

### Iran approves six candidates for June 28 presidential vote

TEHRAN: Iran on Sunday announced the six candidates, mostly conservatives, approved for the June 28 election to replace president Ebrahim Raisi, who was killed in a helicopter crash. The candidates announced by the interior ministry were selected from 80 registered hopefuls by the Guardian Council, which oversees elections in the Islamic Republic.

SUNRISE - 05:20 AM

PRAYER TIMINGS

FAJR - 03:52 AM

DHUHR - 12:11 PM

ASR - 03:30 PM

MAGHRIB - 06:58 PM

ISHA - 08:20 PM



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VALUE OF FISH LANDED IN OMAN REACHES RO 147M BY END OF Q1



P12

ALCARAZ BEATS ZVEREV TO WIN FIRST FRENCH OPEN TITLE



P20

'LET'S BE AN ACHIEVEMENT' SHOWCASING SPECIAL TALENTS



#### MUSCAT

### HM GREET'S PRESIDENT OF PORTUGAL

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Dr Marcelo de Sousa of the Portuguese Republic on his country's National Day. In the cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sentiments to President Sousa, wishing him good health and happiness. His Majesty also wished the people of Portugal further progress and prosperity.

#### NEW DELHI

### INDIA'S MODI SWORN IN AS PM FOR 3<sup>RD</sup> TERM



India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi was sworn in on Sunday for a third term after worse-than-expected election results left him reliant on coalition partners to govern. Modi, flanked by officials from his Hindu-nationalist party and leaders of his coalition members, vowed in a ceremony marking his formal assumption of power to "bear true allegiance to the constitution of India". Modi's Hindu-nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) ruled outright for the past decade but failed to repeat its previous two landslide wins this time around, defying analysts' expectations and exit polls. He was instead forced into quick-fire talks with the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), a 15-member coalition, to gather the parliamentary numbers needed to govern. **SEE ALSO P7**

## One-week Eid Al Adha holidays from June 16



MUSCAT: On the advent of Eid Al Adha 1445 AH and as per the Royal Directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, it has been decided that the holiday for employees of the State's Administrative Apparatus and other legal entities, as well as establishments of the private sector will start from Sunday, Dhul Hijjah 9, 1445 AH

corresponding to 16 June, to Thursday, Dhul Hijjah 13, 1445 AH, corresponding to 20 June. Work shall be resumed on Sunday, June 23. The Ministry of Labour pointed out that employers may agree on terms to engage employees on the said holiday — if deemed necessary — provided they compensate the workers for the holiday.

## Oman condemns Israeli strikes on Nuseirat camp in Gaza

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman on Sunday condemned the brutal Israeli attack that targeted the Nuseirat camp in Gaza, which resulted in a massacre that resulted in the death and injury of hundreds of Palestinian civilian victims, a statement from the Foreign Ministry said.

The Foreign Ministry affirmed that the continued commission of systematic war crimes against the Palestinian people is a clear and explicit violation of international conventions and international humanitarian law, which requires urgent intervention by the international community to put an end to these crimes against humanity, protect civilians, and hold the Israeli occupying state responsible for its actions.

On Sunday, Israeli forces pounded central Gaza anew, a day after killing 274 Palestinians during a hostage rescue raid, and tanks advanced into further areas of Rafah in an apparent bid to seal off part of the southern city, residents and Hamas media said.

Palestinians remained in shock over Saturday's death toll, the worst over a 24-hour period of the Gaza war for months and including many women and children, Palestinian medics said.



The pace of colonists' and extremists' incursions into Al Aqsa Mosque in occupied Jerusalem has increased significantly since the start of the Israeli aggression on the Gaza Strip on October 7 last year

#### COLONISTS STORM AL AQSA

Colonists stormed the courtyards of the blessed Al Aqsa Mosque in the occupied city of Jerusalem on Sunday, under the protection of the Israeli occupation police. Eyewitnesses said that the colonists stormed Al Aqsa in groups from the Mughrabi Gate, carried out provocative tours, and performed Talmudic rituals in its courtyards, Palestinian news agency (WAFA) reported.

— SEE ALSO P6

### 10 PACTS INKED TO BOOST TOURISM IN 4 GOVERNORATES

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism on Sunday signed 10 usufruct contracts worth RO 6 million to implement projects in the governorates of the Sultanate of Oman. The contracts were signed by Salim bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism, and representatives of the investment companies concerned. The projects will come up in four governorates as follows: In Dhofar Governorate, the projects include the setting up of a 3-star hotel and a rest house in the Wilayat of Salalah, the establishment of a tourist camp in the Al Khadhaf area in the Wilayat of Thamrait and the establishment of a 3-star tourist resort in the Wilayat of Shaleem and Al Halaniyat Islands.

In the Governorate of Al Dakhiliyah, the projects include the setting up of a 3-star hotel, an adventure centre and a luxury tourist camp in Barkat Al Sharaf, in addition to a 3-star resort in Misfat Al Abriyeen in the Wilayat of Al Hamra.



Al Dakhiliyah Governorate is taking steps to launch a two-month festival titled 'Al Jabal Al Akhdhar Summer' that will be held from July 18 to September 14. — **DETAILS ON P2**

## MOCIIP TO LAUNCH ID-BASED LPG CYLINDERS

VINOD NAIR  
@vinot\_nair

To ensure better safety standards, the Ministry of Commerce, Industry, and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) issued a decision on Sunday to regulate the packaging and sale of liquid petroleum gas (LPG) cylinders that are used for cooking purposes.

Decision 185/2024 stipulates that MoCIIP is responsible for regulating this business and prices of cylinder will be determined after the approval of the Ministry of Finance.

As per the decision, the current users must replace their units with an ID-based cylinder made of iron or fibreglass within three years from the date of implementation of this decision, which is May 28.

From December 6, the customer will have to pay a one-time insurance or deposit to obtain it, which will be determined according to the type, capacity, and size of the cylinder.

The deposit amount will be between RO 5 and RO 15, depending on the size of cylinders made of iron, and between RO 15 and RO 30 for cylinders made of fibreglass.

The current users can replace the cylinder owned in exchange for obtaining the ID cylinder without paying the insurance amount within three years of the decision.

The decision stipulates that it requires a licence to practice the activities of filling and selling LPG cylinders, and the user



First-time users to pay a one-time insurance fee or deposit

All customers must move to ID cylinders within 3 years

Cylinders must be made of iron or fibre glass

pays the amount to the person who sells the gas cylinder and the seller delivers the amount to the person engaged in the filling activity.

The decision explained that it is possible to recover the insurance or deposit when the user returns the cylinder without obtaining another one.

However, in the event that the cylinder is lost or misused, the insurance amount will be confiscated.

The decision authorised the ministry to impose one or more penalties, ranging from a written warning, to an administrative fine not exceeding RO 1,000, suspension, and cancellation of the licence.

#### WEATHER

MUSCAT: Max 37°C Min 31°C

SALALAH: Max 33°C Min 29°C

NIZWA: Max 41°C

Min 27°C



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# Sayyid Shihab pins aviation wings on RAFO pilot officers



MUSCAT: HH Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, pinned aviation wings on pilot officers after they passed out the flight training course.

HH Sayyid Shihab also handed over His Majesty the

Sultan's Cup for Aviation to Flying Officer Khalid Hamad al Majrafi, on scoring the top position in the course.

The event was attended by Air Vice Marshal Khamis bin Hammad al Ghafri, Commander of the Royal Air Force of Oman (RAFO),

Air Commodore Khalid Mohammed al Abri, Director General of Operations and Air Commodore Yaqoub Rashid al Maamari, Director General of Administration and Human Resources at the RAFO Command.

— ONA

# Oman takes part in Doha session of GCC ministerial council

DOHA: The Sultanate of Oman took part in the 160th session of the GCC Ministerial Council, held in Doha, the State of Qatar. Oman's delegation in the session was headed by Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister.

The meeting reviewed joint GCC action and decisions were taken regarding several matters.

The ministers underscored the unwavering positions of GCC states regarding regional and international issues, most notably the Palestinian cause.

Sayyid Badr also participated in the 6th joint ministerial meeting between the foreign ministers of the GCC and Dr Shaya Mohsin Zindani, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates of the Republic of Yemen.

The meeting highlighted developments in the Yemeni arena.

The meeting also affirmed the firm, joint and supportive position towards the Yemeni Presidential Leadership Council in a bid to reach a comprehensive and sustainable political solution in accordance with the GCC Initiative and its implementation mechanism, the outcomes of the comprehensive National Dialogue Conference and Security Resolution 2216. This, the ministers affirmed, must be done in a manner

OMAN, YEMEN AGREE TO BOOST RELATIONS IN ALL FIELDS

Sayyid Badr meets with Dr Shaya Mohsin Zindani

DOHA: Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, on Sunday met with Dr Shaya Mohsin Zindani, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates of the Republic of Yemen. This meeting was held on the sidelines of the joint GCC-Yemen ministerial meeting, hosted by the State of Qatar.

During the meeting, two sides underlined the depth of relations between Oman and Yemen and the joint keenness to boost relations in all fields.

They also highlighted the continuous talks and cooperation between the two sides in support of

the security and stability of Yemen, as well as consolidating its sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence.

Moreover, two ministers reiterated the importance of enabling means of achieving peace and harmony among all components of the Yemeni peoples.

The meeting was attended by Sayyid Ammar bin Abdullah al Busaidy, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the State of Qatar, Shaikh Ahmed bin Hashel al Maskari, Head of the GCC Department at the Foreign Ministry and several officials from both sides.

— ONA

# Haj Mission delivering services

MADINAH: The Omani Haj Mission continues providing services to Omani pilgrims arriving in Madinah.

Abdulaziz bin Masoud al Ghafri, Deputy Head of the Omani Haj Mission for Pilgrims and Haj Companies Affairs, said that the Omani Haj Mission is engaged in providing health and guidance services as well as supervising the Haj operators that began arriving by land and air.



He pointed out that some 5,500 Omani pilgrims have arrived in Madinah so far out of 7,013 pilgrims expected to arrive in Madinah.

The pilgrims are expected to visit the Prophet's Mosque before heading to Makkah to perform the Haj rituals.

The Omani Haj Mission comprises 31 people representing the religious guidance delegation, the administrative and financial delegation, the Haj campaigns supervising delegation, the medical delegation, the Royal Oman Police delegation and the scout delegation.

Dr Ali bin Suleiman al Jahdhami, Deputy Head of the Fatwa and Religious Guidance

Delegation, called on the pilgrims to keep on communicating with the Religious Supervision Delegation to avoid falling into the prohibitions of Haj.

This year, the number of pilgrims from the Sultanate of Oman stands at 14,000 including 13,500 Omanis, 250 Arab residents, and 250 non-Arabs while the number of licensed Haj operators reached 31.

— ONA



The meeting highlighted developments in the Yemeni arena. — ONA

# Jabal Akhdhar summer activities begin from July 18

AMAL AL RIYAMI  
AL JABAL AL AKHDHAR, JUNE 9

Thanks to moderate weather, Al Jabal Al Akhdhar in the Al Dakhiliyah Governorate is currently witnessing a significant tourist influx from citizens, residents, and visitors. The hilly terrain is an ideal destination for nature lovers and offers unique tourist experiences that combine natural beauty and cultural heritage.

Al Dakhiliyah Governorate

is preparing to launch Al Jabal Al Akhdhar Summer activities, starting from July 18 and concludes on September 14.

On Sunday, a meeting was held under the chairmanship of Shaikh Hilal bin Said bin Hamdan al Hajri, Governor of Al Dakhiliyah, to discuss the most prominent activities that will be included in the 'Al Jabal Al Akhdhar Summer.' The meeting decided to form a committee to supervise the activities of Al Jabal Al



Shaikh Hilal bin Said bin Hamdan al Hajri, Governor of Al Dakhiliyah, led the meeting to discuss the summer activities.

Akhdhar Summer, headed by the Director General of Administrative and Financial Affairs in the governorate, to ensure its follow-up and readiness.

Within this framework, the season will include various cultural, social, sports, entertainment, heritage, and popular events planned by the governorate to stimulate local tourism and promote the tourism, heritage, and natural components that characterise the wilayat. It was taken into

account that the activities keep pace with the unique tourist attractions, historical sites, and cultural landmarks of the province.

Regarding the most prominent events, the Governor was keen to include an exhibition for productive families and SMEs to encourage them to participate in Al Jabal Al Akhdhar Summer and benefit from opportunities to promote tourism and create temporary employment.



# MOHERI, QS DISCUSS OMAN AS A GLOBAL STUDENT HUB

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation (MoHERI) and UK-based QS Quacquarelli Symonds organised a significant roundtable discussion and seminar in Muscat, focusing on establishing Oman as an international student hub.

The event, held at the Maani Muscat Hotel & Suites, was conducted under the auspices of Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah, Chair of the Board of Oman Authority for Accreditation and Quality Assurance (OAAAQA) and Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation in Oman.

The seminar brought together prominent attendees, including senior officials from the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, university presidents, esteemed faculty members, and industry experts.

The primary agenda was to deliberate on Oman's potential as an International Student Hub, emphasising its multicultural environment, peaceful society, and strategic location at the crossroads of Asia and Africa.



Key highlights from the seminar included data from QS research, showcasing successful international student destinations and drawing parallels with Oman's unique attributes.

The roundtable discussions provided an in-depth analysis of Oman's strengths and areas needing development to enhance its appeal to international students.

A networking lunch offered

attendees an opportunity to further discuss and collaborate on these ideas.

Dr Ashwin Fernandes, Executive Director for Africa, Middle East, and South Asia, and Rami Awad, Regional Manager for Africa, Middle East, and South Asia, were among the notable presenters who shared their insights and expertise on the subject.

Following this enlightening

session, QS will embark on creating a comprehensive white paper titled 'Oman as an International Student Hub', to be published jointly with MoHERI in September 2024.

This document will encapsulate the study presented, discussions held, and actionable plans and objectives, aiming to pave the way for Oman's emergence as a premier destination for international students.



The National Museum hosted the student exhibition for the Design Department of Oman College of Management and Technology.

## Student design exhibition showcases Omani talent

STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT, JUNE 9

The National Museum represented by the learning Centre hosted on Sunday, the second student exhibition for the Design Department of Oman College of Management and Technology.

The event was held under the auspices of HH Sayyidah Meyyan bint Shihab al Said, the Chairperson of Oman Design Association, and in the presence of Jamal bin Hassan al Moosawi, Secretary-General of the National Museum, Dr Hazem Migdady, Dean, Oman College of Management and Technology, and a group of academics and students.

The exhibition continues for the public until June 13.

The exhibition aims to showcase student projects in the field of interior design developed by talented students that reflect the high level, qualifications, and capabilities acquired by the students during their studies at the college.

The exhibition includes 21 three-dimensional models of projects, consisting of houses and residential units with different styles where students used various natural materials such as stones, woods, and plants to add aesthetic and detailed design elements with precision. The exhibition also includes models of seats (chairs) made from wires and cardboard inspired by some designs of global designers in the field of design such as Michael Thonet, Mike Dunbar, and Charles Rennie Mackintosh.

Students also participated in the exhibition with canvas murals of Arabic calligraphy and Islamic geometric patterns with contrasting aesthetic balance and rhythm, and artistic drawings using skilled artistic media and shading techniques acquired to achieve visual balance for cohesive artistic compositions. The exhibition is interspersed with a series of accompanying seminars and workshops focusing on design, heritage, and Omani identity.

