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SALAH TO BRING
CURTAIN DOWN ON
GOLDEN ERA FOR
LIVERPOOL

12



'AL MASARAT' BRINGS HEAVY RAINS IN OMAN



Many wilayats received moderate to heavy rainfall on Wednesday.

THE CIVIL AVIATION AUTHORITY (CAA) has rebuffed rumours circulating on social media about the Sultanate of Oman and the other GCC countries experiencing a rare weather phenomenon bringing abnormal precipitation and historic rainfall on Thursday. The CAA described the news as unfounded, urging everyone not to publish misleading news and to obtain information from official sources.

The CAA clarified that the forecast for Thursday indicates relatively

calm weather with a chance of thundershowers, particularly in the governorates of Al Buraimi, Al Dhahirah and Al Batinah North.

The effects of 'Al Masarrat' low pressure continued on Wednesday in several wilayats and governorates of the Sultanate of Oman, with moderate to heavy rainfall, resulting in the flow of several wadis and streams.

VITAL SERVICES
The Essential Services Sector at the National Emergency Management Committee handled hundreds

No truth in claims of historic rainfall

The Civil Aviation Authority has affirmed that the information and reports being circulated regarding a rare meteorological phenomenon accompanied by unprecedented rainfall in the Sultanate of Oman and the Arabian Gulf region are unfounded. It called upon everyone to refrain from disseminating such misleading reports and emphasised the necessity of obtaining information from official channels. The Relief and Shelter Sector of the National Committee for Emergency Management said that 93 individuals were in shelters across several governorates affected by the recent weather condition. This action is part of the ongoing efforts to ensure the safety of citizens and residents.

of reports related to disruptions or impacts on vital services. The sector enhanced its preparedness to ensure the continuity of essential services across the Sultanate of Oman. The sector plays a pivotal role in securing and maintaining road, electricity, telecommunications, water, and sanitation services, as well as fuel and cooking gas supplies, public hygiene, and waste management services, thus ensuring the stability of daily life and mitigating the impact of the weather conditions. **SEE ALSO P2 & 3**

HM’S CONDOLENCES TO SAUDI KING

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of condolences to the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, on the death of Princess Noura bint Abdulaziz bin Abdulrahman al Saud. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sympathy, praying to Allah the Almighty to rest the deceased soul in peace in paradise and to grant her family the fortitude to bear the loss.

SULTAN QABOOS AWARD FOR CULTURE

The Sultan Qaboos Higher Centre for Culture and Science at the Diwan of Royal Court announced the opening of nominations for the Sultan Qaboos Award for Culture, Arts and Literature in its 13th edition for 2026. This edition is designated for Omani, with competition restricted to Omani nationals only.

EU’S STRATEGIC PARTNER

*The European Union is moving to deepen ties with the Sultanate of Oman across energy, trade and regional security, positioning Oman as a key partner in stabilising markets and advancing clean energy, as tensions around the Strait of Hormuz drive up global shipping and insurance costs. Luigi Di Maio, EU Special Representative for the Gulf, told the Observer that Oman is increasingly viewed not as a traditional oil supplier, but as a strategic partner in diplomacy. **DETAILS ON P5***

Iran still ‘reviewing’ US proposal for talks

IRAN IS still reviewing a US proposal to end the war, despite an initial response that was negative, a senior Iranian official said on Wednesday, indicating that Tehran had so far stopped short of rejecting it outright.

Publicly, Iranian officials poured withering scorn on the prospect of any negotiations with the administration of US President Donald Trump. But an apparent delay in delivering a formal response to Pakistan, which delivered a 15-point proposal on behalf of Washington, appeared to signal that at least some figures in Tehran may be considering it.

The senior Iranian official’s comments that the proposal was still under review — though the initial response was “not positive” — appeared to contradict a report by Iran’s Press TV that cited an unidentified official as saying Iran had rejected it.

A senior Pakistani security official said that Pakistan had followed up with Iran’s foreign



A man holds a picture of Iran’s late Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei along Enghelab Square in central Tehran on Wednesday. — AFP

minister and was still awaiting a formal reply. A second Pakistani source said, “The Iranians told us they will get back to us tonight. The media is reporting they’ve said no. But we have not received any official confirmation from Iran. So we are just waiting. They are all underground and communication is big challenge.”

Another senior Iranian official had earlier confirmed that Tehran had received a proposal and said that talks, if they went ahead, could be held in either Pakistan or Türkiye.

Oil prices fell and shares regained some ground on Wednesday after reports that Washington had sent the 15-point plan to Iran, with investors hoping for an end to a war that has killed thousands of people and disrupted global energy supplies.

The senior Pakistani security official said Pakistani intelligence had delivered the US proposal to Iran, and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar had followed up with Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi.

SEE ALSO P6 & 7

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 25

AS the weather conditions seem to be calming down a bit from the impacts of the low pressure, Oman Meteorology experts said a more significant weather wave is set to impact the Sultanate of Oman from late Thursday or early Friday.

Nasser bin Said al Ismaili, Director of the Forecasting and Early Warning System at the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA), said that while the current atmosphere may feature intermittent calm periods lasting several hours, the overall unstable weather pattern is expected to persist right through the weekend.

Abdullah bin Rashid al Khadhuri, Director-General of the Directorate-General of Meteorology, CAA, said, “The weather condition will be relatively calm on Thursday, but the major wave is expected to impact the Sultanate of Oman’s atmosphere from late Thursday, which is expected to bring torrential rain. It will be the last wave that is going to affect Al Buraimi and Musandam first, and then extend over other governorates.”

On Saturday, the weather conditions are expected to bring intermittent rain of varying intensity. It needs to be mentioned that Oman’s specialised meteorological centres are equipped with adequate monitoring systems.”

He added, while some effects will be felt along the coastal areas of the Arabian Sea on Sunday, the skies of the Sultanate of Oman will be clear in the next few days.”

He urged people not to take risks and keep children away from flowing wadis. It may be noted that several people were rescued by the Civil Defence Ambulance Authority (CDAA), including families, since the start of the current weather conditions on Saturday, March 21.

Authorities have issued safety guidelines urging the public to take precautionary measures during hailstorms, as unstable weather conditions continue to affect parts of the Sultanate of Oman.

The advisory emphasised the importance of remaining indoors and staying in safe locations while avoiding unnecessary movement during periods of intense hail. Residents were also urged to keep away from windows and open areas to reduce the risk of injury.

Motorists have been advised to avoid driving during heavy hail and to park their vehicles in safe, covered locations whenever possible. In cases where shelter is unavailable, covering vehicles can help minimise damage caused by hailstones.

On Wednesday, several wilayats and governorates across the Sultanate of Oman including Muscat experienced rainfall on Wednesday, ranging from moderate to heavy, resulting in the flow of numerous wadis and streams. The weather conditions are attributed to the influence of the low-pressure system known locally as ‘Al Masarat’.

In the Governorate of Al Batinah South, the wilayats of Al Rustaq, Al Musannah, Barka, Nakhal, Al Awabi and Wadi Al Maawil witnessed rainfall varying between heavy and moderate. Similarly, a number of villages and towns in the Wilayat of Yanqul in the Governorate of Al Dhahirah experienced moderate to heavy rainfall, which caused the flow of several wadis.

In the Wilayat of Nizwa in the Governorate of Al Dakhiliyah, several villages received rainfall of varying intensity. This led to the flow of streams and wadis such as Wadi Al Hijri. The rain extended across all villages of the wilayat, resulting in the overflow of dams.

Meanwhile, villages in the Wilayat of Liwa in the Governorate of Al Batinah North



experienced heavy rainfall accompanied by active winds. This caused wadis and streams to flow across various villages, leading to a complete halt in traffic on main and service roads in some areas. The rainfall was concentrated in both mountainous and coastal villages.

The Wilayat of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar witnessed heavy rains on Wednesday, accompanied by strong winds and hail. The rainfall was concentrated across all villages and areas of the wilayat, resulting in the flowing of several wadis, including the wadis

of Saig, Wadi Qatam, Al Manakhir, Hail Al Musbat, Al Shuraijah, Wadi Bani Habib, Al Sawjarah, Al Roos and Hail Al Yaman. Furthermore, the flowing of wadis and reefs led to the filling of a number of groundwater recharge dams.

Meanwhile, the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) said it is the sole official source for meteorological forecasts, alerts, and bulletins. The law prohibits any media agency from broadcasting any information or meteorological data other than that acquired from the Authority. Article (48):

It is not permissible to practice any work related to the activities of meteorological services in the Sultanate of Oman, such as installing a meteorological station, providing meteorological services, or carrying out meteorological training activities, except after obtaining the required approval. Except with the approval of the Authority, it is prohibited to utilise meteorological data or information acquired from the competent authority for purposes other than those approved.

CAA recently said that certain entities, as well as news outlets and personal accounts,

INDIVIDUAL BEHAVIOURS POSE THREAT TO LIVES DURING RAIN

SAUD AL ANSARI
MUSCAT, MARCH 25

Despite the continuous efforts made by relevant authorities in public awareness and early warning systems, some individual behaviours still pose a direct threat to lives by venturing into wadis.

The National Multi-Hazard Early Warning Centre stresses the importance of following weather bulletins and official alerts, and strictly avoiding wadi channels during rainfall or when flood warnings are issued. It also urges the public not to risk crossing waterlogged roads due to the difficulty of estimating their depth and the strength of the current.

An official from the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority noted that “many of the incidents recorded in recent years were the result of poor individual decisions, such



as attempting to take photos near wadis or crossing them by vehicles,” adding that “the moment a person underestimates the danger can be the difference between survival and loss of life.”

In this context, Mohammed al Amri, a resident of Maabela stated, “Public awareness is the first line of defence in

reducing wadi-related incidents. Adhering to official guidelines and instructions plays a major role in minimising human losses. Underestimating the force of water or attempting to cross wadis, even when water levels seem low, can lead to severe consequences.”

Media outlets and social media platforms also play a vital role in raising awareness, as sharing warning videos and guidance messages is an effective way to reach different segments of society, particularly young people.

In light of climate changes that may intensify weather phenomena, the need to strengthen public safety culture becomes increasingly important. Promoting awareness, caution, and responsibility among individuals will contribute to building a more informed society capable of dealing with natural hazards.

Emergency medical services functioning non-stop

OHOU D AL JILANI
MUSCAT, MARCH 25

THE National Centre for Emergency and Health Risk Management said that a number of health facilities located near wadis were closed as a precautionary measure to ensure the safety of staff and patients. Al Rahma Hospital in Muscat Governorate was evacuated and temporarily closed and patients were transferred to Al Masarra Hospital.

Dr Mohammed bin Saif al Bousafi, Director of the National Centre for Emergency and Health Risk Management, said: “The centre’s emergency operations room and the operations rooms in the affected governorates have been fully activated, with staff working around the clock. The health facilities were not directly affected, however some were closed as a precautionary measure due to their location near wadis. Al Rahma Hospital in Muscat Governorate was evacuated and closed as a precautionary measure, and patients were transferred to Al Masarra Hospital.” He added that citizens and residents were advised to reschedule appointments at specialist clinics and surgeries to spare patients, visitors, and their families the risks associated with venturing out and crossing roads during rainfall or flash floods.

Working hours were extended at some healthcare institutions to operate around the clock, and some facilities located near wadis were closed as a temporary precautionary measure to protect staff and visitors.



DR MOHAMMED
BIN SAIF
AL BOUSAFI

Dr Al Bousafi noted that direct coordination is maintained with supporting and partner agencies through on-duty personnel in the Ministry of Health’s operations rooms, the National Emergency Management Center at the National Emergency Management Committee, and the subcommittees in the governorates. He added that continuous communication is also maintained with the National Emergency Management Committee to overcome any difficulties and challenges.

Regarding the measures taken to ensure the continuity of emergency services (ambulance, childbirth, dialysis), oxygen,

medicines, and others, Dr Al Bousafi said that all directorates and health institutions were instructed to ensure the availability of all medicines and medical supplies and the provision of the basic requirements during the adverse weather period. Dialysis sessions for patients will be rescheduled in a way that does not affect their safety and ensures the continuity of medical care.

All health institutions were instructed to keep providing emergency medical services around the clock, with health institutions continuing to perform emergency surgical operations and childbirth operations around non-stop.

Mwasalat halts major bus services over weather

MUSCAT: Following weather alerts issued by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA), Oman’s national transport operator, Mwasalat, has announced the temporary suspension of several key ‘City’ and ‘Intercity’ bus services.

The precautionary measure aims to ensure passenger safety and maintain a secure transport environment during the prevailing unstable weather affecting multiple governorates.

Effective immediately, the suspension impacts several high-traffic city routes within Muscat, including:

Route 6: Al Khoudh – Sultan Qaboos University – Al Khoudh

Route 7: Al Mabelah – Al Khoudh – Burj Al Suhwa

Route 9: Al Athaiba – Al Ansab – Misfah Industrial Area

Route 10: Al Maabelah – Seeb Souq – Burj Al Suhwa

For Thursday, March 26, intercity operations between Muscat and key areas have also been suspended, including services to Duqm (Route 52),



Ibri and Buraimi (Route 53), and the Haima-Duqm line (Route 103).

In a statement, Mwasalat emphasised that all other city and intercity services are under continuous evaluation in coordination with relevant authorities. While bus operations face temporary disruptions, ferry services on the Shannah–Masirah route will continue as scheduled.

Gates of dams exceeding 75% capacity to be opened

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MoAFWR) alerted that it will begin opening the gates of dams where water levels have exceeded 75 per cent of their storage capacity.

This measure aims to utilise the released water to recharge groundwater aquifers and to accommodate additional quantities of incoming water. The Ministry clarified that this action comes in response to the continued impacts of the weather condition on the northern governorates of the Sultanate of Oman.

Rainfall is expected to increase in intensity, leading to the heavy flowing of wadis. Consequently, lowering the water levels in the dam lakes will help manage the situation while simultaneously benefiting groundwater reserves.

The Ministry strongly urged citizens and residents to stay away from the courses of wadis and to strictly adhere to safety instructions. — ONA



LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
MUSCAT, MARCH 25

Heavy rains in Muscat and other governorates have turned the streets into temporary streams, making commuting risky and difficult. While it may be tempting to see a flooded street as a swimming pool, stagnant rainwater can be dangerous.

There are several reasons to avoid stagnant water, one of the most obvious being that it comes from wadis and may contain hidden hazards.

Runoff water picks up debris like broken glass, metal scraps, and thorny plants, making puddles potentially dangerous. Submerged hazards, such as open manholes or silt pockets, can also pose risks.

Electric hazards are a major concern in urban areas, as heavy rain and winds can damage power lines or cables, creating live wires. Faulty streetlights can also lead to fatal electric shocks for anyone entering the water.

Biological contamination is another threat, as stagnant water can contain invisible dangers.

Sewage overflow is one such problem that could lead to the mixing of raw waste into the floodwater, exposing one to parasites and bacteria. This, according to experts, can cause severe gastrointestinal issues if one is to accidentally swallow even a drop.

In industrial or paved areas, the water teems with oil and fuel from



leaked fluids from automobiles and petrol stations. In addition, chemicals washed off from gardens and farms can cause severe skin irritation or chemical burns.

