



HM launches identity of Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority

HIS MAJESTY SULTAN HAITHAM BIN TARIQ, the Supreme Commander, inaugurates the identity of the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority, in reflection of the care and attention accorded by His Majesty to the safety and civil protection system. It also reflects the priority attached by the authority to enhancing its role in serving citizens and residents.

At the behest of His Majesty the Sultan, Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office, Head of the Office of the Supreme Commander, and Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority, on Wednesday patronised over the launching ceremony, in the presence of a number of ministers, under-secretaries, and commanders of the military and security apparatuses.

The launch of the identity embodies a renewed stage in the authority's journey and the development of its ecosystem, in keeping pace with the rapid transformations in this sector. — ONA
SEE ALSO P2

- NEW IDENTITY FOR CIVIL DEFENCE AND AMBULANCE AUTHORITY
- REFLECTION OF THE CARE AND ATTENTION ACCORDED BY HIS MAJESTY
- AUTHORITY'S PRIORITY IN SERVING CITIZENS AND RESIDENTS
- EMBODIES A RENEWED STAGE IN THE AUTHORITY'S JOURNEY
- KEEPING PACE WITH RAPID TRANSFORMATIONS IN THE SECTOR

HM'S GREETINGS CONVEYED TO PAKISTAN PM

Mohammad Shehbaz Sharif, Prime Minister of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, on Wednesday received in Islamabad Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidi, Foreign Minister. The Foreign Minister conveyed the greetings of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq

to the Prime Minister, alongside His Majesty's wishes of further progress and prosperity for Pakistan and its people. For his part, the Prime Minister conveyed his warm greetings to His Majesty the Sultan, wishing the Sultanate of Oman and its

people continued progress and growth. During the meeting, the Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister emphasised the historical relations existing between the two countries, as well as the importance of promising economic and investment opportunities. SEE P3

Stone laid for Oman Cables' third plant

MUSCAT: Oman Cables Industry celebrated the laying of the foundation stone for its third manufacturing plant, with an investment exceeding RO 10 million in Al Rusayl Industrial City.

The event was held under the auspices of Eng Salim bin Nasser al Auqi, Minister of Energy and Minerals.

This comes as part of its strategic investment programme exceeding RO 15 million in recent years, aimed at developing the next generation of industrial and manufacturing capabilities in the Sultanate of Oman, and enhancing the company's capacity to keep pace with the growing needs of the energy and infrastructure sectors in Oman and the region.

The third plant represents more than just an expansion of manufacturing capacity for Oman



The event was held under the auspices of Eng Salim bin Nasser al Auqi, Minister of Energy and Minerals.

Cables Industry; it constitutes an investment in the company's future manufacturing ecosystem through the deployment of artificial intelligence-powered technologies to enhance safety, efficiency, and operational sustainability, while

focusing on developing Omani talent and preparing national leaders.

The project embodies Oman Cables Industry's firm commitment to the Sultanate of Oman and its support for the targets of Oman Vision 2040 by enhancing the competitiveness of the industrial sector and contributing to the transition towards more efficient infrastructure with lower environmental impact, in line with energy transition requirements.

The third plant will contribute in developing the company's advanced manufacturing capabilities and building upon its established technical expertise.

The design of the new plant is built on a smarter and more interconnected industrial concept through the deployment of an integrated digital ecosystem across various manufacturing stages.

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HIS MAJESTY LAUNCHES CDAA IDENTITY



NEW IDENTITY EMBODIES RENEWED CDAA’S JOURNEY

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SHORT TAKES



Officials and participants at KLUST's session during EduTraC Oman 2026 at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre.

MALAYSIAN UNIVERSITY, OMANI FIRM SIGN MoU

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, OCT 14

Kuala Lumpur University of Science and Technology (KLUST) and Omani consultancy International Business Execution (IBE) have signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to explore cooperation in professional training, applied research and skills development. The agreement, signed during EduTraC Oman 2026 at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre, covers potential collaboration in executive education, consultancy, sustainability, corporate social responsibility and the exchange of expertise.

The MoU was signed by Prof Chen Xiaoyun, Chairman of KLUST's Board of Governors, and Dr Rashid bin Abdullah al Nasri, Chairman of IBE, in the presence of the Malaysian Ambassador to Oman.

The agreement establishes a framework for exploring joint initiatives rather than committing the two institutions to specific programmes, and no implementation timetable, funding commitment or training targets were specified.

Professor Chen said cooperation between universities and businesses could help align academic programmes with industry requirements while creating opportunities for joint research, professional training and knowledge exchange.

INITIATIVES ENHANCE MARINE ENVIRONMENT



SUR: During the month of September 2026, specialised teams from the Environment Department in Al Sharqiyah South Governorate conducted a campaign during which the participants saved the lives of 201 adult turtles that went astray from their natural habitat. They also brought a total of 57,744 turtle hatchlings back to the sea during the campaign. — ONA

IDRIS AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, OCT 14

A STUDY at Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) has sparked discussion on social media about student mental health after revealing that more than a third of participating students reported symptoms of depression, highlighting the pressures that can affect university life. The study found that 34.9 per cent of the 1,000 participating students reported depressive symptoms. The highest rates were recorded at the College of Science, at 39.9 per cent, followed by

the College of Engineering at 38.5 per cent and the College of Agricultural and Marine Sciences at 36.8 per cent.

However, Dr Kholoud al Abri, Director of SQU's Student Counselling Centre, cautioned against generalising the findings to the entire university population, noting that the study involved 1,000 students out of a total student body exceeding 18,000. She stressed that the research should not be considered a comprehensive survey of all university students.

The findings have drawn attention to the academic, social and financial pressures that can

Oman, Pakistan deepen ties with five agreements

CALL FOR REGIONAL DIALOGUE TO DEFUSE TENSIONS

OMAN AND Pakistan on Wednesday signed an agreement and four memorandums of understanding (MoUs) in Islamabad in the presence of Mohammad Shehbaz Sharif, Prime Minister of Pakistan, during the official visit of Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidi, Foreign Minister. The documents include an agreement on visa exemption for holders of official, diplomatic, special and service passports, and MoUs for cooperation in telecommunications and information technology, radio and television, news and information exchange, and between the National Records and Archives Authority and the National Archives of Pakistan.

The documents were signed by Sayyid Badr on behalf of Oman and by Mohammad Ishaq Dar, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, on behalf of Pakistan. The visit also included the eighth session of the Oman-Pakistan Joint Ministerial Commission (JMC), a bilateral meeting between the two ministers.

TALKS WITH PRIME MINISTER
The Pakistani Prime Minister received Sayyid Badr, who conveyed the greetings of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and His Majesty's wishes for further progress and prosperity for Pakistan and its people. The Prime Minister returned his greetings to His Majesty the Sultan, wishing Oman and its people continued progress and growth.

The two sides underlined the historical relations and deep-rooted ties between the two countries, and the economic and investment opportunities both are working to develop, building on strong cultural bonds, human communication and political and diplomatic cooperation. The meeting also touched on regional affairs and efforts to contain crises and their repercussions on security and stability in the region, stressing the need to keep channels of communication and dialogue open among all concerned parties. The Prime Minister commended the role played by Oman, under the leadership of His Majesty the Sultan, in bringing views closer together.



The documents were signed by Sayyid Badr on behalf of Oman and by Mohammad Ishaq Dar, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, on behalf of Pakistan. — ONA

Sayyid Badr said dialogue, diplomacy and constructive engagement were essential to addressing regional challenges, easing tensions and resolving disputes in a way that prevents further escalation.

REGIONAL CHALLENGES
At the joint press conference after the JMC session, Sayyid Badr stressed the importance of dialogue, diplomacy and constructive engagement in addressing regional challenges, de-escalating tensions and resolving disputes in a way that prevents further escalation.

He commended Pakistan's constructive role in supporting diplomatic efforts in the region, saying such efforts were significant in building confidence and advancing peaceful solutions. In his speech to the commission, Sayyid Badr praised Pakistan's efforts in creating space for dialogue between Iran and the United States, saying that efforts reinforcing communication and understanding gained special importance amid regional developments.

Dar said the two sides had exchanged views on the war between the United States and Iran, as well as regional and international developments. He underlined the importance of bringing the two countries' positions closer and of intensifying efforts to address these issues and restore peace and stability to the region. Both sides underscored the need to continue diplomatic efforts and prioritise dialogue in

resolving disputes and de-escalating tensions.

JOINT COMMISSION
Opening the JMC session, Sayyid Badr said Omani-Pakistani relations rested on long-standing historical, geographical, commercial, maritime and human ties, and that the commission offered an opportunity to expand cooperation and turn the abundant opportunities in both countries into practical outcomes. Dar praised Oman's standing in the region and its balanced approach to strengthening good-neighbourly relations and cooperation among the countries of the region under the leadership of His Majesty the Sultan. He stressed the importance of building on the strength of relations and of institutional follow-up on the commission's work so that understandings are turned into practical steps.

The commission discussed developing cooperation in trade, investment, industry, agriculture, the financial sector, energy, oil and gas, logistics, ports, food security, technology and tourism, as well as labour, consular affairs, security, defence, climate change, civil aviation, education, media and culture, along with strengthening partnerships between institutions and the private sector in both countries.

MINISTERS' MEETING
In their bilateral meeting, the two ministers also discussed strengthening partnerships between private sector institutions and making use of available opportunities to establish projects that serve the shared interests of the two countries.

Dar praised Oman's role in facilitating communication and bringing views closer on regional issues, and both sides stressed the importance of continued coordination and adherence to the rules of international law in support of de-escalation and regional and international security and stability.

The agreement and MoUs represent a practical step towards strengthening institutional cooperation between the two countries, coordination and the exchange of expertise among relevant entities. — ONA

SQU study puts spotlight on students' mental health



affect students' mental well-being. Social media influencer Khalid bin Saif, drawing on his own two decades of experience since university, addressed students in a message encouraging them to appreciate this stage of their lives

while taking their mental health seriously. He noted that depression among university students is a widespread concern internationally and regionally, with academic demands, financial difficulties and social and psychological transitions among the contributing pressures. He also highlighted lifestyle factors, including insufficient sleep and poor nutrition, which can compound these challenges.

Khalid encouraged students to exercise regularly, whether through running or walking, and to establish healthier sleep routines. He also called for university policies to

consider students facing financial hardship, particularly those who struggle to meet the requirements for monthly financial assistance. He emphasised that prevention is less costly than treatment and that even modest improvements in students' financial circumstances could support academic performance and overall well-being.

Meanwhile, Dr Said al Abri, Assistant Professor at SQU's College of Engineering, has reassured students placed under academic probation that the status does not mean they are poor or failed students.

OMANI WOMEN’S DAY

FROM MATERNITY TO RETIREMENT

What social protection offers Omani women

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, OCT 14

AS OMAN MARKS Omani Women's Day on October 17, the country's social protection framework offers an opportunity to examine how financial benefits, maternity insurance and retirement provisions support women at different stages of their lives. Amendments to social protection benefits announced in January 2026 have brought renewed attention to the eligibility rules for lower-income households, including specific categories of women. Alongside existing insurance and pension arrangements, these changes raise a broader question: how effectively does the system respond to women's changing financial and family circumstances?

TARGETED SUPPORT
The January changes removed the imputed income assessment based on work capacity for selected categories, including unmarried women aged 40 and above, divorced women with children aged 40 and above, divorced women without custody of their children, and widows without children. For these categories, the maximum monthly benefit under the Household Income Support Scheme rose from RO 80 to RO 115, subject to eligibility conditions and benefit calculation rules.
Child support payments and children's shares of pensions are now also excluded from household income calculations for widows and divorced women under the scheme. Daughters and divorced women aged 31 to 39 who have lost their fathers are recognised as independent families for eligibility purposes, subject to the prescribed conditions. The changes reflect an effort to account for circumstances that may affect a woman's ability to secure a stable income. However, the maximum amount is not a universal payment to all women, and eligibility remains subject to the rules of each benefit.

MATERNITY PROTECTION
Under Oman's Social Protection Law, the maternity leave insurance programme provides a fully paid maternity leave allowance for 98 days. Eligible insured women can also request an additional period of leave, without the allowance, to care for their children. For working mothers, for whom childbirth and early childcare can bring competing professional and family demands, the programme reduces the financial pressure of taking time away from work. Maternity insurance is part of a wider system covering old age, disability and death, occupational injuries and diseases, job security risks, and certain types of sick and exceptional leave.

RETIREMENT CHOICES
Retirement has also become part of the discussion on women's financial security, following renewed public calls in October 2026 for greater flexibility in retirement arrangements. Under the current law, women in regular employment can retire at 55 without pension deductions. Early retirement with deductions is available at 50 after 20 years of active service, or after 30 years of service regardless of age. Different provisions apply to women in hazardous or arduous occupations and to women with disabilities.
The Social Protection Fund has clarified that 20 years of service does not, by itself, guarantee a full pension; entitlement and the amount payable depend on eligibility conditions and calculation rules. Some women may wish to remain in employment, while others may seek more flexibility to accommodate family responsibilities. Any further changes would need to balance individual needs with the long-term financial sustainability of the pension system.

AWARENESS
The effectiveness of social protection also depends on how easily eligible people can understand and access it. For women, this includes knowing the difference between a social benefit and an insurance-based pension, understanding the conditions of each programme, and keeping personal and household information up to date when applying for assistance.
Omani Women's Day is an opportunity to look at these provisions beyond the language of celebration. Financial security is shaped by income support, insurance coverage, retirement planning and access to accurate information, which together help women and families navigate financial uncertainty with greater confidence.



Social protection provisions support Omani women at different stages of life, from motherhood to work and retirement.

WOMEN’S DAY TO SPOTLIGHT ENERGY, ENVIRONMENT AND MINERALS

OMAN WILL mark Omani Women's Day on Saturday, an annual occasion held on October 17 that recalls the journey of Omani women and their contributions to building the nation. This year's celebration, under the slogan "She is Oman", highlights women's contributions to the energy, environment and minerals sectors and their role in economic diversification and sustainable development. The slogan carries a set of messages about the standing of Omani women in the present and the future: as a national energy that contributes to economic diversification, as a partner in crafting solutions that support sustainable development, and as a national competence in sustaining the country's wealth and preserving it for coming generations.
Omani women's growing presence in building the nation reflects the Royal care accorded to them under His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, and Royal directives have affirmed women's standing in Omani society as a pillar of the Renaissance, a guardian of values and a nurture of generations.

