

P13

OQ TO OFFER
25% STAKE IN
OQEP SUBSIDIARY
VIA IPO

P12

SINNER
SWEEPS ASIDE
FRITZ FOR US
OPEN TITLE

P19

MUSCAT DANCERS
CELEBRATE 'RANGAPRAVESHA'
WITH STUNNING DEBUT
PERFORMANCE

MUSCAT

JOINT MILITARY DRILL
'ARABIAN TIGER' BEGINS

A joint Omani-Bahraini military exercise, code-named 'Arabian Tiger', kicked off on Monday in the training zone of the Wilayat of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar. The 10-day exercise is being implemented by the Royal Army of Oman (RAO) and the Royal Special Force of the Kingdom of Bahrain. The RAO is represented by the Musandam Security Force and the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF) engineering, with support from the Royal Air Force of Oman (Rafo). The joint exercise, which will continue until September 18, is part of RAO's training plans aimed at maintaining high levels of performance and combat ability. It also reflects the strong bonds between Oman and Arab countries.

GENEVA

UNITED NATIONS FEARS
FOR UKRAINIANS



A girl wearing glasses bearing the slogan "Free Azov" takes part in a rally of relatives and friends of Ukrainian prisoners of war from the Azov Brigade and sub-units in Kyiv.

The United Nations' human rights commissioner on Monday condemned Russia's repeated attacks on Ukraine's energy facilities and said he feared for civilians there this winter. Volker Turk said the population is "trapped in cycles of war, through ongoing attacks by the Russian Federation striking civilian facilities like hospitals, schools and supermarkets, and repeated waves of targeting of energy infrastructure leading to countrywide blackouts. "I fear for Ukrainians this coming winter," he told the UN Human Rights Council. Turk said he was troubled by the impact on civilians of the recent escalation in fighting, including in the Russian region of Kursk. **SEE ALSO P7**

GCC calls for efforts to
stop Israeli war on Gaza



GCC foreign ministers pose for a group photo.

Ministers hold joint meetings with India, Russia and Brazil

RIYADH: The Sultanate of Oman on Monday took part in the 161st meeting of the GCC Ministerial Council, which was held at the GCC Secretariat-General in Riyadh.

Oman's delegation was led by Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister.

The Ministerial Council, chaired by Shaikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman al Thani, Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Qatar, was briefed on the efforts made by the committees working within the framework of the GCC and the Secretariat-General to implement the decisions of the GCC Supreme Council in a manner that enhances joint Gulf action in all fields.

The Council also reviewed developments in political issues at the regional and international arenas, most notably the Israeli war on the Gaza Strip and the international efforts made to stop it.

Sayyid Badr also took part in the joint ministerial meeting held between the GCC foreign ministers and S Jaishankar, Minister of

Oman denounces
Israeli strike on Syria

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman condemned the Israeli strikes that targeted the Masyaf area in Hama province, killing dozens of Syrians. In a statement, the Sultanate of Oman called on the international community to put an end to the series of aggressions, war crimes and political assassinations committed by Israel, which require an international stance to deter Israel and hold it to account. — **ONA**

External Affairs in the Republic of India.

The meeting discussed aspects of Gulf-Indian cooperation and means of boosting the strategic partnership between the two sides in various fields, especially in the economic, trade and investment areas. The meeting also looked into opening new horizons that contribute to achieving sustainable growth.

It also reviewed a number of developments and issues on the regional and international arenas.

Sayyid Badr also took part in the joint ministerial meeting held between the GCC foreign ministers and Sergey Lavrov, Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation.

RELIEF EFFORTS

The meeting reviewed relations between the GCC countries and Russia in various areas and means of promoting them. The two sides exchanged views on a set of thorny issues, especially those related to the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, the unjust Israeli war on the Gaza Strip, and efforts for ceasefire, as well as backing humanitarian relief efforts and pushing the political process towards achieving a just peace based on a two-state solution.

The GCC side lauded the Russian stance on the Palestinian issue, which is consistent with the stances of the GCC countries. Meanwhile, Sayyid Badr took part in the joint ministerial meeting held between the GCC foreign ministers and Mauro Vieira, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Federative Republic of Brazil. — **ONA**

Focus on projects
to enhance economic
diversification



HH Sayyid Belarab bin Haitham al Said presides over the meeting.

MUSCAT: HH Sayyid Belarab bin Haitham al Said, Honorary President of the 'Programme of Promising Omani Startups' (POPS), on Monday chaired the third meeting of the programme's Supervisory Committee during 2024.

HH Sayyid Belarab was briefed on the progress made in developing and empowering the startups sector, spreading the culture of entrepreneurship, utilising innovative solutions, and exploring technical opportunities to accelerate the growth and sustainability of startups.

The briefing outlined methods of attracting talents and encouraging them to propose their ideas for establishing projects that enhance economic diversification. The aim is to place the Sultanate of Oman on the map of attractive destinations for investors, including technology companies and venture

capital investments.

The meeting also discussed the incentives offered to Omani startups that capitalise on technology and innovation and ways to enhance the progress of the initiative to implement startup accelerators.

The meeting also studied the outcome of 'Future Pioneers' camps that were implemented during the summer vacation in coordination with the Ministry of Education in 11 governorates, targeting more than 500 students.

It is worth noting that the POPS is supervised by the Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development (ASMED), in cooperation with the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, the Ministry of Economy, and ITCHA group. — **ONA**

Cross-country tourism a new trend for adventure seekers



Special packages to meet the expectations of tourists.

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Tourism in Salalah has evolved significantly over the years, with the city now emerging as a year-round destination. While it was once primarily known for its khareef season, Salalah now attracts tourists from all corners of the globe, including Germans, Italians, Australians and Swiss nationals, well beyond the monsoon period.

The uniqueness of Salalah attracts tourists from other GCC countries, which still experience the harshness of summer, and

those from Europe where winter starts settling. Seeking refuge from the harshness of winter in their home countries, they look for Salalah's mild and green winter. These visitors start flocking to Salalah from September through May.

However, a new trend gaining popularity among visitors is 'cross-country tourism'. This trend, fuelled by an increasing demand from tourists arriving by charter flights and cruise ships, has opened up exciting opportunities for local tour operators.

According to a tour operator,

this demand has prompted his company and others to tailor special packages to meet the expectations of tourists eager for a more diverse and adventurous experience. "We've recognised this new interest and developed offerings that take tourists beyond Salalah to explore the stunning and diverse landscapes of Oman," he said.

Tour operators have cross-country packages that showcase Oman's rich geography. Tour operator Al Fawaz has a flagship package called 'Oman Crossing', which offers an extensive journey starting from

the rolling sand dunes of Rimal Al Sharqiya and stretching through the majestic Rub Al Khali desert in Dhofar Governorate, via Oman's breathtaking coastal terrain. "The package offers our guests the chance to experience Oman's contrasting landscapes, from deserts to remote coastal areas and mountain villages," explained a staff member at Al Fawaz. "We provide an immersive experience that includes spending nights under the stars in the desert, interacting with local Omani traditions, and enjoying freshly prepared barbecue meals on serene beaches."



Oman participates in GCC ministerial meetings with India, Russia and Brazil



RIYADH: Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, took part on Monday in the joint ministerial meeting held between the GCC foreign ministers and S Jaishankar, Minister of External Affairs in the Republic of India, Sergey Lavrov, Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation, and Mauro Vieira, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Federative Republic of Brazil. The meetings, which were held at the headquarters of the GCC Secretariat-General, discussed aspects of cooperation and means of boosting the strategic partnership. — ONA

CPA’S CONSUMER-FRIENDLY INITIATIVE BOOSTS TRUST

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The Consumer Protection Authority (CPA) has launched the second edition of its ‘Consumer-friendly institutions’ initiative in partnership with the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority. The initiative invites SMEs to participate, aiming to reduce consumer complaints while raising awareness about consumer rights and supplier responsibilities.

The core objectives of the initiative are to ensure sustainability through strategic service improvements, enhance service quality, foster competition among businesses, and maintain a continuous cycle of service development.

By promoting better business practices, the initiative aims to strengthen relationships between consumers and service providers, ultimately creating a more transparent and trustworthy



المؤسسات الصديقة للمستهلك Consumer friendly establishments

consumer environment. This effort is also expected to boost confidence in the local market and support the broader economy. Issa al Nabhani, Director of the Studies and Market Research Department, emphasised that participating institutions are encouraged to innovate in their approach to customer service by making consumer satisfaction a central focus of their strategies.

Selection criteria for consumer-friendly institutions are based on innovation, customer satisfaction mechanisms and a clear focus on meeting consumer needs. Participating institutions undergo performance evaluations via periodic inspections and reports, ensuring they comply with the initiative’s standards. A team of local experts and consultants assesses the

institutions through field visits. Based on the evaluation, institutions scoring between 80 per cent and 100 per cent receive a detailed report on their performance, a certification of compliance with the standards, and a distinctive consumer-friendly sticker. Institutions scoring between 71 per cent and 80 per cent receive a report and a certification but do not receive the sticker.

In future phases, the initiative plans to expand beyond Muscat Governorate and cover additional sectors across Oman. This expansion is in line with the Authority’s broader objectives under Oman Vision 2040, focusing on enhancing consumer services in retail, commercial, industrial and economic sectors.

The Authority also seeks to refine the initiative based on both its positive outcomes and areas for improvement, further boosting service quality across the Sultanate of Oman.

Oman at Asia-Africa Legal Consultative Organisation session



Oman’s delegation is led by Dr Abdullah bin Mohammed al Saeedi, Minister of Justice and Legal Affairs. — ONA

BANGKOK: Represented by the Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs, the Sultanate of Oman is taking part in the 62nd session of the Asian-African Legal Consultative Organisation (AALCO) in Bangkok. The meeting lasts from 8 to 13 September 2024.

Oman’s delegation is led by Dr Abdullah bin Mohammed al Saeedi, Minister of Justice and Legal Affairs.

Speaking at the session, Al Saidi affirmed the Sultanate of Oman’s full support for all the efforts made by AALCO in consolidating bonds among member states. He also spoke about the adverse humanitarian conditions experienced by the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip as a result of the brutal Israeli aggression, which reflects a complete disregard for basic rules of international law, international humanitarian law, and international norms and charters.

Al Saidi urged the international community to fulfil its humanitarian duty to stop the bloodshed, starvation, and displacement of the Palestinian people, who, he said, deserve to look forward to a better future of security, peace, freedom and dignity.

In this context, the minister underscored the need to immediately halt the dangerous escalation taking place in the occupied Palestinian territories, protect the lives of civilians, and allow them to receive humanitarian aid without restrictions.

Al Saidi reiterated Oman’s firm stance on the Palestinian cause. He underlined the necessity of achieving a just, comprehensive, and lasting peace in Palestine, supporting the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, putting an end to the Israeli escalation, protecting innocent civilians, and stopping their bloodshed.

He called for concrete action to implement international humanitarian law and international conventions for the Palestinian people who, he observed, are being subjected to unprecedented attacks by the Israeli occupation forces.

The meeting discussed a report on topics related to the United Nations International Law Commission (which will hold its upcoming 75th meeting on international trade and investment law), international law in cyberspace, and environmental and sustainable development law. — ONA

Shrimp fishing season begins across coastal governorates

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, SEPT 9

As September begins, artisanal fishermen across the coastal governorates of Oman gear up for the highly anticipated shrimp fishing season. The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources has prepared extensively for this period by conducting guidance and awareness initiatives to support fishermen before the season starts.

Abdullah bin Mohammed al Mukhaini, Director of the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources in Jaalan Bani Bu Ali, highlighted the Eastern Province’s prominent role in shrimp production. The region



Shrimp plays a key role in boosting national income and strengthening the local economy

consistently ranks second in local shrimp output, contributing around 30 per cent of the total, with an estimated annual production of 205,000 tonnes. Al Mukhaini emphasised the significant demand for shrimp, both locally and internationally,

noting that it is a critical economic resource. Shrimp plays a key role in boosting national income and strengthening the local economy. He also pointed out that the shrimp fishing season presents an excellent opportunity for artisanal fishermen, while also providing substantial job prospects for those seeking employment in related projects. In 2023, shrimp landings amounted to 5,690 tonnes and expectations are high for an even larger haul this year.

The Department of Fisheries Control and Licensing at the General-Directorate of Fisheries Resources Development has ramped up monitoring efforts during the season by deploying fish control teams along the coasts. The Ministry’s General-

Directorate of Fisheries Research, through its Marine and Fisheries Sciences Centre and Fish Farming Centre, has conducted a range of scientific research aimed at improving shrimp fishing techniques, as well as exploring cultivation and propagation methods. These studies are crucial for advancing the sustainable development of shrimp fisheries in Oman.

Shrimp, a member of the crustacean family, is a vital source of protein and serves as a nutritious alternative to meat. It is low in fat, rich in vitamin B12 and contains omega-3 fatty acids, which are beneficial for health. In addition to its culinary uses, shrimp also has applications in medical and food manufacturing industries.

Prevention of psychotropic substances: Salalah wins first prize

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Salalah won the third edition of the Community Competition to reduce the spread of drugs and psychotropic substances, conducted by the Committee for the Prevention of Narcotics and Psychotropic Substances Executive Office.

The third edition of the competition saw a total of 28 projects participating, of which 19 qualified. The central evaluation

team reviewed and assessed the projects based on specific criteria. The ceremony took place at the Movenpick Hotel and was inaugurated by Dr Mohammed bin Said al Maamari, Minister of Awqaf and Religious Affairs, with the presence of ministers, Under-Secretaries, governors and walis, along with representatives from various government and non-governmental sectors. The patron of the event honoured the winners of the third edition of the community competition.



Salalah’s project, “Determined for a Safe and Promising Society,” won first place, while Muttrah received second place for their project showcasing resilience and teamwork under the slogan “Together We Stand United.”

Al Rustaq received third place for its well-structured training programme aimed at achieving sustainable development, while fourth place was shared by two wilayats: Al Mudhaibi and Shinas.

Fifth place was granted to Adam for its project aimed at

enhancing awareness of drug and psychoactive substance harms through community-based initiatives. Dr Huda al Siyabi, Director of Community-Based Initiatives at the Ministry of Health, mentioned that 35 projects participated in this edition. “We conducted a thorough evaluation and selected 19 projects. We visited all 19 projects, conducting field visits and observing the work done in each wilayat. At the end, we

selected five projects,” said Dr Huda. The event occurs every two years, inviting all 63 wilayats in Oman with health committees. Salalah took the trophy for their initiative, with a strong focus on community participation and awareness. Muttrah utilised Muttrah Souq to spread awareness, while Al Rustaq used the title “Salah” to inspire others and involved non-Arabic speakers in their community.



SAYYID BADR RECEIVES COPIES OF CREDENTIALS OF AMBASSADORS



MUSCAT: Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, received a copy of credentials of Jocelyn Fenard, Representative of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) to the GCC countries, who is residing in the Sultanate of Oman. Sayyid Badr wished the UNFPA representative success in carrying out his duties. He also lauded the efforts of the UNFPA in supporting fields related to population, development and health. Moreover, Sayyid Badr received a copy of credentials of Rashad Ismayilov, Ambassador of the Republic of Azerbaijan appointed to the Sultanate of Oman, Nabil Hajlaoui, Ambassador of the French Republic appointed to the Sultanate of Oman and Agis Loizou, Ambassador of the Republic of Cyprus appointed to the Sultanate of Oman. Sayyid Badr welcomed the ambassadors and wished them success in carrying out their duties. He also wished bilateral relations further development and growth. The meeting was attended by several officials from the Foreign Ministry. — ONA

Workshop reviews ‘Guide to Omani Building Requirements’

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, SEPTEMBER 9

The Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning (MoHUP) organised a workshop in Muscat on Monday to discuss the ‘Guide to Omani Building Requirements’. The workshop reviewed the initial draft of the guide.

Over 100 specialists from public institutions and private sector establishments participated in the workshop. They discussed general observations and ways to adapt to international criteria and meet the increasing local demand in urban and regulatory areas.

The guide is one of six regulatory frameworks aimed at standardising construction practices in Oman, with the help of experts from the International Code Council (ICC).

The first draft of the guide focused on construction requirements and non-construction requirements. It aims to enhance building quality and safety in Oman, promote resource efficiency, and reduce environmental impacts from construction activities.

