

O M A N
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ARE MASS WEDDINGS
LOSING APPEAL?

4

INBRIEF

HM’S GREETINGS TO VIETNAM PRESIDENT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Luong Cuong of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam on his country’s National Day. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his heartfelt sentiments and best wishes of success to President Luong in achieving further accomplishments and aspirations that serve the people of his country. His Majesty also wished the bilateral relations of cooperation further progress and growth in all spheres.

HIS MAJESTY THE SULTAN’S AVIATION CUP FOR 2025



HH Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, pinned the flying wings to graduates of the Royal Air Force of Oman’s (RAFO) aviation course. The graduates successfully completed all training stages and various flying skills. HH Sayyid Shihab also presented the His Majesty the Sultan’s Cup for Aviation to Flying Officer Salim bin Ibrahim al Hamrashdi for achieving first place overall in the aviation course. **DETAILS ON P2**

BIDS FOR 4 MINING CONCESSION AREAS

The Ministry of Energy and Minerals has unveiled new investment opportunities in four concession areas, open for competition among local and international companies as part of the 2025 Mining Bidding Round. This initiative aligns with the ministry’s efforts to boost investment in the mining sector and increase its contribution to the national economy, in accordance with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040. The offered areas include four geologically promising sites in several governorates. **DETAILS ON P13**

Huge quake in Afghan village leaves no family untouched

NURGAL: No household was spared death or injury in the village of Wadir when a powerful earthquake shook eastern Afghanistan, reducing homes to piles of rubble. Aftershocks from the 6.0-magnitude earthquake continued to rumble across the scenes of destruction, where remains of dead livestock jutted out from a tangle of broken beams and muddy, flattened homes. “In every home at least one person was killed or injured,” 55-year-old resident Gul Mohammad

Rasooli said, himself injured. The smell of death mingled with the sound of wailing women and scraping shovels as rescuers and residents desperately tried to find anyone still alive. In front of what was a single-storey mud-brick home, rescuers were undeterred by a string of aftershocks that sent a din echoing between the mountains as they tried to find two children. Their mother had been injured, a rescue worker said, “and when



Injured Afghan children receive treatment at a hospital after an earthquake in Jalalabad on Monday. — **AFP**

we pulled her out she was calling out for her children”, who were still inside. Many families were asleep when the quake struck in the dead of the night. Every 15 minutes, the roar of a helicopter filled the air, with Taliban security personnel spilling out to unload bread and water and then refilling the aircraft with stretchers bearing those hurt worst. Men, women and children were ferried to hospitals in the nearest city, Jalalabad, capital of Nangarhar

province, around 40 km away. Many roads through the mountainous areas that were already difficult to navigate were rendered impassable by landslides. The grim toll of the earthquake started to become clear from the first hours after the earthquake, early on Monday. The country — regularly hit by natural disasters that are expected to multiply under the effects of climate change — has already counted more than 800 dead. **SEE ALSO P6**

Oman targets one million tourists annually from India

VINOD NAIR
MUSCAT, SEPT 1

The Sultanate of Oman is targeting one million tourists annually from India, said a top official of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism during the recently held workshop in Jaipur. Yousuf bin Khalaf al Mujaizi, assistant director, business development of the ministry, said: “We are investing in multi-channel

campaigns targeting luxury travel, weddings, MICE and adventure tourism.” He said India is a priority market due to cultural and economic ties and has a vast and diverse traveller base. The Sultanate of Oman received 246,663 tourists in the first five months of this year, while it received 623,623 Indian visitors in 2024, making it the second largest nationality to visit the country after UAE nationals.

It may be noted that the ministry had recently concluded promotional workshops in India, with the participation of 25 Omani tourism institutions. They met with 150 outbound travel companies from India to strengthen cooperation between Oman’s tourism sector and Indian tourism companies, and to attract targeted segments from the Indian market. The promotional workshops

recorded a notable presence from leading Indian tourism companies and representatives of the media, reflecting the growing interest in Omani tourism in the Indian market. The campaign also raised awareness of Oman’s tourism assets and highlighted its position as a fully integrated tourist destination, in addition to promoting the key services, facilities and products available in the tourism sector.

GCC nations call for end to Israeli aggression in Gaza

Council hails Oman’s role in facilitating US-Iran talks

THE Sultanate of Oman on Monday participated in the 165th session of the GCC Ministerial Council, held in the State of Kuwait. Oman’s delegation was headed by Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister. The meeting addressed the developments in joint Gulf action across political, economic, security, developmental and other fields. It also discussed other topics on the agenda. Several decisions were taken to enhance integration among GCC member states and reinforce regional security and stability, with an emphasis on the importance of dialogue and diplomacy as a strategic choice in addressing challenges. The Ministerial Council lauded the role undertaken by the Sultanate of Oman in facilitating dialogue between the United States of America and the Islamic Republic of Iran, stressing the importance of sustaining these efforts, alongside other international initiatives, to reduce tensions and avoid escalation in the region. As for the ongoing humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip, the council reiterated its call for an end to Israeli aggression, ensuring the protection of civilians, lifting the blockade, securing the unimpeded delivery of humanitarian aid, and the return of displaced people, in accordance with international legitimacy resolutions.



Oman’s delegation was headed by Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister

The council denounced the statements of Israeli prime minister and his government concerning violations of the sovereignty of some Arab countries, considering them a serious threat to regional and international security



Displaced Palestinians make their way as they flee amid an Israeli military operation, in Gaza City, on Monday. — **Reuters**

The council also denounced statements of Israeli prime minister and the government concerning violations of the sovereignty of some Arab countries, considering them a serious threat to regional and international security. Furthermore, the council affirmed its support for international efforts aimed at resolving the Russian-Ukrainian crisis, contributing to the

enhancement of international peace and security. **JOINT MEETING** The Sultanate of Oman participated in the second joint ministerial meeting of the strategic dialogue between the GCC foreign ministers and Takeshi Iwaya, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Japan, in the State of Kuwait. The Sultanate of Oman was represented at the meeting by Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy. **TURN TO P3**

OMAN

SHORT TAKES



Khalid bin Hilal al Maawali, Chairman of Majlis Ash'shura, holds talks with Ibrahima Seck, Senegal Ambassador

OMAN, SENEGAL STRENGTHEN PARLIAMENTARY TIES

MUSCAT: Khalid bin Hilal al Maawali, Chairman of Majlis Ash'shura, received Ibrahima Seck, Ambassador of the Republic of Senegal to Oman, at the Majlis Ash'shura headquarters on Monday.

During the meeting, the Chairman welcomed the Ambassador and praised the strong bilateral relations between Oman and Senegal. The discussions also covered regional issues and explored ways to address them through dialogue and peace. Both sides exchanged views on areas of mutual cooperation and discussed strategies to further enhance and develop these partnerships.



The War Course aims to prepare military and security leaders

NATIONAL DEFENCE AND WAR COURSES AT NDC

MUSCAT: National Defence College (NDC) at the Academy of Strategic and Defence Studies, Bait Al Falaj, on Sunday, inaugurated the 13th National Defence Course and the 1st War Course, under the auspices of Rear Admiral Ali bin Abdullah al Shidi, Commandant of the National Defence College.

The National Defence Course is designed to equip military and civilian leaders with the knowledge, skills and values necessary to assume strategic positions, contribute to policy formulation, and support informed decision-making.

Meanwhile, the War Course aims to prepare military and security leaders, fostering strategic thinking, innovation and operational creativity in the fields of security and defence. These courses underscore Oman's commitment to developing highly skilled leaders capable of addressing contemporary challenges in national security and defence strategy. — ONA

Oman TV’s Khareef Nights concludes

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, SEPT 1

Oman TV's popular summer programme Khareef Nights wrapped up its 2025 season on August 31 after a month of nightly broadcasts from Dhofar, the only part of the Arabian Peninsula that experiences the monsoon. The season transforms Dhofar's mountains into lush green hills under mist and drizzle, attracting hundreds of thousands of visitors each year.

Directed by Nawaf al Huraizi and produced by Mohammed bin Ahmed al Salimi al Mahri, the programme aired daily between 9 and 10 pm on Oman TV General and Oman TV Cultural.

Filmed live from Awdat al Madhi, a heritage village in Salalah celebrating traditional crafts, music and food, the show also moved weekly to diverse settings - from farmland to Bedouin tents - spotlighting the region's culture and hospitality.



Khareef Nights went live from Awdat al Madhi, a heritage village in Salalah

Al Huraizi noted that the aim was to capture the ‘full character of the Khareef’ by showcasing not only the unique climate but also the traditions and people of Dhofar. He stressed that the programme serves as a

SAYYID SHIHAB PINS FLYING WINGS, PRESENTS HM’S AVIATION CUP

MUSCAT: HH Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, pinned the flying wings to graduates of the Royal Air Force of Oman's (RAFO) aviation course.

The graduates successfully completed all training stages and various flying skills.

HH Sayyid Shihab also presented the His Majesty the Sultan's Cup for Aviation to Flying Officer Salim bin Ibrahim al Hamrashdi for achieving first place overall in the aviation course.

The ceremony was attended by Dr Mohammed bin Nasser al Zaabi, Secretary-General of the Ministry of Defence, Air Vice Marshal Khamis bin Hammad al Ghafri, Commander of the Royal Air Force of Oman, and a number of other senior officers from RAFO. — ONA



HH Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said pinned the flying wings to RAFO graduates of aviation course

Midday break ends, MoL reports few violations

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabiyousef

ONLY a few violations were reported as the midday break granted by the Ministry of Labour to those who work outside during the months of June, July and August ended, according to the ministry.

The ministry had instructed construction companies and other entities that have their employees exposed to the sun during work to allow their workers to rest from 12.30 pm to 3.30 pm during the 3 months. The law was introduced to save workers from physical discomfort and the directive came into effect from June 1.

Every year, the ministry instructs rest time in hot weather. “Last year, only a few violations of the midday break were reported in Muscat, thanks to awareness and monitoring efforts of the Ministry of Labour and other authorities,” said a senior official from the MoL.

The Ministry of Labour had intensified its efforts in monitoring the implementation of the ministerial decision regulating working hours during midday in the Governorate of Muscat as well as in other governorates. The ministry had also placed strong emphasis on awareness by conducting more than 450 awareness visits to various work sites.

The authorities have taken strong action against companies that did not allow rest time. Action has also been taken against companies that failed to provide facilities for rest



Some workers are calling for midday break be allowed in the coming weeks as the heat continues in the country.

The authorities have taken strong action against companies that did not allow rest time. Action has also been taken against companies that failed to provide facilities for rest.

At the same time, the ministry issued over 130 permits allowing companies that provide essential public services to continue operations during midday hours, in line with health and safety requirements that ensure worker protection.

These combined efforts have led to a significant decrease in the number of violations recorded in

Muscat, reflecting the commitment of employers to comply with the regulations and the ministry's role in providing a safe and healthy work environment that protects workers from heat stress risks.

Meanwhile, some workers are calling for extension in the coming weeks as the heat continues in the country. There are some companies that are continuing the exemption and continuing to allow midday rest. This is to protect the health of their employees. They will continue to change their working hours as usual.

TOUR PACKAGE SCAM DEFRAUDS HUNDREDS IN DHOFAR

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabiyousef

Several residents of Dhofar have fallen victim to a large-scale scam by a fraudulent travel and tourism agency that promised luxury holiday packages at bargain prices before fleeing with collected funds.

Individual losses reportedly range from RO 100 to more than RO 1,500. Victims, many of them families, were lured through raffle coupon counters set up outside supermarkets. Days later, they received congratulatory calls claiming to be among ‘5,000 selected families’ eligible for exclusive international tour offers.

Meetings were arranged at a well-known hotel, where the gang posed as a professional tour operator. Packages were presented as all-inclusive, covering flights, hotels and meals, with added perks such as gym memberships and children's activity vouchers.

However, the company's CR



details, addresses and office locations later proved to be fake.

The masterminds, identified as Radhakrishnan and his associate Saleena, are believed to have executed similar scams earlier in Bahrain and Sharjah. Victims have filed complaints with the Royal Oman Police for forgery and fraud.



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TURKISH VICTORY DAY



The Embassy of the Republic of Türkiye hosted a reception on Sunday at the Grand Hyatt Hotel to mark Victory Day. The ceremony was attended by senior officials, heads of diplomatic missions accredited to Oman, and representatives from the Foreign Ministry. The event highlighted the ongoing friendship and diplomatic ties between Oman and Türkiye. — ONA

GCC CALLS FOR
END TO ISRAELI
AGGRESSION

FROM PAGE 1
The meeting discussed means to enhance friendship and cooperation between the GCC states and Japan in various fields, particularly economic, trade, and investment domains. This aims to achieve common interests and support sustainable development efforts, in line with the implementation of the joint action plan signed between Japan and the GCC for the period from 2024 to 2028.

The ministers emphasised the importance of expanding horizons of cooperation in new and promising areas, such as renewable energy, petrochemical industries, technology and the logistics sector, and leveraging the advanced supply chains of Japan and the Gulf states to enrich long-term economic partnerships.

Regarding regional and international developments, the two sides addressed the latest updates and exchanged views on key issues, foremost among them the Palestinian cause and the catastrophic humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip resulting from the brutal Israeli aggression and refusal to withdraw from Palestinian territories, which hinders the establishment of an independent Palestinian state.

The GCC member states expressed appreciation for Japan's stance in support of resolving the Palestinian issue in accordance with international legitimacy resolutions, contributing to the consolidation of security and stability in the region and reflecting Japan's commitment to supporting just causes on the international stage.

The meeting was chaired by Abdullah Ali al Yahya, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the State of Kuwait, and the current president of the Ministerial Council session, in the presence of the GCC Secretary-General. — ONA

OMAN AND JAPAN BACK TWO-STATE SOLUTION

KUWAIT: Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, held a bilateral meeting on Monday with Takeshi Iwaya, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Japan.

The meeting took place on the sidelines of the second joint ministerial meeting of the strategic dialogue between the GCC Foreign Ministers and the Japanese Foreign Minister.

During the meeting, the two sides discussed aspects of bilateral cooperation between the two friendly countries and ways to enhance it across various fields, particularly in economic, trade and investment sectors, in a manner that strengthens the existing partnership and serves the common interests



Sayyid Badr holds talks with Takeshi Iwaya

of both nations. The two sides affirmed their shared stance on the importance of finding a permanent and just solution to the Palestinian issue, ending the humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip, and supporting the two-state solution in accordance with relevant international resolutions. They underlined the necessity of respecting international law and ensuring the protection of civilians.

The two ministers also exchanged views on a number of regional and international issues of mutual interest and reiterated their commitment to sustaining coordination and baking all efforts towards enhancing regional security and stability. — ONA

Panel set up to integrate
AI into school curriculam

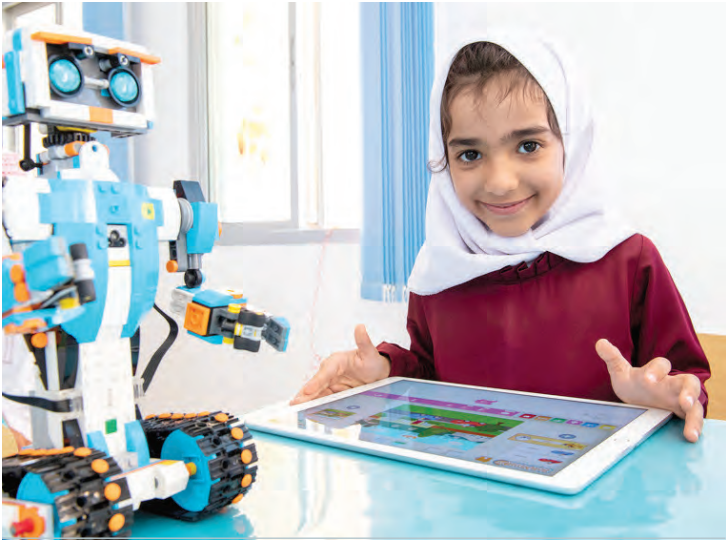
AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, SEPT 1

OMAN is fast-tracking its national agenda for comprehensive development, placing the education sector at the heart of its transformation to achieve Oman Vision 2040. Central to this effort is the digital transformation of schools, aimed at building an innovative, sustainable education system that delivers high-quality smart services to students.

The Ministry of Education continues to enhance educational systems and infrastructure, developing Internet services, electronic systems and interactive applications, while providing smart boards and launching several digital transformation initiatives.

Dr Faisal bin Ali al Busaidy, Director-General of the Directorate-General of Information Technology, said that the ministry has established the National Team for Artificial Intelligence under the Digital Transformation Committee.

This team is preparing an executive programme to integrate AI into education, aiming to improve curricula, personalise learning and



The focus on digital education ensures that students gain modern skills and capabilities

The ministry has set up the National Team for AI under the Digital Transformation Committee

automate administrative processes.

The e-learning system and digital repository project has completed its first two phases, reaching 578 schools, with teacher access at 96 per cent and student access at 65 per cent. The third phase, now underway, will expand to 730 schools across 11 governorates, aiming to activate all Noor system services while ensuring close monitoring and support for teachers and students.

