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IN BRIEF

HM’S GREETINGS TO SINGAPORE

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Tharman Shanmugaratnam of the Republic of Singapore, on his country’s National Day. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan lauded the strength of the partnership and cooperation relations between the two countries. His Majesty wished Singapore further progress and prosperity.

SUHAR INDUSTRIAL CITY SIGNS 39 CONTRACTS

Suhar Industrial City, affiliated to the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates ‘Madayn’, received 49 investment applications during the first half of 2026, of which 39 contracts were successfully signed comprising 22 new contracts, 12 expansion contracts, four substitution contracts and one renewal contract. The total investment value of these contracts exceeds RO 214 million, covering projects spanning over 1.1 million sqm. Eng Abdullah bin Ahmed al Mayasi, Director General of Suhar Industrial City, pointed out that the city’s cumulative investment volume has now surpassed RO 2.3 billion. The total leased area has touched 16,285,914 sqm out of the city’s 19,856,507 sqm of developed area, while the overall area of Suhar Industrial City, including both developed and undeveloped land, stands at 30,487,399 sqm. **DETAILS ON P13**

RESTORING MARINE LIFE



The Environment Authority (EA) in Musandam Governorate is continuing the implementation of the Musandam Coral Park project to rehabilitate damaged marine sites, expand coral cover and support biodiversity. This is achieved by transplanting coral fragments onto eco-friendly concrete structures and aluminium plates as part of a monitoring and evaluation programme that runs through the end of 2029. **DETAILS ON P3**

OMAN SAYS TALKS ON TO OPEN UP HORMUZ

CONDEMNS ATTACKS ON SHIPS IN STRAIT OF HORMUZ

THE Sultanate of Oman expressed its condemnation of the repeated attacks on ships transiting the Strait of Hormuz, which constitutes a violation of international law and the sovereignty of territorial waters, and poses a threat to the safety of maritime navigation and the security and stability in the region.

In a statement issued by the Foreign Ministry on Saturday, the Sultanate of Oman affirmed that the ongoing talks regarding arrangements of navigation on the Strait of Hormuz are proceeding in a positive and constructive atmosphere. It stressed the importance of avoiding any actions that could affect the talks and the progress achieved which takes into account the interests of all parties.

Earlier, Iran said that a deal on Hormuz was close but would not be enough to free up the waterway, and the United Arab Emirates said Iran had hit another ship there.

An agreement over the strait is seen as vital to a wider deal to end the war that began with US and Israeli attacks on Iran on February 28 and led to Tehran establishing a chokehold over the major energy export route. A US official, who declined to be identified, had said on Friday that Washington anticipated an agreement soon so that normal oil traffic could resume.

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi said Iran and Oman



Women walk past a billboard at Valiasr Square in central Tehran on Saturday. — AFP

were “very close” to agreement on a new shipping route through the strait but that reopening it depended on other conditions, including US compensation to Iran.

The secretary of Iran’s top national security body, Mohammad Baqer Zolqadr, listed other demands including ending US threats against Iran, stopping aggression against Iran and its Lebanese, Palestinian, Yemeni and Iraqi allies, lifting a blockade

and sanctions on Iran and freeing Iranian assets.

Araqchi said the previous shipping traffic separation scheme through the strait was no longer acceptable to Tehran and that Iran was discussing a temporary route while technical and legal issues surrounding a permanent route were resolved.

Iran’s President Masoud Pezeshkian said he believed now was the best time for an agreement. “There is cohesion,

strength, and unity in the country, and as far as I know, Iran is considered victorious and powerful in this war,” Iranian news agencies quoted him as saying.

The UAE has reported an attack on a carrier affiliated with its state oil company with a missile as it transited the Strait of Hormuz, with no injuries reported, in the latest escalation in attacks on shipping there.

— Agencies

National E-commerce plan reaches 86.7% completion

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP), has reinforced its e-commerce ecosystem via the implementation of a comprehensive package of legislative, regulatory and technical initiatives. These efforts

increased the completion rate of the National E-Commerce Plan 2022–2027 to 86.7 per cent by 2025, following the completion of 26 out of 30 initiatives.

The achievements form part of Oman’s efforts to develop the digital business environment, establish key enablers for the

growth of e-commerce and enhance the competitiveness of the country’s economy in line with Oman Vision 2040.

The integrated e-commerce ecosystem is built on updating legislation, advancing digital services, improving the efficiency of electronic payment systems,

enhancing logistics services and raising awareness of e-commerce. These efforts provide a business environment that is better prepared to embrace digital transformation while supporting the growth of SMEs, entrepreneurs and investments linked to the digital economy. **SEE P15**

Scientists turn to sharks to improve hurricane predictions

DELWARE: From the killer shark of ‘Jaws’ to the tornado-tossed predators of the ‘Sharknado’ movies, films long have portrayed sharks as objects of summer fear. But when a shark cuts through the waters off the US East Coast, it now may be doing more than hunting. It may also be gathering data that helps scientists understand the potential intensity of a hurricane before it makes landfall.

University of Delaware researchers are testing whether sharks can serve as mobile near-

real-time ocean-data observers, carrying sensors that measure ocean conditions to inform oceanographic, atmospheric and climate models.

These CTD tags are small electronic devices that measure ocean electrical conductivity - a metric closely related to salinity - as well as temperature and depth, as marine creatures to which they are attached swim and dive.

“Animal-borne sensors have been used successfully by oceanographers for years, particularly on elephant



Researcher Aaron Carlisle grasps a white shark alongside a boat off the coast of Delaware, US. — Reuters

seals in polar regions where scientific observations are scarce,” said Aaron Carlisle, principal investigator and a professor in the university’s School of Marine Science and Policy.

Sharks offer a new opportunity in such research because they are abundant, widely distributed and easier to access than many protected marine mammals, Carlisle said.

Until now, shark tagging typically has tracked only where these fish

travel and the habitats they use.

The University of Delaware researchers select sharks that can collect the measurements most useful for hurricane research, and favour species that surface often enough for their tags to transmit the information to satellites. Previous analyses identified shortfin mako sharks, blue sharks, smooth hammerheads and juvenile great white sharks as strong candidates for such research in the North Atlantic. — Reuters

OMAN

SHORT TAKES



At present, the wild population of sea cucumbers is protected in Oman; the solution is aquaculture.

PILOT SEA CUCUMBER PROJECTS YET TO GO COMMERCIAL

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
MUSCAT, AUGUST 8

The Wilayat of Mahout is renowned for its abundant marine resources, particularly the sea cucumber (*Holothuria scabra*).

Sea cucumbers are very much in demand in some countries, particularly in Asia. It is used in Chinese traditional medicine.

According to Dr Issa bin Mohammed al Farsi, Director of the Aquaculture Development Department at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, this trade began in the last century but flourished in 2005. Locals harvest and collect the sea cucumber, then cook, dry, package, and export it to Hong Kong, Singapore, and China.

Currently, there are no commercial sea cucumber farming projects. However, the ministry has implemented pilot projects.

“These projects are aimed at applying sandy sea cucumber farming techniques, such as hatching and rearing of young; assessing the feasibility of increasing the stock; and determining the breeding season for Omani sandy sea cucumbers and the minimum catch size,” pointed out Dr Al Farsi.

A major objective is to encourage and train fishermen to cultivate sea cucumbers in their known habitats within the Sultanate of Oman. Some local companies are studying sea cucumber farming in its natural area but have not yet moved into the commercial sector.

Dr Al Farsi leads national strategies for sustainable and integrated aquaculture expansion. “Sea cucumbers live on the seabed, among coral reefs, and in soft mud and sand, spending most of their time buried beneath it. This unique marine environment off the coast of Mahout is where this particular species of sea cucumber, belonging to the class of marine invertebrates, thrives.”

At present, the wild population of sea cucumbers is protected in Oman; the solution is aquaculture.

“Because the sandy sea cucumber is subject to overfishing and illegal harvesting in most of the world’s producing countries, it is rapidly being depleted from its natural habitat. This has been confirmed by studies conducted by the ministry,” said Dr Al Farsi.

This prompted the ministry to issue a ban on the harvesting, trade, and export of sea cucumbers in 2025 for the next five years.

Dhofar to host Food Security Forum and Exhibition

SALALAH: The Food Security Forum and Exhibition 2026 will be held in the Wilayat of Salalah on August 10, as part of Oman’s efforts to strengthen food security, attract investment and promote sustainable growth in the agricultural and food sectors.

Organised by the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) branch in Dhofar Governorate, in cooperation with the Office of the Governor of Dhofar, and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MoAFWR), the forum will be held under the auspices of HH Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar.

The event aims to support the objectives of Oman Vision 2040,

particularly economic diversification and sustainability, while bringing together decision-makers, investors, entrepreneurs, specialists and representatives of public and private sector institutions.

The accompanying exhibition will be held at the Atin Plain from August 11 to 15, featuring around 100 exhibitors representing companies, institutions and projects working in agriculture, livestock, fisheries, food industries, modern agricultural technologies, logistics, finance and investment.

The forum’s programme includes specialised working papers addressing food security indicators and achievements, usufruct laws, investment-support services through

the “Tatweer” platform and investment opportunities under the “Invest in Oman” initiative.

Other sessions will focus on the development of Najd, financing solutions for agricultural projects, the proposed Najd Agricultural City and the role of modern technologies in sustainable food supply chains, transportation and food security.

The forum will focus on promoting investment across food security sectors, developing economic diversification enablers and increasing local content by attracting and localising quality projects based on innovation and modern agricultural and food technologies.

Naif bin Hamed Fadel, Chairman

of the OCCI branch in Dhofar, said the event represents a strategic step towards strengthening public-private sector partnerships and enabling private-sector institutions to contribute to Oman’s economic diversification goals.

He stressed that achieving food sustainability requires integrated national efforts and an attractive investment environment capable of transforming Oman’s resources into productive, value-added projects.

The forum will also witness the signing of usufruct contracts in cooperation with the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning (MoHUP) to support agricultural and food investments and facilitate value-added projects. — ONA

Don’t fall for travel scams

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, AUGUST 8

FAKE TRAVEL apps, websites and bogus offers are on the rise as the majority of itineraries are done digitally.

“In view of the increase in travel-related cyber scams, holidayers should take precautions before booking,” says Sunil D’souza.

“To begin with, the booking URL should be checked twice before entering payment details because the phishing pages disguised as airline, transport, or booking sites often use lookalike domains that are easy to miss at a glance.”

A particular brand alone has thwarted nearly 270,000 cyber attack attempts over the last year, a report by a cybersecurity firm said.

The report, published by Kaspersky, shared safe travel insights to help tourists travel smarter and safer.

“These threats come in different forms and the first and foremost such threat is in the form of bogus transport brands, as booking a trip today means juggling ride-sharing apps, airlines, and online travel agencies, mostly often across multiple tabs and devices, often under time pressure to grab a good deal. This mix of urgency, trust in familiar brands, and constant switching between platforms creates fertile ground for cybercriminals, who disguise phishing pages, fake apps, and fraudulent offers



Monitor bank and card statements after booking travel, and report any unrecognised charges immediately.

abusing legitimate transport and travel services,” the report said.

The report suggests that attacks masquerading as a leading airline alone accounted for the largest share, representing 61 per cent of all detections associated with transport brands, followed by road transport apps with 37 per cent. The overwhelming majority of activity observed in this category involved leveraging the appearance of two leading brands, demonstrating how attackers can concentrate their efforts around widely recognised services with large audiences and frequent payment activity.

Among the types of cyber threats, Trojans were the most common threat type detected among files and objects associated with transport brands, accounting for 30.5 per cent of detections, with Trojan-Bankers following at 22.5 per cent. This type of malware is designed to steal banking credentials and payment information. In other words, cybercriminals impersonating transport brands aren’t just after a traveller’s booking details — in the majority of cases, they’re going straight for the traveller’s bank account.

A plethora of cyber threats disguised as travel and accommodation services is also

on the prowl, according to the report. As many as 5,414 attack attempts associated with these brands were recorded in one year.

“The threats most frequently distributed under their guise were Trojans, which accounted for 54.6 per cent of detections.”

Travel service accounts can contain payment details, personal information, booking histories and conversations with accommodation or activity providers, making them attractive targets for cybercriminals.

Tariq al Barwani, Founder of Tech Oman, suggests being wary of “too good to be true” deals, especially those requiring urgent action or unusual payment methods like wire transfers or gift cards.

“Make sure you’re using strong, unique passwords for travel and transport accounts, and enable multi-factor authentication (MFA) wherever it’s offered. Also, only download travel and transport apps from official app stores, and check reviews and permissions before installing. Monitor bank and card statements after booking travel, and report any unrecognised charges immediately.”

The report further urges travellers to scan QR codes from trusted and verified sources, check website addresses and payment details before proceeding, and avoid downloading applications or files from QR code links unless their legitimacy has been confirmed.

Rains lash some part of Oman; motorists warned about poor visibility

KABEER YOUSUF &
SUHAIL AL NAHDI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 8

Torrential rains lashed affected various parts of the Sultanate of Oman over the weekend accompanied by thunderstorms and strong winds. Flash Floods, overflowing wadis and rockslides were also recorded in many parts just after Al Jabal Al Akhdhar reported heavy rainfall.

Al Buraimi, Suhar, Misfat Al Abriyeen, Ibri and Al Mudhaibi reeled under heavy rains accompanied by thunderstorms. Major wadis in these areas are overflowing .

The desert and mountainous wilayats of Dhofar Governorate witnessed scattered rainfall associated with active winds that led to the flow of several wadis on Saturday.

The National Multi-Hazard Early Warning Centre expects continued rainfall in these areas over the next two days, urging users of the Sultan Said bin Taimur Road (Maqshin-Thamrait) to exercise caution due to reduced visibility during rainfall and rising dust and sand.

The Royal Oman Police (ROP) alerted users of the Sultan Said bin Taimur Road to be aware of reduced horizontal visibility in the Wilayat of Adam due to active winds and rising dust.

ROP said that driving in dusty conditions poses a danger to the safety of drivers and advised them to reduce speed, use headlights and tail lights, maintain a safe distance and stop in a safe place in the event of poor visibility. Parts of the Dhofar Governorate’s coast and adjacent mountains experienced heavy drizzle, with moderate temperatures across the governorate. Salalah recorded 24.4°C, Qayrun Hayrti 21.6°C and Dhalkout 21.8°C.

In the Al Hajar Mountains range and surrounding areas, cumulonimbus clouds formed, leading to scattered thunderstorms accompanied by active downdrafts. The meteorological department warned of a potential dust storm affecting some desert areas south of the Al Hajar Mountains, resulting from downdrafts from the thunderstorms in the surrounding regions. This could stir up dust and reduce horizontal visibility. Hamra Al Duru recorded the highest temperature on Saturday at 47°C, while Al Rustaq recorded 46.8°C.



Parts of the Dhofar Governorate’s coast and adjacent mountains experienced heavy drizzle.

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Musandam drive revives coral reefs

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUGUST 8

THE Environment Authority (EA) in Musandam Governorate is continuing the implementation of the Musandam Coral Park project to rehabilitate damaged marine sites, expand coral cover and support biodiversity. This is achieved by transplanting coral fragments onto eco-friendly concrete structures and aluminium plates as part of a monitoring and evaluation programme that runs through the end of 2029.

The project is one of the key environmental initiatives aimed at creating new marine habitats that contribute to the growth of coral reefs and the reproduction of fish and marine life. Additionally, it establishes a scientific database documenting the stages of transplantation, growth and survival rates, and environmental changes at the site. Coral reefs represent one of the most vital marine ecosystems due to the shelter, feeding, and breeding grounds they provide for a vast number of marine organisms, alongside their role in maintaining ecological balance. However, they face several challenges

The Musandam Coral Park project aims rehabilitate damaged marine sites, expand coral cover and support biodiversity. The project is one of the key environmental initiatives aimed at creating new marine habitats that contribute to the growth of coral reefs



The project involves formation of coral colonies by transplanting coral fragments onto eco-friendly concrete structures and aluminium plates.

resulting from climate change and human activities.

Abdulwahid bin Hassan al Kamzari, an EA official, said that the idea for the Musandam Coral Park came as a result of monitoring, follow-up, and field surveys conducted by the Authority under an approved environmental plan. These surveys revealed that several marine sites had been impacted by harmful practices, prompting

the adoption of initiatives to restore ecological balance and enhance the sustainability of marine ecosystems. Speaking to Oman newspaper, he added that project implementation began in 2023 with the deployment of 250 eco-friendly concrete structures at the designated park site to serve as the core for new marine habitats.

Operations continued in 2024 with the addition of another 250 concrete

structures, bringing the total number of submerged artificial structures to 500, supporting marine biodiversity and providing a suitable environment for marine life to thrive.

He explained that in 2025, the project entered a new phase focused on coral transplantation. Coral fragments were attached to 250 concrete structures, alongside the deployment of 50 aluminium plates planted with coral pieces, a step that enhances coral growth and recovery while boosting the site's environmental and tourism value.

Field operations are continuing through 2026 to complete transplantation on the remaining 250 concrete structures and deploy an additional 50 aluminium plates. This is accompanied by numbering, follow-up, and evaluation efforts to measure the growth and survival rates of the transplanted coral fragments.

He said coral pieces are fixed onto the concrete structures and aluminium plates using specialised materials designed to withstand marine conditions without causing harm to the site, with the ultimate goal of expanding suitable areas for coral growth and the formation of new colonies.

WHY MANY RESIDENTIAL PLOTS REMAIN UNDEVELOPED?

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUGUST 8

A study by Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) has identified the key reasons why many government-granted residential plots in Oman remain undeveloped for years, highlighting the implications for sustainable urban growth and future planning policies.

Conducted by a research team that included Dr Aliya bint Abdulsattar al Hashim from the College of Engineering, the study examines one of the country's most pressing urban development challenges: why residential land allocated to citizens often remains vacant, and what this means for the long-term sustainability and efficiency of Oman's expanding cities.

