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INBRIEF

OMAN WELCOMES
APPOINTMENT OF ALI
AL ZAIDI AS IRAQ PM

The Sultanate of Oman has welcomed the appointment of Ali al Zaidi as Prime Minister of the Republic of Iraq and the formation of the new government. Oman extended its best wishes for his success in serving the aspirations of the Iraqi people. In a statement issued by the Foreign Ministry on Monday, the Sultanate of Oman reaffirmed its commitment to strengthening bilateral cooperation across all fields in a manner that serves the joint interests.

LEBANON SEEKS
SECURITY DEAL
WITH ISRAEL

Lebanese President Joseph Aoun on Monday said a security deal and an end to Israeli attacks were needed before any meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, sought by Washington. Aoun's office said in a statement that the president "reiterated his view that the timing is not appropriate now for a meeting" with Netanyahu. The statement quoted Aoun as saying: "We must first reach a security agreement and stop the Israeli attacks on us before we raise the issue of a meeting between us." Israeli and Lebanese representatives last month met twice in Washington - the first such meetings in decades, which came after Hezbollah drew Lebanon into the Middle East war on March 2, sparking heavy Israeli strikes and a ground invasion.

ROSE SEASON BLOSSOMS



Rose season in Oman is shaping a narrative that goes beyond agriculture, extending into culture, economy and national identity. The rose continues its journey from a flower picked at dawn to a symbol of heritage and enterprise, supported by development programmes and government initiatives. There are more than 6,500 rose trees in Al Jabal Al Akhdhar covering an area of more than 10 acres, with an annual production of up to 30,000 litres of rose water and an economic return for farmers. **DETAILS ON P3**

ATTACK ON RESIDENTIAL BUILDING IN BUKHA HURTS 2

IRAN FIRES ‘WARNING SHOTS’ AS US NAVY SHIPS ENTER GULF VIA HORMUZ

A SECURITY source has reported that a residential building housing company employees in the Tibat area of the Wilayat of Bukha was targeted in an attack, resulting in moderate injuries to two expatriates, damage to four vehicles and shattered windows in an adjacent house. The relevant authorities are investigating the incident and have affirmed their commitment to taking all necessary measures to ensure the safety and security of both citizens and residents.

Earlier, US President Donald Trump had announced a plan to guide ships from neutral countries out of the Gulf, saying it was a humanitarian effort to help their stranded crews. Negotiations between Washington and Tehran have been deadlocked since a ceasefire in the US-Israeli war against Iran took effect on April 8, with Tehran's stranglehold on the strait a main point of contention. "For the good of Iran, the Middle East, and the United States, we have told these (non-combatant) countries that we will guide their ships safely out of these restricted waterways," Trump posted on Truth Social, saying operations would begin on Monday. Once out, "they will not be returning until the area becomes safe for navigation,"



In this picture obtained from Iran's ISNA news agency on Monday, the Iran-flagged tugboat Basim sails near a ship anchored in the Strait of Hormuz off Bandar Abbas in southern Iran. — AFP

Trump added. In response to Trump, the Iranian military's central command said any safe passage through Hormuz must be coordinated with its forces "under all circumstances". US media reported that the US Navy would not escort vessels through the strait but would provide guidance on traversing the narrow seaway. News site Axios said US ships would be "in the vicinity" to prevent Iranian attacks on commercial vessels. On Monday afternoon, CENTCOM said that, as "a first step" in Project Freedom, two "US-flagged merchant vessels"

had travelled out of the Gulf. Iranian state media then reported that "following the Zionist American destroyers' disregard for the initial warning, the Navy issued a warning shot by firing cruise missiles, rockets, and combat drones around the aggressor enemy vessels". The Fars news agency had earlier reported that Iran hit a US warship with missiles, a claim that CENTCOM immediately denied. There was also a brief missile attack alert sent to mobile phones in the UAE on Monday afternoon, which was later lifted. As of April 29, more than

900 commercial vessels were located in the Gulf, according to maritime intelligence firm AXSMarine. In the early hours of Monday, the British maritime agency UKMTO also reported an attack on a tanker off the UAE with "unknown projectiles". Later in the day, the UAE said Iran had fired drones at a tanker affiliated with its state-owned oil giant ADNOC. By blocking the strait, Iran has choked off major flows of oil, gas and fertiliser to the world economy, while the United States has imposed a counter-blockade on Iranian ports. **SEE ALSO P6 & 7**

SQU announces winners of 2026 Royal Grant

MUSCAT: Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) on Monday announced the winning research projects for the Royal Grant for Strategic Research Projects during its celebration of the 26th University Day. The event was held under the auspices of Dr Madeeha bint Ahmed al Shaibani, Minister of Education. A total of nine research projects were awarded the grant. These included 'Multi-Omics Signature and Artificial Intelligence

Characterisation of Omani Familial Hypercholesterolemia (MOSAIC FH)' by Prof Khalid bin Humaid al Rasadi from the Medical Research Centre; 'Quantum-FinTech: The Next Generation Financial Technologies Powered by Quantum Computing' by Dr Hafiz Mohammed Asif from the College of Engineering; and 'Designing Public Procurement Policies for Sustainable Economic Development and Diversification: AI-based

Multidisciplinary Analysis of Procurement Notices' by Dr Bedri Kamil Onur from the College of Economics and Political Science. The winners also included the project 'A Digitally-Integrated Framework for Nanoparticle-Enhanced CO₂-EOR and Sequestration in Omani Carbonate Reservoirs' by Dr Usman Habu Taura from the Oil and Gas Research Centre; 'A Machine Learning-assisted Method for the

Concurrent Detection of Multiple Heavy Metals in Food Samples Utilising Nanoparticles and a Paper-Based Lab-on-a-Chip Technique: Rice and Honey as Model Systems' by Prof Haider bin Ahmed al Lawati from the College of Science; and 'Skymions Generation by Plasmonic Effect for Low Energy and High Capacity Neuromorphic Computing Devices' by Prof Rachid Sbiaa from the College of Science. **TURN TO P2**

Diveability Programme to support persons with disabilities

MUSCAT: Oman Sail and Asyad Shipping launched the Diveability Programme to support persons with disabilities. The programme offers weekly sessions that guide participants from beginner level through to Open Water certification, aiming to enhance the physical and social well-being of persons with disabilities through underwater activities. Thirty candidates will have the opportunity to experience diving in a swimming pool, allowing them

to engage with the sport in a safe environment and decide whether to progress further. Of these, 15 will advance to an Open Water course at the Daymaniyat Islands. By the end of the programme, they will obtain an internationally-recognised PADI certification, enabling them to dive alongside others independently. The programme will initially be delivered by PADI-qualified instructors from SeaOman at the Al Amal Club swimming pool before shifting to



Oman Sail's Al Mouj Sailing School for open water activities. Laila bint Ali Ambusaidi, Acting Senior Sponsorship Sales at Oman Sail, said, "Water sports, including swimming, diving and sailing, have been shown to have a positive impact on the lives of persons with disabilities. We have seen the benefits firsthand, and by continuing the Diveability Programme with the support of Asyad Shipping, we are delighted to support more people to enjoy the water, learn new skills and

build the capacity for a future career as an instructor." Abdunnasser bin Salim al Sinani, Diveability Coach, added, "Diveability has the potential to transform lives across the country by introducing people with disabilities to an activity they can do safely by providing an experience free of the limitations they live with on land. Activities in the water can also provide therapeutic benefits for those recovering from injury or trauma, as well as supporting physical exercise." — ONA

SHORTTAKES



The cooperation programme includes the implementation of several joint initiatives and activities.

SOCIETY FOR WRITERS SIGNS PACT WITH UTAS

MUSCAT: The Omani Society for Writers and Literati (OSWL) signed an agreement with the University of Technology and Applied Sciences (UTAS) programme to enhance collaboration in cultural and literary fields, and to exchange scientific and practical expertise to support cultural activity and develop students’ creative capabilities.

The agreement was signed on behalf of UTAS by Dr Huda bint Salem al Shueili, Vice-Chancellor for Electronic Systems and Student Services, while the Omani Society for Writers and Literati was represented by Said bin Mohammed al Saqlawi, Chairman of the Society.

The signing of the programme reflects both parties’ commitment to strengthening institutional partnership and activating cultural initiatives that serve the community, in line with national priorities that emphasise investing in human capital and developing intellectual and creative capabilities.

The cooperation programme includes the implementation of several joint initiatives and activities, such as organising cultural evenings and events hosting prominent literary figures at the local and regional levels, and engaging university students in the cultural activities organised by the society throughout the cultural season. It also includes supporting talented students in publishing their literary works and reviewing them prior to release.

Rose season blossoms into tourism, trade and tradition

RUQAYA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, MAY 4

ROSE SEASON in Oman is shaping a narrative that goes beyond agriculture, extending into culture, economy and national identity. The rose continues its journey from a flower picked at dawn to a symbol of heritage and enterprise, supported by development programmes and government initiatives.

“There are more than 6,500 rose trees in Al Jabal Al Akhdhar covering an area of more than 10 acres, with an annual production of up to 30,000 litres of rose water and an economic return for farmers of about RO 210,000,” said Omair al Fahdi, Head of the Agricultural Development and Water Resources Department in Al Jabal Al Akhdhar.

Farmer Qais al Amri, owner of Dehjan factory in Al Jabal Al Akhdhar, said the sector has evolved significantly. “We started by producing rose water and rose oil, known for their concentrated aromatic fragrance. This helped us develop personal care products with a rose touch, providing a year-round source of income for us and many families working in the same field.”

The rose has also found its way into retail and culinary innovation, where it is transformed into products, identity markers and flavours.

The local brand Al Sharaa has introduced seasonal offerings such as rose-filled sweets, rose-infused date cookies, and rose-flavoured Arabic coffee, while continuing to produce rose water and rose shampoo year-round. Mazoon



There are more than 6,500 rose trees in Al Jabal Al Akhdhar covering an area of more than 10 acres, with an annual production of up to 30,000 litres of rose water and an economic return for farmers of about RO 210,000

OMAIR AL FAHDI



Agricultural heritage in Jabal Al Akhdhar has further evolved into a cultural tourism experience. — Picture by Bhavish K B

Dairy has also joined this trend by launching rose-flavoured milk, which has been well received in the market.

In the culinary space, young Omani entrepreneurs are increasingly incorporating rose essence from Al Jabal Al Akhdhar into juices, dairy products, tea, coffee, cakes and Omani halwa.

Food content creator Mohammed Moosa said, “Using rose products in food gives it a distinctive flavour, and people are now seeking this local touch.”

The rose is also making its mark in the fragrance and incense industry, reflecting Omani identity in contemporary form. Local houses such as Amouage and Omanluxury have incorporated rose as a key ingredient in recent fragrance releases, blending heritage with modern perfumery and achieving

international recognition.

Rose season is also deeply rooted in tradition passed down through generations. Saif al Tobji, owner of Bait Asarh Rose Water Factory, said, “The secret of the craft, in its traditional form, has been passed down through our family since 1984. We have also incorporated modern methods of rose water production.”

Agricultural heritage in Al Jabal Al Akhdhar has further evolved into a cultural tourism experience. “Last season attracted more than 30,000 visitors from different nationalities, and this season is expected to achieve new record numbers,” Al Fahdi added.

Rose season thus highlights how nature in Oman is not only a source of beauty, but also a driver of sustainable economic activity and a contributor to shaping a distinctive national identity.

Rising Omani writer wins Sharjah School Theatre Award again

SIHAM AL SAIDI
SUHAR, MAY 4

In a remarkable achievement highlighting the rising literary talent among Omani youth, Aisha bint Abdullah al Mazrouai has once again secured first place in the Sharjah School Theatre Playwriting Award (Student Category) in its 13th edition, marking her second victory in the prestigious international competition.

Aisha’s latest win comes through her script ‘Room 7’, a deeply reflective theatrical work that combines intellectual depth with compelling dramatic storytelling.

Her return to the top spot not only underscores her consistency, but also signals the emergence of a strong creative voice capable of resonating beyond the classroom.

Unlike conventional student scripts, ‘Room 7’ explores the inner worlds of its characters. The story follows four students racing against time to recover a missing project notebook just an hour before a crucial presentation.

What begins as a simple search evolves into an emotional and psychological journey. Inside the symbolic ‘Room 7’, each character confronts



Aisha’s latest win comes through her script ‘Room 7’, a deeply reflective theatrical work that combines intellectual depth with compelling dramatic storytelling.

personal truths, realising that what they once considered strengths may, in fact, be their greatest limitations. By the end, the students gain something far more valuable than their lost project — a deeper understanding of themselves.

Speaking to the Observer, Aisha said her journey into theatre writing began with a strong desire to give life to her thoughts. “I didn’t want my ideas to remain trapped in my mind,” she said. “Theatre allows me to express them, to let others see and feel them. Winning was also a goal, especially in a competition of this international level.”

Her words reflect both ambition and clarity of purpose. For Aisha, the award is not a destination

but a stepping stone. She describes theatre as the ‘father of all arts’, a space where storytelling, emotion and intellect converge. This latest recognition, she added, strengthens her resolve to continue writing and exploring new creative horizons.

Behind her success lies a disciplined routine — extensive reading, daily writing, listening to podcasts, and critically analysing theatrical texts and performances. These practices, she noted, have refined her craft and shaped her distinctive voice.

Looking ahead, Aisha aspires to compile her theatrical works into a published collection and see her scripts brought to life on stage — a goal that now feels increasingly within reach.

Hotel Indigo Jabal Akhdar Resort & Spa: Why Jabal Akhdar Should Be Your Ultimate Summer Retreat in Oman



HOTEL Indigo Jabal Akhdar Resort & Spa invites travellers to discover why Oman’s famed “Green Mountain” Jabal Akhdar stands out as one of the region’s most famous summer retreats. Perched high in the majestic Al Hajar Mountain range, this extraordinary destination offers 15-degree cooler climates with breathtaking canyon vistas. With immersive cultural experiences not found elsewhere in the GCC, it creates the perfect setting to reconnect with nature, Arabian heritage, and relaxation.

