

O M A N
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HODGKINSON
HEADLINES BRITAIN'S
SUPER SUNDAY AT
WORLD INDOORS

D E A T H T O L L F R O M T H E W E A T H E R S Y S T E M R I S E S T O S I X

More heavy rains expected today

A TOTAL of four people have died in the past 24 hours from incidents related to the ongoing weather conditions, the Search and Rescue sector at the National Emergency Management Committee said on Sunday. The Search and Rescue sector stated that among the recorded deaths were two citizens, who were swept away after their vehicle was trapped in a wadi in Wadi Al Maawil, Al Batinah South Governorate. Their bodies were recovered later. The sector also noted that a vehicle carrying ten people was swept away in Barkah, Al Batinah South Governorate. Seven people were rescued, two were found dead, while the search is on for one missing person.

Meanwhile, the Emergency Management Subcommittees in the governorates of Al Dakhiliyah, Al Sharqiyah North, Al Sharqiyah South and Al Dhahirah, held meetings to discuss the latest developments regarding the weather condition (Al Masarrat Depression) currently affecting the Sultanate of Oman.

The committees discussed their preparedness and assessed the readiness of various sectors within the emergency management system and the National Emergency Management Centre. They also discussed the continued activation of emergency plans for essential services, ensuring the readiness of shelters, specifying deployment points for ambulance and rescue teams, and preparing to reopen roads and ensure smooth traffic flow in the governorates in accordance with directives issued by the National Emergency Management Centre.

MORE RAINS

Several governorates are experiencing cloud cover and development of thunder cells on Sunday, particularly the governorates of Al Dakhiliyah, Al Wusta and Al Dhahirah.

Thunder clouds are expected to move northeastward towards the Al Hajar Mountains in the coming hours. Areas bordering the Al Hajar Mountains are expected to experience



Heavy to extremely heavy rains were reported from various wilayats on Monday.

rainfall of varying intensities.

Mohammed bin Ali al Mashaikhi, a meteorologist at the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA), said that rains are expected in the governorates of Al Dhahirah, Al Dakhiliyah and Al Sharqiyah North, as well as parts of the Al Hajar Mountains extending from Al Batinah North and Al Batinah South to Al Sharqiyah North, and the governorates of Muscat and Al Wusta. **SEE ALSO P2 & 3**

No compensation for deliberately crossing wadis

The Financial Services Authority (FSA) has said that the Unified Motor Vehicle Insurance Policy in Comprehensive and Third Party Coverage provides

coverage for damages resulting from natural disasters, including hail, wadis, storms and cyclones.

It stipulates that the policyholder must take all

necessary precautions to protect lives and vehicles and not risk crossing wadis. They must also follow the instructions of the Royal Oman Police (ROP).

ITALY’S MELONI LOSES JUSTICE REFERENDUM



ROME: Italian voters emphatically rejected a flagship judicial reform championed by Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, dealing a blow to her right-wing coalition ahead of next year’s general elections.

With most ballots counted after the March 22-23 referendum, the opposition-backed “No” bloc took almost 54 per cent of the vote against 46 per cent who approved of the government drive to rewrite the constitution and revamp Italy’s fiercely independent judiciary.

“The Italians have decided and we respect this decision,” Meloni said in a message posted on social media.

“Clearly, we regret this missed opportunity to modernise Italy, but this does not change our commitment to keep working seriously and resolutely for the good of the nation,” she added, making clear she had no intention of resigning.

Turnout was much higher than expected at almost 60 per cent, with voters apparently energised by an ill-tempered campaign that laid bare deep animosity between the right-wing coalition and Italy’s magistrates, that will leave lasting scars.

Around 50 magistrates gathered in the courthouse of the southern city of Naples to follow the count and started singing the anti-fascist anthem of resistance “Bella Ciao” when it became clear the government had lost. — **AFP**

Trump announces ‘very good’ talks with Iran

PRESIDENT Donald Trump shelved plans on Monday to attack Iran’s power plants in a stunning about-turn sparked by what he said were “very good” talks with unidentified Iranian officials to bring an end to the war. The reversal came ahead of a Monday night ultimatum for the Islamic republic to reopen the Strait of Hormuz shipping lane - or see Trump “obliterate” its power plants.

In another development, Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, said that the Sultanate of Oman is making intensive efforts to ensure safe passage through the Strait of Hormuz. The foreign minister noted that the war in the region has caused widespread economic issues which will be even worse if the war continues. With observers scrambling to interpret the latest statements from Trump, oil prices fell and stock markets jumped, even though Iran denied that any talks were under way.

Trump said his administration



A member of the Iranian Red Crescent comforts a resident of a destroyed apartment block in northern Tehran on Monday. — **AFP**

was discussing with an unidentified “top person”, but not the country’s supreme leader Mojtaba Khamenei. “We’ve wiped out the leadership phase one, phase two, and largely phase three. But we’re dealing with the man who I believe is the most respected and the leader,” Trump told reporters in Florida. He described the individual as “very reasonable,” while warning that if the talks failed, “we’ll just keep bombing our little hearts out.”

In Iran, media outlets quoted the foreign ministry denying any talks and suggesting Trump was angling to bring down energy prices sent soaring by the war - with no mention of his claim on state television’s latest news bulletin. In a post on his Truth Social site, Trump said he had told the Pentagon to “postpone any and all military strikes against Iranian power plants and energy infrastructure for a five day period, subject to the success of the ongoing meetings.”

SEE ALSO P6 & 7

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 23

The governorates of Al Dhahirah, Al Buraimi, Musandam, Al Batinah North and Al Batinah South experienced heavy thundershowers associated with strong downdrafts, causing most wadis to flow.

Hilal bin Salim al Hajri, Head of the Forecasting and Early Warning System Department at the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA), said that there are chances of continued thundershowers over the governorates of Al Dakhiliyah, Muscat, Al Sharqiyah North, Al Sharqiyah South, and the northern parts of Al Wusta.

Most wilayats of Muscat Governorate witnessed moderate to heavy rainfall on Monday due to the ongoing weather conditions affecting the Sultanate of Oman. Musandam Governorate witnessed moderate to heavy rainfall.

Moderate to heavy rains were also reported in Musandam Governorate on Monday.

In the interest of public safety and due to the unstable weather conditions, the Royal Hospital has decided to postpone appointments scheduled between March 24 and 26 for patients who are unable to attend.

Patients are advised to reschedule their appointments at a later time once conditions improve.

All hospital services will continue as usual despite the current weather conditions in the Sultanate of Oman.

The hospital team will contact affected patients to reschedule their postponed appointments in due course. Patients may also follow up during official working hours via WhatsApp at 90669066.

Emergency services remain fully operational 24/7 without interruption.

The Royal Oman Police (ROP) announced the closure of the Al Amerat-Bausher mountain road as a precautionary measure due to expected heavy rainfall in the coming hours. Motorists are advised to use alternative routes until further notice and to adhere to safe driving guidelines during rainy conditions.



World Meteorological Day today

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the National Multi-Hazard Early Warning Centre at the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA), alongside the world countries, is marking World Meteorological Day, which falls on March 23 each year.

Oman continues to develop its meteorological services through an integrated system for monitoring, forecasting, and early warning.

In 2025, the number of weather monitoring stations reached 83 in Oman. In addition, 2,850 special weather bulletins were issued, along with 10,950 weather forecasts for Oman's airports (TAF), 1,460 aviation weather maps, 82 warnings for Omani airspace, and 423 warnings related to runways.

The National Multi Hazard Early Warning Centre was established in 2004 and officially launched in 2015. It is one of the first specialised centres in the region providing comprehensive alerts and warnings for natural hazards including tropical cyclones, severe weather conditions, flash floods and the risk of tsunamis resulting from undersea earthquakes.

The country's early warning system has witnessed significant development in recent years within the framework of the Muzn strategic programme launched by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) to

develop the meteorological and early warning system during the period from 2023 to 2026. Several strategic projects were implemented, including upgrading the network of monitoring stations, enhancing weather radar capabilities, developing numerical forecasting systems and databases, and establishing advanced digital platforms for providing meteorological information.

Abdullah bin Rashid al Khadouri, Director-General of Meteorology at the CAA, said that the Authority's efforts are part of a strategic vision aimed at improving the accuracy of weather forecasts and enhancing the efficiency of early warnings, thereby supporting public safety and the aviation sector and contributing to national development plans.

He added that the CAA employs modern technologies such as

artificial intelligence and big data analytics to support weather forecasting and the analysis of complex weather phenomena. The CAA has enhanced its systems to track tropical cyclones in the Arabian Sea and predict heavy rainfall and flash floods. The Civil Aviation Authority, also hosts the Centre of Excellence for Satellite Applications in Muscat, which operates under the supervision of the World Meteorological Organization and the European Organization for the Exploitation of Meteorological Satellites. It is a regional platform specialising in capacity building and providing training programmes in the using satellite of data in weather monitoring and forecasting, serving specialists in the countries of the Middle East, North Africa and West Asia. — ONA



In 2025, the number of weather monitoring stations reached 83



No insurance cover for vehicles intentional crossing flooded wadis

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 23

The Financial Services Authority (FSA) has warned that insurance claims may be denied for vehicles damaged while deliberately crossing flooded wadis in violation of safety instructions, as unstable weather continues to impact parts of the country.

In a public advisory, FSA said standard motor insurance policies — including comprehensive and third-party coverage — do provide protection against damages caused by natural disasters such as heavy rain, hailstorms and flooding.

However, the authority stressed that such coverage is conditional on policyholders adhering to safety guidelines issued by authorities, including avoiding risky behaviour such as attempting to cross flooded wadis.

“The intentional crossing of wadis and failure to follow official instructions may lead to the loss of compensation rights if damage occurs,” the FSA said.

The regulator added that insurance companies are not liable for damages resulting from deliberate actions by drivers, including entering wadi channels or leaving vehicles in flood-prone areas without taking necessary precautions.

The warning comes as Oman experiences heavy rainfall and overflowing wadis in several governorates, prompting repeated advisories from authorities urging residents to avoid low-lying areas and floodwaters.

Separately, the FSA noted that under Oman's traffic law, motorists who intentionally cross wadis in a manner that endangers lives may face penalties, including imprisonment of up to three months, a fine of up to RO 500, or both.

FSA last month introduced automatic coverage for material damage caused by natural disasters and weather-related events across all motor insurance policies, including



mandatory third-party policies.

The decision came in light of the climate developments witnessed in the Sultanate of Oman in recent years, reinforcing the role of insurance as an effective risk management tool, mitigating economic and social impacts and strengthening community preparedness.

According to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, the Wilayat of Barka received the highest rainfall on Monday at 133 mm, followed by Bahla (120 mm), Wadi Al Maawil (96 mm), Sur (94 mm), Al Seeb (88 mm) and Al Musannah (87 mm). Muscat got 38 mm of rain while Al Amerat got 36 mm.



TACKLING TUBERCULOSIS

THE SULTANATE
OF OMAN will mark
World Tuberculosis Day,
which falls on March 24 every year.
This underscores the importance of
enhancing global efforts to prevent and
contain tuberculosis, and highlights the
importance of early detection and effective
treatment of the disease.

The Sultanate of Oman continues its efforts to combat tuberculosis, one of the world's most prominent health challenges. The Ministry of Health (MoH) implements integrated programmes that target prevention, early detection, treatment and raising community awareness.

These efforts have contributed to maintaining low infection rates, with the Sultanate of Oman classified according to international standards, as a low-infection country. The infection rate in 2025 was approximately 8.5 cases per 100,000 people, with an average of nearly 300 cases registered annually. Most of these cases were among expatriates arriving from high-risk countries, resulting from the transformation of latent tuberculosis bacteria, acquired in the country of departure, into its active form due to several factors, including changes in environment, nutrition, immunity and others.

SEVERAL MILESTONES

In recent years, the Sultanate of Oman has achieved several milestones in combating tuberculosis, including the launch of the National Tuberculosis Elimination Strategy for 2021-2025, the strengthening of surveillance and electronic reporting systems, and the linking of contact data to confirmed cases.

In addition, a community-based direct treatment programme was implemented to support patients and ensure adherence to treatment plans. Besides, latent tuberculosis screening and treatment for expatriates upon arrival were implemented in four governorates starting in 2024.

The Ministry of Health focused on strengthening health education programmes to raise awareness about the symptoms of the disease, its transmission methods, and the importance of early diagnosis. Educational materials, including brochures and videos, were published on the ministry's digital platforms in seven languages.

The Ministry of Health relies on promoting early detection of tuberculosis through highly accurate laboratory tests and epidemiological investigation of contacts of infected individuals. Free treatment is provided to everyone, and patients are monitored throughout the treatment period, which can last six months or more in some cases, to ensure full adherence to the treatment plan up to complete recovery.

Prevention strategies involve monitoring and testing contacts of confirmed cases to detect infection early and initiate treatment promptly. This is in addition to

programmes for screening and treating latent tuberculosis that are implemented for high-risk groups, such as immunocompromised individuals, healthcare workers and arrivals from high-incidence countries as part of the medical fitness screening programme. The ministry continues to promote health education on the symptoms of the disease, its transmission methods and ways to prevent it. The Sultanate of Oman achieves high success rates in treating tuberculosis patients, in line with the standards recommended by the World Health Organization. This is attributable to the provision of free treatment and continuous follow-up of cases, along with the implementation of direct treatment programmes that promote patient adherence until full recovery.

The treatment completion rate for Omani and resident patients who completed the treatment programme in the Sultanate of Oman in 2024 was 88 per cent.

The Ministry of Health implements awareness campaigns and educational initiatives to promote awareness of tuberculosis and methods of prevention, particularly on the occasion of World Tuberculosis Day, in all governorates.

These initiatives include disseminating awareness materials through digital platforms and preparing educational materials in several languages to ensure that health messages reach all segments of society.

The Ministry of Health enhances partnerships between government agencies, the private sector and civil society organisations to support tuberculosis control programmes. This is achieved through the implementation of joint awareness initiatives and community participation in prevention and early detection efforts. The ministry urges members of the community to visit health institutions if they have symptoms of the disease and to cooperate with health teams in identifying contacts of infected individuals to undergo the necessary medical examinations and begin treatment if required.

The Ministry of Health is working on updating the National Tuberculosis Elimination Strategy for Phase II, taking into account a multi-sectoral approach and understanding the social determinants of the disease in society. This includes expanding latent tuberculosis screening and treatment programmes for expatriates to cover all governorates.

