

OMAN

دولة عمان

DAILY

Observer

VOL. 45, NO. 46

PAGES 20 BAISAS 200

SUNRISE 06:48 AM

PRAYER TIMINGS

FAJR 05:27 AM

DHUHR 12:14 PM

ASR 03:15 PM

MAGHRIB 05:35 PM

ISHA 06:50 PM

2010000387405

12

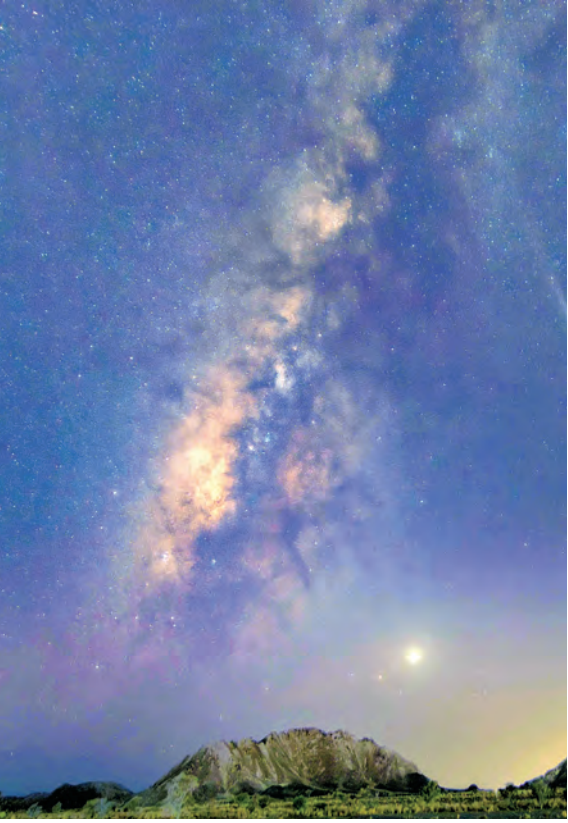
MOZAMBIQUE  
END 39-YEAR  
WAIT FOR FIRST  
AFCON VICTORY

INBRIEF

OMAN SUPPORTS  
SOMALIA’S UNITY

The Sultanate of Oman is closely following developments related to the unity and territorial integrity of the Federal Republic of Somalia. In a statement issued by the Foreign Ministry on Sunday, the Sultanate of Oman affirmed its support for Somalia’s sovereignty and territorial unity, stressing the importance of respecting the principles of international law and the Charter of the United Nations, and refraining from any unilateral actions that may affect the unity or internationally recognised sovereignty of nations.

MILKY WAY ’S SPIRAL ARM



A photograph taken from the Wilayat of Ibra shows the Milky Way’s spiral arm with Comet Tsuchinshan at a distance of 70 million km from planet Earth, visible in Venus and adjoining the heart of the scorpion (Antares). **Photo by Mahmoud al Amri**

2 SITES FOR MARBLE  
INVESTMENT

As part of its ongoing efforts to enhance the attractiveness of the mining sector, the Ministry of Energy and Minerals has offered some public minerals areas for investment by local and international companies, in Al Sharqiyah North Governorate, from December 28, 2025 to April 28, 2026. The step was in implementation of plans to provide quality investment based on geological and economic resources/principles. The offering covers two public sites in Al Sharqiyah North Governorate. The first covers approximately 1.33 square km and the second area covers approximately 1.22 square km. Initial geological indicators of the two zones show the presence of dark marble deposits with investment potential.

DETAILS ON P13

0

SULTAN’S ACCESSION DAY:  
Thursday, January 15, 2026

NATIONAL DAY:  
Wednesday & Thursday,  
November 25 and 26, 2026

AL ISRA’ WAL MI’RAJ:  
Sunday, January 18, 2026.

PROPHET’S BIRTHDAY  
(PBUH): Thursday,  
August 27, 2026

ADVANCE ANNOUNCEMENT OF NATIONAL HOLIDAYS

The Council of Ministers has approved a policy for the annual advance announcement of national and religious holiday dates at the beginning of each Gregorian year. The exceptions are the Eid Al Fitr and Eid Al Adha holidays, which will be announced in accordance with the declarations of the Main Committee for the Sighting of the Hijri Month Crescents. This policy is part of the government’s focus on improving institutional and administrative planning efficiency. The Ministry of Labour clarified in a statement that this approach is based on the anticipated positive impacts of such an announcement,

the most important of which are enabling units of the state administrative apparatus and the private sector to regulate their daily, quarterly, and annual work schedules, programmes and timelines. Accordingly, the dates for the national and religious holidays for 2026 are as follows (National occasions) The Sultan’s Accession Day: Thursday, January 15, 2026; the National Day: Wednesday and Thursday, November 25 and 26, 2026; (Religious occasions) Al Isra’ wal Mi’raj: Sunday, January 18, 2026; New Hijri Year: Thursday, June 18, 2026 and Prophet’s Birthday (PBUH): Thursday, August 27, 2026. SEE ALSO P2

Trump has ‘productive’  
talks with Putin

Z E L E N S K Y T O P U S H N E W U K R A I N E P E A C E D E A L

**DONALD** Trump said on Sunday he had “productive” talks with Russian leader Vladimir Putin hours before the US president meets Ukraine’s Volodymyr Zelensky, in a year-end sprint to seal a deal to end the war. Trump’s renewed upbeat tone comes despite wide scepticism in Europe about Putin’s intentions after Russia carried out another massive bombardment of the Ukrainian capital Kyiv just as Zelensky was heading to Trump’s Florida estate. “I just had a very good and productive telephone call with President Putin of Russia,” Trump announced on his Truth Social platform.

Trump is set to meet Zelensky at 1:00 pm (1800 GMT) in the dining room of his Mar-a-Lago estate, where he frequently brings both foreign guests and domestic supporters. Trump has made ending the Ukraine war a centrepiece of his second term as a self-proclaimed “president of peace,” and he has repeatedly blamed both Kyiv and Moscow for the failure to secure a ceasefire. Zelensky, who has faced verbal attacks from Trump, has sought to show willingness to work with the contours of the US leader’s plans, but Putin has offered no sign that he will accept it. Sunday’s meeting will be Trump’s first in-person encounter



A machine-gun mounted US Coast Guard boat turns away recreational boaters in the water near US President Donald Trump’s Mar-a-Lago club ahead of his meeting with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky at the club in Palm Beach, Florida, on Sunday. — Reuters

with Zelensky since October, when the US president refused to grant his request for long-range Tomahawk missiles. And the Ukrainian leader could face another hard sell this time around, with Trump insisting that he “doesn’t have anything until I approve it.” The talks are expected to last an hour, after which the two presidents are scheduled to hold a joint call with the leaders of key European allies. Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk, who will join the call, wrote on X that the

Russian attacks on Kyiv were “contrary to President Trump’s expectations and despite the readiness to make compromises” by Zelensky. The revised peace plan, which emerged from weeks of intense US-Ukraine negotiations, would stop the war along its current front lines and could require Ukraine to pull troops back from the east, allowing the creation of demilitarised buffer zones. As such, it contains Kyiv’s most explicit acknowledgement yet of possible territorial concessions.

It does not, however, envisage Ukraine withdrawing from the 20 per cent of the eastern Donetsk region that it still controls - Russia’s main territorial demand. The Ukrainian leader said he hoped the talks in Florida would be “very constructive” but stressed that Putin had shown his hand with a deadly drone and missile assault on Kyiv that temporarily knocked out power and heating to hundreds of thousands of residents during freezing temperatures. — AFP

National Guide for Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative launched

**MUSCAT:** The Ministry of Health launched the National Guide for the Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative (BFHI) in primary healthcare institutions. The launch of this national guide for primary healthcare represents the second phase of the programme. It aims to ensure the continuity of breastfeeding support from the hospital to the community and to enhance integration across various healthcare levels, which positively impacts the health indicators of both mothers and children. This initiative embodies the

Ministry of Health’s commitment to the continuous development of national programmes concerning maternal and child health and fosters a healthy environment supportive of breastfeeding, contributing to an improved quality of life and the achievement of sustainable health development goals in the Sultanate of Oman. Dr Sami bin Suleiman al Farsi, Director of the Maternal and Child Health Centre at the Ministry of Health, emphasised that breastfeeding is the cornerstone of a child’s health from the first moments of

**“**  
*This national guide serves as a unified scientific and practical reference and helps in enhancing the efficiency of health cadre.*  
**DR SAMI BIN SULEIMAN AL FARSI**

life. He highlighted its role in boosting immunity, supporting healthy growth and preventing numerous diseases, as well as its positive impact on the mother’s physical and mental health. He noted that primary healthcare institutions serve as the first line of defence in providing awareness, counselling, and continuous support to mothers and families. He explained that this national guide serves as a unified scientific and practical reference. It helps enhance the efficiency of health cadre, standardises

professional practices and ensures the provision of breastfeeding support services according to best practices and international standards, achieving continuity of care from pregnancy through childbirth and into the community. This step is an extension of the Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative, a global initiative launched by the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the United Nations Children’s Fund (Unicef) in 1991 to protect, promote and support breastfeeding. — ONA

OMAN

SHORT TAKES



There is a chance of rainfall of varying intensity and the possibility of flash floods and overflowing wadis.

RAINS LIKELY FROM TODAY; TROUGH OF LOW PRESSURE

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH  
MUSCAT, DEC 28

Thunderstorm activity continued on Sunday over the Sea of Oman with varying intensity of rainfall accompanied by active descending winds. The latest forecasts and analyses from the National Multi-Hazard Early Warning Centre indicate that the Sultanate of Oman will be affected by a trough of low pressure, bringing scattered rainfall of varying intensity, which may be thundery at times, during the period from December 29 to 30, 2025. On Monday, there is a chance of rainfall of varying intensity and the possibility of flash floods and overflowing wadis in Musandam Governorate. Cloud formation is expected over the northern governorates and the Arabian Sea coast with a chance of scattered rainfall. On Tuesday, December 30, continued cloud formation is expected over the northern governorates and the Arabian Sea coast with a chance of scattered rainfall. The National Multi-Hazard Early Warning Centre said active northwesterly winds could lead to dust storms and a drop in temperatures.

INITIATIVE UPGRADES VIA FERRATA ROUTE



Works included replacing old supports with 48 stainless steel anchors.

AL HAMRA: Maintenance and rehabilitation works have been completed on the Via Ferrata (W6) tourist climbing route in Jabal Shams through a community volunteer initiative supervised by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism. The works included replacing old supports with 48 stainless steel anchors, enhancing safety along the 120-metre suspended cable route overlooking Wadi Nakhr. Mahmoud bin Nasser al Fahdi, an adventure technician, said the initiative used high-quality materials suitable for harsh mountainous environments, ensuring long-term safety and durability. — ONA

MUSCAT MUNICIPAL COUNCIL REVIEWS MUSCAT NIGHTS 2026

MUSCAT: The Muscat Municipal Council held its tenth meeting for the year, under the chairmanship of Sayyid Saud bin Hilal al Busaidy, Governor of Muscat and Chairman of Muscat Municipal Council, in the presence of Ahmed bin Mohammed al Humaidi, Chairman of Muscat Municipality. The Municipal Council reviewed Muscat Municipality’s statement regarding the general programme of Muscat Nights 2026, scheduled to take place from January 1 to 31. The statement said that the events of Muscat Nights will be held in key locations to ensure broader community access. The events include entertainment, cultural and community performances, interactive activities, and specialised



The festival is expected to attract visitors, stimulate economic activity and create supportive platforms for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). — ONA

tournaments under the umbrella of an integrated programme designed to meet public expectations. The festival is expected to attract visitors, stimulate economic activity and create supportive platforms for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). As part of efforts at developing the business environment and

improving investor experience, the Municipal Council reviewed Muscat Municipality’s statement regarding the change in the inspection methodology of commercial activities from pre-oversight to post-oversight. The change is aimed to simplify business procedures and enhance the efficiency of the oversight system, fostering a more flexible and competitive economy. Muscat Municipality clarified in its statement that the implementation of the new methodology addresses challenges related to lengthy procedural periods and the frequency of field visits. It will enhance transparency, standardise procedures, and reduce operational costs for both the public and private sectors. — ONA

Advance holiday notice wins praise across Oman

STAFF REPORTER  
MUSCAT, DEC 28

THE government’s decision to announce annual public holidays in advance has drawn widespread appreciation from citizens, professionals and officials, who say it promotes better planning, strengthens family ties and supports economic activity. Dr Abdulaziz, a ministry official, called the move “a wise decision that enhances community well-being and individual quality of life — fully aligned with Oman Vision 2040.” He noted that early holiday announcements also boost domestic tourism, allowing families and individuals to plan trips to Oman’s diverse destinations. Officials from the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism echoed this sentiment. Ibtisam al Mamari said, “It helps people arrange gatherings and family meetings well in advance,” while Dr Adel al Ajmi, a medical practitioner, highlighted the broader economic benefits, pointing out that early planning mobilises both local and international tourism, supporting market growth. Employees and professionals welcomed the clarity the initiative provides. Fahad al Tobi of OETC said, “It allows individuals and businesses to plan schedules and holidays with confidence.” Similarly, media professional Ibrahim al Hadi emphasised that advance announcements bring clarity to both personal and professional life, making travel bookings and family arrangements smoother. Communication and finance experts see additional advantages. Al Yaqdhan Ali said, “Announcing



The move has been hailed as a wise decision that enhances community well-being.

Overall, the advance announcement of public holidays is being hailed as a proactive, strategic initiative that promotes economic activity, social cohesion and personal well-being, while allowing Omanis to make the most of their time off.

national holidays early allows for better financial planning and smarter use of long weekends.” Research specialist Azza al Mamari added, “It helps us plan ahead without stress, saving time and money.” PR executive Hameeda al Balushi noted that parents can better organise children’s activities, while Maha al Balushi, CEO of Key Marketing, said knowing dates in advance reduces stress and improves alignment of work schedules. From an educational perspective, Said al Rawahi, a social specialist, explained that clear holiday schedules benefit both students and institutions by facilitating academic planning, exams and developmental programmes. Student Azza al Battashi said, “Knowing holiday dates in advance

helps us plan study schedules, assignments and exam preparation more effectively.” The tourism sector also benefits, with Salem al Hinaï, a tour operator, noting, “Advance notice of holidays allows us to prepare suitable offers and improve service quality to meet expected demand.” Ahmed al Qasmi and Ahmed al Abri, public sector employees, called the initiative “long overdue” for enabling departments and companies to plan work schedules efficiently. Sports journalists and communications specialists emphasised the social impact. Adel, a sports journalist, said, “Families can plan gatherings properly, strengthening social bonds,” while Anfal, a communications expert, described it as “a thoughtful approach that truly supports family bonding and togetherness.”

SQCCCRC achieves milestone in radiotherapy dosimetry audit

STAFF REPORTER  
MUSCAT, DEC 28

The Radiotherapy Department at the Sultan Qaboos Comprehensive Cancer Care and Research Centre (SQCCCRC) has achieved internationally accepted results in the IAEA’s radiation dose quality audit, a significant accomplishment that reflects the University Medical City’s commitment to implementing the highest global standards of quality and patient safety. The centre explained that this dosimetry audit is one of the most important independent verification

programmes worldwide. It aims to ensure the accuracy of radiation doses received by patients and their conformity to the planned treatment doses. This guarantees the highest levels of therapeutic effectiveness with maximum safety. The audit included reviewing the calibration accuracy of radiotherapy equipment, verifying the validity of treatment planning systems, measuring doses using independent and internationally accredited reagents and then comparing the results with global reference values approved by the IAEA.



The audit results showed that the radiotherapy equipment in the department operates with exceptional accuracy. All measurements fell within the internationally accepted range of ±5 per cent, with a comfortable margin of error. The maximum recorded deviation was only 2.3 per cent with the department achieving perfect accuracy with a 0.0-per cent deviation in one measurement. This reflects the exceptional proficiency of the medical physics team in instrument calibration accuracy, the strength of the quality

assurance programme and a commitment to providing the highest levels of patient safety. Iqbal al Amri, Head of Medical Physics at the Radiotherapy Department of the SQCCCRC at the University Medical City, said: “Passing the IAEA radiation dose audit confirms the medical physics team’s commitment to the highest standards of accuracy and safety in dose calibration. It also reflects the integrated institutional work to ensure the provision of safe and effective radiotherapy that puts patient safety first in line with approved international standards.”

بـرجـيل

burjeel

hospital

By Burjeel Holdings

24399777

Hold on to your dreams, not your pain.

Restore movement with our Orthopedic & Spine Oncology care.

Dr. Humaid Hamood Al Farii

Consultant Spine & Orthopaedic Oncology

Burjeel Hospital, Al Khuwair

www.burjeelhospitaloman.com

SHORT TAKES



The forum serves as a vital platform for marketing home-based products

SECOND FAMILY CREATIVITY FORUM OPENS IN NIZWA

**NIZWA:** The second edition of the Family Creativity Forum commenced on Sunday in the Wilayat of Nizwa, organised by the Directorate-General of Social Development in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate.

Held under the theme ‘Together Towards an Inspiring and Active Family,’ the three-day event is taking place at the Nizwa Grand Mall under the auspices of Shaikh Saleh bin Dhiyab al Rubaiee, Wali of Nizwa.

Azza bint Ali al Abdaliyah, Head of the Empowerment and Capacity Building Department, emphasised that the forum is designed to support productive families by providing economic empowerment and reinforcing their role in Oman’s sustainable development journey.

She noted that supporting these families is a fundamental pillar for achieving broader economic stability and social well-being. Through its ‘Tamkeen’ programme, the Ministry of Social Development has adopted a clear vision to invest in the potential of individuals and families.

The goal is to transform them into active community contributors by promoting the concept of self-employment and assisting families in managing their small and medium enterprises with high efficiency. The forum serves as a vital platform for marketing home-based products, introducing them to the public, and encouraging a local culture that prioritises and supports domestic production. — ONA

PROGRAMME LAUNCHED TO EMPOWER SMES



The programme involves 35 entrepreneurs who own SMEs and is organised by OQGN.

**SUR:** The ‘Tasaeud’ (Rising) programme was launched on Sunday in the Wilayat of Sur, Al Sharqiyah South Governorate, with the aim of supporting small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and enabling them to transition into more advanced stages of growth and sustainability.

The programme involves 35 entrepreneurs who own small and medium enterprises and is organised by OQ Gas Networks (OQGN) in cooperation with the Office of the Governor of Al Sharqiyah South. This initiative is designed to enhance integration between the public and private sectors while linking SMEs to available opportunities that support their expansion and long-term viability.

