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CERUNDOLO'S MIAMI
MAGIC CONTINUES
WITH STUNNING
MEDVEDEV UPSET

12

Oman, EU call for ending conflict

Iran, Israel trade strikes despite Trump talk of negotiations

HM, leaders discuss regional situation

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik received a telephone call from King Abdallah II of Jordan. During the call, the two leaders discussed the close bilateral relations binding the two countries and ways to enhance cooperation across various fields to serve mutual interests. They also reviewed the latest regional developments. His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik also received a telephone call from President Emmanuel Macron of the French Republic. The call addressed the latest regional developments, as well as international efforts aimed at achieving de-escalation and ending the conflict.

SAYYID BADR BIN HAMAD AL BUSAIDY, Foreign Minister, on Tuesday received Luigi Di Maio, the European Union (EU) Special Representative for the Gulf Region.

During the meeting, the two sides discussed opportunities and ways to halt the ongoing conflict in the region and its repercussions on the security and stability of nations, as well as its impact on international navigation and energy supplies.

Both parties emphasised the importance of aligning and integrating regional and international efforts, and in this context, pushing for channels of dialogue and peaceful and legal solutions.

They further stressed the necessity of de-escalation through the cessation of military actions, adherence to the principles of international law and international humanitarian law, and respect for the



Iranian people walk at Tajrish Bazaar in Tehran, Iran, on Tuesday. — Reuters

sovereignty of states, while underscoring diplomatic efforts to address crises and achieve sustainable security and stability.

CONFLICT

Iran and Israel traded strikes on Tuesday, as the Middle East war showed no sign of de-escalation after US President Donald Trump signalled “very good talks” to end the three-week conflict.

The war, sparked by US-Israel attacks on Iran that killed its supreme leader, has upended global energy markets, roiled the world economy, and spiralled throughout the region.

Israel’s army said it had conducted a “large wave” of air strikes across several areas of Iran, which had earlier launched a “direct hit” on a building in an upscale area of Tel Aviv.

AFP images showed rubble-strewn streets and the side of a three-storey building in Israel’s commercial hub in ruins, as first responders scrambled to assist at least four people lightly injured at four different locations.

Earlier, Iranian media reported US-Israeli warplanes had struck two gas facilities and a pipeline, hours after Trump stepped back from his threat to attack energy sites, citing negotiations to end the war.

Trump on Monday said his administration was speaking with an unidentified “top person”, as he extended by five days a deadline to hit Iran’s power plants.

But Tehran’s parliamentary speaker, Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf said “no negotiations” were under way, accusing Trump of seeking “to manipulate the financial and oil markets.”

As uncertainty swirled about diplomatic efforts to end the war, Bahrain, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia said they intercepted renewed drone and missile attacks on Tuesday. SEE ALSO P6 & 7

HM’S GREETINGS TO GREECE PRESIDENT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Konstantinos Tasoulas of Greece, on his country’s National Day. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sentiments and best wishes of good health and happiness to President Tasoulas. He also wished the people of Greece further progress and prosperity.

HM SENDS MESSAGE TO SAUDI KING



His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a written message to the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, pertaining to the fraternal relations between the two countries. The message was delivered by Sayyid Najib bin Hilal bin Saud al Busaidy, the Sultanate of Oman’s Ambassador to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, its Permanent Representative to the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation and its Permanent Representative to the Digital Cooperation Organisation in Al Riyadh, during a meeting in Riyadh where he was received by Eng Waleed bin Abdul Kareem al Khereiji, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Saudi Arabia. SEE ALSO P4

Woman swept away as heavy rains hit Oman

THE

SEARCH sector of the National Emergency Management Committee said that a citizen was swept away in the Wilayat of Khasab in Musandam Governorate due to the heavy flow of wadis, and she was found dead by search and rescue teams.

The Ministry of Labour has announced the implementation of remote working for employees in both the public and private sectors on Wednesday, in response to ongoing unstable weather conditions affecting different parts of the Sultanate of Oman.

The decision follows alerts issued by the National Multi-Hazard Early Warning Centre regarding forecast of heavy rainfall in a number of governorates, and in line with directives from the National Committee for Emergency Management.

According to the ministry, remote work will apply to units of the civil administrative apparatus of the state and private sector establishments



More rains are expected on Wednesday.

in the governorates of Muscat, Al Batinah North, Al Batinah South, Musandam, Al Buraimi, Al Dhahirah, Al Dakhiliyah and Al Sharqiyah North. The move aims to ensure public safety amid

the adverse weather conditions currently affecting these regions.

HIGHEST RAINFALL

During the current Al Masarrat depression from Friday until Tuesday, the Wilayat of Bahla has

received the highest volume of rainfall in the Sultanate of Oman at 153 mm, followed by the Wilayat of Barka (137 mm) and the Wilayat of Bausher (112 mm).

SEE ALSO P2 & 3



HEAVY RAINS TODAY

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 24

The latest weather maps and numerical forecasts issued by the National Emergency Management Centre at the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA), indicate that thundershowers and the effects of the weather system will continue on Wednesday over most of the governorates of the Sultanate of Oman.

Thundershowers associated with hail and strong winds will begin gradually in the governorates of Al Buraimi, Al Dhahirah, Al Batinah North and Musandam, and will later extend to the governorates of Al Dakhiliyah, Al Batinah South, Muscat, Al Sharqiyah North, Al Sharqiyah South and Al Wusta.

The National Early Warning Center has predicted heavy rainfall on Wednesday and warned against crossing running wadis and leaving children near water brooks. It also advised fishermen not to venture into the sea until further notice.

The Meteorology Department said that rainfall will continue until Saturday evening, noting that some waves will carry less rain, and the atmosphere will be relatively calm, followed by heavy waves of rain until the beginning of next week.

The governorates of Al Buraimi, Al Dhahirah, Al Dakhiliyah, Al Batinah South, Al Batinah North, Muscat, and parts of the governorates of Al Sharqiyah South, Al Sharqiyah North and Dhofar, experienced thundershowers associated with hail on Tuesday. Rainfall amounts ranged from 30 to 100 mm, causing wadis to overflow.

The Wilayat of Bahla recorded the highest rainfall amount at 153 mm, followed by the Wilayat of Barka with 137 mm followed by the Wilayat of Baushar with 112 mm, during the period from March 20 to 24, according to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources.

The Wilayat of Wadi Al Maawil recorded 111 mm, followed by the Wilayat of Al Musannah with 97 mm, and the Wilayat of Al Seeb with 96 mm.

The Wilayat of Bahla witnessed varying amounts of rainfall causing some wadis to the flow including Wadi Al Sinti, Wadi Al A'la, Wadi Al Kahafa, Wadi Saifam, Wadi Qaryat, Wadi Al Athal, and Wadi Sayh Al Maashi and a number of streams in different villages.

The Wilayat of Sinaw in Al Sharqiyah North Governorate witnessed rainfall of varying amounts leading to the flow of several wadis and streams in addition to the accumulation of water in some locations without recording any significant damage.

Rainfall of varying intensity was also reported in the wilayats of Al Rustaq, Barkah, Al Musannah, Al Awabi, Nakhal and Wadi Al Maawil in Al Batinah South Governorate.

The wilayats of Bukha, Khasab and Madha in Musandam Governorate experienced rainfall of varying intensities, leading to the flow of several wadis, including Wadi Al Khashkar and Wadi Al Hawra, and the filling of Al Sarouj Dam and Sahna Dam. The Wilayat of Khasab witnessed heavy rainfall, causing wadis to overflow including Wadi Al Hajir, Wadi Al Wain, Wadi Rubiya, and Wadi Mahas. Meanwhile, the Niyabat of Lima experienced light to moderate and heavy rainfall.

The Wilayat of Bukha witnessed extremely heavy rains concentrated in the mountainous areas leading to the flow of several wadis and streams. The heavy rainfall was concentrated in the areas of Tibat, Ghamdha, Padhfa and Al Jadi.



Remote work announced for public, private sectors

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 24

The Ministry of Labour has announced the implementation of remote working for employees in both the public and private sectors on Wednesday, March 25, in response to ongoing unstable weather conditions affecting parts of the Sultanate of Oman.

The decision follows alerts issued by the National Multi-Hazard Early Warning Center regarding heavy rainfall impacting a number of governorates, and in line with directives from the National Committee for Emergency Management.

According to the ministry, remote work will apply to units of the civil administrative apparatus of the state and private sector establishments in the governorates of



Muscat, Al Batinah North, Al Batinah South, Musandam, Al Buraimi, Al Dhahirah, Al Dakhiliyah and Al Sharqiyah North.

The move aims to ensure public safety amid the adverse weather conditions currently affecting these regions.

BAHLA RECEIVES HIGHEST VOLUME OF RAINFALL



MUSCAT: During the current Al Masarrat Depression, from March 20 until Tuesday, the Wilayat of Bahla has received the highest volume of rainfall in the Sultanate of Oman at 153 millimetres, followed by the Wilayat of Barka (137 mm) and the Wilayat of Bausher (112 mm). The data, which was registered by monitoring stations run by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, also showed that the Wilayat of Wadi Al Maawil received 111 mm of rainfall, followed by the Wilayat of Al Musannah at 97 mm and the Wilayat of Al Seeb (96 mm). — **ONA**

ROP intensifies campaign on dangers of crossing flowing wadis

BAIQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, MARCH 24

Amid unstable weather conditions affecting the Sultanate of Oman, the Royal Oman Police has intensified its public awareness campaigns across various media platforms, warning motorists against the dangers of crossing flowing wadis and stressing that reckless behaviour during such conditions could put lives and property at serious risk.

In a recent awareness post published on its official social media accounts, the police featured an illustrative image of a vehicle stranded in a fast-flowing wadi, highlighting the severe consequences of underestimating floodwaters. The message

emphasised that flowing water alone is capable of lifting and sweeping away a vehicle, underscoring the power and unpredictability of flash floods even when water levels appear shallow.

The post also reiterated that Oman's traffic law criminalises the deliberate crossing of wadis in a manner that endangers lives. Under Article 49, violators may face imprisonment for up to three months, a fine of up to RO 500, or both, depending on the severity of the offence.

This warning comes as several governorates across the Sultanate of Oman continue to experience varying levels of rainfall, resulting in active wadi flows and water accumulation in low-lying areas.



The campaign comes as several governorates across the Sultanate of Oman continue to experience varying levels of rainfall.

Authorities have repeatedly urged the public to remain cautious, avoid flood-prone locations, and refrain from unnecessary risks.

The Royal Oman Police further

emphasised that many incidents recorded during adverse weather conditions are often the result of ignoring official warnings. Some motorists attempt to cross flooded

wadis out of overconfidence, assuming they can pass safely — an assumption that has led to serious and sometimes fatal consequences.

Road safety experts explain that the force of moving water cannot be accurately assessed by sight alone. Even shallow water can destabilise a vehicle, particularly when combined with strong currents or uneven terrain. In addition, floodwater may conceal hidden hazards such as debris or damaged road surfaces, increasing the likelihood of accidents.

Authorities have called on citizens and residents to stay updated with official weather bulletins and strictly follow safety instructions, avoiding travel unless necessary during severe conditions.

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SHORTTAKES



HIS MAJESTY SENDS
WRITTEN MESSAGE
TO SAUDI KING

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a written message to the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, pertaining to the fraternal relations between the two countries.

The message was delivered by Sayyid Najib bin Hilal bin Saud al Busaidy, the Sultanate of Oman’s Ambassador to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, its Permanent Representative to the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation and its Permanent Representative to the Digital Cooperation Organisation in Al Riyadh, during a meeting in Riyadh where he was received by Eng Waleed bin Abdul Kareem al Khereiji, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Saudi Arabia. — ONA

ASDS CHAIRMAN
HOLDS TALKS WITH
ITALIAN OFFICIAL



Maj Gen Hamid bin Ahmed Sakroon with Andrea Margelletti

MUSCAT: Maj Gen Hamid bin Ahmed Sakroon, Chairman of the Academy for Strategic and Defence Studies (ASDS), received in his office at Bait Al Falaj on Tuesday Andrea Margelletti, Chairman of the Italian Center for International Studies, and his accompanying delegation.

The Chairman of the Academy for Strategic and Defense Studies, welcomed the Italian official, and the two sides exchanged conversations regarding a number of topics, particularly in academic fields. — ONA

Oman, EU stress necessity of de-escalation in the region

MUSCAT: Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, on Tuesday received Luigi Di Maio, the European Union (EU) Special Representative for the Gulf Region. During the meeting, the two sides discussed opportunities and ways to halt the ongoing conflict in the region and its repercussions on the security and stability of nations, as well as its impact on international navigation and energy supplies. Both parties emphasised the importance of aligning and integrating regional



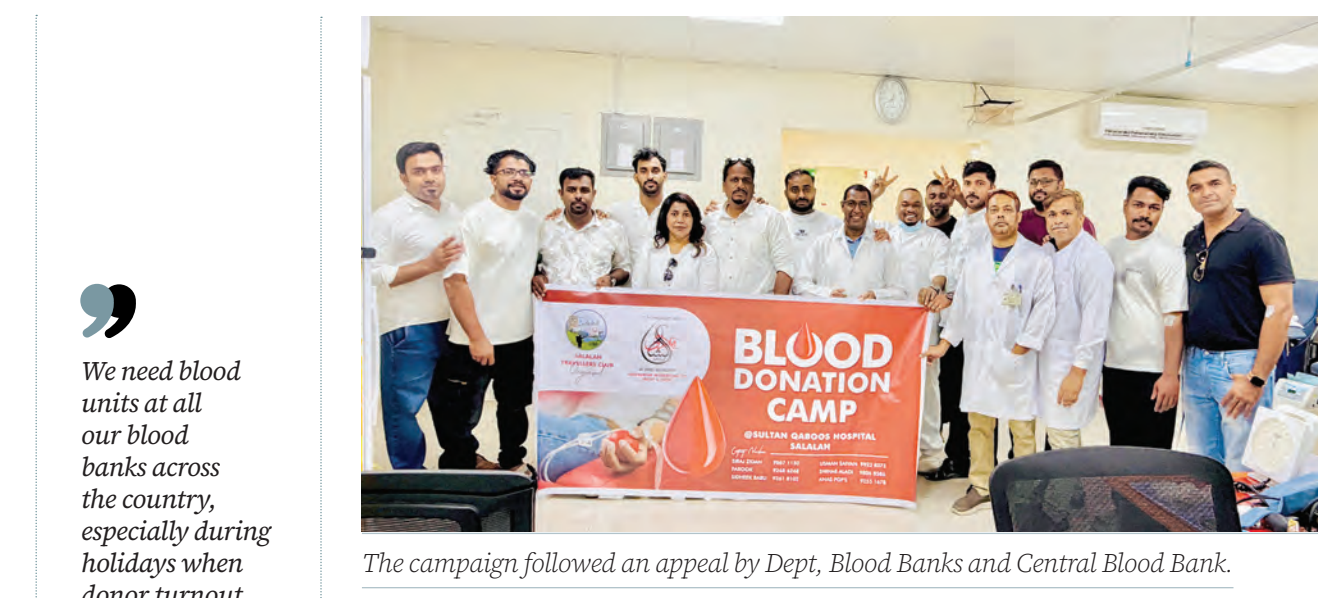
The two sides discussed opportunities and ways to halt the ongoing conflict in the region. — ONA

and international efforts, and in this context, pushing for channels of dialogue and peaceful and legal solutions. They further stressed the necessity of de-escalation through the cessation of military actions, adherence to the principles of international law and international humanitarian law, and respect for the sovereignty of states, while underscoring diplomatic efforts to address crises and achieve sustainable security and stability. — ONA

130 donate blood at Sultan Qaboos Hospital for Eid

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, MARCH 24

IN A STRONG show of community spirit, more than 130 people turned up to donate blood on Eid day at a camp organised at Sultan Qaboos Hospital, responding to a nationwide call to replenish dwindling blood bank stocks. The camp, supported by the Salalah Travels Group, witnessed a steady stream of donors from early morning, with many choosing to participate immediately after Eid prayers, setting aside personal celebrations to contribute to the humanitarian cause. Organised by Salalah Travels Group administrators — Siraj Zidan, Farooq Salalah, Usman Saiwan, Shihab Aladi and Anas Popes — the initiative saw overwhelming participation, forcing organisers to close registrations by the 1 pm deadline, with several willing donors unable to be accommodated. The drive, which began at 8 am and continued until around 1:30 pm, was attended by several community representatives, including Abdul Nasser Latif (ICF)



The campaign followed an appeal by Dept, Blood Banks and Central Blood Bank.

