

IRAN LAUNCHES NEW MISSILE SALVO AT ISRAEL AND US TARGETS

OMAN FLAYS ATTACK ON THE UAE’S CONSULATE-GENERAL IN IRAQI KURDISTAN

HM, LEADERS DISCUSS REGIONAL SITUATION

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik received a telephone call on Tuesday from President Abdul Latif Rashid of the Republic of Iraq.

The two leaders reviewed the evolving military escalation within the region and its profound ramifications for the security and stability of sovereign states. They reaffirmed the imperative of sustained international engagement to restore dialogue and diplomatic avenues as the means to resolve the extant conflict and its far-reaching consequences, thereby safeguarding the region’s tranquillity and the well-being of its peoples.

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik also received a phone call from Mark Carney, Prime Minister of Canada, on Tuesday. They discussed developments of the ongoing military escalation in the region and its repercussions on the security and stability of countries. — ONA



A photograph shows a damaged building in the aftermath of a drone strike in the Seef district of Manama on Tuesday. — AFP

THE SULTANATE OF OMAN voiced its condemnation of the attack on the Consulate-General of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in Iraqi Kurdistan, which constitutes a violation of diplomatic laws and norms that guarantee the protection of diplomatic missions and premises.

In a statement issued by the Foreign Ministry on Tuesday, the Sultanate of Oman expressed solidarity with the UAE and the measures it is taking to protect its diplomatic missions and ensure their security and stability, reiterating its position rejecting all

forms of violence regardless of their motives.

Meanwhile, Iran launched a new salvo of missiles on Tuesday at Israeli cities including Tel Aviv and US targets in the region, the Revolutionary Guards said, as fighting between the foes showed no signs of letting up. The latest salvo utilised “strategic” missiles, including some of the most powerful in Iran’s arsenal, such as the Fattah, Emad and Khaibar missiles, the Guards said in their statement.

Iran’s parliamentary speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf warned that any attack on the Islamic

republic’s infrastructure would result in a tit-for-tat response.

“The enemy should know that whatever they do, undoubtedly it will have a proportionate and immediate response,” Ghalibaf wrote on X, more than a week into the Middle East war that began with US-Israeli strikes on Iran.

“We today go with the rule of ‘an eye for an eye’, without compromise, without exception,” he said. “If they start a war on infrastructure, we will undoubtedly target infrastructure.”

Russian President Vladimir Putin called for de-escalation in the Iran

conflict during a phone call on Tuesday with his Iranian counterpart Masoud Pezeshkian, the Kremlin said.

“The President of Russia reaffirmed his principled position in favour of a speedy de-escalation of the conflict and for it to be resolved through political means,” the Kremlin said. “Pezeshkian thanked Russia for its support, particularly for providing humanitarian aid to Iran,” the Kremlin added, confirming Moscow has sent assistance to its ally Tehran. — Agencies

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4 IRANIAN DIPLOMATS KILLED IN LEBANON ATTACK

HM SENDS MESSAGE TO AZERBAIJAN

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a written message to President Ilham Aliyev of the Republic of Azerbaijan, concerning the strong bilateral relations between the two countries and their friendly peoples, and ways to foster them in all fields. The message was delivered by Saif bin Rashid al Jahwari, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the Republic of Türkiye, non-resident Ambassador to the Republic of Azerbaijan, when he met Jeyhun Bayramov, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan, in Baku.

OMAN, SINGAPORE TO BOOST TRADE TIES

HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs, received a written message from Gan Kim Yong, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade and Industry of the Republic of Singapore. The message pertains to the enhancement of economic, commercial and industrial cooperation between the two countries. The message was handed over by the Chargé d’Affaires of the Embassy of the Republic of Singapore to the Sultanate of Oman, when he was received by the Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs on Tuesday.

Muscat International Airport operations normal

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 10

Oman Airports has confirmed that operations at Muscat International Airport are continuing as normal. The airport continues to receive passengers and deliver its services in line with the highest standards of safety and security.

Operational teams are working around the clock to ensure the smooth flow of passengers within the terminal and to facilitate travel procedures. Operational readiness has also been enhanced through the opening of additional check-in counters, along with the deployment of support and guidance teams to assist passengers and provide directions throughout the terminal. As part of efforts to further streamline travel procedures, dedicated counters have been made available within the passenger terminal



Operational teams at Muscat International Airport are working round the clock to ensure the smooth flow of passengers.

for booking and purchasing airline tickets, enabling travellers to arrange their flights directly from the airport as part of the company’s ongoing efforts to provide integrated and convenient services.

Airport facilities and services continue to operate as usual. Food and retail outlets, along

with various service points within the passenger terminal, remain open, while comfortable waiting areas are available to enhance the overall passenger experience.

At the same time, Oman Airports continues to coordinate closely with airlines and relevant authorities, as well

as with government and security entities, to ensure the smooth flow of procedures at the airport. Coordination with embassies is also ongoing regarding special flights or travel arrangements of a particular nature.

In this context, Oman Airports urges passengers to check directly with their respective airlines to confirm flight schedules before heading to the airport, and to follow the official communication channels of Oman Airports and the relevant authorities for the latest verified updates on travel and flight movements.

Oman Airports also stresses the importance of adhering to the regulations and instructions in force within the airport, including refraining from photographing airport facilities or passengers, in order to safeguard operational procedures and protect passengers’ privacy.

OMAN



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SHORT TAKES



The message was delivered by Saif bin Rashid al Jahwari, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the Republic of Türkiye, non-resident Ambassador to the Republic of Azerbaijan. — ONA

HM SENDS WRITTEN MESSAGE TO PRESIDENT OF AZERBAIJAN

BAKU: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a written message to President Ilham Aliyev of the Republic of Azerbaijan concerning the strong bilateral relations between the two countries and their friendly peoples and ways to foster them in all fields.

The message was delivered by Saif bin Rashid al Jahwari, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the Republic of Türkiye, non-resident Ambassador to the Republic of Azerbaijan, when he was met by Jeyhun Bayramov, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan, in Baku, on Tuesday.

The ambassador conveyed the greetings and best wishes of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to President Ilham Aliyev of the Republic of Azerbaijan, wishing him continued health and happiness, and further progress and prosperity for the friendly Azerbaijani people.

Jeyhun Bayramov, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan, asked the ambassador to pass on the greetings of President Ilham Aliyev to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and his best wishes for His Majesty and the Omani people for continued progress and prosperity. — ONA

GLOBAL EDUCATION EXHIBITION TO KICK OFF ON APRIL 20

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman is preparing for the 25th edition of the Global Education Exhibition (GEDEX 2026), which will take place on April 20-22 at Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre.

The expo marks the culmination of a distinguished journey spanning more than a quarter of a century since the first edition of the exhibition in 2001, making it one of the most prominent educational platforms in the region.

Amr bin Abdullah Baabood, Group CEO Arabian Research Bureau, said: “This year, we will be marking the 25th edition of the Global Education Exhibition (GEDEX), which is the oldest and most prominent educational event in the Sultanate of Oman. This edition has seen an evolution in its visual identity, now becoming ‘GEDEX Global Education Exhibition,’ highlighting the importance of the event and the changes in the educational system in the Sultanate of Oman. The exhibition is no longer limited to universities and colleges, but it has become a comprehensive platform encompassing institutes, schools and educational centres.”

He added: “Through our partnership with the Ministry of Education, we aim to support this vital sector by inviting local and international educational institutions and contributing to shaping the future of education in the Sultanate of Oman. This aligns with the goals of Oman Vision 2040 for high-quality education and enhances innovation and scientific research.”

The GEDEX Global Education Exhibition 2026 aims to empower the education sector by attracting leading educational institutions and supporting students’ aspirations across various disciplines.

Oman’s social protection system serves 3.3 million

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, MARCH 10

THE SOCIAL PROTECTION FUND (SPF) disclosed its intention to activate sick leave and emergency leave insurance this year, with the mandatory savings system for non-Omani employees to be launched next year and work injury insurance to be applied to non-working employees in 2028. This was revealed by the Social Protection Fund at a media meeting held on Tuesday under the theme: ‘Building a Sustainable System’.

Speakers at the media briefing explained that the social protection system comprises three main components. The first of these is the social protection benefits which are funded by the state treasury and represent the basic social safety umbrella aimed at supporting the most vulnerable groups and promoting social equity. These include benefits for the elderly, children, people with disabilities, orphans and widows and family income support.

The second component comprises social insurance programmes, which rely on contributions from both employees and employers. These programmes cover old age, disability, death, work-related injuries and occupational diseases, job security, insurance of maternity leave, sick leave and other unusual leaves and supplementary programmes.

The third component consists of additional programmes that enhance the financial security of individuals, such as the mandatory savings programme for non-Omani, the voluntary savings programme for Omanis and retirement support programmes.

The speakers emphasised that the social protection system continues to develop its programmes to enhance sustainability and comprehensive coverage. They stated that during 2026, they intend to activate sick leave and other leave insurance, targeting all workers in the Sultanate of Oman. This insurance will require a 1-per cent contribution from the total salary borne by

EXPATS SAVINGS SCHEME FROM 2027



A mandatory savings scheme for expatriate workers will be launched from 2027, aimed at strengthening their financial security, the Social Protection Fund officials said on Tuesday. Under the new system, 9 per cent of an expatriate employee’s basic salary will be allocated towards a mandatory savings programme, creating a structured financial reserve that workers can access at the end of their employment.

In 2028, authorities also plan to introduce work injury insurance for all workers including expatriates, requiring a 1 per cent contribution of salary and offering compensation of up to RO 3,000 for workplace-related injuries. The scheme is expected to replace or complement traditional end-of-service benefits, creating a more transparent and regulated system for employee financial entitlements.

The initiative forms part of a broader effort by Oman to modernise its social protection framework and ensure better financial planning for expatriate. The savings programme is designed to provide expatriates with a long-term financial cushion, helping them accumulate funds during their years of service in the country. The savings will effectively serve as a structured financial benefit when workers complete their employment contracts or return to their home countries.

the employer and aims to provide sick leave and other regular leaves for the insured. These leaves will become insurance rights and job allowances.

The meeting addressed the SPF’s services which are provided through an integrated network of channels. These include 11 social protection offices in the governorates, 3 model service centres for direct service delivery and digital services such as the SPF’s online portal, the Himaya (protection) application, the customer care account and the smart call centre. The number of customers served through various digital and non-digital channels reached 333,727 in 2025, averaging 1,264 customers daily.

The SPF’s statistics presented at the media briefing showed that the number of insured Omanis is approximately 615,174 as of January 2026, while the total number of insured non-Omanis was 1,061,319, bringing the total number of insured people to 1,676,493.

The total number of active employers was 137,240. Beneficiaries of child benefits increased from 1,236,501 in 2024 to 1,251,274 in 2025, whereas beneficiaries of elderly benefits increased from 167,687 in 2024 to 174,662 in 2025.

Speakers at the media briefing stressed that the SPF provides services to 64 per cent of the population covered by the social protection system, according to the general indicators for 2025. This translates to a total of 3.3 million people served by the fund. The number of people served by social protection offices in the governorates was 228,274. The number of calls received through the call centre reached 192,258.

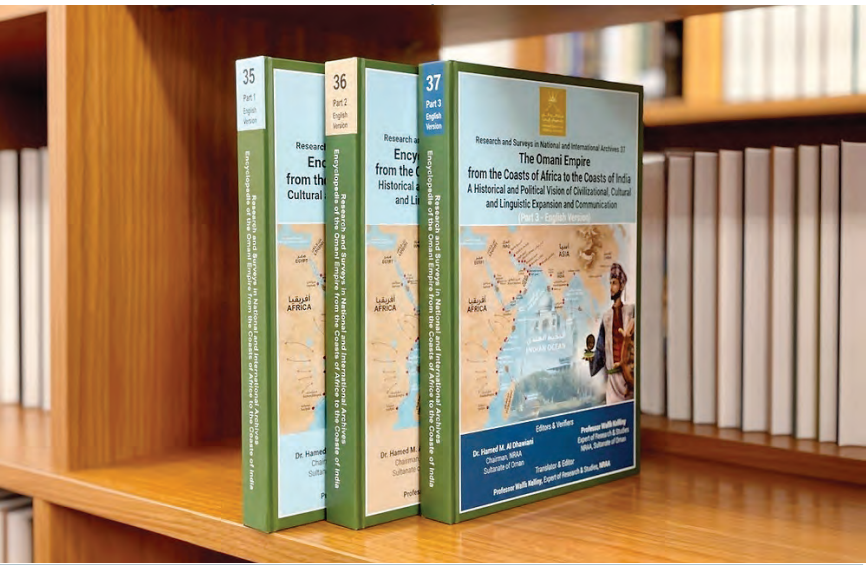
The statistics presented at the media briefing showed that the number of active beneficiaries of social protection benefits was 1,552,749 as of the end of January 2026, including 177,051 elderly beneficiaries, 1,251,309 child beneficiaries, 49,906 persons with disabilities beneficiaries, 10,271 orphans and 5,489 widows. The number of beneficiaries who continue to receive social security benefits reached 16,761.

Three books chronicle Omani empire’s legacy

MUSCAT: The National Records and Archives Authority (NRAA) has unveiled three English-language volumes of the comprehensive work “The Omani Empire from the Coasts of Africa to the Coasts of India: Civilisational, Cultural and Linguistic Expansion and Communication,” marking a significant addition to its academic series of research and studies on national and international documentary heritage.

These publications represent the Authority’s ongoing scholarly commitment to disseminating historical research rooted in authentic documents and primary sources, illuminating the Omani Empire’s profound civilisational impact and its rich tapestry of cultural, political and economic exchanges across vast maritime spaces stretching from the African littoral to the shores of India and the broader Indian Ocean world.

The first volume, designated as number 35 in the series,



The publications represent the Authority’s ongoing scholarly commitment to disseminating historical research. — ONA

assembles sixteen scholarly papers investigating the Omani Empire’s multifaceted relations with nations bordering the African coasts and adjacent territories, extending across the Indian Ocean rim and the Arabian Gulf to reach China, spanning the 17th through 19th centuries. The collected research

traverses historical, political, geographical, economic, social and cultural dimensions, enriched by a selection of period images and cartographic treasures.

Volume two, series number 36, presents fourteen academic contributions offering historical and political perspectives on the

Omani Empire’s expansive reach and its enduring civilisational, cultural and linguistic connections. An accompanying appendix draws upon the Authority’s archival holdings to present original documents, historical imagery, and maps that illuminate the research themes.

The third volume, series number 37, comprises twelve scholarly explorations examining diverse aspects of the Omani Empire’s historical, political, economic and cultural engagements with regions along the African seaboard, the Indian Ocean perimeter and the Arabian Gulf, extending to China during the same era. A complementary appendix features documents, images and historical cartography pertinent to the volume’s scope.

This encyclopedic trilogy stands as an indispensable scholarly resource for researchers and students of Oman’s historical trajectory and its international relations. — ONA

SHORT TAKES



The meeting was chaired by Eng Masoud bin Said al Hashmi, Governor of Al Batinah South. — ONA

Chinese delegation explores tourism cooperation in Al Batinah South

AL RUSTAQ: Within the framework of its efforts to upgrade cooperation and explore partnership in developmental, economic and cultural fields, the Office of the Governor of Al Batinah South recently received a delegation from the People’s Republic of China. The meeting was chaired by Eng Masoud bin Said al Hashmi, Governor of Al Batinah South. It discussed ways of establishing an agreement between the Wilayat of Barka and the Chinese city of Hefei.

The meeting discussed proposed areas of cooperation, including the mutual activation of tourist destinations, promoting innovation, technology and digital transition, supporting cultural exchange, organising joint art exhibitions, consolidating investment partnerships and boosting the process of economic development in a manner that serves the mutual interests of the two sides.

The meeting reflects the keenness of Al Batinah South Governorate to enhance its international relations and explore opportunities for cooperation and investment with friendly countries, in order to enhance the governorate’s global presence in the fields of tourism, economy and culture.

The meeting was attended by Shaikh Khalifa bin Saleh al Busaidy, Wali of Nakhal, and Shaikh Abdussalam bin Sultan al Shukaili, Deputy Wali of Barka, officials, stakeholders and representatives of parties concerned. — ONA

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RAMADHAN
1447 AH
WEDNESDAY
MAR 11, 2026

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PRAYER TIMINGS

FAJR

05:05 AM

DHUHR

12:22 PM

ASR

03:46 PM

MAGHRIB

06:19 PM

ISHA

07:29 PM

INFORMATION MINISTERS DISCUSS MEDIA AMIDST ESCALATION

THE SULTANATE OF OMAN took part in the extraordinary meeting of the GCC Information Ministers, which was held via videoconference. The meeting aimed to discuss the rapid developments in the region and enhance Gulf media coordination amidst the current escalation. The Sultanate of Oman was represented at the meeting by Dr Abdullah bin Nasser al Harrasi, Minister of Information.

During the meeting, Dr Abdullah affirmed that the media message at this critical juncture carries multiplied significance.

He stressed the necessity of maintaining a balanced and responsible media discourse — one that reinforces stability, consolidates awareness and reflects the confidence of GCC societies in their ability to overcome this crisis, just as they have overcome numerous challenges in the past.

