE MARKET SURGES TO RO 3.4 BILLION

MUSCAT: Oman’s real estate market recorded a significant 29.6% increase in total transaction value, reaching RO 3.379 billion by the end of December 2024, up from RO 2.607 billion in 2023, according to preliminary data from the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

Government-collected transaction fees rose by 6.4% to RO 69 million, reflecting sustained market activity. Sales contracts accounted for RO 1.094 billion, marking a 4.8% rise, with 13,668 contracts recorded — up 3.8% from the previous year.



By the end of 2024, the number of issued property deeds stood at 233,345.

Mortgage transactions saw the most substantial growth, surging

46.4% to RO 2.271 billion across 20,680 contracts. Meanwhile,

exchange contracts totalled 1,325 transactions valued at RO 13.1 million. By the end of 2024, the number of issued property deeds stood at 233,345, showing a slight decline of 0.9%.

However, property transactions by Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) nationals grew by 10%, with 1,447 properties issued to GCC citizens.

The strong growth in mortgage transactions and overall real estate trading underscores Oman’s resilient property market, driven by increased investor confidence and strategic government policies.

— ONA

Ladayn Polymer Park to begin production in 2025

MUSCAT: Ladayn Polymer Park is set to enter a new phase of development as three pioneering companies move from construction to production in early 2025. With a combined investment of \$42 million, these firms — one Omani and two international — underscore Oman’s ambition to establish itself as a regional leader in plastics manufacturing.

Since its inception, Ladayn Polymer Park has secured 16 agreements worth nearly \$155 million, supporting industries in packaging, construction and advanced polymer solutions.

This initiative is a major step in reducing Oman’s reliance on imports and strengthening local manufacturing capabilities.

“This milestone highlights

the transformative role of Ladayn Polymer Park in driving industrial growth, creating jobs and positioning Oman as a hub for polymer innovation and sustainability,” said Sadiq Hassan al Lawati, Managing Director of OQ Marketing.

Madayn Plastic Company (MAPCO), an Omani firm, has invested \$8 million to establish the country’s first production line for Form Fill Seal (FFS) bags. With 20 direct jobs expected, MAPCO’s operations will enhance Oman’s self-sufficiency in plastic packaging.

MAK Sohar, a German company specialising in high-performance chemical solutions for the automotive, construction and healthcare sectors, has committed \$11 million to a cutting-edge facility



Ladayn Polymer Park has secured 16 agreements worth nearly \$155 million.

in Sohar Free Zone. Set to begin production in Q2 2025, the plant will manufacture TPE and engineering compounds, supporting the growing demand for advanced polymer materials.

Meanwhile, Multibond Metal LLC, a Chinese-Indian joint venture, has invested \$23 million in advanced polymer solutions for heat resistance and surface protection.

This initiative, set to create 30 direct jobs, will solidify Oman’s position as a leader in specialised polymer applications.

“Our partnerships with investors like MAPCO, MAK Sohar and Multibond Metal LLC reflect Ladayn Polymer Park’s strategic role in the region. We are building an integrated ecosystem that supports value-added manufacturing

and enhances Oman’s industrial capabilities,” said Mundhar al Rawahi, Ladayn Park Programme Leader.

To ensure efficient operations, all three companies have secured supply contracts with OQ, guaranteeing access to high-quality raw materials at competitive prices.

Additionally, Ladayn Polymer Park’s proximity to SOHAR Port and Freezone provides a logistical advantage for companies expanding into West Asian and African markets.

“With advanced infrastructure, attractive incentives and a steady raw material supply from OQ, Ladayn Polymer Park is the ideal destination for polymer manufacturers. We look forward to welcoming more investors in 2025,” added Sadiq al Lawati.

OPINION

Are AI apps supporting or exposing you?



TARIQ
AL BARWANI

The author is the founder of Knowledge Oman

NOWADAYS I see beautifully crafted communications (email, letter, correspondence) from people who hardly know how to write. I also see translated messages sent in different languages from people who speak merely one language.