The ‘Tasaeud’ programme provides a comprehensive practical platform focused on improving the performance of participating institutions and enhancing their readiness for expansion. This is achieved through specialised development tracks that include strategy, financial management, value building, governance and decision-making, all under the supervision of a group of experts and specialists. — ONA

FAMILY AFFAIRS COMMITTEE MEETS TO BOOST CHILD PROTECTION, SOCIAL COHESION

**MUSCAT:** The National Committee for Family Affairs held its second meeting of 2025 on Sunday, chaired by Dr Laila bint Ahmed al Najjar, Minister of Social Development and Chairperson of the Committee. The meeting focused on the stability of the Omani family and the enhancement of social cohesion.

During the session, the Committee discussed national efforts dedicated to child protection and the support of



Dr Laila bint Ahmed al Najjar chaired the meeting on National Committee for Family Affairs.

relevant legislative frameworks. These efforts aim to provide a safe and supportive environment

for child development while protecting them from various risks.

The Committee reviewed several initiatives designed to strengthen community prevention, including plans to prepare integrated national programmes focused on protecting children from the risks of unsafe use of social media and technology and raising awareness regarding the dangers of e-cigarettes within the community and the school environment. — ONA

Scholarship students get ready for university life

MOHAMED AL BATTASHI  
MUSCAT, DEC 28

**THE** Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation (MoHERI) held orientation meetings on Sunday for new internal scholarship students at the Grand Hall of the Cultural Centre at Sultan Qaboos University.

The meetings aim to prepare students academically, administratively and emotionally for university life.

The programme targets students enrolled in private higher education and training institutions in Muscat Governorate. It supports students as they move from school to university and helps them understand their academic responsibilities, in line with the goals of Oman Vision 2040.

Fahd bin Said al Qasabi, Director-General of Scholarships, MoHERI, said the meetings are an important step in preparing students before they begin their university journey. He explained that the sessions introduce students to scholarship rules, their rights and duties, and key academic and administrative requirements. This helps students feel more confident and reduces difficulties during the early stages of study.

He added that the meetings help students understand university study systems, assessment methods and the importance of discipline and commitment.

On a personal level, the programme also supports students by answering their questions, building confidence and explaining the support services available to



The programme also included awareness sessions on education priorities under Oman Vision 2040.

them.

Al Qasabi stressed that a scholarship is a national responsibility as well as an educational opportunity. He encouraged students to work hard, remain committed, and use their university years to develop personal and professional skills. He noted that these meetings support Oman Vision 2040 by helping prepare skilled graduates for future labour market needs.

Suad al Farha, Director of the Internal Scholarships Department, said the department supervises internal scholarship programmes and follows up on students’ academic and administrative matters.

She explained that the meetings focus on clarifying scholarship regulations, students’ rights and obligations, and academic follow-

up procedures, while encouraging regular communication with the department.

The programme included awareness sessions on education priorities under Oman Vision 2040, the dangers of drugs and harmful substances, student mental health, information security, and financial management. Presentations were also given on scholarship systems and grants, followed by an open discussion that allowed students to ask questions and engage with specialists.

Officials said the meetings play an important role in helping students adjust to university life, increase awareness and support their overall well-being, ensuring a positive and successful academic experience.

Strategic visions aim to enhance academic knowledge with industrial applications

**AL MUSANNAH:** Higher education institutions in the Sultanate of Oman have successfully developed an integrated strategic vision aimed at bridging the gap between academic theory and industrial practice.

This vision is being realised through several practical tracks, including linking education directly to industry, solving real-world challenges, and creating integrated training programmes that develop specialised skills tailored to immediate industrial needs.

Graduation projects in universities and colleges have emerged as one of the most effective methods for connecting Artificial Intelligence (AI) with industrial and practical applications. These projects aim to apply acquired knowledge to solve tangible problems and have the potential to transform into commercial



Students developed a project on ‘Detecting Traffic Violations on University Campuses’

For university students several projects have demonstrated the successful integration of AI into industrial processes

opportunities, especially with the growing national focus on innovation and digital solutions. These academic endeavours span various fields, particularly AI, where students are equipped with the technical skills necessary for the labour market by turning theoretical ideas into applicable tools for various sectors of life.

At the University of Technology

and Applied Sciences (UTAS) in Al Musannah, Al Batinah South Governorate, several standout projects have demonstrated the successful integration of AI into industrial processes.

One such project is ‘Detecting Traffic Violations on University Campuses,’ developed by students Khalsa bint Salem al Maqbaliyah, Sara bint Khalid al Amriyah, and Nusaiba bint Suleiman Al Maqbaliyah. This system utilises advanced AI technologies, including YOLOv8, OCR (Optical Character Recognition), and OpenCV-DNN.

The project was developed as a prototype using the NVIDIA Jetson Nano platform, demonstrating high efficiency and impressive real-time processing capabilities. By using cameras to monitor parking lots and roads, the system automatically counts vehicles and verifies if they are parked correctly. — ONA

SPOTLIGHT

OMAN  
THROUGH  
THE LENS



STAFF REPORTER

**OMANI** DOCUMENTARY cinema offers something increasingly rare: a contemplative gaze that transforms geography into narrative and place into memory. From the rugged peaks of Al Hajar Mountains to the vast horizons of the Arabian Sea, from ancient souqs to the quiet stories of remote villages, Oman's landscape emerges not merely as scenery, but as a living visual language shaping the rhythm and soul of documentary storytelling. Blessed with striking geographical diversity — Oman provides film-makers with exceptional cinematic material. This diversity does more than frame the image; it actively participates in the narrative, lending authenticity, emotional depth and cultural resonance to documentary films. Dr Mohammed bin Sulaiman al Kindi, documentary film-maker and member of the Oman Film Society (OFS), describes Oman's environmental and climatic diversity as a defining cinematic strength. "The sea, trees, people, stones, and even the movement of the sun and moon merge into a unique visual narrative," he says.

"The meeting of desert sands with the sea, and the sea with the mountains — shaped by caves, plains, valleys and traditional architecture — creates a visual harmony that documentary cinema can transform into powerful storytelling."

According to Al Kindi, these elements form the building blocks of stories that give documentaries credibility and depth. He also points to Oman's strategic maritime position as a cultural asset. With a coastline extending more than 3,165 kilometres, the country has long been a crossroads of cultures shaped by trade, migration and maritime exchange — legacies that continue to influence contemporary documentary narratives.

Echoing this perspective, Dr Rashid bin Abdullah al Yafai, OFS board member, describes Omani documentaries as part of a broader cultural project. "They are closely connected to people and their environment," he says. "From daily customs to crafts and arts, these films preserve cultural memory while presenting it in a visually compelling and human-centred way."

Al Yafai stresses the importance of balancing local authenticity with a universal human perspective. By focusing on individuals and their lived experiences, Omani documentaries transcend cultural boundaries without losing their identity.

He also highlights the early role of Oman TV in the 1970s in shaping documentary cinema, followed by the growing influence of the Oman Film Society in nurturing talent and promoting films locally and internationally. Director Ahmed bin Amer al Hadhari views documentary film as an art form in its own right, noting that documentaries explore themes such as identity, tradition and modernity through a careful balance of reality and interpretation.

Looking ahead, Fahad bin Ramadan al Maimani, lecturer in film-making at the University of Technology and Applied Sciences, sees AI as an opportunity rather than a threat. "Technology is a tool, not a replacement," he says. "AI can enhance visuals and restore archives, but it cannot replace human emotion."

Despite rapid technological change, Omani documentary cinema remains rooted in place, people and memory — continuing to tell Oman's story to the world through a visual language shaped by authenticity, imagination and belonging.

With a coastline extending more than **3,165** kilometres, the country has long been a crossroads of cultures shaped by trade



The sea, trees, people, stones, and even the movement of the sun and moon merge into a unique visual narrative.

DR MOHAMMED AL KINDI



They are closely connected to people and their environment. From daily customs to crafts and arts, these films preserve cultural memory while presenting it in a visually compelling and human-centred way.

DR RASHID BIN ABDULLAH  
AL YAFAI



Tax Excellence Card

Honoring Commitment... Partners in Excellence

The Tax Authority is pleased to announce the launch of the "Tax Excellence Card" for compliant taxpayers.

Card Validity: Two years from the date of issue.

In the first phase, 100 taxpayers have been selected to receive the "Tax Excellence Card" and they will be contacted directly by the Tax Authority.

Objectives of the "Tax Excellence Card":

- Promoting and embedding a culture of voluntary compliance.
- Highlighting and recognizing compliant taxpayers as role models.
- Building an effective partnership based on trust and cooperation between the Tax Authority and taxpayers.



omantax

taxoman

1020



Recall

Recall Date: 29/12/2025

Hyundai Santafe MX5

| Brand of Commodity  | Year of Production | Number of Affected Commodities |
|---------------------|--------------------|--------------------------------|
| Hyundai Santafe MX5 | 2024               | 125                            |

Recall consequence

The main floor wire harness used in the subject vehicles could become damaged due to contact with the passenger -side, second -row bench seats folding hinge assembly. A damaged main floor wire harness could result in illumination of the air bag warning light, unintended air bag deployment, and / failing to deploy the air bags during a crash.

Recall Action

Dealers will notify owners to bring their vehicles to Hyundai Dealer to inspect and properly secure the wire harness. In the event wire harness damage is confirmed, the floor wire harness will be replaced with new one. Dealers will inspect and, if necessary, remove and replace the finish on rear seat lower child seat LATCH anchorage bars.

To check the serial Numbers of the affected commodities, please visit the website for Recalls & Warnings: <http://recall.pacp.gov.om>  
Toll free No 80050003 on all working days between 8.00 AM to 1.00 PM & 2.00 PM to 5.00 PM with effect from Date 29/12/2025



Consumer Protection Authority

SHORT TAKES



The exhibition featured the participation of local craftsmen who showcased traditional crafts.

EXPO SHOWCASES MUSANDAM’S HERITAGE

**KHASAB:** The Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority (Riyada) in Musandam Governorate inaugurated the Technology and Crafts Exhibition, highlighting the governorate’s rich cultural heritage through a blend of traditional craftsmanship and modern technology.

The exhibition features the participation of local craftsmen who showcased traditional crafts for which Musandam is renowned, reflecting authenticity, creativity and cultural identity.

The initiative aims to enhance product quality, expand marketing opportunities, raise competitiveness and support the sustainability of craft-based enterprises. It also aligns with Riyada’s broader efforts to empower craftsmen through modern training programmes focused on technology, design, marketing and management.

Manea al Shehhi, Director of SME Development in Musandam, said the exhibition reflects Riyada’s commitment to supporting craftsmen by providing platforms for display and market access, while preserving national heritage and contributing to economic development.

The exhibition coincides with Winter Musandam activities, which aim to stimulate tourism and economic activity while highlighting the governorate’s cultural and heritage assets.

— ONA

WADI AHAN DAM MAINTENANCE WORKS COMPLETED



The works included repairing landslides, enhancing groundwater recharge efficiency

**SAHAM:** The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources has completed maintenance and development works at Wadi Ahan Dam in the Wilayat of Saham, Al Batinah North Governorate.

The works included repairing landslides, enhancing groundwater recharge efficiency, constructing a side dam to prevent flooding and installing smart monitoring and drainage systems. Built in 1994, the dam has a storage capacity of 6.8 million cubic metres and plays a vital role in flood control and water resource management. — ONA

Nama launches strategic water purification project at Wadi Dayqah Dam

**QURAYAT:** Nama Water Services company is engaged in building a water purification plant of Wadi Dayqah Dam in the Wilayat of Qurayat.

The Wadi Dayqah Dam stands out as one of the Sultanate of Oman’s vital projects that has a developmental impact.

It serves as one of the basic pillars for diversifying sources of water production and raising the readiness of the supply system during emergency situations.

Eng Nadia al Balushi, director of projects on partnership with the private sector at Nama Water, said that the progress rate in the first



ENG NADIA AL BALUSHI

phase of the project has so far stood at 20 per cent, which covers design and planning works.

She pointed out that the second phase, set to begin in January 2026, represents the practical implementation stage and



The water purification project addresses rising water demand due to urban expansion.

constitutes 80 per cent of the total tasks of the project.

The project is scheduled to be completed in accordance with the approved timetable in March 2027, she said.

Eng Nadia said that the project is being implemented through a strategic partnership with the private sector within the context of a “build-own-and-operate system” for a period of 20 years.

The plant’s production capacity will stand at 65,000 cubic metres per day. This will enhance the flexibility of the water system and augment the reliability of the water supply chain.

— ONA

LEADERSHIP TALK STRENGTHENS ENTREPRENEURSHIP CULTURE

**DIBBA:** The Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority organised a Leadership Talk event in the Wilayat of Dibba, Musandam Governorate, under the auspices of Abdulaziz bin Ahmed al Mayyasi, Wali of Dibba.

The event aimed to consolidate entrepreneurship culture, strengthen communication with entrepreneurs and create a constructive dialogue platform to identify challenges facing SMEs, explore investment opportunities and develop sustainable business



The talk provided an opportunity for entrepreneurs to transform their perspectives into development initiatives.

solutions.

Maneaal Shehhi said the event provided a valuable opportunity to listen directly to entrepreneurs and transform their perspectives into actionable development initiatives that support project sustainability and enhance the local economy. The programme included interactive discussions and the presentation of development proposals focused on improving the business environment and fostering sustainable economic growth in Dibba. — ONA

Khaznah among top 30 innovations; 1,800 trained



The programme hosted activities in Suhar and focused on transforming ideas into viable, impact-driven projects

**STAFF REPORTER**  
MUSCAT, DEC 28

**THE** Jadeer programme, launched by DotNext in March and concluded early in December, attracted around 1,800 participants from diverse backgrounds, including students, job-seekers, employees, homemakers and individuals affected by layoffs. Structured across three progressive stages, the programme hosted activities in Suhar and focused on transforming ideas into viable, impact-driven projects aligned with Oman Vision 2040.

The first stage of Jadeer was designed to be introductory and widely accessible, concentrating on foundational concepts and early ideation. As the programme moved into the second stage, the intensity increased significantly, with deeper coursework, multiple learning tracks and a critical phase dedicated to evaluating and selecting ideas.

During this stage, concepts were filtered, refined and tested for feasibility, leading to the selection of the most promising proposals. By the end of this phase, Maram al Hadi’s idea had successfully qualified among the top 30 ideas across the entire programme.

Following the qualification of her idea, Maram advanced to the bootcamp phase. In preparation, she

conducted interviews and carefully selected two team members to join the project — Sara al Balushi and Shams al Balushi.

This deliberate and focused team formation reflected a strong leadership approach, ensuring that each member contributed a clearly defined and complementary role to the project. Maram al Hadi, who specialises in Information Technology, is the founder and team lead of the initiative. She personally developed the website prototype, delivering a solution that is practical, user-friendly and closely aligned with real user needs.

Sara al Balushi led the marketing and social media strategy, while Shams al Balushi managed the legal, administrative and regulatory components. Under Maram’s leadership, the team operated with a clear division of responsibilities, enabling the idea to evolve into a structured and credible digital solution The project, named Khaznah, is a digital platform designed to modernise traditional group saving practices (Jam’iya) in a secure, transparent and organised manner.

Khaznah addresses a genuine social and financial need, particularly for individuals with irregular income, by offering a trustworthy system that combines financial planning with cultural relevance. The concept aligns

closely with Oman Vision 2040 by supporting financial inclusion, digital transformation and community-based innovation.

“Jadeer pushed us to move beyond ideas and focus on impact,” said Maram al Hadi. “Khaznah was built from a real community need, and the programme helped us turn that need into a practical, trustworthy digital solution aligned with Oman’s future vision.”

Throughout the programme, the team encountered several challenges, including communication gaps and rising pressure at each stage of development.

Each phase introduced new expectations and obstacles, demanding adaptability, resilience and consistent leadership. Despite these challenges, the project continued to progress steadily, underscoring the strength of the idea and the commitment of the team behind it.

Khaznah is more than a financial tool; it represents a socially driven digital solution grounded in local understanding and practical needs. The project highlights Maram al Hadi’s capability as a founder, technical lead and visionary, successfully translating an idea into a functional prototype while guiding her team through a demanding and highly competitive innovation programme.

Selected among the top 30 ideas from the Jadeer programme, Khaznah reimagines traditional Jam’iya savings through a secure and transparent digital platform

WORLD

LASTING PEACE



Displaced people arrive at a temporary camp in Cambodia's Oddar Meanchey province. — AFP

CHINA WELCOMES THAILAND, CAMBODIA TRUCE AHEAD OF TALKS

BEIJING: China on Sunday congratulated Cambodia on reaching a ceasefire with Thailand after weeks of deadly border fighting, as officials from the three countries prepared to open a two-day meeting in southwestern China. Thailand and Cambodia on Saturday ended weeks of fierce border clashes that killed at least 101 people and displaced more than half a million by agreeing their second ceasefire in recent months.

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, in a meeting with his Cambodian counterpart, called the ceasefire “an important step towards restoring peace” and said it was “in line with the shared expectations of countries in the region.” Cambodia’s top diplomat, Prak Sokhonn, and his Thai counterpart, Sihasak Phuangketkeow, are both expected to meet Wang in the Chinese province of Yunnan on Sunday and Monday to discuss the border situation.

Cambodia and Thailand should “promote a complete and lasting ceasefire, resume normal exchanges and rebuild mutual trust” Wang said, according to the official Xinhua news agency. The two countries’ diplomats and military officials should use the meeting in Yunnan as an opportunity to “communicate in a flexible manner and enhance understanding,” Wang added. China is willing to provide humanitarian aid to Cambodia for the settlement of those displaced in the border regions, he said.

Officials on both sides said the day-old ceasefire was holding on Sunday, but for most areas, there has been no all-clear notice just yet. The truce follows three weeks of renewed cross-border fighting that killed at least 47 people and displaced more than a million on both sides. China has been involved in mediation efforts, and Beijing’s top diplomat Wang Yi is hosting the Cambodian and Thai foreign ministers for talks in Yunnan province on Sunday and Monday. Wang told his Cambodian counterpart Prak Sokhonn that the ceasefire “has opened the process of rebuilding peace”, according to a statement from Beijing’s foreign ministry. “In the next step, both sides should proceed step by step to promote a comprehensive and lasting ceasefire, restore normal exchanges, rebuild mutual trust and achieve a turnaround in relations,” Wang added.

A previous round in the decades-old conflict — five days of fighting in July — killed dozens before a truce was brokered, and then broken. Many of those displaced by the latest violence had evacuated in July, too.

