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12

PRIZMIC STUNS DJOKOVIC, ZVEREV THROUGH





IN BRIEF

PROJECTS TO BOOST NATIONAL ECONOMY

The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology has unveiled a package of initiatives and projects to enhance the land transport sector's contribution to the national economy. These include establishing a digital ticketing platform for bus passenger transport, implementing a smart weighing system as well as licensing and monitoring smart transport applications. Haitham bin Ahmed al Zadjali, Director of the Land Transport Department at the Directorate-General of Land Transport and Roads at the ministry, said that the ministry oversees the licensing of all land transport activities including taxis, rental services, school transport, and freight transport. **DETAILS ON P2**

HM'S GREETINGS TO DJIBOUTI PRESIDENT



Assigned by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, Dr Khamis bin Saif al Jabri, Minister of Economy, participated in the swearing-in ceremony of President Ismail Omar Guelleh for a new presidential term, which was held in Djibouti, on Saturday. The minister conveyed the greetings of His Majesty to the president along with his best wishes for him and the brotherly people of his country for further progress and prosperity. The president asked the minister to convey his greetings to His Majesty, coupled with his best wishes for His Majesty and the Omani people for further progress and prosperity. **DETAILS ON P2**

9 PER CENT RISE IN VISITORS



Al Jabal Al Akhdhar recorded a notable increase in tourist activity during 2025, with visitor numbers rising by 9 per cent compared to the same period last year, reflecting the growing appeal of the mountain destination as one of Oman's leading tourism hotspots. **DETAILS ON P5**

His Majesty awarded Arab Cultural Excellence Medal

THE ARAB LEAGUE EDUCATIONAL, Cultural and Scientific Organisation (ALECSO), has awarded His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik the Supreme Class of the Arab Cultural Excellence Medal, in recognition of His Majesty's contributions to supporting Arab culture, enhancing its presence, preserving identity and supporting intellectual and cognitive development in the Arab world. Sayyid Saud bin Hilal al Busaidi, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, said that ALECSO's awarding of the Arab Cultural Excellence Medal to His Majesty the Sultan, affirms the Royal approach of consolidating the status of knowledge and culture for their civilisational role in promoting the values of tolerance, coexistence and



rapprochement among peoples. The Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organisation (ALECSO) will hold an official ceremony on Tuesday at its headquarters in the Tunisian capital to honour His Majesty in the presence of senior officials, intellectuals and persons interested in Arab cultural affairs. The Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organisation (ALECSO) is one of the specialised organisations affiliated with the League of Arab States. It was established in 1970 and is headquartered in Tunis, Tunisia. It is concerned with developing the fields of education, culture and science in the Arab countries, promoting Arab cultural and intellectual integration, preserving cultural heritage, and building intellectual and cultural partnerships among the Arab countries. — ONA

Iran keeps US waiting for response

TEHRAN: Iran questioned the seriousness of American diplomacy on Saturday in the wake of renewed naval clashes in the Gulf, while keeping Washington waiting for a response to its latest negotiating position. US President Donald Trump had said on Friday that he was expecting Iran's response to Washington's latest proposal for a deal to extend a fragile truce and launch peace talks - "supposedly tonight". But if Iran did send Pakistani mediators a response, there was no public sign of it, and Tehran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi called into question the reliability of the US leadership in a call with his Turkish counterpart. "The recent escalation of tensions by American forces in the Arabian Gulf and their numerous actions in violating the ceasefire have added to suspicions about the motivation and seriousness of the American side in the path of diplomacy," he said, according to an Iranian account of the call published by



An Iranian woman holds her son's school bag as she leads him towards a busy street in the capital, Tehran, on Saturday. — AFP

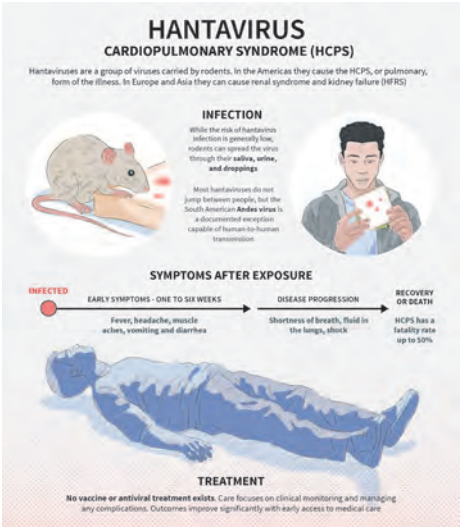
the ISNA news agency. In an incident on Friday, a US fighter jet fired on and disabled two Iranian-flagged tankers that Washington accused of challenging its naval blockade of Iran's ports. An Iranian military official told local media the country's navy had responded "to American terrorism with strikes" and that "the clashes have now ceased". The latest incident came after a previous flare-up overnight on Thursday to Friday in the Strait of Hormuz, a vital international sea lane that Iran is seeking to control. US Secretary of State Marco Rubio reiterated on Friday that it was "unacceptable" for Tehran to

control the key oil route. Washington has sent Iran, via Pakistani mediators, a proposal to extend the truce in the Gulf to allow for talks on a final settlement of the conflict launched 10 weeks ago with US-Israeli strikes on Iran. Iran's foreign ministry spokesman Esmail Baqaei said on Friday that the proposal was still "under review", according to ISNA. Qatar's Prime Minister, Shaikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman al Thani, met with US Vice-President JD Vance in Washington on Friday and discussed the Pakistani-led efforts to broker a permanent peace. Meanwhile, satellite images have shown that an oil slick is spreading off the coast of Iran's Kharg Island, a key oil export terminal for the Islamic republic. It was not immediately clear what had caused the apparent spill, which was off the island's west coast and appeared to cover more than 52 square km, according to global monitor Orbital EOS. **SEE ALSO P6**

WHO chief tells risk from hantavirus-hit ship 'low'

GENEVA: The WHO chief told the people of Tenerife on Saturday that the risk to them from an arriving cruise ship hit with a deadly hantavirus outbreak was "low". "I need you to hear me clearly: this is not another Covid," World Health Organisation Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus wrote in an open letter to the people of the Spanish island where the MV Hondius was expected to arrive on Sunday. "The current public health risk from hantavirus remains low." The Dutch-flagged cruise ship was

expected to reach waters off Tenerife at dawn, with Tedros also due on the archipelago to help coordinate the evacuation of around 150 people on board. Three passengers from the ship - a Dutch husband and wife and a German woman - have died, while others have fallen sick with the rare disease, which usually spreads among rodents. The only hantavirus type that can transmit from person to person - the Andes virus - has been confirmed among those who have tested positive, fuelling



international concern. It has also sparked fears among people of the Canary Islands, with regional authorities having refused to allow the vessel to dock, deciding it will remain offshore while passengers are screened and evacuated. In his open letter, Tedros hailed the people of Tenerife for their solidarity and said he had thanked Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez personally for Spain agreeing to take on its "moral duty" and receive the ship. "I know you are worried," Tedros

wrote in his open letter. "I know that when you hear the word 'outbreak' and watch a ship sail toward your shores, memories surface that none of us have fully put to rest. The pain of 2020 is still real, and I do not dismiss it for a single moment," he said. Tedros acknowledged that the Andes strain of hantavirus "is serious". "Three people have lost their lives, and our hearts go out to their families," he said, stressing though that "the risk to you, living your daily life in Tenerife, is low". — AFP

OMAN

SHORT TAKES



The interactive workshops explained key rulings related to Haj rituals.

SUHAR HOSTS ‘NUSUK’ HAJ AWARENESS EXHIBITION

SUHAR: The Department of Endowments and Religious Affairs in Al Batinah North Governorate, represented by the Preachers and Guidance Department, organised an awareness exhibition titled ‘Nusuk’ to introduce Haj rituals. The three-day exhibition is being held in the Wilayat of Suhar.

The exhibition features several sections designed to educate pilgrims on the spiritual preparation for Haj, etiquette of the journey, designated timings, types of rituals, and other key aspects related to performing Haj. It also includes dedicated segments on introducing Islam and promoting cultural exchange, alongside seminars and religious lectures held on the sidelines of the event.

A number of government and private institutions participated in the exhibition, including the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority, the General-Directorate of Social Development, the General-Directorate of Health Services, and the Zakat Committee in Suhar.

The programme also features awareness activities and interactive workshops aimed at explaining important rulings related to Haj rituals, as well as clarifying legal guidelines and organisational procedures to help pilgrims perform their rites with ease, tranquillity and confidence.

The exhibition was inaugurated under the auspices of Shaikh Saud bin Mohammed al Hinai, Wali of Suhar, in the presence of officials, stakeholders and members of the public. — ONA

ENTREPRENEURSHIP EXPO HELD IN MUSCAT

MUSCAT: The sixth edition of the ‘Takatif Al Khaleeji’ exhibition opened in Muscat Governorate, bringing together entrepreneurs and small businesses from the Sultanate of Oman and GCC countries for a three-day showcase of innovation and enterprise.

The event was inaugurated under the auspices of Sayyid Dr Munthir bin Hilal al Busaidy, Head of Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit at the Ministry of Economy, in the presence of officials and representatives of supporting institutions.

Organised in partnership between the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority, and several private institutions, the exhibition aims to empower SMEs and strengthen their contribution to the national economy in line with Oman Vision 2040. More than 140 entrepreneurs from Oman and GCC countries took part. — ONA

OMAN PRESENT AT DJIBOUTI PRESIDENT’S INAUGURATION



DJIBOUTI: Assigned by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, Dr Khamis bin Saif al Jabri, Minister of Economy, participated in the swearing-in ceremony of President Ismail Omar Guelleh for a new presidential term, which was held in Djibouti, on Saturday. The minister conveyed the greetings of His Majesty to the president along with his best wishes for him and the brotherly people of his country for further progress and prosperity.

The president asked the minister to convey his greetings to His Majesty coupled with his best wishes for His Majesty and the Omani people for further progress and prosperity.

The minister of economy was accompanied by Abdullah bin Nasser al Rahbi, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the Arab Republic of Egypt and its Permanent Representative to the League of Arab States and a number of officials. — ONA

MoTCIT unveils several projects to boost economy

SUHAIL BIN NASSER AL NAHDI
MUSCAT, MAY 9

THE MINISTRY of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MoTCIT) has unveiled a package of initiatives and projects to enhance the land transport sector’s contribution to the national economy.

These include establishing a digital ticketing platform for bus passenger transport, implementing a smart weighing system as well as licensing and monitoring smart transport applications.

Haitham bin Ahmed al Zadjali, Director of the Land Transport Department at the Directorate-General of Land Transport and Roads at the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, said, “The ministry seeks to develop the sector by transitioning to smart transport, regulating the operation of applications, improving service quality and intensifying inspections to reduce violations.”

Al Zadjali pointed out that the ministry oversees the licensing of all land transport activities including taxis, rental services, school transport and freight transport.

The ministry is also working to digitise these services through smart applications.

He explained that the ministry aims to develop the sector by issuing regulations, introducing modern technologies and collaborating with companies and vehicle owners to improve and enhance service quality.

He stated that the most prominent violations recorded in the land



HAITHAM BIN AHMED AL ZADJALI

The ministry is working to digitise services of taxis, rental services, school transport, and freight transport through smart applications



MoTCIT aims to develop the sector by introducing modern technologies.

transport sector include operating without a licence, failing to adhere to the set fares, operating vehicles without an operating permit, or operating vehicles that do not meet the required specifications as well as safety-related violations related.

The student transport sector is a vital sector, and the ministry is keen to regulate it by imposing strict requirements on buses and drivers and conducting periodic inspections.

The most prominent violations in the student transport sector include the use of unauthorised vehicles and non-compliance with safety requirements.

Necessary measures are taken against violators and the number of violations has recently decreased, he said.

The Tenth Five-Year Plan (2021-2025) witnessed significant progress in developing the infrastructure of the transport, logistics, communications and information technology sectors, and implementing a number of strategic projects and qualitative initiatives especially in roads, land and sea transport and logistics in general, in addition to the level of programmes and targets of the National Digital Economy Programme.

Qurayat mango season drives new agricultural growth plans

MOHAMED AL BATTASHI
MUSCAT, MAY 9

Qurayat’s mango season has attracted significant public attention this year, with strong visitor turnout and rising consumer demand underscoring the wilayat’s growing reputation as one of Oman’s key agricultural hubs.

The momentum comes amid broader efforts to build on the season’s success through new development and investment initiatives.

In a move aimed at strengthening agricultural investment and supporting sustainable development goals, Shaikh Talal bin Saif al Hosni, Wali of Qurayat, reviewed proposed agricultural development areas under the Eleventh Five-Year Plan.

The plan includes four major sites across the wilayat, which are expected to be presented to



Shaikh Talal bin Saif al Hosni, Wali of Qurayat, heads the meeting to review proposed agricultural development areas.

the Municipal Council of Muscat Governorate for approval and completion of required procedures.

Preparations are also underway for the upcoming Mango and Agricultural Products Exhibition in Qurayat. Discussions are focusing on introducing a refreshed format for the event, along with a structured

implementation timeline. The initiative reflects wider ambitions to enhance the exhibition’s economic and social impact, while creating greater opportunities for local farmers and producers.

Abdullah al Ghazali, a researcher in Omani and maritime heritage, described this year’s mango season



as exceptional in terms of public engagement and turnout. He noted that mango cultivation in Qurayat holds importance beyond agriculture, forming part of the cultural and social identity of the wilayat.

He added that years of research and documentation have examined

the history of mango farming in Qurayat, including its varieties, trade practices, quality and benefits to local communities. Such efforts, he said, help preserve agricultural heritage while serving as an important reference for future generations. Meanwhile, social media influencer Omar al Nabhani highlighted mango cultivation in Hail Al Ghaf as one of Oman’s most successful agricultural experiences. He noted that the area’s unique environmental conditions have earned it comparisons to ‘Oman’s Zanzibar,’ reflecting its distinctive agricultural and climatic character.

As interest in Qurayat’s mango season continues to grow, it is increasingly being viewed not only as a seasonal agricultural highlight but also as a platform for economic activity, community engagement, and the strengthening of the wilayat’s agricultural identity.

Scammers target online buyers

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, MAY 9

AS DEMAND for rental properties continues to rise, online scamsters are increasingly targeting unsuspecting residents searching for flats, villas, and bed spaces across Oman through fake property listings and fraudulent payment requests.

Several recent incidents have highlighted a growing trend in which fraudsters pose as property agents, share attractive offers online, and demand advance payments for properties they neither own nor manage. Mohammed Risham, a private sector employee, narrowly escaped losing RO 100 after being lured by an attractive rental offer for

a flat in Mabela.

“I came across the advertisement on a popular buy, sell and rent group and contacted the number provided. The person asked me to inspect the flat first and then transfer the advance amount if I liked it,” he said.

Risham became suspicious after being offered a three-bedroom apartment for RO 190, significantly below the market rate of around RO 300.

“I spoke to a resident in the same building who shared the owner’s contact number. The owner told me I was already the fifth person contacting him regarding the same fake listing,” he added.

According to victims, the fraudsters avoid meeting in person and operate primarily through WhatsApp chats, using photographs



Fraudsters avoid meeting in person and operate primarily through WhatsApp chats.

of properties and false promises to gain trust. Social media influencer Rekha Prem said such scams are no longer limited to property rentals.

“Anyone buying or selling through online platforms should remain cautious. Fraudsters often attempt

to deceive users through small transactions, assuming victims may not pursue complaints over relatively minor amounts,” she said.

In another incident, Rigel Aboobacker Sidhique, an administrative staff member at a school, lost RO 350 while attempting to sell an infant car seat online.

“A woman claiming to be a foreign buyer contacted me and asked for my bank details to transfer RO 20 as confirmation. She later sent a link asking me to verify the payment. Soon after opening it, RO 350 was withdrawn from my account,” he said.

Following his complaint, the bank reportedly informed him that the fraud had been carried out from outside the country using remote access manipulation.

Online trading platforms continue

to advise users never to transfer money in advance, avoid engaging with suspicious international numbers, and report questionable accounts immediately.

The Royal Oman Police has repeatedly warned the public against the rise of online scams, noting that many fraud operations are now run by organised transnational criminal networks. The ROP has also cautioned residents against sharing screens or opening suspicious links, stressing that no government institution requests sensitive transactions through such channels.

Authorities urged residents not to transfer money for unauthenticated properties or to unknown individuals until all legal documentation and verification procedures are completed.

CONTRACT SIGNED FOR ATIN NATURE PARK

SALALAH: Dhofar Governorate signed an agreement with the Ministry of Energy and Minerals to establish the ‘Atin Nature Park’ project in Salalah at a cost exceeding RO 4 million.

The signing took place in the presence of HH Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar. Located in the Atin Plain area of Salalah, the project will span approximately 270,000 square metres and is designed as an integrated recreational and tourism destination combining nature, leisure and family entertainment.

The development will feature a water canal, entertainment and play areas, restaurants, rest spaces, public facilities and dedicated venues for events and activities.

The project represents a community partnership between Dhofar Governorate, the Social Responsibility Development Foundation for the Energy Sector, and Petroleum Development



The RO 4 million project will span an area of approximately 270,000 square metres.

Oman, reflecting cooperation between government institutions, the private sector and the local community.

Officials said the project aims to boost tourism activity, particularly during the Khareef season, while supporting sustainable development and enhancing the quality of life in the governorate.