The research underscores the significance of the issue in relation to citizens' right to housing and the effectiveness of the country's lottery-based land allocation system. Between 2001 and 2020, approximately 613,552 residential plots were distributed across Oman.

In Muscat Governorate alone, 17,412 plots were allocated over a ten-year period. Of these, 32 per cent were sold, only 19 per cent were developed, while around half remained vacant.

Seeking to understand this pattern, the researchers explored the factors influencing citizens' decisions to build, the barriers preventing development, the reasons behind selling allocated land and public perceptions



The SQU study revealed that the strongest determinant of whether citizens decide to build is not the availability of infrastructure and services, but their actual need for housing.

of what constitutes an ideal neighbourhood. The study adopted a qualitative research approach based on focus group discussions within a social constructivist framework. The discussions were conducted at the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning in August 2022 and involved 44 participants divided into four groups: citizens who had built on their allocated plots, those who had not yet built, individuals still awaiting allocation and those who had sold their plots. The findings were then analysed to identify the principal trends and influencing factors.

The results revealed that the strongest determinant of whether citizens decide to build is not the availability of infrastructure and services, but their actual need for housing. Financial capability emerged as the second most important factor, followed by the location of the plot, the availability of services and finally the overall quality of

the neighbourhood.

The research also found that many citizens postpone construction while they remain comfortably accommodated elsewhere, even when they already own serviced residential land. Financial constraints, remote locations and inadequate infrastructure were identified as the principal reasons for leaving plots undeveloped or selling them. Based on these findings, the researchers recommend redesigning Oman's residential land allocation policy to better support sustainable urban development.

They propose prioritising applicants with genuine housing needs, ensuring essential infrastructure and services are provided at the time of land allocation, establishing monitoring mechanisms to encourage timely development, and expanding community participation in urban planning.

Al Madina Insurance Company SAOG (Al Madina Takaful) Wins Best General Takaful Provider in the Middle East Region 2026 by Global Banking & Finance Review London



Al Madina Insurance Company SAOG has been honoured with the prestigious **Best General Takaful Provider in the Middle East Region 2026** award by Global Banking & Finance Review, recognising the company's outstanding contribution to the development and delivery of Shariah-compliant insurance solutions to its policyholders.

Global Banking & Finance Review officially presented Al Madina Takaful with its award at a dedicated event held at the London Stock Exchange, UK. The Global Banking team conducted an exclusive interview with the Executive Management team of Al Madina at the state-of-the-art London Stock Exchange Studio. The high-level session explored the key milestones behind Al Madina Takaful's rise to regional prominence, its rich growth history, and its forward-looking strategic objectives in the Takaful sector. Full interview session is available on official social media channels of both Al Madina Takaful and Global Banking and Finance Review.

This award highlights its continued commitment to innovation, customer-centric services, and operational excellence within the Takaful industry. Over the years, Al Madina Insurance has strengthened its position as a trusted provider of Shariah-compliant insurance products by offering a comprehensive range of Takaful solutions, including Motor, Property, Engineering, liability, Energy, Aviation, Marine, General Accident, Life and Medical class of Insurance.

Varan Sash, CEO & Editor-in-Chief of Global Banking & Finance Review, commented: "We are pleased to recognise Al Madina Insurance Company SAOG with the award for Best General Takaful Provider Middle East 2026. The company has demonstrated a strong commitment to delivering high-quality, Shariah-compliant insurance solutions while maintaining a clear focus on innovation, customer service, and operational excellence. Its continued

growth and dedication to ethical financial practices have positioned it as a trusted provider within the region's Takaful landscape."

Commenting on the achievement, **Mr. Usama Al Barwani, Chief Executive Officer** of Al Madina Takaful, said:

"We are honoured to receive the Best General Takaful Provider Middle East 2026 award from Global Banking & Finance Review®. This achievement reinforces our commitment to delivering innovative, customer-focused and Sharia-compliant insurance solutions that meet the evolving needs of our policyholders. As we look ahead, we remain focused on creating sustainable value for our policyholders, shareholders and all our stakeholders."

Mr. Shakaib Mahmood, Deputy CEO, added:

"This award is a huge achievement, not in the country, but in the entire Middle East Region and is a testament to the collective efforts of our Board, management and employees. At Al Madina Takaful, we believe lasting trust is built through transparency, disciplined underwriting and an empathetic approach to claims. These principles remain at the heart of how we serve our customers and conduct our business."

Mr. Aneesh Varghese, General Manager and Head of Insurance Operations, said:

"We are profoundly grateful to accept this prestigious accolade at the historic London Stock Exchange. This prestigious recognition is a testament to our team's unwavering dedication to innovation, customer trust, and financial excellence. It validates our commitment to set new benchmarks in the regional insurance sector and inspires us to continue delivering our commitment to all our stakeholders."

With this latest accolade, Al Madina Takaful further reinforces its reputation as a leading Takaful provider in the Middle East Region, continuing to drive industry standards while delivering sustainable and responsible insurance solutions to its policyholders.



Celebrating 59 years of ASEAN :

Navigating our Future Together with the World and the Middle East



H.E. Sayyid Badr Albusaidi briefed ACM on regional situation and ensured of Oman's support for dialogue and safety of ASEAN nationals during ACM's courtesy call on 4 March 2026.



ASEAN Committee in Muscat 56th Meeting with Thailand's chairmanship. (From left to right: CDA a.i. of Indonesia, Ambassador of Malaysia, Ambassador of Brunei, Ambassador of Thailand, Ambassador of the Philippines, CDA of Singapore)



ACM visited Sayyid Tarik bin Taimur Cultural Complex of the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Youth and discussed with Dr. Samir Al Azri, Project Director.



ACM visited Royal Academy of Management for a productive and insightful exchange on human resource development for future-ready leaders and international cooperation.

8 AUGUST 1967, ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) was established with initial emphasis on regional peace and stability, gradually deepened its economic cooperation and integration. This year 2026 marks 59th anniversary of ASEAN, 50th anniversary of Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC) and 1st year of ASEAN Community Vision 2045 implementation - translating ASEAN Vision into concrete deliverables.

Oman, with her policy of being friend to all and constructive role in regional peace and security through dialogues, joined TAC since 3 August 2022 becoming one of 58 High Contracting Parties which includes Bahrain, China, EU, Iran, Russia, Saudi Arabia, UAE, UK and US.

Two weeks ago on 24 July 2026, H.E. Sayyid Badr bin Hamad bin Hamood

Albusaidi, Foreign Minister, participated in TAC 50th Anniversary commemoration with high-level delegations from ASEAN and across the globe during ASEAN Ministerial Meeting in Manila, the Philippines, reflecting how close Oman, ASEAN and its eleven member states' are.

Physically, Oman- ASEAN is only 6 hours apart. Thanks to Oman Air's direct flights to Bangkok, Phuket, Kuala Lumpur, Singapore, and the Philippines facilitating people, business and government visits.

ASEAN's eleven member states engage with external partners with ASEAN Centrality. With combined population of 700 million people, ASEAN represents one of the world's largest markets offering opportunities for Omani businesses and industries. As world's fifth largest economy,

ASEAN continues working towards deeper economic integration to become the fourth by 2030, advancing trade and investment with our external partners, including effective utilizations of free trade agreements.

With strong agricultural sectors, ASEAN is well positioned for halal food security, in addition to trade, investment, and tourism. "ASEAN Digital Economy Framework Agreement (DEFA)" to be signed this year expected to raise ASEAN digital economy to USD 2 trillion by 2030.

ASEAN 2026 is under the Philippines's Chairship with the theme "*Navigating Our Future, Together*"- foster regional growth, build connections and keep people at the center of change. Priority areas including maritime cooperation, advancing regional economic integration and connectivity, and

effectively addressing climate security and disaster preparedness, are being pursued through various initiatives among ASEAN Member States and external partners.

In May, 48th ASEAN Summit in Cebu agreed on a concrete agenda to strengthen ASEAN's resilience including diversifying energy sources and safeguarding supply chains. ASEAN Committee in Muscat is working with Oman towards such goals.

ASEAN Committee in Muscat (ACM)

Currently, 6 Embassies of ASEAN Member states represent in Oman, namely, Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand. First half of 2026, ACM under Singapore's Chairmanship worked closely with the Sultanate with gratitude in safeguarding ASEAN nationals in Oman. ACM was warmly welcomed by H.E.

Foreign Minister discussing regional situation and cooperation, also by Sayyid Tarik bin Taimur Cultural Complex Project and Royal Academy of Management.

Under Thailand's Chairmanship for second half of 2026, ACM continues to be channel of further cooperation between ASEAN and Oman for mutual benefit in all areas. Planned activities include follow-up on way forward from the Sultanate's participation in TAC Commemoration and visits of 6 Ambassadors to Ministry of Transportation, Communication and Information Technology, as well as Oman's logistics terminal, facilities and relevant authorities, to discuss Oman's updated logistics plans for current geopolitical context. Oman can serve as important alternative route outside the Strait of Hormuz for ASEAN – Oman and GCC trade and businesses.

¹ Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Timor-Leste, and Vietnam

THAILAND

H.E. Ms. Warunee Pan-krajang, Ambassador of the Kingdom of Thailand



ASEAN has always been at the heart of Thailand's Foreign Policy. Thailand was among five founding members signing Bangkok Declaration 8 August 1967. Today, ASEAN expands to a community of eleven members - 700 million population. Thailand continues to work closely with ASEAN colleagues, Dialogue Partners and external partners including Oman to further cooperation and address common challenges.

As ASEAN Coordinator on Sustainable Development, Thailand leads to align ASEAN community-

building with UN 2030 Agenda/ SDGs into a community that is sustainable, resilient, people-centered, and leaves no one behind.

As Chair of Negotiating Committee for ASEAN Digital Economy Framework Agreement, Thailand steered the negotiation to a conclusion which creates opportunities for MSMEs to enter regional digital markets.

Thailand is advancing ASEAN Power Grid, strengthening ASEAN food and energy security and leveraging ASEAN as regional food producer and logistic hub.

Online scams are transnational threats to security and economy, Thailand pushes forward cooperation through existing ASEAN mechanisms for faster information-sharing, law-enforcement cooperation, stronger engagement with private sector, effective protection of victims, building on outcomes of

International Conference we hosted in Bangkok in December 2025.

At the 2nd ASEAN-GCC Summit in May 2025, Thailand reaffirmed its commitment and ties with GCC through ASEAN-GCC Framework of Cooperation 2024-2028.

Oman-Thailand, reaching 46th anniversary of diplomatic relations, enjoy enduring friendship on mutual trust and shared interests.

The exchange of official visits between His Excellency Mr. Sihasak Phuangketkeow, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Thailand, and His Excellency Sayyid Badr bin Hamad Al Busaidi, Foreign Minister of the Sultanate of Oman, contributes to strengthening cooperation between the two countries, particularly in the areas of food security, energy, logistics, and tourism.

Thailand and ASEAN continue to be long-term partners of Oman on her journey towards Oman's Vision 2040 goal.

BRUNEI DARUSSALAM

H.E. Ms. Noralizan Abdul Momin, Ambassador of Brunei Darussalam



Brunei Darussalam plays an active role in advancing regional peace, stability, and prosperity by upholding the principles of dialogue, consultation, consensus, and mutual respect, which underpin ASEAN cooperation. Guided by ASEAN's shared vision of a resilient, innovative, dynamic and people-centred Community, Brunei remains committed to strengthening regional cooperation, driving sustainable economic growth, enhancing connectivity, and addressing common challenges collectively. Brunei contributes

to ASEAN's Community-building efforts by supporting initiatives that strengthen regional integration, deepen cooperation among ASEAN Member States, and support ASEAN-led mechanisms that uphold ASEAN Centrality as the primary driving force to promote peace, security, and sustainable development in the region.

Beyond the ASEAN region, Brunei values its warm and longstanding friendship with the Sultanate of Oman. The two Sultanates share close and brotherly relations founded on mutual respect, shared values, and cooperation in both bilateral and multilateral fora. Over the years, the relationship has been enriched through high-level exchanges, educational and cultural initiatives, student exchanges, participation in respective international book fairs, and investment collaboration through the Oman Brunei Investment

Company (OBIC). Looking ahead, Brunei and Oman remain committed to further strengthening their partnership by exploring new opportunities for cooperation, including in healthcare and other areas of mutual interest, for the benefit of both nations.

Brunei's rich cultural heritage reflects the values of harmony, respect, and community. Visitors can also experience Brunei's renowned hospitality through its national dish, Ambuyat, served with a variety of flavourful side and dips dishes, as well as local favourites such as Kelupis and Kuih Mor. Together with iconic landmarks such as Omar Ali Saifuddin Mosque and Kampong Ayer, the world's largest water village, these cultural treasures offer a glimpse into the unique identity, enduring traditions, warm hospitality, and rich heritage of Brunei Darussalam.

INDONESIA

Mr. Heru Budiarmo, Chargé d'Affaires a.i. of the Republic of Indonesia



The 59th Anniversary of ASEAN is an important occasion to celebrate the region's enduring commitment to peace, stability, economic growth, and cooperation. As a founding member of ASEAN, Indonesia has consistently played a central role in promoting ASEAN unity, centrality, and an inclusive regional architecture. Indonesia also continues to strengthen ASEAN's engagement with partners beyond Southeast Asia, including the Sultanate of Oman.

Indonesia and Oman share longstanding and friendly

relations founded on mutual respect, dialogue, and a common commitment to peace and stability. These shared values provide a strong foundation for expanding political cooperation and addressing regional and international issues of mutual concern. The second Indonesia-Oman Political Consultation, held in Muscat in 2025, reaffirmed both countries' commitment to strengthening cooperation in economic, investment, and cultural fields, while enhancing dialogue on regional developments.

Economic cooperation remains an important pillar of the bilateral partnership. Indonesia and Oman have significant opportunities to expand trade, investment, tourism, logistics, renewable energy, food security, and other strategic sectors. Oman's position as a maritime and logistics hub connecting the Gulf, Asia, and Africa complements

Indonesia's role as Southeast Asia's largest economy and an important gateway to the ASEAN market.

The Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia in Muscat continues to serve as a bridge between Indonesia, ASEAN, and Oman. Through diplomatic engagement, business promotion, cultural activities, and people-to-people exchanges, the Embassy supports stronger political relations and mutually beneficial economic partnerships.

As ASEAN marks another milestone, Indonesia remains committed to advancing cooperation with Oman based on friendship, mutual benefit, and shared prosperity. The growing Indonesia-Oman partnership demonstrates how stronger engagement between ASEAN and the Gulf can contribute to regional stability, sustainable development, and a more connected future.

MALAYSIA

H.E. Mr. Ahmad Kamrizamil bin Mohd Riza, Ambassador of Malaysia



Oman is an important partner of ASEAN, having acceded to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC) in 2022, reaffirming its commitment to peaceful cooperation and closer engagement with the region. With ASEAN-GCC trade reaching USD130.7 billion in 2023, there is considerable potential to further strengthen ASEAN-Oman economic cooperation and mutually beneficial partnerships.

In Oman, Malaysia is proud to work closely with fellow ASEAN missions through the ASEAN Committee in Muscat to raise ASEAN's profile, strengthen engagement and foster closer

links with the Omani government, business community and people. Malaysia looks forward to building stronger, mutually beneficial partnerships between ASEAN, Oman and the wider Gulf region in the years ahead.

Malaysia places strong emphasis on deepening ASEAN's engagement with the Gulf region. The growing ASEAN-GCC partnership offers valuable opportunities in trade, investment, energy, food security, the halal economy, digital transformation, education, tourism and sustainable development.

As ASEAN marks its 59th year of establishment, ASEAN Day, which falls on 8 August, marks tremendous achievements by ASEAN Member States in continuing their commitment to advancing peace, regional unity and stability, shared prosperity and mutual respect.

As one of the founding members, Malaysia has consistently supported a strong, cohesive and outward-looking ASEAN, with ASEAN centrality remaining at the heart of its foreign policy.

Malaysia's Chairmanship in 2025 culminated in the adoption of the Kuala Lumpur Declaration on ASEAN 2045: Our Shared Future, setting a long-term direction towards a resilient, innovative, dynamic and people-centred ASEAN.

The Chairmanship in 2025 also delivered several important political and economic outcomes, notably the admission of Timor-Leste as ASEAN's 11th member, the conclusion of the Digital Economy Framework Agreement, the upgrade of the ASEAN Trade in Goods Agreement, and the signing of the Enhanced Memorandum of Understanding on the ASEAN Power Grid. Together, these milestones will deepen digital and energy connectivity, facilitate trade, and strengthen regional supply-chain and energy resilience.

In terms of trade, ASEAN remained Malaysia's largest regional trading partner in 2025, accounting for 25.4 per cent of Malaysia's total trade, valued at USD181.6 billion.

PHILIPPINES

H.E. Ms. Noralyn Jubaira Baja, Ambassador of the Republic of the Philippines



The Philippine Embassy in Muscat celebrates with the ASEAN Community in Muscat ASEAN Day 2026, with gratitude to the friendly Sultanate of Oman for their gracious hospitality to the ASEAN and Filipino community.

Over 47,000 Filipinos in the Sultanate embody the spirit of ASEAN as a binding force for the good. Their industry contributes meaningfully to the local economy, and their sincerity forges genuine friendship with the vibrant Omani

and international community in the Sultanate.

With Oman being one of our robust trading partners in the region, the Philippine-Oman trade relationship remains thriving and growth-oriented. The success of our Oman-Philippines Investment Forum, conducted three times in two years, brings to fruition our vision to connect more Omani and Filipino entrepreneurs, investors, and industry drivers for a flourishing economic partnership.

The year has so far brought two Ministerial visits from the Philippines to the Sultanate which ushered in new avenues for diplomatic dialogue, high-level coordination, and enhanced frameworks for labor and economic cooperation.

