

\$1m pledged for new start-ups

Oman Technology Fund (OTF), a state-backed fund specialising in investing in start-ups and innovative and creative ideas in the IT sector in the Sultanate of Oman and the MENA region, has pledged to provide \$1 million in funding support for new start-ups as part of a 'Pitch Battle' contest to be held during the upcoming Comex technology show. **DETAILS ON P13**



P10

SAHAM, BAHLA IN DANGER ZONE AS RELEGATION FIGHT HEATS UP



P13

WORLD FACES \$410 BILLION ECONOMIC SHOCK AS CENTRAL BANKS REVERSE COURSE



P19

'TOP GUN' GETS 'EVOLUTION' IN SEQUEL 36 YEARS ON, SAYS CRUISE



ZURICH

RCA WINS 3 AWARDS FOR OLIVE OIL PRODUCTION

The Royal Court Affairs, represented by the Royal Gardens and Farms, garnered three awards for extra virgin olive oil produced in Riyadh Al Jabal Farm in Al Jabal Al Akhdhar. This is yet another achievement for the Royal Court Affairs to be added to its achievements record. The awards came during the RCA's second participation in the Olive Oil Award organised by Zurich University of Applied Sciences in Switzerland. **DETAILS ON P2**

MANILA

MARCOS JR ON VERGE OF HISTORIC VICTORY

The son of late Philippine ruler Ferdinand Marcos was set to address hundreds of thousands of supporters on the final day of presidential election campaigning, as polls showed him heading towards a landslide win. Victory in Monday's election would cap a decades-long effort to rehabilitate the Marcos legacy. Hundreds of thousands of red-clad Marcos supporters on Saturday amassed on a dusty wasteland overlooked by a gleaming luxury resort — a stark reminder of the country's vast income gap.

READ IN OPINION



LET US NOT GET CARRIED AWAY BY CELEBRATIONS

DR HAMED AL SINAWI

P8

THE SWEET GRACE OF GOD IS OUR OWN SAVING GRACE

RAY PETERSEN

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INSIDE



SINN FEIN HAILS 'NEW ERA' AFTER HISTORIC POLLS

P6



SHOULD YOU SUBSCRIBE TO YOUR NEXT VACATION?

P7

TURTLES ARE WEALTH



The Department of Environment in South Al Sharqiyah Governorate will organise a symposium under the title 'Turtles are Wealth' at Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry on Wednesday. The symposium coincides with the turtle nesting season and also comes within the framework of Environment Authority's preparations to mark the World Turtle Day which is celebrated on May 23 each year.

E-registration for Haj from tomorrow

MUSCAT: Registration for the pilgrimage season for the year 1443 AH will open on Monday and continues till May 14 through the e-registration system for pilgrimages from the Sultanate of Oman, the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs announced on Saturday. The Sultanate of Oman's quota for this year's Haj has been reduced by 45 per cent to 6,338 due to Covid restrictions. The permanent Haj committee, chaired by Dr Mohammed bin Said al Maamari, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs, discussed the preparations for Haj in terms of the readiness of the e-system and timeline for starting the Haj arrangements.

Simple entry visa norms for World Cup fans

VINOD NAIR
[@vinot_nair](#)

The aviation and hospitality sector in the Sultanate of Oman will go all out to receive fans of the World Cup 2022, which will be hosted by Qatar between November 31 and December 18. The efforts seem significant, as according to Fifa, 23.5 million World Cup tickets were requested in the latest round of sales for the tournament which starts in less than seven months from now. Applications from Argentina, Brazil, England, France, Mexico, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United States topped the list. Shaikh Aymen al Hosni, CEO of Oman Airports, recently said that any

international fan holding a Fifa card to attend the Qatar 2022 World Cup can visit the Sultanate of Oman as it will be considered an entry visa to the Sultanate of Oman. He said airlines will offer special prices for the fans of the World Cup as they will add capacity with daily flights between Muscat and Doha during matches. He reiterated that Oman Airports will continue to strive to be among the top 10 airports in the world, while the earlier target was to be among the 20 top airports. The CEO said SalamAir will operate direct daily flights from next month to the Indian sub-continent from Suhar, which will include both day and night operations.

Back to work from today

SAMUEL KUTTY
[@samkuttv](#)

After a month of relaxed timings coinciding with Ramadhan and a long break thanks to the Eid al Fitr holidays, citizens and residents are returning to Muscat for regular work. Roads in the capital city, which wore a deserted look during the last few days, witnessed usual traffic on Saturday evening with people who left for their native places to celebrate Eid with their loved ones. Arrival terminals at Muscat and Salalah airports reported heavy rush of people who travelled abroad to spend the holidays. So were the bus terminals of state-owned Mwasalat and private buses and taxi stands. After 9 days of holidays, Sunday marks the first day back at work and school under regular timings, and many said they have been preparing to slip back into

Eid holidays were especially lovely as I could spend time with my relatives in my hometown. Thanks to ease in the restrictions, there were guests from other countries as well. Now it is back to work for me and school for children

HAMED HADHRAMI

their normal weekday routines. While hypermarkets saw substantial rise in the number of customers to buy groceries and other essentials required for the week, stationery outlets saw the presence of a good number of parents and children.

Although the first few working days after the season will not be as pleasant as the regular days, both citizens and residents who arrived in the city reminisced about how they celebrated their Eid without many restrictions after two years. "Eid holidays were especially lovely as I could spend time with my relatives in my hometown. Thanks to ease in the restrictions, there were guests from other countries as well. Now it is back to work for me and school for children", said Hamed Hadhrami, who works in the Ministry of Labour. This year, many observed Eid al Fitr marked with communal prayers and celebratory gatherings in accordance with the guidelines issued by the Supreme Committee dealing with Covid-19 situation. Mohammed Rauf, a teacher whose family lives in Saham, said that family reunions were physical this year, as protocols had changed thanks to the fall in the pandemic cases.

No 'practical evidence' Russia plans to use tactical nukes: CIA

WASHINGTON: The US Central Intelligence Agency sees no indications that Russia is preparing to deploy tactical nuclear weapons in the Ukraine war, CIA Director Bill Burns said on Saturday. "We don't see, as an intelligence community, practical evidence at this point of Russian planning for the deployment or even potential use of tactical



nuclear weapons", Burns said. "Given the kind of saber rattling that... we've heard from the Russian leadership, we can't take lightly those possibilities", Burns told a conference hosted by the 'Financial Times'. "So we stay very sharply focused as an intelligence service... on those possibilities at a moment when the stakes are very high for Russia", he said.

Russia placed nuclear forces on high alert shortly after Russian President Vladimir Putin sent troops to Ukraine on February 24. Putin has also made thinly veiled threats hinting at willingness to deploy Russia's tactical nuclear weapons. The Kremlin chief has warned of a "lightning fast" retaliation if the West directly intervenes in the Ukraine conflict. **SEE ALSO P7**



Oman to take part in Arabian Travel Market expo



LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism and 14 institutions and establishments and destinations related to the tourism sector, is participating in the activities of this year's edition of the Arabian Travel Market (ATM) exhibition in Dubai, UAE, to be held from May 9 to 12.

This international tourism exhibition is the largest of its kind in the Middle East and the theme this year is 'The Future of International Travel and Tourism.'

According to the statement from the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, "The new pavilion of the Sultanate of Oman extends over an area of 200 square metres and includes the main council, the tourist information centre, meeting room, two reception

offices, and a hospitality tent."

In all, 14 corners are designed for the participating Omani tourism related institutions, namely Hotels and Resorts, adventure tourism agencies, travel agencies, Dhofar Municipality, Salam Air, Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry's branch in Al Buraimi Governorate as well as the digital platform - Visit Oman.

Visit Oman is the digital travel booking gateway of the Sultanate



of Oman and it provides travel agents and tour operators access to a Business to Business marketplace that has a range of Oman suppliers providing travel and tourism services such as transportation, accommodation and experiences through a dynamic digital platform making it easier for international travel agents and tour operators.

The activities of the Arabian Travel Market 2022 will be held over four consecutive

days from May 9 to 12 at the Dubai World Trade Centre, which is celebrating its 29th anniversary this year. According to officials, the number of visitors and participants will include professionals related to tourism sectors, investors, entrepreneurs, and workers from the region.

In 2019, more than 39,000 participants attended the Arabian Travel Market.

According to the organisers, ATM Dubai 2022 can accelerate

business as established brands and influential industry leaders will be at the show. Motivational speakers, entrepreneurs and leadership figures representing various sectors such as destinations, travel technology, airlines, cruise hospitality, car rental, hotels and hospitality will be present at the event. While the in-person event will take place from May 9 to 12 at Dubai World Trade Centre, ATM virtual is online from May 17 and 18.

Royal Court Affairs wins 3 awards for olive oil in Switzerland



ZURICH: The Royal Court Affairs (RCA), represented by the Royal Gardens and Farms, garnered three awards for extra virgin olive oil produced in Riyadh Al Jabal Farm in Al Jabal Al Akhdhar.

This is yet another achievement for the Royal Court Affairs to be added to its achievements record. The awards came during the RCA's second participation in the Olive Oil Award organised by Zurich University of Applied Sciences in Switzerland.

The Olive Oil Award saw competition among 123 products from 11 countries including Spain, Italy, France, Greece, Portugal, Germany and Switzerland.

The extra virgin olive oil produced at Riyadh Al Jabal Farm this year garnered a silver medal for olive oil produced from Koroneiki olive and two bronze medals for olive oil produced from cortina olive mixed with other types of olive.

Engineer Hilal bin Mohammed al Waili, Director-General of Royal Gardens and Farms Affairs said that

this award is a credible indication of high quality olive oil that can be used in the local and global markets, and we view it as a certificate of trust. Winning these prestigious awards is yet another milestone in the efforts made by the Royal Gardens and Farms to achieve excellence in olive oil products with a focus on sustainability and a genuine benchmark for global excellence.

Extra virgin olive oil produced in Riyadh Al Jabal Farm is classified among the highest quality olive oil in the world. It is extracted from olives grown in cold climates at the farm where the climate contributes greatly to increasing the proportion of fatty acids, antioxidants and flavonoids. It is extracted manually using elaborate harvesting methods to preserve the integrity of the fruits and the quality of the oil. The olive fruits are then entered into the oil extraction unit immediately after harvest using the best extraction devices to ensure the production of high quality extra virgin olive oil, he added. — ONA



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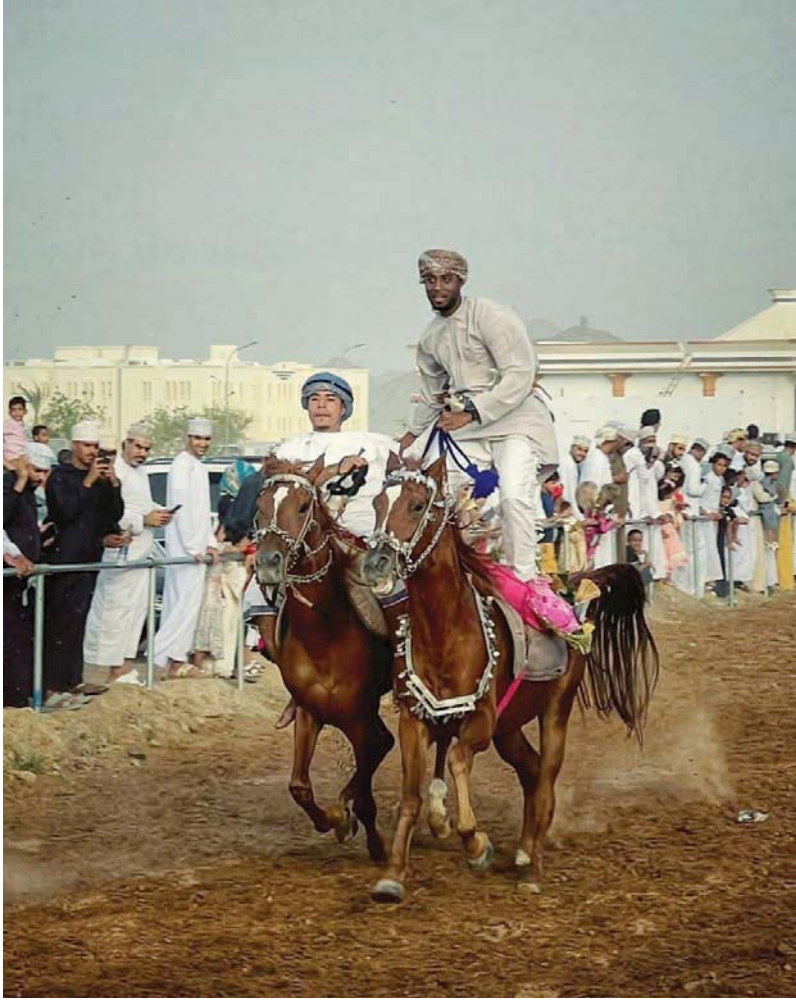









HORSE RACES CAPTURE GLOBAL ATTENTION



KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

The performance of Oman's best horses in Ibri proved to be a rare visual treat and captured the attention of the world as the wilayat relived an age-old tradition of horse riding.

The nerve-racking series of performances that kept the near-capacity audience spellbound has won international acclaim as it was broadcast live globally.

"It was a feast for the eyes of fans of traditional horse races,

being held during Eid holidays, and people from different corners who poured into Ibri to witness the power of these animals", Anbar al Maskari, a tour guide who loves horses and attends the horse riding fests in other GCC countries, said.

The show that featured horses of different kinds from various governorates and wilayats, was also a day dedicated for these different breeds of horses to display their prowess.

"Horse shows have been a culture of Oman from time immemorial, and Ibri has been

the hotspot with the local people being very keen on holding such traditional events.

The best of horses displayed their power as well as beauty at the race and show, many fans who watched the show said.

Oman has nearly 2,000 horses of various kinds. Out of them, more than 350 are purebred Arabian horses, 150 thoroughbreds and 1,500 indigenous breeds, the statistics available with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources indicated.

The country has a well maintained horse riding culture. Rearing of horses is one of the popular hobbies of citizens and equestrian activities are a part of the sports arena as well. Many Omanis take pride in keeping horses and take part in equestrian activities regionally and globally.

For Omanis, horse breeding is a passion, which is also a trait of the entire Arab culture. Horse races are held annually, and include the Royal Horse Race being organised by the Royal Stables and horse racing in various governorates.



Festivities at Al Amerat Park conclude

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 7

Muscat Municipality concluded the Eid festival activities at Al Amerat Park on Saturday, which saw the presence of thousands of visitors.

The five-day event included entertainment programmes, food corners instant prizes, and games.

The recreational activities for

children included horse riding and electronic games.

The Al Amerat Charitable Team, along with the staff of Muscat Municipality, participated in organising this event by streamlining the entry and exit of visitors and parking of vehicles.

Several real estate owners also took part in the events to showcase their upcoming and ongoing projects.



Parks, beaches bear the brunt of 'holiday wastes'

SAMUEL KUTTY
@samuelkutttyp

Despite warnings and fines, littering and fly-tipping are increasingly becoming rampant in the recreational spaces, especially during holidays.

From disposable barbeques left on beaches to bin bags containing food waste and indiscriminately thrown water bottles in parks are not only an eyesore, but are also potentially dangerous for young children, marine life, pets and in fact anyone who uses these spaces.

"There are strict laws to deal with littering or any other activity that will deface the look of the city. Yet visitors to beaches and parks do not bother to use the receptacles or bins kept at every nook and corner", said an official of Muscat Municipality who was monitoring the cleaning operations on Friday evening at the Wadi Kabir park.

He said that many people do not stop to consider that a litter-strewn public place is a health hazard. "Although fine is an effective deterrent, when it comes to the reason for littering, some people are too lazy to walk to the bin. Others drop rubbish out of bravado", he said.

Last week Muscat Municipality reiterated a decision of 2017 that a fine of RO 100 will be imposed on anyone who disposes of waste in unspecified locations.

In a statement, the municipality added that the offender will be



There are strict laws to deal with littering or any other activity that will deface the look of the city. Yet visitors to beaches and parks do not bother to use the receptacles or bins kept at every nook and corner

AN OFFICIAL OF MUSCAT MUNICIPALITY

given one-day time to clear up the waste to designated places, and in case of repetition of the act fine will be doubled.

"The act of littering food or throwing thrash by people during their visit to a park has no justification. It is a criminal act that needs to be punished. Thrash can serve as a breeding ground for insects and rodents, in addition to

being a threat to the environment", the official said.

