

HIS MAJESTY GIVES AUDIENCE TO EGYPTIAN FOREIGN MINISTER

TALKS FOCUS ON RESTORING CALM IN THE REGION



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At the outset of the audience, the guest conveyed the greetings of President Abdel Fattah el Sisi of the Arab Republic of Egypt to His Majesty the Sultan, along with his good wishes for abundant health and well-being to His Majesty. The Egyptian President also wished the Omani people continuous progress and prosperity.

In return, His Majesty the Sultan asked the guest to convey his greetings and wishes to the Egyptian President for continuous good health and happiness. His Majesty also wished the Egyptian people continuous progress and development.

EVOLVING SITUATION

During the audience, discussions focused on the evolving situation in the region, in light of the ongoing and escalating military operations, alongside the resulting targeting of countries’ interests and the violation of their sovereignty.

The audience underscored the imperative of coalescing regional and international endeavours to contain tensions, restore calm and work towards de-escalation, thereby advancing the cause of security and stability on both the regional and global stages.

The meeting was attended by Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, and Yasser Mohamed Ahmed Shaaban, Ambassador of the Arab Republic of Egypt to the Sultanate of Oman. — ONA

SEE ALSO P2

Allies rebuff Trump’s request on Hormuz

OMAN CRUDE PRICE REACHES \$147.79 A BARREL

IEA TO RELEASE MORE OIL STOCKS IF NEEDED

GERMANY WILL NOT TAKE PART IN WAR

IRAN WOMEN’S SOCCER TEAM HEAD HOME

ISRAELI STRIKE ON IRAN PRISON A WAR CRIME: UN

UK’S STARMER RULES OUT JOINING WIDER WAR

US ALLIES said they had no immediate plans to send ships to unblock the Strait of Hormuz, rebuffing a request by President Donald Trump for military support to keep the vital waterway open.

Trump called on nations to help police the strait after Iran responded to US-Israeli attacks by using drones, missiles and mines to effectively close the strategic channel off its shores for tankers transporting a fifth of global oil supply.

Most Nato countries, several of whom have been at the sharp end of criticism from Trump in recent months, are usually wary of angering the White House but are now signalling reluctance to become embroiled in the conflict with Tehran.

“What does (...) Donald Trump expect a handful or two handfuls of European frigates to do in the Strait of Hormuz that the powerful US Navy cannot do?” German Defence Minister Boris Pistorius said in Berlin on Monday, as he downplayed threats by Trump that failing to come to Washington’s aid could have consequences for the Nato alliance.

“This is not our war, we have not started it,” he added.

The conflict has nothing to do with Nato and Germany has no plans to be drawn into it, government spokesperson Stefan Kornelius said.



A woman reacts while standing near the grave of her son, who was killed in strikes, amid the US-Israeli conflict with Iran, at Behesht-e Zahra cemetery, in Tehran, Iran, on Monday. — Reuters

“Neither the United States nor Israel consulted us before the war, and... Washington explicitly stated at the outset of the war that European assistance was neither necessary nor desired,” the spokesperson said.

Still, some allies signalled a cautious willingness to help.

EU foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas said the bloc is in talks with the United

Nations about replicating a deal that allows for grain to be exported out of Ukraine during its war with Russia.

The EU is also discussing whether it could change the mandate of its Middle East naval mission, Aspides, which currently protects ships in the Red Sea from attacks by Yemen’s Ansar Allah group, to include the Strait of Hormuz, Kallas said.

But Greece, which leads the Aspides mission, will limit its participation in the Middle East to the Red Sea, said government spokesman Pavlos Marinakis. China is talking with all sides about the strait as it seeks to de-escalate the conflict, its foreign ministry said on Monday.

Britain will work with allies on a collective plan to secure freedom of navigation through the strait, Prime Minister Keir Starmer said, while acknowledging that it wouldn’t be easy and reiterating the UK would not be drawn into a wider war. The UK has autonomous mine-hunting systems that could be used, Starmer said.

Denmark said the EU should work to reopen the strait even if it didn’t agree with the war.

“Even if we don’t like what’s going on, I think it’s wise to keep an open mind on whether Europe... in some way can contribute, but with a view towards de-escalation,” Danish Foreign Minister Lars Lokke Rasmussen said. SEE ALSO P6 & 7

OMANI CITIZENS RETURN FROM IRAN

The Foreign Ministry, in coordination with the relevant authorities in the Sultanate of Oman, continued to implement the necessary arrangements to facilitate the return of Omani citizens currently abroad, in light of the current developments in the region.

In this context, a group of citizens arriving from the Islamic Republic of Iran has returned to the homeland safely through coordinated ground and air transit arrangements, in collaboration with Oman’s diplomatic missions in Tehran and Ankara, as part of the approved plan.

The Foreign Ministry affirmed that the situation of citizens continues to be monitored around the clock, in coordination with overseas missions, to ensure their security and safety.

OMAN

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—ONA



Oman, Egypt discuss developments of military escalation in region

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman and the Arab Republic of Egypt held a session of consultations on Monday. This took place when Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, received Dr Badr Abdelatty, Minister of Foreign Affairs, International Cooperation and Egyptians Abroad of the Arab Republic of Egypt.

The two sides reviewed the latest developments concerning the current military escalation in the region. They expressed their deep concern over this escalation and its expanding scope, agreeing on the paramount importance of halting it and working to end the war. They emphasised the need to enhance political and diplomatic solutions, and to employ reason and dialogue to spare the region from sliding into utter chaos as a result of continued escalation and the broadening of the conflict. The two ministers renewed their rejection and condemnation of all military actions targeting Arab countries. They stressed



Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, on Monday received Dr Badr Abdelatty, Minister of Foreign Affairs, International Cooperation and Egyptians Abroad of the Arab Republic of Egypt. — ONA

the importance of stopping these actions immediately, maintaining the policy of good neighbourliness and consolidating the principles of

regional cooperation.

Furthermore, both sides agreed on the importance of continuing their joint efforts to push for

political and diplomatic solutions to preserve regional and international peace and security. They strongly reaffirmed the necessity of

respecting the Charter of the United Nations, the rules of international law and international humanitarian law.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs, International Cooperation and Egyptians Abroad of the Arab Republic of Egypt expressed his country’s appreciation for the wise leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik.

He highly valued the mediation efforts undertaken by the Sultanate of Oman aimed at de-escalating tensions and advancing the pathways for political solutions in the region. In turn, the Foreign Minister expressed his appreciation for the existing cooperation and coordination between the two countries. He praised the efforts exerted by the Egyptian side alongside the Omani side within the framework of political and diplomatic endeavours to support the pursuit of regional security and stability, and to bolster political solutions to ongoing crises. — ONA



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SHORT TAKES



The annual event celebrates the unique beauty of the governorate's mountain nature. — ONA

JABAL AL AKHDHAR
SPRING ROSE FESTIVAL
ON MARCH 30

The Governorate of Al Dakhiliyah announced the launch of the Spring Rose Season Festival 2026 in the Wilayat of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar from March 30. The annual event celebrates the unique beauty of the governorate's mountain nature. It also highlights one of the wilayat's most prominent agricultural resources, notably the mountain rose that has been an integral part of the Wilayat of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar's heritage identity. The festival seeks to promote the status of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar as a unique tourist destination in the Sultanate of Oman.

The rose season is an annual event during which visitors learn about the experience of cultivating mountain roses, their harvesting and their distillation methods that the local community has inherited over generations. The outcome is the rose water perfume, which is considered one of the finest natural aromatic products in the governorate. — ONA

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RAMADHAN
1447 AH
TUESDAY
MAR 17, 2026

PRAYER TIMINGS

FAJR

04:59 AM

DHUHR

12:20 PM

ASR

03:45 PM

MAGHRIB

06:22 PM

ISHA

07:32 PM

1 2 3 4 5

6 7 8 9 10

11 12 13 14 15

16 17 18 19 20

21 22 23 24 25

26 27 28 29 30

CBSE 12TH
STUDENTS
IN GCC, IRAN
AWAIT NEW
GRADING
SYSTEM

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
MUSCAT, MARCH 16

Students of Class 12 from 22 CBSE-affiliated Indian schools in Oman, along with peers in other GCC countries and Iran, are anxiously awaiting details on how their final results will be calculated. The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) announced the cancellation of the 12th board exams in light of the regional situation.

Syed Ahmad Salman, Chairman of the Indian School Board of Directors, told the Observer: “This decision has been made with the utmost consideration for the well-being of our children. Rather than keeping students in prolonged uncertainty, the Board has chosen a path that provides immediate clarity.” He added, “This proactive step allows students to move forward without the mental burden of waiting for rescheduled dates in

an unpredictable environment. While the specific mode of result declaration is yet to be announced, we are confident the evaluation criteria will be designed in the best interest of the students. CBSE has a proven track record of fairness, as seen during the Covid-19 pandemic.” Chairman Salman also reassured families about college admissions and career guidance: “Our Career Counsellors are available at all school branches to provide personalised support.”

1m Prophet’s Biography
Museum launched



The establishment forms part of the efforts towards the realisation of Oman Vision 2040 goals.

THE Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs on Monday celebrated the launch of the ‘Endowment Foundation for the Museum of the Prophet’s Biography’ and unveiled its logo. The ceremony was held under the auspices of Sayyid Ibrahim bin Said al Busaidy, Minister of Heritage and Tourism, and attended by Dr Mohammed bin Said al Maamari, Minister of Awqaf and Religious Affairs, dignitaries, officials and representatives of parties interested in

cultural, religious and media affairs. The ceremony included a presentation and a dialogue session outlining the project. The foundation seeks to establish and operate an integrated cultural museum that presents the noble biography of Prophet Mohammad in a comprehensive manner. It will showcase the Prophet’s lifestyle, values and morals that spearheaded the Islamic civilisation. The foundation also aims to develop partnerships with other parties in Oman and

abroad. This includes a vision for investing endowment funds in a manner that preserves their assets and ensures their sustainability to serve the foundation’s objectives. The museum will be located in the Wilayat of Samayil due to the historical significance of the wilayat that took the lead in the propagation of Islam in Oman. Al Maamari pointed out that the museum’s project will be carried out in 36 months. — ONA

Agenda for the Annual General Meeting of the Pearl Real Estate Investment Fund

The Fund Management Body of the Fund is pleased to invite the unitholders to attend the Annual Ordinary General Meeting which will be held at 10:00 pm on Monday 30th of March 2026, via the electronic platform for general meetings which may be accessed through Muscat Clearing and Depository's website ([www.mcd.gov.om](#)). In the event that the quorum to convene the Annual Ordinary General Meeting is not complete, the second general meeting will be convened at 10:00 pm on 31st of March 2026, to discuss and consider the following agenda:

- To consider and approve the Fund Management Body's report for the financial year ended on 31 December 2025 (as per the attached).
- To consider and approve the auditor's report on the financial statements of the Fund for the financial year ended on 31 December 2025 (as per the attached annexure).
- To consider and approve the proposed distribution of cash dividends to the unitholders registered on the date of the Annual Ordinary General Meeting of an amount of 5.78 baizas per unit for the financial year ended on 31 December 2025.
- To ratify the sitting fees paid to the Fund Management Body for the financial year ended on 31 December 2025 and determine the sitting fees for the Fund Management Body for the financial year ending on 31 December 2026 (as per the attached annexure).
- To consider and approve the proposed distribution of remuneration of an amount of OMR 30,000 to the Fund Management Body for the financial year ended on 31 December 2025 (as per the attached annexure).
- To notify the general assembly of the related party transactions entered into by the Fund during the financial year ended on 31 December 2025 (as per the attached annexure).
- To appoint the external auditor for the financial year ending on 31 December 2026 and to determine its remuneration (as per the attached annexure).

Pursuant to the Fund's Articles of Association and the Rules for Attending General Meetings and Voting via Electronic Systems issued by the Financial Services Authority, we would like to bring your attention to the following:

- Juristic persons shall have the exclusive right to appoint a natural person to attend the Annual Ordinary General Meeting and vote on their behalf via electronic means, provided that this natural person has an investor number in Muscat Clearing and Depository Company.
- Voting on any of the items on the agenda shall commence no more than three days before the date of the general meeting and until the voting process ends on the day of the meeting. If a unitholder's balance is increased or decreased, the voting process will be cancelled, and the unitholder must cast his vote again on the day of the general meeting.

To prevent delay in starting the meeting, unitholders are requested to attend the meeting at least half an hour before the scheduled meeting time.

For any clarification regarding the matters mentioned in the above agenda, please contact Mr. Alsalt Moosa Al Nabhani by telephone 21011788 or email [Alsalt.alnabhani@sib.om](#)

Seminar highlights human rights
protection in digital space and AI

SAUD AL ANSARI
MUSCAT, MARCH 16

The Oman Human Rights Committee held a seminar on Monday titled ‘Protecting Human Rights in the Digital Space and Artificial Intelligence’ at the Diplomatic Club in Muscat, in celebration of Arab Human Rights Day. The event was held under the auspices of Dr Yahya bin Nasser al Khusaibi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs, and attended by representatives from government institutions, the private sector, civil society and international organisations operating in Oman. The seminar reflects the Committee's ongoing efforts to raise awareness of human rights while keeping pace with rapid digital and technological transformations. It builds on last year’s successful celebration under the theme ‘The Right to Food’, which received recognition from the Arab Permanent Human Rights Committee at the Arab League. This year, the focus was on AI and human rights, emphasising that technology should serve humanity while protecting rights. Algorithms and intelligent systems must not violate privacy or reinforce discrimination but should promote fundamental rights and freedoms, particularly in health, education and employment. Dr Rashid bin Hamad al Balushi, Chairman of the Committee,



The focus was on AI and human rights, emphasising that technology should serve humanity while protecting rights.

highlighted that this year’s celebration comes amid rapid digital change, requiring a balance between technology and human rights to ensure AI serves humanity and preserves dignity. Saleh bin Yahya al Maskari, Head of Global Affairs at the Foreign Ministry, emphasised the importance of protecting human rights in the digital space and AI. He noted that the digital space is an extension of daily life where individuals exercise rights in education, communication and work, stressing the need to address system breaches, data misuse and the ministry’s role in promoting international cooperation for safe and equitable digital innovation. Counsellor Jamal bin Saleem al Nabhani, member of the Arab Charter Committee, noted that Oman’s accession to the Charter reflects its positive stance on

regional initiatives, highlights the reality of human rights, and demonstrates genuine government-committee partnership, stressing the importance of responsibly exercising rights amid the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Hamid bin Abdullah al Harrasi, Director of the Sectoral Skills Unit at the Oman Society for Information Technology, stressed aligning technological innovation with human rights safeguards, empowering the digital community, and promoting technological culture to support responsible technology use and Oman Vision 2040 goals. Abdulaziz bin Ali al Saadi, Director of Legal Affairs at the Committee, highlighted that AI enhances rights monitoring and facilitates access to justice, while adhering to ethical standards protecting privacy and preventing bias, with international experiences.



