

Royal grant for 400 to perform Haj

The Ministry of Social Development, in coordination with the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs, announced that 400 beneficiaries who fall under the 'social security' category would avail the Royal grant to perform Haj rituals. The ministry has announced that the e-registration for Haj 1443 AH will be open from May 9 to 14, taking into consideration that applicants should meet conditions outlined by the ministry.



P11

ALCARAZ HAS EYES ON ROLAND GARROS AFTER MADRID TRIUMPH



P15

INDIAN RUPEE FALLS TO NEW LOW ON US FED ACTION AND INFLATION FEARS



P20

"KAMSA HAMNIDA" TO THIS COUNTRY



MUSCAT

HM GREETINGS TO SAUDI KING

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on the success of the medical check-ups he underwent.

In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his heartfelt sentiments and best wishes of continued health and welfare to King Salman.

His Majesty also prayed to Allah the Almighty to grant King Salman a long life and to realise the Saudi people's aspirations for further prosperity under the monarch's wise leadership.

— ONA

IS CARDIAC ARREST RELATED TO VACCINES?

Some deaths due to cardiac arrest, not limited to a particular group but in different age groups, are linked to the Covid-19 vaccines. Dr Zaid al Hinai, Consultant Physician of Paediatric Infectious Diseases at the College of Medicine and Health Sciences, Sultan Qaboos University, explained that there is an expected increase in heart disease and stroke after waves of Covid-19 infections, according to many studies. This possibility persists for months after the infection (even after mild cases).

DETAILS ON P3

HM RECEIVES CREDENTIALS OF AMBASSADORS



His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik received separately at Al Barakah Palace on Monday credentials of a number of ambassadors of Arab and friendly countries accredited to the Sultanate of Oman. His Majesty the Sultan received credentials of the following ambassadors: Filali Guenni, Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Ambassador of President Abdelmadjid Tebboune of the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria, accredited to the Sultanate of Oman. Jota Yamamoto, Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Ambassador of Emperor Naruhito of Japan, accredited to the Sultanate of Oman. Morgunov Ilya, Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Ambassador of President Vladimir Putin of the Russian Federation, accredited to the Sultanate of Oman. Muhammad Imran Chaudhry, Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Ambassador of President Dr Arif Alvi of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, accredited to the Sultanate of Oman. Kiejoo Kim, Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Ambassador of President Moon Jae-In of the Republic of Korea, accredited to the Sultanate of Oman. Thomas Oertle, Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Ambassador of President Ignazio Cassis of the Swiss Confederation, accredited to the Sultanate of Oman. **DETAILS ON P2**

Budget surplus at RO 357m as revenues soar

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 9

On the back of record revenues with oil prices more than doubling, the State Budget registered a surplus of RO 357 million by the first quarter of 2022 against a deficit of RO 751 million in the same period in 2021.

According to the Ministry of Finance, the total revenues registered a mammoth 66.3 per cent to reach RO 3.25 billion during the first three months of the current year against RO 1.819 billion in the corresponding period last year.

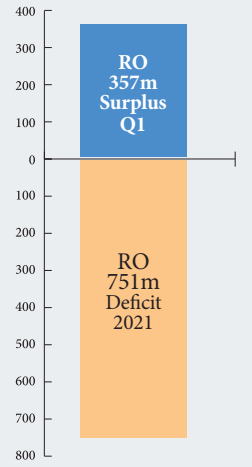
The surplus amount, says the quarterly bulletin from the ministry, "will be directed to stimulating economic recovery, increasing spending on priority development projects, reducing the level of indebtedness and managing its risks".

According to the bulletin, net oil revenue witnessed RO 1.565 billion registering a record 70.2 per cent compared to the same period in 2021 as the country sold its crude for an average of \$78 per barrel compared with \$45 per barrel a year ago.

The average production rose to about 1.25 million barrels per day against 952,000 barrels per day during the period last year.

SEE ALSO P13

RECORD REVENUES



Period	Amount (RO)
Q1 2022	357m Surplus
Q1 2021	751m Deficit



JUMAN TWO
MARSA DISTRICT



NOW WITH TAYSEER DIRECT FINANCING



Pay 10%* and move in end of 2022

5 year post handover payment plan

1 & 2-bedroom marina front apartments

Excellent rental yields

Leasing support available

[almouj.com](#) | Reserve your new home **800 77776** *Terms & conditions apply



WEATHER

MUSCAT: Max 37°C Min 28°C SALALAH: Max 34°C Min 27°C NIZWA: Max 42°C Min 27°C

PRAYER TIMINGS

SUNRISE: 05:28 FAJR: 04:05 DHUHR: 12:08 ASR: 15:32 MAGHRIB: 18:44 ISHA: 20:01



HM receives credentials of ambassadors



Jota Yamamoto of Japan



Morgunov Ilya of Russia



Muhammad Imran Chaudhry of Pakistan



Kiejoo Kim of Korea



Thomas Oertle of Switzerland

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik received separately at Al Barakah Palace on Monday credentials of a number of ambassadors of Arab and friendly countries accredited to the Sultanate of Oman.

His Majesty the Sultan received credentials of the following ambassadors: Filali Guenni, Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Ambassador of President Abdelmadjid Tebboune of the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria, accredited to the Sultanate of Oman.

Jota Yamamoto, Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Ambassador of Emperor Naruhito of Japan, accredited to the Sultanate of Oman.

Morgunov Ilya, Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Ambassador

of President Vladimir Putin of the Russian Federation, accredited to the Sultanate of Oman.

Muhammad Imran Chaudhry, Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Ambassador of President Dr Arif Alvi of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, accredited to the Sultanate of Oman.

Kiejoo Kim, Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Ambassador of President Moon Jae-In of the Republic of Korea, accredited to the Sultanate of Oman.

Thomas Oertle, Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Ambassador of President Ignazio Cassis of the Swiss Confederation, accredited to the Sultanate of Oman.

During the sidelines meetings with His Majesty the Sultan, the ambassadors conveyed greetings

and best wishes of their countries' leaders to His Majesty and the Omani people.

They also expressed their great honour and delight in presenting their credentials before His Majesty the Sultan. They affirmed to exert their sincere efforts to promote relations of their respective countries with Oman in various spheres in a manner that serves the joint interests of the Omani people and their countries' citizens.

His Majesty the Sultan welcomed the ambassadors, expressing his gratitude for their leaders' greetings and best wishes. His Majesty confirmed that they would receive all support from him, the Government and the Omani people to facilitate carrying out their duties.

— ONA



Is cardiac arrest related to Covid vaccines?

ZAINAB AL NASSRI

@zainabalnasseri

Some deaths due to cardiac arrest, not limited to a particular group but in different age groups, are linked to the Covid-19 vaccines.

Dr Zaid al Hinai, Consultant Physician of Paediatric Infectious Diseases at the College of Medicine and Health Sciences, Sultan Qaboos University, explained that there is an expected increase in heart disease and stroke after waves of Covid-19 infections, according to many studies. This possibility persists for months after the infection (even after mild cases). The vaccines, on the other hand, have been proven to reduce long-term symptoms and protect against complications, in addition to their known benefits of preventing severe infection and death from Covid-19.

Al Hinai elaborated that the vaccines used in the

Sultanate of Oman have been monitored rigorously by multiple independent international bodies. “While it is true that myocarditis (inflammation of the heart muscle) has been identified as a rare side effect of some of the vaccines, the frequency of this side effect is very rare, approximately 1 in 100,000. Further, this side effect is mainly reported in the first two weeks after the vaccine dose, and not after that, and recovery rates are excellent. Contrast this with the long term cardiovascular complications of a Covid-19 infection, which have been estimated to occur in 45 out every 1,000 cases, up to 1 year after infection. Additionally, vaccines have been shown to prevent or decrease some of the long term symptoms of Covid-19, including chest pain. As such, it is clear that an increase in cardiac events is expected with an increase in Covid-19 infection”. He added,



“the role of the vaccines is protection, and as such it is quite unfair to blame them.”

However, the doctor said “currently, there are no comprehensive statistics in the Sultanate of Oman confirming

an increase in the incidence of heart attacks, but the matter is noticed in the community, and could be expected based on the recent Omicron wave of Covid-19 infection”, while providing reassurance that despite this

“While it is true that myocarditis has been identified as a rare side effect of some of the vaccines, the frequency of this side effect is very rare, approximately 1 in 100,000

DR ZAID AL HINAI

relative increase, it still remains true that most of those infected with Covid-19 recover without complications.

“It has been observed since the start of the pandemic that this virus has complications in the circulatory system and the heart in particular. This was observed

in the first weeks of infection and subsequent studies from around the world found that up to 6 to 12 months after recovery there is still an increase in the incidence of heart attacks, as well as other symptoms, collectively known as long Covid. So unfortunately, it is not surprising to hear about cardiac complications” he said.

He also mentioned that heart disease occurs more among people who have been infected with Covid-19 while having additional risk factors such as high cholesterol, diabetes, high blood pressure or old age. But they also occur in young people or even athletes. He advises professional athletes to undergo routine heart exams to be safe. He advised people who have recovered from Covid-19 to seek professional advice if they experience any cardiac symptoms such as chest pain, shortness of breath with routine activities, or palpitations.



The General Federation of Oman Workers marked the International Workers Day on Monday under the auspices of Dr Mahad bin Said Baowain, Minister of Labour. Shaikh Nasr bin Amer al Hosni Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Labour for Labour, hailed the positive contribution of Oman labour unions to the country's development during the peak of coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic. This, in turn, reflected positively on the stability of manpower in Omani firms, said Al Hosni. – ONA

Minimum wage to be reviewed as the cost of living shoots up

VINOD NAIR

@vinot_nair

The worker's union has said that the issue of minimum wage in the private sector must be addressed, especially in the wake of rising costs and household expenses.

At an event on Monday, it was revealed that according to statistics published by the competent authorities, the average wages of nearly 24 per cent of Omanis insured in the social insurance system are between RO 325 to 400, and that half of the insured are generally below RO 500.

According to the National Centre of Statistics and Information, the average household spending has gone up

to RO 757.

Shaikh Nasr bin Amer al Hosni, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Labour for Labour, praised the role played by trade unions during the Covid-19, which affected the workforce in several companies.

He said a Community Social Dialogue Committee is reviewing the minimum wages. It includes the Ministry of Labour, the General Federation of Oman Workers and the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI).

The issue of wages was studied in the first meeting and will be studied in the upcoming meetings to reach an agreement between the three parties, noting that there are issues related to wages, the most

important of which are inflation and other economic data.

He said the number of new workers, including expatriates, who have entered the job market in recent times indicate that private health and education sectors and construction are showing signs of recovery and growth. Bank lending has also increased, which is a good indicator which points towards economic recovery.

“This situation calls for the need for immediate intervention and finding solutions to wages and improving the social security of the citizens to ensure a decent life for workers and their families”, said Nabhan al Battashi, Chairman of the General Federation of Oman Workers (GFW).

He added, “With the gradual lifting of subsidies for the number of goods and services, and high rates of inflation, there is a need to review the wages system and the adoption of the national social security system.”

Al Battashi said the revision of the minimum wage requires consultation with all stakeholders as there are concerns it may lead to further hikes in goods and services and slow down investments, which can adversely impact the economy.

He said a specialised study would soon begin to review the minimum wage, and it may be assigned to a specialised company to see the extent to which the minimum wage can be developed as per the available data.

Oman promotes upcoming Khareef at ATM Dubai 2022

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman's pavilion at the 29th edition of the Arabian Travel Market was opened at Dubai World Trade Centre on Monday under the auspices of Azzan bin Qasim al Busaidy, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism for Tourism.

In a space of 200 sqm, Oman Pavilion features various aspects of Omani architectural identity and houses Oman Tourism Centre, a boardroom, a hospitality corner and compartments for 14 Omani establishments participating under the purview of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, along with a display of tourism promotional leaflets. Oman's participation

constitutes a significant relaunch of activities within the quest for recovery from coronavirus pandemic's impacts, said Al Busaidy, adding that the event is an opportunity to promote Omani tourism products, services and tourist designations at a time the country is bracing for the monsoon season (Khareef) in the Governorate of Dhofar where moderate weather will settle along the Arabian Sea coast and high hill tops.

The 29th edition of Arabian Travel Market focuses on elements of creativity, sustainability and human resources. It also targets emerging tourism markets in different Middle East destinations. — ONA



INR hits 'double century', edges above 200/RO for first time

KABEER YOUSUF

@kabeeryousef

Indian Rupee has hit an all-time low as one Rial was valued at INR 200.70 on Monday. The money exchanges did relatively good business but failed to fetch customers as desired owing to many reasons.

The key factor driving the Rupee lower was a surge in the US dollar globally.

Crude prices are elevating to around \$110 per barrel, which added further pressure on the Rupee. In addition to this, a forecast of 10 per cent inflation

by the Bank of England and a tightening lockdown in Shanghai has also had Asian currencies depreciate against the Dollar.

People were welcomed to messages reading “INR hits a double century. Remit now and be part of this golden opportunity” since Monday morning and were invited to even competitive rates by different money exchanges. However, that failed to bring in as many customers as expected due to major festivals in the past few weeks.

“The good news for businesses in the Sultanate of Oman is that exports to India and imports from



India are at an all-time high. This could help the businesses in Oman importing from India as well the exporters back in India,” said KJ Prabu, General Manager, Mustafa Sultan Exchange.

It is evaluated that Indian Rupee hovering over 200 against one

Omani Rial can be a good incentive for Non-Resident Indians as well. This is also a favourable time to plan investments in reliable assets, while investments in liquidity can be held for a while.

Expat Indians in the Sultanate of Oman, who celebrated many festivals in the recent past, including Eid al Fitr, Easter, and Diwali, couldn't convert their savings into INR. Those who believed in Akshaya Tritiya had already invested their money in gold last week.

“Actually Dollar appreciated for many reasons,” said sources from Al Jadeed Exchange.

Prabu said that the exchange, managed by India's largest bank, the State Bank of India, is very well equipped to handle this increased demand and has always been the case during such episodes in the past.

“We are witnessing a large number of customers and volumes to India, he added.

“The major reasons behind such a change is due to RBI increase in the repo rate to reduce the inflation, and also US Federal increased the interest rates. This has resulted in an increase in the volume of business due to the rate changes, said Supin James,

Country Manager, Purushotham Khanji Exchange.

“Volume has definitely increased over the past few days. Customers who were holding amounts in their accounts have started sending at record-high rates. However, not many new customers were witnessed yet,” said Rajeev, Global Exchange.

According to him, the reasons for a weakening Rupee are manifold. The aggressive rate hike by Federal Reserve (USA) by 50 basis points has resulted in a surge in the US treasury yield. Due to which Dollar has strengthened globally.



THE COMEBACK!

TRAVEL AND TOURISM INDUSTRY
SEES PENT-UP DEMAND

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH
[@patkaushal](#)

There is pent-up demand for travel. People want to travel to see their families, resume work and kill the monotony of being stranded at one place due to the pandemic that virtually shut down the travel industry.

A section of tourists, however, are confused over hidden restrictions and the news of new variants of Covid-19 coming in from some parts of the world. Such tourists are in a miniscule minority as the trend is in favour of the aviation sector that has geared up with all possible readiness to meet travellers' demand globally.

According to airline association IATA, demand for air travel continued its recovery in March despite the war in Ukraine and China's restrictive Covid-19 policies.

Softening or removal of restrictions helped surge in pent-up demand in many regions. The aviation sector is seeing the long-expected surge in pent-up demand finally being realised.

A leading online travel marketplace in the Mena region, Wego, suggests travellers would opt for longer holidays and spend more on travel in summer 2022.

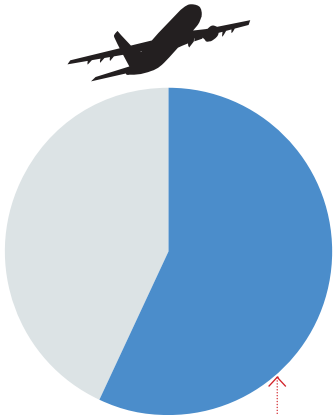
"The average booking value for flights this summer has increased by 57 per cent in comparison to the same period in 2019. Similarly, hotels saw a spike of 55 per cent compared to 2019," it said.

"...people are looking to spend more and book leisure trips. We also see travellers opting for all-inclusive leisure travel which gives them a safe travel experience during the pandemic," a Wego statement said.