According to John Albert, public relation official with a leading hotel brand, tourists love to visit a clean country and so will be encouraged to drive and walk around. Litter negatively impacts the environment and everyone in it.

"The sight of trash that includes bottles, burger wrappers and pizza boxes strewn on parks, wadis and beaches are immensely disturbing. We all need to take responsibility for our personal waste so that we don't make this stunning nation seem uncared for", he said.

Giving a suggestion, he said that using colourful bins at parks and beaches or any other public places where people gather en masse during holidays will help them stand out, grab the visitors' attention and make them easy to find.

"Since they're easier to locate, visitors may be more likely to throw away their trash instead of littering", he added.

Parks and beaches have many health benefits for the people who use them, but litter can cancel those out, said Abdul Latif, Marketing Specialist at a hospital.

"Rather than promoting better physical health for the people who use it, litter can create health problems. Food left behind also creates a food source for rats and other disease-carrying rodents", he said.

Awassr Internet services affected: TRA

MUSCAT: The Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) said that the Internet services of Awassr company have been affected due to a technical failure that took place on Friday, May 6, in some wilayats of the Governorate of Muscat.

The faults have been fixed and services were gradually restored to the affected areas on Saturday, the statement said.

"We regret the interruption of the Internet service due to an outage beyond our control, rest assured that our teams are working on solving the issue shortly", Awassr said in a statement.

The 'Observer' earlier received several messages on its social media platforms with subscribers of Awassr saying that their services have been facing issues since Friday night.

Earlier, TRA said that Omantel mobile subscribers were affected in some wilayats of South Al Batinah and Al Dakhiliyah on May 5 as some of the fibre-optic cables were cut in these areas.

TRA said that it followed up with the company's stakeholders about the measures taken to fix this malfunction and find alternative solutions.

The authority said that services were gradually resumed in the evening of the same day.



WAKING UP TO WELLNESS

SAMUEL KUTTY
@samkuttv

Although interest in health and wellness has seen significant rise over the years, the Covid-19 pandemic has brought it into even sharper focus, with people becoming more conscious of both physical and mental health.

After two years of the pandemic in which people spent months cooped up at home getting very little exercise, health and wellness have become more important than ever before. And the wellness industry has pivoted fast!

Increased health consciousness has fuelled the wellness industry into overdrive, and it is becoming a stronger, fitter industry.

The fitness industry in the Sultanate of Oman is highly influenced by growing awareness about better lifestyle and balanced diet. The country is facing a rising wave of chronic diseases like heart disease and diabetes, plus non-communicable diseases.

The government is taking action to reduce these diseases and risk of chronic disease by introducing major schemes promoting better lifestyle and physical activity on a community level scale.

According to a report on the outlook for Oman's fitness services market, it has a ripple effect on other sectors such as fitness equipment industry, construction, real estate, apparel and footwear and technology.

"Sedentary lifestyles and hectic schedules along with Covid-19 outbreak have resulted in a spike in the number of people working out from homes to avoid getting infected, thus fuelling the adoption of in-home fitness equipment", says the report prepared by Ken Research.

The Sultanate of Oman is a country with strong and expansive infrastructure but still the majority of the population is high on the risk of chronic diseases.

Oman ranked 66 worldwide in the healthcare quality index. The generous healthcare budget of the country has also helped maintain this position in the healthcare index. The exercise services provided through fitness centres offer preventative health benefits to customers, essentially reducing the incidence of chronic diseases attributable to physical inactivity.

"Assuming a significant percentage of the population affected with lifestyle diseases goes to a fitness centre, the estimated savings in direct healthcare costs from Oman's fitness centres will be high in the country",

says the report titled, "Oman Fitness Services Market Outlook to 2025 — driven by rise in health consciousness and increasing penetration of international brands across the country".

The largest component of this saving arises from the avoided costs of cardiovascular disease in a year along with increase in workforce participation and increase in workforce productivity.

"With the change in the attitude of the public and strong push from the government, the fitness market in Oman is expected to experience double digit growth due to rapidly rising interest in all kinds of wellness-related behaviours and lifestyles accompanied by accelerating consumer spending", the report points out.

The offline fitness centres in Oman health and fitness market are expected to contribute the majority of the revenue share with online fitness market anticipated to show a double digit growth of more than 16 per cent compound annual growth rate by 2025.

Currently, most fitness brands in the market are positioned towards the mid-to-low end of the market, targeting the mass public. Entries of major fitness chains such as Horizon fitness followed by Flex fitness and Gold's Gym are providing more attentive and personalised services focusing on specialised offerings to differentiate themselves and strengthen their competitiveness.

According to the report, between 8 per cent and 20 per cent of the universities in Oman have well equipped gyms at their campuses/ hostels and charge a membership of \$15-\$20 per month separately and offer their services for the students who aspire for physical well-being thus promoting an active healthy lifestyle.

Fitness centres in residential compounds and townships is a new concept in Oman with only a small number of them having well-equipped gyms in their compounds. Few of the apartments in the country have fitness centres in the residential compounds offering a variety of equipment, amenities, classes and training options for the in-house residents.

The middle class prefers to access these gyms in residential areas and communities since they provide opportunity to socialise, making them coveted with residential property. Majority of the luxury hotels and resorts have well-equipped gyms offering special memberships to the public.



A celebration that fosters universal brotherhood

KABEER YOUSUF

@kabeeryousef

The true spirit of Eid al Fitr, undoubtedly, is love, care for one another, peace and prosperity for one and all.

Believers live up to the credos of the Eid festival, which will not be a celebration until they make sure that their neighbours are not starving for food and share the bounties of Almighty Allah with others.

There are non-believers who fast along with their colleagues and friends and share the experience of one month-long refrainment from material pleasures.

But, there are families which celebrated Eid as a joyous occasion of their own and shared the true spirit of the day with their Omani and expatriate friends.

This year with the announcement of long holidays, several groups of families decided to give it a festive touch by wearing new dresses, cooking traditional food like kababs and shuwa and preparing desserts like kunafa and um ali.

During the long holiday, they wore new clothes —



ladies wore green salwars while men dazzled in white kurtas — to add to this festive mood, decorated their houses and offices with the half crescent and lanterns that exemplify the day of Eid and exchanged greetings, besides gathering at friends' houses.

“Eid al Fitr marks the religious festival and conclusion of the holy month of Ramadhan and is much awaited by all our Muslim brethren after fasting for 30 days from dawn to dusk. We believe it is an occasion to

share the joy of the day with our friends”, said Philu Moras, an expatriate from India's Karnataka state.

At one such event, families of Alfred, Celine D'Souza, Lancy, Anitha, Ivan, Flaviana and Valerian Monica Dantis gathered together at the house of one of them and marked the day with complete gaiety and fervour.

More than the adults, their children shouldered the tasks of coordinating, decorating and conducting various programmes as part of the

Eid celebration. They too were equally excited as adults started their celebrations with traditional kahwah and dates.

“Living in this peaceful country among our loving brothers and sisters for over two decades, we too eagerly await this festival”, adds Sylvester Vaz and Nancy Vaz, who conceptualised and hosted an Eid gathering.

Adding flavour to the Arabic cuisine made them feel that they too are part of this celebration and that humanity is one.

Simple entry visa norms for World Cup fans

FROM P1

Fifa President Gianni Infantino has promised it will be the best-ever World Cup and the global body is looking to the healthy ticket sales to back its case.

Oman Air also announced a plan for the travel and tourism sector in the Sultanate of Oman to benefit from the World Cup (Qatar 2022) in partnership with Omran, Oman Airports and official authorities in the country, with facilities for fans coming to the World Cup at the Oman Convention and

Exhibition Centre.

Apart from providing hotel facilities, it will offer an air bridge for the match venues in Qatar.

Speaking to the ‘Observer’, Saada bint Abdullah al Harthi, Director of Business Development, Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, said: “We will have roadshows and special packages in time for the World Cup. With visa-free travel available for nationals of many countries, the Sultanate of Oman will be an ideal tourist destination.”

Back to work from today

FROM P1

“I could enjoy time with my family back home in accordance with tradition. We exchanged gifts and visited relatives and neighbors bringing happiness to everyone”, he said.

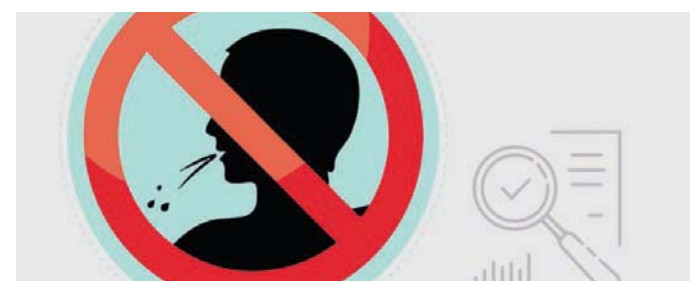
Abdul Latif, an Indian expatriate, after returning from Salalah, said: “Seeing friends and relatives, whom I couldn't see previously due to the pandemic restrictions, was so

refreshing”.

Nasser al Wahaibi, who returned from Dubai after spending the holidays, said he needs to adjust himself both mentally and physically to face the old working system.

“As many of us worked less hours during Ramadhan, I have to re-align my schedules. So we will have to go to bed early, and get the children to rest up before the start of school”, he said.

RO 20 fine for spitting in public places



STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT, MAY 7

Muscat Municipality has warned that anyone found spitting in public places will be fined RO 20.

Earlier, it warned that a fine

of RO 20 will be imposed on anyone who sets a fire under trees or in recreational areas.

A fine of RO 100 will be imposed on anyone who disposes of the waste in the wrong places, which will be doubled upon repetition.

Anthology of poems released



‘Father's Face’, an anthology of poems written by Sulatha Francis, was launched at an event recently.

MUSCAT: ‘Father's Face’, an anthology of poems authored by Sulatha Francis, a Muscat resident, was released recently at a function attended by writers, professionals and others.

Dr Said al Saqlawi, Chairman of the Omani Society for Writers and Literati, who was the chief guest, unveiled the book and handed over the first copy to Dr Mehdi Jaffer, founder of the forum ‘Penned Thoughts’ and member of the

Environment Society of Oman.

Dr Retnakumar, founder of ‘Bhavalaya’ and global president of World Malayalee Federation, delivered the keynote address. He emphasised the need for human bonding and value-based relationships which offer a sound platform for the younger generation.

Emerging poetess Nasra al Adawi wished the author all success for the future.

Sulatha proposed a vote of thanks.

Tender Announcement
The Internal Tender committee of **Ministry of Social Development** hereby announces the following tender :-

Tender No.	Tender Subject	Grade	Last date for obtainment of Tender Document	Last date for Tender Submission	Tender Document Price (non-refundable)
46/2022	Technical support system and hardware management	Companies specialized in the field of designing, installing and maintaining programs and equipping informational data centers that are registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board with excellent or first degree	Thursday 26-5-2022 02:00 PM	Wednesday 15-6-2022 10:00 AM	R.O. 25/=

- Specialized Companies, registered with the **Tender Board** may obtain the Tender documents at the Tender Board e-tendering digital portal link (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>). On Sunday 8/5/2022.
- Tender shall be submitted in compliance with the technical specifications and terms along with a local bank warranty at (1%) of the tender value, valid ninety (90) days from the date of e-submission.
- For Inquiry, please contact through the e-tendering website (reg@tenderboard.gov.om) tel. (24402200).

“ The lowest or any other tender shall not be binding to the Ministry “

www.mosd.gov.om

OCEANIC SHRIMP AQUACULTURE LLC
A subsidiary of Fisheries Development Oman
Minaret Al Qurum Building, Muscat
Tel: 22526800

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بناية منارة القرم، مسقط
هاتف: ٢٢٥٢٦٨٠٠

ANNOUNCEMENT OF TENDER
SUPPLY OF STREET LIGHT POSTS AND LED STREET LIGHTS

Tender No.	Description	Last Date of Collection of RFP	Last Date of Submission	Tender Fee
NSA/2022/01	Supply of Street Light Posts and LED Street Lights to NSA Shrimp Farm Project at Qurun, Jalan Bani Bu Hassan	18 May 2022	25 May 2022	Nil

Interested suppliers may contact Procurement Department, Oceanic Shrimp Aquaculture LLC, 5th Floor, Minaret Al Qurum Building, Qurun, Muscat during official working days between 9:00am to 2:00pm to collect the detail of the scope of supply and specifications or may contact by e-mail at purchase@oceanic.om for the same.

Note: OSA is not obliged to accept the lowest or any bid.

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Tel: 22526800

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بناية منارة القرم، مسقط
هاتف: ٢٢٥٢٦٨٠٠

ANNOUNCEMENT OF TENDER
ASPHALT ROAD WORKS, SHRIMP FARM PROJECT, QURUN, JBBH

Tender No.	Description	Last Date of Collection of RFP	Last Date of Submission	Tender Fee
NSA/2022/02	Asphalt Road works, Shrimp Farm Project, Qurun, Jalan Bani Bu Hassan	18 May 2022	25 May 2022	Nil

Interested contractors may contact Procurement Department, Oceanic Shrimp Aquaculture LLC, 5th Floor, Minaret Al Qurum Building, Qurun, Muscat during official working days between 9:00am to 2:00pm to collect the detail of the scope of works and specifications or may contact by e-mail at purchase@oceanic.om for the same.

Note: OSA is not obliged to accept the lowest or any bid.



A Russian BTR-MDM Rakushka airborne armoured personnel carrier parades through Red Square during the general rehearsal of the Victory Day military parade in central Moscow. — AFP

Russia fine tunes Victory Day parade amid Ukraine campaign

MOSCOW: Russia on Saturday held its final rehearsal for an annual parade marking the Soviet victory in World War II, where its military might will be showcased amid Moscow’s campaign in Ukraine.

To mark the 77th anniversary since victory in what Russia calls the Great Patriotic War, thousands of soldiers will march across the Red Square in Moscow followed by tanks, armoured vehicles and missile launchers.

Monday’s Victory Day parade comes on the third month of Russia’s “military operation” in Ukraine despite predictions of a swift victory.

Troops who participated in the operation took part in Saturday’s practice, indicating that they’ll

participate in Monday’s parade, the state TASS agency reported.

The parade became an annual event after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and has gained prominence during President Vladimir Putin’s two decades in power as a display of military muscle.

Like every year, Putin is expected to deliver a speech at the parade. Some Western officials say he may declare all-out war on Ukraine or announce mobilisation across the country. The Kremlin has dismissed this as “nonsense”.

Since sending troops into Ukraine on February 24, Russia has said it is carrying out a “special military operation” to “de-Nazify” the country. — AFP

Macron promises new start at second term inauguration

PARIS: French President Emmanuel Macron on Saturday vowed a new start to face immense challenges in foreign and domestic policy, as he was inaugurated for a second term after his election victory over the far right.

In a ceremony at the Elysee Palace, Macron was confirmed by Constitutional Council chief Laurent Fabius as the winner of April election and then signed the formal re-investiture document.

Attended by 450 people, including his wife Brigitte and his only surviving predecessors Francois Hollande and Nicolas Sarkozy, the ceremony was relatively modest but marked the first time a French leader is serving a second term in 20 years.

Macron faces a daunting agenda of implementing the reforms he vowed when he came to power as France’s youngest-ever president in 2017, as well as dealing with the Russian assault against Ukraine.

“Rarely has our world and our country been confronted with such a combination of challenges,” he said, referring to the Russian invasion, the pandemic and the ecological emergency.

He vowed to be a “new president” for a “new mandate” and create a “stronger France”. “Every day of the mandate that lies ahead I will have just one compass point. And that is to serve.”

He also suggested a more

Emmanuel Macron

Dec 21 1977

2004

2008

2012

2014

2015

April 2016

Married, no children

AFP Photo

Born in Amiens

Completes studies at prestigious National School of Administration (ENA)

Banker at Rothschild & Co

Deputy Secretary General at the Elysee during Francois Hollande's presidency

Minister of Economy, Industry & Digital Technologies

His law on economic growth and activity is enacted

Launches his political movement "En marche!"

