

HM greets King of Denmark

Muscat: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to King Frederik X of Denmark on his country's National Day. In the cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sentiments and best wishes to King Frederik. His Majesty also wished the people of Denmark further progress and prosperity.

SUNRISE - 05:20 AM
PRAYER TIMINGS
FAJR - 03:53 AM
DHUHR - 12:10 PM
ASR - 03:29 PM
MAGHRIB - 06:56 PM
ISHA - 08:18 PM



P12

SINNER POWERS INTO FIRST FRENCH OPEN SEMIS



P13

BIDDERS INVITED TO PREQUALIFY FOR PDO'S MANAZIL PROJECT



P20

MUSIC NEEDS NO LANGUAGE OR WORDS



MUSCAT

OMAN AIR TO BE SUSTAINABLE NATIONAL CARRIER

The recently appointed CEO of Oman Air, Con Korfiatis, in an exclusive interview with the Observer, said the airline is committed to total transformation by 2027, which he considered is a fair time under circumstances to lay the foundation for rapid growth. Delving into a range of issues, Korfiatis said the immediate priority is to implement the strategy to transform Oman Air into an efficient and sustainable national service provider to meet the objectives of Vision 2040, which has tourism as one of the main pillars among non-oil sectors. **SEE P2**

DOHA

NO CLEAR POSITION FROM ISRAEL ON CEASEFIRE DEAL



Mediator Qatar said on Tuesday it was waiting for a “clear position” from Israel on a proposed Gaza ceasefire and captives release deal outlined by US President Joe Biden. “We have yet to see a very clear position from the Israeli government towards the principles laid out by Biden,” foreign ministry spokesman Majed al-Ansari said, adding there was no “concrete approval” from either side. **REPORT ON P6**

TELEGRAPH ISLAND TO BECOME TOURISM DESTINATION



The foundation stone was laid for the development project of the historic Telegraph Island in the Wilayat of Khasab under the auspices of Sayyid Ibrahim bin Said al Busaidy, Governor of Musandam, on Tuesday. The Telegraph Island is an environmental tourism project implemented by the Musandam Governor's Office in cooperation with Musandam Municipality, OQ Company and the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism. The Governorate of Musandam seeks to transform the island into a distinctive and unique tourist attraction on top of the existing tourism projects in the governorate. **SEE P2**

OIA'S ASSETS UP BY OVER RO 1 BILLION

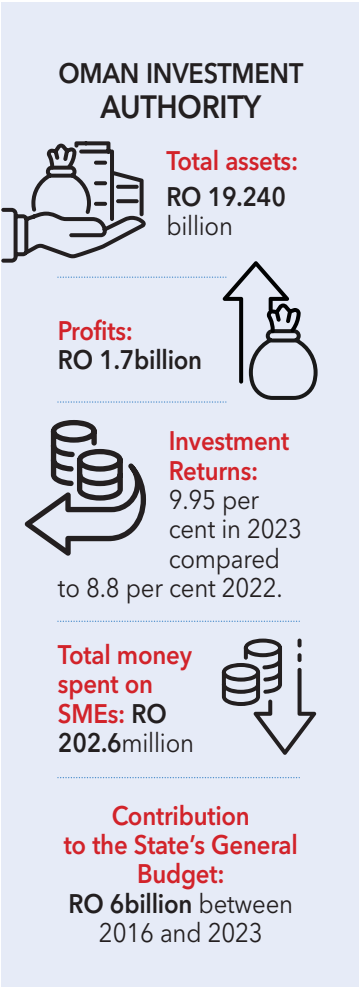
OFFERS 1,300 JOBS

MUSCAT: Assets of Oman Investment Authority (OIA) have grown by over RO 1 billion, reaching a total of RO 19.240 billion. Additionally, OIA achieved profits that surpassed RO 1.7 billion. Additionally, OIA achieved 9.95 per cent in investment returns compared to 8.8 per cent last year. Continuing the divestment plan set mid-2022 to achieve various national goals, OIA and its companies successfully completed nine divestments in 2023, surpassing the planned eight divestments. These included both direct sales and public offerings on the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX), notably the two companies Abraj Energy Services and OQ Gas Networks. This had a positive impact on the trading volume at MSX and attracted foreign investments.

In order to fulfil the national agenda of OIA and its companies and align with the Royal Directives on employment and provision of job and training opportunities for Omanis, OIA has achieved remarkable success. It surpassed its target of creating 800 new jobs by successfully generating 1,307 job opportunities for Omanis.

Additionally, OIA initiated several training and qualification programmes, including the highly esteemed external scholarship programme for exceptional students known as Oman Scholars, which has received Royal blessings.

Moreover, 2023 witnessed the launch of OIA's Academy for Training and Development and the unified Jadarah recruitment platform for employment and



training opportunities, which utilises artificial intelligence. OIA and its companies continued their steadfast efforts to maximise In-country Value (ICV) and enhance the role of SMEs. The total spent on SMEs amounted to RO 202.6 million, with RO 106.7 million going to holders of the Entrepreneurship Card. This represented a significant contribution of 16.8 per cent of the total supply chain expenditures. Furthermore, OIA Companies spent more than RO 42 million on services and products in the mandatory list during 2023. **SEE ALSO P13**

Modi set for third term with narrow majority



NEW DELHI: Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi looked set on Tuesday to retain power at the head of a ruling coalition, but his party lost its outright majority for the first time in a decade as voters defied predictions of another landslide. The outcome spooked investors, with stocks falling steeply as emerging results showed that Modi would, for the first time since sweeping to power in 2014, depend on at least three disparate regional parties whose political loyalties have wavered over the years. This, analysts say, could introduce some uncertainty into policymaking after a decade in which Modi has ruled

with an authoritative hold. Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) won a majority on its own in 2014, ending India's era of unstable coalition governments, and repeated the feat in 2019. Modi said people had placed their faith in the BJP-led coalition for a third time and it was historic, in his first comments since counting of votes began. "I bow to the people for this affection and assure them that we will continue the good work done in the last decade to keep fulfilling the aspirations of people," he posted on X. He also thanked BJP members, saying "words will never do justice to their exceptional efforts". — Reuters **SEE ALSO P7**

State Council session reviews draft media law, adds three new articles

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
Muscat, June 4

The State Council discussed draft law on media on Tuesday. Shaikh Abdulmalik bin Abdullah al Khalili, Chairman of the State Council, reviewed the session's agenda, which included the media law draft referred by the Council of Ministers as per Article (49) of the Council of Oman Law, along with various topics related to the Council's work. In his speech, the chairman praised the significant

contributions of the members through both permanent and special committees. The proposed media law draft follows years of regulatory laws, such as the Press and Publishing Law, the Artistic Works Law, and the Private Radio and Television Establishments Law. These laws, coupled with advancements in media tools and methods, necessitated a new law to regulate and enhance media work in Oman. This new legislation aims to support journalists, media professionals and institutions, covering both traditional



Shaikh Abdulmalik bin Abdullah al Khalili, Chairman of the State Council

and social media formats. Dr Mohammed bin Saeed al Hajri, Chairman of the Council's Social and Cultural Committee, emphasised the importance of the draft law in adapting to changes in media practices. He noted that existing legislation needs updating to align with the goals of Oman Vision 2040. Dr Abdullah bin Khamis al Kindi, the committee's rapporteur, provided a summary of the draft media law and the amendments introduced during its review. The Council agreed

not to add a new article proposed by the Majlis Ash'shura, voted to summarise twelve articles without amendments, and added three new articles. They voted to delete a clause from Article Four that would prohibit broadcasting and publishing certain information, citing it as prior censorship. A majority vote approved a new article added by the, stipulating that complaints must be submitted to the minister, and any licence or media activity cancellation would be issued by the minister.



BEWARE OF UNLICENSED FILLERS AND BOTOX SURGERIES

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
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Authorities in the Muscat Governorate have cracked down on a ring of unlicensed individuals offering cosmetic services, including Botox and fillers. The service was being run in residential apartments and a beauty centre.

The Consumer Protection Authority, in cooperation with

the Ministry of Health and Royal Oman Police, arrested several female expatriate workers who were operating outside health regulations and without proper licensing.

The operation netted a significant haul of over 4,600 unlicensed materials, including creams, injections, and fillers. These items were found to be stored improperly, raising concerns about hygiene and



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sterilisation practices.

This bust highlights the dangers of seeking cosmetic procedures from unqualified practitioners. Improper techniques and unlicensed materials can lead to serious health risks, including irreversible damage, deformities, and allergic reactions.

Khalid bin Salim al Sibani, Director of the Authority's Markets Regulation and Supervision Department,

emphasised the importance of consumer vigilance. He urged individuals to be wary of cosmetic services offered in non-medical settings and by unlicensed individuals.

"The Authority received information indicating the existence of illegal practices in some residential apartments and a beauty centre and according to that the Authority began collecting information,

researching, investigating. We found that the services were being offered in consumers' residences, outside health requirements that lack hygiene, sterilisation rules and use of medical materials that are not licensed to be sold or traded in the Sultanate of Oman."

The Consumer Protection Authority remains committed to safeguarding public health. They actively monitor markets and investigate potential violations.

Telegraph Island to get facelift

AHMED AL SHUHI
KHASAB, JUNE 4

The foundation stone was laid for the development project of the historic Telegraph Island in the Wilayat of Khasab under the auspices of Sayyid Ibrahim bin Said al Busaidy, Governor of Musandam, on Tuesday.

The Telegraph Island is an environmental tourism project implemented by the Musandam Governor's Office in cooperation

with Musandam Municipality, OQ Company and the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism.

The Governorate of Musandam seeks to transform the island into a distinctive and unique tourist attraction on top of the existing tourism projects in the governorate.

The Telegraph Island development project involves a multi-purpose hall with an area of 731m2 with an attached service building, an 8-metre long,

2.5 metres wide marine landing platform, and a mountain walkway leading all the facilities on the island, two photographing platforms overlooking the most beautiful landmarks surrounding the island, a shaded area, among others.

The Telegraph Island is home to the first modern communications line in the Arabian Gulf, where a submarine cable was extended from Mumbai in the Indian continent

and Basra in Iraq making the Maqlab Island in Khorsham in the Wilayat of Khasab the transmission station in 1864 thus marking the beginning of the modern communications in the region. The development project of the historic Telegraph Island in the Wilayat of Khasab comes as a translation and completion of the governorate's efforts to achieve comprehensive economic development in line with the Oman Vision 2040.



Foreign Ministry Under-Secretary meets Kuwaiti counterpart

KUWAIT: Khalid bin Hashil al Muselhi, Under-Secretary of the Foreign Ministry for Administrative and Financial Affairs on Tuesday held a meeting with Shaikh Jarrah Al Jaber al Sabah, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the State of Kuwait. During the meeting, the two sides reviewed relations and discussed several matters of common concern. — ONA



The Governorate of Musandam seeks to transform the island into a distinctive and unique tourist attraction. — ONA

Oman participates in GCC Higher Education Ministers meeting



Oman's delegation was headed by Dr Bakhit bin Ahmed al Mahri, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation for Higher Education. — ONA

DOHA: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, on Tuesday took part in the 24th meeting of GCC ministers of higher education and research, held in Doha, the State of Qatar.

Oman's delegation was headed by Dr Bakhit bin Ahmed al Mahri, Under-Secretary of the

Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation for Higher Education.

The meeting discussed a spectrum of topics, namely matters related to higher education and research. It also approved several decisions and regulations in a bid to boost the march of joint GCC action in those fields. — ONA

Oman Air committed to total transformation for rapid growth

VINOD NAIR
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The recently appointed CEO of Oman Air, Con Korfiatis, in an exclusive interview with the Observer, said the airline is committed to total transformation by 2027, which he considered is a fair time under circumstances to lay the foundation for rapid growth.

Delving into a range of issues, Korfiatis said the immediate priority is to implement the strategy to transform Oman Air into an efficient and sustainable national service provider to meet the objectives of Vision 2040, which has tourism as one of the main pillars among non-oil sectors.

On the transformation goals achieved which started last year, he said, "There were already some results that our chairman

spoke of recently. Then this year, we are accelerating those initiatives. We are on a three to four-year programme, which in pure business terms is to get ourselves to a business breakeven level, a profit and loss breakeven. We believe we can achieve that, but it is a large programme, and there are many things we have to do in the coming years to deliver on that."

The CEO added that the airline was never really run with a commercial agenda and was able to justify the investment in it. "The transformation journey is about bringing the airline onto a commercial footing and into the more modern world. We still have a lot to do in the area of digitalisation. There is a lot we could do to improve processes and procedures and bring efficiencies into the organisation, utilise assets more



CEO of Oman Air, Con Korfiatis, said the transformation journey is about bringing the airline onto a commercial footing and into the more modern world

effectively, increase productivity, review contracts and cost bases, and all sorts of things. There is no stone we will leave unturned on that journey to being as good a commercial organisation as we can be."

"I think we have a very good product, a lovely cabin, lovely crew ethos and service attitude. We have fantastic catering and a network that links Europe



to the subcontinent, to the Far East. We have been winning outstanding awards, including for on-time performance. It has done a wonderful job of creating an outstanding brand and it carries the name of the country. So obviously that is a huge responsibility," he added.

"However, on the other hand, Korfiatis said a 30-plus-year-old airline and has never

really transformed. "Once we have got ourselves on stronger financial footing, we can go back to growing the fleet, more significantly expanding our footprint, investing more in digitalisation and where the world is headed in this space because it is on a very fast track to a future that is still undefined. But there are lots of interesting things that are going to be coming," he

said.

On the perception that there is far too much downsizing, the CEO said, "I have never seen a transformation through growth. I have seen transformation through stemming the losses by putting some things to the side. We must find a fine balance there and then focus on fixing the foundations. And when we have fixed the foundations, then you can go back to saying right."

He said, "In the future, we will start increasing the network and start taking more aircraft in. But for now, we have a responsibility whereas a state-owned company, we use public monies, we have to be responsible. We must fix our foundations. So rather than call it cuts and losses and reducing, I call it investing in fixing the foundations and then creating the platform for growth and going back to it again."



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GCC occupational health meet discusses work-related stress

MUSCAT: The 10th GCC Conference on Occupational Health and Safety kicked off in Muscat on Tuesday under the theme of “Welfare and Ideal Health at Work”.

HH Sayyid Faris bin Fatik al Said presided over the opening of the two-day conference, organised by the Ministry of Labour.

The conference lays emphasis on the significance of observing occupational

health and mental health at the workplace. It elaborates on the extend to which occupational health influences success and productivity.

The meeting offers an opportunity for the participants to exchange knowledge and expertise with specialists in the field of mental health, occupational safety and the well-being of employees. It also seeks to enhance awareness about issues of mental health at

the workplace.

Through its 14 sessions, the conference reviews working papers on recent global trends in realising employee well-being. The papers deal with ideal health measures, the impact of emotional intelligence on mental health and the role of innovation and technology in enhancing well-being at the workplace. The papers also cover occupational health in the digital age and review

successful experiences in local and international arenas.

The conference focuses on establishing a healthy and supportive work environment, as well as the role of information technology in devising programmes for promoting this theme. The event targets executive managers, directors-general, operation supervisors and all other personnel responsible for occupational health and safety.

