

OMAN

دولة عمان

DAILY

Observer

VOL. 45, NO. 116
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U S - I S R A E L I S T R I K E S O N I R A N A V I O L A T I O N O F I N T E R N A T I O N A L L A W

HIS MAJESTY’S GREETINGS TO MOJTABA KHAMENEI

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of congratulations to Ayatollah Mojtaba Khamenei on the occasion of his selection as Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his best wishes for his success and good fortune in assuming his leadership responsibilities in his friendly country. Iran on Monday appointed Ayatollah Mojtaba Khamenei to replace his father as its Supreme Leader.

THE SULTANATE OF OMAN participated in the emergency leaders’ conference on regional developments, held via video conference, on Monday.

The conference was attended by representatives of GCC countries, Arab leaders as well as representatives of the Republic of Türkiye and Republic of Armenia, the President of the European Council and the President of the European Commission.

Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, represented the Sultanate of Oman at the meeting.

The participants discussed the situation in the region in light of the war waged by the United States and Israel against the Islamic Republic of Iran, and its repercussions on regional security and stability. They also discussed ways to de-escalate the military situation and bolster diplomatic efforts aimed at containing the crisis.

In his address to the conference, Sayyid Badr underscored the Sultanate of Oman’s solidarity with



A mourner reacts as she attends a funeral ceremony for victims of Israeli and US strikes in Tehran, Iran, on Monday. — Reuters

OMAN CONDOLENCES TO UAE OVER COPTER CRASH

The Sultanate of Oman expresses its deepest condolences and sincere sympathy to the sisterly United Arab Emirates (UAE) and to the families of the victims of the tragic helicopter crash that claimed the lives of two members of the armed forces while on duty, expressing its solidarity with the UAE in this painful loss.

MORE OMANIS RETURN HOME FROM GCC STATES

Groups of citizens arriving from several GCC countries and the Kingdom of Jordan have returned to the homeland via land borders and air travel, under organised arrangements that ensure their safety and smooth transit. The Foreign Ministry affirms its continued efforts to facilitate the gradual return of citizens.

HIS MAJESTY, MAURITANIA PRESIDENT DISCUSS WAR

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Monday received a telephone call from President Mohamed Ould Cheikh El Ghazouani of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania. During the call, they exchanged views regarding the developments of the ongoing war in the region and its grave implications. The two sides underscored the importance of halting the cycle of conflict, preventing further escalation and giving primacy to the language of dialogue and diplomacy.

the GCC countries and other Arab states in confronting any violations of their sovereignty or attacks on their territories and infrastructure.

He reiterated the Sultanate of Oman’s position that the US-Israeli military attacks on the Islamic Republic of Iran represent a violation of international law, warning that the continuation of military operations could worsen the crisis and pose a serious threat to the international legal order which forms the basis of global security and stability.

REGIONAL ESCALATION

Sayyid Badr received a telephone call from Anwar Ibrahim, Prime Minister of Malaysia.

During the call, the two sides exchanged views regarding the current escalation in the region. Both sides underscored the convergence of their nations’ stances on prioritising efforts to cease the Israeli-American military campaign against the Islamic Republic of Iran. They addressed its ramifications, including the targeting of several neighbouring states. — ONA

Global markets plunge as oil surges above \$120

The official price of Oman Crude for May delivery settled on Monday at \$124.68 per barrel. This represents a substantial increase of \$24.37 compared to last Friday closing price of \$100.31. It is noteworthy that the monthly average price of Omani crude for March delivery 2026 stood at \$62.17 per barrel, reflecting a marginal gain of 8 cents compared to the February delivery price.

Meanwhile, bonds across the globe sank on Monday as a rapidly

worsening US-Israeli war with Iran briefly pushed oil prices near \$120, heightening investor fears over inflation which they bet may prompt European central banks to hike rates this year.

Brent crude prices soared as much as 28 per cent to almost \$120 per barrel - their highest since July 2022 and were last up 14 per cent at around \$105. The war is keeping the Strait of Hormuz, through which roughly one-fifth of the world’s oil



A crude oil tanker is guided to a berth at the oil terminal at the port in Qingdao, in China’s eastern Shandong province.

and liquefied natural gas typically passes, virtually shut. “Today is much more like in panic mode,” said Lyn Graham-Taylor, senior rates strategist at Rabobank in London.

Investors are “purely pricing in a focus from central banks on the inflation side of an energy supply shock. There’s relatively limited pricing in of the downside from the perspective of GDP,” he said.

The spectre of rising inflation and the possibility of central banks

needing to keep rates higher for longer or even hiking them has meant the safe-haven allure of bonds is being overlooked in the conflict.

On Monday, government bond yields surged further as prices tumbled, adding to last week’s dramatic moves. Investors moved to price in as much as two rate hikes from the European Central Bank by year-end, a huge turnaround from February, when the risk was another rate cut. — Agencies

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SHORT TAKES



GOVT TREASURY
BILLS WORTH
RO 11M ISSUED

MUSCAT: The total issuance of Government Treasury Bills amounted to RO 11 million this week. The value of the allotted Treasury bills amounted to RO 7 million, for a maturity period of 28 days.

The average accepted price reached RO 99.720 for every RO 100, and the minimum accepted price arrived at RO 99.720 per RO 100. The average discount rate and the average yield reached 3.65000 per cent and 3.66025 per cent, respectively.

The value of the allotted Treasury bills amounted to RO 3 million, for a maturity period of 91 days. The average accepted price reached RO 99.040 for every RO 100, and the minimum accepted price arrived at RO 99.040 per RO 100. The average discount rate and the average yield reached 3.85055 per cent and 3.88787 per cent, respectively.

The value of the allotted Treasury bills amounted to RO 1 million, for a maturity period of 182 days.

The average accepted price reached RO 98.135 for every RO 100, and the minimum accepted price arrived at RO 98.135 per RO 100. The average discount rate and the average yield reached 3.74025 per cent and 3.81133 per cent, respectively.

Treasury Bills are short-term highly secured financial instruments issued by the Ministry of Finance, and they provide licensed commercial banks the opportunity to invest their surplus funds.

The Central Bank of Oman (CBO) acts as the Issue Manager and provides the added advantage of ready liquidity through discounting and repurchase facilities (Repo).

It may be noted that the interest rate on the Repo operations with CBO is 4.25 per cent while the discount rate on the Treasury Bills Discounting Facility with CBO is 4.75 per cent.

Furthermore, Treasury Bills promote the local money market by creating a benchmark yield curve for short-term interest rates. Additionally, the Government may also resort to this instrument whenever felt necessary for financing its recurrent expenditures. — ONA

Altitude, climate affect Omani pomegranate quality

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 9

A recent study at Sultan Qaboos University revealed that altitude and local climate play a decisive role in determining the quality of Omani pomegranates.

Conducted by researcher Basim al Kalbani from the College of Agricultural and Marine Sciences, the study explores how environmental conditions influence the characteristics of this prized



Despite its high temperatures, Oman is capable of cultivating diversity of pomegranates.

fruit grown in the mountainous regions of northern Oman.

Despite its predominantly arid climate and high temperatures, Oman is capable of cultivating a remarkable diversity of fruit crops, particularly in the towering Al Hajar Mountains.

Al Kalbani's PhD research examined the relationship between altitude and pomegranate fruit characteristics by analysing two local cultivars, Helu and Malasi. Field experiments were conducted

in three mountain villages at different elevations: Saiq (2,019 metres), Sograh (1,876 metres), and Wakan (1,540 metres). The study aimed to understand the suitability and distribution of pomegranate cultivation across these altitudes while evaluating differences in fruit quality through physical and chemical analyses. It also explored how local climatic conditions influence the phenological stages of growth, morphological traits, and genetic diversity of the cultivars.

Shura discusses reports on international agreements

MOHAMED AL BATTASHI
MUSCAT, MARCH 9

THE Majlis Ash'shura convened its twelfth regular session of the third annual sitting for the tenth term (2023–2027) on Monday, chaired by Khalid bin Hilal al Maawali, Chairman of Majlis Ash'shura. Members discussed various agenda items, including reports from the Council's standing committees on agreements, proposals and draft laws referred by the government.

During the session, the draft amendment to certain provisions of the Mineral Wealth Law was sent to the State Council to complete its legislative cycle. The Economic and Financial Committee presented their views and observations on the draft, focusing on regulating mineral wealth exploitation and enhancing its management efficiency.

The session also involved reviewing and approving the Services and Public Utilities Committee's perspective on several international agreements, as outlined in Article 54 of the Council of Oman Law.

These agreements included a



The report focused on achieving sustainable growth and enhancing the competitiveness of Omani products.

The report suggested adjusting current banking fees and policies to balance the sustainability of the banking sector with protecting customers' interests.

maritime transport cooperation agreement with the Russian Federation, as well as air services agreements with the Republic of Mali and the Federal Republic of Somalia.

Furthermore, the agenda covered discussing and approving the themes for ministerial statements from the Ministry of Energy and Minerals and the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs, as required by Article 69 of the Council of Oman Law.

The Council also reviewed and approved reports from the

Economic and Financial Committee on two significant economic initiatives, comparing bank fees of local banks to those in GCC countries. The report suggested adjusting current banking fees and policies to balance the sustainability of the banking sector with protecting customers' interests.

Additionally, the Council endorsed a report supporting national industries, emphasising the industrial sector's crucial role in driving national economic transformation.

The report focused on achieving sustainable growth, reducing reliance on imports, and enhancing the competitiveness of Omani products locally, regionally and internationally.

The Media, Tourism and Culture Committee presented a report advocating for the establishment of integrated service stations for motorhomes to promote overland and adventure tourism.

The session concluded with a briefing on various draft laws and agreements referred by the government, notably the draft Unified Law for the Management of Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture for GCC states.

Omani short story reflects the subtle transformations of society

MUSCAT: The Omani short story has emerged as one of the most compelling literary forms capable of capturing the subtle rhythms of everyday life and the evolving realities of society.

Far from merely recording daily events, this genre offers a rich creative space for exploring deeper human questions, preserving collective memory, and reflecting the rapid transformations shaping contemporary life.

Through refined aesthetic sensibility and innovative narrative techniques, Omani writers have increasingly used the short story to reimagine the human experience. The genre portrays individuals not as figures confined to their locality but as active

participants in a wider human dialogue — balancing heritage with renewal and tradition with openness.

Writers have transformed ordinary moments and human experiences into vivid narratives that celebrate social diversity and multiple perspectives. Omani storyteller Hamad bin Rashid al Juma emphasises that literary creation is deeply connected to the writer's surroundings.

“The storyteller is a product of his environment and is affected by events locally and globally,” he said. “The tragedies unfolding in places such as Gaza and Palestine inevitably influence the writer's mood and are reflected in storytelling.”

Al Juma explained that his



Writers have transformed ordinary moments and human experiences into narratives that celebrate social diversity and multiple perspectives.

early stories documented the hardships faced by displaced Palestinians, portraying life in refugee camps and the struggles of children and women deprived of basic necessities.

He also highlights the importance of precision in storytelling. According to him, a storyteller must capture small details and use poetic description without exaggeration or unnecessary

embellishment.

“The writer should not hand information to the reader on a silver platter,” he noted. “Instead, the reader must be involved in anticipating the outcome through techniques such as open endings and subtle narrative cues.”

Al Juma draws a clear distinction between literary forms. “The novel is like a turbulent sea, while the short story resembles a small river with limited sources and branches,” he said, stressing that each genre demands its own artistic discipline.

Similarly, Omani novelist and short story writer Mahmoud bin Mohammed al Rahbi believes that storytelling is fundamentally an art that carries an implicit

moral message.

“A good story is concise and free of excess,” he said. “It develops fully in the writer's mind before it appears on the page. Readers first enjoy the narrative, and later begin to reflect on its deeper meaning.”

Al Rahbi cites classic works such as Anton Chekhov's short story 'Death of a Government Clerk', which many critics interpret as a satire on bureaucracy in Tsarist Russia. Similarly, Nikolai Gogol's famous story 'The Overcoat' continues to influence world literature because of its simplicity and powerful underlying message. Beyond artistic expression, the Omani short story often explores the tension between tradition and modernity. — ONA

SHORT TAKES



Markets in Al Awabi are currently experiencing remarkable activity.

AWABI SEES ROBUST COMMERCIAL ACTIVITIES AND STABLE PRICES

HARITH AL BAHRI
AL AWABI, MARCH 9

The Wilayat of Al Awabi in Al Batinah South Governorate is experiencing increased commercial activities in the markets and shopping centres. A notable abundance of goods and stable prices currently seen in the wilayat’s markets indicates a robust economic situation and buzzing commercial activities.

Shops are witnessing a heavy customer footfall with brisk purchasing activity across various markets.

This is due to the availability of essential and consumer goods, which strengthens consumer confidence and confirms the stability of the local market and its ability to meet the needs of the community.

Badr bin Saif al Kharousi, a trader and food commodities supplier in Al Awabi, stressed that price stability is the result of fruitful cooperation between traders and suppliers as well as sound planning that contributes to ensuring the availability of goods at concessionary prices.

He added that the markets in Al Awabi are currently experiencing remarkable activity, providing shoppers with a comfortable and safe shopping environment. He noted that price stability sends a reassuring message to consumers and demonstrates sound market management.

He explained that the brisk activity in shops also reflects the community’s awareness of the importance of supporting the local economy and highlights the authorities’ ability to balance supply and demand thus contributing to economic stability.

AL DAKHILIYAH POSTS 1,498 NEW APPLICATIONS IN 2025

NIZWA: Al Dakhiliyah Governorate continues to solidify its position as a thriving economic hub in Oman, driven by growth across commercial, industrial and investment sectors.

Supportive government policies, streamlined procedures, and enhanced digital services have fuelled entrepreneurship and business activity throughout the region. In 2025, the governorate recorded 1,498 new commercial registrations, a 12.2-per cent

increase from 1,335 in 2024, bringing the cumulative total to 25,329 registrations. Nizwa led the wilayats with 458 registrations, followed by Bahla (251) and Samayil (216).

Commercial licences completed in 2025 reached 14,016, raising the cumulative total to 38,058, while 17,574 automatic licences were processed, totalling 49,312. Industrial licences numbered 2,677, increasing the cumulative tally to 12,289, with Nizwa

again leading with 641 licences. Certificates of origin issued during the year reached 1,501, totalling 5,750 overall. Investment licences completed numbered 95, bringing the cumulative total to 681.

Hilal bin Badr al Rashdi, Director of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, highlighted that these figures reflect the governorate’s growing economic momentum, its strategic location, and ongoing efforts to enhance investor confidence. – ONA

Passengers using Muscat airport need to reconfirm

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, MARCH 9

AIRLINE COMPANIES operating to and from Muscat International Airport are urging passengers to reconfirm their tickets, check in online and arrive at the airport on time due to the current heavy rush. Sources at the airport have noted that the sudden increase in passengers is a result of many travellers from neighbouring countries using Muscat as a transit point.

“A significant number of passengers from neighbouring countries are being transported by road to Oman to catch their flights at Muscat International Airport,” stated an airline representative.

With passengers from various countries using Muscat as a layover, the airport is experiencing a significant influx of travellers, increasing the likelihood of missed flights.

“It is advisable to check your flight status, reconfirm your departure time and check in online to avoid missing your flight,” the representative added.

Abdul Waheed al Balushi,

With passengers from various countries using Muscat as a layover, the airport is experiencing a significant influx of travellers, increasing the likelihood of missed flights.



With passengers from various countries using Muscat as a layover, the airport is experiencing a significant influx of travellers. — ONA

Manager of Ground Operations at SalamAir, acknowledged the airport’s congestion with passengers from Oman and other countries due to closed land borders and airports, resulting in heavy queues at check-in counters.

“We recommend arriving early at the airport to avoid missing a flight. In case of any cancellations, updates are available on our website and sent to passengers via messages. Passengers should double-check their flight status,” Abdul Waheed

emphasised. Another airline official mentioned that while the current rush is being managed effectively, it is advisable to arrive at the airport four hours in advance to navigate through the high queues at departure and immigration counters.

“Passengers are encouraged to check their flight status on the airline’s website, as schedule changes may occur. Providing active contact numbers for timely updates is recommended for a smooth travel experience,” she concluded.

CBSE CLASS XII EXAMS IN MIDDLE EAST POSTPONED TO MARCH 16

MUSCAT: The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE), India, has announced a further postponement of Class XII board examinations in schools across Oman, Bahrain, Iran, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE. This marks the fifth circular on the matter, following the earlier notice dated March 7, 2026.