He pointed out that the current phase necessitates adhering to established constants in Gulf media discourse, founded on wisdom, balance, prudence and prioritising the common



Oman was represented at the meeting by Dr Abdullah bin Nasser al Harrasi, Minister of Information.

interests that unite the region’s states and peoples.

The minister added that the efforts undertaken by the Sultanate of Oman, with the support of the GCC states, stem from a sincere desire to spare the region the scourges of conflict. However, the destructive war witnessed

in the region today, whose repercussions have expanded to include GCC member states and other nations, multiplies the media’s responsibility to act as a voice of wisdom and stability, Dr Abdullah affirmed.

For his part, Dr Ramzan bin Abdullah al Nuaimi, Minister of Information of the Kingdom

of Bahrain and chairman of the meeting, lauded the efforts of the Sultanate of Oman, under the leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, in bringing viewpoints closer between the American and Iranian sides, serving international peace and security. — ONA

Special iftar gatherings hosted for special children

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, MARCH 10

While mass iftars are proving to be an ideal platform to reinforce brotherhood and solidarity with fasting people across the world, a different thought of including a segment in society is gaining brownie points.

Two iftar gatherings were held recently in support of the special children, thus enhancing their their confidence and accentuate their rehabilitation.

Hotel Grand Millennium Muscat, in the true spirit of the holy month, embraced compassion, togetherness and generosity through a heartfelt CSR initiative, invited children with Down Syndrome to break fast and spend some quality time with the pride world.

The initiative, under the Millennium Green Path



The children were encouraged to express themselves, build self-assurance and enjoy moments of joy.

programme, was dedicated to children from the Oman Down Syndrome Association, at the Bahriyat Hotel, where their families too were welcomed for a warm and meaningful Iftar experience.

The evening also honoured each child’s unique abilities, inspired confidence and

strengthened community bonds through a series of engaging activities.

The children were encouraged to express themselves, build self-assurance, and enjoy moments of joy within a supportive and inclusive environment. This initiative not only aimed

to inspire confidence in the children, but also reinforced the importance of empathy, acceptance and unity, reflecting the true spirit of Ramadhan.

“Hospitality is about people; it’s about creating spaces where everyone feels seen, valued and celebrated. These children inspired us with their joy, resilience and individuality. We were truly honoured to welcome them and their families for an evening that was both festive and empowering,” Ahmed Ashfaq, Taskforce General Manager, told the Observer.

Meanwhile, Care & Special Education (CSE), a division of the Indian School Muscat, hosted a special Iftar gathering for their students and parents at the school premises, bringing together families and school representatives in the spirit of unity and Ramadhan.

Al Sharqi House: A historic landmark

MUTTRAH: Al Sharqi House or ‘The Eastern House’ stands as one of the most illustrious historic residences in the Wilayat of Muttrah, a venerable structure that for decades served as a gracious waypoint for merchants and visitors arriving in this storied port city, long celebrated for its maritime enterprise and commercial vibrancy.

Following meticulous restoration undertaken pursuant to an agreement between the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism and Al Jabal Al Akhdhar Hotels and Resorts, the Al Sharqi House now reclaims its rightful place in Muttrah’s collective memory and urban identity.

The project safeguards both its architectural integrity and its strategic proximity to Muttrah Fort, ensuring this nearly 131-year-old edifice endures



The Al Sharqi House distinguishes itself through architectural character of exceptional distinctiveness, reflecting the diverse cultural currents that shaped historic Muttrah.

as a touchstone of the city’s built heritage.

Eng Hamida al Azri, Projects Director and Chief Architect at Al Jabal Al Akhdhar Hotels and Resorts, elucidates the house’s origins: it derives its name from its geographical position east of Muttrah, with construction dating to approximately 1895. The commission came from merchant Said bin Rashid al Zakwani, scion

of a distinguished Omani trading family of that era, whose commercial enterprise centred upon exporting dried dates through the harbour known as ‘Al Fardha.’

His selection of this site — chosen for its proximity to the port — aligned perfectly with his mercantile operations, facilitating both storage and export logistics. He dedicated portions of the ground floor

to warehousing goods. The house assumed its present form upon completion by Talib bin Mohammed al Zakwani in 1960.

During its heyday, she noted, the residence attracted dignitaries and merchants from across the Sultanate of Oman’s governorates. Morning gatherings convened in a corner known as ‘Al Sabah,’ where news was exchanged before proceeding to the market.

The Al Sharqi House distinguishes itself through architectural character of exceptional distinctiveness, reflecting the diverse cultural currents that shaped historic Muttrah.

The residence synthesises elements derived from traditional Muttrah dwellings of that epoch with features evincing East African influence — a testament to Muttrah’s nature. — ONA

وزارة الإعلام
Ministry of Information

•Reminder•

The Ministry of Information calls on media entities and those working in media professions subject to licensing to take the initiative to regularize their status and fulfill the regulatory requirements before 14 March 2026, the deadline for the specified grace period. This is in implementation of the provisions of the Executive Regulations of the Media Law and in commitment to consolidating an organized media environment.

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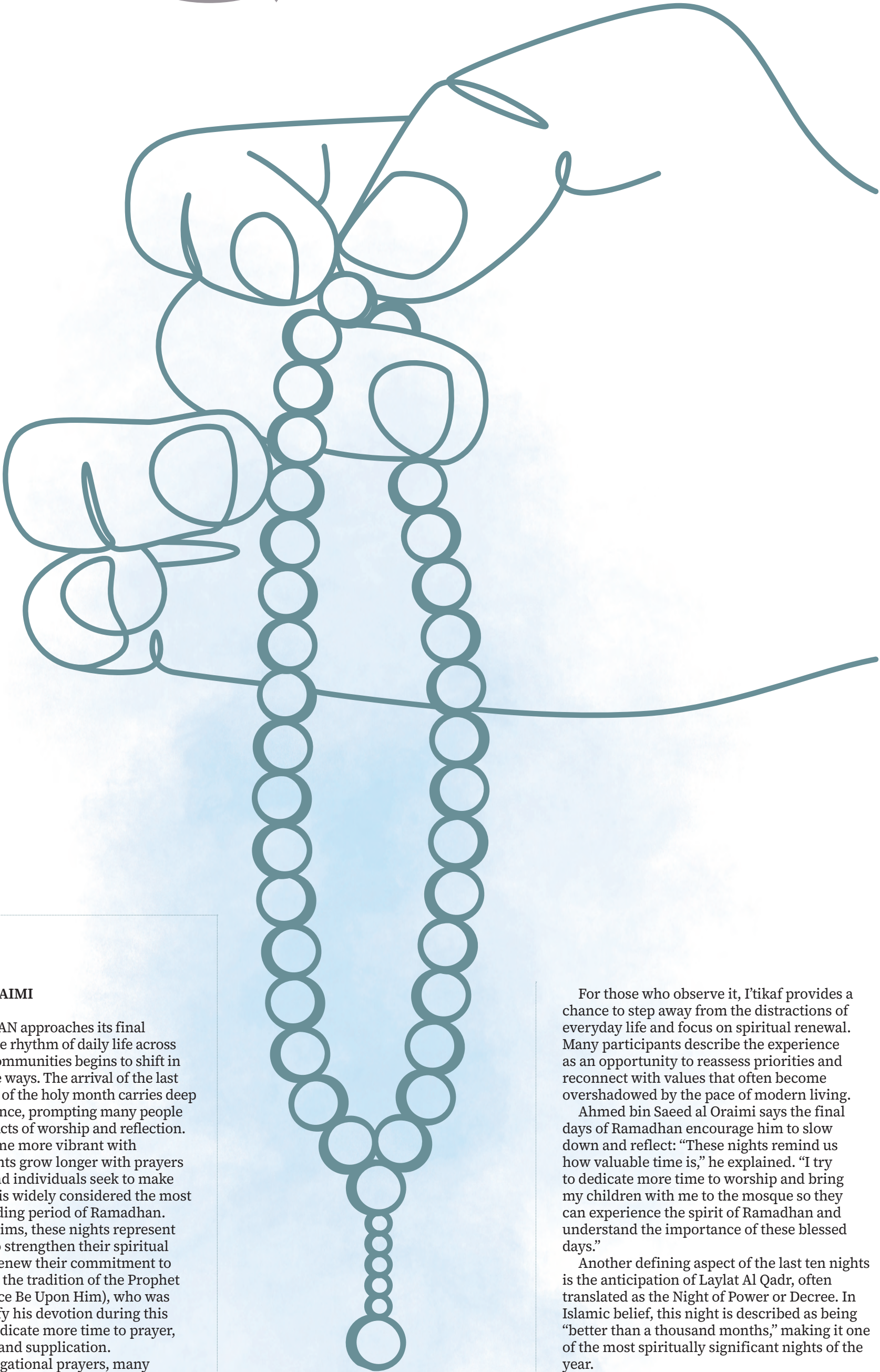
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LAST 10 NIGHTS

DEEP
REFLECTION,
INCREASED
DEVOTION



BALQEES AL ORAIMI

AS RAMADHAN approaches its final stretch, the rhythm of daily life across Muslim communities begins to shift in noticeable ways. The arrival of the last ten nights of the holy month carries deep spiritual significance, prompting many people to increase their acts of worship and reflection.

Mosques become more vibrant with worshippers, nights grow longer with prayers and recitation, and individuals seek to make the most of what is widely considered the most spiritually rewarding period of Ramadhan.

For many Muslims, these nights represent an opportunity to strengthen their spiritual connection and renew their commitment to faith. Inspired by the tradition of the Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him), who was known to intensify his devotion during this period, people dedicate more time to prayer, Quran recitation and supplication.

Beyond congregational prayers, many mosques also host Quran recitation circles and religious reminders, adding to the spiritual atmosphere that characterises this period. Families often bring their children along, allowing younger generations to experience the unique ambience of Ramadhan's final nights.

Abdulla bin Hamad al Hasani, a citizen who regularly attends night prayers, says the final ten nights hold a special place in his heart. "The atmosphere in mosques during these nights is truly different. People come together with a shared intention of seeking blessings and making the most of these precious moments. It also strengthens the sense of community when you see neighbours and families gathering for worship," he said.

Among the most prominent traditions observed during the last ten nights is I'tikaf, a spiritual retreat in which worshippers spend extended periods inside the mosque devoted entirely to prayer, reflection and Quran recitation.

The arrival of the last ten nights of the holy month carries deep spiritual significance, prompting many people to increase their acts of worship and reflection. Mosques become more vibrant with worshippers, nights grow longer with prayers and recitation, and individuals seek to make the most of what is widely considered the most spiritually rewarding period of Ramadhan.

For those who observe it, I'tikaf provides a chance to step away from the distractions of everyday life and focus on spiritual renewal. Many participants describe the experience as an opportunity to reassess priorities and reconnect with values that often become overshadowed by the pace of modern living.

Ahmed bin Saeed al Oraimi says the final days of Ramadhan encourage him to slow down and reflect: "These nights remind us how valuable time is," he explained. "I try to dedicate more time to worship and bring my children with me to the mosque so they can experience the spirit of Ramadhan and understand the importance of these blessed days."

Another defining aspect of the last ten nights is the anticipation of Laylat Al Qadr, often translated as the Night of Power or Decree. In Islamic belief, this night is described as being "better than a thousand months," making it one of the most spiritually significant nights of the year.

Khalid bin Rashed, a muezzin at a mosque in Al Sharqiyah South Governorate, says the difference in atmosphere during the final nights is unmistakable: "We clearly notice a larger number of worshippers attending the late-night prayers," he said. "People are eager to benefit from these blessed nights, and it creates a deeply spiritual environment. As a muezzin, it is inspiring to see the community gathering with such devotion."

Social gatherings also tend to take on a quieter tone during this period. Conversations often revolve around faith, reflection and shared hopes that Ramadhan's blessings will continue to inspire positive change long after the month ends.

The final nights of Ramadhan are also marked by increased acts of charity and generosity. Many individuals choose this period to offer donations or support charitable initiatives, hoping to multiply the reward of their good deeds.

SHORTTAKES



UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres speaks at the United Nations headquarters. — AFP

UN WARNS OF ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARDS FROM WAR

UNITED NATIONS: UN chief Antonio Guterres’s office warned of “serious environmental consequences” from recent strikes on oil facilities and desalination plants in the Middle East, saying they pose significant threats to air quality and drinking water. “We continue to raise the alarm over the humanitarian impact of escalating violence across parts of the Middle East, which is driving rising civilian casualties, damage to civilian infrastructure and growing displacement of people,” the secretary-general’s spokesman Stephane Dujarric told a press conference. He added that the United Nations was “particularly concerned by the number of reports of recent strikes on oil facilities, which could have serious environmental consequences across the region, with immediate possible impacts on safe water, on air that people need to breathe, and on food.” Bahrain’s interior ministry had said on Sunday that an Iranian drone attack also damaged a water desalination plant, which is essential infrastructure for the country’s economy and drinking water supplies. “We reiterate again that all possible precautions must be taken to protect civilians from the impact of hostilities and to avoid damage to health facilities, schools, water systems and other essential infrastructure,” Dujarric said. — AFP

WHO WARNS OF HEALTH RISKS FROM ‘BLACK RAIN’



A smoke plume rises from an ongoing fire following an overnight airstrike, in Tehran. — AFP

GENEVA: The World Health Organization warned on Tuesday that the “black rain” falling in Iran after strikes on oil facilities could cause respiratory problems, and it backed Iran’s advisory urging people to remain indoors. The UN health agency, which has an office in Iran and works with authorities on health emergencies, said it has received multiple reports of oil-laden rain this week. Tehran was choked in black smoke on Monday after an oil refinery was hit, in an escalation in strikes on Iran’s domestic energy supplies as part of the US-Israeli campaign. “The black rain and the acidic rain coming with it is indeed a danger for the population, respiratory mainly,” WHO spokesperson Christian Lindmeier told a press briefing in Geneva, adding that Iran had advised people to stay indoors. Asked whether the WHO backed that advice, he said: “Given what is at risk right now, the oil storage facilities, the refineries that have been struck, triggering fires, bringing serious air quality concerns, that is definitely a good idea.” — AFP

DOZENS OF INDONESIANS EVACUATED FROM IRAN ARRIVE HOME

JAKARTA: Nearly two dozen Indonesians repatriated from Iran arrived home on Tuesday, recalling the terror of falling bombs in the Islamic republic as the Middle East descended into war. The group of 22 people is the first to be brought back to Indonesia by the government, having been evacuated over land from Iran to Azerbaijan before flying on to Jakarta. Thousands of Iranians had been taking to the streets every night to condemn and mourn the killing of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei in US-Israeli strikes, he told reporters

at Jakarta’s main airport. Attacks by the United States and Israel on Iran, and Tehran’s retaliatory strikes in the Middle East, have caused flight cancellations and airspace closures that have stranded large numbers of foreigners. They include 329 Indonesians in Iran, most of them students in the central city of Qom. “This afternoon we are welcoming our brothers and sisters back,” Foreign Minister Sugiono said at the airport. He said 10 more Indonesians were set to arrive on Wednesday, and another 36 have

registered to be repatriated in a later wave. Jakarta said it was not considering evacuations from Middle Eastern countries where half a million Indonesians live. There have been no reports of Indonesians killed since the war broke out, but three Indonesian crew members are missing after a United Arab Emirates-flagged tugboat sank in the Strait of Hormuz. President Prabowo Subianto has volunteered to act as a mediator between Iran on the one hand and the United States and Israel on the other. — AFP

War displaces over 667,000; kills 84 children in Lebanon



A displaced woman stands next to her tent inside the Camille Chamoun Sports City stadium, in Beirut. — AFP

THE HUMANITARIAN crisis in Lebanon has deepened amid the wider Middle East war, with 84 children killed and more than 667,000 people displaced, two UN agencies said on Tuesday, as lives are upended on a massive scale across the country. Lebanon was dragged into the US-Israeli war on Iran this month when Iran-backed Lebanese militant group Hezbollah launched rockets and drones into Israel, which has responded with heavy bombardment across the country. A total of 486 people have been killed in the war so far and 1,313 injured, of which 259 are children, according to the World Health Organization. “This is only seven-days conflict, and we are already seeing that almost 100 children that have lost their lives,” said Abdinasir Abubakar, WHO representative in Lebanon. “One reason why we have a high number of children is that most of the attacks that we see actually is,

“This is only seven-days conflict, and we are already seeing that almost 100 children that have lost their lives, One reason why we have a high number of children is that most of the attacks that we see actually is, it’s urban centres, like in Beirut.”