Rice and cassava farmer Saichon Wongpitak said she could not afford to wait any longer, planning to return to her home in Thailand’s Sisaket province on Sunday afternoon. “I talked to our neighbour who said there was no gunfire since yesterday,” Saichon, 38, said, adding that her family would evacuate again if necessary.

Under the truce, the two countries agreed to cease fire, freeze troop movements and allow civilians living in border areas to return home as soon as possible, while Thailand was to return 18 Cambodian soldiers captured in July within 72 hours. — AFP

NEW ALLIANCE VOWS TO ADDRESS YOUTH DEMANDS IN NEPAL POLLS

KATHMANDU: Two of Nepal’s most popular political leaders united on Sunday to forge a new alliance ahead of next year’s election, a move that is likely to challenge the long-dominant traditional parties. Television host Rabi Lamichhane, the 51-year-old chairperson of the Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP), and Kathmandu mayor Balendra Shah pledged to address the demands of the younger generation following September’s deadly anti-corruption protests that ousted

the government. Swarnim Wagle, vice-chairman of RSP, called the alliance a “rare combination of courage, sacrifice and hope” for the country as it gears up for the March 5 election. “The new generation leaders have united by putting nation above self, in tune with the aspirations of the youth of Nepal,” Wagle said.

According to the agreement, Lamichhane will remain the party’s chairman, while rapper-turned-mayor Shah, 35, will be

the candidate for prime minister. “Consensus should not be as the leader seeks, it should be what the country needs,” Lamichhane said in a statement on social media after the deal was signed. Lamichhane, who was recently released on bail in connection with cooperative fraud and organised crime, is a popular television host in the Himalayan republic. He set up the RSP in 2022, tapping into widespread discontent at Nepal’s elderly political leadership. — AFP

EU urges respect for Somalia’s sovereignty

THE European Union insisted Somalia's sovereignty should be respected after Israel formally recognised its northern region of Somaliland as an independent state. Israel said on Friday it was officially recognising Somaliland, a first for the self-proclaimed republic that in 1991 declared it had unilaterally seceded from Somalia.

EU foreign affairs spokesman Anouar El Anouni said the bloc “reaffirms the importance of respecting the unity, the sovereignty and the territorial integrity of the Federal Republic of Somalia pursuant of its constitution, the Charters of the African Union and the United Nations.”

“This is key for the peace and stability of the entire Horn of Africa region,” the spokesman said in a statement. “The EU encourages meaningful dialogue between Somaliland and the Federal Government of Somalia to resolve long-standing differences,” he added.

After Israel’s move, Mogadishu denounced a “deliberate attack” on its sovereignty, while Egypt, Türkiye, the Gulf Cooperation Council and the Saudi-based Organisation of Islamic Cooperation all condemned the decision. A self-proclaimed republic, Somaliland enjoys a strategic position on the Gulf of Aden and has its own money, passports and army. But it has been diplomatically isolated since unilaterally declaring independence.

Israel’s recognition of the breakaway region of Somaliland “is (a) threat to the security and



President of Somalia Hassan Sheikh Mohamud delivers remarks in Mogadishu. — AFP file photo

EU foreign affairs spokesman Anouar El Anouni said the bloc “reaffirms the importance of respecting the unity, the sovereignty and the territorial integrity of the Federal Republic of Somalia pursuant of its constitution, the Charters of the African Union and the United Nations.”

stability of the world and the region,” Somali President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud told an emergency parliamentary session on Sunday.

Somalia and the African Union reacted angrily after Israel became the first country to formally recognise the northern region of Somaliland as an independent state. Somaliland declared independence from Somalia in 1991 and has pushed for international recognition for decades, with president Abdirahman Mohamed Abdullahi making it a top priority since taking office last year.

Several other countries condemned Israel's decision. The African Union (AU) rejected the move and warned that it risked “setting a dangerous precedent with far-reaching implications for peace and stability across the continent”.

Somaliland “remains an integral part” of Somalia, an AU member, said the pan-African body’s head Mahamoud Ali Youssouf.

Türkiye, a close ally of Somalia, also condemned the move. “This initiative by Israel, which aligns with its expansionist policy... constitutes overt interference in Somalia's domestic affairs”, a foreign ministry statement said. Egypt said its top diplomat had spoken with counterparts from Türkiye, Somalia and Djibouti, who together condemned the move and emphasised “full support for the unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Somalia”.

Somalia's group Al Shabaab vowed to fight any attempt by Israel “to claim or use parts of Somaliland” following its recognition of the breakaway territory.

“We will not accept it, and we will fight against it,” Al Shabaab said in a statement. Its spokesman Ali Dheere said in the statement that Israel’s recognition of Somaliland as a sovereign state showed it “has decided to expand into parts of the Somali territories” to support “the apostate administration in the northwest regions”.

Somaliland’s lack of international recognition has hampered access to foreign loans, aid and investment, and the territory remains deeply impoverished.

A deal between landlocked Ethiopia and Somaliland last year to lease a stretch of coastline for a port and military base enraged Somalia. Israel has been trying to bolster relations with countries in the Middle East and Africa. — Agencies



WINTER RAINS BATTER DISPLACED GAZANS

KHAN YUNIS: The winter rains have made an already precarious life worse for hundreds of thousands in the Palestinian territory displaced by the war. A fragile ceasefire between Israel and Hamas has been in place since October 10, following two years of devastating fighting.

But despite the truce, Gazans still face a severe humanitarian crisis, and most of those displaced by the war have been left with little or nothing. Families are crowded into camps of tents hastily erected from tarpaulins, which are often surrounded by mud and standing water when it rains. Nighttime temperatures in Gaza have ranged between eight and 12 degrees Celsius in recent days.

Nearly 80 per cent of buildings in the Gaza Strip have been destroyed or damaged by the war, according to United Nations data. And about 1.5 million of Gaza’s 2.2 million residents have lost their homes, said Amjad Al Shawwa, director of the Palestinian NGO Network in Gaza. — AFP

RALLY CASUALTIES

Three dead in Syrian coast protests



Three people were killed on Sunday when protests in Syria's Latakia spiralled into gunfire and other violence. Thousands of protesters gathered on Sunday in Azhari Square in Latakia city to demand a decentralised political system in Syria and the release of thousands of prisoners. About two hours into the protest, gunshots rang out from an unidentified location. Security forces then fired in the air and the protest descended into chaos. — Reuters

CASTING BALLOT

Myanmar stages election after civil war



Voters trickled to Myanmar’s polls on Sunday, with the ruling junta touting the exercise as a return to democracy five years after civil war. The Southeast Asian nation of around 50 million people is riven by civil war and there will be no voting in areas controlled by rebel factions that have risen up to challenge military rule. While opposition factions threatened to attack the election, there were no reports of violence. — AFP

SPACE PROGRAMME

Iranian satellites launched from Russia



Three more Iranian satellites were sent into space on Russia's Soyuz launchers on Sunday, Iranian state media said, as the two US-sanctioned nations extend their space collaboration. “These satellites were designed and produced by Iranian scientists... despite all the sanctions and threats,” Iran’s Ambassador to Russia Kazem Jalali said. “We are working together (with Russia) in different areas. Some are evident, and some we don’t like to clarify,” he added. — Reuters

SHORT TAKES



A woman and child make their way with their luggage at the train station, Sweden. — AFP

SWEDEN’S DEATH TOLL FROM STORM RISES TO THREE

**HELSINKI:** The death toll in Sweden rose to three after a storm battered Scandinavia, with thousands still without power on Sunday. The storm, dubbed Johannes in Sweden, swept over large parts of the northern half of the country and western parts of Finland. A man in his 60s who had been working in the forest was hit by a falling tree on Saturday in Hofors in Sweden, police said on Sunday. He later died of his injuries in the hospital.

The fatality adds to the two reported on Saturday: a man in his 50s died at the hospital after also being hit by a falling tree near the Kungsberget ski resort in central Sweden, Mats Lann of Gavleborg police said. Further north, regional utility Hemab said that one of its employees had died in an accident “in the field”.

Strong gusts toppled trees, disrupted traffic and caused large power outages in Sweden and Finland. In Finland, more than 85,000 homes were still without power around 12 am after a peak of over 180,000. Energy companies warned the reparation work might take several days. Meanwhile, Swedish news agency TT reported that at least 40,000 Swedish homes were still left without electricity on Sunday morning. — AFP

WWII BOMB REMOVED IN BELGRADE



A 470-kilogramme World War II aerial bomb was safely removed on Sunday from a construction site in a central district of Serbia’s capital, Belgrade, police said. The US-made AN-M44 bomb was used during Allied air raids on German positions during the liberation of Belgrade from Nazi occupation in 1944. Ahead of the bomb’s removal, the site, which is near a residential area and a shopping mall, underwent detailed reconnaissance “to ensure safe conditions,” police said. The bomb was transported to an army arms training ground 180 km from Belgrade. — AFP

CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC HEADS TO POLLS AFTER YEARS OF CIVIL WAR

**DAKAR:** The Central African Republic holds presidential elections on Sunday, with controversial incumbent Faustin-Archange Touadéra expected to secure another term in the conflict-ridden country. Touadéra, who has been in office since 2016, is expected to win in the first round. If no candidate receives more than 50 per cent of the votes, a runoff election is planned. The incumbent is running for office following a controversial constitutional referendum in 2023

that allows him to serve additional terms.

The elections are taking place against the backdrop of a civil war that has been ongoing since around 2013 and has brought the state to the brink of collapse, with armed groups controlling large parts of the country at times.

International peace missions, including the UN mission MINUSCA, as well as military support from Russia and Rwanda, have helped to partially stabilise

the situation in recent years.

Parliamentary elections and, for the first time in decades, local elections are also to be held on Sunday in the country of around 5.5 million inhabitants. Several opposition parties called for a boycott of the election.

The main challengers are former prime ministers Anicet Georges Dologuéléand Henri-Marie Dondra, who were only approved as candidates shortly before the election date. — dpa

Zelensky looks to close Ukraine plan with Trump

**UKRAINIAN** President Volodymyr Zelensky will sit down with Donald Trump and seek to secure the US president’s stamp of approval for a new proposal to end the nearly four-year conflict with Russia. The 20-point plan, which emerged from weeks of intense US-Ukraine negotiations, lacks Moscow’s approval, and the face-to-face in Florida follows a massive Russian missile and drone attack on Kyiv. The meeting, to be hosted by Trump at his Mar-a-Lago residence at 1:00 pm (18:00 GMT) according to the White House, will be their first in-person encounter since October, when the US president refused to grant Zelensky’s request for long-range Tomahawk missiles.

Zelensky said during a stopover in Canada on Saturday he hoped the talks would be “very constructive”, and said Russian leader Vladimir Putin had shown his hand with the latest assault on the Ukrainian capital. “This attack is again Russia’s answer on our peace efforts.

And this really showed that Putin doesn’t want peace,” he said. Zelensky held a conference call while in Canada with European leaders who, according to German Chancellor Friedrich Merz, pledged their full support for his peace efforts.

Russia has accused Ukraine and its European backers of trying to “torpedo” a previous US-brokered plan to stop the fighting.

Adding to pressure on the battlefield, Russia announced on Saturday it had captured two more towns in eastern Ukraine, Myrnodgrad and Guliaipole. “If the authorities in Kyiv don’t want to settle this business peacefully, we’ll resolve all the problems before us by military means,” Putin said on Saturday. He was also quoted by state news agency TASS as saying that “the leaders of the Kyiv regime are in no hurry to resolve this conflict peacefully.”

EU chiefs Ursula von der Leyen and Antonio Costa, who joined Zelensky’s conference call, said the European Union’s backing for Ukraine would never falter and vowed to maintain pressure on the Kremlin to come to terms. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov told TASS that Moscow would



Ukrainian rescuers look through rubble inside a damaged building, in Kyiv. — AFP

continue its “engagement with American negotiators” and “address the root causes of the conflict”, but criticised the Europeans. “After the change of administration in the US, Europe and the European Union have become the main obstacle to peace,” Lavrov said. “They are making no secret of their plans to prepare for war with Russia,” Lavrov said, adding that the ambitions of European politicians are “literally blinding them.” “Not only do they not care about Ukrainians, but they also don’t seem to care about their own population,” he said.

Trump has been non-committal on the new peace proposal so far, telling Politico on Friday that Zelensky “doesn’t have anything until I approve it.”

The talks will address a plan that would stop the war along its current front lines and could require Ukraine to pull troops back from the east, allowing the creation of demilitarised buffer zones. As such, it contains Kyiv’s most explicit acknowledgement yet of possible territorial concessions.

However, it does not envisage Ukraine withdrawing from the 20 per cent of the eastern Donetsk region that it still controls — Russia’s main territorial demand. Trump has made ending the Ukraine and Gaza wars the centrepiece of his second term as

a self-proclaimed “president of peace.” But the Ukraine war has, by his own admission, proved far harder than he expected.

Zelensky told reporters in Canada that security guarantees would be a focus of the Florida talks. “Security guarantees must be simultaneous with the end of the war, because we must be confident that Russia will not start aggression again,” he said. “We need strong security guarantees. We will discuss this and we will discuss the terms.” Ukraine insists it needs more European and US funding and weapons — especially drones. Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney, who met with Zelensky on Saturday, announced CAN\$2.5 billion (\$1.82 billion) in fresh economic assistance to help Ukraine rebuild once the war ends.

The latest Russian attack, in which 500 drones and 40 missiles pummelled Kyiv, knocked out power and heating to hundreds of thousands of residents during freezing temperatures.

Power has since been restored “to all homes in the capital”, DTEK, the largest private investor in the energy industry in Ukraine, said on Sunday. The military administration in Kherson city, just south of Kyiv, said Russia launched an attack overnight that left part of the city without electricity as well. — AFP

Kosovo goes to polls in bid to end a year-long political impasse

**PRISTINA:** Kosovo went to the polls on Sunday, with nationalist Prime Minister Albin Kurti’s party seeking a majority to end a year-long political deadlock that has paralysed parliament and delayed international funding for Europe’s youngest nation.

The vote is the second this year in Kosovo after Kurti’s Vetevendosje party fell short of a majority in February.

Months of failed coalition talks prompted President Vjosa Osmani to dissolve parliament in November and call an early election.

Failure to form a government and reopen parliament would prolong the crisis at a critical time. Lawmakers must elect a new president in April and ratify 1 billion euros (\$1.2 billion) in loan agreements from the European Union and World Bank that expire in the coming months. Polls opened at 7 am, with the first official results

expected soon after voting ends.

The Balkan country’s opposition parties have refused to govern with Kurti, criticising his handling of ties with Western allies and his approach to Kosovo’s ethnically divided north, where a Serb minority lives. Kurti blames the opposition for the impasse.

In a bid to woo voters, Kurti has pledged an additional month of salary per year for public sector workers, 1 billion euros per year in capital investment and a new prosecution unit to fight organised crime.

Opposition parties have also focused on improving living standards — a leading concern for voters.

“We want the next government to create conditions for the youth to stay here and not leave,” one voter, 58-year old Rexhep Karakashi, said in the capital, Pristina.

Opinion polls are not published



President of Kosovo Vjosa Osmani speaks to the media, in Pristina. — Reuters

in Kosovo, giving no clues to the possible outcome, and some voters said they did not expect the vote to bring significant change. “There wouldn’t be great joy if Kurti wins, nor would there be if the opposition wins.

This country needs drastic

changes, and I don’t see that change coming,” said Edi Krasiqi, a doctor.

After casting his ballot at a polling station in Pristina, Kurti urged people to vote, saying higher turnout would bolster the parliament’s legitimacy. “Once the election result is known, we will

do everything we know and can to constitute the parliament as soon as possible and to proceed with a new government,” he said. Kosovo declared independence from Serbia in 2008 with US backing, including a 1999 Nato bombing campaign against Serbian forces trying to crush an uprising by the 90 per cent ethnic Albanian majority.

Despite international support, the country of 1.6 million has struggled with poverty, instability and organised crime.

Kurti’s tenure, which began in 2021, was the first time a Pristina government completed a full term. Tensions with Serbia flared in 2023, prompting the EU to impose sanctions on Kosovo.

The bloc said this month it would lift them after ethnic Serb mayors were elected in northern municipalities, but the measures likely cost Kosovo hundreds of millions of euros. — Reuters

OPINION

How algorithms are reshaping reading habits



DR SANDHYA RAO MEHTA

The writer is an Associate Professor, Sultan Qaboos University

THE Pursuit of reading as a hobby has seen contradictory impulses in the last few years. While we assume that people are reading less because of multiple distractions, facts prove otherwise. The rise of reading recommendation platforms online and the popularity of book fairs suggest that reading is still considered an aspirational goal. Most people get suggestions for what to read from online sources and social media. This is the product of the ever-present 'I agree' button at the bottom of each webpage that allows user's information to be shared across different platforms. Whether it is subscription services or social media feeds, applications use algorithmic systems that show patterns of consumer behaviour. This includes previous purchases, ratings given and even reading duration. This is used to offer suggestions and what seems like a personalised recommendation. Traditionally, books were chosen just by strolling in a book shop or even browsing dusty shops and lanes of second-hand stores. Now, suggestions pop up on our screens,

tailored to our taste. Today, romance and fantasy novels, 'romantasy', for short, like Rebecca Yarros's 'Fourth Wing' and Sally Rooney's 'Normal People' circulate widely, not because they are new releases, but because algorithms keep bringing them up as for their instant quotable quotes. This has also taken on wider overtones as algorithms even determine what genre we read. As mental health, wealth, and comfort food gain traction in online conversations, books on these topics also see wider representation. Books offering emotional comfort, escapism with romance, and hopeful climate fiction are all making a mark in online fiction and non-fiction recommendations, mainly because these trend with top concerns in the world today. According to Goodreads, one of the most popular reviewing platforms, mega authors like Kristin Hannah and Sarah Maas continue to be popular as cross generational readers find meaning and escape through them. Of course, the death of a popular writer like Sophie Kinsella also brings her books to

Today, 'romantasy', novels circulate widely, not because they are new releases, but because algorithms keep bringing them up as for their instant quotable quotes

the top of the reading list, as algorithms toss up her novels as suggestions. This system of algorithms determining our choices of readings continues to be an engaging debate. Some readers are happy to have choices made for them based on previous readings and preferences. After all, even the ever-present Google and Amazon preserve our choices in a readymade format. But digital choices also take away from traditional book selection. As writer David Rodeback put it, "When we roam a real bookstore or browse the library stacks, we brush against the larger world and its infinite realities. The algorithms would never think to offer all the perspectives which beckon there, all the voices of the living and the dead, waiting and wanting to go home with us". That is not to stubbornly stay in the past, wishing that the cosy bookstores of our past come back. But it is to suggest that reading just based on algorithms limits our knowledge of the world out there. Reaching out to a world beyond such digital limitations may take effort but is worthwhile.