BALQEES AL ORAIMI

THE PUBLIC PROSECUTION of Oman has reiterated the importance of respecting public decency and adhering to the social values and traditions of Omani society, warning that appearing in public places in a manner that offends modesty or contradicts prevailing customs is punishable under the law.

In an awareness message shared on its official account on the social media platform X, the authority stated that appearing in public roads or places with attire or an appearance that violates public decency or contradicts the customs and traditions of society constitutes a legal offence.

The Public Prosecution noted that Omani legislation places strong emphasis on safeguarding social values and protecting public morals as part of the broader effort to maintain social stability and community order.

According to the authority, individuals found guilty of such acts may face imprisonment of up to three months, a fine of up to RO 300, or one of the two penalties under Article (294/1) of the Penal Code, which criminalises acts that offend public modesty in public places or areas accessible to the public.

The statement forms part of the Public Prosecution's ongoing awareness campaign aimed at strengthening legal literacy among members of the community and reminding them to comply with laws regulating public behaviour in shared spaces such as streets, markets, parks and other public facilities.

Officials stressed that respecting public decorum is a collective responsibility requiring awareness and cooperation from all segments of society.

They clarified that such laws are not intended to restrict personal freedoms but to regulate them in a manner that balances individual liberties with the preservation of public values that underpin the social fabric of the Oman.

Maintaining a respectful appearance in public places, the authority said, reflects the civilised image of society and promotes a culture of mutual respect among citizens, residents and visitors.

The Public Prosecution added that these awareness messages are part of its broader digital outreach initiatives aimed at educating the public about key legal provisions related to public conduct and highlighting behaviours that may carry legal consequences.

Legal observers note that such campaigns play an important role in promoting legal awareness within society, particularly through the wide reach of social media platforms that

enable institutions to communicate directly with the public. They also emphasised that proactive awareness helps prevent violations by clearly outlining the legal boundaries governing behaviour in public spaces.

Observers further pointed out that preserving social values and public morals remains a core pillar of Omani society, closely linked to the cultural identity and traditions that define the community.

In this context, the Public Prosecution urged members of the public to respect prevailing customs and traditions and avoid practices that may offend public decency or disrupt public order, stressing that compliance with the law is a shared responsibility that helps safeguard social harmony and national values.

RESPECT FOR PUBLIC DECENCY URGED

Appearing in public with attire or behaviour that violates public decency is a punishable offence

Penalty may include up to 3 months' imprisonment, a fine up to RO 300, or both

The offence falls under Article 294/1 of the Penal Code

SHORT TAKES



Chiru Mega Youth Force (CMYF), a voluntary organisation held a blood donation camp recently at Central Blood Bank, Bausher.

MOH URGES BLOOD DONATIONS AHEAD OF EID AL FITR

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Health (MoH), through the Central Blood Bank, has urged citizens and residents to donate blood ahead of the Eid Al Fitr holiday to ensure adequate blood supplies for patients in need. Authorities said there is an urgent requirement for donors with negative blood types, particularly O- and A-, due to low stock levels. The ministry also called on individuals with A+ blood type to donate platelets, noting that more than six platelet donors are urgently needed.

The donation timings are:
•Central Blood Bank – Bausher (Daily): 7 pm – 11:30 pm
•Seeb Blood Donation Centre (Sunday–Thursday): 7 am – 11:30 am
•Non-fasting donors (Central Blood Bank): Sunday–Thursday, 8 am – 12:30 pm

Applications open for Scientific Research Award

MUSCAT: The Research and Innovation Authority has announced the opening of applications for the 13th edition of the National Scientific Research Award for 2026, with submissions accepted from March 15 to June 16.

The initiative is part of the authority’s continued efforts to encourage researchers in Oman to undertake high-quality, globally competitive scientific research and to emphasise publication in reputable peer-reviewed international journals. The award in its current cycle targets two categories of researchers.

The first category is for researchers holding a PhD or equivalent, including physicians with the rank of senior specialist or higher.

The second category aims to encourage emerging researchers who do not hold a PhD, ensuring support across various academic and professional levels.

The award covers six strategic fields aligned with national development priorities. They include education and human resources, information and communication systems, health and community service, culture, social sciences and basic sciences, energy and industry and lastly environment and vital resources.

Applicants must be the principal researcher whose name appears first among the authors of the published



The initiative is part of the authority’s continued efforts to encourage researchers in Oman.

scientific paper.

The research must address issues relevant to Oman and fall within one of the award’s designated fields. To qualify, the research must have been published after March 15, 2023, in a peer-reviewed journal indexed in Scopus, Web of Science, or approved Arabic journals listed on the award’s official website.

The award is limited to original research and studies, and does not accept review papers, conference papers, historical studies, book chapters, or medical reports. Each researcher may submit only one application, and

multiple submissions will lead to disqualification.

Applicants must also provide written approval from all members of the research team, and submissions will be accepted only through the electronic application system with all required documents attached.

Since its launch, the National Scientific Research Award has honoured 140 winners, recognising outstanding research contributions and promoting stronger links between research outputs and beneficiaries, while encouraging scientific publishing and innovation.

— OMA

Nurses balance fasting, care in hospitals in Ramadhan

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, MARCH 16

INSIDE hospital corridors, where the rhythm of care never pauses, nurses continue their humanitarian mission — often breaking their fast quickly before returning to the bedside of patients who rely on their constant attention.

Ramadhan within hospital walls carries a unique atmosphere. Behind the quiet hallways and softly lit wards, healthcare teams move steadily through their duties. Nurses check vital signs, administer medication and offer reassurance, all while managing the physical demands of long hours of fasting.

For many nurses, Iftar is not marked by a family gathering or a large meal, but by a brief pause during a busy shift. A date and a sip of water often become the first nourishment of the day before they resume caring for patients.

Aisha al Mukhaini, a nurse working in an emergency department, describes Ramadhan shifts as both challenging and deeply meaningful.

“Our days can be very busy, especially in



emergency care,” she says. “Sometimes we break our fast quickly with dates and water, then continue attending to patients. But knowing that we are helping people in difficult moments gives us a strong sense of purpose.”

In small staff rooms across hospital departments, nurses sometimes gather briefly at sunset to share simple Iftar items brought from home. Though these moments are short, they offer a brief sense of community before staff return to their duties, where emergencies can arise at any time.

In critical care units, the responsibility is even greater. Monitors beep steadily as medical teams track patients’ vital signs around the clock. For nurses assigned to

these units, the fast may continue well beyond the call to prayer.

Sara al Balushi, who works in intensive care, says time can pass unnoticed during demanding shifts.

“There are moments when we are fully focused on stabilising a patient, and only afterwards do we realise that Iftar time has passed,” she explains. “Our priority is always the patient.”

Despite the demanding pace, Ramadhan also brings a strong sense of solidarity among healthcare teams. Nurses often create a warm atmosphere in their departments through small gestures such as sharing homemade food or exchanging Ramadhan greetings during brief breaks.

Hasan al Zawaydi, a nurse working in a medical ward, believes the role of nurses during Ramadhan goes beyond clinical duties.

“Patients can feel especially vulnerable during Ramadhan because they miss being with their families,” he says. “We try to offer extra kindness and support. Sometimes a simple conversation can lift a patient’s spirit.” Healthcare professionals say the holy month often strengthens their sense of empathy and responsibility.

MOORE STEPHENS LLC

NOTICE ON THE COMMENCEMENT OF LIQUIDATION OF Q FIVE PARTNERS MANAGEMENT CONSULTANCY LLC (AS APPEARED IN OFFICIAL GAZETTE NO 1639)

Moore Stephens LLC, announces the liquidation process of Q Five Partners Management Consultancy LLC, bearing commercial registration number 1477194, in accordance with the decision taken by the Company's Shareholders on 24 February 2026. The liquidator alone have the right to represent the Company under liquidation before third parties, and all parties are to confirm with the liquidator for all matters concerning the company's business at the following address:

Office No. 41, 4th Floor, Building No. 1022, Way No. 1013; Al Walaj Street, Al Qurum P O Box 933, Ruwi, Postal Code 112, Sultanate of Oman Tel: 24061000, Email: liquidation@moore-oman.com

By this announcement, the liquidator calls the company's creditors to submit their claims against the company, together with the supporting documents, to the above address within 180 days from the date of publishing this announcement for the first time, and any debtors should settle the company's rights with the liquidator on the address above.

Moore Stephens LLC
Official Liquidators of Q Five Partners Management Consultancy LLC (Under voluntary liquidation)

المتحدة للتقويم

United Finance

أحمد المزيد

Achieve more

Notice and Invitation to attend the Annual General Meeting (AGM)

The Board of Directors of the United Finance Co. SAOG has the pleasure to invite the shareholders to attend the Annual General Meeting, which will be held on Monday at 5:00 PM on 30/03/2026, via the electronic platform which can be accessed through the website of Muscat Clearing & Depository Company (www.mcdc.om) . If the quorum requirement for holding the Annual General Meeting is not fulfilled, a second Annual General Meeting shall be held on Thursday 5: PM on 2/04/2026, via the electronic platform which can be accessed through the website of Muscat Clearing & Depository Company (www.mcdc.om) to discuss the following agenda:

- To consider and approve the Report of the Board of Directors for the financial year ended on 31/12/2025. (Annex 1)
- To consider and approve the Report on Corporate Governance for the financial year ended on 31/12/2025. (Annex 2)
- To consider the Statutory Auditor's Report and approve the audited Balance Sheet and Profit & Loss Account for the financial year ended on 31/12/2025. (Annex 3)
- To consider and approve the Board of Directors Performance report for the financial year ended 31/12/2025. (as per attachment)
- To Consideration and approval of a proposal to distribute cash dividends to the shareholders as on the date of meeting, at the value of 5 Baisa for the financial year ended on 31/12/2025.
- To consider and approve the proposal of distribution the total sum of RO 138,000 as remuneration for the Board of Directors of the Company for the year ended on 31/12/2025.
- To ratify the sitting fees paid to the Board of Directors for attending the Board and the Board Committee meetings for the financial year ended 31/12/2025 and determine their sitting fees for the current financial year 2025 (annex 4).
- To inform the shareholders about Related - parties' transactions during the financial year ended 31/12/2025 (annex 5).
- To Consider the amount allocated and spent for the company social responsibilities for the year ended 31 December 2025 (as per the Annexure).
- To consider and approve the proposal to allocate up to RO 20,000 to support community services during the financial year ending on 31/12/2026.
- To appoint Statutory Auditors for the financial year ending 31 December 2025 and specify their fees (annex 6)

Pursuant to the Company's Articles of Association, every shareholder has the right to authorize in writing any other person to attend the meeting and vote on the decisions taken on his behalf provided that such authorization should be on the authorization card issued from Muscat Clearing and Depository Co. SAOG (MCDG) attached with the invitation. If the authorized person is a national, he should attach a copy of his ID with the authorization letter for the adults and passport for ladies and minors who do not have ID, or resident card or passport for non-Omani. For legal entities, the proxy form should be stamped and signed by an authorized signatory of the legal entity and the commercial registration certificate and list of authorized signatories should be attached, along with the proxy form.

The shareholders are requested to be present at least half an hour before the time of the meeting.

In case of any enquiry please contact Mr. Ali bin Jaffer bin Mohammed on (968) 24577373, Mobile No. (968) 89245066, Fax No. (968) 24560885.

Chairman

Auditors

Legal Advisor

جمعية المهندسين العُمانية

Oman Society of Engineers

Invitation to Attend the 2025 Annual General Meeting

The Board of Directors of the Oman Society of Engineers is pleased to invite its esteemed members to attend the Annual General Meeting, scheduled to be held at 4:30 p.m. on Tuesday, 24/03/2026, in the main building of the University of Technology and Applied Sciences.

The meeting will address the following agenda:

- The Board of Directors' report on the work completed during the past year, along with the proposed work plan for the new year.
- The balance sheet and final accounts for the concluded fiscal year, as well as the proposed budget for the new year.
- The auditor's report.
- Any topics the Board of Directors deems appropriate to present.

All the above reports will be available at the Society's headquarters for members to review.

For any inquiries, please contact: 24210099 / 98356109.

MUSCAT MUNICIPALITY EXPANDS EV CHARGING NETWORK

VINOD NAIR
MUSCAT, MARCH 16

Muscat Municipality has expanded the number of electric vehicle (EV) charging stations across the governorate, with new installations at several locations, including Al Khuwair Square and the Green Walkway in the Wilayat of Al Seeb. The municipality said the move forms part of ongoing efforts to strengthen infrastructure for electric vehicles and encourage the adoption of environmentally friendly modes of transportation.

According to the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, 160 EV charging points were installed across Oman in 2025, with plans



Oman plans to add 200 more charging points in 2026.

to add 200 more charging points in 2026. Data from the Green Mobility website shows that the Sultanate of Oman currently has around 2,200 electric vehicles supported by 160 charging stations nationwide.

ISRAEL PLANS FOR WEEKS OF WAR AS AIR STRIKES POUND IRAN

TRUMP CALLED FOR A COALITION OF NATIONS TO HELP REOPEN THE VITAL SHIPPING ROUTE OF HURMOZ

ISRAEL said on Monday it has detailed plans for at least three more weeks of war as its military pounded sites across Iran overnight, while Iranian drone attacks temporarily shut Dubai airport and hit a key oil facility in the United Arab Emirates. The US-Israeli war on Iran is now entering its third week, with no clear end in sight, shutting down the Strait of Hormuz through which 20 per cent of the world's oil and liquefied natural gas flow, pushing up oil prices and raising fears of a renewed spike in global inflation.

TRUMP COALITION CALL

US President Donald Trump called for the Nato alliance faces a "very bad" future if its members fail to come to Washington's aid. His call drew a wary response from allies, who voiced support for diplomatic efforts to reopen the route but signalled caution about the possibility of military action.

Israeli military spokesperson Lieutenant Colonel Nadav Shoshani told reporters there are detailed operational plans for the war with Iran for the next three weeks, along with additional plans extending further ahead. The military has framed its aims as limited to weakening Iran's capacity to threaten Israel by striking ballistic missile infrastructure, nuclear facilities, and the security apparatus. "We want to make sure that they are as weak as possible, this regime, and that we degrade all their capabilities, all parts and all wings of their security establishment," Shoshani said. The military has said it still has thousands of targets to hit inside Iran. Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said Tehran has not asked for a ceasefire or exchanged messages with the US.