ABDINASIR ABUBAKAR

it’s urban centres, like in Beirut,” he said, adding that Israel’s airstrikes, which it says target Hezbollah infrastructure, are putting civilian lives at risk. The current rate of displacement in Lebanon is outpacing levels seen during the 2023-24 war between Hezbollah and Israel, the UN Refugee Agency said on Tuesday. During that conflict, 886,000 people were internally displaced in Lebanon, while tens of thousands of Israelis were evacuated from northern towns near the Lebanese border. Lebanon’s sharp rise in displacement this week stems from large-scale evacuation orders issued by the Israeli army for southern Lebanon and Beirut’s densely populated southern suburbs, which the UN human rights chief said on Friday raised serious concerns under international law. The WHO warned that Lebanon’s hospitals and frontline responders were under “extraordinary strain”

trying to manage the rising number of patients. Five hospitals are now out of service, four partially damaged, and 43 primary healthcare centres are closed - mostly in the south, which has been largely evacuated, Abubakar said. “Many of the people fleeing were also fleeing back in 2024. We met many who then had their homes completely destroyed, family members killed and so on. So this means that people are not waiting to see what will happen next. They leave immediately,” said Karolina Lindholm Billing, UNHCR representative in Lebanon. Some 120,000 people are staying in government-designated shelters, while others are still looking for somewhere to stay, the UNHCR said, citing government figures. “Many others are staying with relatives or friends or still searching for accommodation, and we see cars lined along the street with people sleeping in them and also on the sidewalks,” Billing said. — Reuters

Thousands of Afghans have returned from Iran and Pakistan

GENEVA: Some 270,000 Afghans have returned to their country from Pakistan and Iran so far this year, the UN said on Tuesday, warning that the escalating Middle East war risked pushing the numbers higher. UNHCR, the United Nations’ refugee agency, said that 110,000 Afghans had returned from Iran and another 160,000 had returned from Pakistan since the start of 2026. And the numbers seem to have risen since the Middle East erupted on February

28, with the United States and Israel unleashing a barrage of strikes on Iran, and Tehran responding with drone and missile strikes on Israeli and US interests across the region. Since then, there have been some 1,700 returns from Iran to Afghanistan each day, Arafat Jamal, UNHCR’s representative in Afghanistan, told reporters in Geneva. Speaking from Islam Qala, on the Afghan-Iranian border, he said the situation there was



Afghan families along with children make their way in the Samkani district of Paktia province. — AFP

“deceptively calm.” “Returns are orderly but freighted with tension and apprehension,” he said, adding that with the hostilities elsewhere escalating, “I do fear there is more to come.” “We are preparing for massive returns.” The new Middle East war, he warned, was “layering itself on top of an existing war on another frontier”, Jamal said. UNHCR highlighted that the latest crises came after returns to Afghanistan

had already been “exceptionally high” in recent years. More than five million Afghans had returned from neighbouring countries in the past two years, including 1.9 million returning from Iran last year alone. Jamal warned that “many Afghan families are now facing cycles of displacement: first forced to flee Afghanistan, later displaced again inside Iran due to conflict, and now returning once more to Afghanistan”. — AFP

IRAN SLAMS TRUMP’S ‘EMPTY’ THREATS, VOWS TO FIGHT ON



French President Emmanuel Macron addresses the Nuclear Energy Summit. — AFP

MIDEAST WAR EXPOSES EUROPE’S ENERGY VULNERABILITY

PARIS: EU chief Ursula von der Leyen and French President Emmanuel Macron on Tuesday called on European countries to boost the use of civilian nuclear power to secure the continent’s energy independence, saying the Middle East war had exposed Europe’s vulnerability. They spoke at a nuclear energy summit which was briefly interrupted by Greenpeace protesters as the US-Israeli war with Iran entered its second week.

Von der Leyen said Europe’s turn away from civilian nuclear power had exposed the continent’s fossil fuel “vulnerability”. “It was a strategic mistake for Europe to turn its back on a reliable, affordable source of low-emission power,” she said at the opening of the second Nuclear Energy Summit just outside Paris. “For fossil fuels, we are completely dependent on expensive and volatile imports.

They are putting us at a structural disadvantage to other regions,” she said. “The current Middle East crisis gives a stark reminder of the vulnerability it creates,” she added. “We have home-grown low-carbon energy sources: nuclear and renewables. And together, they can become the joint guarantors of independence, security of supply and competitiveness — if we get it right.”

Macron said civilian nuclear power helped provide energy sovereignty. “Nuclear power is key to reconciling both independence — and thus energy sovereignty — with decarbonisation, and thus carbon neutrality,” Macron said. “We can see it in our current geopolitical context: when we are too dependent on hydrocarbons, they can become a tool of pressure, or even of destabilisation,” he added.

Von der Leyen said that “while in 1990, one-third of Europe’s electricity came from nuclear, today it’s only close to 15 per cent”. “In the last years, we see a global revival of nuclear energy. And Europe wants to be part of it,” she said. She said European Union would “create a 200-million-euro (\$230-million) guarantee to support investment in innovative nuclear technologies”, unveiling a new strategy for small modular reactors.

“We want this new technology to be operational in Europe by the early 2030s.” Small modular reactors are advanced nuclear reactors that have a power capacity of up to 300 megawatts of electricity per unit, or about a third of the generating capacity of a traditional nuclear power reactor. They are relatively simple to build, which makes them more affordable than large power reactors. Nuclear energy fell into crisis after the 2011 Fukushima disaster in Japan. But the growing focus on energy sovereignty and the search for clean energies to counter global warming has reignited atomic interest. — AFP

IRAN’S SECURITY chief Ali Larijani issued on Tuesday a veiled threat to US President Donald Trump, warning him to be careful “not to be eliminated” and saying the Islamic republic was not afraid of his “empty threats.” “Iran is not afraid of your empty threats. Even those greater than you could not eliminate the Iranian nation,” said Larijani in a post on X. His remarks came in response to a post by Trump threatening to hit Iran harder if it stops the oil flow through the strategic Strait of Hormuz. “Take care of yourself not to be eliminated!” Larijani added.

In a post on Truth Social, Trump had said: “If Iran does anything that stops the flow of Oil within the Strait of Hormuz, they will be hit by the United States of America TWENTY TIMES HARDER than they have been hit by us thus far.” On February 28, the US and Israel launched strikes against Iran that killed its supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and triggered a war that has spread across the Middle East. Iran has responded with drone and missile strikes targeting Israel and countries across the region. Shipping traffic through the Strait of Hormuz, through which nearly 20 per cent of the world’s crude oil usually transits, has been severely disrupted. Iranian forces have threatened to block “the export of a single litre of oil from the region” to allies of the United States and Israel as long as the war continues.

Oil prices sank and equities rallied on Tuesday following a wild day of swings that came after President Donald Trump signalled that the US-Israel war on Iran could end sooner than thought. The Paris and London stock markets gained around two per cent, as European gas prices sank 15 per cent, helping ease concerns over a renewed surge for global inflation. Frankfurt jumped 2.6 per cent in midday deals.

International oil benchmark, Brent North Sea crude, plunged more than seven per cent to around \$92 a barrel, a day after nearing \$120. “This downward swing in oil helped US stocks stage an impressive comeback on Monday to trade in positive territory - a trend which continued in Asia and is now being repeated in Europe,” noted AJ Bell investment director Russ Mould. Asian stock markets rallied, with Seoul up more than five per cent and Tokyo ending with a gain of 2.9 per cent.

There were advances in Hong Kong, Shanghai, Sydney, Singapore, Bangkok, Mumbai, Taipei, Manila and Jakarta. “This is still a fluid market, and if the headlines deteriorate, or the war escalates, then we could see prices reverse once again,” said Kathleen Brooks, research director at trading group XTB. As the crisis in the crude-rich Middle East entered its second week, Trump said the campaign was far ahead of his initial timeline of around a month.



Women mourners react before the grave of a person killed in recent air strikes, in Tehran. — AFP

BAGHDAD

Strike blamed on US kills four in Iraq



Mourners attend a funeral for members of the Popular Mobilisation Forces (PMF) in Baghdad. — AFP

An armed group in Iraq said strikes it blamed on the United States killed four of its fighters on Tuesday. The attacks followed the downing of a drone late on Monday near the UAE consulate in Erbil, the capital of the autonomous Kurdistan region, drawing condemnation from Arab countries. The Kataeb Imam Ali group said its fighters were killed in an “American aggression” against one of their positions in the Debs district of Kirkuk province.

The bombing targeted a position belonging to the Hashed al Shaabi, which is an alliance of factions now integrated into Iraq’s regular army. The Iraqi government’s security information cell confirmed that several Hashed fighters were killed in a bombing in Kirkuk, without attributing the attack to anyone. “It is a blatant attack on Iraq,” it said. — AFP

ANKARA

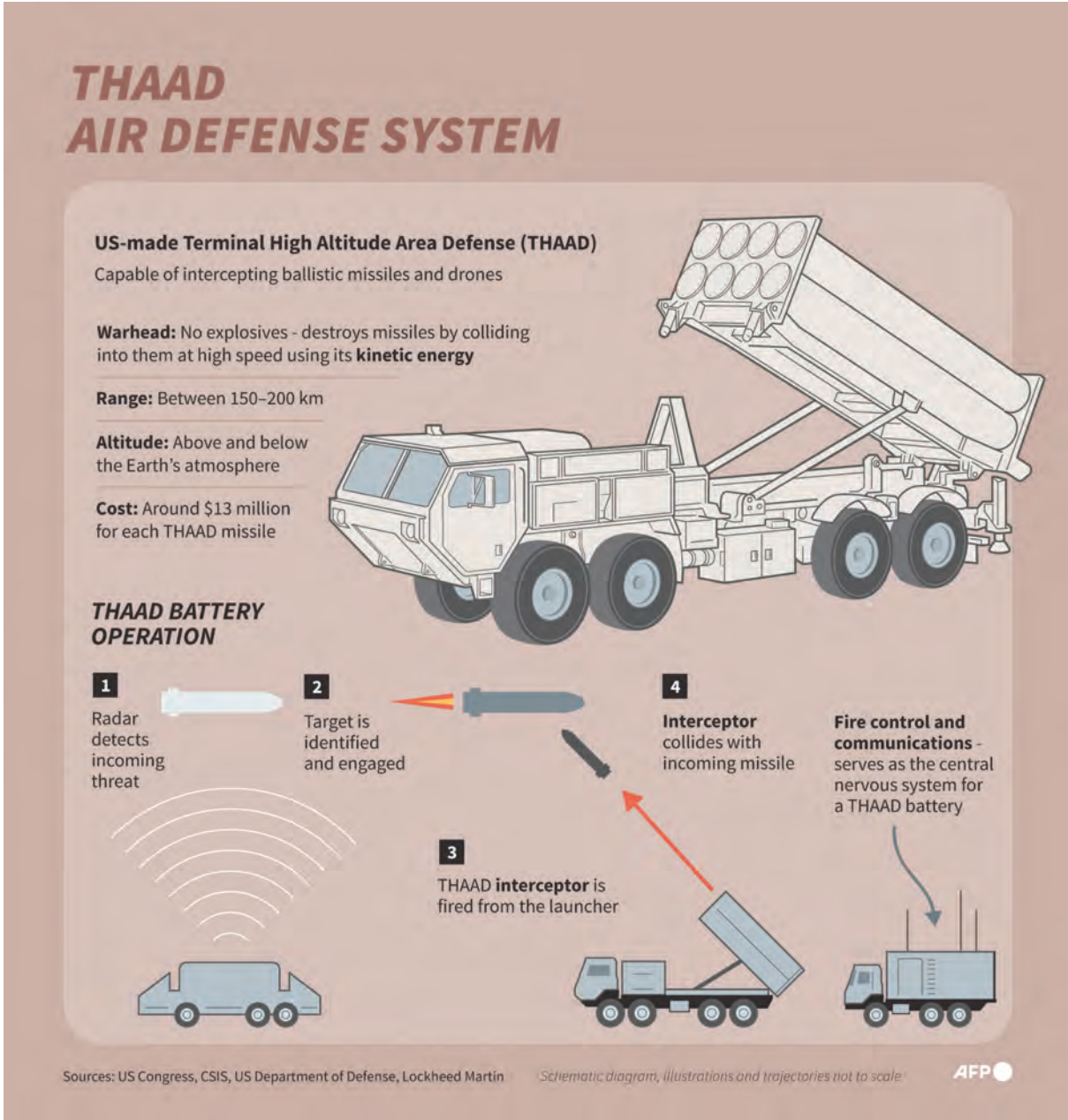
Patriot defences deployed in central Türkiye



Soldiers wait beside a Patriot missile system at a Turkish military base in Gaziantep. — Reuters

Türkiye said on Tuesday a Patriot missile defence system was being deployed in the centre of the country, a day after Nato intercepted a second ballistic missile fired from Iran in Turkish airspace. The move was announced after a phone call between Türkiye’s President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Iran’s Masoud Pezeshkian, with the Iranian president denying the missile had been fired from Iran.

“Necessary measures are being taken for the security of our borders and airspace, and consultations are being held with Nato and our allies. “In addition to the measures we have taken at the national level, Nato has strengthened its air and missile defence measures,” a Turkish defence ministry statement said. “Within this scope, a Patriot system assigned to support the protection of our airspace is being deployed in Malatya” in central Türkiye. — AFP



Iran responded by vowing to block Gulf oil exports and asserting that they, not the US, would “determine the end of the war”. Still, Trump’s remarks helped reverse the previous day’s spike in oil prices, which had surged since Iranian attacks on shipping closed the strategic Strait of Hormuz in response to the US-Israeli strikes that killed its supreme leader.

The US president also said he would temporarily waive some oil-related sanctions, after acknowledging talks with his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin. Investors’ attention focused on the Strait of Hormuz, through which nearly 20 per cent of the world’s crude oil usually transits from the Gulf to world markets. About 10 vessels in or near the strait have come under attack since Iran all but blocked the strait in retaliation for the US-Israeli strikes, according to shipping experts.

President Emmanuel Macron has said France and its allies are working on a “purely defensive” mission to reopen the strait, aiming to escort

ships “after the end of the hottest phase of the conflict”.

US and Israeli strikes have hit an airport in southern Iran, damaging part of the site as well as aircraft, local media reported on Tuesday. “Following an American-Zionist attack on Kerman Airport, part of it was damaged and two old, out-of-service aircraft were hit,” Iran’s Tasnim news agency said, quoting a statement from the governor’s office in the southern province of Kerman. It is not clear whether there are any military facilities at or near the site.

The standstill in the Strait of Hormuz caused by the Middle East war could hammer some of the world’s most vulnerable people, the United Nations warned on Tuesday.

The strait is the only sea passage from the Gulf towards the Indian Ocean, through which nearly a quarter of the world’s seaborne oil supplies pass, as well as a significant amount of cargo. — AFP

GENEVA

Red Cross launches Iran emergency appeal



A man rides a motorcycle past a banner displayed at Valiasr Square in central Tehran. — AFP

Humanitarian needs in Iran are growing sharply due to the war, the Red Cross said on Tuesday as it launched an emergency appeal for more than \$50 million. The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies said its appeal for 40 million Swiss francs (\$51.5 million) would help support five million people through the next 16 months.

“Across the country, communities are facing growing humanitarian needs related to health care, shelter, water and sanitation, and mental health and psychosocial support,” the IFRC said. The funds will help the national Iranian Red Crescent Society (IRCS) to prioritise those directly affected by the war, and deal with infrastructure damage and disruptions to essential services. — AFP

‘Empty’ threats Iran’s security chief Ali Larijani brushed off threats by US President Donald Trump to hit the Islamic republic harder if the flow of oil stops through the strategic Strait of Hormuz.	Fresh Tehran strikes The Israeli military said it has begun a new wave of strikes on Tehran. Journalists reported hearing a loud explosion in the city centre.	Qatar rebuke A spokesman for the Qatari foreign ministry, Majed al Ansari, said that Iran has pressed its attacks against Qatar’s civilian infrastructure “and we rebuke any justification that the Iranians are offering for these attacks”.	Oil markets warning The head of Saudi Arabia’s state-owned Aramco energy giant, president and CEO Amin H Nasser, warned the war could have “catastrophic consequences” on oil markets.	Displaced in Lebanon More than 100,000 people have been displaced in Lebanon in a single day, the UN said, as Israel continued to pound Hezbollah.	Fresh Lebanon strike A new strike hit Lebanon’s southern city of Tyre. The strike came after Israel’s military said it would hit Hezbollah targets there and in Sidon.	Trump says war will end ‘soon’ Trump suggested the Iran war could soon end, but remained vague on a timeline for stopping the attacks.	Energy prices drop, stocks rally World oil prices dropped by around eight per cent, while the European benchmark gas price, the Dutch TTF natural gas contract, fell around 15 per cent.	Talks ‘not on agenda’ Iran’s Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said that “I don’t think talking with the Americans would be on our agenda anymore”, adding that Tehran had a “very bitter experience” during previous negotiations.	‘Not done yet’ Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said the offensive against Iran was “not done yet”. “Our aspiration is to bring the Iranian people to cast off the yoke of tyranny; ultimately, it depends on them”.	Patriot in Türkiye Ankara said a US-made Patriot missile defence system would be deployed to central Türkiye, a day after Nato shot down a second ballistic missile fired from Iran in Turkish airspace.	Iran targets US base in Iraq Iran’s Revolutionary Guards said they targeted a US base in Iraq’s Kurdistan region, the Al Harir air base, with five missiles.
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OPINION

From reaction to response: The inner work of conscious



HYESHA BARRETT

The writer is a Master Life Coach and NLP Practitioner

PARENTING has a curious way of revealing our inner world. Many of us begin the journey believing our role is to guide, teach, and shape our children's behaviour. We read books, gather advice, and search for the right strategies to raise happy, well-adjusted humans. However, somewhere along the way, something deeper becomes clear. Parenting is not only about raising children. It is also about raising our own awareness.