The guide is crucial for ensuring the sustainability of urban projects and striking a balance between urban



The guide is crucial for ensuring the sustainability of urban projects and striking a balance between urban development and environmental conservation

development and environmental conservation. It also plays a key role in improving safety and security standards in buildings, complying with international standards, unifying building requirements, and attracting international investments to Oman.

Hamid Naderi, Senior Vice-President of Product Development, and SK Ghosh, who leads business initiatives, explained that the primary goal of the Oman Building Code is to ensure minimum safety standards for people inside buildings and to protect structures from fire and other hazards.

Naderi elaborated on the development of six building codes adapted from the 2021 International Codes (ICC) specifically for Oman. These codes cover general construction and design, existing and historical buildings, energy efficiency, sustainability, plumbing, mechanical systems and private storage disposal.

Shahswar Gamdust al Balushi, the Adviser to the Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion for Construction and Engineering Consultancy, highlighted the importance of the newly developed code in establishing standards for a safe living environment in Oman. He emphasised the need for standardised construction methods across the country, considering its diverse topography.

Al Balushi also stressed the importance of involving all stakeholders, such as consultants, municipalities, and construction companies, in the discussions to ensure a clear understanding of how the code will function and be implemented.

Participants commended the expertise provided by the International Code Council (ICC) team, recognising this as a significant step towards Oman adopting a modern regulatory framework in the construction sector to facilitate sustainable urban development in line with international standards.

Forum showcases education tracks

MUSCAT: Acting in cooperation with the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation (MoHERI), the Ministry of Labour (MoL) on Monday organised a professional qualifications forum in Muscat. The forum reviewed ways of expanding employment opportunities and upgrading methods.

During the forum, working papers presented by academics, officials and decision-makers highlighted pillars of sustainable education and means of guiding society towards embracing knowledge and competitive national capabilities.

The opening ceremony was held under the auspices of Sayyid Salim bin Musallam al Busaidy, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Labour for Human Resources Development.

Professional qualifications enhance job opportunities and reflect the keenness of the labour market on accommodating specific skills and knowledge that enable individuals to adapt to the challenges of modern times.

These qualifications constitute standards of their holders and a means for accessing global standards, skills, knowledge, specialisations that qualify them to professionally undertake any jobs or missions. — ONA



The opening ceremony was held under the auspices of Sayyid Salim bin Musallam al Busaidy, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Labour for Human Resources Development. – ONA

Oman participates in GCC Endowment meeting



Oman was represented during the meeting by Ahmed bin Saleh al Rashdi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs. — ONA

DOHA: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs took part today in the 9th meeting of GCC Under-Secretaries of Endowments and Religious Affairs, held in Doha, the State of Qatar.

Oman was represented during the meeting by Ahmed bin Saleh al Rashdi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs.

The meeting discussed the importance of highlighting the real image of Islam and combating hate campaigns, fanaticism, extremism and sectarianism.

It also underscored the importance of consolidating the bases of cooperation between endowment and religious affairs ministries and authorities.

Further, the meeting discussed several other mutual topics related to endowments and religious affairs. — ONA

■ EXPLORING OMAN'S ANCIENT TRADE ROUTE



Frankincense, which is produced by Wadi Dawkah's trees and historically used to power trade routes beyond the Arabian Peninsula, is pictured at Al Haffa Souq in Dhofar Governorate. Frankincense remains a vital aspect of Omani culture, used in religious rites, incense and perfumes. – Reuters



WORLD PHYSICAL THERAPY DAY

PHYSIOTHERAPY PROMOTES HEALTH, PREVENTS DISEASE, AND AIDS IN TREATMENT AND REHABILITATION

ADDRESSES JOINT, MUSCLE, NEUROLOGICAL, HEART, AND RESPIRATORY DISORDERS

HELPS PEOPLE OF ALL AGES, FROM MANAGING SPORTS INJURIES AND NEUROLOGICAL CONDITIONS

MOST EFFECTIVE WHEN COMBINED WITH EXERCISE AND LIFESTYLE CHANGES

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Physiotherapy plays a vital role in healthcare by promoting health, preventing disease, and aiding in treatment and rehabilitation. September 8 was World Physical Therapy Day, a celebration aimed at increasing awareness of how physical therapy enhances the quality of life for individuals across the globe.

Known interchangeably as physical therapy, this branch of medical care focuses on restoring and maintaining movement and physical function that may have been compromised due to illness, injury, or disability.

A growing number of people opt for physiotherapy over invasive surgeries or heavy medical interventions, as it offers minimally invasive solutions with fewer side effects.

The effectiveness of physiotherapy largely depends on the patient's condition and can yield significant results without the need for more aggressive treatments.

Contrary to the common misconception that physiotherapy only addresses bone issues, it extends far beyond. Physiotherapists, who are licensed and trained professionals, treat a wide array of conditions including joint and muscle problems, heart diseases, neurological disorders, paediatric cases, and even cancer rehabilitation. This profession has evolved to cover many areas of medical care, benefiting both individual patients and healthcare systems.

World Physical Therapy Day has a positive impact on the profession's reputation as it enhances visibility among the public and policymakers.

The day also raises awareness of the crucial role physical therapists play in recovery and rehabilitation.

It offers a valuable opportunity for physical therapists to connect with the public and educate them about the role of physical therapy in managing injuries and restoring balance and mobility.

Physiotherapy serves people of all ages and addresses a wide range of health issues, including bones, joints, and soft tissues namely back, neck, and shoulder pain, as well as

PHYSIOTHERAPY

A VITAL KEY TO RECOVERY AND WELLNESS

sports injuries.

Brain and nervous system disorders namely stroke, multiple sclerosis (MS), and Parkinson's disease. Heart and circulatory system like cardiac rehabilitation post-heart attack. Lung and respiratory problems like chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and cystic fibrosis. Additionally, physiotherapy helps older adults maintain independence, prevent falls, and manage age-related conditions such as osteoporosis. It is also beneficial for women, offering support during pregnancy and post-childbirth by addressing pelvic pain and urinary incontinence.

While the benefits of physical therapy are numerous, it does have limitations. It is most effective when integrated into a comprehensive treatment plan that includes exercise and lifestyle adjustments.

Although physiotherapy is generally not painful, discomfort can sometimes occur as the body responds positively to treatment through improved blood flow, muscle flexibility, or the regaining of movement after prolonged inactivity.

Physiotherapy encompasses various techniques like stretching exercises to enhance flexibility and relieve stiffness; prosthetic training, assisting patients in adapting to movement tools such as walking aids or prosthetic limbs; and iontophoresis, using electrical charges to help deliver medication and reduce inflammation.

It also involves electrical stimulation, heat therapy, and light therapy. The latter uses specialised lasers to address specific medical conditions. By recognising the scope and effectiveness of physiotherapy, society can better appreciate its profound impact on health and well-being.



SYLLABUS OF THIS ACAMEDIC YEAR TO REMAIN UNCHANGED: MOE

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Education (MoE) issued a statement on Monday on possible amendments to the curriculum for the 2024/2025 academic year.

In its statement, which came in response to what has been circulated on social media about the cancellation of 'short tests' for grades 1 to 10, the ministry said the Ministerial Decision 152/2024 that outlines the annual calendar for government and private schools remains in effect. The first semester will include 21 weeks to ensure that the study plan approved by Ministerial Decision 68/2024 is fully implemented without delay. According to the statement, the units and lessons scheduled



for this academic year remain unchanged, calling on the public to rely on official guidance bulletins, which can be accessed via the ministry's website.

The ministry said short tests for the first and second grades along with the associated subjects for grades 1-4, are still in place, noting that the new adjustment made this year is the cancellation of short tests for grades 5 to 10 in specific subjects, including school sports, music, visual arts, and life skills.

While the ministry confirmed that the decision reflects the ministry's focus on skill-based learning, it urged the public to verify the accuracy of information from official sources only.

New guidelines to protect passenger rights: CAA

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The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) has issued regulations for the Protection of Passenger Rights based on Royal Decree 65/2006 and the executive regulations of the Civil Aviation Law. These regulations aim to update the rules and enhance the experience of both inbound and outbound travellers to and from the Sultanate of Oman.

According to a statement from the CAA, the regulations consist of 62 articles outlining the rights and obligations of passengers and the air carrier.

These passenger rights were developed after numerous discussions and consultations with government agencies, the private sector, and relevant organisations.

In the event of a flight delay while a passenger is in paid accommodation, the air carrier is responsible for covering the cost of extending the accommodation until the alternative departure time.

Article 20 states that if a flight is delayed for less than six hours,



Passenger rights were developed after numerous discussions and consultations with government agencies, the private sector, and relevant organisations

the passenger is entitled to care and support as outlined in the regulations. The air carrier is accountable for any financial costs incurred by the passenger due to the delay, in accordance with the Montreal Convention.

Article 21 specifies that if a flight is delayed for more than six hours, the passenger can demand compensation from the air carrier as per the flight cancellation provisions in the regulations.

Article 22 details that when an air carrier notifies a

passenger of the cancellation of an international flight within 14 days of the scheduled departure time, the carrier must explain the passenger's rights, offer alternative flights, and provide compensation based on the distance of the flight.

Article 23 allows passengers to terminate the contract of carriage upon flight cancellation and non-acceptance of an alternative flight. The passenger is entitled to a refund of the unused ticket and any additional fees

paid, in addition to compensation as outlined in Article 22.

No compensation is provided if a passenger is informed of a flight cancellation at least 14 days before the scheduled departure time and an alternative flight is offered. The passenger has the option to accept the alternative flight or terminate the contract, with the air carrier exempt from providing care and support in this scenario.

Article 25 requires the air carrier to inform passengers of the cancellation of a specific sector of a connecting flight. Passengers can then request to reschedule the flight or terminate the contract, with compensation provided as per the regulations.

Article 26 states that no compensation is offered if an alternative flight is provided to the final destination within two hours of the previously scheduled arrival time.

Article 27 holds the air carrier liable for damages resulting from the diversion of international flights to an alternative airport not agreed upon in the contract of carriage, in accordance with the Montreal Convention.

FAO workshop focuses on climate finance, adaptation



A workshop on climate finance and climate change adaptation methods began in Salalah.

SALALAH: A five-day workshop on climate finance and climate change adaptation methods in the agriculture and water sectors commenced in Salalah on Sunday. Organised by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) in collaboration with Oman's Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, the workshop is part of the 'Building a Resilient Environment and Sustainable Agricultural and Water Resources' project, funded by the Green Climate Fund.

Dr Ahmed bin Mohsin al Ghassani, Chairman of Dhofar Municipality, emphasised that climate change is a global challenge demanding international collaboration. He highlighted that 'Oman Vision 2040' has recognised agriculture as a key sector for non-oil investments, and tackling climate challenges is crucial to achieving this vision.

Thaer Yassin, Acting FAO Representative in Oman, stated that the workshop aims to build local expertise in securing international climate finance for adaptation projects, with a focus on long-term sustainability in agriculture and water management.

The workshop comprises two training programmes: one focused on navigating the processes of securing international climate funding, particularly from the Green Climate Fund, and another on using climate data for better preparedness in agriculture and water management. A total of 30 participants from government bodies and civil society organisations are attending, with training led by local and international experts.

Additionally, the Salalah Free Zone, in collaboration with the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Department of Dhofar, hosted an exhibition showcasing products and services from local business owners. The exhibition featured around 15 small and medium enterprises (SMEs) specialising in fields such as cooling system maintenance, gypsum manufacturing, professional clothing design, and food safety testing.

The Salalah Free Zone's cumulative investment has reached RO 4.7 billion, with 64 out of 145 companies fully operational, reflecting the growing strength and diversity of the governorate's industrial sector. — ONA

SFZ expo highlights local SME products and services

SALALAH: The Salalah Free Zone, in partnership with the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Department of Dhofar Governorate, organised an exhibition showcasing the products and services of local business owners. The event, featured approximately 15 small and medium enterprises (SMEs) from various sectors, including cooling and air conditioning



system maintenance, gypsum manufacturing, professional clothing design, food safety testing, stationery supply, architectural design, as well as handicrafts and artisanal gifts.

Muslim bin Farah al Maashani, Head of the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Department, emphasised that the exhibition aims to foster

collaboration between SMEs and larger companies, promoting the integration of local entrepreneurs into larger business ecosystems.

The cumulative investment in the Salalah Free Zone has reached RO 4.7 billion, with 64 out of 145 registered companies in the operational phase. Industrial companies account for 56 per cent of these businesses. — ONA

Ain Sahban: A station for healing skin diseases

TEXT & PHOTOS BY
YAHYA ALSALMANI

The Wilayat of Sohar is home to many natural and archaeological sites that attract tourists from around the world. One of the most significant sites is the sulphurous 'Ain Sahban', located between the mountains in the village of Al Araib, approximately 50 km from the main road in the centre of the Wilayat of Sohar.

The waters of 'Ain Sahban' flow continuously throughout the year, maintaining their turquoise colour regardless of the weather. The water is warm in winter and moderate in summer.

As the water emerges from the ground, it mixes with rocks



The waters of 'Ain Sahban' flow continuously throughout the year, maintaining their turquoise colour regardless of the weather.

that release a white sulphurous substance, changing the water's colour.

Many people visit this site, particularly those suffering

from skin diseases. Studies have shown that sulphur water can treat conditions such as chronic eczema, psoriasis, and skin allergies.



The site's popularity is not just due to its natural beauty and sulphurous water; there are also numerous archaeological sites on its mountain plateaus.

Visitors can see walls, old houses, and tombs constructed from stones and mud near the water springs, adding to the area's charm.

The village is a blend of vibrant colours, with clear water reflecting the green hues of surrounding agricultural oases.

The oasis produces high-quality crops, including palm trees, mangoes, various citrus fruits, grapes and olives. Farmers also grow onions, garlic, peppers, tomatoes, and corn.

Due to the rough terrain, visitors can only access this unique site with four-wheel drive vehicles.

Signs on the site warn against swimming in the pools, especially after heavy rains when water levels rise significantly.

Visitors are also prohibited from disturbing the nearby archaeological sites.



Israeli army orders new evacuation in Gaza

GAZA: The Israeli military said on Monday it ordered the evacuation of several neighbourhoods and towns near Gaza City, warning of imminent fighting after rockets were launched from the area.

Avichay Adraee, a military spokesman, posted on social media platform X a map showing several areas in the Gaza Strip's northwest to be evacuated, declaring them part of a "dangerous combat zone".

Israel has issued numerous evacuation orders during its war in Gaza. The evacuation orders have covered most of Gaza's territory, according to the UN, and include areas where the military had previously said were largely cleared of Palestinian armed groups.

Adraee said Palestinian fighters were "once again firing rockets at the State of Israel" from Gaza's northwest, a focus of Israel's military operations in the early stages of the war.

Earlier on Monday the armed wing of Islamic Jihad, a Palestinian group fighting alongside Hamas in Gaza, claimed responsibility for rockets launched at southern Israel.

The military said "two projectiles



A man cycles past vendors displaying wares outside damaged buildings in a camp sheltering displaced people in Jabalia. — AFP

The evacuation orders have covered most of Gaza's territory and include areas where the military had previously said were largely cleared

were identified crossing from northern Gaza into Israeli territory" late on Sunday, with one intercepted and the other falling in the sea.

The vast majority of Gaza's 2.4 million people have been displaced at least once during more than 11 months of war, according to the United Nations.

Previous evacuation orders have sent people fleeing entire neighbourhoods or towns with whatever belongings they can carry with them.

Israel's military offensives in Gaza has killed at least 40,972 people, according to the territory's health ministry. The UN rights office says most of the dead are women and children.

Meanwhile, Syrian state media said on Monday that overnight Israeli strikes killed 16 people in central Hama province, while a war monitor reported a higher death toll in the "intense" raids on military sites.

The Israeli military, which has carried out hundreds of strikes in Syria since 2011, declined to comment on the latest reported attack.

Syrian official news agency SANA, citing a medical source said the number of dead "in the Israeli aggression on a number of sites on the outskirts of Masyaf" was "16 martyrs and 36 wounded, including six critically", updating an earlier toll of 14.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights war monitor reported "intense Israeli strikes" overnight, providing an updated of toll of 25 dead including "five civilians, four soldiers and intelligence personnel and 13 Syrians working with groups".

The Observatory said "Israeli strikes... targeted the scientific research area in Masyaf" in Hama province and other sites, destroying "buildings and military centres". — AFP

Vietnam death toll from Typhoon Yagi jumps to 59

HANOI: The death toll in Vietnam from Typhoon Yagi jumped to 59, state media reported on Monday, as business leaders said the storm had been a "disaster" for the country's vital manufacturing sector.