— ONA



HH Sayyid Faris bin Fatik al Said presided over the opening of the two-day conference, organised by the Ministry of Labour. – ONA

OMAN PARTICIPATES IN ARAB FORUM FOR ENVIRONMENT IN RIYADH



The purpose of the forum is to identify potential cooperation partnerships and anticipate prospects for environmental work in the Arab region. – ONA

RIYADH: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Environment Authority, is currently taking part in Arab Forum for Environment under the theme “Restore Land to Build Resilience.”

Oman’s delegation to the forum is headed by Dr Abdullah bin Ali al Amri, Chairman of the Environment Authority.

The event, held in Riyadh, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, is organised the Secretariat-General of the Arab League, in cooperation with the UN Environment Programme’s West Asia Office.

It discusses four main themes, namely land degradation and regional and global environmental challenges, land and enhancing food and water security, the importance of environmental

commitment in preserving terrestrial ecosystems, and international, regional and national initiatives to rehabilitate terrestrial ecosystems.

The main purpose of holding Arab forum for Environment sessions is to exchange experiences in relevant fields, identify potential cooperation partnerships, establish regional dialogue among stakeholders to discuss the current situation and anticipate prospects for environmental work in the Arab region.

It aims to provide a regular platform for dialogue among various stakeholders, including policymakers, international and regional experts in various environmental fields, while expanding opportunities for partnerships and possible cooperation among key actors.

— ONA

Scientific approach essential to tackle coconut mites in Dhofar

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH
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Coconut trees in Dhofar Governorate are facing significant challenges due to pest infestations. Among these pests, the coconut mite (*Aceria guerreronis*) stands out for its severe impact on income, attacking the nuts and leading to substantial economic losses.

In an interview with the *Observer*, Dr Ahmed al Shanfari, Director of the Department of Agricultural and Livestock Research in Dhofar, said: “Traditional chemical control measures have proven inadequate and detrimental to benefit insects. There is a need for a scientific, biological approach to pest management.”

“Rhinoceros beetles (*Oryctes rhinoceros*) and coconut hispine beetles (*Brontispa longissima*) attack during the early growth and mature stages, respectively, often resulting in the death of the palms. However, it is the coconut mite that poses the most critical economic threat by damaging the nuts,” he said.

Chemical control methods, according to him, offer only short-term relief and often



Dr Ahmed al Shanfari said there is a need for a scientific, biological approach to pest management



harm beneficial insects. This leads to decline in the number of beneficial insects that work as saviours against any foreign agents.

Moreover, the chemicals used against the coconut hispine beetle become an expensive affair due to the recurrence of damage due to hispine beetle infestations.

“Consequently, biological control methods have gained prominence as a sustainable solution. These methods, though slower to show results, suppress pest populations below economic threshold levels, allowing coconut palms to thrive and maximise their yield potential,” said Dr Al Shanfari.

“The Coconut Improvement

Project in Dhofar has prioritised biocontrol measures. Authorities have undertaken significant steps to introduce biocontrol agents such as *Tyrophagus putrescentiae*, *Neoseiulus baraki*, *Baculovirus oryctes*, *Asecodes hispaniarum*, and *Tetrastichus* species into Oman. These agents were imported from reputed institutions like the Coconut Research Institute of Sri Lanka and the Department of Agriculture in Bangkok, Thailand.”

Upon arrival, these biocontrol agents were established in the laboratory of the Agriculture and Livestock Research Department in Dhofar. Specific protocols were followed to rear and release

these agents effectively. For instance, *Baculovirus*-infected rhinoceros beetles and larvae were released in Taqah and Salalah Agricultural Research Farm to disseminate the virus among the wild population. Additionally, breeding pits filled with cow dung and compost were created to attract and infect rhinoceros beetles naturally.

“The predator mites *Neoseiulus baraki* and *Tyrophagus putrescentiae* faced initial challenges due to inadequate polypropylene sachets, which allowed enemies to infiltrate. This issue was resolved by importing more durable sachets from Sri Lanka and reestablishing the cultures. Despite difficulties, a total of 12,250,000 predators were successfully released into the open field last year,” said Dr Al Shanfari.

Parasitoids targeting the *Brontispa* beetle were released following meticulous rearing processes. However, environmental conditions hindered the development and effectiveness of these parasitoids, necessitating further research and adjustments.

MINISTRY OF INFORMATION

TENDERS ANNOUNCEMENT

The Internal Tender Committee at Ministry of Information announces its Tenders for the following works:

Tender No.	Tender Name	Class & Grade	Last Date For Collection	Submission Date	Purchase Fees (R.O.)
4/2024 (207/2024) at E-Tendering	Development and Implementation of the Electronic Portal and Mobile Application for the Government Communication Center	Excellent Frist	15/6/2024	30/7/2024	25/-
5/2024 (212/2024) at E-Tendering	Supply, Delivery and Commissioning of Two Identical Outside Broadcasting Vans each with Five 4K UHD IP Cameras and Accessories	International Excellent Frist	15/6/2024	30/7/2024	80/-

1. All specialized companies in the field of the tender shown above and are registered with the Tender Board to the degree indicated above, may obtain tender documents, against non-refundable fees, from the website through the following link: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>

2. Companies and institutions are exempted from providing a temporary insurance of 1% when submitting their bid, provided that they sign a document committing themselves to the submitted bid for a period determined when the bidding strategy is approved in accordance with the document attached to the Isnad platform. As for international companies that do not have a headquarters in the Sultanate of Oman, they are required to provide temporary insurance of 1%.

(For more information, please see the original circular issued by the Tender Board on the Isnad platform.)

Note that the last date for accepting bids as mentioned above is before 10:00 am . Any bid received after the time and date mentioned in the submission date will be rejected automatically. You are requested to provide 2 hard copies for your offer after the submission in Projects Department at Ministry of Information.

3. The Ministry has the right to:

1) Add or Cancel some works in the tender if necessary.

2) Cancellation of the tender without giving reasons.

For clarifications you may contact via:

Telephone : 24943785, 24943177, Email: (Moi.Tenders@omaninfo.om)



AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, JUNE 4

During the summer season, people often suffer from excessively high water temperatures. Water from overhead tanks and public networks becomes unbearable. This common issue forces water users to waste the accumulated hot water in pipes to obtain water at a bearable temperature.

Abu Sultan, a resident of the Wilayat of Bausher, shared his experience, stating that the high water temperature makes daily tasks challenging. “When taking a shower or washing dishes, the water is uncomfortably hot, especially during daylight hours. We try to use water early in the morning or late at night, but this is not always a solution,” he said.

Abu Sultan mentioned that despite trying various methods to mitigate the problem, such as making shades to protect the tanks from the sun, there were no best results due to the hot water in the pipes.

Said al Ghafri clarified that many people mistakenly believe that the primary cause of hot water is the exposure of water tanks to direct sunlight. He explained that water tanks typically have three layers of protection. The main reason for the hot water is the exposure of pipes to direct sunlight, not the tanks themselves.

Al Ghafri noted that some individuals attempt to install cooling devices on water tanks, thinking this will solve the issue.

However, the real problem lies in the pipes running from the tank to various parts of the house. Sunlight heats the water in these exposed pipes, while the water inside the tank remains relatively cool.

Al Ghafri suggested practical solutions to address this problem.

COVERING EXPOSED PIPES

A simple and cost-effective solution is to cover the exposed pipes to prevent them from heating up in direct sunlight. This method helps maintain cooler water temperatures in the pipes, reducing the need for waste water.

Planting trees and plants: Another effective solution is to plant trees and shrubs around the house. These plants provide a natural shade, protecting external pipes and tanks from direct sunlight, which helps keep the water cool.

Al Ghafri emphasised the importance of regular maintenance of pipes and tanks to ensure there are no leaks or damages that could affect water temperature. Periodic checks can help maintain the efficiency of the system and prevent unnecessary water wastage. For a more technical approach,

water cooling devices can be installed to regulate the water temperature. However, these devices can be expensive and consume significant electricity.

SOLUTIONS
TO GET
COOL
WATER
FROM TAPS



OWA organises silversmithing workshop for women

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, JUNE 4

The Omani Women’s Association in Muscat Governorate organised a training workshop over three months with the support of the Omani Indian Fertiliser Company (OMIFCO) and in cooperation with the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority.

A number of the association’s members participated in the course and a training programme that prepared the participants with theoretical and practical knowledge of the craft of silversmithing.

Maryam bint Mohammed al Zadjaliyah, Chairwoman of the Board of Directors of the Omani Women’s Association in Muscat,



The workshop includes silversmithing course on many topics including theoretical, practical, and marketing aspects

said: “To ensure the involvement of women and their contribution to self-reliance, we organised this training workshop, which includes a specialised silversmithing course, on many topics, including theoretical, practical, and marketing aspects.”



On the theoretical level, the participants will learn about the skill. The craft, the tools and equipment used in it, and the accompanying safety procedures due to the use of some chemicals and gases during the welding and unloading operations.



The Omani Women’s Association in Muscat has prepared a special workshop that includes the necessary equipment and devices, including the safety tools necessary to protect the participants during training.

She added that the participants

will be trained to manage the marketing account on social media platforms (Instagram and WhatsApp) to allow them to electronically market their products while designing a visual identity and a trade name that reflect the identity of the craft product and help spread and market it. The participants will also be trained at this stage on how to photograph with a mobile phone to prepare clips. Marketing products and marketable images.

This workshop is presented by the trainer, Wafa bint Masoud al Habsiyah, founder of the craft project ‘Hajoula’.

The Association’s chairperson confirmed that in addition to the craft goals, the Omani Women’s

Association in Muscat seeks several social and economic goals, the most important of which is consolidating the culture of craft work and creating sources of income for families with limited income and social security, where the trainee will acquire all the necessary skills to be able to open his craft business project.

It seeks to empower women economically, support them in establishing various projects that serve the individual and society, and contribute to the advancement of the Omani economy. The association also aims to continue and sustain traditional crafts, transmit them across generations, and develop them using the latest tools and machines.

Oman secures 12 top places at Gulf investor award

SIHAM AL SAIDI
SUHAR, JUNE 4

Oman secured 12 top positions at the second edition of the 2024 Gulf Smart Investor Awards held recently in Saudi Arabia. This award is a key initiative under the Gulf Financial Awareness Programme “Mulim”, which encourages creative content production to enrich financial awareness across the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries.

Organised by the Financial Services Authority alongside GCC securities market regulators, the award ceremony was hosted by the Saudi Capital Market Authority in Riyadh. The competition featured 36 awards across four categories: Photography, Video production, Drawing, and Creative writing.

These categories were segmented into three participant groups: Individuals, School students, and College and



university students. The 2024 Gulf Smart Investor Awards witnessed the participation of over 45,000 entrants across its four categories, with school students contributing over 36,000 participants.

Shabib al Hadi won first place

in the short film production field for individuals with his innovative short film. He commented, “I intend to use my modern film-making techniques and self-developed technology to present a unique piece of art that reflects

my competence in the field.”

Aisha bint Mohammed al Yaqoobiya also took first place in the same category. She said, “My film about a girl refurbishing dolls using extra accessories and starting her own business aims to raise financial awareness among children, even though I am still at school.” Her father added that she was inspired by support for youth entrepreneurship in the Sultanate of Oman.

The “Mulim” programme, launched by the GCC General Secretariat and supported by the region’s securities authorities, aims to elevate financial literacy and investment culture through various awareness campaigns and events. Oman’s participation underscores its commitment to fostering regional youth engagement, enhancing competitiveness, and supporting promising Omani talent in creative content development for financial awareness.



During the meeting, Eng Salim al Busaidy, DG of Muscat Municipality in Seeb, presented a visual presentation in which he reviewed noticeable projects

Development projects in Seeb evaluated

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

Members of the Muscat Municipality, along with the members of the Majlis Ash’shura and the Municipal Council assessed and evaluated the status of implementation of service projects in Al Seeb with Al Mutasim bin Abdullah al Siyabi, Deputy Wali of Al Seeb on Tuesday.

During the meeting, Engineer Salim bin Hamed al Busaidy, Director General of Muscat Municipality in Al Seeb, presented a visual presentation in which he reviewed the most noticeable projects approved for the Wilayat in the annual plan for the current year, its executive situation in the first

quarter and the annual target to be achieved.

In addition, Muscat Municipality’s specialists listened to the presented inquiries and discussions during the meeting, and common opinions and viewpoints were exchanged on these projects.

“The high level discussions come in the background of the principles of participation between the various organisational units in Muscat Governorate and the local community,” said Al Siyabi.

It is worth noting that this visit comes within a series of complementary visits that bring together specialists from Muscat Municipality and the walis’ offices aimed at enhancing integration and effective communication.

Most postal mails received in Oman are from UAE, US

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 4

Majority of postal mails received in the the Sultanate of Oman by post are from the United Arab Emirates, United States of America and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) said in its semi-annual report for the second quarter of 2023.

Top three destinations for international express mail originating from the Sultanate of Oman are the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Qatar. In the postal services sector, the report indicated that the number of outbound packages reached 207,515, a growth rate of 27 per cent compared to the second half of 2022, and the number of local packages reached 1,738,918, a growth rate of 46 per cent compared to the same quarter of 2022.

The number of incoming mails was 1,197,119, a growth rate of 84 per cent compared to the same year in 2022. The report indicated that the percentage of change in the number of 5G stations increased by a growth



TRA said the number of incoming mails was 1,197,119, a growth rate of 84 per cent compared to the same year in 2022

rate of 102 per cent compared to the same period in 2022, and by 5,238 stations by the end of 2023.

It also said that the number of mobile phone subscriptions by the end of 2023 was 6.98 million, with a growth rate of three per cent compared to 2022, achieving a penetration rate of 135 per 100 individuals of the population.

The growth rate of mobile broadband subscriptions reached five per cent compared to 2022, with 6.03 million subscriptions, achieving a penetration rate of

117 per 100 individuals of the population.

As for fixed telecommunications services, the growth rate in fixed telephone subscriptions reached 3 per cent compared to 2022, at 579 thousand, achieving a penetration rate of 82 per 100 households.

The growth rate of fixed broadband subscriptions reached 5 per cent compared to 2022, with 562,000 subscriptions, with a penetration rate of 80 per 100 households.



Tender Announcement :

Procurement Department at the Nakheel Oman Development Company announces the below Tender:

Tender NO	Tender name	Date of Publishing	Design and Supervision of Tissue Culture Centre- Salalah	Bid Submission date	Companies who should participate in the tender	Tender fees
11-2024	Design and Supervision of Tissue Culture Centre- Salalah	04-06-2024	16-06-2024	(07/07/2024),1 2:00PM	Engineer consultancy	25.00 RO

Interested companies can participate by purchasing the tender document by transfer to below account details:

Beneficiary: Nakheel Oman Development Co.

Bank: Bank Nizwa

Account No. 00150000004001

Payment receipt to be forwarded to Procurement-team@nakheel.om

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Palestinians seek to join genocide case at World Court

AMSTERDAM: Palestinian authorities have filed an application with the International Court of Justice (ICJ) to join South Africa as a party in its Gaza genocide case against Israel, the court said.

In a statement the ICJ, also known as the World Court, said the Palestinian authorities “filed... an application for permission to intervene and a declaration of intervention in the (South Africa v. Israel) case.”

On May 31, the Palestinian authorities officially recognised the authority of the ICJ to resolve all disputes that may arise or have already arisen under Article IX, which paved the way for them to request to join South Africa’s case against Israel as a party.

If granted by the court, the request could allow the Palestinian authorities to also add an ad hoc judge of their choosing to the ICJ panel which currently has 16 judges, 15 of the court’s regular judges and one Israeli ad hoc judge.