A highlight of the digital

transformation is the introduction of interactive smart boards in schools. These boards combine digital whiteboard functionality, display screens, and remote collaboration tools, supporting AI-powered handwriting recognition, cloud-based content, and multimedia integration for a more engaging and personalised learning experience.

Oman's focus on digital education ensures that students gain modern skills and capabilities, preparing them for an innovative and advanced educational and professional future.

The ministry is also working closely with educators and parents to ensure that digital tools are effectively integrated into daily learning.

Training programmes for teachers focus on leveraging technology to enhance lesson delivery, assess student progress and foster interactive classroom experiences.

By empowering teachers with modern tools, the ministry aims to create an education ecosystem that encourages creativity, critical thinking and problem-solving skills among students.

Red palm weevil infections decline in Al Dhahirah

IBRI: Al Dhahirah Governorate recorded a decline in red palm weevil infections during the second quarter of 2025, thanks to intensive field campaigns under the Integrated Management Project for Red Palm Weevil Control.

Control teams handled 601 new infestations between April and June. April saw the highest number with 217 cases, where 171 palms were treated and 46 removed. In May, infestations fell to 203 cases (170 treated, 33 removed), and in June, dropped further to 181 cases (153 treated, 28 removed).

The steady decline reflects the effectiveness of technical interventions and awareness campaigns led by the General Directorate of Agricultural Wealth and Water Resources in Al Dhahirah.

The field teams conduct inspections, treatments and awareness meetings with farmers to curb the pest's spread



Control teams handled 601 new red palm weevil infestations between April and June

Eng Salem bin Musabah al Kalbani, Director of the Agricultural Development Department, said that field teams are conducting inspections, treatments and awareness meetings

with farmers to promote early reporting. He noted that intensified surveys of home gardens and strengthened community partnerships have further curbed the pest's spread.

Al Kalbani emphasised the media's role in raising awareness about early detection and control methods, which has fostered greater community cooperation and faster intervention.

Farmer Hamdan bin Salim al Mandhari from Ibri praised the directorate's technical support in treating infestations on his farm of 670 palms, where 86 were infected. He highlighted training workshops, pesticide supplies and regular field visits by the directorate's teams, stressing that joint efforts remain key to protecting date palms — a national resource of economic and social importance. The directorate confirmed it will continue strengthening rapid response systems, technical support and awareness campaigns to preserve palm trees and reinforce food security across Oman. — ONA

SPOTLIGHT

Rising gold prices, reduced pvt sector sponsorship and a growing preference for smaller, more intimate family weddings are seen as key factors behind the decline in mass weddings

Committees across wilayats usually identify financially challenged youth and raise funds through community support. The money often goes toward covering the Mahr—a customary payment given to the bride—which generally ranges between RO 3,000 and RO 4,000

ARE MASS WEDDINGS

LOSING APPEAL?

KABEER
YOUSUF
@kabiyousef

ONCE A POPULAR WAY to ease wedding expenses and strengthen community ties, mass weddings across Oman appear to be witnessing a decline, with organisers and participants pointing to financial challenges, lack of sponsorship and changing social preferences.

While some see waning interest, others argue the tradition still holds strong as families seek cost-effective alternatives.

Mass weddings, which make the dreams of scores of young men possible and unite families in different parts of the country, have long been considered a vital social practice. They help mitigate the heavy costs of weddings and discourage extravagance.

Committees across wilayats usually identify financially challenged youth and raise funds through community support. The money often goes towards covering the Mahr — a customary payment given to the bride — which generally ranges between RO 3,000 and RO 4,000.

Recently, a mass wedding was held in Bahla for 60 grooms, while similar initiatives have been observed in other wilayats. The government's Marriage Support Fund,

which provides RO 2,000 to individuals earning less than RO 600, has also served as an incentive for many to marry.

However, some voices indicate that the frequency of such weddings has declined. Saif bin Khalfan al Kindi, media personality and columnist, noted that private sector support, including banks, has dwindled, reducing the scale of these events. “These initiatives usually increase in the years leading up to legislative and municipal elections, while there may also be other financial reasons, such as the high price of gold, forcing some to postpone weddings,” he added.

Other observers cite shifting preferences. Some families now prefer intimate private weddings with only close relatives and friends, while others opt for smaller group ceremonies among siblings or cousins.

Khalid al Khanbashi, a research student, believes financial difficulties are at the heart of the decline: “Over the past five years, fixed employment opportunities have decreased, with many relying only on short-term contracts. The salaries are often insufficient to support marriage plans.”

On the other hand, journalist Abdullah al Kaifi believes mass weddings still hold strong appeal: “I expect there will be a demand, because the cost of mass weddings is shared, resulting in lower expenses for the individual.”

Eng Zakaria bin Khamis al Saadi highlighted that the lack of sponsors to cover wedding gifts is another reason. He also pointed out new cultural trends: “Due to the proliferation of majlis, many pageants are now held after afternoon prayers, limited to coffee and sweets. This new ‘afternoon pageant’ culture has emerged, while overseas marriages also

play a role in reducing mass weddings locally.”

Teachers and community members also echo concerns about reduced backing from businessmen and philanthropists. “The noticeable decline is directly linked to a lack of financial support,” says Ahmed Mohammed.

Issa bin Abdullah al Qassabi, a correspondent with the Oman News Agency, underlined that marriage success depends more on mutual respect than on lavish celebrations: “Extravagance only burdens couples and limits the continuation of a successful marriage.”

Nashia al Kharusi, a public sector employee, believes the deeper issue is mindset. “There should be awareness that expensive marriage parties do not ensure success, especially with divorce rates rising. Youth today are still in school or college and are not ready to shoulder full family responsibilities at a young age, unlike in the past.”

Despite differing views, the common thread is clear: while mass weddings continue in some wilayats, financial pressures, cultural shifts and reduced sponsorship appear to be reshaping the tradition, leaving its future at a crossroads.



Over the past five years, permanent employment opportunities have declined, with many relying solely on short-term contracts. Salaries are often insufficient to support marriage plans

KHALID AL KHANBASHI
A research student

SHORT TAKES



Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, holds talks with his Bahraini counterpart

MoTCIT Minister holds talks with Bahraini, Iraqi, Algerian counterparts

SALALAH: Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MoTCIT), met separately in the Wilayat of Salalah with Dr Shaikh Abdullah bin Ahmed al Khalifa, Bahrain's Minister of Transportation and Telecommunications; Razzaq Muhaibas al Saadawi, Iraq's Minister of Transport; and Said Saioud, Algeria's Minister of Transport.

The meetings focused on several topics of mutual interest, most notably the development of transport and logistics infrastructure, strengthening integration between ports and airports, and enhancing cooperation in digital transformation and modern communications applications. A number of officials attended the meetings. — ONA

NRAA to hold symposium to highlight Dhofar history, civilisation on Sept 14



MUSCAT: The National Records and Archives Authority (NRAA) will organise a symposium titled 'Dhofar in the Memory of Omani History' on September 14 in the Wilayat of Salalah. The event will be held under the auspices of HH Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar.

The symposium is a key milestone in the Authority's series of academic events, which have previously highlighted the history of Musandam, Al Buraimi, Al Dhahirah, Al Sharqiyah South and Al Batinah North.

The symposium will feature 33 working papers presented by researchers and academics from Oman and abroad. The topics are divided into five main themes: historical and political, economic and social, cultural and scientific, and documents, manuscripts and oral history.

These papers aim to highlight Dhofar's historical significance and its role in shaping Omani and human identity. They will also explore the implications of its strategic geographical location and the openness it fostered with civilisations of the

East and West. The symposium will also focus on ancient caravan routes and trade journeys that originated from its plains and mountains, making the land of frankincense an uninterrupted civilisational bridge. Over three days, seven academic sessions will discuss various topics, including political events, historical treaties, influential figures, economic and social activities, aflaj and water resources, the role of women in society, the scientific and intellectual output of Dhofar's scholars and writers, defensive fortifications, archaeological sites, and the documents, manuscripts, and oral histories that preserve the collective memory of the region. The symposium aims to reinterpret the history of the governorate within a broader civilisational context and educate future generations about its pioneering role in human history. Dhofar, the land of frankincense, will remain a living testament to the richness of the past and present and the enduring Omani identity across time and place. — ONA

CMYF HOLDS BLOOD DONATION CAMP

Chiru Mega Youth Force (CMYF), a voluntary organisation, conducted a blood donation camp on the occasion of the birthday of popular film star Chiranjeevi. The camp was held at Central Blood Bank in Bausher, opposite to the Royal Hospital. CMYF founder-president Ramdas Chandaka thanked all humanitarians who came forward to donate blood. The CMYF has been conducting blood donation camps continuously for the last two decades.



Oman moves to digitise construction sector

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, SEPT 1

OMAN has unveiled a sweeping initiative to regulate and modernise its construction sector, signing four cooperation programmes with universities, industry groups and a national digital platform aimed at raising standards, fast-tracking approvals and embedding new technologies. At the launch ceremony, Shahswar al Balushi, Adviser to the Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion for Construction and Engineering Consultancy, told the Observer that the project is designed to 'govern the sector end-to-end' and create a Centre of Excellence focused on automation and digital transformation. The initiative also paves the way for a national building code, which officials say will be critical as major real estate and infrastructure projects roll out across the country. The agreements were signed with Sultan Qaboos University, the German University of Technology in Oman, the Oman Energy Association (OPAL) and eBinaa, a digital services platform for construction.



The initiative will support the setting up of a Centre of Excellence focused on automation and digital transformation

The initiative paves the way for a national building code, which will be critical as major infrastructure projects roll out across the country

Together, these partnerships will support training and research, accelerate the adoption of modern building methods, and align the sector with international standards. Al Balushi underlined the central role construction plays in Oman's investment climate. "Every investor — whether in healthcare, tourism or industry — must first build," he said. "Our job is to ensure that happens to the highest possible standard, with clear codes, digital processes and strong governance." He noted that construction is one of the country's largest employers, relying on both Omani and expatriate talent, and stressed that

companies entering the sector must bring strong technical expertise. "It is not an easy job; it is complex and demanding. But with the right people and the right technology, success will follow," he added. Officials say the cooperation programmes will not only help companies raise productivity and reduce errors, but also ensure that Omani graduates are equipped with the technical skills needed to serve a rapidly changing industry. By linking academia, industry and digital platforms, the government hopes to position the sector as a driver of sustainable growth and a magnet for foreign investment.



TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

Nama Electricity Supply Company S.A.O.C invites interested companies to participate in the following tender

Tender No.	Description	Last Date of Buying	Date of Submission	Grade	Tender Price (OMR)
NESC/2025/026	K2/Nintex Development Resource & Platform Services	08/09/2025	22/09/2025	Specialized Companies	52.5
The table below shows the instructions for participation: -					
Participation	- Companies registered with Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion may obtain Tender documents. - The amount specified above is including 5% VAT. - The amount specified above is Non-Refundable payment (Terms and Condition apply) - To obtain the tender document and payment procedure, please visit https://supply.nama.om, under NESC vendor / E Tender				
Enquiries	- Any inquiry can be sent to Tender@supply.nama.om using the inquiry form found in the tender document (05) Five working days before bid submission date. - Any request for clarification received after the above-mentioned period will not be considered.				
Tender Submission	Please follow SUBMISSION OF TENDER and supplier guidelines available at NESC Website https://supply.nama.om, under NESC vendor / E Tender				
Guarantee	- The Tender should enclose a bank guarantee or a certified cheque issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman Unconditional and irrevocable and shall be disbursement as soon as it is submitted for the value of (1%) of the tender value valid for a period of at least ninety (90) days from the last date of tender submission and addressed to the CHAIRMAN OF MINOR TENDER COMMITTEE, Nama Electricity Supply Company S.A.O.C. - The hard copy of the bid bond should be deposited in the Tender Box at the Nama Electricity Supply Company Main Office at Wilayat Al Seeb, before 10:00 AM on the day specified for bid submission or any extended deadline. - Any tender not accompanied by a Tender Bond shall be rejected.				
Terms and Conditions	- The Tender shall be valid for a period of (90) days from the last date of tender submission including any extension thereof. - If the submission date extended, the bank guarantee or a certified cheque shall be extended in accordance with the bid extension date. - NESC is not bound to accept the lowest (or highest) Tenderer. - Provide 60% Omanization, must be provided. Alternatively, a commitment letter must be submitted, confirming the implementation of the required Omanization % within a timeframe specified by NESC during the contract's validity period - Preference of awarding the tender will be given to those bidders who achieved a high percentage of purchasing from Local Products and have a High-level percentage of Omanization - NESC gives priority to award the projects to SMEs companies. - Failure to comply with the instructions in tender document may lead to disqualification.				
Incentives and exemptions	- Riyada card holders from Small and Medium Enterprises, SME, are exempted from Tender fees - Riyada card holders from Small and Medium Enterprises, SME, are exempted from bid bond requirements. - Riyada card holders from Small and Medium Enterprises, SME, are exempted from registration fees on business opportunities platform and supplier registration with Nama Group.				



Nama Electricity Supply Company SAOC
PO Box 1239, PC 131, Sultanate of Oman
Tel: +968 24250800 | CR 1/71235/7
records@supply.nama.om | www.supply.nama.om



WORLD

MASSIVEMURDERS



Mourners react during the funeral of Palestinians, in Khan Yunis. — Reuters

Israel is committing genocide in Gaza, says association of scholars

THE HAGUE: The world’s biggest academic association of genocide scholars has passed a resolution saying the legal criteria have been met to establish that Israel is committing genocide in Gaza, its president said. Eighty-six per cent of those who voted among the 500-member International Association of Genocide Scholars backed the resolution declaring Israel’s “policies and actions in Gaza” had met the legal definition set out in Article II of the 1948 UN convention on genocide.

Israel’s Foreign Ministry called the statement disgraceful and “entirely based on Hamas’ campaign of lies”. Israel has in the past strongly denied that its actions in Gaza amount to genocide and says they are justified as self-defence. It is fighting a case at the International Court of Justice in the Hague that accuses it of genocide.

Israel launched its assault on the Gaza Strip in October 2023, after fighters from Palestinian Hamas attacked Israeli communities, killing 1,200 people and capturing more than 250 hostages.

Since then, Israel’s military action has killed 63,000 people, damaged or destroyed most buildings in the territory and forced nearly all its residents to flee their homes at least once. A global hunger monitor relied on by the United Nations says parts of the territory are now suffering a man-made famine, which Israel also denies.

The three-page resolution calls on Israel to “immediately cease all acts that constitute genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity against Palestinians in Gaza, including deliberate attacks against and killing of civilians including children; starvation; deprivation of humanitarian aid, water, fuel, and other items essential to the survival of the population and forced displacement of the population.”

It also states that the Hamas attack on Israel, which precipitated the war, constituted international crimes. “This is a definitive statement from experts in the field of genocide studies that what is going on on the ground in Gaza is genocide,” the association’s president, Melanie O’Brien, a professor of international law at the University of Western Australia who specialises in genocide, said. “There is no justification for the commission of war crimes, crimes against humanity or genocide, not even self-defence,” she added.

Since the genocide scholars’ association was founded in 1994, it has passed nine resolutions recognising historic or ongoing episodes as genocides.

The IAGS publishes a journal and holds regular international conferences of scholars studying genocide, and is considered the largest academic group in the field.

Another group, the International Network of Genocide Scholars, also holds conferences and publishes a journal but does not issue similar resolutions. — Reuters

THAI OPPOSITION’S KINGMAKING SUMMIT FAILS TO BACK NEW PRIME MINISTER

BANGKOK: Thailand’s largest opposition party failed to decide who to back as the nation’s next prime minister at a kingmaking summit, after the incumbent was ousted by court order. Paetongtarn Shinawatra was sacked as prime minister on Friday by Thailand’s Constitutional Court after it found she had breached ethical standards during a border row with Cambodia.

The ruling has left Thailand with only an acting prime minister and

a caretaker cabinet as minority factions jostle to secure backing to form a new government. Paetongtarn’s Pheu Thai Party and the conservative Bhumjaithai Party — which abandoned her coalition over the border row — are both now courting the People’s Party’s stronghold of 143 parliamentary seats.

But People’s Party spokesman Parit Wacharasindhu told reporters a summit to weigh their options on Monday ended with no decision,

and would resume on Tuesday. “Members expressed comments with concerns both ways,” he said. The People’s Party says its backing will be conditional on parliament being dissolved for fresh elections within four months, paving the way for yet more political upheaval in the kingdom.

Paetongtarn — heiress to the Shinawatra dynasty, which has dominated Thai politics for two decades — had only been in office since last August. — AFP

Strong Afghanistan quake kills more than 800 people

A massive rescue operation was underway in Afghanistan, after a strong earthquake and multiple aftershocks collapsed homes onto sleeping families in a remote, mountainous region, killing more than 800 people, according to the Taliban authorities. The 6.0-magnitude earthquake struck just before midnight, rattling buildings from Kabul to neighbouring Pakistan’s capital, Islamabad.

More than 1.2 million people likely felt strong or very strong shaking, according to the US Geological Survey (USGS), which recorded at least five aftershocks throughout the night. Casualties and destruction swept across at least five provinces. Near the epicentre in eastern Afghanistan, around 800 people were killed and 2,500 injured in remote Kunar province alone, chief Taliban government spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said. Another 12 people were killed and 255 were injured in neighbouring Nangarhar province, while 58 people were injured in Laghman province.