“We need blood units at all our blood banks across the country, especially during holidays when donor turnout typically declines

CENTRAL BLOOD BANK

and members of INCAS Salalah such as Hari Cherthala, Salim Kodungallur, Harish Kumar, Vijay Manikaparambil, Shine Abdul Kalam, Lakshmi Kumar and Kalamka. The campaign followed an appeal by the Department of Blood Banks and Central Blood Bank, which had highlighted a drop in blood reserves, particularly during holiday periods when regular donors are often unavailable.

“We need blood units at all our blood banks across the country, especially during holidays when donor turnout typically declines,” the department said in a statement, urging residents to consider blood donation a social and moral responsibility. The strong turnout in Salalah underscores growing public awareness and willingness to support life-saving initiatives, even during festive occasions.

Omani poets reflect on identity, digital change for World Poetry Day

MUSCAT: As the world marked World Poetry Day, designated by Unesco, Omani poets and writers reflected on poetry’s enduring role as a vessel of cultural identity, a voice of conscience and a powerful medium for human expression. Celebrated annually on March 21, the occasion highlights poetry’s unique ability to transcend boundaries, connect cultures and articulate the depth of human experience, even amid rapid global transformations that are reshaping modes of expression and reception. Poet Wafaa bint Hilal al Busaidy underscored poetry’s capacity to distil complex human emotions into evocative language, describing it as a medium that ‘touches hearts’ while addressing universal themes such as identity, justice and belonging. She noted that poetry in Oman remains deeply rooted in heritage, reflecting social values and traditions while strengthening individuals’ connection to their cultural roots. At the same time, she pointed out that digital platforms have transformed the poetic landscape by enabling wider and faster dissemination, though often at the cost of depth, with some contemporary texts characterised by brevity and immediacy rather than layered expression. Despite this, she stressed that poetry has not declined, but rather evolved in form and reach. Echoing similar sentiments, poet Talal al Salti described poetry as an enduring



WAFAA AL BUSAIDY

Poetess



YOUNIS AL BUSAIDY

Poet

expression of humanity, capable of conveying noble values such as honesty, integrity and pride. He highlighted its ability to resonate deeply within the emotional and psychological realms, extending beyond mere intellectual engagement. He noted that while digital transformation has made poetry more accessible than ever, it has also introduced challenges related to maintaining quality amid the pressures of instant publication and continuous audience engagement. Meanwhile, Younis bin Marhoon al Busaidy observed that contemporary poetry is at a critical juncture, navigating between modernist experimentation and traditional forms. He pointed to the rise of

‘consumer-driven’ content on digital platforms, which competes with other media formats such as video and podcasts, potentially affecting poetry’s standing among audiences. He emphasised that the challenge lies not only in preserving poetic quality but also in maintaining the essence of the poetic experience in an age of rapid consumption. For his part, Ahmed bin Mohammed al Shueili highlighted poetry’s timeless role as a guardian of truth and a reflection of human conscience. He noted that poetry’s metaphorical richness allows it to express complex realities that may be difficult to articulate directly, making it a powerful tool for defending

values and shaping societal awareness. He further stressed that Omani poetry draws strength from the country’s unique cultural and geographical landscape, embedding elements of place, tradition and identity within its imagery and language. Across these perspectives, a common thread emerged: while digital transformation has expanded poetry’s reach and accessibility, it has also introduced new challenges related to authenticity, quality and audience engagement. Yet, despite these shifts, poetry continues to endure as a vital cultural force—preserving memory, articulating identity and offering a profound reflection of the human condition in an ever-changing world. — ONA

SHORT TAKES



The session was held under the theme 'Intellectual and Cultural Horizons of Omani Civilization'.

OMANI LITERARY
VOICES BRIDGE
CULTURES AT
VIRTUAL EVENT

WASHINGTON: Reinforcing the enduring power of literature as a bridge between cultures, the Sultan Qaboos Cultural Center hosted a virtual session of its 'Poetry and Prose' series under the theme 'Intellectual and Cultural Horizons of Omani Civilization.'

The event brought together writers, intellectuals and audiences from Oman and the United States, highlighting literature's vital role in preserving cultural identity while fostering dialogue across borders. Moderated by Arwa Sawan, the session emphasised how literary expression continues to serve as a cornerstone of national identity and a dynamic platform for cultural exchange in an increasingly interconnected world.

The programme featured Lubna al Balushi, a multilingual poet recognised as the first Omani author to publish a poetry collection in German, alongside Abdulaziz al Jahdhami, an acclaimed writer and translator known for his contributions to bilingual literature.

Al Balushi's works, including 'The Beauty of the Heart' and 'Faces from the Land of Tolerance, Oman,' reflect a nuanced engagement with themes of identity and belonging. — ONA

MUSCAT MUNICIPALITY SETS REGULATIONS FOR MOBILE BEAUTY SALONS



Al Buraimi advances digital push with smart services

THE Governorate of Al Buraimi continues to advance its presence on the path of government digital transformation through a series of strategic initiatives and projects. These efforts have contributed to the enhancement of service delivery, the improvement of institutional performance efficiency, and the streamlining of procedures for beneficiaries, in line with the objectives of the National Government Digital Transformation Program.

Eng Tariq bin Hassan al Maamari, Head of the Digital Transformation Team at the Governorate of Al Buraimi, stated that the number of transactions completed digitally reached 2,805 during the period from January to December 2025.

Additionally, 25 new services were digitised, including 16 services for external beneficiaries and 9 services for employees through the 'Maktabi' system, with the aim of elevating the quality of government services and enhancing institutional efficiency in alignment with the vision for an integrated digital government.

He further noted that 'Himma' was launched as a digital portal for employees, featuring interfaces consistent with the governorate's identity. The 'Masar' platform was also introduced to monitor data, indicators, and projects through a



ENG TARIQ BIN
HASSAN
AL MAAMARI

*The e-portal
has also been
enhanced to
improve user
experience in line
with best digital
practices*



Over 2,800 transactions completed via digital channels in Al Buraimi.

digital dashboard. The first pilot phase of the artificial intelligence project has been completed, while work is underway on the second phase, which involves hosting and integration with select systems.

Al Maamari also pointed out that internal digital systems have been activated to enhance attendance management, meeting scheduling, and vehicle reservation services. In addition, the services of the 'Maktabi' system have been made available on smart devices to facilitate access for both employees and beneficiaries.

He explained that integration has been completed with several platforms, including the 'Tajawob' platform, to activate channels for receiving reports and suggestions

within a unified framework based on engagement and integration with national registries.

The Al Buraimi Governorate e-portal has also been enhanced to improve user experience in line with best digital practices, while a 'Sat Bot' service has been introduced on the governorate's website to expand intelligent communication with beneficiaries.

Furthermore, digital policies and plans related to data classification and the institutional architecture road map have been finalised, alongside integration with the 'Mawred Plus' systems and the activation of digital access services for the governorate's website and digital services portal. — ONA

MODERN
EXCHANGE



الصرافة
الحديثة

**SUMMARY OF INCOME STATEMENT – MODERN EXCHANGE CO. LLC
AS OF DECEMBER 31ST, 2025 (In RO '000)**

Operating Income	31.12.2025	31.12.2024
Interest on Deposits	8	6
Commission on Remittance	2,005	1,897
Exchange Earnings on Remittance	1,017	857
Foreign Currency Earnings	117	150
Other income	3	5
Total Operating Income	3,151	2,914
Operating Expense		
Staff Cost	1,227	1,149
Interest on Borrowings	-	-
Occupancy Costs	262	255
Bank Charges	613	556
Administration Costs	556	515
Depreciation	123	135
Write-Off	-	-
Other Expenses	77	56
Total Operating Expense	2,858	2,666
Net profit	293	248
Income Tax	55	40
Net profit and Total Comprehensive Income for the year	238	208

SUMMARY OF ASSETS AND LIABILITIES AS OF DECEMBER 31, 2025

	31-12-2025 RO.000'	31-12-2024 RO.000'		31-12-2025 RO.000'	31-12-2024 RO.000'
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES:			ASSETS:		
Capital and reserve	5,580	5,517	Cash in hand	890	1,096
Borrowing from bank	--	--	Deposit with Central Bank of Oman	170	170
Balances due to branches	--	--	Precious metals	--	--
Balances due to money exchangers	172	150	Balances due from banks	3,935	3,237
Loans and advances payable	--	--	Balances due from branches	--	--
Cheques and draft issued and outstanding	--	--	Balances due from money changers	1,303	1,548
Other liabilities	1,430	1,281	Cheques and draft purchased (collection)	--	--
			Loans and advances	--	--
			Investments	--	--
			Fixed assets	362	392
			Other assets	522	505
Total	7,182	6,948	Total	7,182	6,948

We certify that the above balances are in agreement with the books and records of Modern Exchange Company LLC as of December 31, 2025.

BDO LLC
Chartered Accountants
18-03-2026

For Modern Exchange Co. LLC

MUSCAT: Muscat Municipality has introduced a set of regulations governing the operation of mobile beauty salons, which will function from specially equipped vehicles.

According to the guidelines, licences will be granted only to already licensed women's salons that meet approved health standards.

In a statement, Muscat Municipality said, 'All mobile salon staff must be women'.

The municipality stipulated that vehicles must comply with strict health, technical and safety requirements, including the use of approved and sanitised tools and products. Equipment must be disinfected before and after each use.

'Each mobile unit is also required to be fitted with a hand-washing sink, sanitisation supplies and proper waste disposal systems, ensuring high standards of hygiene and customer safety,' the Muscat Municipality stated.



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Government Development Bonds

On behalf of the Government of the Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Finance, the Central Bank of Oman announces the 82nd Issuance of Government Development Bonds (GDBs) to be auctioned. The 82nd Issuance of GDBs will be issued on **Thursday 2nd April 2026**, carrying a coupon rate of **4.25% per annum** for a maturity period of **7 years (maturing on 2nd April 2033)**. These Bonds will be auctioned and priced on **Tuesday, 31st March 2026**. Investors may apply for these Bonds through licensed commercial banks by completing the application form.

Security of Capital

The GDBs are direct and unconditional obligations of the Government of the Sultanate of Oman.

Steady Returns

Interest shall accrue from the date of issuance and will be paid semi-annually on **2nd April and 2nd October** of every year until maturity. The first payment will be made on **2nd October 2026**. Interest payments will cease once the Bond matures.

Liquidity

The bonds will be listed and can be traded before maturity in the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) at the prevailing market price.

Collateral Advantage

The Bonds can be used as collateral security to obtain loans from any licensed commercial bank.

Who Can Invest?

The 82nd issuance of GDBs is offered to all categories of investors, residents and non-residents (irrespective of their nationalities).

How to buy the bonds?

Investors may obtain bonds through any licensed commercial bank operating in the Sultanate of Oman, upon the submission of an eligible application form. Investors must provide their MCD Investor Code in the application form.

Bank Account Details

The investor must provide the same Bank Account details registered with Muscat Clearing and Depository Co. S.A.O.C. (MCD).

MCD Investor Code

Anyone without an MCD Investor Code can obtain it from MCD's website (www.mcd.gov.om) or via the Oman Stocks app at least one day before applying through the commercial bank.

For any enquires:
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E-mail: mcd.support@mcd.om

You may also contact us via the "Contact Us" tab on the company's website.

The

82nd

Issuance

Opens: Tuesday, 24th March 2026
Closes: Monday, 30th March 2026
Auction: Tuesday, 31st March 2026

The minimum subscription amount

₹ 100

To view the prospectus for the 82nd issuance of GDBs, please visit the following websites:

Ministry of Finance | www.mof.gov.om
Central Bank of Oman | www.cbo.gov.om

Contact the Central Bank of Oman (Market Operations Department) or any commercial licensed bank for details.
Tel: +968 24822222 / 24822303 / 24822302 / 24822260
P.O Box 1161, Postal Code 112, Sultanate of Oman

WAR

- 1

IRAN ARRESTS

Iranian authorities said that 466 people have been arrested, accused of seeking to destabilise the country through their online activity.
- 2

GULF ‘BREAKDOWN’

The Gulf states will need to re-evaluate their shared security, which has resulted in a “breakdown of the security system,” Qatar foreign ministry said.
- 3

IRAN ENVOY OUT

Lebanon withdrew the accreditation of Iran’s ambassador and gave him until Sunday to leave the country.
- 4

ISFAHAN STRIKES

Israel’s military said that it had completed a “large wave of strikes in Isfahan.”
- 5

SECURITY ZONE

Israel’s Defence Minister Israel Katz said the military would take control of south Lebanon up to the Litani River as a “security zone”.

Israel’s army said it had conducted a “large wave” of air strikes across several areas of Iran, which had earlier launched a “direct hit” on a building in an upscale area of Tel Aviv. Images showed rubble-strewn streets and the side of a three-storey building

IRAN AND Israel traded strikes on Tuesday, as the Middle East war showed no sign of de-escalation despite US President Donald Trump signalling “very good talks” to end the three-week conflict. The war, sparked by US-Israel attacks on Iran that killed its supreme leader, has upended global energy markets, roiled the world economy, and spiralled throughout the region — even dragging in safe-haven Gulf nations.

