

OMAN

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WINTER
BLOOM
BOOSTS
VISITORS

INBRIEF

COLOMBIAN DUEL WIN OPENING STAGE



Juan Sebastian Molano of the UAE Team Emirates prevailed in a Colombian duel to take the opening honours of the Tour of Oman 2026 on Saturday. The Colombian rider claimed the red jersey after edging out another Colombian, Fernando Gaviria, to the line in a bunch finish. Molano emerged fastest to finish the 170.9-km Stage 1 from the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism to Bimmah Sink Hole in Qurayat with a time of four hours, 24 minutes and 54 seconds. **DETAILS ON P12**

OMANI BEEKEEPER WINS THREE INTERNATIONAL MEDALS IN PARIS



Omani beekeeper Masoud bin Bakhit al Shahri was awarded three international medals at the Paris International Honey Competition during the honouring ceremony held on Saturday evening in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, in an achievement that confirms the prestigious position that Omani honey enjoys and its high quality in international forums. Al Shahri, the owner of the Salalah Honey project, received two Platinum medals, the highest classification category in the competition, for his Frankincense Honey and Frankincense Honey with Acacia, in addition to a gold medal for his “Acacia Gum Honey” product.

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, FEB 7

More AI-powered cameras are being installed to catch seat belt violations as well as speed and other traffic violations, as part of the Royal Oman Police's (ROP) upgradation of traffic surveillance infrastructure with advanced AI-powered smart cameras to monitor, detect and issue fines for multiple traffic violations simultaneously.

Speaking to the Observer, an official from the Traffic Department said that the

systems use Artificial Intelligence and 4D radar to identify violations without human intervention, capable of detecting infractions even in low light, and are currently in the installation phase. These smart systems were undergoing trials during the past few months and are activated in phases to curb rising accidents.

“These cameras, activated using AI, are capable of multi-violation detection which means that while one camera can detect speeding, the other can detect if the



These smart systems were undergoing trials during the past few months and are activated in phases to curb rising accidents.

people inside are not wearing a seatbelt, or if the driver is holding a mobile phone, and if the vehicle is tailgating. They are in the installation phase, and further details can't be disclosed,” he said, adding that, “However, a video will be released and shared before the devices are fully activated.” According to the source, these cameras are being installed on major highways and at key traffic signal intersections in Muscat. These cameras, with a 24-hour notification system for fines, can detect if the driver is holding a phone

or not wearing a seat belt and update the vehicle owner simultaneously.

These systems can also verify the status of vehicle insurance and update the authorities for violations and activate instant measures against the offenders.

These high-end cameras, currently being installed on highways, are said to be having a standard 20 km/hour buffer and minimum penalties include RO 20 for speeding, but violations 50-80 km/hour over the limit can result in fines of RO 35-50.

‘Together We Progress’ forum kicks off today

MUSCAT: The fourth edition of the ‘Together We Progress’ forum will begin on Sunday. The forum is organised annually by the General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers in compliance with the Royal directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to enhance communication between the government and society, and to listen to the opinions, suggestions and aspirations of citizens in

various fields.

The forum aims to inform citizens about development policies, programmes and government initiatives, and will also give them an opportunity to express their opinions and suggestions, as well as share their concerns and challenges with decision-makers in a constructive participatory environment.

This year’s forum agenda will

include a number of discussion and dialogue sessions, whose topics revolve around vital themes that touch upon societal interest and contribute to comprehensive national development.

OMAN VISION 2040

On its first day, the forum will address the theme of Oman Vision 2040 by reviewing the level of progress made in achieving the

vision’s indicators and targets after five years of implementation, in addition to addressing the economic and developmental paths of the eleventh five-year plan.

The first axis will also include investment aspirations in priority economic sectors, namely: manufacturing, tourism and the digital economy, and the role of the private sector in promoting investment in these sectors. — ONA

Iran to hold next round of talks with US ‘soon’

C o u n t r i e s w e l c o m e O m a n ’ s h o s t i n g o f U S - I r a n t a l k s

THE Kingdom of Bahrain, the State of Kuwait, the State of Qatar and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) have welcomed the Sultanate of Oman’s hosting of high-level negotiations between the United States of America and the Islamic Republic of Iran, expressing their appreciation for Omani diplomatic efforts.

These countries, in statements on Saturday, expressed their hope that the talks would contribute in fostering a peaceful solution for resolving disputes through dialogue and negotiations, in accordance with international law and the UN Charter, enhance confidence-building and consolidate the foundations of security, stability and peace at both the regional and international levels.

Meanwhile, Iran’s foreign minister said a fresh round of talks with Washington would take place “soon”, while insisting that enrichment was Tehran’s “inalienable right” and that building trust would take time.

Abbas Araghchi said the first round of talks in Oman on Friday had been a “good start”.

He added that nuclear “enrichment is our inalienable right and must continue. Even with bombing they could not destroy our capabilities,” according to excerpts of an interview with the Al Jazeera network, published in Persian on his official Telegram channel.

“We are ready to reach a reassuring agreement on enrichment,” he added during the interview, which was later released in parts by Al Jazeera with Arabic dubbing. He said, however, that “Iran’s sovereign position is opposition to transferring uranium abroad”.

“The Iranian nuclear case will only be



A photograph shows copies of Iranian daily newspapers at a kiosk in Tehran on Saturday reporting on the first round of talks between Iran and the United States. — AFP

resolved through negotiations,” he added.

Friday’s negotiations were the first since nuclear negotiations between Iran and the United States collapsed last year following Israel’s unprecedented bombing campaign against Iran, which triggered a 12-day war.

Araghchi called Friday’s talks “a good start”, but insisted that “there is a long way to go to build trust”.

The two sides had agreed to hold another round of talks “soon”, but the date has yet to be determined, Araghchi said.

“Changing the location of negotiations

with Washington in the second round is possible,” he added.

US President Donald Trump said that Washington had “very good talks” on Iran after the two sides held an indirect dialogue in Oman, pledging another round of negotiations next week.

“We likewise had very good talks on Iran,” Trump told reporters on board Air Force One en route to his Mar-a-Lago resort in Florida.

“We’re going to meet again early next week,” he added. — Agencies

New AI-powered cameras to catch traffic violators

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SHORT TAKES



SAYYID BADR VISITS
SULTAN QABOOS
CULTURAL CENTRE

WASHINGTON: As part of his official visit to the United States, Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, visited the Sultan Qaboos Cultural Centre here on February 3.

Upon his arrival at the centre, he was received by Ambassador Talal bin Saif al Rahbi, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the United States, and Dr Majid al Khalili, Executive Director of the centre. They accompanied Sayyid Badr on a tour of the centre's various facilities, departments and programmes.

During the visit, Sayyid Badr was briefed on the centre's cultural and educational programmes and activities, which aim to enhance the Omani cultural presence in the United States and present a comprehensive image of the Sultanate of Oman, its heritage, its humanitarian values and its message of tolerance, openness and understanding among peoples.

Sayyid Badr also received a briefing on the role of the Sultan Qaboos Cultural Centre by organising cultural events, exhibitions, lectures and educational programmes. These activities contribute in strengthening cultural exchange and intercultural dialogue between the Sultanate of Oman and the United States, and in expanding engagement with American cultural, intellectual and academic institutions.

‘BRIDGES’ EVENT
SHOWCASES
OMANI IDENTITY



Hosting the event in Nizwa reflects the city's significant tourism appeal.

NIZWA: The Department of Awqaf and Religious Affairs in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate launched the ‘Bridges: Oman Identity and Civilisation’ event at Nizwa Fort, with activities held over four days.

The event aims to familiarise visitors with the features of authentic Omani identity and the Sultanate’s rich cultural and civilisational heritage, through a series of educational and cultural showcases.

The programme is organised around four main sections: Omani Identity, Islamic Publications, Muslim Women and Hospitality, each highlighting key aspects of Oman’s social, cultural and religious fabric.

Saad bin Sulaiman al Kindi, Head of the Department of Introducing Islam and Cultural Exchange at the Department of Awqaf and Religious Affairs in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, said the ‘Bridges’ event has been held in several locations in previous editions.

He noted that hosting it in the Wilayat of Nizwa reflects the city’s significant tourism appeal, as it attracts large numbers of visitors daily from within and outside Oman. — ONA

OMAN HOSTS
NEUROCRITICAL
CONFERENCE
TODAY

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman is hosting the Neurocritical Care Conference 2026 at the Crowne Plaza Muscat, Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre, today.

The conference is an advanced scientific platform aimed at developing clinical knowledge and improving the quality of critical healthcare. Leading experts and specialists in the field will discuss the latest developments and evidence-based practices in

managing critical neurological cases. The conference is organised by the Ministry of Health and Neurocritical Care Association in collaboration with several national institutions, including Khoula Hospital, the Omani Centre for Organ Transplantation, the Oman Ultrasound Association, the World Federation of Neuro-Ultrasound and the European Society of Neuro-Ultrasound and Cerebrovascular Engineering. The conference is

held under the auspices of the American Society of Neurocritical Care. The conference focuses on enhancing medical competencies and exchanging expertise in several key areas including identifying brain death and supporting examinations, organ donation and improving donor care, advanced stroke and neurovascular care, neurological interventions and neuromonitoring and transcranial Doppler. — ONA

Gulf states welcome Oman’s
hosting of US–Iran talks

THE United Arab Emirates (UAE) has welcomed the talks between the United States (USA) and the Islamic Republic of Iran be held in the Sultanate of Oman, describing the move as a positive step in support of dialogue and de-escalation.

In a statement issued on Saturday, the UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs expressed appreciation for Oman's efforts in creating a conducive environment for dialogue. It commended the Sultanate's constructive role in fostering understanding at both regional and international levels and in promoting security and stability.

The UAE reiterated its belief that dialogue, de-escalation, adherence to international law and respect for the sovereignty of states remain the most effective means of addressing current crises.

It voiced hope that the talks would yield positive results that strengthen regional and international peace.

Jassim bin Mohammed al Budaiwi, Secretary-General of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (GCC), has commended Oman for hosting talks between the United States and the Islamic Republic of Iran.

He said Oman’s facilitation of the discussions underscores its constructive role in promoting regional and international understanding and dialogue.

Al Budaiwi also lauded the Sultanate’s sustained and valuable efforts, undertaken



Jassim bin Mohammed al Budaiwi

in cooperation with a number of sisterly and friendly countries, to bring the two sides closer and create an enabling environment for constructive engagement. Such efforts, he noted, serve regional stability and enhance prospects for peace.

The Secretary-General reaffirmed the GCC countries’ commitment to safeguarding security and stability in the region and supporting the prosperity of their peoples.

He further expressed the Council’s hope that the consultations would yield positive outcomes, contributing to de-escalation and strengthening the foundations of security and stability, while advancing common interests and fostering an environment conducive to cooperation and development.

The Kingdom of Bahrain also welcomed Oman’s hosting of the high-level

negotiations, expressing appreciation for Muscat’s diplomatic efforts.

In a statement, Bahrain’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs said it hoped the talks would contribute to peaceful solutions through dialogue and negotiations in accordance with international law and the UN Charter. It added that such efforts would enhance confidence-building and consolidate the foundations of security and stability at regional and international levels.

The State of Kuwait welcomed the talks hosted by Oman and expressed hope that they would lead to a comprehensive agreement serving the interests of both sides and preserving regional security and stability.

In a statement, Kuwait’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs affirmed its support for Oman’s efforts, alongside those of other friendly nations, to advance negotiations and promote constructive dialogue aimed at achieving lasting stability.

The State of Qatar expressed appreciation to Oman for hosting and facilitating the talks, and for its continued efforts to resolve the crisis and enhance opportunities for dialogue on outstanding issues.

In a statement, Qatar’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs reiterated full support for diplomatic initiatives aimed at reducing tensions and resolving disputes through peaceful means, expressing hope that the discussions would produce outcomes that strengthen security and stability in the region. — ONA

CSE exhibition champions inclusive education

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
MUSCAT, FEB 7

The Care and Special Education (CSE) Centre inaugurated its annual exhibition titled Teach to Reach – ‘Expanding Possibilities’ on Saturday at its premises at Indian School, Muscat (ISM).

Dr Alya al Gabshi, Chairperson of the Oman Autism Centre, attended as chief guest, while Dr Abdullah bin Hamad al Maamari, Studies and Follow-up Specialist at the Ministry of Education, was the guest of honour.

In his address, CSE Director Shameer PTK reflected on the Centre’s nearly 34-year journey of dedicated service. He paid tribute to the visionaries who laid its foundation, noting that their compassion and commitment to inclusive education created opportunities for countless children to receive specialised support.

“Today, CSE stands as a living testament to that original vision — a sanctuary where every child is valued and empowered to realise their highest potential,” he said.

He emphasised that the exhibition reflects the Centre’s core



The Care and Special Education (CSE) Centre inaugurated its annual exhibition at ISM.



The Exhibition showcases a wide range of adaptive learning tools, assistive technologies, rehabilitative aids and vocational initiatives

belief that every child can learn, grow and contribute meaningfully when provided with the right adaptive tools and purposeful opportunities.

The CSE Exhibition 2026 showcases a wide range of adaptive learning tools, assistive technologies, rehabilitative aids and vocational initiatives. “These are not merely displays; they are practical bridges to independence,” he noted, adding that such solutions help students build confidence and life skills necessary to navigate the world with dignity.

“Inclusion is far more than a checklist — it is a collective social responsibility. When schools, families and communities unite, we dismantle barriers and create a world where every child can participate fully and authentically,” he added.

The opening ceremony also recognised winners of a poster competition on the theme of inclusion, with participation from various schools. Faculty members who completed 10 and 20 years of service at CSE were honoured.

The exhibition concludes today.

SHORT TAKES

CLOUDS BRING RAIN TO NORTHERN OMAN

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
MUSCAT, FEB 7

Clouds flowed over parts of the northern governorates of Oman on Saturday, with chances of scattered rainfall over Al Batinah North and Al Batinah South, potentially extending to the Hajar Mountains and areas overlooking the Sea of Oman.

Satellite images showed high clouds covering the northern governorates, while low clouds or fog appeared over parts of the Eastern and Central governorates, Dhofar, and coastal areas along the Sea of Oman.

Winds are expected to be northeasterly to easterly, light to moderate, occasionally fresh along the Oman Sea coast, becoming variable at night. For other regions, winds will be southerly to southwesterly, light to moderate, occasionally fresh over parts of the Arabian Sea coast.

The sea state is forecast to be moderate along the coasts of western Musandam and the Arabian Sea, with maximum wave heights of 1.5 metres, and slight elsewhere, reaching up to 1.25 metres. Visibility may reduce during fog formation and rainfall, warned the Oman Met Office.

On Sunday, clear to partly cloudy skies are expected over most northern governorates, with isolated rain possible in Musandam, the Hajar Mountains, and coastal areas of the Oman and Arabian Seas.

Low clouds and fog patches may form over parts of Al Sharqiyah South, Al Wusta, Dhofar and the Oman Sea coastal areas.

AFDF finances 13 projects worth RO 2.4 million in 2025

MUSCAT: The Agricultural and Fisheries Development Fund (AFDF), in cooperation with relevant entities within the food security system, financed 13 development projects across the agricultural, fisheries and water resources sectors during 2025, with a total value of RO 2.4 million.

The funding forms part of the Fund's ongoing efforts to support projects with sustainable developmental impact, enhance local production, and advance food security objectives in line with the Oman Vision 2040.

Hanan bint Said al Sulaimi, Executive Director, AFDF, said that the Fund has financed around 64 development projects across Oman over the past five years, with total funding exceeding RO 10.6 million. She explained that agricultural projects accounted for approximately RO 6.5 million of this total, followed by the fisheries sector with RO 2.2 million and the livestock sector with around RO 1.2 million. The water resources sector received about RO 312,000, while projects related to food safety and quality amounted to RO 285,000.

Al Sulaimi noted that recent years have witnessed the financing of a wide range of development initiatives aimed at strengthening food security. These include projects to boost local production, expand aquaculture, improve value chains and marketing and promote innovation and sustainability. Among the funded initiatives are model grape farms in Oman, the localisation of turmeric cultivation in Dhofar, the propagation of economically important fruit varieties, enhancing the added value of Omani roses in Al Jabal Al Akhdar, improving animal housing for rural women, and developing fresh dairy products in Dhofar.



Among the funded initiatives are strengthening the sustainability of abalone fisheries and developing brown mussel farming, among others.