Dr Sanyam Bhardwaj, Controller of Examinations, explained that after reviewing the current situation in parts

of the Middle East, along with students’ stress and uncertainties, the Board has decided to reschedule exams originally set for March 12, 2026 (Thursday) to March 16, 2026 (Monday).

The CBSE will review the situation on March 14, 2026 (Saturday) to determine dates for remaining examinations. Students are advised to stay in touch with their schools and follow official announcements closely.

SJC reviews judiciary purviews

MUSCAT: The Supreme Judicial Council (SJC) reviewed the roles and purviews of the judiciary, as well as the jurisdictions of the Supreme Court and the Investment and Commercial Court, on Monday.

Speaking to participants in the 13th National Defence Course (NDC), Sayyid Khalifa bin Said al Busaidy, Chairman of the Supreme Court, said that litigation is a protected and guaranteed right for all under the Basic Law of the State issued by Royal Decree No 6/2021.

He noted that the judiciary plays a pivotal role in promoting the rule of law, safeguarding rights and freedoms and consolidating the principles of justice.

The Chairman of the Supreme Court explained that, pursuant to Royal Decree No 35/2022, the Supreme



The judiciary plays a pivotal role in promoting the rule of law.

Judicial Council (SJC) was restructured to be under the direct supervision of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, thereby enhancing the independence of the judiciary and enshrining the principle of separation of powers.

This restructuring included the establishment of an independent judicial body to

manage judicial affairs free from any influence, granting the SJC broad powers to better manage the affairs of the courts and judges and setting objective criteria for selecting qualified and experienced judges with a focus on their qualification, training and continuous development of their capabilities.

وزارة الإعلام
Ministry of Information

Reminder

The Ministry of Information calls on media entities and professionals working in professions subject to licensing to take the initiative to regularize their status and fulfill the regulatory requirements before 14 March 2026, the deadline for the specified grace period. This comes in implementation of the provisions of the Executive Regulations of the Media Law and as part of ongoing efforts to foster a well-regulated media environment.

For further inquiries, please contact the numbers listed below during official working hours, or communicate via email:

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Ramadhan

AFRAH AL
BALUSHI

DURING

RAMADHAN, many people feel tempted to skip Suhoor simply out of tiredness or laziness. However, missing this important pre-dawn meal means losing out on essential nutrients that help the body endure the long hours of fasting throughout the day.

During the holy month, daily routines change significantly, especially the timing and number of meals. Suhoor, eaten before sunrise, plays a crucial role in preparing the body for the day's fast. A healthy Suhoor provides the energy and nutrients required to sustain the body during fasting hours, helping maintain vitality and concentration.

The importance of Suhoor lies in its ability to fuel the body and maintain hydration levels. Nutrition experts emphasise that a balanced Suhoor meal can reduce fatigue, dizziness and headaches that some people experience while fasting. Skipping the meal, on the other hand, may make the fasting hours feel longer and more physically demanding.

Health specialists note that the choice of food at Suhoor is equally important. Many fasting individuals look for meals that keep them feeling full for longer and help reduce thirst throughout the day. Experts recommend including proteins, complex carbohydrates and adequate fluids in the meal to provide sustained energy during the fasting hours.

The Ministry of Health also advises delaying Suhoor until closer to the dawn prayer, explaining that this helps avoid fasting for excessively long periods. When the gap between meals becomes too long — exceeding 16 hours — the body may experience fatigue and other health challenges. Delaying Suhoor therefore allows the body to better manage hunger and thirst during the day.

At the same time, nutritionists advise avoiding foods that are overly fatty or salty, as these can increase thirst while fasting. Drinking sufficient water and including fibre-rich foods can also help the body stay hydrated and energised.

Beyond its nutritional value, Suhoor carries a special spiritual and social significance during Ramadhan. The quiet moments before dawn offer time for reflection and prayer, adding a deeper dimension to the meal. In many households, family members gather around the table together, sharing conversations and preparing for the day's fast before the call to the dawn prayer.

In this way, Suhoor becomes more than just a meal — it is a moment that blends health, spirituality and family bonding, making it one of the most cherished traditions of Ramadhan nights.

SUHOOR PROVIDES
ESSENTIAL
NUTRIENTS, PROTEINS
AND FLUIDS

EATING CLOSER TO
DAWN WITH CARBS,
PROTEIN, AND FIBRE
HELPS REDUCE
FATIGUE, THIRST, AND
DIZZINESS

SUHOOR IS A MOMENT
FOR REFLECTION,
PRAYER AND FAMILY
BONDING

Delaying Suhoor rather than skipping it helps fasting individuals maintain energy, hydration and overall well-being during the long hours of Ramadhan fasting

DELAY SUHOOR, DON'T SKIP IT



PRODUCTIVEFAMILIES



The Al Seeb Ramadan Festival is on till March 12.

RAMADHAN
FESTIVITIES BEGIN

AL SEEB: The Al Seeb Ramadhan Festival began on Sunday in the Wilayat of Al Seeb, bringing together entrepreneurs, productive families and visitors for a five-day celebration of commerce and culture. The festival is organised by the Social Development Committee in Al Seeb in cooperation with the Omani Women’s Association in the wilayat.

The opening ceremony was attended by several female entrepreneurs from across Oman as well as participants from Gulf and other Arab countries, alongside a number of local productive families showcasing their handmade products and home-based industries.

Hilal bin Hamad al Sarmi, general supervisor of the festival, said the event aims to stimulate commercial and recreational activity in the wilayat while providing a platform for entrepreneurs and families to display and market their products.

Visitors can explore a wide range of consumer goods, handicrafts and locally produced items displayed across the festival halls. — ONA

Dhofar wins top Arab Environmental
Award for invasive plant control

SALALAH: Dhofar Governorate has secured first place in the Environmental Health and Safety category at the 15th edition of the Arab Towns Organization Awards for its Invasive Plant Control Programme targeting the spread of the Parthenium weed.

The programme is being implemented through a national working group comprising Dhofar Municipality, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, and the Environment Authority, with academic and research support from Sultan Qaboos University, Dhofar University, Nizwa University and the Oman Botanic Garden.

Dr Ahmed bin Mohsen al Ghassani, Chairman of Dhofar Municipality and head of the steering committee overseeing the programme, said the achievement reflects the governorate’s commitment to adopting best practices



The motivation serves to further advance environmental initiatives.

in environmental health and safety.

He noted that the Parthenium weed control programme is based on an integrated approach that combines scientific planning, institutional collaboration and continuous field monitoring to limit the spread of the invasive plant and safeguard natural pastures and biodiversity in Dhofar.

Dr Al Ghassani added that Dhofar Governorate continues to strengthen its environmental initiatives in cooperation with relevant authorities to ensure the sustainability of the results achieved and promote a culture of environmental awareness in the community.

He stressed that the Arab recognition serves as motivation to further advance environmental

initiatives and contribute to regional efforts aimed at developing Arab cities and improving the quality of life.

The programme has been implemented in partnership with several government, academic and environmental institutions, which contributed to research, environmental monitoring, community awareness campaigns and field studies on invasive plant species.

The award is presented by the Arab Towns Organization, established in 1983, which seeks to encourage innovation, preserve the identity and heritage of Arab cities, and promote sustainable urban development.

The Environment Health and Safety Award is one of the organisation’s key categories and recognises Arab cities that implement specialised programmes in environmental protection, public health and pollution reduction. – ONA

MoSD cracks down on
unlicensed fundraising

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 9

In a move to enhance transparency and regulate charitable activities, the Ministry of Social Development (MoSD) seized 67 unlicensed fundraising operations across various governorates in 2025, with a combined value of approximately RO 30,000.

Muscat Governorate recorded the highest number of cases at 20, while Al Sharqiyah South reported none.

Hamoud bin Mardad al Shabibi, Adviser to the Minister for Planning and Acting Director-General of Voluntary Work and Civil Society Organisations, emphasised the importance of verifying the legitimacy of donation campaigns to protect donors from fraud and ensure contributions reach their intended recipients.

He highlighted that proper channels, licensed by the ministry, safeguard charitable funds, uphold integrity and minimise illegal practices.

The ministry regulates public fundraising



The ministry urges the public to donate through official channels.

under Ministerial Decision No 336/2024, restricting licensing to authorised entities such as non-profits, social development committees, and officially licensed volunteer teams. Donations must comply with transparency and accountability standards, ensuring all contributions are secure and effectively directed.

To further streamline charitable work, the ministry manages the Jood Charity Platform, comprising 64 volunteer teams, 31 charitable societies and five endowment institutions.

The platform facilitates secure digital donations, provides accurate financial data, and allows donors to track campaigns by licensed entities.

Since its launch, it has attracted over 344,000 donors and raised more than RO 4 million, reinforcing trust and ensuring aid reaches those in need efficiently.

The ministry urges the public to donate through official channels to maintain the integrity of charitable work and strengthen community trust in humanitarian initiatives.

Ministry boosts live animal imports ahead of Eid



MUSCAT: The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources reported that Oman imported a total of 285,890 live animals from January 1 to March 5 to meet rising demand for red meat as Eid al Fitr approaches. Imports included 27,718 heads of cattle and 258,172 sheep and goats, while local production and chilled or frozen meat also contribute to fulfilling market needs. Statistical data revealed a significant increase compared to last year: sheep and goat imports rose from 141,008 heads in January 2025 to 156,419 heads in January 2026, and cattle imports increased from 7,725 to 11,098 heads over the same period, reflecting stronger market demand.

The ministry emphasised its commitment to ensuring a steady supply, coordinating with livestock import companies, and facilitating import operations by simplifying procedures and expediting quarantine transactions.

During this period, 239 livestock import permits were approved to maintain abundant supplies and stable food availability across Oman’s governorates. Authorities continue to monitor market movements and collaborate with relevant entities to ensure sustainable food supplies for consumers. — ONA



Announcement of the tender TND GSI G3 0009/03/2026 for the Supply, Scissor Lift for Al Ghubrah III IWP

GS INIMA (AL GHUBRA) LLC has been awarded with the Engineering, Procurement and Construction of AL GHUBRAH III IWP in Oman, for CAPITAL DESALINATION COMPANY S.A.O.C.

Omani companies are invited to quote their most competitive price **for the supply of Scissor Lift.**

To participate in the bidding please send by **12th March 2026** a copy of CR, copy of VAT certificate and copy of SME card (if any), via e-mail: **ghubrah.3.site@inima.com**, subject: **TND GSI G3 0009/03/2026 Supply Scissor Lifts.**

A reply with bid documents will be sent to candidates on the same day.

Bid closing date: **17th March 2026 1:00PM.**

IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT



This is to inform all customers of **Mohsin Haider Darwish (MHD)** who have handed over their items for repair before **31 December 2025** at our electronics service facility in **Ruwi**, including but not limited to car stereos, music systems, televisions, home appliances, washing machines, air conditioners, weighing scales, and similar items, that they are required to collect their items on or before **15 April 2026**.

Any items not collected by this date will be deemed unclaimed and will be disposed of accordingly, without further notice. **Mohsin Haider Darwish (MHD)** shall not be held responsible or liable for any loss, damage, or claims arising after the above-mentioned deadline.



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Wide-scale’
Iran strikes

The Israeli military said it had launched new “wide-scale” strikes on Tehran, Isfahan and southern Iran.

Rally for
new leader

Thousands flocked to a central square in Tehran in a show of support for Ayatollah Mojtaba Khamenei, appointed as Iran’s supreme leader.

US urges
citizens out of
south Türkiye

Washington has advised non-essential staff to leave its consulate near the southern Turkish city of Adana near a key Nato base.

US, Israel
‘despair’

Iran’s security chief Ali Larijani said that the election of Mojtaba Khamenei to succeed his father had left Israel and the United States in “despair”.

Putin backs
new leader

“At a time when Iran is confronting armed aggression, your tenure in this high position will undoubtedly require great courage and dedication,” the Russian leader added.

G7 to talk oil
reserves

French President Emmanuel Macron said the G7 will discuss a possible release of strategic oil reserves, as war caused crude prices to steam past \$100 a barrel.

One killed
in Israel

Israel’s first responders said a man was killed by shrapnel and another person severely wounded as several blasts rocked central Israel.

Iran blames
Europe

Iran said European countries including France had created the conditions that led to the United States and Israel attacking the Islamic republic.

Qatar arrests
313

Qatari authorities have arrested more than 300 people for sharing images and “misleading information” during days of attacks by Iran.

Israel strikes
Lebanon

An air strike hit Beirut’s southern suburbs, with footage showing large plumes of smoke rising from the area.

Stocks fall

European stock markets slid at the open on the back of surging energy prices caused by the war, after Japan’s Nikkei index of stocks closed down more than five per cent.

China on new
leader

China said it opposes any targeting of Iran’s new supreme leader, after the Israeli military threatened to target any successor to his slain father.

IRAN PLEDGES FEALTY TO NEW LEADER MOJTABA

IRAN’S HARDLINERS staged a show of force on Monday, taking to the streets to proclaim their loyalty to new supreme leader Mojtaba Khamenei, whose rise appeared to dash hopes of a swift end to war in the Middle East causing havoc on global markets. The prospect that one of the most severe disruptions ever to hit global energy supplies could last longer than previously expected sent oil prices surging in record leaps and stock markets into a nosedive. Khamenei, 56, a cleric with a power base among the security forces and their vast business empire, has been declared unacceptable by US President Donald Trump, who has demanded Iran’s unconditional surrender.

Iranian state media showed large crowds in several cities rallying behind the new leader, waving Iranian flags and holding portraits of his father Ali Khamenei, killed by strikes on the war’s first day. In Isfahan, state TV reported the sound of nearby explosions from apparent airstrikes as loyalists gathered in the historic Imam Square, chanting “God is the Greatest” below a stage with portraits of Ali and Mojtaba Khamenei. In Tehran, a eulogist could be heard singing: “Either death or Khamenei, our blood leads to paradise.”

Politicians and institutions issued pledges of loyalty to the new supreme leader. “We will obey the commander-in-chief until the last drop of our blood,” a defence council statement said. Iranians reached by telephone were divided, with supporters of the authorities hailing the choice as a declaration of defiance and opponents fearful it would dash their hopes for change. “I am so happy that he is our new leader. It was a slap in the face to our enemies that thought the system will collapse with the killing of his father. Our late leader’s path will continue,” said university student Zahra Mirbagheri, 21, from Tehran. Israel says its war aim is to overthrow Iran’s system of clerical rule. U.S. officials mainly say Washington’s aim is to destroy Iran’s missile capabilities and nuclear programme, but Trump has said the war could end only with a compliant Iranian government. Israel had said it would kill whoever succeeded the elder Khamenei unless Iran ended its hostile policies. Fox News quoted Trump, who says he must have a say in the choice of new supreme leader, as saying that he was “not happy” with the choice.

The war has effectively shut the Strait of Hormuz, where a fifth of global oil and liquefied natural gas is shipped along Iran’s coast. With tankers unable to sail for over a week, producers have run out of storage and are being forced to stop pumping. Sources said on Monday that Saudi Arabia had curbed production at two oil fields, making the world’s top oil exporter the latest Gulf country forced to reduce output, following Iraq and Kuwait in recent days. Brent crude futures were up nearly 8.4 per cent at \$100.54 per barrel around 1344 GMT, having earlier shot as high as \$119.50 in what would have been the biggest one-day rise on record.

The prospect of a prolonged energy crisis - reviving memories of the Middle East oil shock of the 1970s - sent share markets in Asia and Europe into a tailspin, which carried over to Wall Street after it opened on Monday. Bond yields surged as investors bet that central



Demonstrators wave Iranian national flags as they gather for a rally in support of the new Supreme Leader at Enghelab Square in central Tehran. — AFP



A man walks past a banner depicting an illustration of a younger Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. — AFP



A demonstrator holds a picture of Iran’s new Supreme Leader Ayatollah Mojtaba Khamenei, at Enghelab Square in central Tehran. — AFP

banks would have to cancel rate cuts or impose hikes to fight inflation. The price of gasoline has particular political resonance in the United States, where Trump’s Republicans hope to keep control of Congress in midterm elections in November. He won re-election in 2024 after pledges to end foreign wars and cut the cost of living. “Short-term oil prices, which will drop rapidly when the destruction of the Iran nuclear threat is over, is a very small price to pay for U.S.A., and World, Safety and Peace.” Trump posted on Truth Social on Sunday night. “ONLY FOOLS WOULD THINK DIFFERENTLY!” Tehran was choked in black smoke after an oil refinery was hit, an escalation in strikes on Iran’s domestic energy supplies which appeared to trigger attacks on Washington’s Gulf Arab allies. Thick smoke rose from a refinery in Bahrain, where state oil company Bapco declared force majeure. — Reuters



Women mourners pray and react before the grave of a person killed in recent US-Israeli air strikes at Beheshta Zahra cemetery, Tehran. — AFP

Explosions heard across Doha and sirens sound in Bahrain



A plume of smoke rises over buildings in Doha. — AFP

DOHA/MANAMA: Several more explosions were heard across Doha and warning sirens sounded in Manama on Monday, according to journalists, as Iran pressed its aerial campaign against Gulf neighbours. The oil-rich Gulf states have been targeted by waves of drones and missiles since Tehran launched its retaliation campaign in the wake of the US and Israeli attacks against Iran.