NEW SEATS IN MAJLIS ASH'SHURA
This year's celebration comes as His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has directed the allocation of an additional seat for women in Majlis Ash'shura from each governorate, totalling 11 seats, in addition to the general seats open for competition. The directive continues the Royal attention to entrenching the principle of Shura and developing Majlis Ash'shura, and strengthens women's participation in decision-making. The new seats will enhance the representation of women from the various governorates in Majlis Ash'shura, giving them a role in discussing national issues and shaping general policies. The step also has a dimension beyond the local framework: during its participation at the United Nations in 2026, Oman affirmed that women's empowerment is one of the national constants tied to the Basic Law of the State and Oman Vision 2040, reflecting its commitment to continued support for women's participation across the various fields of development.

SUPPORT FOR WOMEN’S ASSOCIATIONS
Her Highness The Honourable Lady Assayida Ahd Abdullah Hamed al Busaidi, Spouse of the Sultan of Oman, gave particular attention to women's contributions during her visits to a number of governorates in 2026. The visits went beyond official meetings to include close acquaintance with community initiatives and women's projects that turn heritage, experience and knowledge into initiatives of social and economic impact. Her Highness visited the Omani Women's Association in the Wilayat of Khasab in January and the Omani Women's Association in Salalah in August.
The visits affirmed the role of Omani women's associations in supporting women's skills, particularly handicrafts, and in turning them into products of community and economic value that benefit women, their families and their local communities.
They also highlighted the importance of community initiatives in empowering women, increasing their participation in productive activities and passing handicraft heritage on to coming generations, creating new opportunities for women to develop their projects and support the local economy.



Omani women's contributions to the energy sector are a focus of this year's Omani Women's Day. — ONA

ENERGY, ENVIRONMENT AND MINERALS
In the energy sector, which covers oil, gas, electricity, renewable energy, hydrogen and clean energy, women's participation supports economic diversification, enhances sustainability and helps the sector keep pace with the transformations it is undergoing. In the environmental sector, women's contributions stand out in sustainability, the protection of natural resources, the preservation of biodiversity, and environmental research and innovation. Their presence there reflects the role of national competencies in addressing environmental challenges and in developing solutions that balance the requirements of development with environmental protection.
The minerals sector is a growing field for Omani women, given the national wealth it represents and its opportunities for economic diversification. Women's contributions there extend to exploration, mining, mineral-linked manufacturing and the development of value-added industries. Together, the three fields reflect a growing transformation in women's participation, through their presence in sectors linked to future energy, environmental protection and the investment of national wealth.

A MESSAGE TO COMING GENERATIONS
The annual celebration also reinforces a culture of appreciation for women's role in the stability and cohesion of society, and highlights success stories that begin within families and extend to work, creativity, production and community participation. It carries a message to coming generations of women and girls that Omani women have been and remain active partners in development and a model of perseverance and giving, contributing to the targets of Oman Vision 2040. — ONA



SHORT TAKES



The 12th periodic meeting of the heads of the GCC Supreme and Cassation Courts in Manama. — ONA

Oman joins GCC supreme courts meeting in Manama

MANAMA: Oman took part on Wednesday in the 12th periodic meeting of the heads of the Supreme and Cassation Courts of the GCC states, held in Manama, Bahrain. The Omani delegation was headed by Khalid bin Rashid al Manwari, Deputy Chairman of the Supreme Court.

The meeting reviewed the efforts of judicial authorities in the GCC countries to combat money laundering and human trafficking, and discussed the electronic Gulf judicial magazine and the selection of a topic for the 2027 annual report. It also considered a proposal to introduce a GCC Award for Research and Studies in Judicial Fields and reviewed developments on the electronic platform for Gulf judicial rulings and principles. The meeting forms part of efforts to strengthen judicial cooperation and the exchange of expertise among GCC judicial institutions. — ONA

Committee reviews school evaluation results for 100 schools



The joint coordination committee between the Oman Authority for Quality Assurance of Education and the Ministry of Education holds its first meeting. — ONA

MUSCAT: The joint coordination committee between the Oman Authority for Quality Assurance of Education and the Ministry of Education held its first meeting on Tuesday, reviewing school performance evaluation results for the 2025/2026 academic year.

The meeting was co-chaired by Dr Jokha bint Abdullah al Shukaili, Chairperson of the Oman Authority for Quality Assurance of Education, and Dr Intisar bint Abdullah Ambusaidi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Education for Educational Support Programmes. Members reviewed the ministry’s mechanisms for supporting schools at the fourth and fifth levels, its follow-up of 100 schools under improvement and development plans, and the authority’s plan for evaluating school performance in the first semester of the 2026/2027 academic year. They also discussed using the ministry’s digital systems to feed evaluation indicators and reduce administrative burdens, joint awareness workshops for school leaders, and a draft cooperation charter between the two bodies. — ONA

New Al Mudhaibi polyclinic to serve 26 villages

AL MUDHAIBI: The Al Mudhaibi Health Polyclinic opened on Wednesday in Al Sharqiyah North Governorate, serving a population of 34,229 across 26 villages. The opening was held under the auspices of Zahir bin Sulaiman al Salmi, Deputy Chairman of the State Financial and Administrative Audit Authority for Oversight on Government Units.

The polyclinic has 16 specialised and general clinics and offers general medical services, laboratory and radiology services, a pharmacy, oral and dental health, antenatal care and birth spacing services, child healthcare and immunisation, chronic disease programmes and health promotion. It also provides physiotherapy, elderly care and home healthcare. Healthcare services in the Wilayat of Al Mudhaibi date back to 1978, and construction of the new polyclinic began in 2024. — ONA

ARMY OFFICER WINS DEFENCE MINISTRY RESEARCH PAPER COMPETITION

MUSCAT: The Academy for Strategic and Defence Studies (ASDS) on Wednesday concluded the second edition of the Ministry of Defence Research Paper Competition for 2025/2026, with Major Ahmed bin Khalifa al Amri of the Royal Army of Oman taking first place.

His winning paper was titled “The Role of Artificial Intelligence in Elevating the Efficiency of Military Media in Monitoring and Strategic Analysis in the Sultanate of Oman – A Semiotic Approach”. The ceremony



was held under the auspices of Dr Khamis bin Saif al Jabri, Minister of Economy, in the presence of Dr Mohammed bin Nasser al Zaabi, Secretary-General of the Ministry

of Defence, and Maj Gen Hamid bin Ahmed Sakroon, Chairman of the Academy for Strategic and Defence Studies (ASDS).

Air Commodore Ali bin Rashid al Abri, Director-General of Studies and Academic Affairs and Chairman of the Competition Committee, outlined the competition’s objectives, stages and evaluation criteria. The competition aims to encourage strategic and defence research, empower researchers and support decision-makers. — ONA

Oman seeks better health equity for the vulnerable

OMAN, represented by the Ministry of Health, on Wednesday took part in the 73rd session of the World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean (RC73), hosted by Egypt in Cairo. The delegation was headed by Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health and Vice-Chairman of the Bureau of the WHO Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean. Held under the theme “Together for a Healthier Future: Action, Access, Equity”, the session brings together health leaders and decision-makers from across the region to discuss shared public health challenges.

In Oman’s statement, Al Sabti called for continued investment in resilient health systems built on primary healthcare and universal health coverage, ensuring continuity of services and equitable access, particularly for the most vulnerable and those affected by crises. He said Oman continues to turn these priorities into national action. In prevention and health security, it has maintained polio immunisation coverage above 99 per cent while strengthening its surveillance, preparedness and response systems. It also continues its efforts to combat antimicrobial resistance (AMR), guided by the commitments of the 2022 Muscat Ministerial Declaration and the One Health approach.

Al Sabti said digital transformation, data and artificial

Al Sabti called for continued investment in resilient health systems built on primary healthcare and universal health coverage, ensuring equitable access, particularly for the most vulnerable and those affected by crises.



Oman’s delegation at the 73rd session of the WHO Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean in Cairo. — ONA

intelligence offered a strategic opportunity to advance health systems across the region. He called for clear governance frameworks, better interoperability and the responsible, trustworthy use of technology to improve the quality of healthcare and support evidence-based decision-making.

He said the challenges facing the region called for greater solidarity and collective action, more exchange of expertise and data, and capacity-building, alongside support for countries affected by conflicts and emergencies. He also underlined the importance of protecting health workers and healthcare facilities and keeping essential services running for affected populations, and reaffirmed Oman’s support for the

Regional Office and its commitment to continued cooperation with WHO and member states.

The WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean presented the Annual Report for 2025/2026.

The agenda includes health financing to strengthen financial protection, a multi-communicable disease elimination approach, health emergencies and polio eradication.

Participants will also review technical resolutions, the proposed Programme Budget for 2028-2029 and resolutions adopted by the 79th World Health Assembly, and the session will close with a panel discussion on artificial intelligence for health in the region.

— ONA

Event maps urban future along metro route

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, OCT 14

Visitors to the Royal Opera House Muscat on Wednesday followed a route modelled on the proposed Muscat Metro, as ‘Happy City Journey – Muscat’ turned the Music Arts Hall into seven interactive stations on urban development. The day-long event, organised by the Directorate-General of Housing and Urban Planning in Muscat Governorate under the theme ‘Happy and Prosperous Cities’, was part of the accompanying programme of the Urban October Conference 2026.

Each station reflected a stop proposed along the Muscat Metro route, one of the key outputs of the Greater Muscat Structure Plan, and highlighted a different side of urban development. At Al Seeb, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning presented its Sorouh projects, housing options, the addressing project and the Building Code. The Knowledge and Innovation station showcased students’ graduation projects in architecture, urban planning and smart cities, while Al Khuwair displayed shortlisted entries in the event’s design and photography competitions for visitors to vote on. Al Qurum gave space to SMEs, and the journey ended at Ruwi, themed ‘The Happy City’, with a painting by Omani artist Salem al Salami.

“Through this event, we aim to raise awareness of the importance of urban



The Knowledge and Innovation station showcased students’ graduation projects in architecture, urban planning and smart cities, while Al Khuwair displayed shortlisted entries in the event’s design and photography competitions for visitors to vote on. — ONA

planning and its role in improving quality of life, highlight the efforts and projects that contribute to the development of Muscat, and encourage community participation by listening to people’s ideas and needs,” said Eng Saba al Amri.

Cities, she said, should be understood not merely as networks of buildings and roads but as living environments in which people

build their experiences and pursue their aspirations.

The programme also included a ‘Little Engineer Lab’ for children aged six to 14, a ‘City for All’ lab inviting persons with disabilities to identify barriers to accessibility in buildings and public spaces, and a freehand drawing workshop led by an architect.

WORLD

SHORT TAKES



People disassemble an abandoned wreckage of a truck during fighting in Adi Mesno. — Reuters

ETHIOPIAN FORCES
APPROACH ERITREA
BORDER TOWN

ADDIS ABABA: Ethiopian federal forces and their allies are closing in on a town near Eritrea’s border, a pro-government commander and a resident said, raising fears of a regional war. Ethiopia accuses Eritrea of backing the rebel Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF), which launched a major offensive against government forces on September 23 before being pushed back and losing control of its strongholds.

A foreign security source has estimated that between 5,000 and 8,000 Eritrean forces were deployed in Ethiopian territory to support the rebels but were also forced into an apparent retreat. A member of the pro-government group said that Eritrean soldiers present in the town of Zalambessa had withdrawn.

“Villages near the town are held by the defence forces,” he said, speaking on condition of anonymity, adding: “No Ethiopian troops have crossed into Eritrea”. “The Ethiopian army has arrived about five kilometres south of the town, while the Eritrean army is on its northern outskirts,” a Zalambessa resident said. The “situation is causing deep concern among residents, who fear the town could become a battlefield”, he added. — AFP

INDONESIA HAZE
SPIKES SINGAPORE
POLLUTION



Motorists commute in the afternoon in Palangkaraya, Central Kalimantan. — AFP

SINGAPORE: Air pollution in part of Singapore hit the country’s “very high” band while East Timor shut schools, as haze from forest fires raging in Indonesia causes a regional crisis. In Indonesia, authorities said more than 280,000 respiratory problems have been recorded in haze-affected regions since August 18, as blazes burned through hundreds of thousands of hectares of forests and plantations on Borneo and Sumatra islands.

Air pollution in western Singapore on Wednesday hit “very high” — the country’s top level — the National Environment Agency said. It recorded levels of tiny particulates capable of penetrating the bloodstream and lungs, known as PM2.5, at 288 microgrammes per cubic metre, vastly exceeding the World Health Organization’s recommended average annual exposure of five micrograms.

The haze has drifted into neighbouring Singapore, Malaysia and East Timor, which said it would shut schools nationwide for three days from Thursday. The closures in East Timor were necessary “as a preventive measure to protect the health of students, teachers and other members of the educational community, given current air quality conditions”, it said. — AFP

PAINFUL TRAGEDY

India festival boat capsizes kills 13 children



Rescuers dragged out 13 dead children from India’s Ganges River after an overloaded boat capsized en route to a festival, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi expressing grief over the “deeply painful” tragedy. The boat overturned in Vaishali district in eastern Bihar state, with locals rushing to pull people out of the water in the dark using mobile phones to find the bodies. Six people were pulled out alive, including two children reported to be in critical condition. — AFP

VIOLENT OUTBURST

Fire set at Albania’s Education ministry



Albania’s Education Ministry caught fire on Wednesday during a second day of student protests over corruption and education, as police used tear gas and water cannons to disperse crowds in Tirana. Thousands of protesters gathered in front of the Education Ministry. Some threw bricks at the building. They broke metal sidewalk barriers and overturned trash cans. This has been the most violent outburst of anti-corruption protests, which started in May. — Reuters

VIRAL DISEASE

Kenyan authorities report 2nd Ebola case



Kenya reported a second case of Ebola after recording its first-ever infection with the viral disease. The second patient, a 39-year-old man, is a close family member of the first case and was already in quarantine when he fell ill on Tuesday, the health ministry said in a statement. Kenya is the fourth country to record a case linked to the Ebola epidemic in Congo, the second-largest on record globally with more than 8,000 cases and more than 4,000 deaths. — Reuters

UN DEMANDS
LEBANON
STABILITY
AS END OF
PEACEKEEPERS’
MANDATE
LOOMS

BEIRUT: A visiting senior United Nations official on Wednesday reaffirmed the UN’s commitment to stability in Lebanon as the mandate of its peacekeeping force in the country is set to expire this year. Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations Jean-Pierre Lacroix met officials as well as representatives of countries contributing to the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), which counts some 7,500 personnel from nearly 50 countries. “I thanked them for their critical support to

UNIFIL and reiterated the UN’s strong commitment to supporting peace and stability in Lebanon,” Lacroix said.