HEAVY STRIKES ACROSS IRAN

Iran's Mehr news agency reported five people were killed and seven wounded in overnight strikes hitting Markazi province in central Iran. The news agency said a residential area on the outskirts of Arak city was attacked as well as a residential building in the Mahallat county. In Khomein city, also in Markazi province, a boys' school was targeted, causing some damage to the surrounding area. No casualties were reported.

The Israeli military said on Monday it was carrying out air strikes on Tehran, Shiraz and Tabriz against what it described as infrastructure of the "Iranian terror regime". Rescue workers in Tehran worked to pull people from the mangled wreckage of a building in what an Iranian Red Crescent aid worker said was an entirely residential alleyway. "Rescue teams are currently pulling people out from under the rubble. The search and rescue operation is still ongoing," he said without giving his name.

Fars News Agency reported several civilians were killed in a strike near Martyrs' Square, without giving exact figures. Shahnaz, 62, told Reuters via WhatsApp from Tehran that there had been no Internet overnight. "We feel cut off from the world. People are being killed," said Shahnaz. "It's just days before Nowruz (Iranian New Year is on March 20), but people are not in the mood to celebrate. When will this end?" When asked if she supported the Islamic Republic, Shahnaz said: "No, I don't. How can I? They killed my granddaughter in (the January)



protests. We want this regime to go. We want this misery to end." In Israel, air raid sirens warned of Iranian missiles. Iran's Revolutionary Guards said Tehran had launched attacks on areas in Tel Aviv, the US al Dhafra air base in Abu Dhabi, the US naval base in Bahrain and Bahrain's Sheikh Issa air base.

TRUMP DELAY BEIJING VISIT

In a weekend social media post he said he hoped China, France, Japan, South Korea, Britain and others would participate. Japan said it had no plans to dispatch naval vessels to the strait, and Australia, which has said it would send a military surveillance aircraft and missiles to

help defend the UAE, said it would not send its navy. Germany's Defence Minister Boris Pistorius ruled out his country's participation in any military activity in the Iran war, including efforts to reopen the strait. "This is not our war, we have not started it."

Trump told the Financial Times on Sunday

he may postpone a meeting with President Xi Jinping scheduled for later this month if China does not help to unblock the Strait. Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent, however, said that if the trip is rescheduled it will be because of logistical issues due to the war, and not related to the strait. — AFP

Emergency personnel work at the site of a strike on a residential building, in Tehran. — Reuters

EU TO DISCUSS NAVAL MISSION TO STRAIT OF HORMUZ

BRUSSELS: EU foreign ministers will discuss extending the bloc's Red Sea naval mission to help reopen the strategically vital Strait of Hormuz, the bloc's top diplomat Kaja Kallas said. "It is in our interest to keep the Strait of Hormuz open, and that's why we are also discussing what we can do in this regard," Kallas told journalists heading into the Brussels talks.

An option on the table would be to change the mandate of the EU's naval mission in the Red Sea, Operation Aspidos, Kallas said. She suggested this would be the "fastest" way for the 27-member bloc to boost security in



EU High Representative Kaja Kallas addresses the media, in Brussels. — AFP

the Strait of Hormuz, where Iranian retaliatory attacks to a US-Israeli bombing campaign have largely halted

maritime traffic.

"If we want to have security in this region, then it would be easiest to actually already use the operation that we have in the region," she said. But it remained to be seen whether EU countries were willing to use it to that end, Kallas added. "We will discuss with member states whether it's possible to really change the mandate of this mission," she said.

Several capitals indicated they were cold to the idea. "The current mandate of Operation Aspidos is correct and does not require any changes," Spain's foreign minister Jose Manuel Albares said arriving at the talks. — AFP

THAI SAILORS RETURN HOME AFTER VESSEL ATTACKED

BANGKOK: Twenty Thai crew members of a cargo ship attacked in the crucial Strait of Hormuz arrived in Thailand on Monday, with three of their colleagues still stranded on the vessel in the Gulf. The Thai-registered Mayuree Naree was hit by two projectiles while transiting through the Gulf waterway, after departing a port in the United Arab Emirates.

Iran's Revolutionary Guards said they had struck the Thai ship, as well as a Liberia-flagged vessel, in the strait because they had ignored "warnings". The 20 sailors landed at Thailand's main international airport early Monday morning and were immediately escorted



Thai crew members arrive at Suvarnabhumi International Airport, in Bangkok. — AFP

away by officials without speaking to gathered media.

The vessel's owner Precious Shipping

said Monday that the firm would provide "welfare support for the crew, including medical examinations and mental health assessments", according to a statement. Its "highest priority" remained the "continued efforts to locate the three crew members who are still missing", it added.

The company said last week that the three crew were "believed to be trapped in the engine room", which was damaged in the attack. Thailand was seeking assistance for them from two other nations, foreign ministry deputy spokeswoman Maratee Andamo told reporters. — AFP

UK's Starmer resists being drawn into wider war



British PM Keir Starmer speaks to the media, at Downing Street in central London. — Reuters

LONDON: Prime Minister Keir Starmer said on Monday Britain would not be drawn into a wider war in Iran but would work with allies on a "viable" plan to reopen the key Strait of Hormuz, a task he said would be "difficult" without de-escalation in the Middle East.

At a press conference aimed at easing public concern over rising energy costs, Starmer again justified his decision not to take part in the initial US-Israeli strikes on Iran, a move US President Donald Trump has criticised, going as far as calling the British leader "no Churchill".

"Ultimately, we have to reopen the Strait of Hormuz to ensure stability in the (oil) market. That is not a simple task," Starmer told reporters. "So we're working with all of our allies, including our European partners, to bring together a viable collective plan that can restore freedom of navigation in the region as quickly as possible and ease the economic impact." About a fifth of global oil and liquefied natural gas normally passes through the strait, a narrow passage of water. Tehran's effective shutting of the strait has sent oil prices to more than \$100 a barrel. — Reuters



South Korean protesters hold placards during a protest against Trump's request to dispatch warships to the Strait of Hormuz, Seoul. — AFP

Dubai flights disrupted after nearby drone fire



An Emirates aircraft prepares for landing as a smoke plume rises, at Dubai International Airport. — AFP

DUBAI: Missiles and drone attacks hit across the UAE on Monday, with a drone-related incident sparking a fuel tank fire near Dubai airport that disrupted travel, while a missile killed a civilian in Abu Dhabi. In the eastern emirate of Fujairah, a drone attack on oil infrastructure sparked a fire, just one day after a journalist saw smoke rising from a major UAE energy installation in the emirate.

The attacks came a day after Iranian foreign minister Abbas Araghchi said in an interview that rockets had been launched from the UAE to attack Kharg Island. UAE officials have denied the claim. A Palestinian was killed on the outskirts of the Emirati capital Abu Dhabi when a missile hit their car, the Abu Dhabi Media Office said in a statement. — AFP

1

DRONES OVER SAUDI

Saudi Arabia has intercepted 61 drones in the east of the country since midnight, according to a tally of defence ministry figures.

2

UK WEIGHING OPTIONS

Prime Minister Keir Starmer said London was working with allies to come up with a "viable" plan to reopen the Strait of Hormuz

3

HORMUZ CROSSING

A non-Iranian oil tanker transited the Strait of Hormuz with its automatic transponder system activated, despite major disruption to shipping.

4

IRAN WARNING

Iran's FM Abbas Araghchi said Tehran had shown it was ready to take the war with Israel and the United States as far as necessary.

5

'LIMITED' OPERATIONS

The Israeli military said it had begun what it described as "limited ground operations" against Hezbollah in southern Lebanon.

6

DUBAI RESUMES FLIGHTS

Authorities said flights were gradually resuming at Dubai airport Monday after a "drone-related incident" sparked a fuel tank fire nearby.

7

UAE OIL ZONE ATTACKED

A drone slammed into oil infrastructure on the Fujairah oil industry zone on the UAE's east coast and sparked a large fire.

Oman’s ability to balance growth with stability crucial



OMAN'S economy, like many in the region, is navigating a complex web of global challenges. The ongoing conflict between Iran, the US, and Israel poses significant risks, but it also presents opportunities for growth and diversification. Oman's neutral stance and commitment to diplomacy position it well to capitalise on emerging opportunities. Oman's strategic location and strong regional partnerships also make it an attractive hub for trade and investment. The country's proximity to major shipping routes and its commitment to facilitating trade make it an ideal location for businesses looking to expand into the region.

Oman's commitment to peace and stability has been a hallmark of its foreign policy, and it's played a significant role in maintaining regional security. The country's neutral stance has allowed it to foster strong relationships with neighbouring countries, including Iran, and it's often played a crucial role in mediating regional conflicts. Vision 2040, the government's ambitious plan to transform Oman into a sustainable, knowledge-based economy, is a step in the right direction. The plan focuses on investing in key sectors like logistics, manufacturing, and tourism, which are already yielding results.

The tourism sector, in particular, is showing promising signs of growth, with

increasing visitor numbers and investments in infrastructure.

The government's focus on diversification is crucial, and the development of non-oil sectors like renewable energy and technology can reduce reliance on fossil fuels and create new revenue streams.

While challenges persist, Oman's economic resilience and adaptability are notable. The government's proactive approach to diversification and diplomacy will be key in navigating these uncertain times. By focusing on sustainable growth and regional cooperation, Oman can emerge stronger, with a more diversified and resilient economy.

The proposed green corridor between Oman and Dubai represents a beacon of hope for regional cooperation and sustainable growth. This ambitious project has the potential to transform the economic landscape of the Gulf, fostering a new era of collaboration and environmental stewardship.

By bridging the gap between Oman and Dubai, the green corridor will create new opportunities for trade, investment, and cultural exchange, benefiting not just the two countries but the entire region.

Oman's commitment to this initiative is a testament to its constructive role in facilitating regional stability and peace. The country's neutral stance and diplomatic efforts have earned it a reputation as a trusted mediator, and it has played a crucial role in easing tensions and promoting dialogue

Oman should focus on implementing policies that support economic diversification, such as investing in infrastructure and promoting entrepreneurship

among neighbouring countries.

Oman's ability to balance economic growth with stability and security will be crucial in the coming months. With careful planning, strategic investments, and a commitment to regional cooperation, Oman is well-positioned to overcome the obstacles and emerge stronger, with a brighter future for its citizens. The development of human capital, investment in education and training, and the promotion of innovation and entrepreneurship will also be essential in driving sustainable growth.

The private sector's role will be vital in this endeavor, and the government should continue to create an environment conducive to business growth and innovation. Encouraging foreign investment, streamlining regulations, and investing in infrastructure will be crucial in attracting businesses and creating jobs.

As Oman navigates the complexities of the global economy, its commitment to stability, diplomacy, and sustainable growth will be essential. With a clear vision and strategic planning, Oman can overcome the challenges and emerge stronger, with a more resilient economy and a brighter future for its citizens. The path forward is promising, and Oman's economic future looks bright.

In the short term, Oman should focus on implementing policies that support economic diversification, such as investing in infrastructure and promoting entrepreneurship.

Strait of Hormuz forms part of front line in Middle East war

Attacks targeting commercial vessels in or near the Strait of Hormuz have put the blockaded waterway on the front line of the Middle East war, with spreading economic repercussions.

Iran's quest to inflict maximum pain on the global economy in retaliation for US-Israeli strikes has all but shut the narrow strait through which 20 per cent of global crude and LNG normally passes. US President Donald Trump on Saturday urged countries that rely on oil carried through the Hormuz Strait to step up and help take responsibility for keeping the passage open — with American support. Currently, only a tiny fraction of the vessels that used to navigate the strategic waterway have made it through, while some have ended up in flames.

At least 10 oil tankers have been hit, targeted or reported attacks since the start of the conflict, according to data from the UK Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO), the International Maritime Organization (IMO), Iraqi authorities, and Iranian authorities. Seven were reported to the UKMTO: the Skylight, MKD Vyom, Hercules Star, Ocean Electra, Stena Imperative, Libra Trader and Sonangol Namibe.

Iraq's State Organisation for Marketing of Oil said two other oil tankers, Safesea Vishnu and Zefyros, were hit on Thursday.

The Revolutionary Guards, the ideological arm of the Iranian military, claimed drone strikes on two other oil tankers: the Prima and the Louis P. It also said it hit the Athe Nova, an asphalt/bitumen tanker.

Four bulk carriers, three container ships, a tugboat, an oil drilling vessel and a cargo ship also reported explosions, strikes or suspicious activity in the area to UKMTO.

Thailand's navy said its bulk carrier, the Mayuree Naree, was attacked while transiting the strait. Provisional figures from the IMO show that at least six sailors and a port worker were killed, and one sailor was still reported missing as of Wednesday.

The UKMTO said in its latest advisory, issued on Saturday, that, since the war started, "at least twenty maritime incidents involving commercial vessels and offshore infrastructure have been reported" across the Gulf, the Strait of Hormuz and the Gulf of Oman. — AFP

A love story between Omanis and WhatsApp

THE story of Omanis and WhatsApp can best be described as a love story — one that speaks to our collective quest for connection and expression. Since its inception, WhatsApp has quietly filled a gap in the heart of our society, a gap we never knew existed until the app made its home in our phones and daily routines.

When WhatsApp entered Omani life in 2012, it did not merely offer a new means of communication; it marked a cultural zeitgeist, symbolising a new era of digital connection and community. It allowed us to reconnect with distant family members, rediscover friendships, and perform our communal roles in ways that felt both intimate and protected. In a society that values privacy and kinship, the platform's encrypted spaces became extensions of our homes — majalis tucked away behind screens, where we could share jokes, advice, and even social commentary without fear of public scrutiny.

At first, the charm lay in the basics — messages, emojis, the new thrill of instant presence. Then came voice notes that mirrored our oral traditions, and stickers that opened the floodgates of emotion and humour. Omanis embraced these tools not just for efficiency, but for creativity and self-expression. Through WhatsApp, digital communication became social art.

This Ramadhan, I found myself reflecting on how deeply ingrained WhatsApp has become in our social fabric. This is so because I was invited to join a WhatsApp group of



DR NAJMA AL ZIDJALY

The writer is Associate Professor, Sultan Qaboos University

WhatsApp has transformed from a communication tool into a social lifeline, continuing to evolve with us, adapting to new needs and new generations while preserving the intimacy of Omani life



As we exchange Eid greetings this year, we might pause to acknowledge not just the celebration itself, but the technology that allows it to unfold across our palms.

Omani women with disabilities — fifty-two remarkable women who, like so many others in our society, have built communities of support on the platform. During the holy month, our chat space blossomed into a microcosm of Omani life during Ramadhan: messages filled with prayers, news, health tips, shared recipes, reflections, and laughter. The women exchanged photos of their iftar tables, sent voice notes of duas, and distributed digital stickers featuring crescents and Arabic calligraphy.