“Stagnant water is an ideal breeding ground for mosquitos. Mosquitoes are the vectors through

which viral diseases like dengue are transmitted by the Aedes species from one person to another when mosquitoes bite. Malaria is also transmitted in the same way, and the vector is the Anopheles mosquito species. People in the community should take care that water should not get accumulated and become stagnant, which is very common after rains,” said Dr Dilip Kumar Singvi, Specialist Internal Medicine, Burjeel Hospital.

Children and teenagers have been trying to swim and even surf along running water in the flooded areas.

According to the health experts, swallowing even a small amount of stagnant floodwater right now can lead to stomach issues because the water is not just from rain — it is a

mix of overflow from septic tanks, animal waste, and street runoff.

“If the water is swallowed while playing in such water it will cause gastroenteritis, that is infection in colon, and the person or child will have vomiting, and loose motions, pain in the abdomen, etc. It is better to avoid playing in such stagnant pooled waters. Also it can cause skin infections, athlete’s foot, and contaminate any open wounds,” he noted.

He explained that in case the water goes into the lungs it can cause infection especially fungal, as moulds grow in stagnant water. “It’s prudent not to play or go in stagnant water , avoid accumulation of water as it leads to water borne, mosquito borne diseases and skin infections.”

SPOTLIGHT

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B R A V I N G T H E W E A T H E R

How Oman’s classrooms move online



Younger children often struggle to stay attentive without in-class supervision.



AFRAH AL BALUSHI
& BALQEES AL ORAIMI

FOLLOWING THE Ministry of Education’s decision to shift to distance learning in response to the low-pressure system affecting some governorates, parents in Oman have encountered difficulties accessing e-learning platforms, resulting in limited student participation.

Weak network connectivity and overloaded platforms have compounded the challenges. The Noor educational platform, Oman’s latest e-learning initiative, struggled to function effectively, prompting teachers to continue classes via global platforms such as Microsoft Teams and Google Classroom.

Despite strategic steps by the ministry to ensure continuity in education, many families still struggle with access.

Parent Mohammed al Hashemi suggests incorporating more interactive content — short videos and educational games — instead of lengthy lessons to maintain students’ focus.

Amna al Balushi recommends dedicating one day per week to distance learning to better prepare students.

Challenges extend beyond

“It has significantly enhanced the readiness of both students and teachers to engage with modern technologies, aligning with Oman’s broader vision for educational development.

ABDULLA BIN SALIM AL GHAILANI
Educational specialist

device availability. Parents often find themselves acting as teaching assistants, particularly for early-grade students, while working families face difficulty coordinating schedules with synchronous online classes.

Technological gaps among parents further complicate the process, leaving some unable to navigate platforms or submit assignments properly. Families with multiple children also face challenges in providing enough devices simultaneously.

Teachers advise keeping MS Teams and Chrome updated to the latest versions, noting that 70 per cent of platform issues arise from outdated software.

Some schools have started offering tutorials and helplines for parents to navigate e-learning platforms more effectively. Workshops on creating interactive lesson plans and using educational tools aim to reduce parents’ stress.

Experts also encourage blended approaches, combining online lessons with occasional in-person sessions when possible.

Students themselves have mixed reactions to distance learning. While older students appreciate the flexibility of attending classes from home, younger children often struggle to stay attentive without in-class supervision.

KEEPING STUDENTS LEARNING

Educational institutions have demonstrated growing readiness by activating digital platforms and creating virtual learning environments, allowing students to attend classes safely from home. This transition reflects sustained investment in technological infrastructure and ongoing training for educators, ensuring learning outcomes remain consistent even during emergencies.

Abdullah bin Salim al Ghailani, an educational specialist, emphasised that distance learning has played a critical role in minimising learning loss during weather-related school closures. “It has significantly enhanced the readiness of both students and teachers to engage with modern technologies, aligning with Oman’s broader vision for educational development,” he said.

Parents have welcomed the shift, particularly given concerns over student safety during unstable weather.

Ahmed bin Rashid noted, “We no longer worry about sending our children to school during heavy rains or weather alerts. At the same time, their academic progress has not been affected — in fact, they have become more disciplined in following lessons from home.”

Students themselves have shown remarkable adaptability, supported by widespread access to smart devices and user-friendly learning platforms. Mohammed bin Rashid al Alawi shared, “Distance learning felt unfamiliar, at first, but over time we became comfortable with it. It is now easier to attend classes, manage our time, and revisit recorded lessons whenever needed.”

Despite its advantages, distance learning still faces challenges, including inconsistent Internet connectivity in some areas, limited access to digital devices for certain students, and the ongoing need to enhance teachers’ skills in managing virtual classrooms. In-person interaction also remains vital for developing social skills and fostering meaningful engagement among students.

Education experts recommend a blended learning model as the most effective path forward. This approach ensures continuity during emergencies while preserving the benefits of face-to-face interaction, ultimately strengthening the resilience of the education system.

Oman’s experience highlights the importance of digital transformation in education and demonstrates a broader commitment to building an adaptive learning environment where education continues seamlessly under all circumstances. As climate variability continues to shape the global landscape, distance learning is expected to remain a vital tool in ensuring students’ right to safe and uninterrupted learning.

SHORT TAKES



AL WUSTA ADVANCES IN DIGITAL SERVICES WITH 1K+ TRANSACTIONS

HAIMA: Al Wusta Governorate is strengthening its position along the path of government digital transformation through a range of strategic initiatives and projects that have contributed to service development, enhanced institutional performance efficiency, and streamlined procedures for beneficiaries, in line with the objectives of the National Government Digital Transformation Programme.

Dr Hashim bin Khamis al Balushi, Head of the Digital Transformation Team in Al Wusta Governorate, stated that 1,034 government digital transactions were completed during the period from January to December 2025, and nine new services were digitised on the governorate’s digital portal — a step aimed at developing institutional performance and enhancing operational efficiency.

In a statement to Oman News Agency, he added that the governorate also launched a digital educational platform to develop technical skills for employees and beneficiaries, as well as a project monitoring platform to improve oversight accuracy across implementation stages. This was accompanied by the adoption of open-source software to foster innovation and provide sustainable technical solutions.

Dr Al Balushi noted that Al Wusta Governorate witnessed a series of achievements during 2025 that lay the foundation for comprehensive digital transformation.

These included upgrading core digital infrastructure to ensure continuity and efficiency; deploying drone technology to enable intelligent project monitoring and data analysis; launching a promising innovation management system within the governorate to enhance creativity and stimulate initiatives; and utilising modern technologies such as 3D building printing to construct a traveller service station along Adam–Salalah road, which features a prayer hall, cafés, and other amenities to ensure comfort. — ONA

PUSHING FOR LOWER SUGAR IN CAFES

MUSCAT: The Food Safety and Quality Centre has called on cafés and coffee shops specialising in tea and coffee to join a nationwide initiative aimed at reducing sugar consumption.

The campaign seeks to promote moderation in dietary habits, encourage healthier consumer choices and position cafés as key partners in advancing public health.

The centre noted that reducing sugar content does not negatively impact sales, but instead appeals to a growing segment of health-conscious customers. It also helps



The campaign is open through registration via a dedicated QR code

lower long-term operating costs and enhances the brand image of participating outlets.

Cafés joining the initiative will be recognised as health-friendly establishments, contributing to national efforts to combat obesity and diabetes while fostering a culture of mindful consumption.

Participation in the campaign is open through registration via a dedicated QR code, with organisers aiming to transform the initiative into a sustained, long-term behavioural shift within the community.

Oman emerges as EU’s partner as tensions rise

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, MARCH 25

THE EUROPEAN UNION is moving to deepen ties with Oman across energy, trade and regional security, positioning the Sultanate of Oman as a key partner in stabilising markets and advancing clean energy, as tensions around the Strait of Hormuz drive up global shipping and insurance costs.

Luigi Di Maio, EU Special Representative for the Gulf, told the Observer that Oman is increasingly viewed not as a traditional oil supplier, but as a strategic partner in diplomacy, energy transition and supply chain resilience.

The shift comes as disruptions linked to regional tensions push up the cost of transporting oil and gas, with knock-on effects across global trade.

“The situation in Hormuz is affecting insurance costs, the security of crews and ultimately the price of oil and gas,” Di Maio said, warning that market volatility is being driven as much by risk premiums as by supply itself.

Despite Oman’s role as a significant crude exporter, Di Maio said Europe’s interest is no longer centred on volumes.

“Most of Oman’s exports are not directed to Europe,” he said.



We see Oman as a strategic partner — particularly for its diplomatic role and its multilateral approach. In a more complex world, partners like Oman are essential.

LUIGI DI MAIO
EU Special Representative for the Gulf

“We see Oman as a strategic partner — particularly for its diplomatic role and its multilateral approach.”

That positioning has gained weight during the current crisis, with Oman’s role in regional dialogue and de-escalation increasingly seen in Europe as critical to maintaining stability in one of the world’s most important energy corridors.

HYDROGEN AND STANDARDS

Energy cooperation is shifting towards future fuels, with green hydrogen emerging as the central pillar of EU–Oman engagement.

European ports, industrial regions and energy firms are already working with Omani counterparts to build supply chains that could link Gulf production with European demand.

But Di Maio signalled that investment will depend less on capital and more on regulation.

“The more we align standards and certification mechanisms, the more the market will do the rest,” he said.

The comment underscores a key challenge for Oman’s hydrogen ambitions: global competitiveness will hinge on compatibility with European regulatory frameworks, not just production capacity.

The current conflict is reinforcing a broader shift in

how both Europe and Gulf states approach energy security.

“We need to secure maritime routes and ensure freedom of navigation,” Di Maio said.

“At the same time, we must continue diversifying the energy mix.”

For Europe, which has already diversified supply sources following the Ukraine war, the latest shock highlights continued exposure to global price swings driven by geopolitical risk.

For Gulf producers, including Oman, the challenge lies in safeguarding export routes while adapting to a more complex and fragmented energy landscape.

The EU is now working towards a comprehensive strategic partnership agreement with Oman, expected to cover political cooperation, trade, energy and investment.

Engagement is also expanding through education and mobility programmes, alongside a steady rise in high-level diplomatic exchanges between Europe and the Gulf.

As global uncertainty deepens, Di Maio said partnerships with countries able to combine stability, diplomacy and economic openness will become increasingly valuable.

“In a more complex world, partners like Oman are essential,” he said.

Youth with disabilities redefine digital creativity

MUSCAT: Amid rapid digital transformation, digital creativity and interactive art are emerging as powerful platforms for self-expression, enabling individuals to turn ideas into immersive artistic experiences that engage audiences. Increasingly, young people with disabilities are stepping forward as inspiring role models — overcoming barriers and harnessing modern technologies to produce innovative content that reflects both resilience and talent.

At the technical forefront, programming has evolved into a vital tool for inclusion and social impact. Developers are adapting programming languages and artificial intelligence to create solutions that overcome traditional limitations. Ali al Omari, a programmer with visual impairment, highlights the transformation: “I have followed the evolution of assistive technologies — from early screen readers to today’s AI driven tools. These advancements have opened doors we never imagined. Today, we can solve everyday challenges more efficiently and independently.” He notes that many visually impaired programmers are now developing applications for reading and analysing scanned documents, image recognition and navigation.

Al Omari himself has created an online library tailored for the blind, integrating AI tools to convert scanned texts into accessible formats,



Young people with disabilities are stepping forward as inspiring role models

significantly expanding the availability of books. In the field of design, Tariq bin Ahmed al Yousfi, a graphic designer with a hearing disability, underscores the importance of continuous learning and exposure. A graduate of the Scientific College of Design, he has actively participated in exhibitions, volunteer initiatives, and design projects.

Al Yousfi seamlessly blends Omani heritage with contemporary digital aesthetics. Drawing inspiration from Arabic calligraphy, traditional doors, and the colours of Oman’s landscapes, he transforms these elements into interactive visual experiences.

“Interactive art allows audiences to engage through touch, movement,

or sound, making them part of the creative journey,” he explains.

For Samah bint Badr al Houti, a visual artist with hearing impairment, silence itself becomes a source of creativity. “Silence is not a limitation — it is a space where I see the world more deeply,” she says. Through interactive art, she builds bridges with audiences, enabling them to connect beyond verbal communication and experience art as a universal language.

Abdullah bin Mohammed al Sulaimi, founder of Al Sulaimi Media Foundation, combines photography, media production, and digital storytelling. His initiative, ‘My Creative Title’, showcases Omani talent while promoting inclusion through creative platforms.

Al Sulaimi emphasises that challenges can serve as catalysts for innovation. He calls for greater institutional support — not only financial, but also in terms of training, mentorship, and infrastructure. “We have the talent and capability, but we need stronger support systems aligned with Oman Vision 2040,” he notes.

Despite significant progress, challenges remain, including accessibility in infrastructure, availability of specialised equipment, and logistical barriers such as travel constraints for people with disabilities. He suggests creation of dedicated hubs to support projects led by people with disabilities. — ONA

 لولو للصرافة LuLu Exchange							
SUMMARY OF ASSETS & LIABILITIES OF M/S. LULU EXCHANGE CO. LLC AS OF 31ST DECEMBER 2025 (IN RO '000)							
	ASSETS	31.12.2025	31.12.2024		LIABILITIES	31.12.2025	31.12.2024
(01)	Cash in Hand	2,968	2,693	(01)	Capital & Reserve	5,378	5,398
(02)	Deposits with Central Bank of Oman	130	130	(02)	Borrowing from Banks	1,233	1,284
(03)	Precious Metals	-	-	(03)	Balances due to Branches	-	-
(04)	Balances due from Banks	3,032	3,128	(04)	Balances due to Money Changers	614	84
(05)	Balances due from Branches	-	-	(05)	Loans and Advances Payable	-	-
(06)	Balances due from Money Changers	609	289	(06)	Cheques & Drafts issued & outstanding	-	-
(07)	Cheques and Draft purchased	-	-	(07)	Other Liabilities	603	734
(08)	Loans and Advances	-	-				
(09)	Investments	-	-				
(10)	Fixed Assets	657	698				
(11)	Other Assets	432	562				
	TOTAL	7,828	7,500			7,828	7,500

SUMMARY OF INCOME STATEMENT - LULU EXCHANGE CO. LLC AS OF DECEMBER 31, 2025 (IN RO '000)			
		31.12.2025	31.12.2024
Operating Income			
Interest on Deposits		2	2
Commission on Remittance		1,686	1,875
Exchange Earnings on Remittance		963	743
Foreign Currency Earnings		972	840
Other Income		94	43
Total Operating Income		3,717	3,503
Operating Expense			
Staff Costs		1,862	1,775
Interest on Borrowings		82	75
Occupancy Costs		284	278
Bank Charges		120	87
Administration Costs		1,035	1,035
Depreciation		265	250
Write-Off		72	-
Other Expenses		-	-
Total Operating Expense		3,720	3,500
Net Profit or Loss (-)		(3)	3
Income Tax		17	14
Profit and Total Comprehensive Income for the year		(20)	(11)

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

BDO LLC Chartered Accountants	for LULU EXCHANGE CO. LLC
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1

DO NOT TEST OUR RESOLVE

Iran's parliament speaker warned Washington not to test the Islamic republic's determination to defend its territory after the United States was reported to be sending more troops.

2

DEADLY 'MISTAKE'

The leader of Iraq's autonomous Kurdistan region said that Tehran acknowledged that a strike that killed six security personnel a day earlier was a "mistake".

3

'FAR WORSE' THAN IRAQ

Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez warned that the Middle East war presented a "far worse" scenario than the invasion of Iraq in 2003.