South Africa and Israel have been invited to furnish written observations on the Palestinian application for permission to intervene as a party.

The Palestinian authorities became a signatory to the genocide convention in 2014 after they were granted United Nations permanent observer state status.

The 1948 Genocide Convention is the basis for South Africa’s ICJ case against Israel for allegedly committing genocide in Gaza.

Several other states have already signalled they want to intervene in the Gaza genocide case including Nicaragua, Colombia, Libya and Mexico. In December last year, South Africa filed a genocide case against Israel over the war in Gaza declaring that Israel was in breach of its obligations under the Genocide Convention.

Last month, the World Court ordered Israel to prevent acts of genocide against Palestinians and do more to help civilians. — Reuters

No clear position from Israel on ceasefire deal, says Qatar



A Palestinian man carries a sheet containing goods he retrieved from under the rubble of destroyed buildings in the Jabalia refugee camp. — AFP

DOHA: Mediator Qatar said on Tuesday it was waiting for a “clear position” from Israel on a proposed Gaza ceasefire and captives release deal outlined by US President Joe Biden.

“We have yet to see a very clear position from the Israeli government towards the principles laid out by Biden,” foreign ministry spokesman Majed al Ansari said, adding there was no “concrete approval” from either side.

“We have read and seen the contradictory statements coming in from Israeli ministers, which doesn’t give us much confidence of there being a unified position in Israel over this current proposal on the table,” Ansari told a regular press conference.

The Palestinian movement Hamas has also yet to give a firm response, the official added. “We haven’t seen any statements on both sides that give us a lot of



We have read and seen the contradictory statements coming in from Israeli ministers, which doesn’t give us much confidence of there being a unified position in Israel

MAJED
AL ANSARI

Qatar foreign ministry spokesman

confidence,” he added, noting, however, that “the process is progressing and we have been

working with both sides on proposals on the table” Qatar, with the US and Egypt,

has been engaged in months of back-and-forth negotiations over details for a ceasefire and exchange of captives and prisoners by both sides.

But with the exception of a seven-day break in the fighting beginning in November that led to the release of more than 100 captives, a series of in-person mediation efforts have not stopped the fighting.

In an effort to reinvigorate talks, US President Joe Biden said on Friday that Israel was offering a new three-stage roadmap towards a full ceasefire, including the release of captives held by Palestinian groups in the Gaza Strip.

According to the US president, Israel’s three-stage offer would begin with a six-week phase that would see Israeli forces withdraw from all populated areas of Gaza and an initial captive-prisoner exchange. — AFP

Palestinian children dream of school in water queues

GAZA: Thirteen-year-old Palestinian Hadeel Madi has many dreams, she said, and worked hard at school so she could study abroad.

She is one of many children who trek daily to collection points where water is poured into their plastic buckets, cans and bottles. They take it back over long distances, along dusty roads lined with mountains of rubble from destroyed buildings.

Some of them pull water on makeshift carts, but for most, it has to be carried.

“My back hurts from carrying all this water,” Madi said. “We are tired. Life is a lot of big struggles. The destruction around us, we breathe in dust.”

Twelve-year-old Maram al Hajj remembers when water was available before current war.

“Before, we were living our lives, but the Israelis have replaced our thoughts with other thoughts. We no longer have thoughts like before, we used to think about going to school and what to study.”

Israel’s post-October 7 offensive has killed more than 36,000 Gazans, health authorities in the Hamas-run enclave say, and created a humanitarian crisis with shortages of medicine, fuel, food and water.

People have dug wells in bleak areas near the sea where the bombing has pushed them or rely on salty tap water from Gaza’s only aquifer, which is contaminated with sewage and seawater. “Food, drinks or water — nothing is available,” said Hajj.

The children are desperate for signs that life will one day return to normal so that they can think about school, rather than survival, but mediators seeking a ceasefire are struggling to clinch a deal. “God willing, the war will end,” Madi said “and we will be able to learn.” — AFP

UN decries ‘unfathomable’ numbers killed in West Bank

GENEVA: The UN rights chief demanded on Tuesday an end to surging violence in the occupied West Bank, saying it was “unfathomable” that more than 500 Palestinians had been killed there since October 7.

Volker Turk said at least 505 Palestinians had been killed in the West Bank by the Israeli military and by West Bank settlers since the war in nearby Gaza erupted nearly eight months ago.

Palestinian officials have given a toll of at least 523. Two dozen Israelis, including eight soldiers, have also been killed in West Bank clashes or alleged attacks by Palestinians from the West Bank during the same period, he said.

“As if the tragic events in Israel and then Gaza over the past eight months were not enough, the people of the occupied West Bank are also being subjected to day-after-day of

unprecedented bloodshed,” he said in a statement. “It is unfathomable that so many lives have been taken in such a wanton fashion.”

Turk insisted “the killing, destruction and widespread human rights violations are unacceptable, and must cease immediately.”

“Israel must not only adopt but enforce rules of engagement that are fully in line with applicable human rights norms and standards,” he said, demanding accountability for all alleged unlawful killings.

Turk decried the “pervasive impunity for such crimes” in the West Bank, which Israel has occupied since 1967, and which had seen a surge in violence even before October 7.

He pointed to a case over the weekend in which Israeli forces shot dead a teenager and critically injured another who later died near the Aqabat Jabr refugee camp near

Jericho in the West Bank.

He said CCTV footage indicated that the boys were shot at a distance of 70 metres while running away after throwing stones and/or Molotov cocktails towards a military post.

Turk’s statement said that the Israeli military had often used lethal force “as a first resort against Palestinian protesters... in cases where those shot clearly did not represent an imminent threat to life.”

Turk warned that the violence “against the backdrop of the scale of killing and destruction continuing in Gaza have instilled fear and insecurity among Palestinians in the occupied West Bank”.

The war in Gaza was sparked by October 7 attack, which resulted in the deaths of 1,194 people. Israel’s retaliatory bombardment and ground offensive have to date killed 36,550 people in Gaza. — AFP



Israeli military vehicles drive by an ambulance during a raid in the Balata refugee camp in the occupied West Bank. — AFP



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In brief

■ BEIJING



CHINA LUNAR PROBE TAKES OFF FROM MOON WITH SAMPLES

A Chinese probe carrying samples from the far side of the Moon started its journey back to Earth on Tuesday, a world first achievement for Beijing's space programme.

The ascender module of the Change-6 probe "lifted off from lunar surface" and entered a preset orbit around the Moon, the China National Space Administration (CNSA) said.

It was the first craft to ever successfully take off, with state news agency Xinhua describing the launch as "an unprecedented feat in human lunar exploration history". Samples will allow scientists "to deepen research on the formation and evolutionary history of the moon". — AFP

■ NOUMEA



NEW CALEDONIA AIRPORT TO RESUME SOME COMMERCIAL FLIGHTS

Commercial flights to and from the main airport in New Caledonia will resume, an airline and the operator said, after weeks of stoppage following deadly rioting in the French Pacific territory. "From tomorrow, Wednesday June 5, Aircalin will progressively resume a part of its long- and medium-haul commercial flights" from the Tontouta International Airport outside the capital Noumea.

Aircalin said that it would be running "a reduced flight schedule until the situation returned to normal". Flights were halted in mid-May after unrest broke out over a new voting law. — AFP

■ SYDNEY



CLIMATE CHANGE THREATENS AUSTRALIA'S SNOWY ALPS

Climate change could make Australia's annual snow season more than a month shorter, placing a unique alpine ecosystem under threat, new research warned.

Modelling showed even with mitigation efforts, snow in the country will become much rarer.

The Australian Alps are seeing the rapid and "sobering" impacts of climate change, according to the study's co-author Adrienne Nicotra.

Australia's snow season will be 44 days shorter by 2050. If climate mitigation efforts are taken immediately, the snow season could be 28 days shorter by 2050. — AFP

MODI FALLS SHORT OF LANDSLIDE

RULING NDA TO WIN AT LEAST 291 SEATS OUT OF A TOTAL OF 543 COMPARED TO OPPOSITION'S 232

NEW DELHI: India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi claimed election victory for his party and its allies on Tuesday, but the opposition said they had "punished" the ruling party to confound predictions and reduce their parliamentary majority.

For the first time in a decade Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) failed to secure an overall majority of its own, figures from the election commission showed, meaning it would need to rely on its alliance partners.

India has placed its faith in the ruling coalition "for a third consecutive time", Modi wrote on social media platform X, referring to the BJP and its allies.

"We will continue the good work done in the last decade to keep fulfilling the aspirations of people."

The main opposition Congress party was set to nearly double its parliamentary seats, in a remarkable turnaround largely driven by deals to field single candidates against the BJP's electoral juggernaut.

"Voters have punished the BJP," Congress leader Rahul Gandhi told reporters. "I was confident that the people of this country would give the right response." With nearly 99 per cent of votes counted, the BJP's vote share at 36.7 per cent was marginally lower than it was in the last polls in 2019.

Modi was re-elected to his constituency representing the Hindu holy city of Varanasi by a margin of 152,300 votes — compared to nearly half a million votes five years ago.

The election commission figures showed the BJP and its



Supporters of Narendra Modi celebrate vote counting results for India's general election, at BJP party office in Hyderabad on Tuesday. — AFP

allies on track to win at least 291 seats out of a total of 543, enough for a parliamentary majority.

But the BJP itself had won or was leading in only 239, well down from the 303 it took five years ago, while Congress had won or was ahead in 99, up from 52.

Among the independent lawmakers elected were two serving time in jail — firebrand Sikh separatist preacher Amritpal Singh, and Sheikh Abdul Rashid

from Kashmir, who was arrested on charges of "terror funding" and money laundering in 2019.

Celebrations had already begun at the headquarters of Modi's BJP before the full announcement of results.

But the mood at the Congress headquarters in New Delhi was also one of jubilation.

"BJP has failed to win a big majority on its own," Congress lawmaker Rajeev Shukla told

reporters.

The polls were staggering in their size and logistical complexity, with 642 million voters casting their ballots — everywhere from megacities New Delhi and Mumbai to sparsely populated forest areas and the high-altitude Himalayas.

"For BJP, complacency was one of the biggest enemies," Nistula Hebbar, political editor of *The Hindu* newspaper said.

"We will now see an entirely new Modi, because we've never seen Modi operate a government without a full majority." It forces Modi to tread more carefully to ensure backing for more controversial policies.

"With this, we come back to a more traditional form of Indian politics where there will be an alliance government," said Hartosh Singh Bal, editor of *The Caravan* in New Delhi. — Agencies

South Korea, Africa leaders pledge deeper trade relations

GOYANG: South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol and the leaders of African countries agreed on Tuesday to forge deeper trade and business cooperation and launched a "critical minerals dialogue" aimed at sustainable development of the continent's resources.

Hosting a first-ever summit with the leaders of 48 African nations, Yoon said South Korea would increase development aid for Africa to \$10 billion over the next six years as it looks to tap the continent's rich mineral resources and potential as a vast export market.

"The Critical Minerals Dialogue launched by South Korea and Africa will set an example for a stable supply chain through mutually beneficial cooperation and contribute to sustainable development of mineral resources around the world," Yoon said. He also pledged to offer \$14 billion in export financing to promote trade and investment for South Korean companies in Africa. South Korea is one of the world's largest energy buyers and is home to leading semiconductor producers. It is also home to the world's fifth-largest automaker, Hyundai Motor Group.

Partnering with Africa, which has 30% of the world's reserves of critical minerals including



South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol speaks during the 2024 Korea-Africa Summit in Goyang, South Korea. — Reuters

chrome, cobalt and manganese is crucial, Yoon's office has said.

In a joint declaration issued by South Korea, the African Union (AU) and its member nations, the leaders pledged to speed up talks for economic partnership agreements and trade and investment promotion frameworks.

African leaders welcomed South Korea's "Tech4Africa" initiative aimed at supporting the education and training of Africa's young population.

AU chair and Mauritanian President Mohamed Ould Ghazouani, at a joint news conference with Yoon, said African countries were looking

to learn from Korea's experience in developing human resources, industrialisation and digital transformation. Yoon said 33 heads of state participated in the summit. Yoon has proposed "shared growth" as a pillar of cooperation with the continent and said the leaders agreed to expand trade and investment by establishing institutional frameworks to facilitate them.

By reaching out with offers to help with industrial infrastructure and digital transformation, South Korea is trying to tap into a vast and fast-growing market that is home to 1.4 billion people, the majority of whom are 25 or younger. — Reuters

Ukraine says Italy will supply air defence battery

KYIV: Kyiv on Tuesday said that Italy would supply Ukraine with another air defence system, weapons that senior Ukrainian officials have been urging allies to send to fend off Russian assaults.

President Volodymyr Zelensky says his country urgently needs at least seven more systems, including two just to defend the eastern Kharkiv region, where Moscow recently launched a fresh ground offensive.

"Italian Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani confirmed that his country will provide Ukraine with a second SAMP/T air defence system," Andriy Yermak, the head of the Ukrainian president's office announced on social media. An Italian government source confirmed the announcement from Yermak, without elaborating.

The news came as regional Ukrainian officials said eight people had been wounded in overnight Russian attacks in the central Dnipropetrovsk region and also in the eastern Kharkiv region.

The head of the southern Kherson region, which the Kremlin claims is part of Russia, separately said that Russian artillery fire had killed an elderly woman in her yard in the village of Veletynske.

State power operator Ukrenergo introduced forced electricity blackouts in several regions, including the capital Kyiv and frontline Donetsk and Kharkiv regions. Recent Russian missile and drone barrages, including a major attack over the weekend, have stretched Ukraine's air defence capacity. — AFP



Rescuers extinguish a fire in an apartment building destroyed by a Russian missile attack in Kharkiv. — AFP file photo.

Developments in generative AI models



Dr Muamar bin Ali al Tob

The writer is Omani academic and researcher

Microsoft-owned OpenAI’s ChatGPT 4o is an advanced iteration of ChatGPT 4. This version is available for free to a certain extent; some users can try it for free, while others cannot, without the need for a monthly subscription, unlike ChatGPT 4 which comes with various smart models such as those for generating images and videos.

We have previously discussed ChatGPT 4 and compared it with ChatGPT 3.5 and Google’s Bard, which has been renamed Gemini. The comparison was based on several factors, including the structure of each model in terms of the amount of data used in training and parameters, and the capabilities and efficiency of each model.

ChatGPT 4o has created a digital stir; awakening the digital community and alarming some of its members. This opens the door wide for competition among digital companies. We are on the brink of seeing rapid advancements in other AI models, particularly generative ones like Gemini. Google is expected to announce updates to its upcoming version to take on its rival OpenAI. In this article,

we will explore the updates of this advanced generative model, understand some of its features that distinguish it from ChatGPT 4 and introduce its rapid advancements that contribute to changing our lifestyle and the nature of our social interactions.

ChatGPT 4o is an improved version of ChatGPT 4, with enhancements focused on greater capabilities in natural language processing. The reasons for this superiority lie in the doubling of the amount of data used in training the new model and the increase in parameters. OpenAI has not yet disclosed the size but acknowledged that the quantity has increased, explaining the model’s superiority.