UNIFIL has served as a buffer between Israel and Lebanon since 1978, but its presence has been unable to prevent several rounds of conflict. Under US pressure, the UN Security Council last year voted to end UNIFIL’s mandate on December 31, 2026.

President Joseph Aoun told Lacroix that Lebanon “is keen

on UNIFIL staying, considering the importance of the role that it has played from the start of its mission until today”, according to a statement from his office.

“The circumstances resulting from Israel’s attacks and occupation of southern villages and towns... make the presence of international forces extremely important.” UNIFIL’s “withdrawal will create a vacuum that will have negative repercussions on the security situation in the region”, he warned. — AFP

Blasts heard in Saudi after
strike on Aramco’s office

POWERFUL EXPLOSIONS rattled the Saudi capital on Wednesday, hours after an Ansar Allah strike hit a building in the area housing energy giant Aramco’s operations centre, in a fresh escalation of the war between the kingdom and the Yemeni group. Regional powerhouse Saudi Arabia unleashed salvos against the Ansar Allah stronghold in the Yemeni capital Sanaa, while the group fired back at sites across the kingdom, which is the world’s top crude oil exporter.



People crowd outside a shop to buy sacks of wheat flour in Taiz, Yemen. — Reuters

Most strikes on Saudi Arabia have targeted infrastructure on the outskirts of the capital, but the barrages appear to be getting closer to the city centre. On Wednesday, the Saudi-led coalition fighting the Ansar Allah said it had intercepted a missile fired by the group towards Riyadh. In the city’s downtown, residents have been seen parking their cars to stop and look up at the sky, a journalist said.

On Tuesday night, the white plumes of air defence missiles could be seen streaking across the sky, followed by explosions. While walking down a major avenue, a witness said that he “saw a projectile cutting across the sky” above a mall, saying it left “a yellowish trail of light followed by a trail of smoke. Then, we heard an explosion”. “People were calm; no one was speaking. We were

Most strikes on Saudi Arabia have targeted infrastructure on the outskirts of the capital, but the barrages appear to be getting closer to the city centre. The Saudi-led coalition fighting Ansar Allah said it had intercepted a missile fired by the group towards Riyadh

scared and all looking up at the sky,” he added, requesting anonymity.

More blasts were heard on Wednesday, journalists in Riyadh reported, as messages were received on phones warning of an “aerial threat” and urging people to take shelter. The alert was lifted a few minutes later. A Saudi energy ministry official said a building belonging to Aramco in Dhahran was struck on Tuesday, resulting in a “limited fire” but “no casualties or fatalities”. Dhahran is home to Aramco’s headquarters, a vast complex comprising several buildings and residential compounds.

In Riyadh, the civil defence agency said four people — two women, a man and a child — were wounded by debris from two intercepted Ansar

Allah cruise missiles and that 15 homes were damaged. The Saudi-led coalition meanwhile struck oil sites across western Yemen, with spokesman Turki al Malki saying the attacks targeted facilities used to supply the Ansar Allah effort to “threaten the kingdom, Yemen, the southern Red Sea and waterways”.

A correspondent in Sanaa reported an explosion, while a breaking news alert on the Al Masirah TV channel said “Saudi aggression” targeted an oil firm. The coalition has supported Yemen’s government militarily against the Ansar Allah since 2015 in a long-running civil war that has created a humanitarian crisis. Many civilians in the Ansar Allah-controlled Yemeni capital, fearing shortages, have rushed to queue in front of fuel stations, a journalist said.

The escalation in violence follows a strike on Riyadh’s international airport on Saturday that left 13 people dead and operations suspended in the worst attack on the kingdom since 2015. The Saudi cabinet vowed in a meeting led by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman that it “will not allow its security or freedom of navigation in the Red Sea and Bab Al Mandab Strait to be threatened”.

Many countries have issued travel warnings to their citizens in Saudi Arabia, with France telling its nationals on Tuesday to avoid Riyadh, Jeddah and Dammam airports. — AFP

GAZANS HARVEST FROM DESTROYED GROVES

GAZA: Before the war, olives were the jewels of Gaza agriculture, pressed into enough rich oil to serve as a staple for the local diet, and a small surplus for export to Israel. The shady groves abutting Gaza’s concrete cities were a sanctuary for families in one of the world’s most densely populated territories.

Today, nearly half of the orchard lies beyond the “yellow line” guarded by Israeli troops who bar Palestinians from even entering two-thirds of the Gaza Strip. The other half of the grove, though still accessible, has mostly been bulldozed. Gaza’s agriculture authorities estimate that of 2 million olive trees, barely 150,000 are still standing. They anticipate a harvest of about 5,000 tonnes of olives instead of the usual 40,000, producing only 700 tonnes of oil instead of 5,000.

Bushels of olives and drums of freshly pressed oil would normally be stacked high in Gaza’s markets this time of year. Nowadays there is barely any at all, and what does make it to market sells at around triple the pre-war price, nearly \$500 a drum, well beyond what Gazan families can afford. — Reuters

SHORT TAKES



A protester kicks back a tear gas canister during a demonstration of students in Paris. — AFP

Macron says student protesters ‘exploited’ by political forces

PARIS: French President Emmanuel Macron believes students waging three weeks of protests that have closed many schools have “legitimate” grievances but are also being “exploited” by political forces, a government spokeswoman said on Wednesday. The leader, who is in his final six months of office, has asked the government to come up with “concrete responses” within weeks to the unrest by high school pupils, spokeswoman Maud Bregeon told reporters. She spoke after Macron held his weekly meeting with his cabinet, a day after nationwide solidarity demonstrations showed significant support for the students. The interior ministry said 161,500 people turned out for demonstrations held in Paris and other cities. Unions organised the rallies put the figure at 480,000. Some violent scenes erupted on the sidelines of marches in Paris and Lyon, with police firing tear gas in response. In his cabinet meeting, Macron “stressed that young people have legitimate concerns, but said these are being exploited for political purposes and turned into urban violence”, Bregeon said. With French presidential elections due in April and May next year, some opposition parties have seized upon the demonstrations. — AFP

POLISH PM PLEDGES ‘RULE OF LAW’



Polish PM Donald Tusk pledged a return to the rule of law, following protests outside Poland’s highest court by right-wing supporters of a judicial overhaul. The protests follow a years-long rule-of-law crisis gripping Warsaw’s Constitutional Tribunal (TK), which began when the then-ruling Law and Justice (PiS) party launched sweeping changes to the judiciary. “The Polish state has been functioning for far too long without a properly elected Constitutional Tribunal,” Tusk said, adding “we will be restoring legal and constitutional order using the methods available to the state”. — AFP

TRUMP AMBASSADOR SCANDAL A US ISSUE, SAYS GREECE

ATHENS: Greece’s conservative government on Wednesday sought to distance itself from the shock ouster of US ambassador Kimberly Guilfoyle, with a senior official insisting relations with Washington are unaffected. “These are issues that concern the United States and do not affect Greek-American relations,” deputy prime minister Costis Hatzidakis said. “This is not the first time that there are no ambassadors, in Greece or other countries in Europe, representing

the US or other states for some months,” he said. US President Donald Trump forced Guilfoyle out of the administration on Tuesday, amid allegations she sought money from one of his supporters and accepted lavish hospitality from wealthy Greek businessmen. The move came days after a visit to Athens by Secretary of State Marco Rubio. Guilfoyle, 57, a former Fox News host and ex-fiancee of Trump’s eldest son, had faced mounting

scrutiny following a series of reports by The Wall Street Journal about her financial dealings and relationships with wealthy businessmen. The Journal reported that she asked Eric Deters, an influential Trump supporter, to pay off \$100,000 in personal credit card debt shortly before her Senate confirmation hearing in July 2025. The Journal also reported that Guilfoyle boasted of luxury trips and hotel stays funded by wealthy Greek businessmen. — AFP

Kyiv accuses US of helping Russia as missiles strike

UKRAINE ON Wednesday accused the United States of helping Russia, saying Washington failed to warn it of incoming missile strikes and slowed the Starlink system it relies on for its battlefield communications and frontline logistics. US President Donald Trump on Tuesday insisted Washington was still helping Ukraine, while a US official said on Wednesday that its policy had “not changed”. The EU also said there were “no indications” sharing had stopped.

Ballistic missiles have now struck the Ukrainian capital, Kyiv, for two nights running — before air raid sirens could sound in time to warn people to take cover in basements, bomb shelters or metro stations. Energy facilities were targeted, cutting power to more than 600,000, despite Trump’s surprise announcement of an “energy ceasefire” in the nearly five-year conflict. “Russia has never before shown such ostentatious disrespect toward the United States,” said Ukraine’s President Volodymyr Zelensky. “Russia does not consider the American President’s statements strong,” Zelensky said on Tuesday night that the lack of notice from Ukraine’s Western partners about imminent Russian ballistic-missile launches was “completely unjust”.

JET-POWERED DRONES The lack of warning has been reported only rarely over the course of the nearly five-year conflict and Ukrainian officials have suggested the Russian military’s use of hard-to-detect missiles or potential technical issues could be to blame. But one senior Ukrainian official pointed the finger at Washington after slower speeds were reported on Wednesday on some Starlink internet terminals



Rescuers work at a site of a Russian drone strike in Rivne. — Reuters

“Russia has never before shown such ostentatious disrespect toward the United States. Russia does not consider the American President’s statements strong. The lack of notice from Ukraine’s Western partners about imminent Russian ballistic-missile launches was completely unjust.”

VOLODYMYR ZELENSKY
UKRAINE’S PRESIDENT

used by its military for strikes on Russian-occupied territory and interceptor drones. “It’s obvious they (the United States) are helping Russia for some reason,” the official said. Zelensky adviser Sergiy Beskrestnov linked the attacks and the Starlink restrictions, as the network was “the most effective solution” for protecting Ukraine against jet-powered Russian attack, which can fly at up to 600 kilometres per hour. “Through their actions, our partners are depriving us of one of the few chances we have to defend the country against jet-powered Shahed drones,” he wrote on Telegram. Ukrainian defence sources said SpaceX “unilaterally restricted the operation of Starshield terminals... without prior warning”, hitting connectivity for its drones.

RUSSIA ‘CAREFULLY NOTING’ Russia is watching for any sign Washington’s backing for Ukraine may have shifted, the Kremlin said. “We are carefully noting all this. It is too early to draw any systemic conclusions,” spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters. Six people were killed and dozens more wounded in Kyiv on Wednesday, the

authorities said, while significant damage to facilities and equipment knocked out power to swathes of the city. Power plants also came under ballistic-missile attack in the eastern Kharkiv region, hitting electricity and heating infrastructure, Prime Minister Sergiy Korotshuk said. Nato chief Mark Rutte urged alliance members to step up support for Ukraine’s air defences. Zelensky, expected in London on Wednesday for talks with UK Prime Minister Andy Burnham, has said Ukraine is prepared to hold off from striking Russian energy infrastructure. But he accused the Kremlin of having “squandered the opportunity for de-escalation”. Russia has previously targeted Ukraine’s power stations and heating infrastructure, crippling supplies before winter, when temperatures can plummet to as low as -20C. Ukraine has been pushing its allies for more military support as Kyiv increasingly comes under attack, particularly the supply of advanced interceptor systems to shoot down missiles and jet-powered drones. Russian ballistic missile attacks were also reported in Zhytomyr in the northwest, and other strikes hit Sumy in the northeast and Chernigiv in the north. Two people were killed in the central Dnipropetrovsk region and a further person in Zaporizhzhia in the southeast, the authorities said. Six people were killed in a drone strike at a wholesaler in the western city of Lutsk, the interior ministry said. In Russia’s southwestern Saratov region, the local governor said a Ukrainian drone strike had killed one person in the city of Balakovo. Moscow mayor Sergey Sobyanin said air defence forces had downed nearly 500 drones flying towards the Russian capital while about 160 more were brought down over the Rostov region. — AFP

World leaders pray for Pope Leo after lung cancer diagnosis

VATICAN CITY: World leaders, Catholics across the globe and senior cardinals at the Vatican offered prayers for Pope Leo on Wednesday after doctors announced the 71-year-old pontiff had been diagnosed with lung cancer and had part of one lung removed. The cancer diagnosis for a pope known to be relatively young and energetic and who was elected only in May 2025 caused shock. A prayer was recited for Leo to have a good convalescence and complete healing during an open-air Mass in St Peter’s Square on Wednesday following the surgery. The pope was diagnosed on Tuesday with lung adenocarcinoma, the most common form of lung cancer, after doctors removed the lower lobe of his right lung during an operation. Leo spent a peaceful night in hospital, the Vatican said, adding that further information about his condition would be released later on Wednesday. The pontiff had been admitted to Rome’s Gemelli hospital after doctors discovered a growth during a recent

The pope was diagnosed with lung adenocarcinoma, the most common form of lung cancer, after doctors removed the lower lobe of his right lung during an operation. Leo spent a peaceful night in hospital and further information about his condition would be released later



A nun holds a picture of Pope Leo on the day of a mass including special prayers for his health in St Peter’s Square at the Vatican. — Reuters

routine health check. The operation lasted about 90 minutes and was completed without complications, the pope’s lead surgeon, Stefano Margaritora, and his personal physician, Luigi Carbone, said late on Tuesday. The doctors said in a joint statement that the entire lower lobe of the right lung was removed in an effort to eliminate all cancerous tissue. Human

lungs have five lobes - three in the right lung and two in the left. The Vatican has not disclosed the size of the tumour or whether the disease had spread to nearby lymph nodes, key factors in determining prognosis. Leo is relatively young for a Church leader. He enjoys sports, including tennis, and is not known to be a smoker or to have had recent health issues. The Vatican said earlier this week that the pope was expected to remain in hospital for about a week and that all his public engagements had been cancelled until October 20. The Mass on Wednesday was the closing act of an assembly of bishops called by Leo to discuss the Church’s family life teachings, the largest gathering of Church leaders so far during this papacy. Filipino Cardinal Luis Tagle led the Mass in place of Leo. The pope last week approved Tagle as the dean of the Church’s College of Cardinals, in the first selection of an Asian cleric to the elite role. Political leaders offered messages of support.