Yagi, according to meteorologists the most powerful typhoon to hit northern Vietnam in 30 years, downed bridges, tore roofs off buildings and damaged factories after making landfall on Saturday carrying winds in excess of 149 kilometres per hour.

The north was also battling serious flooding on Monday, with several communities partially underwater.

The storm killed 59 people in Vietnam, state media reported, 44 of them in landslides and flash floods. The death toll had earlier been put at 21. Authorities said on Monday that

247 people had been injured.

"The (flooding) situation is very serious. We have ordered the discharge of water (from reservoirs)," Nguyen Hoang Hiep, deputy minister of agriculture and rural development, said in a statement. "Localities must be active to support and ensure the safety of their people and assets."

At least 24 others were killed as Yagi tore through southern China and the Philippines before hitting Vietnam. Some 1.5 million people were still without electricity in Vietnam on Monday and a major bridge across the swollen and fast-moving Red River collapsed in northern Phu Tho province. Pictures on state media showed half of the 375-metre Phong Chau bridge gone.

Deputy Prime Minister Ho Duc Phoc estimated 13 people were missing. — AFP



This picture shows the collapsed Phong Chau bridge over the Red River in Phu Tho province, Vietnam. — AFP

Spain's Sanchez meets Xi, pushes 'fair trade order' on China trip

BEIJING: Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez called on Monday for a "fair trade order" during a visit to China where he met leader Xi Jinping and aimed to boost ties despite a tariff standoff between Beijing and the European Union.

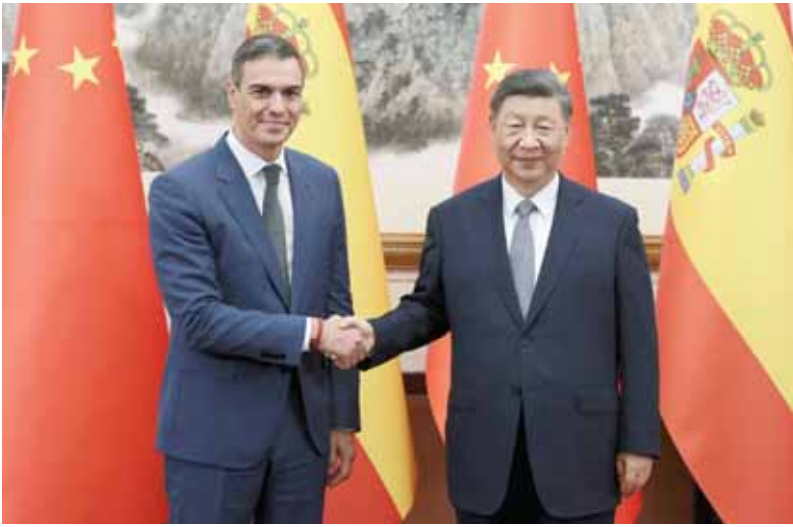
Xi called on the two sides to "jointly promote development in AI, the digital economy, new energy, and other high-tech fields", according to state broadcaster CCTV.

"I hope Spain will continue to provide a just, fair, secure, non-discriminatory business environment for Chinese companies investing and operating in Spain," he said.

Sanchez wrote on social media platform X after his meeting with Xi that there were many challenges, including "the climate emergency, threats to international peace and stability, and the fight against poverty and inequality".

"We must work together to resolve differences through negotiation, in a spirit of dialogue and collaboration, and within multilateral frameworks," he said.

Sanchez earlier met counterpart Premier Li Qiang at



Chinese President Xi Jinping and Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez shake hands at their meeting in Beijing, China. — Reuters

Beijing's ornate Great Hall of the People, telling him Spain "wishes to continue strengthening its relations with China". "We want to build bridges to defend together a fair trade order," he said in a post on X. This, he said, "allows our economies to grow and benefits our industries and citizens".

Sanchez's trip will take him to Shanghai on Tuesday and Wednesday, where he will meet local officials and businesses as well as inaugurate a new Cervantes Institute cultural

centre. Sanchez hailed "strong ties" between China and Spain at a forum in Beijing on Monday.

"Even on those issues where our positions do not fully coincide, we maintain a constructive willingness to engage in dialogue and cooperation," he said.

Sanchez also met the Spain-China Business Advisory Council on Monday as part of efforts to "deepen trade and investment relations". The Spanish premier also met Xi during his last visit to China in March 2023 and took

We must work together to resolve differences through negotiation, in a spirit of dialogue and collaboration, and within multilateral frameworks

PEDRO SANCHEZ
Spanish Prime Minister

part in the Boao Forum for Asia in China's Hainan province.

Sanchez's visit also comes against the backdrop of mounting trade tensions between the European Union and China. The European Commission announced last month that it planned to impose five-year import duties of up to 36 per cent on electric vehicles imported from China. Beijing also launched a probe last month into EU subsidies for some dairy products imported into China. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

TOKYO

Japan to resume trial removal of Fukushima debris

The operator of Japan's stricken Fukushima nuclear power plant said it will start a trial removal of highly radioactive debris from today after an earlier attempt was suspended. Thirteen years after a 9.0-magnitude earthquake and tsunami hit Fukushima-Daiichi in one of the world's worst nuclear accidents, around 880 tonnes of extremely hazardous material remain inside its reactors.

"We have finished the work to thoroughly check the steps. The retrieval will resume from



September 10," a Tokyo Electric Power Company (Tepco) official said. The debris has radiation levels so high that Tepco had to develop specialised robots able to function inside. — AFP

DUBAI

RSF paramilitaries kill 31 in Sudanese city

At least 31 people have been killed and 100 wounded since the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces renewed an assault on the city of Sennar in southeastern Sudan. Several parts of the city including the main market have been targeted by RSF artillery fire, said Emergency Lawyers, which has monitored civilian deaths and other humanitarian violations.

The progress of the RSF, which already controls most of Sennar and at least half of the country,



has slowed in the southeast as heavy rains have made movement difficult. Its war with Sudan's army has created the world's largest hunger and internal displacement crises. — Reuters

NAIROBI

Kenya starts DNA testing for school fire victims

Distraught parents gathered on Monday at a hospital in central Kenya for DNA tests to identify the victims of a deadly school dormitory fire that claimed the lives of 21 boys.

Kenya's government declared three days of mourning amid public anger over continued safety lapses and repeated fires in the country's schools.

"The forensic exercise of identifying the bodies will start because that's the only way they can be identified," Nyeri County



Commissioner Pius Murigu said. President William Ruto has described the incident as an "unfathomable tragedy". Flags were flown at half-mast on all Kenyan public buildings. — AFP



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In brief

■ BERLIN



GERMANY TO EXTEND BORDER CONTROLS TO CURB MIGRATION

Germany will extend temporary controls to all of its borders to crack down on irregular migration into the country, a government source said. The decision was also intended to “protect internal security from the current threats posed by terrorism and cross-border crime”, the source said.

Germany will also move to make it easier to turn irregular migrants back at the border, the source said. Chancellor Olaf Scholz’s government has faced rising pressure to curb migrant numbers and crack down on extremists. Last month, three people were killed in a knife rampage in the western city of Solingen. — AFP

■ STOCKHOLM



SUSPECT DRONES DISRUPT TRAFFIC AT STOCKHOLM AIRPORT

Air traffic at Stockholm’s Arlanda international airport was halted for two hours overnight after four drones entered its air space, police said on Monday. Police alerted air traffic controllers to the drones between 1:00 am and 2:00 am, Sweden’s Civil Aviation Administration said.

“We concluded that we were unable to guarantee aviation security and decided to restrict the air space,” spokesman Daniel Ackermann said. Police have opened an investigation into “airport sabotage”, they said. “We suspect that this is a deliberate act, but I can’t say what the motive may have been,” Daniel Wikdahl said. — AFP

■ SAN SALVADOR



EL SALVADOR POLICE CHIEF DIES IN HELICOPTER CRASH

El Salvador’s police chief was killed in a helicopter crash along with several others, the army said on Monday. The helicopter was also carrying Manuel Coto, a former manager of the Cosavi credit union, under police custody, it said, after his arrest in Honduras.

“We regret to confirm the death of all those on board the UH-1H helicopter of the Salvadoran Air Force, which crashed in Pasaquina”, the military said on social media platform X. Others killed in the crash were two high-ranking commissioners, a corporal, a sergeant and two lieutenant pilots. — AFP

UN rights chief fears for Ukrainians

GENEVA: The United Nations’ human rights commissioner on Monday condemned Russia’s repeated attacks on Ukraine’s energy facilities and said he feared for civilians there this winter.

Volker Turk said the population is “trapped in cycles of terror, through ongoing attacks by the Russian Federation striking civilian facilities like hospitals, schools and supermarkets, and repeated waves of targeting of energy infrastructure leading to countrywide blackouts. “I fear for Ukrainians this coming winter,” he told the UN Human Rights Council.

Turk said he was troubled by the impact on civilians of the recent escalation in fighting, including in the Russian region of Kursk.

Ukrainian forces made a large-scale push into the region, which borders Ukraine, on August 6.

Turk’s office said it had asked Russian authorities last month for access to areas of the country affected by the conflict, including Belgorod, Bryansk and Kursk.

But he said on Monday that Moscow had declined their request.

When asked if the UN rights office had also asked Ukraine for access to Kursk or other Russian areas under its control, spokeswoman Liz Throssell said that it had not.

“Our position is that access to the territory of the Russian Federation would be requested through Russian authorities.



A firefighter works in the yard of a destroyed house following the shelling, in the Donetsk region.

— Reuters

Access to the territory of Ukraine occupied by the Russian Federation would need to be facilitated through Ukrainian officials,” she said in an email. “We would access Russian territory through Russia and Ukrainian territory through Ukraine.”

More than 1,000 people have been killed or wounded by cluster munitions in Ukraine since Russia launched its war, a monitor said on Monday, urging all countries to ban the weapons. Since Russia began its full-scale attack of its western

The population is trapped in cycles of terror, through ongoing attacks striking repeated waves of targeting of energy infrastructure leading to countrywide blackouts
VOLKER TURK
UN rights chief

neighbour in February 2022, Ukraine has registered the highest number of recorded annual cluster munition casualties in the world, the Cluster Munition Coalition (CMC) said in its annual report.

It said cluster bombs had been used in Ukraine by both sides and the weapons had killed and wounded more than 1,000 people there since the war began.

The vast majority of casualties were registered in 2022. But the report stressed

that the figure for 2023 was probably a dramatic underestimate.

Cluster munitions can be dropped from planes or fired from artillery before exploding in mid-air and scattering bomblets over a wide area. They pose a lasting threat, as many fail to explode on impact, effectively acting as landmines that explode years later. In Ukraine, more farmland is now contaminated by cluster munition remnants than by landmines, the report said. — AFP



British actor Idris Elba (3L) attends a summit on knife crime with Britain’s Prime Minister Keir Starmer (C) at 10 Downing Street, London. — AFP

Starmer launches anti knife crime coalition

LONDON: British Prime Minister Keir Starmer convened a coalition to stop young people from falling into knife crime on Monday, joined by actor and anti-knife crime campaigner Idris Elba.

Starmer launched the coalition to fight the “national crisis”, bringing together campaign groups as well as families and young people affected by knife crime, the most common method of homicide in England and Wales. The annual knife crime meeting aims to increase understanding of the causes behind youth involvement in knife crime.

The government is also looking to strengthen laws around the online sale of knives and younger people’s access to them. Addressing the summit at 10 Downing Street, Starmer said there was a need to “try to reach into the lives of young people who may be going off the tracks and trying to bring them back before

they do so”.

“Far too many knives are too easily available, whether that’s online, whether that’s through the post. “Talk is good, but action is important,” Elba, who shot to fame as drugs kingpin Stringer Bell in the hit TV series “The Wire”, said at the meeting. “We needed joined-up thinking, we needed so many different perspectives: parents’ perspectives, youth workers’ perspectives, charity organisations, governance, policing,” he added, after previously calling the summit a “positive” step.

In January, Elba launched the campaign “Don’t Stop Your Future”, pushing for urgent government action on youth violence, including addressing drastic cuts to youth services funding. Although knife-related offences in England and Wales are lower than pre-pandemic levels, they have been steadily increasing since 2012. — AFP

Pope arrives in East Timor, 750,000 to attend mass

DILI: Pope Francis arrived on Monday in East Timor, a predominantly Catholic nation in Southeast Asia, for a three-day visit that will include an open-air celebration of Mass the Vatican says may include more than half the population of 1.3 million. The 87-year-old pontiff is on an ambitious 12-day visit to four countries across Southeast Asia and Oceania, his longest overseas journey yet.

He came to East Timor from Papua New Guinea, where on Sunday he delivered medical supplies to a small town located at the edge of a vast jungle, in one of the most remote areas of the world.

Francis landed in Dili, the Timorese capital, on Monday afternoon. He was met at the airport by President Jose Manuel Ramos-Horta and two young women dressed in traditional outfits, who offered him flowers and a tais, a woven ceremonial scarf, which the pontiff briefly put on.

Tens of thousands of people filled entire city blocks around the airport as Francis left in a white, open-top vehicle. Many were using umbrellas decorated in the white and yellow colours of the Vatican flag.

East Timor, a half-island nation north of Australia, gained independence from Indonesia in 2002, after a brutal, decades-long occupation. Francis is the



Pope Francis greets youths in traditional dress as East Timor’s President Jose Ramos-Horta looks on during a welcoming ceremony at the Presidential Palace in Dili, East Timor. — Reuters

Francis is the second pope to visit, following John Paul II in 1989, in a trip that gave the country’s independence movement a historic boost

second pope to visit, following John Paul II, who came in 1989, on a trip that gave the country’s independence movement a historic boost.

The country is likely the most Catholic in the world, with the Vatican saying some 96 per cent of Timorese are adherents to the faith. In a speech to about 400 politicians, diplomats and civic leaders a few hours after arriving, Francis said East Timor had

endured the “greatest suffering and trial”.

“We give thanks to God, since you never lost hope ... and after dark and difficult days, a dawn of peace and freedom has finally arrived,” he said.

Organisers are preparing for some 750,000 people to attend a Mass with Francis at the Tasitolu, a wide, dusty coastal area.

The pope’s first address in the country will come later on Monday when Francis is due to address the political authorities. Francis is visiting East Timor until Wednesday as part of a tour that also included a stop in Indonesia. He travels next to Singapore before returning to Rome on September 13.

— Reuters

Why World Cup 2026 matters to Oman



The next World Cup is two years away but the fever has already started, especially for countries like the Sultanate of Oman which have high chances of making it to the tournament this time.

The Fifa World Cup 26, which will take place from June 11 to July 19, 2026, jointly hosted by Canada, Mexico and the United States, will be the first hosted by three nations and the first North American World Cup since 1994.

Apart from its reputation as a competitive team from the region or even in Asia, the Sultanate of Oman can fancy its chances because for the first time, the tournament finals will include 48 teams.

The interaction of His Highness Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, with the national team players and expressing confidence ahead of the first qualifiers match was certainly a kind of morale boost that the team needs.

It is no coincidence that this editorial appears ahead of Oman's second match against South Korea today.

Even as we keep our fingers crossed with some crucial matches still to be played, a ticket to North

America is no longer elusive but a possibility.

The team playing in the World Cup does not just displays its individual players, but also its country, its people, its culture, its economic growth, and more importantly, coming of age on a global platform.

Oman has been no pushover in the world of football and its impact in a World Cup can be easily more inspiring than the way Cameroon entertained fans in 1990 or the spirited Morocco in 2022.

The Red Warriors, as they are called, won the Gulf Cup twice in 2009 and 2017, apart from reaching the finals multiple finals. They were also in the quarterfinals of the 2019 Asian Cup.

Football is in the minds and hearts of Omani citizens. All the time, they are glued to matches played in European leagues even if the matches does not involve any national players.

The World Cup played in neighbouring Qatar in 2022 had a positive impact on Oman tourism in the region and has been widely discussed in recent times.

The cooperation was mutual and so its benefits were shared amicably.