The Ministry of Health stresses that early detection and adherence to treatment are fundamental in combating tuberculosis. It urged members of the community to visit health institutions if they have a persistent cough lasting more than two weeks, weight loss, or fever. The ministry also stressed the importance of cooperating with health teams in tracing contacts and initiating treatment when necessary to maintain public health and limit the spread of the disease. — ONA

The infection rate in 2025 was approximately 8.5 cases per 100,000 people, with an average of nearly 300 cases registered annually

*National Tuberculosis
Elimination
Strategy for Phase
II, expanding
latent TB screening
and treatment for
expatriates to cover all
governorates*

Latent tuberculosis screening and treatment for expatriates upon arrival were implemented in four governorates starting in 2024

The MoH implements integrated programmes that target prevention, early detection, treatment and raising community awareness

Free treatment is provided to everyone, and patients are monitored throughout the treatment period, which can last six months or more in some cases.

*Oman will mark World Tuberculosis Day today.
This highlights the importance of early detection and effective
treatment of the disease*

LOCKED CONFLICT



Pakistani soldiers keep watch at the border in Chaman, Balochistan province. — AFP

PAKISTAN VOWS TO FIGHT AS AFGHAN TRUCE NEARS END

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan’s foreign minister said that the country remains committed to “eradicating the menace of terrorism”, as the clock ticked down to the end of a temporary ceasefire with Afghanistan. Both countries last Wednesday announced a halt to weeks of hostilities for the Eid Al Fitr holiday, agreeing to a temporary ceasefire until midnight Monday. But in a message to mark Pakistan Day, a national holiday, Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar indicated that the country’s approach to the conflict had not changed.

“Pakistan remains firmly committed to eradicate the menace of terrorism,” he said in a statement. “Pakistan’s actions inside Afghanistan... are directed towards this goal.” The Taliban government and a medical source said one person was killed by a mortar shell fired by Pakistan in the eastern border province of Kunar.

Afghanistan and Pakistan have been locked in conflict for months over claims from Islamabad that Kabul is harbouring extremists behind cross-border attacks on its territory. The Taliban authorities deny the claim. In his own Pakistan Day message, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Monday said military action inside Afghanistan was “a symbol of our national resolve against terrorism”. “We will not allow any harm to the peace and security of our country,” he added.

The Eid truce came after a Pakistani strike on a drug rehabilitation centre in Kabul last Monday, which Afghan authorities said killed more than 400. The Norwegian Refugee Council, an international NGO, said the following day that “hundreds” were killed and injured. The UN assistance mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) on Monday said preliminary figures from their investigation indicated that there were 143 killed and 119 wounded. But a spokesperson said that the toll was likely to increase, with the process slowed by difficulties in identifying some bodies. According to a UN toll last Tuesday, not taking into account the drug rehabilitation centre strike, 76 Afghan civilians have been killed in the fighting since it intensified on February 26. Over 115,000 people have been displaced in Afghanistan. — AFP

ORBAN LASHES OUT AT CLAIM FM PASSES EU DATA TO RUSSIA

BUDAPEST: Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban lashed out at allegations in the Washington Post newspaper that his foreign minister had passed sensitive information about European Union negotiations to Russia. “Eavesdropping on a member of government is a serious attack on Hungary,” Orban said on Facebook, adding that he had asked the justice minister to investigate. Szijarto said on Facebook the accusations in the Post were “senseless conspiracy theories”. He accused “one or more foreign intelligence agencies” of engaging

in “surveillance, with the active cooperation of a Hungarian journalist” whom he did not name. The Post’s article also alleged that Russian services may have considered influencing the campaign for the Hungarian parliamentary elections on April 12. Independent opinion polls say Orban, who supports both US President Donald Trump and Russian leader Vladimir Putin, is in a weak position ahead of the ballot. Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk said the US paper’s article “should not surprise anyone”.

“We have suspected this for a long time,” Tusk said on X on Sunday. “(This is) one of the reasons why I speak only when strictly necessary and say only what is strictly necessary.” A European Union spokeswoman, Anitta Hipper, said the reports were “greatly concerning.” A “relationship of trust between member states, and between them and the institution is fundamental for the work of the EU and we expect the Hungarian government to provide the clarifications”, she said. — AFP

Israeli minister calls for annexation of S Lebanon

ISRAEL SHOULD extend its border with Lebanon up to the Litani River deep inside the country’s south, Israel’s finance minister said on Monday as Israeli troops bombed bridges and destroyed homes in the area in an escalating military assault. The comments by Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich were the most explicit yet by a senior Israeli official on seizing Lebanese territory in a fight Israel says targets Hezbollah. Lebanon was pulled into the regional war on March 2 when Hezbollah fired missiles into Israel. Since then, Israel has ordered all residents to leave the area south of the Litani River as it pummels the area with air strikes, viewing it as a Hezbollah stronghold. Lebanese authorities say the Israeli air and ground assault has killed more than 1,000 people, and more than a million have been driven from their homes, with Israel having ordered residents to flee swathes of the country. Smotrich told an Israeli radio programme that the military campaign in Lebanon “needs to end with a different reality entirely, both with the Hezbollah decision but also with the change of Israel’s borders.” “I say here definitively... in every room and in every discussion, too: the new Israeli border must be the Litani,” Smotrich said. Smotrich, leader of a small far-right party in Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s cabinet, often makes comments that go beyond official Israeli policy.



A displaced woman sits next to her tent in a camp erected along the Beirut seafront area. — AFP

Lebanon needs to end with a different reality entirely, both with the Hezbollah decision but also with the change of Israel’s borders. I say here definitively... in every room and in every discussion, too: the new Israeli border must be the Litani

BEZALEL SMOTRICH

Netanyahu’s office did not immediately respond to a request for comment on the remarks. Defence Minister Israel Katz hinted earlier this month at plans to capture land, saying Lebanon could face “loss of territory” if it did not disarm Hezbollah. Smotrich’s remarks were deeply resonant in Lebanon, which is trying to emerge from a decades-old cycle of invasions and occupations by its neighbour. Israeli forces have launched repeated assaults on Lebanon since 1978 and occupied the south from 1982 to 2000. A Lebanese official said that Beirut was still counting on foreign powers to put enough pressure on Israel to put an end to the war, through an offer from President Joseph Aoun to hold direct talks. Smotrich also called for Israel to annex territory it now controls in the Gaza Strip, up to an armistice

line with Hamas. A ceasefire signed in October left Israel in control of 53% of Gaza, where it has ordered residents out and bulldozed buildings. The Israeli military says its troops in Lebanon are carrying out ground maneuvers and targeted raids on Hezbollah militants and weapons stores, aimed at protecting residents in northern Israel from Hezbollah fire. The Lebanese government has outlawed Hezbollah military activity and said it wants to engage in direct talks with Israel. Over the weekend, Israel struck a main bridge linking south Lebanon with the rest of the country after ordering its military to destroy all crossings over the Litani River and to step up the demolition of homes near the southern border. International law generally prohibits militaries from attacking civilian infrastructure, and the United Nations human rights chief has criticised Israel’s actions in Lebanon, particularly its use of widespread evacuation orders. Israeli strikes hit two more crossings on the Litani River on Monday — a road running near a main bridge hit on Sunday and another small bridge on another section of the river. Hanna Amil, the mayor of the Christian border town Rmeish, whose residents have refused to leave their homes, said that it was getting increasingly difficult to move around. “Once or twice a week, a convoy from the Lebanese army accompanies us as we try to get basic goods from nearby areas,” he said. — Reuters



RUNWAY COLLISION SHUTTERS NY AIRPORT

NEW YORK: A plane carrying dozens of people collided with a fire truck on a runway at New York’s LaGuardia airport, killing the pilot and co-pilot and causing “serious injuries” to others, authorities said. Due to the crash, US aviation authorities halted all flights at LaGuardia, and the port authority said the airport would stay shut until at least 2:00 pm “to allow for a thorough investigation.” The closure follows the dramatic collision that left the Air Canada Express plane tilted back on its tail on the tarmac with a smashed cockpit, and flanked by emergency vehicles with flashing lights. The pilot and co-pilot were killed in the crash, Kathryn Garcia, the head of the city’s port authority, said. Forty-one people were taken to the hospital, some with “serious injuries,” though 32 have since been released. — AFP

DISTRIBUTION GANG

India seizes 20,000 books over piracy ring



Indian police have seized more than 20,000 pirated books to dismantle a major piracy ring. It exposed a “sophisticated and large-scale distribution operation”, Penguin Random House India said, who said it worked with police in collaboration with fellow publishers Hay House, and Simon & Schuster India. “The nearly 24-hour operation targeted multiple warehouses as well as an illegal printing press,” it said. — AFP

NATIONWIDE TRAGEDY

Greece opens trial over deadly train crash



The long-awaited trial over a train crash that killed 57 people in Greece in 2023 was adjourned soon after opening due to poor courtroom conditions and amid protests outside against what many see as the state’s role in the incident. The 36 defendants include a station master, rail managers and former railway operator executives, with charges ranging from traffic disruption to negligent manslaughter. — Reuters

Aquinex

NOTICE INVITING TENDER

Tender Ref: Q260050

Aquatic Investments Excellence LLC (Aquinex) is spearheading the development of a mega aquaculture facility in Al Jazer, Sultanate of Oman. Spanning an area of approximately 80 km2 with an initial target production capacity of 70,000 MT per year.

Aquinex invites sealed tenders from experienced contractors for the following package:

Project Name: Al Jazer Shrimp Farm Project

Tender Title: Construction of Seed Facilities and Associated Infrastructure

1.Scope of Work
The project comprises Phase 1 construction works for the Broodstock Multiplication Center, Larviculture and Maturation Buildings, and associated infrastructure, in accordance with approved drawings, specifications, and applicable standards. The Contractor shall execute all works including construction, installation, testing, and commissioning.
The scope includes, but is not limited to:

- **Civil & Structural:** Site preparation; construction of Brook Stock Multiplication Center, Larviculture Buildings (6 Nos.), Maturation Buildings (2 Nos.), effluent ponds, and water reservoirs.
- **Architectural:** Finishes, roofing, partitions, and internal fit-outs.
- **MEP Works:** Electrical, plumbing, process piping, firefighting, HVAC, telecom, CCTV, and utilities.
- **Utilities & Infrastructure:** Pumphouses, RO plant, fire pump station, external water networks, roads, grading, and ancillary works.

2. Eligibility
Contractors must be registered and possess a proven track record in executing projects of similar magnitude and complexity within the Sultanate of Oman.

3. Tender Documents
Interested parties may request the tender documents by emailing procurement@aquinex.om (referencing the tender number) no later than **01/04/2026**.

S P I R A L L I N G T E N S I O N S

IRAN REPORTS NO US TALKS

Iranian media reported that there were no negotiations after US President Donald Trump announced progress in talks on ending the war.

RUSSIA-IRAN CALL

Russia called for a settlement to the Middle East war just as Trump claimed Washington and Tehran had held talks on ending the conflict.

US-IRAN TALKS

Trump wrote that Washington and Tehran have had “VERY GOOD AND PRODUCTIVE CONVERSATIONS REGARDING A COMPLETE AND TOTAL RESOLUTION OF OUR HOSTILITIES IN THE MIDDLE EAST” over the past several days.

TEHRAN EXPLOSIONS

Strong explosions were heard in the Iranian capital, as the war with the United States and Israel raged for its fourth week.

AIRCRAFT CARRIER RETURN

The USS Gerald Ford, which has played a key role in the Middle East war, has returned to a base in Crete.

‘GOODBYE TO ELECTRICITY’

Iran’s state media published infographics of power plants in the region that its forces could target, in response to Trump’s threat.

FRIENDLY FIRE

The Israeli military confirmed that its own artillery fire had killed an Israeli civilian on the northern border, where Hezbollah had claimed an attack.

NAVAL MINES

Iran’s defence council said that it would mine “all access routes and communications lines in the Gulf and coastal areas” — including deploying “drifting mines deployable from the coasts”.

US President Donald Trump said on Monday he had given orders to postpone any military strikes against Iranian power plants for five days, hours ahead of a deadline that threatened further escalation in the conflict now in its fourth week. Trump added in a post on his Truth Social platform that the US and Iran had had “VERY GOOD AND PRODUCTIVE” conversations over the past two days about a “COMPLETE AND TOTAL RESOLUTION OF HOSTILITIES IN THE MIDDLE EAST”. A reporter for the US news outlet Axios said Türkiye, Egypt and Pakistan had met White House envoy Steve Witkoff and, separately, Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi. The reporter, Barak Ravid, cited an unnamed US source as saying the discussion was about ending the war and resolving all outstanding issues. Araghchi’s ministry said there were “initiatives” to reduce tensions, the Mehr news agency reported, adding that Tehran wanted Washington, as the party that began the war, to be a direct participant. The White House did not respond to questions about the content of the talks, who participated or where they were held.

IN HIS MESSAGE, WRITTEN ENTIRELY IN CAPITAL LETTERS, TRUMP SAID HE HAD INSTRUCTED THE DEFENCE DEPARTMENT TO POSTPONE THE STRIKES PENDING THE OUTCOME OF THE TALKS. HE ALSO TOLD FOX BUSINESS NETWORK THAT IRAN WANTED BADLY TO MAKE A DEAL, WHICH COULD COME WITHIN FIVE DAYS

OIL DROPS, STOCKS RECOVER In his message, written entirely in capital letters, Trump said he had instructed the defence department to postpone the strikes pending the outcome of the talks. He also told Fox Business Network that Iran wanted badly to make a deal, which could come within five days. A source briefed on Israel’s war plans said Washington had kept it informed of its talks with Tehran, and that Israel was likely to follow Washington in suspending any targeting of Iranian power plants and energy infrastructure. The Israeli prime minister’s office did not immediately respond to a request for comment on talks with Iran or Washington’s decision to suspend strikes on some Iranian targets.

Trump’s comments briefly sent the price of the Brent crude oil benchmark down around 13% to back below \$100 a barrel. By 1245 GMT, it stood around \$101.80. Global markets also recovered sharply, with US stock futures reversing losses to gain around 1.3%. On Saturday, Trump had warned that Iranian power plants would be destroyed if Tehran failed to “fully open” the Strait of Hormuz to all shipping within 48 hours. Trump set a deadline of around 7:44 pm on Monday.