Our Philippine School in Oman also continues to further enrich the cultural and educational landscape

of the Sultanate, providing high-quality education to our youth while fostering deeper cross-cultural ties between our two nations

The Philippine Embassy in Muscat together with the ASEAN Community in Muscat is committed to further strengthen our enduring diplomatic relations with the Sultanate of Oman; and open up opportunities for further collaboration in areas of mutual benefit.

We likewise acknowledge the ASEAN and the Sultanate of Oman's shared goals for regional security and economic development, and we reaffirm our dedication to advancing our mutual interests for shared growth and prosperity.

Again, we greet our ASEAN partners and friends in the Sultanate, a happy ASEAN Day.

SINGAPORE

Mr. Syed Nouredin Bin Syed Hassim, Chargé d'Affaires of the Republic of Singapore



ASEAN is a cornerstone of Singapore's foreign policy. As one of ASEAN's founding members in 1967, Singapore strongly supports building a prosperous and rules-based ASEAN for the region's stability and prosperity. Through ASEAN, Singapore has deepened economic linkages and enhanced people-to-people ties across Southeast Asia. Initiatives like the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA)

eliminate intra-regional tariffs, while collaborative ventures in the digital and green economies, as well as the ASEAN Power Grid, bolster its position as a central trade and connectivity hub.

Southeast Asia is widely seen as one of the world's fastest-growing markets. It is on track to be the world's fourth largest economy by 2030, with its digital economy expected to surpass US\$300 billion, driven by rapid growth in e-commerce and Artificial Intelligence (AI) adoption. Data centre capacity across the region is expected to more than triple between 2025 and 2030, while undersea cable networks are expanding rapidly.

Singapore is committed to working closely with fellow

ASEAN Member States and our external partners to build a more prosperous, resilient, and forward-looking region. We will accelerate ASEAN's Community-building agenda and engage in omnidirectional cooperation to foster an open and inclusive regional architecture, with ASEAN at the centre. The Sultanate of Oman is a natural partner given its location across the Indian Ocean, its membership in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), as well as its shared commitment to free and open trade and a rules-based international order. Singapore will continue to encourage ASEAN to deepen our cooperation with Oman and the GCC in shared interests such as trade and investment, energy, the digital economy, and AI.

SHORT TAKES



HH Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said led the campaign's launch ceremony

ORGAN DONATION CAMPAIGN BEGINS IN DHOFAR

SALALAH: As part of activities of Khareef Dhofar Season, a five-day campaign on organ donation and surgical health at Atin Plain in the Wilayat of Salalah, Governorate of Dhofar.

The campaign, codenamed 'Life After Life', seeks to raise public awareness about the importance of organ donation. It also aims to foster a health culture focusing in the fields of surgery, prevention of diseases and early detection of health complications.

The campaign's launch ceremony was held under the auspices of HH Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar. It was attended by local dignitaries and representatives of government departments, health establishments, academic institutions and supporting bodies.

The campaign constitutes a platform for direct communication between community members, doctors and specialists. It contributes to correcting misconceptions and developing sound health decisions. — ONA

Higher education fosters sustainable development

SPRINGER NATURE has recently published a scientific book titled: 'Higher Education and Sustainable Development in the Arab Gulf States: Practical Approaches and Institutional Strategies.'

The book is edited by Dr Khalaf bin Marhoon al Abri, Associate Professor and Head of the Educational Foundation and Administration Department at the College of Education, Sultan Qaboos University, and Dr Elizabeth Buckner from the University of Toronto, Canada.

The book provides an in-depth scholarly analysis of the role of higher education institutions in the Gulf Cooperation Council countries in fostering sustainable development pathways.

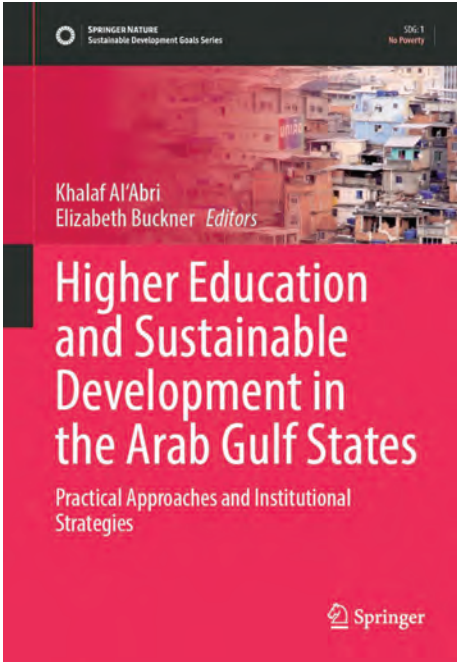
This is achieved by showcasing the experiences and practices of several universities and academic institutions across the region, and by analysing policies, programmes, and initiatives that help align Higher Education with Sustainable Development Goals at both the institutional and national levels.

The publication features a set of research studies conducted by scholars from universities and research centres both within and outside the region. It covers a wide range of themes including university governance, institutional sustainability, education for



DR KHALAF BIN MARHOON AL ABRI

Associate Professor, College of Education, SQU



The publication covers themes including university governance, institutional sustainability, education for sustainable development, innovation, and community partnerships

sustainable development, innovation, and community partnerships.

Additionally, it addresses the main challenges and opportunities facing higher education institutions in the GCC countries as they seek to enhance their contribution to sustainable development.

Dr Khalaf explained that the idea of the book originated during the 13th Gulf Research Meeting, hosted by the University of Cambridge, UK, in 2023, before evolving into a scientific project in which many researchers from various universities and academic institutions participated.

He added that the book aims to enrich the scholarly literature on Higher Education in the Gulf countries by offering insights and experiences grounded in the Gulf context, supporting researchers, policymakers, and university leadership in developing institutional policies and practices.

This publication represents a valuable scientific contribution to SQU, enhancing its presence in global knowledge production in the fields of Higher Education and sustainable development. It also highlights the contribution of Omani researchers to addressing key national and regional priority issues.

Dr Khalaf specialises in education and higher education policies and systems, education for sustainable development, educational governance, quality assurance, and academic accreditation.

His work focuses on developing educational policies and aligning them with sustainability issues and the Sustainable Development Goals. He has authored numerous research and scholarly publications in these fields, actively participating in various international scientific committees and initiatives related to education and sustainable development.

He also contributed to numerous published studies that examine the development of education systems and their role in achieving sustainable development.

DIGITAL SAFETY INITIATIVE FOR CHILDREN LAUNCHED



The initiative is part of Omantel's awareness programmes aimed at promoting digital literacy.

SALALAH: Omantel has launched an awareness initiative titled 'The Digital Detective' as part of its participation in the Khareef Dhofar Season 2026, aimed at promoting digital safety among children and equipping them with skills to use modern technologies safely and responsibly.

The initiative offers children an interactive educational experience that combines learning with practical application. Participants take on the role of a 'digital investigator' and navigate scenarios simulating common online risks, including fraudulent messages, fake accounts, sharing personal information and communicating with strangers on digital platforms.

The experience is designed to help children identify suspicious indicators, assess information and make appropriate decisions when using digital platforms.

Qais bin Mohammed al Amri, Director of Social Responsibility at Omantel, said the initiative seeks to strengthen digital awareness among children and provide them with

The experience is designed to help children identify suspicious indicators and make appropriate decisions when using digital platforms

practical skills to navigate modern technologies safely.

He said the interactive format places children in situations that mirror everyday Internet use, helping them distinguish between safe and unsafe practices and encouraging responsible digital behaviour.

The initiative, which runs until August 10, targets children aged 6 to 15, with content tailored to different age groups. Parents also participate in some stages of the experience to encourage family discussions about responsible digital technology use.

Participants progress through several stages, beginning with registration, followed by the interactive experience and concluding with an assessment of their understanding and newly acquired skills.

The initiative forms part of Omantel's awareness programmes aimed at promoting digital literacy, strengthening information-security awareness and encouraging children to adopt responsible practices when using digital technologies. — ONA

وزارة الصحة
Ministry of Health

Announcement

The Ministry of Health invites specialized companies to participate in the following Tenders:-

Tender Ref.	Description	Last Date for Collection of Tender Document	Bid Submission Closing Date on/ Before 10:00 am Wednesday	Eligibility	Tender Fee (Non-Refundable) Per set
3122/2026/ MOH/ HQ-296	Replacement of CO2 Fire Fighting System in AL Buraimi Hospital at Al Buraimi Governorate	13-08-2026	16-09-2026	Specialized companies registered with the Projects, Tenders, and Local Content Authority, First, Second	• SME: 10 • LO: 25
3116/2026/ MOH/ HQ-295	Replacement and Installation of Washing Machines for Laundry in Sohar Hospital at North Al Bathnah Governorate	13-08-2026	16-09-2026	Specialized companies registered with the Projects, Tenders, and Local Content Authority in Third, Fourth	• SME: 10 • LO: 25
3115/2026/ MOH/ HQ-294	Supply of Surgical Items (Infusion Set) for the Royal Hospital	13-08-2026	09-09-2026	Specialized companies registered with the Projects, Tenders, and Local Content Authority in Excellent, First, Second, Third, Fourth	• SME: 10 • LO: 25
3114/2026/ MOH/ HQ-293	Supply of Liquid Medical Oxygen to Various Ministry of Health Hospitals	20-08-2026	16-09-2026	Specialized companies registered with the Projects, Tenders, and Local Content Authority in Excellent, First, Second, Third, Fourth	• SME: 10 • LO: 30
3113/2026/ MOH/ HQ-292	Supply of Laboratory Items	13-08-2026	19-08-2026	Specialized companies registered with the Projects, Tenders, and Local Content Authority in Excellent, First, Second	• SME: 10 • LO: 25
3094/2026/ MOH/ HQ-290	Supply & Installation of Air Cooled Chillers with Circulation Pumps in Ibra Hospital at North Al Sharqiyah Governorate	13-08-2026	09-09-2026	Specialized companies registered with the Projects, Tenders, and Local Content Authority in Excellent, First, Second	• SME: 10 • LO: 25
3089/2026/ MOH/ HQ-289	Supply of Surgical Items (Neurophysiological Monitoring)	20-08-2026	09-09-2026	Specialized companies registered with the Projects, Tenders, and Local Content Authority in Excellent, First, Second	• SME: 10 • LO: 25
3149/2026/ MOH/ HQ-298	Supply and Installation of Smart Data Center for Various Health Centers at Musandam Governorate	17-08-2026	09-09-2026	Specialized companies registered with the Projects, Tenders, and Local Content Authority in Excellent, First	• SME: 10 • LO: 25

- Tenders should be submitted **online** on <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>.
- Ministry is not bound to accept the lowest tender and reserves the right to accepts or reject any tender.
- For any Clarification, you may contact via Telephone: 24402200, Email id etenderhd@ita.gov.om

WORLD

SHORT TAKES



A Lebanese army soldier stands on guard by his armoured vehicle in the southern Lebanese village of Zawtar al-Gharbiyah. — AFP

Lebanon says Israeli troops infiltrated army-held village

BEIRUT: Israeli troops infiltrated a Lebanese village placed under the control of Lebanon’s army as part of a June agreement, building an earthen barrier there overnight, state media and the local mayor said. A correspondent saw the barrier, situated at the village’s eastern entrance and blocking the road. The local authorities said it was unclear if any Israeli forces remained in the area.

“An Israeli occupation army force advanced into the village of Zawtar al Gharbiya shortly after midnight... and erected a new earthen barrier near the town square,” Lebanon’s state-run National News Agency (NNA) reported. Zawtar al Gharbiya was one of two designated “pilot zones” where the Lebanese army was to take over as part of a US-sponsored framework agreement signed with Israel. Confirming the incident, a Lebanese military source said that it was a violation of the framework agreement.

Lebanon and Israel had just completed their seventh round of direct negotiations in Rome on Thursday, with a Lebanese source saying that the Israelis refused to discuss withdrawing from more areas before making sure Beirut’s military had full control over the pilot zones. The NNA on Saturday reported artillery shelling in southern Lebanon. — AFP

Thailand shooting toll rises to 9 after death of 12-year-old girl



Flowers are left outside Debsirin Nonthaburi School in tribute to the victims, Bangkok. — Reuters

BANGKOK: The death toll from a school shooting in Thailand rose to nine on Saturday, after police said a 12-year-old girl caught up in Friday’s incident had died. Police at the Plai Bang Police Station in Nonthaburi Province told Reuters the girl had died on Saturday, a day after a 14-year-old boy allegedly shot his grandparents and then killed five more people at his school before turning the gun on himself.

Students streamed out of the Debsirin Nonthaburi School, on the capital’s northwestern outskirts, as the wounded were loaded on to ambulances and teachers hugged each other and cried. In photos circulated by emergency workers, one person is seen lying down on a stretcher outside an ambulance.

Police said 23 people were wounded in the incident, the latest in a succession of mass shootings in recent years in Thailand, which has by far the largest number of guns in civilian possession in Southeast Asia and among the most per capita in Asia. — Reuters

ICC CALLS ON CHAD, VENEZUELA TO RECONSIDER WITHDRAWALS

THE HAGUE: The International Criminal Court (ICC) expressed concern at the decision by Chad and Venezuela to withdraw from the body and called on them to reconsider. “The presidency regrets these developments,” said a statement from the court’s leadership, currently made up of Finland, Sierra Leone and Poland. It said that withdrawals from the Rome statute that set up the ICC “risk undermining the collective pursuit of justice and weakening

global efforts to end impunity.” It added: “The ICC stands at the heart of the international system of accountability, and its effectiveness depends on sustained and unequivocal support from the international community.” “The presidency calls on Chad and Venezuela to remain committed states parties to the Rome Statute.” Venezuela announced its withdrawal from The Hague-based court on July 25 and Chad two days later. Both accused the body of

biased in the investigations. Earlier, the United States launched a diplomatic offensive against the court promising new sanctions and calling on other nations to quit. Relations between President Donald Trump’s administration and the court are poor, with some judges already subject to US sanctions. Chad accused the ICC of focusing on African countries. Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger have also signalled they want to leave the ICC. — AFP

Typhoon Dolphin hits Japan, as China shuts ports

TYPHOON

DOLPHIN lashed Japan’s southern Okinawa prefecture on Saturday, injuring six people and cutting power to more than 50,000 buildings, while China shut ports and halted ferries ahead of the storm’s expected arrival on its east coast. Five elderly people, three of whom fell due to strong winds, suffered non-life-threatening injuries in Okinawa while another person was injured in Kagoshima prefecture, authorities said.

Nearly 39,000 buildings were without power in Kagoshima while just over 12,000 were affected in Okinawa. Domestic airlines, ANA and Japan Airlines, cancelled flights to and from Okinawa. The typhoon had maximum sustained winds of 162 kph with gusts reaching 216 kph. Okinawa and Amami island in Kagoshima prefecture are the main areas expected to be affected in Japan.

In China, where the typhoon is expected to make landfall between late on Sunday and early on Monday, authorities have designated Dolphin as an orange-category typhoon - the second-highest level. Worried about the risk of flooding and landslides, authorities also raised the emergency response level for Dolphin by one notch to level III, the second-lowest level.

The typhoon is most likely to make



A car makes its way through strong winds and rain as Typhoon Dolphin approaches, in Nazeasahicho, Japan. — Reuters

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landfall between Zhoushan city in Zhejiang province and Fuding city in Fujian province and is expected to have winds of 38-45 metres per second near its centre, according to China’s National Meteorological Center. China’s National Marine Forecasting Center on Saturday maintained its highest, red-level warning for waves, forecasting 5-to-8-metre waves in coastal waters off Zhejiang through Sunday afternoon.

Under an orange-level warning, waves in coastal waters off Shanghai and northern Fujian could be 3 to 5.5 metres. On Saturday evening, Chinese authorities issued five weather and disaster warnings, including orange alerts for typhoon, heavy rain, and geological-disaster risks, along with a red alert for

mountain torrents.

Rain and strong winds are expected to affect eastern China through August 12, including parts of Shanghai and neighbouring provinces. Some areas could see short bursts of rainfall exceeding 80 mm an hour, accompanied by thunderstorms and strong winds. Zhejiang, one of China’s biggest provincial economies and a manufacturing and export hub, raised its coastal typhoon alert to its highest level and halted port operations. Authorities in eastern and southern China also suspended ferries, halted some construction work and ordered fishing boats back to port.

Ningbo Lishe International Airport in Zhejiang said it will suspend all flights on Sunday. Shanghai’s Yangshan port had been cleared of vessels by late on Friday, while some rail services in the Yangtze River Delta will be suspended from Sunday. Beijing authorities have said they are monitoring the typhoon’s path and are preparing flood-control and evacuation plans for the capital.

In Taiwan, 78 flights were cancelled because of the typhoon. Heavy rain was expected in northern parts of the island over the weekend, though authorities had not ordered evacuations. China has ordered that ships passing through the Taiwan Strait must heed its traffic control instructions. — Reuters



HAMAS SAYS READY TO GO FOR GAZA PLAN

GAZA: Hamas said on Saturday it remained ready to proceed with a US-backed Gaza peace plan and urged pressure on Israel, which insists it did not agree to the latest part of the deal. Hamas informed US President Donald Trump’s Board of Peace that it stood by the latest stage of the plan, under which the militants would hand over weapons to a nascent Palestinian governing committee in the war-battered territory.