Imagine, the Red Warriors in the last 16 of the World Cup 2026 and the advertising potential

EVEN AS WE KEEP OUR FINGERS CROSSED WITH SOME CRUCIAL MATCHES STILL TO BE PLAYED, A TICKET TO NORTH AMERICA IS NO LONGER ELUSIVE BUT A POSSIBILITY

it brings to promote tourism in the Sultanate of Oman that is a peaceful haven to people of many nationalities and religions.

Oman is currently competing in the third round of the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) qualifiers for the Fifa World Cup 2026. They are placed in Group B, which includes strong teams such as South Korea, Iraq, Jordan, Palestine and Kuwait. As of now, Oman has faced challenges in their matches, including a recent loss to Iraq (1-0), which puts pressure on their qualification hopes.

Oman's upcoming fixtures will be crucial. They need to secure wins against teams like Palestine and Kuwait while also aiming for points against stronger opponents like South Korea and Iraq. The ability to capitalise on home advantage and perform well under pressure will be vital for Oman's chances.

Historically, Oman has been a competitive team within the AFC but has never qualified for a Fifa World Cup. Their performance in the second round of qualifiers was commendable as they finished top of their group. However, their current form in the third round indicates that they need to improve significantly to secure one of the top two spots in their group for automatic qualification.

Macron cuts diminished figure in shake-up

VALERIE LEROUX AND FRANCESCO FONTEMAGGI

For the past seven years, President Emmanuel Macron has basked in the largely undivided attention of the French nation, enjoying freedom in shaping the country's foreign and domestic policy. The appointment of Michel Barnier, a 73-year-old traditional conservative, as Macron's new prime minister on Thursday marks the beginning of a new era for a president who once famously said he wanted to rule like Jupiter, the Roman god of the sky and thunder.

Under the new power-sharing arrangement that the Elysee presidential palace calls an era of "demanding coexistence", Macron will cut a diminished figure both at home and abroad.

"We won't have the same presidency," said Anne-Charlene Bezzina, an expert in public law. "It's up to the prime minister to get his hands dirty, to build alliances and coalitions. He's the one who'll be caught in the National Assembly's crossfire."

The appointment of Barnier marked a potential turning point following two months of political chaos in the wake of snap elections called by Macron that left no group close to an overall majority in the National Assembly lower house of parliament. Barnier, a former foreign minister who acted as the European Union's Brexit negotiator, quickly indicated he would be his own man.

"The president will preside and the government will govern," Barnier, the oldest premier in the history of modern France, said on Friday evening. Macron is expected to be the "guarantor" of France's institutions and no longer dictate government policy.

Having been known for his top-down leadership style since coming to power in 2017, observers say Macron will have to learn humility. The Elysee presidential office and Matignon, the office of the French prime minister, will no longer share advisers, as has been the case for the past seven years, and Macron's advisers will no longer attend interministerial meetings.

Barnier will be in charge of the budget, security, immigration and healthcare, and will have to take into account the interests of the far-right National Rally, the single largest party in a fragmented parliament, to avoid a motion of no confidence.

—AFP



Nidal al Mughrabi

The writer is Reuters correspondent based in Gaza Strip, covering general and political news

Fear of 'lost generation' for Gaza children

The new school year in the Palestinian territories officially began on Monday, with all schools in Gaza shut after 11 months of war and no sign of a ceasefire.

In its ongoing assault on the Palestinian territory, Israel announced new orders to residents of the north Gaza Strip to leave their homes, in response to rockets fired into Israel. Umm Zaki's son Moataz, 15, was supposed to begin tenth grade. Instead he woke up in their tent in Deir al-Balah in central Gaza and was sent to fetch a container of water from more than a kilometre away.

"Usually, such a day would be a day of celebration, seeing the children in the new uniform, going to school, and dreaming of becoming doctors and engineers. Today all we hope is that the war ends before we lose any of them," the mother of five said by text message.

The Palestinian Education Ministry said all Gaza schools were shut and 90 per cent of them had been destroyed or damaged in Israel's assault on the territory, launched in October last year. The UN Palestinian aid agency UNRWA, which runs around half of Gaza's schools, has turned as many of them as it can into emergency shelters housing thousands of displaced families.

"The longer the children stay out of school the more difficult it is for them to catch up on their lost learning and the more prone they are to becoming a lost generation, falling prey to exploitation including child marriage, child labour, and recruitment into armed groups," UNRWA Director of Communications Juliette Touma said. In addition to the 625,000 Gazans already registered for school who would be missing classes, another 58,000 six-year-olds should have registered to start first grade this year, the education ministry said.

Last month, UNRWA launched a back-to-learning programme in 45 of its shelters, with teachers setting up games, drama, arts, music and sports activities to help with children's mental health.

Nearly all of Gaza's 2.3 million people have been forced from their homes



Children attend a class in a tent being used as a make-shift educational centre for primary education students in Jabalia in the northern Gaza Strip on Sunday. — AFP

THE PALESTINIAN EDUCATION MINISTRY SAID ALL GAZA SCHOOLS WERE SHUT AND 90 PER CENT OF THEM HAD BEEN DESTROYED OR DAMAGED IN ISRAEL'S ASSAULT ON THE TERRITORY, LAUNCHED IN OCTOBER LAST YEAR

at least once, and some have had to flee as many as 10 times. In the latest evacuation order, Israel told residents of an area in the northern Gaza Strip they must leave their homes, following the firing of rockets into southern Israel the previous day. The United Nations urged Palestinians

in the northern Gaza Strip to attend medical facilities to get children under the age of 10 years old vaccinated against polio. Limited pauses in fighting have been held to allow the vaccination campaign, which aims to reach 640,000 children in Gaza after the territory's first polio case in around 25 years.

UN officials said the campaign in the southern and central Gaza Strip had so far reached more than half of the children there needing the drops. A second round of vaccination will be required four weeks after the first. Health officials said on Monday two separate Israeli air strikes had killed seven people in central Gaza, while another strike killed one man in Khan Yunis further south.

The war was triggered after October 7 attack. Israel's subsequent assault on Gaza has killed more than 40,900 Palestinians, according to the enclave's health ministry.

The two warring sides each blame the other for the failure so far to reach a ceasefire that would end the fighting and see the release of captives.

Lookout... Z has joined the workforce

The Gen Z according to experts are born anywhere between the late 1990s to 2012. They are children of younger baby boomers and Gen X.

We can do our best to avoid a generation gap. The boomers experienced it, Gen X did it, the millennials and Gen Z often say, “It is interesting you understood what I meant.”

Each generation has its own characteristics too. The boomers were very expressive. The 70s looked into freedom of expression, but Gen Z have social media to express themselves from because they live on digital platforms.

If we thought professional jargons were to be avoided in order for everyone to understand what we conveyed, Gen Z is quite nonchalant about it. They were just born with technology and probably not too bothered about Artificial Intelligence taking over. Probably they would be the first ones to do the smooth transition.

As of now, most of them are just shaping their career paths. Just like any other generation, they too will also be going through uncertainties and, no matter which part of the world they are from and what language their native language is, they are in the same boat in terms of thoughts and ideas, and not to forget trends. The fact is, social media have made borders almost ambiguous.

Gen Z almost speaks another language, even though it is spoken English. When they say ‘Fire’, you do not have to call an emergency or run for water, they have just described something amazing and yes, if it is a text message, then they probably would just send a fire emoji.

Is life all about L and W? You were just asked if life is all about loss and winning. If someone has gone ‘Ick’ you just have lost someone’s interest. Oh, Gen Z can easily lose interest and guess what? They won’t mind telling you that. There is nothing about adjusting and holding it all back and suffering quietly. They are very clear about what they want and how they want it. I quite like it because they are not told and not going to pay attention to the concept of - ‘What would people say?’

But they might still be a bit raw about



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The writer is a senior journalist and a radio anchor

THE 70S LOOKED INTO FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION, BUT GEN Z HAVE SOCIAL MEDIA TO EXPRESS THEMSELVES FROM BECAUSE THEY LIVE ON DIGITAL PLATFORMS

emotions. They could be flooded with their own emotions and might not think too much about another person’s feelings. But they are very much in touch with theirs. Their major decisions are yet to be made, and it would be interesting to see how they would take the steps.

As in the case of weddings, would they be bold enough to alter the concept of Maher, the dowry money gifted to the bride? Would they make it more practical and easy for the grooms? Would the genders equalise and accept each other’s ever-changing duties and roles,

Or is the global movement of Gen Z just contained in slang and digital awareness?

Yes, we know they are the generation that has been exposed to the most amount of information. They do not depend on their parents, teachers or traditional media to know more about their favourite topics. They may not be too into reading books or writing with their hand. Texting and typing are their norm.

If they are vibing, they are having a peaceful time, if they are ‘sus’, they are being suspicious and poggers mean there has been a good element of surprise, and they are excited, (used especially in gaming.) It is almost a profession and could become an art. There is another factor about Gen Z, because while other generations had their own time to explore and experience life and society, this generation gets to see all that on the net. They know, period.

I like being with Gen Z, they are quite knowledgeable and practical but at times, might be just another youngster people come across during the years of any other generation.

That is because life is not just about knowledge, it is also about experience. At one point, as we enter the world doing responsible work, there are times when we think we know it all until we see the wisdom of people with experience. There are values based on traditions that are part of the roots of any culture. Anthropologists are probably observing the new generation, but it would also be nice on our part to meet them half way. But parents have probably learned a few words and their definitions too, because they have to keep the communication channel open. So should we have a class on Gen Z terminologies?

UP FOR GRABS!



A member of staff holds a VOX HDC-77 Electric guitar used by US late musician and singer Prince during a press photocall at Sotheby’s auction house for the Popular Culture Auction, in central London. – AFP

The US election and Europe’s strategic status quo

With the US election just two months away, European decision-makers have gone from grappling with Trumpian nightmare scenarios – new trade wars, abandoning Ukraine, withdrawing from Nato – to experiencing an emotion they had almost forgotten: hope. Vice-President Kamala Harris’s ascent to the top of the Democratic ticket has eliminated Donald Trump’s polling lead and allowed Europeans to contemplate alternatives to their worst-case scenario.

Yet, even if Harris wins, it would be foolish to expect complete continuity with Joe Biden’s administration. Europe remains unprepared for what’s coming.

While Trump and J D Vance’s talk of ending US support for Ukraine has set off alarms in European capitals, a Harris administration’s Ukraine strategy probably would depart from the status quo, too. As the war grinds on, US officials have lost confidence that Ukraine will capture and hold enough ground to break the current deadlock. Despite the Ukrainians’ offensive into Russia’s Kursk region, they are still losing ground in Donetsk. Recovering the territory they have lost since February 2022 becomes more unlikely by the day.

Thus, a Harris administration would have to look for ways to strengthen Ukraine’s hand in the short term in order to pivot towards a settlement. Knowing better than



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EVEN IF HARRIS WINS, IT WOULD BE FOOLISH TO EXPECT COMPLETE CONTINUITY WITH THE BIDEN ADMINISTRATION

anyone that their situation is bleak, the Ukrainians have been looking for a way out of the stalemate. Though they have launched their Kursk gambit, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said in July that he wants the “hot stage” of the war to end this year. Privately, Ukrainian leaders may be hoping that the United States will push them to the negotiating table, as that would provide the political cover they need to change course. Such discussions are already well underway in Washington.

This might come as a shock to those Europeans (including the next high representative for foreign affairs) who still talk about supporting Ukraine for “as long as it takes,” and whose rhetoric has hardly changed since February 24, 2022. Whatever happens, the challenge for Europeans is to ensure that the war does not result in a “peace” on Russian terms: a demilitarised Ukraine that is forced to abandon its aspirations to join Nato and the European Union.

Trade policy will be another major issue. Trump is promising a blanket 10 per cent tariff on all imports, and new tariffs of 60 per cent or more on all goods from China (in addition to all the restrictions already introduced by the Biden administration). Faced with US tariffs and pressure from

the Trump administration to apply its own tariffs on Chinese goods, Europe would find itself in an extremely difficult position.

But, again, there is no reason to expect that Harris would have a significantly softer China policy than Biden (whose approach has been much tougher than Trump’s was while in office). The anti-China consensus in the US is solid and in her few public statements on the matter. While her running mate, Tim Walz, has visited China many times, he has done so largely as an advocate of human rights.

Unlike Trump, Harris has been vocal in her support for America’s network of alliances. But this commitment might make her expect more from US allies. Moreover, since she is no dyed-in-the-wool Atlanticist like Biden, the broader trend of US foreign policy

shifting away from Europe and toward Asia would persist. When Europeans talk about investing more in defence, they should ask themselves whether they are merely trying to placate Trump, or whether they are genuinely serious about providing for their own long-term security.

Much of the task of envisioning what a Trump or a Harris presidency would mean for Europe will fall on the new European Commission, which will have to start preparing Europeans so that they do not panic if their biggest fears regarding Ukraine or China are realised. Failure to do so will increase the likelihood of a disjointed response, with smaller member states possibly peeling off to pursue bilateral deals with the US. It will be up to the bigger countries to calm their smaller

counterparts (many of them in eastern Europe).

To that end, recasting relations with the United Kingdom could be a game-changer. If the EU and the UK can work in lockstep on geoeconomic issues, they will have more policy leeway and clout vis-à-vis the US and China. Although Britain cannot replace the US, its reintegration into European defence and technology frameworks could significantly bolster the continent’s strategic position. British Prime Minister Keir Starmer’s new government has already embarked on an enhanced security and defence partnership with Germany, and similar deals with likeminded members could follow, culminating in a pact with the EU as a whole.

Poland and the Baltic and Nordic countries will likely take the lead in pursuing this outcome, but French President Emmanuel Macron may emerge as the key swing vote. Will he embrace a geopolitical vision of bringing the UK into the European fold on defence, technology, and climate issues? Or will he channel Charles de Gaulle by sidelining Britain, thus weakening the EU in the process? One thing is clear: Whether the next US president is Trump or Harris, Europeans must start planning for a change.

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Europe still remains unprepared for what’s coming.

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Red Warriors ⚽ chase win in crunch match



ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, SEPT 9

Oman will eye a strong comeback in the AFC Asian Qualifiers – Road to 2026 campaign as they host South Korea in a key match for the second-round games in Group B on Tuesday. The match will kick off at 6 pm (Muscat time) at Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex.

The Red Warriors are in their best shape to earn a positive result that will keep their hopes alive in this long campaign. Coach Jaroslav Silhavy’s men will aim for the winning points, as a victory will return the team to competition mode while a loss or draw will reduce the team’s morale.

It is expected that today’s match will not be easy, as the strong opponent, South Korea, will be looking to bounce back after their draw in the opening game against Palestine in Seoul last week, while Oman suffered a 1-0 defeat against Iraq.

Oman national team players completed their training sessions at Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex

on Monday night under the watchful eyes of head coach Silhavy. The Czech coach put his final touches on the starting line-up during the last session.

The coach may continue relying on the same squad as the previous match, with the possible inclusion of Abdullah Fawaz and Omar al Malki.

POSITIVE RESULT

Silhavy voiced confidence that the goal is to achieve a positive result in the match. “We are in our best shape for this game. It is going to be a tough clash. South Korea is ranked as the top team in the group. I am confident that we will get the required support from the fans in today’s crucial match to achieve the desired result.”

Responding to a question on the level of Group B teams after the first-round games, the coach said: “Group B is not an easy group, especially as the results of the opening round reflected that. I have trust and belief in my players to deliver a top game. Also, the players are aware of the strengths and weaknesses of the opponent. Our target is to qualify



from this group,” he added.

“The key to winning is respecting the team and working hard on the field, besides applying the best tactics to attack the rivals. These are the key solutions to winning, and we will follow this strategy,” the Czech coach opined.

“Salah is a key player, and his absence is critical. However, we are confident that the rest of the players are in good shape and ready. Also, Ahmed al Khamisi and Mohammed al Musallami are prepared for the game, while Arshad al Alawai will miss the match due to a red card,” he concluded.

STRONG TEAM

Oman’s Ali al Busaidi affirmed that he will fight alongside his teammates in today’s clash to secure a win. “Our target is to recover from the Iraq game and win this crucial match. We are aware that the opponent is not an easy team, and they are the best in the group.

However, we will give our best to achieve the desired victory. I would like to thank all the fans, government, and private sector

entities for their support of the national team,” he said.

South Korea head coach Hong Myung-bo said that his team will implement their best tactics after a draw against Palestine in the opening game. “This will be our first away game in these qualifiers. There are many challenging conditions, but our focus is on winning the game.

I expect the match will not be easy, but my players have enough experience to achieve the required result and progress in the qualifiers,” he said.