Israel’s army said it had conducted a “large wave” of air strikes across several areas of Iran, which had earlier launched a “direct hit” on a building in an upscale area of Tel Aviv. Images showed rubble-strewn streets and the side of a three-storey building in Israel’s commercial hub in ruins, as first responders scrambled to assist at least four people lightly injured at four different locations. According to several Israeli media outlets, police believe the damage was caused by a cluster munition missile equipped with three to four warheads, each carrying around 100 kilograms of explosives.

Earlier, Iranian media reported US-Israeli warplanes had struck two gas facilities and a pipeline, hours after Trump stepped back from his threat to attack energy sites, citing negotiations to end the war. Trump said his administration was speaking with an unidentified “top person”, warning if talks failed in the next five days “we’ll just keep bombing our little hearts out”. But Tehran’s parliamentary speaker, Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, reportedly involved in talks, said “no negotiations” were underway, accusing Trump of seeking “to manipulate the financial and oil markets.” Stock markets soared and oil prices saw brief respite after Trump’s abrupt about-turn that came ahead of a deadline he had set to reopen the Strait of Hormuz shipping lane or see the US “obliterate” Iran’s power plants.

US media outlet Axios reported US negotiators Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner may meet an Iranian delegation for talks in Pakistan as soon as this week, with Vice-President JD Vance possibly joining. White House spokeswoman Karoline Leavitt did not deny the reports, saying “speculation about meetings should not be deemed as final until they are formally announced by the White House.” Pakistan’s Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said on Monday he spoke with Iran’s President Masoud Pezeshkian, promising Islamabad’s help to bring peace to the region. “Pakistan is one of the few countries with warm ties with both Tehran and Washington,” said Michael Kugelman from the Atlantic Council think tank.

“It’s been engaging heavily at the highest levels with both capitals over the last year, going back to the brief Iran conflict last summer,” he noted. Traditional mediator Qatar said on Tuesday it “supports all diplomatic efforts” to end the war.

Israel pounded Beirut’s southern suburbs throughout the night, while a strike on Bshamoun, south of the capital, killed two people on Tuesday, according to Lebanon’s health ministry. “There’s nothing left. It’s all burned or destroyed... No walls, the windows are gone, the facade is gone, all my hard work has been lost,” said Abbas Qassem, 55 from Bshamoun, weeping at the damage to his flat. In Beirut, images showed smoke billowing from gutted buildings, as rescuers picked through the rubble and twisted metal. Strikes also targeted several service stations linked to Iran-backed Hezbollah, which Israel has vowed to dismantle.

Israel’s attacks in Lebanon have killed more than 1,000 people, according to Lebanon’s health ministry, and displaced more than a million others. The war has killed at least 3,230 Iranians, including 1,406 civilians, according to the US-based Human Rights Activists News Agency. Underscoring the war’s broad impact, Iraq’s autonomous Kurdistan region accused Iran of killing six of its fighters in the first deadly attack on the regional security forces since the start of hostilities. And Qatar said the war had caused the “breakdown of the security system in the Gulf region.”

Iran’s neighbours had breathed a sigh of relief after Trump stepped back from an earlier threat to target the country’s power infrastructure. Tehran had vowed to deploy naval mines and strike power and water infrastructure across the region in retaliation, threatening to escalate an energy crisis of already historic proportions. “Trump has been a master of sudden pivots and switches. So it’s sometimes hard to know if there is a strategy or if it’s just always improvisation,” said Garret Martin, a professor of international relations at American University in Washington.

Since the war erupted, Tehran has retaliated by throttling traffic through the Strait of Hormuz, a conduit for one-fifth of global crude, and by hitting Gulf energy sites and US embassies as well as targets in Israel. International Energy Agency chief Fatih Birol warned if the war is protracted, daily oil losses would pave the way for a crisis worse than the combined impact of both 1970s oil shocks and Russia’s attack of Ukraine. Oil prices, which had tumbled after Trump’s comments, rebounded slightly in Tuesday trade, with Brent back above \$100 a barrel. — AFP



Israeli soldiers arrive to check an Iranian missile fragment that landed in the West Bank. — AFP

IRAN, ISRAEL TRADE STRIKES DESPITE TRUMP NEGOTIATIONS

WAR

- 6

UN RIGHTS MEET

The UN Human Rights Council said it will hold an urgent meeting on Wednesday on Iran’s strikes on countries in the Gulf region.
- 7

IRAN ENERGY SITES HIT

Iranian media reported that Israeli-US strikes targeted two gas facilities and a pipeline, hours after Trump stepped back from his threat.
- 8

WOUNDED IN TEL AVIV

Four people were wounded in Tel Aviv, where police reported several impact sites after the military warned of incoming missiles from Iran.
- 9

TWO KILLED NEAR BEIRUT

An Israeli strike on Bshamoun, a town south of Beirut which lies outside of the traditional strongholds of Hezbollah, killed at least two people, Lebanon’s health ministry said.
- 10

IRAQ DEATHS

A strike in western Iraq killed 15 fighters, including Saad Dawai al-Bajji, provincial commander and head of operations in Anbar.

Deadly strikes in Iraq blamed on US, Iran

BAGHDAD: An air strike in Iraq killed 15 members of a former paramilitary coalition, the deadliest attack on the group since the Middle East war began, as missile fire elsewhere killed six Kurdish security personnel. The Hashed al Shaabi coalition, part of Iraq’s regular armed forces but which also includes brigades belonging to Iran-backed groups, blamed the strike that killed a commander and 14 other fighters on the United States. In Kurdistan region, a ballistic missile attack killed six peshmerga fighters, with the region accusing Iran of conducting the first such deadly attack on Kurdish security forces since the war began. Neither the United States nor Iran commented on the accusations.

In a statement, the Hashed al Shaabi, also known as the Popular Mobilisation Forces (PMF), said those killed in the strike targeting its fighters included a top provincial commander. It described the strike as a “treacherous American attack that targeted the operation headquarters”. Last week, the Pentagon acknowledged that combat helicopters had carried out strikes against pro-Iran armed groups in Iraq during the current conflict. On Tuesday, the PMF urged “political forces to take responsibility and confront these repeated American violations”.

A security official said the building was coalition leader Faleh al-Fayyad’s second home, adding that he was not present during the attack. — AFP



Members of Iraq’s Hashed al Shaabi guard the streets. — AFP



Rubio to meet G7 ministers in France on Iran

WASHINGTON: US Secretary of State Marco Rubio will meet G7 counterparts in France on Friday on the war in Iran, the State Department announced. The trip comes after President Donald Trump announced that the United States has been talking with Iran — a claim denied by Tehran — as he put on pause his threat to destroy the country’s electricity production. Rubio, in his first foreign trip since the United States and Israel attacked Iran on February 28, will join the G7 foreign ministers’ talks in Cernay-la-Ville, near Versailles on the outskirts of Paris, the State Department announced on Tuesday. — AFP



Frank-Walter Steinmeier

the justification of an imminent attack on the US does not hold water,” he added. Germany’s head of government, Chancellor Friedrich Merz, has harshly criticised Iran’s leadership and backed several key US-Israeli war goals. But he has also stated that, had Berlin been

consulted in advance, it “would have advised against” the war.

Steinmeier called the military campaign “a politically disastrous mistake” and “a truly avoidable, unnecessary war”. “Realism means we must be pragmatic in our dealings with this US administration and focus on our core interests,” he said. “But realism also means we must not compromise our own principles.” He added: “The US government has a different world view to ours, one that shows no regard for established rules, partnership or hard-won trust. “We cannot change that. We must deal with it. But this is my conviction: we have no reason to align ourselves with this world view.”

Volker Beck, president of the German-Israeli Society, labelled Steinmeier’s comments on the war “grossly inappropriate” and said they displayed a “smug know-it-all attitude”. Tuesday’s comments were not the first time the German president has criticised the United States. In January, shortly after the US intervention in Venezuela, Steinmeier spoke of a “breakdown of values” in the United States and insisted the world must not be allowed to turn into a “den of thieves”. — AFP

Philippines declares ‘national energy emergency’

MANILA: Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos declared a state of “national energy emergency” on Tuesday, citing risks to the domestic fuel supply and energy stability created by the Middle East war. The state of emergency was declared just hours after the country’s energy secretary said the Philippines planned to boost the output of its coal-fired power plants to keep electricity costs down as the war wreaks havoc with gas shipments.

“A state of national energy emergency is hereby declared in light of the ongoing conflict in the Middle East, and the resulting imminent danger posed upon the availability and stability of the country’s energy supply,” the executive order released on Tuesday evening said. The order authorises the country’s Department of Energy to make advance payments of 15 per cent to secure fuel contracts while taking direct action against hoarding or profiteering. “The declaration... will enable the government, through the (energy department) and other concerned agencies, to implement responsive and coordinated measures under existing laws to address the risks posed by disruptions in the global energy supply and the domestic economy,” the order said.

The order also grants the transportation department the ability to direct public transportation fuel subsidies and reduce or suspend toll charges and aviation fees, while fast-tracking aid to individuals in “crisis situations”. — AFP



A Filipino activist holds a sign as they protest outside the US Embassy, in Manila. — Reuters

Iran names new security chief

TEHRAN: Iran named on Tuesday a former Revolutionary Guards commander to succeed Ali Larijani as head of Iran’s Supreme National Security Council after the veteran insider of the Islamic system was killed in an Israeli strike. Mohammad Bagher Zolghadr, whose appointment was confirmed by state TV, is a former deputy commander-in-chief of Iran’s ideological army who has also held senior posts in the interior and justice ministries. Larijani was killed last week in an Israeli strike, ending the life of one of the most heavyweight non-clerical figures in Iranian politics who had been seen as a possible pointman in any eventual talks with the United States.

Zolghadr’s career has been embedded in the Revolutionary Guards, whose stated aim is to protect the Islamic revolution from internal and external threats. After serving in



Mohammad Bagher Zolghadr

the 1980s war against Iraq, Zolghadr was the head of the Guards joint staff for eight years, and then as the deputy commander-in-chief of the Guards for another eight years. In 2005, he was named deputy interior minister for security and police in the government of then president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, a move that was seen at the time as bolstering the Guards’ influence in politics. — AFP

OPINION

When the rain disrupts, home becomes the anchor



HYESHA BARRETT
The writer is a Master Life Coach and Positive Parent Specialist

THERE IS something about unexpected rain in a place so accustomed to sunshine. It does more than interrupt plans; it unsettles the rhythm, energy, and emotional climate within our homes. As the Eid holidays came to a close, many families were still immersed in the softness of celebration. Mornings were slower, routines looser, and there was a sense of ease from shared time and connection. Towards the end of the holidays, the skies opened, and with that, plans shifted. Heavy rains led to flooding in parts of the country, movement became restricted, and schools transitioned online for a few days. Almost instantly, the home expanded to hold everything once again: a place of rest, learning, work, and emotional processing all at once.

This shift is not only felt by children; it is deeply experienced by parents, especially those who are working. Professional responsibilities continue, deadlines remain, and meetings go on, yet there is now the added role of supporting online learning and holding the emotional tone of the home. The mental load increases significantly. What may appear as a temporary adjustment can feel like a constant balancing act, where attention is pulled in multiple directions. In these moments, there is often an

unspoken pressure to hold everything together. To be present for work, attentive to children, and composed throughout. This can create tension, frustration, and even guilt when expectations feel unmet. The reality is that this is not a normal setup. It is a merging of multiple roles within the same space. Acknowledging this allows for a softening of expectations, both towards oneself and towards the day as it unfolds.

Children, in parallel, are navigating their own internal shifts. A disruption in routine, a change in their social environment, and a subtle sense of uncertainty can all surface in different ways. Behaviour, in these moments, becomes communication. Resistance, distraction, or clinginess are often signs of dysregulation rather than defiance. When the external world feels unpredictable, children instinctively look for stability, most often found in the presence of a calm, attuned parent.

Home-based learning also brings its own complexity. Psychologically, home is associated with rest and safety, while school represents structure and expectation. When these two environments merge, children can struggle to find their footing. Focus, motivation, and emotional regulation may fluctuate, not because something is wrong, but because their environment is asking them to hold two opposing states at once.

Creating small pockets of focused work time, alongside moments of connection with children, can ease the sense of overwhelm

In situations like these, creating a gentle rhythm can be more supportive than trying to replicate a structured school day. A sense of flow, with clear beginnings and endings to learning, balanced with moments of rest and connection, can help children regulate more easily. Small shifts, such as designating a space or time for schoolwork, can provide structure without losing the emotional safety of home.

For parents, this rhythm applies just as much. Rather than striving to meet every expectation perfectly, it can be helpful to prioritise what is essential, and allow flexibility where needed. Creating small pockets of focused work time, alongside moments of connection with children, can ease the sense of overwhelm. In doing so, parents are managing the day while modelling adaptability and self-compassion.

As the rain settles and routines begin to return, there is value in reflecting on what this moment has revealed. Disruptions often show us where pressure builds, where connection is needed, and how we respond when life does not go as planned. Within that awareness lies an opportunity to shift towards presence.

In the end, it is not how smoothly everything ran that children will remember, but how safe, seen, and supported they felt within the experience.

‘Perfect Japan’ posts spark Gen Z social media backlash

Take an everyday video on any suburban transport network, add anime-style music and a rosy filter, and it’s suddenly a scene from the Japanese holiday of your dreams.

That’s the “Japan effect”: a Gen Z social media trend satirising the often-romanticised image of the Asian country, which welcomed a record number of visitors last year.

Residents of Kyoto and other tourist hotspots have expressed exasperation with selfie-taking crowds, and now an online backlash against Japan fever is growing.

The short video posts on platforms like TikTok show how even just the words “Tokyo, Japan” with a cherry blossom emoji can make an otherwise banal street scene more appealing for some users.

“The point is to make fun of Japan’s ‘cute’ image online, with all its cliches and stereotypes,” 25-year-old French YouTuber Rocky Louzembí, who analyses Internet culture, said.

But some people take their love of Japan too far, said Louzembí, who goes by the handle rockylevrai.

To describe the phenomenon, he used the slang word “glazing” — to excessively praise something.

A “Japan glazer” is “someone who puts everything that comes from Japan on a pedestal, while disparaging things that come from their own country”, Louzembí said.

Japan logged a record 42.7 million tourist arrivals in 2025, despite a steep fall in Chinese visitors in December due to a diplomatic row.

Many visitors post online about their trip — making pilgrimages to real-life locations from cartoons or joking about spending \$1,000 on flights just so they can eat a \$1 convenience store rice ball.