4

NO TALKS

Iran's ambassador to Pakistan said Tehran and Washington have not held talks, after US President Trump signalled tentative progress in diplomatic efforts to end the war.

5

GULF SHIPPING

China's shipping Giant Cosco said it was resuming new bookings for shipments to some Gulf countries, which it halted because of the war.

6

MISSILE SITES HIT

The Israeli military said it had struck two naval cruise missile production facilities in Tehran that were used to "develop and manufacture long-range naval cruise missiles".

7

IEA ON OIL RELEASE

The head of the International Energy Agency said he was "ready to move forward" with an additional release of oil reserves "if and when necessary".

UN DEMANDS 'REPARATION' FOR IRAN STRIKES ON GULF

GENEVA: The UN Human Rights Council condemned Iran's "egregious attacks" on its Gulf neighbours and demanded full "reparation" for all victims of its strikes. The 47-member council backed a resolution brought by the six Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries and Jordan demanding Iran immediately "cease all unprovoked attacks". The resolution was adopted by consensus, though some countries, while backing the text, criticised its scope and the fact that it made no mention of Israel or the United States. The Middle East war erupted on February 28 when Washington



Smoke rises in the sky after blasts were heard in Manama, Bahrain. — Reuters file photo

and Israel began their attacks on Iran, with Tehran in turn striking targets in Israel and Gulf nations. The resolution "condemns in the strongest terms the egregious attacks" by Iran, condemns Tehran's actions aimed at closing the Strait of Hormuz and voices "grave concerns at the Iranian attacks on energy infrastructure". It demands Iran "immediately and unconditionally cease all unprovoked attacks" against the GCC states and Jordan and "provide full, effective and prompt reparation to all victims for the damage and injury caused by its attacks". — AFP

UK TO HOST TALKS ON MISSION TO REOPEN HORMUZ

LONDON: Britain and France will chair military talks this week involving about 30 nations to form a coalition to reopen the Strait of Hormuz, a UK defence official said on Wednesday. Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and the Netherlands said last week they were ready "to contribute to appropriate efforts to ensure safe passage through the Strait of Hormuz". A further 24 countries then endorsed this statement. The "expectation is that there will be a further meeting, military-to-military, the chiefs of defence staff



A boat approaches a container ship while cruising in the waters of the Strait of Hormuz. — AFP

of the wider group that has now signed ... later this week," the official said. The chief of the defence staff of Britain's armed forces, Richard Knighton, chaired a meeting of the initial six countries plus Canada on Sunday, The Times reported. The British defence official said that other countries would also now be potentially invited. "We recognise that we have a role to play in bringing together this coalition and helping to lead the rest of the world to develop a plan to ensure that we can reopen the Strait of Hormuz as quickly as possible," the official said. — AFP

IRAN FIRES AT US CARRIER AS DIPLOMACY AIMS TO END WAR

IRAN SAID on Wednesday it fired a volley of cruise missiles at a US aircraft carrier, as strikes rained down across the Middle East despite back-channel diplomatic efforts to end the nearly four-week war. A conflict that began on February 28 with a US-Israeli bombing campaign on Iran has rapidly engulfed the entire region, sending oil prices skyrocketing and threatening to derail the global economy.

Diplomats said they were working behind the scenes to ferry messages between the warring parties, despite contradictory public statements about whether talks were actually taking place. But there was no let-up in the military activity, with targets in Iran, Israel, Lebanon, Bahrain, Kuwait, Jordan and Saudi Arabia all coming under fire. Iran's military said its cruise missiles at the USS Abraham Lincoln carrier group had "forced it to change its position", warning of "powerful strikes" when the "hostile fleet" comes into range.

WAR FRONTS

On the other side, Israel said it had struck targets in Tehran as well as a submarine development facility in the central city of Isfahan. From the Iranian capital, 40-year old Shayan said: "There is gasoline, water and electricity. But there is a sense of helplessness in all of us. We don't know what to do and there's really nothing we can do."

On another front, Israeli warplanes pounded the southern suburbs of Beirut, a stronghold of Iran-backed group Hezbollah. A correspondent saw a street covered in debris including shattered cement and warped metal after the early morning strike, while an apartment building's upper floors appeared damaged. Lebanon was pulled into the war when Hezbollah began firing rockets into Israel on March 2 to avenge the killing of Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

According to Lebanese authorities, more than 1,000 people have been killed in over three weeks of Israeli strikes and upwards of one million people displaced. In the southern Lebanese city of Tyre, almost cut off from the rest of the country by bombs, Khalil, a man in his 30s, voiced his defiance. "They'll have to take us by force," he said. Despite Israeli ground operations and the spectre of a full-blown invasion, "we don't want to leave our land... our heart is here", said Khalil, sheltering with his young family in a theatre.

DIPLOMACY ROUTE

Diplomatically, the two sides offered conflicting accounts even though mediators in the region said work was ongoing behind the scenes.

US President Donald Trump signalled talks were underway, with a 15-point peace plan reportedly sent to Tehran, but Iran's ambassador to Pakistan slapped this down, saying no negotiations had taken place.

Reza Amiri Moghadam said that "contrary to Trump's claims — so far no negotiations, direct or indirect, have taken place between the two countries". The Javan newspaper in Iran splashed a caricature of Trump with a Pinocchio-style nose, under the headline: "The world's most failed and disgraced liar." One diplomatic source in the region however said mediators were shuffling messages between the two sides, who were both open to negotiation.

"There is hope but it's too early to be optimistic," said this source, who requested



A man walks along a street strewn with building debris, in Beirut. — AFP

anonymity to discuss sensitive issues.

Both sides need to be able to climb down without losing face, the source noted. In public, Iran kept up its belligerent rhetoric, with the speaker of Iran's parliament, Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, warning the US: "Do not test our resolve to defend our land."

UNBELIEVABLE PRICE

Stocks rose and oil prices tumbled after Trump's conciliatory tone, but focus remained on the Strait of Hormuz, through which one fifth of the world's oil passes. Trump told reporters in the Oval Office that Iran had given him "a very big present worth a tremendous amount

of money", which he said demonstrated that "we're dealing with the right people". The US president did not elaborate further but said it was related to the Strait of Hormuz, which Iran has largely blockaded in retaliation for US and Israeli strikes. Tehran, in a message circulated by the International Maritime Organization (IMO),

assured safe passage through the strait to "non-hostile vessels".

However, the IMO cited a statement from Iran's foreign ministry as saying no passage would be granted to vessels belonging to "the aggressor parties — namely the United States and the Israeli regime". On a visit to Tokyo, the head

of the International Energy Agency said he was ready to approve the release of more oil reserves if needed to cushion the war's impact on global supplies. But the effects are already visible around the world, with Sri Lanka ordering an extra day off to conserve energy and the price of diesel doubling in Vietnam. — AFP

Fresh strike on base in western Iraq kills seven



Soldiers guard the streets during the funeral for members of forces in Baghdad. — AFP

BAGHDAD: A new strike in western Iraq killed seven security personnel, the defence ministry said on Wednesday, a day after a deadly attack on the same base targeted the former paramilitary Hashed al Shaabi. Iraq has been unwillingly pulled into the war sparked by US and Israeli strikes against Iran on February 28, and which has since engulfed much of the region. Pro-Iran armed groups have claimed responsibility for attacks on US interests in Iraq and across the region, while strikes have also targeted these groups, including on state-linked positions.

The the office of the prime minister said Iraq would submit a formal complaint over the latest strike to the United Nations Security Council. The defence ministry said seven security personnel were killed and 13 others wounded in the attack on the base in Anbar province, which hosts both regular security personnel and Hashed forces. The ministry said the air strike also targeted the base's military healthcare clinic. It labelled the assault a "flagrant and dangerous violation of international law, which prohibits targeting medical facilities and their personnel". Rescue operations were ongoing, it added. — AFP



Smoke rises from the area of the Kuwait International Airport. — AFP

Fire at Kuwait airport after drones attack

KUWAIT CITY: Drones hit a fuel tank and sparked a fire at Kuwait International Airport, the Gulf state's civil aviation authority said, as Iran presses on with its attacks in the nearly four-week regional war. Citing preliminary information, the Directorate General of Civil Aviation said in a statement posted online that the attack had caused only "limited" damage and no casualties. Firefighters were working to bring the blaze under control, said agency spokesman Abdullah al Rajhi.

Iran's Revolutionary Guards said in a statement carried by state broadcaster IRIB that they had launched missiles and drones at military bases hosting US forces in Kuwait, Jordan and Bahrain as well as targets in Israel. The Kuwait National Guard said in a statement that its forces intercepted six drones early Wednesday, and the army said air defences were "responding to hostile missile and drone attacks".

The Kuwait airport is largely closed to commercial flights and has come under attack several times since the regional war began on February 28, when Israel and the United States launched strikes on Iran. On March 14, the civil aviation authority said an attack with "several drones" targeted the airport and "struck its radar system". No casualties were reported. Drones hit fuel tanks at the airport on March 8, and an earlier attack on a passenger terminal left several people mildly wounded and caused some damage. — AFP

OPINION

What the war burns where no one looks



RUMAITHA AL BUSAIDI

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The writer is an environmental strategist advancing Middle East climate action and women's leadership

EID FELT different this year. The preparations carried the same rhythm they always do: the dressing up, the cooking, and the gathering of family. But the shuwa drowned. The pit that should have held heat and spice and hours of slow patience filled with water instead, and what rose from the ground was not the meal we had been waiting for.

Shuwa is time given to the earth and returned as something shared. When the earth gives back floodwater instead, the loss stays in the body longer than a single holiday, because it is the land itself that has broken a promise it used to keep.

The same week, the World Meteorological Organization published its annual report. It confirmed that the past eleven years are the hottest in recorded history.

For the first time, it included a metric called the Earth's energy imbalance, which tracks how much more energy enters the planetary system than leaves it. The imbalance has reached its highest point in 65 years of measurement.

In my last two columns, I wrote about the environmental cost of this war we are witnessing as it moved through the Gulf's air, water, and marine life and about the way

ports carry the energy, water, and food nexus on a single berth.

Those pieces followed the damage you can see: black rain over Tehran, oil on the surface of the Sea of Oman, the threat to Bushehr and every desalination intake downstream.

New data now confirms the damage you cannot see. Analysis from the Climate and Community Institute found that the first fourteen days of the conflict released more than five million tonnes of carbon dioxide, more than Iceland emits in a year, and equivalent to the combined annual output of 84 small nations. Two weeks outpacing what 84 countries produce in 12 months. The largest source is fuel.

A single F-35 combat sortie burns enough kerosene to emit 14 to 17 tonnes of CO₂, roughly equal to the lifetime output of a conventional passenger car. More than 8,000 combat flights have been launched since the operation began.

Half a million passengers a day were moving through Gulf aviation hubs before the war, and many of those routes have since been pushed onto longer paths, burning more fuel with every additional mile.

Beyond CO₂, the targeting of gas storage facilities and gas fields releases uncombusted

The exhaust will shape the atmosphere for years longer, feeding the same imbalance now producing more violent weather over the countries living under the consequences of the war itself.

methane directly into the atmosphere, a gas that traps far more heat in the short term than carbon dioxide.

The refinery smoke made headlines. The exhaust from thousands of sorties, the rerouted civilian flights, and the methane leaking from shattered storage and gas fields did not. They will shape the atmosphere for years longer, feeding the same imbalance now producing more violent weather over the countries living under the consequences of the war itself.

The WMO report says the changes now underway have occurred within a few decades but will carry consequences for hundreds and potentially thousands of years. The full climate cost of this war belongs to that longer timescale. It will be measured by generations who inherit the compounding, who live through rains more extreme than ours and heat extremes we have only begun to experience.

We do not yet know what they will say when they look back at what was burned in their name. What we know is that somewhere in Oman this week, a family stood over a pit of wet earth where a meal should have been, and the ground was already answering a question we have not yet learned to ask.

KYIV GRIPPED BY DRONE RUSH AMID MIDEAST WAR

ANIA TSOUKANOVA

Ukrainian drone manufacturers say they have been inundated with requests from the Middle East since the outbreak of war in the region, likening the surging interest in Ukraine's drone technology to a modern-day gold rush.

Kyiv has become one of the world's most advanced drone manufacturing hubs since Russia invaded in 2022, forcing it to develop an entire industry of weapons to fend off nightly Russian aerial barrages. The country now has hundreds of manufacturers pumping out millions of devices — from small first-person-view (FPV) craft used along the front line to interceptors that take down enemy drones mid-air.

With US allies across the Gulf being attacked by Iranian drones — the kind that Russia has been firing at Ukraine for the past four years — Ukraine's weapons sector says their wares are in high demand.

General Cherry, a major private sector producer of anti-Shahed interceptor drones, said it has received "hundreds, even thousands" of requests since the start of the war in the Middle East, triggered by US-Israeli strikes on February 28.

"Almost every Middle Eastern country attacked by Iran" has been in touch — government representatives, private companies and middlemen — spokesman Marko Kushnir said.

"The interest is enormous," he added, without disclosing specific details on the conversations.

"Neither the US, nor Europe, nor the Middle East are prepared for drone warfare," a Ukrainian drone unit commander said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

President Volodymyr Zelensky was quick to recognise the opportunity of the war in the Middle East. "For us, drones are like oil," he said in mid-March. Around 200 Ukrainian military specialists have already been dispatched to the Gulf, but Kyiv has not said how many drone interceptors, if any, have been used.

US President Donald Trump has rebuffed the idea of turning to Kyiv for help.

Industry estimates suggest only half of the potential production capacity is being used due to a shortage of funds.

"We definitely can see the spike in terms of interest towards the interceptors," said a spokesperson for major Ukrainian producer, Skyfall.

So secretive is the industry the man only identified himself by his pseudonym, Ares, and wore a mask as he demonstrated his firm's P1-Sun interceptor to AFP journalists at an undisclosed location. — AFP

The \$1.3m-a-minute war

LET'S PONDER for a moment the vast sums that we're pouring into the war with Iran. The Pentagon has requested \$200 billion (more than \$1,400 per American household) to fund the war, but even that understates the total cost. Linda Bilmes, a Harvard expert on financing war, told me that most of the costs will arrive later. For example, any soldier who develops a medical disorder or aggravates an existing one will receive lifelong benefits and medical care.

If today's troops claim such benefits at the same rate as those who participated in the 1990-91 Gulf War, that alone would eventually cost at least \$600 billion, Bilmes said. Not to mention, of course, the human toll of all of this. All told, she expects this Iran war to cost taxpayers more than \$1 trillion.

Here are some ideas about what the war money could be used for instead. My calculations are conservative, based on Pentagon reporting that the first six days of the war cost \$11.3 billion — and even that incomplete tally amounted to more than \$1.3 million a minute.

— For a bit more than two weeks of this war, we could offer free college education to every American family earning less than \$125,000 annually, at a cost of around \$30 billion a year.

— For less than three weeks of war, or \$35 billion, we could run a nationwide pre-K programme for 3- and 4-year-olds.

— For \$75 million, about an hour's worth of war, we could provide three books to every child in America who is living under the poverty line, according to Kyle Zimmer of First Book, a non-profit that works on early literacy. Research suggests that books like these can help get children reading and improve their outcomes.

— A woman dies in the United States every two hours, on average, from cervical cancer. Screening all uninsured women who need it would cost perhaps \$1 billion



NICHOLAS D. KRISTOF

The writer is an American journalist and political commentator

and could save hundreds of lives, according to Dr. Linda Eckert, a cervical cancer expert at the University of Washington. That's less than 13 hours of the war bill.