IRAQIS USE CLAY TO CURB SANDSTORMS

AMMAR KARIM

Deep in Iraq's southern desert, bulldozers and earthmovers spread layers of moist clay over sand dunes as part of a broader effort to fight increasingly frequent sandstorms. Iraq has long suffered from sand and dust storms, but in recent years they have become more frequent and intense as the country falls prey to the effects of climate change. Sand and dust storms — driven by severe drought, rising temperatures and deforestation — have cloaked cities and villages in an endless ochre haze, grounded flights and filled hospitals with patients suffering from breathing difficulties. Iraqi authorities have warned that these suffocating storms will intensify further, adding urgency to address the root of the problem. In a relatively small area between the cities of Nasiriyah and Samawah, not far from ancient Sumerian ruins, labourers are working hard to stabilise the soil by applying a layer of moist clay 20-25 centimetres thick. The project also includes planting heat-tolerant seedlings like Prosopis and Conocarpus to further stabilise the soil. "The main goal is to reduce the impact of transboundary dust storms, which may reach Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Qatar," said Udai Taha Lafta from UN-Habitat, which is leading the project to combat sandstorms with Iraqi expertise. "It is a vital area despite its small size, and will hopefully help reduce dust storms next summer," Lafta said. A short-term objective is to shield a southern highway where many traffic accidents have occurred due to poor visibility during dust storms. The Ministry of Environment estimates that Iraq now faces about 243 storms per year, and the frequency is expected to increase to 300 'dust days' by 2050 unless drastic mitigation measures are adopted. In 2023, Iraqi authorities teamed up with the UN-Habitat and the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development in areas that have been identified as major sources of sandstorms. The project has been implementing several methods in three southern areas, including digging water canals and supplying electricity to pump water from the Euphrates river, preparing barren lands for vegetation. One of the project's ultimate goals is to increase green spaces and for farmers to eventually sustain the lands after droughts and chronic water shortages have drastically reduced agricultural areas. Qahtan al Mhana, from the agriculture ministry, said that stabilising the soil gives agricultural efforts in sandy areas a chance to endure. He added that Iraq has extensive "successful" experience in combating desertification and dust storms by stabilising sand dunes. — AFP

Why humans and animals never see the same reality

SOMETIMES

I forget that what I see feels obvious only because I have seen it for so long. Blue looks blue, a wall looks still, and light feels reliable, so the mind settles and moves on. End of story. Except the story never really ends there. A bird passes overhead, a cat waits in the shade, and a fly moves through the air with its usual urgency, all in the same place and at the same time. Yet it is hard to believe they experience that moment in the same way. Do they notice the same bench, the same tree, the same quiet pause in the air before someone walks past? Probably not. And that should not surprise us, even though it often does. We still talk about eyesight as if it comes in one standard version, something that is either better or worse, sharp or blurry, as if nature ordered eyes from a single shelf and handed them out unevenly. But eyes are not decorations or luxuries. They are tools, shaped by need and built for specific tasks. An eagle needs distance. A mouse needs warning. A frog needs movement. What matters to an animal is not beauty or comfort, but whether sight helps it eat, hide, or escape. Humans care deeply about colour. We admire sunsets, argue about paint shades, and spend too long deciding between two nearly identical sofa tones. Animals often do not share this interest. Many of them care far more about movement, about something that shifted or flickered when it should not have. For some creatures, detail barely matters at all. Speed matters. A sudden shadow, a break in a pattern, or a fast change in contrast can mean danger or dinner. If the world arrives late, there is no second chance, and that simple rule explains much about how eyes develop. The brain also does more work than we like to admit. Light enters the eye, but meaning comes later,



DR KHALFAN HAMED AL HARRASI

The author is an academic and researcher

built through guessing, shortcuts, and quick decisions. Perfect accuracy takes time, and time is often unavailable. Animals fall for visual tricks too, responding to false patterns or misleading shapes in ways that show how much perception depends on assumption. Confusion, it seems, is not a human flaw. It is part of seeing itself. Colour, when examined more closely, found to be less reliable than we think. Humans see a narrow slice of what exists and call it complete, while other animals quietly collect the rest. Ultraviolet patterns sit on flowers like arrows that guide insects to nectar, on feathers like signals that help birds recognise mates, and on skin like private notes meant for very specific viewers. We walk past these signs every day, confident in our eyesight, unaware that most of the message never reaches us. Some animals also notice qualities of light that humans rarely think about. Polarised light carries information about direction, surfaces, and water. It sounds technical, but certain insects and marine animals read it the way we read road signs. To them, a change in reflection may reveal water, a surface may signal danger, and the sky may offer guidance. Then there are animals that glow, not in a poetic sense but literally. Under the right light, feathers and skin light up in ways humans never notice.

Displays that once looked dull or excessive suddenly become clear once we realise that the intended audience sees something entirely different. What looked plain was never plain. It was selective. Colour in nature often works in layers, combining reflection, structure, ultraviolet response, and sometimes glow, all aimed at the right eyes at the right moment.

Movement again matters more than colour for many species. A fast blur can save a life, while fine detail can wait. Night hunters accept softer images in exchange for seeing at all, trading sharpness for survival. These compromises appear everywhere. Nature does not offer free upgrades, only solutions that work well enough. Then sight moves even further from our familiar idea of vision. Heat enters the picture. Some snakes do not rely on light at all. Warmth outlines prey clearly, darkness stops being a problem, and heat turns into shape. A mouse becomes visible not because of colour or outline, but because it carries warmth. It is vision, but not the version most of us were taught. Water changes the rules as well. Light bends, colour fades early, and contrast survives longer. Fish adapt because there is no alternative. Eyes follow physics, not preference. Insects take a different route altogether, using many small eyes working together to provide wide coverage and fast reaction. There is no interest in human-level sharpness, because speed matters more. All of this comes at a cost. Eyes use energy, and brains use even more. Evolution keeps what proves useful and quietly drops the rest. There is no best eyesight in nature. There is only eyesight that fits the job. Once this becomes clear, ranking vision starts to feel unnecessary. Scientists learned, sometimes the hard way, that human vision made a poor reference point. Studying animals through our own eyes led to confident mistakes. New tools now help correct that. Cameras can capture movement, colour, ultraviolet detail, and timing together, allowing researchers to see displays as animals might see them. Suddenly, the signals make sense. They were always there. We simply could not see them.

# Even hands covered in dust build dreams



ABDULAZIZ  
AL JAHDHANI

The writer is author,  
translator and a  
communications  
professional

**DREAMS** Don't only live in glass buildings or quiet offices. They wake up before sunrise, and they ride buses and bikes. They pull on worn gloves, tie up heavy boots and step into the noise of the real world. Dreams live in places where hands are hard-skinned, backs are tired and pride is earned the hard way.

Dreams belong just as much to the hands that build our roads, wire our homes, stitch our clothes, fix our engines, cook our meals and keep our cities running. Everyone has the right to dream, especially the people whose work keeps the world standing and holds society together.

A dream doesn't disappear because a uniform is blue instead of white. It doesn't shrink because a paycheck is earned hourly or because the work is physical. In fact, some of the strongest dreams are born where effort is visible and mistakes can't be hidden. On construction sites, in workshops, kitchens, warehouses, farms and factories, dreams grow alongside sweat.

A construction worker may dream of mastering his craft, starting a small business, or building a safe home for his family. A cleaner may dream of stability, dignity, and time with loved ones. A mechanic may dream of opening a shop, mentoring beginners, or

creating something reliable that lasts. These dreams are not small; they are rooted in pride, skill and contribution.

Blue-collar work demands strength, patience and expertise. It teaches problem-solving in real time, resilience in tough conditions and teamwork under pressure. From these realities come powerful dreams — not always flashy, but deeply meaningful. Dreams of respect, dreams of growth and dreams of a future where effort is seen and valued.

When we protect everyone's right to dream, we build a stronger world. One where a person's value is not measured by a job title, but by their humanity and hope. One where children see dignity in all work and believe their future can take many worthy forms.

Dreams don't always shout, sometimes they whisper during lunch breaks or long shifts. Sometimes they show up as a side project, a night class, a saved coin, or a plan scribbled after midnight. Occasionally, the dream is not to leave the job, but to make it safer, fairer, or something to pass on with pride.

As a matter of fact, the world's biggest dreams collapse without blue-collar hands. Ideas mean nothing if no one builds them. Visions fade if no one wires them, drives them, fixes them, or cleans up after them. The future is not only imagined — it is

*Dreams belong  
just as much to the  
hands that build  
our roads, wire  
our homes, stitch  
our clothes, fix our  
engines, cook our  
meals and keep our  
cities running*

assembled, lifted, repaired and maintained by people whose dreams deserve respect.

Dreams don't require perfect circumstances. Many blue-collar dreams are hidden in challenge: long hours, physical strain and uncertainty. Yet dreaming in these conditions is an act of courage.

So let us change the story. Let us say that dreams belong everywhere — on scaffolds and shop floors, in kitchens and garages, under the open sky and factory lights. Let us teach the next generation that success has many uniforms and that dignity lives in all honest work.

Let every dream take root and grow in workshops, kitchens, garages, roads and factories. Let no uniform, no label, no circumstance make anyone believe that hope is not theirs. Everyone has the right to dream, the thinkers, the builders, the planners and the hands that make plans real. When those who carry the weight of the world are finally allowed to dream, the world doesn't just move forward; it rises, stronger and brighter than ever before.

Each dream is a spark — a promise to yourself that your life has more colours, more possibilities, more dignity than anyone can take away. Hence, everyone has the right to dream. Not just those who plan the world, but those who build it, carry it and keep it alive every single day.

## NOISE COMPLAINTS SPARK VIETNAM PICKLEBALL WARS

TY MCCORMICK AND LAM NGUYEN

The piercing pop-pop of pickleball paddles starts before sunrise and ends after midnight at dozens of newly built courts across Hanoi, as residents relish one of Vietnam's fastest-growing sports - or rage at the noise it makes. The initial craze saw more people in Vietnam pick up a paddle per capita than anywhere else in Asia, according to one survey.

Now unwitting spectators are yelling fault, filing noise complaints and petitions to curb playing hours that have left authorities in a pickle.

In the country's densely packed cities, courts are wedged between tight alleyways and nestled beneath high-rises, disturbing thousands of people at once. "It drives me nuts," said Hoa Nguyen, 44, who lives with her family behind a multicourt complex in Hanoi's northeastern outskirts.

"People are playing in the middle of the night and there's nothing we can do about it," Nguyen said, adding that she had filed a complaint with local authorities. "The noise makes it impossible for me to sleep. It just keeps going pop-pop-pop."

Most noise complaints on the capital's iHanoi app stem from pickleball, according to state media, which has dubbed the sport an "acoustic hazard".

Associated noise-related issues range from unruly crowds to honking horns in overcrowded parking lots. Lam Thanh, 50, who manages a dormitory for workers near one of Ho Chi Minh City's estimated 1,000 courts, says the cacophony is proving to be costly. "Many tenants couldn't stand the noise and have moved elsewhere," she said. "There's the popping sound of paddles, cheering, shouting and joking around - it's all extremely exhausting for us." Vietnam's pickleball boom began around two years ago, players and coaches say, well after its popularity surged in the United States and Canada. But the country is now the sport's second-fastest-growing market in Asia after Malaysia, according to pickleball rating company DUPR.

Regional professional circuit PPA Tour Asia says more than 16 million people in Vietnam have picked up a paddle, though that figure is extrapolated from a survey of around 1,000 respondents. Hanoi's Long Bien district, its pickleball centre, has more than 100 courts, up from 54 in less than a year, according to state media.

Pickleholics Club, Victory Pickleball and Pro Pickleball Vn are all within a five-minute walk, with dozens more a short drive away. Coach Pham Duc Trung, 37, said the sport's accessibility was key to its popularity. "The paddle is light and the ball is light... Children can play it, and so can adults," he said.

"The sound of the ball hitting the paddle is quite appealing," he added. Around the world, the plinks and pops of pickleball have spawned outrage, provoking protests and even lawsuits. But Vietnam's widespread embrace of the sport, and its cities' rapid growth in recent decades as the economy boomed, help explain the intense frustration. — AFP

# Multicultural UK town bids to turn a new page

**ONE** Of Britain's most multicultural towns, long tarnished by extremist links, is increasingly seeking to celebrate its identity, despite a bitter immigration debate and US President Donald Trump's warning that Europe risks "civilisational erasure" from migrants. Luton, north of London, is among a small number of UK towns and cities with a non-white majority. An estimated 150 languages and dialects are spoken in the town of 230,000 people.

Notorious far-right agitator Tommy Robinson and misogynist influencer Andrew Tate, who faces court cases in Britain and Romania, hail from the town, where about a third of residents are Muslim.

Both have used Luton and its post-industrial struggles with deprivation and community cohesion in their stories. Robinson in particular has presented himself as homegrown resistance to extremism.

A number of those behind UK attacks have had links to the town. But neither Robinson, 43, nor the self-proclaimed misogynist Tate, 39, are seen there these days, and residents eschew their divisive beliefs to defend Luton's diversity.

"That non-love energy, spirit, that comes from Tommy, that comes from Andrew... that is definitely not representative of Luton," lifelong resident Glenn Jenkins, 62, said from a community space he founded. Housing a music studio, among other things, it sits near Marsh Farm, a once-notoriously deprived public housing complex where US-born Tate grew up. He branded it "the worst area of the worst town". "Luton is highly multicultural, which is one of its treasures," Jenkins added.

Luton, best known for its airport serving budget airlines and a football team with topsy-turvy fortunes, was for centuries an industrial town. Its factories were once renowned for hat-making then, more recently, vehicle manufacturing. But like many places, it has struggled with the loss of heavy industry and some of its neighbourhoods are among Britain's most deprived. Robinson,



This photo shows a pedestrian walking through the town centre in Luton, north of London. — AFP



JOE JACKSON

The writer is  
an experienced  
and versatile  
British journalist,  
specialised in  
reporting and  
writing, based  
in London, UK,  
working for AFP

whose real name is Stephen Yaxley-Lennon, first garnered national attention by forming the now-defunct far-right English Defence League (EDL) in 2009.

That followed demonstrators staging an anti-war protest during a parade of soldiers returning from Iraq. Seven men from Luton appeared in court for branding soldiers murderers and baby killers.

The town saw occasional clashes between the EDL, counter-protesters and police in subsequent years, and plenty of what locals call "bad press".

Supported by X owner Elon Musk, Robinson drew up to 150,000 people to Britain's biggest-ever far-right march in London in September.

But in Luton, with its sizeable Irish and eastern European heritage communities alongside a big British-South Asian population, leaders say they have worked hard - and successfully - at cohesion. "We're a workshop for peace," Peter Adams, a lay member of the Anglican St Mary's Church for nearly two decades, said. The town council has long been Labour-controlled and the centre-left ruling party holds its two parliamentary seats.

Luton's ceremonial mayor, Amy Nicholls, aged 30 when nominated earlier this year, is its youngest.

But populist Nigel Farage's hard-right Reform UK, which leads in

national polls, could be poised to make inroads. It nearly won a recent by-election for a local government seat. Ex-Labour now-Conservative councillor Aslam Khan said Reform has aired valid concerns over "illegal immigration" but accused the party of "demonising certain communities" like his own, of Pakistani heritage.

"Criticising and stigmatising and demonising a community is very unfair," he said. Khan and others argue that economic regeneration plans, which include a £1.7-billion (\$2.3-billion) town centre renovation and repurposing the former Vauxhall car plant, are the best way to counter far-right narratives. But Tricia, 75, whose family has lived there for generations, said: "You feel like a foreigner in your own town."

"I think the English are just being pushed out, all over the country," she said, beneath a World War I memorial bearing relatives' names.

Perhaps tellingly, Tricia noted her views are not endorsed by her adult sons, denying their accusations of racism. For Jenkins, "two different takes on the world" are playing out in Luton and beyond. "I know people who love Tommy, and they're my friends and brothers - I grew up with them - but they're a minority," he said. He insisted that in the multicultural town "people cross cultural barriers every day".

# SPORTS

SHORTTAKE



Oman International Rally

## SOHAR MOTORS FESTIVAL KICKS OFF ON FRIDAY

SPORT REPORTER  
SUHAR, DEC 28

The Sohar Motors Festival (Second Edition) will roar back into action this Friday, following the outstanding success of its inaugural edition, which attracted large crowds and strong engagement from motorsports fans across the Al Batinah North Governorate. Organised by the Office of the Governor of Al Batinah North in cooperation with the Oman Automobile Association (OAA), the festival will host a wide range of motorsports competitions and activities, including the Oman International Rally and the Freestyle Championships, reflecting the rapid growth of motorsports in the governorate and their rising popularity among youth and families alike.

Motorsports have become one of the most followed sports in Al Batinah North, supported by a vibrant fan base and increasing participation from young enthusiasts. This growing interest has played a key role in the continuity and expansion of the festival from one season to the next, turning it into a major annual sporting attraction.

The opening event of this year's festival will be the Freestyle Championship, which takes place this Friday at Sohar Talent Square, a modern venue inaugurated last season. The facility serves as a fully integrated platform designed to nurture youth talent and channel their passion for motorsports within a safe, professional, and well-regulated environment that meets the highest safety standards. The Oman Automobile Association confirmed that all competitions are conducted under a comprehensive operational system that includes strict safety regulations, professional event management, and technical supervision by qualified specialists, ensuring the protection of both participants and spectators while maintaining high organisational standards.

The Sohar Motors Festival forms part of broader joint efforts to promote sports tourism, support national motorsport talents, and strengthen the position of Al Batinah North Governorate as one of Oman's leading hubs for motorsports events, contributing to the Sultanate of Oman's growing reputation in this dynamic sporting sector.

# Top runners to participate in Oman Desert Marathon

THE 11th edition of the Oman Desert Marathon is set to launch on January 10, 2026. The event will be held in Rimal Al Sharqiya, Wilayat of Bidiyah in the Al Sharqiyah North Governorate and will continue for five days, featuring elite runners from various countries around the world.

Said bin Mohammed al Hajri, General Supervisor of Oman Desert Marathon and Chairman of Oman Athletics Association, stated to Oman News Agency (ONA) that the Sultanate of Oman is preparing to host one of the most prominent global sporting events at the beginning of 2026 by organising Oman Desert Marathon. This exceptional event combines the spirit of athletic challenge with the beauty of the Omani desert landscape, attracting professional and amateur runners from different parts of the world.