“Hamas and other factions have confirmed to mediators their readiness to begin implementing the agreement and move to the second phase, provided it receives Israeli approval and that Israel begins implementing the agreement,” a Hamas official said. “Hamas is urging the US administration to exert pressure on Israel to compel it to abide by the agreement and move to the second phase,” the official said on condition of anonymity. Israeli operations in Gaza, while ongoing, appear to have decreased in intensity in recent days. On Saturday, the Nasser hospital in Khan Yunis reported three people injured by Israeli army gunfire. — AFP

FIGHTING WILDFIRE

Spain deploys 275 firefighters to tackle blaze



More than 275 firefighters were battling a challenging wildfire in Spain’s Andalusia region, though authorities said no residential zone was currently under threat. The blaze, happening north of the town of Niebla, halfway between Seville and the Portuguese border, was active in an area of around 4,000 hectares, an adviser to Andalusia’s emergency service, Antonio Sanz, said. “This wildfire is driven by constantly changing winds, which upend attack strategies,” he told reporters. — AFP

MOUNTAINS TRAGEDY

Nepal rescuers find bodies of five climbers



Rescuers in Nepal have found the bodies of five mountaineers, including three foreigners, killed in an avalanche last year. “Five bodies, three foreigners and two Nepalis, who had been missing since last November, have been discovered,” said Biswash Karki, chairman of Gaurishankar Rural Municipality. The foreigners were an Italian-Canadian, a German and an Italian, he said. Rescuers discovered the bodies on Thursday and local authority was working to recover them. — AFP

PRESERVING ENVIRONMENT

Deforestation hits record low in Amazon



Deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon last year plunged to its lowest level in a decade, according to official data, the latest decline under Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva’s government. The world’s largest tropical rainforest had 2,874 square kilometres cleared from August 2025 to July 2026, marking a nearly 37 per cent drop from the previous year, the National Institute for Space Research said. The group began tracking deforestation via satellite starting in 2016. — AFP

SHORT TAKES



Todd Blanche takes press questions at the Justice Department in Washington, DC. — Reuters

US Senate confirms Trump’s ex-lawyer as attorney general

WASHINGTON: The US Senate confirmed President Donald Trump’s former personal lawyer Todd Blanche as attorney general early on Saturday after Republican lawmakers shrugged off Democratic concerns over politicisation of the Department of Justice. Blanche, who has already been serving as the top US law enforcement officer in an acting capacity, represented Trump as his private attorney in several criminal trials before entering government.

The Senate, which Republicans narrowly control, confirmed him by 50 votes to 49. Republican senators Susan Collins and Lisa Murkowski joined the Democrats in voting no, underlining the political sensitivity over the nomination.

Blanche said he was “deeply honoured by the trust and confidence President Trump has placed in me to lead the Department of Justice.” “I am grateful to the Senate for staying late to complete this process. To the dedicated public servants of the Department of Justice, thank you for your work each day to uphold the law and keep our country safe,” Blanche wrote on X.

Trump, who has upended US political norms by seeking to bring nominally independent government agencies under his increasingly direct control, calls Blanche a “star.” Democrats opposed Blanche from the beginning, accusing Trump of turning the Department of Justice into a political weapon. — AFP

CREWS TAME ROTTERDAM PLANT BLAZE



A fire broke out at a recycling plant near the port of Rotterdam, spewing thick smoke across the area before being brought under control in an all-night operation, authorities said. The blaze prompted a large-scale emergency response involving fire units, a fireboat from the port and a drone used to identify hotspots, according to the public safety information service for the Rotterdam-Rijnmond region. — AFP

DRONE ENTERS BULGARIA, EXPLODES NEAR PIPELINE AT ROMANIAN BORDER

SOFIA: A drone that entered Bulgaria on Saturday exploded near the Romanian border and the Trans-Balkan gas pipeline there, which links Türkiye to Ukraine, Bulgarian Prime Minister Rumen Radev announced. Radev did not specify where the drone, which caused no casualties, came from and said authorities did not yet know what type it was.

But he said the amount of explosives it was carrying was “significant”. “The drone exploded

in the immediate vicinity of the Kardam border-crossing with Romania,” near the Black Sea in the country’s northeast, “1,000 metres from the Trans-Balkan gas pipeline’s compressor station,” he said in a video released by the government on social media. The drone later crashed into a sunflower field, he said.

The sound of the drone was recorded by border police in Romania, and then “a loud explosion accompanied by black smoke” was spotted by a Bulgarian

border police patrol, Radev added, speaking after an extraordinary meeting of his cabinet’s security council.

“One thing is certain: the drone was carrying a significant amount of explosives, given that it could be heard from a distance and produced such black smoke,” he said.

It was said later that the drone was a type “widely used by the Ukrainian military. Currently, nothing suggests that this was a deliberate incident.” — AFP

Zelensky visits Russian ally Serbia as Moscow hits Kyiv

PRESIDENT VOLODYMYR ZELENSKY was making his first official visit to Serbia — a rare European country still closely aligned with Moscow — on Saturday as Ukraine seeks to bolster international support in the face of intensifying Russian strikes. Zelensky received a ceremonial welcome as talks with his counterpart Aleksandar Vucic got under way at the presidential palace, after another intense bombardment of Kyiv and the surrounding region overnight killed at least four people. Diplomacy is at a standstill more than four years after the start of Russia’s large-scale offensive against Ukraine and the two countries are ramping up long-range strikes, causing a growing number of civilian casualties.

Zelensky said on Saturday that his war-torn country was left “with virtually no intact thermal power plants” because of Russian strikes as it braced itself for another winter of the attack. “We also spoke about the challenges Ukraine faces this winter, when we are left with virtually no intact thermal power plants because of Russian strikes, when Russian missiles are aimed precisely at making the lives of Ukrainians unbearable,” Zelensky told reporters in Belgrade speaking alongside Serbian counterpart Aleksandar Vucic.

Moscow has significantly upped its attacks on the Ukrainian capital in recent months, typically firing salvos of hard-to-intercept ballistic missiles in short blitzes, with Ukraine pleading for more US-made Patriot interceptors. Kyiv, in turn, has been firing record numbers of drones at Russia in retaliation. A senior Ukrainian official earlier described Zelensky’s visit to Moscow’s traditional ally Serbia as “a slap in the face for the Russians”.

Serbia is historically close to Russia and Vucic has refused to

“We also spoke about the challenges Ukraine faces this winter, when we are left with virtually no intact thermal power plants because of Russian strikes, when Russian missiles are aimed precisely at making the lives of Ukrainians unbearable.”

VOLODYMYR ZELENSKY



Serbia’s President Aleksandar Vucic and Ukraine’s President Volodymyr Zelensky (L) give a press conference following their meeting at the Palace of Serbia, in Belgrade. — AFP

sanction Moscow, a move that has irked the EU and slowed Belgrade’s path to joining the bloc.

Zelensky had dinner with Vucic, who repeated this week that he will not change his mind on sanctions, ahead of the talks. “We will discuss expanding economic ties between our countries, relations with the European Union, other areas that can benefit our nations, and security issues,” Zelensky said on X.

After arriving at the palace on Saturday morning, the leaders posed for photos before talks began behind closed doors. They are later due to address the media. Zelensky — who has toured much of the world seeking support since Russia’s 2022 attack — has not visited Serbia since he became president in 2019.

Although heavily dependent on cheap Russian gas and one of the rare European leaders to still visit Moscow, Vucic has also supplied non-military aid to Kyiv. The Kremlin has accused Serbian firms of selling munitions to Ukraine, a claim Vucic has repeatedly denied. Vucic went to Ukraine for a regional summit in

2025 and visited Kyiv this year.

The visit comes as Russia launched another overnight barrage of missiles and drones, targeting mostly the capital Kyiv region. The attack killed three people, including a child, outside Kyiv, Zelensky said on X on Saturday. “Last night, Russia killed three people in Pukhivka, Kyiv region, with drone strikes — a grandfather, a grandmother, and their grandson,” Zelensky said, adding that “the boy was only three years old”.

Ukraine’s state emergency service shared photos of a destroyed building in flames, saying the attack in Pukhivka destroyed a two-storey house. “Four more people were hospitalised: the child’s parents, his 15-year-old brother, and a neighbour who came to the family’s aid and was wounded in a double-tap strike,” Zelensky said.

Another person was killed in a strike “involving six ballistic missiles against civilian infrastructure in Kyiv.” He urged more pressure on Russia, including “new sanctions that will prevent the production of these ballistic missiles”. — AFP

Spain imposes border checks on Italy as migrant showdown grows

MADRID: Spain announced it would introduce temporary border checks on travellers from Italy in response to Rome imposing similar measures after a mass migrant rush into Ceuta. The checks, which come “amid the persistent irregular migration pressure” facing Italy, will last until September 7, Spain’s interior ministry said in a statement. Earlier, Spain threatened Italy with countermeasures if it did not swiftly lift its own border checks, drawing a rebuff from Rome.

The rare spat between the European Union and Nato allies came after tens of thousands of people crossed from Morocco to Spain’s North African territory on July 30-31 in an unprecedented, deadly rush. The scenes infuriated EU members that back a hard

line on irregular immigration, including Italy which imposed a one-month suspension of its visa free-travel Schengen deal with Spain.

The Spanish government slammed the measure as “unfair, contrary to the EU’s interests and discriminatory for the Spanish population”. Foreign Minister Jose Manuel Albares described it as “a torpedo fired at the hull of European unity.” “We urge the government of Italy to rectify, put an end to the checks and treat Spaniards like other European citizens,” the government said. He threatened “proportional measures” in response by Sunday if Italy failed to comply.

Within hours, the government of Italy’s far-right Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni said it “had no intention



Spanish national police officers monitor as travellers arrive from Italy, at Madrid-Barajas Airport. — Reuters

of revising the decision” before August 15, when it said Spanish authorities “expected a new wave of migration” to hit Ceuta. “Italy does not accept ultimatums or impositions from abroad regarding national security

and border control,” Meloni’s office said in a statement. “Only when there is certainty that there are no security or terrorism risks to Italy, that no new wave is occurring, and that no irregular migrants are heading toward European

territory, will the decision be reconsidered,” it read.

Spain’s interior ministry announced the reciprocal measures within hours. Spanish police have been monitoring online rumours and social media about possible fresh arrivals in Ceuta in mid-August, according to local media. But authorities have not expressly said they expect a repeat of last week’s rush.

Border authorities would in the meantime “do their utmost to ensure maximum ease of movement for Spanish and European citizens” who are not affected by border checks. Italy, which does not share a land border with Spain, introduced border controls at maritime and air entry points for third-country nationals arriving from the

Iberian country.

The move announced on July 31 was an “extraordinary measure” intended to “safeguard national security and prevent possible repercussions for our nation”, Meloni said at the time. She was among EU leaders who called for Spain to be suspended from the visa-free Schengen travel zone after the Ceuta incident, despite such a move being legally impossible.

The Spanish government warned against “creating rifts and sterile conflicts driven by internal electoral motives” and said “we trust that pro-European sentiment, common sense and good faith prevail”.

Of the 72,000 people who entered Ceuta, 70,000 have returned to Morocco. Spanish authorities said 80 people died in the crossings. — AFP

OPINION

We only call it reckless when it fails



DR HAMED
AL SINAWI

The writer is a senior consultant psychiatrist at SQU Hospital

LAST WEEK, several social media platforms carried news of the sad death of ten mountain climbers in an avalanche in Pakistan. Sympathetic people posted their condolences to the victims’ families. Videos were shared showing clips of their previous adventures, and it was clear that this form of sport carries a great risk to one’s life. People expressed different opinions about the accident: while many praised the spirit of adventure, others called them “adrenaline junkies” who were needlessly risking their lives.

The phrase “adrenaline junkies” might be considered an accusation, yet it is not entirely wrong or an insult either. Psychologists call it “sensation seeking,” which is defined as the tendency to pursue novel, intense, and varied experiences and to accept risk in order to have them. It is a normal personality dimension, partly inherited, and linked to how the brain’s reward system responds to stimulation. People with such a personality trait are not necessarily damaged.

They simply need more input before life feels vivid. Many of them become surgeons, firefighters, pilots, emergency physicians,

and war correspondents. Societies quietly depend on such people, then condemn them when the risk they carry becomes visible. Elite mountaineers are usually the least impulsive people you will meet. They spend years training, months acclimating, and days waiting for a weather window. They calculate oxygen, load, rope, and route, and a good climber is defined less by the summits reached than by the number of times he turned back. What killed those ten men was not recklessness but residual risk, the part that preparation reduces and can never remove.

So why are we so quick to judge? Partly because of hindsight. Had the expedition succeeded, the very same footage would have been shared as inspiration, and the very same men and women would have been called heroes.

The outcome changes our verdict on a decision that was identical either way. I was discussing this incident with a friend, and he rightly pointed out that sometimes we tend to judge chosen risks far more harshly than habitual ones. He gave examples of how road accidents, smoking, obesity, and inactivity end vastly more lives each year than

Psychologists call it ‘sensation seeking,’ which is defined as the tendency to pursue novel, intense, and varied experiences and to accept risk in order to have them.

mountains ever will, yet nobody is called a junkie for driving too fast on a familiar highway or for a third cigarette after lunch. We reserve moral language for risks that are voluntary, visible, and unfamiliar to us.

None of this is meant to romanticise what happened. Ten families are grieving, and children have lost their parents. It is also worth remembering that the risk on such expeditions is not shared equally, as we tend to forget the local porters and guides who carry the heaviest loads through the most dangerous ground, for modest pay and without the fame that later attaches to the climb.

Perhaps my friend was right in pointing out that the deeper discomfort comes from the realisation that a life arranged entirely around the avoidance of risk is not automatically a safe life; it is often a small one, and meaninglessness carries its own mortality. Most of us settle somewhere between the mountain and the sofa, and we are not always honest about where.

In my opinion, when people die pursuing something that mattered to them, what is owed to them is condolence, not a verdict. May their souls rest in peace.

CANADA TRIES TO ADAPT TO A FUTURE OF WILDFIRES

FANNY ALARCON

Faced with another summer when wildfires have scorched millions of hectares of land and blankets of smoke have disrupted daily life nationwide, Canada is trying to limit the annual devastation.

Yet, despite procuring new water bombers and deploying forest management strategies to protect populated areas, experts caution that intense wildfires will remain a fixture of Canadian life.

“We’re going to have to live with this,” said Normand Lacour, who spent decades at Quebec’s wildfire prevention and detection organisation (SOPFEU). Canada is home to about a quarter of Earth’s boreal forest area and average annual temperatures in the country are increasing roughly twice as fast as the global average.

That makes conditions in Canada particularly “conducive to intense and very extensive forest fires,” University of Ottawa geography professor Patricia DeRepentigny said.

Canada’s last three wildfire seasons have been among the 10 worst on record, including the devastating summer of 2023 when 18 million hectares were torched, an area nearly as large as Syria. This summer is not currently on track to approach that historic toll, with 4 million hectares burned so far, but the damage has been widespread.

In the western province of British Columbia, 15,000 people have been ordered to evacuate their homes, while residents of major eastern population centres like Toronto endured some of the world’s worst air quality last month.

Canada’s emerging response is broad-based. The federal government has invested \$227 million over five years “to establish a new national aerial firefighting surge capacity,” Ottawa announced in May.

The money is being used to lease 10 aircraft capable of confronting wildfires, to be dispatched to provinces facing intensifying blazes.

Ottawa is also backing a CAD\$150 million programme that aims to clear flammable material such as vegetation from populated areas.

Provinces have also beefed up their firefighter capacity, including in Quebec where SOPFEU staffing levels are up 40 per cent.

But when it comes to protecting people from wildfires, “Canada is not in an excellent position,” said Ryan Ness, the director of adaptation research at the Canadian Climate Institute. There are “too many communities that are in areas that are exposed to wildfires that continue to develop,” he said. Canada is also extremely vulnerable to “fire clouds,” or pyrocumulonimbus clouds, immense blazes that create their own wind and even lightning that can spark fresh fires. — **AFP**

United we stand and grow; divided we fall and decline

THE ARAB world and its neighbours face a simple choice: build trust with one another or allow division to make every country less secure. From the Gulf to the Levant, from North Africa to the states adjoining the Middle East, shared history, faith, trade routes and family ties are stronger than the disagreements that too often dominate public debate. They have sufficient enemies without fighting each other.

Division is not only irrational but dangerous. The GCC states have shown that practical cooperation can bring real benefits. Oman, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, Yemen and Bahrain each have their own character, priorities and national interests. Yet they also share deep connections and common concerns: secure seas, stable borders, economic opportunity, food and water security, and a peaceful future for younger generations. Their strength lies not in becoming identical, but in recognising that cooperation gives every member greater protection and greater influence. The same principle applies across the wider Arab and Muslim world. Muslims follow different schools of thought, cultures and personal paths. None of this removes the duty to treat all people, no matter what their religion, with dignity, fairness and brotherhood.

Too often, regional differences are widened by suspicion, inflammatory language and the belief that another country’s weakness is a national advantage. This is a short-sighted view. Instability does not remain within one border. Conflict disrupts trade, threatens shipping, drives displacement, encourages extremism and creates uncertainty for investors and families alike.

When one state is weakened, its neighbours eventually feel the consequences. The countries of the Middle East and those adjoining it



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The message is clear: united, the nations of this region can protect their interests, develop their economies and offer their people a future of confidence. Divided, they become more vulnerable to pressure, conflict and manipulation.



A region that relies entirely on others for its security leaves itself exposed whenever foreign priorities change.

should also be realistic about external powers. Foreign partners can be useful in trade, technology, education and defence cooperation. Relations with the wider world are neither wrong nor avoidable. But no outside actor will care more deeply about the region’s people, culture, sovereignty and long-term stability than the countries of the region themselves.

External powers have interests, not principles. They act according to their own interests, changing governments, economic calculations and strategic priorities. Alliances can shift quickly. Promises can be delayed. Assistance can come with conditions. A region that relies entirely on others for its security leaves itself exposed whenever foreign priorities change.

The better path is regional unity. This means stronger dialogue, direct communication during crises and serious efforts to prevent misunderstandings from becoming confrontations. It means joint protection of maritime routes, intelligence cooperation against terrorism and organised crime, economic links that create shared interests, and investment in education, industry, renewable energy, food production and

advanced technology. It also means choosing diplomacy before escalation. Oman’s long tradition of dialogue and balanced relations offers a valuable example.

Quiet diplomacy is not weakness. It is often the most practical way to preserve peace, save lives and create room for solutions that public confrontation can make impossible. Unity does not mean ignoring disputes or pretending that difficult issues do not exist. It means handling them with patience, respect and a clear awareness of the common good.