Even though the airlines are geared up for operations, due to heavy rush there are reports of glitches and delays in some cases. Willie Walsh, IATA Director General, admitted the situation and called for urgent attention "to avoid frustrating consumer enthusiasm for air travel"

As a mark of caution he said, "We are seeing long delays at many airports with insufficient resources to handle the growing numbers."

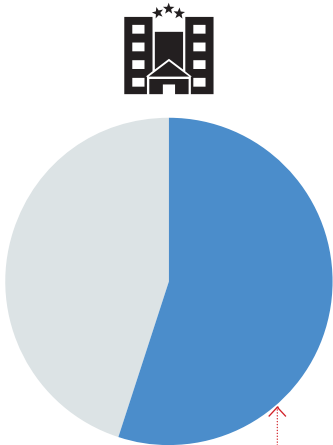
While domestic movement has improved globally, people are wary of long-distance journeys due to prevalence of Covid-19 concerns. Even though conflict in Ukraine has limited impact on the travel industry, it is forcing a section of tourists to re-think and re-plan.



The average booking value for flights this summer has increased by

57%

in comparison to the same period in 2019



Hotels saw a spike of

55%

compared to 2019



Philippines elections in Oman smooth and successful

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, MAY 9

The polling process for the Philippines national elections in the Sultanate of Oman was generally peaceful, according to the Philippines Ambassador Imelda B Panolong.

“The month-long election process in the Sultanate of Oman was generally peaceful, quiet and successful,” the ambassador said.

The Philippines overseas voting started on April 10 and ended at 3PM on Monday (May 9), the election day in the Philippines.

With a turnout of more than 37 per cent or more than 8,000 of the 22,680 registered voters in the Sultanate of Oman, the said percentage is considered huge compared to voter turnout in other countries. It also surpassed the voter turnout during the 2019 mid-term elections and presidential elections in 2016,



A woman poses for a picture after casting her vote at the Philippines Embassy in Muscat.

where only 33 per cent of the registered voters cast their ballots.

“The field voting held in Salalah, Duqm, Suhar, Buraimi, and Musandam helped increase the voter turnout,” the ambassador said. “Filipinos in Musandam, mostly frontline workers, are very passionate in their desire to vote, so we decided to conduct field voting there. We don’t want anybody to be disenfranchised,” the ambassador added.

Meanwhile, only a handful came to the embassy to vote

on the last day of the elections. “Our community listened to our campaign prior to the start of the election, where we told them not to wait for the last week. So they came in the first three weeks of the elections. Also, many came during the holidays and during the weekends,” Ambassador Panolong said.

Meanwhile, Lorbillaine Lukman, a poll watcher and Chairperson of party-list AKO OFW and Vice-President of PDP Laban Oman, noticed very few Filipinos went to the embassy to cast their votes.

“Maybe because it is a working day, and most of them came during the week-long Eid holidays, and during weekends, she said.

“The election process in the Sultanate of Oman is very peaceful and smooth. There was no fighting between the political parties and the voters,” she added.

Salvador Verdejo, a poll

watcher and a representative of Liberal Party, said the election was generally harmonious and orderly. He witnessed some problems, but these were negligible — like bringing campaign paraphernalia and campaigning within the premises of the embassy — which were immediately corrected.

Mary Nissa Imbat, a physiotherapist and among the last to cast a vote, said the last day of the election was well-organised and peaceful. She said she is looking for a leader who has compassion for the overseas Filipino workers.

“On behalf of the Philippine Embassy, including our labour office, I am very happy with the turnout of our votes. We exceeded the 2019 midterm elections and the 2016 presidential elections. It doesn’t matter who they voted for. What’s important is that they exercised their right of suffrage,” the ambassador added.



RAO commander receives Palestinian delegation

MUSCAT: Maj Gen Matar bin Salim al Balushi, Commander of the Royal Army of Oman (RAO), received in his office at Muaskar Al Murtafaa on Monday a delegation of the General Military Training Commission of the State of Palestine, headed by Maj Gen Mahmoud Fouad Saleem.

The two sides exchanged views on several matters of common interest.

The meeting was attended by Air Commodore Nasser bin Said al Sa’adi, RAO Assistant Chief of Staff for Training and Joint Drills, and Ambassador of Palestine to Oman.

VISIT TO NDC

The delegation from the State of Palestine also visited the National Defence College (NDC).

The guests were greeted upon their arrival by Air Vice Marshal Saleh bin Yahya al Maskari, Commandant of the NDC.

Members of the visiting delegation were briefed on the college’s facilities and equipment, as well as various departments and halls designed according to the latest specifications and equipped with the best educational systems, training aids and multi-purpose electronic network systems. — ONA

200 expats to perform Haj through Awqaf

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

As many as 200 expatriates will perform Haj through the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs this year, along with 5,956 Omanis, according to the ministry.

The remaining 418 includes Arab and non-Arab pilgrims along with administrative staff, technicians and various service providers besides the Royal Oman Police and Oman Army.

Oman began Haj registration on Monday, May 9, and expression of interest to carry out Haj rituals in the holy city and was invited from both citizens and expatriates.

Speaking to the Observer, Abdulaziz bin Masoud al Ghafri, Assistant Director General of the General Directorate of Preaching and Guidance at the ministry, said that this will form part of the 6,338 pilgrims from the Sultanate of Oman for this year’s Haj quota.

“A whopping number of Omanis and expatriates will visit the holy sites this year in connection with the holy Haj pilgrimage,” he said.

In 2021, the rituals of Haj were conducted virtually and only those inside the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia were allowed to perform Haj practically.

The year before, 14,700 people from Oman performed Haj which included 13,500 Omanis,

250 Arab and 250 non-Arab pilgrims besides 700 members from various ministries, Royal Oman Police (ROP), Defence, Oman Scouts and Guides, other administrative staff, technicians and representatives of various service providers.

This was following the 14,000 believers who performed Haj the year earlier, after registering with the Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs (Awqaf).



RNO commander receives Indian military official

Rear Admiral Saif bin Nasser al Rahbi, Commander of the Royal Navy of Oman (RNO), received in his office on Monday Rear Admiral Jaswinder Singh, Assistant Chief of Naval Staff for Foreign Cooperation and Intelligence of the Republic of India. The two sides reviewed naval fields of mutual interest and ways of enhancing cooperation between the two sides. The meeting was attended by a number of senior RNO officers and the Military Attaché in the Indian Embassy at Muscat. — ONA

FOR SALE

SALE OF VEHICLE/EQUIPMENT

Leading Construction Co. in Oman intends to dispose off their used vehicles and equipment, in ‘as is where is’ condition. The items identified are presently located at their Al Khoud yard and will be offered for inspection to the public on 15/05/2022, 16/05/2022 and 17/05/2022 between 8.00am to 12.00pm and 3.00pm to 5.00pm.

Last date for submission of closed tender is 17/05/2022 at 5pm. at our Al Khoud office.

Interested parties may contact at:
Tel: (+968) 24525345 / 24525314 / 24525303, Mob: 91354151.



Sultanate of Oman Ministry of Agricultural, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources

TENDER NOTICE

The Ministry of Agricultural, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources
Announces the following Tender: -

Tender No.	Description	Tender Documents Price (R.O)	Class	Last Date for Collection of Documents	Last Date for Submission of Documents
232/2022/MAFWR/HQ-26	Design and Develop a Customer Service Management System using Artificial Intelligence Technology	25/-	Specialized	Sunday 29/5/2022	Monday 20/6/2022

- Interested Companies registered with Tender Board (in the above mentioned Grade) may obtain Tender documents from the E-Tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om> against non-refundable payment as mentioned above for each set of document.
- The value of the document will be paid & submitted on line on given website.
- The Tenderer should attach Bank Guarantee issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman (as required in the tender), and addressed to the Ministry of Agricultural, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources, And the bidders can contact the Esnad technical support team at the number listed below to find out how to request electronic guarantees from local banks.
- All correspondence pertaining to the tender inquiry must be online at e-tendering System.
- All correspondence pertaining to the e-tendering System technical support must be directed to the following helpdesk email address and phone number: +968 24402200 or etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om.
- Note:** Bid Submission will be online only. Scan Copy of Tender Bond needs to be attached in system.

TENDERS COMMITTEE
Ministry of Agricultural, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources

Oman to host MENATox 2022 congress

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Health (MoH), the Directorate General of Diseases Surveillance & Control will host the 12th Middle East and North Africa Clinical Toxicology Association Congress (MENATox 2022) during May 11 - 14.

A number of experts from the World Health Organization (WHO), The American Association of Poison Control Centers (AAPCC), European Society of Toxicology (EUROTOX), and Asia Pacific Association of Medical Toxicology along with participants from the GCC countries, the Middle East, Asia, North America and Europe will attend the Congress.

The Congress aims to discuss the latest development, research and scientific discoveries in clinical toxicology. It also highlights the best relevant national training programmes and building regional and global partnerships in the Sultanate of Oman.



SULTANATE OF OMAN MINISTRY OF HEALTH

ANNOUNCEMENT

The Ministry of Health invites specialized companies to participate
in the following Tenders: -

Tender Ref.	Description	Last date for Collection of tender Document	Bid Submission Closing Date on/ Before 08:00 am Wednesday	Eligibility	Tender Fee (Non-Refundable)
MOH/HQ-27/2022	Outsourcing of MRI Services for Al Buraimi Hospital in Al Buraimi Governorate	19-05-2022	01-06-2022	Specialized Companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board	25.000
MOH/HQ-80/2022	Supply & Installation of Medical Equipment for The Royal Hospital	12-05-2022	08-06-2022		25.000
MOH/HQ-82/2022	Supply and Installation of Servers and Network Components for Ibra Hospital in North Al Sharqiyah	12-05-2022	01-06-2022		25.000
MOH/HQ-83/2022	Provision of Cleaning & Pest Control Services for HQ Building	12-05-2022	08-06-2022		25.000
MOH/HQ-84/2022	Supply of Pharmaceuticals	12-05-2022	25-05-2022		25.000
MOH/HQ-85/2022	Supply of Surgical Consumables (Respiratory Care)	12-05-2022	01-06-2022		25.000

- Tenders should be submitted on line on <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om> enclose **Electronic Bank Guarantee** issued by a Local bank for not less than One percent (1%) for the Tender value validity for (90) days from the Tender Submission date, addressed to The Chairman of the Tender Committee.
- Ministry is not bound to accept the lowest tender and reserves the right to accepts or reject any tender.
- For any Clarification, you may contact via Telephone: 24402200, Email id: etenderhd@ita.gov.om.



Sri Lanka PM quits as violence kills 3, injures 150

COLOMBO: Sri Lankan Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa quit on Monday after a day of violence saw three people including an MP killed and over 150 wounded as government supporters armed with sticks and clubs attacked protestors.

Lawmaker Amara Keerthi Athukorala from the ruling party shot two people -- killing a 27-year-old man -- and then himself after being surrounded by a mob of anti-government protestors outside the city, police said.

Sri Lanka has suffered months of blackouts and dire shortages of food, fuel and medicines in its worst economic crisis since independence, sparking weeks of overwhelmingly peaceful anti-government demonstrations.

On Monday scores of Rajapaksa loyalists attacked unarmed protestors camping outside the president's office at the sea-front Galle Face promenade in downtown Colombo since April 9, reporters said.

The violence began after several thousand supporters of the prime minister, brought in buses from rural areas, poured out of his nearby official residence.

Rajapaksa had addressed some 3,000 supporters at his house and pledged he would "protect the



Mahinda Rajapaksa

interests of the nation."

The supporters then initially pulled down tents of protestors in front of the prime minister's Temple Trees residence and torched anti-government banners and placards.

They then marched to the nearby promenade and began destroying other tents set up by the "Gota go home" campaign that demands the president step down.

"We were hit, the media were hit, women and children were hit," one witness said, asking not to be named.

Police fired tear gas and water cannon and declared an immediate curfew in Colombo which was later widened to include the entire South Asian island nation of 22 million people. Over 150 injured people were hospitalised, Colombo National Hospital spokesman Pushpa



Demonstrators and government supporters clash outside the official residence of Sri Lanka's Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa in Colombo. — AFP

Soysa said.

Officials said the army riot squad was called in to reinforce police.

Soldiers have been deployed throughout the crisis to protect deliveries of fuel and other essentials but until now not to prevent clashes.

"Strongly condemn the violent acts taking place by those inciting and participating, irrespective of political allegiances.

Violence won't solve the current

The US Embassy has condemned 'the violence against peaceful protestors and called on the government to conduct a full investigation

problems," President Rajapaksa tweeted.

The US Ambassador to Sri Lanka said Washington condemned "the violence against peaceful protestors today, and call(s) on the government to conduct a full investigation, including the arrest & prosecution of anyone who incited violence".

"Our sympathies are with those injured today and we urge calm and restraint across the island," Julie Chung tweeted.

Marcos Jr urges supporters to keep watch as he leads presidential poll

BATAK CITY: The son of late Philippines dictator Ferdinand Marcos commanded a massive early lead in the presidential election on Monday, according to an unofficial tally of results that pointed to a historic landslide victory.

Nearly 40 years after his namesake father was deposed by a popular revolt and his family chased into exile, Ferdinand Marcos Jr was seen doubling the tally of his nearest rival.

With more than 60 per cent of the country's precincts reporting, Marcos had garnered more than 20 million votes, to liberal candidate Leni Robredo's 9.4 million. In the Philippines, the winner only has to get more votes than anyone else.

But if sustained, the tally -- published by local media from Commission on Elections figures -- would make Marcos the first Philippine president since his father's ouster to be elected with an absolute majority.



Workers wait for polls to close for the presidential election at the election watchdog Parish Pastoral Council for Responsible Voting unofficial parallel count's command centre in Manila. — AFP

It would also signal an astonishing turnaround for the fortunes of the Marcos clan, who have come from pariahs to the presidential palace in a generation.

"This will be a historic election," said Cleve Arguelles, an assistant lecturer in political science at De La Salle University in Manila.

Commission on Elections chief

George Garcia said: "Until the last vote is counted, it's not yet the end of everything." But the writing appeared to be on the wall for Marcos's nine rivals, vying to succeed President Rodrigo Duterte in elections seen by many as a make-or-break moment for the Philippines' fragile democracy.

The results would be a crushing blow for supporters of Robredo,

the incumbent vice-president who turned her campaign into a movement to defend democracy and brought almost a million people onto the streets in one recent rally.

From before dawn, mask-clad voters formed long queues to cast their ballots in 70,000 polling stations across the archipelago.

Polls officially closed at 7 pm.

At Mariano Marcos Memorial Elementary School in the northern city of Batak, the ancestral home of the Marcoses, voters waved hand fans to cool their faces in the tropical heat.

Bomb sniffer dogs swept the polling station before Marcos Jr, 64, arrived with his younger sister Irene and eldest son Sandro.

They were followed by the family's flamboyant 92-year-old matriarch Imelda, who was lowered from a white van while wearing a long, red top with matching trousers and slip-on flats.

— AFP

Iran: N-coordinator to visit Tehran this week

TEHRAN: The European Union's coordinator for talks between Iran and world powers over restoring a frayed 2015 nuclear deal will visit Tehran this week, Iran's foreign ministry said on Monday.

The coordinator, Enrique Mora, has played a key role as an intermediary between the US and Iran during a year of on-off talks in Vienna that seek to revive the deal.

The date of Mora's arrival in Iran's capital has not been confirmed, but local press reported he is expected on Tuesday.

"The agenda for talks in Tehran is nearly finalised," foreign ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh (pictured), said at a weekly press briefing.

Mora "will meet with Ali Bagheri, the Islamic Republic of Iran's chief nuclear negotiator."

The 2015 deal gave Iran sanctions relief in exchange for curbs on its nuclear programme to guarantee that it could not develop a nuclear weapon, something Tehran has always



denied wanting to do.

It was agreed between Iran and the five permanent United Nations Security Council members China, Russia, the United States, United Kingdom and France, alongside Germany.

But Washington unilaterally withdrew in 2018 under then-president Donald Trump and reimposed biting economic sanctions, prompting Iran to begin rolling back its own commitments.

Talks in Vienna have focused on bringing Washington back into the deal and lifting its sanctions, while ensuring Tehran's full adherence to its own commitments.

— AFP

BEIRUT

60pc Lebanon diaspora voter turnout for polls

The turnout of Lebanese diaspora voting in 58 countries ahead of May 15 parliamentary elections was nearly 60 per cent, officials said, similar figures to the last polls in 2018. Some 130,000 Lebanese expatriates out of 225,000 registered voters cast their ballots, foreign ministry official Hadi Hashem said, releasing preliminary figures. While the number of overseas voters has more than doubled this year, they represent only a fraction of the millions of Lebanese residing abroad.