The agreement was signed on behalf of Dhofar Municipality by Dr Abdullah bin Mohammed Baowain, Director-General of Projects and Technical Affairs, while Hafeez bin Salim al Haddad signed on behalf of the implementing company, alongside Abdullah bin Mubarak al Shukaili representing PDO. — ONA

CAA receives 731 complaints in 2025, including 210 delays

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 9

The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) has registered 731 passenger complaints so far in 2025, including 210 complaints related to flight delays, according to the authority.

The complaints also included 132 cases linked to flight cancellations, 114 complaints involving denial of confirmed boarding, 145 complaints concerning delayed, lost or damaged baggage, and five complaints related to flight rerouting. Another 121 complaints fell under miscellaneous categories.

The CAA said the regulations protecting passenger rights apply to all flights departing from airports in Oman on both national and foreign carriers, as well as domestic flights and inbound flights operated by Omani airlines. The framework is intended to ensure broad protection for passengers, including frequent flyer programme members.

However, certain categories — such as complimentary



Airlines are required to notify passengers in advance in the event of flight cancellations.

travellers or holders of discounted tickets not available to the public — are excluded from some provisions. Flights operated by foreign airlines into Oman remain subject to the laws of the country of departure or the 1999 Montreal Convention in the absence of applicable domestic legislation.

The authority stressed that airlines are required to maintain transparency in ticket pricing and are prohibited from imposing undisclosed charges. Carriers must also provide passengers with all terms and conditions of carriage before bookings are confirmed and verify that travellers possess the

required documentation in line with regulations.

The CAA noted that airlines may be exempt from financial compensation in extraordinary situations such as severe weather conditions, political unrest or unforeseen technical issues. However, carriers remain obligated to provide passengers with necessary care and assistance during such disruptions.

Hamed bin Ahmed al Barashidi, Director-General of Strategic Planning and spokesperson for the CAA, said the authority places strong emphasis on protecting passenger rights and improving the travel experience through clear regulations governing the relationship between passengers and airlines.

Al Barashidi added that passengers can submit complaints and feedback through the CAA’s official website or directly through the authority’s customer service channels.

He noted that the authority is committed to handling complaints within defined timeframes and works closely with airlines and relevant entities.



ABRAJ Energy Services Starts 2026 on a Strong Footing with Improved Margins, Higher Rig Utilization, and Record Backlog

- Improved EBITDA and Net Income margins compared to the previous quarter.
- Highest rig utilization rate in the last 12 months.
- All time high backlog of **₪ 898 million**.
- Capex expansion plan with new build rigs on track.
- No material impact of current geopolitical situation on ABRAJ's business.

ABRAJ Energy Services SAOG ("ABRAJ" or the "Company") (MSX: ABRJ), Oman national champion for integrated energy services, announced today its financial results for the first quarter of 2026 ("Q1'26").

Financials Highlights

Q1'26 Revenue of 36 million Omani Riyal ("₪") was -6% compared to last quarter of 2025 ("Q4'25"). The decrease quarter-on-quarter ("QoQ") was essentially due to overall lower rig move and frac activities. Compared to Q4'25, two rigs were out of operations, one rig moving to a new client and the other one under planned major maintenance. These revenue downsides were partially offset by the start-up late January of one rig that was inactive in Q4'25, as well as another rig which started in November 2025, with full revenue contribution in Q1'26.

Q1'26 EBITDA and Net Income margin profile improved QoQ with a margin of 33.3% and 12.4%, respectively, of the revenue. EBITDA margin remained within the communicated guidance and the Profit after Tax ("PAT") increased from **₪ 3.7 million** in Q4'25 to **₪ 4.5 million** in Q1'26, representing a 20% upside QoQ. The PAT increase is mainly coming from reduced operating expenses, as well as a one-off impairment charge recognized in Q4'25.

Q1'26 CAPEX spending was **₪ 10.6 million** attributed to the ongoing fleet expansion, mainly related to the seven new built rigs with Petroleum Development Oman ("PDO"). The first two PDO rigs are expected to be deployed by the end of the third quarter of 2026. The additional batch of four rigs will be delivered in the course of 2027 and the last rig in early 2028.

Q1'26 Net Debt of **₪ 110 million** has increased by +16% QoQ as additional bank loans were drawn up during the quarter to finance the ongoing fleet expansion efforts. In the short-term, Net Debt is expected to continue increasing as the Company is nearing the peak of the Capex cycle.

Key Financial Metrics

₪ millions	Q1'26	Q4'25	QoQ (%)	YTD'26	YTD'25	YoY (%)
Revenue	36.0	38.4	-6%	36.0	36.8	-2.1%
EBITDA	12.0	12.1	-1%	12.0	12.5	-4%
EBITDA Margin	33.3%	31.6%	1.6pp	33.3%	34.0%	(0.7pp)
Operating Profit (EBIT)	6.7	5.9	14%	6.7	7.1	-5%
Profit after Tax	4.5	3.7	20%	4.5	4.9	-9.1%
Net Income Margin	12.4%	9.7%	2.7pp	12.4%	13.3%	(0.9pp)
EPS (Baisa)	5.79	4.81	20%	5.79	6.37	-9%
Capital Expenditures	10.6	3.8	177%	10.6	3.8	180%
Cash Flow from Operations (excl. WC)	12.1	12.0	1%	12.1	12.7	-5%
Net Debt	110.4	95.2	16%	110.4	95.2	16%
ROCE	11.4%	11.8%	(0.4pp)	11.4%	11.2%	0.2pp
Net Debt / TTM EBITDA	2.26x	1.93x	0.33x	2.26x	2.09x	0.17x

CONDENSED INTERIM STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION As at 31 MARCH 2026

	31 March 2026 (Unaudited) ₪ '000	31 Dec 2025 (Audited) ₪ '000	
ASSETS			
Non-current assets			
Property and equipment	192,884	189,737	
Intangible assets	119	147	
Right-of-use assets	3,438	3,020	
Contract fulfillment costs	832	95	
Capex advances	15,234	13,614	
	212,507	206,613	
Current assets			
Inventories	26,779	27,136	
Trade receivables	45,326	40,719	
Advances, prepayments, and other receivables	3,956	3,012	
Contract fulfillment costs	217	160	
Cash and cash equivalents	6,554	7,050	
	82,832	78,077	
TOTAL ASSETS	295,339	284,690	
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES			
Equity			
Share capital	77,020	77,020	
Treasury shares	(58)	(65)	
Reserve on trading of treasury shares	(68)	(90)	
Legal reserve	14,618	14,172	
Cash flow hedge reserve	(210)	(360)	
Retained earnings	46,504	55,492	
Total equity	137,806	146,169	
Non-current liabilities			
Term loans	85,185	71,993	
Contract liabilities	1,781	1,651	
Derivative financial instruments	193	304	
Employees' end of services benefits	2,253	2,215	
Lease liabilities	2,641	2,343	
Deferred tax liabilities	2,501	2,532	
	94,554	81,038	
Current liabilities			
Trade payables	19,243	14,384	
Term loans	18,182	17,060	
Short term loan	10,000	10,000	
Contract liabilities	1,134	1,193	
Lease liabilities	903	822	
Other payables	8,133	8,537	
Derivative financial instruments	54	120	
Income tax payable	5,330	5,367	
	62,979	57,483	
Total liabilities	157,533	138,521	
TOTAL EQUITY AND LIABILITIES	295,339	284,690	

CONDENSED INTERIM STATEMENT OF PROFIT OR LOSS AND OTHER COMPREHENSIVE INCOME For the three months period ended 31 March 2026			
	2026 (Unaudited) ₪ '000	2025 (Unaudited) ₪ '000	
Revenue	36,016	36,769	
Cost of revenue	(26,839)	(27,520)	
Gross profit	9,177	9,276	
General and administrative expenses	(2,442)	(2,165)	
Other income	-	50	
Operating profit	6,735	7,161	
Finance costs	(1,451)	(1,420)	
Finance income	14	29	
Net finance costs	(1,437)	(1,391)	
Profit before tax	5,298	5,770	
Income tax expense	(839)	(867)	
Profit for the period	4,459	4,903	
Other comprehensive income:			
Items that may be reclassified to profit or loss in subsequent periods (net of tax):			
Net gain on cash flow hedges	150	-	
Other comprehensive income for the period, net of tax	150	-	
TOTAL COMPREHENSIVE INCOME FOR THE PERIOD	4,609	4,903	
Earnings per share			
Basic and diluted earnings per share - ₪	0.0058	0.0064	
Note:	The complete accounts will be sent by mail to any shareholder in Arabic or English as requested, within 7 days of receipt of the request.		

SPOTLIGHT



OMAN’S HIDDEN LIFELINES

MOHAMED AL BATTASHI

ACROSS OMAN’S rugged mountains, winding valleys and expansive coastal plains, wadis quietly shape the environmental heartbeat of the nation. Often seen merely as seasonal waterways that awaken after rainfall, wadis are in fact living ecological systems — natural lifelines that connect mountains to the sea, replenish underground water reserves, sustain agriculture and nourish some of Oman’s richest coastal habitats.

In one of the world’s most water-scarce regions, these natural channels have long played a vital role in maintaining environmental balance. During seasonal rainfall, wadis collect and channel water across landscapes, allowing it to seep gradually into the earth and recharge underground aquifers — a critical source of freshwater for communities across Oman.

Yet the importance of wadis extends far beyond water alone. As freshwater flows from the highlands toward the coast, wadis transport sediments, minerals and nutrients that enrich wetlands, estuaries and marine ecosystems. In doing so, they create ecological corridors linking inland landscapes with coastal environments and sustaining biodiversity above and below the waterline.

Marine biologist and science communicator, Malaak al Lawati, described wadis as vital environmental connectors. “Oman’s wadis act as ecological corridors connecting mountain ecosystems to coastal environments, transporting freshwater, sediments and nutrients that sustain coastal biodiversity and productivity,” she said.

That connection is clearly visible in Oman’s coastal ecosystems. Mangrove forests, tidal wetlands and fish nursery habitats depend on the natural flow of freshwater and nutrient-rich sediments carried through these ancient drainage systems. Places such as Qurum Nature Reserve and Barr Al Hikman reflect the long ecological reach of Oman’s wadis — landscapes shaped over centuries by the quiet, steady movement of water.

Wadis have also shaped human life in Oman for generations. Their seasonal flows replenish soil moisture, support groundwater reserves and sustain traditional irrigation systems such as aflaj, enabling farming and settlement in otherwise arid environments. Communities have flourished along these waterways, building livelihoods around the rhythms of water, land and season.

Hatim bin Saif al Battashi, Head of Wadi Dayqah Dam Section, said wadis remain a foundational part of Oman’s natural water system. “Wadis represent a fundamental



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Wadis represent a fundamental component of Oman’s water resource system, supporting groundwater recharge and environmental stability, particularly in water-scarce regions.

HATIM BIN SAIF AL BATTASHI
Head of Wadi Dayqah Dam Section

“
Oman’s wadis act as ecological corridors connecting mountain ecosystems to coastal environments, transporting freshwater, sediments and nutrients that sustain coastal biodiversity and productivity.

MALAAK AL LAWATI
Marine biologist & science communicator

component of Oman’s water resource system, supporting groundwater recharge and environmental stability, particularly in water-scarce regions,” he said.

Today, as climate pressures intensify and environmental systems face growing strain, the importance of wadis is becoming even clearer. They are not simply channels carved by rain, but dynamic systems that sustain biodiversity, strengthen water security and maintain the delicate balance between nature and human development.

For Oman, protecting wadis means safeguarding far more than seasonal streams. It means preserving ecological corridors, protecting freshwater reserves and sustaining landscapes that have quietly supported life for thousands of years.

In the story of Oman’s natural heritage, wadis are not only pathways for water — they are pathways for life itself.



SHORT TAKES



The forum aims to support scientific research and empower young researchers.

THIRD LEGAL STUDIES FORUM HELD IN IBRA

IBRA: The third scientific forum for postgraduate students in legal studies was held on Saturday in Ibra, Al Sharqiyah North Governorate, with the participation of postgraduate law students from various higher education institutions across Oman.

The forum aims to support scientific research and empower young researchers, in line with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040 in building a knowledge-based society capable of addressing contemporary legal challenges.

Dr Khalid bin Abdullah al Khamisi, Chairman of the Forum's Scientific Committee, said the event reflects the commitment of the College of Law at the A'Sharqiyah University to strengthening legal research and its role in developing the legislative system and reinforcing justice and the rule of law.

He noted that the committee received more than 24 peer-reviewed research papers covering three main themes: public law, private law, and personal status law. The submissions were evaluated through academic arbitration based on originality, objectivity and adherence to research methodology standards.

The forum also featured 10 scientific presentations on diverse legal topics, presented by postgraduate students from the College of Law at the A'Sharqiyah University, law colleges from other Omani universities, as well as members of the Supreme Judicial Council.

Discussions at the forum focused on the importance of legal and jurisprudential research in addressing emerging issues within the legislative system. It also highlighted key legal challenges requiring deeper academic study, including civil and commercial aspects of private law, public law and public freedoms and personal status law.

— ONA

AL RUSTAQ EXPO BLENDS TECH WITH TRADITIONAL CRAFTS



Participants from craft institutions are taking part.

AL RUSTAQ: The ‘Technology and Craft Art Exhibition’ concluded on Saturday at Al Rustaq Public Park in Al Batinah South Governorate. The expo showcased the integration of modern technology with traditional Omani handicrafts.

Organised by the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Department in the governorate, the exhibition featured 35 participants representing craft institutions, artisans, home-based businesses, SMEs and productive families from across the governorate. The event aims to promote and modernise Omani handicrafts through innovative techniques and digital solutions, while preserving national identity and creating new opportunities for craftsmen and entrepreneurs.

Several government entities participated to showcase their services, including the Ministry of Health, which is introducing the digital features of the ‘Shifa’ application. School students also displayed scientific innovations reflecting growing youth interest in technology and innovation.

The exhibition included a special section for the University Student Fund under the Wali of Al Rustaq, where proceeds from used book sales supported university students. Theatrical performances, arts, photography and Omani sweet-making demonstrations were also held. The exhibition was inaugurated by Shaikh Humaid bin Salim al Tabai, Deputy Wali of Al Rustaq. — ONA

OCCI HONOURS HUMANITARIAN WORKER

KABEER YOUSUF

MUSCAT: The Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) has felicitated Oman-based social welfare worker Syed Shaandar Ali Shah Bukhari in recognition of his significant humanitarian contributions to society.

Faisal bin Abdullah al Rawas, Chairman of the OCCI, who honoured Bukhari, described him as a ‘National Champion’ for his outstanding community service and dedication to humanitarian causes. The ceremony, held at the



Faisal bin Abdullah al Rawas felicitates Syed Shaandar Ali Shah Bukhari.

OCCI headquarters, highlighted Bukhari’s efforts in social welfare, including a courageous act that helped rescue a distressed individual and avert a potential tragedy. Al

Rawas conveyed appreciation on behalf of Oman, commending his selfless commitment to community wellbeing.

Al Rawas also stressed the importance of acknowledging individuals engaged in public service, stating that such recognition helps uplift unsung heroes who contribute to strengthening the social fabric and fostering positivity in society.

Bukhari currently serves as Director of Welfare in the Interim Committee of the Pakistan Social Club Oman.

Jabal Al Akhdar sees 9 pc rise in visitors in 2025

BALQEES AL ORAIMI

MUSCAT, MAY 9

AL JABAL AL AKHDHAR in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate recorded a 9 per cent increase in tourist arrivals in 2025 compared to the same period last year, underscoring its growing status as one of Oman's leading tourism destinations.

The rise reflects increasing demand for eco-tourism and mountain getaways, supported by the region's cool climate, scenic landscapes, and diverse attractions that continue to draw both domestic and international visitors, particularly during holidays and peak travel seasons.

The destination has become a preferred choice for families and nature enthusiasts, offering panoramic mountain views, terraced farms, traditional villages and adventure activities that blend leisure with cultural exploration.

Local stakeholders say tourism activity this year has been notably stronger. Salim bin Nasser al Riyami, owner of a guesthouse in the area, noted higher occupancy rates across hospitality establishments, especially during weekends and peak periods, compared to previous years.

He said visitors are increasingly seeking tranquil natural escapes away from urban centres, giving Al



The sustained growth reflects the rising popularity of nature-based travel in Oman.

Improvements in tourism infrastructure and road connectivity have significantly enhanced accessibility, contributing to steady growth in visitor numbers and encouraging repeat visits

Jabal Al Akhdhar a strong position as a premier nature-based tourism destination in Oman. Al Riyami also highlighted the positive impact on small businesses, including vendors of local products such as honey, rose water, mountain fruits and traditional handicrafts, which remain popular among tourists. Tour guide Rashid bin Saif al Abri said the area now attracts a diverse range of visitors, including families, adventure seekers, photographers, and hiking enthusiasts.

He noted that mountain trails and heritage villages are among the most sought-after experiences.

He added that improvements in tourism infrastructure and road

connectivity have significantly enhanced accessibility, contributing to steady growth in visitor numbers and encouraging repeat visits.

Known for its agricultural heritage, Al Jabal Al Akhdhar is famous for producing pomegranates, Omani roses, apricots, peaches, and walnuts, along with its iconic terraced farms offering panoramic views.

Tourism observers say the sustained growth reflects the rising popularity of domestic tourism and nature-based travel in Oman, aligned with efforts to diversify tourism offerings and strengthen the sector's contribution to the economy under Oman Vision 2040.