— We could get glasses to all 2.3 million low-income schoolchildren in the United States who need them but don't have them. The base cost would be about \$300 million, according to Vision to Learn, a non-profit that does this work. The bill would be what we spend on four hours of this war.

— For about \$34 billion a year, less than three weeks of war, we could restore health insurance subsidies that the Trump administration let expire last year. One analysis predicted an additional 8,800 preventable American deaths as a result.

The war money would save even more lives if we allocated part of it abroad. Indeed, we spent more on the first three days of war than we spent (\$4 billion) on all humanitarian aid in 2025. Consider what we could achieve internationally: — For \$400 million or less, a bit more than five hours of war, we could deworm all children in need worldwide, according to Evidence Action, a non-profit that works on deworming. This would result in stronger, healthier children and adults.

— For \$380 million, less than five hours of war, we could provide vitamin A supplementation for the 190 million children who need it. Helen Keller Intl, a non-profit engaged in this work, says this would prevent up to 480,000 child deaths each year and virtually eliminate blindness from vitamin A deficiency.

— About one day's worth of war spending could save more than 350,000 lives from malaria, through a rigorously studied screening and prevention programme, according to Esther Duflo, an economist at the Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

— For \$4.3 billion, less than three days of the war bill, we could

largely end the most terrible form of malnutrition, called severe wasting. That would save about 1.5 million children's lives annually. We would accomplish something historic: For the first time in the history of humanity, large numbers of children would no longer be starving to death.

We have to know that numbers like this are never totally reliable, but that's true of military costs as well. George W. Bush's administration in 2003 put the cost of the Iraq War at \$40 billion; it ended up costing perhaps \$3 trillion.

Moreover, my figures are based on only the initial costs of the Iran war. And even the estimate of \$1 trillion for the full cost doesn't include the bills for more expensive gasoline we're now paying and for pricier fertiliser and food that are likely soon.

If we reallocated this war spending to needs at home and abroad, Americans would have access to school from pre-K to college and would have health insurance, and large numbers of children worldwide would not starve to death — and we would still have billions of dollars left over.

We can cough up the cash when there's political will, such as to drop bombs halfway around the world. But where is the political will to get people health care or education, to build rather than to destroy?

I've chosen my 2026 win-a-trip winner, Brunella Tipismana Urbano, and she'll join me on a reporting trip this year (possibly to Bangladesh). Tipismana Urbano has had a remarkable journey already: She grew up in Peru, taught herself English and will graduate this year from Yale University with almost perfect grades while working as a student journalist, writing for Bloomberg and penning a novel. The runners-up are Kaja Andrić of New York University, Michal Ruprecht of the Wayne State University School of Medicine and Jessica Sachs of the University of Colorado, Boulder.

— The New York Times

The Rose of Hiroshima, Project Flower, and their scent



SONIA AMBROSIO

The writer is a journalist, academic and researcher in media studies

THE NAMING of military projects after flowers serves a contradictory function in warfare: it generates an aesthetic image for destructive technology, making it more memorable while also striking a symbolic balance between the violence of the weapon's aggression and the beauty of nature. Flowers are also used in protests as a reminder of the human cost of war and as a symbol of life's frailty, in contrast to their use in military settings. Vinicius de Moraes, a Brazilian poet, singer, and composer, wrote Rose of Hiroshima immediately after the 1945 nuclear blasts as a warning against war's dehumanising effects. The poem speaks of horrific destruction. It discusses the generations harmed by war, as well as the pain left behind for future generations. Its symbolism cries out for empathy.

Building on this theme, the Rose of Hiroshima became an effective protest symbol, initially as a poem and later as a song. Its verses highlight the tragedy created by the atomic bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, which the Americans called Fat Man and Little Boy. In a paradox, the small tree oleander (classified as Nerium oleander) is officially the "city flower" of Hiroshima, as it was the first to bloom on the burnt, radioactive land following the 1945 atomic explosions, representing strength and hope.

Weapon development also incorporates floral terminology to either reflect visual effects or establish an ironic contrast. Russia, for example, uses flower names for artillery, tree names for missiles, river names for air defence, and destructive natural phenomena for rocket systems, as well as female names for nuclear weapons. Developers claim that an explosion from a mortar can resemble an opening bud. It is comical, if not tragic!

The Oreshnik (Hazel Tree in Russian) is a Russian intermediate-range, nuclear-capable hypersonic ballistic missile, first used in November 2024 against Ukraine. The missile can carry multiple warheads and, reportedly, has devastating capabilities.

Project Flower was the codename of a weapons alliance between Iran and Israel. According to public records, the project involved Iranian funding for Israeli research into surface-to-surface missiles, which ironically are now a major component of Iran's anti-Israel arsenal.

The military agreement from 1977 was one of various pacts established using the 'oil-for-arms' framework. The project attempted to develop medium-range missiles capable of carrying nuclear warheads. The design was based on an American missile, and its components were manufactured in Israel. The project ended two years later, when the Islamic Revolution broke out.

Building on this theme, the Rose of Hiroshima became an effective protest symbol, initially as a poem and later as a song. Its verses highlight the tragedy created by the atomic bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, which the Americans called Fat Man and Little Boy

There are various reasons for military engagements and weapons being named after flowers, but the primary ones are symbolic and historical. Pear blossom spear, which created a flower-like appearance upon ignition, was used during the Song Dynasty in China. The Wars of the Roses were a series of armed confrontations from 1455 to 1485, fought between the House of Lancaster and the House of York for control of the English throne. The First Opium War, fought in 1839 between Britain and China, was sparked by China's attempts to disrupt Britain's lucrative trade in opium, a poppy-derived addictive substance.

Anti-war movements, in contrast, utilise flowers to convey the delicate nature of existence, pain, and a stance against violence. Flower Power (1960s) began as a protest against the Vietnam War. During the 2022 Russian attack of Ukraine, the sunflower, the country's national flower, became a global symbol of resistance and resilience.

Military brutality reveals profound irony. Institutions that are designed to protect are instead acting as agents of chaos, highlighting the contrast between the military's noble purpose and the reality of its actions that destroy communities. Naming weapons of war after flowers suggests that beauty can mask lethality. It is the symbol of innocence surrounded by horror!

Gen Z Italians helped reject PM Meloni’s referendum reform

TAIMAZ SZIRNIKS

Young Italians voted overwhelmingly against the judicial reform proposed by Giorgia Meloni’s government, playing a major role in its defeat in Monday’s constitutional referendum.

Generation Z, the youngest voters, voted against the reform more than any other age group, at 61.1 per cent, according to a Consorzio Opinio exit poll for public broadcaster Rai based on 40,000 voters.

“It was wonderful to see how many Italians felt the need to defend the Constitution by going out to vote,” said Valentina Alberti, a 24-year-old psychologist in Turin.

“I thought Meloni had a stronger influence. Turnout among people my age was very high. Many people around me stayed informed.”

The constitutional reform sought to separate the role of judges and prosecutors and reform their oversight, in measures that Meloni’s hard-right government said were essential for judicial impartiality. The referendum mobilised Italians in large numbers, with a 55.7 per cent turnout. But young people participated the most, at 67 per cent, according to an Ipsos poll.

That was all the more surprising given that many students remain registered in their hometowns and are not eligible to vote by proxy or by mail when away from home. Voters over 61 and those in southern Italy also tipped the referendum in favour of a “no” vote.

The reform, which was presented by the opposition as a vote on Meloni’s leadership ahead of the 2027 general election.

Vittorio Gioda, a 24-year-old software developer in Turin, had planned to abstain but ultimately voted “No”.

“The idea of the Constitution in the hands of people whom I consider inadequate or dangerous, like those currently in power, really scares me.

“This time, I felt like I could really make a difference by saying no.”

In the week before the election, Meloni even appeared on a podcast hosted by rapper Fedez to try to convince young voters, a strategy that backfired, according to Gioda: “The intense pressure exerted by Meloni to push us to vote had the opposite effect.”

Moreover, he said, given the tense geopolitical situation, many people, including his parents, saw a “No” vote as a way to show opposition to the government’s policies beyond the justice system, specifically its closeness to US President Donald Trump. Roman Federico Giorgetti, 25, said for young people his age it was “very difficult to get to the heart of the matter”.

Giorgetti, a political science student who voted “Yes”, cited the reform’s technical aspects that made it confusing to many. “The information circulating on Instagram is inherently polarising; it tends to oversimplify, and the political class didn’t make things any easier for us,” he said.

Surveys show that priorities for most Italians involve stagnant purchasing power and low wages, rather than justice reform. — AFP

Why Gulf exceptionalism being revised, not broken

THE LATEST military conflict has shaken the Gulf, but it has not broken it. simplistic argument is now circulating: that the Gulf states relied too heavily on the United States for security, that this dependence has now been exposed, and that the Gulf business model could therefore unravel. That argument is too linear, and it misunderstands both the Gulf and the nature of the current shock.

The right starting point is Gulf exceptionalism. In the literature, this is not a casual compliment about wealth or modern skylines. It is a political idea, sharpened especially after the Arab uprisings, that the Gulf countries operate under a different logic from much of the wider Arab world. The term has been used both positively and critically. At its core lies the claim that Gulf states were not easily explained by the standard scripts of Arab regime collapse, because they combined oil wealth, strong ruling families, social distribution, coercive capacity, and distinctive forms of political legitimacy. Scholars have also criticised the term for overstating immunity and ignoring differences within the Gulf itself.

That debate matters now because resilience in the Gulf does not rest on one pillar alone. It is not simply military protection bought from abroad. Nor is it just rent. It comes from a deeper structure.

These are not monarchies in the European sense. They are Arab Muslim monarchies, embedded in kinship, family continuity, tribal memory, religious reference, and a historically evolved relationship between ruler and ruled. That relationship is not reducible to the crude language of dictatorship, nor can it be romanticised. It is a negotiated order. There are understood boundaries. The rulers know that social peace, service delivery, welfare, access, and dignity matter. The governed know that abrupt rupture carries high costs in a region that has repeatedly shown what state collapse looks like. Gulf rule has also historically included mechanisms of internal



QatarEnergy’s liquefied natural gas production facilities, amid the US-Israeli conflict with Iran, in Ras Laffan Industrial City, Qatar. — Reuters file photo



AHMED AL MUKHAINI

The author is a policy analyst

There is a growing resentment in Gulf capitals that they are paying the price for a war they neither initiated nor endorsed. Those are not minor developments

consultation and power sharing within ruling houses, which helped sustain continuity and gradual change.

This is one reason the Gulf is more resilient than many outside observers assume.

The present conflict is serious. There have been reported attacks on airports, hotels, ports, oil installations, and urban areas, along with major disruptions to aviation, tourism, and trade. There is a growing resentment in Gulf capitals that they are paying the price for a war they neither initiated nor endorsed. Those are not minor developments. They expose the limits of a security bargain under which some Gulf states hosted bases, bought weapons, aligned strategically, and still found themselves vulnerable when escalation came. But this does not lead automatically to collapse.

Even under a difficult external environment, the IMF still assesses GCC economies as resilient, with non-hydrocarbon activity remaining robust and external positions overall still strong. That does not mean the Gulf is safe from damage. It means the baseline case is stress, revision, and adaptation, not systemic failure. The region still has deep fiscal buffers, functioning state capacity, strategic energy weight,

and centrality in trade, logistics, aviation, finance, and capital flows. The Gulf matters not only to itself, but to the wider Arab world and to the global economy. Its energy role remains critical, and its geography still places it at the centre of exchange between Asia, Africa, and Europe.

It is also worth keeping perspective. Reliance on alliances does not make Gulf states uniquely fragile. Many established states with long military traditions and larger arsenals remain vulnerable when confronted by determined great powers or hard security threats. Strategic dependence is not a Gulf oddity. It is a feature of the modern international system. The problem in the Gulf is not that it relied on partnerships. The problem is that this conflict has shown the need to rebalance them.

That is why the more serious conclusion is not that the Gulf model is over, but that it is entering a new phase.

Its business model will likely continue, but in a revised form. The Gulf can remain a hub for goods, services, money, energy, and mobility. But it can no longer market itself mainly as a protected zone outside regional conflict. It must become a region that is credible under pressure.

SPORTS

NEW OWNERS



Royal Challengers Bengaluru players celebrate with the trophy after winning the IPL 2025. — Reuters

India-US consortium buys Royal Challengers Bengaluru for \$1.7bn

BENGALURU, India: A consortium of investors, including US asset management giant Blackstone, on Tuesday announced the takeover of Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB), one of the founding clubs of Indian Premier League, for nearly \$1.8 billion. The announcement comes just days before the start of the lucrative T20 tournament on Saturday. The franchise, which won the IPL for the first time last year, was sold by United Spirits Limited, the Indian unit of British alcoholic beverage giant Diageo, for 166.6 billion rupees (\$1.77 billion).

In a statement, the acquiring consortium said it was “proud to become custodians of RCB.”

The group includes Bolt Ventures, run by leading sports investor David Blitzter, Indian media conglomerate The Times of India Group, along with Blackstone and Indian corporate giant Aditya Birla Group.

RCB’s “championship-winning culture” and its connection to the southern city of Bengaluru and “one of the most passionate fanbases in world sport make this an extraordinary opportunity.”

“We are committed to taking RCB to new heights, on the pitch and beyond.”

Praveen Someshwar, chief executive at United Spirits Limited, said the deal was a milestone “as we sharpen focus on our core beverage alcohol business to unlock its true potential with sustained growth.”

The sale announcement came hours after RCB announced it will keep 11 seats at Bengaluru’s M Chinnaswamy Stadium empty in memory of the fans crushed to death in title celebrations last year.

Eleven supporters, aged between 14 and 29, died in a stampede outside the stadium in June a day after RCB won the final against Punjab Kings and returned to a homecoming trophy parade.

Earlier this year, RCB’s women’s team won their second Women’s Premier League title. — AFP

Asian Games Qualifier moved to Bangkok



The decision was linked to regional circumstances rather than any organisational or technical issue related to Oman’s readiness to host the qualifier.

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, MARCH 25

THE Men’s Asian Games Qualifier 2026 in hockey has officially been moved from Muscat to Bangkok, in a significant change to the tournament’s hosting arrangements after Oman had earlier been announced as the venue.

The Asian Hockey Federation had initially confirmed Muscat as the host city for the qualifier, with the tournament scheduled to take place from March 28 to April 5, 2026. However, a later update confirmed that Bangkok, Thailand, will now stage the competition from April 2 to April 10, 2026.

The decision marks an important shift for the tournament, particularly for Oman, which had been preparing to host the event and offer its national team the advantage of playing on home soil. Early promotional materials and initial competition details had all pointed to Muscat as the venue, which explains why some previously circulated visuals and fixtures continued to reference Oman’s capital.

The clearest official explanation for the change came through the Olympic Council of Asia, which stated that the event was transferred from Muscat to Bangkok due to disturbances in the Middle East. This indicates that the decision was linked to regional circumstances rather than any



Oman and Germany players during a friendly in Muscat recently. Germany won 6-2.

organisational or technical issue related to Oman’s readiness to host the qualifier.

NINE TEAMS

According to the latest update issued by the Asian Hockey Federation, the tournament will feature nine teams divided into two groups. Group A consists of Oman, Hong Kong China, Thailand, Kazakhstan and Indonesia, while Group B includes Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Chinese Taipei and Uzbekistan. The preliminary stage will be played in a single round-robin format, with the leading teams progressing to the knockout rounds.