In 2018, roughly 50,000 people out of 90,000 registered voters abroad voted, a turnout of 56 per cent. The overseas ballots will now be sent to the capital Beirut for counting. — AFP

CAIRO

IS claims attack that killed 11 Egyptian soldiers

The IS group claimed responsibility for an attack the previous day that killed 11 Egyptian soldiers in the Sinai Peninsula. It was the heaviest loss of life the Egyptian army had suffered in years in its long-running campaign in and around the Sinai against fighters loyal to the group. "IS fighters killed Egyptian soldiers, seized their weapons and burnt down their position in West Sinai," the group said. Egypt's Sinai Peninsula has been gripped for more than a dec-



ade by an armed insurgency. More than a thousand suspected fighters and dozens of security personnel have been killed since the start of operations, according to official figures. — AFP

PARIS

French court to probe Yemenia Airways crash

A French court opened hearings in the case of the 2009 crash of a Yemenia Airways flight that killed 152 people but miraculously left a 12-year-old girl alive. The Yemeni national airline, whose representatives will not be in the dock due to the country's still-raging civil war, faces a maximum fine of \$240,000 for involuntary homicide and injuries in a trial expected to last four weeks. On June 29, 2009, flight Yemenia 626 was on approach to Moroni, the capital of the Comoros is-



lands between Mozambique and Madagascar. Part of the archipelago is controlled by France as the overseas department of Mayotte.

— AFP



omanobserver.com/podcast

world

OMANDAILYOBSERVER

TUESDAY | MAY 10 | 2022

7

In brief

■ BELFAST



UK URGES N IRELAND PARTIES TO FORM A NEW GOVERNMENT

UK Northern Ireland Secretary Brandon Lewis called on all parties in the province to form a new power-sharing government in Belfast, after historic elections and despite unresolved Brexit disputes. All five main political parties were due to meet

Lewis for talks at the devolved legislature in Belfast, on their first day back in the job since Sinn Féin won Thursday's vote. The nationalists, formerly the political wing of the IRA, ended a century of dominance by pro-UK unionists to become the biggest party in Northern Ireland. The win allows Sinn Féin to nominate the symbolic position of first minister.

—AFP

■ BERLIN



GERMAN GOVT CONFIRMS SERIES OF CYBER ATTACKS

The German government has confirmed a series of cyberattacks on government bodies and ministries in recent days. Interior Ministry spokesman Maximilian Kall said on Monday that the attacks had been successfully repelled and had not caused any permanent damage. No data had been leaked, he added. In so-called DDoS attacks (Distributed Denial of Service), attackers try to paralyse servers with a flood of requests. The ministry spokesman said that since the beginning of the Russian war in Ukraine, the federal authorities had “not been able to detect any major cyberattacks.” — dpa

■ HELSINKI



HUGE SUPPORT FOR NATO BID AMONG FINNS: POLL

More than three quarters of people in Finland now support joining Nato, a new poll showed on Monday, after opinion on the military alliance flipped following Russia's attack on Ukraine. Support for Nato membership used to be steady at 20-30 per cent but has soared in Finland, as well as neighbouring Sweden -- both historically militarily non-aligned -- in recent months. Around 76 per cent of Finns now want the country to join Nato, up from 60 per cent in March, according to the poll commissioned by broadcaster YLE and conducted by research firm Taloustutkimus. The survey also showed a majority in favour no matter the party alignment. — AFP

Moscow marks Victory Day in shadow of Ukraine war

MOSCOW: Tanks rolled through the streets of Moscow on Monday just like every May 9, but this year's Victory Day was being marked with Russia's military action in Ukraine on everyone's minds.

The annual celebration, which sees military vehicles parade through Red Square and central city streets, is one of Russia's most important holidays, celebrating the anniversary of the Soviet victory over Nazi Germany in 1945.

In most years the focus is squarely on the past, on the heroic victories and sacrifices of what Russians call the Great Patriotic War. But with troops now deployed in Ukraine for what President Vladimir Putin calls a campaign to “de-Nazify” Russia's pro-Western neighbour, this year the present was never far away.

Joining the crowds in central Moscow, Anya said she was from the Ukrainian city of Mariupol -- which has seen some of the heaviest fighting since Moscow sent troops to Ukraine on February 24 -- and that she supported Russia's military action.

“I am very grateful to Putin for what he is doing.... We must defeat Nazism like our grandparents,” said Anya, wearing a military-style cap and a black-and-orange ribbon, a symbol of World War II victory celebrations in Russia.

Like others who spoke on Monday, Anya refused to give her last name.

Other participants questioned whether it was appropriate to link the sacred memories of World War II with the current conflict.



Kyrgyz honour guard soldiers fire a salute at the Eternal Flame monument during Victory Day celebrations in Bishkek. — AFP

“You shouldn't draw parallels, these are completely different times,” said 40-year-old Irina, who came out to pay tribute to her two grandfathers who fought against Nazi Germany.

She said she hoped “all this will end quickly”. Some simply chose to ignore the celebrations, like 35-year-old blogger Anna, who said she would spend the morning in bed with noise-cancelling headphones.

“I can't bear anything connected to the military anymore, because it used to be associated with peace and defending the Motherland. Now it's not,” she said.

“It feels like the whole memory

of Victory Day has been stolen and destroyed,” she said.

For many, the day was a simply a chance to enjoy some time off and the spectacle of the parade.

Waving Soviet and Russian flags, they watched as tanks, intercontinental ballistic missile launchers and armoured vehicles made their way to Red Square.

“Look, those are S-300s and S-400s, they're using them in Ukraine right now,” said one man to his girlfriend in the crowd.

“These are the most powerful weapons we have,” said a father to his little boy perched on his shoulders as surface-to-air missile systems went by. The city was

festooned with Soviet-era symbols ahead of the celebration, including a 10-metre-high replica of a medal from 1945 reading “USSR - Victory” and displayed outside the Bolshoi Theatre, a short walk from the Kremlin.

But a new military symbol was also on display this year, drawn on car windows and on people's clothes -- the letter “Z” that is being used to show support for Russia's campaign in Ukraine.

During rehearsals for the parade, Russian fighter jets even practised flying across Moscow in the shape of a “Z”, although the flypast was cancelled on the day due to bad weather. — AFP

French court upholds fake-job verdict against ex-premier

PARIS: A French appeals court on Monday upheld a conviction against former right-wing prime minister Francois Fillon for providing a fake parliamentary assistant job to his wife that saw her paid hundreds of thousands of euros in public funds.

The “Penelopegate” scandal, revealed in a media report while he was the front-runner in the 2017 presidential race, torpedoed his political career and cleared a path for then-relatively unknown Emmanuel Macron to win the race.

Fillon, a hard-nosed fiscal conservative, angrily denied the claim and insisted that his wife Penelope Fillon had done genuine constituency work while he was an MP for the western Sarthe department.

But prosecutors insisted there was scant record of any actual work and noted she had rarely joined her husband at the lower-house National Assembly, which was a civil plaintiff in the case.

The court trimmed Fillon's sentence to four years in prison with three suspended -- down from five years with three suspended when he was first found guilty in 2020.

Penelope Fillon was given a suspended two-year prison sentence for the embezzlement and complicity in misuse of public funds charges, down



It is unlikely that Fillon will spend any time behind bars, and can be ordered instead to wear an ankle-bracelet

from three years suspended, but the court maintained fines of €375,000 for each of them.

They were also ordered to repay \$845,000 to the National Assembly, which reimbursed Penelope for the job as Fillon's assistant.

Under French sentencing guidelines, it is unlikely that Fillon will spend any time behind bars, and can be ordered instead to wear an ankle-bracelet. The couple was not in court for the verdict, and their defence team said in a statement afterwards

that they would lodge a further appeal with France's supreme court.

At the November appeals hearings, prosecutors said there was clear evidence that Fillon and his stand-in as MP for the Sarthe department, Marc Joulaud, employed Fillon's wife Penelope in an “intangible” or “tenuous” role as a parliamentary assistant between 1998 and 2013.

The court also upheld on Monday the original three-year suspended sentence for Joulaud. Fillon, now 68, was widely tipped to win the 2017 presidency race when the Canard Enchaîné newspaper reported that Penelope had been his parliamentary assistant for 15 years, earning some one million euros over the period.

It later emerged that Fillon also used public money to pay two of his children a combined 117,000 euros for allegedly sham work while he was a senator, before he became premier in the government of president Nicolas Sarkozy from 2007 to 2012.

On Monday the court reduced the conviction on that charge.

But he was again convicted in a third fraud case, of getting the millionaire owner of a literary magazine to pay his wife 135,000 euros for “consulting work” that was largely fake. — AFP

Two Austrian ministers resign as support for government crumbles

VIENNA: Two Austrian ministers have stepped down in one day, as the coalition government under Chancellor Karl Nehammer struggles to maintain power after the retirement of ex-chancellor Sebastian Kurz last year.

Announcing her resignation in a statement on Monday, Agriculture and Tourism Minister Elisabeth Köstinger from the ruling Austrian People's Party (ÖVP) said: “It is now time for me to stay connected to politics and the country, to the People's Party, and yet to open anew chapter of my life.”

The move had been planned since former chancellor Kurz stepped down last year, Köstinger said.

Hours later, Economy Minister Margarete Schramböck, who has been ridiculed for misstatements and policy choices, resigned. Schramböck is also an ÖVP member.

Köstinger is considered a close confidant of Kurz, who resigned in October after an official corruption investigation was opened against him.

Nehammer become chancellor and ÖVP party chief in December.

It is unclear whether Monday's resignations will lead to further changes in the Cabinet.

UN Human Rights Council to hold session

GENEVA: The UN Human Rights Council announced it will convene a special session on Thursday to address alleged Russian human rights violations during its war in Ukraine.

More than 50 countries on Monday backed a request from Kyiv and demanded an extraordinary meeting of the UN's top rights body to examine “the deteriorating human rights situation in Ukraine stemming from the Russian aggression”.

Yevhenia Filipenko, Ukraine's ambassador to the UN in Geneva, said it would send a strong signal to Russian President Vladimir Putin about Moscow's international isolation.

“Together, we are sending another strong message to Putin and his clique of war criminals: you are isolated as never before,” she said in a video message on Twitter.

“We want to see the UN take practical steps to address Russia's violation of human rights in Ukraine and the war crimes which it commits daily against our people.”

“This includes an investigation by the Commission of Inquiry into Russia's crimes committed in Bucha and other liberated areas.”

“This is also an opportunity for the international community to focus on the situation in Mariupol, as well as forced transfers of our population, and other violations and abuses against innocent Ukrainian civilians. “We will not rest until we ensure that those who commit these crimes are held to account.” — AFP



Chancellor Karl Nehammer



It is now time for me to stay connected to politics and the country, to the People's Party, and yet to open anew chapter of my life.

ELISABETH KOSTINGER

Agriculture, Tourism minister

The ÖVP is in a fragile governing coalition with the Greens and under pressure due to different corruption investigations and rising costs of living.

According to polls from early May, Nehammer's party only has the support of some 24 per cent of voters, falling behind the opposition Social Democrats (SPÖ) with 28 per cent. — dpa

Downtime has much needed upsides



Sandhya Rao Mehta

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

As the week long Eid break in the Sultanate of Oman came to an end and everyday routine took over, it is an opportune time to look at why having occasional downtime is important and how we can maximise the benefits of such a time.

While the dictionary defines downtime as a time when ‘the system is not functioning,’ especially in the manufacturing sector, this seems an apt metaphor for the human brain too. Not to function, or be in a hyperactive mode, means that the human mind and body have got a much needed reprieve from everyday stress.

This is why, ironically, downtime

needs to be taken seriously. There is enough evidence that workaholics tend to burn out very quickly, having reached an unsustainable peak too soon. Even when not at work, people tend to intuitively reach out for work mails, updates on social media, and the ever present WhatsApp messages.

There are various ways of having downtime, and not all of them involve expensive trips abroad. The simplest is to just stay away from the smartphone, a device which is now just an extension on the palm.

As Jim Wilson of the New York Times says, “when people keep their brains busy with digital input, they are forfeiting downtime that

DOWNTIME COULD BE IN THE FORM OF WALKING, BIKING, SWIMMING, OR PREFERABLY SOLITARY ACTIVITY, THAT GIVES A MUCH NEEDED ME-TIME

could allow them to better learn and remember information, or come up with new ideas”. We need time to process information and experiences, and a perpetual state of stimulation doesn’t give the necessary time to reflect.

Downtime could be in the form of walking, biking, swimming,

or any other, preferably solitary activity, that gives a much needed me-time.

Ask college students what they want to do over a weekend and a typical response is ‘sleep’. There is clear evidence that young adults are not getting the sleep required to sustain normal work hours. Downtime could then just be to catch up on sleep, preferably without the phone on the bedside.

Much like everything else, downtime requires planning. The best way to go about it, according to behaviour scientists, is to first finish up any urgent work that may be pending, to avoid thinking about it. Next, coopting family or friends

into your plan is important, so that they can stay involved or give you time off. Finally, ignore the urge to grab the closest digital device to get back on social media.

Holidays are invaluable times to recharge, physically and mentally. They make us more creative and reflective, add to the quality of our relationships at work, and teach us something about ourselves.

South Indian actor Prabhas Raju seems to have got it right when he said, “A holiday is an opportunity to travel within”. For those of us who are lucky enough to have such a time off, using it as downtime is possibly the best use we can make of it.

Biden team revives Asia focus with visit to Asean nations

SHAUN TANDON

President Joe Biden was clear from the moment he entered office -- China is the main international competitor and should be the top concern for US foreign policy. Then Russia attacked Ukraine.

After months devoted to supporting Ukraine and punishing Russian President Vladimir Putin, Biden is shifting focus, at least temporarily, back to Asia, a sign that the ongoing war will not drown out the administration’s other international goals.

Biden from Thursday meets leaders of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations for a two-day summit, a sign of personal US engagement in a region full of disputes with a rising China.

A week later, Biden travels to Japan and South Korea, two treaty allies of the United States, and will hold a four-way summit in Tokyo with the prime ministers of Australia, India and Japan -- the “Quad” widely perceived as a counter to Beijing.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken will soon deliver what is billed as a major speech on China, although it was recently pushed back after the top US diplomat tested positive for Covid.

At the Asean summit, “certainly the war in Ukraine will be a topic of discussion, but it’s also an opportunity to discuss security in the region,” White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said.

She said she also expected discussion on the pandemic and on North Korea -- which may soon soar to the top of US priorities with Washington seeing signs of an imminent new nuclear test.

Yuki Tatsumi, a senior fellow at the Stimson Center, said Biden was sending a message by going ahead with the Asia diplomacy.

“For the Biden administration, this is quite important for giving assurances to countries in the Indo-Pacific that, yes, we are doing things in Ukraine in the short term, but we are fundamentally committed to the Indo-Pacific,” she said.

With its rapid gains in technology, growing assertiveness at home and abroad and nearly one-fifth of the world’s population, China has loomed large for successive US administrations that have all seen the future in the Pacific -- but each has faced the reality of troubles elsewhere.

Most famously, former president Barack Obama launched a “pivot to Asia” that included winding down commitments in the Middle East, although he sent troops back to Iraq after the rise of the IS movement. In 2014, after Russia seized Crimea from Ukraine, Obama angered Putin by dismissing Russia as a weak “regional power.”

Hal Brands, a senior fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, said there was an “obvious tension” between the need to keep the focus on Asia and the rising priorities around the world.

— AFP

Russian retreat seen near Kharkiv, despite Victory Day push for gains

MICHAEL SCHWIRTZ, CORA ENGELBRECHT & MEGAN SPECIA

Russia’s push to give its president a showcase victory in Ukraine appeared to face a new setback on Saturday, as Ukrainian defenders chased the invaders back towards the northeast border and away from the city of Kharkiv, with the Russians blowing up bridges behind them.

With Russian President Vladimir Putin leading his country in Victory Day celebrations commemorating the Soviet triumph over Nazi Germany, the apparent Russian pullback from the area around Kharkiv, Ukraine’s second-largest city, contradicted the Russian narrative and illustrated the complicated picture along the 300-mile front in eastern Ukraine.

The Russians have been trying to advance in eastern Ukraine for the past few weeks and have been pushing especially hard as Victory Day approaches, but Ukrainian forces — armed with new weapons supplied by the United States and other Western nations — have been pushing back in a counteroffensive.