## Unicef Oman hosts child protection workshop

MUSCAT: Under the leadership of the Ministry of Social Development and in collaboration with Unicef Oman, a comprehensive validation workshop was held to review the updated 'National Guidance Manual for Child Protection.'

This critical initiative represents a key milestone in the ongoing efforts to strengthen the national child protection system and ensure the well-being of children across the Sultanate.

The updated 'Child Protection Manual' aims to establish a unified and clear referral mechanisms for the cases based on its level of danger along with case management system, to promote a cohesive approach among all stakeholders.

By strengthening the roles of various entities in preventing and responding to risks, harm, and violence, the manual seeks to address child protection issues at both preventive and early intervention levels.



Ministry of Social Development and Unicef Oman held a workshop on 'National Guidance Manual for Child Protection.'

The workshop brought together representatives from governmental institutions, academia, child protection committees, NGOs, community organisations, and agencies serving executive

authorities.

Through collaborative discussions and expert insights, participants worked to refine the manual, ensuring it provides a robust reference framework for all involved in

child protection efforts.

Sumaira Chowdhury, Unicef Oman Representative, says, "The updated manual is a significant step forward in our collective mission to protect children at risk," said "It will enhance intervention mechanisms and ensure that all entities are equipped with the necessary guidelines to effectively address and prevent violence and harm against children."

The workshop highlighted the significance of a coordinated approach, utilising the strengths and resources of various sectors to create a safer environment for children.

By promoting collaboration and sharing best practices, the updated manual seeks to enhance the effectiveness of child protection interventions throughout Oman.

Unicef Oman remains committed to supporting the government and its partners in their efforts to safeguard children's rights and well-being.



## HOSPITAL PROJECT FOUNDATION STONE LAYING TODAY

IBRA: A ceremony will be held today to lay the foundation stone of Al Nama Hospital in the Al Sharqiyah North Governorate. The project is worth RO 56.05 million. The Ministry of Health pointed out that the project will be established on an area of 428,000 sqm. Its construction will take 30 months to complete. - ONA

# Habta: A vibrant pre-Eid tradition in Al Sharqiyah South

BALQEES AL ORAIMI

MUSCAT, JUNE 9

The 'Habta' custom is considered one of the ancient traditional customs of Al Sharqiyah South which precedes the blessed Eid al Adha. This custom combines joy, happiness, and the necessary preparations for Eid, in which various products and goods are exchanged in an open market characterised by a festive atmosphere.

Habta is considered one of the Omani social legacies and customs, to which citizens are

keen to buy and sell sacrificial animals, Eid supplies, and other local products. Supplies, local agricultural products, children's toys, and other items are also on offer for which the citizens come from various places to shop and buy.

To shed light on this custom, some of the citizens shared their experiences about the tradition.

Khalid bin Muhanna al Ismaili, Director, Department of Events and Awareness, Municipality of Al Sharqiyah South, says the process of organising, distributing, and determining the location for the



'Habta' is considered one of the ancient traditional customs of Al Sharqiyah South Governorate.

sale of livestock is underway.

The governorate's preparations coincide with the Sur Habta

starting on the fifth day of Dhul Hijjah which is followed by Wilayat of Al Kamil W'al Wafi,

and after the seventh day, in the Wilayat of Jaalan Bani Bu Hassan.

The people of Al Sharqiyah South Governorate flock to the shops where the products on offer are varied and suitable for different age groups. Care is also taken to provide websites for owners of SMEs so they can showcase their household products. Some stalls sell food and fast food products.

Says Saeed al Bahri, an elderly in Sur, "Habta in Sur is not just a market, but rather a social occasion that brings together the people and tourists alike. The market begins several days before Eid and

continues until the day of Arafat. We come to the market to buy Eid supplies, such as clothes, sweets, and meat, and also exchange news and congratulations with friends, and relatives. "

Ali al Ghailani, a merchant spoke about the economic aspect of the custom. He says, "Al Habta represents a golden opportunity for us as merchants, as people from different regions flock to buy Eid supplies. We are keen to provide the best products at competitive prices. In addition, Al Habta also helps strengthen the local economy and support national products."



# MAGICAL FAMILY HOLIDAY MEMORIES

STAFF REPORTER  
MUSCAT, JUNE 9

HOLIDAYS are around the corner, and families are buzzing with excitement, eagerly preparing to create cherished memories together. As the festive season approaches, parents have a unique opportunity to take their children on holidays, blending excitement, education and bonding. Travelling with kids can be both exhilarating and challenging, opening up opportunities for creating lasting memories and deepening family bonds. However, it requires patience and careful planning. Many families avoid travelling with their kids because managing them, especially on long flights, can be daunting.

Here are some tips to help make family adventures more enjoyable.

PLAN AHEAD

Before embarking on your journey, take time to plan meticulously. Research family-friendly accommodations, activities, and attractions at your destination. Consider the needs and interests of the children and involve them in the planning process to build excitement and give them a sense of ownership.

USE SOCIAL STORIES TO EXPLAIN

Inform your children about what to expect during the flight. Preparing them for what's coming can make the experience less intimidating. One mother shared, "I always ensure my kids are mentally prepared by showing them videos and thoroughly explaining the journey ahead. This preparation helps them remain calm and composed when unexpected situations arise."

KEEP THEM ENTERTAINED

Long journeys can be tedious for children, so pack plenty of entertainment options to keep them engaged. Consider bringing books, games and puzzles, and embrace screen time on the flight, even if it is not usually encouraged. Keeping children still and engaged during travel is crucial.

CREATING UNFORGETTABLE MOMENTS

One of the greatest joys of travelling with children is witnessing their wonder at the world. Every experience is magnified through a child's perspective, so do not underestimate any simple activity. Whether it's tasting exotic food, watching the sunset from a beautiful spot, visiting a museum or going to Disneyland and watching the fireworks, these moments become the fabric of a family's shared history.

"This time with my children is irreplaceable, especially at this stage of their lives, before we all grow older," said Al Mukhaini, a parent.

EMBRACE THE OPPORTUNITY

Holidays are a time to embrace the opportunity to explore new cultures and adventures through the eyes of children, significantly enriching their development. Although it can be challenging for some parents, the effort is truly worthwhile for both parents and children.

As Al Mukhaini reflected, "Travelling with children can sometimes be chaotic, but it is a delightful chaos. There are zero regrets... Create lasting memories that will be cherished for years to come."



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## Oman Cables Industry and Ministry of Education Commemorate 'Kids in STEM' Graduation: Empowering Young Minds



Oman Cables Industry (OCI), in collaboration with the Ministry of Education of Oman, proudly commemorates the successful completion of a key pillar of the 'Kids in STEM' initiative. Over a four-month period, OCI adopted Al Tafawok Basic Education School, culminating in a celebratory graduation ceremony. This initiative marks a significant milestone in Oman's journey, fostering creativity and innovation in children through hands-on activities in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM).

Aligned with Oman's Vision 2040 objectives, which emphasizes progress and inclusivity, this initiative is part of a long-term project. It focuses on engaging children aged 6 to 10 from within the community of all stakeholders. Over the last four months, 130 students from grades one to four, dedicated three hours per week to a curriculum in STEM education, focusing on junior engineer programming, electronics on solar cell, types of lamps, motors & resistors, screen printing, microbat among others. These courses were facilitated by seven specially trained educators committed to igniting the potential of Oman's younger generation.



# 13 new schools come up in 7 governorates



**MUSCAT:** Thirteen new schools were handed over to the Ministry of Education in the governorates of Musandam, Al Buraimi, Al Batinah North, Al Batinah South, Muscat, Al Sharqiyah South and Dhofar.

The total cost of the new schools stands at RO 26.8 million and they will be opened for the academic year 2024-2025.

Khamis bin Mubarak al Hadidi, Director-General of Projects and Services at the Ministry of Education, said that the construction of the new schools reflects the government's commitment to enhancing education and community development in the governorates and providing an optimal educational environment for the students.

The construction of these schools will provide more educational opportunities as well as enhance the educational infrastructure in the governorates in line with the Oman Vision 2040 goals to achieve sustainable development and enhance the quality of education, the official said.

# Cybersecurity conference to bring together industry leaders

STAFF REPORTER  
MUSCAT, JUNE 9

Cybersecurity and Cloud Conference and Awards ceremony is set to bring together industry leaders, innovators and subject matter experts for a deep dive into the latest trends, challenges and advancements shaping cybersecurity and cloud services.

The conference, scheduled on June 12 at Intercity Hotel (Al Khuwair) in Muscat promises a dynamic lineup of expert-led sessions, panel discussions and case study presentations. Notably, the event will also honour outstanding achievements in cybersecurity and cloud services through awards.

His Highness Sayyid Dr Adham bin Turki al Said will grace the event as the chief guest, whereas Eng Said bin Abdullah al Mandhari, Group CEO of ITHCA Group, will deliver the keynote speech.

The event is supported by Oman Banks Association, Oman American Business Council, NSSG, Aon, Securado and Vidopix.



Over 100 delegates including policymakers, CISOs/CIOs/ CDOs & IT Heads, cybersecurity & cloud solutions providers, consultants in cybercrimes & digital forensics, risk and compliance professionals, and innovation leaders from across sectors including banking & finance, power, telecom, logistics, healthcare, manufacturing and consulting are participating in the event.

The conference will address imminent cybersecurity challenges posed by emerging technologies, with experts analysing the implications of these advancements. It also aims to discuss advanced threat detection, using AI and machine

learning to strengthen defences against sophisticated cyber threats.

Other topics include the need for strong security setups in multi-cloud environments, as well as strategies for protecting data across borders. The conference will also delve into managing and securing IoT networks, along with techniques for investigating breaches and responding effectively.

These focus areas underscore the conference's commitment to equipping attendees with actionable strategies to optimise cybersecurity and cloud ROI in digital transformation projects and foster a cybersecurity-aware corporate culture.

# WORLD ENVIRONMENT DAY CELEBRATED

**MUSCAT:** The World Environment Day was celebrated by the Muscat Mar Gregorios Orthodox Christian Youth Movement on June 7 with various programmes at the Ruwi St Thomas parish.

As part of the Environment Day celebration, activities included the distribution of saplings, tree planting, an art exhibition, and an essay competition involving the parishioners.

A public meeting was presided over by the parish vicar-in-charge, Fr Abey Chacko. Selvi Sumesh, a teacher and environmental activist, delivered the Environment Day message where she emphasised the moral responsibility of the current generation to protect the environment for future generations.

Suni Shyam, a young farmer and admin, of Oman Agriculture Group, delivered a talk on the importance of agriculture and how to create a model farm garden.

This year's Environment Day slogan, marking half a century since the inception of World Environment Day, was 'Ecosystem Restoration, Desertification, and Drought Prevention.'



# TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

Nama Electricity Supply Company S.A.O.C invites interested companies to participate in the following tenders

| Tender No.                   | Description                                                                                                                    | Last Date of Buying | Date of Submission | Grade      | Date of Site Visit | Tender Price (OMR) |
|------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|--------------------|------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| RFP No. 14/ Nama Supply/2024 | Making Path for emergency Fire Exit & Concrete Modification at the Auditorium for Nama Electricity Supply Company Head Quarter | 24/06/2024          | 17/07/2024         | Specialist | 25/06/2024         | 26.250             |
| RFP No. 15/ Nama Supply/2024 | Comprehensive Communication Services for Nama Electricity Supply Company                                                       | 24/06/2024          | 17/07/2024         | Specialist | -                  | 26.250             |
| RFP No. 16/ Nama Supply/2024 | Providing Consultancy Services for MIS certification against ISO (9001:2015, 14001:2015 & 45001:2018)                          | 24/06/2024          | 17/07/2024         | Specialist | -                  | 26.250             |

| The table below shows the instructions for participation: - |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |  |  |  |  |  |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|--|--|--|--|
| Participation                                               | • Companies registered with Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion and in I Supplier with Nama Groupe may obtain Tender documents.<br>• The amount specified above is including 5% VAT.<br>• The amount specified above is Non-Refundable payment ( Terms and Condition apply)<br>• To obtain the tender document and payment procedure, please contact us by email <a href="mailto:procurement@supply.nama.om">procurement@supply.nama.om</a><br>• Tender purchase will be in working ours between 08:00 AM till 02:00 PM.                                                                                                                                                                               |  |  |  |  |  |
| Enquiries                                                   | • Any inquiry can be sent using the inquiry form found in the tender document to <a href="mailto:procurement@supply.nama.om">procurement@supply.nama.om</a> five (5) days before the date of submission of the tender.<br>• Any request for clarification received after the above-mentioned period will not be considered.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |  |  |  |  |  |
| Tender Submission                                           | • Please follow SUBMISSION OF TENDER mentioned in the Prime Document                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |  |  |  |  |  |
| Guarantee                                                   | • The Tender should enclose a bank guarantee or a certified cheque issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman Unconditional and irrevocable and shall be disbursement as soon as it is submitted for the value of (1%) of the tender value valid for a period of not less than Ninety (90) days from the last date of tender submission and addressed to the CHAIRMAN OF PROCUREMENT COMMITTEE, Nama Electricity Supply Company S.A.O.C.<br>• The bid bond should including 5% VAT.<br>• The bid bond should be submitted as a separate envelope.<br>• Any tender not accompanied by a Tender Bond shall be rejected.                                                                                                     |  |  |  |  |  |
| Terms and Conditions                                        | • The Tender shall be valid for a period of not less than Ninety (90) days from the last date of tender submission including any extension thereof.<br>• If the submission date extended, the bank guarantee or a certified cheque shall be extended in accordance with the bid extension date.<br>• NESC is not bound to accept the lowest (or highest) Tenderer.<br>• Preference of awarding the tender will be given to those bidders who achieved a high percentage of purchasing from Local Products and have a High-level percentage of Omanization.<br>• NESC gives priority to award the projects to SMEs companies.<br>• Failure to comply with the instructions in tender document may lead to disqualification. |  |  |  |  |  |
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| Tender Number        | Description of Tender                                                                                      | Last Date to Collect the Tender | Tender Return Date |
|----------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------|
| PRE/23/278           | Design & Construction of Dualization of Green Walk at Al Mabellah                                          | 29/06/2024                      | 21/07/2024         |
| PRE/24/032           | Consultancy Services for Design of Sculpture & Landscaping Works at Al Bustan R/A                          | 29/06/2024                      | 21/07/2024         |
| PRE/24/050 Re-Call 2 | Consultancy Services for Outdoor Advertising and Commercial Signboards                                     | 17/06/2024                      | 24/06/2024         |
| PRE/24/055           | Design & Construction of Al Saleel Park                                                                    | 29/06/2024                      | 21/07/2024         |
| PRE/24/091 Re-Call   | Supply of Photograph Devices                                                                               | 17/06/2024                      | 24/06/2024         |
| PRE/24/093 Re-Call   | Consultancy Services for Supervision of Roads in AL Khoudh Village                                         | 17/06/2024                      | 24/06/2024         |
| PRE/24/103 Re-Call   | Supply of Building Materials                                                                               | 29/06/2024                      | 21/07/2024         |
| PRE/24/130           | Replacement of Existing Irrigation to Central Control                                                      | 29/06/2024                      | 21/07/2024         |
| PRE/24/135           | Consultancy Services for Supervision of Construction for Upgrading Al Mouj Street and 18th November Street | 29/06/2024                      | 21/07/2024         |
| PRE/24/138           | Organizing of Health Affairs Conference                                                                    | 21/06/2024                      | 30/06/2024         |
| PRE/24/150           | Supply of Food Stuff                                                                                       | 29/06/2024                      | 21/07/2024         |
| PRE/24/151           | Supply of Labour Furniture                                                                                 | 29/06/2024                      | 21/07/2024         |
| PRE/24/153           | Maintenance of Pumps at Al Qurum                                                                           | 29/06/2024                      | 21/07/2024         |

- Bidders shall submit their offers electronically.
- Clarification and Support:
  - For any inquiries regarding tenders, please visit e-tendering website: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>).
  - For technical support of e-tendering system please send an email to ([etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om](mailto:etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om)) or call (+968 24402200).