The qualifier carries added importance as only four teams will secure places at the 2026 Asian Games, raising the level of competition among the participating sides. For Oman, the relocation means losing the valuable backing of home support, but the national team remains firmly in contention for one of the four available qualification spots.

Despite the venue change, Oman’s target remains unchanged to produce a strong campaign in Group A and push for a place among the top four, which would confirm its qualification for the next Asian Games.

Oman Sail’s high-performance 49er team set for Mallorca regatta

MUSCAT: Oman Sail’s high-performance 49er team will travel to Palma, Mallorca, to compete at the 55th Princess Sofia Regatta, joining sailors from around the world at he first regatta of the season. Getting underway on March 27, the week-long regatta will see Oman Sail’s Waleed al Kindi and Ahmed al Hasani take on join a fleet of more than 95 sailors all looking to kick-start their Olympic qualification campaign.

The team will be coached by experienced 49er sailor and coach Jacek Nowak and following a solid performance at the recent Vilamoura Championship, the team looks forward to building on this progress.

Oman Sail continues to promote the nation through sailing, inspire the Omani youth and position Oman as a world class host venue. Participation in the Princess Sofia Regatta is the start of a journey which aims to end in qualification for the LA28 Olympic Games as Oman



Ahmed and Waleed competing in Vilamoura Championship.



Oman Sail’s high-performance 49er team.



Hashim al Rashdi

Sail targets its ultimate goal of winning an Olympic medal in sailing.

Hashim al Rashdi, Oman Sail’s Head Coach Performance, said, “The Princess Sofia Regatta is a very prestigious event with a rich history. As part of the Sailing Grand Slam Series it brings together the best sailors in the world across all events. Our goal is to qualify for the Olympic Games LA28, and this is the first step in that journey. We need to compete against a high calibre fleet in high profile events to test our sailors and improve on and off the water. Vilamoura was a great experience and proved we belong among the best. This is another chance to gain valuable experience and prepare for the challenges to come.”

LEARNING OPPORTUNITY

49er coach Jacek Nowak added, “Every event from now on is a learning opportunity. We will look to build on the progress

made in Vilamoura and put ourselves in a position to qualify. Recent training camps and competitive events have seen both sailors improve physically, mentally and tactically, and we are looking forward to another positive performance in Palma.”

Racing begins on March 27 with 15 races scheduled until the medals series on April 4. The event is being held in open water off the beach at the Club Nàutic S’Arenal.

The team will also be competing at Semaine Olympique Françaises in Hyères, France, from April 18-25, and Kiel Week in Germany from June 20-28 – both also Sailing Grand Slam Series events – with the 2026 49er World Championships scheduled for May 12-17 in Quiberon, France.

Later in the year, the team will sail at the 49er European Championship in Germany and Gdynia Sailing Days in Poland, both in July.

TWO-YEAR DEAL



Atletico Madrid's Antoine Griezmann (R) in action with Real Madrid's Thiago Pitarch. — Reuters

GRIEZMANN TO LEAVE ATLETICO FOR ORLANDO AT END OF SEASON

PARIS: Antoine Griezmann will leave Atletico Madrid for MLS side Orlando City at the end of the season, the two clubs announced on Tuesday.

Atletico's all-time record goalscorer has agreed a two-year deal with Orlando and will become the latest veteran star to move to North America.

"The forward travelled to Orlando, with the club's permission, during the two days of rest granted to the first team, to finalise his contract with the Florida side," Atletico said in a statement.

The 35-year-old Griezmann will be hoping to sign off in style and cap his 10th season as an Atletico player with a second major trophy at the Rojiblanco, after the 2018 Europa League.

"Let's leave the future in the future for now: because I'm not leaving yet," he said in an Instagram post. "I have months left with this shirt, months to give my all in this stadium and away, to lift that Copa del Rey and to dream of going as far as possible in the Champions League."

Atletico will face La Liga rivals Barcelona in the Champions League quarter-finals next month and take on Real Sociedad in the Copa del Rey final on April 18 in Seville.

Griezmann, who won the 2018 World Cup with France, retired from international football in 2024 after scoring 44 goals in 137 caps for Les Bleus.

He has netted 211 times for Atletico, surpassing the previous record of 173 set by Luis Aragones.

Griezmann joined Atletico in 2014 from Real Sociedad and has made 488 appearances for the club, who he left for Barcelona in 2019 before returning two years later, initially on loan.

Griezmann has scored 13 goals in 43 appearances for Diego Simeone's Atletico this season.

The MLS will add Griezmann to the ranks of well-known players to have made the switch from Europe in recent seasons, including his former Barcelona teammates Lionel Messi and Luis Suarez. "He is one of the most gifted, accomplished and influential players of his generation, and his decision to choose Orlando City reflects the mission and culture of our club," said Orlando City owner Mark Wilf.

"Our focus is on consistently building a championship-caliber roster every year, and adding a world-class player like Antoine reinforces that commitment and our belief in what the club can achieve."

Orlando, who have played in MLS since 2015, have never won the MLS Cup and have lost four of their first five games of the 2026 season.

Atletico sit fourth in La Liga this term, but are comfortably placed to qualify for next season's Champions League, with a 13-point lead over fifth-placed Real Betis. Griezmann will make his move to Orlando in July. — AFP



Karolina Muchova (CZE) reaches for a forehand against Victoria Mboko (CAN) on day eight of the 2026 Miami Open at Hard Rock Stadium. — Imagin Images

Muchova edges Mboko at Miami Open, to face Gauff

KAROLINA MUCHOVA needed all of her experience to hold off rising Canadian teenager Victoria Mboko 7-5, 7-6(5) on Tuesday, booking a place in her first Miami Open semifinal after a match she admitted could have gone either way. The 29-year-old Czech secured her fifth WTA 1000 semifinal berth in a hard-fought contest that lasted one hour and 47 minutes.

"It was very close, basically one point at the end. It can always change in tennis. I'm just very grateful I was able to win the last point," Muchova said.

The opening set was a tight affair, remaining on serve until 5-4 when Muchova found herself in trouble at 0-30 before reeling off four consecutive points to level at five games all.

She then capitalised on a shaky service game from world-number-nine Mboko to edge ahead, eventually converting on her third set point to take the opener.

The second set proved no easier, with both players holding serve all the way to a tiebreak. Muchova seized control with an early mini-break and kept her nerve to close out the match.

"She's an amazing player. Every time you play a top-10 player you go on the court and you don't know who's gonna win, who's gonna lose," she added. "I tried to stay focused and stay aggressive."

The win extends Muchova's excellent run, having now reached the fourth round or better at all five tournaments she has played in 2026, including beating Mboko to claim the Doha title in February.



Coco Gauff (USA) reacts after winning a point against Belinda Bencic (SUI) on day eight of the 2026 Miami Open at Hard Rock Stadium. — Imagin Images

GAUFF OUTLASTS BENCIC

In Thursday's semifinal, Muchova will face Coco Gauff after the American battled past Switzerland's Belinda Bencic in three sets to take a 6-3, 1-6, 6-3 win.

With the win, world-number-four Gauff reached the semifinals in Miami for the first time in her career, after failing to make it past the fourth round in her previous six attempts.

"Belinda is a tough player. Every time we play, it's a long match. It took a lot of running today, some falls, but I'm really proud of how I fought today. I think that's been a theme of the week," Gauff said.

"It felt like today, my opponent, she raised her level, and I was able to raise it in the third."

The 22-year-old will fancy her chances

against Muchova, having beaten the Czech in all five of their previous meetings.

SINNER IN QUARTERS

In the men's section, world number two Jannik Sinner fought back in the second set against American Alex Michelsen to seal a 7-5, 7-6(4) victory and reach the quarterfinals, extending his record run of consecutive sets won at ATP Masters 1000 events.

Sinner edged a tight opening set before facing a sterner test in the second, where he trailed 5-2 as Michelsen raised his level from the baseline.

The Italian fought back to force a tie-break, which he closed out to maintain his perfect record against the American and further stretch his unprecedented run of straight sets won at Masters 1000 level to 28.

"I felt like the serve helped me quite a lot today, especially in important moments and in the tiebreak, so I'm happy about that," Sinner said in his on-court interview.

"I know that if I want to go far in this tournament, I have to improve from the back of the court. Tomorrow is a day off, which helps me and I will try to find good rhythm in the practice session. Then we'll see how things go."

Sinner also reached his 20th Masters quarterfinal, while he kept alive his bid for a rare 'Sunshine Double' after lifting the title at Indian Wells earlier this month without dropping a set.

The 24-year-old could become the first man since Roger Federer in 2017 to win both US hard court Masters events in the same season. — Reuters

Esterhuizen steers South Africa to T20 series win over New Zealand

CHRISTCHURCH: Connor Esterhuizen's knock of 75 off just 33 balls helped South Africa secure a 33-run win over New Zealand on Wednesday, clinching a comeback 3-2 victory in their five-match Twenty20 series after New Zealand had taken a 2-1 lead last week.

Esterhuizen, who made his international debut earlier in the series, rekindled South Africa's innings after a muted start to help them post 187-4 in Christchurch, before two-wicket hauls from Gerald Coetzee, Wiaan Mulder and Ottniel Baartman restricted

New Zealand to 154-8.

"Means everything and pinch-me moment to play for your country. Special feeling and humbling," said player of the series Esterhuizen, who had also scored a fifty in the previous game to help South Africa level the series.

New Zealand chose to bowl first and despite Benjamin Sears and Josh Clarkson dropping catches early on, South Africa were struggling at 76-2 in the 11th over before Esterhuizen came on.

The 24-year-old smashed four sixes and three boundaries to reach fifty in 24



South Africa's Connor Esterhuizen plays a shot during the fifth Twenty20 international match between New Zealand and South Africa at Hagley Oval in Christchurch on Wednesday. — AFP

balls, and by the time he was caught by the hosts' stand-in captain James Neesham, Esterhuizen had partnered with Dian Forrester to add 61 runs in 27 balls for the fourth wicket.

New Zealand, seeking their first win over South Africa in a multi-game bilateral T20 series, lost opener Katene Clarke early to Mulder, before Dane Cleaver (22), Tim Robinson (25) and Nick Kelly (14) fell in quick succession to leave them at 69-4 in the 11th over.

Neesham, captaining New Zealand after regular skipper

Mitchell Santner was rested and back-up captain Tom Latham got injured, batted till the last over but could do little as their innings fizzled out after Bevon Jacobs' (36 off 19 balls) brief stand.

"Unfortunately a couple of sub-par performances at the end of the series... South Africa have a quality bowling attack and (our) batters got a taste of what the next level is like," said Neesham. New Zealand, who lost to hosts India in the T20 World Cup final earlier this month, will visit Bangladesh for a white-ball tour in April. — Reuters



SALAH TO BRING CURTAIN DOWN ON GOLDEN ERA FOR LIVERPOOL

MOHAMED

SALAH'S long goodbye from Liverpool signals the end of a glorious era and leaves the Premier League giants facing another expensive rebuild.

The Egyptian superstar announced on Tuesday that he would be leaving Anfield at the end of the season after a glittering nine-year spell at the club.

An emotional Salah, 33, expressed his love for Liverpool, where he stands alongside the all-time greats.

“Liverpool is not just a football club. It’s a passion, it’s a history, it’s a spirit. I can’t explain in words to anyone not part of this club,” he said in a video posted on social media.

Salah, who arrived from Roma in 2017, has scored 255 goals for the Reds, putting him third on their list of leading goalscorers, behind only Ian Rush and Roger Hunt.

He has won two Premier League titles along with a Champions League and other silverware and piled up a remarkable number of personal awards.

But beyond his numbers, Salah was the poster boy of Jurgen Klopp’s Liverpool revolution at Anfield, helping fire the German’s team back to the summit of English and European football alongside the now departed Sadio Mane and Roberto Firmino.

Salah was again the main man last season under new boss Arne Slot, scoring 29 goals to collect the Premier League Golden Boot award for a record-equalling fourth time as the club romped to a 20th English title.

The winger signed a new two-year deal in April, riding a wave of goodwill, after months of speculation over whether he would stay or go.

But serious cracks emerged earlier this season when he said he had been “thrown under the bus” by Liverpool and that his relationship with head coach Slot had broken down after a dramatic dip in form that meant the Egyptian was repeatedly benched.

Soon afterwards he left for the Africa Cup of Nations but he returned to the Liverpool fold in January, becoming a regular starter again.

Slot tried to draw a line under the incident but Salah did not publicly apologise and speculation over his future never entirely went away.

MOHAMED SALAH BY NUMBERS
Age: 33
Joined Liverpool: 2017 from AS Roma for £34 million (\$45.5 million)
Appearances (all competitions): 435
Goals (all competitions): 255 — third in club’s all-time list behind Ian Rush (346) and Roger Hunt (285)
He was the fastest in club history to 100 league goals, taking just 151 matches to achieve the landmark
Assists — 119 including a joint club record of 92 (along with Steven Gerrard) in the Premier League
European goals — a club record 53, with 48 of those in the Champions League. He scored the fastest ever goal in the club’s European Cup/Champions League history (they are six-time winners) when he netted against Danish outfit FC Midtjylland in 2020 after 55 seconds.
Most goals against Premier League rivals — Scored 16 against Manchester United, with Tottenham Hotspur close behind on 14
In October, 2021, Salah became the first player to score a hat-trick for the away team in a Premier League match against Manchester United at Old Trafford

MAJOR TROPHIES
Champions League (1) — 2019 (finalist 2018/22)
World Club Cup (1): 2019
Premier League (2): 2019-20, 2024-25
FA Cup (1): 2022
League Cup (1): 2022 (finalist 2025)
European Super Cup (1): 2019
Personal awards:
Premier League Player of the Season (2) — 2017-18, 2024-25
Professional Footballers Association Player of the Year (3) — 2017-18, 2021-22, 2024-25
Football Writers’ Player of the Year (3) — 2017-18, 2021-22, 2024-25
Premier League Golden Boot (four, a record he shares with Thierry Henry) — 2017-18, 2018-19 (shared), 2021-22 (shared), 2024-25
Liverpool Players’ Player of the Season (5) — 2017-18, 2020-21, 2021-22, 2023-24, 2024-25
PFA Fans player of the year (3): 2017-18, 2020-21, 2021-22

INTERNATIONAL HONOURS
Appearances for Egypt — 113
Goals for Egypt — 65

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE GLORY

Salah is one of the few survivors from the Liverpool side that won the 2019 Champions League under Klopp, along with goalkeeper Alisson Becker and defenders Virgil van Dijk and Andy Robertson.

The Reds appeared to have engineered a smooth transition when Slot won the Premier League in his first season before splashing out nearly £450 million (\$600 million) on new players including forwards Hugo Ekitike and Alexander Isak last summer.

But there were also many outgoings, which left the club light on options in various areas, while the impact of the death of Diogo Jota in July has been impossible to gauge.

A lack of depth has been exacerbated by significant injuries, including to Isak, and a collective loss of form in a disastrous title defence.

Salah himself has managed just five goals in the Premier League this season — a paltry return by his stellar standards.

It means Liverpool are braced for another expensive summer transfer window as they seek to return to the top.

A wide attacking player to replace Salah will be a major priority and the club will look at reinforcements for an ageing defence that includes captain Van Dijk and Robertson, as well as fresh midfield options.