In Wadir village in the hard-hit district of Nurgal, dozens of people joined the effort to pull people from the rubble of destroyed or severely damaged homes more than 12 hours after the initial earthquake, journalists saw. The epicentre was about 27 kilometres from the city of Jalalabad in Nangarhar province, according to the USGS, which said it struck about eight kilometres below the Earth’s surface. Such relatively shallow quakes can cause more damage, especially since the



Afghan medical and security personnel carry stretchers for evacuated earthquake victims, in Jalalabad. — AFP

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majority of Afghans live in low-rise, mud-brick homes vulnerable to collapse.

Some of the most severely impacted villages in remote Kunar provinces “remain inaccessible due to road blockages”, the UN migration agency warned in a statement. The Taliban authorities and the United Nations mobilised rescue efforts, with the defence ministry saying at least 40 flight sorties had so far been carried out.

A member of the agricultural department in Nurgal said people had rushed to clear blocked roads in the hours after the earthquake, but that badly affected areas were remote and had limited telecoms networks. “There is a lot of fear and tension... Children and women were screaming. We had never experienced anything like this in our lives,” Ijaz Ulhaq Yaad said. He

said that many living in quake-hit villages were among the more than four million Afghans who have returned to the country from Iran and Pakistan in recent years. “They wanted to build their homes here.”

Nangarhar and Kunar provinces border Pakistan, with the Torkham crossing the site of many waves of Afghan returnees deported or forced to leave, often with no work and nowhere to go.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres added his condolences to those shared by the Taliban government and several nations. “I stand in full solidarity with the people of Afghanistan after the devastating earthquake that hit the country earlier today,” he said.

Pope Leo XIV said he was “deeply saddened by the significant loss of life caused by the earthquake in the area of eastern Afghanistan”. — AFP

TECHNICAL FAULT

Pakistan army helicopter crash kills five



An army helicopter crashed in northern Pakistan, killing all five people on board, the military said. “The helicopter was on routine training flying when it developed a technical fault and crashed,” it said in a statement. Two pilots, two crew and a flight engineer on board the MI-17 died. A police official in the district had earlier said that the helicopter crashed during a test landing on a newly proposed helipad. — AFP

DRONE ATTACKS

Sudan shuts down Heglig oil facilities



Sudan has initiated a shutdown of the Heglig oil facility following drone attacks it blamed on the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces, according to a letter sent by its government to its South Sudanese neighbour. Heglig houses the main processing facility for South Sudanese oil, which accounts for the majority of South Sudan’s government revenues. The letter cited drone attacks on August 26 and 30 as the cause for the shutdown. — Reuters

EASING TENSIONS

South Korea halts propaganda broadcasts



South Korea has stopped broadcasting propaganda radio programming into the North, the latest move by Seoul’s new administration to ease tensions with its nuclear-armed neighbour. “The defence ministry suspended the Voice of Freedom broadcast as part of measures to ease military tensions with the North,” ministry spokesman Lee Kyung-ho told reporters on Monday. It is the latest in a series of moves by the new Lee Jae Myung administration. — AFP

SHORT TAKES



A helicopter makes a water drop over a wildfire in Larouco, Spain. — Reuters file photo

SPAIN SEEKS TO COORDINATE CLIMATE PACT

MADRID: Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez said that his government would coordinate a series of measures on climate change with neighbouring countries in response to recent weather-related disasters, such as August’s massive wildfires. Civil Protection authorities on Sunday declared an end to one of the worst waves of wildfires recorded in the country, with more than 300,000 hectares burnt down in less than a month. Four people died, 48 were injured and almost 36,000 had to be evacuated.

Two weeks ago, Sanchez urged for a “state pact” on climate change with all main political forces in response to the fires, which would be discussed with political parties, regional and local authorities, labour unions, activists, scientists and farmers. “There cannot be more excuses or pauses, it is time to accelerate ecological transition,” Sanchez said in a speech in Madrid.

The government intends to coordinate the new measures with its European neighbours. “We will propose the Portuguese and French governments to work with us on this state pact and we will tell the EU Commission to all but continue with the ecological transition,” he said. — Reuters

BOSNIAN TRUCK DRIVERS BLOCK ROAD



Bosnian truck drivers blocked the movement of all goods in the Balkan country on Monday over what they said was the government’s failure to support the transport sector. About 600 trucks were parked near cargo customs terminals in several towns, including the capital Sarajevo, and near the borders with Croatia and Serbia. Logistika, a body representing 47,000 workers in the transport sector, organised the protests under the slogan “That’s enough” after months of negotiations with Bosnia’s numerous layers of government yielded no results, it said. — Reuters

EUROPEAN UNION CHIEF’S PLANE HIT BY GPS JAMMING IN BULGARIA

BRUSSELS: A plane carrying EU chief Ursula von der Leyen was hit by GPS jamming as it readied to land in Bulgaria and Russia was suspected to be behind the incident, the European Commission said. The commission said Bulgarian authorities believed Moscow was responsible for the incident on Sunday but it was not clear whether the aircraft was deliberately targeted as such attacks are common in the region. “We can indeed confirm that there was GPS jamming,”

commission spokeswoman Arianna Podesta told a press conference. The chartered flight landed safely at Plovdiv International Airport, in the south of the country, without having to change route. Commission president Von der Leyen, 66, was in Bulgaria as part of a seven-country tour of “frontline” European Union states, which, sitting on the 27-nation bloc’s eastern flank, are more exposed to Russian hybrid threats. The region has experienced “a lot

of such jamming and spoofing activities”, a separate commission spokesperson said, adding it has sanctioned several companies believed to be involved. The incident was confirmed by the Bulgarian government. “During the flight carrying European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen to Plovdiv, the satellite signal transmitting information to the plane’s GPS navigation system was neutralised,” a government statement said. — AFP

Xi, Putin round on West at China’s regional summit

PRESIDENTS

Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin took turns on Monday

to swipe at the West during a gathering of Eurasian leaders for a showpiece summit aimed at putting Beijing front and centre of regional relations. The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), comprising China, India, Russia, Pakistan, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Belarus, is touted as a non-Western style of collaboration and seeks to be an alternative to traditional alliances.

Xi told the SCO leaders, including Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko and India’s Prime Minister Narendra Modi, that the global international situation was becoming more “chaotic and intertwined”. The Chinese leader also slammed “bullying behaviour” from certain countries — a veiled reference to the United States. “The security and development tasks facing member states have become even more challenging,” he added in his address in the northern port city of Tianjin. “With the world undergoing turbulence and transformation, we must continue to follow the Shanghai spirit... and better perform the functions of the organisation,” Xi said.

Putin used his speech to defend Russia’s Ukraine offensive, blaming the West for triggering the three-and-a-half year conflict that has killed tens of thousands and devastated much of eastern Ukraine. “This crisis wasn’t triggered by Russia’s attack on Ukraine, but was a result of a coup in Ukraine, which was supported and provoked by the West,” Putin said. “The second reason for the crisis is the West’s constant attempts to drag Ukraine into Nato.”

Meanwhile, Putin praised Türkiye’s mediation attempts around the Ukraine war during his first meeting this year with Turkish counterpart Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Monday. Türkiye has hosted three rounds of peace talks between Russia and Ukraine this year that have failed to break the deadlock over how to end the conflict.

Earlier, leaders from the 10 SCO countries stood on a red carpet and posed for a group



Chinese President Xi Jinping (R) shows the way to Russian President Vladimir Putin, at the Meijiang Convention and Exhibition Centre in Tianjin. — AFP

photo. Xi, Putin and Modi were seen on live footage chatting, the three leaders flanked by their translators. Modi and Putin, who were photographed holding hands, held talks in the afternoon. Russian state media reported the pair spent nearly an hour talking “face-to-face” in Putin’s armoured presidential car before their official bilateral meeting.

“Conversations with him are always insightful,” Modi wrote on X along with a photograph of them travelling in the car. In opening comments before their meeting, Modi praised the “special and privileged strategic partnership” with Moscow. “India and Russia have stood shoulder to shoulder, even in the toughest situations,” he said. On the conflict in Ukraine, Modi said India wanted both sides to end it “as soon as possible and to find stable peace”.

The SCO summit, which also involves 16 more countries as observers or “dialogue partners”, kicked off on Sunday, days before a massive military parade in the capital Beijing to mark 80 years since the end of World War II.

The member states signed a declaration on Monday, agreeing to strengthen cooperation in sectors such as security and

economy, China’s Xinhua news agency said. They also “unanimously agreed” to admit Laos as a “dialogue partner”, Xinhua added. Xi held a flurry of back-to-back bilateral meetings with leaders including Lukashenko and Modi, who is on his first visit to China since 2018. Modi told Xi that India was committed to taking “forward our ties on the basis of mutual trust, dignity and sensitivity”. The world’s two most populous nations are intense rivals, competing for influence across South Asia, and fought a deadly border clash in 2020. A thaw began last October, when Modi met Xi for the first time in five years at a summit in Russia. Their rapprochement deepened as US President Donald Trump pressured both Asian economic giants with trade tariffs. More than 20 leaders, including Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian, are attending the bloc’s largest meeting since its founding in 2001. Many of the assembled dignitaries will be in Beijing on Wednesday to watch the military parade, which will also be attended by North Korean leader Kim Jong Un. Kim left Pyongyang by train on Monday afternoon, and is expected to arrive on Tuesday. — AFP

Japan and South Korea endure hottest summer on record

TOKYO: Japan and South Korea sweltered this year through the hottest summers since records began, their weather agencies said. Temperatures the world over have soared in recent years as climate change creates ever more erratic weather patterns. Japan’s average temperature between June and August “was 2.36°C above the standard value, which marked the hottest summer since records began in 1898”, according to the Japan Meteorological Agency (JMA). The agency did not disclose what the new mark was, but said it was the third consecutive summer of record high temperatures. During that same period in South Korea, the average temperature was 25.7°C, “the highest since data collection began in 1973”, the Korea Meteorological Administration said in a press release. The previous record over the same period was 25.6°C, set just last year. In Japan

the scorching heat left some 84,521 people hospitalised nationwide from May 1 to August 24 this year, up slightly from 83,414 during the same period last year, according to the Fire and Disaster Management Agency. In Tokyo, avid runner Masao Nakano, 80, said that he pines for the old days when he could just “step outside, sprinkle water in the street and feel the cool air”. Nakano says he survived the sizzling summer by working out at a gym and jogging to prepare for a marathon. “This is crazy. It’s all man-made, right? All the air-cons and power generation”, he said. Miyu Fujita, a 22-year old businesswoman in the city, said she had mostly socialised indoors this summer to escape the oppressive temperatures and was also worried about children forced inside. Japan’s beloved cherry trees are blooming earlier due to the warmer climate, or sometimes not



A woman with an umbrella walks in the scorching sun in Tokyo. — AFP

fully blossoming because autumns and winters are not cold enough to trigger flowering, experts say. The famous snowcap of Mount Fuji was absent for the longest recorded

period last year, not appearing until early November, compared with the average of early October. In South Korea, the country is grappling with a prolonged drought that has hit the

eastern coastal city of Gangneung. A state of national disaster has been declared in the city of 200,000 after weeks without rain — with water levels at the Obong reservoir, the city’s main source of piped water, falling below 15 per cent. The dry spell has forced authorities to implement water restrictions, including shutting off 75 per cent of household meters. Kim Hae-dong, professor of meteorological studies at Keimyung University, said that the hot weather streak was linked to “the weakening of Arctic cold air due to global warming”. “Because it is expected to continue weakening with global warming in place, we forecast similar weather patterns to repeat next year,” he said. Heatwaves are becoming more intense and frequent worldwide because of human-caused climate change, scientists say. But the speed of temperature increases across the world is not uniform. — AFP

OPINION

Golden visas foster sustainable business environment



OMAN'S Golden Residency programme, launched on Sunday, offers a compelling opportunity for investors seeking long-term stability and growth in the Middle East. This initiative is a cornerstone of Oman Vision 2040, aiming to diversify the economy beyond oil and attract foreign direct investment.

With the new programme, Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) is set to rise further. The ratio of FDI inflows to GDP reached 12.1 per cent in 2023, with an annual growth rate of 10.6 per cent. The cumulative total of FDI increased by the end of 2024 to approximately RO 30 billion, reflecting the improved investment climate in Oman.

The Golden Residency programme represents the government's commitment to creating a balanced investment environment combining quality opportunities and long-term stability. Oman ranked fourth globally in the Quality of Life Index for 2024, enhancing its appeal as both an investment and a living destination.

The programme provides renewable 5-year or 10-year residency permits for investors and their families, including spouses, children under 25 and dependent parents, without requiring local sponsorship.

The programme offers various pathways to obtain residency, catering to different investment preferences. These include

property ownership in integrated tourism complexes, company establishment, purchase of government bonds or shares and bank deposits.

Specifically, a 10-year visa is available for individuals investing a minimum of RO 500,000 in a limited liability company, public joint-stock company, government bonds, or real estate. This tier also applies to those who establish a company employing at least 50 Omanis.

For a 5-year visa, an investment of RO 250,000 in the same categories is required. Additionally, expatriates wishing to retire in Oman can apply for a 5-year residence permit by demonstrating a fixed monthly income of RO 4,000.

The Golden Residency programme offers a comprehensive suite of benefits designed to attract high-net-worth individuals and foster a sustainable business environment. These benefits include full business ownership rights, tax exemptions, property ownership rights in freehold zones, and access to quality healthcare and education.

Oman's stable political environment, low crime rates and welcoming society further enhance its appeal as a safe haven for international investors. The launch of the programme is a key component of Oman Vision 2040, which seeks to reduce the country's reliance on oil and expand its non-oil economic base.

Investments are being directed

Attracting long-term residents and their families can stimulate demand in various sectors, including housing, retail, and services, contributing to sustained economic growth.

into priority sectors such as logistics, manufacturing, real estate, information technology, renewable energy and tourism. The programme is expected to attract foreign capital, encourage entrepreneurship and generate employment for Omanis, thereby contributing to a more resilient and diversified national economy.

The programme is part of a broader trend in the Gulf region, where several nations have implemented similar long-term residency schemes to attract capital, talent and strategic investment.

While Oman's investment requirements have historically been higher compared to some regional counterparts, the renewed focus and promotion of its programme aim to increase its competitiveness. The programme also seeks to attract specialised talent and entrepreneurs, fostering innovation and bringing new expertise into Oman's economy.

Alongside the Golden Visa, Oman is implementing digital trade reforms, such as the electronic transfer of commercial registrations via the 'Oman Business' platform. These reforms aim to reduce bureaucracy, cut costs and promote faster company setup and licensing, thereby improving the overall ease of doing business.

Attracting long-term residents and their families can stimulate demand in various sectors, including housing, retail and services, contributing to sustained economic growth.

NEW ZEALAND LETS CERTAIN FOREIGNERS BUY HOMES

LUCY CRAYMER & CHRISTINE CHEN

New Zealand said it will open its housing market to wealthy foreigners who invest in local businesses, reversing a previous ban in expectation it will boost economic growth.

New Zealand Prime Minister Christopher Luxon said investors on the foreign investor migrant visa reintroduced in April would be able to buy or build one home if it costs at least NZ\$5 million. Previously those on the visa but not in New Zealand for six months of the year were banned from buying property.

"This change navigates a path between those who do not want foreign ownership opened up, and the desire to attract high net worth investors by deepening their connection to our country to help grow the economy," Luxon said.

The government hopes relaxing the ban will make investing here more attractive. It is part of broader government efforts to increase foreign investment into the country to boost an economy that dipped into a recession in the second half of 2024 and has remained weak in the first half of this year. In April, it loosened rules around eligibility for the so-called 'golden' visa known as the Active Investor Plus residency visa.

This included lowering the minimum required funds for the category that focuses on higher-risk investments to NZ\$5 million from NZ\$15 million and removing the English language requirement. The government said 301 applications for the visa have been received and if these are all approved and proceed it means a potential investment of at least NZ\$1.8 billion in the country's economy.

Foreign investment in New Zealand's property market has been a concern for locals as it is seen as a significant driver of house prices and in 2018 the then Labour-led government passed a law to ban many non-resident foreigners from buying existing homes. Luxon said less than 1 per cent of New Zealand homes were worth over NZ\$5 million and they believed this changed balanced the need to meet the needs of high-net worth investors with the desires of those who do not want foreign ownership. Mischa Mannix-Opie, from Greener Pastures, which specialises in helping people get residency in New Zealand through investment, said while not everyone wanted to buy a house in New Zealand, their clients would be pleased to have the option. — AFP

SQCC: Exploring identity through collaboration

AS an associate professor of social media and Arab Omani identity, I often find myself walking the thin line between academia and real-world application. This duality is especially evident when I reflect on my experiences with the Sultan Qaboos Cultural Centre (SQCC) in Washington, DC.

The centre serves as a remarkable bridge connecting Omani heritage with American culture, and my connection to it runs deep. As a graduate of Georgetown University, I have had the privilege of witnessing firsthand how cultural institutions can foster understanding and collaboration between diverse communities.