Jabal Akhdar offers something for everybody including a vibrant Omani street food scene, spectacular sunrises and sunsets, Museums, traditional Souqs (Nizwa) and numerous hiking trails that wind through ancient villages, terraced farms, and hidden wadis, revealing stories of resilience shaped over generations. The landscape itself is a striking contrast of rugged cliffs softened by pockets of lush greenery and flourishing orchards, offering visitors a deeper connection to Oman’s natural beauty. Soon, the region will also welcome the much-anticipated Rumana (pomegranate) season, when the mountain is painted in vivid shades of red as orchards burst into harvest.

At Hotel Indigo Jabal Akhdar Resort & Spa, guests can choose from a variety of accommodations, including canyon view rooms, terrace suites, and pool chalets, with complimentary access to Jala Spa & Wellness one of the largest spas in Oman where every experience is designed to restore balance and renewal. Offering traditional hammam rituals, revitalising facials, soothing Vichy showers, hydrotherapy vitality pools, and holistic treatments guests can melt away tension and re-energise both mind and body against a breathtaking mountain backdrop.

Combined with Vue Rooftop & Lounge - the Middle East’s highest rooftop lounge offering an elevated



dining experience set against breathtaking canyon views. Dining at the resort is equally memorable, with culinary experiences inspired by both local and international flavours. Fresh, locally sourced ingredients, aromatic spices, and chilled dining settings come together to create unforgettable moments, all framed by sweeping panoramic views of the surrounding mountains.

Whether it’s a romantic getaway, a family retreat, or an adventure-led experience, Jabal Akhdar offers something for every traveller. Travellers can enjoy peaceful seclusion, families can reconnect through nature, and adventure seekers can explore the region’s rugged trails and outdoor experiences.

Located approximately 174 km from Muscat International Airport, Jabal Akhdar is around a two-hour drive from Muscat. Access to the mountain requires a 4WD vehicle from the police checkpoint, though transfers can be arranged to ensure a seamless journey.

This summer, retreat from the heat and discover a destination where nature, culture, and wellbeing come together. Jabal Akhdar awaits.

For reservations: stay.indigojabalakhdar@ihg.com

bp Oman expands social impact, reaching more than 290,000 people



Sharah programme created 17 jobs for people with hearing disabilities



3 million visitors to the Raqmina digital curriculum platform

MORE than 290,000 people across Oman have benefited from bp Oman’s social investment programmes since 2014, as the company marks a decade of initiatives focused on education, skills, inclusion and sustainability.

bp Oman said the programmes have reached all governorates and supported children, students, jobseekers, people with disabilities, entrepreneurs and educators.

Over the past decade, the company has delivered more than 180 initiatives. In 2025 alone, 42,547 people benefited from 11 initiatives, including 748 people with disabilities, and 3,658 jobseekers and employees. The programmes also delivered 92 employment opportunities.

bp Oman said this work forms part of its wider partnership with the Sultanate, which dates back more than a century, from early geological surveys in the 1920s to current gas operations in Block 61; which bp operates in partnership with OQEP, PTTEP and Petronas. The block contributes around 35% of Oman’s total natural gas demand.

Najla Al Jamali, bp Oman President, said the company’s role in Oman goes beyond energy production.

“We are committed to supporting Oman’s growing energy needs while continuing to invest in its people,” she said.

“For over a decade, our social investment programmes have supported communities by advancing education, enhancing employability and promoting inclusion. This work is delivering tangible impact, strengthening livelihoods and creating opportunities which we plan to build on in the future.”

Education and digital learning

Education remains one of the main areas of focus for bp Oman’s community programmes.

In 2020, as Oman marked its 50th National Day, bp supported a nationwide project to digitize the school curriculum for grades 1 to 12.

Working with the Ministry of Education, the project turned printed textbooks into interactive digital content used by students and teachers across the country.

It currently supports more than 800,000 students and 55,000 teachers across around 1,200 schools, with plans to expand further to include private education. Since its rollout in 2024, the Raqmina platform has recorded more than 3 million visits.

Supporting Diversity and inclusion

bp Oman has also widened its work in social inclusion. In 2025, bp Oman launched its new Gift to the nation - a national multi-year initiative focused on creating equal opportunities for Omanis with disabilities through training and accessible education – in partnership with the Ministry of Social Development, the Ministry of Education and the Office of the Governor of Al Dhahirah.

The first programme aims to convert existing curricula for grades 1-4 into accessible digital formats for students with hearing and visual disabilities.

The second programme will provide training workshops for government employees to provide accessible service and for Omanis with disabilities preparing for workplace. The programme will be piloted in Al Dhahirah governorate and

will then be implemented across all other governorates, benefiting over 44,000 people nationwide.

Supporting SMEs and local enterprise

Beyond education, the company highlighted how it supports small and media enterprise via the Khazzan SME Development Programme done in partnership with Sharakah supporting Omani-owned businesses by building commercial capabilities, improving access to finance and strengthening long-term sustainability. An independent assessment of the programme found that it generated a strong social return on investment (SROI), delivering approximately 4.9 Omani Rials in social and economic value for every rial invested.

One of the beneficiaries, **Musab Al Farsi, Founder and CEO of Nafath**, joined the programme in 2017. He said: “The Khazzan SME Development Programme provided critical support to Nafath in its early years. It strengthened my business capabilities and introduced more structured thinking to our growth. Since then, we have worked with bp on several initiatives, including Mustadeem and Ruwad.”

Empowering people with hearing disabilities

bp Oman has also supported inclusive skills development through the Sharah programme, delivered in partnership with Al Tawasul Institute, an Omani institute specializing in training people with hearing disabilities.

The programme is designed to strengthen employability and workforce readiness for jobseekers with hearing impairments through certified training in Arabic and English language skills, computer and digital literacy, and interpersonal and job-readiness skills.

Through the programme, 40 people with hearing disabilities were trained, resulting in around 17 employment opportunities and the certification of 20 trainers, helping to sustain skills development beyond the programme itself.

Maryam Al Azizi, a participant of the programme, said: “The programme helped me improve and develop new skills – especially computer literacy. Today, I can use computers and the internet independently, which has greatly improved my daily life.”



Beneficiary of the Khazzan SME Development Programme

M I D D L E E A S T L A T E S T D E V E L O P M E N T S

SOUTH KOREAN SHIP
EXPLOSION

Seoul said on Monday that an “explosion and fire” had struck a South Korean ship in the Strait of Hormuz, the crucial Middle Eastern waterway.

UAE MISSILE
WARNING

The United Arab Emirates issued a mobile phone alert for a potential missile attack, nearly a month into a fragile ceasefire in the Middle East war.

HEZBOLLAH
CONDEMNS ISRAEL

Hezbollah’s leader condemned Israel’s operations in Lebanon amid a fragile ceasefire, repeating the group’s rejection of direct negotiations.

IRAN FIRED AT
US FRIGATE

Iranian media said that a US navy frigate was targeted by two missiles in Hormuz. The US military denied that any of its ships had been hit.

ABANDON EXCESSIVE
DEMANDS

Iran’s foreign ministry spokesman Esmail Bagaei said that the United States must reduce its demands on ending the two-month-long war.

DUBAI AIRPORT
TRAFFIC SLUMPS

Dubai airport’s passenger traffic plunged to 2.5 million passengers in March, two-thirds down last year, following Iran’s attacks.

RUBIO TO DISCUSS
MIDEAST IN VATICAN

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio will visit Rome and will discuss Mideast war in the wake of President Donald Trump’s criticism of Pope Leo XIV.

PAKISTAN FACILITATES
CREW RETURN

Pakistan said that it had facilitated the transfer of 22 Iranian crew members from a US-seized vessel, describing it as a “confidence-building measure”.

MACRON URGES
COORDINATION

French President Emmanuel Macron urged the United States and Iran to reopen the Strait of Hormuz in a “coordinated” way.

TRUMP CALLS TALKS
‘VERY POSITIVE

President Donald Trump said on Sunday that “very positive discussions” were underway with Iran on finding a solution to the war.

IRAN FIRES
‘WARNING SHOTS’
AT US WARSHIPS
IN HORMUZ



Vessels in the Strait of Hormuz near Bandar Abbas, Iran. — Reuters

IRAN’S navy fired ‘warning shots’ at US warships in the Strait of Hormuz on Monday, state media said, after the American military sent cruisers into the Gulf as part of a plan to help trapped commercial vessels leave. Earlier, US President Donald Trump had announced a plan to guide ships from neutral countries out of the Gulf, saying it was a humanitarian effort to help their stranded crews. Negotiations between Washington and Tehran have been deadlocked since a ceasefire in the US-Israeli war against Iran took effect on April 8, with Tehran’s stranglehold on the strait a main point of contention. “For the good of Iran, the Middle East, and the United States, we have told these (non-combatant) Countries that we will guide their Ships safely out of these restricted Waterways,” Trump posted on Truth Social, saying operations would begin on Monday. Once out, “they will not be returning until the area becomes safe for navigation,” Trump added. In response to Trump, the Iranian military’s central command said any safe passage through Hormuz must be coordinated with its forces “under all circumstances”. US media reported that the US Navy would not escort vessels through the strait but would

On Monday afternoon, CENTCOM said “guided-missile destroyers are currently operating” in the Gulf, having transited Hormuz. It added that, as “a first step” in Project Freedom, that two “US-flagged merchant vessels” had travelled out of the Gulf. The Fars news agency had earlier reported that Iran hit a US warship with missiles, a claim that CENTCOM immediately denied.



A memorial depicting a symbolic classroom representing the Minab school children is displayed in a square in Tehran. — AFP

provide guidance on traversing the narrow seaway. News site Axios said US ships would be “in the vicinity” to prevent Iranian attacks on commercial vessels. On Monday afternoon, CENTCOM said “guided-missile destroyers are currently operating” in the Gulf, having transited Hormuz. It added that, as “a first step” in Project Freedom, that two “US-flagged merchant vessels” had travelled out of the Gulf. Iranian state media then reported that “following the Zionist American destroyers’ disregard for the initial warning, the Navy issued a

warning shot by firing cruise missiles, rockets, and combat drones around the aggressor enemy vessels”. The Fars news agency had earlier reported that Iran hit a US warship with missiles, a claim that CENTCOM immediately denied. There was also a brief missile attack alert sent to mobile phones in the UAE on Monday afternoon, which was later lifted. - ‘Positive discussions’ - As of April 29, more than 900 commercial vessels were located in the Gulf, according to maritime intelligence firm AXSMarine. In the early hours of Monday, the British maritime agency

UKMTO also reported an attack on a tanker off the UAE with “unknown projectiles”. Later in the day, the UAE said Iran had fired drones at a tanker affiliated with its state-owned oil giant ADNOC. By blocking the strait, Iran has choked off major flows of oil, gas and fertiliser to the world economy, while the United States has imposed a counter-blockade on Iranian ports. Trump in his post said he was “fully aware that my Representatives are having very positive discussions with the Country of Iran, and that these discussions could lead to something very positive for all.” But he made no direct mention of a 14-point plan that Tehran said it put forward last week to end the war. Speaking on Monday, Iran’s foreign ministry spokesman Esmail Bagaei said Iran’s “priority is to end the war” but blamed the US for a lack of progress. “The other side must commit to a reasonable approach and abandon its excessive demands,” he said. He had earlier said Washington had responded to the 14-point plan in a message to Pakistani mediators. On Sunday, Iran’s Revolutionary Guards sought to put the diplomatic onus back on Trump, saying he must choose between “an impossible operation or a bad deal with the Islamic Republic”. — AFP

STARMER
SIGNALS
‘TENSION’
BETWEEN
EU, US OVER
IRAN



President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen (L) and British Prime Minister Keir Starmer shakes hands during a bilateral meeting, in Yerevan. — AFP

LONDON: UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer has spoken of heightened “tension” between US President Donald Trump and Europe at a gathering of leaders from across the continent, which he used to announce the United Kingdom’s bid to join the European Union’s recovery loan for Ukraine. Trump has lashed out at some Nato nations for what he sees as their lack of support for Washington in Iran, most recently announcing plans to withdraw 5,000 troops from Germany. The prime minister warned of the strained relations at the European

Political Community summit in Armenia, which is being dominated by the conflicts in Ukraine and Iran, amid concerns over the US president’s waning interest in the first and attacks on traditional allies over their stance on the second. Speaking in the plenary session, Starmer said: “We cannot deny that some of the alliances that we have come to rely on are not in the place we would want them to be.” “There is more tension in the alliances than there should be and it’s very important that we therefore face up to this as a group of countries together.” The prime minister also said the

damage done to economies around the world by the Middle East crisis would “play out with our electorates in all of our countries.” His trip to Yerevan comes as Labour is expected to face a drubbing in this week’s local elections. Starmer announced that Britain would start talks to access the European Union’s 90 billion (\$105 billion) loan for Kyiv, which amounts to around £78 billion. Starmer said the UK’s involvement in the initiative would be “very good” for Ukraine’s military capability, for British jobs and for UK-EU relations. The UK and EU. — dpa

SHORT TAKE



US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent

BESSENT URGES
CHINA TO STEP
UP DIPLOMACY

WASHINGTON: US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent on Monday urged China to step up its diplomatic efforts to persuade Iran to open the Strait of Hormuz to international shipping, adding that the subject will be discussed when President Donald Trump meets with Chinese President Xi Jinping next week. “China, let’s see them step up with some diplomacy and get the Iranians to open the strait,” Bessent said during a live Fox News Channel interview. Bessent said that China was buying 90 per cent of Iran’s energy, “so they are funding the largest state sponsor of terrorism.” He said that he was urging China to “join us in this international operation” to open the Strait, but he did not specify what action Beijing should take. He added that China and Russia should stop blocking initiatives moving through the United Nations, such as a resolution encouraging steps to protect commercial shipping in the Strait of Hormuz. Bessent said Trump and Xi have been discussing the Iran situation and will exchange views on this in person during their May 14-15 summit in Beijing. But he emphasised that the two will strive to maintain stability. — Reuters