“The ‘Japan’ portrayed in an anime world is often quite different from how Japanese society is”, said Marika Sato, a 29-year-old who works in marketing in Tokyo.

Some of the online Gen Z pushback focuses on the exaggerated idea that Japan’s streets are so spotless that people don’t even have to wear shoes.

“Japan is clean but not THAT clean,” joked a US couple who post social media content about the country under the name The Hitobito — showing off their dirty white socks after a real-life experiment.

Japan’s tourist boom has forced some authorities to take action. A cherry blossom festival boasting a highly Instagrammable view of Mount Fuji was cancelled this year after residents complained of overtourism. — AFP

How innovation expands Oman’s space economy

THE MORE I see societies hit and miss when it comes to the digital economy, the more I’m impressed by sustainable strategic disruptive programmes that end up making an impact, especially in my field of the entrepreneurship and startups ecosystem.

This is because history shows that nations make their biggest leaps when institutions adopt new tools before they become mainstream. From the astronomical breakthroughs of the Abbasid era to the rise of maritime trade in the Indian Ocean, early adopters consistently shape the future. In 2026, the Sultanate of Oman is demonstrating this pattern through two seemingly different but deeply connected initiatives: the launch of an AI-powered satellite and a transformative push toward mastery in endowment or Waqf investment, revealed in a recent The Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs (MoARA) press conference.

Together, they reveal how disruptive innovation can accelerate progress across both advanced technology and traditional institutions. Following the momentum of Aman-1 in 2023, Oman is preparing to launch a new AI-equipped satellite in the first half of 2026. Developed by Oman Lens, the platform will deliver 50-centimetre high-resolution imaging and onboard artificial intelligence capable of hundreds of trillions of operations per second.

This capability allows data to be processed in orbit, reducing costs and enabling near-real-time insights for agriculture, urban planning, environmental monitoring, and disaster response. The mission involves partnerships with Star Vision Space, the Bahrain



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Disruptive innovation is not limited to startups. Public institutions can also become early adopters, driving new industries while strengthening social foundations.

Space Agency, and Sultan Qaboos University, reinforcing Oman’s ambition to become a regional hub for space logistics and satellite data services.

Yet the most important story is economic. The global space economy is projected to exceed RO 1.5 trillion within the next decade. Within this, the satellite data and downstream analytics segment, the part most relevant to Oman, represents an estimated RO 115 billion total addressable market (TAM) globally.

For the Arab region, a realistic serviceable obtainable market (SOM) over the next decade is estimated at RO 1.1-1.5 billion, driven by demand for climate monitoring, smart cities, logistics, energy and maritime services. If Oman captures even 3-5 per cent of this regional SOM, the potential revenue opportunity could reach RO 33-75 million annually within the coming decade.

For a nation investing strategically in diversification, this is not a niche sector. It is the foundation of a new knowledge economy.

Perhaps the most immediate beneficiaries are the approximately 25 emerging space startups in Oman, as announced by the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MoTCIT). Early-stage space ecosystems depend heavily on anchor projects that create demand for services, talent and partnerships.

A single national satellite mission can generate entire downstream industries. This is exactly how neighbouring countries like the UAE and India accelerated their space startup ecosystems over the past decade. The lesson is simple: government investment in frontier technology reduces risk for entrepreneurs. It signals long-term commitment and unlocks private-

sector confidence.

While Oman looks to orbit, another transformation is taking place on the ground. MERA has declared 2026 the “Year of Mastery,” signalling a shift toward advanced financial management and digital transformation.

This transformation reminds us one of the most powerful financial innovations in Islamic history: the waqf system. For centuries, endowments funded universities, hospitals, water systems, and public infrastructure across the Islamic world. These institutions thrived because waqf assets were professionally managed and strategically invested.

Today’s digital transformation represents a modern revival of that legacy. Seen together, these initiatives illustrate a powerful national strategy: disruptive innovation is not limited to startups. Public institutions can also become early adopters, driving new industries while strengthening social foundations.

Oman’s satellite programme expands the country’s presence in the global space economy. The modernisation of waqf investment strengthens financial sustainability and social resilience.

Both initiatives align directly with Oman Vision 2040’s goals of diversification, knowledge creation, and sustainable development.

Societies that lead in new industries rarely begin as leaders. They become leaders by investing early, building talent, and creating ecosystems. Oman’s 2026 initiatives send a clear signal: the country is not waiting for the future to arrive. It is building it, from the ground to the sky. And history suggests that early adopters of disruptive innovation rarely remain followers for long, inshAllah.

As war rages, a quieter catastrophe is unfolding



SAMUEL KUTTY

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

SINCE February 28, the global security landscape has experienced severe instability following the outbreak of war between the United States, Israel, and Iran. The main focus of headlines now centres on loss of life, oil prices, geopolitical tensions and military build-up. Yet, there is another aspect that often goes unmentioned, particularly that which affects the broader environment and ecology. We have observed that within days of the initial US-Israel strikes, energy itself became a direct battleground, as attacks and counterattacks targeted fossil fuel infrastructure.

The Strait of Hormuz has become a flashpoint, with dozens of tankers carrying billions of litres of oil trapped in the Persian Gulf. Military operations and explosions involving vessels and coastal installations risk releasing oil, chemicals and other hazardous materials into the waters.

“The headlines are dominated by oil prices, geopolitical brinkmanship and military escalation. However, beneath the surface of the Arabian Gulf, a quieter catastrophe is taking shape, one that will outlast any ceasefire”, reported Sevenseas Media in its March 2026 edition.

The Arabian Gulf and the Sea of Oman together form a marine system covering hundreds of thousands of square kilometres and are reported to host more than 5,000 marine species, highlighting the ecological significance of the region. Among the most important habitats are coral reefs, mangrove

forests and seagrass beds.

The Arabian Gulf is a shallow, semi-enclosed body of water with an average depth of approximately 35 metres and limited water circulation with the open ocean. As a result, pollutants can remain trapped in the marine environment for extended periods, thereby increasing their ecological impact.

Corals are highly sensitive to pollution, sedimentation and temperature changes. Previous episodes of coral bleaching, linked to pollution and warming waters, have already damaged reef systems across this strategically important body of water.

Even before the escalation of conflict at the end of February, the Gulf’s ecosystem was already under stress from climate change and heavy maritime traffic.

A 2017 study by Joydas et al reported “alarming levels” of hydrocarbons persisting in secluded bay areas. However, a 2024 study published in Marine Pollution Bulletin found that 63.5 per cent of the Gulf’s key habitats and species remain “data-deficient”.

According to the United States’ National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the consequences of a large oil spill on marine ecosystems can be felt for decades, not just years. “Oil destroys the insulating fur of sea otters and the feathers of marine birds, exposing them to hypothermia. It suffocates coral, poisons fish, shellfish, dolphins and whales, blocks sunlight from reaching the ocean floor and dismantles entire food chains”, the report states.

UK-based non-profit Conflict and

While the main focus of headlines now centres on loss of life, oil prices, geopolitical tensions and military build-up, yet, there is another aspect that often unmentioned — particularly that which affects the broader environment and ecology

Environment Observatory highlights in a report, “when oil facilities are bombed — as they have been in Iran and other Gulf states — they can release plumes of toxic pollutants that may spread to nearby communities and accumulate on roads, roofs, soils and croplands”. It is clear that military activities can simultaneously produce various forms of pollution. Oil spills may occur if tankers or offshore installations are damaged, while explosions can release hazardous substances from ship cargo or industrial systems. Debris from damaged ships may also bring heavy metals, paints and insulating materials into ocean waters.

Greenpeace Middle East and North Africa, in a report, lamented, “Ecological warfare, as well as attacks on oil infrastructure, tankers and other facilities, are raising concerns about a major environmental disaster in the region”.

While warning against the destruction of the environment and its impact on our livelihoods, it stated, “The natural world cannot be rebuilt overnight. The people of this region deserve a future where the land beneath their feet, the water they drink, and the air they breathe are not poisoned by war”.

In a region already vulnerable to extreme weather events, water scarcity and food insecurity, instead of dedicating every moment to resolving these issues, war rages on alongside the globe’s key oil transport route, “disputing whose missile is less specific and wagering with a sea that shows no political loyalties and no concern for our conflicts”.

IN LEBANON’S TYRE, ANCIENT SITE THREATENED BY ISRAELI BOMBS

CÉLIA LEBUR

At an archaeological site in southern Lebanon’s Tyre, small signs bearing a blue and white emblem provide a symbolic shield, meant to protect the ancient ruins from bombardment.

One of the oldest cities on the Mediterranean coast, Tyre is located around 20 km from the Israeli border and has been the target of several strikes since Lebanon was drawn into the Middle East war by Hezbollah’s March 2 rocket attack on Israel.

The Al Bass site is centred on a necropolis that dates back three millennia to Tyre’s time as a major Phoenician city and was still in use until the Arab conquests of the 7th Century.

An organisation linked to Unesco, the United Nations’ cultural heritage agency, launched the signs initiative near the site, part of a push that covers more than 30 locations across the country.

It is a reminder that the 1954 Hague Convention obliges warring parties to protect cultural property. On March 6, an Israeli strike hit just a few metres away, killing eight people according to Lebanon’s health ministry.

The target, a family home, is now a pile of rubble. “They were our neighbours... They thought that being close to an archaeological site protected them, that because this is a World Heritage site it would not be struck”, said Nader Saqlawi, director of archaeological excavations in the south for Lebanon’s culture ministry.

The team from the ministry that came to inspect possible damage to the monuments found human remains — “a hand and pieces of flesh” — on the roof of the site’s museum, which is still under construction, he said.

The museum suffered damage, its windows were blown out, but the explosion did not reach the necropolis nor the Roman-era triumphal arch, aqueducts and hippodrome that are also part of the site. In antiquity, the city of Tyre was at various times Phoenician, Persian, Hellenistic, Roman and Byzantine.

While many of its inhabitants have fled the latest war, others remain alongside the city’s precious relics. Lebanese Culture Minister Ghassan Salame condemned what he called Israel’s aggression. “The archaeological sites do not contain any military or security presence. Therefore, this argument cannot be used to justify their bombing”, he said.

There was no immediate comment in response to AFP’s request from the Israeli army, which usually says it is targeting Hezbollah with its attacks. “Lebanon is full of archaeological riches... and the Beirut depots do not have the capacity to accommodate all these threatened objects”, said David Sassine, an expert at the International Alliance for the Protection of Heritage. — AFP

Mamdani shows what government can do

FOR DECADES, New York City has been held up as both the promise and the failure of American capitalism. It is a city of immense wealth and relentless inequality, where luxury towers rise beside overcrowded apartments and working families struggle to afford rent in the very neighbourhoods they sustain. But since Zohran Mamdani became mayor, something noticeable has begun to change, not only in policy, but in how New Yorkers understand what the government is supposed to do.

Perhaps the most striking development has been Mamdani’s willingness to treat public office as a tool for public good rather than corporate accommodation. One of his earliest achievements was reaching an agreement with President Donald Trump to expand affordable housing construction across the city. In a place where housing costs have pushed teachers, service workers and even middle-income professionals out of their communities, the commitment to building accessible housing marks a significant departure from decades of market-driven urban policy. Instead of waiting for private developers to solve the crisis, the city has stepped in directly.

Housing, however, is only one part of a broader vision. Mamdani has also proposed higher taxes on large corporations and ultra-wealthy residents, a move that immediately sparked criticism from business interests but resonated strongly with ordinary New Yorkers. The logic behind the policy is straightforward: cities function because of public infrastructure, workers and shared services, yet the greatest financial burden has long fallen on those with the least ability to pay. Redirecting resources from extreme wealth toward public programmes challenges a long-standing assumption in American politics that taxing the rich inevitably harms economic growth.

For many residents, the most



Mayor Zohran Mamdani speaks at a press conference at New York’s LaGuardia Airport in Queens, New York, US, on Monday. — Reuters

tangible example of this shift has been the administration’s push toward free childcare to start in September. In a city where childcare costs often rival rent payments, working parents, particularly women, have historically faced impossible choices between employment and caregiving. By treating childcare as public infrastructure rather than a private luxury, Mamdani’s policies recognise something many European countries accepted long ago: economic participation depends on social support systems.

Critics predicted chaos. Instead, early indicators suggest stability. Crime rates have continued to decline. Mamdani’s approach emphasises prevention rather than punishment, investing in housing, services and community stability rather than relying exclusively on policing. The result challenges decades of fear-based messaging that framed social welfare policies as incompatible with public safety.

One moment that captured this change came during the recent snowstorm that paralysed parts of the city. Rather than relying solely on overstretched municipal crews, Mamdani called on New Yorkers themselves to help clear sidewalks and streets, and crucially, ensured that participants were paid \$35 an hour, far above minimum wage,



OMAN AL YAHYAI

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Generations of Americans have been taught that socialist policies inevitably undermine freedom or prosperity. Yet what New Yorkers are witnessing under Mamdani looks far less radical than advertised

SPORTS

His Majesty’s Camel Racing Festival to be held from March 28 in Barka



HUMAID BIN ALI AL ZAREI
Director General of the Royal Camel Corps at the Royal Court Affairs.

THE ROYAL CAMEL Corps has announced the race schedule for the His Majesty the Sultan’s Camel Racing Festival 2026, which will take place from March 28 to April 2, at Al Fulaij Racetrack in the Wilayat of Barka, Al Batinah South

Governorate. The festival comprises 85 races across various camel categories.

Humaid bin Ali al Zarei, Director General of the Royal Camel Corps at the Royal Court Affairs, stated that camel racing in the Sultanate of Oman enjoys unwavering support and patronage from His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, reflecting the sport’s significance and its role as a deeply rooted cultural heritage of the Sultanate of Oman, in addition to its vital contribution to the preservation of authentic Omani camel breeds.

Al Zarei affirmed that the Royal Camel Corps is committed to enriching and advancing camel racing in the Sultanate of Oman by organising His Majesty the Sultan’s Camel Racing Festival each season, offering valuable prizes to the winning she-camels across all races as a gesture of support to owners and trainers. The festival also features races for long-distance “Al Ardah” (with human riders), alongside “Al Zamt” racing, which constitutes the foundational racing style observed today. Following the qualifying rounds, the winning she-camels in this category will be felicitated with valuable prizes on the closing day. He added that the festival will also feature an accompanying heritage village, showcasing selected products and achievements of the Royal Court Affairs, alongside traditional handicrafts and products from small businesses, as well as heritage performances and activities and competitions for children. Al Zarei noted that the Royal Camel Corps, through its various committees, has finalised all technical preparations for the festival and its associated heritage village, which will run from March 28 to April 2, 2026.

The Royal Camel Corps has announced that it will purchase the she-camels that secure first place in races one through five on the final day. — ONA



The festival comprises 85 races across various camel categories.



