

Call to donate blood platelets

The Department of Blood Bank Services at the Central Blood Bank in Bausher has called upon donors to come forward and donate blood and platelets to help save lives which are in need of the life-saving liquid. There has been a dip in the number of donors during the holy month, and the department has urged those who have not travelled out of the Sultanate of Oman in the past few months to come forward and donate blood and platelets. **DETAILS ON P2**



P10

LIVERPOOL
OVERCOME
EVERTON
BATTLE



P15

OIL PRICES SINK
MORE THAN 5%
ON DEMAND
FEARS



P19

IRAQ EXHIBITS
RESTORED ART
PILLAGED AFTER
2003 INVASION



MUSCAT

HM GREETINGS TO TANZANIA PRESIDENT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Samia Hassan of the United Republic of Tanzania on her country's National Day. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sentiments and best wishes of good health and happiness to President Samia. His Majesty also wished the people of Tanzania further development and growth. — ONA

HM THANKED BY SERBIA PRESIDENT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has received a cable of thanks from President Aleksandar Vucic of the Republic of Serbia in reply to His Majesty's greetings cable on the occasion of his country's National Day. In his cable, President Vucic expressed his sincere appreciation for His Majesty's heartfelt sentiments. He also reiterated his keenness to promote the bilateral relations to serve the interests of the two countries' peoples. — ONA

24
RAMADHAN
1443 AH

PRAYER TIMINGS

Fajr
04:18 AM

Dhuhr
12:10 PM

Asr
03:36 PM

Maghrib
06:37 PM

Isha
07:52 PM

INSIDE



IRAN URGES NEW NUCLEAR MEET AS SOON AS POSSIBLE

P6



WILL UKRAINE WAR UPEND THE SUSTAINABILITY AGENDA?

P9

Royal Decree ratifies agreement with Bangladesh

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Monday issued two Royal Decrees.

Royal Decree No 21/2022 on the ratification of an agreement between the Government of the Sultanate of Oman and the Government of the People's Republic

of Bangladesh on mutual waiver of visas for holders of diplomatic, special, service and official passports, signed in Dhaka on March 24, 2022.

Article (1) ratifies the aforesaid agreement as per the version attached to this Decree.

Article (2) says that this Decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from its data of issue.

Royal Decree No 22/2022 endorsing the Sultanate of Oman's joining the Amendment to the Convention on the Physical Pro-

tection of Nuclear Material.

Article (1) endorses the Sultanate of Oman's joining the Amendment to the Convention on the Physical Protection of Nuclear Material as per the version attached to this Decree.

Article (2) says that the com-

petent departments shall deposit the endorsement document as per the aforesaid Convention's provisions.

Article (3) says that this Decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from its data of issue. — ONA

DEMYSTIFYING THE ROSE SEASON



Renaud Salmon's gentle demeanour and welcoming nature made him the perfect guide for the Rose Village garden tour. He easily navigated the maze of rose bushes. It's the perfect time of the year when the green leaves compete with the popping pink glow of the damask roses' blossoms. He has been to these mountains numerous times and with more than half a dozen guests trailing behind, he was checking for the best spots where he can capture the beauty of the rock roses that had become an attraction at this time of the year. **DETAILS ON P20**

First official Holy Quran for the blind launched

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

The Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs launched the first official Holy Quran for the blind in Braille under the auspices of Her Excellency Dr Laila bint Ahmed al Najar, Minister of Social Development and Dr Mohammed bin Said al Maamari, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs, at the Oman Exhibition and Convention Centre on Sunday. Blind children are expected to make use of the book to learn, while elders can read on a daily basis.



The Sultanate of Oman has more than 26,000 blind people in the age brackets of 1 to 80, and the reasons are varied. "Most of them are blind by birth, while others are due to road accidents or other diseases. The number comprises blind and people with blurred vision", said the minister. **TURN TO P2**

Macron seeks to heal divisions

PARIS: French President Emmanuel Macron faced the daunting challenge of uniting a deeply divided nation on Monday after winning re-election in a battle against Marine Le Pen that saw the far right come its closest yet to taking power.

Centrist Macron won 58.54 per cent of the vote in the second-round run-off compared with 41.46 for Le Pen, according to final results from the interior ministry.

Macron is the first French president in two decades to win a second term and his victory prompted a sigh of relief throughout Europe. But his victory over his far-right rival was narrower than their last face-off in 2017 when Macron won

HM greetings to French President

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Emmanuel Macron of the French Republic, for winning a second presidential term. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere greetings to the President wishing him success in leading the French people towards further progress and prosperity hoping for the Omani-French relationship to see more development. — ONA

over 66 per cent, and Le Pen's result was the best ever for the far right.

The president already has an overflowing in-tray, ranging from

preparing for parliamentary elections in June to implementing explosive pension reform plans and dealing with the Russian war on Ukraine. Macron made no public appearance on Monday, staying in the secluded presidential retreat of La Lanterne next to the park of the Versailles Palace outside Paris to plot his future political strategy.

"The difficulties are going to start real soon", Brice Teinturier, Managing Director at public opinion specialists Ipsos France, said.

Addressing supporters late on Sunday, Macron vowed to heal rifts in a deeply divided country, vowing a response to the "anger" that prompted many French to vote for the far-right. **SEE ALSO P7**

HAMOUD AL MEHRZI
MUSCAT, APRIL 25

The Ministry of Economy is currently working on a national programme for economic diversification which aims to expedite the realisation of the diversification plan and establish a diversified production base which can partially disengage the economy from reliance on oil and gas revenues.

This was stated by Dr Nasser bin Rashid al Maawali, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Economy.

He added: "Certainly we will be able to realise the objectives set for the economic diversification sectors during the Tenth Five-Year Development Plan (2021-2025). This will serve as a solid foundation and a pivotal achievement for the upcoming five-year plans."

In an interview with 'Oman Arabic', sister publication of the 'Observer', Dr Al Maawali said that the positive expectations of the World Economic Outlook


The positive expectations of the World Economic Outlook published by the IMF reflect the government's efforts to set the Sultanate of Oman's economic growth back on track

DR NASSER
BIN RASHID AL
MAAWALI
Under-Secretary

(April 2022) published by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) reflect the government's efforts to set the Sultanate of Oman's economic growth back on track, and speed up recovery from the economic setbacks of the previous years including the Covid-19 pandemic. **TURN TO P2**



Dhofar Municipal Council approves recommendation to set up workers' city

SALALAH: The Municipal Council of Dhofar Governorate approved a number of recommendations including establishing workers' cities for the accommodation of expat labourers.

The Municipal Council held its fourth regular meeting on Monday under the chairmanship of Sayyid Mohammed bin Sultan al Busaidy, Minister of State and Governor of Dhofar and Chairman of the Municipal Council. The Municipal Council approved the recommendation of the Social Affairs Committee on the formation of standing and interim sub-committees as

per Article 28 of the executive regulations of the Municipal Council's Law promulgated by the ministerial decision No (44/2022). These include the Legal Affairs Committee, the Social Affairs Committee, the Health and Environmental Affairs Committee, and the Governorate Development Committee.

The council approved another recommendation presented by the Social Affairs Committee for forming a joint unified team to stem the begging phenomenon and its recommendation for protecting the school students from the effect of social media.

Shopping fever picks up as countdown begins for Eid

SAMUEL KUTTY
@samkuttyvp

A festive air has started across the city markets as shopping for Eid al Fitr got into full swing with the announcement of holidays that will last more than a week.

While traders say the economic situation is picking up, the Consumer Protection Authority (CPA) keeps a watch on the markets to ensure the availability of goods, that too at a fair price.

From clothing, accessories and jewellery to shoes and gift items — a heavy rush of customers is seen in most shops, especially after iftar.

The CPA has already instructed commercial establishments not to hike the prices of products and commodities that are currently available in the market and have been affected by the increase in oil prices.

According to a statement from the CPA on Monday, Sulayem bin Salim al Hakmani, Chairman of the Consumer Protection Authority, has already visited a number of commercial centres and markets in Seeb.

"In view of the Eid al Fitr next week, officials are visiting shops and other commercial establishments to ensure the commitment of suppliers to



implement value-added tax and the availability of goods in the markets," the statement said.

Although Eid takes place next week, a lot of hustle bustle is seen in the evening in major shopping areas thanks to offers and promotions launched by retailers to lure shoppers who can look forward to extensive discounts on consumer goods.

Although retailers are facing tough competition from online traders, with people spending significantly more time shopping on the web, most shop owners, from those in the malls to the high streets, said they are happy and busy as the mood is quite upbeat. "Compared with the last few

years, the mood of the customers seems to be much better, and they are buying more. The situation has really improved," said Nasser Ahmed, a supermarket owner in Ruwi.

Rakesh Vasudevan, a mobile seller, expects it to be busy over Eid but thought the numbers could be down on previous years for several reasons.

"People are spending more money online than ever before because of the pandemic, so it will be interesting to see how busy Eid is this year. Still, we expect good business in the coming days," he said.

A retail salesman in a shopping centre said Eid this time will be

busy in the evenings if previous years were anything to go by.

"It's been quiet over Ramadhan, which you would expect, but it's starting to pick up, and I think it will be very busy over the Eid break for sure. It usually gets a lot busier at night time as more people come out then," said Rauf.

A customer at a hypermarket in Ruwi said prices of most items except for grocery and other food items have remained the same for many years and prices vary from type to type according to the quality, brand and place of origin.

"Readymade clothes and accessories are often cheaper than those tailored on-demand," said Emad Ahmed.

Call to donate blood and platelets

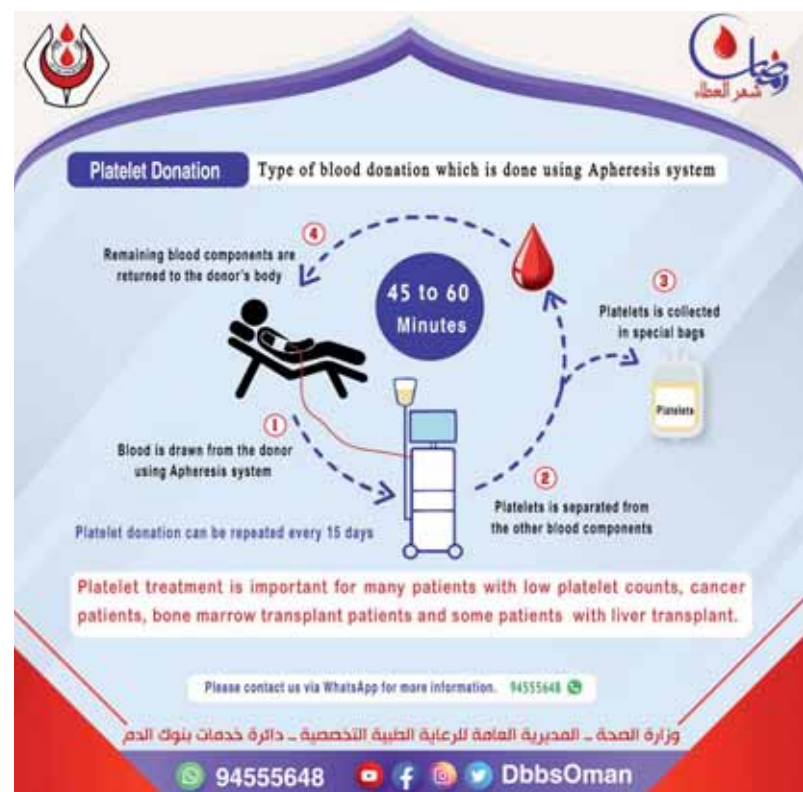
KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

The Department of Blood Banks Services (DBBS) at the Central Blood Bank in Bausher has called on donors to come forward and donate blood and platelets to help save lives which are in need of the life-saving liquid.

There has been a dip in the number of donors who turned out to donate blood during the holy month and the DBBS has made an appeal to those who have not travelled out of Oman in the past few months to come forward and donate blood and platelets.

"However, there have been efforts from NGOs and other organisations, corporates to conduct blood donation camps to support the authority to cope with the demand and that has really helped us," a spokesperson has said.

Those who are fasting can donate after they break their fast and those who are not fasting can donate even during the day time.



"The capital city alone needs close to 120 blood units daily and more than 6,000 blood units monthly. There's a shortage of supply over the past few weeks

and those who can donate are requested to come forward," he adds.

Reports suggest that the number of patients who need

blood transfusion, including patients with genetic blood disorders such as sickle cell anaemia, thalassemia, patients with tumours or victims of traffic accidents and patients undergoing open surgeries in hospitals across the country.

The DBBS has been organising blood donation campaigns during the holy month at various mosques and public places. Nonetheless, not many donors were reported to come forward as they can only do so after breaking the fast. And this has necessitated a public call for blood units.

Those who have not travelled away from Oman for the past four months, or those who donated more than a month ago or those who are willing to do so can approach the blood bank in Bausher and take part in the blood and platelets donation campaign.

Blood donation timings in Ramadhan: 7:30 pm to 11.30 pm every day and from 8 am till 12.30 pm from Sunday to Thursday.

Economic growth back on track

FROM P1

Dr Al Maawali praised the positive indicators of the Omani economy that came as a result of incentivisation efforts and the measures aimed at accelerating the economy and stemming the economic impact of the pandemic.

He stressed that all the packages that were directed towards the recovery measures, whether for small or medium enterprises or the exemption packages for investments, have contributed to economic stabilisation and restoration of economic growth.

Commenting on the IMF's expectations of a real GDP growth of 5.6 per cent in 2022, Dr Al Maawali said that this is only an

interim gain for Oman's economy, especially when we take into account the IMF's expectations of a slowdown in the global economy during the 2022-2023 period at just 3.6 per cent.

He noted that economic growth enhances attracting foreign investments, improves the credit rating of the Sultanate of Oman and reflects positively on the citizens' standard of living. He pointed out that this gain was the result of several factors, most importantly the rise in oil and gas prices. This is also attributed to the government's integrated efforts to stimulate economic recovery on the one hand and accelerate economic diversification, on the other hand.

First official Holy Quran for the blind launched

FROM P1

Individuals and corporates can sponsor the Holy Quran in Braille for the blind by getting in touch with the ministry and paying RO 200 for 30 books of 12x12 size. The ministry will make sure that the copies reach the deserving.

"We are happy to be associated with the Al Noor Association for the Blind and other authorities for an initiative like this which will help people read the Holy Quran through their digital extrinities," said Dr Mohammed al Maamari, Under-Secretary at the Ministry of Awqaf and Reli-

gious Affairs.

There are Holy Quran editions in Braille, but most of them are oversized for children with special needs, and this is the first time that each of the 30 segments of the holy book are printed individually. They are printed in Jordan and transported by air to the Sultanate of Oman.

"Children would find it easy to carry, study and comprehend the Holy Quran in the present version, and that will help our children improve their Quran skills," added Badriya al Wuhaibi, Head of Omar Bin Qattab School for the Blind.



Sultan Qaboos University, represented by the Center for Omani Studies, has marked the World Book and Copyright Day, which falls on April 23 of each year. The event included the inauguration of nine publications of the Omani Studies Center, a review of publishing houses in promoting the culture of authorship, and highlighting the roles played by publishing houses. The World Book Day aims to promote reading, writing novels and stories, translating, publishing and copyright. — ONA

■ **SQU MARKS WORLD BOOK DAY**



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Barka Health City comes under healthy cities network

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, APRIL 25

The World Health Organisation has included Barka Health City in the healthy city network of the region. This recording came after Shaikh Abdullah bin Mohammed al Buraiki, Wali of Barka, signed a letter of cooperation for Barka Health City with Dr Jan Jabbour, representative of the World Health Organisation. The recognition is part of the basic goal of the General Directorate of Health Services in Al Batinah South Governorate to improve its health services.

The move emphasises quality health care for everyone, as well as developing the idea of a healthy lifestyle programme in a healthy city. It focuses on environmental and social aspects as one of the most important determinants of health and the most important programmes to enhance the health of individuals and reduce the risk factors for non-communicable diseases.

Barka's inclusion in the healthy cities system is based on indicators studied by the stakeholders

in the Ministry of Health and some relevant authorities, the most important of which is the rapid growth in the state population and the high prevalence of chronic non-communicable diseases.

The partnership programme that will be between Barka city and the WHO aims to study the health problems that Barka city suffers from and to develop plans and programmes to address them and determine their priorities according to a specific timetable with the participation of various governmental and private agencies and the people of this state.

The WHO representative praised the Barka Health City's inclusion in the network. "It is fortunate that the Wilayat of Barka is added to the network of global health cities as an integrated health city."