# Livestock, aquatic feed production at Khazaen City advances 25pc

**BARKA:** A project on setting up an animal and marine life feed production unit in Khazaen City is progressing as scheduled, at 25 per cent now. The project seeks to meet the needs of livestock and marine life.

The project, being implemented by Omani Bioproducts Company, is an investment shared by Oman Flour Mills Group and Nakheel Oman Development Company, said Eng Abdullah bin Said al Muzaini, Director of operations at the factory. He added that the project aims at enhancing food security and recycling agricultural and biological by-products into specialised value-added products.

Al Muzaini pointed out that the investment value of the project upon completion of all three stages will be RO 37 million and that the unit will have a capacity to produce 100,000 tonnes of animal feed and alternatives, in addition to 300,000 tonnes of marine life feed.

— ONA



WAR ENDLESS CASUALTIES



Protesters lay on the ground outside Bilbao's Guggenheim Museum of modern art to mimic casualties in Gaza, during a protest organised by the Gernika-Palestina collective from the Basque region of Spain, amid the Israel war on Gaza, in Spain. — Reuters

# ISRAEL RESUMES GENOCIDE IN THE PALESTINIAN ENCLAVE

**GAZA:** Israeli forces pounded central Gaza anew on Sunday, a day after killing 274 Palestinians during a captive rescue raid, and tanks advanced into further areas of Rafah in an apparent bid to seal off part of the southern city, residents and media said.

Palestinians remained in shock over Saturday's death toll, the worst over a 24-hour period of the Gaza war for months and including many women and children, Palestinian medics said.

In an update on Sunday, Gaza's health ministry said 274 Palestinians were killed - up from 210 it reported on Saturday - and 698 were injured when Israeli special force commandos stormed into the densely populated Al-Nuseirat camp to rescue four captives held since October by Palestinian groups. Sixty-four of the dead were children and 57 were women, the Gaza government media office said on Sunday.

Israel's military said a special forces officer was killed in exchanges of fire with groups



Palestinians inspect the damage and debris a day after an Israeli raid in the Nuseirat camp. — AFP

emerging from cover in residential blocks.

On Sunday, three Palestinians were killed and several hurt in an Israeli airstrike on a house in Al-Bureij in the central Gaza Strip, while tanks shelled parts of nearby Al-Maghazi and Al-Nuseirat. All are built-up, historic refugee camps.

The Israeli military said in a statement its forces were continuing operations east of Bureij and the city of Deir al-Balah in the centre of the coastal enclave, killing several Palestinian gunmen and destroying infrastructure. — Reuters



Israeli firefighters put out flames in a field after rockets launched from Lebanon landed on Baniyas area in the Golan Heights. — AFP

## Two dead, fires in south Lebanon after strikes

**BEIRUT:** Israeli strikes killed two people and sparked wildfires in southern Lebanon, state media said, with armed groups announcing the death of one fighter.

Lebanese groups has traded near-daily fire with Israeli forces in the eight months since the Gaza war began, triggered by the October 7 attack.

The deadly clashes have intensified in recent weeks, causing multiple brush fires on both sides of the Israel-Lebanon border and raising fears the conflict could broaden.

Lebanon's official National News Agency (NNA) said that "an Israeli drone carried out an air attack with two guided missiles, targeting a cafe in Aitarun and killing the cafe's owner, Ali Khalil Hamad, 37, and a young man named Mustafa A. Issa." The agency also reported a "violent airstrike" on the border village of Khiam.

Shortly after, Lebanese groups said they had launched Katyusha rockets on a town across the border "in response to the Israeli enemy's attacks against southern villages and safe houses, and the targeting of civilians, notably in Aitarun where two people were killed". — AFP

# US begins aid deliveries to Gaza

**WASHINGTON:** The United States has resumed aid deliveries to Gaza from a temporary pier, the country's military said, after the structure suffered storm damage and underwent repairs in a nearby port.

"Today at approximately 10:30 am Gaza time US Central Command (USCENTCOM) began delivery of humanitarian assistance ashore in Gaza. Today, a total of approximately 492 metric tonnes of much needed humanitarian assistance was delivered to the people of Gaza,"

CENTCOM said.

"No US military personnel went ashore in Gaza," the military command responsible for the Middle East added.

Gaza has been devastated by Israeli operations against Palestinian groups now entering their ninth month, uprooting the coastal territory's population and leaving them in dire need of humanitarian assistance.

More than two million pounds of humanitarian aid were delivered via the pier last month, but it was damaged by high seas around a

week after deliveries began.

The pier was repaired in the Israeli port of Ashdod before being brought back to the Gaza coast and reestablished on Friday.

Israel has been accused of delaying the entry of aid into Gaza, depriving the territory's 2.4 million people of clean water, food, medicines and fuel.

Plans for the pier were first announced by US President Joe Biden in early March and US Army troops and vessels soon set out on a lengthy trip to the Mediterranean to build the pier.

UN agencies and humanitarian aid groups have warned sea or air deliveries cannot replace far more efficient truck convoys into Gaza, where the United Nations has repeatedly warned of looming famine.

CENTCOM also said on Saturday that the pier — "including its equipment, personnel, and assets" — had no role in Israel's operation earlier.

"An area south of the facility was used by the Israelis to safely return the captives to Israel," CENTCOM said. — AFP



Palestinians check a UN-school housing displaced people that was hit during Israeli bombardment in Nuseirat. — AFP file photo



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## In brief

### ■ ISLAMABAD



#### PAKISTAN'S ARMY SAYS BOMB BLAST KILLS SEVEN SOLDIERS

A bomb blast targeting a military truck killed seven soldiers on Sunday in northwestern Pakistan along the border with Afghanistan, the army said. The incident took place in the Lakki Marwat district which is on the edge of a lawless tribal region divided on both sides of the border.

The improvised explosive device exploded near the military vehicle, killing seven soldiers including an officer.

"The perpetrators of this act will be brought to justice," it said.

A group called Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) has been waging a war against the state to try to overthrow the government. — **Reuters**

### ■ YEREVAN



#### THOUSANDS RALLY IN ARMENIA AGAINST PM PASHINYAN

Thousands of Armenians took to the streets in the capital Yerevan on Sunday in a fresh protest against Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's concessions to arch foe neighbour Azerbaijan.

The protests began in April, when the Caucasus nation's government agreed to hand back to Baku territory it had controlled since the 1990s.

Pashinyan has not changed his position, despite public opposition from influential archbishop Bagrat Galstanyan.

On Sunday, several thousand anti-government protesters gathered in Yerevan's central Republic Square, outside government headquarters, a reporter said. — **AFP**

### ■ ISLAMABAD



#### BRITISH TV DOCTOR MOSLEY FOUND DEAD ON GREEK ISLAND

British TV presenter Michael Mosley has been found dead in a rocky area of Symi, days after he disappeared during a walk on the Greek island, local officials and police said.

The 67-year-old healthy living advocate, who was had been a prominent face on British TV for two decades, was found on Sunday morning, ending a four day search that included aircraft, drones and sniffer dogs.

Officer Constantina Dimoglidou said the body of a person believed to be Mosley had been found in the area of Agia Marina, north of the village of Pedi and opposite the beach of Agios Nikolaos. — **Reuters**

# Seoul blasts loudspeaker after North's balloons

SEOUL: South Korea resumed loudspeaker broadcasts directed at North Korea on Sunday, its military said, following through on a warning demanding Pyongyang stop sending balloons carrying trash into the South.

The decision to resume the broadcasts, as a form of psychological warfare, was made after North Korea began launching on Saturday about 330 balloons with trash attached, with about 80 of them dropping over the border, South Korea's military said.

"The measures we will take may be unbearable for the North Korean regime but they will send a message of hope and light to the North's troops and its people," South Korea's National Security Council said.

South Korea had warned the North it would take retaliatory measures which could include propaganda broadcasts from huge loudspeakers set up at the border.

The broadcasts were made on Sunday afternoon and whether more will follow depends on how North Korea responds, South Korea's military said.

The South Korean military said later on Sunday that more balloons had been launched by the North and could fly into the South, warning residents to not touch any objects they find attached to balloons. It gave no other details.

Pyongyang started sending balloons carrying trash and manure across the border in May and has said the move was in retaliation for anti-North leaflets flown by South Korean activists as part of a propaganda campaign.



South Korean soldiers work on a loudspeaker that is set up for propaganda broadcasts during a military drill near the demilitarised zone separating the two Koreas in Paju, South Korea. — **Reuters**

**The decision to resume the broadcasts was made after North Korea began launching 330 balloons with trash attached, with about 80 of them dropping over the border**

On June 2, it said it would temporarily halt sending the

balloons because 15 tons of trash it sent was probably enough to get the message across. However, it vowed to resume if leaflets are again flown from the South by sending a hundred times the amount.

A group of South Korean activists defied the warning and have since flown more balloons to the North with leaflets criticising its leader Kim Jong Un together

with USB sticks containing K-pop videos and dramas, and US dollar notes.

North Korea has shown some of the angriest reactions towards the leaflet campaign and the loudspeaker broadcasts, in some cases firing weapons at the balloons and speakers.

South Korea stopped the broadcasts under an agreement signed by the two Korea's

leaders in 2018 but tensions have mounted since then as Pyongyang pushed ahead with weapons development.

South Korea's broadcasts include world news and information about democratic and capitalist society with a mix of popular K-pop music. The sound is believed to travel more than 20 kilometres (12.4 miles) into North Korea. — **Reuters**

## India's Modi sworn in as PM for historic third term

NEW DELHI: Narendra Modi was sworn in as India's prime minister on Sunday for a record-equalling third term, but as a restive coalition's head after a shock poll setback that will test his ability to ensure policy certainty in the world's most populous nation.

President Droupadi Murmu administered the oath of office to Modi at a grand ceremony at the Rashtrapati Bhavan, the president's palace in New Delhi, attended by thousands of dignitaries, including the leaders of seven regional countries, Bollywood stars and industrialists.

Modi, who started as a publicist of the nationalist Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the ideological parent of his Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), is only the second person after independence leader Jawaharlal Nehru to serve a third straight term as prime minister.

Modi, 73, secured the third term in elections that concluded on June 1 with the support of 14 regional parties in his BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA), unlike in the previous two terms when his party won an outright majority.

The outcome is seen as a big setback to the popular leader as surveys and exit polls had predicted BJP would secure even more seats than in 2019.



India newly sworn-in Prime Minister Narendra Modi (5R) with President Droupadi Murmu (5L) and Vice President Jagdeep Thakkar (4L) stands with foreign dignitaries during the oath-taking ceremony at presidential palace Rashtrapati Bhavan in New Delhi. — **AFP**

Modi delivered world beating growth and lifted India's global standing but appeared to have missed a step at home as a lack of enough jobs, high prices, low incomes and religious faultlines pushed voters to rein him in.

When Modi was the chief minister of the western state of Gujarat from 2001 to 2014, BJP enjoyed strong majorities, allowing him to govern decisively.

Modi's new term as prime minister, therefore, is likely to be fraught with challenges on building consensus on contentious political and policy issues in the face of different interests of regional parties and a

stronger opposition.

Some analysts worry that the fiscal balance in the world's fastest growing economy could also come under pressure due to demands for higher development funds for states ruled by the NDA's regional partners and a possible push by BJP to spend more on welfare to woo back voters it lost in this year's election.

"We have won the majority ... but to run the country it is unanimity that is crucial ... we will strive for unanimity," he said on Friday after the NDA formally named him coalition head.

— **Reuters**

## Ukraine says hit latest-generation Russian fighter jet

KYIV: Ukrainian forces have for the first time hit a latest-generation Russian Sukhoi Su-57 fighter jet at an air base inside Russia, Kyiv's GUR defence intelligence agency said on Sunday, showing satellite pictures which it said confirmed the strike. In a Telegram post, the GUR did not specify how the Su-57 was hit or by which unit of the Ukrainian military.

A popular Russian pro-war military blogger who calls himself Fighterbomber and focuses on aviation said the report of the strike on the Su-57 was correct and that it had been hit by a drone.

The GUR said the aircraft was parked at the Akhtubinsk airfield, which it said was 589 km from front lines in Ukraine

between Ukrainian and Russian attack forces.

"The pictures show that on June 7, the Su-57 was standing intact, and on (June 8th), there were craters from the explosion and characteristic spots of fire caused by fire damage near it," the GUR said, with the images posted alongside the message.

Ukraine has been fighting a full-scale Russian attack since February 2022. Both sides conduct regular strikes hundreds of kilometres into enemy territory with missiles and drones.

Ukraine, which lacks the vast arsenal of missiles available to Moscow, has focused on making long-range drones to strike targets deep inside Russia. — **Reuters**



A Sukhoi Su-57 jet fighter performs during the MAKS 2021 air show in Zhukovsky, outside Moscow, Russia. — **Reuters file photo**

# The rise of digital literature



Sandhya Rao Mehta

The writer is Associate Professor, Dept of English Language and Literature Sultan Qaboos University

As summer temperatures shoot up and the preferred choice of entertainment is to stay indoors and hydrated, it is time to explore all that digital platforms provide. Today, the Internet is no longer used to just shop, dine or communicate but it is also a hyperactive creative space where artists gather to showcase forms of literature that would not have been dreamt of before.

Digital literature is not just a traditional book which is now found online. That would just be an e-book which can be scrolled on a device and has the convenience of portability.

Digital fiction is ‘born digital’ — it is not adapted from existing forms but uses emerging technologies to create a mood, a plot, or even a series of books.

Whether Instagram poetry, hypertext narratives or interactive pictorial stories, they are engaging and involve the reader in a way that traditional literature cannot.

A major advantage of digital literature is that it is accessible to anyone with Internet, can be

carried anywhere with ease, and is environmentally friendly. It is more affordable, even if books are bought, or access is given only through paid memberships.

More importantly, creative work online is interactive. Rather than merely turning pages in an e-book, a reader is engaged with the storyline in a digital novel by selecting hyperlinks for more information or controlling a character’s actions, leading to alternate endings.

For example, ‘Flight Paths’ by Kate Pullinger and Chris Joseph outlines the story of a young boy looking for work and the story follows him through his struggles and victories.

All this is done digitally where the action of the young boy walking, working, or thinking are all shown through animation, bringing the narrative closer to the reader.

“Afternoon, a Story” by Michael Joyce and ‘Patchwork Girl’ by Shelley Jackson are classic examples of hypertext fiction that provide non-linear experiences, with readers going back and forth in time, even allowing readers to delve into the lives of the characters.

LITERATURE HAS ALWAYS ADAPTED TO CHANGING TIMES AND TAKEN ON NEW FORMS WITHOUT CHANGING THE FUNDAMENTAL ACT OF READING

A major advantage of digital literature is that it has truly removed the hierarchy of publication where a manuscript would only have a few places it could be sent.

Today, everybody can become a writer and there are many platforms for authors to self-publish. This has made publishing much more equitable, offering everybody equal opportunities to share their creative talents.

This democratisation has led to a more diverse literary landscape, where voices that were earlier marginalised can now find an audience.

The platforms for sharing literature are many: Instagram poetry, YouTube book clubs, and the very creative space on Twitter (or X) where a poem can exist in 240 characters.