Countries can defend their sovereignty and national interests while still seeking understanding with their neighbours. Indeed, true sovereignty is strengthened when a nation is secure in its region rather than isolated within it.

The message is clear: united, the nations of this region can protect their interests, develop their economies and offer their people a future of confidence. Divided, they become more vulnerable to pressure, conflict and manipulation. Friendship, mutual respect and solidarity are not idealistic slogans. They are the foundations of security and prosperity.

Showing the way to other Omanis



RAY PETERSEN
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The writer is a media consultant

IT WASN'T success that inspired Nadhira al Harthy to challenge Mount Everest, the most daunting of all mountains, but failure. Yet, she succeeded where so few have dared to venture, and in doing so inspired a nation and generations.

Al Harthy wasn't one of those serial winners we all know; she wasn't set upon mountaineering all of her life, but a typical young Omani woman, a diligent student who graduated from Al Rustaq University and went to work in the education sector. Teaching briefly, she supervised a student group on a geographical field trip to Mount Kilimanjaro, where, suffering from altitude sickness, she failed to make the summit.

But she was made of sterner stuff, and, her interest piqued, she threw herself wholeheartedly at the many challenges of climbing, from the very basics, including how to use her physical attributes in concert with the psychological demands of simply "looking a long way up and a long way down," as she told me in 2019.

She trained determinedly for the UTMB event on Al Jabal Al Akhdhar and was stung by her inability to complete it, the DNF only increasing her focus. She worked with Khalfan al Siyabi to develop her physique even further, and even an abortive climb at

Ama Dablam in Nepal later that year, 2018, did little more than reinforce her confidence in her abilities.

And here's where it all came together, and an Omani woman, a daughter of the Sultanate of Oman, a child of the sea and sand, put it all together, and in June 2019, Nadhira al Harthy cemented her name, her reputation and her strength of character, at the Everest, on top of the world, where so few have been, where according to folklore 'to face the Everest is to know there can be no expectation of mercy.'

Edmund Hillary, a modest, shy beekeeper from New Zealand, was the first to conquer the 'staircase to the stars' in 1952, with so many going before, failing, and so many before, both successful and otherwise. Yet none of those should demean the reality of Al Harthy's achievement. And she would go on, always challenging herself and 'her' mountains, with Madly, Ama Dablam, K2, the Matterhorn, Nd Nanga Parbat, the so-called killer mountain, all proving she was much more than a 'one-trick pony.'

I interviewed her twice, post-Everest, and found sitting opposite me a young woman, much younger than her years, with a nature, a manner, and a confidence that distanced arrogance. She had a clarity of purpose that wasn't overwhelming, but discomforting in

In June 2019, Nadhira al Harthy cemented her name, her reputation and her strength of character at Everest, on top of the world

its way, and evident in my past interactions with Frankie Dettori, Paula Radcliffe, Jonah Lomu, and John Walker, all masters of their respective fields.

She had a bold eye! Clear, bright, and so intense. She hated to lose at anything, and confessed that this side of her character only emerged as she learned of the possibilities that lay ahead of her. I confessed to being scared, no, terrified, of heights.

She didn't want to be idolised, but to 'show the way,' to other Omanis, boys or girls, and for them to know that nothing comes easy, but that success is all the richer for the struggle.

I will never forget the strong, forthright, bold woman who tolerated my intrusion into her past, present, and future, with such openness, her faith secure, her intent certain, and that future in the hands of fate. I also know that none of us want to 'go,' but if she was to, to do so doing what she had grown to love.

Edmund Hillary spoke of looking out from the summit of Everest, and "seeing another route to climb the mountain," and thinking, "This can't be the end of everything." In Al Harthy's life... it was just the beginning. She is mourned and celebrated, but clearly chosen to be more than a teacher... an inspiration.

COLOMBIA'S NEW PRESIDENT VOWS TO 'DEFEAT NARCO TERRORISTS'

DAVID SALAZAR

Colombian President Abelardo de la Espriella vowed to restore order and eradicate "narco-terrorists" in a fiery first speech as leader on Friday.

The US-backed millionaire flew by helicopter to address soldiers in a military garrison after his inauguration in the southwestern city of Cali.

His mandate marks a sharp turn right for the Andean nation, with the 48-year-old keen to cozy up to Washington and come down hard on Colombia's patchwork of armed groups.

"There will be no room for maneuvers that undermine the stability of the nation," the president, who adopted a stiff military salute on the campaign trail, told hundreds of soldiers.

He pledged to "relentlessly defeat narco-terrorism," adding that "the option of dialogue is completely exhausted" - a reference to the former administration's spluttering peace talks with guerrillas.

The first thing on his to-do list, he said, was to join US President Donald Trump's regional anti-cartel alliance known as Shield of the Americas.

The US leader now has an eager ally in Bogota, and the feeling appeared to be mutual late on Friday, when the US State Department issued a release saying the Trump administration intends to work with Congress to announce "\$1 billion in assistance as part of a security package to support" the new administration.

De la Espriella, who holds dual US and Colombian citizenship, has offered to host US troops on Colombian soil and wants to bomb jungle cocaine labs, build "mega-prisons" and slash the size of the state.

In a break with tradition, his inauguration took place in Cali, Colombia's salsa capital, not at Congress in more buttoned-down Bogota.

Among the guests was beleaguered Fifa boss Gianni Infantino, who faces scathing criticism over his now-shelved plan to open the World Cup and other competitions up to private investment.

Right-wing figures also attended, including Argentina's President Javier Milei and Todd Blanche, Trump's acting attorney general, who headed the US delegation. De la Espriella's leftist predecessor Gustavo Petro declined to attend the ceremony. He earlier left the presidential residence in the capital, bidding "farewell, freedom and life."

Cali has suffered several guerrilla attacks in recent years, and the city saw beefed-up security for the occasion, including 11,000 troops and an anti-drone system.

De la Espriella's narrow victory of less than one percentage point ended four years of Colombia's first-ever leftist government.

He is now faced with a divided Congress, where he lacks a majority.

Supporters are hoping for a harsh crackdown on crime and dissident armed groups.

"This government has a lot to prove. A lot was said during the campaign," 46-year-old Marisol Peira said in Cali. — AFP

Bangladesh textiles sector rethinks on energy sources

BANGLADESH'S VITAL textile sector was already suffering high energy costs from the Middle East war when a fire at one of its two gas import terminals last month further exposed its energy insecurity and forced industry leaders to look to other fuels.

The textile industry employs some 4 million people out of a total industrial workforce of about 14 million and produces around 80 per cent of Bangladesh's exports and about 13 per cent of its GDP.

But the industry is heavily reliant on gas for its wet processing operations such as washing, dyeing and finishing clothes.

Bangladesh has a longstanding gas supply shortfall due to local production falling and import costs rising.

Qatar, one of the world's biggest exporters of Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG), has said its supply to Bangladesh will be slashed as a result of Iran's near-closure of the Strait of Hormuz and Iran's bombing of Qatari LNG export facilities.

A fire at one of Bangladesh's two LNG terminals last month then cut supply to just over half of demand, according to data from state-owned oil and gas company Petrobangla.

Mohd Khorshed Alam, a director of the Bangladesh Textile Mills Association (BTMA), said a large number of factories in the industrial belts of Savar, Ashulia and Narayanganj were now operating at up to 40 per cent below capacity.

Some factories have turned to more costly compressed natural gas from roadside filling stations that normally fuel cars, or to even more expensive diesel to fulfil urgent orders.

"The country cannot build future industrial investment on uncertain LNG supplies and repeated supply disruptions. We need energy security, not piecemeal firefighting," said Fazlul Hoque, managing director of Plummy Fashions, one of the country's leading textile producers.

Hoque's factory in Narayanganj employs more than 1,000 people and has faced disruptions to its energy supply for years. As a result, he is considering switching to electrification and alternative fuels such as biomass.



MD TAHMID ZAMI

The writer is a Climate Correspondent for the Thomson Reuters Foundation based in Dhaka



A woman walks past the closed Lithe Group garments factory at Baniachala in Bangladesh's Gazipur district. — AFP

Almost all rural households in Bangladesh use biomass for cooking, burning pellets made of agricultural residues like rice husk, rice straw, jute sticks, bagasse and wheat straw, as well as wood residues and municipal waste.

A few textile factories have already begun burning biomass to fuel their boilers.

But the textile sector has an exceptionally large fuel demand relative to the country's biomass base, and would compete with rural households, said Dr Laxmikant Jawale, regional lead for South Asia and Southeast Asia at the Apparel Impact Institute, a non-profit focused on decarbonising the apparel supply chain.

Bangladesh's logistics and infrastructure for aggregating biomass at an industrial scale is still underdeveloped, while switching to biomass requires investment in boiler retrofitting and changing the way fuel is handled, stored, combusted, and how ash is removed, he said.

"Biomass thus cannot be a sector-wide strategy; rather it works better as a facility-by-facility, case-by-case option," Jawale said.

Other solutions include installing electric boilers and heat pumps that could cut energy use by up to 45 per cent.

But the Apparel Impact Institute said in a report last year that installing heat pumps would require large-scale capital investment and that grid-connected electric boilers could not alone make up the energy deficit if supply were not consistent.

"Urgently improving grid access and reliability for factories across the country will send a clear market signal that grid electricity — and preferably renewable electricity — is what the industry needs," said Jawale.

Alam from the BTMA is also managing director of Little Group, a yarn spinning company. He has installed rooftop solar panels and batteries to store power at his plants, as well as energy-efficient motors to cut electricity use.

The government should now step up and remove duty from imports of energy-efficient technologies, provide support to the textile industry to adopt renewable energy and vigorously explore domestic gas fields to boost local supply, Alam said.

SPORTS

PERFECT PLATFORM



Oman players during a match.

OMAN HEAD COACH KULKARNI EYES ‘CHECKLIST’ SERIES AGAINST GOA SIDE

MUSCAT: Oman head coach Sulakshan Kulkarni believes the five-match white-ball series against the visiting India’s Goa Ranji Trophy squad will provide the perfect platform to assess his players and fine-tune combinations ahead of two major international assignments.

The Goa state team will arrive in Oman for a five-match tour from August 10 to 17, featuring two T20 matches and three 50-over contests against the Oman national team.

The series will serve as an important preparation phase for Oman ahead of the ACC Premier Cup 2026 in August-September in Malaysia and the remaining two legs of the ICC Cricket World Cup League 2, beginning with a tri-series at home in October and concluding with a tri-series in the UAE in December.

Describing the series as a vital “checklist” and exposure opportunity, Kulkarni said the matches would help the team management identify the players who fit into Oman’s plans for the upcoming challenges.

“This is the checklist and exposure series for us, so we will try to check the players whom we’re looking for,” Kulkarni said.

“This will help us build the team for the upcoming ACC Premier Cup and the remaining two League 2 series. Goa is a good team and did well in white-ball cricket in India. They have quite a few experienced players and I’m sure it will be a great series.”

The series will also mark the first major assignment for Vinayak Shukla as Oman captain after succeeding long-serving skipper Jatinder Singh, who continues to remain an important part of the national setup.

Shukla’s leadership will be closely watched as Oman look to build momentum before resuming their World Cup qualification campaign and competing for honours in the ACC Premier Cup.

OMAN FOURTH IN WCL 2
Oman, currently fourth in the eight-nation ICC Cricket World Cup League 2, need to finish among the top four to advance to the final round qualifier of the 2027 ODI World Cup.

Kulkarni’s men have 31 points from 28 games and have eight more games to play. USA top the table with 43 points (32 games) and are followed by Scotland (39 pts from 33 games) and the Netherlands (38 from 32 games). Namibia are fifth (28 from 31 games) and are followed by Canada (25 from 31 games), Nepal (24 from 32 games) and the UAE (16 from 26 games).

The series against Oman will also provide valuable match practice for the visitors ahead of the 2026-27 Indian domestic season in October. This will be Goa’s first overseas exposure tour in 14 years, with their previous international trip coming in 2012 when the senior men’s team travelled to South Africa.

Former India all-rounder Dinesh Mongia will guide Goa as head coach. He brings considerable international experience to the role, having represented India in 57 ODIs and was part of the Indian squad that reached the final of the 2003 ICC Cricket World Cup. He had earlier coached Goa during the 2024-25 season, when the side topped the Plate Division and secured promotion to the Elite Group.

The five matches will be played at Oman Cricket Academy, with all games streamed live on the Oman Cricket YouTube channel.

Oman vs Goa series schedule: T20 matches: August 10 and 11: 6.30 pm; 50-over matches (2.30 pm start): August 13, 15, 17.

Seeb take Group 1 lead as Saham stay top of Group 2



Seeb thumped Al Nasr 4-1 in the Jindal Youth League.



Al Rustaq beat Al Nahda 4-2 for their first win in the league.

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 8

SEEB MOVED to the top of Group 1 in the Jindal Youth League after defeating Al Nasr 4-1 in the fourth round, while Saham remained at the summit of Group 2 despite sitting out of the latest round of matches.

Seeb continued their impressive run with a third consecutive victory, overcoming previous leaders Al Nasr to maintain a perfect record. The win took Seeb to nine points from three matches, having scored 18 goals and conceded just once. Oman Club also climbed

to nine points after edging Samayil 3-2 in a five-goal contest. Oman Club have now registered three victories from four matches and occupy second place behind Seeb on goal difference.

Al Nasr dropped to third following their first defeat of the competition but remain firmly in the qualification race with seven points. Sur are also on seven points after securing a 3-1 victory over Dhofar, with Sur having played one match fewer.

Samayil remain fifth with three points, while Bahla and Dhofar are yet to open their accounts.

Competition in Group 2 remained tight behind leaders

Saham, who retain first place with nine points from three victories despite receiving a bye in the fourth round.

Al Khabourah boosted their campaign with a 2-0 victory over Ibri, moving on to four points. Despite the defeat, Ibri remain second with six points from four matches.

Al Shabab and Sohar shared the points in a 1-1 draw. The result moved both sides to five points, with Al Shabab occupying third place on goal difference ahead of Sohar.

AL RUSTAQ SECURE FIRST WIN
Al Rustaq, meanwhile, secured their first victory of the tournament after defeating Al

Nahda 4-2. The result lifted Al Rustaq to four points, level with Al Khabourah, while Al Nahda remain without a point.

Attention now turns to Sunday’s fifth round, which could have a significant impact on the race for the semifinal places.

In Group 1, Samayil face Sur and leaders Seeb take on Bahla at 6 pm, before Al Nasr meet Oman Club in a key contest at 7:20 pm.

Group 2 will see Al Nahda face Al Khabourah, and Sohar take on Al Rustaq at 6 pm, while the round concludes with an important 7:20 pm clash between leaders Saham and third-placed Al Shabab.

AL RAWAHI CLINCHES FOURTH ROUND HONOURS OF JORDAN NATIONAL RALLY

SPORTS REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUGUST 8

Young Omani driver Abdullah al Rawahi added another title to his impressive career after winning the fourth round of the Jordan National Rally on Friday. He dominated the day’s competition, leading the rally from start to finish, ahead of second-place finisher Bader al Fayeze and co-driver Joseph Mattar and third-place finisher Shaker Juwaihian and co-driver Mustafa Juma.

Al Rawahi and his Jordanian co-driver Atta al Hamood, driving a Skoda Fabia R5, delivered a strong performance on relatively new and challenging stages, far from the Dead Sea stages. These semi-desert stages were speedy on a difficult terrain.

Al Rawahi achieved fast times in each of these stages, securing a significant lead over the rest and ultimately winning the local title.

Regarding Friday’s race and his first place, champion Abdullah al Rawahi confirmed that the fourth round race was behind the rest of

“Thank God, we were able to win the fourth title of the Jordan National Rally. Our participation in this race was very important as we are continuing our preparation for the upcoming events. Our next programme is the International Rally of Lebanon.”

Abdullah al Rawahi



Oman’s Abdullah al Rawahi and Jordanian co-driver Atta al Hamood celebrate with their trophies during the podium ceremony for the Jordan National Rally.

the previous local races and had rough parts and new stages, but they were fast at the same time.

“Thank God, we were able to win the fourth title of the Jordan National Rally.” He added that “our participation in this race was very important as we are continuing

our preparation for the upcoming events. Our next programme is the International Rally of Lebanon.”

“It was also vital for us to get used to the car with the possibility of developing it in each participation,” the Omani rally driver added.

OMAN HUNTS FOR NEXT AL HABSI AS COACHES CALL FOR NATIONAL PROJECT



Fayez al Rushaidi in action.

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 8

FINDING and developing a goalkeeper capable of reaching the highest levels of the game is one of the most demanding tasks in football. Unlike many other positions, goalkeeping requires a combination of technical ability, physical attributes, tactical awareness, mental strength and leadership qualities that must be developed over many years.

For Oman, the success story of former national team goalkeeper Ali al Habsi remains a benchmark. His career, which saw him establish himself as one of the country's most successful footballers and compete at the highest levels of the game, has also raised an important question for Omani football: how can the country identify and develop

already has a good base of goalkeepers, but greater attention is required in specific areas. He pointed to Ibrahim al Mukhaini as the leading goalkeeper in recent years at international level, while noting that Oman also has experienced alternatives such as Fayez al Rushaidi and Ibrahim al Rajhi. "The level is good, but there are areas that need further development," Al Dohani said. "One of the areas that requires greater attention is dealing with crosses, as well as developing the goalkeeper's personality and leadership qualities."

For Al Dohani, the answer lies in taking the search for talent directly to the young players. "We need a national programme involving a group of specialist goalkeeping coaches to identify young goalkeepers through schools and clubs across the governorates," he said. "We should not wait for the child to come to the goalkeeper centre. We should go to the child and discover the talent."

He also believes schools can play a major role through physical education classes and school competitions, with basic assessments focusing on reaction speed, balance, coordination, concentration and courage.

