

OMAN

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EIGHT RACES OPEN
ANNUAL HORSE
RACING SEASON AT
AL RAHBA

IN BRIEF

HIS MAJESTY
GREET'S PRESIDENT
OF AZERBAIJAN

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Ilham Heydar Aliyev of the Republic of Azerbaijan on his country's Independence Anniversary. His Majesty wished the president continued success to achieve further accomplishments and fulfil the aspirations of the friendly people of Azerbaijan, expressing his hope for continued progress of cooperation and partnership between the two countries in various fields. — ONA

2ND PHASE FOR
VARSITY ADMISSION
OPENS TODAY

MUSCAT: Registration for the second sorting phase of admission for the 2026/2027 academic year begins today and continues until Saturday, October 24, the Higher Education Admission Centre (HEAC) at the Ministry of Education announced on Saturday.

The aim of the second sorting phase is to fill the seats that remained vacant in the first phase.

The available seats include several programmes at SQU, the Oman College of Health Sciences, the University of Technology and Applied Sciences, domestic and international scholarships and vocational colleges. The total number of vacant seats available for competition in this phase is 2,894. Students who have already secured a place and completed the registration process are not eligible to compete in the second phase.

The second phase of admissions targets Omani students who obtained a General Education Diploma (GED) or its equivalent for the 2025/2026 academic year and who have not previously registered in the unified admission system, or who did not secure a place in the first phase, or who were accepted but did not complete the registration process, students who were enrolled in an educational institution but withdrew as well as the students studying at their own expense.

TWO DEAD IN HOUSE
FIRE IN AL AWABI

MUSCAT: Two people died and six others sustained injuries when a fire broke out in a house in the Wilayat of Al Awabi, on Saturday. The Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority (CDAA) said that its teams in the Al Batinah South Governorate put out the fire in the house in Al Awabi and transported the injured to hospital. The CDAA extended its deepest condolences to the families of the deceased wishing the injured a speedy recovery.

HM TO PAY STATE VISIT TO THE UK

THE FIRST STATE VISIT TO THE UK SINCE 1982, FOLLOWS AN INVITATION BY KING CHARLES III

HIS Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik will pay a state visit to the United Kingdom (UK), starting from this Monday.

This came in a statement issued today by the Diwan of Royal Court, the text of which reads as follows:

“In reinforcement of the enduring historical bonds between the Sultanate of Oman and the friendly United Kingdom, and in response to the gracious invitation extended to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik from His Majesty King Charles III of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and Head of the Commonwealth, His Majesty the Sultan will pay state visit to the United Kingdom commencing Monday, 19 October 2026.

His Majesty the Sultan's visit to the United Kingdom comes within the framework of reinforcing all that would elevate the facets of cooperation existing between the two countries across various domains, and the means of developing them in service of their mutual interests and aspirations in the present and the future. During the visit, the two leaderships



will hold consultation and coordination on various developments on the regional and international arenas.

Accompanying His Majesty the Sultan during his visit will be a high-level official delegation comprising: HH Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs; HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs; HH Sayyid Lu'ai bin Ghalib al Said, Secretary-General of the Diwan of Royal Court; Sayyid Khalid bin Hilal al Busaidi, Minister of the Diwan of Royal Court; Gen. Sultan bin Mohammed al Nu'amani, Minister of the Royal Office; Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidi, Minister of Interior; Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidi, Foreign Minister; Dr. Hamad bin Said al Aufi, Head of the Private Office; Dr. Madiha bint Ahmed al Shaibani, Minister of Education; Nasser bin Khamis al Jashmi, Chairman of the Tax Authority; Hussein bin Ali bin Abdul Latif, Adviser at the Private Office; Anwar bin Hilal al Jabri, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion an Badr bin Mohammed al Manthari, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the UK. — ONA

SEE ALSO P2&3

SAUDI REPORTS
INCOMING
FIRE AS EGYPT
WEIGHS
SENDING HELP

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia said on Saturday that it had intercepted a fresh wave of incoming drones, as its ally Egypt weighed sending the kingdom help in defending against repeated attacks from Yemen's Ansar Allah.

Riyadh leads a military coalition supporting Yemen's internationally recognised government in its war with the Ansar Allah, and media affiliated with the Iran-backed

group reported on Saturday that Saudi airstrikes beginning overnight had killed at least 12 people.

Since Yemen's conflict flared back to life in July after a years-long hiatus, Saudi Arabia has faced sustained Ansar Allah missile and drone attacks targeting its oil installations, tankers and transit hubs, including one on Riyadh's airport last week that killed 13

people. A spokesman for the Saudi coalition said on Saturday that it had “intercepted and destroyed four drones over the past few hours in the regions of Riyadh, the Eastern Province, and the South”.

The interceptions came as the president of Egypt, which is also a member of the coalition, said he was willing to “carry out any measure to protect” Saudi Arabia if its leaders requested it. — AFP

EL Nino may bring more rain in Oman as temperatures stay hot

MUSCAT: Oman is facing the prospect of wetter-than-usual conditions in its northern regions and higher temperatures across the country in the coming months, with a strengthening El Niño weather pattern potentially influencing rainfall and increasing the risk of extreme weather.

A seasonal outlook issued by the Civil Aviation Authority forecasts above-average rainfall across northern Oman in October and November, while temperatures nationwide are expected to remain higher than normal through December.

According to a report by the National Multi-Hazard

Early Warning Centre and covering September 2026 to May 2027, El Niño is likely to strengthen in the coming months, reaching its peak in November and December.

Although rainfall in December is expected to remain close to seasonal averages across most of the country, northern areas could continue to experience wetter conditions. Coastal regions along the Arabian Sea, meanwhile, are forecast to receive below-average rainfall in October.

Historical climate records suggest that El Niño can significantly influence Oman's rainfall patterns, particularly in the north, where moisture flows interact



From September 2026 to May 2027, El Niño is likely to strengthen in the coming months, reaching its peak in November and December.

with weather systems approaching from the west.

An analysis of records from 1980 to 2025 found that rainfall during El Niño

54 per cent between March and May.

The centre emphasised that these figures represented historical trends, not projected rainfall increases for the coming season.

The outlook also highlighted the possibility of intense rainfall capable of causing flash floods strong winds, rough seas and hail.

The report pointed to the El Niño episodes of 1997–1998 and 2015–2016 as examples of periods associated with substantial rainfall in Oman.

In March 1997, successive episodes of heavy rain and thunderstorms produced approximately 86 millimetres of rainfall in the climate record cited by the centre,

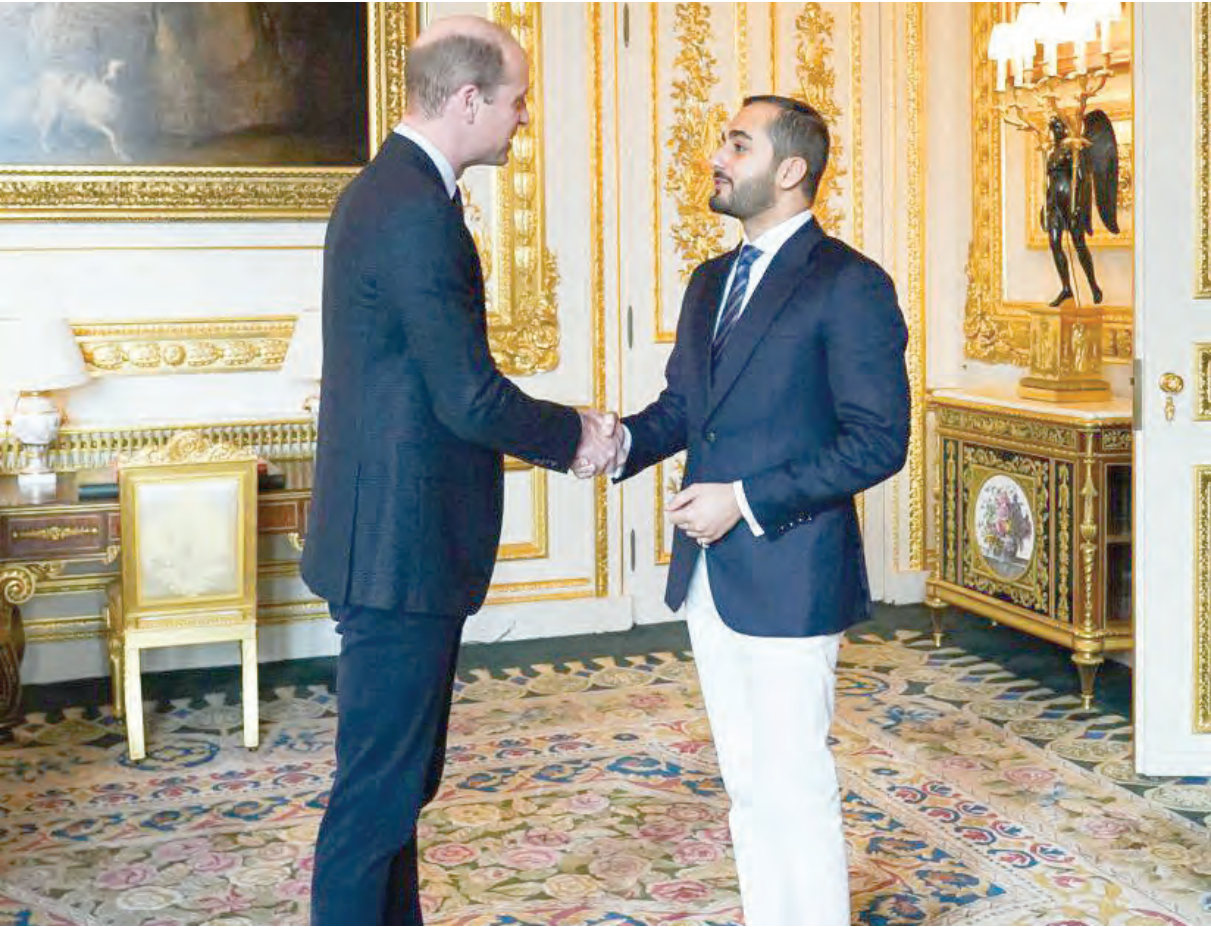
compared with a long-term average of 14.8 mm.

A similar period of severe weather occurred between March 7 and 11, 2016, when the Al Hamayil low-pressure system brought widespread thunderstorms and heavy rainfall to northern governorates.

The resulting downpours caused wadis to overflow and flooding in several areas. Al Mudhaibi recorded 120.4 mm of rainfall, followed by Al Rustaq with 105.2 mm and Bahla with 101 mm. Despite the disruption, the rainfall helped replenish water resources, increasing dam storage levels and recharging groundwater reserves in affected areas. — ONA



OMAN, UK SET TO DEEPEN STRATEGIC TIES AS HM BEGINS HISTORIC STATE VISIT



The Sultanate of Oman and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland are bound by deeply rooted historical relations extending over several centuries, translated into cooperative partnerships across numerous fields.

As an extension of these venerable relations, the state visit of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq to the United Kingdom from Monday, at the invitation of His Majesty King Charles III of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and Head of the Commonwealth, affirms the firmly established Omani-British friendship and the keenness of the leaderships of the two countries to continue strengthening it across various fields in a manner that secures further benefits and interests.

His Majesty the Sultan has been keen to develop Oman's relations with the various countries of the world and to entrench the principles of its Renaissance, founded upon mutual respect, the establishment of the values of international peace and security, and the maximisation of common benefits.

In this context, His Majesty met King Charles III at Windsor Castle in the English county of Berkshire in July 2025, where emphasis was placed during the meeting on ways to invest these robust historical relations between the two friendly countries in a manner that contributes to realising mutual interests and future visions and meets the aspirations of the peoples of the two countries. The awarding by the late Queen Elizabeth II to His Majesty the Sultan in 2021 of the distinguished honorary Order of the Knight

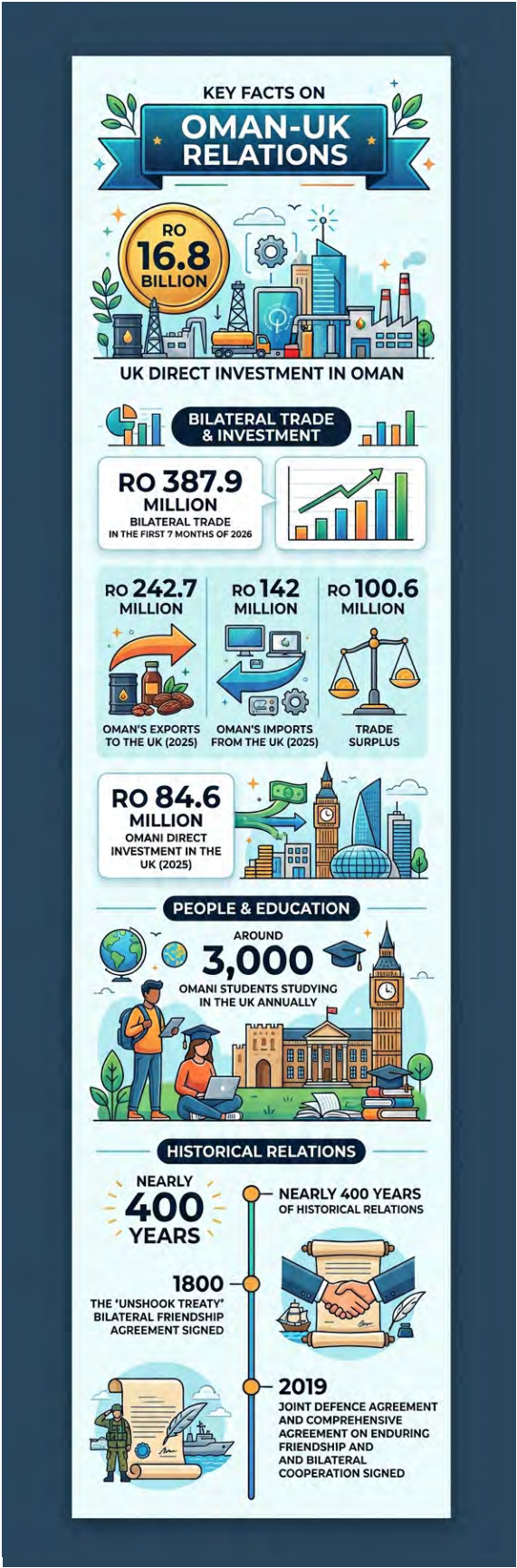
Grand Cross further affirms the depth of these relations and the bonds uniting the two countries and their peoples.

In pursuit of elevating strategic partnerships, enhancing interests and opening broader horizons for cooperation, His Majesty has been keen to meet British Prime Ministers. The past years have likewise witnessed intensive meetings between senior officials of the two countries, aimed at expanding and creating new partnerships for bilateral cooperation, strengthening historical ties and broadening the partnership in the political, economic and cultural fields in a manner that realises the common interests of the two countries and their friendly peoples. Among these meetings was that of HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham Al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs, with His Royal Highness Prince William of Wales, at Windsor Castle.

Since the two friendly countries signed the UnshookTreaty more than 200 years ago, relations have witnessed steady growth across various fields, crowned by the signing of the Joint Defence Agreement in February 2019 and the Comprehensive Agreement on Enduring Friendship and Bilateral Cooperation in May of the same year.

These reflected the keenness of the two countries to deepen and unify shared visions in service of their security, stability and the prosperity of their peoples, as well as to enhance military cooperation embodied in numerous aspects of close cooperation and joint bilateral exercises, the most recent of which was Exercise Swift Sword 3 'Al Saif Al Sareea 3' held in October 2018.

In turn, the Comprehensive Agreement on Enduring Friendship and Bilateral



Cooperation affirms the shared commitment of the two friendly countries to work together across several sectors, including the political, military, cultural, economic, investment, tourism and other fields.

In January 2022, the Sultanate of Oman, represented by Oman Investment Authority (OIA), and the UK, represented by the UK Office for Investment (OfI), signed an investment partnership agreement in the capital, London, aimed at strengthening the bonds of ties and increasing the volume of high-value investments in both countries.

The signing of the agreement came

within the framework of a memorandum of understanding between the UK Office for Investment and Oman Investment Authority, in reinforcement of bilateral economic relations. The agreement targets investment in specific fields such as the clean energy sector and information technology.

Statistics issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) indicate that the trade balance between the Sultanate of Oman and the United Kingdom recorded in 2025 a surplus in favour of the Sultanate of Oman amounting to RO 100.6 million, with the total trade exchange between the two countries reaching RO 384.7 million.

The statistics showed that the total Omani exports to the United Kingdom in 2025 reached approximately RO 242.7 million, while the value of Omani imports from the United Kingdom reached approximately RO 142 million.

Preliminary statistics indicated that the total trade exchange during the first seven months of 2026 reached RO 387.9 million, with the volume of Omani exports to the United Kingdom reaching approximately RO 139 million, while the volume of Omani imports from the United Kingdom reached approximately RO 248.9 million.

From the statistics, it may be observed that the volume of UK direct investment in the Sultanate of Oman is in continuous growth, rising from RO 14.9 billion in 2024 to RO 16.1 billion in 2025. The volume of UK direct investment in the Sultanate of Oman reached, by the end of the second quarter of 2026, RO 16.8 billion.