But what struck me most was how seamlessly the group blended the spiritual and the entrepreneurial. Alongside Ramadhan greetings, members shared videos of their small businesses — handmade crafts, homemade sweets, and services they proudly offered to

help sustain themselves and their families. Through WhatsApp, these women were not only connecting; they were claiming agency. The platform that once symbolised connection had become a tool of empowerment.

As Ramadhan draws to a close, I find myself reflecting on how WhatsApp encapsulates the spirit of Eid itself. It allows us to reach out, to congratulate, to forgive, to share joy and remembrance. Each Eid morning, phones across Oman light up with love and friendship notes of a digital kind.

And so, as we exchange Eid greetings this year, we might pause to acknowledge not just the celebration itself, but the technology that allows it to unfold across our palms — connecting us to one another, one message at a time.

Oman’s diplomatic resilience... the active neutral



LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

The writer is a senior editor of Observer

THE SULTANATE OF OMAN does not just avoid conflict; it actively manages it. In an article written by Helmi Hammam in the Arabian Weekly titled ‘Oman’s neutral role emerges as crucial stabiliser in Gulf crises,’ the author stated that Omani neutrality is no longer simply a political option; it is a genuine stabilising tool, preventing the region from sliding into potentially catastrophic conflicts. Even following the high-tension strikes between Israel, the US and Iran in February 2026, Oman remained the only state capable of hosting indirect negotiations. It proved to be the safe zone because while neighbouring airspaces closed, Oman’s diplomatic channels stayed open, facilitating the repatriation of foreign nationals and maintaining an open dialogue to prevent total regional war. His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Monday gave an audience at Al Barakah Palace to Dr Badr Abdelatty, Minister of Foreign Affairs, International Cooperation and Egyptians Abroad of the Arab Republic of Egypt. And then there is economic resilience, as Oman’s internal economy is hitting record milestones. Oman’s 2026 Economic Freedom score rose to 68.5 on the Heritage Foundation’s list, making it the third freest economy in the MENA region. This reflects a massive improvement in investment freedom and government integrity. However, just as the environment knows no borders, the impact of a conflict has a ripple effect. One of the first disruptions we

saw in the regional conflict was in safety, travel, education and work. First, it was about securing a flight ticket, and now it is about the cost of a flight ticket. We are just in the third month of 2026, and quite a lot has happened. Geopolitics has an impact on the travel industry, and now we are seeing it in the Middle East. Airline tickets are becoming expensive in 2026 due to a convergence of surging jet fuel prices — up significantly due to geopolitical tensions — and strong consumer demand. Major contributing factors include limited aircraft availability due to grounded planes, higher operating costs, and necessary, longer flight paths navigating around conflict zones. When the supply chain is hindered, the shortage begins to leave a mark of scarcity, as in the case of cooking gas in India. But most of all, it is humanity that is being challenged. Every child has the right to health, education and protection, and every society has a stake in expanding children’s opportunities in life, says the United Nations. Yet, around the world, millions of children are denied a fair chance for no reason other than the country, gender, or circumstances into which they are born. And when they are in places of conflict, they are most vulnerable. They are the future generation, but they face many challenges as they enter an era of artificial intelligence and drones. Silently, there is one more issue that has been brewing, and that is mental health. Mental health and the Middle East in the

Peace is the core of Omani diplomacy. The foreign policy of the Sultanate of Oman is dedicated to peace and security. It is based on certain core principles, which are rooted in an understanding of Oman as an active participant in a mutually supportive global community

areas of conflict have been subjects of study already, and the World Health Organization has said the conflict has created a profound mental health crisis characterised by high rates of PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder), depression and anxiety among populations exposed to war, displacement and trauma, with children and women particularly vulnerable. There is an urgent need for mental health support. Some of the key findings state that there is a high prevalence of disorders: Studies indicate 15-40 per cent of populations in conflict-affected Arab countries suffer from PTSD, with major depression being the most common mood disorder. According to WHO, children in Gaza have reported high levels of PTSD (54 per cent), depression (41 per cent) and anxiety (34 per cent), driven by violence and displacement. Chronic conflict leads to cumulative trauma, with 62 per cent of respondents in some studies reporting at least four traumatic events in ten years. The right to peace is part of fundamental human rights because the right to enjoy peace is a fundamental condition for the realisation of all other human rights. Peace is the core of Omani diplomacy. The foreign policy of the Sultanate of Oman is dedicated to peace and security. The Foreign Ministry describes: It is based on certain core principles, which are rooted in an understanding of Oman as an active participant in a mutually supportive global community. And most importantly, being a good neighbour.

AMID WAR, EU DEBATES HOW TO CURB ENERGY COSTS

KATE ABNETT AND ALEXANDER CHITUC

European Union energy ministers on Monday debated ways to curb the impact of a surge in energy prices caused by the US-Israeli war on Iran. The bloc’s heavy reliance on imported oil and gas means it is highly exposed to global price swings - leaving some officials and analysts doubtful that the EU can find quick fixes. The European Commission, the EU executive, is drafting emergency measures that include examining state support for industries, cutting national taxes, and using an upcoming revision of the EU carbon market that would lower carbon prices by increasing the supply of emissions permits, according to EU officials familiar with the discussions. “We are in a price crisis,” EU energy commissioner Dan Jorgensen told reporters ahead of the meeting. He also said the bloc’s oil and gas supplies were secure - since most come from the US, Norway and other suppliers that are not directly affected by Middle East production cuts. Jorgensen said Brussels was preparing “targeted, short-term” measures that should avoid an overhaul of Europe’s electricity market design, despite governments including Austria suggesting the bloc look into this.

Germany, Romania and Sweden ruled out reversing Europe’s phase-out of Russian gas, as a way to curb costs. Hungary last week asked Brussels to lift sanctions on Russian energy. “Gas supply from Russia would mean returning to an absolutely insecure situation and supporting a warmonger. That is out of the question,” German Energy Minister Katherina Reiche said. Commission President Ursula von der Leyen has said Brussels was also considering capping gas prices. A gas price cap introduced after Russia’s 2022 attack of Ukraine was never implemented and some countries voiced concern it would limit Europe’s ability to secure fuel supplies from global markets if prices surged in a crisis. Von der Leyen will send EU leaders a shortlist of emergency options this week, ahead of a summit on Thursday. European benchmark gas prices have increased by more than 50 per cent since the Iran war began last month. Some governments, including Italy, want a sweeping EU intervention — such as suspending the bloc’s carbon emissions trading system, to curb the influence of CO2-emitting gas plants on power prices. Poland, a long-time critic of the ETS, on Monday struck a more cautious tone. “The market and the investors need stability, so we cannot, from one day to another, suspend the rules,” said Energy Secretary of State Wojciech Wrochna, noting that proceeds from the ETS are returned to national budgets. — Reuters

Mideast war disrupts pharma air routes

WAR IN the Middle East is disrupting the flow of critical medicines to the Gulf, imperilling supply routes for cancer drugs and other treatments that require refrigeration and forcing companies to reroute flights and find overland access into the region, industry executives said. The conflict, sparked by US and Israeli attacks on Iran two weeks ago and broadened by Iranian strikes around the region, has knocked out key air transit hubs and closed shipping routes, snarling the movement of goods for many products from medicines to food and oil. While there are few signs yet of major shortages, that could change if the conflict drags on, some executives said. The Gulf relies heavily on imports and some medicines have short shelf lives and need strict cold-chain storage, making lengthy overland shipping less practical. Executives at Western drugmakers said they were seeking alternative routes into the Gulf and trucking some drugs overland from airports like Jeddah and Riyadh in Saudi Arabia. Other options were Istanbul and Oman. Major airports in the region including Dubai, Abu Dhabi and Doha have been closed due to strikes by Iran in response to US and Israeli attacks. Dubai and Doha are major cargo hubs linking Europe with Asia and Africa, with airlines Emirates and Etihad and logistics firms such as DHL handling temperature-sensitive drugs that must be kept within a narrow range to remain safe and effective. Wouter Dewulf, a professor at the Antwerp Management School, cited industry data showing over a fifth of global air cargo - the main route for critical or life-saving drugs and vaccines - is exposed to Middle East disruption. One executive cautioned that alternative “cold-chain corridors”, or temperature-controlled routes used for sensitive medicines, could



Worldwide Flight Services (WFS) personnel prepare humanitarian aid packages for the first French humanitarian flight to Beirut, carrying 60 tonnes of relief supplies and pharmaceutical products, at Paris-Charles de Gaulle Airport, in Roissy-en-France near Paris, France. — Reuters



MAGGIE FICK

The writer is a Britain-based reporter covering the European pharmaceuticals industry with a global perspective for Reuters

not be set up overnight and were not always available. Another pharmaceutical company executive said it had set up internal teams to prioritise patient-critical shipments, including cancer treatments, and warned some temperature-controlled shipments could miss connections unless proper storage and handling were secured. A medical device company executive said the first step was to map shipments already in transit or ready to depart, then decide which pallets needed to be diverted and whether new shipments had to be planned. The executive, who like others spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss internal operations, said some Europe-Asia cargo that typically moves through Dubai or Doha airports was being rerouted via China or Singapore. Sea routes were not practical due to longer journey times, as well as the closure of the critical Strait of Hormuz by Iran. “If you have an urgent surgery with a patient waiting for treatment, you have to choose the faster mode of transport,” the executive said. Prashant Yadav, senior fellow

for global health at the Council on Foreign Relations, said stocks of short shelf-life, temperature-sensitive and more expensive medicines were usually around three months, with cancer drugs, particularly monoclonal antibodies, among those at highest risk. Delays in delivery of oncology medicines can have dire consequences for patients, who might be forced to restart a course of therapy, or see their cancer worsen. The disruption was already a problem for some companies, Yadav said, with some customers warning they could run low on supplies within four to six weeks if things did not improve. Over 100 pharma and logistics industry participants joined a webinar last week hosted by Pharma. Aero, a life sciences logistics group, to discuss the Gulf crisis and its supply-chain and transport implications. Doaa Fathallah, chief operating officer at a biopharma logistics company, said cold-chain cargo was getting through, but only with round-the-clock re-routing as airspace restrictions shifted rapidly.

SPORTS

SHORT TAKES



Joan Laporta celebrates his victory after being re-elected as FC Barcelona president alongside his board members. — Reuters

LAPORTA RE-ELECTED BARCA PRESIDENT FOR NEXT FIVE YEARS

BARCELONA: Joan Laporta was re-elected as Barcelona president on Sunday, defeating Victor Font to stay in charge of the Catalan giants until 2031.

The charismatic 63-year old, who also beat out Font in the 2021 election, will reclaim his position in July after resigning a few weeks ago as part of the electoral process.

Around 42 per cent of Barcelona club members voted — translating to 48,480 votes. Laporta triumphed by 68.18 per cent to Font’s 29.78 per cent.

“This result makes us very happy and gives us a lot of strength, a lot, so much that it leaves us speechless,” Laporta told reporters.

“No one will stop us. I am sure that in the coming years, as I’ve said to you, we have some thrilling times ahead.”

Laporta said the club would focus on completing the partially-rebuilt Camp Nou stadium, now slated for completion in 2027, a year later than planned, as well as continuing to defend the club against perceived outside attacks.

“(Club members) have voted for our proposal, which was that all of us together should defend Barca against everything and everyone,” added the re-elected chief.

He also thanked coach Hansi Flick and sporting director Deco, who helped the club win a domestic treble last season.

Laporta previously led the club between 2003-2010, in arguably Barcelona’s golden era, during which they won the treble with Pep Guardiola at the helm in 2009.

PLAYERS VOTING

Several Barcelona first-team players and Flick headed to vote after the team’s 5-2 victory over Sevilla earlier on, with Laporta joining them at the ballot boxes.

Former Barca midfielder Sergio Busquets, three-time women’s Ballon d’Or winner and star of Barca Femeni Aitana Bonmati and former player and coach Xavi Hernandez were among other club members casting votes. Voting booths were set up at Camp Nou, as well as other Catalan cities Girona, Tarragona and Lleida, and in Andorra.

Laporta was seen celebrating long before the votes were counted, as well as dancing with Barca players after their emphatic win at Camp Nou.

The lawyer, who was elected in 2021 after pledging to keep superstar Lionel Messi at the club — which he was unable to do — helped Barca stay afloat despite inheriting a financial crisis.

Laporta controversially sold off future television rights and parts of the club to generate funds to sign players including Robert Lewandowski and Raphinha in the summer of 2022.

Barca won La Liga titles in 2023 and 2025, and with coach Flick at the helm returned to the Champions League semifinals last season for the first time since 2019.

Laporta was criticised in some quarters for joining forces with Real Madrid chief Florentino Perez to try and make the doomed European Super League project happen. Barcelona finally pulled out of it earlier this year.

During Laporta’s first spell as president he oversaw a joyous period for Barca, including the arrival of Brazil star Ronaldinho, the club’s greatest ever player Messi emerging and two Champions League triumphs in 2006 and 2009.

Defeated candidate Font said he would like the election process to be modernised, allowing members who live far from Catalonia to vote without having to travel. “The turnout is the most negative aspect of the day — we would have loved for it to be higher because we believe the club needs to be more participatory, as with voting by mail,” said Font. “More participation means more strength.” — AFP

Oman Club beat Muscat to clinch fifth handball title



Oman Club players celebrating with the trophy after the win. — Photo by Khalfan al Ruzaiqi

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, MARCH 16

OMAN CLUB retained the First Division Handball League title after defeating Muscat Club 31-28 in the final held at the main hall of Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher on Sunday evening, under the auspices of Mohsin bin Hani al Bahrani, Chairman of Al Amerat Club. Oman Club continued its dominance of the competition by securing its fifth consecutive title and the 11th in its history, while Al Seeb Club finished third.

The match started at a fast and exciting pace from the opening moments, with Oman Club taking an early lead through Said al Hasani before Muscat replied quickly via Zakariya al Busaidy.

Hamad al Dughaisi restored Oman’s advantage, but Hussein al Hasani levelled for Muscat at 2-2, setting the tone for a fiercely contested opening. Said al Hasani then added Oman’s third as both sides continued to trade goals in an evenly matched first half.

Muscat moved ahead for the first time through Qais al Hasani, while Said al Hasani kept Oman in touch with key goals. Zakariya al Busaidy and Azzan al



The final match between Oman Club and Muscat at Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex.

Maashari were influential for Muscat as the score stayed close at 11-11.

A major turning point came in the 20th minute when Muscat’s Azzan al Maashari was sent off despite his strong performance.

Muscat still pressed on, with Zakariya al Busaidy scoring twice to open up a 13-11 lead, the first two-goal gap of the match. Said al Hasani reduced the deficit and later converted a seven-metre throw to make it 14-13 with four minutes left in the half. Oman then suffered a setback of their own when Abdulmalik Fadl was shown a red

card after a VAR review in the 26th minute, before Muscat closed the half leading 16-15.