Major landscaping and afforestation project to transform Sultan Qaboos Street in Barka

STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT, MAY 9

The Al Batinah South Municipality, represented by its Afforestation Section, has launched a major initiative to revitalise and enhance the landscape along Sultan Qaboos Street in the Wilayat of Barka.

The project aims to remove dead and deteriorated Sidr trees that have lost their environmental and aesthetic value, as part of broader efforts to improve green space management and upgrade the visual appeal of the governorate's main roads.

The first phase of the initiative includes the removal of dried and ageing trees, site preparation and landscape improvement works in readiness for modern afforestation activities.

The project will extend for nearly 3 kilometres towards the Wilayat of Al Musannah, contributing to a cleaner and more organised urban environment.

In the second phase, the municipality will plant a variety of shade trees and ornamental species, including Salsola, Bougainvillea and Acacia, selected for their



Muscat Municipality will also launch a large-scale reforestation project along Sultan Qaboos Street.

The project aims to remove dead and deteriorated Sidr trees that have lost their environmental and aesthetic value

adaptability to the local climate and their ability to provide shade, improve air quality and add aesthetic value to the roadway.

A further beautification phase will include the installation of plant fences and decorative shrubs to create a more visually harmonious and sustainable streetscape.

Meanwhile, Muscat Municipality is also preparing to launch a large-

scale reforestation project along Sultan Qaboos Street in Al Seeb.

According to the municipality, improper tree selection can obstruct visibility, create traffic hazards and increase maintenance and resource consumption.

The project will therefore involve the removal of existing palm trees, reorganisation of landscaping and the planting of more suitable species.

The afforestation works in Al Seeb will cover around 14 kilometres on both sides of the road, with landscaping extending across five metres. Around 1,300 palm trees will be removed and replaced with nearly 1,500 new plants.

Sultan Qaboos Street (N5), one of Oman's most important highways, passes several key landmarks including the Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque, the old Muscat International Airport and the Royal Opera House Muscat.

The road is expected to undergo a significant transformation in the coming years with the development of the Downtown Al Khuwair project and the proposed Muscat Metro network.

WAR

SHORTTAKES



A satellite image shows a likely oil spill covering dozens of square kilometres near Iran’s Kharg Island. — Reuters

SUSPECTED OIL SLICK OFF IRAN’S KHARG ISLAND

Satellite images appeared to show an oil slick spreading off the coast of Iran’s Kharg Island, a key oil export terminal for the Islamic republic. It was not immediately clear what had caused the apparent spill, which was located off the small Gulf island’s west coast.

Orbital EOS, which monitors oil spills, told The New York Times that the spill appeared to cover more than 20 square miles (52 square kilometres) as of Thursday. The Conflict and Environment Observatory, a non-governmental organisation, said on X that the “original source remains unclear, meanwhile it’s drifting south and seems unlikely to be addressed appropriately.”

Kharg Island is at the heart of Iran’s oil export industry, a lynchpin of the country’s battered economy. It sits off Iran’s Gulf coast, hundreds of kilometres northwest of the narrow, strategic Strait of Hormuz. Kharg Island has Iran’s largest oil terminal, oil pipelines, storage tanks and related infrastructure. — AFP

QATAR PM CALLS FOR IRAN TALKS IN VANCE MEETING



This combination shows, L/R, Qatar’s PM and Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani and US Vice President JD Vance. — AFP

Qatar’s prime minister called for renewed diplomacy on an agreement with Iran as he met in Washington with Vice President JD Vance. Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani met with Vance and discussed Pakistani-led efforts to broker a permanent peace amid a shaky ceasefire.

The Qatari prime minister “stressed the need for all parties to engage with the ongoing mediation efforts, to pave the way for addressing the root causes of the crisis through peaceful means and dialogue, leading to a comprehensive agreement that achieves lasting peace in the region,” the Qatari foreign ministry said on X. Qatar has long been a key intermediary for the United States, engaging in dialogue with Iran and liaising with Hamas to help broker a ceasefire with Israel in Gaza. — AFP

BEIRUT: Lebanese official media reported a new Israeli strike outside Beirut on Saturday, moments after it reported two strikes on the highway linking the capital to the country’s south. The state-run National News Agency said the strike hit the Chouf district, around 20 kilometres (12 miles) south of Beirut and not far from a previous strike on the Saadiyat highway. Both areas are outside Hezbollah’s traditional strongholds and came despite a ceasefire in the Iran-backed group’s war with Israel.

Lebanon said at least one person was killed in Israeli strikes on the country’s

south on Saturday despite a ceasefire with Hezbollah, after Israel’s army issued an evacuation warning to several villages. Israeli forces and Iran-backed Hezbollah have traded fire daily, mostly in southern Lebanon, despite the ceasefire agreement in effect since April 17.

Israel’s military had called on residents of nine villages to evacuate, warning that it would act “forcefully” against Hezbollah after its “violation of the ceasefire agreement”. Lebanon’s state-run National News Agency said Israeli warplanes “launched a strike on the town of Zrariyeh” and several other areas included

US AND IRAN NO CLOSER TO ENDING WAR

A STATE of relative calm prevailed around the Strait of Hormuz on Saturday, after days of sporadic flare-ups, as the United States waited for Iran’s response to its latest proposals to end more than two months of fighting and begin peace talks. US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said on Friday that Washington expected a response within hours. But a day later, there was no sign of movement from Tehran on the proposal, which would formally end the war before talks on more contentious issues, including Iran’s nuclear programme.

With US President Donald Trump due to begin a long-awaited visit to China next week, there has been mounting pressure to draw a line under the conflict, which has thrown energy markets into turmoil and posed a growing threat to the world economy. Recent days have seen the biggest flare-ups in fighting in and around the Strait of Hormuz since a ceasefire began a month ago, and the United Arab Emirates came under renewed attack on Friday.

CLASHES TEST CEASEFIRE

On Friday, there were sporadic clashes between Iranian forces and US vessels in the strait, Iran’s semi-official Fars news agency reported. The Tasnim news agency later cited an Iranian military source saying the situation had calmed but warning more clashes were possible. The US military said it struck two Iran-linked vessels attempting to enter an Iranian port, with a US fighter jet hitting their smokestacks and forcing them to turn back.

Tehran has largely blocked non-Iranian shipping through the strait since the war began with US-Israeli air strikes across Iran on February 28. Before the war, one-fifth of the world’s oil supply passed through the narrow waterway. The US imposed a blockade on Iranian vessels last month. But a CIA assessment indicated Iran would not suffer severe economic pressure from a US blockade of Iranian ports for about



A man sits near a memorial depicting a symbolic classroom representing the Minab School, in Tehran. — AFP

There was no sign of movement from Tehran on the proposal, which would formally end the war before talks on more contentious issues, including Iran’s nuclear programme.

another four months, according to a US official familiar with the matter, raising questions over Trump’s leverage over Tehran in a conflict that has been unpopular with voters and US allies.

A senior intelligence official characterised as false the “claims” about the CIA analysis, which was first reported by the Washington Post. Clashes extended beyond the waterway. The UAE said its air defences engaged with two ballistic missiles and three drones from Iran on Friday, with three people sustaining moderate injuries.

Trump said on Thursday the ceasefire, announced on April 7, was still holding despite the flare-ups, while Iran accused the US of breaching it. “Every time a diplomatic solution is on the table, the US opts for a reckless military adventure,” Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi said on Friday.

US PURSUES DIPLOMACY

The US has found little international support in the conflict. After meeting with Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, Rubio questioned why Italy and other allies were not backing Washington’s efforts to reopen the strait, warning of a dangerous precedent if Tehran were allowed to control an international waterway. Speaking in Stockholm, German Chancellor Friedrich Merz said European countries shared the aim of stopping Iran from getting nuclear weapons and said they were working to bridge differences with Washington. While pursuing diplomacy, the US also ratcheted up sanctions to pressure Iran. Days before Trump travels to China to meet President Xi Jinping, the US Treasury on Friday announced sanctions against 10 individuals and companies for aiding efforts by Iran to secure weapons. — Reuters

UK SENDING WARSHIP TO MIDEAST AHEAD OF HORMUZ MISSION

LONDON: The UK will send a destroyer to the Middle East ahead of any international mission to help protect shipping in the key Strait of Hormuz, its defence ministry said on Saturday. “The pre-positioning of HMS Dragon is part of prudent planning that will ensure that the UK is ready, as part of a multinational coalition jointly led by the UK and France, to secure the strait, when conditions allow,” a ministry spokesperson said. Britain and France said last

month that military plans to secure the Strait of Hormuz were coming together and would succeed in restoring trade flows through the vital passage. The MoD said deploying HMS Dragon would strengthen the confidence of commercial shipping and support mine clearance efforts once hostilities end.

At a two-day meeting in London in April involving more than 44 countries, military planners discussed the practicalities of a

multinational mission led by the UK and France to protect navigation in the key waterway. Some 40 countries are understood to have agreed to participate in plans for the mission to free up navigation in Hormuz.

Before the war on Iran started, about a fifth of the world’s oil was shipped through the strait. But that has dwindled in past months. Iran largely closed the strait, throwing global markets into turmoil and driving up oil prices. — Reuters

Lebanon reports third Israeli strike outside Beirut



Emergency responders inspect the site of an Israeli strike in Saksakiyeh, Lebanon. — Reuters

in the notice. It reported casualties in a strike on a car on a road between two of the locations, and said Israeli air strikes and artillery shelling

hit other areas of the south not mentioned in the warning.

The health ministry said an Israeli strike on a motorbike in the town of Nabatieh

outside the evacuation areas hit “a Syrian national and his 12-year-old daughter”. “After they managed to move away from the site of the first strike, the drone attacked a second time,” killing the father, the ministry said, while the drone then targeted the girl “directly for a third time”, adding that she was undergoing life-saving surgery. It slammed a “barbaric” attack and “deliberate violence against civilians and children”.

Hezbollah on Saturday said it targeted northern Israel with a drone in response to repeated Israeli attacks on Lebanon despite an ongoing truce between the two sides.

Meanwhile, European Union crisis management chief Hadja Lahbib on Saturday urged increased humanitarian access in south Lebanon, where Israel has kept up strikes and Hezbollah has been launching attacks despite a ceasefire. “Humanitarian aid is ready, but too often it cannot reach those who need it most,” Lahbib told a news conference on the second day of her visit to Lebanon, ahead of an expected EU aid delivery.

“South of the Litani River, access is still severely restricted due to evacuation orders and Israeli military activity. — AFP

SHORT TAKES



Peter Magyar delivers a speech after becoming Hungary's new Prime Minister, at the Parliament in Budapest. — Reuters

MAGYAR SWORN IN AS HUNGARY'S PRIME MINISTER

BUDAPEST: Centre-right leader Peter Magyar was sworn in as Hungary's prime minister on Saturday, propelled into office on promises of change after years of economic stagnation and strained ties with key allies under his predecessor Viktor Orban. Magyar defeated nationalist Orban after 16 years in power in an April 12 election landslide, handing his Tisza party a constitutional majority that will allow him to roll back reforms critics say have weakened democracy.

Foreign investors and Hungarians alike have welcomed Magyar's victory, with the forint hitting four-year highs against the euro, bond yields falling and post-election polls showing more voters backing Tisza. But any honeymoon for the 45-year-old leader may be short-lived, with the clock ticking to secure billions of euros in suspended European Union funding needed to kick-start the economy and shore up strained public finances.

"Hungarian people have given us a mandate to put an end to decades of drifting," Magyar said. "They have given us a mandate to open a new chapter in Hungary's history. Not only to change the government, but to change the system as well. To start again." Magyar inherits an economy that only just emerged from stagnation in the first quarter and now faces fresh headwinds from surging energy costs linked to the Middle East conflict, which could weigh heavily on Europe's import-reliant economy. — Reuters

MACRON STARTS AFRICAN TOUR



France's President Emmanuel Macron (L) shakes hands with his Egyptian counterpart Abdel Fattah el-Sisi upon his arrival at the Senghor University in Borg el Arab, near the Mediterranean coastal city of Alexandria. Macron hopes to highlight France's renewed relationship with the continent as a "report card on his Africa policy", said one diplomat. — AFP

Australia's far-right party wins first lower house seat

SYDNEY: Australian far-right populist party Pauline Hanson's One Nation won its first seat in the country's House of Representatives in a by-election on Saturday, a preliminary vote count showed. The result is in line with a surge of electoral support for far-right populist parties globally. David Farley, a former agribusiness executive, won the rural seat of Farrer, some 550 km south of Sydney and 320 km north of Melbourne,

for the anti-immigration party with 59.3 per cent of the vote, defeating the incumbent centre-right Liberal Party, according to the Australian Broadcasting Corp. One Nation's first preference vote in the by-election was 42 per cent, the ABC said, compared to the 6.6 per cent first-preference vote it got at a federal election last May. "We're like a mason with a chisel and we're carving letters into Australia's democracy," Farley said

at a televised election event. "One Nation has reached the end of its beginning." The result is significant in that it marks the first time One Nation has won a lower-house seat since Hanson formed the party 30 years ago. But it does not affect the parliamentary majority of the ruling Labor Party, which holds 94 of 150 lower-house seats. The Labor Party did not run a candidate in the contest for the seat

that has been held by the opposition conservatives since it was formed more than half a century ago. Party leader Pauline Hanson, a senator, standing beside Farley, said the result was "a win for Farrer but a bigger win for the nation". She knew her party was favoured to win but when the first television station projected victory "I actually got a tear in my eye", she said. "You really don't understand the journey I've been on," she added. — Reuters

Putin chides Nato in speech at Victory Day parade

RUSSIAN President Vladimir Putin said on Saturday that his soldiers in Ukraine were fighting an "aggressive force" backed by all of Nato and described his war goals as "just", as he addressed a scaled back Victory Day parade on Red Square. Putin has made the memory of the Soviet victory over Nazi Germany in World War II a central narrative of his 25-year rule. Russian authorities typically mark the parade with pomp and grandeur. But a spate of Ukrainian long-range attacks in recent weeks prompted the Kremlin to ramp up security measures and downsize this year's celebrations.

The parade was vastly smaller compared to previous years, with no military hardware on display for the first time in nearly two decades and only a handful of foreign dignitaries in attendance — most of them leaders of Russia's close allies. Both Moscow and Kyiv agreed to observe a three-day ceasefire over the event, announced by US President Donald Trump. Moscow had threatened a "massive" strike on central Kyiv if Ukraine disrupted the proceedings.

In an address to the parade, attended by Russian military units as well as soldiers from North Korea, Putin invoked the Soviet victory to rally support for his army in Ukraine. "The great feat of the generation of victors inspires the soldiers carrying out the goals of the special military operation today," Putin said. "They are



Members of a military band stand next to a screen broadcasting Russia's President Vladimir Putin's address during the Victory Day military parade in Moscow. — AFP

confronting an aggressive force armed and supported by the entire Nato bloc. And despite this, our heroes move forward," he said. "I firmly believe that our cause is just," he added later.

The speech drew a cool reception from some in Moscow, with Internet outages and fatigue over the four-year Ukraine war casting a shadow over the events. When asked how she felt on Victory Day, which marks the Soviet Union's defeat of Nazi Germany in World War II, 36-year-old economist Elena replied: "Nothing." "I need the Internet, and I don't have it," she said from central Moscow, saying she would not watch the parade.

Russian President Vladimir Putin on Saturday received Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico in the Kremlin, the only EU leader visiting Moscow

during scaled-back Victory Day celebrations. Slovakia, a central European country dependent on Russian oil, is the most friendly state to the Kremlin in the EU. This was the second time Fico, who is sceptical of the EU's aid to Ukraine, has visited Russia for the key patriotic event.

After two failed attempts at truces this week by both Russia and Ukraine, Trump announced on Friday a three-day ceasefire between both sides would come into effect from May 9. "Hopefully, it is the beginning of the end of a very long, deadly, and hard fought War," Trump posted on his Truth Social network, adding the ceasefire would be accompanied by a prisoner exchange. The Kremlin said that as of now there were no plans to prolong the truce. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky issued

a decree on Friday ordering the Ukrainian military not to attack the parade and in a separate statement confirmed his government would adhere to the ceasefire to enable the swap of 1,000 detainees from each warring side. "Red Square is less important to us than the lives of Ukrainian prisoners who can be returned home," Zelensky said, referring to the historic site in the Russian capital where the annual event is held. Both the Ukrainian air force and Russian defence ministry reported fewer drone attacks overnight.

Now in its fifth year, the war has killed hundreds of thousands of people and spiralled into Europe's deadliest since World War II. US-mediated talks on ending the fighting have shown little progress since February, when Washington shifted focus to its war against Iran. Before Trump's announcement on Friday, Zelensky had balked at the idea of a truce over the parade and warned Moscow's allies against attending.