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said he and his wife Jeanette were praying for the pope, an American who was born in Chicago. “May the Lord give him strength and the Holy Spirit guide the medical professionals taking care of the Holy Father,” he said on X. Rubio met Leo at the Vatican in May. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen sent her best wishes. “His serenity and strength are an inspiration for all of us. We hope for his full and speedy recovery,” she wrote on X. Leo normally follows a very busy schedule. He is due to make a tour of Uruguay, Argentina and Peru from November 6 to 17, but it was not clear if this trip would still go ahead. The pope is the ultimate earthly authority for the world’s 1.4 billion Catholics and does not have a deputy who steps in when he is sick. When a pope is incapacitated, the business of the Vatican’s vast bureaucracy carries on as usual, holding off on any decisions that require papal approval. — Reuters

The geography of a troubled mind



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THERE IS a peculiar difference between walking through a quiet, tree-lined neighbourhood and navigating a busy road with traffic on either side. In one, the mind seems to wander freely, while in the other, our attention narrows to the noise and immediate demands of getting somewhere. We tend to think of these as passing experiences, small inconveniences or pleasures that accompany urban life. Yet research suggests that the environments we inhabit may have a deeper influence on our mental well-being than previously understood.

A recent United Nations Environment Programme publication drew attention to studies associating air pollution with depression, and possibly anxiety. Much of the research concerns fine particulate matter, known as PM2.5, particles approximately 30 times smaller than the width of a human hair. Produced by vehicle exhaust and industrial combustion, these particles can penetrate deep into the lungs, with some entering the bloodstream. Researchers are investigating how prolonged exposure may contribute to inflammation and other biological processes affecting the brain, suggesting pollution could influence mental health without our awareness.

For decades, public health discussions surrounding air pollution concentrated on respiratory and cardiovascular disease.

Earlier in my career, I participated in environmental studies around the Sohar refinery and industrial area, speaking with elders from neighbouring villages who described wheezing and asthma, and raised concerns about miscarriages they associated with nearby industrial activity. Their observations warranted scientific investigation, but that conversation concerned consequences people could recognise, while researchers today are examining effects considerably harder to identify. Few people report a harm they cannot name, and what is never reported is seldom counted. There is also an uncomfortable geographical dimension to these findings. Environmental exposure is rarely distributed equally, even within the same city. A family living beside a major transport corridor may experience different levels of pollution and noise from another living near shaded streets and accessible green spaces. Income and housing conditions further determine how much choice people have over their surroundings. The geography of a city can become part of the geography of health, creating differences in exposure that accumulate over years.

Yet the environments we inhabit are defined as much by what they offer as by what they expose us to. Research associates access to nature with improved psychological well-being. Some former classmates and I recently discussed the places where we used

Mental health involves biological, social and personal circumstances, and environmental improvements cannot substitute for healthcare. But neither should we assume that psychological well-being begins and ends with the individual.

to gather. Many are now mothers, and some have become grandmothers. We were struck by how little the availability of green spaces had changed in many older neighbourhoods, despite more people now depending on them.

In Oman, where extreme heat already limits the hours we can comfortably spend outdoors, the spaces near home carry more weight. New developments increasingly incorporate landscaping and recreational areas, while established neighbourhoods must accommodate growing populations within existing infrastructure.

Alongside investments in tourism destinations and private developments, there is an equally important case for accessible public spaces where people can gather without having to pay for the privilege.

Mental health involves biological, social and personal circumstances, and environmental improvements cannot substitute for healthcare.

But neither should we assume that psychological well-being begins and ends with the individual. Some influences may be embedded in decisions about where roads are constructed and how neighbourhoods develop. We have learned to measure the environmental footprint of our cities with increasing precision. Perhaps we should become equally interested in the imprint those cities leave on the people who inhabit them.

Aspiring Danes in long and agonising wait for citizenship

CAMILLE BAS-WOHLERT

“We wait, we wait, we wait. It’s been going on for years,” laments Syrian technician Ahmad Albokie, who is trying to acquire Danish nationality but faces a long and uncertain path. Denmark’s strict naturalisation procedure takes about two years on average, but Albokie’s case has been delayed due to this year’s election and because parliament needs to formally approve every new citizen.

He has already had to clear several hurdles to be eligible, including secure employment, a permanent residence permit, a clean criminal record, and qualifications in language and Danish general knowledge. After signing a declaration of loyalty and allegiance to Denmark, in June 2023 he was finally able to apply for citizenship for himself and his three children. Twice a year, a bill listing every person to be naturalised is presented to parliament for debate and adoption. Albokie’s name was set to appear on a bill put forward in October 2025.

“Because Denmark held the EU presidency, it was postponed to January 2026. In 2026, a first reading in parliament was to begin, but when the prime minister called parliamentary elections, it was dropped,” he said.

The government, led by the Social Democrats who are staunch advocates of a restrictive citizenship policy, is now considering a new bill to be presented in 2027, after all applications for citizenship are re-examined. Like Albokie, more than 2,000 people, not counting their children, are waiting for a clear decision on a path forward.

“I feel very disappointed and not really welcome. It’s as if I were a second-class citizen,” one of them, Sandra Frederiksen, said. For Albokie’s eldest daughter, time is running out. Jouli was 14 when Albokie first submitted her application. Today, she is 17.

If she does not obtain Danish citizenship through her father before her 18th birthday, she will have to start the process again on her own. “When I get to the point where I have to apply for Danish citizenship myself, there may be new rules and new requirements, which could make it harder for me,” the teenager said. “Just the idea of having to go through all that again, and on top of it all alone, is really stressful,” she said. — AFP

‘Digger’ a flop. It’s also the best climate crisis movie

DIDN’T want to see “Digger.” The trailers, in which Tom Cruise, in heavy old-man makeup, plays a cartoonish oil baron named Digger Rockwell, looked empty, grating, unfunny. What’s more, I already knew the film’s big twist, which has been widely spoiled, and which I will also spoil, below.

My premonition turned out to be well founded. The film has been roundly savaged as a critical and financial catastrophe, a soon-to-be legendary flop that will go down alongside Cruise’s biggest public missteps, like the couch jumping, the Matt Lauer interview and “Knight and Day.” Perversely, I decided to see “Digger” anyway, hoping to rubberneck, and the first 30 minutes played out just as I suspected. The film begins as a rickety “Dr Strangelove”-esque satire, coated in flop sweat and whiffing on all the jokes. Sandra Hüller, playing Digger’s little sister, screeches her lines and dresses like a Spirit-of-Halloween Annie Hall, while John Goodman, as President Compson, roars like a community-theatre George C. Scott. Everything is unendurably loud; nothing is funny.

Yet, by the time the credits rolled two hours later, I was moved and engaged, and no longer hiding my face in my hands. The director, Alejandro G. Iñárritu, has hidden a quiet, thoughtful movie about our collective failure to act on climate change inside the husk of an earsplitting, empty one. As a result, “Digger” may be the best climate crisis movie ever made, cleverly disguised as the worst.

Climate crisis movies have always been notoriously hard to make, for the same reason the climate crisis is hard to combat: It’s too big.



JAYSON
GREENE

Greene is the author of the novel ‘UnWorld’

Yet beneath the shouting, the ungodly animatronic cat and Cruise’s layers of prosthetics, “Digger” is a surprisingly empathetic, nuanced film about the difficulty of confronting, let alone averting, climate change.

Everyone’s affected, but not in the same ways, on the same timelines, or at the same scale. We can see and comprehend elements of the problem but no one sees the whole picture, or how its disparate causes and effects connect together.

Paul Schrader’s 2017 film “First Reformed” tackled climate change by focusing on one tortured man’s psyche, following a priest, played by Ethan Hawke, who crosses paths with the radical environmentalist husband of a parishioner and descends into spiritual despair. Adam McKay’s “Don’t Look Up” in 2021 parodied our societal indifference through a parable about alarmed scientists warning everyone about a meteor coming to destroy Earth. Climate change has been exploited for apocalyptic action-movie spectacle, as in “The Day After Tomorrow” and “Snowpiercer,” or fashioned into allegory, as in Bong Joon Ho’s “Parasite” and Valentyn Vasyanovych’s war-fallout film “Atlantis.” But it’s always the backdrop.

“Digger” succeeds where previous climate-warning films have fallen short because it truly captures what the cultural critic Amitav Ghosh called “the great derangement,” our total imaginative failure in the face of the scale of what is happening to the planet. To do so, the film takes a different, and unusual tack — and here’s where we get to that oft-spoiled twist.It also neatly mimics the sensation of climate despair: Mostly, you just go about your life. But every once in a while, you need to freak out — and when you do, you too might resemble one of the two-dimensional characters depicted in “Fossil Fools.” In one of the many memorable pans of the

film, New York magazine’s Bilge Ebiri wrote that watching the film felt like “being trapped inside a tuba for two hours.” He’s not wrong — the movie is loud and overwhelming and in many ways repellent. But for me, that’s how “Digger” succeeds. It acknowledges the ways in which art about the climate crisis almost always resembles being stuck inside a tuba: The pitch of our indignation and our terror and panic at what is being lost reliably render us overwhelmed and incoherent.By daring to make the movie this way, Iñárritu not only courts audience rage (at this writing, the film sits with a deadly C+ on CinemaScore, which measures viewer reaction), but also risks making himself, having twice won an Oscar for Best Director, look incompetent. For a movie about Method acting, role-playing and artistic failure, it’s an apt gesture, if a slightly insane one.

How might we tell future generations of our failure? “Digger” is such an accurate portrayal of the necessity of bad art that it’s very easy to mistake it for bad art. It’s certainly provoked that response from many viewers: During its second weekend in theatres, its audience plummeted even further, fuelled in part by toxic word of mouth.

Yet beneath the shouting, the ungodly animatronic cat and Cruise’s layers of prosthetics, “Digger” is a surprisingly empathetic, nuanced film about the difficulty of confronting, let alone averting, climate change. It strives to understand what has happened already, what will happen to us next, and even why. We know all of this is too big, the film says, and it’s going to make shrieking cartoons of us all. — The New York Times

How to improve global mineral governance



HASRUL HANIF

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INTERDEPENDENCE MAY be the theme of this year’s annual meeting of the Intergovernmental Forum on Mining, Minerals, Metals, and Sustainable Development (IGF), held in Geneva on October 12–14, but competition between countries to secure transition minerals remains intense. This scramble could have dire consequences for mineral-producing countries if it undermines sustainability standards and prevents equitable cost- and benefit-sharing between and within countries.

The International Energy Agency estimates that, to achieve net-zero emissions, demand for critical minerals will triple by 2030 and quadruple by 2040. Mineral-rich countries, aware of the “resource curse,” are seeking ways to retain control over their reserves. In a bid to promote domestic value addition and meet their economic-development objectives, many of these countries are pursuing export bans on critical raw materials.

But Indonesia’s experience as one of the first countries to implement such a ban shows that downstream industrialisation is not a cure-all. It can come with substantial environmental and social costs, and the benefits are not always shared equitably with the local communities that often bear the greatest burden of extraction and processing.

And while extraction, smelting, and processing have boosted economic growth in Indonesia’s three nickel-rich provinces, they have not contributed significantly to the national economy. Frontier-making — the act of transforming marginal areas into centres of resource extraction — can create new “sacrifice zones” when not accompanied by robust regulation and democratic oversight.

Meanwhile, the emphasis on sustainable mining has never been greater at the global level. In 2024, the United Nations Secretary-General’s Panel on Critical Energy Transition Minerals released a set of guiding principles that underscore the need for a new paradigm rooted in justice and equity, and for mining to benefit host countries and local communities. Regional frameworks, including the African Union’s Africa Mining Vision, its follow-up guidelines and frameworks, and the Asaen Principles for Sustainable Minerals Development, reflect similar commitments.

These agreements are sidelined, however, when countries pursue bilateral agreements that prioritise market access over all else. Consider the uneven treatment of nickel and palm oil in the EU–Indonesia Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement. The European Union has strict sustainability standards for palm oil, but not for nickel, even though both sectors can cause significant social and environmental degradation. The best way to put principles

The International Energy Agency estimates that, to achieve net-zero emissions, demand for critical minerals will triple by 2030 and quadruple by 2040

into practice is to consolidate Global South policy and advocacy networks. This would enable policymakers, civil society, and local communities to share their experience with mineral extraction and processing and their proposals for making the sector more equitable and environmentally responsible.

There is a genuine desire among policymakers in the Global South to share the lessons learned from their successes and failures. The Natural Resource Governance Institute’s South–South Transition Minerals Learning Platform has facilitated the dissemination of policy insights among government officials from Indonesia, Chile, Zambia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and other countries. While they share the same goal — to build more inclusive, resilient, and prosperous societies using mineral wealth — the platform enables a deeper understanding of how variations in commodities, domestic political economies, and value-chain positions require different strategies, rather than a one-size-fits-all approach.

Equally important are transnational or transcalar advocacy networks that connect civil-society groups across the Global South. They, too, can provide a platform for sharing experience and knowledge, while also strengthening collective action and extending accountability beyond national borders.

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Deluge by design... Thai villages flooded to protect capital

CHAYANIT ITTHIPONGMAETEE

Stilt houses in villages north of Bangkok are no longer high enough to stay dry as Thai authorities deliberately flood riverside communities to spare the capital. Inside the home of Kamonchanok Sathaphonamonwut, raised more than three metres above the ground in Ayutthaya province, her family of three sleeps on makeshift platforms and cannot use the waterlogged toilet.

Her village has been flooded six years in a row, pushing some to move away, while others have raised their houses higher.

“Our area simply cannot cope with this much water anymore,” the 34-year-old said, wading through her soaked home.

But while authorities prioritise protecting Bangkok and other business hubs from floods, “when it comes to our residential communities, they neglect us”, she said.

Thailand experiences flooding every year during the monsoon season, and scientists say human-made climate change has made heavy rain and floods more frequent and severe.

After devastating floods in 2011, the government expanded embankments, water gates and other infrastructure to direct water away from Bangkok, the historic city of Ayutthaya and industrial zones along the Chao Phraya River, which flows through the capital.