The Healthy Cities Programme is one of the health promotion programmes that is based on the principle of community participation from individuals and governmental and non-governmental institutions.



DGSG unveils scouting summer programme

MUSCAT: The Directorate-General of Scouts and Guides (DGSG) on Monday unveiled its local programme for this summer, which contains lots of activities and events that aim at upgrading the skills of scouts, guides and rangers.

The summer programme, to be held between May and August, will see a wide participation of various age groups. DGSG will set up four camps at Jabal Ashur



The summer programme aim to solidify social ties among the scouts and guides and allows them a chance to experience the nature

Plain in Dhofar Governorate.

Dr Yaqoub bin Khalfan al Nadabi, Director-General of DGSG, said that the summer programme aim to solidify social ties among the scouts and guides and allows them a chance to experience the nature and practice the methods of scouting, adding that the summer programme will include the Oman Rangers Challenge to be held on June 6-9 and targets female ranger job-seekers. — ONA

Al Muhtadi — plant that can tolerate dry conditions

TEXT & PHOTOS
BY YAHYA AL SALMANI

The beautiful Al Muhtadi flowers are spread all over the Arabian Peninsula and the Levant. Known as 'pulicaria glutinosa', Al Muhtadi is found widely with many species in the Sultanate of Oman.

The plant has medicinal value and was used widely in the past as herbal medicine. Many still use the plant for the treatment of health issues in joints, particularly rheumatism, by collecting the juice from the Al Muhtadi leaves, heating it and then wiping the affected area with the liquid.

This plant is abundant on the slopes of mountains and valleys. Its flowers are yellow in colour, look shiny, especially on sunny days. Thus, it is classified as one of the common plants in the Sultanate of Oman, providing food for wild animals and birds throughout the year. This plant tolerates the high heat of the sun and the dry climate for long periods.

"This plant is considered one of the symbols of Omani nature. There is no valley without this plant. It can be seen on the hills of the Al Hajar Mountains and in the streams of the valleys. Omanis still benefit from it in extracting medicinal herbs, as they treat skin diseases and joint diseases", a specialist in the Sultanate of Oman's biodiversity told the Observer.

"This plant has a great environmental contribution in the expansion of the green



area in the mountains and valleys of the country. Its overuse as a medicinal plant and food for animals has led to a reduction in the plant's population. So we demand the necessity of studying the possibility of re-using it as a medicinal plant. Cultivation in their natural habitats," he added.

The Sultanate of Oman is rich in flora and fauna. It hosts nearly 1,200 species of plants, including 78 species not found anywhere else in the world. Official data indicate that the Sultanate of Oman has more than 200 edible wild plants, such as: bot, qasm, sedaf and many others.

To preserve this unique biodiversity,

the Sultanate of Oman has paid special attention to protecting these natural species. Laws have been formulated to protect such plants.

The Sultanate of Oman has joined many international environmental agreements and protocols. Various natural reserves have been established and specialised research centres have been established, such as the Oman Centre for Animal and Plant Genetic Resources of the Scientific Research Council, and work to invest, conserve and preserve these natural resources for generations.

Local references mention that national universities and colleges are seeking to benefit from the raw materials of the Omani environment. Perhaps the establishment of the University of Nizwa for the research chair entitled Omani plants and marine biology products is one of the models in directing scientific research to benefit from Omani plants. "The Omani frankincense project is one of the leading projects in the field of Omani medicinal plants and other diverse projects in this field".

Botanists consider plants to be the basis of the food pyramid for life, and in the event of their demise, life on earth disappears with it. Therefore, these specialists recommend that the responsibility for the preservation of plants is a "collective responsibility", and accordingly, projects must continue to propagate and cultivate plants of economic, cultural and medical importance.

IN LOVING MEMORY

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KURIEN POULOSE

Condolences from all of us at

Al Majadeef Trading LLC



REASONS TO CELEBRATE WITH MUCH VIGOUR



VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

The holy month of Ramadhan is now in its final days, and not to forget that all related festivities and celebrations were put on hold in the first two years of this decade.

The Covid scare is not fully over yet, but Muslims across the world and here in the Sultanate of Oman did celebrate and socialise without going overboard.

According to religious leaders, all Ramadhan nights are important, but the last week or ten days are more special and important compared to others.

Speaking to the ‘Observer’, several citizens and expatriates said that Ramadhan this year was almost back to normal, but not yet.

“I hope businesses were able to make up for the losses of the last two years and let us hope that this will be a new beginning for each and everyone – business, students, teachers, employers, employees and elders”, said Saeed, 70, from Qurayat, who for the first-time spent Ramadhan inside four walls in 2020 and 2021 without even going to mosques. Traditional cities like Nizwa, saw streets and shops with lanterns, while malls and food joints joined the bandwagon with discounts, promotions and lucky draws.

“We all remember the times when I used to buy lights for Ramadhan and invite my friends or relatives for iftar.

I hope businesses were able to make up for the losses of the last two years and let us hope that this will be a new beginning for each and everyone – business, students, teachers, employers, employees and elders

SAEED
A 70-year-old citizen

Occasionally, we used to visit their homes”, said Mustafa Khan, who used to work with volunteer groups to provide iftar boxes to blue-collar workers who often spent fasting months working under the scorching sun.

“Every Ramadhan, we only want the world to be a peaceful place with no tensions and disputes, but that has been one of the most difficult things to achieve”, he regretted.

“With many jobs and lives lost due to the pandemic, I hope this Ramadhan will make up for the lost two years of this decade, and people will have reasons to celebrate in much more vigour next year, which will also be in milder months of March”, said Ghazala, who is observing the fast with her eight-year-old daughter.

Still urging to exercise caution, the Supreme Committee urged that Eid al Fitr congregational prayers should be restricted to the vaccinated only; unvaccinated people and children under 12 years will not be allowed to attend the prayers.

Abidance by the precautionary measures, including wearing a face mask in indoor settings and avoiding handshakes and hugging, is mandatory.

It also called for the continuation of precautionary measures, social distancing in indoor settings and abidance by health norms when sneezing and coughing, a ban on all forms of assembly at public places especially Eid gatherings and mass celebrations, on wedding parties and condolences at mosques, halls and other public places is still in place.



Winners of Mahout village design contest declared

MUSCAT: In partnership between the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources and Oman Tourism Development Company (OMRAN Group), the awarding ceremony of Mahout fishermen village design contest was held at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre.

The contest was launched to develop young Omani talents in the field of Architecture and engage them in various initiatives aimed at improving the facilities.

The contest witnessed wide participation from young Omani graduates who are majoring in architecture and urban planning. The contest's jury received around 100 designs which were evaluated as per architectural, aesthetics, and environmental criteria. Critical elements of sustainability and geographical suitability were

also taken into consideration.

Asma bint Hilal al Kharusi won the first prize in the contest, and Wadha bint Khalid al Jabri was the runner-up, whereas the third place has been won jointly by, Alaa bint Nasser al Rawahi, Jawaher bint Salem al Hajari and the 'Abstract team'.

Acknowledging the high number of entries received and the excellence of the participating designs, the jury decided to allocate incentive prizes, which were won by Bushra bint Walid al Sulaimani, Maryam bint Ali al Mashrafi and Afrah bint Saif al Shaaili.

Dr Abdulaziz bin Said al Marzouqi, Director of Fisheries Resources Development at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, said: "The ministry's goal is to create a



safe and stable environment for fishermen all around Oman. We believe that this can be accomplished by developing an integrated infrastructure that includes all services. We've also made care to construct this

particular project in a distinctive manner that represents the architectural design's modernism while also taking environmental sustainability into account."

"This contest for Oman's budding architects, and designers,

is in line with the ministry's aim to empower and utilise young people's abilities. We hope to include modern architectural aspects in the ministry's numerous development projects as a result of this effort," he further stated.

Commenting on the contest, Eng Saif bin Ali al Hinai, Chief Development Officer at OMRAN Group, said: "The contest is one of OMRAN Group's various initiatives that aims to support local talents and grant them the opportunity to contribute to Oman's development. It comes in line with the group's strategy towards generating In-country value and meeting its corporate social responsibility objectives."

"OMRAN Group aims to boost national growth through strategic relationships with various government institutions.

Therefore, our collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, and Water Resources demonstrates our commitment in this regard," he said further.

Expressing her delight in winning the first place, Asma bint Hilal al Kharusi said: "I am pleased to have participated in this contest that gave us a platform to hone our skills and showcase them in various ways. I would like to thank the organisers of this contest for their continued support and efforts to make it a success story."

It is worth mentioning that OMRAN Group places great emphasis on local development and community sustainability. This is demonstrated through devising vital initiatives that seek to involve the local community and young talents in the group's various projects.



Bahwan Engineering Group

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Suitable candidates qualifying the job requirements shall only be contacted for assessment. Final selection is subject to approval by Client. Candidates from Ash Sharqiyah region will have added advantage.

Interested candidates may apply immediately mentioning the position code in subject line by email to omanization@becoman.com

OSHRM and WorlDatWork sign MoU



MUSCAT: The Omani Society for Human Resource Management (OSHRM) and WorlDatWork signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) recently in Muscat, inking a milestone partnership for the provision of human resources services.

In the presence of members of the OSHRM board, human resource and business leaders, and both companies' senior representatives, Dr Ghalib al Hosni, Chairman of OSHRM, and Mihai Popoaca, President of WorlDatWork, signed the MoU, reconfirming both par-

ties' commitment to best-in-class Rewards practices in Oman.

The MoU is set to provide OSHRM and the HR community in the Sultanate of Oman with the education, leadership, and community needed to build and nurture their Human Capital capabilities and Rewards best practices.

A roundtable discussion on Rewards best practices preceded the MoU. The audience shared their insights on the latest practices in leveraging Rewards practices within organisations to drive performance and employee engagement.

In his address, Dr Ghalib al Hosni noted that "this partnership is between two associations with a common mission and purpose. We are looking forward to this partnership to contribute to cultivating inspired, engaged, productive, and committed workers in effective and rewarding workplaces in the Sultanate of Oman."

WorlDatWork expanded its footprint last October, reaching the MENA region through Talent at Work, aiming to expand its presence and support its membership base and certification holders in the region.

New hotel project announced in Muscat

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 25

Valor Hospitality Middle East has announced its first hotel in Muscat, adding to its portfolio in the Middle East.

The upscale, full-service hotel in Muscat, Oman is scheduled to open in Q1 2024, after a complete renovation, refurbishment and rebranding.

When open, the hotel will feature 201 guest rooms, ballroom and conference facilities, leisure and fitness amenities, and dining venues. Located in the centre of Muscat, in Qurum, the hotel will offer a great location and diverse room mix for both short and long stays, corporate and leisure travellers.



Sultanate of Oman
Ministry of Economy

TENDER NOTICE

The Ministry of Economy Announces the following tender:

Tender No.	Tender Title	Document Fees	Last Date For Tender collection	Last Date For Tender Submission
2022/4	Request for Proposal (RFP) for the Matrix & Budget Web Based Application	25 Omani Rials	2/5/2022	5/6/2022

First

All specialized and interested companies that are registered with the Tender Board can participate and collect the specifications and conditions of the tender from the following website: www.etendering.tenderboard.gov.om. The bidders must submit their offers electronically via the website and attach an electronic copy of the temporary insurance in the form of a bank guarantee or a cheque certified by one of the banks operating in the Sultanate with a value of (1%) of the value of the tender submitted and valid for (90) days from the last date of submission of bids. It has to be addressed to HE Chairman of the Tender Committee of the Ministry of Economy.

Second

Tenders that does not meet the above conditions shall not be considered. The ministry shall have the right to reject any tender, and shall not be obliged to award the tender for the lowest bid without giving reasons.

For inquiries regarding tenders, please contact through the website of the electronic tendering system; <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>

For inquiries regarding the technical support of the electronic tendering system, please contact via e-mail and phone :

 etenderhd@ta.gov.om
 + 96824166670



Invitation to Tender

In accordance with the following conditions:

Tender / Auction Number	Subject	Tender / Auction Document Fees (Nonrefundable)	Tender / Auction Bond	Tender/Auction Offer	Closing Date
QPMC/TD/2022/08	Call-Off Agreement for the Supply of Single Size and Pipe Bedding Gabbro Aggregate (CIF) for Qatar Primary Materials Company ("Supplies")	QAR 5000	QAR 1,000,000	Two Bids Technical & (Commercial)	May, 12 2022 PM 01:00

1) Tender Documents can be collected from our head office located at Al-Saad, Suhaim bin Hamad St., Qatar First Bank Building, 10th Floor (Sunday: Thursday) between 08:00 to 13:00.

2) Bids are to be submitted in two sealed (in red wax) envelopes (Technical & Commercial) and addressed to Tenders and Auction Committee, Tender reference number and subject are to be clearly written on the envelopes, provided that the last date for submitting bids is one o'clock in the afternoon on the closing day. Any bids submit after this date will not be accepted.

3) Tender Documents will be released only after delivery of Deposit Slip Stamped by Commercial Bank along with Authorization Letter to the delegated person signed by authorized person as per Computer ID, Copy of commercial Registration (CR), Business License and Computer ID.

4) Tender Fees are nonrefundable and can be transferred online to Account of Qatar Primary Material Company- Bank A/C (4050-651111-006) at Commercial Bank of Qatar. For IBAN, send email for tender department email. Tender reference number and subject are to be written on the deposit slip.

5) Tender Bond (Bank Guarantee/ Manager Cheque) must be valid for 120 days after closing date and must be submitted in separate & sealed envelope along with technical bid and a photocopy is to be attached with commercial bid. Bids without tender bond will be rejected.

6) Bids must be valid for 90 days after closing date and are to be submitted in two copies (Original & Duplicate).

7) Any queries relating to the Tender Documents must only be raised in writing, preferably by email, to the address specified in the respective Tender Document. Any response issued by Qatar Primary Material Company will be in the form of a question and answer and will be distributed to all Tenderers without revealing the identity of the originator of the query(ies) in the Form of Tender Bulletins. Queries must be received at the address specified in the respective ITT Documentation at least five (5) calendar days prior to the Tender closing date. Any queries received after such date will be ignored.

8) The amount of the Performance Bond to be provided by the awarded bidder is (10% of the contract value) and its validity period; must remain valid under the contract implementation period and the guarantee period according to the terms of the tender.

9) The Technical Bids shall be opened within one week from the closing date.

10) Qatar Primary Material Company has the right, during the contract period, to request an increase or decrease in the amounts of the items, works or services by a percentage not exceeding (20%) of the contract value with the same conditions and prices, provided that the increase is of the same type of contracted items, works or services.

11) Qatar Primary Material Company's tendering terms and conditions apply.

For further Inquiry, please send your queries at Fax Number: 44479559 or email to tender@qpmc.qa or visit Qatar Primary Material Company website @ www.qpmc.qa



Iran urges new nuclear meet ‘as soon as possible’

TEHRAN: Iran called on Monday for a new meeting “as soon as possible” in the talks that have been held in Vienna aimed at restoring its frayed 2015 nuclear deal with major powers.

Tehran has been engaged in negotiations with Britain, China, France, Germany and Russia directly and the US indirectly to revive the so-called Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). “It is appropriate that a face-to-face meeting is held as soon as possible”, foreign ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh told his weekly press conference.

“It is not yet decided where and when to have this meeting and at what level it should be held, but it is on the agenda.” The 2015 deal gave Iran sanctions relief in exchange for curbs on its nuclear programme to guarantee that Tehran could not develop a nuclear weapon, something it has always denied wanting to do.

The US unilaterally withdrawal from the accord in 2018 under then-president Donald Trump

“Iran and the European Union have agreed that ‘prolonging the pause in the negotiations is not in anyone’s interest’

SAEED
KHATIBZADEH
Foreign ministry spokesman

and reimposed biting economic sanctions, prompting Iran to begin rolling back its own commitments. Iran and the US, have been exchanging views through the European coordinator of the Vienna talks, Enrique Mora.

Khatibzadeh said Iran and the European Union agreed that “prolonging the pause in the negotiations is not in anyone’s interest”.

He added that the talks “have not stopped and are continuing



Iran’s Foreign Ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh speaks to media during a press conference in Tehran. – AFP

through the coordinator of the Vienna negotiations”.

The Vienna talks have been paused since March 11 after Russia demanded guarantees that Western sanctions imposed against it after its February 24 war

on Ukraine would not damage its trade with Iran.

Days later, Moscow said it had received the necessary guarantees.

The Vienna talks, which started a year ago, aim to return the United States to the nuclear deal, including

through the lifting of sanctions on Iran, and to ensure Tehran’s full compliance with its commitments.