I see fantastic presentation slides created with creative and amazing images, videos and also sounds from people that used to create plain vanilla slides (in a white background and black fonts). I also find many people now speaking and sharing wonderful ideas where they used to be quite shy and also quite conservative during social and professional set meetings.

These and more have all become possible, thanks to artificial intelligence-powered and driven applications, which continue to grow in types and strength. Moreover, they are available free for use easily by almost anyone – be it young kids or retired adults as well.

Working professionals and entrepreneurs, on the other hand, use various dedicated AI-powered applications, be it via their smartphones, tablets and/or even desktop computers, to do things that include but are not limited to preparing for and scheduling meetings, managing their emails, reviewing and managing their financial information, attaining tips and performing health and fitness activities and many more.

This is all good and is done today; YET, are you aware of the risks that these nifty AI-powered applications bring to the table irrespective of the apparent value they have become lately? Let me share with you a story based on a real-world experience.

Adil (omitted real name) downloads and uses most of the AI-powered applications that are being advertised and promoted for their effective personal and professional use; applications of the sort I had shared at the beginning of my article today.

Adil, however, noticed that his devices, applications he uses, and/or the websites he visits have lots of information about him that he has not stored/saved with. Information includes what he likes/dislikes, has or doesn't have, visits and has been to and regular communications, be it for personal or professional reasons.

Think about this. What if a hacker gets access to these details? It will make life much easier to take you for a wild ride. Trust me, whatever happened to Adil is also happening to many other people and YES, it can mostly happen to you too, if it hasn't already.

Let's look over stats. Over 92 per cent of organisations worldwide have experienced some security breaches due to using generative AI in the past year. Furthermore, approximately 72 per cent of businesses have also faced AI security breaches, which clearly indicates a growing concern about using AI

Over 92 per cent of organisations worldwide have experienced some security breaches due to using generative AI in the past year. Furthermore, approximately 72 per cent of businesses have also faced AI security breaches, which clearly indicates a growing concern about using AI in organisations.

in organisations. While AI offers benefits, it is yet a double-edged sword. There are many AI-generated phishing scams in the making, utilising deep fakes (for videos) and voice cloning (for audio) to deceive, trick, scam and ultimately get your data hacked. How many videos and audios have you received lately that were fake? That's proof in the pudding.

As amazing as these AI-powered and generative tools are, the amount of data and information you share as an input to these apps can be used maliciously.

You don't pay anything to many of these apps and as the saying goes, "there is no such thing as a free lunch." What do you expect your information is going to? My advice: always ask yourself why you should download and use a specific AI app and what kind of assistance you are looking for. The goal, of course, is for it to support you, not expose you.

To conclude my article this week, please note that I by no means discourage you from using AI-powered apps. They are useful and can truly support you with many tasks, from personal to professional endeavors. Nevertheless, one needs to be very careful upon using these AI apps, for cybercriminals and hackers continue to learn and find ways to utilise these AI apps in order to get to you. Until we catch up again next week, stay informed, be cautious and continue to remain safe.

JAPAN PASSES FIRST TRUMP TEST WITH PERFECT TIMING

HUDSON LOCKETT

AFTER MONTHS of speculation on whether Shigeru Ishiba would be able to rekindle the bonhomie his predecessor Shinzo Abe had with Donald Trump, the Japanese prime minister has proven he knows how to deliver exactly what the US President wants — and not a moment too soon.

Indeed, the post-summit memo reads like a laundry list of Trump's top concerns asked and answered. Chief among these was closing Japan's \$69 billion trade deficit, which the US president described as "pretty easy to do."

Ishiba, for his part, promised to boost Japanese investment in the world's biggest economy to \$1 trillion and buy more of its liquified natural gas.

These pledges ride on existing trends: Japan's imports of American LNG rose 15 per cent last year, per finance ministry figures.

