

Haj registration from November 4

The Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs announced on Saturday the opening of registration for those wishing to perform Haj from the Sultanate of Oman for the 1446 AH season. The registration process starts from Monday, November 4, and will continue until Sunday, November 17, 2024. The ministry stated that the registration process for pilgrims from the Sultanate of Oman will be through the electronic platform (www.hajj.om). It is noteworthy that the Sultanate of Oman's quota for this year is 14,000 pilgrims. – ONA

SUNRISE - 06:03 AM

PRAYER TIMINGS

FAJR - 04:48 AM

DHUHR - 11:58 PM

ASR - 03:19 PM

MAGHRIB - 05:48 PM

ISHA - 06:58 PM



Established 1981. Editor-in-chief: Abdullah bin Salim al Shueili



OMAN OBSERVER



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P12

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ICON COPPI WITH  
FOURTH STRAIGHT IL  
LOMBARDIA TRIUMPH



P13

CONSTRUCTION  
OF MUSCAT  
AIRPORT FREE  
ZONE BEGINS



P20

THE STRAIN OF BAD  
TOURIST BEHAVIOUR  
ON LOCAL OMANI  
VILLAGES



MUSCAT

DEPRESSION FORMS,  
RAINS EXPECTED

A low-pressure system developing over the Arabian Sea has been classified as a tropical depression, prompting the Oman Met Office to closely monitor its progress due to potential impacts expected midweek. Speaking to the Observer on Saturday, a weather expert at the Met Office stated, “The timing of the low-pressure system remains uncertain. Currently, we anticipate it could affect the region on Monday evening or Tuesday morning. We are monitoring it closely.”

DETAILS ON P2



Audrey Azoulay with Amna al Balushi

Oman, Unesco relations deep: Director-General

PARIS: Audrey Azoulay, Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (Unesco), received the credentials of Amna bint Salim al Balushiyah, Permanent Representative of the

Sultanate of Oman to Unesco, during her reception at the organisation's headquarters in the French capital, Paris.

During the meeting, Amna conveyed the greetings of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and his wishes for the Unesco to achieve its desired

goals.

During the meeting, Amna affirmed the Sultanate of Oman's keenness to enhance joint cooperation with the Unesco in all fields.

The Director-General of Unesco praised the deep relations between the

Sultanate of Oman and the Unesco, stressing her keenness to ensure the success of the mission of the Sultanate of Oman's representative to the Unesco in a way that serves the common interest and enhances aspects of cooperation. — ONA

FORCES CONTINUE TO POUND JABALIA FROM AIR AND GROUND

Israeli strikes kill 19 people in Gaza

CAIRO: Israeli military strikes on Gaza overnight killed at least 19 Palestinians, medics said on Saturday, while forces continued to push deeper into the Jabalia area, where international relief agencies say thousands of people are trapped. Residents said Israeli forces continued to pound Jabalia, which is in the north of the enclave and is the largest of the enclave's historic refugee camps, from the air and ground.

The Israeli military published new evacuation orders on Saturday to two neighbourhoods on the northern edge of Gaza City, which also lies in the north of the enclave, saying the area was a “dangerous combat zone”.

In a statement, Gaza's Hamas-run interior ministry urged residents not to relocate within northern areas of the enclave and also to avoid heading south “where the occupation is conducting continued bombing and killing every day in the areas it claims to be safe”. There has been no fresh Israeli comment on deaths but the military said in past days that forces operating in Jabalia and nearby areas killed dozens of militants, located weapons and dismantled military infrastructure.

The operation in this area began a week ago and the military said then it aimed to fight against militants waging attacks and to prevent Hamas from regrouping.

Palestinian health officials put the number of people killed in Jabalia over the past week at around 150. On Friday, Israeli strikes hit four houses in Jabalia, killing around 20 people and wounding dozens, medics said. The Israeli military has sent troops into the



A man pushes the wheelchair of a woman as Palestinians carrying their belongings flee areas north of Gaza City in the northern Gaza Strip on Saturday. – AFP

nearby towns of Beit Hanoun and Beit Lahiya as well as Jabalia and ordered residents to evacuate their homes and head to safe areas south of the enclave.

Palestinian and United Nations officials say there are no safe areas in Gaza. They have also voiced concerns over severe shortages of food, fuel and medical supplies in northern

Gaza, and said there is a risk of famine there.

In a statement on Saturday, Hamas said Israel's “massacre against the civilians” aimed to punish the residents of Jabalia for refusing to leave their homes. It also said it was a sign of Israel's military failure to defeat the group. Israel has denied it targets civilians. — Reuters

Israel warns  
south Lebanon  
residents to  
‘not return’

JERUSALEM: Israel warned residents of south Lebanon “not to return” to their homes on Saturday as Hezbollah said it launched missiles across the border on Yom Kippur, the holiest day in the Jewish calendar.

In cities around Israel, markets were closed and public transport halted.

But with the country at war, troops remained engaged in combat in Hamas-run Gaza and in southern Lebanon, a traditional Hezbollah stronghold, amid a firestorm of criticism over the wounding of four UN peacekeepers.

In a message addressed to south Lebanese, Israeli military spokesman Avichay Adraee wrote on X: “For your own protection, do not return to your homes until further notice... Do not go south; anyone who goes south may put his life at risk.” The war between Israel and Hezbollah has since September 23 killed more than 1,200 people in Lebanon, according to an AFP tally of Lebanese health ministry figures, and forced more than a million to flee their homes. – AFP

OMAN ENHANCES  
EFFORTS AGAINST  
COUNTERFEITING



The Sultanate of Oman has intensified its security measures, preventive actions and community awareness initiatives to combat the crime of counterfeiting and circulating currency. This crime poses a serious threat to the national economy, undermining confidence in the financial system and significantly contributing to inflation. It also leads to associated crimes such as fraud, swindling and money laundering.

DETAILS ON P3

30 PROJECTS  
IN FOOD SECURITY

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources is preparing to launch 30 new investment projects focused on bolstering food security, with a combined value exceeding RO 10 million. These projects are part of the ongoing “Food Security Lab 2024,” a collaborative effort between the ministry, Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit, the National Programme for Investment and Export Development (Nazdaher), the National Employment Programme and private sector entities. The initiative aims to strengthen local food production, enhance self-sufficiency and reduce the country's reliance on imports. DETAILS ON P13



Dhofar geared up for a thriving winter season

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH  
@patkaushal

With the beginning of the winter season, Salalah has started welcoming tourists from European countries. The first charter of the season arrived from the Czech Republic, carrying 183 visitors. This marked the beginning of an influx of tourists, with additional flights from Slovakia and Hungary expected in the coming weeks. Hotels in Dhofar, particularly those within the Integrated Tourism Complex (ITC), are already reporting high occupancy rates.

Leading properties such as Rotana, Al

Fanar, Juwaira and the Club by Fanar are projected to reach 92 per cent occupancy by the third week of October.

“It is a good start to the season.

With our 1,204 rooms, we expect full occupancy from a mix of charter and regular tourists,” said a senior official from the ITC. This high demand highlights Salalah's growing popularity as a winter tourism hub, particularly among European travellers.

There has been growing demand for Dhofar's natural and cultural attractions.

Salalah's appeal is not just limited to its luxurious accommodations but also its stunning natural beauty and

cultural heritage. Last season, Dhofar saw a remarkable 18.4 per cent increase in tourists, largely thanks to 239 charter flights from various European countries.

To cater to this growing demand, the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism has been working on enhancing key tourist sites in the governorate.

ADVENTURE TOURISM

Projects like the development of Haywar Cave in Jabal Samhan and upgrades to adventure tourism offerings are aimed at improving the overall tourist experience. Additionally, the ministry is focusing on promoting local culture by creating

opportunities for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and Riyada cardholders to showcase local crafts and souvenirs at popular tourist spots such as Al Baleed Archaeological Park. This initiative not only supports the local economy, but also gives visitors a chance to immerse themselves in Dhofar's rich heritage. The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism is also implementing a strategic promotional campaign targeting Gulf and international markets. With a combination of luxury resorts, cultural experiences and eco-tourism, Salalah is positioning itself as a premier destination for winter tourism.

WEATHER

MUSCAT: Max 34°C Min 27°C

SALALAH: Max 34°C Min 26°C

NIZWA: Max 36°C Min 25°C

OMAN

CULTURALIMPACT



DHOFAR INTL THEATRE FESTIVAL WRAPS UP

**SALALAH:** The first edition of the Dhofar International Theatre Festival concluded at Al Murooj Theatre in Salalah, celebrating the artistic talents of over 350 participants from 50 countries. Organised by Dhofar Municipality in collaboration with the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Youth, the eight-day festival showcased a diverse array of theatrical performances across six different tracks, leaving a lasting cultural impact. Under the patronage of Dr Abdullah bin Nasser Al Harrasi, Minister of Information, the closing ceremony included a visual presentation titled 'Harvest of the First Session of the Dhofar International Theatre Festival,' summarising the event's highlights. Following this, awards were presented to the best performances in categories like Grand Shows, Popular Theatre, Children's Theatre, Street Theatre, and Monodrama, with Omani and international productions receiving recognition. Ammar bin Obaid Ghawas, General Coordinator of the festival, emphasised its role in fostering cultural exchange and dialogue among artists and audiences. He noted that the festival's workshops and performances served as a platform for sharing expertise in acting, directing, and theatrical improvisation. The event not only celebrated the richness of Omani and global theatrical culture but also aimed to boost cultural tourism in the Sultanate. — **ONA**



CAIRO MUSIC FESTIVAL HONOURS SAYYID KHALID

**CAIRO:** At the 32nd Arab Music Festival held at the Egyptian Opera House, renowned composer Sayyid Khalid bin Hamad al Busaidy was honoured for his outstanding contributions to music, spanning over 42 years. Since the beginning of his career in 1982, Sayyid Khalid has composed more than 200 works, collaborating with Omani and Arab singers, and has played a vital role in preserving traditional Omani music. The festival, featuring 14 diverse musical and singing nights with artists from across the Arab world, also paid tribute to 19 other artists, including an exclusive Omani-themed musical night, showcasing the rich musical heritage of Oman. — **ONA**

Majis waterfront: Boosting economy and leisure in Al Batinah North

SIHAM AL SAIDI  
SUHAR, OCT 12

The Majis waterfront project in Suhar, Al Batinah North Governorate, is going to transform the area into an active recreational hub, benefiting both locals and tourists. Covering a total area of 9,665 square metres in Majis, the project promises to enhance the city's appeal by offering a mix of leisure, cultural and family-friendly facilities. The key features of the development include a prayer and toilet block (170 sqm), a coffee shop (170 sqm), and several open spaces designed to cater to different age groups and interests.

Families will enjoy the family area and interactive children's play area, while fitness enthusiasts can take advantage of the outdoor gym and volleyball court. The amphitheatre too will host events and performances, and the BBQ area will provide a spot for social gatherings. For visitors looking for a quick bite, the food cabinet area adds to the convenience of this multi-purpose space. Eng Waleed al Nabhani, Director of Projects at Al Batinah North Municipality, highlighted the project's significance saying, "This development is not just about providing leisure spaces, but also about stimulating the local economy and boosting tourism. It meets our broader vision



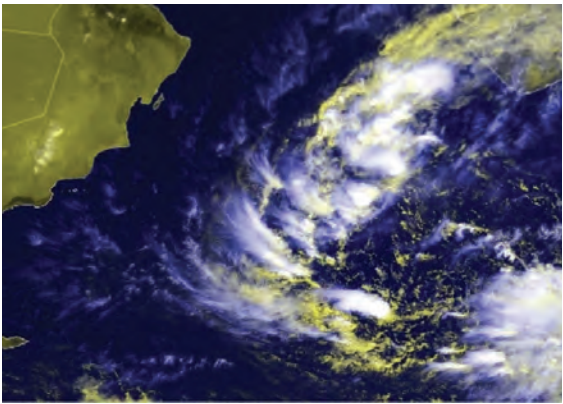
for urban development that enhances the quality of life for residents and attracts visitors to the governorate." The project emphasises the role of public spaces in urban life, contributing to economic growth and making the governorate more attractive for both residents and tourists. As part of Al Batinah North Governorate's ongoing efforts, this waterfront development is expected to be a key driver in elevating the city's recreational and economic potential. This project comes under the set of developmental projects that Al Batinah North presented and highlighted at the October conference. Such projects play a vital role in the well-being of citizens by providing

spaces for leisure, social interaction and relaxation, which are essential for improving the quality of life. They are also essential for domestic tourism, attracting visitors from across the country and boosting the local economy. By incorporating modern facilities and sustainable designs, these developments contribute to the creation of smart cities, where technology and infrastructure are integrated. This will not only improves urban living standards, but also positions cities like Majis as destinations for both residents and tourists alike where such initiatives support long-term economic growth and social life.

Tropical depression forms over Arabian Sea

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH  
MUSCAT, OCT 12

**A** LOW-PRESSURE system developing over the Arabian Sea has been classified as a tropical depression, prompting the Oman Met Office to closely monitor its progress due to potential impacts expected mid-week. Speaking to the Observer on Saturday, a weather expert at the Met Office stated, "The timing of the low-pressure system remains uncertain. Currently, we anticipate it could affect the region on Monday evening or Tuesday morning. We are monitoring it closely." As of the latest reports, the wind speed at the centre of the depression is between 20 and 25 knots, with the system located 950 km from Oman's coast. The nearest rain clouds are situated 520 kilometres away. The system is moving westward towards the coasts of Dhofar and the Gulf of Aden, with coordinates of 16 degrees north and 66.5 degrees east. On Tuesday, October 15, the forecast predicts continuous cloud formation, with varying intensity rain and occasional thunderstorms expected across Al Wusta and Dhofar



governorates, as well as Muscat, Al Batinah South, Al Dakhiliyah and Al Sharqiyah North. The Oman Met Office estimates rainfall between 30 to 60 mm for Dhofar and Al Wusta, along with Muscat, Al Batinah South, Al Dakhiliyah and Al Sharqiyah North, which could lead to flash floods and flowing wadis. Additionally, fresh downdraft winds are expected, with speeds ranging from 15 to 20 knots (28 to 37 km/h). Thunderstorms may result in decreased horizontal visibility and rising dust due to downdraft winds. The sea is forecasted to be

moderate along the Arabian Sea coasts, with wave heights reaching up to 2.0 metres. The weather system's effects are anticipated to continue on October 16-17, with ongoing cloud formation and varying intensity rain, alongside the possibility of thunderstorms over Dhofar, Al Wusta, Al Batinah South, Al Dakhiliyah and Al Sharqiyah North. Expected rainfall during this period is projected to be between 20 and 40 mm, contributing to the flow of wadis. Fresh downdraft winds will persist at speeds between 15 and 20 knots (28 to 37 km/h). Meanwhile, cumulus cloud activity continues over parts of Al Hajar Mountains, with the chance of scattered rain. The wilayats of Al Awabi and Nakhal in Al Batinah South Governorate witnessed heavy to moderate rainfall on Friday. Rainfall in Al Awabi was concentrated in the centre of the wilayat and the villages of Al Rami, Al Waliya, Tawi Al Sayh, Al Rajmah, Falaj Bani Khazir, Al Subaikha and a number of villages in Wadi Bani Kharous. Rainfall in the Wilayat of Nakhal was concentrated in the villages near the centre of the wilayat and in the villages of Wadi Mustal and Al Madrah.