Among the key remaining sticking points is Iran’s demand that Washington delist its Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps from

a US terror list.

“It is clear that if the US had given the right answers to the remaining issues ... everyone would have been in Vienna by now”, said Khatibzadeh.

US State Department spokesman Ned Price said last week that “if Iran wants sanctions-lifting that goes beyond the JCPOA, they’ll need to address concerns of ours that go beyond the JCPOA”.

Meanwhile, Iran also said that the latest round of talks with Saudi Arabia was “positive and serious” and voiced hope for further progress soon.

Tehran and Riyadh, which severed diplomatic ties in 2016, held four rounds of talks in Iraq between April and September last year, with a fifth meeting last Thursday.

“The fifth round of negotiations between Iran and Saudi Arabia in Baghdad... was positive and serious and saw progress”, foreign ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh told reporters. — AFP

UN says dozens killed in South Sudan violence

NAIROBI: At least 72 civilians were killed over a seven-week period in a single county in South Sudan, with some beheaded and others burned alive, as interethnic violence roils the oil-rich region, the United Nations said on Monday.

The bloodshed between February 17 and April 7 in Leer county in Unity state reportedly forced 40,000 people to flee their homes, with UN investigators recording 64 cases of violence, the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) said.

“UNMISS strongly condemns the widespread violence, killings, burning alive of civilians and attacks on humanitarians”, it said in a statement.

In total “72 civilians were killed, at least 11 injured”, the statement added.

Two women told a UN team they were repeatedly abused by armed youths when they came out of hiding to look for food for their children.

Another woman who had recently given birth suffered a similar fate and was beaten for three days.

“I am strongly appalled by these horrific attacks on civilians



in Leer”, said Nicholas Haysom, who heads UNMISS.

“We must all do everything we can to ensure that victims and survivors get the justice they deserve and receive the care and support they need.”

Terrified villagers said earlier this month about spending days hiding in swamps as armed men set fire to their huts and raided their livestock.

Some described horrific abuses on women and girls.

The violence has prompted fears of a return to conflict in the fragile young nation, which plunged into a civil war in 2013,

barely two years after achieving its independence from Sudan.

The fighting between troops loyal to President Salva Kiir and his rival Vice- President Riek Machar left nearly 400,000 dead before the two men agreed to lay down their guns in 2018.

But the country of 11 million has struggled to maintain a tenuous peace in the intervening years, grappling with lawlessness and explosions of interethnic violence. Political bickering between Kiir and Machar has not helped, with both sides exchanging fire in recent months. — AFP

Indian IT giants set high hiring target for 2022

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH
@patkaushal

Fresh information technology graduates have bright chances of getting jobs in leading IT companies as most of them have set new recruitment targets for the current year. The Covid-19 pandemic boosted demand for digital skills and talent due to market demand for innovative ways to address day-to-day requirements in every sector.

“The year 2020 was really bad due to the sudden outbreak of the pandemic. Job-seekers in the IT sector were staring at a bleak future because many companies had freeze recruitment and many had started laying off employees. From a total uncertainty, demand for IT solutions increased. Every sector had a demand for customised services, and during the peak of the pandemic, we were running short of skilled IT graduates. So 2021 saw a boost in recruitment which is likely to boom in 2022”, said Alok Kumar, an IT expert from the IIT in India.

The best thing that happened during the process was opportunities for students studying in remote areas, who otherwise were in the shadow of



big institutions like IITs and others. Many of them got placed in IT companies, for which they were not prepared. Some additional courses helped them boost their career, and in most cases, the courses were sponsored by recruiting companies where they wanted them to work as per their own module from the very beginning.

It was a digital shift. In recent years, hiring in the IT sector saw an unexpected surge. In fact, the country’s four major IT service providers, Tata Consultancy Services (TCS), Infosys, Wipro and HCL Technologies, employ more than one-fourth of India’s total workforce, recruited around 120,000 freshers in FY22, said a report in News18. As per the trend, these IT companies will provide jobs to more than 300,000 lakh people by the end of this year.

Going by the recruitment reports, TCS recruited twice its target last year. It had planned to recruit some 40,000 fresh graduates but ended up hiring 100,000. India’s largest IT company, TCS, targets to recruit 40,000 freshers in the current financial year.

Last year, Infosys did almost double the target with 85,000 new appointments last year, while it has a recruitment target of 50,000 new graduates this year. “With demand for new solutions, Infosys is set to exceed the target”, said some IT experts.

Wipro and HCL are also on the same lines. Wipro has set almost a double hiring target of 30,000 in the current financial year, while HCL, which recruited 17,500 IT engineers last year, has a target of 45,000 recruitments this year.

JAKARTA

Indonesia raises alert level for offspring volcano

Indonesia raised the alert status for the offspring of the infamous Krakatoa volcano to its second highest level on Monday, a day after it erupted and spewed a towering ash cloud 3,000 metres into the sky.

Authorities bumped the threat of Anak Krakatoa, which means Child of Krakatoa, to level three of a four-tier volcanic alert system after witnessing a sharp rise in activity in the last month with the biggest eruption coming on Sunday. They also widened



the exclusion zone around the crater a day after warning nearby residents to wear masks outside because of the large plume of ash it belched over the strait that separates the islands of Java and Sumatra. — AFP

YANGON

Myanmar court delays verdict in Suu Kyi trial

A Myanmar junta court has postponed giving its first verdict in the corruption trial of ousted leader Aung San Suu Kyi, a junta spokesman said, a case which could see the Nobel laureate jailed for 15 years.

Suu Kyi, 76, has been detained since the generals staged a coup and ousted her government in February last year, ending the Southeast Asian country’s brief period of democracy. She has since been hit with a series of charges, including violating the



official secrets act, corruption and electoral fraud, and she faces decades in jail if convicted on all counts. “There was no verdict today”, in the corruption trial in which Suu Kyi is accused of accepting a bribe. — AFP

TOKYO

World’s oldest person dies in Japan at 119

A Japanese woman certified the world’s oldest person has died at the age of 119, local officials said. Kane Tanaka was born January 2, 1903, in the southwestern Fukuoka region of Japan, the same year the Wright brothers flew for the first time and Marie Curie became the first woman to win a Nobel Prize. Tanaka was in relatively good health until recently and lived at a nursing home, where she enjoyed board games, solving maths problems, soda and chocolate.



In her younger years, Tanaka ran various businesses including a noodle shop and a rice cake store. She married Hideo Tanaka a century ago in 1922, giving birth to four children and adopting a fifth. — AFP



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In brief

GAZA



4,500-YEAR-OLD STONE STATUETTE FOUND IN GAZA

A stone statuette over 4,500 years old depicting the face of an ancient goddess was discovered in the southern Gaza Strip, archaeological authorities in the Palestinian enclave announced. Carved out of limestone and 22 centimetres long, the 2500 BC statuette was found by a farmer working his land in Khan Younis, according to the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities for Hamas, the Islamist movement that rules Gaza.

“The statue represents the Canaanite goddess Anat,” Jamal Abu Reda, in charge of antiquities at the ministry, said in a statement. Anat, one of the best-known Canaanite deities, was the goddess of love and war.

SEOUL



N KOREA HOLDS MILITARY PARADE TO MARK KEY ANNIVERSARY

North Korea kicked off a much-anticipated military parade on Monday, a South Korean military source said, commemorating a major army holiday with a show of strength at a time when Pyongyang has accelerated weapons testing. The nuclear-armed country stages military parades to mark important holidays and events that feature thousands of goose-stepping troops followed by a cavalcade of armoured vehicles and tanks and culminating with the key missiles Pyongyang wants to display. Observers closely monitor these events for clues on North Korea's latest weapons development.

WASHINGTON



BIDEN PICKS SENIOR DIPLOMAT AS UKRAINE ENVOY

President Joe Biden has nominated career foreign service officer Bridget Brink to be the next US Ambassador to Ukraine, the White House announced.

In Brink, Biden has chosen a seasoned diplomat who speaks Russian to be his chief envoy in a nation suffering a full-scale invasion by Moscow.

Brink, currently the US Ambassador to Slovakia, would fill a position that has been officially empty since 2019. She has “spent her twenty-five-year career in the Foreign Service focused on advancing US policy in Europe and Eurasia,” the White House said in a statement announcing Biden's pick.

World leaders welcome Macron's win

PARIS: World leaders rushed to congratulate France's centrist President Emmanuel Macron on his re-election and defeat of far-right leader Marine Le Pen in elections Sunday.

“We can count on France for five more years,” European Council President Charles Michel wrote on Twitter. “I am delighted to be able to continue our excellent cooperation,” tweeted European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen.

Macron sought to unite a deeply divided nation on Monday after winning re-election in a battle against rival Marine Le Pen that saw the far right come its closest yet to taking power.

Centrist Macron won 58.54 per cent of the vote in the second-round run-off compared with 41.46 for Le Pen, according to final results from the interior ministry.

Macron is the first French president in two decades to win a second term and his victory prompted a sigh of relief throughout Europe that the far right had again been thwarted from taking power in the key EU state.

But his latest victory over his far-right rival was narrower than their last face-off in 2017 when Macron won over 66 per cent, and Le Pen's result was the best ever for the far right.

The president already has a



French President and La Republique en Marche party candidate for re-election Emmanuel Macron greets supporters after his victory in France's presidential election in Paris. — AFP

daunting in-tray, ranging from preparing for parliamentary elections as soon as June to implementing explosive pension reform plans and dealing with the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Addressing supporters in the shadow of the Eiffel Tower late on Sunday, Macron vowed to heal rifts in a deeply divided country.

“From now on, I am not the candidate of one camp, but everybody's president,” he said.

“An answer must be found to

the anger and disagreements that led many of our compatriots to vote for the extreme right.”

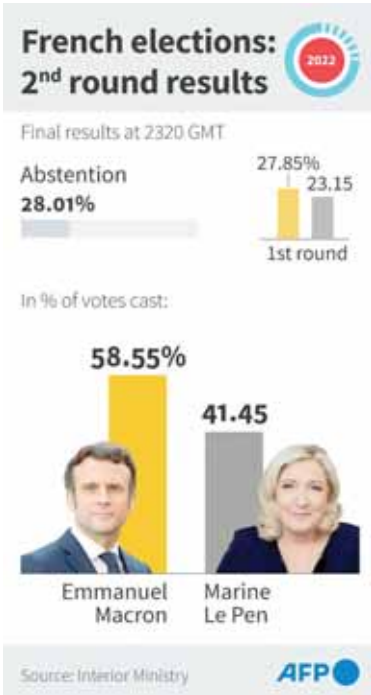
Turnout was the lowest in any presidential election second-round run-off since 1969 and, in another striking sign of disenchantment with politics, 8.6 per cent of people who voted either delivered a blank ballot or spoilt their papers.

The 44-year-old president now faces the challenge of parliamentary elections in June, where

keeping a majority will be critical for his ambitions.

In a sign of roadblocks ahead, two polls published late on Sunday showed that most voters do not wish for him to also carry the parliamentary vote.

“Macron's biggest challenge will be to create a sense of cohesion in an extremely fragmented country,” said Tara Varma, senior policy fellow and head of the Paris office of the European Council on Foreign Relations.



French daily Le Monde called Macron's win “an evening of victory without a triumph”, while left-leaning Liberation called it “a victory without the glory”.

Conservative daily Le Figaro said after all the challenges of his first term, Macron's win was “no mean feat”, but also asked: “Who can possibly believe that it is rooted in popular support?”

For Le Pen, her third defeat in a presidential poll was a bitter pill after years of effort at making herself electable. On Sunday Le Pen, 53, said she would “never abandon” the French and was already preparing for the June legislative elections. — AFP

Crowds join Anzac Day services for Australia, NZ forces

SYDNEY: Crowds of Australians and New Zealanders joined Anzac Day services at dawn on Monday to honour their armed forces as the countries' leaders pointed to new global threats and the war in Ukraine.

With Covid-19 restrictions of the past two years eased, large numbers of people gathered just before the sun rose to observe solemn ceremonies, many held at beaches and war memorials in towns and cities across the two countries.

Anzac Day marks the ill-fated World War I landing of Australia and New Zealand Army Corps troops at Gallipoli, in what is now Turkey, in 1915. Facing dug-in German-backed Ottoman forces, more than 10,000 Australian and New Zealand servicemen were killed in the Allied expedition.

Anzac Day now honours Australians and New Zealanders who have served in

wars, conflicts and peace-keeping operations.

“On this particular day, as we honour those who fought for our liberty and freedom, we stand with the people of Ukraine who do the same thing at this very moment,” Prime Minister Scott Morrison said as the sun rose over the Northern Territory capital of Darwin.

“Coercion travels our region once more,” he added, in an allusion to China's growing political and military sway in the Pacific.

In New Zealand, Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said the Russian invasion of Ukraine made Anzac Day especially poignant.

“Fresh in all our minds is the invasion of Ukraine, a most grim reminder of the fragile nature of peace, and the devastating impact of war on people's lives,” she said at a memorial service in Auckland where she laid a wreath. — AFP



People participate in the annual parade to mark ANZAC Day in Sydney. — AFP

US sees Ukraine beating Russia with ‘right equipment’

KYIV: The United States believes Kyiv can win the war against Russia if it has the “right equipment”, Pentagon chief Lloyd Austin said on Monday, as strikes on railway infrastructure in the central Ukraine killed at least five.

A landmark visit by Austin and Secretary of State Antony Blinken to Ukraine came as the war entered its third month, with thousands killed and millions displaced by the fighting. The bloody conflict has triggered an outburst of support from Western nations that has seen a deluge of weapons pour into Ukraine to help beat back the Russian invaders.

“The first step in winning is believing that you can win. And so they believe that we can win,” Austin told a group of journalists after he and Blinken met Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky.

“We believe that we can win, they can win if they have the right equipment, the right support”

The meeting between the two sides lasted three hours and was “very productive and detailed”, according to a Pentagon spokesman, adding that Zelensky was also briefed on a security summit in Germany on Tuesday among Western allies.

Following the talks, Austin said the US hoped the Russian military would be exhausted in Ukraine, preventing it from launching further attacks.

“We want to see Russia weakened to the degree that it can't do the kinds of things that it has done in invading Ukraine,” said Austin.

For months, Zelensky has been begging for heavy weapons — including artillery and fighter



Secretary of Defence Lloyd Austin and Secretary of State Antony Blinken with reporters after returning from their trip to Kyiv and meeting with Ukrainian President Zelensky. — AFP

The US has been a leading donor of finance and weaponry to Ukraine and a key sponsor of sanctions

jets — from Western countries, vowing his forces could turn the tide of the war with more firepower.

The calls appear to be resonating now, with a host of Nato countries pledging to provide a range of heavy weapons and equipment to Ukraine, despite protests from Moscow.

The US has been a leading donor of finance and weaponry to Ukraine and a key sponsor of sanctions targeting Russia, but

had not yet sent any top officials to Kyiv, while several European leaders have travelled there to underscore their support.

“Many countries are going to come forward and provide additional munitions and howitzers. So we're going to push as hard as we can, as quickly as we can, to get them what they need,” Austin later said in reference to Tuesday's summit in Germany.

Austin and Blinken also said US diplomats will begin a gradual return to Ukraine this week and announced \$700 million in additional military aid.

The highly sensitive trip by two of President Joe Biden's top cabinet members came as fighting continued across swathes of Ukraine, casting a long shadow over Easter celebrations in the largely Orthodox country. — AFP

Tips to attain a balanced life



Hyesha Barrett
@coach_hyesha

Hyesha is a certified Master Life Coach and NLP Practitioner based in Muscat

Take a few long deep breaths and open your senses. How do you feel overall — on top of things or a bit submerged? Do you feel centred or a bit wobbly? Do you sometimes feel you are neglecting various important parts of your life while spending valuable time on areas which make you feel bad, sad or guilty?

Here are four signs you may feel out of balance:

1. Your “to do” list grows longer each day, yet you are only really doing the necessary. You aren’t enhancing parts of your life, you are simply keeping up.
2. You are busy being busy. You have so much to do and you are always rushing around, yet not much is being done. You are

- good at making excuses.
3. You feel burned out. You’re constantly tired, have headaches or other physical and emotional signs of stress.
 4. You feel like you are living by someone else’s schedule and have lost direction. Often, our spouses, children, work govern our time and it can pull us in many directions.

In order to feel better and more in control, prioritising your own needs and focusing on yourself will bring you balance.

