

INTERNATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS THAT DELIVER



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About Tejarah Talks

INSPIRE EDUCATE ENTERTAIN

Tejarah Talks is organized by Oman Business Forum in association with the Ministry of Commerce, Industry & Investment Promotion. With a firm focus on Oman's current and future business, export and investment environment, Tejarah Talks is a series of informal, interactive discussions that brings together some of Oman's most inspirational and innovative thinkers and doers to share their stories, insights and ideas with an enthusiastic crowd. It is a platform for positive interaction.



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“

The winds and waters of commerce carry opportunities that help nations grow and bring citizens of the world closer together. Put simply, increased trade spells more jobs, higher earnings, better products, less inflation, and cooperation over confrontation. The freer the flow of world trade, the stronger the tides for economic progress and peace among nations.

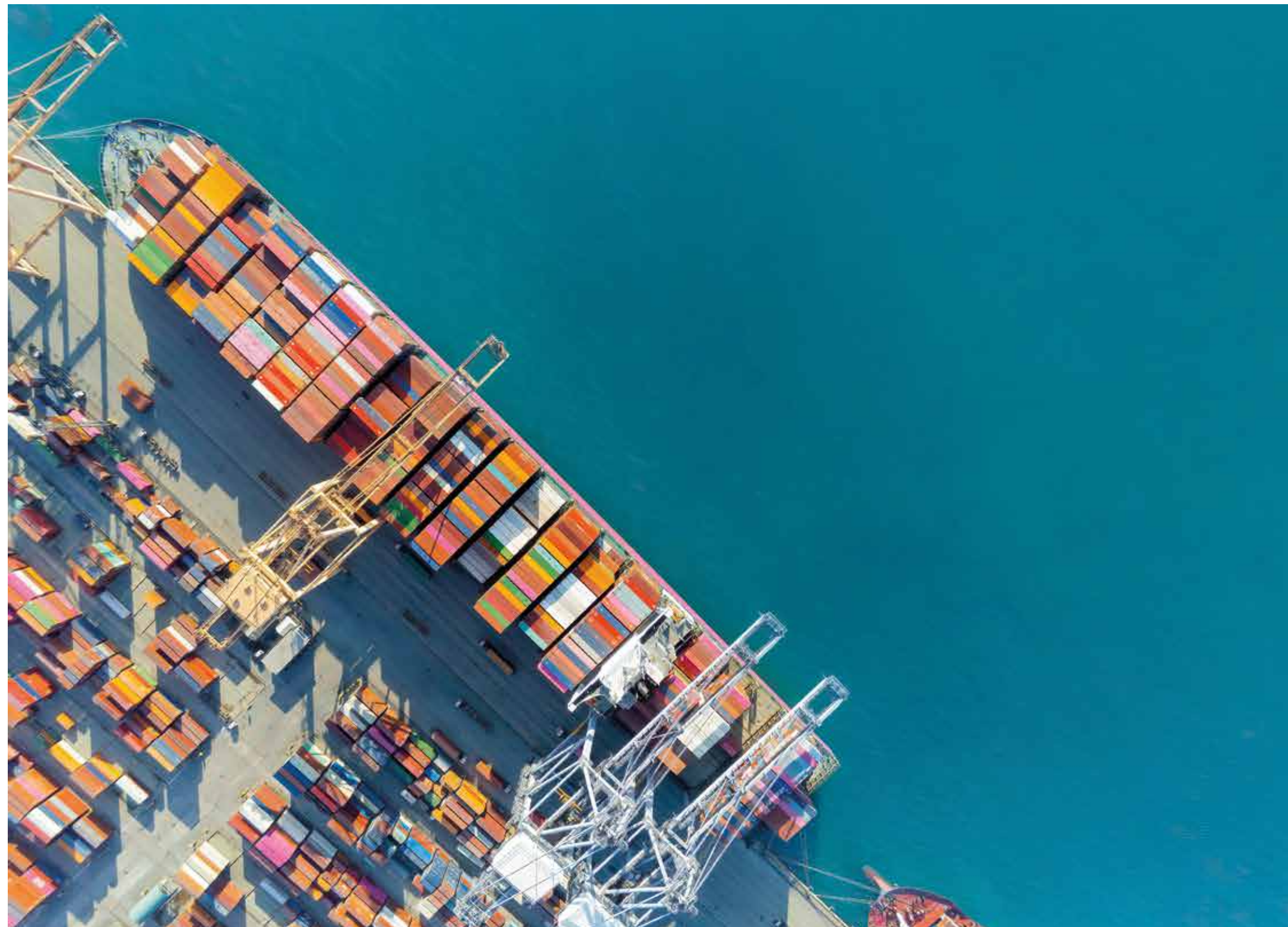
PRESIDENT RONALD REAGAN

”



Talking Point 1

FINDING THE FRICTION



NON-OIL EXPORTS:
RO5.6BN
(+9.9%)

OIL & GAS EXPORTS:
RO12.1BN
(-16.3%)

TOTAL IMPORTS:
RO14.6BN
(+6.8%)

The question worth tabling is simple - which friction is stopping Oman from scaling exports and investment and which kind of partnership removes it rather than merely applauding it. Oman's advantage here is that it doesn't need to invent a personality for itself, it already has one. It's a country that tends to do dependable better than dramatic which is an underrated trait in a global trading system that's increasingly dramatic and not always dependable.