And its foreign direct investment position stateside already stood at about \$780 billion in 2023 — the largest of any country.

Though Ishiba's promise that Nippon Steel will invest in US Steel, instead of trying to buy the iconic company outright through an acquisition Trump has opposed, was met by silence from the Tokyo-based company.

In return for all of this — plus a gift to Trump of a golden samurai helmet — the prime minister received endorsement of Japan's security concerns on issues ranging from China to North Korea and Russia.

Ishiba's relatively strong hand means he can afford some of the optimism he expressed following his White House summit about averting US levies.

But any such reprieve would mark a stark exception to the new tariffs Trump has vowed are coming for many trading partners this week. Other issues for Japan, including being caught in the middle of the US-China tech war, may cause more friction later.

The friendly meeting also gives Ishiba a stronger hand heading into negotiations with Japanese lawmakers over his 115.5 trillion yen (\$759 billion) budget. The fact Trump didn't publicly push for more military spending suggests Tokyo's current, already record-high defence spending plan, equivalent to 1.4 per cent of its GDP forecast for 2025, is adequate for now.

His new status as successful Trump wrangler strengthens the prime minister's weak position within his Liberal Democratic Party which recently lost its parliamentary majority.

He may not be Abe, but Ishiba appears capable of keeping his mercurial US counterpart placated, so far as that is possible. — Reuters

Opportunities at the Indian Ocean Conference

AS Muscat prepares to host the 8th Indian Ocean Conference this February, its significance transcends the realm of a typical diplomatic gathering. Amidst global trade uncertainties and shifting geopolitical dynamics, Oman's role in hosting this prestigious forum marks a pivotal moment for regional cooperation and maritime development.

The Indian Ocean Conference, since its inception in 2016, has evolved into the leading platform for dialogue and collaboration among Indian Ocean rim countries, reflecting the growing recognition of this region's vital role in global trade and security.

Oman's opportunity as host nation is particularly timely. Recent disruptions in traditional maritime routes have underscored the Indian Ocean's strategic importance as a stable and secure corridor for global commerce. Oman, with its modern ports, strategic location and unwavering commitment to maritime excellence, is ideally positioned to lead discussions on enhancing regional maritime cooperation and promoting sustainable development.

The Sultanate of Oman's long-standing reputation as a neutral and reliable partner further strengthens its ability to foster consensus and drive collaborative initiatives.

For Omani businesses, the conference unlocks a wealth of opportunities. Local companies across diverse sectors, from logistics and tourism to fisheries and renewable energy, stand to gain immensely from direct engagement with international partners, investors and industry leaders.

The maritime sector, in particular, is poised for significant growth, with Oman's ports — Duqm, Sohar, and Salalah — emerging as vital logistics hubs in the evolving landscape of global supply chains.

The conference's emphasis on sustainable maritime development aligns seamlessly with Oman Vision 2040's ambitious goals. This synergy creates a powerful platform for showcasing Oman's achievements



Oman is ideally positioned to lead discussions on enhancing regional maritime cooperation and promoting sustainable development.



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in environmental stewardship and maritime innovation. Omani enterprises are prepared to demonstrate their capabilities in building a sustainable blue economy, encompassing green shipping initiatives, marine biotechnology research and responsible resource management.

Regional security concerns add further weight to this year's gathering. As traditional shipping routes face challenges, Oman's reputation as a stable and neutral partner gains renewed importance.

The conference provides a crucial forum for addressing shared challenges in maritime security, from combating piracy and illegal fishing to ensuring freedom of navigation and protecting critical infrastructure.

The conference also serves as an ideal platform for strengthening economic ties within the Indian Ocean region. As global trade patterns evolve, new partnerships in emerging sectors become essential.

Omani businesses can leverage this opportunity to establish themselves in fields ranging from renewable marine energy and sustainable aquaculture to digital maritime solutions and marine tourism.

Technology and innovation are central to discussions about the future of ocean governance.