All these platforms challenge writers to create in new ways that reflect a changing society.

For the traditionalists, nothing can compare with the joy of holding a traditional book, turned up at its corners, yellowed and much thumbed.

But literature has always adapted to changing times and taken on new forms without changing the fundamental act of reading.

## Tourism buoys southern Europe’s ‘Club Med’ nations

VALENTIN BONTEMPS

Derided as “Club Med” nations during the European debt crisis 15 years ago, the economies of Spain, Greece and Portugal are now outperforming their northern peers thanks to a rebound in tourism.

The three nations had to endure harsh austerity measures in the early 2010s imposed by their European Union partners, who were quick to blame their fiscal laxity and lack of competitiveness for their economic woes.

But “the situation has changed” since the Covid-19 pandemic ended, said Zsolt Darvas, an economist at Bruegel, a Brussels-based think-tank.

“Today, those countries are growing faster than the European Union average, they are no longer seen as black sheep.”

Spain’s gross domestic product (GDP) expanded by 2.5 per cent last year, while Portugal’s economy grew by 2.3 per cent and Greece by 2.0 per cent.

That compares to growth of 0.4 per cent for the entire 27-member European Union, which was weighed down by Germany’s 0.3 per cent contraction, making it the world’s worst-performing major economy in 2023.

The International Monetary Fund expects the three nations to continue to outperform this year, although at a more modest pace.

It sees growth this year of 2.4 per cent in Spain, 1.7 per cent in Portugal and 2.0 per cent in Greece.

Spain’s economy is taking off “like a rocket”, Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez said recently. The country is “the locomotive” of job creation in the EU, he added.

Economists say this turnaround is largely due to a strong rebound in tourism, which reached record levels last year following the lifting of pandemic travel restrictions. The sector is key for the three nations, accounting for almost 25 per cent of Greece’s economy, and 12 per cent in both Portugal and Spain.

The trio of nations are also benefiting from the EU’s massive pandemic recovery fund, whose mix of grants and loans in exchange for structural reforms will largely go to southern countries. Spain — the biggest beneficiary of the fund after Italy — has so far received €38 billion, Greece €15 billion and Portugal € billion. The three nations have also made “great efforts to improve their economic attractiveness” with structural reforms that have boosted their competitiveness and improved their labour markets, said Darvas.

The reforms have helped draw foreign investment, especially in renewable energy and cloud computing. — AFP



Ahmed Al Mukhaini

The writer is a Muscat-based policy analyst and international interlocutor

THE ONGOING CRISIS IN GAZA IS NOT JUST A HUMANITARIAN TRAGEDY BUT A MORAL INDICTMENT OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY’S FAILURE TO ACT DECISIVELY

As Gaza faces yet another surge of violence, the international community stands at a critical juncture.

Recent developments in the conflict, alongside President Biden’s ceasefire proposal, underscore the urgent need for a comprehensive and effective humanitarian intervention.

This time, however, it is imperative to focus not just on immediate peace, but on addressing the systemic and ongoing oppression faced by the Palestinians.

To achieve this, the global community must hold Israel accountable and take decisive actions to protect the rights and lives of the Palestinian people.

The conflict in Gaza is not an isolated incident but a manifestation of long-standing geopolitical dynamics that have perpetuated Palestinian suffering.

The blockade imposed by Israel, with the cooperation of Egypt, has created a humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza.

This blockade has choked the economy, restricted access to essential goods, and left the population in dire conditions. These actions are not merely defensive measures; they constitute a systematic effort to undermine the basic human rights of Palestinians.

The international community’s response has historically been characterised by a cycle of in-camera condemnations followed by political inaction.

Major donors suffice themselves in reconstruction projects, only to be completely destroyed by Israel.

Diplomatic efforts, such as the Oslo Accords and the several iterations of the Middle East Peace Process, have repeatedly failed to bring about a lasting peace or address the fundamental grievances of the Palestinian people.

The asymmetry of power between Israel and the Palestinians has led to a situation where the latter’s rights and aspirations are consistently marginalised.

President Biden’s recent ceasefire proposal, while a necessary step towards halting the immediate bloodshed, is far from sufficient. Ceasefires, as history has shown, are temporary palliatives that do little to resolve the underlying issues.

Without addressing the root causes



Demonstrators outside the Eisenhower Executive Office Building, surrounding the White House grounds with a red banner symbolising President Biden’s ‘red line’ about Israel going into Rafah, during a pro-Palestinian protest, amid the Israel-Hamas conflict, in Washington. – Reuters

— such as political disenfranchisement, including the liberation of the Palestinian people, exercise of their right of self-determination, and enjoyment of right of return or compensation in lieu thereof; the ending of settlement expansion; the status of the Jerusalem — any ceasefire will be merely a pause before the next round of violence. Furthermore, the US’s longstanding support for Israel, both financially and politically, has emboldened policies that contravene international law and human rights norms. This support has often translated into a lack of accountability for Israel’s actions, further entrenching the status quo.

The principle of humanitarian intervention, grounded in international law, posits that the international community has a duty to intervene when a state is unable or unwilling to protect its population from severe human rights abuses. In the case of Gaza, this principle must guide our actions. The suffering of the Palestinian people in Gaza — due to the blockade, military operations, and systemic deprivation — constitutes a humanitarian crisis of grave proportions.

The time has come for the international community to move beyond symbolic gestures and take real, concrete actions to alleviate the plight of the Palestinians in Gaza, and equally in the West Bank.

President Biden’s proposal, now a draft UN Security Council resolution, must address the following key element: The blockade on Gaza must be lifted

immediately and unconditionally. This will allow for the flow of essential goods, services, and humanitarian aid, and enable the reconstruction of Gaza’s devastated infrastructure.

An international protection mechanism, sanctioned by the United Nations, should be deployed to monitor the situation on the ground, ensure the safety of civilians, and facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid.

The international community must establish independent and impartial mechanisms to investigate and hold accountable all parties responsible for violations of international law. This includes scrutinising Israel’s actions in Gaza and ensuring justice for the victims, as well as Hamas actions against civilian settlers.

Diplomatic efforts must be reinvigorated with a focus on achieving a just and lasting peace. This involves addressing core issues such as the right of return for Palestinian refugees, the status of Jerusalem, and the establishment of a viable and sovereign Palestinian state. The ongoing crisis in Gaza is not just a humanitarian tragedy but a moral indictment of the international community’s failure to act decisively.

It is also a geopolitical challenge that demands a reevaluation of longstanding policies and alliances.

The world must recognise that a stable and just Middle East is contingent upon addressing the legitimate aspirations and rights of the Palestinian people.

# Every dawn brings a new surprise

Days of life are full of different challenges; with most come unexpectedly out of a sudden! Nobody dares to deny this fact as everyone could experience hiccups, difficulties, disappointments and obstacles of different forms in a way or another.

Regardless how hard or soft these challenges are hitting and breaking people, they bring a headache that requires part of one's attention, time and effort. This is life, every dawn brings a surprise; either a pleasing or frustrating one.

One just wakes up every morning with a distinct experience for the day! Possibly, more than a challenge on a day comes on one's plate! Days are not all alike, so are life experiences and happenings. However, all what matters is the way on which one handles every challenge or experience that comes across.

They are either making or breaking people for their reaction and attitude are what always count. Some are easily and immediately provoked and tensioned while others get very self-controlled and patient.

As people own the control button of how they run the show of their days, one should be positively looking at the brighter side of each experience.

Although it is not easy to manage self-reaction, attitude and feelings, but one must try the best possible to have a good day and enjoy every moment of life. Helen Keller, an American lecturer and author, said: "Optimism is the faith that leads to achievement. Nothing can be done without hope and confidence."

Most likely, all what one needs is just to have a dose of patience, which could cure the tension, frustration and disappointment. Being hopeful could be another relief that makes people less tensioned. Staying positive and optimistic rise the level of patience with people. Usually, patience can help people achieve their goals, maintain a more positive outlook on life, and make them less reactive, which in turn will make



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LIFE IS VERY SHORT, SO IT SHOULD NOT BE WASTED IN MOMENTS OF SADNESS, MISERY AND DISAPPOINTMENTS

them less directed to bad decisions.

Stress, regret, and anger do not help getting anything. Hence, when facing an uncertain future, a negative incident or something scary, one has to take a minute and think before acting on spot. Life is very short, so it should not be wasted in moments of sadness, misery and disappointments.

Challenges are to be regarded learning lessons and experiences, while disabilities should be turned into abilities that bring new opportunities. Just be positive and believe in yourself as greater than any obstacle.

As the saying goes, a minute of patience equals ten years of peace. If one finds the brain deviates to a negative direction, perhaps recalling a positive incident would help getting back on track of mind to make a better decision. Patience is not the ability to wait, but the ability to keep a good attitude while waiting. Nobody pretends that exercising patience is easy, but one tries the best possible to overcome the bitterness of patience. As Aristotle said, patience is bitter, but its fruit is sweet.

Practically, everyone should always take the needed dose of patience whenever one comes across a challenge in life. Likewise, as emotionally sensitive human beings we should all be fair with ourselves by having enough time to fully understand what happens and what are the possible reasons behind incidents and situations? Then, things will undoubtedly get clear for us, so we can wisely think of potential solutions.

Possibly, seeking the support from others could work as another way of getting things out of our chest. Thus, we might need to get a proper consultation and an advice from a trusted friend, colleague or loved ones even.

Receiving a word of commendation or lending a hand of support to others gives another mind to think with and introduces a better vision of decision-making. As it has been said, a friend in need is a friend indeed.

# TRADITIONAL HUNGARIAN VOTING



Women in traditional Hungarian dresses leave the voting booth at a polling station in a school in Veresegyszaz, some 30 km east of Budapest, during the European Parliament election. – AFP

# What the EU has done for us

This month, hundreds of millions of voters will head to the polls for the European Parliament elections, and many will ask what the European Union has done for them since the last election, in 2019.

The fact that 27 countries choose to pool their sovereignty and build an economic, social, and political partnership based on the shared values of peace, justice, respect, and solidarity is unique in global history. It is a triumph that we should not take for granted, especially when so many people around the world still yearn for the freedom to choose their government from a diverse array of candidates and parties.

At a time when the geopolitical ground is shifting, the global order that we helped build – and which has served us well these past 80 years – is being put to the test. Nonetheless, our greatest challenges – whether they concern security, health, digitalisation, or climate change – are still ones we share and that require cooperation to address.

Europe's own experience shows that we are stronger together, and that we can succeed when we act according to three principles: unity, determination, and solidarity.

Our shared experience since the last European elections attests to the value that the EU adds to our daily lives. When an unprecedented



Nadia Calviño

The writer is President of the European Investment Bank

pandemic hit, every citizen had access to life-saving vaccines, and the pooling of economic and financial resources had a remarkable impact.

For example, the European Central Bank provided liquidity to protect our financial systems; the European Commission's SURE (Support to mitigate Unemployment Risks in an Emergency) programme helped countries protect jobs throughout the EU; and the European Investment Bank's European Guarantee Fund complemented national support systems to protect small- and medium-size enterprises (SMEs) and the broader business ecosystem.

Even now, the Recovery and Resilience Facility is promoting the reforms and investments needed to achieve a strong recovery, and to drive the green and digital transitions.

The EU, in short, is a shining success story. Not only has it brought prosperity, peace, stability, and social progress to a large European community; it also has become a force for good in the world. It is a leading source of humanitarian assistance and development finance, a strong advocate for the multilateral institutions that maintain global financial stability, and a major supporter to the world's most vulnerable

countries.

I am proud of the EIB Group's instrumental role in delivering these results. With €22 billion (\$24 billion) of paid-in capital, we have been able to mobilize more than €5 trillion in investment. This financing has gone to support top-notch transportation and energy infrastructure, hospitals, schools, SMEs across the EU,

NOT ONLY HAS THE EU BROUGHT PROSPERITY, PEACE, STABILITY, AND SOCIAL PROGRESS TO A LARGE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY; IT ALSO HAS BECOME A FORCE FOR GOOD IN THE WORLD

highly innovative technologies, and many rapidly scaling startups, thus contributing to the green and digital transitions and reinforcing our strategic autonomy and security.

To name just a few recent examples, the EIB Group has supported vaccine development in the EU with a loan to

BioNTech, the company that delivered the breakthrough mRNA platform at the height of the pandemic. We are also financing the largest solar-panel factory in Italy, the first circular-production battery gigafactory in Sweden, and large offshore wind farms in the Baltic and Nordic regions. And we have funded an innovative chip manufacturing plant in France, efforts to decarbonise heavy industry in Germany, new green hydrogen projects and infrastructure in the Iberian Peninsula, and an upgrade to Poland's electricity-transmission network.

Since its creation in 1958, the EIB Group has financed EU policies and evolved to respond to European needs. I am convinced that we are currently financing the technologies that will be the building blocks of an efficient net-zero economy, and which will be instrumental to accelerate digitalisation and innovation.

But we are no less determined to support European agriculture, help our industries seize existing opportunities, strengthen European competitiveness and strategic autonomy, and address challenges such as housing costs (an important issue for people in most EU member states). Given the

EIB Group's track record, I am convinced that we will also play an important role in supporting the next phase of EU enlargement and in amplifying Europe's voice in the world.

The turbulent five years since the last European elections show us that we need more Europe, not less. We need the EU for our security, stability, and prosperity. With populists promising easy solutions and calling for less solidarity, we must remember what the EU is doing for us everyday.

A new geopolitical order is emerging, and the foundation of Europe's success is being put to the test. Our decisions at the ballot box will determine the EU's priorities and role in the world at a crucial moment in world history. I believe this election should be a vote of confidence in Europe and the principle of solidarity. We must strengthen the institutions that have long ensured our own peace and prosperity, and which remain a beacon and a force for good in the world. Let's defend our European values. Let's focus on what truly matters. Let's appreciate what the EU means for security, welfare, and prosperity throughout all member states. And then let's use our vote!

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# sport

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## Red Warriors morale high after recent win

ADIL AL BALUSHI  
MUSCAT, JUNE 9

Oman football team players are currently undergoing an intensive training sessions ahead of Kyrgyzstan clash which will decide the group topper on Tuesday. The coaching staff of the team headed by Jaroslav Silhavy and his assistant team focused on stress relief, recovery exercises and tactical training during Saturday’s sessions. The team resumed more tactical drills on Sunday. The preparatory trainings took place at Royal Oman Police Stadium in Al Wattaya while the main warm-up training will take place on Monday at the Sultan



Qaboos Sports Complex where the head coach will finalise the start up list. Red Warriors confirmed their progression to the next and deciding stage of the Preliminary Joint Qualification

for the Fifa World Cup 2026 and AFC Asian Cup Saudi Arabia 2027 following the 3-0 win over Chinese Taipei by 3-0 while Kyrgyzstan and Malaysia’s encounter ended by a 1-1 draw. Abdulrahman al Mushefri,



the man of the previous game, received a warm welcome from his teammates during the training session on Saturday. It was a recognition from the team for his outstanding performance during Chinese Taipei match

as he scored two goals. The 25-year-old The 25-year-old was named as one of the Match day 5 Star Performers by the AFC. On the other side, Kyrgyzstan delegation arrived in Muscat ahead of the match

on Tuesday. The opponent began their training sessions at the Royal Courts Stadium in Al Khoudh, while they will get the chance to train in the main venue on Monday. The press conference and the technical meeting will be held on Monday. Oman’s head coach Silhavy and Kyrgyzstan’s coach Stefan Tarkovic will highlight on the latest readiness of both teams ahead of the awaiting clash. Oman currently are leading group D by 12 points followed by Kyrgyzstan with 10 points. Malaysia is in third place with seven points while Chinese Taipei in the bottom of the group with no points.

