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SABALENKA
BEATS COCO
GAUFF TO WIN
MIAMI TITLE

INBRIEF

OMAN’S ECONOMY TO GROW BY 1.4% IN 2026

S&P Global Ratings has affirmed Oman’s sovereign credit rating at investment-grade ‘BBB-’ with a stable outlook, citing the strength of the Sultanate of Oman’s fiscal and external positions and the continued support of solid government buffers. The Ministry of Finance, citing the ratings agency, said liquid government assets exceed 40 per cent of GDP, while foreign reserves are close to 20 per cent of GDP, helping underpin Oman’s credit profile at a time of heightened regional uncertainty. S&P expects Oman’s economy to grow by 1.4 per cent in 2026 and by an average of 2.3 per cent during 2027–2029. DETAILS ON P13

STRUGGLE FOR SURVIVAL



A girl walks with pails of water filled from a nearby cistern at the Bureij camp for Palestinian refugees in the central Gaza Strip. Violence has persisted in Gaza despite a ceasefire in October 2025, with both Israel and Hamas regularly accusing each other of violations. — AFP

STEPS TO ENSURE STABILITY OF PRICES

The Consumer Protection Authority is stepping up efforts to ensure the stability of market prices amid the impacts of the weather system Depression Al Masarat. The authority is monitoring the commitment of the suppliers to laws regulating the provision of goods and services to members of the public. It is conducting check-up campaigns in markets and commercial centres with the aim of ensuring the availability of basic and consumer goods and verifying the integrity of supply chains. The authority is also maintaining its coordination with the government departments concerned to discuss any observations or impacts related to the recent weather condition. DETAILS ON P13

No party claimed role for attacks targeting Oman

I R A N A C C U S E S U S O F G R O U N D A S S A U L T P L A N S

THE FOREIGN MINISTRY affirmed that no party has claimed responsibility for the treacherous and cowardly attacks recently targeting the Sultanate of Oman. The competent authorities continue to investigate the true origin and underlying motives of the attacks.

In a statement issued on Sunday, the ministry conveyed the Sultanate of Oman’s strong condemnation and denunciation of the ongoing war, as well as all acts of violence and military targeting across the region. At the same time, the ministry reaffirmed Oman’s unwavering commitment to its established and prudent principles, grounded in a policy of active neutrality. This approach advocates for the establishment of peace, the realisation of security and stability for all countries in the region, an end to the ongoing war, and a return to dialogue and diplomacy to address the root causes of the current regional conflict — thereby preserving the region’s foundations, its prosperity and the safety and well-being of its peoples.

Meanwhile, the Sultanate of Oman participated in the 165th regular session of the Council of the League of Arab States at the ministerial level, which was held virtually, on Sunday.

Oman was represented at the meeting by Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthy, Under-Secretary of the Foreign Ministry for Political Affairs. The meeting addressed the current situation and the dangerous escalation in the region and its impact on the security, stability, and interests of the region and the world at large. The meeting was attended by Abdullah bin Nasser al Rahbi, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the Arab Republic of Egypt and



A woman outside an office building that housed the offices of the news network Al Araby TV following a missile strike in Tehran, Iran. — AFP

Permanent Representative to the League of Arab States, Shaikh Faisal bin Omar al Marhoon, Head of the Arab Department at the Foreign Ministry, and a number of officials from the Foreign Ministry.

Arab foreign ministers unanimously named former Egyptian foreign minister Nabil Fahmy the Arab League’s new Secretary-General. Fahmy will be officially approved by Arab leaders at the

next summit, set to be held in Saudi Arabia, before starting his five-year term in July.

ATTACK ON MILITARY CAMP Kuwait’s defence ministry on Sunday said 10 service members were injured in an attack on a military camp, as Iran continues targeting positions in the region in response to US-Israeli strikes.

“Over the past 24 hours, the armed forces detected 14 ballistic missiles and 12 hostile drones in Kuwaiti airspace,” said defence ministry spokesman Colonel Saud bin Abdulaziz al Atwan in a statement.

Iran said it was ready to respond to a US ground attack, accusing Washington of preparing a land assault even as the Trump administration sought talks and as regional countries met in Pakistan to try to end the conflict.

The foreign ministers of Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Türkiye and Egypt met in Islamabad to discuss ways to halt the Iran war, which has killed thousands of people and caused the biggest-ever disruption to global energy supplies.

The ministers exchanged views on the severe economic repercussions of the military escalation in the region, its impact on international navigation, supply chains and food security, as well as its implications for energy security in light of rising oil prices, Egypt’s foreign ministry said.

As the conflict entered its second month, Israel’s military said it carried out overnight strikes on Tehran, targeting what it described as a facility producing critical components for ballistic missiles and a weapons production and storage site. Iran launched multiple missile salvos at Israel on Sunday, sending millions of people across the country into shelters. SEE ALSO P6 & 7

Low pressure trough to bring rains from Tuesday

MUSCAT: The latest forecasts and analyses from the National Multi-Hazard Early Warning Centre indicate that the weather over the Sultanate of Oman will be affected by a trough of low pressure starting from Tuesday evening and continuing until the morning of Thursday. There are chances of rainfall of varying intensity, associated with thundershowers and fresh winds. These conditions may lead to flash floods in wadis and valleys, as well as reduced horizontal visibility during rainfall. The centre pointed out that clouds advection

and formation are expected starting from Tuesday evening over the governorates of Musandam, Al Buraimi, Al Dhahirah, Al Batinah North, Al Wusta and Dhofar. This will bring chances of scattered rainfall that may be associated with thundershowers at times, with a low (limited) impact level. The expected effects during this period include light to moderate rains causing limited runoff in valleys, along with light to moderate winds ranging from 10 to 20 knots. The centre noted that from Wednesday evening until Thursday morning



The basic services sector reported significant progress in restoring services in rain-affected wilayats.

(April 1-2), forecasts indicate continued cloud formation and advection over the governorates of Musandam, Al Buraimi, Al Dhahirah, Al Batinah North, Al Batinah South, Muscat, Al Dakhiliyah, Al Sharqiyah North, Al Sharqiyah South and Al Wusta. There are chances of rainfall of varying intensity, sometimes associated with thundershowers, which will extend to Dhofar Governorate. The level of impact is expected to be low to moderate, which may lead to flash floods in some wadis and fresh winds with speeds

ranging from 15 to 30 knots (27 to 55 km/hr). Sea conditions are expected to feature moderate to rough waves along most of the coasts of Oman, with maximum wave heights reaching 2 to 3 metres. Therefore, it is advised not to go to sea during thunderstorm activity. The Civil Aviation Authority urges everyone to exercise caution during rainfall and flash floods, to be mindful of reduced horizontal visibility, to check sea conditions before heading out and to follow the official weather bulletins issued by the authority. — ONA

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EMERGENCYMANAGEMENT



The total number of people who have been sheltered since the beginning of the weather condition reached 539.

SECTORS OF NCEM
CONTINUE EFFORTS
TO ADDRESS IMPACTS

MUSCAT: The sectors of the National Committee for Emergency Management continue their efforts to address the impacts of the weather condition (Low-Pressure System ‘Al Masarat’), ensure the safety of citizens and residents, and accelerate the restoration of essential services to normal operation, amid ongoing coordination among the various relevant sectors. The Relief and Shelter Sector of the National Committee for Emergency Management clarified that the number of currently activated shelter centres has reached six, distributed across various governorates, housing 138 individuals. The total number of people who have been sheltered since the beginning of the weather condition has reached 539.

For its part, the Essential Services Sector reported significant progress rates in service restoration. The rate of restored paved roads has reached 98 per cent and unpaved roads 88 per cent. Meanwhile, the rate of restored electricity services has reached 99 per cent and telecommunications 83.7 per cent. The restoration rate for water and sanitation services has reached 95 per cent, fuel 99 per cent and waste management 98 per cent.

As far as the health sector is concerned, the Medical Response and Public Health Sector indicated that all health facilities are operating normally, with the exception of the Al Mazare’a Health Centre in the Wilayat of Qurayat (Muscat Governorate), which remains closed until further notice due to the impact of the weather conditions on the access road.

The Search and Rescue Sector of the National Committee for Emergency Management reported 44 sorties since the start of the weather event (Depression Al Masarat) until Saturday, including 38 for the Royal Oman Police Air Wing and 6 for the Royal Air Force of Oman, resulting in 58 rescue operations and 6 medical evacuations.

The sector indicated that the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority responded to 254 reports, during which 404 people were rescued and evacuated. — ONA

NATIONAL
CENTRE FOR
EMERGENCY
MANAGEMENT
DEACTIVATED

MUSCAT: The National Committee for Emergency Management has announced the deactivation of the National Centre for Emergency Management, as well as the sectoral and subcommittees in the governorates that had been activated to address the impacts associated with the Low-Pressure System ‘Al Masarat’. Relevant authorities will



Relevant authorities will continue to carry out their core roles. — ONA

continue to carry out their core roles and work towards restoring affected services. The committee expressed its gratitude to the sectoral bodies and governorate-level subcommittees for their efforts in managing this weather condition, commending the role of community members in adhering to public safety guidelines and cooperating with the competent authorities. — ONA

Flooded wadis claim lives
as drivers take deadly risks



Oman’s topography makes flash floods in dry riverbeds extremely dangerous.

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
MUSCAT, MARCH 29

RECENT HEAVY rains during the Al Masarat weather system have exposed the deadly consequences of attempting to cross flooded wadis in Oman, resulting in multiple fatalities and ongoing rescue operations.

Rescue teams from the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority (CDAA) in Muscat Governorate responded to dozens of emergency calls.

In the Wilayat of Bausher, 30 people were rescued from a bus trapped in a valley stream on Saturday, while another individual was saved from a wadi in Bahla. Not all incidents ended safely, however.

In Barka, Al Batinah South, a vehicle carrying 10 people was

Experts say that visual demonstrations, real-life stories and clear social norms are critical for preventing tragedies

swept away, causing multiple deaths, including children. Fatalities were also reported in Wadi Al Maawil, Wadi Andam, Bidiyah and Ibri.

Authorities emphasise that Oman’s topography makes flash floods in dry riverbeds extremely dangerous, with swift currents capable of sweeping away vehicles in seconds.

Social media footage showed pedestrians, cyclists and drivers attempting to cross flowing wadis, despite weather alerts and safety warnings.

Senior psychiatrist Dr Hamed al Sinawi explained that psychological factors often contribute to such risky decisions. Optimism bias — believing danger will affect others but not oneself — social proof, and cognitive dissonance can make drivers underestimate the risks of crossing flooded areas. He

stressed that even shallow water can lift vehicles or disrupt traction, making the environment far more unpredictable than it appears.

Public safety experts say that warnings alone may not suffice. Visual demonstrations, real-life stories and clear social norms — such as ‘most drivers turn back’ — are critical for preventing tragedies.

Authorities reiterated that attempting to cross flowing wadis is punishable under Omani law, with potential imprisonment of up to three months and fines up to RO 500.

Campaigns such as “Do not test the strength of your vehicle — test your awareness” are being promoted to reinforce the dangers.

The message from experts and authorities is clear: in the face of flash floods, the safest decision is often the simplest — stop, turn around, and wait.

Life at Muttrah Souq is slowly getting back to normalcy

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, MARCH 29

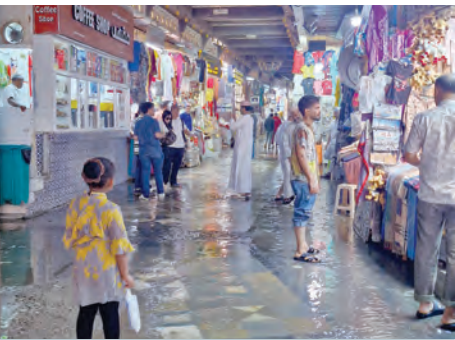
The lives of people in Muttrah Souq, one of the oldest marketplaces in the Arab world, are slowly getting back to normal after days of rain ravaged the traditional souq and disrupted daily life.

The souq, which is the livelihood for nearly 3,000 people, including shop owners and expatriate employees, suffered the most recent

rains due to its geographical location. The souq allows water to flow from the northern side to the Corniche side facing the Arabian Sea.

Shops were submerged, and muddy water entered most shops selling household goods, clothing, spices, antiques, and more. This made visiting the shops nearly impossible and kept shoppers and workers away for days.

“Shops inside the souq were all affected, and we had to wait for days



Most shops in the souq were open for only a few hours due to the weather forecast.

as the narrow paths inside the souq turned into water canals with a high-speed flow. We are slowly returning to normal life,” said Talal al Zadjali, a shop owner who sold traditional medicine.

“Most shops in the souq were open for only a few hours due to the weather forecast. They closed around noon as the rains began, and we were prepared for any adversity,” said Mohammed Aftab, a social worker who runs a shop in the souq.

He remembers how a large amount of water flowed through the souq towards the beach road as the rain continued. However, shoppers had already moved their belongings to higher ground as instructed by the Muscat Municipality.

“Most water-sensitive items were moved to a higher area and were closely monitored near the souq,” said Ahmed al Mujaini, who sells frankincense and other traditional goods.

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SADAH, MIRBAT WITNESS MODERATE TO HEAVY RAINS



The rain resulted in the flow of a number of wadis. — ONA

THE WILAYATS of Sadah and Mirbat in Dhofar Governorate experienced moderate to heavy rainfall on Sunday as the Al Masarat low-pressure system continues to affect the Sultanate of Oman, bringing unstable weather conditions and varying intensities of precipitation across several areas. In Sadah, moderate to heavy rain fell over most parts of the wilayat during the evening hours, resulting in the flow of a number

of streams. Areas affected included Haddbin, Fushi, Atah, Shaliun, Jawfa and Sawb, where water runoff was observed following the rainfall.

Meanwhile, in the Wilayat of Mirbat, the Ain and Hino areas recorded heavy rainfall, which led to the flow of multiple valleys. These included the eastern and western Ain valleys, in addition to the Atounat and Anshir valleys in the Hino area. These rainfall events are part of the direct impacts of the

current weather system, which has contributed to the development of cumulonimbus clouds across parts of Dhofar Governorate.

Authorities continue to monitor weather conditions closely, as the ongoing system is expected to produce further rainfall in different parts of Oman. Residents are advised to exercise caution, particularly near valleys and low-lying areas prone to flash flooding during periods of heavy rain. — ONA



هيئة الخدمات المالية
FINANCIAL SERVICES AUTHORITY





Tender Announcement

Financial Services Authority announces the following tender :-

Tender name	Tender Number	Release the RFP	Last date for Purchase of RFP	Last date of Submitting the proposal	Tender fees in OMR
Project Management Resources for Digital Transformation	FSA 005/2026	29 March 2026	5 April 2026 03:00 PM	19 April 2026 02:00 PM	40 Non Refundable

- Specialized companies interested in participating in the above tender must deposit the tender fee into bank account, and submit payment receipt of the tender along with a copy of the commercial registration certificate and the contact details of the authorized person to the Services & Public Relations Department e-mail : Tenders@fsa.gov.om. hence, we shall provide you with Tender document by e-mail.
- All participating companies must provide a bank guarantee, issued by locally registered bank not less than 2 % of the tender value addressed to FSA , the bond shall be valid for 90 days from the submission of the proposal.
- All bids shall be submitted in tender box at the headquarters of the Financial Services Authority, located in Airport Heights.
- FSA is not obliged to accept the lowest bid or any other bid without any justifiable reasons.

Bank account information :-
Name of beneficiary : Financial Services Authority
Account no : 0423019706330018
Bank : Bank Muscat- Corporate Branch- CBD
SWIFT code : BMUSOMRXXX
Please attach a copy of the deposit receipt

For inquiries, please contact :-
E-mail : Tenders@fsa.gov.om
Telephone Number : 24823299, 24823133
Timing : 8:00 am to 3:00 pm
Workdays : Sunday to Thursday.