Doha has been targeted by waves of Iranian drones and missiles since Iran launched a sprawling retaliation campaign across the Gulf in the wake of US and Israeli attacks against the Islamic republic. Qatar’s defence ministry said on Monday that its forces had intercepted a missile attack. Bahrain said on Monday that an Iranian drone attack on the island of Sitra injured 32 people overnight, as Gulf nations reported new attacks with Tehran pressing its retaliatory strikes across the region. All of the wounded were Bahraini citizens

and there were four “serious cases”, including children, the health ministry said in a statement carried by the state news agency. The wounded included a 17-year old girl who suffered severe head and eye injuries, and a two-month-old baby, according to the ministry.

Elsewhere in the Gulf, Saudi Arabia’s defence ministry said the kingdom intercepted and destroyed two drones heading towards the Shaybah oil field in the southeast of the country. Kuwait’s defence ministry said the country’s air defences were working to intercept a missile and drone attack on Monday. On Sunday, the Gulf nation was targeted by seven missiles and five drones, according to figures released by authorities.

Several people were also injured on Sunday in an Iranian drone attack on Bahrain’s island of Sitra, the interior ministry said, as journalists reported two loud explosions. In the UAE,

the National Emergency Crisis and Disaster Management Authority said in a statement on X that air defences responded to “a missile threat”.

The United States said on Sunday that it was ordering embassy staff to leave Saudi Arabia as Iran strikes the kingdom. The State Department said in a travel advisory it had “ordered non-emergency US government employees and US government employee family members to leave Saudi Arabia due to safety risks”. Drones hit the US embassy in the Saudi capital Riyadh last week, and drones have also caused damage at the US embassies in Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates. Gulf countries have borne much of Tehran’s response after the United States and Israel launched a massive air campaign against Iran on February 28. Iran’s President Masoud Pezeshkian has warned that the Islamic republic “will be forced to respond” against its neighbours if their territory is used to attack it. — AFP

ANKARA

Nato intercepts missile in Turkish airspace



Ankara on Monday confirmed a second ballistic missile was shot down by Nato defences in Turkish airspace, as Washington urged all of its citizens to leave southeast Türkiye over security concerns. So far, Türkiye appears to have been spared, despite the fact that US troops are stationed at several of its bases, one of which is the Incirlik airbase which lies just outside the southern city of Adana. But on Monday, the US embassy in Türkiye said it had closed its consulate in Adana and advised non-essential staff to leave, with the State Department urging all US citizens to leave the southeast. — AFP

BEIRUT

HRW accuses Israel of unlawful bombs



Human Rights Watch accused Israel of “unlawfully” using white phosphorus over residential parts of a southern Lebanese town last week. “The Israeli military unlawfully used artillery-fired white phosphorus munitions over homes on March 3, 2026, in the southern Lebanese town of Yohmor,” the New York-based rights group said in a report. HRW added that it “verified and geolocated seven images showing airburst white phosphorus munitions being deployed over a residential part of the town and civil defence workers responding to fires in at least two homes and one car in that area”. — AFP

OPINION

People of Middle East deserve to live in peace and prosperity



WHILE IRAN’S missile and drone strikes on neighbouring countries are strongly condemned as ‘dangerous miscalculation’ and a betrayal of the Gulf region, the US and Israel’s attacks on Iran are deemed a violation of international law. The recent escalation of violence in the Middle East has sparked widespread concern, with the international community calling for an immediate ceasefire and a return to diplomacy. The situation is complex, with multiple stakeholders involved, but one thing is clear: the status quo is unsustainable, and a new approach is needed.

Oman, led by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, is a country known for its commitment to peace and diplomacy, and this is evident after it has been actively involved in mediating talks between Iran and the US.

During calls with different world leaders, His Majesty the Sultan has emphasised the importance of respecting sovereignty and territorial integrity, exercising restraint, and halting military operations to preserve regional security and stability.

The conflict has resulted in significant humanitarian losses, with civilians caught in the crossfire. The international community must come together to support efforts towards a peaceful resolution. War should not

mean that the hope of peace is extinguished. It’s crucial that leaders prioritise diplomacy and dialogue to prevent further escalation and protect civilians.

Oman’s efforts are a beacon of hope in a region beset by conflict. The country’s commitment to promoting peace and encouraging dialogue is a model for others to follow.

As emphasised by Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, who has been in close contact with his regional and international counterparts, it’s essential that the international community supports these efforts and works towards a comprehensive and lasting peace.

The path to peace will not be easy, but it’s a journey that must be taken. The people of the Middle East deserve to live in peace and prosperity, free from the scourge of war and violence. Oman is leading the way, and it’s time for others to follow.

In this critical moment, the international community must put aside differences and work towards a common goal: a peaceful and stable Middle East. The alternative is unthinkable. Let’s hope that leaders will rise to the challenge and prioritise peace over conflict.

As the situation continues to unfold, one thing is clear: diplomacy is the only way forward. Oman has shown the way, and

Let’s seize this moment and work towards a brighter future for the Middle East. The future is uncertain, but one thing is clear: peace is possible, and it’s up to us to make it a reality.

it’s time for others to follow. The world is watching, and the people of the Middle East are counting on us.

Let’s work together towards a brighter future, one where peace and diplomacy prevail over conflict and violence. The time for action is now.

The road ahead will be challenging, but with collective effort and commitment, a peaceful resolution is achievable.

The people of the Middle East deserve nothing less. Oman’s leadership in promoting peace and stability is a testament to the power of diplomacy. Let’s build on this momentum and work towards a future where peace reigns supreme. The stakes are high, but the potential rewards are even greater. It’s time for leaders to act.

In the face of adversity, Oman remains steadfast in its commitment to peace. The country’s efforts serve as a reminder that even in the darkest moments, diplomacy can be a powerful tool for change.

As the international community looks to Oman for guidance, it’s clear that the path to peace is paved with cooperation and dialogue.

Let’s seize this moment and work towards a brighter future for the Middle East. The future is uncertain, but one thing is clear: peace is possible, and it’s up to us to make it a reality.

Stranded Iran sailors put Sri Lanka, India in diplomatic dilemma

AMAL JAYASINGHE

Sri Lanka and India are providing sanctuary to 434 sailors from three Iranian naval vessels targeted or threatened by the United States, a diplomatic conundrum as the war spills into the Indian Ocean.

The ships had taken part in a naval exercise organised by India off the coast of Visakhapatnam when the United States and Israel began bombing Iran. For Sri Lanka and India, wary of a US response, the dilemma of what to do with the ships and crew has sent legal officials scouring conventions and the laws of the sea.

IRIS Dena, a frigate, was sunk with a torpedo fired by a US submarine on Wednesday, just outside Sri Lanka’s territorial waters. Between 130 and 180 sailors were on board, and at least 84 were killed.

IRIS Lavan, an amphibious landing ship, docked in India’s southern port of Kochi on Wednesday. It had 183 sailors aboard, now hosted in naval facilities.

IRIS Bushehr, a supply vessel, entered Sri Lankan waters on Thursday, carrying 219 crew members. Among those, 15 remain onboard to assist Sri Lanka’s navy, which has taken full control of the vessel. The total of Iranian sailors hosted by Sri Lanka is currently 251.

The two South Asian nations have not taken sides in the Middle East war and have justified their decision to host the Iranian sailors on humanitarian grounds. “Our approach is that every life is as precious as our own,” Sri Lanka’s President Anura Kumara Dissanayake said in a statement. Sri Lanka maintains close ties with the United States, its biggest export market, and Iran, a key buyer of tea, Sri Lanka’s main export commodity. Indian Foreign Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar spoke in parliament in New Delhi on Monday about the sailors.

“We believe that this was the right thing to do and the Iranian Foreign Minister has expressed his country’s thanks for this humane gesture,” Jaishankar said. Media reports suggested Washington was pressing Sri Lanka not to repatriate the Iranians. But a US State Department spokesperson said their fate was up to Colombo.

“The United States, of course, respects and recognises Sri Lanka’s sovereignty in the handling of this situation,” the spokesperson said.

Sri Lanka is keeping the sailors from the two vessels apart because separate international conventions apply. — AFP

Trump’s fantasy in middle east is crashing down



LYDIA POLGREEN

The author is opinion columnist at The New York Times

If war is God’s way of teaching Americans geography, perhaps it will also serve as a lesson to Trump. It should be a simple one: Other places and other people are real, possessing their own agendas and agency — and America’s actions have consequences it cannot control.

drones not only on American and Israeli targets but also on the Gulf countries — the United Arab Emirates, Qatar and Saudi Arabia — that play host to US military bases. Airports, hotels, data centres and energy infrastructure have been struck, causing chaos. Meanwhile, the Strait of Hormuz, a crucial chokepoint for the export of oil and gas, is all but closed, sending shudders through energy markets.

This is the world Trump tries to disavow — complex and interconnected, resiliently interwoven and yet vulnerable to disruption. The Arabian Gulf embodies it like no other place. An apotheosis of globalisation, it is a crossroads of money, people and power deeply intertwined with not just America’s fortunes but also Trump’s personal wealth. More than anything, it shows up — in its grounded flights, shuttered refineries and intercepted missiles — the fallacy of Fortress America.

Trump neither sought nor received congressional approval, much less international support, for his war. But perhaps the most shocking thing about his cavalier approach is that he seems to have had no idea the Gulf would be a target. In an interview with CNN on Monday, he professed that Iran’s attacks on US allies in the Gulf were “probably the biggest surprise” — despite the fact that just about every country in the region had warned his administration that Iran would surely attack them in retaliation for a US assault.

This thoughtlessness is part of a pattern. For one thing, the Trump administration has given no plausible explanation for the war, offering instead confused and contradictory justifications. Secretary of State Marco Rubio

even suggested that America was effectively bounced into it by the prospect of an imminent Israeli attack on Iran. Trump soon weighed in, claiming that he was actually the one who pressured Israel into the venture. His press secretary, Karoline Leavitt, perhaps offered the closest thing to the truth. “The president had a feeling,” she told reporters on Wednesday, “that Iran was going to strike the United States.” For another, Trump appears strangely uncertain about where the war is heading. “The worst case would be we do this and then somebody takes over who’s as bad as the previous person,” Trump mused on Tuesday, seated in his gilded Oval Office alongside Chancellor Friedrich Merz of Germany. “We don’t want that to happen,” he said, seeming to be considering this very real possibility for the first time. “It would probably be the worst.” It is unsettling how often Trump affects astonishing indifference, as if the most powerful man in the world were merely a spectator to events he has set in motion — and who in any case has little investment in the outcome. But that curious passivity reveals a darker truth. Trump seems to believe that he, like his fantasy America, exists on a different plane, utterly untouchable by the swirl of global events. The devastating consequences of his actions are not just someone else’s fault. They are someone else’s problem, too.

If war is God’s way of teaching Americans geography, perhaps it will also serve as a lesson to Trump. It should be a simple one: Other places and other people are real, possessing their own agendas and agency — and America’s actions have consequences it cannot control. Anything else is pure fantasy. — The New York Times

It’s more than a meal...



LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

The writer is a senior editor of Observer

IFTAR is a word you hear so many times during the month of Ramadhan. An auspicious time when everyone who is fasting simultaneously breaks their fast at the time of the prayer call (Maghrib). I have heard my Omani friends call it Fatoor. Iftar offers a beautiful opportunity to blend the sensory experience of the meal with the deeper communal and spiritual values of Ramadhan.

Iftar also reminds us of togetherness. A team has been volunteering to distribute Iftar packets, with different organisations contributing as their CSR initiatives. The best part has been to see people smile and watch their eyes light up as they receive the packet.

This is the emotional weight of the meal. Sometimes people are on duty and may not be able to reach home on time. As for residents, many of them could be on their own. Yet there are students who are studying abroad. The emptiness can be felt if one is going through the first Iftar alone. Asmahan is a student studying abroad, but she made sure she was back in Muscat on time for Ramadhan. Then there might be someone who has lost a family member. And the sense of emptiness is difficult to overcome.

I can never forget how one person chose

to be with his family while he had his meal. He beautifully recreated the ‘feeling’ of home when the table he was at was significantly quieter. He works at the supermarket. He took a break to have his meal and had his family join him via video. Once done, he bid them bye and went on to continue his work.

Truly, technology has changed the way families in the diaspora break their fast together across time zones.

Food is a living history, and Iftar is a platform that has been showcasing the variety in taste and recipes.

The community Iftars bring together people from all walks of life. And to share your space with someone you have never met before gives one an opportunity to understand the world from a different perspective.

The Iftar at Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque had people of different nationalities, along with individuals who had taken the first steps towards knowing the religion. For many, it was the first Iftar. They were introduced to the process of breaking the fast — dates, water, buttermilk and snacks. And the dates are taken in odd numbers.

It is an intriguing experience to understand the science of the date: a deep dive into the nutritional ‘why’ behind the Sunnah of

This is the emotional weight of the meal. Sometimes people are on duty and may not be able to reach home on time. As for residents, many of them could be on their own

breaking fast with dates and water.

The logistics of generosity are different from person to person. There have been public gatherings of Iftars, which saw participation of 3,000 to 5,000 people.

The focus is to get hot meals to everyone at the exact moment of sunset. A friend said she and her friends found a person capable of cooking large amounts, and they provide incentives for him and the provisions.

Then there are people who are breaking fast on the clock, such as paramedics, firefighters, police, pilots, or ER doctors who have to catch a bite to eat between emergencies.

Then there is the delivery drivers’ and taxi drivers’ sunset:

They might have to spend the ‘golden hour’ delivering Iftar meals to others, often breaking their own fast with a bottle of water on a motorbike or in a car. What is important is not to be in a hurry to reach the destination to break the fast. Safety first. This is why another friend pointed out that it is better to keep dates and water with you. It is common knowledge that traffic gets tighter towards the Iftar, and people are known to become impatient. Once again, the Iftar deadline teaches us the importance of time management.

ASIAN ECONOMIES MOVE TO LIMIT WAR’S IMPACT AT HOME

Faced with soaring prices and disruptions to their oil and gas supplies, Asian countries heavily dependent on fossil fuels from the war-struck Gulf are moving to protect their domestic markets.

South Korean President Lee Jae Myung has said the manufacturing powerhouse, the world’s eighth-largest consumer of crude oil, is moving towards instituting fuel price caps to alleviate pressure on the country’s energy supply.

“We should swiftly introduce and decisively implement a price ceiling system for petroleum products that have recently seen excessive price increases,” he told a Monday cabinet meeting.

His chief of staff said last Friday the country had already secured the “emergency delivery” of four million barrels of crude oil from ports in the United Arab Emirates.

Vietnam has prepared a draft decree that would slash import tax rates to zero on certain petroleum products in a bid to “stabilise the domestic market”, its finance ministry has said.

Current tariffs of 10 per cent on unleaded gasoline and seven per cent on diesel, aviation fuel and kerosene would all be temporarily removed under the decree. According to Japanese news agency Kyodo, Tokyo is considering drawing on its national oil reserves to protect itself against possible prolonged supply disruptions - a measure being demanded by the country’s refiners.

The government said last week that Japan had stocks equivalent to 254 days of crude oil consumption - including reserves held by the private sector - and three weeks of liquefied natural gas (LNG) consumption. Government departments in the Philippines, a country heavily dependent on oil imports, began adopting a four-day working week on Monday to cope with soaring fuel prices.

President Ferdinand Marcos has also ordered all government agencies to reduce their fuel and electricity consumption by 10 to 20 per cent, while police have warned against hoarding as queues were seen forming at some petrol stations.

India has been pushing ahead with imports of Russian oil, after the United States issued a temporary waiver allowing New Delhi to buy Moscow’s oil if it was currently stranded at sea.

An Indian government source, however, said that New Delhi does not need any country’s permission to source the fuel from Russia, its largest crude supplier. The source also said India was “well stocked” with more than 250 million barrels of crude and petroleum products to “handle short-term disruptions”.

The country’s petroleum ministry has reassured the public that India “has sufficient energy reserves”, without ruling out potential measures to mitigate the impact.