Iran’s Revolutionary Guards on Monday threatened retaliation, saying they would attack Israel’s power plants and those supplying US bases across the Gulf. — Reuters



TRUMP PUTS OFF THREAT TO BOMB IRAN POWER GRID

RUSSIA CALLS FOR ‘POLITICAL’ SETTLEMENT OVER WAR



US Air Force C-17 Globemaster III lands at RAF Fairford airbase, Gloucestershire, Britain. — Reuters

MOSCOW: Russia called for a “political and diplomatic” settlement to the Middle East war just as US President Donald Trump revealed Washington and Tehran had held talks on ending the conflict. In a call with Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, Russia’s top diplomat Sergei Lavrov urged an “immediate cessation of hostilities and a political

settlement that takes into account the legitimate interests of all parties involved, above all Iran,” the Russian foreign ministry said in a readout of the call.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov had earlier said the “situation should have transitioned to a political and diplomatic settlement.” “This is the only thing that can effectively contribute to

defusing the catastrophically tense situation that has now developed in the region,” Peskov told reporters at a briefing. He was speaking before Trump’s statement that talks had taken place.

Russia — which helped build Iran’s only operational nuclear power plant at Bushehr — has warned against strikes that could endanger the site. — AFP

China warns of war ‘vicious cycle’

BEIJING: China urged all parties involved in the Middle East conflict, particularly the US and Israel, to cease military operations, warning of a “vicious cycle” in a war that analysts say, if prolonged, could undermine global growth and weaken demand for Chinese exports. “The one who tied the bell must be the one to untie it,” said Chinese special envoy to the Middle East Zhai Jun at a briefing after his shuttle-diplomacy trip that included stops in Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Kuwait.

In a separate briefing, the foreign ministry spokesperson Lin Jian cautioned that the use of force would only lead to a “vicious cycle” and that the war should not have been started. “Should the hostilities continue to spread and intensify, the entire region will be plunged into chaos,” he said.

LESSONS FROM HISTORY

“The lessons of the past are not far behind us,” the Chinese foreign ministry said on Monday in a reply to Reuters seeking comment on the Iraq War anniversary last week. “The war 23 years ago brought profound suffering to the Iraqi people and had a serious impact on the Middle East,” the statement said.

Last Friday marked the 23rd anniversary of the Iraq War, in which US-led forces invaded the country to oust Saddam Hussein, partly on claims that his government possessed weapons of mass destruction. Though the regime fell quickly, Iraq sank into years of chaos and instability, in a war estimated to have killed more than 100,000 people, cost the US trillions of dollars and created a power vacuum that saw the rise of the IS group. “The war, 23 years later, on Iran has caused severe losses to the Iranian people, and the spillover and spread of the conflict have also affected the entire region,” the ministry said.

LAST FRIDAY MARKED THE 23RD ANNIVERSARY OF THE IRAQ WAR

The war 23 years ago brought profound suffering to the Iraqi people and had a serious impact on the Middle East.

Iraq sank into years of chaos and instability, in a war estimated to have killed more than 100,000 people



An excavator clears rubble from a destroyed residential building in northern Tehran. — AFP

CHINA’S EXPORTS

Trump on Saturday imposed a 48-hour deadline on Tehran to reopen the Strait of Hormuz to all shipping, threatening to destroy Iranian power plants otherwise. Iranian attacks have effectively closed the key waterway which carries a fifth of global oil and liquefied natural gas, causing the worst oil crisis since the 1970s. While Beijing did

not detail its concerns, a prolonged conflict could weigh on China’s export outlook.

Emerging markets-key drivers of Chinese export growth-are particularly vulnerable due to limited oil reserves and sensitivity to rising energy costs. “Weakening growth in China’s emerging market trading partners will likely weigh on Chinese exports to these countries

in the coming quarters,” Goldman Sachs’s Hui Shan said in a report about the near-term risks to China’s economy. China is relatively better positioned to absorb higher oil prices, with coal accounting for about 60% of its energy mix, ample oil stockpiles and imports via the Strait of Hormuz, representing only around 5% of total energy consumption. — Reuters

ECONOMIC FALLOUT

UK’s Starmer calls for emergency meeting



LONDON: Prime Minister Keir Starmer summoned a national emergency meeting on Monday to deal with the economic fallout from the escalating war in Iran, as Britain’s government borrowing costs surged to their highest level. Britain’s heavy dependence on imported natural gas, persistently high inflation and stretched public finances have pushed its government bonds into a far steeper decline than those of international peers. — Reuters

NEEDFUL HELP

India’s Kashmiris donate to Iranians



SRINAGAR: Residents in Indian-administered Kashmir donated cash and precious metals to support Iranians affected by the Middle East war, while volunteers said some people also offered sheep or goats. The Iranian Embassy in New Delhi has shared several videos of Kashmiris donating to help them, and issued bank details where cash donations can be paid. “We will never forget your kindness and humanity,” it said it.” — AFP

ESSENTIAL DEMAND

S Korea asks Iran for safety in Hormuz



SEOUL: South Korean Foreign Minister Cho Hyun asked his Iranian counterpart to ensure the safety of vessels that remain inside the Strait of Hormuz and expressed deep concern about the impact of the Middle East conflict on the global economy, his office said. Cho spoke to Iran’s Abbas Araqchi by telephone and urged Tehran to stop strikes against civilian facilities in Gulf states and to ensure the safety of navigation through the Strait. — Reuters

OPINION

The human cost of war is incalculable



DR SANDHYA
RAO MEHTA

The writer is
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AS WAR rages around our neighbourhood and shows no signs of abating, it is perhaps too soon to calculate its cost. Already, experts have weighed in on the physical costs of destruction, of energy prices spiralling up and the stock market crashing.

While such costs are tremendous and will actually impact households worldwide, it is the human story that remains untold, as is often the case in conflicts.

On the one hand, there are traumatic visuals of young children killed in an air strike on their school in Iran, and the brutal destruction that follows bombing in urban areas around Tehran.

On this side of the Arabian Gulf, the cost to lives has been, fortunately and so far, being contained.

But the panic, uncertainty and fear in a region historically known for its stability and peace have been unprecedented.

Currently, news reports suggest that around 25 people have been killed across all the countries in the Gulf.

Most of them were migrants whose only

dream was to support their families back home.

Little would they have suspected that going to one of the world's safest regions would impact them in this way.

The daily reports of alarms ringing at the approach of missiles in all the Gulf countries, except Oman, have kept the population on edge.

Entire communities were suddenly made to change their routines with offices, schools and colleges going online.

While everyone goes about their daily lives, they are also looking out for the next ping of the phone, the next alarm.

Students' futures have also been upended. With the cancellation of the school-leaving exams of Indian schools, an entire cohort of thousands of students are currently in limbo, without any clarity on how they will be graded.

This exam is important for their future careers as it determines the professions they will pursue.

Of course, there have been all the stories of tourists, visitors and individuals caught in

Extended leave in the hotel industry is being talked about, and if this situation goes on longer, job losses may follow, forcing workers to go back home

the cross hairs of the conflict, unable to get back home on time.

A woman tourist had to wait over a week to travel for her chemotherapy session, a young man could not attend his father's funeral and another couldn't go on his long-awaited leave to see his 1-year-old daughter for the first time.

The conflict is having an impact on major industries like tourism and hospitality. Extended leave in the hotel industry is being talked about, and if this situation goes on longer, job losses may follow, forcing workers to go back home.

These migrant workers often pay a fortune to middlemen to facilitate their travel and are deep in debt.

They will not be able to pay back if they lose their livelihood and this will severely impact their families back home.

Wars never end well. But, while the reports of gains and losses at a macro level will be counted by many experts, it is the daily lives of those who are not even aware of these events that are affected the most. Hopefully, these stories will end positively.

FAR-RIGHT FRENCH
PRESIDENT NO
CERTAINTY DESPITE
RISE OF EXTREMES

ANNA SMOLCHENKO

France's local elections show the appeal of political extremes is growing in France, but Marine Le Pen's far-right party is not necessarily poised to win the presidency next year when Emmanuel Macron must step down, analysts said on Monday.

Leftists held onto France's biggest cities in Sunday's polls, including Paris and Marseille, boosting hopes that the next leader of the European Union's second biggest economy, and sole nuclear power, will come from a mainstream party. The right notched wins in several other big cities, while the far right and hard left established a stronger local footprint.

But limited gains of the far-right National Rally party and divisions on the left suggest the 2027 race is open, despite opinion polls favouring Le Pen and her allies, experts said.

"French town hall elections yielded no big breakthrough for the far right and no clear trend nationwide," Mujtaba Rahman, Europe director at risk analysis firm Eurasia Group, said.

The RN secured wins in small and mid-sized towns, but failed to take any major urban centre.

"It's a catastrophe (for them) in large cities," said Nonna Mayer, a political scientist at Sciences Po university and research centre CNRS.

RN party leader Bardella, 30, failed to secure support from the traditional right in run-off votes.

After a far-right ally won Nice, he claimed France's fifth-largest city as a win for his own party.

The hard-left France Unbowed (LFI) of firebrand Jean-Luc Mélenchon also scored some wins, taking the economically depressed town of Roubaix on the Belgian border and the working-class Paris suburb of Saint-Denis.

The mainstream left has sought to distance itself from LFI, over claims of antisemitism and the fatal beating of a far-right activist last month, blamed on the hard left. Analysts said that the question of strategy for both the left and right remained unresolved in the run-up to the 2027 presidential polls.

On the left, said Leridon, the rift between those who champion a broad united front and those who advocate for a left without France Unbowed was only going to widen.

"While the Socialist Party can afford to bypass LFI at the municipal level, it will be a completely different story on a national scale," she said.

Analysts say Melenchon, 74, hopes to capitalise on his party's performance to launch a strong new run for the presidency.

Eric Maurice, an analyst at the Brussels-based European Policy Centre, said the left needs to craft a viable strategy for next year's vote that includes LFI voters. — AFP

Beautiful and risky: When
the rain falls on Muscat

IN RECENT days, Oman — especially Muscat — has experienced heavy rainfall and thunderstorms. The Civil Aviation Authority has issued warnings, urging people to stay indoors and avoid wadis and flooded areas.

Streets are drenched, schools have closed, and police patrol the roads to make sure people remain safe.

It is the kind of weather that reminds us how powerful nature can be, and how quickly beauty can turn dangerous.

When I hear thunder over Muscat, I feel a mix of emotions. There is worry about safety and flooding, but also comfort in the smell that fills the air when the first drops hit the ground.

That smell is one of my favourite things about rain. It feels like the earth itself comes back to life after months of heat and dust. In Oman's dry climate, rain changes everything: The mountains turn green, the air cools and people step outside just to enjoy the moment.

In Islam, rain has deep meaning. It is a sign of Allah's mercy and blessing. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) taught that rain is a time when prayers are answered and that it symbolises purification.

Every drop reminds us that we depend on divine kindness for our crops, our water and our daily lives. In a country where rain is not constant, its arrival brings both gratitude and reflection.

The floods also bring back childhood memories. When I was younger, living in my parents' house in Muttrah, I would watch the water gush through the narrow streets from the second floor.

People sometimes threw rubbish into the water, not realising the harm it caused. Today, things have changed.

There is more awareness that flash floods are dangerous and not something to play with. The police and civil defence teams now work



It is the kind of weather that reminds us how powerful nature can be, and how quickly beauty can turn dangerous.



DR NAJMA
AL ZIDJALY

The writer is
Associate Professor,
SQU

May the land absorb what it needs, filling wells and reservoirs. May families stay safe in their homes, and those who work on the roads — be protected

tirelessly to close risky routes, rescue people and keep traffic under control.

Their quiet efforts save lives every season.

Unlike in the past, people in Muscat now react more cautiously to rainfall.

In earlier years, some treated flooded wadis as an adventure, driving through them even when it was risky.

Today, after many warnings and incidents, most understand that safety comes first.

Social awareness campaigns and reliable weather updates have made a difference. The government deserves recognition for improving early-warning systems and for the quick response of rescue teams during heavy storms.

Still, as the rain falls, another thought crosses my mind — the stray cats that roam Muscat's streets.

Over the years, I have fed and cared for many of them, but lately I have not been able to do as much.

Three of my own cats ran away when I was travelling, and during storms like these, I cannot help but wonder if they are safe. Seeing the rain pour down makes me wish there were more shelters for animals in Oman, places that could protect them from both weather and neglect.

One of my future goals is to create a small sanctuary for stray cats and dogs, because care for animals should also be part of how we respond to nature's challenges.

As these rains continue, I hope they will bring blessings, not damage.

May the land absorb what it needs, filling wells and reservoirs. May families stay safe in their homes, and those who work on the roads — police, civil defence and emergency teams — be protected.

Over a cup of kahwa and enjoy rain...



LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

The writer is senior editor of Observer

WHAT WOULD we need to stay at home to be safe from flash floods? One round of Omani kahwa? A good conversation? All the three days of Eid, everyone must have enjoyed the festivities and hospitality. A major part of it is the serving of halwa followed by kahwa. Then came the downpour on the second day of Eid. It was unfortunate that there were mishaps due to flash floods that also resulted in flooding of roads. Loss of life is painful. It reminds us how vulnerable we are next to nature. The weather condition is something we cannot have control over, but how we handle it depends on our managing skills — from drainage system to avoiding risks. On Saturday, many were caught off guard. The Royal Oman Police announced that, due to the expected heavy rains, the Al Amerat-Bausher mountain road will be closed as a precautionary measure. The world was celebrating one more thing on March 22 — World Water Day, with the theme ‘Water and Gender.’ The campaign is spearheaded by UN-Water to drive progress towards Sustainable Development Goal 6 (Water and Sanitation) and Goal 5 (Gender Equality). Every year, UN-Water, the UN’s coordination mechanism on water and sanitation, sets the theme for World Water Day. In 2024, the focus was on Leveraging Water for Peace; in 2025, on Glacier Preservation. All these themes seem to

need continuous attention. According to unwater.org, more than three billion people worldwide depend on water that crosses national borders. “Yet, out of 153 countries that share rivers, lakes and aquifers with their neighbours, only 24 countries report having cooperation agreements for all their shared water.” The impact of the trough of low pressure brought in so much rain in different parts of Oman on March 21. The Wilayat of Barka recorded the highest rainfall at 133 mm, followed by Bahla with 120 mm and Wadi Al Maawil at 96 mm. Other notable readings include Sur at 93 mm, Al Musannah at 83 mm, and Bidiyah at 80 mm. The total amount of water impounded by dams due to the weather conditions that affected several governorates in the Sultanate of Oman between March 20 and 22 reached 24.47 million cubic metres. The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources said that the amount of water retained in Muscat Governorate reached 5.7 million cubic metres in Wadi Dayqah Dam. In Al Batinah South Governorate, the water amount retained was 1.1 million cubic metres in Al Falij Dam, 5 million cubic metres in Al Taw Dam and 4.6 million cubic metres in Al Maawil Dam. All good news to celebrate World Water Day. What seemed to have been a pretty day quickly changed in tempo. Just before we were ready to get back to the regular routine, it was announced that classes will be conducted

The weather condition is something we cannot have control over, but how we handle it depends on our managing skills — from drainage system to avoiding risks

online and work can be handled from home. Remote work can also mean more rounds of kahwa, and conversations can be on many topics from geopolitics to topographical phenomena of wadis — the dry riverbeds. The short-duration “cloudbursts” that deliver months’ worth of rain in just a few hours tend to overwhelm the soil’s ability to absorb water, resulting in flash floods rushing down from mountains to reach the sea. Today, Oman has numerous dams to feed aquifers. Look back and think of water management in the past. The familiar scenes of Oman are the management of the flow of falaj water by farmers and women collecting water and using it for washing. The BBC, meanwhile, reported on the UN’s weather agency’s warning that the Earth’s climate is further out of balance than at any time in recorded history. The World Meteorological Organization says that our planet is gaining much more heat energy than it can release, driven by emissions of warming gases such as carbon dioxide. The report stated that this record “energy imbalance” heated the ocean to new heights last year and continued to melt our planet’s ice caps, and scientists fear that a natural warming phase called El Niño — expected to begin later this year — could soon bring further heat records. It is best to stick to main roads, and if they are flooded, patiently wait for the water to pass through, or better still, stay at home until the weather condition improves.

ASIA FACES CRISIS FROM MIDEAST DISRUPTION

MARK BENDEICH AND JOSH SMITH

The war against Iran threatens to send Asian economies into crisis, Singapore’s foreign minister said on Monday, a stark warning in a region that is acutely exposed to the massive disruption of Middle East energy supplies. “Right now, the closure of the Strait of Hormuz is, in a sense, an Asian crisis,” Vivian Balakrishnan said. In remarks made over an hour-long interview, he also raised questions about the necessity and legality of the US-Israeli war on Iran that is now entering its fourth week, saying the “entire global economy has been taken hostage” by a conflict that could usher in a financial crisis. The war has shut down the Strait of Hormuz through which 20 per cent of the world’s oil and liquefied natural gas flows, pushing up oil prices and raising fears of a renewed spike in global inflation, with no clear end in sight. While the United States has become a net oil exporter, industry-heavy economies in Asia are far more reliant on crude oil from the Middle East, Balakrishnan said. Asia, the top oil importing region, sources nearly 60 per cent of its crude and petrochemical naphtha feedstock from the Middle East. That exposure has led countries, including China, to halt refined fuel exports, while numerous petrochemical plants and refineries in the region have scaled back operations or declared force majeure. Reuters reporting shows that around 80 per cent of oil shipped through the Strait of Hormuz heads to Asian buyers. “The vulnerability has been known, but it’s never been tested to the extreme that it is being tested today,” Balakrishnan said. He warned that much would be determined by whether US President Donald Trump followed through on his warning to destroy Iranian power plants if the Strait of Hormuz was not open to all shipping by around 2345 GMT on Monday. In turn, Iran said it could attack Israel’s power plants and plants supplying US bases in the Gulf. “If indeed you get tit-for-tat destruction of energy infrastructure, then you’re dealing not only with an immediate blockage of the straits, but scarring of energy infrastructure from the Middle East which means a prolonged period in which energy exports will be diminished,” Balakrishnan said, cautioning that would mean higher oil and gas prices, as well as greater inflation across the board. Balakrishnan said it is too early to tell if the situation will deteriorate to the levels of the 1997-1998 Asian financial crisis, which sent many countries in the region into recession and spread to the global economy. But Singapore is dusting off contingency plans to not only weather the storm but look for opportunities as well, he said. — Reuters

The wisdom of stability amid the storms of war

MAJOR REGIONAL wars constitute a genuine test of neighbouring states’ capacity to safeguard their national security and preserve their developmental achievements — particularly when they find themselves in the line of fire without being direct parties to the conflict. In this context, the American-Israeli war on Iran has represented a critically dangerous turning point in the contemporary history of the Arabian Gulf region, as its states were subjected to thousands of Iranian ballistic missiles and unmanned aerial vehicles targeting their civilian and vital infrastructure. The Gulf states — from the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar and Oman to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia — endured successive waves of Iranian ballistic missile strikes and drone attacks. These attacks were not confined to targets of a military nature; rather, they extended to international airports, seaports, strategic energy facilities and essential civilian assets, including hotels, residential complexes and government buildings. The targeting of civilian infrastructure belonging to states not directly engaged in the armed conflict constitutes an explicit violation of the principles of international humanitarian law, most notably the principles of distinction and proportionality enshrined in the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols. From the very first moments of the outbreak of hostilities, the Gulf states adopted a position built upon three principal pillars: an immediate call for de-escalation, adherence to the provisions and principles of international law, and the avoidance of being drawn into reactionary alignments or inflammatory rhetoric that could deepen the crisis. Most critically, they refused to be drawn into the war despite being directly subjected to attacks. This position should not be interpreted as passive neutrality or an inability to act;



Smoke rises following a strike on the Bapco Oil Refinery, amid the US-Israeli conflict with Iran, on Sitra Island, Bahrain.

— Reuters file photo



DR KHALID AL JABER

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rather, it is fundamentally a mature strategic calculation rooted in a profound understanding that wars are, by their very nature, protracted operations of attrition in which all parties lose to varying degrees, and that wisdom lies not in the pursuit of total military victory, but in minimising losses and preserving developmental gains. The contemporary strategic posture of the Gulf cannot be adequately understood without reference to its historical trajectory. Over the past several decades, the region has experienced three major conflicts, each producing significant and enduring consequences. The first, the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988), disrupted critical oil export routes and compelled the Gulf states to navigate complex and often precarious regional alignments. The second occurred in 1990 with Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait, prompting a US-led international military intervention. The third episode, the 2003 US invasion of Iraq, resulted in the removal of Saddam Hussein’s regime but simultaneously facilitated expanded external influence and contributed to the emergence of extremist actors across the Gulf.

Collectively, these experiences have fostered a distinctive strategic consciousness within the Gulf, one that perceives armed conflict not as a mechanism for resolution but as a persistent drain on regional stability and developmental progress, irrespective of immediate military outcomes. The Gulf states demanded the cessation of attacks on their territories, an end to political escalation, and the reopening of vital economic waterways — foremost among them the Strait of Hormuz, a critical economic lifeline for the region and the world. Certain Gulf states, particularly the Sultanate of Oman and the State of Qatar, have historically played pivotal roles in diplomatic mediation between Iran and Western powers. However, Iranian attacks on civilian targets within these states have undermined the effectiveness of existing diplomatic channels and complicated mediation efforts. Nevertheless, it remains an established truth in strategic studies that diplomatic solutions, not military ones, are what ultimately determine the outcome of protracted wars. Accordingly, wisdom dictates that regional and international channels of dialogue remain open regardless of the intensity of the confrontation. In light of the foregoing, it becomes clear that the Gulf position on the American-Israeli war on Iran was neither a reflexive reaction nor an improvised stance. Rather, it was the product of a deep historical accumulation and a strategic awareness forged through the lessons of three major wars that exhausted the region and burdened its peoples. The Gulf states recognised that being drawn into war would lead to nothing but further destruction and attrition, and that the preservation of internal stability and developmental achievements constitutes, in and of itself, a form of strategic victory. The region is in the most urgent need of elevating the language of diplomacy over the language of arms.

SPORTS

FOUNDERSCUP



Kim Hyo-joo clinched a one-shot victory.

KIM HOLDS OFF KORDA CHARGE TO WIN LPGA TITLE

SAN FRANCISCO: South Korea’s Kim Hyo-joo held off a final day charge from Nelly Korda to clinch a one-shot victory at the LPGA Tour’s Fortinet Founders Cup tournament in California on Sunday. Kim, who started the day five shots clear of Korda, carded a closing one-over-par 73 to finish on 16 under at the Sharon Heights Golf & Country Club in Menlo Park, outside San Francisco. Korda fired a three-under-par 69 in a valiant bid that came up just short, leaving her on 15 under for the tournament. The victory marked Kim’s second victory in the tournament after she won the Founders when it was held in Arizona in 2015. The 30-year-old Kim had watched final round partner Korda whittle away at her five-shot advantage with a blistering front nine. Korda, who was playing after tennis-playing younger brother Sebastian dumped world number one Carlos Alcaraz out of the Miami Open earlier Sunday, rattled off six birdies in the first 10 holes to pull level with Kim at 17 under just after the turn. But just when it seemed as if Korda was building unstoppable momentum, the 27-year-old two-time major champion wobbled, and she failed to make a birdie in her final eight holes to surrender the initiative. Kim regained her one-shot lead on the 11th hole with a birdie after Korda found a bunker with her second shot and could only par. Both players then bogeyed the 12th, and Kim retained her lead on the par-three 13th when she parred after hitting the pin with her second shot. — AFP

Korda sends Alcaraz to another early exit in Miami

SEBASTIAN KORDA stared down Carlos Alcaraz on Sunday, sending the world number one crashing out of the Miami Open third round 6-3, 5-7, 6-4. Korda, ranked 36th in the world, notched his first victory over a world number one, sending Alcaraz to his second straight early exit in Miami following defeat to 55th-ranked Belgian David Goffin in the second round last year. Since that defeat, Alcaraz had built a remarkable 73-6 record, including a 16-0 start to 2026 that included an Australian Open triumph to complete a career Grand Slam and a title in Doha. It looked like Korda had missed his chance to spring the upset when he served for the match at 5-4 in the second set and was broken at love. Alcaraz won the next two games to force a third set, part of a run of five straight games for the Spaniard. But Korda didn’t buckle, and it was the American who seized a break for 4-3 in the third when Alcaraz sailed a forehand wide. He held his next service game with confidence, slamming down an overhead winner on game point and after Alcaraz held serve Korda served for the match again, this time making no mistake. “It feels great,” said Korda, who has been ranked as high as 15th in the world but has endured two seasons disrupted by injuries. “I took the scenic route, that’s for sure — a little more stress than I would want but happy with how I played, happy with how I stayed with it.” Alcaraz said Korda played an “incredible” match. “A lot of tight, tight moments that I just didn’t make the most of it,” Alcaraz said. “I think he was better on those points, on those moments. I would say that was the key of the match.” Korda will face Spanish qualifier Martin Landaaluce for a place in the quarterfinals after Landaaluce ousted 14th-seeded Russian Karen Khachanov 6-3, 7-6 (7/2).

SABALENKA MARCHES ON World number one Aryna Sabalenka kept her title defence on track with a 6-4, 6-2 victory over 72nd-ranked American Caty McNally that was tougher than the score indicated. They were on serve after exchanging four breaks in the opening set when Sabalenka gained the decisive break in the final game. The Belarusian star, trying to complete the ‘Sunshine Double’ after capturing her first Indian Wells title last week, wasted one chance to break in the second set before ramping up her return pressure to break McNally’s on her last two service games. “She played really great tennis,” Sabalenka said, adding that her hold for 5-4 in the opening set, in a game that went to deuce five times, was key. “(I’m) super happy to close this match in straight sets,” said Sabalenka, who booked a meeting with China’s Olympic



Sebastian Korda (USA) serves against Carlos Alcaraz (ESP) on day six of the 2026 Miami Open at Hard Rock Stadium. — [Imagn Images](#)

gold medallist Zheng Qinwen a 6-2, 6-4 winner over Madison Keys. It was Zheng’s first win over a top-20 player since elbow surgery last July. World number two Elena Rybakina, who beat Sabalenka in the Australian Open final but fell to her in the Indian Wells title match, moved smoothly into the last 16 with a 6-3, 6-4 victory over Ukraine’s Marta Kostyuk. Rybakina next faces Australian qualifier Talia Gibson, who knocked off another seed with a 6-2, 6-2 victory over 18-year-old 18th seed Iva Jovic. Gibson, who reached the quarterfinals at Indian Wells, had ousted former world number one Naomi Osaka in the second round. — AFP

Oman’s U16 boys begin Davis Cup Juniors campaign in Sri Lanka

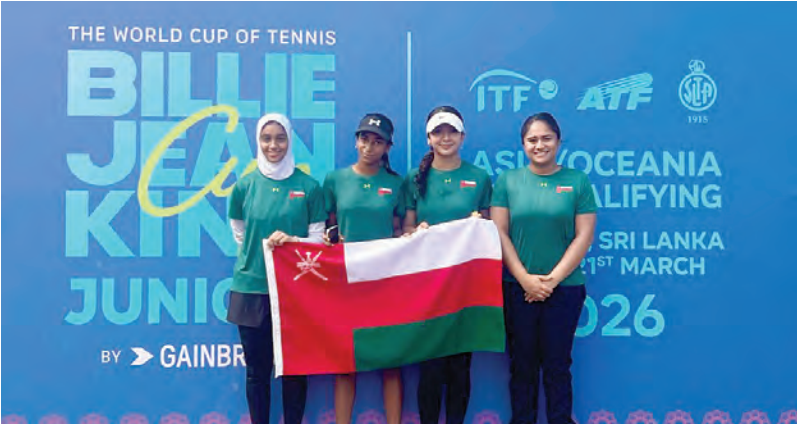
SPORT REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 23

Oman’s national Under-16 boys’ tennis team has begun its campaign in the Davis Cup Juniors Asia/Oceania Pre-Qualifying tournament in Colombo, Sri Lanka, marking a second successive appearance for Omani teams in the Sri Lankan capital after the national girls’ team recently concluded its participation in the Billie Jean King Cup Juniors competition. The ITF lists the Colombo event as DCJ Asia/Oceania Pre-Qualifying and schedules it from March 23 to 28, 2026. The tournament features 14 participating teams after several countries were unable to take part due to the current circumstances. Originally, 28 teams were expected to compete, with the top two sides from the 15-team field advancing to the finals later this year.