At club level, he called for dedicated programmes for young goalkeepers and better training for coaches in identifying and developing goalkeeping talent. The psychological side of goalkeeping is another important consideration. According to Al Dohani, many young players avoid the position because of the fear of making mistakes and carrying responsibility in front of team-mates and spectators.

"The role of goalkeeping coaches is to change this perception," he said. "Instead of allowing the goalkeeper to fear mistakes, we need to make the player understand that he is an important player and a leader within the team."

FOOTBALL DEVELOPMENT

Oman Olympic team goalkeeping coach Hassan al Naimi believes attracting children to the position requires a complete project combining football development, education, promotion and an enjoyable training environment. He proposed a series of initiatives including open talent – identification days, specialised goalkeeping schools and academies, social media campaigns, greater involvement of parents, enjoyable training



Ibrahim al Mukhaini in action.



JASSIM AL DOHANI



HASSAN AL NAIMI



AWADH AL ALAWI



MOHAMMED AL ZIDI

programmes, goalkeeper-specific competitions and stronger cooperation with schools.

Al Naimi suggested that the initiative could be launched under the title 'Future Goalkeeper', creating a national platform to identify and develop promising young goalkeepers. "Recruiting children to goalkeeping does not depend only on training," Al Naimi said. "It requires an integrated project that combines marketing, education and an attractive training environment, while also benefiting from the experience of former goalkeepers and highly qualified coaches."

He believes the position needs to become more attractive to youngsters. "In most football festivals and competitions, attention is focused on outfield players, while goalkeepers do not always receive enough opportunities to demonstrate their abilities," he said.

"Specialised programmes and goalkeeper festivals should become part of the football development strategy."

Al Naimi also stressed that specialist goalkeeping coaches should be present across the different age groups. "The goalkeeper is different from other players in terms of technical skills, physical requirements and mental aspects, and therefore needs specialised preparation from the early years," he said. "A specialist goalkeeping coach is a long-term investment. A good goalkeeper is not produced in one season; he is built over many years of systematic and specialised training."

The question of physical development, particularly height, also generated discussion among the coaches. Al Naimi believes height can provide an advantage but should not become a reason to overlook talented youngsters.

"The most important qualities in a young goalkeeper are not necessarily height, but the correct technical foundation, game intelligence and strong personality," he said. "The successful goalkeeper combines intelligence, technical ability, personality and quick decision-making. Physical characteristics then complement these qualities."

PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS

Sur-based football academy goalkeeping coach and former Oman junior national team goalkeeper Awadh al Alawi, however, believes physical characteristics remain an

important part of the overall equation. "A goalkeeper is half the team and sometimes the entire team," Al Alawi said. "To compete at any level, you need a goalkeeper with strong physical, technical and leadership qualities."

He called for greater investment in specialist goalkeeping coaches within academies and youth teams, arguing that not every goalkeeping coach is necessarily equipped to work with children. "Not every goalkeeping coach is suitable to develop young goalkeepers," he said. "We need qualified coaches who specialise in youth development, particularly in academies and development centres."

STANDARD FOR OMANI GOALKEEPERS

Oman U-19 team goalkeeping coach Mohammed al Zidi believes the standard of Omani goalkeepers has improved in recent years, despite challenges including

“A specialist goalkeeping coach is a long-term investment. A good goalkeeper is not produced in one season; he is built over many years of systematic and specialised training.**”**

HASSAN AL NAIMI

limited opportunities for overseas professional development. He highlighted the emergence of goalkeepers such as Ibrahim al Mukhaini and Ibrahim al Rajhi at national-team level, as well as several promising goalkeepers competing domestically.

For Al Zidi, making goalkeeping attractive to youngsters is essential.

"Children need to understand that the goalkeeper is half the team and a leader on the field," he said. "Training should also be enjoyable and engaging. Small incentives for good saves or winning goalkeeper challenges can encourage children to continue in the position."

The coaches agreed on a proposal for a 'Future Goalkeeper' project that could become a nationwide talent pathway, with specialist coaches visiting different governorates, conducting goalkeeper assessment days, organising camps and competitions, and maintaining long-term performance records for promising players.

another goalkeeper capable of following a similar pathway?

Oman Observer spoke to a number of experienced Omani goalkeeping coaches, who agreed that producing another Al Habsi does not depend on individual talent alone. Instead, they believe Oman needs a structured national project dedicated specifically to identifying, developing and monitoring young goalkeepers across all the governorates. One of the key proposals is the creation of a national goalkeeper development programme that brings together leading goalkeeping coaches from across the Sultanate of Oman.

Under such a programme, coaches would travel to schools, academies and clubs in different governorates to identify promising youngsters rather than waiting for talented children to enter established football centres.

GOOD BASE

Former Oman Olympic team goalkeeping coach Jassim al Dohani believes the country

MUSCAT
STOCK
EXCHANGE
4,608.841

BUSINESS

CRUDE OIL
OMAN \$72.84
BRENT \$74.31
LIGHT \$70.29



SHORT TAKES



Calcium chloride is among the product lines associated with Oman Chlorine’s operations in the Sultanate of Oman.

GCC INVESTIGATION CONFIRMS CALCIUM CHLORIDE DUMPING

BALARAB AL TAMIMI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 8

A Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) trade body has concluded that imported calcium chloride was dumped into the GCC market and caused material injury to Gulf producers, but has decided against imposing provisional duties at this stage, Oman Chlorine SAOG said on Wednesday.

In a disclosure dated August 5, the Muscat-listed producer told shareholders that the Technical Secretariat for Combating Harmful Practices in International Trade, at the GCC General Secretariat, had completed the preliminary stage of its investigation.

According to the preliminary findings, imports of calcium chloride originating in or exported from India and Egypt were dumped into the GCC market. The report also concluded that the dumped imports had caused material injury to the GCC industry and established a causal link between those imports and the injury sustained by regional producers.

Despite the findings, the GCC anti-dumping body opted to continue the investigation without imposing provisional measures for the time being. The decision was taken under Article 21 of the Implementing Regulations of the Unified Law on Anti-Dumping, Countervailing and Safeguard Measures of the GCC States.

The disclosure follows Oman Chlorine’s announcement of December 25, 2025, which confirmed the filing of an anti-dumping complaint concerning calcium chloride imports.

The company said it would continue to monitor the progress of the case and disclose any material developments in accordance with applicable regulatory requirements.

Calcium chloride is among the product lines associated with the company’s chemical operations. Oman Chlorine maintains its head office in Muscat and operates a plant at Suhar in Al Batinah North Governorate.

Oman Food Capital posts 40% revenue rise in 2025

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, AUGUST 8

OMAN Food Capital (OFC), the food sector investment arm of Oman Investment Authority (OIA), has reported significant growth in its maiden annual report for 2025, marking the first full year following the landmark consolidation of OIA’s food-related investments under one integrated group.

Established to build and manage a diversified investment portfolio across food, agriculture, livestock and fisheries, OFC recorded a strong financial performance in 2025, with consolidated revenue rising by 40 per cent to RO 105.1 million, compared with RO 75.4 million in 2024. Earnings Before Interest, Taxes, Depreciation and Amortisation (EBITDA) also increased by 28 per cent, reflecting improved operational efficiency, cost optimisation initiatives and portfolio enhancement programmes.

The year was defined by major structural milestones, most notably the completion of the merger between Nitaj and Fisheries Development Oman (FDO), a move that strengthened integration across the group’s assets, improved operational efficiency and enhanced portfolio management effectiveness.

“The completion of the merger between Nitaj and Fisheries Development Oman represented a significant structural milestone, strengthening integration across the portfolio’s assets, improving operational efficiency and enhancing the effectiveness of portfolio management,” said Muneer bin Ali al Muneeri, Chairman of Oman Food Capital.

OFC Chief Executive Officer Abdullah bin Mohammed al Rashdi said the group’s improved performance reflected the impact of transformation initiatives implemented across its businesses.

“Portfolio revenue increased by 40 per cent compared with 2024,



Oman Food Capital’s portfolio now comprises 15 strategic investments across the country’s food ecosystem

“The completion of the merger between Nitaj and Fisheries Development Oman represented a significant structural milestone, strengthening integration across the portfolio’s assets, improving operational efficiency and enhancing the effectiveness of portfolio management.
”

MUNEER BIN ALI AL MUNEERI
Chairman of Oman Food Capital

supported by improved operating efficiency. EBITDA improved by 28 per cent, reflecting the impact of performance improvement programmes and optimisation of the cost base”, he said.

The group’s operating businesses delivered broad-based growth across its core sectors. The dairy business remained the largest contributor, generating RO 43.7 million in revenue, followed by fisheries at RO 29.1 million, dates processing at RO 16.2 million and animal feed at RO 12.3 million.

FISHERIES STRONG

Fisheries recorded the strongest year-on-year growth among the operating businesses, increasing from RO 13.1 million in 2024, while dairy, dates and animal feed operations also recorded positive gains.

OFC’s associate companies further strengthened the group’s overall performance, with animal feed generating RO 73.4 million, followed by flour milling at RO

44.5 million, egg production at RO 27 million, baked goods at RO 18.6 million and poultry at RO 11.8 million.

The results highlight OFC’s expanding role across Oman’s integrated food value chain, covering seven strategic sectors — grain and flour, agriculture, animal feed, dairy, meat and poultry, aquaculture and fisheries.

During 2025, OFC also advanced its portfolio optimisation strategy through selective divestments and capital reallocation initiatives. The company completed a partial divestment of its stake in Oman Flour Mills, reducing its ownership from 51 per cent to 31 per cent, as part of a strategy focused on higher-return opportunities and long-term value creation. Additional reforms included restructuring boards and executive management structures across subsidiaries, strengthening financing arrangements, enhancing risk management frameworks and improving decision-making efficiency.

Suhar Industrial City signs 39 investment deals over RO 214m

Suhar Industrial City, affiliated to the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn), received 49 investment applications during the first half of 2026, of which 39 contracts were successfully signed comprising 22 new contracts, 12 expansion contracts and one renewal contract. The total investment value of these contracts exceeds RO 214 million, covering projects spanning over 1.1 million sq m.

Eng Abdullah bin Ahmed al Mayasi, Director General of Suhar Industrial City, informed that the city’s cumulative investment volume has now surpassed RO 2.3 billion. “The total leased area has touched 16,285,914 sq m out of the city’s 19,856,507 sq m of developed area, while the overall area of Suhar Industrial City, including both developed and undeveloped land, stands at 30,487,399 sq m. Moreover, the total number of



The city’s cumulative investment volume has now surpassed RO 2.3 billion

localised projects has increased to 497, employing approximately 12,671 workers”, Al Mayasi said.

Al Mayasi highlighted that the signing of an investment contract with Fujian Mansheng Industrial Investment Company to establish

a ceramic manufacturing plant valued at RO 25 million as one of the city’s landmark projects during the first half of 2026. “This project will be developed over an area of 241,000 sq m and will feature three production lines, each with

a daily production capacity of 30,000 sq m, bringing the total capacity to 90,000 sq m per day upon full operation. The factory will commence operations with an initial production capacity of 60,000 sqm per day.” According to the project representatives, 25% of production will serve the local market, while 75% will be exported to the GCC countries and neighbouring markets. The ceramic manufacturing plant is expected to generate significant added value for the national economy by creating 500–600 job opportunities, including more than 150 jobs for Omani nationals, while facilitating knowledge transfer and supporting industrial development.

Al Mayasi further noted that the 93 MW renewable energy project currently under development at Suhar Industrial City represents a strategic milestone in advancing the Sultanate of Oman’s clean energy transition and supporting

the sustainability and economic diversification goals of Oman Vision 2040. “Developed through a strategic partnership, the project aims to operate and manage the city’s clean energy distribution network efficiently while establishing an integrated billing governance framework and delivering energy services to investors in line with best international practices”, he said.

He elaborated that the project will provide direct value to investors by supplying clean energy at competitive prices and hence reducing electricity costs during solar generation hours, while ensuring uninterrupted electricity supply during night-time and non-solar periods. The project site has been allocated within Phase 7 in Suhar Industrial City and is planned to provide the integrated infrastructure required for renewable energy generation and distribution. — ONA

ADVERTORIALS

SHORTTAKE



Jumaa al Fulaiti said: “Our relationship with our customers is founded on partnership, trust and a shared understanding of their aspirations”.

OMAN ARAB BANK STRENGTHENS CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIPS

MUSCAT: Oman Arab Bank (OAB) recently hosted a special customer gathering in Salalah, bringing together customers and representatives of the Bank to strengthen connections, encourage open dialogue and celebrate the partnerships that continue to shape their shared journey.

Held under the auspices of HH Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar, the event reflected OAB’s belief that meaningful customer relationships extend beyond banking services and are built through trust, understanding and continuous engagement. It provided a valuable platform for customers to connect directly with the Bank’s team, exchange perspectives and gain further insight into OAB’s evolving range of financial solutions.

The programme opened with a welcome address, followed by a keynote speech from Jumaa al Fulaiti, Deputy Head of Retail Banking at Oman Arab Bank. In his remarks, Al Fulaiti highlighted the important role customers play as partners in the Bank’s continued development and in shaping banking experiences that are relevant, responsive and accessible.

Commenting on the occasion, Jumaa al Fulaiti said: “Our relationship with our customers is founded on partnership, trust and a shared understanding of their aspirations. Opportunities such as this allow us to connect more closely, listen to their perspectives and deepen the relationships we have built over the years. Their confidence continues to inspire us to develop flexible and relevant solutions that support their financial goals at every stage”.

Through such engagements, Oman Arab Bank continues to place customer partnership at the heart of its approach. By maintaining open channels of communication and creating opportunities for meaningful interaction, the Bank remains committed to building enduring relationships and serving as a trusted financial partner to customers across the Sultanate of Oman.

BankDhofar delivers enhanced savings value through its High Yield account

MUSCAT: BankDhofar’s High Yield Savings Account continues to strengthen its position as one of the preferred savings solutions among the bank’s discerning clientele in Oman, offering a compelling combination of competitive returns, liquidity and digital convenience.

Designed to meet the evolving financial expectations of both Omani nationals and expatriates, the account enables customers to earn attractive returns on their savings while maintaining unrestricted access to their funds. It reflects BankDhofar’s broader strategy of delivering value-driven retail banking solutions that combine performance with everyday usability.

A key distinguishing feature of

the High Yield Savings Account is its competitive interest structure, which has positioned it among the more rewarding savings products in the local banking market. Interest is calculated on a daily basis and credited monthly, allowing customers to benefit from compounding returns over time. Depending on prevailing market conditions and balance tiers, the account can offer interest up to approximately 4 per cent per annum, reinforcing its appeal to customers seeking efficient cash management solutions.

Unlike traditional fixed deposits that require locking in funds for a specified period, BankDhofar’s High Yield Savings Account is structured as a flexible, transactional savings



Customers can open and manage accounts through digital onboarding platforms, monitor balances in real time via mobile banking and conduct transactions securely through a fully integrated digital interface.

product. Customers retain full access to their funds at all times through ATM networks, debit cards and digital banking platforms,

TOYOTA GR YARIS: MOTORSPORT DNA, EVERYDAY THRILL

Toyota GR Yaris, the rally-bred high-performance hatchback, continues to turn heads on the roads of Oman, bringing genuine motorsport DNA to everyday driving.

Developed with the expertise of the TOYOTA GAZOO Racing World Rally Team, the force behind Toyota’s five consecutive FIA WRC manufacturers’ championships, the GR Yaris stands as the brand’s first model built with a “motorsport-first” approach, refined through the rigorous demands of the Super



Taikyu Series and the Japanese Rally Championship to deliver unmatched confidence and control on every road.

Under the hood lies a 1.6-litre

inline three-cylinder turbo engine (G16E-GTS) that delivers 296 HP and 400 Nm of torque. Drivers can choose between two transmission options — an 8-speed Direct Automatic Transmission (DAT) for rapid, seamless shifting, or a six-speed intelligent manual transmission (iMT) for a more direct, mechanical connection. Power is managed by the GR-FOUR full-time 4WD system with an electronically controlled multi-plate clutch and three selectable modes.

Sohar Intl sponsors mass wedding in Al Mudhaibi

CONTINUING its support for community-uplifting initiatives, Sohar International announced its main sponsorship of the 8th Mass Wedding in Al Mudhaibi, which celebrated the marriage of 27 grooms from across Oman and its resident community on Friday, July 31. Bringing people together in a powerful expression of national solidarity, the event strengthened social cohesion while generating a positive economic impact, with a total cost of RO 50,000. Through this sponsorship, Sohar International reaffirms its commitment to aligning with national efforts aimed at strengthening the foundations of Omani society, facilitating family formation and easing marriage expenses for youth to build a stable community. This aligns with the bank’s ethos, which was previously demonstrated by the introduction of its interest-free marriage loan as an innovative and accessible financing solution.

The mass wedding was held under the umbrella of the Social Committee in the Wilayat of Al Mudhaibi and Al Mudhaibi Club. The event featured an accompanying charity exhibition to support productive families, with the participation of over 20 SMEs. It also included performances of various folk and heritage arts, alongside honouring the grooms and sponsoring companies and with the efforts of more than 300 volunteers from the wilayat.

In this regard, Abdul Qadir bin Ahmed al Sumali, Chief Retail & Wealth Management Officer at Sohar International, stated: “At Sohar International, we take immense



Sohar International takes immense pride in sponsoring initiatives that foster social solidarity

pride in sponsoring initiatives that foster social solidarity, such as the 8th mass wedding. This stems from a deeply-rooted corporate vision through which we believe that social stability is the bedrock of economic prosperity. Our support for this event is a strategic investment aimed at easing the financial burden on young couples embarking on marriage. It also transforms these occasions into vital economic drivers that empower entrepreneurs and SMEs, while stimulating the services sector and related local markets.

“Through this, we reaffirm our deep commitment to the goals of Oman Vision 2040 in achieving sustainable development, embodying responsible corporate citizenship and fostering community partnerships that value local grassroots efforts and support the nation’s development journey”.