OMAN WOMEN 'S DAY ON OCT 17

**MUSCAT:** The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Social Development, will mark the Omani Women's Day on Thursday which falls on October 17. This year's celebrations are dedicated to culture, literature and manuscripts and will include an operetta entitled 'Eve of Oman'. A number of outstanding Omani women in the field of culture, literature and manuscripts will be feted as part of the celebrations. Wadha bint Salim al Alawiyah, Director of Women's Affairs at the Ministry of Social Development, said: "Celebrating the Omani Women's Day on October 17 of each year embodies the Sultanate of Oman's interest in Omani women and the belief in their active role in the comprehensive development process and is in line with the Royal directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to enhance their status and capabilities and facilitating appropriate opportunities for them." — **ONA**

FOOD SECURITY LAB 2024 ADDRESSES KEY CHALLENGES

KABEER YOUSUF  
@kabeeryousef

The inaugural week of the Food Security Lab 2024, held under the auspices of Dr Saud bin Hamoud al Habsi, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MoAFWR), spotlighted various challenges facing Oman's food security sector. The event was organised in collaboration with the Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit, the National Programme for Investment and Export Development (Nazdaher), and the National Employment Programme.

Taking place at the JW Marriott hotel, the week concluded with engaging discussions and brainstorming sessions aimed at bolstering strategic directions and addressing challenges in the presence of their excellencies, dignitaries and CEOs from both the public and private sectors. **EVALUATION PROCESS** Key outcomes included the identification of challenges, standardisation of procedures, and the establishment of strategic planning through a structured evaluation process. Analytical studies focused on

Oman's investment opportunities and operational challenges, particularly concerning data and information management. The need for quality and accuracy standards for data was emphasised, alongside the necessity of creating matrices to catalog and evaluate opportunities in alignment with strategic aspirations. Finding solutions to gaps in digital transformation and integration were also highlighted during the high-level discussions. During an alignment session, a comprehensive overview of the lab was presented, including updates on several key initiatives.

"These included an executive briefing on the Investment Centre, an overview of the Import Substitution Initiative, a briefing on the Ministry's Land Investment Initiative, and a review of the progress on the Enablers Pillar," a representative from the ministry noted. Furthermore, the session featured updates on Oman's Water Consumption from Wells Measurement Initiative, the Energy Initiative, and the presentation of the National Community Solar Energy Programme by the Authority for Public Services Regulation.

## *Oman-Pakistan Business Conference from today, promising new investments*

**KABEER YOUSUF**  
@kabeeryousef

Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP), will be the chief guest at the inaugural Oman-Pakistan Business Conference, welcoming over 65 top industrialists from Pakistan starting today. The two-day event takes place at the Intercity Hotel in Al Khuwair.

Alongside the minister, notable attendees include Faisal bin Abdullah al Rawas, Chairman of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI); Ibtisam bint Ahmed al Faroojiah, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of

Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion for Investment Promotion; HH Sayyid Juland bin Jaifar al Said, Chairman of Pak-Oman Joint Investment; HH Sayyidah Hujaija bint Jaifar al Said, International Ambassador for Social Responsibility and Advocate for People with Disabilities; Eng Ridha bin Juma al Saleh, former chairman of OCCI; Saqib Fayyaz Magoon, Vice-President of the Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry; and Noman Ansari, Chief Executive Officer of Pak-Oman Joint Investment. They will share insights on the abundant investment opportunities existing in both countries during the two-day conference.

The business delegates represent a diverse array of sectors, including agro-products, food, textiles, leather, pharmaceuticals, construction and IT solutions. Other sectors featured at the event include sports, art and media management, real estate, salon supplies, industrial chemicals and marble industries.

"The first Oman-Pakistan Business Conference is of great importance. We expect more than 500 potential customers among the thousands of visitors anticipated to visit the pavilions set up at the hotel as part of the conference," the organisers stated. They added that individuals and business repre-

representatives are encouraged to visit, network and establish mutually beneficial business ties. Entry to the conference is free on both days.

The organisers emphasised the importance of strengthening bilateral relations, noting Pakistan's geographical proximity to Oman and its shared maritime boundary. Reports from the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) highlight that Oman's closeness to Pakistan's Gwadar port, a key part of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), offers significant opportunities for expanding trade routes and economic collaboration. Oman exports a vari-

ety of goods, including crude petroleum (\$32.8 billion), petroleum gas (\$12.7 billion), refined petroleum (\$4.24 billion), nitrogenous fertilizers (\$4.14 billion), and semi-finished iron (\$3.44 billion). Conversely, Oman imports textiles, food and agricultural products from Pakistan, with other imports including iron reductions valued at \$158 million, semi-finished iron (\$100 million), and rice (\$49.6 million).

Reports indicate that over the past five years, Pakistan's exports to Oman have surged at an annual rate of 32 per cent, increasing from \$120 million in 2017 to \$479 million in 2022.

**SCIENTIFIC**SESSIONS

# OSWL HOLDS CONFERENCE

**IBRA:** *The Omani Society for Writers and Literati (OSWL) organised an international conference titled 'Utilising Heritage in Omani Literature'.*

The conference was held in cooperation with the Office of the Governor of Al Sharqiyah North and A'Sharqiyah University. The participants recommended the setting up of a 'Studies and Research Centre for Human Sciences' to be entrusted with studying tangible and intangible heritage.

They also recommended the addition of 'folk literature' to the curricula of Arabic language students (of higher education institutions). In addition, the conferees proposed an 'Award for the Best Academic Research Specialised in Omani Heritage'. The conference focused on the use of heritage in Omani literature through the presentation of narrative readings and models of novels, blogs, poetic and literary writings. It showcased the intellectual collections of Omani thinkers, writers and authors across different historical eras.

The conference featured three scientific sessions, with a total of 12 working papers presented. The first session included discussions on heritage representation in Omani literature, such as the study of 'The Story of the Village' by Nasser al Hasani, and the depiction of *afṣaj* in Omani novels. — **ONA**

## Nizwa, Jabal Al Akhdhar health sector hosts community walk

AMAL AL RIYAMI  
NIZWA, OCT 12

*The health sector of Nizwa and Al Jabal Al Akhdhar, in collaboration with Nizwa Healthy City, sports teams, community associations and the University of Nizwa, organised a sports and tourism walk in the village of Tanuf.*

This event was part of the Ministry of Health's initiatives to commemorate the International Day of Older Persons. The walk was themed 'Health and Community,' aimed at encouraging physical activity and enhancing the role of seniors in society. Over 300 participants joined the walk, which began on Saturday and covered approximately 10 kilometres. They went through green farms and fresh springs, enjoying the serene beauty of the landscape. The event also fostered an interactive environment, combining entertainment with community participation.

The day concluded with a special entertainment programme for seniors, attended by elderly individuals, in recognition of the International Day of Older Persons, celebrated on October 1 each year. In addition to the walk,



*an awareness exhibition was held. This exhibition showcased a wide range of health services, including dental clinics, a heart clinic, health education clinics and other community services. Supported by various health and community organisations, the exhibition aimed to promote elderly health and raise public awareness of the importance of physical activity.*

*Dr Abdullah al Busaidi, Head*

of the Birkat Al Mouz Health Centre, emphasised, “This exhibition aligns with the vision of the General Directorate of Health Services in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate for sustainable health and pioneering services, alongside community partnerships with private and civil institutions. It aims to raise community awareness on the International Day of Older Persons.”

# Oman boosts efforts against counterfeiting

**THE** Sultanate of Oman has intensified its security measures, preventive actions and community awareness initiatives to combat the crime of counterfeiting and circulating currency. This crime poses a serious threat to the national economy, undermining confidence in the financial system and significantly contributing to inflation. It also leads to associated crimes such as fraud, swindling and money laundering.

Brigadier Jamal bin Habib al Quraishi, Director-General of Criminal Investigations at the Royal Oman Police (ROP), emphasised that the police have devoted their resources and capabilities to tackle various crimes, including counterfeiting currency, aiming to mitigate its risks to both individuals and society. He noted that, while counterfeiting remains at normal levels and has not reached a concerning threshold, raising awareness about its risks and associated criminal activities remains crucial.

He further mentioned that in the first half of 2024, no incidents of counterfeit currency operations were reported in Oman. However, one prevalent issue is the promotion of counterfeit currency through fraudulent methods, such as fake advertisements offering to exchange counterfeit foreign currencies for Omani rials at seemingly attractive



Brigadier Jamal bin Habib al Quraishi

rates. These schemes often lure those eager for quick profits, only for them to later realise they have been deceived.

Brigadier Al Quraishi also highlighted another method observed by the General Administration: promoting the exchange of foreign currencies that, while not counterfeit, have been suspended in their country of origin. Unsuspecting individuals fall prey to such scams, enticed by lucrative offers,

only to find that the currency they possess is worthless and cannot be exchanged at legitimate exchange offices.

He explained that official documents, including passports, identification cards and paper currencies, are equipped with advanced security features to guard against forgery and fraud. The ROP's efforts to counter counterfeit currency include collaborating with international bodies to exchange information and expertise, equipping law enforcement with the necessary tools for detection and investigation, and providing specialised training programmes for officers.

Brigadier Al Quraishi also pointed to Omani laws addressing forgery in Article (175) of the Penal Code, which states: "Anyone who counterfeits, forges, or falsifies in any way a paper or metal currency legally circulating in the country or another country, or counterfeits national public bonds or promotes any of them with knowledge of that, shall be punished by imprisonment for not less than 5 years and not more than 15 years."

The law also mandates a minimum prison sentence of 10 years if the offense results in a devaluation of the national currency or bonds or disrupts credit in domestic or foreign markets.



سلطنة عُمان  
وزارة النقل والاتصالات وتقنية المعلومات  
Sultanate of Oman  
Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology



## إعلان مناقصة Tender Notice

The Internal Tenders Committee at the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology invites for the Following Tenders:

| TENDER NUMBER      | TENDER NAME                                                                 | DATE OF PUBLISHING | LAST DATE TO PURCHASE TENDER DOCUMENT | SUBMISSION DATE | COMPANIES WHO SHOULD PARTICIPATE IN THIS TENDER                                                            | DOCUMENT PRICE                                                                                                       |
|--------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|---------------------------------------|-----------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| MT CIT<br>257/2024 | PREPARATION OF SHIP REGISTRATION DEPARTMENT OFFICES ON MUSANDAM GOVERNORATE | 10-10-2024         | 24-10-2024                            | 17-11-2024      | EXPERIENCED COMPANIES AND REGISTERED WITH THE SECRETARIAT GENERAL OF TENDER BOARD (THIRD & FOURTH CLASSES) | (25/-)<br>TWENTY FIVE OMANI RIAL FOR LOCAL COMPANIES<br><br>(10/-)<br>TEN OMANI RIAL (FOR SME)<br><br>NON-REFUNDABLE |

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**Tel: +968 24402200, e-mail: [etenderhd@gstb.gov.om](mailto:etenderhd@gstb.gov.om)**

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SPOTLIGHT

# SOLAR IS RAY OF HOPE FOR ENERGY

AFRAH AL  
BALUSHI  
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SOLAR ENERGY projects in the Sultanate of Oman are witnessing a significant expansion as part of the country's efforts to diversify energy sources and raise the contribution of renewable energy in the national electricity mix to 30 per cent by 2030 and 39 per cent by 2040.

The use of solar energy instead of traditional energy sources contributes to reducing carbon emissions and maintaining air quality. The resources saved can then be used for other uses of higher value that will enhance the national development process, provide job opportunities for local cadres, add new industries and sectors, and drive economic diversification.

The International Energy Agency data indicated that the Sultanate of Oman's electricity consumption is expected to increase by 2.6 per cent annually during the period from 2022 to 2025, compared to 8 per cent in 2021.

This came to meet the high demand for electricity while reducing reliance on gas, as the Sultanate of Oman's plans to add 1.9 gigawatts of renewable energy by 2026.

The Sultanate of Oman also aims in Oman Vision 2040 for solar energy consumption to reach an estimated 30 per cent by 2040.

It aims, through this trend in the transition to the use of renewable energy, to enhance energy security for a sustainable future and achieve a balance between the requirements of sustainable development and the optimal use of natural resources for the growth of the national economy and reducing the effects of climate change.

The Oman government continues to launch its renewable initiatives at all times, and in this context, Oman launched the 'Green Mosque' programme through several concerned Omani entities specialised in energy.

The programme converts a mosque into an environmentally friendly building that operates on solar energy, and the project works to reduce the consumption of electricity to a rate of up to 100 per cent.

By positioning a clean energy generation system in a group of mosques of various sizes and areas, the initiative comes in line with Oman Vision 2040 and the global trend towards establishing green buildings by adopting the approach of transitioning to a green economy in development projects.

Oman plans to add 1.9 GW of renewable energy by 2026

Goal to raise the contribution of renewable energy in the national electricity mix to 30% by 2030 and 39% by 2040

Electricity consumption is expected to increase by 2.6% annually from 2022 to 2025, compared to 8% in 2021

Green Mosque programme converts a mosque into an environmentally friendly building that operates on solar energy

BIGHONOUR

Artist attends Jordan Fine Arts Forum

TALEB BIN ALI AL KHAYARI



ALI BIN HILAL AL MAAMARI

Omani artist Ali bin Hilal al Maamari recently represented the Sultanate of Oman, in the 10th Jordan International Fine Arts Forum which was held in the city of Al Salt in Al Balqa Governorate in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. The event was held on the occasion of

the Silver Jubilee celebration of King Abdullah bin Al Hussein's accession to the throne. Many fine artists from the region and beyond took part in the forum including the Arab Republic of Egypt, the Kingdom of Bahrain, the Republic of Tunisia, the Republic of Algeria, the Republic of Lebanon, the Kingdom of Morocco and the Republic of Armenia in addition to a group of senior Jordanian artists. On the sidelines of the forum, an exhibition was held that highlighted the works of the participating artists. The exhibition was opened under the auspices of Haifa Najjar, Jordanian Minister of Culture.

Speaking about his participation in the forum, Al Maamari expressed his happiness to represent Oman in this artistic forum. He says, "Such artistic events benefit artists through meeting his/her fellow artists with different cultural backgrounds and diverse artistic styles and methods. In such gatherings, artists get the opportunity to hone their skills and artistic talents. The forum saw art workshops which brought together the artists under one roof to exchange ideas and artistic styles."

Al Maamari added: "The forum gave me a chance to increase my list of artistic acquaintances and interact with other artists. Jordan is a brotherly country to the Sultanate of Oman.

Oman mourns veteran educator Henwood's death

STAFF REPORTER  
MUSCAT, OCT 12

THE PASSING of Barry Henwood (Sept 20, 1947–Sept 30, 2024) has left a profound sense of loss among all who knew him. Among those grieving his loss is Salim al Maskri from Muscat, a close family friend whose connection with Barry spanned more than 30 years. The news of Barry's passing has profoundly impacted many, particularly within the educational community where his influence and dedication left a lasting mark.

Barry's career in education was distinguished by significant contributions, most notably at MLS College, where he played a pivotal role in supporting thousands of students, including many from Oman. "Barry was more than just an educator; he was a mentor, a guide and a friend to countless students. His impact on our community will be felt for generations to come," said Salim al Maskri, reflecting on their long-standing friendship. At MLS College, Barry was instrumental in developing English and business-related courses.

He was committed to providing academic instruction and the personal support necessary to help students thrive, particularly those adjusting to new cultural environments. His dedication ensured that students from diverse backgrounds — Asia, Latin America, Europe and the Arab world—found the institution's welcoming and supportive



Barry Henwood with Salim al Maskri at Muscat University in October 2016.

atmosphere. "Barry's ability to connect with students from different cultures was unparalleled. He believed in the transformative power of education and made sure that every student, no matter where they came from, felt at home," added Salim.

Beyond his contributions to MLS College, Barry played a crucial role in the establishment of Muscat University, where he designed and implemented English language programmes. His attendance at the university's opening ceremony in October 2016 marked a significant milestone in his career.

Barry had a particular passion for supporting Arab students, especially those from Libya, guiding them through their educational journeys.

He was also an active member of the Oman British Society, further strengthening the bonds between the two cultures. Barry's love for Oman was evident through his frequent visits, during which he actively engaged with the local community and participated in cultural events.

He formed meaningful relationships both within and beyond the academic sphere, contributing to local initiatives and bridging cultural divides.