NCSI trade data tell a clear story with two moving parts. Between January and October 2025, Oman's non-oil exports reached RO5.6 billion (US\$14.6bn) up 9.9% year-on-year. Over the same period, oil and gas exports fell to RO12.1 billion (US\$31.6bn) down 16.3%, leaving total merchandise exports at RO19.3 billion (US\$50.3bn). So, the diversification effort is working, yet the overall export headline still depends on energy. That is why predictability, compliance and reliable routes to market matter so much. They are what help Oman's non-oil exporters keep growing even when oil prices and global trade conditions turn choppy.

Imports underline the same theme from the other side. Recorded merchandise imports were RO14.6 billion (US\$38.2bn) January to October 2025, up 6.8%. When trade volumes are this large, the costs around trade begin to matter. Documentation, testing, finance, delays, mismatched standards, disputes that refuse to die. Trade is often described as the movement of goods, yet in practice it's the movement of paperwork and risk with goods squeezed in between. And with over 90% of global trade depending on finance, the word partnership quickly stops meaning handshakes and starts meaning whether banks and insurers will price risk at a level that doesn't strangle the deal.

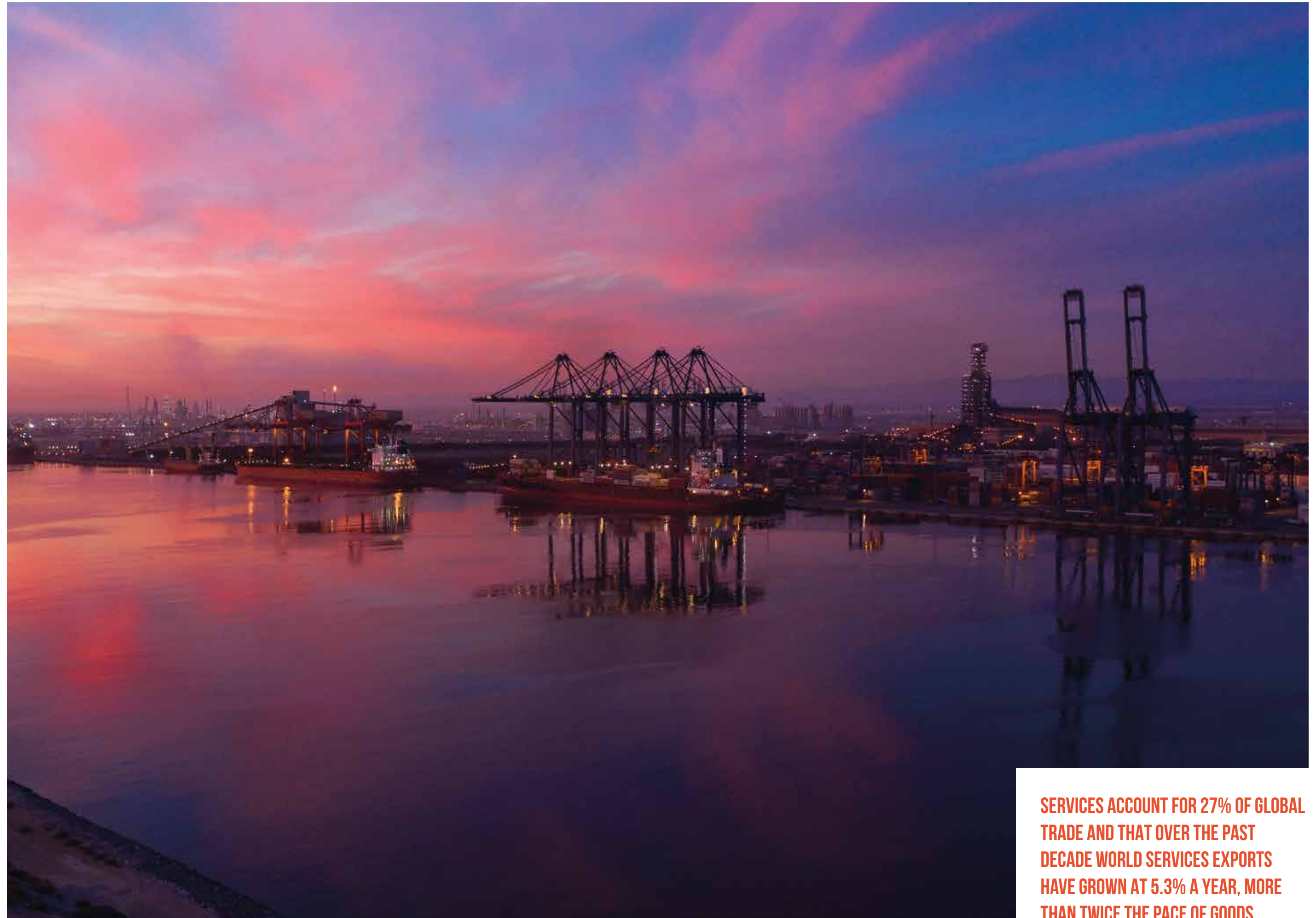
Talking Point 2

THE LATEST EVIDENCE

UNCTAD's Global Trade Update published in December 2025 argues that global trade in 2025 passed US\$35 trillion, about US\$2.2 trillion higher than 2024, roughly 7% growth year-on-year. It also says momentum eased into the final quarter with goods trade growing around 0.5% and services at 2% in that period. The message isn't that trade is collapsing, the message is trade is expanding while the environment is becoming more selective and more risk-aware. That is where partnerships start to matter.

UNCTAD's Global Trade Update published January 2026 pushes the point even further. It reports services account for 27% of global trade and that over the past decade world services exports have grown at 5.3% a year, more than twice the pace of goods. It also reports services export growth in 2025 was around 9%. The implication for this report is straightforward. Trade is becoming more services-enabled, more data-dependent and more compliance-heavy. Partnerships that strengthen logistics, standards support, documentation systems, risk mitigation and settlement tend to deliver more than partnerships that remain largely legal text.