Other projects include strengthening the sustainability of abalone fisheries, brown mussel farming, technical pilot research on the LMD digital system, and the evaluation of plastic components used in food-contact packaging materials. She added that the Fund's financing objectives directly support key pillars of Oman Vision 2040, particularly labour market development, economic diversification, financial sustainability, environmental protection, natural resource management and enhanced governance, while ensuring long-term developmental impact. Al Sulaimi highlighted the strategic partnership between the AFDF and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, describing it as an integrated effort to develop agricultural and fisheries wealth, water resources, and food safety and quality in support of national food security goals.

She further explained that project financing is based on carefully defined criteria to ensure quality and sustainability.

These include alignment with the Fund's 2040 strategy, revenue generation

to strengthen financial sustainability, partnerships with public and private sector entities, direct developmental impact on beneficiaries, job creation for citizens, human capacity building, broad geographic reach across governorates, and adherence to environmental and economic sustainability principles.

The Executive Director said that the Fund's 2040 strategy focuses on preserving and efficiently utilising natural agricultural, livestock and fisheries resources, increasing sectoral contributions to food security and GDP, transferring and localising modern and innovative technologies, raising beneficiaries' income levels, building human capacities, and creating investment opportunities.

She added that during 2026, the Fund will continue implementing its work plan by financing projects in agriculture, fisheries, water resources and food safety across various governorates to improve production efficiency, develop value-added chains, and promote innovation.

These efforts aim to enhance national economic competitiveness and reduce dependence on food imports.

— ONA

Dhahirah Tourism Festival draws 420,000 visitors

THE 3rd edition of the Al Dhahirah Tourism Festival concluded on February 6, after a month of diverse activities and programmes, drawing strong public turnout and active participation from various segments of the community. The festival ran from January 8 to February 6.

The closing ceremony was held under the auspices of Tahir bin Mabkhout al Junaibi, Governor of Al Dhahirah, in the presence of Ibrahim bin Saad bin Bishan, Ambassador of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Their Excellencies the Walis, members of the Majlis Ash'shura and Municipal Council, as well as representatives of government and private entities. The ceremony also honoured supporting institutions and partners who contributed to the festival's success and its wider community impact.

The festival delivered significant developmental and economic outcomes, benefiting more than 200 job-seekers, supporting over 30 SMEs, and assisting around 300 productive families. These achievements highlight the festival's role in empowering national talent, promoting entrepreneurship, and strengthening local production.

Additionally, the event contributed to revitalising the tourism sector and attracting



visitors from within and outside Oman, boosting hotel occupancy, and driving demand for markets, restaurants, and entertainment facilities. It also showcased Al Dhahirah Governorate's tourism and investment potential.

The festival drew approximately 420,000 visitors, while digital engagement across social media platforms exceeded 23 million views, underscoring its wide media reach and reinforcing its status as a key cultural and tourism event in the Governorate.

Al Madina Insurance Company SAOG (Al Madina Takaful) voted winner of Oman's Most Trusted Brand Awards 2025 in the Insurance Category



Al Madina Takaful, one of the Sultanate's leading insurance providers, has been recognised as the winner in the Insurance category at the 9th edition of Oman's Most Trusted Brand Awards 2025 (OMTB). The accolades were presented during a gala ceremony held at the Hotel Kempinski Muscat in January 2026.

Hosted by Apex Media, the publishers of Muscat Daily, the awards are widely regarded as a benchmark for consumer confidence in the country. Guest of Honour Pankaj Khimji, Advisor for Foreign Trade and International Cooperation, presented the awards to the winning brands. This year's edition saw over one million consumer votes cast across 53 categories, selecting winners from a pool of approximately 750 participating companies.

For Al Madina Takaful, the award serves as a significant validation of its relationship with the customers and all other stakeholders.

Speaking on the achievement, Mr. Usama Al Barwani, Chief Executive Officer, highlighted the fundamental role of trust in the insurance sector. "Trust is the absolute currency of our industry, and to be voted the most trusted brand by the public is the highest honour we could receive," said Al Barwani. "This award validates our enduring promise to stand by our policyholders when it matters most. It is about financial protection and about the deep confidence our customers place in us to safeguard their futures."

Mr. Shakaib Mahmood, Deputy CEO, commented while receiving the award that "Most trusted brand is built on integrity in every policy, clarity in every promise, compassion in every claim and

reliability in every moment of customer need. Trust grows when customers feel protected, understood and respected. AMI adheres to these attributes by not only ethical governance but transparent policy terms. We prioritize quick and compassionate claim settlement. Our Company has settled the single largest claim in the history of Oman, which was around USD 250 Million, within few weeks of the claim. We opened special units in Barka to settle cyclone Shaheen claims on the spot. We are rated best in all attributes of claim services by an international Reinsurance Broker for last three consecutive years. We pay dividend to our shareholders for last 10 years and maintain a healthy solvency ratio. We build long term relationship over short term gains- earning trust through consistent service and care"

Mr. Aneesh Varghese, Head of Operations, emphasized that operational excellence is the cornerstone of customer confidence. He stated, "Customer trust is built on a foundation of seamless service and consistent delivery. This recognition reaffirms that our operational strategies are aligned with the evolving needs of the market, enabling us to ensure that our clients feel valued, heard, and secure at every stage of their journey with us."

This achievement adds to a growing list of accolades for the company, which was also named Insurance Company of the Year at the Oman Leadership Awards 2025. The victory at OMTB reinforces Al Madina Takaful's position as a preferred and pioneering provider, dedicated to driving service excellence within the region.

SPOTLIGHT



WINTER BLOOM BOOSTS VISITORS



The ministry is studying the feasibility of a cable car or alternative transport system to ease congestion during peak seasons, in coordination with the ROP'

DR
AL MUATASIM
BIN NASSER
AL HILALI,
Director, Heritage
& Tourism Dept



WAKAN VILLAGE in the Wilayat of Nakhal, Al Batinah South Governorate, welcomed 39,976 visitors in 2025, marking a steady rise from 36,759 visitors in 2024 and 35,302 in 2023. The increase reflects the village's growing reputation as a distinctive mountain tourism destination, attracting visitors from within the Sultanate of Oman and abroad. Known for its terraced farms, ancient mountain trails and cool climate, Wakan offers a unique blend of eco-tourism, adventure and heritage experiences. Dr Al Muatasim bin Nasser al Hilali, Director of the Heritage and Tourism Department in Al Batinah South Governorate, said the growth in visitor numbers represents a qualitative leap driven largely by favourable winter weather and the village's seasonal natural spectacles. He noted that from late January to February, apricot and plum trees burst into bloom, covering the village in shades of white and pink – a rare scene often compared to Japan's cherry blossom season. The bloom attracts photographers,

hikers and nature enthusiasts seeking cooler temperatures at an elevation of approximately 2,000 metres above sea level. The grape harvest season and the popularity of mountain hiking – particularly the 700-step ascent to the village summit – further contribute to visitor flows, especially during weekends and public holidays. Dr Al Hilali added that the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism is working to enhance infrastructure, including securing mountain pathways with guardrails and rest areas, expanding parking facilities and encouraging residents to convert traditional homes into guesthouses and heritage lodges. "The ministry is studying the feasibility of a cable car or alternative transport system to ease congestion during peak seasons, in coordination with the ROP," he said. Wakan Village remains one of Al Batinah South's most prominent high-altitude destinations, distinguished by its temperate climate and diversified agricultural produce, including apricots, pomegranates, plums, walnuts and grapes. — ONA

SHORT TAKES



Dhofar branch of the Oman Cancer Association celebrated Cancer Day.

OMAN CANCER ASSOCIATION LAUNCHES SUPPORT FORUM IN DHOFAR

SALALAH: The Oman Cancer Association, Dhofar branch, organised the first edition of the ‘Recreational and Sports Forum for Cancer Patients’ at the Sultan Qaboos Youth Complex for Culture and Entertainment in Salalah, coinciding with World Cancer Day.

Zain Al Abidin bin Ali al Ajili, overseeing the association’s president, said the forum aims to raise awareness and provide psychological and moral support to cancer patients and their families. He highlighted the importance of physical activity as part of treatment and said the event fosters an interactive atmosphere that strengthens family integration and mutual support.

The association’s mission extends beyond awareness to provide psychological, social and moral support. The programmes are designed to improve patients’ quality of life and promote early detection through health and awareness initiatives

Dhofar branch, noted that the association’s mission extends beyond awareness to provide psychological, social and moral support. She emphasised programmes designed to improve patients’ quality of life and promote early detection through health and awareness initiatives.

The forum featured recreational and sports activities for patients, alongside sections dedicated to the Dhofar branch, private health institutions, and family and child support.

The event concluded with Eng Mohammed bin Autfit al Maashani, CEO of Corporate Affairs at Salalah Port, honouring entities and individuals who contributed to the success of the association’s initiatives. — ONA

UTAS RUSTAQ SIGNS MOU TO STRENGTHEN PROFESSIONAL TRAINING

AL RUSTAQ: The University of Technology and Applied Sciences (UTAS) – College of Education in Al Rustaq – signed a memorandum of cooperation with the Green Line Training Institute, reinforcing collaboration between the academic and vocational training sectors to qualify specialised national cadres.

The agreement aims to implement a package of professional training programmes targeting future teachers, university employees and members of the local community.

The memorandum establishes



The agreement will implement a package of professional training programmes.

a collaborative framework to provide students and trainees with accredited industrial professional

licences issued by government and private-sector entities. It also includes the implementation of Oman Energy Association (OPAL) programmes to enhance occupational health and safety (HSE) standards and technical competencies.

The cooperation also includes the launch of a Professional Diploma in Mechanical Engineering, offered by the institute as an applied programme designed to strengthen technical capabilities and link educational outcomes with modern

mechanical applications.

Dr Walid bin Zaher al Shaqsi, Head of the Support and Sponsorship Team, said the cooperation focuses on delivering quality professional qualification programmes in operation, maintenance and industrial safety.

The memorandum was signed on behalf of UTAS Rustaq by Dr Sarah bint Mohammed al Bahlani, Dean of the College, while Mohammed bin Salem al Rashdi, Executive Director of the Green Line Training Institute, signed on behalf of the institute. — ONA

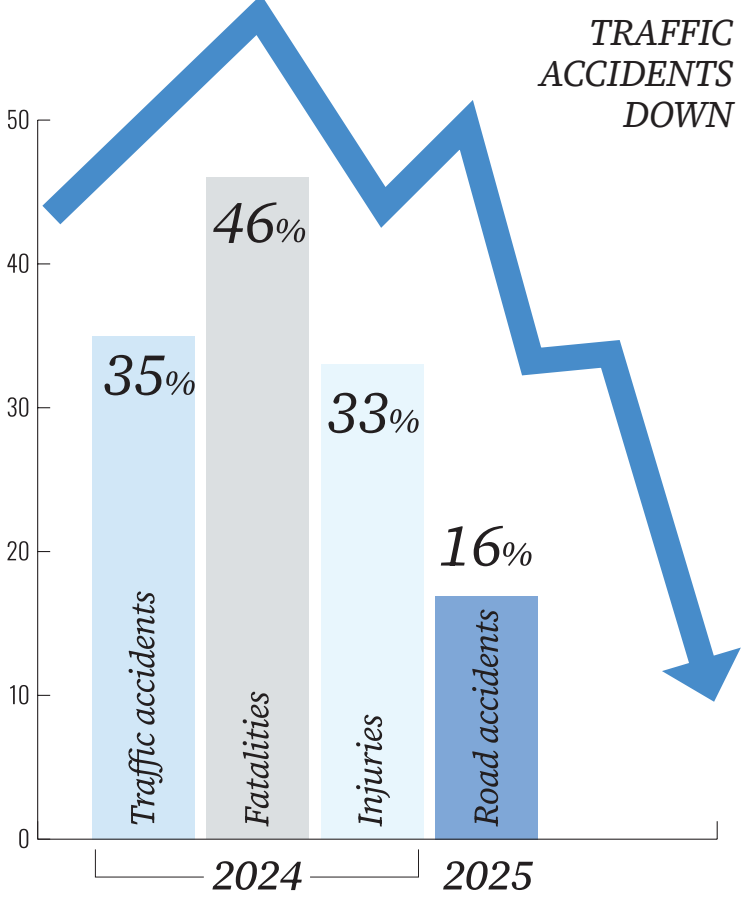
Scholar says Ramadhan promotes safety, discipline

KABEER YOUSEF
MUSCAT, FEB 7

THE holy month of Ramadhan, expected to arrive in the third week of February, teaches humanity important lessons in safety, discipline, compassion and responsibility, according to scholars.

Speaking to *Oman Observer*, Dr Neelesh Songani, CFIOSH, a distinguished HSE leader with over 28 years of experience across the Middle East, India and Africa, said the foundation of Ramadhan is disciplined self-restraint: abstaining from food, drink, and harmful impulses from fajr to maghrib (morning to evening). This intentional control builds resilience, prioritising long-term well-being over fleeting desires.

“For everyday Omanis, this discipline directly supports safer choices,” Dr Songani said. “At home, it means checking electrical appliances before Iftar, securing children from hazards, and avoiding risky home repairs in haste. In workplaces — whether offices, construction sites, or oil and gas facilities — it encourages proper risk checks, use of personal protective equipment, and resisting shortcuts. On Oman’s roads, it translates to observing speed limits, avoiding phone use while driving,



During the first 10 days of Ramadhan 2024, traffic accidents fell by 35 per cent, fatalities by 46 per cent, and injuries by 33 per cent

and planning journeys to prevent fatigue-related risks.”

Royal Oman Police (ROP) data illustrate the impact. During the first 10 days of Ramadhan 2024, traffic accidents fell by 35 per cent, fatalities by 46 per cent, and injuries by 33 per cent compared with the previous year.

In March 2025, aligning with Ramadhan, overall road accidents declined 16 per cent year-on-year, demonstrating how the spiritual discipline of fasting promotes caution and restraint.

“Fasting cultivates acute mindfulness, sharpening awareness of physical limits, surroundings, and potential dangers,” Dr Songani explained. “This presence turns ordinary moments into opportunities for thoughtful action.”

Ramadhan’s values also foster proactive vigilance, helping prevent accidents before they occur and encouraging communities to look out for one another. “The month emphasises mercy over judgement. Struggles with fasting are met with guidance and empathy, encouraging honesty and improvement without fear,” he added.

In daily life, this “no-blame” approach strengthens safety culture. At home, a minor accident becomes a learning moment; at work, near-misses trigger constructive reviews rather than finger-pointing; on roads, compassion builds trust through education rather than penalties.

“These practices foster psychological safety, empowering people to address issues early and strengthen overall protection,” Dr Songani said.

IDF Oman showcases innovation, art

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, FEB 7

The 12th edition of the Interior Design and Furnishing Expo (IDF Oman) concluded at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre, reaffirming its status as Oman’s leading platform for design, décor and lifestyle innovation.

The three-day exhibition brought together global trends and local creativity, attracting design professionals, architects, developers and homeowners under one roof.

The event was inaugurated by HH Sayyid Faisal bin Turki al Said, who highlighted the exhibition’s importance as a catalyst for economic synergy and the advancement of Oman’s creative industries.

The 2026 edition featured more than 200 exhibitors from over 10 countries and drew an estimated 19,000



Over 15 artists displayed creative artistry at IDF Oman Expo.

registered visitors. While smart home technologies and luxury furnishings dominated the show floor, a key highlight this year was the Creative Art Space, where fine art intersected with functional interior design.

Sponsored by Hempel Paints, the Creative Art Space showcased the works of more than 15 established and emerging artists, demonstrating how art can transform interiors into expressive, personalised environments.

Artist-cum-Curator Rema Sivakumar presented abstract and contemporary works inspired by nature and human emotion.

Rachel Eapen, acclaimed

for her fine art and food photography who recently showcased at Art Miami Week, presented conceptual pieces that used light and shadow to redefine wall décor.

Artist Hetal drew attention with vibrant abstract works rich in colour and texture, while Mehran impressed visitors with intricate mirror art that combined traditional craftsmanship with a sense of luxury and spatial depth.

Other participating artists included M-Heart, artists Nishant, Mina, Nirvana Arts, Mona Art, Afra Al Nabi, Zaytoona, Handcrafted Hues Art and Moosa Art, adding diversity to the artistic showcase.