According to financial outlet Bloomberg News, China, the world’s second-biggest economy, has asked its main refiners to suspend exports of diesel and gasoline to prioritise domestic needs.

The Middle East accounted for about 57 per cent of China’s direct imports of crude transported by sea in 2025, according to the analysis firm Kpler.

Indonesia, under pressure due to a fiscal policy that worries the markets, warned of the limits of its room for manoeuvre. — AFP

Fake AI satellite imagery spurs war disinformation

THE SATELLITE image posted by an Iranian news outlet looked real: a devastated US base in Qatar. But it was an AI-generated fake, underscoring the accelerating threat of tech-enabled disinformation during wartime. The rise of generative AI has turbocharged the ability of state actors and propagandists to fabricate convincing satellite imagery during major conflicts, a trend that researchers warn carries real-world security implications.

As the US-Israeli war against Iran rages, Tehran Times, an English daily, posted on X a “before vs after” image it claimed showed “completely destroyed” US radar equipment at a base in Qatar.

In fact, it was an AI-manipulated version of a Google Earth image from last year of a US base in Bahrain, researchers said.

The subtle visual giveaways included a row of cars parked in identical positions in both the authentic satellite photo and the manipulated image. Yet the manipulated photo garnered millions of views as it spread across social media in multiple languages, illustrating how users are increasingly failing to distinguish reality from fiction on platforms saturated with AI-generated visuals.

Brady Africk, an open-source intelligence researcher, noted an “increase in manipulated satellite imagery” appearing on social media in the wake of major events, including the Middle East war.

“Many of these manipulated images have the hallmarks of imperfect AI-generation: odd angles, blurred details, and hallucinated features that don’t align with reality,” Africk said.

“Others appear to be an image manipulated manually, often by superimposing indicators of damage or another change on a satellite image that had no such details to begin with,” he said.

Information warfare analyst Tal Hagin flagged another AI-generated satellite image purporting to show that Israeli-US jets had targeted the painted silhouette of an aircraft on the ground in Iran, while Tehran seemingly moved real planes elsewhere. The telltale clues included



A satellite image shows an overview of Ahvaz drone base, amid the US-Israeli conflict with Iran, in Ahvaz, Khuzestan Province, Iran. — AFP

gibberish coordinates embedded in the fake image, which spread across sites including Instagram, Threads and X. AFP detected a SynthID, an invisible watermark meant to identify images created using Google AI. The fabricated satellite images follow the emergence of imposter OSINT - or open-source intelligence - accounts on social media that appear to undermine the work of credible digital investigators.

“Due to the fog of war, it can be very difficult to determine the success of an adversary’s strikes. OSINT came as a solution, using public satellite imagery to circumvent the censorship” inside countries like Iran, Hagin said.

“But it’s now being preyed upon by disinformation agents,” he added.

Reports of fake satellite imagery created or edited using AI also followed the Russia-Ukraine conflict and the four-day war between India and Pakistan last year.

“Manipulated satellite imagery, like other forms of misinformation, can have real-world impacts when people act on the information they come across without verifying its authenticity,” Africk said.

“This can have effects that range

from influencing public opinion on a major issue, like whether or not a country should engage in conflict, to impacting financial markets.”

In the age of AI, authentic high-resolution satellite imagery collected in real time can give decision-makers vital clues to assess security threats and debunk falsehoods from unverified sources.

During a recent militant attack on Niamey airport in Niger, satellite intelligence company Vantor said it detected images circulating online purporting to show the main civilian terminal on fire.

The company’s own satellite imagery helped confirm that the photos were fake, almost certainly generated using AI, Vantor’s Tomi Maxted said.

“When a satellite image is presented as visual evidence in the context of war, it can easily influence how people interpret events,” Bo Zhao, from the University of Washington, said.

As AI-generated imagery grows increasingly convincing, it is “important for the public to approach such visual content with caution and critical awareness,” Zhao said.

SPORTS

PLAYOFFWIN



Akshay Bhatia celebrates his win on the 18th green after a playoff victory in the Arnold Palmer Invitational tournament. — *Imagn Images*

BRILLIANT BHATIA SNATCHES ARNOLD PALMER VICTORY

MIAMI: Akshay Bhatia produced a dazzling charge down the stretch to reel in Daniel Berger before snatching victory in a playoff at the Arnold Palmer Invitational in Florida on Sunday.

A gripping final-day duel at the Bay Hill Club & Lodge in Orlando ended with Bhatia pocketing the third PGA Tour title of his career — all via playoffs — on the first sudden death hole.

Bhatia finished with a closing three-under-par 69, to finish tied on 15 under alongside Berger, who shot a final-round two-under-par 70 for an aggregate 273.

The 24-year-old Bhatia had forced the playoff with an electrifying birdie spree over the back nine after trailing Berger by four shots at the turn.

Bhatia had drifted off the pace with a bogey five on the par-four ninth, but responded to that setback with a brilliant run of four straight birdies to slice into Berger's lead.

Bhatia said his bogey on the ninth had been the catalyst for his charge after the turn.

"I missed that putt on nine, that was just a lack of focus. And then I just played with some anger for those couple holes," he said.

"The putt on 11 was a huge bonus for me. That really switched my momentum." — *AFP*

CHINA BEAT N KOREA TO TOP GROUP B AT WOMEN'S ASIAN CUP



China came back to beat North Korea 2-1.

SYDNEY: Defending champions China fought back from a goal down to beat North Korea 2-1 and top women's Asian Cup Group B and Uzbekistan sealed their quarterfinal place with a 4-0 win over Bangladesh on Monday.

North Korea, second in the group, will face Group A winners Australia in the quarterfinals on Friday in a repeat of the 2010 final, which Australia won on penalties. China, who won all their group games, will play the second-placed team in Group C on Saturday.

Three-time champions North Korea took the lead in the 32nd minute when Han Jin-hong's cross from the right was put away by Kim Kyong-Yong at the Western Sydney Stadium.

China equalised two minutes later, when Shao Ziqin played a corner back to Chen Qiaozhu, whose low left-footed shot from outside the box went through a cluster of defenders and into the net.

China, seeking a record-extending 10th title, took the lead in added time before the break when Zhang Chengxue sneaked past the North Korean defensive line to send a perfect cross for Wang Shuang to fire home. Zhang was initially flagged offside, but a VAR review overturned the decision, and the goal stood. The North Korean players and staff protested the decision as the referee booked coach Ri Song-ho and declared halftime.

In Perth, Uzbekistan's Diyorakhon Khabibullaeva scored early against Bangladesh, before Dildora Nozimova struck twice within four minutes in the second half and Nilufar Kudratova completed the rout. Uzbekistan finished third in Group B with three points. — *Reuters*

Sinner sets up Fonseca clash, Zverev advances

WORLD number two Jannik Sinner took another step toward a first Indian Wells Masters title on Sunday, easing past Denis Shapovalov 6-3, 6-2 to reach the fourth round and a clash with exciting Brazilian teenager Joao Fonseca.

After dropping just two games in his second-round opener against Czech qualifier Dalibor Svrčina, Sinner was caught napping to drop his serve in the opening game.

He responded with confidence against a potentially tricky opponent known for producing winners.

Sinner quickly recouped the break and grabbed another in the eighth game.

"It's a very tough second match for me," the Italian said. "He's a very high-quality player... he had great wins in the past so I'm very happy about today's performance."

With one set in his pocket Sinner was in full control in the second, opening with a break on the way to a 5-2 lead and closing it out with a love game.

"I tried to stay solid on the baseline but also a bit more aggressive in the second set," Sinner said. "It was a tough start for me with a break down but I'm happy how I reacted."

Sinner faces the 19-year-old Fonseca for a place in the quarterfinals.

Fonseca, who saved two match points in his second-round victory over Karen Khachanov, beat another seeded player, American Tommy Paul, 6-2, 6-3.

Fonseca brought the heat, displaying thunderous groundstrokes as he reached the fourth round of a Masters 1000 for the first time.

He said he was eager for the chance to test himself against four-time major winner Sinner. "We tennis players, we look to playing against top players so it's going to be a pleasure — and hopefully I can get the win," he said.

Fourth-seeded German Alexander Zverev held off a determined Brandon Nakashima 7-6 (7/2), 5-7, 6-4.

Zverev didn't have a break point against the 30th-ranked American until the third set. He missed his first two opportunities before finally making one count, breaking Nakashima in the final game to seal the victory.

"He played a fantastic match today,"



Jannik Sinner (ITA) during his third round match defeating Denis Shapovalov (CAN) in the BNP Paribas Open at the Indian Wells Tennis Garden. — *Imagn Images*



Frances Tiafoe (USA) reacts during his third round match against Flavio Cobolli (ITA). — *Imagn Images*

Zverev said of Nakashima, who had 17 aces to Zverev's 15. "He served like I have never seen before. He was hitting his spots well. Every ace was more or less on the line for him, so I've got to give credit to him. He played a great match."

Zverev gained the upper hand in a close-run contest with a dominant first-set tie-breaker, but the American converted

his fifth break chance for a 6-5 lead in the second and leveled the match with a love game. "Definitely happy to get the win because that was a difficult match," said Zverev, who next plays American Frances Tiafoe.

TIEN TOPS SHELTON

Frances Tiafoe beat Flavio Cobolli 6-1, 6-2 in a rematch of last week's final in Acapulco won by the Italian.

Rising US talent Learner Tien knocked off eighth-seeded compatriot Ben Shelton 7-6 (7/3), 4-6, 6-3.

Tien peppered big-serving Shelton with 15 aces while Shelton, apparently still feeling the effects of the illness that slowed him in a second-round win over Reilly Opelka, produced just eight.

"It's great," Tien said of lining up a last-16 shot at 18th-seeded Spaniard Alejandro Davidovich Fokina — a 6-2, 4-6, 6-2 winner over 12th seed Jakub Mensik. — *AFP*

Women's Ramadhan basketball semifinals today

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, MARCH 9

The race for the title enters its decisive stage on Tuesday as the Fifth Ramadhan Women's Basketball Championship for Institutions and Organisations 2026 reaches the semifinals at the sub-hall of Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher.

Two crucial matches are on the schedule between 8:30 pm and 10:30 pm, with the four remaining teams battling for places in the final.

Emerald will take on Shooting Stars in the first semifinal, while Qeem Al Alamiya will meet Betal in the second clash, as each side looks to keep its championship hopes alive.

In the previous round, Shooting Stars secured an important 37-30 victory over Betal in a game that remained competitive for long spells before Shooting Stars imposed their defensive edge and made the most of their structured



Shooting Stars and Betal players in action during the tournament.

attacks in key moments.

For Shooting Stars, Shams al Duha led the way with 11 points, followed by Sara with 10 points and Malak with 8, while Aisha added 4 points.

For Betal, Kristina and Ward stood out with 11 and 10 points respectively, while Bea scored 7 points and Jobs added 6.

The game began in balanced

fashion, with Betal holding a slight edge and finishing the first quarter ahead 10-6.

Shooting Stars then responded strongly in the second quarter through tight defensive pressure and quick fast breaks, scoring 17 points to Betal's 9 to take a 23-19 lead into half-time.

In the third quarter, scoring dropped, but Betal narrowed the gap with 5 points to Shooting Stars' 4, making it 27-24 at the end of the period.

In the final quarter, Shooting Stars maintained their advantage, adding 10 points against Betal's 6 to seal a 37-30 win.

QEEM AL ALAMIYA EDGE EMERALD

In the second match, Qeem Al Alamiya claimed a hard-fought 23-21 victory over Emerald in a contest shaped by defensive discipline and a relatively low scoring rate, with the teams closely matched and the excitement lasting until the

final moments.

Ruba starred for Qeem Al Alamiya with 12 points, while Fatima added 6 and both Ghadeer and Reem contributed 4 points each. For Emerald, Kimia impressed with 14 points, while Saji and Reema scored 4 points apiece, alongside contributions from Tamader and Juhaina.

Emerald started strongly and ended the first quarter ahead 9-4, but Qeem Al Alamiya responded powerfully in the second period, using solid defence and quick transition offence to score 12 points while allowing only 2, taking a 16-11 lead into half-time.

After the break, Emerald cut the deficit in the third quarter by scoring 5 points to Qeem Al Alamiya's 2, but Qeem Al Alamiya still held an 18-16 advantage. In the fourth quarter, both teams scored 5 points, allowing Qeem Al Alamiya to hold on for a narrow 23-21 victory.

SHORT TAKES



India captain Suryakumar Yadav (C) and his teammates celebrate during a victory lap after winning the 2026 ICC T20 World Cup final. — AFP

UNSTOPPABLE INDIA
EYE OLYMPIC GOLD
AFTER WC TITLE

AHMEDABAD: Captain Suryakumar Yadav said gold in 2028 on cricket’s return to the Olympics was India’s next big aim after extending their T20 domination with back-to-back World Cup titles.

Co-hosts India hammered New Zealand by 96 runs in the final in Ahmedabad on Sunday to be the first team to retain the T20 world crown and first to win it three times. It was also the first time a team have won the title on home soil, and they did it with a brand of fearless, attacking cricket.

“It has been very special,” Suryakumar told reporters at a celebratory midnight press conference, as fans across the country flooded into the streets. “And definitely the next goal is Olympics, Olympic gold and also the T20 World Cup that year.”

Los Angeles 2028 will see cricket return to the Olympics for the first time since 1900.

Led by then captain Rohit Sharma, India won the T20 World Cup two years ago in Barbados for their first major title since the 2013 Champions Trophy. “I think that drought ended in 2024 after a really long time and from there we never looked back,” said the 35-year-old. “We played a different brand of cricket in 2024 and from there we understood how this team needs to work (going) forward. “And it’s been a wonderful journey since then.”

Suryakumar added: “We wanted to do something special in front of the home crowd. We want to continue doing that... and never stop.”

Two-time World Cup winner Gautam Gambhir, who succeeded Rahul Dravid as coach after the 2024 World Cup win, wants to carve out his own legacy. “I don’t believe in inheriting anything, I believe in creating something,” said Gambhir, who has not always been universally popular with fans and pundits as the coach.

“And hopefully we’ve created something which probably all of you guys could be proud of, that the kind of brand of cricket we’ve played.” — AFP

KIRSTEN NAMED SRI LANKA COACH

Sri Lanka Cricket said Gary Kirsten would begin a two-year contract on April 15. — Reuters

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka named former South African Test player Gary Kirsten as their new coach on Monday after Sanath Jayasuriya quit following the team’s early exit from the T20 World Cup. Sri Lanka Cricket said Kirsten would begin a two-year contract on April 15, even though Jayasuriya’s contract was not set to expire until the end of June.

Kirsten previously served as India coach from 2008 to 2011, and as South Africa coach from 2011 to 2013. His appointment was part of Sri Lanka’s “efforts to revamp the structure of the National High Performance Centre” responsible for training elite players, the board said in a statement.

Jayasuriya said that he would be the centre’s director. “I will be overall in charge of training and will continue to work with the team,” he said.

Jayasuriya was appointed coach in July 2024. He is one of Sri Lanka’s greatest cricketers, playing 586 internationals, scoring 42 centuries and taking 440 wickets between 1989 and 2011.

Sri Lanka co-hosted the T20 World Cup with eventual winners India but crashed out at the Super Eights stage, their fate sealed by a 61-run defeat to New Zealand. — AFP



India’s Sanju Samson (R) plays a shot as New Zealand’s wicketkeeper Tim Seifert watches during the 2026 ICC Men’s T20 Cricket World Cup final match between India and New Zealand at the Narendra Modi Stadium in Ahmedabad. — AFP

Double super-over drama
to Allen’s record ton

A u s t r a l i a e x i t a f t e r s h o c k l o s s t o b l a c k h o r s e s Z i m b a b w e

INDIA THRASHED New Zealand in the final of the T20 World Cup in Ahmedabad to retain their crown in style. Some memorable storylines from the tournament.

DOUBLE SUPER-OVER DRAMA
South Africa and Afghanistan played out a tie followed by a first-ever double super over in a T20 World Cup to decide the winner of their gripping group contest.

The drama unfolded after Afghanistan posted 187 all out in response to South Africa’s 187-6 in Ahmedabad.

The teams were tied again after a breathless first super over before South Africa won off the final ball of a heart-thumping second sudden-death showdown.

Afghanistan batter Rahmanullah Gurbaz needed four sixes off four balls in the second super over to pull off a win but only managed three before being caught out.

SHOCK AUSTRALIA EXIT
Former champions Australia suffered a shock loss to the tournament’s surprise packages Zimbabwe in a group game after they were dismissed for 146 while chasing 170 for victory.

Without injured fast bowlers Pat Cummins and Josh Hazlewood, Australia suffered another defeat to Sri Lanka to leave their campaign hanging by a thread.