The draw for the tournament was held the night before last, placing Oman in Group B alongside second-seeded Singapore, sixth-seeded Turkmenistan and Myanmar. Oman will open their campaign against Turkmenistan, with the team hoping to produce positive results despite facing strong competition from higher-ranked and more experienced opponents. The immediate target will be to secure a place in the second round of the tournament. The Omani delegation includes Ahmed bin Ibrahim al Balushi as head of delegation, coach Soufiane Doub, and players Moataz bin Issa al Mazrouei and Abdulrahman bin Ahmed al Rahbi. The participating teams in the tournament are Oman, Sri Lanka, Singapore, Saudi Arabia, Turkmenistan,



Oman are in Group B alongside second-seeded Singapore, sixth-seeded Turkmenistan and Myanmar.



Oman’s U16 girls’ team concluded its participation in the Billie Jean King Cup Juniors after reaching the quarterfinals.

Macau, the Philippines, Guam, Mongolia, Pacific Oceania, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar and Nepal. Ahmed al Balushi, head of delegation, said the tournament represents an important stage in the development of Oman’s junior players and reflects the team’s growing familiarity with the Davis Cup Juniors pathway, which has become a regular feature for Omani tennis in recent years. He added that the current U16 squad is being prepared for the future with the aim of progressing to the senior men’s level, stressing the importance of competing in such tournaments to improve technical standards, gain international exposure and collect more ranking points. He noted that the tournament will be highly competitive due to the presence of several seeded teams and strong players chasing qualification

to the finals. **U16 GIRLS END CHALLENGE IN QUARTERFINALS** Al Balushi said Oman will work hard to achieve positive results and first secure a place in the second round, adding that playing on clay courts will also provide a valuable new experience for several players who are more accustomed to other main playing surfaces. Meanwhile, Oman’s national U16 girls’ team concluded its participation in the Billie Jean King Cup Juniors in Sri Lanka a few days ago after reaching the quarterfinals and delivering a number of encouraging results in the opening stage against higher-ranked teams. The team was represented by Sarah al Balushi as head of delegation, along with players Taliya al Busaidy, Areen al Azkawi and Salma al Riyami.

SPANISH LEAGUE



Barcelona’s Uruguayan defender Ronald Federico Araujo da Silva celebrates scoring his team’s first goal against Rayo Vallecano de Madrid. — AFP

REAL MADRID DOWN
ATLETICO IN DERBY,
BARCA EDGE RAYO

BARCELONA: Vinicius Junior struck twice as Real Madrid shaded Atletico Madrid 3-2 in a thrilling derby clash on Sunday to stay on leaders Barcelona’s tail at the top of La Liga.

After the Catalan giants edged Rayo Vallecano 1-0 earlier, Madrid ensured the gap to the champions stayed at four points by beating Diego Simeone’s side at the Santiago Bernabeu.

Ademola Lookman put Atletico ahead in the first half but Vinicius and Federico Valverde’s strikes gave the hosts the lead soon after the interval. Nahuel Molina equalised for Atletico, fourth, with a spectacular effort from distance but Vinicius netted again to claim the three points for Los Blancos.

Valverde was sent off for hacking Alex Baena in the final stages but his side held on to win in Alvaro Arbeloa’s first derby clash with Atletico since taking over in January.

“We showed mental toughness and strength worthy of this club’s badge,” Arbeloa told reporters, proud of his team’s effort with 10 men. “It made things hard for us and we had to suffer a lot.”

After ousting Manchester City in the Champions League last 16 on Tuesday, victory against Atletico completed a successful week for Arbeloa and his team. “We’re evolving and working hard so that in games like these Madrid fans can be happy, that the fans can enjoy themselves and that Madrid always win,” Vinicius told Real Madrid TV.

“Everyone deserves credit, the coach, the players, the fans, all the work we’ve done this week. We were sure of our gameplan from the start and that made all the difference.”

Vinicius’s double brought him to 10 goals in his last 11 matches across all competitions.

“I’m very happy because I’ve worked all season for games like this,” added Vinicius. “When this moment of the season arrives, I don’t know why, I always improve.”

Arbeloa has praised Vinicius since his first day at the helm and brought the best out of the forward after a barren spell under Xabi Alonso. “Another great game from Vinicius, another demonstration of bravery and character,” said Arbeloa.

Atletico are a point behind third-place Villarreal after they beat Real Sociedad on Friday.

BARCA SCRAPE WIN

Araujo nodded home from a corner after 24 minutes to secure Barca the three points at Camp Nou but goalkeeper Joan Garcia’s superb display played just as big a part in their victory. — AFP

“We knew how important it was to get this win before the international break, we did it, but it’s true we suffered more than we would have liked,” Garcia told DAZN.

Hansi Flick’s side were caught snoozing in the opening stages but Garcia made a fine save to deny Carlos Martin from close range.

At the other end, Raphinha was guilty of profligate finishing on numerous occasions, but the champions took the lead through Araujo’s header midway through the first half.

“I feel very good, physically well, it’s important that I can help the team,” said Araujo.

Elsewhere Alaves produced a sensational comeback from three goals down to beat Celta Vigo 4-3 and move 16th.

Athletic Bilbao, ninth, defeated fifth-place Real Betis 2-1 to stay in the fight for European football next season. — AFP



Real Madrid’s Vinicius Junior celebrates scoring his team’s third goal against Atletico Madrid. — AFP



Manchester City players celebrate after winning the Carabao Cup. — Reuters

City’s League Cup glory
adds twist to title race

AS PEP GUARDIOLA wiped away the sting of the Champagne sprayed by his jubilant players after Sunday’s League Cup final triumph against Arsenal, the Manchester City boss was confronted with a burning question.

Nico O’Reilly’s second-half double had just sealed a 2-0 win in the Wembley showpiece, handing City a psychological boost at the expense of their Premier League title rivals.

But will Guardiola’s record fifth League Cup serve as a catalyst to catch Arsenal in the title race?

The City boss, who hadn’t masterminded a victory over his old assistant Mikel Arteta since 2023, knows beating Arsenal in a one-off showpiece occasion is difficult enough.

Finding a way to overhaul Premier League leaders Arsenal, who hold a nine-point advantage over second-placed City, is an even more daunting proposition.

“I would like to have nine points in front of Arsenal,” Guardiola said. “I said to the players: ‘Today, we are going to see what our level is’. They are the best so far, no doubt about that, so let’s prove ourselves and in the second half, I could not believe we could do it against Arsenal. “But this win will have no impact (on the title race). It is a different competition.” City have a game in hand on Arsenal and host the Gunners at the Etihad Stadium in April.

Yet Guardiola acknowledged even winning those two matches won’t be enough for City unless Arsenal slip up elsewhere.

“They will be more controlled when they



Manchester City’s Nico O’Reilly celebrates scoring their second goal against Arsenal. — Reuters

come to the Etihad. Maybe for that game it will help us, but the Premier League is in their hands,” he said. “Is that team going to drop points? We will try to win our games and then see what happens.”

After recent damaging draws in the league against lowly West Ham and Nottingham Forest, as well as a limp Champions League last-16 exit against Real Madrid, City badly needed a trophy to lift the mood at the Etihad.

‘FIRE IN THE BELLY’

They went without silverware last term, but Guardiola believes this can be the start of a new era for a club with 19 trophies in all competitions since he arrived a decade ago.

“When you start to win and the generation is young you can continue that. I need to know how they behave in certain moments,”

Guardiola said of a team expensively revamped in the last 18 months.

“I can smell something that can flourish. Winning helps to anticipate the process.

“We are much better than last season but still we are not the team we should be. That requires time. Hopefully by the end of next season we will be.”

Arsenal went into the final as firm favourites as they chased a first trophy in six years.

But they departed still waiting for the second major prize of the Arteta era, assailed with questions about their manager’s selections and tactics, as well as a recurring habit of choking on the big stage.

Runners-up in the Premier League for the last three seasons, Arsenal cannot afford to let the Wembley defeat impact the rest of their treble-chasing campaign.

Arteta’s decision to pick Kepa Arrizabalaga instead of regular goalkeeper David Raya backfired when the understudy fumbled Rayan Cherkhi’s cross as O’Reilly bagged City’s first goal.

Arteta’s conservative game-plan also came under fire, but the Arsenal boss vowed his team would use the pain as fuel to win the Premier League for the first time since 2004.

“We need to have some perspective on it. We are going to use this disappointment and this fire in the belly to have the most amazing two months that we have ever had together,” said Arteta, whose side are in the Champions League and FA Cup quarterfinals. — AFP

S Africa clinch 19-run win over Kiwis in fourth T20

WELLINGTON: South Africa’s spinners played a decisive role as the tourists won the fourth Twenty20 international against New Zealand by 19 runs on Sunday to square the five-match series 2-2.

New Zealand were well placed to clinch the series midway through their chase in Wellington after the Proteas scored 164-5. However, from 88-3 after 10 overs, they lost wickets in rapid succession to be all out for 145 off 18.5 overs.

It sends the series, played between weakened sides from both countries, to a decider in Christchurch on Wednesday.

The match swung in favour of South Africa when spinners

Keshav Maharaj and Prenelan Subrayen turned the screws through the middle stages of the chase. Captain Maharaj is comfortably the most experienced member of an experimental tour squad and proved hard to score from as he took 2-22 off four overs.

Subrayen, playing his first T20 international, bowled Dane Cleaver for 26 to spark New Zealand’s middle order crumble and finished with 2-13 off three overs. Maharaj said his side played with more energy than in defeats in Hamilton and Auckland. “It was a perfect response to two disappointing losses in a row,” he said.

“Coming into this game, you



could see there was a little bit more energy and hunger.

“We are a young team, finding our way in international cricket so it takes a little bit of time.”

Opener Tim Robinson top-scored with 32 for New Zealand while Proteas paceman Gerald Coetzee took 3-31.

South Africa’s innings were dominated by 57 off 36 balls from wicketkeeper Connor Esterhuizen. He was dismissed by a spectacular outfield catch from Katene Clarke, on his international debut, off Ben Sears’ bowling. Paceman Sears impressed, taking 1-22 off four overs, which included conceding just two runs off the last over of the innings. — AFP

SPORTS



HODGKINSON HEADLINES
BRITAIN 'S SUPER SUNDAY
AT WORLD INDOORS

Britain's Keely Hodgkinson celebrates after winning the women's 800 metres final during the World Athletics Indoor Championships Kujawy Pomorze 2026 in Torun, Poland. — AFP



British gold medal winners, women's 1500m winner Britain's Georgia Hunter Bell (L) and women's 800m winner Britain's Keely Hodgkinson celebrate during the World Athletics Indoor Championships Kujawy Pomorze 2026 in Torun, Poland. — AFP



Bahamas' Devynne Charlton wins the women's 60 metres hurdles final at the World Athletics Indoor Championships. — AFP



Spain's Mariano Garcia celebrates with his national flag after winning gold in the men's 1500m final. — Reuters

KEELY HODGKINSON headlined a 'Super Sunday' for Britain at the world indoor championships as she stormed to victory in the 800m just minutes after teammates Georgia Hunter Bell and Molly Caudery had also triumphed.

Hodgkinson was then back on the track to anchor the British women's team in the championship-ending 4x400m relay, but they could only finish fifth in a race won by the USA.

Hodgkinson set a new world indoor record over 800m last month and proceeded to clock the second fastest time ever run over the distance for a stunning individual victory — and a first global gold.

"I'm just happy and healthy to finish and, finally, to come into a championships as favourite and actually finish on top," said Hodgkinson, who clocked a blistering 1min 55.30sec for the win.

She was welcomed at the line by training partner Hunter Bell, who had just won the 1,500m, and Caudery, winner of the women's pole vault. The three golds came within the space of 28 minutes.

"There has been a lot going on in

the last hour — everything seems a bit blurry to me!" said Hodgkinson, hailing herself and her gold medal-winning teammates as "three great examples" of British girls.

Hunter Bell had impressively reeled in Ethiopian front runner Birke Haylom at the bell to produce a crushing final lap in her race.

She clocked 3:58.53 for gold — her first global victory after world indoor bronze last year, an Olympic bronze in the 1,500m and world outdoor silver in the 800m.

"This victory is so sweet," said Hunter Bell. "It's such a relief to win a gold medal. I knew I had to prepare mentally before coming here as a favourite.

"I was asking myself today why was I stressing, I knew I could win it. There were a lot of instincts today. There was a gap and I felt the pressure from the pack — I knew I had to close that gap."

Caudery, who previously won world indoor gold in Glasgow in 2024, was also not to be denied, clearing 4.85m to see off the challenge from Slovenia's Tina Sutej.

It was some reward for an athlete who went out of the heats at the Paris Olympics and was unable



Gold medallist Britain's Keely Hodgkinson celebrates on the podium for the women's 800m event during the World Athletics Indoor Championships Kujawy Pomorze 2026 in Torun, Poland. — AFP

to compete at last year's world outdoors in Tokyo after sustaining an injury in the warm-up.

"This gold means so much more this time. I had a really tough two years so I really needed this," she said.

"Two years ago in Glasgow it was a 'Super Sunday' for GB as Josh Kerr and I won gold medals, today feels like a 'Super Sunday', too. It's like repeating history but even better. Georgia and Keely have been amazing and I could have not wished for a better evening."

CHARLTON MATCHES WR

In a heedy night's track and field, Devynne Charlton of the Bahamas matched her own world record when she defended her 60m hurdles title in 7.65 seconds. "I knew I had run the world record, I knew I had it when I crossed the finish line," said Charlton, who overcame an early stumble.

"I know I could have run a bit faster too but, not having the best start, I will take it... I am really proud to win my third world indoor title in a row."

Spain's Mariano Garcia won the men's 1,500m crown, outsprinting

Portugal's world champion Isaac Nader for victory in 3:39.63.

Garcia became the first athlete in world indoor history to win titles at both the 800 and 1,500m, having won the former in Belgrade in 2022.

Cooper Lutkenhaus won the 800m this time around, the 17-year-old American prodigy clocking 1:44.24 for gold to confirm his status as an absolute track star in the making.

"I came out here thinking I probably wasn't the favourite but any time I feel like I can step into a final I have a chance to win," said Lutkenhaus.

"Maybe it came from confidence or maybe from being too young but I really wanted to try to make a defining move."