Upon my first visit to the SQCC, I was struck by the centre's architecture, which is harmoniously integrated into the fabric of Washington, DC. The building stands as a testament to the nation's rich heritage, adorned with exquisite motifs and museums that tell stories of Oman's long history and vibrant culture. This aesthetic appeal sets a welcoming tone for visitors from all walks of life, eager to learn about this relatively lesser-known Arab nation.

The mission of the SQCC is articulated with great clarity: to promote a greater understanding of Oman and its contributions to the global community. It serves not just as a cultural centre but as a hub for dialogue and education, effectively dismantling stereotypes and preconceived notions about the Arab world. In my work, I often emphasise the power of narrative in shaping identity, and the SQCC embodies this principle through its diverse array of programmes,



DR NAJMA AL ZIDJALY

The writer is Associate Professor, Sultan Qaboos University

The SQCC is more than a cultural centre; it is a beacon of hope and a testament to the enduring spirit of Oman and its people.

exhibits and workshops.

The centre organises a variety of events that engage the community and celebrate Omani culture. From art exhibitions showcasing traditional handicrafts to musical performances featuring the soothing sounds of Omani folk music, each event offers a unique lens through which to view and appreciate the richness of Omani life. One memorable exhibition featured the work of contemporary Omani artists, whose interpretations of tradition brought a fresh dynamism to the conversation about identity and culture. Such events not only highlight Oman's artistic contributions, but also invite attendees to explore broader themes of culture and heritage.

In addition to cultural events, the SQCC also plays a vital role in language education, offering Arabic language programmes for various proficiency levels. These are designed to foster a deeper appreciation for the Arabic language while promoting cross-cultural communication. By providing opportunities to learn Arabic, the centre empowers individuals to engage more meaningfully with the culture and people of Oman and the Arab world at large. I have seen students thrive in these classes, gaining not only language skills but also insights into the nuances of Omani cultural expression that can only emerge through meaningful language immersion.

One of the most poignant memories I have associated with the SQCC was during a cultural event where I was invited to speak on the historic role of Omani women in shaping cultural identity. As I stood before a diverse audience, I realised

that the centre had cultivated a space where dialogue could flourish without fear of misunderstanding. The attendees were not merely passive recipients of information; they actively engaged, asked questions and shared their own experiences. This interaction underscored the heart of what the SQCC represents — an open forum for exploring identity and belonging in an increasingly globalised world.

Moreover, my interactions with fellow educators and community leaders, who have received generous grants from the centre to study Omani culture, have reinforced the importance of collaboration. The SQCC is not just a cultural enclave for Omanis; it actively seeks partnerships with organisations, universities and thought leaders from diverse backgrounds. This spirit of cooperation allows for a rich exchange of ideas, fostering an environment where individuals from various cultures can learn from one another.

As the cultural landscape of Washington, DC continues to evolve, the Sultan Qaboos Cultural Centre stands as a vital institution that sparks curiosity and promotes learning. My experiences with the centre have not only shaped my understanding of Arab Omani identity, but have also reaffirmed the power of culture as a conduit for connection. It is in these spaces — where heritage and dialogue intersect — that we find the threads of our shared humanity, fostering empathy and understanding in a world that desperately needs it. The SQCC is more than a cultural centre; it is a beacon of hope and a testament to the enduring spirit of Oman and its people.

The power of memory... missing you



LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

The writer is senior editor of Observer

EYES that twinkled when I came home. Now they look at me blankly. No smile awaits me. Just silence. A doubt. Who could this be? What do we talk about with a stranger? Who knows nothing about you. The same questions are repeated. Enthusiasm can sometimes wear off. You fed me once, I want to say. And ask, ‘Won’t you have one more piece of bread?’ It is your favourite soup. Your precious recipe from your grandmother. Let’s take out the photo album one more time. For there lay faces you fondly remember. You know not; some have left. And some are your darlings who are older. Sitting next to you. And missing you. Alzheimer’s disease is not something a patient alone suffers from. The whole family suffers because they slowly lose their family member. They might remember some people and might not recognise others at all. Interestingly, the flower that is chosen to represent Alzheimer’s is the forget-me-not flower. We take our power of memory for granted. How often do we think of our childhood memories? When the elders recollect and enthusiastically share their old stories, others

might get bored. But actually, this sharing of stories might be a good sign. That is why conversations are so important, as loneliness can be one of the biggest sufferings that could be going unnoticed in many people’s lives. Today, of course, we seem to enjoy the company of gadgets, and our minds are fed and filled with images from reels on social media. A person I know witnessed a fatal accident as a bystander, and the image of the victims being taken out seemed to be etched on his mind. Now this is something he would like to overcome, but now this memory also seems to be triggering an element of fear and sadness. It is ironic, is it not, how we want to forget certain memories? Oman Alzheimer’s Society has an initiative called Purple Cafe, a support system for caregivers of Alzheimer’s patients. I remember a husband recollecting the first incident when his wife forgot her way back home. She drove and drove but just could not remember the directions to come back home. This September, as the world celebrates Alzheimer’s Month, the theme is to ask about dementia. Awareness changes everything because we almost know what to expect and what to do. Memories are beautiful, and some of them are so wonderful that you want to cherish

This September, as the world celebrates Alzheimer’s Month, the theme is to ask about dementia. Awareness changes everything because we almost know what to expect and what to do

them forever. The sad part is that for some it is not a possibility. We can only imagine how difficult it must be for them not to find their loved ones amongst unfamiliar faces that surround them, not knowing they are the ones but not as they remember them to be. They may not remember us, but there is no way we can forget them. The Oman Alzheimer’s Association was established in 2021 under the umbrella of the Oman Medical Association. It aims to support individuals affected by Alzheimer’s disease and other types of dementia in the Sultanate of Oman. The association works diligently to raise awareness, provide support, encourage practical research, and reduce the stigma associated with dementia, which can often be a significant barrier. One important initiative of the society is Purple Cafe to provide support for the caregivers of Alzheimer’s patients. The caregivers often suffer silently. The caregivers in most cases tend to be one of the family members with whom the Alzheimer’s person might be comfortable. The caregivers would not think of complaining, but the reality is that they have to live the lives of two people. The caregivers also need support for their mental health. The good part is, in Oman, Alzheimer’s patients live with their own families.

Malawi’s fuel crisis hangs over upcoming presidential elections

JACK MCBRAMS

In early morning gloom, a long line of vehicles winds around the lone fuel station in Dedza district in central Malawi, one of many overnight queues for petrol across the country. It is a scene of frustration over chronic petrol shortages and a sputtering economy that has become a black mark against President Lazarus Chakwera as he seeks a second term in September 16 elections.

“My business is not doing well because of the scarcity of fuel,” said Nelson Mazola, a middle-aged boda-boda motorcycle taxi driver at the front of the line, shaking his head with exhaustion. “Now it’s becoming difficult to convince people to pay higher fares, even when they need to get a patient to the hospital quickly,” said Mazola in the largely rural district outside the main city of Lilongwe. It is in rural areas where petrol shortages hurt the most, increasing the costs of transportation and food in the southern African country where more than 70 per cent of the population live in poverty, according to World Bank data.Compounded by rampant hoarding and black-market sales, the petrol shortages are rooted in Malawi’s lack of foreign currency to buy imported fuel and other essentials, a result of a stark trade deficit and high debt payments. It is a part of broader economic troubles in the tobacco-exporting country where a drought last year undercut the maize harvest and left 5.7 million people acutely food insecure, according to the World Food Programme.

Elected in 2020, Chakwera’s government has been accused of mishandling the economy, a factor that will be on voters’ minds, according to economist Adam Chikapa. “Imagine spending the night at a filling station, frustrated and angry, and then going to the polling centre the next day. People won’t be happy; many will vote against the ruling party,” he said. The 70-year-old president, who leads the Malawi Congress Party, announced last year that steps would be taken to tackle the fuel and food crisis, but economic statistician Alick Nyasulu said there was still nothing to show for this. “One would have expected elections would compel authorities to try to fix this and present some sense of normality,” he said. “Sadly, not and this is a reflection of our state of finances.” At a fuel station in Blantyre, the commercial capital, as motorists crowded around the pumps, young men also hawked petrol from plastic jerry cans at four to five times the official price, preying on desperate drivers willing to pay a premium. “In our recent survey, a majority of Malawians cited poor economic management as their biggest grievance with the government,” University of Malawi political scientist and pollster Boniface Dulani said. The fuel queues are the clearest manifestation of this failure. The crisis feeds into a broader set of economic problems - rising prices, increased transport costs - which weigh heavily on ordinary Malawians. — AFP

Palestinian taps run dry in occupied West Bank

PALESTINIANS in the Israeli-occupied West Bank are facing severe water shortages that they say are being driven by increasing attacks on scarce water sources by extremist Jewish settlers. Across the West Bank in Palestinian communities, residents are reporting shortages that have left taps in homes dry and farms without irrigation. In Ramallah, one of the largest Palestinian cities in the West Bank and the administrative capital of the Palestinian Authority, residents facing water shortages are now relying on public taps. “We only get water at home twice a week, so people are forced to come here,” said Umm Ziad, as she filled empty plastic bottles with water alongside other Ramallah residents. The United Nations recorded 62 incidents of Jewish settlers vandalising water wells, pipelines, irrigation networks and other water-related infrastructure in the West Bank in the first six months of the year.

The Israeli military acknowledged it has received multiple reports of Israeli civilians intentionally causing damage to water infrastructure but that no suspects had been identified. Among the targets have been a freshwater spring and a water distribution station in Ein Samiya, around 16 km northeast of Ramallah, serving around 20 nearby Palestinian villages and some city neighbourhoods. Settlers have taken over the spring that many Palestinians have used for generations to cool off in the hot summer months. Palestinian public utility Jerusalem Water Undertaking said the Ein Samiya water distribution station had become a frequent target of settler vandalism. “Settler violence has escalated dramatically,” Abdullah Bairait, 60, a resident of nearby Kfar Malik, standing on a hilltop overlooking the spring.”They enter the spring stations, break them, remove cameras, and cut off the water for hours,” he said. The Ein Samiya spring and Kfar Malik village have been increasingly surrounded by Jewish Israeli



A man pours out water from a tanker for sheep to drink, in Bardala, in Jordan Valley, in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, on Monday. — Reuters



ALI SAWAFTA

The writer is Reuters correspondent



NUHA SHARAF

The writer is TV Producer at Thomson Reuters

settlements. The United Nations and most foreign governments consider settlements in the West Bank to be illegal under international law and an obstacle to the establishment of a future Palestinian state. According to the United Nations’ humanitarian office, settlers carried out multiple attacks targeting water springs and vital water infrastructure in the Ramallah, Salfit and Nablus areas between June 1 and July 14. The Ein Samiya water spring had been repeatedly attacked, it said in a July report. Israeli security forces view any damage to infrastructure as a serious matter and were carrying out covert and overt actions to prevent further harm, the Israeli military said in response to Reuters questions for this story. It said the Palestinian Water Authority had been given access to carry out repairs. Kareem Jubran, director of field research at Israeli rights group B’Tselem, said that settlers had taken control over most natural springs in the West Bank in recent years and prevented Palestinians from accessing them. Palestinians have long faced a campaign of intimidation, harassment and physical violence by extremist settlers, who represent a minority of Jewish settlers living in the West Bank. Most live in settlements for financial or

ideological reasons and do not advocate for violence against Palestinians. Palestinians say the frequency of settler violence in the West Bank has increased since the October 7, 2023, attacks on Israel. They say they fear the rise in settler violence is part of a campaign to drive them from the land. The United Nations has registered 925 such incidents in the first seven months of this year, a 16 per cent year-on-year increase. Since the Hamas attacks, which sparked the war in Gaza, several Israeli politicians have advocated for Israel to annex the West Bank, which it has occupied since 1967. Reuters reported on Sunday that Israeli officials said the government is now considering annexing the territory after France and other Western nations said they would recognise a Palestinian state this month. The Palestinian Authority wants a future Palestinian state to encompass West Bank, East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip. Palestinians in the West Bank have long struggled to access water. The Palestinian Authority exercises limited civic rule in parts of the territory and relies on Israeli approvals to develop and expand water infrastructure. Palestinian officials and rights groups say that’s rarely given.

SPORTS

TRAININGSTRATEGIES

OMAN HOSTS LEVEL 1 BASKETBALL COACHING COURSE

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, SEPT 1



SAFA ALI
AHMED
KAMILIN

International
lecturer

The theoretical and practical sessions of the Level 1 course by the World Association of Basketball Coaches (WABC) saw remarkable interaction from participating male and female coaches. The course, organised by the Oman Basketball Association (OBA) in cooperation with Fiba and the WABC, runs from August 30 to

September 4, with 15 coaches taking part under the instruction of international lecturer Safa Ali Ahmed Kamilin from Iran. Sessions are being held at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher.

Day three focused on the latest basketball training strategies, emphasising the development of players' offensive and defensive skills, and practical applications of ball-handling, movement without the ball, stopping, and pivoting. Lectures also covered the principles and philosophy of offence and defence, the importance of transition play, collective offensive and defensive tactics, as well as training organisation and exploiting time- and score-related situations. At the end of the course, participants will undergo theoretical and practical tests to qualify for Level 1 certification, paving the way to advanced levels.

OBA chief Eng Khalfan al Naabi affirmed that organising this course is part of the association's efforts, together with the Asian federation and the World Association to prepare coaches for internationally recognised classification based on modern scientific standards.

Safa Ali Ahmed Kamilin stressed the importance of the Level 1 course, explaining that it establishes a new calibre of coaches through scientific and systematic methods, equipping them with the right foundations for teaching and training basketball. He added that the World Association aims through such programmes to achieve two main goals: unifying training standards worldwide to ensure a high and consistent coaching level and promoting structured, scientific training methods in all countries.

Regarding training levels, he noted that Level 1 is tailored for coaches working with players under 16, focusing on fundamentals. Level 2 targets advanced training and error correction, while Level 3 is intended for national team and elite-level coaches, requiring broader experience.

Seeb defeat Jordan's Al Karak to enter last 16 of Arab TT

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, SEPT 1

Seeb Club booked their spot in the last 16 round after securing a crucial 3-1 victory over Jordan's Al Karak Club in Group 5 of the Arab Table Tennis Clubs Championship, which is underway in Muscat until Thursday.

A the main hall of the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher, Muhannad al Balushi, Bilal al Rashdi and Hamid Shamas managed to show top game and guide the team into the next level of the tournament. Seeb met Egypt's Enppi club, one of the leading favourites for the title, late on Monday.

Seeb finished second in their group, just behind Egypt's Tagdeef Aswan Club, who topped the standings after defeating Seeb 3-0 and also beating Jordan's Al Karak 3-0. Tuesday's schedule will feature the completion of the women's preliminary rounds alongside the men's classification matches for positions 9th to 16th and 17th to 24th.



Muhannad al Balushi, Bilal al Rashdi and Hamid Shamas shined for Seeb.

Egypt's ENPPI Club began their campaign with a commanding 3-1 victory over Iraq's Naft Al Shamal SC, before defeating Qatar's Al Sadd 3-0 in the evening session to secure qualification. Saudi Arabia's Al Ittihad, led by

Ahli Sidab crowned Youth Hockey League champions



Ahli Sidab sealed a commanding 7-2 victory over Salalah in the final. — Abdulwahid al Hamadani

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, SEPT 1

AHLI SIDAB claimed the 2025 Youth Hockey League title after delivering a powerful performance, sealing a commanding 7-2 victory over Salalah in the final held at the Oman Hockey Stadium in Al Amerat on Monday night. With this triumph, Ahli Sidab reaffirmed their dominance, leaving Salalah in second place and Masirah in third.

On the individual level, Salalah's Hazaa al Balushi earned the league's top-scorer award, while Ahli Sidab's goalkeeper Qais al Wahaibi was named the best goalkeeper. The best player award went to Ahli Sidab's Mohammed al Alawi. The closing ceremony was held under the auspices of Mohammed al Musharafi, Chairman of Qurayat Club, and attended by Dr Marwan al Juma, Chairman of the Oman Hockey Association.

The clash began cautiously, with Ahli Sidab focusing on possession and structured attacks, while Salalah relied on long balls and counter-attacks through the duo Hazaa al Balushi and Rashid Mohammed. Despite both sides creating chances, alert goalkeeping kept the first quarter goalless.

AHLI SIDAB TAKE CONTROL

Ahli Sidab quickly took control in the second quarter. Saad al Fazari broke the deadlock in the 22nd minute from a penalty corner, while Salalah wasted a golden chance to equalise a minute later. With sustained pressure, Anas al Siyabi netted twice in quick succession (26' and 29'), sending his side into half-time with a 3-0 lead.

Momentum carried into the third quarter as Rashid al Alawi added the fourth in the 31st minute, followed by Said al Fazari's strike at 35'. Salalah, despite three consecutive penalty corners, failed to convert, leaving the score 5-0 for Ahli Sidab.

In the final quarter, Laith al Wahaibi made it six at the 48th minute. Rashid Mohammed pulled one back for Salalah in the 54th, but Anas al Siyabi completed his hat-trick two minutes later to restore the margin. Salalah managed a second goal in the 58th, but the final whistle confirmed Ahli Sidab's emphatic 7-2 triumph and championship glory.