Zimbabwe’s rained-off match with Ireland showed Australia the door as the 2021 winners failed to make the second phase for only the second time in the event’s history.

Australia signed off with a thrashing of Oman but skipper Mitchell Marsh said: “It’s a bitterly disappointed changing room.”

OFF-PITCH TENSIONS
There was an acrimonious and chaotic build-up to the tournament.

Pakistan vowed to boycott their group game against arch-rivals India in support of Bangladesh, who refused to play in India and did not take part in the competition as a result.

They were replaced at the 11th hour by Scotland.

After frantic negotiations with the International Cricket Council, the Pakistan government made a U-turn and the blockbuster match went ahead in Colombo.

India beat Pakistan but it was tense on the



South Africa’s captain Aiden Markram plays a shot during the 2026 ICC Men’s T20 Cricket World Cup semi-final match between New Zealand and South Africa at the Eden Gardens in Kolkata on March 4, 2026. (Photo by Dibyangshu SARKAR / AFP)

field and there were no handshakes between the two captains and teams.

SAMSON’S REDEMPTION
India batsman Sanju Samson redeemed himself in a winner-takes-all contest against the West Indies as his unbeaten 97 helped the co-hosts chase down 196 and reach the semifinals. Samson was not in the original plans as opener but a loss of form for Abhishek Sharma and the need to break a left-handed combination at the top got the wicketkeeper-batter back for the Super Eights. After a cameo against Zimbabwe, Samson made the stage his own at Kolkata’s Eden Gardens as India depended on his 50-ball knock laced with 12 fours and four sixes.

Samson, a devout Catholic, said a silent prayer after he hit the winning boundary and struck another match-winning knock of 89 in the semifinal against England, then starred once more in the final.

ALLEN’S RECORD 100
New Zealand opener Finn Allen struck the tournament’s fastest-ever century, off 33

balls, to own the stage in the first semifinal against South Africa.

South Africa, unbeaten until the knockout match, wilted in the face of Allen’s onslaught as he smacked 10 fours and eight sixes.

New Zealand romped to the victory target of 170 with 7.1 overs to spare.

It was a brutal show of power-hitting by Allen, who surpassed the previous fastest century record, in 47 balls, by West Indies’ Chris Gayle in 2016.

EMOTIONAL ITALY MAKE HISTORY
Debutants Italy, the lowest-ranked side in the 20-team tournament, hammered Nepal by 10 wickets for a historic first win.

It left some of the Italy players in tears of joy and sparked dreams about a bright future for cricket in the football-mad country.

“I don’t think you’ll see many players cry on the field after a win in the group stages,” stand-in captain Harry Manenti said.

“I think you’ve got to appreciate what Italy cricket is bringing to the game, understand that the passion is slightly different with the Italians.” — AFP

SPORTS



Elche's Uruguayan forward #20 Alvaro Rodriguez fights for the ball with Villarreal's Spanish defender #06 Pau Navarro and Villarreal's Spanish midfielder #14 Santi Comesana (R) during the Spanish league match at La Ceramica Stadium in Villarreal. — AFP

VILLARREAL STAY ON ATLETICO’S TAIL, VALENCIA SNATCH WIN

VILLARREAL beat Elche 2-1 on Sunday to keep pace with Atletico Madrid in the battle for third in La Liga.

After Atletico beat Real Sociedad on Saturday, Marcelino Garcia Toral's Yellow Submarine, fourth, pulled level on 54 points.

A little further down Spain's east coast, Valencia came from behind to beat Alaves 3-2 in a match which could prove crucial in their bid to avoid relegation.

Tajon Buchanan and Santiago Mourino's first-half goals were reward for a dominant performance by Villarreal, although Elche's Andre Silva pulled one back late on to make the hosts sweat.

"We relaxed a bit. Until the 70th minute we were dominating the game, then we suffered until the end and that can't happen," Mourino told Movistar.

Villarreal had a host of chances in the first half but Elche goalkeeper Matias Dituro made several good saves to keep Nicolas Pepe and Georges Mikautadze at bay.

Elche started the season superbly but are yet to win in 2026, or away from home across the campaign, and have slumped to 17th, one point above the drop zone.

"I think with a bit more time we could have got level. We finished in the way we should have played the whole game," said Silva.

"After letting in the first goal, the team dropped



Villarreal's Uruguayan defender #15 Santiago Mourino scores his team's second goal during the Spanish league match against Elche CF. — AFP

in morale and we can't do that."

Real Betis, fifth, fell further behind in the race for Champions League football with a 2-0 defeat at Getafe.

Manuel Pellegrini's side now trail Villarreal by 11 points with 11 matches remaining.

Kiko Femenia and Martin Satriano netted for Getafe in a good week for Jose Bordalas's side, who beat Real Madrid on Monday at the Santiago

Bernabeu. The match was paused for a few minutes in the opening stages because of a fight involving several visiting fans sitting in a home area. La Liga said they would investigate the incident.

VALENCIA EDGE ALAVES IN THRILLER

Carlos Corberan's Valencia snatched three late points at home against Alaves, with Hugo Duro netting a penalty in the 99th minute to secure the win.

Valencia climbed to 12th while Alaves are 16th, just two points clear of the relegation zone.

Alaves, on new coach Quique Sanchez Flores's debut at the helm, took the lead from the penalty spot in the second minute through Lucas Boye after Guido Rodriguez fouled Toni Martinez.

There were chances at both ends in a scrappy but entertaining battle, as Valencia pulled level right at the start of the second half.

Javi Guerra calmly fired home after Umar Sadiq teed him up in the box to cheer up Valencia's Mestalla stadium. Argentine striker Boye nodded Alaves back in front with less than 20 minutes remaining from Denis Suarez's corner.

However, Eray Comert struck for Valencia before Duro won and scored his penalty to claim victory for the hosts.

Alaves finished the game with nine men after Jon Pacheco and Ander Guevara were dismissed in the aftermath of the penalty decision, the former for fouling Duro and the latter for his complaints.

"The team kept going and fought to the end... what counts is that we gave everything," Duro told Movistar.

Sevilla and Rayo Vallecano shared a 1-1 draw which left both sides content not to lose and avoid sinking from lower mid-table further towards the bottom three.

On Saturday, La Liga leaders Barcelona restored their four-point gap to Real Madrid at the top of the table with a 1-0 win at Athletic Bilbao. Alvaro Arbeloa's Madrid snatched a last gasp 2-1 win at Celta Vigo on Friday, ahead of Wednesday's challenging Champions League match against Pep Guardiola's Manchester City. — AFP

SPANISH LA LIGA RESULTS ON SUNDAY:

Villarreal 2 (Buchanan 31, Mourino 41) Elche 1 (Silva 83)

Getafe 2 (Femenia 28, Satriano 45+2) Real Betis 0

Sevilla 1 (Adams 13) Rayo Vallecano 1 (Espino 50)

Valencia 3 (Guerra 47, Comert 90, Duro 90+9-pen)

Alaves 2 (Boye 3-pen, 71)

Played Saturday

Osasuna 2 (Barja 89, Budimir 90+4) Mallorca 2 (Muriqi 35, 61)

Levante 1 (Espino 50) Girona 1 (Roca 90+4)

Atletico Madrid 3 (Sorloth 5, Gonzalez 67, 81) Real Sociedad 2 (Soler 9, Oyarzabal 68)

Athletic Bilbao 0 Barcelona 1 (Yamal 68)

Played Friday

Celta Vigo 1 (Iglesias 25) Real Madrid 2 (Tchouameni 11, Valverde 90+5)

AC Milan edge derby to trim Inter’s Serie A lead to 7 points

MILAN, Italy: Pervis Estupinan's first-half goal proved enough for AC Milan to claim a 1-0 derby triumph at the San Siro on Sunday and cut Inter Milan's lead at the top of Serie A to seven points.

Inter could have moved 13 points clear with just 10 matches remaining in the season with victory, but instead Milan kept their title hopes alive and extended their unbeaten run against their city rivals to seven meetings in all competitions.

Estupinan struck 10 minutes before half-time before a dogged defensive display in the second period gave Massimiliano Allegri's Milan a much-needed success.

The Rossoneri, who have still lost only twice in the league this season, are



AC Milan's Pervis Estupinan celebrates scoring their first goal against Inter Milan during the Serie A match at San Siro, Milan, Italy. — Reuters

bidding for their first Scudetto since 2022 and only their second since 2011.

"They still have a seven-point lead and remain the favourites for the title — the championship will be decided from March onwards," said Allegri, after Milan's first league double over Inter since he took them to the title during his first spell in charge 15 years ago. Inter are still on track to regain the crown they lost last term to Napoli, who are 11 points off the pace in third after suffering a series of injuries, but this result leaves them with more work to do. However, neither Milan club have ever won Serie A in a season in which they have lost both derbies. "It's a well-deserved victory," said veteran Milan midfielder Luka Modric.

It was Inter's first Serie A defeat

since the previous derby in November and snapped their eight-match winning run in the league.

FEW CLEAR-CUT CHANCES

Romanian Chivu named Pio Esposito and Ange-Yoan Bonny up front with Marcus Thuram ruled out with illness.

Captain Lautaro Martinez, unable to play due to a calf injury, was named among the substitutes but only to be closer to his teammates.

Milan went close to an early lead as the 40-year-old Modric, watched on by former teammates Sergio Ramos and Mario Mandzukic in the stands, fired narrowly wide after Christian Pulisic had intercepted a loose pass from Inter goalkeeper Yann Sommer.

Milan's excellent team move ended

with Youssouf Fofana playing a perfect through ball into the path of left-back Estupinan. The Ecuadorian took a touch and lashed in his first goal for Milan since signing from Brighton last summer. Earlier, Roma dropped out of the top four and were replaced by Como after Vitinha's late strike grabbed Genoa a 2-1 home win over the capital club. — AFP

SERIE A RESULTS ON SUNDAY:

Lecce 2 (Pierotti 22, Stulic 38-pen)

Cremonese 1 (Bonazzoli 47)

Bologna 1 (Rowe 49) Verona 2 (Frese 53, Bowie 57)

Fiorentina 0 Parma 0

Genoa 2 (Messias 52-pen, Vitinha 80)

Roma 1 (Ndicka 55)

AC Milan 1 (Estupinan 35) Inter Milan 0



MUSCAT STOCK EXCHANGE
7,762.599

BUSINESS

CRUDE OIL
OMAN \$124.68
BRENT \$105.71
LIGHT \$103.06



SHORTTAKES



The benchmark crude traded on the Dubai Mercantile Exchange serves as the reference price for Middle East exports to Asia.

OMAN OIL PRICE JUMPS TO \$124.68 PER BARREL

MUSCAT: The official price of Oman crude oil for May delivery rose to \$124.68 per barrel on Monday, recording a sharp increase of \$24.37 compared with last Friday's price of \$100.31.

The benchmark crude traded on the Dubai Mercantile Exchange serves as the reference price for Middle East exports to Asia and reflects movements in global energy markets.

Meanwhile, the average monthly price of Omani crude for March delivery stood at \$62.17 per barrel, marking an increase of 8 cents compared with the average price for February delivery.

Meanwhile, international oil prices surged over \$119 a barrel, hitting levels not seen since mid-2022, on Monday as some major producers cut supplies and fears of prolonged shipping disruptions gripped the market due to the expanding US-Israeli war with Iran.

Brent crude futures were up \$13.02, or 14%, at \$105.71 per barrel at 09:17 GMT, while US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude futures were up \$12.16, or 13%, at \$103.06.

In a whiplash session, Brent had earlier hit a high of \$119.50 a barrel, indicating the biggest-ever absolute price jump in a single day and WTI reached \$119.48 a barrel. Before the surge on Monday, Brent had already climbed 28% and WTI 36% over last week.

The Strait of Hormuz, through which roughly one-fifth of the world's oil and liquefied natural gas typically passes, is virtually shut.

Also boosting prices is the appointment of Mojtaba Khamenei to succeed his father Ali Khamenei as Iran's supreme leader, signalling that hardliners remain firmly in charge in Tehran a week into its conflict with the United States and Israel.

The war could leave consumers and businesses worldwide facing weeks or months of higher fuel prices even if the conflict, which started on February 28, ends quickly, as suppliers grapple with damaged facilities, disrupted logistics and elevated risks to shipping.

US gasoline contracts surged to their highest since 2022 at around \$3.22 a gallon, at a time when US President Donald Trump has told US consumers the impact on their cost of living would be limited ahead of mid-term elections in November. — Agencies

330 MW clean energy projects advance in Oman

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAR 9

OQAE has reported significant construction progress across its Riyah 1, Riyah 2 and North Oman Solar projects, which are expected to begin operations by the end of 2026 and collectively deliver 330 megawatts (MW) of renewable energy capacity.

Developed in partnership with TotalEnergies with a combined investment exceeding \$230 million, the projects include wind farms at Petroleum Development Oman's Amin and West Nimr fields in southern Oman and the North Oman Solar plant at Saih Nahaydah.

Together, they will supply clean electricity to PDO's grid while supporting the Sultanate of Oman's broader energy transition goals.

The projects have already set several milestones for the country's renewable sector, including the development of Oman's largest wind farm and the execution of the longest inland transport convoy for wind turbine components.

Construction progress has also been substantial. The North Oman Solar project has reached 95 per cent completion of tracker and photovoltaic module installation, with full installation targeted by mid-March 2026.

For the Riyah wind projects, seven turbines with a tip height of 200 metres have been fully installed.

All 36 wind turbine generators have arrived in the country,

The projects were designed to strengthen the local renewable ecosystem while advancing the country's decarbonisation ambitions. These projects were designed from the outset to ensure that every megawatt delivered simultaneously strengthens Oman's industrial base, workforce capability and technical expertise.

KUMAIL SAID
Acting CEO,
OQAE



The projects have already set several milestones for the country's renewable sector.

with 19 already transported to the project sites, while the foundations for all turbines have been completed.

OQAE said the projects have also exceeded their in-country value (ICV) commitments, achieving approximately 30 per cent local content by engaging Omani companies across engineering, logistics, civil works and electrical systems.

Local manufacturers including Voltamp, Oman Cables, Al Kiyumi Switchgear and Al Hassan Switchgear supplied key infrastructure components, while Worley Oman handled substation engineering design and Khimji Ramdas managed specialised logistics and customs services.

Omatisation levels have also surpassed expectations, with 40 per cent Omani workforce participation and the creation of around 150 direct and indirect jobs during development and construction.

In addition, OQAE has launched an on-the-job capability development programme placing 15 Omani professionals in roles across construction management, engineering, HSE and operations to strengthen local expertise in the renewable energy sector.

Kumail Said, Acting CEO of OQ Alternative Energy, said the projects were designed to strengthen the local renewable ecosystem while advancing the country's decarbonisation ambitions.

"These projects were designed from the outset to ensure that every megawatt delivered simultaneously strengthens Oman's industrial base, workforce capability and technical expertise", he said.

The projects form part of OQAE's wider renewable energy portfolio aimed at reducing reliance on natural gas, lowering greenhouse gas emissions and supporting economic diversification in line with Oman Vision 2040.

OMAN'S ELECTRICITY OUTPUT UP 14.6% IN JANUARY

MUSCAT: Total electricity production in the Sultanate of Oman rose by 14.6 per cent by the end of January 2026, reaching 3,256.5 gigawatt-hours (GWh) compared with 2,841.5 GWh during the same period last year, according to preliminary data issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

Net electricity production — which includes output purchased by the Oman Power and Water



Net electricity production also recorded solid growth.

Procurement Company and the Rural Areas Electricity Company — also recorded solid growth.

The data showed that net production increased by 13.9 per cent to 3,132.6 GWh at the end of January 2026, up from 2,749.2 GWh in January 2025.

The increase reflects continued growth in electricity demand alongside the expansion of generation capacity across the Sultanate of Oman as the country advances its energy transition and infrastructure development programmes. — ONA

11th Plan to raise private sector's GDP contribution to 56%

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MAR 9

In light of global economic shifts, the private sector in the Sultanate of Oman is no longer merely a supporting partner but has become the primary driver and backbone upon which the state relies to achieve financial independence and economic diversification, moving away from the volatility of oil prices.

Oman Vision 2040 focuses on the private sector and its leading role in the development process, as well as in transforming the national economy from total dependence on oil to a diversified and sustainable economic model.

In its Eleventh Five-Year Development Plan, the Sultanate of Oman aims to raise the private sector's contribution to GDP to 56%.



Oman Vision 2040 seeks to transform the national economy from total dependence on oil to a diversified and sustainable economic model.