Belgium's silver medallist Eliott Crestan said the American was "an incredible talent winning at 17 years of age. I think he can be the future Rudisha", in reference to the Kenyan legend David.

Sofie Dokter of the Netherlands claimed gold in the pentathlon with 4,888 points, 28 ahead of American Anna Hall, while Portugal's Gerson Balde won the men's long jump with a best of 8.46m and the US team won the men's 4x400m relay. — AFP

BUSINESS

SHORTTAKES



Energy analysts cautioned that the situation points to further escalation.

OMAN CRUDE TOPS \$160.20 PER BARREL AMIDST TENSIONS

MUSCAT: The official price of Oman crude oil for May delivery rose to \$160.20 per barrel on Monday, marking an increase of \$2.26 compared to last Friday’s level of \$157.94.

Despite the sharp daily gain, the average monthly price for March delivery stood at \$62.17 per barrel, up marginally by 8 cents from February, indicating a comparatively moderate trend over the longer term.

International oil markets moved higher amidst escalating geopolitical tensions in the Middle East, with concerns centring on potential disruptions to critical energy infrastructure and supply routes.

Brent crude futures climbed \$1.57 to \$113.76 per barrel, while US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) rose \$3.09 to \$101.32 per barrel, reflecting heightened volatility in early trading. The stronger rally in WTI also narrowed its discount to Brent, which had widened significantly in recent sessions.

Market sentiment remains highly sensitive to developments in the region. Analysts noted that while short-term price swings are being driven by rhetoric and threats, underlying supply dynamics will determine longer-term direction.

Tensions escalated after Iran’s Revolutionary Guards warned of potential strikes on Israeli power facilities and infrastructure linked to US bases in the region. The warning followed threats by US President Donald Trump to target Iran’s power sector if key shipping routes are not reopened.

Energy analysts cautioned that the situation points to further escalation, raising the risk of sustained supply disruptions. Observers noted that such developments could have severe implications for Gulf energy infrastructure.

The crisis has brought renewed attention to the strategic Strait of Hormuz, a vital artery for global energy trade that accounts for roughly 20 per cent of worldwide oil and liquefied natural gas flows.

Disruptions in the waterway, coupled with reported damage to energy facilities, have already begun to affect production and exports across the region.

Analysts estimate that between 7 million and 10 million barrels per day of oil supply could be at risk, underscoring the scale of potential impact on global markets. — Reuters

OIA expands footprint in semiconductor landscape

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 23

AS part of its strategic commitment to investing in priority economic sectors identified under the 11th Five-Year Plan and in line with the economic diversification objectives of Oman Vision 2040, Oman Investment Authority (OIA) is expanding its presence in the semiconductor sector to further cement Oman’s position in advanced technology industries and enable the localisation of the value chain key segments.

Recognised as a cornerstone of the digital economy, the semiconductor sector underpins advanced communications, energy systems, artificial intelligence and digital transformation.

These efforts are led through ITHCA Group, OIA’s investment arm in the ICT sector, attracting three global companies by the end of 2025 to establish operational centres and offices in the Sultanate of Oman.

The growth of these investments aligns with OIA’s “Omani Angle” philosophy, which guides its international investment approach, particularly within the digital economy, by focusing on attracting advanced technologies, localising them within Oman, transferring expertise and developing a fully integrated national research and development ecosystem.

Through these investments, OIA aims to strengthen the Sultanate of Oman’s position as an attractive destination for advanced technology industries, support the development of a sustainable knowledge-based economy, diversify national income sources and create high-quality employment opportunities for Omani youth in engineering, technology and innovation.

Through ITHCA Group, OIA invested RO 5 million (USD 13 million) in US-based GSME, a company specialising in

Through these investments, OIA aims to strengthen the Sultanate of Oman’s position as an attractive destination for advanced technology industries, support the development of a sustainable knowledge-based economy, diversify national income sources and create high-quality employment opportunities for Omani youth in engineering, technology and innovation.



The growth of these investments aligns with OIA’s “Omani Angle” philosophy, which guides its international investment approach.

semiconductor design, marking a strategic entry into advanced technologies.

Semiconductors are fundamental components used in the production of electronic chips that power most modern devices.

GSME’s operations include radio frequency (RF) chips, power solutions and outsourced manufacturing services. The investment led to the establishment of a fully integrated semiconductor design centre in Oman.

It also enabled the training of Omani engineers, who successfully designed electronic chips capable of receiving and processing radio signals, as well as integrated circuits for power management, in addition to transferring advanced knowledge in silicon chip design.

This investment has significantly supported national talent development. A total of 92 graduates completed the company’s training programme, of whom 67 were employed in electronic engineering and chip design roles, while the remaining graduates entered the job market after completing their training.

As part of its wider impact, the initiative also supported the hosting of the ‘Oman Semiconductor Ecosystem Enablement & Investment’ Forum, which brought together around 250 global executives, investors and decision-makers, further strengthening Oman’s visibility within the global semiconductor landscape.

In addition, OIA invested RO 1.93 million (\$ 5 million) through ITHCA Group in US-based Lumotive, a company specialising in programmable optics and Light Control Metasurface (LCM) 3D sensing technologies.

These advanced technologies enable electronic light control and precise three-dimensional sensing without mechanical components.

The investment resulted in the establishment of Lumotive’s branch in Oman, the introduction of advanced optical control and AI technologies, a commitment to deploy capital locally within a defined timeframe and the recruitment of Omani technical professionals.

Further reinforcing its focus on next-generation communications technologies, OIA invested RO 7.7 million (\$ 20 million) through ITHCA Group in US-based Movandi, a leader in semiconductor solutions, intelligent wireless connectivity and 5G technologies.

OQBI explores CCUS opportunities to advance decarbonisation

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, MARCH 23

OQ Base Industries (OQBI) — part of Oman’s integrated energy group OQ — is weighing an array of initiatives in support of its decarbonisation and energy transition objectives. These include plans for Carbon Capture, Utilisation and Storage (CCUS), a key climate mitigation technology that captures CO₂ emissions from industrial sources, reuses them in products or processes, or stores them underground to prevent their release into the atmosphere.

Publicly traded OQBI currently operates Oman’s only integrated producer of methanol, ammonia and LPG, with a combined nameplate production capacity of 1,816 kilotonnes per annum (ktpa) at the Salalah Free Zone (SFZ) in Dhofar Governorate.

A comprehensive decarbonisation road map targets a 25% reduction in emissions by 2030 relative to a 2023 baseline, as



OQBI is also evaluating the strategic use of carbon credit certificates and the potential adoption of green hydrogen.

well as the achievement of net-zero emissions by 2050.

Outlining its energy transition and decarbonisation goals in its 2025 financial report, OQBI said it is evaluating further CCUS opportunities, alongside the strategic use of carbon credit certificates and the potential adoption of green hydrogen.

“These measures are intended to enable the future production of blue or green ammonia and support the company’s long-term decarbonisation objectives”, it stated.

Following a series of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions assessments

and energy efficiency studies launched in 2024, OQBI reported a 29% increase in CO₂ emissions to 1.45 million tonnes at the end of 2025 compared with 2023 levels. This was driven by a 32% rise in overall production at the integrated complex, it said.

At a recent conference call with investors, officials said the company delivered a solid operational and financial performance in 2025, underpinned by steady production growth across its core assets. Combined output from its ammonia and methanol plants rose by around 2% to approximately 1.5 million tonnes, while LPG production increased by 3.5% to about 366,000 tonnes.

Notably, both the ammonia and LPG plants recorded their highest annual production levels since commissioning. The methanol plant maintained stable, high output throughout the year without any scheduled shutdowns, operating in line with its

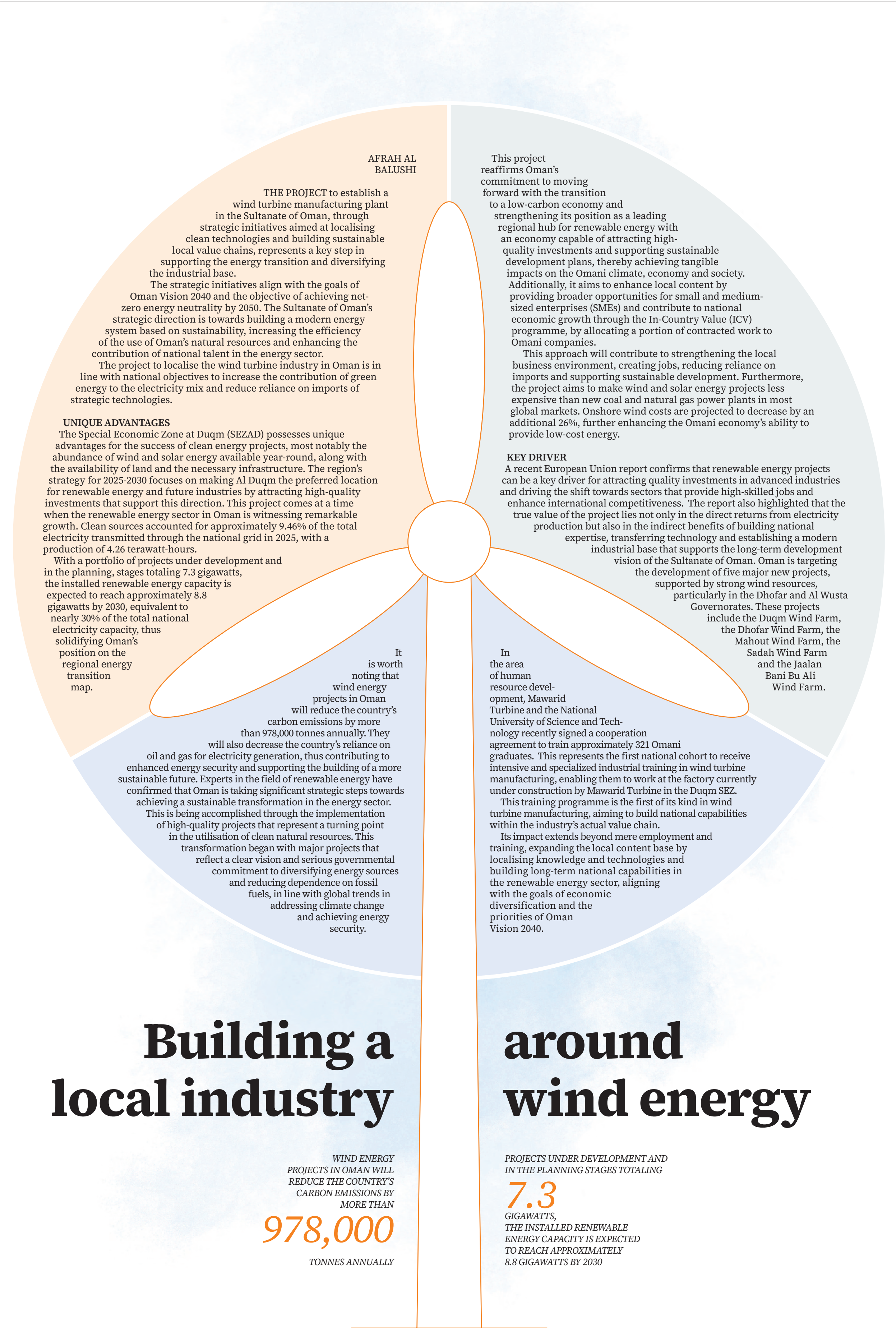
nameplate capacity of roughly 1.1 million tonnes, reflecting strong asset reliability and operational efficiency.

The ammonia plant also posted improved output, particularly in the first half of the year, supported by enhanced efficiency and consistent operations. Meanwhile, the LPG plant exceeded its design capacity of 356,000 tonnes, highlighting disciplined execution and robust plant performance.

Financially, the three business segments generated total revenue of RO 226 million, with EBITDA reaching RO 83.8 million.

Net profit climbed 18% year-on-year to RO 47.7 million, despite a 6% decline in average global product prices, aided by improved cost performance linked to gas pricing. Since its listing, the company’s share price has risen from 111 baisas to 184 baisas, marking an increase of over 66% and approximately 132% growth from its IPO price.

BUSINESS FEATURE



SHORTTAKES



A section of the Capanema iron ore mine in Ouro Preto Minas Gerais state, Brazil. — Reuters

IRON ORE MINERS COULD FACE BILLIONS MORE IN FUEL COSTS

BEIJING: Iron ore miners are at risk of incurring billions of dollars more in fuel costs if diesel prices continue to rise, a senior executive at Australia’s Fortescue said on Monday.

The US-Israeli war on Iran has all but stopped shipments through the Strait of Hormuz, sending oil and gas prices higher and tightening the supply of diesel, a main transport fuel for the mining sector. Benchmark Singapore diesel swaps were trading at slightly more than \$180 a barrel on Monday, up from \$92.5 a barrel before the war broke out, LSEG data showed .

“A 10-cent change in the price of diesel impacts us by \$70 million”, said Dino Otranto, metals and operations chief executive officer at global miner Fortescue, in an interview on Monday. “If you look at our competitors, the top four, every 10-cent movement has a half a billion US dollar impact on the cost structure”.

The company gets most of its fuel from Southeast Asia, but was “comfortable” with current fuel stocks, he said, as long as the war in Iran does not escalate.

The world’s fourth-largest iron ore supplier has set some of the most ambitious decarbonisation targets among Australia’s major miners, which Otranto said had helped it save fuel costs.

He said Fortescue would save at least \$100 million over the next 12 months on diesel costs from its push to electrify operations with renewable energy. The company planned to cut consumption by 1 billion litres of diesel equivalent over the next few years.

“We announced a very aggressive decarbonisation agenda some years ago”, he said. “For a number of years, that plan has been met with a lot of criticism, but now the tides are shifting... now our shareholders say, you need to do this faster”, said Otranto. — Reuters

Iran war deals new blow to Europe’s industrial heartland

KLEINKARLBACH, Germany: In a spartan office adorned with plastic pots and detergent packaging at German chemical company Gechem, owner Martina Nighswonger feels she’s running out of options.

After years battling the fallout from the global pandemic, the spike in energy costs triggered by Russia’s war in Ukraine and then punishing US tariffs, war in the Middle East is ramping up the cost of key raw materials once again.