Oman's growing expertise in port management systems, maritime domain awareness and environmental monitoring positions local companies to contribute meaningfully to regional development.

The conference can catalyse partnerships in these areas, fostering the adoption of smart port solutions, advanced tracking technologies and data-driven decision-making for enhanced maritime security and efficiency.

Looking ahead, the conference's impact is expected to extend far beyond its conclusion. The relationships forged and initiatives launched during this gathering have the potential to shape regional maritime cooperation for years to come.

For Oman, successfully hosting this conference reinforces its position as a key player in regional affairs and a bridge between East and West, further solidifying its reputation as a trusted partner and a promoter of peace and stability.

Furthermore, the gathering presents a critical opportunity to address pressing environmental challenges facing the Indian Ocean.

With the region experiencing faster warming than any other ocean body since the 1950s, collaborative action becomes imperative. Oman's leadership in sustainable maritime practices positions it to guide meaningful discussions on balancing economic growth with environmental protection, promoting responsible fishing practices and combating marine pollution.

In conclusion, the 8th Indian Ocean Conference stands as a beacon of regional cooperation and sustainable development amidst a backdrop of global uncertainties.

For Oman, it represents not just a diplomatic achievement but a crucial step towards realising its vision of becoming a leading maritime nation. The conference promises to usher in a new era of collaboration, innovation and sustainable growth in the Indian Ocean region, with Oman playing a pivotal role in shaping its future.

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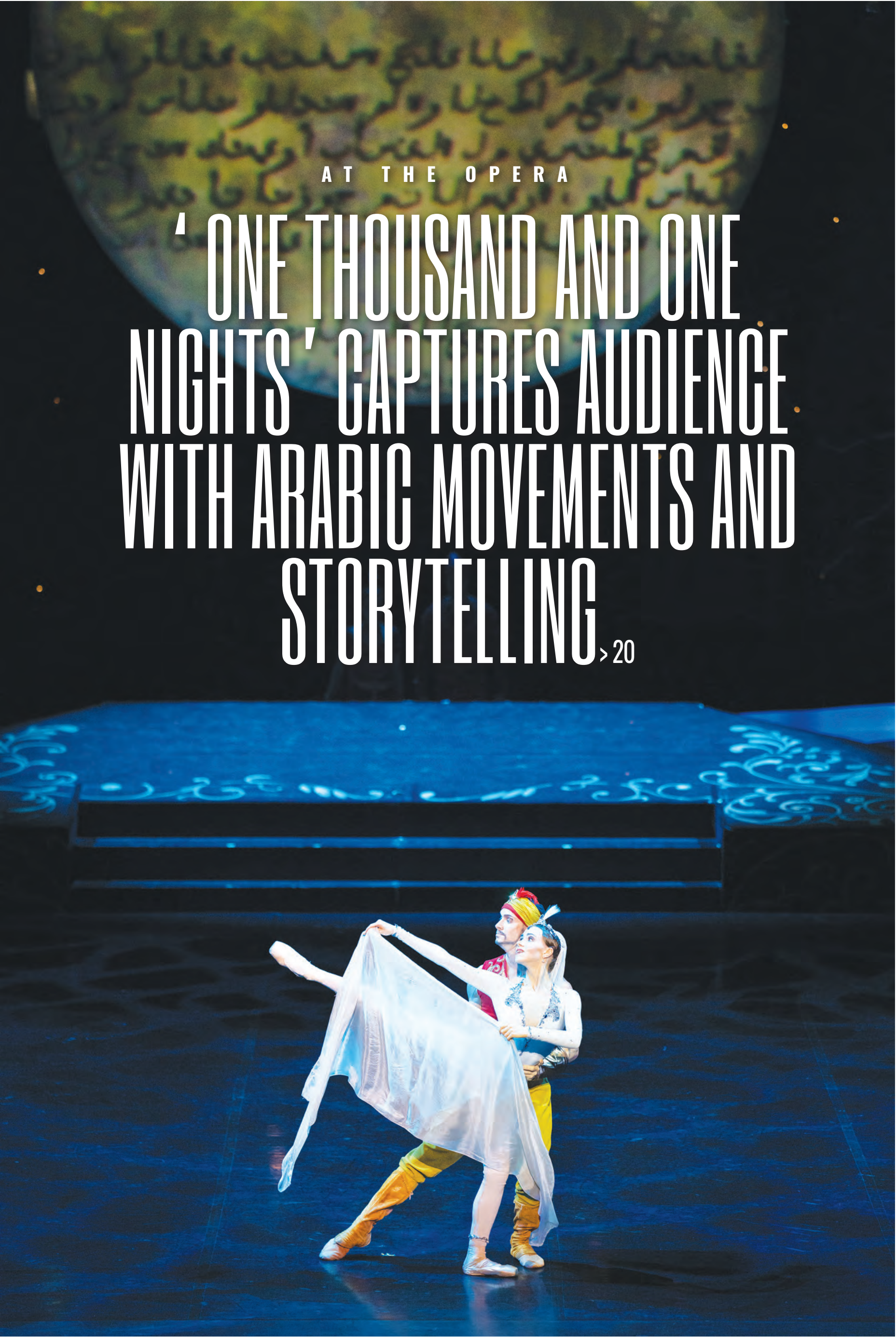
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ART/LIFE