Muscat began the second half strongly and scored first to go 17-15 ahead, but Oman quickly regained its balance through Hamad al Dughaisi, who reduced the gap, before Al Azhar al Hadidi restored Muscat’s two-goal lead.

Oman, however, showed the spirit of champions and levelled the score at 18-18 through back-to-back goals from Said al Hasani and Taher al Hadidi.

From that point, the match entered its decisive phase as both teams continued to exchange goals in a highly intense contest. Oman looked more solid defensively and more effective in taking its attacking chances, moving 29-26 ahead with five minutes remaining.

Maheer al Hadidi then strengthened Oman’s advantage by scoring the 30th goal, while Muscat attempted a late comeback through Asaad al Hasani, who cut the deficit with three minutes left.

In the closing minutes, Oman’s players managed the game well and preserved their advantage until the final whistle, sealing a 31-28 victory and claiming their fifth successive title and the 11th in the club’s history, once again confirming their status as one of the leading handball clubs in Oman.

Oman Logistics Academy crowned Koorathon tourney

WALEED AL JAHWARI
MUSCAT, MARCH 16

Oman Logistics Academy (Team A) were crowned champions of the inaugural Koorathon Championship for Higher Education Institutions 2026 after defeating University of Nizwa 4-2 in the final held on Sunday evening at Goal One Stadium in Muscat.

The final match was held under the auspices of Hussein bin Mohammed al Lawati, Member of Majlis Ash’shura representing Muttrah, and in the presence of Dr Mansoor bin Mahfoodh al Qasimi, CEO of the Oman Logistics Academy.

The match delivered an exciting and competitive contest as both teams displayed strong attacking intent from the opening minutes. Oman Logistics Academy opened the scoring early in the game before University of Nizwa quickly responded with an equaliser.



Oman Logistics Academy celebrating with the trophy.

The academy regained the lead after capitalising on a mistake by the University of Nizwa goalkeeper to score the second goal before adding a third shortly afterwards to end the first half with a 3-1 advantage.

University of Nizwa entered the second half with strong attacking pressure in an attempt to reduce the deficit,

but Oman Logistics Academy struck again with a fourth goal to extend the lead to 4-1.

Despite the setback, University of Nizwa continued their efforts and managed to score a second goal, but time ran out before they could mount a full comeback as the academy secured a 4-2 victory to lift the title.

The goals for Oman Logistics

Academy were scored by Irfan al Salmi, Ali al Balushi, Majid al Wahaibi and Laith al Tuwaigri, while Nasr al Rawahi and Ali Moosa scored for University of Nizwa.

At the conclusion of the tournament, the patron honoured the winning team with the championship trophy and gold medals, while University of Nizwa received the runners-up award. International College of Engineering and Management secured third place and Sultan Qaboos University finished fourth.

Individual awards were also presented, with Hudhaifa al Maamari from the University of Technology and Applied Sciences winning the top scorer award with five goals. Ali bin Moosa al Balushi from University of Nizwa was named the best player of the tournament, while Warith al Raqadi from Oman Logistics Academy received the best goalkeeper award.

SINNER TOPS MEDVEDEV TO WIN FIRST INDIAN WELLS TITLE

WORLD NUMBER two Jannik Sinner surged home to beat Daniil Medvedev 7-6 (8/6), 7-6 (7/4) on Sunday to capture his first Indian Wells ATP Masters 1000 crown. Four-time Grand Slam champion Sinner won his first title of 2026, rallying from 0-4 down in the second-set tiebreaker to seal the win against a resurgent Medvedev, winner of the title in Dubai last month who was riding a nine-match ATP winning streak.

That included an upset semifinal triumph over Carlos Alcaraz that ended the top-ranked Spaniard's 16-match winning streak to start the season.

But Sinner, who didn't drop a set in the tournament, proved just that bit better in a match where both sets went to the tiebreakers without a break of serve.

"I kept believing and kept pushing," Sinner said of his closing burst. "I went for my shots a little more. A third set, we would have started even, so I tried my best to close it out and I am very happy.

"It was an incredible ending," added Sinner, who said he wasn't troubled by the hot afternoon temperatures thanks to the lack of humidity and some extra days of pre-tournament preparation.

Sinner didn't face a break point in the one-hour 55-minute contest, winning 43 of the 47 points on which he put his first serve in play.

Medvedev saved the only two break points he faced in the seventh game of the opening set, but Sinner's tiebreaker prowess proved too much.

Medvedev was up 5-4 in the first-set tiebreaker when he let a ball sail by him and it landed in.

He'd go on to save one set point, but Sinner gave himself another with a blistering forehand that the Russian couldn't handle and pocketed the set with a thundering service winner.

Medvedev looked on track to level the match when he raced to a 4-0 lead in the second-set decider — aided by Sinner's second double-fault of the match.

But Sinner roared home to join Novak Djokovic and Roger Federer as the only players to win all six of the ATP's hardcourt Masters 1000 tournaments.

"It feels amazing, great achievement," said Sinner, who was already turning his gaze to the Miami Open, the second leg of the "Sunshine Double" where men's first-round play begins on Wednesday.

"I have couple of days to relax (but) there is not so much time in between here and Miami ... we try to play the best tennis possible there, too."

BITTERSWEET FEELING

Medvedev said the outcome was "bittersweet" after a semifinal victory over Alcaraz — who beat him in the Indian Wells finals in 2023 and 2024 — that felt like winning the tournament.

"But that's not the reality," he said. "There is a final to play.

I had my opportunity, small opportunity in the first set. A bit bigger opportunity in the tiebreak in the second.

"But at the same time, I was hanging by not big margins in the whole set.

"It's a bittersweet feeling where it feels good to do what I did this week. But of course I wanted to try to push him even more. He was serving phenomenal.

(It) was super tough to be on the return position today."

While Medvedev missed a chance to become just the second player to beat both Alcaraz and Sinner in the same tournament, the former world number one underscored his return to form after a disappointing 2025 campaign and will return to the top 10 on Monday.

"It's great to see Daniil back playing this level," Sinner said. "I do believe that tennis needs him." — AFP



Jannik Sinner (ITA) celebrates with the championship trophy after he defeated Daniil Medvedev (RUS). — **Imagn Images**

Sabalenka edges Rybakina to claim Indian Wells title

Aryna Sabalenka saved a match point on the way to a 3-6, 6-3, 7-6 (8/6) victory over Elena Rybakina on Sunday to claim a long-awaited first Indian Wells title.

Sabalenka ended a frustrating run of finals futility against Rybakina, who had won their last four title clashes starting with a triumph at Indian Wells in 2023 and including a nail-biter at the Australian Open in January.

Sabalenka rallied from a break down in the second set and fought off a match point trailing 5-6 in the tiebreaker before finally gaining the longed-for title — and a healthy measure of revenge.

"Thanks God I got this trophy," said Sabalenka, who lost to Russian teen Mirra Andreeva in last year's final.

She had appeared on her way with a break for 2-1 in the third set. But Rybakina piled on the return pressure to break back for 5-5 and fought off five break points in the next game.

Deflated but determined, Sabalenka held at love to force the tiebreaker, rallying from 3-5 down before saving match point with a stunning backhand winner. She won the next point on Rybakina's serve and delivered another massive serve herself to seal it.

"On that five-all game, I was really upset each time I would miss her second serve," Sabalenka said. "I felt like I had a lot of opportunities in that game, which I didn't use. I didn't feel my best, for sure, after that game.

"But what I'm happy with is that in the next one I was able to pull out great serves to get that game and get into the tiebreak."

Sabalenka said that the "boiling"



Aryna Sabalenka (BEL) celebrates with the championship trophy after winning the women's final of the BNP Paribas Open defeating Elena Rybakina (KAZ). — **Imagn Images**



Aryna Sabalenka (BEL) reacts after a point during the womens final defeating Elena Rybakina (KAZ). — **Imagn Images**

temperature on court had her "dying" in the tiebreaker, but she could see that Rybakina was affected, too.

"So I was trying to push myself basically to the limit," Sabalenka

said. "I'm super happy that in those last three points of the match, I was able to pull out really great tennis and get the win."

The latest clash between the big-serving, big-hitting rivals was again

a match of razor-thin margins.

Rybakina converted the only break point of the opening set for a 4-2 lead and backed up the break with a love game.

It wasn't until she served for the set that Rybakina lost two points in a service game. But after falling behind 0-30 she powered back, giving herself a set point with an ace and pocketing the set when Sabalenka's backhand down the line slipped wide.

A double-fault on break point in the opening game of the second set left Sabalenka in a world of trouble.

BIG DROP

But despite her obvious frustration Sabalenka dug in, winning the next four games to take a 4-1 lead.

She broke Rybakina at love to level the set at 1-1 and saved two more break points in a marathon third game.

Rybakina, her forehand errors rising along with the desert heat, double-faulted on break point to hand Sabalenka a 3-1 lead, Sabalenka holding with ease to make it 4-1 before Rybakina stopped the rot.

Sabalenka had to fend off a break point for 5-2 and saved another one with an ace as she served out the set.

"I think the first set I played really well, and I was much more with the energy. Second set, big drop," Rybakina said. "Then in the third, I think for both of us was quite difficult."

Sabalenka will now head into her Miami Open title defence aiming to complete the "Sunshine Double."

Rybakina will arrive in Miami ranked second in the world, climbing one spot to overtake Poland's Iga Swiatek. — AFP



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Campaign period from 18th February to 18th April 2026 and Customers receive *free registration on all models, **complimentary service package for 3 years or 45,000 km (whichever comes first). The offer includes 3 years of roadside assistance through AAA#, excluding services related to accidents, floods, wadis, mountain roads, islands, and off-road or sand routes; Musandam Governorate is not serviceable. All iCAUR vehicles come with a 6 year / 200,000 km (whichever comes first) manufacturer warranty from the date of delivery, subject to terms and conditions. Power Battery warranty of 8 years / 200,000 km (whichever is earlier), applies to eligible models. The installation charges for ##Home charger will be borne by the customer only. Offers are not applicable to Government Organizations, Ministries, or RACs and all benefits are subject to stock availability. Images and colors are for illustrative purposes only. For more details and model availability, please visit your iCAUR showroom.

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SHORT TAKES



The index evaluates 176 economies worldwide based on the degree of economic freedom.

OMAN JUMPS 19 PLACES IN ECONOMIC FREEDOM INDEX

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman has advanced 19 positions in the 2026 Index of Economic Freedom, ranking 39th globally compared with 58th in 2025, according to the latest report published by the The Heritage Foundation. The index evaluates 176 economies worldwide based on the degree of economic freedom, measured across 12 indicators grouped into four main pillars: rule of law, government size, regulatory efficiency and open markets. These pillars assess factors including property rights, government integrity and judicial effectiveness, as well as tax burden, government spending, fiscal health, business freedom, labour freedom, monetary freedom and openness to trade, investment and financial services.

Oman's overall score rose to 68.5 out of 100, marking its highest level in the past five years and maintaining the country's classification as a "fairly free" economy. The score also stands above both the global averages, reflecting improvements in fiscal management and market openness.

The most notable progress was recorded in the Fiscal Health indicator, where Oman's score surged from 63.2 in 2025 to 97.5 this year. The improvement reflects a decline in the public debt-to-GDP ratio and the recording of a budget surplus, both outcomes of Oman's fiscal consolidation efforts in recent years.

Oman also achieved strong results in Trade Freedom, scoring 78.4 out of 100, reflecting relatively low tariff barriers and policies supporting the movement of goods and services across borders.

In addition, Oman recorded 74.7 out of 100 in the Government Spending indicator, which measures the scale of public expenditure, including state consumption and transfer payments linked to social programmes. The report also shows Oman maintaining stable performance across several indicators, including Tax Burden (97.6), Investment Freedom (70) and Financial Freedom (60). Efforts to enhance the country's global competitiveness are being coordinated by the National Competitiveness Office, working through the National Team for Improving Network Readiness and Economic Freedom, under the National Programme for Private Sector Development and Foreign Trade (Nazdaher). — ONA

Muscat seeks global playbook for competitive business districts

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, MARCH 16

Muscat has joined the Global Business Districts Innovation Club in a move that officials say could give the Omani capital access to the global knowledge, planning models and innovation tools behind some of the world's leading business districts.

According to Jamal al Hadi, Media Adviser to the Minister of Housing and Urban Planning, Muscat became the first city in the Middle East to enter the network after the Greater Muscat Structure Plan and the Al Khuwair Downtown project were admitted as the club's 15th member worldwide.

In remarks posted on LinkedIn, Al Hadi said the agreement was signed during MIPIM 2026 in Cannes, France, one of the world's leading real estate investment events.

He said Muscat now joins a network that includes internationally recognised districts such as Paris La Défense, Chicago Loop Alliance, Toronto Waterfront and Beijing CBD. Al Hadi said the value of the



Muscat became the first city in the Middle East to enter the network after the Greater Muscat Structure Plan and the Al Khuwair Downtown project were admitted as the club's 15th member worldwide.

JAMAL AL HADI



Al Khuwair Downtown, a key component of the wider structure plan for Greater Muscat.

step lies not only in international recognition, but also in what the membership could bring in practical terms.

He said joining the network would support knowledge and technology transfer, including access to global data, innovation frameworks and urban development models used by

established business centres.

That could strengthen Muscat's planning capacity as the capital seeks to improve its appeal as a destination for investment, enterprise and higher-value business activity. The development also adds momentum to the Al Khuwair Downtown project, a key component

300,000 m³/day.

In the Sharqiyah Zone — covering the governorates of Al Sharqiyah North and South, excluding Masirah Island — peak water demand is expected to increase at 4 per cent per year, from 137 thousand m³/day in 2025 to 178 thousand m³/day by 2032. No new capacity is envisaged for procurement in this zone during the forecast period.

Peak water demand in the Dhofar Zone, meanwhile, is projected to grow at 3 per cent annually, rising from 201 thousand m³/day in 2025 to 240 thousand m³/day by 2032.

Nama Dhofar Services (NDS) — a subsidiary of Nama Group — oversees the delivery of potable water to consumers and manages the development, operation and maintenance of the Dhofar water network across Salalah, Taqah and Mirbat.

In assessing water demand growth in the zone, authorities are considering two main drivers:

In assessing water demand growth in the zone, authorities are considering two main drivers: City demand, representing the water needs of Salalah, Taqah and Mirbat cities currently supplied through the existing distribution network; and Jabal demand, covering the mountainous areas of these wilayats, where supply still partly depends on local wellfields.