It is unclear though whether Slot will be in place to oversee the rebuild, with uncertainty over the Dutchman’s future and continuing speculation linking former Liverpool midfielder Xabi Alonso with the Anfield job.

But Liverpool — and Salah — can still end the season on a high, with quarterfinals to come against Paris Saint-Germain and Manchester City in the Champions League and FA Cup.

They remain fifth in the Premier League table, which would almost certainly bring Champions League football next season, despite a poor recent run.

Salah’s own future is uncertain — he has previously been linked with a switch to Saudi Arabia, while other options include Major League Soccer in the United States or a return Italy’s Serie A. But before his departure comes a lengthy and emotional farewell. “You deserve a send off that reflects your status at LFC — the greatest,” Robertson posted on Instagram. “Second to none.” — AFP



MUSCAT
STOCK
EXCHANGE
8,027.519

BUSINESS

CRUDE OIL
OMAN \$109.55
BRENT \$100.32
LIGHT \$89.24



SHORT TAKES



A man fills a car with petrol at a gas station. — AFP

OIL PRICES SLIDE AS OPTIMISM FOR CEASEFIRE GROWS

MUSCAT/LONDON: Oil prices fell sharply on Wednesday, retreating about 4 per cent amidst renewed optimism over a potential ceasefire in the Middle East that could ease supply disruptions. Brent crude dropped \$4.17 to \$100.32 per barrel by 07:08 GMT, after touching an intraday low of \$97.57. US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) declined \$3.11 to \$89.24, having earlier slipped to \$86.72. The decline follows a near 5 per cent rally in the previous session, underscoring continued market volatility.

Market sentiment softened after reports that the United States had presented Iran with a 15-point proposal aimed at ending the conflict.

US President Donald Trump said progress was being made in negotiations, while media reports indicated the proposal includes a temporary ceasefire to facilitate broader discussions, including issues related to Iran's nuclear programme and regional security.

Analysts noted that while expectations of a ceasefire have increased, uncertainty persists over the outcome of negotiations. "Profit-taking is also weighing on prices, although the overall outlook remains unclear", said Hiroyuki Kikukawa, chief strategist at Nissan Securities Investment.

Despite easing prices, supply concerns remain significant. The conflict has severely disrupted oil and liquefied natural gas shipments through the Strait of Hormuz, a critical artery that typically carries around one-fifth of global energy supplies. The International Energy Agency has described the situation as an unprecedented supply shock.

Industry analysts caution that even if flows resume, a full recovery in production may take time pending clarity on the durability of any ceasefire. Meanwhile, geopolitical tensions remain elevated, with continued military activity reported across the region.

Efforts to mitigate disruptions have seen Saudi Arabia increase exports via its Red Sea Yanbu port, with shipments rising to nearly 4 million barrels per day last week.

Meanwhile, Oman crude for May delivery was priced at \$109.55 on Wednesday, down \$30.09 from the previous session. The average price for March delivery stood at \$62.17 per barrel, marginally higher than February levels.

— Agencies

War highlights need to rethink energy security

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, MARCH 25

THE global energy shock triggered by the partial closure of the Strait of Hormuz in the wake of the US-Israel war on Iran requires long-term solutions that go beyond immediate measures aimed at easing the crisis for governments and consumers, says a prominent Omani researcher and policy expert.

Dr Aisha al Sarihi, who specialises in energy transition, climate policy and sustainable development in the Gulf region, warned that short-term measures — from tapping strategic reserves to imposing demand curbs — may stabilise markets, but do not address the underlying structural constraints on energy supply.

In an opinion piece published by Springer Nature, the world's leading research publisher, the Muscat-based researcher emphasised the need to diversify trade routes beyond critical chokepoints, strengthen global coordination across supply chains and accelerate investment in renewable energy.

"In a matter of weeks, oil prices have surged across Asia, Europe and the United States, with effects visible at fuel pumps worldwide", Dr Al Sarihi noted in her commentary, titled 'How the war in Iran is reshaping the energy landscape'.



Gulf countries will need to work together to align resilience investments with potential geopolitical threats. They can draw lessons from geostrategic co-investments in energy infrastructure by European Union nations.

DR AISHA AL SARIHI

BEIJING: China said on Wednesday that Mexico's trade measures against it, including tariff increases, constitute trade and investment barriers and that it had the right to take countermeasures.

The import duty hikes affect more than \$30 billion worth of Chinese exports to Mexico and could lead to estimated losses of about \$9.4 billion to China's mechanical and electrical sectors, the Chinese Ministry of Commerce said in its conclusion of an investigation into the measures.

About \$9 billion in those losses would be borne by China's



Cranes and cargo ships at a terminal of the Yantian port in Shenzhen, Guangdong, China. — Reuters

automobile and auto parts industries, as Mexico was China's biggest vehicle export destination in 2025, the ministry said, citing customs data and industry estimates.

Mexico announced in December steep tariff increases on imports from China and other countries without free trade agreements with Mexico — up to 35% on the majority of products. The move was seen by analysts as an attempt to placate the United States, whose president levied significant tariffs on Chinese goods. — Reuters

CHINA SAYS IT HAS RIGHT TO RETALIATE AGAINST MEXICO'S TARIFF HIKES

MDO grows asset base as Oman bets on mining pipeline

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, MARCH 25

Minerals Development Oman (MDO), the wholly state-owned mining sector investment company, grew its asset base strongly in 2025 even as revenue fell, highlighting how Oman's mining sector is still in a build-up phase, with money going into major projects that are expected to deliver over time rather than immediately.

MDO — part of Oman Investment Authority — said total assets rose to RO 226.9 million in 2025 from RO 185.9 million a year earlier, while net assets increased to RO 189.6 million from RO 159 million. Revenue, however, dropped to RO 10.1 million from RO 16.6 million.

The company said this reflected its current focus on developing strategic projects rather than operating at full commercial scale.



Beyond copper, MDO is pushing ahead with a wider pipeline of projects.

That matters because the numbers tell a clearer story than the headline growth alone. MDO is not yet being judged mainly on sales. It is being judged on whether it can turn Oman's mineral potential into bankable, operating projects that create long-term

value.

The clearest example is the Mazoon Copper Project, which remains the centrepiece of MDO's portfolio. The project reached 35 per cent completion in 2025 and secured \$270 million in financing, equal to around 60 per cent of its

total value. MDO also said Mazoon added 4.9 million tonnes of new resources during the year.

Beyond copper, the company is pushing ahead with a wider pipeline. The Sohar Titanium Project reached 89 per cent overall completion, with construction works 84 per cent complete and the first two furnaces successfully commissioned.

In Dhofar, the Ash-Shiwaymiyyah Industrial Minerals Project moved forward through a strategic partnership with JSW (India) and is designed around large reserves of gypsum, limestone and dolomite, backed by dedicated port infrastructure.

Taken together, these projects show where the real story is: Oman is trying to build a mining sector that goes beyond extraction and moves into processing, industrial inputs and export capacity.

That fits squarely within the

broader diversification agenda under Oman Vision 2040.

MDO also used 2025 to deepen exploration. The company said it carried out large-scale geophysical surveys, drilling and geochemical analysis across its concessions, helping lift copper and chromite resources and strengthen its longer-term production base.

There is also a domestic economic angle. MDO said 32 per cent of its total spending in 2025 went to small and medium enterprises, as it tried to widen local participation in the mining value chain.

The wider message from the report is straightforward: revenue may be softer for now, but MDO is using this phase to build assets, secure financing and push strategic projects closer to production. For Oman, that makes mining less a short-term earnings story and more a long-term industrial one.

ADVERTORIALS

SHORTTAKES



With this addition, Sohar Islamic now operates 21 branches and two service centres.

Sohar Islamic opens new branch in Jaalan Bani Bu Hassan

MUSCAT: Reinforcing its commitment to expanding access to integrated Islamic banking solutions, Sohar Islamic — the Islamic banking window of Sohar International — recently inaugurated a new branch in Jaalan Bani Bu Hassan, further strengthening its nationwide footprint and bringing comprehensive Sharia-compliant banking services closer to local communities.

With this addition, Sohar Islamic now operates 21 branches and two service centres, underscoring its disciplined approach to calibrated growth while maintaining operational consistency and service excellence.

Fahad al Zadjali, Head of Sohar Islamic, stated, “Branch expansion remains a core driver of customer confidence and long-term relationship building in Islamic banking. The inauguration of our Jaalan Bani Bu Hassan branch enhances access to Sharia-compliant financial services in the wilayat and surrounding areas, enabling customers to engage with these services within a professionally managed and service-focused banking environment.

This branch has been established to strengthen our presence at the community level and to provide individuals and families with structured financial solutions aligned with their evolving priorities”. He added, “The steady growth of our branch network reflects a clear conviction that Islamic banking must be both accessible and convenient in order to encourage meaningful participation.

By ensuring that customers can engage with Sharia-compliant services within their communities, we foster greater confidence, familiarity and sustained engagement with the Islamic banking system. In doing so, we continue to support the advancement of Islamic finance as a resilient and trusted component of Oman’s broader financial sector”.

Strategically located within Jaalan Bani Bu Hassan, the branch has been designed to provide a professionally structured banking environment that strikes a balance between operational efficiency and personalised engagement.

Equipped with modern banking infrastructure and supported by secure, integrated systems, the branch delivers optimised transaction processing and responsive service execution, enhancing overall customer experience.

The branch is staffed by experienced banking professionals with a strong understanding of the local customer base, ensuring efficient service delivery and informed financial guidance.

Customers can access a comprehensive portfolio of retail banking services, including current and savings accounts, debit and credit cards; and a range of Sharia-compliant financing solutions designed to support effective personal financial management.

Range Rover Evoque delivers refined luxury

FOLLOWING the spirit of Ramadhan, MHD ACERE, the official distributor of Range Rover in the Sultanate of Oman, continues to extend its exclusive offer on the Range Rover Evoque, allowing customers to experience refined luxury and distinctive design with exceptional value.

Celebrated for its contemporary design and premium craftsmanship, the Range Rover Evoque blends modern elegance with advanced capability.

Crafted with considered materiality from contemporary wool blends to exquisitely finished leathers, the Evoque surrounds every journey in unmistakable refinement.

Its sophisticated interior, intuitive technology and confident road presence make it the ideal companion for both city drives and weekend escapes.

Originally introduced during the Ramadhan period, this exclusive offer remains available for a limited time, giving customers the opportunity to make the Range Rover Evoque their own while enjoying a range of ownership benefits designed to enhance convenience and peace of mind. The offer is valid until March 31, 2026.

Commenting on the offer Mohsin bin Hani al Bahrani, CEO of MHD ACERE, said: “Ramadhan is a time that reflects generosity



The Evoque surrounds every journey in unmistakable refinement.

and meaningful connections; and we are pleased to continue extending this special offer on the Range Rover Evoque beyond the season.

This allows more customers to experience the brand’s unmistakable refinement and craftsmanship with added value.

The Evoque truly represents modern luxury and capability; and we welcome our customers to discover it for themselves”.

Exclusive benefits include:

- Complimentary insurance and registration (first year)
- 5-year/105,000 km service package
- 5-year/150,000 km warranty
- 5-year/150,000 km roadside assistance
- Premium window tinting

For further details, visit the Jaguar Land Rover showroom in Al Athaiba or call the toll-free number 80062643.

National Finance, Sharakah advance SME development

MUSCAT: National Finance, Sultanate of Oman’s leading finance company and Sharakah, Oman’s leading SME development firm, have announced the selection of 12 new Omani enterprises for the fifth edition of the SME Growth Programme under the Imtidad initiative, reaffirming their shared commitment to strengthening Oman’s entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Building on the continued success of previous editions, the programme remains a flagship corporate social responsibility initiative by National Finance, delivered in partnership with Sharakah.

The fifth edition will support a new group of high-potential SMEs representing diverse sectors across Oman, reflecting the depth of innovation and ambition within the country’s business landscape.

The selected SMEs for the 2026 edition come from different parts of Oman, reflecting the breadth of entrepreneurial talent across the country.



The selected SMEs for the 2026 edition come from different parts of Oman.

The cohort includes Ahmed bin Abdullah al Shabibi’s Zulfa Centre for Psychological & Family Counselling; Muhannad bin Musa al Hanai’s Creative Packaging International, focused on innovative packaging solutions; and Fatima bint Said al Maawali’s Round in Oman, a destination management company delivering curated tourism experiences.

Also selected are Asim bin Mohammed al Zadjali’s Abu Al Reesh restaurant, Salem bin Khamis al Quraini’s Vitamin Cup Juices, Hazza bin Salem al Jahmani’s Wing Tech specialising in aerial and drone technologies; and Omar bin Talib al Ghafri’s Sayyar App, a smart mobility platform.

The group further includes Al Salt bin Saleh al Rawahi’s SRT, providing air conditioning and maintenance services; Suad bint Abdullah al Mahrouqi’s Salis World, an education and

training brand; Muntadhar bin Sharaf al Musawi’s Bin Omaira Labs offering medical laboratory services; Hamood bin Humaid al Habsi’s Al Jawhara Rest House in the hospitality sector; and Ahmed bin Abdullah al Abdali’s Dubal, specialising in organic fertilisers and agricultural solutions.

Together, these twelve enterprises represent a diverse mix of industries poised for growth within Oman’s SME landscape. The programme offers participants a structured development journey that combines Sharakah’s industry-certified Business Performance Monitoring Tool, tailored mentorship, practical workshops and specialised advisory support.

Through this comprehensive approach, SMEs receive strategic guidance to enhance operational efficiency, strengthen financial planning, refine marketing strategies and position their businesses for sustainable growth.

Kia Oman announces final opportunity to win Fifa World Cup 2026 tickets

MUSCAT: Kia Oman has announced the final phase of its highly anticipated festive campaign, giving customers across the Sultanate of Oman one last opportunity to win tickets to the Fifa World Cup 2026™.

With the promotion set to conclude on April 1, customers purchasing a new Kia vehicle still have the chance to secure the ultimate football experience through the brand’s Assured Scratch and Win promotion.

As an Official Partner of Fifa, Kia continues to bring fans closer to the world’s biggest sporting event. The ongoing campaign has already created excitement among customers, with several winners confirmed.

However, with 100 total Fifa World Cup 2026™ match tickets allocated



The promotion ends on April 1.

for the promotion, many prizes are still available, offering customers the chance to witness football history live.

To further support customers, Kia Oman is offering additional financial benefits by adjusting the VAT amount against the down payment, reducing the initial cost of ownership.

Every new Kia vehicle purchased during the campaign also comes with free registration and insurance for the first year, along with a complimentary service package for either 50,000 km or 100,000 km, ensuring peace of mind and long-term value for customers.

Alongside the chance to win match tickets, the campaign features exclusive offers across Kia’s lineup. Customers can enjoy savings of up to RO 2,650 on the popular Sportage L, while the Seltos and Sonet are available with savings of up to RO 750, making it an ideal time to upgrade to a new Kia.

Kia’s diverse lineup continues to offer options for every lifestyle. The Sorento and Sportage L provide spacious comfort for family travel, while the Seltos and K4 sedan

combine bold design with advanced technology for everyday driving.

Customers looking to embrace electric mobility can also explore Kia’s award-winning EV range, including the EV6 and the flagship EV9, both offering cutting-edge technology and impressive performance.