TENDER NOTICE

وزارة الزراعة والسمكية وموارد المياه
Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources Announces the following Tender: -

Tender No.	Tender Title	Tender Document Sales Start Date	Tender Document Sales End Date	Bid Submission Closing	Companies that are Eligible to Participate	Tender Document Fee (R.O)
65/2026/MAFWR/HQ- 6	Maintenance of protection wall at Saad village, Madha Wilayat, Musandam Governorate	Tuesday 3/2/2026	Monday 23/2/2026	Sunday 15/3/2026	Specialized SMEs companies registered with Fourth grades	(10/-) Omani riyals for SMEs

- Interested Companies registered with The General Secretariat of the Tender Board (in the above mentioned Grade) may obtain Tender documents from the E-Tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>.
- The value of the document will be paid & submitted on line on given website.
- The Tenderer should attach Bid Commitment Declaration for local companies.
- All correspondence pertaining to the tender inquiry must be online at e-tendering System.
- All correspondence pertaining to the e-tendering System technical support must be directed to the following helpdesk email address and phone number: [+968 24402244](mailto:etenderhd@pttc.gov.om) or etenderhd@pttc.gov.om.

TENDERS COMMITTEE
Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources

WORLD

SHORT TAKES



Japan's PM Sanae Takaichi delivers a campaign speech ahead of the House of Representatives election, in Tokyo. — AFP

JAPAN’S TAKAICHI TALKS TOUGH ON IMMIGRATION

TOKYO: Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi pledged to make Japan “more prosperous and safer”, including through tougher immigration screening, in a final appeal to voters on the eve of snap elections. Opinion polls suggest that Takaichi’s ruling bloc, led by the Liberal Democratic Party, could romp home in Sunday’s vote and secure a two-thirds majority in the powerful lower house.

“Pushing the button for growth is the Takaichi cabinet’s job. Japan will become more and more prosperous and safer,” Takaichi, 64, told a campaign rally attended by thousands in Tokyo. “This is the year in which we want to turn the anxieties people feel about their lives today and about the future into hope,” she said.

The arch-conservative Takaichi became Japan’s fifth premier in as many years in October. Immigration screening “has already become a little stricter, so that terrorists, and also industrial spies, cannot enter easily,” Takaichi said on Saturday. “We must properly examine whether (foreigners) are paying taxes, whether they are paying their health insurance premiums,” Takaichi said. — AFP

SPAIN, PORTUGAL BRACE FOR STORM AFTER FLOODS



Emergency personnel get ready to carry out a total evacuation of the town of Grazalema. — AFP

RONDA: Spain and Portugal on Saturday braced for another storm heading for the Iberian peninsula, just days after the floods caused by Storm Leonardo proved fatal in both countries. The latest depression, christened Storm Marta, has prompted the deployment of more than 26,500 rescuers in Portugal, where the foul weather has led three municipalities to postpone Sunday’s presidential vote till next week.

Both countries have issued warnings over the potential fresh floods, after inundations blocked hundreds of roads, disrupted trains and forced thousands to evacuate from the rising waters. In Spain, much of the country’s south, particularly Andalusia, was placed on orange alert on Saturday, as was the north-west facing heavy rain and violent storms, said national meteorological agency Aemet.

Portugal was already reeling from the effects of Storm Kristin injured hundreds and left tens of thousands without power, when Leonardo hit earlier this week. Portugal’s National Meteorological Institute (IPMA) has placed the entire coastline on orange alert. — AFP

GROUND COLLAPSE

Indonesia landslide death toll rises to 74



The death toll from a landslide in Indonesia has climbed to 74, authorities said, extending the search for missing people and bodies nearly two weeks since it began. Thousands of rescuers, supported by police, military and volunteers, have been digging through mud and debris manually and using heavy equipment. “There are still a number of residents on the missing persons list who have not yet been found,” said the agency’s head Ade Dian Permana. — AFP

HAITI ENTERS POLITICAL LIMBO AS TRANSITION GOVT’S MANDATE ENDS

PORT-AU-PRINCE: Haiti entered political limbo on Saturday as the mandate of the Caribbean nation’s transitional governing council, a body intended to curb a bloody gang conflict and bring about long-delayed elections, ended with no succession plan in place. The nine-member Transitional Presidential Council (CPT, by its French initials) was installed in April 2024 after Prime Minister Ariel Henry resigned. It has been led by a rotating roster of council presidents.

However, its term has been marked by a deterioration in

security, corruption accusations and political infighting. In late January, several members of the CPT said they were seeking to oust Prime Minister Alix Didier Fils-Aime, even as the U.S. threatened serious consequences should they do so and backed Fils-Aime staying on after February 7.

The US also said the CPT must leave power and has imposed sanctions on five council members. “As the Transitional Presidential Council’s mandate ends on February 7, we support Prime Minister Fils-Aime’s leadership in building a strong, prosperous and

free Haiti,” the US embassy in Haiti said on Wednesday. A day earlier, three US warships arrived in the Bay of Port-au-Prince. The embassy said their presence “reflects the United States unwavering commitment to Haiti’s security, stability, and brighter future.”

Although there is broad agreement between Haiti’s leaders that the CPT should step down, a consensus has yet to emerge over what structure should replace it. Ex-lawmaker Antoine Rodon Bien-Aime said there had been many proposals but an agreed solution has yet to emerge. — Reuters

US pressing Ukraine and Russia to end war by June

THE United States wants Ukraine and Russia to end their nearly four-year war by June, and has offered to host talks between the two sides in Florida next week, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said. US-led efforts to end Europe’s deadliest conflict since World War II have stepped up a gear in recent weeks, but Moscow and Kyiv remain at odds over the key issue of territory. Russia, which occupies around 20 per cent of its neighbour, is pushing for full control of Ukraine’s eastern Donetsk region as part of any deal and has threatened to take it by force if talks fail. But Ukraine says ceding ground will embolden Moscow and so it will not sign an agreement that fails to deter Russia from invading again. “The United States has proposed for the first time that the two negotiating teams — Ukraine and Russia — meet in the United States, probably in Miami, in a week’s time,” Zelensky told reporters in comments made public early on Saturday. “They say that they want to do everything by June,” he added. The US has mediated two rounds of negotiations between the two sides in Abu Dhabi since January, brokering a major prisoner exchange but failing to reach a breakthrough on territory. Both Moscow and Kyiv said talks have been difficult.

Zelensky has repeatedly expressed frustration that his country is being asked to make disproportionate compromises compared to Russia.



Volunteers remove debris at a compound of an animal shelter, in Zaporizhzhia, Ukraine. — Reuters

“The United States has proposed for the first time that the two negotiating teams — Ukraine and Russia — meet in the United States, probably in Miami, in a week’s time

Volodymyr Zelensky

Ukraine has proposed freezing the conflict along the current front lines. Russia has rejected this and Washington has instead pushed for Kyiv to convert the land it currently controls in the Donetsk region into a “free economic zone” where neither side has military control. “Even if we come to the creation of a free economic zone, we will need fair and reliable rules,” Zelensky said.

The two sides have also failed to reach a “common understanding” on the issue of control over the Russian-occupied Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant, Zelensky said. Russian forces seized the plant, the largest in Europe, at the start of the conflict and have held onto it since.

Ukraine will not tolerate Russia and the United States making deals about Ukraine behind its back, Zelensky added.

Throughout the negotiating progress Russia has launched waves of deadly strikes on Ukraine that have cut heating and power to millions during freezing temperatures. Kyiv says they are a war crime. The country was forced to request emergency assistance from Poland on Saturday after Russia hit the Burshtynska and Dobrotvirska power plants in western Ukraine, causing blackouts across the country, Energy Minister Denys Shmygal said. “Due to the damage caused by the enemy, emergency outages have been applied in most regions,” grid operator Ukrenergo said on Saturday. Ukraine’s nuclear power plants were forced to “reduce their generation capacity”, the energy ministry said. Russia, which denies targeting civilians, accused Ukraine on Friday of orchestrating the shooting of a top military intelligence general in Moscow, leaving him wounded. Kyiv has yet to comment. Russia attacked Ukraine in February 2022, describing it as a “special military operation” to prevent the expansion of Nato — a war aim that Kyiv has called a pretext for an illegal land grab. The conflict has resulted in a massive wave of destruction that has left entire cities in ruins and killed tens of thousands of soldiers and civilians, while forcing millions to flee their homes. — AFP

THOUSANDS GATHER AS PAKISTAN BURIES BLAST VICTIMS

ISLAMABAD: Thousands gathered on Saturday for the funerals of victims of a bombing at a mosque that killed 31 people and wounded 169 others in Pakistan’s capital. Friday’s attack, which was claimed by the IS group, was the deadliest in Islamabad since the 2008 Marriott hotel bombing. The death toll was expected to rise. Tearful mourners gathered at locations across Islamabad to bury the dead.

Officials including a senior police officer in Pakistan’s northwest said on Saturday that some of the bomber’s relatives had been arrested. The officer, who did not give his name, said the attacker was from Peshawar, the capital of the violence-racked western province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and that some of his relatives had been living in Nowshera on the road to the capital for several years.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif condemned the blast and vowed that those responsible would be found and brought to justice. Deputy Prime Minister Ishaq Dar branded it “a heinous crime against humanity and a blatant violation of Islamic principles.” — AFP

NATIONWIDE CRISIS

Cuba adopts urgent measures over energy



The Cuban government announced emergency measures to address a crippling energy crisis worsened by US sanctions. Among the new measures are the reduction of the working week in state-owned companies to four days, restrictions on fuel sales, a reduction in bus and train services and the closure of tourist establishments. School days will also be made shorter, and universities will reduce the requirement of in-person attendance. — AFP

LIVING DEMANDS

Brazil suspends dredging of Amazon river



Brazil announced the suspension of dredging operations on a major Amazon tributary, after Indigenous communities protested the work on rivers they see as vital to their way of life. The government said that it suspended the process of contracting a company for annual dredging work on the Tapajos River in the state of Pará “as a gesture of negotiation.” Protesters have demanded the cancellation of a decree signed by leftist leader Lula in August. — AFP

The New York Times

Harvard proposes capping A's to curb grade inflation



MARK ARSENAULT

The author is covering higher education for The New York Times

HARVARD undergraduates would compete for a limited number of A grades in their courses under a faculty committee proposal released Friday meant to tame grade inflation at the Ivy League school. During the last school year, about two-thirds of all undergraduate letter grades were A's. Under the new proposal, grades of A would be limited to 20 per cent of grades in a course, with an allowance of four additional A's. So, for example, a professor teaching a class of 100 students would be able to award up to 24 grades of A under the proposal, which could come to a vote by faculty this spring. There would be no limits on A-minus and lower grades.

Grades of A at Harvard are supposed to be reserved for work of "extraordinary distinction," but they have exploded to become the majority of grades awarded. In developing the proposal, the committee decided to propose returning the A to a lofty designation, as it had originally been intended, said Alisha Holland, a professor in the department of government at Harvard and a member of the committee that issued

the proposal. "We thought, 'What if we try to give meaning to the shared standards we already have around grading?'" Joshua Silverstein, a professor of law at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock, said the proposal, if approved, should effectively control inflation and make grades more meaningful.

The purpose of grades, he said, is to signal to students their level of accomplishment and subject mastery; help outside parties such as employers and graduate school admissions officers differentiate among candidates; and to help fairly disperse rewards, such as honours and merit scholarships. "I like what Harvard is doing," said Silverstein, who has studied and written about grading theory. "I think it's a very important step in the right direction" to allow grades to once again serve their intended function. If nearly every grade is an A, then grades no longer serve much purpose, he added.

Studies have found grade inflation to be a national issue that has been intensifying for decades. Harvard has been trying to make A's more rare. Its Office of Undergraduate Education released a report in October urging faculty to bring grading "back into integrity."

The new proposal would also determine rankings for honours and awards not by GPA but average percentile rank, which is a measure of how students in a course compare with one another, the proposal says. That ranking would be for Harvard's internal use and not appear on transcripts.

The encouragement seemed to have some effect: Grades of A fell to 53.4 per cent in the fall semester. Harvard's grade inflation report in October floated the notion of recognising the very best students by allowing a limited number of A+'s, a grade not used at Harvard, but that idea is not in the new proposal. The new proposal would also determine rankings for honours and awards not by GPA but average percentile rank, which is a measure of how students in a course compare with one another, the proposal says. That ranking would be for Harvard's internal use and not appear on transcripts.

Princeton University attacked grade inflation in the early 2000s, with a recommended limit on A's, which did tame inflation. The measure was unpopular with students, however, who said it increased competitiveness and stress, and discouraged cooperation. The limit was repealed a decade ago, and grade inflation returned. Silverstein said increased competitiveness for limited top grades is "a real concern," though he still believes the proposal would be valuable. The proposal will be up for discussion at town hall-style meetings on campus later this month.

In Afghanistan, a trail of hunger and death follow US aid cuts



ELIAN PELTIER

The writer is the Pakistan, Afghanistan bureau chief for The New York Times

THE US aid cuts in Afghanistan were as sudden as they were brutal. Even after the US withdrawal and the end of the war in 2021, the United States continued pouring money into Afghanistan. From the 2021 Taliban takeover until last year, Washington had provided nearly \$1 billion annually — over a third of all aid flowing into one of the world's poorest countries. That funding has all but evaporated with the dismantling of the US Agency for International Development.

The agency's programmes once helped clear landscapes scarred by war and mines, diversify crops and keep millions from hunger. Four million children are now at risk of dying from malnutrition, according to the World Food Program, the most in a quarter-century. "The US withdrawal exacerbated an already bad situation," said Sherine Ibrahim, a former head of the Afghanistan office of the International Rescue Committee, which received three-quarters of its funding from the US government. "No other donor has stepped in and no one will in those proportions."

Nearly 450 health centres closed because of the cuts, including a tiny white building in the drought-stricken village of Nalej, where Malika Ghullami safely gave birth to two children in past years and was pregnant again with twins last year. After the midwife and nutritionist left Nalej, however, Ghullami had to be driven on a spine-jarring dirt track to another clinic more than an hour away when she felt the first labour pains one morning this winter. "They were solving our issues," Ghullami, 34, said of the staff in the now-shuttered clinic in Nalej. "Now we're left on our own."

While funding has shrunk, needs have increased. More than 2.8 million Afghan refugees were expelled or forcibly returned from Iran and Pakistan last year and now live in communities struggling to absorb them. Two deadly earthquakes that struck the country last summer and fall left thousands homeless, often in isolated valleys.

Other international institutions, the Afghan government and private businesses have tried to fill the gap, but they are nowhere close to matching the size of American aid. The crisis has been worsened by smaller but still painful reductions in aid from European countries. "We can only provide them with cash," said Naimatullah Ulfat, a government official in the southern province of Kandahar. "The food, the clothes and other forms of assistance non-governmental organisations were providing, we can't. It's going to be very difficult."

The Trump administration has resumed sending aid to some crisis-hit countries, but not Afghanistan. A bill in the Senate would bar the State Department and US-backed

More than 2.8 million Afghan refugees were expelled or forcibly returned from Iran and Pakistan last year and now live in communities struggling to absorb them. Two deadly earthquakes that struck the country last summer and fall left thousands homeless, often in isolated valleys



Villagers live in tents in Kunar Province, Afghanistan.

international organisations from funding humanitarian programs that might benefit the Taliban, even indirectly.

The isolated province of Daikundi has lost many of its health clinics to the US aid cuts. The clinic in Nalej, surrounded by parched orchards of almond and mulberry trees, was a lifeline for 850 families. The villagers say its closure has hurt children the most. "When I was giving birth, we were losing babies," said Nik Bakht, Khawari's mother-in-law. "One would hope that younger mothers these days wouldn't face that."

Other clinics are struggling to stay open. Benazir Muhammadi, 32, a nurse at a clinic run by an Afghan non-profit, MOVE, in a remote valley of Daikundi, worked without pay for three months after US funds ran out. The clinic had to let go of its nutritionist. "Proximity health care centres are an absolute necessity," she said. "You simply cannot wait when you're about to deliver."

In 2024, the United States funded over half of Afghanistan's nutrition and agricultural programmes. Food insecurity has skyrocketed since last year's cuts. More than 17 million Afghans — 40 per cent of the population — now face acute levels of hunger, 2 million more than last year. Seven provinces face critical food insecurity, the final stage before famine, according to the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification, a group of international organisations that the United Nations and aid agencies rely on to monitor global hunger. None were at this level a year ago. "That is a 20- to 30-year impact, not a one-year budget decision," said Mohammad Mustafa Raheal, a

research fellow at Lund University in Sweden who studies humanitarian aid delivery in Afghanistan. "You can't just 'switch the aid back on' later and undo that damage."

The aid cuts have also crippled the response to natural disasters. Months after a summer earthquake killed more than 2,200 people in eastern Afghanistan, families whose homes had collapsed still live in tents battered by freezing winds — a mosaic of white dots amid destroyed villages and cornfields.