To view



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SPOTLIGHT

533

Individuals were accommodated in shelters, with nine centres continuing operations for 253 people, providing food, accommodation and healthcare.

BALQEES
AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, MARCH 29

LIFE ACROSS OMAN is returning to normal after the impacts of the ‘Al Masarat’ low-pressure system, reflecting the country’s strong institutional preparedness and public awareness. The recent weather tested national readiness, showcasing effective coordination across sectors that minimised losses and safeguarded citizens and residents. At the peak of the storm, the National Committee for Emergency Management activated proactive plans and rapid response measures. In the relief sector, 533 individuals were accommodated in shelters, with nine centres continuing operations for 253 people, providing food, accommodation and healthcare.

Healthcare services demonstrated resilience despite temporary closures in Al Sharqiyah North Governorate. Seventeen patients were airlifted to hospitals, and affected medical services were redirected to nearby facilities, ensuring uninterrupted care. Authorities also implemented remote learning and working systems to reduce movement during hazardous conditions, while maintaining continuity in education and business operations. Search and rescue teams played a critical role on the ground. In Al Buraimi Governorate, Civil Defence and Ambulance teams evacuated over 99 individuals trapped in their homes due to rising water levels, all reported safe.

Infrastructure was affected, with temporary road closures in multiple governorates, including Al Batinah North, Al Batinah South, Al Sharqiyah North, Al Dakhiliyah, Al Buraimi, Al Dhahirah and Al Wusta. A partial road collapse in the Wilayat of Mahadha prompted immediate repair work. Roads have since reopened in phases following safety assessments. With improving conditions, government and private institutions have resumed operations, students have returned to schools and commercial activities are picking up. Authorities continue to assess damages and address remaining impacts to ensure full recovery. Oman’s swift return to normalcy highlights the effectiveness of its emergency management framework, integrated response efforts and public adherence to safety guidelines. The experience reinforces the value of preparedness, strategic planning and coordination in mitigating risks during extreme weather events.

AL SHARQIYAH SOUTH
STEPS UP RESPONSE
Al Sharqiyah South Municipality ramped up its response to thunderstorms, which caused wadi flows and water accumulation across several areas.

Eng Abdullah bin Salem al Hajri said the municipality activated a comprehensive plan focused on early preparedness and swift intervention. Preventive steps included clearing drainage networks, opening wadi crossings and preparing roads to reduce disruption. Field teams, supported by pumps and heavy equipment, worked to remove water, sediments, and debris from roads and residential areas, while also rehabilitating wadi crossings and addressing localised flooding. Al Hajri affirmed that efforts will continue until conditions fully stabilise, underscoring the municipality’s commitment to public safety and uninterrupted services. In the Wilayat of Sur, an ongoing stormwater drainage project covering 11 key locations has helped ease water accumulation and improve resilience. Authorities also strengthened response systems by monitoring public reports, while vector control teams treated stagnant water to prevent the spread of insects. Residents praised the quick response, noting improved safety and faster restoration of normal conditions. Officials said efforts will continue until all impacts are fully addressed.



ENG ABDULLAH BIN SALEM AL HAJRI

OMAN
RECOVERS
SWIFTLY
AFTER
LOW-PRESSURE
SYSTEM
AUTHORITIES CONTINUE TO ASSESS DAMAGES IN VARIOUS AREAS IN ORDER TO BRING LIFE BACK TO NORMALCY



وزارة الإعلام
Ministry of Information

ELECTRONIC BIDDING ANNOUNCEMENT

The Ministry of Information shall be electronically bidding vehicles through on Mazad Oman (www.mazad.om) in accordance with the following statement:

Statement	Place of Inspection	Date and Timing of Inspection	Date of Electronic Bidding
Vehicles	Madinat Al Ilam	Monday 6/4/2026 Tuesday 7/4/2026 Between 8:00 am & 1:00 pm	From Wednesday 8/4/2026 To Thursday 9/4/2026

- You may acquaint yourself with the terms and sign up through www.mazad.om
- For further details, you may reach us through info@mazad.om

SHORTTAKES



Omani author releases children’s book ‘Karibu’



IMAN FADL

Children’s literature specialist

MUSCAT: A new children’s storybook titled ‘Karibu’, authored by Omani writer and children’s literature specialist Iman Fadl, has been released by Red Fox Library Publishing and Translation House.

The book follows the journey of a young girl, Zainab, who travels with her father to Zanzibar to assist her grandmother after the loss of a family endowment for students.

Through this narrative, the story sheds light on the historical and cultural ties between Oman and Zanzibar, featuring well-known landmarks such as the House of Wonders and Khawla Road.

Speaking about the book, Fadl said Karibu presents travel literature for children in an engaging narrative form, allowing young readers to experience a different culture while accompanying the protagonist through Zanzibar’s streets and traditions.

She noted that the work aims to go beyond presenting Oman’s historical connection with Zanzibar as a static subject, instead weaving it into a warm, family-centred adventure. Fadl added that Omani history has long inspired her writing, and she sought to create a story that connects young readers to the country’s influence in East Africa while also introducing international readers to Oman’s cultural legacy.

Illustrator Sherine Mustafa described the project as a deeply enriching artistic journey, noting that the story’s themes of identity and belonging inspired her visual approach. — ONA

STATE COUNCIL MEETS TODAY TO DISCUSS DRAFT LAWS

MUSCAT: The State Council will hold the 7th session of its 3rd ordinary sitting of the eighth term today, March 30.

The meeting, which will discuss a number of draft laws, will be headed by Shaikh Abdulmalik bin Abdullah al Khalili, Chairman of the State Council.

The 7th session will deal with the ‘Draft Law on Combating Drugs and Psychotropic Substances’, the ‘Draft Law on Amending Some Provisions of the Bylaw on



The 7th session will deal with the ‘Draft Law on Combating Drugs and Psychotropic Substances’. — ONA

Protecting Personal Data’, the ‘Draft Law on Amending Some Provisions of the Penal Law’ and the ‘Draft Unified Scheme for International Land Transport among GCC States.’

The session will also look into a report by the Council’s Secretariat-General on the recent activities.

Cardiologist spots rare stick insect in Dhofar

LIJU CHERIAN
@lijucherianoman

A REMARKABLE sighting in the lush hills of Dhofar has once again highlighted the region’s rich and often overlooked biodiversity.

Cardiologist and wildlife photographer Dr S M Ziaul Haque recently documented a rare stick insect during a night photography session, drawing attention to one of nature’s most elusive masters of camouflage.

Dr Zia, who has been exploring the landscapes of Dhofar for years, noted that this was not his first encounter with the species. “I first spotted a similar stick insect in 2017 in Dhalqut, east of Salalah. The recent sighting happened during a night mission while I was photographing a field mouse. As I took the shot, I noticed what seemed like a tiny stick swaying beside it. On closer look, it turned out to be a stick insect - so small and highly camouflaged that it was almost impossible to detect,” he said.

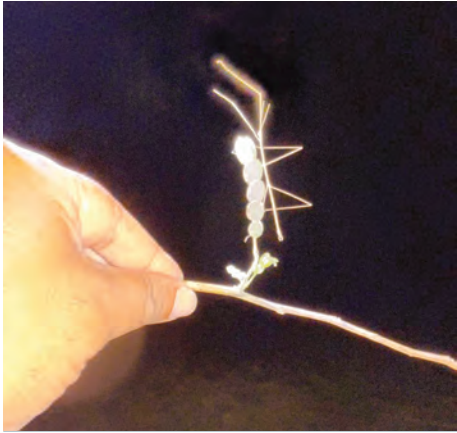
The discovery underscores the nocturnal nature of these insects, which are rarely seen despite not being strictly seasonal.

According to Dr Zia, they are more commonly observed during the Khareef season, when Dhofar’s



On closer look, it turned out to be a stick insect - so small and highly camouflaged that it was almost impossible to detect

DR ZIAUL HAQUE



A rare stick insect in Dhofar.

landscape transforms into a mist-covered green haven.

Stick insects, known for their extraordinary ability to mimic twigs and branches, remain motionless during the day, blending seamlessly into their surroundings.

As dusk falls, they become active, moving quietly from leaf to leaf in search of food. This nocturnal behaviour helps them avoid predators such as birds, which hunt during daylight hours.

“They stay still for hours during the day, gently swaying like a branch in the wind, making them nearly invisible. At night, however, they emerge as quiet grazers of the forest canopy,” Dr Zia explained.

While most species are strictly

nocturnal, some may exhibit limited daytime movement, particularly in dense or low-light forest environments.

Reflecting on the moment of discovery, Dr Zia described it as a reminder of nature’s hidden wonders: “By day, it is a motionless twig. By night, it becomes a quiet grazer of the forest canopy.”

The sighting adds to the growing documentation of Dhofar’s unique wildlife and serves as a call for greater appreciation and conservation of Oman’s lesser-known natural treasures.

The sighting also highlights the importance of microhabitats in Dhofar’s ecosystem. Dense foliage, moisture-rich environments, and minimal disturbance provide ideal conditions for such species to thrive.

However, increasing human activity and habitat changes pose subtle threats to these delicate ecological niches.

Dr Zia’s observation serves as a reminder that many of nature’s marvels remain hidden in plain sight. It is especially important in regions like Dhofar where biodiversity is still being documented. His work continues to shed light on the smaller, often overlooked creatures that play a vital role in maintaining ecological balance.

وزارة النقل والاتصالات وتقنية المعلومات
Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology

إعلان مزايدة استثمارية
Investment Announcement

Investment Announcement No: (1/2026)
Bidding for the Establishment and Design of a Digital Ticketing Platform for Scheduled Public Transport

The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology is pleased to invite local companies and investors specialized in developing digital platforms and smart applications to submit investment proposals for the establishment and design of a digital ticketing platform for scheduled public transport.

This investment bidding aims to develop and operate an integrated electronic platform for managing and selling public transport tickets through various digital channels, thereby contributing to improving user experience, enhancing the efficiency of managing and operating the public transport system, and supporting digital transformation in the transport sector in the Sultanate of Oman.

NUMBER	DOCUMENT PURCHASING DATE	CLARIFICATION PERIODS	CLOSING DATE	DOCUMENT FEES
1/2026	30/03/2026 to 10/05/2026	10/05/2026 to 24/05/2026	05/07/2026 12:00 AM	100 Omani Rials (non-refundable)

- Document fee should be paid by bank transfer only to the Ministry’s account number **0423076490490027** Bank Muscat
- The payment receipt must be sent to investment@mtcit.gov.om
- The bidding document will be shared via email
- The Investment proposals must include all the requirements mentioned in the Bidding document
- The Investment proposal must be valid for at least 12 months and should be signed and stamped
- All investment proposals should be sent as PDF to investment@mtcit.gov.om
- For any other inquiries, you can reach us via the following contact details:

PHONE NUMBER	E-mail
24685340 24685341 24685091	investment@mtcit.gov.om

INTERNAL INVESTMENT COMMITTEE

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TENDER NOTICE

وزارة الزراعة والسمكية وموارد المياه
Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources Announces the following Retenders: -

Tender No.	Tender Title	Tender Document Sales Start Date	Tender Document Sales End Date	Bid Submission Closing	Companies that are Eligible to Participate	Tender Document Fee (R.O)
627/2025/MAFWR/DG AFWRM-10 Recall-1	Manufacturing and supplying a boat to the General Directorate of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources in Musandam Governorate	Wednesday 11/3/2026	Thursday 26/3/2026	Wednesday 1/4/2026	Specialized companies registered with Excellent, First, Second, Third and Fourth grades	(25/-) Omani riyals for local companies ----- (10/-) Omani riyals for SMEs
791/2025/MAFWR/HQ-89 Recall-1	Design and Build Services for Construction of Boat Berthing and Onshore Facilities at Musandam Governorate (Second Phase)	Thursday 12/3/2026	Thursday 26/3/2026	Sunday 5/4/2026	Specialized companies registered with Second and Third grades	(50/-) Omani riyals for local companies ----- (10/-) Omani riyals for SMEs
755/2025/MAFWR/HQ-88 Recall-1	Renting a helicopter for a rainfall enhancement stations	Wednesday 18/3/2026	Wednesday 1/4/2026	Sunday 12/4/2026	Specialized companies registered with, Excellent, First, Second, Third and Fourth grades	(25/-) Omani riyals for local companies ----- (10/-) Omani riyals for SMEs

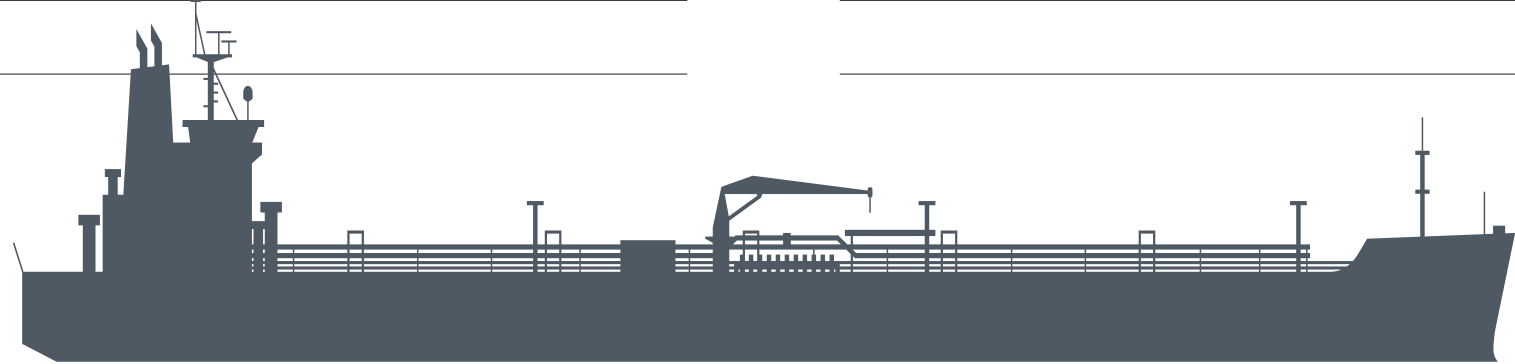
- Interested Companies registered with The General Secretariat of the Tender Board (in the above mentioned Grade) may obtain Tender documents from the E-Tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>.
- The value of the document will be paid & submitted on line on given website.
- The Tenderer should attach Bid Commitment Declaration for local companies.
- All correspondence pertaining to the tender inquiry must be online at e-tendering System.
- All correspondence pertaining to the e-tendering System technical support must be directed to the following helpdesk email address and phone number, **+968 24402244** or etenderhd@ptlc.gov.om.

TENDERS COMMITTEE
Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources

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THAILAND,
IRAN REACH
DEAL FOR
VESSELS

Thailand has reached an agreement with Iran to allow Thai oil vessels safe passage through the Strait of Hormuz, the Southeast Asian nation's prime minister said. "An agreement has been reached to allow Thai oil tankers to transit safely through the Strait of Hormuz," Thai Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul told a news conference, adding that the development would alleviate concerns over fuel imports. — AFP



TWO MORE
TANKERS
PASS STRAIT
OF HORMUZ

Two more Indian-flagged tankers carrying LPG passed through the Strait of Hormuz, India's shipping ministry said on Sunday. Two LPG carriers, BW TYR and BW ELM, carrying combined LPG cargo of about 94,000 tonnes were sailing towards India's coast, the ministry said in a statement. BW TYR was proceeding towards Mumbai while BW ELM was heading to New Mangalore, the statement said. — AFP

Pakistan talks focus on Hormuz



Foreign Ministers Badr Abdelatty of Egypt, Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud of Saudi Arabia, Ishaq Dar of Pakistan and Hakan Fidan of Türkiye pose for a group photo, in Islamabad. — Reuters

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan hosted talks with Türkiye, Egypt and Saudi Arabia on Sunday as part of its efforts to broker an end to the Iran war, with initial discussions focused on proposals to reopen the Strait of Hormuz to shipping, sources familiar with the matter said. Foreign ministers from the three regional powers landed in Islamabad for the talks as Iran warned the US against launching a ground attack and global oil prices surged amid continued fighting between Iran, the US and Israel.