Oman drawn in tough group at 6th Asian Beach Games

RIYADH AL BALUSHI
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Oman’s national beach handball team has been drawn into Group B of the 6th Asian Beach Games, which will be held in Sanya, China, from April 22 to 30, following the official draw conducted recently.

Group B features Oman alongside Pakistan, Jordan, the Maldives, Bangladesh, Thailand, Qatar and Mongolia, making it one of the most competitive groups in the tournament due to the closely matched levels of the participating teams and the rapid development of beach handball across Asia in recent years.

Meanwhile, Group A includes China, Iran, the Philippines, Hong Kong, India, Sri Lanka and Bahrain, highlighting the strong level of competition expected in the tournament, which will witness wide participation



Head coach Hamoud bin Salem al Hassani.

from across the continent.

The Omani team is set to begin its training sessions today at the sand court of the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher under the leadership of head coach Hamoud bin Salem al Hassani, assisted by Jaber bin Yaqoub al Balushi. The coaching staff aims to make the most of the current



The Omani team is set to begin its training sat the sand court of the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher.

preparation period to enhance the players’ physical and technical readiness ahead of the competition.

A squad of 16 players has been selected for the first phase of preparations, which will run from March 23 to 31. The squad includes: Yasser bin Saeed al Harthy, Saeed bin Hamad al Hassani, Nawaf bin Khalid al Hassani, Saud

bin Nasser al Hassani, Azzan bin Najeeb al Maashari, Hamad bin Hamoud al Hassani, Al Yazan bin Yahya al Busaidy (Muscat Club), Mahdi bin Salem al Sulaimani, Ali bin Salem al Jamii, Muhannad bin Saeed al Zarafi, Mohammed bin Abdulmajeed al Balushi (Seeb Club), Hudhaifa bin Suwaid al Siyabi, Bashar bin Yaqoub

al Hinai, Saeed bin Issa al Hassani, Abdulhakim bin Abdullah al Siyabi ‘Oman Club’ and Asaad bin Saeed al Hassani ‘Al Amerat Club’. The squad will be reduced after the first phase, with daily training continuing from April 1 to 4, before entering a domestic training camp from April 5 to 10. The list will then be trimmed to

10 players ahead of the final preparation stage scheduled for April 11 and 12.

On April 13, the team will depart for an overseas training camp in either Thailand or China, running until April 19, during which several friendly matches will be played to boost match readiness and overall performance.

The delegation will then travel to China on April 20, where Oman will play a friendly match upon arrival to acclimatise to the conditions before the official start of the competition on April 22.

The team’s technical and administrative staff includes head coach Hamoud bin Salem al Hassani, assistant coach Jaber bin Yaqoub al Balushi, team manager Saeed bin Ali al Hassani, administrator Talib bin Afandi al Balushi; and physiotherapist Hossam El Din Adly Abdelhamid.

SHORTTAKES



Oman players in action during a beach soccer training session in Bausher.

BEACH SOCCER TEAM
STEP UP ASIAN BEACH
GAMES BUILD-UP

SPORTS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 24

Oman's national beach soccer team have intensified their daily training sessions at the sand pitch of Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher as part of their fifth preparatory camp ahead of the 6th Asian Beach Games, to be held in Sanya, China, from April 22 to 30.

The current training camp runs from March 23 to 30 and includes two friendly matches against Belarus, offering the technical staff an important chance to assess the squad's readiness before the upcoming continental challenge.

The squad for this camp remains unchanged from the previous gathering, with head coach Talib bin Hilal al Thanawi retaining the same 16 players. The list includes Khalid al Oraiimi, Abdullah al Sooti, Ahmed al Mashikhi, Sami al Balushi, Ahmed al Owaisi, Salem al Oraiimi, Al Yaqdhan al Hindasi, Khalfan al Ghazali, Younis al Owaisi, Fahad al Mashikhi, Musllam al Oraiimi, Mohammed al Oraiimi, Majid al Afari, Abdulrahman al Fazaari, Zakariya al Qurtoobi and Qusai al Balushi.

Belarus arrive for friendlies
Belarus arrived in Muscat early on Tuesday to play two friendlies against Oman on March 26 and 28. Oman will play the first match on Thursday at 7 pm, before meeting the same opponents again on Saturday at 5 pm. Both matches will be held at the sand pitch of Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher.

For Oman, the friendlies represent a valuable test against one of the strongest teams in world beach soccer. Belarus are ranked fourth in the world in the latest international rankings issued in January, while Oman are placed 11th, underlining the quality of opposition and the technical value of the two matches.

The draw for the Asian Beach Games placed Oman in Group A alongside hosts China and Palestine, while Group B features Iran, the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Thailand.



Oman's national volleyball team's last presence was in July as they had secured the bronze medal at the West Asia Men's Volleyball Championship.

Oman to host West Asian
Volleyball events in Muscat

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MARCH 24

THE OMAN Volleyball Association (OVA) will host two major events this year including West Asian Volleyball Championship (Indoor) in July and West Asian Beach Volleyball Championship in December. Both events are scheduled in this year calendar as the national team (indoor) under the technical guidance of the Tunisian coach Nizar El Shukaili will eye to perform a top show in this event. The indoor event will take place during July 11 to 21 in Muscat while the beach tournament dates in December will be confirmed later.

Oman's national volleyball team's last presence was in July as they had secured the bronze medal at the West Asia Men's Volleyball Championship which was hosted in Bahrain in July last year. Oman team had managed to defeat Saudi Arabia 3-1 (25-19, 20-25, 28-18, 25-22) in the third-place playoff. During the event, Oman had played six matches including three in the group stage. The team recorded a victory over Kuwait but suffered defeats against Saudi Arabia and Qatar.

Oman had advanced to the quarterfinals where they had defeated UAE to reach the semifinals. In the last four, they had faced Qatar once again but suffered a loss and then set up a rematch against Saudi Arabia in the playoff for third place. The championship had featured the



Oman's national volleyball team's last presence was in July as they had secured the bronze medal at the West Asia Men's Volleyball.



participation of eight teams of the West Asia Volleyball Federation. The teams were divided into two groups: Group A included Bahrain, Jordan, Lebanon, and the United Arab Emirates, while Group B comprised Oman, Qatar and Saudi Arabia.

Oman team will have another two essential assignment ahead of the West Asian events as they will take part in the Asian Volleyball Confederation (AVC) Men's Cup 2026 which will be hosted in Ahmedabad, India, from June 20-28, 2026. Oman Men team will vie in this prestigious event beside Australia, Bahrain, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Korea, New Zealand, Pakistan, Qatar, Chinese Taipei and Thailand, alongside the host nation India bringing together established contenders and emerging teams from across the continent. This tournament will form a key part of the AVC's 2026 international calendar and is expected to deliver high-level competition, while providing valuable opportunities for national teams to compete on the continental stage.

Also, the AVC send a confirmation letter to Oman Volleyball Association (OVA) for Oman's team participation in the AVC Volleyball Men's Continental Championship which will take place in Fukuaka, Japan from September 4 to 13.

The confirmed teams till now to take part in this Asian championship are: Japan as the hosts, Iran, Qatar, South Korea, China, Australia, India, Chinese Taipei, New Zealand, Thailand and Oman.

Jetour Cup semi-finals postponed to March 31 amid adverse weather

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, MARCH 24

The semi-finals of the Jetour Cup for the 2025-2026 season have been officially postponed to Tuesday, March 31, after the continued effects of the low-pressure system currently influencing weather conditions across parts of the Sultanate of Oman.

The decision was taken by the League Association in coordination with the Competitions Committee, which cited force majeure circumstances and the need to ensure the safety of players, referees, club personnel and supporters. The two semi-final fixtures had originally been scheduled for Thursday, March 26, before being moved to the new date.

Under the revised schedule, Al

Nahda will host Sur at Al Buraimi Sports Complex at 5:55 pm, while Sohar will travel to face defending champions Seeb at Al Seeb Stadium at 8:10 pm.

The postponement comes at a decisive stage of the competition, with all four remaining teams still firmly in contention for a place in the final. For Seeb in particular, the delay means a slightly longer wait before continuing their latest title defence in a tournament they have dominated in recent years.

Seeb reached the last four after finishing top of Group A with 13 points, collected from four wins, one draw and one defeat. They scored 11 goals and conceded six, once again demonstrating the balance and consistency that have made them



Players from Seeb and Sohar battle for an aerial ball during the tightly contested match, won 1-0 by Seeb.

one of the most complete sides in the competition. Their semi-final against Sohar now carries added significance as they attempt to move one step closer to a fourth consecutive Jetour Cup title. The Muscat side has won each of the last three editions of the tournament, including the 2024-2025 final, when they defeated Bahla 2-1 at Seeb Stadium on May 18, 2025. That sustained success has reinforced Seeb's status as the benchmark side in the competition and a team with proven experience in handling decisive knockout ties.

Sur, meanwhile, booked their place in the semi-finals after finishing runners-up in Group A with 12 points from four wins and two defeats. They scored seven goals and conceded seven, doing enough to progress and

set up a difficult away assignment against Al Nahda.

Al Nahda entered the semi-finals after topping Group B with 12 points, gathered from three wins and three draws in six matches. They found the net 13 times and conceded only five goals, numbers that underline both their attacking sharpness and defensive organisation. Their consistency throughout the group stage has made them one of the strongest contenders remaining in the tournament. Sohar also advanced from Group B after finishing second with 11 points from three wins, two draws and one defeat. They scored nine goals and conceded nine, and will now attempt to halt Seeb's march and deny the holders another appearance in the final.

SPORTS

SHORT TAKES



Miami Heat centre Kel'el Ware (7) blocks the shot of San Antonio Spurs guard Dylan Harper (2) during the first half at Kaseya Center. — **Imagn Images**

SPURS HAMMER HEAT TO STRETCH WIN STREAK TO 6

Victor Wembanyama posted 26 points, 15 rebounds, five blocks and four assists as the San Antonio Spurs defeated the host Miami Heat 136-111 on Monday night. It was the sixth straight win for the Spurs (54-18), who are 22-2 since Feb. 1, the best record in the NBA during that span.

With Wembanyama playing, the Spurs have won 11 straight games. On Monday, he got the most support from Dylan Harper and Keldon Johnson (21 points each off the bench); and Stephon Castle (19 points).

Castle (hip) and Devin Vassell (hamstring) returned from injuries for the Spurs, with the latter scoring six points.

Miami (38-34) lost its fifth straight game, tying its longest skid of the season. The Heat's next game will be another tough one — at Cleveland on Wednesday.

Norman Powell led Miami on Monday with 21 points while Bam Adebayo and Tyler Herro had 18 points each. The Heat are now just 1-5 since Adebayo scored 83 points on March 10 against Washington for the second-highest-scoring game in NBA history.

Powell, Andrew Wiggins (nine points) and Jaime Jaquez Jr. (eight points) all returned from injuries for the Heat, but they weren't enough.

San Antonio, led by De'Aaron Fox's 10 points, led 38-31 at the end of the first quarter during which the Spurs shot 6 of 13 from deep. San Antonio also had a 10-0 advantage on second-chance points in the period. Miami stayed in the game by shooting 50% from the floor and gaining a 9-2 edge on fast-break points.

The Spurs stretched their lead to 76-58 at halftime. Wembanyama led all second-quarter scorers with 11 points, and the Spurs shot 59.1% overall and 4-of-9 on 3-pointers.

For the half, San Antonio shot 52.0% from the floor and 45.5% on 3-pointers (10-for-22). Miami shot 47.7% overall and 38.1% from deep.

The Spurs reached the century mark on a Harper 3-pointer with 2:19 left in the third, and San Antonio ended the quarter leading 108-81. Miami shot just 26.9% in the quarter, including 3-for-16 on 3-pointers.

San Antonio was never threatened in the fourth quarter, finishing the game with a 60-40 edge in paint points. The Spurs also had a 17-6 advantage on offensive rebounds. — **Reuters**



Miami Heat centre Bam Adebayo (13) takes a shot over San Antonio Spurs forward Victor Wembanyama (1) during the first half at Kaseya Center. — **Imagn Images**



Francisco Cerundolo (ARG) hits a forehand against Daniil Medvedev (not pictured) on day 7 of the 2026 Miami Open at Hard Rock Stadium. — **Imagn Images**

Cerúndolo shocks Medvedev in Miami open thriller

FRANCISCO CERUNDOLO'S love affair with the Miami Open shows no signs of cooling after the Argentine world number 19 stunned Russian Daniil Medvedev 6-0 4-6 7-5 to reach the fourth round on Monday.

The 27-year-old secured his first top-10 victory of the season against the former world number one, who arrived in Florida in peak form after thwarting Carlos Alcaraz's 16-0 start to the season, and finishing as runner-up at Indian Wells.

"I felt good in my first-round match here, and now I feel way better," said Cerundolo after the match.

"I'm recovering that confidence. The level was there, I was just trying to find it. But now, (I am in) the round of 16, so hopefully I can keep it up."

The match began with Cerundolo racing through the opening set, but Medvedev rallied from 1-3 down in the second set to force a decider.

The pair traded high-quality rallies amid the Florida heat, with Cerundolo's forehand aggression disrupting Medvedev, while he produced an instinctive winner to end the two-hour, 17-minute encounter.

"I didn't know what to expect... It was a great match, super tough," Cerundolo



Daniil Medvedev serves against Francisco Cerundolo (ARG) (not pictured) on day 7 of the 2026 Miami Open at Hard Rock Stadium. —**Imagn Images**

added. "It was my first match against Daniil. He's probably one of the only guys on Tour who I have never played".

"He has had a great year so far, so I didn't expect to be up 6-0 in the first set and a break up in the second."

The match also had an unusual incident in the third set when umpire Mohamed Lahyani almost became entangled with the Spidercam, the aerial camera that flies over the court during matches.

The camera's cables got caught on the umpire's chair, causing the structure to move and forcing Lahyani to step down onto the court quickly to avoid falling.

The Swedish umpire subsequently requested that the production team keep the Spidercam from passing so close to his chair or the players.

Cerundolo has long thrived in Miami, highlighted by his semi-final run on his debut in 2022 before adding quarter-final showings in 2023 and 2025. He will next face Frenchman Ugo Humbert.

The defeat ends Medvedev's pursuit of a Tour-leading 20th win of the season, with the 30-year-old exiting Miami with a 19-5 record after already claiming titles in Brisbane and Dubai. — **Reuters**



MUSCAT
STOCK
EXCHANGE
7,916.081

BUSINESS

CRUDE OIL
OMAN \$139.64
BRENT \$101.19
LIGHT \$90.28



SHORT TAKES



International benchmarks, however, edged higher on Tuesday amidst persistent supply concerns.