On a recent morning in Kunar province, an International Rescue Committee team of a half dozen health professionals visited Badgor, an isolated village hit by the quake. It was the last mobile team that the organisation has kept operating since the cuts, which forced it to disband 33 others. Under a large parasol blocking the winter sun, one of its members examined children who arrived with fever, chest pains and diarrhoea. Tuberculosis cases were ballooning; so was despair.

Humanitarian workers say aid cuts have hampered their ability to survey the needs of Afghanistan's population. A major concern remains the returnees from Iran and Pakistan. At the Pakistan border on a recent morning, a trickle of Afghans passed a UN sign reading, "Welcome to your sweet country." Most nonprofit offices there were closed. "The cuts hit us hardest just as returns and needs increased," said Ahmad Shah Irshad, a UN refugee agency supervisor at a sprawling transit centre with hundreds of tents and shelters near the border. "We don't know what 2026 will be made of."



SAFIULLAH PADSHAH

The writer is working as a local reporter for The New York Times in Kabul



YAQOOB AKBARY

The writer is a contributor to The New York Times Covering Afghanistan

OPINION

Why some workplace well-being programmes miss the point



DR HAMED
AL SINAWI

The writer is a senior consultant psychiatrist at SQU Hospital

I recently attended a well-being at work event in Muscat where experts from around the globe presented their initiatives in this field. The discussion was fascinating, and I was happy to see programmes applied here in Oman.

Over the past few years, workplace well-being has become a booming industry. By 2026, global spending on employee wellness is expected to exceed \$94 billion.

Mindfulness apps, resilience workshops and digital therapy platforms are now available in many organisations. Yet despite this investment, burnout, disengagement and psychological distress continue to rise. This raises the question: why aren't we seeing better mental health at work?

One explanation lies in the fact that some well-being initiatives focus on the individual while ignoring the real sources of distress. Telling exhausted employees to 'practice self-care' while maintaining excessive workloads, rigid schedules, or unclear expectations is not support; it is contradiction.

Research shows that when people are encouraged to look after themselves without any meaningful change in their working conditions, they are more likely to experience frustration rather than gratitude.

Employees feel blamed for struggling in systems that are structurally stressful. In

some studies, workers who were offered well-being tools without organisational change reported feeling more disengaged and even more distressed than those who received no intervention at all.

In Oman, conversations about employee well-being have become more visible in recent years within some government institutions and large private companies.

While awareness has increased, many employees still experience high workloads, performance pressure and limited flexibility. Well-being initiatives are sometimes introduced alongside these pressures, rather than as a response to them, which can lead to skepticism and low engagement.

In a culture that values commitment and endurance, employees may also hesitate to openly use mental health resources unless they feel genuinely supported by leadership.

Another problem is uptake. Many organisations heavily rely on Employee Assistance Programmes or well-being apps, yet usage rates remain low due to stigma, lack of trust and time pressure.

Even when employees do engage, the evidence for effectiveness is limited. Large studies have shown that mindfulness training, resilience workshops and well-being apps often have minimal impact on long-term mental health outcomes.

When organisations commit to meaningful structural change, well-being stops being a slogan and starts becoming a reality'

One reason is selection bias: those who are already coping relatively well are more likely to participate, while those who are struggling most are least able to engage.

So, how can organisations genuinely support their employees?

When I conduct well-being workshops, participants consistently rank work-life balance, flexibility and manageable workloads as top priorities. Experiments with four-day work weeks, flexible scheduling and results-based work environments have shown promising effects not only on well-being but also on productivity and retention. When people are given more control over when and how they work, stress decreases and engagement improves.

Many leaders feel ill-equipped to talk about mental health or respond to distress. Investing in leadership, psychological literacy and people-management skills can significantly reduce turnover and improve morale.

In my opinion, true workplace well-being is not about asking individuals to cope better with unhealthy systems.

It is about designing healthier systems where people can thrive.

When organisations commit to meaningful structural change, well-being stops being a slogan and starts becoming a reality.

FROM RURAL KENYA TO THE GLOBAL ROBOTICS STAGE

BRIAN GITONGA

Jeremiah Kithinji had never touched a computer before he finished high school. A decade later, he is teaching robotics and even took a team of rural Kenyans to the World Robotics Olympiad in Singapore.

In a classroom in Laikipia county - a sparsely populated grasslands region of northern Kenya known for its rhinos and cheetahs - students are busy snapping together wheels, motors and sensors to assemble a robot.

Guiding them is Kithinji, 27, who runs a string of robotics clubs in the area that have taken some of his students far beyond the rural landscapes outside.

In November, he took a team of three to Singapore for the Olympiad, where he also served as the competition's first Kenyan judge. They presented a simulated space mission with a robot that could launch a model satellite and collect space debris.

Singapore was an eye-opening experience for Kithinji, who was educated in a modest rural school without access to computers.

"I felt this country is so advanced. Interacting with the people showed me how much they care about their nation, and it made me think about how I can instil the same mindset in my students," he said. Kenya has pushed science and engineering in its latest curriculum, but lacks the resources for robotics training.

The clubs in Laikipia, which reach around 200 students, are funded by a US nonprofit, Science in a Suitcase, which helped train Kithinji and funded the trip to Singapore.

They have inspired Natalia Wangari, 14. "In the future, when I become a neurosurgeon, I won't have to perform every surgery myself. I can build a robot that acts as a doctor. I'll just need to code it, and it will do the surgery itself," she said.

Kithinji hopes robotics can provide solutions to some of Kenya's specific challenges.

He previously coached a team at the African Olympiad in South Africa in 2024, where they designed agricultural robots that can operate farming tools and irrigate fields, and sees particular benefits for rural hospitals - assisting in surgeries and delivering medication.

He dreams of more support and collaborators to expand his robotics programme across the country.

For now, his students are focused on winning a place at the next Olympiad, in Puerto Rico, and they are brainstorming ideas for this year's theme: robots meet culture.

— AFP

Rediscovering your sense of purpose in retirement

MANY people look forward to retirement as a reward for decades of hard work, imagining a life free from pressure, deadlines and responsibility.

Whether you are already retired, approaching it, or simply thinking about the future, this expectation is normal. Yet the reality of retirement often proves far more complex.

When work ends, it is not only a pay cheque that disappears. Work provides structure, routine, social contact and a sense of identity.

For many of us, it answers the simple question, "What do you do?" When that answer vanishes, it can leave a surprising sense of emptiness.

I experienced this myself when I retired from running schools in Cambridge. At first, retirement felt like an enormous relief. The constant demands, the responsibility for staff and students, and the pressure of daily decision-making were suddenly gone.

For a brief period, the absence of stress felt liberating. That feeling did not last. Within a few weeks, an uncomfortable question emerged: Who was I now? Without my role, my days lacked shape and direction. The freedom I had long anticipated began to feel unsettling rather than satisfying. This loss of professional identity can quietly undermine confidence and self-esteem.

When recognition, feedback and purpose disappear overnight, it is easy to feel diminished or invisible. These feelings are not unusual.

Many retirees struggle with restlessness, depression and a sense of isolation, particularly when social contact decreases at the same time as work ends. Without a reason to



KARIM
EASTERBROOK

The writer is a Former Cambridge School Principal and Author

Retirement requires preparation that goes far beyond financial planning, and psychological readiness matters just as much



get up at a certain time or a clear sense of being needed, time drags. Yet these challenges are rarely discussed openly, which can make them feel personal rather than shared.

Like many people, I tried to deal with this by staying busy. I took up golf, believing this was what retirement was supposed to look like. For a while, it provided routine and distraction, but it soon lost its appeal. I then turned to business, developing properties in the UK and overseas, followed by running a short-let apartment business.

These ventures were stimulating at first and gave me something to focus on, but they did not fill the deeper gap left by my former career.

I missed intellectual engagement, working with academics and being part of an educational community. Even when these projects were successful, they felt curiously empty.

Over time, I came to understand that activity alone does not create meaning. Retirement often involves a long period of trial and error, during which confidence rises and falls and motivation can be hard to sustain.

It was only later, almost by chance, that I returned to reading

more widely. Reading led to writing, first books and eventually articles, including my work for the Oman Observer.

Writing provided intellectual challenge and, most importantly, a renewed sense of purpose. It gave structure to my days and a reason to stay engaged with the world. Even so, this transition did not happen quickly. It took years to discover a direction that genuinely replaced what I had lost.

In retrospect, the lesson is clear. Retirement requires preparation that goes far beyond financial planning. Psychological readiness matters just as much.

Thinking in advance about how you will find meaning, structure and identity in retirement can make a profound difference. Developing interests, being creative and imagining who you want to be can help protect self-esteem and wellbeing. Freedom is not enough. What sustains us is purpose. Finding it after a long career may be one of the greatest challenges but it can also open new doors of opportunity.

I now realise that a fulfilling life exists beyond the pressures and routines of full-time work and I don't regret my decision to retire early.

Milquetoast, and the man who would be king



RAY PETERSEN

The writer is a media consultant

HOW is it that a nation that so wants to be everybody’s friend, loved and admired by all, can be so fickle, so dismissive, so selfish, so careless, and so... brutal?

In the same way that personal relationships sour quickly, the same is true of international relationships, and the United States of America is currently making an art form out of ‘how to lose friends and alienate people,’ and we, all of us, should have seen them on the horizon, however, blinded by our own self-interests we didn’t see these betrayals coming.

We have seen the wholesale global trade tariffs inflicted by the Americans as indiscriminately towards its ‘friends’ as its ‘foes.’ Yet the question whether we, its friends, deserved that is itself brought into question by our muted responses. America has ‘yanked the rug out from under all of us’. This is the geo-political ‘trade chaos theory,’ that we never thought could happen because of the genuine implications for so many of the smaller and less affluent nations. The poverty-stricken among us have no chance!

The world’s leaders have maintained a stifled indignation, with facile responses that label them as ‘milquetoast,’ after the HT Webster comic character of a century ago,

Caspar Milquetoast, who refused to engage in any discussion that had any chance of becoming controversial, incredibly weak, timid and insipid. How can they so readily ignore the needs, let alone the opinions, of their people? It is symbolic of appalling arrogance!

Last month we saw the United States intervention in Venezuela, tearing up the international law that had established legal perspectives within which nations are both protected from others and accountable for their own violations of justice in, and abuse of, human rights, employment law, war crimes, and crimes against humanity, ostensibly ensuring justice for all. That has all gone out the window, as the world has seen, ‘If they can do it – so can we!’

And now, echoing similar themes, we see threats against Iran, where the ‘hawks’ of the American military simply can’t wait to bring peace, through war, to a people clearly unhappy with their lot, but lying in a bed of their own making. The Iranians have the leadership they wanted, the leadership they protested for, the leadership they fought for, and have exercised little else for the West than hatred... yet now America is making noises about either saving them from anarchy or bombing them into submission.

We have seen the wholesale global trade tariffs inflicted by the Americans as indiscriminately towards its ‘friends’ as its ‘foes’

Then there is Greenland! A tiny nation under the ‘protection’ of Denmark, its population barely that of a small Mid-West American town, yet, as I have recently researched, has been actively solicited by America since 1867, and subsequently in 1910, 1946, 1948, 1951, 1952, 1955, 2019, 2025, and now in 2026. Numerous times, America has asked Denmark to ‘put a price tag’ on the strategic North Atlantic island, but been rejected each time, and with the most recent referendum also rejecting American ‘sovereignty,’ it could prove a hostile takeover target.

I’m told that President Trump seeks the accession of Greenland as a permanent monument to his presidency, as so many earlier Presidents have sought the same real estate and failed. I guess it’s not enough that the latest addition to the White House is to be named after him in perpetuity, the Donald Trump Banquet Hall?

On the other hand, maybe it’s entirely fitting... Because amidst his bluster and threats, he is making a meal of this presidency. His bigotry, misogyny, narcissism and insecurity, making him an object of ridicule and fear, a combustible combination, and lacking respect for anyone or anything.

GREENLAND VILLAGERS FOCUS ON ‘NORMAL LIFE’

NIOUCHA ZAKAVATI

Proudly showing off photographs on her tablet of her grandson’s first hunt, Dorthe Olsen refuses to let the turmoil sparked by US President Donald Trump take over her life in a small hamlet nestled deep in a Greenland fjord.

Sarfannguit, founded in 1843, is located 36 km east of Sisimiut, Greenland’s second-biggest town, and is accessible by boat in summer and snowmobile or dogsled in winter if the ice freezes. The settlement has just under 100 residents, most of whom live off from hunting and fishing. On this February day, only the wind broke the deafening silence, whipping across the scattering of small colourful houses.

Most of them looked empty. At the end of a gravel road, a few children played outdoors, rosy-cheeked in the bitter cold, one wearing a Spiderman woolly hat.

“Everything is very calm here in Sarfannguit,” said Olsen, a 49-year-old teacher, welcoming AFP into her home for coffee and traditional homemade pastries and cakes.

In the background, a giant flat screen showed a football match from England’s Premier League. Olsen said of the tears of pride she shed when her grandson killed his first caribou at age 11, preferring to talk about her family than about Trump. The US president has repeatedly threatened to seize the mineral-rich island, an autonomous territory of Denmark, alleging that Copenhagen is not doing enough to protect it from Russia and China. He nevertheless climbed down last month and agreed to negotiations.

Greenland’s health and disability minister, Anna Wangenheim, recently advised Greenlanders to spend time with their families and focus on their traditions, as a means of coping with the psychological stress caused by Trump’s persistent threats. The US leader’s rhetoric “has impacted a lot of people’s emotions during many weeks”, Wangenheim said in Nuuk.

Olsen insisted that the geopolitical crisis - pitting Nato allies against each other in what is the military alliance’s deepest crisis in years - “doesn’t really matter”.

“I know that Greenlanders can survive this,” she said. Is she not worried about what would happen to her and her neighbours if the worst were to happen - a US invasion - especially given her settlement’s remote location?

“Of course I worry about those who live in the settlements,” she said. “If there’s going to be a war and you are on a settlement, of course you feel powerless about that.”

The only thing to do is go on living as normally as possible, she said, displaying Greenland’s spirit of resilience. That’s the message she tries to give her students, who get most of their news from TikTok.

“We tell them to just live the normal life that we live in the settlement and tell them it’s important to do that.”

The door opened. It was her husband returning from the day’s hunt, a large plastic bag in hand containing a skinned seal. — AFP

Pushed to margins, women vanish from political arena

FOR more than three decades, Bangladesh was one of the few countries in the world to be led by women, yet there are almost none on the February 12 ballots.

Despite helping to spearhead the uprising that led to this vote, women are poised to be largely excluded from the South Asian country’s political arena.

Regardless of which parties win this week, the outcome will see Bangladesh governed almost exclusively by men.

“I used to be proud that even though my country is not the most liberal, we still had two women figureheads at the top,” first-time voter Ariana Rahman, 20, said.

“Whoever won, the prime minister would be a woman.”

Women make up less than four per cent of the candidates for this election: just 76 among the 1,981 contestants vying for 300 parliamentary seats. And most of the parties put only men on their tickets.

Women’s political representation has always been limited in the conservative South Asian nation. Since independence, the highest number elected was 22 in 2018.

But from 1991 until the 2024 revolution, Bangladesh was helmed, represented abroad and politically defined by two women: Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia.

Zia died in December after leading the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) for four decades and serving three terms as premier.

Hasina, the five-time prime minister overthrown in the July 2024 uprising, is hiding in India and sentenced to death in absentia for crimes against humanity.

Many rights campaigners had hoped the revolution that ended Hasina’s rule would usher in a period of greater equality, including for women.

While the caretaker government of Nobel Peace Prize winner Muhammad Yunus set up a Women’s Affairs Reform Commission, his interim administration has also been criticised for sidelining the body and making unilateral decisions without consulting women officials.

And there has been a surge of



A Dhaka University student and first-time voter Ariana Rahman speaks during an interview. — AFP file photo



RASHEEK MUJIB

The writer is a digital investigation journalist at AFP, Dhaka, Bangladesh

open support for Islamist groups, which want to limit women’s participation in public life.

After years of being suppressed, emboldened hardliners have demanded organisers of religious commemorations and other public events remove women from the line-up, as well as calling for restrictions on activities like women’s football matches.

“Historically, women’s participation has always been low in our country, but there was an expectation for change after the uprising, which never happened,” said Mahrukh Mohiuddin, the spokesperson for women’s political rights organisation Narir Rajnoitik Odhikar Forum (Women’s Political Rights Forum).

An entrenched patriarchal mindset means women are often relegated to household duties, she added. Those who dare to speak out

often face hostility.

“Women are censored, vilified... judged for simply being part of a political party,” said uprising leader Umama Fatema. “That is the reality.”