ChatGPT 4o excels in high accuracy in language processing and understanding complex contexts compared to the previous version’s capabilities. It can generate clear and precise responses and texts quickly, including in complex topics, allowing for deeper discussions with more sophisticated language and analysis than ChatGPT 4, making its language more akin to human style. Additionally, the new model can generate long textual contexts without disruptive breaks, a feature the previous version lacked, leading to inconsistencies in the information contained

CHATGPT 4O EXCELS IN HIGH ACCURACY IN LANGUAGE PROCESSING AND UNDERSTANDING COMPLEX CONTEXTS COMPARED TO THE PREVIOUS VERSION’S CAPABILITIES

within the text. One of the most significant features giving the new model exceptional superiority is its ability to interact via text, voice and image. Although these features were present in the previous model, its voice and visual interactions were less human-like compared to the latest version. I found ChatGPT 4o’s voice interaction smart and fast.

Users can set a specific tone for the model’s voice, language and dialect, including Arabic dialects like Omani and Egyptian, which I tested during the interaction. You can directly take a photo for the model or upload a saved image and ask it to describe and identify it. Its interaction is high, precise and fast compared to the previous model, which often lacked accurate and efficient description capabilities.

In case of video clips — which I have not yet tested due to its unavailability — ChatGPT 4o has the ability to act as a special tutor for a student, helping solve math problems and assisting a blind person with a precise description of the external environment.

Regarding security and privacy, the new model boasts better data handling capabilities, and reduces information leakage risks and cyber attacks thanks to updates in the model’s algorithms.

Pandemic, war anger boost far right in EU vote

BLAISE GAUQUELIN

While EU leaders vaunt their handling of Covid and the Ukraine war, far-right parties have seized on discontent over the crises — a strategy set to pay off in upcoming European elections.

Embodying this trend are two countries at the heart of Europe: Austria and Hungary.

Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban has vowed to “occupy Brussels” as he transforms his country into what he calls an “illiberal democracy”.

He has cast the June 9 elections as a “referendum” on the response to Russia’s attack on Ukraine.

In Austria, meanwhile, the far-right Freedom Party (FPÖ) has soared in the polls, buoyed by discontent over the government’s handling of the Covid pandemic, as well as soaring inflation and migration.

Since the last EU elections in 2019, European far-right parties have responded to a worsening economic situation by cranking up their rhetoric, said European politics expert Catherine Fieschi at Counterpoint, a London-based think tank.

Brussels has claimed success in dealing with the pandemic and touts its solidarity in the face of Russia’s attack on Ukraine, she said, “but things are still not going as well as they did in 2019”.

In campaign posters and speeches, Orban repeatedly calls for “peace” and an end to the war — implying coming to terms with Russia’s authoritarian president, Vladimir Putin.

Orban has also frequently cast himself as the “protector” of stability in a changing world that he claims is under threat from immigration, LGBTQ rights and Brussel’s climate policies.

A senior member of Orban’s Fidesz party, outgoing EU parliament member Balazs Hidveghi, said Orban has won support by reading what is on voters’ minds.

EU sanctions on Russia were “the wrong response” as they failed to “prevent the continuation of hostilities”, Hidveghi said.

In power for the past 14 years, Fidesz is currently leading in the opinion polls. Various surveys indicate it has between 39 and 48 percent support.

In Austria, the far-right Freedom Party (FPÖ) now tops the polls with an estimated 25 to 30 percent of votes — thanks to a similar strategy.

Its popularity slumped in 2019 amid a string of corruption scandals, but the party has since bounced back. Its recent success under its leader Herbert Kickl is attributed above all due to his rebellious Covid anti-vaccination stance. — AFP

Ridiculed for a decade, Rahul Gandhi slows Modi juggernaut in India

KRISHN KAUSHIK

Indian opposition leader Rahul Gandhi, mocked by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his supporters for a decade as an entitled dynast, marked a stunning comeback on Tuesday, emerging at the centre of an alliance that made deep inroads into ruling party strongholds.

The scion of India’s fabled Nehru-Gandhi political dynasty, he embarked on two cross-country marches against what he called Modi’s politics of hate and fear, giving a jolt of enthusiasm to his Congress party and rehabilitating his own image.

Reduced by a Modi landslide to just 52 seats in the 543-member lower house of parliament in 2019, Congress looks well set to nearly double that tally this year, according to the vote count from the general election.

That total is likely to restrict Modi’s Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to less than the 272 seats needed to win a majority on its own, and it will have to rely on allies to form the government.

Though it might have to sit another term out of power, Congress will have the loudest voice in a much stronger opposition, with Gandhi at its centre.

As the opposition’s most prominent face, Gandhi has been a target of attacks from Modi and other BJP leaders, who often call him “the prince”. Gandhi’s father, grandmother and great-grandfather have all been prime ministers. During the campaign, Gandhi, with close-cropped black hair and a scruffy salt-and-pepper stubble, criss-crossed the country as his party’s main face, even though Congress is led by family loyalist Mallikarjun Kharge.

“I think Rahul Gandhi will get credit, not just for mobilisation, for his marches, but also for continuously clarifying the Congress’s ideological pitch against the BJP,” said Rahul Verma, political analyst at the Centre for Policy Research think tank in New Delhi. “If there was a moment when Gandhi really emerged, it is now.”

BATTLE AGAINST HATE

At a news conference on Tuesday,



Rahul Gandhi with India’s constitution at a press conference in New Delhi on Tuesday. — Reuters

REDUCED BY A MODI LANDSLIDE TO JUST 52 SEATS IN THE 543-MEMBER LOWER HOUSE OF PARLIAMENT IN 2019, CONGRESS LOOKS WELL SET TO NEARLY DOUBLE THAT TALLY THIS YEAR

Gandhi pulled out a red-jacketed, pocket-sized version of the country’s constitution that he has referred to continuously during the campaign, and said his alliance’s performance was the “first step” in preventing Modi from attempting to change it.

Changing the constitution requires a two-thirds in parliament. Cambridge-educated Gandhi has often said that he is battling Modi’s BJP not just to wrest power, but to defeat the party’s and its parent Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh’s Hindu-first character, which goes against India’s secular roots enshrined in the constitution.

Single at 53, a trained pilot like his father, and a certified scuba diver, Gandhi is known to be a fitness and martial arts enthusiast and has been seen cycling on New Delhi’s leafy avenues, accompanied by security men.

A member of parliament since 2004, Gandhi’s attendance has been far below average. His frequent absences from the chamber, and the country, have been the focus of the media and drawn

BJP accusations that he does not take politics seriously.

LIKENED TO KENNEDYS

Gandhi has never been a minister in a federal or state government, and has not led his Congress party to a general election victory.

Congress was the largest national political party with a footprint across the country of 1.4 billion people until it was overtaken by the BJP in 2014.

Outside parliament, Gandhi has often reminded his supporters of his family’s commitment and sacrifices, talking about assassinations of his grandmother, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, and of his father and ex-prime minister Rajiv Gandhi.

The political lineage, likened to the Kennedys in the United States both for the power it has enjoyed and the tragedies that have befallen it, started with Motilal Nehru, who practiced law in the early 20th century and gave up a Western lifestyle to become president of the Congress party.

His son, Jawaharlal, was independence hero Mahatma Gandhi’s closest confidant and prime minister from 1947 until 1964.

Jawaharlal’s daughter, Indira, married a Gandhi who was no relation to the Mahatma, but the name was certainly no handicap in politics. Indira Gandhi became prime minister in 1966, but was voted out in 1977 after imposing a harsh internal emergency on the country, becoming the first of her family to lose a national election.

But the mystique of the dynasty brought her back to power within three years and her son Rajiv took over after she was shot dead by two bodyguards in 1984. Rajiv Gandhi served one term as prime minister and when he was campaigning for a comeback in 1991, he was assassinated by a suicide bomber. Those killings have made Rahul, his mother Sonia and sister Priyanka among the most protected people in the world. Armed men guard them at public functions and, for security reasons, Rahul even used a false name at university and when he worked in London at the turn of the century. — Reuters

Protect the nature for a brighter future

We all know that the oxygen that we breathe is created by green plants. We know that beyond being the beautiful backdrop to every season, they are part of the earth’s atmosphere and the habitat for numerous creatures!

We also know that in any attempt to do away with those plants, we’d be gone. Alas! Still, we do it! And the result is that the health of the ecosystems in which we and other species live is waning more rapidly than ever.

But sadly, hardly any day now goes by without reports about droughts or floods, new oil spills or forest fires, or the threatened extinction of a species or even a mutated microbe. The fact is that these climate extremes are becoming more frequent, more severe, longer, and larger!

Unscrupulous and predatory human activities like dumping waste, polluting the air, cutting down forests, mining and monoculture agriculture are all destroying the natural order and balance. Interestingly, much of our civilisation and advancement have come at the expense of other species and our environment!

Scientists have long warned that the lives of current and future generations are under threat as the world is moving dangerously towards an environmental catastrophe. If earth’s temperature rises much higher, our planet will become uninhabitable, they warn.

According to the eighth report of the Lancet Countdown project, the global population will face a nearly five-fold increase in heat-related deaths by 2050, while climate inaction is already costing lives and well-being today.

An estimated seven million people die each year from causes related to air pollution, with a majority occurring in the Asia-Pacific region, which is otherwise exceptionally rich in biodiversity with rich land and water ecosystems.

Environmental pollution is one of the biggest issues that the world is facing today. We are putting



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The writer is a senior journalist, author and columnist

too much pressure on the natural environment. One-fifth of the earth’s land is now degraded. The soil is losing its fertility, and in most places, soil pollution makes it difficult to grow crops.

Our lakes are shrivelling up. Our forests are disappearing. Our farms are turning into dust bowls. All these are at the cost of the well-being of more than three billion people.

Against this backdrop, the world is celebrating Environment Day today to raise awareness about our environment, prevent damage to it through human activities, and protect the earth.

World Environment Day falls on June 5 every year since it was established in 1972. Approximately 143 countries worldwide celebrate this day, which was instituted by the United Nations. This day is the largest global platform for environmental public outreach.

With the theme “Reviving lands for a brighter future,” the focus of the celebrations will be on land restoration, stopping desertification and building drought resilience. It is hosted by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, a Gulf Cooperation Council country.

As Elizabeth Maruma Mrema, Deputy Executive Director of the UN Environment Programme, pointed out, “Our priority now must be on restoring ecosystems — on replanting our forests, on rewetting our marshes, on reviving our soils.”

Restoration can create havens for wildlife, helping to foil the extinction crisis gripping our planet. It can counter climate change by reviving the ability of forests and rivers to store planet-warming carbon.

“This World Environment Day is a golden opportunity to spur hundreds of millions of people to take action. We are the generation that can make peace with land,” she reminds us.

Be it the wonders of the natural world or life lessons we learn from, there’s something for everyone to learn from our environment. So let us undo the damage we have done; let us give a better future for our generations!

HARDLY ANY DAY NOW GOES BY WITHOUT REPORTS ABOUT DROUGHTS OR FLOODS, NEW OIL SPILLS OR FOREST FIRES, OR THE THREATENED EXTINCTION OF A SPECIES OR EVEN A MUTATED MICROBE

ESCAPE FROM FLOODS



A flood victim pushes an inflatable boat with her dog after receiving lunch packets for her family from Sri Lankan army members, on a flooded road in Kelaniya, Sri Lanka, on Tuesday. – Reuters

Sustainable leadership for a resilient future

In today’s dynamic global landscape, sustainable leadership is essential for organizations striving for long-term viability. This approach goes beyond mere organisational gains, focusing instead on environmental, social, and economic sustainability. To effectively implement sustainable leadership, it is crucial to motivate and enable teams to embrace sustainable practices, thereby accelerating organisational change towards a more sustainable future. Visionary leaders can unify diverse interests and drive collective action towards common sustainability goals through effective communication and visionary thinking.

Sustainable leadership is not just a theoretical concept but a practical necessity for addressing the challenges of the twenty-first century. As we face existential threats such as social unrest, biodiversity loss, and climate change, the need for innovative leadership is more critical than ever. Sustainable leaders have the power to inspire positive change, mobilize collective efforts, and create a future that is resilient, equitable, and prosperous.

Sustainable leadership transcends traditional performance indicators, which often focus solely on financial



Sonia Umair

The author is with Al Zahra College for Women, Muscat

metrics. Instead, it adopts a comprehensive perspective that integrates social responsibility, ethical governance, and environmental stewardship into organizational decision-making processes. By understanding the interdependence of social, economic, and environmental systems, sustainable leaders strive to balance immediate needs with long-term sustainability objectives.

Oman, with its diverse natural landscapes, rich cultural heritage, and strategic location in the Gulf, is guided by Vision 2040—a comprehensive plan for social progress, environmental sustainability, and economic diversification. Achieving this vision requires sustainable leadership that balances social justice, environmental conservation, and economic prosperity. Despite significant advancements in infrastructure, diversification initiatives, and economic development, Oman faces serious environmental challenges such as waste management, water scarcity, and the need for climate change adaptation. Navigating these challenges effectively necessitates

AS OMAN STRIVES TO ACHIEVE ITS VISION 2040 GOALS, SUSTAINABLE LEADERSHIP BECOMES CRUCIAL FOR CREATING A WEALTHY, DIVERSE, AND SUSTAINABLE SOCIETY FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS.

sustainable leadership.

As Oman strives to achieve its Vision 2040 goals, sustainable leadership becomes crucial for creating a wealthy, diverse, and sustainable society for future generations. To preserve the country’s unique cultural character and natural resources, leaders must adeptly manage the complex terrain of rapid development, population changes, and environmental challenges. By adopting visionary leadership, actively engaging stakeholders, fostering innovation, and building capacity, sustainability leaders can effectively guide economic diversification, environmental

preservation, and social progress while maintaining Oman’s rich cultural and environmental heritage.

Oman’s varied natural landscapes, cultural legacy, and strategic location in the Gulf provide unique opportunities and challenges. The Vision 2040 plan aims to foster social progress, environmental sustainability, and economic diversification, with sustainable leadership at its core. Despite notable progress in infrastructure and economic development, Oman faces ongoing environmental issues like waste management, water scarcity, and the impacts of climate change. Addressing these requires leaders who can balance immediate needs with long-term sustainability goals.

Sustainable leadership involves a holistic approach that transcends traditional performance metrics, focusing instead on a comprehensive perspective that integrates social responsibility, ethical governance, and environmental stewardship. Visionary leaders can unify diverse interests and drive collective action towards common sustainability

goals through effective communication and innovative thinking.

By understanding the interdependence of social, economic, and environmental systems, sustainable leaders strive to reconcile immediate needs with long-term sustainability objectives. This approach is essential for navigating the complex challenges of the twenty-first century, including social unrest, biodiversity loss, and climate change.

Sustainable leadership is vital for creating a prosperous, diverse, and sustainable future, particularly as Oman works towards its Vision 2040 goals. Leaders must skillfully navigate rapid development, population changes, and environmental challenges to preserve the country’s unique cultural and natural heritage. Through visionary leadership, stakeholder engagement, innovation, and capacity building, sustainability leaders can effectively steer economic diversification, environmental preservation, and social progress while maintaining Oman’s rich cultural and environmental legacy.

sport

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Ministry unveils 2024 Summer Sports Programme

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, JUNE 4

The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth announced the 2024 Summer Sports Programme on Tuesday at the Grand Hormuz Hotel. The event was attended by Mohammed bin Ahmed al Ameri, Director-General of Sports Activities at the Ministry, members of the main committee for the Summer Sports Programme, and several ministry officials and the programme-supporting companies. The Summer Sports Programme, initiated by the Ministry in 2006, aims to fill summer leisure time with beneficial sports activities that enhance participants' skills and build their character, helping them become active contributors

to community development. This year's programme will feature 244 activities, including 115 training centres, 77 open sports days, 33 sports caravans and 19 initiatives and volunteer workshops. These activities will take place in various sports complexes across Oman, as well as in sports clubs, Omani women's associations and local teams.