Ayman Al Kathiri, Ahli Sidab's coach, praised his team. "We congratulate our players, fans, and staff on this achievement, adding to the club's legacy. We were last year's champions, and retaining the title shows our consistency.

However, I am not satisfied with the league system. We played only four matches before reaching the final, which is far too few to truly develop players. Young athletes need more competitive matches to sharpen their skills, yet some groups had just two teams, which undermines the league's purpose."

From the other side, Wael Mahmoud Yehia, Salalah's coach, admitted the defeat was tough. "We weren't as prepared as Ahli Sidab, who entered the tournament already sharp from their youth league. Our preparation was disrupted, as the league coincided with the Khareef season in Dhofar, and many players were busy with work. We even hoped for a postponement. Still, reaching the final was an achievement. Ahli Sidab deserved their victory by capitalising on chances and maintaining composure, especially in the first quarter. Unfortunately, our players let nerves and disputes with referees affect their focus."

He concluded by stressing the importance of expanding local competitions: "Three matches are not enough to build strong players. A league that spans several months would provide better preparation and positively impact the national team."



Seeb finished second in their group, just behind Egypt's Tagdeef Aswan Club, who topped the standings.

professional player Omar Assar, also made a strong start with a hard-fought 3-2 victory against Egypt's Petrojet, followed by a convincing 3-0 win over Syria's Al Salamiyah to book their place in the next round.

In Group 3, Bahrain Club swept aside Morocco's Wydad 3-0 before also defeating UAE's Shabab Al Ahli 3-0, ensuring their advancement to the following round of the event. Similarly, Qatar's Al Arabi made a flawless

start in Group 4 with back-to-back 3-0 wins over Kuwait's Al Yarmouk and Oman's Salalah Club, confirming their spot in the second round.

In other results, Bahrain's Saar Club overcame Kuwait's Al Sahel (3-1) and Djibouti's Coast Guard Club (3-1) to progress, while Iraq's Sulaymaniyah edged Kuwait's Al Fahaheel 3-2 before the Kuwaiti side bounced back with a 3-1 victory against Syria's Al Rowad. Iraq's Ghaz Al Junoob narrowly defeated Qatar Club 3-2 in Group 8, though the Qatari side, featuring Nigerian star Quadri Aruna, recovered to beat Oman's Ibri 3-0 later in the evening.

Oman's other representatives Salalah and Ibri ended their campaign at the group stage. Ibri received two losses against Iraq's Ghaz Al Junoob and Qatar Club while Salalah also suffered two defeats against Qatar's Al Arabi and Kuwait's Al Yarmook club. Despite their losses, the Omani clubs players gained the desired exposure and experience ahead of the forthcoming local events.

RALLY OF PARAGUAY



French driver Sebastien Ogier (L) and co-driver Vincent Landais celebrate with the trophy after winning the WRC Rally Paraguay, 10th stage of the FIA World Rally Championship (WRC). — AFP

OGIER WINS IN PARAGUAY TO BOOST HOPES OF A NINTH TITLE

ENCARNACION, Paraguay: Toyota’s Sebastien Ogier won the inaugural Rally of Paraguay on Sunday to boost his chances of a record equalling ninth world championship crown. The 41-year old Frenchman, who started the season intending to mount only a part time campaign, is nine points behind Welsh teammate Elfyn Evans, who finished runner-up 26.2 seconds behind.

Evans still extended his lead from three points after his previous closest challenger, double world champion teammate Kalle Rovanpera, could finish only sixth after a puncture on Saturday. The Finn and Ogier, who has compatriot Sebastien Loeb’s record nine titles as a target, are now level on 189 points. Hyundai’s reigning champion Thierry Neuville took the final podium position in third place.

The victory was Toyota’s 102nd in the world championship, and ninth out of 10 this season, equalling Citroen’s all-time record.

Ogier’s only significant setback was on the final Power Stage, where bonus points can be won, when the weather changed before his run and he had heavy rain that rivals avoided.

“How unlucky can you be? Only one to have this heavy rain. But we’ll keep winning, and win this championship,” said the Frenchman.

“The points don’t really show it right now, that’s the only negative part, but it’s still a win and that’s the most important thing,” added Ogier, who has not had much previous success in South America. Hyundai’s Adrien Fourmaux was fourth and teammate Ott Tanak fifth.

The championship now moves to Chile for the next round on September 11-14. — Reuters



French driver Sebastien Ogier and co-driver Vincent Landais compete in their Toyota GR Yaris Rally1 during the Trinidad stage of the WRC Rally Paraguay, 10th stage of the FIA World Rally Championship (WRC), in Trinidad. — AFP



Seattle Sounders players celebrate winning the Leagues Cup after the match

Seattle Sounders stun Inter Miami to lift Leagues Cup

THE Seattle Sounders stunned Lionel Messi and Inter Miami 3-0 on Sunday to win the Leagues Cup, in a final marred by a post match brawl in which Inter’s Luis Suarez appeared to spit at an opposing coach.

Osaze De Rosario scored in the 26th minute and Alex Roldan added a penalty in the second half before Paul Rothrock capped the scoring for the hosts, whose determined defense stymied a star-studded Inter lineup led by Messi.

Inter’s frustrations spilled over at the final whistle at Lumen Field and officials had to scramble to quell a brawl sparked by Suarez before Seattle could celebrate their first Leagues Cup title.

Suarez rushed at Sounders midfielder Obed Vargas to spark a series of skirmishes, including one in which Suarez was caught on camera apparently spitting toward a Sounders assistant.

The Sounders — whose \$16.7 million payroll is dwarfed by Miami’s \$46.8 million player compensation total — became the first Major League Soccer team to win every North American trophy on offer.

They already own two MLS Cup crowns, an MLS Supporters Shield, four US Open Cups and a Concacaf Champions Cup.

This one was especially sweet

The Sounders — whose \$16.7 million payroll is dwarfed by Miami’s \$46.8 million player compensation total — became the first Major League Soccer team to win every North American trophy on offer.

with eight-time Ballon d’Or winner Lionel Messi on the other side.

“It’s a lot,” Sounders coach Brian Schmetzer said. “It’s against one of the best teams in our league, in the world, with Messi the best player in the world.”

De Rosario put the Sounders in front, heading in a cross from Roldan.

De Rosario had electrified the crowd when he came close in the third minute with a header saved by Miami goalkeeper Oscar Ustari.

“What’s going through my mind right now? It’s crazy, it’s a dream come true, I beat Messi in a final!” De Rosario said.

The announced attendance of 69,314 shattered the previous record for a Leagues Cup crowd of 50,675 and was also a record for a Sounders game at Lumen Field. It was a frustrating first half for Inter, who lifted the Leagues Cup in 2023 in Messi’s first season in MLS.

Inter’s first opportunity saw Messi take a quick tumble after tangling with Vargas.

Seattle’s Jackson Ragen blocked Messi’s attempt from outside the area in the 19th minute then a minute later blocked a shot from Rodrigo De Paul.

Miami pressed early in the second half and appeared to have every chance of pulling off the kind of comeback they posted over Orlando in the semi-finals. Suarez spun

through traffic to deliver the ball to Messi as he cut in front of goal, but Messi chipped his attempt over the crossbar. Miami were finding their rhythm but they squandered another opportunity in the 60th minute when Tadeo Allende, fed by Suarez, missed from directly in front of the goal.

SOUNDERS DIG DEEP

Miami appeared to have seized the momentum, but Seattle wouldn’t let go. “I think the guys dug down deep,” Schmetzer said. “At 1-0 the game could have gone either way. They were putting a lot of pressure on us.”

Roldan’s penalty in the 84th minute gave Seattle some breathing room and Rothrock sparked wild Seattle celebrations with a goal in the 89th. But when the final whistle blew things turned ugly. “I guess we can take that as a compliment that Miami’s frustrations led to some things happening,” Schmetzer said. “But that shouldn’t be the story.”

Instead he focused on the collective effort of his team in overcoming Messi and his star teammates. “They have unbelievably talented players,” Schmetzer said. “We were under it in the second half, and they probably should have scored a couple of goals. But we played smart, kept our composure, and that’s why we won.” — AFP

Zampa makes long trip as Invincibles win Hundred final

LONDON: Adam Zampa’s marathon 21,000 mile (34,000 kilometres) round trip from Australia just to bowl 20 balls paid dividends as the Oval Invincibles won their third successive final in English cricket’s Hundred with a 26-run victory over the Trent Rockets at Lord’s on Sunday.

Zampa’S near 30-hour journey came about after the 33-year-old, who’s been on international duty with Australia, was summoned as a replacement for fellow leg-spinner Rashid Khan, called up to play for Afghanistan. Zampa, who had starred in the Invincibles previous two title-winning campaigns, took a miserly 1-21 from his maximum 20 balls on Sunday, with the veteran having Rockets dangerman David



Trent Rockets’ Ben Cox runs out Oval Invincibles’ Tom Curran. — Reuters

Wiley stumped for 14. He was not the only Australian leg-spinner in the wickets for the Invincibles.

Penrith-born but England-qualified Nathan Sowter took 3-25 — including the prize scalp of England great Joe Root for 10 — as the Rockets set 169 to win, were held to 142-8.

It was something of an ‘Australia Day’ at Lord’s, with all-rounder Marcus Stoinis returning figures of 2-40 for the Rockets before top-scoring for the Nottingham-based side with a quickfire 64, including four fours and five sixes, that ended when he was lbw to England quick Saqib Mahmood.

England’s Will Jacks laid the foundations for the Invincibles’ win with a 41-ball 72 at the top of the order, although he was reprieved

on 28 by a Stoinis no-ball after the Rockets lost New Zealand fast bowler Lockie Ferguson to injury in the warm-up.

Australia internationals also took centre stage in the preceding women’s final, with Annabel Sutherland, Nicola Carey and Phoebe Litchfield, the player of the tournament, starring as the Northern Superchargers beat the Southern Brave by seven wickets.

The 23-year-old Sutherland took 2-23, with the Brave, previously unbeaten in this season’s edition, held to 115-6 in the 100 balls per side showpiece match.

Then, Sutherland’s 28 not out helped put the result beyond doubt after the Superchargers had faltered at 59-3. — AFP

SPORTS

US OPEN



Serbia's Novak Djokovic serves to Germany's Jan-Lennard Struff during their Round of 16 match on day eight of the US Open tournament. — AFP

ALCARAZ, DJOKOVIC MOTOR INTO QUARTERS

NEW YORK: Carlos Alcaraz and Novak Djokovic motored into the quarterfinals of the US Open on Sunday as reigning women's champion Aryna Sabalenka kept her title defence firmly on track.

Spanish second seed Alcaraz and tennis icon Djokovic — who are on course to meet in the semifinals — both recorded straight-set wins on the Arthur Ashe Stadium main court.

Five-time Grand Slam champion Alcaraz overpowered France's Arthur Rinderknech 7-6 (7/3), 6-3, 6-4 and has not dropped a set to date at the championships. "I think my style of tennis suits pretty well the energy here in New York," the 22-year-old said. Alcaraz will face Czech 20th seed Jiri Lehecka in the quarterfinals on Tuesday.

Lehecka reached the last eight of a Grand Slam for only the second time after battling past veteran Frenchman Adrian Mannarino, winning 7-6 (7/4), 6-4, 2-6, 6-2. Djokovic, 38, continued his latest bid for a record 25th Grand Slam singles title with a brisk 6-3, 6-3, 6-2 defeat of unseeded German Jan-Lennard Struff.

Djokovic faces a quarterfinal on Tuesday against fourth seed Taylor Fritz, the lone American man left in the draw.

Fritz sprinted into the last eight with a 6-4, 6-3, 6-3 defeat of the Czech Republic's Tomas Machac in 1hr 38min.

In the women's draw, Sabalenka never looked troubled in a 6-1, 6-4 defeat of Moldova-born Spaniard Cristina Bucsa, ranked 95th in the world.

Sabalenka has now reached the quarterfinals or better at 12 straight Grand Slam tournaments.

Sabalenka faces a quarterfinal against the Czech Republic's Marketa Vondrousova, the 2023 Wimbledon champion, who upset ninth seed Elena Rybakina 6-4, 5-7, 6-2 in the late game on Arthur Ashe. Another Czech, unseeded former French Open and Wimbledon champion Barbora Krejickova, conjured a remarkable escape to oust Taylor Townsend, saving an incredible eight match points before digging out a 1-6, 7-6 (15/13), 6-3 victory. — AFP

AL FAISAL & CO STRIKE GOLD IN NURBURGRING

AL MANAR

Racing by Team WRT's Al Faisal al Zubair, Jens Klingmann and Ben Tuck secured outright victory in the Gold Cup category at the penultimate round of the GT World Challenge Europe Endurance Cup powered by AWS at the Nurburgring in Germany on Sunday.

The stunning result in their BMW M4 GT3 EVO strengthens the team's grip on second place in both the Endurance Cup's Teams' and Drivers' Championships and means that the outcome of the title race will be decided at the final round in Barcelona in October.

Initially, it looked as though Chris Lulham, Thierry Vermeulen and Harry King had earned Gold Cup success and guaranteed that the Verstappen.com Racing Aston Martin team had sealed the endurance title with a race to spare. But they were awarded a 10-second penalty after the race and slipped back to third position behind the CSA Racing McLaren.

A delighted Al Zubair said: "I think it was a very solid weekend. We started off very strongly in free practice. The BMW has been quite positive this weekend. In previous years, we have seen the BMW struggling against some manufacturers, like the Ferrari and the Mercedes. To come away with a win this weekend is something we should be very proud of.

"As a team and a manufacturer, to come away with this result at such a prestigious track like the Nurburgring is something extremely satisfying. It is my first win here personally. I am extremely happy and hoping to be able to carry this momentum into the final two races."

The Al Manar Racing by Team WRT BMW lined up second in the Gold Cup category behind the Garage 59 McLaren for the start of the three-hour endurance race on the 5.1km GP-Strecke circuit.

Al Zubair ceded a place to Vermeulen in the Verstappen.com Racing Aston Martin early in the stint before the yellow flag caused a brief stoppage.

For the remainder of the first stint, the Omani closely shadowed the Aston Martin in third place with Adam Smalley out in front in the Garage 59 McLaren. The Tresor Attempto Racing Audi pulled out after five laps.

Al Zubair handed over to Tuck for the second stint but Vermeulen



Al Manar Racing by Team WRT's Al Faisal al Zubair, Jens Klingmann and Ben Tuck secured outright victory in the Gold Cup category at the penultimate round of the GT World Challenge Europe Endurance Cup powered by AWS at the Nurburgring in Germany.

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stayed out right until the end of the one-hour opening session and moved into the Gold Cup lead before all the changeovers were carried out.

Once the nine Gold Cup driver changes had taken place after 32 laps, Chris Lulham retained the advantage for the Verstappen.com team from Louis Prette in the Garage 59 McLaren and Tuck in the Al Manar Racing by Team WRT BMW. Tuck then passed Prette and settled into second place. Prette then retired the Garage 59 McLaren after 45 laps.

Another full course yellow stopped the action around the two-hour mark and the time of the final driver change, as Klingmann replaced Tuck in the Al Manar Raving by Team WRT BMW. The German retained second

place behind Harry King heading into the remaining 57 minutes with action restarting after 62 laps with 45 minutes on the clock.

There were no late dramas and Klingmann brought the BMW to the finish behind the Aston Martin to grab second place for Al Manar Racing by Team WRT. The CSA Racing McLaren crew rounded off the podium finishers and lost ground on Al Manar Racing in the battle for second place in the Teams' and Drivers' Championships.

But then the 10-second penalty was later awarded to the Verstappen.com car and the outcome of the Endurance Championship now goes on to the final round in October.

The team is back in action for the final round of the GT World Challenge Europe Sprint Cup in Valencia on September 19-21.

M a n C i t y r o c k e d b y B r i g h t o n , P a l a c e b l a n k V i l l a

Szoboszlai gem seals Liverpool win over Arsenal

LONDON: Dominik Szoboszlai's brilliant free-kick fired Liverpool to a dramatic 1-0 win over title rivals Arsenal on Sunday, while Manchester City lost 2-1 at Brighton to extend their troubled start to the season.

Szoboszlai curled a sublime set-piece past Arsenal keeper David Raya with seven minutes left at Anfield in a tense clash between the two leading contenders for the Premier League crown. The Hungary midfielder's gem was enough to seal a third successive league victory for champions Liverpool as Arsenal lost for the first time this term following consecutive wins.

The Gunners finished as runners-up behind Liverpool last season and the clubs have been engaged in an

expensive arms race since the end of the season. Liverpool's Florian Wirtz and Hugo Ekitike and Arsenal's Martin Zubimendi and Viktor Gyokeres had their chance to shine under the spotlight on Sunday.

None of the new additions dazzled. Instead it was Szoboszlai, deployed out of position at right-back, who delivered the defining moment.

Zubimendi fouled Curtis Jones 25 yards from goal and Szoboszlai stepped up with a masterful finish.