His ability to foster understanding and respect among diverse groups made him a respected figure in the educational community of Oman. Al Maskri expressed the profound sense of loss, saying, "The weight of this loss feels almost unbearable. Barry's absence leaves a void that will be felt deeply, not only by those who knew him personally but also by the countless lives he touched through his work." Barry is survived by his wife, Josephine, and his children Mark, Suzy, Katy, Paul, Barry and John, as well as his brother Sandy and nine grandchildren. His legacy of dedication and passion for education will continue to inspire all who were fortunate enough to have known him.

"We extend our deepest heartfelt condolences to his family during this difficult time," said Al Maskri, as he mourned the loss of a dear friend and a true champion of education.

### Tender Announcement

The Internal Tender committee of **Ministry of Social Development** hereby announces the following tender :-

| Tender No. | Tender Subject                                                                                                         | Grade                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | Last date for obtainment of Tender Document | Last date for Tender Submission | Tender Document Price (non-retundable) |                 |
|------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------------------------|-----------------|
|            |                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |                                             |                                 | Small and Medium Companies             | Local Companies |
| 418/2024   | Providing tools and equipment for t he occupancy program hall at the Down Syndrome Center                              | Companies specialized in the field of supplying office and educational tools, materials, and supplies and registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board in the excellent, first, second, third, or fourth degree.                                             | Friday 01-11-2024 02:00 PM                  | Thursday 21-11-2024 10:00 AM    | 10 R.O                                 | 25 R.O          |
| 419/2024   | Equipping the sensory stimuli hall at the Al-Wafa Center for the Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities at Rustaq | Companies specialized in the field of supplying office and educational tools, materials, and supplies and registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board in the excellent, first, second, third, or fourth degree.                                             | Friday 01-11-2024 02:00 PM                  | Thursday 21-11-2024 10:00 AM    | 10 R.O                                 | 25 R.O          |
| 420/2024   | Providing a planning, monitoring and evaluation system programs                                                        | Companies specialized in the field of designing, installing and maintaining software and information systems/equipping information data centers and registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board in the first, second, third or fourth degree of excellence. | Sunday 27-10-2024 02:00 PM                  | Monday 11-11-2024 10:00 AM      | 10 R.O                                 | 25 R.O          |
| 421/2024   | Providing tools for the leatherwork workshop at the Vocational Rehabilitation Center at Al Seeb                        | Companies specialized in the field of supplying office and educational tools, materials, and supplies and registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board in the excellent, first, second, third, or fourth degree.                                             | Friday 01-11-2024 02:00 PM                  | Thursday 21-11-2024 10:00 AM    | 10 R.O                                 | 25 R.O          |
| 422/2024   | Equipping the sensory stimuli hall at Al-Wafa Center for Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities at Al-Buraimi     | Companies specialized in the field of supplying office and educational tools, materials, and supplies and registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board in the excellent, first, second, third, or fourth degree.                                             | Friday 01-11-2024 02:00 PM                  | Thursday 21-11-2024 10:00 AM    | 10 R.O                                 | 25 R.O          |
| 423/2024   | Providing and installing a meeting system in the meeting room of the Office of His Excellency the Undersecretary       | Companies specialized in the field of design, installation and maintenance of software and information systems Registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board in the excellent, first, second, third or fourth degree.                                         | Friday 01-11-2024 02:00 PM                  | Thursday 21-11-2024 10:00 AM    | 10 R.O                                 | 25 R.O          |
| 424/2024   | Implementing special questionnaires for the Ministry of Social Development 2024                                        | Companies specialized in the field of design, installation and maintenance of software and information systems Registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board in the excellent, first, second, third or fourth degree.                                         | Friday 01-11-2024 02:00 PM                  | Thursday 21-11-2024 10:00 AM    | 10 R.O                                 | 25 R.O          |

❖ Specialized Companies, registered with the **Tender Board** may obtain the Tender documents at the Tender Board e-tendering digital portal link (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>). On **Sunday 13/10/2024**.

❖ For Inquiry, please contact though the e-tendering website ([reg@tenderboard.gov.om](mailto:reg@tenderboard.gov.om)) tel. (24402200).

**" The lowest or any other tender shall not be binding to the Ministry"**

[www.mosd.gov.om](http://www.mosd.gov.om)

WORLD

SHORTTAKES



Rescuers inspect a house damaged by an air strike in Zaporizhzhia. — Reuters

UKRAINE, RUSSIA SAY FOILED DRONE ATTACKS

**KYIV:** Russia and Ukraine traded drone attacks overnight, with Russian officials saying on Saturday that Ukrainian strikes had killed one person in the Belgorod border region. Russia said it had downed 47 Ukrainian drones overnight, while Ukraine reported it neutralised 24 drones fired by Moscow. The Ukrainian air force said many missiles were fired from Belgorod, without specifying the number or type. It said Russia had fired 28 drones at Ukraine, of which 24 were destroyed in the Sumy, Poltava, Dnipropetrovsk, Mykolaiv and Kherson regions. In the southern region of Zaporizhzhia, Russian bombardments wounded four people, the head of the regional administration said. The Russian defence ministry said the 47 Ukrainian drones taken down overnight included 17 in the southeastern Russian region of Krasnodar, 16 over the Azov Sea and 12 over the border region of Kursk. A separate Ukrainian drone attack killed one person in the village of Ustinka in the Belgorod region, the regional governor said on Telegram. — AFP



Polish PM Donald Tusk attends a press conference in Prague. — Reuters

TUSK SAYS POLAND TO LIMIT ASYLUM RIGHTS

**WARSAW:** Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk said on Saturday he planned to partially suspend asylum rights for irregular migrants, accusing human traffickers and countries such as Russia and Belarus of abusing the system. Tusk, who is due to present a migration policy package on Tuesday, said in a speech to his Civic Coalition movement that Poland would wage a “merciless” fight against undocumented immigrants entering the country. “I’m saying loud and proud that our migration strategy will include the temporary suspension of the right to asylum on our territory,” he said. He added he would ask the European Union to “recognise” the proposal. “We know perfectly well how Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko, Russian President Vladimir Putin, migrant brokers and human traffickers use it,” he said of the asylum system. “The way asylum rights are being used is completely contrary to the actual essence of the right to asylum,” said Tusk. — AFP

TRUMP DEMONISES MIGRANTS IN MISLEADING SPEECH

**AURORA:** Donald Trump painted an apocalyptic picture of a country “occupied” by hordes of criminal foreigners in a campaign speech on Friday as he escalated his efforts to make November’s US election about a migrant crime wave that isn’t happening. With the White House race neck-and-neck in the final stretch, the Republican ex-president has been dividing his closing pitch between a protectionist economic message and riling his largely white, working-

class supporters by demonising immigrants. As his Democratic election rival Kamala Harris pledged to work with Republicans to promote united government, Trump delivered as divisive a speech as he has ever given, wildly exaggerating local tensions and misleading his audience about immigration statistics and policy. “America is known, all throughout the world, as ‘Occupied America.’ They call it ‘occupied.’ We’re being occupied by a criminal force,”

Trump thundered, in an 80-minute appearance, Colorado focused almost entirely on immigration. “But to everyone here in Colorado and all across our nation, I make this pledge and vow to you: November 5, 2024 will be Liberation Day in America,” he added. Aurora was the scene of a viral video showing armed Latinos rampaging through an apartment block that spurred sweeping, false narratives about the town being terrorised by migrants. — AFP



Aerial view of destroyed houses in Port St Lucie as Hurricane Milton swept through Florida. — AFP

MILTON LEAVES 16 DEAD

**SIESTA KEY:** The death toll from Hurricane Milton has risen to at least 16, officials in Florida said, and millions were still without power as residents began the painful process of piecing their lives back together. More than two million households and businesses were still without power, officials said, and some areas in the monster storm’s path through the state remained flooded. “There are places where water is continuing to rise,” Governor Ron DeSantis warned on Friday. But while the storm was “significant,” he said, “thankfully this was not the worst-case scenario.” In a White House briefing, US President Joe Biden said experts estimated the cost of storm damage at \$50 billion. The federal response to the huge storm — and to Hurricane Helene, which devastated parts of the US southeast just two weeks earlier — has taken on an increasingly political edge, and Biden said he would visit Florida today. — AFP

UN force refuses to quit south Lebanon positions

**A** SPOKESMAN for UN peacekeepers in Lebanon on Saturday said Israel had requested they leave their positions in south Lebanon, where Israel is clashing with the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah, but they had refused. They asked us to withdraw “from the positions along the Blue Line... or up to five kilometres from the Blue Line,” UNIFIL spokesman Andrea Tenenti said, using the term for the demarcation line between both countries. “But there was a unanimous decision to stay.”

UN peacekeepers in Lebanon on Saturday said he feared an Israeli escalation against Hezbollah in the country’s south could soon spiral out of control. This risks “turning very soon into a regional conflict with catastrophic impact for everyone,” Tenenti said, calling for a diplomatic solution.

Meanwhile, the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) said that unknown gunfire a day earlier hit a peacekeeper, the fifth wounded in south Lebanon near the Israeli border in just two days. “Last night, a peacekeeper at UNIFIL’s headquarters in Naqura was hit by gunfire due to ongoing military activity nearby... We do not yet know the origin of the fire,” a statement said, adding that the peacekeeper was “stable.” Clashes in the south of the country had inflicted “a lot of damage” on its positions. Working is “very difficult because there is a lot of damage, even inside the bases,”



People carry belongings as they walk on rubble at the site of an Israeli strike, in Beirut. — Reuters

The United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) said that unknown gunfire a day earlier hit a peacekeeper, the fifth wounded in south Lebanon near the Israeli border

Tenenti said. “Just last night, on the position of the Ghanaian peacekeepers, just outside, the blast was so strong that it destroyed some of the containers inside very badly.”

Hezbollah said on Saturday it launched a drone attack on a military base in north Israel’s Haifa a day earlier. Hezbollah fighters at 8:00 pm on Friday launched “an air attack with a swarm of explosives-laden drones on an air defence base” in Haifa, a statement from the group said.

The Israeli military on Saturday warned residents of south Lebanon

“not to return” to their homes as troops continued fighting Hezbollah gunmen in the area. Israeli forces continue to “target Hezbollah posts in or near your villages,” military spokesman Avichay Adraee said on X. “For your own protection, do not return to your homes until further notice. Do not go south; anyone who goes south may put his life at risk.” In a separate post, Adraee reiterated an earlier call for health workers and medical teams in southern Lebanon to avoid using ambulances, claiming they are being used by Hezbollah fighters. — AFP

COMPUTING LITERACY

School sets world record for largest lesson



Nearly 1,700 students gathered at the University of Lisbon’s IST School of Technology to set a new Guinness World Record for the largest computer programming lesson in a single venue. The previous record grouped 724 participants in Dallas, in the US, in 2016. “The final total was counted on how many people were here and 1,668 participants were achieved,” said Guinness World Records Adjudicator Paulina Sapinska. — Reuters

AIMING TO WIN

Conservatives ‘determined’ to win 2025



Germany’s centre-right Christian Democrats (CDU) and their Bavarian sister party set their sights firmly on victory in the 2025 parliamentary elections. “We are determined to win this Bundestag election in a year’s time,” CDU leader Friedrich Merz told a party conference of the Christian Social Union. Germany needs a government that is not hamstrung by infighting, Merz said, in a shot at the deeply unpopular centre-left coalition government led by Chancellor Olaf Scholz. — dpa

QUELLING VIOLENCE

Kenya says extra police ready for Haiti



An extra 600 Kenyan police officers set to join a UN-backed mission to try to quell rampant gang violence in Haiti will be ready for deployment in early November, Kenya’s police chief said on Saturday. President William Ruto had pledged the additional officers following a meeting with Haiti’s interim Prime Minister Garry Conille, as the two leaders appealed for the international community to do more. — AFP

The New York Times

Elon Musk shows off Tesla ‘Robotaxi’ that drives itself



JACK EWING

The author writes about the auto industry with an emphasis on electric vehicles

AFTER YEARS of promises, Tesla on Thursday unveiled a car that Elon Musk, the company’s CEO, said will be able to drive itself without human supervision. Musk has said the vehicle will add trillions of dollars to the company’s stock market value and fuel its growth. The “robotaxi,” which Musk also referred to as a “cybercab,” will cost less than \$30,000 and be available before 2027, he said. He acknowledged, “I tend to be a little optimistic.”

The product, which does not have a steering wheel or pedals, is a prototype of a self-driving taxi that Musk has staked Tesla’s future on. Musk promised that the vehicle, which appeared to be made of stainless steel, will be able to ferry passengers to any destination without human intervention—a feat that other companies have achieved in just a few places like Phoenix and San Francisco.

Analysts at BNP Paribas Exane called the event a disappointment and said it appeared to be little more than a dem-

onstration of Tesla’s existing software “in a different body shell on a handful of concept vehicles, navigating a carefully sanitised movie studio lot with no pedestrians, cats, dogs, etc.”

Tesla’s existing cars, including the Model 3 sedan and Model Y sport utility vehicle, will be able to offer robotic taxi rides in Texas and California well before the new vehicle becomes available, Musk said.

Still, Musk’s supporters and fans believe that the robotaxi will open a lucrative line of business that will more than make up for Tesla’s recent struggles in the electric car market, where it has lost market share to more established carmakers. Musk has said people will be able to purchase robotaxis for personal use and earn extra money by allowing the vehicles to ferry passengers—the automotive equivalent of listing a home on Airbnb.

For Tesla investors, whose shares are trading for about the same price they were at the beginning of the year, much

Musk promised that the vehicle, which appeared to be made of stainless steel, will be able to ferry passengers to any destination without human intervention

was riding on the event.

Tesla’s status as the most valuable car company in the world was once based on Musk’s claim that the company would sell 20 million cars a year by the end of the decade—twice as many as Toyota and more than 10 times as many as Tesla sold last year.

Lately, as sales growth at Tesla has slowed, Musk has stopped emphasising that goal and instead staked the company’s future on self-driving technology. People who do not believe in Tesla’s ability to conquer the obstacles to fully autonomous driving “should not be an investor in the company,” Musk said in April.

In a surprise, Tesla also rolled out an autonomous “robovan” capable of transporting 20 people. “We’re going to build this,” Musk said.

However, the company disappointed some investors who had hoped to see a prototype of a Tesla car priced lower than existing models. Tesla has said such a car will go on sale next year.

What flying in a wind tunnel reveals about birds

EMILY ANTHERS

In North America alone, billions of birds fly south for the winter, sometimes in enormous undulating flocks. It is one of nature’s great spectacles as well as an athletic feat: Some birds regularly migrate thousands of miles or stay aloft for days at a time. And yet, for a large-scale, annual event, migration remains surprisingly mysterious. Scientists are still seeking answers to basic questions about the costs and benefits of these avian journeys and what it takes to survive them.

“How do you get a bird like a godwit that can fly over the entire Pacific Ocean?” said Christopher Guglielmo, a biologist at Western University in Ontario who studies the physiology of bird flight. “How do they have enough energy?” And, perhaps more to the point of his own research, he added, “How do you study what’s going on inside a bird?”

It is understandably difficult to monitor the internal workings of a wild bird while it is soaring thousands of feet in the air. So Guglielmo sends his avian test subjects on simulated journeys. At the Advanced Facility for Avian Research, he and his colleagues use a hypobaric wind tunnel, which functions, in essence, as a treadmill for airborne birds. Researchers can adjust not only

Scientists are still seeking answers to basic questions about the costs and benefits of these avian journeys and what it takes to survive them

the wind speed inside the tunnel but also the temperature, humidity and air pressure to simulate different flying conditions and altitudes. They can study the physics of flight, mapping how air flows around the bodies of different birds,

or focus on avian physiology: How does a bird’s breathing change at higher altitudes? How does diet affect flight performance? Answering these questions will help scientists grasp what birds are capable of and what their limits are. It could also help to predict how wide-scale environmental changes from pollution and global warming might affect the ability of birds to survive long-haul journeys.

In one current study, Guglielmo’s team is examining Western sandpipers, small shorebirds that spend their summers breeding in the Arctic tundra of Alaska and Siberia. “The family of birds that they’re from, of shorebirds, are considered the champion migrators of the bird world,” Guglielmo said.