Existing Kia owners are also being rewarded during this campaign, with exclusive upgrade incentives, including premium 3M window tint packages and attractive trade-in bonuses, making it easier than ever to step into the latest Kia models.

With the April 1 deadline fast approaching, Kia Oman encourages customers to visit any Kia showroom across the Sultanate of Oman to explore the latest models and participate in the promotion.

SHORTTAKES



Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr speaks during a press conference at Malacanang Palace in Manila, Philippines. — Reuters

PHILIPPINES SEEKS TO OBTAIN OIL FROM US-SANCTIONED COUNTRIES

MANILA: The Philippines is working with Washington to secure waivers and exemptions that will allow it to obtain oil from US-sanctioned countries and guarantee supplies, its ambassador to the United States said.

The Philippines, which relies heavily on imported fuel, declared a state of national energy emergency on Tuesday to deal with the fallout from the Middle East war, including the disruptions to oil procurement.

“We are working with the State Department to get waivers or exemptions to purchase oil from US-sanctioned countries”, Jose Manuel Romualdez said in an exchange of phone messages.

Asked if imports of oil from Venezuela and Iran were part of the discussions, Romualdez said “all options are being considered”. Asked what has been the response from the State Department, the ambassador said: “Work in progress”.

As of March 20, the government said the Philippines had around 45 days of fuel supply and is procuring 1 million more barrels of oil to build its buffer stock.

Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr said in a televised address on Wednesday that the country’s fuel supply would not run dry after 45 days as his government has been looking for other sources.

“We are exploring other sources not affected by the war”, Marcos said. “Things are beginning to open up... we can be confident that after the 45 days we will have a flow of oil”. — Reuters

Energy crisis deepens; oil supply efforts lag

THE global energy crisis is deepening as emergency measures by governments worldwide have fallen short of plugging the huge shortfall in oil and gas supply caused by the US-Israeli war on Iran, executives and oil ministers said on Tuesday.

Costs for energy, fertilisers and petrochemicals are soaring as the world is losing as much as 20 million barrels of oil per day from Middle East producers due to Iran’s effective closure of the shipping chokepoint of the Strait of Hormuz.

The impact of the reduction of a fifth of global oil and gas supplies has quickly spread through economies and supply chains.

United Airlines on Tuesday said it may have to raise ticket prices by up to 20%. The Philippines declared a national energy emergency.

The acute energy supply shock now hitting Asia, the region most heavily reliant on Middle East supplies, will spread to Europe in April, oil executives and energy ministers said this week at the annual CERAWEEK conference in Houston, the US energy capital.



“These are not even stopgap measures. Kuwait was producing some 2.6 million barrels per day of oil before the war and has had to reduce production and halt deliveries to refiners that buy its crude.”

SHAIKH NAWAF AL SABAH

In Asia, countries are taking measures to reduce energy consumption including implementing four-day work weeks and asking citizens to limit travel and use stairs rather than elevators.

Governments around the world are releasing a record 400 million barrels of oil from strategic reserves into the market and the US has waived sanctions on some Iranian and Russian oil so refiners short of supplies can buy it.

“These are not even stopgap measures”, Shaikh Nawaf al Sabah, CEO of Kuwait Petroleum Corp, said on Tuesday.

Kuwait was producing some 2.6 million barrels per day of oil before the war and has had to reduce production and halt deliveries to refiners that buy its crude.

Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates have kept some exports flowing from pipelines that bypass the Strait of Hormuz. But those exports, as well as the other emergency measures, do not come close to covering the supply disruption, Al Sabah said.

All told, the emergency measures were not even a “drop in the proverbial barrel”, he said.

Coordinated releases from strategic reserves were not enough to fix supply shortages, said Takehiko Matsuo, Japan’s Vice Minister for International Affairs.

His country is contributing some 80 million barrels to the strategic stock release coordinated by the International Energy Agency.

Japan has roughly three weeks of gas in storage, he said.

Supply shortages could hit Europe in April if the war continues, German economy minister Katherina Reiche and Shell CEO Wael Sawan both said.

“We are trying to work with governments to just alert them to the various levers they will need to pull, including on the demand side, including what they need to do around storage, what they need to do around purchasing”, Sawan said.

Lack of preparation has exacerbated the challenges for Europe and other parts of the world, he added.

“The problem is we are more in reaction mode”, said Sawan.

“The best energy strategies are the strategies that actually look five, 10 years out and build resilience from now”. — Reuters

IRAN WAR STARTS TO HIT GLOBAL ECONOMY, BUSINESS SURVEYS SHOW

FRANKFURT: The Iran war is already taking a toll on major economies around the world, according to business surveys on Tuesday which showed how a surge in energy prices and rising uncertainty were dampening activity and pushing inflation expectations higher.

The initial findings of questionnaires sent to purchasing managers at companies in the United States, Europe and Japan are

the most comprehensive snapshot yet of the economic impact of the near four-week conflict that has shut off indefinitely a large chunk of the world’s energy supplies.

The ensuing leap in the price of oil, gas and other related products is a potential double whammy for economies around the world, feeding through into wider inflation and stunting growth.

Beyond the trouble that spells for leaders of those economies —

including US President Donald Trump himself — it has already prompted many of the world’s central banks to envisage tighter policy to keep a lid on price pressures.

Among the 21 economies that share the euro currency, private sector growth all but stalled as companies signalled an increase in delivery times and expectations of rising costs that they in turn would be trying to pass on. — Reuters

India delays coal flexibility plan as solar power curbs rise

SINGAPORE: India has pushed back by a year its plan for coal-fired power plants to lower output when solar generation is high, as regulators work out how to compensate for the higher costs of retrofitting entailed, documents show.

Analysts say lack of flexible generation of coal power as India expands renewable capacity threatens to waste green investments, swell compensation costs and boost emissions from greater coal use that could otherwise have been avoided.

The move comes at a time when the world’s second largest user of coal is curbing solar output for lack of dedicated transmission lines, while coal-fired capacity wrestles with operational constraints.

Solar generators told to cut output as India’s coal plants could not ramp down could get compensation of as



Workers drill at an open cast coal field at Dhanbad district in the eastern Indian state of Jharkhand. — Reuters

much as \$76 million for the eight months ended December, energy think-tank Ember estimates, a cost that will be passed on to consumers.

Government officials blamed the delay of a year on the absence of rules to compensate coal plants for higher costs of maintenance

and retrofitting needed to cut the minimum use rate to 40% from 55%, the minutes of a January 16 meeting showed.

Retrofitting coal plants would swell tariffs by as little as 0.28 rupees to 0.60 rupees per kilowatt-hour, versus 5.76 rupees to 6.04 rupees for battery storage, making flexible coal at least 10 times cheaper, the Central Electricity Authority (CEA) said at the meeting.

CHINA’S MORE AMBITIOUS COAL PHASEDOWN

Unveiled in 2023 with its first phase making slow progress, the plan is less ambitious than efforts by China, which last year cut the minimum coal plant utilisation rate to a range of 25% to 40% from 50% to 60% to boost renewables use.

Indian state coal plant operator NTPC warned the January meeting against “accelerated wear and tear of

critical equipment” that stems from operating at minimum loads of 40%. NTPC urged “detailed studies” on ways to cut use to avoid such damage, adding that its new project contracts included the 40% requirement.

But CEA officials responded that other countries’ coal plants running at lower levels of output have been shown to operate safely if properly retrofitted.

The federal regulator has yet to approve the higher maintenance costs proposed by CEA, citing lack of operational data, the agency’s presentation showed.

Senior officials of the federal power ministry, CEA, the federal regulator, the grid operator, NTPC and industry lobby group Association of Power Producers agreed to study the impact of the plan based on latest cost estimates, the minutes showed. — Reuters

GOLD RALLY

Safe-haven demand lifts gold prices



Gold prices rose over 2 per cent, supported by a weaker US dollar and easing inflation concerns as oil retreated below \$100 a barrel. Market sentiment improved amidst reports of a US initiative to end the Middle East conflict.

Spot gold climbed 2.1 per cent to \$4,568.29 per ounce, while futures gained 3.8 per cent. Silver, platinum and palladium also recorded notable increases. — Reuters

CURRENCY DRIFT

Dollar slips as markets turn cautious



The US dollar edged lower in subdued Asian trading as investors remained cautious over diplomatic efforts to end tensions with Iran. The dollar index dipped 0.1 per cent, while the euro and pound posted modest gains.

The Japanese yen held steady amidst expectations of further rate hikes by the Bank of Japan. The Australian dollar fluctuated before stabilising, reflecting mixed market sentiment. — Reuters

EQUITY WEAKNESS

US stocks dip despite oil rebound



Major US stock indices declined as investors weighed market uncertainty, despite a rebound in oil prices. Brent crude futures reached \$100.32 a barrel while West Texas Intermediate crude rose more than \$3 to \$91.67 per barrel.

The Dow Jones fell 84 points, while the Nasdaq dropped 184 points. The S&P 500 also slipped by 24 points, reflecting cautious investor sentiment across equities. — Reuters

OPINION

Why government development bonds matter for Oman’s economy



HAIDER AL LAWATI
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The writer is a Muscat-based economic analyst who previously worked for CBO and OCCI

SUBSCRIPTIONS to the 82nd issue of Government Development Bonds opened last Tuesday, with a value of RO 75 million (\$193.5 million) and an option to increase the issuance by an additional RO 25 million (\$64.5 million).

This is the third issuance of its kind this year and the Sultanate of Oman plans to introduce further development bond issues during the remaining months of the current year.

As is well known, investing in government development bonds is considered a conservative investment option suitable for a certain category of investors with strong financial capacity, as well as for those seeking to diversify their investment portfolios.

Sources interested in these issuances believe that investing in government bonds is a good and relatively low-risk investment compared to many local alternatives, especially for investors seeking security and fixed income, as the return on this issuance reaches 4.25% annually.

Government bonds are among the least risky investment instruments locally, since they are backed by the state, compared to other assets individuals may hold in their portfolios such as real estate, stocks and business ventures.

The objective of these issuances is to continue supporting the country’s financial sustainability plans and efforts, while diversifying sources of funding for the annual state budget, in addition to reducing reliance on external borrowing, lowering the public debt servicing ratio; and strengthening and expanding the Omani capital market through attractive opportunities for both local and international investors.

The maturity period of this issuance is 7 years.

The current timing for subscription to government bonds is appropriate for two main reasons: the improvement in Oman’s credit rating and the decline in the public debt ratio compared to previous years, which enhances investors’ confidence in government bonds.

According to the 2026 State General Budget statement, net domestic borrowing during the current year is expected to reach RO 130 million Rials Omani (\$335.4 million) after completing new issuances and repaying bonds due this year.

The total financing needs of Oman’s general budget for 2026 amount to approximately RO 2.3 billion (\$5.934 billion), including about RO 1.7 billion (\$4.386 billion) allocated to repay maturing debt (both domestic and external), in addition to

As is well known, investing in government development bonds is considered a conservative investment option suitable for a certain category of investors with strong financial capacity, as well as for those seeking to diversify their investment portfolios.

financing the estimated budget deficit for the current fiscal year.

Bond issuances perform several natural economic functions in public finance management, including financing development projects and capital expenditures for infrastructure and long-term development plans such as roads, energy and public services.

They also help diversify government funding sources instead of relying entirely on oil revenues or external borrowing, as the government uses domestic debt instruments to reduce financial risks.

Furthermore, bonds provide a safe investment tool within the local economy, especially for banks, pension funds, insurance companies and major investors, while supporting the local financial market, improving market liquidity and strengthening the Muscat Stock Exchange.

Bond issuances also help absorb excess liquidity or redistribute it in an organised manner.

The government’s bond investment policy has helped reduce the debt-to-GDP ratio over recent years to about 34% currently, compared to approximately 68% in 2020. This ratio is expected to decline further to 33% by 2028, which represents a significant improvement in the Omani economy.

CHINA AI LABS FACE GROWING OPEN-SOURCE DILEMMA

ROBYN MAK

To open-source or not may soon be the trickiest question facing China’s top artificial intelligence companies. The \$300 billion Alibaba and compatriots made most of their models free and available for anyone to use, which in turn has accelerated innovation and adoption across the country.

Even US firms have benefitted. But mounting investor pressure to generate a profit, as well as geopolitical pressures, may prompt a rethink to prioritise proprietary breakthroughs instead.

This week, buzzy San Francisco-based coding startup Cursor AI acknowledged its latest “frontier-level” model was built on an open-source one owned by up-and-coming Chinese AI lab Moonshot.

It’s an awkward situation: Cursor, backed by heavyweights including Andreessen Horowitz and Google, is in talks to raise funds at a \$50 billion valuation, Bloomberg reported this month, citing sources.

That’s nearly double the worth it secured in November and more than two and a half times that of Moonshot.

It also underscores a new reality in Silicon Valley and beyond: startups and more established companies alike are increasingly eschewing pricey proprietary models from OpenAI and others for free or low-cost Chinese versions which are rapidly closing the performance gap despite Washington’s export curbs and sanctions.

Rankings on OpenRouter, a platform that lets developers access and use different models, currently show 7 of the 10 most popular offerings are Chinese; companies from Airbnb to German industrial giant Siemens have made no secret about using models from the People’s Republic.

Chinese tools, however, now have a target on their back. On Monday, the US-China Economic and Security Review Commission published a report warning that China’s open-source successes “reflect a more fundamental challenge to US AI supremacy”.

And last month, OpenAI and Anthropic separately accused Chinese AI labs like DeepSeek of improperly using US models to improve their own; both have called for tougher restrictions on US tech.

There is a simple reason for Chinese companies to pivot away from open-source: Alibaba, Tencent and rivals are under increasing pressure to show they can monetise their AI models and applications.

The e-commerce group last week even went as far as laying out a goal of surpassing \$100 billion in annual revenue from cloud computing and AI customers over the next five years.

Keeping more Chinese innovations behind closed doors may even suit officials in Beijing, who are increasingly anxious that the country is losing its best and brightest entrepreneurs.

The world may soon see fewer free Chinese models. — Reuters

Auditor ‘has doubts’ about Bank of London

LAUNCHED

in November 2021, the online Bank of London remains under investigation by City watchdogs and faces “significant doubts” over its future, latest accounts show, as losses mount at the troubled fintech.

The challenger clearing bank recorded a net loss of £24 million for the year ending December 31, 2024, almost double its £12.4 million loss the previous year, according to corporate filings.

The accounts said the losses were the result of investment in infrastructure and hiring “the high-calibre workforce required”. Losses were in line with directors’ expectations, the accounts added.

Net assets fell from £26.7 million to £22.1 million over the year, while net interest income rose from £1.2 million to £2.7 million.

The bank submitted the results at Companies House on January 23.

It was the second year running that it had missed the statutory deadline

Since 2024, Bank of London has attempted to recover from a string of financial and regulatory setbacks that have put its governance under scrutiny. The firm disclosed in May that the Bank of England’s Prudential Regulation Authority (PRA) was investigating it over “historical matters”.

“The firm remains subject to enhanced regulatory supervision from the PRA and Financial Conduct Authority (FCA)”, the latest accounts read.

“There is a pathway to removing these measures based on the resolution of the various underlying matters that is underway as at the date of signing these financial statements”.

Bank of London’s auditor EY warned in the accounts that unfavourable or punitive outcomes from the ongoing regulatory probe could result in significant penalties, remediation costs, or restrictions, increasing financial pressure.