Hezbollah condemns ‘Israeli aggression’
despite ongoing ceasefire in Lebanon

BEIRUT: Hezbollah’s leader on Monday condemned Israel’s operations in Lebanon amid a fragile ceasefire, repeating the group’s rejection of direct negotiations between the Israeli and Lebanese governments. Israel has kept up deadly strikes on Lebanon despite the April 17 ceasefire that sought to halt more than six weeks of war between its military and Hezbollah, with both sides accusing the other of violating the truce. In Lebanon’s south near the Israeli border, the Israeli army has also demolished buildings and prevented residents of dozens of towns from returning. “There is no ceasefire in Lebanon, but a continuous Israeli-American aggression,” Hezbollah leader Naim Qassem said in a written statement broadcast by the al-Manar TV channel, which is affiliated with the Iran-backed group. “Lebanon is the victim of aggression, and it is Lebanon that needs guarantees for its security and sovereignty” from Israel, he added. He criticised the direct talks, saying they put Lebanon “under tutelage”, and instead called for diplomacy that leads to an end to the war that began on March 2. “Direct negotiations are a gratuitous concession, without results,” he said. “So do not betray the resistance.” The US embassy in Beirut had on Thursday called for a meeting between Lebanese President Joseph Aoun and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, which it said



There is no ceasefire in Lebanon, but a continuous Israeli-American aggression. Lebanon is the victim of aggression, and it is Lebanon that needs guarantees for its security and sovereignty from Israel. Talks put Lebanon under tutelage, and instead called for diplomacy that leads to an end to the war

NAIM QASSEM



A displaced girl, draws the Lebanese national flag at a makeshift encampment, in Beirut. — Reuters

would be a “historic opportunity” for the Lebanese people “to shape their future”. On Monday, the Israeli army carried out a series of strikes after a new evacuation order was issued to residents of four towns in southern Lebanon. The ceasefire text — published by the US State Department — grants Israel the right to act against “planned, imminent or ongoing attacks” by Hezbollah. Israeli attacks on Lebanon have killed more than 2,600 people and

displaced more than a million since the war began. After initial talks took place between Lebanon and Israel, US President Donald Trump announced the ceasefire would last for 10 days, before a three-week extension was agreed after the second round. Meanwhile, Israeli police on Monday warned people not to defy the cancellation of a major pilgrimage near the border with Lebanon, scrapped because of hostilities with Hezbollah. — AFP

CONFIDENCE BUILDING

Pakistan facilitates return of Iranian crew



Pakistan said that it had facilitated the transfer of 22 Iranian crew members from a US-seized vessel, describing the move as a “confidence-building measure” amid fragile diplomatic contacts between Washington and Tehran. The sailors, who had been held aboard the container ship Touska, were flown into Islamabad. The transfer was coordinated with both sides, Pakistan said, reflecting a rare instance of practical cooperation despite wider tensions. — AFP

TARGETING SHIPPING

UAE condemns Iran attack on oil tanker



The UAE on Monday strongly condemned an Iranian drone attack on an ADNOC oil tanker in the blockaded Strait of Hormuz, as the US was due to start guiding ships through the waterway. Two drones hit the MV Barakah but no one was injured. “Targeting commercial shipping and using the Strait of Hormuz as a tool of economic coercion or blackmail represents acts of piracy by Iran’s Revolutionary Guard Corps,” the United Arab Emirates foreign ministry said. — AFP

CRUCIAL WATERWAY

Seoul says ‘explosion, fire’ on ship in Hormuz



Seoul said that an “explosion and fire” had struck a South Korean ship in the Strait of Hormuz, the crucial Middle Eastern waterway effectively blocked following US-Israeli attacks on Iran. The foreign ministry said that, at around 8:40 pm, “an explosion and fire occurred on a vessel operated by a South Korean shipping company... anchored in waters near the United Arab Emirates inside the Strait of Hormuz”, adding that there had been “no casualties to date”. — AFP

A conflict the world simply cannot afford



A FRAGILE ceasefire may have quieted the skies, but the crisis is far from over. As tensions persist between the United States, Israel and Iran, the conflict has shifted from open confrontation to a high-stakes standoff over the Strait of Hormuz — one of the world’s most critical economic lifelines.

What began as a regional war now threatens to trigger far-reaching global consequences.

The conflict has crossed the 65-day mark. While direct military exchanges have eased, a volatile war of statements and strategic pressure has taken centre stage. At the heart of it lies the Strait of Hormuz, a narrow maritime corridor through which a significant share of the world’s energy supplies flows.

Global leadership must move beyond brinkmanship. Every day this disruption continues, the risk of a wider economic and humanitarian crisis deepens.

The human cost has already been severe. Thousands of lives have been lost across Iran, Lebanon, Israel and parts of the GCC. Yet the ripple effects are now reaching millions far removed from the frontlines. By leveraging energy supply routes, the conflict risks holding the global economy — and its most vulnerable populations — hostage to inflation, food insecurity and unemployment.

The warnings are stark. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has already cut global growth forecasts from 3.4 per cent to 3.1 per cent. If disruptions to oil and gas flows persist, growth could fall to 2 per cent, while inflation may rise to 6 per cent. Such a scenario would deepen poverty and intensify the cost-of-living crisis, particularly in energy-importing and low-income nations.

An equally alarming, yet less visible, crisis is unfolding in agriculture. The Strait of Hormuz is a key route for around 30 per cent of global fertiliser trade and 20 per cent of liquefied natural gas — essential for producing nitrogen fertilisers. Any prolonged disruption could severely impact crop yields, with some estimates warning of drastic reductions in staple production, translating into billions of meals lost each week.

For import-dependent nations, this poses a direct threat to food security.

Even with oil prices at \$80 per barrel, central banks may be forced into tighter monetary policies, slowing recovery. Every sustained \$10 increase in oil prices adds roughly 0.2 percentage points to global inflation, affecting transport, manufacturing and food supply chains.

Even major economies such as China, Japan and those in Europe are feeling the strain. The current ceasefire offers only a narrow window for diplomacy.

Global leadership must move beyond brinkmanship. Every day this disruption continues, the risk of a wider economic and humanitarian crisis deepens

The IMF has cautioned that disruption in the Strait of Hormuz is not a strategic advantage but a ticking time bomb. Leaders must prioritise restoring trade flows and protecting global supply chains over geopolitical posturing.

Encouragingly, there are tentative signs of diplomatic movement. Iran has indicated it received a response from the United States to its latest peace proposal.

Tehran’s 14-point plan calls for the withdrawal of US forces from areas near its borders, an end to naval blockades on Iranian ports, and a halt to hostilities — including Israel’s offensive operations in Lebanon.

It also proposes reaching a comprehensive agreement within 30 days, urging all sides to focus on ending the war rather than prolonging a fragile ceasefire.

Iran continues to insist that its nuclear programme is for peaceful purposes, despite concerns over its uranium enrichment levels.

Meanwhile, US President Donald Trump has stated that Washington would assist vessels stranded in the Strait of Hormuz, warning that any interference with maritime movement would be dealt with ‘forcefully.’

Since the outbreak of hostilities in February, Iran has significantly restricted traffic through the strait, while the United States has maintained pressure through naval measures targeting Iranian ports.

ITALY PROBES DETENTION OF FLOTILLA ACTIVISTS

Italian prosecutors have opened an unlawful detention investigation following a raid by Israeli forces on a Gaza-bound aid flotilla, Italian media reported on Monday.

The probe was opened following complaints received over the detention last week of Spanish citizen Saif Abu Keshek and Brazilian Thiago Avila, who were on an Italian-flagged vessel.

An Israeli court on Sunday extended for two days the detention of the two activists who were taken to Israel for questioning.

The two were on a flotilla of more than 50 vessels that left France, Spain and Italy aiming to break Israel’s blockade of Gaza and bring supplies to the devastated Palestinian territory.

They were intercepted in international waters off Greece on Thursday, with Israel saying it had removed some 175 activists.

Avila and Abu Keshek were taken to Israel for questioning, while the other activists were released.

The Israeli operation was widely criticised, particularly by Italy and Spain.

The Rome prosecutor’s office opened a similar investigation last October following a previous attempt by a humanitarian flotilla to reach Gaza.

In that incident, several hundred activists, including Swedish climate campaigner Greta Thunberg were detained at sea, transferred to Israel and then expelled.

Meanwhile, an Israeli court on Sunday extended for two days the detention of two foreign activists from a Gaza-bound flotilla, who were brought to Israel for questioning, a rights group representing them said.

The flotilla of more than 50 vessels had set sail from France, Spain and Italy to break Israel’s blockade of Gaza and bring supplies to the devastated Palestinian territory.

They were intercepted by Israeli forces in international waters off Greece early on Thursday, with Israel saying it had removed some 175 activists — two of whom were taken to Israel for questioning.

Spanish national Saif Abu Keshek and Brazilian Thiago Avila appeared before a court in the southern city of Ashkelon on Sunday.

Footages showed the pair being escorted into the courtroom, with Avila walking with his hands behind his back and Abu Keshek’s feet in shackles.

“The court extended their detention by two days,” Miriam Azem, international advocacy coordinator at the rights group Adalah, said.

— AFP

Spring cleaning and books

SPRING FOR academics signals the end of an intense period of teaching and the beginning of a slower, more flexible season. Summer is usually associated with travel, conferences, or simply stepping back. There are times for rejuvenation and rest.

This year, I found myself approaching spring in a more practical way. I started with a long-overdue task: cleaning and decluttering my house. What began as a simple attempt to organise quickly turned into something more reflective. As I opened boxes that I had not touched for years, I realised I was not just sorting objects. I was revisiting different stages of my life.

Most of these boxes were filled with books. Academic books, novels, non-fiction, works on esoteric topics, books on writing, and even a few controversial or banned titles. Some I had carefully selected, while others seemed to find me by chance in secondhand bookstores or during international travels.

My collection in English and Arabic reflects both my professional identity and personal curiosity.

While going through these books, I started thinking seriously about moving.

The idea of starting fresh in a new home felt alluring. However, the cost of housing in Oman makes this decision complicated.

A large house that can accommodate an extensive personal library is not always realistic. An apartment, on the other hand, is more practical and manageable. But it also comes with space limitations.

This led me to consider something I had been avoiding: reducing my book collection. On a practical level, it makes sense. Books take up space, and moving to a smaller place requires prioritisation. However, I found it difficult to follow through with this



DR NAJMA AL ZIDJALY

The writer is Associate Professor, Sultan Qaboos University

Books take up space, and moving to a smaller place requires prioritisation. Each book is connected to a specific memory, context, need, or phase in my life. Letting go of them feels unnecessary, and in some cases, irreversible

idea. Each book is connected to a specific memory, context, need, or phase in my life. Letting go of them feels unnecessary, and in some cases, irreversible.

There is also a structural issue that shapes this decision. Access to books in Oman is not as immediate or reliable as in other places.

In countries where books can be ordered online and delivered within a day, it is easier to treat books as temporary possessions. Here, the situation is different.

Availability is limited, and certain titles are difficult to find.

As a result, maintaining a personal collection becomes less about accumulation and more about ensuring access.

This is particularly evident in how I choose what to read next. After finishing a book, I usually take a few days before starting another. During that time, I often browse my own collection rather than looking for something new externally.

This habit turns my shelves into a kind of internal resource.

A recent example illustrates

this clearly. After coming across the work of Ken Honda online, I became interested in reading his book ‘Happy Money’. I could not find it in local bookstores, including Borders in Muscat. However, while reorganising my books, I discovered that I had already bought it some time ago.

I simply had not read it yet. The same thing happened with a novel I purchased nearly ten years ago and had completely forgotten about until now.

Experiences like these make it difficult to justify downsizing my collection. What may seem like excess at one moment often becomes relevant later.

In this sense, my books function less as static objects and more as a flexible archive that I return to over time.

While the idea of moving to a smaller space remains appealing, I am not convinced that reducing my books is the right step.

For now, it seems that living with them, rather than without them, is the more practical choice.

Allies jolted as Trump pulls troops from Germany



UMBERTO BACCHI

The writer covers Southern Africa for AFP's English language service from Johannesburg

AMERICA'S NATO allies put a brave face on a US decision to withdraw 5,000 troops from Germany, but warned it was proof Europe needs to step up for its own security, and fast. US President Donald Trump cast fresh doubts over the future of the alliance as he announced Washington was to scale back its largest troops contingent in Europe, after a spat with Berlin over the Iran war. But, gathered in Yerevan, Armenia, for a meeting of the European Political Community (EPC), European leaders and Canada's Mark Carney said they were ready to step up. "Europeans are taking their destiny into their own hands, increasing their defence and security spending, and building their own common solutions," said France's President Emmanuel Macron. Trump has vowed to slash US troop numbers in Europe during both his White House terms, saying he wants the continent to take on greater responsibility for its defence rather than depending on Washington. Faced with Trump's wavering commitment and Russia's assault on Ukraine, America's Nato allies have been surging security and defence investments. Last year, they pledged to boost national defence spending to five per cent of GDP, under pressure from Washington. But divisions over the Iran war seem to have precipitated events - although German

Chancellor Friedrich Merz has insisted there was "no connection" between the troop cuts and his recent row with Trump over the conflict. "There has been talk about withdrawal US troops for a long time from Europe," EU foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas told reporters in Yerevan. "But of course, the timing of this announcement comes as a surprise." "It shows that we have to really strengthen the European pillar in Nato, and we have to really do more," Kallas said, while stressing that "American troops are not in Europe only for protecting European interests, but also American interests". The Pentagon said last week the 5,000-troop reduction would take place within the next year. Trump has told reporters, without elaborating, that cuts would go "a lot further". Trump has suggested in particular he might pull troops also from Italy and Spain over them not getting behind the US-Israeli operations against Iran. As of the end of 2025, there were 36,436 active-duty US troops in Germany, 12,662 in Italy and 3,814 in Spain. Nato chief Mark Rutte, who was also in the Armenian capital, conceded there had "been some disappointment on the US side" over Europe's reluctance to support the US-Israeli campaign against Iran. But Europeans had "heard the message", were now providing logistical support to US operations and pre-positioning "key assets

Faced with Trump's wavering commitment and Russia's assault on Ukraine, America's Nato allies have been surging security and defence investments

close to theatre, for the next phase", he told reporters. "Europeans are stepping up - a bigger role for Europe and a stronger Nato," Rutte said ahead of the EPC meeting, dominated by the twin security threats posed by the Ukraine and Middle East wars. Following talks with Rutte, Canada's Carney said that while there was "some concern" around adjustments in US personnel, these had to "be put against the backdrop of very, very, very considerable American resources" dedicated to Nato. About 68,000 US troops are permanently stationed in Europe, according to figures from the US Department of Defence, with thousands of others deployed on a rotational basis, primarily in countries on Nato's eastern flank. Total troop numbers surged to more than 100,000 following Russia's 2022 war on Ukraine, under Joe Biden's presidency, but have fallen gradually back since then. In an interview with public broadcaster ARD on Sunday, Merz, who did not take part in the Armenia talks, appeared to confirm that a planned deployment of US long-range Tomahawk cruise missiles to Germany — announced by Biden — was also being called off. He cited depleted arsenals because of the wars in Iran and Ukraine as the reason. "We have to step up our military capabilities to be able to defend and protect ourselves," EU chief Ursula von der Leyen told reporters in Armenia.