“There’s just no letup. Every year profits get a little smaller and eventually they’re gone”, Nighswonger said at the firm’s plant in Kleinkarlbach, where she now holds daily crisis meetings and takes out her frustrations on a punching bag. “It’s exhausting and you just

don’t know what to do anymore”. Gechem, which mixes chemicals for household cleaning products and bottles brake fluid for the car sector, is at the sharp end of the latest crisis to hit industries in Europe, from chemicals and plastics to metals, textiles and toys.

While the fallout from war in the Gulf is hitting companies worldwide, it’s punching harder in Europe where energy prices are already higher than other regions, according to a dozen executives across Germany, France, Denmark and Switzerland.

Iran’s blockade of the Strait of Hormuz following attacks by Israel and the United States had already hit oil exports before tit-for-tat strikes on huge gas installations in Iran

GLOBAL shares slid on Monday while US bond yields hit eight-month peaks as the US and Iran traded escalating threats and Israel planned for “weeks” more fighting, sending oil prices on another roller-coaster ride.

Iran on Sunday said it would strike the energy and water systems of its Gulf neighbours if US President Donald Trump followed through with a threat to hit Iran’s electricity grid within 48 hours, extinguishing any hope of an early end to the war, now in its fourth week.

Trump warned Iran had two days to fully open the vital Strait of Hormuz, which is effectively closed for most vessels with little prospect of naval protection for shipping, with a deadline culminating at 23:44 GMT on Monday.

MSCI’s broadest index of global stocks ticked 0.6% lower on Monday, adding to over 7.4% of losses for the month.

Japan’s benchmark Nikkei fell 3.5% and nerves finally hit China, where blue chips headed for their heaviest beating since US tariffs hit markets last year.

European shares opened lower, falling to a four-month low, led by the defence sector, as a spike in crude prices prompted investors to factor in potential inflation pressures with the Middle East conflict intensifying. The pan-European stocks index was last down 1.75%.

S&P 500 futures slipped 0.6%, while Nasdaq futures lost 0.7%. Oil prices were again choppy with Brent last up 0.8% at \$113.20 a barrel, more than 55% higher for the month so far. US crude gained 0.9% to \$99.15.

Near-term supplies have been aided by the US allowing Iranian



People take pictures of a monitor displaying Topix share average and Nikkei share average outside a brokerage in Tokyo, Japan, in this file photo. — Reuters

and Russian oil to be sold from tankers, but the growing risk of longer-term shortages was lifting futures down the curve.

September Brent, for instance, was up \$2 at \$93.90, suggesting high prices were here to stay. “Far from providing reassurance that the conflict could be resolved, Trump’s ultimatum to Iran over the Strait of Hormuz has sent another jolt of worry through markets”, said Susannah Streeter, chief investment strategist at Wealth Club, a British brokerage.

Analysts at HSBC noted Singapore jet fuel was up 175% this year to a multi-decade high, while Asian liquefied natural gas has climbed 130%. Bunker fuel used in shipping has blown out, raising the cost of transporting goods, while surging fertiliser prices will make food more

expensive.

Wall Street’s main indexes ended sharply lower on Friday, with the Dow dropping nearly one per cent, the S&P 500 falling one-and-a-half per cent International Energy Agency boss Fatih Birol warned the crisis was “very severe” and worse than the two oil shocks of the 1970s put together.

SAY GOODBYE TO RATE CUTS

The inflationary pulse from energy has seen markets abandon hopes for further monetary easing globally and swing to pricing in rate hikes across most developed nations.

Futures have wiped out expectations for 50 basis points of easing from the Federal Reserve this year, with even a small chance the next move could be up.

The hawkish sea change

has hammered bonds and sent yields climbing, adding to borrowing costs for many governments already struggling with deficits and debt.

The prospect of higher costs and softer consumer demand has clouded the outlook for corporate profits, while the jump in yields made equity valuations look ever more stretched.

The energy shock, combined with pressure on fiscal budgets from higher defence spending, saw double-digit increases in bond yields globally last week.

Ten-year US Treasury yields hit a nine-month high of 4.4274%, having climbed a steep 44 basis points since the war began.

The heightened volatility in markets has tended to benefit the US dollar as a store of liquidity. — Reuters



A general view of the building complex of Gechem, in Kleinkarlbach, some 25 km west of Ludwigshafen, Germany. — Reuters

and Qatar last week propelled crude to almost \$120 a barrel, double the price at the start of 2026.

Germany’s economy alone could face a 40 billion euro (\$46 billion) hit over two years if oil stays at \$100 a barrel, according to the IW German Economic Institute, underlining how exposed Europe’s industries have become after years of high energy costs, fierce Chinese competition and plant closures.

Europe’s biggest economy, still reeling from the fallout from the Ukraine war, has some of the highest wholesale power prices worldwide at \$132 per megawatt hour (MWh), significantly above \$48 per MWh in the United States and also higher than the \$120 EU average, according to International Energy Agency data.

“Europe is on the chopping block for this and clearly does not have the margin to take a second energy hit in such a short period of time”, said Ipek Ozkardeskaya, senior analyst at Swiss bank Swissquote. “Germany and the UK look like the most vulnerable to the energy shock”. Founded in 1861, Gechem is emblematic of Germany’s Mittelstand, a term for the 3.4 million mid-sized firms that employ over 33 million people and generate more than half the economic output in the world’s third largest economy.

Gechem had sales of 46 million euros last year and employs 165 people but has frozen hiring and, for the first time in two decades, is no longer ruling out job cuts, Nighswonger said. — Reuters

MONETARY OUTLOOK

ECB seen hiking rates twice



Goldman Sachs expects the European Central Bank to raise interest rates by 25 basis points in April and June, reversing its earlier pause outlook.

The shift aligns with peers as policymakers flag rising inflation risks linked to Middle East tensions and higher oil prices. The European Central Bank held rates steady in March but signalled readiness to act if inflationary pressures persist. — Reuters

LABOUR MOMENTUM

Japan firms sustain strong wage growth



Japanese companies agreed to wage hikes exceeding 5% for a third straight year, with Rengo reporting a preliminary average increase of 5.26%. The gains, among the strongest in decades, support policymakers’ push for durable growth.

Final figures may ease as smaller firms report. Labour unions and organisations are seeking a higher average rise of 5.94%. — Reuters

MARKET REACTION

Dollar rises on safe-haven demand



The US dollar strengthened as escalating Middle East tensions drove investors towards safe-haven assets and weighed on equities. Threats of further conflict raised concerns over energy supply shocks, supporting the greenback as against other currencies.

The dollar index rose 0.22% to 99.77, while currencies such as the euro and yen weakened amidst heightened geopolitical uncertainty. — Reuters

OPINION

Guiding our children in the age of distraction



**TARIQ
AL BARWANI**

The writer is strategic adviser, businessman and motivational speaker

LAST week, my article revolved around what kind of person I would become if I were born today. This week, I want to shift that question towards us as parents: what can we do today to ensure our children become the right kind of people tomorrow, especially with the kind of distraction (from technology, social environment, etc) that exists today?

Why? Because whether we like it or not, the world has changed. And parenting must change with it (trust me, the generation today is in no way comparable to our (yesterday's) generation). Let me be clear, this is not about fear; it is about awareness.

Today's children, especially Generation Z and Alpha, are growing up in a world that is faster, louder and more influential than anything we experienced. Social media and network platforms like YouTube, TikTok, Snapchat and Instagram are not just entertainment tools; they are shaping opinions, behaviour and even identity. So what should we as parents do?

First, we must be present, not just physically, but mentally too. Many parents believe providing education, a good home and comfort is enough. Trust me, that may not be enough today because the real battle is for the attention.

If we are not actively present in our children's lives, something else will take

our place and most likely, it will be a digital screen. Talk to your children. Not as an authority figure all the time, but as someone who listens.

Ask them what they watch, who they follow and what they think. You might be surprised by what you learn. I tried and continue to learn.

Second, we must understand technology before trying to control it. Banning devices completely is not realistic. This is their world. Instead, guide them. Teach them when to use technology, how to use it and more importantly, when to disconnect from it.

Obviously, we as parents need to keep updated on how technology works and is changing lives. Set boundaries. Not aggressive ones, but consistent ones. Screen time, sleep time and family time should not be negotiable every day.

Third, we must rebuild respect and responsibility at home. One of the biggest shifts I see today is the changing relationship between children and parents. Respect is no longer automatic, as I had shared in my last week's article.

Respect must be taught, demonstrated and reinforced. Period! Respect starts at home. How we speak, how we listen and how we behave sets the standard for our children.

Fourth, we must address the uncomfortable topics early. Let us be honest. Today's children are exposed to things much

Today's children, especially Generation Z and Alpha, are growing up in a world that is faster, louder and more influential than anything we experienced. Social media and network platforms like YouTube, TikTok, Snapchat and Instagram are not just entertainment tools; they are shaping opinions, behaviour and even identity.

earlier than we were. Whether it is peer pressure, harmful substances, or late-night social environments, pretending these issues do not exist will not protect our children.

Open conversations will. Speak to your children about right and wrong. Not through fear, but through understanding.

Fifth, we must always teach and align them with values, not just rules. Rules can control behaviour temporarily. Values shape decisions for life.

This is where faith plays a powerful role. Teaching children discipline through prayer, patience through daily practice and accountability through understanding right and wrong builds an internal compass, one that works even when we as parents are not around.

Lastly and most importantly, we must lead by example. Children do not only listen to what we say, but they also observe what we do. If we are constantly on our phones, they will be too. If we lack discipline, they will mirror it. If we show respect, patience and balance, they will learn it naturally.

Parenting today is not easy. In fact, it may be one of the most challenging responsibilities of our time. Trust me and ask me. But it is also one of the most important, because at the end of the day, we are not just raising children; we are raising the generation that will define what this world looks like tomorrow.

Renewables surge 44% across MENA as region accelerates energy transition

NAJAH AL RIYAMI

Renewable energy capacity across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) expanded by an estimated 44 per cent year-on-year in 2025, signalling a decisive acceleration in the region's transition towards low-carbon and more resilient energy systems.

The growth, driven primarily by large-scale solar deployments, reflects a broader structural shift in energy markets historically anchored in hydrocarbons. Across the region, governments are rapidly scaling up renewable energy programmes as part of long-term strategies aimed at economic diversification, emissions reduction and energy security.

Solar power continues to lead this expansion. Supported by some of the world's highest solar irradiation levels, alongside a sustained decline in technology costs, solar has emerged as the most competitive source of new electricity generation in many parts of the region.

Over the past decade, global solar costs have fallen dramatically, enabling countries across MENA to deploy utility-scale projects at record-low tariffs (IRENA).

Wind energy is also gaining traction, particularly in areas with strong and consistent wind resources, while hybrid systems combining solar, wind and battery storage are beginning to reshape how power is generated and managed.

The growing integration of storage technologies is playing a critical role in addressing intermittency challenges, improving grid reliability and enabling higher shares of renewable energy within national power mixes.

The regional surge aligns with wider global momentum. Renewable energy continues to capture an increasing share of electricity generation worldwide, with solar expected to dominate new capacity additions over the coming decade (IEA).

Major economies are accelerating deployment at scale, reinforcing a global shift that is both environmental and economic in nature.

Beyond electricity generation, MENA is positioning itself at the forefront of the emerging green hydrogen economy.

By leveraging abundant renewable resources, countries in the region are developing large-scale projects aimed at producing green hydrogen and its derivatives, including ammonia, for export.

These fuels are expected to play a key role in decarbonising hard-to-abate sectors such as heavy industry, shipping and aviation, where direct electrification remains challenging.

The increasing focus on hydrogen is also creating new industrial opportunities, linking renewable energy development with downstream sectors such as manufacturing, logistics and export infrastructure.

Two borders, one vision: Oman's twin zones

THERE is a quiet revolution underway along the Sultanate of Oman's land borders. It does not involve speeches or summits alone — it is being built with asphalt, concrete and cross-border customs corridors.

At a time when global supply chains are fracturing under the weight of tariff wars and maritime disruptions, Oman has chosen to answer with infrastructure. Two special economic zones — one facing the UAE, the other facing Saudi Arabia — are being constructed not merely as industrial parks, but as economic bridges between three of the Gulf's most consequential economies.

The numbers speak clearly. Total committed investment in Oman's economic and free zones crossed RO 22.4 billion by the end of 2025, rising 6.8 per cent year-on-year.

Over 138 new investment contracts were signed in the first half of 2025 alone, with the industrial sector accounting for 97 per cent of incoming capital. The zones now employ nearly 85,000 workers, including over 30,000 Omanis — a localisation rate of 36 per cent that is quietly becoming one of the most effective job-creation engines in the country.

AL RAWDAH: THE OMAN-UAE INDUSTRIAL CORRIDOR: On the eastern frontier, the Al Rawdah Special Economic Zone in the Wilayat of Mahadha, Al Buraimi Governorate, represents a historic first: a joint venture between Oman and the UAE to build a shared industrial ecosystem.

The agreement, signed in May 2025 by OPAZ and Mahdah Development Company — a joint venture majority-owned by DP World — covers a 50-year usufruct period. Phase 1 spans 14 square kilometres, with the master plan allowing expansion to 25 square kilometres.

What makes Al Rawdah genuinely distinctive is geography. Positioned just 10 kilometres from the UAE border, equidistant from Sohar Port and Jebel Ali Port, the zone offers



The Al Rawdah Special Economic Zone represents a historic first: a joint venture between Oman and the UAE to build a shared industrial ecosystem.



**DR YOUSUF
HAMED AL
BALUSHI**
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The writer is founder and CEO, Smart Investment Gateway, economist, board adviser & business transformation mentor

dual-market access from a single location.

Goods manufactured here can reach Dubai's global shipping lanes or Oman's Indian Ocean trade routes with equal ease. Bilateral non-oil trade between Oman and the UAE reached a record AED 56 billion in 2024 — a 9.8 per cent jump — and Al Rawdah is designed to accelerate that trajectory.

Phase 1 targets manufacturing, logistics, pharmaceuticals, food processing, plastics, mining and automotive components. A 200,000-square-metre dry port is under development.

The incentive package is aggressively competitive: a 10-year income tax exemption extendable for two additional terms, zero customs duties, 100 per cent foreign ownership and a one-stop-shop licensing process.

By January 2026, OPAZ and DP World had confirmed the Phase 1 road map and leading UAE firms—including Conares, Apparel Group and Al Bayader — had signed Letters of Intent.