The moments that challenge us most often arrive without warning. A child refuses to listen after a long day. A sibling argument escalates into shouting. A small request turns into a power struggle that leaves everyone frustrated. On the surface, these moments appear to be about behaviour that needs correcting. Yet beneath the surface, something more complex is happening.

Our reactions are rarely just about the present moment. They are shaped by our past experiences, our upbringing, and the emotional patterns we carry within us. A child's defiance might stir memories of being unheard. A tantrum may trigger feelings of overwhelm that echo earlier chapters of our own lives. Before we even realise it, we may find ourselves reacting from old emotional scripts, rather than responding to what is actually happening.

This is where conscious parenting invites a different approach. Instead of focusing only on controlling behaviour, it encourages us to pause and notice our internal landscape. What am I feeling right now? Why does this moment feel so intense?

This pause may seem trivial, yet it is powerful. When we slow down enough to observe our reactions, we create space between stimulus and response. In that space lies choice. Instead of reacting impulsively, we can begin to respond with intention.

Children are remarkably perceptive. Long before they fully understand language, they read the emotional climate of their home. They sense tension, calm, impatience, and warmth through tone of voice and body language. Our nervous systems communicate with theirs constantly. When we are grounded and regulated, we offer them a sense of safety.

We cannot expect parents to remain calm at all times. That would be unrealistic. Conscious parenting is not about perfection. It is about awareness and repair. When we lose our patience, what matters most is what happens next.

A sincere apology and tender explanation teach children something valuable: that relationships can stretch, bend, and return to connection again.

Responding rather than reacting often begins with learning to regulate ourselves.

When we shift from reacting to responding, we change the emotional atmosphere in which our children grow. They experience a home where feelings are acknowledged, mistakes are welcomed, and connection remains the guiding thread.

Slowing our breath before speaking. Stepping away from a heated moment to gather composure. Softening our tone when emotions begin to rise. These small acts may seem insignificant; however, they shift the emotional dynamic of the home.

Over time, these pauses reshape familiar patterns. Instead of escalating conflict, we become curious about what lies beneath our child's behaviour. Instead of trying to control every outcome, we learn to guide with empathy and steadiness. The home becomes less about power struggles and more about understanding.

Something subtle and profound happens in this process. As we become more aware of our triggers and reactions, we begin to heal the parts of ourselves that were never fully seen nor soothed. Parenting becomes not only a responsibility, and also an invitation for personal growth.

When we shift from reacting to responding, we change the emotional atmosphere in which our children grow. They experience a home where feelings are acknowledged, mistakes are welcomed, and connection remains the guiding thread.

Quite possibly, this is one of the quiet gifts of conscious parenting. In learning how to guide our children with greater awareness, we also learn how to meet ourselves with the same patience, compassion, and understanding we wish to offer them.

AI-enhanced images of real events distort view of Middle East war

The Middle East war has unleashed a torrent of AI-driven disinformation. Beyond entirely fabricated visuals, another kind of content is spreading: authentic images “enhanced” in ways that experts say are subtly distorting perceptions of what’s happening on the ground.

In one striking photo, a kneeling US pilot is confronted by a Kuwaiti local, moments after parachuting from his jet. The high-quality image was widely shared online and even published by media outlets. Yet the pilot appears to have only four fingers on each hand.

AFP fact-checkers ran the photo through AI detection tools and found it contained a SynthID, an invisible watermark meant to identify images made with Google AI. But that’s not the whole story. The situation itself appears to be genuine. A video showing the same scene began circulating on social media on March 2, and satellite imagery verified the location. It also corresponded with reports that day that Kuwait had mistakenly shot down three US warplanes.

AFP was also able to locate an earlier version of the photo on Telegram that matched the high-resolution photo exactly, except that it was blurry.

AI verification tools determined this image, which had none of the same detail in the pilot’s face, was real. This suggests it may have served as the starting point for the image that returned the Google AI result. “AI-enhancement may subtly alter textures, faces, lighting, or background details, creating an image that looks more ‘real’ than the original,” said Evangelos Kanoulas, a professor in AI at the University of Amsterdam.

This can “strengthen a particular narrative about an event — for example, making a protest appear more violent, making a crowd appear larger, making facial expressions more intense.”

In another case, social media users shared a dramatic image of a huge blaze near Erbil airport in Iraq, after the area was targeted by Iranian strikes on March 1.

Experts warned that the line between enhancement and content generation, accidentally or intentionally, was a thin one. “Even little changes can end up telling a very different story,” said James O’Brien, a professor of computer science at the University of California, Berkeley, and “could change the perception of events.”

Generative artificial intelligence is also still prone to error and may “hallucinate” elements that were not in the original image, Kanoulas added. — AFP

US-Israel bombing Iran to rubble won’t give it life

IN September 1996, I visited Tehran, Iran, for the first time. I stayed at the Homa Hotel, formerly a Sheraton. I wrote at the time that fixed above the door in the lobby was a sign that read, in English, “Down with USA”

As I pondered that sign, I remember thinking something like: Wow, that’s not graffiti! That’s firmly attached. That won’t come down easily.

The late 1990s were a fleeting moment of openness in Iran, which is how I got a visa. I was hopeful that the obvious quest then of many of Iran’s young people to join the world economy would eventually triumph over its leaders who had fixed those words into the wall. It didn’t happen. The words were too deeply embedded.

Now, we’re more than a week into the war with Iran launched by President Donald Trump and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel, and the biggest question I have is this: What if the necessary is impossible? What if the transformation of Iran is so much more important than the war’s critics admit, but so much more difficult than the war’s designers understand? Yes, nothing would improve the prospects of the people of Iran, Lebanon, Iraq, Syria, the Gaza Strip, Yemen and Israel more than removing the Islamic regime in Tehran.

Netanyahu, I suspect, would probably be happy to turn Iran into another big Gaza and to just keep “mowing the grass,” or periodically putting down threats there, as he was so inclined to do in Gaza. As Haaretz military analyst Amos Harel put it: “A few months ago, Netanyahu described Israel as a modern Sparta.

But to preserve its militarist



THOMAS L. FRIEDMAN

The author is reporter, and NYT columnist

But endlessly bombing it, destroying more and more military and civilian infrastructure and just hoping that Iranians seeking democracy will come together — with barely any Internet to communicate with, and where moving anywhere on the roads can be deadly dangerous — and topple this entrenched killer regime on their own ... well, show me where that has ever happened in history

identity, a Sparta requires permanent military friction — of a kind that would also enable its ruler to remain in power — regardless of the price it exacts from the country.”

Keeping Israel at war with Iran, Hamas and Hezbollah enables Netanyahu to drag out his corruption trial and avoid a commission of inquiry for his failure to prevent Hamas’ Oct. 7, 2023, invasion. (If you think that is too cynical, you don’t know Netanyahu.)

For his part, Trump has been all over the map when talking about the morning after in Iran — and saying truly ridiculous and often contradictory things that reveal a commander in chief who is just making it up as he goes along.

That is, if the United States and Israel declared that, having achieved most of their military objectives, they are now ready to halt their attacks — as long as Iran does as well — the surviving Iranian leadership would most certainly declare to the world and its people the morning after: “We showed them — we defied the combined power of the Great Satan and the Little Satan.” But the morning after the morning after, I’d bet on an explosive debate and infighting among the ruling elite in Tehran.

Many voices of the people, merchants and reformers in the regime will surely declare to Iran’s hard-liners: “Look at the disaster you have brought upon us. If this is a great victory by Iran, what does defeat look like? We have lost our savings, our economy, our environment, much of our military and the friendship of all our immediate neighbours. What future do we have?” Just consider the infighting we are already seeing

between Iran’s president and hard-line military factions over the wisdom of Iran attacking its Arab neighbours in hopes of getting them to pressure Washington to stop the war. Who knows what could emerge between the Iranian people and the regime, and within the regime, over time when the war stops and the true bill for Iran’s extreme behaviour comes due.

Iran’s regime is a disgrace — a menace to its own people, to its neighbours and to a rules-based order as much as any other nation. I pray that it can pass into history soon, at a reasonable cost, and unlock the Iranian people’s enormous potential to contribute to humanity.

But endlessly bombing it, destroying more and more military and civilian infrastructure and just hoping that Iranians seeking democracy will come together — with barely any Internet to communicate with, and where moving anywhere on the roads can be deadly dangerous — and topple this entrenched killer regime on their own ... well, show me where that has ever happened in history.

My guess is that this regime will break only from the top, which will be a process that will start only after there is a ceasefire.

The best that the Trump-Netanyahu bombs-away strategy can do is start that process; just tilting Iran onto a better track where it is less of a threat to its own people and neighbours would be a significant achievement.

The worst the strategy can do is to devastate Iran with endless aerial bombardments so that it becomes ungovernable for anyone. That would be a disaster of incalculable proportions.

Protect children from the horrors of war



SAMUEL KUTTY

The writer is a freelance journalist and author who worked in Oman and India

IT WAS not long ago that we heard a displaced eight-year-old Syrian child tell the media that she would not want any child in the world to endure the same harsh circumstances she faces. “I dream of a future where I can live without the constant fear of being killed,” an emotional Fatima was quoted as saying, her emotions running deep.

From Syria to Gaza and now Iran, the headlines continually remind us of a painful truth: children are always among the hardest hit during conflicts and wars. The latest tragedy is the deadliest attack on a primary school in southern Iran, which has killed scores of children amid the ongoing conflict involving the US and Israel.

Reports indicate that a missile struck the Shajareh Tayyebah girls’ school while classes were in session. The victims were primarily girls aged 7 to 12, and significant portions of the school building were damaged during the attack.

A strike on a school represents a grave assault on children, education, and the future of an entire community. Schools are civilian sites, and children receive explicit protection under international humanitarian law.

Attacking civilian objects, such as schools, is prohibited under customary international humanitarian law unless these objects have been transformed into military targets. Deliberate attacks on educational institutions

that do not have military significance are classified as war crimes under Article 8 of the Rome Statute.

International humanitarian law is a set of rules that limit the effects of armed conflict. It was established by the Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907, the four Geneva Conventions of 1949, and supplemented by the Additional Protocols of 1977.

According to the United Nations’ 2024 annual report on violations of children’s rights worldwide, violence against individuals under 18 reached an unprecedented level, with a staggering 25 per cent increase compared to 2023.

While condemning the killing of children, Virginia Gamba, Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, said, cries of 22,495 innocent children who should be learning to read or play ball—but instead have been forced to learn how to survive gunfire and bombings—should keep all of us awake at night.”

The report verified 41,370 grave violations against children in 2024 —comprising 36,221 committed in 2024 and 5,149 committed previously but confirmed in 2024 — the highest number since the monitoring tool was established nearly 30 years ago. This new record surpasses 2023, another record year, which itself represented a 21 per cent increase over the previous year.

With more than 4,500 killed and 7,000

Children living in conflict zones are losing their childhood. Rather than acknowledging the unique safeguards granted to children, governments and armed factions globally openly disregard international law

injured, children continue to bear “the brunt of relentless hostilities and indiscriminate attacks,” the report stated.

Children are not the instigators of wars, yet they bear the greatest burden of the consequences. They are at a higher risk than adults of being killed or injured by bombs or weapons. They lose the support and care of relatives and companions.

Children living in conflict zones are losing their childhood. Rather than acknowledging the unique safeguards granted to children, governments and armed factions globally openly.

Global peace and security organisations, including the United Nations Security Council and regional bodies, must reaffirm their commitment to cooperative initiatives that prioritise the protection and welfare of children affected by armed conflicts, emphasising diplomatic efforts to resolve these disputes.

Let me conclude with what the United States’ First Lady, Melania Trump, said to the UN Security Council during its meeting last weekend: “The most effective way to protect children from conflict is to prevent and end wars.”

What we are witnessing today is a breakdown in the basic protections owed to each of these children — not only as a legal obligation but also as a matter of human decency.

QUESTIONS OVER AI CAPABILITY AS TECH GUIDES IRAN STRIKES

TIPHAINE LE LIBOUX AND THOMAS URBAIN

The latest bout of fighting between the United States, Israel and Iran has seen AI deployed as never before to sift intelligence and select targets, although the technology’s use in war remains hotly debated.

Different forms of artificial intelligence have reportedly been used to guide the Israeli campaign in Gaza and the capture of Venezuelan leader Nicolas Maduro in an American raid.

And experts believe the technology has helped select targets for the thousands of US and Israeli strikes on Iran since February 28 - although exact uses have yet to be confirmed.

Today, “every military power of any significance invests hugely in military applications of AI,” said Laure de Roucy-Rochegonde of French think tank IFRI.

“Almost any military function can be boosted with AI,” from “logistics to reconnaissance, observation, information warfare, electronic warfare and cybersecurity,” she added.

AI tools can also be found built into semi-autonomous attack drones and other weapons. But one of their best-known uses is in shortening the so-called “kill chain”, the time and decision-making between detecting a target and striking it.

US forces use the Maven Smart System (MSS) built by Palantir, which the company says can identify and prioritise potential targets.

The Washington Post reported this week that Anthropic’s Claude generative AI model has been integrated with Maven to boost the tool’s detection and simulation capabilities.

Palantir and Anthropic did not respond to AFP’s requests for comment.

AI algorithms “allow us to move much faster in handling information, and above all to be more comprehensive,” said Bertrand Rondepierre, head of the French army’s AI agency AMIAD.

The technology can sift through vast quantities of data, including “satellite images, radar, electromagnetic waves, sound, drone images and sometimes real-time video,” he added.

AI’s deployment in war poses a slew of moral and legal questions, notably on the extent of human control over their actions.

The debate was brought to the fore during the fighting in Gaza, where Israeli forces used a programme dubbed “Lavender” to identify targets - within a certain margin of error. That application worked “because it covered a very limited area”, De Roucy-Rochegonde said.

Israel also has a “mass surveillance system” that could feed data about the enclave’s inhabitants into Lavender.

“It seems less likely that such a system has been set up in Iran,” she added.

“If something does go wrong, then who’s responsible?” Peter Asaro, chair of the International Committee for Robot Arms Control (ICRAC), said in an interview. — AFP

Oil, power, politics of war

WHEN THE United States and Israel justify military strikes against Iran, the explanation presented to the world is familiar: the goal, they say, is to protect the Iranian people from an authoritarian regime. Yet the reality on the ground raises serious questions about whether humanitarian concern is truly the motivation behind the conflict. When bombs fall on civilian areas, schools, hospitals and residential neighbourhoods, the narrative of “liberation” becomes difficult to believe.

If the goal were genuinely to protect the Iranian population, civilian casualties would not be treated as collateral damage. Reports of attacks killing students in schools or striking densely populated areas undermine the claim that this war is about protecting ordinary people. Saving civilians cannot logically involve putting their lives at immediate risk. The contradiction reveals a deeper problem in the way wars are justified: humanitarian rhetoric often masks strategic interests.

The United States has repeatedly framed military interventions as efforts to defend democracy or liberate populations from oppressive governments. Yet history tells a different story. From Iraq to Yemen, Somalia and Venezuela, US foreign policy has often prioritised strategic and economic interests over humanitarian concerns. These interventions have frequently resulted in instability, destruction of infrastructure and civilian suffering rather than democratic transformation.

The war with Iran fits into this broader pattern. Iran sits in one of the most strategically important regions in the world for global energy markets. Tensions between the United States, Israel and Iran routinely send oil prices soaring and destabilise international markets. The Arabian Gulf, and especially the Strait of Hormuz, remains one of the most critical oil transit routes in the world, with roughly one-fifth of global oil supply passing through it. Any escalation in conflict immediately affects global energy flows and the economic interests tied to them.

This reality makes it difficult



OMAN AL YAHYAI

The writer is a multilingual writer and media professional based in Paris. She specialises in human rights and immigration

Reports of attacks killing students in schools or striking densely populated areas undermine the claim that this war is about protecting ordinary people. Saving civilians cannot logically involve putting their lives at immediate risk



A boy looks on while lying under a blanket alongside family belongings in a makeshift encampment along the waterfront in Beirut, Lebanon. — AFP

to ignore the role that oil and geopolitical dominance play in the confrontation.

Wars in the Middle East have long been entangled with the control of energy resources and regional influence. Strategic positioning in the Gulf is not simply about security; it is also about maintaining leverage over global oil markets and the political systems connected to them.

Beyond energy interests, there is also a deeper regional dynamic tied to Israel’s long-term security strategy. For decades, Israeli governments have framed Iran as their most significant strategic threat.

Some critics argue that weakening Iran serves a broader goal of maintaining Israeli military and political dominance in the region. The concept of a stronger, expanded Israeli sphere of influence, sometimes referred to by critics as “Greater Israel”, reflects fears that destabilising neighbouring states could shift regional power balances in Israel’s favour.

Whether or not one accepts that interpretation fully, it is clear that regional tensions between Israel and Iran are not simply about ideology.

They are about power, territory and geopolitical competition.

The consequences of this confrontation are already being felt beyond Iran and Israel themselves. As tensions escalate, neighbouring Gulf countries are becoming targets of retaliation or collateral damage. Missile strikes and proxy attacks threaten to drag additional states into the conflict, creating the possibility of a much wider regional war.

This raises another troubling possibility: that escalation itself may serve strategic interests. A destabilised Middle East can create opportunities for external powers to expand influence, secure military presence and shape regional political outcomes. If the region becomes fragmented and weakened by prolonged conflict, it becomes easier for the United States and Israel to intervene politically, economically and militarily.

