

# UN CHIEF HAILS OMAN 'S ROLE IN REGIONAL PEACE

S A Y Y I D B A D R , G U T E R R E S C A L L F O R D I A L O G U E T O R E S O L V E C R I S E S

SAYYID BADR BIN HAMAD AL BUSAIDI, Foreign Minister, met António Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations, at the UN headquarters in New York on Saturday.

The foreign minister conveyed the greetings of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to the UN Secretary-General, along with His Majesty's wishes for success in fulfilling his international and humanitarian responsibilities.

The UN Secretary-General asked the foreign minister to convey his sincere greetings and best wishes to His Majesty and to the Omani people for continued progress and prosperity.

The two sides discussed ways to foster cooperation between



Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, with António Guterres at the UN headquarters in New York on Saturday.

the Sultanate of Oman and the United Nations, and integrating efforts to build trust and foster understandings to enhance regional security and create a more solid foundation for peace.

The UN Secretary-General expressed his deep appreciation for the efforts of the Sultanate of Oman to facilitate dialogue and bridge differences, commending its wise and balanced approach, its contribution to supporting UN efforts and enhancing opportunities for the peaceful resolution of conflicts as well as its constant humanitarian endeavours.

The meeting also addressed regional and international developments and ways to expand the diplomatic action to contain

crises and mitigate their impact, while emphasising the priority of protecting civilians and facilitating the delivery of humanitarian aid to the affected people.

Sayyid Badr also met Catherine Russell, Executive Director of the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (Unicef), on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in New York.

They reviewed the existing partnership between the Sultanate of Oman and Unicef.

Sayyid Badr also met Massad Boulos, Senior Adviser to the President of the United States on Arab and African Affairs. They discussed a number of Arab and African issues of mutual interest.

SEE ALSO P2

## IN BRIEF

### AWARDS REFLECT OMANI MEDIA'S PROGRESS

The Ministry of Information won six awards at the 26th edition of the Arab Radio and Television Festival held in Tunisia. Mohammed bin Said al

Balushi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Information, said that the ministry, represented by Oman Radio and Television and the News Centre, winning

six awards at the Arab Radio and Television Festival marks a qualitative shift in the level of Omani media participation.

DETAILS ON P2

### BANGKOK DECLARES FLOOD DISASTER



Bangkok authorities declared a flood disaster across the Thai capital on Saturday after almost 48 hours of heavy rain left homes, shops and roads waterlogged and residents wading through waist-deep water. Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul cut short a trip to London to return home after more than 300 mm of rain fell in some areas between Thursday afternoon and Saturday morning, according to officials. "The water keeps coming in. It's hard to go out now. It's like at my waist level now," said Somkid Pheuk-ngam, a vendor who lives near a canal just north of central Bangkok. DETAILS ON P6

## Oman's real GDP to grow at 3.5%

NEW YORK: Standard & Poor's has affirmed the Sultanate of Oman's rating at the investment grade level of 'BBB-' with a stable outlook, citing continued fiscal consolidation measures and improved economic performance and financial and external positions.

In its report, the agency raised its forecast for real GDP growth in the Sultanate of Oman during 2026 to about 3.5 per cent, compared to its previous forecast of 1.6 per cent. On the public finance side, the agency predicted a fiscal surplus in 2026 of about 4.8 per cent of GDP, and also predicted a surplus in 2027 of about 2.2 per cent of GDP.

The agency noted in its report the continued

improvement in public debt indicators, along with maintaining a positive position for net government assets in the medium term.

The agency also predicted a current account surplus of about 3.5 per cent of GDP during 2026, to reach about 1.8 per cent by 2029, noting that foreign exchange reserves amounted to about \$19.5 billion by the end of June 2026.

Regarding non-oil economic activities, the report indicated the continued growth of the trade, logistics, information technology and financial services sectors, as non-oil activity recorded growth of about 1.3 per cent year-on-year during the first half

of 2026. Shipping levels in Salalah Port and Sohar Port also increased by about 15 per cent and 52 per cent respectively during the same period, reflecting the growing role of the Sultanate of Oman as a centre for trade and logistics in the region.

The agency commended Oman for continuing its efforts to improve the financial and economic situation and enhance governance and transparency in public finance management, noting the progress made in achieving the objectives of the Tenth Five-Year Plan, and its continued focus within the framework of the Eleventh Five-Year Plan (2026-2030).

— ONA

## A Significant Milestone for Special Oilfield Services LLC (SOS Energy) in Duqm



Mr. Mohammed A. Al Kharusi, The Chairman Special Oilfield Services LLC (SOS Energy)



WE are pleased to announce a major advancement in our operational capabilities with the inauguration of our new manufacturing facility in Duqm, located within the Medium Industries Zone under the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones. This milestone reflects our continued commitment to supporting Oman's energy sector.

Encompassing 75,000 square meters and supported by capital investment exceeding USD 10 million, this facility has been purposefully designed to deliver precision manufacturing, operational excellence, and sustained support to the oil and gas industry.

The facility is designed to manufacture specialized oilfield products that support critical upstream oil and gas operations. Local production of these products strengthens supply chain resilience, enhances operational responsiveness, and contributes to Oman's industrial development

objectives and in-country value creation initiatives.

The facility incorporates advanced, fully customized automated production technologies, specifically engineered for our product portfolio. Furthermore, it is designed to support Industry 4.0 applications, including intelligent monitoring systems and predictive maintenance capabilities, positioning SOS Energy at the forefront of technological innovation.

Through strategic layout optimization that minimizes internal material handling, the facility substantially enhances production efficiency and overall capacity.

The Chairman of Special Oilfield Services LLC (SOS Energy), Mr. Mohammed A. Al Kharusi, stated that sustainability and quality assurance are at the core of our operations. The facility features energy-efficient infrastructure and comprehensive waste reduction and recycling programs aligned with our

environmental, social, and governance objectives. These initiatives also support the objectives of Oman Vision 2040, particularly its focus on sustainable development, and environmental stewardship, reinforcing SOS Energy's commitment to contributing to a more sustainable and resilient future for the Sultanate of Oman.

The strategic location of the facility in Duqm enhances our ability to serve all operators throughout the Sultanate. It enhances supply chain efficiency and enables more reliable, timely delivery to concession areas throughout Oman.

This facility represents a substantial long-term investment in technical capability, operational resilience, and value creation for our clients, partners and stakeholders. It underscores SOS Energy's commitment to supporting the development of Oman's energy sector while contributing to the nation's industrial growth and economic diversification objectives.

OMAN

SHORT TAKES



The inauguration ceremony was held under the auspices of Sayyid Ibrahim bin Said al Busaidi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism.

OMAN’S FIRST  
ROBOTIC  
OBSERVATORY OPENS  
AT JABAL SHAMS

TALIB AL KHAYARI  
AL HAMRA, SEPT 26

The Oman Astronomical and Space Society inaugurated its new astronomical observatory at the Jabal Shams Resort in the Wilayat of Al Hamra, Al Dakhiliyah Governorate. It is the Society’s first fully integrated, remotely operated robotic astronomical observatory.

The inauguration ceremony was held under the auspices of Sayyid Ibrahim bin Said al Busaidi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism. This initiative aims to boost the presence of astronomy and support fields such as astronomical observation, astrophotography, and scientific and educational activities within the Sultanate of Oman.

The launch of the observatory represents a technological leap that opens up vast horizons for astronomical observation and imaging, and scientific research. It utilises remote operation and control technologies to serve researchers, students, and astronomy and space enthusiasts.

The project is supported by Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) as part of its community investment efforts, its support for scientific and knowledge-based initiatives, and its commitment to fostering partnerships in science and innovation. Furthermore, the project leverages the strategic location of Jabal Shams, which is renowned for its high altitude and exceptional sky clarity, to create a comprehensive environment that integrates scientific research, community outreach, and astrophotography, while offering researchers, enthusiasts, and visitors the opportunity to explore the astronomical wonders of Oman’s skies.

Dr Ishaq bin Yahya al Shueili, Oman Astronomical and Space Society Chairman, said that the launch of the observatory aims to enhance the Society’s advanced astronomical capabilities and integrate positive community engagement with its various activities and events.

Al Shueili added that the project serves as a major tourism draw for the Sultanate of Oman.

Six awards at Arab festival reflect Omani media’s development

**MUSCAT:** The Ministry of Information won six awards at the 26th edition of the Arab Radio and Television Festival held in Tunisia. The documentary Arabian Humpback Whale won first prize in the documentary film and programme category. The talk show Youth Talk won first prize in the talk show category at the television competition.

The news report Apricot Blossom Season in Wakan Village won second prize in the news report category.

In the cultural programmes category, the programme What the Shadow Said won first prize.

In the economic programme category, the programme Hands That Bear Fruit won first prize.

The programme Al Farahidi won first prize in the drama category.

The achievement is the fruition of the ministry’s efforts to elevate the Omani media standing. It is the culmination of several stages in the production of media content and reflects the diversity of media production, the integration

Winning the awards is a testament to the efforts the ministry has undertaken to elevate radio, television, and news content to a higher level at the Arab and international media, Mohammed bin Said al Balushi, MoI Under-secretary, said



The news report Apricot Blossom Season in Wakan Village won second prize in the news report category.

Diplomacy is essential to  
ease tensions: Sayyid Badr

**OMAN** STEPPED up its diplomatic engagement at the United Nations, highlighting the need for stronger international cooperation, respect for international law and greater humanitarian support for children and communities affected by conflicts.

Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidi met India’s External Affairs Minister Dr S. Jaishankar, with discussions focusing on regional and international developments and their implications for maritime security, energy supplies and supply chains.

“Continued diplomacy remains essential to reach practical, consensual solutions and reduce tensions,” Al Busaidi posted in X. He said Oman has made and its aligned on supporting regional coherence for security and stability, including maritime security and energy supplies.

In another meeting, Sayyid Badr and Catherine Russell, Executive Director of UNICEF, reviewed the existing partnership between Oman and UNICEF, the priorities of the cooperation programme for the period 2026–2030, and opportunities for exchanging expertise to support children’s growth, develop their capabilities, and enhance services provided to them.

They stressed the importance of partnerships with private sector institutions and encouraging their active participation in humanitarian programmes and related fields.

They also discussed the humanitarian situation of children affected by conflicts, particularly in the Gaza Strip, Sudan, Yemen, Syria, and other regions. They stressed the need for solidarity with these children, ensuring the safe and sustainable delivery of humanitarian aid, non-interrupted provision of healthcare and education, and the provision of necessary protection to safeguard their rights and dignity.

Sayyid Badr also met with Massad Boulos, Senior Adviser to the President of the US on Arab and African Affairs. They discussed issues of mutual interest, as well as diplomatic efforts to contain conflicts and create conditions for political settlements that preserve the sovereignty and security of states and respond to the aspirations of their peoples for peace and stability.



Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, with India’s External Affairs Minister Dr S. Jaishankar in New York on Saturday.



Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, with Catherine Russell, Executive Director of UNICEF, in New York on Saturday.

The Sultanate of Oman highlights the need for stronger international cooperation, respect for international law and greater humanitarian support for children and communities affected by conflicts

The US official commended Oman’s wise policies, its role in bridging differences and its tireless work to enhance reconciliation and peace in the region.

Regarding Omani-American relations, both sides expressed their shared commitment to continuing constructive work to develop cooperation and partnership.

The Sultanate of Oman participated in the High-Level Meeting in Defence of International Law, held at the United Nations Headquarters in New York in response to a joint invitation from South Africa and Malaysia.

Delivering Oman’s statement, Ambassador Shaikh Mohammed bin Abdullah al Qatbi, Head of the International Organizations Department at the Foreign

Ministry, stressed the importance of respecting and applying international law fairly, consistently, and without selectivity or double standards and the need for strengthening international institutions.

He noted that the Palestinian cause is one of the most prominent tests of the credibility of the international system, reiterating Oman’s firm position calling for an end to the Israeli occupation and the establishment of an independent Palestinian state.

Oman participated in the High-Level Meeting of the Group of Friends of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC), held at the UN Headquarters in New York.

The meeting discussed the most prominent achievements the UNAOC has made and its future priorities, efforts to support dialogue and understanding among cultures and religions, and reviewed its initiatives in the field of preventive diplomacy. It also discussed ways of countering hate speech and intolerance and enhancing the values of coexistence and peace.

The event was attended by Ambassador Shaikh Al Qatbi and Dr Maysa bint Khamis al Shibli, First Secretary and member of the Permanent Mission to the UN.

Oman attends joint AL, OIC meeting on Jerusalem

The Sultanate of Oman participated in the joint ministerial meeting of the League of Arab States (AL) and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) on Jerusalem, held in New York.

Oman was represented by Khalid bin Saleh al Rabkhi, Deputy Permanent Representative of Oman to the UN.

The meeting discussed the developments in the city of Jerusalem and ways to enhance joint Arab and Islamic action to protect its legal and historical status, safeguard its Islamic and Christian holy sites, and counter Israeli measures aimed at altering the city’s reality and identity.

The meeting stressed the importance of continuing to support the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people and preserve the opportunities for achieving a just and lasting peace based on the two-state solution, and the establishment of an independent Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital. — **ONA**

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SHORT TAKES



The first phase of the project involved the execution of 69 television transmission stations distributed across various governorates and wilayats of the Sultanate of Oman.

MoI TO INAUGURATE TV AND RADIO STATION IN AL SUWAIQ

**AL SUWAIQ:** The Ministry of Information will inaugurate the digital terrestrial radio and television transmission station in the Wilayat of Al Suwaiq on Sunday. This is part of the ministry’s projects to digitise terrestrial television broadcasting and enhance digital television coverage in a number of governorates and wilayats of the Sultanate of Oman.

Said bin Mohammed al Shraiqi, Director-General of Engineering at the Ministry of Information, said that the digitisation of terrestrial television broadcasting is in line with global developments in the field of digital terrestrial television broadcasting.

He explained that the first phase of the project involved the execution of 69 television transmission stations distributed across various governorates and wilayats of the Sultanate of Oman.

He added that the second phase of the project covers a number of areas that were not covered by the service, and includes the establishment of three new transmission stations in the wilayats of Al Suwaiq, Suhar, and Bidiyah.

He said that the Al Suwaiq station will cover the Wilayat of Al Suwaiq and its surrounding areas, adding that the digital terrestrial television broadcasting project is one of the Ministry of Information’s strategic projects, as it provides an integrated terrestrial broadcasting system that can be controlled and managed by Oman TV and the Ministry of Information, thus enhancing service continuity and operational efficiency. — **ONA**

As Khareef ends, Dhofar’s camels begin journey home



QASIM AL MAASHANI  
TAQAH, SEPT 26

**CAMELS** ARE moving back into Wadi Khashim near Taqah this week. Three months ago, many herds were travelling in the opposite direction.

The movement marks the transition from Khareef — Dhofar’s summer monsoon season of rain, mist and green mountains — to Sarb, the locally known post-monsoon period when the fog recedes, the ground begins to dry and livestock return to natural grazing areas.

For generations, camel owners in southern Oman have organised part of their year around this cycle.

As Khareef sets in, many move their animals away from the rain-soaked mountains. They return only when conditions improve and the pasture is ready. Herders say the state of the ground matters more than a date on the calendar.

*As the rain and mist retreat, the animals return — but modern jobs, commercial feed and pressure on grazing land are changing an old seasonal practice.*

Mohammed al Maashani, a camel owner, spent this Khareef with his animals on Dhofar’s coastal plain.

Earlier generations of his family would often travel farther with their camels towards the Nejd, the dry plateau beyond the mountains and outside the main influence of the monsoon. For Al Maashani, that journey no longer fits easily with everyday life.

His work means he cannot remain for long periods with the herd in distant areas. Keeping the animals on the coastal plain allows him to stay closer to work and home while protecting them from persistent rain and wet mountain conditions.

It is a small example of how an old seasonal migration is adapting to a different way of life. Another difference becomes clear when the pasture is poor.

Al Maashani described natural grazing this year as particularly weak. He said older generations had spoken of similar years when lower

rainfall resulted in poorer pasture.

But livestock owners today have an option their grandparents had on a far smaller scale: commercially produced feed and fodder.

Al Maashani said earlier generations depended much more heavily on what the land could provide. Their camels and other livestock had to find natural grazing, making the quality of the pasture central to the survival and condition of the herd. Today, owners can buy feed when natural grazing is insufficient.

Poor pasture therefore still matters — but increasingly as an added financial burden on the owner rather than leaving animals wholly dependent on whatever vegetation the season produces.

Bakhit al Shahri said camel owners had experienced substantial changes in recent years, although many continued to follow practices inherited from their fathers and grandfathers.

Eastern Dhofar’s working coast carries livelihoods across generations

QASIM AL MAASHANI  
SALALAH, SEPT 26

Nearly half of Dhofar’s artisanal fishing boats are concentrated in three eastern wilayats, underlining the continuing economic weight of the sea in communities where fishing, fish trading and boat maintenance are still passed from one generation to the next.