May 2017

Nov 2018

2020-2021

April 24, 2022

May 7, 2022

Youngest president, elected with 66% against Marine Le Pen

Faces "yellow vest" protests and in 2019 organises national debate

Pandemic, implements social safety net to save companies and jobs

Re-elected French president with 58.55% of votes

Inauguration

Act to avoid any escalation following the Russian aggression in Ukraine, to help democracy and courage to prevail, to build a new European peace and a new autonomy on our continent

EMMANUEL MACRON

French President

inclusive and understanding style of ruling after his first term saw critics complain the former investment banker had abrasive and arrogant methods.

He vowed a “new method” to govern, far from the “worn-out rites and choreography” of the past.

In a tradition dating back to the Middle Ages, 21 cannon shots were fired from the Invalides military memorial complex to celebrate the

inauguration. With no drive down the Avenue des Champs-Elysees or long red carpet, the ceremony resembled the re-inaugurations of Francois Mitterrand in 1988 and Jacques Chirac in 2002, the last French president to win a second term. Macron’s second term will only start officially when the first one expires at midnight on May 13.

He is set to keep playing a leading role in efforts to stop Russia’s war

against Ukraine, while he carries an immense burden of expectation as a leader on the European stage with Germany still finding its footing in the post-Angela Merkel era.

Macron vowed to “act to avoid any escalation following the Russian aggression in Ukraine, to help democracy and courage to prevail, to build a new European peace and a new autonomy on our continent.” On the domestic front, Macron must deal with the crisis over the rising cost of living and also brace for possible protests when he finally tackles his cherished pension reform, raising France’s retirement age. — AFP

Sinn Fein hails ‘new era’ for N Ireland after historic polls



Deputy First Minister of Northern Ireland and Irish republican Sinn Fein party member Michelle O'Neill (centre L) takes a selfie with Sinn Fein party President Mary Lou McDonald (centre R) as they arrive in Londonderry. — AFP

BELFAST: Sinn Fein leader Michelle O'Neill on Saturday hailed a “new era” for Northern Ireland as pro-UK unionists conceded a historic election victory for her Irish nationalist party, while threatening anew to boycott the devolved government.

“It’s a defining moment for our politics and our people”, O'Neill said before full results were announced.

“I will provide leadership which is inclusive, which celebrates diversity, which guarantees rights and equality for those who have been excluded, discriminated against or ignored in the past”

Tallies from Thursday’s complex proportional voting showed Sinn Fein, the former political wing of the IRA paramilitary group, had secured at least 23 seats for the 90-seat legislature, setting it on course for

victory. Sinn Fein will have enough seats to make O'Neill first minister, a century after Northern Ireland was carved out as a Protestant fiefdom under British rule.

“The people have spoken and our job is now to turn up. I expect others to turn up also”, O'Neill told reporters, stressing the new government must tackle foremost a cost-of-living crisis in the UK.

But she said a “healthy conversation is already under way” about Irish reunification, and the party is targeting a referendum in the next five years. Democratic Unionist Party leader Jeffrey Donaldson conceded that his nationalist rivals looked set to “emerge as the largest party”, with the DUP winning 21 seats so far.

The DUP occupied the role of first minister in the outgoing Stormont assembly, before it

collapsed the executive in protest at post-Brexit trading rules between the UK and EU.

Donaldson demanded that Prime Minister Boris Johnson “deliver on his word to honour the commitments he has given and to take the action that is necessary” on the Northern Ireland Protocol.

He urged “decisive action by the government to remove the Irish Sea border, because we don’t believe it is acceptable or necessary to have checks on goods moving within the United Kingdom”.

While Sinn Fein will get to nominate a first minister, Northern Ireland’s power-sharing government cannot form unless the DUP agrees to take part.

“I want a government in Northern Ireland, but it has to be one based on stable foundations”, Donaldson said. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

BEIJING

Shanghai varsity entrance exam postponed

The annual university entrance exam in Shanghai has been postponed by a month against the backdrop of an ongoing coronavirus lockdown. Vice Mayor Chen Qun announced at a press conference that more than 50,000 would now take the three-day test marathon in early July. The so-called ‘Gaokao’ is considered the most important exam in the life of every Chinese person, as it significantly determines one’s career path. The announcement

has dashed hopes that everyday life in China’s most important economic metropolis will soon return to normal. — dpa

HAVANA

Death toll climbs to 25 in Havana hotel blast

A powerful explosion due to a suspected gas leak ripped through a luxury hotel in central Havana, killing at least 25 people on Friday, according to official tallies.

Rescuers pulled four bodies out of the rubble in the early evening as they combed through what remained of the prestigious Saratoga Hotel looking for survivors.

At least one woman with whom rescuers made contact was alive in the debris, officials

said, adding they believed more survivors were still trapped and that a canine squad was searching them out. Cuba’s president attributed the massive blast to a gas leak. — AFP

SEOUL

N Korea may have tested submarine-launched missile

North Korea may have tested a nuclear-capable submarine-launched missile, according to the South Korean military. North Korea fired a ballistic missile early on Saturday off Sinpo on the east coast, the general staff said. It flew towards the open sea.

The missile is believed to be a short-range submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM). Whether it was actually fired from a submarine or possibly from an underwater platform

remained unclear at first. South Korea’s military is prepared for possible further missile launches by the neighbouring country, it said. — dpa

Why battle for Mariupol is important for Putin as Moscow forces mount final push

ANTON TROIANOVSKI

It is a predominantly Russian-speaking city in the eastern Ukrainian region known as the Donbas, the one where President Vladimir Putin falsely claimed Ukraine was carrying out a “fight” before launching his attack.

The Azovstal steel plant in the middle of the city has also become the last bastion of Ukrainian military’s Azov regiment, whose origins in a far-right military group, the Azov Battalion, have lent a veneer of credibility to Putin’s false narrative that the country is overrun by “Nazis.”

The steel plant is the last holdout of Ukrainian resistance in Mariupol as Moscow’s forces mount a final push to seize control of the city.

In weeks of fierce fighting, much of the city of more than 400,000 was levelled, and Ukrainian officials said more than 20,000 civilians were killed. But despite the horrific toll, Russian state media outlets are now highlighting Russia’s capture of almost all of Mariupol as a long-anticipated victory in Putin’s campaign to “denazify” Ukraine.

That message is particularly important to the Kremlin, as it prepares for May 9 celebrations on Monday, when Russia marks the Soviet victory over Nazi Germany. The looming Victory Day holiday — one of the most important dates on the calendar for Russians as they remember the 27 million Soviets killed in World War II — is already being used by the Russian government to channel national pride into support for the war.

Vladimir Solovyov, a state television host, travelled to Mariupol and was captured on video holding court in the city in military fatigues, later telling viewers that local residents “wanted to touch me and hug me.”

Another host, Dmitry Kiselyov, highlighted the fight for Mariupol last Sunday on his marquee weekly news show, which declared: “Denazification is when the neo-Nazis from the Azov Battalion rot alive in cold factory basements.”

WORLD WAR II VETERAN

But perhaps the most striking sign of Mariupol’s importance ahead of May 9 is that one of Putin’s most powerful aides, deputy chief of staff Sergei Kiriyenko, visited the city this week. He was shown meeting with a man described as a Mariupol World War II veteran, and looked on as the man became the first Mariupol resident to get a passport of the breakaway “Donetsk People’s Republic”, which Putin recognised as independent in February.

On Wednesday, Kiriyenko helped unveil a statue to “Grandma Anya” — a Ukrainian woman filmed greeting



Nadiiajda Vorotylna reacts after arriving with her family from the besieged city of Mariupol in their own vehicle, ahead of an expected humanitarian convoy at a registration and processing area for internally displaced people in Ukraine. — AFP

Ukrainian soldiers with a Soviet banner last month, apparently thinking they were Russian, according to Russian media. Anya, whose full name is not known, has become a symbol for proponents of the war in Russia of the idea that some Ukrainians are in fact greeting Russian troops as liberators.

Kiriyenko, in his speech, evoked the May 9 holiday and called her “a living symbol of the continuity of generations. Continuity in the fight against Nazism and fascism.”

Kiriyenko is in charge of domestic politics in Putin’s administration, and the fact that he is becoming closely involved in Russian-occupied eastern Ukraine is being seen as a signal that the Kremlin may be planning to incorporate the territory into Russia.

In Mariupol, Kiriyenko said that it would not be possible to hold Victory Day parades in Donetsk and Luhansk, the main cities of the Donbas, but he pledged they would take place in the future.

Should you subscribe to your next vacation?



New subscription travel services are on the rise, with offers of discounts, special access and streamlined planning.

ELAINE GLUSAC

New subscription travel services are on the rise, with offers of discounts, special access and streamlined planning. There are different ways to pay for a subscription plan, though they often involve an annual or monthly fee. The plans themselves may be called memberships, clubs or subscriptions. Subscriptions in the travel realm aren’t new, of course. Think of airline credit cards that charge an annual fee in exchange for free checked bags and early boarding when you use the card to buy a ticket. But pressure from the pandemic has inspired companies to experiment with new ways to sell and engage people in travel, say experts.

“Travel and tourism have historically been linked to free points or free miles programmes”, said Adam Levinter, the author of the recently published book “The Subscription Boom.” “With paid programmes, customers are incentivised to spend because they have skin in the game.”

Just as travel takes many forms — work-from-anywhere stints, family vacations, quickie business trips — so do subscriptions. Most aim to streamline travel through savings, curation or both.

Many existing subscription services dangle discounts and efficiency. Scott’s Cheap Flights, for example, sends flight deals of 40 per cent-90 per cent s off to subscribers who pay \$49 a year, a fee that is often made up in one booking, and, fans say, saves substantial search time.

Alaska Airlines’ new Flight Pass charges \$49 a month at



the entry level, entitling subscribers to six round-trip flights a year. Those \$98 trips reflect discounts of 20 per cent-30 per cent on average, according to the company. The pass targets travellers in California with flights to 13 destinations within the state, plus Las Vegas, Phoenix and Reno, Nevada.

Among newer entries, Tripadvisor, the travel guidance platform, launched Tripadvisor Plus in 2021. For \$99 a year, subscribers get discounted hotel rates at roughly 300,000 properties globally and 10 per cent off theme parks and activities, including tours booked through Tripadvisor.

CitizenM, the Netherlands-based hotel group with locations in 16 cities worldwide, including six in the United States, recently launched mycitizenM+. For \$12 a month and a minimum 12-month term, members get 10 per cent off room rates, late checkout and upgrades, if available.

In its first month, more than 1,500 members joined, according to Ernest Lee, the chief growth officer at citizenM, noting that the offer is aimed at frequent business travellers, especially the self-employed. “These are people who need to be frugal but still want a high-quality travel experience”, he wrote in an email.

Travellers can compare flights, rental cars, resorts and activities on the Internet, but those searches take time. Think of the hundreds of short-term rental listings you might peruse before finding the perfect cabin near Lake Tahoe, California.

A subset of new subscription services aims to reduce search time by narrowing results for things like hotels and travel packages by using filters either tailored to your interests or the service’s point of view.

Among those services is Safara, slated to start up later this month by invitation.

“The online travel space is due for a shake-up, and it’s a good time for innovation”, said Doug Schuessler, the Chief Executive of Safara.

Let us not get carried away by celebrations



Dr Hamed al Sinawi
@alsinawi

The writer is a senior consultant psychiatrist at Sultan Qaboos University Hospital

Throughout history human beings had a relationship with food that goes beyond it being a source of energy but also a way of expressing our moods and social status.

When we feel sad our appetite changes so we would eat less or lose the desire to eat completely.

In some types of depression the person tends to consume a large amount of food especially that which is rich in carbohydrates such as chocolate and sweets. The science behind that is explained by the fact that such food contains serotonin which is a brain chemical responsible for mood regulation.

When we celebrate weddings,

birthdays or religious festivals we eat special food.

In some cultures special food is consumed during grief after the death of a loved one. Food is also a way of expressing social status as some people would pay a huge amount of money for things like caviar, lobster or special sweets.

In some villages here in the Sultanate of Oman fresh dates are sold at a very expensive price when they first become available, sometimes more than five Riyals per piece. Yet some people would buy it and offer it to their guests to express their wealth, even when they know that the price will go

CONSUMING MORE SWEETS AND MEAT FOR EID CAN HAVE A NEGATIVE IMPACT ON THE DIGESTIVE SYSTEM ESPECIALLY AFTER FASTING

down to less than one Riyal per kilogram after a few weeks when dates become widely available.

During festivities such as Eid people also express their status by preparing food in large quantities and consuming more sweets and meat for the three days of Eid. This can have negative impact to

their digestive system especially after 30 days of fasting therefore health professionals advice to eat in moderation and avoid excessive amounts of meats and sweets especially that most traditional sweets such as the Omani halwa contains large amount of sugar and oil which when consumed in large quantities can lead to raise in blood sugar level and increase risk of obesity and heart disease.

Therefore it's important to exercise during and after Eid to enable your body to burn the calories obtained from all the sweets and meat.

Eid is a time to meet friends

and families and leave behind any conflict with others. This year Eid came after almost two years of Covid-19 restrictions that forced us to celebrate indoors and with limited social contact.

But now these restrictions are relaxed and let us meet others with moderation while observing the health advice issued by the WHO to reduce the risk of spreading Covid-19. Finally, Ramadhan has been a good time for extended prayers either at home or in the mosques. So let us not get carried away with the celebrations and remember our prayers, may God accept our deeds.

Japan's virtual YouTubers make millions from fans

TOMOHIRO OSAKI

Mayu Iizuka sheds her soft-spoken personality and starts cackling, screaming and waving wildly in a makeshift studio in Tokyo as her avatar appears on a livestream before hundreds of fans.

Virtual YouTubers like Iizuka, who voices and animates a character called Yume Kotobuki, have transformed a niche Japanese subculture into a thriving industry where top accounts can rake in more than a million dollars a year.

The videos are designed to make fans feel they are interacting directly with their favourite animated idols -- with viewers sometimes paying hundreds of dollars to have a single comment highlighted on a livestream.

"When I'm playing video games on my channel and succeed at something, my fans congratulate me" and pay tips "as a way to show their support and appreciation", Iizuka said.

The 26-year-old uses a laptop, webcam and a motion sensor worn around her neck to appear on screen as Yume, whose facial expressions are controlled by a producer.

With her squeaky voice, short skirt and huge purple eyes, Iizuka's avatar follows a popular model for "VTuber" characters, which often resemble the hyper-feminine heroines of Japanese anime.

Since emerging about five years ago, the VTuber world has grown quickly, with about 16,000 active streamers globally, according to data firm User Local, and growing fanbases on other platforms like TikTok and gaming site Twitch.

Regional governments in Japan have used them for promotion, and "The Batman" stars Robert Pattinson and Zoe Kravitz even gave a recent interview to a top Japanese VTuber.

VTubers generate money in ways similar to traditional livestreamers, including through YouTube's "Super Chat" system, where the more a fan shells out, the more attention is drawn to their comments.

In fact, the world's nine top-earning YouTube accounts for "Super Chat" last year were all VTubers.

All nine are affiliated with one Tokyo-based talent agency, and each earned between \$700,000 and \$1.7 million from the cash gifts, according to data analysis site Playboard.

Most fans spend only a few hundred yen (\$1) per comment, but the most dedicated sometimes splurge 50,000 yen (\$400) to post impassioned missives to their virtual idols.

Kazuma Murakami, a 30-year-old car parts inspector, has been known to spend 10,000 yen to get his comments highlighted in red and seen by his favourite VTuber.

"I really want her to notice I'm here again, visiting her channel," Murakami said. Another VTuber fan, who asked to be identified only by his first name, Kazumi, has adorned his tiny one-room apartment near Tokyo with posters, framed pictures and keyrings featuring his favourite character, Mio Ookami. — AFP

Johnson's party takes a hit in local elections



Stephen Castle

The writer is the London correspondent at the *New York Times*

Prime Minister Boris Johnson of Britain suffered significant losses in results from local elections last week in voting that was being watched closely as a test of the damage to him and his Conservative Party from a swirling scandal over lockdown-breaking parties at Downing Street.

For the first time in decades, the Conservatives lost control of the borough of Wandsworth in London to the Labour Party, which also took over Westminster and Barnet in the capital, as well as Southampton and several other districts elsewhere in England. The centrist Liberal Democrats also turned in a much-improved performance.

But it appeared that voters were punishing the Conservatives for the illicit Downing Street parties and the rising cost of living at a time of surging inflation and tax increases.

Johnson acknowledged that it had been a "tough night in some parts of the country," according to the BBC, but he also said the Conservatives were making "remarkable gains" elsewhere.