## MoCSY, Al Maha sign pact to boost financial sustainability

AHMED AL KAABI  
MUSCAT, JUNE 9

In a move aimed at enhancing sport investment and financial sustainability, the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth (MoCSY) has signed an investment agreement for the lands of the Oman Olympic Committee and sports federations with Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing Company. The agreement was signed by Basil bin Ahmed al Rawas, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth for Sports and Youth, and on behalf of the company, Eng Hamad al Mughdari, CEO of Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing Company. The agreement comes within the framework of the Ministry’s efforts, in coordination with Oman Olympic Committee and sports federations, to invest the granted



lands with financial returns that achieve financial sustainability and strategic goals. The project will include the establishment of facilities for selling petroleum products and commercial facilities, in addition to open spaces and corridors for sports activities, on a total area of more than 18,000 sqm, at a total

cost of up to 4 million Omani riyals. This project will achieve direct and indirect financial returns for sports bodies, in addition to new job opportunities, and facilities for marketing and promoting sporting events and activities. Basil al Rawas stressed that the signing of the agreement aims to provide sustainable financial



resources and returns for sports federations and bodies, which enhances their ability to perform their duties effectively. Al Rawas explained that the MoCSY through the Fund for the Support of Cultural, is making great efforts to develop investment sports projects that align with “Oman Vision 2040” and achieve financial sustainability for the sports sector. These efforts aim to transform sports into a

thriving industry that generates substantial financial returns for sports institutions, contributing to placing the Sultanate of Oman among the ranks of advanced countries. Al Maghdari explained that “The project comes within the framework of Maha Company’s strategy to expand and diversify its activities, maintain sustainable growth, and keep pace with changes

in the business environment. The project is located in a strategic location opposite the Boshier Sports Complex, making it an ideal place for commercial and residential activities. It includes extensive green spaces, the use of renewable energy, and energy efficiency, to be a model for sustainable projects that represent an important part of the future economy in the Sultanate of Oman.



# Brazil boosted ahead of Copa America after 3-2 win

TEXAS: Brazil enjoyed the perfect warm-up as they secured a 3-2 win over Mexico in their pre-Copa America friendly in Kyle Field stadium in Texas on Saturday.

Coach Dorival Junior, who assumed the Brazil job in January, decided to rest first-choice players such as Vinicius Jr, Rodrygo and Raphinha. His decision paid off as they took an early lead when Andreas Pereira scored from a Savio pass in the 5th.

Mexico enjoyed the majority of possession in the first half but lacked the cutting edge to test goalkeeper Alisson Becker, who replaced the injured Ederson after he was ruled out with a fractured eye socket.

Brazil doubled their lead nine minutes after the break when



#09 Endrick (2nd L) scores third goal. – AFP

Eder Militao's long throw-in was met by Yan Couto, who flicked the ball back into the area for Gabriel Martinelli to tap in alone.

The Mexican side weren't done yet, though, as Julian Quinones scored in the 73rd minute from

Alexis Vega's superb cross, before Guillermo Martinez Ayala equalised in the 92nd minute of added time.

But it was young prodigy Endrick who sealed Brazil's victory four minutes later,

heading in a cross from Vinicius Jr, who had come on as a substitute.

"I'm very grateful to God for another opportunity to score for the national team. Thanks to the squad and Dorival's excellent work. We trained well and I hope we can work even harder because the goal is to win Copa America," said 17-year-old Endrick after the match.

The nine-times champions face the US in another warm-up friendly on Wednesday before opening their Copa America campaign against Costa Rica on June 24 followed by Paraguay four days' later and Colombia on July 2.

The quadrennial tournament will be held in the United States from June 20-July 14. — Reuters

## Roglic holds on to win second Criterium du Dauphine



Primoz Roglic (L) and Giulio Ciccone await the last stage start. – AFP

PLATEAU DES GLIERES, FRANCE: Slovenia's Primoz Roglic held off a late surge by American Matteo Jorgenson to win his second Criterium du Dauphine by just eight seconds on Sunday in an eventful 160-kilometre mountainous run from Thones to Plateau des Glieres. Roglic, who rides for Bora-Hansgrohe, went into the last day of the pre-Tour de France race with a 1 minute 2 second lead on Jorgenson but the American put in a fine performance to come second in the eighth and final stage, just behind stage winner Carlos Rodriguez of Spain.

"It's crazy to be able to win the Dauphine after everything that happened, the crash (on Thursday) and everything that came in between. It's incredible," said Roglic.

"I was hearing all the gaps all the time. It was close but finally I'm satisfied for the team. It's definitely something we needed with the team to be able to win the Dauphine.

"I first want to be happy because you don't win a race like this every day," he added.

The 34-year-old Slovenian came in sixth on the day after forcing his way up the final ascent just in time to ensure he added a second Dauphine victory to his win in 2022.

Comfortable Roglic -

After being caught up in the mass fall in Thursday's stage, Roglic showed no signs of hurt as he won back-to-back stages on Friday and Saturday to stake his claim on the race lead going into the final stage.

After having previously lost the race on the last day in 2020, Roglic looked comfortable as the riders set off from Thones but began to falter in the final climb before recovering to fight hard in the last 500 metres to maintain his grip on the yellow jersey.

Jorgenson, 24, of Visma just failed to add a Criterium win to his Paris-Nice title this year as he ended up second in the overall classification.

Derek Gee was dropped by the leading group of Jorgenson and Rodriguez shortly before the finish line but rolled through in third place for the stage to finish 36sec behind Roglic and become the first Canadian to ever to make the overall podium in the Criterium.

Ineos' Rodriguez claimed a career-first Criterium stage win on Sunday to jump to fourth in the overall ranking.

Italian Lorenzo Fortunato clinched the polka dot jersey from Roglic on the final day as the race's best climber with 40 points overall. — AFP

# Russell takes Canadian pole with same time as Verstappen

MONTREAL: George Russell put Mercedes on pole position for the Canadian Grand Prix by the blink of an eye on Saturday after setting exactly the same time as Red Bull's Max Verstappen.

Triple Formula One world champion Verstappen missed out on pole because he set his time of one minute 12.000 seconds after his British rival in a drama-filled qualifying session at the Circuit Gilles Villeneuve.

Mercedes signalled they were going to be a threat for pole earlier on Saturday when Lewis Hamilton, a seven-times winner in Canada, posted the top time in final practice with Russell close behind in third.

Rain, which had disrupted both practices on Friday, returned for the first two phases of qualifying but the skies cleared and the sun began to appear in time for the last-10 shootout that ended in a dead heat.

Russell will start on pole for the first time since Brazil 2022, joined on the front row by Verstappen who is chasing a Canadian Grand



(L-R) Second place Max Verstappen; pole winner George Russell; and third place Lando Norris. – AFP

Prix hat-trick.

"I've missed this feeling," Russell said. "Excited for tomorrow, first step done but now obviously we've got our eyes on that win.

"The car has been feeling amazing since we brought some upgrades to Monaco, we have really been in that fight now. So we're going for it tomorrow."

Russell's pole provided yet another sign that Red Bull's domination is waning.

After Verstappen's run of eight

consecutive poles extending back to last season, three different drivers have started from the front in the last three races.

If Russell can follow up his pole with a victory on Sunday he would also become the fourth different winner in the last four.

### DANGEROUS THREAT

Red Bull and Verstappen will not be waving the white flag, however, and the Dutchman showed that his team are still a threat.



George Russell during qualifying. – REUTERS

"I think overall we still had a good qualifying," summed up Verstappen, who tops the drivers standings 31 points clear of Ferrari's Charles Leclerc.

"The whole weekend has been still a bit tricky for us, but to be P2, I'd take it," he added.

"Going into qualifying I would have definitely taken that.

"That it was that close at the end makes it really exciting for tomorrow as well."

Verstappen will not be getting

much help from Mexican team mate Sergio Perez, who turned in an uninspired effort and will start well back in 16th.

Perez's day was not as bad as Ferrari's with Leclerc, a winner two weeks ago in Monaco, and Carlos Sainz stumbling out in the second phase and starting 11th and 12th respectively.

"For sure when you are 11th and 12th you are not happy," said Ferrari team principal Frederic Vasseur. "It's tight.

"At the end of the day Perez is 16th and for one or two tenths you can be out."

Sauber's Zhou Guanyu, who crashed early in two of the three practice sessions, paid dearly for his lack of track time and finished bottom of the results sheet.

It will be Alpine's Esteban Ocon starting last on Sunday, however, the Frenchman taking a five-place grid penalty for colliding with team mate Pierre Gasly in the last race in Monaco. — Reuters

# ALCARAZ WINS FIRST FRENCH OPEN TITLE

**PARIS:** Carlos Alcaraz fought back to defeat Alexander Zverev in a five-set French Open final on Sunday and become the youngest man to win Grand Slam titles on all three surfaces. The 21-year-old battled cramps to recover from 2-1 down in sets and win a gripping contest 6-3, 2-6, 5-7, 6-1, 6-2 after four hours and 19 minutes on Court Philippe Chatrier.

Alcaraz adds the Roland Garros crown to the Wimbledon title he won against Novak Djokovic last year and the 2022 US Open.

He will head to the Australian Open next year with the chance to become the youngest man to complete the career Grand Slam.

Fourth seed Zverev, who settled a court case in Germany two days ago over domestic abuse allegations, is still waiting for a maiden major title.

He had also lost his only previous Slam final in five sets, when he blew a two-set lead against Dominic Thiem at the 2020 US Open. Zverev had high hopes of finally getting over the line — he has also lost six Slam semi-finals — but Alcaraz was too strong in the key moments as he levelled their head-to-head record at 5-5. Alcaraz said before the final he wanted to join the list of men's players from his country, including his idol Rafael Nadal, to win the Roland Garros title, and he celebrated becoming the eighth Spanish champion by falling to the clay with his head in his hands in disbelief.

### ZVEREV'S NERVY START

Zverev endured a miserable start, double-faulting on the first two points of the match en route to being broken in the opening game.

But Alcaraz was not immune to the nerves of a maiden French Open final, framing a regulation forehand into the stands and then also double-faulting as he gifted the break straight back.

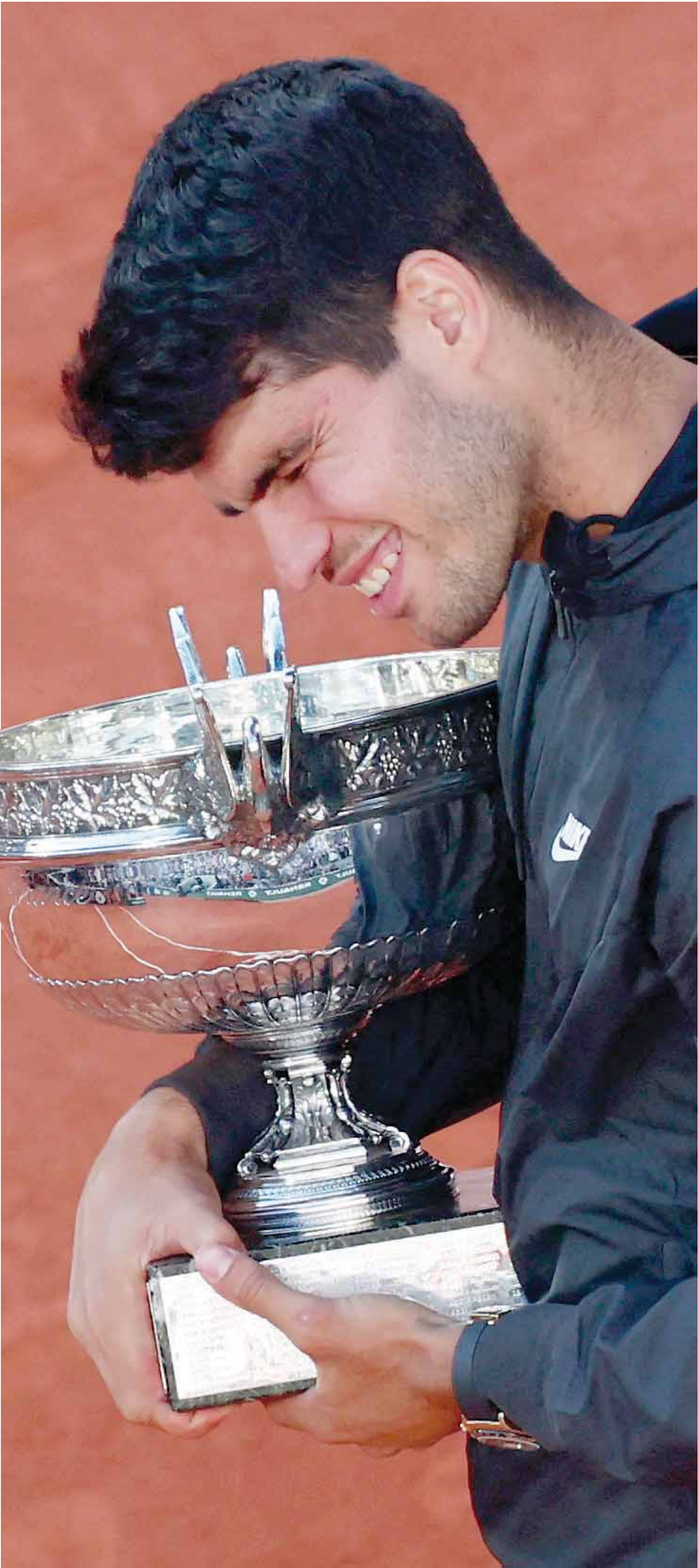
The Spaniard did not take too long to find his groove, though, breaking to love in the fifth game on his way to pocketing the opener.

The youngster had to save three break points to hold in a 10-minute first game of the second set, but slipped 3-2 behind when he failed to stave off two more break points as another forehand sailed into the crowd. Suddenly Zverev had a spring in his step and Alcaraz was reduced to scrambling at the back of the court, falling a double-break down with a double-fault.

Zverev wrapped up an ultimately one-sided second set with a hold to love. The German made it three successive love holds with two more early in the third set, before Alcaraz celebrated coming out of a tricky service game unscathed with a fist pump as he edged 3-2 ahead, despite having been largely on the back foot. Serving into an increasingly strong breeze, Zverev was caught out by an Alcaraz return that crept over the net and the Spaniard went on to grab a break to love. But he could not serve out the set as a rasping Zverev passing shot secured a break back. That failure to take control of the match seemed to temporarily break Alcaraz's spirit, as he ended up losing five games on the spin to concede the set.

### CRUCIAL LINE CALL SAVES ALCARAZ

Alcaraz would not go down without a fight, though, breaking for a 2-0 advantage in the fourth with a magnificent curling winner on the run. Just seconds before, Zverev had been angrily disputing a line call which was clearly correct, drawing jeers from the crowd. The German was rattled and his serve started to desert him, with Alcaraz racing through the fourth set to force a decider despite having to take a medical time-out to have treatment for apparent cramp at 4-1. Zverev had won 10 of his previous 11 five-setters at Roland Garros but handed Alcaraz a break on a platter in the third game of the fifth. Alcaraz stuttered himself, falling 0-40 down in the next game. — AFP







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# Oman records trade surplus of RO 2.61 billion in Q1

**MUSCAT:** The Sultanate of Oman recorded a trade balance surplus of RO 2.610 billion by Q1 2024, up from RO 1.932 billion during the same period in 2023, according to preliminary statistics issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

Statistics indicated that the value of merchandise exports by the end of March 2024 was RO 6.502 billion, marking an increase of 16.7 per cent over the same period last year, which stood at RO 5.572 billion.