Even the group formed by student leaders of the revolution, the National Citizen Party (NCP), is fielding just two women among its 30 candidates. “I don’t take part in any decision-making of my party, (and) the biggest and most important decisions are not taken in our presence,” said NCP member Samantha Sharmeen.

The NCP has allied with Jamaat-e-Islami, the largest Islamist party and one of 30 parties to have failed to nominate a single woman.

Jamaat’s assistant secretary-general, Ahsanul Mahboob Zubair, said society was not yet “ready and safe” for women in politics.

Nurunnesa Siddiqua of its women’s wing added: “In a religious organisation, there can’t be any women leaders, we have accepted that.”

One of the few women running in this election, Manisha Chakraborty, said women’s participation in Bangladesh’s politics has long been limited to tokenisation.

The nation of 170 million people directly elects 300 lawmakers to its parliament, while another 50 are selected on a separate women’s list.

“Lobbying, internal preference, nepotism - all play a role in making women’s participation in parliament just a formality,” she said.

Former minister Abdul Moyeen Khan said the reserved seats “were meant to help women establish a foothold”, but “the opposite happened”.

Selima Rahman, the only woman on the BNP’s standing committee, said promising women leaders often “fade away” due to a lack of party support.

And while Zia and Hasina served important symbolic roles, she pointed to how both had been elevated to the pinnacle of power through family connections.

Student voter Ariana Rahman fears a long struggle lies ahead.

“More women in this election would have made me feel better represented,” she said. “The next few years are likely to be more hostile towards women.”

SPORTS

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, FEB 7

ANTICIPATION is reaching fever pitch as Al Nahda and Oman Club will put the final touches on their preparations ahead of the highly anticipated His Majesty the Sultan's Football Cup final which is scheduled to take place on Saturday at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex. The showpiece event of the top domestic football event will be held under the auspices of His Highness Sayyid Bilarab bin Haitham al Said, Minister of State and Governor of Muscat, at the behest of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik. The final will bring together two clubs with contrasting ambitions but equal determination. Oman Club will be chasing a historic third HM Cup title, having previously lifted the coveted trophy in 1979 and 1994 while Al Nahda will be eyeing their second crown and hoping to relive the success of their memorable triumph in 2023 against Seeb at the same venue. Both clubs have gone beyond technical readiness in the build-up to the final, launching fan engagement initiatives to ensure a packed stadium and vibrant atmosphere. These efforts include distributing team jerseys and

and will be supported through a closed training camp three days ahead of the final. Squad selection will be based on current form and tactical suitability, adding that there are no major injury concerns, with minor issues being closely monitored by the medical staff. I revealed that some players were rested in recent league fixtures to ensure peak condition for the final," he said. "These matches are always decided by fine margins," al Shibli added. "Cup finals have their own calculations and one goal can change everything. Despite our league position, we are optimistic and fully focused on winning this title."

MOTIVATION
On the Al Nahda side, team manager Issa al Nuaimi confirmed that preparations are progressing smoothly. "The coaching staff used recent matches to assess player readiness and that all players are fit and motivated. The significance of the occasion is considered through stressing that cup finals are unique regardless of form or standings, and expressed hope that Al Nahda can add a second HM Cup title to their honours list," he added. Al Nahda team players arrived in Muscat recently to gear up for their match against Saudi Arabia's



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ISSA AL NUAIMI
Al Nahda team manager



The team reached an advanced level of technical and physical preparation and will be supported through a closed training camp three days ahead of the final.

ADIL AL SHIBLI
Oman Club team manager

arranging dedicated buses to transport supporters to the venue, underlining the importance of fan backing in such a decisive encounter. Al Nahda will enter the final under the guidance of newly appointed Portuguese head coach André Jasmíns, who has taken charge at a crucial stage of the season. The Buraimi-based side are currently placed fifth in the Jindal League and remain active on the continental stage, as they will prepare to face Saudi Arabia's Al Shabab in the 2025-2026 AGCFF Gulf Cup Champions League on Tuesday with a semifinal berth at stake. Their route to the HM Cup final was marked by resilience, overturning a 1-0 first-leg defeat to Seeb with a commanding 2-0 victory in the second leg at Al Buraimi Sports Complex. Oman Club, led by experienced Moroccan coach Driss El Mrabet, secured their place in the final with a composed semifinal performance against Al Nasr. A 2-0 victory in the first leg at Seeb Stadium, followed by a 1-1 draw in the return leg at Al Sadaa Stadium in Salalah, sealed their passage and highlighted their tactical discipline and defensive solidity. Speaking to *Oman Observer*, Oman Club team manager Adil al Shibli expressed confidence in his side's readiness. "The team reached an advanced level of technical and physical preparation



ANDRÉ JASMIN'S

Al Nahda
head coach



DRISS EL MRABET

Oman club
head coach

AL NAHDA AND OMAN CLUB AHEAD OF HM CUP FINAL

Al Shabab club on Tuesday. Then , the team will be in a closed camp until the final HM Cup match.

SPECTACULAR FINAL
Away from the pitch, the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth (MoCSY), in coordination with the Muscat Governorate and the Oman Football Association (OFA), is finalising comprehensive organisational and logistical arrangements. Fans can expect a visually spectacular final, featuring laser displays, fireworks and a drone show, adding a celebratory dimension to one of Oman's most cherished sporting events. The HM Cup tour began on Saturday in Muttrah city and it will be in Bausher on Sunday while it will move to Muscat on Monday. Seeb will receive the coveted cup on Tuesday and in the following day, it will be Al Amerat while the concluding destination is in Qurayat on Thursday. The tour will cover all the six wilayats of Muscat Governorate. Historically, Dhofar remained the most successful club in the competition with 11 titles, followed by Fanja with nine. Al Nasr and Ahli Sidab have each lifted the trophy five times, while Sur, Al Oruba, and Seeb have claimed four titles apiece. Al Suwaiq has won the cup three times, with Oman Club and Saham sharing two titles each. Muscat, Al Tali'ah, Al Nahda and Al Shabab have each won the coveted trophy once.

SHORT TAKES



Participants at the Omani Special Olympics

SPECIAL OLYMPICS
BADMINTON, TT
COMPETITIONS
CONCLUDE

SPORT REPORTER
MUSCAT, 7 FEB

The activities of the national “Table Tennis and Badminton” competition of the Omani Special Olympics concluded on Saturday at the Sports Complex in Suhar.

The closing ceremony events, organised by the Omani Special Olympics, were held under the auspices of HH Sayyid Faisal bin Turki al Said, with the participation of 60 male and female athletes from various governorates of Oman.

In the table tennis competition results, first category (females), Thuraya al Shaibani from Al Wafa Centre for the Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities in Bahla secured first place, followed by Sara al Buraiki from the Association of Children with Disabilities in Suhar in second place, while Ruqayyah al Maamari from Al Wafa Centre in Liwa claimed third place.

In the first category (males), Al Qasim al Badawi from Al Wafa Centre in Al Mudhaibi won first place, Abdullah al Jabri from Al Wafa Centre in Suhar finished second, and Abdullah al Ghafri from the Association of Children with Disabilities in Suhar came third.

In the second category (males), Suhaib al Rahbi from Al Wafa Centre in Ibra secured the first place, Mohammed al Maqbali from Al Wafa Centre in Suhar came second, and Zakariya al Majrafi from Al Wafa Centre in Ibri took third place.

Badminton results showed Hassan al Sinani winning first place in the first category (males) from Al Wafa Centre in Al Khabourah, followed by Muneeb al Lamki from the Intellectual Education School in second, and Saïd al Qartoubi from Al Wafa Centre in Al Khabourah in third.

In the second category (males), Mohammed al Rudaini from Al Wafa Centre in Al Khabourah claimed first place, Aasim al Ameri from Al Wafa Centre in Al Suwaiq came second, and Abdulhakim al Habsi from Al Wafa Centre in Al Mudhaibi finished third.

In the third classification category, Mishaal al Ameri from Al Wafa Centre in Al Suwaiq secured first place, Abdullah al Noubi from Al Wafa Centre in Salalah came second, and Ahmed al Barashdi from Al Wafa Centre in Al Mudhaibi took third place.

In the badminton competition for females, first category, Rayyan al Musallami from Al Wafa Centre in Nizwa achieved first place, Maryam al Siyabi from Al Wafa Centre in Bidbid came second, and Sharifa al Farsi from the Association of Children with Disabilities in Suhar finished third.

In the second category (females), Najla al Yahyai from Al Wafa Centre in Al Suwaiq claimed first place.

Shepherd’s hat-trick secures West Indies’ T20 World Cup win over Scotland

KOLKATA: Pace bowler Romario Shepherd took the first hat-trick of the 2026 T20 World Cup on Saturday to help the West Indies blow away Scotland’s tail and win by 35 runs in their Group C opener in Kolkata.

Shepherd grabbed four wickets in five balls in the 17th over to put an end to Scotland’s hopes of chasing their target of 183.

Shimron Hetmyer’s 36-ball 64 at Eden Gardens earlier propelled the West Indies to 182-5 in their 20 overs.

The Scots, who only received a call-up two weeks ago to replace Bangladesh, were threatening a famous victory at 114-3 at the end of the 13th over, with big-hitting captain Richie Berrington and Tom Bruce at the crease.

A 78-run fourth-wicket



West Indies’ Romario Shepherd celebrates after taking the hat trick wicket during the 2026 ICC Men’s T20 Cricket World Cup group stage match between Scotland and West Indies. — AFP

partnership between Berrington, who made 42, and Tom Bruce (35) had put them back in the hunt.

But strikes by Jason Holder and then Shepherd’s burst saw Scotland bowled out for 147.



Manchester United’s Bryan Mbeumo celebrates scoring their first goal with Manchester United’s Amad Diallo and Manchester United’s Kobbie Mainoo. — Reuters

Man Utd make hay after
Spurs’ Romero sees red

MANCHESTER U nited profited from Tottenham captain Cristian Romero’s red card to stretch their perfect start under Michael Carrick to four games with a 2-0 win at Old Trafford in the Premier League on Saturday.

Goals from Bryan Mbeumo and Bruno Fernandes ended an eight-game winless run against Spurs for the Red Devils, who cemented their position in the Premier League’s top four.

United close to within two points of third-placed Aston Villa and open up a five-point cushion over Liverpool in sixth.

A place in the top five is likely to secure a place in next season’s Champions League due to the strong performance of English sides in European competition.

Spurs’ hopes of qualifying for the Champions League through their league position have long since disappeared as another damaging defeat for Thomas Frank leaves Tottenham in 14th.

But there could be lasting consequences for Romero after his ill-discipline cost his side just days after a social media outburst aimed at the club’s hierarchy.

Frank said the Argentine international had been “dealt with internally” after he described Tottenham’s threadbare squad as “disgraceful” following the closure of the transfer window.

Romero’s future as skipper had already been called into question and the 27-year



Manchester United’s Bruno Fernandes celebrates scoring their second goal. — Reuters

old will now be suspended for four matches after his second red card of the season and sixth of his Spurs career.

The centre-back lunged in to catch Casemiro on the ankle on 29 minutes after playing himself into trouble just outside the Tottenham box.

United had been the better side during the opening half hour even against 11 men and made their numerical advantage count.

Mbeumo stroked into the bottom corner for his third goal in four games since Carrick took charge after a clever corner involving Fernandes and Kobbie Mainoo freed the Cameroon international at the edge of the box.

Amad Diallo and Matheus Cunha had

goals ruled out for offside as the home side dominated but had to wait until nine minutes from time to make the points safe.

Fernandes showed Romero how to lead from the front with another fine individual display. The United captain prodded in Diogo Dalot’s cross at the back post for his 200th goal or assist in 314 games for the club.

Carrick said before the game that United cannot afford to rush their choice of a new permanent manager.

But the former midfielder, who enjoyed a stellar playing career at Old Trafford, is making his case for that job as he continues overseeing United’s stunning turnaround in fortunes since the departure of Ruben Amorim last month. —AFP



Molano prevail in Colombian duel to win Tour of Oman opening stage



Juan Sebastian Molano of the UAE Team Emirates prevailed in a Colombian duel to take the opening honours of the Tour of Oman



ANUROOP ATHIPARAMBATH
@anuroop_ath

JUAN SEBASTIAN MOLANO of the UAE Team Emirates prevailed in a Colombian duel to take the opening honours of the Tour of Oman 2026 on Saturday.

The Colombian rider claimed the red jersey after edging out another Colombian Fernando Gaviria (Caja Rural-Seguros RGA) to the line in a bunch finish.

Molano emerged fastest to finish the 170.9 km Stage 1 from the Ministry of Tourism to Bimmah Sink Hole in Qurayat with a time of four hours 24 minutes and 54 seconds.

Gerben Thijssen swept up third, after Alpecin-Premier Tech delivered arguably the best lead-out but not the best finish.

Molano, 31, also led the overall points classification to take the

green jersey and gave UAE Team Emirates-XRG their seventh win of the season.

Polish rider Patryk Goszczurny, 19, of Team Visma | Lease a Bike claimed the gold jersey, while also securing the white jersey as the best young rider (Under-21).

Speaking after his victory, Molano said: “I am very happy with this win in the first stage of the Tour of Oman. It is a special victory for me and for UAE Team Emirates. The race was fast and highly competitive from the very first kilometres, but thanks to the great support of my team-mates, I was able to position myself perfectly in the final metres and secure the win.”

“Wearing the red jersey as the overall leader, along with the green jersey for the points classification, gives me a huge motivation for the coming stages. The Tour of Oman is an important race on the international cycling calendar,

TOUR OF OMAN STAGE 1 RESULTS		
(Read as rank, rider, country, team, time)		
1.	Juan Sebastian Molano (COL) – UAE Team Emirates XRG	– 04:24:54
2.	Fernando Gaviria (COL) – Caja Rural-Seguros RGA	– 04:24:54
3.	Gerben Thijssen (BEL) – Alpecin-Premier Tech	– 04:24:54
4.	Erlend Blikra (NOR) – UNO-X Mobility	– 04:24:54
5.	Amaury Capiot (BEL) – Team Jayco AlUla	– 04:24:54
6.	Rick Pluimers (NED) – Tudor Pro Cycling Team	– 04:24:54
7.	Madis Mihkels (EST) – EF Education – Easypost	– 04:24:54
8.	Ivan Garcia Cortina (ESP) – Movistar Team	– 04:24:54
9.	Bryan Coquard (FRA) – Cofidis	– 04:24:54
10.	Steffen de Schuyteneer (BEL) – Lotto Intermarche	– 04:24:54

and its organisation and varied routes make it both exciting and challenging. We will continue to work as a team to defend the lead and aim for positive results in the remaining stages,” the Colombian added.

SCENIC STAGE

The first stage was officially flagged off by Sayyid Ahmed bin Hilal al Busaidy, Wali of Bausher. The route started from Al Khuwair Square, passing through several key areas of Muscat before concluding at the scenic Hawiyat Najm in Qurayat. The stage route took riders from Al Khuwair towards the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning (MoHUP), turning right onto Culture Street and crossing the Ministries Bridge.

The peloton then continued past Doha Al Adab Street, joining the expressway towards Bausher Heights and the mountain road.

Riders passed through Al Amerat, Al Hajir Roundabout, and across Al Masarat Hospital Bridge, before heading through Jahlout Al Sareen and Al Suwaqim to Qurayat. The final descent led towards Fins Beach, with the stage concluding at Hawiyat Najm, one of Oman’s most iconic natural landmarks.

The stage awards ceremony was held in presence of Dr Marwan bin Juma al Juma, Board Member of the Oman Olympic Committee and Chairman of the Oman Hockey Association.

Oman national team riders fared well with Mazin al Riyami finishing 41st with the same time as the winner (04:24:54). Other Omani riders, 67 Abdulrahman al Yaqoobi (67), Asad al Habsi (70), Said al Rahbi (84) and Mohammed al Wahibi (96) all completed the race in the same time as 114 riders clocked the same. Hazaa al Habsi (122) in 04:27:18 was one position better than the last rider.

BUSINESS

SHORT TAKES



Since the start of operations, the refinery has exported 633 shipments of refined products to global markets.

DUQM REFINERY STRENGTHENS PERFORMANCE, EXPANDS OUTPUT

Al DUQM: Duqm Refinery has recorded significant improvements in operational performance and production efficiency since its official inauguration on February 7, 2024, marking an important milestone in Oman’s downstream energy sector and the broader Oman–Kuwait strategic partnership that underpins the project.

Engineer Abdullah bin Salim al Ajmi, CEO of Duqm Refinery, said the refinery has focused on building a reliable operational model centred on efficiency, discipline and long-term value creation.

Since the start of operations, the refinery has exported 633 shipments of refined products to global markets, including 284 shipments during 2025 alone, reflecting increasing operational stability and stronger export performance.