The destruction of three bridges by Russian forces, about 12 miles northeast of Kharkiv, reported by the Ukrainian military, suggested that the Russians not only were trying to prevent the Ukrainians from pursuing them but also had no immediate plans to return.



A World War II memorial in Kyiv, Ukraine,during a Ukrainian holiday known as the Day of Remembrance and Reconciliation.

The Russian actions were similar to what the Russian military had done last month in a retreat from the city of Chernihiv, north of Kyiv, Ukraine’s capital, said Frederick Kagan, a military historian and a senior fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, a Washington-based public policy research group. The strategy near Kharkiv was an indicator, he said, that “the order to retreat to somewhere had been given and they were trying to set up a defensive line.”

Ukrainian forces have retaken a constellation of towns and villages in the outskirts of Kharkiv this past week, putting them in position to unseat Russian forces from the region and reclaim total control of the city “in a matter of days,” according to recent analysis by the Institute for the Study of War, a Washington-based research group.

“The Russian occupiers continue to destroy the civilian infrastructure of the Kharkiv region,” the region’s governor, Oleh Sinegubov, said in a Telegram post on Saturday, adding that shelling and artillery attacks overnight had targeted several districts, destroying a national museum in the village of Skovorodynivka.

For Russia, perhaps the best example of anything resembling a victory was the long-besieged southeastern port city of Mariupol. Although much of the city has been destroyed by Russian bombardments, there were growing indications on Saturday that Russia’s

control of the city was nearly complete.

The Ukrainian Ministry of Defense’s intelligence directorate said in a statement that Russian officers were being moved from combat positions and sent to protect a Russian military parade being planned in Mariupol.

Petro Andrushchenko, an adviser to the city council, posted a series of photos to Telegram on Friday that appeared to show how Russian forces were restoring “monuments of the Soviet period” across the city.

One image appeared to show a Russian flag flying above an intensive care hospital. Another image, posted last week, showed municipal workers replacing Ukrainian road signs with signs in Russian script. The images could not be verified.

On Friday, 50 people were evacuated from the city’s Azovstal steel plant, the final holdout of Ukrainian forces and a group of civilians. Evacuations under the auspices of the United Nations and Red Cross resumed on Saturday.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said in an overnight address that diplomatic efforts were still under way to ensure that both the civilians and the remaining military personnel hunkered inside the steel plant could be brought to safety.

The goal of Russian forces — for now at least — appears to be seizing as much of the eastern Ukrainian region known as the Donbas as possible, by expelling Ukrainian forces that have been fighting Russian-backed separatists for years in the provinces of Donetsk and Luhansk. Since Russia’s attack began on February 24, about 80 per cent of those two provinces have fallen under the Kremlin’s control.

Russian forces are trying to break through Ukrainian lines and encircle troops defending the area around the eastern city of Severodonetsk but are being held in check, the regional governor, Serhiy Haidai said.

“It is a war, so anything can happen, but for now, the situation is difficult but under control,” Haidai said in a telephone interview. “They have broken through in some places and these areas are being reinforced.”

The Russians seemed “unlikely to successfully surround the town,” according to the latest update from the Institute for the Study of War.

—The New York Times

You are not alone makes a difference



Lakshmi Kothaneth
@lakshmioman

The writer is a senior journalist and a radio anchor

It was 1981 summer vacation in the Sultanate of Oman and almost every adult around me was talking about the Royal wedding of Prince Charles and Princess Diana. And finally I saw on Television, video cassettes and newspapers. It was a fairy tale with a real princess and with the absence of social media... there was quite a bit left to our own imagination. Was fascinated with her wedding dress and her hairstyle became iconic.

Wanted to know everything about her so did the whole world. Princess Diana had no choice but be part of world's fascination. Maybe she never wanted it but that probably was the most intriguing part. Years passed by and was at a birthday dinner, yet again another summer in Oman but a different decade and just establishing a career... so not a school kid anymore, when the news came in about the demise of the Princess. Smiles disappeared instantly and the sadness was indescribable. Did not know her but the gloominess could have felt across the globe. Once again for the one who didn't seek attention, the photographers and commentators were readily available. The paparazzi became a key terminology.

The fairy tale had ended with a jolt. But not quite so. Sitting at the Oman National Museum, it is 2022, I was listening to Tessy Ojo CBE, Chief Executive Officer, speak about Diana Awards. She said, Princess Diana was known all around the world for her compassion. The award is her legacy and today the award recognises youth across the globe who have made a difference with their social action towards humanity. So in many ways the fairy tale continues. But most intriguing part

was that school kid of 1981 could do the report on one of the legacies of Princess Diana. The Princess had proven that it is not the titles that matter but the quality of the personality that makes lasting impression.

At the National Museum, the 'Not Alone Campaign' celebrating its eighth year, played the video of Princess Diana's visit to the Sultanate of Oman with Prince Charles as guests of

late Sultan Qaboos. Once again the school kid popped her head while watching Princess Diana sit elegantly at a meeting and later sitting down on the majlis with the ladies, listening to children and delicately scoop Omani halwa with a spoon.

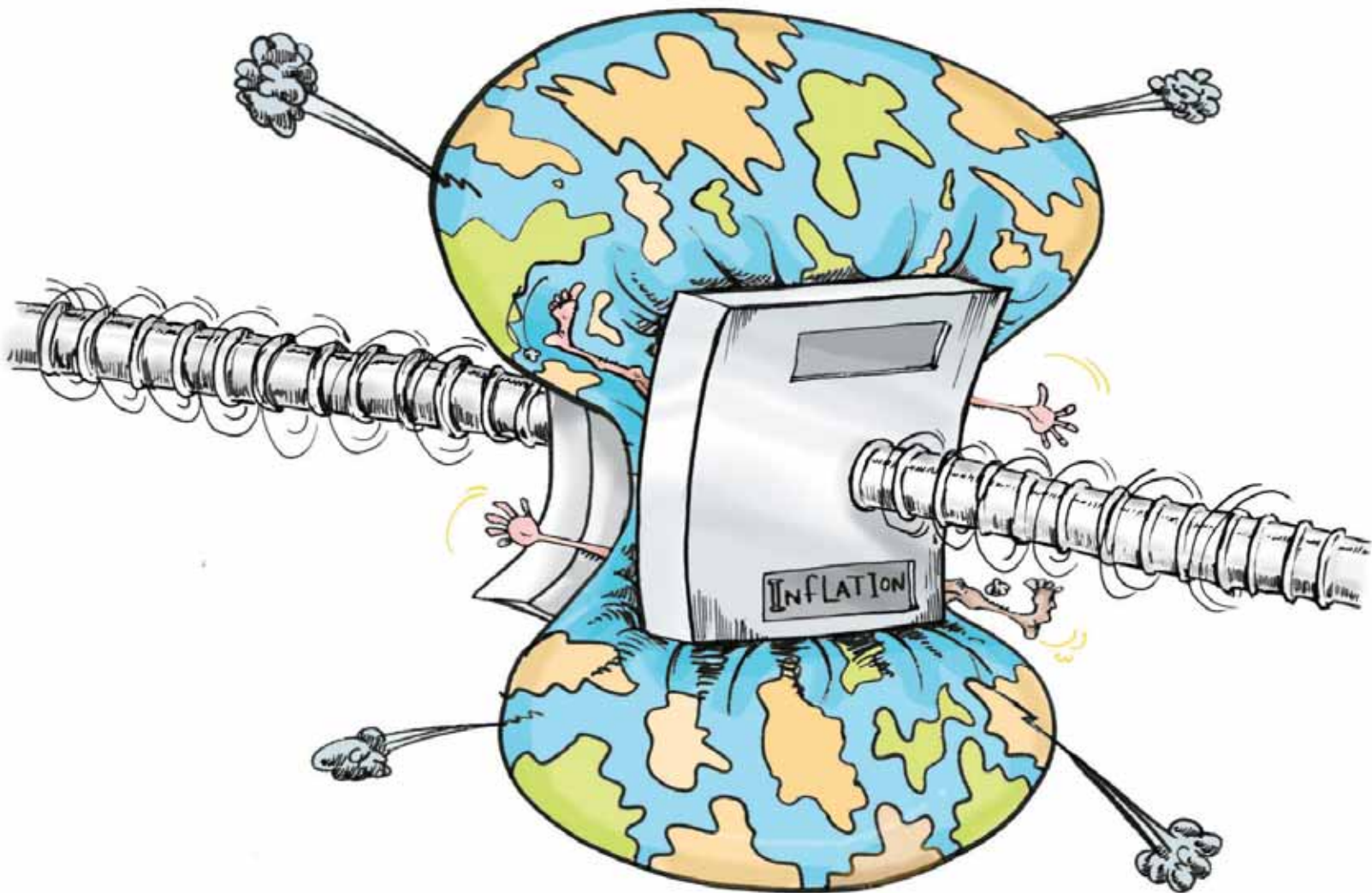
What a lovely journey of memories and nostalgia.

Was brought back to reality with speeches that reminded us about the importance of month of May — month of mental health. This year being about loneliness again tell us how this feeling can conquer the mind no matter who one is. Feeling alone in the crowd and does not matter how busy one can be.

The founder of 'Not Alone campaign', HH Sayyidah Basma al Said said, no matter how many therapists one meets and how many medications, the will to change has to come from within.

So the solution is from within. To reach the will we have the 'want' and for that we must realise the beauty within the gift of life. Each life is important and it is how we shape and channelise life.

In case there are obstacles that is when a letter from a loved one saying, "You are not alone," would make all the difference.



PAHAD AL-ZEDJALI

Intangible cultural heritage as an effective tool as soft power!



Sultan Al Bimani
sultan.albimani@hotmail.com

Heritage is what we inherit from the past and is of use and value in the present day. In broad terms, heritage consists of cultural assets (cultural heritage) and nature (natural heritage). Cultural heritage is the past created by human-kind and its various tangible and intangible elements. And comes in the form of material objects (tangible cultural heritage) such as archaeological remains, villages, buildings, cities, landscapes, museums, handicrafts, art collections, historic gardens and antiques.

However, it also encompasses non-material elements of culture (intangible cultural heritage) including folklore, beliefs, music, rituals and dance. Intangible cultural heritage is playing an important role in soft power of the country. It also contributes to the government's international cultural strategy and creates robust cultural tourism that secures long-term economic growth and heritage preservation.

Power in general is the ability to affect others to get the outcomes one prefers. And that can be achieved by payment, coercion, or persuasion and attraction. "Soft power" is the ability to obtain preferred outcomes by attracting others rather than payment or coercion. Countries use military power to issues which are related to threats or fight and to achieve desired results within a reasonable period.

While economic power is frequently a straightforward matter with some possible acts from the governments such as bank account freezing, bribes distributing or aid promptly. In this type of power, economic sanctions could take a long time to produce desired outcomes.

Soft power is more difficult to wield than military and economic powers. Many of soft power's critical resources are outside the control of the government, because they work indirectly by shaping the environment for policy, and occasionally take long time to produce the desired results (Nye J, 2004). It is difficult to talk about hard power without touching on the soft power.

Despite building up the capabilities of hard power is unavoidable, countries should pay more attention to soft power and make it their ideal tool of nation

branding. This anecdotal comment recounts the origins of the concept as an analytical tool, and its gradual development as an instrumental concept used in political discourse in the United States, China and Europe. Nowadays soft power plays an important role in building of a nation's brand image, identity, value, influence and attractiveness (Global Soft power, 2021).

Nye (2007) states that soft power is based on three resources: its culture, its political values and its foreign policy. However, culture either tangible or intangible is one of the pillars of soft power. Nowadays, countries attempt to have enormous soft power resources to use them effectively to accomplish outcomes they wanted.

Over its long history, the Sultanate of Oman has been something of a cross-

and its cultural heritage.

According to the World Soft Power Index by (Brand Finance, 2022), Oman was ranked the 49th globally comparing to 51st in 2021. The index was determined through a series of measures across seven 'pillars' in which pillar research explores various aspects of business and trade, governance, international relations, culture and heritage, media and communications, education and science, and people and values. The study also measures the contribution of the favourable or unfavourable perception of the nation brands. Furthermore, Omanis are characterised by tolerance and generosity. The warmth and kind nature of the Omanis are the main characteristics that visitors can feel it in the country.

Thus, how Oman gained benefits from using intangible cultural heritage (ICH) as a soft power. And does the strength of ICH indeed reflects and directly influences the soft power of a country? Also, how does the indicator of ICH influences the outcomes achieved by any country in the given ranking of soft power?

The Sultanate of Oman, which has already launched the government initiative programme "Tanfeedh" in 2016 which is leading to Oman's Vision 2040. This programme aims generally at linking the main vital sectors' strategies with the purpose of diversify the national income resources. There are many examples of countries using cultural heritage as an effective tool to strive for soft power.

Assuming that cultural heritage in Oman today is well-maintained and has good soft power sources, but it needs more efforts. However, by enhancing the cultural heritage, Oman will increase the international cultural relationships as this will get more benefits economically and socially.

However, does the strength of cultural heritage indeed reflect and directly influence the soft power of Oman, or could it be compensated by others such as non-cultural elements? Also, how does the indicator of cultural heritage tourism influences the outcomes achieved by any country in the given ranking of soft power?

OVER ITS LONG HISTORY,
THE SULTANATE OF
OMAN HAS BEEN
SOMETHING OF A CROSS-
CULTURAL ENTREPOT,
AN OUTWARD-LOOKING
AND HIGHLY EVOLVED
SOCIETY INTERACTING
FREELY WITH OTHER
CIVILISATIONS BOTH
AT HOME AND ON ITS
EXPLORATIONS OVERSEAS.
OMAN IS PROUD OF ITS
DEEP-ROOTED HISTORY
AND ITS CULTURAL
HERITAGE

cultural entrepot, an outward-looking and highly evolved society interacting freely with other civilisations both at home and on its explorations overseas. Oman is proud of its deep-rooted history

sport

Follow us on
omanobserver.om/sports



Atletico edge past weakened Real Madrid, Sevilla peg back Villarreal

MADRID: Atletico Madrid won a La Liga derby against Real Madrid for the first time in six years on Sunday as a 1-0 victory left Diego Simeone's side on the cusp of securing Champions League qualification.

YANNICK CARRASCO'S first-half penalty proved enough at the Wanda Metropolitano against a heavily weakened Real Madrid, who took the chance to rotate after their incredible Champions League comeback against Manchester City on Wednesday.

With Karim Benzema, Luka Modric and Thibaut Courtois among those on the bench for the already-crowned champions, Atletico took advantage, even if they missed a string of chances that made the contest far more uncomfortable than it needed to be.

Atletico sit fourth, six points clear of Real Betis in fifth, with three games left to play. Their better head-to-head record over Betis means they will be guaranteed to finish in the top four if Betis fail to win away at Valencia on Tuesday.

If Betis beat Valencia, Atletico can make sure of their spot themselves by winning away at Elche on Wednesday.

"It is very important to qualify and we have to get one more win in three games to achieve it", said Atletico captain Koke. "If we work like this, we'll get there."

Sevilla's place also looks almost sealed after a 1-1 draw away at Villarreal earlier on Sunday gave them a seven-point cushion over Betis.

Atletico had not beaten Real Madrid in La Liga since 2016 and not at home since 2015, while their last eight games in all competitions against their city rivals had brought two goals and no victories.

Ending that run will certainly bring much satisfaction to Atletico's fans and players but the bigger relief will be Champions League qualification, which has been in doubt for the duration of what has been an inconsistent and disappointing campaign.



Carlo Ancelotti made a raft of changes to his starting line-up as only Toni Kroos, Casemiro and Eder Militao remained from the team that pulled off the sensational victory over City.

It meant rare starts for the likes of Luka Jovic up front, Eduardo Camavinga in midfield and Jesus Vallejo at the back while Ukrainian Andriy Lunin made his first league appearance of the season in goal.

Lunin did nothing wrong but nobody stood out, with Camavinga out of sorts and Jovic replaced in the second half.

"We have rested some players, we have avoided problems, and we have given minutes to those who have had less", said Ancelotti. "It will be like this for the next few games."

Atletico's greater intensity showed in the first half as Angel Correa drove an early shot wide after a poor pass from Camavinga allowed Geoffrey Kondogbia to rob Kroos before Carrasco weaved through but flashed wide.

The goal came from another misplaced pass, this time from Marco Asensio in midfield, and as Matheus Cunha bore down on goal, he was squeezed out between Vallejo and Militao.

Atletico wanted a penalty and while the referee initially waved away appeals, he changed his mind after consulting the replay, with Vallejo deemed culpable. Carrasco slammed in the spot-kick.