Meanwhile, the populations living in these regions bear the consequences. Civilians are the ones who suffer the most during war. Homes are destroyed, infrastructure collapses and entire generations grow up in environments defined by instability and violence.

SPORTS

WOMEN’ ASIAN CUP



Japan eased past Vietnam 4-0.

JAPAN KNOCK OUT VIETNAM, TAIWAN BEAT INDIA

PERTH, Australia: Japan stayed perfect in the women’s Asian Cup group stage as they eased to a 4-0 win over Vietnam, who crashed out of the tournament as Taiwan secured second place in Group C with a 3-1 victory over India on Tuesday.

Vietnam, who finished with three points, ranked bottom of the three third-placed teams in the group stage, with Uzbekistan and the

JAPAN ADVANCE WITH PERFECT GROUP STAGE RECORD, NO GOALS CONCEDED

VIETNAM ELIMINATED, TAIWAN TO FACE CHINA IN QUARTERFINALS

Philippines advancing to the quarterfinals due to better goal differences.

Taiwan will face defending champions China in the quarterfinals on Saturday, a day before Japan take on the Philippines.

Japan, the only team to not concede a goal in the group stage, took the lead in the 21st minute with Yui Hasegawa’s cross being

headed into the net by striker Riko Ueki.

Vietnam keeper Khong Thi Hang’s diving saves limited the damage in the first half, but Japan’s persistent attacks paid off after the break, when Maika Hamano, Aoba Fujino and Kiko Seike scored within 16 minutes.

In the other Group C game in Sydney, India failed to take an early lead when Martina Thokchom’s header hit the post. Taiwan led 10 minutes later, as Sanju Yadav’s pass to the keeper was intercepted by Chen Jin-wen, who crossed to Su Yu-hsuan for an easy finish.

Manisha Kalyan struck from a long-range free kick to restore parity in the 39th minute, as her powerful left-footed shot rattled the crossbar before bouncing behind the line. But three-time champions Taiwan retook the lead on the stroke of halftime, when Hsu Yi-yun’s penalty came off the post but hit Indian keeper Elangbam Panthoi Chanu’s back and rolled into the net.

Wu Kai-ching’s defence-splitting through ball set up Chen Yu-chin for a close-range finish in the 77th minute, securing Taiwan’s win and a second straight quarterfinal qualification. India, who lost 11-0 to Japan in the weekend, ended their campaign with zero points and a goal difference of minus 14, the worst in the group stage. — Reuters



Chinese Taipei secured second place in Group C.



Oman Sail were crowned champions of the 2026 Ghazi Ramadhan futsal tournament.

Oman Sail crowned Ghazi Ramadhan tourney champs

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, MARCH 10

OMAN SAIL were crowned champions of the 2026 Ghazi Ramadhan futsal tournament after defeating Oman Charitable Organisation 3-1 in the final, bringing the curtain down on an edition filled with excitement and strong competition. The tournament once again underlined its growing status as one of the leading sporting and community events in Sur during the holy month of Ramadhan.

The closing ceremony was held under the auspices of Dr Amer bin Nasser al Matani, CEO of Oman LNG Development Foundation, while the tournament was supported by Oman LNG and organised by the Directorate of Culture, Sports and Youth in Sur.

The final concluded a vibrant run in the 23rd edition of the Ghazi Ramadhan activities, which drew strong public and community attendance and wide participation, reflecting the tournament’s place as a renewed sporting, social and cultural platform in Sur’s Ramadhan

calendar. Earlier media coverage highlighted not only the competitive side of the championship, but also its wider community role, the value of institutional partnership and the professional standard of organisation surrounding the event.

In the final, Oman Sail asserted their superiority and converted their attacking presence into three goals scored by Jumaa Naseeb, Sultan al Hashmi and Mubarak al Bahlouli, while Mishari Mohammed netted the only goal for Oman Charitable Organisation, who also enjoyed an impressive run to the title match before settling for second place.

Sunday also featured the third-place playoff, where the Directorate of Labour defeated Al Oruba Club 5-3 to claim third place after an eight-goal encounter that once again reflected the high competitive spirit that marked the tournament through to its closing stages.

The latest edition of the Ghazi Ramadhan Tournament extended the event’s consistent success from year to year, whether in terms of technical quality, community engagement or media attention. It also reflected the importance of cooperation between sports institutions,

community bodies and supporting entities in delivering a Ramadhan event that brings together sporting competition and a broader social dimension.

SPECIAL ATMOSPHERE

Dr Amer bin Nasser al Matani said they were delighted by the special atmosphere and the great joy created by the youth through this sporting festival, noting that over the past two weeks the tournament had produced entertaining and high-quality performances, along with fair competition and the strong sporting spirit shown by all players.

He also thanked the Development Foundation of Oman LNG for its continued support, praised the participating teams and expressed appreciation to the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth (MoCSY) for hosting the sporting gathering. In his concluding remarks, he voiced his deep appreciation to the fans whose attendance played a major role in the tournament’s success, stressing that efforts would continue to deliver even more and that the next edition would be even better following the success of this year’s tournament.

Gulf Club handball in Bahrain postponed

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MARCH 10

The participation of Oman Club in the 42nd edition of the Gulf Club Handball Championship in Bahrain has been postponed until further notice. The tournament was originally scheduled to take place from March 23 to April 1 in Bahrain.

However, the organising committee, represented by the Bahrain Handball Federation, announced that the championship has been postponed due to the current security situation in the region. In an official statement, the federation confirmed that a new date for the tournament will be determined after consultations with the relevant Gulf handball federations.

In a related development, the Asian Handball



Oman Club had hosted the 41st Gulf Club Handball Championship in Muscat in February last year.

Federation also announced the postponement of several training courses that were scheduled to be held during March and April in Lebanon, Syria, Qatar, and Jordan, citing the same reasons related to the prevailing security situation in the region.

Oman Club, under technical guidance of experienced coach Ibrahim Bodrali, had ended their domestic campaign at the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth’s handball Shield tournament as runners-up following their 31-34 loss against Al Amerat in the final

match which was played on February 17. The team is currently competing at the top-tier handball league and they managed to win against Nizwa by 33-21 in the third round.

Oman Club had hosted the previous edition, the 41st Gulf Club Handball Championship in Muscat in February last year. Qatar’s Al Arabi had lifted the title after defeating Kuwait SC 33-32 in the final clash. Qatar’s Al Rayyan club had won against Al Noor club from Saudi Arabia 39-21 in the bronze-medal playoff match.

The hosts, Oman Club, had finished in fifth place as they had finished their fifth and sixth playoff with a 32-27 victory over Dibba Al Hisn from UAE while Oman’s other representative Seeb ended seventh in the tournament as they had received a 34-26 loss against Dibba Al Hisn in the concluding game.

TITLE-CLASH



Asfandiyar’s Abrar hit 74 runs to claim the man of the match award.

MEERATH BAUSHAR, ASFANDYAR REACH PSC CRICKET FINAL

MUSCAT: Meerath Baushar and Asfandiyar reached the final of Pakistan Social Club (PSC) Ramadhan cricket tournament. Hussain of Meerath and Abrar of Asfandiyar were the star performers in the semifinals on Monday in front of a good turnout of supporters.

In the first semifinal, Meerath won the toss and bowled first. Horizon Cosmos posted a total of 85 runs.

Meerath reached the target with only losing a wicket. Hussain scored 36 runs studded with three sixes and two fours to guide Meerath to the final. Hussain received the man of the match from chief guest Chaudhary Abbas .

In the second semifinal, Asfandiyar XI won the toss and elected to bat against AR Roshni XI coming all the way from Barka.

Abrar was in supreme form to score a blistering knock of 74 runs with the help of 8 sixes and 2 fours in just 26 balls. He also took two brilliant catches to claim the man of the match award.

In reply, AR Roshni could not batted well and lost the match by 65 runs.

The grand finale will be played on Friday, March 13 at 9 pm at the Pakistan School Muscat grounds. Syed Naveed Safdar Bokhari, Pakistan Ambassador to the Sultanate of Oman, will be the chief guest and Paul Robert Sheridan, Vice-Chairman of Oman Cricket, will be the guest of honour. Kaleem Akhtar, PSC Director of Sports, and Chief Coordinator Syed Jameel Zaidi thanked all 32 teams for their contribution to make the tournament a success.



Meerath Baushar players celebrate after beating Horizon Cosmos in the semifinal.

Djokovic, Alcaraz battle on; Andreeva’s defence ends

NOVAK Djokovic and Carlos Alcaraz were both made to work hard before reaching the fourth round of Indian Wells on Monday but defending women’s champion Mirra Andreeva crashed out and let her frustrations boil over on court.

Third seed Djokovic overcame a second-set reverse to beat American Aleksandar Kovacevic 6-4, 1-6, 6-4 and reach the last 16 for the first time since 2017, setting up a clash with holder Jack Draper, who swept past Francisco Cerundolo 6-1, 7-5.

The 24-time Grand Slam champion, who has claimed a record-equalling five titles at the Californian desert event, said he had been managing a forearm problem for the past two weeks.

“It’s a bit odd: The more I serve, the better I feel, but it comes on and off if I get cold,” Djokovic told Tennis Channel.

“If I don’t serve for five or six minutes then I feel like the first couple of serves of that game are a bit painful. I’m working through it. It’s not something I haven’t faced before.

“I’m trying to manage my body and mental state on a daily basis so I can be peaking as much as I possibly can on a given day ... It’s not going to get easier ... Draper is next and playing at a high level again, but I love the challenge.”

Britain’s Draper, playing his second event after an arm injury of his own, was in commanding form as he breezed through the opening set before enduring a stiff challenge from his Argentine opponent in the second.

Alcaraz was also tested by Arthur Rinderknech and faced the threat of losing his first match of the year after dropping the first set and his serve early in the second, but the world number one recovered to prevail 6-7(6), 6-3, 6-2.

The Spaniard rolled his ankle midway through the contest but shrugged off the injury scare and pulled level, before switching gears to improve his record in 2026 to 14-0. Up next for the twice champion is Casper Ruud, who downed Rinderknech’s cousin Valentin Vacherot 3-6, 6-3, 6-4.

SINIAKOVA STUNS ANDREEVA
Katerina Siniakova caused the biggest upset of the day in the women’s draw by beating Andreeva 4-6, 7-6(5), 6-3, prompting the defending champion to throw her racket towards her chair and storm off the court after shouting at a section of the crowd.

“There were a lot of emotions that I was going through after the loss,” said Andreeva, who also smashed a racket earlier.

“But of course I’m not really proud of how I managed it ... Those are the things that I really need to work on soon. Not in the future but whenever I get the chance.”

Siniakova’s Czech compatriot Karolina Muchova was equally impressive as she defeated Croatian Antonia Ruzic 6-0, 6-3, while Swiss Belinda Bencic eased past Belgian Elise Mertens 6-2, 6-3.

Second seed Iga Swiatek, twice champion at Indian Wells, overpowered Maria Sakkari



Novak Djokovic (SRB) hits a shot during his third round match as he defeated Aleksandar Kovacevic (USA) during the BNP Paribas Open at the Indian Wells Tennis Garden. — **Imagn Images**



Katerina Siniakova (CZE) hits a shot during her third round match against Mirra Andreeva (RUS) in the BNP Paribas Open at the Indian Wells Tennis Garden. — **Imagn Images**

- VETERAN DJOKOVIC GETS PAST KOVACEVIC IN THREE SETS
- SERB TAKES ON DEFENDING CHAMPION DRAPER IN LAST 16
- ALCARAZ PASSES RINDERKNECH TEST TO BOOK RUUD CLASH
- HOME FAVOURITES FRITZ AND KEYS FALL IN THIRD ROUND
- ANDREEVA THROWS RACKET, YELLS AT CROWD AFTER LOSS

with a commanding 6-3, 6-2 win but it was the end of the road for American Madison Keys who crashed 2-6, 6-2, 6-3 against Briton Sonay Kartal.

Fifth seed Jessica Pegula kept the flag flying for United States by recovering to defeat former French Open winner Jelena Ostapenko 4-6, 6-3, 6-2 and step into the fourth round.

Fellow American Alex Michelsen earlier ousted seventh seed and home favourite Taylor Fritz 6-4, 7-6(6) in the men’s draw and Briton Cameron Norrie continued his run by beating Australian sixth seed Alex de Minaur 6-4, 6-4.

Australian qualifier Rinky Hijikata also caught the eye, recovering from a first-set tie-break deficit to defeat Kazakh 10th seed Alexander Bublik 6-7(3), 7-6(3), 6-3 in a hard-fought contest lasting over 2-1/2 hours.

Russia’s Daniil Medvedev was in no mood to waste time as he saw off Sebastian Baez 6-4, 6-0 in 78 minutes to close out the evening’s action on the men’s side. — **Reuters**

ATP INDIAN WELLS RESULTS MEN (THIRD ROUND)
Carlos Alcaraz (ESP x1) bt Arthur Rinderknech (FRA x26) 6-7 (6/8), 6-3, 6-2; Casper Ruud (NOR x13) bt Valentin Vacherot (MON x24) 3-6, 6-3, 6-4; Rinky Hijikata (AUS) bt Alexander Bublik (KAZ x10) 6-7 (3/7), 7-6 (7/3), 6-3; Cameron Norrie (GBR x27) bt Alex De Minaur (AUS x6) 6-4, 6-4; Novak Djokovic (SRB x3) bt Aleksandar Kovacevic (USA) 6-4, 1-6, 6-4; Jack Draper (GBR x14) bt Francisco Cerundolo (ARG x19) 6-1, 7-5; Daniil Medvedev (RUS x11) bt Sebastián Báez (ARG) 6-4, 6-0; Alex Michelsen (USA) bt Taylor Fritz (USA x7) 6-4, 7-6 (8/6)

India team to pocket \$14 million for T20 World Cup triumph

NEW DELHI: India’s all-conquering men’s cricket team will pocket \$14 million after lifting the T20 World Cup for a record third time, the country’s cricket board said on Tuesday.

The co-hosts and pre-tournament favourites swept aside New Zealand by 96 runs in Sunday’s final in Ahmedabad to become the first team to retain the trophy and the first to win it on home soil.

Cricket commands an unrivalled following in the world’s most populous country, with top players enjoying star status.

The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI), the world’s richest and most powerful cricket body, praised the players, support staff and selectors for the “historic



India players celebrate with the trophy after winning the 2026 ICC Men’s T20 Cricket World Cup final match against New Zealand at the Narendra Modi Stadium in Ahmedabad. — **AFP**

achievement” as it announced the cash reward.

The victory cemented India’s place “among the most successful teams in the history of the format”, BCCI secretary Devajit Saikia said in a statement.

The prize money will be shared among the entire team, including coaches and support staff.

The Indian team will separately receive \$2.34 million from the International Cricket Council while runners-up New Zealand will earn \$1.17 million.

Midnight celebrations broke out across the country on Sunday as delirious fans in blue Indian shirts took to the streets, beating drums and dancing to Bollywood hits.

SPORTS

MACHIDA, BURIRAM ADVANCE IN ASIAN CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

JAPAN'S MACHIDA Zelvia booked their place in the Asian Champions League quarterfinals in their competition debut after beating South Korea's Gangwon 1-0 in Tuesday's last 16 second leg. Thailand's Buriram United joined them in the last eight after squeezing past Australia's Melbourne City 4-2 on penalties after a 0-0 draw.

Machida, who were playing non-league football less than 15 years ago, went through 1-0 on aggregate after Hotaka Nakamura's first-half header made the difference.

"We were determined to make history for Machida," said Nakamura.

"It was a tough game but we have written a new page for the club. Now we move on to the next stage and we want to show everyone something great."

The Asian Champions League becomes a single-leg knock-out competition from the quarter-finals onwards, with all games set to be played in Saudi Arabia next month.

The Asian Football



Japan's Machida Zelvia Hotaka Nakamura (L) is congratulated by his teammate Keiya Sento after scoring the opening goal against South Korea's Gangwon FC. — AFP

Confederation last week postponed last-16 matches played by clubs in the Middle East after the US and Israeli strikes on Iran.

Machida and Gangwon kicked off for the second leg of their tie at the Japanese club's homely stadium in the suburbs of Tokyo after a 0-0 draw in South Korea last week.

Machida suffered an early blow when Japan international winger Yuki Soma was forced off with an injury in the 12th minute.

His replacement Na Sang-ho supplied the cross for the winning goal in the 25th minute as Nakamura ran in at the back post to head home.

Machida, who had never played in the Japanese first division until 2024, won last season's domestic Emperor's Cup.

Buriram came through a tense tie with Melbourne despite losing midfielder Robert Zulj to a red card after just 20 minutes.

Goalkeeper Neil Etheridge was the hero in the shoot-out, saving twice before Australian Kenny Dougall slammed home the winning spot kick.

The win meant Buriram qualified for the quarterfinals for the second successive season. — AFP



Japan's Machida Zelvia player Yuta Nakayama (L) controls the ball in Tokyo. — AFP



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SHORT TAKES



The authorities highlighted a range of streamlined procedures aimed at enhancing trade flows and strengthening supply chain efficiency across GCC.