Preliminary 2025 figures from the National Centre for Statistics and Information show that Mirbat, Sadah and Shaleem and Al Hallaniyat Islands together accounted for 5,767 artisanal fishermen and 2,342 boats.

That represents about 41 per cent of Dhofar’s 13,940 artisanal fishermen and almost 49 per cent of its 4,803 boats. The concentration gives a measurable scale to an economy that is often

described only through tradition and heritage.

Behind those numbers is an economic chain still built around relationships carried through generations.

For fisherman Amer Ahmed, fishing is an inherited occupation. He said abalone, locally known as safailah, has been an important source of income for fishermen in the area, particularly during periods when harvesting is permitted.

The importance of abalone to eastern Dhofar extends beyond one fishing community. Government licensing rules identify residents of Mirbat, Sadah, Shaleem and the Al Hallaniyat Islands among those eligible to apply for abalone-diving licences, reflecting the resource’s close association with this stretch of coastline.

But a fisherman is only the



Preliminary 2025 figures from the National Centre for Statistics and Information show that Mirbat, Sadah and Shaleem and Al Hallaniyat Islands together accounted for 5,767 artisanal fishermen and 2,342 boats.

first link in a much longer economic chain.

Said al Amri, a wholesale fish trader, inherited his occupation from his father. He buys fish directly from fishermen, connecting what comes ashore with the wider

market. His work shows how income generated at sea moves through coastal communities: from fishermen to traders and on to transport, marketing and consumers.

A third part of that chain operates before a boat can

return to sea.

Ahmed Suwailim works in boat maintenance and repair, another occupation passed through generations. His livelihood depends on the same fishing economy but from shore, providing the work required to keep vessels operating.

Together, the fisherman, trader and boat repairer reveal something statistics alone cannot: fishing in eastern Dhofar is not a single occupation. It supports a network of interconnected activities in which one livelihood creates demand for another. The relationship historically extended inland as well.

Livestock breeder Mohammed al Amri described how the sea once supplied coastal communities with food and income while trade connected them with

agricultural and livestock communities further inland.

Marine products moved away from the coast, while agricultural produce and livestock products moved in the other direction.

Roads, refrigeration, vehicles, shops and wider supply chains have fundamentally changed how that exchange takes place. But the older economic geography has not disappeared. The coast continues to produce, the hinterland continues to raise livestock and trade remains the link between them. What is changing is the scale of the economy developing around these occupations.

In Sadah, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources has been implementing fishing harbour projects at Hasik and Hadbeen at a combined cost of RO 5.8 million.

SPOTLIGHT



MOHAMED AL BATTASHI

AS Oman’s intense summer heat begins to ease and the country moves through its transition period towards cooler months, many people notice changes in how they feel. Some experience fatigue, recurrent colds, coughing, or worsening allergies, and it is common to hear these problems blamed simply on “the weather change.” The reality, according to doctors, is more precise than that.

“Changing weather does not directly cause infections,” says Dr Mahmoud bin Nasser al Rahbi, Head of the Emergency Department at Samayil Hospital. “Infections are caused by viruses and other microorganisms, while environmental changes can influence our exposure and symptoms.” He points to Oman-specific factors instead: dust and airborne particles can irritate the nose, throat, and lungs, and may worsen asthma and allergies, while seasonal viruses such as influenza circulate more widely during these months regardless of temperature.

Dr Benny Panakkal, a Senior Consultant Interventional Cardiologist in Muscat, agrees: “Respiratory viruses circulate more easily when people spend longer periods together indoors.”

One of the most common questions doctors face is whether moving repeatedly between intense outdoor heat and cold indoor air conditioning weakens the immune system. The answer, both say, is no. “There is no strong evidence that temperature changes alone weaken the immune system,” says Dr Al Rahbi, though the temperature swing can still irritate the airways, particularly for people with asthma or allergies. Both recommend the same solution: avoid excessive air conditioning, avoid sitting directly under strong vents, and keep indoor temperatures comfortable.

On diet, both reject the idea of a single “immunity-boosting” food. “A healthy immune system depends on an overall balanced diet,” says Dr Al Rahbi, pointing to a variety of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, legumes, fish, eggs, nuts, and seeds. Dr Panakkal warns against excess sugar, processed foods, and

*1. Infections are caused by viruses, while environmental triggers like dust and airborne particles irritate the respiratory system and worsen asthma or allergies.*

*2. Moving between hot outdoor air and cold indoor air conditioning does not weaken the immune system, though direct blasts of cold AC air can irritate airways.*

*3. There is no magic “immunity-boosting” food or supplement; immunity depends on a balanced diet rich in whole foods, along with limiting sugar and processed items.*

*4. The cooler transition period is a great time to exercise outdoors, but activity should be increased gradually after summer inactivity and paused during fever or infection.*

*5. Getting at least seven hours of quality sleep and maintaining proper water intake are essential pillars of immune function that should not be neglected.*

*6. A cough, breathing difficulty, chest pain, or high fever should not be dismissed as “just the weather,” and self-medication should be avoided.*

unnecessary supplements.

Exercise should continue rather than stop. “There is no reason to stop exercising when the weather changes,” says Dr Al Rahbi. “The cooler months provide an excellent opportunity to become more physically active outdoors.” His cautionary advice is to increase activity gradually after months of summer inactivity, and move indoors on dusty days. Dr Panakkal adds that exercise should be paused during a fever or an acute infection.

Sleep and hydration come up as the two pillars hardest to get right. “Inadequate sleep affects immune function and recovery, while dehydration can contribute to fatigue, headaches, and dryness of the respiratory passages,” says Dr Panakkal. Dr Al Rahbi recommends around seven or more hours of quality sleep, and stresses that water intake should not drop simply because the air feels cooler.

Common mistakes, both doctors agree, include assuming every cough is “just the weather,” sitting in excessively cold air conditioning, cutting back on water, neglecting sleep, and returning to intense

exercise too suddenly after inactivity. Dr Panakkal adds that using antibiotics without medical advice and going to work while clearly unwell are also common mistakes. Persistent or worsening symptoms should not simply be put down to the season. A cough, breathing difficulty, chest pain, high fever, or worsening fatigue warrants medical assessment rather than assumptions.

Asked for the simplest message to leave with readers, Dr Al Rahbi keeps it plain: “Take care of the basics: sleep well, stay hydrated, eat a balanced diet, remain physically active, protect yourself from dust and respiratory infections, and listen to your body.” Dr Panakkal adds one more thing: keeping recommended vaccinations up to date, including the seasonal influenza vaccine.

“The transition into winter in Oman is not something we need to fear,” says Dr Al Rahbi. “It is an opportunity to improve our daily habits and enjoy the cooler season while taking sensible precautions.” A healthy winter starts with the basics, done consistently.

SHORT TAKES



The Omani troupe took part with artists and theatre groups from 55 countries at the forum.

OMANI TROUPE WINS TOP AWARD AT CAIRO INTL THEATRE FORUM

**CAIRO:** The Omani amateur theatre troupe ‘With Disability We Create’ has won the Mohamed Sobhi International Award for Best Integrated Theatrical Performance for its play Secrets at the 10th International Forum for the Arts of People with Special Abilities ‘Our Children’, held at the Egyptian Opera House in Cairo.

The Omani troupe participated alongside artists and theatre groups from 55 countries at the international forum, which seeks to showcase the talents of people with disabilities and promote their inclusion in cultural and artistic life.

The troupe presented Secrets on the Small Stage of the Egyptian Opera House, receiving strong audience response for its humanitarian themes addressing the rights of people with disabilities to full integration into society and their ability to contribute creatively to various fields of life.

The play focused particularly on women with disabilities and their right to marry, form families and lead fulfilling lives. Through a blend of human and aesthetic elements, the production highlighted that disability does not prevent creativity and achievement, and that determination can help overcome challenges.

The forum was held under the auspices of Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El Sisi and brought together artists, groups and others interested in the arts of people with disabilities.

The achievement reflects Oman’s efforts to support and empower people with disabilities and recognise their contributions to cultural and artistic life. It also highlights the role of theatre in promoting inclusion, equality and social participation.

The award ceremony was attended by Oman’s Ambassador to Egypt and Permanent Representative to the Arab League, Abdullah bin Nasser al Rahbi, who supported the Omani troupe during its participation in the event. — ONA

Omani hand surgery conference highlights advances in treatment

**MUSCAT:** The annual conference of the Omani Hand Surgery Association for 2026 was held in Muscat and brought together specialists in hand and upper limb surgery from Oman, the GCC countries and several other countries.

The conference aims to facilitate the exchange of scientific and practical expertise, highlight the latest developments in the diagnosis and treatment of hand, wrist and upper limb injuries and diseases, and promote continuing medical education and research cooperation among specialists.

The event is organised by the Omani Hand Surgery Association in cooperation with the orthopaedic, plastic and reconstructive surgery teams at the University Medical City.

The scientific programme includes lectures and specialised sessions covering complex hand and wrist injuries, surgical reconstruction, nerve and tendon injuries, fractures of the hand and upper limb, the latest technologies in hand surgery, and rehabilitation following surgical procedures.

The conference featured discussions of complex clinical cases and challenges facing specialists through interactive sessions aimed at sharing experiences and examining the latest evidence-based practices.

A series of specialised practical and training workshops will focus on developing participants’ clinical and surgical skills and



The Omani Hand Surgery Association for 2026 was held in Muscat.

strengthening the link between scientific knowledge and clinical practice.

Dr Ahmed al Ghaithi, chairman of the Omani Hand Surgery Association Conference 2026 and vice-president of the association, said the conference provides a platform for bringing together local, regional and international expertise in hand and upper limb surgery.

The conference, held under the auspices of Dr Siham al Sinani, president of the University Medical City, featured speakers from Oman, the GCC and other countries who delivered specialised lectures on recent developments and technologies in hand surgery, reconstruction and rehabilitation. — ONA

Over 1.9 million vehicles registered in Oman

**ABDULAZIZ AL ABRI**  
MUSCAT, SEPT 26

The overall number of vehicles registered in the Sultanate of Oman recorded 1,912,897 as of end-August 2026, a 5.4-per cent increase compared to the corresponding period of 2025, when a figure of 1,851,469 vehicles was registered, according to the monthly statistical bulletin published by the National Centre for Statistics and

Information (NCSI).

The NCSI data shows that private vehicles accounted for 79 per cent of vehicles, with 1,514,331.

Commercial vehicles came in second place with 285,204 vehicles (14.9 per cent), with a growth of 6.6 per cent. Rental vehicles numbered 45,479, an increase of 8 per cent, representing one of the highest growth rates recorded by registration type.

Taxis reached 28,931 vehicles,

a 2-per cent increase, while motorcycles numbered 9,001, a 6.4-per cent rise. Government vehicles reached 11,748, a 1.3-per cent decrease.

The number of driving school cars dropped by 3 per cent to 4,913, and agricultural tractors declined by 1 per cent to 1,228. Vehicles with temporary registrations reached 11,148, a 2.2-per cent increase.

Vehicles with engine capacities between 1,500 and 3,000 cubic

centimetres represented the highest category, with a total of 1,038,380 vehicles, a 5-per cent increase compared to August of last year.

The figures reflect the continued growth in the number of vehicles registered in the Sultanate of Oman in all categories, especially private, commercial and rental vehicles, at a time when urban and population expansion continues and movement and economic activity between governorates are increasing.

Inspire next generation to look toward the stars

**KABEER YOUSUF**  
MUSCAT, SEPT 26

Youth should be encouraged to learn more about astronomy, space science and technology to help them take advantage of emerging opportunities in these fields and contribute to national development, according to the Oman Astronomical and Space Society (OASS).

The emphasis was made during an Oman-Zanzibar space collaboration meeting, where participants highlighted the importance of strengthening cooperation among governments, educational institutions and stakeholders in science and technology.

Representatives of OASS met with the leadership of the Zanzibar Astronomy Space Society (ZASS), an organisation involved in astronomy and space science in Zanzibar, to explore avenues for cooperation in space education and awareness among young people.

Abdulwahab bin Sulaiman al Busaidi, a board member of OASS, presented various astronomical photographs taken from Zanzibar by ZASS, showcasing different celestial formations and scenes of the night sky.

“Education in astronomy, science and technology is important in preparing young people to keep pace with technological changes,



Officials of OASS and ZASS held a meeting in Zanzibar.

The meeting explores avenues for cooperation in space education between OASS and ZASS

conduct research, promote innovation, and use modern technologies in various areas of development,” Al Busaidi said.

He praised ZASS for its efforts to promote astronomy and space science, particularly among young people.

“Our delegation was able to showcase the advancements that the Sultanate of Oman has achieved in recent years and share expertise with our counterparts in Zanzibar,” he said. Abu Bakar Harith, spokesperson for ZASS, said satellites could support research and provide important information for Zanzibar’s development planning. “The use of satellites could support research and

provide important information for Zanzibar’s development planning, including information related to the ocean, the environment and various changes taking place around the world,” he said.

OASS recently completed a visit to Tanzania aimed at promoting astronomy, standardisation of moonsighting and citizen science outreach.

The delegation was led by Al Busaidi and Ibrahim Jaafar, a UK-based expert in Islamic moonsighting. The visit included lectures, meetings with religious scholars and discussions on strategic partnerships with government and religious institutions.

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Tender Documents are available at the Company’s Head Office in Ghala Industrial Area from 28 September 2026 to 11 October 2026 during official working days, from 8:00 AM- 5:00PM, upon payment of the applicable Tender Fee into the Company’s Bank Dhofar Account No. 01040805344006, IBAN: OM080250001040605344006. The Tender Documents will be issued upon payment of the applicable Tender Fee.

| S. No. | Tender No.         | Description                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | Location           | Tender Fee Inc. VAT (﷼) | EMD                              | Tender Document Purchase Period | Bid Submission Deadline |
|--------|--------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1      | AW/T/ PH4/ 01/2026 | Sale of 14 units of used heavy equipment and vehicles, including a crawler dozer, excavator, wheel loaders, tipper trucks, a water tanker truck and a crane-mounted truck.                                                                                                         | Ghala / Barka Yard | 150/-                   | 10% of total bid value incl. VAT | 28/09/2026 To 11/10/2026        | 20/10/2026 5.00 PM      |
| 2      | AW/T/ PH4/ 02/2026 | Sale of 39 used light and miscellaneous vehicles, including a 3-ton truck, buses, pickups, a fuel tanker truck, small water tankers, saloon cars and station wagons.                                                                                                               | Ghala / Barka Yard | 50/-                    | 10% of total bid value incl. VAT | 28/09/2026 To 11/10/2026        | 20/10/2026 5.00 PM      |
| 3      | AW/T/ PH4/ 03/2026 | Sale of 145 units of used light and construction equipment, including 3-ton tandem rollers, air compressors, asphalt cutters, bar-bending and bar-cutting machines, concrete mixers and vibrators, dumpers, skid-steer loaders, tower hoists, lighting towers and other equipment. | Ghala / Barka Yard | 50/-                    | 10% of total bid value incl. VAT | 28/09/2026 To 11/10/2026        | 20/10/2026 5.00 PM      |
| 4      | AW/T/ PH4/ 04/2026 | Sale of 33 used electrical generators of various capacities ranging from 30 kVA to 250 kVA.                                                                                                                                                                                        | Ghala / Barka Yard | 25/-                    | 10% of total bid value incl. VAT | 28/09/2026 To 11/10/2026        | 20/10/2026 5.00 PM      |
| 5      | AW/T/ PH4/ 05/2026 | Sale of used scaffolding, household appliances, electrical transformers and other assets.                                                                                                                                                                                          | Ghala / Barka Yard | 50/-                    | 10% of total bid value incl. VAT | 28/09/2026 To 11/10/2026        | 20/10/2026 5.00 PM      |

- Purchasers of the Tender Documents may inspect the assets at the Company’s Ghala and Barka Yards during official working hours, subject to prior appointment.
- Each bid must be accompanied by an Earnest Money Deposit (EMD) equivalent to 10% of the total bid value inclusive of VAT, provided as a certified cheque issued by a local bank, a bank deposit or transfer to the Company’s account, or a bank guarantee issued by a local bank. Proof of any deposit or transfer must state the bidder’s name and Tender Number.
- Where the EMD is provided as a bank guarantee, it must remain valid for at least 30 days from the Tender closing date. Any certified cheque must be valid for collection upon presentation. The bid and original EMD instrument, where applicable, must be deposited in the Tender Box at the reception of the Company’s Head Office in Ghala, Muscat, no later than 20 October 2026 at 5:00 PM. Late bids will not be accepted.
- Tender Fees and submitted bid prices shall be inclusive of VAT. The 10% EMD shall be calculated on the total bid value inclusive of VAT.

Contact: 2450 2581 / 82, Ext. 149 / 150; Mobile: 7722 8166 / 9294 7637.