The researchers are studying how much energy it takes for the sandpipers to fly at different speeds. The relationship is not a linear one. Hovering in one place requires a lot of energy, Guglielmo said, as does flying at top speed. Somewhere between those extremes is a bird’s most energy-efficient speed, one that allows it to cover a lot of ground while burning relatively few calories.

The scientists are charting the birds’ energy expenditures at both ground level and a simulated altitude of about 10,000 feet. A warming climate could prompt some birds to fly at higher altitudes, where the air is cooler but also thinner.



JONATHAN WEISMAN

The writer is a politics writer for The New York Times, covering campaigns.

IT WAS the kind of exchange Democrats are hoping for as they hit the streets of Wisconsin, rounding up votes in the first truly contested state legislative races in 13 years. An energised Democratic Party, awakened like Rip Van Winkle after perhaps the most systematic gerrymander in the country, is eyeing newly competitive local districts for a possible updraft effect — ideally benefiting both Vice-President Kamala Harris and Senator Tammy Baldwin, whose seat is critical to Democrats’ hopes of keeping control of the chamber or at least holding Republicans to a narrow majority.

In a state that President Joe Biden won in 2020 by 20,682 votes, and former president Donald Trump won in 2016 by 22,748, even a few thousand voters energised by the candidates at their doorstep could make a difference. Ben Wikler, the chair of Wisconsin’s Democratic Party, said issues like school funding and Medicaid expansion would drive “a small but incredibly consequential group of voters to the polls.”

Despite Wisconsin’s status as a national battleground, Republicans have controlled both of the state’s legislative chambers since 2011, aided by the voting maps that their party drew heavily in its favour. Just south of Green Bay, for example, three state Senate districts converged in a jigsaw puzzle configuration, allowing three Republican state senators to live within a half-dozen miles of one another.

Then last year, voters handily elected a liberal justice to the state



VP Kamala Harris delivers remarks at a Republicans for Harris campaign event at the Gray Hawk Golf Club in Scottsdale, Arizona.

Supreme Court, handing the left a majority.

The campaign that elected the justice, Janet Protasiewicz, was driven in large part by a push to prevent 19th-century issues from snapping back into place with the repeal of Roe v. Wade. But voters also chafed at the draconian gerrymander that ensured an almost evenly divided state had a Legislature with an overwhelming Republican majority.

Just after Protasiewicz was sworn in, a coalition of voting-rights groups and left-leaning law firms filed a legal challenge to the districts, arguing that new maps should be drawn before the 2024 election.

Governor Tony Evers, a Democrat, drew up new maps that were grudgingly accepted by the Republican Legislature — not heavily weighted to the Democrats but even: 45 Assembly seats are Democratic-leaning, 46 are Republican-leaning and eight are considered tossups.

To an extent, Democrats agree.

The voters of northeast Wisconsin do not have the state Legislature top of mind, they concede. But the Wisconsin Democratic Party is contesting 97 of the 99 seats in the Assembly and all 16 state Senate seats up for election, numbers not seen since 2011, the last election before Republicans gerrymandered the Legislature out of contention. Two years ago, Democrats ran in 84 Assembly seats and 12 of the 14 Senate seats up that year.

In contrast, Republicans have given up on contesting five Democrat-held state Senate districts this year. Repeated efforts to reach legislative candidates in the party.

In Appleton, about 30 miles southwest of Green Bay, Kristin Alfheim, the Democrat running in the newly formed 18th state Senate district, marvelled at the constant flow of volunteers at the Outagamie County Democratic headquarters. The area was once known for Senator Joseph McCarthy, the anti-communist demagogue, and the far-right John Birch Society.

Despite Wisconsin’s status as a national battleground, Republicans have controlled both of the state’s legislative chambers since 2011, aided by the voting maps that their party drew heavily in its favour

OPINION

Are workplace well-being programmes failing?



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**OCTOBER** 10 is World Mental Health Day, and this year’s official theme, ‘It is time to prioritise mental health in the workplace,; highlights the importance of fostering supportive work environments.

A recent report by the World Health Organization (WHO) found that mental health issues among employees result in an annual loss of \$1 trillion (£ 747 billion) in productivity worldwide. To address this growing crisis, WHO has urged employers to introduce comprehensive well-being programmes in the workplace.

I recently participated in a panel discussion that explored well-being programmes offered by various companies in Oman. I was impressed by the variety of initiatives presented — ranging from free gym memberships and on-site nurseries for working mothers to fully paid weekend stays at prominent hotels in Muscat. However, one question lingered: Do any of these programmes work?

I did my research and came across a study from the UK that looked at 46,336 employees from 233 organisations and found there was no evidence that a range of common workplace wellbeing initiatives – including

mindfulness and stress management classes, one-to-one mental health coaching, well-being apps or volunteering work – improved employee wellbeing.

This was shocking to read especially since the financial cost of such programmes was over \$60 billion annually worldwide. So, why don’t these programmes work?

According to psychologists, factors such as employees’ motivation to adopt these programmes, the content of each programme and the way they are implemented significantly impact their outcomes. Some organisations deal with well-being as an accreditation point so they choose easy-to-implement initiatives, such as hosting well-being talks or offering mindfulness or yoga classes and other activities that do not address the actual needs of the employees, no wonder then such activities are often poorly attended. On many occasions, these programmes are run by management consultants who may be charismatic and have good public speaking skills but lack experience in psychology or mental health, so they end up presenting book abstracts and PowerPoint presentations downloaded from the internet. Many employees report skipping well-being activities because they find them irrelevant or unhelpful, reflect-

Some organisations deal with well-being as an accreditation point so they choose easy-to-implement activities that do not necessarily address employees’ needs

ing a disconnect between the programmes and their actual needs. A recent survey from the UK revealed that employees were more interested in learning about healthy lifestyles rather than discussing depression, anxiety, and stress management. This suggests that to be successful, well-being initiatives must align more closely with employees’ needs and interests. In my opinion, focusing on what is important for each group of employees is essential in developing a well-being programme that works. I have been conducting workshops about mental well-being for a variety of organisations and the audience was more interested to learn about practical skills such as problem-solving, dealing with difficult colleagues, and effective communication skills. However, a small group wanted to hear about achieving work fulfilment and being appreciated and valued by the organisation so I made it a point to survey the needs and interests of the audience before my workshop.

Ultimately, the success of any well-being programme depends not only on its content but also on how it is delivered. Tailoring these initiatives to the unique needs and interests of employees is key to maximising their impact and fostering a truly supportive workplace culture.

NUCLEAR  
DETERRENCE KEY  
TO POWER STRATEGY,  
SAY EXPERTS

MATHIEU RABECHAULT

Nuclear-armed powers have no intention of giving up the atom bomb as part of their military strategy, experts said after the Nobel Peace Prize committee urged against any weakening of the nuclear “taboo”.

Awarding this year’s peace prize to Japan’s Nihon Hidankyo, a grassroots movement of Hiroshima and Nagasaki survivors pushing for a nuclear weapons ban, the committee said on Friday the atom bomb attacks on both Japanese cities in 1945 had led to a “nuclear taboo” which had, however, come under “pressure” since. While none of the countries possessing nuclear weapons have used them in war since 1945, the implicit or even explicit threat to do so is part of their arsenal. Moscow has repeatedly brandished the nuclear threat in a bid to dissuade the West from supporting Ukraine, which has been fending off Russia’s attack since February 2022.

According to Alexander Gabuev, Director at the Carnegie Russia Eurasia Center, it was “no coincidence” that Russian President Vladimir Putin made a nuclear threat on the eve of a meeting between US President Joe Biden and Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelensky about Kyiv’s possible use of missiles capable of striking Russian territory.

The Nobel committee wanted to send “a strong signal” to Russia, said Bruno Tertrais, a political scientist at France’s Strategic Research Foundation.

Russia, he said, had “normalised”, even “trivialised”, talk of a nuclear weapons use since its attack of Ukraine.

The Kremlin is not alone.

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un said last week his country would use nuclear weapons “without hesitation” if attacked by South Korea and its ally, the United States. And in the Middle East, Israel, the region’s only nuclear-armed state, has vowed a “deadly, precise and surprising” response to Iran’s direct strike on Israeli territory on October 1.

“The logic of deterrence is firmly entrenched in countries that have nuclear weapons,” said Tertrais, adding however that the risk of atomic bomb use “is no greater now than five years ago”.

Standard nuclear doctrine — developed during the Cold War between superpowers the United States and the Soviet Union — is based on the assumption that such weapons will never have to be used because their impact is so devastating and because nuclear retaliation would probably bring similar destruction on the original attacker.

This is why China has never given up its “no first strike” doctrine, said Lukasz Kulasa, Director of Proliferation and Nuclear Policy at the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI). — **AFP**



DOUGLAS  
ALEXANDER

The writer is UK’s  
Minister of State  
for Trade Policy  
and Economic  
Security



Douglas Alexander, the UK Minister of State for Trade Policy, holds talks with Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, during his visit to Oman in September 2024.

**THERE'S** A REASON I chose to visit Muscat as part of my first overseas visit since being appointed as the United Kingdom’s Minister for Trade Policy in July 2024.

The UK and Oman share a deep friendship, as we saw when UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer welcomed His Majesty the Sultan to London in August. Trade and investment are vitally important components of that relationship and I was fascinated to get to see that for myself in person.

The UK accounts for more than half of Oman’s entire foreign direct investment. In the year to April, this was worth some \$30 billion, creating jobs and new opportunities to share expertise. I want to see this investment grow, diversify, and support your country’s priority ‘Oman Vision 2040’ sectors, from renewable energy to manufacturing to tourism.

In the last year, Oman signed major green

hydrogen deals with eight different business groups, half of which contain UK companies. These investments will support all kinds of regional opportunities, from Duqm to Salalah, deliver growth for businesses in both countries and help both sides work towards a sustainable future.

Our two great countries are also aligned in our aims to ensure economic growth is spread across the country. That’s why it was great to be able to share our experiences of decentralisation and improving economic performance at a local level at the UK-Oman Strategic Advisory Group in July.

I was honoured to visit Oman and see for myself the opportunities to grow our trading relationship even further. I met with Omani investment funds who told me about their interests in the United Kingdom. I met with UK companies in Oman to hear about their successes here and how they hope to expand. And I met with Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry

and Investment Promotion, to discuss how both governments can help UK-Omani trade thrive.

One important way we can do that is through an ambitious Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between the UK and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). This could increase trade between the UK and the GCC by 16 per cent - boosting investment, growth, and jobs in all seven countries.

From what I have seen during my time here, UK and Omani companies are ready to seize those opportunities. Omani exports to the UK grew by 44 per cent in the last financial year. UK investment into Oman increased by \$ 5 billion since the signing of the UK and Oman Sovereign Investment Partnership in 2022. These improvements are just the beginning.

Thank you for welcoming me to your beautiful country. I look forward to returning and seeing our businesses go from strength to strength.

# It’s okay to not be okay



RAY PETERSEN  
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The writer is a media consultant

IT’S AN absolute certainty that none of us, educators, educationalist, or parents, could have foreseen the effects of the global pandemic on pupil’s, now student’s, educational experiences, so it’s only now that its consequences are being felt.

Covid’s impact upon youth social skills, behaviour and relationships is not a trickle however, and within education, it is becoming a tsunami of erratic conduct, disinterest, disrespect and ill-discipline, causing huge concern among parents, teachers, schools and education authorities.

Reflecting on the challenges facing the wider educational spectrum, NEU Workplace Representative, Nick Jones, paused recently to reflect upon how students are having difficulty achieving balance between the pandemic requirements for disassociation from others, and their reliance upon TEAMS, ZOOM and social media for their lessons and social interactions.

“These precautions, though necessary at the time, have created artificial environments in which to live and work for so long, resulting in poor socialisation, self-help skills, failing relationships, language, communication, and the ability to read social clues, among their peers.”

In short, their interactive development has suffered, their ability to communicate with each other, adults and teachers have suffered, preventing their investment in a respectful learning process, and these are

just some of the difficulties that they, and schools, are challenged by.

Covid’s educational shortcomings have been ‘papered over,’ for the sake of expediency, and while confident, articulate students will always progress enthusiastically, what of those for whom intellectual and social resilience are just words?

We face an epidemic of immense proportions in youth mental health adding further woe to a generation’s learning challenges. In the North East of England, the Harrogate and North East NHS Trust, through their Emotional Health and Resilience Team, is working hard to increase awareness of these many challenges, by talking about what many don’t want to, facing the issues instead of turning their backs on a very clear need.

Their research has found that in every class of thirty-four students, the UK national average... One will have suffered a bereavement; five will have diagnosed SEN or mental health issues that severely affect their learning experience; nine will have experienced a significant traumatic event; six will have self-harmed; and eighteen will have experienced, or are close to, mental health problems.

The slippery slope towards youth mental health chaos is littered with bullying, alcohol and drug abuse, intra-family conflicts, loneliness, unresolved bereavements and loss, racism, gender insecurity, workplace stress, failed relationships, financial worries, cyber bullying, just to name a few.

It’s also easy to ‘call out’ social media

Interactive development has suffered, their ability to communicate with each other, adults and teachers have suffered, preventing their investment in a respectful learning process

due to the false imagery it portrays. Today’s youth are misled by Facebook and the like to feel that sunrises, sunsets and million-dollar backgrounds are the norm, like hourglass figures and six-packs, and that anyone with a more diverse’ body is not just ‘unwelcome at parties,’ but probably undesirable as a friend, socially backwards, and probably ‘not all there.’

Social media is currently seen by healthcare professionals as more addictive than cigarettes, alcohol or drugs. You can see why can’t you? Every time your mobile ‘pings’ you reach for it like a drowning man for a lifebelt, and it is inextricably linked to sleep deprivation, anxiety and depression.

Though not always, there are signs, and anxiety can be observed, especially in times of stress such as tests and exams, when we don’t have enough money, when we’re angry, tired, sad, frustrated, or when relationships are tested, or we are over-emotional. And really, it’s okay to be anxious, just not to let it take over. Easier said than done though.

Remarkably, and shamefully, only one in three students with identified mental health issues get access to NHS care and support. Can you imagine if only one in every three people taken to hospitals with broken legs were treated?

Four schoolchildren commit suicide every week... and by the time they are 17 years old, 7 per cent of our youth population will have contemplated suicide. We must do more to mitigate their Covid ‘hangovers,’ because what we are doing now, is just not enough.

## HIROSHIMA VISITORS HOPE NOBEL WIN WILL BOOST PEACE EFFORTS

DANIEL LEUSSINK & IRENE WANG

Visitors to the memorial park for Hiroshima’s atomic bombing said they hoped Nobel Peace Prize for Japan’s atomic bomb survivors would boost efforts for world peace and spur world leaders to visit the site. The Norwegian Nobel Committee awarded the prize to the Nihon Hidankyo group, representing survivors of the 1945 US atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, for its decades-long efforts to abolish nuclear weapons.

“As Japanese people, I believe we need to ensure that the same thing doesn’t happen again,” Ui Torisawa, a 21-year-old student who was visiting the Peace Memorial Park with her friend, said.

“Since Japan is the only country to have suffered atomic bombings, and because similar things could be repeated in other countries, I think Japan is probably in the best position to stop that.”

August next year will mark the 80th anniversary of the bombings. It is likely to draw focus on the legacy of its survivors, known as “hibakusha”, and could set off a renewed debate about nuclear weapons.

YASUHIRO SUZUKI

Yasuhiro Suzuki, who was visiting the Peace Memorial Park with his wife, son and daughter from Fukuoka prefecture in southwest Japan, called it “groundbreaking” that the group representing the atomic bomb survivors was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

“Nuclear power is incredibly beneficial to the world, but we must be careful not to misuse it,” Suzuki said. “I hope this becomes an opportunity for people around the world to think about various aspects of this issue.” Hiroshima’s peace park has long drawn not just Japanese visitors but also foreigners, including world leaders such as Barack Obama, who spoke at the site as US president in 2016 and hugged a tearful hibakusha.