US midterm race enters last 6 months with Congress at stake

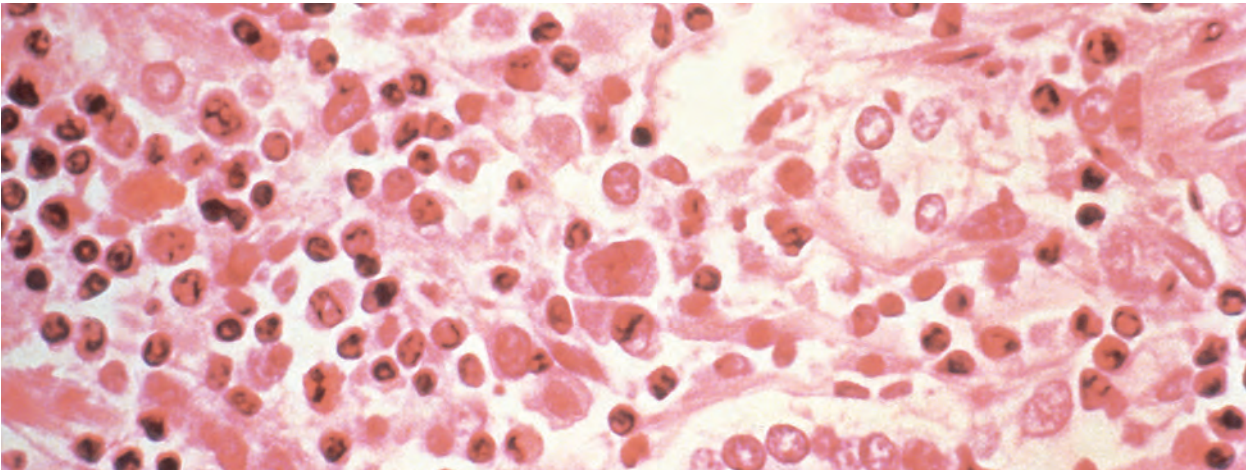
FRANKIE TAGGART

The battle for control of the US Congress entered its final six months on Sunday, with midterm elections in November that could reshape President Donald Trump's second term and redefine the balance of power in Washington. As ever, the midterms will be a referendum on the president, with Democrats hoping to capitalise on economic discontent and Trump's sliding approval ratings to retake the House of Representatives and Senate - while Republicans fight to defy political headwinds. At stake is not just legislative control but the trajectory of Trump's agenda, with a Democratic-run Congress able to launch investigations, block nominees and generally complicate the remainder of his presidency. Early indicators point to a challenging environment for Republicans, with Trump's approval rating around 40 per cent and economic dissatisfaction - particularly inflation and Iran war-related costs - eroding confidence. Polling shows Democrats with a narrow edge on the generic ballot, while some surveys suggest voters now trust them more on the economy. A Republican-aligned group, AFP Action, warned the party's Senate majority was "at risk," citing "structural headwinds" and disengaged voters. In midterm elections, Americans vote to fill all 435 House seats, about one-third of the 100-member Senate and most governorships. Democrats need to flip three House seats and four in the Senate to take control. "The Senate is on the table here," Molly Murphy, of pollster Impact Research, told cable network MS NOW, pointing to Trump's waning popularity and strong Democratic turnout in recent elections. "When the president's approval rating is at or below 40 per cent, that is when you start to see these deeper pickups in much more Republican-heavy terrain." Still, the landscape remains fluid, with structural challenges for both parties. Republicans benefit from a favourable Senate map, with Democrats needing to win in states Trump carried. And heavily gerrymandered districts - as well as a shrinking number of competitive seats - limit how far a national swing can translate into House gains. The campaign has been further complicated by a fierce redistricting battle, with states including Texas, California, North Carolina, Ohio, Florida, Missouri, Utah and Virginia pursuing new mid-decade voting maps. The overall impact of the changes — alongside a Supreme Court ruling limiting race-based redistricting — remains unclear. — AFP

Hantavirus... spread by rodents, potentially fatal

HANTAVIRUS, THE disease which has caused a deadly outbreak on a cruise ship in the southern Atlantic, circulates in rodents and can be deadly when transmitted to humans. Dutch cruise operator Oceanwide Expeditions confirmed Monday it was dealing with "a serious medical situation" on board the MV Hondius, travelling from Argentina to Cape Verde. Hantaviruses are among the pathogens that can cause respiratory and cardiac distress, as well as haemorrhagic fevers. There are no vaccines or specific medications to combat hantaviruses, meaning treatment consists solely of attempting to relieve the symptoms. There are many types of hantavirus, which vary in their geographical spread and their pathologies, according to Switzerland's FOPH health ministry. "Human-to-human transmission has only been observed with one single virus type, which is extremely rare," it says.

Hantaviruses are found on every continent. The virus is named after the Hantan River in South Korea, where more than 3,000 troops fell seriously ill after becoming infected with it during the 1950-1953 Korean War, the FOPH says. Hantaviruses are transmitted to humans through infected wild rodents, such as mice or rats, which shed the virus in their saliva, urine, and droppings. A bite, contact with these rodents or their droppings, or breathing in contaminated dust can cause infection. The French National Public Health Agency says human infection generally occurs through the inhalation of dust and aerosols contaminated by the excretions of infected animals. This is typically "during activities in forests, or in long uninhabited



A micrographic study of liver tissue seen from a Hantavirus pulmonary syndrome (HPS) patient is shown in this undated photo. — Reuters



AGNÈS PEDRERO

The writer covers international organisations in Geneva and news in Switzerland for AFP

buildings near forests, as well as during activities in rural areas where fields and farms offer a favourable environment for reservoir rodents", it says. The only way to minimise the risk of infection is to avoid contact with rodents and their secretions and excretions. The World Health Organization's Europe director Hans Kluge said hantavirus infections are "uncommon" and "it is not easily transmitted between people". "The risk to the wider public remains low. There is no need for panic or travel restrictions," he said on Monday. Suspected cases can be confirmed through various laboratory tests, according to the WHO, including through "the presence of hantavirus-specific IgM antibodies". The two most common illnesses caused by infection are haemorrhagic fever with renal syndrome (HFRS), caused by hantaviruses found mostly in Europe and Asia; and hantavirus pulmonary syndrome (HPS), caused by viruses found in the Americas. The hantavirus types in the Americas can also cause pulmonary oedema or acute respiratory failure. Different health authorities give varying time periods before symptoms start to manifest. According to the US Centers for

Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), HPS symptoms usually start to show one to eight weeks after contact. HFRS symptoms usually develop within one to two weeks after exposure, and in rare cases, up to eight weeks, says the CDC. Though most cases of hantavirus infection pass unnoticed, according to Switzerland's FOPH, hantaviruses can cause infections of varying severity in humans - sometimes fatal. The first clinical symptoms generally present like flu: fever, headache, and muscle aches. The CDC says four to 10 days after initial HPS illness, late symptoms appear, which include coughing and shortness of breath. "Patients might experience tightness in the chest, as the lungs fill with fluid," it says. The types of hantavirus prevalent in Europe and Asia can cause kidney dysfunction and even acute kidney failure. The Public Health Agency of Canada says around 200 HPS cases occur each year, primarily in North and South America, putting the average case fatality rate at 40 per cent. It adds that between 150,000 and 200,000 HFRS cases occur each year worldwide, most of which are in China, where the average case fatality rate is from one to 12 per cent.

SPORTS

Sur beat Ibri to boost hopes



Action from Sur's 2-1 win over Ibri in the Jindal League at Nizwa Sports Complex.



Scenes from Sur's valuable 2-1 triumph over Ibri in Jindal League.

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT MAY 4

SUR CLAIMED an important 2-1 victory over Ibri at Nizwa Sports Complex, producing a strong second-half response to secure three valuable points in the Jindal League and improve their position in the standings.

The match began at a lively pace, and it was Ibri who made the brighter start. The home side capitalised on an early defensive mistake by Sur's Abdulaziz al Ghailani, allowing Ali al Balushi to press high, win possession and drive a powerful effort past goalkeeper Bilal al Balushi in the fifth minute.

The early breakthrough gave Ibri confidence and briefly shifted momentum in their favour, as they looked to build on the advantage.

Sur, however, gradually settled into the contest and began to find more rhythm in possession. The two sides traded attacking moves for much of the first half, with neither team able to create sustained pressure in the final third. Ibri looked dangerous in transition, while Sur continued to search for openings through direct play and movement behind the defence.

The visitors found their way back into the match in the 41st minute when they were awarded a penalty. Foreign player Axel May stepped up and calmly sent his effort to



Sur's players press forward during their hard-fought victory against Ibri.

the right of goalkeeper Omar al Matroushi to bring Sur level before the break. The goal arrived at an important moment and changed the complexion of the contest heading into the second half.

Sur returned from the interval with greater purpose and completed the turnaround five minutes after the restart. Axel May once again played a decisive role, breaking through the Ibri defence before delivering a pass that found Waleed al Saadi in front of goal. The latter made no mistake, finishing well in the 50th minute to put Sur ahead for the first time in the match.

Ibri attempted to respond and pushed forward in search of

an equaliser, but Sur's defence remained compact and disciplined in the latter stages. While the home side managed to get into promising areas, their efforts lacked the final touch needed to seriously trouble the visitors.

Sur, meanwhile, looked the more composed side as the match progressed, managing the tempo effectively and limiting Ibri's attacking threat.

The result lifted Sur to 22 points in eighth place, giving the side a timely boost as the league enters its decisive stretch. For Ibri, the defeat left them on 20 points in 13th place and increased the pressure in the battle to avoid relegation.

Oman set for strong participation with 11 teams at GCC Games

RIYADH AL BALUSHI
@riyadhbaluch

The Oman Olympic Committee has unveiled details of the Sultanate's participation in the 4th GCC Games (Doha 2026), during a coordination meeting held on Monday morning in the presence of representatives from national teams, sports federations, as well as administrative, technical and media delegations.

Oman will take part in the event, hosted by Qatar from May 11 to 22, with 11 national teams competing across a range of sports, including aquatic sports, taekwondo, table tennis, women's 3x3 basketball, bowling, shooting, athletics, fencing, billiards and snooker, volleyball, and karate. This participation reflects Oman's ambition to achieve positive results across multiple disciplines.

The meeting reviewed key

technical and organisational aspects of the competition, including match schedules, venues, and regulations, in addition to media guidelines, medical services, and anti-doping procedures.

These discussions come as part of efforts to ensure full readiness ahead of the Games. The Oman Olympic Committee confirmed that all logistical and administrative preparations have been completed, including finalising team lists, registering delegations, and organising travel and accommodation arrangements to ensure a smooth and well-coordinated participation.

The official delegation will be led by HH Sayyid Azzan bin Qais al Said, accompanied by Abdullah bin Mohammed Bamakhlef, Secretary-General of the Oman Olympic Committee, Dr Marwan bin Juma al Juma, Deputy Head of Delegation,



A section of the attendees at the meeting held at the Olympic Committee.

Badr bin Ali Awlad Thani, Director of the Delegation, and Abdullah bin Rashid al Ghafri, Assistant Director, along with administrative, medical and media staff.

In terms of team participation, Oman's aquatic sports team will include four athletes, while the taekwondo team will feature four male and two female athletes. The table tennis team will consist of one male

and two female players, and the women's 3x3 basketball team will include four players.

The bowling team will compete with two players, while the shooting team will include 12 male and female athletes. Athletics will see participation from 16 athletes, while the karate team will have a limited representation. The fencing team will include nine

athletes, and the billiards and snooker team will feature three players. Meanwhile, the volleyball team stands out as one of the largest delegations, with 16 players.

The 4th GCC Games will bring together more than 1,074 athletes from six GCC countries, competing in 19 different sports, highlighting the continued growth of the event both technically and organisationally.

Competitions will be held across several world-class venues in Doha, including Aspire Dome, Hamad Aquatic Center, Lusail Shooting Range, Duhail Sports Hall, and Khalifa International Complex, providing an ideal environment for high-level competition.

The organising committee has adopted the slogan "One Gulf... One Heart," emphasising unity among GCC nations. The official mascot, "Oshiq," inspired by the desert lynx, symbolises agility, precision, and discipline, reflecting the region's cultural and environmental identity.

The Games will officially kick off with an opening ceremony on the evening of May 11 at Al Shaqab Arena, featuring artistic performances that blend modern elements with Qatari heritage, setting the stage for a vibrant sporting celebration of Gulf unity.