OMAN STRENGTHENS ROLE AS TRADE GATEWAY IN GCC

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, in cooperation with the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Royal Oman Police, has affirmed the readiness of the land transport sector to facilitate the movement of goods from Omani ports to Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) markets.

The authorities highlighted a range of streamlined procedures aimed at enhancing trade flows and strengthening supply chain efficiency across the region. According to the ministry, a package of logistical facilities has been introduced to ensure the smooth movement of goods and enable faster responses to transport and supply requirements.

to ensure the smooth movement of goods and enable faster responses to transport and supply requirements. These measures include facilitating the entry of empty land transport vehicles from GCC countries to collect goods from Oman.

Transport operators can also submit applications through the “Bayan” system, which enables faster and more efficient processing of transport-related procedures.

The ministry noted that these initiatives underscore the importance of transit transport in supporting the movement of goods through Oman to regional markets.

The measures are expected to improve shipping efficiency and strengthen the sustainability of supply chains.

Officials said the initiatives further reinforce Oman’s position as a key logistics corridor and a reliable trade gateway in the region, while also opening new avenues for economic cooperation with neighbouring countries. — ONA

Digital economy adds 800m to Oman’s GDP

OMAN’S digital economy is emerging as a significant driver of economic growth and diversification, with its direct contribution reaching around RO 800 million in 2023, according to a new report issued by the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MoTCIT).

The report, titled “The Harvest of the Digital Economy in the Sultanate of Oman: From Establishment to Empowerment”, highlights progress achieved between 2021 and 2025 under the National Digital Economy Programme.

Launched in 2021, the programme aims to accelerate digital transformation across the economy and supports eight strategic areas, including government digital transformation, artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, digital industry, space technologies, e-commerce, financial technology and digital infrastructure.

MoTCIT oversees five of these initiatives, while the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, the Central Bank of Oman and the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority supervise the remaining programmes.

Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, said the ministry is pursuing an ambitious vision to build a sustainable and advanced digital economy in line with the directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik.

He noted that efforts have focused on strengthening digital government services, empowering a digital society and supporting the digitalisation of businesses. These initiatives have helped



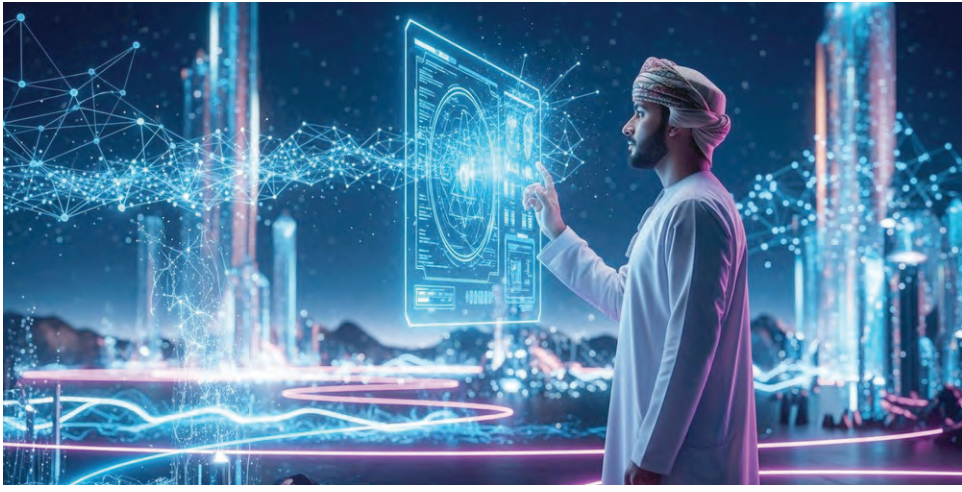
ENG SAID BIN
HAMOUD AL
MAAWALI

Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology.



DR ALI BIN
AMER AL
SHAITHANI

Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology for Communications and Information Technology.



The programme aims to accelerate digital transformation across the economy and supports eight strategic area.

Oman improve its standing in global indicators, particularly the E-Government Development Index and the Cybersecurity Readiness Index.

Among the key initiatives launched are the Omani Language Model (Ma’een) aimed at enhancing digital sovereignty, the Artificial Intelligence Studio, expanded 5G networks and improvements in national digital infrastructure.

Dr Ali bin Amer al Shaithani, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology for Communications and Information Technology, said the National Digital Economy Programme was designed as a comprehensive framework to support a knowledge-based economy built on advanced technology and innovation.

Progress under the programme includes the launch of a unified digital government portal, the Irtaq programme to empower national talent in digital transformation and the Tajawub national platform for public suggestions and complaints.

During the past five years, 3,166 government services were

streamlined, 2,277 permits and services digitised; and more than 29 million digital government transactions were completed annually. The national integration platform also facilitated the exchange of 2.26 billion data records, while more than 200 million electronic authentication requests were processed with a 94 per cent performance rate.

Artificial intelligence investments exceeded RO 79 million, supporting projects such as the National Generative AI Linguistic Model, the Oman Digital Triangle initiative and the development of a dedicated zone for AI startups. The ecosystem now includes around 22 AI-focused companies.

In human capital development, more than 11,000 Omanis were trained through the Makeen initiative, while Omanisation in technical and specialised IT roles reached about 69 per cent, representing 45.5 per cent of the total IT workforce.

The cybersecurity sector has also expanded, with around 8,000 individuals in Oman and 5,000 international beneficiaries participating in cybersecurity programmes. — ONA

Al Mazunah Free Zone secures 15 project investments in 2025

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAR 10

Al Mazunah Free Zone, managed and operated by the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn), has successfully localised 15 projects in 2025 with a total investment exceeding RO 650,000. The projects occupy a combined area of 10,000 sqm and span industrial activities, logistics services and export services.

This growth has increased the cumulative investment volume in the free zone to RO 140.7 million. The total leased area stands at 1,402,714 sqm of the free zone’s total area of 15,362,305 sqm, while the workforce has reached 550 employees.

Eng Ahmed bin Khamis al Kasbi, Director General of Al Mazunah Free Zone, said that the free zone recorded notable growth in goods and vehicle movement during 2025.

“The goods handling increased by 22% compared to 2024, with total goods weight touching 270,000 tonnes. Car exports also rose by 26% during the same period, with nearly 6,800 vehicles exported from the free zone in



Cumulative investment in the free zone has climbed to RO 140.7 million.



ENG AHMED
BIN KHAMIS AL
KASBI

Director General of Al Mazunah Free Zone

2025”, he said.

Al Kasbi added, “Al Mazunah Free Zone has completed more than 15,000 electronic transactions during 2025, in

addition to organising Al Mazunah Economic Exhibition and Forum with the participation of over

100 companies. The year also witnessed the full operation of the free zone’s security system”.

Al Kasbi further explained that several key projects are planned by Madayn in the free zone under the Eleventh Five-Year Development Plan (2026-2030).

These projects include the operation of the livestock quarantine facility, which has been fully completed, with coordination currently underway between the operator and Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources to finalise administrative procedures prior to

launch.

He added that other projects in the pipeline include signing an MoU with the operator of Al Najd Farms to market agricultural products in Al Mazunah Free Zone, alongside plans to open a representative office in Yemen to attract investments and assess the Yemeni market.

Planned projects also include organising three specialised exhibitions; adding one megawatt of solar energy capacity to the free zone; and planting 1,000 seedlings over five years to expand green areas, with at least a 10% increase targeted during 2026.

Al Kasbi noted that Al Mazunah Free Zone is home to key productive projects, one of which is a fish processing factory with an investment of RO 1.6 million. Occupying approximately 4,000 sqm, the facility has an annual production capacity of 2,000 tonnes.

The factory processes, markets and exports seafood products to China and East Asian markets in accordance with the highest quality standards, thereby meeting regional demand for seafood products.

This project represents a strategic step towards maximising the economic utilisation of fish resources in the Sultanate of Oman and Yemen; and hence meeting international market requirements. The factory aims to boost economic returns, strengthen trade balance, support sustainable development and reinforce Oman’s position as a trusted global food supplier. Notably, 20% of the factory’s workforce are from the Wilayat of Al Mazyouna.

Al Mazunah Free Zone represents a strategic pillar supporting economic and commercial development in Dhofar Governorate in particular and the Sultanate of Oman in general. The free zone enjoys a strategic location close to regional markets and serves as a key gateway for expanding trade exchange.

Moreover, the free zone presents an integrated infrastructure aligned with investment requirements, alongside a diversified investment base spanning industrial sectors, advanced technologies, food industries and logistics services.

ADVERTORIALS

SHORTTAKES



The match delivered an exciting spectacle as Takaful Oman emerged victorious over Alizz Islamic Bank.

Ominvest concludes 4th Ramadhan football championship

MUSCAT: The highly anticipated fourth Ominvest Ramadhan Football Championship concluded successfully after two weeks of intense competition and memorable moments.

Held under the auspices of Abdulaziz al Balushi, Group CEO of Ominvest, the tournament took place at the Military Technological College from February 22 to March 4, 2026, exemplifying the Group's dedication to promoting sports, people's wellbeing, active lifestyles and fostering a strong sense of unity.

The final match delivered an exciting spectacle as Takaful Oman emerged victorious over Alizz Islamic Bank in a dramatic shootout (5–1), securing their second championship title, in a thrilling and closely contested showdown. The event was attended by Ominvest executives, CEOs from participating companies and enthusiastic supporters from across the Group.

Reflecting on the championship's impact, Abdulaziz al Balushi stated, "This event has been a truly exceptional experience, with participants displaying remarkable competitiveness and outstanding performances.

The final match was particularly exciting, showcasing the dedication and teamwork of both finalists. We are proud that this championship has evolved beyond just a sporting event, becoming a platform for strengthening professional relationships and fostering a collaborative corporate culture within the Ominvest Group".

Waleed al Yarubi, Chief People, Corporate Communication and Sustainability Officer at Ominvest, added, "Beyond the excitement of the matches, this championship embodies our commitment to holistic wellbeing. By fostering a culture of health and active engagement, we are directly contributing to the achievement of the third United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) — ensuring healthy lives and promoting wellbeing for all at all ages.

This initiative strengthens our social fabric and reinforces our dedication to creating a thriving and sustainable community".

This year's edition witnessed expanded participation with the inclusion of the Authority for Public Services Regulation for the first time, alongside Oman Arab Bank, Ubhar Capital, National Finance, Alizz Islamic Bank and Bank Muscat.

The Ominvest Ramadhan Football Championship continues to solidify its position as a cornerstone of the Group's corporate social responsibility and sustainability initiatives, with Ominvest remaining steadfast in its commitment to organising future editions and further promoting a healthy, active and vibrant community in the Sultanate of Oman.

Biggest excitement now with Toyota Corolla

CELEBRATING the spirit of giving during this holy month, Saud

Bahwan Automotive is proud to announce that the Toyota Corolla is now with the Toyota's Biggest Excitement Ramadhan campaign. This special promotion, running until April 8, 2026, ensures that one of Oman's most beloved sedans is more accessible than ever.

The campaign prioritises exceptional value for customers, headlined by an attractive zero per cent interest offer for three years. This is complemented by a comprehensive 5-year/50,000 km service package, designed to keep every drive smooth and stress-free.

Furthermore, every new Corolla purchase includes one year of free insurance, one year of registration and Thiqah Loyalty Points worth RO 50, along with a thrilling chance to win a Supra GR in the grand raffle, or one of five Urban Cruiser GLs in the raffle. The

Toyota Corolla continues to lead in comfort and reliability, setting the benchmark for sedans in its segment by combining advanced technology with a refined driving experience.

Designed to handle daily commutes and long-distance journeys across Oman with ease, the Corolla offers a balance of style and practicality that remains unmatched. Under the hood, drivers can choose between two engine options tailored to their needs.

The 2.0-litre four-cylinder Dynamic Force engine produces 168 horsepower and 20.39 kg-m of torque, paired with a Direct Shift CVT transmission for smooth, responsive acceleration.



The Corolla offers a balance of style and practicality that remains unmatched.

For those prioritising efficiency, the 1.6-litre four-cylinder engine generates 121 horsepower and 15.7 kg-m of torque, providing a quiet and fuel-efficient drive that maintains Toyota's hallmark performance.

Inside the cabin, the Corolla prioritises space and convenience for all occupants.

Passengers benefit from generous legroom and headroom, plush seating with advanced cushioning and rear AC vents to ensure comfort in all weather conditions.

The interior is further enhanced by wide armrests and a large boot that provides ample space for luggage or groceries, making it an ideal choice for active families.

On the technology front, the Corolla is equipped with an 8-inch display audio system, a 4.2-inch multi-information display and a six-speaker audio setup.

Features like cruise control and an optional moonroof add to the sense of

openness and connectivity, ensuring every journey is as enjoyable as it is smooth.

Safety remains central to the Corolla's design philosophy, offering peace of mind to drivers and families alike. The vehicle is equipped with four SRS airbags and a comprehensive suite of active safety features, including Vehicle Stability Control (VSC), Anti-lock Braking System (ABS) and Brake Assist.

Additionally, Electronic Brakeforce Distribution (EBD) and a Tyre Pressure Monitoring System (TPMS) work together to protect occupants at every stage of the journey. With its combination of dependable performance, premium comfort and the incredible value offered during this Ramadhan campaign, the Toyota Corolla continues to be the preferred choice for those seeking a sedan that delivers excellence on every road in Oman.

ahlibank launches 4th Ramadhan Souq

MUSCAT: Continuing its commitment to driving economic growth in the Sultanate of Oman, ahlibank launched the fourth edition of the 'ahlibank Ramadhan Souq' in collaboration with the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority (Riyada).

The initiative serves as an integrated platform that brings together small and medium enterprises, providing a strategic opportunity to empower Omani entrepreneurs and support the development of their businesses while encouraging sustainable growth.

The fourth edition of the Souq was held from March 5-7, 2026 at ahlibank's Head Office in Al Wattayah, attracting strong participation and achieving notable success.

The Ramadhan Souq reflects ahlibank's commitment to supporting the objectives of Oman Vision 2040, which aims to diversify the national economy, empower small and medium enterprises; and strengthen their role as a key driver of economic growth.



More than 70 entrepreneurs and SMEs join this year.

Through this initiative, ahlibank continues to leverage its community and economic platforms to empower entrepreneurs by providing a supportive environment where they can showcase their products, expand their networks and unlock new opportunities for business growth.

The Souq also fosters stronger collaboration between the financial sector

and the local community by supporting youth and emerging enterprises, encouraging innovation and entrepreneurial spirit; and reinforcing the bank's role as an active partner in achieving sustainable economic and social development.

This year's edition of the ahlibank Ramadhan Souq witnessed significant expansion, hosting more than 70 entrepreneurs representing SMEs within a vibrant commercial environment.

Participants showcased a diverse range of products associated with Eid Al Fitr preparations, including clothing, perfumes, handicrafts and other distinctive local products.

The Souq opened with a festive atmosphere through a Qaranqasho celebration for children, bringing joy and excitement through interactive activities, gifts and special raffles in a Ramadhan experience that reflects the spirit of community and authentic Omani traditions.

Spreading smiles: BankDhofar celebrates 'Qaranqasho' with children

MUSCAT: Reinforcing its long-standing commitment to social responsibility and inclusive community development, BankDhofar proudly sponsored the annual 'Qaranqasho' mid-Ramadhan celebration organised by the Association for Children with Disabilities.

Held at the Kempinski Hotel Muscat, the event brought together children and their families for an evening filled with joy, cultural tradition and meaningful community engagement.

The sponsorship reflects BankDhofar's broader CSR strategy, which places strong emphasis on supporting children with disabilities and promoting inclusive participation in national and religious celebrations.

Qaranqasho, a cherished mid-Ramadhan tradition in Oman and



The event brought together children and their families for an evening filled with joy, cultural tradition and meaningful community engagement.

across the Gulf, provides children with the opportunity to dress in traditional attire, celebrate with their peers and experience the spirit of generosity and belonging that defines the holy month. As part of its participation, BankDhofar hosted a dedicated booth at the event, distributing gifts and ice cream to children and their families.

The initiative was met with enthusiastic engagement, adding a festive touch to the evening and reinforcing the bank's commitment to creating joyful and memorable experiences for children.

The gesture underscored the importance of ensuring that children with disabilities are fully included in community celebrations.

BankDhofar's support for humanitarian and social initiatives is a core pillar of its CSR framework.

By partnering with organisations such as the Association for Children with Disabilities, the bank aims to help strengthen community institutions that provide essential educational, therapeutic and advocacy services to children with physical, intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Through targeted sponsorships, volunteerism and sustainable community programmes, BankDhofar continues to align its efforts with Oman's broader social development priorities.

The Association expressed its appreciation for the bank's ongoing support, noting that such partnerships play a vital role in enabling the association to expand its programmes and enhance the quality of services offered to children and their families across the Sultanate of Oman.

SHORTTAKES



The value of property sales contracts climbed 37.5 per cent to RO 109.9 million, compared to RO 79.9 million a year earlier.

REAL ESTATE
TRANSACTIONS IN
OMAN JUMP 27%

MUSCAT: The total value of real estate transactions in the Sultanate of Oman rose to RO 235.8 million by the end of January 2026, marking a 27.1 per cent increase compared to RO 185.5 million recorded during the same period in 2025.