“The Oman team suffered a loss in the previous game, and they will enter the game with different tactics. On the other hand, we are well prepared for this match and our target is to win,” he said. “We cannot predict the result, but the goal is to secure the three points,” Hong said.

Bayern Munich defender Kim Min Jae said that they are accustomed to different weather conditions. “We arrived in Oman a few days ago, and the players have adapted to the weather conditions. This will not impact the team’s performance,” he said.

SQSC ready to stage qualifier against South Korea

WALEED AL JAHWARI
MUSCAT, SEPT 9

The Oman national team’s match against South Korea will be Oman’s 40th and the eighth qualifier at home. The first match was against Iraq in the 1990 World Cup qualifiers.

The Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher, opened in 1985 with an area of 800,000 square metres, is one of the largest sports complexes in Oman, with a capacity of 28,000 spectators. It won the Unesco medal in 1995.

The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth is keen to provide many services and facilities for the fans at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex to support the national football team. Regarding the fans’ entry, four main gates will be opened: gates No 1, 2, 4, and 5; Block C1 will be allocated for families. Gate 5 and Block No



27 will be designated for South Korean fans.

Saud bin Badr Ambusaidi, Assistant Director-General of the General-Directorate of Sports Activities at the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, spoke about the most prominent preparations: “Each gate has approximately 10 to 15 entrances,

with coordination with the Royal Oman Police to facilitate movement. In addition, 28 other sub-gates will be open to avoid any congestion.”

“The ministry is seeking to provide free drinking water through cooperation with distribution companies inside the complex, distributing shirts to the

public with promotional tools, as well as the presence of more than 20 mobile food carts, in addition to some simple activities that will be held in the inner courtyard of the complex,” he said.

The gates will open to the public at 3:00 pm to ensure comfortable and smooth movement.

The Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex will accommodate more than 1,000 cars, parking next to the beach playgrounds to ensure flexibility of exit after the match. The Royal Oman Police will be present inside and outside the complex to control movement.

Ali bin Hamad al Maawali, Director in Muscat Governorate,

indicated that “The Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher is fully prepared in all administrative, coordination, and technical aspects. Tickets have been offered for the VIP platform, and their entrances will be A and B from Gate No 11. A special area has been allocated for media, which will be on the left of the main cabin, as well as special places will be provided for prayer.”

Fayez al Rushaidi, national team goalkeeper, opined that “Our team’s match with South Korea will be difficult on our land and among our fans, and we hope the fans will stand by us during this important match. The players need the fans’ support to compensate for the failure of the last match’s result, indicating that the Iraq match saw us obtaining a number of opportunities, but we did not succeed in translating them into goals.”

Al Maqbali re-elected as chairman of OVA, Al Hajri to lead OAA

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, SEPT 9

Eng Ibrahim bin Abdullah al Maqbali was re-elected as chairman of Oman Volleyball Association (OVA) for the second successive term (2024-2028) as he received nine votes compared to his opponent Dr Mohammed al Maamari who received six votes only.

The General Assembly members of OVA voted for all the positions to form the new board.

For the vice-chairman position, the only candidate Dr Salam bin Salim al Toubi was elected while Aisha al Jabri was elected for the women's seat in the board.

The three board members received high votes including Yousef al Badwawi, Salim al Hamadani and Ahmed al Maamri. The representative of the athletes in the board member will be defined in later stages.

The elections were held in presence of 15 clubs which are eligible for voting at the General Assembly.

After re-election as chairman of OVA, Eng Ibrahim al Maqbali thanked the General Assembly members for their support and confidence.

"I am pleased to continue working on my set strategic plans which has been implementing in cooperation with relevant authorities including the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth (MoCSY) and relevant stakeholders. I will work hard with my board members to achieve the best for Oman's volleyball," he said.

"The Oman national team will take part in the Arab Championship in Bahrain besides the women team which will attend the Beach Volleyball Championship in Qatar. Furthermore, the OVA



Eng Ibrahim bin Abdullah al Maqbali

will organise series of local events including the league, the Ministry's Shield championship, Youth league and the beach volleyball championship. All these activities and events will be discussed in the first board meeting which will take place very soon," Eng Ibrahim al Maqbali concluded.

AL HAJRI TO CHAIR OAA

The General Assembly Meeting to form the new board directors of Oman Athletics Association (OAA) took place on Monday.

The General Assembly members formed a new board directors that featured from a new chairman represented by Said bin Mohammed al Hajri who earned 17 votes from the clubs while his nearest competitor Jihad al Shaikh received five votes and former chairman Salim bin Said al Amri got two votes only.

Ali al Marzooqi was elected as vice-chairman while Noora al Balushi took the women's mandatory seat.

The elected board members were Hadi al Alawi, Ahmed al Dhori and Hilal al Masrouri while Mohammed al Shukaili was elected as representative of athletes committee of the Oman Athletic Association.

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, SEPT 9

The Oman Open Hockey5s Championship kicked off on Sunday in Muscat with 12 matches featuring teams from various military and civilian sectors. The first day witnessed a series of exciting games, reflecting the intense competition and thorough preparation of the participating teams.

In the opening match, the Royal Army team secured a resounding 5-1 victory over the FAP team, starting the tournament strongly and demonstrating their readiness to compete for the title. In another match, the Security and Safety team triumphed over the Jindal team with a 4-1 score, showing clear dominance throughout the game.

In the third encounter, Badr Al Sama secured an important 3-1 win over the Royal Guard team, controlling the game and sealing the victory in their favour. Additionally, the first day's matches saw a significant 5-1 win for the Al Fayha team over the Royal Navy team.

Later, in a second match for FAP, they suffered a defeat against the Royal Navy team with a 7-3 score, in a game marked by strong offensive play from the Navy. In another encounter, the Royal Navy team prevailed against the Security and Safety team with a 3-1 victory, strengthening their position in the competition.

The Royal Army team continued their impressive performance with a comfortable 3-0 win over Badr Al Sama, boosting their chances of advancing to the later stages. In a strong matchup, Al Fayha defeated Jindal 5-2, confirming their dominance on the first day.

In the next game, FAP lost a close match to Badr Al Sama with a 3-2 score, in an exciting game that remained competitive until the final moments. Meanwhile, Al Fayha returned with another



big win, beating the Security and Safety team 4-1.

In another match, the Royal Army team continued their outstanding performance, defeating the Royal Guard team 4-1, maintaining their consistent high-level play. The first day concluded with Jindal beating the Navy team 3-2 in a competitive game that saw both teams exchanging control throughout.

Amir al Maashari, representing

the Badr Al Sama team, stated that this championship plays a very important role in enabling young players to gain experience through interactions with other teams in both local and international matches.

Commenting on the expected level of the championship, Al Maashari said: "We expect strong competition, as most teams have been preparing for this tournament for long and

intensive periods."

Regarding his team's preparations, Al Maashari noted that they are fully ready to compete, saying: "We have trained for two consecutive months, with two daily training sessions, one in the morning and one in the evening. We will strive to deliver an outstanding performance worthy of our reputation, and we aspire to seize the championship title."

Bahla promoted to Omantel League

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, SEPT 9

The Board of Directors of the Oman Football Association held an emergency meeting on Sunday, during which it was decided to continue the Omantel League competition with the participation of 12 clubs. This decision followed the confirmation of Dhofar Club's absence from the tournament due to its relegation to the First Division League. To compensate for this absence, Bahla Club was promoted from the First Division League based on the competition's regulations.

The relegation of Dhofar, considered one of the most prestigious clubs in the Sultanate of Oman with a history rich in achievements, came as a major blow to their fans and supporters. The relegation was resulted from the club's failure to obtain the necessary local and Asian licenses required for participation in the



league, which opened the door for Bahla Club's return to the Omantel League as the highest-ranked relegated club that met the licensing requirements.

Bahla Club received the news of its promotion to the Omantel League with great enthusiasm from its fans and management. The club's management announced in an official statement that it had received a letter from the Oman Football Association confirming the team's return to the Omantel League for the 2024-2025 season. The

management emphasised that this promotion came after significant efforts to obtain the Asian license, allowing the club the opportunity to return to the Sultanate of Oman's premier league.

In preparation for the competition, Bahla's management immediately began developing comprehensive technical and administrative plans to equip the team for the upcoming challenges. These plans include signing several local and foreign players in a bid to strengthen the squad and compete for top

positions in the league. Despite facing significant financial challenges, the management affirmed its commitment to achieving the best possible results, aiming to bring joy to Bahla's loyal fans.

Bahla Club's first test in the Omantel League will be against league leaders Seeb in the fourth round of the competition at the Ibri Sports Complex. This match presents a perfect opportunity for the team to prove its readiness and ability to compete in the tournament, especially against a club as large and powerful as Seeb, who have achieved several successes in recent years.

The club's management pointed out that the primary goal for the upcoming season is to maintain the team's presence among the top-tier clubs in the Omantel League while striving for positive results that bolster the club's ambitions to compete for titles, despite the financial difficulties it faces.

Nissanka stars as Sri Lanka end 10-year wait for Test win in England

LONDON: Pathum Nissanka's superb unbeaten century guided Sri Lanka to an ultimately commanding eight-wicket win at The Oval on Monday as they ended a decade-long wait for a Test-match victory in England. Sri Lanka, set a target of 219, reached that total for the loss of two wickets before lunch on the fourth day, with Nissanka 127 not out and Angelo Mathews 32 not out in an unbroken stand of 111.

Victory gave Sri Lanka just a fourth Test win in England and first since a 100-run success at Headingley back in 2014. England, however, took this three-match series 2-1 after wins at Old Trafford (five wickets) and Lord's (190 runs).

But defeat meant England, who whitewashed the West Indies 3-0 earlier in the season, failed to achieve a first home campaign clean sweep since 2004, when Michael Vaughan oversaw seven successive wins. Nissanka, named player-of-the-match after also making 64 in the first innings, told Sky Sports: "It was a great opportunity to play in England and I enjoyed that innings."

"I just wanted to play my normal game and I have done that," added the opener, who spent two years out of the Test side.



Sri Lanka's Pathum Nissanka celebrates with Angelo Mathews after winning the match. — Reuters

And for Sri Lanka captain Dhananjaya de Silva, there was no doubting the significance of leading his country to only their fourth win in 21 Tests in England. "This is one of the happiest moments in my career and my life," said De Silva.

"We had a tough time in the last two weeks so to come here and get a win in English conditions against an English team, it is a very good moment for me, my team, and my country as well."

Sri Lanka resumed on 94-1, already well-placed to end a run of seven straight Test defeats by England. — AFP

Sinner sweeps aside Fritz for US Open title

WORLD NO 1 BECOMES FIRST ITALIAN MAN TO TRIUMPH IN NEW YORK

NEW YORK: Jannik Sinner won his second Grand Slam title of 2024 on Sunday when he swept aside Taylor Fritz in the US Open final, shattering American hopes of a first male champion at the majors in 21 years.

World number one Sinner, who won his maiden Slam at the Australian Open in January, became the first Italian man to triumph in New York with a 6-3, 6-4, 7-5 victory.

For 23-year-old Sinner, it was a 55th match win of the season and sixth title.

After his 21-year-old rival Carlos Alcaraz pocketed the French Open and Wimbledon titles to take his majors collection to four, the two men have cemented their places as the powerhouses of tennis's new era.

"This title means so much," said Sinner who arrived in New York under a cloud after it was revealed he had failed two drug tests but escaped sanction.

"The last period of my career has not been easy but I have my team and family who support me.

"I love tennis but off court there is a life also and I want to dedicate this trophy to my aunt because she is not well and I don't know how much longer I will have her in my life. She was a very important part of my life and still is. It's nice to share this with her."

World number 12 Fritz was bidding to be the first American man since Andy Roddick in New York in 2003 to win a major.

He was backed by A-list celebrity support amongst the 23,000-strong crowd inside Arthur Ashe Stadium.

Pop queen Taylor Swift watched alongside boyfriend and NFL star Travis Kelce while Oscar-winning actor Matthew McConaughey was hard to miss as he donned a Stars and Stripes headband.

"It has been an amazing two weeks. Congratulations to Jannik, he played a great match. He was very impressive and was too good today," said Fritz.

'NEXT TIME'

"I'm sorry I couldn't get it done but I will keep working and I feel I will get it the next time."

Sinner raced to a 2-0 lead in the first set before Fritz settled and levelled for 2-2.

The 26-year-old American saved a break point on the back of an exhausting 23-shot rally in the fifth game but soon slipped 4-3 down.

Sinner pounced again with a third break to claim the opening set as Fritz fired a backhand long.

The two players had only dropped serve a combined 20 times over six rounds each at the tournament before Sunday's final. — AFP



Italy's Jannik Sinner celebrates with the trophy after winning his final match against Taylor Fritz of the US. – Reuters

JANNIK SINNER'S PATH TO US OPEN TITLE
(x denotes seed):
Jannik Sinner (ITA x1)
1st rd: bt Mackenzie McDonald (USA) 2-6, 6-2, 6-1, 6-2
2nd rd: bt Alex Michelsen (USA) 6-4, 6-0, 6-2
3rd rd: bt Christopher O'Connell (AUS) 6-1, 6-4, 6-2
4th rd: bt Tommy Paul (USA x14) 7-6 (7/3), 7-6 (7/5), 6-1
QF: bt Daniil Medvedev (RUS x5) 6-2, 1-6, 6-1, 6-4
SF: bt Jack Draper (GBR x25) 7-5, 7-6 (7/3), 6-2
F: bt Taylor Fritz (USA x12) 6-3, 6-4, 7-5

Ahmad eyes Fuji fightback in FIA WEC

FUJI: Only a week since Ahmad al Harthy returned home to Oman after a hugely competitive FIA World Endurance Championship outing in the USA, the Sultanate of Oman's number one racing driver is preparing for more travels as he heads to Fuji Speedway in Japan for round seven of the 2024 season.

The penultimate race of the FIA WEC campaign, the 6 Hours of Fuji, will be contested on September 15, and the Far East track is one where Al Harthy did shine last year on his first ever visit to the venue.

Going into the event sixth in the LMGT3 standings, along with Team WRT team-mates Maxime Martin and Valentino Rossi, Al Harthy is aiming for a trouble-free weekend in Japan after a fantastic showing from the squad in America ended with enforced retirement very late in the race.

Based on performance, pace and consistency during round six at the Circuit of the Americas in Texas just over a week ago, by rights the No 46 BMW M4 trio would have celebrated their second LMGT3 podium of the year — at the very least a top four finish after storming from 15th on the grid.

During the final quarter of an hour though, with Martin at the wheel, power steering failure meant a bitterly disappointing

- Ahmad al Harthy focused on replicating COTA pace in Japan
- BMW M4 driver looking forward to Fuji return this weekend in FIA WEC
- Al Harthy, Maxime Martin and Valentino Rossi P6 in driver standings
- Penultimate event of WEC season to mark Omani's second visit to Fuji

retirement from the 'Lone Star Le Mans' after a truly magnificent performance by all three team-mates, one which really did deserve significant reward. As the Omani's first season of FIA WEC racing a BMW, his second visit to Fuji will bring another new challenge as his previous experience of the track last year came at the wheel of a different car and so all that was learnt then will require some additional thought.

Having adapted very impressively this year to the BMW M4 LMGT3, and gelling perfectly with the high-profile Team WRT squad and his superstar team-mates, the Omani heads to world-famous Fuji this week aiming to fight as hard as possible for an overdue return to the podium. Al Harthy's racing this coming weekend will, as always, be made possible by the outstanding support of prestigious partners OQ, Oman Ministry

of Culture, Sports and Youth, Omantel, Experience Oman and BMW Oman.

AHMAD AL HARTHY:
"It's exciting to be heading back to Fuji for only the second time in my career this weekend, it's an incredible circuit and I'm really looking forward to going there for the first time with WRT and the BMW M4. It's a big turnaround for the teams and drivers with it only being just over a week since we left America, but we're aiming to continue the momentum of the performance we showed at COTA.

"Without the issue with the steering almost near the end of the race it would've been a fantastic result, coming from P15 to P4 and being pretty close to the podium. It wasn't to be, unfortunately, but the hard work and commitment of everyone in the team really did show our capability. It'd be great to challenge for the podium at Fuji, hopefully we'll be in a position to try and achieve that."