The total number of institutions in which there is investment from the United Kingdom in 2026 reached approximately 32 institutions. The statistics showed that the volume of Omani direct investments in the United Kingdom in 2025 reached approximately RO 84.6 million.

Regarding the movement of the number of visitors arriving in the Sultanate of Oman from the United Kingdom through legal outlets, their number rose from 93,700 visitors to 103,500 visitors in 2025, and their number reached, by the end of September 2026, 61,886 visitors.

On another front, the Oman-UK Joint Working Group, since its formation in 2010, has been working to enhance bilateral cooperation and partnership, addressing numerous topics and thorny issues and working to find appropriate solutions for them. The Group also addresses topics related to commercial and investment aspects, with the 18th round of the Group's meetings held in early September 2026 in Muscat. It discussed the broadening of the horizons of relations and benefiting from British expertise and experiences in the fields of developing education, vocational training and sports, and revitalising tourism movement and enhancing cultural exchange and participation between the two countries.

Numerous associations have arisen between the Sultanate of Oman and the United Kingdom, foremost among them the British Omani Society, which was founded in 1976 and enjoys the Royal patronage of His Majesty the Sultan. This Society weaves ties from the standpoint of the firmly established roots of friendship and shared values, to enhance mutual understanding between cultures and to enable the next generation to shape a shared prosperous future between the Sultanate of Oman and the United Kingdom.

It also works to enhance education and cultural exchange by maximising understanding between the British and Omani publics of one another, through holding lectures, seminars and social events, as well as providing scholarships and educational assistance.

The Omani-British Friendship Association, meanwhile, seeks to promote trade, partnership and the exchange of commercial and industrial investments between businesspeople in the Sultanate of Oman and Britain, and to develop relations between the two countries in the fields of education, culture, tourism and sports. The Strategic Consultation Team between the Sultanate of Oman and the United Kingdom was also established to support economic diversification between the two friendly countries, through coordination in the fields of investment, financial reform and diversification strategies.

Badr bin Mohammed al Manthari, Oman's Ambassador to the United Kingdom, affirmed that the forthcoming Royal Visit of His Majesty to the United Kingdom represents an important milestone in the march of Omani-British relations, which are firmly established historical relations founded upon friendship, trust and mutual respect, and which have, over long decades, been able to evolve and keep pace with changes.

TURN TO P3

SHORTTAKES



Mona Hawwa,
Palestinian journalist



Hajar Bayoud from Al
Sharq Bloomberg

OMANI WOMEN
HAILED AS ROLE
MODELS IN NATIONAL
DEVELOPMENT



Mabrouka Khadhir
from Tunisia



Samia Mohammed
Ayes, journalist and
digital media trainer

MUSCAT: Several international media professionals and trainers said that Omani women serve as role models in the nation's development. They have successfully established their presence across diverse fields, making their competence and hard work tangible tools for contributing to the development of their society.

Fairouz Mubaideen, Director-General of the Jordan News Agency, noted that the role of Omani women has evolved significantly over the past decades in various fields, including education, employment, management, the economy, culture and media.

She highlighted that the policies of the Sultanate of Oman have contributed to supporting women's education and empowering them to participate in public life.

She pointed out that the empowerment of Omani women is evident in their attainment of leadership positions and their participation in government, diplomacy, the economy and culture, while preserving the unique character and values of Omani society.

Mabrouka Khedir, international media development trainer based in Tunisia, remarked that discussing Omani women today is a reflection on a journey of progress and ambition, and a testament to women who have successfully asserted their presence across a wide range of fields.

Hadjer Bioud, presenter at Asharq Bloomberg, explained that Omani women have secured their rights and contributed to their country's development. They serve as successful and confident role models with a strong leadership presence.

Mouna Hawa, Palestinian journalist and writer, said that the presence of women reflects a deep awareness of their place in society and confidence in what they can contribute, as they play an active role in shaping their society. She pointed out that Omani women are present throughout state institutions, the workforce and the fabric of daily life. — ONA

Women urged to embrace AI, new opportunities

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, OCT 17

OMANI WOMEN have immense opportunities to advance in education, leadership, digital technology and entrepreneurship while remaining rooted in their cultural identity and values, says Dr Azza al Busaidi, Fulbright Visiting Scholar at the University of South Carolina and Assistant Professor and Head of the Marketing and Logistics Unit at the University of Technology and Applied Sciences.

She encouraged young women to move beyond simply using technology and develop the skills to understand, question and shape it, particularly as artificial intelligence, digital marketing



Dr Azza al Busaidi, Fulbright
Visiting Scholar, University of South
Carolina, Assistant Professor

and consumer research create new academic and professional opportunities.

Al Busaidi said Omani women could play a greater role in shaping how the country's destinations, cultural heritage, organisations and national identity are presented to the world, in line with the ambitions of Oman Vision 2040.

She highlighted the growing intersection of technology, consumer behaviour and sustainability, noting that artificial intelligence could offer new ways to understand consumer emotions, improve digital experiences and encourage responsible engagement with cultural and natural heritage.

She also urged women to pursue

their ambitions without feeling compelled to choose between professional and personal identities, emphasising that women could be academics, researchers, leaders, entrepreneurs and mothers without being confined to a single definition of success. As a Fulbright Visiting Scholar, she is pursuing academic engagement in an environment that supports research, collaboration and cultural exchange.

On Omani Women's Day, she described women as a beautiful mosaic, with individual experiences and differences combining to create a richer collective picture. She said the occasion was not only an opportunity to celebrate the progress achieved by Omani women, but also to recognise the opportunities that lie ahead.

Omani women advance
policing, digital forensics

LT MOHAMMED AL MADASARI
MUSCAT, OCT 17

OCTOBER 17

MARKS
OMANI
WOMEN'S
DAY,

celebrating women's contributions to education, healthcare, technology, business, and other professional fields. On this occasion, the Royal Oman Police (ROP) celebrates its female personnel, who are dedicated to maintaining security, preserving public order, and safeguarding the lives and property of citizens and residents.

Reflecting on this commitment, Major Thuraya bint Ahmed al Kalbani, Head of the Press and Publishing at the Directorate of Relations and Security Information, said, "I feel the trust that our leadership has placed in us. Every morning when I wear my uniform, I feel that I represent thousands of female ROP personnel who have given their all for the nation's security." She added, "This day sheds light on the capability of Omani women to serve on the front lines, carrying out their duties with unwavering dedication and competence."

Beyond front-line operations, women have contributed significantly to the development of the ROP's policing services, setting an example of excellence in governance and institutional performance. Highlighting this impact in specialised fields, Lieutenant Safia bint Salim al Hakmani, a Psychologist at the Directorate-General of Planning and



Royal Oman Police celebrates its female personnel on Omani
Women's Day.

The future
holds huge
opportunities
for women to
expand their
contributions
across diverse
fields, lead
initiatives that
serve the public,
and enhance the
quality of services
provided to the
community

Development, said, "I am committed to applying the knowledge and skills I have gained through my specialisation to improving work processes and leading initiatives that enhance the quality of services provided to the community."

Indeed, female officers and other ranks within the ROP play a key role in institutional security, with responsibilities that extend beyond traditional policing duties to encompass public safety and the protection of individuals' rights.

Lieutenant Shaikha bint Rashid al Raisi, of the Digital Laboratory at Muscat Governorate Police Command, said, "As a forensic specialist, I examine digital evidence and extract information that assists in solving criminal cases."

She added, "Combining knowledge and technical skills has enabled me to overcome

challenges, and I am proud of the digital solutions I have developed. These include tools that help identify perpetrators' images among thousands of images in just a few minutes, as well as techniques for detecting manipulated videos, including those generated by artificial intelligence."

Within the ROP, many female officers undertake highly sensitive responsibilities in forensic genetics, a complex field that demands extensive scientific knowledge, analytical thinking, precision, and meticulous attention to detail.

Lieutenant Ghaida bint Said al Mamari, specialising in genetic and genomic science, commented, "I have developed the knowledge and skills necessary in forensic genetics to analyse genetic data and conduct DNA profiling, supporting criminal investigations, identifying suspects, and uncovering the circumstances surrounding crimes."

She emphasised, "I believe that women's participation in complex fields such as forensic genetics demonstrates our ability to handle demanding tasks, address challenges, develop solutions, and adapt to rapid technological advancements."

The achievements of Omani women reflect a distinguished journey marked by dedication, professionalism, and excellence. Looking ahead, the future holds further opportunities for women to expand their contributions across diverse fields, lead initiatives that serve the public, and enhance the quality of services provided to the community.

Women's leadership, AI and future of work in focus at US event

WASHINGTON, DC: The Sultan Qaboos Cultural Centre (SQCC), in collaboration with the Embassy of the Sultanate of Oman in Washington, DC, and in partnership with the AMENA Foundation and the Women's Foreign Policy Group (WFPG), hosted a special celebration of Omani Women's Day under the theme 'Women Lead: Leadership, Work and Innovation.'

The event welcomed distinguished ambassadors and diplomats, representatives from the US Department of State, think tank experts, university professors, journalists, women leaders, professionals, and members of the international community to celebrate the achievements of Omani women and explore their

growing contributions to diplomacy, leadership, innovation, and economic development.

The event opened with welcoming remarks by Halima al Balushi of the Sultan Qaboos Cultural Centre, followed by remarks from Counsellor Sabra al Hooti, Deputy Chief of Mission at the Embassy of the Sultanate of Oman, highlighting the important role of Omani women in the Sultanate of Oman's development and their contributions across various sectors.

Merissa Khurma, Founder and President of the AMENA Foundation, and Emma Sanderson of the Women's Foreign Policy Group (WFPG), also delivered remarks emphasising the importance of women's leadership,



SQCC, in collaboration with the Embassy
of Oman in Washington, hosted a special
celebration of Omani Women's Day.

collaboration, and international partnerships in advancing opportunities for women.

The first panel discussion,

'Women's Leadership in Diplomacy', was moderated by Merissa and featured Hunaina al Mughairi, former ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the United States, and Greta C Holtz, former US ambassador to Oman. Drawing on their extensive diplomatic experience, they reflected on women's leadership in international relations, the importance of mentorship, and the role of women in strengthening diplomatic relationships and fostering mutual understanding between nations. The programme also featured a special tribute honouring the late Nadhira al Harthi, recognising her remarkable legacy and contributions as an inspiring Omani woman.

The 2nd panel discussion, 'Women, Innovation and the Future

of Work in the MENA Region', was also moderated by Merissa, Founder and President of the AMENA Foundation, and featured Counsellor Farah al Raisi, Political Adviser and Congressional and Think Tanks Liaison at the Embassy of the Sultanate of Oman; Hiba Abdulkhalig, Senior Programme Officer at the Sultan Qaboos Cultural Centre; Gihan Elhadidy of the Women's Foreign Policy Group (WFPG); and Faria Nasruddin of AMENA Foundation.

The discussion explored the opportunities and challenges facing women in an increasingly digital world, particularly the growing influence of AI on education, employment, entrepreneurship, and leadership. — ONA

SHORTTAKES



ENVOY-DESIGNATE PRESENTS COPY OF CREDENTIALS TO BELARUS FM

MINSK: Oman’s Ambassador-designate to Belarus, Shaikh Nasser bin Sulaiman al Harthi, presented a copy of his credentials to Belarusian Foreign Minister Maxim Reznikov on Friday. During the meeting, the two sides reviewed bilateral relations and discussed ways to enhance cooperation in areas of mutual interest. — **ONA**

OMAN TO HOST 6TH SESSION OF THE INTERNATIONAL DATES COUNCIL



The meeting aims to discuss several topics related to the development of the palm and date sector.

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, will host the 6th Session of the International Dates Council. The meeting aims to discuss several topics related to the development of the palm and date sector and the enhancement of international cooperation in this field.

The meeting, featuring the participation of several member states, will involve discussions on a range of organisational and technical topics. It will review the Council’s annual report, highlight key achievements from the past period, and cover plans, programmes, and initiatives designed to support and develop the palm and date sector at both regional and international levels.

Furthermore, the Council will address topics concerning the strengthening of cooperation among member states, alongside the exchange of expertise, knowledge, studies, research, technologies, and promising practices across production, quality, processing, marketing, and international trade. These efforts aim to boost the competitiveness of date products and enhance their presence in global markets.

The meeting will also highlight the Council’s vital role in providing data and indicators on production, trade, and markets. It will support member states in developing joint projects and building partnerships with the private sector, universities, research centres, and relevant institutions, in addition to building national capacities and sharing expertise in innovation, sustainability, and value chains.

Additionally, the session will review state memberships and the opportunities they offer to enhance member states’ participation in shaping trends, strategies, and initiatives for the future of the palm and date sector. It will also focus on fostering cooperation in standards, quality, food safety and international market access. — **ONA**



The school administration announces a public tender for the **sale of used furniture**. Sealed bids must be submitted at the school premises in Al Ansab.

For inquiries: 24202221
Deadline for Submission of Bids: 21 October 2026

Oman, GCC and EU Parliaments discuss key partnership

BRUSSELS: The Majlis Ash’shura participated in the second meeting of the heads of legislative councils of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries with the European Parliament, held at the European Parliament headquarters in Brussels.

The Omani delegation was headed by Khalid bin Hilal al Maawali, Chairman of Majlis Ash’shura. The meeting was chaired by Roberta Metsola, President of the European Parliament, and attended by Jassim bin Mohammed al Budaiwi, Secretary-General of the GCC.



Khalid bin Hilal al Maawali, Shura Chairman led the Omani delegation.

The meeting discussed ways to strengthen parliamentary cooperation between the GCC countries and the European Union

(EU), including regular dialogue, closer institutional ties and the exchange of views on key regional and international issues.

Participants explored opportunities to translate shared interests into a sustainable strategic partnership by promoting open trade, improving regional connectivity and strengthening people-to-people ties.

Discussions also covered regional security, including security in the Gulf region and freedom of navigation in the Strait of Hormuz and the Red Sea, as well as developments in European security and the wider implications of the Russia-Ukraine war. — **ONA**

Oman renews biodiversity pledge at COP17 summit

THE Sultanate of Oman participated in the World Leaders’ Summit on Biodiversity, held in Yerevan, Republic of Armenia.

The summit was attended by a number of heads of state, heads of government, officials, and representatives of environmental organisations.

The Sultanate of Oman’s delegation was headed by Dr Abdullah bin Ali al Amri, Chairman of the Environment Authority (EA).

In his address, Al Amri conveyed the greetings of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq and his wishes for continued progress and prosperity for the government and people of the friendly Republic of Armenia and for the success of the summit.

The chairman of the EA said that the convening of the Leaders Summit, as part of the 17th Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (COP17), comes at a critical juncture, requiring everyone to strengthen collective action and expedite

The summit calls for collective action to accelerate efforts to halt biodiversity loss and restore ecosystems



Dr Abdullah bin Ali al Amri, EA Chairman, led Oman’s delegation to COP17.

efforts to stem biodiversity loss and restore ecosystems.

The Sultanate of Oman is committed to implementing the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Goals 13, 14, and 15, by strengthening its national policies and programmes concerning environmental protection, mitigating the impacts of climate change, protecting biodiversity, expanding the conservation of ecologically important areas, protecting species and natural habitats, restoring

degraded ecosystems and promoting the sustainable management of natural resources, Al Abri said.

The chairman of the Environment Authority stressed the Sultanate of Oman’s commitment to implementing the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF), in line with its national priorities and the Oman Vision 2040, as well as its development with a view to achieving the goals and objectives of the Convention on Biological Diversity. — **ONA**

Oman hosts global scouts’ JOTA-JOTI event in Muscat

RIYADH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, OCT 17

Gulf College is hosting the 2026 World Scout Jamboree on the Air and Internet (JOTA-JOTI) from October 16 to 18, bringing together Scouts, Guides and members of the Scouting and Guiding movement for an international event that combines education, technology and cultural exchange.

The programme provides young participants with opportunities to develop digital and media skills, strengthen teamwork and connect with peers worldwide through amateur radio communications and online platforms.



The scouting event demonstrates how modern technology can be used to develop young people’s capabilities.

international audience.

The programme features online seminars and workshops, talent shows, live video communications and virtual challenges. Participants can also explore an interactive three-dimensional campsite developed under the supervision of the global JOTA-JOTI team affiliated with the World Organization of the Scout Movement.

Alia bint Amer al Saadi, head of the Wireless Communications and Internet Team, said this year’s event uses digital communication platforms and amateur radio to encourage intercultural dialogue, knowledge exchange and international friendships.

She noted that Gulf College’s

role as the main host station gives Omani Scouts and Guides opportunities to communicate directly with their counterparts around the world and participate in a wide range of activities and challenges. Nasser bin Saif al Subhi, a member of the Wireless Communications and Internet Team, said JOTA-JOTI is a unique global Scouting event that transcends geographical boundaries and demonstrates how modern technology can be used to develop young people’s capabilities.

He explained that the main station features several dedicated spaces, including an amateur radio room where participants can communicate with Scouts in other countries and learn about

radio transmission techniques. A video communication room enables direct discussions and the exchange of experiences, while a digital communication and innovation room introduces modern technologies and encourages creative thinking.