The 2024 Summer Sports Programme introduces new and innovative ideas to engage participants during their summer holidays. Samira al Shukaili, Director of the Sports Activity Department at the Ministry and Chair of the Main Committee for the 2024 Summer Sports Programme, stated that the programme aims to have a significant social impact by protecting against modern



diseases, promoting a positive lifestyle, improving mental and social health, and guiding behaviour through its vision of quality and excellence in promoting sports for all.

Al Shukaili added that the programme's mission is to prepare a generation

knowledgeable in sports and aware of the importance of sports in instilling healthy and social values. She noted that the programme's activities will be divided into four main parts: sports centres, open sports days, sports caravans and volunteer and community initiatives.

Governorate Programmes

Al Shukaili confirmed that the activities of the work teams in the governorates will be diverse.

In Muscat Governorate, there will be 14 training centres, 11 open days, 4 volunteer initiatives and one sports caravan. Al Sharqiyah North Governorate will have 8 training centres, 5 sports caravans, 5 volunteer initiatives and 4 open sports days. Dhofar Governorate will have 13 training centres, 6 open days, 3 sports caravans and 2 awareness workshops.

Al Dhahirah Governorate will have 13 training centres, 3 sports caravans, 7 open sports days and one awareness workshop. In Al Batinah North Governorate, there will be 17 training centres, 14 open days and 3 sports caravans. Al Sharqiyah South

Governorate will have 9 training centres, 3 sports caravans, 3 open sports days and 3 awareness workshops.

In Al Batinah South Governorate, there will be 10 training centres, 5 open sports days, and 2 sports caravans. Musandam Governorate will have 9 training centres, 4 sports caravans, 9 open sports days and 2 awareness initiatives.

In Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, there will be 11 training centres, 6 open sports days, 3 sports caravans, 2 awareness workshops and one volunteer initiative. Al Buraimi Governorate will have 11 training centres, 3 sports caravans, 6 open sports days and 3 awareness workshops. In Al Wusta Governorate, there will be 3 training centres, 3 sports caravans and 4 open sports days.

Oman team touch down in Taipei ahead of WC qualifier

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JUNE 4

Oman will target to seal their spot in the next stage when they face Chinese Taipei on Thursday in their penultimate round of the Preliminary Joint Qualification - Round 2 for the Fifa World Cup 2026 and AFC Asian Cup Saudi Arabia 2027 Group D in Taipei. Red Warriors are entering this encounter with high hopes after the impressive show and essential triumph against Malaysia by 2-0 in the previous rounds.

The Oman delegation arrived on Tuesday in Taipei city ahead of the match by two days. During these days, the team will train in the Taipei Municipal Stadium during the evening sessions.

On Tuesday, the coaching staff preferred to do some recovery sessions for the players after the long flight from Muscat to Taipei. The team will resume their training sessions on Wednesday. Czech coach Jaroslav Silhavy



will focus on the playing strategy for the match and finalising the starting list. The team is fully aware of this tie's importance to claim the required three points to inch closer to the next stage ahead of the concluding qualifier match of Group D against Kyrgyzstan on June 11. Oman had managed to beat Chinese Taipei in Muscat by 3-0 on November 16, 2023.

Kyrgyzstan is currently leading Group D by nine points with goal difference from the national team who are positioned in the second place with the same points. Then, the Malaysian team is third with six points followed by Chinese Taipei with no points.

Oman national team players, under supervision of Silhavy, had switched gears at Sultan Qaboos

Sports Complex to overcome their Taipei rivals. Silhavy will be aiming to secure their third consecutive victory in the qualifiers and continue in moving on the winning path to ensure team's topping in the group and progressing to the next round of the qualifiers.

Oman team began their actual preparations for the remaining matches in the joint qualifiers

with a domestic camp in Muscat started on last Tuesday. All the 25 selected players attended the camp which focused on different areas including physical, technical and tactical.

OMAN SQUAD: Ibrahim al Mukhaini, Faiz al Rushaidi, Ahmed al Rawahi, Ahmed al Khamisi, Khalid al Buraiki, Mohammed al Musallami, Ghanim al Habsi,

Abdulaziz al Shammosi, Amjad al Harthy, Ali al Busaidy, Ahmed al Kaabi, Arshad al Alawi, Abdullah Fawaz, Harib al Saadi, Nasser al Rawahi, Omar al Malki, Salah al Yahyaie, Zahir al Aghbari, Issam al Subhi, Jameel al Yahmadi, Abdulrahman al Mushifri, Musab al Maamari, Mohsin al Ghassani, Mohammed al Ghafri and Waleed al Musallami.

AFGHANISTAN ROUT DEBUTANTS UGANDA IN T20 WORLD CUP OPENER

GEORGETOWN, GUYANA: Afghanistan produced a dominant bowling and batting performance to thrash debutants Uganda by 125 runs in the T20 World Cup in Guyana on Monday.

Afghanistan openers Rahmanullah Gurbaz and Ibrahim Zadran laid the foundations for the win with an opening stand of 154 in Afghanistan's 183-5.

Left-arm seamer Fazalhaq Farooqi dazzled with five wickets for just nine runs as Uganda were skittled for 58 in 16 overs.

"It was the kind of start we wanted as a team," Afghanistan captain Rashid Khan said.

"It does not matter who we play, it is about the mindset.

"The hard work we have done in the last few weeks, the way the openers started and the way our bowlers bowled — it was a great overall team effort."

Afghanistan had looked poised for a massive total after Gurbaz's 76 off 45 balls which included four fours and four sixes.

Zadran was in similarly swashbuckling form, blasting 70 off 46 deliveries including nine



fours and a six.

Gurbaz and Zadran's opening partnership was the second highest in men's T20 World Cup history, beaten only by the 170 by England's Jos Buttler and Alex Hales in 2022.

But when Gurbaz and Zadran fell in the space of four balls, Uganda were able to peg back Afghanistan.

Masaba claimed a piece of cricket history for the East African nation after taking his country's first ever World Cup wicket, bowling Zadran in the 15th over to leave the score at 154-1.

Alpesh Ramjani then removed Gurbaz, who was caught by Riazat Ali Shah at deep square leg for 76.

Masaba claimed his second wicket, getting rid of Najibullah Zadran, who was caught at deep square leg by Dinesh Nakrani.

Cosmas Kyewuta took the other two wickets.

Any hopes that Uganda's bowling fightback would spill into their innings were snuffed out by Fazalhaq in the first over.

After Uganda opener Ronak Patel creamed a four off Fazalhaq's

first ball, the Afghan bowler hit back with two wickets with his next two deliveries, removing Patel and Roger Mukasa, to leave the Africans reeling at 4-2.

Mujeeb Ur Rahman then had Simon Ssesazi caught by Fazalhaq off a top edge for four as Uganda slumped to 8-3.

The wickets continued to tumble and Uganda were soon 18-5 in the fifth over.

Fazalhaq took the wickets of Masaba and Robinson Obuya, both caught behind, to complete his five-wicket haul before skipper Khan mopped up the tail by dismissing Bilal Hassan lbw and bowling Hendry Ssenyondo.

Uganda skipper Masaba took positives from his team's T20 World Cup debut, despite the heavy defeat.

"Pretty special moment for us, hearing our national anthem and seeing our flag at the World Cup," Masaba said.

"Something I will cherish for the rest of my life.

"First game at the World Cup, lot of nerves. Good to get that out of the way. We will look to come out and play better next game."

— AFP

Mohammad Nadeem: The unyielding pillar of Oman's T20 WC aspirations

BRIDGETOWN: At the age of 41 years, Mohammad Nadeem is the seniormost all-rounder of Oman team at the ongoing ICC Men's T20 World Cup, co-hosted by the West Indies and the USA. The soft-spoken medium pacer and middle-order batter has been serving the national team for a decade with pride and has made important contributions in some of the memorable victories over the years in both the T20 and the ODI formats.

Nadeem, who failed to make any major contribution in Oman's opening match defeat against Namibia in Group B at the Kensington Oval on Sunday (Monday morning, Oman time), is now hoping to play a bigger role in the remaining games in West Indies. Nadeem could score only 6 runs in Oman's total of 109 and did not get a chance to bowl during the Super Over loss.

Speaking a day after the team's narrow defeat, Nadeem said: "Yes, it was a very close game, an edge of the seat thriller for fans around the world. We were possibly 20-30 runs short but we fought bravely to make a game out of it. Few would give us a chance when we finished our innings at 109. But this is what our team is all about. We showcased how strong our bowling attack is and but for few dropped catches, we almost won the game."

He added: "Defeats are always tough to swallow but the way we came back in the game against Namibia give us lot of hopes that as a unit, we can fight till the end, irrespective of any opposition."

Nadeem, who landed in Oman in 2009 and have played for domestic top-flight club Assarain CT for long, made his T20I debut for his adopted country in 2015



against Afghanistan in Dublin.

With a decade of service to Oman's national team, Nadeem embodies dedication and resilience

He said: "For me, it was important to make contribution with both bat and ball. I am thankful to Oman Cricket and national coach Duleep Mendis for his trust and belief in me. I am proud to represent Oman at the world's biggest stage and this is my second T20 World Cup."

During his early days, Nadeem impressed with his speed and line and length as the Sialkot-born all-rounder from Pakistan clocked above 140km regularly. Of late, he may not have the same speed but is a smart cricketer with effective use of line and length. While he has been used often as a change bowler, his batting skills have been more to the fore including his crucial and unbeaten innings of 46

during Oman's historic five-wicket win over Ireland last year during the ICC ODI Cricket World Cup Qualifier in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe.

In the T20Is, Nadeem has played 53 games so far and scored 489 runs with his highest being an unbeaten 77 against Canada in 2022 while he has picked 30 wickets with his career-best figures of 4/23 against Jersey in 2019.

Nadeem is a vital cog in the wheels of success of Oman's cricket over the years and is described as a "living legend" by his team-mates. His batting style is simple but efficient, but what stands out is his ability to soak up pressure in tense situations and steer Oman across the line on many occasions.

Fondly known as 'Bhalli', Nadeem has a gentle run up that belies the consistent 120-130kph pace he can generate even now and has an impressive strike rate with

"I am ready to put in my best foot forward if I am given a chance. At this level and in this format, there are no favourites. We can upset any team on our day"

MOHAMMAD NADEEM

Oman all-rounder

his success particularly achieved in the middle overs.

Nadeem, who idolised and closely followed the journey of South African all-rounder Jacques Kallis, during his young days, is still passionate about his cricket.

Looking forward to the remaining Group B games with the next match coming up against former champions and heavyweights Australia, Nadim said: "I am ready to put in my best foot forward if I am given a chance. At this level and in this format, there are no favourites. We can upset any team on our day. We have prepared well, and we are ready to take on the heavyweights."

Following the match against Australia on June 5, Wednesday 8.30 pm (June 6, Thursday, 4.30 am, Oman time), Duleep Mendis' Men in Red will travel to Antigua to play the remaining two games, first against Scotland on June 9, on Sunday, 1 pm (Sunday, 9 pm, Oman time) and then conclude the league engagement against the defending champions England on June 13, on Thursday, 3 pm (Thursday, 11 pm, Oman time).



ROYAL CAVALRY'S 'AL NAJIB' CLAIMS SECOND PLACE IN FRANCE

The Royal Cavalry's horse 'Al Najib' won second place in the sixth round competition, which was held at the French Latest track, the round was allocated to purebred Arabian horses over a distance of 1,900 metres. 'Al Najib' was ridden by Michael Forrest under the supervision of trainer Elizabeth Bernard. 'Al Najib' had achieved second place in the fourth round of the Sheikhha Fatima bint Mubarak race in May, which was held on the French Bourdax track for a distance of 1,600 metres.

Dravid to bow out as India coach after T20 World Cup

NEW YORK: Rahul Dravid said on Monday that he will leave his post as India coach at the end of the T20 World Cup after almost three years in charge.

Dravid's contract runs out at the end of the month and he will not re-apply for the job, which has been advertised by India's governing cricket body, the BCCI, since last month.

"It is going to be the last one that I am in charge of," the 51-year-old told reporters ahead of India's opening match against Ireland in New York on Wednesday.

"Unfortunately, the kind of schedules and where I find myself at this stage in my life, I don't think I'll be able to re-apply.

"I love doing the job. I've really enjoyed coaching India and I think it's a truly special job to do."

The former India captain took over the team from Ravi Shastri after the 2021 T20 World Cup.

This year's edition in the United States and West Indies is his last chance to end the country's global trophy drought, which stretches back to the 2013 Champions Trophy.

Dravid oversaw India's runs to the finals of both the World Test



Rahul Dravid

Championship and their home 50-over World Cup last year, but they came up short against Australia each time.

"I enjoyed working with this team and it's a great bunch of boys to work with," Dravid said.

"To be very honest, I think we've actually played really well in these tournaments.

"The World Test Championship is slightly different in terms of it's not one tournament but a whole cycle, but playing extremely well in the cycle to get to the final there again. "The 50-over World Cup we had a great run and went into the final. I think we've been right up there with some of the best teams." — AFP



Poland's Iga Swiatek reacts during her quarterfinal match against Czech Republic's Marketa Vondrousova at the French Open in Paris. – Reuters

Swiatek sets up last-four clash with Gauff

PARIS: Reigning women's champion Iga Swiatek continued her ruthless demolition of French Open opponents on Tuesday as she stormed into the semifinals. Swiatek thrashed Wimbledon champion Marketa Vondrousova 6-0, 6-2 to set up a last-four showdown with American third seed Coco Gauff, the player she beat in the 2022 Roland Garros final.

World number one Swiatek improved her career record in Paris to 33-2 and is on course to become the first woman to lift the Coupe Suzanne Lenglen three years in a row since Justine Henin in 2005-07.

After Swiatek's 40-minute rout of Anastasia Potapova in the last 16, the only consolation for Vondrousova was her snapping the Pole's incredible run of 20 consecutive games won early in the second set.

"Honestly I think everything worked," said the 23-year-old Swiatek. "I felt like I was in the zone today."

Since saving a match point against Naomi Osaka in round two, Swiatek has looked every bit the tournament favourite and goes into her semifinal with Gauff having won 10 of their 11 meetings, all in straight sets.

Gauff has come up short against Swiatek in four attempts on clay and was beaten by the top seed on her way to the title in Rome last month.

"You don't want to change your routines. Not to put too much baggage on your shoulders, just treat it like any other match and not something huge," said Swiatek.

"Against Coco it's not easy, she really likes playing on clay especially here, I think so I'll just focus on myself."

Gauff passed her toughest test of the fortnight as she fought back from a set down to beat three-time Grand Slam finalist Ons Jabeur 4-6, 6-2, 6-3.

The 20-year-old Gauff is set for a third straight Grand Slam semifinal, after also making the last four at the Australian Open.

Tunisian eighth seed Jabeur is still waiting for a maiden major title, having lost three finals and four quarterfinals. — AFP



US Coco Gauff celebrates after winning her quarterfinal against Tunisia's Ons Jabeur on Court Philippe-Chatrier on day 10 of the French Open tournament at the Roland Garros Complex. – AFP

Sinner powers into first French Open semis

PARIS: Jannik Sinner powered past Grigor Dimitrov in straight sets on Tuesday to reach his first French Open semifinal, where he could face rival Carlos Alcaraz, on the day he secured the world number one ranking.