OMAN CRUDE ADJUSTS LOWER DUE TO HEIGHTENED OIL VOLATILITY

MUSCAT: The official price of Oman crude oil for May delivery fell to \$139.64 on Tuesday, marking a steep decline of \$20.56 from the previous day's level of \$160.20.

The drop follows heightened volatility in global oil markets, driven by shifting geopolitical signals and uncertainty surrounding supply routes in the Gulf.

Despite the daily decline, the average monthly price of Omani crude for March delivery stood at \$62.17 per barrel, up marginally by 8 cents compared to February.

International benchmarks, however, edged higher on Tuesday amidst persistent supply concerns. Brent crude rose by \$1.25, or 1.3 per cent, to \$101.19 per barrel, while US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) gained \$2.15, or 2.4 per cent, to reach \$90.28.

Market sentiment remains fragile as tensions linked to the Iran conflict continue to disrupt energy flows. Iran has denied engaging in negotiations with the United States to end the conflict, contradicting earlier remarks by US President Donald Trump suggesting that progress had been made towards a possible agreement.

Oil prices had plunged by more than 10 per cent on Monday after Washington announced a temporary delay in planned strikes on Iranian energy infrastructure, citing ongoing discussions with unnamed Iranian officials.

The conflict has significantly impacted shipments through the Strait of Hormuz — a critical artery for global energy trade — with flows of oil and liquefied natural gas severely constrained. The International Energy Agency has described the situation as the largest oil supply disruption on record.

Analysts say markets are struggling to stabilise amidst conflicting developments. — **Reuters**

Meranti advances Duqm iron project milestones

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, MARCH 24

AHEAD

low-carbon iron production plant in Oman, Meranti Green Steel says it is currently focused on delivering a number of key development milestones critical to advancing the project to bankability and execution readiness.

According to Meranti CEO Dr Sebastian Langendorf, these milestones span financing, permitting, engineering, EPC tendering and contract finalisation — prerequisites for a looming FID on the proposed 2.5 million tonnes per annum (mtpa) hot briquetted iron (HBI) plant in the Duqm Special Economic Zone.

“Over the next three to four months, we have several important milestones, including finalising the financing package — both debt and equity — completing permitting, advancing engineering and launching the EPC tender process”, Dr Langendorf said.

“We are also working to convert existing term sheets — across upstream supply, downstream offtake and other agreements — into binding long-form contracts. Infrastructure planning is progressing in parallel as part of the engineering work.

Overall, multiple workstreams are advancing simultaneously and we believe we are making good progress”. Speaking to the *Observer* during his latest visit to the Sultanate of Oman, the CEO said the trip — coming less than a month after the formal launch of Meranti's office in Muscat — forms part of ongoing engagement with

of a much-anticipated Final Investment Decision (FID) on its landmark



We are also working to convert existing term sheets — across upstream supply, downstream offtake and other agreements — into binding long-form contracts. Infrastructure planning is progressing in parallel as part of the engineering work. Overall, multiple workstreams are advancing simultaneously and we believe we are making good progress.

DR SEBASTIAN LANGENDORF
CEO — Meranti Green Steel



Dr Sebastian Langendorf, CEO — Meranti Green Steel

the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ), Hydrom, Invest Oman and Integrated Gas Company (IGC), as well as existing business partners.

These engagements are helping prepare the company for the next phase as it moves towards FID and eventual implementation, he said. At the same time, preparatory work is progressing on the multibillion-dollar complex in Al Duqm.

“We expect to launch a formal tender process in the coming months. We have identified several target EPC partners, typically large international contractors. Our priority is to minimise delivery risk — ensuring the project is completed on time, within budget and safely.

To achieve this, we prefer to work with partners who have prior experience working together, particularly with our technology provider”, he noted.

Significant opportunities are also expected for local companies, particularly at the subcontractor level, spanning civil, mechanical, electrical and installation works.

“We are already facilitating connections between local firms and potential EPC partners”, Dr Langendorf added.

The CEO also welcomed the

onboarding of a new strategic partner, whose identity, he said, will be disclosed in the “not-too-distant future”.

Asked about the potential for an Omani equity partner — such as Oman Investment Authority (OIA) or one of its subsidiaries — he said this would be a strong fit.

“In general, we aim to create a balanced shareholding structure between international and local partners.

Each shareholder should bring a strategic angle — either as part of our upstream or downstream supply chain, or as a local partner helping us navigate the domestic landscape and networks”. Meranti is also working to convert key term sheets into binding agreements, the finalisation of which will enable full disclosure of the promoter company's equity structure.

Under commitments announced recently, the company has secured long-term offtake pledges covering the full 2.5 mtpa output of the first module of its green HBI plant in Al Duqm.

Volumes have been allocated to a group of international partners, including Thyssenkrupp Materials Trading, INTERFER and Glencore, as well as to its own downstream steel facility in Thailand, with provisions for additional volumes linked to a potential second phase.

On the financing side, Meranti is also exploring participatory roles for local banks.

“We have made good progress internationally, with KfW IPEX-Bank as lead arranger and planned export credit agency (ECA) coverage. At the same time, we are engaging with several local banks.

While we have not finalised the balance between international and local lenders, we see clear potential for local participation. Part of my visit has also involved meetings with banks”, he added.

Australia and European Union seal minerals trade deal

SYDNEY: Australia and the European Union signed a trade deal on Tuesday that was eight years in the making, removing tariffs for almost all European goods and for nearly all exports of Australian critical minerals.

But some Australian agricultural products like beef and sheep meat, for example, will be subject to export quotas and Australian farmers sharply criticised the pact for delivering “subpar” access to the bloc.

The agreement comes after both sides stepped up talks in the wake of significantly higher US tariffs under the Trump administration and more angst in the West over China's dominant position in the supply of rare earths and other critical minerals. The two sides also signed an agreement to boost security and defence ties.

“The EU and Australia may be geographically far apart but we couldn't be closer in terms of how we see the world”, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said in a statement.

“With these dynamic new partnerships on security and defence, as well as trade, we are moving even closer together”. The agreement will remove over



Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese and President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen shake hands during a press conference at Parliament House in Canberra, Australia. — **Reuters**

99% of tariffs on EU goods exports to Australia, cutting 1 billion euros (\$1.2 billion) a year in duties for companies. EU exports to Australia are now expected to grow by up to 33% over the next decade.

Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese told a news conference that the agreement would be worth about \$7 billion annually to the Australian

economy, adding that the removal of almost all import tariffs on Australian critical minerals into the European Union will help stabilise global supply chains.

“For both Europe and Australia, getting China right is a strategic imperative and this is why bringing to life our critical minerals partnership will be

crucial to our success”, von der Leyen told Australia's parliament.

“We cannot be over-dependent on any supplier for such crucial ingredients and that is precisely why we need each other”. The deal also signals Europe's growing engagement in the Indo-Pacific, after striking trade accords with Indonesia in September and India in January.

AUSTRALIA AGREES TO BEEF QUOTAS

Australian tariffs will drop to zero for European wine, sparkling wine, fruit and vegetables and chocolates from day one and for cheeses over three years.

The EU will remove tariffs for many agricultural products but some key exports will have quotas.

For beef — one of the biggest sticking points that sank the previous talks in 2023 — the EU will open two tariff rate quotas of a total of 30,600 metric tonnes, with about 55% of the volume to enter duty-free.

“Australian farmers are extremely disappointed that negotiations for a free trade deal with the European Union (EU) have concluded without commercially meaningful

agricultural market access gains since Australia last walked away from negotiations”, Hamish McIntyre, president of the National Farmers Federation in Australia, said in a statement.

Under the agreement, some EU ‘geographical indications’ names for products such as Pecorino Romano or Ouzo, will be fully protected after a relatively short phasing-out period. But some producers of goods like feta will be able to continue to use those names, provided there is clear labelling of the product's origin.

Australia also agreed to lift the luxury car tax threshold for EU electric vehicles to \$83,600, meaning about 75% of EVs from the region will be exempted from the tax.

Trade between the two sides is substantial, with EU firms exporting to Australia 37 billion euros of goods in 2025 and 28 billion euros of services in 2023.

As a bloc, the EU was Australia's third-largest two-way trading partner in 2024 as well as the sixth-largest export destination, official data showed.

The bloc was Australia's second-largest source of foreign investment in 2024. — **Reuters**

ADVERTORIALS

SHORTTAKES



The bank supported a business development programme for visually impaired individuals, equipping them with entrepreneurial skills.

Sohar International supports Al Noor Association and Takaful Sohar Charity Team

MUSCAT: Sohar International strengthened its community impact during Ramadhan through targeted initiatives in collaboration with the Al Noor Association for the Blind in Suhar and the Takaful Sohar Charity Team, reinforcing its commitment to inclusive empowerment and environmental responsibility.

The bank supported a business development programme for visually impaired individuals, equipping them with entrepreneurial skills, while advancing a recycling initiative across Suhar in partnership with the Takaful Sohar Charity Team — effectively linking environmental action with social impact.

Commenting on the occasion, Dr Mazin Mahmood al Raisi, Chief Marketing Officer at Sohar International, stated: “Ramadhan serves as a powerful reminder that sustainable progress is rooted in shared value. At Sohar International, our approach to community engagement is guided by a long-term perspective — one that prioritises empowerment, inclusivity and measurable impact.

Through our initiatives, we aim not only to extend support, but to enable individuals and communities to build resilience and unlock opportunities that endure beyond the Holy Month. This reflects our broader commitment to contributing meaningfully to Oman’s socioeconomic development in alignment with national priorities”.

As part of its collaboration with the Al Batinah North branch of the Al Noor Association for the Blind, Sohar International supported a specialised business development programme designed to support visually impaired individuals. The initiative equips participants with practical entrepreneurial and freelance skills, enabling them to build independent income streams and actively participate in the broader economic landscape.

By focusing on capability development, the programme moves beyond traditional support models to create sustainable pathways for empowerment and self-reliance. In parallel, the bank partnered with Takaful Sohar Charity Team to deliver an environmentally driven initiative aimed at promoting responsible recycling practices.

Malabar Charitable Trust partners with Pratham Education Foundation

MUSCAT: Malabar Charitable Trust, the CSR wing of Malabar Group, has partnered with the Pratham Education Foundation to further strengthen its Micro Learning Centres (MLCs) initiative aimed at rehabilitating and supporting the education of underprivileged children across India.

A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between Malabar Charitable Trust, social welfare organisation Thanal and Pratham Education Foundation at the Malabar Group headquarters in Kozhikode.

The signing ceremony was attended by M P Ahammad, Chairman of Malabar Group; Asher O, Managing Director — India Operations, Malabar Gold & Diamonds; Preeti Pandey, Programme Manager at Pratham Education Foundation; Dr V Idrees, Chairman of Thanal; Nishad A K, Executive Director of Malabar Group; and U V Jose, Head — Public Affairs at Malabar Group.



The initiative aimed at rehabilitating and supporting the education of underprivileged children across India.

Through this partnership, Pratham Education Foundation will support Malabar Group’s Micro Learning Centres with curriculum development, teacher training, learning assessments and structured academic interventions, enabling children from vulnerable backgrounds to reintegrate into formal education systems.

Discover the powerful Ford Bronco with rewards

THE Ford Bronco is built for people who truly love to explore. It is a wild-spirited SUV designed to take on the toughest terrains with a mix of power and legendary style. Right now, exclusive seasonal rewards are available across Oman, making it the perfect time to own this iconic vehicle.

This campaign is all about giving explorers and families more value, ensuring that every trip into the wild is backed by Ford’s commitment to quality and a rewarding ownership experience. To celebrate the season,

Ford is offering a package that focuses on peace of mind and excitement. If you choose a Bronco before April 10, you will benefit from a 5-year or 100,000 km service and warranty package. The offer also includes free first-year registration and a selection of complimentary accessories to help you customise your SUV.

Adding to the fun, anyone who takes a test drive gets a chance to win an iPhone 17, while those who purchase a new vehicle enter a grand draw to win a Ford Territory Ambiente.

THE FORD BRONCO BIG BEND: POWER FOR YOUR DAILY ADVENTURES

The Big Bend model is perfect for those who want a vehicle that feels alive and ready for action. It is powered by a 2.3L EcoBoost engine delivering 294 horsepower and 427 Nm of torque.

This is paired with a smooth 10-speed automatic transmission and six G O A T (Goes over Any Terrain) modes, including Sand, Mud and Sport. Inside, you will find



Ford is offering a package that focuses on peace of mind and excitement.

a comfortable cabin with a 12-inch screen and a remote start system, so you can set the perfect temperature before you even step inside. It even features a handy AC outlet in the centre console to keep your gear powered up during a trip.

THE FORD BRONCO BADLANDS: BUILT FOR THE EXTREME

For those who want to push their limits, the Badlands model offers even more capability. It features a stronger 2.7L EcoBoost V6 engine with 330 horsepower and 563 Nm of torque.

This model is a serious off-roader, equipped with Bilstein position-sensitive shocks and a front stabiliser bar disconnect to help you climb over large obstacles. It comes with seven G O A T modes and the famous Sasquatch Package, which adds 35-

inch mud tyres and front and rear locking differentials.

The interior is just as tough, featuring marine-grade vinyl seats and rubberised flooring that you can easily wash out after a day in the sand.

THE FORD BRONCO RAPTOR: THE ULTIMATE DESERT DOMINATOR

If you are looking for the absolute peak of 4x4 performance, the Bronco Raptor is the perfect choice. It carries an exclusive 3.0L twin-turbo V6 engine that pumps out a massive 394 horsepower and 597 Nm of torque. With its Raptor-specific HOSS 4.0 suspension and massive 37-inch tyres, it is designed to fly over dunes or crawl over rocks with total stability. It also features a reinforced trailer hitch, increasing your towing capacity to 4,500 pounds.

National Finance celebrates Eid Joy with patients

MUSCAT: Reaffirming the values of social responsibility and social solidarity; and preserving the joy of Eid, National Finance, the Sultanate of Oman’s leading finance company, hosted a special Eid Joy event for children with heart conditions in collaboration with the National Heart Centre at the Royal Hospital.

Represented by its dedicated Himmah Volunteer team, the company organised engaging educational and entertainment activities, while also distributing thoughtfully prepared gifts, bringing moments of joy, comfort and encouragement to young patients and their families during their treatment.

The initiative highlights National Finance’s dedication to supporting vulnerable members of society while strengthening meaningful connections with the community. Aligned with its promise to be a trusted partner for growth, the company goes beyond offering innovative finance solutions, actively engaging in initiatives that uplift the community and generate lasting positive impact across both social and economic spheres.



Represented by its dedicated Himmah Volunteer team, the company organised engaging educational and entertainment activities.

Commenting on the initiative, Tariq bin Sulaiman al Farsi, Chief Executive Officer at National Finance, stated, “Our Himmah Volunteer team truly reflects the core values of National Finance — empowerment, service, care and community spirit.