Russia had threatened a massive strike on the heart of Kyiv if Ukraine disrupted the commemoration and urged foreign diplomats to leave the Ukrainian capital ahead of the event. Security was tight in the capital before the parade, with reporters seeing empty streets. Mobile Internet was also disrupted. Only the leaders of Belarus, Malaysia, Laos, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan were listed as attending, in contrast to high-profile visitors including China's Xi Jinping during last year's event. — AFP

European states to evacuate citizens from hantavirus-hit ship

MADRID: Germany, France, Belgium, Ireland, and the Netherlands will send planes to evacuate their citizens aboard the Tenerife-bound cruise ship hit by a deadly hantavirus outbreak, Spain's interior minister said in Madrid on Saturday. The European Union is sending two further planes for remaining European citizens, Fernando Grande-Marlaska added. The US and UK have confirmed planes and contingency plans were being arranged for non-EU citizens whose countries were unable to send air transport, he said. World Health Organization (WHO) Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus will meet Spain's Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez in Madrid on Saturday afternoon and then travel to

Tenerife in the Canary Islands, alongside Spain's interior and health ministers to coordinate the arrival of the ship. It is expected to anchor near the island between 03:00 GMT and 05:00 GMT. Local authorities have warned the evacuation must take place between Sunday midday and Monday afternoon before conditions at sea are expected to take a turn for the worse until the end of May due to stormy weather. The luxury cruise ship MV Hondius left for Spain on Wednesday from the coast of Cape Verde after the WHO and European Union asked the country to manage the evacuation of passengers onboard after the hantavirus outbreak was detected. The World Health Organization said on Friday that eight people had fallen ill, including three



Members of the Spanish Civil Guard work at the port of Granadilla de Abona, Tenerife, Canary Islands, Spain. — Reuters

who died — a Dutch couple and a German national. Six of these people are confirmed to have contracted the virus, with another two suspected cases, the WHO has said. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) said affected US passengers aboard a Dutch cruise ship

hit by an outbreak of a deadly strain of hantavirus are expected to be repatriated on a US government medical flight to Nebraska. MV Hondius is expected to arrive in the Canary Islands on Saturday or Sunday. There are 17 US passengers aboard the ship, according to cruise operator

Oceanwide Expeditions. "The Department of State is closely tracking the hantavirus outbreak on a Dutch cruise ship in the Atlantic Ocean and maintaining close contact with the cruise ship staff, Americans on board, and US and international health authorities," a US State Department spokesperson said earlier in the day. The US passengers will be brought to Offutt Air Force Base in Omaha before being transported to the National Quarantine Center at the University of Nebraska. A team of CDC epidemiologists and medical professionals has been deployed to the Canary Islands to assess the exposure risks of the US passengers and determine appropriate monitoring measures, the agency said.

An additional CDC team is set to deploy to Offutt Air Force Base to support health assessments for the returning passengers. Hantavirus is usually spread by rodents but can in rare cases be transmitted person-to-person. All passengers as well as 17 crew members will be evacuated but 30 crew will stay on board and travel on to the Netherlands, Spain's Health Minister Monica Garcia said. Luggage and the body of a deceased passenger on the ship will remain on board and the ship will be fully disinfected on arrival, she added. Spanish citizens will disembark first, with the order of evacuation of the remaining groups of citizens to be determined by health authorities. — Reuters

OPINION

What happened to our best friends?



DR HAMED
AL SINAWI

The writer is a senior consultant psychiatrist at SQU Hospital

RECENTLY attended a social gathering for former classmates. It was a pleasant evening filled with laughter and shared memories.

For a few hours, we stepped back into a time when life felt simpler and the future seemed wide open. Conversations quickly turned to old stories, late nights before exams, inside jokes and the small dramas that once felt so important.

Yet, within the nostalgia, something quietly struck me. Some of those we once described as our ‘best friends’ now felt surprisingly distant. Not in a negative way, but in a subtle sense that life had gradually carried us in different directions.

We exchanged polite conversations and smiles, but the deep familiarity that once defined our friendship seemed to have softened. This made me wonder: what happens to the idea of a ‘best friend’ as we grow older?

During our school or university years, friendships often feel intense and permanent. We spend long hours together, share the same routines and experience similar milestones. These shared experiences create a powerful sense of closeness. At that stage of life, it is

easy to believe that the friends sitting beside us will remain with us forever.

But as we grow older, our careers begin to shape our daily lives. Some of us move to different cities or countries. Others develop new interests. Gradually, the natural structure that once kept friendships alive begins to dissolve.

Psychologists call this ‘context-based friendship.’ Many relationships form because people share the same environment, such as school, workplace, or neighbourhood. When that context disappears, maintaining the same level of closeness requires deliberate effort from both sides. Without that effort, even meaningful friendships can slowly drift apart.

This shift can sometimes feel disappointing. After all, we are raised on stories that celebrate the idea of the lifelong best friend, the one person who knows us better than anyone else and remains beside us through every stage of life.

Research on social networks suggests that as we age, our circles of friends tend to become smaller but more meaningful. Instead of maintaining a large number of relationships, we invest energy in a few

Perhaps the real lesson is that friendship is more like a journey. People walk alongside us for a while, then sometimes take another path

connections that provide emotional support, trust and understanding. Others may rely more on partners, family members, or colleagues.

In other words, friendships are not fixed positions in our lives; they are chapters.

Instead of asking whether we have a best friend for life, we might ask whether we have meaningful connections at different stages of our lives.

Seen this way, the value of friendship does not lie in permanence but in presence. A friend who stands beside us during a difficult year or a personal crisis may be just as important as the mythical lifelong companion.

Perhaps the real lesson is that friendship is more like a journey.

People walk alongside us for a while, then sometimes take another path. Their departure does not erase the meaning of the time shared.

And when we meet again, at a reunion or a chance encounter, we realise that even distance cannot fully erase those early bonds.

So, who needs a best friend? Maybe none of us do. What we need instead are good friends at the right moments in our lives.

RIISING FUEL PRICES
STRAND INDONESIAN
FISHERMEN

Hundreds of fishermen in an Indonesian coastal town on the island of Java have been forced to stop going out to sea and said their livelihoods are at risk due to soaring fuel prices.

The price of subsidised fuel has remained unchanged but the cost of non-subsidised fuel, including industrial diesel, surged as high as 30,000 rupiah (about \$1.73) per litre since last month, a steep increase from 14,000 to 23,000 rupiah before the hike.

Hundreds of fishermen held a protest in Pati, a coastal town in Central Java, on Monday, demanding a lower price for the diesel that fuels their boats.

A fisherman working in Pati, Zen Zen Al Wijaini, said he cannot work because his boss, the boat owner, can’t afford the fuel that accounts for 70 per cent of operational costs.

“So, we can’t earn (a living) for our families, because the operational costs are so high, we end up just unemployed at home,” the 40-year-old said on Friday.

State-owned gas and oil company Pertamina said last month the price increase was necessary due to geopolitical conditions, referring to the Middle East war that has driven up global oil prices.

Central Java governor Ahmad Luthfi said he would plead with Jakarta to relax the price of non-subsidised fuel.

“If fishermen can’t go out to sea, the implications are far-reaching,” he said during a meeting with fishermen on Friday, according to the government’s website.

“Fish production will be disrupted, fish prices may rise, inflation can be affected, and the economic ecosystem in port areas will also be disturbed.”

The Indonesian Fishermen’s Association in Central Java said most of the 1,600 fishing vessels moored along the Juwana River in Pati have ceased operating. “As a fisherman... I really, truly beg for a reduction in the price of non-subsidised fuel for fishermen,” said Waluyo, a Pati fisherman who said he had gone into debt to afford fuel.

“Because, no matter what, the kitchen, our food, our stomachs, those needs can’t wait,” he said on Thursday.

The Indonesian Fishermen’s Association in Central Java is one of the region’s key organisations representing the interests of fishing communities, particularly small-scale and traditional fishermen affected by rising operational costs, labour issues and changing fishing regulations.

Central Java is one of Indonesia’s major fishing regions, with coastal towns such as Pati, Tegal, Batang and Cilacap heavily dependent on the marine economy. — AFP

Preserving social bonds
amid mental illness

OMAN CONTINUES to offer something precious: a society held together by family, faith and strong communities. That is not a romantic slogan, but a real social strength: one that deserves recognition at a time when suicides are rising in many parts of the world.

Oman is making progress by providing more medical facilities dedicated to mental health, but depression and mental illness are still too often stigmatised.

Across the Arab world, suicide remains a subject often spoken about in whispers, if at all. Even so, suicide rates in many Western countries appear higher than in Arab Middle Eastern societies.

Social connection, religious faith, family cohesion and close community ties all seem to offer a measure of protection, even if they do not provide complete immunity.

In many Western societies, the individual stands more alone. People may live farther from extended family, move more often for work and face loneliness behind apparently comfortable lives.

Where family ties are looser, distress can go unseen for longer. By contrast, in Arab societies, including Oman, the extended family still has a powerful presence. Parents, siblings, cousins, uncles and aunts often remain closely connected, offering support in practical and emotional ways. That sense of belonging can matter enormously when a person is struggling.

Religion also plays a significant part. Muslim societies have a moral and spiritual structure that gives meaning to life. In addition, faith offers a reason to endure hardship. It is not a cure for despair, but it can be a strong source of resilience during difficult times.

There is also a cultural difference to explain why poor mental health well-being may be less catastrophic



KARIM
EASTERBROOK

The writer is a former Cambridge School Principal and Author

Oman must preserve what is precious in its social life while facing mental health problems with honesty and compassion



In a closely knit Omani household, people find that their struggles are quickly seen and family members offer support.

in Middle Eastern countries. A financial crisis, a broken marriage, or a child’s unemployment is often felt by the whole family. That can sometimes be burdensome, but it can also be protective. Someone who is isolated in a Western city may have no one to notice that they are sliding into depression.

In a closely knit Omani household, people find that their struggles are quickly seen and family members offer support. The threat of suicide is especially relevant for men.

In the UK, men are three times more likely to commit suicide than women. In societies where masculine pride and the obligation to support the family are highly valued, unemployment or marital breakdown can strike at a man’s identity as well as income.

The shame of not coping may deepen his risk of depression. Modern pressures have not spared Arab countries.

Employment uncertainty, joblessness and family pressures are all real and growing concerns. The protective support of traditional social bonds can be weakened when

younger people live more urban, more separated lives.

It would be wrong, however, to pretend that extended families solve everything. They do not. They can become places of tension and pressure.

Under-reporting causes serious problems and some tragedies are never recorded properly. Even so, the broad lesson is encouraging. Where people have strong webs of family, faith and communal obligation, despair may be less likely to lead to suicide. That is not because Arab societies are perfect, but because human beings are less likely to break when they are not entirely alone.

Oman must preserve what is precious in its social life while facing mental health problems with honesty and compassion. The answer is not to copy less socially supportive western societies, but to strengthen the bonds already present while making it easier for men and women alike to speak openly before silence becomes tragedy.

In that way, Oman can remain true to its values while also protecting those who may be struggling quietly.

Beware of the clobbering machine, and tall poppy syndrome



RAY PETERSEN

The writer is a media consultant

IT DOESN'T matter what you, the ordinary folk, do to improve yourselves, as a certain breed of politicians, as Winston Churchill intimated, "are asked to stand, want to sit, and end up lying," and they will say and do anything to keep their foot on your throat.

Though I'm sure that most of us do improve ourselves as we grow, learn, mature and gain experience, it is almost as if despite demonstrating compassion, care and concern for others, despite having good work ethics, contributing to families, communities and societies, being faithful, loyal and true, showing resilience and integrity, there is always something we have no control over, that prevents us from achieving the fulfilment that truly completes us.

Is it perhaps what we New Zealanders refer to as the 'tall poppy syndrome,' where societies find ways of ostracising high achievers in society or the workplace, so seek to "bring them back to earth," through criticism. Its origins are credited to the Roman author Titus Livius, in his history of Rome, Ab Urbe Condita, in which he identified the tyrant King, Tarquinius of Gabii, who, in hacking off the tallest poppies in his garden, demonstrated the threats to his rule. A

It, tall poppy syndrome, is usually driven by insecurities or envy, in what starts as

banter, but quickly becomes malicious, often finds the individual unfairly maligned, socially ostracised, and their achievements belittled, resulting in self-doubt, anxiety, and a complete withdrawal from seeking excellence or approval. It is, absolutely, bullying and harassment by another name.

Another malignant presence, more institutional than individual, is known as the 'clobbering machine,' a scenario which pressures individuals to 'not make waves,' and accept the status quo, or be 'cut down to size.' It is different because it threatens, right from the start, malignant and poisonous, saying, "toe the line, or else!"

Politicians wield such threats effectively, and Vladimir Putin's, when imperialist objectives were put under pressure by opposition leader Alexei Navalny, warned, "Imperialism is evil. It harms the interests of the Russian people." Putin's response was chilling, referring to "that person," or "that character," and warning, "We will fight against them." Which is exactly what he did, as Navalny was charged with fraud and extremism in 2021, and sentenced to 19 years' hard labour. Imagine, 19 years!

Navalny was quietly moved to the Polar Wolf Colony in Kharp, in Russia's harsh Far North, where he died in February 2024, from what was originally said to be a blood

It, tall poppy syndrome, is usually driven by insecurities or envy, in what starts as banter, but quickly becomes malicious, often finds the individual unfairly maligned, socially ostracised, and their achievements belittled, resulting in self-doubt, anxiety, and a complete withdrawal from seeking excellence or approval

clot, then later to have been 'sudden death syndrome.' An authoritative investigation by an international panel found he had been poisoned with epibatidine, a laboratory-produced toxin. The implication is that Navalny's death has the imprint of the FSB clobbering machine all over it.

So, it's no wonder we feel that no matter what we do, we're going to get 'slapped' metaphorically, by the clobbering machine, or 'cut down' by those who aren't doing quite so well, so why... bother? You think to yourself, "I was born to stand out..." like a poppy in a field, that last bit being the death knell, again, you know you'll get 'slapped down.'

The great clobbering machine may well be defined in our lives as a metaphorical media onslaught, a political force majeure, or even intense social media pressure, etc., yet I will always see it as the inflated egos of too many narcissistic, antagonistic, masochistic politicians.

Look around the world right now, and a rich harvest of warmongers, deceivers, and charlatans, of whom George Orwell may have spoken thus, "political language makes lies sound truthful."

Beware of the politician whose lips are moving, for in Voltaire's words, echoing the clobbering machine's justification as, "politics being the art of deliberately lying."

TRAPPED SEAFARERS TRAUMATISED BY IRAN WAR

ROLAND LLOYD PARRY

Isolated and traumatised by drones and missiles, seafarers in the Gulf face grave mental suffering after more than two months stuck on board in the Middle East war, maritime charities warn.

From captains to cooks, engineers and other officers, the workers who keep global freight flowing have found themselves not just stranded but in some cases right in the firing line of the US-Israeli war with Iran.

"We hear stories of how frightened they are. It's pretty scary," said Gavin Lim, head of the Crisis Response Network for the Sailors' Society, a UK-based seafarers' charity, who spoke with one crew whose vessel was hit. "They thought: 'We were going to die.'"

Trade vessels have been struck by projectiles and fired on by Iranian Revolutionary Guards in dozens of incidents, according to the British maritime security monitor UKMTO. At least 11 seafarers have been killed, according to the International Maritime Organization.

"They see drones flying, they see missiles flying, and then we see instances where the ships get hit," said Lim. "You can imagine that anxiety and fear building up. 'Are we just bait? Are we going to be a victim so that someone can make a point?'"

The Seafarers' Charity cites hypervigilance, burnout, fatigue, loneliness, depression and anxiety as some of the mental strains facing the 20,000 seafarers stranded by Iran's blockade of the Strait of Hormuz since February 28.

At least two commercial vessels have been seized by Iranian forces under their blockade of the vital trade route. A video showed masked guards with guns boarding a ship.

"We heard that one of the seafarers, an officer, suffered a panic attack while the vessel was being boarded," said John Canias, maritime operations coordinator for the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF).

"Fortunately, the news is they have been taken care of... they have been allowed to speak to their family through the Internet."

The strain extends to the seafarers' families at home, worried about their stranded loved ones - or in the worst cases, bereaved.

On March 1, the second day of the conflict, a projectile hit a tanker in the Gulf, killing a 25-year-old Indian seafarer as he started his shift in the engine room, said Melanie Warman, communications director for the Sailors' Society, who spoke to his family.

"The mother has been in and out of hospital, not eating. It's obviously a really desperate situation," she said.

"For the families, this is really, really difficult. We hear from families who can't reach their loved ones on board ships and they're really frantic with worry."

Like the Sailors' Society, another sailors' helpline charity, the International Seafarers' Welfare and Assistance Network (ISWAN), fields calls from trapped workers and offers them practical and psychological support. — AFP

Macron seeks to cement Africa legacy from Kenya

DELPHINE TOUITOU AND FRANCESCO FONTEMAGGI

PRESIDENT Emmanuel Macron on Saturday embarked on a visit to Africa aimed at renewing France's engagement with the continent after years of strained ties with former French-speaking colonies.

In English-speaking Kenya, Macron will co-host a summit on Monday and Tuesday, bringing together African leaders and business executives, as he seeks to cement his legacy one year before the end of his term.

He will also travel to Egypt and Ethiopia as part of his Africa tour.

"The Africa Forward summit marks a major milestone in relations between France and the African continent," the Elysee Palace said.

The meeting will focus on economic development and cross-border investment, among other themes, the French presidency said, stressing that it will be the first such forum held in an English-speaking country. Macron hopes to highlight France's renewed relationship with the continent as a "report card on his Africa policy", said one diplomat.

Anti-French sentiment runs high in some former African colonies as the continent becomes a renewed diplomatic battleground, with Russian and Chinese influence growing.

Once master of vast expanses of northern, central and western Africa, France has played a crucial role in the continent's post-colonial history, repeatedly intervening militarily since the early 1960s.

France has vowed to abandon the so-called "Francafrrique" strategy, under which Paris sought to keep francophone Africa under its thumb through political collusion, exclusive access for French businesses and oblique financial deals including graft.