The station also includes a Scout broadcasting room, where participants can prepare and present programmes, interviews and media coverage, helping them develop communication, presentation and confidence-building skills. Recreational activities and a photographic exhibition documenting the history and achievements of Oman’s Scouting and Guiding movement complete the programme.

Organisers have placed particular emphasis on protecting children and young people from online risks. Written, audio and video communications are monitored by designated channel operators, supported by the directorate’s safeguarding team. Online learning programmes and awareness sessions also help participants understand responsible internet use and maintain a safe digital environment throughout the event.

The gathering also promotes Oman’s heritage, traditions and tourism destinations, strengthening the country’s visibility within the international Scouting community.

OMAN

SHORT TAKES



Over 100 persons with severe and multiple disabilities will benefit from the programme.

OCCUPATIONAL REHAB PROGRAMME HALLS LAUNCHED

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Social Development (MoSD) launched today the halls for the Occupational Rehabilitation Programme for persons with severe and multiple disabilities over the age of 18. The project was funded by Petroleum Development Oman (PDO).

The ceremony was held under the auspices of Dr Abdullah bin Hamoud al Harthi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Social Development for Persons with Disabilities Affairs.

This project comes within the framework of the Ministry’s efforts to develop rehabilitation services and programs provided to persons with disabilities, and to enhance opportunities for their empowerment and integration into society. The project aims to enable persons with severe and multiple disabilities to develop their independent capabilities and occupy their time with manual, motor, and artistic activities suited to their abilities and needs, alongside providing rehabilitation programmes that take into account their age characteristics and individual differences, and enhancing integration among specialisations and rehabilitation services provided to them.

More than 100 persons with severe and multiple disabilities enrolled in centres affiliated with the Department of Specialised Rehabilitation Centres benefit from the programme’s halls, including the Physical Disability and Cerebral Palsy Centre, the Intellectual Disability Centre, and the Down Syndrome Centre. The programme also targets female technical assistants working with this category by developing their skills in using modern rehabilitation methods and strategies. — ONA

NEPAL, OMAN SEEK STRONGER BILATERAL TIES



Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthi holds talks with Dr Sarmila Parajuli Dhakal.

KATHMANDU: The Ambassadors Club Nepal hosted a reception in honour of a visiting Omani delegation, highlighting longstanding friendship and opportunities to strengthen cooperation between Nepal and Oman.

The delegation was led by Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthi, Under-Secretary of the Foreign Ministry for Political Affairs, and included Ambassador Shaikh Abdulaziz al Hosni, Head of the Asia and Pacific Department at the ministry, and Issa bin Saleh al Shibani, Oman’s Ambassador to Nepal.

Ambassadors Club Nepal President Dr Sarmila Parajuli Dhakal and Bimal Dhakal welcomed the delegation at the club’s premises in Kathmandu.

Dr Sarmila congratulated both sides on convening the second meeting of the Nepal-Oman Bilateral Consultation Mechanism, describing it as an important platform for sustained dialogue and closer engagement.

Recalling her appointment as Nepal’s first ambassador to Oman in 2017, she reflected on her tenure and the friendships forged during her service. Dr Sarmila welcomed Ambassador Al Shibani as an honorary member of the Ambassadors Club Nepal and highlighted opportunities to expand cooperation in tourism, trade, investment, education, skills development, technology, renewable energy, culture and research.

Al Harthi thanked the hosts for their hospitality and referred to the forthcoming 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Nepal and Oman.

SPF puts subscribers at heart of service delivery

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, OCT 17

THE Social Protection Fund (SPF) is strengthening its customer-centred approach by engaging beneficiaries directly, using their feedback to improve services and expanding digital and field-based channels to make social protection more accessible across Oman.

Speaking on the sidelines of the Customer Forum 2026, Hashem bin Mohammed al Hashmi, Director-General of Customer Services at the SPF, said the forum provides a platform for dialogue with beneficiaries, partners and community groups, enabling the Fund to identify needs, address challenges and translate suggestions into practical improvements.

“The customer is not simply the recipient of a service, but a partner in its development,” Al Hashmi said, emphasising that service quality must be assessed not only through operational indicators but also through beneficiaries’ actual experiences.

Organised through the Fund’s service departments across the governorates, the forum reflects an institutional commitment to listening to beneficiaries, measuring satisfaction and continuously improving service delivery.

Al Hashmi said the forum had evolved beyond periodic consultation into a mechanism for identifying service gaps and monitoring improvements.

Participation has increased significantly, with attendance rising from 233 in 2024 to 452 in 2025, an increase of 94 per cent. Survey responses also grew from 78 to 103, representing a rise of 32.1 per cent.

Feedback has also translated into tangible changes. Of the proposals tracked from the 2024 and 2025 forums, 15 were implemented, representing 78.9 per cent of the total.

Three proposals were raised



Physical service departments across the governorates remain essential, particularly for people who need direct assistance, clarification or additional support.



“The customer is not simply the recipient of a service, but a partner in its development.

HASHEM BIN MOHAMMED AL HASHMI
D-G, CUSTOMER SERVICES, SPF

again, while one remained under consideration. The measures covered direct communication, automated response systems, customer satisfaction monitoring, social media awareness, call centre improvements, online services and simplified guidance materials.

“These results demonstrate that participation must lead to action,” Al Hashmi said, noting that feedback is assessed, prioritised and incorporated into service development where appropriate.

The SPF’s customer-centred approach rests on three interconnected elements: the customer, the service and the service provider.

The objective is to understand not only what services beneficiaries need, but also how they prefer to access them, which procedures cause difficulties and what changes could make the process simpler and more efficient.

This approach supports the Fund’s broader ambition to deliver smarter, more proactive services, improve satisfaction and strengthen access to social protection programmes throughout the different stages of an individual’s and family’s life.

The 2026 forum brought together a diverse group of participants, including social protection and

social insurance beneficiaries, job-seekers, entrepreneurs, civil society organisations, students, residents, government and private sector institutions, Fund employees and strategic partners. Discussions covered developments in the social protection system, the Thiqah application, digital transformation, electronic services, customer service achievements, communication channels and satisfaction levels.

Digital transformation remains central to improving access. The SPF is developing electronic channels and strengthening integration with other institutions to reduce administrative requirements and make services faster and easier to access. However, Al Hashmi stressed that digitalisation involves more than moving transactions online. It requires redesigning the beneficiary journey to eliminate unnecessary steps, save time and effort, and use technology to improve the overall experience.

Physical service departments across the governorates remain essential, particularly for people who need direct assistance, clarification or additional support. The Fund is therefore working towards an integrated service model in which digital platforms, call centres, local service departments and field teams complement one another.

Research sheds new light on harmful algal blooms

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, OCT 17

An innovative research project is shedding new light on the environmental factors that drive the formation and movement of harmful algal blooms along the northern coast of Oman, with findings that could help better protect desalination plants, fisheries and aquaculture operations. The project, titled “Formation, Characteristics and Advection of Harmful Algal Blooms (HABs) along Northern Omani Coast”, was funded by the Strategic Research Programme of the Research and Innovation Authority in collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources. It was led by Prof Sergey Dobretsov, Unesco Chair in Marine Biotechnology at the College of Agricultural and Marine Sciences and the Centre of Excellence in Marine Biotechnology at Sultan Qaboos University.

According to Prof Dobretsov, HABs occur frequently in the Sea of Oman and can affect fisheries and aquaculture, disrupt desalination plants, interfere with marine activities and potentially impact the tourism sector. The research therefore sought to better understand the ecology of



The project calls for the importance of stronger collaboration among research institutions, government agencies and industry to improve harmful algal bloom forecasting, develop more effective treatment technologies and strengthen mitigation strategies.

harmful algal blooms, identify the main environmental factors driving their development, and examine how they are transported and dispersed along the northern coast of Oman. The team combined biological sampling with advanced oceanographic technologies, including sea gliders, to monitor water conditions, circulation patterns and changes in marine ecosystems.

The findings showed that harmful algal bloom development in the Sea of Oman is influenced by a complex combination of environmental

and oceanographic processes, including monsoon-driven winds, ocean currents, coastal upwelling, the outflow of water from the Arabian Gulf, internal tides and ocean eddies. Seasonal changes in water column mixing and the thermocline, the layer separating warmer surface water from colder deeper water, were also found to influence nutrient availability and phytoplankton biomass.

The research team observed changes in phytoplankton communities over time, with diatoms becoming dominant from 2018 to 2019, while

Noctiluca scintillans was identified as a major harmful algal bloom-forming species in both surface and subsurface waters. The study also examined the role of the oxygen minimum zone, where dissolved oxygen levels are particularly low. The findings indicate that nutrient-rich upwelled waters, together with low oxygen conditions, may contribute to bloom formation, while the inflow of more oxygenated water from the Arabian Gulf can modify the depth and characteristics of the oxygen minimum zone.

The project also examined bacteria associated with harmful algal blooms. Bacillus species were the most abundant bacterial isolates recorded during the sampling period, while analysis of bacterial communities revealed clear differences between bloom and non-bloom phases. The findings suggest a possible relationship between the abundance of Noctiluca scintillans and bacterial community diversity. Potentially pathogenic bacterial strains were also detected, highlighting the need for continued monitoring and further research into interactions between harmful algal blooms and marine microbial communities.

SHORT TAKES

Egypt’s Sisi pledges to leave office when term ends in 2030



ABDEL FATTAH EL SISI
Egyptian President

CAIRO: Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el Sisi said on Saturday that he would not seek to remain in office when his current term expires in 2030, describing the matter as “completely settled”. Sisi, 71, a former army general who became president

in 2014, made the remarks at a graduation ceremony at the Egyptian Military Academy in the New Administrative Capital, one of his flagship megaprojects.

Speaking to graduates and state officials in the sprawling new city east of Cairo, Sisi said the Egyptian constitution “would not be touched”. “The period leading up to 2030 will be the end of my term as president of the state, if I am still alive. This is completely settled and there will be no discussion about it,” he said.

On Saturday, Sisi said the run-up to 2030 would be used to groom a new generation of leaders, with the Military Academy training hundreds of prospective officials, ministers and presidential candidates in statecraft and leadership. During his 12 years in power, Sisi has overseen an ambitious state-led development programme centred on megaprojects which critics say have relied heavily on borrowing and contributed to Egypt’s mounting debt burden and economic pressures. — **AFP**

French protesters clash with police during wide demonstrations



A protester wearing a yellow vest and holding a French flag walks past a burning car amid clashes with the French riot police in Paris. — **Reuters**

PARIS: Protesters clashed with police in Paris and other cities in France on Saturday during nationwide rallies over high prices as the country heads towards a presidential election. Protesters broke into the town hall of France’s second-largest city of Marseille before being forced out by police.

In Paris, police fired a water cannon and teargas after hundreds of protesters, most wearing face masks and some setting off fireworks, confronted them at several locations. The offices of French broadcasters CNews and Europe 1 in western Paris had windows broken when protesters threw projectiles.

Thousands of demonstrators converged for a march through Paris, cutting main roads and prompting authorities to close many metro stations in the centre. The protests are piling pressure on President Emmanuel Macron’s government after weeks of student demonstrations that turned violent at times.

More than 32,000 protesters had taken part in some 140 actions nationwide outside Paris shortly after midday on Saturday, a source at the interior ministry said. Police detained more than 160 people nationwide, the source said. The country’s Yellow Vest movement, which eight years ago staged street protests against Macron’s government over planned fuel tax hikes, had called for the “yellow and youth” demonstrations. — **AFP**

NEPAL FLOODS ‘DEFINING MOMENT’ FOR CLIMATE ACTION: UN

KATHMANDU: Nepal’s devastating floods should be a turning point for global climate action, with the international community helping the Himalayan nation recover, a top UN official said on Saturday. The country suffered one of the worst disasters in its history on August 26, when a mountain collapse near the China border triggered catastrophic floods that killed more than 1,400 people and left over 5,000 missing. Scientists said climate change played a significant role in that

disaster. Jorge Moreira da Silva, executive director of the UN Office for Project Services (UNOPS), which implements humanitarian and development projects, said he had witnessed “massive devastation” during a visit to affected communities. Nepal, a largely rural country of 30 million people that contributes little to global greenhouse gas emissions, estimates reconstruction will cost \$4.78 billion. “This is a defining moment not only for Nepal, this is a defining

moment for the international community,” Moreira da Silva said in Kathmandu. “It’s not fair to ask a country that emits almost nothing of CO2 to suddenly pay alone the consequence of something that was not generated by the country,” he added. “That’s why it’s fundamental that global solidarity is brought to this equation.” The UN launched a \$49.6 million appeal last month to provide emergency assistance to flood victims. — **AFP**

Zelensky fears Trump could lift more Russia sanctions

UKRAINE’S PRESIDENT

Volodymyr Zelensky said on Saturday that he feared the United States would lift more sanctions on Russia and that President Donald Trump’s action only “rewards” Kremlin leader Vladimir Putin. Trump heightened a battle with Zelensky on Friday when he signed an executive order that waived sweeping US sanctions targeting Russia’s energy revenues. The decision came despite Russia increasing strikes on Ukraine in the fifth year of its war, which has killed hundreds of thousands of people and displaced millions.

Trump had already announced that he has agreed a deal with Putin to allow exports of Russian diesel in exchange for the easing of sanctions, and Zelensky said he feared more concessions. “Unfortunately, the lifting of sanctions will continue. I believe the ‘diesel deal’ is just the first step,” Zelensky told reporters. He said he still “personally” hoped that Trump will do “everything in his power” to make Putin end the war but added: “You cannot achieve this by limiting Ukraine’s responses to Russia for killing our people. And certainly not by lifting sanctions.” Ukraine said at least two people were killed in Russian air strikes on Saturday.

Zelensky said the US decision on Friday came the same day as Russia



A police officer helps a resident at the site of an apartment building damaged during a Russian air strike in Zaporizhzhia. — **Reuters**

Unfortunately, the lifting of sanctions will continue. I believe the ‘diesel deal’ is just the first step. You cannot achieve this by limiting Ukraine’s responses to Russia for killing our people. And certainly not by lifting sanctions

VOLODYMYR ZELENSKY
UKRAINE’S PRESIDENT

attacked 15 critical power generation facilities across Ukraine in “one of the largest” attacks on Ukraine’s energy grid. Officials said one person was killed in the southern city of Kherson in an attack that also wounded 22 people, including two children, and that another was killed in the northeastern city of Sumy. Zelensky said the US decision on Friday came the same day as Russia attacked 15 critical power generation facilities across Ukraine in “one of the largest” attacks on Ukraine’s energy grid. The Lindsey Graham Act targeted Russia’s energy and defence sectors, as well as Putin and the so-called “shadow fleet” of tankers used by Moscow to circumvent Western sanctions. “It is important that everyone in America also sees what is really happening,” Zelensky

said on social media. The Lindsey Graham Act, he said, was “supposed to impose truly effective pressure on Russia to bring this war to an end” adding that the act “could have helped enormously — and still can!”. “A US sanctions blackout, easing pressure on the aggressor, financial rewards for Putin — all of this only encourages him to keep attacking,” he warned.

The Ukrainian leader said Russia wanted to cause a “blackout” in Ukraine ahead of winter: “Russia is trying to leave millions of our people without electricity and heating.” He called on allies to pressure Moscow to “stop this.” Last winter saw hundreds of thousands in Ukraine consistently without heat and electricity in freezing temperatures.

The Kremlin and Putin have not yet reacted to Trump, but several Russian officials celebrated the move as a win. “The Trump administration’s suspension of the Graham Act is an important and truly historic moment,” Kirill Dmitriev, a Putin envoy, said on social media. Dmitriev said the act would have caused “serious damage first and foremost to the US economy and global markets”.

Trump announced the waiver in an executive order, shortly after Putin appeared in military uniform and said Moscow aims to capture the rest of east Ukraine. — **AFP**



ALBANIA SEES 5TH DAY OF VIOLENT CLASHES

TIRANA: Albania’s capital Tirana saw clashes for a fifth straight day as protesters demanded the resignation of Prime Minister Edi Rama, who pledged to listen to their criticism. Several hundred people, some masked, gathered around noon in front of the ministry of education, with protests later spreading across the city. Protesters threw rocks at the police and set litter bins on fire, using them as barricades to prevent the police from advancing.

After police officers had used megaphones to call on those gathered to desist from violence, they used water cannons and tear gas to temporarily disperse the crowd. Violent demonstrations have rocked Tirana since Tuesday, with thousands of protesters calling for Rama to step down over university conditions and high tuition fees.

At the beginning of the protest demonstrators set a suitcase on fire and threw it in the education ministry courtyard — symbolically showing they do not want to leave Albania.