He added that Oman Desert Marathon is the first event in the Middle East to obtain this unique accreditation. The global organisation "SheRACES" works to achieve parity by supporting organisers in providing a fair and inclusive sporting environment. He noted that the accreditation certificate confirms the marathon's commitment to providing an experience where everyone feels supported throughout the race competitions.

He explained that Oman Desert Marathon presents a unique test for runners, as temperatures vary between day and night, and the terrain shifts between soft sands, high dunes, and open tracks. This adds an adventurous dimension that enhances the race's uniqueness and places it among the world's most prominent desert races.

Said al Hajri emphasised that the marathon seeks to achieve several goals, most notably promoting sports tourism, boosting the local economy, highlighting the beauty of the Omani desert environment and its rich natural diversity, and establishing the concept of sport as a healthy and sustainable lifestyle within the community.

He noted that the marathon is expected to witness wide international participation from dozens of countries, serving as a platform for the convergence of different cultures, the exchange of sporting experiences, and enhancing the global



Participants will traverse varied desert routes extending through Rimal Al Sharqiya.



presence of the Sultanate of Oman on the map of sport and adventure.

He pointed out that the marathon will start from Al Wasil village in the Wilayat of Bidiyah, Al Sharqiyah North Governorate. Participants will traverse varied desert routes extending through Rimal Al Sharqiya before concluding the journey on the shores of the Arabian Sea at Qahid village in the Wilayat of Jaalan Bani Bu Hassan, Al Sharqiyah South Governorate.

He added that the main course length is 165 kilometres for desert running, in addition to a 100-kilometre desert walking course, distributed over five stages, representing a true challenge to test physical ability and mental endurance.

He stated that the global event in its eleventh edition is held amidst exceptional winter weather as part of the "North A'Sharqiyah Winter Festival" activities. It

is not limited to long-distance races only but includes an integrated programme suitable for all ages and abilities. This includes a 2-kilometre race for children, a 5-kilometre race for youth and families, a 10-kilometre cross-country race, a half marathon of 21 kilometres, and a full marathon of 42 kilometres for professionals and amateurs.

He furthered that this diversity reflects the organisers' keenness to make the marathon a community sports festival, opening the door to broad and anticipated participation, especially as these races in past editions have seen significant turnout from participants of both genders and various nationalities from within and outside the Sultanate of Oman.

It is worth noting that Oman Desert Marathon 2026 represents more than just a sporting race; it is a global message reflecting the Sultanate of Oman's ability to organise major international events and affirms its position as a leading destination for desert sports and adventures.

It is where physical challenge meets the spirit of discovery in the heart of the Omani desert, especially with the marathon having gained international recognition.

— ONA

# Al Nassr, Oman Club in HM Cup quarterfinals

RIYADH AL BALUSHI  
MUSCAT, DEC 28

Two thrilling encounters marked the Round of 16 stage of His Majesty's Cup football competition on Saturday, as Al Nassr and Oman Club secured their places in the quarterfinals following hard fought matches at the Al Rustaq Sports Complex and Ibra Sports Complex.

At the Al Rustaq Sports Complex, Al Nassr claimed a dramatic 2-1 victory over Al Khabourah in a match characterised by intensity, tactical discipline and effective counter attacking football, despite Al Khabourah enjoying the better share of possession and creating several early opportunities, Al Nassr proved more clinical in front of goal.

The breakthrough



Al Nassr claimed a dramatic 2-1 victory over Al Khabourah.

came in the 17th minute, when Hussain al Shuhari capitalised on a swift counter attack, exploiting the space left behind Al Khabourah's defensive line, Al Shuhari unleashed a precise finish that beat the goalkeeper and gave Al Nassr an early lead, following the goal, both

teams adopted a more cautious approach, with chances becoming scarce as the tempo dropped and the first half ended with Al Nassr leading 1-0.

The second half saw a more balanced contest, with both sides sharing possession and attempting to build attacks patiently, Al Khabourah increased their attacking pressure as the match entered its final stages and were rewarded in the 82nd minute, when Darwish al Matroushi found the net to level the score, finishing confidently from inside the penalty area.

However, Al Nassr responded almost immediately. In the 85th minute, Fahd Adel led another rapid counter attack and calmly converted his chance to restore Al Nassr's advantage, the visitors

then managed the closing minutes effectively, maintaining their defensive organisation to preserve the lead and secure qualification for the next round.

In the second match of the day at the Ibra Sports Complex, Oman Club and Al Wahda played out a tightly contested encounter that ended in a goalless draw after both regulation time and extra time, the match was marked by strong midfield battles and disciplined defensive displays, limiting clear cut scoring chances for both teams.

With neither side able to break the deadlock, the match was decided by a penalty shootout, where Oman Club showed greater composure and accuracy to claim victory and book their place in the quarterfinals.



Recall

Recall Date: 29/12/2025

HYUNDAI KONA SX2

| Brand of Commodity | Year of Production | Number of Affected Commodities |
|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------------------|
| Hyundai Kona SX2   | 2024               | 17                             |

Recall consequence

The exhaust gas recirculation (EGR) valve assembly in the subject vehicles may contain a sensor that was contaminated with solder flux during supplier manufacturing, which could potentially result in an electrical short. An electrical short within the EGR valve could lead to a malfunction of the EGR valve or crank position sensor, both of which reside on the same power circuit, resulting in MIL illumination and/or a sudden loss of power while driving.

Recall Action

The Hyundai dealer will notify owners of Kona SX2 vehicles to bring their affected vehicles in so that the EGR valve can be replaced at no cost to the customers.

To check the serial Numbers of the affected commodities, please visit the website for Recalls & Warnings: <http://recall.pacp.gov.om>  
Toll free No 80050003 on all working days between 8.00 AM to 1.00 PM & 2.00 PM to 5.00 PM with effect from Date 29/12/2025



Scanning the QR code of the subject items, allowing please visit the website for Recalls & Warnings to check the commodity details



Oman Trading Establishment LLC



Consumer Protection Authority  
مجلس حماية المستهلك

SHORTTAKES



At the conclusion of the course, Paramedic Jazab Hussein distributed certificates of participation to the coaches who took part in the programme.

SHOTOKAN HOLDS FIRST AID COURSE IN AL AMERAT

Shotokan Karate Center organised a specialised First Aid training course on Saturday, at the Center’s main hall in the Wilayat of Al Amerat, as part of its continuous efforts to enhance coaches’ skills and promote safety standards in sports halls and tournaments.

The course was delivered by Paramedic Jazab Hussein, Head of First Aid Trainers at Al Sarooj Institute for Security and Safety, who presented a comprehensive program combining theoretical and practical components. The course targeted male and female coaches of Shotokan Karate Center.

The training addressed common sports injuries in gyms and tournaments, in addition to practical instruction on how to properly manage emergency cases such as fainting, fractures, bleeding, and choking, highlighting correct first aid procedures and common mistakes to avoid.

The organisers emphasised that this initiative reflects the Shotokan Karate Center’s commitment to providing a safe training environment and raising health awareness among coaches, ensuring rapid and effective responses to emergencies and safeguarding athletes during training sessions and competitions.

At the conclusion of the course, Paramedic Jazab Hussein distributed certificates of participation to the coaches who took part in the programme. In recognition of his valuable efforts and the precise and enriching information he provided on proper first aid practices, Sensei Yousuf bin Muslim al Siyabi and Sensei Hilal bin Mohammed al Abdali presented him with a commemorative medal.



Saham continued their strong run with a deserved 5–2 victory over Salalah. — Khalfan al Ruzaiqi

Amerat, Masirah and Saham win in beach league

AHMED AL KAABI  
MUSCAT, DEC 28

**TWO** exciting matches in Round 11 of the Beach Soccer League at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher saw Saham defeat Salalah 5–2 and Masirah beat Mirbat 4–2.

In the first match, Saham continued their strong run with a deserved 5–2 victory over Salalah in a game that saw several momentum shifts. Salalah took an early lead through Abdulrahim Faraj in the third minute, before Saham goalkeeper Abdullah bin Nasser brought his side back into the contest with a long-range effort to level the score, ending the first period at 1–1.

In the second period, Salalah regained the lead through Mohammed Shamas, but Saham responded quickly via Mujtaba Al Ajmi to restore parity at 2–2.

In the third period, Saham asserted their technical and physical superiority, scoring three consecutive goals through Malik Al Qartoubi, Abdulrahman Al Fazari and Yousuf Al Marzouqi to seal a 5–2 win.

With this result, Saham raised its tally



to 15 points in fourth place, while Salalah remained sixth, second from bottom, on 6 points.

**MASIRAH BEAT MIRBAT**  
Masirah also continued their fine form against Mirbat.

Mirbat made a strong start when Aiham Awad opened the scoring in the first minute, but Masirah quickly equalised through Sherif Al Balushi in the sixth minute, ending the first period 1–1.

Yousuf Al Zajali scored twice in the second period and completed his hat-trick in the third to lead Masirah to a 4–2 victory. Masirah climbed to 22 points in second

place, with Mirbat remaining fifth on 6 points.

**AL AMERAT CONTINUE AT THE TOP**  
In Salalah, Al Amerat maintained their excellent form with a convincing 5–2 win over Taqah on the sandy pitch at the Sultan Qaboos Youth Complex for Culture and Entertainment.

Khalid Al Araimi gave Al Amerat an early lead in the first minute with a powerful strike, before Hussein bin Ali equalised for Taqah in the fifth minute. Al Araimi then restored Al Amerat’s lead with a second goal in the eighth minute to make it 2–1 at the end of the first period.

In the second period, Yahya Al Muraiki extended Al Amerat’s advantage, but Fawzan Dorbin brought Taqah back into the contest with their second goal.

However, Yaqdhan Al Hindasi netted Al Amerat’s fourth to keep his side in control.

The third period saw strong competition between the two teams before Abdullah Al Sawti sealed the result with Al Amerat’s fifth goal, confirming a 5–2 victory.

Al Amerat now lead the league with 30 points, while Taqah remain bottom without a point.

Antetokounmpo leads Bucks past Bulls

WASHINGTON: In a return from injury, Giannis Antetokounmpo scored a game-high 29 points to help the visiting Milwaukee Bucks earn a 112-103 victory over the Chicago Bulls on Saturday.

Antetokounmpo had missed eight straight games with a right calf strain for Milwaukee, which had dropped four of its last five games. Ryan Rollins added 20 points, while Bobby Portis had 17 points and 10 rebounds. Myles Turner chipped in 13 points and Kyle Kuzma scored 12.

Nikola Vucevic and Coby White led Chicago with 16 points apiece, while Josh Giddey tallied 13 points, nine assists and seven boards. Ayo Dosunmu had 11 points off the bench for the Bulls, who saw their five-game winning streak come to an end.

After holding a four-point halftime lead, Milwaukee doubled the margin to 71-63 on Turner and Rollins’ layups with 6:31 left. Giddey then scored five on a 7-0 run, pulling Chicago within a point.

Giddey’s three-point play and Zach Collins’ lay-up knotted the score at 75 with 3:12 remaining in the third. Antetokounmpo split a pair of free throws with four seconds left in the



Milwaukee Bucks guard Gary Harris (11) defends Chicago Bulls guard Tre Jones (30) during the first half at United Center. — Imagin Images

quarter, giving Milwaukee an 85-80 edge entering the fourth.

Antetokounmpo’s alley-oop dunk on an assist from Porter extended the Bucks’ advantage to 90-83, before

Vucevic’s back-to-back layups cut the lead to three.

Rollins’ fourth trey gave the Bucks a 95-91 lead with 5:14 left in the fourth. After Giddey responded with a 3-pointer of his own, another Rollins 3-pointer pushed the lead back to four.

After Turner’s put-back lay-up and AJ Green’s triple extended the lead to nine, six straight Chicago points pulled the Bulls within three with 1:31 remaining. From there, Antetokounmpo’s four straight points gave the Bucks a 107-100 lead with 45.7 seconds left.

After Chicago led by seven early, Rollins’ 3-pointer with 33 seconds remaining in the opening quarter gave the Bucks a 28-26 lead entering the second.

Milwaukee opened the second quarter on an 8-3 run, taking a seven-point lead on Porter’s pull-up jumper. After Chicago pulled within five, Antetokounmpo’s three straight dunks stamped an 8-0 Bucks run to give the visitors a 44-31 edge.

Collins’ lay-up and Tre Jones’ 3-pointer finished the first half, trimming the Bulls’ halftime deficit to 54-50. — Reuters

Recall

Recall Date: 29/12/2025

Hyundai Veloster FS  
Hyundai Santafe CM

| Brand of Commodity  | Year of Production | Number of Affected Commodities |
|---------------------|--------------------|--------------------------------|
| Hyundai Veloster FS | 2011 - 2014        | 344                            |
| Hyundai Santafe CM  | 2011 - 2014        | 280                            |

Recall consequence

Electrical shorts in the HECU module may occur very rarely. It could increase the risk of an engine compartment fire.

Recall Action

Replace the HECU fuse.

To check the serial Numbers of the affected commodities, please visit the website for Recalls & Warnings: <http://recall.pacp.gov.om>  
Toll free No 80050003 on all working days between 8.00 AM to 1.00 PM & 2.00 PM to 5.00 PM with effect from Date 29/12/2025

Oman Trading Establishment LLC

Consumer Protection Authority  
سلطة حماية المستهلك

SPORTS

SHORTTAKES



AC Milan's French forward #18 Christopher Nkunku controls the ball. — AFP

NKUNKU STARS AS MILAN EDGE VERONA TO MOVE TOP OF SERIE A

**MILAN:** Christopher Nkunku fired AC Milan top of Serie A with a brace in Sunday's 3-0 win over Verona at the San Siro, the France forward's first goals in Italy's top flight.

Nkunku ended a league goal drought stretching back to February when he doubled Milan's lead two minutes after half-time with a penalty he earned.

NKUNKU SCORES TWICE, PULISIC OPENS SCORING FOR MILAN

MILAN MOVE PROVISIONALLY TOP OF SERIE A

ALLEGRI PRAISES NKUNKU'S PERFORMANCE AND TEAM'S IMPROVEMENT

Five minutes later he was on hand to tap home the third and give the hosts a two-point lead over local rivals Inter Milan.

The 28-year-old's only previous goal for Milan since signing from Chelsea for an initial 37 million euros (\$43.6 million) in August came against Lecce in the Italian Cup in September.

Inter can reclaim top spot later on Sunday

when they make the short trip to Bergamo to face Atalanta who have been revitalised since Raffaele Palladino took charge last month.

Milan were set on their way to a comprehensive victory on the stroke of half-time by Christian Pulisic who continued his sensational form by scoring his eighth goal in 11 Serie A appearances.

Pulisic, who has missed around a month of this campaign to injury, has had a hand in 50 goals in Serie A since arriving at Milan in 2023.

He broke Verona's spirited resistance when he prodded home Adrien Rabiot's flick-on at a corner in the first minute of stoppage time at the end of the first half.

It helped Milan confidently beat one of the lower ranked teams, something which Massimiliano Allegri's players have had a hard time doing even though they haven't been beaten in Serie A since the opening day of the season.

Nkunku made sure of the points and made his case to lead the line for Milan, with Mexico striker Santiago Gimenez out until February and Niclas Fullkrug set to sign from West Ham next month.

Verona, who had won their last two matches against Atalanta and Fiorentina, stay in the relegation zone, two points behind Genoa who sit just outside the bottom three and face Roma on Monday.

Also on Sunday, champions Napoli will try to



AC Milan's French forward #18 Christopher Nkunku celebrates after scoring his team second goal. — AFP



Gabon's defender #13 Mick Kila Omfia and Mozambique's midfielder #10 Geny Catamo vie during the Africa Cup of Nations. — AFP

Mozambique end 39-year wait for first AFCON victory

**MOZAMBIQUE** ended a 39-year wait for a first Africa Cup of Nations victory by defeating Gabon 3-2 in a Group F thriller in Agadir on Sunday.

The Mambas began the match having drawn four and lost 12 since making the first of six appearances at the tournament in 1986.

Goals from Faisal Bangal, Geny Catamo and Diogo Calila won a seesaw struggle for the Mozambicans, who led 2-1 at half-time in the Moroccan coastal city.

Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang and Alex Moussounda netted for Gabon, who twice halved two-goal deficits before suffering a second straight loss after falling to Cameroon.

Defending champions Ivory Coast and Cameroon, who meet later on Sunday in Marrakesh, and Mozambique have three points each.

Catamo had the first clearcut chance, but was let down by poor control, allowing the ball to run too far in front of him and goalkeeper Loyce Mbaba dashed forward to gain possession.

Mozambique — 24 places below Gabon in the world rankings — were more adventurous and deservedly took the lead on 37 minutes through Bangal, a striker with an Italian fourth division club.

Bangal rose unchallenged from a corner and his header bounced off the ground into the left corner of the net with Mbaba helpless.

Mozambique increased their lead just five minutes later after Bruno Ecuele Manga pulled the shirt of Elias 'Domingues' Pelembe in a clash of the rival captains.

Catamo calmly placed the penalty into the left corner as Mbaba dived in the opposite direction.

The Mambas almost scored again soon after with Witiness 'Witi' Quembo bending a shot from outside the box that struck the woodwork.

Gabon pulled one goal back five minutes into first-half added time through their best known footballer, 36-year-old Marseille striker Aubameyang.

The 2015 African player of the year was perfectly positioned to tap the ball into the net after Mozambique goalkeeper Ernan Siluane failed to grasp a Didier Ndong shot.

Portugal-based right-back Calila scored the third Mozambique goal on 52 minutes, venturing forward to nod a Witi cross past Mbaba.

Aubameyang had a scoring chance soon after, but headed wide from point-blank range in a let-off for the Mozambicans.

Domingues, a 42-year-old and second oldest footballer to play at an AFCON, was



Gabon's midfielder #17 Andre Poko and Mozambique's midfielder #19 Witiness Quembo vie during the Africa Cup of Nations (CAN) Group F football match between Gabon and Mozambique. — AFP



Mozambique's defender #23 Diogo Calila celebrates his goal during the Africa Cup of Nations. —AFP

substituted midway through the second half by a more defensive midfielder, Manuel Kambala.

Siluane saved superbly from Aubameyang

and Ndong, but a subsequent corner led to a goalmouth melee that ended with Moussounda slamming the ball into the net on 76 minutes to set up a tense finish. — AFP

MUSCAT  
STOCK  
EXCHANGE  
4,608.841

# BUSINESS



EXPLORE NEW HORIZONS  
with profit rates starting from  
**3.49%**  
on travel financing.



[www.dhofarislamic.com](#) 24775777

\*Terms and Conditions Apply.

## SHORTTAKES



By the end of September, Oman had 36,300 hotel rooms in operation, with another 1,000 set for completion in Q4 2025.