**Global trade in 2025 passed-US\$35 trillion,
about US\$2.2 trillion higher than 2024,
roughly 7% growth year-on-year**



**SERVICES ACCOUNT FOR 27% OF GLOBAL
TRADE AND THAT OVER THE PAST
DECADE WORLD SERVICES EXPORTS
HAVE GROWN AT 5.3% A YEAR, MORE
THAN TWICE THE PACE OF GOODS.**

Talking Point 3

AGREEMENTS AS INFRASTRUCTURE

Beyond the Signing Ceremony: Making Trade Predictable in 2026.

If you want a practical definition of competitiveness in 2026, it's this - how many forms do you have to file, how many stamps do you have to collect and how many days pass before a decision is made to approve the shipment, release the funds or sign the contract. Trade agreements matter most when they make those steps simpler, faster and more predictable. An agreement is enabling infrastructure, it makes certain outcomes possible, yet it doesn't produce them by itself. What matters is whether compliance costs fall, border delays shorten, dispute resolution confidence becomes credible and financiers feel confident enough to underwrite flows at scale.

Oman already has a working example of how an agreement can behave like enabling infrastructure. The US - Oman FTA has been in force since 1 January 2009, it gives duty free access for industrial and consumer goods and sets out obligations on services and investment. In practice, it doesn't sell anything for you yet it does make it easier for the next shipment to clear without a debate about what the rules are.

Now there's the Oman-India Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) signed 18 December last year, covering goods and services, investment, professional mobility and regulatory cooperation. For Oman, it strengthens a relationship that already shows up in trade figures. From January to October 2025, non-oil exports to India were RO597 million (US\$1.5bn) up 15% and imports from India were RO1.2 billion (US\$3.1bn). That is why the agreement matters, it's less about the signing photo op and more about whether rules of origin, standards cooperation and faster clearance make those flows easier, cheaper and more predictable.

Talking Point 4

FROM AGREEMENT

Trade agreements earn their reputation when they change day-to-day operating conditions in ways businesses can feel.



Clarity

Clear origin rules, predictable classification and consistent enforcement reduce surprises. That lowers the odds of delays, rejected consignments and disputes that drag on. It also reduces the need for costly workarounds that companies rely on when the route to market feels uncertain.



Compatibility

Practical regulatory cooperation can reduce repeat testing and duplicated paperwork. For many non-oil Omani exporters that's where the true cost sits, not in headline tariffs.

TO ADVANTAGE

Data

Trade is increasingly data-led. If trusted documents can move digitally and risk-based inspection is applied consistently, clearance becomes more predictable. Exporters can live with a timetable that's known. They will always struggle with variance.



Enforcement

Investment and trade rely on enforceability. If dispute pathways are legible and outcomes can be enforced in a reasonable time, the perceived risk premium falls and financing becomes easier. A useful way to keep this section grounded is to ask a simple question each time an agreement is discussed. What changes for an exporter, a customs process, a warehouse manager and a credit committee?



Talking Point 5

DISRUPTION



The earlier US - China measures show the scale. Section 301 tariffs ranged from 7.5% to 25% on roughly US\$370 billion of imports from China. Section 232 tariffs imposed 25% on steel and 10% on aluminium.



It is hard to talk about partnerships in 2026 without acknowledging trade friction has become a design constraint not an occasional storm. The tariff playbook of the late 2010s taught governments a lesson. Tariffs, controls and subsidies can be used as bargaining tools as industrial policy and as political signalling, sometimes all at once. The earlier US - China measures show the scale. Section 301 tariffs ranged from 7.5% to 25% on roughly US\$370 billion of imports from China. Section 232 tariffs imposed 25% on steel and 10% on aluminium. The more important point for businesses isn't the history lesson, it's the speed and discretion with which trade policy can be redeployed and the way it now interacts with standards, origin rules, climate-linked requirements and technology controls. Trade is starting to look less like a matter of pure economics and more like a convergence of policy, security, climate, industry and domestic politics. These forces are being drawn together with growing momentum.

Recent tariff announcements in mid-January 2026 aimed at parts of Europe reinforce the message that policy can move faster than supply chains can blink. In that world, companies don't simply pay the bill, they redesign, they build redundancy and they favour jurisdictions that feel dependable geopolitically. Reliability becomes a commercial advantage which is flattering if you've got it and expensive if you don't. That is the part that rarely makes it into the ceremony photos. A tariff announcement might last a day on the front page while the compliance overhead can sit in the system for years.

Impact on Business

The disruption businesses care about most is the kind that becomes an overhead. It shows up as longer compliance cycles, bigger documentation packs, more audits and slower approvals in credit committees. It also shows up in procurement decisions that favour predictability over marginal cost savings. UNCTAD's December 2025 update is useful here because it pairs record trade levels with slowing momentum and that combination matters. When growth is strong and predictable, companies can absorb friction. When growth moderates and policy risk rises they start paying for dependability and they reduce exposure to routes and markets where the rules feel uncertain. The 2025 WEF Global Risks Report supports this, treating geoeconomic confrontation as a leading concern, meaning economic tools are increasingly being used to pursue strategic goals. That increases the likelihood of spillovers into trade, investment and supply chain decisions. It is another reason partnerships are being judged by whether they help businesses operate through volatility rather than promise a world without it.