Kroos shot wide and then Jovic's only contribution was to hit Jan Oblak when the ball spilled out to him after Rodrygo raced in behind.

Without the second goal, the tension grew and as every fresh opportunity went begging, the sense that Real Madrid might capitalise increased.

Carrasco fired over after Nacho Fernandez gave the ball away and then another Camavinga error gave Cunha a chance but his effort was saved. — AFP



Atletico had not beaten Real Madrid in La Liga since 2016 and not at home since 2015, while their last eight games in all competitions against their city rivals had brought two goals and no victories

Oman futsal side trains hard for GCC Games

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MAY 9

The Oman futsal team is undergoing an intensive domestic camp ahead of the GCC Games which will take place in Kuwait from May 13 to 31.

The final preparatory camp ahead of the Gulf assignment began on Thursday and will conclude on Wednesday as the team will travel later to Kuwait.

The futsal team had a local warm-up fixture against Al Rustaq club late on Monday at Al Rustaq Sports Complex.

The GCC Games will act as a vital preparation stage for the team's forthcoming assignment

at AFC Futsal Asian Cup Kuwait 2022. Oman head coach Younis al Fahdi will aim to secure top output from this participation and to take maximum advantages from the matches that the team will play during this tournament.

SUCCESSFUL PARTICIPATION

The team is back to action after their successful participation at the West Asia qualifiers for AFC Futsal Asian Cup Kuwait 2022 which was held in the UAE in April. The warm-up camp featured different sessions including the fitness and physical sessions which was under watchful eyes of the Portuguese fitness coach Ricardo Silva.



Experienced national coach Younis al Fahdi has selected 17 members for the Gulf assignment. Al Fahdi focused during the previous days on many technical and tactical trainings including playing in very little area, quick passes and ways to press hard on taking balls. It is expected that the head coach will finalise the final line-up in the upcoming sessions prior travelling to Kuwait.

Oman futsal team had booked their spot in the AFC Futsal Asian Cup Kuwait 2022 which will be

held in September this year after defeating UAE 5-3 in the West Asia Play-off in April.

Five teams from West Asia have qualified to the 2022 AFC Futsal Asian Cup Kuwait including Lebanon, Saudi Arabia from Group A, while Iraq and Bahrain made the finals from Group B and Oman entered through play-off.

OMAN SQUAD: Hisham al Wahaibi, Abdulaziz al Raqadi, Mohammed al Lawati, Muhanad al Shibli, Khalfan al Maawali, Mansoor al Hadi, Zamil al Balushi, Essa al Balushi, Loai al Wahaibi, Motaism al Shamsi, Samer al Balushi, Salim al Mukhaini, Mohammed al Raisi and Waleed al Farsi.

CONWAY, MOEEN LEAD AS CHENNAI ROUT DEPLETED DELHI

MUMBAI: Devon Conway's 87 and inspired bowling by Moeen Ali helped holders Chennai Super Kings thrash Covid-affected Delhi Capitals by 91 runs in the Indian Premier League on Sunday.

The left-handed Conway recorded his second 80-plus score in just his fourth match this season to guide Chennai to an imposing 208 for six in Mumbai.

Moeen then returned figures of 3-13 with his offspin as Chennai bowled Delhi out for 117 in 17.4 overs.

Fast bowlers Mukesh Choudhary, Simrajeet Singh and Dwayne Bravo took two wickets each.

Chennai, who had a change of captaincy midway as M S Dhoni took over from Ravindra Jadeja, have only a slim chance of making the play-offs but improved on their net run-rate and moved to eighth in the 10-team table.

"You just want to enjoy the IPL. When two other teams are playing, you don't want to be under pressure," Dhoni said on his team's play-off hopes.

"You just have to think about what to do in the next game. If we make the playoffs, great. But even if we don't it's not the end of the world."

Delhi, who came into the game after a positive Covid test to one of their net bowlers and with opening batter Prithvi Shaw in hospital with a fever, stay fifth as the Twenty20 tournament moves towards the business end.

Coach Ricky Ponting said his team will never make excuses and have earlier faced a similar situation when Delhi's New Zealand import Tim Seifert tested positive just hours before the start of a match last month.

-- No excuses -- "That's not an excuse for us. It's not the first time that we've had to deal with it



on game day. In one of the earlier games against Punjab Kings we had to deal with the same thing and ended up winning that game really comfortably," Ponting told reporters.

"Although today wasn't ideal preparation, we need to play better cricket. To lose by 91 runs and put a huge dent in our net run-rate means we need to bounce back really strongly in our next game"

Conway set up the victory for Chennai with a 110-run stand with opening partner Ruturaj Gaikwad, who made 41, before Shivam Dube and Dhoni exploded.

Dube hit a 19-ball 32 in another attacking stand with Conway, who struck seven fours and five sixes in his 49-ball knock, but fell to Marsh.

Left-arm pace bowler Khaleel Ahmed denied Conway, who made a match-winning 85 not out against Sunrisers Hyderabad last Sunday, his hundred after getting the batter caught behind.

The 40-year-old Dhoni smashed an unbeaten eight-ball 21 to roll back the years.

Delhi were never in the chase after opener Srikar Bharat (8) and David Warner (19) returned to the dugout inside five overs.

Moeen soon sent back Mitchell Marsh for 25 and then struck twice in one over including the wicket of skipper Rishabh Pant for 21.

The Delhi batting soon caved in as wickets fell like nine pins and Bravo wrapped up the innings with two successive wickets.

In the first match of the day, superstar cricketer Virat Kohli's miserable batting form extended with a third golden duck this IPL season but his team Royal Challengers Bangalore hammered Sunrisers Hyderabad by 67 runs.

— AFP



Osaka pulls out of Italian Open with injury

ROME: Naomi Osaka has withdrawn from the Italian Open in Rome to rest an Achilles injury ahead of the French Open, the WTA said on Monday.

The four-time Grand Slam champion suffered the injury in her opening match in Madrid earlier this month, before struggling in a second-round loss to Sara Sorribes Tormo.

"Unfortunately I'm going to have to withdraw from Rome as the injury which I picked up last week in Madrid hasn't healed yet," the Japanese star said in a statement.

"It's an Achilles injury so I need to be careful, especially in advance of Roland Garros."

The former world number one has never reached the final of a clay-court tournament, but will be hoping to put that record straight at the French Open which starts on May 22.

Osaka, currently ranked 38th, has shown signs of a return to form this year.

The 24-year-old reached the Miami Open final, where she lost to world number one Iga Swiatek, in April.

She has been replaced in the Rome draw by Spain's Nuria Parrizas Dias. — AFP

Teenager Alcaraz has eyes on Roland Garros after Madrid triumph

MADRID: Teenager Carlos Alcaraz continued his blazing rise by demolishing Alexander Zverev in the Madrid final on Sunday and then said "I really want to prove my level in a Grand Slam".

Two weeks before the start of the French Open, the young Spaniard brushed aside his third-ranked foe 6-3, 6-1 in 62 minutes to continue a run that signals tennis has a new power.

"I really want to go to Paris to win a Grand Slam, to show my level in a Grand Slam," said Alcaraz at a press conference after winning the second Masters 1000 of his career.

"People are going to take me as a favourite, but I take that as motivation," added Alcaraz.

He said he will miss the Rome claycourt tournament this week after injuring an ankle in beating Rafael Nadal in the quarterfinals on Friday. "This morning, because of the fall against Rafa, I woke up with a more swollen ankle and I also had a blister that had become infected," he said.

"It was a little difficult to walk, but... we were able to do a few things to be at 100 per cent for the match."

Before the Madrid tournament last year, Alcaraz was ranked 120th

in the world. On Monday he will reach number six.

"I have five more to go to be the best in the world," he said.

He became the youngest US Open quarter-finalist of the Open era last September, then won his first Masters 1000 title in Miami in early April.

Victory on Sunday brought a second Masters 1000 title. The only younger player to reach that milestone was Nadal, who won in Monte Carlo and Rome when he was 18. Alcaraz turned 19 on Thursday and over the next two days battled past Nadal in two hours and 28 minutes and Novak Djokovic in 3hr 36min.

"I am 19 years old, which I think is the key to be able to play long and tough matches in a row. I am feeling great physically," he said

"It feels great to be able to beat these players. To beat two of the best players in history and then Zverev, the world No. 3. He is a great player. I would say this is the best week of my life," he said.

- 'Good shots' -

Zverev had no doubt where the teenager's trajectory is heading.

"It's great to see for tennis that we have such a new superstar who is going to win so many Grand



Slams and is going to be world No. 1," said the German.

The atmosphere on Sunday did not reach the fervour of the day before, as Alcaraz grabbed control early and cruised to his quickest victory of the week.

Even so, "it was a spectacular atmosphere," he told the crowd at the end.

"This tournament is special for me because it's the first tournament I watched when I was seven or eight," said Alcaraz.

"Watching Rafa lift this trophy so often, gave me a lot of power to work hard for this moment."

Zverev complained that he was "dead" because he had played the latest matches the previous two nights, yet he was impressed with Alcaraz.

"Carlitos, right now you are the best player in the world. Even though you are still five years old you are still beating us all," he told Alcaraz on court after the match.

Alcaraz said he had some way to go. "I still have to improve in everything," he said. "I have very good shots, but they can be improved and can be much better"

— AFP

Gunners well placed after win over Leeds

ANDY JALIL
LONDON, MAY 9

With a comfortable 2-1 win over Leeds, Arsenal remain in fourth position in the Premier League to qualify for Champions League but much depends on their London derby match against rivals Tottenham, in a couple of day, who are also vying for a top-four finish.

Gunners manager, Mikel Arteta, said: “Thursday can be a defining moment in our season. That’s extra motivation for us to really go for it. I can’t wait for the game and we’re going to approach that match with the same enthusiasm that we always do. We are finding ways to win under pressure. We are getting better and dealing with it because we are winning matches. Hopefully it’s not just about handling the nerves.

Leeds played for well over an hour with 10 men after Luke Ayling was sent off for a foul on Gabriel Martinelli. It was a reckless two-footed lunging tackle. The referee straightaway showed the yellow card but after consulting VAR he produced the red card.

Arteta said: “Leeds completely changed their behaviour after the red card. For the first 35 minutes we were electric. We were so determined and incisive.” He added: “We conceded a set-piece goal and had to handle some nerves after that because in games now this is the decisive moment when a single goal can change a whole season.”

The Gunners fast-paced start paid off with their two goals coming in the first 10 minutes. The first one was after

a misjudged pass by Ayling from the left to his goalkeeper Illan Meslier with Arsenal’s Eddie Nketiah in fairly close attendance. Instead of clearing first time, Meslier took a heavy touch to control and Nketiah tackled him on the goal-line before sliding the ball home.

Within five minutes Arsenal then doubled the lead. Martinelli beat Ayling with a surging run on the left before pulling the ball back in his cross for Nketiah to slam in a left-footed first-time shot.

Thereafter, the Gunners could have quickly further extended the lead but Diego Llorente cleared a flighted free kick off the goal-line after a misjudgement by Meslier. The goalkeeper then saved two attempts, one with his knee from Martinelli and then his shoulder from a shot by Bukayo Saka.

Leeds were better organised and disciplined after the break and pressed hard but the Gunners defence stood firm. Leeds best effort came near the end but Rodrigo headed straight to the goalkeeper after Junior Firpo had flicked on a pass following a free kick.

Leeds, manager, Jesse Marsche, didn’t blame his players. “Luke (Ayling) has apologised and this is not the time to point fingers at anyone. We’re screwed if we start playing the blame game, because the only way out for us is for everyone to stick together and fight for points.”

He added: “We dug ourselves a massive hole with the way we started the game and made our task more difficult. We have to be realistic and understand that starting a game like this can absolutely destroy our chances.”



Milan close in on title glory after Tonalì double sinks Verona

MILAN: Sandro Tonalì fired AC Milan closer to the Serie A title with a brace in Sunday’s 3-1 win at Verona which maintained their two-point lead over Inter Milan at the top of the league.

Italy midfielder Tonalì struck with almost identical goals created by Rafael Leao either side of half-time before Alessandro Florenzi completed the scoring near the end to leave Milan needing four points from their final two games to claim a first Scudetto since 2011.

Their superior record in this season’s Milan derbies gives the seven-time European champions an advantage which would keep them ahead of champions Inter should the two local rivals end the season level on points.

“I’m in love with my players,” said coach Stefano Pioli to DAZN.

“I see the effort they put in everyday and I know the journey we’ve been on... we’ve got to keep this concentration, determination and belief in the final two games.”

Milan overcame the toughest test of their run-in against ninth-placed Verona and now host

Europe-chasing Atalanta next weekend before travelling to Sassuolo on the closing weekend of what has been an enthralling campaign.

Inter meanwhile are in Sardinia on Sunday against a Cagliari team fighting for its Serie A life, with their final opponents Sampdoria and the small matter of the Italian Cup final against Juventus on Wednesday further complicating matters.

TONALÌ TAKES CONTROL

Tonalì’s double was the second time in three matches he has been crucial to Milan’s title charge after also netting a late winner at Lazio a fortnight ago.

The 22-year-old thought he had opened the scoring in the 15th minute when he raced onto a long ball from goalkeeper Mike Maignan and slotted past Lorenzo Montipo, only for the wild celebrations among the large contingent of away fans to be cut short by a tight offside ruling via VAR.

After also going close through Davide Calabria Milan fans

started thinking about a Stadio Bentegodi hoodoo — they have thrown away two league titles at Verona in the past — six minutes before the break when Davide Faraoni finished off a beautiful Verona move by nodding home Darko Lazović’s floated cross.

However Tonalì had a deserved goal deep into first-half stoppage time when after Leao burst into the box he met the Portugal attacker’s pass and pushed in the equaliser.

It galvanised Milan who were in front shortly after the restart thanks to a carbon copy effort, the only real difference being that Leao’s low pass for Tonalì’s second was with his left foot.

From then on Milan were in almost complete control and Florenzi made sure Milan continued their charge for a first league crown since 2011 when he exchanged passes with Junior Messias before rifling home his second Serie A goal of the season.

- Altare saves Cagliari - Giorgio Altare’s thumping header in the ninth minute of stoppage handed Cagliari a dramatic 1-1 draw

at Salernitana which kept their survival hopes alive.

The 23-year-old’s last-gasp effort, which came just moments after his team had a penalty revoked following a long VAR check, ensured that Cagliari stay a single point behind 17th-placed Salernitana.

“That denied penalty would have killed off most people but they had the heart to get back up and keep everything alive,” said Alessandro Agostino, in charge of Cagliari for the first time following Monday’s sacking of Walter Mazzarri.

Davide Nicola’s Salernitana, who are attempting a miracle escape act after being bottom of the division for most of the season, face a fight in what will be an exciting run-in with the bottom six teams still not safe.

Among them are current bottom side Venezia, whose top flight status is secure for at least another week after Altare’s header and a 4-3 home win over Bologna which came thanks to another superb stoppage time finish from Dennis Johnsen. — AFP

Mavs drill 20 three-pointers to pull level with Suns

LOS ANGELES: The Dallas Mavericks rained 20 three-pointers and again neutralised Phoenix point guard Chris Paul to beat the top-seeded Suns 111-101 on Sunday and knot their NBA playoff series at two games each.

Star guard Luka Dončić scored 26 points and Dorian Finney-Smith added 24 for Dallas, who have won two games at home to level the best-of-seven Western Conference matchup after dropping the first two games in Phoenix.

The Suns, who finished the regular season with the best record in the league, will try to regain the advantage when they host game five on Tuesday. It’s guaranteed to shift back to Dallas for game six on Thursday.

The Philadelphia 76ers also won a second straight game at home to level their Eastern Conference series with Miami at two-all.

Former NBA MVP James Harden scored 31 points to lead six Philadelphia players in double figures in a 116-108 victory.

Center Joel Embiid, who missed the first two games with a concussion and facial fracture, scored 24 points, his presence again making things tougher for Miami defensively.

“The organisation on offence, it helps a lot with him on the floor,” said Philadelphia’s Danny Green, who made three three-pointers on the way to 11 points. “Without him we look a little discombobulated.”

“James was incredible tonight for us,” Green added of Harden,



who also pulled down seven rebounds and handed out nine assists in his strongest showing of these playoffs.

Embiid carried the Sixers early, scoring 15 points in the first quarter. Harden, who didn’t score in the opening period, took over with 13 points in the second and Philadelphia took a 64-56 lead into halftime after an opening half that featured 17 lead changes.