The defences have largely kept commercial centres safe, but residents of other areas have been left to fend for themselves.

Around 20 km from Ayutthaya’s centuries-old temple ruins, a Unesco heritage site, residents say floods that once reached their knees now rise above their heads in some areas and can take several months to recede. Office worker Kamonchanok has been forced to commute by boat, and hoist her household appliances and other belongings above the waterline. “All we can do is deal with the consequences,” she said.

“There’s only so much we can do to adapt.” Thai irrigation department spokesman Thanet Somboon said climate change, low-lying geography and recently built embankments that altered the natural flow of the Chao Phraya have contributed to more severe flooding of downstream communities.

“Even when water is released from the Chao Phraya Dam at the same rate as before, the impact is greater than it used to be,” Thanet said.

And after irrigation channels were completely full of diverted water, he said authorities had “no choice but to discharge the remaining water downstream”.

But Thanet acknowledged that officials may need to review infrastructure to “ensure floodwater can be kept within the intended limits”.

Environmental conservationist Sasin Chalermarp said the government has done “an excellent job” managing floods across the central plains. — AFP

When good scores conceal poor service

IMAGINE a citizen leaving an office with an unresolved request while a dashboard upstairs logs another completed transaction. The employee has met the target; the institution’s score has improved. The citizen, meanwhile, must return tomorrow.

The scene raises a real question: when does better measurement produce better government?

Oman’s drive to strengthen public-sector performance deserves support. Clear expectations can recognise effort, expose bottlenecks and replace arbitrary judgements with evidence. Evidence from Europe and Asia, however, points to a persistent danger: people can become adept at satisfying an assessment while the service itself barely improves.

England demonstrates both the promise and the risk. Studies comparing hospital waiting times in England and Scotland found that targets in England reduced waits. A later study found no deterioration in the patient outcomes it examined. Well-chosen targets can focus attention and deliver public benefit.

Elsewhere in the English NHS, however, the picture was less reassuring. Bevan and Hood’s 2006 analysis described how pressure to offer GP appointments within two working days led some practices to restrict advance bookings. Patients seeking certainty encountered a barrier created by a measure intended to improve access.

The lesson is to follow the citizen’s entire journey. Faster processing is a hollow achievement if errors, repeat visits or unresolved requests increase. Reported progress should be independently verified.

Portugal brings the question of fairness into sharper focus. Introduced in 2004, its integrated appraisal system links the performance of institutions, managers and employees. The architecture makes sense: individual contribution belongs within organisational performance and leadership responsibility.

Yet a peer-reviewed survey of



AHMED AL MUKHAINI

The author is a policy analyst

Oman’s drive to strengthen public-sector performance deserves support. Clear expectations can recognise effort, expose bottlenecks and replace arbitrary judgements with evidence

2,066 Portuguese civil servants, including managers, found strongly negative perceptions of the system’s objectivity, transparency and fairness. These perceptions do not prove that services deteriorated, but they reveal a serious challenge for a reform that depends on employees accepting its judgements.

Portugal later revised its public-sector appraisal quotas. From 2025, up to 60 per cent of employees assessed could receive one of two higher ratings: up to 30 per cent could be rated “Very Good” (with “Excellent” recognition capped at 10 per cent of those assessed), and a further 30 per cent could be rated “Good”. These ratings count towards pay progression, but do not guarantee promotion. Quotas remained, although the cap on these ratings increased.

South Korea offers an even more striking illustration. A peer-reviewed study described officials in some ministries pooling performance bonuses meant to differentiate between individuals, then redistributing them among colleagues. The incentive remained on paper; its intended effect was neutralised.

Interviewees linked this practice to doubts about appraisal fairness and a desire to preserve cooperation. The study also reported improved perceptions as appraisal arrangements evolved. This evidence concerned particular organisations and periods; it was not a verdict on the entire Korean system. Nevertheless, it shows why employee trust deserves attention during implementation.

Singapore offers a constructive design lesson. Its Public Service Division has described supervisor training, greater ministry autonomy and individual development plans, introduced in 2014 to encourage regular career conversations. These arrangements show how assessment can become an ongoing process of guidance, feedback and development.

What should Oman take from these experiences?

Begin with a few objectives that matter. Meetings held, reports

submitted and training attended describe activity. The harder question is what improved as a result. Combine volume with quality, timeliness, accessibility and public benefit.

Make leaders accountable for the conditions that affect performance. Employees cannot fix inadequate systems on their own, acquire authority they do not have or resolve delays caused by another institution. Managers should identify these constraints, act on them and explain what remains unresolved. Otherwise, appraisal merely transfers responsibility downwards.

Protect fairness. Employees need clear standards, consistent application, evidence-based moderation and a credible appeals process. Where rating quotas operate, examine whether they recognise demonstrated achievement or force managers to ration recognition. Staff should know what excellent performance requires and have a realistic opportunity to attain it.

Reward cooperation. The colleague who shares expertise, prevents an error or helps another department may create value without owning the final output. Public goals such as employment, investment and regional development also require institutions to work together. Separate achievements should add up to a public result.

Finally, assess the assessment system. Review service outcomes, staff confidence, reporting burden and unintended behaviour. Low scores should prompt diagnosis and support, with proportionate consequences where warranted. High scores should withstand scrutiny. A system that demands more documentation without delivering better services needs correction.

Oman can make performance management a source of institutional learning and public trust. To do so, leaders must be willing to question comfortable numbers and lists

Now, let us return to the citizen at the counter: when the unnecessary second visit disappears, the improvement is real.

SPORTS

REGIONAL GAMES



The competitions are scheduled to take place in Muscat from November 6 to 12.

Muscat to host Mena Special Olympics racket games, golf

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, OCT 14

The Sultanate of Oman, represented by Special Olympics, will host the Racket Games and Golf competitions of the 10th Special Olympics Middle East and North Africa (Mena) Regional Games 2026, which will bring together athletes with intellectual disabilities from across the region.

The competitions are scheduled to take place in Muscat from November 6 to 12, with events in table tennis, badminton, tennis and golf. The venues will include Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex, Al Amal Club and Ghala Golf Club.

The event forms part of a new regional Games format, with competitions across 19 sports being staged throughout the year in five countries. The programme aims to provide athletes with opportunities to compete, develop their sporting abilities and prepare for future international competitions.

The organising committee in Oman is gearing up and coordinating with the relevant national sports associations to ensure preparations are completed across all four disciplines.

The coordination includes arrangements for competition venues, technical requirements and the organisation of the events in line with Special Olympics standards.

Hosting the competitions represents an important opportunity for Oman to support the development of athletes with intellectual disabilities and strengthen the country's role in promoting inclusive sport across the region.

The Muscat competitions will also provide athletes with a valuable platform to demonstrate their abilities and gain competitive experience ahead of the 2027 Special Olympics World Summer Games, which are scheduled to take place in Santiago, Chile, from October 16 to 24, 2027.

Oman has previously being represented at the Special Olympics World Games, with its athletes competing in a range of sports on the international stage.

At the 2023 World Summer Games in Berlin, Germany, Omani athletes took part in several disciplines, including athletics and bocce, gaining valuable experience while showcasing their abilities alongside athletes from around the world.

Also, Oman had continued its participation at the 2025 Special Olympics World Winter Games in Turin, Italy, where a six-athlete delegation competed in cross-country skiing, short-track speed skating and snowshoeing. These appearances reflect the country's ongoing involvement in the Special Olympics movement and underline the importance of providing athletes with regular competitive opportunities as they prepare for future regional and global events.

Al Haj hat-trick leaves Seeb searching for first points

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, OCT 14

SEEB'S AFC Champions League Two campaign suffered another setback on Tuesday as Aref al Haj scored a hat-trick to give Jordan's Al Hussein a 3-0 victory at Seeb Stadium.

The defeat was Seeb's second in Group D, following their 1-0 loss away to Iraq's Al Shorta in the opening round. Al Hussein, who drew 2-2 with East Bengal in their first match, moved into second place with four points. Al Shorta lead the group with six after beating East Bengal 3-2 on Tuesday, while the Indian side have one point and Seeb remain without a point.

Seeb began brightly in front of their home supporters. Ali al Busaidi had an early effort deflected behind for a corner, and Omar al Malki headed narrowly wide in the tenth minute. The hosts continued to find openings, but could not turn their promising approach play into a goal.

Al Hussein also threatened as the first half developed. Masoud Juma sent a header over the bar before Seeb's Zuhair al Aghbari attempted an acrobatic shot that went wide. Mohammed al Riyahi then missed one of the hosts' better chances, firing over after receiving the ball inside the penalty area.

The breakthrough came in the 42nd minute. Al Haj struck a free-kick past goalkeeper Ibrahim al Mukhaini to send the visitors into the interval ahead, despite a first half in which both teams had created opportunities.

STRONG SECOND-HALF

Al Hussein made a stronger start after the break and doubled their lead in the 55th minute. Al Mukhaini saved Al Haj's initial shot from inside the area, but the forward reacted first to the rebound and put the ball into the net.

Seeb pressed for a response. Mulham al Sinaidi shot over from distance and later forced a save from Yazeed Abu Layla,



Aref al Haj scored a hat-trick to give Jordan's Al Hussein a 3-0 victory during the AFC Champions League Two Group D match at the Seeb Stadium. — **Abdulwahid al Hamadani**



Seeb and Jordan's Al Hussein players fight for the ball at the Seeb Stadium.

while Augustine Oladapo also sent an effort above the crossbar. Axel Mayi came closest with a header in the 76th minute, but Abu Layla kept it out to preserve the visitors' two-goal advantage.

Al Haj settled the contest six minutes later.

He worked his way through the Seeb defence and lifted the ball over Al Mukhaini to complete his hat-trick. The Jordanian forward had another shot saved late on, while Mayi and substitute Abdulmajeed al Balushi were unable to find a consolation goal for the hosts.

Seeb now face a pivotal pair of matches against East Bengal.

They host the Indian club on October 27 before travelling for the return fixture on November 3. With the top two teams in the group advancing to the round of 16, Seeb need points from those meetings to revive their qualification hopes.

UTAS claim University 3x3 basketball title

RIYADH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, OCT 14

The University of Technology and Applied Sciences (UTAS) claimed the title of the 2026 Higher Education Institutions 3x3 Basketball Championship after defeating Muscat University in the final, bringing the students' competition to a close following an event that featured 11 higher education institutions.

Muscat University finished runners-up, while Sultan Qaboos University secured third place after beating the Military Technological College in the playoff for third and fourth positions. The championship featured a series of competitive encounters, highlighting the role of university sport in encouraging student participation and developing sporting talent in Oman.

Dr Ali bin Salam al Yaarubi, Chairman of the Oman University Sports Committee, said the championships form part of the committee's ongoing efforts to strengthen university sport and broaden student participation in sporting activities. He described the competitions as an important platform for identifying promising athletes, developing their abilities and fostering communication and cooperation among higher education institutions.

Al Yaarubi explained that the second 3x3 Basketball Championship for Higher Education Institutions in 2026 was the third event on the committee's sporting



UTAS won the title of the 2026 Higher Education Institutions 3x3 Basketball Championship.

calendar for the second half of the year. It followed the esports championship and the students' and women's volleyball competitions, reflecting a varied programme designed to offer students multiple opportunities to participate and compete.

A total of 11 teams were divided into two groups, with six teams in Group A and five in Group B. The preliminary stage was played on a round-robin basis, with the top two teams from each group advancing to the semifinals.

UTAS topped Group A, followed by Muscat University, while Sultan Qaboos University finished first in Group B, ahead of the Military Technological College. In the semifinals, UTAS defeated the Military Technological College, while Muscat University overcame Sultan Qaboos University to set up the final showdown. UTAS went on to secure the championship, completing a successful campaign.

VALUES OF TEAMWORK

Al Yaarubi stressed that the purpose of university competitions extends beyond winning titles and securing top positions. Such events also help students develop their skills and reinforce the values of teamwork, cooperation, discipline and sportsmanship, while encouraging physical activity as an essential part of a balanced university experience.

He added that the participation of higher education institutions reflects growing interest in university sport and their commitment to supporting students in combining academic studies with sporting activities. According to Al Yaarubi, bringing academic and sporting development together plays an important role in building students' character and strengthening their abilities in different areas.

The committee chairman also emphasised that the success of the university sports calendar should not be measured solely by the number of competitions organised. Student participation, the positive impact of sporting activities and their contribution to promoting sports awareness and healthy lifestyles are equally important indicators. Al Yaarubi concluded by thanking the participating institutions, organising committees, technical and administrative staff, and students for their cooperation and efforts in delivering the championship and supporting the wider development of university sport in Oman.

WORLD TENNIS AGM



OTA Chairman Mutasim bin Hamoud al Zadjali and board member Faisal bin Mohammed al Yousuf represented the association at the meetings.

OTA JOINS GLOBAL, ASIAN TENNIS MEETINGS IN ALMATY

SPORT REPORTER
MUSCAT, OCT 14

The Oman Tennis Association (OTA) participated in the annual general meetings of World Tennis and the Asian Tennis Federation (ATF) in Almaty, Kazakhstan, joining discussions on the sport’s development and opportunities to strengthen cooperation between national associations.

OTA Chairman Mutasim bin Hamoud al Zadjali and board member Faisal bin Mohammed al Yousuf represented the association at the meetings.

The World Tennis Conference and Annual General Meeting took place on October 12 and 13, bringing together national tennis associations to discuss priorities for the game’s growth. World Tennis was formerly known as the International Tennis Federation.

The Asian meeting, chaired by ATF president Yuriy Poltskiy, addressed a range of issues concerning tennis development across the continent. Delegates reviewed the federation’s achievements and initiatives, alongside proposals to support the sport’s continued progress in member countries.

The Asian meeting, chaired by ATF president Yuriy Poltskiy, addressed a range of issues concerning tennis development across the continent.

The agenda also included the presentation of the 2026 regional development awards, approval of the balance sheet and financial statements, and the appointment of auditors. The meeting concluded with consideration of proposals submitted by national associations under other business.

On the sidelines, Al Zadjali met presidents and representatives of several Asian tennis associations to explore opportunities for closer cooperation.

The discussions focused on sharing technical and administrative expertise and organising reciprocal training camps to support tennis development in Oman and the participating countries.