This direction comes within the framework of strengthening partnerships between the public and private sectors, allocating RO 33 million to finance small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and supporting non-oil sectors such

as logistics, tourism and industry under the umbrella of Oman Vision 2040.

The initiative forms part of broader efforts to enhance economic diversification, drive growth and focus on value-added

sectors to reduce reliance on oil.

The Labour Market Committee of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry reviewed several challenges related to the employment environment in the private sector during its meeting chaired by Mohammed bin Hassan Al Ansi.

Participants emphasised the importance of the current phase, which requires integrated efforts and a unified vision among stakeholders to support the private sector and enhance labour market efficiency in Oman, in line with economic development goals and the creation of sustainable job opportunities.

The meeting also discussed the importance of reviewing and regulating the labour market structure to promote economic growth and create new job opportunities.

It further stressed the need to empower, regulate and protect self-employment from illicit business practices, while encouraging young Omanis to pursue entrepreneurship and self-employment.

The Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority noted that the expected strategic economic impact will support Omani start-ups by increasing their contribution to GDP, expanding job opportunities for young Omanis, and improving the Sultanate of Oman's ranking in global start-up indicators.

SMEs are also being enabled to benefit early from programmes available under the Eleventh Five-Year Plan, while incentives are being introduced to support Omani SMEs and entrepreneurs in their management and production processes.

BUSINESS FEATURE

OMANI PORTS PITCHED AS ALTERNATIVE HUBS AMIDST HORMUZ CRISIS

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, MAR 9

WITH growing numbers of carriers avoiding ports inside the Arabian Sea amidst the ongoing conflict in the region, shipping agencies and service providers are highlighting the advantageous position of Omani ports as alternative hubs for cargoes originating from or destined for countries across the Arabian Peninsula.

In recent days, leading shipping lines have introduced measures limiting voyages into the Gulf, citing rising war-risk insurance costs and the heightened risks faced by vessels entering the conflict zone. That zone effectively encompasses the waters of the Arabian Sea, the Strait of Hormuz and much of the Sea of Oman.

For example, MSC — the world’s largest container shipping line — declared an “End of Voyage” for all shipments destined for ports in the Arabian Sea, effectively terminating its contractual responsibility for cargo transiting the Strait of Hormuz. Responsibility for arranging onward transportation and assuming associated risks now rests with cargo owners.

MSC stated that shipments en route would be diverted to the next safe port of discharge, where cargo would be made available for local delivery and recovery, accompanied by a mandatory \$800 per container surcharge to cover deviation costs. All discharge-related expenses, including handling and storage, remain the responsibility of the cargo owner.

Maersk, also ranked among the world’s largest container carriers, has suspended new bookings to and from Oman (with the exception of Port of Salalah), the UAE, Iraq, Kuwait, Jordan, Qatar, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia, citing operational measures to ensure safety and service stability.

The carrier also introduced an emergency surcharge on cargo already in transit to cover alternative routings and operational adjustments. Surcharges amount to \$1,800 per TEU, \$3,000 per forty-foot container and \$3,800 for reefer units.

Chinese shipping and logistics giant COSCO Shipping’s container liner unit likewise suspended new bookings for routes to and from the Middle East, citing the escalating conflict and restrictions in the Strait

The carrier introduced an emergency surcharge on cargo already in transit to cover alternative routings and operational adjustments. Surcharges amount to \$1,800 per TEU, \$3,000 per forty-foot container and \$3,800 for reefer units.

of Hormuz. CMA CGM the France-based global shipping and logistics group, introduced an Emergency Conflict Surcharge of up to \$4,000 per container on Gulf and regional trades, while Hapag-Lloyd implemented a War Risk Surcharge of around \$1,500 per TEU and up to \$3,500 for specialised equipment.

VARYING IMPACTS

While these measures will affect trade flows for Gulf states, the impact on countries outside the conflict zone is comparatively less. Saudi Arabia retains access to global routes via the Red Sea and the UAE can utilise its ports at Fujairah and Khor Fakkan for Sea of Oman connectivity.

Oman’s maritime gateways at Sohar Port, Duqm Port and Salalah Port — located outside the conflict zone — are being promoted as contingency hubs for cargo flows into the Arabian hinterland. Carriers and logistics providers are positioning these ports as stable alternatives capable of absorbing diverted traffic.

Mohammed al Tamami, Co-Founder of well-known fintech venture Mamun, described Oman’s role as a “stabilising bridge between seas, markets and neighbours” during regional disruptions, noting that decades of infrastructure cooperation across the GCC have produced strategic redundancy.

Examples include Kuwait’s downstream investments in Oman, Saudi Arabia’s road connectivity to Duqm, UAE logistics integration through Sohar and planned rail corridors; and interconnected port ecosystems that enhance regional resilience.

As Al Tamami observed, when maritime risk rises, trade typically re-routes rather than stops. Container traffic may shift towards transshipment hubs such as Salalah, while Duqm and Sohar serve industrial and feeder functions. Land corridors linking Oman, the UAE and Saudi Arabia further redistribute cargo and routes through the Al Mazunah Free Zone into Yemen connect Gulf supply chains to wider regional markets, he noted in a post.

ALTERNATIVE CORRIDORS

Service providers are capitalising on potential cargo diversions to Oman by expanding resources to support rerouting. Oman-based integrated logistics and supply chain company

Al Madina Logistics affirmed its readiness to provide integrated logistics solutions that facilitate the movement of goods through Oman to regional markets, leveraging the Sultanate of Oman’s transport infrastructure and gateway position. The company also operates strategic logistics facilities, including the Muscat Container Depot, the Sohar Logistics Hub and the Mazunah Dry Port, which support local and regional trade.

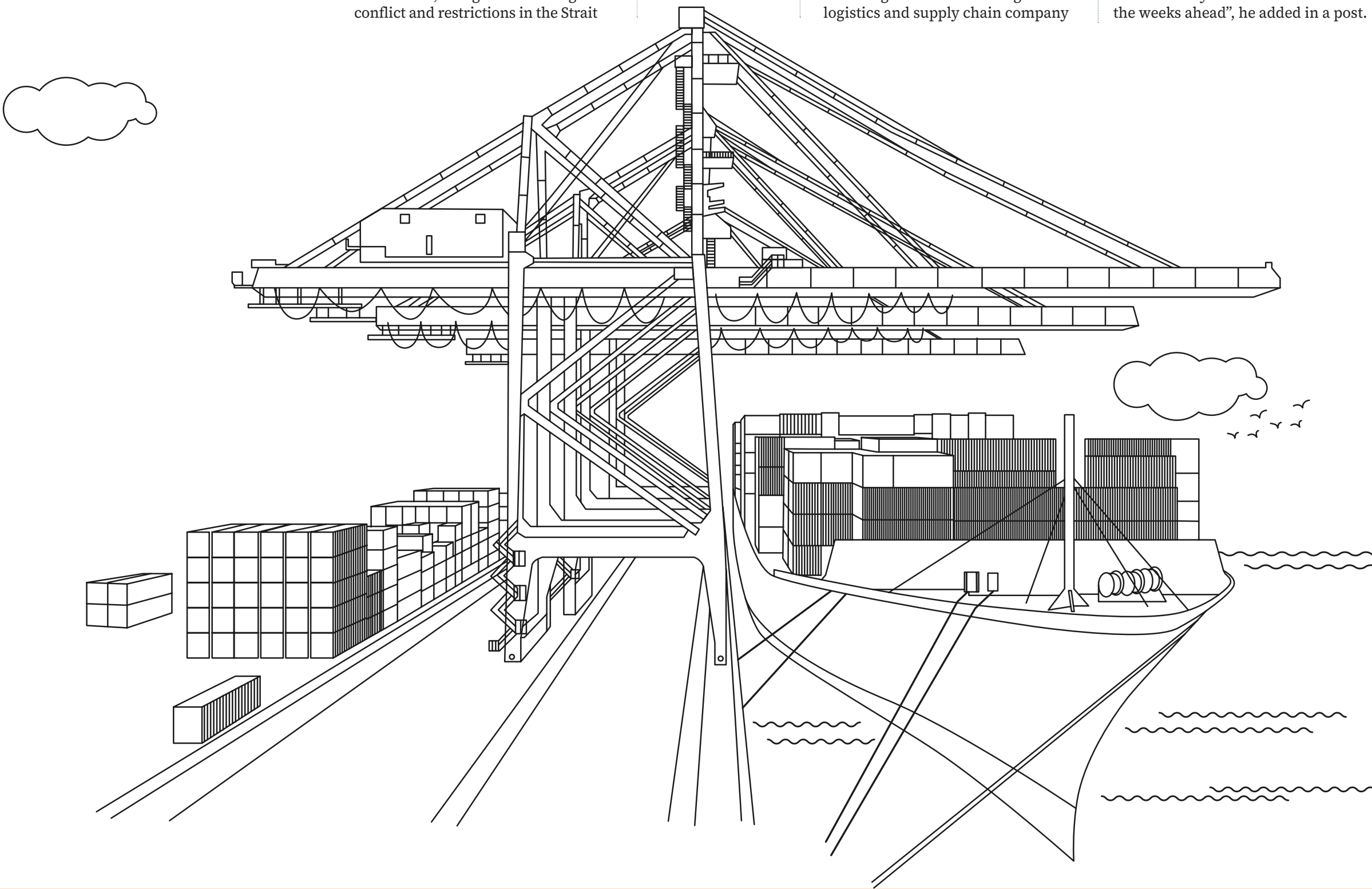
Kanoo Logistics — the logistics and supply chain arm of the Yusuf Bin Ahmed Kanoo Group — noted growing demand for stable alternative corridors amidst disruptions, highlighting SOHAR Port and Freezone as an effective gateway for supply chain continuity. The company emphasised its ability to leverage Oman’s multimodal infrastructure and road connectivity to GCC markets, enabling cargo rerouting and uninterrupted logistics operations.

SOHAR’s strengths include sea-road connectivity to GCC destinations, dedicated customs and documentation services; and secure handling of transit cargo with duty and VAT deposit arrangements. Cross-border trucking services into Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Qatar, Kuwait and Bahrain further support regional distribution, while ongoing monitoring of border conditions optimises transit times, Kanoo stated in a post.

Thus, while ports outside the Gulf are expected to double as alternative hubs amid the conflict, maritime experts caution that congestion and overcapacity could emerge as rerouted shipments place additional pressure on some terminals.

Alfredo Busiello, an expert in the container shipping industry, commented: “While ports such as Khor Fakkan and Salalah may absorb part of the additional workload, their ability to mitigate the disruption remains limited due to the sudden spike in diverted volumes.

The industry will now require: Strong coordination across carriers, shippers and logistics stakeholders; Agile planning and routing flexibility; and Clear communication throughout the supply chain. The overall impact on schedules, equipment availability and transit times is likely to be considerable in the weeks ahead”, he added in a post.



SHORTTAKES



Dr Yousuf Hamed al Balushi talks at the event.

OMAN AND INDIA STRENGTHEN ECONOMIC TIES AT CEPA SEMINAR

MUSCAT: Oman and India reaffirmed their strong and growing economic partnership during a high-level business seminar on “Leveraging the India–Oman Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA)”, which was held in Kochi (India) recently. The seminar brought together senior government officials, diplomats, policy experts and leading business representatives from both countries to explore strategic trade and investment opportunities under the CEPA framework.

A dedicated panel discussion on ‘India–Oman Trade and Investment Opportunities under CEPA’ was moderated by Dr Davis Kallukaran, Deputy Chairman, Foreign Investment Committee, OCCI. The panelists included Dr P Mohamed Ali, Founder, Galfar Group; Dr M I Sahadulla, Group Chairman & Managing Director, KIMS Health; Dr Siddeek Ahmed, Chairman & Managing Director, Eram Group; Abdul Latheef Uppala, board member OCCI; Sheraz Anwar, Director, Abad Group; and Anirudh Sankar, Senior Official, DGFT Kochi.

The panel deliberated on sector-specific collaboration in infrastructure development, healthcare services, industrial partnerships, export facilitation and regulatory alignment, while highlighting practical pathways for strengthening private-sector engagement between Oman and India.

The sessions that followed focused on ‘How Oman Vision 2040 is aligned with CEPA’, presented by Dr Yousuf Hamed al Balushi, Economic Advisor & Research Analyst, Oman, and a presentation on the Special Economic Zones and Free Zones of Oman and Madayn by Yarub Nasser al Siyabi, Specialist at OPAZ. The speakers highlighted priority sectors under Vision 2040 and significant investment potential within Duqm and other strategic economic zones.

QASIM AL MAASHANI

MUSCAT, MAR 9

Oman ranks among the key desalination producers in the Middle East — a region that accounts for nearly half of global contracted desalination capacity, according to a peer-reviewed review published in npj Clean Water, a Nature Portfolio journal.

The study said the Middle East’s contracted desalination capacity reached 60.1 million cubic metres per day (m3/d) by the end of 2023, equal to 46.9 per cent of the global total. The region’s operational capacity stood at 28.96 million m3/d, or 41.8 per cent of global output, underlining desalination’s central

role in water security across one of the world’s most water-stressed regions.

The paper places Oman among the major contributors to seawater desalination in the Middle East and highlights a broader regional shift towards seawater reverse osmosis (SWRO), which is increasingly preferred over older thermal technologies because of lower energy use.

Researchers said SWRO typically consumes 4 to 6 kilowatt-hours per cubic metre, compared with 18.3 to 28.5 kWh/m3 for multi-stage flash and 14.2 to 21.6 kWh/m3 for multi-effect distillation.

That transition is already visible in Oman’s own project



Major desalinated water sources in Oman are dominated by RO-based plants.

pipeline. Nama Power and Water Procurement Company said in its Water 7-Year Statement 2026–2032 that major desalinated water sources in the Main Interconnected System are dominated by RO-based plants, including Ghubrah II at 191,000 m3/d, Qurayyat at 200,000 m3/d, Barka IV at 281,000 m3/d, Barka V at 100,000 m3/d and Sohar IV at 250,000 m3/d. A new Ghubrah III plant is also under construction with planned capacity of 300,000 m3/d and expected commercial operation from February 2027.

The review said more than 70 per cent of desalinated water produced by the region’s top contributors goes to utility companies, mainly to supply municipalities and support

industrial activity. It also found that while most desalination plants in the Middle East are small to medium in number, a smaller group of very large plants accounts for a substantial share of production.

The authors said desalination has become a strategic infrastructure pillar in the Middle East as climate pressure, drought risk, population growth and limited conventional freshwater resources continue to raise demand for reliable non-conventional water supplies

They added that the region is expected to contract an additional 20.9 mm3/d of seawater desalination capacity between 2024 and 2028, equivalent to 53.1% of projected new global contracted capacity.

SAFE-HAVEN FX

Dollar jumps as oil nears \$120



The US dollar surged on Monday as escalating Middle East conflict pushed oil prices close to \$120 a barrel, prompting investors to seek safe-haven assets.

The euro and sterling fell 0.7% and 0.8% against the dollar, while the Australian dollar and Swiss franc slipped about 0.6%. Analysts said the dollar is supported by its haven status and the US’ position as a major net energy exporter. — Reuters

CHIP TENSIONS

China warns of fresh chip shortage



China’s commerce ministry warned that renewed tensions involving Dutch chipmaker Nexperia and its Chinese subsidiary could trigger another global semiconductor shortage.

The dispute follows earlier export controls imposed by Beijing after the Netherlands seized the company from Chinese parent Wingtech. Nexperia chips are widely used in automotive electronics. — Reuters

AVIATION PRESSURE

Airline stocks tumble as oil spikes



Airline shares across Asia slumped on Monday as oil prices surged and the US-Israeli conflict with Iran intensified. Oil jumped about 20% in, raising fuel costs for carriers already facing airspace restrictions in the Middle East.

Travellers have rushed to exit the region, driving demand for last-minute flights, overland routes and private jet charters as commercial evacuation capacity remains limited. — Reuters

Oman Cement turns to waste as fuel alternative

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, MAR 9

OMAN

Cement Company has announced the launch of a project that harnesses industrial waste to supplement its energy requirements while reducing its dependence on fossil fuels, chiefly natural gas.

Currently installed at the cement manufacturer’s Misfah complex in Muscat Governorate is a shredding machine designed to prepare industrial waste as a fuel resource. At the same time, a contract has been awarded for the supply and installation of a plant that will feed industrial waste into Kiln-1.

The initiative is part of the publicly listed company’s strategy to enhance efficiency, increase capacity and reduce reliance on fossil fuels, said Xu Gang, Chairman of the Board of Directors of Oman Cement.

It also aligns with Oman Vision 2040 and the company’s broader decarbonisation goals, he stated in the company’s 2025 annual report.