“I believe there are still many prime ministers and leaders in the world who could come (to Japan), and I hope they will make the effort to visit,” said Hiroshima resident Hirokazu Tanabe, who works as a driver. — Reuters

# Israel’s brutal campaign and a world divided



DR  
MUSALLAM  
AL MAANI

The writer is Dean of Al Zahra College for Women



A child poses for a picture next to her painting at an art exhibition of works by displaced Palestinian children as part of a psychological rehabilitation and support sessions, organised by the Palestinian Red Crescent, in Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip. — AFP

THE WAR in Gaza has by now gone over 12 months, exceeding what was originally expected.

From the ground of the expectation of success, Israel has waged the war against Palestinians in Gaza with an attitude of superiority, manifested in a harsh and haughtily manner and in presumptuous claims that its army would be the victor in the war.

Israel has experimented with all brutal methods known in the modern era, with the aim of infliction of intense pain to punish, coerce and afford sadistic pleasure against unarmed Palestinian people.

Footings coming from the buildings levelled to the ground show that Israel takes pleasure in the infliction of pain, punishment, and humiliation on the people of Gaza.

Promises of eliminating all threats that come from Gaza, which were given by the Israeli regime at the point at which the war

began a year ago, have not been fulfilled, even though Israel has chosen to achieve this by force and threat.

A costly miscalculation has been looming on the horizon from the first steps of the Israeli troops on Gaza. Young men and women in the Israeli army have been conscripted for military action.

But, from the time the war started, the people of Israel have never seen peace, nor have they had the freedom from disquieting insecure thoughts and emotions, either because they have lost one of their relatives in war or because of their consistent fear of any missile attacks coming from Gaza, Hezbollah, Yemen or Iran. They simply live in a state and feeling of anxiety, fear and self-doubt about their country and the governing regime since the start of the war.

Israel has long been filled with great joy and triumph of its army. The Israeli army possesses the latest and most sophisticated

weaponry and military hardware, which is seen, by the Israelis, as a source of pride and honour to them. But, neither the highly complicated and developed weapons nor the sense of pride is the talk of the street in Israel now, as such a dream has been torn apart with the inability of their army to gain control over a small piece of besieged land, accompanied with increased numbers of Palestinian citizens killed in Gaza and with the merciless bullets fired against children in Gaza.

The democratic people of today’s world, whose countries are the allies of Israel, experience a state of self-conscious distress because of the war on Gaza. Without a doubt, their inherent democratic values emphasise the idea that all people should be treated equally, along with such unique traits of having compassionate, sympathetic, and generous behaviour and disposition.

Third-world peoples have always seen such values as the foundational principles of modern states. But, although Israel has long been seen as the only democratic state in the Middle East, the recent war on Gaza shows that it is the most brutal regime known in the 21st century, killing with deliberate means innocent people without consideration, compunction and clemency and lacking disposition to be merciful and to moderate the severity of revenge to inflict injury in return for the legitimate claims of land by Palestinians.

However, as the war on Gaza continues with an extremely brutal and cruel mode of procedure and way of acting by Israel, people around the world have started to revisit the conceptualisation of such views especially since Israel has a total no-regard for humanity at all in this war.

Men and women, young and old, are indiscriminately killed. The whole of the world is unable to say a word against Israel, either because of fear or reluctance, which seems to befit the Arabic saying ‘As long as my camel is safe, I don’t care about the camels of others.’ The Arabic saying, unfortunately, reflects an attitude of contentment of the countries and peoples of the world with their own situation and indifference towards the affairs of Palestinians.

# SPORTS

JUNIORBILLIARDS



## AL MOUSAWI WINS SILVER IN 9-BALL IN RIYADH

AHMED AL KAABI  
MUSCAT, OCT 12

National billiards player Hassan al Mousawi clinched the silver medal in the 9-ball junior billiards competition at the 2024 Arab Billiards and Snooker Championship, organised by Saudi Billiards and Snooker Federation.

Al Mousawi put on an impressive performance, starting his campaign with a 7-5 victory over Qatar’s Abdullah al Saleh, followed by a 7-4 win against Saudi Arabia’s Firas al Madin. In the quarterfinals, he narrowly defeated Saudi player Nawaf al Shumrdel 7-6, and in the semifinals, he overcame the UAE’s Salem Sakkar by the same score.

However, Al Mousawi lost the final match to Saudi player Khalid al Ghamdi 9-3. This silver medal marks Al Mousawi’s first regional achievement, and he is set to compete in the 10-ball and 8-ball billiards events as well.

Meanwhile, in the same tournament, national junior player Al Mutasim al Saadi advanced to the quarterfinals in the under-17 snooker competition.

The national team is participating in the championship with eight players: three in senior snooker competitions, two in senior billiards and three in junior competitions (one in snooker and two in billiards).

The snooker team consists of Abdullah al Raisi, Taha al Khasbi, Qasim al Balushi and Al Mutasim al Saadi, while the billiards team includes Hamza al Awaidi, Mohammed al Balushi, Hassan al Mousawi and Hisham al Mousawi. They are being coached by Mohammed Moataz.

The championship runs until October 18.

# Salah helps Egypt to win, Comoros shocks Tunisia

**MOHAMED** SALAH was on target to help Egypt maintain their 100 per cent record in 2025 Africa Cup of Nations qualifying with a comfortable 2-0 home win over Mauritania, but Tunisia slipped to a shock 1-0 home defeat to Comoros in their fixture on Friday.

Salah added to an opener from Trezeguet in Cairo as Egypt toiled for almost 70 minutes before they broke down the Mauritania defence to move six points clear at the top of Group C at the midway point of the qualifiers.

Tunisia were heavy favourites after starting their campaign with two wins, but despite 15 goal attempts fell to a lone strike from Rafiki Said just past the hour mark.

It was Tunisia’s first home defeat in Cup of Nations qualifiers since 2010 but they remain on top of Group A with six points from three games. Comoros are behind them on five points.

The top two teams in each pool advance to the 24-team finals in Morocco next year.

Nigeria needed a late goal to seal a 1-0 home win over Libya as German-born midfielder Fisayo Dele-Bashiru netted four minutes from the end to spare the blushes of the 2023 finalists.

It was an important win for Nigeria who top Group D and are five points ahead of third-placed Rwanda with three games remaining. Ivory Coast brushed aside Sierra Leone 4-1 in San Pedro as Franck Kessie scored a brace, both netting and missing a penalty. Nicolas Pepe was also on target as they made it three wins from three.

Sadio Mane and Nicolas Jackson were both on the scoresheet for Senegal as they beat 10-man Malawi 4-0 in Diamniadio. Senegal and Burkina Faso are each on seven points at the top of the pool and favourites to qualify.

Cameroon eased to a 4-1 victory over Kenya as Bryan Mbeumo took his Premier League form with Brentford onto the international stage with a goal, to go with a penalty from Vincent Aboubakar, a first international strike for Martin Hongla and a goal from Christian Bassogog.

South Africa recorded the joint second biggest win in their history as they thumped Congo 5-0 in Gqeberha to continue their good form under coach Hugo Broos. Victory over the same opponents in Brazzaville on Tuesday will see them qualify.

Teboho Mokoena netted a brace to go with goals from Bathusi Aubaas, Lyle Foster and Iqraam Rayners. — Reuters



## EGYPT CAPTAIN SALAH RELEASED FROM INTERNATIONAL DUTY

**LIVERPOOL:** Egypt captain Mohamed Salah will not play in next week’s Africa Cup of Nations qualifier in Mauritania, club side Liverpool confirmed on Saturday.

The 32-year-old has “been released early from international duty amid the ongoing October break,” Liverpool said.

On Friday, Salah scored for Egypt in a 2-0 victory over Mauritania and had been due to play a second fixture against the same opponents on Tuesday.

Egypt manager Hossam Hassan had told journalists in Cairo on Friday that there were concerns over playing on Mauritania’s artificial turf and injury fears.

Record seven-time African champions Egypt faced stubborn resistance from Mauritania until Mahmoud ‘Trezeguet’ Hassan netted 69 minutes into the Group C clash.

Prolific Liverpool scorer Salah put the outcome beyond doubt with a second goal 10 minutes later to maintain the perfect record of the Pharaohs after three rounds.

Egypt need a single point in the next match to qualify as they sit six points ahead of rivals Cape Verde, Botswana and Mauritania.

Liverpool also confirmed that Dutch defender Virgil van Dijk had been also released early from international duty.

Van Dijk was dismissed for the Netherlands after picking up two yellow cards during a 1-1 Uefa Nations League draw with Hungary.

“The pair will take no further part for their respective nations this month after the decision was made to relieve them both early from their international commitments.” — AFP

# OBA hosts referee training course at Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex

AHMED AL KAABI  
MUSCAT, OCT 12

The Omani Basketball Association (OBA), represented by the Referees Committee, organised a training course for new basketball referees at Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher from October 11 to 13.

The course saw participation from referees across the Sultanate of Oman, including 8 new referees, under the supervision of a distinguished group of local and international lecturers, including local referee Ahmed al Khasbi and international referees Ahmed al Balushi and Issam al Siyabi.

Opening the course, Eng Khalfan bin Saleh al Naabi, Chairman of Oman Basketball Association (OBA), emphasised the importance of the course within the framework

The course included a series of theoretical lectures and practical training, with a focus on the latest international developments in basketball refereeing



of the association’s plans to develop the game and enhance the level of refereeing in Oman.

Al Naabi added that the course is part of efforts to qualify referees of both genders to serve as a key component in the national refereeing system, contributing to the development of the game locally. He urged the participants to make the most of the theoretical lectures and practical applications provided during the course.

The course included a series of theoretical lectures and practical training, with a focus on the latest

international developments in basketball refereeing.

The event aims to prepare a new generation of referees in collaboration with clubs and the Ministry of Education.

This course is part of the Referees Committee’s programme to enhance refereeing skills through organising courses and training camps both inside and outside Oman, in line with the game’s development and the increasing number of competitions, especially in youth categories.

The course presents a valuable opportunity for new referees to gain knowledge about the latest basketball regulations and practice applying them in real-life scenarios, while also allowing for the exchange of experiences with international referees participating in the course.

KEY MEETING



Chairman of the OTA with the President of the International Tennis Federation

OTA TAKES PART  
IN HONG KONG  
MEETING

SPORTS REPORTER  
MUSCAT, OCT 12

Oman’s Motasim bin Hamood al Zadjali, Chairman of the Oman Tennis Association (OTA), attended the ordinary general meetings of both the International Tennis Federation (ITF) and the Asian Tennis Federation (ATF), which were held in Hong Kong recently. The agenda covered several key items, including a review of the financial status and proposals to amend some regulations and statutes within the federation’s constitution. During the meetings, the OTA chief engaged with members of the ITF and ATF, discussing several key topics related to the development of tennis at both the international and Asian levels. Additionally, they explored various aspects of tennis development in the Sultanate of Oman. Motasim al Zadjali also reviewed upcoming plans and programmes for the growth of the sport over the next four years, as well as the schedule for hosting international and Asian championships.

Sabalenka downs Gauff in 3  
sets to reach Wuhan final

TOP-SEEDED

Aryna Sabalenka fought back from a set down to beat Coco Gauff 1-6, 6-4, 6-4 on Saturday and reach the Wuhan Open final for the third time. A champion in Wuhan in 2018 and 2019, Sabalenka improved her perfect record in the tournament to 16-0 and will next face Zheng Qinwen, who became the first Chinese player to reach a WTA 1000 final on home soil. It will be a rematch of the Australian Open final, which Sabalenka won earlier this season.

In an all-Chinese affair, the fifth-seeded Zheng defeated Wang Xinyu 6-3, 6-4 to reach her fourth final of the season. “I never imagined that my first WTA 1000 final would happen here in Wuhan,” said Olympic champion Zheng, who was born in the Hubei province and moved to Wuhan when she was a child. “Today was a very tough match, Xinyu played really well. The crowd was very supportive and fair to both of us.”

Gauff, who was on a nine-match winning streak on the back of her title run in Beijing last week, played a perfect first set but committed a whopping 21 double faults during a semi-final lasting two hours, 26 minutes. Sabalenka has now won 19 of her last 20 matches, a stretch that includes titles in Cincinnati and at the US Open.

“It definitely felt like one of the biggest matches of my career because the crowd made it feel like it was a Grand Slam final,” said Sabalenka, who is now 4-4 in career meetings with Gauff. Sabalenka struggled on serve early on and couldn’t control her forehand as a clinical Gauff leapt to a double-break 5-0 lead inside 19 minutes.

The American fourth seed dropped a mere two points behind her first serve and limited the Belarusian to just two winners throughout that opening frame. Down 2-4 in the second set, Sabalenka took seven games in a row, capitalising on Gauff’s double faults to build a 3-0 lead in the decider. Despite Gauff’s best retaliatory efforts, Sabalenka held on to close out a gritty victory.

Sabalenka, who has had her fair share of serving woes in the past and worked with a specialised biomechanics coach



Sabalenka reacts after a point against Coco Gauff. — AFP

to overcome them, said she could relate to Gauff’s double-faulting issues during the semi-final. “I was playing that match thinking, ‘Well, girl, I feel you. I feel you like nobody else,’” said Sabalenka, 26. “I know what she’s going through. This is really difficult. But I know that if she’ll be able to overcome this serve situation -- she is already one of the best players, but

I’m pretty sure she’s going to be one of the greatest players.”

Gauff added a new coach to her team, Matt Daly, after the US Open and they’ve been tinkering with her serve ever since. The 20-year-old described her troubles on Saturday as “growing pains” and assures “there’s a lot of positives to look forward to.” — AFP

Oman, Afghanistan A draw T20 series ahead of Asia Cup

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman’s cricketing community is abuzz following a riveting bilateral T20 series against Afghanistan A, where the national team displayed their determination and skill, wrapping up the series with a 1-1 draw at the Oman Cricket Academy (OCA) ground in Al Amerat recently. Head coach Duleep Mendis praised his players for their spirited efforts against such a formidable opponent, emphasising that these experiences are invaluable for their growth.

“Playing against stronger teams like Afghanistan A is crucial. Our boys fought hard, and it was uplifting to see them rise to the occasion,” Mendis remarked during his recent evaluation of the team’s performances.

The two T20 matches, played last week, provided Oman with a vital opportunity to assess their capabilities ahead of the ACC T20 Men’s Emerging Teams Asia Cup, set to kick off at the Oman Cricket Academy on October 18. The tournament will feature A teams from five Asian cricketing powerhouses — defending champions Pakistan, India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Afghanistan — alongside national teams from the UAE, Hong Kong and the hosts, Oman. Oman shocked Afghanistan A (also known as Afghan Abdalyan) in the first T20 match, clinching vic-



Playing against stronger teams like Afghanistan A is crucial. Our boys fought hard, and it was uplifting to see them rise to the occasion

DULEEP MENDIS  
Head coach



Oman National cricket team T20 World Cup 2024. AFP Photo

tory by seven wickets after bowling out the visitors for 143 runs. Rafiullah emerged as the star with a four-wicket haul, while Shoaib Khan’s explosive 64 runs off 43 balls led the chase in just 18.3 overs, supported by Jatinder Singh’s crucial contribution of 30 runs.

In the keenly contested second match, Oman nearly pulled off another upset, chasing down Afghanistan A’s target of 190. Zubairullah Akbari’s 56 and quick-fire knocks from Karim Janat and Shahidullah Kamal propelled Afghanistan to 190/6. Although Oman’s Vinayak Shukla struck 74 runs and Ayaan Khan added 46,

the hosts fell just short, finishing at 184/6. “We displayed a commendable fighting spirit against a strong team,” Mendis commented after the matches. “Such performances not only boost player morale but also allow our technical staff to identify areas for improvement.”