Talking Point 6

ASSURED ACCESS

Nearshoring and friendshoring can sound like consultancy language, yet the underlying idea is straightforward. Businesses are placing a higher value on assured access than they did a decade ago. They will tolerate higher unit costs if it buys fewer unpleasant surprises at the border and fewer late-night calls from compliance. For Oman, that's a useful way to think about alliances that deliver. The most valuable partnerships are often the ones that reduce uncertainty. Clear standards pathways, predictable customs processes, credible dispute resolution and dependable logistics don't hit the front pages, yet they make for repeat orders and lower financing spreads. That's where geopolitics meets the balance sheet. Exporters don't only ask whether there's demand. They ask whether they can clear, comply, get paid and enforce.

The same thinking explains why assured access matters to investors, not only to exporters. Long-term capital has to live inside a system of rules, permits, enforcement and settlement. If those foundations feel dependable, investors can plan, commit and expand. If they don't, they price in risk or walk away. That context matters for Oman. By the end of Q3 2025, FDI stood at RO30.9 billion (US\$80bn), up 16.2% on the same period in 2024. The largest reported sources were the UK (RO16 billion, up 21.5%), the US (RO8.2 billion, up 24.7%) and Kuwait (RO1.3 billion, up 11.5%). Strong inflows do not remove the need for dependable rules, but they underline a simple point - investment is sustained by confidence in the operating environment as much as by expected returns. Where enforcement is predictable and policy is legible, investors stay and scale. Where it isn't, they hesitate.



BY THE END OF Q3 2025, FDI STOOD AT RO30.9 BILLION (US\$80BN), UP 16.2% ON THE SAME PERIOD IN 2024. THE LARGEST REPORTED SOURCES WERE THE UK (RO16 BILLION, UP 21.5%), THE US (RO8.2 BILLION, UP 24.7%) AND KUWAIT (RO1.3 BILLION, UP 11.5%).

What Assured Access Looks Like

Assured access is practical, not aspirational. It rests on three things that have to work together.

- **Compliance Access.**

A product only truly has market access when it can meet standards and prove it can meet standards at a reasonable cost and within a dependable timeline. That places testing capacity, certification timelines and recognized pathways at the heart of competitiveness.
- **Border Access**

Border access isn't only speed. Predictability matters more. Exporters plan around a known timetable. They can't plan around random variance.
- **Settlement Access**

Settlement is where deals either survive or die. If payment risk is high and trade finance is scarce, trade slows even when demand is there. The Asian Development Bank has reported a global trade finance gap of US\$2.5 trillion in 2025, the highest on record. In brief, access to finance and risk mitigation isn't a footnote, it's often the deciding factor.

Talking Point 7

SOUTH - SOUTH TRADE

Alongside geopolitics there's a structural story. A growing share of world trade is happening between developing economies. The latest UNCTAD figures put South - South trade at US\$6.2 trillion in 2024, a 7% increase on 2023 and its share of world merchandise trade increased from 11% in 2000 to 26% in 2024. That isn't a niche story, it reflects demand, demographics and increased industrial capacity. The detail that matters for Oman is where this trade concentrates and why. In 2024, 59% of Asia's exports stayed within Asia. Africa, by contrast, still sent most exports outside the continent with extra-regional partners accounting for roughly 70% to 95% of exports depending on the grouping. The lesson isn't that Oman should pivot anywhere, it's that the strongest performers in South - South trade focus on execution, they build the practical enablers that make transactions repeatable.



You can see this in the data. ASEAN's own figures show intra-ASEAN trade accounted for 21.4% of ASEAN goods trade in 2024 - a sign of repeat business supported by workable systems rather than one-off transactions. Africa illustrates both momentum and headroom. Afreximbank reports intra-African trade rose to US\$220.3 billion in 2024 and the share of intra-African trade in total African trade remains far below Asia's which is a reminder practical bottlenecks still restrain growth.

For readers who don't work in trade, the reason South - South growth still under-delivers in many places is straightforward. Wanting to trade isn't the same as being able to trade easily. Trade grows when the basics work repeatedly, not once. Companies need to ship without repeated surprises, meet requirements without constant rework and get paid on time without the transaction becoming too risky to finance. South - South trade expands fastest when three conditions are in place.

Repeat Business

Trade grows when the same buyer can reorder without friction. That depends on dependable delivery, workable returns and after-sales support and a route to market that doesn't break every time something changes. When these pieces are in place, nearby markets become attractive because problems can be solved quickly and relationships can be maintained.

Day-to-day Systems

Customs processes, standards bodies, labs, ports and dispute mechanisms need to behave consistently. If requirements change without notice, testing takes too long or paperwork is interpreted differently each time, companies build buffers into every order or stop trying to scale. The benefit of fixing these systems compounds because each improvement is repeated across every shipment.

Finance & Risk Tools

Trade often stalls at the payment stage. When risk rises, banks and insurers can tighten quickly and viable deals become hard to fund. That is why access to insurance, guarantees and confirmation capacity matters, it keeps transactions financeable and helps companies offer workable payment terms without taking excessive risk.

This connects to the growing role of services in trade. As services make up a larger share of trade and underpin more production, success depends more on the supporting services around the goods, logistics, compliance support, documentation handling and risk mitigation. The South -South relationships that strengthen these practical layers tend to scale because they make trade easier to execute and easier to repeat.



Talking Point 8



A useful case study is ASEAN, not because Oman can copy its scale but because it shows what delivery looks like when you keep improving the practicalities year after year. In 2024, ASEAN’s total trade in goods reached US\$3.8 trillion and the intra-ASEAN share was 21.4%.