He noted that one of the refinery’s key achievements has been the expansion of production capacity from 230,000 barrels per day to 255,000 barrels per day, allowing the facility to operate at approximately 110 per cent of its nameplate capacity.

This performance highlights the success of ongoing operational optimisation efforts and the refinery’s ability to sustain higher output levels while maintaining reliability and safety standards.

Supply-chain resilience has also improved, with feedstock sourcing expanding from two supplying countries in the early stages of operations to twelve countries currently.

This diversification has strengthened operational continuity and enhanced the refinery’s preparedness to manage fluctuations in global crude supply markets.

On the financial front, the refinery achieved a major milestone in March 2025 when lenders released the \$4 billion shareholder guarantee after the project successfully passed the lenders’ reliability test. The development signalled strong confidence in the refinery’s operating performance and governance framework.

Al Ajmi added that the refinery continues to support local economic development, allocating about 12 per cent of its 2025 procurement and service spending to local content, particularly small and medium enterprises, reinforcing its role as a strategic industrial anchor within the Duqm Special Economic Zone. — ONA

Oil steadies after Iran-US meeting in Oman

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, FEB 7

OIL prices hovered around two-month highs on Friday as traders weighed the initial readout from Iran–United States contacts hosted in Muscat, with markets showing cautious relief but little conviction that tensions have materially eased.

Ali al Riyami, an Omani energy analyst, said the generally positive tone following the meeting helped reduce the geopolitical “risk premium” that had built into crude prices, nudging them back towards fundamentals. However, he said investors continued to price in uncertainty, given conflicting signals on the broader security backdrop.



Oil prices hovered around two-month highs on Friday as traders weighed the initial readout from Iran–United States contacts hosted in Muscat. (Picture: **Reuters**)

Madayn plans RO 245m industrial city projects

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, FEB 7

ENG Dawood bin Salim al Haddabi, CEO of the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn), stated that the Omani Industry Day, observed annually on February 9, coincides this year with the launch of Madayn’s expanded phased plan for the period 2026–2030.

“The plan forms part of the broader strategic vision “Madayn 2040”, which was updated in alignment with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040.

Through this approach, Madayn aims to deliver a long-term economic and development impact across all governorates of the Sultanate of Oman and hence contribute directly to the Vision’s pillars of a competitive economy and a sustainable environment, while supporting six national priorities and nine strategic objectives under Oman Vision 2040”, Al Haddabi noted.

Al Haddabi elaborated that the phased plan (2026–2030) is structured around three key strategic directions: development and operations, institutional excellence and environmental protection.

“These directions translate into 24 institutional programmes and 90 strategic projects, developed based on a practical implementation methodology that links programmes with executable projects and measurable performance indicators, while considering institutional capabilities, the prevailing legislative and regulatory framework; and financial sustainability”, he said, adding: “The plan is grounded in an in-depth analysis of development and operational gaps, an assessment of regional and international competitive challenges; and an



These directions translate into 24 institutional programmes and 90 strategic projects, developed based on a practical implementation methodology that links programmes with executable projects and measurable performance indicators, while considering institutional capabilities, the prevailing legislative and regulatory framework; and financial sustainability.

ENG DAWOOD BIN SALIM AL HADDABI
CEO, Madayn



The phased plan includes around 90 strategic projects aimed at developing infrastructure and services in existing and new industrial cities.

evaluation of Madayn’s position within industrial value chains, ensuring optimal allocation of resources towards areas with the highest economic and developmental impact”.

He noted that the 24 institutional programmes include 10 programmes under development and operations focusing on infrastructure development, developing existing and new industrial cities, investment attraction, industries’ localisation and empowering the SMEs.

“Meanwhile, 11 programmes fall under institutional excellence, covering organisational development, digital transformation and artificial intelligence, human capital development, governance, performance measurement and local content.

Moreover, the environmental protection pillar comprises three programmes focusing on renewable energy efficiency, circular economy and waste management; and environmental risk management”, he pointed out.

Al Haddabi added that Madayn will rely on a set of enablers and accelerators to implement

these programmes, including digital transformation through advanced digital infrastructure, adoption of artificial intelligence and data analytics, innovation and entrepreneurship support in industrial and technology sectors; and strengthening strategic partnerships through public–private partnership models.

The plan also emphasises enhancing investment attractiveness by streamlining procedures and introducing innovative incentives, in addition to accelerating environmental sustainability initiatives, particularly the renewable energy and circular economy related projects.

The phased plan includes around 90 strategic projects aimed at developing infrastructure and services in existing and new industrial cities, establishing specialised industrial cities, enhancing the investor journey and ease of doing business, advancing digital transformation and artificial intelligence applications, supporting environmental sustainability and energy efficiency; and promoting social responsibility and community development.

ELECTRICITY OUTPUT RECORDS STEADY GROWTH

MUSCAT: Oman’s total electricity production reached 51,612.3 gigawatt-hours (GWh) in 2025, up about 5 per cent from 49,132.0 GWh in 2024, according to preliminary data from the National Centre for Statistics and Information.

Net electricity production,

including output procured by Oman Power and Water Procurement Company and the Rural Areas Electricity Company, rose 4.4 per cent to 50,160.6 GWh.

In contrast, water production declined 1.9 per cent to 509.9 million cubic metres. Muscat

Governorate recorded a 12.5 per cent decline to 204.1 million cubic metres, while Dhofar production increased 2.7 per cent to 76.2 million cubic metres. Output in other governorates rose 8.2 per cent to 229.6 million cubic metres.

— ONA

ADVERTORIALS

SHORTTAKES



The two-day workshop brought together SME owners, entrepreneurs and business professionals.

OAB CONCLUDES TUMOUIH SME ROADSHOW IN AL MUSANNAH

MUSCAT: Oman Arab Bank (OAB) has successfully concluded the Tumouhi SME Development Roadshow — Al Musannah Edition, held on January 28 and 29, 2026 at Barcelo Al Musannah, reinforcing its commitment to empowering small and medium enterprises across the Sultanate of Oman.

The guest of honour at the event was Eng Masoud bin Said al Hashmi, Governor of Al Batinah South. In attendance was also Shaikh Ahmed bin Ali al Habsi, Wali of Al Musannah.

The two-day workshop brought together SME owners, entrepreneurs and business professionals for a series of expert-led discussions and practical knowledge-sharing sessions.

Participants engaged directly with Oman Arab Bank specialists, gaining insights into key business challenges, growth strategies and financial solutions tailored to the SME sector.

The Al Musannah edition formed part of the Bank's ongoing Tumouhi programme, which focuses on building long-term partnerships with SMEs by combining financial support with advisory and developmental initiatives.

The roadshow provided a platform for open dialogue, enabling entrepreneurs to exchange experiences and explore opportunities aligned with their business goals.

Sulaiman al Hinai, Chief Wholesale Banking Officer of Oman Arab Bank, commented on the successful conclusion of the event, stating, "The strong engagement we witnessed in Al Musannah reflects the growing demand for practical, value-driven support among SMEs.

Tumouhi is designed to create meaningful impact by listening to business owners and responding with solutions that support resilience and sustainable growth. We are proud to see this platform continue to deliver tangible value to the SME community".

Attendees also had the opportunity to learn more about Oman Arab Bank's SME-focused offerings and how the Tumouhi programme supports businesses at different stages of development. The interactive nature of the sessions encouraged participation and strengthened relationships between the Bank and the local business community.

AHLI ISLAMIC SPONSORS THE 17TH IFSB SUMMIT

MUSCAT: Reflecting its commitment to constructive engagement within the global Islamic finance ecosystem, ahli islamic served as the Gold Sponsor of the 17th Islamic Financial Services Board (IFSB) Summit, hosted by the Central Bank of Oman and held from February 2 to 4, 2026, at the St Regis Muscat.

As part of its participation, the bank contributed to the Summit's Fintech Forum, Unlocking the Potential of Digital Transformation in Islamic Finance, through a



panel discussion, underscoring ahli islamic's focus on advancing informed dialogue around digital innovation within Sharia-compliant financial services.

Yousuf bin Salim al Rawahi — Deputy General Manager, Head of ahli islamic, said, "Global conversations around Islamic finance are becoming more complex, not only in terms of products but in how institutions demonstrate governance quality, risk clarity and accountability in execution".

NBO advances its fintech accelerator programme

THE National Bank of Oman (NBO) continues to advance its Fintech Accelerator Programme with the progression of its second cohort, building on the strong outcomes of the inaugural cycle and supporting the objectives of Oman Vision 2040 to enable SMEs, foster innovation and digital transformation; and drive private sector growth within the financial services sector.



The second cohort brings together six fintech startups.

The second cohort brings together six fintech startups at varying stages, from early innovation to more established growth: CXingularity, Bayzati, A4 Labs, Rushd Capital, Payce and Cardo, selected for their ability to address real banking use cases.

Together, they offer solutions spanning AI-driven credit decisioning, personal finance, customer retention, digital wealth advisory, QR-based

This approach strengthens financial inclusion, supports Oman's digital transformation agenda and helps build a resilient fintech ecosystem that can scale sustainably".

Delivered in collaboration with Al Jabr MENA, the programme provides participating startups with access to mentorship, industry expertise and real banking environments, enabling them to validate, refine and scale their solutions, culminating in a Demo Day.

The success of the first cohort, where all participating startups secured investment to support growth and market entry, underscores the programme's impact.

In parallel with NBO's wider digital transformation and fintech initiatives, this strengthens the Bank's role as a forward-looking institution aligned with Oman's long-term economic priorities.

Mitsubishi Oman partner of Muscat Marathon 2026

MUSCAT: Mitsubishi Motors Oman proudly partnered with Muscat Marathon 2026, held on January 23 and 24, as the official automotive partner reaffirming the brand's strong commitment to community engagement, wellness and active lifestyles.

The highly anticipated event achieved remarkable success, welcoming over 15,000 participants from across Oman and beyond. The Muscat Marathon brought together runners of all ages and abilities, creating an atmosphere filled with energy, determination and unity. From professional athletes to first-time runners and families, the event celebrated inclusivity while encouraging a healthier and more active community.

As the official automotive partner, Mitsubishi Motors Oman played a key role in supporting the successful execution of



The event celebrated inclusivity while encouraging a healthier and more active community.

the marathon and actively engaging with participants and visitors throughout the two-day event.

Manoj Ranade, General Manager, Mitsubishi Motors Oman, said: "We are

proud to support the Muscat Marathon, an event that truly reflects the values of perseverance, teamwork and community spirit. At Mitsubishi Motors Oman, we believe in being part of initiatives that bring people together in meaningful ways".

The Muscat Marathon not only provided a platform for runners to challenge themselves but also fostered a strong sense of camaraderie and connection among participants and spectators alike. Mitsubishi Motors Oman's involvement underscores its dedication to contributing to community-driven initiatives that inspire movement, resilience and unity.

By sponsoring this landmark sporting event, Mitsubishi Motors Oman continues to strengthen its presence as a brand that actively supports healthier, more connected communities, both on and off the road.

Sohar Intl concludes its participation in Suhar Investment Forum 2026

MUSCAT: Sohar International reaffirmed its commitment to advancing industrial and technological investments in the Sultanate of Oman through its prominent participation in the Suhar Investment Forum 2026.

The forum attracted strong local and international engagement, bringing together representatives from more than 30 countries and over 750 participants from within and outside the Sultanate of Oman, including government entities, international institutions, leading corporations and investment bodies — highlighting Sohar's growing prominence as a competitive and attractive regional investment destination.

As a national financial partner and a key catalyst for economic growth, Sohar International plays a central role in supporting the objectives of Oman Vision 2040 by attracting foreign direct investment (FDI), financing strategic national infrastructure and



The forum highlighted Sohar's growing prominence as a competitive and attractive regional investment destination.

enabling the Sultanate of Oman's economic diversification agenda.

Through its active participation in the forum, the bank reinforced its commitment to mobilising capital, facilitating cross-border

investment flows and supporting projects that deliver long-term and sustainable economic value.

Abbas bin Hassan al Lawati, Senior Executive Vice President & Head - Investment Banking, FIG and International Operations at Sohar International, participated in the forum's second session titled "Enhancing the Investment Environment: Financing, Logistics & Sustainability Pillars".

During the session, he highlighted the bank's role in enabling investors, strengthening financial and logistics infrastructure and advancing sustainability-driven initiatives that support a resilient and future-ready investment ecosystem in Sohar.

Sohar International remains firmly committed to supporting sustainability-led projects and industrial transformation initiatives that drive long-term growth, competitiveness and regional expansion.

Abbas bin Hassan al Lawati said: "Our role extends beyond financing to acting as a long-term strategic partner for investors — from the initial concept and structuring phase through to execution, operation and future expansion.

By offering flexible and tailored financing solutions, particularly across the industrial and technological sectors, we enable projects to scale efficiently and sustainably. This approach is underpinned by robust risk management, deep sector expertise and strategic advisory capabilities that not only safeguard investments, but also contribute meaningfully to Oman's economic diversification agenda and the broader objectives of Oman Vision 2040".

During the forum, Sohar International highlighted its position as a strategic partner to investors through the provision of integrated financing solutions tailored to industrial and technological projects of varying scales.

SHORTTAKES



The fund focuses on supporting economically viable projects across priority sectors.

Inma allocates RO 33 million SME financing

MUSCAT: The Small and Medium Enterprises Development Fund (Inma) announced the opening of financing applications for the new year 2026, as part of its continued efforts to empower entrepreneurs and SME owners to benefit from its financing products and services, supporting their businesses and enhancing their role in strengthening the national economy.

Yahya bin Saleh al Siyabi, Head of Marketing at Inma, said the total amount allocated for SME financing this year stands at RO 33 million, distributed among the Fund’s branches in Suhar and Salalah in addition to its headquarters in Muscat.

He noted that the Fund will continue operating under established procedures and requirements enabling beneficiaries to obtain financing, ensuring continuity of support and easier access to financial services.

He explained that the Inma Fund places significant importance on SMEs as a key pillar of economic development in the Sultanate of Oman.

The Fund focuses on project quality and economic feasibility regardless of sector, while continuing to support priority sectors including tourism, services, infrastructure and transportation, oil and gas, industry and trade.

He added that the Fund is keen to encourage SME owners to sustain their operations by offering flexible repayment periods of up to eight years for selected financing products, easing financial burdens and supporting operational sustainability. — ONA

Mobile subscriptions in Oman rise

MUSCAT: The total number of mobile subscriptions in the Sultanate of Oman recorded a 7 per cent rise by the end of 2025, reaching 8,054,413 subscriptions compared with the same period in 2024, according to the latest figures issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information.

Active post-paid mobile subscriptions increased by 3 per cent to 1,273,795 subscriptions, while prepaid subscriptions registered a modest 1 per cent rise, reaching 5,148,166 subscriptions. Internet of Things (IoT) subscriptions also recorded strong growth of 42 per cent, reaching 1,632,452 by the end of December 2025.

Internet services likewise showed notable development, with total active mobile broadband subscriptions rising to 5,421,911, while total active fixed broadband subscriptions grew by 3 per cent to 598,907.

Fibre-optic subscriptions increased by 9 per cent to 356,897, while fixed 5G subscriptions posted a slight 1 per cent rise to 219,862 by the end of December 2025. In contrast, fixed 4G subscriptions declined by 53 per cent to 10,448.

Subscriptions to Digital Subscriber Line (DSL) services fell by 34 per cent to 9,856, while satellite subscriptions rose sharply by 173 per cent to 1,101. Other subscriptions — including internet access via power lines, Ethernet and leased lines — decreased by 9 per cent to 743 by the end of December 2025 compared with the same period in 2024. — ONA

TRADE POLICY

US, India advance interim trade framework



The United States and India unveiled an interim trade framework aimed at lowering tariffs, strengthening energy cooperation and advancing negotiations towards a bilateral trade pact.

Both governments said additional talks are needed to finalise the agreement. Trump lifted an additional 25% tariff on Indian goods after New Delhi pledged to halt direct or indirect imports of Russian oil. — Reuters

CONSUMER SENTIMENT

US consumer confidence hits 6-month high



US consumer sentiment rose to a six-month high in early February, marking a third consecutive monthly gain, according to the University of Michigan survey.

The improvement was driven by wealthier households with significant stock holdings. Survey said sentiment may have bottomed out, though concerns over labour markets continue to weigh on outlooks. — Reuters

CORPORATE LEADERSHIP

Toyota announces CEO leadership change



Toyota Motor announced a surprise leadership change, replacing CEO Koji Sato after three years, despite the company’s strong performance amidst global industry disruptions. Finance chief Kenta Kon will assume the role on April 1.