Data released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) showed that the value of property sales contracts climbed 37.5 per cent to RO 109.9 million, compared to RO 79.9 million a year earlier.

Mortgage activity also registered solid growth. The value of mortgage contracts increased 20 per cent to RO 125.4 million across 2,179 contracts, compared to RO 104.5 million through 1,705 contracts in the same period last year.

The number of sales contracts recorded a marginal rise of 0.7 per cent, reaching 5,725 transactions, up from 5,688 during the corresponding period in 2025.

Mortgage activity also registered solid growth. The value of mortgage contracts increased 20 per cent to RO 125.4 million across 2,179 contracts,

compared to RO 104.5 million through 1,705 contracts in the same period last year.

In contrast, swap contracts declined significantly. Their total value fell 50.4 per cent to RO 0.5 million for 100 contracts, down from RO 1 million for 152 contracts a year earlier.

Meanwhile, the number of property titles issued in Oman declined 24.9 per cent to 15,469 titles, compared to 20,588 titles recorded during the same period in 2025. Titles issued to GCC nationals also fell sharply, dropping 59.1 per cent to 83 titles, compared with 203 titles issued by the end of January last year. — ONA

Economic, free zones offer stable investment climate in Oman

MUSCAT: The Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) has affirmed that business operations across Oman's special economic zones, free zones and industrial cities are continuing normally, with supply chains and logistics services functioning without disruption.

The assurance came during a virtual meeting chaired by Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Chairman of the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ), with investors, operating companies, factories and chief executives across the zones under the authority's supervision.

Eng Ahmed bin Hassan al Dheeb, Deputy Chairman of the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones, also attended the meeting. Al Yousef said the authority remains committed to



OPAZ remains committed to maintaining a safe and reliable investment environment for local and international investors.

SPACEX IPO

SpaceX weighs Nasdaq listing plans



Elon Musk's SpaceX is leaning towards listing its shares on the Nasdaq in what could become the largest initial public offering on record, sources said. The company is seeking early inclusion in the Nasdaq-100 index, a key factor in its potential listing decision.

The New York Stock Exchange is also competing for the IPO. Discussions remain confidential and plans could still change. — Reuters

OIL DROP

Oil falls 7% on easing fears



Oil prices plunged about 7 per cent after US President Donald Trump predicted a possible de-escalation in the Middle East conflict. Brent crude dropped to \$102.05 per barrel while US West Texas Intermediate fell to \$91.99.

Prices had surged above \$119 earlier amidst supply concerns. Lower trading volumes also reflected easing market anxiety over prolonged disruptions to global oil supplies. — Reuters

FUEL SHOCK

Airlines raise fares on fuel surge



Major airlines including Qantas, SAS and Air New Zealand have raised ticket prices as jet fuel costs soar due to the Middle East conflict. Fuel prices have jumped from about \$85-\$90 per barrel to as high as \$200.

The surge has disrupted airline planning, with Air New Zealand suspending its 2026 outlook amidst uncertainty over energy costs and travel demand. — Reuters

OQEP projects capex at \$800-900 million for 2026



Top officials of OQEP addressing investors recently.

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, MAR 10

OQ Exploration & Production SAOG (OQEP) — the majority Omani state-owned upstream energy company — anticipates capital expenditures totalling between \$800 million and \$900 million across its expansive portfolio of operating and non-operating assets in the Sultanate of Oman during 2026.

The publicly listed company — part of OQ Group — currently oversees a portfolio of 14 upstream assets, which contributed to a hydrocarbon output averaging 224,000 barrels of oil equivalent per day (boe/d) in 2025, corresponding to its net working interest.

According to company executives, production is targeted at between 220,000 and 230,000 boe/d in 2026 as well, with oil accounting for 54% of this output and gas making up the remaining 46% — a balanced portfolio that provides flexibility during periods of oil price weakness.

Addressing investors last week, Jaber al Noumani, Chief Financial Officer, said the company aims to maintain operating costs below \$10

The publicly listed company — part of OQ Group — currently oversees a portfolio of 14 upstream assets, which contributed to a hydrocarbon output averaging 224,000 barrels of oil equivalent per day (boe/d) in 2025, corresponding to its net working interest.

per barrel of oil equivalent. Capital expenditure is expected to average between \$0.8 billion and \$0.9 billion at the net working interest level.

In terms of capital structure, OQEP's current net debt-to-EBITDA ratio of around 0.24x provides significant headroom for growth. As the company pursues a five-year growth strategy and targets production of around 300,000 boe/d by 2030, a prudent capital structure is envisaged, targeting around 1.0x net debt-to-EBITDA at current oil prices and below 1.5x under stress oil price scenarios, he noted.

Dr Anwar al Kharusi, Chief Commercial Officer, stated that OQEP's five-year strategy (2026-2030) is built on key pillars: growing cash flow, increasing production and reserves, sustaining that growth through 2030 and beyond, and gradually diversifying internationally.

There are two core growth pillars, he explained. First, to maximise domestic opportunities in Oman by developing resources, strengthening the company's portfolio and advancing integrated oil, gas and LNG projects such as the Marsa LNG bunkering project currently under development at SOHAR Port and Freezone.

Second, to build resilience and expand internationally by leveraging government support and IOC partnerships to grow in relevant geographies across the Middle East and North Africa, transferring the expertise developed in Oman to international markets.

Commenting on the company's strategy for growth, Hamoud al Hashmi, CEO, said it will be driven by a combination of organic growth, including exploration success in Blocks 48 and 60, as well as M&A, both international and local.

Any stake acquisitions will be governed by clear screening criteria covering strategic fit, financial metrics and other key considerations. The process includes internal assurance reviews as well as third-party reviews before asset selection, he stated.

"Our ambition is to reach 300,000 barrels of oil equivalent per day by 2030. The pace will depend on the availability of suitable acquisitions, alongside organic growth. If we can accelerate growth earlier, that would be positive, but we must also ensure we meet our financial criteria. We aim to grow gradually while maintaining discipline across all key financial parameters", he added.

OPINION

MSX and company profits: Joining the dots



KARL JACKSON

The writer is an Audit, Assurance and ESG Partner with Crowe Oman karl.jackson@crowe.om

CAPTURING the headlines for the past six months has been the relentless performance of the companies listed on the MSX and tracked by the MSX30 index, which has risen by 68% in the past 12 months, against a backdrop of the equivalent Saudi index that is in negative territory.

There are many factors that contribute to increased company share prices such as improved market liquidity, foreign investment, geopolitical developments and potential elevation of the MSX to emerging market status by the MSCI.

Also, fundamentally, there should be some linkage to the underlying financial performance of the companies, which in turn translates into dividend payments, which are highly sought after throughout the GCC.

As usual, at this busy time of the year, we have analysed the annual results announcements of all the SAOG companies listed on the MSX. Overall, the performance of most companies within most of the sectors has been compelling success stories and must therefore be considered as one of the factors influencing the MSX30 rise. However, looking more closely there are some anomalies, meaning some of the other factors listed above must also be at play.

In the financial sector, there has been across the board solid performance from the large banks that dominate MSX liquidity, matched by the smaller leasing

and insurance companies. Most notable were Bank Muscat and Bank Dhofar that respectively delivered 13% and 17% increases in profitability, unlike Sohar International that posted flat results.

All banks have seen healthy 50~100% increases in their share prices and are now trading at substantial premiums to their book values (x1.6 for Bank Muscat). Since recording losses in 2024, due to extreme weather events in the UAE, Liva Insurance delivered a profit of RO 14 million this year.

Although much smaller in scale, Muscat Insurance and United Insurance both delivered profit increases exceeding 200%. Finally, the five leasing companies generated profits that were on average 25% up on the prior year.

In the industrial sector, comprising construction and manufacturing, we witnessed Galfar Engineering turning a RO 3 million loss into a RO 3 million profit and Al Jazeera Steel booking profits of RO 9 million, up 35%. Albeit a slight improvement on the prior year, Raysut Cement again posted losses of RO 10 million, as its restructuring efforts continue.

The manufacturing heavyweight Oman Cables did not fail to deliver and posted a robust 7% increase to RO 24 million but the real success stories in this sector were Oman Refreshments (Pepsi), back with a profit of RO 4 million after a loss of RO 3 million in 2024 and Voltamp with a surge in results, up 135% to RO 14 million.

The service sector, encompassing

There are many factors that contribute to increased company share prices such as improved market liquidity, foreign investment, geopolitical developments and potential elevation of the MSX to emerging market status by the MSCI.

telecoms, energy and oil and gas was probably the most interesting and confusing. Especially when compared to the share price increases of the companies. Despite only slight improvements in their results Al Sawadi, Sembcorp and Phoenix Power, up 4~15%, their share prices have all surged by more than 100%.

Offsetting these companies were SMN Power and Dhofar Generating who face headwinds from PPA renegotiations and saw profits collapsing 24% and 69% respectively.

Within the oil and gas sector, the two petrol station operators — Shell Marketing and Oman Oil delivered profit increases exceeding 40%, which might explain the traffic congestion we are all facing within Muscat these days.

The recent IPOs in the oil and gas sector delivered mixed performances, with Abraj, OQ Gas Networks and OQ Base Industries increasing profits by 5~14% offset by OQ Exploration that posted a 10% decline in profits to RO 293 million, yet still saw its share price rise by 50%.

The two telecoms companies have reporting complexities.

Omantel restated its prior year profit of RO 306m down to RO 197 million as they recognised impairment losses on their Sudanese operations and then booked profits of RO 371 million in 2025, driven by top line revenue growth. With a large charge for employee restructuring, Ooredoo saw its profits collapse from RO 12 million to RO 1 million.

CHINA’S PROPERTY RESET COMES WITH A HEAVY PRICE

KA SING CHAN

There is no doubt that China’s real-estate bubble needed popping. Beijing has spent nearly a decade letting air out of the country’s historically speculative property market, which at times powered a quarter of the world’s second-largest economy.

However, the structural distortions that fed the bubble still exist, while the cleanup is exerting a lasting drag on growth.

For years, real estate soaked up Chinese savings, drove urbanisation and bankrolled local governments, who partly relied on land sales for income.

Easy credit, perceived implicit state backing and a lack of attractive investment alternatives all pushed households and developers to bet on ever-rising prices. So entrenched was the mania that few people took Xi Jinping seriously in 2016 when the Chinese president declared that houses are for living in, not for speculation.

The real estate market only started buckling in 2020 when Beijing unleashed its “three red lines” policy, which limited developers’ debt-fuelled growth by testing their borrowings against assets, equity and cash.

By that point, the problem was acute. Floor space under construction amounted to over five times annual sales, implying a giant backlog of developments that would take years to shift, if they could even be sold at all.

Xi’s ensuing crackdown upended the decades-old property order by deflating prices. In economic terms, the seismic shift faintly echoes the Communist Party’s early efforts, beginning in the 1940s, to reshape the distribution of wealth by uprooting the landlord class.

China Evergrande, a colossus of the boom years, went into liquidation in 2024 under the weight of \$300 billion in liabilities. Its founding chairman Xu Jiayin, once listed as China’s wealthiest man, is under police control. Virtually all other major developers in the private sector have defaulted.

After much upheaval, China’s property debt reduction drive now seems to be over. Local media reported earlier this year that the “three red lines” policy has effectively been shelved.

The five-year deleveraging campaign has proved transformative. Property investment has declined from about 12% of GDP in 2021 to roughly half that share today. The financial system’s exposure to a sudden, uncontrolled real-estate blowup has therefore reduced. — Reuters

IPO pipeline deserves a country equity story

IF I have learned anything in the last 20 years at the intersection of communications and financial markets, it is that every IPO tells a story that goes beyond the numbers. Not only about the company going public per se, but also about the country behind it and the industry in which it operates.

And when a country like Oman launches six major IPOs in three years, raises over \$4 billion from international and domestic investors, sets up an international financial centre under English common law and brings its public debt down from 60 per cent of GDP to 35 per cent, what it is conveying (whether it realises it or not) is a country story.

More or less consciously. I have worked all over the world and participated in IPOs in the United States, the United Kingdom, the European Union and emerging markets; and I have seen few economies as solid as Oman’s.

And few countries have the market activity that Oman has at the moment, where I travel quite frequently and have had the chance to see this transformation take shape on the ground, in conversations, in the confidence of the local financial community and in the speed at which things are moving.

Over the last three years, some national champions have made themselves available to investors.

In recent years, Abraj Energy Services went public with an 8.7 times oversubscribed offering, OQ Exploration & Production raised \$2 billion, Oman’s largest IPO on record and the biggest Gulf listing since Adnoc Gas in 2023; and Asyad Shipping was listed in 2025, raising \$333 million last year and bringing Oman’s maritime sector to the stock market for the first time. Just to name a few.

The Oman Investment Authority, which manages more than \$50 billion in assets, has launched an ambitious privatisation programme affecting dozens of its 160 affiliated companies. Oman India Fertiliser,



The MSX closed 2025 as the best-performing market in the GCC, with a 28.2% return on the MSX30 index.



RAMON PEDROSA

The writer is the founder of Pedrosa & Ende, a strategic communications and investor relations consultancy specialising in the global capital markets and working in the West and the Middle East.

Minerals Development Oman and others are in the pipeline and are almost ready to go public.

The creation of the Oman International Financial Centre in Madinat Al Irfan, announced by Royal Decree in early 2026, adds another dimension to this commitment.

The IFCO is supposed to operate under English common law, with its own courts and regulator, offering international investors a familiar framework for accessing the Omani market.

The MSX closed 2025 as the best-performing market in the GCC, with a 28.2% return on the MSX30 index. Trading volumes quadrupled. Market capitalisation now exceeds \$87 billion, up 51% from 2020. Oman has regained investment-grade credit ratings from Fitch, S&P and Moody’s.

Public debt has fallen from over 60% of GDP in 2020 to approximately 35% in 2025. Listed companies posted combined profits of RO 881 million in the first half of 2025, a 20% year-on-year increase.

These are spectacular figures. And yet, foreign investors still account for less than 15% of MSX’s trading volume. The MSX remains classified by MSCI as a frontier market.

The barrier is not regulatory — 100% foreign ownership is allowed in almost all publicly traded companies — or performance. The barrier is narrative.

The problem is not execution. It is

how financial work is viewed. All of these transactions are carried out by bankers who do not take financial communication seriously. It’s all numbers and ratios.

The prospectuses have described businesses and highlighted very large figures, with grand industrial ideas about how much we will build, buy, produce, extract, or export. But they have not been framed within a national narrative.

None has promoted Oman as a financial destination.

There is a lack of a coordinated narrative linking the macroeconomic story with the microeconomic opportunity.

Above all, no consideration has been given to Oman’s strategic importance as a state in using these IPOs to build a stronger, more resilient country brand, on a par with other states that have demonstrated the power of a single, coherent story to communicate a country’s financial strength.

The MSCI classification is highly relevant in this regard. Moving from frontier to emerging is not a change of label. It is a change of investment universe.

There are funds that, by mandate, cannot invest in frontier markets. The day a country moves to emerging, it enters the indices that those funds replicate and money flows in almost automatically.

But here’s what many people don’t understand: MSCI doesn’t just evaluate liquidity and capitalisation; it also assesses accessibility for international investors and the quality and clarity of the available financial information.

A market with good fundamentals but poor financial communication will remain a frontier-labelled market longer than necessary.

That is why Oman needs a country equity story that connects its macroeconomic transformation with each individual investment opportunity and is distributed in a coordinated manner to global capital decision-makers, not as a by-product of each transaction, but as a deliberate country strategy.