The initiative is part of Oman Cement’s broader decarbonisation strategy.

Earlier in 2024, Oman Cement announced plans to invest in a waste-to-energy plant designed to utilise Refuse Derived Fuel (RDF) — a form of processed municipal solid waste — as an alternative source of energy supply.

RDF derived from municipal solid waste typically consists of different types of waste, such as non-recyclable plastic and paper, wood chips and sawdust and other mixed combustible materials processed according to required specifications.

Previously in February 2020, Oman Environmental Services Holding Company (be’ah) had formalised a deal to supply Oman Cement with processed

scrap tyres as a fuel resource for use in its cement kilns . Under the agreement, be’ah committed to supplying around 30,000 tonnes per annum of Tyre-Derived Fuel (TDF) processed from scrap tyres.

“The company is, under its alternative fuel initiatives, considering using products derived from municipal solid waste to reduce gas consumption towards decarbonisation in line with Oman Vision 2040”, the Chairman stated.

Oman Cement reported modest operational growth in 2025, with clinker production rising to 2.97 million tonnes and cement output reaching 3.38

million tonnes, representing increases of 3.39% and 2.19% respectively compared with the previous year.

Cement sales volumes also climbed 2.9% to 3.40 million tonnes, generating revenues of RO 68.94 million, slightly higher than the RO 67.65 million recorded a year earlier. Clinker sales more than doubled to 57,554 tonnes, reflecting the company’s efforts to diversify its product mix.

Despite higher production and sales volumes, profitability declined during the year. Profit before tax fell to RO 9.57 million from RO 13.07 million in the previous year, while profit after tax dropped to RO 8.30 million from RO 11.12 million.

The decline was attributed mainly to higher natural gas and electricity costs, increased lease rentals and greater kaolin consumption, among other factors.

Oman Cement is majority-owned by Hong Kong-based Huaxin International Holdings Limited through its wholly owned subsidiary, the Mauritius-based Abra Holdings Limited.

Transport Ministry promotes investment in roads

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology reviewed the technical and economic objectives of investment road projects during a meeting aimed at expanding private sector participation in infrastructure development.

The session outlined mechanisms for submitting investment proposals and clarified participation requirements, enabling investors to explore opportunities in the road sector.

An open discussion was also held with participating companies to address inquiries related to the technical, financial and regulatory aspects of the projects. The ministry said the initiatives form part of broader efforts to



The meeting was attended by Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali and Eng Khamis bin Mohammed al Shammakhi.

strengthen public-private partnerships and enhance transparency while creating an attractive and competitive investment environment.

These projects are expected to contribute to the development of the national road network, improve operational efficiency and provide alternative routes that shorten travel distances and facilitate smoother mobility for residents.

The meeting was attended by Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, Eng Khamis bin Mohammed al Shammakhi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology for Transport. — ONA

OPINION

Is this a real or fake AI video?



**TARIQ
AL BARWANI**

The writer is strategic adviser, businessman and motivational speaker.

I keep receiving videos from friends and family with the question, “Is this real or a fake AI video?” Hence, I decided to answer the same by writing an article about it.

You may have received a video that appeared to show a well-known public figure saying something controversial. That video looked very real and convincing and matched the voice of the public figure in question.

The facial expression seemed natural and everything looked just somewhat perfect to you. The same video is also shared and circulated across many other social media and network platforms/channels. Almost everyone is reacting emotionally to it for believing that it is real. The reality, however, is that the video was not real but rather a fake, generated AI video.

You were fooled! But you are not alone. Every Tom, Dick and Harry had the same experience. I did too until I learned some tips.

Over 30+ years exploring, experimenting and working on finding the best and different ways to impact the society with technology, I have never come across a tool as close as the Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) — where it offers amazing benefits for productivity (in many areas of life, be it

personal or professional) yet also has a very serious dark side, including the “deep fake” videos that continue to negatively impact the society with misinformation.

AI can generate videos that look incredibly authentic. With the right tools, someone can create a video of a person saying words they never actually said. While this technology has legitimate uses in entertainment, education and creative industries, it also opens the door for misinformation, scams and reputational damage.

According to an industry report, the number of deepfake videos online is increasing dramatically. Over 90% of deepfake videos involve manipulated faces or voices. I am sure you too are witnessing the same from the kind of videos and messages you get on a daily basis.

How can we find out if a video is real or fake? Please note that AI is a master of patterns and AI continues to improve, yet as of date, AI struggles with the nuances of human biology and physics. What you need to do is develop a “critical eye”, some “common sense” and “validating and investigating” skills while viewing any videos you receive.

First, watch the facial details and

AI can generate videos that look incredibly authentic. With the right tools, someone can create a video of a person saying words they never actually said. While this technology has legitimate uses in entertainment, education and creative industries, it also opens the door for misinformation, scams and reputational damage.

expression of the speaker in the video carefully. Watch the way his/her eyes are blinking. They would not be natural (as we blink every few seconds). Watch closely and you will notice they look unnatural.

Furthermore, you will notice at times that the eyes don’t follow the movement of the head.

Secondly, focus on how he/she talks. While the audio sound may sound right, the mouth would not move correctly in some of the sentences. If you notice closely, the lips may not perfectly match the spoken words.

Third, and the most important way I follow is validating and verifying whether what I see makes sense and is from a reputable source, ie, official media has reported the same. If I don’t mind any source and if the video was only shared via WhatsApp, then it’s likely a fake AI-generated video.

In conclusion, while AI continues to evolve rapidly, our awareness must evolve with it too. We can no longer believe everything we see online. Taking a moment to question, verify and apply common sense can prevent the spread of misinformation. AI itself is not the problem; it is a powerful technology with many benefits when used responsibly. The real challenge lies in how we respond to it.

NEW DELHI HAS WEAK HAND IN BANK DEAL FRENZY

SHRITAMA BOSE

A dealmaking boom in India’s banking sector has an unlikely loser: the government. Canadian insurance holding firm Fairfax Financial leads the race to buy a 61% stake from Indian state entities in \$13 billion IDBI Bank, Bloomberg reported in February, citing sources.

An \$8 billion transaction would be the largest-ever foreign direct investment in a local bank. But crystallising a premium valuation looks challenging.

A deal would complete a full circle for the lender hardest hit by an asset quality crisis: in 2018, bad loans comprised nearly one-third of its portfolio.

Provisions for that sour pool eroded its capital base and prompted New Delhi, which then owned 86% of IDBI, to press state-backed Life Insurance Corporation to pump in 216 billion rupees, or \$2.4 billion at current rates, to raise its 8% stake to 51% in 2019.

LIC now holds 49% of IDBI’s shares and the government owns 45%. Selling a 30% stake to Fairfax at the latest market price would fetch the insurer a 136% return on its 2019 investment. New Delhi would be worse off, though: the lender’s shares trade lower than they did 13 years ago.

Yet even current multiples may be difficult to fetch. IDBI’s shares are trading at about 2 times forward book value, almost twice that of similar-sized rivals Yes Bank and IDFC First Bank.

Throwing in employee liabilities, restructuring costs and the likely absence of indemnity clauses gives the buyer a strong case for a discount.

An abundance of takeover targets has hurt New Delhi, too. Launched in 2022, the slow-moving sale process of IDBI prompted early potential bidders to look elsewhere: last year Sumitomo Mitsui Banking Corporation bought a 24% stake in Yes Bank.

With Emirates NBD still in the reckoning with Fairfax, it’s a two-horse race to own IDBI. Both bidders already have a foothold in India’s credit market: the Dubai-headquartered lender is set to take control of the \$2 billion RBL Bank and Fairfax owns \$675 million CSB Bank.

That chips away at any shred of bargaining power left with the sellers, who can hardly demand a control premium. Regulations cap voting rights of private bank shareholders at 26%.

That puts the new owner effectively at par on voting decisions with LIC and the government, which will hold a combined 34% after the sale. To maximise takings, officials could ask the central bank to relax the voting rule. The other option is to reduce their total stake to well below 26%.

Otherwise, New Delhi risks catching the weak end of India’s banking M&A wave. — Reuters

20 million barrels a day: Geography drives Gulf oil

EVERY day, approximately twenty million barrels of crude oil transit through a single waterway thirty-four kilometres wide and sixty metres deep.

That volume represents roughly one-fifth of global oil consumption. Alongside it flows roughly a quarter of the world’s liquefied natural gas, destined overwhelmingly for China, Japan, India, the EU and South Korea.

A tanker passes every few minutes. Nearly one hundred vessels a day. The energy that heats Asian homes, powers Chinese factories and fuels Indian industry funnels through this narrow passage between two shorelines. When that passage is disrupted — as it now is — the consequences are not regional. They are global.

But the deeper question is not about the current disruption. It is about what happens next. Maritime chokepoints have been contested throughout recorded history and this strait has been threatened or instrumentalised in nearly every Gulf crisis of the past four decades.

What changes is the trigger; what remains constant is the vulnerability. For nations whose economies depend on uninterrupted passage through a waterway they do not fully control, the question is no longer whether disruption will recur. It is how to build an economic architecture that functions even when disruption occurs.

Classical economics identifies four factors of production: land, labour, capital and enterprise. For most of the twentieth century, Gulf economies understood ‘land’ primarily as what lay beneath it — hydrocarbons.

The surface was incidental; the subsurface was everything. But the current crisis demands a fundamental reassessment. Land is not merely a repository of natural resources. It is location. It is connectivity.

It is the physical position of a nation relative to the trade routes, the ports, the rail corridors and the logistics networks that determine whether goods, energy and people can move freely.

In a world where maritime passages can be closed in hours, the geography above the ground — the



Land is not merely a repository of natural resources. It is location. It is connectivity.



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The writer is founder and CEO - Smart Investment Gateway, economists, board adviser & business transformation mentor.

roads, the railways, the ports that sit outside chokepoints, the overland corridors that connect producer to consumer without depending on a single strait — becomes the most consequential factor of production a nation possesses.

This is not theoretical. The alternative infrastructure either already exists or is under construction. Rail corridors now connect Gulf ports to hinterland markets by land. Deep-water port complexes on the Arabian Sea provide access to the Indian Ocean without transiting any chokepoint.

Multimodal logistics networks link the Gulf to the Red Sea, East Africa and the Indian subcontinent through routes no single state can blockade. The engineering and commercial logic for chokepoint-free trade corridors is already established. What has been absent is the collective will to prioritise them — and a sufficiently visceral demonstration of why they matter. That demonstration is now underway.

The case for regional collaboration has never been more compelling. The Gulf Cooperation Council was founded on the principle that collective economic security is stronger than individual vulnerability.

That principle has never been tested as directly as it is today. When pharmaceutical supply chains serving sixty million citizens are hostage to a single waterway; when food imports depend on passage through contested waters; when insurance premiums surge overnight and shipping lines suspend operations — the response cannot be national. It must be regional and it must be structural.

What does structural resilience

look like? It looks like accelerated investment in rail corridors connecting Gulf ports to Gulf markets by land.

It looks like shared pharmaceutical and food strategic reserves at facilities on the Arabian Sea that no blockade can reach. It looks like cold-chain logistics enabling temperature-sensitive medicines to move by rail between GCC capitals in hours.

It looks like trade agreements — such as the recently ratified India–Oman Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), with near-complete tariff elimination — that create direct corridors between Gulf producers and Asian consumers, independent of any chokepoint.

And it looks like a GCC-wide commitment to treating supply chain resilience as sovereign infrastructure — as essential as defence, yet far less costly to build. There is a further dimension that deserves candid acknowledgement.

The nations whose economic infrastructure has proven most resilient during this crisis are not the most militarised. They are the most diplomatically balanced.

Neutrality — genuine, consistent, institutionalised neutrality — has demonstrated its value not merely as a diplomatic posture, but as an economic asset.

Jurisdictions that maintain constructive relationships across all geopolitical axes, that invest in mediation rather than confrontation, have emerged with their ports operational, their airspace open and their credibility intact. That is not coincidence. It is strategy. And it is a strategy the entire Gulf would benefit from studying.

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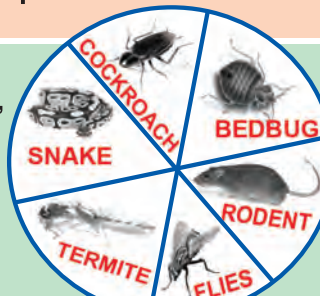
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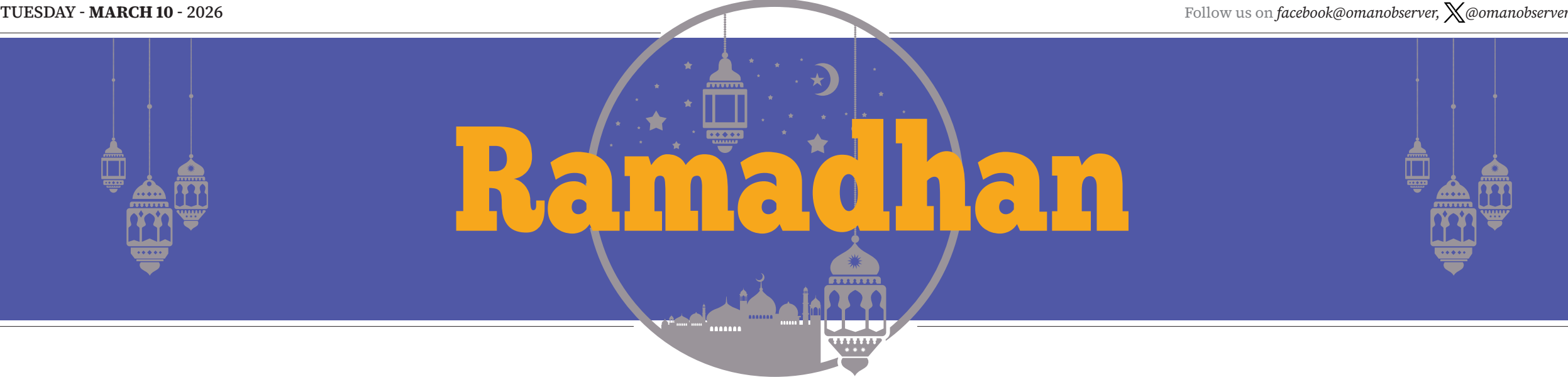


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FAITH, FOOD AND COMMUNITY SPIRIT BLEND DURING HOLY MONTH IN INDIA



KABEER YOUSUF

In India, from east to west and north to south, the holy month of Ramadhan is observed in its full spirit as people join hands in celebrating the 30 days' fasting and other rituals with a whole lot of enthusiasm and solidarity. People engage in besides the obligatory fasting, prayer, reflection and charity, they take this as a season for networking as better community life spills gently into bazaars, railway stations, campuses, kitchens and neighbourhood streets. With Muslims forming 17.22 crore people (14.2 per cent of India's population, according to census 2011), Ramadhan is intimate and nationwide, shaped by local languages, food cultures and regional histories. From Kashmir to Kerala, the rhythm is recognisable. People begin the fast with sehri (pre dawn meal), spend the day in regular work and study; and break the fast at sunset with iftar. Mosques host Taraweeh prayers at night and families intensify holy Quran recitation and charitable giving. What is distinct in India is how often these private acts intersect with public life: neighbourhood iftar tables extend into lanes, vendors adjust work



hours around prayer time and non Muslims colleagues frequently accommodate fasting friends with small everyday courtesies.

DELHI
In Delhi, the iftar scene around Jama Masjid is both devotional and communal. People gather to break the fast near one of the country's best known mosques and the surrounding area becomes a moving portrait of India's pluralism: families, students, tourists and working professionals navigating the same streets and food stalls. Iftar at Jama Masjid is a cultural experience tied to the city's identity.

MUMBAI
Mumbai's Ramadhan nights are famous for how the city reorganises itself after sunset. Areas around Mohammed Ali Road and nearby neighbourhoods turn into late night food corridors where the fast is broken amidst intense street energy. Coverage of the area highlights how Ramadhan draws people for iftar food walks and legacy eateries, turning faith seasonality into an annual civic festival that many non-Muslims also participate in.

HYDERABAD
If one city's Ramadhan food has become a cultural emblem, it is

Hyderabad's haleem. The dish is closely associated with Ramadhan iftar in the city and is treated as a part of Hyderabad's public identity.

KERALA AND SOUTH INDIA
In Kerala and parts of Tamil Nadu, Ramadhan carries a strong community care dimension through foods designed for gentle nourishment after fasting. Nombu kanji (Ramadhan kanji), a comforting rice and lentil porridge often made with coconut milk and spices, is widely described as a traditional Ramadhan preparation in the south.