Our lives are made up of many elements including, but not confined to: family, friends, body (health, fitness and well-being), self (emotions and personal growth), money, work and

A BALANCED LIFE IS WHERE YOU HAVE A HANDLE ON ALL THE VARIOUS AREAS, WHEREBY NONE PULLS YOU TOO HARD IN ONE DIRECTION, AWAY FROM THE OTHERS

enjoyment. When each element gets an equal amount of attention, there is an overall feeling of certitude and triumph. A balanced life is where you have a handle on all the various areas, whereby none are pulling you too hard in one

direction, away from the others.
Here are four tips to attain more balance:

1. Acknowledge and accept that you are where you are, right now. Start improving from today. Compare yourself to no-one else but who you will be a year from now.
2. Manage yourself, not time. At the end of our wonderful existence, we all want to look back on our lives with pride. Always stick to your word. This will make you a more proactive, honourable and reliable person – to others and yourself.
3. Delete what depletes you and enhance what energises you. Subtract all that is not in alignment with your overall

happiness, so if it does not serve you, release it. Add people and things in your life which bring you joy, peace, security, honesty and love.

4. Set boundaries and spend time on yourself. To hold the empowering stance of always being at choice and saying ‘no’ is a critical piece to reducing stress in your life.

When you are able to achieve equilibrium, a feeling of calm, groundedness and motivation will ensue. Be cognizant of the signs your life may be out of balance and take the right steps to regain control. This will create harmony in all areas and there will be an overall feeling of everything in flow.

Shaken by war, Ukrainian artists ‘fight with images’

ALICE HACKMAN

Ukrainian artist Vlodko Kaufman hopes one day he will be able to stop scribbling portraits of troops killed by Russia on utility bills and old tram tickets. “Every day I keep track of what is happening at the front, how many are killed, wounded, missing or captured,” the 65-year-old said. He matches each grim report with a quick biro headshot of the same brooding soldier on whatever paper is lying around.

On a table in his gallery in western Ukraine, Kaufman spread out hundreds of identical images of the combatant in a helmet. The most recent stretched out in rows on furniture assembly instructions, a photocopy of his passport, or a plane ticket.

“This work is a requiem that will be performed as long as the war lasts,” he said.

“I will only stop drawing when the conflict is over, so who knows how many more there will be.”

The artist started his project in 2014, when fighting first flared between Ukraine and Russia-backed separatists in the country’s east.

But since Moscow launched a full-scale attack on February 24, he has been drawing with increasing regularity, he says.

Kaufman is only one of many Ukrainian artists in the relatively sheltered western city of Lviv employing their talent to record the horrors of war, call for the world’s attention, or simply support those affected.

A short walk away, at the top of a winding wooden staircase, 49-year-old Serhiy Savchenko stood in his paint-splotted studio next to one of the few paintings he has managed to create in recent weeks.

“It’s called ‘Green,’” he said, after the military shade that has pervaded daily life. Dozens of tiny abstract figures representing the civilians who have signed up to fight parade across the canvas.

Savchenko said he needed to paint so he could “breathe”, but these days art had taken a backseat. Requests for paintings and exhibitions would have to wait. “We are at the top of Western interest, but we have to use it to get more aid,” he said.

The established artist has transformed his gallery in Poland into a logistics centre to ship in supplies.

He spends much of his day on the phone, and his new profession sometimes involves stuffing tactical boots with medical supplies and chocolate.

“I try to invest all my artistic knowledge, all my contacts, all my time, all my health into the situation,” said Savchenko, one of many improvised go-betweens hooking up donors with Ukrainians in need. “We have to win.” As he spoke, he awaited the wife of a musician friend deployed to Mykolaiv in the embattled south of the country. She was going to pick up two sleeping bags that someone brave would drive down to him. — AFP

Mask ruling underscores split in attitudes

RONI CARYN RABIN
AND EMILY ERDOS

Wearing masks during the pandemic has long been a divisive issue in the United States. And now that a federal judge has tossed out the mask mandate for planes and public transportation, rules in some places have been thrown into chaos. Many were lifted, and a few reimposed.

But even as the changes cause some confusion, Americans’ attitudes towards the restrictions have wavered little in recent months and, in fact, are still impassioned. Some who are already in the habit of masking in public and see Covid-19 cases rising again in parts of the country are angry at losing the protection on which they have relied.

Others are elated by the release from those irritating bands behind their ears.

“Ecstatic” was the way Patrick McDonnell, a 30-year-old architect from the New York City borough of Brooklyn, described his feelings, adding, “Enough is enough.” McDonnell said he found wearing a mask “annoying” and “uncomfortable” and has already stopped masking on the New York City subway, even though face coverings are still required on mass transit in the city.

“Adults should be able to make their own decisions regarding the risks they’re willing to take,” McDonnell said. As for masking for the sake of fellow riders who are older or in poor health, he said that vaccines and treatments are now available for Covid-19, and he should no longer have to alter his behaviour to accommodate others.

“I want to get back to living my life,” he said. “Do I have to factor in everyone in the world around me when I make a decision?”

McDonnell was one of thousands who responded to a New York Times callout asking how readers felt about the court decision lifting the mandate, if they would continue to mask while on planes, buses and trains and if they were reconsidering travel plans. The respondents are not representative of the US population.

Public opinion surveys before the court ruling found mixed views. A Kaiser Family Foundation survey of 1,243 adults conducted in March reported that 8 in 10 adults said they had worn a mask indoors recently,

but only 6 in 10 people wanted mask-wearing in some public spaces to continue to minimise the spread of Covid-19 and to prevent another surge. But the poll also found that respondents were evenly split over whether to extend the mask mandate for public transportation or let it

PEOPLE OF COLOUR, LOWER-INCOME INDIVIDUALS AND THOSE WITH CHRONIC HEALTH PROBLEMS WERE MORE LIKELY TO FAVOUR MASKING POLICIES, AS WERE DEMOCRATS

expire. People of colour, lower-income individuals and those with chronic health problems were more likely to favour masking policies, as were Democrats.

Another survey of 1,085 adults in mid-April by The Associated Press and NORC Center for Public Affairs Research found that 56 per cent of respondents favoured requiring masks on public transportation, while about

one-fourth opposed them and one-fifth had no opinion either way.

The US government is appealing the decision that said the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention did not have the authority to impose the mask mandate for transportation, which was set to expire in early May.

Since Monday’s ruling, some cities have decided to keep their mask mandates for public transit in place, although the rules do not appear to be enforced much. Most states or cities that had imposed some type of mask restrictions for indoor gatherings lifted them a while ago. And some Southern and Western states had forbidden any type of masking rule, so public transportation — via airlines, trains, subways or buses — remained one of the last holdouts beyond hospitals and healthcare sites.

Resistance to masks had been building over time, even in tight quarters such as airplanes and as cases of Omicron subvariants began rising around the country a month or so ago. Although hospitalisations and deaths have not risen in tandem — those indicators previously started increasing several weeks after cases did — the uptick worried some of the readers who responded to the Times. They called the judge’s decision “premature,” “political,” “unwise and irresponsible,” even “unconscionable.”

— The New York Times.



A traveller dons a mask at Union Station in Washington, the day after a federal judge struck down the mask mandate for travel on buses, trains and planes.

Time is the real healer



Lakshmi Kothaneth
@lakshmioman

The writer is a senior journalist and a radio anchor

It is summer again and the interior areas of the Sultanate of Oman are enjoying afternoon showers almost on a daily basis.

The summer rains on their own could be a tourist attraction.

The humidity tends to be on the higher side, but it is all part of local

cloud development of Al Hajar mountain range and so where the Hajar stretches up to one can experience the overcast weather and sense the rain somewhere having a touchdown.

When one stands on the natural balconies of Wakan village, a sight to behold is the flowing clouds bringing in precipitation on time and that is by late afternoon.

On the other hand one should fight against the urge to visit the wadis during that time because this is when the flash floods occur.

I remember driving down Al Jabal Al Akhdhar, it had just begun to drizzle up on the mountains, but by the time we reached the foothills after a few stops here and there the wadis were flowing in full strength.

Everyone waited for the water to rush across and calm down, while some got out of their vehicles to watch the water pass by in its set path there was excitement in the air and moments for photography and videography. That was when passengers in one vehicle looked distressed and impatient. They were from India and had come for a short stay at one of the hotels on Jabal

DEATH IS INEVITABLE AND IS GUARANTEED ONCE BORN. ALL STORMS HAVE TO CALM DOWN WITH TIME. AND WHEN LOST, WHAT WE CAN DO IS TO LOOK BACK ON WHAT OUR PARENTS, OUR FIRST TEACHERS, HAVE TAUGHT US

Akhdhar, and had to rush to catch the flight because tomorrow was another day with full of appointments.

Asked whether they had explored other parts of the Sultanate of Oman and they said, ‘No.’ They had just come to the mountains to enjoy the spa and facilities and go back. And this wasn’t their first visit. Explained to them the dangers of crossing a running wadi and it is best to be safe than try to save few minutes. But this was also the time I realised the different aspects of tourism — leisure tourism.

This summer the rains have been bringing lot of joy as always. But not for a friend of mine. I have a friend who works in Muscat but is from the interior and so she usually times her trip back home during summer period in such a way that she can avoid not just the weekend traffic but also the rain and the wadi flow.

This year though the rain and the wadi flow seem to me as her tears being washed away. She has just lost her dear father and the pain is unbearable and the rain must bring back lot of memories. She finds solace in prayers now. When we lose someone we go through a variety of emotions but when it is a parent we become like an anchor less ship said another friend. It is true — a ship caught in the storm with no direction but circling in swirling water.

Death is inevitable and is guaranteed once born. All storms have to calm down with time. And when lost, what we can do is to look back on what our parents, our first teachers, have taught us.

We will get back our orientation and our compass.



Will the Ukraine war upend the sustainability agenda?

BERTRAND BADRÉ
AND GILLES MOËC

Beyond the immense tragedy which Russian President Vladimir Putin’s war has brought upon Ukraine and its people, we are starting to grasp its potentially devastating consequences for the global sustainability agenda.

Already, the Covid-19 pandemic redirected global attention and resources away from the targets enshrined in the 2015 Paris climate agreement, as countries focused on their immediate public-health needs. Now, Putin’s war is intensifying the economic, social and geopolitical pressures countries face, while deepening divisions among them. This does not bode well for efforts to address the shared challenge of climate change.

To improve our chances of salvaging the sustainability agenda, we must recognise the concerns and imperatives raised by the current crisis and adjust our approach accordingly. That means making our approach to environmental, social and governance (ESG) issues both more holistic and more granular.

For starters, any discussion of energy policy must now account for both the non-negotiable target of reaching net-zero carbon dioxide emissions by 2050 and the need to deliver energy security and ensure social cohesion. If energy policies focus only on security concerns, they are likely to undermine the sustainability agenda.

European efforts to replace Russian gas with liquefied natural gas (LNG) from the United States or Qatar are a case in point. One might argue that this is merely a “quick fix”, aimed at addressing an urgent problem. But such systems can easily become entrenched — for example, if operators demand long-term commitments from governments — which would undermine efforts to decarbonise power generation.

To be sure, the Ukraine war demands urgent action, which might include quick-fix solutions. But such measures must be carefully integrated into a wider strategy, including both a faster shift toward renewable energy — which, in the European Union, may demand the enlargement of the funding capacity of the Next Generation EU pandemic-recovery package — and a reconsideration of nuclear power.

The EU has yet to finalise its position on nuclear power in its sustainable finance taxonomy, which seeks to guide companies, investors and policymakers towards climate-friendly activities and investments. But it is worth noting that the net-zero pathway proposed by the International Energy Agency in its World Energy Outlook 2021 calls for an increase in nuclear power’s share of the energy mix.

This is not a matter only for policymakers to consider; all investors must take a more holistic approach to energy, one that balances the imperative of shifting away from fossil fuels with countries’ geopolitical constraints. Similarly, investors must improve their capacity to assess environmental and social considerations in tandem.

The idea of a “just climate transition” is not new. But it takes on new salience amid Russia’s war on Ukraine, which has driven up global prices not only of energy, but also of food. In fact, by disrupting food supplies from Russia and Ukraine, the war threatens global food security.

TO PREVENT THE SUSTAINABILITY AGENDA FROM BECOMING A CASUALTY OF RUSSIA’S WAR ON UKRAINE, POLICYMAKERS AND CITIZENS MUST RECOGNISE THE IMPERATIVES RAISED BY THE CRISIS AND ADJUST THEIR STRATEGIES ACCORDINGLY

Agriculture and the food industry — energy-intensive sectors that have far-reaching effects on biodiversity — were always going to play a key role in the net-zero transition. But the Ukraine war has shown that any strategy for mitigating these sectors’ environmental impact must also recognise the need to ensure food security, such as through the diversification of supplies.

The need to combine environmental

and social considerations applies to firms, but also — and perhaps more importantly — to governments, for which the financial industry has yet to adopt a sufficiently detailed common methodology. The approach that emerges must account for the effectiveness with which governments manage the distributive effects of policies related to the net-zero transition. Without fair burden-sharing, popular support for climate action will deteriorate.

Another area where ESG strategies will need to become more granular in the wake of the Ukraine war is cryptocurrencies. So far, the focus has been on the environmental impact of crypto “mining”, which is hugely energy-intensive. But the war has highlighted the social and geopolitical dimensions of cryptocurrencies, which Ukraine has used to crowdfund its military, and Russia could use to evade international sanctions.

Finally, investors must take a more nuanced view of the defence industry. It has been customary for ESG investors to exclude such businesses from their portfolios. While there is no reason to start investing in the development and production of controversial weapons, ESG investors might want to reconsider their approach to firms that enhance countries’ capacity to defend themselves against aggression. A more robust set of principles on integrating human rights into investment policies is urgently needed.

In these — and, most likely, many more — ways, the Ukraine war has complicated ESG investing. This could prove disastrous for the sustainability agenda, especially if it is used as an excuse to relegate environmental and social considerations to the back burner. The world’s silence on the latest report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change shows just how acute this risk has become.

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Rescuers clear debris in a damaged building in Odessa, southern Ukraine on Sunday, which was reportedly hit by missile strike. — AFP

sport

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LIVERPOOL OVERCOME EVERTON BATTLE

PRESSURE ON MANCHESTER CITY AT TOP

LIVERPOOL: Liverpool kept the pressure on Manchester City at the top of the Premier League table and pushed local rivals Everton towards relegation with a 2-0 win in the Merseyside derby on Sunday.

The ‘Toffees’ day got off a terrible start even before a ball was kicked at Anfield as Burnley’s 1-0 win over Wolves dumped Everton into the relegation zone.

Second-half goals from Andy Robertson and Divock Origi ensured they remained there despite a spirited display in a feisty encounter.

A 12th consecutive home league win for Liverpool cuts City’s lead at the top of the table back to one point with five games remaining.

“Thank God a football game has two halves”, said Liverpool boss Jurgen Klopp.

“I’m really happy because it isn’t about flying every week, it is about getting results.”

Everton have still not won away from home in the league since August, but they dispelled criticism of being a soft touch away from Goodison Park by showing the fight they will need in the remaining six games to maintain their 68-year stay in the top-flight.

In stark contrast to Manchester United’s capitulation in losing 4-0 at Anfield in midweek, Frank Lampard’s men at least managed to make the Reds earn the three points.

“The important thing is to stick with it. The attitude and the way the lads stuck to their task today was really, really good”, said Lampard, despite his side enjoying just 17 per cent possession.

Everton trail Burnley by two points and could be five adrift of safety by the time they are next in action against Lampard’s old club Chelsea. “We’ve got six games to Burnley’s five left”, he added.

“We had to expect Burnley might win today and worry about our own job. It’s important not to get sucked into that in a negative way.”

A Sadio Mane dipping effort from the edge of the box was the sum total of the threat to the Everton goal in a scrappy first 45 minutes littered with stoppages in play.

Mane was lucky just to see yellow from one melee involving almost all 22 players after Liverpool refused to put the ball out of play with Richarlison down injured.

‘LEGEND’ ORIGI TO RESCUE

Everton’s 32 completed passes in the first half was the fewest of any team in a Premier League game

Premier League		2021	2022
Standings			
	Points	played	
1 Man City	80	33	●●●●●●●●●●
2 Liverpool	79	33	●●●●●●●●●●
3 Chelsea	65	32	●●●●●●●●●●
4 Arsenal	60	33	●●●●●●●●●●
5 Tottenham	58	33	●●●●●●●●●●
6 Man Utd	54	34	●●●●●●●●●●
7 West Ham	52	34	●●●●●●●●●●
8 Wolves	49	33	●●●●●●●●●●
9 Newcastle	43	34	●●●●●●●●●●
10 Leicester	42	32	●●●●●●●●●●
11 Brighton	41	34	●●●●●●●●●●
12 Brentford	40	34	●●●●●●●●●●
13 Southampton	40	34	●●●●●●●●●●
14 Crystal Palace	37	32	●●●●●●●●●●
15 Aston Villa	37	32	●●●●●●●●●●
16 Leeds	33	32	●●●●●●●●●●
17 Burnley	31	33	●●●●●●●●●●
18 Everton	29	32	●●●●●●●●●●
19 Watford	22	33	●●●●●●●●●●
20 Norwich	21	33	●●●●●●●●●●

● Won ● Drawn ● Lost

● Champions League (C1)

● Europa League

● Relegation

AFP

since 2006.