Local media reported further protests in the coastal town of Durres, where demonstrators smashed the windows of the post office and blocked roads with burning barricades. On Friday night police deployed tear gas and water cannons as protesters hurled stones at security forces, burning dustbins to block roads across the city. — **AFP**

MAJOR BREAKDOWN

Sri Lanka suffers nationwide blackout



Sri Lanka suffered a six-hour nationwide electricity blackout after the national grid tripped, possibly because solar power generation exceeded consumption, officials said. The country was without grid power from around noon until dusk, when supplies were restored in stages across the island of 22 million people, the state electricity authority said. Energy Minister Anura Karunathilaka said the cause of the major breakdown was still under investigation. — **AFP**

FORECASTERS WARNING

Hurricane Trudy threatens western Mexico



Hurricane Trudy maintained its strength as it moved toward Mexico’s western coast on Saturday, with forecasters warning it could strengthen further before beginning to weaken on Sunday. The US National Hurricane Center said Trudy was about 305 km south-southeast of Manzanillo early on Saturday, with maximum sustained winds of 150 kph. The hurricane was moving at about 13 kph and was forecast to approach southwestern and west-central Mexico. — **Reuters**

SUCCESSFUL OPERATION

Pope leaves hospital after cancer surgery



Pope Leo left hospital in Rome to return to the Vatican following surgery for lung cancer four days ago. The 71-year-old walked unaided to his waiting car, stopping to speak to well-wishers outside Rome’s Gemelli Hospital. His doctors had earlier said he was well enough to return home after they carried out the latest blood tests and chest imaging. The pope will hold his first public engagement since surgery on Sunday when he leads weekly prayers. — **Reuters**

OPINION

Would you consult a doctor who has mental illness?



DR HAMED
AL SINAWI

The writer is a senior consultant psychiatrist at SQU Hospital

LAST SATURDAY was World Mental Health Day, a day dedicated to raising public awareness and promoting the development of mental health services.

This year, the official global theme was “Lived Experiences Heard: Real Voices, Real Change”, which means the voices of people living with mental illness were heard clearly.

Across social media, many shared their personal stories: how they struggled with their symptoms, how people saw them, and what it was like to finally seek professional help.

These stories matter, but sharing experiences is only the first step. The real test is whether we include people with mental illness in planning the services designed for them.

This sounds obvious, yet it can be surprisingly challenging in practice. In a recent workshop on mental well-being, I asked participants a simple question: would you still consult a doctor if you knew that he or she had been diagnosed with a mental illness?

The room fell quiet. A few hands went up, many did not, and some participants admitted they would quietly look for another doctor. When I asked why, the answers were honest: worries about judgment, reliability,

and whether a doctor who “struggles himself” could help others.

I was not surprised, but the answers made my point better than any lecture could.

We speak warmly about acceptance and inclusion, but when mental illness comes close to us, when it sits across the desk in a white coat, our hidden assumptions surface.

Doctors are not immune to mental illness. Depression, anxiety and burnout are common among healthcare workers, partly because of long hours, emotional strain and a culture that expects them to be strong at all times. Many suffer in silence precisely because they fear the reaction my workshop participants displayed.

A doctor who seeks treatment, recovers and returns to work is not a risk to patients. The real risk is the doctor who hides the illness and never seeks help at all.

The same principle applies more broadly. People who have experienced depression, psychosis, or addiction possess knowledge no textbook can provide. They understand what it is like to wait months for an appointment, to be spoken about rather than spoken to, to leave hospital without a clear plan, or to face a family that does not understand. Lived experience is not a weakness to manage; it is expertise to draw on.

Many countries now involve people

World Mental Health Day lasts only one day. Inclusion must last all year

with lived experience in designing mental health services, reviewing policies, training staff, and working as peer support workers alongside doctors and nurses. Peer workers, people who have recovered from mental illness themselves, can offer hope in a way professionals cannot.

In Oman, we have made real progress in expanding mental health services and reducing stigma. The next step is to move from awareness to participation.

This could start simply by including service users and family members on hospital committees, inviting their feedback when new services are planned, and involving them in training medical students and health professionals. It also means creating workplaces, including hospitals, where staff can seek help for their own mental health without fearing for their careers.

This will be easy. It requires professionals to share some of their authority, and also requires society to examine its own prejudices honestly, as my workshop participants courageously did.

In my opinion, if we truly believe that mental illness is like any other illness, then we must be ready to listen to those who live with it, work alongside them, and yes, be treated by them.

FOOD CRISIS LOOMS AFTER GLOBAL ENERGY SHOCK

JULIEN GIRAULT

Rising energy and fertiliser costs are hitting smallholder farmers and driving up prices of agricultural commodities, fuelling fears of a global food crisis, the head of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization said.

Global agricultural prices jumped 13 per cent in the third quarter of the year, according to the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), which warned a “global food crisis is looming”.

The surge in energy prices due to conflict in the Middle East has sparked a sharp increase in the cost of fertilisers and fuel this year, driving up agricultural production and transport costs.

“Over the next six to nine months, we will see continued increases related to food prices, but also I would say even inflation in terms of food, which will impact most of the populations that actually can afford it less,” IFAD President Alvaro Lario said in an interview.

Already, “almost one in three people in the world cannot afford a healthy diet”, Lario said.

“So I think the costs of a healthy diet, which means an increased cost on legumes, on vegetables, on meat, is just having a big impact on what people can afford to consume.”

Food insecurity affects around 260 million people worldwide, according to UN figures.

Because food accounts for a significant portion of household budgets in developing countries, price hikes are felt acutely there, noted Lario, speaking on the sidelines of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank meetings in Bangkok.

Smallholder farmers - who account for one-third of global food production, and up to 70 per cent in many developing nations - are the most severely affected by the energy shock, according to IFAD, and were especially vulnerable to rising fertiliser prices.

“In the very short term, there is very little that governments can do. They can subsidise, for example, the price of fertiliser input... or fuel through subsidies,” he said.

G7 nations pledged on Thursday to mobilise \$2.5 billion to assist countries at risk of food insecurity, with a specific focus on fertilisers.

“The important lesson is that these shocks will continue over time. So the most important lesson is that actually we should be building the resilience for the next three to five years,” he said.

“You need to diversify the type of value chains and crops that you are currently self-sufficient, and food security becomes, now in many countries, a matter of national security,” he added. — AFP

Teach schoolchildren to think, not just to recite

ALEXANDER The Great’s (356 BC -323 BC) education was unique for his time, not because it offered privileged access to knowledge but because it trained him in a way of thinking. Where other rulers leaned on religious omens or superstition to guide decisions, Alexander was taught to treat the world as something that can be understood.

That understanding was not produced by passive acceptance or inherited belief. It was built through careful reasoning, disciplined observation, and evidence that could be examined. His teacher, the philosopher Aristotle (384 BC -322 BC), did not ask the young Prince merely to repeat what others said or to adopt explanations simply because they were repeated by authority.

He encouraged him to ask what counts as evidence, how we know and whether an explanation fits what we observe. Critical thinking is the ability to test claims against evidence.

It is the practical skill of evaluating ideas, recognising uncertainty and deciding what to trust when you meet competing explanations.

Students who learn to reason are harder to mislead. They learn to distinguish strong evidence from weak assertions and to separate what they want to be true from what the facts support.

In 1991, Japan experienced a catastrophic economic recession. It quickly realised that concentrating too heavily on rote learning in schools had created a serious limitation.

During this downturn in their economy they needed individuals who had the ability to think outside of the box. Japanese schools trained children to memorise and reproduce, yet it did not equip individuals to diagnose what was wrong, to



KARIM
EASTERBROOK

The writer is a Former Cambridge School Principal and Author

The aim of education is judgement not compliance. Compliance rewards repetition of what is already approved while judgement requires students to justify decisions

test competing explanations or to propose recovery strategies. There was an emphasis on conformity instead of the critical judgement needed to work through real problems.

When conditions worsen, new policy choices are needed. Decision-makers and their employees must be able to analyse what is happening, identify which explanations are supported by evidence and think of solutions.

Without critical thinking, recovery efforts can become driven by persuasive narratives that feel right but do not match the real cause of the problem. People without critical thinking skills then struggle to suggest improvements, challenge assumptions and understand why particular measures might work, or fail.

Language matters in education. Many wrong decisions begin with words being used unclearly or with arguments that sound good while concealing false assumptions.

Schools should therefore consider introducing philosophy as an academic subject within their curricula with a clear emphasis on how to critically assess meaning and how to assess rationally any decision or judgement.

Philosophy trains students to interpret terms carefully, ask what a statement claims and check whether a conclusion follows from the reasons provided.

Students must learn to ask what counts as evidence, not just what is claimed. The same discipline supports better judgement in both study and future employment.

Problem solving in careers rarely offers complete information or a single model answer. It demands evaluation, prioritisation and reasoned choice under pressure.

The aim of education is judgement, not compliance. Compliance rewards repetition of what is already approved. Judgement requires students to justify decisions, scrutinise assumptions and revise conclusions when better reasons or new evidence appear.

When students learn to check claims against evidence and understand what words really mean, they get better at spotting weak arguments, noticing hidden assumptions and avoiding misleading statements that aren’t supported by the facts.

Alexander’s education illustrates a principle that still applies: teaching should not be mere repetition. The purpose is to cultivate evidence-testing, careful interpretation and rational judgement, so that knowledge becomes usable.

Rote learning may help students pass exams, but in a rapidly changing world it may not give them the skills they need to handle new problems, evaluate competing policies or make sound decisions when their approach to work has to change. Japan’s experience of recession underlined this: economic recovery depends on individuals who can understand what went wrong and think of how to solve the problem using critical thinking skills.

Another man’s grass is always greener



RAY PETERSEN
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WORK KEEPS us busy, doesn’t it? It consumes about a third of every workday, a quarter of our adult lives, and funds our lifestyles, so...

Confucius said, “Choose a job you love, and you’ll never work a day in your life.” That love is hard to find, because we rarely stay in the one job for life. It’s not that we don’t want to, but the workplace has become so dynamic, with ownership changes, corporate acquisitions, bankruptcies, and our changing needs affecting our ability to stay in that one job.

While staying with one employer is ideal, it rarely happens. As many as 55 per cent of us find our job is ‘not what it’s cracked up to be’, and start looking around for something else! In fact, research by parkerdewey.com tells us that 70 per cent of us will ‘move on’, within two years. It’s not easy to find a job that engages with talent, encourages, motivates, and rewards, in the way we want.

So, we look around, and the grass always appears greener elsewhere! Some jobs look brilliant on paper, yet few measure up. Emotion-driven jobs like the police, nursing and teaching appeal to our moral and social responsibilities, our desire to build futures, to shape and save lives, drawing on empathy, and a desire to ‘do good’. Policing can be violent and unpleasant, nursing gruelling and distressful, and teaching frustrating, and incredibly demanding. Yet, thousands still choose them.

Others are just odd. The most unusual job I know is that of a ‘Chicken Sexer’, who takes

one-or-two-day-old hatchling chicks, and gender assesses a thousand an hour, with an incredible 98 per cent success rate, by identifying their ‘bump’, and long, straight feathers among the males, ‘cockerels’, or by their ‘bubble’, and alternating long and short feathers among female ‘pullets’.

How unique, and weird, is that job? This ‘Purchasing Specialist’, vacancy caught my eye as being extraordinarily demanding: “The role oversees purchase policies, procedures, and processes, leverages product expertise, procurement planning, strategic sourcing, manages inbound purchase orders and facilitates special order fulfilment, delivering a vast product inventory, with speed and reliability.”

This company appears to really want its ‘pound of flesh’, doesn’t it? That impression was reinforced in their person specification: “The position requires minimum A-Levels in Mathematics and English, proficiency with Enterprise Resource Planning systems, Microsoft Excel, MS Office, Word, Excel, PowerPoint, and Outlook; strong numerical, analytical, organisational, multi-tasking, and communication skills; experience in computers, IT, virtual platforms, purchasing, via vendor-specific platforms, web-based and phone systems.”

So, they also want an immense range of skills, don’t they? So, now let’s look at the duties, or job specs: “The appointee will utilise the ERP system effectively for accurate data entry, messaging, queue management, batching, communication workflow, and

Policing can be violent and unpleasant, nursing gruelling and distressful, and teaching frustrating, and incredibly demanding. Yet, thousands still choose them.

purchasing; Maintain precise records within ERP, managing and updating purchase orders; Review lead times for effective strategic planning; Resolve vendor delivery and pricing issues, expedite damage and freight claims efficiently, cultivate strong vendor relationships, escalate problem-solving as appropriate, and perform additional duties to meet evolving organisational needs.”

That last clause means “and anything else...” So, in addition to the number and complexity of the tasks, they must be done ‘accurately, effectively, efficiently, precisely, and reliably’, all demanding adjectives, indicating almost immaculate expectations, and now looking incredibly intimidating. Yet, reading on, we find, “The role is 37.5 hours weekly involving routine physical activity including: bending, lifting, and carrying up to 4kg; continuous, prolonged use of hands and arms, extended sitting, intermittent standing and walking; frequent phone communication and inter-person interactions,” which are almost ridiculously facile, docile in comparison with the earlier demands.

I don’t know. Maybe it’s just this PC world, but I guess they felt the need to dot i’s, cross t’s, and cover bases. That final paragraph made me smile, then laugh, and I still smile every time I reflect upon it.

Maybe though... you get the company medical plan, pension plan, gym membership, life insurance, paid holidays, professional development opportunities, and a better salary? So, maybe the other man’s grass is greener?

BRAZIL’S LEFT RALLIES AS LULA CLOSES GAP BEFORE RUNOFF

FACUNDO FERNÁNDEZ BARRIO

Brazil’s left has mounted a political fightback ahead of the October 25 presidential runoff, rallying supporters in the streets, overhauling its social media campaign and pushing through a landmark labour reform.

President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, 80, was jolted when he finished behind right-wing Senator Flavio Bolsonaro — son of former president Jair Bolsonaro — by 47 per cent to 45 per cent in the October 4 first round. But a Datafolha poll published last week showed Bolsonaro’s lead in the runoff narrowing from four percentage points to two, putting the rivals in a statistical tie.

Bolsonaro was on 51 per cent of valid votes against Lula’s 49 per cent, within the survey’s two-point margin of error.

Seeking a fourth term, Lula is now targeting the 33.4 million Brazilians who stayed away from the first round — more than one in five eligible voters.

“Lula is still in the race, and the election is far from decided — despite what many of us thought after the first round,” political scientist Eduardo Grin of the Getulio Vargas Foundation said.

Congress approved a constitutional amendment on Wednesday abolishing Brazil’s six-day working week, a flagship Lula campaign promise that will give employees two paid days off without cutting their wages.

The reform will replace the widespread “6x1” system — six days of work followed by one day off — with a five-day week, gradually reducing the maximum working week from 44 to 40 hours.

The vote handed Lula, a former trade union leader, a major victory just 10 days before the runoff, giving him a popular achievement to champion among working-class voters who have traditionally formed his political base. The measure was so widely supported that even Bolsonaro, who had previously opposed it, voted in favour.

Lula attributed his rival’s reversal to “pressure from society,” hailing the reform as a victory born of the street protests demanding change.

The president has also unveiled debt relief for small businesses, new university grants and measures to ease fuel costs, while proposing free weekend public transport.

His government had already increased payments under Bolsa Familia, Brazil’s flagship welfare programme for low-income families, before the first round. But the flurry of economic measures has raised concerns over government spending in a country whose public debt already exceeds 80 per cent of GDP.

Lula has also shaken up a digital campaign he acknowledged was his most “disorganised” in decades, seeking to challenge the Brazilian right’s formidable social media operation. — AFP

Democracy-for-diesel deal of Trump shames us all

IF PRESIDENT Donald Trump does not understand what will happen to him if he proceeds with his plan to trade away support for Ukraine’s democracy for Russian diesel, let me spell it out: He will enter the history books in the chapter on leaders who sold out their country’s democratic values to appease a dictator.

Donald Trump, meet Neville Chamberlain. When future students search online for “sellout,” “appeaser” or “traitor to his country’s core values,” their two pictures will come up first, side by side. And deservedly so. At least Chamberlain was trying, in what proved to be a lethally misguided fashion, to avoid a world war. Trump is trying to avoid losing a few seats in Congress — and is likely to be no more successful in achieving his goal than Chamberlain was in achieving his.

I have never believed that Trump was somehow an agent of Russia’s leader, Vladimir Putin, or in his pay. It is much worse. He simply does not cherish democracy. He cherishes money. And he has no problem selling the first for the second. When he acts in his own commercial interests, that’s his personal business. When he uses the American presidency to make a buck, it is our collective shame.

There is simply no core American value Trump will not sell. Desperate to lower diesel prices, which are hurting Republicans in the midterms, Trump actually made a deal to import diesel fuel from Russia, even though it offers a potential windfall for the Kremlin so it can bomb Ukraine harder — and is unlikely to help lower prices or increase supplies much at all.

Worse, his aides then asked Ukraine to refrain from attacks on Russia’s oil refineries, without Trump making the same demand of Putin regarding Ukraine’s energy infrastructure. It makes me sick to my stomach to even type this.

Unique among great powers, “the United States has always made the protection and promotion of



THOMAS L. FRIEDMAN

The writer is reporter, author and NYT columnist

Desperate to lower diesel prices, which are hurting Republicans in the midterms, Trump actually made a deal to import diesel fuel from Russia, even though it offers a potential windfall for the Kremlin so it can bomb Ukraine harder — and is unlikely to help lower prices or increase supplies much at all.

liberal values part of its foreign policy because it’s part of the country’s political DNA,” said Michael Mandelbaum, the author of the new book “The American Way of Foreign Policy: Ideology, Economics, Democracy.” “Different presidents have given these values different emphases, depending on the circumstances and their own personal predilections.” But none have “ever abandoned them entirely — let alone repudiated them,” Mandelbaum added. “In that sense, Trump really is unique. Of course, all presidents, including him, have operated in a domestic political environment in which those values are widely shared, which means that he will pay a political price for violating them. But in the short term, that isn’t likely to help Ukraine.” This is shocking to Ukrainians, who for nearly five years have been resisting Putin’s attempt to wipe their country off the map.