Macron has gone further than his predecessors in admitting France's colonial-era abuses in countries including Rwanda, Cameroon and Senegal. But he has ruled out any official apology for torture and other abuses carried out by French



France's President Emmanuel Macron kisses the forehead of a girl as he meets with a group of children who laid a wreath of flowers in front of the flame at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier during a ceremony at the Arc de Triomphe to mark the 81st anniversary of VE Day, or Victory in Europe Day, in Paris, on Friday. — AFP

France has vowed to abandon the so-called "Francafrrique" strategy, under which Paris sought to keep francophone Africa under its thumb through political collusion, exclusive access for French businesses and oblique financial deals including graft

troops in Algeria.

Ahead of his trip, the French parliament definitively adopted legislation to simplify the return of artworks looted during the colonial era. But under his watch, French forces deployed in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger withdrew following successive coups, as the juntas in those countries drew closer to Russia.

The unravelling of those ties came after Macron in 2020 summoned leaders of Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, Chad and Mauritania to the southwestern French town of Pau, threatening to pull out French troops.

The meeting was widely seen as a throwback to the colonial era and accelerated France's crisis in ties with the countries in the Sahel.

Amaka Anku, head of the Africa section at Eurasia Group, a risk analysis firm, said Macron should not be blamed for France's loss of influence in the Sahel.

"That was a long time coming, it's inherited," she said.

"The best thing Macron did was to try to expand France's relations with anglophone Africa."

The military leaders of Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger will not attend the summit.

Africa expert Niagale Bagayoko expressed scepticism about what Macron might be able to achieve.

"Nothing particularly new can happen in Franco-African relations before the end of Emmanuel Macron's term," she said.

"There is too much baggage."

She said Macron was perceived by many in Africa as a leader who had "failed to grasp" the evolution of public opinion and was seen as "arrogant and paternalistic".

Some still remember how Macron in 2017 nearly sparked a diplomatic incident with Burkina Faso's then-president Roch Marc Christian Kabore as he spoke to students in Ouagadougou. Some complained of persistent electricity cuts, and when Kabore briefly left the room, Macron joked that he had gone to fix the air conditioning.

Critics also pointed out that the overhaul of the CFA franc, a French-backed currency used by some African countries and seen as a relic of the colonial past, did not amount to much.

Former French ambassador Nicolas Normand said the reform was "homeopathic", accusing Macron of failing to grasp the symbolic weight of a colonial-era legacy.

Before travelling to Kenya, Macron will unveil the new campus of a university in Alexandria in northern Egypt alongside President Abdel Fattah el Sisi. — AFP

SPORTS

CLOSECONTEST



ISC-Rockers beat Team ISC 2-1 in the final.

ISC-ROCKERS EMERGE ISC OMAN ANNUAL TT CHAMPIONS

MUSCAT: The Annual Table Tennis Team Championship organised by the Indian Social Club (ISC) Oman witnessed enthusiastic participation from members, bringing together players and supporters.

Following a series of closely contested league matches, Bohra Wing, Deccani Wing, Team ISC and ISC-Rockers advanced to the semifinals.

In the semifinals, ISC-Rockers defeated Deccani Wing, while Team ISC overcame Bohra Wing to secure a place in the final.

The grand finale between ISC-Rockers and Team ISC turned out to be an exciting contest. Chintan Gohel and Sathisha Gunduramaiah defeated Gopal Krishnan and James Lorence 2-0, while Suhail Khan and Dr Vinay registered a hard-fought 2-0 victory over Preetam Shete and Urav Gohel.

Vaibhav Lingarkar and Abhishek Lingarkar then sealed the decisive win against Hemachandra Ail and Shanawaz KK.

ISC-Rockers eventually clinched the championship title with a 2-1 victory.

The competition featured teams comprising six players each, forming three doubles pairs. Each pair competed against the corresponding pair from the opposing team. The preliminary rounds were held in a round-robin format, with the top two teams from each group advancing to the knockout stage.

Teams representing various wings of the club participated with great enthusiasm, while the Goan Wing and Sindhi Wing delivered commendable performances.

The winning ISC-Rockers consisted of Chintan Gohel, Urav Gohel, Preetam Shete, Sathisha Gunduramaiah, Vaibhav Lingarkar and Abhishek Lingarkar.

The runners-up Team ISC consisted of Suhail Khan, Shanawaz KK, Hemachandra Ail, Dr Vinay, James Lorence and Gopal Krishnan.

ISC Joint Sports Secretary Shameer PTK and under the guidance of ISC Chairman Suhail Khan organised the tournament.

The championship offered members a platform to celebrate the spirit of sportsmanship and teamwork. Large supporters turned up to cheer for their respective teams, creating a lively atmosphere throughout the tournament.



Sohar players celebrate with the Jetour Cup trophy after their 1-0 win over Al Nahda.

SOHAR CLINCH FIRST EVER TITLE AT JETOUR CUP

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, MAY 9

SOHAR CLUB wrote a new chapter in their history after winning their first official football title with a 1-0 victory over Al Nahda in the final of the Jetour Football Cup for the 2025-2026 season at Al Rustaq Sports Complex.

The final was held under the auspices of Azzan bin Qasim al Busaidy, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism for Tourism, in a memorable night for Sohar supporters as their team finally ended a long wait for silverware.

The match carried contrasting ambitions for both sides. Al Nahda entered the final looking to add another title to their season after winning His Majesty's Cup, while Sohar were chasing a historic first trophy after 54 years.

The opening half was played at a high tempo, with both teams showing caution in structure but creating clear chances. Sohar's Spanish coach Juan Gonzalez, relied on defensive stability and patient build-up from the back, while Al Nahda, coached by Algerian Mahdi Laawamel, tried to impose their technical quality and experience.

Al Nahda had the first attempt in the third minute through Mohammed al Ghafri, before Sohar responded four minutes later when Abdullah al Balushi missed a good opportunity. Al Nahda's



Sohar and Al Nahda players in action during the final at the Al Rustaq Sports Complex.

foreign forward Amir Alaa then wasted a clear chance in the 10th minute, while Sohar's Mohammed al Hamadani came close in the 15th minute with a powerful shot. Despite several dangerous moments at both ends, neither team managed to break the deadlock before the interval, as the first half ended goalless.

Al Nahda began the second half with more urgency and almost opened the scoring in the 55th minute when Mohammed al Ghafri's header was cleared by Sohar's defence. Sohar gradually regained their rhythm, and in the 71st minute Al Nahda goalkeeper Fayez al Rushaidi produced a fine save to deny a

strong effort from M Keita.

The decisive moment arrived in the 77th minute when substitute Mohammed al Mujaini struck a left-footed shot from inside the penalty area to give Sohar the lead. The goal sparked wild celebrations among the Sohar fans and placed Al Nahda under pressure in the closing stages.

Al Nahda pushed forward in search of an equaliser, but Sohar goalkeeper Majdi al Ajmi and his defensive line stood firm to repel repeated attacks. The final whistle confirmed a historic 1-0 victory for Sohar and sealed the club's first official title.

CLEAR TARGET

Speaking after the match, Sohar player Mazin al Saadi said the team entered the final with one clear target: to lift the trophy. "This victory did not come by chance. From the start of the season, the team has been fighting hard. From the first minute of the final, we played with belief and proved that we deserved to win. We are very happy to achieve this historic title for Sohar," he said.

Sohar's Salim al Shabibi also described the final as a tough contest, but said the team's effort and determination made the difference.

"It was a difficult match, but we worked very hard, and we deserved this title. We are proud to represent Sohar Club and to give it its first championship. This is a special moment for everyone, and we hope to achieve more in the future," he said.

Al Qudra Club claim Land of Peace Open karate championship

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, MAY 8

Al Qudra Club emerged as the overall champions at the third Land of Peace Open Karate Championship, which concluded at the sports hall of Ahli Sidab Club in Muscat Governorate.

The event, organised by Shotokan Karate Centre (SKC) under the supervision of the Oman Karate Committee (OKC), brought together 275 male and female athletes representing 17 clubs, academies and training centres. The event featured individual and team contests in kata and kumite across different age groups.

The closing ceremony was held under the auspices of Dr Ibrahim al Hadi, member of Shura Council representing the Wilayat of Al Amerat, in the presence of Dr Faisal al Maawali, OKC Chairman.

The chief guest honoured the winners in various categories and the top-ranked clubs in the overall



The winners in various sections celebrate with officials and guests.

medals table.

Al Qudra Club topped the overall standings with 15 gold, eight silver and nine bronze medals. The Champ Sport & Arts finished second with 14 gold, eight silver and 14 bronze medals, while SKC came third after collecting 11 gold, 15 silver and 44 bronze medals. Karate Champions Club took fourth place with seven gold, seven silver and 10 bronze medals, followed by

Emperor Academy in fifth with six gold and one silver.

The championship produced strong contests in both kata and kumite, with several young players standing out across the age-group competitions. In the six years and under category, Adam of Talent won gold in the boys' kumite, while Nachele Mehza Thanooof of SKC claimed the girls' kumite title. Al Qasim al Qasmi of Samayil Karate

won gold in boys' kata.

In the seven-year category, Jannah Vasim Assadi of The Champ Sport & Arts won the girls' kumite title in the 20 kg and below division, while Nihira Nidhi, also of The Champ, secured two gold medals in girls' kumite above 20 kg and girls' kata. In the boys' events, Muhammad Hamdaan Khan won kata gold and Fares Taiseer claimed kumite gold.

Among the notable winners in the older categories, Tariq al Riyami of SKC won the boys' kumite 25 kg and below title in the nine-year category, while Sarah al Wahaibi of Al Qudra Club took gold in girls' kumite 30 kg and above. In the ten-year category, Jumana al Kathiri of Freedom Karate won girls' kumite 40 kg and above, while Abdullah al Hinai of Al Qudra Club won boys' kumite below 30 kg.

At the 12-year level, Ahmed al Raghadi of Al Qudra Club won boys' kumite 45 kg and below, while Mariam Omar, also of Al

Qudra, claimed gold in girls' kumite 50 kg and above. In the 13-year category, Jasim al Ismaili of Karate Champions Club won boys' kumite below 50 kg, and Zuwaina al Wahaibi of SKC won girls' kumite.

In the senior categories, Sarina Zolfi of Al Qudra Club won gold in both women's kata and kumite for the 18 years and above category, while Mohammed al Hajri of Karate Champions Club won men's kata gold in the 19 years and above class. Talal al Marhoobi of Al Qudra Club claimed the men's kumite title in the 30 years and above category.

Idris al Batrawi, Oman national karate team player, said the tournament reflected clear technical progress.

"The level of the players is improving, and the level of competition is stronger than before. The organisers have also benefited from previous editions, and this was clear in the organisation of the championship," he said.



**SALIM
ALI RAJAB**

A lifetime dedicated to refereeing

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MAY 9

FOR MORE than five decades, veteran Omani referee Salim Ali Rajab has remained one of the respected names in the country's refereeing history, dedicating his life to football as a referee, lecturer evaluator and administrator.

The 68-year-old spoke to Oman Observer about his umpiring journey which is still ongoing as evaluator and lecturer. His journey in officiating began in the early 1970s during the Renaissance era in Oman, when football was played on simple grounds in local neighbourhoods.

Speaking about his early beginnings, Salim recalled how his passion for the sport started on the beaches of Sidab, where several community teams used to gather and compete regularly.

"I was responsible for one of the local teams at that time and this strengthened my connection with football from all aspects," he said. "After the establishment of Sidab Club, my interest gradually moved towards refereeing as I always enjoyed organising matches and ensuring fairness inside the field."

His dedication and enthusiasm did not go unnoticed as he was nominated by the club to join the sports affairs office as a new referee before the establishment of the Oman Football Association (OFA).

Salim explained that the main motivation behind choosing refereeing was his deep love for football and his desire to contribute to the development of the game not only as a player or administrator, but also as an official capable of maintaining discipline, justice and respect for the laws of the game.

Like many pioneers of Omani sport, Salim faced several challenges in his early years. He highlighted the lack of facilities, transportation difficulties and limited administrative organisation during that era.

"We played football more of passion rather than resources," he said. "Balancing sports with studies and work was not easy, while some people at that time considered sports only as a hobby rather than a profession or future career."

VALUABLE EXPERIENCE

Despite the obstacles, Salim continued his journey through determination, self-development and teamwork. Over the years, he transformed those challenges into valuable experiences that later helped him serve Omani football in multiple roles, including his work with the referees committee and his contribution to preparing and evaluating young referees.

Salim, who hails from Salalah, shared some incidents from the past. "I had to officiate a match in Sur and we could not go by road. Then, we had arranged a boat from Muscat to Sur in order not to miss the match. Also, we were a group of referees and we had a car accident but still we moved to the stadium to officiate the match," he said.

Reflecting on the evolution of refereeing in Oman, Salim praised the tremendous progress witnessed over the decades.

"In the past, refereeing depended mainly on personal effort and experience," he explained. "Today, the environment is much more professional with advanced training



Salim Ali Rajab during an umpiring course.



From the albums of Salim Ali Rajab.



Salim Ali Rajab during a match.

courses, modern technology and better opportunities for referees to prove themselves at local and international levels."

DHOFAR DERBY

Throughout his long career, Salim had officiated many important domestic matches, including high-profile and emotionally charged encounters. However, one particular match still remains vivid in his memory – the famous Dhofar derby between Dhofar Club and Al Nasr Club.

"It was one of the most challenging matches because of the huge fan attendance, media attention and the presence of several international players," he recalled. "The match required maximum concentration and strong personality from the referee."

One of the proudest moments of his career

came when he was appointed as the fourth official in the final of the prestigious HM Cup, where he had the honour of greeting the late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos.

Although Salim did not officiate in international tournaments as a field referee, he built an impressive profile in refereeing development and administration. He participated in several lecturer preparation programmes organised by the OFA, the Arab Football Association and the Asian Football Confederation (AFC). He also attended specialised leadership and stadium management courses in the UAE and under AFC supervision.

On modern refereeing, Salim described the introduction of VAR technology as a major positive step for football. "VAR has helped reduce critical mistakes and improved fairness in matches," he said. "However, technology should support the referee and not replace his authority inside the field."

He also admitted that today's referees are under greater pressure due to the speed of the game, media scrutiny and technological advancements, but pointed out that modern referees now receive better preparation and education to handle such challenges.

FOCUS ON DISCIPLINE

The veteran referee stressed that young officials must focus on discipline, fitness, continuous learning and confidence.

"A referee should never stop learning," he said. "Reading the laws of the game, analysing matches, maintaining physical fitness and accepting constructive criticism are essential for success."

Salim also highlighted some of the common mistakes made by beginner referees, including poor positioning, weak communication with assistants, losing concentration in the final stages of matches and being influenced by crowd pressure.

Even after retirement, Salim remains closely connected to football through referees' evaluation, coaching courses and seminars aimed at developing the next generation of Omani referees.

"The Omani sport has great potential and talented youth capable of achieving success," he concluded. "What we need is continuous planning, proper development of age-group players and greater support for national talents in all sporting sectors."

SPORTS

8-WICKET WIN



Kolkata Knight Riders' Finn Allen plays a shot against Delhi Capitals in New Delhi. — Reuters

ALLEN TON FLATTENS DELHI, BOOSTS KOLKATA'S PLAYOFF CHANCE

NEW DELHI: Kolkata Knight Riders opener Finn Allen smashed an unbeaten 100 off just 47 balls in their eight-wicket demolition of Delhi Capitals in a timely boost to their playoff hopes in the Indian Premier League (IPL) on Friday.

Allen smashed 10 sixes in his scintillating knock as Kolkata chased down a 143-run target with 5.4 overs to spare for their fourth win on the trot to move up to seventh place in the 10-team league.

Delhi's hopes of a top-four finish appear over as they slumped behind Kolkata and their captain Axar Patel was already thinking about the next season. "We'll go and figure out where we've made mistakes," Axar said after the home loss. "There's next year too, we'll have to think of plans and preparation for next year, and accordingly, think of which players who are currently on the bench should be given chances."

Put into bat, Delhi managed a below-par 142-8 with only Pathum Nissanka (50) and Ashutosh Sharma (39) briefly dominating the bowlers.

Kolkata applied the squeeze through their three-pronged spin attack, which returned the combined figures of 12-0-76-3. Allen toyed with the Delhi attack when Kolkata returned to chase and the New Zealander was particularly harsh on the spinners. With the target in sight, Allen put on a show, hitting Vipraj Nigam for three sixes in a row and smashing a couple of them in the next over from Kuldeep Yadav.

A six off Mukesh Kumar sealed Allen's maiden IPL hundred while also securing his team's victory.

"I've been working on having more strings in my bow," player of the match Allen said.

"It was challenging early on, then I went on to bat deep. That's my model - stay in when it's tough, give myself a chance. Nice to have success after some frustration." — Reuters



Croatia's Dino Prizmic celebrates winning his second round match against Serbia's Novak Djokovic in Italian Open. — Reuters

Prizmic stuns ailing Djokovic at Italian Open

NOVAK DJOKOVIC slumped to an early elimination from the Italian Open on Friday, crumbling to a second-round defeat at the hands of qualifier Dino Prizmic which leaves question marks about his physical condition ahead of Roland Garros.

Tennis icon Djokovic was sent packing by big-hitting Croatian Prizmic, who claimed the biggest scalp of his young career with a stunning 2-6, 6-2, 6-4 win on centre court in Rome.