In the voting on Thursday, Britons were mainly electing thousands of "councillors" — their representatives on municipalities that decide issues such as garbage collection, planning applications and highway maintenance.

The Conservatives fared badly in London — the party has held Westminster ever since the council

was created nearly 60 years ago — and also suffered losses to the Liberal Democrats outside the capital. But Labour was making only limited progress in the north of England at a time when it was expecting advances against a government facing a series of problems.

With 77 of 146 councils in England declaring their results, the Conservatives had shed 121 seats, which meant the loss of control of several boroughs, including

THE CONSERVATIVES FARED BADLY IN LONDON AND THE PARTY HAS HELD WESTMINSTER EVER SINCE THE COUNCIL WAS CREATED NEARLY 60 YEARS AGO

Wandsworth, long a symbolic fortress of Conservatism in the capital. Labour was up 34 council seats, fewer than the Liberal Democrats, who had gained 58. The Greens, another smaller party, also made advances.

Although the local elections have no direct effect on the fate of the national government, they were seen by many as a litmus test of the popularity of a prime minister who has already been fined by the police for one breach of his

own strict coronavirus laws.

Johnson's handling of the invasion of Ukraine has stabilised his leadership, but more fines for lockdown breaches could follow, and the government has promised to publish a report on the Downing Street parties that many expect to criticise Johnson.

With the Conservatives trailing in opinion polls behind the Labour Party, Johnson's own lawmakers are once again considering a no-confidence vote on his leadership. A poor result in the local elections could damage his survival prospects, while a solid performance would help him ride things out.

In England, more than 4,400 seats were contested in over 140 municipalities, but the voting took place only in parts of the country. All the municipalities in Scotland and Wales held elections, and voters in Northern Ireland cast ballots for its devolved power-sharing assembly.

Before the votes were cast, some analysts said they expected Johnson's Conservatives to lose out in London, other cities and in parts of the south of England but to perform better in northern areas known as the "red wall."

These are regions that have traditionally voted for Labour but switched to the Conservatives en masse in the 2019 general election, helping Johnson to a landslide victory.

— New York Times



Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson during a visit at the Field End Infant school in South Ruislip. – AFP

The sweet grace of God is our own saving grace



Ray Petersen
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The writer is a media consultant

Bathing in the almost euphoric sentiments of the Eid observance, must offer some recognition of the absolute notions of salvation and relief must positively impact upon those who are under pressure, under stress, under threat, under sufferance, of any kind. I guess we have all been there in some way, but how good must it feel?

With Ramadhan being an opportunity to reflect upon the situations of those less fortunate than ourselves. It is an opportunity for religious or social enlightenment. A chance to grow closer together as a family, community, society, nation, or faith. It is also, yet another chance for believers, being as fragile and wanton as we all sometimes are, to grow even closer to Allah. Most strenuously though, for those of the faith, it is recognition that they are never alone, and that a quarter of the world's population, or nearly two billion other Muslims, share their five pillars of obligation.

Actress Judy Garland may well have been referring to the muted exuberance, the sentiments of Ramadhan, Eid and of course the Almighty, when she once said, "For it was not into my ear you whispered, but into my heart. It was not my lips you kissed, but my soul." That is so incredibly beautiful in any context but offered as a recognition of the redemptive nature of Ramadhan, and the requital of the blessed Eid, it is momentous.

Another context for people who need salvation at this time is the untold misery being suffered, not only by the Ukraine and its people, but also the forces of the Russian behemoth. The world mourns the loss of thousands of Ukrainian citizens, and rightly so, as so many lives have been lost, families ripped asunder, homes destroyed, futures and prospects immeasurably harmed. Yet, being of faith, we must also mourn the young men of the Russian military who probably thought their show of force would present a fait accompli. They too have families...

WITH RAMADHAN BEING AN OPPORTUNITY TO REFLECT UPON THE SITUATIONS OF THOSE LESS FORTUNATE THAN OURSELVES. IT IS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR RELIGIOUS OR SOCIAL ENLIGHTENMENT

Demonstrating their sensitivity, many ordinary people have shared on social media recently their apprehension for those fleeing in search of sanctuary, concerned for the families, particularly the elderly and children, who will be traumatised forever. Charles Darwin, foreshadowing the most visceral nature of conflict and redemption, in his unique way, wrote, "Struggle is the father of all things. It is not by the principles of humanity that man lives, or preserves himself above animals, but only by means of that most brutal struggle."

The Chinese too, are being made to suffer, maybe for their avoidance of culpability in the matter of the global pandemic? But in any sense, hundreds of thousands of the citizens of Shanghai are amidst a lockdown of epic proportion, locked into their apartment homes without warning as the authorities battle to contain the latest version of the pandemic scourge. Harrowing descriptions are emerging.

However, as in the other situations, there is relief, there is redemption, and my source has pointed to a camaraderie, a level of community and social concern, in most apartment blocks, for centralisation of food supplies, sharing and rationing, particularly to protect those most vulnerable, again, the elderly, the infirm and children. China's elderly, sustained by Confucianist respect for elders, long-standing friendships, and a reliance on their offspring to provide meaningful, late in life care, have not faced such trauma before, and with the losses from the pandemic, their stress levels are genuine.

Three very different situations, religious, political and societal, and three very different environments all point to the vastly disparate challenges facing us, and our ilk. We are all one, one's loss is all our loss. Whether reflecting on Ramadhan, the Ukraine or Shanghai, we must all be thankful that but for your faith, beliefs and an intensely compassionate God's sweet grace, and a strong government, there go we.



MEETING THE REFUGEES

US First Lady Jill Biden poses for a photo during a meeting with Ukrainian teachers and refugees at the "Uruguay Gymnasium School", in Bucharest. Jill Biden is visiting Romania and Slovakia to meet with displaced Ukrainian parents and children, aid workers, US service members and embassy personnel. – AFP

What should Macron do now?



Pascal Boniface

The writer is Director of the French Institute for International and Strategic Affairs (IRIS)

Within Europe, French President Emmanuel Macron's victory over the far-right leader Marine Le Pen has been broadly welcomed. After all, although Le Pen abandoned her old idea of ditching the euro, she still views the European Union as a threat to French sovereignty — a force that prevents the government from protecting the French people from the perils of globalisation.

Among other things, Le Pen wanted to reconsider the Franco-German alliance (the bedrock of the European project since its beginning), leave Nato's integrated military command and seek reconciliation with Russia, despite its war on Ukraine. Her admiration for Russian President Vladimir Putin is ideologically motivated: He supposedly defends Christian civilisation. But the affinity is also psychological and financial. Le Pen and the rest of the far-right long for a strongman; and in 2014, her party received a €9.4 million (\$10 million) loan from a Russian bank.

But while Macron's 2017 victory over Le Pen triggered an outpouring of enthusiasm (the cover of "The Economist" depicted him walking on water), his re-election elicited only a sigh of relief. Macron did not meet Europeans' lofty expectations during his first term. Some of his difficulties, such as the "yellow vests" (gilets jaunes) protests and the perception that he is a "president of the rich", were of his own making. Others, such as Donald Trump's presidency in the United States, Brexit, and then Covid-19, confronted him with tests for which he was not always prepared.

With Europe confronting a war on its border, the new strategic landscape does not seem to favour Macron's 2017 agenda. Since Russia's war on Ukraine is a clear violation of international law, it precludes any French-Russian partnership in the coming years — at least while Putin is in charge.

This is a big change. Ever since Charles de Gaulle and the creation of the Fifth Republic in 1958, engaging with the Kremlin has been a unique element of French security policy. Owing to its own nuclear deterrent, France was always less fearful of Moscow and less dependent on the US nuclear umbrella, than other European countries. Allied but not always aligned with the US, successive French presidents viewed engagement with the Soviet Union, and then Russia, as a way to preserve France's room for manoeuvre.

When Macron came to power in 2017, his goal was to push for European "strategic autonomy" — to make Europe less dependent on the US. This was necessary, he explained in 2019, because Nato was becoming "brain dead."

But, thanks to Putin, Nato is now stronger and more united than it has been in decades. Every European country recognises that, where security is concerned, Nato is the only game in

town, and the US remains the only force capable of deterring wider Russian war. Though America's strategic credibility was called into question by its shambolic withdrawal from Afghanistan last year, it has now been restored. By making clear that the US will not deploy troops to protect a non-Nato country, US President Joe Biden has strengthened the incentive for countries like Finland and Sweden to abandon their neutrality and join the alliance.

Under these new circumstances, Macron's previous plea for greater autonomy vis-à-vis the US suddenly seems rather foolish to many European leaders. For now, it is the French project of European strategic autonomy that has become brain dead. Restoring normal relations with the Kremlin would take years. If Macron persists in pressing for autonomy, Europe will remain divided.

Beyond Europe, France's efforts to help

AFTER SETTING HIGH EXPECTATIONS WHEN HE WON THE FRENCH PRESIDENCY IN 2017, EMMANUEL MACRON WILL NEED TO DEVISE A MORE REALISTIC AND DOWN-TO-EARTH AGENDA FOR HIS SECOND TERM

governments in Africa's Sahel contain a rebellion are also running into trouble. The fighting has already shattered the link between France and Mali, and victory against regional extremist groups is nowhere in sight. The situation is similarly gloomy across Africa more broadly. Not only is France no longer Africa's cop; its prestige on the continent is quickly deteriorating. The growing popularity of racist far-right figures in France is one reason for this; but another is that France has been less willing to maintain ties with authoritarian French-speaking regimes.

The situation in the Middle East

and North Africa is also problematic. Lebanon is mired in political and financial crises that Macron is powerless to resolve. Algeria's internal conflicts are hurting its relationship with France, despite Macron's best efforts to reflect honestly on the legacy of colonialism and the brutal war of independence. And, after long serving as an active participant in efforts to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, France, like the rest of the international community, has largely given up that cause.

Where might Macron's characteristic dynamism make an effective contribution? The first area that comes to mind is the fight against climate change. Having hosted the successful 2015 summit that produced the Paris climate agreement, France has a strong claim to global leadership on this issue. Moreover, forward-looking green policies have become increasingly popular around the world, specifically among young people, whose support Macron needs to recapture.

Macron also will likely be a strong proponent of multilateralism, which has suffered in this age of populist nationalism. The crisis of multilateralism is arguably at the heart of Europe and the world's most pressing strategic problems today. Here, too, France has a legitimate claim to leadership, given that Macron placed multilateralism at the heart of his campaign. France is powerful enough to influence global affairs, but not to act unilaterally. With his high global profile, Macron could work with Japan, Germany, India and others to forge a united front in defence of the multilateral system.

Lastly, Macron's France — working closely with Germany and the EU more broadly — can help to ensure that the confrontation between the West and Russia over Ukraine does not escalate into a more dangerous global confrontation between authoritarian and democratic countries. That is the last thing France or Europe needs.

@Project Syndicate, 2021



Emmanuel Macron arrives at the Elysee presidential palace in Paris on Saturday to attend his investiture ceremony as French President, following his re-election last April 24. – AFP

sport

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OMANTEL LEAGUE POINTS TABLE
(RANK, TEAM, PLAYED, WON, DRAW, LOST,
GD, POINTS):

1. Al Seeb	24	16	5	3	33	53
2. Al Nahda	24	14	7	3	17	49
3. Dhofar	24	13	8	3	23	47
4. Al Musannah	24	12	5	7	9	41
5. Al Nasr	24	10	8	6	5	38
6. Al Rustaq	24	9	7	8	2	34
7. Sohar	24	8	9	7	-2	33
8. Oman club	24	8	7	9	0	31
9. Al Suwaiq	24	8	7	9	-2	31
10. Al Ittihad	24	4	9	11	-20	21
11. Bahla	24	4	8	12	-10	20
12. Muscat	24	5	5	14	-12	20
13. Nizwa	24	4	7	13	-25	19
14. Saham	24	2	10	12	-18	16

S A H A M , B A H L A I N D A N G E R Z O N E A S R E L E G A T I O N F I G H T H E A T S U P

Seeb inch closer to OL crown

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MAY 7

League leaders Seeb inched closer to lift their second title as they blanked Al Nasr 1-0 at the latter's home in Al Saada Sports Complex to continue on the top of the table in the 25th week of Omantel League.

Mohammed Ramadhan scored the all-important goal in the 51st minute through a header after a corner taken by Ali al Busaidy. Ramadhan's goal was enough for the Muscat-based team to seal 53 points and keep the margin

of four points with the closest opponents Al Nahda. The HM Cup champions will need one more victory in the forthcoming round against Al Musannah to confirm a new triumph and clinch the shield of the league for second successive time. Al Nasr remained at the fifth place with 38 points.

Seeb players received a grand welcome after their arrival to Muscat International Airport on Saturday morning.

Seeb will face Al Musannah on Tuesday at Seeb Stadium and it is expected to be a full capacity crowd at their home venue as the

victory will decide the league title for Seeb.

AL SUWAIQ STAY IN OL

Abdullah al Balushi delivered a crucial 1-0 win for Al Suwaiq as he netted the only goal in the match against Al Musannah to confirm his team's presence at the top local division league next season. The Southern Batinah team secured a place in the comfort zone with 31 points at ninth place while their neighbours remained in the fourth place with 41 points.

Saham received another shock this week as they suffered a 1-0 loss

against Al Rustaq. Saham are inch closer to the relegation as they are in bottom with 16 points only at 14th place.

Sohar registered a 5-2 win over Nizwa at Sohar Sports Complex. The defeat raised chances of Nizwa's relegation to first division league as they have 19 points at 13th position while Sohar confirmed their presence at the top-flight league with 33 points at seventh place.

Muscat and Al Ittihad ended their fixture at goalless draw where both teams were seeking for three points. The draw kept both teams at the danger zone as Muscat are at

12th position with 20 points while Al Ittihad are slightly up at 10th position with 21 points.

Al Nahda recorded a crucial 2-0 win against Oman club at Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher. The victory maintained four points gap with leaders Seeb as the Al Buraimi representative club are at the second place and possess 49 points. Ali Dhahi and Oudi al Quraa confirmed Al Nahda's victory in the first half as both goals were scored before the half-time break.

Bahla were back to losing trail after a 1-0 loss against Dhofar at their home in Nizwa Sports

Complex. Bahla were looking to runaway from the relegation zone as they registered a 2-1 victory over Al Nasr last week but the defeat brought them back to danger area with 20 points at 11th place.

With two more rounds remaining, the fight to stay afloat in the league saw intense competition among the bottom rank teams.

On Monday, Muscat will face Bahla while Saham will meet Al Suwaiq. Nizwa will play against Al Ittihad in a tight clash. The upcoming round will finalise the relegated teams to the first division league.



Fraser-Pryce clocks world-leading 10.67 to win 100m in Nairobi

NAIROBI: Jamaican sprint legend Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce posted the fastest 100m in the world this year as she clocked 10.67secs to win her season opener in Nairobi on Saturday.

The 35-year-old, who has won eight Olympic medals including silver in Tokyo last summer, was a comfortable winner after new sprint sensation, the 18-year-old Namibian Christine Mboma, pulled up suddenly before collapsing to the track.

Fraser-Pryce's winning time was close to her personal best of 10.60, set in Lausanne in August 2021.

Only four other women

have run the distance faster: Americans Marion Jones (10.65) and Carmelita Jeter (10.64), fellow Olympic champion Elaine Thompson-Herah (10.54), and the controversial world record holder American Florence Griffith-Joyner (10.49).

Earlier, the men's Olympic 100m champion Marcell Jacobs withdrew at the last minute from his long-awaited return to the track in Nairobi because of intestinal problems.

The Italian, who was a surprise winner at last year's Olympics, was due to go head to head with silver medallist Fred Kerley for the first time since Tokyo. — AFP

Jaiswal, Hetmyer keep Rajasthan Royals in hunt for play-offs

MUMBAI: Yashasvi Jaiswal's 68 and an unbeaten 31 by Shimron Hetmyer guided Rajasthan Royals to a six-wicket victory over Punjab Kings in the Indian Premier League on Saturday.

Jaiswal's 41-ball knock lay the foundation for the Royals' chase of 190 before Hetmyer steered the team home with two balls to spare in a tense finish in Mumbai.

England's Jonny Bairstow made 56 — his first fifty of this IPL season — to guide Punjab to 189 for five after electing to bat first on another hot afternoon.

The left-handed Jaiswal combined with opening partner Jos Buttler (30) to give the Royals a quick start to their chase and then kept up the charge with skipper Sanju Samson (23).