Liverpool, who have the only 100 per cent record in the top tier, go into the international break in a familiar position on top of the table as they chase a record 21st English title.

"If you win against a team like



Liverpool's Dominik Szoboszlai celebrates scoring their first goal. — Reuters

Arsenal, who last season were such a good team and have strengthened so much, it is very positive," Liverpool boss Arne Slot said.

"In the end we needed a moment of magic. We will know at the end of the season what it's worth."

Arsenal must lick their wounds after a result that suggested their bid to end a run of three successive second place finishes is still a work in progress. "At the end of the game, I said we have to find a way to win these big matches," said Arsenal manager Mikel Arteta.

Earlier, at the Amex Stadium, City striker Erling Haaland marked his 100th Premier League appearance with his 88th goal in the competition since joining from Borussia Dortmund in 2022. But the 25-year-

old's third goal this season wasn't enough to help Pep Guardiola's side bounce back from last weekend's 2-0 home loss to Tottenham.

James Milner's second half penalty hauled Brighton level before Brajan Gruda's late strike completed City's collapse. "We forgot to pass the ball, just played long balls and we were not good enough," said Guardiola.

West Ham eased the pressure on boss Graham Potter with a 3-0 win at Nottingham Forest.

Aston Villa's winless start continued with a 3-0 home defeat to Crystal Palace. Jean-Philippe Mateta, Marc Guehi and Ismaila Sarr struck for the Eagles as Villa missed the presence of goalkeeper Emi Martinez. — AFP

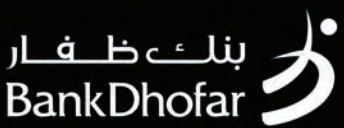


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The four licences are prospective for copper, gold, silver, chromite, silica, salt and kaolin, in addition to basalt and gabbro.

OMAN INVITES BIDS FOR FOUR NEW MINING CONCESSIONS

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 1

The Ministry of Energy and Minerals has invited local and international companies to bid for investment opportunities across four mining concession areas. The new acreage is part of the Ministry’s 2025 Mining Licensing Round aimed at growing the sector’s contribution to the Omani economy.

The Ministry said the four sites, each with promising geological potential, are distributed across several governorates:

- Block D-11 (Al Buraimi Governorate) — 1,084 km² with early indicators of copper, gold, silver and chromite, in addition to basalt and gabbro.
- Block E-22 (Al Sharqiyah North Governorate) — 810 km² with preliminary signs of copper, gold, silver and chromite, alongside basalt and gabbro.
- Block B-14 (Al Batinah South Governorate) — the largest at 2,673 km², with data indicating copper, gold, silver and chromite, plus industrial rocks such as basalt and gabbro.
- Block H-51 (Al Wusta Governorate) — 4,181 km² with indicators for industrial minerals including silica, salt and kaolin.

The licensing round underlines the Ministry’s continued work to enable sustainable investment and maximise the value of the Sultanate of Oman’s mineral wealth by providing a transparent, competitive and well-regulated environment — supporting income diversification and stronger in-country value from mining.

Study underscores wave energy potential

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, SEPT 1

A new study conducted by a joint team of Omani researchers has uncovered compelling evidence of significant wave energy potential off key stretches of the Sultanate of Oman’s southeastern coastline.

An analysis of wave conditions at three locations along the country’s eastern seaboard determined that Masirah and Shaleem and Al Hallaniyat Islands hold strong promise for wave energy development, while Muscat showed more moderate potential.

If proven commercially viable, wave energy could complement solar and wind — currently at the heart of Oman’s transition to a low-carbon economy. The findings also bolster the ambitions of a number of ocean energy developers keenly eyeing investment opportunities in Omani waters.

Globally, wave energy is considered vast but still largely untapped, with a theoretical potential of over 29,000 terawatt-hours (TWh) per year — close to current global electricity demand.

In practical terms, however, the economically recoverable share is estimated at about 4,000 TWh per year, enough to supply roughly 10–15% of global electricity needs.

Underscoring wave energy’s appeal is its predictability, consistency and higher energy density compared to solar and wind.

The latest study adds to a growing body of research on Oman’s wave energy prospects. The three-year project involved Abdullah al Badi of the College of Engineering (Sultan Qaboos University), Jamal al Hinai of the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA), Abdulmajeed al Wahaibi of the University of Technology and Applied Sciences (UTAS) and Sultan al Yahyai of Code Academy.



Swathes of Oman’s southeastern coast, notably Masirah and Shaleem and Al Hallaniyat Islands, hold strong promise for wave energy development.

“The spatial analysis reveals a clear trend of increasing wave power along the southeastern coast, towards the open Indian Ocean, where stronger wind conditions prevail.

The monthly analysis indicates that mean wave power peaks during the summer months (June to August), coinciding with the southwest Indian monsoon season, which significantly enhances wave activity along the southern coastline”, the team noted in their published report.

“Results indicate that most of the annual wave energy is contributed by significant wave heights ranging between 1 and 4 metres, suggesting that systems designed for this region should be optimised for this range.

These findings offer valuable insights into the site-specific feasibility of wave energy development in Oman, highlighting the most promising locations and seasons for efficient energy harvesting”, they added.

The researchers concluded that, of the three locations studied, Shaleem and Al Hallaniyat Islands (off Dhofar Governorate) exhibited the highest potential, with peak wave power reaching up to 64.5 kW/m during summer.

Masirah also showed strong seasonal potential, while Muscat displayed the most stable wave conditions in terms of monthly and seasonal variability, though with lower overall energy levels.

“In conclusion, Oman’s southern coastline — especially near Shaleem and Al Hallaniyat Islands and Masirah — presents substantial potential for wave energy development, particularly as a seasonal source that can help meet rising energy demand during the summer months”, the scientists said.

“These findings provide valuable guidance for future strategic planning, site selection and system design of wave energy projects in the region. Further work is recommended to explore techno-economic feasibility, environmental impacts and long-term variability under climate change scenarios”, they added.

OQ Trading eyes Bangladesh FSRU to expand South Asia footprint

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, SEPT 1

Oman’s OQ Trading International has proposed building a floating storage and regasification unit (FSRU) in Bangladesh, seeking to strengthen its role as a reliable energy partner in South Asia as the country’s domestic gas output declines.

The proposal, submitted to state-run Petrobangla under a build-own-operate-transfer (BOOT) model, would provide capacity of around 3.75 million tonnes per year, The Financial Express (Bangladesh) reported on August 31.



LNG carrier Nizwa LNG at the Qalhat jetty in Oman

Petrobangla Chairman Md Reznur Rahman told the paper the proposal is under review.

Bangladesh currently operates two FSRUs that are near saturation, regasifying about 1,050 million cubic feet per day (mmcf) against combined capacity of 1,100 mmcf, according to the Dhaka-based daily.

Domestic production has slipped to about 1,800 mmcf, levels last seen in 2008–09.

The development comes as Dhaka signed its first short-term LNG supply deal with OQ Trading last month.

The agreement covers 17 cargoes between August 2025 and

December 2026, priced against the Japan Korea Marker (JKM) with a \$0.15/MMBtu premium, offering an alternative to Brent-linked contracts in the country’s long-term portfolio.

Since its first LNG delivery to Bangladesh in 2019, OQ Trading has supplied 125 cargoes totalling 7.8 million tonnes, making it one of Dhaka’s most trusted partners.

For Oman, the proposed Moheshkhali FSRU reinforces OQ’s global strategy and aligns with Oman Vision 2040 by expanding energy infrastructure investments abroad and deepening the Sultanate of Oman’s position in Asian energy markets.

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These solutions reflect Muzn Islamic Banking’s mission to empower families with financial tools that support their aspirations while remaining true to Sharia principles.

MUZN ISLAMIC BANKING UNVEILS BACK-TO-SCHOOL SOLUTIONS

MUSCAT: The National Bank of Oman’s (NBO) Muzn Islamic Banking has introduced tailored financial solutions to support families across the Sultanate of Oman with back-to-school expenses, including tuition fees, transportation and school supplies.

Salima bint Obaid Issa al Marzoqiyah, Assistant General Manager and Chief Islamic Banking Officer at NBO, said: “At Muzn Islamic Banking, we believe education is the foundation for prosperous communities and knowledge-driven societies.

As families prepare for the new school year, we are proud to offer Sharia-compliant solutions that ease financial pressures and enable parents to invest in their children’s future with confidence, while contributing to Oman’s vision of sustainable development and lifelong learning”.

Muzn Islamic Banking’s education finance is offered under a Services Ijarah arrangement, with competitive rates and flexible payment options. The facility can be used for school fees, undergraduate and postgraduate studies, PhD programmes and professional training courses, both locally and internationally. Repayment periods extend up to 10 years, giving families the flexibility to pursue long-term educational goals with confidence.

In addition, Muzn Islamic Banking offers the Kids Wakalah Account, which allows parents to save for their children’s education without a minimum balance requirement. Muzn acts as an investment agent, managing savings responsibly in line with Sharia principles while providing competitive profit rates.

The account also encourages children to develop disciplined saving habits from an early age, helping them build financial awareness and responsibility. Families can further benefit from Muzn Islamic Banking’s Gold, Platinum and Signature credit cards, offering convenience and security with features such as free supplementary cards for family members, flexible repayment options and access to discounts and offers — providing added peace of mind when managing seasonal and back-to-school expenses.

AL MOUJ MUSCAT HANDS OVER GOLF BEACH RESIDENCES

MUSCAT: Al Mouj Muscat has begun handovers at Golf Beach Residences, welcoming homeowners to one of Oman’s most exclusive oceanfront communities.

Located in the gated Golf District, this collection of five- and six-bedroom villas offers direct access to golden beaches, a private park and Oman’s only PGA Standard Championship Golf Course.

Each residence features private pools, spacious terraces, Zen suites and bespoke elevation designs. The



neighbourhood balances privacy with openness through wide boulevards, green corridors and landscaped walkways, creating a serene yet connected living

experience. Nasser al Sheibani, CEO of Al Mouj Muscat, said: “Golf Beach Residences exemplifies how we design neighbourhoods at Al Mouj Muscat.

Perfectly positioned between the St Regis Hotel, the beach and the golf course, it blends privacy with exceptional leisure amenities. Handovers now underway mark the start of a vibrant, lived experience for families, reaffirming our commitment to creating spaces where lasting memories are made”.

Oman’s investment sector boosts regional growth

OMAN’S investment sector is playing an increasingly strategic role in the country’s economic diversification efforts under Oman Vision 2040, supported by fiscal reforms, private capital mobilisation and cross-border partnerships.

A new Growth Perspectives video produced by Oxford Business Group (OBG), in collaboration with Oman International Development and Investment Company (Ominvest), explores how Oman is strengthening its economic foundations while positioning itself as an active player in regional growth.

The video, titled “How Oman and Ominvest drive sustainable growth beyond oil”, highlights the country’s progress in reducing its reliance on hydrocarbons over the past decade, underpinned by policy frameworks such as the Five-Year Strategy and the Medium-Term Fiscal Plan.

These measures have helped lower public debt from nearly 70% of GDP to under 34%, restore investment-grade status and channel resources into infrastructure, private sector development and job creation.

Particular focus is placed on

With sustainability, governance and innovation becoming core investment priorities, Ominvest is building cross-border partnerships, investing in platforms that connect markets and supporting sectors such as finance, insurance and technology.



The video, titled “How Oman and Ominvest drive sustainable growth beyond oil”, highlights the country’s progress in reducing its reliance on hydrocarbons over the past decade

emerging industries, including tourism, logistics, mining, fisheries and green hydrogen, all aligned with Oman Vision 2040.

The video also examines Ominvest’s contribution, both through domestic investment and by expanding its footprint in high-growth regional markets such as Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

With sustainability, governance and innovation becoming core investment priorities, Ominvest is building cross-border partnerships,

investing in platforms that connect markets and supporting sectors such as finance, insurance and technology. This reflects a broader transformation in Gulf investment institutions, which are increasingly shaping industries and fostering regional integration.

Dana Carmen Agarbicean, OBG’s Country Director for Oman, said: “Oman’s investment sector is emerging as a catalyst for sustainable economic growth and diversification.

National Finance unveils green financing solutions

MUSCAT: National Finance, the Sultanate of Oman’s leading finance company, has introduced a Sustainable Finance offering to help individuals and businesses adopt environmentally responsible practices.

The initiative aligns with Oman Vision 2040 and forms a significant milestone in the company’s long-term sustainability strategy.

The new product promotes greener choices by providing financing for electric and hybrid vehicles, residential solar



To make sustainable options more attractive, the offering features up to 1% lower preferential financing rates for eligible products and zero processing fees on approved projects.

energy systems, water recycling solutions and smart home technologies.

For corporate and SME clients, financing extends to sustainability-linked projects with a focus on environmental conservation and positive social impact. To make sustainable options more attractive, the offering features up to 1% lower preferential financing rates for eligible products and zero processing fees on approved projects.

In addition, corporate and SME customers can benefit

from expert guidance provided by National Finance’s team of specialists, who are well-equipped to help businesses seamlessly integrate sustainable practices into daily operations.

This reflects the company’s commitment to customer service while encouraging enterprises to embrace sustainable growth. Tariq bin Sulaiman al Farsi, CEO of National Finance, said: “Our Sustainable Finance solutions are designed to empower individuals and businesses to make responsible choices.

Grand Millennium Muscat launches 2025 MICE & Weddings offer

MUSCAT: In collaboration with Millennium Hotels & Resorts, Grand Millennium Muscat has unveiled its 2025 MICE and Weddings Campaign, reinforcing its position as a premier venue for Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, Exhibitions (MICE) and Weddings in Oman and the wider region.

The campaign invites corporate planners, event organisers and wedding specialists to explore the hotel’s versatile venues and personalised services, offering a suite of benefits for qualified group events scheduled between now and December 2025.

Planners booking events at Grand Millennium Muscat can enjoy ‘Triple



Planners booking events at Grand Millennium Muscat can enjoy ‘Triple My Millennium Points’ through the ‘My Millennium Biz’ loyalty programme, accelerating rewards accumulation.

My Millennium Points’ through the ‘My Millennium Biz’ loyalty programme, accelerating rewards accumulation.

Additional complimentary perks include free room nights, suite upgrades, rebates towards future bookings, themed coffee breaks, welcome cocktails and personalised branded signage, creating value-rich experiences for both planners and guests.

Flexible event solutions cater to a wide range of needs, from group stays and full-scale conferences to catering-only arrangements for a minimum of 10 rooms or 20 delegates. Whether it is a board meeting, a destination wedding, or

a product launch, the hotel ensures seamless, elevated experiences.

Glenn Nobbs, Cluster General Manager of Grand Millennium Muscat, said: “Oman has become a hub of opportunity for businesses and a breathtaking destination for celebrations.

Our 2025 MICE and Weddings Campaign is a reminder that Grand Millennium Muscat is more than just a venue — we are a trusted partner in creating unforgettable events”.

Located in the heart of Muscat, the hotel features one of the city’s largest ballrooms, adaptable meeting rooms, curated wedding packages, bespoke catering and full in-house event coordination.

SELECTIVEGROWTH



The National Digital Mailbox enables individuals and businesses to receive and manage official communications digitally

OMAN POST
LAUNCHES NATIONAL
DIGITAL MAILBOX
SERVICE

MUSCAT: Oman Post has officially launched the National Digital Mailbox service through a strategic partnership with Denmark’s e-Boks. The platform will act as the official, secure channel for communication between government entities, private sector organisations and individual users across Oman.

This initiative is part of the country’s ongoing efforts to accelerate digital transformation, enhance governance, strengthen data protection and contribute to building a more efficient and reliable digital economy, in line with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040.

The National Digital Mailbox enables individuals and businesses to receive and manage official communications digitally, including invoices, contracts, statements and notifications, through a single, trusted source.

The platform is accessible 24/7 and ensures full legal recognition of all digital correspondence, offering a reliable alternative to traditional postal channels.

According to Sayyid Nasr bin Badr al Busaidy, Chief Postmaster General at Oman Post, the service is

designed to provide faster and more secure delivery of government services, support companies in their communication needs and give individuals a verified digital mailbox to safely store important documents.

The platform also contributes to sustainability by reducing the use of paper, lowering administrative costs and accelerating transaction times.

As part of the partnership, Oman Post and e-Boks will exchange knowledge, share expertise and build local capacity to ensure the platform’s resilience, compliance with international standards and readiness for future digital economy requirements.

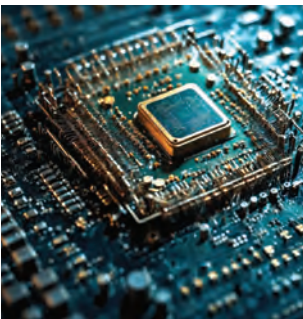
Ulrik Falkner Thaysen, CEO of e-Boks, highlighted the company’s two decades of global experience in developing secure digital mailbox solutions, emphasising that the platform can be fully integrated with public and private sector systems across Oman.

This agreement sets new regional benchmarks for secure, user-focused digital mail services, reinforcing Oman’s commitment to digital innovation, economic diversification and national resilience.