Djokovic, a 24-time Grand Slam winner, was making his comeback from a shoulder injury in the last big tournament before the French Open, which starts later this month.

And the world number four was unsure as to whether he would be back to his best for the clay-court Grand Slam, simply saying "I hope so" when asked by reporters whether Paris would see the all-conquering 'Nole' of old.

"Let's see what happens," said Djokovic, who lamented persistent physical problems in the twilight of his stellar career.

"I don't recall the last time in the last couple of years of preparation where I didn't have any physical issues coming into a tournament," said Djokovic.

"It's always something, it's kind of a new reality that I have to deal with."

Djokovic wore shoulder strappings in his first tournament since losing in the last 16



Poland's Iga Swiatek celebrates after winning her match against Caty McNally. — Reuters

at Indian Wells in March, after pulling out of tournaments in Miami, Monte Carlo and Madrid.

He hadn't previously been knocked out this early in a tournament since the Madrid Open last year, and he looked a long way from the player who has won six titles at the Foro Italico.

He breezed into a one-set lead but then buckled under the weight of Prizmic's

powerful hitting which has led to the 20-year-old rising to a career-high world ranking of 79.

Prizmic has beaten two top 10 players in a matter of weeks with sixth-ranked Ben Shelton succumbing in the second round in Madrid last month.

Djokovic is Prizmic's idol, and a landmark win gives the young talent a match with either Ugo Humbert or Vit Kopriwa and a chance to make the fourth round of a Masters 1000 event for the first time.

"It was big moment for me. It was also big thing to share the court with a legend," said Prizmic. "So yeah today, I mean, I played unbelievable. I'm very happy about my performance."

ZVEREV, SWIATEK THROUGH Earlier, Alexander Zverev eased into the third round after comfortably dealing with fellow German Daniel Altmaier in straight sets, 7-5, 6-3.

Three-time champion Iga Swiatek battled into the third round of the women's tournament with a 6-1, 6-7 (5/7), 6-3 win over Caty McNally. Swiatek will play US 28th seed Emma Navarro or Italy's Elisabetta Cocciaretto this weekend for a place in the last 16, after a match which initially looked like being a routine win but dragged on for the best part of three hours.

"It was a tough match, Caty really played great," said Swiatek. — AFP

Oman Rugby youth centres show strong progress at Bausher event

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, MAY 9

Oman Rugby's youth development programme continued to gather momentum as 57 young players took part in the third edition of the Youth Centres Event organised by Oman Rugby at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher.

The event brought together players from the Bausher Centre and the Dima W'attayeen Centre, including 52 Omanis, in a friendly, developmental atmosphere aimed at giving children match experience, building confidence and strengthening links between the centres.

Mohammed bin Rabee al Hashami, national team manager and coach of the Bausher Centre, said the turnout reflected the

growing interest in rugby among young Omanis and their families.

"The response has been very encouraging. Families are highly involved, and in many cases it is the children themselves who insist on attending. These gatherings help the players enjoy the game, meet players from other centres and motivate each other," he said.

Al Hashami said Oman Rugby is working to expand the programme in Muscat and other areas, with plans to establish four to five centres and increase cooperation with government schools and clubs.

"Our target is to reach 500 players in the age-group categories within two years. We are also working with clubs such as Dima W'attayeen and hope to involve more clubs including Fanja, Seeb, Al Amerat and Bausher," he said.



During the third edition of the Oman Rugby Youth Centres Event.

YOUTH TALENT PROJECT Brian Hopkins, head coach of the national rugby team, praised the impact of the Youth Talent Project, saying it has provided a strong platform to introduce rugby to children in Oman. "The children have been outstanding. Some of them had only three training sessions before playing matches, yet they looked as if they had been playing for months. This shows the athletic ability of Omani youngsters. With more training, many of them can develop into players capable of representing Oman internationally."

He added that the programme must grow gradually to maintain quality. "This is only the beginning. We currently have two centres, and we can already see the success. Hopefully, we will move to three and four centres, attract more children

through schools, and develop more coaches. I would love to see 1,000 Omani children playing rugby by the end of next year," he said.

Ali al Dhakhri, coach of Dima W'attayeen Rugby Centre Rugby Centre and assistant coach of the national team, said the age-group programme forms the foundation for the future of the sport. "If we want a strong national team in the future, we need a strong base. We are now working with young players, especially in the under-13 and under-18 age groups, to identify talent and develop them step by step."

Several young players also expressed their excitement. Hussein al Saadi said rugby helped build fitness and strength, while Hatim al Shibli said the sport attracted him because of its teamwork and energy.

BUSINESS

SHORT TAKES



PO transactions also recorded robust performance, with the total value of payments through POS devices exceeding RO 7.5 billion in 2025.

DIGITAL PAYMENTS IN OMAN SURGE TO 3.2 BILLION

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman recorded strong growth in digital payment activity during 2025, reflecting changing consumer behaviour, expanding commercial activity and rising confidence in electronic transactions as the country accelerates its digital transformation agenda.

According to data released by the Central Bank of Oman, the value of transactions processed through local electronic payment gateways climbed to around RO 3.2 billion in 2025, representing a sharp increase of 76.3 per cent compared with 2024. The number of transactions also rose significantly from 67 million to more than 168 million during the year, marking growth of 150 per cent.

Point-of-sale transactions also recorded robust performance, with the total value of payments through POS devices exceeding RO 7.5 billion in 2025, up 33.2 per cent from the previous year. The figures highlight the widening adoption of electronic payment methods across retail outlets, services and commercial establishments. QR code payments posted the fastest growth among digital payment channels. Transaction values through QR technology increased by 133.5 per cent to nearly RO8 million, almost tripling compared with 2024.

Nasra bint Sultan al Habsi, Director-General of Trade at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, said the indicators reflect stronger purchasing activity in the local market and improving consumer confidence.

She noted that the sharp rise in transaction volumes and values across various channels demonstrates growing purchasing power and increasing demand within the Sultanate of Oman. She added that the performance aligns with the Ministry's efforts to improve spending flexibility and strengthen the business environment in a way that supports sustainable economic growth and meets evolving consumer expectations.

Azza bint Ibrahim al Kindi, Director of Commercial Affairs and E-Commerce at the Ministry, said the increase in electronic payment gateway activity reflects a fundamental shift in consumer behaviour and rising trust in digital platforms. — ONA

OIA expands strategic investments in Türkiye

THE Oman Investment Authority (OIA) has signed agreements to acquire stakes in two Turkish companies operating in the mining and defence sectors through the Turkish-Omani Investment Company, established under the Oman-Türkiye Joint Fund.

The agreements involve SAMAS Mining, a producer of sodium bentonite and Tekatron, which specialises in remotely operated unmanned ground military systems.

The investment in SAMAS Mining is aimed at expanding production of sodium bentonite, a strategically important material used in oil and gas operations, industrial applications, pharmaceuticals and cosmetics.

The investment in Tekatron forms part of efforts to diversify the Authority's portfolio into sectors with strategic and technological importance.

Ibrahim bin Said al Aisri, Head of Private Markets Investments at the Oman Investment Authority, said the move reflects OIA's strategy of incorporating an "Omani dimension" into overseas investments by supporting priority sectors within the Sultanate of Oman, including oil and gas, industry, logistics and defence-related industries.

SAMAS Mining operates the Tokat bentonite deposit in Türkiye, regarded as one of only

The investment in SAMAS Mining is aimed at expanding production of sodium bentonite, a strategically important material used in oil and gas operations, industrial applications, pharmaceuticals and cosmetics.



The agreements involve SAMAS Mining, a producer of sodium bentonite and Tekatron, which specialises in remotely operated unmanned ground military systems.

two remaining deposits of its kind globally.

The reserve is expected to remain viable for nearly 200 years.

Under the agreement, the company's production capacity is planned to increase from 160,000 tonnes annually to more than 300,000 tonnes annually. Oman will also receive priority access to the material to support local industries linked to the resource.

Tekatron designs and manufactures remotely operated unmanned ground systems in Ankara and has demonstrated operational capabilities in military applications within Türkiye.

The investment is expected to strengthen Oman's access to

advanced defence technologies for border security, surveillance and military logistics, while also creating opportunities to localise related technologies and manufacturing capabilities in the Sultanate of Oman.

The Turkish-Omani Investment Company was established in 2025 through a partnership between the Oman Investment Authority and OYAK with a capital of \$500 million contributed equally by both parties.

The fund seeks to promote joint investments, technology transfer and cooperation in sectors including mining, logistics, industry, agriculture and renewable energy. — ONA

21ST OMAN DESIGN AND BUILD WEEK OPENS TODAY

MUSCAT: The 21st edition of Oman Design and Build Week 2026 opens today (Sunday) at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre, bringing together developers, investors, architects and construction specialists from Oman and abroad for one of the Sultanate of Oman's largest real estate and construction gatherings.

Organised by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning in partnership with the Oman Real Estate Association and Connect, the

four-day event will be held under the auspices of Sultan bin Salim al Habsi, Minister of Finance.

The exhibition and conference are expected to attract broad participation from companies operating in real estate development, urban planning, construction and design, reflecting the rapid transformation taking place across Oman's property sector in line with national development goals.

A specialised knowledge

programme featuring more than 50 dialogue sessions and working papers will be held during the event, with participation from over 95 local and international speakers, including policymakers, developers, urban planners, architects and industry experts. Discussions will focus on major regional and global trends shaping the sector, including investment, sustainability, planning, real estate technologies, construction methods and urban development strategies. — ONA

Competition laws boost investor confidence in Oman

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman is continuing to strengthen its legislative and regulatory framework to create a more competitive and transparent business environment, supporting the objectives of Oman Vision 2040 and efforts to build a diversified, private sector-led economy.

Competition protection and anti-monopoly legislation have become central to market regulation, helping ensure equal opportunities for businesses while improving the efficiency and resilience of the national economy.

The introduction of the Competition Protection and Anti-Monopoly Law in 2014 marked a major step in regulating market practices, followed by the establishment of the Competition Protection and Anti-Monopoly Centre under Royal Decree No 2/2018 to oversee implementation and monitor anti-competitive behaviour.

The law aims to safeguard fair competition by preventing monopolistic agreements, abuse



The introduction of the Competition Protection and Anti-Monopoly Law in 2014 marked a major step in regulating market practices.

of market dominance, price manipulation and practices that restrict market access.

The Centre has been granted broad regulatory powers, including judicial authority for its employees, inspection rights and the ability to impose administrative fines of up to RO 5,000, with penalties doubled for repeat violations. Serious breaches may also be referred to the Public Prosecution.

These measures have contributed to stronger market discipline and growing investor confidence.

Economic indicators show Oman's competitiveness index improved from around 59 per cent between 2015 and 2017 to nearly 65 per cent in recent years, supported by enhanced oversight mechanisms and institutional reforms.

Reported anti-competitive cases

also declined to around 14 in 2024, indicating improved compliance within the market.

Oman has also strengthened its global standing in several international rankings. The Sultanate of Oman ranked 74th globally in the 2024 Global Innovation Index among 133 economies, while also securing 70th position in the Ease of Doing Business Index and 11th globally in the Paying Taxes indicator.

The improving business climate has been reflected in rising foreign direct investment inflows, which reached around RO 5.2 billion, compared with RO 4.1 billion during the same period last year.

Economists say the increase reflects growing confidence in the Omani market and the effectiveness of reforms aimed at improving transparency and competitiveness.

Dr Yousuf bin Hamad al Balushi, economist and founder of Smart Investment Gateway, said global economic shifts and increasing competition among countries

require stronger economic legislation and more advanced competitiveness frameworks.

Al Balushi said Oman Vision 2040 has placed business environment reforms at the centre of the country's economic strategy since its launch in 2021, adding that the results are gradually becoming visible through continued FDI growth.

He noted that although much of the investment remains concentrated in the oil and gas sector, non-oil industries are also recording notable expansion and contributing to economic diversification across the Sultanate of Oman's governorates.

Al Balushi stressed that the next phase will require further improvements in legislation, greater transparency and stronger implementation mechanisms to keep pace with evolving economic demands. He also highlighted the importance of clear investment frameworks in supporting sustainable development and attracting long-term capital. — ONA

ADVERTORIALS

SHORTTAKES

AHLIBANK REPORTS SOLID Q1 2026 PERFORMANCE



SAID BIN ABDULLAH AL HATMI
CEO, ahlibank

MUSCAT: As global markets navigate a period marked by geopolitical uncertainty and evolving trade conditions, ahlibank has announced its financial results for the first quarter of 2026, delivering a strong and disciplined start to the year. Against the backdrop of Oman's steady economic trajectory and ongoing diversification agenda, the bank advanced its strategic priorities through targeted participation in large-scale financing, continued digital enablement and deeper institutional engagement, reinforcing its position as a key participant in the Sultanate of Oman's financial sector and a trusted partner in enabling sustainable growth.

For the three-month period ended March 31, 2026, ahlibank delivered a strong financial performance, reflecting continued balance sheet expansion and consistent earnings progression. Net loans, advances and financing reached RO 3,553.7 million, an increase of 15.7%, supported by sustained lending activity across key segments. Total assets grew by 17.8% to RO 4,330.4 million, while customer deposits rose by 15.3% to RO 3,406.2 million, reinforcing the strength of the bank's funding base. Income generation remained resilient during the period, with operating income rising to RO 30.56 million, up 8.2% year-on-year. This was accompanied by a measured increase in operating expenses to RO 13.25 million, up 7.9%, reflecting continued investment in strategic capabilities and infrastructure. As a result, profit for the period rose to RO 10.81 million, marking an 11.3% increase compared to the corresponding period last year and underscoring the bank's ability to sustain growth while maintaining financial discipline. Commenting on the bank's performance, Said bin Abdullah al Hatmi, CEO of ahlibank, stated, "Our performance this quarter transcends traditional balance sheet growth; it is a testament to our agility in translating national economic priorities into institutional momentum.

In an era of complexity, we have moved beyond being a mere provider of capital to becoming a strategic enabler of Oman's industrial and digital transformation. By synchronising our investment in high-yield technology with robust participation in large-scale national projects, we are building a resilient, future-ready institution that creates enduring value for our shareholders and the Sultanate of Oman's economy". Building on this momentum, ahlibank's first quarter performance was defined not only by financial growth, but by the depth and sophistication of its engagement across priority sectors of the economy. The bank's involvement in structuring a large-scale, multi-tranche syndicated financing for a major mining project reflects its growing capability in executing complex transactions, demonstrating its ability to mobilize capital at scale while supporting the Sultanate's industrial and economic diversification. This trajectory extended across core segments, with continued activity in real estate financing and the expansion of Sharia-compliant solutions through ahlii islamic, spanning both project-level funding and end-user financing.

NBO, RIYADA TO BUILD FINANCIAL CAPABILITY ACROSS THE SME SECTOR

MUSCAT: The National Bank of Oman (NBO) has signed an agreement with the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority (Riyada) to support Oman's ever-evolving small and medium enterprises (SME) sector while providing practical financial literacy training and tailored banking solutions. The partnership reflects NBO's continued commitment to contribute to the development of Omani entrepreneurs, through



focusing on specialised training programmes that help business owners enhance their financial knowledge, manage their operations more effectively and make informed decisions for long-term sustainability. Under the agreement, NBO will also develop banking products and services tailored to the practical needs of SMEs, giving entrepreneurs access to solutions that support their ambitions at different stages of growth.

Experience the Kia EV6: A bold vision for the future

AS the Sultanate of Oman continues to embrace a more sustainable future, the Kia EV6 stands as a powerful symbol of how electric vehicles are redefining the driving experience. The EV6 is more than just an electric vehicle; it is a sophisticated blend of long-range performance, ultra-fast charging and forward-thinking design that caters to the evolving lifestyles of everyone.

A NEW PERSPECTIVE ON DESIGN, SPACE The EV6 makes a definitive statement on the road with its futuristic design, inspired by electronic pixels and sleek, aerodynamic lines. One of its most striking features is the auto-flush door handles, which remain hidden within the body for a seamless look and pop up only when needed. This attention to detail extends to the rear as well, where a curved full LED lamp setup gives the vehicle a sporty and unmistakable presence. Built on Kia's dedicated Electric-Global Modular Platform (E-GMP), the EV6 features a flat floor that creates an exceptionally spacious interior, offering roominess comparable to much larger SUVs while maintaining a compact and agile exterior.

DYNAMIC PERFORMANCE AND RAPID CHARGING Driving in Oman often involves long distances and the EV6 is engineered to handle them with ease. Equipped with



The EV6 makes a definitive statement on the road with its futuristic design.

a 77.4kWh battery, the vehicle offers an impressive driving range of up to 528 km on a full charge. For those focused on daily city commuting, a 58kWh battery option is also available. Performance remains a priority, with the All-Wheel Drive (AWD) model capable of reaching 100 km/h in just 3.5 seconds. The EV6 also solves the time constraint of charging through its 800V ultra-high-speed charging capability. In just 4.5 minutes, the vehicle can gain 100 km of range and a charge from 10% to 80% takes less than 18 minutes. This ensures that drivers spend less time at charging stations and more time

on the road.

SUSTAINABILITY MEETS PREMIUM COMFORT The interior of the EV6 is a sanctuary of modern luxury that does not compromise on environmental responsibility. The cabin utilises sustainable materials, including high-quality vegan leather and recycled PET plastics, reflecting a commitment to a greener future. To enhance the experience, the front "Relaxation Comfort Seats" are designed to recline to a nearly horizontal position, allowing passengers to rest comfortably while the vehicle charges.