The Australian Open champion, who will move top of the rankings next week after Novak Djokovic's withdrawal from the tournament, eased to a 6-2, 6-4, 7-6 (7/3) victory and will take on either Alcaraz or Stefanos Tsitsipas in the last four.

Sinner's achievement of becoming Italy's first number one in the sport was confirmed during his match, as the injury-enforced withdrawal of Djokovic was announced. "What can I say?" said the 22-year-old.

"It's every player's dream to become number one in the world. On the other hand, seeing Novak retiring (from the tournament) is disappointing, so I wish him a speedy recovery."

Sinner already knew that he could take the number-one berth by reaching the final at Roland Garros.

He has enjoyed a fine season, also winning the Rotterdam and Miami Opens in addition to his maiden Grand Slam title in Melbourne.

"I'm trying not to think about it too much as this has been a tournament I've struggled in the last couple of years so I'm very happy to be in the semifinals," Sinner added.

"It's a special moment for me... for



Italy's Jannik Sinner celebrates after winning against Bulgaria's Grigor Dimitrov in Paris. – AFP

people watching in Italy. Let's see on Friday what I can do."

Sinner's win-loss record this year now stands at an impressive 33-2, his only two defeats this season coming against Alcaraz in the Indian Wells semifinals and Tsitsipas in the Monte Carlo last four.

"My performance was solid, a little bit of tension when I was serving for the match which is normal, but I'm very happy to be in the semifinals," he said. — AFP



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MENA’s largest fish canning factory begins operations in Duqm SEZ

HIBBA AL KINDI
DUQM, JUNE 4

The largest fish canning factory in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region began operations at a site in Duqm Special Economic Zone (SEZ) in the first quarter of 2024.

The International Seafood Company (Simak), a subsidiary of Fisheries Development Oman is the largest tuna and sardine canning plant in the region, spanning over an area of 85,000 m2 with a production capacity of 100 million cans per year.

Speaking to the Observer, Chief Executive Officer of Simak, Eng Zakariya al Hasni, shared that Oman produces over 750,000 metric tonnes of fishery products per year, making it the largest producer in the Middle East, which justifies a significant investment in the industry.

Furthermore, Simak identified a significant gap in the MENA market, he stated. “Most of the cans available in the region, even those from regional brands, are imported from East Asia, accounting for 90 per cent to 95 per cent of the supply.

This presents a significant opportunity for us to introduce our brand, Simak. Oman, being well-known for its abundant fisheries resources and proximity to the Middle Eastern market, is well-positioned to fill this gap.” The company also intends to expand to European and American markets.

According to the CEO, the factory’s location creates a win-win situation for all parties. Located near the Duqm Industrial Fishery Port, also a subsidiary of FDO, the factory’s



Eng Zakariya al Hasni, CEO of Simak Oman.

location allows the company to source produce from artisanal fishermen directly, while saving on transportation costs.

“Most of the fish landed in Duqm will come through this port, which is only two to three kilometres away.

This proximity facilitates our engagement with the local artisanal fishermen, making it more convenient and advantageous for them to collaborate with us.

By significantly reducing their operational costs, we eliminate the need for them to transport their catch to distant locations in the north or south of Oman.

The transportation cost savings will be substantial.” Additionally, the factory’s location within the SEZ at Duqm, allows for the export to other global free economic zones with zero tariffs or taxes.

“We’re in a free economic zone, which means exporting to other free zones worldwide incurs zero tariffs or taxes. And here, anything we report also faces no taxes.”

The company has a output capacity of 192,000 cans of sardines and 180,000 cans of tuna per day. Simak products are expected to be available in local markets within the next month.

Oman Investment Authority’s assets value hits RO 19 billion

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 4

Oman Investment Authority (OIA) announced that its assets have grown by over RO one billion, reaching a total of RO 19.240 billion. Additionally, OIA achieved profits that surpassed RO 1.7 billion. Additionally, OIA achieved 9.95 per cent in investment returns compared to 8.8 per cent last year.

All the while, it continued its contribution to the State’s General Budget, amounting to more than RO 6 billion between 2016 and 2023. This report reflects the principles and national goals of Oman Vision 2040, focusing on enhancing transparency, governance, and institutional performance. Furthermore, OIA reiterates its commitment to having continued communication with society.

This is the third annual report



OIA officials sharing details about the Authority’s performance during a media briefing on Tuesday.

of OIA since its establishment on June 4, 2020, under Royal Decree No. 61/2020.

In his foreword, Sultan bin Salim al Habsi, Minister of Finance and Chairman of OIA’s Board of Directors, confirmed that OIA and its companies have played a direct

role in the government’s reform programmes and initiatives aimed at mitigating the negative effects of economic fluctuations.

Abdulsalam al Murshidi, President of OIA, expressed that the high praise received from His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik serves as a starting point

and motivation to continue growing and achieving success.

These milestones were achieved despite the global economic fluctuations and escalating geopolitical tensions, tightening monetary policies by major central banks, banking sector turmoil in the US and Europe, the US debt ceiling controversy, the Ukrainian-Russian war, and the impacts of the Gaza events.

He further went on to state that the accomplishments of 2023 are attributed to a talented national workforce, of which OIA and its companies are proud.

Their experience, ambition, and confidence enabled them to work in harmony with the demands of their work at the Sovereign Wealth Fund of the Sultanate of Oman and meet the expectations set for achieving national goals.

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Bidders invited to prequalify for PDO’s Manazil Project

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, JUNE 4

Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) has invited contracting firms to prequalify for its tender for the implementation of the Manazil Project – a major initiative to provide improved accommodation and welfare facilities for company and contractual staff within its Block 6 concession.

The prequalification exercise is intended to ascertain the capabilities of the bidders in undertaking the Engineering, Procurement and Construction (EPC) of a series of PDO camps at interior locations within its concession.



An illustrative image.

According to PDO, the Manazil Project consists of two programmes, the first of which centres on the design and construction of four new camps at: Fahud, Marmul, Harweel and

Amal, catering to around 900 staff. Programme 2 envisages the upgrade of seven existing PDO camps at: Lekhwair, Yibal, Saih Rawl, Nimr, Bahja, Qarn Alam and Rima, catering to around

1,200 staff.

The greenfield camps will be required to incorporate the following key elements: catering facilities, recreational areas with multi-use courts for football, cricket and other sports, swimming pool and gym, and community amenities such as supermarket, ATM and post office.

Interested bidders have until June 24, 2024 to submit their prequalification documents.

First unveiled in 2019, PDO’s Manazil Project was envisaged as a significant initiative to transform the management and standard of staff accommodation at interior sites in the company’s concession area.

Oman participates in 9th World Cities Summit in Singapore

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 4

The Sultanate of Oman, represented by Muscat Municipality, participated in the ninth edition of the World Cities Summit, held in the Republic of Singapore and concluded yesterday. The summit was themed ‘Liveable and Sustainable Cities: Rejuvenate, Reinvent, Reimagine.’ The forum brought together capital secretaries, mayors, and specialised delegations from various countries worldwide to



World Cities Summit, which opened in Singapore on Monday.

discuss how to achieve smart, regenerative, and sustainable cities for future generations. It served

as an ideal platform to showcase best practices, learn from the experiences of others and develop

sustainable solutions for future cities.

The Omani delegation was headed by Ahmed bin Mohammed al Humaidi, Muscat Municipality Chairman, who commented on the participation, saying: “Prosperous cities are those that maintain high standards of welfare for their inhabitants and can sustainably provide these standards regardless of external conditions.

To ensure the prosperity of these cities, we must ensure their ability to adapt to technological,

social, environmental, and other changes. This was extensively discussed during the forum sessions, where we learned from the experiences of cities with rich histories and promising futures.

We are striving diligently to make Muscat a vibrant, inclusive, and sustainably growing city.”

HE added, “This year’s forum emphasised the strategic partnership between the public and private sectors in building the cities of the future. Both sectors must work together to achieve this goal.

In Muscat Municipality, we call on everyone to collaborate to make Muscat and all Omani cities smart, resilient, and regenerative.”

The forum’s activities included various events such as the Mayor’s Forum, a special symposium for young leaders, the “Lee Kuan Yew World City Prize” award ceremony, and an accompanying exhibition.

The event addressed several key topics, including humanising cities, regenerative cities, smart cities, sustainable financing of cities, and future cities.

2024 Chery Tiggo 7 Pro Max – Perfect blend of comfort and performance

MUSCAT: The 2024 Chery Tiggo 7 Pro Max is making a significant impact. With its potent 1.6T GDI engine and a suite of advanced features, it promises both comfort and performance.

The 2024 Chery Tiggo 7 Pro Max boasts a modern, aerodynamic design. Measuring 4500mm in length, 1842mm in width, and 1746mm in height, its robust stance is enhanced by sleek LED headlights and a bold front grille. The overall design is not only eye-catching but also functional, hinting at the SUV’s off-road potential.

Upon entering the Tiggo 7 Pro Max, the spacious and luxurious cabin immediately stands out. The high-quality materials and thoughtful layout provide a premium feel. The cabin comfortably seats five passengers (2+3), ensuring ample space and comfort for all occupants.

The dual 12.3-inch screens for the instrument cluster and infotainment system are impressive, offering clear, responsive displays that support both English and Arabic.



Under the hood, the 2024 Tiggo 7 Pro Max is powered by a 1.6T GDI engine paired with a 7-speed dual-clutch transmission (7DCT), delivering 197 horsepower and a maximum torque of 290 Nm.

On the road, this SUV delivers smooth and powerful

acceleration, making highway driving and overtaking effortless.

The electronic shift and drive mode selection (Normal, Economy, Sport) with memory enhance the driving experience, allowing the driver to tailor performance to their preference.

The Tiggo 7 Pro Max offers a commendable fuel efficiency of 16.1 km/l, which is impressive for an SUV of its size and power.

The 51-litre fuel tank ensures a decent driving range, making it suitable for both city commutes and long-distance travels.

The suspension system in the Tiggo 7 Pro Max is well-tuned, absorbing road imperfections with ease and providing a smooth ride.

The seats are ergonomically designed, offering excellent support and comfort for long journeys. The quiet cabin further enhances the driving experience by minimising road and wind noise.

The dual 12.3-inch capacitive touchscreens are the centrepiece of the interior. They are intuitive and easy to navigate, providing access to a variety of functions including navigation, entertainment, and vehicle settings.

The HD 360 panoramic camera system significantly aids in parking and tight manoeuvring, offering a comprehensive view of the surroundings.

Additionally, the voice control feature allows for hands-free operation, enhancing convenience and safety.

The sound system, featuring eight SONY speakers, delivers high-quality audio, making every drive enjoyable.

BMW Group announces new Head of Corporate Communications



BMW Group Middle East, Head of Corporate Communications Rami Joudi

DUBAI: BMW Group has announced Rami Joudi as Head of Corporate Communications for BMW Group Middle East. Joudi now leads the communications strategy for both BMW and MINI brands across the region. Rami Joudi brings to the table specific regional automotive and luxury lifestyle experience, having served since 2018 as the Regional PR and Communications Manager for Rolls-Royce Motor Cars Middle East and Africa.

In this capacity, Joudi had been instrumental in steering the brand’s narrative through innovative public relations strategies, impactful media relations and successful regional launches and events.

His extensive experience in luxury lifestyle, motorsports, automotive communications, and PR strategies, coupled with his deep understanding of regional market dynamics, uniquely positions Joudi to enhance BMW and MINI’s communications in the Middle East, solidifying their dominance in the premium automotive sector.

Born in Kuwait and of Syrian descent, Joudi graduated from Lincoln University in the UK with a Bachelor’s Degree in Business Administration and a Diploma in Sustainability Leadership from The University of Cambridge (CISL).

As BMW Group Middle East continues to innovate and grow, the addition of Rami Joudi to the team marks a step forward in shaping the future of BMW and MINI’s communications across the region, as well the company’s ongoing efforts to connect with customers and enthusiasts in meaningful and engaging ways.

Liva insurance and Omantel partner to offer motor insurance

MUSCAT: Liva Insurance, a leading insurer in Oman, is pleased to announce a strategic partnership with Omantel to provide third-party and comprehensive motor insurance coverage to Omantel postpaid customers.

This collaboration highlights both companies’ dedication to delivering innovative and customer-centric solutions. The agreement was recently signed at Omantel headquarters by Hanaa al Hinai, CEO of Liva Insurance, and Talal al Maamari, CEO of Omantel.

Under this partnership, eligible Omantel customers can purchase third-party and comprehensive motor insurance policies online with an Easy Monthly Instalment (EMI) option.

The annual premium will be divided into 12 easy monthly instalments, added to the customer’s postpaid phone bill.



CEO of Omantel Talal al Maamari and Liva Insurance CEO Hanaa al Hinai

This seamless integration allows customers to manage their insurance payments effortlessly alongside their regular phone bills.

Hanaa al Hinai, CEO of Liva Insurance, stated, “We are thrilled to partner with Omantel to offer

an innovative motor insurance solution tailored for Omantel’s postpaid customers.

This collaboration reflects our commitment to delivering unparalleled customer experiences by making insurance accessible and affordable.

Malabar Gold & Diamonds unveils innovative concept outlet in UAE

ABU DHABI: Malabar Gold & Diamonds, the world’s sixth-largest jewellery retailer, has launched a groundbreaking showroom concept at Al Wahda Mall in Abu Dhabi, UAE.

The new outlet, inaugurated by Indian actress and brand ambassador Kareena Kapoor Khan, promises a revolutionary shopping experience for jewellery enthusiasts. The showroom marks Malabar’s 15th outlet in the Abu Dhabi and Al Ain region and its 63rd in the UAE.

Designed to offer a unique shopping experience, the

showroom features exclusive designs in gold, diamonds, and precious gems from Malabar’s brands such as Mine, Era, Viraaaz, Precia, Ethnix, and Divine.

The collections, which include traditional, modern, and daily wear jewellery, are crafted in 18K, 21K, and 22K gold and curated from over 20 countries.

The showroom also boasts a customised jewellery design facility, allowing customers to create bespoke pieces with the help of expert designers and craftsmen.

“At Malabar Gold & Diamonds, we are committed to continually enhancing the jewellery shopping



Al Wahda Mall branch cutting ceremony

experience for our vast customer base. Our new concept showroom at Al Wahda Mall is a testament

to this commitment,” said M P Ahammed, Chairman of Malabar Group.



Tasees, SMEDA conclude sixth pre-incubation programme for startups

MUSCAT: The Khimji Ramdas (KR) Eshraqa ‘Tasees Programme’, in collaboration with SME Development Authority (SMEDA), has successfully concluded the sixth edition of its pre-incubation programme for startups. Designed to equip entrepreneurs with the necessary skills and knowledge to translate their innovative ideas into businesses, Tasees’ pre-incubation programme guided participants through the essential phases of business development.

SMEs that underwent the Programme were eligible to apply for a loan through the Authority’s funding initiative (Al Azm) upon completion of the Jahiziah programme.

With the objective of providing entrepreneurs with the essential tools and knowledge to translate their concepts into real-time businesses, the pre-incubation programme consisted of comprehensive modules spanning over three weeks.