FASHION

Christian Siriano looks to sleek autos at New York Fashion Week



DESIGNER CHRISTIAN Siriano looked to the automotive world for his Fall/Winter collection at New York Fashion Week, presenting plenty of metallics for both women and men.

Models dressed in shiny jackets and trousers, sleek dresses and voluminous gowns walked down an all-red catwalk with a parked Toyota nearby. Designs nodded to cars with some details appearing as paint slicks, oil slicks as well as tyre tracks. Siriano used plenty of red as well as blue, black and bronze.

“(The collection) was ... inspired by a ... connection between sexy ... automotive design and clothing. So the red ... symbolises for me that iconic red car, that iconic red carpet and how those ... go together,” Siriano said backstage.

Siriano’s show on Thursday took place on the first day of New York Fashion Week, where some 60 labels, including Michael Kors, Carolina Herrera and LaQuan Smith will present their creations. The event runs until February 11.

New York is the first leg of the autumn-winter 2025/2026 catwalk calendar, with buyers and editors then heading to London, Milan and finally Paris to see designers present their latest lines.

Siriano has become a highly anticipated name at New York Fashion Week, renowned for his innovative and inclusive designs. Rising to fame after winning the fourth season of “Project Runway” in 2008, Siriano has captured the fashion world’s attention with his commitment to body positivity.

His collections are celebrated for their vibrant colours and playful silhouettes, reflecting his belief that “fashion should be for everyone; all women deserve beautiful clothes” (Vogue, 2020). Siriano’s dedication to inclusivity is evident in his choice of diverse models and celebrities who grace the red carpet in his creations. Notably, his stunning gown worn by Viola Davis at the 2017 Oscars showcased both elegance and representation, further cementing his influence in the industry.

Siriano blends traditional tailoring with modern aesthetics, delivering pieces that are both avant-garde and elegantly wearable. — Reuters

QUICK FEATURES



TRAVEL

A visitor sketches while seated before the Great Colonnade (Decumanus Maximus) at the ancient ruins of Palmyra in central Syria. —AFP



ENTERTAINMENT

American singer and actor Nick Jonas poses for a photograph at his brother-in-law Siddharth Chopra’s and his fiancée actress Neelam Upadhyaya’s Sangeet ceremony, a pre-wedding celebration, in Mumbai. —AFP