Opening free practice at Fuji will begin at 11:00 local time on September 13, with the second session following at 15:30. On September 14, third practice starts at 10:20 local time ahead of qualifying, followed by Hyperpole, at 14:20. The 6 Hours of Fuji race follows on September 15, at 11:00 local time.



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JOINT VENTURE

OMAN, BAHRAIN FINALISE STEPS FOR JOINT INVESTMENT COMPANY



With an issued capital of RO 10 million, the company seeks to enhance trade and investment flows.

MUSCAT: The Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) and the Bahrain Chamber of Commerce and Industry convened in Muscat to finalise the establishment of the ‘Oman and Bahrain Investment Company.’ This joint venture aims to foster and develop projects in collaboration with the private sectors of both countries.

The meeting focused on formalising the registration and announcement process in line with regulations set by the relevant authorities, while also exploring promising investment opportunities. Priority sectors identified include food security and logistics, with initial projects slated for Oman.

Key discussions centred around high-potential sectors that align with the strategic development goals of both nations, particularly in empowering the private sector. The chambers also outlined procedures for conducting feasibility studies to assess market opportunities.

Accelerating the next steps was emphasised to ensure the company can commence operations promptly. Both sides highlighted the role of the private sector in contributing to the company’s growth after its launch.

The meeting also featured presentations on lucrative investment opportunities in the food security sector, as well as promising ventures listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange.

With an issued capital of RO 10 million, the Oman and Bahrain Investment Company seeks to enhance trade and investment flows between the two countries, focusing on food security and logistics. Bahrain remains a key trading partner for Oman, with bilateral trade reaching RO 95.5 million by June 2024. — ONA

OQ to offer 25% stake in OQEP subsidiary via IPO

NASRULAH AL AJMI
MUSCAT, SEPT 9

OQ Exploration and Production (OQEP), the government-owned upstream oil and gas operator – part of OQ Group – plans to proceed with an initial public offering (IPO) and list its shares on the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX). The IPO, offering up to 25 per cent of OQEP’s shares, is expected to begin in September 2024, pending regulatory approval, with the listing anticipated in October 2024.

The Offering gives investors access to a leading oil and gas producer in Oman, with significant reserves and a 14-fold increase in daily production since 2009. OQEP’s successful joint ventures and strategic location – along with Oman’s developed sector, stable environment, and supportive government policies – make it a key player in the hydrocarbon industry.

Ashraf bin Hamed al Mamari, Group CEO of OQ, emphasised that the plan to float OQ Exploration and Production is a key move to enhance OQ’s portfolio through strategic divestments.

He highlighted the commitment to creating new growth opportunities and boosting Oman’s economic stability. Al Mamari also noted the focus on sustainable development and local value creation, including support for local communities and small and medium-sized enterprises. In a video presentation at the event, Ahmed al Azkawi, Chief Executive Officer of OQEP, highlighted that OQ’s strategic goals align with Oman Vision 2040. The company is committed to transforming hydrocarbon resources into clean energy and supporting the shift to renewable sources.

The Offering will be divided into



High-level officials of OQ Group addressing a media briefing on OQEP’s upcoming IPO.

The first part, known as the Category I (Institutional Tranche), will make up

60 PER CENT

of the total Offering and will be available to eligible investors in Oman and institutional investors in other countries, allocated on a pro-rata basis.

two parts. The first part, known as the Category I (Institutional Tranche), will make up 60 per cent of the total Offering and will be available to eligible investors in Oman and institutional investors in other countries, allocated on a pro-rata basis.

The second part, the Category II (Retail Tranche), will account for 40 per cent of the Offering and will be offered to retail investors in Oman. Shares in this tranche will be divided between large and small retail investors based on their subscription amounts. If the demand from retail investors is less than 40 per cent of the Offering, any remaining shares will be allocated to institutional investors if there is oversubscription in that category.

Al Azkawi underscored OQ’s dedication to sustainability in key energy sectors, noting that the company has achieved a reduction of fifteen kilogrammes of CO2 equivalent per barrel, one of the

lowest rates globally. He highlighted a 21-per cent reduction in emissions as a significant milestone, reflecting OQ’s steady progress towards reaching net-zero emissions by 2050.

Al Azkawi noted that enhancing the local economy is a core component of their sustainability initiatives, including promoting Omani balance and supporting social projects to strengthen their regional impact. As OQ continues to explore and pursue sustainable growth opportunities, Al Azkawi reaffirmed the company’s dedication to supporting local communities and collaborating with companies and stakeholders. OQ is committed to transparency, credibility and effective partnerships to uncover new opportunities and boost investment. Al Azkawi also mentioned that OQ is keen on expanding its production sector in Oman, where it stands as the only fully national company operating in this field.

TURN TO PAGE 15

Oman’s Islamic banking sector records substantial growth

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, SEPT 9

Islamic banking in Oman has made impressive strides, showcasing remarkable growth despite holding a small share of the overall financial market. Tahir bin Salim al Amri, Executive President of the Central Bank of Oman (CBO), highlighted this during his speech at the IFN Oman Forum 2024.

Al Amri shared several key figures and developments, underscoring the sector’s role in supporting the Omani economy, improving financial inclusion and increasing its presence both locally and abroad.

As of June 2024, total assets of Islamic banks and windows in Oman had grown by 11.4 per cent year-on-year to reach RO 7.8 billion. This now represents a significant 18.1 per cent of the country’s total banking assets. The growth in financing was equally



TAHIR BIN SALIM
AL AMRI

Executive President
of the Central Bank
of Oman

impressive, with Islamic banks contributing RO 6.4 billion in total financing to the economy.

“The Islamic banking sector has demonstrated robust expansion, consistently supporting the economy with healthy growth compared to the previous year,” said Al Amri. He also noted that the total deposits in Islamic banking had risen by a third, further showcasing the confidence of depositors. Despite holding a smaller market share, the sector is efficiently mobilising funds and increasing its impact on the national economy.

The capital adequacy of Islamic banks remains strong, with a capital adequacy ratio of 15.8 per cent and a Tier 1 capital ratio that exceeds the average for the industry. While there was a slight increase in impaired financing, rising from 2.1 per cent to 2.8 per cent, Al Amri noted that this still remains below the non-performing financing

ratio of conventional banks, demonstrating the sector’s overall stability.

Profitability also continued to trend upward, with the sector recording an 8.7-per cent increase in profits during 2023. Islamic banks in Oman have expanded their operations, with around 100 branches offering a variety of services including mobile banking, digital platforms and on-site banking.

Al Amri emphasised the sector’s growing sophistication, as the range of products and services offered has expanded to meet the evolving needs of businesses and individuals alike.

In addition to financial growth, Islamic banks have also played a crucial role in the introduction of Sharia-compliant financial products, an area that continues to draw interest from both domestic and international investors.

The sector has offered an alternative source of funding, contributing 40 per cent to new deposits, despite its

smaller share of the market.

Looking forward, Al Amri outlined key regulatory developments that are expected to further enhance the sector’s growth. The CBO has been working on regulatory frameworks to guide the conversion of conventional banks and their branches into Islamic entities, a trend seen in many countries across the region.

Additionally, the Central Bank of Oman is developing more Sharia-compliant liquidity tools, including Islamic certificates of deposits and treasury bills, expected to be launched soon.

“The Islamic banking sector, though starting with a modest market share, has shown significant growth and efficiency in mobilising funds and contributing to the national economy,” said Al Amri. He concluded by expressing confidence in the sector’s future potential, particularly in helping to diversify Oman’s economy.

QUICK TAKES



NBO IMPLEMENTS RISK AND FRAUD MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

MUSCAT: In a significant step forward in safeguarding customer data and reinforcing customer confidence and trust, National Bank of Oman (NBO) has successfully implemented advanced Risk Management and Fraud Risk Management systems to enhance its capabilities in protecting clients and ensuring secure transactions.

Introducing the latest risk control and fraud prevention technology marks a milestone in improving a customer's journey towards operational excellence, ensuring every transaction is completely secure. These systems are designed to monitor transactions across all digital channels for NBO and non-NBO customers, ensuring the highest security and protection against fraudulent activities.

Since March 2024, NBO's Fraud Risk Management system has been operational, providing robust protection by analysing transaction behaviours and identifying potential threats in real time. This system, now live, has demonstrated its effectiveness in significantly reducing fraud, thereby enhancing customer trust and confidence. After successfully implementing its Fraud Risk Management system, NBO upgraded its Risk Management System (RiskNet) in June 2024.

NATIONAL FINANCE HOSTS AUTO DEALERS AT SUR & NIZWA BRANCHES

MUSCAT: Strengthening its footprint across the Sultanate of Oman, and reaffirming its commitment to facilitating continued collaboration among its local partners, National Finance, the country's leading finance company, recently hosted distinguished gatherings for both new and used auto dealer partners at its newly relocated branches in Sur and Nizwa. This initiative underscores the company's dedication to building robust business partnerships and improving accessibility and convenience for its customers, while showcasing its extensive range of financial solutions.

The gatherings were graced by a diverse group of new and established auto dealer partners, all of whom play a crucial role in National Finance's extensive network.

These partners have been key in delivering the company's top-notch auto finance services to their valued customers.

Ominvest champions students entrepreneurship

MUSCAT: Ominvest, a leading investment company in the region, reaffirmed its commitment to fostering the next generation of Omani entrepreneurs by serving as the main sponsor for the Schools category in the recent Injaz Oman Student Company Programme and Competition.

The programme, organised by Injaz Oman, a non-profit dedicated to youth empowerment, culminated in an award ceremony held at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre under the auspices of Sultan bin Salim al Habsi, Minister of Finance.

The event celebrated the achievements of student companies across various categories. In the Schools category, Courts company secured the coveted "Best Student Company Award," earning the opportunity to represent Oman in the Injaz Al Arab Competition. The "Best Innovative Product" award went to Blood Point, while Salaba company received recognition for the "Best Sustainable Product".

Abdulaziz bin Mohammed al Balushi, Group CEO of Ominvest, emphasised the company's dedication to nurturing an entrepreneurial spirit among Omani youth.



"Our continued support of the Injaz Oman program reflects our belief in the power of innovation and the potential of young Omanis to drive economic growth," he stated. "By encouraging students to establish and manage their own companies, we are equipping them with the skills and mindset needed to thrive in a dynamic business environment."

Injaz Oman, a non-profit

organisation, works on preparing youth for the job market, enhancing their financial literacy, developing students' skills and empowering them to turn their ideas into innovative projects.

Khaula al Harthi, CEO of Injaz Oman, praised the level of competition seen in the latest edition of the Student Company programme and competition.

She noted that 200 student companies from 72 educational institutions across various governorates participated in the competition, reflecting a heightened awareness among youth of the importance of companies in economic development and their anticipated role in the future.

She said that Injaz Oman aims through the Student Company programme and competition to enhance young people's confidence in their ability to establish successful companies and enter the world of entrepreneurship with greater assurance.

She emphasised that Injaz Oman, with its accumulated experience over the years, will continue to enhance the benefits for youth from the programmes it implements and remain a supporter of their various projects and entrepreneurial ideas. The concept of Courts company focuses on creating a sports platform that brings together venue owners, their clients, academy owners, sports equipment shops and their customers under one roof.

OABC, Takaful Oman to launch HR Community

MUSCAT: The Oman American Business Council (OABC) is proud to announce the official launch of its HR Community on September 11, 2024, made possible by the generous support of Takaful Oman.

This groundbreaking initiative aims to bring together HR professionals and business leaders from across Oman to foster collaboration, share best practices and drive innovation in the human resources field.

The new community will provide OABC members with a dynamic platform to connect, exchange insights and address the evolving challenges within HR. The launch event, hosted at Oman Arab Bank, promises to be an exciting opportunity to hear from inspirational speakers,

participate in thought-provoking discussions and ignite new ideas for effective HR management in today's business landscape.

"We are deeply grateful to Takaful Oman for their invaluable support in making the OABC HR Community a reality," says Rebecca Olson, CEO of the Oman American Business Council.

Their commitment to excellence in the workplace aligns perfectly with the goals of this community, which is to empower HR professionals with the knowledge and tools they need to succeed.

This all started because we saw a need: our member CEOs and GMs get to network and share best practices at OABC events, but HR executives



don't typically have the same opportunities to network in an informal, regular, friendly way.

"What we are most excited about is warm nature of this group—it's a place where people can ask questions and be heard."

"The HR Community events will cover a range of essential HR topics, from talent development and employee engage-

ment to diversity and inclusion," said Ismail al Ismaili, Assistant General Manager - Head of HR, Admin & Procurement at Takaful and Chairman of the OABC HR Community.

"Attendees will benefit from engaging sessions and discussions with industry leaders, ensuring they stay at the forefront of HR strategies that contribute to organisational success in Oman and beyond."

This is just the beginning of an exciting journey for the OABC HR Community. With a full calendar of upcoming events and initiatives, members will have countless opportunities to build valuable connections, explore potential collaborations and find inspiration from their peers.

Range Rover Evoque redefines modern luxury

MUSCAT: The Range Rover Evoque, a hallmark of contemporary luxury, continues to set the benchmark for comfort, convenience and well-being in the SUV segment. With its sleek, reductive design and the integration of state-of-the-art technologies, the Evoque delivers a driving experience that is both serene and sophisticated.

Now, starting at just RO 311 per month, the Range Rover Evoque redefines what it means to travel in style.

Unparalleled comfort and well-being

The Range Rover Evoque is engineered to create a sanctuary on wheels, offering a suite of advanced features designed to enhance comfort and well-being for all occupants. Central to this is the Cabin Air Purification Plus system, one of the most sophisticated interior air quality technologies available in its class.

This system ensures that the cabin environment is not only clean but also conducive to well-being and alertness. By purging the cabin air before each

The Range Rover Evoque is engineered to create a sanctuary on wheels, offering a suite of advanced features designed to enhance comfort and well-being for all occupants.



journey, it helps to reduce allergens and particulates, making the Evoque an ideal choice for health-conscious drivers and their families.

Serene and composed ride

Driving the Evoque is an experience in itself, thanks to its advanced chassis systems.

Both Adaptive and Configurable Dynamics contribute to a ride that is smooth, composed and cossetting, ensuring that every journey is as comfortable as it is enjoyable.

Whether navigating city streets or cruising on the highway, the Evoque provides the refinement and comfort that are synonymous with the Range Rover brand.

Mohsin bin Hani al Bahrani, CEO of MHD ACERE, commented "The Range Rover Evoque goes beyond simply being an SUV; it makes a statement about modern luxury and technological innovation.

In every aspect of the Evoque, we've committed to providing unparalleled comfort, refined design and leading-edge technology.

"We have carefully crafted this vehicle to meet the evolving needs of our discerning clients, offering them not just a mode of transportation, but a sanctuary on wheels. The Evoque is designed to exceed expectations and set new standards in the luxury SUV segment."

AGRIFOOD SYSTEMS

NEXT TEJARAH TALKS TO FOCUS ON AGRIFOOD AND CULTIVATING OPPORTUNITIES



MAYMUNA AL ADAWI
Director, PPP, Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion and Tejarah Talks organiser.

The latest OECD-FAO Agricultural Outlook projects that global demand for food will increase significantly in the next decade, adding urgency to the need for innovation and adaptation in agriculture.

The latest OECD-FAO Agricultural Outlook projects that global demand for food will increase significantly in the next decade, adding urgency to the need for innovation and adaptation in agriculture.

The September 24 Tejarah Talks will cover how digital technology is being used to improve agricultural processes and boost productivity, helping enhance Oman's long-term food security.

Experts will also discuss the resilience of food supply chains, strategies for climate-smart farming, shifting consumer preferences and the role of public-private partnerships in advancing sustainable agrifood initiatives.

Maymuna al Adawi, Director, PPP, Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion and Tejarah Talks organiser, said: "Oman's agrifood sector is key to our economic and environmental future. We need to explore new strategies and partnerships to build resilient food systems that can meet domestic as well as global needs."

She went on to add: "Attracting young Omanis into the agrifood sector is essential for the country's future food security and economic growth. Currently, the average age of farmers globally is over 60 and the sector faces challenges in attracting younger generations. "There is an urgent need to engage youth with modern, tech-driven opportunities in agriculture that offer rewarding careers and drive innovation — a theme our panel will be tackling."

The evening's discussions will be moderated by Jamal al Asmi, Executive Producer, Reality CG. September's Tejarah Talks aims to bring together industry leaders, policymakers and innovators to discuss the future of Oman's agrifood sector and explore opportunities for collaboration.