Analysts expressed surprise at the move, noting Toyota’s relative success navigating challenges including global trade conditions. — Reuters

United Solar Polysilicon’s \$1.6 bn project goes live

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, FEB 7

THE landmark polysilicon project of United Solar Polysilicon (USP) commenced operations at the Sohar Freezone over the weekend, marking Oman’s entry into advanced high-tech and clean-energy manufacturing and signaling progress towards participation in the global semiconductor and solar value chains.

The soft commencement comes ahead of a grand launch planned for next month, as disclosed by top representatives of the \$1.6 billion project during the debt financing agreements signed last month.

At full capacity, production of polysilicon — a key ingredient for the global solar photovoltaic (PV) value chain — will ramp up to 100,000 tonnes per annum (tpa), roughly equivalent to an annual nameplate capacity of 40 GW of solar modules.

Chinese equipment supplier Shuangliang Hydrogen, contracted to provide key technology for the Oman project, announced the project’s launch in a post dated February 7, 2026.

The company supplied polycrystalline silicon reduction furnaces, hydrogen production equipment and refrigeration systems for the high-purity polysilicon facility.

“On February 5, United Solar Polysilicon (USP)’s 100,000 tpa polysilicon project in Oman



USP’s launch heralds Oman’s entry into advanced high-tech and clean-energy manufacturing.

— one of the world’s most technologically advanced polysilicon plants — officially commenced operations at the Sohar Freezone”, the tech specialist, part of Shuangliang Group, noted in the post.

“The project represents a key component of the Middle East photovoltaic value chain and serves as a new connection point linking PV supply chains across Europe, Africa and Asia”,

it added.

The Chinese firm said it has supplied four sets of green power intelligent hydrogen production systems, with core performance indicators at an industry-leading level.

“Looking ahead, Shuangliang will continue to build on its core technologies and innovation-driven approach, working closely with global partners to support the development of

clean energy worldwide”, the company stated.

USP’s process uses key raw materials such as trichlorosilane and metallurgical-grade silicon, along with hydrogen produced from water electrolysis. The production chain includes steps such as air separation, hydrogenation, distillation, chemical vapor deposition, gas recovery and final product finishing.

The resulting high-purity polysilicon rods are broken into smaller pieces and, when necessary, cleaned with acidic solutions to remove any surface contamination. Much of the gas and liquid used in production is recycled, while the remainder undergoes treatment before disposal.

An on-site silicon grinding facility, operated by a separate company, prepares the metallurgical-grade silicon feedstock for the polysilicon plant.

United Solar Polysilicon (USP) is backed by a mix of Omani and international investors, led by the Oman Investment Authority’s Future Fund Oman as a major shareholder, alongside the International Finance Corporation as a key development financier.

The project is also supported by financing from local and regional banks, a strategic investment and offtake partner in Waaree Solar and other shareholders at the United Solar Holding level, including private investors and the founding shareholders.

Duqm Now session to boost export efficiency

DUQM: The Special Economic Zone at Duqm will host the first 2026 session of its “Duqm Now” programme next Wednesday, February 11, under the theme “Made in Duqm”. The session will gather selected investors, operators and partners from the industrial and logistics sectors.

The session comes amid rapid transformations in the global trading system, including evolving customs tariffs, compliance rules and increasingly complex supply chains.

Industrial hubs are now assessed by how effectively they convert production into exports that reach markets on schedule with minimal operational complications.

Engineer Ahmed bin Ali Akaak, CEO of the Special Economic Zone at Duqm, said the “Made in Duqm” session will focus on practical factors that convert industrial output into dependable exports.

He noted that it will examine the product journey from manufacturing to shipment through real examples and the experiences of key investors and operators in Duqm.

He added that the session will highlight elements ensuring consistent operational standards, streamlined procedures and the swift movement of goods from factory gate



The session will focus on practical factors that enable industrial production to translate into reliable exports.

to vessel.

It will also discuss documentation requirements, including emissions data increasingly required by markets and buyers.

Participants, he stressed, will gain a clear and practical understanding of effective export performance.

The significance of this operational

approach is reflected in Oman’s foreign trade indicators.

Data from the National Centre for Statistics and Information for January–October 2025 shows total merchandise exports reached RO 19.3 billion, while non-oil exports rose 9.9 per cent to RO 5.6 billion compared with the same period in 2024. This underscores the expanding role of non-oil sectors dependent on efficiency and reliable delivery.

The February “Duqm Now” session will bring together investors, operators, suppliers and partners to discuss practical methods for building industrial competitiveness.

Discussions will address performance indicators, reducing processing times and ensuring continuity and efficiency of export operations alongside rising production volumes.

The Duqm Special Economic Zone enjoys strategic advantages supporting industrial activity, benefiting from its Arabian Sea location and proximity to major international shipping lanes.

This provides an attractive environment for companies seeking flexible export routes and stable, reliable operating conditions.

— ONA

OPINION

Industry Day: Economic diversification and sustainable growth



DR HILAL
AL SAWAI

The writer is local content, sustainability and innovation expert.

OMAN Industry Day serves as a reminder of the commitment of the Sultanate of Oman to building a diversified, resilient and future-ready economy. While Oman Industry Day commemorates the role of industrial development in achieving long-term economic sustainability, it serves as a flexible indicator of Oman's national priorities and reflects the importance of industrial development. For decades, Oman's economy has been predominantly oil and gas. While oil and gas remain important pillars of the Sultanate of Oman's economy, Oman has begun to make deliberate and strategic steps to expand the Sultanate of Oman's economy. In this regard, Industry Day represents the transformation of the economy, where government leaders, investors, manufacturers and innovators come together to evaluate the economy and define the industrial transformation phase.

ECONOMIC DIVERSIFICATION AND SUSTAINABLE GROWTH
Oman's industrial strategy hinges on Oman Vision 2040. Oman Vision 2040 places industry at the centre of economic diversification. Oman has focused on several sectors including manufacturing, logistics, mining, food processing and chemicals, which are consolidated in economic and industrial zones.

Further, the zones are backed by a strong commitment to business friendly policies. In this regard, the economic and industrial zones are developed as industrial cities and transformed into engines of industrial development and economic diversification. During the Oman Industry Day, the values of sustainability and creation of overall value are reinforced. Oman invites the world to explore the industrial potential that goes beyond simple output. Oman aims to promote industries that conserve or have a low detrimental effect to the environment while utilising and adding value to local resources and adopting new technologies. Renewable energy, green hydrogen and environmentally responsible manufacturing are newer, yet, strategically important fields of growth, that Oman is committed to in an effort to sustain economic development and the environment. Another important theme is the development of human capital. An effective industrial ecosystem needs to be supported by the right capacity of the educated, trained and adaptable workforce. Oman has made significant investments in education, vocational training and workforce nationalisation. The Industry Day showcased Omani professionals that spearheaded and managed factories and supply chains; and led innovation. These accomplishments reiterated the importance of industrial

Industry Day represents the transformation of the economy, where government leaders, investors, manufacturers and innovators come together to evaluate the economy and define the industrial transformation phase.

activities as an economic pillar and, as a source of decent work and the facilitation of skill development and transfer. During Industry Day events, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are given special treatment. SMEs are considered important industrial ecosystem collaborators, as they support the large manufacturers in providing supply chain services and, specialised and innovative solutions. To make the Omani SMEs a part of the industrial growth, the government provides soft loans, business incubators and promotes local content. The Oman Industry Day is more than a celebration. It demonstrates the importance of collaboration between the private and public sectors and the need for Oman to keep expanding its global partnerships. The more Oman grows its industrial base, the more Oman will be able to serve as a manufacturing and logistics regional centre, linking the Middle East, Africa and Asia. Oman Industry Day may be a symbolic celebration, but it is a celebration of a historic journey through the building of a more resilient economy; and a sustainable and prosperous Omani society. Industry, along with infrastructure, a trained and educated population and a society focused on innovation, will make the industrial sector one of the key components of national development for Oman for decades to come.

Oman’s future in low-carbon steel: From pilot to practice

NAJAH AL RIYAMI

CARBON capture is rapidly moving from experimental pilot projects to full industrial deployment in the global steel sector, as producers confront tightening climate regulations and growing demand for low-carbon materials. With steel responsible for roughly 7 to 9 per cent of global carbon dioxide emissions and industry pressure accelerating decarbonisation, technologies like carbon capture and hydrogen-based steelmaking are becoming core components of steel’s transformation. Worldwide, major steelmakers are beginning to install carbon capture systems on operating plants rather than waiting for full technology replacements. Retrofitting capture units onto blast furnaces and direct reduced iron facilities allows emissions reductions while sustaining output. In Europe, projects already capture CO₂ from blast furnace gas, compress it and transport it for permanent underground storage, showing that emissions can be reduced at scale without shutting down existing assets. Gas-based DRI plants are especially attractive because they generate more concentrated CO₂ streams that are easier and less costly to capture. Many industrial operators in Europe and the Middle East are piloting capture on DRI units, demonstrating that a significant share of plant emissions can be removed through bolt-on systems. Alongside capture, carbon utilisation activities, transforming captured CO₂ into products like methanol and carbon-cured concrete, are linking decarbonisation with new industrial value chains. Hydrogen-based steelmaking is progressing in parallel. In northern Europe, new plants are producing iron using hydrogen instead of coal, sharply lowering emissions. Buyers in automotive and construction sectors are already signing supply agreements for this lower-emission steel, signalling strong market demand for cleaner inputs. The combination of hydrogen ironmaking and selective carbon capture on emissions that remain is emerging as a leading model for near-zero-emission steel. These global developments align closely with Oman’s industrial transition strategy. The Sultanate of Oman hosts established steel and metals clusters in Suhar and Al Duqm and is investing in large-scale green hydrogen projects alongside exploring carbon storage potential. This creates a practical pathway for integrating capture technology into both existing and future facilities. A major example is Jindal Steel Duqm, which is developing a 5 million tonnes per annum hydrogen-enabled green steel complex in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm. Designed to be one of the world’s most advanced hydrogen-ready steel facilities, it consists of two direct reduced iron (DRI) modules of 2.5 Mtpa each and is expected to begin commissioning in phases from 2028 onward.

User journey drives customs-tax integration

THE idea of merging Customs with the Tax Authority is often framed as a simple organisational decision: one entity instead of two. In reality, it is a policy choice with direct consequences for trade competitiveness, service quality, compliance culture and the credibility of public finance. For a country strengthening its position as a logistics and investment hub, the goal should be straightforward: protect revenue and improve compliance without slowing trade or raising the cost of doing business. The most practical way to debate this issue is to focus less on structures and more on outcomes — starting with the “user journey” for businesses and individuals. Traders and taxpayers do not experience government as a chart of departments. They experience it through processes: how many portals they must use, how many times they submit the same documents, how predictable decisions are and how quickly issues are resolved. Every extra step adds time, confusion and cost — costs that may not appear in government accounts but are paid daily by the economy. It is also important to recognise that Oman’s customs ecosystem already operates at scale and at speed. Digitisation has become part of the operating model, not just a public-facing interface. That matters because the border is a live economic artery. Even small friction at clearance points can ripple across supply chains, raise storage and transport costs, disrupt delivery schedules and feed into final prices. This is why any reform that touches border operations must be designed carefully and sequenced wisely. The strongest case for Customs–Tax integration is not the merger itself. It is the opportunity to create a single, reliable chain of information from “border to books”. Customs sees invoices at the border — value, origin, classification and



The strongest case for Customs–Tax integration is the opportunity to create a single, reliable chain of information from “border to books”.



QASIM
AL MAASHANI

The author is the head of the Business and Politics department at Oman Observer.

quantity — while tax administration sees the same transactions later in accounts, margins, inventory and declarations. If these datasets connect in a structured, secure and timely way, the state can close gaps that enable undervaluation, misclassification and other non-compliant practices. Crucially, this is not an argument for heavier inspection across the board. It is an argument for smarter controls. When systems share data and apply risk-based targeting, compliant traders move faster and enforcement focuses where it is most needed. That is how a modern state protects revenue while supporting growth. The biggest risk is assuming that a formal merger is the quickest route to these gains. A rushed institutional merger can create operational uncertainty: new approval lines, unclear decision rights, overlapping responsibilities and learning curves that slow day-to-day clearance. If the border slows, the economy pays immediately. In a trade-oriented strategy, the cost of disruption can outweigh the benefit of any short-term revenue gains. A sensible approach is to treat “integration” as a graduated path rather than a single yes-or-no decision. The first and most valuable step is integration without disruption: unify client identity across systems, enable real-time data exchange, align service pathways and use a shared risk engine so low-risk transactions move smoothly while high-risk cases receive the necessary scrutiny.

This path can deliver most of the benefits — better compliance and better service — without destabilising border operations. The second step, if needed, is stronger governance coordination under one umbrella while keeping operational separation clear. Customs must retain its trade facilitation and border-security priorities and tax administration must retain its compliance, audit and taxpayer service priorities. Coordination can improve consistency and reduce duplication, but it should not force border operations into an administrative model that undermines speed and predictability. Only after data integration, service reform and governance controls mature should a full merger be considered — and even then, it should be approached as an end-state, not a starting point. How should success be measured? Not by revenue alone. A credible reform should also improve clearance times and predictability, reduce repeated document submissions, increase automated handling for low-risk cases, reduce avoidable disputes and shorten dispute-resolution timelines. In other words, the state should strengthen compliance and fairness while keeping trade flowing and lowering the cost of compliance for legitimate businesses. Governance must sit at the centre of any closer integration. Concentrating authority without strong safeguards would be counterproductive. Clear separation between key functions, robust internal controls, transparent service standards and a credible appeals process are not administrative details; they are the foundation of trust and predictability. The balanced conclusion is this: integrating Customs and Tax can deliver real gains in efficiency, compliance and fairness, but the reform must be designed around the user journey and national competitiveness — not around institutional optics.

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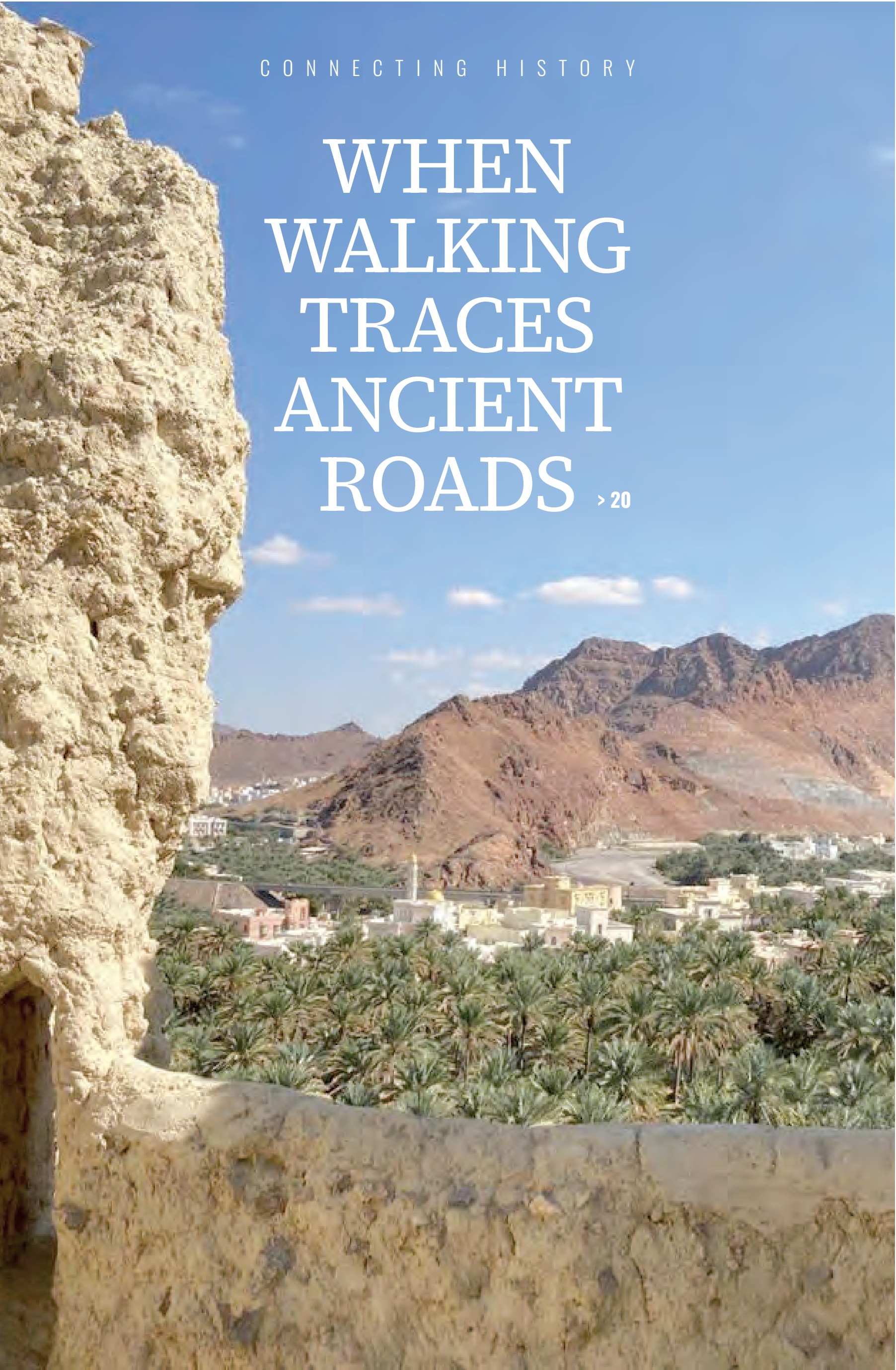
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THE GRAMMYS

S KOREA CELEBRATES BREAKTHROUGH K-POP GRAMMY WIN FOR ‘GOLDEN’



Critics and fans welcomed South Korea’s first major Grammy win for the song “Golden”, from the hit animated film “KPop Demon Hunters”, describing it on Monday as a breakthrough for the genre.