The value of merchandise imports to Oman amounted to RO 3.892 billion, an increase of 6.9 per cent compared to RO 3.640 billion at the end of March 2023.

The rise in exports was mainly driven by an increase in the value of Oman's oil and gas exports to RO 3.722 billion, up by 3.1 per cent from RO 3.609 billion at the end of March 2023.

Among oil and gas exports, the value of Oman's crude oil exports amounted to RO 2.704 billion, reflecting a 13.3 per cent increase over the same period last year.

Conversely, the value of refined



The value of merchandise exports by the end of March 2024 was RO 6.502 billion, marking an increase of 16.7 per cent over the same period last year.

oil exports decreased to RO 336 million, a drop of 13.9 per cent. The value of liquefied natural gas exports declined to RO 682 million, an 18.1 per cent decrease compared to the end of March 2023.

The data also revealed that non-oil merchandise exports increased by 44.9 per cent by the

end of March 2024, reaching RO 2.338 billion, compared to RO 1.614 billion at the end of March 2023.

Among non-oil commodity exports, mineral products had the highest value, reaching RO 1.169 billion, an increase of 127 per cent over the same period in 2023. This was followed by

ordinary metal products and their manufactures at RO 352 million, an increase of 9.6 per cent.

Exports of chemical industry products and related industries amounted to RO 253 million, a decrease of 7.3 per cent.

The value of Oman's exports of plastic and its products, rubber and its products rose to RO 233

million, a 20.4 per cent increase.

Exports of live animals and products of the animal kingdom decreased by 1.2 per cent to reach RO 89 million, while the value of other product exports reached RO 242 million.

The value of re-exports from Oman increased to RO 442 million, a 26.8 per cent rise by the end of March 2024 compared to the end of March 2023.

Re-exports of transportation equipment products reached RO 140 million, an increase of 49.3 per cent.

Re-exports of machinery, appliances, electrical equipment, and their parts amounted to RO 103 million, a 22 per cent increase. Re-exports of live animals and products of the animal kingdom increased to RO 39 million, an 8.6 per cent rise.

However, re-exports of food, beverages, and liquids decreased by 2 per cent to RO 35 million, while re-exports of mineral products amounted to RO 28 million, a 56.8 per cent increase.

The value of other re-exported products was RO 98 million.

On the import side, metal products had the highest value of

merchandise imports to Oman, recording RO 1.097 billion by the end of March, an increase of 15 per cent.

This was followed by machinery, appliances, electrical equipment, and their parts and audio recording and broadcasting equipment, with a value of RO 605 million, an 8.1 per cent growth by the end of March 2024.

Chemical industry products and related industries were valued at RO 375 million, a growth of 2.1 per cent, while transportation equipment imports stood at RO 330 million, a decrease of 2 per cent.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia topped trade exchange operations in non-oil exports, with a value of approximately RO 238 million by the end of March, an increase of 9.5 per cent from March 2023.

The United Arab Emirates led in re-exports from Oman, with the value of re-exports to the UAE reaching RO 175 million.

The UAE also ranked first among the top countries exporting to Oman, with a value of RO 982 million, an increase of 1.4 per cent from the end of March 2023. — **ONA**

## Value of fish landed in Oman reaches RO 147 million by end of Q1



**MUSCAT:** The total value of fish landed in the Sultanate of Oman by end of Q1 amounted to about RO 147.308 million, an increase of 0.5 per cent, compared to the same period in 2023, which amounted to RO 146.543 million.

Preliminary statistics issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information indicated that artisanal fishing recorded an increase of 11.4 per cent at end of March, reaching 193,054 tonnes, compared to 173,267 tonnes in the same period in 2023, while the amount of commercial fishing reached 23,826 tonnes.

The amount of coastal fishing is 2,443 tonnes. Statistics showed that the Al Wusta Governorate harvested the highest quantity of fish landed by artisanal fishing, amounting to 79,294 tonnes, followed by the Al Sharqiyah South Governorate with 60,734 tonnes, then the Dhofar Governorate with 22,119

tonnes, and in the Al Batinah North and Al Batinah South Governorates, 14,898 tonnes.

When the amount of fish landed by artisanal fishing in Musandam Governorate reached 9,969 tonnes, and in Muscat Governorate, 6,39 tonnes.

Statistics showed that the largest quantity of fish landed by artisanal fishing came from small pelagic fish, as the quantity amounted to about 118,389 tonnes at the end of last March.

The amount of large pelagic fish landed by artisanal fishing amounted to 39,959 tonnes, while the amount of demersal fish amounted to 29,617 tonnes.

The amount of crustaceans landed by artisanal fishing amounted to 1,284 tonnes.

As for crustaceans and molluscs landed by artisanal fishing, they amounted to 2,354 tonnes, and other fish amounted to 1,450 tonnes. — **ONA**

# OIA's direct investments target green energy and tech startups in 2023

CONRAD PRABHU  
MUSCAT, JUNE 9

Green energy and climate tech firms were among six international start-ups that received funding infusions from Oman Investment Authority (OIA) in 2023 – part of the wealth fund's continuing efforts to align with prominent players in the global clean tech industry with the underlying goal of facilitating the transfer of their technologies into Oman.

The list includes Our Next Energy (ONE), a US-based startup specialising in innovative electric car battery and energy storage technology.

"A strategic cooperation agreement has been signed with ONE to determine likely areas of collaboration in energy storage and battery manufacturing in Oman," said OIA in its 2023 Annual Report here last week.

Another recipient of investment from OIA is Jurata, also US-based, which is credited with pioneering the development of novel thin film technology, which enables the storage and transportation of biological materials without relying on cold chain infrastructure.

Earlier, OIA announced a direct investment in Electric Hydrogen



Recipients of OIA direct funding included tech startups specialising in EV battery, electrolyser, energy storage, IoT application and other technologies.

(EH2), an American company specialising in developing and manufacturing electrolysers using Proton Exchange Membrane (PEM) technology to produce green hydrogen.

"Electric Hydrogen and OIA have signed a strategic cooperation agreement to launch a green hydrogen production project using PEM technology and localise the electrolyser industry," said OIA in its report.

Italy's Energy Dome, a start-up that provides long-duration energy storage using a thermodynamic CO2 system, is also backed by OIA. Energy Oman has entered into a partnership with Takhzeen, a local Omani company, to promote

this technology in Oman.

More recently, Australian green energy startup Hysata announced that it has receiving funding support for OIA. The company has pioneered the development of a new kind of electrolyser based on technology has the potential to spark change in green hydrogen production economies.

Among the six beneficiaries of OIA direct investments in 2023 was Omani tech firm eMushrif.

Founded by Omani engineers, eMushrif has harnessed the power of IoT technologies to develop safety monitoring solutions for students on school buses. OIA's venture capital fund IDO Investments enhanced its investments in eMushrif to

support the latter's expansion.

OIA's direct investments represent one of three arms that together make up its Future Generation Fund (FGF), whose portfolio has ballooned to RO 7.065 billion as of 2023-end.

The top performer was the Public Markets arm, which achieved high returns of 9.8 per cent, exceeding the 5 per cent target annual return for the FGF.

"This is attributable to global equity's strong performance throughout the year, reinforced by projected profits from the AI industry, positive economic indicators and profits from companies that surpassed expectations," said OIA in its report.

The Private Markets arm, on the other hand, reported investments in 13 global funds last year.

The list includes Platinum Investment Fund, which invests in manufacturing, chemical materials and distribution; the Global Infrastructure Fund, which invests in North America, Europe, Asia, the Pacific Ocean and Latin America; and the Chinese fund 5Y, which focuses on consumer innovation, information technology, and life sciences.

# Ominvest and Oman In Focus sign pact to explore Empty Quarter Desert

MUSCAT: Oman International Development and Investment Company SAOG (Ominvest) and Oman In Focus Company have joined forces to create the documentary film “Empty Quarter Desert,” aimed at showcasing the pristine nature and ecological diversity of the desert.

This collaboration underscores Ominvest’s commitment to support the ecotourism sector in Oman as well as to support the SMEs exploring the nation’s unique tourist and natural treasures. The agreement was signed by Abdulaziz al Balushi, Group CEO of Ominvest, and Maisa al Hooti Owner and Founder of Oman In Focus.

“The Empty Quarter Desert” is the latest in a series of documentary



films by Oman In Focus, produced in collaboration with wildlife experts and film-makers both local and international. The film will be broadcast in multiple languages on various specialised regional and international satellite channels.

Al Balushi emphasised that the agreement reflects the Ominvest’s dedication to promoting tourism in Oman, encouraging eco-tourism, supporting Omani small and medium enterprises, and raising awareness about preserving the Omani environment as part of

Ominvest ESG strategy.

In a press statement, he commended the dedication of Omani companies to documenting the wildlife of the Sultanate of Oman, emphasising Ominvest’s efforts in preserving and sustaining the environment, positioning it as a unique tourist attraction on the global tourism map, and promoting it on international satellite channels.

Maisa al Hooti expressed her gratitude to Ominvest for sponsoring this project.

She stated that the support of leading Omani companies exemplifies the private sector’s partnership in promoting tourism and exploring Oman’s environmental diversity.

The film, created by a team of international and local

photographers, will facilitate the exchange of expertise and highlight the unique wildlife of the Empty Quarter desert.

Ominvest owns high-quality durable assets in diversified sectors, producing healthy cash flows. As of 2023-year end, the company’s total assets stood at RO 1.3 billion covering diverse sectors, including Banking, Insurance, Finance and Leasing, Financial Investments, Private Equity and Investment Banking.

The company’s assets cover diversified geographies including the GCC and Asia in addition to significant investments in global capital markets. The company is led by a progressive board and a capable management team — dedicated to enhancing value for all stakeholders.

## OAB launches direct debit service for seamless payment automation



MUSCAT: Oman Arab Bank (OAB) continues its commitment to pioneering innovative and secure banking solutions with the introduction of its latest product, direct debit.

Tailored for both individual and corporate customers, this new service simplifies digital payments by automating recurring bill payments, offering unparalleled convenience in banking transactions.

Aligned with the Central Bank of Oman’s latest direct debit system, this service promises to streamline and automate transactions while enhancing payment security standards. By offering numerous benefits to businesses of all sizes and sectors, it effectively addresses the recurring payment needs of customers.

Khalid al Amri (pictured), Chief Retail Banking Officer at OAB, said, “By investing in the latest financial technologies, we are aligning with Oman’s digitisation efforts in financial services, and ensuring that our secure and convenient payment solutions are tailored to meet our customers’ evolving needs.”

The direct debit system not only streamlines financial operations but also prioritises customer satisfaction by reducing the risks of debts and enhancing fraud protection measures, thus ensuring a seamless and reliable banking experience.”

Customers can easily set up their direct debit through the OAB mobile app or Internet banking platform, eliminating the need for branch visits.

Once the direct debit authorisation form is completed, payment experience will be processed automatically from their accounts on predetermined dates.

This new service eliminates the need for writing cheques or manually managing bill payments, offering a more convenient and efficient payment solution.



## Shell Oman, Al Meera Markets collaborate to enhance customer offerings

MUSCAT: Driven by an unwavering dedication to continuously elevate its offerings, Shell Oman Marketing Company SAOG. (Shell Oman) has recently announced a strategic partnership with Al Meera Markets, effective June 1, 2024.

This collaboration will witness the co-branding of Shell Select shops with Al Meera Markets across the entire network — a move that heralds a significant expansion in product diversity, positioning these outlets as comprehensive one-stop shopping destinations for customers. This initiative aims to cater to the diverse needs of customers, thereby focusing on improving overall customer satisfaction.

Speaking about the new milestone, Dr Mohammed al Balushi — Chief Executive Officer at Shell Oman Marketing Company, said, “The partnership between Shell Oman and Al Meera Markets is founded on shared values that prioritise understanding customer trends and responding to evolving needs.

By partnering with Al Meera, we are poised to provide a seamless and enriching shopping experience for our customers, as this initiative underscores Shell Oman’s aim of increasing In-Country Value, whilst upholding sound principles of innovation, customer-centricity, and service excellence.”

# Bank Muscat launches Tap’N’Go service on Android smartphones and devices

MUSCAT: In line with global digital trends and the bank’s commitment to implementing online innovative banking solutions and services, Bank Muscat, the leading financial service provider in the Sultanate of Oman, has launched the Tap’N’Go service available on various Android devices that are enabled with the Near Field Communication (NFC) feature.

The service eliminates the need of having a physical terminal to accept payments. To launch the new service, it is worth noting that a memorandum of understanding was recently signed by Bank Muscat and Visa.

The memorandum was signed by Abdullah bin Hamood al Jufaili, Assistant General Manager, Digital Banking, Bank Muscat and Manish Gautum, Visa’s Country Manager for the Sultanate of Oman. Launching the new service came in translation of the bank’s vision “To serve you better, everyday,” aiming to facilitate customers’ access to a suite of innovative digital banking services and solutions that cater to their diverse needs and recent preferences.

The new service also allows customers to initiate and complete transactions in a quick and secure



manner.

The new service is a revolutionary technology that allows merchants and business owners including home business owners to accept card payments directly on their Android phones and smart devices of version 11 and above.

All NFC-enabled payment cards may be used for customers to initiate payment transactions via the Tap’N’Go application. This digital service is available for Bank Muscat and Meethaq customers alike.

However, merchants have to open a merchant account that allows business to accept card payments, in addition to opening

a Bank Muscat corporate account.

Furthermore, the technology also enables merchants to verify their transactions through the application which can be directly downloaded using the App Stores on the Android smartphones and following the steps illustrated on <https://www.bankmuscat.com/ar/Business/Digitalsolutions/Pages/TapAndGo.aspx>.

Tap’N’Go users will receive a daily account statement on their registered email ID and may also check the completion status of their transactions by viewing the last transactions initiated through the application as well as verifying the transaction amounts. Customers may also

# Oman Air and SalamAir extend codeshare partnership

MUSCAT: Oman Air and SalamAir leadership met recently to mark the launch of the airlines’ latest codeshare partnership, which offers passengers an expanded range of travel options within the Sultanate of Oman and beyond.

During the meeting, the airlines discussed their future prospects as national carriers and their common commitment to supporting the country’s tourism goals as part of Oman’s Vision 2040.

“We are thrilled to further strengthen our partnership with Oman Air,” said Adrian Hamilton-Manns, Chief Executive Officer of SalamAir.

“This extended codeshare

agreement reflects our shared commitment to providing passengers with unparalleled travel options and superior service.

Together, we eagerly anticipate aligning ourselves with the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology’s sentiments and the overarching of Oman Vision 2040; thus, reinforcing our commitment to driving excellence in the aviation sector and promoting Oman as a premier travel destination.”

Con Korfiatis, Chief Executive Officer of Oman Air, said, “We are excited about this expanded codeshare partnership between Oman Air and SalamAir



and the strengthening of our collaboration.

This latest development enables us to jointly offer even more choice and schedule options, which both

benefit our customers and serve the broader tourism ambitions of the country.”

During the first phase, effective July 4, 2024, passengers can book

their travel on a selection of SalamAir’s routes connecting to Oman Air’s network, with more destinations to be added post-successful implementation.



# Gulf Accreditation Centre branch launched in Oman

**HIBBA AL KINDI**

MUSCAT, JUNE 9

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion announced the inauguration of a branch of the Gulf Accreditation Centre in the Sultanate of Oman on Sunday, June 9, 2024. The launch coincided with celebrations marking World Accreditation Day.