USA's Ann Li hits a return to Belarus's Aryna Sabalenka during the Wuhan Open tournament in Wuhan, in China's Hubei province on Wednesday. — AFP

Top seed Sabalenka falls at first hurdle in Wuhan

A frustrated Aryna Sabalenka suffered a second successive early exit as her bid for a fourth Wuhan Open title was foiled by American world number 31 Ann Li 3-6, 6-4, 7-6 (7/5) in round two on Wednesday.

The top-seeded Sabalenka fell to Nikola Bartunkova in the third round at the China Open last week and squandered a 6-3, 4-2 lead against Li to stumble at her very first hurdle in Wuhan.

The Belarusian four-time major winner lost her number one ranking to Elena Rybakina last month and has not won a title since March.

Playing with protective taping around her right knee, Sabalenka was in control of the match until Li swung the momentum in her direction halfway through the second set.

Sabalenka asked for the trainer when she was broken early in the decider and appeared to be struggling with her movement. Still, she was able to wipe a 2-5 deficit, saving nine match points along the way.

Li steadied the ship, though, and finished the job in two hours and 27 minutes on her 10th opportunity, to set up a last-16 clash with Indonesia’s Janice Tjen.

Meanwhile, second-seeded Jessica Pegula, the runner-up in Wuhan last year, was also sent packing.

The American suffered a 2-6, 7-6 (9/7), 6-3 upset at the hands of Jelena Ostapenko, wasting three match points en route.



Latvia's Jelena Ostapenko hits a return to USA's Jessica Pegula at the Wuhan Open. — AFP

Ostapenko is the first player to beat Pegula in her opening match at a WTA 1000 event since Indian Wells two and a half years ago, snapping Pegula’s 22-event winning streak in openers at this level.

RELENTLESS SWIATEK

Earlier, six-time Grand Slam champion Iga Swiatek launched her Wuhan Open campaign by triumphing 6-2, 6-1 in an all-Polish battle against lucky loser Magdalena Frech.

Swiatek posted her 40th victory of the season in one hour and 42 minutes and no longer has Sabalenka as a potential roadblock in the quarter-finals.

“We know each other pretty well, so I just

wanted to focus on being consistent and playing as good as possible,” Swiatek, the seventh seed, said of Frech.

“I know she is running to every ball always and sometimes using the power of the opponent, so I wanted to not play too crazy but play solid and I’m happy that I did that,” said Swiatek, who is chasing a qualification spot for the year-end WTA Finals.

Despite the lopsided scoreline the opening set was tight, lasting over an hour and requiring Swiatek to erase a 0-2 deficit and save seven of eight break points before she finally took the lead on her fourth set point.

Upping the pressure with her relentless forehand, Swiatek breezed through the second set to advance to a round of 16 meeting with American lucky loser Ashlyn Krueger.

Wimbledon finalist Karolina Muchova weathered a three-hour storm to come through 3-6, 7-6 (7/1), 7-6 (7/4) against American qualifier Caty McNally to extend her record in tie-breaks this season to a perfect 10-0.

The sixth-seeded Muchova will face Diana Shnaider in the round of 16.

British world number 170 Sonay Kartal, who missed six months this year with a spinal stress fracture, upset ninth-seeded Belinda Bencic 6-0, 7-5 to book a third-round date with Italian 15th seed Jasmine Paolini.

— AFP

Youth Handball League set for another competitive weekend

RIYADH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, OCT 14

The Oman Youth Indoor Handball League will resume on Friday with three matches in the third stage of the 2026-27 season, as clubs look to build momentum, strengthen their positions in the standings and improve their chances of reaching the second round.

With the competition progressing through its early stages, the upcoming fixtures offer teams an opportunity to assess their form, develop consistency and give their young players valuable competitive experience. Every result could prove important as the clubs seek to establish themselves in their respective groups.

In Group One, Al Khabourah will host Oman Club at 4 pm at the Al Khabourah Sports Hall. Both sides will be looking for a positive result

to strengthen their campaigns and maintain their hopes of progressing in the competition.

Muscat made an impressive statement in the previous round, recording a commanding 51-22 victory over Al Khabourah. The result highlighted Muscat’s attacking strength and gave the team a strong start to its league campaign.

The scheduled Group One match between Muscat and Al Orouba, which was due to take place at the Sur Sports Complex hall on Friday, has been postponed until further notice by the competitions committee.

Group Two will feature two matches at the Seeb Sports Hall. Al Ittihad will face Nizwa at 4 pm before hosts Seeb take on Al Amerat at 6 pm. The fixtures present an important opportunity for the participating teams to collect points and improve their standings. With



In Group One, Al Khabourah will host Oman Club at 4 pm at the Al Khabourah Sports Hall on Friday.

the league still in its early stages, consistent performances will be essential for clubs hoping to remain in contention for qualification.

Seeb will enter the match against Al Amerat encouraged by their 24-16 victory over Al Ittihad in the second round. The result gives Seeb a positive platform ahead of Friday’s encounter, while Al Ittihad will aim to respond against Nizwa and return to winning ways.

FOUR MATCHES ON SATURDAY

The league programme continues on Saturday with four matches in the fourth round, featuring two fixtures in each group. In Group One, Muscat will meet Oman Club at 4 pm at the Oman Club Sports Hall, while Al Khabourah will host Saham at the same time. Both matches will provide the teams with another opportunity to strengthen their positions and build momentum for

the coming rounds.

In Group Two, Seeb will welcome Nizwa at 4 pm at the Seeb Sports Hall, followed by the meeting between Al Ittihad and Masirah at 6 pm at the same venue.

The busy weekend schedule is expected to test the teams’ consistency and ability to recover between matches. Securing points at this stage could help clubs establish a stronger position as the competition develops.

Beyond the results, the league remains an important platform for developing young handball players, allowing them to gain match experience, improve their technical and physical abilities and compete at a higher level. The coming fixtures will therefore be significant not only for the standings but also for the continued development of the next generation of Omani handball talent.

SPORTS



Atletico Madrid players applaud fans after the Uefa Champions League match against Manchester United in Madrid. — Reuters

Atletico sink Man Utd as Viking deny Bayern in Champions League

ATLETICO MADRID beat Manchester United 2-0 in the Uefa Champions League on Tuesday as the Red Devils continued their poor run, while Bayern Munich were held 3-3 in Norway by underdogs Viking Stavanger. Elsewhere, last season's beaten finalists Arsenal eased to victory over Lille while Barcelona came from behind to beat Galatasaray but Inter Milan lost a seven-goal thriller at home to Club Brugge.

Atletico, who lost at Liverpool in their opening European encounter, took the lead inside the opening minute in the Spanish capital through Pablo Barrios. Alejandro Grimaldo struck the woodwork from a free-kick later in the first half.

Johnny Cardoso also had a goal disallowed before the break but Ademola Lookman got Atletico's second in the 79th minute, just after United defender Leny Yoro had been sent off.

The defeat continued the Old Trafford club's disappointing start to the campaign and increased the pressure on manager Michael Carrick.

They have gone five matches without a victory and have won only once in seven outings, with a trip to Italy to face Como next up in the Champions League.

"Tonight is a one-off game in judgement, it is the Champions League and a tough place to come. We are doing certain things OK," Carrick told broadcaster Amazon Prime.

Viking, who are in the Champions League after winning a first Norwegian title in 34 years, appeared to be heading for a famous win over Bayern when they led 2-0 at half-time in Stavanger. Gianni Stensness headed them in front in the second minute and Peter Christiansen ran away to double their advantage.



OLISE SENT OFF
Harry Kane pulled one back from a penalty early in the second half and then headed in his eighth goal of the season in nine games in all competitions.

Luis Diaz then converted as the match was turned completely on its head, but Bayern's



Barcelona's Spanish midfielder Fermin Lopez (CR) celebrates with Spanish forward Lamine Yamal after scoring Barcelona's second goal during the Uefa Champions League match against Galatasaray in Istanbul. — AFP

Michael Olise was sent off in the 74th minute — the France star was booked and then shown a second yellow seconds later for throwing the ball at his opponent.

He will therefore miss next week's home meeting with Arsenal.

Viking snatched a memorable draw as Herman Haugen headed home in the last minute.

Speaking to Amazon Prime, Kane said Olise "will be gutted and he has to take responsibility for it. It was a mistake, and mistakes happen. He has to learn from it. It's a shame because we have important games ahead of us."

Arsenal were too strong for Lille as the Premier League champions won 3-0 at the Emirates Stadium with goals by Jurrien Timber, Eberechi Eze and Bukayo Saka, in the space of eight second-half minutes.

Barcelona, one of the favourites to win the competition, maintained their 100 per cent record this season with a 4-1 win over Galatasaray in Istanbul.

Russian international Aleksei Batrakov gave the Turkish champions the lead and they then had another goal disallowed, but Joao Cancelo equalised before half-time.

Lamine Yamal then turned on the style, setting up goals for Fermin Lopez and Anthony Gordon early in the second half, before substitute Karim Adeyemi sealed Barca's victory.

TRESOLDI HAT-TRICK
Italy-born German striker Nicolo Tresoldi scored a hat-trick, including a penalty, as Club Brugge claimed a remarkable 4-3 win away to Inter at San Siro.

Romeo Vermant got the Belgians' other goal, with Lautaro Martinez on target twice for Inter as they succumbed to a second straight European defeat.

In other games, Villarreal came from behind to beat Napoli 3-1 in Spain while RB Leipzig beat PSV Eindhoven 1-0 with a Brajan Gruda goal after Ivan Perisic failed to convert a penalty for the Dutch side.

Sporting of Portugal won 2-0 away to Lens in France with goals by Luis Suarez and Issa Doumbia, and it was a night to remember for Sabah as the rank outsiders from Azerbaijan downed Slavia Prague 2-0 in Baku.

Jamaican international Kaheem Parris and Rwanda's Joy-Lance Mickels secured their first victory in the league phase.

Wednesday's Champions League games include reigning champions Paris Saint-Germain at Manchester City and Real Madrid at Roma. — AFP

UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE RESULTS
In Lens, France Lens (FRA) 0 Sporting (POR) 2 (Suarez 22, Doumbia 74)
In Baku Sabah (AZE) 2 (Parris 49, Mickels 88) Slavia Prague (CZE) 0
In London Arsenal (ENG) 3 (Timber 64, Eze 67, Saka 71) Lille (FRA) 0
In Madrid Atletico Madrid (ESP) 2 (Barrios 1, Lookman 79) Manchester United (ENG) 0
In Istanbul Galatasaray (TUR) 1 (Batrakov 28) Barcelona 4 (ESP) (Cancelo 43, Lopez 50, Gordon 53, Adeyemi 65)
In Milan Inter Milan (ITA) 3 (Martinez 44, 81, Bonny 90+3) Club Brugge (BEL) 4 (Tresoldi 30-pen, 63, 74, Vermant 87)
In Leipzig, Germany RB Leipzig (GER) 1 (Gruda 75) PSV Eindhoven (NED) 0
In Stavanger, Norway Viking (NOR) 3 (Stensness 2, Christiansen 38, Haugen 90) Bayern Munich (GER) 3 (Kane 54-pen, 60, Diaz 71)
In Villarreal, Spain Villarreal (ESP) 3 (Mikautadze 23, Mourino 26, Oluwaseyi 86) Napoli (ESP) 1 (Rrahmani 8)

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BUSINESS

CRUDE OIL
OMAN \$108.86
BRENT \$106.51
LIGHT \$95.51



SHORTTAKES



Ehsan Khoman, Macro Strategist at BlackRock, speaks at the ConFEAS 2026 in Muscat.

PRIVATE LISTINGS KEY TO OMAN MARKET GROWTH

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, OCT 14

Oman needs a steady pipeline of private-sector listings to turn growing international recognition into opportunities for long-term investors, Ehsan Khoman, Macro Strategist at BlackRock, told ConFEAS 2026 in Muscat.

Speaking during a panel discussion on capital markets and regional cooperation, Khoman said Oman had gained recognition from international credit rating agencies and investors following the Covid-19 pandemic. The next phase of market development, however, would increasingly depend on investment returns and the ability of private companies to access the capital market.

His comments came a week after FTSE Russell placed Oman on its Watch List for potential reclassification from Frontier to Secondary Emerging Market status.

Khoman pointed to the Muscat Stock Exchange's Alternative Investment Market as a potential route for smaller enterprises and family-owned businesses to strengthen their institutional structures, raise capital and create opportunities for liquidity.

The market offers eligible companies more flexible listing conditions, although trading is restricted to sophisticated investors.

Khoman acknowledged the contribution of the Oman Investment Authority's public offering initiatives to market development, while calling for more sustained participation by privately owned companies.

A consistent flow of private-sector issuers alongside government divestments would broaden the range of companies available to investors and support the market's next stage of expansion.

His remarks highlighted the importance of building on international recognition by expanding investment opportunities.

The availability of investable companies and their ability to deliver sustainable returns would remain central to attracting longer-term capital, he said.

Oman summit unveils new investment plans

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, OCT 14

COMPANIES announced investment plans in oil waste processing, engineering and pharmaceutical manufacturing at the Inspire Oman Investors Summit 2026 on Wednesday, as Oman seeks to attract capital and expand private-sector partnerships.

Premium Global Group announced plans to invest \$10 million in a facility for the partial refining and processing of oil waste in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm. Hotpack and Sea Pride signed a memorandum of understanding in the packaging sector.

Other announcements included an engineering and manufacturing facility by E M Badr El-Din & Co, a pharmaceutical manufacturing investment by Avenzo Pharma in Khazaen Economic City and Al Fardan's launch of the Bianca Luxury project in the same economic city.

The summit, held under the theme 'Where Vision Meets Investment', brought together investors, business leaders and other stakeholders to discuss opportunities across Oman's economy.

Held under the auspices of HH Sayyid Mohammed bin Salim al Said, it was attended by Faisal bin Abdullah al Rawas, Chairman of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI).

Al Rawas said Oman's location along global trade routes, proximity to markets in the GCC, Asia and Africa, and investment in ports, economic zones and industrial cities strengthened its appeal to regional and international investors.

He said efforts to diversify the economy were accompanied by improvements to legislative and regulatory frameworks, simpler business procedures and the expansion of digital services.

Changes in global supply chains,



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a growing emphasis on energy and food security, and advances in technology and industry were increasing the importance of investment destinations offering stability, competitiveness and access to markets, he said.

The summit provided an opportunity to strengthen economic ties, identify investment opportunities and develop partnerships, Al Rawas added.