Through initiatives such as the Eid Joy event, they work tirelessly to bring joy, comfort and support to vulnerable members of society, while reinforcing the spirit of social solidarity among community members. This initiative is a meaningful

extension of our purpose, deepening our sense of service and strengthening the bonds we share with the communities we serve”. The Himmah Volunteer team embodies National Finance’s commitment to delivering lasting social impact, in line with the company’s sustainability framework and its efforts to strengthen support for the community across environmental, economic and social dimensions. Guided by the company’s core values of care, integrity, service and empowerment, the team turns these principles into hands-on initiatives that touch lives.

By actively engaging employees in volunteer programmes and supporting important causes, National Finance cultivates a culture of compassion, social responsibility and purposeful action, strengthening its role as a responsible corporate citizen committed to the wellbeing of the community.

Through such initiatives, National Finance delivers value beyond being a financial partner, standing alongside people in their journeys and offering heartfelt support to those in need.

SHORTTAKES



People walk past an office building of Agricultural Bank of China, in Beijing, China. — Reuters

CHINA BANKS EYE PROFIT BOOST

BEIJING: China’s leading state-owned banks are expected to recover this year from record-low profit margins as the repricing of nearly \$8 trillion worth of maturing high-priced time deposits eases pressure on their funding costs.

The top-five state banks, some of the biggest in the world, are expected by analysts to post a drop in profits or lower income growth for 2025 when they release annual results this week as they reeled from a deepening property sector debt crisis and a slowing economy.

While the war in Iran could stoke cost-push inflation and pile pressure on corporates, jobs and wages in the world’s second-largest economy that is already battling deflation, analysts see mitigating factors for lenders this year.

Chief among them is the repricing of high-cost time deposits as the tightly controlled deposit rates have been steadily lowered by the regulator over the past four years with a view to protecting the profit margins of the lenders. That is expected to boost their profits.

“Deposit repricing will be the main driver behind banks’ earnings performance bouncing back in 2026 and should help stabilise their net interest margins”, said Zhang Yiwei, an analyst at China Galaxy Securities.

Zhang estimated around 54 trillion yuan (\$7.8 trillion) in time deposits at listed banks will mature in 2026 and rolling over of maturing three-year deposits at current rates will lower costs by roughly 135 basis points compared to 2023 levels.

That is estimated to add about 12 basis points overall to banks’ net interest margins (NIMs), a key gauge of profitability, said Zhang.

Industrial and Commercial Bank of China is estimated to post a 2% decline in 2025 profit, while China Construction Bank is expected to report a 0.4% decline, according to LSEG data.

Agricultural Bank of China is forecast to report a 2.3% net profit growth, though slower than last year. — Reuters

Euro zone growth stalls as war fuels inflation surge

EURO zone private sector growth slowed sharply in March as the Middle East war drove input costs to their highest in more than three years and triggered the worst supply chain disruptions since mid-2022, a survey showed on Tuesday.

The S&P Global flash euro zone Composite Purchasing Managers’ Index fell to 50.5 in March from 51.9 in February, marking a 10-month low and missing expectations in a poll for a more modest dip to 51.0. It has stayed above the 50.0 mark separating growth from contraction for 15 straight months.

Growth stalled as new orders — a key gauge for demand — fell for the first time in eight months, driven by weakness in the services sector. Manufacturing orders continued to expand, although the output reading in the sector dipped to 51.7 from 51.9 the previous month.

“The flash euro zone PMI is ringing stagflation alarm bells as the war in the Middle East drives prices sharply higher while stifling growth”, said Chris Williamson, chief economist at S&P Global Market Intelligence.

Overall input costs jumped at the fastest pace since February 2023, with both manufacturing and services facing steeper inflation.



A steel worker walks in front of a blast furnace at a ThyssenKrupp steel factory in Duisburg, Germany. — Reuters

The acceleration was more pronounced in manufacturing as energy prices surged and supply chains became choked due to the conflict.

Manufacturing suppliers’ delivery times lengthened substantially, the most since August 2022, largely due to shipping disruptions linked to the war.

Output continued to rise in Germany, helped by the fastest expansion in manufacturing production in more than four years, but fell again in France. The rest of the euro zone posted only a slight increase in activity, the weakest in 27 months.

Employment fell for a third consecutive month, with job cuts centred on manufacturing where staffing levels have declined every month since June 2023.

Services employment rose marginally but at the smallest extent since September.

Business confidence plunged to its lowest in almost a year, with the monthly drop the largest since Russia’s war in Ukraine in early 2022.

Firms remained optimistic about output over the coming year but sentiment was below the series average.

“Output growth has meanwhile slowed to near-stagnation thanks to a slump in business confidence and deterioration of new orders”, Williamson added.

The survey data pointed to euro zone gross domestic product growth slowing to a quarterly rate of just below 0.1% in March, with forward-looking indicators suggesting a heightened risk of a downturn in coming months. — Reuters

INDIA’S RELIANCE BUYS 5 MILLION BARRELS OF IRANIAN OIL

NEW DELHI: India’s Reliance Industries, operator of the world’s biggest refining complex, has purchased 5 million barrels of Iranian crude, days after the US temporarily removed sanctions on the oil, three sources familiar with the matter said on Tuesday.

The Indian refiner bought the oil from the National Iranian Oil Co, the sources said. One of them said the crude was priced at a premium of

about \$7 a barrel to ICE Brent futures. It was not immediately clear when the oil would be delivered.

Iranian oil, which in recent years has mainly been bought by Chinese independent refiners, is often rebranded as originating from another country.

The Trump administration on Friday issued a 30-day sanctions waiver for the purchase of Iranian oil already at sea. — Reuters

Japan to tap joint oil stockpiles, PM says, with no end seen to supply crisis

TOKYO: Japan will tap joint oil stockpiles held by producing nations in the country by the end of March, Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi said on Tuesday, as Tokyo ramps up emergency measures to offset supply losses from the Middle East.

Global oil prices spiked to their highest levels since 2022 after the US and Israel launched missile strikes on Iran on February 28. The Strait of Hormuz, a key route for oil and liquefied natural gas shipments, remains closed.

“We began releasing privately held reserves on March 16 and will begin releasing national reserves from the 26th”, Takaichi said on social media.

“Furthermore, releases from jointly held stockpiles with oil-producing countries are also scheduled to begin later in March”. Japan’s contribution to a record oil stockpile



A small tanker sails near an oil refinery, in the Keihin Industrial Zone in Kawasaki, Japan. — Reuters

release coordinated by the International Energy Agency will total nearly 80 million barrels, consisting mainly of crude oil, according to the IEA.

In addition, some 13 million barrels, or a total of seven days of supply, are jointly held in Japan by Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Kuwait. Of those, Japan will use five days’ worth of supply, industry minister Ryosei Akazawa said.

NO STRAIT OF HORMUZ TANKERS SAIL TOWARDS JAPAN

Two tankers, one sailing from the Red Sea’s Yanbu port in Saudi Arabia and another from Fujairah in the UAE — all bypassing the Strait of Hormuz — are heading to Japan, Akazawa said and are expected to arrive this week and early April.

Another tanker from outside the Middle East is also heading to Japan, due to arrive in late April, Akazawa added.

Tehran is ready to let Japanese-related ships pass through the Strait of Hormuz, Iranian

Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi said last week. But Kpler ship tracking data showed no Japan-bound tankers left the area since early March.

Mitsui O S K and Nippon Yusen Kaisha, two major Japanese shipping companies with tankers stuck in the Gulf, have suspended transit and their vessels are waiting in a safe area, both companies said by email.

As Japan is tapping its reserve funds for gasoline subsidies and, according to sources, is looking at intervening in the crude oil futures market, local buyers are looking elsewhere, including to the US, for supplies.

Oil releases from private and public stockpiles can cover for external supplies until the end of April, said Shunichi Kito, president of the Petroleum Association of Japan (PAJ), the industry group that represents the country’s major oil refiners. — Reuters

INDUSTRIAL INCIDENT

Refinery blast prompts Texas safety alert



A powerful explosion at the Valeo refinery near Port Arthur, Texas, forced residents to remain indoors, though no injuries were reported, local authorities confirmed.

The facility, employing around 770 staff, processes heavy crude with a capacity of 435,000 barrels per day. The incident comes amidst heightened global oil market uncertainty linked to ongoing tensions involving Iran. — ONA

MARKET PRESSURE

Gold extends losses on strong dollar



Gold prices dropped more than 1 per cent, marking a tenth straight session of decline, weighed by a stronger US dollar and reduced expectations of a United States Federal Reserve interest rate cut.

Spot gold fell to \$4,345.48 per ounce. Other metals also weakened, with silver, platinum and palladium posting notable losses in continued volatile trading conditions. — ONA

TECH DISRUPTION

Drone activity disrupts AWS operations



Amazon confirmed disruption to its AWS cloud region in Bahrain due to drone activity linked to regional tensions, marking the second such incident in a month.

The company did not clarify whether its facility was directly hit or affected by nearby strikes. Service status updates had not reflected the disruption as of Monday night, raising operational concerns. — Reuters

OPINION

AI revolution and global job market: Fear, reality and readiness



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The writer is Assistant Professor, Marketing and Management Dept, CBFS



K.V. CH. MADHU SUDHANA RAO
The writer is AI researcher based in the USA

ARTIFICIAL intelligence is advancing at a pace that few predicted even five years ago. The emergence of sophisticated generative AI systems and “AI coworkers” capable of writing software, analyzing data and producing content has triggered excitement across industries, but also profound anxiety among students and young professionals.

In universities around the world, a growing number of students worry that the careers they have spent years preparing for may soon be automated. Social media and sensational headlines amplify this fear, often portraying AI as an unstoppable force that will replace entire professions.

For academically driven students who equate educational success with career stability, such narratives can be psychologically devastating.

In several countries, intense academic pressure combined with uncertainty about future employment has been linked to rising stress levels and tragic mental health outcomes among high-performing students.

The fear is not simply about losing jobs; it is about losing purpose in a rapidly transforming world. However, the assumption that artificial intelligence is directly responsible for widespread layoffs is only partially accurate.

Recent job cuts in the technology sector have been influenced more by economic corrections than by automation. During the Covid-19 pandemic, technology companies

expanded aggressively to meet surging digital demand. When economic conditions normalised, companies began reducing staff to adjust to slower growth.

According to the World Economic Forum, about 23% of global jobs are expected to change significantly by 2027, with 83 million roles potentially displaced but around 69 million new roles created. Meanwhile, global technology layoffs that accelerated after 2022 were largely attributed to post-pandemic over-hiring, rising interest rates and corporate restructuring.

Artificial intelligence plays a role, but often indirectly. AI tools increase productivity, allowing fewer employees to complete tasks that previously required larger teams.

This productivity shift can slow down hiring or trigger restructuring, but it is rarely the sole cause of job losses. Another emerging factor is the massive wave of investment required to build the infrastructure that powers AI.

Training large AI models requires enormous computational capacity, leading companies to invest heavily in advanced data centres, specialised chips and cloud infrastructure.

Analysts estimate that global spending on AI infrastructure and data centres could exceed \$1 trillion over the next decade. Such investments often force companies to reallocate budgets, prioritising infrastructure and AI research over large workforces.

In some cases, firms reduce operational teams while expanding engineering and AI research units. At the same time, there is a

In universities around the world, a growing number of students worry that the careers they have spent years preparing for may soon be automated. Social media and sensational headlines amplify this fear, often portraying AI as an unstoppable force that will replace entire professions.

significant upskilling gap. A McKinsey report suggests that nearly 40% of workers may need to reskill over the next few years due to automation and AI adoption. Employees whose skills do not align with emerging AI-driven workflows risk being displaced not because machines fully replace them, but because the nature of work itself is changing faster than the workforce can adapt to it.

The fear surrounding AI, therefore, stems from multiple overlapping forces: technological acceleration, economic restructuring, educational gaps and the psychological pressure created by uncertain career paths.

History shows that transformative technologies, from the Industrial Revolution to the rise of the internet, initially sparked similar concerns. Yet they also created entirely new industries and professions that were previously unimaginable.

Artificial intelligence is likely to follow a comparable path, reshaping the labour market rather than eliminating it. The real challenge lies in preparing societies for this transition.

Educational systems must emphasise adaptability, digital literacy and interdisciplinary thinking, while governments and institutions must invest in large-scale reskilling programmes.

If managed responsibly, AI can augment human potential rather than replace it. But if societies fail to prepare the workforce for this shift, the greatest risk may not be artificial intelligence itself, but the widening gap between technological progress and human readiness.

IRAN WAR WILL PUT ENERGY BARTERS ON THE TABLE

ANTONY CURRIE

Fatih Birol is trying to shake the world out of its complacency. In a visit to Canberra on Monday, the boss of the International Energy Agency echoed sobering comments he gave to the Financial Times last week that the US-Israeli war on Iran has created the greatest threat to global energy security “in history”. How governments respond to his wake-up call risks worsening the crisis, though.

Birol has ample data to back up his assertion. The conflagration in the Middle East has removed 11 million barrels of oil a day from global markets, double each of the supply shocks of the 1970s. Meanwhile, the 140 billion cubic metres of natural, or fossil, gas lost is almost twice as much as after Russia’s 2022 war in Ukraine.

Moreover, it will take time to repair or rebuild damaged pipelines and production facilities in the region. Restoring the 17% of Qatar’s liquified natural gas (LNG) production hit by Iran last week could take five years, QatarEnergy CEO and state minister for energy affairs Saad al Kaabi said on Thursday.

There’s only so much that can be done. Oil prices have risen following new attacks and threats, eliminating any relief from the recent release of a fifth of global strategic reserves. Birol says the IEA is talking to Mexico, Canada and others about delaying refinery maintenance and boosting production.

And, on Friday, the agency published a 10-point plan for reducing demand, including working from home, reducing driving speeds and avoiding air travel. That’s piecemeal if the Strait of Hormuz remains closed.

The Australian government is already mulling a different plan: using its vast exports of LNG to persuade trading partners to keep oil imports flowing, according to the Sydney Morning Herald and AFR, citing sources.

The country is a top-three exporter of both that and coal yet imports as much as 90% of its oil and has roughly a third of the 90 days of reserves required by the IEA.

Reminding China, Malaysia and other suppliers of black gold and commodities like fertilisers that are also in short supply that they’re dependent on Australian energy products could keep supply lines open.

Others like Indonesia, the world’s biggest coal exporter, may consider following suit. Trouble is, the tactic has broader downsides. It would stoke protectionism and an even greater uncertainty of supply as countries negotiate.