Left-arm pace bowler Arshdeep Singh returned figures of 2-29 and gave away just three runs in the 19th over, which included the wicket of Devdutt Padikkal, who made 31, to test the Royals.

Earlier Bairstow smashed New Zealand quick Trent Boult for two boundaries in the first over to signal his intent as he helped Punjab to 48-1 in the first six overs.

But left-handed Hetmyer smashed three fours and two sixes in his 16-ball blitz to ensure the Royals bounced back from two losses and stayed third in the 10-team table. He lost his opening partner Shikhar Dhawan to a stunning catch from Buttler.

Bairstow put on key partnerships including a 42-run second-wicket stand with Bhanuka Rajapaksa before he fell lbw to Yuzvendra Chahal, who returned figures of 3-28. Wicketkeeper-batter Jitesh Sharma kept up the attack and found Liam Livingstone's company as the duo added 50 off 26 balls for the fifth wicket.

Livingstone was bowled by Prasidh Krishna for 22 off 14 balls, but Sharma finished with a flourish as he hit a six and two fours in a 16-run 20th over. It was not enough as the Royals won their first match chasing this season. — AFP

BRIEF SCORES: Rajasthan Royals 190-4 (Yashasvi Jaiswal 68, Shimron Hetmyer 30*; Arshdeep Singh 2-29) beat Punjab Kings 189-5 (Jonny Bairstow 56, Jitesh Sharma 38*; Yuzvendra Chahal 3-28) by 6 wickets.



Sams helps Mumbai stun Gujarat

MUMBAI: Mumbai Indians skipper Rohit Sharma on Friday praised the "skills" of Daniel Sams after the Australian fast bowler defended nine runs off the last over to hand his team their second win this IPL.

The five-time champions edged out table-toppers Gujarat Titans by five runs as they kept down the opposition to 172-5 in a chase of 178 at Mumbai's Brabourne Stadium.

Gujarat were sailing along at 156-3 when skipper Hardik Pandya was run out and Mumbai seized the moment to make a comeback. David Miller, who made an unbeaten 19 in his 100th IPL match, and Rahul Tewatia, attempted to complete the chase but left-arm quick Sams denied the opposition with just three runs in the 20th over that included a run out.



"He was under the pump in a couple of games, but I have seen him for Australia and in the BBL (Big Bash League), he has a lot of skill", Rohit said of his bowler who was taken for 35 runs in an over by Kolkata Knight Riders' Pat Cummins. "It was not easy to defend nine runs."

Openers Wriddhiman Saha (55) and Shubman Gill (52) added 106 but leg-spinner Murugan Ashwin sent the duo back to the dugout in his fourth over.

Gujarat, one of the two new teams in the expanded 10-team Indian Premier League Twenty20 tournament, still stay top of the table but went down to their second successive loss. Mumbai won their second straight match but remain bottom of the heap.

Earlier, Tim David's unbeaten 44 off 21 balls guided Mumbai to 177 for six. — AFP

Ayan Intl claim Pran Frooto trophy



MUSCAT: Ayan International beat Friendly Stars by 43 runs in the final to win the Pran Frooto cricket tournament organised by Al Hail Cricket Club recently.

The final was held on April 28, where SK Firoz Ahamed, Marketing & Business Development Manager of PRAN Food Oman, presided as the chief guest. Doshambe al Balushi, Ismail, Waleed, captain of OCT Al Hail CT and Khalid al Balushi, senior board member of Al Hail CC were also present for the award ceremony.

In the final match, Ayan XI captain Z Haider won the toss and elected to bat first. Ayan XI went on to score 85 runs in the stipulated 8 overs for the loss of 4 wickets. Haider top-scored with 31 runs and other useful contributions came from Nasir Siddiq with 27 runs and Shafeeq with 9 runs.

For Friendly Stars, Bilal took 3 wickets giving away 22 runs. In reply, Friendly Stars fumbled to a measurable 42 for 2 wickets at the end of 8 overs. Bilal was the top-scorer with 20 runs while Irfan from Ayan XI was the pick of the bowlers destroying the Friendly Stars top line.

Zulqarnain Haider of Ayan International was declared as man of the tournament and best batsman as well.

The tournament was sponsored by PRAN Foods Oman and supported by Cricket Cottage and Baab Al Hail Trading.

Inter reclaim top spot, Juventus collapse at Genoa



(From L) Inter Milan's goalkeeper Samir Handanovic, Lautaro Martinez, Arturo Vidal and Danilo D'Ambrosio celebrate at the end of the Serie A match against Empoli at the San Siro stadium in Milan. – AFP

MILAN: On a night of wild swings in Serie A, Inter Milan came from two goals down on Friday to beat Empoli and later Juventus conceded two late goals to lose at Genoa.

In Milan, Lautaro Martinez scored twice as Inter fought back to beat Empoli 4-2 and jump to the top of Serie A.

“The team showed character. We’re here,” said Inter coach Simone Inzaghi on DAZN.

In the late game, Juventus dominated relegation-haunted Genoa only to concede an 87th minute equaliser and a 96th minute penalty, converted by Domenico Criscito, who had missed a late derby penalty a week earlier.

“Football gives and takes,” said Criscito. Inter moved one point ahead of rivals AC Milan and have a superior goal difference but have played a game more.

Juventus started the evening mathematically still in the title race. They ended it still in fourth, a point behind Napoli, and nine points behind Inter with two games left.

AC Milan will go back on top if they win at Verona on Sunday.

At the San Siro, Empoli, who are in 14th, dominated the first half-hour with Andrea Pinamonti, who is on loan from Inter, putting the visitors ahead after just five minutes.

Albanian midfielder Kristjan Asllani added a second after 28 minutes.

Inter were level by half-time with Empoli captain Simone Romagnoli putting through his own net five minutes before the break and Martinez grabbing his first just before the whistle.

The Argentine was on target again in the 64th minute with his 19th goal of the season before former Arsenal striker Alexis Sanchez added a fourth in the dying seconds.

“This comeback victory against a very well organised opponent gives me great confidence,” said Inzaghi.

Genoa remained 19th and second from bottom, but closed to a point behind resurgent Salernitana in 17th.

Juventus dominated but only led by one goal, a beautiful strike by Paulo Dybala, in the 48th minute.

The Argentine later hit a post and Dusan Vlahovic and Moise Kean also squandered chances. — AFP

ITALIAN SERIE A TABLE AFTER FRIDAY'S MATCHES
(PLAYED, WON, DRAWN, LOST, GOALS FOR, GOALS AGAINST, POINTS):

Inter Milan	36	23	9	4	78	31	78
AC Milan	35	23	8	4	61	30	77
Napoli	35	21	7	7	67	31	70
Juventus	36	20	9	7	55	33	69
Roma	35	17	8	10	55	40	59
Lazio	35	17	8	10	70	53	59
Fiorentina	35	17	5	13	54	47	56
Atalanta	35	15	11	9	62	54	56
Verona	35	14	10	11	61	52	52
Torino	35	12	11	12	45	37	47
Sassuolo	35	12	10	13	60	61	46
Udinese	35	10	13	12	54	54	43
Bologna	35	11	10	14	39	48	43
Empoli	36	9	10	17	48	69	37
Sampdoria	35	9	6	20	42	57	33
Spezia	35	9	6	20	37	63	33
Salernitana	35	7	8	20	31	72	29
Cagliari	35	6	10	19	32	64	28
Genoa	36	4	16	16	27	56	28
Venezia	35	5	7	23	29	65	22

ITALIAN SERIE A RESULTS
On Friday
Inter Milan 4 (Romagnoli og 40, Martinez 45, 64, Sanchez 90+4) Empoli 2 (Pinamonti 5, Asllani 28)
Genoa 2 (Gudmundsson 87, Criscito 90+6-pen) Juventus 1 (Dybala 48)



Spain's Carlos Alcaraz reacts as he competes against Spain's Rafael Nadal during their 2022 ATP Tour Madrid Open quarterfinal at the Caja Magica in Madrid. – AFP

ALCARAZ DOWNS NADAL TO BOOK DJOKOVIC CLASH

MADRID: Carlos Alcaraz overcame an injury scare on his way to a milestone victory over Rafael Nadal on Friday to set up a blockbuster semifinal against Novak Djokovic in Madrid.

Alcaraz entered the contest with a 0-2 record against Nadal, but the 35-year-old arrived in Madrid with little to no preparation on clay after six weeks nursing a rib injury.

In an eventful quarterfinal at the Caja Magica, the 19-year-old Alcaraz beat 21-time Grand Slam champion Nadal 6-2, 1-6, 6-3 for his 26th victory of the season.

“It means a lot to me, all the hard work that I put in every day paid off today to beat Rafa, beat the best player in history on clay, it means a lot to me,” said Alcaraz, who is

the first teenager to beat Nadal on a clay court.

“It affected me a lot the fall in the second set but when I lost the second, I went to the bathroom and I believed I was able to get back, I was able to do my best, try everything on court, fight until the last ball and I think it was the key.”

The first three games went against serve and lasted over 20 minutes before Alcaraz finally held for a 3-1 advantage. Nadal mustered just one more game in that set.

In the third game of the second set, Alcaraz took a tumble trying to retrieve a ball and had a medical timeout at 1-2 to get his ankle taped. Replays showed Alcaraz had badly rolled his ankle.

Nadal broke upon resumption before play was

The world number one will face Alcaraz for the first time and heaped praise on the young Spaniard, having spent some time with him earlier this week

interrupted again for attention to someone in the crowd.

After a long pause, Nadal held and ran away with the set with Alcaraz visibly restricted in his movement.

Alcaraz moved better at the start of the decider after his toilet break, leaping to a 3-1 lead. He completed the win in two hours and 28 minutes and set up a clash with Djokovic.

‘FANTASTIC FOR OUR SPORT’

“I will text (David) Nalbandian to see how he did it. I will fight and let’s see what happens tomorrow,” joked Alcaraz, referring to Miomir Kecmanovic’s coach David Nalbandian, who beat Nadal, Djokovic and Roger Federer on his way to the Madrid title in 2007. Djokovic reached his seventh Madrid semifinal, easing past Pole Hubert Hurkacz 6-3, 6-4 to record a 30th career victory in the Spanish capital.

The world number one will face Alcaraz for the first time and heaped praise on the young Spaniard, having spent some time with him practising earlier this week.

“I love to watch him play, as a lot of other players on

the tour. He’s fantastic for our sport, no doubt. I think it’s great that we have a young player who is doing so well and giving a new fresh breath to the tennis world,” said Djokovic.

“Seeing that and knowing that he’s a very nice guy, very humble with good values, is a perfect combination.”

Monte Carlo champion Stefanos Tsitsipas squeezed past familiar foe Andrey Rublev 6-3, 2-6, 6-4 to record a tour-leading 27th match-win of the season.

The 2019 Madrid runner-up edged ahead 5-4 in his head-to-head against Rublev and now awaits defending champion Alexander Zverev or Canadian eighth seed Felix Auger-Aliassime in the semifinals. — AFP

Embiid inspires 76ers to rout of Heat

LOS ANGELES: Philadelphia’s star centre Joel Embiid returned from injury to help the re-energised 76ers beat the Miami Heat 99-79 on Friday, clawing back a game in their NBA play-off series.

Luka Doncic and the Dallas Mavericks also avoided falling into a 3-0 hole with a 103-94 victory over the Phoenix Suns.

Embiid missed the Sixers’ double-digit losses in the first two games against Miami after he suffered a concussion and orbital fracture in the first-round, series-clinching win over Toronto.

With his return confirmed just shortly before tip-off in Philadelphia, Embiid scored 18 points and pulled down 11 rebounds as the 76ers trimmed the deficit in the best-of-seven Eastern Conference series to 2-1. “I tried to push as much as I can, I’m glad that we got the win”, said MVP candidate



Embiid, who played in a protective mask but was still clearly hurting when he took a hand to the face late in the game. Danny Green drained seven of his nine three-point attempts on the way to 21 points for Philadelphia. Tyrese Maxey scored all 21 of his points in a scintillating second-half performance.

Maxey picked up the slack

after former MVP James Harden keyed the Sixers before the break, when he scored 15 of his 17 points.

Jimmy Butler led the Heat with 33 points. Tyler Herro added 14 off the bench but point guard Kyle Lowry, back after missing four games with a hamstring strain, didn’t score.

Embiid, who is also playing

with torn ligaments in his right thumb, certainly showed signs of rust and, late in the game, fatigue.

The Cameroonian, who was unable to do conditioning work while suffering concussion symptoms during the week, said he expects to improve. “I didn’t think I had a lot of energy, honestly”, said Embiid, who said he dealt

with “a bunch” of concussion symptoms during the week. “I was really trying to really get through it and kind of just use my presence out there as a decoy.

MAVS GET JOB DONE

In Dallas, Luka Doncic came up just shy of a triple-double with 26 points, 13 rebounds and nine assists. And the Mavericks’ Slovenian star finally got some support as Jalen Brunson scored 28 points to lead five Dallas players to score in double figures.

Most importantly, the Mavericks clamped down defensively on the top-seeded Suns, who were harried into 17 turnovers. Jae Crowder led the Suns with 19 points while star point guard Chris Paul — celebrating his 37th birthday — was held to 12 and Devin Booker scored 18. — AFP



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Oman Tech Fund pledges \$1m for new start-ups

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 7

Oman Technology Fund (OTF), a state-backed fund specialising in investing in start-ups and innovative and creative ideas in the IT sector in the Sultanate of Oman and the MENA region, has pledged to provide \$1 million in funding support for new start-ups as part of a 'Pitch Battle' contest to be held during the upcoming COMEX technology show.

An agreement to this effect was signed by Dr Yousef bin Abdullah al Balushi, Acting CEO of OTF, and Amr bin Abdullah Baabood, CEO of OITE — organiser of COMEX 2022.

The 31st edition of COMEX — the official technology event of the Sultanate of Oman, will take

place from May 23 to 25 at the OCEC Muscat.

This event is one of the leading exhibitions to highlight the digital transformation of ministries, authorities, and companies by showcasing their achievements and opportunities for innovation in technology and their steps towards Oman Vision 2040.

The expo provides the most engaging and networking platform for youth talent development leaders, learning heads, human resources and business leaders to bridge the gaps and find solutions in several areas of the digital eco system, such as AI, Cybersecurity, IoT, Innovation, Drones, Future Mobility, Blockchain, Coding and more, which correspond to the Oman Vision 2040 and the



Only 10 start-ups will qualify for the finals, which will be presented to the fund's investment committee to evaluate the possibility of receiving investment from OTF

government digital economy goals.

For the first time, COMEX will have a dedicated zone for start-ups called COMEX Tech Venture, where many start-ups from across the region will have the opportunity to showcase their products and services.

With the support of OTF, the COMEX group of events will focus on enhancing the investment opportunities in ICT

start-ups locally and globally within the framework of Oman Vision 2040.

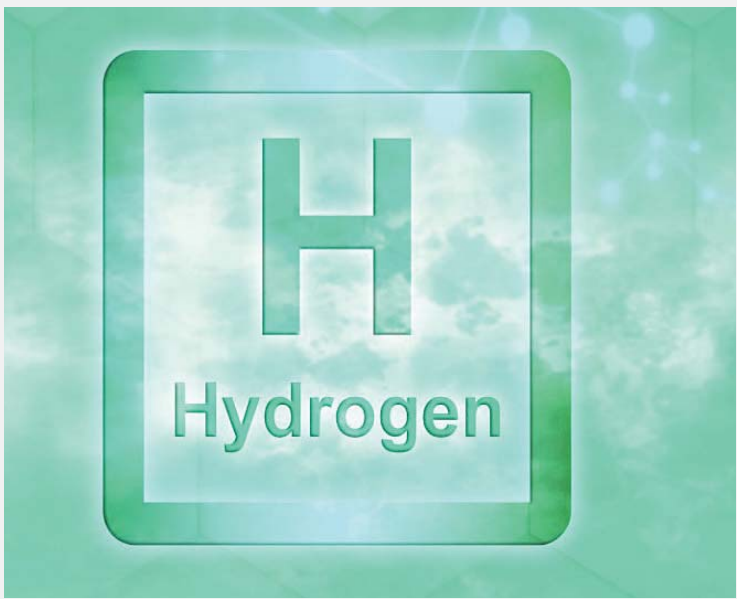
The jury members will select the top 40 start-ups to exhibit at COMEX and they will compete with the other start-ups. Only 10 start-ups will qualify for the finals, which will be presented to the fund's investment committee to evaluate the possibility of receiving investment from OTF.