EZAD: THE OMAN-SAUDI ARABIA GATEWAY: On the western border, the Special Economic Zone at Al Dhahirah near Ibri tells a complementary story. Spanning 388 square kilometres, EZAD is being developed in coordination with Saudi Arabia's

Economic Cities and Special Zones Authority.

Phase 1, covering 20 square kilometres, had reached 14.9 per cent completion by early 2026, with 17 kilometres of roads, a 6.3-kilometre wadi diversion system and solar-powered infrastructure already taking shape.

EZAD's strategic anchor is its four-square-kilometre dry port, operated by ASYAD Group, complete with veterinary quarantine and specialised customs facilities.

This inland terminal directly addresses the congested Rub Al Khali border crossing, enabling customs clearance and consolidation before goods reach the Saudi border.

EZAD aligns seamlessly with Saudi Arabia's Logistics Corridors Initiative, which seeks to redirect cargo flows towards the Red Sea coast — transforming Oman into a genuine land bridge to the Kingdom's interior.

TRADE AGREEMENTS: THE MULTIPLIER EFFECT

World-class infrastructure needs market access to deliver returns. The Oman-India Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement, signed in December 2025 and ratified via Royal Decree shortly after, is the first bilateral trade pact of its kind between India and a single GCC nation.

Oman has eliminated duties on 98 per cent of tariff lines, encompassing 99.4 per cent of Indian exports by value. India has opened 78 per cent of its tariff lines in return.

For manufacturers considering either zone, the CEPA creates a compelling proposition: source raw materials from India at preferential rates, add value inside an Omani SEZ under generous tax conditions and re-export finished goods across the Gulf, Africa and Europe.

The broader GCC-India Free Trade Agreement remains under negotiation, with talks expected in the second half of 2026. Until then, Oman's bilateral CEPA provides a head start into a 1.4-billion-consumer market that no neighbouring state currently holds.

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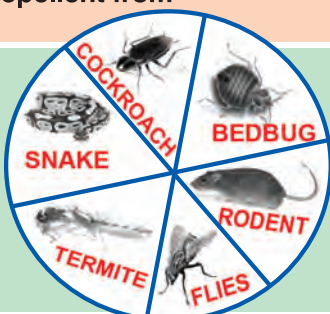
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ANNOUNCEMENT

ANNOUNCEMENT OF CHANGE OF LEGAL FORM

Pursuant to the provisions of Article (31 bis) of the Commercial Companies Law promulgated by Royal Decree No 18/2019, as amended, **Three Pillars Consulting** (Commercial Registration No 1277884), registered with the Commercial Registry Secretariat, hereby announces its intention to change its legal form from a **Sole Proprietorship** to a **Sole Person Company (SPC)**. Any person having an objection to this change shall submit the reasons for such objection to the Commercial Registry Secretariat at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion within **one (1) month** from the date of publication of this announcement.

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EAST MEETS WEST

KPOP DEMON HUNTERS BRINGS GLOBAL FANS TO SEOUL'S SITES



People walk along the fortress wall at Naksan Park in Seoul. — AFP

Australian visitor Nhung Nguyen made the hike up steep steps to a stunning Seoul park precisely because of its star turn in mega-hit “KPop Demon Hunters”.

The real-life settings of the animated film, fresh off a double Oscars win, have become a pilgrimage site for fans of Netflix’s most-watched original film of all time.

Naksan Park sits on a ridge high above the South Korean metropolis that includes parts of an 18.6-kilometre (11.5-mile) fortress wall built to surround the capital hundreds of years ago.

“I thought the location was very beautiful and I found out that it’s a real location so I came here”, said 29-year-old Nguyen, who said she grew up listening to K-pop.

The movie tells the tale of HUNTR/X, a popular K-pop girl group whose members live double lives as weapons-wielding demon slayers. Their songs help create a magical barrier called the Honmoon that protects humanity.

It won best animated feature and an Academy Award for best original song for “Golden”, the film’s infectious anthem about empowerment, self-reliance and personal growth. It was the first K-pop song to win the category.

In the movie, Naksan Park is where the main character, the half-human Rumi, meets clandestinely with a star-crossed love interest.

Nguyen was thrilled to be high above the city of 9.3 million at the site of special segment of the film that is set to a thumping soundtrack.

“It was a scene in ‘KPop Demon Hunters’ where they sung ‘Free’”, she enthused. “The wall I feel... is very iconic”. She wasn’t the only one who had the idea to make the trip on Tuesday, just days after the movie’s Academy Award triumph.

“We came to Korea for a family vacation but we really liked ‘KPop Demon Hunters’. So with the kids we wanted to come and see this place”, said Emily Han from Florida in the United States.

The movie had helped add “interest to different places that we can go and see”, said Han, who was adopted from South Korea as a child.

The movie was seen as the latest example of the “K-syndrome” — the world’s irresistible appetite for movies, music, books, fashion and cuisine showcasing Korean life and experiences.

Bong Joon-ho’s 2019 Palme d’Or and Oscar best picture winning film “Parasite” and the hugely popular television series “Squid Game” are just some of the other examples of productions out of South Korea that have made a global splash.

“This is for Korea and Koreans everywhere”, Kang said in her emotional acceptance speech.

“It’s a good kind of East meets West kind of movie”, said Nguyen, an Asian-Australian of Vietnamese descent. “It was a good representation of that”. — AFP

QUICK FEATURES



TAKE OFF

A group of snowy egrets at the Pantanal, a key region along birds’ migratory routes, in Mato Grosso do Sul state, Brazil. — AFP



FESTIVAL

Hot air balloons during the annual hot air balloon festival held to celebrate Eid Al Fitr at Semayu village in Wonosobo, Central Java. — AFP



CULTURE

Afghan horse riders compete in Buzkashi, a traditional Central Asian goat-grabbing sport, at a field in Faizabad district, Badakhshan. — AFP

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BTS DRAWS OVER 100,000 FANS TO SEOUL COMEBACK CONCERT



K-pop boy group BTS performs during their concert at Gwanghwamun Square in Seoul. — AFP

SEOUL: More than 100,000 fans turned out to see K-pop superstars BTS’s first concert in nearly four years, their label said on Sunday, a smaller number than originally expected for the highly anticipated event in central Seoul.

The seven-member group took to the stage together for the first time following a years-long hiatus prompted by mandatory military service, with some stationed near the heavily fortified border with North Korea. The comeback concert was held on Saturday against the backdrop of the historic Gyeongbokgung Palace — fitting for the “Kings of K-pop” — with thousands of fans from South Korea and abroad singing along. “An estimated 104,000 fans attended the Gwanghwamun Square concert, based on ticket sales and data from the country’s three major

mobile carriers”, HYBE said .

The figure was lower than an initial projection of 260,000, while police estimates of the crowd size were far lower at about 42,000, according to Yonhap news agency.

Netflix livestreamed the concert to about 190 countries.

Fans waved a sea of glowsticks and sang along to the group’s hits, holding their phones aloft to film the performance as giant screens set up across the venue allowed the crowd to watch.

Some 15,000 police officers and security personnel were mobilised for the concert, with barricades lining the roads and nearby venues shut.

The latest album, “ARIRANG”, released on Friday, is billed as reflecting the maturing boy band’s Korean identity. It sold nearly four million copies on its first day, according to the label. — AFP



Divers learn to explore icy polar waters

IN a square hole carved out of the thick ice, two divers vanished into the depths of an Arctic lake, leaving nothing but bubbles at the surface.

Returning 45 minutes later, Marta Lukasik tapped her fist on the top of her head — a diver’s signal that means “I’m ok”.

On the frozen Lake Kilpisjarvi, just below the tree line at the intersection of the Finnish, Swedish and Norwegian borders, 12 divers were taking a course to learn how to dive in polar regions so they could carry out scientific research.

“Just wow, every small thing you see in the water... Just wow”, said Lukasik, a 41-year-old oceanology PhD student who works as a diving inspector on fish farms in Norway, mesmerised by the experience.

For 10 days, the international group from different professions and backgrounds learnt vital skills below the 80 centimetres (30 inches) of ice covering the lake.

According to Erik Wurz, coordinator of the programme run by the Finnish Scientific Diving Academy which is part of the University of Helsinki, there is a critical need for skilled people who can conduct research in demanding polar environments.

Climate change is warming and transforming the Arctic and Antarctic at a faster rate than the rest of the planet.

“There are still lot of questions to be covered in

There are still lot of questions to be covered in the polar regions and access is very limited. The number of scientific divers that can go under the ice is even more limited

ERIK WURZ
Coordinator of the programme run by the Finnish Scientific Diving Academy



A participant in the Polar Scientific Diving programme takes ice samples during a 45-minute-long diving session, at the Kilpisjaervi Biological Station in Finland.

the polar regions and access is very limited”, said Wurz, stood next to two large holes cut into the ice and a pitched wind shelter.

“The number of scientific divers that can go under the ice is even more limited”, he added, estimating there to be only around 100 to 200 people globally.

Wearing dry suits to fend off the 2 degrees Celsius cold in the water, the divers arrived on snowmobiles at the site, located close to the University of Helsinki’s biological station at the foot of the Saana mountains.

Ruari Buijs, 21, checked his course mates at the “base Alpha” hole to make sure they were ready to dive, before helping them slide into the water with steel gas cylinders on their backs and torches attached to their arms.

“I think the most important thing is definitely teamwork”, noted Buijs, who studied marine biology and oceanography at the University of Plymouth in Britain, as the divers disappeared.

“For instance... if there’s low visibility, there’s always a line back”, he said, indicating a yellow, 50-metre (165-foot) safety line in his hand, the other end tethered to the diver underwater.

A light attached to a steel tank flickered in the clear water — a sign post for the divers if they become disoriented.

With only two holes for entry and exit, the biggest challenge for the divers was “the overhead environment they are getting into”, Wurz said.

“They are going into an ice cave”.

The day’s task was to practice drilling a sample of the ice sheet, so-called “ice coring”, explained Caroline Chen, 23 — a Canadian trained scientific diver and research assistant at the University of Hamburg.

“Sometimes you bump your head, I’m still getting used to this”, she said.

In this “safe setting”, the divers were training to be “confident when they are deployed to Antarctica” or any polar expedition where they would not have the luxury of warm buildings and showers nearby, Wurz said.

Having finished the course, Wurz joined an expedition to the Antarctic research station Scott base, 1,350 kilometres (840 miles) from the South Pole.

“We are at a really critical point in time because the polar regions are changing very fast”, Wurz said.

“There are huge areas of shelf ice breaking off... that has not happened before at such a fast rate”, he added.

An AFP review of US data showed in March that Arctic sea ice is headed for one of its smallest winter peaks on record due to human-induced warming.

“We need to get samples and reliable data from these regions because they are the fastest changing on the planet in the warming ocean”, Wurz said.

Still beaming after her dive, Lukasik described how the sun piercing through layers of snow and ice had created rays in the water.

— AFP

FEATURES



THE SNOWY OWL

The Hudsonian godwit, the snowy owl, striped hyena and hammerhead shark are among 42 species proposed for international protection at a meeting of parties to the UN Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species (CMS)

CAN NATIONS SAVE THE SHOREBIRD THAT FLIES 30,000 KM A YEAR?

FRAN BLANDY

CHASING an endless summer, one shorebird species undertakes a grueling annual journey from the Arctic to the tip of South America and back — a feat increasingly fraught with peril.

The Hudsonian godwit (*Limosa haemastica*) is one of the world’s most remarkable travellers, but its population has plunged 95 per cent in four decades due to a complex mix of environmental changes across multiple countries.

It is one of 42 species proposed for international protection at a meeting of parties to the UN Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species (CMS) that starts in Brazil on Monday.

Iconic creatures like the snowy owl — of Harry Potter fame — striped hyena and hammerhead shark are also on the list deemed in danger of extinction and needing conservation by the countries they pass through.

Migratory birds are facing “rapid and dramatic declines”, said Nathan Senner, an ecologist and ornithology professor at the University of Massachusetts Amherst who has studied the Hudsonian godwit for 20 years.

Scientists are still unraveling the mysteries of the shorebird — which can fly up to 11,000 km in one stretch without stopping to eat, drink, or sleep.

And it is only part of the 30,000 km that the godwit travels every year from their breeding grounds in the Arctic

to Patagonia where they spend the southern summer.

DISRUPTED MIGRATIONS

In order to do this “epic flight”, they need “really predictable, abundant food resources” at every step of the journey, Senner said.

That predictability is crumbling.

In the Arctic, shifting spring timing attributed to climate change has created a mismatch between when chicks hatch and the peak availability of insects they feed on.

One of the puzzles Senner is currently working on is why Hudsonian godwits have begun migrating later by six days than they did a decade ago.

Something “has either disrupted the cues that they use to time their migrations or their ability to successfully and rapidly prepare for the migration”, he said.

In southern Chile, a boom in salmon and oyster farming has led to a build-up of infrastructure and the presence of people in the intertidal zones where they feed.

And in the United States, changes in farming practices are making the shallow water wetlands that the godwits rely on rarer and less predictable — meaning they spend more time looking for a place to stop and feed.

“I think that is emblematic of lots of species, that most species can respond to one kind of change, but not a whole bunch of them all at the same time”, said Senner.

THE HUDSONIAN GODWIT

ESSENTIAL TO ECOSYSTEMS

“Climate change is taking a heavy toll on species that rely on a ‘geological clock’ for their survival; many are disappearing”, Rodrigo Agostinho, president of Brazil’s environmental agency (Ibama), said.

These are some of the issues CMS parties will tackle at their meeting in Brazil’s biodiversity-rich Pantanal, one of the world’s most important global meetings for wildlife conservation.

These countries are legally obliged to protect species listed as at risk of extinction, conserve and restore their habitats, prevent obstacles to migration and cooperate with other range states.

Nevertheless, among the species listed under CMS, a report released earlier this month showed that 49 per cent now have populations that are declining, up from 44 per cent two years ago.

Amy Fraenkel, CMS executive secretary, said that most of the species doing worse were birds, such as the Hudsonian godwit.

She was also “particularly alarming” for fish species, with 97 per cent of those listed under the treaty threatened with extinction.

Migratory species “are essential to healthy ecosystems and a healthy planet”, playing a key role in pollination, pest control and transporting nutrients, she said.

In a piece of good news, the meeting will propose removing Central Asia’s Bactrian deer from its list of animals needing high protection, due to an increase in its population. — AFP

STRIPED HYENA