The countries meeting in Pakistan have floated proposals to Washington tied to maritime traffic and reopening the Strait of Hormuz, five sources familiar with the matter said, as part of wider efforts to stabilise shipping flows. The Strait of Hormuz was previously a conduit for about a fifth of global oil and liquefied natural gas supplies, but Iran has effectively halted shipping flows through it in response to the US and Israeli air strikes that began a month ago.

Pakistan, which like Türkiye borders Iran, has leveraged its

Foreign ministers from the three regional powers landed in Islamabad for the talks as Iran warned the US against launching a ground attack and global oil prices surged amid continued fighting between Iran, the US and Israel

close ties to both Tehran and Washington to emerge as a key diplomatic channel in the conflict, while Ankara and Cairo have also played a role. A source from Pakistan said proposals, including from Egypt, had been forwarded to the White House by Pakistan before Sunday's meeting and they included Suez Canal-style fee structures. Two other Pakistani sources said Türkiye, Egypt and Saudi Arabia could form a consortium to manage oil flows through the waterway, and had asked Pakistan to participate.

The proposal for a management consortium had been discussed with the US and Iran, the sources said. The first Pakistani source said the country's army chief Asim Munir had been in regular contact with US Vice President JD Vance. Egypt's and Pakistan's foreign ministries did not respond to a request for comment. The Saudi government media office and the White House did not immediately reply to a comment request.

A Turkish diplomatic source said Ankara's priority was securing a ceasefire. — Reuters

ISRAELI
STRIKE
IN SOUTH
LEBANON
KILLS
PARAMEDIC



BEIRUT: An Israeli strike on an ambulance belonging to the Hezbollah-affiliated Islamic Health Committee killed one paramedic and his patient on Sunday, the group's spokesperson said. "A paramedic and a wounded person who was with him were killed in an Israeli raid on an ambulance in the town of Bint Jbeil," Islamic Health Committee spokesperson Mahmoud Karaki said. An image shared by Karaki showed a destroyed ambulance, set ablaze. In a statement, the Israeli military's

Arabic-language spokesperson Avichay Adraee warned that Israel would continue to strike ambulances if, in its view, Hezbollah continues to use them. "We reiterate our confirmation that, as part of its terrorist activities, Hezbollah is making extensive military use of ambulances," he said. On Saturday, Israeli strikes killed at least nine paramedics across the south, alongside several other deadly bombings. Israeli warplanes also broke the sound barrier over Beirut, causing panic. — AFP

TRAPPED SEAFARERS
BUZZ HELPLINES

Seafarers' helplines say they are inundated with pleas from crews trapped in the Gulf as the Middle East conflict leaves roughly 20,000 workers stuck in the war zone.

THAILAND
SECURES TRANSIT

Thailand has reached an agreement with Iran to allow Thai oil vessels to travel through the Strait of Hormuz, its prime minister said.

IRAN TURNS
BACK SHIPS

Iran's Revolutionary Guards said that they had turned back three ships trying to transit the Strait of Hormuz, saying the route was closed to vessels travelling to and from ports linked to countries aiding the US-Israeli attacks.

IRAN
WARNS
US OVER
GROUND
ATTACK

Smoke rises following an Iranian missile strike, in Southern Israel. — Reuters



IRAN ALLOWS SHIPS
THROUGH HORMUZ

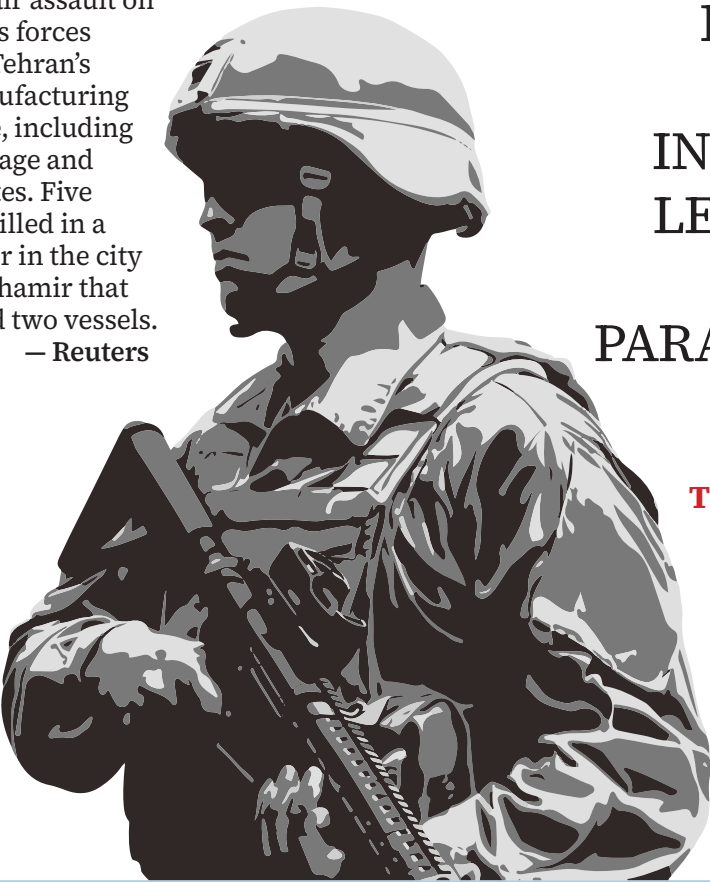
Pakistan Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar announced that Iran had allowed "20 more ships" under the Pakistani flag to pass through the Strait of Hormuz.

INDIAN TILE MAKERS
SQUEEZED

India's vast ceramics hub in Morbi has been paralysed after the Middle East war choked LPG supplies, forcing hundreds of propane-fired kilns to go cold.

SHIP INSURERS
JUGGLE WAR RISKS

Iranian forces' threat to shipping in the Strait of Hormuz has driven up insurance payments for the world freight industry. Operators face sharply higher costs.



PAKISTAN
TALKS

Foreign ministers from Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Türkiye started talks on the war, with Islamabad acting as a go-between the United States and Iran.

IRAN THREATENS
US AIRCRAFT CARRIER

Iran's navy chief Shahram Irani said the USS Abraham Lincoln aircraft carrier would be targeted by the Islamic republic if it comes within range.

JOURNALISTS'
FUNERAL

Lebanon held a funeral for three journalists killed by an Israeli strike the previous day in the south of the country.

IRAN WARNS
GROUND ATTACK

Iran's parliament speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf said the United States was plotting a ground attack despite publicly engaging in diplomatic efforts on ending the war.

QATARI CHANNEL
DAMAGED

Qatari news channel Al Araby said an Israeli missile had hit and damaged the building housing its office in Tehran. Footage from inside the office showed broken windows, shattered glass and debris.

IRAN CONDEMNS
KILLING OF JOURNALISTS

Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi on Sunday condemned Israel's killing of three journalists in Lebanon the day before.

NEW ATTACKS ON
IRANIAN PORT

US-Israeli strikes hit the Iranian port city of Bandar Khamir near the strategic Strait of Hormuz, killing five people, Iranian state media reported.

Facts about
Strait of Hormuz

A PASSAGE FOR AROUND
A FIFTH OF GLOBAL CRUDE OIL AND
LIQUEFIED NATURAL GAS



26 Ships approved
by Iran

95%
Shipping
drop

8 Sea workers
killed



300
Oil, gas
ships signal

55
Sanctioned
ships

Around
20,000
seafarers are affected
in the region



HITS ON
ALUMINIUM PLANTS

Iran's Revolutionary Guards said they launched missile and drone strikes on aluminium plants in Bahrain and the UAE over the weekend, targeting what they described as industries linked to the US military.

ISRAEL FIFTH
MILITARY DEATH

The Israeli army announced the death in combat of a soldier in south Lebanon — the fifth in Lebanon since Hezbollah launched new rocket attacks on Israel on March 2.

PENTAGON GROUND
OPERATIONS

The Pentagon is preparing for weeks of ground operations in Iran though US President Donald Trump has yet to approve any deployment.

KUWAIT RESPONDS
TO ATTACKS

"The general staff of the Kuwaiti Armed Forces confirms that any explosions that may be heard are the result of air defence systems intercepting hostile targets".

IRAN THREATENS
US UNIVERSITIES

Iran's Revolutionary Guards threatened to target US universities in the Middle East, while saying US-Israeli strikes had destroyed two Iranian universities.

ANTI-WAR PROTESTS
IN ISRAEL

Hundreds gathered in Tel Aviv and some other Israeli cities to protest the Middle East war, in demonstrations that security forces sought to disperse.

TAIWAN TO FREEZE
LPG PRICES

"Liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) prices will remain unchanged in April, and key feedstocks such as ethylene and propylene will be prioritised for domestic downstream industries," a statement said.

OPINION

The war is redefining what it means to be ‘home’



SANDHYA RAO MEHTA

The writer is Associate Professor, Sultan Qaboos University

THE CONTINUING war is exacerbating a stressful situation in the Arabian Gulf, not least because of the uncertainty and possible repercussion for the entire region. But if there is one clarity that has emerged in this cloud of uncertainty, it is the way that residents, who make up between 60-90 per cent of the population in these countries, have rallied around the host nations, redefining what home means to them. The usual instinct at a time of strife, conflict, uncertainty, and indeed, war, is to escape to a safer place. In the ongoing conflict around the countries in the Gulf, however, what has been apparent is the tenacity and resolve of all residents to stay with the countries of their residence and not give in to fear. This has been apparent right from the beginning of the conflict. In spite of many notices from, mainly western, countries to their citizens to leave, many across the Gulf chose to stay, taking advantage of the facilities provided to everybody, including

working from home, clear messaging, and open communication corridors. A rising number of social media influencers have also participated in educating the community and the world about the everyday, normal life that they are engaging in, bringing much-needed comfort to the nervous few. All this has redefined the way that home is being conceptualised by residents in the Arabian Gulf. Much research has shown the temporary nature of workers in this region, with large populations of expatriate communities from all corners of the world, as far as Brazil and Japan, working and living harmoniously together. For many of them, home has been a distant place to go back to every few years. But now, when having to make a choice, many of them have actively adopted their place of residence as their home. This is not taken lightly. Home has many connotations, including that of safety, comfort, meaning and hope of a happy future. By aligning their futures with those

In today’s globalised world, home carries a different meaning from that of earlier generations, owing to increased mobility and better communication with the homeland

of their host countries, a growing group of residents has created new relationships and found new communities that they can be a part of. In today’s globalised world, home carries a different meaning from that of earlier generations, owing to increased mobility and better communication with the homeland. One is never far away from home, as it is just one digital device away. Yet, there is a new trend that is the result of this mobility. This is the creation of new homes, new hybrid identities that are possible when living in a new land. This new identity is best reflected in the way that residents in the Gulf have intertwined their futures with those of their host countries, making common cause and having an equal stake in their future. Such an international community showcases much-needed hope in a world which seems to be more divided than united. It is also generating a vision of home that is defined by more than just a physical space but by a sense of a community and purpose.

SEAFARERS CAUGHT IN MID EAST WAR TRIGGER WAVE OF DISTRESS CALLS

LAETITIA COMMANAY

Seafarers’ helplines say they are overwhelmed with messages from crews stuck in the Gulf by the Middle East war, desperately seeking repatriation, compensation and onboard supplies. “Writing to urgently inform you that our vessel is currently facing a critical situation regarding provisions and one crew health conditions,” read an email from one seafarer on March 24 to the International Transport Workers’ Federation (ITF)’s Seafarer Support team. “Immediate supply of food, drinking water, and basic necessities is required to sustain the crew,” said the message to the team’s helpline. The ITF said it had received more than 1,000 emails and messages from seafarers stuck around the Strait of Hormuz and the wider region since the war erupted with US-Israeli strikes on Iran on February 28. Some sought to clarify what their rights are while navigating a war zone, while others sent videos of bombings striking next to their ship and asked the federation for help to get off board, according to ITF documents seen by AFP. “It is an extraordinary situation, there is a lot of panic,” Mohamed Arrachedi, ITF’s Network Coordinator for the Arab World and Iran, in charge of handling requests from seafarers in the region, said, describing the situation as “really shocking”. “I get calls from seafarers at 2 or 3 o’clock in the morning. They call me the minute they have access to the Internet,” Arrachedi said by telephone from Spain. “One seafarer called in a panic, saying: ‘We are here bombed. We don’t want to die. Please help me, sir. Please get us from here.’” About 20,000 seafarers are currently stuck in the Gulf, according to the UN’s maritime body, known as the IMO, and at least eight seafarers or dock workers have died in incidents in the region since February 28. All correspondence was shared on condition of anonymity, as the helpline guarantees confidentiality to seafarers. The International Bargaining Forum (IBF), a global maritime labour body, has declared the area a war zone. This normally gives seafarers exceptional rights, including repatriation at the company’s cost and double pay for those working on ships covered by IBF agreements - around 15,000 vessels worldwide, according to the ITF. Despite this, many seafarers - especially on ships without such labour agreements - are reporting difficulties with getting repatriated. In one email sent to the ITF on March 18, a seafarer said the ship’s operator was ignoring crews’ requests to leave, arguing that there were no flights from Iraq and refusing alternative routes. — AFP

Indian tile makers feel heat of energy crunch

BLAZING-HOT KILNS in India’s \$6.5 billion ceramics manufacturing hub, employing hundreds of thousands of people, have gone cold, shut down in an energy crunch caused by the Middle East war. At a cavernous facility in Morbi, in India’s western Gujarat state, a 200-metre-long propane-powered kiln that normally fires clay nonstop is silent. It is one of hundreds of plants supplying homeware tiles across the world that have been forced to suspend operations. Thick layers of dust smother giant grinding and pressing machines, while only some workers transfer the last batch made three weeks ago off snaking assembly lines and into trucks.

“We are suffering a lot,” said Kishor Dulera, a tile unit proprietor who closed this factory and two others in early March, sending hundreds of workers home. India, the world’s fourth-largest economy, depends on imports for 60 per cent of its liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) demand. The overwhelming majority comes through the Strait of Hormuz waterway, which has been effectively blocked by Iran after US-Israeli strikes on the Islamic Republic late last month sparked a broader regional conflict, disrupting global energy supplies. New Delhi has prioritised supply for households, shielding Indians who use it to cook food. That has squeezed the amount available for industrial use. Factories in sectors including stainless steel and plastic have cut back on production as a result. “If the main raw material is disturbed, the whole industry is disturbed,” Dulera said. The ceramics hub at Morbi makes up 90 per cent of India’s total production and is one of the world’s largest ceramic manufacturing centres, exporting tiles to countries like the United States and Thailand. The industry in Morbi provides



An aerial view shows ceramic tiles stacked at an open field in Morbi, Gujarat, India. — AFP



ANUJ SRIVAS

The writer is a correspondent with AFP

The ceramics hub at Morbi makes up 90 per cent of India’s total production and is one of the world’s largest ceramic manufacturing centres

direct and indirect employment to nearly a million people, according to government statistics. More than 400 plants have closed after the gas supply chain was ‘broken’, said Manoj Arvadiya, head of the local manufacturing industry association. Keeping the kilns hot means plants operate around-the-clock - and emergency shutdowns can damage machinery. “It is a continuous process,” said Arvadiya. “You can’t run it for two days and then switch it off for one day. It doesn’t work like that.” Hitesh Detroja said his now-shut Lexus Granito plant had produced 30,000 tiles per day, calling the closure a “disaster”. He said he has no income to pay his fixed costs and interest on loans of \$74,000 each month. “This crisis is horrible,” Detroja said. The ripple effects of the energy crisis have been felt throughout the Morbi ecosystem. “Everyone is worried,” said 29-year-old labourer Bunty Goswami, a migrant worker at a shut plant. “We are confused about what to

do - whether we should go home, or not.” India’s government has boosted domestic LPG production, negotiated the passage of a handful of tankers and purchased new cargoes from Australia and Russia. That should, in time, ease supply constraints. Jitendra Aghara of Simpolo Tiles, one of Morbi’s biggest manufacturers, has kept operating by buying propane at more than double the price it was before the war to ensure he fulfils customer orders. “If now we suffer a loss for two to three months, in the future we will get it back,” he said. The tile industry developed in Gujarat due to the availability of clay and good transport connections, but it relies on overseas energy to fire. Aghara said the previous abundance of LPG and natural gas meant that there had been few moves to fully develop and adopt electric or hydrogen-powered kilns. Indian corporate giants like Reliance Industries have big green hydrogen production plans, which could remove Morbi’s import dependencies.