Start-ups specialising in different areas in the ICT field, such as gaming, e-commerce, e-lifestyle, business, entertainment, health and fitness, education, travel, utilities, fintech, biotech and logistics tech, and other areas are all welcome to register for the Pitch Battle until May 17, 2022 by filling out this form: <https://bit.ly/3ryXZhm>

Oman to set up new hydrogen company

NEW ENTITY: Hydrogen Development Oman (HDO) to be part of EDO

CONRAD PRABHU
[@conradprabhu](#)



A new national energy company dedicated to the pursuit of green hydrogen projects in the Sultanate of Oman is on the anvil, the 'Observer' has learnt.

The new entity, Hydrogen Development Oman (HDO), is proposed to be a wholly-owned subsidiary of Energy Development Oman (EDO), the state-owned holding company set up by Royal Decree in December 2020 to represent the government's stake in Petroleum Development Oman (PDO), as well as champion the country's energy transition.

A 'technical committee' headed by Dr Mohammed bin Hamad al Rumhy, Minister of Energy and Minerals, is currently deliberating on the broad framework and remit of the new entity.

A number of stakeholder government bodies and energy companies are part of this effort as well, notably EDO, OQ, Oman Investment Authority, Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion and the Authority for Public Services Regulation (APSR).

According to experts, the establishment of a national hydrogen-centric company stems from the recent directives

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A NATIONAL HYDROGEN-CENTRIC COMPANY STEMS FROM THE RECENT DIRECTIVES OF HIS MAJESTY SULTAN HAITHAM BIN TARIK CALLING FOR EFFECTIVE INSTITUTIONAL AND REGULATORY FOUNDATIONS TO BE LAID TO SUPPORT THE GROWTH OF A FUTURE GREEN HYDROGEN ECONOMY IN THE SULTANATE OF OMAN

of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik calling for effective institutional and regulatory foundations to be laid to

support the growth of a future green hydrogen economy in the Sultanate of Oman.

His Majesty the Sultan also stressed the need for a dedicated department to be set up within the Ministry of Energy and Minerals to oversee all regulatory aspects of this future industry.

Accordingly, with the Ministry as the regulator and policymaker for the green hydrogen sector, the proposed new entity Hydrogen Development Oman (HDO) will emerge as the national company for hydrogen projects.

HDO will partner with local and international investors in the implementation of green hydrogen projects. Its equity in any project will also include the vast tracts of land that will be required for the upstream green electricity generation component of the project, it is learnt.

World faces \$410 billion economic shock as central banks reverse course

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 7

The central banks of Group of Seven countries are estimated to shrink their balance sheets by around \$410 billion for the remainder of 2022, a significant turnaround from the purchasing blitz enacted throughout the pandemic, according to a report by Bloomberg Economics.

This course change from an era of easy money will threaten to shock the global economy and financial markets and represents a considerable change from central bank policy during the pandemic.

While G7 central bank balance sheets are expected to shrink \$410 billion this year, last year they increased \$2.8 trillion, hitting a total of more than \$8



A person walks past the Bank of England in London. — AFP

trillion since Covid-19 started, the report noted.

TURN TO PAGE 14

Investment Opportunity
at Sumail Industrial City

The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madaayn) Sumail Industrial City announce the offering of an investment opportunity for investing one plots in the industrial city of Sumail to establish a cafe and mini market.

Bidding Number	Name of Project	Last date of buying	Date of visit the location	Date of submission	Type of work	Fee (R.O)
1/2022	Establish a cafe and mini market	22/05/2022	22/5/2022	26/05/2022	Investment opportunity	50 non-refundable

Bidding Documents can be obtained from Support Department at Sumail Industrial City (Tel: 25362021/25362022) during official working hours, against non-refundable fee as mentioned above.

Offers must be submitted in a closed envelopes sealed with red wax. The Bidding number and name shall be written on the top of the envelope containing the offer. Nothing should be written on the exterior of the envelope to display the identity of the tenderer.

Offers should be addressed to, The Head of investment Committee, Post Box No. 400, Postal Code 615.

The completed Offer Document must be deposited in the Bids Box at Sumail Industrial City.

Madaayn is not bound to accept the highest or any other Offer and has the right to cancel this bidding and the tenderers have no right to claim for Madaayn.

@madaaynoman

MSX listed firms post 6.2 per cent rise in first quarter net profits



BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 7

Publicly traded companies listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) posted a combined net profit of RO 223.1 million in Q1 2022, up from RO 210.1 million for the corresponding quarter of 2021, registering a growth of 6.2 per cent.

The financial results of 97 public joint stock companies announced their preliminary financial results as of the start of May 2022. The results show that 71 companies achieved profits while 26 firms recorded losses.

Of the 71 profit-making firms, 41 companies posted a rise in their profits, while 23 others saw

earnings decline. Seven were able to switch from losses to profits.

The financial sector was the leading gainer, with a combined net profit of RO 122.3 million this year, against RO 112.1 million in the same period last year.

The services sector achieved a combined net profit of RO 87.8 million this year, up from RO 78.1 million in Q1 2021.

The industrial sector recorded a combined net profit of RO 12.6 million, down from RO 17.8 million for the corresponding period of 2021, a decline of 29.2 per cent.

Losses recorded by the sector rose to RO 6.6 million, up from RO 2.6 million in first quarter of 2021.

— ONA

Crude oil and condensate output in Oman climbs 8.7 per cent



BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 7

Output of crude oil and condensate in the Sultanate of Oman increased 8.7 per cent to 93.304 million barrels in the first quarter of this year, up from

85.825 million barrels for the corresponding period of 2021, according to the National Center for Statistics and Information.

Crude oil production alone rose 12.2 per cent during this period, while condensate output dipped 2.7 per cent during the

comparative period.

The average price of Omani crude rose 59.5 per cent to \$79 per barrel during Q1 2022, up from an average of \$49.5 per barrel for Q1 2021.

The country's total crude oil exports increased by 18 per cent

in Q1 2022 compared to the corresponding period of 2021.

Shipments to South Korea grew by 99.4 per cent to 1.995 million barrels (1.2 million barrels in Q1 2021), while crude oil exports to India climbed 44.4 per cent during this period.

Hydrogen to play a key role in decarbonisation of the utilities sector

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 7

In an evident and dramatic policy shift around the world recently, several countries are now actively pursuing decarbonisation strategies, raising the profile of zero-carbon fuels. As the utilities sector goes through the energy transition, the increasing use of zero-carbon fuels such as green hydrogen is likely to be a significant factor in the quest to decarbonise.

The drive to tackle global warming through decarbonisation has picked up momentum in recent months, with net-zero targets announced by the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Bahrain (2050), as well as China (2060), Japan, South Korea, and Canada (all 2050), and the Biden administration recommitting the US to the Paris Agreement.

Global demand for hydrogen currently stands at around 8-10 exajoules (EJ), most of which is consumed in the chemical sector; this figure looks set to grow. The EU published its hydrogen strategy last summer aiming for six gigawatt (GW) of capacity by 2024, ramping up to 40 GW by 2030. Germany, Spain, Portugal, Netherlands, Finland, Sweden, Poland, and Canada all published a national hydrogen strategy in the last year.

The Hydrogen Council's "Hydrogen for Net Zero" report shows that hydrogen can provide the lowest-cost decarbonisation solution for over a fifth of final energy demand by mid-century, while another estimate says that the world is going to need 1,000



GW of electrolyser capacity by 2050 to meet demand forecasts.

Currently, approximately 95 per cent of worldwide hydrogen production comes from fossil fuels, according to the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA).

However, hydrogen from renewable sources has the potential to play a key role as the energy industry tackles various critical challenges including how to channel large amounts of electricity from renewable sources to sectors for which decarbonisation is otherwise difficult, including industrial, transportation and niche applications.

Despite clear demand drivers and several opportunities on the horizon for hydrogen, the International Energy Agency (IEA) says demand for low-carbon hydrogen remains low, limited only to road transport and falling short of Net Zero Emissions by

2050 Scenario requirements. It says that more efforts are needed to create demand, and reduce emissions associated with hydrogen production.

Ferdinand Varga, Managing Director and Senior Partner of Boston Consulting Group, the Strategic Insights Partner of the World Utility Congress said: "One of the most forward-looking energy supply for industries is low-carbon fuels, specifically hydrogen.

Meeting the future demand for hydrogen will not be easy, as production and supply of it might require subsidisation of its production to close the gap with other forms of low — carbon fuels — and most importantly, an adequate supply of cheap renewable power.

Discussion on how hydrogen will play a key role in the decarbonisation of the utility sector will help to provide a path forward on when, where, and how

players should participate in it."

The economic case for green hydrogen has improved dramatically with costs for solar and wind dropping, as well as the scale up of electrolyser capacity and associated supply chain. With the green hydrogen project pipeline burgeoning in the last year, there will be significant demand pressure on electricity supply, where costs remain high.

The role of hydrogen in the future of the utilities sector will play an important role at the World Utilities Congress, with a dedicated spotlight session titled "What will it take for hydrogen to become the low-carbon champion?"

The World Utilities Congress will take place on May 9-11 in Abu Dhabi's ADNEC, where more than 10,000 global utilities professionals will attend to learn details on critical topics driving the future of low carbon power and water supplies.

World faces \$410 bn economic shock as banks reverse course

FROM PAGE 13

Central banks enacted unprecedented purchasing during the pandemic to prop up their economies and protect business during a Covid-19 slump.

This long-term purchasing, along with continued supply chain disruption, has been a driver of soaring inflation.

Now, with balance sheets set to shrink, interest rates continuing to increase, continued economic disruption caused by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and ongoing Covid-19 lockdown disruption in China, the global economy faces significant challenges.

To add further fuel on the fire, the US Fed is not acting alone during this tightening cycle, with other central banks also undertaking balance sheet reductions at the same time.

The new policy, known as quantitative tightening — the opposite of the quantitative easing that central banks turned to during the pandemic and the Great Recession — will likely send borrowing costs higher and dry up liquidity, Bloomberg said.

"This is a major financial shock for the world," Alicia Garcia Herrero, chief economist for Asia Pacific at Natixis SA, who previously worked for the European Central Bank and International Monetary Fund, told Bloomberg.

"You are already seeing the consequences of tapering in reduced dollar liquidity and dollar appreciation."

The US Fed is expected to raise its interest rate by 50 basis points

The new policy, known as quantitative tightening — the opposite of the quantitative easing that central banks turned to during the pandemic and the Great Recession — will likely send borrowing costs higher and dry up liquidity

at its May 3 to 4 policy meeting, with several hikes expected thereafter. Traders see about 250 basis points of tightening between now and year's end, while officials are expecting to start trimming the balance sheet at a maximum pace of \$95 billion a month, quicker than expected at the start of the year.

Others are moving in the same direction:

- The European Central Bank has signalled it will end QE in the third quarter, a timeline that is complicated by the spillover from war in Ukraine.
- The Bank of England has already started to shrink its balance sheet by ending gilt reinvestments in February. It is expected to hike rates again in May, bringing the key rate to the threshold where policy makers will weigh active sales from their asset portfolio.

"With all this central bank tightening coming into a slowdown already, it will really be all about if the central banks will tip us into recession," Kathy Jones, chief fixed-income strategist at Charles Schwab & Co., which manages over \$7 trillion in total assets, told Bloomberg.



India's Reliance rakes in \$100 bn annual revenue



Labourers rest in front of an advertisement of Reliance Industries Limited at a construction site in Mumbai. — AFP

MUMBAI: Reliance Industries became the first Indian company to cross \$100 billion in annual revenues after the oil-to-telecoms giant reported strong quarterly results across its energy, telecoms and retail businesses.

The conglomerate, which is owned by Asia's richest man Mukesh Ambani, reported a net profit of 162.03 billion rupees (\$2.1 billion) between January and March, 22.5 per cent higher than the same period last year.

Revenues from operations increased 36.8 per cent year-on-year to 2.12 trillion rupees, aided by both its legacy energy business and newer ventures such as retail. Income in the quarter helped gross revenue cross 7.93 trillion rupees (\$104.6 billion) for the financial year ended March 31.

"Despite the ongoing challenges of the pandemic and heightened geopolitical uncertainties, Reliance has delivered a robust performance", Chairman and Managing Director Ambani said in a statement.

"Our O2C (oil-to-chemical) business has proven its resilience

and has demonstrated strong recovery despite volatility in the energy markets", the billionaire added.

Revenues from Reliance's oil refinery and petrochemicals business — which accounts for more than half of total income — benefited from higher crude oil prices, rising 44.2 per cent year-on-year to 1.46 trillion rupees.

The energy giant's smaller oil and gas exploration and production business saw revenues jump 136.8 per cent year-on-year to 20 billion rupees, helped by higher gas prices.

But India intervening to keep domestic fuel prices low even as global oil prices skyrocketed in the quarter hurt Reliance's nascent petrol pump partnership with British oil and gas major BP, the company said.

Net profit from telecoms arm Reliance Jio rose 22.9 per cent to 43.13 billion rupees, boosted by tariff hikes undertaken in December 2021, even as its customer base shrunk by 10.9 million subscribers in the quarter. — AFP

Solid job growth continues in recovering US economy

WASHINGTON: From bars to factories to warehouses, American businesses hired staff with vigour in April as the US economy recovers from the damage done by Covid-19 while grappling with inflation that has hit the highest rate in decades.

Employers in the world's largest economy added 428,000 jobs last month, the Labour Department said, keeping the unemployment rate at 3.6 per cent, just above where it was before the spread of Covid-19 caused mass layoffs two years ago.

The data pointed to continued strong job growth and contained hints that some inflationary pressures may be easing — welcome news for an economy where consumer prices have climbed at a rate not seen since the 1980s. President Joe Biden described the data as a sign that his policies had revived the economy from the grievous damage wrought by the pandemic.

"Our plans and policies have produced the strongest job creation economy in modern times", Biden said in a statement.

The report was released two days after the Federal Reserve hiked its key lending rate by a half-percentage point to crush the wave of price increases, and signalled it plans further hikes in the months to come.

Workers' wages are a



A man puts a job advertisement poster at a restaurant chain in California. — AFP

component of accelerating inflation, and the jobs report showed average hourly earnings rising only 0.3 per cent compared to March, a slower pace that in recent months and potential signal the price pressures are abating.

However, economist Joe Naroff warned wages were still trending upwards and the generally rosy picture of the labor market the data painted may convince the Fed aggressive rate hikes are needed to lower inflation.

"Sometimes good news is not necessarily good news and this report, thought it shows that economy is still moving forward solidly, may be a problem for

investors", he said.

After spiking to 14.7 per cent in April 2020 following business closures across the country as the pandemic began, unemployment has declined steadily and is now just a hair above its 3.5 per cent rate before Covid-19 arrived.

The number of unemployed people was at 5.9 million last month, the Labour Department said, also not far from where it was in February 2020, while a range of businesses took on new hires.

These included the leisure and hospitality sector, which encompasses the bars and restaurants that bore the brunt of the pandemic restrictions.

The sector added 78,000 jobs last month, while manufacturers hired 55,000, transportation and warehousing took on 52,000, and employment at professional and business services firms rose 41,000.

But the labour force participation rate indicating the share of the population employed or searching for work declined slightly from March to 62.2 per cent, bringing it back to its level at the start of the year.

Supply of workers has been an ongoing problem for employers: Other data released recently shows there are nearly two job openings for every unemployed person in the labor force. — AFP

Britain construction activity logs strong growth

LONDON: Britain's construction activity logged strong growth in April, but the speed of recovery lost momentum amid weak new orders, survey results from S&P Global showed on Friday.

The construction purchasing managers' index fell to 58.2 in April, from 59.1 in March. A score above 50.0 indicates expansion.

Of the three main construction segments monitored by the survey, the fastest-growing remained commercial work, followed by civil engineering.

Meanwhile, residential work remained the worst-performing sub-sector in April. The near-term outlook for construction activity deteriorated in April, as total new order



A man works at a construction site in central London. — AFP

volumes expanded at the slowest rate for four months.

Respondents cited the fact that higher costs and worries about the economic outlook

acted as a brake on demand. At the same time, employment grew at the fastest pace in three months in April.

Companies recruited more

people to deliver forthcoming projects and rebuild business capacity.