Prashant Pise, India's Ambassador to Oman, said opportunities in both countries offered scope for Omani and Indian companies to establish joint ventures, combine expertise and resources, and expand into regional and international markets.

He described the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement between Oman and India as a significant step towards increasing bilateral trade and investment.

The agreement would create opportunities for businesses in both countries and support the further development of their economic partnership, he said.

Abdul Latheef Moideen Kunhi, an OCCI board member and head of its Foreign Investment Committee, said Oman's transport networks, logistics services and economic and free zones supported investment in production, trade and exports.

These advantages could help attract investment, increase the private sector's contribution to economic activity and develop projects that add value to the economy, he said.

Shabeer K A, Director of Lulu Hypermarket in Oman, urged established investors to encourage other businesses to explore the market. "The Sultanate of Oman offers numerous opportunities across diverse sectors and plays a crucial role in the current global landscape", he said.

He added that opportunities were available to businesses of all sizes, reflecting the range of investment prospects across the country.

Panel discussions examined entrepreneurial experiences and investment opportunities in the circular economy, energy efficiency and fisheries. Participants also discussed how environmental solutions could be developed into commercially scalable businesses.

Other sessions focused on artificial intelligence and innovation, including their potential to improve business operations, raise efficiency and strengthen competitiveness.

Discussions also explored how modern technologies could support organisational development and open new avenues for growth.

Oman advances geothermal energy study of natural hot springs

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, OCT 14

Nama Power and Water Procurement Company (Nama PWP) has floated a new consultancy tender to advance investigations into the geothermal energy potential of natural hot springs in northern Oman, marking a further step towards assessing the commercial viability of this largely untapped renewable energy resource.

The tender, titled 'Provision of Techno-Economic Consultancy Services for the Hot Springs Geothermal Project - Phase 2 and 3', builds on an earlier initiative launched in April 2025 to assess geothermal prospects in an area extending from Fanja in the Wilayat of Bidbid to Al Ansab in the Wilayat of Bausher.

According to the announcement, the latest tender (OPWP/2026/042) invites qualified and experienced



The consultancy tender marks a further step towards assessing the commercial viability of geothermal energy resources in the Sultanate of Oman.

geothermal consultancy firms to undertake a comprehensive programme of geological, geochemical and deep geophysical investigations, geothermal resource assessment and three-dimensional conceptual modelling.

The scope also encompasses site selection, preliminary techno-economic assessment and preparation of a temperature-gradient drilling programme, potentially paving the way for more detailed subsurface exploration.

Significantly, the tender includes an optional third phase covering drilling tender support and supervision, post-drilling resource assessment, and detailed feasibility and development studies. These activities would

help determine whether the identified geothermal resources can be harnessed commercially for electricity generation or other energy applications. Bids must be submitted by November 30, 2026.

The initiative follows Nama PWP's April 2025 invitation for consultancy proposals covering Phase 1 of the Hot Springs Geothermal Project, which envisaged a feasibility assessment of geothermal resources at pre-identified locations between Fanja and Al Ansab.

Northern Oman hosts several naturally occurring thermal springs, including those at Bausher and Fanja, where groundwater circulating through deep geological faults and fractures is heated by the Earth's natural geothermal gradient.

Other prominent geothermal manifestations include Ain Al Kasfa in Al Rustaq, where spring temperatures can exceed 45°C, and

Ain Al Thowarah in Nakhal.

The initiative complements broader efforts to evaluate Oman's geothermal resources. In 2022, the Ministry of Energy and Minerals signed an agreement with global technology company SLB to assess the country's geothermal potential, with Oman Investment Authority also collaborating in the initiative.

Earlier research by Sultan Qaboos University has identified geothermal reservoirs in Oman characterised by low-temperature resources of around 70-90°C and medium-temperature resources of 100-174°C.

While their suitability for commercial electricity generation remains to be established, these resources could potentially support direct heating, cooling and other industrial applications, contributing to Oman's wider energy diversification and decarbonisation objectives.

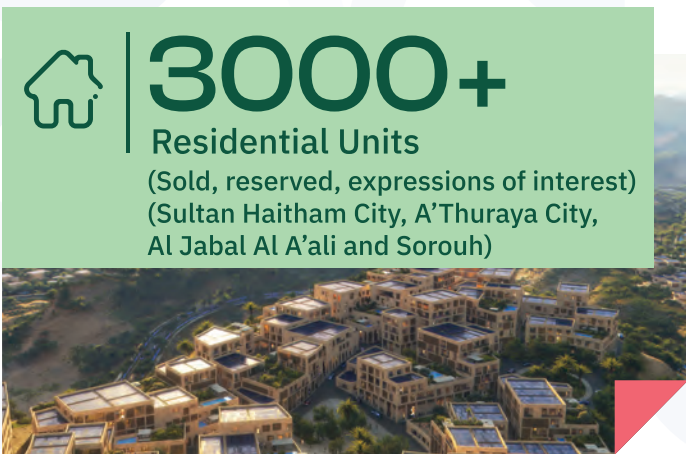


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5 October 2026 | Muscat, Oman
World Habitat Day
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The NUMBERS BEHIND
The IMPACT



220+
Participating
Entities



50+
Participating
Countries



100+
Speakers
& Experts



85+
Research
Papers



65+
Local & International
Real Estate Developers



25
SME
Projects



35.6 Million
Impressions



365,362
Engagements



2,226
Mentions



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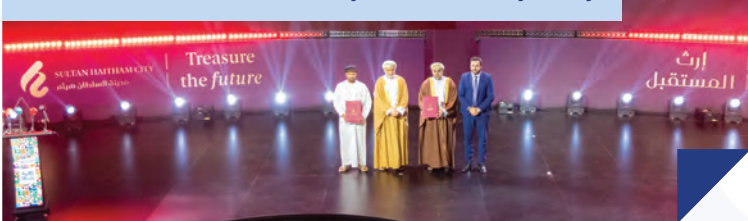
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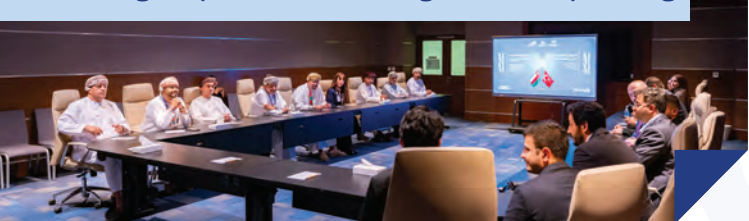
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OPINION

Why do governments pay attention to small enterprises?



HAIDER AL LAWATI
haiderdawood@hotmail.com

The writer is a Muscat-based economic analyst who previously worked for CBO and OCCI

In recent years, the media have devoted considerable attention to the difficulties faced by some Omani-owned small enterprises and the challenges they encounter in their day-to-day operations. This is where the government has an important role to play in mitigating the negative effects affecting these enterprises.

Many of these challenges can be addressed by reducing administrative procedures and simplifying requirements, to able them to achieve success and long-term sustainability.

The number of enterprises registered with the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority (Riyada) reached 130,359 at the end of last year.

Of these, 110,479 were micro-enterprises, 18,804 were small enterprises, and 1,076 were medium-sized enterprises. These enterprises are classified primarily according to their annual revenues and the number of employees they have. Here, it is important to emphasise the need to unify the statistics published by the various authorities concerned with small and medium enterprises.

There are currently significant variations between the figures published by Riyada, the National Centre for Statistics and Information, the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and others. Some data indicate that the total

number of registered SMEs in Oman has reached around 270,000, of which more than 130,000 are registered with Riyada.

There is no doubt that many of these enterprises are currently facing a number of challenges and difficulties, some of which are related to markets and business opportunities.

They need access to small government contracts and tenders to secure their day-to-day operations and maintain business continuity. Such opportunities give them a better chance of surviving and meeting their financial obligations to banks and financing institutions.

Another major challenge is the rising cost of doing business, including fees and Omanisation requirements imposed on these enterprises. They also face difficulties in securing working capital and maintaining adequate liquidity during their operations.

In response, the relevant authority has introduced a number of programmes aimed at empowering these enterprises and supporting the financing of working capital, contracts, exports and other business needs.

This situation requires appropriate policies, legislation and streamlined procedures that enable small enterprises to obtain licences and access the various forms of support and business-enabling facilities available to them.

Some believe that the solution lies in allocating genuine business opportunities

The number of enterprises registered with the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority (Riyada) reached 130,359 at the end of last year. Of these, 110,479 were micro-enterprises, 18,804 were small enterprises, and 1,076 were medium-sized enterprises.

to these enterprises. This could include implementing Ministry of Finance decisions to allocate 10% of government purchases and tenders to small enterprises, while distributing such opportunities geographically among eligible beneficiaries.

It is equally important to accelerate the payment of government dues owed to these enterprises, and to reduce the financial burden them during their early years of operation.

One option worth examining is the possibility of deferring certain fees and tax obligations until enterprises have had sufficient time to become profitable. In other words, the economic burden imposed on a business should be linked, to a reasonable extent, to its actual capacity to bear such costs during its initial years.

Such measures would help small enterprises remain in business, increase their annual sales, employ more Omani workers, and gradually to grow. They would also contribute to increasing local added value.

Small enterprises have the potential to create employment opportunities for young people in the future, diversify the economy and reduce excessive dependence on traditional sectors or large companies.

They can further contribute to the development of Oman's governorates and regions, increase domestic production, and provide a wide range of goods and services to larger companies.

ALUMINIUM’S CALM BELIES LINGERING SUPPLY-CHAIN STRESS

ANDY HOME

Iranian missile attacks on Gulf smelters and the blocking of the Strait of Hormuz have knocked out almost 3 million metric tonnes of aluminium production capacity. Yet, eight months on, the market is seemingly unconcerned.

Indeed, London Metal Exchange (LME) three-month aluminium is now trading just above \$3,000 per tonne, which is where it was in early February before the US and Israel unleashed Operation Epic Fury against Iran.

Traders are betting that a combination of rising output in Indonesia and higher product exports from China can tide things over until the Gulf smelters are repaired and shipping fully resumes in the Strait of Hormuz.

The surface calm, however, masks lingering stress in a physical supply chain that is still reeling from the unprecedented disruption.

Gulf production of primary aluminium slumped by an annualised 2.8 million tonnes between February and May, according to the International Aluminium Institute.

The collapse reflected the forced shutdown of Emirates Global Aluminium's Al-Taweelah smelter and damage to Aluminium Bahrain's facility, as well as logistics problems at other Gulf operators.

Regional production has since been creeping higher as both plants undergo repairs and ramp production back up, but the August run-rate of 3.5 million tonnes annualised was still 2.6 million tonnes below pre-hostility levels.

China and Indonesia have stepped in to plug the gap. China's exports of primary metal are constrained by a hefty 30% export duty, but outbound volumes of alloy doubled year-on-year to 349,000 tonnes in the January to August period.

Exports of semi-finished products such as aluminium plate, sheet and strip surged by 774,000 tonnes to 4.46 million tonnes over the same period.

Indonesia's new Chinese-owned smelters are also ramping up at speed. The country exported 114,000 tonnes of primary metal in July, a fresh monthly record.

Around half of last year's Indonesian aluminium exports went to China but shipments since the Iran war have been dispersed across Asia, Europe and even the US.

Improved availability in Asia has caused physical premiums to ease from their June highs.

Japanese buyers have negotiated a fourth-quarter delivery premium of \$255 per tonne over the LME cash price, which marks a 35% decline from the previous quarter.

However, that's still higher than the \$200-per-tonne premium that was trading at the start of the Iran war, attesting to continued tension even in this relatively well-supplied part of the market.

European buyers are paying significantly more for their physical metal. — Reuters

Top UK fintechs call for end of stamp duty

THE Group representing the UK's fastest growing fintech companies has called for the government to scrap stamp duty on shares to boost London's flagging initial public offering market.

Innovate Finance — which counts Revolut, Monzo and Zitch among its members — has called for the Treasury to ditch the 0.5 per cent levy on UK stocks to boost British equity ownership and revive the London Stock Exchange's appeal.

Ousted Chancellor Rachel Reeves introduced a three-year stamp duty holiday for new listings in her 2025 budget, which the body described as “welcome” but the move has failed to so far translate into new listings.

“Now is the time to abolish stamp duty on UK listed shares in entirety”, Innovate Finance said in a new report.

“Abolishing stamp duty on UK shares would remove this competitive disadvantage, encourage greater domestic investment, strengthen London's attractiveness for IPO's and help reverse the decline in British ownership of UK companies”.

Tax receipts for the shares levy rose 35 per cent in the 2024 to 2025 financial year, totalling some £4.3 billion. Despite Reeves' intervention in her final Budget, pressure has remained high on policymakers to improve conditions for companies considering a float in the City.

Officials have courted the fintech industry — many of which are vocal about their ambitions for a public debut — in hopes of luring them towards a London listing.

The boss of fintech unicorn Thought Machine previously said that Reeves' changes were not “big enough to really change anybody's mind either for or against” listing in the UK.

Innovate Finance said the tax made raising capital in the UK more expensive and dissuaded domestic investment.

Meanwhile — UK equity funds have been hit with another month of outflows after investors dumped stocks in favour of cash and bonds.



ANDY JALIL
andyjalil@aol.com

The writer is our foreign correspondent based in the UK

Ousted Chancellor Rachel Reeves introduced a three-year stamp duty holiday for new listings in her 2025 budget, which the body described as “welcome” but the move has failed to so far translate into new listings.



People walk across a square at lunchtime in the financial district of Canary Wharf as Britain enters the third heatwave of the year in London. — Reuters

Investors withdrew a net £601 million from UK stock funds during August a broader £315 million net outflow across global equity strategies.

The retreat marks the fourth consecutive month of net selling globally and the 14th month of UK equity outflows over the past 15, according to the Latest Fund Flow Index from funds network Calastone. Since June 2025, investors have pulled £15.16 billion from equity funds.

European stock funds registered £145 million of outflows while North American funds lost around £3 million. Edward Glyn, head of Global markets at Calastone, said selling in the UK had been compounded by caution over potential tax hikes at the Budget this month.

“Continuous Budget speculation is adding to that caution. If investors believe capital gains and pension tax breaks are in the firing line, some of them have a reason to act now rather than risk delay”, he said.