Ahmed al Habsi — Head of the mass Wedding, added: “Sohar International’s sponsorship of this mass wedding exemplifies a model partnership between the banking sector and civil society organisations.

“With the total number of beneficiaries reaching 169 grooms since the initiative’s inception in 2017 and a remarkable turnout exceeding 5500 well-wishers at this ceremony, it clearly underscores how effectively these community initiatives align with authentic Omani values and religious principles that call for facilitating marriage”.

This sponsorship reflects the continuity of Sohar International’s approach to supporting national initiatives, reaffirming its commitment to delivering value that extends beyond traditional banking towards meaningful partnerships aimed at strengthening the Sultanate of Oman’s social fabric.

Chery Tiggo 8 Pro Max: flagship luxury, redefined

The Chery Tiggo 8 Pro Max stands as the brand’s flagship seven-seater SUV, transforming the landscape of premium family travel across the Sultanate of Oman. Built to command attention on every road, it delivers elite luxury, cutting-edge technology and commanding performance in a single, sophisticated package.

The visual presence of the Tiggo 8 Pro Max reflects executive sophistication, featuring an aerodynamic profile and an



elegant posture on Omani roads. Its signature design is instantly recognisable by the illuminated logo set against a distinct diamond-shaped radiator grille, beautifully flanked by dynamic LED headlights

and anchored by striking R19 sporty alloy wheels. This exterior layout provides a powerful structural frame that flawlessly balances a high-end business appearance with the rugged underpinnings necessary to tackle diverse topographies across the country.

Inside, the cabin opens into an intelligent, high-tech sanctuary meticulously engineered to accommodate up to seven occupants in absolute luxury.

The immersive interior

experience is highlighted by a futuristic 24.6-inch integrated dual-screen display and an intuitive 12.3-inch digital driver instrument cluster that simplifies media control and navigation.

The refined, spacious environment treats passengers to a panoramic sunroof, customisable ambient mood lighting and a tri-zone automatic climate control system that ensures customised cabin cooling regardless of exterior regional summer temperatures.

SHORTTAKE



Motorists get opportunity to get closer than ever to the excitement and atmosphere of elite international motorsport

SHELL OMAN LAUNCHES ‘FEEL THE PIT LANE’ CAMPAIGN

MUSCAT: Shell Oman has launched its latest motorsport campaign, ‘Feel the Pit Lane’, offering customers who fuel with Shell V-Power the chance to experience one of the world’s most prestigious and unforgettable motorsport weekends in Singapore.

Running until August 31, 2026, the campaign rewards customers for choosing Shell V-Power and Shell V-Power Racing 98, with every qualifying fuel purchase providing entries into a prize draw through the Shell Go+ App (Shell GO+). Participation is simple. Customers can download the Shell Go+ App, register their account and fuel with Shell V-Power at their nearest participating Shell service station. Customers who spend RO 15 or more on Shell V-Power will receive one entry, while those who spend RO 15 or more on Shell V-Power Racing 98 will receive three entries, increasing their chances of winning.

Five winners will be selected over the course of the campaign, comprising one winner from each of the May, June and July draws and two winners from the August draw. Each winner will receive a premium travel package to Singapore, including a three-day Pit Grandstand experience, a stay at a five-star hotel, exclusive access throughout the race weekend and a unique ‘Beyond the Paddock’ luncheon experience.

With ‘Feel the Pit Lane’, Shell Oman continues to create memorable customer experiences while showcasing the benefits of its premium fuels, giving motorists across the Sultanate of Oman the opportunity to get closer than ever to the excitement and atmosphere of elite international motorsport. Shell V-Power is formulated with advanced fuel technology that helps clean up to 100 per cent of critical engine parts by removing performance-robbing deposits from key fuel system components.

Refinery products output hits 109 m barrels till June

THE total output of refinery products in the Sultanate of Oman declined by 5.1% by the end of June 2026 to reach 108,849,200 barrels, compared with 114,662,900 barrels during the corresponding period in 2025. Total motor fuel production also decreased by 1.5% by the end of June 2026, according to the latest preliminary statistics issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

The statistics showed that production of regular (91 octane) petrol fell by 4.7% by the end of June 2026 to 8,251,000 barrels, compared with 8,659,100 barrels during the corresponding period in 2025.

Sales of regular (91 octane) petrol decreased by 13.3% to 7,857,300 barrels, compared with 9,065,500 barrels during the corresponding period in 2025. Its exports, however, increased by 4.2% to 1,883,400 barrels by the end of June 2026, compared with 1,808,000 barrels during the corresponding period in 2025.

In contrast, production of premium (95 octane) petrol rose by 2.6% by the end of June 2026 to 6,889,600 barrels, compared with 6,717,600 barrels during the corresponding period last year. However, its sales declined by 13.6% to 7,371,400 barrels by the end of June 2026, compared with 8,535,000 barrels during the corresponding period in 2025. Its exports also fell by 3.5% to 362,900 barrels by the end of June 2026, compared with 376,000 barrels during the corresponding period in 2025.

Diesel production declined by 7.5% by the end of June 2026 to 36,527,600 barrels, compared with 39,491,100 barrels during the corresponding period in 2025. Diesel sales



The total output of refinery products in Oman declined by 5.1% by the end of June 2026 to reach 108,849,200 barrels

also fell by 6.1% to 9,927,500 barrels, compared with 10,576,700 barrels during the corresponding period last year, while exports dropped by 12.9% to 27,912,300 barrels by the end of June 2026, compared with 32,053,400 barrels during the corresponding period in 2025.

Meanwhile, jet fuel production increased by 9.2% by the end of June 2026 to 14,062,100 barrels, compared with 12,874,400 barrels during the corresponding period last year. Its sales declined by 14.3% to 2,116,600 barrels, compared with 2,470,200 barrels during the corresponding period last year. Exports, however, rose by 20.9% to 11,710,000 barrels, compared with 9,687,300 barrels during the corresponding period in 2025.

Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) production declined by 4.6% by the end of June 2026 to 5,447,100 barrels, compared

with 5,712,600 barrels during the corresponding period in 2025. LPG sales also decreased by 22.2% to 1,519,600 barrels, compared with 1,954,200 barrels during the corresponding period last year. Its exports, meanwhile, increased by 1.7% to 1,713,600 barrels, compared with 1,685,200 barrels during the corresponding period in 2025.

Naphtha production rose by 3.5% by the end of June 2026 to 19,006,400 barrels, compared with 18,372,300 barrels during the corresponding period in 2025. Naphtha sales increased by 4.5% to 7,095,800 barrels, compared with 6,787,600 barrels during the corresponding period last year. Its exports also edged up by 0.8% to 12,043,500 barrels, compared with 11,945,200 barrels during the corresponding period in 2025.

On the other hand, production of other refinery

products declined by 18.3% to 18,665,400 barrels by the end of June 2026, compared with 22,835,800 barrels during the corresponding period in 2025.

Sales of other refinery products fell by 27.1% to 14,894,100 barrels, compared with 20,436,900 barrels during the corresponding period in 2025, while exports rose by 9.1% to 5,170,200 barrels by the end of June 2026, compared with 4,737,200 barrels during the corresponding period in 2025.

In the petrochemicals sector, the statistics showed that benzene production increased by 12.9% by the end of June 2026 to 97,100 metric tonnes, compared with 86,000 metric tonnes during the corresponding period in 2025. Benzene exports also rose by 16.6% to 95,500 metric tonnes, compared with 81,900 metric tonnes during the same period last year. — ONA

86.7% of National e-commerce plan completed in 2025

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP), has reinforced its e-commerce ecosystem via the implementation of a comprehensive package of legislative, regulatory and technical initiatives. These efforts increased the completion rate of the National E-Commerce Plan 2022–2027 to 86.7 per cent by 2025, following the completion of 26 out of 30 initiatives.

The achievements form part of the Sultanate of Oman's efforts to develop the digital business environment, establish key enablers for the growth of e-commerce and enhance the competitiveness of the country’s economy in line with Oman Vision 2040. The integrated e-commerce ecosystem is built on

updating legislation, advancing digital services, improving the efficiency of electronic payment systems, enhancing logistics services and raising awareness of e-commerce. These efforts provide a business environment that is better prepared to embrace digital transformation while supporting the growth of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), entrepreneurs and investments linked to the digital economy.

Implementation of the National E-Commerce Plan accelerated during H2 2025 with the completion of four key initiatives. These included awareness campaigns promoting the use of electronic payment methods, approval of the review of electronic payment transaction fees, implementation of e-commerce



The integrated e-commerce ecosystem is built on updating legislation, advancing digital services, improving the efficiency of electronic payment systems, enhancing logistics services and raising awareness of e-commerce.

awareness programmes and the integration of e-commerce concepts into school curricula and educational programmes. As a result, completed initiatives increased from 22 in mid-2025 to 26 by the end of the year.

The Ministry continued to strengthen the legislative framework governing e-commerce, building on the Governance Regulation for Electronic Commerce issued under Ministerial Decision No 499/2023. The regulation governs the practice of e-commerce, safeguards the rights of consumers and merchants, enhances the reliability of electronic transactions and provides a regulatory environment that supports the expansion of SMEs in digital commercial activities.

In collaboration with relevant stakeholders, the Ministry also

completed the review and approval of fees for electronic payment systems and services, alongside the implementation of programmes to promote the use of electronic payment methods. These measures support the efficiency of digital transactions and provide more suitable payment solutions for e-commerce activities.

The Ministry's efforts also extended to implementing awareness programmes and incorporating e-commerce concepts into school curricula and educational programmes. These initiatives support the development of national capabilities, raise awareness of digital transactions and enhance the readiness of the national workforce to meet the requirements of the digital economy. — ONA

TARIFF WAR

Canada offers concessions



Canada and the US are discussing a prospective deal in which Ottawa would tackle a list of Trump administration trade demands in exchange for Washington scrapping a threat to impose new tariffs, a source familiar with the talks said on Friday.

Trump slapped tariffs on a range of Canadian imports after returning to power last year and in July unveiled 50% tariffs on a wide range of imports.

OIL ON FIRE

Brent rises amidst uncertainty



Brent crude oil climbed more than \$1 a barrel on Friday over ongoing uncertainty about the negotiations in progress that determine control of and reopen, the key shipping artery of the Strait of Hormuz. Brent crude futures settled at \$83.55 a barrel, gaining \$1.06, or 1.3%. West Texas Intermediate futures finished at \$78.18 a barrel, up 89 cents, or 1.15%.

NATIONAL SECURITY

US to invest \$3 billion in mineral projects



The US government will invest \$3 billion in critical minerals and battery projects as part of a push to increase domestic production and boost national security and industrial policy, President Donald Trump said on Friday. “We’re reclaiming America’s rightful place as the minerals superpower of the world”, Trump told more than 200 mining executives, educators, investors and fellow politicians at a roundtable.

OPINION

Why a national local content certificate is key for Oman



DR HILAL AL SAWAI

The writer is local content, sustainability and innovation expert.

AS Oman advances towards the ambitions of Oman Vision 2040, one question deserves greater attention: How do we measure whether investments are truly creating long-term value for the national economy?

For years, local content has been recognised as a strategic driver of economic diversification. It has encouraged organisations to employ Omani talent, source goods and services locally, strengthen domestic supply chains and develop national capabilities. Yet one important element is still missing — a nationally recognised mechanism that objectively verifies and recognises these contributions. A National Local Content Certificate could become that mechanism. This certificate should not be viewed simply as another regulatory requirement or compliance document. Instead, it should serve as an independent mark of excellence that demonstrates an organisation's genuine contribution to Oman's economic development. It would recognise companies that create measurable value through local procurement, workforce development, supplier capability building, technology transfer, innovation and support for Omani SMEs. The introduction of such a certification system would also send a powerful message to investors: Oman rewards organisations that invest in the country's future, not merely those that operate within its borders.

Today, governments worldwide are increasingly assessing investments based

on the value they generate beyond financial returns. Major infrastructure, industrial and energy projects are expected to leave lasting economic legacies by strengthening domestic industries, creating skilled employment opportunities and developing resilient local supply chains. Measuring these outcomes requires more than contractual commitments — it requires credible verification.

This is precisely where a National Local Content Certificate can make a meaningful difference. From a business perspective, certification represents more than recognition; it becomes a competitive advantage. Organisations that can independently demonstrate their contribution to the national economy are better positioned in procurement processes, investment partnerships and corporate reputation. Increasingly, customers, regulators and investors expect evidence of responsible business practices. A trusted certification framework provides that evidence. Perhaps more importantly, certification encourages better corporate management.

Companies seeking certification would need reliable systems for collecting and analysing data relating to procurement, employment, supplier development and local investment. This naturally strengthens governance, improves reporting quality and encourages executives to integrate local content into strategic planning rather than treating it as an administrative obligation.

Rather than simply complying with

As Oman continues implementing Oman Vision 2040, the next evolution of local content should focus not only on policy implementation but also on recognising excellence

minimum requirements, organisations would compete to maximise their contribution to Oman's economy. Businesses would invest further in local suppliers, workforce development, innovation and technology partnerships because these investments would be recognised, measured and rewarded. This represents a shift from measuring expenditure to measuring economic impact. Local content has never been about limiting international participation or creating protectionist markets. Instead, it seeks to ensure that every investment made in Oman leaves behind stronger national capabilities, more competitive local enterprises, better employment opportunities and a more resilient economy.

As Oman continues implementing Oman Vision 2040, the next evolution of local content should focus not only on policy implementation but also on recognising excellence. A National Local Content Certificate would provide that recognition. More importantly, it would establish a transparent, credible and internationally respected framework that transforms local content from a procurement requirement into a national competitiveness strategy.

The real measure of investment is not how much is spent, but how much lasting value remains in the country. A National Local Content Certificate can help ensure that this value is created, verified and sustained for generations to come.

CAN RENEWABLES HELP SOLVE OMAN’S WATER CHALLENGE?

NAJAH AL RIYAMI

For a country surrounded by seawater but with limited natural freshwater resources, Oman's future has always been closely tied to desalination. As the population grows, cities expand and industries develop, the demand for reliable water will only increase.

But producing drinking water from seawater requires large amounts of energy.

That makes Oman's renewable-energy expansion particularly interesting. The growth of solar and wind power could eventually do more than reduce the carbon intensity of electricity generation. It could help transform the way the country produces one of its most important resources: fresh water.

Desalination has become an essential part of life across the Gulf. Oman relies heavily on desalination plants to supply water to urban centres and industrial areas, with large facilities operating along the coast. Traditionally, these plants have been powered largely by electricity generated from natural gas.

As renewable generation expands, however, there is an opportunity to increasingly connect desalination with clean electricity.

The idea is straightforward. Solar power generated during Oman's long daylight hours can provide electricity for desalination, while battery storage and flexible plant operation can help manage periods when renewable generation is lower.

This could be particularly attractive for Oman because the country's strongest renewable resource is also one of its most abundant: sunlight.

Solar photovoltaic technology has become dramatically cheaper over the past decade, making large-scale solar electricity increasingly competitive with conventional generation. Oman has already demonstrated the potential of utility-scale solar through projects such as Ibri II, while further solar and wind projects are being developed across the country.

The combination of renewable energy and desalination could create an important feedback loop.

More renewable electricity means less reliance on gas for power generation. Less gas consumed for electricity could potentially free up additional gas resources for industry or exports. At the same time, using renewable electricity to produce water could reduce the emissions associated with desalination.

The opportunity is not limited to conventional desalination.

Reverse osmosis, which pushes seawater through specialised membranes to remove salt and other impurities, has become one of the most important desalination technologies worldwide. Unlike older thermal desalination methods, reverse osmosis relies primarily on electricity, making it particularly well suited to renewable power.

Oman’s mining target needs a denominator

OMAN'S mining ambitions are becoming easier to see. Measuring their economic impact is harder.

New concessions are being developed, copper production has returned and investment is flowing into extraction and associated infrastructure. Yet behind this expansion sits a surprisingly basic question: what exactly counts as mining when Oman measures the sector's contribution to the economy?

The answer matters because the target is substantial. Invest Oman publishes a target to raise mining's contribution to gross domestic product from 1.4 per cent in 2020 to 10 per cent by 2040. A target of that scale is not merely an expression of ambition; it is a benchmark against which diversification should eventually be judged.



QASIM AL MAASHANI

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

The question is no longer whether Oman can extract more minerals. It is whether the country has a consistent way to measure how much economic value those minerals create

For that to happen, the denominator must be clear.

The national accounts provide one starting point. At constant 2018 prices, the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) recorded value added from mining and quarrying at RO 228.1 million in 2022, RO 225.2 million in 2023 and RO 218.8 million in 2024. It rose 1.5 per cent to RO 222.1 million in 2025.

The important point is not the small increase in the latest year but the longer trajectory: on this measure, mining and quarrying generated less real value added in 2025 than in 2022. That does not demonstrate failure. Large mining developments take time to move from concessions and capital spending into production and value added. What the figures do show is why the definition behind the target matters. Measured against this series, 10 per cent of GDP is roughly twenty times the sector's present share of national output — if, that is, the target refers to the same mining-and-quarrying category used in the national accounts. If it refers instead to a wider minerals economy incorporating processing, manufacturing and other

downstream activity, the comparison is not like-for-like.

There is another clue in the official numbers. The Ministry of Energy and Minerals reported that 62.5 million tonnes of minerals were sold in 2024, generating more than RO 114.3 million. NCSI recorded RO 218.8 million of value added under mining and quarrying in the same year.

These are not two estimates of the same quantity. Sales revenue and value added are different concepts and the statistical coverage may differ too. That is precisely why the figures are useful here: they show how easily different measures labelled “mining” can enter public discussion without describing the same thing. The ministry's own reporting reveals another limitation. Its 2024 annual report said mineral sales volumes fell 12 per cent from the previous year, with building materials accounting for much of the decline and attributed the fall to delays by mining companies in submitting monthly production reports. A movement in an administrative series may therefore reflect reporting completeness as well as underlying economic activity.