The investment side remains substantial as well. ASEAN’s inward FDI increased to US\$226 billion in 2024. This isn’t a coincidence, it’s the dividend from building systems that make cross-border commerce less painful. Their customs transit system is a good example of how this compounds in practice. Reported movements under the ASEAN Customs Transit System jumped 1,557% January to August 2024 compared with the same period in 2023. When that kind of plumbing improves, companies don’t need to be motivated, they trade more because it’s easier to do so.

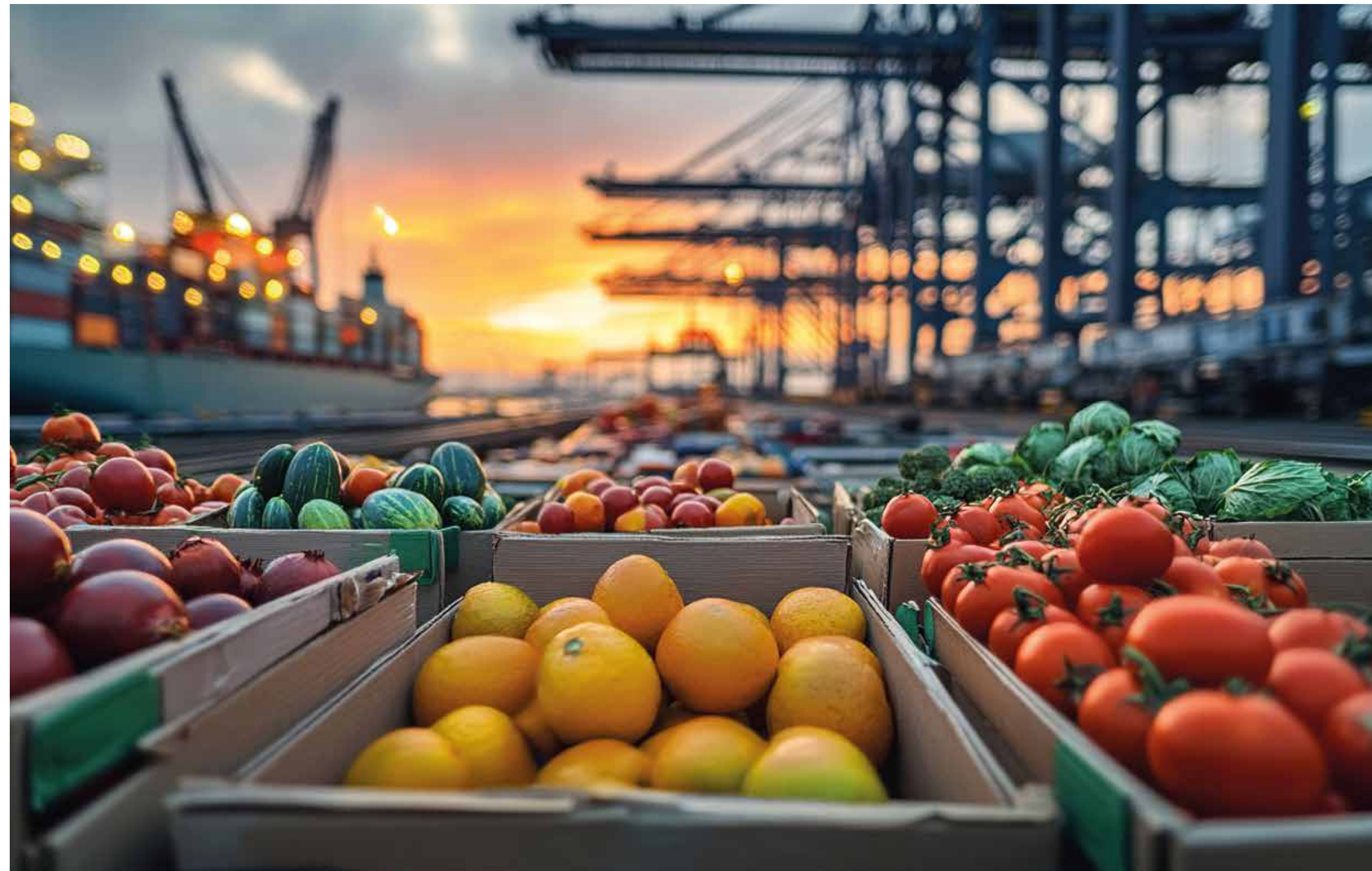
What’s Worth Borrowing From ASEAN?

ASEAN is useful here because it’s a reminder that trade growth often comes from process design rather than grand announcements.

- **Transit Systems Reduce Repetition**
Less re-declaration, fewer stops, less uncertainty. That lowers the marginal cost of each additional shipment.
- **Predictability Supports Scale**
A route to market that is reliably average will often outperform one that is occasionally brilliant and frequently frustrating. Predictability improves inventory planning, finance planning and contract planning.
- **Systems Create Momentum**
Once the operating environment becomes easier, companies don’t need persuasion, they follow the path that wastes less time and carries less risk.

Talking Point 9

IMPLICATIONS FOR OMAN



So, where does this all leave Oman? South - South isn't a single direction, it's a set of trade relationships where reliability and speed pay. Oman should look hardest at markets where it can win on three things at once, proximity, connectivity and credibility. That naturally points to the Indian Ocean rim, South Asia and East Africa, plus selected Gulf-to-Africa routes where Oman can offer something companies are now pricing highly, assured access. The strategic play isn't to chase the biggest headline market, it's to build repeatable routes to market where Oman can lower the cost of compliance, lower the cost of capital and shorten the time from order to cash.