According to the Ministry, the Centre will work alongside the Accreditation Office at the Directorate General of Standards and Metrology at the Ministry,

to support the country's national accreditation strategy.

This will include the training of accreditation employees, facilitating international accreditation procedures for Oman's conformity assessment bodies, and developing skilled evaluators.

Additionally, the centre will work towards facilitating international recognition by regional and international accreditation organisations.

The Gulf Council Cooperation Accreditation Centre (GAC) is a regulatory agency responsible for the accreditation of conformity



The Gulf Accreditation Centre (GAC) is a regulatory agency responsible for the accreditation of conformity assessment bodies among the GCC states.

assessment bodies (ABS) amongst GCC member states. The accreditation of conformity assessment bodies can be a key

enabler in boosting trade.

In a previous Observer exclusive, the Director General of the Gulf Accreditation Centre,

Moteb al Mezani, stressed the significance of accreditation of conformity assessment bodies both in terms of consumer safety and boosting trade.

Al Mezani explained that the presence of certifications from accredited assessment bodies is necessary to boost trade between member states and with the rest of the world, due to World Trade Organisation (WTO) mandates.

The Gulf Accreditation Centre will also assist in the establishment of the Oman Accreditation Centre, according to previous statements by the Director General of Standards

and Metrology at MoCIIP, Imad bin Khamis al Shukaili.

The Centre, according to Al Shukaili, will be responsible for assessing conformity assessment bodies including calibration and testing laboratories, certification bodies, and inspection bodies.

According to data from the Ministry, there are currently 112 registered conformity assessment bodies in Oman as of May, 2024.

These include 48 testing laboratories, 16 calibration laboratories, 32 inspection bodies, 10 management systems certification bodies and 6 product certification bodies.

## Madayn signs pact to establish solar PV power plant at KOM



**MUSCAT:** Knowledge Oasis Muscat (KOM), the technology arm of the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn), has signed an agreement with Solar Wadi to establish a solar PV power plant with a capacity of 1.4 MW.

This plant, costing approximately RO 500,000, will be installed and operational within a year at KOM, alongside a 25-year contract for installation, operation, and maintenance.

This agreement aligns with Madayn's objective to promote clean energy and contribute to the Sultanate of Oman's efforts to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050. Madayn is continuously working towards creating a dynamic live-work-play environment model while ensuring environmental preservation, particularly in the

industrial sector.

In collaboration with its partners, Madayn is committed to raising awareness among investors in various industrial cities, encouraging the adoption of safe, sustainable, and innovative alternative sources.

Madayn also focuses on several key areas, including managing hazardous and non-hazardous waste, controlling liquid waste disposal into marine environments, reducing emissions of air and noise pollutants, ensuring proper handling and usage of chemicals (including storage, transportation, and loading), storing hazardous materials, safely demolishing buildings and disposing of asbestos, mitigating land pollution, and optimising water and energy consumption.

## MEM celebrates graduation of first batch of 'Mining Competencies' programme

**MUSCAT:** Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals, presided over the graduation ceremony of the Mining Competencies programme cohort at the Oman Institute for Oil and Gas.

The two-year programme provided a comprehensive understanding of the mining industry in Oman, targeting both technical and non-technical professionals in the Ministry of Energy and Minerals (MoEM) and the mining sector.

The programme had two main parts. The first part was a two-week introductory course on mining operations, aimed at enhancing participants' awareness of general mining processes. It involved contributions from nine local and international entities and targeted around 60 participants from the Ministry and various mining companies.

The second part included seven advanced units, each lasting a week, focusing on specialised topics for technical professionals like geologists and mining engineers. It covered exploration



The two-year programme provided a comprehensive understanding of the mining industry in Oman, targeting both technical and non-technical professionals in the Ministry of Energy and Minerals and the mining sector.

methods, ore quantity estimation, mine design, feasibility studies, and practical mining project models.

Over 25 entities from various fields contributed to this segment, enhancing participants' understanding and skills. International visits to the UAE and Saudi Arabia were also organised to learn about mining operations and regulatory management.

The programme aimed to elevate knowledge and expertise in mining, develop technical and

non-technical skills, enhance interaction and cooperation among participants and experts, provide advanced knowledge in specialised areas, and encourage practical learning through international visits.

It also sought to foster innovation and strengthen strategic partnerships between the public and private sectors. Al Aufi stated: "In our ongoing efforts to develop the mining sector, we celebrate the graduation of this cohort from the national

programme for developing competencies in the Ministry and the mining sector.

This programme aims to enhance the skills and competencies of our national workforce and is part of several initiatives by the Ministry to develop the mining sector. These initiatives include identifying public sites and concession areas, launching a digital platform for automating bidding processes to enhance transparency and equal opportunities."

## The new world business climate: BANI

**DR MYTHILI KOLLURU**

The writer is a National-Level Award-Winning Outstanding Women Educator and Scholar in Strategic Management. She is an assistant professor at the marketing and management department of the College of Banking and Financial Studies in Muscat and a member of Knowledge Oman.

Most of the world is familiar with the term VUCA. It is an acronym that is used to describe the world business climate. The term was coined in the 1980s by Warren Bennis and Burt Nanus, a team of economists and university professors, but Herbert Barber

is also known to have made it popular in the 1990s.

For decades, the business world has held VUCA in relevance and reference. The acronym stands for volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous. However, our environment, work, and play have witnessed various structural transformations.

Our turbulent and chaotic world presents an era of intensity and unprecedented change beyond human comprehension.

The world environment in which organisations and individuals perceive conditions and strategise to mitigate risk, foster change, and solve complex problems has metamorphosed from VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous) to BANI (brittle, anxious, nonlinear, and incomprehensible).

In 2016, James Casio coined the term BANI. This construct better describes the world we live in today. Our world today is delicate, uncontrollable, unpredictable, and incomprehensible.

Our world today is characterized by climate change, global instability, inequality, a

heightened threat of terrorism, escalating geopolitical tensions, energy price fluctuations, political unrest, war threats, immigration issues, unrest in the Middle East, refugee crisis, cyber security issues, blockchain, and the emergence of artificial intelligence.

The advent of the Covid-19 pandemic and the economic recession further exacerbated the world climate.

The world experienced a massive supply chain breakdown and political and financial mayhem. The world requires a new framework that provides a practical code for awareness and readiness for most contemporary organisations.

### **The BANI framework:**

One aspect of the BANI framework is '**brittle**'. This refers to situations and organisations that may outwardly appear reliable, flexible, and unbreakable but are actually on the verge of collapse.

For instance, in 2016, the Brexit referendum and the subsequent negotiations were prime examples of brittleness, with the outcome being highly unpredictable. Organisations,

too, can exhibit brittleness.

They may have developed vast, highly interconnected, robust global supply chains to maximise efficiency and profitability.

However, this could mean they lack resilience and collapse with the slightest disruption.

The global supply chain breakdown the world experienced during the Covid-19 Pandemic is a stark illustration of this brittleness.

**Anxious:** Heightened anxiety is a common feature of the new business model. Leaders and employees will face more anxiety due to the increase in uncertainties. Research has shown that "hectic schedules" are more frequently used in recent years than in the 1980s. Today, individuals and organisations are in a constant state of chaos and anxiety.

The pandemic and other crises like climate change, inequality, job insecurity, and global instability have familiarised anxiety. The pace of technological change and the subsequent crisis have now become a permanent feature of human civilisation.

**Nonlinear:** Now, the

business environment is not just VUCA but is characterised by nonlinearity. A nonlinear world is one in which there is a disconnection between cause and effect in time, proportion, and perception.

In the corporate world, leaders will experience that the cause-and-effect relationship will become nonlinear. Carbon emissions in one corner of the world are creating consequences reverberating across geographies.

Frequent severe weather events, rising sea levels, and melting glaciers reflect the nonlinearity and complexity of climate change.

**Incomprehensible:** The intricacies and complexities will make the world incomprehensible.

The Russia-Ukraine tensions started much before the war of 2022; tensions between these countries resulted in conflict in 2014.

In February 2022, Russia launched a full-scale attack on Ukraine, which was internationally condemned, and many countries imposed sanctions against Russia and increased existing sanctions.

The sanctions have caused economic damage to the EU economy, the collapse of the Russian ruble, and worsened the financial impact on Ukraine, significantly impacting international trade, particularly Russia's trade patterns and the EU's economy.

The world has witnessed a sharp rise in Artificial Intelligence (AI) and its applications in various industries, like facial recognition, voice assistance, and self-driving cars.

The world we live in resonates with BANI's characteristics, which are evident in political, social, environmental, and economic events.

The BANI framework or business climate calls for a new approach to coping with external development. BANI is not a fancy word, but it is the lens through which we can understand what is happening in the world around us.

It emphasises the need for empathy, a growth mindset, resilience, trust, diversity, agility, learner attitude, adaptability, and innovative thinking in manoeuvring the challenges of the modern world.

# Oman’s money supply hits record high amidst healthy economic indicators and low inflation



AHMED AL RAISI

The writer has over 16 years of experience in economics and business strategy. He combines his academic background in economics with practical experience in data analysis, project management and consulting to create clear and engaging economic articles

Oman’s money supply, as measured by M2, reached a historic peak of RO 24.24 billion at the end of March 2024, according to recent data from the Central Bank of Oman as reported by Trading Economics.

This milestone comes as the nation’s GDP stood at a healthy RO 38.2 billion at the close of 2023, signifying a sound economic foundation.

The M2 money supply, which encompasses physical currency and easily accessible deposits, has been steadily growing in recent years, reflecting increased economic activity and investment in the Sultanate of Oman.

The current M2/GDP ratio of approximately 0.63 is considered to be within a healthy range, indicating that the money supply is not excessively large relative to the size of the economy.

The expansion of the money supply can have several positive implications for the Omani economy.

It could signify increased spending and investment, which are crucial drivers of economic growth.

Additionally, the increased availability of credit can stimulate businesses and contribute to job creation.

While the growth in the money supply has raised some concerns about potential inflationary

pressures, recent data from the National Centre for Statistics and Information indicate that inflation remains under control, with a rate of 0.39 per cent in April 2024.

This suggests that the increased liquidity has not yet translated into significant price increases.

Given that the Omani Rial (RO) is pegged to the US Dollar (USD), the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) does not have the independent monetary policy flexibility to adjust interest rates as a tool to control inflation directly.

However, several alternative policy measures are available to manage the money supply and address any future inflationary risks:

**1. Sterilisation operations:**

The CBO can engage in open market operations to absorb excess liquidity from the banking system.

**2. Reserve requirements:** The CBO could adjust the reserve requirement for banks to influence lending activity.

**3. Exchange rate adjustment:** While a significant change is unlikely, a minor adjustment to the peg could be considered to manage trade balances.

**4. Fiscal policy measures:** The government can implement fiscal policies such as adjusting spending or taxes to complement the CBO’s efforts.

**5. Supply-side policies:** Efforts to enhance productivity and increase the supply of goods and

services can help to alleviate any future inflationary pressures.

Oman’s economic outlook remains positive, with a healthy GDP, a manageable M2/GDP ratio and low inflation.

While the current economic situation does not necessitate immediate intervention, the CBO and the government should remain vigilant and prepared to implement appropriate measures if inflationary pressures emerge.

By proactively monitoring the economic situation and maintaining a range of policy tools at their disposal, Oman can ensure continued economic stability and sustainable growth while navigating the challenges posed by a growing money supply.

## Japan has ways to avoid a sovereign debt crunch



A Japanese flag flutters atop the Bank of Japan building in Tokyo, Japan. – Reuters

EDWARD CHANCELLOR

As interest rates rise, investors are once again fretting about the sustainability of government debt across the developed world.

Attention naturally turns to the country with the highest debt load relative to economic output and the heaviest debt-service burden.

Some bond investors liken Japan’s national accounts to a Stephen King horror story. However, appearances are deceptive. Though Japan needs to rein in its fiscal deficit, its debt looks far less perilous than some of its peers.

Financial crises, sluggish growth and the pandemic have pushed up government debt for many wealthy countries. At more than 250 per cent of GDP, Japan’s gross debt stands out.

Combined with sluggish growth and a shrinking population, many financiers and economists see it as an existential risk.

Yet economists at the Federal Reserve Bank of St Louis point out that this ratio provides little insight into debt sustainability.

It is important to look at the public sector’s balance sheet in its entirety. The Japanese state is asset-rich. Many of its liabilities are held by state institutions.

The Bank of Japan owns domestic government bonds equivalent to around 100 per cent of GDP. It also owns around 7 per cent of Tokyo-

listed stocks, as well as many foreign securities.

This means Japan’s consolidated net liabilities in late 2022 amounted to 119 per cent of GDP, according to the St. Louis Fed, less than half the gross figure.

On this basis, Japan has the same level of indebtedness as the United States. Debt servicing costs are another potential cause for concern.

If a government spends a large chunk of its revenue paying interest, the bill can quickly spiral.

In its presentation of the 2024 budget, Japan’s Ministry of Finance (MoF) reports “national debt service” costs at 27 trillion yen, or a hefty 21 per cent of total central government expenditure.

Yet this figure is misleading. According to Alex Kinmont of Milestone Asset Management, a separate disclosure by the MoF shows that around two-thirds of this national debt service goes towards so-called sinking funds, which set aside money for future repayments, and mandatory redemptions.

The true cost, Kinmont claims, is closer to 10 trillion yen, or 10 per cent of the budget. That’s somewhat below the US government’s current expenses. Other factors also make Japan unusual.

In recent years, the BoJ has engaged in a massive and highly profitable carry trade. The central bank has acquired high-yielding domestic stocks and foreign securities which it funded by issuing short-term debt on which it until recently paid negative interest rates.

— Reuters

## An economic agenda for Mexico’s new president



SANTIAGO LEVY

The author, a non-resident senior fellow with the Global Economy and Development Programme at Brookings, is a former chief economist and a former vice-president for Sectors and Knowledge at the Inter-American Development Bank

Mexico’s first female president, Claudia Sheinbaum, will take office on October 1, and for at least the first half of her six-year mandate, the coalition of parties that brought her to power will have a majority in both houses of Congress.

Sheinbaum’s first order of business will be defining the government’s 2025 budget.

Here, the highest priority must be to shrink Mexico’s budget deficit — which will reach 5.8 per cent of GDP in 2024, compared to 2.0 per cent in 2018 — and thereby send a clear signal that the country’s debt is sustainable.

The next challenge will be to get the economy growing again. Under the outgoing administration of Andrés Manuel López Obrador, widely known as AMLO, annual GDP growth averaged just 1.1 per cent.

Some might claim that slow growth was a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, not the government’s policies, but during the same period, the United States — Mexico’s largest trading partner — grew twice as fast. Mexico’s per capita income in 2024 will be the same as it was six years ago.

To boost growth, Sheinbaum will be told that she should seek to take advantage of the push in many Western countries, including the United States, for



Mexico’s presidential candidate for the Morena party, Claudia Sheinbaum, celebrates following the results of the general election in Mexico City. – AFP

nearshoring — that is, shifting supply chains to countries that are friendlier and/or geographically closer than China.

This trend — a reaction to both the pandemic and deepening tensions with China — could present an important opportunity for Mexico to attract more foreign investment.

But to seize it, the government must demonstrate a stronger commitment to the rule of law, including judicial independence.

It must also expand access to, and improve the reliability of, energy supplies across Mexico. In recent months, the country has endured rolling blackouts — a result of an overstretched system operating with thin margins.