WORLD

SHORT TAKES



Guinea's opposition leader Sidya Toure waves to supporters in Conakry. — AFP file photo

Guinea opposition figure, former PM, dies in Paris

**CONAKRY:** Sidya Toure, former prime minister and a leading opposition figure in Guinea where dissenting voices and political parties have been stifled, has died at age 81, sources close to his family said. Toure had been leading one of the country's major opposition parties, the Union of Republican Forces (UFR), from exile in Ivory Coast. UFR was among 40 political parties dissolved in March in a major crackdown on civil liberties under the country's longtime strongman Mamady Doumbouya.

Toure died in Paris after several decades at the forefront of Guinean public life. He had been hospitalised at the American Hospital of Paris for some two weeks after falling ill in Abidjan, sources close to his family said. Toure had lived in Abidjan since leaving Guinea following the September 2021 military coup.

UFDG leader Cellou Dalein Diallo regretted losing "a friend and companion in the struggle" for Guinea, in a statement posted to Facebook. Toure, he said, shared the same dream of transforming "our country, with all its vast potential, into a prosperous economy governed by the principles of democracy and the rule of law". — AFP

UN rights chief alarmed by escalating fighting in Ethiopia



Tigray fighters appear at Tigray Martyr's Memorial Monument Center in Mekele. — AFP file photo

**GENEVA:** The United Nations rights chief warned on Friday of the threat the escalating fighting in Ethiopia poses to civilians, adding that "deeply troubling" Internet and telecommunications interruptions were increasing the risks. "I am deeply alarmed by the recent escalation in hostilities... and the harmful impacts it is already having on civilians," said a statement from UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Turk. "All parties must urgently de-escalate tensions and avoid a return to full-scale war."

The UN rights office highlighted reports that air strikes by the Ethiopian National Defence Force (ENDF) had hit five Tigray schools on September 22, resulting in deaths and injuries.

"A mortar strike on September 23 in Kobo town in Amhara reportedly by the ENDF also resulted in civilian deaths," it said. Turk called on the parties to ensure civilians were protected and to allow "safe and unimpeded humanitarian access to all who need it". He criticised the near-total disruption of the Internet, which has raised fears in Tigray of a return to the devastating blockade the northern region experienced during the last civil war. — AFP

INDONESIA FIRES THREATEN CRITICALLY ENDANGERED ORANGUTANS: IUCN

**JAKARTA:** Wildfires that tore through Indonesian Borneo's vast tropical forests have piled pressure on critically endangered Bornean orangutans, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) said on Saturday. Indonesia has been battling fires for weeks in parts of Borneo and Sumatra, sending suffocating haze across the islands and neighbouring Malaysia and Singapore. Fires are currently burning within habitats containing 52

per cent of Borneo's orangutan population, including 13 of the 20 largest remaining populations, it said. "Fire and smoke exposure impose measurable physiological, behavioural and ecological costs on orangutans in peat forest habitats," the conservation network said. Wildfires have also been reported in the habitats of five gibbon species across Sumatra and Borneo, the conservation network said. "Gibbons breathe the same smoke-laden air as the people

living alongside them, and there is every reason to expect they suffer similar respiratory harm, on top of habitat loss and disruption to the behaviours that keep wild populations viable." As of Tuesday, Indonesia had rescued 100 animals, including 53 orangutans, that were threatened by the blazes, a forestry ministry spokesman said. Conservationists call on the authorities to go beyond first response and implement prevention measures. — AFP

Bangkok declares flood disaster over heavy rains

**BANGKOK** AUTHORITIES declared a flood disaster across the Thai capital on Saturday after almost 48 hours of heavy rain left homes, shops and roads waterlogged and residents wading through deep water. Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul cut short a trip to London to return home after almost 300 millimetres of rain fell between Thursday afternoon and Saturday morning, according to officials.

"The water keeps coming in. It's hard to go out now. It's like at my waist level now," said Somkid Pheuk-ngam, 67, a vendor who lives near a canal just north of central Bangkok. "I cannot go anywhere. I have been closing my shop for two days now," she said. Bangkok is no stranger to wet weather, and September is the peak of the rainy season, but several residents said it felt worse than usual. "I feel like in all the many years I've lived here, I've never encountered anything like this, where it rains continuously for days," said 63-year-old resident Anutin Meechamnan.

The Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA) declared a disaster for all the city's 50 districts, a move which gives local organisations special powers to act. Bangkok Governor Chadchart Sittipunt said on Saturday afternoon that the situation had "stabilised", adding: "If more



The capital recorded 487 mm of rain between Sept 1 and 25. — Reuters

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rainwater doesn't fall in the area, it will be solved." "If the rain stops, it is expected that it will take two to three days to drain the floodwater," he said in an update broadcast on social media.

Almost continuous rain since Thursday afternoon has swelled Bangkok's network of canals, sending murky water into surrounding homes, restaurants, shops and alleyways. "Our problem is that the canals are full," Chadchart said. "We are cooperating with nearby provinces and trying to drain water out through other sides, minimising the amount that flows into Bangkok." Once dubbed the "Venice of the East", the city is built on former marshland and rests about 1.5 metres above sea level. The BMA earlier said the city's pumping stations were operating at full capacity, pumping some 1,200

cubic metres per second combined. Reporters saw residents wading or pushing their motorcycles through high waters in several districts of eastern Bangkok, while on one major road, parked cars were partially submerged.

Some convenience stores had empty shelves by lunchtime as residents raced to buy essentials. Chadchart said at least 13 major roads were flooded but urged residents not to worry about potential food shortages, stressing: "The public don't have to be panicked." He said around 980 people were staying in temporary shelters, while authorities had transferred 36 bedridden people to hospitals. The city has also prepared one million sandbags.

September has been wetter than usual, according to figures from Bangkok's drainage and sewage department. The capital recorded 487 mm of rain between September 1 and 25, compared to an average of almost 269 mm for the same period from 1991 to 2020. Scientists warn the intensity and frequency of extreme weather events will increase as the planet continues to heat up because of fossil fuel emissions.

Flooding was also reported across 21 provinces in Thailand, with one fatality, according to the Department of Disaster Prevention and Mitigation. It said more rain was expected into Sunday. — AFP

DROUGHT DECLARED IN THREE-QUARTERS OF INDIAN STATE

**MUMBAI:** Drought has hit three-quarters of India's richest state of Maharashtra, the government said on Saturday, after prolonged low rainfall in the region home to the megacity of Mumbai. The declaration in Maharashtra came after the national weather department forecast India would end its annual monsoon season with a rainfall deficit, threatening farmers' livelihoods.

A stronger-than-usual El Nino climate phenomenon, which typically brings drier conditions to South Asia, has also led to abnormal rain patterns, the weather department has said. The government of Maharashtra, a huge western state whose capital Mumbai is India's financial and commercial centre, said drought was present across 74 per cent of the territory.

Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis said the administration stood "firmly behind our farmer brethren" during the crisis. The government will assess crop damage and "ensure that farmers, farm labourers and rural families receive the necessary assistance in a timely manner", his office said. Hundreds of millions of people in India depend on the June-to-September monsoon to bring vital rains that sustain agriculture and industry. Maharashtra has a population of 130 million and is a major agricultural state that produces cotton, soybeans, sugarcane and pulses. — AFP

DISEASE CONTROL

Bangladesh launches vaccination drive



Bangladesh launched a nationwide measles-rubella vaccination campaign, targeting 3.4 million unvaccinated and missed children, amid its worst-ever measles outbreak, which has killed more than 1,000 people and infected thousands. The month-long campaign aims to vaccinate children aged 6 months to 59 months who missed earlier immunisation efforts after authorities lowered the minimum vaccination age from the usual 9 months because of the outbreak. — Reuters

PEOPLE RALLY

Thousands protest over Ceuta migrant crisis



Thousands of people rallied in Madrid to protest the Spanish government's handling of a recent migrant influx into Ceuta, accusing it of failing to protect the country's borders. Demonstrators, many waving red and yellow Spanish flags, chanted "Ceuta is not for sale, Ceuta must be defended" as they marched through the centre of the Spanish capital. Ceuta has been embroiled in a humanitarian crisis since more than 70,000 migrants arrived on July 30 and 31. — AFP

VIOLENCE ACTIONS

Militant attack kills 11 in northern Pakistan



Militants rammed an explosives-laden vehicle into a security check post in northern Pakistan, killing at least 11 people and wounding 18 others. Saifullah Khan, a Dera Ismail Khan police official, said that the attack on the security check post took place "around noon". "A suspected bomber rammed an explosives-laden vehicle into the checkpoint, killing 11 people," he said. Earlier this month, at least 31 people were killed in an attack at a police headquarters at Kohat. — AFP

SHORT TAKES



Emergency personnel work after an old building partially collapsed in the Plaka area of central Athens. — AFP

4 American tourists among six killed in Athens building blast

**ATHENS:** Four American tourists visiting Greece were among six people confirmed dead on Saturday after a blast brought down the small Athens residential building they had been staying in near the Acropolis, officials said. The explosion, which occurred at dawn on Friday in the popular Plaka district filled with tourist lodgings, was likely caused by a gas leak, according to the capital’s mayor, Haris Doukas. The other two people killed were an elderly British man and his Greek wife who lived on the second storey of the three-storey building.

The American family of four had been renting an apartment on the first storey and were preparing to go to the airport hours later on Friday for their return to the United States when the blast occurred, according to the Kathimerini newspaper. The explosion brought down the residential building and damaged properties and vehicles along the street. Greek authorities did not immediately give their identities, ages or where in the United States they came from. The neighbourhood is one of Athens’s most popular tourist areas. The nearby Acropolis, one of Greece’s best-known landmarks, welcomed 4.6 million visitors last year. — AFP

CAT 5 POLO THREATENS OFF MEXICO



Hurricane Polo moved away from Mexico’s Pacific coast after it regained the highest Category 5 strength, before an expected return to make landfall in Baja California Sur on Monday, forecasters said. On Saturday morning, Polo was about 425 miles south west of the Mexican resort town of Cabo Corrientes, with maximum sustained winds of 160 mph, according to the US National Hurricane Centre. The storm was moving north west at 10 mph. The hurricane’s heavy rain and strong winds along Mexico’s Pacific coast forced evacuations, port closures and school cancellations this week. — Reuters

Pope Leo XIV celebrates giant Paris mass in landmark visit

**PARIS:** Pope Leo XIV on Saturday celebrated an open-air mass in front of hundreds of thousands of faithful in Paris after riding in the popemobile along the iconic Champs Elysees to the cheers of vast crowds clutching French and Vatican flags. The leader of the world’s 1.4 billion Catholics is on a four-day trip to France, a secular country with deep Catholic roots, with his trip stirring enthusiasm and spiritual fervour among the faithful. In the highlight of the visit’s second day, the 71-year-old pope led believers in a mass at Place de la Concorde, where a giant white canopy had been erected to serve as a makeshift altar. Dozens of screens have been installed to allow worshippers to follow the service. Some 700,000 people were in attendance, the Vatican said. The city centre was sealed off for the service, with helicopters circling overhead and snipers positioned on rooftops.

Parents arrived with pushchairs and children perched on their shoulders as crowds hoped to catch a glimpse of the pontiff on the first official papal visit to France in nearly two decades. “We’re incredibly lucky,” Suzanne Grange, 62, said ahead of the mass. “We were already

Some 700,000 people were in attendance, the Vatican said. The city centre was sealed off for the service, with helicopters circling overhead and snipers positioned on rooftops

Venezuela govt, oppn agree to begin top court reform

**CARACAS:** The second round of US-backed negotiations between Venezuela’s interim government and opposition members has concluded with an agreement to work on reforming the South American country’s top court. The deal announced on Friday marked the first concrete step in broader judicial reform long sought by the opposition and promised by interim leader Delcy Rodriguez. In the first round of talks,

which concluded in August, the parties agreed in principle to overhaul Venezuela’s justice system and recover frozen Venezuelan assets from the Bank of England. During this week’s talks, the two sides appointed a seven-member committee to review the system for choosing candidates for the Supreme Court of Justice, according to a joint statement released on Friday. The parties also agreed to

“continue the analysis and review of legislative instruments needed for the transformation of the judicial system,” said the statement. A third round of talks is scheduled for October. The government was led by National Assembly chief Jorge Rodriguez, the brother of the country’s interim leader. Delcy Rodriguez has governed under pressure from Washington since US forces seized president Nicolas

Maduro in a January raid. The opposition was represented by Dinorah Figuera, who led the opposition bloc that won a majority in Venezuela’s last internationally recognised elections in 2015. Exiled opposition leader and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Maria Corina Machado has been excluded from the talks, though she has said she will not interfere and hopes to see concrete results. — AFP

China and US to open AI ‘communication channel’

**CHINA** AND the United States agreed to set up a “communication channel” for artificial intelligence incidents, both sides said, after a Washington summit short on breakthroughs. Donald Trump and Xi Jinping discussed matters ranging from AI and trade to the stalled war in Iran, and confirmed that they would meet for a third and fourth time this year at international summits in China and the United States.

Xi’s visit to Washington was marked more by pomp than substance, but the White House said on Friday the nations agreed to establish a “bilateral communication channel” for AI incidents. Chinese state media confirmed the AI hotline was agreed in a report about the summit’s outcomes on Saturday. While billionaire Trump has repeatedly dismissed fears that AI could pose a threat to humanity, Xi took a more measured tone, noting the technology must develop under human control.

The White House also reported some deals from the visit, including China agreeing to import at least 10 million metric tons of coal from the US in 2027 and 2028. Additionally, the two countries agreed more favourable tariff treatment for \$30 billion of “non-sensitive goods” in each direction and two Chinese pandas were to arrive at a US zoo.

Despite the focus on pomp and ceremony during the visit, the message from the US and Chinese sides was that the summit had



US President Donald Trump shakes hands with China’s President Xi Jinping after a visit to the National Archives in Washington, DC. — AFP

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nevertheless helped smooth tensions between the rival superpowers over a host of issues. Trump said the meeting was “one of Friendship, Strength, and Success, for both China and the USA.” “We’ve made great strides, very positive for both countries,” Trump told reporters as he had tea with Xi at the White House on Friday before the archives trip. Trump rolled out the red carpet throughout the visit, treating Xi to a state banquet full of US tech titans, plus military parades, a flyover and even a tour of his new White House helipad and ballroom. For his part, Xi said his Washington trip had added “new substance” to his summit with Trump in Beijing in May. The Chinese leader added that they had agreed to “strategic stability on the basis of respect, fairness and reciprocity.” The announcement that the two leaders would continue their dialogue was perhaps the biggest

deliverable for both sides. Both leaders confirmed they would meet again at the APEC summit in Shenzhen, China, in November and the G20 forum at Trump’s Doral resort in Miami in December. While visiting the National Archives in Washington, the leaders inspected the Declaration of Independence, which marks its 250th anniversary this year and which set out the path for American independence from the “tyrant” British king. Beneath the rotunda, Trump also showed Xi the US constitution, the document that set out the principles of the country’s democratic government two and a half centuries ago. “We’re just comparing how this goes 250 years, theirs goes 6,000 years,” Trump told reporters, referring to China’s ancient roots, as he stood alongside Xi, chairman of the Chinese Communist Party, which has ruled China since 1949. Trump’s showcasing of US democracy at the National Archives comes a week after he banned three major US media outlets from the White House. They were readmitted on Thursday on the orders of a US judge. The First Amendment of the US Constitution protects the freedom of the press. Rights groups criticise China for its lack of press freedoms and the right of free expression. Trump also publicly mocked his democratically elected predecessor Joe Biden as he gave Xi a tour of the White House on Thursday, showing him a picture of an “autopen” that he has mounted in a gallery of US presidents instead of Biden’s portrait. — AFP



Pope Leo XIV waves to the crowd from the Papamobile as he rides down the Champs-Elysees Avenue on his way to the Place de la Concorde, Paris. — AFP

lucky enough to see Pope John Paul II in Paris back in 1980,” her husband Pascal, 65, added. The first US pontiff was visiting France seven months before voters choose a successor to centrist President Emmanuel Macron, with the anti immigration far right eyeing its best opportunity yet to capture the presidency. A number of politicians were present,

including far-right leaders Marine Le Pen and Jordan Bardella and former president Nicolas Sarkozy. Macron was not expected to attend the mass and was represented by his wife Brigitte. Fifteen-year-old Alix said ahead of the service that seeing the pope would be “really something.” “After all, he’s God’s representative on Earth,” said the teenager who wore electric blue mascara and glittery cross-shaped earrings. Earlier

in the day, the pope met migrants as he visited Maison Bakhita, an association supporting refugees. He said it was “possible to encounter one another and to live together in dignity and peace.” Leo also stressed the “fundamental role of women in building a civilisation of love.” The association said the pope’s visit sent a “message” ahead of the April-May election. On Friday, an estimated 300,000 people turned out to see the pontiff as he waved from his popemobile on the way to the Notre Dame Cathedral. “There is a sense of fervour reminiscent of that experienced over 40 years ago with John Paul II,” Francois Mabilbe, director of the Geopolitical Observatory on Religion, told broadcaster RMC. Pope Leo stressed the need for ethics to avoid an AI-driven “paradise of machines” and, as war rages in Ukraine for a fifth year, urged France to remain a “tireless champion of peace”. He also told young adults at a stadium outside the French capital on Friday night that they were the “saints of France.” In a deeply secular country, only around five per cent of France’s 69 million residents go to Catholic church services regularly, a survey found last year. — AFP