The National Digital Mailbox marks a major step towards a fully digital and sustainable future for communications in Oman. — ONA

SEMICONDUCTOR SECTOR

Samsung, SK Hynix shares fall



Shares in Samsung and SK Hynix dropped after the US revoked authorisations to import chip-making equipment for their China factories. SK Hynix makes 30%-40% of its DRAM and NAND there, Samsung a third of its NAND. SK Hynix said it will work with US and Korean authorities; Samsung declined comment. — Reuters

HOUSING SECTOR

UK house prices fall unexpectedly in August



UK house prices fell 0.1% in August as high valuations weighed on buyers, Nationwide said. Annual growth slowed to 2.1%, the weakest since June 2024. Chief Economist Robert Gardner noted affordability pressures, while some analysts warned that speculation over potential property taxes could further dampen the market. — Reuters

OIL TALK

India denies profiteering from Russian oil



India is not profiteering from Russian oil imports, Oil Minister Hardeep Singh Puri said, adding that the country’s purchases have stabilised global markets and curbed price spikes. Critics claimed India acted as a “laundromat” for Russian oil, but Puri rejected this, noting all transactions follow legal, audited channels. — Reuters

CEOTALKS

Partnerships key to
Duqm Port’s growth: CEO

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, SEPT 1

PORT of Duqm’s long-term success hinges on pairing efficient operations with “captive” industrial cargo, green-energy-led manufacturing and tight public-private partnerships — rather than relying on transshipment alone, Reggy Vermeulen, CEO, stated here yesterday.

Addressing the Middle East Transport Forum, Vermeulen said: “Efficiency is essential, but location and infrastructure by themselves are no longer enough”. He cautioned however that ports which focus only on transshipment risk under-utilisation despite world-class facilities, adding: “You need steel, gas, fisheries and other industries tied to the quay to create a virtuous cycle of volumes and investment”.

The CEO cited examples of modernised ports that struggled because they lacked an industrial hinterland and guaranteed volumes. By contrast, Al Duqm is steering cargo generation from within



Efficiency is essential, but location and infrastructure by themselves are no longer enough

REGGY VERMEULEN

Oman through major projects and off-takers “anchored” in and around the port and Special Economic Zone.

Three strategic pillars The CEO outlined three priorities shaping Al Duqm’s next phase:

Decarbonisation: Capitalising on Al Duqm’s complementary wind and solar profile to supply competitive green electricity and derivatives (hydrogen, ammonia, methanol)

for downstream industries — especially low-carbon steel.

“We are moving ahead of the curve by aligning off-takers with projects before the upstream is fully online”, he said, noting active interest from Japanese, Brazilian, European and Chinese players.

People and community: Expanding education, healthcare and urban services to attract talent and residents to Al Wusta Governorate, while preserving distinctive natural assets, including sensitive coastal and migratory-bird habitats.

Health and wellbeing at work: Embedding safety and quality-of-life measures to sustain a liveable industrial city.

On logistics efficiency, the CEO said Al Duqm is working with national authorities on a logistics community system linking port operators, customs, free zones, warehouses and shippers.

The aim is real-time visibility and faster clearance — “closing the gap between B2C tracking standards consumers now expect and the B2B cargo world”. He added that overcapacity

across parts of the Gulf, Indian Ocean and Mediterranean means the “old model of a dominant port authority waiting for customers is over”.

Success, he said, will come from teamwork among cargo owners, regulators, operators and shipping lines, coupled with policies that make Oman a natural origin-and-destination market for volumes moving north-south to the UAE and beyond.

Operational performance According to the CEO, Port of Duqm’s core operations — vessel turnaround, loading and unloading — are benchmarking well. “The task now is to compound that operational base with captive industries so that volumes are resilient through the cycle”, he said.

A technical workshop scheduled this week will focus on captured, origin-based cargo strategies for Al Duqm and its hinterland, he noted.

“Partnership is the only way forward. When you have a plan that makes sense — industries tied to clean energy, communities that can thrive and digital transparency — capital follows”.

TRA launches consultation on postal tariffs

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, SEPT 1

The Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) has announced the launch of a public consultation on a proposed regulatory framework for postal service tariffs in Oman, as part of efforts to foster competition, safeguard consumer rights and enhance service quality in the sector.

The Authority said the initiative aims to align tariff approval mechanisms with international best practices, create a fair competitive environment to ensure the sustainability of licensed companies and empower beneficiaries with transparent choices.

The consultation document highlights three core areas, notably: Standards for determining tariffs for licensed postal companies; Services that will be subject to tariff approval; and the Impact of digital transformation on service delivery and pricing.

According to TRA, the proposed framework will cover all providers of express and related postal services, excluding incoming international express services



The move is aimed at fostering competition, safeguarding consumer rights and enhancing service quality in the sector. (Illustrative image)

paid abroad and certain commercial transport contracts. The Authority would retain powers to set or adjust tariff ceilings and floors, direct special tariffs for vulnerable groups such as low-income beneficiaries or people with disabilities and reassess tariffs on its own initiative or upon request from stakeholders.

Minimum tariff levels are also outlined for local parcel services, including RO 2 for door-to-door delivery, RO 1 for office-to-office delivery and RO 1.5 for office-to-door and door-to-office services across all governorates. Food delivery and fast courier service providers operating through licensed digital applications

will additionally be required to submit tariff data and service conditions to TRA 30 days before launching services, with promotional offers capped at RO 7 per month.

Stakeholders, including licensed operators, businesses and consumers, have until Thursday, September 15, 2025, to submit their feedback.

Why the AI Bubble Resembles the Dot-Com Bubble



**TARIQ
AL BARWANI**

The writer is the founder of Knowledge Oman.

I received many interesting messages and feedback on my article about the AI bubble last week. Some agreed, others disagreed, but many questioned the moral behind my opinion.

That’s why I decided to focus this week’s article on why I compare the AI bubble to the infamous dot-com bubble that bust more than 20 years ago.

Back in the late ’90s, the internet promised to revolutionise countless industries. As a result, everyone wanted to jump on the bandwagon. Ambitious individuals dreamed of becoming internet entrepreneurs and companies raced to establish an online presence.

Investors, eager not to miss out, poured money into startups that were expected to grow their investments into millions, if not billions, of dollars. The stock markets soared to new heights.

But by 2000, reality struck. Many entrepreneurs took advantage of the internet hype, selling visions with little practical value. When the truth emerged, the dot-com bubble bust.

In just two years, trillions of dollars in market value were wiped out. Most startups

that had been built on lofty promises collapsed. A few, like Amazon and Google, survived and thrived, but many, like Yahoo, AltaVista, GeoCities and others faded into history. Some entrepreneurs cashed out successfully, while many others went bankrupt and lost their jobs. All of it started with bold promises of revolutionising industries with the internet.

Fast forward to today and I see the same thing happening with AI. Everyone, once again, is trying to join the bandwagon, from creating, demonstrating, or pitching AI as the ultimate tool to transform industries.

Do I believe AI will have a real impact? Absolutely. But at the same time, I see familiar patterns that once defined the dot-com bubble.

Back then, many dot-com startups promised to revolutionise industries but had little to show in practice. Today, countless AI initiatives make bold claims without delivering practical results. In the ’90s, internet companies raised hundreds of billions of dollars while generating little or no revenue.

Today, many AI startups have unclear paths to profitability yet attract massive

Both the internet two decades ago and AI today represent transformative technologies. Yet in both cases, enthusiasm has run far ahead of actual progress. Time will eventually separate reality from hype

investment. During the dot-com era, investor enthusiasm was sky-high, only to evaporate when the crash came. Now, AI attracts the same level of attention and no one can say when the correction might arrive.

Finally, dot-com startups often looked alike, with only minor differences separating them. AI is no different too as most solutions look and function almost the same, with only small enhancements setting them apart. Déjà vu, isn’t it?

To conclude, let me emphasise that I firmly believe AI will transform industries just as the internet already has. But patterns suggest that an AI bubble bust may be around the corner, especially given the sheer volume of AI apps and solutions being introduced almost daily.

Both the internet two decades ago and AI today represent transformative technologies. Yet in both cases, enthusiasm has run far ahead of actual progress.

Time will eventually separate reality from hype. Until then, keep your eyes wide open for opportunities and your hard-earned money safe for the real deal. Let’s catch up again next week as we explore reality from fiction and productivity from waste.

AFRICA’S GREEN ECONOMY IS A GOOD INVESTMENT

FITSUM ASSEFA ADELA

Africa is on the frontline of a socially and economically corrosive global environmental crisis. Droughts and floods are disrupting agriculture and displacing millions of people across the continent. According to the African Development Bank, climate change reduces Africa’s GDP growth by 5–15% each year — losses that translate to fewer jobs and less investment in critical infrastructure.

Yet Africa is also a model of climate possibility, with vast renewable resources, rich biodiversity, rapidly growing economies and a young, innovative population. Much of this green potential remains untapped.

For example, although the continent has 60% of the world’s best solar resources, it accounts for only 1% of global installed solar capacity and just 3% of global energy investment.

Initiatives like the Africa Green Industrialisation Initiative (AGII) and the Flagship Report at ACS2 highlight how governments, private companies and development-finance institutions can scale transformative projects

This represents a major opportunity for investors. While industrialised countries try to retrofit fossil-fuel-based economies, Africa can build resilient, sustainable economies from the ground up. Broad commitments to green development by African governments create favourable conditions for investment and long-term returns. Several projects demonstrate Africa’s green potential. Ethiopia has built a national grid powered almost entirely by renewables, especially hydropower. The Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) currently generates 2,350 MW and will reach 5,150 MW when fully operational, powering homes in Ethiopia and neighbouring countries like Djibouti, Kenya, Sudan and Tanzania.

In The Gambia, the Jambur Solar Power Station (23 MW), supported by a \$165 million blended-finance package, created over a thousand local jobs while delivering clean power to households.

South Africa’s Impofu Wind Complex (330 MW) facilitates industrial decarbonisation through innovative agreements that attract global capital. In Kenya, solar-powered green-ammonia production reduces agricultural emissions, lowers costs for farmers and boosts food security.

Initiatives like the Africa Green Industrialisation Initiative (AGII) and the Flagship Report at ACS2 highlight how governments, private companies and development-finance institutions can scale transformative projects. Africa’s renewable-energy potential is immense, measured in terawatts rather than megawatts, with opportunities across energy, climate-smart agriculture, sustainable transport and nature-based solutions.

Investors must overcome outdated perceptions of Africa as a high-risk destination.

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Oman’s green logistics shapes future trade

In a world where trade routes are being redrawn and climate imperatives are reshaping economies, Oman is stepping forward not just as a transit point but as pioneering architect of the future. With its commanding perch on the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean, Oman is no longer content to be a waypoint — it is fast becoming a destination.

At the heart of this transformation is logistics, elevated from a back-end function to a strategic pillar of national growth. Seamlessly linking sea, air, rail and road, Oman is designing a logistics blueprint that serves not only domestic ambitions but also global sustainability goals.

This logistics modernisation is not merely about physical infrastructure but about unlocking new avenues of economic potential. According to the Sultanate of Oman Logistics Strategy (SOLS 2040), logistics contributed approximately 6% to Oman’s GDP in 2023 and this figure is forecast to rise to 14% by 2040.

This growth is facilitated by digitalisation initiatives like the Bayan Single Window and e-documentation systems, projected to cut customs dwell time by 20–30%. These reforms reflect a deeper shift — logistics is no longer about moving goods; it is about building a knowledge-based economy, integrating services, data and sustainability into the fabric of trade.

Oman’s approach to logistics is also grounded in strategic integration. From the Suhar-Khazaen-Al Wajajah corridor to the Salalah Sea-Air Express, the nation is forging seamless intermodal connections that not only shorten delivery times but also open up new markets across the GCC and Africa.

The Khazaen Dry Port now acts as a final destination for containers, speeding up internal customs processing and reducing congestion at primary gateways. Meanwhile, the Hafeet Rail Project, linking Suhar to the UAE border, represents a milestone in regional



With its commanding perch on the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean, Oman is no longer content to be a waypoint — it is fast becoming a destination.



**DR YOUSUF HAMED
AL BALUSHI**

yousufh@omaninvestgateway.com

The writer is founder and CEO - Smart Investment Gateway, economists, board adviser & business transformation mentor.

connectivity. These investments aren’t only domestic enhancements; they are cementing Oman’s reputation as a reliable, stable and efficient global trade hub. With Oman Vision 2040 as the policy anchor and strong public-private collaboration as the engine, Oman’s logistics blueprint is a model of long-term planning and near-term action.

Where Oman is truly redefining its logistics identity is in the green transformation of the sector.

The commitment to achieve net-zero carbon emissions by 2050 has positioned logistics

at the centre of climate and economic policy.

The most compelling example is the Al Duqm–Amsterdam Green Corridor — the world’s first commercial liquid hydrogen trade route. This corridor, formalised through an international agreement in 2025 involving eleven partners from Oman, the Netherlands and Germany, links Al Duqm’s renewable energy output with European hydrogen demand.

The vessels on this route are designed with zero-boil-off technology, preventing cargo loss and setting new benchmarks for sustainable logistics worldwide.

Hydrogen produced in Oman will be regasified in Amsterdam and distributed across Europe, turning Oman’s sun and wind into strategic exports.

To support this vision, the government established Hydrogen Oman (Hydrom) in 2022, tasked with orchestrating policy, investment and project execution. By 2030, Oman aims to produce 1 to 1.25 million tonnes per annum of green hydrogen, with a target of 7.5 to 8.5 million tonnes by 2050.

The pipeline includes mega-projects like Green Energy Oman (1.8 Mtpa), HyPort Duqm (650,000 tonnes of ammonia) and ACME Duqm (900,000 tonnes).

These projects are expected to generate over \$49 billion in

investment by the end of this decade. More importantly, they are designed with a clear mandate to maximise In-Country Value (ICV) — from localising electrolyser manufacturing to developing domestic logistics services, thus creating a fully integrated hydrogen economy within Oman.

Oman’s strength lies not in being the cheapest producer of green hydrogen — that title may go to countries like Chile — but in offering a de-risked, investment-ready ecosystem. Hydrom serves as a one-stop regulator and planner, smoothing investor pathways and reducing uncertainties associated with land acquisition, power sourcing and export infrastructure.

The incentives are generous: a 90% reduction in land lease fees during development, 10-year tax exemptions and low base royalties. This business-friendly model, combined with political stability and regulatory clarity, sets Oman apart in the competitive global hydrogen race.

Already, the nation has allocated over 50,000 square kilometres for renewable energy projects and plans to install 300 million solar panels and 10,000 wind turbines by 2050.

Logistics, once seen as the “last mile” of economic activity, is becoming the first principle of Oman’s future. It is the foundation upon which industrial growth, renewable energy exports and regional trade integration will be built.

As global supply chains realign in the wake of geopolitical shifts and climate imperatives, Oman’s logistics sector offers an example of how foresight, infrastructure and green innovation can converge.

The story is no longer just about containers and customs — it is about how a nation redefines value, not by where it’s location, but by what it moves and how it moves it. Oman is inviting the world to partner in this transformation, not as a crossroads, but as a destination of purpose and progress.

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(2) In charge of management and the supervision of our facilities management segment as well as of the standardization and of the deployment of the company FM processes.