National women's basketball team players step up preparations during the internal camp in Muscat before travelling to Cyprus. — [Khalfan al Ruzaiqi](#)



Omani women's 3x3 basketball team prepare in Bausher before heading to Cyprus for their final Gulf Games build-up. — [Khalfan al Ruzaiqi](#)

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT MAY 4

OMAN'S WOMEN'S national basketball team have entered the final phase of their preparations for the fourth Gulf Games in Qatar, with an overseas training camp in Cyprus from May 4 to 10.

The camp comes as part of the team's build-up for the women's 3x3 basketball competition, scheduled from May 12 to 14 in Doha. The technical staff aim to use the Cyprus programme to sharpen the players' physical and technical readiness, while also providing valuable match exposure against different teams before the official competition begins.

Oman had earlier completed an internal camp in Muscat from April 24 to May 3 at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher under the supervision of national team

coach Wafa Zaghdoud. The sessions focused on fitness, technical drills, team chemistry and assessing the players' readiness before moving into the final overseas stage.

The squad includes Shams bint Khalil al Khanji, Reem bint Sulaiman al Sheirawi, Ruba bint Salim al Kalbani, and Fatma bint Said al Numani. The team are looking to deliver a competitive performance that reflects the steady growth of women's basketball in Oman. Zaghdoud said the team have made clear progress over the past period, helped by consistent training and participation in several competitions. She noted that the players had gained valuable experience from recent events, including a Gulf tournament in which the team finished third in the junior category, in addition to an Arab participation that also ended with a third-place finish.

The programme did not stop. We continued through several stages, including the international 3x3 basketball event held as part of Muscat Nights, which was an important



Wafa Zaghdoud
Coach, women's basketball national team

Cyprus camp would be centred on higher-intensity exposure and contact with players and teams of different levels.

Our main focus in Cyprus is strong match exposure and adapting to a higher rhythm of competition. I am confident the players will develop quickly during this camp, she added.

Speaking about the demands of 3x3 basketball, Zaghdoud said the game requires speed, strength and sharp concentration,

step in our preparation before the internal camp, she said.

Zaghdoud added that the players showed strong commitment and focus during the Muscat camp, describing the upcoming participation as an important turning point for the team. She said the

especially in transition between attack and defence. She pointed out that the technical staff are focusing on quick movement, finishing under the basket and immediate defensive recovery after scoring or losing possession.

Team captain Shams al Khanji said morale is high ahead of the Gulf Games. We have been training continuously for more than two years and have taken part in local and overseas competitions whenever possible. This is not our first participation, and we feel more prepared this time, she said.

She added that Oman had come close to winning a medal in previous appearances and that the team now feels more confident after a long period of development. Ruba al Kalbani echoed the same optimism, saying the players are improving well and training with strong spirit and intensity. She said the team's ambition goes beyond participation, with the players aiming to compete strongly and fight for a medal in Doha.

Al Sulaimi set for World Road Cycling Championship debut in Italy

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, MAY 4

Omani para cyclist Sami bin Salim al Sulaimi will make his first appearance at the World Road Cycling Championships in Italy from May 7 to 10, 2026, marking a major step in his fast-rising international career.

Al Sulaimi, one of Oman's leading para athletes, will compete in the individual time trial and the 60km road race, facing a strong field that includes some of the world's top para cyclists and professional riders. He will be accompanied by his German coach Stefan Hoffmann, who has been working closely with him on endurance, race rhythm and tactical awareness ahead of the global event.

The championship represents an important milestone for the Omani rider, as it will be his first direct test against elite world-level competitors in road cycling. Beyond the result, the participation is expected to give Al Sulaimi valuable technical and tactical experience, allowing him to



Sami al Sulaimi, accompanied by coach Stefan Hoffmann, is set to compete against elite world-level riders.

measure his performance against higher international standards and continue his development ahead of upcoming major competitions.

Al Sulaimi has emerged as one of the standout names in Asian para cycling after winning the Asian title for three consecutive years in 2024, 2025 and 2026. His consistency at continental level has underlined his growing potential and strengthened his status as one of the region's most promising riders in para cycling.

The Italian championship also forms part of a broader preparation programme developed by the Oman Paralympic Committee, the athlete and his technical team to raise his physical and technical readiness for the next phase, particularly the Asian Games, which will be hosted by Japan later this year.

Dr Mansoor bin Sultan al Touqi, Chairman of the Oman Paralympic Committee, said Al Sulaimi's participation comes within an integrated preparation plan aimed at improving his readiness for the coming assignments.

This world participation is an important preparatory station for Sami, especially as road races require high levels of endurance, focus and experience in dealing with fast race tempo and group tactics, Dr Al Touqi said.

He added that coach Hoffmann has been working to develop these aspects in Al Sulaimi's performance, expressing hope that the rider will deliver a strong showing in his first world championship appearance.



Recall

Recall Date: 05/05/2026

GWM TANK 500

Brand of Commodity	Year of Production	Number of Affected Commodities
GWM TANK 500	2023-2026	88

Recall consequence

The rear windshield cannot perform the defrosting function. In 2023, during the introduction of the TANK 500 to GCC market, a change in project personnel and the complexity of global configuration development led to an error in the configuration of the rear window defroster system. While the physical switch and rear window heating components were reserved in the design, the associated wiring harness BOM data was omitted, resulting in the functionality not being implemented.

Recall Action

Dealers will inspect and, if necessary, Replace the rear door wiring assembly + replace the central control panel switch assembly + install the electric heating wire assembly + reprogram the HUT/AC configuration

To check the serial Numbers of the affected commodities, please visit the website for Recalls & Warnings: <http://recall.pacc.gov.om>
Toll free No 80050004 on all working days between 8.00 AM to 1.00 PM & 2.00 PM to 5.00 PM with effect from Date 5/5/2026



Scan the QR code to check the status of the recall. Please refer to the recall notice for more details.



Oman Trading Establishment LLC



Customer Feedback Hotline: 80050004

SPORTS

Sinner dismantles Zverev to win Madrid Open, set record



WORLD number one Jannik Sinner dispatched Alexander Zverev 6-1, 6-2 on Sunday to win the Madrid Open for the first time.

The Italian claimed a record fifth consecutive Masters 1000 title and stretched his winning streak to 23 matches with a superb display in the Spanish capital.

Only greats Roger Federer, Rafa Nadal and Novak Djokovic had managed to win four titles at this level in a row.

“I’ll never be able to compare myself to Rafa, Novak and Roger, what they’ve achieved is incredible, over 10 or 15 years,” Sinner told Movistar.

“I’m trying to make my own mark, but I’m doing it for myself, I don’t play for the records, I’m just putting myself in a position to succeed.”

Sinner said he felt he was playing extremely well, in contrast to his opponent, who struggled to produce his best.

“Today I played very, very solid tennis. Sascha didn’t play very well today, but if I don’t get a break or two right away and stay out in front, his legs get going and he gains a bit of confidence, especially here on this court,” he continued.

“He’s been playing late all tournament, so his schedule is

“
Today I played very, very solid tennis. Sascha didn’t play very well today, but if I don’t get a break or two right away and stay out in front, his legs get going and he gains a bit of confidence, especially here on this court.”

JANNIK SINNER

also a bit off, but I can be happy with what I’m doing.”

Sinner has been in impeccable form and broke world number three Zverev’s first service game before consolidating for a 3-0 lead.

The Italian, who also won the eight prior meetings against Zverev, secured another break and eased into a 5-0 advantage on his serve.

In the sixth game Zverev produced his first hold, but there was nothing the 29-year-old could do about Sinner’s powerful serving.

The four-time Grand Slam winner has been working on increasing his variety and a drop shot left Zverev scrambling before Sinner clinched the first set with an ace.

World number two Carlos Alcaraz’s wrist injury has left Sinner with no realistic rival in the weeks ahead, leading up to Roland Garros.

Sinner broke in the third game of the second set to tighten his grip on the title.

Zverev, a two-time Madrid winner who thrives at altitude, showed more fight than in the first stanza but could not stop his opponent.

Sinner hammered down a forehand winner for another break to take a 5-2 lead and serve for the championship.

The Italian sealed his triumph serving to love to wrap up a sublime fortnight in Madrid where nobody has come close to stopping him. — AFP



Italy’s Jannik Sinner celebrates with the Madrid Open trophy after winning the men’s final with runner-up Germany’s Alexander Zverev. — Reuters

Italy’s Jannik Sinner celebrates with the trophy after winning the 2026 ATP Tour Madrid Open tennis tournament final singles match against Germany’s Alexander Zverev. — AFP

MUSCAT STOCK EXCHANGE
8,397.650

BUSINESS

CRUDE OIL
OMAN \$102.04
BRENT \$111.66
LIGHT \$104.76



First Omani investor for AI zone

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, MAY 4

OMANI real estate and investment firm Afouq says it has been selected by Omani authorities to develop and operate a section of the new Special Artificial Intelligence Zone in Muscat Governorate, formally established by Royal Decree just last week.

Muscat-based Afouq Investment and Development United, which has a presence across Oman, Saudi Arabia and Yemen, among other markets, announced in a post that it has been granted a licence to develop, operate and manage a roughly 105,000 m² plot within the new AI-focused zone.

Commenting on the licence, Dr Siham al Harthy, Chairperson of Afouq, said: “We take great pride in this trust, becoming the first private sector operator of a special economic zone in this vital field. This reflects a qualitative shift in empowering the private sector as a key partner in leading New Economy projects”.

“Our role as developer and operator is centred on leveraging



We take great pride in this trust, becoming the first private sector operator of a special economic zone in this vital field. This reflects a qualitative shift in empowering the private sector as a key partner in leading New Economy projects.

DR SIHAM AL HARTHY
Chairperson,
Afouq



The AI zone is positioned as a cornerstone of Oman's broader economic diversification agenda.

the exceptional incentives provided by the zone's regulatory environment, including tax and customs exemptions and land usufruct rights. Our objective is to attract major global corporations and start-ups in strategic sectors such as semiconductors, quantum computing and cybersecurity”.

Royal Decree No 50/2026, issued last week, formalises the establishment of the Artificial Intelligence Special Economic Zone to operate within the framework of Oman's special economic zones law, offering a package of incentives, exemptions and privileges designed to attract both global technology firms and local innovators.

The zone will be overseen by the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones in coordination with the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, which will jointly supervise its development, management and operations.

Strategically, the AI zone is positioned as a cornerstone of Oman's broader economic diversification agenda under Oman Vision 2040, with artificial intelligence identified as a key driver of future growth.

The initiative aims to accelerate investment in advanced technologies, support start-ups and foster innovation

across sectors such as logistics, healthcare, energy and urban development.

It also reflects a wider push to increase the contribution of the digital economy to national GDP, while strengthening Oman's position as a regional hub for emerging technologies and enhancing long-term digital self-sufficiency.

Plans for a dedicated AI Special Economic Zone were first unveiled last September at Comex 2025. Afouq announced at the time that it had been entrusted with the first phase of the zone's development, covering an area of 100,000 m².

A partnership between Afouq and Egypt's Prime Group also envisaged investment inflows of around RO 100 million in this initial phase.

In its most recent post on Monday, Afouq's Chairperson Dr Al Harthy said the company was committed to working closely with government entities to ensure the zone's readiness to become a premier destination for innovators and entrepreneurs.

“This initiative aims to increase the digital economy's contribution to GDP to 4.2% and provide high-quality employment opportunities for Omani youth, aligning with the objectives of the 11th Five-Year Plan and Oman Vision 2040”, she added.

New fuel station regulatory framework from May 6

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 4

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) will begin implementing the provisions of the new regulatory framework for fuel filling stations, issued under Ministerial Decision No 142/2025, effective Wednesday, May 6, 2026.

This move comes in line with the MoCIIP's continued efforts to advance the fuel station sector by enhancing the quality of services provided to consumers and supporting the investment environment through updating regulatory frameworks and streamlining procedures for issuing licences to establish and operate stations, thereby improving sector efficiency and keeping pace with economic growth requirements.

The MoCIIP noted that the fuel filling station sector in Oman recorded notable activity during 2026, with 16 applications submitted for the establishment of new stations, alongside the issuance of two operating licences and six licences to construct fuel filling stations, reflecting growing investment interest in this vital sector.

Nasra bint Sultan al Habsi, Director General of Commerce at the MoCIIP, affirmed that the new updates to the regulatory framework aim to simplify licensing procedures and classify stations according to modern technical and planning standards that ensure sustainability and strengthen the local investment environment,



The new framework aims to enhance service quality and develop the energy sector's infrastructure, in line with the goals of Oman Vision 2040.

while providing integrated services that meet consumer needs, improve urban planning efficiency and support economic growth across the governorates of Oman.

Eng Ahmed bin Mubarak al Balushi, Head of Petroleum Products Licensing Section at the MoCIIP, said the new regulation represents a developmental shift in organising the sector, noting that it is aligned with market developments and urban planning requirements.

He added that the regulation aims to organise and classify licences for establishing and operating fuel stations, while setting clear technical and planning requirements. Stations have been classified into four categories based on size and the type of services provided: integrated stations with a minimum area of 10,000 square metres, commercial stations at 3,000 square metres, smart self-service stations at 800 square metres and mobile stations that provide services through portable units.

He pointed out that the regulation sets precise requirements for distances between stations, stipulating a minimum of 5 kilometres between stations in the same or opposite direction on non-dual carriageways, with certain exceptions for locations in Muscat Governorate and the Wilayats of Salalah and Suhar, based on economic feasibility and regional needs.

It also requires a minimum distance of 50 kms between integrated stations in the same direction, with exceptions permitted by decision of the competent committee based on defined technical and planning criteria.

Regarding requirements, Eng Ahmed al Balushi explained that establishing fuel stations requires proof of ownership, a lease agreement or usufruct rights, with the site designated for commercial or mixed residential-commercial use, in addition to meeting economic feasibility, safety, technical and planning requirements, as well as providing hydrogen refuelling services.