For more information or to register, visit: <https://shorturl.at/MPnvp>

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 9

The next Tejarah Talks session, titled "Agrifood: Cultivating Opportunity," will be held at 7.30 pm on Tuesday, September 24, 2024 at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre.

The event will focus on the challenges and opportunities within the agrifood sector as it faces rising global demand, climate change and the need for sustainable practices. Agrifood systems are under pressure as the world grapples with feeding a growing population and adapting to climate-related challenges. The FAO estimates over 800 million people globally are undernourished, while food production systems are increasingly vulnerable to environmental changes.

Yamna pledges support for growth of Oman's green hydrogen ecosystem

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, SEPT 9

UK-BASED global green hydrogen and derivatives investment company Yamna has added its voice to the chorus of support extended recently by a wide array of local and international companies to the Omani government's ambition to ignite the growth of a domestic green hydrogen-based ecosystem. Yamna, which is a key member of a consortium that has successfully bid for a land block to develop a green ammonia project in Dhofar Governorate, was represented at the National Green Hydrogen Ecosystem Readiness Lab launched recently by Hydrom, the country's green hydrogen industry master-planner and orchestrator.

"Yamna supports Oman's ongoing efforts to promote hydrogen sector development," the company stated in a post on Monday, September 9, 2024.

"We are proud to participate in the National System Readiness Lab for the Green Hydrogen Sector, organised by Hydrom in cooperation with the Oman Vision 2040 Unit and the Ministry of Energy and Minerals.

This initiative represents a key pillar in supporting the Sultanate of Oman's efforts to achieve its green hydrogen production goals by 2030 and consolidate its position as a leading country in the field of clean energy at the global level."

In April, a consortium group-ing Electricité de France SA and its subsidiary EDF Renewables



Yamna CEO Abdelaziz Yatribi speaking at the opening of the National Ecosystem Readiness Lab in Muscat.

This initiative represents a key pillar in supporting the Sultanate of Oman's efforts to achieve its green hydrogen production goals by 2030 and consolidate its position as a leading country in the field of clean energy at the global level

(EDF Group) of France, Electric Power Development Co Ltd (J-POWER) of Japan, and YamnaCo Ltd (Yamna) of the UK, was awarded a land block for the development of a large-scale green ammonia project with a capacity of 1 million tonnes per year.

The consortium plans to install around 4.5 GW of wind and solar capacity on its 341 sq km concession, supported by battery storage and 2.5 GW of electrolyser capacity.

Green hydrogen produced by the electrolyser will be pumped to an ammonia plant planned in Salalah Free Zone. In its recent post, Yamna commented that the green ammonia project is "a pivotal step in strengthening Oman's position in

the global hydrogen economy and accelerating its transition towards a low-carbon future".

Speaking at the opening of the National Ecosystem Readiness Lab in Muscat, Yamna CEO Abdelaziz Yatribi highlighted the "remarkable progress made by the company in developing this pioneering project, reaffirming Yamna's firm commitment to building a sustainable green hydrogen ecosystem in the Sultanate of Oman, in accordance with the highest international standards," the company added in its post. Around 50 government, public sector and private organisations are taking part in the fortnight-long lab, which concludes later this week.

OQ TO OFFER 25% STAKE IN OQEP SUBSIDIARY VIA IPO

FROM PAGE 13

The Company has adopted a quarterly dividend policy and plans to distribute dividends following the Offering. It aims to return most of its distributable free cash flow, after investments and growth opportunities.

The first dividend, about RO 57.7 million (\$150 million), is expected in December 2024 for Q3 2024, with another similar payment in March



ASHRAF BIN HAMED AL MAMARI
Group CEO of OQ

2025 for Q4 2024.

Annually, this totals approximately RO 230.7 million (\$600 million).

For the following two years, dividends will include a base amount of RO 230.7 million per year, plus a performance-linked dividend of 90 per cent of free cash flow and net proceeds from asset sales, minus the base dividend.

The first performance-linked dividend is anticipated in Sep-

tember 2025 and December 2025.

A pre-IPO dividend of \$300 million for the first half of 2024 will also be paid.

The dividend policy reflects strong cash flow expectations while retaining capital for growth and operational needs.

The Offering and Listing of the shares on the MSX are anticipated to be completed in October 2024, pending market conditions and necessary regulatory approvals in the Sultanate of Oman.

Al Mouj Muscat awards phase two of business park to Oman Shapoorji

MUSCAT: Al Mouj Muscat, Oman's leading integrated tourism complex, has awarded phase two of the Al Mouj Business Park to Oman Shapoorji Company.

Set to be completed in 2026, all units of this final phase of the project have already sold, underscoring the high demand for premium business locations in Oman.

Phase two of the business park comprises of three office buildings, each designed to the highest standards with controlled access basement parking, rooftop gardens and extensive landscaped outdoor spaces conducive to business networking.

These facilities will offer flexible office spaces, catering to the diverse needs of modern businesses whilst leveraging Al Mouj Muscat's strategic location and world-class amenities.



The Business Park redefines the standard for premium office environments in Oman.

Nasser al Sheibani, CEO of Al Mouj Muscat, said: "Al Mouj Muscat has set a new benchmark for corporate offices with the launch and sell out of its stunning Business Park. Positioned at the intersection of nature and quality design, this premier business destination boasts flexible workspace spread across eight Grade A office buildings.

"With its award-winning design and infrastructure, the Business Park redefines the standard for premium office environments in Oman.

"Al Mouj Muscat's commitment to excellence extends beyond just office space.

"It's about creating a destination where business innovation flourishes, ideas are exchanged, and businesses are empowered to grow and reach new heights. With the construction of phase one progressing, this award of the final phase will ensure timely delivery of the project."

The Al Mouj Business Park is uniquely situ-

ated adjacent to a World Top 100 golf courses next to the ocean, providing an exemplary business environment that combines professional and leisure facilities.

Tenants will also benefit from the development's sophisticated infrastructure, including advanced telecommunications and IT systems, as well as its proximity to major road networks and Muscat International Airport.

Additionally, the Business Park's location within Al Mouj Muscat provides access to world-class lifestyle, leisure and business support services, enhancing the overall working environment.

The Al Mouj Business Park is part of the broader Al Mouj Muscat community, which is home to over 8,000 residents from 85 nationalities. The development includes luxury residential properties, a 400-berth marina, an 18-hole championship golf course, and a variety of retail and dining options, making it a vibrant and dynamic place to live and work.

OPINION

Avoid attending meetings without an agenda



TARIQ
AL BARWANI

The author is the founder of Knowledge Oman

NADIR recently expressed frustration about the numerous meetings he’s required to attend at work, often leaving without any tangible results. Similarly, a friend of mine, Nisha, working at a different company, voiced the same concern.

I asked both of them the same question: “Do your meetings have a well-defined agenda?” Their experiences reflect a common problem that many people face, including myself at times.

Meetings without a proper agenda tend to waste valuable time. And time, as we all know, is not just a precious resource; it is money, particularly for those who manage it as such.

I often receive countless meeting requests, whether at work, through various associations I’m involved with, extracurricular activities, or even from friends and relatives.

The number of these requests has increased significantly, primarily due to my active participation in social media networks such as Facebook, LinkedIn and Instagram, as well as video conferencing platforms like Google Meet, Zoom and Microsoft Teams. While the ways to hold meetings have evolved, the fundamental principles for conducting effective meetings are often neglected, leading to confusion and wasted time.

Having attended or conducted numerous meetings over the years, I can confidently say that what Nadir and Nisha face is not uncommon. It’s an issue across different industries and even casual meetups.

The underlying reason for this is simple: most of these meetings lack a proper agenda. I always avoid attending meetings without a clear agenda unless there’s a compelling reason. It’s something I recommend to anyone looking to ensure productive outcomes from meetings. After all, requesting an agenda is not just your right — it’s a safeguard for your time.

A study by the Harvard Business Review (HBR) found that 71 per cent of senior managers believe that meetings are inefficient and unproductive.

Another report I read indicated that 47 per cent of employees find meetings to be not only a waste of time but sometimes even counterproductive. Many people spend countless work hours in pointless meetings, often just to appear busy. This is alarming and represents a significant cost to organisations. You only need to glance at your work calendar to see the proof of this problem.

So, what is needed for an effective meeting? First, request or set a clear agenda, depending on whether you’re attending or organising the meeting.

Highlights

A study by the Harvard Business Review (HBR) found that

71 PER CENT

of senior managers believe that meetings are inefficient and unproductive.

Ensure that the agenda is shared well in advance with all participants, so everyone can prepare. Second, set a specific timeframe for the meeting. Open-ended meetings are rarely productive. Third, make sure only relevant team members are invited. This will ensure the right people are in the room and that the conversation stays focused. Personally, I find that smaller groups with well-informed contributors lead to the best results.

Finally, document every decision or action item, assign responsibilities and share minutes with all attendees after the meeting. This creates accountability and allows for follow-up.

While one cannot deny that meetings are necessary for discussing new initiatives, projects, updates and other important matters, meetings without an agenda are a recipe for disaster.

They waste time and can even demoralise team members. An agenda provides direction, clarity, focus, and helps manage time effectively. In my experience, meetings with a pre-shared agenda are always more productive.

The next time you’re invited to a meeting, don’t hesitate to ask for an agenda. Trust me, it will save you a lot of frustration. Until we meet again next week, stay positive and continue striving for success.

INDIA PLANS TO USE LNG FOR THIRD OF TRUCK FLEET, IN BLOW TO DIESEL

India plans to have a third of its heavy duty long-haul trucking fleet fuelled by liquefied natural gas (LNG) instead of diesel in five to seven years to cut pollution, according to a draft policy from the federal oil ministry.

India, one of the biggest emitters of greenhouse gases, has set a 2070 net-zero goal and wants to raise the share of natural gas in its energy mix to 15 per cent by 2030 from about 6 per cent now.

India is slow to adopt LNG-fuelled trucks compared to China, where use of electric vehicles and LNG-powered trucks is weighing on its oil demand. Diesel consumption accounts for the bulk of refined fuel use in India, the world’s third biggest oil importer and consumer.

Switching trucks to LNG would curtail India’s diesel consumption, freeing up products for global markets. While some cars and buses in India already use compressed natural gas, the government says LNG, which gives better range, would be a better option for long-haul trucks. Indian oil and gas retailers are setting up 49 LNG dispensing stations in the initial phase

and the government plans to work towards a consistent LNG price across the country, according to the draft policy, which was published last week.

At present, due to state tax variations, the cost of LNG is not uniform in India.

The government plans to allocate 0.5 million cubic metres of gas per day of local gas to meet the needs of about 50,000 trucks

for two-to-three years, the draft said. Heavy duty vehicles account for a majority of energy-related carbon dioxide emissions by India’s transport sector.

The country had 5.8 million trucks and lorries and 1.6 million multi-axle articulated vehicles registered as of March 31, 2020, the draft said. — Reuters



A driver covers a supply truck in south Kashmir's Anantnag district, India. — Reuters



DANI RODRIK

The author, Professor of International Political Economy at Harvard Kennedy School, is President of the International Economic Association and the author of Straight Talk on Trade: Ideas for a Sane World Economy (Princeton University Press, 2017)



A labourer marks steel bars at a steel and iron factory in Changzhi, China.

— Reuters

I WROTE a speculative article in 2000 on what I called “the political trilemma of the world economy.” My claim was that advanced forms of globalisation, the nation-state and mass politics could not coexist. Societies would eventually settle on (at most) two out of three.

I suggested that it would be the nation-state that would give way in the long run. But not without a struggle. In the short term, the more likely consequence was that governments would seek to reassert national sovereignty, to address the distributive and governance challenges posed by globalisation. To my surprise, the trilemma proved to have long legs. My book The Globalisation Paradox, published a decade later, developed the idea further.

The concept of the trilemma has become a handy way to understand the backlash against hyper-globalisation, Britain’s exit from the European Union, the rise of the far right and the future of democracy in the EU, among other issues.

Lately, another trilemma has preoccupied me. This one is the disturbing possibility that it may be impossible simultaneously to combat climate change, boost the middle class in advanced economies and reduce global poverty. Under current policy trajectories, any combination of two goals appears to come at the expense of the third.

During the early postwar decades, poli-

cies in the developed and developing world alike emphasised economic growth and domestic social stability.

The advanced economies built extensive welfare states but also progressively opened their markets to poorer countries’ exports, so long as the distributional and social consequences were manageable.

The result was inclusive growth in the rich countries, as well as significant poverty reduction in those developing countries that were pursuing the right policies.

Successful as this strategy was, it sidestepped the risks of climate change. Over time, the consequences of economic growth powered by fossil fuels have become increasingly difficult to ignore.

The postwar Keynesian-social democratic bargain in the advanced economies was further undone by the internal contradictions generated by my original trilemma.

As hyper-globalisation replaced the earlier Bretton Woods model, labour markets in the advanced economies experienced greater disruption, undermining the middle class and democracy itself. Both of these developments required new strategies.

In the United States, President Joe Biden’s administration has tackled these new realities head-on.

It has broken new ground by promoting substantial investment in renewables and green industries to combat climate change.

And it deliberately aims to restore the middle class by promoting labour’s bargaining power, reshoring manufacturing and creating jobs in regions that were badly hit by imports from China.

This new focus on climate and the middle class is long overdue. But what US and European policymakers see as a necessary response to neoliberalism’s failures looks, to poor countries, like an assault on their development prospects. The recent crop of industrial policies and other regulations are often discriminatory and threaten to keep out manufactured goods from developing countries.

Green subsidies in the US incentivise the use of domestic over imported inputs. The EU’s carbon-pricing mechanism will soon require “dirty” exporters from developing countries to pay additional tariffs. Governments in poor countries believe that such measures will sabotage their efforts to replicate East Asian nations’ export-oriented industrialisation.

We can imagine an alternative combination of policies that focus on poor countries and the climate. This would entail a large transfer of resources — financial and technological — from the North to the South, to ensure the requisite investments in climate adaptation and mitigation in the latter.

It would also require significantly greater access in the North’s markets to goods, services and workers from the poor countries of the South, to enhance these workers’ economic opportunities. This policy configuration is morally appealing; it would effectively apply the philosopher John Rawls’ principles of justice on a global scale.

But here, too, the trilemma rears its ugly head. Such an approach would work at cross purposes with the imperative of rebuilding the middle class in advanced economies. It would create much greater competition for workers without college or professional degrees, driving down their wages. It would also reduce the fiscal resources available for investment in their human capital and physical infrastructure.