While reflecting on the recent success, Mendis also acknowledged the team’s disappointing performances in the World Cricket League (WCL) 2, where they currently find themselves in sixth position out of eight teams. “We have not yet performed to our potential in the WCL,” he admitted. Oman’s campaign began in

Scotland, facing harsh weather and struggling to adapt to hybrid wickets, which were new to them.

“It’s been a learning curve,” Mendis said. “We need to enhance our batting consistency. Adverse conditions have not helped our progress, but we must adapt and find our rhythm.” With only two wins from eight matches and six points in total, Oman faces a tough road ahead, having secured victories only against Namibia and Nepal.

Oman now compete in a T20 tri-series, which began on Saturday, involving Hong Kong and Afghanistan A that will precede the Emerging Teams Asia Cup. “These contests will provide significant exposure for our boys, allowing us to put forth our strongest team for the tournament. We are proud to host this event, showcasing emerging talent and appreciating the support from the OCB and the ACC,” he said.

With crucial WCL 2 fixtures approaching, Oman aims to leverage home advantage against Namibia and Nepal in November, as well as a tri-series in January before travelling to the US. As they look to climb the WCL 2 table — currently led by Canada with 16 points (12 games) — Mendis stays optimistic, reiterating the importance of facing stronger teams to cultivate a competitive spirit.



Tadej Pogacar raises his bicycle after crossing the finish line. — AFP

# POGACAR EMULATES ICON COPPI WITH FOURTH STRAIGHT IL LOMBARDIA TRIUMPH

**TADEJ** POGACAR won Il Lombardia for the fourth time in as many years on Saturday to equal a record streak of victories set by cycling great Fausto Coppi over seven decades ago. World champion Pogacar capped an astonishing year in which he also claimed a Tour de France and Giro d'Italia double by matching Coppi, who won five times in total, including four victories between 1946 and 1949 at the last "Monument" of the season. Pogacar made his widely predicted move on the decisive Colma di Sormano climb, 48.5 kilometres from the end of the 255km "Race of the Falling Leaves," whose course had been modified following heavy rain and landslides in northern Italy. After being guided through the race by his strong UAE support team, Pogacar surged to his second victory in as many races since donning the rainbow jersey



*It was a big day for us, a long race, a hard race, and it was all dependent on our team, so we did a super good job and I'm super happy to win with the team*

**TADEJ POGACAR**  
Professional cyclist

in Zurich a fortnight ago with a trademark solo attack. "It was a big day for us, a long race, a hard race, and it was all dependent on our team, so we did a super good job and I'm super happy to win with the team," said Pogacar. "We planned it like this... I knew that if I had a decent gap there, I can come to the finish."

The 26-year-old finished over three minutes ahead of double Olympic champion Remco Evenepoel, who returned to the site of his horror crash from four years ago, which left him with a fractured hip when he plunged into a ravine.

Pogacar was already the first ever cyclist to win the triple crown of the Tour, Giro, and worlds with at least one Monument victory in the same season. And Saturday's triumph, his 25th in 2024, gives the Slovenian star a good claim to have had the greatest ever season in the history of road cycling.

Pogacar began his campaign in Italy eight months ago by storming to the Strade Bianche with an 81km charge and topped that by nearly 20km on his way to world championship glory in Switzerland. Between those two wins, Pogacar claimed a second Liege-Bastogne-Liege and six stages in each of his victories at the Tour and Giro, while also winning the Tour of Catalonia, the Montreal Grand Prix, and last weekend's Giro dell'Emilia.

Merckx's heir: Those triumphs have made him the heir not just to seven-time Grand Tour champion Coppi but also Eddy Merckx, the greatest to ever sit on a bike. No one since Merckx's heyday of the 1970s has expressed the

sort of dominance Pogacar has over the rest of the field this year. Pogacar has only been beaten twice this year, at Milan-San Remo, where he finished third, while his seventh place at the Quebec Grand Prix was his worst finish of the season.

But he refused to put himself on the same level as Merckx, saying when asked if he realised the magnitude of his achievements: "Let's see where we will be after the career."

Pogacar's task was made easier on Friday night by Ineos dropping Tom Pidcock, who had finished second behind Pogacar at the Giro dell'Emilia. Sensing an opportunity to maybe hold off Pogacar, an early breakaway group of 21 riders extended their lead to over four minutes heading towards the long Sella di Osigo and Madonna del Ghisallo climbs after the halfway point.

But UAE began pushing to get Pogacar in position to make his move, with less than two minutes separating the two groups as they descended back down towards the world-famous lake. And 6.5km before the summit, Pogacar charged off on his own with a timid response from his rivals, although Evenepoel desperately tried to follow him up the road.

Belgian Evenepoel went out on his own in pursuit of Pogacar on the descent, but with over a minute separating the pair at the bottom, the gap was too big. Pogacar somehow looked fresher than his chasers and added even more time on Evenepoel, breezing through the final kilometres and going on a victory parade through the streets of Como.

— AFP

# BUSINESS



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## OCCUPANCY UP



### HOTEL REVENUES SURGE TO RO 149.4 MILLION

**MUSCAT:** Oman's hotels, classified from 3 to 5 stars, reported a 7.8% increase in revenues, reaching RO 149.4 million by the end of August 2024, compared to RO 138.6 million in 2023. The rise in revenues coincided with an 8.4% growth in hotel guests, totalling around 1.4 million. The National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) attributed the growth to higher numbers of local and international visitors. Omani guests grew by 7.5% to 541,035, while European visitors rose by 16.5% to 322,632. Gulf, Arab and Asian tourists also saw notable increases, although guests from Oceania declined by 27.2%. The hotel occupancy rate climbed by 2.3%, further driving the sector's performance. — **ONA**

## Asyad Group commences construction of Muscat Airport Free Zone

BUSINESS REPORTER  
MUSCAT, OCT 12

Asyad Group has officially commenced the construction of the Muscat Airport Free Zone, a strategic initiative aimed at transforming Oman into a global logistics and business hub. Located adjacent to Muscat International Airport, the free zone is designed to attract multinational corporations, financial institutions, start-ups and logistics companies, offering a prime location for businesses seeking rapid access to international markets. The initial phase of development will focus on building key infrastructure, including road networks, essential utilities and public service facilities. In addition, the project will include the construction of an administrative complex, developed in partnership with the private sector. This infrastructure is expected to create a state-of-the-art business environment that caters to the needs of companies requiring fast and efficient logistical operations. Faisal bin Ali al Balushi, Senior Manager of Muscat Airport Free Zone,



**Faisal bin Ali al Balushi,**  
Senior Manager of Muscat  
Airport Free Zone

emphasised the strategic importance of the project: "This free zone is central to Asyad's vision of making Oman a key player in the global logistics industry. It aligns with our efforts to boost economic growth and enhance Oman's competitiveness under the goals of Oman Vision 2040." One of the free zone's key advantages is its close proximity to Muscat International Airport, enabling seamless integration with Asyad's logistics network, which links land, sea and air transportation hubs across the country. The location is ideal for com-

panies dealing with time-sensitive products such as pharmaceuticals, perishable goods and e-commerce shipments. The free zone will also feature specialised facilities to support high-speed distribution, making it an attractive option for businesses reliant on air freight. The project is expected to significantly boost foreign direct investment (FDI) by offering a range of incentives, including tax and customs exemptions. Asyad's comprehensive logistics network, along with Oman's strategic position at the crossroads of global trade routes, is expected to make the free zone a competitive destination for international companies. The free zone is also expected to contribute to Oman's economic diversification efforts, creating job opportunities for Omanis and reducing the nation's dependence on oil revenues. The free zone will support the country's long-term economic development goals. As Asyad continues to collaborate with the private sector, the Muscat Airport Free Zone is set to become a central node in the global logistics industry.

## 30 investment projects in food security

**OMAN'S** Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources is preparing to launch 30 new investment projects focused on bolstering food security, with a combined value exceeding RO 10 million. These projects are part of the ongoing "Food Security Lab 2024," a collaborative effort between the ministry, the Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit, the National Programme for Investment and Export Development (Nazdaher), the National Employment Programme and private sector entities. The initiative aims to strengthen local food production, enhance self-sufficiency and reduce the country's reliance on imports. Dr Masoud bin Sulaiman al Azri, Director-General of Agricultural and Fisheries Marketing and official spokesperson at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, confirmed that the projects will focus on critical areas such as strategic crops with low self-sufficiency rates, aquaculture and water resources. "These



The projects will focus on critical areas such as strategic crops with low self-sufficiency rates, aquaculture and water resources.



The goal is to increase local production, reduce the import bill and create job opportunities for Omanis

**DR MASOUD BIN SULAIMAN AL AZRI**  
Director-General of  
Agricultural and  
Fisheries Marketing

projects will focus on crops like onions, garlic and potatoes, as well as fish farming and water management," he said. "The goal is to increase local production, reduce the import bill and create job opportunities for Omanis." The Food Security Lab 2024, which will conclude on Thursday, builds upon the work of previous food security initiatives launched in 2021. It prioritises attracting investment in sectors that will increase the country's food production capacity, enhance local content and support value-added industries. One of the lab's key ob-

jectives is to boost Oman's self-sufficiency in critical food products by encouraging partnerships with private sector players. Al Azri explained that the current lab adds new dimensions to Oman's food security strategy, with an emphasis on strategic planning and digital transformation. The ministry has already assigned the digital transformation project to the "Idhkaa" group, which will digitise the ministry's services. "By the end of 2025, all 248 services provided by the ministry, both public-facing and internal, will be digitised," he added. The Tharawat platform, which will soon be launched as part of the lab's outcomes, will streamline the ministry's services related to agriculture, fisheries and water resources, making them more accessible and efficient for users. This digital transformation is expected to greatly enhance service delivery, enabling faster response times and better coordination between government bodies and private stakeholders. — **ONA**

### Invitation to Tender



| Tender / Auction Number | Subject                                                                                                                                      | Tender / Auction Document Fees (Nonrefundable) | Tender / Auction Bond | Tender / Auction Offer            | Closing Date             |
|-------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------|
| AL-AWALIA/ TD/2024/49   | Call-Off Agreement for the Supply of Gabbro Aggregate Materials from Oman (FOB, Sohar port) for Qatar Primary Materials Company ("Supplies") | 2,000 QAR                                      | 580,000 QAR           | Two Bids (Technical & Commercial) | 27 October 2024 01:00 PM |

- In accordance with the following conditions:
- Tender Documents can be collected online by sending email to [tender.docs@qpmc.qa](mailto:tender.docs@qpmc.qa) along with requested documents in point No.2.
  - Tender Documents will be shared only after delivery of Deposit Slip Stamped by Commercial Bank along with Authorization Letter to the delegated person signed by authorized person as per Computer ID, Copy of commercial Registration (CR), Business License and Computer ID.
  - Bids are to be submitted in two sealed (in red wax) envelopes (Technical & Commercial) and addressed to Tenders and Auction Committee, Tender reference number and subject are to be clearly written on the envelopes, provided that the last date for submitting bids is one o'clock in the afternoon on the closing day. Any bids submitted after this date and time will not be accepted.
  - Tenderers shall submit the proposals to our head office located at Lusail, Building No. 108, St. No. 303, Burj Marina Tower, 17th Floor before the closing date. (To get the map of the new building, please scan the QR code below).
  - Tender Fees are nonrefundable and can be transferred online to Account of Qatar Primary Material Company- Bank A/C (4050-651111-006) at Commercial Bank of Qatar. **IBAN No. (QA 18 CBQA 0000 0000 4050 651111 006)**. Tender reference number and subject are to be written on the deposit slip.
  - Tender Bond (Bank Guarantee/ Manager Cheque) must be valid for 120 days after closing date and must be submitted in separate & sealed envelope along with technical bid and a photocopy is to be attached with commercial bid. Bids without tender bond will be rejected.
  - Bids must be valid for 90 days after the closing date.
  - Any queries relating to the Tender Documents must only be raised in writing, preferably by email, to the address specified in the respective Tender Document. Any response issued by Qatar Primary Material Company will be in the form of a question and answer and will be distributed to all Tenderers without revealing the identity of the originator of the query(ies) in the Form of Tender Bulletins. Queries must be received at the address specified in the respective ITT Documentation at least five (5) calendar days prior to the Tender closing date. Any queries received after such a date will be ignored.
  - The amount of the Performance Bond to be provided by the awarded bidder is (10% of the contract value) and its validity period must remain valid under the contract implementation period and the guarantee period according to the terms of the tender.
  - The Technical Bids shall be opened within one week of the closing date.
  - Qatar Primary Material Company has the right, during the contract period, to request an increase or decrease in the amounts of the items, works or services by a percentage not exceeding (20%) of the contract value with the same conditions and prices, provided that the increase is of the same type of contracted items, works or services.
  - Qatar Primary Material Company's tendering terms and conditions apply.
  - For any inquiries about the tender except collecting the documents, please contact [tender@qpmc.qa](mailto:tender@qpmc.qa)
  - Location of the new building



For further Inquiry, please send your queries at Fax Number: **44479559** or email to [tender@qpmc.qa](mailto:tender@qpmc.qa) or visit Qatar Primary Material Company website @ [www.qpmc.qa](http://www.qpmc.qa)

BUSINESS

GLOBALPARTNERSHIPS



The meeting included participation from seven of the country's top universities and colleges.

OABC, MOHERI DISCUSS COLLABORATIVE OPPORTUNITIES

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation (MoHERI) of Oman welcomed the Oman American Business Council (OABC) to a pivotal meeting aimed at fostering collaboration between Omani universities and their counterparts in the United States. The meeting included participation from seven of the country's top universities and colleges, highlighting Oman's proactive steps toward educational and professional growth through international partnerships.

The initiative, led by Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, reflects Oman's commitment to strengthening its educational system and supporting the career development of graduates. The meeting focused on a broad spectrum of opportunities, including potential partnerships with US universities, internship programs, and strategies for creating job opportunities for graduates, including remote work opportunities.

In her remarks, the Minister encouraged representatives from educational institutions to explore collaboration opportunities with their American counterparts in the areas of education, training, and research, facilitated through the Oman American Business Council (OABC). "We applaud the Minister for the synergy and collaboration displayed today by including so many essential stakeholders for this meeting, and we are excited to collaborate on projects that will provide meaningful opportunities for students and graduates alike," said Rebecca Olson, CEO of OABC.

"The Ministry and these institutions have already made impressive strides in supporting graduates with jobs, including remote positions, and we applaud their efforts. This partnership aims to build on their successes and create even more pathways for collaboration between Oman and the United States."

The meeting laid the groundwork for future initiatives that will enhance educational and employment opportunities, aligning with Oman's long-term vision for international collaboration and development in education.

Suwaiq to host new industrial city

THE Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn) has initiated work on a major new project in the Wilayat of Al Suwaiq, Al Batinah North Governorate, marking a significant step in Oman's industrial expansion. The new industrial city, designed with comprehensive infrastructure services, aligns with Madayn's long-term strategy to develop industrial zones across Oman and foster private sector involvement in economic growth.

The strategic location of Al Suwaiq was a key factor in Madayn's decision to establish the new industrial city there. Positioned between Muscat and Al Batinah North, Al Suwaiq's proximity to the Sea of Oman and the Port of Al Suwaiq allows it to integrate seamlessly with Oman's major ports. This will enhance the area's connectivity to global markets, providing a vital boost to the country's maritime logistics sector.

Hamoud bin Abdullah al Balushi, Assistant Director General of Al Suwaiq Industrial City, highlighted the broad objectives behind establishing the industrial city.

"Our aim is to strengthen Oman's economy, enhance the competitiveness of the industrial sector, and create jobs," he said. He added that the city is designed to attract both local and international investments, with a focus on industries that incorporate advanced technologies, including



The strategic location of Suwaiq was a key factor in Madayn's decision to establish the new industrial city there.

Positioned between Muscat and Al Batinah North, Al Suwaiq's proximity to the SEA OF OMAN and the Port of Al Suwaiq allows it to integrate seamlessly with Oman's major ports

artificial intelligence.

Madayn has secured a plot of land covering more than 10 million square metres for the Al Suwaiq Industrial City.