The Sixers, up 89-85 going into the fourth, pushed the lead to 10 with less than six minutes remaining. Miami had cut it to five when Harden drove to the rim for a basket then drained a three-pointer. Embiid, still playing in a protective mask, grabbed an offensive rebound and fed Tyrese Maxey for a dunk that made it 111-

103 and Harden made another three-pointer to push the lead to 11 with 1:07 left, effectively sealing the win.

Harden scored 16 points in the fourth quarter as the Sixers withstood a 40-point performance from Miami’s Jimmy Butler.

“We know it’s going to be tougher in their building,” Green said of game five looming in Miami on Tuesday. “We’ve got to come in more intense, more focused.”

In Dallas, the Mavericks held off the Suns despite a poor shooting effort from Dončić, who connected on just nine of 25 shots and just one of 10 from three-point range. Overall, the Mavs were on fire from beyond the arc, their eight three-pointers in the first quarter helping them build a 37-25 lead. — AFP



#THANKYOUWORLD

Competitive profit rates starting from 3.45%

MAISARAH AUTO FINANCE OFFER

The offers are valid till May 31, 2022.

Terms & Conditions Apply

Oman’s 2022 Budget surplus climbs to RO 357m in Q1

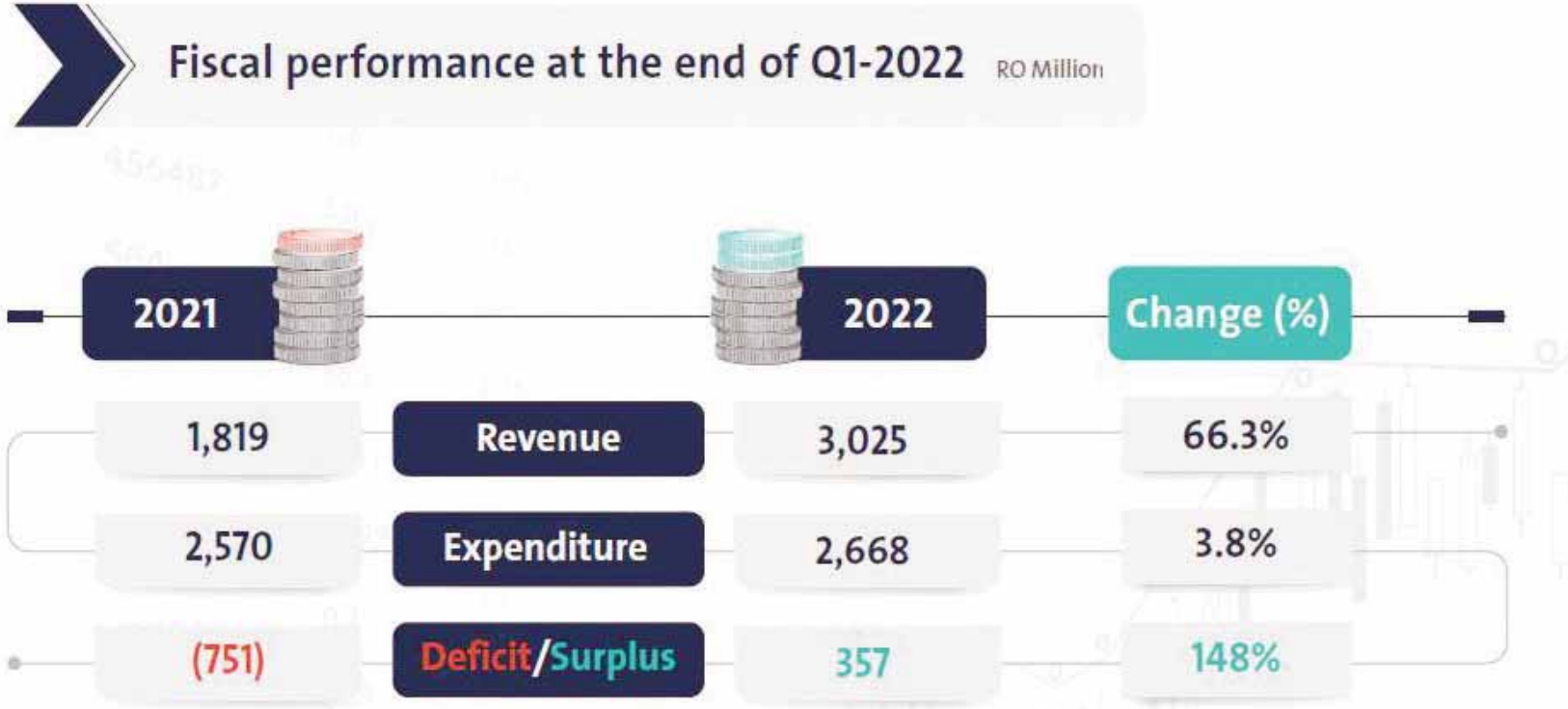
JOMAR MENDOZA
@JmObserver

Buoyed by resurgent oil and gas prices and increasingly strong fiscals, the Sultanate of Oman’s 2022 Budget registered a surplus of RO 357 million at the end of first quarter, as compared to a deficit of RO 751 million over the same period in 2021.

Shedding light on the country’s fiscal performance for Q1 2022, the Ministry of Finance noted that the surplus will be utilised towards three key objectives: Accelerating economic recovery, Enhancing development spending and Mitigating the risks of public debt portfolio.

Public revenue, bolstered by strong hydrocarbon export earnings, surged 66.3 per cent to RO 3.025 billion, up from RO 1.819 billion for the corresponding period of 2021.

The biggest contribution came from crude oil, with net revenue soaring 70.2 per cent to RO 1.565 billion, up from RO 919 million in Q1 2021. This is credited to a higher average oil price of \$78 per



barrel and an uptick in average oil production to 1.025 million barrels per day this year, versus an average oil price of \$45 and an output of 952K barrels per day in Q1 2021.

Gas revenue also surged 124.4 per cent to RO 454 million, up from RO 365 million for Q1 2021.

Current revenue increased by 23.7 per cent to RO 636 million, up from RO 514 million last year. VAT receipts totalled RO 69 million, while excise tax of RO 24 million help boost the collection of government revenue, the Ministry stated in its latest newsletter.

Public spending, on the other hand, inched up 3.8 per cent to RO 2.668 billion, up from RO 2.570 billion in Q1 2021.

The current expenditure of civil ministries and units registered almost similar figures of the same period in 2021. Moreover, the public debt service

registered an increase to RO 291 million.

The development expenditure of civil ministries and units increased by 130.8 per cent to RO 150 million compared to the same quarter in 2021.

The total amount spent represents 13.6 per cent of total

development budget allocated for 2022 i.e. RO 1.100 billion. Contributions and other expenses amounted to RO 179 million, including RO 50 million allocated for public debt service, the report stated.

Significantly, an amount totalling over RO 146.4 million was paid by the Ministry to private sector in Q1 2022. “This reflects the payment vouchers received through the e-financial system, and which have completed the documentary cycle”, it noted.

Citing the MENA Economic Update, the report stated that the Sultanate of Oman’s economy is projected to recover as measures against the Covid-19 pandemic continued to be lifted, and also due to higher oil prices and production.

The gross domestic production (GDP) is projected to grow to 5.6 per cent supported by a growth of more than 8 per cent and 2 per cent in oil and non-oil sectors, respectively, in 2022. However, the GDP is projected to decrease to 2.7 per cent on average in 2023 and 2024.



Oil prices slip, weighed down by strong dollar

TOKYO: Oil prices slipped on Monday alongside equities and weighed down by a strong dollar and demand concerns on the back of continued coronavirus lockdowns in China, the world top oil importer.

Brent crude fell \$2.27, or 2 per cent, to \$109.86 a barrel by 12:22 GMT. US West Texas Intermediate crude was at \$107.10 a barrel, down \$2.39, or 2.2 per cent. Both contracts have gained over 40 per cent so far this year.

The dollar hitting a fresh two-decade high made oil more expensive for holders of other currencies.

Global financial markets have been spooked by concerns over interest rate hikes and recession worries as tighter and wider Covid-19 lockdowns in China

led to slower export growth in the world’s No. 2 economy in April.

“The full extent of Chinese oil demand destruction has yet to be felt,” said PVM analyst Stephen Brennock, adding he expected oil demand forecasts from the International Energy Agency and others to be revised down in upcoming data releases. Crude imports by China fell 4.8 per cent in the first four months compared with last year, but included a nearly 7 per cent rise in April.

In Russia, oil output rose in early May from April and production has stabilised, Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak was cited as saying, after output fell in April in the wake of Western sanctions imposed over the Ukraine crisis. — AFP

Treasury Single Account project to cover 57 Omani government entities

Effective oversight: Ministry of Finance pilots unified scheme through Ministry of Labour, Tax Authority

CONRAD PRABHU
@conradprabhu

The Treasury Single Account (TSA) project, one of several financial management initiatives launched by the Omani government to streamline the handling of public finances, has been piloted thus far through two key entities: Ministry of Labour and the Tax Authority, according to the Ministry of Finance, which is overseeing the rollout of this far-reaching scheme.

When eventually implemented, the scheme will cover as many as 57 government ministries and departments, effectively elevating the Sultanate of Oman into the ranks of modern economies that have embraced the TSA model to ensure prudence and probity in the management of financial resources.

Initiated pursuant to the Ministry’s circular 18/2020, the



Treasury Single Account (TSA) is described as a unified structure of government bank accounts dealing with public revenue and expenditure on a daily basis – a move that allows for the optimal use of government cash resources.

Besides enhancing the efficiency of public cash management by enabling the utilisation of unused funds, it also helps improve the monitoring of the implementation of the State Budget, notably by providing accurate information on revenue and expenditure.

Additionally, the unified account structure helps reduce banking fees and the cost of transactions typically associated

with the operation of multiple accounts.

According to the Ministry, the introduction of a Treasury Single Account helps achieve four overarching goals: The unified account structure consolidates government cash balances and enables monitoring of cash flows; It ensures that government cash balances are optimally managed to reduce short-term borrowing costs; It enhances treasury management and improves cash flow forecasting capabilities; and importantly, it augments transparency by providing oversight of budgeted revenue and expenses. The recent launch of the pilot follows the successful

completion of a number of pre-launch phases, notably a study to ensure that the Omani TSA model is benchmarked to international standards.

A full-fledged rollout, covering all government departments, is envisioned upon the completion of the evaluation of the pilot phase, the Ministry noted.

Significantly, the TSA initiative is a key component of a newly deployed Government Financial System, dubbed ‘Maliyah’. Described as a modern system for managing public finance, use of the Maliyah system is mandatory for government departments when planning, implementing, controlling and reporting on the State Budget.

It provides accurate, reliable, timely and consistent financial information that enables financial and economic decision-makers to enact policies, formulate strategies and take effective decisions in line with the country’s economic diversification and financial sustainability principles. Maliyah is also underpinned by a modern financial accounting and reporting system.

Sohar Freezone announces new incentives

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 9

Sohar Freezone has introduced new incentives to help businesses start trading with the world immediately. Until the end of 2022, new and renewing tenants can purchase a General Trade Licenses (GTLs) for one, two or three years at up to 50 per cent of the usual cost.

SOHAR is also offering a complete working solution for companies looking to relocate to the complex through its commercial office partner, Corporate Parks, which offers a reduction of between 30 per cent and 45 per cent in office rental rates for up to three years. The new offers are designed to encourage investment in SOHAR across all sectors and provide the spark for existing businesses to take the next step in their development. Companies can enjoy all of the benefits of working and trading in the Freezone with added flexibility and greater cost-efficiency.

SOHAR Port and Freezone is one of the fastest-growing



2022 Office Lease Duration Rental Promotions

30% off

1 Year

35% off

2 Years

45% off

3 Years



Valid until 31 December 2022

Note: Above prices include electricity, water, and internet with access to the pantry and meeting room.

For more information or queries, contact: **+968 71518812 / 79922998**

Or send an email to **gtl@soharportandfreezone.com**

It all starts here

+968 2685 2700 | soharportandfreezone.com

complexes of its kind in the world.

Located at the crossroads of East and West, the complex offers unrivalled access to key markets in Europe, Africa, Asia and the Americas, as well as across the Middle East through well-connected modern highways.

The SOHAR Freezone offers sector-specific zones and clusters, and integrated, bespoke logistics solutions across the value chain, with warehousing and cold storage facilities available. The Freezone is connected to SOHAR Port through a bonded transport corridor and is reachable within 14 minutes, ensuring goods reach their destination in optimal condition.

Omar al Mahrizi, CEO of SOHAR Freezone & Deputy CEO of SOHAR Port, said, "SOHAR is committed to supporting the growth of new and existing business throughout the complex and by offering reduced rates on GTLs and office space, we are introducing another incentive for companies to join or expand their operations within the rapidly-expanding Freezone. We also

cater to the rising demand for hybrid working environments by offering cost-efficient office space within close proximity to a wide range of local and international clients for the times when face-to-face meetings are essential. Being based in SOHAR offers a wealth of advantages to companies, including access to raw materials, a world class port and exceptional transport links to key markets."

With competitive rates starting from one to three years, companies can register for a SOHAR GTL electronically from anywhere in the world and secure all required permits through the on-site one-stop shop. Investors also enjoy 0 per cent personal income tax, 0 per cent import and re-export duties and a corporate tax holiday of up to 25 years.

The partnership with Corporate Parks allows businesses access to meeting room space when required, high speed internet and utilities for a single annual fee. Options start from a one-year to three years, including a reduction of 45 per cent on the normal rate offered.

Own a luxury Lincoln vehicle before campaign ends

MUSCAT: Lincoln is offering enthusiasts of Lincoln luxury an exclusive opportunity to own a Lincoln and benefit with service 5 years/100,000 kms, 1 year registration and 3M window tint. The campaign will end on May 18, 2022. (Conditions apply. For details visit a Lincoln showroom Wattayah.)

Lincoln has an inspiring range in Oman that includes the family-size Lincoln Navigator, Lincoln Aviator, Lincoln Corsair and Lincoln Nautilus.

The large and spacious Navigator, combines modern luxury with advanced technology. A twin-turbo V6 engine that can produce 450 horsepower provides smooth power whenever you need it, delivered through a 10-speed transmission. Navigator's lighter, high-strength aluminium-alloy body helps create a more refined ride.

The Aviator is packed with advanced technologies that let the luxury SUV rise up to greet you, and scan the road ahead to glide through an uneven pavement. Aviator offers the kind of capability premium clients require in a three-row SUV, with available all-wheel drive. The standard twin-turbocharged 3.0-litre V6 engine, paired with a 10-speed SelectShift automatic transmission, it delivers an impressive 400 horsepower and 562 Nm of torque for effortless acceleration.

The Corsair features exquisite contouring throughout the body section of the door, offering a deep landscape of curvature and relief with a fast-falling roofline. Staying true to its Quiet



Flight DNA, Corsair is engineered to deliver the effortless drive experience and sensation of gliding over the road. A standard 2.0-litre with a targeted 245 horsepower is mated to a new 8-speed automatic transmission for agile performance. The attractive and luxurious Lincoln Nautilus is bold, stylish and powerful.

The Lincoln Nautilus is equipped with a turbocharged engine line-up. Delivering a luxurious driver environment with SUV flexibility, the Nautilus offers a stunning exterior design.

Inside, the cabin is welcoming and keeps all occupants comfortable. In terms of safety, the Nautilus is equipped with Lincoln Co-Pilot360 and advanced driver-assist features. A 2.7-litre twin-turbo V6 engine boasts an AWD drivetrain with adaptive suspension and all-wheel drive disconnect. It delivers 335 hp and 515 Nm of torque and includes standard Auto Start-stop capability, plus a new eight-speed automatic transmission with SelectShift capability.

Al Mouj Muscat's Kindness Festival features multiple charity events

MUSCAT: Throughout Ramadhan, Al Mouj Muscat's Kindness Festival has demonstrated how simple acts of care can help improve well-being in the Sultanate of Oman and three events organised by the leisure and lifestyle destination stand out as already having made a difference to those in need.

The trio of charitable initiatives include distributing food boxes to Al Mouj Muscat construction workers, the donation of specialist educational materials to a blind school in Seeb, and welcoming a group of children and staff from a local orphanage.

The distribution of food packages containing essential items to help construction workers prepare their suhoor and Iftar meals is an annual event and this year 1,000 were gifted which was a big rise on last year. The second event saw a group of volunteers present Omar Bin Al Khattab School for the Blind with resources in braille and, having developed a programme of games for the school, they also engaged with the children in play.