Fortunately, some of these conflicts are more apparent than real. In particular, policymakers in advanced economies and poor countries alike need to understand that the vast majority of the good, middle-class jobs of the future will have to come from services, not manufacturing. And economic growth and poverty reduction in developing economies will be fuelled mainly by the creation of more productive jobs in their service sectors. ©Project Syndicate, 2024

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CULTURE

A woman walks with two dolls representing Cuba's patron saint, Our Lady of Charity of El Cobre and the Regla virgin during celebrations in Havana, Cuba. — AFP



FASHION

A model displays a creation from the Nunu Nono collection by En Zhang during China Fashion week in Beijing. — AFP



ENTERTAINMENT

US director Angelina Jolie speaks to the media as she attends the world premiere of "Without Blood" at TIFF Lightbox theatre during the Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF) in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. — AFP



CHANGING WORLD

US musician Taylor Swift, US NFL football player Travis Kelce, US NFL football player Patrick Mahomes, and his wife Brittany Mahomes attend the men's final match between Italy's Jannik Sinner and USA's Taylor Fritz on day fourteen of the US Open tennis tournament at the USTA Billie Jean King National Tennis Center in New York City. — AFP



LIFESTYLE

A breast cancer survivor stands while an artist places a head-dress on her during the ninth edition of the project "Una pincelada por la vida" (A brushstroke for life), in Zapopan, Jalisco state Mexico. — AFP

art & life

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A CAREFREE GETAWAY IN MUSANDAM

Musandam remains to be a top destination especially for international travellers. In this anecdote, the writers detail various experiences, including snorkelling, exploring local culture and enjoying Musandam's luxurious amenities... **P20**



ENTERTAINMENT

Almodovar wins top Venice prize for end-of-life film

SPAIN'S PEDRO ALMODOVAR won Venice's Golden Lion award on Saturday for his pro-euthanasia film "The Room Next Door", with the acting prizes going to Nicole Kidman and veteran Frenchman Vincent Lindon. The female friendship end-of-life film starring Tilda Swinton and Julianne

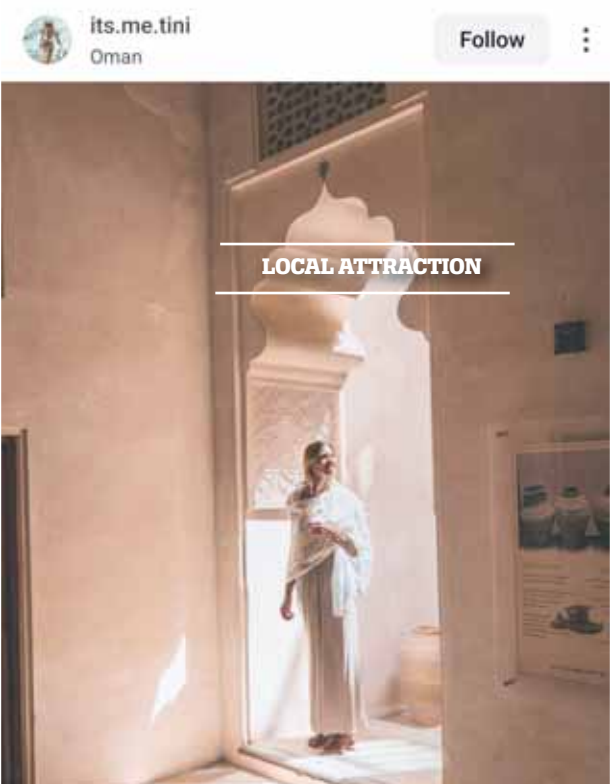
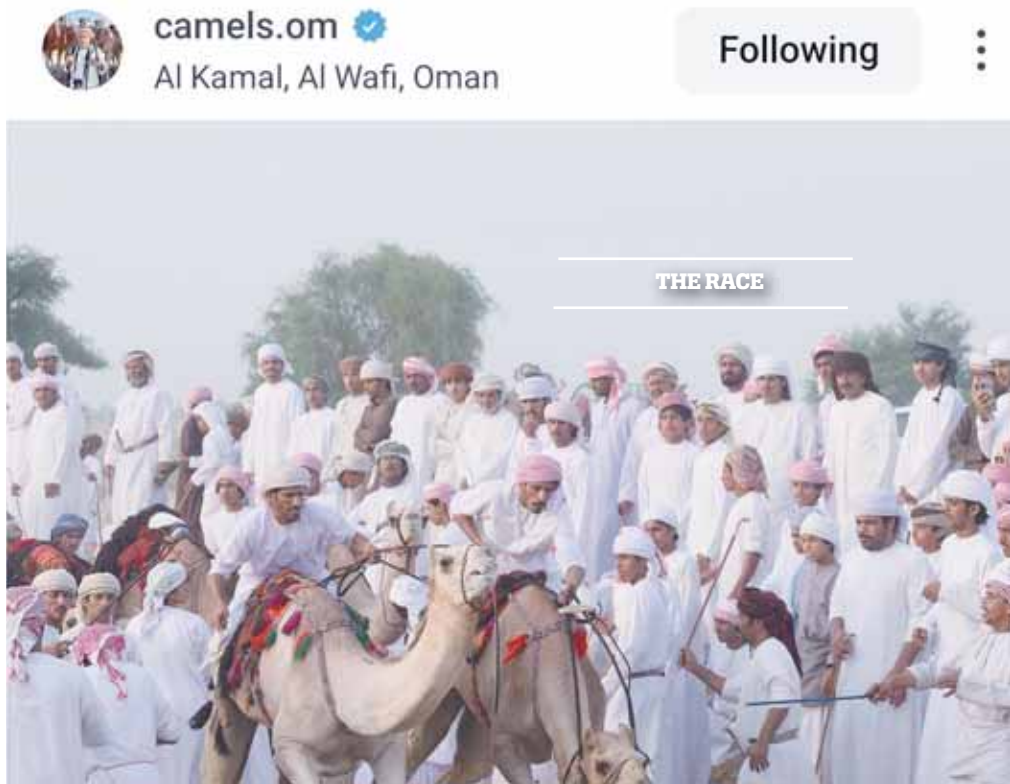
Moore was Almodovar's first English-language feature-length film. Kidman was awarded the best actress award for her fearless turn as a CEO who has an affair with an intern in "Babygirl", but she was unable to collect the prize following the sudden death of her mother. "My heart is broken," said the Australian actress in a statement read onstage on her behalf by the film's Dutch director, Halina Reijn. "I'm in shock, and I have to go to my family. But this award is for her. She shaped me, she guided me, and she made me," she said. Kidman was praised by critics during the 10-day festival for her no-holds-barred performance in an explicit film about female desire and power relationships. In Almodovar's winning film which like many of his films hinges on strong female characters – Swinton plays a war correspondent suffering from terminal cancer. She asks her friend, played by Moore, to be at her side when she takes her own life. — AFP

Princess Kate's wedding dress designer takes over at Givenchy

BRITISH FASHION DESIGNER Sarah Burton, who famously created Princess Catherine's wedding dress, is the new creative director of Givenchy, the luxury French house said Monday. Burton, 50, who was creative director at Alexander McQueen for more than a decade after its founder's suicide, has designed clothes for a host of global stars including

actor Cate Blanchett and singer Lady Gaga. Givenchy, a subsidiary of the French LVMH luxury powerhouse, specialises in high-end fashion, perfume and accessories. Burton said making Kate Middleton's dress for her wedding to Prince William in 2011 was "the experience of a lifetime". She was also included in US magazine Time's list of the "World's 100 Most Influential People" in 2012. Burton left Alexander McQueen last year, sparking speculation in the fashion world as to what her next move might be. Burton said in a statement on Monday that she was "enthusiastic" about her new job, and would bring her own vision and "convictions" to Givenchy where she will be in charge of all women's and men's collections. Her first show is scheduled for March of next year, Givenchy said. The creative director job had been vacant since January after the departure of American Matthew William who wanted to focus on his own streetwear brand. —AFP

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



K H Deksha and Hemasri Raju performed on the second day.

MUSCAT DANCERS CELEBRATE 'RANGAPRAVESHA' WITH STUNNING DEBUT PERFORMANCE

THE RIGOROUS PREPARATION involved in achieving 'Rangapravesha' requires profound physical and mental commitment. Dancers dedicate countless hours in mastering complex choreography, refining expressive capabilities, and ensuring perfect synchronisation with music and stage elements. "The dancer must invest significant time in rehearsals, focusing on technical precision, emotional depth and stage presence while managing the pressures of a momentous debut performance. Balancing the physical demands with artistic and emotional expression, in addition to coordinating costumes and makeup, creates a challenging yet rewarding practice that ultimately leads to a deeply fulfilling milestone," explained the trainer. A two-day event showcased five talented students trained at Bhramari Nritya Academy under the leadership of Vidushi Theertha Kateel.

The performances occurred over two dates: August 23, featuring Apoorva Nagaraju (10th Grade, ISWK), Prerana Diwakar Shetty (11th Grade, ISB), and Parnika Pradeep Shetty (9th Grade, ISM), followed by Deksha K H and Hemasri Raju, both in 6th Grade at ISM and ISG respectively, on August 30.

"We express our sincere gratitude to our teacher for instilling in us the confidence to perform 'Rangapravesha' before such a large audience," remarked the children who celebrated their 'Rangapravesha' or 'Arangetram' in Muscat.

The children, trained in Bharatanatyam – the oldest classical dance form originating



Apoorva Nagaraju, Prerana Diwakar Shetty and Parnika Pradeep Shetty performing on the first day.

from Tamil Nadu, India – embody a tradition revered as a foundation for numerous other classical Indian dance styles.

With a history spanning over 2,000 years, Bharatanatyam is known for its intricate footwork, expressive gestures and its components of nritya, nritya and natya. The event was of great significance in the world of classical Indian dance, as it marks the debut performance of dancers who have under-

gone years of rigorous training.

The programme commenced with the 'Pushpanjali,' captivating the audience from the outset. As subsequent performances featured Alarippu, Jatiswara, Shabdham, Padavarnam, Padam and Kriti, the dancers enchanted the packed auditorium with their remarkable artistry and emotional expression. "This was an unforgettable experience for all of us. Organising an event of this magnitude in Muscat is no small feat, and the execution was truly commendable," shared several attendees. Others noted that such an unprecedented event had never occurred in Muscat's history.

The success of this two-day event is attributed to Vidushi Theertha Kateel, a Mangalore native who has successfully trained over 300 students. Special recognition goes to the commendable singing by Saju Raman, complemented by the contributions of artists Girish Kumar on mridanga and Pradeep Kumar on flute.

For dancers, Rangapravesha signifies a formal introduction into the professional realm, offering a platform to demonstrate their skills, establish credibility and attract future performance opportunities and collaborations.

ENTERTAINMENT



'A way of life': The Japanese dancer conquering Spain's flamenco scene

JAPAN'S JUNKO HAGIWARA has caused a stir in Spain's traditional flamenco world by unexpectedly winning the prize for best dancer at the country's leading flamenco festival – the first foreigner to do so.

The announcement that the 48-year-old – who performs under the stage name "La Yunko" – was awarded the honour at the closing ceremony of August's "Cante de las Minas" festival in the southeastern town of La Union was met with a mixture of applause and some jeering.

"I was very surprised, I could not believe it. I believed it but I did not believe it," she said from the southern city of Seville, where she has lived for over two decades when asked about her reaction to getting the award.

Hagiwara, who was born in Kawasaki near Tokyo, said she did not notice the jeers because she "went blank" when her name was announced as the winner.

"When I dance, I don't think I am a foreigner; that I am Japanese. I don't think that. It doesn't occur to me. I am simply on stage, I listen to the guitar, the singing and what I feel I express in my dancing," she added.

Created in 1961, the "Cante de las Minas" festival is considered to be the world's most important annual flamenco festival. It features prizes for best singing, guitar playing and musical instrument performance in addition to dance.

Critics were unanimous in their support for Hagiwara.

"I liked her more than her competitors for three reasons: her classicism, the fact that she did not dance for the gallery, that is, for the public, and, finally, her good training," flamenco critic Manuel Bohorquez wrote in online newspaper Sevilla Info.

- 'WAY OF LIFE' -

Hagiwara said she became fascinated by flamenco – a centuries-old art form that combines rhythmic hand clapping, stamping feet and impassioned singing – at age 14 when she watched a gymnastics championship in which a Spanish competitor used the genre's guitar music.

"I loved the flamenco guitar, the sound and the melody, the rhythm," she said.

There was no Internet at the time to help her explore her new interest, so she went to a shop that rented records and borrowed the only available flamenco CD.

"I listened to it, but there was no guitar, it was just singing," she recalled.

"Flamenco performers often have a very hoarse voice, very deep, and it scared me," she added while laughing.

Hagiwara went on to study pedagogy at Waseda University in Tokyo, where she joined a flamenco club, and started to take flamenco lessons.

But she felt she needed more. In 2002, she decided to take the



dramatic move across the world to Seville, capital of the southern region of Andalusia and the cradle of flamenco, to pursue her passion.

She made the move despite objections from her parents.

"In Japan, you can learn technique, choreography, but, of course, flamenco is culture, it's a way of life," she said.

"My father got very, very angry. He did not speak to me for three months. And my mother said 'how shameful, how shameful,'" Hagiwara said.

- CULTURE SHOCKS -

In Spain, she dedicated herself to flamenco, learning to dance with the best teachers, became fluent in Spanish and married an Andalusian man from the coastal town of Tarifa.

She gradually made a name for herself as a performer in Seville, and has also taught flamenco.

As is the case with many foreigners, she was surprised at first by the lively way locals talked to each other.

"I thought everyone was fighting!" Hagiwara said.

There were other differences.

"In Japanese culture, we place a lot of value on hiding the feeling, and in flamenco, you have to show it. In Japan it is for the inside, and in flamenco it is for the outside," she said. — AFP

MUSANDAM
CONSISTS MOSTLY
OF ROCKY,
SAW-TOOTHED,
BLACKISH-YELLOW
CRAGS THAT
TUMBLE
ABRUPTLY INTO
WHITE SANDY
BEACHES

BYEVA SOHLMAN
AND NEIL MACFARQUHAR

After spending the better part of a day exploring the museums in Sharjah, we headed towards Musandam. Our destination, the Six Senses Ziggy Bay Resort, a two-hour drive from Sharjah, lies just over the border in Oman. The hotel arranges a border pass for guests lacking an Omani visa.

Musandam consists mostly of rocky, saw-toothed, blackish-yellow crags that tumble abruptly into white sandy beaches. There are few hotels — either upscale or downscale — with limited water access. We chose the Six Senses resort for its splendid isolation on its own cove, although the price caused some hesitation.

The final stretch of gravel road to the beach goes from the drab to the dramatic, with a steep ascent filled with hairpin turns up one side of a dun-coloured mountain. At the crest a breathtaking sea vista opened at our feet.

The hotel's 82 stone villas are nestled in a beachfront oasis of more than 1,000 palm trees on the cove's left end. To the right stands the old fishing village of Ziggy, rebuilt by the hotel and the government to match the resort. Ziggy means hot in the local dialect; during the low season from June to September, the temperature can hit above 50 degrees Celsius.

At the hotel, we hopped on the bikes available at each villa and pedalled past the spa, the saltwater pool and the organic garden. A large freshwater pool, two restaurants constitute the heart of the resort. We found our villa extremely comfortable. It had beamed ceilings, plaster walls and large flagstone floors.

It had two drawbacks, however. No screens meant we could not sleep with the windows open because of random mosquitoes, and it flooded badly in a rare rainstorm. But for our first night, it was clear. We opted for a barbecue outdoors in our own little walled compound, lit by scattered candles.

The resort offers distractions for the whole family, ranging from face painting to water sports to a gruelling bike ride up the mountain. So first thing the next day, we went on a dhow snorkelling cruise.

We launched from the local marina, which lies through the village of Ziggy, population of 300. (Hotel guests are discouraged from wandering through it. Signs on the tracks leading to it read: "Please respect Ziggy's local traditions by covering up appropriately beyond this point.")

After boarding, as we glided out of the cove across jade-coloured waters, the captain, Humaid al Shehi, 29, explained that the area was no longer the string of fishing villages as it had been when the hotel was built nine years ago. He was one of the first men hired from the initially hostile village. "It is a simple life, eating and sleeping and feeding their goats," said Al Shehi. "They have lived like this for hundreds of years. They don't know anything about fighting or what is going on in the rest of the world."

The day started sunny and bright, so we snorkelled around admiring the fish. On the way home the sky darkened and began pelting the sea with hailstones. It rains about nine days a year around Musandam, and we had the poor luck to be there for about a third of them.

The hotel has its own security, said the resort manager, including a substantial checkpoint monitoring who drives over the mountain, the lone access.



We slept soundly after a day on the water. Early the next morning, walking along the deserted paths to the pool felt like being in an isolated Arab village. Goats bleated in the distance, while swallows and myna birds darted out of the palm trees. With its raked sand pathways, it was rather better groomed than an ordinary village, however.

It was not dolphin season, but we were determined to see them. We decided to visit the dolphin-dense fjords of Khasab, the peninsula's port, three hours and two border crossings away by car. It is a bit of a long trek for a day's outing.

We set out at 6 am. The coastal road is dramatic, winding along the curves of the mountains. Khasab boasts a small, handsome 17th-century fort, built by the Portuguese to control the nearby Strait of Hormuz.



We opted for a full-day dolphin cruise. Propped up on oriental cushions and carpets at the bow of the boat, we had a sweeping view of the harbour and realised that the most exotic sight around might not be the dolphins.

Dozens of small, powerful motorboats were skimming across the harbour, driven by tanned, wind-beaten men. It is a two-hour trip across the strait, one of the world's major oil transit points.

While our dhow motored out into the strait, we were treated to fresh fruit and cardamom coffee. As the boat gathered speed, the dolphins emerged, frolicking playfully all around the dhow. At one point we had a pair on each side, and their bubbling effervescence proved infectious. The captain steered into a khor (narrow fjord), where the dolphins vanished and we made several stops to swim and admire the stark cliffs.

On the way back, we anchored in a quiet inlet. The captain turned off the engine, allowing for a delicious snooze in the splendid serenity. We had found the warmth and utter peace we sought. — NYT