Route-to-market Strategy

UNCTAD's January 2026 update argues global growth is projected to remain subdued this year and that weaker demand and tighter financial conditions are likely to weigh on trade. It also notes that diversification and stronger regional trade links matter for resilience, especially for developing economies. That reinforces a simple point. In a tougher cycle, trade relationships that are easier to execute and easier to finance tend to grow faster than those that rely on optimism.

For Oman, a route-to-market strategy can be expressed in plain operating terms. Start with relationships where there is already volume. NCSI figures for January to October 2025 show substantial non-oil exports into nearby and well-connected markets, including the UAE, Saudi Arabia and India. That provides a practical foundation. It's easier to improve a route that's already active than to create one from scratch.

Build the toolkit that makes repeat trade easier. Clear standards, adequate testing capacity, predictable customs processes, data interoperability and payment risk tools that allow buyers and banks to trust settlement. These are the ingredients that turn proximity into competitiveness. Then speak in the language that decides whether deals scale. Credit committees and insurers price uncertainty. If they can price a route to market with more confidence, financing spreads can tighten and credit limits can widen. That is how partnerships show up as growth rather than messaging.

Talking Point 9 - Implications for Oman

Africa

Afreximbank estimates intra-African trade increased to US\$206.6 billion in 2024, up 5.4% and that Africa’s total merchandise trade reached US\$1.3 trillion, putting intra-African trade at around 15% of the total. This reflects gradual progress but it also underlines the fact that Africa’s trade remains anchored in large external supply relationships.

For those unfamiliar with African trade, the structure is best understood in two parts. First, Africa’s engagement with major partners is still driven by what the continent produces competitively at scale – energy and resource commodities and a range of minerals and metals. In return, Africa sources much of what it needs to build and run modern economies from outside the continent, including machinery, transport equipment, electronics and a broad set of industrial and consumer inputs such as chemicals and pharmaceuticals. This helps explain why countries with manufacturing depth, strong shipping networks and the ability to provide financing have been able to consolidate their position. China, for example, remains a dominant external partner at scale, and Europe continues to be structurally important, particularly through North Africa’s industrial links into European production and consumer markets.

Second, within Africa, the most repeatable growth tends to sit in practical, high-frequency trade tied to urbanization and infrastructure delivery – food and agro-related inputs, packaging, building materials, basic consumer goods and medical supplies. The main constraint is often execution rather than demand with outcomes shaped by transport and handling costs, the consistency of border procedures and standards enforcement and in some markets the availability of foreign exchange and predictable payment timing.

For Oman, the implication is to concentrate on a focused set of nearby East African markets where shorter maritime routes can convert into a reliability advantage and to prioritize product lines where disciplined documentation and well-structured trade finance materially improve the competitiveness of Omani suppliers.



India

India is another example and it matters for Oman given the recent CEPA signing. Recent official statements from India put India – Africa trade at more than US\$100 billion in 2024-25 and describe cumulative Indian investment in Africa as over US\$75 billion over the long run. The numbers are useful, yet the bigger point is what sits behind them. Trade at this scale rarely depends on one-off deals, it’s usually sustained by practical capability that makes transactions repeatable. That capability reduces the hidden costs that often derail cross-border business, compliance, distribution, after-sales support and payment reliability.

India’s approach typically combines trade with on-the-ground capability in sectors that remove common barriers for new entrants – securing reliable distribution, meeting standards and documentation requirements, managing working-capital cycles and reducing payment and currency friction. This isn’t theoretical, in practice, it tends to deliver four effects.

- **Pharmaceuticals**
Businesses don’t only ship products, they also build the systems that keep products compliant and usable in market, registration, quality assurance, storage, distribution and handling of returns or recalls. When these systems exist, the next shipment is less likely to get stuck on paperwork or authorization questions.
- **IT Services**
IT supports the less visible parts of trade that now decide whether goods move smoothly, documentation management, tracking, customer service and the data handling required by modern compliance regimes. When this layer is strong, companies spend less time firefighting and more time selling.
- **Automotive & Industrial Supply Chains**
These sectors generate ongoing demand for parts, servicing and warranties. That creates steady commercial contact and predictable logistics needs, which makes trade less fragile and easier to finance.
- **Banking & Financial Services**
Banking relationships reduce payment risk. They make it easier to insure transactions, confirm letters of credit where needed and settle payments more reliably. This is often what turns interest into purchase orders.

For Oman, the practical question is what CEPA changes for companies trying to sell into India. CEPA will matter if it reduces the friction inside that trade, clearer origin rules, smoother standards processes and more predictable clearance alongside the support services that make repeat orders easier, compliance help, reliable logistics and payment risk tools that help companies get paid on time.