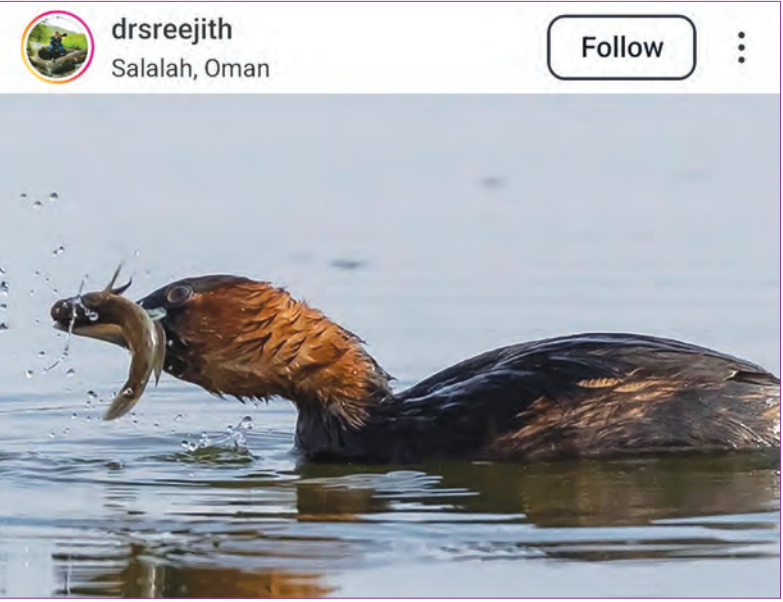
LIFESTYLE

A welder passes by carnival floats during the preparation for the upcoming 2025 Nice Carnival in Nice. —AFP

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Barry Humphries’ personal items, including Dame Edna props, head to auction



FROM DAME Edna Everage’s outlandish dresses and snazzy spectacles to paintings and books, items from the personal collection of late Australian comedian Barry Humphries head to auction next week in a sale estimated at up to around \$5 million.

A household name in Britain and Australia, Humphries, who died in 2023 aged 89, was best known for his persona Dame Edna Everage, an instantly recognisable character with lilac hair, curly or diamante glasses and zany frocks. Humphries’ other well known characters was drunk and coarse diplomat Les Patterson and the elderly, rambling Sandy Stone.

As well as Dame Edna’s glasses and outfits, the February 13 “Barry Humphries: The Personal Collection” sale includes a variety of artwork, lead by Charles Conder’s painting

“Sand dunes, Ambletuse” with an estimate of 200,000 pounds — 300,000 pounds.

Also on offer are plenty of books, including a first edition copy of “The Importance of Being Earnest” signed by Oscar Wilde to his publisher. It has an estimate of 100,000 — 150,000 pounds.

“Barry Humphries was obviously best known for his comedic personas but behind that was a really passionate, intelligent and curious man,” Benedict Winter, associate director, private & iconic collections at Christie’s London.

The total sale was estimated at 2 million — 4 million pounds (\$2.49 million — \$4.98 million).

“He was a passionate art collector who collected throughout his life and this auction is around 240 lots of works of art and books that he lived with, he loved and he really cherished.” — Reuters



For quake survivors, art brings healing in Türkiye’s Antioch

AT FIRST glance, it’s a happy image: hundreds of smiling faces torn from newspapers and pasted into a frame. But these are ghosts, victims of the 2023 earthquake in Türkiye that claimed more than 53,000 lives.

The montage was put together by a local artist from Antakya, whose life was among the thousands upended when the 7.8-magnitude quake devastated huge areas of southern Türkiye two years ago, in the early hours of February 6, 2023.

“When I put people’s memories into those frames with all that emptiness and despair, they see their own lives. There is sadness but also happiness that someone is trying to keep those memories alive,” said artist Emil Genc, 43.

No place was worse hit than Antakya, the site of the ancient city of Antioch, where 90 per cent of the buildings were lost and more than 20,000 people died in the town and the surrounding Hatay province.

“We lost an entire city,” said Genc, who uses things salvaged from the ruins — old photos, trinkets, fragments of concrete — in her art which expresses “the utter emptiness and despair of losing absolutely everything”.