The city will host projects in several key sectors, including food processing, mining, pharmaceuticals, logistics, and manufacturing. The development will also feature light and medium industries, as well as areas dedicated to supporting the industrial sector.

In terms of infrastructure, the city's first phase will include the construction of road networks, water and sewage systems, lighting, water tanks, and a security fence.

Surveillance systems will also be installed to ensure safety. Additionally, the service building, along with a number of ready-made units in the pioneering Madayn complex, will be constructed. Investment opportunities in

the developed area are currently being evaluated.

Al Balushi also emphasised that the new industrial city will not only benefit from Al Suwaiq's strategic location but will also contribute to the overall economic development of Oman by strengthening the industrial sector's production base. The city is expected to attract industries focused on technology and innovation, further diversifying Oman's economic landscape.

The tender for consultancy services to design and supervise the city's development has been awarded, with the selected company already beginning the implementation process.

This includes preparing a detailed master plan for the entire city, with particular emphasis on the infrastructure required for the first phase of development.

SOHAR INTERNATIONAL WINS BEST CORPORATE BANKING – OMAN

MUSCAT: Sohar International, Oman's best bank, continues to set new benchmarks in the banking sector. Honored with the 'Best Corporate Banking – Oman' title by the Global Business Review Magazine Awards 2024, the bank's exceptional performance, operational excellence, and innovative product portfolio stand out. Dedicated to driving socio-economic progress, Sohar International empowers its clients to achieve their goals through tailored financial and advisory solutions offered by its Wholesale Banking Group.

Dr Manish Dhameja, Chief Wholesale Banking Officer at Sohar International,



stated: "We are truly honoured to receive the 'Best Corporate Banking – Oman' award. We understand that market leadership carries great responsibility, which is why we uphold strong business fundamentals and adopt global best practices across our products, processes, and people. This award reflects our ability to consistently deliver innovative financial solutions that meet the evolving needs of our corporate clients. By staying attuned to market dynamics and forging strategic partnerships, we remain committed to driving Oman's economic growth and supporting the goals of Oman Vision 2040."

Hafeet Rail signs pact for 27-strong fleet of heavy-haul freight locomotives

BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, OCT 12

HAFEET RAIL, the developer and operator of the UAE-Oman Rail Network, has partnered with Progress Rail, a Caterpillar company, to supply 27 state-of-the-art EMD SD70ACS heavy-haul freight locomotives. The locomotives will be custom designed to withstand the region's unique environmental conditions while adhering to the highest global standards of safety, security, sustainability, and environmental protection. This took place during the inaugural Global Rail Transport Infrastructure Exhibition & Conference (Global Rail) 2024.

Commenting on the announcement, Ahmad Al Musawa al Hashmi, CEO of Hafeet Rail, said: "This partnership reaffirms our commitment to developing and operating a state-of-the-art railway network equipped with cutting-edge heavy-haul freight locomotives that meet international benchmarks. Additionally, our fleet is tailored to comply with GCC Railway Network

These trains, each approximately

TWO KILOMETRES

long, will transport various railcars carrying bulk materials, containers, petrochemicals, metallic products, and other industrial goods



The 27 locomotives from Progress Rail are designed to withstand the region's unique climatic and geographical conditions. Picture for illustration only.

standards, paving the way for efficient and streamlined freight movement between Oman and the UAE in the future."

"We are keen on forging partnerships that resonate with our mission to provide competitive freight solutions across the joint network. This initiative is poised to boost regional trade and unlock new prospects in the infrastructure, transportation, and logistics sectors of both countries, thereby enhancing economic

diversification and fostering sustainable growth", he added.

John Newman, president and CEO for Progress Rail, said: "The GCC is geographically, financially and economically important on a global scale, and the UAE has been a driving contributor to the region's growth. We are proud to have been selected to work with Hafeet Rail to further connect Oman and the UAE. Progress Rail has developed strong trust and relationships with

our business partners in the GCC through decades of investment in products, technologies and local teams. We greatly appreciate our relationship with Hafeet Rail and are looking forward to continuing our support of our customers' growth in the GCC region."

The joint rail network's new fleet boasts high-powered engines designed to haul a diverse range of cargo. These trains, each approximately two kilometres-long, will transport various railcars carrying bulk materials, containers, petrochemicals, metallic products, and other industrial goods.

These locomotives will ensure the safe, secure, and efficient movement of trains across the Oman-UAE railway network.

The 27 locomotives are equipped with high-performance engines and advanced filtration technologies, including pulse and sand filtration systems, as well as carbon emission reduction technologies, aligning with Hafeet Rail's commitment to environmental sustainability and carbon reduction.

QUICKTAKES



The forum will explore investment opportunities in the blue economy.

DUQM FORUM TO SPOTLIGHT BLUE ECONOMY

**MUSCAT:** The 5th Duqm Forum, themed “Blue Economy: The New Investment Destination”, is set to kick off on October 20 at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre. Organised by the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry’s Al Wusta branch, in collaboration with the Foreign Ministry and the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones, the forum will explore investment opportunities in the blue economy. His Highness Sayyid Harib bin Thuwaini al Said, Assistant Secretary-General of the Council of Ministers for Conferences, will inaugurate the event. The forum features three key sessions: the first will focus on investment strategies in the blue economy, the second will delve into opportunities across food security, logistics, tourism, and renewable energy sectors, and the third will examine global technologies that enhance blue economy investments. Experts, officials, and speakers from Oman and abroad will share insights on expanding blue economy investments. — **ONA**



The forum coincides with Sur being named the Arab Tourism Capital for 2024.

ARAB FORUM FOR TOURISM STATISTICS SET TO BEGIN

**MUSCAT:** The second Arab Forum for Tourism Statistics will commence on Monday, October 14, in Muscat. Organised by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), in cooperation with the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MoHT) and the Arab League, the forum will run for three days. Salim bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism, will preside over the opening ceremony. The forum coincides with Sur being named the Arab Tourism Capital for 2024 and aims to foster Arab cooperation in tourism statistics. It will feature discussions on four main themes, including the role of tourism statistics in national development, innovations in tourism data, and Arab and global experiences in data use. Tourism experts from various countries and international organisations are expected to participate in the event. — **ONA**

Decarbonisation of Oman’s housing sector

CONRAD PRABHU  
MUSCAT, OCT 12

**A NUMBER** of research initiatives have been announced designed to support renewable energy adoption, sustainable energy use, decarbonisation and even the uptake of green hydrogen as part of Oman’s energy transition. The research projects are funded by the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation (MoHERI) and Sultan Qaboos University (SQU), among other agencies. Notable is a research project initiated recently by the Oman Hydrogen Centre (OHC), an International Competence Hub established at GUTech for research, technology, education, economy and industrial applications. The research project, focusing on the decarbonisation of Oman’s residential sector, is led by Dr Saleh al Saadi, Principal Investigator from Sultan Qaboos University (SQU), with support from Co-Principal Investigator Dr Hayder Khan and Co-Investigator Dr Sausan al Riyami, who is also Director of OHC. According to the Centre, decarbonising the housing sector is pivotal to Oman’s Net-Zero goals. Citing data from the Authority for Public Services Regulation (APSR), it noted that the sector accounts for around 80 per cent of total power consumption. With the power generation sector contributing a significant 19 per cent of total national carbon emissions, sustainable energy solutions coupled with innovative building design and construction options, are key to making buildings energy efficient, it said. “This innovative research project will focus on developing sustainable design guidelines



SQU’s Eco-house, built as a modern of sustainable design.

Notable is a research project initiated recently by the Oman Hydrogen Centre (OHC), an International Competence Hub established at GUTech for research, technology, education, economy and industrial applications

tailored to Oman’s unique climate, emphasising energy efficiency, solar energy integration, and green hydrogen storage. The goal is to create a framework for decarbonising residential buildings,” the Centre stated. Importantly, the research initiative will capitalise on learnings garnered from two key pilots established at SQU. One is the Hybrid Station, a facility set up within SQU’s Sustainable Energy Research Centre. Integrating multiple energy sources into a standalone microgrid system, the high-tech station features a 5 kW methanol-reformed fuel cell, a 5 kW photovoltaic (PV) system, and a 6 kW diesel generator, all managed by a smart microgrid capable of handling up to 15 kW. The other pilot is an Eco-house, built on the SQU campus as a model of sustainable design. Comprising a two-story single-family villa, with a built-up area of 279.32 m², the Eco-house is equipped with

a rooftop PV system delivering approximately 20 kW peak power, meeting immediate energy needs and channelling surplus energy back into the grid. According to OHC, the research project aims to “break new ground in the development of off-grid, net-zero energy housing across -four distinct climatic zones” in Oman. As part of the study, a comprehensive assessment will be made of energy consumption patterns in residential buildings throughout Oman. It will also explore the use of energy-efficient technologies, coupled with the integration of solar power and green hydrogen, to create off-grid, net-zero energy residential buildings. “The findings from this pioneering research will provide valuable guidance for architects, engineers, policymakers, and developers dedicated to advancing sustainable, energy-independent housing solutions in Oman,” OHC added.

TAX AUTHORITY HOLDS WORKSHOP ON WITHHOLDING TAX

**MUSCAT:** The Tax Authority, represented by the Second General Directorate of Taxes, organised an introductory workshop on withholding tax, targeting officials in various ministries and government agencies. The workshop aimed to raise the percentage of commitment of government agencies in applying the provisions of withholding tax. The workshop received



The workshop aimed to raise the percentage of commitment of government agencies in applying the provisions of withholding tax.

a wide participation of more than 100 participants, which reflects the keenness of government agencies to adhere to the provisions of the tax and apply them accurately. During the workshop, Iman bint Abdulrahman al Hindasiyah, Tax Inspector, reviewed the withholding tax laws and how to apply them, focusing on the importance of cooperation between the public and pri-

vate sectors to overcome the challenges facing to implement the taxes. Specialists stressed the importance of complying with tax regulations, noting that holding such workshops represents a crucial step to enable taxpayers to fully understand their tax rights and duties, raise their tax awareness, and build bridges of trust with the tax administration.

Muscat Stock Exchange sees RO 826 million in trading value

**TRADING ACTIVITY** at the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) witnessed a substantial surge in the first nine months of 2024, with the total value of transactions reaching RO 826.1 million. This marks a significant 35.8% increase compared to RO 608.1 million during the same period last year, driven by rising investor confidence and strong corporate performance. The positive sentiment among investors has been bolstered by several factors, including the distribution of cash dividends and free shares by public joint-stock companies listed on the exchange. Additionally, many companies reported strong financial results and announced new developments, further strengthening investor optimism.



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Alongside the rise in trading value, other key indicators of the stock exchange also showed impressive growth. The number of traded securities more than doubled, rising from 2.2 billion in the first nine months of 2023 to 4.7 billion in the same period this year. Similarly, the number of executed transactions increased by 45.9%, from 109,000 to over 159,000. The market value of the MSX also recorded gains, growing by over RO 1.16 billion to reach RO 24.5 billion by the end of September, a 4.3% increase from last year. Non-Omani ownership of shares in companies listed on the exchange accounted for 19.1% by the end of September, demonstrating the continued interest of foreign investors in Oman’s stock market.

July 2024 was a standout month for trading, with a total value of RO 152.4 million, making it the highest month for trading during the period. February followed with RO 129.8 million, while April saw transactions worth RO 119 million. On the lower end, June recorded the smallest trading value at RO 42 million. In terms of the number of executed transactions, March led the way with over 26,000 deals, followed by April with approximately 23,000 and January with 21,000. August recorded the fewest transactions, with 12,517. Several companies led the market in trading value, with Energy Services Towers topping the list at RO 130.6 million. Sohar International Bank came in second with RO 109.9

million, and Bank Muscat followed with RO 75.4 million. At the sector level, the services sector was the most active, accounting for 42.6% of the total trading value with transactions worth RO 352.5 million. The financial sector was second, contributing RO 313.8 million, while the industrial sector recorded RO 73.7 million in trading. The growth in trading activity was reflected in the MSX’s main index, which increased by 196 points during the first nine months of 2024, closing at 4,710 points. This contrasts with a decline of 179 points during the same period in 2023. The bonds and sukuk market also saw significant activity, with trades totalling RO 68.3 million, representing 8.2% of the total trading value.

OPINION

The cashless society is coming with pros and cons



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Press Association

THE FUTURE OF FINANCE is digital, and a growing number of nations are spearheading the transition towards a cashless society. Driven by convenience, security, and efficiency, these countries are rapidly adopting digital payment methods, paving the way for a world where physical currency becomes obsolete. This shift towards digital transactions aligns with increasingly tighter regulations surrounding the movement of physical money.

Several factors contribute to this global trend. Digital payments offer unparalleled convenience and speed, eliminating the need for physical currency. Security concerns associated with cash, such as theft and fraud, are minimised with digital transactions.

Efficiency is another key driver, as businesses benefit from streamlined accounting and reduced cash handling costs. Furthermore, technological advancements like contactless cards and mobile payment apps make cashless transactions more accessible than ever.

Dubai is actively pursuing a cashless future with the launch of its “Dubai Cashless Strategy” in 2024. This ambitious initiative aims for 90% of all transactions to be digital by 2026. The strategy focuses on enhancing secure digital payment solutions across government and private sectors, with the goal of positioning Dubai as a global digital capital. With strong governmental support and a thriving fintech ecosystem, Dubai is poised to become a leading example of a

cashless society in the Middle East.

Sweden, the pioneer, has seen cash usage plummet, with cards and mobile payments dominating transactions. Even street vendors prefer the ease of digital transactions.

While no specific “cashless regulation” exists, Sweden’s journey began in the 1960s with the introduction of bank cards and has steadily progressed with innovations like Swish, a popular mobile payment app. This gradual shift, coupled with declining cash usage, puts Sweden at the forefront of the cashless movement.

In China, Alipay and WeChat Pay have revolutionised transactions, making QR code payments ubiquitous. From street performers to multinational corporations, everyone embraces the convenience and speed of mobile payments. While the government hasn’t mandated a cashless society, the widespread adoption of mobile payments, fuelled by their convenience and accessibility, has organically driven China towards a cashless future.

South Korea, a technological powerhouse, boasts high credit card penetration and rapidly growing mobile payment systems like Samsung Pay and Kakao Pay. The “Act on the Promotion of Non-cash Payment” implemented in 2014, aims to reduce reliance on cash and promote digital transactions through tax benefits and incentives, accelerating South Korea’s transition towards a cashless society.

Digital payments offer unparalleled convenience and speed, eliminating the need for physical currency. Technological advancements and mobile payment apps make cashless transactions more accessible than ever

Singapore, a global financial hub, has actively promoted electronic payments since the 1980s with initiatives like GIRO and NETS.

While not explicitly aiming for a fully cashless society, the government has fostered a conducive environment for digital payment adoption through various initiatives like the “Smart Nation” programme, which encourages the use of e-payments for greater efficiency and convenience. This, coupled with the widespread availability of diverse cashless options, has positioned Singapore as a leader in the digital finance arena.

The move towards a cashless society is not just about convenience and technology; it also aligns with increasingly stringent regulations on cash transactions. In the Eurozone, for instance, moving €10,000 or more in cash requires explicit approval from banks, who in turn adhere to the regulations set by the European Central Bank (ECB).

This is part of a broader effort to combat money laundering and terrorist financing, as outlined in directives like the Anti-Money Laundering Directive (AMLD).

The increasing prevalence of digital payments provides a comprehensive record of transactions, making it easier for authorities to track and monitor the flow of money.

This increased transparency can help prevent illicit activities and enhance financial security, further driving the global shift towards a cashless society.

CHINA M&A LEAVES OFFSHORE INVESTORS IN THE LURCH

Hong Kong investors look likely to end up as losers in Beijing’s drive to consolidate its state-backed companies. Shanghai-based Guotai Junan Securities and its cross-town rival Haitong Securities on Wednesday unveiled the terms of their merger — first announced a month ago — to create China’s largest brokerage with \$226 billion in assets. It’s a fiddly transaction, given both companies have listings in Hong Kong and the mainland that trade at different prices and the stock is not fungible. Pleasing four sets of shareholders was always going to be hard, but Guotai Junan’s offshore backers seem to be getting the worst deal.