Chancellor John Healey did little to quash Budget speculation in a speech last month where he refused to rule out tax hikes in the forthcoming Budget on numerous occasions. Healey is facing

amplified pressure from the global bound rout that has sent borrowing costs soaring. Some economists have forecast that the £23.6 billion left in fiscal headroom could be slashed in half following downward pressure on gilts.

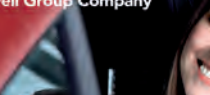
August, according to latest figures, marked the strongest month for money market funds since November, while bond inflows continue to attract healthy sums, Glyn added.

Instead of abandoning financial markets entirely, capital was being re-routed into fixed income, money markets and real assets offering steadier income and downside protection, he said.

Safe-haven money market funds, which invest almost exclusively in short-term, high-quality debt issued by governments and top-rated financial institutions, enjoyed their strongest monthly inflow since November taking in a net £364 million. This was double the 12-month average.

Meanwhile, bond funds landed £407 million in net new capital, securing its fourth straight month of positive inflows. Cash and fixed income strategies combined have absorbed £8.7 billion since equity outflows began last summer.

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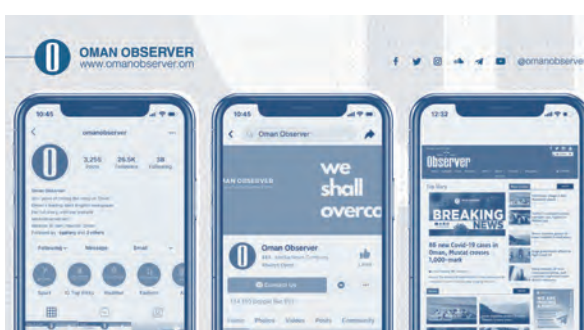
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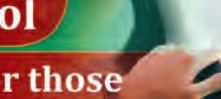
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ART/LIFE



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HOLLYWOOD SCOOP

TECH SCAMMER FOCUS OF NEW DOC



Disgraced Theranos founder Elizabeth Holmes, who spoke to former president Bill Clinton at an event in 2015, is the subject of a new documentary. — AFP

The private life of disgraced Silicon Valley startup founder Elizabeth Holmes will soon be aired to the public in a startling new documentary filmed in the 34 days before she went to prison.

The film from Nathan Fielder and Lance Oppenheim, out in US theatres on October 16, captures the former executive’s world before her incarceration for fraud at her now-defunct health technology company Theranos.

Theranos falsely touted technology capable of performing medical tests using only a few drops of blood. The project took Silicon Valley by storm in the early 2010s, but Holmes’s fall proved just as rapid. Her sensational trial ended in her 2022 sentencing to more than 11 years in prison for fraud and conspiracy.

The scandal inspired a book, podcasts and the mini-series “The Dropout”, starring Amanda Seyfried.

Holmes herself shied from the public eye, making the surprise release of “You Can See Everything” all the more astonishing when it debuted to high praise at the Telluride Film Festival in September.

The film follows her life at home with partner Billy Evans and their two children, a hybrid of documentary and reality television that drew laughter, gasps and applause at a Los Angeles screening this week.

The Canadian comedian, writer and producer Fielder is famous for harnessing the power of awkwardness, cringe and deadpan wit to great, if unsettling, comedic effect.

Fielder and Oppenheim said Holmes initiated conversations with entertainment company A24 about documenting her daily life, later inviting them into her California home.

The directors described their experience as “really sad and hard at times”.

Fielder, behind “The Rehearsal” and “Nathan For You”, said there was “never a great explanation” for choosing him, “or why you would want to spend your last month of freedom in a decade with this guy”.

“I like to see myself as like a nice person overall, but still, I wouldn’t choose me.”

Fielder is a constant presence in the documentary, a decision made on the fly. Close-up shots of him face-to-face with Holmes have already become social media memes.

Early images released by A24 show Holmes maintaining intense, unnerving eye contact with Fielder, scenes that made even him “uncomfortable”.

“At a certain point, I was like, ‘I’m not going to stop.’ If she’s looking at me, I’m just going to keep looking at her.” The directors said living under the same roof as their subjects created tensions and saw Evans try to exert control over production.

But the filmmakers were never thrown out.

Neither Holmes nor Evans has seen the finished film, the directors said. She remains in prison.

— AFP

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



CULTURE

Chief Sachem of the Narragansett Indian Tribe takes part in the Calumet dance during an Indigenous People’s Day event in the US.

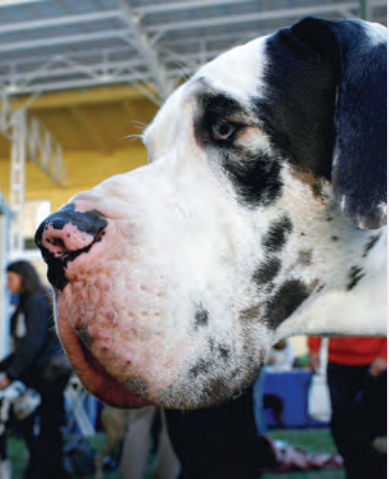
— AFP



FANS

A vendor sells products bearing pictures of members of BTS outside Estadio San Marcos before a concert by the South Korean.

— Reuters



FURRY FRIENDS

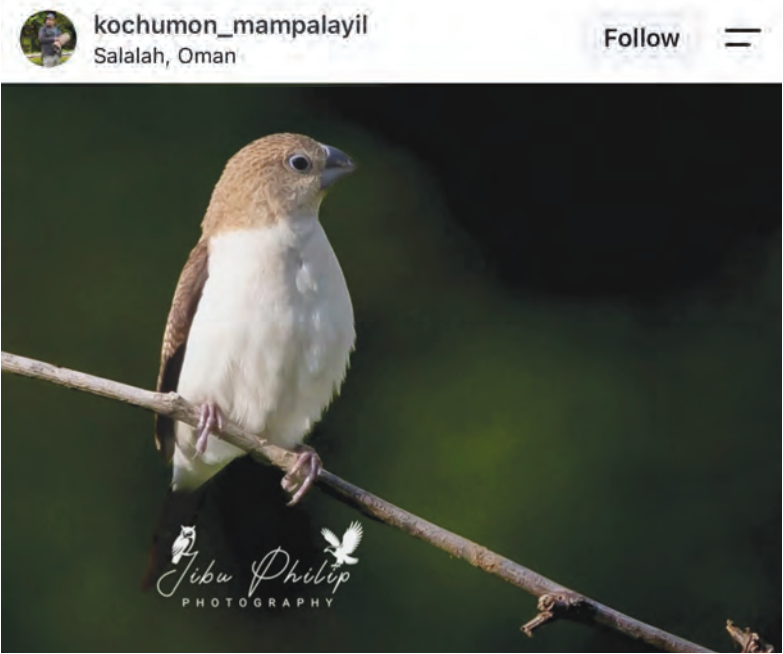
A Great Dane looks at a Yorkshire terrier during an International dog show in Budapest, Hungary.

— Reuters

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LENA DUNHAM’S ‘GIRLS’ TO RETURN IN LIMITED RUN



Cast member Zosia Mamet during the premiere of the third season of the show in New York in 2014. — Reuters

Lena Dunham’s award-winning television show “Girls” will return to screens for a limited run, HBO said on Tuesday.

The five-episode revival is set to begin production next year, a decade after the original series finale aired.

Dunham, who created, wrote and starred in the show, will reprise her role as Hannah alongside Allison Williams as Marnie, Jemima Kirke as Jessa, Zosia Mamet as Shoshanna and Andrew Rannells as Elijah.

“I’ve missed these characters, but for a long time I couldn’t quite picture them in the present day”, Dunham said in a statement.

“Then, right around my fortieth birthday, they started talking to me in the shower”, she said. “And, as you may remember, once this fivesome starts talking it’s pretty hard to get them to stop”.

HBO announced the show’s

return in a social media post featuring Dunham on a mock video call with members of the original cast.

In the video, Dunham asks whether the cast members are in before raising another question: “Can we still call it ‘Girls’?”

Adam Driver, who played Hannah’s on-off love interest, was not mentioned in the announcement.

In her memoir “Famesick”, Dunham accused Driver of aggressive behaviour on the set of “Girls”. Driver has not commented publicly on the allegations.

The original series followed the lives of women in their twenties in New York, with critics describing it as a defining portrayal of the social mores of that generation.

The show received 19 Emmy nominations and won two awards during its six seasons.

— AFP

Following the Wind: From Masirah to Mozambique



The Female Collective brought women from Oman and around the world together on Mozambique’s Inhaca Island.



The 10-day trip combined kitesurfing with yoga, mobility and wellbeing activities.

PHOTO CREDIT: AZZAN AL SINANI

NAJAH AL RIYAMI

A group of women from Oman and around the world came together on Mozambique’s Inhaca Island for The Female Collective, a 10-day kitesurfing experience held in collaboration with Beyond XP.

Held from September 17 to 26, the trip brought together women of different nationalities and riding levels. Time on the water was accompanied by yoga, mobility and wellbeing activities. Each rider arrived with her own goals, while the island offered a chance to experience unfamiliar conditions within a wider female kite community.

For the Omani women taking part, the journey reflected their growing thirst for adventure and extreme sports, with women stepping boldly outside of their comfort zone.

From beginners to riders with years of experience, women are now flying as high as the men on Oman’s waters.

“Our idea is to create a movement that brings women together through sport, while promoting wellness and wellbeing.

We want to encourage more women to become active, explore different

Women from Oman joined riders from around the world on Mozambique’s Inhaca Island for 10 days of kitesurfing, wellbeing and shared adventure, building their skills and finding encouragement within a wider female kite community.

sports and feel supported as they progress on their own journey”, said Johanna Mueller, one of the organisers and founders of Khareef Kiteboarding, a kitesurfing school in Oman.

For Khulood Yaseen, travelling to Inhaca meant taking her first kite trip outside Oman. “I was really anxious at the beginning, with all the travelling and everything, especially as this is my first kite trip outside of Oman. But I’m so glad I came”, she said.

“There’s also a little bit of home here, with kites and friends we already know”, Khulood added. “As a female kiter, it’s also been really nice having so many women together on the water, sharing tips, encouraging each other and helping each other progress”.

Lying off the coast of Maputo, Inhaca offers a natural point of comparison with Masirah, where Oman’s kite community gathers during the summer wind season. Both islands are shaped by the Indian Ocean and the winds that draw riders to their shores, yet each offers a different experience. Masirah’s season is driven by the southwest monsoon, bringing powerful and consistent summer winds across an expansive coastline.

Riders can move between flatter water and waves, with open beaches and plenty of space forming part of the island’s appeal.

Inhaca offered a different rhythm. Shallow waters and sandbanks provide areas of flatter riding, while more exposed sections face the open ocean.

Tides transform the water throughout the day, influencing where and when riders head out.

Moving between the two meant reading unfamiliar water and adjusting to a different landscape, even for experienced riders. Away from the water, both islands offered the sense of escape that draws kitesurfers to remote destinations. The wind set the pace of each day, while the hours between sessions left time to explore and connect.

For The Female Collective, Inhaca offered more than time on the water. Familiar faces from Oman joined women they might never otherwise have met, sharing the experience both on and off the beach.

It is a connection the organisers hope to carry into future trips, opening up new destinations to women in Oman and beyond and giving them more opportunities to explore and progress together.

FEATURES

Rahma hopes to inspire understanding of invisible chronic illnesses.

BEYOND THE DIAGNOSIS: RAHMA’S JOURNEY OF RESILIENCE

IDRIS AL BALUSHI

AS OMAN approaches Omani Women’s Day on October 17, Rahma Adam’s story highlights the many forms of strength, perseverance and contribution among Omani women. Through sharing her experience with multiple sclerosis, she has turned a deeply personal journey into an opportunity to raise awareness, encourage understanding and offer hope to others facing chronic illness. Her story is a reminder that a woman’s impact is not defined by her physical abilities or circumstances, but also by her resilience, the lessons she shares and the lives she touch.

At 23, Rahma was looking forward to a future filled with hopes and possibilities. However, symptoms that began in 2015 left her searching for answers for nearly three years before she was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis (MS) in 2018.

The condition gradually changed her physical abilities, and since 2024, she has been unable to walk and relies on a wheelchair. Everyday activities that once came naturally now require assistance, patience and planning.

Despite these challenges, Rahma has found strength in her faith in Allah, embracing patience, gratitude and trust in His plan.

“I never would have chosen this journey for myself, but I believe that Allah can bring goodness out of experiences we would never have chosen”, she said.

For Rahma, viewing MS as a blessing does not mean denying its difficulties. She continues to experience challenging days, grieve what she has lost and pray for healing. However, the experience has strengthened her relationship with Allah and taught her that gratitude need not depend on favourable circumstances.

“I can grieve what I have lost and still be grateful for what remains. I can ask Allah for healing while trusting Him through the waiting”, she said.

Her journey has also reshaped her understanding of strength. Through physiotherapy, appreciating small improvements and taking life



one day at a time, she continues to navigate an uncertain future. She believes that accepting assistance does not diminish a person’s worth, dignity or potential.

Rahma has turned her personal experience into an opportunity to raise awareness about MS through social media, sharing the challenges of living with the condition alongside the lessons she has learned.

Having experienced symptoms for nearly three years before receiving a diagnosis, she understands the importance of awareness and early recognition. She hopes her story will encourage others to seek answers and help society better understand chronic illnesses.

MS affects people differently, she noted, and not every symptom is visible. People may appear well while experiencing fatigue, pain or mobility difficulties, making greater compassion and understanding essential.

Throughout her journey, Rahma has drawn strength from her faith, family and friends, as well as an online community whose prayers and heartfelt messages have helped her feel less alone. She also carries the enduring love of her late parents, whom she remembers with deep affection.

By sharing her experience, she has transformed a personal struggle into an opportunity to raise awareness, encourage understanding and offer hope to others facing chronic illness. Her story reminds us that a woman’s impact extends beyond her physical abilities or circumstances to the lessons she shares and the lives she touches.

Her message to women facing chronic illness is simple: they do not have to be strong every day or measure their worth against others.

“Do not let your hardship convince you that Allah has abandoned you, and do not wait for your circumstances to change before you allow yourself to see the blessings that remain”, she said.

For Rahma, life may look different from what she once imagined, but its possibilities remain. Through faith, hope and perseverance, she continues to find meaning in the journey ahead.