EY reiterated “significant doubts” over Bank of London’s ability to continue as a going concern, with “material uncertainty surrounding the current funding” despite shareholders’ commitment to inject



A man walks past the Bank of England building in London, Britain. — Reuters



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The writer is our foreign correspondent based in the UK.

capital into the group.

“Owing to significant turnover of staff and inadequate record keeping creating challenges to the retrieval of historical data, the directors have been unable to conclude on the completeness, accuracy and disclosure of the employee share scheme records”, EY added.

To avoid “further additional delays” to the accounts, the bank agreed with EY to provide only limited information on share-based payments, according to the accounts.

A spokesperson of the bank said the 2024 performance was “under entirely different leadership and ownership” and that the results “reflect continued progress on a comprehensive transformation”. Accounts for the Bank of London’s holding company, which changed its name to Oplyse last year, have still not been published despite originally being due in September.

The holding company previously boasted high profile board members, including Labour party grandee Peter Mandelson and Carlyle boss Harvey Schwartz- both of whom quit in October 2024.

“I don’t understand how a bank is permitted to repeatedly file late accounts without regulatory sanctions”, said Dan Neidle, former UK head of tax at law firm Clifford

Chance and founder of think-tank Tax Policy Associates.

Anthony Watson, who founded Bank of London in 2016 and which was valued at \$1.1 billion in a February 2023 fundraiser, stepped down as its CEO in September 2024, two days before its holding company briefly became the subject of a winding-up petition from the UK’s tax authority — which the firm blamed on an “administrative error”.

While on the issue of investigations in banks, I can mention here that German prosecutors have searched Deutsche Bank’s offices in Frankfurt and Berlin as part of an investigation into allegations of money laundering.

The Frankfurt prosecutor’s office said on January 28 that it was conducting a preliminary investigation into managers and employees of Deutsche Bank on suspected money laundering.

The bank has maintained business relationships with foreign companies that are suspected of having been used for money laundering in other investigations, the prosecutor’s office added.

A Deutsche Bank spokesman said: “The bank has cooperated fully with the public prosecutor’s office. We cannot comment further”.

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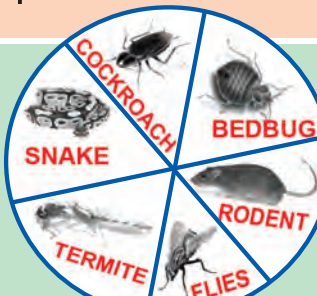
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ANNOUNCEMENT

ANNOUNCEMENT OF CHANGE OF LEGAL FORM

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

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CHANGING WORLD

WHY ONLINE REPUTATION MATTERS IN CRISES



SHADDAD AL MUSALMI
The writer is a Senior Editor at Oman Daily Observer.

In today's digital age, online reputation is crucial for businesses, organisations and individuals alike. In Oman, where the government is actively promoting digital transformation, online presence is more important than ever. But what happens when an emergency strikes? How do

organisations respond to protect their reputation online? In this column, I explore the significance of online reputation management during emergencies in Oman.

Online reputation is the perception of an organisation or individual based on their online presence. It's shaped by reviews, social media, news articles and more.

A good online reputation can build trust, credibility and loyalty, while a poor one can lead to loss of business, customers and revenue. In Oman, where social media is widely used, online reputation can make or break an organisation.

Emergencies, such as natural disasters or crises, can strike at any time. How an organisation responds online can significantly impact their reputation.

A swift and effective online response can show empathy and concern for affected parties, provide critical information and updates, mitigate misinformation and rumours; and demonstrate transparency and accountability.

On the other hand, a slow or inadequate response can lead to criticism and backlash on social media, loss of trust and credibility, spread of misinformation and long-term reputational damage.

Effective online reputation management during emergencies requires monitoring social media and online channels, responding promptly and empathetically, providing accurate information, being transparent and accountable, and collaborating with stakeholders.

A case in point is Oman's response to Cyclone Shaheen in 2021. The government's swift online response, led by the National Centre for Emergencies Management, helped mitigate the impact. Timely updates were provided on evacuation centres, shelters, and relief efforts, accurate information was shared on weather conditions and road closures, empathetic messages were conveyed from officials and influencers, and there was collaboration with telecom companies to provide critical updates. The response helped maintain public trust and demonstrated preparedness and resilience.

In Oman, where digital transformation is a priority, online reputation management is crucial during emergencies. By understanding the significance of online reputation and adopting best practices, organisations can protect their reputation, build trust, and demonstrate resilience. During emergencies, a swift and effective online response can make all the difference. Moreover, organisations in Oman can leverage social media listening tools to track conversations about their brand and respond promptly to concerns.

Proactive communication is key to managing online reputation and organisations should have a crisis management plan in place to address emergencies effectively. By being prepared and responsive, organisations can turn a potential crisis into an opportunity to showcase their commitment to their stakeholders and the community.

QUICK FEATURES



TRADITIONAL RACE

A jockey competes in Pacu Jawi, a traditional Minangkabau bull race held in harvested paddy fields, in Tanah Datar regency, West Sumatra province, Indonesia. — **Reuters**



LIFESTYLE

A woman takes images of blooming trees during cherry blossom season in a park in Beijing, China. — **Reuters**



TOURISM

Tourists visit as tulips bloom in the Indira Gandhi Memorial Tulip Garden in Srinagar, India. — **AFP**

INSTA PICKS



Deluge



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UK TEENAGERS TO TRIAL SOCIAL MEDIA BANS, DIGITAL CURFEWS



The pilot comes as the government seeks views from parents on whether to follow Australia and issue a blanket ban on social media for children under 16.

Hundreds of British teenagers will trial social media bans and time limits on apps as part of consultations over new measures to keep children safe online, the government announced on Wednesday.

The pilot comes as the government seeks views from parents on whether to follow Australia and issue a blanket ban on social media for children under 16.

Three hundred youngsters aged 13 to 17 will try out different restrictions on social media use over six weeks to gauge the impact on their schoolwork, sleep and family life.

Some will have their social media apps disabled entirely, while others will have no access to them overnight, said the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology.

A third group will have a one-hour-per-day cap on the most popular apps for teenagers, including Instagram, TikTok and Snapchat.

The results will be compared to a fourth set of children who will continue to receive unlimited access.

“We are determined to give young people the childhood they deserve and to prepare them for the future”, said technology minister Liz Kendall.

“These pilots will give us the evidence we need to take the next steps, informed by the experiences of families themselves”.

Australia in December became the first nation to prohibit people under the age of 16 from using immensely popular and profitable social media platforms. — AFP



Nasa's Artemis II Space Launch System (SLS) rocket and Orion spacecraft are seen at sunrise at Launch Pad 39B at the Kennedy Space Centre in Cape Canaveral, Florida. — AFP

Meet the four astronauts set to voyage around the Moon

CHARLOTTE CAUSIT

THE four astronauts selected for the Artemis 2 Moon mission will be the first to travel there in more than five decades.

In doing so, they will become the new faces of American space exploration.

Americans Reid Wiseman, Victor Glover and Christina Koch will make the voyage with their Canadian colleague Jeremy Hansen and are now preparing to take off as soon as April 1.

The journey, set to last around 10 days, will take the astronauts on a loop around the Moon, though they will not land on its surface.

The crew comprises the first woman, the first person of colour and the first non-American to take part in such a journey.

Those are key differences from the Apollo era, which included the first and to this day the only humans to travel to the Moon.

Here is a closer look at the crew:

REID WISEMAN
At 50 years old, Reid Wiseman is the mission's commander.

The native of Baltimore joined Nasa in 2009 following a 27-year career in the US Navy.

“I never thought I'd be an astronaut”, he said on a Nasa podcast. “I mean, come on, it's like an unobtainable dream”. Until it's not: in 2014, Wiseman travelled to space for a 165-day mission aboard the International Space Station and later served as Nasa's chief of the astronaut office.

After losing his wife to cancer in 2020, he raised his two daughters — now teenagers — on his own.

In January, he said he aimed for transparency in explaining to them the



Reid Wiseman, Victor Glover and Christina Koch will make the voyage with their Canadian colleague Jeremy Hansen

The crew comprises the first woman, the first person of colour and the first non-American to take part in 10-day journey

inherent risks of his career and his coming journey.

“I told them, ‘here's where the will is, here's where the trust documents are’”, he said.

VICTOR GLOVER
Victor Glover, 49 and also a Navy veteran, will serve as pilot of the Orion spacecraft.

The native of California and father of four daughters was working as a legislative advisor in the US Senate when Nasa selected him in 2013.

He has recounted youthful dreaming of becoming a police officer like his father.

But watching a Space Shuttle launch on his family's television set changed his perspective: “I thought, ‘I really want to drive one of those’”. “And yes, I said drive, because I didn't know any pilots or engineers”. He will become the first Black man — and person of colour, period — to travel to the Moon.

In 2020, he became the first African American to take part on a long-duration mission to the ISS.

He emphasised at the time that the historic first was made possible thanks to those who came before him, paying tribute to figures including Guion Bluford, the first

African American to travel to space in 1983.

CHRISTINA KOCH
American astronaut Christina Koch, 47, will become the first woman to take part in a lunar mission.

Like Glover, she was also chosen by Nasa in 2013.

Her background is particularly eclectic: an engineer by training, she is a seasoned explorer who has worked in extreme environments including Antarctica.

She long dreamed of becoming an astronaut, she has said, noting the poster of the iconic “Earthrise” image plastered to the wall of her childhood bedroom.

“I always say to people, do what scares you”, she says of her personal motto. “And that means I have to follow my own advice”. Koch already holds the record for longest spaceflight by a woman — 328 days — and also participated in the first spacewalk performed entirely by women, alongside her colleague Jessica Meir.

JEREMY HANSEN
Canadian Jeremy Hansen, 50, rounds out the crew and will be the first non-American to fly around the Moon.

Following his career as a fighter pilot in the Royal Canadian Air Force, the Canadian Space Agency brought him into its ranks in 2009.

Post-training he served for several years as a liaison between Earth and the ISS, after which he was entrusted with training a new class of astronauts.

He has said that as a child he found a photograph of Neil Armstrong on the Moon, a moment that sparked his passion for space exploration.

The Artemis 2 mission will be his first journey away from Earth — and with that, the father of three will fulfill a lifelong dream. — AFP

FEATURES

REDEFINING DESSERT: ZAHWA AL RAHBI'S PASTRY VISION



ZAHWA SAYS, 'EACH DESSERT BEGINS AS AN IDEA, OFTEN SPARKED BY A FEELING, BEFORE EVOLVING INTO A CAREFULLY CONSTRUCTED BALANCE OF TASTE AND PRESENTATION'



IDRIS AL BALUSHI

LONG before the polished plating and precision of professional kitchens, Zahwa al Rahbi's story began at home, in the quiet comfort of family gatherings, where simple ingredients turned into moments of joy. Today, in the refined kitchens of Kempinski Hotel Muscat, that same sense of wonder continues to shape her work as one of Oman's emerging pastry talents.

Zahwa's journey began with a natural curiosity and a love for sweets. As a child, she was drawn to the simple joy of making desserts for her family, often experimenting with recipes and discovering new flavours.

Over time, this curiosity deepened into a clear realisation: pastry is not merely about following recipes, but about balancing precision with imagination. This understanding, that desserts exist at the intersection of science and art, inspired her to pursue pastry as a career and continuously refine her craft.

Her early achievement of working at Kempinski Hotel Muscat marks a defining chapter in her journey. The opportunity did not come overnight, but through consistent learning, hands-on experience and a commitment to growth.

In the high-pressure environment of a luxury hotel kitchen, Zahwa developed a deeper understanding of discipline, technique and attention to detail. At the same time, she found space to innovate, transforming classic desserts into visually striking and thoughtfully composed creations.

For Zahwa, inspiration is not confined to the kitchen. She explains, "Inspiration can be found in a flavour that one loves, the colours

of nature, a piece of art, or even a memory tied to food. Each dessert begins as an idea, often sparked by a feeling, before evolving into a carefully constructed balance of taste and presentation". This process reflects her belief that desserts should not only be delicious but also evoke emotion and tell a story.

Beyond her work in the kitchen, Zahwa has embraced social media as a platform for expression and connection. What began as a personal archive of her creations has grown into a space where she shares her journey, ideas and techniques with a wider audience.

Through this, she hopes to inspire others to explore cooking, experiment freely and perhaps discover their own creative paths.

Despite her contemporary approach, Zahwa's work remains deeply rooted in her Omani heritage. She frequently incorporates local ingredients such as dates, cardamom, saffron and rose water into her desserts, adding layers of flavour that reflect the richness of Omani culture. These elements do more than enhance taste, they anchor her creations in a sense of place, offering a modern interpretation of tradition.

Looking ahead, Zahwa's ambitions continue to grow. She aspires to further develop her skills, explore new ideas and participate in larger competitions and creative projects. More importantly, she hopes to contribute to showcasing Omani talent on a broader stage, proving that local voices have a place in the global culinary conversation.

For young Omanis who dream of becoming chefs, Zahwa offers grounded advice: start with genuine passion and patience. The culinary world demands persistence, practice, and resilience. Mistakes, she believes, are not setbacks but essential steps in the learning process.

LASTING JOY

EMBRACE CHILDREN WITH AUTISM AS THEY ARE; IT IS MORE THAN CELEBRATION

SIHAM AL SAIDI

For many families, Eid is a joyful whirlwind — laughter spilling across rooms, relatives arriving in a steady stream. But for children with autism spectrum disorder, these same moments can feel overwhelming rather than celebratory.

Noise, unfamiliar faces and disrupted routines may turn a happy occasion into a source of stress. Yet, with understanding and thoughtful preparation, Eid can become a meaningful and even joyful experience for these children, one that honours who they are.

For Amal, mother of an 8-year-old boy, Eid used to be exhausting. "We would arrive at gatherings and within minutes, he would cover his ears and cry. People didn't understand; they thought he was being difficult. Many times, we questioned whether bringing him to family gatherings was the right choice", she shares. Over time, Amal learned to prepare her son in advance. "Now I show him pictures of where we're going and tell him who will be there. It makes a huge difference. He feels safer".

Preparation, specialists say, is key. Mona al Hosni, a child development specialist at Wafa Centre, explains: "Children with autism often rely on predictability. When we explain what will happen, even in simple ways, we reduce anxiety and help them engage at their own pace".

She also recommends creating a 'quiet corner' during gatherings — a small space where the child can retreat if things become too intense.

Parents also stress the importance of setting boundaries with well-meaning relatives. "Not every child is comfortable with hugs or kisses", says Ahmed, father of a 6-year-old girl. "We gently explained to family members that her way of greeting might be a smile or just sitting nearby — and that's okay".

Redefining participation can open new doors. Some children may not join group conversations, but they might enjoy handing out sweets, playing quietly with a cousin, or simply observing from a distance. These small moments are significant steps towards connection.

"Last Eid, my daughter stayed in the gathering for almost an hour", Ahmed adds. "That may sound small, but for us, it was a milestone. We celebrated it".

Al Hosni emphasises the importance of recognising these achievements. "When families focus on progress rather than comparison, they create a supportive environment where the child feels valued".

She adds that families should accept their children's differences and engage them in gatherings to help them develop social skills and confidence.

Eid, at its heart, is about belonging. And belonging does not require sameness — it requires acceptance. When families embrace children with autism as they are, adjusting expectations and offering compassion, they give them something far more lasting than a fleeting celebration: the quiet, powerful joy of being understood.