My friend Vitaly Sych, the editor-in-chief of the Ukrainian news outlet NV, texted me from Kyiv the other day: “When Donald Trump became president, Ukraine lost an ally.” From his first days in office, Trump “started positioning himself as a ‘negotiator,’ as an ‘intermediary’ between Ukraine and the aggressor — Russia,” Sych added. “That was strange enough. And now he is openly siding with Russia, pushing for Ukraine’s capitulation and calling it a peace deal,” Sych said. “If Ukraine hits an oil refinery in Russia, there is always an outraged post from the US president on Truth Social.

Is he now the Kremlin’s spokesperson?” The United States has long stood for freedom and democracy, Sych said. “Now they are just for diesel. What a change.” Russian missiles and drones kill or wound dozens of civilians, including children, every day, he wrote. “Russians are killing us like in a shooting range. No concern comes out about this from the White House.

Only about Russian diesel. It is a mix of intellectual and moral bankruptcy to claim we don’t want

peace. Of course we want peace,” he said. “But we don’t want capitulation packaged as peace.” I have to say, it is hard for me to decide who is more despicable: Trump or tough-guy Republican senators like Tom Cotton, who lambasted president Joe Biden for not sending enough military aid to Ukraine and today sits curled up in a corner of the US Capitol, saying nothing while Trump sells Ukraine to Putin outright.

Here’s the beginning of a story in The Hill from September 16, 2023: A group of Republican senators sent a letter to president Biden on Saturday urging him to “immediately” provide the missiles Ukraine needs to win its war against Russia. Senator Tom Cotton (R-Ark.) shared the letter in a post on X, the platform formerly known as Twitter, arguing that not sending the weapons would “only prolong the war and cost lives.” Cotton was joined by Senators Roger Wicker (R-Miss.), Susan Collins (R-Maine) and Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.) in his request. “We... urge you to immediately send MGM-140 Army Tactical Missile Systems (ATACMS) to Ukraine,” they wrote. “Additional delay will only further undermine US national security interests and extend this conflict.” That was then — when Biden was president.

This week, a bipartisan group of 12 senators (six Republicans and six Democrats) sent a letter to Trump demanding that he rescind the diesel agreement and roll back the Treasury Department’s licence allowing it. Cotton, who is the chair of the Senate Intelligence Committee, did not sign the letter.

It is hard to tell whether Trump’s democracy-for-diesel idea is his alone or was cooked up with his negotiators, Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner. If those two are part of it, I hope they understand that they will share Trump’s infamy in the history books. The good work they have done to end the war in the Gaza Strip will all be forgotten. They should speak up now, because history will have its eyes on them, too.

— The New York Times

SPORTS

GOLFING EXCELLENCE



Oman secured three medals — two golds and one silver — at the Arab Age Group Golf Championship held in Cairo.

SAYYID AZZAN FELICITATES OMAN GOLF CHAMPIONS AFTER ARAB SUCCESS

SPORTS REPORTER
MUSCAT, OCT 17

His Highness Sayyid Azzan bin Qais al Said, Chairman of the Oman Olympic Committee (OOC) and the Oman Golf Association (OGA), honoured the national golf team players in recognition of their historic achievement at the Arab Age Group Golf Championship, recently held in Cairo, Egypt.

Oman secured three medals — two golds and one silver — marking an unprecedented achievement for the country at an Arab golf championship.

The ceremony, held at Ghala Golf Club in the presence of OGA Vice-Chairman Fayez Mohammed Riyad, celebrated the players' achievements and acknowledged the efforts of the technical and administrative staff in preparing and supporting the team throughout the tournament.

Ahmed bin Khalil al Wahaibi won gold in the under-21 individual competition before teaming up with Adam bin Masoud al Barwani to secure the under-21 team gold. Yousef bin Azzan al Rumhi completed Oman's medal haul by claiming silver in the under-13 individual competition.

The results highlighted Oman's competitiveness across age groups, with gold medals in both the individual and team events in the under-21 category and a silver in the under-13 competition.

Al Barwani was absent from the ceremony after returning to the United States to continue his university studies. His contribution to the under-21 team's gold-medal triumph alongside Al Wahaibi was an important part of Oman's success.

OOC CHIEF PRAISES YOUNG CHAMPIONS

HH Sayyid Azzan praised the players for their performances, stressing the importance of continued efforts to develop their abilities and provide an appropriate environment for training and preparation.

He expressed confidence that sustained support would help the players achieve further success and represent Oman with distinction at Gulf, Arab, continental and international competitions.

He also congratulated Al Rumhi on winning the under-13 individual silver medal, commending the team's performances and the progress of Omani golf. He highlighted the importance of nurturing promising young talents who can contribute to the sport's future development. The team's performance reflected the combined efforts of the technical and administrative staff. Head coach Jonathan and his assistant, Fahad bin Harib al Kutaini, played key roles in preparing the players, while the OGA provided administrative and organisational support throughout the team's campaign.

INVESTING IN YOUNG PLAYERS

Fayez Mohammed Riyad expressed pride in the team's performance in Cairo, describing the two gold medals in the under-21 individual and team competitions and the under-13 silver as a significant milestone for Omani golf.

He said the results strengthened confidence in the potential of young Omani players and highlighted the importance of investing in their development. "Investing in young players and providing opportunities for preparation and participation in tournaments will create champions capable of raising Oman's flag high at Arab and international sporting events," Riyad said. He added that the under-21 double gold was a source of pride for the Omani golf community, while Al Rumhi's silver medal underlined the importance of nurturing younger age groups and preparing a new generation of players for future championships.

Brunei replace Bahrain in Oman's King's Cup build-up

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, OCT 17

OMAN WILL join hosts Thailand, Tajikistan and Brunei Darussalam at the 52nd King's Cup next month after the Football Association of Thailand confirmed Brunei as replacements for Bahrain.

The announcement, issued on October 16, completes the four-team line-up for the international tournament in Sisaket province, which falls within the November 9-17 Fifa international window. The draw and official press conference will take place on Monday, October 19, at the Gallery Hotel in Sisaket.

Thai government publicity lists November 14-17 as the competition dates, distinguishing the tournament itself from the broader international window.

According to the Thai association, Bahrain formally withdrew following changes to their coaching staff, requesting time to reassess their training and match programme for November. The organisers subsequently approached national teams without conflicting commitments, with Brunei accepting the invitation at short notice.

The association identified Brunei as ranked 196th in the world in its announcement. Monday's draw ceremony is scheduled for 2 pm local time, equivalent to 11 am in Oman.

Bahrain's withdrawal follows the appointment of Spanish coach Felix Sanchez on October 12. The former Qatar and Ecuador coach succeeded Dragan Talajic after Bahrain's group-stage elimination from the Gulf Cup. The Bahrain Football Association said Sanchez would begin his duties during the November international break.

For Oman, the trip forms part of preparations for the AFC Asian Cup Saudi Arabia 2027 under Moroccan head coach Tarik Sektioui, who took charge in March. The tournament will provide another opportunity to assess players and combinations ahead of the continental competition.

The November fixtures offer Sektioui a chance to assess Oman against opponents



For Oman, the trip forms part of preparations for the AFC Asian Cup Saudi Arabia 2027.



Oman will join hosts Thailand, Tajikistan and Brunei Darussalam at the 52nd King's Cup next month.

from different footballing backgrounds before attention turns to their Asian Cup group. With Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Palestine awaiting them, the emphasis will be on finding consistency and turning lessons from the Gulf Cup into a more effective tournament performance.

NEXT ASSIGNMENT

Oman head into their next assignment after reaching the semifinals of the 27th Gulf Cup in Jeddah, where they lost 1-0 to the United Arab Emirates on October 3. Saudi Arabia subsequently claimed the title with a 2-0 victory over the UAE in the final on October 6.

The Asian Cup will run from January 7 to February 5, 2027, with Oman drawn in Group A alongside hosts Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Palestine.

Uzbekistan, Bahrain, DPR Korea and Jordan make up Group B, while Iran, Syria, Kyrgyzstan and China are in Group C. Australia face Tajikistan, Iraq and Singapore in Group D.

Group E comprises South Korea, the UAE, Vietnam and Yemen, while Japan, Qatar, Thailand and Indonesia complete Group F.

OWSC signs Brighton Plus Helsinki 2014 Declaration

MUSCAT: Oman Women's Sports Committee (OWSC) at Oman Olympic Committee (OOC), signed the Brighton Plus Helsinki 2014 Declaration on Women and Sport on Thursday, reaffirming Oman's commitment to promoting women's participation in sport, advancing the principles of equal opportunity, and expanding cooperation with international organisations dedicated to the development of women's sport. The signing coincided with the celebration of Omani Women's Day.

The signing ceremony was held virtually from the headquarters of OOC, in coordination with the British Embassy in the Sultanate of Oman and in cooperation with the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth (MoCSY) and the International Working Group on Women and Sport (IWG).

The initiative was also endorsed by OOC Board of Directors and forms part of ongoing efforts to strengthen Oman's engagement in international initiatives supporting women's sport.

Representing OWSC at the



The signing reaffirms Oman's commitment to promoting women's participation in sport, advancing the principles of equal opportunity, and expanding cooperation with international organisations.

ceremony were Sayyidah Sanaa bint Hamad Al Busaidi, Chairperson, and Saada bint Salem al Ismaili, Vice Chairperson. The MoCSY was represented by Khawla bint Rashid al Rawahi, Director of the Women's Sports Department, while Lisa O'Keefe, Secretary General of IWG, represented the group.

The Brighton Plus Helsinki 2014 Declaration provides an international framework for advancing gender equality in sport, ensuring appropriate opportunities for women

and girls to participate in all areas of sport, strengthening women's representation in leadership and decision-making positions, and developing institutional policies and practices that promote equal opportunities in sports participation, administration and achievement.

10 KEY PRINCIPLES

The Declaration sets out ten key principles covering equity and equality in society and sport; sports facilities;

school sport and junior sport; the development of sports participation; high-performance sport and sporting achievement; leadership in sport and decision-making; education, training and development; sports information and research; resources and support; and national and international cooperation.

These principles provide guidance for sports organisations in developing their programmes and policies and fostering a more inclusive and equitable sporting environment. The signing marks an important step towards strengthening cooperation with the IWG, exchanging expertise and best practices in the development of women's sport, drawing on international experience to broaden women's participation in sport, and expanding opportunities for women in coaching, competition and sports leadership.

This initiative aligns with OOC broad efforts to strengthen women's presence across the sports system.



The team was formed through the school football competition organised under the Oman School Sports Association, supported by the General Directorate of Education in Musandam and the governorate's school sports committee.

Musandam schoolgirls break barriers through football

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, OCT 17

THE FIRST pass was simple. The first shot may not have been perfect. But for a group of schoolgirls in Lima, a remote community in Oman's Musandam Governorate, every touch of the football carried a meaning far greater than the game itself. For years, football had been widely viewed in their surroundings as a sport for boys.

Then, during the 2025–26 academic year, a group of girls from Lima School, which caters for students from Grades 1 to 12, stepped onto the pitch to challenge that familiar perception and begin a new sporting journey. Their ambition was not to win a major championship or attract the attention of a national audience. At first, it was simply to play. What followed was the establishment of the first schoolgirls' football team in Musandam, an initiative that offered more than an opportunity to compete. It gave the girls a chance to discover their abilities, build confidence and show that a football pitch could also be a place for them.

The team was formed through the school football competition organised under the Oman School Sports Association, with coordination of the General Directorate of Education in Musandam and the governorate's school sports committee. After the initiative was announced at the school and the target age group identified, players were selected to represent Lima School. It was a modest beginning, but one that carried the promise of something bigger.

WINNING TRUST
The first challenge was not necessarily learning how to pass, defend or score. It was convincing some parents that football was an appropriate sport for their daughters. The

idea of girls joining a football team initially raised concerns among families, reflecting a familiar perception that the sport belonged primarily to boys. For the players, the journey therefore began with a challenge beyond the touchline: earning the trust and support of the people closest to them.

As training progressed, however, the girls' commitment began to speak for itself. Their enthusiasm, discipline and willingness to learn gradually helped ease their families' concerns. What began with hesitation increasingly became encouragement, as parents and the school saw how seriously the players approached the opportunity.

For Haneen bint Mohammed bin Sulaiman al Shihi, becoming a footballer was never something she had expected. "I never imagined that I would become a football player, but my passion and love for sport from an early age led me to this experience," she said.

Her words reflect the way the team opened a door that some of the girls had never considered walking through. Football became an opportunity to explore an interest, test their abilities and discover a new side of themselves.

Mahra bint Ahmed bin Hassan al Shihi also experienced surprise from her family when she announced that she wanted to play football. Their initial reaction, she said, eventually gave way to support.

"My family were surprised at first, but they later encouraged and supported me," she said.

That change mattered. Behind every player taking part in training was a family learning to see the game differently. The growing support helped create an environment in which the girls could pursue their interest with greater confidence.



Musandam girls football team



Musandam School League

BEHIND THE DREAM
Experience also demanded adjustments to everyday life. For young students, the opportunity to play came with the responsibility of managing their time and maintaining their studies alongside sport.

Al Reem bint Khalid bin Mohammed al Shihi identified this balance as one of the most difficult aspects of joining the team. "Organising my time between sport and personal commitments was one of the biggest challenges at the beginning," she said.

Yet the difficulties did not diminish her optimism about what could follow. "I see a promising future for women's football in Musandam, with plenty of talent and potential for support," she added.

Her hopes extend beyond the present team. The girls want the opportunity they have received to become a starting point for others, allowing more students to experience football and develop their abilities.

For them, the future is not defined solely by how far one school team progresses. It is also about whether another group of girls will be able to join a team without facing the same questions and uncertainty.

NATIONAL LESSON
The team's first competitive outing brought an encouraging result. Lima School secured first place at governorate level, marking a significant achievement for a group of players at the beginning of their football journey. The girls then advanced to compete at national level. Although they did not progress beyond the group stage, the experience gave them an opportunity to test themselves against teams from outside their governorate and understand the demands of a wider competition. This was their first participation in the schoolgirls' football competition, and reaching

the national stage was itself an important step for the newly formed team. For Lima's players, the national competition was not the end of their story. It was an introduction to the level they hope to reach.

WIDER OPPORTUNITY
The team's emergence was made possible through the school sports system and the support of education and sports bodies in Oman represented by the Oman Football Association (OFA). Those involved in the initiative also highlighted the role of Hajar al Mazini, OFA board member and head of the women's football. She introduced the Lima's girls team to Fifa, in helping bring the team's story to wider public attention in Oman.

For a newly established school team from a community far from the country's main sporting centres, visibility can be important. It allows the players' efforts to be recognised and brings attention to the potential of school sport to identify talent in different parts of the country.

But recognition alone cannot guarantee continuity. The next step will depend on whether the girls can continue training, take part in further competitions and receive the resources needed to improve. A clear pathway from school football to more advanced opportunities would help ensure that the experience becomes more than a one-season achievement.

Those behind the initiative hope the team will be the beginning of a larger project for women's football in Musandam. They acknowledge that resources are limited, but believe the girls' passion, commitment and willingness to train provide a foundation on which to build. The challenge now is to turn a promising beginning into a sustainable opportunity.

SPORTS

CLOSEFIGHT



Poland's Maja Chwalinska celebrates after winning her semifinal against Poland's Iga Swiatek in the Wuhan Open. — Reuters

CHWALINSKA OVERCOMES INJURED SWIATEK IN WUHAN OPEN SEMIFINAL

WUHAN, China: A left-leg injury derailed Iga Swiatek as she went down fighting to Polish compatriot and childhood friend Maja Chwalinska 7-5, 6-1 in the Wuhan Open semifinals on Saturday.

French Open runner-up Chwalinska, who was Swiatek's junior doubles partner, will face Sonay Kartal in the final after the Briton beat Jelena Ostapenko 7-6(9), 7-6(5) in the first semifinal.

Swiatek was 5-3 ahead in the first set but fellow 25-year-old Chwalinska saved two set points and took a 6-5 lead before the six-time Grand Slam winner had to take a medical timeout.

After receiving treatment, Swiatek continued the match with a bandaged left thigh, but found it difficult to put pressure on her leg and struggled to chase returns across the court.

She completed the match with encouragement from her team and the two players, who have known each other since they were 10, shared a quiet handshake after their first competitive clash in 10 years.

"She is a great champion, living legend, she won everything. So it was a great honour for me to share the court with her today," an emotional Chwalinska said of Swiatek.

"The fact that I actually won against her is actually crazy for me."

With Swiatek losing, world number six Elina Svitolina secured her place in the WTA Finals, becoming the seventh player to qualify for next month's year-ending championship, with only one spot still up for grabs.