ARTISTS AS CITY’S ‘MEMORY’

Many of Genc’s works are on display at Antakya’s Art and Culture Market, an open-air complex of wooden booths which opened on January 1 and showcases the work of more than 70 local artists.

“During the earthquake, many of the city’s cultural and social venues were reduced to rubble,” explained Hakan Boyaci, head of Hatay’s cultural association.

The aim was to create a space that would bring back local artists, many of whom had left and offer them somewhere to show their work and serve as a social meeting place for the community.

“The main idea was to bring back the artists, who are the memory of the city. You can rebuild homes and buildings, but that alone won’t put a city back on its feet,” he said.

On a quiet Wednesday afternoon,



only a handful of visitors were there, peering into the windows and chatting with the artists, some of whom offered workshops.

Outside one, a young girl stood proudly holding up a piece of paper marbling art she’d done, her family snapping photos, everyone smiling.

“Many people are still living in container cities and they needed somewhere to go out. This place provides space for social gathering and healing through art and culture while the city gets back on its feet,” Boyaci said.

Another initiative involving quake-hit restaurants opened in September, with the Antakya Gastronomy Market showcasing the best of the city’s rich culinary heritage, much of which draws inspiration from Syria’s Aleppo, just two hour’s drive east.

‘HEALED’ BY MAKING MOSAICS

For 10 years, 47-year-old Eser Mansuroglu had made traditionally-themed mosaics of ancient historical artefacts but since the earthquake, she’s copied images that deeply moved her.

Outside her shop is a mosaic of an iconic image of a man in an orange high-visibility jacket sitting by the rubble holding onto his 15-year-old

daughter’s hand, a photo taken by AFP photographer Adem Altan.

“He didn’t let go of his daughter’s hand until the morning even though she’d died. That affected me very, very deeply because I also lost my mother and brother, so I can feel that pain,” she said.

“After so much death we were in a very, very bad place. For a while, I stopped making art but then I started again. I threw myself into my art to heal, it felt like therapy,” she said.

“I healed by doing mosaics.”

Funded by the governor’s office and the Eastern Mediterranean Development Agency, the initiative has provided “a breath of fresh air” for both the artists and the city’s residents, Boyaci said.

Outside the complex, two more young artists are painting bright friezes on the concrete sidings.

“Art is a way of documenting history,” said Mehmet Ercin, a 27-year-old graffiti artist who is being paid to paint scenes showing the city’s rich history.

But it will omit one key event.

“We’re not going to paint the earthquake because we don’t want to remember it,” he said, his gloved hands splattered with acrylic paint.

— AFP

FEATURES

BY GEORGINA BENISON
PHOTO BY KHALID AL BUSAIDI

LAST weekend at the Royal Opera House Muscat, audiences were whisked away into an enchanting world of fantasy and adventure as the esteemed Mariinsky Theatre of Vladivostok and accompanied by the Mariinsky Orchestra presented the breathtaking ballet performance of “One Thousand and One Nights.”

Originally premiering in January 1979 in Baku, Azerbaijan, this captivating production, under the direction of conductor Ayyub Guliev and choreographer Eldar Aliev, transports viewers into an exotic realm filled with wonder. With a dazzling set and costumes designed by Pyotr Okunev, the stage became a vibrant tapestry, conjuring a mesmerising world of Arabic fantasy that delighted attendees of all ages.

The curtain rose to reveal a projection of abstract splendour at the front of the stage as the orchestra performed the Overture. A ladies’ choir sung off-stage, creating a mystical atmosphere with a wordless chorus. A huge book of miniature paintings illustrated the stories yet to be told: the book of, “One Thousand and One Nights” in pictures. The screen lifted to a lavish set of Persian splendour; the Royal Court dotted with middle-eastern lampshades, golden divans, Turkish carpets and sliding colonnades in Act 2. Effective use of changing coloured lights on the set reflected the mood of each scene, such as red in conflict and blue in dark exchanges. A central panel lifted as Sultan Shahryar and his unfaithful first wife danced a seductive pas-de-deux. Dressed in period eastern costume, the couple were played superbly by Russian Principals in an extremely demanding choreography. The impossibly agile Nurida was danced in Thursday’s cast by Lilia Berezhnova and Shahryar by Sergei Umanetc to gasps of disbelief from the spellbound audience. Umanetc displayed stamina and strength throughout his role, including a lengthy soliloquy in Act 1 using impressive leaps and pirouettes.