The third demonstration



of care in our local and wider communities was hosting a visit from Oman's Childhood Care Home. Staff and children from the central Muscat orphanage were treated to gifts and as well took part in educational activities, helping to make special memories for all.

Al Mouj Muscat's CEO Nasser bin Masoud al Sheibani commented: "Supporting others in the spirit of kindness sits at our core and I have been overwhelmed at the variety of thoughtful and imaginative initiatives organised so far.

"These three events were only

made possible by the generosity of Al Mouj staff and residents giving up their time, clearly demonstrating our commitment to community and well-being which is a mindset and culture we actively encourages all year round." From workshops and training designed for Omanis developing and running their own sustainable small businesses, to creating a world-class leisure and tourism destination that supports over 2,200 permanent jobs, Al Mouj Muscat is focused on achieving long-term sustainable growth to help ensure that communities can flourish.

Energy sector doing the heavy lifting as metals falter

OLE S HANSEN

The commodity sector is showing a growing divergence between metals and energy, with the Russia/Ukraine war continuing to raise supply concerns for crude oil, refined products and natural gas while industrial metals have suffered a continued setback on concerns about the short-term direction of the Chinese economy.

During the past week, the Bloomberg Commodity Spot Index rose by 2.2% and sits just below the April record, but as the table below shows, the gains were

mostly driven by strong gains in energy, led by US natural gas which surged to the highest level in almost 14 years.

Industrial metals have become increasingly challenged by China's stubborn adherence to the Dynamic Zero Covid policy despite mounting economic and social costs. Lockdowns have reduced mobility, productivity and with that the economic growth outlook. On Thursday, the Standing Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, chaired by President Xi, doubled down on its policy and asked for its leaders not to waver in pandemic control.

While infections in Shanghai,



China's financial hub, have been on a continuous downtrend since April 22, the prospect for a return to normality still seems weeks away. China's current situation was recently described by a major investor in Hong Kong as the worst in 30 years with Beijing's increasingly fraught zero-Covid

policies slowing growth while raising discontent among the population.

As a result, global supply chains continue to be challenged with congestions at Chinese ports building, while demand for key commodities from crude oil to industrial metals have seen a clear

drop.

One of the consequences being the need for the government to launch a major stimulus drive to support a recovery in growth, currently well below the 5.5 per cent target. Such initiatives are likely to support the industrial metal sector given the focus on infrastructure and energy transition, hence our view that following the recent weakness a floor is not far away.

Other current drivers for the commodity sector remains supply disruptions driven by the war in Ukraine supporting energy, while a continued surge in US bond yields and the dollar continues to create

some headwinds for investment metals such as gold and silver.

The US Federal Reserve stepped up its pace of tightening by raising its benchmark rate by 50 basis points with similar hikes expected at future FOMC meetings, the next on June 15 and July 27.

The Bank of England meanwhile warned of recession risks from double-digit inflation, and the intensified concerns over inflation helped drive US ten-year yields past 3 per cent while global stocks took another tumble, thereby souring the investment climate further. *(The writer is Head of Commodity Strategy at Saxo Bank)*



Indian rupee falls to new low on US Fed action and inflation fears

MUMBAI: The Indian rupee plunged to an all-time low against the greenback on Monday, as US monetary policy tightening roiled sentiment and foreign investors continued to dump domestic stocks.

Rising oil prices and a strengthening US dollar have weighed heavy on the rupee with a surprise rate hike by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) last week doing little to stem capital outflows.

The rupee fell past its previous record low of 76.98 against the US dollar in March to 77.56 on Monday. The fall came as Indian stocks on the benchmark Sensex and Nifty50 indices extended losses for a fourth day, falling more than one per cent each on Monday before recovering ground later in the day.

Banks, metals and oil and gas stocks declined the most, with market heavyweight, the conglomerate Reliance, losing more than 3.0 per cent following its quarterly results reported late on Friday.

Foreign investors have withdrawn a net 1.34 trillion rupees (\$17.3 billion) from Indian equities so far this year, stock



A bank employee counts rupee currency notes in Mumbai. — AFP

exchange data showed.

The war in Ukraine and resurgence of Covid-19 restrictions in China have exacerbated outflows from emerging markets like India as foreign funds turn risk-averse. Inflation worries on the back of rising commodity prices have also soured sentiment in Asia's third-largest economy, which imports more than 80 per cent of its oil needs.

Consumer price inflation in

India hit a 17-month high of 6.95 per cent year-on-year in March, and economists expect data to be released later this week to show that number rising beyond seven per cent in April.

The US Federal Reserve last week hiked the key lending rates by half a percentage point, but also held off on signalling more aggressive measures. "After an unscheduled rate hike by the Reserve Bank of India, if India's inflation moves higher

than 7.0 per cent... the pressure will be on for the RBI to act again", forex firm OANDA's Jeffrey Halley said in a note.

"That may give some strength to the rupee but is unlikely to be bullish for local equities." India's forex reserves declined for an eighth consecutive week, slipping below \$600 billion in the week ending April 29 as the central bank sold foreign currency in an effort to stabilise the rupee.

— AFP



A vendor carries sacks of onion at a market in Surabaya. — AFP

Indonesia maintains steady growth in Q1

JAKARTA: Indonesia's economy maintained steady growth in the first quarter of 2022 despite global tensions, official data showed on Monday, as the nation reaped the benefits of soaring commodities prices and an easing of Covid restrictions.

Indonesia was badly affected by the coronavirus pandemic, with its exports and tourism-reliant economy taking a massive hit in 2020 as GDP shrunk by 2.07 per cent — its first recession since the 1997 Asian financial crisis.

But Southeast Asia's largest economy has picked up in recent months, and

the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) on Monday reported an on-year expansion of 5.01 per cent in January-March.

"The high economic growth for the first quarter of 2022 is caused by the recovery of public activities", head of the bureau Margo Yuwono said during a press conference.

"Public mobility in the first quarter of 2022 has been really good."

Exports showed an especially impressive growth of 16.22 per cent in the first quarter of 2022 as prices for Indonesia's palm oil, nickel and tin soared on the global market. — AFP

UK slaps new sanctions on Russia and Belarus

LONDON: The UK on Sunday said it was slapping fresh sanctions on Russia and Belarus over Moscow's war on Ukraine, including import tariffs on precious metals and export bans.

The import tariffs, including on platinum and palladium, target trade worth £1.4 billion (\$1.7 billion), while export bans worth £250 million target Russia's manufacturing and heavy industry, said a statement from the Department for International Trade.

"This far-reaching package of sanctions will inflict further damage on the Russian war machine", said Secretary of State for International Trade Anne-Marie Trevelyan.

"It is part of a wider coordinated effort by the many

countries around the world who are horrified by Russia's conduct and determined to bring to bear our economic might to persuade (Russian President Vladimir) Putin to change course."

The UK's new sanctions bring the total value of products subjected to full or partial import and export sanctions to more than £4 billion.

"Over £4 billion worth of goods will now be subject to import and export sanctions, doing significant damage to Putin's war effort", said Finance Minister Rishi Sunak.

The UK has slapped a range of sanctions on Russian companies and individuals since Russia invaded Ukraine with Belarusian help in February. — AFP

China's exports slump to lowest in two years

BEIJING: China's export growth slumped in April to its lowest level in almost two years, customs data showed on Monday, as a Covid resurgence shuttered factories, sparked transport curbs and caused congestion at key ports.

The data shows the extent of growing damage to the world's second largest economy as millions are confined to their homes — particularly in key business hub Shanghai — to stamp out its worst Covid resurgence since the early days of the pandemic.

Beijing has persisted with a strict zero-Covid policy involving lockdowns and mass testing, but the economic costs are mounting as manufacturing hubs and supply chains atrophy under gruelling restrictions.

Export growth plunged to 3.9 per cent on-year last month, the Customs Administration said.

While this was above analysts' expectations of 2.7 per cent growth according to a Bloomberg poll, it marked the lowest rate



A Chinese worker looks on as a cargo ship is loaded at a port in Qingdao, eastern China's Shandong province. — AFP

since June 2020.

Import growth was flat in April, an improvement from a 0.1 per cent contraction in March, as Chinese consumers remain hesitant under a welter of restrictions across the country.

Customs spokesman Li Kuiwen tried to strike an upbeat note on Monday saying the economy still has room to make a turnaround and that its

"positive fundamentals" remain unchanged.

But analysts are less optimistic. "Export growth could get worse in the next couple of months due to the pandemic and China's stringent Covid containment measures, falling external demand, and loss of orders to other regions", Nomura Chief China Economist Ting Lu said.

Export growth was among the

key economic drivers of the last several quarters but could turn into a "drag" on the economy, he warned. Last month, China's trade surplus came in at \$51.1 billion, according to official data.

In April, China's biggest city Shanghai was almost entirely sealed off as it became the epicentre of the country's worst coronavirus surge, with many factories halting production and trucker shortage causing goods to pile up at its port.

Restrictions also appear to be looming in other cities, including the capital Beijing. "Lockdowns in large cities like Shanghai and rising input costs are major reasons" behind the underwhelming trade figures, analyst Zhaopeng Xing of ANZ Research said.

While top leaders have offered words of reassurance for tech, infrastructure and jobs, experts warn that Beijing's unswerving adherence to its zero-Covid strategy will continue to hack into growth. — AFP

Lagarde bats back ECB staff's inflation wage ask

FRANKFURT: European Central Bank chief Christine Lagarde (pictured) rejected union calls to peg wages to inflation at the Frankfurt-based institution as consumer prices in the eurozone soar.

Indexing the wages of employees to inflation was "not desirable and not intended", Lagarde said in an internal memo to staff on May 5. In the note, first reported by Bloomberg News, Lagarde said many staff were "disappointed" by the increases they received this year under the current pay formula in light of high inflation.

Consumer prices in the eurozone rose at an annual pace of 7.5 per cent in April, an all-time high for the currency club and well above the ECB's two-per cent target.

The latest surge has been driven in no small part by steep increases in the price for energy due to the Russian war on Ukraine.

"Our mandate is price stability and we will do what is needed to ensure that inflation stabilises at our two-per cent target", Lagarde said in the memo to the central bank's roughly 3,700 staff.

"The ECB's management is



asking us and all workers in Europe to take the hit for the sake of maintaining price stability", said Carlos Bowles, Vice-President of

the IPSO union, which represents ECB employees.

"Clearly this line of reasoning is not something

Lagarde has repeatedly said that the ECB is watching closely for "second-round effects" from inflation, as increasing prices lead to higher wage demands.

that we and other European workers can accept", he said. Lagarde has repeatedly said that the ECB is watching closely for "second-round effects" from inflation, as increasing prices lead to higher wage demands.

Such rises can lead to a so-called wage-price spiral, where the increasing cost of staff supports high inflation. Policymakers at the ECB are determined to avoid inflation becoming entrenched in this way, with calls growing for the bank to act by raising interest rates soon.

The head of the Finnish central bank on Sunday said the ECB should "raise the key interest rate in the third quarter, probably in July." Any hike would be the ECB's first in over a decade and would lift rates from their current historically low levels. — AFP

The woman steering Russia's war economy

For the second time in less than a decade, Elvira Nabiullina is steering Russia's economy through treacherous waters.

In 2014, facing a collapsing rouble and soaring inflation after barely a year as head of the Central Bank of Russia, Nabiullina forced the institution into the modern era of economic policymaking by sharply raising interest rates. The politically risky move slowed the economy, tamed soaring prices and won her an international reputation as a tough decision maker.

In the world of central bankers, among technocrats tasked with keeping prices under control and financial systems stable, Nabiullina became a rising star for using orthodox policies to manage an unruly economy often tethered to the price of oil. In 2015, she was named Central Bank Governor of the Year by 'Euromoney' magazine. Three years later, Christine Lagarde, then the head of the International Monetary Fund, effused that Nabiullina could make "central banking sing."

Now it falls to Nabiullina to steer Russia's economy through a deep recession, and to keep its financial system, cut off from much of the rest of the world, intact. The challenge follows years she spent strengthening Russia's financial defences against the kind of powerful sanctions that have been wielded in response to President Vladimir Putin's geopolitical aggression.

She has guided the extraordinary rebound of Russia's currency, which lost one-quarter of its value within days of the February 24 war on Ukraine. The central bank took aggressive measures to stop large sums of money from leaving the country, arresting a panic in markets and halting a potential run on the banking system.

In late April, Russia's parliament confirmed Nabiullina, 58, for five more years as chairwoman after Putin nominated her to serve a third term.

"She's an important beacon of stability for Russia's financial system", said Elina Ribakova, the Deputy Chief Economist of the Institute of International Finance, an industry group in Washington. "Her reappointment has symbolic value."

Prescribing a Tough Remedy

In her last crisis, she turned a catastrophe into an opportunity. In 2014, Russia was rocked by twin economic shocks: a collapse in oil prices — caused by a jump in US production and the refusal of Saudi Arabia to cut production, denting Russia's oil revenue — and economic sanctions imposed after Russia annexed Crimea.

The rouble plummeted. Nabiullina abandoned traditional policies — such as spending vast amounts of foreign currency reserves to support the exchange rate — and turned the bank's focus to managing inflation. She raised interest rates to 17%, and they stayed relatively high for years.

It was a painful readjustment, and the economy shrank for a year and a half. But by mid-2017, she had managed something that had seemed far-fetched just a few years



earlier: The inflation rate fell below 4%, the lowest in the country's post-Soviet era.

"She's been the very model of a modern central banker", said Richard Portes, a professor of economics at London Business School who has shared panel stages with Nabiullina at conferences.

"She was doing what she had to do", he said, even when it was politically difficult. "If you want a demonstration of the alternative", Portes added, "you need look only at Turkey", where years of political interference in the central bank have allowed inflation to run out of control, reaching 70% this month.

Under Nabiullina's direction, the central bank kept up its modernising efforts. It improved its communication by scheduling key policy decisions, providing guidance about policy, meeting with analysts and submitting to interviews with reporters. The Central Bank of Russia came to be regarded as the key economic brain of the country, attracting respected economists from the private sector.

Cleaning up the Banks

Besides her record on monetary policy, Nabiullina has drawn praise for pursuing a thorough clean-up of the banking industry. In her first five years at the bank, she revoked about 400 banking licenses — essentially closing one-third of Russia's banks — in an effort to cull weak institutions that

were making what she termed "dubious transactions."

It was considered a brave crusade: In 2006, a central bank official who had started a vigorous campaign to close banks suspected of money laundering was assassinated.

"Fighting corruption in the banking sector is a job for very courageous people", said Sergei Guriev, a Russian economist who left the country in 2013 and is now a professor at Sciences Po in Paris. He called her programme flawed, though, because it was largely limited to private banks. This created a moral hazard problem that left state-owned banks feeling comfortable taking on lots of risk with the protection of the government, he said.

Building a Fortress

Nabiullina has been a high-ranking official in Putin's regime for two decades. She was his chief economic adviser for little more than a year before she was made chair of the central bank in June 2013, having already served as minister for economic development while Putin was prime minister.

"She's well-trusted in the government and by the president", said Sofya Donets, an economist at Renaissance Capital in Moscow who worked at the central bank from 2007 to 2019. In recent years, it was quite evident that all kinds of policy questions in the financial sphere were delegated to the central bank, she added.

This trust was built up while Nabiullina was buttressing Russia's economy against Western sanctions, especially from the long reach of American penalties. In 2014, the United States cut off many major Russian companies from its capital markets. But these companies had large amounts of foreign currency debt, raising alarms over how they would service their debts.

Nabiullina set about squeezing as many US dollars from the economy as possible, so that companies and banks would be less vulnerable if Washington further restricted access to the country's use of dollars.

She also shifted the bank's reserves, which grew to be worth more than \$600 billion, toward gold, the euro and the Chinese renminbi.

Over her tenure, the share of dollars in the reserves fell to about 11%, from more than 40%, Nabiullina told parliament last month. Even after sanctions froze the bank's overseas reserves, the country has "sufficient" reserves in gold and renminbi, she told lawmakers.

Other protections against sanctions included an alternative to SWIFT, the global banking messaging system, developed in recent years. And the bank changed the payments infrastructure to process credit card transactions in the country so even the exit of Visa and Mastercard would have minimal effect.

In March, Bloomberg News and "The Wall Street Journal", citing unidentified sources, reported that Nabiullina had tried to resign after the Ukraine war, and had been rebuffed by Putin. The central bank rejected those reports.