When the sky sends a warning, who listens?



ABDULAZIZ AL JAHDHAMI

The writer is author, translator and a communications professional

DURING ADVERSE weather conditions, the sky does not send emails. It does not issue circulars or wait for approvals. When it turns heavy and gray, and rain begins to fall, its message is simple and universal: slow down, stay safe. Yet on the ground, the response can vary.

On one side of the city, an employee stood with his phone in one hand and coffee in the other, watching water gather along the street. Then his screen lit up: “Due to weather conditions, all employees will work remotely today.” He exhales in quiet relief, puts his cup down, opens his laptop, and the day begins safely and predictably.

Across the street, someone else’s morning was starting differently. He had looked out at the same rain and heard the same wind hitting the windows. But his phone remained silent — no message, no update. He heads off to the office while the roads were already crowded, water splashing high with every passing vehicle. Like many others, he found himself asking, “Why am I out here?”

The answer is simple: he had to step into the same storm, not because he must, but because his employer’s policies did not include weather conditions. Though the sky warns everyone equally, protection arrives selectively.

This is not merely a difference in

operational style; it reflects a deeper disconnect in values. When some workers are told to stay home while others are expected to risk the commute, a powerful message emerges: your safety depends on where you work. Over time, this message hardens into frustration and eventually into disengagement.

No organisation — public or private — benefits from a workforce that feels unequally protected. The truth is that storms reveal what routine days conceal. They expose how quickly systems can adapt or how stubbornly they resist. They highlight whether leadership is guided by insight or by habit. Most importantly, they test whether employee well-being is treated as a principle or a convenience.

Usually this happens with corporates where the private sector is often praised for its responsiveness and innovation. Yet during adverse weather, parts of it remain bound to strict expectations of physical presence. This is not a limitation of technology, but of mindset.

What is needed is not criticism, but coordination: a single, clear directive during severe weather, issued at the national level and applied across all sectors. Such a measure would replace uncertainty with confidence and ensure that no employee is left to interpret risk alone or choose between safety and obligation.

The truth is that storms reveal what routine days conceal. They expose how quickly systems can adapt or how stubbornly they resist. They highlight whether leadership is guided by insight or by habit

Such a decision would not hide the line between public and private sectors; rather, it would draw a stronger line around what truly matters. To make this shift meaningful, forward-thinking practices and clear directives must be established and applied across all organisations. At the same time, organisations should be encouraged to document and review their responses to adverse weather conditions.

Ultimately, strength is not about enduring the storm, but about preparing for it together. The sky will continue to send its warnings through wind and rain. The question is no longer whether we hear them, but whether we choose to respond as one.

Imagine, instead, a different morning. The same rain, the same sky, but this time, a single announcement reaches every phone, every office, every employee, public and private alike: “Due to severe weather conditions, remote work is in effect for all. Stay safe.”

The message is clear: safety belongs to everyone. To reach that morning, change must begin before the next storm arrives. The rain will come again, it always does. Next time, the story it tells should not be one of division, but of a city that responded together. Until then, the city will continue to witness two mornings in every storm: one that begins with safety, and another that begins with risk.

REPUBLICANS DIVIDED ON IDENTITY, STRATEGY FOR US MIDTERMS

FRANKIE TAGGART

Conservatives gathering in Texas this week showcased a Republican Party wrestling with its identity, as activists debated whether ideological purity or broader appeal offered the best path to victory in looming midterm elections.

In conversations across the Dallas-area Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC), supporters framed the stakes not just in terms of who should prevail in the “primary” elections that pick candidates for November, but what kind of party Republicans should be.

It is an increasingly heated debate that has exposed tensions between hardline conservatives, pragmatists and those unsure of how to reconcile the two.

The discussion is playing out most visibly in high-profile contests such as the Texas Senate primary between incumbent John Cornyn and state attorney general Ken Paxton, a race that has become a proxy for the party’s wider struggle. For some, the answer is clear: the more conservative the candidate, the better.

“Oh, Paxton, definitely. All the way. Paxton, all the way, because he is a genuine conservative,” said Petrina Bullard, 49, a realtor and community health worker from Dallas.

“Cornyn is not. He never has been. I honestly believe he’s a Democrat parading as a Republican just to get voted in.”

Bullard said Republicans should prioritise candidates who are “really down in the trenches with the people” rather than establishment figures, arguing that ideological compromise risks diluting the party’s core values.

“It definitely needs to be more conservative people rather than establishment people,” she said, warning that Texas risked becoming a “purple state” with the Democrats growing as powerful as the Republicans. Others, however, see that approach as a liability in competitive races.

Sean O’Brien, a 20-year-old from Connecticut who is studying at Alabama’s Auburn University, said Republicans need to broaden their appeal - even as he acknowledged tensions within that position. “I will say that we need to pivot more towards the centre,” he said, arguing that President Donald Trump remains “a very divisive figure.”

At the same time, O’Brien said he favoured candidates aligned with Trump’s “America First” agenda, reflecting the balancing act facing many younger conservatives.

He also warned that broader political dynamics - including the war in Iran - could weigh on Republican prospects. “I see Democrats winning more seats... possibly taking the Senate,” he said of November’s midterms, while suggesting Republicans might still hold the House.

For others, the question of direction remains unresolved. — AFP

It’s Vance vs Rubio as war weighs on Trump

AS THE war in Iran threatens to imperil President Donald Trump’s legacy, the political stakes also are rising for two of his top lieutenants: Vice-President J D Vance and Secretary of State Marco Rubio. The pair, widely viewed as potential successors to Trump, have been thrust into still-developing negotiations to end the war at a moment when the Republican Party is already weighing its post-Trump future.

Vance has taken a cautious approach, reflecting his skepticism towards prolonged US military involvement, while Rubio has aligned himself closely with Trump’s hawkish stance and emerged as one of the administration’s most vocal defenders of the campaign. Trump has said both men were involved in efforts to force Iran to accept US demands to dismantle its nuclear and ballistic missile programmes and allow oil traffic to pass freely through the Strait of Hormuz.

With the next presidential election due in 2028 and term limits barring Trump from running again, the president has been putting the succession question to allies and advisers in private, asking “JD or Marco?” two people familiar with his views said. The outcome of the US military operation now in its fifth week could shape the two men’s 2028 prospects, political analysts and Republican officials said. A swift end to the war that favours the US might bolster Rubio, who also serves as Trump’s national security adviser and could be seen as a steady hand during a crisis. A prolonged conflict could give Vance space to argue he reflected the anti-war instincts of Trump’s base without openly breaking with the president.

Trump’s own standing is also at stake. His approval rating fell in recent days to 36 per cent, its lowest point since he returned to the White House, hit by a surge in fuel prices and widespread disapproval of the Iran war, a four-day Reuters/Ipsos poll completed last week found. Some Republicans say they are watching closely for which senior aide Trump appears to favour as the



US Secretary of State Marco Rubio listens to President Donald Trump speaking to the media in Washington, DC, US.

— Reuters file photo



STEVE HOLLAND

The writer covers White House and US politics for Reuters



NANDITA BOSE

The writer is White House Correspondent for Reuters

Iran conflict unfolds. Some see signs of Trump leaning towards Rubio but note he could change his mind quickly. “Everyone is watching the body language that Trump makes on Rubio and not seeing the same on Vance,” a Republican with close ties to the White House said.

The White House rejected the idea that Trump is signalling a preference.

“No amount of crazed media speculation about Vice-President Vance and Secretary Rubio will deter this administration’s mission of fighting for the American people,” spokesman Steven Cheung said.

Vance, 41, a former Marine who served in Iraq, has long argued against US entanglements in foreign wars. His public comments on Iran have been limited and calibrated, and Trump has noted the two have “philosophical differences” on the conflict. Once a self-described “never-Trumper,” Vance wrote an opinion piece in the Wall Street Journal in 2023 saying Trump’s best foreign policy was not starting any wars during his first four years in office between 2017 and 2021.

The White House has downplayed any rift between the president and vice-president. Standing alongside Trump in the Oval Office earlier this month, Vance said he supported Trump’s handling of the war and

agreed with him that Iran should not obtain a nuclear weapon.

Vance could take on a more direct role in negotiations if Trump’s special envoy Steve Witkoff and son-in-law Jared Kushner make sufficient progress, a person with knowledge of the matter said.

“Vice-President Vance is proud to be a part of a highly effective team that, under President Trump’s bold leadership, has had incredible success in making America safer, more secure and more prosperous,” a Vance spokeswoman said.

A senior White House official, who like others in this story was granted anonymity to speak freely about a sensitive topic, said Trump tolerates ideological differences as long as aides remain loyal, adding that Vance’s skeptical views have helped inform Trump about where part of his voter base stands.

A person familiar with Vance’s views said the vice-president will wait until after the November midterm elections before deciding on whether to run in 2028. Rubio, 54, has said he will not run for president if Vance does, and sources familiar with Rubio’s views say he would be content as Vance’s running mate. But any perceived vulnerability for Vance could encourage Rubio and other Republicans eyeing bids.

“Trump has a long memory,” said Republican strategist Ron Bonjean. “And he may call out Vance for his lack of allegiance. And if Trump remains popular with the MAGA base, that could hurt him by not getting the endorsement of the president.”

Trump has floated the idea of Vance and Rubio running together, suggesting they would be hard to beat. “Trump doesn’t want to anoint anyone,” the senior White House official said.

A March Reuters/Ipsos poll found that 79 per cent of Republicans have a favourable view of Vance, while 19 per cent viewed him negatively. Some 71 per cent had a positive view of Rubio, while 15 per cent viewed him unfavourably. In comparison, 79 per cent of Republicans viewed Trump favourably and 20 per cent unfavourably.

SPORTS

SHORT TAKES



Moosa bin Khamis al Balushi, President, Oman Handball Association.

OHA HOLDS ANNUAL GENERAL ASSEMBLY MEETING TODAY

RIYADH AL BALUSHI
@riyadhbaluch

The Oman Handball Association (OHA) will hold its Annual General Assembly meeting under the chairmanship of Moosa bin Khamis al Balushi, Chairman of the Board, with the attendance of board members as well as presidents and representatives of affiliated clubs. The meeting takes place at 4 pm today at the Oman Olympic Committee Academy Hall in Muscat.

The association has extended invitations to all member clubs that meet the requirements stipulated in Articles (25) and (25 bis) of the statute. A total of 22 clubs are eligible to attend the meeting.

The agenda features several key items, beginning with the approval of the agenda, followed by the chairman's address. Three members will then be appointed to review the meeting minutes. The assembly will also approve the minutes of the previous meeting and review the administrative and financial reports for the fiscal year ending 2025. In addition, the audited annual financial statements, including surplus and liabilities for the same period, will be presented for approval.

Discussions will also cover the proposed budget for 2026 and the appointment of external auditors for the upcoming financial year. Furthermore, the assembly will approve the formation of the Disciplinary and Appeals Committees, as well as endorse the Athletes' Committee representative nominated for membership on the Board of Directors for the next term.

The meeting will also address proposals submitted by member clubs, which were filed in accordance with the association's statutes at least 30 days prior to the assembly. These proposals are expected to enhance the role of clubs in developing Omani handball and support the federation's future plans.

The outcomes of the meeting are anticipated to outline the federation's road map for the upcoming phase, both administratively and technically, in alignment with clubs' aspirations and the continued growth of the sport at both domestic and international levels.

Oman down Belarus 6-5 in friendly beach soccer



A thrilling moment from Oman's 6-5 victory over Belarus at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex.

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, MARCH 29

OMAN'S BEACH soccer team secured an exciting 6-5 victory over Belarus in their second friendly match, played on Saturday at the sand pitch of Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher. The match came as part of the team's internal training camp being held from March 23 to 30 in preparation for the 6th Asian Beach Games, which will take place in Sanya, China, from April 22 to 30. The contest carried a strong competitive edge from the outset, with both sides closely matched and exchanging control and chances until the closing moments.

Oman entered the match with an early attacking rhythm and opened the scoring quickly through Abdullah al Sooti in the second minute of the first period. Belarus responded just one minute later through Yury Petrovsky to restore parity early in the game. Belarus then maintained their pressure and took the lead in the seventh



Action-packed scenes from Oman's match against Belarus.

minute of the first period through Ihar Breshtsel, but the Omani Red did not take long to respond, as Sami al Balushi equalised in the ninth minute, leaving the opening period finely balanced.

In the second period, both teams continued to trade the advantage and Belarus went ahead once again through Uladzislau Kananenka in the eighth minute. Oman, however, remained fully in the contest and drew level once more when Sami al Balushi scored his second personal goal and Oman's third in the 11th minute, keeping the match

open to all possibilities before the decisive final period.

With the start of the third period, the intensity rose sharply. Qusai al Balushi scored Oman's fourth goal in the fifth minute before Sami al Balushi struck again in the seventh minute to complete his hat-trick and give Oman a 5-4 lead, delivering one of the standout performances of the match. Belarus refused to surrender and reduced the deficit with Aliye Haboun's goal in the eighth minute. Amid this fluctuating scenario, Musallam al Orami scored the decisive goal for Oman in

the eighth minute of the third period. Belarus then pulled one back again through Mikata Shakiouska in the ninth minute, setting up a tense finish.

Oman's players managed to hold on and secure an important 6-5 victory in a match that reflected the team's attacking readiness, despite the need for greater defensive solidity against an opponent with varied solutions in the final third. The match saw only one booking, issued to Belarus player Yauhien Novika in the 10th minute of the third period for reckless play, while there were no dismissals.

This friendly win represents both a morale-boosting and technical gain for Oman, especially as the match featured a variety of scorers, giving the technical staff positive indicators ahead of the next phase of preparations. The result gains added significance considering the strength of the opposition, with Belarus ranked fourth in the world in the latest beach soccer national team rankings issued on January 19, 2026, while Oman was ranked 11th.

Al Sawafi, Al Busaidy, Al Kathiri lead Oman Chess Open after Round 4

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, MARCH 29

The Oman Individual Chess Open 2026 moved into a more decisive phase after the fourth round, which featured key clashes among leading contenders and fresh surprises that kept the title race wide open. With the leading players separated by only a narrow margin, the battle for top honours is beginning to take clearer shape.

Board one saw a strong encounter between Candidate Master Hamood al Busaidy, rated 1554 and Waddah al Sabti, rated 1596. Al Busaidy managed to settle the contest in his favour to stay on course among the leading title challengers.

On Board Two, Ali al Hamrashdi (1720) produced a spirited performance against Candidate Master Mana al Kathiri (1875), but



The championship saw varying levels of performance, with intense competition in the second, third and fourth rounds.

the latter relied on his experience and composure to secure victory and remain firmly in contention near the top of the standings.

The biggest talking point of the

round came on Board Three, where Abdulrahman al Sawafi (1551) continued his remarkable campaign with another upset, this time overcoming Khalfan al Hosni (1808).

The result extended Al Sawafi's impressive streak and further established him as one of the standout performers of the tournament so far.