البنك الوطني العماني
لدول مجلس التعاون الخليجي
National Bank of Oman GCC Fund

National Bank of Oman GCC Fund

Investment Manager Report For Quarter 1 2026

GCC equity markets delivered a mixed but resilient performance during Q1 2026, supported by strong oil prices, robust banking sector fundamentals, and continued progress in economic diversification across the region. The quarter began with strong investor risk appetite and foreign inflows, before geopolitical tensions toward the end of the period introduced volatility across regional markets.

Elevated hydrocarbon prices remained a key macro tailwind, supporting fiscal balances and government spending across GCC economies. Non-oil sector growth continued to underpin economic momentum, particularly in Saudi Arabia and the UAE. The regional banking sector remained the primary earnings driver, supported by healthy credit growth, stable asset quality, and elevated interest rate environments that sustained net interest margins. Energy and industrial sectors also benefited from firm commodity prices, while real estate and consumer segments showed selective performance.

Country Highlights (Q1 2026): -

Improving domestic liquidity, attractive valuations, and renewed investor interest in smaller GCC markets led to Muscat being the best performing market with a gain of 42%.

While relative resilience supported by banking sector earnings strength and continued oil exports led to Tadawul rising by 7.23% Abu Dhabi and Dubai benchmarks were down by 4.72 % and 10.73 % led by fall in real estate and banking names due to risk off and high Fill selling. Bursa Kuwait (-5.51%) lost all gains of Jan and Feb in March as it was one of the most impacted by geopolitics

On YTD basis, the Fund was up by 3.15 % while the index gained 1.15%. Outperformance was primarily driven by the overweight in the Tadawul Index and underweight in the UAE market. Alpha was generated through concentrated positions in Oman.

Market direction is expected to remain linked to oil price stability, global interest rate expectations, and geopolitical developments, while domestic reform momentum and earnings growth continue to provide medium-term support for regional equities.

Overall, we believe that our portfolio is well positioned to withstand the volatile scenario expected for the remaining 9 months for the year 2026 and our endeavor is to deliver positive results to the unit holders.

INTERIM STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION AS AT 31 MARCH 2026			
	31 March 2026 ﷈	31 March 2025 ﷈	31 Dec 2025 ﷈
Assets			
Investments at fair value through profit or loss	11,133,073	10,902,635	10,726,667
Cash and cash equivalents	573,679	945,942	341,954
Dividends receivable	48,300	56,786	-
Total assets	11,755,052	11,905,363	11,068,621
Liabilities			
Dividend payable	-	659,918	-
Accruals and other payables	215,854	48,138	43,418
Total liabilities	215,854	708,056	43,418
Total net assets attributable to the Unitholders	11,539,198	11,197,307	11,025,203
Net asset value per unit	1.061	1.015	1.028
INTERIM STATEMENT OF COMPREHENSIVE INCOME FOR THE THREE MONTHS PERIOD ENDED 31 MARCH 2026			
	31 March 2026 ﷈	31 March 2025 ﷈	31 Dec 2025 ﷈
	(3 months)	(3 months)	(12 months)
INCOME			
Fair value changes in investments at fair value through profit or loss	334,992	(220,664)	47,215
Dividend income	91,341	105,763	335,147
Net realised gain / (loss) on investments at fair value through profit or loss	5,232	(18,869)	(278,376)
Interest income	236	283	993
Other income	735	-	104,370
	432,536	(133,487)	209,349
EXPENSE			
Management fees	(32,856)	(33,820)	(132,423)
Fund Management Body fees	(17,452)	(18,027)	(33,600)
Brokerage expenses	(7,325)	(5,318)	(58,057)
Administrator fees	(4,480)	(4,612)	(18,058)
General and administration	(3,878)	(3,714)	(21,554)
Custodian fees	(2,550)	(2,716)	(11,453)
Foreign exchange loss	-	(533)	(569)
	(68,541)	(68,740)	(275,714)
Net profit / (loss) and total comprehensive income/(loss) for the period / year	363,995	(202,227)	(66,365)
Net profit / (loss) per unit	0.034	(0.018)	(0.006)

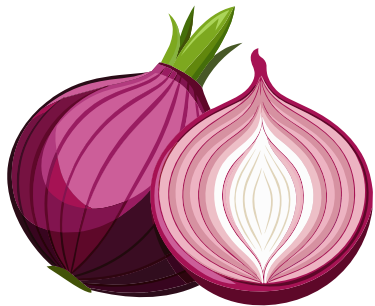
Investment Manager & Administrator

Note: The complete accounts, in Arabic or English as requested, will be sent by mail to any shareholder within 7 days of a written request addressed to the Administrator, Investment Banking Operations, National Bank of Oman, P.O.Box,751, PC 112, Ruwi, Sultanate of Oman. Tel: 24778757, Fax: 24778993 Email: GCCFund@nbo.co.om

البنك الوطني العماني
NBO

BUSINESS FEATURE

KEY PROJECTS IN AL NAJD



ONION CULTIVATION
4.8 MN



GARLIC PRODUCTION
2.3 MN

THE AGRICULTURAL CITIES OF SAHAM IN AL BATINAH NORTH AND AL NAJD IN DHOFAR ARE AT THE FOREFRONT OF THESE INITIATIVES. DEVELOPED USING ADVANCED TECHNOLOGIES, THEY RELY ON HYDROPONICS, ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND REMOTE SENSING, BOOSTING PRODUCTIVITY WHILE REDUCING WATER CONSUMPTION BY 60% TO 90% COMPARED TO TRADITIONAL FARMING.

FROM
TRADITIONAL
AGRICULTURE
TO SMART
AGRI-CITIES

AFRAH AL BALUSHI

Rapid economic activity in 2026 is driving the development of integrated agricultural cities as part of the objectives of Oman Vision 2040. This strategic direction aims to enhance food security and diversify national income.

The transformation is underpinned by strong indicators reflecting the scale of investment and ambition to build a modern, technology-driven and sustainable agricultural sector.

The agricultural cities of Saham in Al Batinah North and Al Najd in Dhofar are at the forefront of these initiatives. Developed using advanced technologies, they rely on hydroponics, artificial intelligence and remote sensing, boosting productivity while reducing water consumption by 60% to 90% compared to traditional farming.

They also feature integrated infrastructure, including processing and packaging centres, cold storage and renewable energy systems, enhancing supply chain efficiency.

On the investment front, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, in cooperation with Invest in Oman, announced 400 investment opportunities in 2026 worth around RO 400 million, with implementation targeted before mid-year.

Key projects in Al Najd include an onion cultivation and processing project valued at RO 4.8 million, a garlic production project worth RO 2.3 million and greenhouse projects for potatoes, melons and leafy vegetables. These initiatives highlight efforts to boost strategic crop production and reduce import dependence.

Eng Salem bin Saif al Abdali, an economic analyst and food security expert, noted that each governorate in Oman has a distinct agricultural profile — from Dhofar’s tropical crops to the date palms of Al Sharqiyah North and South and the fertile lands of Al Batinah.

“Our diversity is the source of our strength in achieving food sovereignty”, he said, stressing that food security underpins both economic and national security.

As part of cross-sector integration, the “Salalah Gardens” project is being developed as the first integrated agritourism destination, spanning over 5.5 million square metres. It combines agricultural production with tourism and leisure, focusing on tropical crops such as coconuts and papayas alongside hospitality and retail offerings.

Meanwhile, the “Jinan Tech” project is entering its second phase, featuring three greenhouse models — traditional, smart and hybrid — to test best practices in controlled-environment agriculture, enhance productivity and

build national expertise.

Agricultural performance indicators show steady progress, with the sector growing 4.3% in 2024 and expected to maintain momentum. Oman has achieved high self-sufficiency in several commodities, including fish (136%, export surplus), dates (99%) and vegetables (77%), with plans to expand self-sufficiency in poultry, onions and garlic.

In land management, 18 agricultural usufruct contracts were signed in 2026, valued at over RO 1.9 million, supporting projects in vegetables, grapes and beekeeping using modern techniques. These initiatives aim to empower local entrepreneurs and investors.

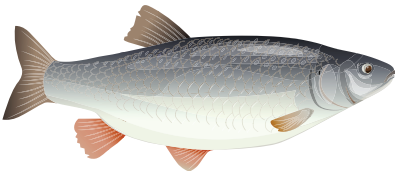
The adoption of advanced technologies — including soilless farming, drones for crop monitoring and pollination, sensor-based irrigation and solar-powered systems — is further enhancing efficiency, reducing costs and conserving resources, particularly water.

Experts emphasise that integrated agricultural cities are central to achieving sustainable food security, enabling year-round production and reducing vulnerability to global market fluctuations. They also contribute to GDP growth, attract investment and create high-quality jobs in agri-tech, engineering and research, supporting balanced regional development.

Overall, these indicators highlight the scale of transformation underway in Oman’s agricultural sector as the Sultanate of Oman advances towards a sustainable, innovation-led economic model capable of achieving self-sufficiency and strengthening its regional position in smart agriculture.

OMAN’S ACHIEVEMENT IN COMMODITIES

FISH
136%



DATES
99%

VEGETABLES
99%



SHORTTAKES



The Engineering Contracts Forum 2026 has brought together regional and international experts.

Contracts reform in focus as Oman scales up project pipeline

MUSCAT: Oman is stepping up efforts to modernise its engineering contract framework as a growing pipeline of strategic projects exposes execution risks around delays, cost overruns and dispute management.

The Engineering Contracts Forum 2026, which opened in Muscat on Monday, brought together regional and international experts to review global best practice in contract design, risk allocation and project delivery.

The two-day forum is organised by the Oman Society of Engineers in partnership with the Projects, Tenders and Local Content Authority, at a time when Oman is accelerating infrastructure and industrial projects aligned with Oman Vision 2040.

Speaking at the opening, Eng Badr bin Salim al Maamari, Chairman of the Projects, Tenders and Local Content Authority, said engineering contracts remain the “foundation” of project success, shaping relationships between government entities, contractors and consultants.

“Through contracts, execution efficiency, quality of outputs, cost control and adherence to timelines are achieved”, he said, adding that Oman has been developing digital platforms to improve transparency, unify data and enhance decision-making in project management. The reforms come amidst rising complexity in project delivery, with multiple stakeholders and financing structures increasing the need for clearer contractual frameworks and stronger governance.

Fouad bin Abdullah al Kindi, Chairman of the Oman Society of Engineers, said tighter contractual controls and better integration between entities are essential to ensure efficient use of resources and consistent project outcomes.

PDO awards contract for fracturing services

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 4

PETROLEUM Development Oman (PDO) has awarded a strategic contract to Abraj Energy Services for the provision of hydraulic fracturing services, as the national operator steps up efforts to boost well productivity, maximise hydrocarbon recovery and deepen in-country value.

Hydraulic fracturing is a core component of PDO’s upstream operations, enabling access to complex reservoirs and supporting production optimisation. Under the agreement, Abraj will deploy advanced fracturing technologies, including optimised proppant and gelling systems, aimed at improving efficiency and delivering high-performance outcomes aligned with PDO’s production targets.

Dr Aflah al Hadhrami, PDO Managing Director, said the partnership strengthens both operational delivery and national capability development

“This partnership with Abraj Energy Services brings us closer to maximising value from our assets while strengthening national capabilities and reinforcing our leading role in advancing local content in Oman.

Hydraulic fracturing is essential to unlocking Oman’s hydrocarbon potential and working with a capable national partner enables us to deliver efficient, sustainable production, in alignment with the objectives of our Journey of Transformation, ‘For Oman’”.

He added that PDO remains focused on nurturing competitive Omani companies within the energy ecosystem.

“We are equally committed to developing Omani companies into



The agreement was signed by Dr Aflah al Hadhrami, PDO Managing Director and Eng Saif al Hamhami, Chief Executive Officer of Abraj Energy Services.

The contract forms part of PDO’s broader supply chain transformation strategy, which emphasises long-term partnerships with capable local suppliers while integrating operational excellence with capability building. The approach is designed to deliver sustainable value and support the development of a resilient, competitive energy sector.

national champions. This contract reflects our continued efforts to empower local players, enhance their technical capabilities and position them to compete regionally and internationally, in line with Oman Vision 2040”.

The contract forms part of PDO’s broader supply chain transformation strategy, which emphasises long-term partnerships with capable local suppliers while integrating operational excellence with capability building.

The approach is designed to deliver sustainable value and support the development of a resilient, competitive energy sector.

Eng Saif al Hamhami, CEO of Abraj Energy Services, said the contract marks a significant step in expanding the company’s technical scope. “We are particularly pleased to have been awarded this upgraded contract by PDO, which expands

our scope of work and enables us to participate in technically advanced and high-end fracturing operations.

This award is a strong endorsement of PDO’s confidence in Abraj’s ability to consistently deliver high quality, reliable services.

It highlights our operational strength, reinforces our position as Oman’s local champion in unlocking hydrocarbon reserves and supports our long-term growth in a competitive market. We remain committed to fostering lasting partnerships and delivering value across the energy sector”.

Through such collaborations, PDO continues to consolidate its role in supporting Oman’s long-term energy sustainability and economic diversification, leveraging technology, partnerships and local expertise to unlock greater value from Oman’s hydrocarbon resources.

Oman startups urged to build beyond borders early

WALAA HAMDAN & JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, MAY 4

Founders in Oman must look beyond the domestic market from the outset if they are to build investable companies, according to insights shared by Vinnie Lauria, Founding Partner at Golden Gate Ventures, during a session organised by Startup Grind Muscat, hosted by Walaa Hamdan.

While the discussion reflected an open and practical exchange with the local startup community, it also highlighted a structural challenge for founders in smaller markets such as Oman: the task is not only to build a good company, but to build one capable of scaling beyond its home base.

Lauria outlined three key considerations — early cross-border thinking, signals of



Vinnie Lauria, Founding Partner at Golden Gate Ventures, during a session organised by Startup Grind Muscat.

investability and a clearer understanding of how investors make decisions.