Further, the survey showed that higher levels of input buying have been recorded in each month since June 2020. Suppliers again struggled to keep up with demand for construction products and materials.

Purchase price inflation grew at the fastest pace since September 2021 largely due to the removal of red diesel subsidies.

The degree of optimism about future workloads reached the lowest since September 2020. Risk aversion among clients and persistently high inflation due to energy price rises weighed on expectations. — dpa

Brazil, Guyana to widen energy cooperation

GEORGETOWN: Brazil and Guyana on Friday agreed to broaden energy cooperation during a visit by President Jair Bolsonaro to Georgetown, in which the South American neighbors also signed infrastructure and legal deals.

Former British and Dutch colony Guyana has emerged as one of the main low cost oil production countries and is preparing to auction offshore oil blocks at the end of the year.

"In terms of oil and gas, we have a Brazilian giant called Petrobras for whom cooperation with Guyana is becoming an

ever greater reality. That's what we hope for", said Bolsonaro.

US giant ExxonMobil announced in April the discovery of three new oil deposits in Guyana, raising estimates of the country's oil reserves to the equivalent of 11 billion barrels.

Those discoveries fueled Guyana's existing border dispute with Venezuela, which wants to explore territorial waters claimed by both countries. Guyana President Irfaan Ali evoked the idea of creating an energy corridor Guyana, Brazil and Surinam. — AFP

Soy boon for Argentina as Ukraine war boosts prices

LOBOS: Russia's war on Ukraine has sent grain prices skyrocketing — a worry for consumers worldwide but potentially a boon for producers like Argentina, which hopes an influx of soybean "agrodollars" will boost its faltering economy.

South America's third-largest economy is the biggest exporter of soybean meal and oil in the world, and only the United States and Brazil export more soybean grains.

Soy represents nearly a third of Argentina's exports and in 2021 contributed \$9 billion to the state coffers.

This year, the sector is expecting record sales of \$23.7 billion — about \$700 million more than in 2021 — despite a 10 per cent smaller harvest due to severe drought.

"The prospects for the producer are good... There is optimism," said Martin Semino, who sells farming equipment and presides over the Rural Society of Lobos, a fertile agricultural zone southwest of Buenos Aires. The harvest season is at its height, and workers are labouring from dawn to dusk to clear the fields before the autumn rains arrive.

"Soy is the dollar, the currency



A combine harvests a soy field in Lobos, 100 km west of Buenos Aires. — AFP

of the countryside", Semino said. In the past, the grain has been a savior for inflation-troubled Argentina.

A soybean boom in the 2000s is widely considered to have helped the country recover from its worst economic crisis in 2001. In the last 40 years, the planted surface area of soy has multiplied 14 times.

Argentina is also a major producer of sunflower oil and wheat — other grains affected by the ongoing war. After a record sunflower harvest of 3.4 million tonnes in 2021-2022, the area under cultivation

is set to increase by 17 per cent this season to two million hectares (4.9 million acres). The country also had a record wheat harvest this season.

Estimates are that in 2022, Argentina's agroindustrial exports will bring in a record \$41 billion — about \$3 billion more than in 2021. "With prices close to historic records, Argentina, which always needs dollars, must seize the moment", Tomas Rodriguez Zurro, an analyst at the Rosario Stock Exchange, said. The rise in prices "is temporary, it will end when the war is over", he cautioned. — AFP

Tejarah Talks: Manufacturing matters



MAYMUNA AL ADAWI

Tejarah Talks

BUSINESS STORIES ABOUT THINGS THAT MATTER

Maymuna al Adawi of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry & Investment Promotion and organiser of the popular Tejarah Talks series shines a light on Omani manufacturing, discussing rising non-oil exports, creative micro-manufacturers, unique product offerings, makeovers and more.

Q: You have been running Tejarah Talks since February what has been the response?

A: That is right. In partnership with the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, Oman Business Forum, HSBC and SOHAR Port and Freezone we have held sessions on sustainability and corporate culture — bringing together established as well as emerging business leaders in order to push boundaries, educate as well as inspire action. I must say the response from attendees has been incredibly positive and encouraging.

Q: The theme for May's Tejarah Talks is 'Manufacturing Matters' who is on the panel?

A: For the May 18 session Cinzia Farisè, CEO, Oman Cables and Nadia al Zakwani, Managing Director, Endamage will join Eng Hilal al Shibli, General Manager, Makers Oman Centre and Firas al Balushi, CEO, Innovation Factory to discuss the importance of manufacturing to the success of Oman Vision 2040.

His Highness Sayyid Dr Adham al Said, Founder, The Firm, will moderate the panel discussion. We think now is a good time to look at the changing world of manufacturing and understand not only how Omani companies can stay competitive but also lead the pack.

Q: So, how is Omani manufacturing doing?

A: Oman's a country that

makes things. From car batteries, fibre optic cables, footwear, ceramic tiles, sanitary ware, fragrances to washing powder, the products manufactured in the Sultanate of Oman are incredibly diverse. Representing 9.5 per cent of GDP and employing over 200,000 people, locally-made goods are exported to more than 130 countries.

Without doubt, manufacturing is an integral part of Oman's economic fabric; it drives innovation, contributes to employment across all skills levels and in all governorates and plays a crucial role in our return to export-led growth post-pandemic.

In fact, Oman's non-oil exports grew 91.2 per cent to \$15 billion in 2021 up from \$7.8 billion in 2020. A welcome sign that Omani products are proving popular with buyers worldwide.

However, manufacturing is in the midst of profound change. From the Covid-19 pandemic to climate change from the explosion of new technologies affecting customer choices and preferences to global supply chain challenges. Manufacturing is going through one of the most intense periods of change in its history.

Q: What are the manufacturing trends we should be looking out for?

A: Breathing new life into the sector is the growth of niche micro-manufacturers — these are small businesses typically employing fewer than 10 people — that are catering to a specialised market, one generally neglected or forgotten by larger firms. They are often innovative twists on old ideas, completely new innovations or throwbacks to lost ways of doing things.

And there is a wide variety of angles for this business model and it can mold to any area of the economy, from high-end fashion to precision engineering. It is an exciting space.

Though small in size, many of these micro-manufacturers are becoming an economic force to be reckoned with.

A revolution in manufacturing is coming. The power of automation and the dropping of the costs of tools is already altering the landscape of how things are made in Oman.

It is important to remember the micro-manufacturing sector is part of a much larger creative economy that represents about 3 per cent of global GDP,



creating around 30 million jobs and generating \$2.2 trillion in revenue. It is big business.

We now live in a world defined by personalisation and unique product offerings. Thanks to the rise of technology that allows the customisation of everything from textiles to furniture, there is no longer such a thing as "one size fits all". Smaller cultures that function within the wider culture are becoming more common, as is the acceptance of a variety within tastes and lifestyles. The Omani marketplace is changing rapidly to accommodate this new culture of diversity and it is doing this through niche micro-manufacturers.

Q: Who are these micro-manufacturers?

A: They are artists, tailors, builders, programmers, engineers, painters, woodworkers, film-makers, bakers, graphic designers and more. They are a small but influential and quickly growing group of young creatives that are transitioning from hired talent to entrepreneurs taking advantage of Industrial Revolution 4.0. They just want to design and make cool things. I am very optimistic about this revival of entrepreneurial manufacturing.

Q: Who is supporting them?

A: Capitalising on the opportunities presented by micro-manufacturing are a number of small business programmes that are helping young Omanis turn their business ideas into reality by providing the necessary tools,

resources, mentoring and support networks.

For example, we have the SME Development Authority, Injaz Oman, the Zubair Small Enterprise Centre, Madayn's National Business Centre and the Makers Oman Centre on Innovation Park Muscat, all hotbeds of entrepreneurship.

Aided by these organisations young Omani entrepreneurs are setting up manufacturing businesses, attracting funds to their projects and figuring out how to build their products and services locally. They do not need large factories. Instead, they require compact, manufacturing facilities tailored to small, flexible production runs. For many talented Omani designers, inventors and makers, micro-manufacturing will be the key to their commercial success.

Q: Does Omani manufacturing need a makeover?

A: Post-pandemic we are seeing a change in the nature of what work looks like on Oman's production lines. Old stereotypes of dirty factories with blue-collar workers mindlessly repeating the same task over-and-over are shifting to work that requires highly skilled, creative and tech-savvy problem solvers. Sadly, many remain blind to the reality that Omani manufacturing jobs are a unique blend of design, technology and robotics. Jobs that are often well paid.

Data from a recent Deloitte Millennial Survey shows that only

three in 10 parents would consider encouraging their children to take up jobs in manufacturing. The survey also reveals that just 32 per cent of millennials think of manufacturing as clean and safe while 28 per cent considered jobs in the sector stable and secure.

Omani manufacturers clearly need to consider ways to stand out and change this poor image to better attract — and just as importantly retain — the next wave of Omani talent. Changing the perception of manufacturing will be key to winning the hearts and minds of young local talent, and creating a positive employee experience is critical.

Happy and engaged employees are the best advertising — and manufacturing cannot rebrand without them.

Having said that, we are all responsible for the image of manufacturing, it is vital to the success of Oman Vision 2040 and our shared prosperity. It is important we invest in the skills needed to maintain its strength. Together, it is crucial we inspire more young people to see manufacturing as a viable, attractive, exciting and rewarding career choice.

Q: So attracting young talent is key to the success of Omani manufacturing.

A: Absolutely. As I mentioned earlier, manufacturing is no longer the dark, dirty and dangerous place it once was. In truth, it has evolved and we have seen incredible changes just in

the past decade. Employers in the sector are now looking to recruit skilled workers that are fluent in operating and optimising automated technologies and smart solutions, making for a more desirable work environment and offering young Omani talent a variety of highly attractive career options.

Q: One final question — is the sustainability debate having an impact on Omani manufacturing?

A: This is an important question. The fast rise of environmental, social and governance (ESG) factors is redefining and elevating sustainability in Omani manufacturing as never before. Attracting investment as well as talent will be tied to ESG ratings. And as Omani consumers and investors gravitate towards more sustainable brands and business practices, environmental accountability has become a hot topic.

So reporting on energy consumption, emissions, carbon footprint and diversity will continue to rise. Today, manufacturers the length and breadth of Oman understand the substantial financial and reputational benefits that can be realised by paying early attention to developing an ESG strategy. Indeed, those that steal the march will be best placed to prosper.

Tejarah Talks is open to all and free-of-charge to attend. To reserve your May 18 seat email TT@tejarah.gov.om

Spot and derivatives in crypto



STEFANO VIRGILLI stefano@virgilli.com

The writer is a member of the International Press Association

The 17th week of 2022 was the usual rollercoaster in cryptocurrency. Some went up, some went down, and some went both up and down in a very short period of time.

I wrote a column last week on various possible investments during a period of high inflation. In the article I touched briefly on cryptocurrency.

That was enough to spark a LinkedIn conversation among some of my followers. Without a doubt, crypto is hot topic, and many are interested to know when it is a good time to go in. As you read more and more news about retailers, financial

institutions, and even countries opening up to cryptocurrencies, you might think that you are missing out on something spectacular.

But I warn all readers that not all that glitters is gold, and before making any investment — being it in crypto or not — you should seek professional advice. Unless you are a professional investor or trader. In that case you should have already figured out your risk appetite.

First of all, when you read that a big player has opened up to crypto, make sure to read the whole story. Often the headlines are written to sound attractive.

Do not forget that almost every news media makes money via ads, and they go "ka-ching" when you

click on the title to open the article. Secondly, when you deep dive in the content, notice that in the largest majority of the cases, any claim of crypto adoption refers to Bitcoin. In some cases Ethereum.

In other cases a stable coin. Rarely — I mean extremely rarely — you find articles that talk about the use case adoption of an alt-coin (alternative coins, aka tokens and cryptos with lower market cap).

Once the two points above are made clear, if you think you can afford to lose some of your investment, and your financial advisor supported your plan, you can look into the speculative investment in cryptocurrency.

The very basic entry point is to trade spot. That simply means that

you buy or sell cryptocurrencies at the market price offered by the crypto exchange. In spot trading, you open a position by buying, and close it — or exit — by selling. This rewards you only when the prices go up.

Simply put: you buy low, sell high. But sell to whom? Well, as spot trading occurs on a crypto exchange, when you exit a position you could convert your crypto into a stable coin. These are coins that are — arguably — stable, as linked to the value of the US dollar. Stable coins are useful because allows you to stop a trade, without leaving the exchange ecosystem.

For example, if you want to stop a Bitcoin loss, or you want to take a Bitcoin profit, simply convert

Bitcoin to USDT, and you are no longer affected by Bitcoin price fluctuation.

The more experienced traders also make money with derivative products.

These are complex financial instruments that allow for speculative trading by longing and shorting investment positions. Unlike spot trading, derivatives may allow to earn when prices go down.

When betting on prices going down, investors can borrow cryptocurrencies at current price, and profit the difference if indeed the price continues to decrease.

Regardless of spot trading or derivatives, cryptocurrency remains a risky investment.

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ANNOUNCEMENT

Announcement of Capital Reduction

IN accordance with the provisions of Article 150 of the Commercial Companies Law. The company **Rwad Albna Alidyd LLC**, which is registered with the Commercial Registration No **1270190**, hereby announces that it is going to reduce its capital from RO **250,000.000** to **5,000.000**. Whoever has any objection to the foregoing shall present the reasons for such objection to the Secretariat of Commercial Registry at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion within 30 days from the date hereof.

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Empowering women by creating an adventure group in Dhofar

A proud child of Taqah in Dhofar, Khairzad felt that outdoor adventure and activities should also be enjoyed not just by the men but also by people considered weak in some archaic standards but also by those with deep appreciation for life and what Dhofar has to offer... **P20**

Warhol Monroe portrait set to smash records at New York sales

AN ANDY WARHOL portrait of Marilyn Monroe worth an estimated \$200 million headlines this month's spring sales in New York that collectors say are among the most anticipated ever.

Christie's expects Warhol's 1964 "Shot Sage Blue Marilyn" to become the priciest 20th century artwork when the auction house puts it under the hammer on Monday.

Not to be outdone, competitor Sotheby's is offering \$1 billion of modern and contemporary art including the second helping of the famed Macklowe Collection, during its marquee week in May.

"The excitement is certainly unprecedented", Joan Robledo-Palop, a collector and CEO of Zeit Contemporary Art in New York City, told AFP, about the buzz surrounding this season's auctions.

The 40 inch (100 centimetre) by 40 inch silk-screen Warhol is part of a series of portraits the pop artist made of Monroe following her death from a drug overdose in August 1962.

They became known as the "Shot" series after a visitor to Warhol's "Factory" studio in Manhattan fired a gun at them, piercing the portraits which were later repaired.

Alex Rotter, head of 20th and 21st cen-

tury art at Christie's, has called the portrait "the most significant 20th century painting to come to auction in a generation."

The current most expensive 20th century auctioned work is Picasso's "Women of Algiers", which fetched \$179.4 million in 2015. The auction record for a Warhol is the \$104.5 million paid for "Silver Car Crash (Double Disaster)" in 2013.

Other highlights offered by Christie's include Jean-Michel Basquiat's "Portrait of the Artist as a Young Derelict" (1982), expected to go for more than \$30 million, and "Untitled (Shades of Red)" by Mark Rothko, tipped to fetch up to \$80 million.

The auction house is also offering three Claude Monet oil on canvases that are predicted to sell for upwards of \$30 million each.

ROTHKO, PICASSO, RICHTER

"Every couple of decades you have a sale where the quality is so high that you don't see all of this at once normally. This season really grew into one of those unique moments", Rotter told AFP.

After selling the first batch of works from the Macklowe Collection — the most expensive to hit the market at \$600 million — last fall, Sotheby's will auction the remaining 30 items when its sales open on



May 16.

Highlights include Gerhard Richter's 1975 "Seascape", estimated at up to \$35 million, and Rothko's "Untitled" from 1960 that has a high-end pre-sale estimate of \$50 million.

Sotheby's said its modern evening auction of 19th and 20th century works, including by Pablo Picasso and Philip Guston, is its "most valuable" in the category in 15 years. Picasso's "Femme nue couchée" is

appearing at auction for the first time, and Sotheby's expects it to fetch more than \$60 million. Other highlights include a Monet view of Venice tipped to fetch \$50 million.