KOLKATA
Kolkata's Ramadhan evenings are also intensely public. Reporting on Zakaria Street points to seasonal iftar street food as something that has visibly grown into a citywide attraction, with many eateries appearing specifically during Ramadhan.

IFTAR A BRIDGE
Some of the strongest examples of India's inclusiveness during Ramadhan appear when neighbours make deliberate interfaith choices. One widely cited case in Delhi describes a gurdwara hosting iftar with hundreds gathering to share a meal.

FATWA

QUESTION & ANSWER

Shaikh
Dr Kahlan
Al Kharousi

Assistant Grand
Mufti of the
Sultanate
of Oman

QUESTION

Does applying hand and face moisturising cream or oil invalidate fasting?

ANSWER

Things such as ointments, oils and creams applied on the skin do not invalidate fasting

QURAN

VERSE OF THE DAY

﴿وَاصْبِرْ وَمَا صَبْرُكَ إِلَّا بِاللَّهِ وَلَا تَحْزَنْ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا تَكُ فِي ضَلٰىٰلٍ مِّمَّا يَمْكُرُونَ﴾

Act patient; your patience comes only from Allah (God). Do not feel saddened because of them nor be in any anguish over how they plot.

[Surat Al Nahl] – Verse 127

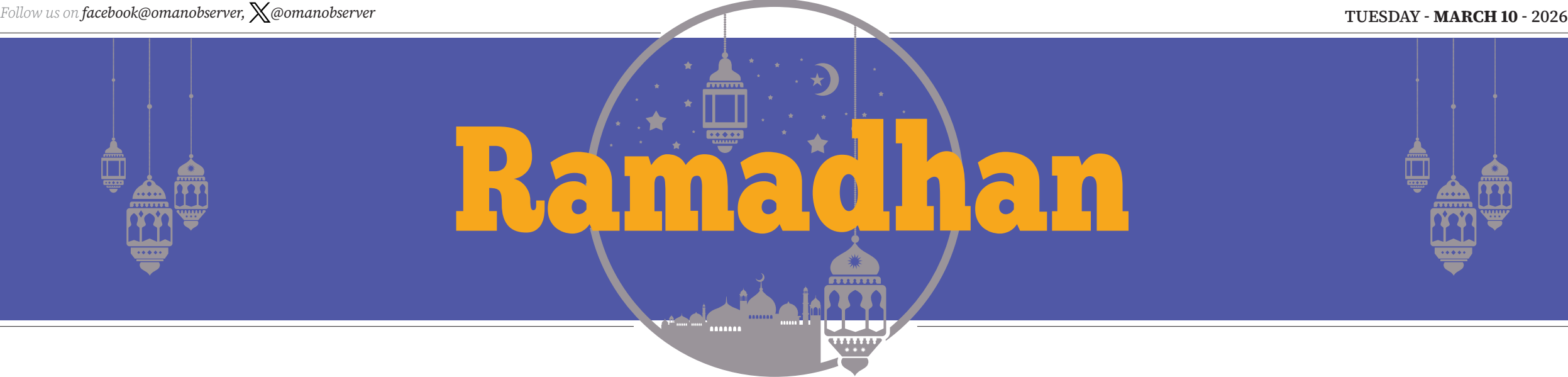
HADITH

A GUIDE FOR THE FAITHFUL

Abu Musa al Ash'ari (May Allah be pleased with him) reported:
Messenger of Allah (PBUH) said,

“He who observes the Fajr and ‘Asr (prayers) will enter Jannah”.

[Sahih al Bukhari]



Volunteers bring iftar to motorists at traffic lights



YERU EBUEN

AS soon as the traffic lights turn red and vehicles come to a halt, a group of young volunteers steps onto the road. To an observer, the movement appears almost choreographed. They fan out swiftly but calmly between rows of stationary cars as drivers lower their windows with quiet smiles.

A brief greeting follows, sometimes nothing more than a nod or a soft “Ramadhan Kareem”. The volunteers then hand out small food parcels, simple kits prepared for the moment the fast is broken. Inside are the essentials of iftar: dates, a bottle of water or laban and occasionally fruit or juice, foods chosen for practicality and nourishment.

Within seconds the exchange is complete. A prayer of thanks is murmured, a hand raised in gratitude and the volunteers move to the next vehicle before the traffic lights change again.

Across Muscat, this quiet ritual unfolds almost every evening during Ramadhan. At busy intersections, neighbourhood roads and outside mosques preparing for evening prayers, young Omanis gather with



boxes of dates and drinks ready for drivers still on the road when the call to prayer signals the end of the day’s fast.

What might appear spontaneous has become one of the most recognisable traditions of Ramadhan in Oman, an informal but deeply rooted expression of charity. Volunteers organise through neighbourhood groups, student associations and local initiatives. In the hours before sunset, homes and community halls turn into small assembly lines where dates are packed, bottles arranged and bags prepared for distribution.

The parcels remain intentionally modest: a few dates, a drink, sometimes fruit.

Yet the gesture carries meaning far greater than its contents. In Ramadhan, acts of charity and compassion hold special significance and these roadside exchanges embody that spirit, ensuring even a stranger can break their fast on time.

For many drivers, especially delivery workers and expatriates, the gesture is quietly powerful. A brief prayer is offered, a smile exchanged and as the traffic lights turn green, both sides move on, carrying with them a small moment of shared kindness.

RAMADHAN TWEETS



Sami alhinai
[@sami_alhinai](#)

[X.com](#)

Translated from Arabic by Grok

Rose Season 🌸, a gift from nature to your hearts
💖💖

Amid terraced fields embraced by mountains, and details that resemble Oman alone, the roses bloom in a short season, yet sufficient to quench the heart with indescribable tranquility.

Rate this translation: 👍 👎



Rose season coincides with Ramadhan



محمد ناصر الخليفة [@desertlover79](#) · 10h

[X](#)

لقطة من مدينة مسقط و تظهر مئذنة مسجد الحاج علي موسى في سلطنة عمان ١٩٧٧ م



Haj Ali Moosa Mosque in Muscat



PROMINENT OMANI FIGURES



Who is he?
Shaikh Mohammed bin Amer al Maawali (Ibn Ariq)

An Omani scholar, judge, historian and poet from Wadi Al Maawil. He lived in the 18th century and served during the rule of Ahmad bin Said, founder of the Al Busaid State.



RAMADHAN TRADITION





Pakistan's Dastarkhwan-e-Ramadhan: Community Iftar for All
Ramadhan in Pakistan is a time of generosity, with large dastarkhwans (traditional meal spreads) set up in mosques and streets, offering free iftar meals to everyone, regardless of background or financial status.



HEALTH TIPS

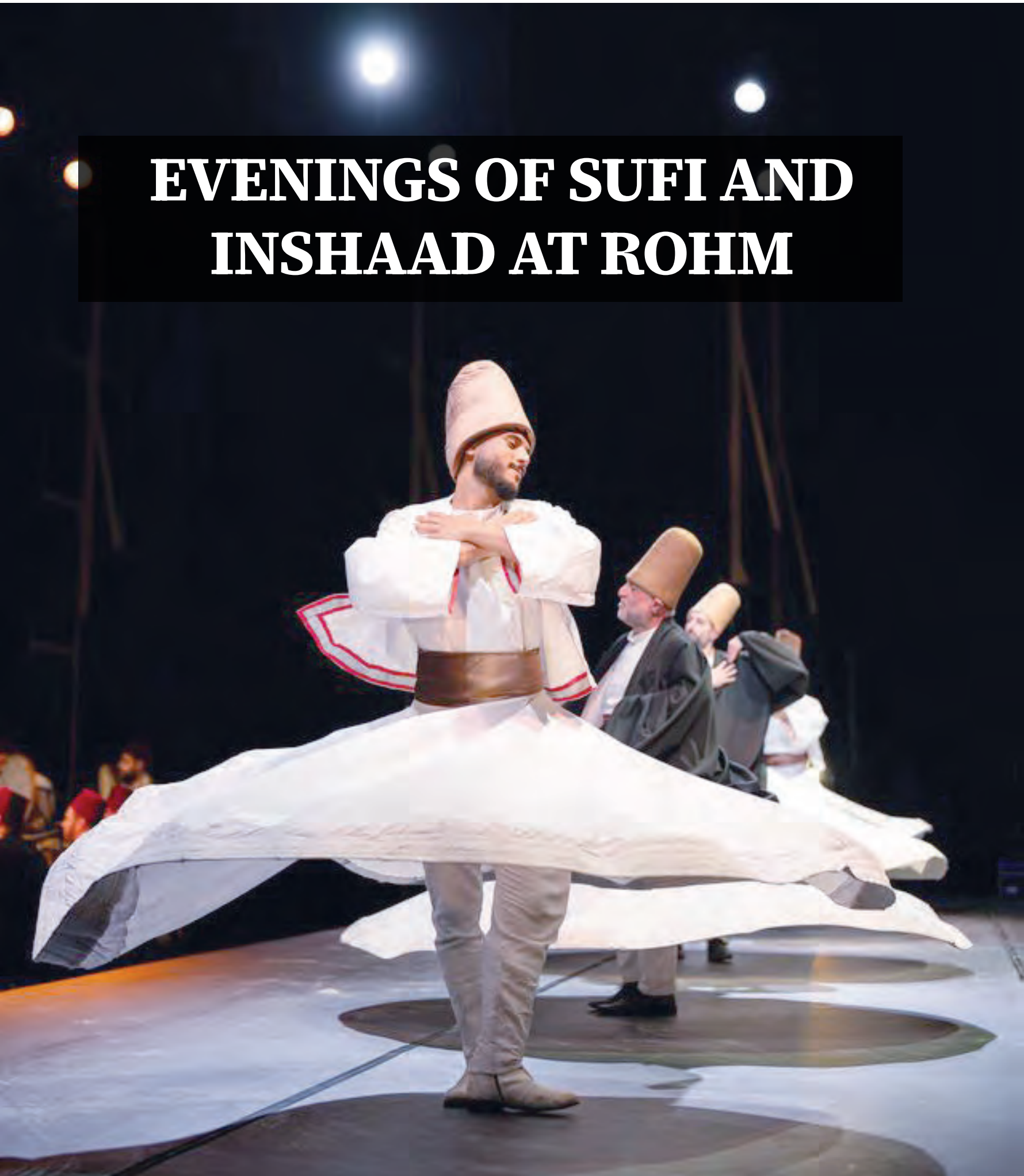




MAKE SURE YOUR MEAL AT IFTAR IS BALANCED

The healthy plate model is a good guide to follow, so try:

- Half of your plate being non-starchy vegetables or salad
- A quarter of your plate being lower GI carbohydrates (pasta, basmati rice, legumes or sweet potato)
- The final quarter being lean protein (lean meat, skinless chicken, fish, eggs or tofu)



EVENINGS OF SUFI AND INSHAAD AT ROHM

STAFF REPORTER

THE timeless beauty of Syrian spiritual heritage resonated through the halls of Royal Opera House Muscat as Syrian vocalist and composer Mustafa Haji Hamdo led an evocative evening dedicated to traditional devotional music.

Held on March 5 at the Opera House’s House of Musical Arts, the performance formed part of the season’s programme “Evenings of Sufi and Inshaad”, a concert series devoted to spiritual music and religious chanting during the 2025–2026 season.

The evening brought together the rich tradition of Syrian devotional singing with a contemporary artistic approach. Accompanied by the Syrian Heritage Ensemble, Hamdo guided the audience through a deeply expressive repertoire that blended classical spiritual chants, poetic mawawil and traditional melodies.

Hamdo is widely recognised in the Arab musical world as a vocalist, composer and certified international vocal trainer. Over the years, he has dedicated a significant part of his career to teaching the foundations of singing and instrumental performance, mentoring new generations of musicians and nurturing emerging talents. His work has taken him to festivals and cultural celebrations across several countries, where he has presented diverse musical productions ranging from traditional devotional pieces to contemporary compositions. Through recordings, visual productions and performances shared on digital platforms, he has established himself as a prominent voice in both heritage and modern Arab music.

Founded in 2014, the Syrian Heritage Ensemble has steadily built a reputation for its artistic commitment to preserving and presenting traditional Arab devotional music. Under Hamdo’s artistic direction, the

ensemble has sought to introduce audiences to the beauty of heritage-based singing while presenting it within a modern framework that bridges authenticity and contemporary interpretation. Their mission centres on celebrating Arab cultural identity and the spiritual depth of Islamic musical traditions while bringing this heritage to wider international audiences.

Throughout the evening, the ensemble performed a rich selection of chants and spiritual songs that reflected the depth and diversity of Syrian devotional music. Among the pieces presented were “Salawat”, “Ya Rasul Allah Ya Man”, “Malik Al Mulk”, “Subhan Man Dhikruhu” and “Ramadhan Tajalla Wa Ibtasama”, alongside traditional Mawlawi-inspired musical passages and improvised vocal mawawil performed by Hamdo.

The audience responded warmly to the performance, engaging with the rhythms and melodies that carried echoes

of centuries-old spiritual traditions. The ensemble’s interpretation highlighted the emotional intensity and poetic beauty that define Syrian religious music, offering listeners an immersive cultural and spiritual experience.

The concert formed the second evening in the Opera House’s spiritual music series this season. The programme opened earlier with a memorable Ramadhan performance by Egyptian singer Mohamed Sarwat and his ensemble, setting the tone for a season dedicated to celebrating devotional music from across the region.

By the end of the evening, Hamdo and the Syrian Heritage Ensemble had not only revived cherished musical traditions but also demonstrated how heritage can continue to resonate with modern audiences.

Through their performance, the enduring spirit of Syrian spiritual music found a new voice on one of the region’s most prestigious stages.



BROADER SHIFT

Recognition, not competition, for Oscar-nominated foreign filmmakers



Joachim Trier’s ‘Sentimental Value’ earned a whopping nine Oscar nominations. — AFP

Foreign films were once considered an afterthought at the Oscars, but the directors behind this year’s nominees for best international feature say they now feel part of a broader shift on Hollywood’s biggest night.

Two of the 10 contenders for best picture — Brazil’s *The Secret Agent* and Norway’s *Sentimental Value* — are largely not in English. Both have also earned acting nominations, reflecting the growing global presence in the awards race.

For Danish-Norwegian filmmaker Joachim Trier, whose *Sentimental Value* has secured nine nominations including best director, the recognition itself is meaningful.

“That’s not about competition. It’s more about recognition. And I like that”, he said.

Knowing that fellow filmmakers acknowledged his work, Trier said, means a lot. He believes the growing diversity within the roughly 10,000-member Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences has contributed to the shift.

But the international appeal of films like his family drama, which stars best supporting actor nominee Stellan Skarsgard, also comes from their emotional honesty.

“The whole clue is to try to get the big machine, the apparatus of cinema, to go to an intimate place”, Trier said. “That’s the kind of film I’m interested in making. And if that works for people, it’s a magnificent thing”.

Franco-Spanish director Oliver Laxe shares a similar view. His film *Sirat* succeeds, he said, because it comes from a place of sincerity.

“All directors have looked inward, tried to do something with their heart, with their soul. And I did it with my gut”, he said.

For Laxe, the recognition of his unconventional, contemplative film suggests audiences are ready for something different.

“It proves that people are tired of seeing the same films and that we need to trust individual sensitivity a little more”, he said, adding that the nomination itself already feels like a collective victory.

Brazilian director Kleber Mendonça Filho said he has been struck by the global response to his political thriller *The Secret Agent*. The film follows an academic, played by best actor nominee Wagner Moura, persecuted during Brazil’s 1970s military dictatorship.

“I made a Brazilian film... and it has had a very strong emotional and political reaction throughout the world”, he said.

Producer Emilie Lesclaux, who is also Mendonça Filho’s wife, said that when they began making films more than two decades ago, the Oscars seemed distant and dominated by American productions.

“Little by little, we saw real changes”, she said. “This year, so many incredible films are being treated the same as American films”.

One of the most politically charged nominees is *It Was Just an Accident* by Iranian director Jafar Panahi, filmed in secret and exploring whether victims of oppression should seek revenge or forgiveness.

Panahi, who has previously been jailed in Iran, has used the Oscars spotlight to draw attention to the country’s political situation, including the recent arrest of his collaborator Mehdi Mahmoudian.

Meanwhile, Tunisian director Kaouther Ben Hania’s *The Voice of Hind Rajab* focuses on Gaza, telling the story of a Palestinian girl whose family is killed by Israeli gunfire.

“My first obsession was how to make this girl’s voice resonate”, Ben Hania said.

She hoped to move Arabic-language cinema beyond a niche audience and present it to the world. “When I made the film, that was my intention”, she said. “But its impact has exceeded my expectations”. — AFP