As part of the tie-up, all Haitong stockholders will receive 0.62 Guotai Junan shares for each share they own in a transaction that is effectively a bailout. The embattled brokerage has been grappling with mounting losses in its offshore subsidiary and reported a 48% year-on-year plunge in revenue for the first half of 2024. Based on the company’s

Based on the company’s undisturbed price before the merger announcement, the share swap ratio represents a 37% premium for holders of Haitong’s Hong Kong

undisturbed price before the merger announcement, the share swap ratio represents a 37% premium for holders of Haitong’s Hong Kong - or H - shares and a 4% premium for those owning the mainland-listed A shares.

The difference comes down to the massive discount Hong Kong stocks generally trade at to their Shanghai or

Shenzhen equivalent. Haitong’s Hong Kong shares were more than 60% lower and Guotai Junan’s roughly 50%, before the deal. That means the financial benefits of a share swap will be skewed to one set of investors.

For the rescuer’s Hong Kong investors, the situation is made worse by the fact that they own just 16% of the company. Following the merger, they will own just 8% of the enlarged entity. They will then face further dilution by a proposed A-share issuance of up to 10 billion yuan (\$1.41 billion).

Moreover, it’s not clear what benefits they will get in exchange. True, a Guotai Junan-Haitong combination will knock Citic Securities from its throne as China’s biggest brokerage. But their combined revenue for the first half of 2024 still lags Citic’s. And given Haitong’s financial troubles, a significant overhaul of the business may be required — a challenge for any acquirer, without even factoring in integration hurdles. — Reuters



DR MYTHILI  
KOLLURU

The author is a  
National-Level  
Award-Winning  
Outstanding  
Women Educator  
and Scholar  
in Strategic  
Management



Tata Group Chairman Emeritus Ratan Tata attends a panel discussion during the annual general meeting of Indian Merchants’ Chamber in Mumbai. — Reuters

RATAN NAVAL TATA was an iconic and modest Indian industrialist who transformed the Indian-centric conglomerate into a global powerhouse. He was one of India’s most internationally recognised industrialists. The company grew from salt to software. He led the Tata Group, a conglomerate of over 100 companies in different business verticals with approximately 660,000 employees across six continents for over two decades. The Tata Group was founded by Jamsetji Tata, an Indian business pioneer with a history of 155 years and businesses ranging from Jaguar Land Rover to aviation and salt production. Ratan Naval Tata was an iconic Indian industrialist who transformed the Tata Group from a largely India-centric conglomerate into a global powerhouse, leaving a significant mark on the global

business landscape. His tenure as the chairman of Tata Sons from 1991 to 2012 and his brief stint as interim chairman from October 2016 to February 2017 saw the Tata Group’s financial success soar. The group became the first Indian conglomerate to surpass a combined market capitalisation of \$400 billion, a feat that brought pride to the nation. As of August 20, 2024, the 29 publicly listed Tata Group companies had a combined market capitalisation of ₹33.7 trillion (\$403 billion), with annual revenues exceeding \$100 billion. Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) is the most significant contributor to the group’s valuation, with a market capitalisation of \$190 billion, accounting for 47% of the group’s total value. Other significant contributors to the group’s valuation include Tata Motors, Titan, and Tata Steel, which, together with TCS, account

for almost 75% of the total. Ratan Naval Tata was born on December 28, 1937, into a highly educated and prosperous traditional Parsis family. He studied at Cornell University in the USA. In 1962, when he returned to India, a relative of his JRD Tata asked him to join the Tata Group. He started working on the shop floor of a steel plant in Jamshedpur in eastern India before he became a technical assistant to the manager. In the 1970s, he took over two sick groups and turned them around with mixed results. In 1991, JRD Tata, despite personal criticism and a label of nepotism, appointed Ratan Tata as his successor for the company. He navigated the growth trajectory of the conglomerate through industry changes, adapting to emerging trends and demands with a keen focus on consumer goods. Tata spearheaded the globalisation of the group through strategic acquisitions. Notable examples include Tata Tea’s acquisition of Tetley, Tata Motors’ purchase of UK brands Jaguar Land Rover, and Tata Steel’s acquisition of Anglo-Dutch Corus. Some strategic decisions paid off, and others cost the company lots of money. The acquisition of Tetley proved impactful; they became the world’s second-largest tea company. Additionally, this was the biggest worldwide brand acquisition by an Indian firm. Tata also faced some major disappointments in his conglomerate business journey. He ventured into building safe and affordable transportation for millions of Indians with the Tata Nano car project. The base model of the car was only 100,000 (\$1,222). However, the euphoria of the initial success was short-lived. Branding the Nano car as the world’s cheapest car was a mistake, as people did not want to be seen driving the cheapest car, so the project was shelved due to production and marketing issues. Ratan Tata retired as chairman of Tata Sons on December 28, 2012. Although he retired from his executive role, Tata remained active in various capacities. Ratan Tata will be remembered as India’s most reflective and visionary leader globally. He is known for his modesty and self-discipline.



# ART/LIFE



LOCAL TRAVEL

## The strain of bad tourist behaviour on local Omani villages > 20

ENTERTAINMENT

### Let ‘Emily in Paris’ remain in Paris, Macron says



**French President** Emmanuel Macron said in an interview published on Wednesday he hoped that Netflix’s hit series “Emily in Paris” would remain centred on the French capital rather than move to Rome.

The fourth season of “Emily in Paris”, currently streaming, takes events to the Italian capital where the show’s star, played by Lily Collins, seeks to break new ground both personally and professionally.

When the show was renewed for a fifth season last month, the series’ creators said it would play out between Paris and Rome, with Emily having “a presence” in Italy.

Darren Star, the creator and showrunner of “Emily in Paris”, was quoted as saying that the show’s heroine “was becoming very comfortable in Paris. I wanted to throw her into some unfamiliar waters”.

Asked by US magazine **Variety** what he thought of the move, Macron said he would not take it lying down.

“We will fight hard,” he said. “And we will ask them to remain in Paris.”

Macron’s wife Brigitte has a cameo appearance in the show’s fourth season, in which, during a chance meeting in a restaurant, she says she follows Emily on Instagram.

“I was super proud, and she was very happy to do it,” the president said about his wife’s effort. “Emily in Paris’ is super positive in terms of attractiveness for the country. For my own business, it’s a very good initiative.”

Was he asked to appear on the show? “I’m less attractive than Brigitte,” Macron replied.

“Emily in Paris” has been mostly lambasted by French critics for showing the French capital in what they say is an unrealistically glamorous light. Some of them have admitted, however, that it has its moments.

“It’s a saccharine series filled with stereotypes,” judged culture magazine **Telerama** when the show first aired. “And yet we can’t get ourselves to totally hate it.”

Britain’s **The Guardian** came to the show’s defence. “Yes, Emily in Paris is unrealistic”, the paper said. “But when it comes to escapist TV, reality is overrated.” —AFP

QUICK

LIFESTYLE

Andrea Oberto (R) drives a tractor carrying boxes of Nebbiolo grapes during a harvest at the Andrea Oberto vineyards in the Langhe countryside, in La Morra, northwestern Italy. —AFP



FEATURES

ENTERTAINMENT

English actor Harris Dickinson poses on the red carpet upon arrival to attend the Premiere of the film “Blitz” during the 2024 BFI London Film Festival opening night Gala in London. —AFP



CULTURE

An aerial view shows revellers wearing traditional clothes as they dance at a ‘Garba’ during the Hindu festival of Navaratri, in the outskirts of Ahmedabad. —AFP

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The Sun Will Destroy the Earth One Day, Right? Maybe Not



In 6 billion years, the sun will expand into a red giant. That process should consume Mercury, and maybe Venus. For a long time, we have thought it might incinerate Earth, too.

But perhaps all is not doomed for Earth, although it may be a world that will have long since become uninhabitable.

Scientists have found a rocky world orbiting another star that already went through its red giant phase. This planet now orbits a white dwarf, the smaller stellar body that remains after a star burns out.

Crucially, the planet looks like it once orbited the star in the same position Earth now travels around our sun, and did so until it was pushed to a more distant orbit, twice the Earth-sun distance, sometime before the dying giant could eat it. This

makes it the first potential rocky world to be observed orbiting a white dwarf.

“We don’t know if Earth can survive,” said Keming Zhang, an astrophysicist at the University of California, San Diego, who led the work published in the journal *Nature Astronomy*. “If it does, it’ll end up somewhere like this system.”

The planet is about 4,000 light-years away from us. It was discovered in 2020 with a Korean telescope network. The Korean team had watched as the planet’s star passed in front of another star, which from the background magnified the amount of light heading toward the telescope by 1,000 times.

This specific occurrence was a one-off event, limiting chances for detailed follow-up observations. But Zhang’s team was able to do additional work at the Keck Observatory in Hawaii last year and identify the star as a white dwarf.

The data the researchers managed to gather allowed them to calculate that there were at least two objects orbiting the white dwarf.

One was a suspected brown dwarf, a failed star that never ignited with nuclear fusion, situated at a very great distance away from the star. But the other object was a planet about 1.9 times the mass of Earth orbiting much closer to the star, suggesting it was a rocky planet.

—NYT



Pharrell Williams to co-chair Met Gala exploring Black dandyism

**SINGER** and designer Pharrell Williams is among the co-chairs of New York’s next Met Gala, which will wade into race relations in the context of fashion, the museum announced on Wednesday.

Rapper ASAP Rocky, actor and playwright Colman Domingo and Formula One driver Lewis Hamilton will co-chair fashion’s marquee event overseen by Anna Wintour, the editor-in-chief of *Vogue*.

Basketball legend LeBron James will serve as honorary chair. The blockbuster night and its corresponding museum exhibit at the Met’s Costume Institute will come five years after the enormous anti-racist uprising of the Black Lives Matter movement, which pushed a number of cultural institutions in the United States to grapple with their representation of race and diversity.

The Costume Institute’s spring 2025 exhibition is entitled “Superfine: Tailoring Black Style” and will focus on the style of Black men within the context of Black dandyism’s complicated history.

It’s a show and theme inspired by guest curator Monica Miller’s book “Slaves to Fashion: Black Dandyism and the Styling of Black Diasporic Identity.” Dandyism was a style imposed on Black men in 18th century Europe, says the Met, when well-dressed “dandified” servants became a trend. The concept also developed throughout history and the diaspora into a means for Black men to use style as a means of creativity, expression and identity establishment.

Speaking at the announcement of the exhibit and theme on Wednesday, Williams — the creative director of menswear at Louis Vuitton, a co-sponsor of the exhibit — emphasised the importance of celebrating



cultures that emerged from the dark origins of slavery.

“As an artist who was literally born and raised in the shadow of where the African diaspora expanded into the country that would become America, celebrating an exhibit centred on Black dandyism and the African diaspora is really, for me, a full circle moment,” said Williams, who is from Virginia.

“It’s literally a dream.”

Not only did members of the Black diaspora survive the horrors of slavery, he said, “but we carried the music, the culture, the beauty and the universal language across an ocean and over a quadruple century.”

The Met Gala, traditionally held on the first Monday in May, was first organised in 1948 and for decades was reserved for New York high society.

Wintour, the high priestess of US fashion, took over the show in the 1990s, transforming the party into a catwalk for the rich and famous.

It’s a fundraiser for the Costume Institute, but it’s also a social media extravaganza that sees stars don over-the-top looks, vying to create the greatest spectacle.

According to *The New York Times*, a seat at the dinner in 2024 cost \$75,000 and a full table went for \$350,000. Last year’s edition raked in some \$22 million. —AFP

# The strain of bad tourist behaviour on local Omani villages

BY YERU EBUEEN

**OMAN'S** villages offer a glimpse into a way of life that has remained largely untouched by time, where villagers rely on age-old irrigation systems, tend their fruit orchards, and uphold traditions that have been passed down through generations. Visitors who venture into these remote areas are often awe-struck by the beauty and tranquillity of Oman's countryside, but with this growing popularity comes an unfortunate side effect: the strain on local communities caused by disrespectful behaviour from some visitors.

The village of Al Aqabiyah in Muscat, known for its stunning pool hidden within a wadi, has become one such example. The pool, with its clear blue waters and natural falaj (irrigation system), was once a place where locals could relax and enjoy their surroundings. However, as more visitors discov-

ered this hidden gem, problems began to arise. Many locals report instances of tourists damaging the falaj system, swimming in inappropriate attire, and leaving behind litter. The villagers, who depend on the pool and falaj for their livelihoods, have now made it clear that visitors are no longer welcome. Signboards warning against trespassing have been put up, and some locals have even resorted to reporting unruly visitors to the authorities.

Al Aqabiyah is not an isolated case. Villages like Wakan, perched on the slopes of the Western Al Hajar Mountains, and Mibam near Tiwi, a garden village surrounded by date palms and wadi pools, have also seen an influx of visitors behaving carelessly. In Wakan, locals have expressed frustration with tourists who take photographs of them without permission, intruding on their privacy. In Mibam, the issue of visitors harvesting fruits from local orchards without consent has become so widespread

that villagers now regularly monitor their groves during harvest season. At the heart of these concerns is a sense of disrespect for the cultural norms and traditions that are deeply ingrained in Omani society. The falaj systems, which are vital for irrigating crops in these arid regions, are particularly sacred. These ancient channels are not just a water source; they are a lifeline for the communities that depend on them.

Visitors who carelessly pollute or damage these systems, whether by swimming in falaj-fed pools or leaving behind trash, are not only disrupting the environment but also impacting the livelihoods of the people who live there. Equally important is the matter of modesty. Omani culture values modest dressing, especially in rural areas where traditions are more closely followed. Visitors are encouraged to dress appropriately, particularly when walking through villages or interacting with locals. This means avoiding revealing clothing like bikinis or short shorts, which can be seen as disrespectful in these conservative communities. Although visitors may feel comfortable in swimwear at popular tourist spots, it is crucial to remember that places like Al Aqabiyah or Wakan, are not just tourist destinations; they are homes to people who uphold their customs with pride.

It is easy for travellers to forget, amidst the breathtaking scenery, that these villages are living, breathing communities, not mere backdrops for adventure. The village of Al Aqabiyah, like many others across Oman, still relies on traditional systems to sustain its way of life. The growing number of tourists has unfortunately begun to erode the delicate balance between welcoming visitors and maintaining the peace and sanctity of village life.

Despite these challenges, Oman continues to offer a wealth of stun-

ning landscapes and cultural experiences to those willing to explore its corners respectfully. There are countless places beyond Al Aqabiyah where visitors are still warmly welcomed, provided they honour local rules and traditions. Simple gestures like asking for permission before taking photos of residents, being mindful of where you park, and picking up any litter go a long way in preserving the beauty and harmony of these villages.

In villages like Wakan and Mibam, where age-old traditions govern daily life, respecting local customs is not just courteous—it is essential. These communities have been generous in sharing their heritage and natural beauty with visitors, but that generosity comes with the expectation that guests will be mindful of their actions.

Visitors to Oman's villages are reminded that they are stepping into spaces where tradition, nature, and community intersect. Following local customs, dressing modestly, and respecting the sacred falaj systems are small but meaningful ways to ensure that Oman's villages can continue to welcome visitors while preserving their unique way of life. For those eager to explore these incredible landscapes, a little respect and mindfulness will ensure that future generations can enjoy the beauty and peace that these villages have to offer.

As Oman's villages open their doors to the world, it is the responsibility of visitors to ensure that they leave a positive mark on the places they visit. By adhering to local customs and being considerate of the villagers who live in these beautiful and historic landscapes, tourists can help maintain the delicate balance between tourism and tradition.

In the end, visiting Oman's villages is not just about the adventure—it's about understanding and appreciating the culture that makes these places so special.