OPINION

How movies can help us deal with emotions



DR HAMED AL SINAWI

The writer is a senior consultant psychiatrist at SQU Hospital

SOME OF us spend part of the weekend watching a movie on TV or in the cinema to unwind after a busy week. At times, we find a movie that affects us and makes us reflect on the plot for some time. Psychologists are increasingly using ‘cinematherapy,’ a form of therapy that uses films to help people explore their inner worlds. One framework describes the process in four stages: identification with a character, catharsis, insight into oneself, and universalisation, the recognition that we are not alone in our experiences. Research on cinematherapy is in its early days, but the approach offers a novel way to explore difficult feelings. Why do films affect us so deeply? When we watch a story unfold, our brains respond as if we were partly living it. We feel tension when the hero is in danger, sadness at a farewell, and relief when things turn out well. Psychologists call this ‘narrative transportation’: for two hours, we step out of our lives and into someone else’s. That step outside is precisely what makes films valuable. It is often easier to look at a painful situation when it belongs to a character on

the screen rather than to ourselves. Take the first stage, identification. A man who has recently lost his father may find himself drawn to a grieving son in a film. He does not need to explain his feelings to anyone because the character does it for him. This leads naturally to catharsis, the release of emotions that have been held back. Many people who ‘never cry’ discover tears during a film scene. This is not weakness. It is often the first time they have allowed themselves to feel what they have been carrying. The third stage, insight, is where change begins. Seeing a character make a mistake we recognise, such as pushing loved ones away, avoiding a difficult conversation, or working until exhaustion, can hold up a mirror. A therapist might ask, “What would you have told that character?” Often, the advice we give the character is the advice we need to give ourselves. Finally, universalisation reminds us that our struggles are shared. Loneliness, family conflict, anxiety, and loss are human experiences that cross cultures and generations. Knowing this can reduce shame, a feeling that keeps many people from seeking help. In a world where many suffer in

Next time you watch a film, pay attention to which character moves you and why. Ask yourself what the story is telling you about your own life

silence, this sense of connection can itself be healing. In practice, a therapist may suggest a specific film between sessions, chosen to match the person’s concerns, and then discuss it together. Films about aging parents, addiction, divorce, or resilience can open conversations that feel too difficult to start directly. Cinematherapy is also used in group settings and with adolescents, who may find talking about a film less threatening than talking about themselves. However, we need to remember that cinematherapy is a supplement to professional treatment, not a replacement for it. Some films may trigger painful memories, particularly for people who have experienced trauma, so the choice of film matters. And evidence from large, well-designed studies is still limited. Still, there is something we can all take from this idea. Next time you watch a film, pay attention to which character moves you and why. Ask yourself what the story is telling you about your own life. You may find that the weekend movie offers more than entertainment. It can be a quiet conversation with yourself.

NEPAL TUNNEL SURVIVOR BACKS FLOOD REBUILD

ANUP OJHA

Pulled alive 10 days after catastrophic floods trapped him in a tunnel, Nepali hydropower worker Kabir Maharjan is determined to help rebuild his country despite his own harrowing ordeal. Traditional music and tearful relatives welcomed the 45-year-old when he returned home after spending weeks recovering at a hospital in Kathmandu. “Life is precious. Hundreds of people have died but I survived,” the father of two said, his voice choked with emotion. “Perhaps I still have work to do for my society, for the country, and my home and family.” The August 26 flood, triggered by a glacial mountain collapse near the China-Nepal border, has killed more than 1,400 people, the majority in Nepal. Over 5,000 remain missing in Nepal since the tsunami-like waves swept away roads, bridges and settlements in the mountainous regions up north, and battered crucial hydropower projects. Maharjan, who was among hundreds of workers employed at projects hit by the floods, was eventually airlifted from the worst-hit Rasuwa region. His miraculous rescue on September 4, alongside fellow worker Sanjay Sah, offered a rare moment of hope during the disaster. Now, as Nepal shifts from emergency response to reconstruction, he said he hopes to return to his profession. “There is risk in everything, but still we have to win over it,” he said. More than 800 people employed at hydropower projects in Nepal remain unaccounted for, the energy minister told parliament last week. Forty-seven bodies have been recovered from flood-hit project sites, while rescue teams continue to comb through the ruins. Maharjan said he survived by reaching an upper floor of the tunnel site and drinking water while waiting for help. “Whenever I was awake, I would try to find a way out,” he said. Days later, he saw what appeared to be a light and heard voices. “I thought I imagined it. But I called out, and they answered.” For Maharjan, the country’s long road to recovery mirrors his own - he is still recovering from wounds on his hand and leg. But he said the rebuilding efforts could also provide spiritual sustenance. “While we are alive, we must be patient and do our work,” he said. — AFP

The men who rarely speak about their problems

AS Oman advances technologically and attracts increasing international investment, its people stand to benefit greatly, particularly through improved education and healthcare. Yet progress always carries a cost. For Omanis, especially men, it also brings new pressures. For much of my life, I suffered from depression. I sought professional help, and with the support of a good therapist and appropriate medication, my life became more stable. In time, I was better able to cope with the pressures of running several businesses. My experience has shown me that mental illness is a health issue, not a personal failing. Oman has recognised the need for greater support for citizens experiencing mental-health problems, but further progress will depend on ensuring that people feel safe seeking help without judgement. Families have an essential role to play by learning to recognise the signs of depression in a loved one. A man may not speak openly about his problems. Instead, he may become increasingly irritable or angry, become distant, tired, and lose interest in activities he once enjoyed. These may indicate that someone is struggling and needs understanding and support. For generations, many Omani men understood their role in fairly clear terms. They were expected to provide for their families and contribute to society. These responsibilities remain, but the world around them is changing dramatically. Today, a man may be expected to succeed in a highly competitive workplace, adapt to new technology, and manage family finances. He may also be expected to maintain traditional male responsibilities while meeting modern standards of professional achievement. However,



The rapid pace of change can also leave older men feeling that the knowledge and skills that once gave them confidence are no longer enough. Image is AI generated.



KARIM EASTERBROOK

The writer is a Former Cambridge School Principal and Author

Many men have been taught that strength means silence. They may conceal anxiety, disappointment, or exhaustion because they fear being judged as weak

change can create opportunity. Oman’s economic development is opening doors that previous generations could scarcely have imagined. Young Omanis can study new subjects at school and enter emerging professions. Improved medical services and greater awareness of health can also lead to longer lives. Opportunities become pressure when people feel they must succeed without showing uncertainty or asking for help. Many men have been taught that strength means silence. They may conceal anxiety, disappointment, or exhaustion because they fear being judged as weak. A man struggling at work, worried about money or experiencing difficulties at home may remain silent until his problems become overwhelming. Social media presents edited images of success, wealth and happiness. Comparing real life with these public performances creates a sense of failure, even when a person is doing reasonably well. The rapid pace of change can also leave older men feeling that the knowledge and skills that once gave them confidence are

no longer enough. Families and communities have an important role to play. Men need to know that responsibility does not require emotional isolation. Speaking honestly with a trusted relative, friend, religious leader, or health professional is not a rejection of tradition. It is a practical way of protecting oneself and one’s family. Workplaces should recognise that productivity depends on well-being. Employers can support staff through reasonable expectations and higher salaries, proper training, and access to professional advice. Employees who are afraid to admit difficulty may appear strong, but it often hides problems until they affect health and performance. Schools and universities can help prepare young men for more than employment. Academic knowledge matters, but so do communication, financial literacy and the ability to cope with pressure. These are essential skills for adult life. Oman’s progress should not be measured only by new buildings, advanced technology or foreign investment. It should also be judged by whether people feel able to live with dignity and confidence within this changing society. Oman’s development offers citizens many opportunities, but it also asks them to adapt. They should not be expected to carry that burden alone. A healthy society is one in which responsibility is shared, difficulties can be discussed, and seeking help is regarded not as failure, but as wisdom. Oman’s future will be strongest when economic and technological progress is matched by equal attention to the people expected to sustain it. My own experience has taught me that seeking professional help can restore not only an individual’s well-being, but also his ability to contribute to his family, his work and society.

# Piddington... ‘The Mouse That Roared’



RAY PETERSEN

The writer is a media consultant

‘THE WORM has turned,’ and the population of the tiny hamlet of Piddington, in Oxfordshire, has struck a blow in reaction to the Labour government’s plans to house 1,256 asylum-seekers in the former military base at nearby Bicester. The ‘worm,’ characterised by John Heywood in 1546, was a quiet, submissive, downtrodden group that found its confidence, its voice, its strength, and was galvanised when pushed beyond reason and respect. Certainly, the citizens of this town, that traces its origins back to the ‘Doomsday Book’ of 1086, have demonstrated their ire as the prospect of this massive influx of single foreigners, all males, within walking distance of their town looms ever closer. “We must be heard,” posted one on Meta, “and although it’s ‘tilting at windmills,’ we won’t be bullied.” Christened by the UK media as the ‘Piddington Revolution,’ their community referendum, notably, was held on September 15, the annual observance of ‘Battle of Britain Day,’ when victory in the battle for air supremacy during WWII is celebrated, and ironically the ‘GBNews’ invoked an appropriately emotive reaction, calling this the beginning of the ‘Battle for Britain.’ Conducted by the Piddington Parish Council, under Chairman Tim McNally, the referendum resulted in a healthy 311 votes being cast, from a total population of 358, or 87 per cent, with 285 votes for independence

and only 26 votes AGAINST; a stunning 92 per cent FOR verdict saw a landslide win against the immigrants. Both the turnout and the result indicate absolute dissatisfaction with the government’s plans for managing the asylum-seeker crisis, not just in Piddington, but across the heartland. Callum Miller, the LibDem MP for the Bicester and Woodcock electorate, is an outspoken opponent of the government’s plans and points to a much smaller 2003 planning application being rejected due to ‘unlit roads,’ which the government suggests will be resolved now as the asylum-seekers would be “issued with high-visibility vests and ‘strongly encouraged’ not to walk on the local roads and verges.” Critics also point to there being no current accommodation, utilities, roading or services infrastructure, and the cost of establishing these as being disproportionate to need. Tim McNally, chairman of the Parish Council, rejects Home Office documentation as ‘unrealistic,’ as the former ammunition dump is advocated as a solution to one part of the ongoing immigration dilemma, with its evident shortcomings ‘the tip of the iceberg.’ However, their indignation centres on the ‘dumping’ of the 1256 young, single men in their vicinity, and they ask, “How would you feel if it was happening to you?” Residents in Colchester, Essex, 108 miles south, have shared their experience of having the ‘immigration overflow’ accommodated at

More than 500 parish councils have indicated a willingness to conduct similar referendums, knowing full well that these are not binding on the government, but desperate to show how they feel about the immigration impositions

the nearby former RAF base at Wethersfield, saying their once ‘joyous’ town centre has become a ‘no-go’ area for local women, intimidated by being photographed, whistled at, stared at, and told to ‘cover up.’ “They’re bringing their way of life, and that’s not right,” voiced a pensioner 83 miles further south, in Crowborough, Sussex, apparently very much reflective of national perspectives, it seems. More than 500 parish (town) councils have indicated a willingness to conduct similar referendums, knowing full well that these are not binding on the government, but desperate to show how they feel about the immigration impositions. Prime Minister Andy Burnham has proven tone deaf to the electorate, commenting, “asylum accommodation should not be concentrated only in poorer communities in the north, but also in the wealthier areas in the south.” ‘The Mouse that Roared,’ a 1954 political satire by Leonard Wibberly, mirrors the Piddington experience, as the folly and arrogance of ‘do-gooders,’ the ‘woke’ element, the perpetually sycophantic civil service, and weak-kneed politicians dismiss communities as inconsequential. Eventually, they must bow to the ‘right-ness,’ the electorate, that is the ‘mouse that roared, or the worm that turned,’ otherwise, PM Burnham’s reign could prove short, entirely due to an ill-thought response to the migrant/asylum seeker-problem.

## EL NINO REWRITES THE MENU IN THE WORLD’S TOP RESTAURANTS

ANNA CUENCA

A record-breaking El Nino will likely force the world’s top chefs to rethink their menus ahead of droughts, floods and heatwaves upending global food systems. Ants are disappearing from the table in Brazil, one Danish chef is opting for cocoa-free chocolate and Japan is serving up warm-water fish, culinary stars disclosed at the Apapaxoa gastronomic festival on Mexico’s Caribbean coast. United Nations experts have predicted an exceptionally strong cycle of the El Nino climate phenomenon, which causes global changes in winds and rainfall as well as erratic weather conditions. The cream of the culinary crop, looking ahead to unpredictable ingredient availability, quality and prices, are rearranging their shelves accordingly. But for these acclaimed chefs, extreme weather events and their habit of turning the kitchen upside down are nothing new. “In the last three years, I’ve been creating an annual menu that I end up adjusting many times, almost weekly, because certain products aren’t available,” Brazilian chef Alex Atala said. “Ants, for example, this year are only available for customers who specifically ask to try them,” said Atala, whose Sao Paulo restaurant DOM plucks ingredients from the Amazonian wilderness to reinterpret Indigenous traditions. El Nino can also massively disrupt transportation, said Atala. Flooded roads or wildfires “delay a product that should be fresh, and by the time it arrives, it’s no longer in good condition,” he said. The renowned Brazilian chef also emphasised the “cultural loss” provoked by El Nino, referring to the disappearance of tradition along with the unavailable ingredient. The climate crisis has wreaked havoc on the Mediterranean, says Spain’s Quique Dacosta, whose restaurant in the port city of Denia sits near Valencia, which was pummelled by torrential rain in 2024. Almost 250 people died, while vineyards, orange groves and plots used to grow Albufera rice, an essential paella ingredient, were decimated. An event of such intensity “directly attacks the raw materials that are the natural foundation on which we build our cuisine,” Dacosta said. Footfall also takes a hit, he said, noting that a stormy season has once again descended and fearful customers are cancelling their reservations. “It’s going to rain a lot and people just don’t come anymore - imagine how vulnerable our businesses are,” he said. While El Nino ramps up weather conditions in some parts, it produces a vacuum in others. “This is the first year without hurricanes” in the Mexican Caribbean, said chef Roberto Solis. — AFP

# The un-ordered UN order

AS WORLD leaders gathered in New York City for the 81st session of the United Nations General Assembly, the international order they have ostensibly come to defend is in worse shape than at any point since 1945. China and Russia never fully accepted the post-Cold War international system, many newly assertive middle powers resent it, and its principal financial backer, the American public, has lost interest in underwriting it. With the UN about to choose a new secretary-general and US President Donald Trump’s administration openly hostile to multilateralism, it is unclear how much longer the system can stagger on. Sadly, no new order is in the making. This is not an interregnum between an American-led order and a Chinese-led one. We have long lived with instances of disorder — with states breaking the rules within a framework that they still recognise — but we are now approaching something new. I call it un-order: a situation in which states act without reference to any common framework. One can already see this new dispensation in how crises unfold. After the United States and Israel launched their war against Iran in February, the parties could not even agree whether a ceasefire existed, let alone who had won. Moreover, disputes regularly jump from one domain to another, such as when Trump’s designs on Greenland lead to tariff threats against the European Union. Everywhere one looks, the ties that once bound the world together are being turned into weapons. Over half of globally traded staple crops pass through at least one maritime chokepoint, and the closure of the Strait of Hormuz (and now the Bab Al Mandab) has shown what happens when they are used for leverage. Europeans have responded to all this as architects would, drawing up blueprints, defending universal norms, and trying their best to keep the old institutions standing. Others are behaving more like artisans — improvising, repurposing what still works, and adapting quickly to the loss of what doesn’t. China has built up the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and an expanded



China’s Vice President Han Zheng speaks during the 81st United Nations General Assembly at UN headquarters in New York on Saturday. — AFP



MARK LEONARD

The writer is Director of the European Council on Foreign Relations, is the author, most recently, of Surviving Chaos: Geopolitics When the Rules Fail

Everywhere one looks, the ties that once bound the world together are being turned into weapons. Over half of globally traded staple crops pass through at least one maritime chokepoint, and the closure of the Strait of Hormuz has shown what happens when it is used for leverage

BRICS, joined the Arctic Council as an observer, and written its surveillance-friendly preferences into Internet standards at the International Telecommunication Union. Europeans could do well to learn a thing or two from this approach. Yet even in a world of un-order, it would be a mistake to think that multilateralism itself is dying. Instead, it is migrating and being transformed. Our research at the European Council on Foreign Relations shows that middle powers are building creative new forms of cooperation everywhere. For example, Barbados’s Bridgetown Initiative is reshaping the debate on climate and development finance; the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor and Lobito Corridor are using infrastructure instead of treaties to bind countries together; and Qatar and Türkiye have become the go-to mediators in conflicts from Gaza to Ukraine. In other words, today’s middle powers are doing what the UN was built to do, but in a more improvised, ad hoc fashion. For Europeans, this is an uncomfortable moment. As architects, they have the furthest to go to catch up with the times. But with the right strategy, they also have much to gain. After all, Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney recently visited Strasbourg to seek an “alliance for the future” because he understands that the EU can serve as an anchor for the West. To fulfil this role, Europeans must do three things. First, they should work with the new builders. That means pursuing observer status and

engagement with groupings they currently treat as rivals. It means helping the UN act as the connective tissue for new platforms, linking the Bridgetown Initiative to international financial institutions, and Qatar’s personalised deal-making to formal legal and reconstruction bodies. And it means understanding how Brazilians, Indians, Indonesians, and South Africans view contemporary geopolitics. Second, Europeans must recognise that they have spent the last few years eroding the credibility of the rule of law by defending it rhetorically but not in practice. They would do better to concentrate on enforcing a narrower interpretation of the rules that still have buy-in beyond the West, not least the prohibitions on territorial conquest, the targeting of civilians, and nuclear weapons. Third, Europeans should spend their shrinking political capital more carefully. The rising risk of a global food crisis is a test. Together, Russia’s war on Ukraine, the blockage of the Strait of Hormuz, and the strongest El Niño on record are threatening global food supplies at a time when 2.3 billion people already face food insecurity. The UN helped tackle the last food crisis in 2022, but it probably will be unable to play the same role this time around. This need for global leadership presents an opportunity for Europeans, who should pursue a new form of multilateralism. By convening a global coalition with Brazil, Egypt, Kazakhstan, Mexico, and Türkiye, Europe can bring together the countries most exposed to the crisis, pool and mobilise resources, and negotiate practical arrangements to keep food and fertiliser shipments moving. On an issue like food security, any such effort would win broad international support. As European leaders hobnob with their counterparts from around the world this week, the first question they should be asking is not how to reform the UN, but how to approach the multilateral landscape as artisans. That means considering which new initiatives they should join, which institutions they can repurpose, and which other countries they can work with to get things done in an un-ordered world. @Project Syndicate, 2026



OFA CHIEF TALK



The Oman Football Association delegation in Jeddah.