It would also widen the gap between those that do and don’t have fossil fuels within their borders to barter with. And it would almost certainly lead to higher prices all around. — Reuters

How comfort kills strategic thinking

COMFORT is not the opposite of ambition. In most organisations, it arrives quietly alongside success a natural companion to years of hard-won stability, reliable processes and teams that have learned to work well together. It does not announce itself as a threat. It presents itself as evidence that something has been built correctly.

This is precisely what makes it dangerous. When an organisation becomes comfortable, it does not stop working. It continues to operate, to meet targets, to produce reports and to hold meetings. What it stops doing gradually, invisibly and without any deliberate decision to do so is thinking strategically. The questions that once drove difficult conversations disappear from the agenda.

The assumptions that once were tested become the assumptions that simply are. The leaders who once challenged direction begin to manage it instead. Strategic thinking, by its nature, requires friction.

It requires the willingness to question what is working before it stops working. It demands that leaders hold two contradictory ideas at the same time: that the current approach is producing results and that the current approach will eventually stop producing results.

This kind of tension is cognitively uncomfortable. And organisations that have found a rhythm that have, in the language of management, found what works develop powerful structural incentives to eliminate that discomfort. An organisation that has stopped asking difficult questions has not found the answers. It has simply stopped looking.

The mechanism is not cynical. No leader wakes up and decides to stop thinking strategically. What happens instead is more subtle. Meetings begin to optimise for



When an organisation becomes comfortable, it does not stop working.



KAMLA AL RAHBI

The writer is a leadership and business strategist focused on decision-making, organisational clarity and cognitive frameworks in complex environments

efficiency rather than inquiry.

Agendas are filled with updates, approvals and reviews all of which are necessary but leave no space for the slower, messier work of examining direction. The people who raise uncomfortable questions are managed rather than heard.

Over time, the organisation selects, unconsciously, for leaders who are good at executing the current strategy and less good at questioning whether it remains the right one.

This dynamic is particularly visible in organisations that have experienced a sustained period of success. Success creates confirmation bias at an institutional level. Every quarter that targets are met is interpreted as evidence that the strategy is sound.

Every year of stable performance reinforces the belief that current assumptions are valid. The longer the success continues, the more resistant the organisation becomes to the possibility that its model is approaching the limits of its usefulness.

The organisations most at risk are rarely the ones that are struggling. They are the ones that have been succeeding for long enough to stop questioning why. In the context of the Gulf’s current economic transformation, this pattern carries specific implications.

Organisations that built their

capabilities during a period of high resource availability and relatively stable demand now face an environment that rewards different qualities: adaptability, speed of strategic recalibration and the ability to generate genuine insight from ambiguous signals.

These are precisely the capabilities that organisational comfort erodes. The corrective is not to manufacture crisis or to introduce instability artificially. It is to redesign how strategic conversations happen within the organisation.

This means creating protected space in leadership agendas, in team structures, in performance frameworks for the kind of thinking that does not produce immediate outputs.

It means rewarding the leaders who surface problems early, rather than the leaders who present only solutions. It means treating the absence of difficult questions not as a sign of health but as a warning signal. There is also a personal dimension that is rarely addressed in organisational strategy discussions.

Leaders who have spent years building and defending a strategy develop a deep psychological investment in its continued validity. Questioning the strategy begins to feel, at some level, like questioning their own judgment.

This is a natural human response. It is also one of the most significant structural vulnerabilities in executive decision-making, because it means that the people most qualified to recognise when a strategy needs fundamental revision are often the least psychologically positioned to initiate that revision.

Strategic thinking does not require the absence of comfort. It requires the discipline to remain intellectually uncomfortable even when the organisation is performing well to keep asking, with genuine seriousness, whether what is working today is building towards what will be needed tomorrow.

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ANNOUNCEMENT

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THE HUMAN COST OF OMAN’S FLASH FLOODS



YERU EBUEN
The writer is a luxury media strategist and a creative director

This week’s heavy rains across Oman have once again followed a grim and familiar pattern. Following flash floods triggered by intense rainfall, numerous deaths had been reported with search operations continuing for others missing. The incidents were not isolated; they were spread

across multiple areas where wadis overflowed and low-lying crossings became impassable within minutes. What is striking is not only the recurrence of such tragedies, but the consistency in how they unfold.

Flash floods in Oman are uniquely deceptive. Rainfall does not need to be heavy where a person is standing. Water accumulates upstream, often in mountainous terrain and funnels rapidly into wadis, creating sudden surges that arrive without visible warning. A crossing that appears shallow can deepen and accelerate within seconds. A stationary flow can become a torrent before there is time to react.

Yet, despite years of public advisories and repeated incidents, behaviour has remained largely unchanged.

Scenes continue to emerge of people gathering near flooded wadis, filming rising waters, or attempting to drive across submerged roads. There is, undeniably, a cultural fascination with rain in Oman, a natural response in a country where rainfall is both rare and transformative. But this fascination increasingly blurs into risk-taking.

There is nothing inherently wrong with wanting to witness rain in Oman. It is, after all, a moment of collective relief and beauty. But that instinct, to get closer, to capture, to experience, has repeatedly placed people in harm’s way. And the cost, measured in lives lost each season, is no longer incidental.

By now, after numerous incidents of drowning and flood-related deaths, the expectation should not simply be awareness, but behavioural change.

Caution in this context is not excessive. It is essential.

Floodwater in Oman is unpredictable by nature, shaped by terrain, distance, and timing. It does not announce itself, nor does it offer second chances. And in a landscape where water can transform from absence to overwhelming force within moments, the most responsible response is distance.

Because no moment of spectacle is worth the risk of becoming part of the next statistic.

SHOT TAKES



SPRING TIME

People rest under a blooming magnolia tree at the Burggarten park behind the Hofburg Imperial Palace on a spring day in Vienna, Austria. — AFP



CARNIVAL

Masked performers take part in the final day of the city’s carnival in the historic centre of Limoux, southern France. — AFP



PREMIERE

US singer-songwriter Miley Cyrus and musician Maxx Morando attend the world premiere of Disney+’s ‘Hannah Montana 20th Anniversary Special’ at El Capitan theatre in Hollywood. — AFP

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SHAKIRA TO WRAP UP WORLD TOUR WITH MADRID RESIDENCY



Colombian singer Shakira performs during her “Las Mujeres Ya No Lloran World Tour” at SoFi Stadium in Inglewood, California. — AFP file photo

MADRID: Pop superstar Shakira will wrap up her record-breaking world tour with a concert residency in Madrid at a custom-built venue, promoter Live Nation said on Monday.

The six-night residency runs September 18-20 and September 25-27, with more dates possibly added depending on ticket demand. The shows will be held at a temporary venue to be built in southern Madrid dubbed the “Shakira Stadium” with a capacity for roughly 50,000 people, the president of Live Nation Spain, Pino Sagliocco, told a news conference.

“Spain is where we’re really going all out. The show’s going to be something people have never seen before. I’m really excited”, Shakira said in an interview published on Sunday in daily Spanish newspaper El Pais.

The concerts will mark her first performances in Spain in

eight years and her first since reaching a 2023 settlement with Spanish prosecutors to settle a tax fraud case. As part of the deal, Shakira, 49, paid a fine of over 7.3 million euros (\$8.6 million), after previously settling 17.45 million euros with the Spanish tax agency.

The case centred on the period when the Colombian singer lived in Barcelona with Spanish football player Gerard Pique. The couple, who have two sons, broke up in 2022.

The residency will mark the final dates of Shakira’s “Women Don’t Cry Anymore” world tour, which has become the highest-grossing tour ever by a Latin artist. Shakira kicked off the tour last year in Brazil, where she is set to perform a free concert on Rio de Janeiro’s iconic Copacabana beach in May, following in the footsteps of Madonna and Lady Gaga.

— AFP



A resident reading a book at his century-old ancestral property Mathur ki Haveli in the old quarters of Delhi. — AFP

CAUGHT BETWEEN REVIVAL AND RUIN

UZMI ATHAR

ONCE the grand residences of Mughal-era nobility, the Indian capital’s haveli homes now stand at a fragile crossroads — a handful lovingly restored but many more sliding quietly into ruin.

Across Old Delhi — the 17th century walled city founded as the Mughal capital Shahjahanabad — cracked facades, shuttered gateways and sagging balconies tell the story of a heritage under siege from neglect, inheritance battles and relentless urban pressure.

Only a few restored pockets provide a glimpse of what once was — airy courtyards, carved sandstone pillars and homes built around a deeply social way of life.

Inside one restored mansion that now houses a cultural centre, sunlight filters through stained glass onto carved sandstone arches, the air infused with freshly polished wood and rosewater.

Musicians tune their instruments in a frescoed courtyard, where nobles may once have entertained guests, offering a rare peek into Old Delhi’s rich architectural past.

But outside in the narrow lanes of Old Delhi’s Chandni Chowk district, the contrast is stark.

Many havelis are abandoned or on the verge of collapsing, their carved facades fading beneath peeling paint.

“Once the grand residences of Mughal-era nobility, the Indian capital’s haveli homes now stand at fragile crossroads — a handful lovingly restored but many more sliding quietly into ruin.



The Dharampura Haveli, an 18th-century haveli-turned-heritage hotel in the old quarters of Delhi. — AFP

The contrast reflects two futures — one of careful restoration and the other of gradual decay.

The Kathika Cultural Centre’s founder Atul Khanna said his initiative hoped to create an immersive cultural space inside a restored structure.

But he admitted that conservation in Old Delhi remains a huge challenge.

Many havelis are split among multiple heirs, with no single stakeholder willing or able to invest in costly upkeep.

“When there are multiple ownerships, that becomes a challenge”, he said.

“If the haveli is decaying, who is going to spend the money?”

Khanna also blamed bureaucratic hurdles for discouraging restoration.

“There should be some kind of a single window for anyone who is working with heritage”, he said, arguing that easing red tape would be more effective than offering subsidies for restoration.

Another prominent restoration is the 18th century Haveli Dharampura, now converted into a heritage hotel.

“Restoration in Old Delhi is still isolated unless there is sustained support and awareness”, said Vidyun Goel, whose family owns the property.

Residents say family disputes and the push to convert properties into shops or apartments have led to rapid decline.

In nearby Roshanpura, only a scattering of old homes still stand. Among them, the century-old Mathur ki Haveli

is a rare example of a lived-in heritage home.

“We are in love with this house”, said Ashok Mathur, a fourth generation resident who continues to live in the ancestral property despite mounting challenges.

Wooden ceilings are deteriorating, floors are wearing thin and doors require constant repair, he said, walking through rooms that bear only traces of intricate craftsmanship.

Still, he said he has never considered leaving — although he can only imagine the social world that once defined haveli life.

“There is no community left”, Mathur, 56, said. “We are living in a cocoon”.

Conservationist KT Ravindran said that while Old Delhi is economically vibrant, its havelis suffer from unclear titles and multiple claimants.

“Often buildings that look intact from outside conceal deeper damage”, he said, noting that the condition was worse in the inner lanes hidden from public view.

Ravindran said revival was still possible, but only through neighbourhood level regeneration rather than isolated showpiece projects.

Oral historian Sohail Hashmi said each haveli once formed part of “a larger social ecosystem of neighbourhoods, crafts and traditions”, with architecture and community deeply intertwined.

As Khanna put it, the loss goes beyond architecture.

“When you lose a haveli, you are not only losing the structure”, he said.

“Every element in it is a piece of art”. — AFP

FEATURES



Artist Afsaneh Moslehi

WHERE LANGUAGE MEETS LANDSCAPE



NAJAH AL RIYAMI

In Muscat’s evolving cultural landscape, a new exhibition is set to explore the quiet yet powerful dialogue between language, land and identity. Opening on April 1, at Stal Gallery in Madinat Al Sultan Qaboos, ‘Echo of the East’ by contemporary artist Afsaneh Moslehi brings calligraphy into a new spatial and emotional dimension, inviting viewers to see written form not simply as text, but as movement, memory and belonging.

Held under the auspices of Her Highness Sayyidah Afra bint Talal bin Tarik al Said, the exhibition reflects a broader cultural momentum in Oman, where traditional art forms are increasingly being reinterpreted through contemporary lenses.

Within this context, Moslehi’s work feels both rooted and forward-looking, bridging heritage with modern artistic expression.

At the heart of ‘Echo of the East’ lies a simple yet profound idea: human expression is inseparable from the land it emerges from. For Moslehi, calligraphy is not merely decorative or linguistic, it is a living gesture. Each stroke carries the weight of cultural memory, shaped by centuries of tradition and the landscapes that inform it.

Her compositions unfold through layered interactions between script, geometry and organic ornament. The calligraphic forms flow across the canvas, often dissolving into intricate geometric structures reminiscent of architectural patterns found across the Middle East.

These are not rigid frameworks, but rhythmic systems that echo natural order, balance and repetition. Interwoven within them are motifs inspired by Persian tazhib, delicate floral and vegetal elements that introduce a sense of life and growth into the visual field.

The result is immersive. Viewers are not simply observing a painting, they are navigating a landscape of language.

Born in Babol, Iran, Moslehi has spent over a decade refining her practice and has been based in Oman since 2021. Her work extends

beyond traditional calligraphy into mirror art, an architectural craft deeply embedded in Iranian heritage. By incorporating reflective materials into her compositions, she introduces another layer of interaction, one that subtly brings the viewer into the work itself.

This interplay between reflection and form is particularly significant in ‘Echo of the East’. It reinforces the exhibition’s central theme: that identity is not static, but shaped through continuous dialogue between past and present, self and environment.

The exhibition also resonates with Oman’s own cultural narrative. As the country continues to position itself as a regional hub for art and design, platforms such as Stal Gallery are playing an essential role in amplifying voices that explore cross-cultural connections. Moslehi’s work, grounded in Middle Eastern visual traditions yet expressed through a contemporary vocabulary, aligns seamlessly with this direction.

Her previous exhibitions across Muscat, including showcases at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre and Bait Muzna Gallery, have already established her presence within the local art scene. However, the present exhibition marks a more cohesive and introspective body of work, one that draws together years of exploration into a singular artistic statement.

Among the featured pieces are large-scale canvases such as Echoes of Muttrah and Sun of the East, where dense calligraphic layers create almost topographical surfaces, evoking dunes, waves and shifting terrains. In these works, language transcends readability and becomes a visual experience, a terrain shaped by memory and movement.

A recurring line within the exhibition, “The land recognises the human who belongs to it”, encapsulates its emotional core. It speaks to a sense of rootedness that goes beyond geography, touching on identity, heritage and the intangible ties that connect individuals to place.

As Muscat continues to cultivate its artistic identity, exhibitions like ‘Echo of the East’ highlight the power of visual language to tell stories that words alone cannot. Moslehi’s work does not demand to be read, it asks to be felt, traced and experienced.

In doing so, it offers a reminder that art, much like language, is not only a means of expression, but a reflection of where we come from and how we choose to remember it.