Oman Investment Bank appoints new CEO

MUSCAT: Oman Investment Bank has confirmed the appointment of Mohamed bin Sultan bin Salim al Habsi as Chief Executive Officer, following a year in which he led the bank as acting CEO. The decision reflects the Board's confidence in his leadership and the progress achieved under his direction. Over the past year, Al Habsi, who brings over 18 years of experience in investment banking and international business, has guided the Bank through a focused phase of execution, advancing strategic



Mohamed Sultan Salim al Habsi, CEO - Oman Investment Bank

priorities, strengthening market positioning and enhancing its role in connecting regional capital with high-quality investment opportunities, in line with Oman's broader economic vision. Abdulsalam bin Mohammed al Murshidi, Chairman of the Board, said: "The Board's decision reflects the strong leadership demonstrated by Mohamed over the past year. His clarity of direction and disciplined approach have supported consistent progress and we are confident in his ability to lead the next phase of

development". Mohamed al Habsi said: "I am honoured by the Board's confidence and grateful for the trust placed in me. Together with the team, we will continue building on recent achievements and remain focused on delivering sustainable growth and long-term value creation". Looking ahead, the Bank will continue to reinforce its position as a trusted partner for investors, with an emphasis on disciplined execution, innovation and supporting the development of Oman's financial ecosystem.

Em Sherif Oman turns Lebanese dining into an experience

MUSCAT: In Muscat's luxury dining scene, Em Sherif Oman has, over the past two years, established itself as a destination where Lebanese traditions, culinary heritage and refined hospitality come together with the signature Em Sherif touch and flair. More than a restaurant, it offers a dining experience shaped by elegance, generosity and celebration, where every table reflects the art of Lebanese dining. The dining experience at Em Sherif Oman is a dedicated tribute to the abundance and spirit of the Lebanese shared table. Each meticulously crafted dish is a

harmony of authenticity and beauty, delivering a culinary journey that is simultaneously elevated and deeply connected to its cultural roots. Thoughtfully tailored for Muscat's discerning patrons, the restaurant captures the essence of Em Sherif's global reputation for creating unforgettable moments defined by warmth, flavour and significance. At the heart of this philosophy lies a dedication to honouring Lebanese culinary traditions through refinement, emotion and creativity. The concept, originally envisioned by Founder Mireille Hayek and brought to life through the artistry of Executive Head



More than a restaurant, it offers a dining experience shaped by elegance, generosity and celebration

Chef Yasmina Hayek, showcases a timeless approach to presenting beloved recipes while preserving their integrity and soul. The brand's distinctive identity celebrates the ritual, memory and inherent benevolence of Lebanese dining, all expertly executed by its passionate team in Oman. The brand's presence in Oman feels especially resonant. Omani culture, with its deep appreciation for hospitality, gathering and generosity, offers a natural home for a concept so grounded in grace and custom. The restaurant has firmly established its position in Muscat,

welcoming guests into a world where Lebanese legacy is expressed with unmistakable character, elegance and warmth. Driven by a distinguished culinary team and inspired by the brand's creative legacy, Em Sherif Oman continues to stand apart for its ability to transform dining into an occasion. The experience is one of intentional detail and balanced contrast, precise yet abundant, polished yet soulful. It is an invitation for guests to discover Lebanese cuisine in a way that is both enduringly memorable and a celebration of heritage.

SHORTTAKES



A number of Omani companies seeking to expand into the Russian market and other Islamic economy markets are expected to participate.

OMAN EYES HALAL EXPORT GROWTH IN RUSSIA

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, represented by Oman Exports and in cooperation with the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, will participate in Halal Expo 2026, scheduled to take place in Kazan, Republic of Tatarstan in Russia, from May 13 to 15.

The exhibition is regarded as one of the leading international platforms for cooperation between Russia and the Islamic world in the halal economy sector.

A number of Omani companies seeking to expand into the Russian market and other Islamic economy markets are expected to participate.

Oman's participation forms part of wider efforts to strengthen the global presence of Omani products, explore new export opportunities and build trade and investment partnerships with emerging markets.

The initiative also supports the objectives of Oman Vision 2040 by promoting non-oil exports and enhancing the competitiveness of national products.

The expo brings together companies, investors and government institutions from across the Islamic world and Russia, providing a platform for showcasing investment opportunities and holding bilateral business meetings.

Lubna bint Mohammed al Harthy, Director of the Export Development Department at the Ministry, said Oman Exports' participation aligns with plans to expand into fast-growing international markets, particularly Russia, where demand for halal and high-quality products is increasing. — ONA

Duqm Refinery posts EBITDA of ₪106 million

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, MAY 9

DUQM Refinery and Petrochemical Industries Company posted EBITDA of approximately RO 106 million in 2025, underscoring the refinery's strong operational performance, healthy cash-generation capability and growing contribution to the financial strength of the OQ8 joint venture.

This compares with EBITDA losses of about RO 124 million recorded in 2024, said Ashraf bin Hamad al Maamari, Group CEO of OQ Group, which represents one half of the 50:50 JV with Kuwait Petroleum International in OQ8.

Al Maamari added that the turnaround in the company's financial performance came at the end of a "transformation strategy" implemented by OQ8 and concluded by end-2024.

"Structural and commercial improvements also eliminated the need for additional shareholder funding and delivered a year-end financial surplus, reflecting the direct positive impact of the comprehensive transformation plan on the refinery's financial and operational efficiency", he added in an interview featured in the latest edition of 'Enjaz & Eejaz', the quarterly newsletter of the Oman Investment Authority.

Significantly, overall refining capacity in the Sultanate of Oman has also grown to 569 thousand barrels per day, driven by the commissioning of the



The turnaround in the company's financial performance came at the end of a "transformation strategy" implemented by OQ8 and concluded by end-2024.

Duqm Refinery and Petrochemical Industries Company and major enhancements at Sohar Refinery and Mina Al Fahal Refinery, said the official.

"This integrated production system now enables the Group to distribute and market its products in more than 80 countries, reinforcing OQ's position as one of the leading global players in the energy sector", he said.

Al Maamari highlighted in particular the "comprehensive changes" that delivered "significant achievements" at OQ Refining and Petrochemical Industries Company and Duqm Refinery and Petrochemical



ASHRAF BIN HAMAD AL MAAMARI
Group CEO — OQ

Industries Company in recent years.

At OQ RPI, operational efficiency improved markedly following deep enhancements that enabled the processing of 93 million barrels of Omani crude per year in 2025, compared with around 86 million in

2021.

At the same time, the company completed the first phase of its transformation plan (2022-2024), contributing, among other outcomes, to cumulative profits of RO 474 million from 2021 to 2025.

Furthermore, upstream oil and gas companies operating under the OQ Group boosted their oil and condensate

production from 109 thousand barrels per day in 2021 to more than 224 thousand barrels per day in 2025, representing 14 per cent of Oman's total production.

OQ Trading, the Group's marketing arm, successfully diversified its portfolio by expanding its fertiliser and ammonia businesses and delivering "strong commercial results that surpassed initial expectations", he said.

This overall progress was reflected in the Group's performance in 2025, with consolidated revenues increasing to approximately RO 15.9 billion by the end of 2025, compared with around RO 9 billion in 2021.

Meanwhile, the outstanding loan balance decreased from about RO 5.3 billion in 2021 to around RO 2.8 billion by the end of 2025, Al Maamari added.

Refinery output in Oman up 0.2% to 56.5 million barrels

MUSCAT: Refinery production in the Sultanate of Oman rose marginally by 0.2 per cent to approximately 56.5 million barrels by the end of March 2026, according to preliminary data issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information, although output and exports of several petroleum products showed mixed trends during the period.

Production of regular gasoline (91 octane) fell sharply by 22.8 per cent to 3.42 million barrels, compared with 4.43 million barrels a year earlier. Sales also declined by 1.5 per cent to 3.79 million barrels.

In contrast, premium gasoline (95 octane) production increased by 9.5 per cent to 3.5 million barrels, while domestic sales rose by 5.9 per cent to 3.5 million barrels. However, exports of premium gasoline dropped significantly by 61.5 per cent to 415,400 barrels.

Diesel production remained broadly stable, rising marginally by



Jet fuel production posted stronger growth, climbing 8.4 per cent to 6.68 million barrels by the end of March 2026.

0.3 per cent to 18.01 million barrels.

Domestic sales increased by 5 per cent to 4.43 million barrels, while exports edged up by 0.8 per cent to 14.89 million barrels.

Jet fuel production posted stronger growth, climbing 8.4 per cent to 6.68 million barrels by the end of March 2026.

Sales surged by 19.9 per cent to 1.13 million barrels, while exports rose by 7.6 per cent to 5.45 million barrels, reflecting improving aviation activity and external demand.

Meanwhile, LPG production declined by 6.1 per cent to 2.68 million barrels. Domestic sales nevertheless increased slightly by 1.7 per cent to 994,900 barrels, while exports slipped by 2.1 per cent to 824,500 barrels.

Naphtha production rose by 1.1 per cent to 9 million barrels. Sales climbed by 13.3 per cent to 3.61 million barrels, although exports

eased by 2.9 per cent to 5.92 million barrels.

Production of other refinery products increased by 3.5 per cent to 10.05 million barrels. While domestic sales declined by 18.9 per cent to 7.04 million barrels, exports surged by 46.1 per cent to 3.81 million barrels.

In the petrochemicals segment, gasoline production rose by 17.6 per cent to 52,600 metric tonnes, while exports increased by 10.5 per cent to 47,900 metric tonnes. Paraxylene production also recorded solid growth of 14.3 per cent to 160,500 metric tonnes, although exports declined by 6.6 per cent.

Polypropylene output, however, fell sharply by 34.8 per cent to 51,100 metric tonnes.

Despite lower production, domestic sales rose by 26.6 per cent to 9,600 metric tonnes, while exports declined by 22.8 per cent to 47,200 metric tonnes. — ONA

TRADE GROWTH

Exports surge in China in April



China's exports rose 14.1 per cent year-on-year in April, sharply higher than March's 2.5 per cent increase and above analyst forecasts, despite persistent US tariff pressures.

ING Bank said semiconductors and automobiles are expected to drive export growth further, while stronger shipments to Europ, Latin America and Africa continue supporting China's broader economic expansion. — Reuters

MARKET RISKS

US Fed flags energy risks



Geopolitical tensions and energy market shocks remain the biggest threats to global financial stability, according to the US Federal Reserve's latest report.

The Fed warned that Middle East unrest, supply chain disruptions and rising oil prices could fuel inflation and slow economic growth. Brent crude prices reached \$100/barrel, while inflation may force banks to maintain tighter monetary policies. — Reuters

INDUSTRY SLOWDOWN

German production output declines



German industrial production fell 0.7 per cent in March from February, weighed down by weaker energy production and machinery manufacturing, official data showed.

Construction and automotive output partly offset the decline. Compared with a year earlier, industrial production dropped 4.1 per cent. Meanwhile, energy-intensive industries recorded modest monthly growth. — Reuters

OPINION

The effects of investment on Oman’s economy



DR HILAL
AL SAWAI

The writer is local content, sustainability and innovation expert

EVERY country’s economy hinges upon how successfully investment is lured. For a long time now, Oman has harnessed investment as a tool to boost the economy and tackle issues like under employment and promote economic self-sufficiency.

Throughout history the government has systematically pursued the policy of promoting both indigenous and foreign investments targeting a broad base of the economy. Consequently, Oman has witnessed investments positively impacting the technological, industrial, infrastructural and tourism sectors, among others.

Investment has significantly impacted Oman by enhancing economic diversification. In the past, Oman, just like many other nations, derived its main income from export of oil and gas. But global oil price irregularities tended to have a disruptive effect.

Long-term development plans to curb economic instability and oil price volatilities began being implemented as the government adopted Oman Vision 2040.

The main purpose of this vision is investment attraction to enable diversification through tourism, logistics, renewables, fisheries and other mining sectors. It is through these initiatives that Oman is able to construct a sound economy.

Investment has the advantage of adding jobs to those that already exist for both citizens and foreigners. Investment demands labour, management, engineering

and service, among other things. Such value-adding investments in sectors like construction, manufacturing and tourism thus “unlocked” jobs for many residents and citizens alike.

Employment diversification and improved living standards for families and suppression of poverty were accomplished.

In Oman, incremental investments positioned small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to benefit from projects and thus have a key contribution to the economy. These SMEs witnessed enhanced business productivity, increased and new funding; and new market demand.

Another benefit of investment is the growing of infrastructure. Both foreign and local investments have aided in the development of more modern roads, ports, airports, hotels and industrial zones.

The transformation of certain areas into major business and trade centres, such as the development of the Duqm Special Economic Zone, is an example of this. Better infrastructure supports and attracts investment in the country.

Businesses of all kinds benefit and more investors are attracted by the new opportunities. The improvement of roads and communication networks helps the country to become a more competitive player in international trade.

Oman’s investment got a great boost in the tourism sector. We have all seen the raw, natural beauty of Oman. Here in Oman, new investments in hotels, resorts and tourism facilities help to give these beautiful

In Oman, incremental investments positioned small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to benefit from projects and thus have a key contribution to the economy. These SMEs witnessed enhanced business productivity, increased and new funding; and new market demand.

resources a great deal of exposure.

This exposure helps Oman to compete in the international tourism market and presents opportunities for local businesses such as restaurants, transportation and crafts.

When international companies set up in Oman, this leads to the introduction of new forms of production and management. This in turn improves the production of Oman’s goods and helps its people to acquire new skills.

The basis of a new world economy is the development of education, of more digital technologies and of more renewable sources of energy for this new world. A lack of investment means Oman will lack the preparations for this new world economy.

Oman faces some problems to attract foreign investment.

That is why the government is very keen to make trade easier by adjusting the trade laws and providing incentives to those foreigners and foreign investors who are trading in Oman’s goods.

To sum up, investment has a positive influence on the economy of Oman. It aids in the diversification of the economy, job creation, infrastructure development, tourism enhancement and the encouragement of a culture of innovation.

If Oman continues to foster investment and deploy appropriate policies, it can develop sustainably and promote a better future for its citizens. Investment will continue to be the foremost indicant for the sustainable choice of the economy.

IEA HIGHLIGHTS OMAN’S GROWING ROLE IN ENERGY TRANSITION

NAJAH AL RIYAMI

The International Energy Agency’s (IEA) Energy Technology Perspectives 2026 report highlights how clean energy technologies are rapidly reshaping global industrial systems, with hydrogen, carbon capture and renewable energy investment emerging as major pillars of the next phase of the energy transition.

For Oman, the report reflects a growing global environment in which the Sultanate of Oman’s hydrogen ambitions and industrial diversification strategy could play an increasingly important role. Published earlier this year, the report emphasises that clean energy is no longer driven solely by climate concerns.

Instead, countries are increasingly investing in low-carbon technologies to strengthen industrial competitiveness, energy security and long-term economic resilience.

According to the IEA, global investment in low-emissions hydrogen production rose sharply in 2025, while spending on carbon capture technologies and renewable infrastructure continued to expand worldwide.

The report notes that industries such as steel, cement, refining and chemicals remain among the most difficult sectors to decarbonise.

As a result, technologies including Carbon Capture, Utilisation and Storage (CCUS), hydrogen fuel systems and electrified industrial processes are becoming central to many national energy strategies.

For Oman, these trends closely align with the country’s evolving energy transition plans under Oman Vision 2040.

Over the past several years, the Sultanate of Oman has accelerated efforts to position itself as a regional hub for renewable hydrogen production.

Oman’s strong solar and wind resources, combined with its geographic location and export infrastructure, have attracted growing international interest in hydrogen development projects, particularly in Al Duqm and Dhofar.

According to earlier IEA assessments, Oman has the potential to become one of the world’s leading renewable hydrogen exporters if planned projects and infrastructure targets are achieved.

Hydrogen Oman (Hydrom) has already launched multiple auction rounds aimed at attracting international developers to large-scale hydrogen concessions across the country.

Beyond exports, hydrogen is increasingly being viewed as a strategic industrial opportunity capable of supporting low-emission manufacturing, shipping fuels and future clean energy supply chains.

Workplace succession fears hurt productivity

NOT every performance problem begins with a lack of talent. In many organisations, the deeper problem is that knowledge, authority and context are kept in too few hands. Decisions then depend on gatekeepers rather than systems, making institutions slower, weaker and more fragile than they appear. This is not just a management flaw. It is an economic one.

When too much knowledge sits with one person, work slows. Decisions are delayed, mistakes are repeated and teams spend time relearning what should already be part of institutional memory.

The cost may not appear immediately on a balance sheet, but it is visible in longer project timelines, uneven performance, rising inefficiency and missed opportunities.

At the heart of the problem is not always incompetence. Often, it is insecurity.

Some workplaces do not reward knowledge-sharing. They reward control. Information is passed selectively. Junior staff are given tasks, but not the wider context needed to understand them.

Responsibilities are distributed in ways that preserve dependence rather than build capability. The result is an unhealthy culture in which people may perform routine duties, yet remain unprepared to lead, decide or improve the way work is done.

That weakens human capital at its core.

An organisation cannot claim to be developing talent if it keeps talent away from real responsibility. It cannot claim to be efficient if decisions are constantly trapped in narrow channels.

And it cannot claim to be resilient if the departure of one individual creates confusion, delay or institutional drift.

The damage is especially clear in project-based sectors, where delivery depends on coordination,



The real test of an organisation is not whether one person performs brilliantly inside it. It is whether the institution itself is built to perform.