On Board Four, Said Shamas (1714) and Rashid al Jabri (1799) shared the points after a closely contested encounter. Another notable result came on Board Five, where Thabit al Hosni (1664) held Candidate Master Salim al Amri (1980) to a draw, denying one of the pre-tournament favourites a full point and highlighting the highly competitive nature of the event.

Elsewhere, Ziyad al Bakri (1565) drew with Imad al Balushi (1806) on Board Six, while Abdulmalik al Sabti (1744) claimed a valuable win over Manaf Bait Said (1660) on Board Seven.

On Board Eight, Candidate Master Amir al Maashani (1994) returned to winning ways with

a victory over Imran al Maamari (1681), bouncing back well after earlier setbacks. Another surprise came on Board Nine, where Mohammed Al Maamari (1640) defeated Salim al Amri (1913). Meanwhile, Mohammed al Saeedi (1892) completed the top-board results with a win over Anas al Yahmadi (1639) on Board Ten.

At the end of the fourth round, Abdulrahman al Sawafi moved to the top of the standings with 4 points, level with Hamood al Busaidy, who also raised his tally to 4 points, and Mana al Kathiri, who maintained his strong form and finished the round on the same total.

Just behind the leading trio, Said Shamas, Thabit al Hasani, Rashid al Jabri and Abdulmalik al Sabti were all on 3.5 points, while Khalfan al Hosni followed with 3 points as the title race remained wide open.

SHORTTAKES



Ashraf RC, owned by the Royal Cavalry of Oman.

ASHRAF RC WINS GOLD AT SHARJAH FESTIVAL

RIYADH AL BALUSHI
@riyadhbhaluch

The colt Ashraf RC, owned by the Royal Cavalry of Oman, claimed the Gold Championship title in the Colts category at the 27th Sharjah International Arabian Horse Festival 2026. The event was organised by the Sharjah Equestrian and Racing Club at its indoor arena in the Emirate of Sharjah, United Arab Emirates and featured strong participation from leading Arabian horse breeders and stables from around the world.

Ashraf RC delivered an outstanding performance throughout the competition. The colt finished first in the qualifying rounds before advancing to the finals, where it maintained its dominance to secure the Gold Championship title in the Colts category for horses aged two to three years, confirming its status as one of the top performers of the festival.

In the same category, Redan Al Sadeem, owned by Shaikh Abdullah bin Mohammed al Thani, finished second to win the Silver Championship title. Essam Al Saeed, representing Hanaya Stud, took third place and was awarded the Bronze Championship following a highly competitive contest that reflected the exceptional quality of the field.

The 27th edition of the festival featured the participation of 217 Purebred Arabian horses representing a number of prominent international studs. The competition included six main categories: yearling fillies, fillies aged two to three years, mares, yearling colts, colts aged two to three years, and stallions.

This achievement adds to the Royal Cavalry's strong record in international competitions and highlights its continued excellence in breeding and presenting Arabian horses. The organisation follows advanced breeding programs, focusing on elite bloodlines and maintaining the highest standards of quality and conformation.

The victory also reflects ongoing efforts in Oman to support and develop the equestrian sector, strengthening the country's presence in major international events while preserving the heritage of Arabian horses.

The Sharjah International Arabian Horse Festival is considered one of the leading events on the global Arabian horse calendar, attracting top owners and breeders each year. It serves as a key platform for showcasing elite horses and exchanging expertise, contributing to the continued growth and global recognition of the sport.

HM Sultan’s Camel Cup Festival kicks off in Barka

WALEED AL JAHWARI
MUSCAT, MARCH 29

‘THANN’ owned by Rashid al Wahibi won the first main round and secured the first car. ‘Shaheen’ owned by Ali al Mughairi claimed the second car. ‘Al Dhabi’ owned by Abdullah al Ghailani took the third car, while ‘Al Tayari’ owned by Mohammed al Jadeeli captured the fourth car.

During the opening day of HM Sultan's Camel Cup Festival 2026, held with the support of the Royal Court Affairs and represented by the Royal Camel Corps (RCC). The festival began on Sunday and concludes on April 2 at Al Felaij Track in the Wilayat of Barka, Al Batinah South Governorate.

The five-day event will feature 85 races, in addition to 23 trophies and 27 cars, in cooperation with the Oman Camel Racing Federation (OCRF).

The opening day, saw 32 races for the Hagayeg category, two year old, over a distance of 4 km. As many as 22 races are being held in the morning, with cash prizes for the top ten.

In the afternoon, 10 main races will take place, with 10 cars and four trophies awarded to winners, in addition to cash prizes up to tenth place.

RESULTS READ AS:
ROUND, CAMEL, OWNER, TIME

- MORNING RESULTS FOR THE HAGAYEG CATEGORY, 4 KM
- 1 Fazaa, Mohammed bin Abdullah al Jahafi
 - 2 Shaheen, Ibrahim bin Said al Jadeeli
 - 3 Al Fari'ah, Abdullah bin Humaid al Amri
 - 4 Bint Salalah, Royal Camel Corps
 - 5 Muhattam, Mohammed bin Mubarak al Saidi
 - 6 Al Wariya, Mohammed bin Saud al Saifi
 - 7 Mikhlab, Salim bin Hamad al Mukhaini
 - 8 Al Dhabi, Saif bin Ali al Duraie
 - 9 Hamloul, Rashid bin Salim al Zara'i
 - 10 Athba, Badr bin Ali al Shamsi



The festival will feature 85 races in addition to 23 trophies and 27 cars in cooperation with OCRF

- 11 Shaheen, Hamad bin Nasser al Junaibi
- 12 Al Haba, Said bin Mabrook al Qaadawi
- 13 Ghazi, Awad bin Ali al Balushi
- 14 Al Thayer, Obaid al Jahafi
- 15 Injaz, Ali bin Majbil al Jahafi
- 16 Al Doha, Sultan bin Hamad al Junaibi
- 17 Mardhi, Mansour bin Nasser al Qanoubi
- 18 Zafranah, Abdullah bin Nasser al Amri
- 19 Khaira, Ahmed bin Hilal al Malki
- 20 Jazeel, Said bin Nasser al Hashmi
- 21 Al Dhafra, Jassim bin Mohammed al Saadi
- 22 Lahab, Mohsin bin Ali al Wahibi

- EVENING RESULTS FOR THE HAGAYEG CATEGORY, 4 KM
- 1 Thann, Rashid bin Obaid al Wahibi, 5:59.52
 - 2 Shaheen, Ali bin Hamoud al Mughairi, 5:53.36
 - 3 Al Dhabi, Abdullah bin Saleh al Ghailani, 5:59.26
 - 4 Al Tayari, Mohammed bin Hamad al Jadeeli, 5:56.82
 - 5 Ashraqat, Nasser bin Hamad al Amri, 5:55.46
 - 6 Farha, Masoud bin Ali al Sunaidi, 6:02.78
 - 7 Samha, Mubarak bin Amer al Wahibi, 6:02.74

- 8 Al Shidman, Ali bin Yameel al Wahibi, 5:55.84
 - 9 Sharah, Faisal bin Shleiwaih al Junaibi, 6:00.96
 - 10 Tashar, Mubarak bin Hamad al Jadeeli, 5:57.08
- The races will continue on the second day, March 30, with 22 races for the Laqaya category, three year old, over a distance of 5 km, divided into 15 morning races with cash prizes for the top ten. Seven main races will be held in the afternoon, offering seven cars and four trophies for winners, along with cash prizes.

REQUIREMENTS FOR PARTICIPATION

The Royal Camel Corps has outlined general conditions for participation in the festival, which is allocated only for purebred Omani camels wholly owned by Omanis.

The Oman Camel Racing Federation will ensure that participants adhere to strict anti-doping regulations, prohibiting the use of any stimulants or banned substances. All winning camels will undergo testing for prohibited substances, and any violations will result in forfeiture of prizes and penalties in accordance with the federation's regulations.



Oman Athletics Association reviews 2032 road map

SPORT REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 29

The Oman Athletics Association (OAA) held its 2026 ordinary general assembly meeting at Intercity Hotel with representatives of 34 clubs in attendance, as the federation reviewed its recent work, financial matters and long-term development plans for the sport in Oman.

The meeting opened with remarks by OAA Chairman, Said bin Mohammed al Hajri, who underlined the central role of clubs as key partners in developing athletics, praising their contribution to talent identification, athlete development and support for national teams.

He also pointed to the progress made by Oman's national squads in recent years, highlighting improved technical standards and results, as



The OAA reviews its 2026 agenda during the ordinary general assembly meeting. — Faisal al Balushi

well as continued efforts to qualify coaches and referees in line with international standards.

Members approved the agenda, endorsed the minutes of the previous general assembly meeting and appointed three members to review the current minutes. The activity report was also ratified after outlining the federation's programmes, competitions and national team participation at regional and international level.

On the financial side, the assembly approved the audited 2025 annual financial statements after reviewing revenues and expenditures, and also adopted the 2026 budget. Independent external auditors for the 2026 financial year were appointed as part of the federation's commitment to transparency and sound governance. The meeting was also informed that no new proposals had been submitted by member clubs

within the approved timeframe, while no new membership applications were recorded.

A major part of the meeting focused on the federation's executive road map for the coming years, which aims to elevate Oman into the ranks of advanced athletics nations, strengthen the competitiveness of national teams, attract regional and international events and target significant Asian, world and Olympic achievements by 2032. The

investment value of the plan was placed at around RO 7.49 million.

The strategy is built around several key areas, including talent identification across Oman's governorates, youth development, financial sustainability through diversified revenue streams, infrastructure enhancement and the use of modern technology in training and performance analysis.

The chairman also announced plans to launch a female athlete preparation centre in Muscat, in addition to a sub-centre in Al Jabal Al Akhdhar to benefit from the advantages of high-altitude training.

The meeting also reviewed the national teams' overseas participation during the 2025-2026 season, along with domestic competitions, noting a rise in both the level of competition and the number of participating clubs.

SPORTS



ARYNA Sabalenka won her second straight Miami Open title on Sunday beating Coco Gauff 6-2, 4-6, 6-3 to complete a “Sunshine Double” Indian Wells-Miami sweep.

The world number one from Belarus, fresh off her first triumph in the California desert, became the fifth woman and the first since Iga Swiatek in 2022 to win both of the elite early season hardcourt WTA 1000 titles.

“It means a lot,” Sabalenka said after joining Poland’s Swiatek, German great Steffi Graf, Belgian Kim Clijsters and fellow Belarusian Victoria Azarenka on the list of women to win both titles in the same year.

“My goal always been to put my name in the history, and I just did it.”

Sabalenka underscored her WTA dominance in a season in which her only defeat to date was her Australian Open finals loss to Elena Rybakina who she went on to beat in the Indian Wells title match and in the semi-finals here.

She handed Gauff her first career defeat in a hardcourt final.

The American had won her first nine, including a triumph over Sabalenka in the 2023 US Open championship match.

Gauff had also beaten the Belarusian for the title on the red clay of Roland Garros last year.

So Sabalenka said she wasn’t surprised to see Gauff dig in, even after the Belarusian pocketed the first set with a ruthless display of power and precision.

She broke Gauff to open the match and, after Gauff saved three break

points in a gritty fifth game, broke the American again in the seventh before serving it out in 37 minutes without facing a break point herself.

In a tense second set, Gauff’s first break point chance from a blistering backhand passing winner in the second game sparked a jubilant reaction from the crowd at Hard Rock Stadium, home of the NFL’s Miami Dolphins that is just about an hour away from Gauff’s Delray Beach home. But Gauff couldn’t convert, slamming a forehand into the net on the next point as Sabalenka held. It needed another gutsy hold from Gauff to keep it on serve in the fifth game. Up 40-0, she wasted three game points with a pair of errors off the ground and a double fault then had to save a break point before taking the game.

But Gauff was finding more depth

on her returns and broke Sabalenka for the first time to take the second set.

“I knew that she’s going to try her very best to fight in this match,” Sabalenka said.

“I was just trying to keep a positive mindset going into the third set, I’m super happy how well I handled my emotions how well I stayed focused from the very beginning to the very end.”

WHAT A MONTH

And the third set, again, was virtually all Sabalenka.

She broke to open the final frame and broke again when Gauff sailed a backhand long on Sabalenka’s first match point.

“What a month,” said Sabalenka, who along with two prestigious titles acquired a new puppy and

got engaged to boyfriend Georgios Frangulis.

Gauff was also feeling grateful after a rocky March that saw her withdraw from her third-round match at Indian Wells with a nerve issue that caused “scary” pain in her left arm. She had said after a dominant semi-final win over Karolina Muchova that she was making progress with the inconsistencies in her serve and forehand, although seven double faults hurt her cause against Sabalenka. And after considering skipping the event, the 22-year old was thrilled to reach the final for the first time.

“I feel like I’m nowhere near my peak of my tennis, so I think it gives me comfort a little bit playing these tournaments and having great results,” she said. — AFP

MUSCAT
STOCK
EXCHANGE
8,028.883

BUSINESS

SHORTTAKES



The campaign focuses on verifying suppliers' adherence to approved pricing.

CONSUMER
AUTHORITY
TIGHTENS POST
STORM CHECKS

MUSCAT: The Consumer Protection Authority (CPA) has stepped up monitoring and field inspections across Oman's governorates and wilayats to ensure market stability and enforce compliance with regulations following the recent Al Masarrat weather system.

The intensified campaign focuses on verifying suppliers' adherence to approved pricing and preventing unjustified price increases or stockpiling. Inspection teams are also assessing the resilience of supply chains to ensure uninterrupted availability of essential and consumer goods.

The Authority said the measures are aimed at maintaining normal market conditions after the weather disturbance, while safeguarding consumers from potential exploitation. Particular attention is being given to areas that witnessed heightened purchasing activity in recent days.

The CPA continues to coordinate with relevant government entities to evaluate any impacts arising from the weather event and to address emerging market challenges. It emphasised that suppliers must comply fully with trade regulations and avoid taking advantage of exceptional circumstances for unlawful gain.

At the same time, the Authority commended consumers for their awareness and cooperation in reporting violations, noting that public engagement remains a key pillar in strengthening oversight.

The CPA reaffirmed its commitment to sustained monitoring and awareness campaigns to protect consumer rights and reinforce market discipline. These efforts are aligned with Oman Vision 2040, which seeks to promote a fair, transparent and resilient economic environment while ensuring the availability of essential goods and services under all conditions. — ONA

Oman retains investment
grade credit rating



S&P expects Oman's economy to grow by 1.4 per cent in 2026 and by an average of 2.3 per cent during 2027–2029.

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, MARCH 29

S&P Global Ratings has affirmed Oman's sovereign credit rating at investment-grade 'BBB-' with a stable outlook, citing the strength of the Sultanate of Oman's fiscal and external positions and the continued support of solid government buffers.

The Ministry of Finance, citing the ratings agency, said liquid government assets exceed 40 per cent of GDP, while foreign reserves are close to 20 per cent of GDP, helping underpin Oman's credit profile at a time of heightened regional uncertainty.

S&P expects Oman's economy to grow by 1.4 per cent in 2026 and by an average of 2.3 per cent during 2027–2029.

It also forecast an average budget surplus of 0.4 per cent over 2027–2029, alongside a current account surplus of 2.3 per cent of GDP in 2026 and around 2.0


The timing of the decision added to its significance, as it came amidst rising geopolitical tensions in the region and reflected continued confidence in the state's fiscal policy, as well as its ability to absorb shocks and manage external risks with discipline.

AZZA AL HABSI
Economist at
Ominvest

per cent over the following three years.

The agency projected that Oman's debt-to-GDP ratio will continue to improve, falling from 33.6 per cent in 2026 to 31 per cent by 2029. Its baseline assumptions include average oil prices of \$80 per barrel in 2026 and \$65 per barrel in 2027–2029, with inflation seen at a moderate 1.5 per cent in 2026–2028.