CLASSIFIEDS

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SALES professional with 5 yrs Experience in Medical sector. Graduate, Available in Muscat. akhilmanu777@gmail.com Contact: 76323324

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OPERATIONS Support / Tendering / Contract Management / Procurement professional with 18+ years' Oil & Gas experience. NOC & driving license available. 96227272, jijilmathew@gmail.com

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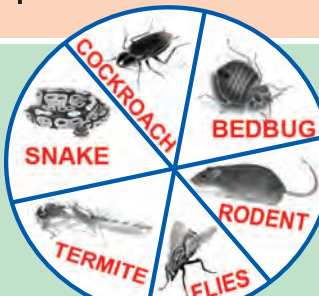
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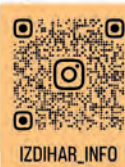
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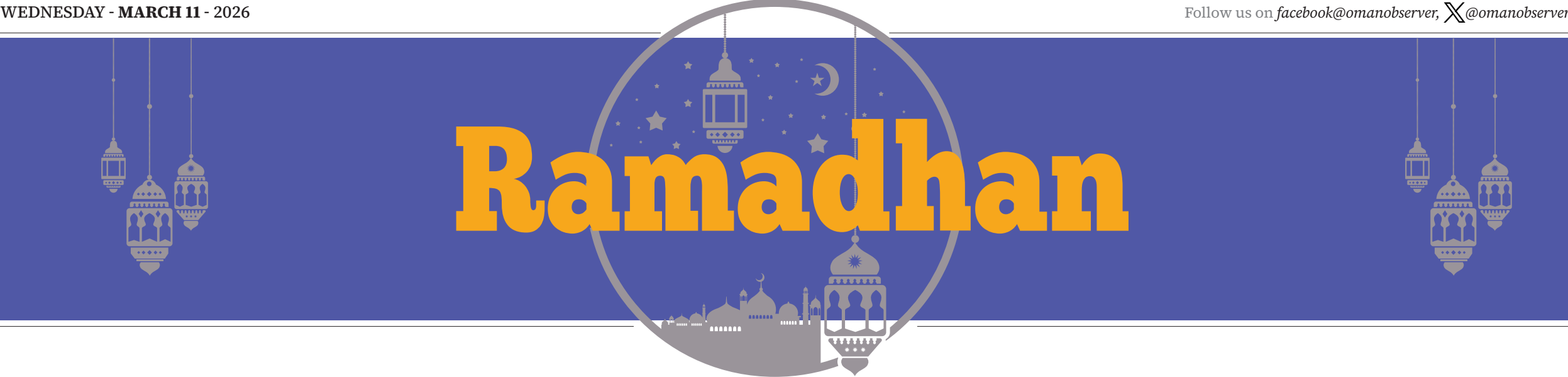


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R A M A D H A N O N T H E F R O N T L I N E O F

EMERGENCY CARE



BUTHAINA AL RIYAMI

FOR many people, the Maghrib Adhan in Ramadhan marks a moment of pause. Families gather around long dining tables, passing dates and water while the soothing call to prayer signals the end of a day of fasting. It is a time of warmth, reunion and quiet gratitude. But in the emergency department, there is no pause. “Ramadhan in the emergency room is not like any other Ramadhan”, says Hafsa al Mamari, a resident in emergency medicine. In a hospital, every room holds its own story, yet in emergency care the atmosphere is always shaped by urgency. Even during the holy month, Maghrib does not necessarily mean breaking the fast or gathering with family. Instead, it often means racing against time, pain and sometimes death itself. She recalls one incident that has remained deeply etched in her memory. “Just minutes before the Maghrib Adhan, an ambulance arrived at high speed”, she says. Inside were five members of the same family, a father, mother and three children, all severely injured in a traffic



accident. Within seconds, the department sprang into action. Rapid instructions filled the corridors, stretchers moved swiftly and equipment was prepared. While the Adhan was calling families to their tables, another kind of family assembled in the hospital: orthopaedic surgeons, general surgeons and plastic surgeons working together to save lives. “No one was thinking about the time, or the fast, or the Adhan approaching”, Al Mamari recalls. “Everyone was focused on the patients”. Nearby, the paramedics who had brought the injured family stood in a corner to break their fast

quickly with dates and water. Their uniforms still carried the urgency of the road, reminding them they could be called away again at any moment. “The scene was simple”, she says. “But it was also profound”. Moments like that often make her reflect silently on the unseen dedication of medical teams. How many quiet prayers are offered for

them by people they will never meet? In Ramadhan, emergency departments see a surge of cases, particularly just before Maghrib. Patients often plead with doctors to hurry so they can return home to break their fast with loved ones. “We understand them”, she says. “We understand their hunger, their exhaustion and their desire to be home. We are human too”. Yet there are times when the pressure hurts. “Sometimes people think we are slow or negligent, while in reality we are giving everything we have”, she explains. Meals are frequently postponed. Doctors promise each other they will eat after finishing a case, only for another patient to arrive. Food grows cold, or is forgotten entirely. Sometimes they break their fast standing, with only a sip of water between patients. For Al Mamari, Ramadhan in the emergency department has reshaped her understanding of patience and devotion. It has taught her that acts of service can also be acts of worship — often unseen and rarely acknowledged. “Ramadhan in emergency remains one of my deepest memories”, she says. “Because it reminds me why I chose this profession in the first place.

FATWA

QUESTION & ANSWER

Samahat Alshaykh
alealaamat 'Ahmad
Alkhalilii

Grand Mufti
of the
Sultanate of Oman

QUESTION

What is the ruling on using an IV drip and injections during the daytime in Ramadhan?

ANSWER

An IV drip breaks the fast and a nutritive injection that provides nourishment also breaks the fast. However, an injection given for medical treatment that does not provide nourishment does not break the fast. And Allah knows best.

QURAN

VERSE OF THE DAY

وَإِذْ تَأْتِيَنَّكُمْ رُكُوبٌ لِغَنَاءِكُمْ لَا يَدْعُونَ بِكُمُ الْإِنشَاءِ لِلْغَنَاءِ

And remember when your Lord proclaimed, 'If you are grateful, I will certainly give you more. But if you are ungrateful, surely My punishment is severe

[Surat Ibrahim] — Verse 7

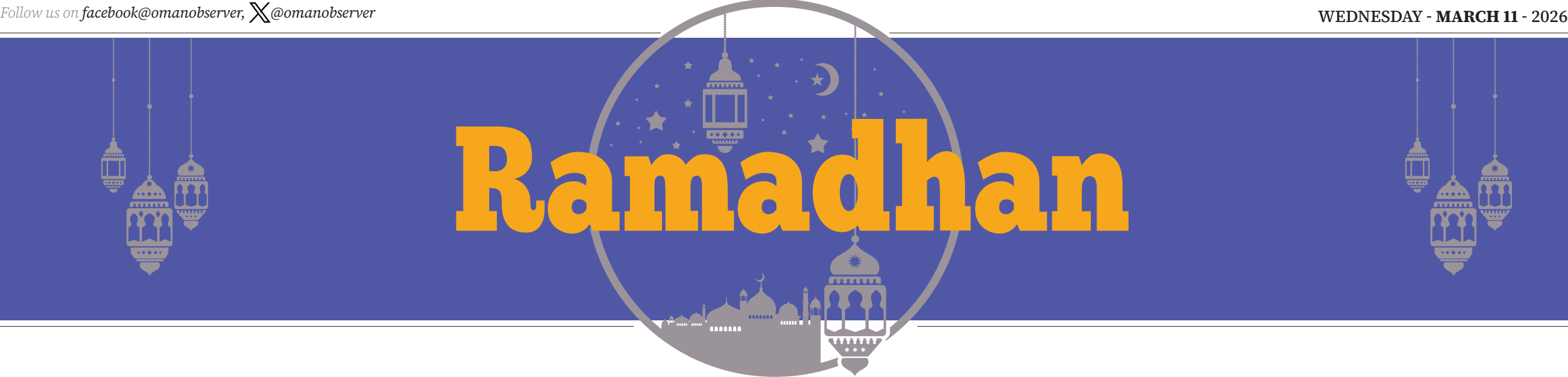
HADITH

A GUIDE FOR THE FAITHFUL

Abu Huraira reported Allah's Messenger (PBUH) as saying:

When there comes the month of Ramadhan, the gates of mercy are opened and the gates of Hell are locked and the devils are chained.

[Sahih Muslim]



SUHOOR THAT PROTECTS YOU FROM THIRST

**PREPARING THE BODY FOR A
BALANCED DAY OF FASTING**



MOHAMED AL BATTASHI

MANY fasting individuals believe that the secret to avoiding thirst during Ramadhan lies in drinking as much water as possible at suhoor, often consuming large amounts within minutes before the call to prayer. Yet experience shows that the matter is more nuanced. The body does not retain water simply because it is consumed in excess; rather, it requires nutritional balance to absorb and utilise fluids gradually throughout the fasting hours.

One common mistake is consuming salty or heavily spiced foods at

suhoor. Such choices tend to increase the sensation of thirst by midday. Likewise, heavy or fatty meals eaten immediately before sleep can strain the digestive system and affect sleep quality. As a result, individuals may wake up feeling fatigued, which can intensify the perception of thirst and exhaustion during the day.

Excessive intake of caffeinated beverages late at night may also be counterproductive. The body needs adequate rest to prepare for the day ahead. When sleep becomes fragmented or insufficient, fatigue becomes more pronounced, regardless of how substantial the meal may have been.

A balanced suhoor is rooted in

simplicity and moderation.

A light meal containing nourishing elements that help stabilise energy levels, combined with steady water intake spaced between iftar and suhoor, gives the body a better chance to maintain hydration.

Rather than focusing solely on quantity, attention should be given to how food and fluids are consumed, while avoiding excess.

Ramadhan is not a month of indulgence, but a month of balance. When suhoor is thoughtfully chosen, fasting becomes a smoother and more comfortable experience, reducing feelings of thirst and fatigue and allowing the day to unfold with calm, focus and resilience.

RAMADHAN TWEETS



زهرة
@Zahra2_z2007

Translated from Arabic by Grok

Ramadan evenings in #Mutrah are joy and delight

🌙💖

#GoodEvening #GenerousRamadan
#EveningOfBeautifulVibes
#OmanOfPeace
#Omanstandscalm

Rate this translation: 👍👎



Ramadhan evenings in Muttrah



أبو سيف
@Abu_Saif... · 5h

صباح الخير ورمضان كريم من أرض #سلطنة_عمان...
دعاء صادق #من اجل عمان 🇲🇪🌙



Ramadhan unites older and younger generations



PROMINENT

OMANI FIGURES

Who is she?
Shaikh Shams bin Hassan al Amri

He is one of the prominent dignitaries and notable figures of Oman in the 13th century AH, was among the leaders of the Omani army that recaptured Al Buraimi Fort from the Najdis. He later served as an advisor to Faisal bin Turki al Said in 1889.





RAMADHAN

TRADITION



The Philippines' Pagmamano: A Tradition of Respect

In the Philippines, pagmamano is a touching Ramadhan tradition where younger people show respect to elders by gently pressing their hand to their forehead. This simple yet profound gesture embodies the spirit of love, family and gratitude during the holy month.



HEALTH

TIPS





DRINK AS MUCH WATER AS POSSIBLE.

Drinking as much water as possible between iftar (dinner/break fast) and sahur/suhoor (pre-dawn meal) reduces your risk of dehydration during fasting.

Make every effort to drink at least 8 glasses of fluids.

FEATURES

WHERE
THE
MOUNTAINS
CALL HER
NAME



IDRIS AL BALUSHI

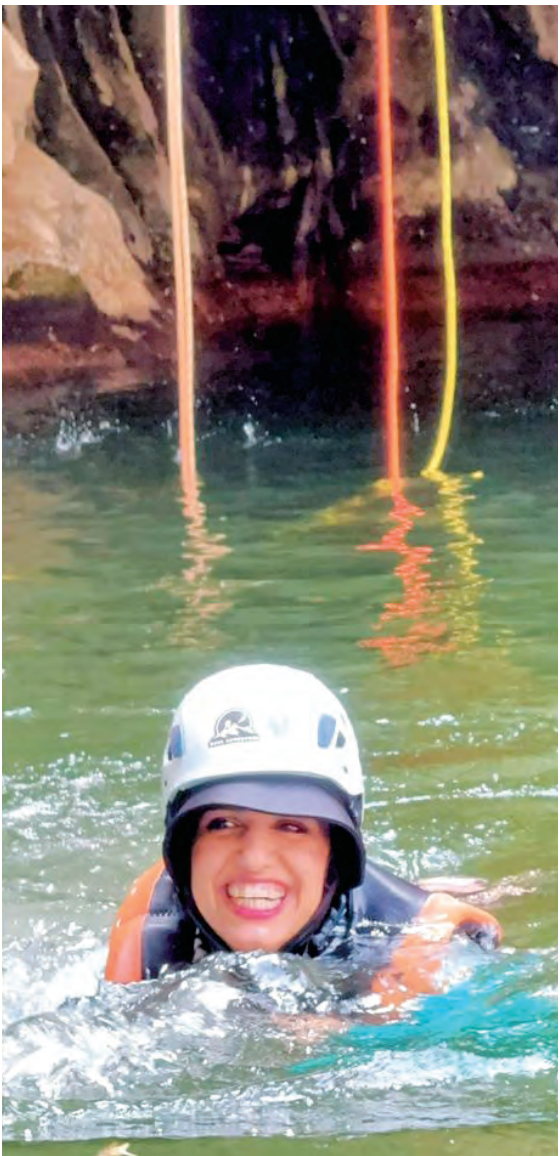
WHEN airports closed in 2020 and the world narrowed to the walls of home, Sharifa bint Ali al Aufi, widely known as Lolo, found her horizon expanding.

Her first adventure was to Wadi Hawer in Oman’s Al Sharqiyah North Governorate. What began as a simple escape during the uncertainty of the pandemic became a revelation. “It was the first time I truly saw this kind of beauty in my own country”, she recalls. Hidden pools, dramatic rock faces and landscapes that felt almost imaginary unfolded before her. In that moment, she realised Oman was not just home, it was an open air treasure.

From then on, weekends were no longer for rest. They were for routes. Each week, Lolo and her team planned a new trail, chasing valleys, mountains and water paths across the country. With every journey, she discovered scenery her mind could hardly process from its sheer beauty. What started as curiosity turned into commitment. Four years later, she has not slowed down.

In the beginning, Lolo was an assistant, supporting female participants on treks and motivating them through challenging terrain. She offered practical help, nutrition, encouragement and steady reassurance. Many hikers underestimated their own abilities, she says, growing tired and wanting to turn back. Her role was to remind them they were stronger than they believed.

In 2023, an announcement changed everything. Oman’s Adventure Centre, affiliated with Civil Defence in cooperation with the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, opened a training programme. Lolo applied and was accepted. She was the second woman to register, but after an injury forced



the other participant to withdraw, she found herself the only woman training alongside five men. The month long programme was intense and physically demanding, filled with risk and endurance tests. She completed it.

Oman, she believes, is unlike anywhere

else. In a single day, the country can offer four climates, summer heat in one region, cool mountain air in another, even misty khareef conditions further south. Visitors can choose their weather and their challenge, from water trails and mountain hikes to long descents, rock climbing and cave exploration. For geology students and researchers, Oman’s diverse rock formations and erosion patterns make it a living classroom.

Lolo does not own her own company yet, but she contracts with More Adventure and Explore and Challenge, offering full travel experiences, airport pickups, hotel bookings, camping gear, helmets, ropes, climbing equipment and curated access to wadis, caves, mountains and hiking trails across Oman.

Her heart, however, belongs to Tiwi. The trails of Wadi Al Shab and Wadi Mibam, the depth of its wells, the colour of its water and the serenity of its waterfalls give her what she describes as inner peace. “You cannot understand it until you see it”, she says.

The journey has not been without obstacles. Some in society question women working in adventure tourism. Some tourists instinctively trust male guides more. Yet certain routes require female presence for comfort and safety. Lolo continues forward, redefining expectations with every step.

She promotes sustainable tourism, leaving no waste, avoiding plastic, respecting marked trails and supporting local communities along the way.

Her advice to beginners is simple, start small, assess your ability, stay hydrated, check your health and do not be afraid. Adventure, she insists, is not about conquering nature, but discovering your own strength within it.

And for Lolo, the mountains are only the beginning.

ON SECOND THOUGHT

UNEXPECTED
OPPORTUNITY



Yeru Ebuen
The writer is a luxury media strategist and a creative director

The past two weeks have been particularly challenging for many people across the Middle East, but perhaps none more visibly than travellers. As tensions across the region escalated, uncertainty spread quickly through aviation networks.

Departure boards across several Gulf hubs filled with cancellations, rerouted flights and sudden schedule changes, leaving passengers scrambling for alternatives and airlines recalibrating routes in real time.

Yet amidst this disruption, Muscat International Airport presented an unusual contrast.

While neighbouring airspaces faced closures and precautionary restrictions that forced carriers to suspend or redirect flights, aircraft in Oman’s capital continued to depart with a degree of steadiness that did not go unnoticed by travellers navigating the chaos.

Across social media, passengers began documenting their unexpected journeys through Muscat after discovering that routes through other Gulf airports had collapsed.

For many, the capital became an unplanned but welcome transit point, one of the few places where flights were still operating with relative continuity while other routes across the region grew increasingly uncertain.

In the intricate geography of aviation, such moments rarely occur by accident. Airlines make route decisions based on an elaborate calculus involving airspace permissions, diplomatic relations, safety assessments and logistical reliability.

Oman’s ability to remain operational during a volatile period reflects a principle that has quietly shaped the country’s foreign policy for decades.

The country’s doctrine, often summarised as “friends to all, enemies to none”, has allowed Oman to maintain open channels across the region.

Muscat’s long cultivated reputation as a careful interlocutor carries implications far beyond politics. As one communications strategist in the country recently observed, the recent disruptions have inadvertently introduced Oman to a wider global audience.

inadvertently introduced Oman to a wider global audience.

Thousands of travellers who may previously have known little about the country suddenly encountered Muscat as a functioning, composed gateway during a moment of regional uncertainty.

From a communications perspective, such exposure is almost impossible to replicate through conventional campaigns.

When a destination becomes visible through reliability rather than advertising, the credibility it gains is far more enduring.

Travellers remember the places that worked when others could not.

In effect, the episode has placed Oman under an unexpected international spotlight, not through spectacle, but through quiet competence.

For a country that has steadily been expanding its tourism ambitions, the moment reinforces an identity it has long cultivated: a nation that favours measured development, stability and authenticity over noise.

In an era where geopolitical tremors can reshape travel routes overnight, the ability of a small nation to offer steadiness carries a deeper significance.

Muscat’s runways, busy while others paused, offered more than a logistical solution for stranded travellers.

They quietly demonstrated that diplomacy, when practised consistently, can shape not only political relationships but the very pathways through which the world continues to move.