AL BUSAIDI MEETS OMAN PLAYERS

WALEED AL JAHWARI  
JEDDAH, SEPT 26

Oman Football Association (OFA) Chairman Sayyid Sulaiman bin Hamoud al Busaidi met the national team players before the Saudi Arabia match, offering his support to the squad as it readies for the second outing in the tournament.

Al Busaidi spoke with the players, as the Red Warriors continue their campaign in Jeddah and prepare for their final Group A fixture against Kuwait. The meeting reflected the continued support of the OFA for the national team and its players during the tournament.

Meanwhile, Oman Consul General in Jeddah Salim bin Mohammed al Busaidi reiterated the consulate’s support for the national team, praising the high morale he observed within the delegation since its arrival in Jeddah.

Salim stressed the importance of continuing to support the players and coaching staff, calling for patience, hard work and responsibility as the team prepares for its upcoming challenges.

Al Busaidi praised the Omani supporters who travelled to Jeddah to back the Red Warriors and affirmed that the Consulate General of Oman in Jeddah is ready to assist and serve Omani fans throughout the tournament.

**BAHRAIN PROTEST MADIBO’S PARTICIPATION**  
Bahrain Football Association lodged an official protest with the Gulf Cup Federation over the participation of Qatar midfielder Assim Madibo in their Gulf Cup 27 match.

The Bahrain FA questioned Madibo’s eligibility over a previous disciplinary suspension reportedly imposed by Fifa following his red card against Canada at the 2026 World Cup.

However, sources confirmed that the Gulf Cup disciplinary committee rejected the protest because it was not submitted within the stipulated time after the match. The committee did not consider the substance of the protest. Sources also confirmed that Madibo’s previous Fifa suspension does not apply to Gulf Cup 27.



Omani fans get ready for their national team’s crucial Gulf Cup Group A match against group leaders Saudi Arabia at King Abdullah Sports City in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia on Saturday. — Pictures by **Abdulwahid al Hamadani**



OMANI FANS CHEER FOR RED WARRIORS IN SAUDI CLASH



Semifinal spots in line as Group B set for crucial second round

WALEED AL JAHWARI  
JEDDAH, SEPT 26

The second round of Group B at Gulf Cup 27 will take place on Sunday, with Yemen facing Qatar and Bahrain taking on the UAE in two important matches in Jeddah.

Qatar will look to build on their opening win over Bahrain, while the UAE will aim to maintain their strong start after a 4-0 victory over Yemen. Bahrain and Yemen, meanwhile, will be seeking positive results to revive their campaigns.

The pre-match press conferences for Sunday’s Group B matches were held on Saturday at the Media Centre at Hilton Jeddah, with the four teams outlining their preparations.

**DALIC TARGETS SEMIFINALS**  
UAE head coach Zlatko Dalic said, “will target a place in the semifinals when we face Bahrain after opening 4-0 win over Yemen.”

“We will face a strong opponent, and we know what we have to do. We will give our best to achieve victory. Bahrain have a lot of



Bahrain’s Mahdi al Humaidan in action with Qatar’s Sultan al Brake. — Reuters

experience and a very good coach,” the Croatian coach said.

“If we win tomorrow, we will qualify for the semifinals and achieve our first objective. We have to forget the Yemen match and focus on Bahrain,” Dalic said.

UAE midfielder Nicolas Gimenez said: “The match will be difficult, and all the teams are strong. We want to give our best and make our fans and coach happy.”

**TALAJIC CALLS FOR SPEED**  
Bahrain head coach Dragan Talajic called for a stronger performance

against the UAE after his side lost 2-0 to Qatar in their opening match.

“This is a difficult tournament, and everyone still has a chance to qualify. I trust my players and we will do a good job tomorrow.”

“The UAE played a very strong match and had high-level players.”

“We have to be faster throughout the match and not give them any chances. The UAE are in a better position because they won their first match,” Talajic concluded.

Bahrain midfielder Mahdi Abduljabbar said: “We trust the coach’s tactics and all the players want to give their best. We will work on our decisions and improve our performance in the next match.”

**LOPETEGUI URGES FOCUS**  
Qatar head coach Julen Lopetegui stressed the importance of the Yemen clash while acknowledging the limited recovery time between matches.

“We don’t have enough time to rest, so tomorrow we will play with the best players who are ready. The match is important for us, and we

will face an opponent for whom it is also important. We have to focus on ourselves.”

Lopetegui stressed, “We are not focusing on their loss in the first match. We respect them. They have strong players, and we have to give our best.”

Qatar midfielder Sultan al Breik added: “We are ready for tomorrow’s match and, God willing, we will achieve victory. There are no easy matches, and we are prepared for the game.”

**OULD ALI SEEKS COMEBACK**  
Yemen head coach Nouredine Ould Ali said the Qatar match represents an opportunity for his side to respond after their opening defeat to the UAE. “For us, the match will be an opportunity to respond. We made some mistakes in the previous match and we will work to correct them.”

Ould Ali pointed out, “we will face a World Cup team that has gained considerable experience, and we will work to improve our performance and benefit from this match.”

# ARABIAN GULF CUP EVOLVE AS CRUCIAL PLATFORM FOR GROWTH OF GCC FOOTBALL



Oman brought home their second Gulf Cup after winning the 23rd edition in Kuwait in 2017.

ADIL AL BALUSHI  
MUSCAT, SEPT 26

FOR decades, the Arabian Gulf Cup had evolved far beyond a two-week football tournament. The competition has become an important platform for football development across the region, providing national teams with a valuable testing ground, creating opportunities for players and coaches, strengthening sporting relationships and giving host nations experience in staging major continental and international events.

From its early editions, the Gulf Cup has played a significant role in shaping the football landscape of the region. What began as a competition designed to bring Gulf nations together has grown into one of the most followed sporting events in the Arab world, attracting millions of supporters and generating a strong sense of regional identity. The tournament's importance can be measured not only by the trophies won but also by the players it has developed, the coaches it has promoted and the infrastructure and organisational experience it has helped create. For players, the Gulf Cup can serve as a gateway to wider opportunities. Performances at the tournament have historically attracted the attention of clubs across the Gulf, while successful coaches have used the competition to establish their reputations and secure new contracts.

Mohammed Murad Ali al Jocker, journalist and sports historian from UAE, who began his media career in 1978, has witnessed the development of Gulf football across several generations. "The first Gulf Cup in Oman in 1984, he recalled, represented an important stage in the country's football development. As Oman continued to participate in the competition, its national teams gradually became more

competitive, eventually advancing further in the tournament and producing players who went on to establish themselves professionally in the Gulf," he told *Oman Observer*.

"Players such as Ali al Habsi, Imad al Hosni, Badar al Maimani and many others have become prominent examples of Omani footballers who built successful careers, while the experiences gained through Gulf competition contributed to the wider development of the national game. Oman subsequently hosted several Gulf and regional competitions, gaining valuable experience in organisation, stadium operations, media management and tournament logistics," he added.

"The hosting experience has become one of the Gulf Cup's most important legacies. The competition has repeatedly provided countries with an opportunity to test their readiness for larger continental and international events. Qatar is perhaps the clearest modern example. Years of hosting major Gulf competitions helped the country develop its sporting infrastructure and organisational capabilities before it staged the 2022 FIFA World Cup, the first World Cup held in the Arab world. The Gulf Cup has therefore become part of a wider sporting pathway: compete, develop, host, learn and then move towards larger international events," he said.

"It has also influenced the football calendar in the region. The tournament has periodically prompted discussions about scheduling, player workloads and the relationship between domestic, regional and international competitions. Its continuation reflects the desire of Gulf countries to maintain a dedicated platform for national-team football," Mohammed said.

**COMMUNITY EVENT**  
For Iraqi journalist and veteran

Gulf Cup observer Dr Hadi Abdullah, the tournament represents much more than football results. "I am pleased to attend and cover the Gulf events since 1979, when I was a student at the College of Media in Iraq," Dr Hadi said.

He described the Gulf Cup as a community event for the region. "Despite political challenges and interruptions that affected some editions, the competition repeatedly returned. Now, with the tournament reaching its 27th edition, its longevity itself has become part of its significance. The Gulf Cup produced many advantages for the Gulf and Arab countries," Abdullah said, pointing to the way technological development has also transformed the tournament.

He recalled earlier editions when media facilities were little more than small tents where journalists, officials and organisers worked together. Today, Gulf Cup host nations compete to provide modern facilities and a high standard of organisation. That evolution mirrors the broader transformation of Gulf football.

"The tournament has also demonstrated that reputation alone does not guarantee success. Defending champions can be eliminated in the group stage, while traditionally strong teams can suffer unexpected defeats. The Gulf Cup has developed its own competitive dynamics, making it difficult for teams to rely solely on their historical standing. Its influence can also be seen in the development of national teams beyond the region's traditional powerhouses," he pointed out.

**OPPORTUNITIES AND EXPOSURE**  
Muadh al Khamisi, chairman of Yemen's media delegation, described the Gulf Cup as a "small FIFA World Cup event" in terms of the opportunities and exposure it provides. "For Yemen, participation has been particularly important.



**DR HADI  
ABDULLAH**  
*Iraqi journalist and  
veteran Gulf Cup  
observer*



**MUADH  
AL KHAMISI**  
*Chairman of Yemen's  
media delegation*



**IBRAHIM  
AL FRAYAN**  
*Saudi Arabia  
media person*



**MOHAMMED  
MURAD ALI**  
*Journalist and sports  
historian from  
the UAE*

The country entered the Gulf Cup from the 16th edition and gradually established itself within the competition. Yemen recorded its first draw against Oman before achieving its first Gulf Cup victory against Bahrain at the 26th edition," he said.

"Those milestones demonstrate how the tournament can provide developing football nations with competitive experience that would otherwise be difficult to obtain. Despite Yemen's financial and organisational challenges, there are high expectations on the national team and the benefits it can gain from continued participation. The broader history of the competition is equally significant," he added.

**VISION AND CREATION**  
Ibrahim al Faryan, from Saudi Arabia media, highlighted the origins of the Gulf Cup and the vision behind its creation. "Prince Khalid bin Faisal bin Abdulaziz proposed, in the late 1960s, the idea of a competition bringing together national teams from the Gulf states as a way of strengthening relations among the peoples of the region. The first tournament was subsequently hosted by Bahrain, with Saudi Arabia staging the second edition. More than 50 years later, the original concept has expanded considerably. The competition now brings together the Gulf states alongside Iraq and Yemen, creating a sporting platform that has survived changing circumstances and multiple challenges," he said.

"Its historical impact can also be linked to the progression of Gulf teams on the world stage. Kuwait qualified for the 1982 FIFA World Cup, Iraq reached the 1986 World Cup, and the United Arab Emirates qualified for the 1990 tournament. Saudi Arabia subsequently established itself as a regular World Cup participant, appearing at five consecutive editions from 1994 through 2010 and continuing their presence at later tournaments," he added.

Back to the most recent FIFA World Cup qualifiers, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Iraq represented the wider Gulf region, while the United Arab Emirates had come close to qualifying. For Saudi Arabia, the Gulf Cup is now part of a much broader sporting journey. The country is preparing to host the 2027 AFC Asian Cup and the 2034 FIFA World Cup, making experience gained through regional tournaments increasingly valuable. The Gulf Cup therefore continues to serve two purposes at the same time. On the field, it gives national teams an intensely competitive environment in which to develop players, test tactical approaches and build experience. Off the field, it gives host countries an opportunity to strengthen their organisational capabilities and prepare for larger sporting responsibilities.

For more than half a century, the Gulf Cup has provided a common sporting stage for countries with different football traditions, resources and levels of development. It has helped emerging players find their way, given established stars a regional platform and offered host nations a laboratory for developing their sporting infrastructure and event-management capabilities. The Gulf Cup may last only a few weeks on the football calendar, but its influence extends far beyond the final whistle. It remains a development platform, a competitive proving ground and a bridge between Gulf football's past and its increasingly ambitious international future.

SPORTS

AZERBAIJAN GRAND PRIX



Mercedes' George Russell celebrates with the trophy after winning the race at the Azerbaijan Grand Prix - Baku City Circuit, Baku, Azerbaijan. — Reuters

RUSSELL FENDS OFF VERSTAPPEN IN BAKU, ANTONELLI FIFTH

**BAKU, Azerbaijan:** George Russell closed the gap to championship-leading Mercedes teammate Kimi Antonelli at the top of the F1 standings after fending off Red Bull's Max Verstappen to complete a lights-to-flag win in Saturday's Azerbaijan Grand Prix, with the Italian fifth. Russell took the flag just 0.196 seconds ahead of the flying Dutchman, who had started eighth but crossed the line nearly side-by-side with his Mercedes rival, after two safety car phases turned a Saturday cruise into a fight for survival for the Briton.

Frenchman Isack Hadjar completed a double podium for Red Bull, repaying the team's decision to give him a contract extension with third on his return to racing action. "It's amazing to be back on the top step of the podium," said Russell, after closing the gap to Antonelli from 81 to 66 points in the overall standings with 15 races completed.

"Every race since the (summer) break I have gone from strength to strength and I feel more like myself again."

Antonelli had started 16th after a rare error saw him crash out of Friday's qualifying. His drive on Saturday was less like his Monza charge — where he went from 19th to first — and more a slow-burn recovery. Saturday's win was the eighth of Russell's career, his third of the season and first since the Austrian GP in June.

It capped a dominant weekend for the Briton and had seemed a mere formality, with the 28-year-old leading off the line and

opening up a comfortable lead ahead of McLaren's Oscar Piastri, Verstappen and Hadjar. But all that changed on the 31st of the race's 51 laps when a crash for Williams racer Alex Albon brought out the safety car. Russell's 11-second lead evaporated as the safety car bunched up the field.