Azza al Habsi, Economist at Ominvest, told the *Observer* that the affirmation should be read as more than a routine technical decision by a ratings agency, describing it instead as a sign that the Omani economy remains capable of maintaining fiscal balance in a highly sensitive regional environment.

She said the timing of the decision added to its significance, as it came amidst rising geopolitical tensions in the region and reflected continued confidence in the state's fiscal policy, as well as its ability to absorb shocks and manage

external risks with discipline.

Al Habsi said preserving investment-grade status under such conditions sends a reassuring signal to markets, investors and lenders that Oman continues to offer a credible and dependable economic base. She added that the next challenge would be to turn this stability into broader, more diversified growth by increasing the contribution of non-oil sectors and reducing exposure to energy market volatility.

S&P said Oman's rating could be upgraded over the next two years if geopolitical tensions ease and reforms continue to strengthen institutions, support economic diversification and further improve fiscal and external buffers.

The latest affirmation extends Oman's investment-grade standing first restored in 2025 and is likely to support confidence in the sultanate of Oman's broader fiscal reform and Oman Vision 2040 economic diversification programme.

Oman targets 400,000 t/y chromite output by 2030

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, MARCH 29

Minerals Development Oman (MDO) has unveiled plans to ramp up exploration and production of chromite ore to support not only export-led growth but also downstream value addition.

MDO says its chromite strategy seeks to “accelerate exploration to build a larger resource base and increase chromite ore production to 400,000 tonnes per year by 2030”. The overarching goal is to “position the Sultanate of Oman as a reliable supplier of chromite ore and value-added products in Asia” by 2030.

Also as part of this strategy, MDO seeks to achieve a profit margin of over 20 per cent from chromite ore production through beneficiation and blending processes. To this end, it has partnered with Oman Chromite Company (in which it holds a 25 per cent stake) in the development of existing chromite deposits within the latter's mining licences.



The goal is to “position the Sultanate of Oman as a reliable supplier of chromite ore and value-added products in Asia” by 2030.

MDO's own chromite ore exploration and production activities are currently focused on two areas in Al Batinah North Governorate. The Mahrah Project centres on the development of an estimated 167,000 tonnes of 29 per cent grade chromite ore

deposits, uncovered in Block 11B in the Wilayat of Shinas. In neighbouring Al Khabourah, around 31,000 tonnes of ore of approximately 10 per cent grade have been identified in Block 12B as part of the Sarrami Project. Additionally, drilling programmes

conducted during 2025 led to the discovery of new chromite resources. Around 254,000 tonnes of additional chromite resources were uncovered during 2025 from the following locations: Jibjibba — 163,000 tonnes (32.30 per cent grade), Wadi Rajmi — 31,000 tonnes (31.95 per cent grade), Mahrah — 168,000 tonnes (29.16 per cent grade), and Daqrah — 60,000 tonnes (36.23 per cent grade).

“Mining and production of chromite ore, with grades ranging from 30–32%, were completed, yielding a total of 64,972 tonnes.

The raw material has been sold and shipped to customers in local and international markets, reflecting the company's success in marketing its products globally”, the company stated in its 2025 Annual Report.

MDO is also playing a lead role in supporting the government's strategy to move the chromite sector from a historically export-driven raw ore industry towards a more integrated, value-

added minerals ecosystem. The emphasis will be on beneficiation, ferrochrome production and tighter export controls — while remaining a key supplier to global steel markets.

To this end, the Ministry of Energy and Minerals has moved to significantly tighten oversight of chromite ore marketing and exports through a new regulatory framework introduced in 2025.

Under Ministerial Decision 18/2025, exports are now subject to stricter controls, including mandatory approvals, quality certification and a minimum grade requirement of 36 per cent chromium oxide (Cr₂O₃) for raw ore shipments.

A central pillar of the reforms is the planned establishment of a state-backed marketing entity to streamline mineral exports, improve pricing transparency and strengthen Oman's bargaining position in international markets. Oman Minerals Trading Company (OMTC) has been established as a subsidiary of MDO.

ADVERTORIALS

SHORTTAKES



The new product aims to facilitate access to safe and reliable banking services for both citizens and residents.

BANKDHOFAR
LAUNCHES ACCOUNT
FOR THE WAGE
PROTECTION SYSTEM

MUSCAT: BankDhofar has announced the launch of the Basic Savings Account for the Wage Protection System, a new banking product specifically designed for employees earning a monthly salary of RO 350 or less. This new product reflects BankDhofar’s commitment to providing accessible financial products that meet the needs of different segments of society and support the integration of individuals into the banking system in the Sultanate of Oman.

The new product aims to facilitate access to safe and reliable banking services for both citizens and residents; and to provide a financial environment that ensures the speed and ease of conducting daily transactions. This, in turn, enhances financial stability and contributes to the development of the electronic payment system in the Sultanate of Oman.

The new account also offers a range of features that align with customer needs and provide them with an efficient banking experience. These include no minimum balance requirement, giving customers complete flexibility in managing their money without any obligations and no account closure fees, providing a convenient banking experience free from additional financial burdens.

In addition, customers will receive a free national payment card, “Maal”, upon opening the account. The card is dedicated for use within the Sultanate of Oman and allows customers to conduct daily transactions easily and securely. Customers can also benefit from digital banking services through the BankDhofar mobile app and online banking, including 24/7 account viewing and transaction management.

Account opening will be subject to a set of conditions, including a maximum balance of RO 3,000, a daily cash deposit limit of RO 100, a daily cash withdrawal limit of RO 500 and a limit of RO 500 for local and international transfers.

Those wishing to open a Basic Savings Account can visit any of BankDhofar’s more than 145 branches located throughout the Sultanate of Oman. Bank staff will complete the simplified Know Your Customer (KYC) process and assist with filling out the account opening form.

The launch of the Basic Savings Account under the Wage Protection System represents an important step that aligns with Oman Vision 2040, which focuses on promoting financial inclusion, enhancing the structure of the banking sector and improving its efficiency to meet the aspirations of the national economy.

Saud Bahwan supports
50 employees for Umrah

A JOURNEY of faith and gratitude began as 50 Saud Bahwan Group employees departed for a blessed Umrah pilgrimage, fully supported by the Group. This noble initiative highlights the Group's ongoing commitment to enriching the lives of its staff, providing them with a unique opportunity for spiritual growth and reflection.

The comprehensive sponsorship covers all aspects of the pilgrimage, including return air travel, comfortable accommodation, meals and all other necessary arrangements for the Umrah rituals.

Recognising the profound importance of this sacred journey, the Saud Bahwan Group is ensuring that every aspect of the trip will be handled with the utmost care.

National Travel and Tourism (NTT) is playing a central role in this process, utilising its professional expertise to manage the travel logistics with a focus on empathy and excellence.

Every detail of the itinerary has been carefully curated to guarantee a seamless experience, which will allow the employees to focus entirely on the spiritual significance of their pilgrimage in an environment of complete comfort.

For those looking to embark on their own path of spiritual discovery, NTT continues to offer specialised Umrah packages.

These are designed to meet individual needs, ensuring a personalised and serene experience for all who wish to undertake this sacred journey.

Saud Bahwan Group's commitment to social welfare is reflected in its wide-reaching humanitarian efforts.

Through independent initiatives and strategic partnerships with Ministries or national institutions, Saud Bahwan Group



50 Saud Bahwan Group employees at Muscat International Airport as they depart for Umrah, fully facilitated by the Group.

remains dedicated to creating a positive impact, upholding the timeless values of kindness and generosity that define its legacy.

By extending this opportunity to its own workforce, the Group highlights its belief in the importance of spiritual wellbeing and personal fulfilment. This gesture is a testament to the deep bond between the organisation and its people, ensuring that the dream of these 50 pilgrims is met with warmth and dignity.

Reflecting on the significance of the trip, a spokesperson from National Travel & Tourism (NTT) stated, “It is a great honour

for NTT to partner with the Saud Bahwan Group in facilitating this sacred journey for its employees.

We believe that providing the opportunity to fulfil spiritual aspirations is a profound way to support one’s wellbeing.

We are dedicated to ensuring that as these pilgrims embark on their sacred journey, they experience a truly seamless and spiritually enriching pilgrimage”.

Through such meaningful initiatives, the Saud Bahwan Group continues to be a guiding light, bringing joy and spiritual peace to many while strengthening the fabric of the community it serves.

ahlibank delivers strong 2025 performance

MUSCAT: Concluding 2025 from a position of sustained strength, ahlibank reported a year of solid financial growth, disciplined execution and institutional advancement.

Marking 18 years of operations in the Sultanate of Oman, the bank continues to expand its strategic footprint in alignment with the national diversification agenda.

For the year ended December 31, 2025, the bank delivered robust performance across its core financial metrics. Net loans, advances and financing expanded by 14.0% to RO 3,446.4 million, up from RO 3,022.3 million in 2024.

Total assets reached RO 4,188.7 million, reflecting a 11.6% increase supported by



SAID BIN
ABDULLAH AL
HATMI
CEO of ahlibank.

sustained momentum across both retail and corporate portfolios.

Customer’s deposits stood at RO 3,157.5 million, marking a 14.3% increase and signalling continued market confidence and liquidity strength.

Shareholders’ equity increased by 14.9% to RO 641.3 million,

further reinforcing the bank’s capital strength.

Operating income climbed 8.7% to RO 117.75 million, while operating expenses were contained at RO 48.97 million, demonstrating continued investment in strategic priorities while maintaining cost discipline.

Profit for the year reached RO 46.32 million, representing a 11.2% year-on-year improvement and highlighting the bank’s capacity to balance expansion with financial stability.

Said bin Abdullah al Hatmi, CEO of ahlibank, stated, “2025 marks a period of measured advancement and strategic depth for ahlibank.

Our focus has centered on

strengthening the foundations that enable sustained performance, including capital robustness, governance integrity and long-term value creation.

Amidst rapid technological transformation and evolving global dynamics, we have been deliberate in shaping a banking model that is adaptive, responsible, and future-ready.

Our progress is defined not solely by financial outcomes, but by the trust we continue to earn and the role we play in advancing the broader aspirations of the Sultanate of Oman. We approach the years ahead with confidence, guided by clarity of purpose and a commitment to enduring institutional strength”.

Goyal unveils \$24 million Malabar Gold & Diamonds CSR plan

MUSCAT: Malabar Gold & Diamonds, the world’s fifth-largest retail jewellery group and a responsible jewellery brand, has today announced their CSR initiatives worth \$24 million for the financial year 2026-27 held at Dr Ambedkar International Centre in New Delhi in the presence of Shri Piyush Goyal, India Union Minister for Commerce and Industry.

At the CSR initiative, the Union Minister inaugurated the distribution of educational scholarships for 33,000 female students across India. The event was attended by Malabar Group Chairman M P Ahammad, Malabar Gold & Diamonds Managing Director — India Operations O Asher, Malabar Group Executive Directors Nishad A K and Abdulla



At the CSR initiative, the Union Minister inaugurated the distribution of educational scholarships for 33,000 female students across India.

Ibrahim, Kerala House Resident Commissioner Puneet Kumar, IAS, Pratham CEO Rukmini Banerji

and Thanal Chairman Dr Idris, among others. Union Minister Piyush Goyal stated that the

initiatives of the Malabar Charitable Trust align closely with Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s vision of empowering India’s daughters through programmes like Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao.

He added that “Malabar Gold & Diamonds’ decision to allocate \$24 million towards CSR will further strengthen the nation’s progress”, emphasising that India’s growth is rooted in the empowerment of its people — especially women and girls; and appreciating the company’s efforts in driving meaningful change through education”.

“He also encouraged students and young citizens to dream big, aspire beyond limitations and seize the vast opportunities India offers, urging them to contribute actively to

the nation’s growth story”.

Malabar Group, Chairman, M P Ahammad highlighted “Human resource development is the backbone of national growth. He noted that nurturing talent through quality education is essential and that the scholarship programme enables students to achieve academic success and contribute to the country’s development. He added that the group remains committed to creating sustainable, long-term societal impact through significant CSR investments”.

During 2026-27, CSR projects worth \$24 million will be implemented across more than 3,000 locations in 19 states in India, covering 15 major initiatives. These programmes are expected to benefit over 200,000 people.

SHORTTAKES



The initiative aims to accelerate procedures, enhance user experience, and significantly reduce reliance on paperwork and manual transactions.

MARITIME PORTAL
STREAMLINES
SECTOR SERVICES
IN OMAN

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology has launched the “Oman Maritime Portal”, a unified digital platform designed to deliver more than 90 electronic maritime services. The initiative aims to accelerate procedures, enhance user experience, and significantly reduce reliance on paperwork and manual transactions.

The platform is also intended to strengthen integration with government and private sector entities, offering secure and reliable digital services.

It will support decision-making through advanced dashboards and analytical reporting tools, while contributing to national workforce development through training and knowledge transfer initiatives.

Implementation will take place in six phases. The first phase introduces 13 core services, including vessel and marine unit registration, issuance and renewal of navigation permits, registration and mortgage certificates, release documentation, and inspection requests.

The system is integrated with multiple stakeholders, including the Royal Oman Police, the Oman Business Platform, relevant ministries and government entities, as well as private sector partners.

The portal provides a single electronic gateway for maritime and port-related services, improving efficiency and accessibility for users. This reflects the Ministry’s ongoing commitment to advancing digital transformation and delivering high-quality public services.

A key feature is its comprehensive dashboard, which enables real-time monitoring of system performance. It presents data on application status, key performance indicators, and recent transactions, supported by advanced filtering and search functions. — ONA

Standards strategy drives
labour market gains

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MARCH 29

THE National Professional Standards Strategy has achieved significant milestones, reflecting a tangible impact on labour market development. It has helped build a professional system based on competence, quality and organisation, comprising Omani citizens.

Speaking to the *Observer*, Zaher bin Abdullah al Sheikh, Director of the Professional Standards Department, affirmed that the strategy represents a fundamental pillar for building trust, competence and quality in the Omani labour market. Raising awareness of the strategy across all governorates is a pivotal step towards developing the work system and enhancing professional sustainability, in line with the Sultanate of Oman’s comprehensive development goals.

The strategy’s initiatives have focused on three main areas that have contributed to its development: establishing and activating sectoral skills units, implementing a professional accreditation system



The strategy represents a fundamental pillar for building trust, competence and quality in the Omani labour market

ZAHER BIN
ABDULLAH AL
SHEIKH

to ensure practitioners’ competence and developing national professional standards to define the skills and knowledge required for each profession.

The figures reflect the progress achieved in this area, with the Ministry noting that the number of professional practice licences has exceeded 60,000, alongside more than 6,000 professional classification certificates, 151 approved professional standards and 132 professions currently undergoing classification. Increased oversight of the sector has led to the seizure of over 150 non-compliant certificates and more than 30 forged licences.

The Ministry indicated that progress towards the strategy’s targets reached 93 per cent in 2025. This includes the adoption of 88 national professional standards, the updating of 49 standards, the adoption of 49 qualification structures and the adoption of 18 professional frameworks.

Furthermore, the Ministry stated that the strategy has had a sustainable impact, including a greater emphasis on obtaining professional licences, enhanced

governance and oversight, closer alignment of education with labour market needs and stronger protection against forgery and violations.

The strategy aims to align skills with labour market demands, bridge the gap between educational outputs and economic sector needs, regulate the labour market and boost national productivity and competitiveness by empowering Omani workers and developing their skills. This aligns with the goals of Oman Vision 2040 in building a knowledge-based economy and strengthening human capital.

According to the latest statistics issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information, the total number of Omani employees across all sectors reached 893,707 by the end of February. Approximately 63,873 workers were employed in the domestic and private sectors.

The strategy supports Omani citizens by providing quality jobs and career pathways in future-oriented fields, contributing to the national economy’s entry into strategic industries and the development of a sustainable, knowledge-based economy.