## HOSPITALITY EXPANSION DRIVES OMAN’S HOTEL REVENUE GROWTH TO RO 193 MILLION

**MUSCAT:** Hotel revenues in Oman rose by more than 18% year-on-year between January and September 2025 to reach a new nine-month high of RO 193.4 million (\$505 million), according to leading real estate advisory and property consultancy, Cavendish Maxwell.

In the same period, room revenues climbed by nearly 21%, occupancy rose by 13%, hotel guest numbers grew by 9% and employment in the hospitality sector increased by 5.3%, the company said. By the end of September, Oman had 36,300 hotel rooms in operation, with another 1,000 set for completion in Q4 2025. With another 3,000 planned for the next two years, room inventory is set to reach 40,300 by the end of 2027, according to Cavendish Maxwell’s latest insight and analysis of Oman’s hospitality sector.

In addition, Oman’s Ministry of Heritage and Tourism is further boosting the sector with RO 100 million (\$260 million) worth of usufruct agreements covering hotels, resorts and integrated developments, while ongoing marketing campaigns are strengthening Oman’s position as a year-round destination.

Oman’s 3-5 star hotels welcomed 1.7 million guests in the first nine months of year, compared to 1.5 million in the same period in 2024, with the Khareef Dhofar Season further boosting visitor numbers.

# Oman launches marble investment openings

**THE** Ministry of Energy and Minerals has announced new investment opportunities in the marble sector, offering two public mineral areas in Al Sharqiyah North Governorate to local and international investors as part of its strategy to expand Oman’s mining investment base.

The offering period runs from December 28, 2025, to April 28, 2026 and targets high-quality, commercially viable projects supported by strong geological and economic fundamentals.

The two areas cover a combined 2.55 square kilometres, with preliminary studies indicating the presence of dark marble deposits with promising investment potential.

Engineer Saud bin Khamis al Mahrouqi, Director General of Minerals at the Ministry, said Omani marble has emerged as one of the mining sector’s most notable success stories, underpinned by its high geological quality and wide range of colours that make it competitive in regional and global markets.

He noted that Omani marble is extensively used in the production of tiles, slabs and decorative stone, with exports reaching several international markets. This performance reflects the Sultanate of Oman’s abundant reserves and the growing efficiency of its extraction, processing and manufacturing value chains.

Al Mahrouqi revealed that Oman currently has more than 15 active quarries and around 11 integrated marble processing plants, with annual production



Oman currently has more than 15 active quarries and around 11 integrated marble processing plants, with annual production exceeding one million tonnes. Production capacity could increase further in line with improving global demand.

**ENG SAUD BIN KHAMIS AL MAHROUQI**  
Director General of Minerals at the Ministry of Energy and Minerals.



The two areas cover a combined 2.55 square kilometres, with preliminary studies indicating the presence of dark marble deposits with promising investment potential.

exceeding one million tonnes. He added that production capacity could increase further in line with improving global demand.

The Ministry’s policy, he explained, prioritises maximising local added value by restricting the export of raw marble blocks and encouraging the production of higher-value finished and semi-finished products. Beyond output growth, the strategy also focuses on improving operational efficiency, promoting advanced technologies, creating employment opportunities and strengthening environmental sustainability.

Recycling marble waste and linking it to supporting industries forms a core part of the Ministry’s push towards a circular economy, helping to reduce environmental impact while generating additional economic value.

Al Mahrouqi added that the Ministry is advancing strategic

programmes to develop the marble sector, including preparing fully approved public mining sites and implementing a transparent bidding system that ensures equal opportunity for investors and provides clear regulatory and legislative frameworks.

Omani marble consists mainly of metamorphic limestone and dense, polishable sandstone in colours ranging from white and brown to yellowish-brown and black. Major reserves are located in Ibri, Bahla, Nizwa, Ibra, Al Qabil and Mahadha, as well as in parts of the Western and Eastern Al Hajar Mountains.

Extraction is carried out in mountainous areas using advanced cutting technologies before blocks are transported for processing. Exports are primarily directed to GCC markets, India and South Korea, in line with the policy restricting raw block exports. — ONA

# Al Duqm emerges as Oman’s launchpad for Petrochemicals 2.0

**CONRAD PRABHU**  
MUSCAT, DEC 28

A new chapter in Oman’s industrial development is taking shape in Al Duqm, as policymakers, energy companies and industrial leaders converge around a shared vision for “Petrochemicals 2.0” — a lower-carbon, integrated and higher-value evolution of the sector.

That was the central message of a recent episode of the Duqm Now podcast, organised by the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD).

The podcast, hosted by Talal al Shahri, brought together Mohammed al Hashmi, Chief Operating Officer of OQ8; Khalid al Qassabi, Director General of Industry at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP); and Dr Idris al Siyabi, Renewable Energy Lead at Petroleum Development Oman (PDO).

Petrochemicals 2.0, as outlined in the discussion, represents a shift away from volume-driven



The podcast, hosted by Talal al Shahri, brought together Mohammed al Hashmi (OQ8), Khalid al Qassabi — MoCIIP and Dr Idris al Siyabi (PDO).

growth towards a model anchored in decarbonisation, circularity and digitalisation.

The aim is to significantly reduce lifecycle emissions by integrating renewable energy, green hydrogen and advanced process optimisation across the petrochemical value chain.

“Petrochemical production is highly energy-intensive and increasingly that energy must come from low-carbon sources”, said Dr Al Siyabi.

Solar and wind power, he noted,

can supply clean energy from feedstock handling through to production and delivery, helping producers meet tightening global regulations on carbon intensity.

From a policy standpoint, petrochemicals remain a strategic pillar of Oman’s industrial strategy.

Al Qassabi described the sector as both natural-resource-based and capital-intensive — a combination that underpins its long-term relevance across industries ranging from plastics and manufacturing to healthcare.

However, competitiveness is no longer defined by cost alone. “Low carbon footprint is now as important as low cost”, Al Qassabi said, highlighting growing consumer and regulatory demands for sustainable products. As a result, Oman is placing emphasis on full supply-chain compliance, supported by new monitoring frameworks and incentives.

According to Al Hashmi, petrochemical companies are already embedding net-zero targets

into operational KPIs and capital investment decisions, with tangible impacts expected over the next five years. Multiple pathways are being pursued, including process engineering improvements, closed-loop systems, carbon capture and a shift from grey to green hydrogen — a critical input for refineries and chemical plants.

Al Duqm’s unique appeal lies in its ability to bring these elements together at scale.

As a greenfield industrial zone, it offers vast land availability, strong solar and wind resources; and proximity to emerging green hydrogen projects. This enables petrochemical facilities to be designed from the outset for low-carbon performance, rather than retrofitted at higher cost.

“Integration is both logical and powerful in Al Duqm”, Dr Al Siyabi said, pointing to the co-location of refineries, renewable energy assets and future chemical value chains. He stressed that Petrochemicals 2.0 is not about replicating existing

models, but about deploying advanced technologies such as AI-driven optimisation, automation, green chemistry and chemical recycling.

Beyond technology, Al Duqm is also positioned as a talent and employment hub. Petrochemicals already account for around 10% of industrial jobs in Oman, a figure expected to rise as downstream value chains expand.

Strong alignment with universities and research institutions is helping prepare a new generation of specialists in renewables, hydrogen and advanced manufacturing.

With existing feedstock, modern infrastructure, upstream industries and a skilled workforce built on decades of oil and gas expertise, Al Hashmi said Al Duqm is ready to define its niche. “We are well qualified to lead the next era of petrochemicals”, he said. “Petrochemicals 2.0 is the future — and Al Duqm is where it can be realised”.

ADVERTORIALS

SHORTTAKES



At the heart of this initiative is a simple promise: every visit to Shell Oman is a chance to raise the bar.

SHELL OMAN  
LAUNCHES NEW  
SHELL V-POWER  
CONSUMER CAMPAIGN

**MUSCAT:** Shell Oman Marketing Company (Shell Oman) has announced the launch of its newest national consumer campaign, an exciting Shell V-Power promotion designed to elevate the customer experience while rewarding loyalty through Shell GO+ App.

Running from December 1, 2025 to January 31, 2026, the 'Fuel & Win' campaign brings together premium performance, digital engagement and unforgettable prizes in one seamless journey for motorists.

At the heart of this initiative is a simple promise: every visit to Shell Oman is a chance to raise the bar. Customers who fuel with RO 12 or more of Shell V-Power at any participating Shell service station will be eligible to enter the monthly draw when they scan their digital Shell GO+ QR code through the Shell Asia app.

This effort not only enhances customer convenience but strengthens Shell Oman's commitment to a smarter, more connected mobility ecosystem in Oman.

As Shell's most advanced performance fuel, Shell V-Power is engineered with cutting-edge DYNAFLEX technology and is formulated to help clean and protect critical engine parts.

The new and improved formulation can remove up to 100 per cent of performance-robbing deposits in the engine's fuel system, enabling a smoother, more efficient drive and helping customers get the most out of every journey. By choosing Shell V-Power, motorists are choosing a fuel designed to restore engine performance while delivering a premium driving experience.

Throughout the campaign period, a total of 55 winners will be selected, reflecting Shell Oman's drive to give back to the communities it serves and inspire customers to experience the power of performance.

The rewards include five brand-new iPhone 17 devices and fifty luxury two-night staycations at the scenic dusicD2 Naseem Resort in Al Jabal Al Akhdhar, a retreat chosen for its blend of tranquility, nature and Omani hospitality.

The first draw will take place on January 1, 2026, offering two iPhones and twenty-five hotel vouchers, while the second draw will be held on February 1, 2026, with three iPhones and another twenty-five hotel vouchers.

Suresh Nair, General Manager of Mobility, said: "Shell V-Power has always stood for more than performance. It reflects our belief that every journey matters and that customers deserve quality and care at every touchpoint. This campaign brings that philosophy to life by pairing a premium fuel experience with meaningful rewards, strengthened through the Shell GO+ platform."

8 more chances to win a  
brand new Toyota Yaris!

**THE** excitement of Toyota's 50th Anniversary Mega Celebration continues to sweep across Oman as Saud Bahwan Automotive, the official distributor of Toyota vehicles, announced the latest raffle winners. Each draw is transforming Toyota ownership into an unforgettable experience, with winners now driving home a brand-new Toyota Yaris.

The campaign marks five decades of excellence and trust between Saud Bahwan Automotive and Toyota, celebrating a journey defined by quality, reliability and customer satisfaction.

Alongside the chance to win a Yaris, participants enjoy exclusive benefits including 50% VAT coverage, 5 years/50,000 km service, 50% insurance coverage and RO 50 worth of Thiqah Loyalty Points.

This edition of winners features individuals and companies from different corners of Oman, all reflecting a unique story of loyalty and faith in the Toyota brand.

Maward Mining LLC from Suhar, who purchased a Land Cruiser, shared, "Our Land Cruiser has always been a reliable partner for our operations.

Winning a Yaris now feels like an extra reward for our loyalty to Toyota. It is truly a special moment for us".

Saif bin Nasser al Maqbali from Barka, who purchased a Hilux, expressed, "We depend on Toyota vehicles to handle demanding conditions.

Winning a Yaris during this 50th anniversary celebration is an exciting surprise for us". Nadyah bint Saif al Maamariyah from Ibra, who purchased a



Each draw is transforming Toyota ownership into an unforgettable experience, with winners now driving home a brand-new Toyota Yaris.

Fortuner, said, "Toyota has always been part of my milestones. Receiving a Yaris as part of this special campaign makes it even more memorable".

Abooda al Hajri from Ibra, who purchased a Hiace, shared his joy: "Toyota has always been part of my daily life. Winning a Yaris now adds a new layer of excitement to this milestone celebration".

Dakan International Business Trad LLC from Seeb, who purchased a Hiace, said, "We trust Toyota to deliver dependable performance every day. Being selected as a Yaris winner during the 50th anniversary campaign is truly rewarding".

Building on the momentum of the giveaway, the customer holding Coupon No 15002 saw their Toyota purchase rewarded with a landmark celebratory milestone, capturing the true essence of this anniversary year.

With each new raffle draw, the thrill of winning continues to grow, giving customers yet another reason to celebrate Toyota's golden milestone.

Those who haven't participated yet are invited to visit their nearest Toyota showroom and explore the chance to drive home their favourite Toyota – and maybe become the next Yaris winner.

OQGN LAUNCHES 'TASAAUD' PROGRAMME TO SUPPORT SMES

**MUSCAT:** OQ Gas Networks SAOG (OQGN), the exclusive operator of Oman's natural gas transmission network, has launched the 'Tasaaud' programme — a specialised development initiative designed to support market-ready small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and enable their transition to more advanced stages of growth and sustainability.

The launch of this programme reflects OQ Gas Networks' continued commitment to supporting the entrepreneurship ecosystem and enhancing the growth of SMEs as a key pillar of national economic development.

"Tasaaud" will be implemented in Al Sharqiyah South Governorate, in the Wilayat of Sur, with the participation of 35 entrepreneurs representing SMEs. The programme also features active engagement from strategic partners, in cooperation with the Office of the Governor of Al Sharqiyah



'Tasaaud' will be implemented in Sur, with the participation of 35 entrepreneurs representing SMEs.

South Governorate and including government entities and relevant institutions, with the aim of strengthening public-private sector integration and connecting SMEs with growth-enabling opportunities.

"Tasaaud" offers an integrated development platform focused on improving the performance

of participating enterprises and enhancing their readiness for expansion. The programme delivers structured development pathways covering strategy, financial management, value creation, governance and decision-making, under the supervision of a distinguished group of experts and specialists.

The programme is distinguished by its applied methodology, which is tailored to the reality of each participating enterprise. Rather than offering theoretical solutions or generic models, 'Tasaaud' works closely with business owners to design realistic, implementable growth pathways aligned with actual market needs and operational challenges.

On this occasion, Eng Faisal bin Ali al Maamari, OQGN Chief People, Technology and Culture Officer stated: "At OQGN, we believe that supporting small and medium enterprises is not a choice, but a necessity for empowering our national economy.

"Tasaaud" programme provides practical tools and realistic development opportunities that help entrepreneurs achieve growth, enhance their competitiveness and build long-term partnerships".

ahli Expo 2025: A national platform to empower SMEs

**MUSCAT:** Continuing its commitment to supporting the national economy and strengthening the foundations of sustainable growth, ahlibank organised the second edition of ahli Expo 2025 under the theme "Sustainable Prosperity: Business Readiness in a Renewed Economic Environment".

The Expo served as a strategic platform bringing together entrepreneurs, SMEs owners, regulators and industry experts. It aimed to foster growth opportunities, build meaningful partnerships; and showcase products and services in an innovative and effective manner.

The event was held at ahlibank's Head Office in Al Wattayah and



ahli Expo 2025 featured an exhibition dedicated to SMEs.

featured a series of interactive workshops and engaging panel discussions that enriched dialogue and knowledge exchange.

ahli Expo 2025 featured an exhibition dedicated to SMEs, where 60 entrepreneurs showcased their products and services in different sectors such as real estate development, education and development, Financing Consulting, HR solutions, contracting and engineering consulting, tourism and hospitality, health and safety, Information Technology and Artificial Intelligence.

It provided valuable opportunities to build strategic relationships and partnerships with local companies and industry

experts, supporting business growth through knowledge and experience exchange. The exhibition served as an effective platform for direct engagement and for gaining insight into the latest trends shaping Oman's business environment.

The event attracted strong attendance and high levels of engagement from both the public and private sectors, bringing them together on a single platform for dialogue and knowledge exchange. The event featured the participation of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion & Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, as the key entities supporting and developing small and medium enterprises.

SHORTTAKES



The industrial portfolio supported by Credit Oman spans a wide range of products.

CREDIT OMAN  
INSURED SALES  
REACH RO 264.7  
MILLION BY Q3

MUSCAT: Credit Oman's insured sales of domestically produced and export goods in the industrial sector reached RO 264.7 million by the end of the third quarter of this year, reflecting a robust 27 per cent increase from RO 208.6 million recorded over the same period last year.

The industrial portfolio supported by Credit Oman spans a wide range of products. Iron and steel accounted for insured sales worth RO 79 million, followed by oils and fats at RO 64.6 million.

Food industries, including meat and poultry products, recorded total insured sales of RO 33.1 million, while refined petroleum products amounted to RO 24 million. Cleaning products achieved insured sales valued at RO 17.3 million and plastic construction equipment recorded approximately RO 7.4 million.

Haitham bin Abdullah al Yaqoubi, Acting Chief Executive Officer of Credit Oman, said the institution is focused on raising the volume of Omani non-oil exports through the insurance coverage it provides to local manufacturers, exporters and retailers. He explained that Credit Oman's role goes beyond insurance to include advisory services and assistance in identifying buyers for Omani exporters.

He added that these efforts are designed to support and strengthen national exports, ease access for Omani products to international markets, broaden the scope of foreign trade and enhance the competitiveness of the Omani economy.

He stressed that Credit Oman plays a vital role in building confidence between exporters and importers while reducing the risks associated with cross-border trade transactions. — ONA

Al Jabal Al Akhdhar  
tourism drive accelerates

A series of development, service and investment projects valued at around RO 9 million are being implemented in Al Jabal Al Akhdhar as part of the Al Dakhiliyah Governorate's efforts to strengthen tourism infrastructure, enhance public services and improve quality of life.

Shaikh Sultan bin Mansoor al Ghufaili, Wali of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar, said the projects aim to upgrade transport networks, expand recreational facilities and attract private investment, reinforcing the Wilayat's position as one of Oman's leading mountain tourism destinations.

Among the most significant initiatives is the development of the Wilayat's main entrance and the dualisation of the primary access road, which has reached the final stages of consultancy work.

Several internal roads have already been paved, while additional road projects remain under tender.

These upgrades are expected to improve traffic safety, accessibility and connectivity to residential and tourist sites.

Al Ghufaili highlighted the completion of key community projects, including Green Mountain Park, a public recreational space that enhances liveability and the Festivals and Celebrations Square, which provides a structured venue for seasonal events.

The latter supports entrepreneurs and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) through integrated service facilities that contribute to local economic



The projects aim to upgrade transport networks, expand recreational facilities and attract private investment.

At the strategic level, Al Ghufaili described the High Mountain Tourist City as one of the most ambitious projects in Al Jabal Al Akhdhar. With estimated development and investment costs of RO 1.2 billion, the project spans more than 11.8 square kilometres at an altitude of nearly 2,400 metres above sea level.

Private sector investment is also gaining momentum, with major projects underway, most notably an integrated commercial complex in Hail Al Yaman.