However, they posed the greater threat early in the second half and were made to rue Anthony Gordon’s chance to open the scoring when he dragged his shot across goal with just Alisson Becker to beat.

Gordon also had claims for a penalty appeal waved away to Lampard’s dismay for a push by Joel Matip.

“If that is Mo Salah down the other end, Liverpool get the penalty”, argued Lampard.

With the scores still level on the hour mark, Klopp was forced to turn to his bench with Luis Diaz and Origi, a perennial scourge of Everton in derbies past, thrown on.

The all-important goal, though, came from an unlikely source as Robertson headed in just his second goal of the season from Mohamed Salah’s dinked cross to the back post.

Origi looks set to depart Liverpool at the end of the season after falling further down the pecking order since the January arrival of Diaz.

But the Belgian signed off with his sixth goal in 10 Merseyside derbies when he headed in at the far post five minutes from time.

“He doesn’t always make the squad which is ridiculous, but he is there when we need him every time”, added Klopp.

“He is a world-class striker, he is a legend and will stay a legend forever.” — AFP



Rahul sends winless Mumbai to eighth loss

MUMBAI: Skipper KL Rahul's unbeaten 103 and disciplined bowling helped Lucknow Super Giants to a resounding win over IPL powerhouse Mumbai Indians who remain winless this season.

Rahul's second ton of this edition steered Lucknow to 168 for six, a total their bowlers defended by restricting Mumbai to 132-8 at the Wankhede Stadium.

Rohit Sharma's Mumbai, the richest and most successful side in Indian Premier League history with five titles, slipped to their eighth straight loss to stay bottom of the 10-team table.

"We haven't batted well in the tournament," Rohit said after their 36-run loss that only gives them a slim mathematical chance of making the play-offs.

"You have to ensure one of the batter bats long but we have failed to do that in this tournament. Some of the opposition players have done that and that has hurt us."

The in-form Rahul, who has amassed 368 runs in eight matches, stood out for Lucknow as he put on 58 runs with Manish Pandey and then a 25-ball 47 with Ayush Badoni for the sixth wicket.

Badoni hit 14 off 11 balls to



boost the team total with Rahul reaching his fourth IPL hundred with a six off Riley Meredith, who took two wickets, in the final over.

West Indies medium-pace bowler Kieron Pollard hurt Lucknow's batting with the key wickets of Pandey, for 22, and Krunal Pandya for one in his two overs to return figures of 2-8.

But Mumbai faltered in their chase to lose regular wickets despite a 31-ball 39 from Rohit who fell to Krunal's left-arm spin after five fours and one six.

Part-time spinner Ayush Badoni got Suryakumar Yadav for seven as Mumbai slipped to 67-4 in 11.2 overs.

Tilak Varma and Pollard attempted to raise hopes of a chase in their 57-run partnership that was finally broken by West Indies fast bowler Jason Holder.

Holder took down Varma for 38 and Pollard fell to Krunal in the final over as a glum Mumbai side and their fans at the Wankhede sauntered off. -- AFP

Brief scores: Lucknow Super Giants 168-6 (KL Rahul 103*, Manish Pandey 22; Kieron Pollard 2-8) beat Mumbai Indians 132-8 (Rohit Sharma 39, Tilak Varma 38; Krunal Pandya 3-19) by 36 runs.

First OJA futsal tournament kicks off



WALEED AL JAHWARI
MUSCAT, APRIL 25

The first futsal tournament of the Oman Journalists Association (OJA), has kicked off at the Al Hilal team stadium, affiliated to Bausher Club, in Al Athaiba on Sunday.

The tournament will continue until April 27 with the participation of eight teams distributed into two groups and playing in a league system in one round. The top team in the two groups will advance to the final, while the second-placed team in the two groups will play for the third place.

The first group includes 4 teams — Ministry of Information 'A', Omantel, Tamkeen for Media and the Oman Journalists Association 'B'.

The second group includes Ministry of Information 'B', Oman News Agency, Al Rou'ah newspaper and the Oman Journalists Association 'A'.

The first day matches, which was on Sunday, witnessed strong competition, the results were as follows: The Ministry of



Information 'B' beat Al Rou'ah newspaper 3-1. The Ministry of Information goals were scored by Mohammed al Alawi, Ashraf al Zaidi and Alawi al Maamari.

In the second match, Omantel defeated Tamkeen Media 1-0. In the second half, Hammoud al Habsi scored the winning goal.

In the third match, Oman News Agency edged the Oman

Journalists Association 'A' 2-1.

The ONA goals were scored in the second half by Montaser al Maamari and Mutasim al Busaidy.

In the fourth match, Ministry of Information 'A' blanked Oman Journalists Association 'B' 3-0.

All the goals were netted in the second half through Anas al Shanfari, Saeed al Bahlani and Mohammed al Siyabi.

LOCAL FLAVOUR

Lions XI enter semis of Pran Frooto cricket

MUSCAT: Lions XI beat Ibn Sina Pharmacy by 6 wickets to enter the semifinals of the Pran Frooto Ramadhan cricket tournament organised by Al Hail Cricket Club at Al Hail Ground on Sunday night.

Ibn Sina captain won the toss elected to bat first, they managed to score 58 runs for 4 wickets in 8 overs.

The Lions XI team chased the target in last ball with the loss of four wickets only. Riaz Aoi top-scored with 25 runs and Jose scored 21.

The Lankan Lions will take on Mash Eagles in the quarterfinal of the 22-team knockout tournament.

Ayan International, BHT XI and Friendly Stars have qualified to the pre-quarters. In a pre-quarter clash, Muscat Zalmi will meet Al Fatah 11 on Monday night.



The final match will be held on April 28. The prize distribution will follow the match with chief guest SK Firoz Ahamed, Marketing & Business Development Manager of PRAN Food Oman. The organisers will present winners

and runners-up trophies along with several prizes for individual performances. The tournament is sponsored by PRAN Frooto Drink which is available in all over the Oman market, Cricket Cottage and Baab Al Hail Trading.

Tauseef powers Smile Strikers into PSM final



MUSCAT: Smile Strikers edged Shaheen XI Mawaleh by three runs to enter the final of the Pakistan School Muscat (PSM) Ramadhan cricket tournament on Sunday night.

The first semifinal proved to be a thriller with situation dwindling in a see-saw battle.

Smile Strikers won the toss and elected to bat first. Opener Tauseef started the innings with a bang hitting sixes at his will all round the ground in front of a cheering crowd.

Smile Strikers scored 123 for

4 in 8 overs thanks to a blistering knock of 74 not out by Tauseef (9x6, 3x4). Bilal took 2 wickets for Shaheen XI.

In reply Shaheen XI, too fought like lions. Asim and Farooq attacked the Smile Strike bowlers smashing sixes in every over, the game was in balance as both the batters played heroic knocks.

During dying moments of the game, Shaheen XI seem to be loosing in last 3 overs but Asim and Farooq brought them back to the game with 13 runs required in the last over.

A no-ball with a six by Farooq made the target 5 runs in 3 balls but some outstanding bowling by Smile Strikers brought them victory by just 3 runs.

Tauseef was declared the man of the match, and was presented a trophy by chief guest Qamar Riaz.

The final will be played on April 27 at 9.30 pm. Earlier, Smile Strikers beat Lamha Signs and Asfandiyar XI beat Ayan XI to qualify for the semifinals.

Brief scores: Smile Strikers 123-4 (Tauseef 74) bt Shaheen XI 120-4 (Asim 47, Farooq 42).

Oman all set for third GCC Games in Kuwait

ADIL AL BALUSHI

MUSCAT, APRIL 25

The Oman Olympic Committee (OOC) unveiled the latest preparations of the national teams and athletes to take part in the third GCC Sports Games, which will be held in Kuwait during the period from May 13 to 31.

As many as 135 members competing at 10 different games will represent the Sultanate of Oman at the prestigious gulf event in Kuwait city. Oman's athletes will take part in 10 sports, including shooting, athletics for men, athletics for women, futsal, padel, video games, volleyball, swimming, basketball (3x3) for women and karate.

Taha al Kishry, Secretary-General of OOC said during the press conference that OOC is very keen to organise this meeting ahead of any external event. "This is a introduction for all the national sporting teams with the administration delegation to understand the requirement and necessary arrangement to be taken ahead of teams arrival to Kuwait. We are optimistic that our athletes will accomplish the desired result as the selected teams have been chosen after a close follow-up since last two years through follow-up and coordination committee in OOC," he added.

Ali al Busafi, Chef De Mission of



the Sultanate of Oman delegation, delivered a detailed presentation on the procedures that to be followed in Kuwait. Also, he highlighted on the technical details of the competitions, schedule and venues of the competitions, the requirements for the games before travelling to Kuwait, procedures upon arrival and during the stay. Later, he briefed the teams on the health protocol to prevent

Covid-19 and the health measures to be taken during their stay to ensure the safety of everyone at the event.

MEDICAL TEAM

The Sultanate of Oman's delegation will be accompanied for first time by a full-fledged medical team headed by Majid al Wardi in presence of one of the specialised doctor and physio therapy



specialist. The medical team will provide a full support to all the athletes in case of any emergency and injury.

Majid al Wardi advised all the participated sporting teams to ensure on the medical status of the athletes ahead of travelling to Kuwait. "We are set to provide all our services to our athletes. It is very crucial to know the status of injuries of the athletes ahead

of travelling to Kuwait. Medical decision on player's probability to take part in the games is important and we hope all the national teams consider this point and cooperate with us," he concluded.

NEW POTENTIAL FACES

Dr Motaism Gotouq, technical expert at OOC and member at follow-up and coordination committee appreciated the efforts

of the sports associations and committees. "We are in a very close contact with the sports associations and committees in their preparation plans for 2024 Olympic Games in Paris and 2028 in Los Angeles. Many of the national teams have new potential faces and this is very positive indication to have a strong team in near future."

"Moreover, many of the new athletes registered good record at junior and youth levels. Continuous attendance of these potential faces in the following regional and international events will build up their technical experience. As a follow-up and coordination committee, we will do an analysis study on their participation at any event and provide the necessary recommendations," he ended.

OOC Chairman Shaikh Khalid al Zubair will lead Oman's delegation in Kuwait. Al Zubair will be accompanied by Taha al Kishry, OOC Secretary-General, Dr Mansoor al Touqi, OOC board director, Ali al Busafi, Chef de Mission, Bader Awlad Thani, assistant Chef de Mission, Said al Hosni, administrator, Asaad al hasani, representing Oman Athletes Committee, Majid al Wardi, physiotherapist, Khalil al Busaidy, physiotherapist, Fahad al Zuhaimi, Khalid al Julandani and Faisal al Balushi as OOC media team.

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OIA, subsidiaries to invest RO 6.7 bn over 2022-26

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 25

Businesses operating across Oman Investment Authority (OIA), the integrated sovereign wealth fund of the Sultanate of Oman, have pledged to invest an estimated RO 6.7 billion in a wide portfolio of growth projects over the next five years (2022-2026). Economic returns anticipated from these investments are projected at RO 2.6 billion during this period.

The revelations came during a briefing by OIA and its subsidiaries of their recent performance, as well as their growth strategies over the next five years. The briefing was held in the presence of business leaders and CEOs.

In opening remarks, Abdulsalam bin Mohammed al Murshidi (pictured), President of the Oman Investment Authority, unveiled the new structure of the Authority with its assets split across two new pillars: National Development Portfolio and the Future Generations Fund.

According to Hisham bin Ahmed al Shidi, Director General of Economic Diversification Investments, the Authority seeks to achieve the priorities of Oman's Vision 2040, especially with regard to economic diversification, empowering the private sector, attracting foreign investments and financial sustainability.

He added that the business



plans of the affiliated companies of the Authority are based on strategic principles, most notably the development of the governorates, creating business opportunities for Omani youth, as well as business opportunities for small and medium enterprises and local companies, as well as achieving financial savings.

A presentation by the Authority affixed eight priorities for the National Development Portfolio.

First – driving financial sustainability by enhancing profitability and increasing the contributions of the tourism, agriculture, fisheries and technology sectors in it, and reducing the total debt during the next five years by 32 per cent;

Second – achieving growth in the selected sectors through a total capital expenditure between 2022

and 2026 amounting to RO 6.7 billion with 30 per cent earmarked for new growth projects.

Third – Contributing to the growth of the gross domestic product.

Fourth – Driving investment inflows through the private sectors, notably by exiting from certain existing investments and privatising others – measures expected to bring in an estimated RO 1 billion in 2022.

Fifth – Realising returns from new investments to the tune of RO 2.6 billion over the 2022-2026 period.

Sixth – Contributing to the in-country value added through the launch of the In-Country Value Programme (Qimam) and determining the total expenditure that serves local businesses.

Seventh – Achieving synergy

The business plans of the affiliated companies of the Authority are based on strategic principles, most notably the development of the governorates, creating business opportunities for Omani youth, as well as business opportunities for small and medium enterprises and local companies, as well as achieving financial savings.

and integration between companies across more than 100 heads related to the supply chain, digital transformation and human resources.

Eighth – Implementing governance and transparency through the introduction of the corporate governance charter associated with the Oman Investment Authority, issuing more than 10 policies and guidelines, and is currently working on preparing a set of policies such as treasury, business plans, environmental and social governance, and performance disclosure.

Eleven subsidiaries of the Authority reviewed their performance over the past years, and their plans during the current year 2022, in addition to their future projects until 2026.

Assets of Oman Investment Authority split among two pillars

NEW FOCUS: National Development Portfolio and Future Generations Fund created to achieve strategic goals



Oman News Agency (ONA), OIA Chairman Abdulsalam al Murshidi said the Future Generations Portfolio will consist of foreign assets and some local assets in various instruments including public and private markets, in addition to real estate. The underlying aim is to achieve the greatest returns for future generations, he noted.

The National Development Portfolio, on the other hand, is responsible for managing local assets and more than 160 Omani companies, Al Murshidi stated. This pillar of the Authority's assets will contribute to the growth and development of the economy, in addition to supporting the state's general budget through dividends, privatisation proceeds and treasury management.

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, APRIL 25

Oman Investment Authority (OIA), the integrated sovereign wealth fund of the Sultanate of Oman, has announced the division of its sizable portfolio of local and international investments into two key pillars: National Development Portfolio and Future Generations Fund. The announcement came in a post on the entity's twitter handle on Monday.

The goal, it noted, is to “contribute to national economic growth, support the state's budget and achieve maximum returns for future generations”.

Later, in a statement to

Oman Food to invest RO 366m in 23 new ventures in next 5 years

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 25

The Oman Food Investment Holding Company (OFIC), the food investment and development arm of the Omani government, says it plans to set up 23 new food related ventures at a cost of around RO 366 million over the next five years (2022-2026).

Presenting its outlook at the OIA briefing on Monday, the Group CEO Eng Saleh al Shanfari said the new investments will seek to unlock the food sector's potential.

Investments are also planned in tourism agreement, contract farming and other initiatives that promote job creation. Once completed, these projects are expected to create 4,087 new jobs, he said.

In 2022 alone, OFIC has plans to set up six projects at a cost of RO 71 million. They pertain to the establishment of vegetable and fruit collection centres, animal feed production, cotton farming, expansion of the Mazoon Dairy project, completion of the Al Namaa Poultry Project and the Agriculture Project Tourist.

Last year, Group investments totalled RO 117.6 million, with as many as 15 projects in various stages of development. Seven of these ventures – spanning dairy, red meat, fodder and grain – are in operation.



BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 25

Oman Water and Wastewater Services Company (OWWSC) announced the operationalisation of the water transmission line that links the Sohar Water Desalination Plant and Al Dhahirah Governorate Ibrahim bin Hamed al Hasani, Project Senior Manager, stated that the total cost of this project is RO 150 million.

“The project cost included the interconnection of the water transmission line to the Sohar Desalination plant with a total length of 230 kilometres.