The energy imperative will be particularly challenging to meet. The good news is that there is significant room for Mexico to make use of renewables, and that Sheinbaum is committed to expanding renewable-energy capacity.

The bad news is that she is committed to upholding her predecessor’s pledge to keep at least 54 per cent of electricity generation under state control. It will be very difficult to fulfil this pledge unless the state electricity company, Comisión Federal de Electricidad, rapidly increases its

generating capacity while phasing out coal and diesel.

Beyond electricity, Mexico also needs more natural gas. However, its state-owned oil and gas company, Pemex — the world’s most indebted energy company — is not well-positioned to increase supply rapidly. Given this, Mexico’s best bet is to open production and transportation to private participants.

AMLO’s predecessor, Enrique Peña Nieto, attempted to do precisely that. But AMLO reversed most of the progress. Now, Sheinbaum must decide between maintaining Pemex’s dominant position — thereby putting more pressure on an already-strained federal budget — and reversing AMLO’s policy.

Unfortunately, even if all goes well, and Sheinbaum’s administration manages to take advantage of nearshoring and increase Mexico’s attractiveness to foreign businesses, this would still be insufficient to kick-start growth. In the three decades before AMLO’s presidency, Mexico’s annual GDP growth averaged just 2.0 per cent to 2.5 per cent.

This is a very mediocre performance, given that Mexico during this period enjoyed a demographic dividend, a stable

macroeconomic environment, and spectacular growth in manufacturing exports — which, at 40 per cent of GDP, now exceed those of the rest of Latin America combined.

But none of this could overcome the effects of stagnant productivity.

In particular, Mexico’s social-protection system subsidises informal activities and imposes large costs on formal ones; its tax system subsidises unproductive firms and hampers the growth of small productive ones; and deficiencies in contract enforcement leave most firms without access to credit.

In Mexico, less productive informal firms can compete with more productive formal ones, thanks to lower tax burdens and labour costs, and the ability to skirt rules and laws.

As a result, only a few high-productivity firms grow, while a much larger number of low-productivity firms survive, rather than being driven out of the market.

This means that investment is continuously wasted. One peso (of capital and labour) produces over 35 per cent more value-added in the formal sector than in the informal sector.

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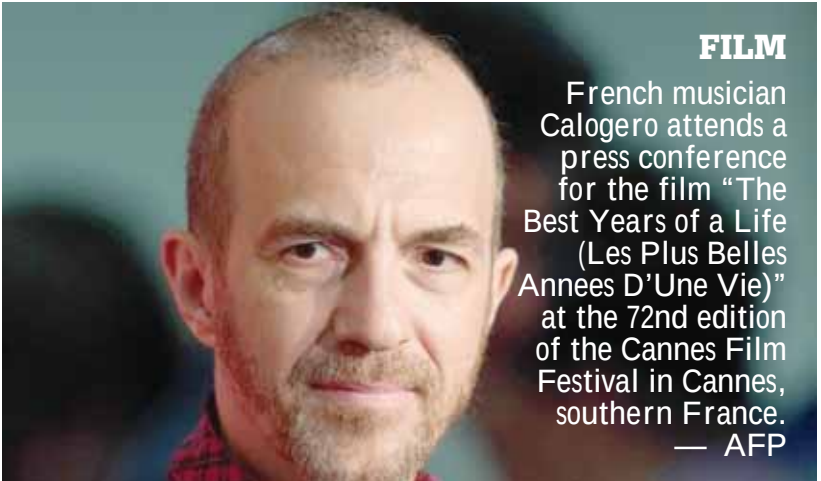


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**FILM**  
French musician Calogero attends a press conference for the film “The Best Years of a Life (Les Plus Belles Annees D’Une Vie)” at the 72nd edition of the Cannes Film Festival in Cannes, southern France. — AFP



**ENTERTAINMENT**  
A man paddles on a board on the surface of the Liangma River in Beijing. — AFP



**MUSIC**  
US musician Josette Maskin of US band Muna performs on stage during LA Pride in the Park at LA State Historic Park in Los Angeles. — AFP



**FASHION**  
A model walks the runway for the second chapter of the Hermes Women's ready-to-wear Fall-Winter 2024 fashion show in New York. — AFP



**TRAVEL**  
This aerial photograph shows the Burgenstock resort above Lake Lucerne, Switzerland. — AFP

# art & life

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## 'Let's Be an Achievement' showcasing special talents

What makes this exhibition unique is that it provided a vibrant portrayal of Bedouin life and wildlife, capturing the essence of the region's natural and cultural heritage... P20

## Royal Opera House Muscat Announces blood Donation Campaign

STAFF REPORTER

**THE ROYAL OPERA** House Muscat (ROHM) is proud to announce the launch of its 2024 blood donation campaign, celebrating the institution's 10th year of organising this life-saving initiative. Under the theme "Anyone Can Be a Donor," the campaign is run in collaboration with the Ministry of Health Blood Bank Services and will take place on Thursday, 13 June, a day before World

Blood Donation Day. Donors are invited to enter through the main entrance of the Royal Opera House Muscat and proceed to the donation clinic set up in the South Porch. The clinic will be open from 9 am to 3 pm, providing ample opportunity for the community to participate. Any healthy individual between the ages of 18 and 65 is encouraged to participate in this vital cause. Blood donations are vital for saving lives, supporting treat-

Anyone can be a donor

13 June  
9 am - 3 pm  
Royal Opera House Muscat



ments for accident victims, blood cancer patients, and mothers during childbirth. Donating blood not only saves lives, but also improves donors' health by promoting better circulation and reducing iron levels, helping prevent heart disease and clogged arteries. Studies show that annual donors are less likely to develop circulatory diseases and leukaemia. A Safe and Comfortable Donation Experience For those concerned about

the donation process, rest assured that each donor will receive careful guidance throughout. Qualified practitioners will perform health checks before the donation. The actual blood donation takes approximately five to ten minutes and will be conducted in privacy behind temporary screens on comfortable reclining seats. After collecting 475ml (just under a pint) of blood, a sterile dressing will be applied. This experience is designed to minimise all concerns, ensuring comfort at every stage. As a national institution, the Royal Opera House Muscat plays a crucial role in engaging with local communities. Beyond being a cultural landmark, ROHM is committed to supporting the community through initiatives like the annual blood donation campaign. This reflects ROHM's dedication to public health and well-being, fostering a spirit of solidarity and care among citizens ensuring an adequate blood supply for those in need across Oman.



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## INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



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# South Korea's young healers revive ancient tradition

**WITH STATUES OF** the Buddha and local gods, candles and incense sticks, Lee Kyoung-hyun's shrine looks similar to those of Korean healers from centuries past.

But the 29-year-old healer — also known as Aegi Seonnyeo, or 'Baby Angel' — reaches her clients in a thoroughly modern way: through social media accounts with hundreds of thousands of followers.

"Shamanism ... was believed to be an invisible, mysterious and spiritual world," Lee said, adding that she had noticed more South Korean shamans posting videos about the spiritual practice since she started her own YouTube channel in 2019.

South Korea is among the world's most modern and high-tech economies. More than half its population of 51 million is not religiously affiliated, polls show. But their appeal has stood the test of time.

Kim Dong-kyu of the Academic Center for K-Religions at Sogang University, a private research university in Seoul, said shamans used to promote themselves in newspapers. It was a "natural phenomenon" to turn to social media, he said.

Google Trends shows that searches on YouTube for "healer" and "fortune-telling" in Korean have nearly doubled over the past five years.

The spiritual tradition was central to the plot of a blockbuster South Korean film this year, 'Exhuma', in which shamans are tasked with lifting a curse on a family.

The movie depicts well-dressed healers in their 20s and 30s and director Jang Jae-hyun said he discovered many young healers while doing his

research.

The movie has grossed at least 132 billion won (\$97 million) internationally, raising interest in the religious tradition. Roughly one in five South Koreans has seen 'Exhuma,' according to Korean Film Council data.

"People used to hide that they live as a (healer). There was a lot of stigma," said 51-year-old Eunmi Pang, who has been a practitioner for almost 20 years. She said that healers today were more willing to express and promote themselves.

Healers — who are believed to have divination abilities — typically charge around 100,000 won (\$73.09) for a consultation of between 30 and 60 minutes, according to Pang and online pricing lists. They offer relationship advice, guidance on job searches and predictions about the future, said Lee.

Healers typically answer queries after conducting rituals that may involve ringing bells and tossing grains of rice.

They also sing, dance and walk on the edge of a knife to call on divine intervention. While practices vary, many Korean shamans worship local deities such as the Mountain God, Great Spirit Grandmother and Dragon King.

Park Chea-bin, a 33-year-old Buddhist, visited Lee when she was struggling to find a job in 2020. She said she felt "peace of mind" after consulting the practitioner.

"I was very anxious at the time but I became a little relaxed after deciding to let things go and focus on what I need to do," said Park, who found employment at roughly the same time.

"I'm a Buddhist but I know Christians



around me who come for their niggles."

Lee says she has felt physical pain and experienced psychosis since she was a teenager - symptoms that some believe are signs of a deity possessing a budding healer.

She decided to embrace her calling in 2018 and soon started a YouTube channel that now has over 300,000 subscribers. She posts videos on topics such as the items she carries in her bag and the country's fate for in 2024.

"The current state of South Korean society is a factor that can't be ignored," she said, adding that many of her millennial and Gen Z clients come to her with concerns about affordable housing and the cost of raising children.

In Seoul, where Lee is based, the price of a home was more than 15 times the median salary in 2022, up from 8.8 in 2017, according to a government report. The country has also suffered from high inflation and interest rates.

The younger generation of shamans who live in the city can connect well with younger clients facing economic challenges that they can't find an answer for, said Han Seung-hoon,



Lee Kyoung-hyun, a popular YouTuber healer in Seoul. — Reuters

an assistant professor at the Academy of Korean Studies, a research and education institute that operates under the Ministry of Education.

A culture ministry agency estimated in 2022 that there were between 300,000 and 400,000 shamans and

fortune-tellers in South Korea.

The Japanese colonial administration of the early 20th century and the military dictatorship of the 1970s attempted to suppress shamanism, which they saw as an obstacle to modernisation.

Politically powerful Christians — who make up roughly a quarter of the population — have also criticised healers and their followers.

Han noted that larger religions such as Christianity and Buddhism — which about 40 per cent of South Koreans say they are followers of — are more influential in society, yet do not draw similar levels of criticism.

Lee said Christians also visit healers in South Korea. "Even ... churchgoers want to have their bad dreams read," she said.

More recently, some practitioners have found themselves in legal trouble. A 66-year-old healer in Seoul was sentenced to four years' imprisonment in February after being convicted of defrauding a client of more than \$200,000, according to local media reports.

The court ruled that the healer had been pretending to speak to the client's dead mother. — Reuters

## TECHNOLOGY

## Japan video-sharing site Niconico hit by cyberattack

**POPULAR JAPANESE** video-sharing website Niconico has suspended its services as it has been under "a large-scale cyber-attack," its operator said.

"Currently, Niconico is under a large-scale cyberattack, and we are suspending our services to minimise its impact," operator Dwango said in a statement late on Saturday.

"We are hastily investigating and taking countermeasures, but we won't be able to restore the service until we make sure about its safety after completely excluding the impact of the cyberattack," it said, adding it didn't expect to be able to restore the service this weekend.



Niconico is one of the largest video-sharing services in Japan where users share various videos ranging from music to sports to a range of hobbies, while live streaming of programmes including press conferences by government officials is also available.

In addition to Niconico, its parent company Kadokawa's official website and its e-commerce site "ebten" were also affected by a possible "unauthorised access from outside," the publisher said on Sunday.

"We offer our deep apology for causing worries and troubles over the phenomenon that several websites of Kadokawa group have been unavailable since before dawn of Saturday," Tokyo-based publisher Kadokawa said.

Kadokawa was investigating the impact from the attack, including "whether there have been leaks of information or not," and was also cooperating with external experts and police, it said.

Dwango said it would give an update on Monday. — AFP

## FILM

## 'Amelie' director to judge first AI film festival

**THE DIRECTOR** of French classic "Amelie" said he was fascinated but occasionally scared by artificial intelligence as he launched a first-ever festival for AI-generated movies on Wednesday.

Jean-Pierre Jeunet will serve as head of the jury for the Artefact AI Film Festival, whose awards ceremony will take place in November.

Anyone can enter a short film — up to five minutes in length — as long as it uses AI tools in some part of its production, from script writing and storyboarding to image generation, editing, music or other aspects.

"Everything that's happening at the moment — whether it's deep-fakes, voice dubbing, it fascinates me," said Jeunet, who was Oscar-nominated for "Amelie" in 2002.

He told reporters he had asked



ChatGPT to come up with ideas for a sequel to his hit film, "but I had to stop because it scared me".

But Jeunet, who also made the gory sci-fi "Delicatessen" (1991), said he was not worried about AI-generated movies replacing traditional films.

"There will always be films made by hand," he said, before taking a light-hearted swipe at Hollywood blockbusters.

"Maybe not the Marvel films, since the scripts written by AI could not be any more stupid than the ones they have done up to now," he said.

The festival is being overseen by Artefact, an AI consultancy firm,

whose experts will be tasked with ensuring there is no breach of copyright or other ethical norms in the way AI is used in the short films.

"We are in a moment of audiovisual revolution — it's important that we address it," said Elisha Karmitz of the production company and cinema chain MK2, which is a partner of the festival.

"The goal of the festival is to promote creativity via the use of AI, and make it more accessible," he said.

Budding film-makers will have until October 1 to submit their entries. As well as several prizes, the best will also be shown ahead in MK2 cinemas. — AFP



## LIFESTYLE

# 'Let's Be an Achievement' showcasing special talents

BY SIHAM ALSAIDI

**"LET'S BE an Achievement"** has once again showcased the remarkable talents and creativity of individuals with special needs in Al Batinah North during the sixth annual art exhibition organised by the Directorate-General of Social Development in Al Batinah North.

Hasan bin Ali al Farsi, Director of the Partnership and Community Development Department, said, "The Al Wafa Centre for the Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities in Suhar organised this art exhibition for talented and creative individuals with disabilities in painting, under the auspices of HH Sayyidah Hujaija bint Jaifar al Said. The exhibition aims to raise community awareness about the talents of individuals with disabilities, integrate them into society, and encourage private sector institutions to provide financial support for the centre's various programmes.

This year's exhibition featured 81 artworks created by 70 participants from Al Wafa Social Centres and Autism Centres across Al Batinah North.

What makes this exhibition unique is that it provid-



ed a vibrant portrayal of Bedouin life and wildlife, capturing the essence of the region's natural and cultural heritage. Each piece reflects the participants' artistic skills and their ability to convey the beauty and challenges of their surroundings through art, showing that nothing can stop them from being productive in the society.

This initiative is aimed at highlighting the exceptional

abilities of people with special needs, promoting their integration into society and recognising their contributions to the cultural landscape. The displayed artworks ranged from paintings of desert landscapes to detailed native wildlife, each reflecting the unique perspective and talent of its artist.

The event not only celebrated artistic expression, but also served as a platform



for raising awareness about the potential and capabilities of individuals with special needs. The participants, who come from various Al Wafa Social Centres, received guidance and support from coaches and instructors who are art lovers.

The exhibition attracted a diverse audience, including art enthusiasts, community leaders, and representatives from social and cultural organisations.

Visitors were surprised by the spirit of Bedouin and wildlife themes, demonstrating that such paintings can tell stories and touch hearts too.

As "Let's Be an Achievement" concluded, it also enriched the cultural treasure of Al Batinah North and inspired others to recognise and celebrate the diverse talents within their community.