The development includes a three-star hotel, educational park, entertainment centre and shopping mall, broadening the range of services available to visitors.

Additional projects include a 3D-themed open-air plaza in Saih Qatna, Da'an Al-Busaiten Park and the development of Saih Qatna Park, which will feature recreational areas, a restaurant and a mountain viewpoint designed to capitalise on the region's distinctive landscape.

At the strategic level, Al Ghufaili described the High Mountain Tourist City as one of the most ambitious projects in Al Jabal Al Akhdhar. With estimated development and investment costs of RO 1.2 billion, the project spans more than 11.8 square kilometres at an altitude of nearly 2,400 metres above sea level.

The development will include over 2,500 residential units housing approximately 10,000 residents, a hotel complex with more than 2,000 rooms, the region's highest golf course covering around 1.5 million square metres and more than 10 cultural, architectural and tourism landmarks.

Built on sustainability and green economy principles, the project will utilise renewable energy and smart, low-emission transport solutions. A cable car system linking Al Dakhiliyah and Al Batinah South Governorates is also planned, enhancing access to the destination.

Al Ghufaili stressed that all projects are being implemented with respect for the mountain environment, aiming to diversify income sources, create sustainable employment and strengthen Al Jabal Al Akhdhar's status as a premier tourism and development hub in the Sultanate of Oman. — ONA

Sohar International gets initial nod for HK representative office

QASIM AL MAASHANI  
MUSCAT, DEC 28

Sohar International said it has received the Central Bank of Oman's initial approval to open a representative office in Hong Kong (HK), as the bank pushes to strengthen links with Asian markets and support clients with cross-border interests.

The bank said the approval was granted on December 25, 2025, noting that the move remains subject to securing all required clearances and licences from the relevant authorities in Hong Kong, alongside compliance with applicable regulations in both jurisdictions.

A representative office is typically a non-transactional presence focused on market development



The Hong Kong step comes after a period of major change for Sohar International at home and in the region.

and client liaison rather than deposit-taking or day-to-day banking activity. Hong Kong's Monetary Authority

notes that local representative offices of overseas banks are not allowed to engage in banking business, with their role largely confined to liaison work.

The Hong Kong step comes after a period of major change for Sohar International at home and in the region.

The bank completed its merger with HSBC Bank Oman, effective August 17, 2023, following shareholder and regulatory approvals. HSBC, meanwhile, has maintained a continuing presence in the Sultanate of Oman through HSBC Bank Middle East Limited — Oman Branch, which opened in May 2024, according to HSBC's Oman profile.

Sohar International has also moved to widen its Gulf footprint. The bank celebrated the official inauguration of its Riyadh branch on

May 4, 2025, according to the Oman News Agency.

Financially, the bank has pointed to continued scale-up following the merger. A bank investor briefing reported that total assets stood at RO 7.361 billion as of December 31, 2024. In its H1 2025 financial statement, total assets were reported at RO 7.877 billion at end-June 2025, with customer deposits at RO 6.313 billion.

Credit ratings have also been in focus. Fitch Ratings said it upgraded Sohar International Bank's Long-Term Issuer Default Rating to 'BB+' from 'BB' with a stable outlook on December 11, 2025.

Sohar International said it will provide updates in line with disclosure requirements as the Hong Kong process moves through the next regulatory stages.

AI GOVERNANCE

China proposes rules for human-like AI



China's cyber regulator has issued draft rules to tighten oversight of artificial intelligence services that simulate human personalities and engage users emotionally. It aims to strengthen safety and ethical standards for consumer-facing AI, requiring providers to warn against excessive use and intervene when users show signs of addiction.

The rules cover text, images, audio and video interactions. — Reuters

ENERGY TRADE

Russia expands LPG exports eastward



Russia has nearly doubled liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) exports to Central Asia and Afghanistan to just over one million tonnes in January–November, industry sources said.

LPG supplies were redirected from Europe after import restrictions linked to the Ukraine war. — Reuters

CORPORATE STRATEGY

Amazon drops Italy drone delivery plan



Amazon has halted plans to roll out drone deliveries in Italy following a strategic review, citing broader business regulatory challenges. While progress had been made with aviation regulators, the company said the framework does not support long-term objectives.

Italian authorities called the decision unexpected. Amazon had completed initial drone tests in Abruzzo in late 2024. — Reuters

OPINION

2026 prospects and risks



DR MYTHILI KOLLURU

The writer is an assistant professor at the marketing and management department of the College of Banking and Financial Studies.

In 2026, GDP growth is projected at 2.5-3.1%, lower than in the pre-pandemic period of roughly 3.7%. However, it does not reflect recessionary averages. The climate of uncertainty will continue to extend its shadow in the new year. Inflation will be moderate with high public debt, geopolitical risks and trade conflicts.

According to the Organisation For Economic Cooperation And Development (OECD) the outlook for 2026 will be defined by three macro-economic variables; first, the trajectory of the Fed’s policy, second the US-China trade relationship developments that will shape supply chain, trade routes, FDI flow in Asia, Europe and the Middle East; and third, the political realignments in US elections and transitions in European leadership will influence sectors of strategic prominence like trade, defence, climate and regulatory frameworks for all stakeholders globally.

These are essential factors that indicate a domino effect that will be felt not only in North America but also across Europe, Asia and the emerging markets. The key factors influencing investment and productivity will be AI and digital transformation. Businesses will take a “slow-hire and slow-fire” approach, but technology will continue to define and shape the nature of jobs and the global labour market.

Even though unemployment will be at its lowest in advanced economies, they

will still experience a talent shortage and underemployment. There will be an increase in flexible work, wellbeing and inclusion, but also in automation and training gaps.

Leaders will need to build wellbeing into productivity, as new work patterns and a focus on employee skilling emerge. There will be an increase in international student migration spread across hubs in Europe, Asia and the Middle East. Gig-like options will increase within the organisation and demand for global freelance and remote talent pools will rise.

Employees must distinguish and add unique human value to a human-AI workflow, and leaders must prioritise governance, AI data and cyber resilience. Students must also future-proof their abilities with micro-credentials and stackable learning. Opportunity zones surrounding AI-enabled services must be identified and planned for by entrepreneurs.

The key to employee survival will be constant upskilling.

Turbulent conditions are expected to persist through 2027, driven by extreme weather events, societal polarisation, geopolitical confrontations and misinformation. Corporations must prepare for supply chain recalibration and prioritise climate transition strategies.

Educational institutions must explore expanding their programme portfolios to include new career pathways in climate technology, resilience planning and

The outlook for 2026 will be defined by three macro-economic variables; first, the trajectory of the Fed’s policy, second the US-China trade relationship developments that will shape supply chain, trade routes, FDI flow in Asia, Europe and the Middle East; and third, the political realignments in US elections and transitions in European leadership will influence sectors of strategic prominence like trade, defence, climate and regulatory frameworks for all stakeholders globally.

sustainable finance.

Global growth could experience a meaningful boost, holding steady despite major policy shifts. This is due to new trade deals, multiple exemptions, private-sector agility in rerouting supply chains, emerging AI investments and fiscal stimulus in major economies.

Several 2026 research reports warn that the Central Bank’s independence faces growing political pressures, potentially undermining its credibility in fighting inflation. Significant productivity gains from AI, faster de-escalation and resolution of trade tensions are key upside factors that could meaningfully boost the global economy.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) projects that 2026 will be a year of cautious optimism and resilient growth with persistent risks. The year will be a turning point where generative and multimodal AI will begin delivering tangible productivity gains.

World reports and analyses concur that key growth engines like clean energy, infrastructure and technology-enabled services will drive global growth in 2026.

In the long run, economies must invest in innovation, productivity and multilateral cooperation, while empowering enterprises through horizontal policies such as education, infrastructure and smart regulations. There is a high probability that 2026 will be a ‘slow growth’ and ‘high impact’ year.

RENEWABLES TURN LNG GLUT INTO A SINKHOLE

ANTONY CURRIE

SOLAR, wind power and batteries are set to make life a misery for the liquefied natural gas market. Some fossil fuel executives already think the push by incumbents like Exxon Mobil, Shell and Woodside Energy to hike global production by some 50% by 2030, per the International Energy Agency, is creating a bubble. But renewable energy’s advantages will make the pop even worse.

On the surface, the LNG expansion might look rational. Europe’s share of imports of liquid methane has doubled to 30% since Russia’s 2022 war in Ukraine, per Capital Economics and the rise of artificial intelligence has created a boom in power-hungry data centres.

Meanwhile, President Donald Trump is trying to force purchases of more US fossil gas into trade agreements with the EU, Vietnam and others.

And the industry argues LNG is the transition fuel to wean the world off coal power — especially Asia, which already accounts for 65% of global LNG imports.

TotalEnergies CEO Patrick Pouyanné, though, told the audience at the Gastech conference in Milan in September that the sector is “building too much”. Vivek Chandra, boss of Gulfstream LNG in Louisiana, summed up the otherwise upbeat mood at the confab as “irrational exuberance”.

That’s likely to be an understatement. Gas turbines have roughly tripled in price since 2021 to \$2,400 per megawatt-hour, per US utility NextEra Energy. With battery costs falling — by 40% in 2024 alone — all-in renewable generation and storage in 2030 could be up to 56% cheaper than gas, estimates Wood Mackenzie.

It’s already having an impact on the world’s biggest LNG importer, China, which is rapidly expanding its wind, solar and hydroelectric generation. By October, Beijing’s LNG imports had fallen 11 months in a row year-on-year, per data provider Kpler.

The People’s Republic is also likely to increase purchases from Russia rather than from the US and Qatar, which are responsible for most of the planned expansion of global supply.

Renewables have another factor in their favour: they’re quicker to install, with major projects taking around a year on average, compared to five years for a gas-fired power plant. And that’s assuming the equipment is readily available.

— Reuters

FCA’s Deputy CEO on how women can reach the top

THE Financial Conduct Authority’s new deputy chief executive has urged women not to rule themselves out of senior jobs. Sarah Pritchard, who took over her role in June, has made the list, compiled by financial organisations, of the 100 Most Influential Women in European Finance this year in recognition of her expanded remit.

“I have always said to people that are younger in their career: don’t worry too much if you don’t have a defined plan”, she said. “I think my CV looks like I have had a very defined plan throughout. What I have done is take opportunity, look for a variety, look for stretch work in organisations that have supported that and work with people that have supported that”.

She added: “I would say to those that are considering more senior roles: “Don’t rule yourself out by perceptions of what you believe that role may entail and always be yourself in the way in which you approach your job”.

The FCA reached gender parity in its senior leadership team in 2023.

“If I compare and contrast, I most immediately joined the FCA from law enforcement. That was a very male environment and made a very monoculture environment”, Pritchard said.

“I saw the importance of role modelling there — there was a female DG (Director General), so that’s the chief executive equivalent and bringing in a new team as she did really visibly marked a different way of leading that organisation”.

There are other women on that list who have made remarkable rise. As an example: Parvoleta Shtereva, who before co-founding Gemcorp Capital a decade ago and becoming one of the few female hedge fund founders in London, spent almost two decades working at big banks and investment management firms.

She is now chief investment officer at Gemcorp and co-heads its management committee. Another example is the appointment of Maria Lusía Gota as the president of Italian fund management association Assicurazioni this year. She became



ANDY JALIL  
andyjalil@aol.com

The writer is our foreign correspondent based in the UK.

There are other women on that list who have made remarkable rise. As an example: Parvoleta Shtereva, who before co-founding Gemcorp Capital a decade ago and becoming one of the few female hedge fund founders in London, spent almost two decades working at big banks and investment management firms. She is now chief investment officer at Gemcorp and co-heads its management committee.



The FCA reached gender parity in its senior leadership team in 2023. — Reuters

the first woman to oversee the trade body in its more than 40-year history.

She is also the first woman to head the asset management division of Intesa Sanpaolo Group and its Eurizon Capital business, a role she has held since April 2024.

However, Pritchard said barriers to progress remain. “I have experienced people treating me differently and making assumptions around levels of ambition after having children”, she said.” I hope that has shifted over recent years.

Some of the developments in terms of paternity leave, maternity leave, that have happened since I’ve had children I think have really helped to level the playing field”.

While the FCA pushed pause on introducing new diversity reporting requirement for companies in the financial district of London in March, Pritchard said the regulator still believes that more diverse organisations can make better decisions and grow faster.

“When we talk about diversity and inclusion at the FCA, we talk about supporting the competitiveness overall of the financial services sector, being able to recruit from the widest pool of talent”, she said.

“Speaking personally, it’s important that people are assessed on their own merit in terms of talent. I would like to feel that I have got the job because I’m good at what I do and good at my leadership, not simply because of my gender. She also spoke about the importance of a “speak-up culture”.

A survey by Everyone Matters earlier this year found that many workers in the City of London had experienced or witnessed coercive behaviour at their organisations, but many were not confident about reporting such incidents.

Pritchard, who often spends her downtime taking her sons to football matches, also urged women in finance to keep a balance between their work and professional lives.

# CLASSIFIEDS

**SIT. WANTED**

ACCOUNTS/  
SALES Indian  
male (b com)  
having 2+ years  
of experience  
in India  
accounts sales  
looking for  
suitable  
placement,  
join  
immediately.  
Contact:  
76324360

LOOKING  
for part time  
OR full time  
Accounts/  
Finance  
job. 20yrs  
experience in  
Muscat. Upto  
finalization &  
Audit.  
Please contact:  
92065499

SALES  
professional  
with 5 yrs  
Experience in  
Medical sector.  
Graduate,  
Available in  
Muscat.  
akhilmanu777@  
gmail.com  
Contact:  
76323324

ACCOUNTS/  
Finance:  
Indian male  
(MBA Fin)  
having more  
than 19 years  
of experience  
in Oman  
accounts &  
finance looking  
for suitable  
placement,  
NOC available  
and can join  
immediately.  
Contact:  
92076716

SALES  
Engineer –  
Instrumentation  
(O&G) with  
7+ yrs Oman  
exp in B2B  
sales, projects,  
tendering,  
F&G systems,  
FAT, SAP/CRM.  
Valid Oman DL.  
Seeking job.  
Mob:91224964

LOOKING for  
SUPPLY CHAIN /  
SALES jobs  
Indian male 24  
years. Commerce  
graduate,  
Experience  
in logistics,  
procurement and  
sales in reputed  
company in Oman.  
Valid Oman D/L.  
Contact  
+96891121694,  
issacantony2002@  
gmail.com

INDIAN Male.  
CPA, CMA, CA  
Finalist, B.Com  
. 12+ Years of  
Experience.  
Currently  
Finance  
Manager.  
Seeking Senior  
Finance  
Leadership  
Roles. Contact:  
90605330.  
su.cpacma@  
gmail.com

INDIAN  
electrical  
engineer more  
than 20 years  
experience  
in “MEP”  
construction  
field in Oman  
seeks suitable  
job.  
Contact:  
92919281

**PEST CONTROL OMAN CO. L.L.C.**

Supply of Pesticides, Gel (Cockroaches), Public Health Chemicals, Agriculture Chemicals, Snake Repellent, Rodent Baits and other insect repellent from UK & USA

PROFESSIONALS in Pest Control Service, Bedbug Treatment, Rodent Treatment, Snake Treatment and Termite Treatment [Pre & Post Construction]

**Tel: 24787606, 24787503**  
**Direct Line: 24786077**  
**GSM: 99382355, 99172309**

**pcomctom@omantel.net.om**  
P.O. Box 565, Al Wadi Al Kabir 117, Sultanate of Oman

**Driving School**

Special offers for those wishing to learn driving in (Aziba - Khwair Qurum - Ruwi Al Amirat)

Contact No: 99074072

WJ Towell Group Company

Quality car rentals at competitive prices.

Muscat 9014 6672, 9679 0684  
Sohar 9731 6218 Salalah 9429 9325  
www.orbit-oman.com

ORBIT Car Rental & Lease

**FOR RENT**

10000 sqm plus area of open  
yard fully blacktop with  
compound wall, wide gate &  
CCTV for immediate rent in  
Jifnain.  
Contact 99853040

**SIT. WANTED**

ACCOUNTS Manager, MBA  
(Fin), PGD, 10+ yrs experience in  
financial statements, auditing,  
budgeting, MIS, VAT, tax, fixed  
assets, reconciliation, payroll.  
Seeking a full-time or part-time  
position in a senior role.  
Contact: akramhaniffa@yahoo.  
com /  
93988825

**ALL SEASON AYURVEDA CLINIC**

The most efficient and authentic Ayurvedic Treatment & Medicine, Panchakarma, Yoga, Kalari, Massage Dhara etc... Rehabilitation, Marma Therapy & Post Delivery Care  
Zaher Building, 1st Floor, Flat 8A, Al Khuwair Service Road, Near Al Zawawi Mosque & Burger-King  
Tel: 24475280, GSM: 95371664, 92504980, Website: www.siddhayur.com



**FOR SALE**

**مصنع للأسماك  
في منطقة المصنعة**

**بالقرب من الطريق العام**

للبيع مباشرة من المالك على أرض مساحتها  
٨٧٩٠ متر مربع يشمل مساكن للعمال  
ومكاتب للموظفين و مطعم و ورش لتصليح  
السيارات و المركبات ومخازن .

للراغبين الجادين الاتصال بالأرقام التالية:  
**سام جونس : ٩٩٦٤٣٧٦٠**  
**إبراهيم : ٩٩٣٤٦٥٤٦ / ٩٢١٩٢٠٢٠**  
**hoghana@hotmail.com**

**FOR SALE DIRECT FROM THE OWNER**  
**Fish Factory (Main Road-Al Musannah)**

Land Area 8790 SQM  
Contains Staff Accommodation &  
Offices including a Restaurant & Workshop  
to Repair Cars & Trucks.

For serious buyers only contact:  
**99643760 / 99346546 / 92192020**  
E-mail: hoghana@hotmail.com

**SIT. WANTED**

LOOKING for  
part time OR full  
time Accounts/  
Finance job.  
20yrs experience  
in Muscat. Upto  
finalization &  
Audit.  
Please contact:  
92065499

LOGISTICS  
Documentation  
Executive. Indian  
male, 25 years,  
BBA, PG Diploma  
in Logistics & SCM  
and have 2 years of  
experience in this  
field.  
Seeking a position  
in Logistics field  
Mob: +968 7506 9882  
Mail:  
shafazhussain18@  
gmail.com

**SIT. VACANT**

LOOKING for Pipeline Engineer with 8  
Years Experience offer salary: 200 OMR

Phone : +96896965333

Email : sultanalhabsi701@gmail.com

**URGENTLY REQUIRED FOR  
CONTRACTING COMPANY**

- 1- Electrical Foreman.
- 2- Civil foreman (Experience in Piping work).
- 3- Civil Supervisor.