The project also includes the construction of 15 reservoirs of a total storage capacity of 451,000 cubic metres located in the Wilayats of Suhar, Ibri and Dhank. In addition, the project consists of four pumping stations with a maximum capacity that can reach 144,000 cubic metres



per day.” Also as part of the project, a parallel water line has been constructed alongside the pipeline running from Suhar to Al Buraimi Governorate, he said. The new route will be used to meet the future water needs of Al Buraimi Governorate.

Huawei Consumer BG enters enterprise market

MUSCAT: Huawei Consumer BG will now enter the enterprise market officially, serving government and enterprise customers, as well as individual consumers. The announcement was made by Richard Yu, Huawei's Executive Director, Consumer BG CEO and Intelligent Automotive Solution BU CEO, at the Huawei Business Product Launch Event.

Yu noted that Huawei would use its hardware and software ecosystems as dual pillars, to support a growing range of versatile office products that work seamlessly with a wide range of smart devices, including laptops, desktops, monitors, tablets, accessories, Visions, and wearables. These new office solutions will address the following key domains: government, education, health care, manufacturing, transportation, finance and energy.

With fast-changing business requirements, market conditions, the need for nimble office solutions has never been greater.



Smart workplaces and equipment have begun to replace traditional office products, which tended to boast impressive specs and control costs at the expense of versatility and user experience.

Huawei Consumer BG hopes to endow office and business products with newly smart and innovative capabilities, using its

success in the consumer domain as a springboard for new-paradigm solutions.

Huawei business products will meet customer requirements for performance and cost-effectiveness, while doubling down on a better and smarter user experience, based on next-level digital technology.

As Yu explained at the launch event: "Our consumer-oriented products have drawn widespread acclaim over the past decade, due largely to their groundbreaking user experience. Huawei will incorporate this premium consumer experience into its business products, following three key principles: quality,

intelligence, and reliability."

As a new force in the enterprise equipment market, Huawei comes with a concept and vision that promise to revolutionise the industry.

Huawei believes that the enterprise equipment is entering an era that will be dominated by Cloud and AI technologies, following 1.0 and 2.0 eras dominated by desktops and multi-device convergence respectively.

Today's products emphasise performance, intelligence, full connectivity, and new paradigms centred around all-purpose convergence and intelligent interactions.

At this crossroads in the enterprise market, characterised by widespread acceptance of versatile smart solutions, Huawei hopes to leverage its consumer electronics know-how to add new value and innovation, with the ultimate goal of building a high-quality, smart, and reliable platform to serve all government and enterprise customer needs.

Huawei has launched a full set of business products, solutions, and service platforms, including MateBook B series for laptops, MateStation B series for desktops, Display B series for monitors, MatePad C series for tablets, B series for printers, B series for Visions, and B series for wearables, which make this vision access to a wide range of customers.

Huawei Consumer BG has unveiled a number of business solutions tailored to governments and small-, medium-, and large-sized enterprises, including paperless government office, smart classroom, computer classroom, health and safety management for miners, health management for drivers, and insurance interaction.

The next phase will see Huawei Consumer BG invest more organisational resources in the business field, to help governments and large-scale enterprises fully digitalise their operations, and help small- and medium-sized enterprises to improve quality and efficiency across the board.

NBO extends reach of market leading electronic remittance services

MUSCAT: As part of its ongoing pledge to open new communication channels with its customers, National Bank of Oman (NBO) recently promoted its multi-lingual electronic remittance services. In partnership with Mwasalat, the leading public transport company in Oman, NBO was able to directly reach potential and existing customers by promoting the services available through the bank's award-winning mobile app.

Delivered in eight different languages for five hours each day during peak times, the campaign



highlighted NBO's ultra-competitive rate for remittance services and the easy process for transferring money to countries worldwide.

Its success was evident as an average of five accounts registered or downloaded the NBO Mobile App each day of the campaign.

Tariq Atiq, Chief Retail and Digital Banking Officer at NBO, said, "We are always mindful of the needs of our customers and assist them as they support their loved ones around the world. Our transfer rate is one of the most competitive in Oman's entire financial sector and the convenience of being able to transfer funds easily through the app, which is available in a variety of different languages, will be invaluable to our customers as the world emerges from a very difficult period for many people living in Oman."

Win a trip for Champions League finals in Paris with Ooredoo

MUSCAT: Calling all Champions League fans! Ooredoo's 'Hello World' campaign is giving football enthusiasts the chance of a lifetime, to win tickets to the upcoming Champions League finals match.

Taking place on May 28, 2022, the draw is open to all Home Internet, Hala prepaid and Shahry post-paid customers. Customers simply need to subscribe to a plan or recharge to enter the draw to win an exclusive trip to watch the game, including match tickets, air travel and accommodation for the winner and a friend.



As the Official Middle East & Africa Telecommunications partner for the Fifa World Cup Qatar 2022, Ooredoo has been holding a series of raffle draws, offering tickets to some of the biggest matches around Europe.

Now the final is waiting for you in Paris! To enter the draw, Home Internet customers need

to activate a new connection or upgrade their existing plan. Hala customers simply need to activate a new SIM or recharge.

Plus, more recharges mean more chances of winning. Meanwhile, Shahry customers, both new subscribers or those upgrading their plans, will automatically be entered into the draw. Winners are being announced on Ooredoo's social media channels.

Don't miss out, grab the chance today to be part of the game! To find out more visit www.ooredoo.om.

Toyota Corolla now available with biggest excitement benefits



MUSCAT: The popular Toyota Corolla is now available with the biggest excitement benefits including 3 years / 30,000 kms service (whichever is earlier) and 1 year insurance (or cash gift in lieu of insurance RO 175).

The Corolla Hybrid is available with 8 years / 80,000 kms service (whichever is earlier) and 1 year insurance (or cash gift in lieu of insurance RO 175).

The campaign is valid until May 19, 2022. (Prospective buyers may be advised that the benefits vary between model variants, model year

and manufacturing year.

Terms & Conditions apply. Visit the showroom for exact details.

Pictures and colours shown may differ from actual specifications. For the latest press releases, test drive requests and more, please visit www.toyotaoman.com, www.youtube.com/toyotaoman, www.facebook.com/toyotaoman and instagram.com/toyotaomanofficial/. For any further details & to ascertain availability of stocks, please visit your nearest Toyota showroom.

Lulu announces winners of 'Shop and Win' 5th and 6th draws

MUSCAT: With the Shop and Win promotion continuing to receive amazing response from customers, Lulu has now announced the fifth and sixth set of winners of the campaign.

The first-of-its-kind promotion is a valuable opportunity for its customers to take home cash prizes worth RO 100,000 during the Holy month of Ramadhan and the following festive season of Eid.

The promotion kicked off on March 10 and will continue till May 7, 2022. The winners of the two draws were selected through the e-Raffle draw held on Wednesday, the April 13 at the Lulu Hypermarket in the Mall of Muscat and April 20, 2022 at Lulu Hypermarket, Nizwa.

Fayyas FM & Mohamed won the cash prize of RO 5,000 and Mahameed Rohan & Hayel took home RO 750 each. Mahmood Said, Said Salih, Hassan Nashab, Attaulla, Abdullah Ali al Farsi & Badar al Yahyai won RO 500 each while 20 winners won RO 200 and 40 others won RO 100 each.

To be part of the promotion, customers have to spend RO 10



at any Lulu stores and register for the e-Raffle draws. The promotion will give 281 customers the opportunity to win amazing cash prizes. There will be a grand prize of RO 10,000 cash as well as weekly cash prizes of RO 5,000, RO 750, RO 500, RO 200 and RO 100.

Speaking about the promotion, Shabeer K A, Regional Director - Lulu Hypermarkets Oman stated "I would like to extend my heartiest congratulations to all

the winners of the fifth and sixth draws. The positive feedback we have received from customers has been very encouraging."

"We take every step to engage with our customers on a regular basis. The month of sharing and caring has always inspired us to connect with our customers and offer them a very special experience, year after year.

This year, we are adding to the excitement by giving them a great chance to win cash prizes and

other offers that promise customer satisfaction and a greater value for money," he added.

Along with the Shop & Win promotion Lulu has ramped up special deals and offers, across all categories, to help everyone prepare for Ramadhan and Eid celebrations in the best possible manner. There will also be lots of daily deals on the online shopping app, which will make shopping a more convenient experience for customers.



Asyad Group eyes strong growth

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 25

Asyad Group, part of Oman Investment Authority, says it earned a cumulative net profit of RO 159 million during 2016 – 2021 on the back of improvements in its financial performance.

Revenues climbed 55 per cent during this period, it announced in a presentation during Sunday's briefing by OIA subsidiaries. Helping augment its performance was the incorporation of Oman Dry-dock.

Additional profitable businesses set up by the Group include Asyad Express, Asyad Container Transport, Asyad Ports, Khazaen Economic City and the Khazaen Dry Port – the country's first inland port.

Over the next five years (2022 – 2026), the Group is eyeing growth of 26 per cent, while also diversifying its asset portfolio through expansions in other logistic sectors such as freight and discharging, cold chains and express delivery services.



Among its important achievements are the expansion of the shipping network for regional container transport, integration of logistics and cold chain projects, implementation of the floating dry dock project, small-scale shipbuilding (tug

and support boats), signing of public service agreements, privatisation of transportation and the development / operation / management of regional ports.

Additionally, Asyad Group has been assigned the role to oversee the competitive tender for the

award of a concession for the management and operation of the container berth at Duqm Port to a global operator.

It is also adding to the competitive advantages of the Salalah region through its port and airport integration initiative.

ITHCA to exit stakes in some investments

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 25

The Oman Communications and Information Technology Group (ITHCA) – part of Oman Investment Authority (OIA) – says it has identified 11 priority areas that are highly promising for investment in the Sultanate of Oman with total economic returns estimated at \$370 million by 2025.

A representative speaking at Sunday's briefing said ITHCA aims to act as a strategic investment arm for the Authority in the ICT sector, focusing on opportunities that will accelerate market growth, and primarily in areas that have not been exploited by the private sector.

ITHCA's investments are focused on the following four drivers: Enhancement, Value Harnessing, Transformation and Optimisation. Current investments total RO 210.5 million riyals and expected revenues are RO 220 million in the current five-year plan. Profits are estimated at RO 30 million.

The group also plans to generate more market value by exiting and selling some stakes in some of its existing investments and using the proceeds to invest in emerging technologies.



Germany to hike 2022 inflation forecast to 6.1%

BERLIN: The German government is set to hike its inflation forecast for this year to 6.1 per cent due to the impact of the war in Ukraine, up from 3.3 per cent it had forecast in January. Berlin, which is due to present its spring economic forecasts on Wednesday, sees consumer price growth easing to 2.8 per cent in 2023.

German annual inflation rose to its highest level in more than 40 years in March as prices of natural gas and oil products soared following Russia's attack on Ukraine and gas and electricity bills for German households signing new contracts hit a record high last month.

Germany's ruling coalition announced relief measures last month worth roughly 16 billion euro (\$17.2 billion) to help consumers cope with soaring energy costs and to reduce dependence on Russian gas. April inflation data is due to be published on Thursday.

The German government's spring forecasts see consumer spending jumping by 9.7 per cent this year, 0.6 percentage points more than forecast in January, the document showed. In 2023, consumer spending will grow more slowly at a rate of 4.8 per cent.

Berlin meanwhile sees the savings rate shrinking to 10.9 per

cent from 15.0 per cent last year.

A survey showed last week that one in 10 consumers in Germany were dipping into their savings to shoulder rising costs. Especially younger consumers aged 25 to 34 were more likely to say they were saving less or had taken out loans to help pay their bills.

The sharp rise in energy prices is also hitting companies. An Ifo survey published on Monday showed that nearly half of German companies planned to reduce investments due to rising energy costs.

German business morale unexpectedly rose slightly in April, following a big drop in March, as companies were less pessimistic after the economy appeared resilient following the initial shock of the war in Ukraine.

However, the government's spring forecasts show that the unemployment rate is expected to decline to 5.0 per cent this year from 5.7 per cent in 2021 and to remain stable next year.

The government is also set to cut on Wednesday its growth expectations for Europe's biggest economy for 2022 to 2.2 per cent from 3.6 per cent, a source said on Friday. Berlin sees growth picking up slightly to 2.5 per cent in 2023, the source had said.

— Reuters



Customers buy pasta at a grocery store in Duesseldorf, Germany. — Reuters

World stock markets plunge on China lockdowns, rate hike fears



A man wearing a face mask is seen inside Shanghai Stock Exchange. — AFP

LONDON: Stock markets and oil prices sank on Monday on growing concern that lockdowns in China aimed at fighting a worsening Covid outbreak could further harm a world economy battling decades-high inflation.

The losses extended last week's sell-off triggered by Federal Reserve boss Jerome Powell indicating that the US central bank would hike interest rates by half a percentage point next month and possibly several times more this year.

That has lent strong support to the dollar, which is benefiting also from its traditional haven status. Dollar-denominated oil prices at one point tumbled more than five per cent on Monday.

Among the world's major stock markets, Shanghai led the losses, closing down more than five per cent. In Europe, Paris shed 2.2 per cent in afternoon deals.

French President Emmanuel Macron is set to begin efforts to unite a deeply divided nation after winning re-election on Sunday

Oil prices sink more than 5 per cent on demand fears

LONDON: World oil prices sank more than five per cent on Monday on fears that China's worsening Covid outbreak could slam demand from the major energy consumer. Europe's benchmark contract Brent North Sea crude fell as low as \$101.20 per barrel and US WTI oil dropped to \$96.85.

China is struggling to get a grip on a renewed Covid outbreak that has forced Shanghai — the country's biggest city — into lockdown and dealt a blow to energy demand. Global markets have also been stung by the prospect of a sharp increase in US interest rates.

"Market moods have deteriorated as the Covid



situation in China is not improving and the media is hinting that Beijing could be next in line for a lockdown after Shanghai and several other major cities," said XTB analyst Walid Koudmani.

"As China is the second largest economy in the world, the situation ... has a big impact on commodity markets with oil and industrial metals dropping significantly." — AFP

Among the world's major stock markets, Shanghai led the losses, closing down more than five per cent. In Europe, Paris shed 2.2 per cent in afternoon deals.

in a battle against rival Marine Le Pen that saw the far right come its closest to taking power. The euro and yuan slid against the dollar, while sterling lost one per cent to hit a 19-month low at \$1.2705.

"The markets have fallen out of bed... in a big way," noted AJ Bell investment director Russ Mould. "The prospect of further restrictions in China could lead to a poisonous mix of further inflationary pressure, as supply chains in the so-called 'factory of the world' get disrupted, and weaker economic growth."

Officials in finance hub Shanghai reported 51 deaths on Monday, its highest daily toll despite weeks of strict containment measures, while Beijing warned of a "grim" situation as infections rise.

Investors were already fleeing risk assets as they become worried that the Fed tightening will knock the pandemic economic recovery off course and dent companies' bottom line. "The surge in energy, as well as food prices, has started to see consumers prioritise where they spend their money," noted Michael Hewson, chief market analyst at CMC Markets UK.

Metals prices also slumped on Monday, as did share prices of energy and mining companies. Elsewhere in Asia, Sri Lanka's stock market halted trading after a nearly 13 per cent plunge as the island nation's beleaguered government is under pressure to resign over a crippling economic crisis. — AFP

The tech bubble that never burst

The Tech Bubble That Won't Burst

Every time the start-up world has a growth spurt, investors and media warn of impending doom.