City demand, representing the water needs of Salalah, Taqah and Mirbat cities currently supplied through the existing distribution network; and Jabal demand, covering the mountainous areas of these wilayats, where supply still partly depends on local wellfields.

In addition, Nama Dhofar Services plans to expand the existing network to cover a larger portion of the Jabal areas and to assess the feasibility of extending supply to nearby wilayats such as Thamrait and Sadah, according to the offtaker.

The new project, designated Dhofar Water IWP 2030, is proposed to be developed in Raysut, for which a suitable site is currently being identified. Development procedures will be initiated upon the completion of a hydrological study to determine safe abstraction levels from the wellfields in the main system (Salalah, Taqah and Mirbat), Nama added.



The Dhofar Water IWP and North Batinah IWP are targeted for commercial launch in 2030 and 2032 respectively.

Two new water projects to address supply gaps

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, MARCH 16

TWO NEW Independent Water Projects (IWPs) are planned for development to help address capacity deficits anticipated in the Sultanate of Oman over the next four to six years.

According to Nama Power and Water Procurement Company (Nama PWP) — the single buyer and procurer of electricity and desalinated water capacity — the first project, designated North Batinah IWP, is envisioned with a capacity of 150,000 m³/day, with operations slated to begin in 2032.

The Dhofar Water IWP 2030, on the other hand, will be sized at around 80,000 m³/day and is expected to commence operations around 2030. The proposed North Batinah project will be sufficient to cover demand growth in the Main Interconnected System (MIS) — encompassing three supply zones: Muscat Zone, Barka Zone and Sohar Zone — in the coming years, PWP noted in its latest 7-Year Outlook Statement.

"Procurement activities would begin once the Pre-Investment Appraisal Documents (PIAD) are finalised and approved by the Authority for Public Services Regulation (APSR). PWP is also coordinating with Nama Water Services (NWS) to secure a suitable site for this project", the company said.

Significantly, peak water demand in the MIS is projected to increase at a rate of 3 per cent per year, rising from 1,211 thousand m³/day in 2025 to around 1,483 thousand m³/day by 2032, according to the offtaker.

Actual average water demand in the MIS reached 1,088 thousand m³/day in 2025. Supply will be further bolstered in 2027 when the Ghubrah III IWP, currently under construction, is scheduled to commence commercial operations with a capacity of

BUSINESS FEATURE

DISCIPLINE OVER VOLUME

WHAT A 15.5 MILLION DHOFAR PORTFOLIO SAYS ABOUT OMAN'S CONTRACTORS



QASIM AL MAASHANI

IN OMAN’S construction business, the number that matters is not always the value of the next contract. More often, it is whether the contractor can keep control when everything hits at once: rising costs, tight schedules, supplier demands and delayed payments.

That is why a Dhofar-based project portfolio worth RO 15.477 million — spread across eight developments — reads less like a headline and more like a useful signal about where the market is heading.

The pipeline is evenly split: four projects have been delivered and four are under construction. Completed works include Marasi Mirbat (RO 3.257 million), Mirbat Complex (RO 500,000), a sales centre in Al Shurooq (RO 120,000) and Al Dahab Residential Complex (RO 1 million). Active sites include Al Dahareez commercial complex (RO 600,000), Marasi Al Saada 1 (RO 2 million), Marasi Al Saada 2 (RO 7 million) and Al Saada residential complex (RO 1 million).

At first glance, this looks like a straightforward growth story. But the mix of projects — and the weight of the largest one — helps explain the new rules of survival for mid-sized contractors in Oman.

A BIG PROJECT IS A WIN — AND A PRESSURE TEST

One project in the portfolio is valued at RO 7 million. That is almost half the pipeline. In construction, a project at that scale can lift a company’s profile quickly. It can also stretch the company in ways smaller jobs never do: larger procurement, heavier reliance on subcontractors, more

complex sequencing and far less room for error.

The real risk is rarely in the drawings. It is in the cash flow.

A contractor may be profitable on paper, yet still struggle if it pays suppliers early while waiting too long for certified payments to come in. This “spend first, collect later” reality is one of the quiet reasons behind contractor distress across the region — including in Oman.

So when you see a portfolio anchored by a single large project, the key question is not “how big is it?” but “how well can the company finance and control it?”

WORKING CAPITAL IS THE REAL BATTLEGROUND

Construction costs are front-loaded. Materials, mobilisation and labour do not wait. But payments depend on milestones, approvals and processing cycles.

That is why many contractors now talk less about margins and more about timing: when you pay and when you collect.

In practical terms, discipline usually shows up in three places:

- *Procurement planning: buying critical items early enough to avoid delays, but not so early that cash gets trapped.*
- *Scope control: preventing small variations from turning into weeks of extra work without compensation.*
- *Site productivity: treating productivity as a financial metric, not just an operational one.*

The Dhofar pipeline’s balance — four completed and four ongoing projects — suggests a deliberate approach: keep delivery moving, keep

exposure manageable and avoid taking on more than the organisation can carry at one time.

“TURNKEY” PROJECTS: CLIENTS LIKE THEM — CONTRACTORS MUST EARN THEM

The listed projects indicate turnkey delivery, including civil works and MEP (mechanical, electrical and plumbing). Clients often prefer this model because it simplifies accountability. One contractor owns the outcome, which reduces coordination failures and handover disputes. For the contractor, though, turnkey work is only an advantage when governance is strong. Otherwise, it can become a trap: one unclear specification or unmanaged variation can quickly ripple across multiple workstreams, raising costs and pushing schedules.

In other words, turnkey delivery is not simply “more work”. It is a different way of operating — one that demands tighter documentation, clearer change-order mechanisms and stronger planning discipline.

TENDERING IS CHANGING: THE MARKET IS LESS FORGIVING

The company profile shows registration with Oman’s Tender Board Secretariat under registration

number 00014767, dated February 5, 2025. Tender Board alignment can expand access to more structured opportunities. But it also comes with higher expectations: compliance, documentation and delivery credibility matter more; and the market is less forgiving of over-promising. One of the clearest shifts in Oman’s contracting space is that “winning” a project is no longer the hardest part. Delivering it without damaging cash flow or reputation is.

This is also why the sector is slowly moving away from price-first bidding. A contract won outside a firm’s capacity can become a long-term burden — financially and operationally.

OMANISATION: THE NUMBER IS NOT THE WHOLE STORY

The workforce in the profile totals 29 employees, including three Omanis — an Omanisation rate of 10.34 per cent.

In construction, localisation is rarely solved by simply increasing headcount. The challenge is skills, site conditions and the fact that productivity is tightly linked to supervision and planning.

A practical pathway many contractors are now following is to localise functions that protect delivery and performance first:

- *Safety supervision*
- *Quality control*
- *Planning and follow-up*
- *Procurement and inventory management*

From there, site supervision roles can expand through hands-on training linked to real projects.

This is how Omanisation stops being a “compliance line” and becomes part of how a contractor builds capacity — which is a key Oman Vision 2040 priority for the private sector.

DHOFAR’S PIPELINE MATTERS BEYOND DHOFAR

These projects are concentrated in Dhofar — in Salalah and Mirbat — which is part of a bigger national story: development is not only about Muscat.

Tourism-linked activity, housing demand and mixed-use development are helping sustain regional construction cycles. But regional growth also comes with challenges: logistics, supply chains and seasonal considerations that increase the importance of planning discipline.

So Dhofar’s projects are not just local business. They are a regional indicator of how Oman’s construction growth is being shaped on the ground.

2026: THE MARKET WILL REWARD CONTROL

If there is one lesson coming through clearly from this pipeline, it is that the market is rewarding a different kind of growth.

Not growth driven by the number of contracts — but growth built on:

- *Delivery credibility*
- *Cash-flow sequencing*
- *Controlled expansion*
- *Disciplined tendering*
- *Productivity-led Omanisation*

As 2026 approaches, Oman’s contracting sector is likely to see more separation between firms that scale with control and firms that scale on paper only. In this cycle, discipline is no longer a “nice-to-have”. It is the business model.

SHORTTAKES



The rise comes amidst heightened volatility in global energy markets.

OMAN CRUDE SURGES TO \$147.79/BARREL

MUSCAT: The official price of Omani crude oil for May delivery rose sharply to \$147.79 per barrel on Monday, marking an increase of \$3.43 from last Friday's price of \$144.36. The rise comes amidst heightened volatility in global energy markets as geopolitical tensions in the Middle East continue to disrupt oil production and shipping routes.

Despite the latest surge, the average price of Omani crude for March delivery stood at \$62.17 per barrel, up slightly by 8 cents compared with the February delivery average.

International oil benchmarks also moved higher on Monday as the ongoing conflict involving the United States, Israel and Iran intensified concerns over supply disruptions in the region.

Brent crude futures climbed \$2.30, or 2.2 per cent, to \$103.44 per barrel, while US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) rose \$1.29, or 1.3 per cent, to \$96.40 per barrel by 09:03 GMT.

Both benchmarks have surged by more than 40 per cent this month, reaching their highest levels since 2022. The spike follows attacks targeting Iran, which prompted Tehran to halt shipping through the Strait of Hormuz, a strategic waterway through which roughly one-fifth of the world's oil and liquefied natural gas supplies normally pass.

Further tightening market sentiment, oil-loading operations at the UAE's Fujairah port were suspended on Monday after a drone strike ignited a fire in the emirate's petroleum industrial zone.

Fujairah — located outside the Strait of Hormuz — handles about one million barrels per day of the UAE's Murban crude, equivalent to roughly 1 per cent of global oil demand.

The International Energy Agency warned the conflict is creating the largest oil supply disruption in history, as major producers including Saudi Arabia, Iraq and the UAE have curtailed output amidst escalating security risks. — Agencies

Regional airline plan to widen tourism reach

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, MARCH 16

OMAN'S PLAN to launch a regional airline by the end of this year could do more than add new air routes. It could help connect underserved parts of the country, open up fresh tourism demand and support broader economic diversification, according to an Omani communications and strategy expert.

The view follows remarks by the Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology in an interview with Al Wisal, in which he said a new regional airline is expected to be launched from Oman to serve destinations within a radius of around 1,200 kilometres. He also said the carrier could operate under Oman Air or SalamAir.

Commenting on the proposal, Mohammed al Salmi, Founding Partner of The Story Teller, said the initiative could carry important economic and developmental value, especially if it improves links between regional airports and makes emerging destinations easier to reach.

He said stronger air connectivity could help reduce dependence on long road journeys, while also supporting Oman's wider push to diversify its economy and spread development more evenly across the Sultanate of Oman.

In his view, destinations such as Khasab, Al Jabal Al Akhdhar, Masirah and Suhar could stand to gain if they are included in a future regional



If implemented well, a regional airline could become an important part of Oman's effort to make itself more connected, more accessible and more competitive as a tourism and logistics hub.

network. Easier access would make such locations more attractive to domestic and international visitors, which in turn could raise tourism spending, improve hotel occupancy and support small and medium-sized businesses in the governorates.

The proposal also aligns with a broader national effort to use transport infrastructure more effectively to support tourism, investment and regional development.

On the business case, Al Salmi said regional aviation in Oman could be commercially viable if routes are chosen carefully and backed by real demand.

At the same time, he noted that in countries with a varied geography such as Oman, regional air services are not always judged only by immediate profit. In many cases, they also serve a strategic

purpose by improving mobility, linking remote areas and creating conditions for local economies to grow.

He added that operating the proposed carrier under an existing airline such as Oman Air or SalamAir could make sound economic sense. Doing so could lower start-up costs and allow the project to build on systems that are already in place, including maintenance, infrastructure and distribution networks.

That approach could also help the airline enter the market more quickly and avoid some of the early pressures that often face a completely new standalone carrier.

Still, Al Salmi said the success of the project would depend on how well it is executed. Among the main issues, he said, are the choice of aircraft, the design of schedules, the

ability to connect regional services with international networks, the readiness of some airports to handle more traffic and the strength of tourism promotion for newly connected destinations.

He also pointed to rising competition in the short-haul market, which means the airline would need a clear and disciplined model if it is to balance commercial realities with its wider developmental role.

As official studies continue, the project is likely to draw close attention from the aviation, tourism and investment communities. If implemented well, Al Salmi said, a regional airline could become an important part of Oman's effort to make itself more connected, more accessible and more competitive as a tourism and logistics hub.

Muscat Stock Exchange to extend trading hours from June

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, MARCH 16

The Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) has announced an extension of its daily trading hours, a move aimed at improving market efficiency, boosting liquidity and strengthening the exchange's alignment with regional and international markets.

According to the exchange, the revised trading schedule will take effect from June 1, 2026, as part of its broader efforts to enhance operational infrastructure and reinforce the attractiveness of Oman's capital market to both domestic and foreign investors.

Currently, trading on MSX typically closes at around 2:00 pm. Under the new schedule, the market will close at 3:00 pm, effectively extending the trading day by

roughly 1 hour.

Under the new schedule, the trading day will begin with a pre-opening session from 9:30 am to 10:00 am, allowing market participants to place and modify orders before continuous trading begins. The continuous trading session will run from 10:00 am until 2:45 pm, representing the core period during which buy and sell orders are matched.

Following this, a pre-closing session will take place from 2:45 pm to 2:55 pm, enabling the market to determine closing prices through an orderly process. This will be followed by a trading at closing price session from 2:55 pm to 3:00 pm, after which the market will officially close at 3:00 pm.

The extension reflects MSX's strategy to strengthen its competitiveness and better



The revised schedule is part of MSX's broader efforts to enhance operational infrastructure and reinforce the attractiveness of Oman's capital market.

integrate Oman's equity market with global financial systems.

By aligning trading hours more closely with regional and international markets, the

exchange expects to facilitate greater participation from foreign institutional investors and improve cross-border investment flows.

Market officials noted that the revised timetable is also designed to support higher levels of market liquidity and trading activity.

Longer trading hours typically provide investors with more opportunities to respond to developments in global financial markets, including economic data releases, geopolitical events and commodity price movements.

Another key objective of the change is to provide investors with additional time to react to local, regional and international news, which increasingly influences market sentiment and trading strategies.

In fast-moving financial markets, the ability to adjust positions in

response to new information is considered an important element in improving market efficiency.

The extended trading hours form part of the exchange's broader initiatives aimed at strengthening Oman's capital market ecosystem.

These efforts include improving market infrastructure, attracting new listings, expanding investor participation and enhancing the overall trading environment.

Analysts note that exchanges worldwide have increasingly adopted longer trading sessions and more flexible market structures to accommodate global investment flows and digital trading platforms.

In this context, MSX's decision represents a further step in positioning Oman's stock market as a more accessible and internationally connected investment destination.

GOLD RETREAT

Gold slips as rate cut hopes fade



Gold prices eased as expectations of a near-term US interest rate cut weakened amidst rising energy costs. Spot gold slipped 0.2% to \$5,007.58 per ounce, while April futures fell 1% to \$5,011.10.