ERROR-PRONE OSTAPENKO LOSES

Former French Open champion Ostapenko was left ruing her mistakes as she squandered 4-1 leads in both sets to lose to Kartal, who is ranked 136 places below the Latvian.

Ostapenko was undone by her 41 unforced errors, including two straight double faults while serving for the first set.

She hit the ground with her racket, frustrated with wayward and netted returns, as Kartal stayed calm to reach her second final on the tour.

"At times she's unplayable and sometimes you just have to ride the wave. Mentally, I think this is one of the best performances I've had in my career," said the 24-year-old Kartal, who returned in September after a six-month absence due to a back injury.

Both Kartal and Chwalinska will play their first WTA 1000 final when they face each other on Sunday. — Reuters



The annual horse racing programme at Al Rahba Racecourse opened with eight races featuring Arabian and Thoroughbred horses. — Mohammed al Balushi

Al Marabet SA, Fadel and Dubai Welcome win races

RIYADH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, OCT 17

THE ANNUAL horse racing programme at Al Rahba Racecourse opened with eight races featuring Arabian and Thoroughbred horses, as owners, trainers and jockeys competed for victories in an opening meeting that highlighted the depth of local racing talent and the readiness of horses for the season ahead.

The programme featured races over 1,600 metres and 1,200 metres, with Arabian horses forming a prominent part of the competition alongside Thoroughbreds. Victories were shared among several owners, trainers and jockeys, reflecting the variety of competitors taking part in the meeting.

In the opening race, the Wadi Bani Khalid Stakes for locally bred Arabian horses over 1,600 metres, BM Al Muhtahij claimed first place. Ridden by Adam bin Talib al Balushi and trained by Ammar bin Abdul Rahim al Balushi, the winner is owned by Mohammed bin Salim al Abdulsalam.

Al Marabet SA took the honours in the second race, the Wadi Shab Stakes for Arabian horses over the same distance. The horse, owned by Saeed bin Abdullah Al Riyami, was ridden by Abdulaziz bin Fahd al Balushi and trained by Hassan bin Mohammed al Falahi.

The third race, the Wadi Dawkah Stakes for Thoroughbreds over 1,600 metres, went to Dubai Welcome. Owned by Amer bin Rashid al Mahrouqi, the winner was ridden by Anas bin Salim al Siyabi and trained by Al Yaqdhan bin Ali al Farsi.

Fadel secured first place in the fourth race, the Wadi al Abyadh Stakes for Arabian



A winner being presented with the trophy.

horses over 1,600 metres. Owned by Abdullah bin Hamoud al Abri, the horse was ridden by Mu'nis bin Salim al Siyabi and trained by Hassan bin Mohammed al Falahi.

The action then moved to the 1,200-metre races. Sahel al Batinah won the fifth race, the Wadi Haibi Stakes for locally bred Arabian horses. The horse is owned by Saleh bin Ali al Ghanbousi, trained by Bassem bin Abdullah al Shukaili and ridden by Abdulrahman bin Talib al Farsi.

'LOOK AT ME' CLAIMS VICTORY

Look At Me claimed victory in the sixth race, the Wadi Dayqah Stakes for Arabian horses. Owned by Sheikh Mohammed bin Shihab al Balushi, the winner was trained by Sultan bin Mohammed al Balushi and ridden by Tariq bin Ibrahim al Azri.

Sound Money won the seventh race, the

Wadi Andam Stakes for Thoroughbreds. Representing Al Saltanah Stud, the horse was trained by Mohammed bin Ali al Hosni and ridden by Hamad bin Sultan al Malki.

The meeting concluded with the Wadi al Jizzi Stakes for Arabian horses over 1,200 metres, where Cosmos de Faust finished first. Owned by Asim bin Abbas al Ajmi, the horse was trained by Ahmed bin Saeed al Balushi and ridden by Adam bin Talib al Balushi, who thus recorded two victories during the meeting.

'PREPARATION KEY TO SUCCESS'

Saeed bin Abdullah al Riyami, owner of Al Marabet SA, said the victory at the start of the season provided valuable motivation for the team to maintain its progress and pursue further positive results. He highlighted the importance of preparation, horse fitness and cooperation between owners, trainers and jockeys, adding that local races help improve horse performance and develop expertise across the sport.

Anas bin Salim al Siyabi, who rode Dubai Welcome to victory in the third race, said success required concentration throughout the distance, sound judgement during the race and an effective understanding of the horse's capabilities. He added that a strong start to the season would encourage jockeys to maintain competitive performances in upcoming meetings.

Trainer Hassan bin Mohammed al Falahi said the victories of Al Marabet SA and Fadel demonstrated the importance of technical preparation and careful monitoring of horses ahead of competition. He stressed that selecting the right race strategy and maintaining coordination between trainers, jockeys and owners were essential to achieving the desired results.

Zverev, Medvedev ousted as Spaniards set up Shanghai title clash

SHANGHAI: Rising star Rafael Jodar ousted Daniil Medvedev in straight sets on Saturday to reach the Shanghai Masters final, where he will play Alejandro Davidovich Fokina in an all-Spanish affair.

The 26th-ranked Davidovich Fokina fought back to stun wilting top seed Alexander Zverev 5-7, 6-4, 6-3. In the second semifinal the 20-year-old Jodar beat Medvedev, a decade his senior, 6-3, 6-4 to deny the Russian former world number one a chance to return to the championship match he won in 2019. Jodar, ranked 13th, started the season ranked 168th. It is his first time in a final at the prestigious 1000 level.

"It was very fun," Jodar told

the crowd afterwards, though he credited Medvedev for making the win "tough". "All the games were very close," Jodar added.

"Super happy with how I handled the important moments," he said, adding that he showed his "best level".

The two players set the tone for a thriller as they pushed the first game to 13 minutes, with Jodar valiantly holding serve.

They traded breaks and battled through gruelling rallies on a humid evening that saw Medvedev, 30, leaning on his racquet and hunched over.

"It was not easy, I was a bit tired but that's part of the game," the sixth-



Alejandro Davidovich Fokina in action against Alexander Zverev. — Reuters

ranked Russian said. "I think he was tired as well but he managed to do it better than me."

"He was better on the return than I was," Medvedev added, calling Jodar a "great player".

"He's top 10. It's not like he's 60 in the world and we're starting to talk about it," Medvedev said.

Medvedev, the 2021 US Open champion, saved four set points but Jodar regrouped to win the first set when the Russian returned long.

Jodar needed a medical timeout before the second set but returned to the court technically excellent, racing to a 2-0 lead.

He broke to go up 4-3 when Medvedev double-faulted, and the

Russian tumbled to the ground as he tried to save a match point.

Medvedev clung on for one more game but Jodar dropped no more points and sent down a decisive forehand to clinch victory.

The 27-year-old Davidovich Fokina combined grit, lightning-fast returns and graceful drop shots to stun the German Zverev, who will end the year world number one.

"I was a little bit nervous," Davidovich Fokina said of his shaky start. "But I keep going, I keep fighting, every ball," he said.

The Spaniard extended his winning streak in China to nine matches, after claiming an ATP 250 title in Chengdu. — AFP

BUSINESS

SHORT TAKES



The changes cover the offering of mining sites, the granting of licences and concessions, financial guarantees and the transfer of mining rights.

Oman revamps mining investment rules

MUSCAT: Oman has amended its Mineral Resources Law to strengthen investor requirements, regulate the allocation of mining rights and help commercially viable discoveries move more quickly into production, according to the Ministry of Energy and Minerals.

The changes, introduced under Royal Decree 69/2026, cover the offering of mining sites, the granting of licences and concessions, financial guarantees and the transfer of mining rights.

Saud bin Khamis al Mahrrouqi, Director General of Minerals at the ministry, said that the amendments were intended to improve transparency, strengthen investor confidence and increase the sector's contribution to the economy.

A key provision gives exploration licence holders priority in obtaining an exploitation licence if they establish the presence of commercially viable mineral deposits and meet the prescribed requirements.

The measure is designed to help convert exploration findings into producing projects and reduce delays between discovery and development. The revised framework also strengthens requirements for investors' technical capabilities and financial standing. Financial guarantees will be linked to the scale of proposed projects and investments to reinforce commitments to approved development programmes.

Al Mahrrouqi said the allocation of mining sites would be governed by principles of transparency, equal opportunity and competition, with the aim of attracting investors capable of developing resources efficiently.

The amendments regulate changes in an investor's legal status, ownership transfers, the assignment of rights and the admission of new partners. These provisions are intended to preserve licence obligations and support project continuity when ownership or corporate structures change.

Penalties have also been tightened for unauthorised mineral extraction, operations outside licensed boundaries and extraction after a licence has expired.

Alongside stronger enforcement, the law establishes a framework for settling specified violations under defined conditions. — ONA

Oman FDI tops 32 bn

OMAN'S foreign direct investment stock rose 6.4 per cent year on year to RO 32.21 billion at the end of June 2026, with oil and gas extraction retaining the largest share, preliminary official data showed.

The National Centre for Statistics and Information also reported investment inflows of RO 1.93 billion.

Foreign investment in oil and gas extraction increased 5.7 per cent to RO 25.82 billion, accounting for about 80 per cent of the total stock. Reported inflows into the sector stood at RO 1.40 billion.

Manufacturing ranked second, with investment stock rising 4.7 per cent to RO 2.83 billion and inflows reaching RO 128.30 million.

Financial intermediation recorded faster growth, with investment stock increasing 18.4 per cent to RO 1.60 billion. Inflows into the sector totalled RO 248.40 million.

The United Kingdom remained



NCSI also reported investment inflows of RO 1.93 billion.

Manufacturing ranked second, with investment stock rising 4.7 per cent to RO 2.83 billion.

Oman's largest source of foreign direct investment, with its investment stock rising 6.6 per cent to RO 16.77 billion.

US investment increased 7.3 per cent to RO 8.69 billion. Together, the two countries accounted for

about 79 per cent of Oman's total FDI stock.

Investment from Kuwait rose 1.7 per cent to RO 1.38 billion, while Chinese investment increased 5.8 per cent to RO 903.80 million.

— ONA

Oman port cargo jumps to 146 million tonnes

MUSCAT: Cargo handled at Oman's ports rose to about 146 million tonnes in the first eight months of 2026, up from 90.5 million tonnes a year earlier, as vessel arrivals, container traffic and vehicle shipments increased, according to the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology.

Container throughput rose 20.5 per cent to more than 4 million twenty-foot equivalent units (TEUs), compared with 3.37 million TEUs in the corresponding period of 2025, Laila bint Ali al Batashi, Director of the Ports and Maritime Docks Department, said.

The number of vessels calling at ports and maritime



The number of vessels calling at ports and maritime docks outside port boundaries increased 27.9 per cent to more than 11,000.

docks outside port boundaries increased 27.9 per cent to more than 11,000, from 8,793 a year earlier.

Vehicle handling recorded the strongest growth among the indicators reported, rising 182.6 per cent to 188,368 vehicles from 66,661.

Al Batashi said the increases reflected stronger activity across the port network and reinforced its role in supporting trade, supply chains and logistics services.

The figures point to rising demand for Oman's maritime facilities, with growth extending across containerised goods, cargo volumes and vehicle movements.

Ports are a central component of Oman's efforts to expand its logistics industry and strengthen commercial links with regional and international markets. — ONA

Pact to establish satellite optical ground network in Oman

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, OCT 17

Oman is set to establish a network of three advanced optical ground stations by 2028 under a strategic partnership between Omani space communications company Durri Space and French photonics specialist Cailabs, marking a significant step towards developing the Sultanate of Oman as a regional hub for high-capacity satellite communications.

The agreement, signed recently under the auspices of Dr Ali bin Amer al Shaithani, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology for Communications and Information Technology, will support Oman's national space ambitions while creating infrastructure capable of serving international satellite operators.

Under the contract, Durri Space, a subsidiary of Enjaaz Group, will own the three-station network, which will incorporate



The agreement will support Oman's national space ambitions.

Cailabs' TILBA-OGS L10 optical communications technology.

Unlike conventional satellite communications that rely on radio frequencies, optical ground stations use laser beams to transmit and receive large volumes of data between satellites and Earth, offering the potential for substantially higher transmission

speeds. The planned facilities will support high-capacity communications with low-Earth-orbit satellites, including those involved in Earth observation and other data-intensive applications.

Their geographical distribution across Oman will also provide greater operational flexibility for satellite data reception.

Ahmed al Fahdi, CEO of Durri Space, said the initiative would establish the foundations for a new national capability.

"Oman has the geography and the ambition to play a meaningful role in the next generation of satellite communications. This network is the first step in building that capability in the Sultanate of Oman and in developing the Omani talent who will lead it", he stated.

The initiative aligns with Oman Vision 2040 objectives to diversify the economy, develop advanced technology industries and strengthen national capabilities in strategically important sectors.

It also complements the Sultanate of Oman's broader efforts to develop a domestic space ecosystem encompassing satellite infrastructure, Earth observation, specialised engineering services and technology-driven employment.

Durri Space, established under Enjaaz Group, is pursuing capabilities in optical satellite

communications, high-resolution Earth observation and potentially satellite assembly and integration within Oman.

Cailabs, headquartered in Rennes, France, was founded in 2013 and specialises in advanced photonic technologies serving the space, telecommunications, industrial and defence sectors.

Its optical ground station systems incorporate proprietary technology designed to mitigate atmospheric turbulence, a major challenge for laser communications. Jean-François Morizur, CEO of Cailabs, said: "Optical communications are moving from demonstrations to operational infrastructure. Durri Space's decision to build a three-station network shows the scale of that transition."

Both companies also plan to support the development of Omani technical expertise, potentially strengthening the country's participation in the rapidly expanding global satellite communications industry.

ADVERTORIALS

SHORT TAKES



NBO's Head Office brings together modern design and traditional Omani architecture.

NBO recognised for alignment with Oman Building Code

MUSCAT: The National Bank of Oman (NBO) has received the Oman Building Code Alignment Recognition Certificate for its Head Office in Al Athaiba. Presented during the Urban, Home & Building Expo 2026, held as part of the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning’s Urban October 2026 Exhibition, the recognition highlights the building’s alignment with Oman’s approved building codes and regulations.

Opened in 2017, NBO’s Head Office brings together modern design and traditional Omani architecture, reflecting the Sultanate of Oman’s natural landscapes and rich architectural heritage. From its stepped terraces inspired by Oman’s mountains to the vertical panels that echo the design of historic Omani forts, the building incorporates elements that reflect the country’s identity.

The building also makes extensive use of locally sourced materials, including natural Omani stone quarried in Suhar. Natural materials account for approximately 90% of those used in its construction, reflecting NBO’s focus on supporting local industries and incorporating locally available resources into its facilities.

Beyond its architectural design, the Head Office was developed to provide a safe, accessible and efficient environment for employees, customers and visitors, with flexible spaces that support the Bank’s day-to-day operations and activities.

The recognition reflects NBO’s continued commitment to maintaining high standards of quality and safety across its facilities, while investing in modern working environments that respect Oman’s architectural heritage and support the country’s long-term development ambitions.

ROBERTO’S MUSCAT WELCOMES NEW GM



MUSCAT: Roberto’s Muscat, the multi-concept fine-dining Italian restaurant at The St Regis Al Mouj Muscat Resort, has named Ilario Prospero (pictured) as General Manager.

His career spans more than 25 years across Italy, Indonesia and Oman, with the past decade dedicated to leading and developing hospitality and F&B concepts.

He now brings that breadth of experience to Roberto’s contemporary lifestyle concept, centred on modern gourmet Italian cuisine, exceptional mixology and world-class entertainment.

Originally from Milan, in Lombardy, Northern Italy, he brings a distinctly Italian understanding of hospitality.

MITSUBISHI OMAN LAUNCHES BACK-TO-SCHOOL SERVICE CAMPAIGN

MUSCAT: General Automotive Company (GAC), a part of The Zubair Corporation and the authorised distributor of Mitsubishi Motors vehicles in Oman, has announced the launch of its Back-to-School Service Campaign 2026.

Running from September 10 to October 31, 2026, the campaign is designed to help Mitsubishi customers prepare their vehicles for the new school year while ensuring safety, reliability, and peace of mind.

As part of the campaign, customers can benefit from a complimentary 24-point safety check-up and tyre inspection, along with a 45% discount on parts and a 20% discount on labour for



The campaign is designed to help Mitsubishi customers prepare their vehicles for the new school year.

additional repairs identified during the safety check-up.

Speaking on the campaign, Manoj Ranade, General Manager, General Automotive Company, said: “As families drive into the

new school year, vehicle safety and reliability become especially important.

Through this campaign, we want to help Mitsubishi customers ensure their vehicles are ready for the school run with expert inspections, genuine parts and attractive service benefits, while reducing the risk of unexpected downtime”.

The back-to-school service campaign reflects Mitsubishi Oman’s commitment to supporting customers with trusted aftersales service and preventive maintenance solutions.

Customers are encouraged to book their service appointments early and take advantage of these limited-time offers.

Bank Muscat 9M 2026 net profit reaches 209.18m

BANK

Muscat, the flagship financial institution in the Sultanate of Oman, announced its preliminary unaudited results for the nine months period ended September 30, 2026.