By ERIN GRIFFITH and TAYLOR JOHNSTON

Venture capitalists are sounding alarms. At conferences, they buzz about falling valuations for start-ups. On CNBC, they bemoan the sudden lack of initial public offerings. On Twitter, they warn of a coming downturn. It is a familiar refrain. For the past decade, such warnings have cropped up

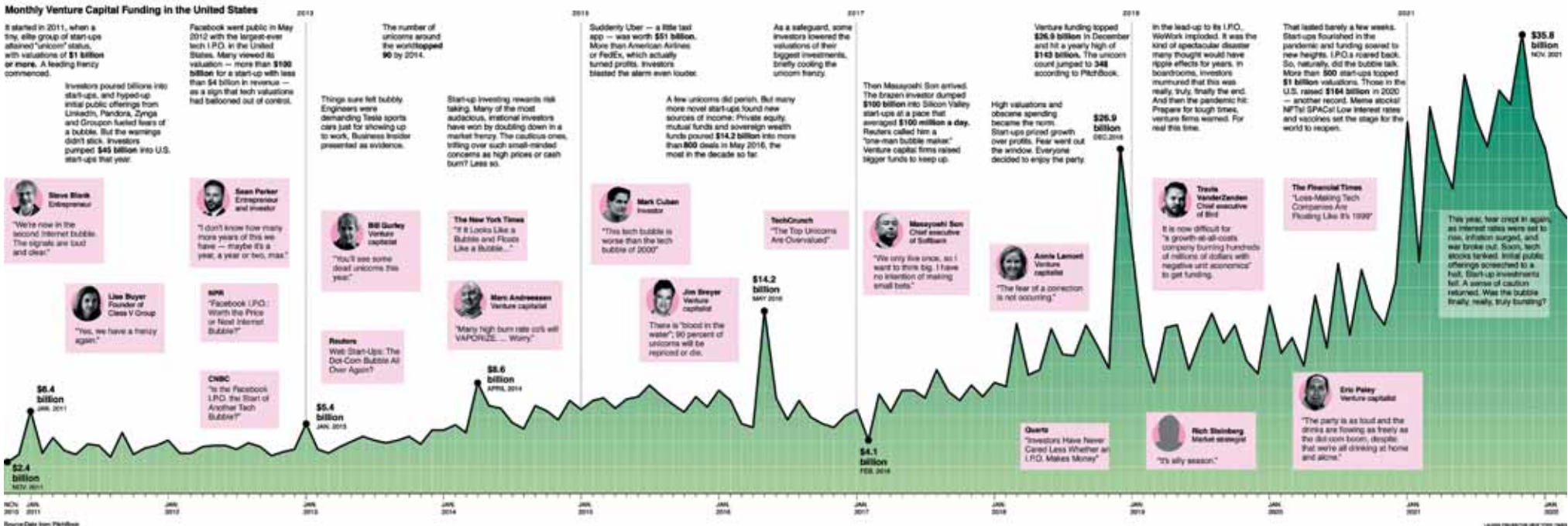
repeatedly. The industry is in another bubble, investors and commentators caution, conjuring the 1999 dot-com era and the dramatic collapse and recession that followed. Jobs disappeared, fortunes vaporized and reputations were tarnished. The message since has carried those scars: The boom times are ending. Buckle in for a rough ride. Yet every time, more money has flooded into start-ups. Instead of a collapse, things just get bubblier.

Today's warnings are different from those of the past decade. Investors tiptoe around the word "bubble," referring instead to a "recalibration," a "pullback" or even a gentle "softening." The people who once called for caution grew tired of being wrong, and their audiences became numb to the warnings. Every time the alarm bells ring, more money poured into start-ups. "This time is different" used to be a muted joke among investors; now people

believe it. Tech is too enmeshed in our lives, the thinking goes, and the dot-com bubble is too far in the rear view. This decade-long start-up boom has surged in the face of so many scares, each time amassing even more money and power. Maybe it really is different this time. Some investors believe market euphoria is a good — even necessary — thing for progress. Without all that attention and excitement, how can a start-up founder

persuade workers and investors to help turn a crazy moonshot idea into reality? Sure, most of the people who flock to a bubble are in it for the money. And yes, things can get messy. But underneath, it's all moving forward. Out of the dot-com ashes, techies like to remind us, grew Amazon, PayPal and eBay. Even as the biggest factor driving investors to high-growth start-ups over the past decade — low interest rates — begins

to change, even as economists worry about an impending recession and even as start-ups lower their valuations or suddenly run out of cash, few today are predicting a total collapse. The message since has carried those scars: The boom times are ending. Buckle in for a rough ride. Yet every time, more money has flooded into startups. Instead of a collapse, things got bubblier. It started in 2011, when a tiny, elite group of startups attained "unicorn" status, with valuations of \$1 billion or more. A leading frenzy commenced.



Every time the start-up world has a growth spurt, investors and media warn of impending doom. Double-track timeline of venture capital funding from 2011-present.

ERIN GRIFFITH AND TAYLOR JOHNSTON

The venture capitalists are sounding the alarm. At conferences, they buzz about falling valuations for startups. On CNBC, they bemoan the sudden lack of initial public offerings. On Twitter, they warn of a coming downturn.

It is a familiar refrain. For the past decade, such warnings have cropped up repeatedly in startup land. The industry is in another bubble, investors and commentators caution, conjuring the 1999 dot-com era and the dramatic collapse and recession that followed. Jobs disappeared, fortunes vaporised and reputations were tarnished.

The message since has carried those scars: The boom times are ending. Buckle in for a rough ride. Yet every time, more money has flooded into startups. Instead of a collapse, things got bubblier. It started in 2011, when a tiny, elite group of startups attained “unicorn” status, with valuations of \$1 billion or more.

Investors poured billions into startups each month, and hyped-up initial public offerings from LinkedIn, Pandora, Zynga and Groupon fuelled fears of a bubble.

Facebook went public in May 2012 with the largest-ever tech IPO in the United States. Many viewed its valuation — more than \$100 billion for a startup with less than \$4 billion in revenue — as a sign that tech valuations had ballooned out of control.

The bubble they had warned of never burst.

Things sure felt bubbly. Engineers were demanding Tesla sports cars just for showing up to work, Business Insider presented as evidence.

By 2014, the number of unicorns around the world topped 90.

The warnings were not all wrong — a few unicorns did perish. (Remember Fab.com and Jawbone?) But for every flameout, there were many more new ideas to back. New sources of capital — including private equity, mutual funds and sovereign wealth funds — began chasing unicorn investments. In May 2016, they poured \$14.2 billion into more than 800 deals, the highest amount of the decade so far.

Just in case the warnings were right, some investors lowered the valuations of their biggest investments, briefly cooling the unicorn frenzy. There was talk of onerous funding terms and startup lay-offs.

Then Masayoshi Son, SoftBank CEO, arrived. The brazen investor dumped \$100 billion into Silicon Valley startups — dwarfing the rest of the venture capital market — at a pace that averaged \$100 million a day. Reuters called him a “one-man bubble maker.” Executives joked nervously about Son’s “capital cannon.” Venture capital firms raised bigger funds to keep up.

High valuations and obscene spending became the norm. Startups prized growth over profits. Investors gave up on their bubble talk. Fear went out the window. Everyone decided to enjoy the party.

Venture funding soared, topping \$26.9 billion in December and hitting

a new yearly high of \$143 billion. The unicorn count jumped to 348, according to PitchBook, which tracks the venture industry.

In the lead-up to its IPO, WeWork imploded. It was the kind of spectacular, embarrassing, humbling disaster that many thought would have ripple effects for years to come.

In boardrooms, investors murmured that this was really, truly, finally the end. On conference stages, startup founders promised to “pivot to profits.” Then the pandemic hit. Prepare for tough times ahead, venture firms declared. For real this time.

That lasted barely a few weeks. Startups flourished in the pandemic and funding soared to new heights. IPOs roared back. So, naturally, did the bubble talk.

More than 500 startups around the world topped \$1 billion valuations. Those in the US raised \$164 billion in 2020, setting yet another record.

Meme stocks! Crypto! NFTs! SPACs! The Federal Reserve was printing money, interest rates were low, vaccines were available, and the world was set to reopen. By 2021, economists began predicting a new Roaring ‘20s led by tech prosperity.

Yeah, it’s probably a bubble, investors shrugged. But YOLO, amirite? This year, fear crept in again, as interest rates were set to rise, inflation surged, and war broke out. Soon, tech stocks tanked. Initial public offerings screeched to a halt. Startup investments fell.

A sense of caution returned. Was the bubble finally, really, truly bursting? Today’s warnings are different from those

of the last decade. Investors tiptoe around the word “bubble,” referring instead to a “recalibration,” a “pullback” or even a gentle “softening.” The people who once called for caution grew tired of being wrong, and their audiences became numb to the warnings. Every time the alarm bells rang, more money poured into startups.

“This time is different” used to be a morbid joke among investors; now people believe it. Tech is too enmeshed in our lives, the thinking goes and the dot-com bubble is too far in the rear view. This decade-long startup boom has surged in the face of so many scares, each time amassing even more money and power. Maybe it really is different this time.

Some investors believe market euphorias are a good — even necessary — thing for progress. Without all that attention and excitement, how can a startup founder convince workers and investors to help turn their crazy moonshot ideas into reality? Sure, most of the people who flock to a bubble are in it for the money. And yes, things can get messy. But underneath, it’s all moving forward. Out of the dot-com ashes, techies like to remind us, grew Amazon, PayPal and eBay.

Even as the biggest factor driving investors to high-growth startups over the last decade — low interest rates — begin to change, even as economists worry about an impending recession and even as startups lower their valuations or suddenly run out of cash, few today are predicting a total collapse.

A decade of talking about a bubble that never burst will do that.

The message since has carried those scars: The boom times are ending. Buckle in for a rough ride. Yet every time, more money has flooded into startups. Instead of a collapse, things got bubblier. It started in 2011, when a tiny, elite group of startups attained “unicorn” status, with valuations of \$1 billion or more.

Why everyone wants to buy Twitter

Elon Musk is the latest rich guy to have fallen for the trap of Twitter.

For nearly its entire 16-year life, Twitter has had the reputation that it hasn’t fulfilled its potential and could be so much more. Twitter’s conundrum is that it’s widely known but not that widely used, financially successful but not wildly so, sometimes competently managed but also chaotic, and influential in a way that is exciting but also terrifying.

The perpetual belief that Twitter is one big idea away from being amazing has made many people think about buying the company to make it shine, but hardly anyone wants to actually own it.

Whether you’re hooked on Twitter or among the world’s majority that stays off the app, what happens to this company matters. Twitter is a digital gathering place that world leaders increasingly fear and want to control, and where elected officials, activists, journalists and executives like Musk spread their messages and settle scores.

Musk made a half-baked proposal last week to buy Twitter that effectively put a for-sale sign on the company. What happens next is anyone’s guess.

Maybe Musk will wind up owning Twitter, if he stays interested long enough to find moneybags to help him afford his offer of about \$43 billion. Perhaps a different billionaire, tech company or financial investor will buy it instead. Maybe no one buys Twitter.

Whether you’re hooked on Twitter or among the world’s majority that stays off the app, what happens to this company matters. Twitter is a digital gathering place that world leaders increasingly fear and want to control, and where elected officials, activists, journalists and executives like Musk spread their messages and settle scores.

Living with an uncertain future is nothing new for Twitter. You could spend days tallying the number of times that companies have considered buying the social media site, or that there were rumors about a possible sale.

Twitter has been perpetually for sale partly for technical reasons. Unlike some tech and media companies including Google, Facebook and The New York Times, Twitter doesn’t have a special type of stock that empowers its founders to all but veto a sale.

But there is also the perennial belief that Twitter should be something other than what it is. There’s no shortage of people who believe that all Twitter needs is some fix — an edit function, different management, a new type of technology backbone, a shift of advertising strategy, lower expenses and app tweaks, or more lax rules of expression, as Musk wants.

Politicians and other influential people, including Musk, regularly complain that Twitter is censoring too much or too little. And investors in Twitter perpetually say that the company doesn’t make enough money.

If I could boil that down to a sentence, it’s that Twitter is not Facebook, which has 23 times the annual revenue of Twitter and nearly 2 billion daily users to Twitter’s 217 million. (The companies count users slightly differently, but you get the point.)

“The cultural influence of Twitter is just as great as

Facebook and yet it’s one-twentieth of the size,” said Mark Mahaney, who has followed Twitter for years as an investment analyst now with Evercore ISI. That makes people ask, “What is wrong with Twitter?” he said.

And yet the people and companies who have looked closely at buying Twitter have mostly been scared off.

In 2016, Disney backed off its flirtation with buying it partly because executives worried about trashing the company’s family friendly image if it owned an unruly social media app.

The Salesforce boss, Marc Benioff, changed his mind when Salesforce’s investors hated the idea of a business software company owning Twitter.

The government authorities most likely wouldn’t permit companies that would seem to be a good fit with Twitter, including Google and Facebook, to buy it because of antitrust concerns.

Twitter is too big, but also not big enough. It is good, but also not good enough. It is not Facebook, which makes people want to buy it but also not want to. Twitter could give any owner influence but also unwanted heat.

Musk might be one of the few people in the world who is brave (or foolish) enough to want to own Twitter and actually do it.

Maybe Musk is the one who can finally unleash Twitter’s potential. Or maybe he’ll just wind up on the long list of people who once believed that they could.

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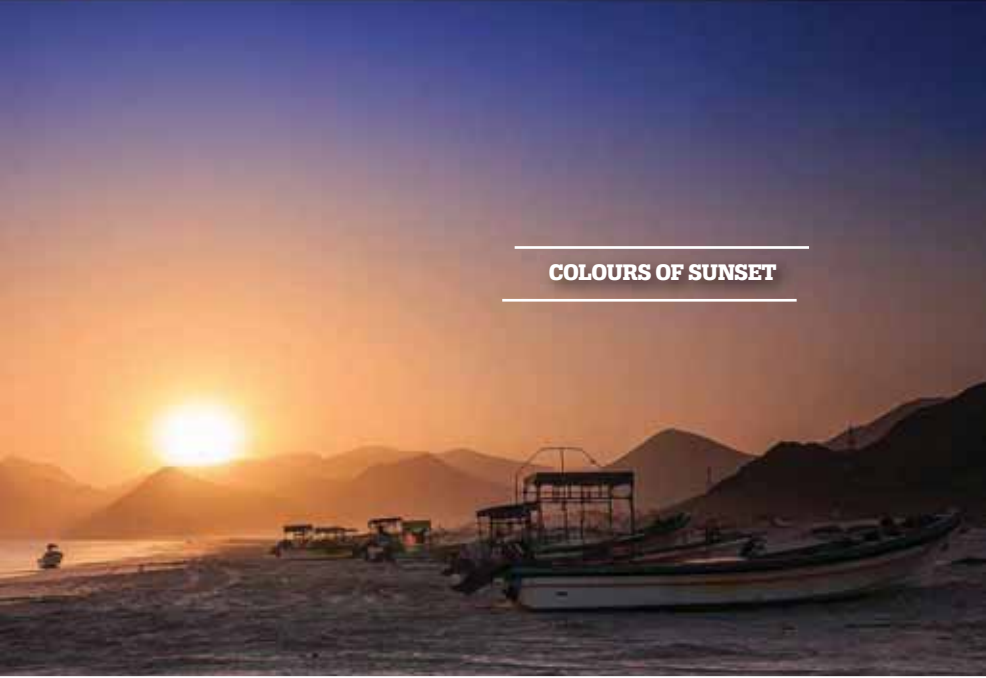
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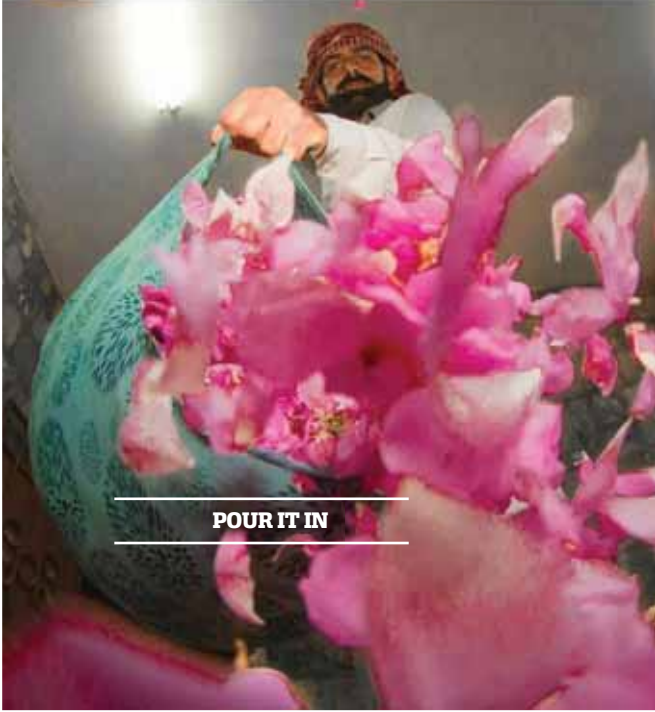


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Around the World

DISCOVERY

Dingoes aren't just feral dogs, says study



DINGOES MIGHT look like regular mutts, but in fact they're genetically in between wolves and dogs, according to a new study published Friday in *Science Advances*. The species -- revered in Aboriginal culture but the bane of modern ranchers -- has been Australia's top predator since the extinction of Tasmanian tigers last century. However, "the evolutionary position of the dingo has been debated for a substantial period of time," co-author Bill Ballard of La Trobe University and the University of Melbourne told AFP.

Some hold that the lean, tan-colored canines, brought to the continent 5,000 to 8,500 years ago, are simply another form of domestic dog, though one which is far harder to tame or keep as a pet. Though not normally aggressive, they aren't especially interested in humans. The new research -- a global collaboration involving 26 authors from 10 countries -- compared the genome of a desert dingo named Sandy, who was rescued in 2014 along with her siblings -- to those of five domestic dog breeds and the Greenland wolf.