These modules include in-class instructional sessions covering idea validation, business model canvas, marketing plans, operations planning, and financial management, followed by individual coaching and final business plan presentations.

Nineteen participants presented their business projects, aligning with the pillars of Oman Vision 2040; in various fields, including manufacturing, tourism, agriculture, fish farming,

technical applications, and educational and consulting institutions.

They presented their business plans to the evaluation team, which included Qais bin Rashid al Toubi, General Supervisor of ‘The Rising Omani Startups’ Programme at the SMEs Development Authority (SMEDA), and Mahmoud bin Khalifa al Saqri, CEO of Eshraqa Foundation.

Nailesh Khimji, Director, Khimji Ramdas stated, “The Eshraqa Foundation’s ‘Tasees’ has successfully guided and trained diverse groups of entrepreneurs to achieve excellence.

Alongside SMEDA, we are committed to empowering them to leverage available entrepreneurship resources and contribute effectively to the Sultanate of Oman’s economic development, in alignment with Oman Vision 2040.”

Expressing his appreciation, Qais al Toubi, General Supervisor of ‘The Rising Omani Startups’ Programme at the SMEs Development Authority (SMEDA) said: Our collaboration with KR Eshraqa’s ‘Tasees’ has resulted in training and qualifying many aspiring entrepreneurs, equipping them with the essential skills and competencies needed for sustainability and risk management.

This programme exemplifies our joint commitment to supporting small and medium enterprises and providing them with the necessary resources for success.”



Industrial Strategy to enhance economic diversification trends

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JUNE 4

With the adoption of the 2040 Industrial Strategy, the industrial sector is set to emerge as one of the fastest growing segments, underscoring Oman's efforts to diversify its economy.

In 2023, the industrial sector achieved a remarkable 9 per cent growth in GDP at current prices, marking it as the most labour-intensive sector and a critical pillar of economic diversification under Oman Vision 2040.

The manufacturing sector has made significant contributions to the national economy, accounting for 9.3 per cent of GDP by the end of September 2023.

This contribution, valued at RO 2.454 billion at constant prices, highlights the sector's vital role. Additionally, the sector employs over 33,000 Omani workers, with direct foreign investments surpassing RO 1.4 billion.

Speaking to the Sultanate of Oman Radio, Dr Saleh bin Said Masan, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion for Commerce and Industry, commented: "The target indicators in the Industrial Strategy 2040 revolve around achieving growth in the contribution of manufacturing industries to the domestic product by 2024 by three times to reach RO 11 billion.

"By 2040, we aspire for the value of industrial exports to



Industrial Strategy 2040 envisions a 3-fold rise in the manufacturing sector's GDP contribution.

reach about RO 25 billion, and the total volume of investments to reach about RO 40 billion."

The Omani industrial sector is adopting modern technologies to enhance efficiency, diversify products and improve quality.

These efforts aim to bolster environmental and economic sustainability and integrate artificial intelligence technologies, aligning with the global shift towards the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

The ministry has meticulously crafted the strategy, moving from

setting the vision and goals to developing policies and industrial tools. This process included identifying priority industries, establishing a governance programme for follow-up, and creating performance indicators after thorough analysis of regional industrial variables and strategies.

This strategy serves as a transformative pillar to boost economic diversification, focusing on the types of industries, technologies and models needed. It was developed in collaboration

with the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) to stay abreast of the latest global economic trends and align with Oman Vision 2040.

Recent years have seen significant changes in Oman's economic landscape.

The new legal framework reflects a strategic shift by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, positioning it as an active promoter of industrial diversification through incentives, policies, regulations and knowledge.

Oman Investment Authority's assets value hits RO 19 billion

FROM PAGE 13

OIA focused on diversifying its foreign and local investments geographically and across various sectors to maximise returns and minimise risks. It also brought an Omani angle in its international investments to attract value and technology to targeted local sectors. OIA's Future Generations Fund (FGF) is responsible for the OIA's investments abroad. In 2023, it invested in 13 global funds operating across multiple sectors in the private markets sector. It also engaged in diversified direct investments.

Meanwhile, the public markets sector, part of FGF, continued investing in various countries worldwide, achieving an average return of 9.8 per cent, surpassing the target return of 5 per cent.

Among OIA's direct foreign investments is Electric Hydrogen (EH2), a company developing electrolyzers with higher current densities and lower voltages.

OIA also invested in Hysata, an Australian company contributing to the production of green hydrogen, as well as Our Next Energy (ONE), a US company specialising in manufacturing vehicle batteries, electric vehicles and energy storage systems. As for global funds, OIA invested in the Platinum Investment Fund, which focuses on the industrial, chemical and distribution sectors; the Global Infrastructure Fund, investing in North America, Europe, Asia Pacific and Latin America; and the Chinese Five Way Fund, which concentrates on consumer innovation, information technology and life sciences.

Continuing its efforts to reduce OIA Companies' debt and mitigate financial risks, OIA successfully paid RO 2.4 billion, including RO 300 million prepaid in 2023. These efforts contributed to raising the Sultanate of Oman's credit rating by international rating agencies.

As part of its commitment to achieving economic diversification, investment spending in the local sectors of the National Development Fund (NDF) increased to approximately RO 2.1 billion, surpassing the target of RO 1.9 billion. This was achieved through expanding and enhancing current projects, completing ongoing projects, approving and developing new projects and announcing the completion of six national projects in diverse geographical and sectoral areas, with a total investment value of over RO 4 billion.

Aligning with the government's economic diplomacy trends to strengthen strategic partnerships with friendly countries, OIA expanded its strategic joint ventures with the establishment of the second Spain Oman Private Equity Fund, following the success of the first fund. It also agreed with India to launch the third joint fund, building on the success of the previous two funds in generating profitable returns from their investments. Furthermore, OIA supported the Foreign Ministry's efforts to enhance international relations by sending investment attachés to the USA, Germany, the UK and KSA.

Continuing the divestment plan set mid-2022 to achieve various national goals, OIA and its companies successfully completed nine divestments in 2023, surpassing the planned eight divestments. These included both direct sales and public offerings on the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX), notably the two companies Abraj Energy Services and OQ Gas Networks. This had a positive impact on the trading volume at MSX and attracted foreign investments.

In order to fulfil the national agenda of OIA and its companies and align with the Royal directives on employment and provision of job and training opportunities for Omanis, OIA has achieved remarkable success. It surpassed its target of creating 800 new jobs by successfully generating 1,307 job opportunities for Omanis. Additionally, OIA initiated several training and qualification programmes, including the highly esteemed external scholarship programme for exceptional students known as Oman Scholars, which has received Royal blessings.

Moreover, 2023 witnessed the launch of OIA's Academy for Training and Development and the unified Jadarah recruitment platform for employment and training opportunities, which utilises artificial intelligence. OIA and its companies continued their steadfast efforts to maximise In-country Value (ICV) and enhance the role of SMEs. The total spent on SMEs amounted to RO 202.6 million, with RO 106.7 million going to holders of the Entrepreneurship Card. This represented a significant contribution of 16.8 per cent of the total supply chain expenditures. Furthermore, OIA Companies spent more than RO 42 million on services and products in the mandatory list during 2023.

Dollar stabilises after drop, yen rallies

LONDON: The dollar bounced on Tuesday after falling to its lowest against the euro, sterling and Swiss franc since mid-March overnight as signs of a softening US economy boosted the case for earlier Federal Reserve interest rate cuts.

Yet the yen powered 0.6 per cent higher for a second day of solid gains as Bank of Japan officials warned they are keeping a close eye on the currency, and a report said the BOJ could soon discuss reducing bond purchases.

The euro was last down 0.4 per cent at \$1.0863 on Tuesday after rising as high as \$1.0916 for the first time since March 21 in the Asian trading session. It climbed 0.5 per cent as the dollar dropped on Monday.

As the US currency found a footing, the dollar index was up 0.27 per cent at 104.32, having fallen to its lowest since mid-April overnight at 103.99. Data on Monday showed a second straight month of slowdown in manufacturing activity and an



US dollar banknotes are seen in this illustration. — Reuters

unexpected decline in construction spending, causing the dollar index to fall around 0.6 per cent.

"Today's US JOLTS job openings data could determine whether recent dollar losses are... the start of an important new trend," said Chris Turner, global head of markets at lender ING.

The US job openings and labour turnover survey (JOLTS) is due out at 1400 GMT, or 10 am ET, and

will show the number of vacancies in May. It will also report on the number of people voluntarily quitting their job.

Japan's yen bucked the trend on Tuesday and continued to rise against the dollar after climbing on Monday, with the US currency down 0.6 per cent at 155.105, around its weakest in two weeks.

Bank of Japan Deputy Governor Ryozyo Himino said on Tuesday the

central bank must be "very vigilant" to the impact the yen's fluctuations could have on inflation in guiding monetary policy.

Bloomberg reported that the BOJ will discuss slowing its bond purchases at its two-day policy meeting next week. That could push up yields in the coming weeks and may come before an interest-rate hike in July, something analysts at TD Securities said they now expect on Tuesday.

"We are inclined to see these stories as a test of the market's reaction rather than anything more concrete, not least given the BOJ's revealed preference for slow... adjustment," said Nicholas Rees, FX market analyst at Monex Europe.

Investors were also keeping an eye on India's rupee as election results come in, with the currency down on Tuesday amid a lack of clarity about the performance of the alliance led by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

— Reuters

Euro zone government bond yields drop on falling oil prices, weak data

MILAN: Euro zone government bond yields dropped on Tuesday as weak economic data and falling oil prices led investors to increase their bets on future European Central Bank rate cuts.

Markets await US jobs data later in the session after economic figures showed on Monday that US manufacturing activity slowed for a second straight month in May, the latest indications that a gradual economic slowdown is taking hold.

The number of people out of work in Germany rose more than expected in May, data showed on Tuesday.

Oil prices eased as much as 1 per cent in Asian trade, extending losses from the previous session.

Germany's 10-year yield, the bloc's benchmark, was down 5 basis points (bps) at 2.54 per cent, after dropping 6.5 bps the day before in its biggest daily fall since May 15.



The German share price index DAX graph is pictured at the stock exchange in Frankfurt, Germany. — Reuters

"With just 35 bps discounted until year-end after this week's prospective ECB rate cut and falling oil prices reviving disinflation hopes, the momentum looks set to continue," said Christoph Rieger, head of rates strategy at Commerzbank.

Investors are taking an ECB rate cut of 25 bps for granted on Thursday but are uncertain about the outlook. Money markets are pricing in 63 bps of ECB monetary

easing in 2024 — from less than 55 bps early on Monday — which implies two rate cuts and slightly more than a 50-per cent chance of a third move by year-end.

"Yet it seems markets are strongly driven by US data when deciding on the number of ECB cuts to expect this year," rate strategists at ING said, after flagging that the correlation between US Treasury and Bund yields is increasing again. — Reuters

FCA cracks down on rogue firms with virtual offices

The Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) is rejecting the requests of firms in the financial district of London — known as the ‘City’ — to use virtual offices as their main addresses, as the regulator cracks down on potential rogues entering the finance sector.

The FCA has taken a dim view of those listing a virtual address as their principal place of business when asking for permission to set up a new firm, according to compliance professionals familiar with the process.

While there may be cases where it allows such an approach, the regulator is moving away from virtual locations as addresses for head offices.

“I’ve seen the FCA taking much more interest in virtual



ANDY JALIL
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The writer is our foreign correspondent based in the UK

THE FCA HAS TAKEN A DIM VIEW OF THOSE LISTING A VIRTUAL ADDRESS AS THEIR PRINCIPAL PLACE OF BUSINESS WHEN ASKING FOR PERMISSION TO SET UP A NEW FIRM

offices, but also accountants’ and solicitors’ addresses being given as the primary place of business on authorisation forms,” said Matthew Drage, managing director at compliance consultancy Square 4 Partners.

He added: “I have also seen the FCA take more interest in senior individuals from firms that only spend a proportion of their time in the UK.”

When a firm applies to the FCA for authorisation, it is asked about both its principal place of business and its registered address — where its work normally takes place and the formal location listed at Companies House respectively.

Several people familiar with the application process said the FCA has accepted some private residences as principal place of business for small firms. However, it is keen to have physical locations its supervisors

or enforcers can visit if they need information.

Broadly speaking, the FCA Handbook states that a firm incorporated in the UK should have its head office and registered office in the country as well.

While the FCA does not explicitly ban virtual addresses or PO boxes, it does expect a firm to give a physical location where it works at least some of the time, rather than a virtual address where it carries out no work.

“If you try to use accountants and solicitors (as addresses) the FCA isn’t interested,” says one compliance consultant.

A key pillar of the FCA’s effort to prevent City scandals is forcing firms to prove their credentials before they enter the market. It argues it is better to stop problems before they happen, rather than get bogged

down in years of investigations, legal claims and compensation.

The FCA had announced back in March of internal changes and it was splitting the roles of chief operating officer and authorisations head.

Emily Shepperd had the roles of Chief Operating Officer as well as head of authorisations.

The creation of a dedicated COO position reflected the broader scope of the role with the FCA having new offices across the country, according to a person familiar with the matter.

The move also reflects an increased focus on hybrid working from the regulator.

The FCA told firms during the pandemic that remote working arrangements should not increase the risk of financial crime.

They should also not prevent the firm from providing it with

information or stop it from having oversight of its own business. Shepperd, whose career took in BNY Mellon, Aegon, JPMorgan and Pershing before she joined the regulator in 2018, was named by a leading financial publication, one of the most influential women in finance in 2022.

After years of frustrations with excess paperwork and slow responses, compliance experts have sounded a more positive note on the regulator’s authorisation process in recent months.

The FCA had been forced to hire about 100 extra contractors to work through backlogs as criticism mounted in 2021. But its latest key performance indicators, covering October to December 2023, show that 97.8 per cent of applications were determined within the FCA’s statutory deadline.

China sees property silver lining but can’t shake Japan comparisons

JOE CASH & KEVIN YAO

A plunge in China’s new housing construction is fuelling hopes the battered property sector is finally coming to terms with chronic oversupply, but a clean-up of bad assets is the missing policy piece that keeps Japan-like stagnation fears alive.

On paper, the world’s second-largest economy is almost where the US and Spain were when their late 2000s property crises began to stabilise, with new Chinese housing construction now at less than half its 2021 peak.

This could indicate, analysts say, that home building activity may find a bottom within a year or so, removing some of the weight China’s real estate troubles are placing on economic growth. “It’s reasonable to expect that construction will stabilise soon,” said Rhodium Group partner Logan Wright.

New home starts in China fell 63 per cent from their peak to 634 million square metres (7.46 billion square feet) in the 12 months through April.

Taking into account demographics and other factors, the International Monetary Fund estimates fundamental demand for housing in China to average 950 million square metres over the next 10 years.

Some of the demand

would have to absorb China’s giant existing inventory, therefore the Fund projects new housing starts to average 715 million square metres - slightly above current rates.

This could mean real estate investment, whose steep 10 per cent back-to-back annual declines JPMorgan estimates chopped 1.5 percentage points off China’s economic growth in each of the past two years, may be close to finding a floor.

George Magnus, research associate at Oxford University’s China Centre, says that could come in 2025 or even sooner.

“There is potential for a cyclical rebound, even while we’re talking about medium-term shrinkage,” in the property sector, said Magnus.

Property investment is expected to gravitate more towards wealthy coastal areas.