A softer dollar and lower yields from the United States Department of the Treasury limited losses. Among other precious metals, silver dropped 1.2%, while platinum rose 0.8% and palladium gained 1%. — Reuters

TRADE DIPLOMACY

US, China advance talks before summit



US and Chinese officials held talks in Paris aimed at shaping potential agreements on agriculture, critical minerals and managed trade ahead of a possible summit between President Donald Trump and President Xi Jinping.

Discussions were described as stable, but final decisions rest with the leaders. Trump also signalled the meeting could be delayed. — Reuters

ENERGY CRISIS

EU seeks ways to curb energy costs



European Union energy ministers are considering emergency measures to contain rising energy costs triggered by the Iran war and the closure of the Strait of Hormuz. Options include state support for industry, tax reductions and adjustments to the EU carbon market.

The European Commission is also examining a possible cap on gas prices to protect consumers and stabilise markets. — Reuters

OPINION

If I were born today, who would I become tomorrow?



TARIQ AL BARWANI

The writer is strategic adviser, businessman and motivational speaker

WITH EVERYTHING that is happening today, from the rapid technological revolution to the changing social environments surrounding our children, I often ask myself a simple question: what kind of person would I become if I were born today? Would I think the same and behave the same? Would my ambitions, habits and character be shaped differently?

Honestly, I doubt that. In fact, I often feel grateful that I was not born at this time. Why I think so is the focus of my article this week. Children today are growing up in a world where information is instant and attention is constantly pulled by platforms like YouTube, Instagram, TikTok and Snapchat.

Access to almost anything — be it knowledge, influence, entertainment or, unfortunately, even harmful behaviours — is only a few clicks away. At the same time, social pressures, late-night lifestyles and exposure to environments that were once reserved for adults are increasingly becoming normalised among young people.

Every generation believes its challenges are unique, but today’s children are growing up in a world that is fundamentally different from the one many parents experienced. Technology, social environments and market forces have transformed childhood itself. My parents had deep respect for and trust in my grandparents.

Those of us born in the same generation as me (Generation X) still tend to maintain that

respect for the elderly. But would we honestly expect the same from those born today? Many children today believe they know more than their parents. They expect more, demand more and sometimes assume it is their parents’ responsibility to provide everything without question.

When I was growing up, information was limited. If I wanted to learn something, I first asked my parents or teachers, then searched in books and ultimately learned through experience. Today, children carry the world’s knowledge in their pockets. With a few taps, they can access vast amounts of information through platforms like ChatGPT and many social media channels.

While this access can accelerate learning, it also changes how young minds process the world. Attention spans are shorter. Patience is thinner. Curiosity is often replaced by instant answers.

Don’t get me wrong — if I were born today, perhaps I would be better at navigating digital tools. But I might also be less patient in discovering things slowly.

Technology has also changed the way children socialise. In the past, friendships were built in playgrounds and neighbourhoods. Conflicts were resolved face-to-face. Today, much of a young person’s social life takes place through screens.

Children are constantly exposed to comparison. Perfect lifestyles, edited photos and viral trends can make ordinary life feel inadequate. The pressure to fit in, gain followers or stay relevant can quietly shape

Every generation believes its challenges are unique, but today’s children are growing up in a world that is fundamentally different from the one many parents experienced. Technology, social environments and market forces have transformed childhood itself. My parents had deep respect for and trust in my grandparents.

a child’s identity. Ask a child today to return home after school, college or even shortly after the last prayer call (Isha) and you might be surprised by the response: “Dad or Mom, life starts now”. But are we fully aware of the environments our children are exposed to outside the home?

What used to be rare behaviour in earlier generations is becoming increasingly normalised among teenagers. Peer influence and nightlife culture can have a strong impact. There is also growing concern about the accessibility of harmful substances among young people. In many places, drugs such as hashish and other dangerous substances are unfortunately finding their way into school environments at younger ages than before.

Technology dependence is another defining feature of modern childhood. Devices are no longer just tools; they are companions. Phones wake children up, entertain them, guide their social lives and sometimes even replace real-world interactions.

This dependence also affects how children solve problems. Instead of thinking deeply, many instinctively search for quick solutions online. While efficiency improves, the ability to struggle through challenges may slowly weaken.

If I were born today, would I be strong enough to resist these pressures? Or would constant exposure make it harder to distinguish what is right from what is simply popular?

CHINA TECH’S OLD GUARD LOSE THEIR AI THUNDER

ROBYN MAK

There’s a new kid on the block in China’s technology sector. Shares in established giants Alibaba and Tencent have underperformed the broader market, while five-year-old MiniMax briefly surpassed Baidu’s \$40 billion-plus market value last week.

It’s still early days for artificial intelligence models, apps and agents, but this may be the start of a changing of the guard. The so-called BAT trio is synonymous with China’s consumer internet, having blazed a trail in e-commerce, search, mobile payments, messaging and more. But they are increasingly playing catch-up in AI.

ByteDance’s Doubao, for instance, is the country’s most popular chatbot, even after aggressive marketing campaigns from the incumbents to lure users. And Knowledge Atlas Technology, an upstart also called Zhipu that’s virtually unknown outside of the People’s Republic, now boasts the country’s best large language model, according to independent research shop Artificial Analysis.

That has translated into a dramatic divergence in market performance. Shares in AI labs MiniMax and Zhipu have delivered triple-digit percentage gains since their January debuts.

Privately held peer Moonshot is planning a \$1 billion funding round that would take its valuation to \$18 billion, up from \$4.3 billion last year. Compare that to Alibaba and Tencent, whose shares have fallen 7% and 9%, this year.

One factor is that growth in their core businesses is slowing. Revenue at Alibaba’s main Chinese commerce unit is forecast to grow less than 5% year-on-year in the three months to the end of December, per analysts’ forecasts on Visible Alpha and account for 47% of the total.

Meanwhile, Tencent’s cash cow divisions of video games, digital media and social networking are expected to do better, with sales on track to rise by 13% over the same period.

But that is upstaged by MiniMax’s 159% surge in full-year 2025 sales, albeit from a much lower base.

A bigger concern is how AI will disrupt Alibaba’s and Tencent’s closely guarded digital ecosystems. Having a virtual assistant order and pay for takeout or schedule meetings will mean less human engagement with all-in-one super apps, many of which prize their hold on user data and advertising dollars. — Reuters

Oman is open for business

CONSIDER THE world as it stands today. The Strait of Hormuz, through which roughly one-fifth of global oil supply flows, has in recent tensions seen severe disruption. Maritime traffic that once averaged over 150 vessel transits a day has declined sharply. Maersk, Hapag-Lloyd, CMA CGM and COSCO have at times suspended Gulf transits. War-risk insurance has surged.

Oil prices have spiked in response to uncertainty. Simultaneously, the global trade system continues to absorb the aftershocks of sweeping tariff escalations that have contracted merchandise trade and forced companies to reconfigure their supply chains.

Against this backdrop, a simple question deserves a thoughtful answer: where does a business go when the traditional corridors close?

One answer is Oman. Not because it is immune to the turbulence around it — no country in the Gulf is — but because the Sultanate of Oman has spent years building the institutional resilience, the physical infrastructure and the policy frameworks that allow it to operate when others cannot.

What makes Oman’s proposition distinctive is not a single advantage but the convergence of several: geographic positioning outside the chokepoint, deep-water port capacity on the Arabian Sea, a diversified economic base that is no longer tethered solely to hydrocarbons and a governance culture that prizes stability, predictability and long-term commitment over short-term spectacle.

Geography is destiny in logistics and Oman’s geography is now proving its worth. The Sultanate of Oman’s major deep-water ports — Al Duqm, Salalah and Suhar — sit on the Arabian Sea and the Sea of Oman, providing access to open shipping routes beyond the immediate chokepoint.

While ports inside the Arabian Gulf may face disruption during periods of tension, Oman’s maritime gateways are being positioned as contingency hubs for cargo flows into the wider Arabian hinterland.



Geography is destiny in logistics, and Oman’s geography is now proving its worth.



DR YOUSUF HAMED AL BALUSHI

youseufh@omaninvestgateway.com

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

Logistics providers operating in the region have already begun rerouting. Overland trucking corridors connecting Oman to the UAE and Saudi Arabia, initially developed in response to earlier Red Sea disruptions, have become critical arteries. The Special Economic Zone at Duqm, with its 2,000-square-kilometre footprint and direct access to open ocean, is no longer a future promise — it is rapidly emerging as a functioning alternative.

This resilience is not accidental. It is the product of deliberate policy. For the better part of a decade, Oman has been systematically building an economy that can absorb shocks. The IMF projects real GDP growth of around 3.7 per cent in 2026, driven not by oil but by sustained momentum in manufacturing, services and logistics.

For businesses evaluating where to establish or expand operations, these are not theoretical figures. They represent an economy that is growing steadily while much of the world is bracing for contraction.

Equally important is how Oman has positioned itself within the global trade architecture. In December 2025, Oman and India signed a landmark Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement — the Sultanate of Oman’s first

bilateral trade deal in nearly two decades — across a relationship worth more than \$10 billion annually.

That same month, Oman and Türkiye signed a protocol targeting \$5 billion in bilateral trade over five years. The US-Oman Free Trade Agreement continues to underpin over \$3.3 billion in annual commerce and the January 2026 Strategic Dialogue in Muscat deepened cooperation on critical minerals and supply chain security.

These are deliberate acts of economic architecture — building bridges before the storms arrive. International capital is responding. By early 2025, cumulative FDI reached RO 30.6 billion, up 20.6 per cent year-on-year. The Foreign Capital Investment Law permits 100 per cent foreign ownership.

Free zones offer tax holidays of up to 30 years and fast-track licensing. Moody’s upgraded Oman to investment grade in 2025 and government debt has fallen to roughly 35.5 per cent of GDP.

In a world where capital is growing cautious, these signals tell investors that Oman is not only welcoming business but managing its own house with discipline.

So where does the opportunity lie? In green hydrogen, Oman is advancing seven large-scale projects targeting one million tonnes of annual production by 2030, backed by a \$3.6 billion incentive package and interest from over 130 global companies.

The world is living through compounding uncertainty. Maritime chokepoints are contested. Trade corridors are fragmenting. Tariff regimes shift beneath the feet of businesses that planned for a different era. In such a moment, what matters is not the loudest voice but the most reliable partner.

Oman does not claim to have all the answers. What it offers is something increasingly scarce: a stable, well-governed economy with world-class infrastructure, open market access and a genuine commitment to long-term partnership.

The Sultanate of Oman is not merely open for business. In a fractured world, it may be one of the most reliable pathways for it.

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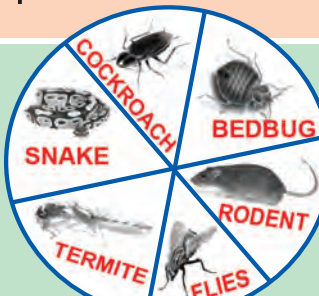
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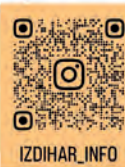
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TIME TO EMBRACE NATURE

IDRIS AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MARCH 16

FOR many, Ramadhan is a time of spiritual reflection, fasting and prayer. But beyond the rituals, the month offers an invitation to reconnect with the natural world, a rhythm of life that mirrors the spiritual journey of the believer.

From the first light of dawn, the quiet of early suhoor hours carries a serenity often overlooked. The rising sun spills gold over rooftops and palm trees, while the soft call of birds accompanies those waking for the pre-dawn meal. In these moments, the stillness of nature becomes a gentle guide, reminding the faithful of patience, presence and gratitude. A recent study

by researchers at the University of British Columbia in Canada found that pausing to reflect on nature, even for brief moments, can increase a person's sense of happiness and inspire a deeper appreciation for faith and the grandeur of creation.

This idea is echoed in the wisdom of the Prophet's companions. Ibn Abbas said that contemplating even an hour of Allah's creation, the universe and its divine laws, is more rewarding than spending an entire night in prayer.

SPIRITUAL REFLECTION

The Holy Quran also reminds believers of this spiritual reflection: "Indeed, in the creation of the heavens and the earth and

the alternation of the night and the day are signs for those of understanding" (Al Imran 3:190). Similarly, the passages of [Al Ghashiyah: 17, 21] encourage us to ponder the natural world as a reflection of divine order.

As the day unfolds, fasting sharpens the senses. The warmth of the sun, the cool evening breeze and the scent of earth become heightened experiences, turning ordinary moments into opportunities for mindfulness. Even the passing shadows of clouds or the subtle rustling of leaves invite reflection, encouraging the believer to slow down and witness the Creator's work in the world around them.

Sunset brings another profound alignment between nature and

spirituality. The anticipation of iftar coincides with the soft glow of the horizon, as golden light fades into twilight. Breaking the fast while observing the evening sky transforms a simple act into a ritual of gratitude.

The cyclical rhythm of day and night, sunrise and sunset, mirrors the spiritual renewal that Ramadhan inspires.

Even the phases of the moon, which mark the holy month, emphasise the connection between cosmic cycles and personal devotion. Each crescent signals not just a temporal change, but a reminder of the larger rhythm of life, the patience required in fasting and the beauty of renewal.

In embracing nature during Ramadhan, believers find more

than aesthetic pleasure, they discover lessons in patience, balance and humility. The rustling of palm fronds, the glimmer of stars at night, or the gentle crash of waves along the coast become teachers, illustrating that spirituality is not confined to rituals alone, but flows through the living world.

Ramadhan, in its essence, calls for alignment, with God, with others and with the world around us.

By observing nature, by noticing the changing sky, the sea and the earth, one finds that the sacred is never far, it is woven into the very fabric of life, inviting each believer to pause, reflect and connect with the divine in every sunrise and every sunset.

FATWA

QUESTION & ANSWER



Samahat Alshaykh
alealaamat 'Ahmad
Alkhalilii

Grand Mufti
of the
Sultanate of Oman

QUESTION

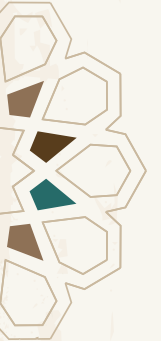
Is wearing artificial (fake) nails permissible in Islam?

ANSWER

Wearing artificial nails for beautification is not permissible because they prevent water from reaching the nails during (ablution). However, they may be permissible for medical or treatment purposes.

QURAN

VERSE OF THE DAY



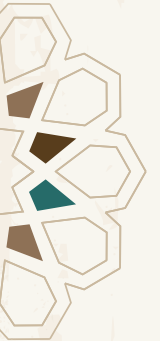
{اللَّهُ لَطِيفٌ بِعِبَادِهِ- يَرْزُقُ مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَهُوَ الْقَوِيُّ الْعَزِيزُ}

Allah is Ever Kind to His servants. He provides abundantly to whoever He wills. And He is the All-Powerful, Almighty.