WTO talks near deal on reform roadmap

YAOUNDE: Trade ministers are close to agreeing a reform plan for the World Trade Organisation, as wrangling continues over extending a moratorium on customs duties for electronic transmissions such as digital downloads, two diplomats said.

The talks at a WTO meeting in Cameroon include efforts to bridge differences between the US and India over extending the e-commerce moratorium, which is due to expire this month.

Extending the moratorium — first adopted in 1998 as part of a declaration to encourage early digital trade growth — is seen as a test for the WTO’s relevance, following a year of tariff-fuelled trade turmoil and major disruptions due to the



Delegates attend the World Trade Organisation (WTO) 14th ministerial meeting in Yaounde, Cameroon. — Reuters

Iran war. After initial resistance from some WTO members, a new draft of the reform roadmap provides a timeline for progress and sets out the key issues to address, according to a copy of the draft seen by Reuters.

Those issues include improving decision-making in a consensus-based system that has long been stymied by a few countries and the trade benefits extended to developing countries.

The reform debate comes amidst efforts to rework WTO rules to render subsidy use more transparent and make decision-taking easier.

The US and the EU argue China in particular has taken advantage of current rules to their detriment. — Reuters

Oman ports emerge as global trade pivot

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, MARCH 29

Oman’s ports are rapidly consolidating their role as critical nodes in global maritime trade, as geopolitical tensions continue to disrupt traditional shipping routes.

New data from maritime intelligence firm Windward indicates a sharp rise in vessel rerouting towards the Sultanate of Oman in March 2026, highlighting growing international reliance on its logistics infrastructure.

SOHAR Port recorded an exceptional 1,766 per cent surge in ship destination change requests, while Port of Salalah posted an 800 per cent increase in route diversions. These figures underscore



SOHAR Port recorded an exceptional 1,766 % surge in ship destination change requests.

a clear shift by global shipping operators towards safer and more reliable alternatives amidst regional uncertainty.

The trend reflects strong confidence in Oman’s capacity to manage trade flows with flexibility and resilience.

Strategically located outside major maritime chokepoints such as the Strait of Hormuz and Bab El Mandeb, the ports of Suhar, Salalah and Al Duqm offer secure entry points for Gulf-bound cargo.

Against this backdrop, Oman has emerged as a central logistics workaroud.

With constraints affecting other Gulf ports and continued risks along Red Sea routes, cargo is increasingly discharged at Omani ports before

being redistributed via feeder vessels or transported overland into neighbouring markets.

This rerouting system is becoming more structured. A recent Dubai Customs directive has formalised a “Green Corridor” between Oman and the UAE, enabling cargo cleared in Oman to move efficiently via Al Wajajah and Hatta. Qatar has also designated Suhar, Salalah and Al Duqm as key alternatives to Hamad Port.

What began as a temporary response is now evolving into a formalised logistics framework.

For Oman, this shift reinforces its strategic importance and strengthens its long-term position as a reliable and resilient hub in global trade networks.

SHIPPING STRAIN

India LPG tankers resume passage



Two India-bound LPG tankers have crossed the Strait of Hormuz, signalling limited movement amidst regional tensions. Data shows BW Elm and BW Tyr entering the eastern strait after Iran allowed “non-hostile vessels” to transit with coordination.

India has now moved four stranded LPG carriers, though around 20 vessels, including five LPG ships, remain held up in the Gulf. — Reuters

BOND SURGE

Euro zone yields hit multi-year highs



Euro zone borrowing costs climbed sharply, marking one of the weakest months for government bonds in years. Italy’s 10-year yield rose above 4 per cent, while France and Spain also hit multi-year highs.

Markets were pressured by inflation fears linked to rising energy prices and expectations that the European Central Bank (ECB) may tighten interest rates further. — ONA

TRADE TALKS

Swiss-US negotiations extend beyond March



Switzerland and the United States will continue trade negotiations beyond March, following delays in finalising tariff agreements. Talks follow a prior deal to cut US duties on Swiss goods, though policy shifts and fresh investigations have added uncertainty.

Swiss officials indicated the timeline has slipped, with the next round of discussions expected to take place in April. — Reuters

OPINION

Why leadership failure is often a thinking problem



KAMLA AL RAHBI

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

WHEN organisations fail under capable leadership, the search for explanation tends to move quickly towards the visible. A strategy that proved wrong. A market that shifted unexpectedly. A competitor that moved faster. An economic environment that changed the rules. These are real factors and they deserve serious analysis. But in a significant number of cases, they are not the root cause of what went wrong.

They are the conditions that exposed a problem that was already present — a problem not of strategy or execution, but of thinking. Leadership failure that originates in thinking is among the most difficult to diagnose precisely because it leaves no obvious trace. A failed acquisition has a paper trail. A missed market shift can be mapped in hindsight.

But a leader who stopped examining their assumptions, who began treating conclusions as permanent rather than provisional, who unconsciously built an organisation that confirmed rather than challenged their mental model — this kind of failure is invisible until it is not.

And by the time it becomes visible, the conditions for recovery are far more difficult than they would have been if the thinking problem had been identified earlier. Most leadership failures are not failures of effort or intention. They are failures of the mental frameworks through which leaders interpret what they see. The thinking patterns that most frequently underlie leadership failure

are not exotic. They are familiar, even understandable, when examined closely.

The first is the tendency to treat the mental model, the internal map of how an industry, an organisation, or a market works — as more reliable than the territory it is supposed to represent. Every experienced leader carries a sophisticated model built from years of observation and decision-making. This model is genuinely valuable. It is also, by definition, a simplification.

The problem arises not from having a model, but from forgetting that it is one.

The second pattern is the compression of thinking time under pressure. When organisations face difficulty, the instinct is to move faster — to decide more quickly, to act more decisively, to demonstrate forward motion. This instinct is often appropriate in execution. It is almost always damaging in diagnosis.

The problems that require genuine strategic recalibration are precisely the problems that require slower, more careful thinking. The pressure that makes fast action feel necessary is frequently the same pressure that makes careful thinking feel like a luxury the organisation cannot afford.

This is when the most consequential thinking errors are made. The third pattern is what might be called the authority of past success. Leaders who have made good decisions in the past develop, quite reasonably, a degree of confidence in their own judgment. This confidence serves them well in many situations. It becomes a liability when it begins to function as insulation when

The thinking patterns that most frequently underlie leadership failure are not exotic. They are familiar, even understandable, when examined closely. The first is the tendency to treat the mental model the internal map of how an industry, an organisation, or a market works — as more reliable than the territory it is supposed to represent.

the accumulated weight of previous success makes it genuinely difficult to entertain the possibility that the current judgment might be wrong. The leader who most needs to question their thinking is often the leader whose track record makes such questioning feel unnecessary. The quality of leadership decisions is determined long before those decisions are made — by the quality of the thinking that precedes them.

What distinguishes leaders who avoid these patterns is not superior intelligence or greater experience. It is a specific kind of disciplined self-awareness about the limits of their own thinking. They have developed practices — not personality traits, but deliberate practices — that interrupt the automatic application of existing frameworks.

They seek information that contradicts their current view, not to undermine their direction but to test it. They create organisational conditions where the people around them are genuinely able to push back.

They distinguish between the confidence needed to lead and the certainty that should never be fully claimed.

This matters particularly in the current Gulf context, where leaders are navigating a genuine strategic inflection point. The capabilities, assumptions and mental models that were built during one economic era are being tested against the requirements of another. The organisations that will navigate this transition most effectively will not necessarily be those with the most resources or the clearest formal strategies.

FOSSIL-FUEL BIGWIGS ARE STUCK IN AN IRAN NULL ZONE

ROBERT CYRAN

The 10,000 attendees descending on the oil and gas industry’s marquee annual get-together in Houston all had one thing on their minds.

Yet even as conflict in the Gulf dominated talk at CERAWEEK, the scope of disruption that has already happened seemed to go little acknowledged on financial markets. Executives unable to address already-rising shortages are receiving few reliable signals to invest in ramping up new supplies. They may well be whistling past the biggest disruption of fossil fuels in their lifetimes.

Energy demand is largely fixed in the short run. Modern cities and industry cannot simply switch off. Ever since the United States and Israel launched joint strikes on Iran, leading to escalating hostilities that have damaged significant oil and gas infrastructure, that’s meant that prices — in some markets — have spiked. A producer could sell gas for over \$20 for 1 million BTU in Asia.

Yet spot prices at a key hub in the Permian Basin in Texas sit at negative \$2.60. The problem is that supply is also fixed. Pipelines, liquefaction facilities and transportation ships cannot be built overnight on a whim.

This leads to widespread oddities. Chevron boss Mike Wirth put it bluntly: if markets reflected the broad state of physical supplies, prices would be much higher.

That’s high enough to tell frackers to drill now, but not enough to provide certainty for long term. After all, if the conflict ends and Gulf production ramps back up, major new domestic investments could lose money.

Yet many attendees were sanguine about the possibility of existential mismatches between the industry and the unfolding crisis. As one executive in the liquefied natural gas industry quipped: “If you are worried about supply in five years — why?” He said that the need to keep the lights on will ensure everything works out.

US Department of Energy Secretary Chris Wright even took the opportunity to spin the global scramble as a positive. “No oil, no modern world” was his mantra. Meaning: everyone at the conference is going to do fine.

The discord came from the smaller part of the conference dedicated to innovations like batteries and solar. The cultural disconnect is plain: the greener technologists used paper teabags, rather than the plastic ones available elsewhere. Yet they’re looking at ever-rising, data centre demand and pricing signals to invest in renewables. If they’re right, then at some point they are going to displace fossil capacity. As Gulf disruption spreads, this trend will only hasten. — Reuters

The 21st century’s Fourth Estate amidst global flux

OVER the centuries, societies commonly spoke of the three ‘estates’. The First Estate was the clergy, who gave the moral framework, the narrative for the society to behave and function. The Second Estate consisted of the nobility and business people who held power and the third was the commoners or citizens.

Much later, the Fourth Estate was created for the press and media, who were expected to question and keep the power in check. The prominence of the Fourth Estate grew in the 18th-19th centuries in France and Britain, when journalists in press galleries began to shape politics as much as officials in power. In the 21st century, there is a transformative change in the narrative of the fourth estate and the first three estates also. The First Estate, which was considered responsible for designing society’s moral framework, is now influenced by algorithms and artificial intelligence that set the narrative.

The Second Estate of people of nobility and influence is also the tech company leaders who have created the algorithms themselves, so we see the blurring of lines between the first two estates.

The Third Estate, the common people, are experiencing attitudinal shifts, evident in their transactional approach to life, short attention spans, unwillingness to deal with inconvenience and discomfort; and growing opinionated perspectives.

The Third Estate seeks conformity from the Fourth Estate and is rather unappreciative of its watchdog role. This nudges the press and media to tune the narrative to the likes of the Third Estate or face financial viability issues.

The press and media have to strike a fine balance between trust, credibility and survival in a fast-paced, trust-deteriorating industry. The Fourth Estate must work within the cultural context of the ecosystem and be comfortable



The dilution and misinterpretation of reality are amplified by the narrative of artificial intelligence. — Reuters



DR MYTHILI KOLLURU

The writer is an Assistant Professor at the Marketing and Management Department, CBFS

The Fourth Estate is in a state of transition, highly influenced by technology, commercialisation, polarisation, fake news, disinformation, misinformation, influencers versus journalists and artificial intelligence.

with accepting and reporting the reality, even if it does not align with pressroom perceptions and background.

The Fourth Estate is in a state of transition, highly influenced by technology, commercialisation, polarisation, fake news, disinformation, misinformation, influencers versus journalists and artificial intelligence. A June 2024 Gallup “confidence in institutions” poll found that trust in newspaper content is 16 per cent and in television content is 12 per cent. The Reuters Institute’s Digital News Report 2025 states that 4 out of 10 people now say they sometimes or often avoid the news.

Distrust of the media is high and it is of paramount importance to regain that trust. In the digital age, where news and information sources extend beyond newspapers and television, the dilution and misinterpretation of reality are amplified by the narrative of artificial intelligence. Despite the growing fragmentation of sources of new channels and platforms, dependence on these intermediaries continues to grow.

According to the Digital News Report 2023, younger generations pay more attention to celebrities and influencers than to journalists.

The Fourth Estate needs to regain its credibility by being more transparent and expressing its difficult opinions about the sources of information. Information must be more evidence-based rather than opinion-based.

There are several challenges and pressures on the Fourth Estate; a quintessential example is the BBC episode. Following controversy over the editing of a speech by US President Donald Trump for a Panorama programme, which critics claimed misrepresented his remarks, BBC Director-General Tim Davie and the company’s chief of news resigned in late 2025.

Since then, Trump has filed a multibillion-dollar defamation lawsuit against the BBC, escalating a disagreement about editorial judgment into a high-stakes legal and political conflict with a public broadcaster.

In response, the BBC appointed former Google executive Matt Brittin as its new director-general at the beginning of 2026, demonstrating how even flagship news organisations are looking to big-tech leadership and data-platform expertise as they struggle for relevance, revenue and trust in a hostile information ecosystem, blatantly proving the blurring of spaces between the Second and the Fourth Estate.

Now, in the 21st century, the Fourth Estate, commonly known as the press and media, has a paramount responsibility to investigate, verify and explain, serving as the voice of diverse stakeholders without bias and with credibility.

Despite pressures and challenges from various agents of change, such as commoner behaviour and mistrust, collapsing media revenues, polarisation and organised disinformation, the Fourth Estate must provide more evidence, unbiased facts and information, even if it might challenge authorities within the given context.

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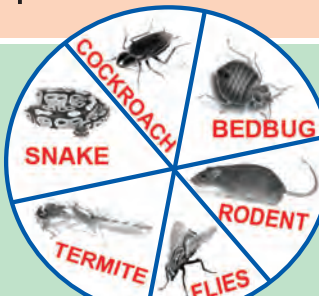
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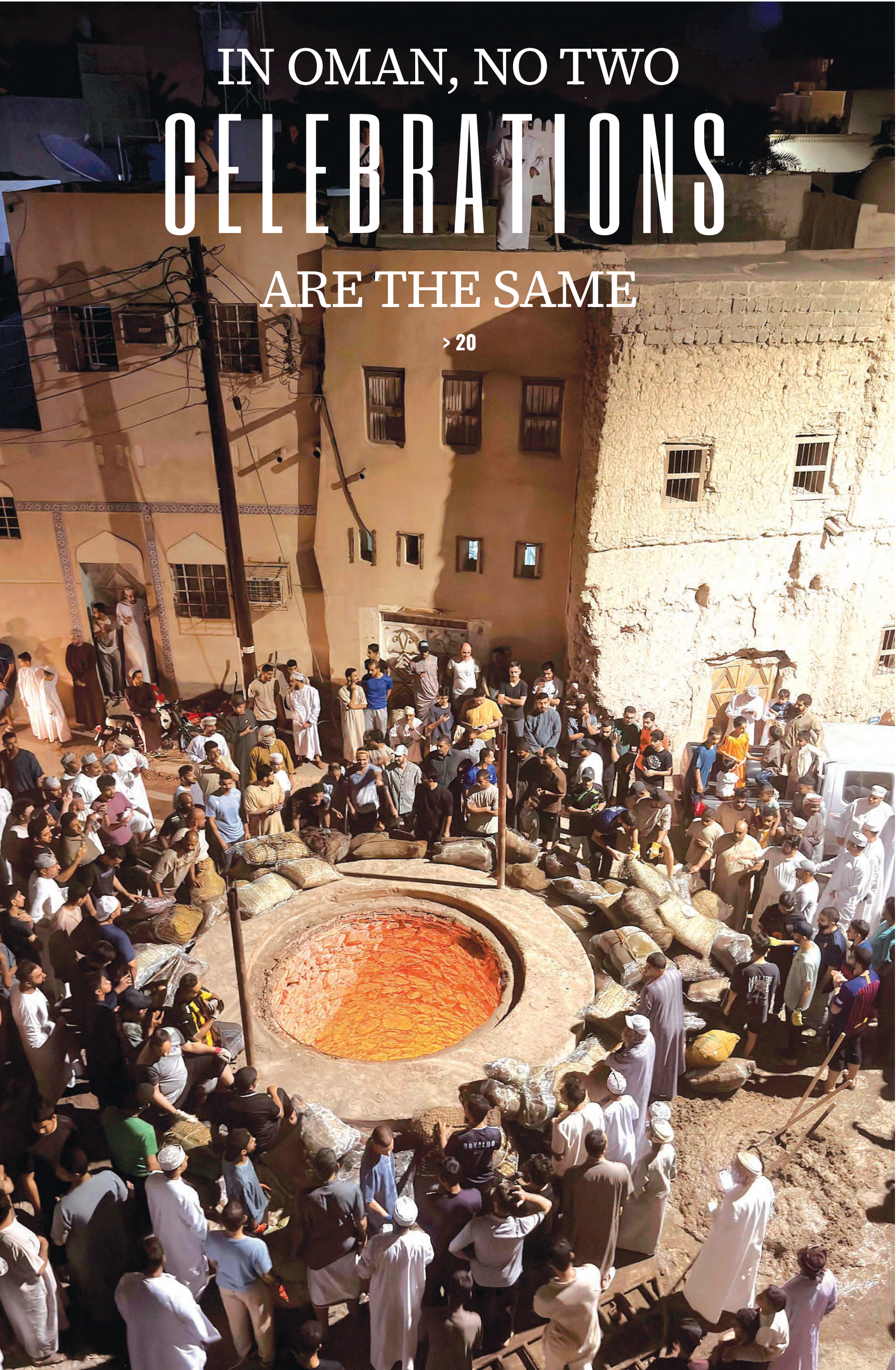


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MUSICAL COMEBACK

PAUL MCCARTNEY RECALLS YESTERDAY WITH FIRST ALBUM IN FIVE YEARS



McCartney named the album, which was released on May 29, after Dungeon Lane, a place close to his childhood home in the Liverpool suburb of Speke.