They found the dingo's genome was structurally distinct from the boxer, German shepherd, basenji, Great Dane and Labrador retriever.

But she still shared more similarity with the domestic dogs than with the Greenland wolf. Among the breeds, Sandy was closer to the German shepherd than the rest.

"Sandy the desert dingo is intermediate between the wolf and the domestic dogs," concluded Ballard. To be even more sure, the team is sequencing the genome belonging to an alpine dingo, found in the Australian Alps in the country's east.

- ANCIENT HUMAN MOVEMENTS -

The finding can have several applications. For one, the dingo genome can be used as an ancient reference book to help identify which genes are responsible for genetic disease in modern dogs, rather than trying to compare between inbred dog breeds.

Knowing more about dingo evolution can also illuminate the history of the ancient people who brought them across the sea from Southeast Asia.

"At some stage they had to cross some water with some traveling peoples," said Ballard. "Whether they're First Nation Australians or whether they're people that interacted with First Nation Australians, we don't know."

The team hopes to get a clearer sense of the timeline and start to answer other questions like whether it was a single migration or multiple, once they sequence the alpine dingo. The study also set out to test the differences in how dingoes metabolize nutrients compared to domestic breeds, by running a controlled diet study on a number of dingoes and German shepherds.

Dingoes, like wolves, have only one copy of a gene that creates pancreatic amylase, a protein that helps dogs live on starchy diets, which humans have thrived on especially in the past 10,000 years.

German shepherds have eight copies of the gene. After receiving the same water and rice-rich food for 10 days, the German shepherds' scat was found to contain three bacteria families that helped them in breaking down starch, confirming the researchers' predictions.

Like the wolf in North America, dingoes are deeply polarizing: they are romanticized by city dwellers and feature prominently in Indigenous songs and stories, but are hated by farmers for allegedly killing livestock.

According to Ballard, however, dingoes evolved to prey on small marsupials and aren't easily able to digest high-fat foods -- thus lambs are more likely being hunted by feral dogs or hybrids.

He hopes to test the prediction, and perhaps exonerate the dingo, in future behavior experiments. — **AFP**

CULTURE

Iraq exhibits restored art pillaged after 2003 invasion



VERDANT LANDSCAPES, stylised portraits of peasant women, curved sculptures -- an exhibition in Baghdad is allowing art aficionados to rediscover the pioneers of contemporary Iraqi art.

Around one hundred items are on display in the capital, returned and restored nearly two decades after they were looted.

Many of the works, including pieces by renowned artists Jawad Selim and Faiyq Hassan, disappeared in 2003 when museums and other institutions were pillaged in the chaos that followed the US-led invasion to topple dictator Saddam Hussein.

Thousands of pieces were stolen, and organised criminal networks often sold them outside Iraq.

Tracked down in Switzerland, the US, Qatar and neighbouring Jordan, sculptures and paintings dating between the 1940s and 1960s have been on display since late March at the Ministry of Culture, in a vast room that used to serve as a restaurant.

"These works are part of the history of contemporary art in Iraq," ministry official Fakher Mohamed said.

ARTISTIC RENAISSANCE

Pictures and sculptures were in 2003 spirited away from the Saddam Arts Centre, one of Baghdad's most prestigious cultural venues at the time. While he crushed all political dissent, Saddam cultivated the image of a patron of the arts. The invasion and years of violence that followed ended a flourishing arts scene, particularly in Baghdad.

Now, relative stability has led to a fledgling artistic renaissance, including book fairs and concerts, of which the exhibition organised by the ministry is an example.

It helps recall a golden age when Baghdad was considered one of the Arab world's cultural capitals.

Among canvases of realist, surrealist or expressionist inspiration, a picturesque scene in shimmering colours shows a boat sailing in front of several "mudhif", the traditional reed dwellings found in Iraq's southern marshes.

Other paintings, in dark colours, depict terrified residents surrounded by corpses, fleeing a burning village.

Elsewhere, a woman is shown prostrate in a scene of destruction, kneeling in front of an arm protruding from stones. There is also a wooden sculpture of a gazelle with undulating curves, and the "maternal statue" -- a work by Jawad Selim that represents a woman with a slender neck and raised arms.

The latter, worth hundreds of millions of dollars, was rediscovered in a Baghdad district known for its antiques and second-hand goods shops. It was in the possession of a dealer unaware of its true value, according to sculptor Taha Wahib, who bought it for just \$200.

PRICELESS WORKS

Looters in some cases had taken pictures out of their frames, sometimes with cutters, to steal them more easily. "Some pieces were damaged during the events of 2003 -- or they were stored in poor conditions for many years," Mohamed, the culture ministry official, said.

But "they were restored in record time," he said.

Other works are being held back for now, with some waiting to be restored -- but they will be exhibited once more, Mohamed pledged.

He wants to open more exhibition rooms to show the entire collection of recovered items.

"Museums must be open to the public -- these works shouldn't remain imprisoned in warehouses," he said.

The 7,000 items stolen in 2003 included "priceless works", and about 2,300 have been returned to Iraq, according to exhibition curator Lamiaa al-Jawari.

In 2004, she joined a committee of artists committed to retrieving the many stolen national treasures.

"Some have been recovered through official channels" including the Swiss embassy, she said, but individuals also helped.

Authorities coordinate with Interpol and the last restitutions took place in 2021.

The selection on display will be changed from time to time, "to show visitors all this artistic heritage," Jawari said.

Ali Al-Najar, an 82-year-old artist who has lived in Sweden the past 20 years, has been on holiday in his homeland.

He welcomed the exhibition. "The pioneers are those who initiated Iraqi art. If we forget them, we lose our foundations" as a society, Najar said. — **AFP**

ENTERTAINMENT

Comedian Jon Stewart feted for humour, advocacy with Mark Twain Prize



Comedian Jon Stewart became the 23rd recipient of the Mark Twain Prize for American Humor at the Kennedy Center on Sunday, with tributes from late night television hosts Stephen Colbert and Jimmy Kimmel plus music from singer Bruce Springsteen.

Stewart, who captured the American zeitgeist while zinging politicians and the media as host of the "The Daily Show" on Comedy Central for 16 years, joked about the big-name stars celebrating him whose careers he helped advance.

"It reminds of ... just how many people I carried," he quipped.

Comedians from Colbert, who appeared by video link because he has Covid-19, to Samantha Bee, Steve Carell, and Dave Chappelle noted the influence Stewart had on their lives and comedic paths.

"He really is the kind of guy that wants to see his friends and people around him succeed," Kimmel told reporters before the show.

Springsteen, who like Stewart hails from New Jersey, performed his song, "Born to Run."

Stewart left "The Daily Show," which is now hosted by Trevor Noah, before President Donald Trump's time in the White House.

"We missed you very much," said Chappelle, a previous recipient of the Mark Twain Prize.

"The Daily Show" won 20 Emmy Awards during Stewart's tenure and boosted the careers of its so-called correspondents, including Bee, Colbert, and John Oliver.

"Jon Stewart changed my life," said actress Olivia Munn, a former correspondent on Stewart's show. She then mocked Stewart for keeping his Emmys in a cardboard box. "Because that's who he is: lazy and vaguely disrespectful."

Colbert recalled telling

Stewart that his job on "The Daily Show" was the best job on television.

"I know now that what I was really saying to you was the best job on television was working for you," Colbert said. "I meant that when I said it in 2000. And 22 years later, I no longer mean that," he said, drawing laughter from the audience.

Colbert is now host of the "The Late Show" on CBS.

Stewart returned to a television hosting gig last year with a new show, "The Problem With Jon Stewart," on the Apple TV+ streaming platform.

An advocate for US military veterans and first responders from the September 11, 2001 attacks, Stewart received the award from two men representing those groups: John Feal, a 9/11 first-responder and Israel del Toro, a veteran.

In his acceptance speech, Stewart took a serious turn when talking about the future of comedy, making a reference to actor Will Smith's onstage slap of comedian Chris Rock at the Oscars.

"Comedy survives every moment," he said. "It's not the fragility of audiences. It's the fragility of leaders."

Stewart said the Mark Twain Prize was a reminder that "what we have is fragile and precious" and said comedy is a bellwether for what is happening in society. "We're the banana peel in the coal mine," he said. "When society is under threat, comedians are the ones who get sent away first. It's just a reminder to people that democracy is under threat."

Authoritarians are the threat to comedy, to art, to music, to thought, to poetry."

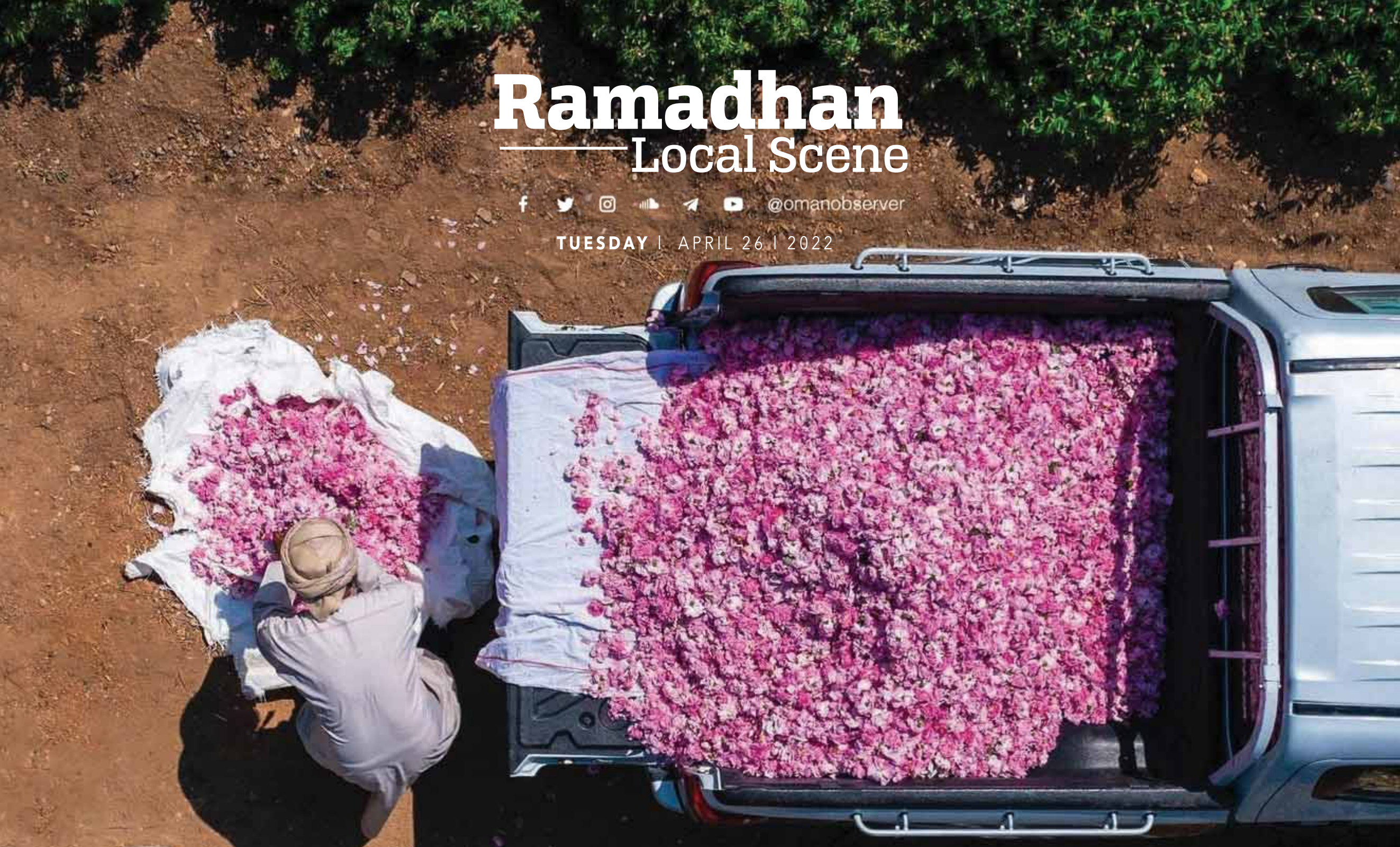
The Mark Twain prize is named after novelist and essayist Samuel Langhorne Clemens, better known by his pen name, Mark Twain. The programme will air on PBS stations on June 21. — **Reuters**

Ramadhan

Local Scene

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TUESDAY | APRIL 26 | 2022



A luxury voyage that demystifies the rose season of Jabal Akhdhar

By Yeru Ebuon
Instagram: @yru_here

He easily navigated the maze made out of rose bushes. It's the perfect time of the year when the green leaves compete with the popping pink glow of the damask roses' blossoms. He has been to these mountains numerous times and with more than half a dozen guests trailing behind, he was checking for the best spots where he can capture the beauty of the rock roses that had become an attraction at this time of the year.

Securely fastened to his shoulder is a black bag. Inside, his photography gears were neatly positioned in their respective slots. Every so often, the camera was on his hand and whenever he saw something interesting, his eye peered through that tiny little square, and with a series of low-toned buzzes, he has preserved a moment forever. He would give out a tiny grin whenever he captured something interesting and by the end of the day, he has dozens of photos that summarised what would have been the second day of the Amouage Voyage. Renaud Salmon's gentle demeanour and welcoming nature made him the perfect guide for the Rose Village garden

tour. As creative director of luxury perfume brand Amouage, he was hands-on with the well-curated luxury experience outlined for their important guests. Joining him on that Thursday morning in April is an eclectic group of creatives comprised of an actor from Germany, a magazine founder and a talented photographer from France, an Australian Youtuber with her perfume enthusiast French partner, Pierre Negrin — a French perfumer based in New York who has created some of the bestseller fragrances for the brand and Andras Komar, the Global Head of Communications for Amouage. They flew from different parts of the globe not only to be introduced to Oman but also to help them understand and become a part of the Amouage Voyage — an exclusive event giving the elite few a behind the scene look at what defines the brand that has become the gifts of kings. Renaud led the group on a tour of Al Ain village, one of the most popular stops of the rose village tour. He directed them on where to go, inwards towards the terrace gardens by the cliff meanwhile taking a different route that allowed him to take photos that showed audiences the grandness of the Jabal Akhdhar's canyon. Upon introducing the guests to the farmers, Renaud then explained the rituals of the rose harvest — how they are collected by hand very early in the morning, how Ahmed, the chief of the rose

harvesters, inspects each of the baskets before they are sent to the factory and how these roses are rushed to the distillation plant for processing. Interacting with the farmers, the guests were then allowed to try the harvesting ritual of daintily handling the flowers while cutting them from the stems. They then met Abdullah, one of the farmers who owned the traditional distillation plant where Renaud spoke lengthily about the complexity of the process, from building the fire made of branches collected from the rocky mountain to how the oil and rosewater were collected through time tested pottery-driven distillation process. "You've seen the traditional way of distillation demonstrated in the old village. For Amouage, the system has been modernised with the distillation system made modern to meet international standards," Renaud explained while showcasing big metallic pieces of machinery with modern gauges. In the next hours, the participants not only smelled the flowers and tested the rose water, but they also went through the ritual of being poured over their heads providing relief from the usually hot, humid temperature of the mountain at noon. The tour ended with a dinner inspired by some of the most successful fragrances produced by the brand in a dinner dubbed Dining Under the Stars overlooking Oman's grand canyon.

Specially curated by the executive chef of Alila Jabal Akhdhar, Epic 56, Lyric, Crimson Rocks and Rose Incense came to life on a plate with each bite starting with the inviting smell of the perfume and with a rose-shaped dessert ending the night, it was an experience unlike any other described by one of the attendees as jaw-dropping. For Renaud, sharing such an experience is one of the best ways to demystify the processes that go behind the scene. He understood the importance of Oman as the base of Amouage and as a product beloved by many, to be let in on the secrets helps create an intimate bond between the brand and its consumers. The full guest itinerary included swimming with the dolphins at Daymaniyat Islands, a visit to Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque, Muttrah Souq and an appreciation stop at the scenic gardens of Birkat Al Mouz. For German actor Ben Dahlhaus, the whole experience was eye-opening allowing him to see Oman and the Middle East in a totally different light. "This was my first time in Oman and the full experience was incredible. The Amouage Voyage was a showcase of everything best about Oman and I would love to come back to see more. Oman is not that known in Germany and from what I've seen and experienced, the potential is amazing. This experience definitely makes me want to come back," he shared.