Verstappen snatched second from Piastri into the first corner as the action resumed, with Russell unchallenged. But the race was neutralised almost instantly by another safety car when Argentine Franco Colapinto locked up and ploughed into Alpine teammate Pierre Gasly, who in turn collected McLaren's reigning champion Lando Norris. Colapinto, who was given a 10-second time penalty, continued but the contact put both Gasly and Norris out of the race. — Reuters

AHMED AL KAABI  
MUSCAT, SEPT 26

Dhofar and Samayil shared 10 goals, while Seeb, Sur and Fanja claimed victories as the fourth round of the Sohar International Cup produced 23 goals across six matches. The round concluded on Friday with Dhofar and Samayil drawing 5-5 at Nizwa Sports Complex, Fanja defeating Al Nasr 3-1, and both Group Two encounters ending level. At Sohar Sports Complex, Al Musannah recovered from a goal down to hold Saham 1-1, with Hazza Zayed cancelling out Said Obaid's first-half opener. Saham made the stronger start, pressing forward and using quick

transitions to trouble Al Musannah's defence. Obaid rewarded their early pressure in the 19th minute, beating goalkeeper Al Mutasim al Balushi. Two further opportunities went begging as Saham sought to extend their advantage, leaving Al Musannah within reach at the interval. The balance shifted after the restart. Al Musannah moved the ball more quickly through midfield and attacked effectively down the flanks, particularly on the right, forcing Saham onto the defensive. Zayed brought them level in the 67th minute with a shot past goalkeeper Muhannad al Maamari. He then had a chance to secure victory in the 89th minute but fired



Sur and Oman Club players in action at Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex.

wide of the right post with only the goalkeeper to beat. Elsewhere in Group Two, Ibri earned their first point of the campaign by holding Al Nahda to a goalless draw at Ibri Sports Complex. **DHOFAR, SAMAYIL IN 5-ALL THRILLER** In Group One, Dhofar and Samayil produced the standout scoreline of the round at Nizwa Sports Complex. Their 5-5 draw accounted for almost half the goals scored across the six fixtures. Fanja secured their first victory of the competition with a 3-1 win over Al Nasr at Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher,

bouncing back from their defeat by Dhofar in the previous round. Thursday's fixtures had brought victories for Sur and Seeb. Sur edged Oman Club 2-1 at Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex to register a second successive win following their comeback against Samayil. At Sohar Sports Complex, Axel Meye scored all three goals as Seeb defeated Sohar 3-1. The striker opened the scoring in the 11th minute before Ibrahim al Ruqadi equalised in the 28th. Meye struck again in the 70th and 87th minutes to complete his hat-trick and secure Seeb's third consecutive victory, taking their tally to 10 points from four matches.



Egypt were crowned champions after defeating Saudi Arabia 5-3 in the final.

EGYPT CROWNED OMAN SKATE BALL CHAMPIONS

Saudi Arabia finish runners-up, UAE take third; Oman end fourth

AHMED AL KAABI  
MUSCAT, SEPT 26

**EGYPT** were crowned champions of the Oman Skate Ball Tournament 2026 after defeating Saudi Arabia 5-3 in the final at the Ibri Sports Club Indoor Hall on Friday.

The closing ceremony was held under the auspices of Shaikh Mohammed bin Said al Qatabi, member of the State Council, in the presence of Dr Ahmed Hassan Taelib, President of the World Skate Ball Federation; Eng Faisal bin Mubarak al Dosari, Vice-President of the federation; and Eng Saud bin Nasser al Aufi, Chairman of the Oman Skating Sports Committee.

Members of the Municipal Council, officials and a large crowd also attended the final-stage matches featuring Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the UAE and hosts Oman.

Egypt secured the title after a strong performance against Saudi Arabia in the final. The eventual champions had earlier edged Oman 7-6 in one of the tournament's closest and most exciting encounters.

The UAE defeated Oman 4-2 to secure third place, while the hosts completed their campaign in fourth following a competitive run that included several strong performances.

The final standings saw Egypt take first place, Saudi Arabia finish second and the UAE claim third. Oman's fourth-place finish reflected a commendable campaign against teams representing different international playing styles.

In the individual awards, Egypt's Omar



The three-day tournament brought together more than 100 players representing 10 countries and featured competitive matches marked by high technical standards.

al Afghani was named the tournament's best player, while Oman's Majdi al Balushi received the best goalkeeper award. Saudi Arabia's Mahdi al Zahrani finished as the tournament's leading scorer.

Dr Taelib praised the standard of the 2026 tournament and the quality of its preparation and execution, saying the organisation demonstrated a high level of professionalism throughout the different stages of the event.

He commended the Oman Skating Sports Committee, organising committees, volunteers and working teams for their efforts. He also highlighted the warm reception and quality of services provided to the participating delegations.

Dr Taelib said Oman had presented an exemplary model for hosting international sporting events and expressed hope that the tournament's success would further strengthen the Sultanate of Oman's presence on the international skate ball map.

The three-day tournament brought together more than 100 players representing 10 countries and featured competitive matches marked by high technical standards.

At the conclusion of the ceremony, Shaikh Mohammed al Qatbi honoured the top three teams, individual award winners, and government and private organisations and individuals who contributed to the success of the tournament.

Goals flow as Seeb, Sur and Fanja claim Sohar Intl Cup wins

# BUSINESS

## SHORT TAKES



Improving the business environment would give the private sector greater scope to invest and expand.

## Oman maps out plan to lift non-oil trade

**MUSCAT:** The Sultanate of Oman is developing an integrated strategy to improve its business environment, expand domestic production and strengthen the country’s non-oil trade balance, a senior government official said.

The initiative follows Royal directives from His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to launch a national programme aimed at making the business environment more attractive to investors and formulate a long-term plan for accelerating non-oil trade growth.

Ghalib bin Said al Maamari, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion for Commerce and Industry, said the two directives would support Oman’s competitiveness, improve government services and broaden the country’s production and export base.

Improving the business environment would give the private sector greater scope to invest and expand, while developing industry and strengthening In-Country Value would make Omani products more competitive in international markets, he said.

The National Programme to Enhance the Investment-Attracting Business Environment will cover the entire lifecycle of economic activity, including company formation, registration, licensing, permits, approvals, operations, expansion and import and export procedures.

It will also seek to improve coordination among government bodies by connecting digital platforms, sharing data and integrating common approvals and procedures.

Government bodies would reduce repeated requests for documents and information already held by other entities.

Al Maamari said the programme would simplify procedures, remove unnecessary requirements and introduce interconnected digital services, reducing the time and cost of completing government transactions.

# Oman awards OQEP three exploration blocks

**THE** Sultanate of Oman has signed three petroleum concession agreements with OQ Exploration and Production covering Blocks 36, 43A and 66, committing the state-owned company to exploration programmes valued at a minimum of \$56 million.

The agreements are intended to expand hydrocarbon exploration, develop oil and gas reserves and support the sustainability of production and energy supplies.

They were signed by Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals, on behalf of the government; and Eng Mahmoud bin Abdullah al Hashmi, Chief Executive Officer of OQ Exploration and Production, on behalf of the company.

OQEP will hold a 100-per-cent interest in the three concession areas and assume full responsibility for their operation and management.

The agreements provide for an initial three-year exploration period that can be extended for another three years. If commercial discoveries are declared, production concessions could be granted for up to 25 years.

The three blocks cover more than 30,000 square kilometres.

Exploration programmes will include geological and geophysical surveys, specialised studies and the drilling of exploration wells.

Block 36, in southwestern Oman, covers about 18,557 square kilometres and has shown signs of hydrocarbons during previous exploration campaigns, although it is located some distance from major oil and gas pipeline networks.

Its work programme carries a minimum commitment of \$20 million and will focus on exploration, appraisal and testing the area’s hydrocarbon potential.

Block 43A, in northwestern Oman, covers about 6,920 square

The three blocks cover more than 30,000 square kilometres. Exploration programmes will include geological and geophysical surveys, specialised studies and the drilling of exploration wells. Block 36, in southwestern Oman, covers about 18,557 square kilometres and has shown signs of hydrocarbons during previous exploration campaigns, although it is located some distance from major oil and gas pipeline networks.



The agreements are intended to expand hydrocarbon exploration, develop oil and gas reserves and support the sustainability of production and energy supplies.

kilometres. Preliminary data have indicated prospects that warrant further exploration and appraisal. OQEP will spend at least \$20 million on surveys, specialised studies and exploration drilling in the block.

Block 66 covers about 4,898 square kilometres in west-central Oman and represents an extension of geological formations discovered and developed in neighbouring areas. It also forms part of exploration activity in the Rub Al Khali salt basin.

Its minimum work commitment is \$16 million, covering further geological assessment and the drilling of exploration wells.

Al Aufi said the agreements would support Oman’s plans to expand exploration and develop oil and gas reserves, strengthening production sustainability and energy security.

Awarding the blocks to OQEP reflected confidence in the national company’s operating capabilities and experience, he said.

The exploration programmes will use geophysical surveying, data analysis and geological modelling technologies to improve exploration efficiency and resource assessment.

Al Aufi said the agreements could generate economic activity beyond the addition of new reserves by stimulating demand for drilling, engineering, technical and logistics services.

They are also expected to create opportunities for Omani companies, strengthen domestic supply chains, increase In-Country Value and support the development of national talent.

Al Hashmi said the agreements represented an important step in OQEP’s growth and portfolio expansion and would strengthen the company’s presence in Oman’s exploration and production sector.

The company would use its technical capabilities and national expertise to support the sustainability of the sector and generate long-term value for Oman, he added. — ONA

# Al Khuwair Downtown nears next phase as 50-plus firms show interest

**QASIM AL MAASHANI**  
MUSCAT, SEPT 26

More than 50 investment companies have shown interest in participating in the development of Al Khuwair Downtown, Minister of Housing and Urban Planning Dr Khalfan bin Said al Shueili told Asharq Bloomberg in London on Thursday.

The companies include investors from Oman, other GCC states, the wider Arab world and international markets, according to the minister.

In a separate London interview during the Live Oman investment showcase, Al Shueili said he expected the project to be launched “in a major way” in the coming weeks and said more than 50 companies were competing for opportunities.

The ministry has not disclosed what that launch will involve. It has also not said how participation by the companies will be structured, including whether opportunities cover individual development parcels, groups of assets or broader development packages.

That distinction will determine how private capital enters the project.

The ministry’s published investment framework provides for state-led land and infrastructure delivery, followed by the phased release of development parcels across residential, office, hospitality, retail



The Al Khuwair Downtown plan provides for six hotels with about 2,200 rooms, Class-A offices intended for government entities, regional headquarters and multinational companies.

and mixed-use assets.

Its current Live Oman project page lists “total investment” at RO 500.5 million, alongside a total area of 1.6 million square metres, more than 7,500 units and more than 18,000 jobs.

The published figure does not specify on the page how the RO 500.5 million is divided between public infrastructure and private development.

The plan provides for six hotels with about 2,200 rooms, Class-A offices intended for government entities, regional headquarters

and multinational companies; and towers reaching up to 180 metres.

The masterplan was produced by Zaha Hadid Architects. It provides for a mixed-use waterfront district combining housing, offices, hotels, retail, healthcare, cultural facilities and public space, together with marinas, beaches and a canal waterfront. Planned mobility infrastructure includes light rail, bus rapid transit, water taxis and cycling networks.

The project has already moved through several preparatory investment and procurement steps.

Tender Board records show that the ministry issued two international tenders in May 2025 for the design and construction of marina infrastructure at Al Khuwair Downtown. One covers the breakwater, while the second covers other marina infrastructure works. The tender records establish that the packages were put to market but do not, on the pages reviewed, establish that contracts were subsequently awarded.

A further consultancy tender floated later in 2025 covered design review and construction supervision for marine infrastructure, including coastal protection, reclamation, the canal and locks and beach protection.

The international developer push accelerated this year. At MIPIM 2026 in

Cannes in March, the ministry signed a memorandum of understanding with Türkiye’s Artas Holding covering proposed investment of more than RO 150 million in Al Khuwair Downtown. A separate strategic cooperation agreement with OGCC Global was aimed at exploring development opportunities in the project.

Al Shueili told Asharq Bloomberg that Oman is preparing to launch a number of property projects in October, while some others could be pushed into early next year. The comments form part of a broader government effort to attract both developers and foreign property buyers.

Attention will now turn to Urban October 2026, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning’s conference and exhibition at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre from October 5 to 8.

The ministry’s official programme lists Al Khuwair Downtown among its strategic initiatives, alongside Sultan Haitham City, A’Thuraya City, Al Jabal Al Aali, Salalah Future City and integrated residential neighbourhoods. The ministry has not said that the forthcoming Al Khuwair launch will take place during the event.

The next announcement is expected to clarify what opportunities will be released first, whether developers have been shortlisted and when private development on the site will begin.

ADVERTORIALS

SHORTTAKES



Osamah bin Mahmoud al Abdullatif, Deputy General Manager for Project Finance & International Branches at Bank Muscat, received the award on behalf of the Bank.

Three years in a row: Bank Muscat retains best performing company listed on MSX

**MUSCAT:** Reaffirming its leadership and distinguished position in the banking sector, Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, has been recognised with the “Best Performing Companies” Award in the Large-Cap Companies category for the third consecutive year at the 2026 Alam Al Iktisaad Wal A'mal Awards. Organised annually by the magazine, the awards recognise outstanding companies listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX). The awards ceremony was recently held under the auspices of Shaikh Dr Ali bin Masoud al Sunaidi, Adviser at the Diwan of Royal Court and attended by a number of officials, CEOs, business leaders, representatives of public joint-stock companies and various private-sector institutions.

Osamah bin Mahmoud al Abdullatif, Deputy General Manager for Project Finance & International Branches at Bank Muscat, received the award on behalf of the Bank. The recognition marks another addition to Bank Muscat’s continued achievements and reflects its outstanding performance, leading position in the banking sector, ability to achieve sustainable growth and commitment to creating value for its various stakeholders.

The award also demonstrates the success of the Bank’s strategy to develop its business and continue investing across key areas, including digital transformation, innovation, customer experience and human capital development, alongside its active contribution to Oman’s economic and social development.

Osamah bin Mahmoud al Abdullatif, Deputy General Manager for Project Finance & International Branches at Bank Muscat, said: “We are delighted to once again receive this prestigious award, which recognises the strong performance that Bank Muscat continues to deliver and reflects the success of its strategy in consolidating its leadership position in the banking sector.

We are proud of this achievement, which is the result of the continuous efforts of our team and the support and trust we receive from our customers, shareholders and partners. We will continue working towards sustainable growth, developing our banking services and solutions; and investing in innovation and digital transformation to further enhance customer experience and create sustainable value across our various products and services”.

Mohsin Automobiles appointed as XPENG’s authorised distributor in Oman

**MUSCAT:** Mohsin Automobiles LLC has signed a strategic distribution agreement with XPENG, the global technology company focused on intelligent new energy vehicle mobility, officially appointing Mohsin Automobiles LLC as the authorised distributor of XPENG vehicles in the Sultanate of Oman. The agreement was signed on Thursday by Mohsin bin Hani al Bahrani, Chief Executive Officer of Mohsin Automobiles LLC, and Ke Wang, General Manager MEA in the presence of senior representatives from both organisations, invited dignitaries, business partners and members of the media.

The partnership marks XPENG’s official entry into Oman and represents a significant step in bringing a new generation of intelligent, sustainable and technology-driven mobility to the local market. Built around the belief that



The agreement was signed by Mohsin bin Hani al Bahrani and Ke Wang.

technology will transform the future of mobility, XPENG positions itself as an “Explorer of Future Mobility”. The company describes itself as a technology company at heart, combining in-house engineering, New Energy Vehicle technology

and intelligent systems to create new ways for people to experience mobility. Under the agreement, Mohsin Automobiles LLC will develop a comprehensive sales and after-sales network for XPENG in Oman.

BYD Oman launches new ownership campaign

**OMAN'S** automotive landscape is shifting into a new gear as BYD launches its latest ownership campaign, “Electric Today. Endless Possibilities”.Running from August 17 to October 17, 2026, the campaign brings together an expanded model range with a package of value-driven benefits, reinforcing BYD’s position at the forefront of new energy vehicle technology across the Sultanate of Oman.

Customers purchasing through the promotion can look forward to special pricing across the lineup, along with a suite of complimentary extras built around long-term peace of mind.

Every eligible retail purchase comes with one year of free insurance through Liva Insurance, a free scheduled service package and a complimentary EV charger.

Buyers can choose selected models to finance their vehicle through Oman Arab Bank can also benefit from two months of complimentary instalments, subject to the bank’s approval.

OAB offer only for limited models. All vehicles remain backed by BYD’s industry-leading protection: a 6-year or 150,000 km vehicle warranty and an 8-year or 200,000 km battery warranty, whichever comes first in each case (Terms & Conditions Apply). At the heart of the campaign sits a lineup built to suit nearly every kind of driver.

Leading the way are two of BYD’s newest Super Hybrid Icons, the all-new Sealion 5 DM-i and the Seal 6 DM-i. The Sealion 5 DM-i brings the brand’s “Ocean X” design



The campaign brings together an expanded model range with a package of value-driven benefits.

philosophy to a full-sized SUV format, wrapped around a roomy, passenger-focused interior, while the Seal 6 DM-i pairs a sculpted, aerodynamic profile with ventilated power seats for a more elevated driving feel. Sitting above them is the flagship ATTO 8, a seven-seat luxury SUV producing 480 hp and equipped with intelligent all-wheel drive and built-in massage seating.

Buyers drawn to hybrid efficiency will find the SEAL 7 DM-i particularly compelling, with a combined range reaching up to 850 km inside a refined, ocean-themed cabin. The line-up’s efficiency credentials continue with the Qin Plus DM-i, capable

of covering up to 990 km on a single tank-and-charge combination and the Song Plus DM-i, which rounds out its practicality with a 360-degree camera system and a signature 15.6-inch rotatable infotainment display. For those who need more rugged capability, the Shark 6 hybrid pickup adds Vehicle-to-Load (V2L) functionality to the mix, while the fully electric ATTO 3 offers the added confidence of BYD’s Blade Battery technology. BYD is inviting customers across the Sultanate of Oman to visit their nearest showroom and experience the range in person, discovering firsthand how each model blends design, performance and technology.