Brooke Lampley, head of sales for global fine art at Sotheby's, said she expects records to be broken across categories.

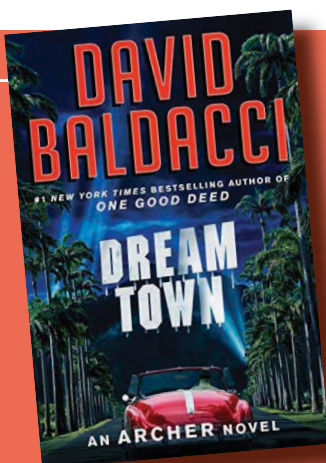
"The art market is very strong. That's why we see such an amazing array of works on offer this season", she said. — AFP

READ

DREAM TOWN

BY DAVID BALDACCI

The third book in the Archer series. Archer, Dash and Callahan search for a missing screenwriter who had a dead body turn up in her home.



FASHION TRENDS

A woman takes pictures of items of German fashion designer, photographer and costume designer Karl Lagerfeld displayed at the Sotheby's in Cologne, western Germany on May 4, 2022. The auction house Sotheby's is auctioning off personal items of Lagerfeld in a live auction on Wednesday evening and Thursday. Among them are the famous fingerless gloves, sunglasses and furniture of the designer, who died in 2019. — AFP



HOT TOPIC

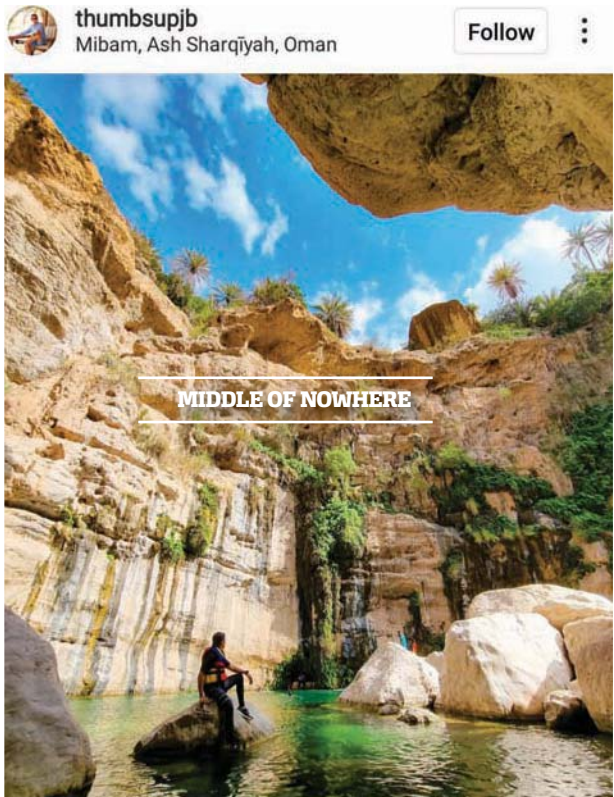
People watch as the Stonewall Jackson statue is removed from Monument Avenue in Richmond, Virginia on July 1, 2020. Since his contracting company began removing Confederate statues from Richmond, Virginia — controversial symbols of the South's slave-holding past.





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AROUND THE WORLD

MUSIC

Against her wishes, Dolly Parton inducted into rock hall of fame



COUNTRY MUSIC icon Dolly Parton was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame on Wednesday even though she did not want the honour, calling herself unworthy of it.

Parton was among an eclectic group of new inductees that include the rapper Eminem, the crooner Harry Belafonte, rocker Pat Benatar, the British band Duran Duran and the pop singer, songwriter and producer Lionel Richie, among others.

Parton, 76 and known for such hits as "Islands in the Stream" and "Jolene" asked last month that her name be withdrawn from consideration.

"Even though I'm extremely flattered and grateful to be nominated for the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, I don't feel that I have earned that right", she said.

When the hall of fame rejected her rejection, in part because voting was already under way, Parton eventually relented.

The hall of fame said she was much more than a country star.

"With her trailblazing songwriting career, distinctive voice, campy glamour, business savvy and humanitarian work, Dolly Parton is a beloved icon who transcends the genre she transformed forever", the organisation said on its website as it announced the new members.

Country stars are not foreign to the Cleveland-based Hall of Fame — Johnny Cash, Jimmie Rodgers and Chet Atkins are all among its ranks.

Other new inductees announced on Wednesday include Carly Simon, the Eurythmics and Judas Priest.

In an interview last with National Public Radio, Parton said that after first saying no, she would "accept gracefully" if she were inducted to the hall of fame.

She said that it was always her belief that the Cleveland-based organisation was for people in rock and roll.

"So I just felt like I would be taking away from someone that maybe deserved it, certainly more than me, because I never considered myself a rock artist", Parton said. "But obviously, there's more to it than that."

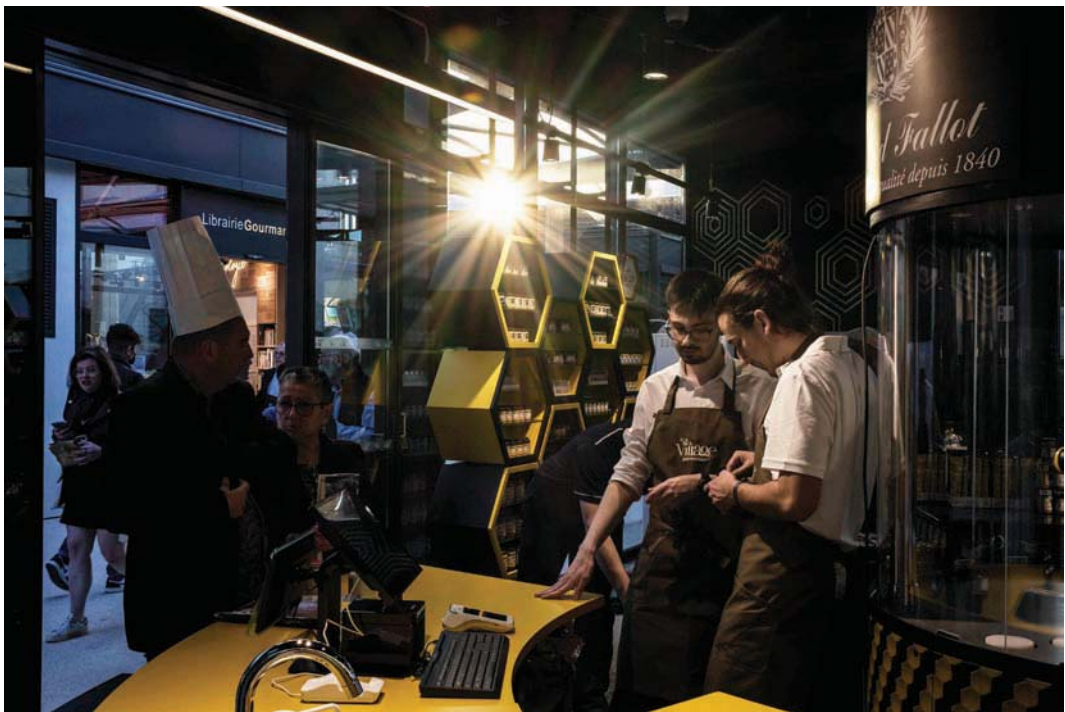
Acts can be inducted 25 years after their first commercial music release.

They are voted on by a body of more than 1,000 artists, music historians and industry veterans.

The new honorees will be formally inducted in a ceremony in Los Angeles on November 5. — AFP

GASTRONOMY

'Unique in the world': France's Dijon opens gastronomy complex



DEVOTEES OF FRENCH food and drinks can flock to a new temple following the opening Friday of a gastronomy and grape juice complex in the capital of France's central Burgundy region, Dijon.

"It's astounding. It's a marriage of gastronomy, grape, culture and education", said former French president Francois Hollande during whose tenure the project was launched.

"It's not unique in France. It's unique in the world", he added at the inauguration.

The city famed for its mustard and rolling vineyards hopes to lure one million visitors a year to the site resembling a village with expositions, a culinary school, shops, restaurants and even a cinema.

"I have no doubt that one million is a completely attainable objective", Socialist Dijon mayor Francois Rebsamen told AFP, adding that Dijon boasted 3.5 million annual visitors before the Covid-19 pandemic hit.

The project began after Unesco added the "French gastronomic meal" to its intangible cultural heritage list in 2010.

The inclusion on the prestigious list sparked the launch of sites in Paris, Lyon, Tours and Dijon designed to showcase different aspects of the country's rich food and grape juice culture.

Meals are a big deal in

France, where 2,000 books on wine or cooking are published every year.

The French will typically sit down together to tuck in unlike Americans "who often eat standing next to the kitchen counter" and alone, says Tours University sociologist Jean-Pierre Corbeau.

The gastronomic meal is "this ritual good food that brings together the French to celebrate the good life together", said European Institute for the History and Cultures of Food founder Francois Chevrier in his book on the Dijon complex.

'EXPERIMENTAL KITCHEN'

The massive Dijon site spreads across 6.5 hectares and combines modern structures with buildings with glazed tiles from the mediaeval times.

"We wanted to enhance the existing heritage while adding contemporary architectural touches to it", architect Anthony Bechu said.

The overall project cost 250 million euros (\$265,000) with the private sector financing 90 percent.

Visitors can meander through four sections on the history of French meals, baking, Burgundy's vineyards and the art of cooking.

Once an appetite is worked up, tourists can eat to their heart's content in two restaurants run by triple-starred chef Eric Pras.

And they can wash the meal down with wine from a cellar that offers "one of the widest selections in the world, with 250 wines by the glass among more than 3,000 references", according to its director Anthony Valla.

The site also includes a butcher's shop and a bakery, an "experimental kitchen" offering demonstrations and workshops, and a branch of the world-renowned Ferrandi culinary school.

Such a huge project has raised some eyebrows, especially after the Lyon site closed down only nine months after its inauguration.

"We learned our lesson from the failure of Lyon, which offered something a little down-market and very expensive", Dijon mayor Rebsamen said.

The Dijon site includes "a whole cultural and heritage section that is free", he added.

The French-style meal is in danger because "people think cooking is a waste of time", according to Paris-Sorbonne professor Jean-Robert Pitte.

Pitte is one of the architects of the campaign that led to the Unesco inscription, designed to restore "the taste for cooking".

He believes "eating well is not superfluous, but necessary for health, sociability, the economy and culture". — AFP

MOVIES

'Top Gun' gets 'evolution' in sequel 36 years on, says Cruise



IT HAS BEEN 36 years since Tom Cruise donned his aviators, jumped into a fighter jet and ascended Hollywood's A-list with "Top Gun" — and, finally, a sequel is about to land.

"I was a little slow — sometimes I'm a little slow," Cruise joked to AFP at the world premiere of "Top Gun: Maverick", held aboard a retired US aircraft carrier in San Diego on Wednesday.

Slow is not usually a word associated with Cruise, arguably the world's biggest movie star, who landed via helicopter onto a red carpet that was rolled across the USS Midway's sprawling top deck for the occasion.

In his new film, out in US theaters May 27, Cruise's hot-shot pilot Maverick returns to the Navy's elite TOPGUN fighter weapons school where he earned his wings to train the latest batch of cocky young aviators.

Among them is Rooster, son of Goose, who was killed in the 1986 original in a moment that still haunts Maverick, even as he must prepare his charges for a deadly mission.

"The sense of romance, the sense of adventure — there's a world that you want to be in", said Cruise, on returning to "Top Gun" at the age of 59.

"And obviously, there's always something about aviation." Cruise's original film popularised the concept of the "wingman", and he said viewers particularly connected with the closeness of relationships in the world of aviation.

"The culture in this world is very unique... and it's really interesting that people can just connect with the friendships," he said.

While the movie opens with a nostalgic throwback sequence set on an aircraft carrier, and features a brief return for Val Kilmer alongside Cruise, it otherwise rests on a group of relatively unknown young actors.

"I always knew that's how I

wanted to open the movie, right from the beginning just to allow the audience to go 'you're gonna get what you (want), trust me', said Cruise.

It also incorporates technological advances such as fighter drones, which Cruise — who has long held a pilot license in real life — said he spent decades looking at and evaluating.

"It has to be an evolution", he said.

'GO LOWER'

In "Top Gun: Maverick", female fighter pilots have joined the elite squadron, including Monica Barbaro's Phoenix.

"I got to learn from some incredible female aviators", said Barbaro, who along with her male and female co-stars underwent training from US Navy pilots.

"They're smart, they're intelligent, they don't have to prove themselves in any aggressive way. They just are incredible."

According to Director Joseph Kosinski, the Navy had been "wary" when the original was shot but was fully supportive and helpful for the sequel.

"The first 'Top Gun' was a reason a lot of these guys signed up for the Navy", said Kosinski.

"The decision-makers in the Navy today are guys who signed up in the '80s because of 'Top Gun'."

The movie largely shuns computer-generated effects and the actors were filmed inside fighter jet cockpits, enduring intense G-forces as the planes swooped dangerously low above the Earth's surface.

Still, according to Kosinski, Cruise "always wanted to go lower."

"There's a sequence in this film where we went so low, I guarantee you'll never see anything quite like it ever again."

"He was always pushing... but I think he was happy with where we ended up." — AFP

Empowering women by creating an adventure group in Dhofar

By Arwa al Hashimi

Growing up on the beautiful shores of Taqah in Dhofar, Khairzad is familiar with the challenges of provincial life appreciating that she was able to do tasks such as tending livestock, cycling and playing music.

A proud child of her wilayat, Khairzad felt that outdoor adventure and activities should also be enjoyed not just by the strong ones but people who also look at life with appreciation.

Her realisation came after her first adventure with the elderly through the Nizwa Oman Association for Elderly Friends which launched a tourism trip and brought 50 elderly from around the country to Dhofar. Being the lead in the Elderly Care Section of the Ministry of Health, Khairzad saw the joy that the trip brought to these elders. They took them around Darbat, making them experience the astonishing khareef weather — an activity-filled with short walks and allowing guests to take deep breaths to be at peace in a beautiful setting.

After this amazing trip, Khairzad met some members of an all-male adventure group in Dhofar who proposed that some women join their nature discovery but while there were some open-minded supporters, there were other members of the group who felt that women will only be baggage in long trips and would only be a cause of concern.

This disappointed Khairzad in some way but having a clear understanding of culture and traditions including the prevailing societal rule on mixed-gender groups, Khairzad instead counter-proposed that a few of them shall be given training that way, once they got familiar, they, as women, can create their own adventure group.

Some of the more welcoming men trained Khairzad and her team and taught them everything there is to know about outdoor adventure. She, in particular, learned how to calculate distance, pick places to visit, get tips on what to wear on every occasion as well as finer details regarding what tools and gears they needed.

During training, they discovered that wearing abayas provided a set of challenges so the team decided on alternatives including making some abayas shorter to ease difficulties when hiking. After getting all the insight they need, Khairzad's adventure team officially started in September 2019 with about 12 women representing different industries including health, religious groups, photography and communities.

Their first adventure took place in November of the same year during the National Day in "Ain Hamran." Their exploits and adventures gathered steam on social media becoming viral over time that by January of 2020, their membership has grown to 40 women.

Khairzad shared that after a series of adventures, the group discovered that they shared many sentiments including living a sedentary lifestyle with limited activities due to societal expectations.

Every event they launched also became a therapy of sort discovering that many of them were suffering from different health issues such as diabetes, high blood pressure, and asthma among other health concerns that some of them are fixable with some exercise and living a healthier lifestyle.

"We did things that we didn't even imagine we will ever do such as climbing, cycling and jet skiing. We even have grandmothers in the team who provided us with valuable information about the places, the trees and other details," shared Khairzad expressing her proudness towards her team.

Asked what has been their most memorable experience to date, Khairzad shared that their conquering 'Jedela', the world's highest sand dunes located in Dhofar was the one for the record.

She shared that on the said adventure, the governor of the place joined the group with a few men and it only took them only 10 minutes to conquer its heights. For the women group, Jamila who was in her 60s was the first to climb the top in less than 30 minutes. Khairzad shared it was a great feat although it took her 45 minutes to complete.

For her, it was a great achievement to put women in these places and it was possible that they were the first Omani women to actually embark on the said adventure and reach its peak.

With a solid foundation, Khairzad wishes to grow the team more and embark on even more ambitious adventures. She said that overall, not only do they look forward to making adventure accessible to women but also inspire other women to live a healthier lifestyle.