[Surat Ash-Shuraa] — Verse 19

HADITH

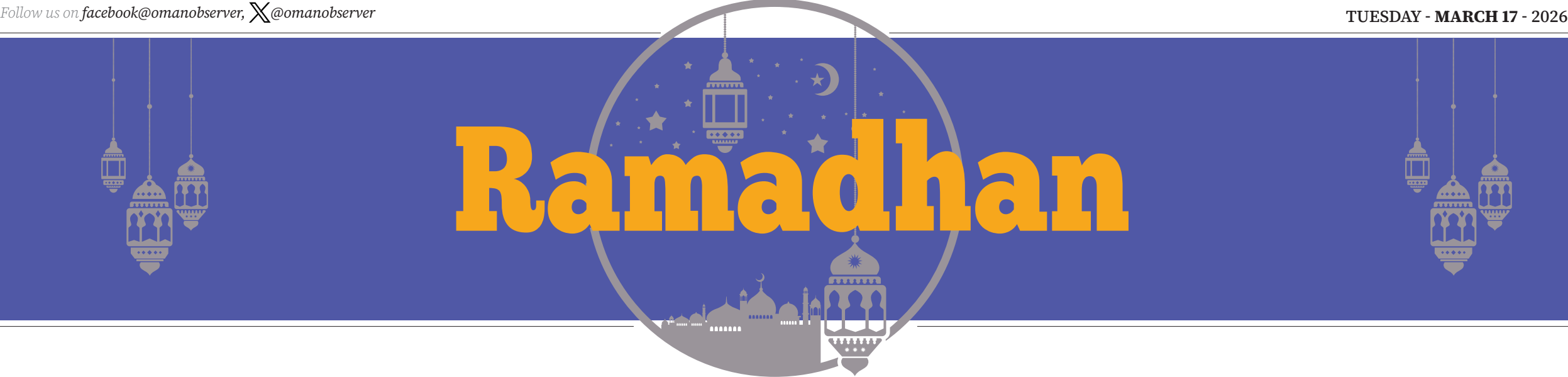
A GUIDE FOR THE FAITHFUL



Abu Huraira reported Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) as saying:

Allah is more pleased with the repentance of His servant when he turns penitently towards Him than one of you would be on finding the lost camel.

[Sahih Al Bukhari]



M A N A G E T H I R S T A N D F A T I G U E

How to stay balanced during fasting hours



MOHAMED AL BATTASHI

MANY people experience thirst and fatigue during the fasting hours of Ramadhan, especially in warmer climates where the day can feel long and demanding. While this feeling is a natural part of fasting, certain daily habits can make the experience more comfortable and help the body maintain its balance throughout the day.

One of the most important factors is how the body prepares before the fast begins. The time between iftar and suhoor gives the body a chance to restore fluids and energy. Drinking water gradually during this period allows the body to absorb it more effectively than consuming large

amounts at once. When hydration is spread out through the evening, the body often feels more stable the next day.

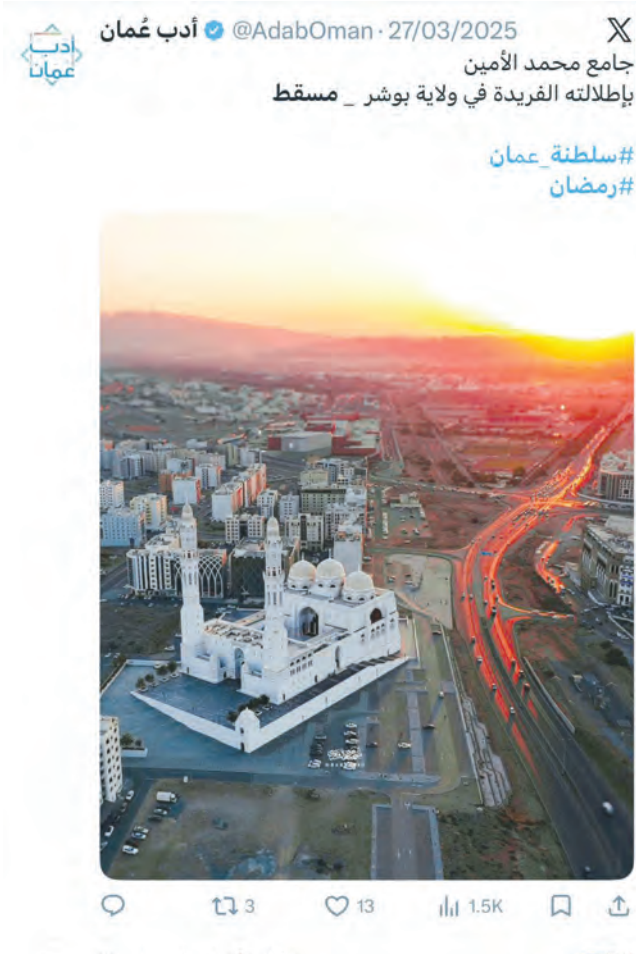
Sleep also plays an important role in how the body handles fasting. When rest is limited or interrupted, the body may feel more tired during the day. A consistent sleep pattern, even if it is slightly different during Ramadhan, can help support energy levels and improve focus during daily activities.

Food choices during the night can also influence how the body feels the next day. Balanced meals that include a variety of nutrients tend to support more stable energy levels compared to meals that are very heavy or overly rich. Eating in moderation often helps the body digest comfortably and prevents sudden feelings of fatigue.

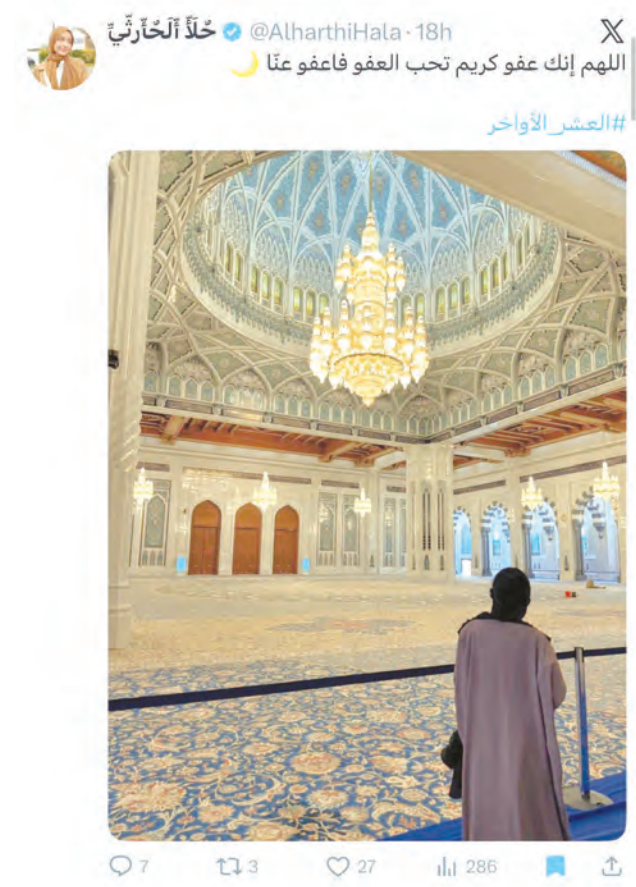
Another helpful approach is managing physical effort during the fasting hours. Light activity and a calm pace can help conserve energy until the evening. Many people find that organising their day to include moments of rest allows them to stay productive without feeling overwhelmed.

Ramadhan is a time of spiritual reflection and personal discipline; and the body gradually adapts to the rhythm of fasting. With mindful hydration, balanced meals and adequate rest, the feeling of thirst and fatigue can become more manageable. Over time, many people discover that maintaining simple daily habits helps them experience the fasting hours with greater ease and comfort.

RAMADHAN TWEETS



Mohammed Al Ameen Mosque glistens beautifully during Ramadhan dusk



A moment of peaceful stillness in Ramadhan

PROMINENT OMANI FIGURES

Who is she?
Aisha bint Rashid bin Khusaib al Riyami al Bahlawi

She was an Omani scholar, jurist and mufti. She was born in Bahla and was regarded as a respected authority and reference in religious knowledge and Islamic legal rulings (fatwas).

RAMADHAN TRADITION



All mosques in the country start their lights at iftar time to show people when they should begin their fasting, light replaces announcements and everyone understands. This silent yet strong custom brings people together through its common rhythm and religious connection, reinforcing shared Ramadhan cultural practices.

HEALTH TIPS

AVOID DIURETIC DRINKS

Excessive consumption of bevarages and liquids that will cause you to lose a large portion of the water stored in your body through urination. It will also result in an increased risk of dehydration.

Therefore, drinks such as coffee and tea should be avoided or limited as much as possible.

FEATURES

EID COUTURE WITH A GLOBAL TOUCH

Al Jasmine’s designs redefine Gulf elegance



SIHAM AL SAIDI
MUSCAT, MARCH 16

AS the festive season approaches, fashion lovers across Oman begin their search for the perfect Eid outfit which is a piece that reflects both celebration and personal style preserving Omani dignity. This year, the new collection by Al Jasmine is drawing attention for its distinctive approach to Eid fashion, combining the refined elegance of Gulf heritage with contemporary design elements that rival international couture trends.

The collection stands out for its luxurious fabrics and intricate craftsmanship. Flowing silhouettes crafted from chiffon, silk and crepe create graceful movement, while hand embroidery and delicate shining accents elevate each design into a statement piece suitable for festive gatherings and evening celebrations.

One of the signature designs from the collection features a regal outline enriched with elaborate gold embroidery across the bodice and sleeves. The garment’s layered chiffon draping adds depth and movement, reflecting a growing trend in Gulf fashion where traditional cuts are reimagined through modern couture techniques.

Commenting on the inspiration behind the collection, Omani fashion designer, Najma al Balushi, founder of the brand, explained that the designs aim to celebrate Gulf taste while presenting it through a modern global lens.

“Each year we try to present something more refined



Omani fashion designer, Najma Al Balushi, founder of Al Jasmine, explained that the Eid collection aims to celebrate Gulf taste while presenting it through a modern global lens.



and distinctive for Eid”, said Najma al Balushi, owner of Al Jasmine brand. “This collection focuses on luxurious fabrics and detailed handwork that highlight the elegance of Gulf fashion while incorporating modern international touches. We want every woman to feel that she is wearing something unique and timeless during Eid”. She added that the collection includes a range of styles such as elegant dresses,

traditional mkhawar pieces and other classic Gulf special inspired cuts, with each design produced in limited quantities to maintain exclusivity.

“Our goal is not just to follow trends, but to create pieces that stand out on their own”, Al Balushi noted. “When women wear these designs, we want them to feel that they are wearing something truly special”. The collection has already generated enthusiastic responses from customers preparing for Eid. Many shoppers have expressed appreciation for the quality and uniqueness of the designs, which offer a level of sophistication often associated with international fashion houses.

One customer, Aisha al hosni, said the collection reflects a new level of creativity in local fashion.

“I used to travel or search online for special Eid outfits”, said Aisha al hosni. “But when I saw the Al Jasmine designs this season, I felt they were truly world-class. The craftsmanship and details are beautiful and honestly they make you feel that you don’t need to look outside Oman to find something elegant and modern for Eid”. For many fashion enthusiasts, this growing confidence in local designers marks an exciting shift in the region’s fashion landscape. Brands like Al Jasmine are demonstrating that Gulf elegance, when paired with creativity and craftsmanship, can easily stand alongside global trends.

As Eid approaches, these designs offer more than festive attire; they represent a celebration of artistry, culture and the evolving identity of Gulf fashion.

ACADEMY AWARDS

‘ONE BATTLE AFTER ANOTHER’ DOMINATES OSCARS



Paul Thomas Anderson stands with his Oscars for Best Picture, Best Adapted Screenplay and Best Director for “One Battle After Another” during the 98th Annual Academy Awards Governors Ball at the Dolby Theatre in Hollywood, California. — Reuters

“One Battle After Another” triumphed at the Oscars on Sunday, winning six awards, including the coveted best picture statuette, besting “Sinners” in a thrilling finale to one of the most competitive awards seasons in recent years.

Director Paul Thomas Anderson personally won three Oscars, the first of his career, for his political thriller that tackles the hot-button issues of immigration raids and white supremacy.

“You make a guy work really hard for one of these,” he said to laughter as he accepted the award for best director.

“I wrote this movie for my kids to say sorry for the housekeeping mess that we left in this world we’re handing off to them,” he said after collecting the best adapted screenplay prize.

“But also with the encouragement that they will be the generation that hopefully brings us some common sense and decency

“One Battle” tells the story of a pot-addled ex-revolutionary, played by Leonardo DiCaprio, who struggles to remember passphrases in a battle of wits against the terrifying Colonel Lockjaw, played by best supporting actor winner Sean Penn. The film also won best editing and the inaugural award for casting.

Anderson is one of the greatest auteurs of contemporary US cinema, but until Sunday had never won an Oscar, despite 11 previous nominations for acclaimed films including “There Will Be Blood” and “Boogie Nights.”

‘SINNERS’ WINS FOUR

Ryan Coogler’s “Sinners,” a bluesy vampire fable that offers a meditation on America’s difficult racial history, had come into the evening with a record-tying 16 nominations.

It left with four awards, including best original screenplay for Coogler and best actor for Michael B. Jordan, who plays gangster twin brothers Smoke and Stack seeking their fortune in the segregated South.

Jordan told reporters backstage that he had created detailed journals to flesh out the backstories of both roles in order to clearly express “those nuances between the two.”

Other prizes were best score for Ludwig Goransson and best cinematography for Autumn Durald Arkapaw, the first time a woman won in that category.

In perhaps the least surprising award of the evening, Jessie Buckley won best actress for her portrayal of William Shakespeare’s heartbroken wife Agnes navigating the loss of their son in “Hamnet.”

Amy Madigan took home the Oscar for best supporting actress for her turn as a demented witch in horror film “Weapons.”

The veteran performer, who scooped the Actors Award two weeks ago, said: “I was in the shower last night, and I thought, ‘Well, this must be a special day, because I’m shaving my legs.’”

INTERNATIONAL AWARD

Norwegian family drama “Sentimental Value” was named best international feature.

“KPop Demon Hunters” won for best animated feature and best original song for “Golden.”

Poignant tributes - Veteran host Conan O’Brien kept proceedings light and funny, with his signature blend of zany satire. That included a swipe at allies of President Donald Trump, who had so objected to Puerto Rican artist Bad Bunny being the star of the Super Bowl halftime show that they had put on their own. — AFP