Sohar Intl exports Omani creativity in New York

**MUSCAT:** Exporting the best of Oman to the world, Sohar International presented a landmark Omani Art Exhibition at Rockefeller Centre in New York, creating an international platform to showcase the Sultanate of Oman’s rich cultural identity and contemporary creative expression.

Held on September 18 and 21, 2026, the exhibition featured the works of three Omani artists — Amjad al Siyabi, Waleed al Yaqoobi and Fahad al Maamari — bringing their distinctive interpretations of Oman’s heritage, identity and evolving creative landscape to audiences in one of the world’s most influential cultural and commercial destinations.

The exhibition was inaugurated under the auspice of Ambassador Omar bin Said al Kathiri, Permanent Representative of the Sultanate of Oman to the United Nations, in the presence of Abdulwahid bin Mohamed al Murshidi, Chief Executive Officer of Sohar International. This was followed by a special showcase on the second day



The exhibition featured the works of three Omani artists — Amjad al Siyabi, Waleed al Yaqoobi and Fahad al Maamari.

under the auspices of Ambassador Talal bin Sulaiman bin Habib al Rahbi, Oman’s Ambassador to the United States of America, further underscoring the significance of the initiative in strengthening Oman’s cultural presence and engagement with international audiences.

Abdulwahid bin Mohamed al Murshidi, CEO of Sohar International, said: “As Sohar

International strengthens its connections with the world, we want that presence to create greater opportunities for Oman and its people. Bringing Omani artists to New York is an expression of that ambition — providing national talent with an international platform while sharing a contemporary story of Oman with global audiences. Our artists carry with them our heritage, identity and creativity and we are proud to support their journey beyond our borders. This reflects our wider commitment to connecting Omani ambition with global opportunity and contributing to the aspirations of Oman Vision 2040”. The exhibition brought together three distinctive perspectives on contemporary Omani art. Amjad al Siyabi’s works explore identity and nature, while Fahad al Maamari draws on traditional narratives through modern artistic techniques. Waleed al Yaqoobi’s work bridges local symbolism with contemporary global expression.

SHORTTAKES



The two additions will bring the company's dry bulk segment to 18 owned vessels, with a combined carrying capacity of more than 3 million DWT.

Asyad Shipping takes delivery of first of two Kamsarmax bulk carriers

BALARAB AL TAMIMI  
MUSCAT, SEPT 26

Asyad Shipping Company has taken delivery of Ain Al Sarooj, the first of two Kamsarmax dry bulk carriers it agreed to buy earlier this year and the vessel has gone straight into a one-year time charter. In a disclosure to the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX), publicly traded Asyad Shipping announced that the vessel would contribute to its revenue immediately.

Its sister vessel, Ain Al Thawarah, is expected to be delivered by the end of November 2026. It has already secured employment under a two-year time charter, the company said.

Asyad Shipping signed the agreement to buy the two second-hand vessels on April 22, 2026, for a total consideration of approximately RO 28 million. Both were built in 2023 and each has a capacity of 85,000 deadweight tonnes DWT.

Dr Ibrahim al Nadhairi, Chief Executive Officer of Asyad Shipping, said the two additions would bring the company's dry bulk segment to 18 owned vessels, with a combined carrying capacity of more than 3 million DWT.

"This owned fleet is further supplemented by vessels chartered in from the market", he said. Al Nadhairi said the dry bulk fleet includes VLOC, Newcastlemax, Baby-Cape, Kamsarmax and Ultramax vessels. He described it as one of the largest and most diverse in the region, and said the mix allows the company "to serve our customers and establish our global presence".

Asyad Shipping has operated for more than 20 years. It runs a fleet of about 90 vessels across five segments (crude, dry bulk, gas, liner and products) and serves more than 60 countries, according to the company.

Transport project spending tops **₹188m**

THE development spending by the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology exceeded RO 188 million during the first nine months of 2026, with road projects accounting for the largest share.

Fahd bin Salim al Hinai, Director-General of Administrative and Financial Affairs at the ministry, said road projects received 68 per cent of the approved funds.

Spending on the Sultan Faisal bin Turki Road project in Musandam Governorate, covering the Dibba-Khasab route and the Lima link, exceeded RO 32 million.

The dualisation of the Adam-Thamrait section of Sultan Said bin Taimur Road received RO 24 million, while expenditure on the Al Mughsail Bridge dualisation project reached RO 9 million.

The ministry also spent about RO 8 million repairing damage caused by adverse weather during 2026, Al Hinai said. Other expenditure covered development projects in the Al Mouj area and along November 18 Street, airport developments and projects transferred to the ministry by other government bodies.

Al Hinai said the ministry was directing financial resources towards priority development schemes while seeking to improve the management of liquidity, financial obligations and payments to contractors, suppliers and other beneficiaries.

Revenue collected by the ministry reached about RO 29.09



Spending on the Sultan Faisal bin Turki Road project in Musandam Governorate, covering the Dibba-Khasab route and the Lima link, exceeded RO 32 million.

million in the first seven months of 2026, an increase of more than RO 3.48 million from the corresponding period of 2025.

The ministry has introduced administrative, financial, digital and human resources initiatives aimed at improving resource utilisation and institutional performance.

Al Hinai said work was continuing to strengthen financial governance, improve spending efficiency and digitise procedures to accelerate financial transactions supporting development and strategic projects.

About 60 per cent of work to classify bank guarantees associated with projects has been completed. These include performance bonds, advance-payment guarantees and insurance policies.

The ministry has also completed 65 per cent of a project to archive development documents held in its storage facilities, improving record management and document retrieval.

The Directorate-General of Administrative and Financial Affairs is working with the ministry's digital transformation team to automate disbursement procedures for development projects.

The initiative is intended to simplify procedures, shorten documentation cycles and improve the speed, accuracy and monitoring of financial transactions.

The ministry's 2026 executive plan focuses on strengthening resource allocation, supporting financial sustainability, rationalising public spending, increasing revenue and developing institutional and individual performance indicators.

Al Hinai said the ministry had met its 2026 recruitment target. It appointed 79 employees to permanent positions and recruited 33 under project contracts, while 475 employees on share-based contracts were regularised. A further 18 employees were appointed to supervisory positions.

The ministry will continue investing in talent, partnerships and innovative solutions while expanding its use of digital systems to improve administrative and financial performance, the Director-General added. — ONA

OIA eyes new markets as Oman leverages Belt and Road connectivity

CONRAD PRABHU  
MUSCAT, SEPT 26

Oman Investment Authority (OIA) is seeking to harness Oman's strategic location, international investment portfolio and expanding network of global partnerships to capture new market opportunities along and beyond China's Belt and Road Initiative.

Muneer bin Ali bin Nasser al Muneeri, Deputy President of Oman Investment Authority for Operations, outlined the strategy during a session titled "Exploring New Market Opportunities Along the Belt and Road and Beyond" at the Belt and Road Summit 2026 in Hong Kong. The session focused particularly on opportunities emerging across the Middle East and Africa amid shifts in the global business landscape.

Al Muneeri highlighted Oman's



Muneer bin Ali bin Nasser al Muneeri, Deputy President of Oman Investment Authority for Operations.

geographical position at the crossroads of Asia, the Middle East and Africa, supported by the ports of Suhar, Salalah and Al Duqm and infrastructure outside the Strait

of Hormuz, as a key competitive advantage. Some Omani ports have recorded traffic growth of up to 100 per cent, he noted, underscoring their growing potential to support resilient international trade and supply chains.

At the same time, OIA is using its international investments to help Omani companies gain access to capital, technologies, expertise, global networks and international markets. Around two-thirds of OIA's investments are allocated within Oman, while the remainder is invested internationally across more than 50 countries, according to Al Muneeri.

Diversification across markets, partners and supply chains is also central to OIA's approach to navigating geopolitical shifts while maintaining commercial and investment viability, he said.

The next phase will increasingly

focus on long-term strategic partnerships that build domestic capabilities and connect markets. OIA currently has around 40 joint investment funds spanning different geographies, helping broaden its international partnerships and investment reach.

China is emerging as an important component of this strategy, particularly in new energy, advanced industries and digital infrastructure. Al Muneeri pointed to strengthened partnerships involving the Templewater Energy Transition Fund, IDG Oman, ewpartners Oman and New Momentum.

OIA's strategy was further illustrated during the Hong Kong summit by an agreement under which it will commit 25 per cent of the capital of the Templewater Innovation Fund, while 50 per cent of the fund's overall capital

will be allocated to investments in Oman. The arrangement is designed to connect Chinese and Hong Kong technology and industrial capabilities with opportunities in the Sultanate of Oman.

The initiative forms part of OIA's wider "Omani Angle" approach, under which overseas investments are expected to deliver benefits beyond financial returns by attracting investment, technology and expertise to Oman while opening international markets to Omani businesses.

Al Muneeri said China's technological and industrial strengths complement the Middle East's capital and energy resources, as well as Africa's markets, resources and growth potential - creating scope for partnerships that extend well beyond the traditional geographical boundaries of the Belt and Road.

ENERGY CRISIS

EU urges action as energy prices rise



The European Union faces an energy price crisis stemming from supply disruptions linked to the Iran war, Energy Commissioner Dan Jorgensen said. He urged member states to prepare for winter by maintaining gas storage injections and considering measures to curb gas and electricity demand.

Jorgensen said the bloc was better prepared than during the 2021 supply crisis. — ONA

CONSUMER CONFIDENCE

US sentiment falls to four-month low



US consumer sentiment fell to a four-month low in September as households grew increasingly concerned about inflation and purchasing power.

The University of Michigan's index dropped to 48.1 from 51.7 in August, leaving it 15 per cent below January levels. One-year inflation expectations climbed to 4.6 per cent, while consumers also reported weaker personal financial prospects. — Reuters

IPO PLANS

Solidigm weighs \$150 bn US listing



SK Hynix's Solidigm is considering a US initial public offering as early as next year that could value the chipmaker at up to \$150 billion, sources said.

The company could raise about \$15 billion and has held talks with investment banks. The potential listing comes amid strong investor demand for semiconductor companies benefiting from expanding artificial intelligence infrastructure spending. — Reuters

OPINION

The impact of local content on Oman’s economic development



DR HILAL  
AL SAWAI

The writer is local content, sustainability and innovation expert

LOCAL content is much broader than purchasing a greater share of goods and services from the local market. It has the potential to develop different segments of the economy, including the labour market, industry, investment, research and innovation; and the national supply chain. Local content focuses on maximising the value added in the national economy from government expenditures, large projects and investments. It is about employing, contracting and procuring from Omanis, SMEs and the local industry. It is also about promoting and developing other functions such as research and training in the national industry.

**CREATING EMPLOYMENT AND TALENT DEVELOPMENT**  
Of all the different aspects of local content, employment is the easiest to measure. The focus, however, should be on the quality and value added by employment. One way to incentivise employment during the implementation of mega projects is for project companies to include training and capacity development in their contracts with subcontracting companies and service providers. Other employment-related targets should also be pursued, such as the establishment of graduate training programmes and other structured talent development programmes.

Beyond employment and talent development, the success of local content should be assessed based on the value added by employees to the national economy. Local content can assist companies to develop capabilities to compete for awards beyond a particular project. Local content policies can facilitate the development of firms to participate in the supply chain and become better positioned to compete for awards. Contract awards alone are not sufficient to develop local content. A combination of finance, technology and mentoring should be part of local content policies. Local content policies enhance supply chain capabilities. Also, the focus on local manufacturing raises the potential for forward and backward integration in the supply chain. With product demand, local manufacture of products currently imported is economically viable. Local manufacture of imported products strengthens the country’s economic base and lessens the economy’s reliance on imported products. Local content policies strengthen the economy by attracting investment to establish local manufacturing. Investment policies also play a key role in facilitating the economic development that local content policies aim to achieve. The aim of integration of policies should be to create strategic economic sectors and strengthen the economy through various means. This includes developing new

Local content focuses on maximising the value added in the national economy from government expenditures, large projects and investments. It is about employing, contracting and procuring from Omanis, SMEs and the local industry.

sectors such as green energy and advanced manufacturing. **FROM EXPENDITURE TO IMPACT**  
The next phase of local content development in Oman must move the measurement of impact to the centre of its activities. The key question must become “What impact did our activities create?” instead of “How much did we spend?”. There are multiple ways to answer the latter question. Local industries, businesses, and companies must assess the number of jobs created, small and medium enterprises (SMEs) established, local manufacturing, imports substitution, investment and other economic and developmental activities. Additionally, local content can integrate large scale economic activities and help achieve diversification of the economy and its growth in Oman. Accomplishing local content is not about limiting the flow of capital. Channelling resources to strategic areas of the economy helps build competitive edges. Ultimately, this can advance the position of the economy and enhance value addition, processing and exports. The real impact of local content will therefore be measured not simply by procurement percentages, but by the businesses created, skills developed, industries established and economic opportunities generated for future generations.

WHAT OMAN’S NEW TURBINES MUST LEARN FROM THE LANDSCAPE



NAJAH AL  
RIYAMI

The is writer a Media and Communication Master’s graduate

As wind farms expand in Oman, planning has to account for more than wind speed. The open landscapes that make some areas suitable for turbines are also used by birds and bats, whose movement patterns change with the seasons. That question is being examined at the Riyah 1 wind project in Dhofar. Its environmental assessment identifies birds and bats as wildlife that could be at risk of collision with operating

turbines. It considers a broad area around the project, including the wetlands at Nimr, about 30 kilometres away, which can attract birds in an otherwise arid landscape. The assessment draws on field surveys conducted at different times of the year. Visits included the autumn migration period in November and the summer season, when resident birds are breeding. Survey teams also used observation points to record bird flight activity, along with equipment to detect bats and cameras placed near areas that may attract wildlife. The work offers a close look at how environmental information can inform renewable energy planning. Identifying where wildlife may gather or travel can help guide project layout and ongoing monitoring as development proceeds. Oman is home to 518 bird species, according to the Environment Authority, including 12 species that are globally threatened. The figure reflects the range of birdlife that environmental studies may need to consider as new energy infrastructure is developed across the country. The Riyah assessment is part of a wider shift in how major projects are planned. OQ Alternative Energy and TotalEnergies have published environmental and social assessment documents for public review, with field studies prepared by environmental consultants. The process gives stakeholders a chance to examine the project information and submit feedback. The value of these studies will depend on how their findings shape decisions over time. Monitoring after turbines begin operating can help determine whether predicted risks emerge and whether further action is needed. For Oman’s wind sector, understanding the surrounding landscape is part of building renewable power responsibly.

Omanisation’s missing number that matters

THE number of Omanis in private-sector employment increased by almost 15,000 in the first eight months of 2026, while the expatriate workforce declined. What the headline figures do not reveal is how much of that change is occurring in technical, specialised and leadership positions. By the end of August, 445,799 Omanis were working in the private sector, compared with 430,913 at the end of 2025 — a net increase of 14,886. Over the same period, the expatriate private-sector workforce fell by 2,585 to 1,408,882. These are changes in employment stocks, not a count of who secured each newly created job. Hiring, departures and movement between employers occur simultaneously. That distinction is important because another Oman Vision 2040 indicator shows that Omanis accounted for 11.8 per cent of private-sector jobs created in 2024, up from 10.5 per cent in 2023. The two figures measure different things in different periods: one is the net change in people employed during 2026; the other is the Omani share of jobs created in 2024. Neither, however, answers a more structural question: what kinds of jobs are Omanis securing? Oman Vision 2040 has already anticipated this question. Its 2022–2023 report listed among its suggested indicators the percentage of Omanis in technical, specialised and leadership positions in the private sector as a share of all workers holding those jobs. The 2024–2025 Vision report continues to emphasise strengthening Omani capabilities in such positions. Yet a regular public reading of that suggested indicator is not among the main labour-market measures currently published. The closest measure is the share of skilled workers in total private-sector employment, which reached 56.6 per cent in 2024, from 56.2 per cent in 2023. But that figure covers Omanis and expatriates together. It



QASIM  
AL MAASHANI

The author is the head of the Business and Politics dept at Observer



By the end of August, 445,799 Omanis were working in the private sector.

tells us whether the private-sector workforce is becoming more skilled, not whether Omanis are taking a larger share of skilled work. Wage data provide another piece of the picture. NCSI’s Statistical Year Book 2026 records 374,903 insured Omanis in the private sector in 2025. The lowest band in its wage table, RO 325 to less than RO 400, alone contains 159,011 workers — 42.4 per cent of the total. The first three published bands, all below RO 600, account for 249,496 workers, or 66.5 per cent. The table labels the measure as basic wages, but its published distribution does not include a separate band below RO 325. It should therefore not be used to estimate how many workers are receiving the statutory minimum wage. Salary alone also cannot determine whether a job is skilled, productive or offers a strong career path. But the figures reinforce the case for looking beyond headcounts. Occupational data bring their own problem: job titles can change without a corresponding change in responsibility, skill or compensation. The safeguard is consistent classification backed by administrative data. The Labour Law issued by Royal Decree 53/2023 already provides much of that framework. Article 22 requires employers with 25 or more workers to use the Ministry of Labour’s approved occupational classification and to prepare plans for appointing and training Omanis

for leadership occupations. Article 25 requires employers to report newly created and vacant positions, including the comprehensive wage allocated to each and the intended date for filling them. It also requires workers in the establishment’s register to be classified by skill level and occupational group. Much of the information required to measure deeper Omanisation therefore already exists within the administrative system. NCSI and the Ministry of Labour should publish, at least annually and preferably quarterly, the Omani share of technical, specialised and leadership occupations, broken down by major economic sector. Wage bands could provide an additional cross-check, while the same series would show whether the occupational structure is changing over time. That would be particularly useful in 2026, when the national employment plan targets 33,000 opportunities for citizens in the private sector across manufacturing, energy, logistics, finance, technology, mining and other activities. Counting those opportunities matters. But as Oman seeks more value from advanced industries and knowledge-intensive services, another measure becomes increasingly important: Not only how many Omanis work in the private sector, but where they sit within its skills and responsibility structure.