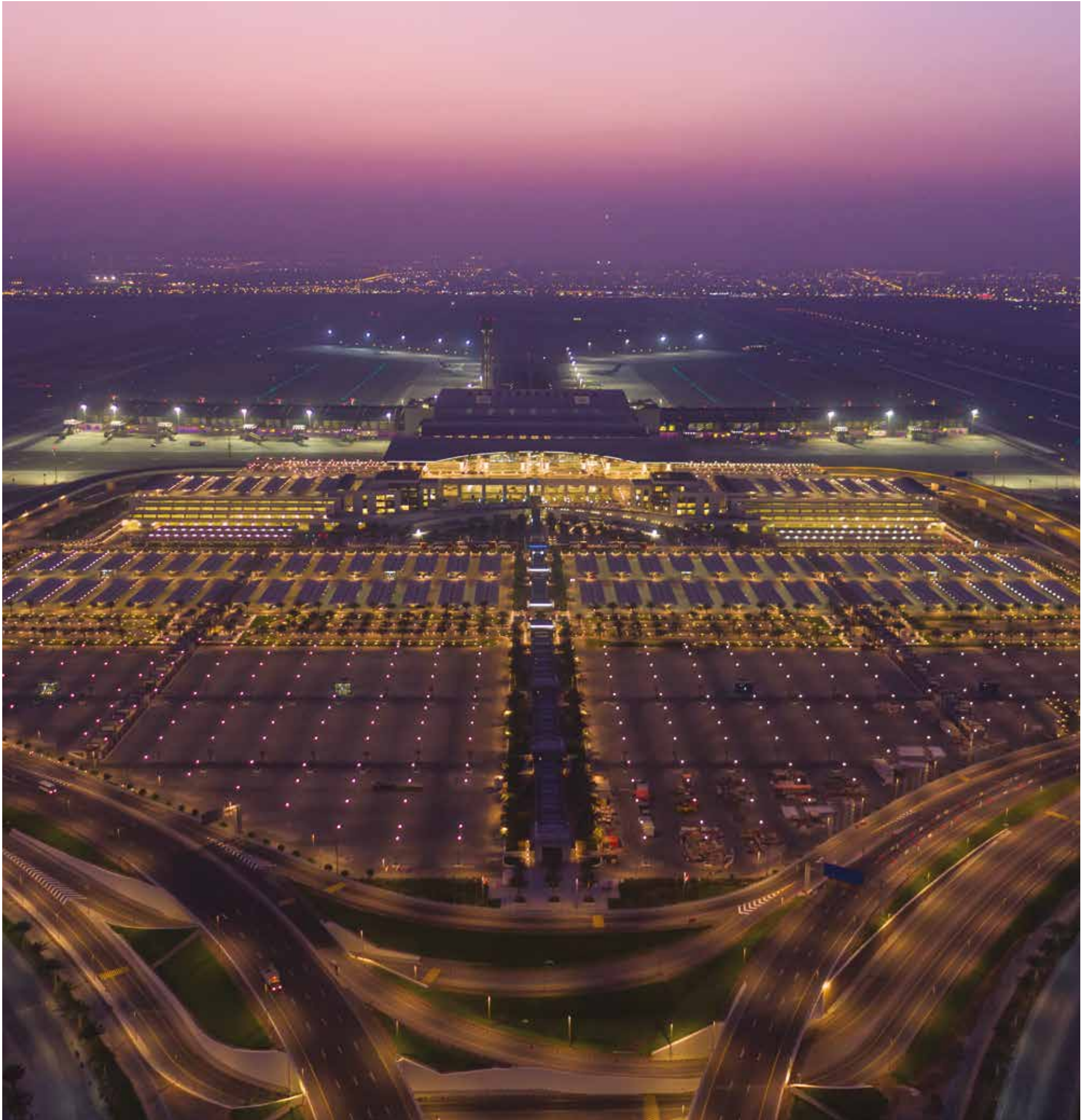
Talking Point 9 - Implications for Oman

Türkiye

Türkiye is active across a recognizable set of African markets where demand is anchored in infrastructure delivery, public procurement and commercially viable service networks. Its footprint is most visible in North Africa - especially Libya, Algeria and Egypt - where proximity across the Mediterranean and long-running contracting relationships support construction, utilities and industrial projects. It is also highly present in the Horn of Africa, particularly Somalia where Turkish companies have operated major onshore and offshore oil and gas exploration projects. In West Africa, Türkiye has been increasingly visible in transport-linked infrastructure and port and airport-related work, including in markets such as Senegal.

This is also where Türkiye has repeatedly won business. It often starts with a major project such as a road, airport or public building, then continues with the work that follows - supplying materials and equipment, providing maintenance and spare parts, training staff and supporting operations. That ongoing presence means problems can be fixed quickly and relationships deepen which helps trade continue without repeated disruption.

In brief, Türkiye’s advantage is that it pairs trade with delivery capability. It tends to compete in sectors where buyers value speed, practical engineering and service support as much as price - construction and infrastructure, transport and logistics assets, energy cooperation and related equipment and services and a range of manufactured goods supplied through established distribution. The result is that when disputes, delays or payment issues emerge, there are existing structures to resolve them which lowers non-performance risk, makes receivables easier to finance and increases the likelihood of repeat business.



Bundled Partnerships Deliver

Bundling means bringing the practical pieces together, not only the product. A buyer isn’t only asking ‘can you supply’? They’re also asking ‘can you supply again, on time, with the paperwork right, with support if something goes wrong and with payment terms we can manage’? Bundling helps for two reasons.

- **Reduces Cost of Switching Supplier**
If a supplier has local distribution, stock, spare parts and a clear return process the buyer is less likely to switch, even if another offer is slightly cheaper. That’s what drives repeat orders.
- **Reduces Uncertainty**
Many deals go wrong after shipment through missing documents, standards issues, installation delays or after-sales problems. Bundled support makes these issues less likely and easier to fix.

Two data points show why this matters today. Services account for around 27% of global trade and grew strongly in 2025 which underlines that logistics, compliance support, documentation and after-sales are increasingly decisive. However, the global trade finance gap is still around US\$2.5 trillion so transactions that are easier to insure and finance are more likely to happen. In practical terms, bundling works when distribution supports continuity, services reduce the buyer’s total cost of ownership and finance tools turn interest into funded purchase orders.