“Building only for the domestic market may feel disciplined, but it can also be limiting”, he said, noting that startups in smaller economies need to think in more than one country from an early stage.

This is particularly relevant in Oman, where the startup ecosystem continues to gain traction amidst broader economic diversification efforts. Founders are often encouraged to scale, but less frequently guided on what that entails in practice.

Lauria cautioned against the common approach of focusing solely on achieving market leadership locally before expanding. In some cases, he observed, companies that remain concentrated on their first

market risk being overtaken by competitors that expand earlier and adapt faster across multiple markets.

On investability, Lauria stressed that ambition alone is insufficient. Investors, he said, look for clear indications that a business can operate across different environments.

He pointed to the composition of founding teams as one such indicator, noting that teams with international exposure or diverse backgrounds are often better equipped to navigate new markets. He cited Carro as an example of a company that benefitted from cross-border insight within its founding team.

“What worked in one country did not automatically work in another. The ability to adapt the model was critical”, he said. Even where founders are locally

rooted, investors still assess their ability to operate across cultures — whether through prior experience, partnerships or exposure to international markets.

Lauria also highlighted a recurring gap in how founders approach fundraising. Venture capital firms, he explained, typically invest based on defined theses aligned with specific sectors and trends.

“A rejection does not necessarily mean the idea is weak. It may simply mean the company sits outside that investor’s focus”, he said.

As such, founders were advised to take a more targeted approach to fundraising — identifying investors whose mandates align with their business and refining their pitch through early-stage engagement before approaching priority investors.

ENERGY TRADE

Global LNG exports hit two-year low



Global liquefied natural gas (LNG) exports fell to about 33 million tonnes in April, the lowest in nearly two years, amidst tanker disruptions linked to the US-Israeli war against Iran.

A production halt in top-producer Qatar weighed on supply, although higher output from the United States and Canada partially offset losses, limiting the year-on-year decline to around 7 per cent. — Reuters

MARKET TRENDS

Gold slips as inflation concerns persist



Gold prices edged lower as inflation concerns clouded the outlook for US monetary policy and investors awaited progress in US-Iran talks. Spot gold fell 0.3 per cent, while futures declined 0.7 per cent.

The US Federal Reserve maintained rates with a hawkish stance, dampening expectations of cuts. Other metals were mixed, while oil remained above \$100 per barrel. — ONA

CURRENCY MARKETS

Yen steadies on intervention expectations



The Japanese yen stabilised in early Asian trade, rising 0.1 per cent to 156.885 against the US dollar, amidst expectations of government intervention. The yen gained about 1.4 per cent last month, supported by suspected official action.

The Dollar held steady, while the euro edged higher. Cryptocurrencies, like Bitcoin, showed mixed performance in cautious trading. — Reuters

OPINION

Oman’s artificial intelligence (AI) zone in a nutshell



TARIQ AL BARWANI

The writer is strategic adviser, businessman and motivational speaker

UNLIKE other countries, we in Oman do not really make noise but rather action by making moves. Yes, through Royal Decree No 50/2026, issued by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, Oman has formally established a dedicated zone focused entirely on artificial intelligence and advanced technologies. What does this mean? We are indeed making moves with artificial intelligence.

The launch of the AI Special Zone in Muscat is one of those decisions that may not look dramatic today but has the potential to reshape the country’s economic future over the next decade. This is not just another free zone designed to attract general business.

It is highly targeted, built around a single idea: if AI is the future, then Oman wants a controlled environment where that future can be built locally.

What makes this initiative interesting is how intentional it is. The zone will operate under the special economic zones framework, meaning companies will benefit from incentives, exemptions and a more flexible regulatory setup.

But beyond incentives, the real value lies in the ecosystem being designed. One that allows startups, global tech companies and researchers to build, test and scale solutions faster than they typically would.

According to recent updates, the zone will be located in the Wilayat of Al Seeb, Muscat Governorate and span around 104,000 square metres, positioning it close to key infrastructure and making it accessible for both local and international players. It is expected to host industries that go beyond just software. Industries include, but are not limited to, semiconductors, robotics and integrated AI systems. The aim is to see the zone connecting multiple sectors into one innovation-driven environment.

The AI zone is aligned with the country’s broader economic direction under Oman Vision 2040 and the Eleventh Five-Year Development Plan (2026–2030), both of which emphasise diversification, digital transformation and the shift towards a knowledge-based economy. Accelerating the digital economy while reducing reliance on traditional sectors is the ultimate goal.

The AI zone is designed to act as a platform, not just a location. It will serve as a hub for startups from Oman and abroad, giving them a structured environment to grow and expand into regional and global markets.

At the same time, it is expected to attract foreign investment, something that has already been highlighted as a key driver behind the initiative. The digital economy contributed only around 2% of GDP in 2021 and the national target is to push that

The AI Special Zone in Muscat is not just another free zone designed to attract general business. It is highly targeted, built around a single idea: if AI is the future, then Oman wants a controlled environment where that future can be built locally.

to 10% by 2040. Startups would have a bigger advantage where they will have an environment that removes friction, ie, getting faster licensing, easier access to investors and a support system that understands tech businesses.

For global companies, Oman will be offering something different from our neighbours, for example, a less crowded entry point into the region, combined with strong government backing. And for local talent, this could be one of the most important shifts in recent years, opening doors to specialised careers in AI, robotics and data science.

Artificial intelligence is not a standalone industry but an enabler. It enhances logistics, improves healthcare systems, optimises tourism experiences and drives smarter manufacturing. By investing in AI infrastructure now, Oman is effectively investing in multiple sectors at once. It is building a multiplier effect, not just a single stream of growth.

This is indeed not just a smart move but also a competitive one. The region is already active in AI, with major investments coming from neighbouring countries. Oman is entering the space slightly later, but that might actually work in our favour. It has the advantage of learning from others, avoiding unnecessary complexity and building a more focused and efficient ecosystem.

A FRAMEWORK FOR SAFEGUARDING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

MURTADHA M J IBRAHIM AL JAMALANI

Safeguarding and protecting citizens, residents and investors is a fundamental responsibility of the state. This includes ensuring security from natural and human-made risks, protecting assets and economic activities and maintaining a stable and trusted environment that supports sustainable development and economic growth.

The Sultanate of Oman is strategically located in the southeastern part of the Arabian Peninsula, overlooking the Indian Ocean and the Arabian Sea. Its position near the Tropic of Cancer contributes to its unique geographic and climatic diversity.

The country is characterised by varied topography, including coastal areas, plains, mountains and valleys, which has influenced the distribution of population and economic activities. Most of the population resides along the coast, in valleys and on mountain slopes, engaging in fishing, trade, agriculture, livestock rearing and various professions across both the public and private sectors. This diversity has contributed to a balanced socio-economic structure and supported national development efforts.

Non-oil GDP has shown steady growth despite fluctuations, at times exceeding 30% of total economic output. Key sectors such as agriculture, fisheries and livestock play a significant role within the frameworks of the green and blue economy, reinforcing economic diversification. To safeguard these achievements, there is a growing need to strengthen risk management and insurance systems, while drawing on international best practices that promote resilience, growth and long-term sustainability across short-, medium- and long-term horizons.

The Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, through its Finance & Insurance and Food Security Committees, intensified efforts during 2018–2022 to develop the infrastructure needed to support the national economic vision. This included collaboration with insurance and reinsurance companies to design specialised products such as agricultural insurance, insurance for fishing boats and equipment, livestock insurance and poultry farm insurance.

These initiatives were further strengthened through coordination with relevant government entities, including the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources; the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology; the Financial Services Authority; the Royal Oman Police (Coast Guard); farmers’ and fishermen’s associations; the Central Bank of Oman; the Development Bank; and specialised private sector providers.

The success of these efforts depends on developing qualified national human capital capable of meeting the requirements of sustainable development and achieving future strategic objectives.

How airport free zones reshape global trade

THERE is a quiet revolution taking place on the tarmac. While the world debates tariffs and trade wars, a different kind of economic architecture is emerging in the shadows of airport terminals; one that may prove more consequential than any bilateral agreement signed in a capital city.

Airport-integrated free zones, once dismissed as glorified customs exemptions, have evolved into some of the most potent instruments of economic diversification in the developing world. And nowhere is this transformation more visible than in the Arabian Peninsula, where governments are betting billions that proximity to a runway can reshape industrial and trade dynamics at a national scale.

The numbers make the case compellingly. Aviation contributes roughly 4.3% of GDP across the Middle East, a figure that exceeds the global average and is projected to more than double by 2043, reaching approximately \$730 billion.

Every dollar of direct aviation value generates an estimated \$3.60 in broader economic activity. In the United Arab Emirates alone, aviation’s contribution to GDP reaches 18.2%, nearly five times the world average.

These are not marginal effects; they represent structural economic drivers capable of reshaping national income profiles. Yet the real story is not about airlines or passenger terminals. It is about what happens on the ground beside them. Airport free zones — purpose-built enclaves offering fiscal incentives, streamlined regulation and direct cargo access — have become the primary mechanism through which Gulf states are converting geographic advantage into sustained industrial and logistics capacity. The concept has matured well beyond tax holidays.

Today’s leading zones function as integrated aerotropolises: self-contained economic ecosystems where logistics, manufacturing, e-commerce and knowledge services cluster around high-speed air connectivity. The regional track



The Muscat Airport Free Zone (MAFZ), managed by Asyad Group, represents a critical node in this strategy.



DR YOUSUF HAMED AL BALUSHI

yousufh@omaninvestgateway.com

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

The zone offers 100% foreign ownership, a 15-year corporate tax holiday extendable by five years, zero import or re-export duties and no minimum capital requirements.

record is instructive.

Dubai Airport Freezone, adjacent to one of the world’s busiest international airports, has attracted thousands of companies by offering full foreign ownership, zero corporate tax and complete profit repatriation. It has more recently pivoted towards green industries, achieving a 48% reduction in its carbon footprint.

Saudi Arabia has raised the stakes further with its Integrated Logistics Special Bonded Zone near Riyadh, offering an unprecedented 50-year tax holiday and tarmac-to-warehouse transfers in under four hours.

Qatar’s Ras Bufontas, directly beside Hamad International Airport, has positioned itself as a hub for pharmaceuticals and high-value logistics, with 5G-ready infrastructure and competitive energy costs.

Even Bahrain’s Express Cargo Village is scaling from 360,000 to 1.3 million tonnes of annual cargo capacity. Competition in this space is intensifying rapidly.

What unites these initiatives is a shared recognition that in an era of fractured supply chains and rising protectionism, speed is the new tariff advantage. When a pharmaceutical shipment from Mumbai can clear customs and reach a regional distribution centre in hours rather than days, the economic calculus shifts dramatically.

Airport free zones compress time and time compression creates value particularly for the sectors that matter most in a post-oil economy: electronics, pharmaceuticals, perishable goods and e-commerce fulfilment. This is precisely the logic underpinning Oman’s ambitious entry into the airport free zone arena.

The country’s Oman Vision 2040 identifies logistics as one of five priority sectors for economic transformation, with targets to grow the sector’s GDP contribution to 14% and generate 300,000 jobs. Non-oil sectors already account for over 60% of Omani GDP and the government aims to push that figure to 90% by 2040.

The Muscat Airport Free Zone (MAFZ), managed by Asyad Group within a 1.7 million square metre master plan, represents a critical node in this strategy.

Located just two kilometres from the air cargo terminal of Muscat International Airport — which itself handles over 350,000 tonnes of annual cargo capacity across 150-plus destinations — the zone offers 100% foreign ownership, a 15-year corporate tax holiday extendable by five years, zero import or re-export duties and no minimum capital requirements.

But the Omani proposition extends beyond fiscal incentives. What distinguishes MAFZ from many of its regional competitors is its integration within the broader Asyad logistics ecosystem, which connects air cargo with seaports, inland transport and cold-chain infrastructure in a single operational framework.

The recently announced OPAZ 2026–2030 strategic plan reinforces this approach, prioritising infrastructure delivery, regulatory simplification and sector-specific clustering aligned with national economic priorities.

The Oman-India Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement adds another dimension, creating preferential trade access and corridor efficiencies that enhance the zone’s attractiveness for businesses targeting South Asian and East African markets.