Shanghai and four of China’s richest provinces — Zhejiang, Jiangsu, Guangdong and Shandong — accounted for 49% of January-April investment, up from 39% five years ago.

But that is where the cyclical silver lining ends and less favourable comparisons with 1990s Japan start.

Wright estimates the industry as a whole, which used to represent about a quarter of China’s economic activity, will stabilise at 40-50% of its peak levels and never return as a driver of growth.

— Reuters



A man looks at the construction site of residential units, in Hong Kong

Automobile electrification terminology explained



Najah Al Riyami

The author is a Media and Communication Master’s graduate skilled in diverse writing formats, specialising in storytelling, branding, and in-depth journalism

So the world is moving forward. Electric vehicles are obviously here to stay, you might as well take the time to understand the differences between them. From an EV, a BEV, PHEV, MHEV and REEV, there are several types of vehicles in the market, and so many abbreviations thrown around, understanding what it all means can make a world of difference; initiating you into the world of automotive electrification in support of Oman’s movement towards carbon neutrality, and enabling you to make the right choice and select the right electric car for you.

Let’s begin with the one you know best — petrol vehicles. ICE is the term you need to remember here. ICE stands for Internal Combustion Engine, used to refer to petrol vehicles. Yes, the ones powered by fossil fuels, the ones EVs and their counter variations are trying to replace.

While not the best for the environment, it’s still a great option for long drives which don’t have accessible charging stations. For the nomadic traveller crossing the desert today, ICE would still be the more convenient and viable option.

Onto the next, EV and BEV both stand for Electric Vehicle and Battery Electric Vehicle, these terms are often interchangeable and used to refer



An electric car is plugged into a charging station. – Reuters

to your fully electric vehicle.

To be clear, fully electric means a vehicle that runs solely charged by electricity (yes, it matters to differentiate this, you’ll soon understand why). These vehicles are heavier because lithium-ion batteries weigh heaps; up to several hundred kilos.

Next are our hybrid variations: PHEV, FHEV, MHEV and more recently, REEV. Hybrids refer to the vehicles which use both Fuel and Battery. By the end of this article you’ll know your way around them!

While all 4 hybrids improve fuel efficiency, they do this on different scales and in different ways. So it’s great to understand these differences in order to choose the hybrid that best suits your needs. Bring Plug in Hybrid Electric Vehicles, PHEV, to the stage: both electric and fuel powered, contain both a lithium-ion battery and a fuel tank.

Note the lithium-ion battery here is smaller than their fully electric counterpart, but they do the job, with one supporting the other these hybrids use both less fuel and less electricity; positively contributing to the environment while still

addressing the need for fuel, where and when required.

PHEV’s give the driver the convenience of switching to either all electric or all gasoline as needed. Which is a great option if range anxiety is a concern, and a wonderful way to ease the transition to fully electric. Next — the FHEV, a Full Hybrid Electric Variant, often referred to as self-charging. The FHEV requires no charging point and uses excess power generated during braking to charge the battery.

It can run on either a

combustion (ICE) engine or a lithium-ion battery (for short distances), as well as a combination of the two.

The next variant is the MHEV- the Mild Hybrid Electric vehicle, commonly known as a mild hybrid, is different from the full hybrid. This variant has both power sources (electric and combustion) working together alongside each other, and never independently from one another. While primarily powered by an ICE, MHEVs require additional input from their electric motors and cannot be driven in all-electric mode.

Finally, we bring you the REEV — the Range Extended Electric Vehicle. To keep it simple, think of it as a flipped around version of the PHEV. REEVs feature a larger electric battery with a range extender in the form of a small petrol engine to act as back-up in case of emergency, not to be confused with the PHEV which has a smaller battery alongside a gasoline engine to provide power when the battery is depleted.

There you go, now that you’re informed, you’re ready to begin your transition into the world of electric mobility.

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EDUCATION

Ananya Rao Prassanna, of Charlotte, North Carolina, thinks during the 96th Scripps National Spelling Bee competition final round at the Gaylord National Resort, in National Harbor, Maryland. — AFP



ENTERTAINMENT

A group of women perform a dance at a mall in Beijing. — AFP



NATURE

A heron flies over Chapultepec's lake in Mexico City.—AFP



PHOTOGRAPH

Children pose for a picture in front of the cartoon character Ultraman at a mall in Beijing. — AFP



MUSIC

Brazilian musician Torcuato Mariano performs at the Blues & Jazz Festival in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. — AFP



art & life

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Music needs no language or words

Iranian musician Harati feels instrumental music is more important because it can showcase the creativity of the mind more than what has just been taught to you... **P20**

Turkish artist's painting in Istanbul highlights Gaza's suffering

TURKISH PAINTER Kasim Tan depicts the suffering of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip to raise awareness about the attacks carried out by Israel on the enclave.

Tan created a 9-metre by 3-metre (30-foot by 10-foot) painting titled "Gaza" in front of the Üsküdar Valide-i Cedid Mosque in Istanbul to support Palestinians through his work, the Turkish Daily Sabah reported.

Inspired by Picasso's "Guernica," Tan expressed concern as a young artist about depicting the horror of the situation.

"I had a concern about expressing the horror I experienced. We prepared our canvas. Then we placed it here and started drawing," he added.

After the attacks by Israel on Gaza on October 7, Tan went into seclusion to ponder: "What can I do against this genocide?"

When he emerged, he decided to create his piece.

The young artist said he mostly creates portraits, but in his Gaza piece, he wanted to depict the striking facial expressions of the Gazan people.

Tan plans to work around the clock in a tent during the final week of the project to finish the painting.

He wants to infuse hope into the work while carefully considering figure placement and perspective.

Despite the challenges of integrating sketches, he is dedicated to crafting a significant piece, and transferring his long-term series onto a large canvas is demanding, but he is committed to creating something captivating.

The artist has received positive reactions from those watching him in Uskudar Square. — **ONA**





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Ancient Moroccan mountain music entrances festival crowd

A hypnotic drum beat blends with ancient Sufi-inspired tunes in a tent in a Moroccan mountain village where local musicians regroup once a year when they don't play the world's top stages.

The Master Musicians of Joujouka draw on centuries of local tradition with a hypnotic sound that captivated the 1950s Beatniks, the Rolling Stones' Brian Jones and fans everywhere since.

The Joujouka collective has performed at top global venues from Paris's Pompidou Centre to Britain's Glastonbury Festival.

But every spring, they like to play to a more intimate audience of only about 50 devotees in their village located 80 kilometres south of Tangier.

Rolling Stone magazine once dubbed the tribal trance festival "the oldest, most exclusive dance party in the world".

"The music must never stop resonating in the village," said Ahmed El Attar, 67, the leader of the collective.

According to local legend, their music traces its influences back 4,000 years in this region of the Rif Mountains.

It also draws on Sufism, the mystical branch of Islam, whose saint Sidi Ahmed Cheikh came to the village in the 15th century, the musicians say.

"It's thanks to the baraka (blessing) of Sidi Ahmed Cheikh that our music has become global," said Attar.

INCREDIBLY POWERFUL MUSIC

It was past midnight when the group's 15 musicians, dressed in wool djellabas, started to play in a large tent decked out with carpets and set up in a courtyard lined with olive trees.

Soon the piercing sound of ghaita horns filled the night, and the session went on for nearly three hours without breaking tempo.

"It's incredibly powerful music," said John Egan, a former member of British psychedelic rock band Ozric Tentacles.

Given the large range of musicians, Egan noted, "it's like herding cats to have multiple musicians playing on tune together".

In one highlight, three boys appeared in traditional women's clothes, signalling according to local belief the coming of Boujloud, a half-man, half-goat mythical figure.

The lights went out, and the creature appeared before the flames of a blazing fire, dancing and waving branches to bring blessings and fertility.

Moroccan artist Mohamed Hamri, a native of the village, in the 1950s played a pivotal role in bringing Joujouka music to the attention of foreign artists.

Among the early fans were British-Canadian writer, painter and sound poet Brion Gysin and his friend the Beat Generation legend William Burroughs, who wrote the "Naked Lunch" in Tangier.

ANCIENT SPIRITUAL CONNECTION



The Joujouka group rose to world fame in part thanks to Rolling Stones founder Brian Jones who, fleeing tensions with band members Mick Jagger and Keith Richards, travelled to Morocco in the summer of 1968.

There he recorded the Joujouka musicians for an album that used a painting by Hamri as its cover art. It was released after Jones' death under the title "Brian Jones Presents the Pipes of Pan at Joujouka" in 1971.

Growing fame allowed the Moroccan artists to travel the world, but disagreements led to a split in the early 1990s, with a separate group called the Master



Musicians of Jajouka led by Bachir Attar.

The group's patron Sufi saint, who is buried in the village, endowed the music with the power to "heal souls", said Abdessalam Rrtoubi, 64, who plays the ghaita.

Japanese musician Haitaro Hanamura, one of the fans, said he had come back for a sixth time and praised the group not just for its music but also for what he said were its therapeutic powers.

"Last year, I had back pain," said the 57-year-old. "The leader gave me a massage at the sanctuary and it really relieved me."

This year the event is being held over two dates due to the high demand.

Frank Rynne, an Irishman who started the Joujouka festival in 2008, said the music "keeps something alive that people can identify with as an ancient spiritual connection". — AFP

TRAVEL

San Francisco's hot tourist attraction: driverless cars

WHEN DAVID DE CLERCQ travelled to San Francisco last year, he had a few musts on his itinerary: Go to Alcatraz. Try new restaurants. And ride in a self-driving car.

Self-driving cars, also known as autonomous vehicles or, colloquially, robotaxis, have been driving the streets of San Francisco in some form since 2009 and have been operating commercially since August. The cars are also shaping up as the city's latest tourist attraction.

De Clercq, 42, who splits his time between New Jersey and Sardinia, where he owns restaurants and bars and rents villas, is an avid traveller.

"I love exploring and doing new things," he said. "I knew that I definitely wanted to get a ride while I was in town."

WHAT, WHERE AND HOW TO RIDE

Conversations abound on Reddit and the social platform X, with visi-

tors seeking advice on how to secure a ride while in San Francisco, or be well positioned to spot a driverless car on the go.

Some basics are necessary when plotting your own robotaxi ride. First, while AV companies such as Cruise and Zoox have proliferated in recent years, Waymo, which is owned by Alphabet (Google's parent company), is currently the only company offering rides to the public in San Francisco.

Waymo also operates in the Phoenix metro area, including offering rides to and from Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport, and is currently slowly rolling out rides in Los Angeles and testing rides on the San Francisco Peninsula and in Austin, Texas. In Phoenix, you can hail a Waymo using the Uber app; in all other locations, downloading the Waymo app is required. (The app is very similar to other ride-hailing services; pricing is comparable, too.) And in



almost all service areas, there is a waiting list to be granted access.

A FUTURISTIC ATTRACTION

Not able to get direct access in time? Try asking friends, family or colleagues if they'll invite you on a ride. Jason Karsh, a 38-year-old San Francisco resident who works as a tech marketing executive and consultant, regularly "hails" Waymo cars and suggests riding in them as a tourist activity.

"San Francisco has gotten a bad rep for visitors recently," Karsh said. "This is a reminder that San



Francisco also is a place that's living a few years into the future technologically."

Waymo vehicles are all-electric Jaguar I-PACEs outfitted with radar, lidar, sensors, and internal and external cameras. You use the app to unlock the car when it arrives and to play music during your ride. Four seats are available to passengers — you can sit up front, but you're not allowed to sit in the driver's seat (if you try, the car will not move). A real-life customer support team remotely monitors your ride for unsafe

activity and is available should you require assistance.

Karsh described a recent ride with a group of colleagues: "They immediately got out their phones and began filming, almost like they were taping a celebrity or a concert."

Indeed, riding in a Waymo can turn you into the main attraction. On a recent trip through San Francisco with my visiting in-laws, we not only filmed much of our ride, but spotted a group of tourists who pointed and stared at our driverless vehicle, even pulling out phones to

snap footage of their own.

De Clercq, visiting from New Jersey, described his ride home from a night out in Chinatown as "very interesting and futuristic. It was extremely cautious and quite slow."

According to safety data from the company, Waymos are significantly safer than human drivers. That hasn't prevented public backlash over AVs — California suspended Cruise vehicles from operating on the streets of San Francisco after an incident in which a pedestrian was hit and dragged under a vehicle. There have been regular complaints of Waymo cars blocking traffic and emergency vehicles. Crashes, largely involving stationary objects, have led to a federal investigation of Waymo.

However, in Karsh's experience, Waymo rides are sometimes less than seamless because they're too cautious.

"If there's a car stopped with the hood up on a two-lane street, a human driver will know to go around. A Waymo might just sit there," he said.

But perhaps the most noteworthy aspect of a first-time Waymo ride is how quickly it feels normal.

— NYT

MUSIC NEEDS NO LANGUAGE OR WORDS



LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

Music has notes, melody and harmony, but need not have lyrics to stir the emotions. This is what Farhad Harati, a musician from Tehran, Iran, believes.

A graduate in Music Science, he wears different hats as a composer, conductor, choir master, music teacher, pianist and singer. What is important to him is taking music to people "Music is not meant just for the elite. People should have accessibility to enjoy and appreciate music."

Harati also feels instrumental music is more important because it can showcase the creativity of the mind more than what has just been taught to you. "Instrumental music is all about you and your connection to the song. I fully respect vocals, but somehow they tend to have an expiry period for it. When people activate their mind and imagination with instrumental type of music, the experience will help them grow their mind with an influence on their level of thinking," said the musician. Connecting with the music is important, he pointed out. "What we see these days is that people are busy at the concerts taking pictures and videos.

They are not actually hearing the music. Instead, let the music flow through you and in the end you will achieve something. It will let you think

more, guide you and be inspired."

He is quick to point out that we are missing this type of music in today's world.

"I respect all types of music. No one can say what is the right way or what is wrong when it comes to music. Anything that helps you express your feelings is a type of art. But I want to focus on music which makes people listen."

He finds a huge potential in Oman. "People in Oman cherish music and fine arts. There is a tremendous potential in the young people of Oman. I have many forthcoming projects where I would like to work with Omani artists," he said.

He has composed numerous single tracks (EP) and nine music albums. The released albums are 'Zero Limitation', 'The Pacific Sun', 'Gray Lone', 'The Lady of Shadows', 'The Silence Season', 'The Sacred Earth', 'Hidden Beliefs', 'Cold Pavements', and 'Angels'.

He won a silver medal from the Global Music Awards for 'Hidden Beliefs' album in the Composition/Composer section in 2020, and he went on to receive a gold medal of the Global Music Awards for 'The Sacred Earth' album in the composer/cinematic choral music section in 2022.

In recent years, Harati has chosen the themes of his musical projects carefully based on the serious issues of the world around him.

Besides holding numerous concerts and producing works, he has always tried to deal with profound concepts on humanity through his works, while critiquing the challenging conditions of the world in the first place, and then producing distinguished works with social themes.

His cooperation with the United Nations Office and the Environment Organization Office in Iran encouraged him to produce works on the themes of AIDS, humanity and war.

This encouraged him to stage concerts in the most prestigious halls of Iran.

According to him, establishing and conducting 'Naamira' Choir was among his valuable achievements in the past three decades. Producing choral and archaic music is among his fields of activity, he also sings the vocal pieces of his compositions.

While his choral works express a deep feeling without using specific words, he feels through his choral compositions he can communicate emotions only through music, without using any spoken languages.