Talking Point 10

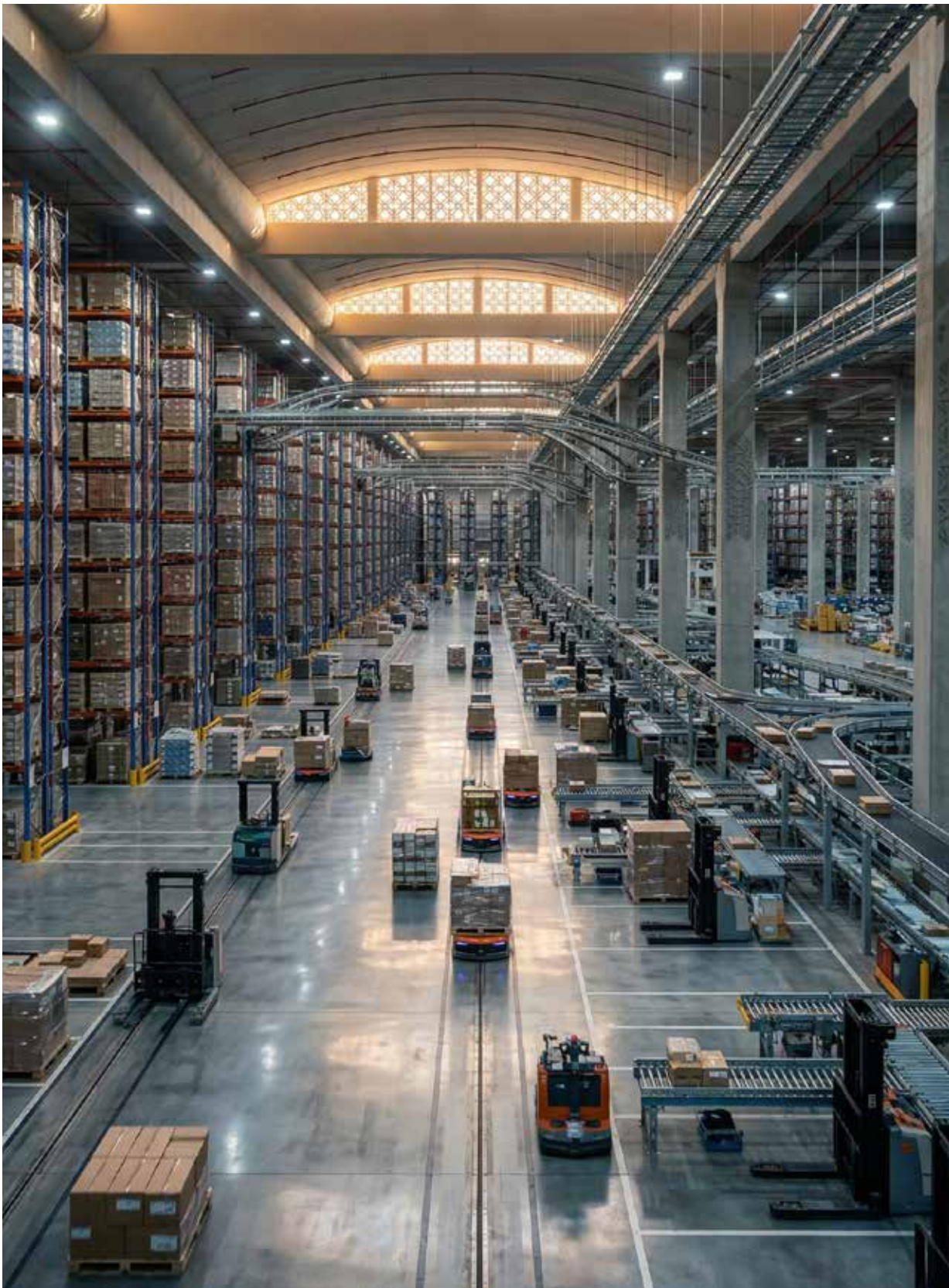
FINAL WORD

Today, partnerships can mean almost anything, so it helps to be clear about what delivery really looks like. A partnership is delivering when it does at least one of three things.

- It reduces the cost of meeting rules and proving compliance;
- it reduces the cost of financing a transaction; and
- it reduces the time it takes to move from an order to being paid.

If it doesn't move one of those, it may still have diplomatic value yet it's unlikely to show up in Oman's non-oil export growth. A useful test is whether you can explain, in simple language, what will change for the people who actually handle trade. That usually means three places. The border, where goods have to clear, the credit committee where a bank decides whether to fund or insure the transaction and the warehouse and logistics team, where timing and reliability decide whether the order can be delivered.

Trade agreements matter within that context. They create clarity and make improvements possible, yet results are driven by the practical parts that determine whether companies can scale. Standards recognition that prevents repeat testing, sufficient lab and certification capacity, customs processes that are predictable, data that's visible and trusted, disputes that can be resolved without dragging on and finance and insurance that remain available when risk rises.



You can see delivery through a short set of measures.

- **Border Movement**
Track typical clearance time and bad-day clearance time so you can see whether delays are becoming less frequent and less severe.
- **Compliance**
Track how long certification takes and how often documents or test results are rejected and have to be resubmitted.
- **Finance**
Track how long it takes to secure trade finance and insurance support, whether confirmation is available where needed and whether smaller companies face a much higher cost than larger ones.
- **Order to Cash**
Track the full time from order to payment then identify where time is being lost, clearance, certification, receivables or settlement.

When these measures improve, partnerships are delivering in ways companies can act on. Trade becomes easier to repeat, more predictable and easier to finance which is exactly what will support Oman's sustained non-oil export growth in a more complex and demanding business world.



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