The Bank posted a net profit of RO 209.18 million for the period compared to RO 191.57 million reported during the same period in 2025, an increase of 9.2 per cent.

The key highlights of the results for the period are as follows:

1) Net Interest Income from Conventional Banking and Net Income from Islamic Financing stood at RO 321.4 million for the nine months period ended



September 30, 2026 compared to RO 310.9 million for the same period in 2025, an increase of 3.4 per cent.

2) Non-interest income was RO 131.63 million for the nine months period ended

30, 2026 as compared to RO 123.57 million for the same period in 2025, an increase of 6.5 per cent, mainly due to growth in business volumes.

3) Operating expenses for the nine months period ended

September 30, 2026 were RO 172.27 million as compared to RO 162.82 million for the same period in 2025, an increase of 5.8 per cent.

4) Net impairment losses on financial assets for the nine months period ended September 30, 2026 were RO 32.76 million as against RO 43.63 million for the same period in 2025.

5) Net Loans and advances including Islamic financing receivables increased by 7.9 per cent to RO 11,552 million as against RO 10,704 million as at September 30, 2025.

6) Customer deposits including Islamic customer deposits increased by 8.1 per cent to RO 10,919 million as against RO 10,099 million as at September 30, 2025.

Sri Lanka steps up tourism promotion in Oman

MUSCAT: The Embassy of Sri Lanka in Oman, in collaboration with the Sri Lanka Tourism Promotion Bureau, organised ‘Discover Sri Lanka’, a tourism promotion forum for travel and tour operators, airlines, social media promoters and journalists in Muscat on October 7.

The event, held at Al Falaj Hotel, aimed to increase visits to Sri Lanka by Omanis and expatriates living in Oman.

In his opening remarks, Sri Lankan Ambassador W A K S De Alwis highlighted the island nation’s proximity to Oman, noting that Sri Lanka is just a four-hour direct flight from Muscat.



The event aimed to increase visits by Omanis and expatriates living in Oman.

Chamila Fayaratne, Deputy Managing Director of the Sri Lanka Tourism Promotion Bureau, presented the country’s

major tourism attractions and priority sectors.

The presentation was followed by an interactive

question-and-answer session.

Participants also viewed videos showcasing Sri Lanka’s diverse tourism offerings.

Shihab al Shidhani, Corporate Sales Director of SalamAir, made a presentation on the airline’s services.

A raffle draw offered prizes, including return air tickets to Sri Lanka sponsored by SalamAir and hotel accommodation vouchers provided by the Aitken Spence Group. Representatives of Oman’s Foreign Ministry, Oman Air, SalamAir, leading tour operators from Oman and Sri Lanka, Aitken Spence Group and Tropical Garden Villas Ltd attended the event.

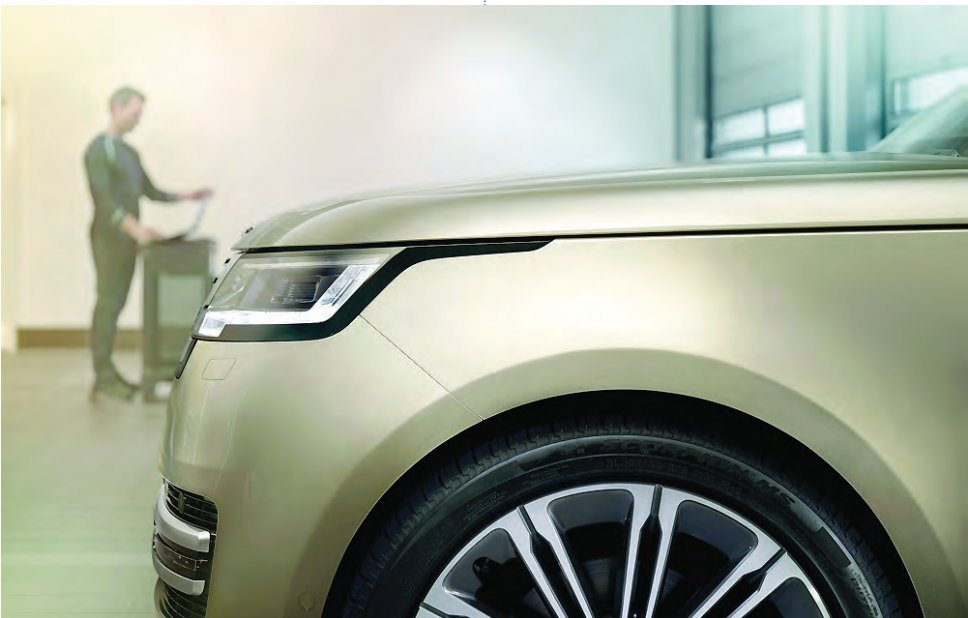
Final days to book MHD’s JLR post-khareef service campaign

MUSCAT: MHD ACERE is encouraging Range Rover, Defender, Discovery and Jaguar owners to take advantage of the final days of its post-khareef service campaign. Designed to help owners maintain their vehicles following the season’s journeys, the campaign combines comprehensive inspections with complimentary benefits and savings on parts and labour.

The offer is available for model years 2016 to 2022 across Range Rover, Range Rover Evoque, Range Rover Velar, Range Rover Sport, Defender, Discovery and Jaguar.

With the campaign nearing its conclusion and bookings available by appointment only, eligible owners are encouraged to arrange their visit promptly.

Following journeys through



Eligible owners are encouraged to arrange their visit promptly.

khareef’s changing conditions, a professional vehicle check provides an opportunity to assess maintenance needs and identify concerns that may require attention.

MHD’s expert technicians will carry out a 50-point vehicle health check and comprehensive visual inspection, helping owners keep their vehicles ready for everyday driving and future journeys.

Campaign benefits include complimentary top-ups of engine oil, coolant and steering oil, alongside a vehicle wash and vacuum and merchandise from the JLR collection.

Owners can also benefit from up to 20% off parts and labour, offering added value when addressing their vehicle’s servicing requirements.

Mohsin bin Hani al Bahrani,

CEO of MHD ACERE, said: “Our commitment to customers extends throughout their ownership journey. The post-khareef service campaign brings together expert attention and meaningful value, helping owners care for their vehicles after the season’s travels. As the campaign enters its final days, we encourage eligible owners to book their appointments and benefit from the support of our aftersales team”.

The initiative reflects MHD ACERE’s continued focus on attentive aftersales service, supporting the performance, comfort and capability owners expect from their vehicles.

Book your service today via the CARE app or by visiting the Jaguar & Land Rover Service Centre in Al Athaiba or call toll-free on 80062643.

SHORTTAKES



436 projects were implemented or developed between 2021 and 2025, involving investment exceeding RO 1.70 billion.

OMAN FOOD SECTORS GROW 3.3 PER CENT

MUSCAT: Oman's agriculture, livestock and fisheries sectors expanded 3.3 per cent in real terms in the first half of 2026, supported by investment in production capacity and food security projects.

Their combined contribution to gross domestic product at constant prices reached RO 623.50 million, compared with RO 603.60 million a year earlier, according to the National Centre for Statistics and Information. The sectors accounted for about 3.2 per cent of total GDP.

Agriculture and livestock output rose 2.6 per cent to RO 352.80 million, while fisheries output increased 4.2 per cent to RO 270.70 million.

Khalisa bint Talib al Hadhrami, Director General of Planning at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, attributed the performance partly to 436 projects implemented or developed between 2021 and 2025, involving investment exceeding RO 1.70 billion.

She said the projects had expanded production capacity and strengthened the competitiveness of activities linked to food security. Investment and the expansion of productive projects had also supported local supply chains, increased domestic output and improved self-sufficiency, she added.

The ministry is seeking to broaden the investment base and diversify production, with a focus on activities that generate greater economic value. Al Hadhrami said continued investment would remain central to raising local production and increasing the sectors' contribution to economic diversification. — ONA

Industrial projects bolster Oman investment drive

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, OCT 17

HOTPACK and Sea Pride plan to establish a packaging complex in Khazaen Economic City with investment expected to exceed RO 30.00 million over three years, as industrial partnerships expand Oman's manufacturing base.

The proposed facility in Barka is expected to create more than 300 jobs, according to Mohammed Ameen Sait, Chief Executive Officer of the Sea Pride Group of Companies.

The companies signed a memorandum of understanding at the Inspire Oman summit, which featured investment announcements spanning packaging, pharmaceuticals, engineering, oil-waste treatment and bathroom products.

The projects form part of efforts to strengthen Omani-Indian economic cooperation, attract manufacturing investment and develop local supply chains under Oman Vision 2040.

“This partnership will take the form of an industrial project focused on packaging materials and solutions, to be developed in Khazaen Economic City in Barka”, Sait said.

The complex is intended to bring a range of packaging solutions into a single facility, supporting industrial supply chains and meeting market demand.

Sait said the partnership with UAE-based Hotpack would expand Oman's capacity to manufacture packaging materials to international



The companies signed a memorandum of understanding at the Inspire Oman summit.

standards, while creating employment opportunities and supporting national talent.

Hotpack was represented at the signing by Zainudheen P B, Co-Founder, Group Chief Operating Officer and Executive Director. Sea Pride was represented by Sait and Basim Shahjahan, Director of Pride Packaging. The packaging development was among several industrial initiatives presented at the summit, highlighting investment opportunities across Oman's economic and industrial zones.

In Al Duqm, Premium Global Group announced plans to establish a mini-refinery for the treatment and management of oil waste. The proposed facility will occupy 20,000 square metres within the Special Economic Zone at Duqm.

The project is intended to expand oil-waste processing capabilities and develop energy-related industrial activities within the zone.

Engineering company E M Badhrudeen & Partners LLC showcased a new engineering and manufacturing facility involving investment of approximately RO 3.00 million. The facility has a built-up area of 4,180 square metres and is intended to expand the company's engineering and manufacturing activities in Oman.

In the pharmaceutical sector, AVENZO Pharma unveiled plans for an integrated pharmaceutical complex in Khazaen Economic City. The proposed development would add local production capacity and support pharmaceutical supply chains.

Al Fidan Group also announced investment exceeding RO 6.00 million through BIANCA, its luxury bathroom solutions brand. The project will occupy more than 40,000 square metres in Khazaen Economic City. The announcements underline the role of Khazaen and Al Duqm in attracting projects across a range of manufacturing and processing industries.

Beyond their capital investment, the projects are intended to support local procurement, develop technical skills and create opportunities for companies supplying industrial goods and services.

The proposed packaging complex, in particular, could strengthen links between local manufacturers and packaging suppliers by expanding the range of materials produced within Oman.

Musandam investment drive boosts tourism and jobs

KHASAB: Musandam put 11 investment opportunities into use and developed or activated four tourism sites in the first nine months of 2026, exceeding its annual targets as the governorate expands tourism, logistics and other economic activities.

Government efforts also helped secure employment for 580 job seekers, while small and medium-sized enterprises received 116 contracts by the end of the third quarter, according to Mahja bint Mohammed al Shehhi, Director of the Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Office at the Governor's Office.

She said several development indicators had exceeded their annual targets, with the unemployment rate standing at about 3.8 per cent. The results come as Musandam pursues infrastructure and



Musandam pursues infrastructure and industrial projects intended to attract investment, improve transport links and broaden its economic base.

industrial projects intended to attract investment, improve transport links and broaden its economic base.

The project pipeline includes the Sultan Faisal bin Turki Road linking Khasab, Lima and Dibba, the development of Khasab Port and associated logistics services, a special economic and tourism zone, and a new Musandam Airport.

Other initiatives cover strategic fuel and medical reserves, a College of Marine Sciences and a permanent branch of the University of Technology and Applied Sciences (UTAS).

Al Shehhi identified the new Khasab Hospital, Mahas Industrial City and the Musandam Centre for Culture and Innovation among completed projects. Transport improvements are intended to strengthen connections between the governorate's wilayats, facilitate access to services and support tourism and business activity.

Musandam is also developing investment opportunities in eco-resorts, mountain and adventure tourism, fisheries-related industries, marine recreation and cultural projects.

Al Shehhi said tourism development would draw on the governorate's coastal and mountain landscapes while balancing investment with the preservation of natural resources. Support for smaller businesses remains a priority, with government and development contracts intended to expand their participation in the local economy and strengthen local content.

Training and qualification programmes are being pursued alongside employment initiatives to align workforce skills with business requirements. Planned higher education institutions are expected to support the development of skills needed by the governorate's industries.

Musandam recorded an 83 per cent satisfaction rate with government services and ranked first on the community satisfaction index for essential services for four consecutive assessments, she said.

The governorate also registered 680 volunteers for community initiatives and maintained 17 recreational and sports facilities.

Al Shehhi said priorities for the next phase included attracting investment, improving project delivery, raising service quality and expanding employment opportunities.

Development spending would be directed according to the needs and economic strengths of individual wilayats. — ONA

MARITIME EVASION

Iran exports fuel despite US blockade



Iran has successfully exported liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) and jet fuel since July despite a naval blockade by the United States. Maritime security sources reveal Tehran concealed shipments using ship-to-ship transfers.

Tracking data confirmed eight gas tankers departed the region, while another tanker carrying Iranian jet fuel reached Myanmar in September, defying targeted US sanctions. — Reuters

SANCTIONS WAIVER

Trump waives key Russian energy sanctions



US President Donald Trump issued an executive order waiving key sanctions and tariffs on Russian energy before they took effect.

Citing national interests, Trump acted ahead of midterm elections to prevent rising oil prices linked to Middle East conflicts. The legislative measure would have penalised major importers of Russian oil and gas with tariffs up to 100%. — Reuters

REFINING PROFITS

Exxon signals major refining profit boost



ExxonMobil signalled a potential \$4.5 billion Q3 boost in downstream earnings due to surging refining margins. Restricted Strait of Hormuz oil shipments and strikes on Russian refineries drove global fuel prices higher.

The top US energy producer projects adjusted refining profits reaching \$8.5 billion, more than doubling its previous quarterly total despite government political scrutiny. — Reuters

OPINION

Strengthening local content in Oman’s healthcare sector



DR HILAL
AL SAWAI

The writer is local content, sustainability and innovation expert

HEALTHCARE in the Sultanate of Oman offers immense opportunities to enhance local content, bolster economic diversification and achieve sustainable development.

Healthcare, in the context of the visions and strategies of Oman Vision 2040, should be an essential public service and an economic sector that provides jobs, attracts investment, supports industry and creates an innovation-driven environment.

Local content is often called ‘in-country value’ (ICV). It is about retaining as much value in the national economy from local procurement, hiring, manufacture, and adoption of innovative technologies as well as supporting small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

The inclusion of local content within the policies and procedures of healthcare provides a number of opportunities to promote economic diversification in Oman.

DEVELOPING LOCAL HEALTHCARE INDUSTRIES
Manufacturing of medical equipment and devices, and other medical products, within Oman is another key area where opportunities exist. At present, many medical products are imported.

Import dependency can be reduced

and the national supply chain can be strengthened with targeted investment, including industrial and technology partnerships.

The establishment of industrial and economic zones offers opportunities to attract local manufacturers in the medical sector.

The role of SMEs and targeted industrial policies is important to build local industries, create jobs, enhance the national supply chain, and develop the innovations Oman needs to achieve the sustainable development goals.

Also, it is vital to further develop the healthcare workforce and enlarge the healthcare sector to employ more Omanis. Closer collaboration between healthcare institutions, universities, vocational training providers, and private companies can further align educational outcomes to the needs of the industry. There are several ways to accomplish Omanisation while improving the quality and efficiency of healthcare services, including structured training, professional certifications, clinical practice and research partnerships.

SUPPORT FOR LOCAL SUPPLIERS AND SMES
In different areas of the health sector, including logistics and services, SMEs can also play an important role in adding value to the health sector and contribute to meeting

Local content is often called ‘in-country value’ (ICV). It is about retaining as much value in the national economy from local procurement, hiring, manufacture, and adoption of innovative technologies as well as supporting small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

quality and service needs. Healthcare institutions should adopt procurement methods that enable qualified local suppliers to enter into healthy competition.

The safety and quality of services can be preserved, and the needs of SMEs for continuing improvement and growth can be addressed by collaborative procurement, supplier development, and contracting programmes.

This can also help strengthen entrepreneurship in the healthcare sector and promote the retention of the sector’s expenditure within the country. Innovation and Digital Transformation of the Healthcare Sector can create unique opportunities to transform and improve all service systems.

There are other possibilities to include local content in healthcare, especially in the field of technology. Omani technology companies and research institutions can develop local solutions in telemedicine, AI, EHR and health data analytics.

Stimulating research and development in healthcare can create a knowledge-based economy and encourage entrepreneurship.

This is in line with some of the strategic directives of Oman Vision 2040 relating to healthcare, science and research and advanced technology.

IRENA outlook puts renewable electricity at centre of energy transition

NAJAH AL RIYAMI

A new report by the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) says the global energy transition will depend not only on expanding renewable power, but also on using electricity to meet a greater share of energy needs.

In its World Energy Transitions Outlook 2026, released on 13 October, IRENA sets out a pathway aligned with limiting global warming to 1.5°C. Under this scenario, electricity would rise from about 23 per cent of global final energy consumption today to 35 per cent by 2035 and more than half by 2050. Renewable power capacity would need to reach about 18.4 terawatts by 2035, rising to 38.2 terawatts by 2050.