The track, performed by Ejae, Audrey Nuna and Rei Ami as the fictional girl group Huntrix in the film, won Best Song Written for Visual Media to claim an accolade that had long eluded the industry despite its global popularity.

K-pop megagroups BTS, for example, has been nominated multiple times in different categories since 2021 but has yet to be recognised at the music industry’s biggest night.

One YouTube commentator, who uses the handle striderz1971, noted that neither BTS nor Blackpink had been able to score a Grammy and said that “a path had now been forced open”.

“With that barrier now breached, K-pop artists may finally begin to receive the recognition they deserve”, they said.

Music columnist Kim Do-hoon said that the Grammys had long sidelined K-pop because of what he said was its “cookie-cutter format”.

“The Grammys have traditionally placed strong emphasis on musical quality — an area in which K-pop is not widely recognised”, he said.

“They are also known for avoiding heavily produced music, which is often the case with K-pop artists”, Kim said.

“Golden” was also nominated for Song of the Year alongside “APT”, sung by K-pop idol Rose and Bruno Mars in a high-octane opening to the ceremony.

“‘Kedehun’, which has captivated the world, has triumphed at the Grammys”, a Yonhap news agency headline read, using a shorthand title for the film that has been widely adopted in South Korea.

The Kyunghyang Shinmun daily noted that the Grammys had until now stopped short of honouring K-pop acts.

“The Grammys have long been seen as a conservative awards show that is not particularly open to diverse music genres, making it difficult for K-pop to break through”, it said.

The Song of the Year nominations for “Golden” and “APT” were “meaningful milestones” even though they did not win, Kyunghyang said. — AFP

QUICK FEATURES



CEREMONY

Italy’s Sofia Goggia holds the Olympic torch after lighting the Olympic cauldron during the opening ceremony at Milano Cortina 2026 Olympics. — Reuters



FASHION

A model walks on the runway during Dubai Fashion Week for Autumn/Winter 2026/2027, bringing together regional and international designers, in Dubai, United Arab Emirates. — Reuters



FESTIVAL

Participants present Chinese traditional costumes during the celebration of the Chinese New Year of the Horse in the Kobanya Chinatown district in Budapest. — AFP

INSTA PICKS



Bewildering pose



Standing tall

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POKEMON THEME PARK OPENS IN TOKYO



The first permanent Pokemon theme park opened in Tokyo, featuring cute rides and a woodland area where visitors can try and “catch ‘em all”.

It is Japan’s latest tourist attraction catering to a record influx of overseas travellers and tickets are already sold out for the next two months.

Visitors to PokePark Kanto, within Tokyo’s largest amusement park Yomiuri Land, are greeted by statues of the electric mouse Pikachu and other creatures from the franchise.

Pokemon — one of Japan’s top cultural exports — began in 1996 with video games on Nintendo’s Game Boy console.

Inspired by the Japanese summer childhood tradition of bug-collecting, players catch and train in battle hundreds of “pocket monsters”.

The phenomenon has evolved since then to become wildly

popular worldwide, with anime series, movies, a trading card game and the augmented reality smartphone app “Pokemon Go”.

PokePark Kanto has two areas: a hilly outdoor zone nearly half a kilometre long (1,600 feet) full of Pokemon figurines and a town modelled on those in the games for shopping and rides.

To access the woodland area, visitors must be able to climb 110 steps without assistance, the park’s website says.

A record number of tourists entered Japan in 2025, despite a steep fall in Chinese visitors in December due to a diplomatic row between the nations.

Another big theme park, Universal Studios Japan in Osaka, said last month it was also planning Pokemon-themed attractions, without giving details. — AFP



Wagner Moura in ‘The Secret Agent’ is a political thriller infused with magical realism. It has been nominated for Oscars in the categories of Best Picture, Best International Feature Film, Best Actor for Moura and Best Casting

ON A ROLL, BRAZILIAN CINEMA SEIZES ITS MOMENT

FOR the second year in a row, a Brazilian movie has wowed international audiences and critics, securing multiple Oscar nominations and drawing fresh interest in the Latin American giant’s film industry.

Experts say the success of “The Secret Agent”, which has won four Oscar nominations, a year after “I Am Still Here” won Brazil its first Oscar, is no fluke, with a bit of a push from the country’s political climate.

“This is neither a coincidence nor a miracle. It is the result of a lot of work, consistent policies and, of course, talent”, Ilda Santiago, director of the Rio International Film Festival and an Oscar voter, said.

Directed by Kleber Mendonca Filho, “The Secret Agent” is a political thriller infused with magical realism. Like “I Am Still Here”, it is set during Brazil’s 1964-1985 military dictatorship.

It has been nominated for Oscars in the categories of Best Picture, Best International Feature Film, Best Actor for Wagner Moura and Best Casting.

Santiago said these two big Brazilian movies resonated with foreign audiences “because they show how our daily lives can be

“This is neither a coincidence nor a miracle. It is the result of a lot of work, consistent policies and, of course, talent.”

ILDA SANTIAGO
Director of the Rio International Film Festival



Fernanda Torres in ‘I Am Still Here’



Poster of ‘City of God’

transformed by governments and that is a mirror of today’s world”. This is especially true for Brazil, whose far-right former president Jair Bolsonaro — an open admirer of the dictatorship — is serving a 27-year prison term for plotting a coup.

Before Bolsonaro came to power in 2019, Brazil’s film industry had well-established financing mechanisms, much like those in countries like France, Canada and Germany. Brazil has enjoyed waves of international breakout moments, with films such as ‘Central Station’ in 1998, ‘City of God’ in 2002 and ‘Elite Squad’ starring Moura in 2007.

Mendonca Filho was also behind the art house hits ‘Aquarius’ (2016) and ‘Bacurau’ (2019).

Film Revived Under Lula

During his time in office Bolsonaro cut the budget of the Audiovisual Sector Fund by almost half, froze bidding for film project grants and threatened to shut down the

national film agency if it did not impose an ideological “filter”. “Brazilian cinema was plugged back in with Lula’s election in 2022, after four years in which culture, in practical terms, was extinguished”, Mendonca Filho said.

Lula’s government reactivated the funding application process and injected record amounts into the sector. The film industry received 1.4 billion reais (\$269 million) in 2025, 180 per cent more than in 2021.

Nevertheless, “putting each of those bricks that were dismantled back in place is a task that takes years”, said Santiago.

Influential film critic Isabela Boscov said that in the past “there was a failure to take advantage” of hit films. She said Brazil was now “breaking out of the bubble”, much like Iranian cinema in the 1990s, Mexican cinema in the 2010s and more recently, South Korean cinema.

‘Small and big victories’

Last year ‘I Am Still Here’ racked up several international awards and won Fernanda Torres a Golden Globe for best actress.

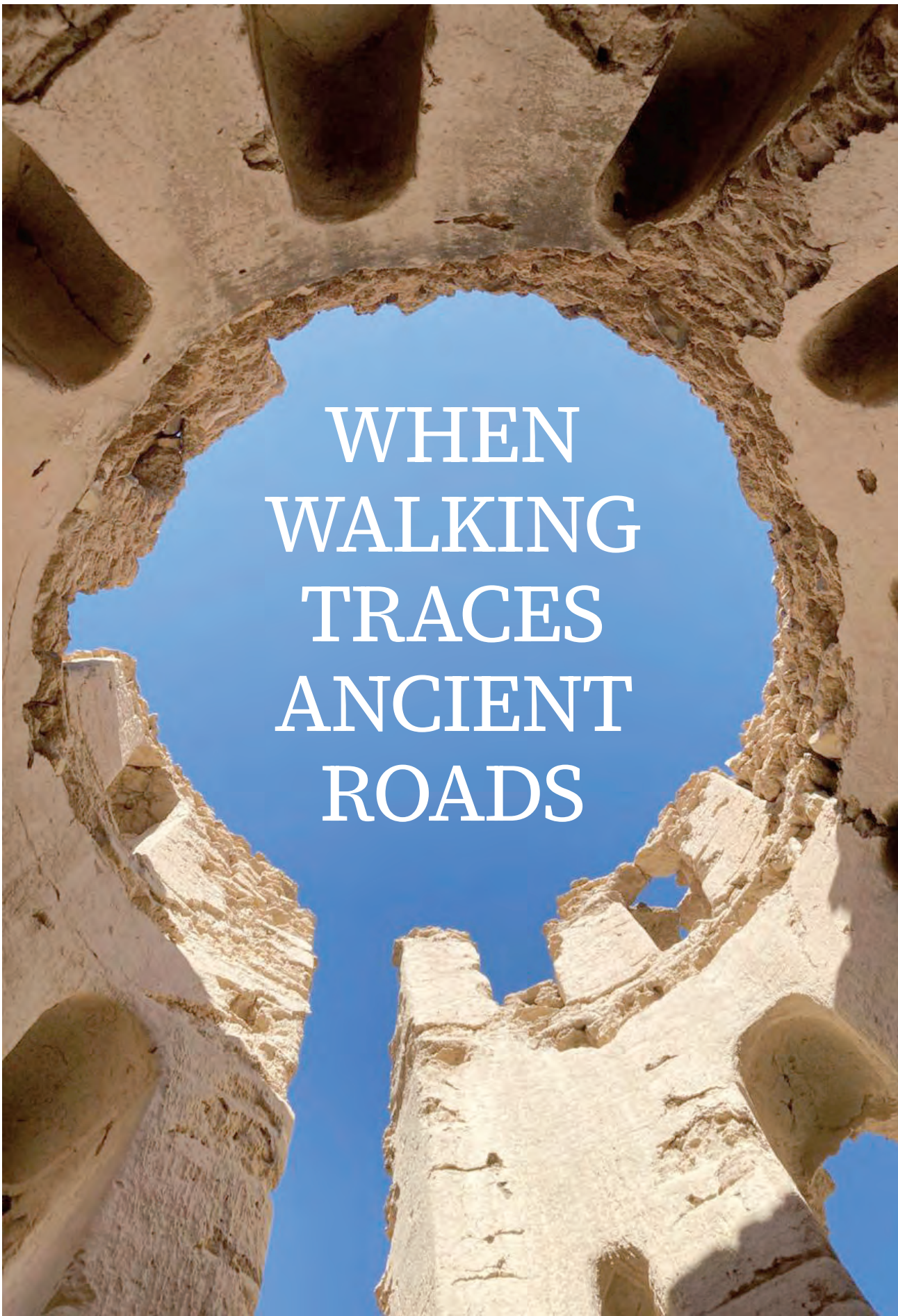
The film won Brazil its first Oscar — for best international feature film.

“The Secret Agent” first earned plaudits at the Cannes Film Festival, where it won for best director and Wagner Moura won best actor. The movie then won two Golden Globes, for best non-English film and best male actor.

“It’s an accumulation of small and big victories, like Cannes, which form the foundation on which a campaign is built”, said Boscov.

She also pointed to the charm and wit of actors like Torres and Moura on the talk show circuit ahead of awards season as playing a fundamental role in promoting their films.

Several other movies have scored successes at film festivals, such as ‘Manas’ in 2024 which tells the story of a 13-year-old confronting abuse on an Amazon island and the dystopian 2025 drama ‘The Blue Trail’ — in which Brazil’s elderly are ordered to move to remote housing colonies. — AFP



AHMED AL KAABI

‘NAGTAFI ATHAR ASLAFINA’ (following our ancestors’ traces) is not merely a long-distance walking journey. It is a cultural and heritage-driven vision that seeks to revive the historic routes once travelled by Omanis between villages and towns, restoring the meaning of the road as an essential part of identity itself.

Here, stories blend with places and every step becomes a form of “field storytelling”, introducing people, especially young generations, to paths that once served as lifelines for life, trade and social connection long before modern roads and highways existed.

Hilmi al Kindi, founder and originator of the initiative, explains that the philosophy behind the initiative represents a “conscious return” to the geography that shaped the memory of earlier generations. The aim, he says, is not only physical endurance, but connecting history with lived experience: walking the same routes, passing through the same villages, standing before forts and ancient quarters; and listening to the stories of residents who still preserve the spirit of these places as their forefathers knew them.

Speaking about the initiative, Al Kindi said “we don’t walk just to arrive... we walk to understand how our ancestors arrived. These paths carry stories and every village you pass through teaches you patience, cooperation and simplicity”. The initiative operates under the supervision of Saud



al Kindi, who provides strategic direction, sets priorities and strengthens partnerships. It is led by Hilmi al Kindi, who established its framework and methodology. Nawaf al Sulaimani serves as a key pillar, supporting planning, logistics and on-ground execution alongside the team.

The aim is not only physical endurance, but connecting history with lived experience: walking the same routes, passing through the same villages, standing before forts and ancient quarters and listening to the stories of residents who still preserve the spirit of these places as their forefathers knew them



During the current season, the team completed the first phase of the initiative in preparation for its official launch. The heritage expedition lasted five days, during which the adventurers covered nearly 130 km across four wilayats in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, retracing the ancient routes that once connected Omani communities.

The journey included Hilmi al Kindi, Nawaf al Sulaimani and Nasser al Falahi; and began from Misfat al Abriyeen in the Wilayat of Al Hamra.

THE ROUTE OF THE JOURNEY The journey began in Misfat al Abriyeen, passing through Al Bilad village before heading toward Bahla, the first major station between rural settlements and historic towns.

Day Two: In a stage combining history and nature, the team continued towards Jabrin Fort, passing Bahla Fort and several traditional neighbourhoods that still preserve their authentic architectural character.

Day Three: The longest stretch of the expedition covered nearly 45 kilometres, from Jabrin Fort to Harat Al Bilad in Manah, crossing several villages between Bahla and Nizwa.

On the fourth day, the route extended towards Al Maamad and Al Mara, then through Karsha, Radt Al Busaidi, Al Jil and Farq in the Wilayat of Nizwa, marking the end of the penultimate stage.

On the final day, the team entered Nizwa city centre, walking through Nizwa Souq, Harat Al Aqr and Al Ghantq, visiting Al Samad Mosque and Radda Al Kunood, before concluding at Harat Al

Suwaiq heritage quarter, where residents warmly welcomed the group with a cultural programme and guided tour through the old alleyways.

The expedition was sponsored by Durrat Al Misfahand led by Dr Engineer Mohammed al Mughairi, the lodge’s founder and owner. He noted that the journey was completed according to schedule and highlighted that supporting “Tracing Our Ancestors” reflects a commitment to promoting Oman’s historical pathways, cultural landmarks and heritage tourism.

Dr Al Mughairi said Initiatives like this transform heritage from images into lived experiences. When young people walk these routes themselves, history becomes real and personal.

Following the completion of Phase One, the “Following Our Ancestors’ Traces” team is preparing for its next launch from Samad Al Kindi, continuing the previous route through Misfat Al Abriyeen, Bahla, Manah and Nizwa.

The long-term vision will gradually expand from Around Oman to around the Gulf to around the world.

The team hopes to conduct two expeditions this winter, or at least one, while preparing for a stronger upcoming season aimed at completing a comprehensive journey around Oman.

Summing up the initiative’s ambition, Al Kindi said we want the old paths to become a living map that people walk, not forget... and for “Tracing Our Ancestors” to grow into a continuous project that introduces people to Oman the way our forefathers once knew it step by step.