CLASSIFIEDS

SIT. WANTED

SALES professional with 5 yrs Experience in Medical sector. Graduate, Available in Muscat. akhilmanu777@gmail.com Contact: 76323324

INDIAN male, 10 year experience in Oman as Coordinator have Driving licence. 90789282

LOGISTICS Documentation Executive. Indian male, 25 years, BBA, PG Diploma in Logistics & SCM and have 2 years of experience in this field. Seeking a position in Logistics field Mob: +968 7506 9882 Mail: shafazhussain18@gmail.com

ACCOUNTS/ SALES Indian male (b com) having 2+ years of experience in India accounts sales looking for suitable placement, join immediately. Contact: 76324360

15+ experience in building material, project sales & Trade market, deal with corporate project customers, looking for a suitable job. Contact 78384283

INDIAN male MBA Graduate with 15yrs experience in Oman seek suitable senior position in finance office admin., sales DTC. Contact: 94158080

OPERATIONS Support / Tendering / Contract Management / Procurement professional with 18+ years' Oil & Gas experience. NOC & driving license available. 96227272, jijilmathew@gmail.com

INDIAN electrical engineer more than 20 years experience in “MEP” construction field in Oman seeks suitable job. Contact: 92919281

ACCOUNTS/ Finance: Indian male (MBA Fin) having more than 19 years of experience in Oman accounts & finance looking for suitable placement, NOC available and can join immediately. Contact: 92076716

INDIAN male civil engineer with more than 30 years experience in different ministers, seek immediate suitable position. CONTACT: 94158080

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SIT. WANTED

LOGISTICS Indian male 24 years, graduate in BBA,PG diploma in logistics and SCM ,6 months of warehouse experience seeking a position in logistics and warehouse fields Contact: +96896161349 Mail: nadanmathew2000@gmail.com

LOOKING for Pipeline Engineer with 8 Years Experience offer salary: 200 OMR Phone : +96896965333 Email : sultanalhabsi701@gmail.com

LOOKING for warehouse manager role. Indian male, 14 years GCC experience with driving licence. Available to join immediately. Please contact: 92991621

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LOOKING for SUPPLY CHAIN / SALES jobs Indian male 24 years. Commerce graduate, Experience in logistics, procurement and sales in reputed company in Oman.Valid Oman D/L. Contact +96891121694, issacantony2002@gmail.com

SIT. WANTED

PROJECT management professional with 20+ years' experience in tendering, business development, business systemisation, ISO QMS, planning and procurement. Possesses managerial and team lead skills. Seeking an opportunity. Contact: 91799438

LOOKING for part time or full time Accounts/ Finance job. 20yrs experience in Muscat. Upto finalization & Audit. Please contact: 92065499

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STORE, shop and studio room for immediate rent in Barka saqsuq. contact: 93368865 94900612

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A CONSUMER goods distribution company FMCG headquartered in Muscat with several branches across the Sultanate of Oman is seeking qualified candidates for the following positions:

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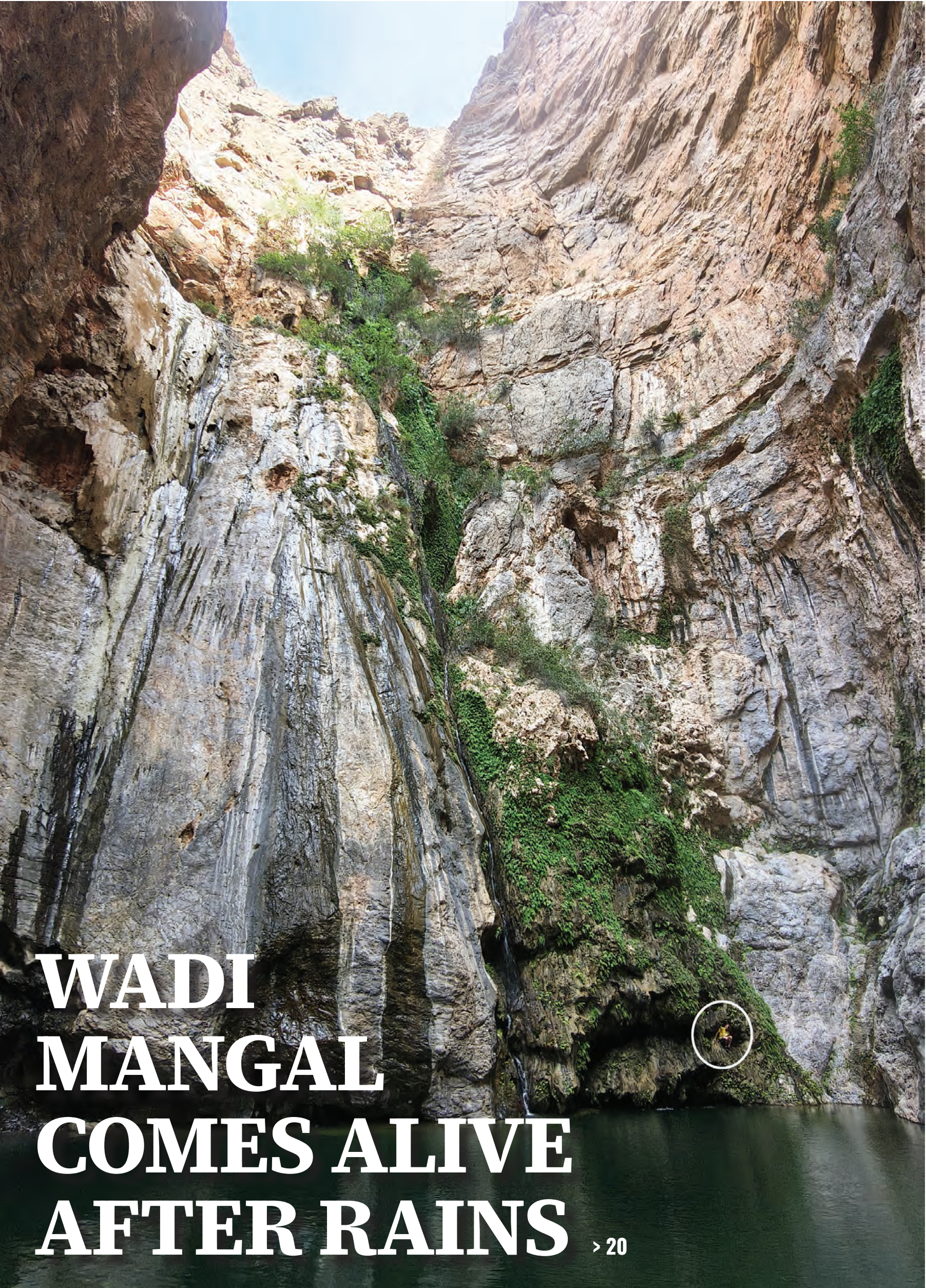
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ART/LIFE



E X P L O R I N G W A T E R W A Y S A N D C A N Y O N S



WADI MANGAL COMES ALIVE AFTER RAINS > 20

PRADA**RETURNS**

‘DEVIL WEARS PRADA 2’ TAKES TOP SPOT IN N AMERICA BOX OFFICE



‘The Devil Wears Prada 2’ debuted atop the North American box office this weekend, industry estimates showed on Sunday, 20 years after the hit original took audiences inside the cutthroat world of haute couture.

The sequel sees Anne Hathaway’s character return to work under tyrannical editor Miranda Priestly, portrayed again by Meryl Streep, as their fashion magazine faces an existential crisis.

Stanley Tucci and Emily Blunt also return as leads, while a host of A-list additions and celebrity cameos round out the star-studded cast.

Released by 20th Century Fox and with returning director David Frankel, the film took in \$77 million in the US and Canadian market, according to Exhibitor Relations.

“This is a sensational opening for a comedy drama”, said analyst David A Gross of Franchise Entertainment Research, noting “very good” reviews and themes of power, image and success that “are more recognisable and relevant today than ever”.

Streep won a Golden Globe and received an Oscar nomination for best supporting actress in her first turn as Miranda Priestly — who is not-so-subtly based on longtime “Vogue” chief Anna Wintour.

Last week’s box office winner “Michael”, the biopic about late superstar Michael Jackson, fell to second place but still took in \$54 million, according to Exhibitor Relations.

Directed by Antoine Fuqua and distributed by Lionsgate, the film chronicles the legendary artist’s rise from a child star to one of the world’s most famous pop icons. In the starring role is Jaafar Jackson, the popstar’s nephew.

Following a whopping \$97 million debut last weekend in North America, the movie has taken in over \$423 million at the global box office.

“The Super Mario Galaxy Movie” came in third with \$12.1 million, taking its cumulative domestic haul over \$400 million.

The animated sequel from Universal and Illumination Studios has earned nearly \$900 million at the global box office, Exhibitor Relations reported.

Fourth place went to Amazon MGM’s hit sci-fi adventure comedy “Project Hail Mary”, with another \$8.6 million. — AFP

Q U I C K F E A T U R E S



PROMO

A balloon of Grogu, a character from Star Wars, is seen during a promotional event for an upcoming film on a street in Jakarta. — AFP



FASHION

Attendees arrive at the annual Debt Gala, a budget-friendly, inclusive alternative to the Met Gala that fundraises for medical debt for vulnerable Americans, in Brooklyn. — Reuters



TRADITION

A woman poses for photos while wearing traditional Hanfu clothing in Beijing, the third day of a five-day national May Day holiday. — AFP

INSTA PICKS



The juvenile greater flamingo



A sunset silhouette in Dhofar Governorate

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ROLLING STONES CONFIRM RELEASE OF NEW ALBUM



The Rolling Stones have confirmed the title of their upcoming music project is “Foreign Tongues”. It comes after months of teasing by the rock group, through mysterious billboards and posts, which sparked rumours that the band would release a new album — their first since their 2023 Grammy Award-winning record Hackney Diamonds.

The Press Association understands the Stones will release their new album on July 10, after band members Mick Jagger, Ronnie Wood and Keith Richards shared the artwork for the upcoming record on Saturday — with each musician posting a different portion of the cover.

Jagger shared a photograph which covered the bottom part of the cover and showed an illustration of what appears to be his mouth and chin. Wood shared the middle portion of the cover which revealed his eyes and nose.

Richards completed the puzzle and shared the top half which featured an illustration

of the head — some messy hair wearing a multi-coloured bandana.

On Friday, the band shared a snippet from an unnamed song over a 13-second video to their 4.2 million fans of their signature tongue and lips logo on a moving background.

The caption consisted of two emojis, including one of a CD, leading fans to believe they are hinting at a new record. Rumours of new music were first sparked last month when a series of cryptic messages including posters and QR codes linked to The Cockroaches popped up around London believed to be connected to the band.

The Rolling Stones have also reportedly released music and performed gigs under the pseudonym, The Cockroaches, with teaser videos hinting at the name shared to their Instagram.

The Cockroaches later released a limited-edition vinyl single, ‘Rough And Twisted’ on April 11, which was only sold exclusively at independent record stores. — dpa

Princess Diana’s voice takes centre stage in upcoming film



A new documentary series based on hours of previously unreleased recordings made by Diana, the late Princess of Wales, is in the works, producers announced on Thursday.

“Diana: The Unheard Truth”, set for release in 2027 — 30 years after her death in a Paris car crash — promises to tell the story of “the people’s princess” in her own words.

Using five hours of conversations between Diana and her close confidante, surgeon Dr James Colthurst, the tapes formed the basis of Andrew Morton’s explosive 1992 book “Diana: Her True Story”.

“This revelatory three-part docuseries restores authorship of one of the most scrutinised lives in modern history”, said a statement released on Thursday by Love Monday TV, the production company behind the venture.

It “will change public perception of Diana forever”.

“Through the tapes, we come to know a resilient, perceptive and relatable young woman, finding herself in the brightest of global spotlights and navigating the challenges with grace, self-awareness and determination”.

Diana’s role in Britain’s storied monarchy is unparalleled.

The sumptuous 1981 wedding between Diana and the future King Charles III was a global extravaganza of good will. But what followed quickly degenerated into a tabloid feeding frenzy as cracks appeared in the fairytale, with husband and wife seemingly seeking solace in the arms of others.

Diana’s shocking 1997 death in a Paris tunnel in a car speeding away from paparazzi sparked a public backlash in Britain that rocked the monarchy and the media.

The tapes, say producers, are a

reminder that things could have turned out differently.

“We hear her infectious humor and twinkling laughter, as she reveals the truth about life inside the most famous family in the world”, the statement said.

“But most importantly we hear her dreams for a future that could have been; a new chapter in which Charles goes off into the sunset with (future queen) Camilla, leaving Diana free to carve her own path”.

Charles and Camilla, who married in 2005, are wrapping up a state visit to the United States, a visit that is being seen as a chance for London and Washington to move past a difficult few months.

The documentary series will also incorporate the perspectives of Diana’s inner circle, including advisers, close friends, her hairdresser, her bodyguard and one-time royal press secretary Dickie Arbiter. — AFP

FEATURES

WADI MANGAL COMES ALIVE AFTER RAINS

A GROUP OF FRIENDS REVISITED WADI MANGAL AFTER RECENT RAINFALL, DISCOVERING STRONGER WATER FLOWS AND STRIKING CANYON VIEWS DURING A CHALLENGING BUT REWARDING HIKE AND ABSEILING ADVENTURE



DR KHALED ABDUL MALAK

LAST Sunday, we decided to revisit Wadi Mangal, a stunning canyon I had previously explored with friends. This time, I was joined by two close friends, Rami and Hamood, making it a more social outing. Our main reason for returning was to inspect the area after recent significant rainfall throughout the country. Such weather events often dramatically alter the landscape and water levels within canyons. Wadi Mangal is a magnificent geological formation, starting at the base of Al Jabal Al Aswad and extending several kilometres southwards, close to the impressive dam structure in Wadi Dayqah. We met in Al Amerat, gathering all three of us before hopping into



a single car to begin our adventure. We set off at 8:30 in the morning, ready to tackle the road ahead with shared excitement and a unified sense of purpose for the day's travels. The geology of this canyon is truly stunning. It offers a breathtaking view of deeply wrinkled rock formations. These unique textures were created millions of years ago when immense geological forces, specifically giant pressure and intense heat deep within the Earth's crust, slowly sculpted the stone over millions of years, leaving behind this remarkable natural legacy for us to observe today. The water flowing through the wadi bed was crisp and clear, sparkling with purity as it meandered along the rocky channel. The nearby ponds were full, reflecting the sky above. In one particular spot within the canyon, we encountered a massive boulder standing prominently in the centre. Upon closer inspection, we discovered the weathered remains of an ancient falaj, a testament to past irrigation systems. The first part of the wadi involved navigating between boulders and further, we had to start climbing on the left side of the canyon to find our way to the top where we would abseil into Wadi Mangal. The climb was quite difficult, following a crack in the mountain where we could see the remains of an old track that locals used in the past to reach Jabal Al Aswad. During our ascent, the views were breathtaking! We could see the ocean between the massive mountains. After about 2 hours of climbing, we reached a place where we used a tree as an anchor to abseil into Wadi Mangal. There was much more water than the first time I crossed this canyon and the waterfalls were active. The following three drops were in three waterfalls ranging from 30 to 120 metres high. The last drop was 120 metres, where we could stop practically in the middle of the waterfall in a shallow cave to retrieve our rope and re-fix it at this place to abseil the second half. That drop finishes in a superb pool measuring around 40 metres in diameter. There we decided to stop and have some drinks and snacks before continuing our hike in the wadi bed and reaching our vehicle at 5:30 pm to drive back home. These moments spent with good friends in such a mesmerising place are priceless and addictive.