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# Observer

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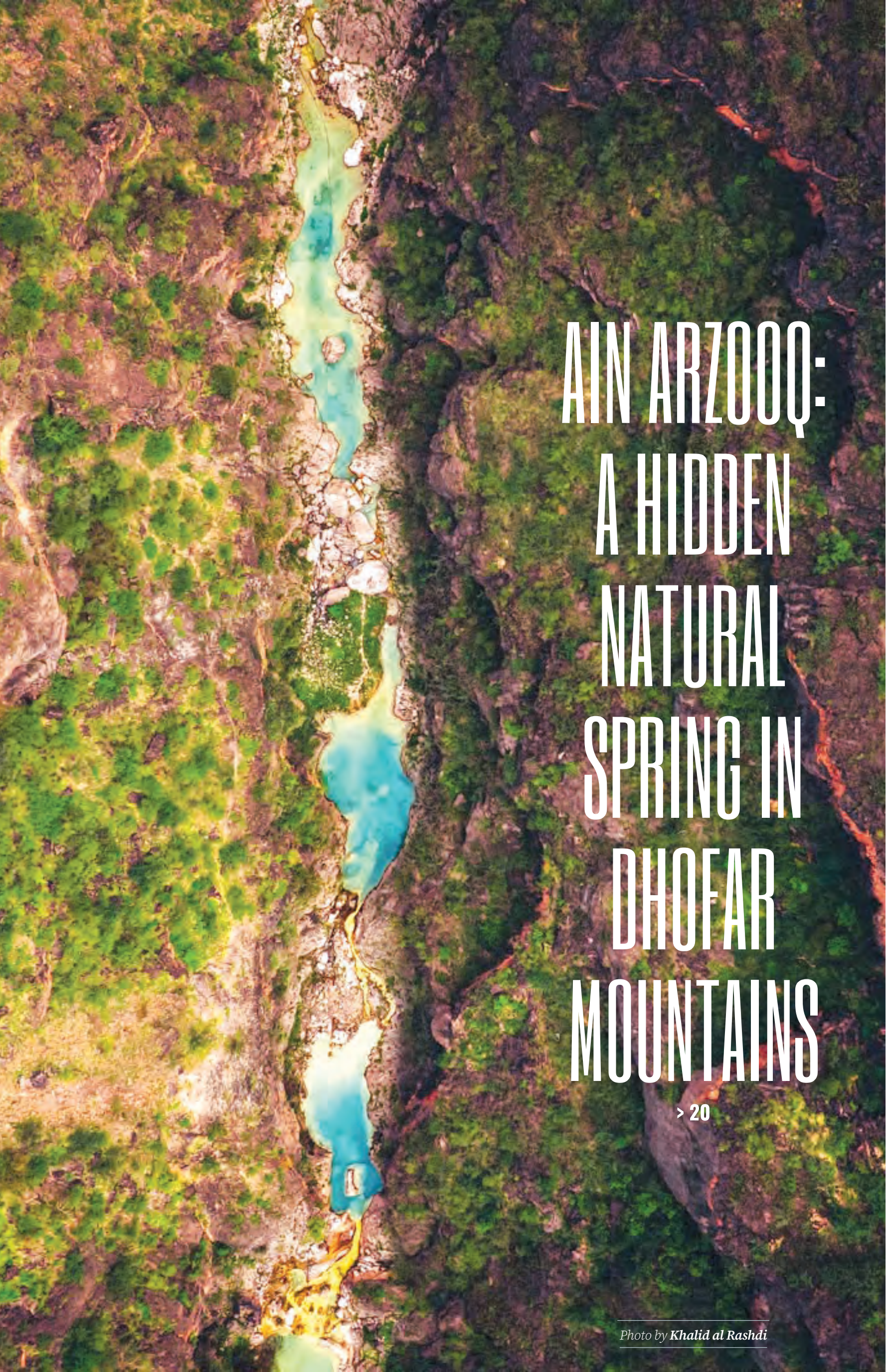
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# ART/LIFE



## AIN ARZOOQ: A HIDDEN NATURAL SPRING IN DHO FAR MOUNTAINS

> 20

Photo by **Khalid al Rashdi**

### GEM **RESTORATION**

#### BATTERED DUERER MASTERPIECE UP FOR FIVE-YEAR REVAMP



Albrecht Durer’s “Feast of the Rosary”, a Renaissance gem of Prague’s National Gallery, is facing a painstaking five-year reconstruction designed to set right five centuries of mistreatment and damage.

Experts have pointed out the poor condition of the colourful painting that the German master created for the San Bartolomeo church in Venice in 1506.

“Its state of preservation has been poor since the late sixteenth century”, University of Texas art historian Jeffrey Chipps Smith wrote in a 2007 review.

True to the Venetian technique, Durer used oil on poplar wood to depict the Virgin Mary holding a baby Jesus handing out rose garlands to believers including future Emperor Maximilian I and Pope Julius II.

But the material did not last and countless repairs and moves caused damage requiring an extensive revamp, National Gallery head Olga Kotkova said.

“People say paintings are an organism similar to people and when someone lives a reprehensible life, it is reflected in their faces”, she said.

“It’s similar with works of art”.

Also known as “The Feast of the Rose Garlands”, the painting will undergo scans to reveal “the tiniest details”, said Adam Pokorny, chief restorer at the National Gallery.

To map the composition of the painting, the gallery will use macro-XRF scanning employed in the ongoing reconstruction of Rembrandt’s “The Night Watch” by the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam.

“We are also planning to make a 3D model of the painting, which will be useful to understand the condition of the wooden base”, Pokorny told reporters.

The lost fly

A book published by the National Gallery on the 500th anniversary of the painting details its history.

Commissioned by the Confraternity of the Most Holy Rosary, a Catholic association sheltered by the Dominican order, the painting was praised widely and drew crowds of German worshippers to Venice.

It was carried on foot to Prague in 1606 when Holy Roman Emperor Rudolph II bought it for his collection.

It escaped looting by the Swedish army during the Thirty Years’ War but fell into oblivion as Rudolph’s collection was plundered.

Described as “completely destroyed” in an 18th-century inventory, the painting changed hands several times before ending up at the Strahov monastery near Prague Castle in 1793.

It underwent the first repair before the move to Prague, and other attempts followed, crowned by the efforts in 1839-1841 of Czech painter Johann Gruss, who was criticised for changing its surface and appearance. — AFP

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



#### FASHION

Model Laila Hasanovic poses before the Antonio Marras collection show as part of Women’s Spring/Summer 2027 Milan Fashion Week. — **AFP**



#### MEMORABILIA

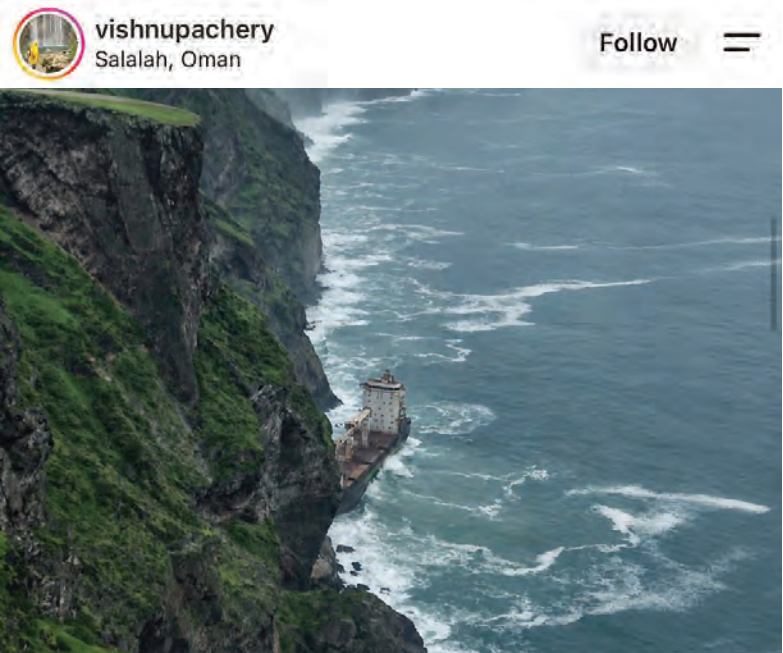
An autographed Takamine FP460SC acoustic guitar from OASIS guitarist Noel Gallagher, showcased at a preview by entertainment memorabilia auction house Propstore. — **AFP**



#### FILM FESTIVAL

US actor Brad Pitt poses during a photocall to promote the film “Heart of the Beast” during the 74th San Sebastian International Film Festival. — **AFP**

INSTA PICKS



The abandoned ship floating on Dhofar’s shores



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SHAKIRA TO END TOUR WITH 12 MADRID SHOWS



Shakira kicked off on Friday evening a marathon twelve-concert run in Madrid, bringing an end to both her world tour and the Colombian superstar’s eight-year absence from Spain. The 49-year-old “Hips Don’t Lie” and “Waka Waka (This Time For Africa)” singer took to a temporary 50,000-seater “Shakira stadium” erected in the south of the Spanish capital. This will go on up till October 11, according to events giant Live Nation. With no other European tour dates announced, Madrid’s authorities are expecting a significant economic windfall from her grand return, after welcoming fellow Hispanic superstar Bad Bunny in May and June for a series of 10 gigs. Shakira has not performed in Spain since 2018, several

years before her separation from former Spanish footballing great Gerard Pique was made public in 2022. She embarked on a world tour in February 2025 to promote “Las Mujeres Ya No Lloran” (Women no longer cry), an album inspired by her breakup with the legendary Barcelona defender which won her a fourth Grammy award. Across her decades-long career, Shakira has sold more than 95 million records worldwide and performed at both the opening ceremony and final of the 2026 Fifa World Cup. “Waka Waka (This Time For Africa)” was also the official song for the 2010 tournament in South Africa, the first time world football’s premiere showcase was held on the continent. — AFP

Fans, art lovers line up for Lucas museum



Aerial view of the Lucas Museum of Narrative Art as it opens to the public. — AFP



A Star Wars prop is displayed at the Lucas Museum of Narrative Art during its opening to the public in Los Angeles, California. — Reuters

**STAR** WARS superfans and art lovers alike descended on George Lucas’s long-awaited Museum of Narrative Art for its grand opening on Tuesday, lining up to experience the colossal structure that itself recalls a spaceship. The Los Angeles museum built by the 82-year-old “Star Wars” franchise creator alongside his wife and business partner Mellody Hobson is intended to be a “people’s temple of art”, according to its creators. The duo stood at the museum’s entrance as its first 100 visitors were invited in, shaking hands with each of them as they entered the biomorphic building. Eric Cheung, a dentist and realtor who arrived in a Star Wars X-wing pilot costume — a get-up featuring a bright orange jumpsuit and distinct combat helmet, like that worn by Luke Skywalker himself — said he was quick to become a museum member and even trained as a volunteer. “Each art piece tells a story”, he said of the museum’s intentions. “Everybody can look at the same thing and then we can create different stories”. The museum was built on



A visitor poses with R2-D2, droid from the Star Wars franchise, wearing a staff badge as it welcomes people at the Lucas Museum of Narrative Art. — AFP

The Los Angeles museum built by the 82-year-old ‘Star Wars’ franchise creator alongside his wife and business partner Mellody Hobson is intended to be a “people’s temple of art”, according to its creators

what used to be a parking lot next to the University of Southern California, the filmmaker’s alma mater. For Brenda Chambliss, a resident of the area in south Los Angeles for more than a decade, it “means everything” that Lucas put the museum in the neighbourhood. The area can carry a “stigma” tied to crime or poverty she said and the

“breathtaking” building filled with art is a positive new attraction, not least for its surrounding park that’s open to the public without a ticket. ‘HELP LOCAL ARTISTS’ At the entrance, visitors are greeted by the yellow Naboo N-1 starfighter from “Star Wars: Episode I – The Phantom Menace” (1999), but with more than 9,300 square meters of exhibition space, the offerings go far beyond the beloved saga. Its more than 30 galleries feature works by artists including Banksy, Frida Kahlo, Jacob Lawrence, Charles White and Robert Colescott; comics by Winsor McCay, Jack Kirby and Frank Frazetta; and illustrations by Norman Rockwell, Jessie Willcox Smith and NC. Wyeth. “I really love that Lucas is using his platform to bring other artists together”, Sandi Granados said in the gift shop, where she was purchasing a trippy, colourful print of a Darth Vader flanked by stormtroopers. “It’s not just for him”, said the 30-year-old cosmetologist who works in the film industry. “He’s using his name to help local artists and big artists come together”. — AFP

FEATURES



The landscape surrounding Ain Arzooq reflects the close connection between water, vegetation and mountain life in Dhofar. Photos by **Khalid al Rashdi**

# AIN ARZOOQ: A HIDDEN NATURAL SPRING IN DHOFAR MOUNTAINS

ARWA AL HASHIMI

**TUCKED** away in the mountainous landscape of Dhofar, Ain Arzooq is one of the governorate’s lesser-known natural springs — a place where water, rugged terrain and generations of local memory come together.

Located in the Adonub area of the Wilayat of Salalah, Ain Arzooq forms part of Dhofar’s network of natural springs, which have long been valuable water resources for communities living across the governorate’s mountains and valleys.

Unlike some of Salalah’s better-known springs, Ain Arzooq remains relatively secluded. Its setting offers a glimpse of a quieter side of Dhofar, away from the more frequented tourist destinations and surrounded by the distinctive landscape of the governorate’s mountains.

The importance of the spring has also been recognised through recent water-resource conservation efforts. In 2025, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources included Ain Arzooq among 12 natural springs in Dhofar covered by rehabilitation and maintenance projects aimed at conserving water resources and supporting their long-term sustainability.

Such water sources are not only part of the governorate’s natural environment, but also represent resources that require careful management and protection, particularly in areas where water, vegetation and traditional ways of life



Ain Arzooq emerges amidst Dhofar’s rugged mountainous landscape, offering a secluded glimpse of the governorate’s natural beauty.

*Ain Arzooq offers a quieter glimpse of Dhofar, where natural springs, rugged mountains and generations of local memory come together, highlighting the importance of preserving the governorate’s water resources, landscapes and heritage.*

have long been closely connected. Local accounts also reveal another dimension to Ain Arzooq. Descriptions of journeys through the surrounding mountains refer to eastern and western springs bearing the Arzooq name and to old mountain paths once used by people moving through the area. The terrain was challenging enough that local volunteers worked to improve access through parts of the mountains, illustrating the strong relationship between communities and this landscape.

Ain Arzooq has also drawn attention for the vegetation around it. Local writing about the area describes lemon trees growing in the valley overlooking the spring and has called for greater efforts to preserve the natural character of the site.

During Khareef Dhofar Season, when moisture from the monsoon transforms large parts of the governorate’s mountains and valleys, places such as Ain Arzooq become part of a wider landscape shaped by greenery, mist and seasonal water flows.

Yet the appeal of Ain Arzooq lies partly in the fact that it has not been transformed into a heavily developed destination. Its relative isolation gives the site an authenticity that is increasingly valuable as Dhofar’s tourism sector expands.

Any future development, therefore, presents both an opportunity and a responsibility. Improving safe access and maintaining the spring could help more people appreciate the site, but such efforts need to preserve its environmental character rather than overwhelm it with infrastructure.

Beyond its scenic appeal, Ain Arzooq tells a broader story about Dhofar, one of water emerging among mountains, communities adapting to difficult terrain and natural resources continuing to connect the present with the past.

As more visitors explore beyond Salalah’s familiar attractions, Ain Arzooq stands as a reminder that some of Dhofar’s most meaningful places are still found away from the crowds. Preserving them is not simply about creating new tourist destinations. It is about protecting the water, landscapes and local heritage that give Dhofar its distinctive identity.