The report describes electrification as a way to reduce dependence on fossil fuels across the wider economy. It calls for renewable electricity to play a larger role in meeting energy needs, supported by system-wide reforms.

This means the transition is not only about building new power plants. It also depends on whether electricity can be made available and used across sectors that currently rely heavily on fuels.

IRENA presents this shift as relevant to energy security and economic competitiveness, as well as emissions reduction. Greater electrification could help countries reduce exposure to fossil fuel markets, while creating demand for investment in renewable generation and the infrastructure needed to support it.

The outlook also highlights the need for energy efficiency to improve alongside electrification, so that rising electricity use does not simply increase pressure on the system.

For Oman, the report’s message comes as renewable power is gaining a larger place in the electricity mix. The contribution of grid-connected renewables rose from 4.26 per cent in 2024 to 9.46 per cent in 2025.

Electricity generated from renewable sources exceeded four million megawatt hours last year, according to figures reported by the Ministry of Energy and Minerals.

Oman aims for renewables to provide 30 per cent of electricity generation by 2030. The ministry has identified further solar and wind projects as part of the pipeline for reaching that goal. Planned developments include around 5,080 megawatts of solar capacity and 1,720 megawatts of wind capacity across several governorates.

The expansion raises a broader question for the country’s energy transition: how can growing renewable supply support wider changes in energy use? IRENA’s outlook shifts attention from power generation alone to the role electricity can play in reducing reliance on fossil fuels across the economy.

For Oman, this invites discussion about where renewable electricity could be put to greater use as new capacity comes online.

The price of living where the jobs are

MORE than half of Omanis insured in the private sector were in basic-wage bands below RO 500 a month in 2025. The National Centre for Statistics and Information counted 207,656 workers in bands from RO 325 to less than RO 500, or 55.4 per cent of the 374,903 covered by its table.

These are basic wages, not total earnings, and some households have more than one earner. Even with those distinctions, the figures raise a question for Oman’s expanding housing programme: what can working households afford, and where?

That question deserves attention after Urban October, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning’s annual programme of exhibitions and conferences, held in Muscat from October 5 to 8.

The Oman News Agency reported 20 development, partnership and tender-award agreements at the opening, involving projects valued at more than RO 1 billion. Such agreements can represent real opportunities, but their stated value is not the same as financing secured, money spent or homes ready for occupation.

Progress should also be recognised where it can be measured. On September 14, Nama Electricity Distribution announced the operation of three substations at Sultan Haitham City with a combined capacity of 160 megavolt-amperes, enabling electricity supply to key facilities and projects.

This is infrastructure put into service, not simply a proposed investment. The next measure is whether new and existing communities become places where families can afford to live.

Rent offers a useful, if incomplete, test. An OpenSooq advertisement dated August 30, 2026, offered an unfurnished one-bedroom flat of 72 square metres in Al Khoud for RO 180 a month. It is one asking price, not a signed lease or a representative rental average, and such a flat would not suit every household.

For a worker whose total monthly



QASIM
AL MAASHANI

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

Rent offers a useful, if incomplete, test. An OpenSooq advertisement dated August 30, 2026, offered an unfurnished one-bedroom flat of 72 square metres in Al Khoud for RO 180 a month. It is one asking price, not a signed lease or a representative rental average, and such a flat would not suit every household.

income was RO 450, that rent would absorb 40 per cent, leaving RO 270 for everything else.

The financing comparison reveals a barrier beyond the monthly payment.

Under Oman Housing Bank’s Iskan programme, a qualified applicant earning RO 450 a month falls within the 3 per cent subsidised rate band. A hypothetical RO 40,000 loan over 25 years would require about RO 190 a month on a standard reducing-balance calculation, leaving RO 260 from that assumed income.

That is not evidence that buying is cheaper than the advertised RO 180 rent: the properties differ, and the loan example excludes fees and ownership costs.

Access also depends on waiting-list priority, programme eligibility, approval from a participating bank and funds to cover any gap between the purchase price and the approved loan. For some households, the obstacle comes before the first instalment.

The Central Bank of Oman’s responsible-lending guidance specifies an overall debt-service ceiling of 60 per cent of net monthly salary for housing borrowing by current employees, counting other loans and credit obligations.

This is a maximum for total repayments, not an affordability target for the mortgage. In the two separate RO 450 illustrations, RO 260 remains after the hypothetical loan instalment and RO 270 after the advertised rent, before essential expenses.

A second earner could change either calculation, but the need to test housing costs against household resources remains.

Government support is substantial. The 2026 budget allocates RO 75 million for housing-loan interest subsidies and RO 614 million for social protection.

Published conditions for direct housing assistance set a salary ceiling of RO 300, while social housing loans and subsidised bank financing follow different rules.

A worker earning above RO 300 is not necessarily excluded from all support. The question is

whether employment and available assistance together are sufficient to secure suitable housing near work.

The housing ministry says more than 189,000 families benefited from housing options between 2020 and 2025, with residential land accounting for 74.4 per cent of the options taken up.

That represents considerable activity, but an allocated plot is not a completed home. A study published in the academic journal Cities in 2024 found that just 3,195 of 17,412 residential plots allocated in Muscat during the historical period it examined had been built on.

The researchers identified financial capacity, housing need, location and neighbourhood conditions as factors in construction decisions.

Their findings do not describe a current nationwide vacancy rate. Location is part of the financial calculation. A worker may own land in a home wilayat but rent near employment in Muscat or another urban centre.

Building far from work can add travel costs or create a need to maintain two residences.

Small communities need reliable access to basic services; specialised facilities may be more efficiently shared across regional centres. Housing plans must therefore be linked to jobs and transport, not treated as a separate measure of development.

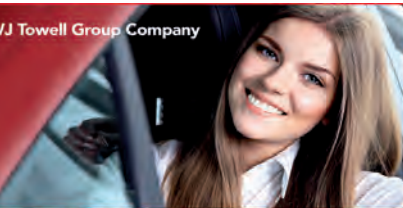
Before the next Urban October, the ministry could publish one annual housing affordability and delivery account with the statistics centre and lenders.

It should show housing costs as a share of household income by income group and governorate, distinguish asking rents from actual leases, and report how many homes announced in previous years have been completed and occupied.

This would make real progress more visible while showing where help and investment still miss the needs of working households. Oman is demonstrating that it can build. The harder test is whether people on modest earnings can afford a suitable home near their work.

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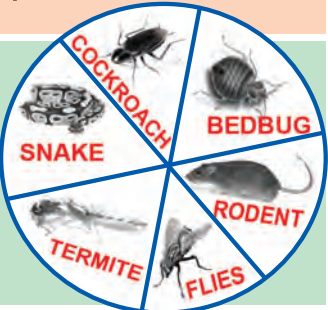
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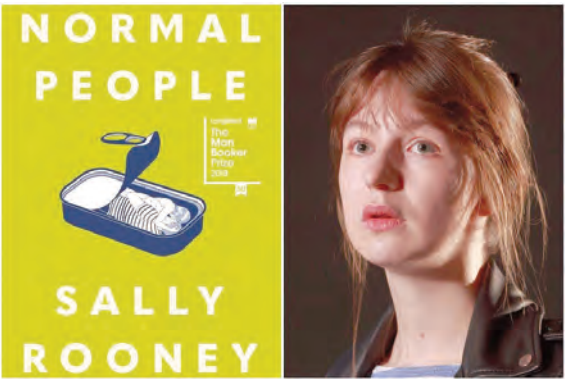
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CHARTING A NEW COURSE FOR OMANI WOMEN IN AVIATION

LITERARYFREEDOM

SALLY ROONEY BOOKS PULLED FROM UK MARKET



Irish author Sally Rooney can no longer sell her books in the United Kingdom because of her support for the activist group Palestine Action, her publisher Faber announced on Wednesday.

Rooney has previously expressed support for the group, which was banned as an “extremist” organisation by the UK government in July 2025. The group is not banned in Ireland, where Rooney lives.

The proscription places Palestine Action on the same blacklist as militant groups Hamas and Hezbollah, making it illegal in the UK to belong to, support or finance the organisation. Palestine Action is appealing the decision.

“Current legislation in the UK has led to circumstances where Faber cannot pass on UK earnings to Sally Rooney for her work”, Faber said in a statement published on its website.

“To sell a writer’s work and not be able to pass on earnings is an unconscionable situation for a publisher”, it added.

The publisher said that, in full agreement with Rooney, it had decided it could no longer supply her books in the UK in any format. However, her works would continue to be sold in other countries and regions.

The best-selling author of *Normal People* and *Intermezzo* previously said she would donate earnings to Palestine Action. She also told the High Court in London that the proscription would affect freedom of expression.

“As a result, the fulfilment of contracts to publish my work in the UK could now constitute a serious criminal offence”, Rooney said in a statement shared with AFP.

She added that, following consultation and deliberation, Faber had determined it could no longer supply her work in the UK, with her full agreement. Rooney said she was prepared to “accept the consequences” of her beliefs.

The controversy has raised questions about the implications of the ban for literary freedom, freedom of expression and the ability of authors to support causes they believe in.

Britain’s Supreme Court is expected to hear an appeal against the ban from Palestine Action co-founder Huda Ammori next month.

Thousands of people have protested against the proscription and been detained in the process. Rights groups and several public figures have also condemned the ban, arguing that it criminalises dissent. Palestine Action’s stated goal, according to its website, is to end “global participation in Israel’s genocidal and apartheid regime”.

The government’s decision to proscribe the group followed a series of high-profile actions protesting the war in Gaza, including operations targeting weapons factories, particularly facilities belonging to Israeli arms company Elbit Systems.

The case has placed Rooney’s publishing arrangements at the centre of a wider debate over the legal consequences of supporting a proscribed organisation and the boundaries of artistic and political expression in Britain. — AFP

QUICK FEATURES



PERFORMANCE

A member of the Golden Years Foundation performs an artistic and musical act on stage during a cultural event hosted by the nonprofit organisation for older adults. — Reuters



LIFESTYLE

People walk with their dogs in the silver grass fields at Haneul park in Seoul in October. — AFP



AUCTION

A view of “Pee-Wee’s Playhouse Christmas Special”, ensemble are displayed during the “Paul Reubens Big Auction” Julien’s auctions press preview. — AFP

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SAO TOME’S NICHE VANILLA FINDS FAR-AWAY FANS



São Tome and Principe, once known as the “Chocolate Islands”, is reviving vanilla cultivation as farmers seek alternatives to cocoa amidst volatile global prices.

Located off the Gulf of Guinea, the Central African archipelago is investing in vanilla, the world’s second most expensive spice after saffron. Farmer Ifrasio de Barros Rompao recently began growing the crop to support his family.

“Vanilla, in terms of money, for me, is essential”, he said.

Introduced to the islands around 1880, vanilla cultivation never flourished as sugarcane, cocoa and coffee dominated agriculture. However, ageing plantations and fluctuating cocoa prices have encouraged efforts to diversify production.

L’Atelier Vanilha, established seven years ago, supports local farmers by purchasing their vanilla, processing it locally and exporting it to European markets. The organisation works with around 50 farmers.

Producing vanilla requires considerable patience, as plants

can take three to four years to flower. After harvesting, the green pods undergo months of drying, scalding, fermentation and curing before developing their characteristic dark colour and fragrance.

Although production remains limited, the initiative aims to supply premium food shops and Michelin-starred restaurants in France, Switzerland and Belgium. Madagascar and Indonesia dominate the global vanilla market, accounting for more than 80 per cent of production. Nevertheless, Sao Tome’s distinctive vanilla is gaining recognition for its complex aromatic qualities.

Mathilde Roellinger, managing director of French spice company Epices Roellinger, described its flavour profile as combining cocoa notes with floral hints of violet and red berries. “For me, every spice carries the landscape it comes from”, she said, describing Sao Tome’s vanilla as reflecting the beauty and mystery of its island home. — AFP

SLEEP-DEPRIVED JAPANESE COMPETE FOR BEST-RESTED



The competition aims to raise awareness of sleep deprivation in Japan.



Competitors nap on mattresses while wearing sleep-tracking devices.



Participants attempt to achieve the deepest sleep during the contest.

Indigent, exhausted Japan, self-described elite “competitive sleepers” gathered in Tokyo to lie down, relax and nap as quickly and deeply as possible in a contest organised by a mattress company.

The competition, dubbed “Matt Race”, saw dozens of participants fitted with sleep-tracking devices as they stretched out on comfortable mattresses for up to 90 minutes on Monday. Competitors were assessed on how quickly and soundly they fell asleep, with the winner receiving a top prize of more than two million yen (\$14,000).

“Japan is often described as a country suffering from sleep deprivation, and people here are very diligent”, said Riichiro Nakama, a creative director who supervised the planning of the competition.

Inside a dimly lit room,

The competition, dubbed “Matt Race”, saw dozens of participants fitted with sleep-tracking devices as they stretched out on comfortable mattresses for up to 90 minutes on Monday. Competitors were assessed on how quickly and soundly they fell asleep, with the winner receiving a top prize of more than two million yen (\$14,000).

participants attempted to fall asleep while wearing monitoring devices attached to their heads. Some embraced stuffed toys as they settled into their beds, creating a scene that combined the seriousness of a competition with the comfort of bedtime.

“By turning it into an event like this, I think we can get people to sleep together, raise interest in sleep”, Nakama said.

The contest also highlighted Japan’s wider struggle with insufficient rest. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) data from 2021 showed that Japanese people slept an average of seven hours and 24 minutes daily, the shortest duration among the organisation’s member countries. Experts have cited long working hours, lengthy commutes and a busy nightlife economy as

contributing factors to the country’s sleep deprivation. Against this backdrop, the unusual competition sought to draw attention to the importance of rest while offering participants an opportunity to enjoy a nap without the pressures of everyday life.

“It was over in an instant. I almost wish I could have slept a little longer”, participant Chisato Honda, 32, said.

The winner, who was identified only by her nickname, Suimii, said she already had plans for her prize money.

“I want to live on my own, so I think I’ll use the money for the moving costs”, she said. Beyond the prize money, the event offered a playful reminder that sleep is an essential part of wellbeing, even in a society widely associated with hard work and demanding schedules. — AFP

FEATURES

Charting
a new
course for

Omani
Women in
Aviation



BALQEES AL ORAIMI

AS Oman marks Omani Women's Day, Maha al Balushi's achievement as the country's first female airline captain in 2023 represents a milestone in women's professional advancement and the expanding possibilities for future generations.

Al Balushi joined Oman Air in 2010, beginning a career that would eventually take her to the captain's seat. Her achievement marked a significant moment for Omani women in a specialised profession where technical expertise, extensive training and sound judgement are essential. As the Sultanate of Oman celebrates Omani Women's Day during October, her story offers an opportunity to reflect on women's participation in the workforce and the career paths available to young Omanis.

A JOURNEY SHAPED BY EXPERTISE
Becoming an airline captain requires rigorous training, technical knowledge, practical experience and an unwavering commitment to safety. Captains carry considerable

responsibility for flight operations, crew coordination and decision-making within established aviation procedures.

Against this backdrop, Al Balushi's achievement reflects the demands of the aviation industry and the importance of developing the skills required to progress within it.

For young women considering careers in aviation, engineering, science and technology, her example can make unfamiliar professional paths more tangible. It also highlights the importance of specialised training and clear opportunities for career progression.

BEYOND THE MILESTONE
Al Balushi's achievement extends beyond aviation, adding to the visibility of Omani women in specialised professions and broadening public understanding of the roles women can occupy across the national economy.

However, representation alone does not remove the challenges women may encounter when entering or advancing in particular fields. Access to education, professional training, mentoring and career development opportunities remains essential to helping ambition translate into



meaningful employment.

Professional role models can help young women recognise possibilities they may not have previously considered. For aspiring pilots, this could mean exploring flight training and licensing requirements, while others may be encouraged to pursue aircraft engineering, air traffic management or related aviation careers.

CREATING PATHWAYS FOR THE NEXT GENERATION
Sustaining women's participation in specialised professions requires more than celebrating individual achievements. It also depends on quality education, career guidance, practical training and workplaces that support professional development.

Media coverage can contribute by highlighting the qualifications, responsibilities and career progression behind professional milestones. Such reporting moves beyond recognition and helps readers understand what pursuing similar careers may involve.

For Oman, where developing skills and human capital remains important to economic growth, greater awareness of specialised professions can help young people make informed decisions about their education and futures.

Al Balushi's story provides a starting point for this conversation, demonstrating the value of recognising individual achievement while considering the opportunities that enable others to follow similar paths.

A MILESTONE WITH A LASTING MESSAGE
Omani Women's Day is an occasion to recognise women's contributions across society and reflect on the opportunities available to future generations.

Al Balushi's appointment as Oman's first female airline captain in 2023 remains a notable milestone in the country's aviation history. Its wider significance lies in the professional possibilities it brings into view for young women considering careers that may once have seemed distant or unfamiliar.

Ultimately, her story is about more than reaching the captain's seat. It highlights the relationship between ambition, preparation and opportunity, and the importance of ensuring that future generations of Omani women can pursue their aspirations with a clear understanding of the pathways available to them.