Contact @Mr.Mohmmaed GSM :  
92563101  
send CV to mohammed92563101@  
gmail.com

**SIT. WANTED**

OPERATIONS Support / Tendering /  
Contract Management / Procurement  
professional with 18+ years' Oil & Gas  
experience. NOC & driving license  
available.96227272,jijilmathew@gmail.com

To advertise in Ministry of Information channels

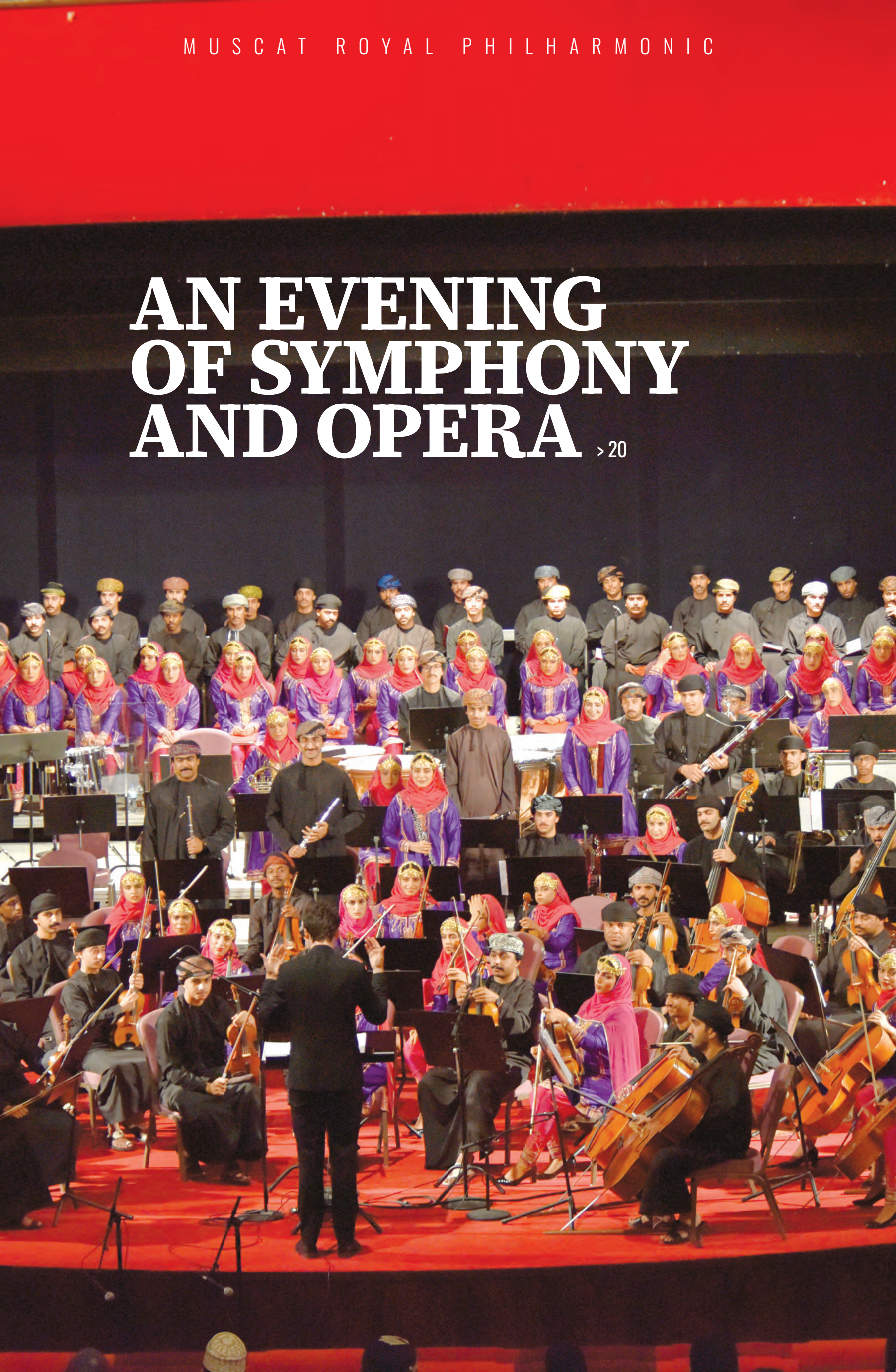


To advertise

71455532- 71455531- 71455530  
adv@omaninfo.om  
izdihar\_info izdihar.info



# ART/LIFE



## SCI-FI SERIES

### THIRD AVATAR FILM TOPS NORTH AMERICAN BOX OFFICE ON DEBUT



“Avatar: Fire and Ash,” the third installment in James Cameron’s blockbuster sci-fi fantasy series, debuted atop the North American box office with \$88 million in ticket sales in the weekend before Christmas, industry estimates showed Sunday.

“Fire and Ash” grossed \$345 million worldwide in its opening weekend, and is expected to do very well abroad, according to David A Gross of Franchise Entertainment Research.

The “Avatar” films “connect everywhere around the world,” Gross said, adding that the 20th Century movie - like its predecessors - would likely rev up on “outstanding word-of-mouth.”

“The openings are not what the Avatar movies are about. It’s what they do after they open,” Gross said. The movie once again stars Zoe Saldana and Sam Worthington as Na’vi warrior Neytiri and ex-Marine Jake Sully, who must battle a new foe threatening their family’s life on Pandora.

Debuting in second place with \$20 million was “David,” an animated retelling of the biblical David and Goliath story from Angel Studios, industry tracker Exhibitor Relations reported.

In third place with \$19 million was Lionsgate’s “The Housemaid,” a film version of Freida McFadden’s best-selling novel about a young woman (Sydney Sweeney) who is hired by a wealthy couple (Amanda Seyfried and Brandon Sklenar) with troubling secrets.

Paramount’s family-friendly animated “The SpongeBob Movie: Search for SquarePants” - based on the popular Nickelodeon TV show - opened in fourth place at \$16 million. And in fifth place was Disney’s feel-good animated film “Zootopia 2,” which earned \$14.5 million. The Oscar contender has so far taken in \$1.27 billion worldwide.

Sam Worthington returns as Jake Sully, the former Marine who has fully embraced life among the Na’vi and leads his family through new trials. Zoe Saldana reprises her role as Neytiri, the fierce Na’vi warrior and Jake’s partner, anchoring much of the emotional depth of the film.

Sigourney Weaver appears as Kiri, the Sully children’s sister, bringing back a beloved character from earlier in the series. Stephen Lang returns as Colonel Miles Quaritch, the franchise’s enduring antagonist whose motivations and alliances continue to deepen conflict on Pandora.

Oona Chaplin joins the franchise as Varang, the formidable leader of the new Ash People clan — a fiery and dangerous Na’vi faction that introduces a fresh threat. — **AFP**

## QUICK FEATURES



**NATURE**  
A person explores an ice path of the Ice Castles during the opening day in North Woodstock, New Hampshire. — **AFP**

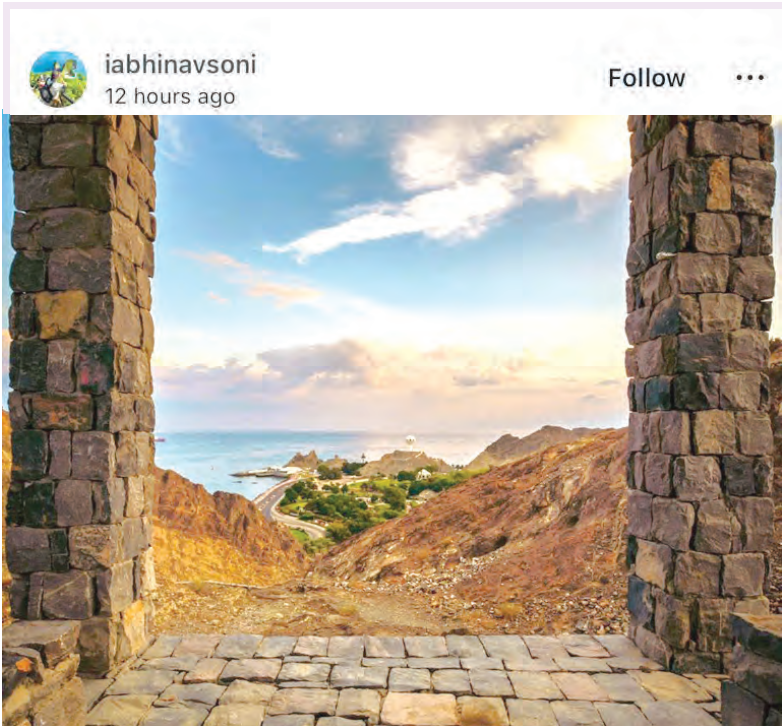


**TRIBUTE**  
Perry Bamonte, keyboardist and guitarist for The Cure, dies at 65. — **Reuters**



**FESTIVALS**  
Masquerades wearing traditional Eyo attire take part in the Eyo Festival, also known as the Adamu Orisa Play, in Lagos, Nigeria. — **Reuters**

INSTA PICKS



Panaromic viewpoints



Masterly takeoff

SHARE A SLICE OF YOUR LIFE

We select photos daily for our Instagram Top Picks of the Day. The rules are simple. Follow us on Instagram. Upload your photos. Tag us and use #OmanObserver and #BeAnObserver.

JAPAN BEAR CRISIS SPARKS CULINARY CRAZE

Since Japan recorded a spike in deadly bear attacks, Koji Suzuki has struggled to keep up with booming demand for grilled cuts of the animal at his restaurant.

Cooked on a stone slate — or in a hot pot with vegetables — the meat comes from bears culled to curb maulings that have killed a record 13 people this year.

Suzuki’s eatery in the hilly city of Chichibu near Tokyo also serves deer and wild boar, but bear has surged in popularity after months of headlines about the animals breaking into homes, wandering near schools and rampaging through supermarkets.

“With news about bears growing, the number of customers who want to eat their meat has increased a lot”, Suzuki, 71, said.

As a show of respect for the bear’s life, “it’s better to use the meat at a restaurant like this, rather than burying it”, said Suzuki, who is also a hunter.

His wife Chieko, 64, who runs the restaurant, said she now frequently turns away customers, but declined to say exactly how much business has grown.

One diner who nabbed a seat, 28-year-old composer Takaaki Kimura, was trying bear for the first time.

“It’s so juicy and the more you chew, the tastier it gets”, he said, grinning as he and his friends sat around the grilling stone and bubbling pot.

Although far from an everyday dish, bear has long been eaten in mountainous villages across Japan.

The government hopes the



People eating bear meat hot pot at a restaurant in Chichibu, Saitama prefecture. — AFP

meat can become a source of income for rural communities.

“It is important to turn the nuisance wildlife into something positive”, the farm ministry said earlier this month.

Local authorities will receive \$118 million (18.4 billion yen) in subsidies to control bear populations and promote sustainable consumption.

Some restaurants need no convincing.

Katsuhiko Kakuta, 50, who runs a village-owned restaurant in Aomori, one of the regions hardest hit by bear attacks, said he sold out of the meat earlier this month. Japan has 826 game factories nationwide, but only a handful in northern prefectures hit hardest by attacks.

Kakuta’s restaurant has its own butchery, supplying bear meat dishes to a nearby hotel.

“Bear meat is a tourism resource for us”, he said.

“And we use something that would otherwise be buried as garbage”. — AFP



OPENING DOORS TO INCLUSION

STAFF REPORTER

THE Royal Opera House Muscat (ROHM) continues to strengthen its cultural and social role within Omani society through its community outreach initiatives, most notably the Open Doors programme.

Designed to extend access to music and theatre beyond the opera house, the programme delivers performances and educational activities to individuals and communities who may not otherwise be able to attend live events, reaffirming the institution’s commitment to inclusion and social engagement.

Launched two years ago, Open Doors highlights the unifying power of the arts and their ability to create meaningful connections.

Over this period, the initiative has engaged with a wide range of partners and beneficiaries, including Sultan Qaboos University Hospital, the Social Welfare Home in Al Rustaq, the Child Care Centre, the Association of Early Intervention and Al Masarra Hospital. These collaborations reflect the programme’s broad reach and its lasting social impact.

Umberto Fanni, Director General of the Royal Opera House Muscat, stated: “Open Doors reflects our commitment to making the arts accessible and to using music and theatre as tools for connection and inclusion within the wider community”.

As part of the programme, the Royal Opera House Muscat recently collaborated with the National Autism Centre of the Ministry of Social Development to present the IN/AUT Theatre Lab for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder. This initiative represents an important step towards enhancing opportunities for children with autism spectrum disorder and supporting their integration into society through creative expression.

The workshops were led by Aleksandra Di Capua and Andrea Tamagnini of the Bradipoteatar San Marino Theatre Company and took place at the centre from December 14 to 18.

The sessions fostered non-verbal communication, creativity, emotional expression and psychological calm, complementing the centre’s therapeutic programmes and supporting participants’ social



ALEKSANDRA DI CAPUA



ANDREA TAMAGNINI

The ROHM’s Open Doors programme is redefining cultural outreach by taking music and theatre beyond the stage and into the heart of the community. The initiative demonstrates how the arts can foster connection, inclusion and meaningful social engagement

development.

Nadia al Ajmi, Director of the National Autism Centre, praised the collaboration, describing it as “a crucial step towards achieving comprehensive social and cultural inclusion for individuals with autism spectrum disorder” and emphasised the role of art in building communication and empowering individuals.

Beyond external partnerships, many of the Royal Opera House Muscat’s Education and Outreach activities are delivered in-house.

These include initiatives such as Omani Sign Language interpretation and tailored educational programming, all designed to “open the doors” wider for the deaf community and other audiences, reinforcing the spirit of inclusivity at the heart of the programme.

This ongoing collaboration has also led to joint Musical Theatre initiatives and international expert-led programmes that support both the humanitarian arts sector and rehabilitation efforts.

In a previous collaboration marking World Autism Awareness Day, the National Autism Centre hosted an exhibition of artworks created by children with autism spectrum disorder.

Operating under the auspices of Her Highness The Honourable Lady Assayida Ahd Abdullah Hamed al Busaidi, Spouse of the Sultan of Oman, the National Autism Centre provides comprehensive rehabilitation and therapeutic services extending into adulthood, with the aim of empowering individuals with autism spectrum disorder to achieve independence and meaningful integration into society.

FEATURES

GEORGINA BENISON

**LAST** Wednesday evening, a rare concert was given by the Muscat Royal Philharmonic Orchestra and Opera Choir Group at the Oman Auditorium, Al Bustan Palace.

The musicians took their places, the women in deep pink and blue national dress, the men in smart quasi-military coats. Under the capable baton of Ilham al Toqi, in dazzling green and gold dress, they opened with the first movement of Mozart's Symphony no 25 in G minor, 'Allegro con Brio'. It was a challenging choice for a new orchestra, especially for the strings, but they came up trumps with a fully rounded Mozartian sound, featuring some fine wind playing. The auditorium was full with family and followers of the ensemble, forming an attentive, appreciative audience. One aspect which was not appreciated was the poor back-lighting which shone throughout into the audience's eyes, making the performers' silhouettes on stage.

A beautiful string opening brought a dark, brooding mood to the solo Aria from Act 1 of the 1978 opera, "Maria Desislava" by the prolific Bulgarian composer, Parashkev Hadjiev. It was performed by soprano, Maisa al Amri, appearing slightly nervous at first and a little overpowered by the full orchestra without amplification. However, Maisa rose to the challenge singing in Bulgarian and showing control in her high tessitura in a sterling performance.

A veritable highlight came in Camille Saint-Saëns' "Introduction and Rondo Capriccioso in A minor". The sensitive, lyrical playing of this familiar piece by solo violinist, Muwiyad al Habsi was simply stunning. A gorgeous, warm timbre was heard in the romantic sections while his brilliant virtuoso technique — such as double-stopping — was executed with great accuracy against the humorous orchestral score. Muwiyad's Paganini-like style to imitate a gypsy fiddle provided an exciting juxtaposition between soloist and orchestra in this amusing 'giocoso' interpretation. Despite the length he captivated the audience with his sustained focus throughout — receiving a well deserved, rapturous applause.

A full orchestral opening introduced "Spuntato Ecco Il Di D'Esultanza" from Act 3 of Verdi's 'Don Carlo'. It has a tricky trumpet part introducing the choir's fine intonation and ensemble voice-blending. Some warm cello and bassoon themes accompanied the male chorus in a rousing military-style ending.

Part one concluded with the Arabic composition "Ahiafu' Alqad" by Head of Music, Dr Khalid al Jabri. It opened with some dark string writing on an Arabic scale introducing a well sung unison for chorus, low in their tessitura. The piece uses changes in rhythm and tempo for variety rather than developing thematic material. It employed full orchestral forces plus keyboard-Oud, bass guitar and extra Omani percussion. Some tuneful horn and woodwind themes and 2-part chorus built up to a syncopated climax. Programme notes on the items performed would have been helpful.

"Honour and Arms" from Act 2 of Handel's 'Samson' began with a stylistic Baroque string opening. Baritone, Abdul Rahman al Rahbi took the solo in Handel's popular aria with commendable technique in the demanding melismatic vocal runs, gaining military confidence and good projection by the end.

The whole choir came to the fore in the romantic language of Wagner's 'Prelude' to Act 3 and 'Bridal Chorus' from Lohengrin. The orchestral tuttis were excellent with splendid horn and trombone passages. It was a pleasure to hear the strong Wagnerian brass playing in an almost professional



# AN EVENING OF SYMPHONY AND OPERA

— Photos by Jihad Ahamed Azeez



presentation. The delightful German chorus, "Here Comes The Bride" included good choral part-singing, tenderly accompanied by three harps.

Fairuz Medley, ("Al Bint Al Shalabiyah" and "Yadara") was sung by the whole choir rather than a rising star among the female vocalists. Precise punctuation and attention to timing in the chorus reflected careful training and musicianship. The typically Lebanese-Arabic orchestral arrangements of the famous Rahbani brothers' beloved songs were enthusiastically performed and enjoyed by choir and audience alike.

To finish, the patriotic fanfare "Glories of Oman" was another substantial composition by Dr Khalid al Jabri; almost a Concerto for Orchestra. After some rhythmically contrasting sections and particularly fine singing from the women the Leader, Mohammed al Harthy, played a delightful solo with beautiful intonation and mellow timbre. A burst of triumphant vocal nationalism brought the work to its final climax and a standing ovation.

The show formed a fitting Christmas Eve celebration for some and an early weekend opener for others. Keep an eye out for further public performances by the Muscat Phil.