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- Responsible for the elaboration of the Development Strategy on this segment. Focuses on acquiring new clients and growing the business through strategic planning and execution
- Identifying new market opportunities, developing and implementing business development strategies, building and maintaining client relationships, and managing the integrated sales process
- Ensure the implementation of MSOP and the response to Invitation to Tenders
- Dealing with clients, managing, and monitoring of Facility management project(s)
- In regards of the marketing tools required for successful sales conclusion, he/she recommends and/or coordinates with the group resources for offer deployment and local market adjustments
- Ensure self-awareness of company QHSE policies & procedures and follow them

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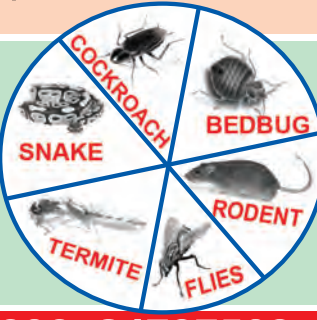
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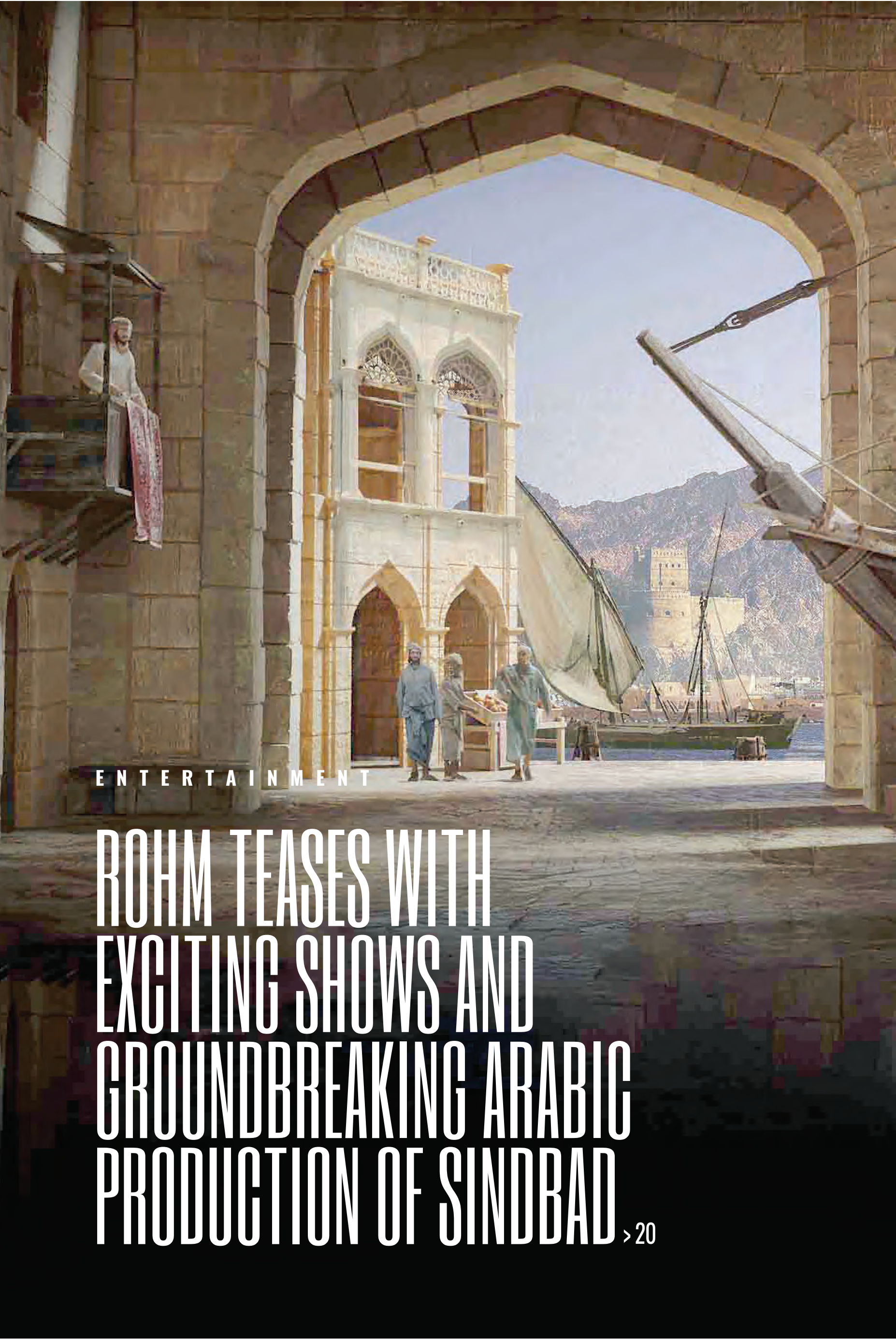
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ART/LIFE



ENTERTAINMENT

ROHM TEASES WITH EXCITING SHOWS AND GROUNDBREAKING ARABIC PRODUCTION OF SINDBAD >20

ART

Van Gogh Museum ‘could close’ without more help from Dutch govt



THE VAN GOGH Museum in Amsterdam warned on Wednesday that it faced closure without more state funding, saying a 104-million-euro (\$120 million) renovation was vital to protect its masterpieces.

The museum — which holds the world’s biggest collection of the artist’s work — said the project could not go ahead unless the Dutch state honoured a 1962 agreement with Vincent van Gogh’s nephew by providing the necessary funds.

“The museum faces closure”, it added “because it will not be able to guarantee the safety of the collection, visitors and staff”. The Dutch ministry of culture rejected the warning, saying the museum already received a subsidy under the Dutch Heritage Act that was sufficient to cover maintenance.

It said its position was based on “comprehensive research” by independent experts.

But the museum has launched legal proceedings over the subsidy, with a court hearing scheduled for February 2026.

The museum houses more than 200 of the tortured Dutch artist’s paintings, 500 of his drawings and almost all of his letters.

They were given by the artist’s nephew Vincent Willem van Gogh in 1962 under a state-backed deal to build and maintain a museum.

“Managing, preserving and exhibiting the collection was considered more important for the Netherlands at the time than financial consequences”, the museum said.

The building, which opened in 1973, was no longer fit for purpose, it argued, after more than 50 years of heavy use.

A major overhaul called “Masterplan 2028” has been budgeted at 104 million, with the museum saying it would use its own resources to co-finance the works and cover an estimated 50 million euros in lost revenue during partial closures.

It said that an annual state subsidy of 11 million euros was needed, compared to the current one of 8.5 million.

Vincent van Gogh, who died in 1890 aged 37, produced more than 800 paintings and is regarded as one of the most influential figures in western art. — AFP

QUICK FEATURES



ENTERTAINMENT

US former UFC fighter Mark Kerr attends the red carpet of the movie “The Smashing Machine” presented in competition at the 82nd International Venice Film Festival. —AFP



LIFESTYLE

A cosplayer poses for a portrait during the Comic Con Africa at Nasrec Expo Centre in Johannesburg. — AFP



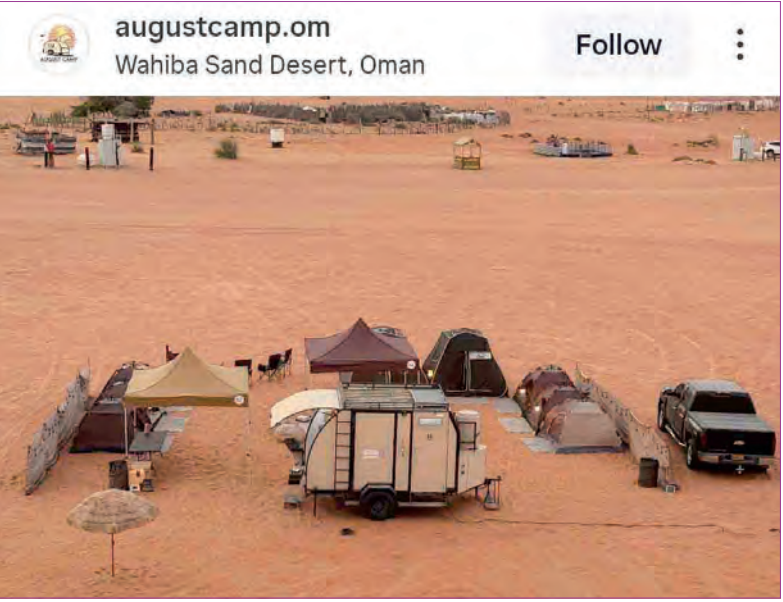
ENTERTAINMENT

Pop superstar Taylor Swift and American football player Travis Kelce announced their engagement on August 26, 2025, setting the stage for a high-profile wedding for the celebrity couple. —AFP

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‘The Rock’ barges into Venice Film Festival for wrestling drama



DWAYNE “The Rock” Johnson was set to thunder into the Venice Film Festival on Monday, with the wrestler-actor appearing in a tailor-made role in Benny Safdie’s latest movie “The Smashing Machine”.
The 53-year-old will be the star attraction at one of Europe’s most prestigious film festivals, which promotes independent arthouse movies alongside a smattering of big-budget Hollywood dramas each year.
Johnson has been cast as a wrestler in the two-hour biopic opposite Emily Blunt (“The Devil Wears Prada”), who plays his wife, for a movie that was enthusiastically hyped by Venice Film Festival director Alberto Barbera beforehand.
It tells the story of champion mixed martial arts (MMA) fighter Mark Kerr, “a beautiful and complicated person”, according to Safdie.
Elsewhere on Monday, Mona Fastvold, one half of the star writer-director couple behind Oscar-winning “The Brutalist”, will showcase her

new movie “The Testament of Ann Lee” about the founder of the radical “Shakers” religious sect in the 1700s.
Packed with music and singing, the feature was co-written by Fastfold and partner Brady Corbet, who used Venice last year to launch “The Brutalist”, which went on to win three Oscars including Best Actor for Adrian Brody.
“The Smashing Machine” and “The Testament of Ann Lee” are among 21 films vying for the top Golden Lion prize at Venice, which will be handed out on Saturday.
Also at the festival on Monday, Hollywood actress Kim Novak, 92, will be presented with a lifetime achievement award.
The festival’s artistic director, Alberto Barbera, has called Novak “one of the most beloved icons of an entire era of Hollywood films”.
Novak played the chilling dual role of suicidal blonde Madeleine Elster and brunette shop girl Judy Barton in “Vertigo”, released in 1958. — AFP



Bollywood reels as AI reshapes Indian films

BOLLYWOOD, famed for its lavish song-and-dance numbers and vast production crews, now finds itself confronting a new kind of spectacle: artificial intelligence.
From altering iconic endings to generating entire films, AI is shaking up India’s multibillion-dollar film industry, raising alarm for some, excitement for others.
The debate first erupted when producers re-released the 2013 hit “Raanjhanaa” with an AI-modified finale, when the Hindi film was dubbed into India’s southern language of Tamil.

The mythological epic, set for a 2026 release, aims to merge ancient legend with cutting-edge technology for a global audience, telling the story of the Hindu monkey god Hanuman.
Not all filmmakers were impressed.
“And so, it begins”, wrote filmmaker Vikramaditya Motwane on social media. “Who needs writers and directors when it’s ‘Made in AI?’”
— ‘Flesh and blood’ — The industry is bracing for a fight.
On one side are those who see AI as a cost-saving disruptor capable of replacing armies of extras and technicians in Bollywood’s famously

unpredictability”, he said.
“AI can’t, at this moment, create great performances on screen — because if you look at any big stars of this world, it is their eyes that act, not their face”. Kapur said AI would be destructive only for filmmakers who rely on formulaic tropes.
“If your movies are predictable... then of course, AI will destroy you”, he added. “Perhaps some kid somewhere will be able to do what you are doing”. Instead, he said AI, at its best, would open the industry to new ideas.
“AI is a hugely democratic technology because it gives opportunities to those who would never get it”, he said. “How many



The new ending changed the tragic death finale into a hopeful one — with the protagonist’s eyes seen to flicker open — triggering outrage from director Aanand L Rai and star Dhanush.
They decried the change as a violation of creative rights.
“This alternate ending has stripped the film of its very soul”, Dhanush posted on social media, after the new version was released in August.
“The concerned parties went ahead with it despite my clear objection”, Dhanush said, calling the use of AI to alter films “a deeply concerning precedent for both art and artists”.
“It threatens the integrity of storytelling and the legacy of cinema”, he added.
Director Rai said that while AI is “definitely the future... it is not there to change the past”.
Then, days later, entertainment firm Collective Artists’ Network announced India’s first fully AI-generated feature film, “Chiranjeevi Hanuman — The Eternal”.

labour-intensive productions.
On the other are defenders of artistry, unpredictability and human expression.
Some see opportunity in using AI to boost traditional films.
“I don’t think AI means there can’t be flesh and blood”, said director Shakun Batra, who has created a five-part short film series using AI. “The best future would be when two skill sets merge”. But he insists that technology must complement, not override, human creativity.
“I don’t encourage AI as a replacement to human endeavour of expression”, said Batra, known for emotional Bollywood dramas such as “Ek Main Aur Ekk Tu”, “Kapoor & Sons” and “Gehraiyaan”.
Veteran filmmaker Shekhar Kapur, director of classics such as “Masoom”, “Mr India” and the 1998 movie “Elizabeth” that was nominated for seven Academy Awards, shrugged off the threat.
He said AI could not replace good storytelling.
“The best stories are unpredictable and AI cannot handle

people in India can afford to go to film schools?”
— ‘Level the playing field’ — The emergence of AI would initially hit high-budget films such as superhero movies where you are “relying on action”, Kapur said.
Kapur is actively integrating AI into his own work and even plans to establish an AI-focused film school in Mumbai’s Dharavi slum.
“AI will empower creators, level the playing field for independent filmmakers and even lead to the creation of entirely new, AI-generated movie stars and characters”, he said.
But filmmakers also point out that the future of movies lies in the hands of the audience.
“Raanjhanaa” director Rai says he was comforted by the support of his fans backing the unchanged version, even 12 years after its original release.
“The way they reacted to AI is much bigger than the way I reacted”, he said. “It is more of their film than mine”. — AFP

FEATURES



ROHM TEASES WITH
EXCITING SHOWS AND
GROUNDBREAKING
ARABIC PRODUCTION
OF SINDBAD

BY YERU EBUEN

IF THERE'S one thing the world still echoes with, it's the timeless allure of Sindbad the Sailor — a legendary figure of adventure, resilience, and discovery. Oman's Royal Opera House Muscat has set a stage worthy of the myth, launching its 2025–2026 season with “Sindbad: The Omani Sailor,” the world's first grand opera performed entirely in Arabic. This groundbreaking production isn't just a performance; it's a voyage into new artistic waters, firmly anchoring Oman on the global cultural map.

The season is rich with traditions and daring innovation. Sindbad's odyssey guides audiences into a space where myth meets modernity, and local stories resonate internationally. Critics note that a season capturing imaginations does more than entertain — it transforms. With this debut, Muscat's arts scene promises an epochal leap into storytelling's new realm.

SINDBAD: THE OMANI SAILOR — A CULTURAL TRIUMPH

The opera's origins tell a compelling story. Crafted by a pan-European team in collaboration with local talent, featuring music by Egyptian composer Hisham Gabr and libretto by Nader Mohamed Salah El Din, “Sindbad: The Omani Sailor” is a daring fusion. It blends Arabic musical maqamat with symphonic grandeur, inspired stage designs reflecting Oman's deserts and mountains, and costumes that evoke Oman's heritage.

What makes this production extraordinary isn't just its aesthetics or score but its intent. Umberto Fanni, Artistic Director of ROHM (*pictured left*), explains, “This opera is about claiming our narrative, reimagining Sindbad as an Omani hero, and sharing that story globally — in a language that echoes our roots but speaks universally.” The production reflects Oman's cultural confidence, with Sindbad's journey beginning

spotlight, blending heritage with innovation.

Cross-cultural collaborations underscore the season's vision: music as a universal dialogue. The Hungarian Radio Symphony Orchestra's performance alongside Oman's Traditional Music Ensemble begins the season, while Russian folk melodies performed by the Ossipov National Folk Orchestra bring the world closer through sound.

For those who love movement, the dance season offers elegance and passion, from the charming “Coppélia” by the ‘Astana Opera’ ballet to fiery Flamenco rhythms in May — showcasing movement's universality.

MORE THAN MUSIC: ARTS THAT UNITE AND INSPIRE

This season is about more than performances. ROHM's dedication to community, dialogue, and education shines through. From masterclasses with



and ending in his homeland yet resonating across borders.

Adding sensory magic, the opera introduces a world first: a custom fragrance by Oman's legendary perfume house Amouage. Diffused through the theatre, it immerses audiences in a multisensory experience with jasmine, oud, and desert air — transforming the opera into an expedition for the senses. This layered storytelling elevates the form into one of art's most immersive experiences.

The performances slated for October 3rd and 5th feature top Arab voices accompanied by the Hungarian Radio Symphony Orchestra. It's a bold statement: an opera embodying Oman's rich storytelling traditions with a contemporary voice, showcasing Arab artistry at its finest.

visiting artists to sign-language performances and open house days, the theatre aims for arts accessibility and inclusion.

Family spectacles like “Cinderella on Ice” and “The Underwater Bubble Show” promise wonder for audiences of all ages, sharing the magic across generations. Beyond the stage, initiatives like “Open Doors” programs, artist workshops, and exhibitions like Rhythm of Life, showcasing Oman's musical heritage, deepen cultural roots and strengthen community bonds.

Ultimately, this season is about forging a collective identity rooted in storytelling told with artistry and passion. The debut of “Sindbad,” inspired by Oman's ancient myth and modern innovation, symbolizes this new chapter. It demonstrates that stories — sung in Arabic, played in orchestras, or danced on stage — are bridges uniting everyone.

Fanni states, “We are creating moments that will inspire generations and stimulate dialogue for years to come. That's the power of art.” In Muscat, that power is alive, guiding audiences on a voyage of discovery that redefines what regional cultural institutions can achieve.

Tickets go on sale starting September 1st, and anticipation for the season is at an all-time high. This journey promises to be not just an artistic celebration but a catalyst for cultural dialogue, shared human experiences, and regional pride. As Oman opens this new chapter of artistic innovation, it invites the world to witness the power of storytelling — a timeless voyage that unites us all through the universal language of art. All aboard for a season of stories, spectacle, and shared human spirit.

A COLLECTIVE SEASON OF CLASSIC AND CONTEMPORARY

As Sindbad takes the stage, the rest of the season sails through a sea of cultural treasures. Opera lovers can anticipate Puccini's “Tosca” in January, performed by the Azerbaijan State Opera and Ballet Theatre, renowned for its passion and political intrigue. In April, Donizetti's “Don Pasquale” offers a playful contrast with spirited performances by the Oviedo Filarmonía Orchestra.

The Arab music segment continues this vibrant tradition. Oman's Diana Haddad celebrates Omani Women's Day in October, backed by the Royal Oman Symphony Orchestra Ladies' Ensemble, highlighting women's voices and the power of music to inspire change. Gulf stars like Rabeh Saqer, Khalid El Sheikh, and Ahmed El Jumairy bring regional melodies into the