None of this means the statistics are wrong. It means they answer different questions and the mistake would be to treat them as interchangeable measures of diversification.

Physical output and economic value can move very differently. A tonne of limestone shipped with limited processing does not have the same effect on the domestic economy as the same resource moving through a local industrial chain. Processing creates demand for engineering, maintenance, transport and specialised skills; and can raise the value of the product before export. Employment cuts the other way. A modern, highly automated mine can generate substantial output and value with relatively few workers. Tonnes alone are therefore insufficient. So are jobs. So are investment announcements. The more useful question is what remains in Oman between extraction

and export.

There is a legitimate objection to this argument. Minerals do not remain minerals statistically once they move along the value chain. Limestone becomes cement and is recorded in manufacturing. Further processing can generate value that appears outside mining and quarrying. Transport and port activity may be recorded under logistics. If that wider chain is what Oman intends to build, a narrow extraction measure will understate mining's broader economic footprint. But that is an argument for greater clarity, not for abandoning measurement.

Whichever perimeter the 10 per cent target represents, it should be published and remain stable enough for progress to be measured over time. Otherwise the benchmark risks moving with the narrative: tonnes when production rises, investment when projects are announced, downstream manufacturing when value creation is discussed and employment when localisation is the focus. Every one of those indicators has value. None can substitute for a consistent measure of the sector's economic contribution.

Oman would benefit from a concise annual minerals scorecard built around one published definition. It need not be complicated: value added on a consistent basis, investment, direct employment and Omanisation, mineral production, the proportion receiving further processing inside Oman and, where measurement permits, the domestic value retained before export.

Most importantly, it should reconcile those indicators with the scope used for the 2040 target.

This is not an argument for lowering the ambition of Oman's mining strategy. It is an argument for making that ambition measurable.

By 2040, Oman should not have to prove the success of mining principally by showing how much rock it moved. It should be able to show, consistently and transparently, how much of that rock's value stayed in Oman.

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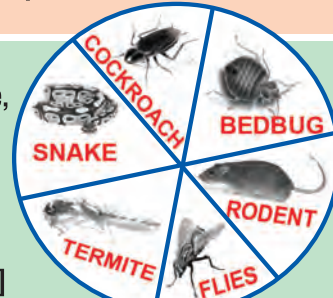
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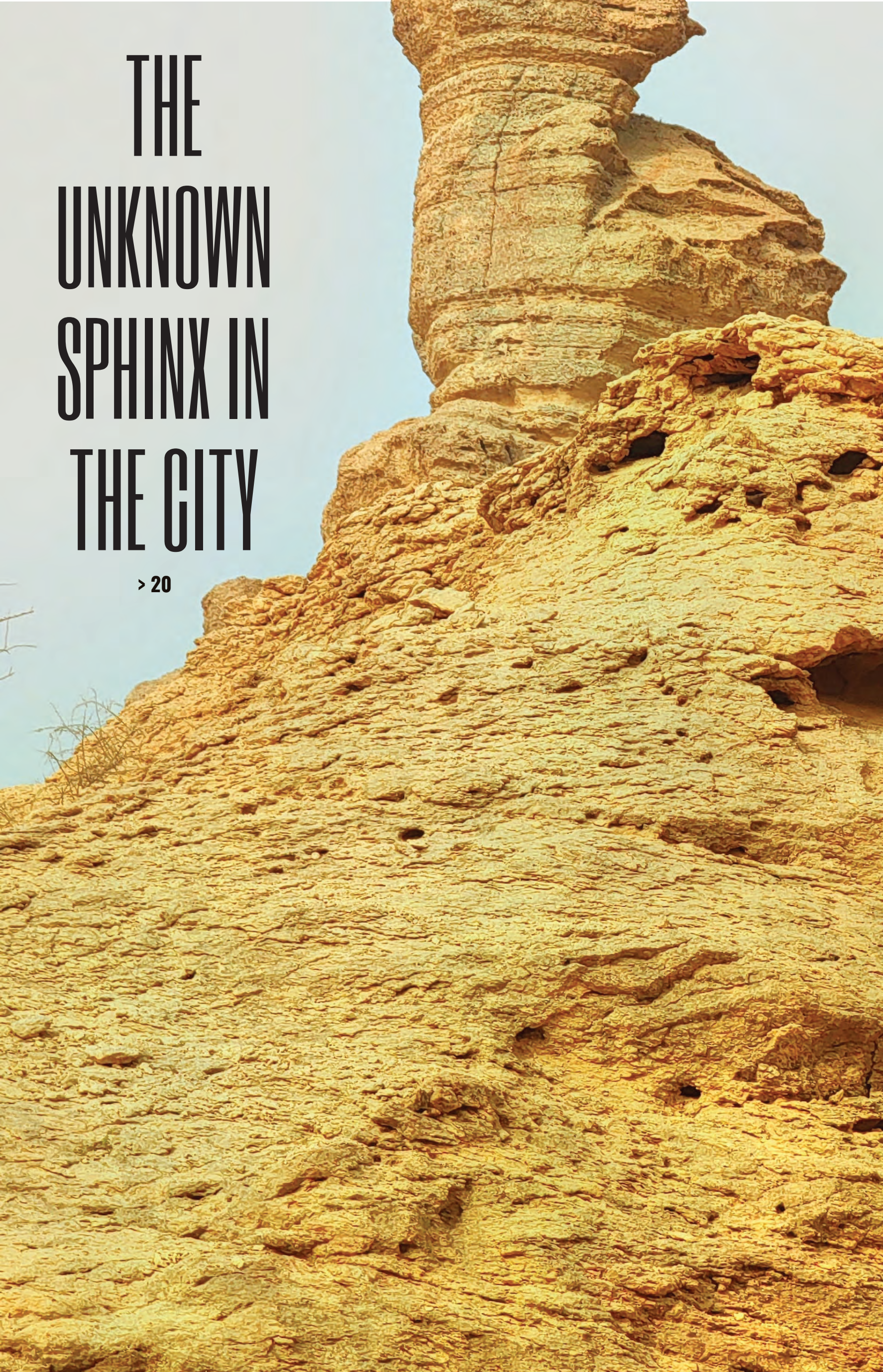


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ART/LIFE



THE UNKNOWN SPHINX IN THE CITY

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WEATHERUPDATE

ERRATIC RAINS DICTATE MENU AT THREE-STAR MICHELIN RESTAURANT IN BRAZIL



Ivan Ralston (C) and Katherina Cordas (2-R), owners of the TUJU restaurant, work with the cooks in the kitchen, in Sao Paulo, Brazil the first restaurant in Latin America to receive three Michelin stars. — AFP

At Brazil’s Tuju, a three-Michelin-star restaurant in Brazil, erratic rainfall keeps chef Ivan Ralston and gastronomic researcher Katherina Cordas constantly adapting.

The couple spent two years studying local ingredients, mainly from Sao Paulo state, but using them at their peak can be challenging. In a region where summer storms bring chaos and reservoirs run dry in winter, flexibility is essential, Cordas said.

Tuju is located in Sao Paulo, a megalopolis of 12 million people. In April, it secured its third Michelin star alongside another city restaurant, Evvai, making them the first two Latin American restaurants to receive the top culinary honour.

Tuju offers four menus, named “Humidity”, “Rain”, “Gale” and “Drought”, but they are not tied to fixed dates. Instead, they follow the weather.

“Sao Paulo is usually dry in July, but this year it stayed somewhat wetter because of El Nino, so mushroom season lasted almost twice as long. You always have to stay alert and adapt”, Ralston said.

The restaurant’s 10-course tasting menu draws primarily on ingredients from small-scale producers across Sao Paulo state, including sardines, pork, artichokes, chestnuts, grapes, guava and capers. Michelin praised the restaurant for combining modern techniques with creativity and extensive research.

“The pursuit of perfection is superficial. What we promise is a genuine experience”, said Ralston, who trained in leading kitchens in Spain and Japan.

Ralston leads eight young chefs, mostly women, who work in silence and synchrony in an open kitchen at the centre of the minimalist dining room.

Cordas moves between the restaurant’s nine green marble tables, where diners pay 1,650 reais, about \$320, for the tasting menu.

Ralston is frustrated by diners who visit mainly to create social media content.

“Eating is a moment to pay attention to details”, he said. “My advice would be: stop working on the marketing of living and enjoy life a little more!” The experience begins with cocktails beneath a towering jabuticaba tree and ends on a rooftop terrace with sweeping views, chocolates and honey from native stingless bees.

Ralston opened Tuju in 2014 and earned its first Michelin star months later, followed by a second.

The restaurant closed during the Covid-19 pandemic, after which Ralston and Cordas spent two years researching Brazilian cuisine before reopening in 2023. — AFP

QUICK FEATURES



FASHION

A woman collecting scrap materials bundles cardboard in front of a fashion store in Hanoi. — AFP



BALLET

Dancers Guillaume Diop and Sae Eun Park from the Paris Opera Ballet perform a scene from “Romeo and Juliet” (excerpt). — AFP



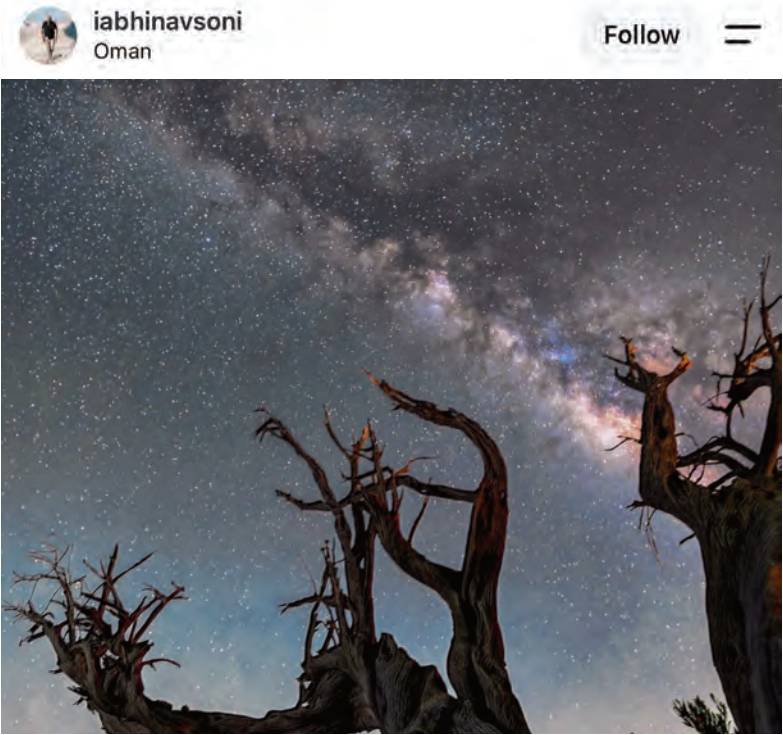
TOURISM

Tourists stand at the Trocadero square in front of the Eiffel Tower on a cloudy summer day in Paris, France. — Reuters

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FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL
IN NEW PSYCHOLOGICAL
THRILLER ‘THE LAST HOUSE’



Greta Lee and Wagner Moura channel their inner survivalists to play a married couple trapped inside their home in “The Last House”, Netflix’s new psychological thriller. Speaking to Reuters, “Past Lives” actress Lee said portraying her character’s emotional breakdown and how it affects the bonds between spouses, parents and children, was among the biggest challenges she encountered during filming. “We were lucky enough to work with an actual survivalist”, she said. “It’s incredibly inspiring to understand the real physiology of what happens to you”. Directed by “Now You See Me” and “Fast X” filmmaker Louis Leterrier, the movie follows a family of four suddenly trapped inside their house with no way out. They must work together as supplies dwindle and a mysterious external threat keeps them confined. The production was shot

entirely inside a single house that deteriorates over time, mirroring the characters’ unravelling. “The Secret Agent” star Moura called the set an engineering feat: “For the second part of the film, the way they managed to transform the house into sort of like an aquarium... I had never seen anything like that before”. Leterrier, who said he has worked on movies with budgets costing \$400 million, admitted this was the most difficult film of his career. “I’ve done movies where literally I was jumping from a plane to another plane”, he said. “(The Last House) was so, so difficult for everyone involved”. Beyond the suspense, Leterrier said he wanted audiences to reflect on themes of consumerism and greed: “I like that people will be experiencing this movie at home... and then looking at their fridge...at their family and be like, how long would we survive if this happened now?”. — Reuters

As Odyssey wows global audiences, Sicily’s Favignana braces for film tourism



Matt Damon as Odysseus with Zendaya as Athena in Favignana, Italy, one of the filming locations.

THE tiny Italian Mediterranean island of Favignana hopes Christopher Nolan’s blockbuster The Odyssey will attract more visitors while avoiding the pitfalls of overtourism. Released last month, The Odyssey grossed more than \$264 million worldwide on its opening weekend, the biggest debut of Nolan’s career. The film retells Homer’s epic tale of Odysseus’ journey home after the Trojan War. Favignana, the largest of the Egadi Islands, lies 7 km off Sicily’s western coast and stands in for Ithaca, Odysseus’ homeland. The Castello di Santa Caterina, a fortress atop the island’s highest hill, serves as the hero’s palace. Local authorities hope to turn the film’s connection with Favignana into a lasting attraction for the island, which has around 3,000 residents.

With support from Sicily’s culture department and Universal Pictures, a permanent exhibition could open as early as October at the former Florio tuna-processing plant, which served as the production’s headquarters. “The idea is to allow visitors to experience the different stages of the production and see some of the costumes and equipment used in the movie”, Favignana Mayor Giuseppe Pagoto said. Local businesses are hoping to benefit from the growing trend of film tourism, much as the long-running Inspector Montalbano series boosted tourism along Sicily’s southeastern coast. “We believe all of western Sicily could become more attractive to American



The Castello di Santa Caterina was used as Odysseus’ palace in Christopher Nolan’s “The Odyssey”. — Reuters

Local businesses are hoping to benefit from the growing trend of film tourism, much as the long-running Inspector Montalbano series boosted tourism along Sicily’s southeastern coast

visitors thanks to The Odyssey”, said Giacomo Incarbona, head of the local hotel operators’ association. The production team spent several months on Favignana between late 2024 and spring 2025, employing about 500 extras and workers. Pagoto estimated the shoot generated between €1 million and €2 million in local spending. Incarbona said Nolan would cycle through town and greet residents, while Zendaya, who plays Athena, would sit in the square reading a book. International investors from North America, the Middle East and India have approached the municipality about high-end tourism opportunities ahead of the 2027 season. But Favignana wants to

avoid the overtourism that has strained destinations such as Venice and Florence. The population can already swell from 3,000 to between 40,000 and 50,000 on summer days, putting pressure on services. “We will have to prepare for growing demand, starting with beach cleaning”, Pagoto said. The municipality has installed 200 mooring buoys to prevent boats anchoring close to shore and is considering measures to regulate visitor flows. Authorities also want to increase the average visit from five or six days to between 10 and 15 days, hoping The Odyssey will extend the tourist season rather than create a surge during peak periods. — Reuters

FEATURES

THE UNKNOWN SPHINX IN THE CITY

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, AUGUST 8

EVER wondered about the gigantic Sphinx-like structure standing head and shoulders above the mountain range in Al Seeb, visible while driving along Muscat Expressway?

During the day, its unusual shape catches the eye. At sunset, it transforms into a mammoth silhouette against the fading sky, leaving many commuters wondering what exactly they are looking at.

Known on social media as ‘Muscat’s Giant’ or the ‘Sphinx Gargoyle’, the striking formation is a natural rock pillar tucked away in an unmarked wadi area near Hayy Al Irfan and the Muscat Expressway.

The formation has become a local point of interest for hikers, trekkers and photographers, despite its rugged surroundings and lack of formal signage. Rough wadi paths, loose sedimentary rocks and uneven terrain make the area an adventurous destination for those keen to explore Muscat’s lesser-known landscapes.

Its resemblance to a Sphinx has naturally inspired comparisons with the famous Great Sphinx of Giza in Egypt, the monumental sculpture traditionally depicted with a human head and the body of a lion.

In ancient Egypt, the Sphinx was associated with royal power and divine protection, with the Great Sphinx believed to represent Pharaoh Khafre. The ancient Greeks had their own interpretation, portraying the Sphinx as a winged female creature associated with the mythical city of Thebes and the famous riddle later answered by Oedipus.

Muscat’s version, however, is entirely a product of nature. Its distinctive form is believed to have been shaped over thousands of years by natural weathering and erosion, with wind and water gradually sculpting the sedimentary rock into the remarkable silhouette visible today.

From certain angles, the formation appears almost like a monumental seated figure, giant or mythical guardian overlooking the surrounding valleys.

The rock pillar is also associated with the Airport Heights hiking area, where visitors can follow a short trail of roughly 3.2 km. The route offers opportunities for hiking, photography and views of Muscat’s rugged mountain landscape.

For photographers, the formation is particularly striking during the early morning and around sunset, when changing light creates dramatic shadows and accentuates its unusual contours.

Those exploring the area should exercise caution, as the surrounding terrain includes loose rocks, steep sections and uneven wadi paths. Appropriate footwear and careful movement are essential.

Whether viewed as a natural Sphinx, a giant carved by the elements or simply one of Muscat’s intriguing geological landmarks, the formation is a reminder that some of the capital’s most fascinating sights can be found hiding in plain sight.



A MYSTERIOUS GIANT RISES ABOVE MUSCAT’S MOUNTAINS, CAPTIVATING MOTORISTS AND HIKERS WITH ITS SPHINX-LIKE SILHOUETTE. SHAPED BY WIND AND WATER OVER THOUSANDS OF YEARS, THIS NATURAL LANDMARK REMAINS ONE OF THE CAPITAL’S MOST INTRIGUING HIDDEN FORMATIONS.