QASIM
AL MAASHANI

The author is the head of the Business and Politics department at Oman Observer

timely decisions and accumulated experience. When knowledge is not transferred properly, the same errors recur.

When communication is restricted, rework rises. When authority is concentrated too tightly, delivery slows and quality suffers.

Over time, this creates a serious structural imbalance. Too few people are ready to take ownership, while too many remain dependent on a small group of decision-makers. That may protect internal hierarchies, but it weakens institutional performance.

For Oman, this matters beyond the office.

Oman Vision 2040 is built around productivity, efficiency, governance and the development of national talent. But those goals cannot be achieved through training programmes alone.

They require workplaces that genuinely develop people by sharing knowledge, widening responsibility and embedding experience into the institution itself.

A workplace that hoards

knowledge is working against that national direction.

It is also working against the basic logic of economic progress.

No economy can improve productivity if institutions remain dependent on a few individuals instead of building systems that allow performance to continue, improve and scale. Real efficiency comes when knowledge moves across teams, decisions are understood and capable successors are prepared before they are urgently needed.

That does not reduce the value of strong individuals. It redefines what strength means.

Strong organisations are not built around people who make themselves indispensable. They are built around systems that continue to perform when key people move on.

Knowledge should be documented. Delegation should be routine. Communication should be clear. Coaching and exposure should be part of daily management, not last-minute responses to retirement, resignation or crisis.

Just as importantly, performance must be measured properly. Efficiency should not remain a slogan.

It should show in faster delivery, fewer repeated mistakes, better coordination and stronger continuity. If those things are not improving, then institutions are not becoming more efficient, no matter how often they claim otherwise.

In the end, the real test of an organisation is not whether one person performs brilliantly inside it. It is whether the institution itself is built to perform.

Where successors are blocked, productivity slows. Where knowledge is hoarded, resilience weakens. Where institutions depend too heavily on individuals, economic value is lost.

Moving from dependence on people to confidence in systems is not a soft management idea. It is an economic necessity.

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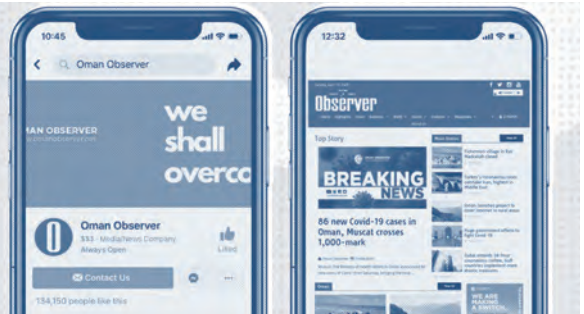
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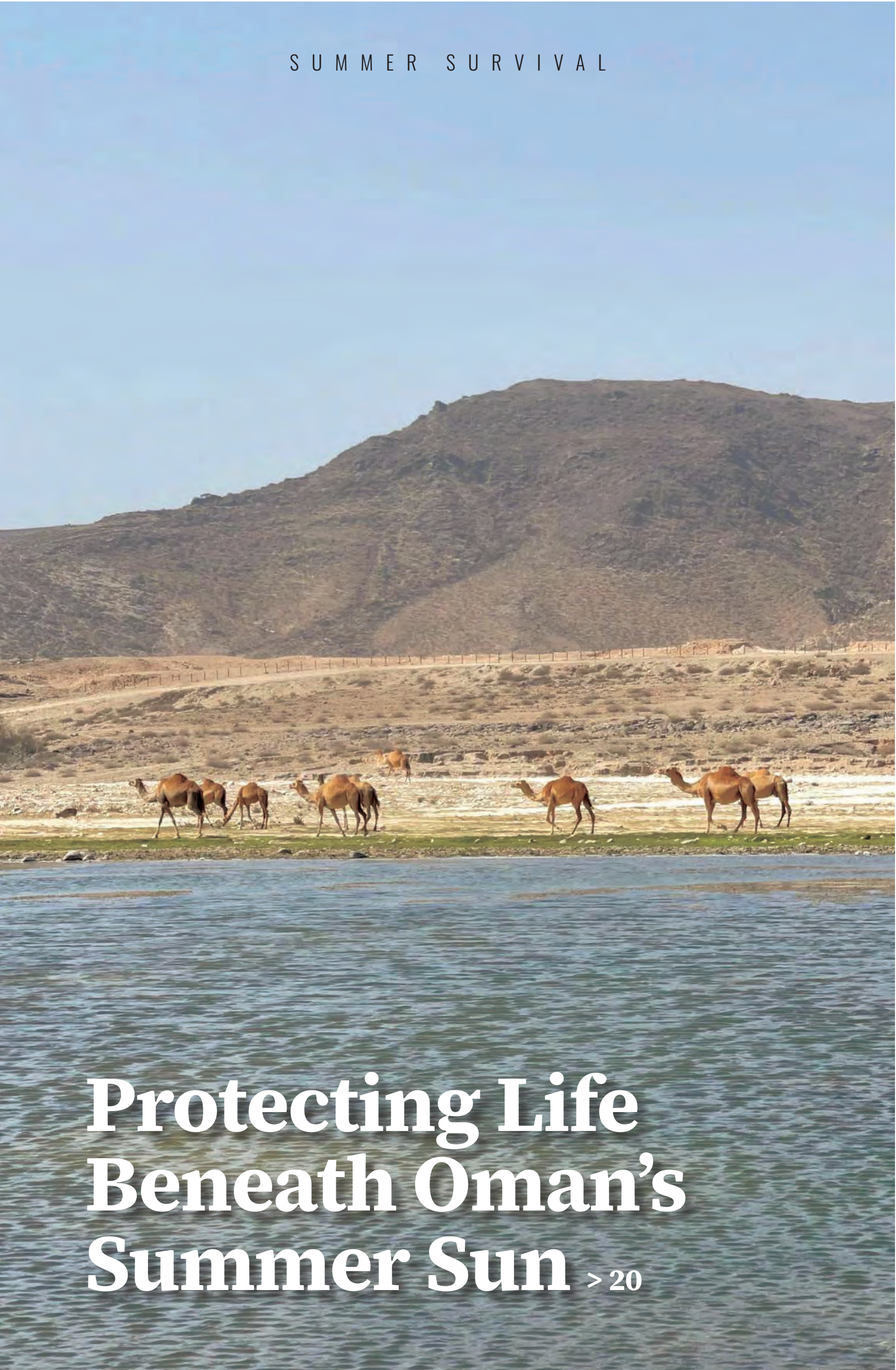


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NEWEXPERIENCE

DISNEY RECREATES SONGS IN ASL FOR DEAF FANS



DISNEY ANIMATION is reimagining some of its most iconic songs in American Sign Language (ASL), offering Deaf audiences a new way to experience classic musical moments during National Deaf History Month.

Songs including “We Don’t Talk About Bruno” from Encanto, “Beyond” from Moana 2 and “The Next Right Thing” from Frozen 2 have been recreated using performances by Deaf West Theatre actors, who served as reference models for the animation. The project is showcased in Songs in Sign Language, which premiered on Disney+ alongside behind-the-scenes footage detailing the creative process.

DJ Kurs, artistic director of Deaf West Theatre, said the initiative challenges long-standing misconceptions that Deaf people cannot engage with music. He emphasised that Deaf and hard-of-hearing artists have always expressed music through rhythm, movement and emotion, with modern tools such as captions and assistive technology further expanding access.

Animator Hyrum Osmond, whose credits include Zootopia and Raya and the Last Dragon, described the project as deeply personal, noting that his father is Deaf. He framed the work as an effort to bridge communication gaps and create a more inclusive connection between Disney storytelling and the Deaf community.

The production required a detailed adaptation of ASL’s visual language, incorporating facial expression, body movement and spatial awareness. Animators studied performances from multiple angles to capture complex sequences, including overlapping signing in group scenes and physically demanding moments, such as a character signing while climbing in Frozen 2.

Each song underwent extensive translation, rehearsal and filming. Rather than focusing on direct word-for-word interpretation, the team prioritised conveying emotion and narrative through movement. Developed over four years, with six months dedicated to animation, the project signals broader industry efforts towards accessibility and more inclusive storytelling in mainstream entertainment, reflecting a growing shift towards representation and creative experimentation across global audiences today worldwide universally. — Reuters

S H O T F E A T U R E S



PERFORMANCE

Colombian singer Shakira performs during a free concert at Copacabana beach in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. — AFP



MUSIC

People film performers at a free music concert in a park in Beijing during the five-day national May Day holiday. — AFP



CELEBRITY

Singer and actress Rihanna and rapper ASAP Rocky at the 2026 Met Gala celebrating “Costume Art” at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. — AFP

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COSM DOMES BRINGS HARRY POTTER WORLD TO LIFE



Transforming family movie nights into enveloping spectacles and offering viewers a ringside seat for sports, US-based Cosm Domes want to give their customers a new kind of immersive entertainment: a towering LED dome. “It feels like being inside the film. It feels real”, Jay Rinsky, founder and CEO of Little Cinema, the creative studio behind what Cosm calls its “shared reality experiences”, said.

Cosm has so far opened Domes in Los Angeles and Dallas, with further venues planned for Atlanta, Detroit and Cleveland.

Screenings are paired with themed food and drinks and photo opportunities; and fans are encouraged to dress as their favourite characters.

For instance, when watching the shared reality version of the film “Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone”, created in partnership with Warner Bros, the audience can also drink a

butterbeer, a fizzy beverage with a butterscotch flavour that’s a favourite of Hogwarts students.

“Shared reality combines the physical — with all of us together — and digital technology”, said Alexis Scalice, Cosm’s vice president of business development and entertainment.

Little Cinema and Warner Bros Pictures launched their multi-film collaboration in 2025 with immersive screenings of “The Matrix”, followed by “Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory”.

The screening of the first “Harry Potter” marks the 25th anniversary of the film that first brought the J K Rowling books about the boy wizard to the silver screen.

Cosm’s technology seeks to create the next generation of experience, with visuals that make audiences feel as though they’re flying through Hogwarts or playing Quidditch on broomsticks. — Reuters

German artist Georg Baselitz dies aged 88



A woman walks past the paintings ‘Portrait of Elke I, 1969’ and ‘Da Portrait (Franz Dahlem), 1969’ (R) of German artist Georg Baselitz during a media preview of the exhibition ‘Baselitz’. — Reuters

GERMAN ARTIST Georg Baselitz, whose expressive paintings and sculptures stirred controversy in West Germany before winning global acclaim, has died aged 88.

His death was confirmed to AFP by Ropac Gallery, which had a long-standing professional relationship with the artist.

A statement from the gallery said Baselitz died peacefully and described him as an artist who defined German visual art for a generation.

Born Hans-Georg Kern in 1938 in Deutschbaselitz near Dresden, he was among Germany’s most prominent contemporary visual artists with a career spanning more than six decades.

He adopted the name Baselitz in 1961 as a nod to his hometown and studied art in East Berlin before moving to West Berlin in 1957 amidst political pressure and fears of forced labour in mining.

His first West Berlin exhibition in 1963 was condemned, with two paintings confiscated and the show closed, leading to a high-profile legal dispute.

He gained recognition in 1965 in Florence with his ‘Heroes’ series, marking an early international breakthrough.

His works often reflected Germany’s traumatic twentieth-century history, particularly the war and post-war division, and became central to postwar European art discourse.

POP ART

In 1969 he began painting canvases upside down, inverting motifs to challenge perception and balance abstraction with figuration.

His influences included German Expressionism, abstract painters such as Jackson Pollock and Willem de Kooning, and elements of Pop Art.

He aimed to shock viewers and create images that forced reflection, saying that surprise was central to artistic purpose.

His wife, Elke Kretzschmar, became a frequent subject in his work after their marriage in 1962.

Baselitz achieved international prominence after the 1980 Venice Biennale alongside Anselm Kiefer, establishing him among leading postwar German artists.

His works are held in major international collections and



German artist Georg Baselitz poses near some of his artworks displayed at the National Museum of Modern Art. — AFP



A woman stands in front of the paintings ‘P D Feet, 1960-63’ and ‘P D Foot-Interior, 1963’ (R) of German artist Georg Baselitz. — Reuters

museums worldwide. He was elected to the French Académie des Beaux-Arts in 2019 and had a major retrospective at the Centre Pompidou in 2021.

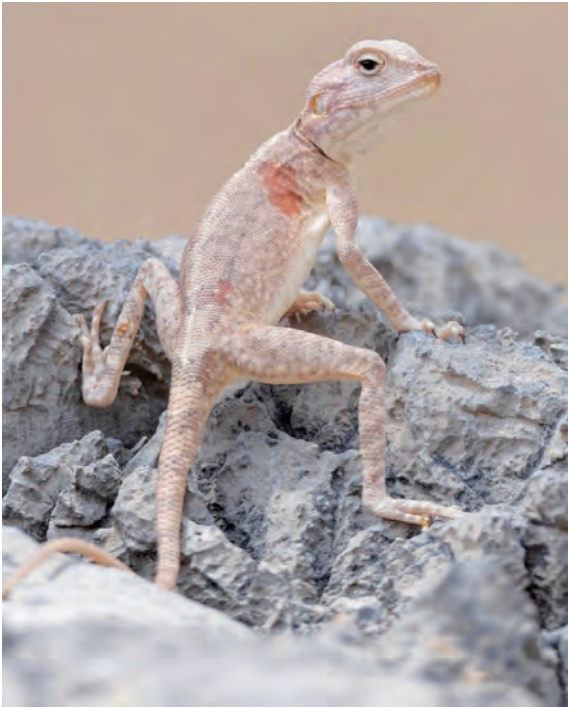
His final works are scheduled for exhibition in Venice at the Fondazione Giorgio Cini.

Across his career, Baselitz reshaped postwar German art with his provocative imagery and distinctive inversion technique, leaving a legacy that influenced generations of painters and sculptors.

He remained active into his later years, continuing to produce paintings and prints that revisited historical themes and personal memory while refining his visual language.

Critics widely regard him as one of the most important German artists of the postwar period, known for challenging conventions and redefining figurative painting in contemporary art. He leaves behind a body of work that continues to provoke debate within the international art world. — AFP

FEATURES



PROTECTING LIFE BENEATH
OMAN 'S SUMMER SUN

IDRIS AL BALUSHI

BY MIDDAY in Oman's summer, the world seems to retreat. Streets fall silent beneath the weight of the sun, the air trembles above burning asphalt and even the wind arrives hot, as though it has passed through fire before touching the skin. But while people disappear indoors behind cooled walls and shaded windows, countless animals remain outside negotiating the long geography of heat. For birds, summer becomes a search for water in a landscape that evaporates quickly. Tiny bodies perch on rooftops and electric wires with open beaks, conserving energy beneath a sky that offers no mercy. Shrinking greenery means fewer places to hide from the sun and fewer feeding grounds. Sometimes, survival can depend on something as small as a shallow bowl of water left on a balcony before dawn, or a handful of seeds scattered beneath a shaded tree. Stray cats know the language of summer differently. They flatten themselves beneath parked cars, curl against narrow strips of shadow beside buildings and move carefully across roads hot enough to burn. Hunger and thirst become heavier in extreme temperatures. The Oman Animal Welfare Association has encouraged the public to feed stray animals responsibly in quiet low-traffic areas away from roads and entrances, while using

bowls instead of placing food directly on the ground to maintain cleanliness and avoid attracting insects. In weather like this, shade itself becomes a form of rescue. Even trees begin to struggle. Leaves crisp at the edges, soil hardens and branches droop beneath relentless sunlight. Yet a watered tree is more than greenery; it becomes shelter for birds, refuge for insects and a small island of coolness in a city radiating heat. Protecting plants during summer is also a way of protecting the fragile ecosystems quietly breathing within them. Pollinators such as bees and butterflies face their own invisible battle. Without flowers, water, or safe spaces free from excessive pesticides, entire cycles of pollination weaken. A shallow dish lined with pebbles or a flowering plant on a balcony may seem insignificant, yet it can sustain life moving silently between petals and branches. Along Oman's shores, the struggle continues beneath another sunlit horizon. Sea turtles, marine mammals and coastal wildlife face increasing environmental pressures from pollution, rising temperatures and human disturbance. Recently, the Environment Authority held a meeting of the national team studying marine mammal and sea turtle deaths and strandings in the Sultanate of Oman, discussing environmental indicators, field monitoring and future conservation

plans extending to 2027. Inside farms and stables, summer reshapes entire routines. Farmers rise earlier, water troughs are refilled repeatedly, and shaded shelters become essential defences against dehydration and exhaustion. Horses, camels, cattle, goats and poultry all endure the season differently, yet all depend on human care to withstand it. Wildlife parks and rehabilitation centres carry a similar responsibility, especially for animals unfamiliar with Oman's climate. Cooling systems, mist sprays, shaded enclosures, hydration checks and veterinary supervision become daily acts of protection against heat stress. Across the Sultanate of Oman, institutions continue broader conservation efforts. The Oman Animal and Plant Genetic Resources Centre "Mawarid" works to preserve biodiversity through scientific research and biological conservation, while the Rehabilitation and Breeding Centre in Barka continues rescuing and rehabilitating endangered wildlife before returning species to their natural habitats. Yet perhaps the most important form of conservation is the quietest one. A bowl refilled before sunrise. A shaded corner left undisturbed. A tree watered before it leaves surrender to the heat. In Oman's summer, compassion becomes its own kind of shelter.