It is referenced in the newly released single “Days We Left Behind”, which the songwriter described as a “memory song” that inspired the album title.

The record will also feature new love songs and memories of life before the Beatles.

British pop legend and former Beatle Paul McCartney on Thursday released a new single and announced his first album in over five years, examining his life in Liverpool before global stardom.

The 83-year-old, one of the most successful artists of all time, announced the 14-track album titled “The Boys Of Dungeon Lane”, taking listeners on a trip down memory lane in the northern English city.

It will include early adventures with his late bandmates George Harrison and John Lennon, prior to Beatles fame, according to the singer’s website.

“The Boys of Dungeon Lane is Paul’s most introspective album to date and takes the listener back to where it all began”, McCartney’s website states.

McCartney named the album, which was released on May 29, after Dungeon Lane, a place close to his childhood home in the Liverpool suburb of Speke.

It is referenced in the newly released single “Days We Left Behind”, which the songwriter described as a “memory song” that inspired the album title.

The record will also feature new love songs and memories of life before the Beatles.

“I do often wonder if I’m just writing about the past but then I think how can you write about anything else?” McCartney said in a statement on his website. “It’s just a lot of memories of Liverpool”.

“We didn’t have much at all but it didn’t matter because all the people were great and you didn’t notice you didn’t have much”.

The announcement comes ahead of two live performances in Los Angeles this weekend, his first since the November 2025 finale of his over three-year-long “Got Back Tour”.

Formed in 1960, the Beatles — McCartney, Lennon, Harrison and Ringo Starr — went on to become the best-selling musical act of all time.

McCartney wrote or partnered with Lennon to write many of their biggest hits, including “Yesterday”, “Hey Jude”, “Let it Be” and “Yellow Submarine”.

Following the band’s split in 1970, the Beatles bassist continued writing and performing with hits including “Maybe I’m Amazed”, “Live and Let Die” and “Band on the Run”. — AFP

QUICK FEATURES



CULTURE

A man dances during the inauguration of a mural depicting Congo culture and the work of artists from the Portobelo workshop in the Casco Antiguo of Panama City. — AFP



ENTERTAINMENT

British model, actress and activist Naomi Campbell poses during the inauguration of the expanded ‘Disney Adventure World’ at Marne-la-Vallee, east of Paris. — AFP



ARCHITECTURE

This general view of the Sagrada Familia basilica taken shows the now fully revealed 17-metre-high and 13.5-metre-wide cross that completes the temple’s main Tower of Jesus Christ in Barcelona. — AFP

INSTA PICKS



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ACADEMY SAYS OSCARS TO LEAVE HOLLYWOOD IN 2029



The Oscars will leave Hollywood after celebrating their centenary, organisers said on Thursday, as they announced a long-term deal to hold the gala in central Los Angeles.

The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences said the ceremony, the most important night of the year for the global film industry, would leave the Dolby Theatre on the Hollywood Walk of Fame after 2028.

The 2029 edition will instead be held at The Peacock Theatre, part of the vast LA LIVE complex, next to the Crypto.com Arena, home to the Los Angeles Lakers.

“For the 101st Oscars and beyond, the Academy looks forward to closely collaborating with (owners) AEG to make LA LIVE the perfect backdrop for our global celebration of cinema, both for our live in-theatre audience and for film fans around the world”, Academy CEO Bill Kramer and President Lynette Howell Taylor

said.

The 10-year deal with AEG comes as the ceremony leaves network television in the United States, to be broadcast instead worldwide by YouTube.

It also marks an end to a decades-long run for the ceremony at the Dolby, which is just a stone’s throw from the Roosevelt Hotel, where the very first Oscars were handed out in 1929.

While Hollywood is synonymous with the Oscars, the ceremony has not always been held there.

Stars have previously descended on a number of venues in the Downtown area and for much of the 1960s, the ceremony was hosted in the beachside city of Santa Monica.

At this year’s awards, held on March 15, Paul Thomas Anderson’s “One Battle After Another” — a wild tale of leftist revolutionaries, white supremacists and immigrant detention centres — was crowned as best picture. — AFP



Renaissance master Raphael feted at NY’s MET MUSEUM

LEONARDO da Vinci, Michelangelo and now Raphael take centre stage once more, as New York’s prestigious Metropolitan Museum of Art unveils a sweeping retrospective dedicated to the youngest of the three great masters of the Italian Renaissance. Opening this Friday, the exhibition invites visitors into the refined and luminous world of Raffaello di Giovanni Santi, whose brief yet extraordinary life left an enduring imprint on Western art.

Titled “Raphael: Sublime Poetry”, the exhibition traces the artist’s remarkable journey from his early training in the cultured court of Urbino, where he absorbed the ideals of harmony and proportion, to the grandeur of the papal court in Rome. There, Raphael rose to prominence under the patronage of powerful popes, producing some of the most celebrated works of the High Renaissance before his untimely death in 1520 at just 37 years old.

The retrospective brings together 175 works, carefully curated by Carmen Bambach, a leading specialist in Italian Renaissance art. It marks the first major exhibition in the United States devoted exclusively to Raphael, offering an unprecedented opportunity to explore both the breadth and intimacy of his artistic practice.

Among the highlights are the earliest known painting Raphael completed independently, revealing the seeds of his emerging genius, alongside a selection of intricate tapestries designed for the Sistine Chapel, which demonstrate his ability to translate painterly vision into other mediums.

Yet what sets this exhibition apart is its thoughtful juxtaposition of finished masterpieces with preparatory drawings. These



The exhibition titled ‘Raphael: Sublime Poetry’ traces Raffaello di Giovanni Santi’s remarkable journey from his early training in the cultured court of Urbino, where he absorbed the ideals of harmony and proportion, to the grandeur of the papal court in Rome

sketches, often overlooked, provide a rare glimpse into Raphael’s creative process. Through them, visitors witness the evolution of composition, gesture and expression, as if standing just behind the artist’s shoulder while he experiments and refines his ideas. Bambach describes these works as deeply intimate, revealing not only technical brilliance but also the humanity behind the perfection.

Raphael’s influence, the exhibition suggests, extends far beyond his own lifetime. His idealised human figures, marked by grace, balance and clarity, became the standard for artistic excellence for nearly three centuries, shaping

generations of painters across Europe.

Enhancing the experience, acclaimed Italian-American actress Isabella Rossellini lends her voice to the exhibition’s audio guide, guiding visitors through Raphael’s world with insight and elegance.

Drawing on masterpieces loaned from institutions including the renowned Louvre Museum, the exhibition stands as a rare convergence of global artistic heritage.

“Raphael: Sublime Poetry” runs through June 28, 2026, offering audiences a fleeting yet unforgettable encounter with one of history’s most graceful and influential artists. — AFP

FEATURES



PHOTOS BY HAMDOON AL HASHIMI

IN OMAN, NO TWO CELEBRATIONS ARE THE SAME



YERU EBUEEN

OMAN is a country of layered traditions, where celebrations shift subtly from one village to another. What may seem uniform at a distance reveals, up close, a rich mosaic of practices shaped by history, geography and community. To truly understand it, one must move through these places and witness how each tells its story differently.

For Hamdoon al Hashimi, this realisation has become a personal pursuit. Drawn to the depth of Omani culture, he has taken to traveling across villages, documenting traditions as they are lived rather than simply remembered. His goal is not only to observe, but to piece together a broader picture of Oman, one celebration at a time.

This past Eid, his journey began in old Al Khoudh, a village known for preserving long-standing customs. Arriving before sunrise in new attire, he made his way to the open-air prayer ground. What stood out was the calm, deliberate rhythm of the gathering. There was no rush. After prayers, men formed lines, exchanging greetings slowly and intentionally, extending the moment beyond ritual into something more communal.

Then came an unexpected moment. A cannon was fired to mark the start of the celebration. The sharp blast cut through the morning, followed by rising smoke and dust. For Hamdoon, it was a striking discovery, a tradition unfolding just 20 kilometres from home, yet entirely new to him.

Soon after, the village came alive with movement. Men formed a procession through narrow alleys, performing razha, a traditional chant driven by rhythm and repetition. The sound echoed between mud houses as families gathered at doorways to watch. It was not a staged performance, but a shared experience, with the entire village taking part, whether actively or from the sidelines. The procession moved steadily for over an hour before reaching the village

centre, where older structures quietly anchor the present to the past.

By evening, Hamdoon's journey continued inland towards the Nizwa region, to the village of Al Kharasen. Here, the focus shifted from spectacle to collective effort. The village is home to one of Oman's oldest communal shuwa tanours, where families prepare marinated meat wrapped in banana leaves and placed inside woven palm bags known as khasfah.

By nightfall, hundreds of these bundles, between 280 and 300, are gathered around a single pit, several metres wide and deep, filled with burning wood and charcoal. At precisely 8 pm, the village comes together. Everyone participates as the bundles are lowered quickly into the pit in a coordinated effort before it is sealed to cook overnight.

This practice, overseen by Mahfudh bin Eisa Ambusaidi, has continued for more than 400 years. What began as a practical solution has become a symbol of unity. Even the smallest details reflect this spirit, as families mark their khasfah with unique identifiers to distinguish them.

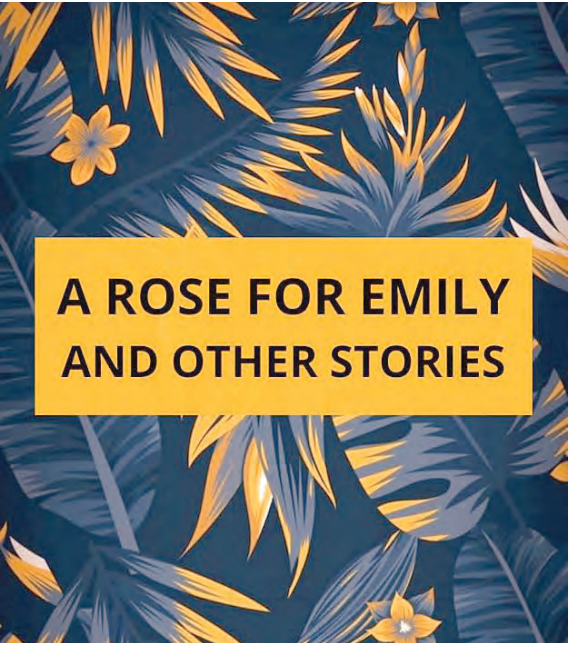
The following day, the pit is opened and each family retrieves its share. A small fee helps sustain the tradition for future generations.

Hamdoon's journey reveals a simple truth: these are not just traditions, but lived experiences that require presence. From the echo of a cannon in Al Khoudh to the shared labour of the tanour in Al Kharasen, each village offers a unique lens on celebration. Together, they form a living narrative, one that continues to unfold.



GOTHIC LITERATURE

THE HOUSE OF SECRETS: WHY A ROSE FOR EMILY STILL HAUNTS



IDRIS AL BALUSHI

Among the many defining works of twentieth-century literature, *A Rose for Emily* by William Faulkner stands out as a haunting and enduring example of Gothic fiction. While the genre is often associated with eerie settings and supernatural elements, Faulkner's story distinguishes itself by grounding horror in psychological depth and human fragility. Through themes of isolation, obsession and decay, it offers a chilling portrait of a woman's descent into madness, making it a powerful subject for any contemporary book review.

One of the story's greatest strengths lies in its use of secrecy and revelation. Gothic fiction thrives on what is hidden, and Faulkner masterfully constructs a narrative shaped by mystery. Told through the collective voice of the townspeople, the story unfolds in fragments, never offering full clarity until its shocking conclusion. Miss Emily Grierson, once a figure of Southern aristocracy, becomes increasingly reclusive following personal loss. Her decaying home, closed off to the world, becomes a symbol of the secrets she guards. The strange odor surrounding the house, her refusal to allow visitors and her withdrawal from society all build a quiet but persistent tension. When the truth is finally revealed, that she has preserved the corpse of her former lover, Homer Barron, for decades, it delivers one of the most disturbing endings in modern literature. This final twist does not rely on spectacle, but on the slow accumulation of unease.

Equally significant is the story's atmosphere of decay, a defining feature of Gothic writing. The Grierson house itself serves as more than a setting; it mirrors Emily's own deterioration. Once elegant, it now stands weathered and forgotten, much like its owner. Faulkner uses this physical decline to reflect a deeper moral and psychological unraveling. The imagery of dust, darkness and disuse reinforces a sense of stagnation, as though time itself has stopped within the house. Even more unsettling is the presence of Homer Barron's decomposing body, which embodies decay in its most literal form. Yet the story goes further, suggesting that the most profound deterioration is not physical, but mental. Emily's inability to accept loss ultimately leads her to commit an irreversible act, blurring the line between love and possession.

Beyond its setting and plot, the story also presents a complex view of character and morality. Emily, though responsible for a horrific crime, is not easily reduced to a villain. Instead, she emerges as a tragic figure shaped by her circumstances. Her father's controlling nature, which drove away potential suitors, leaves her emotionally stunted and deeply isolated. In this light, her actions, while disturbing, appear rooted in a desperate need to hold onto something permanent in a world that has consistently abandoned her. At the same time, the townspeople themselves are far from innocent. Their gossip, judgment and passive cruelty contribute to Emily's isolation, revealing a community that is complicit in her downfall. The story thus challenges readers to reconsider where true responsibility lies.

Ultimately, *A Rose for Emily* endures because it transcends the conventions of Gothic fiction while still embracing its core elements. It replaces supernatural terror with psychological horror, using atmosphere, structure and character to create a lingering sense of unease. Faulkner's ability to weave together themes of decay, secrecy and social pressure results in a narrative that feels both unsettling and deeply human. It is precisely this balance that secures the story's place as a Gothic masterpiece, one that continues to disturb, provoke and resonate long after the final line.