The choreography was unusual, imitating Arabic sculpture and stance with extraordinary flexibility. Twenty-four male Corps de Ballet dressed in green as hunters were perfectly synchronised in their ensemble performance as they escorted the Sultan off to war. They became nymphs in silvery body stockings in a fantastic, dream-like world to the sound of the traditional long-necked lute, the Tar. Later six exactly coordinated male dancers become ghoulish executioners.

Virgin-white ghosts representing the Sultan’s dead wives performed precise pirouettes to a primal percussion rhythm. An other-worldly choir of heavenly beauty was heard off-stage, with Anastasia Kikot providing a celestial vocalise (echoes of Rachmaninov) to further enhance the surreal quality of ‘The Nights’

Here the narrative becomes subordinate to the articulation of the dances and brilliant ballet score by Azerbaijani composer, Fikret Amirov. His new genre of sweeping epic music was as impressive as the visual experience and is a sterling example of Nationalistic writing in the 20th century. Amirov’s ingenious blending of Western (Russian) forms with Eastern scales and folk melodies with irregular, uneven metres (3+3+2 is one example he exploits) resulted in an effective pastiche of orientalism. He benefitted from knowing the scores of Borodin’s, ‘Polovtsian dances’ and Khachaturian’s ‘Sabre Dance’, not to mention Rimsky-Korsakov’s ‘Scheherazade’ itself. He uses extremes of registers in orchestration — piccolos, xylophones and glockenspiel against the deep resonance of trombones, timpani and gongs — to give an illusion of Arabic exoticism which provides an almost filmic soundtrack to complement what is happening on stage.

Shahryar’s beautiful and intelligent wife, Scheherazade appeared in a blue tutu, spinning into the Sultan’s favour by the end of Act 1. She was played with captivating grace by Anna Samostrelova, receiving tumultuous applause in the Finale.



‘ONE THOUSAND AND ONE NIGHTS’ CAPTURES AUDIENCE WITH ARABIC MOVEMENTS AND STORYTELLING



Act 2 introduced some lively, bold characters from “The Nights”, starting with Georgy Stelmakh as Sinbad the Sailor symbolised by a blue, rippling silk sea. He rescues Lada Sartakova as the maiden in distress and overcomes death in the form of the evil Bird Roc (Shizuru Kato).

Suddenly the scene is awash with colour in a peasants’ lively dance, joyous and exhilarating. The walled city of Baghdad is illustrated behind as a child’s dream accompanied by light folk music. The costumes are faux-arabian including six Iraqi dancers — clichés in assorted bright colours. Aladdin (Sergei Amanbaev) is accompanied by his side-kick, the mischievous Wizard (Erlan Suynbek) whirling and spinning with athletic energy, a

full turn in a jump, clutching the Lamp. Later an animated Ali Baba (Vladuslav Rzhevsky) appears, leaping in double spins, turning in the air as the troupe journey towards the Thieves’ den in ancient Mesopotamia. An Egyptian style belly-dancer, Marjana (performed with bewitching guile by Natalia Demyanova) entertains them, gaining an appreciative whoop of delight from the audience.

The mesmerising solos melt into a sustained love duet between Shahryar and Scheherazade in the final, magnificent pas-de-deux, filled with triumph and transformation. A colourful pageant ensues as the full cast and towns people assemble in a grand Royal Ball to bid the couple farewell as they depart — on a magic flying carpet!