Last month, the Canadian government placed her under sanctions for being a "close associate of the Russian regime."

A War Economy

After Nabiullina spent nearly a decade building a reputation for subduing inflation and bringing traditional monetary policy to Russia, the Western financial penalties imposed after the Ukraine invasion quickly forced her to abandon her preferred policies. She more than doubled the interest rate, to 20%; used capital controls to severely restrict the flow of money out of the country; shut down stock trading on the Moscow Exchange; and loosened regulations on banks so lending didn't seize up.

These measures stopped the initial panic and helped the rouble rebound, but the capital controls have only been partly lifted.

Now Russia is entering into a steep recession with a closed economy. On April 29, the bank lowered the interest rate to 14%, a sign it was shifting from quelling a financial tornado to trying to minimise the prolonged impact of sanctions on households and businesses as inflation speeds up and companies are forced to reinvent their supply chains without imported goods.

Inflation has climbed steeply, and could reach an annual rate of 23% this year, the central bank forecast. The overall economy, it said, could shrink as much as 10%.

"We are in a zone of enormous uncertainty", Nabiullina said.

Nabiullina has been a high-ranking official in Putin's regime for two decades. She was his chief economic adviser for little more than a year before she was made chair of the central bank in June 2013, having already served as minister for economic development while Putin was prime minister.

G-7 nations pledge to ban or phase out Russian oil

Leaders of the Group of 7 nations pledged during a virtual meeting on Sunday with President Volodymyr Zelensky to ban or phase out Russian oil, aiming to still further erode Russia's economic standing as it pursues its invasion of Ukraine.

The group did not provide details but said in a statement that the plans would be enforced in a "timely and orderly fashion, and in ways that provide time for the world to secure alternative supplies." Oil bans are a two-edged sword. Oil is a top export for Russia, and Moscow would almost certainly sustain a big economic blow should it be banned, but parts of Europe are heavily dependent on its oil and thus are also vulnerable.

The United States, which imported a relatively small amount of energy resources from Russia, has already banned the import of Russian oil and gas.

The European Union, which gets about a quarter of its crude oil imports from Russia, has also announced plans for phasing out Russian oil but is still in talks to formalise

We remain united in our resolve that President Putin must not win his war against Ukraine. We owe it to the memory of all those who fought for freedom in the Second World War. The actions of Putin bring shame on Russia and the historic sacrifices of its people.

G-7 NATIONS

the decision. The bloc is too dependent on Russian gas to consider banning it in the short term but has laid out plans to become progressively independent from it.

The G-7 also said it would take steps to stop the provision of key services on which Russia depends and to toughen sanctions against the financial elites who support President Vladimir Putin, as well as their family members.

The White House also announced new sanctions against three Russian state television outlets and said it would prohibit Americans from providing accounting or consulting services to anyone in Russia.

The Group of 7, which includes some of the world's biggest economies, said that member nations — Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States — would also continue to provide billions of dollars in military aid and intelligence to Ukraine, which has helped the country thwart Russian forces.

During the meeting on Sunday, Zelensky pleaded

Ukraine's case with the world leaders, saying his ultimate goal was to force the full withdrawal of Russia's army.

The G-7, in its statement, said member nations had assured Zelensky of their "continued readiness to undertake further commitments to help Ukraine secure its free and democratic future."

The call took place on the day the G-7 leaders commemorate the end of the World War II and as Russia prepared for its annual celebration of the Soviet victory over Nazi Germany in 1945.

"We remain united in our resolve that President Putin must not win his war against Ukraine", the G-7 statement said. "We owe it to the memory of all those who fought for freedom in the Second World War." The actions of Putin, it said, "bring shame on Russia and the historic sacrifices of its people." Ahead of the call, the United Kingdom said it would offer an additional 1.3 billion pounds (about \$1.6 billion) in aid and military support to Ukraine. The new funding almost doubles the existing 1.5 billion pounds in support.

WJ Towell Group Company

Quality car rentals at competitive prices.

Muscat 9014 6672, 9679 0684
Sohar 9731 6218 Salalah 9429 9325
www.orbit-oman.com

Fleet of 2,000 vehicles
Choose from a wide range of brands & models
PDO, OXY and BP spec vehicles available
Attractive rates for short-term & long-term lease

أوربيت ORBIT
Car Rental & Lease

Classifieds

Ask For Free Demo

Cloud Computing Services

For Tally Sales, Services or Customization

Contact: Guruprasad +968 79248644, 98753781
Email: guru.prasad@asiasolutions.net
ASIA SOLUTIONS

https://www.asiasolutions.net

Tally FOR VAT
TallyPrime

OMAN DAILY Observer Classified Section

TUESDAY MAY 10, 2022 | SHAWWAL 9, 1443 AH

Mohammed al Rashdi: 99841230
m.alrahd86@yahoo.com

Ali al Maashari: 99639264
ali.almashari@omandaily.om

Saada al Rashdi 95919344

94501166
24649593
24649595

Generator & Marine Engine Sell & Repair

9351 0868

SIT VACANT

WANTED urgently **Tour Handling Office Staffs** to handle incoming tourists from Europe. Excellent communication skill in English, local experience, Omani driving licence and with 5 years work experience. Contact: bunni1958@gmail.com

SIT. WANTED

WANTED for Sohar Production Company

**Civil Engineer
Planning Engineer
Mechanical Engineer
Electrical Engineer
C&A Engineer**

Minimun 8 to 12 years experience in Oil & Gas engineering field.

Send CV to Vap1oman@gmail.com

BIN Management supervisor

1. Can handle team of 30 employee.
2 IT knowledge.
3. Knowledge of Telemetry system.
4. with 4 years of experiene.

Please send the updated CV to the following e-mail IDs: Ahmed.Alisae@imdaadab.om, HR@imdaadab.om

FOR RENT

FOR RENT MONTHLY. Generator type Kirloskar 125 KV, little used, good price. Monthly RO 350 only. Please Contact 95669995.

FROM the owner, Commercial shops and high status finished flats in Al Khoudh 2nd phase. Contact 99311767.

INDIAN male (MBA Finance) having 7 years experience in Oman in accounts, looking for suitable position. Currently in Oman. Contact 77220864.

INDIAN male graduate Executive Secretary/ Stenography/ Oman DL and Muscat experience available. Contact 79256679.

Al Eman Dental Clinic

Flat 22, Floor 2
Abu Zaki Trading Building
Opp. Al Nahda Hospital
Sultan Qaboos Street

+968 24834113
+968 97454854
+968 96438854

Our Mission: To preserve your teeth and smile for a lifetime

AL KHOORY EQUIPMENT EST.
P.O.Box 545, P.C. 117, Al Wadi Al Kabir Area, Sultanate of Oman

Official distributor of Schneider Electric

Stockist & Wholesaler of Low Voltage Switchgear Products and a One Stop Solution for all Switchgear Products and Assembly

Tel: +968 24832474, +968 79474556
E-mail: alkhoory@omantel.net.om • www.alkhooryoman.com

SERVICES

A LEGAL translation office needs **Marketeers.** Contact E-mail: oman4n@gmail.com

AUTOCAD/ REVIT ARCH
MEP part/full-time. Contact
WhatsApp: 79037728.

AL SUMRI AC maintenance. We are ready to repair and install all types of Air-Conditioner within Muscat Governorate. 94301888.

RENT A CAR

Buttercup Rent A Car AMAZING OFFERS

- Rentacarfor10 days and get an extra free day.
- Rent for one month and get 5 days free.

All the cars are 2016 brand new special prices for public departments, companies and long-term contracts. 972494490.

LUXURIOUS Toyota bus 2016, air-conditioned, 30 passengers, offered for daily/ monthly/annually, Muscat. Contact: 98080609, 96316269.

FOR RENT

FLATS, 2BHK and 1 BHK in Muntaz 99341138/ 90991079.

FLATS, 2BHK in Ghubra near Indian School. 99341138/ 90991079.

VAT REGISTRATION, RETURN FILING, TAX CONSULTANCY

Contact: 9246 9602 / 9723 0025

To receive news updates from OMAN OBSERVER
WhatsApp
+your name+ to 96473232

VIGAS CARGO
WORLD WIDE DOOR TO DOOR

Transportation, Packing & Cargo Services

- CARGO SERVICES BY AIR & SEA WORLD WIDE
- DOOR TO DOOR DELIVERY IN INDIA, INDONESIA & UK
- PROFESSIONAL PACKERS & MOVERS
- MUSCAT - DUBAI - MUSCAT REGULAR TRANSPORT

H.O. Ruwi 99851366 92495068

Ghubrah : 93571703
Falaj : 93571704
Store : 93571823
Misfa : 98119561
93260956

vigas.cargo@yahoo.com

M M T CARGO
DOOR TO DOOR SERVICE

MUSCAT: 95605353, 95605454
BARKA: 95893242, 93743308
SOHAR: 96773031, 95347988
FALAJ: 94002341, 95136067
SALALAH: 94575905, 97858656
DUQUM: 97218831, 94002341

ROAD, SEA & AIR TRANSPORT WORLD WIDE

GTC Building, Near Badr Al Sama Hospital, Ruwi, Sultanate of Oman
E-mail: mmtcargo@yahoo.com
Customer Care: 96773031 / 97695454

Sea Cargo 800 Bz/Kg Express Cargo to Kerala 5 to 7 days*

سماء الخضراء للتجارة SAMA AL KHADRA TRADING

SERVICES:

- PIPING SYSTEMS
- VALVES
- DRAINS
- INTERCEPTORS

Tel: 24501568, 24502479 • Fax: 24503566
Email: sales@samaalkhadra.com
Website: www.samaalkhadratradingco.com

Quality Comes First

Tower Cranes & Passenger Lifts:

- Sales and Rental Services
- Installation
- Maintenance Service
- Breakdown Service
- Spare Parts Supply
- Hoist & Lowering
- Support Fixation
- Dismantling

Steel Fabrication Works

NEW MANARA TECHNICAL SERVICES LLC
Mobile: +968 9853 1975, 9853 1970
E-mail: info@newmanara.com / newmanaratechnical@gmail.com
Website: www.newmanara.com

JOB SEEKING

Indian Male, M.com (Finance) 20 years experience in Finance and Accounts. Good experience in MIS Reports, Budget, VAT, Payroll & Admin. Able to handle upto finalisation (Tally, Focus, SAP). DL and NOC available. Looking for senior position. Can join immediately.

Contact: 95392251
E-mail: regi.lukose@gmail.com

PEST CONTROL OMAN CO. L.L.C.

Supply of Pesticides, Gel (crocoraches), Public Health chemicals, Agriculture chemicals, Snake repellent, Rodent baits and other insect repellent from UK & USA

PROFESSIONALS in Pest Control Service, Bedbug Treatment, Rodent Treatment, Snake Treatment and Termite Treatment [Pre & Post Construction]

Tel: 24787606, 24787503
Direct Line: 24786077
GSM: 99382355, 99172309

pcomctom@omantel.net.om
P.O. Box 565, Al Wadi Al Kabir 117, Sultanate of Oman

JOB SEEKING

Indian Male. 16 years working experience in senior position in finance and accounts in Oman. Able to work independently upto finalization, banking, tax matters etc...

GSM: 95392251
Mail ID : regi.lukose@gmail.com

Driving School

Special offers for those wishing to learn driving in (Aziba - Khwair Qurum - Ruwi Al Amirat)

Contact No: 99074072

SITUATION VACANT

Required for Ras Al Hamra Recreation Centre (PDO Club)

SWIMMING POOL LIFEGUARDS/ATTENDANTS (Male & Female) OMANIS ONLY

Qualification & Skills: Accomplished swimmer with recognized Life Saving and First Aid qualifications and certifications. Must be fluent in written & spoken English.

Experience: 2 years working as Life Guard & Pool Attendant.

Job Responsibilities: Supervise swimming activities, children and other weak swimmers and ensure pool and safety guidelines are followed. Must be willing to work shift duties and on weekends.

Note: A swimming test will be conducted to test the candidates swimming and rescue skills.

Please email CV to: oceanint@omantel.net.om

Now get news on the go

To receive news updates from OMAN OBSERVER
WhatsApp
+your name+ to 96473232

SITUATION WANTED

Mechanical Engineer with Master Degree from UK having 7.5 years work experience in Oman. Looking for a suitable Project Manager job role.

Contact: 91162085

OMAN DAILY Observer

For Advertisements

Please Contact with our Team:

Head Office

Mohd Al Rashdi 99841230
malrahd86@yahoo.com

Salalah Office
Bakhit Al Shihri 9298577
bakhit.omandaily@gmail.com

Ali Al Maashari 99639264
wadiameeh@yahoo.com

Nizwa Office

Abdullah Al Abri 99429094
nizwaofc@omandaily.net.om

Suhar Office

Musalam Al Saidi 99429192
sohardaily@outlook.com

To advertise on our social media platforms and website

Please Contact our Team 95210257

OMAN OBSERVER
www.omandailyobserver.com

Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, LinkedIn, WhatsApp, Telegram, Messenger, Email

Diary of an Omani visitor to Korea:

“Kamsa Hamnida” to this country

With the invitation of the Korea Foundation and as a part of its programmes to publicise their country and its successes, this author joined dignitaries and parliamentarians from several countries to visit South Korea to gain insight into their institutions and achievements... **P20**



At NADA, a Glorious Collision of Paintings and Ceramics

TWO THINGS can be found everywhere at NADA New York in lower Manhattan: painting and ceramics. This makes sense, since the younger generation of digital natives (people who grew up with the Internet and social media) that NADA generally features tend to favour art that is pointedly nondigital and handcrafted. But I'm getting ahead of myself. First, NADA.

The New Art Dealers Alliance (NADA) is a group of new and mostly young art dealers. This is the eighth edition of NADA New York (the last New York fair was in 2018, although they appeared in Miami last December). Eighty-one members are represented in this fair, with a total of 120

galleries and nonprofits from the US and around the world.

Younger dealers presumably take greater risks, and you see plenty of that here — in tone and attitude, mostly. The work ranges from scruffy, comic and irreverent to smartly polished — albeit with an edge. The last thing anyone wants to do is look old or irrelevant before their time. And yet, artists and dealers need to make a living, hence the prevalence of painting and sellable crafts that knowingly copy the normcore aesthetic of thrift shops and folk art.

PAINTING AND CERAMICS
What's called pluralism — simultane-

ous strains of art — extends to painting and everything under that umbrella is represented here: figurative painting, abstraction, paintings made without paint, and what might be called “punk” painting, or art works in which the artist appears too cool to expend much effort. New York's Kapp Kapp (Booth 2.02) covers this range, with a lineup of crisp, botanically inspired paintings by Molly Greene and homages to graffiti-and-collage by Hannah Beerman.

Occupying the opposite pole of painting are the socially engaged works of Karla Diaz at the Los Angeles gallery Luis De Jesus (Booth 5.03). Diaz's deep, colour-saturated canvases tell personal stories of migration from Mexico to the United States, as well as preserve folklore from her heritage.

Ryan Crotty at the Lower Manhattan gallery High Noon (Booth 6.15) does a spin on modernist formalism, making translucent abstractions with an acrylic gel medium that creates ethereal and iridescent results that look almost holographic. Other notable galleries showing paintings include Stephen Thorpe at Denny Dimin (Booth 6.14); Mickey Lee at One Trick Pony (Booth 6.01) and a group show at The Pit (1.01).

Then there are the paintings paired with ceramics. Anna Valdez at the Los Angeles gallery Ochi (Booth 4.14) is showing both mediums. Brightly coloured



paintings based on tableau made with books, plants, and animal heads or horns that she arranges in her studio include ceramic vases that she also created; some are displayed nearby, causing a kind of feedback loop between objects and images. Gustav Hamilton at the Denver gallery David B Smith (Booth 4.09) simply collapses the two: his wall reliefs are part painting, part ceramic.

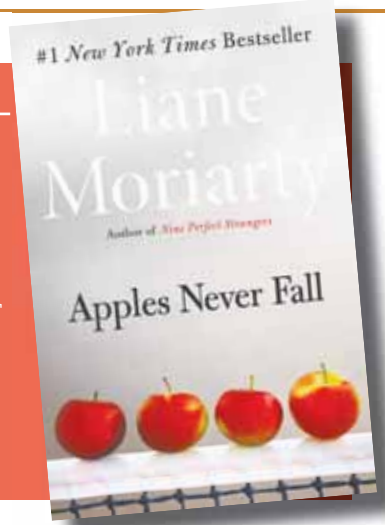
Other galleries showing ceramics —

many of them wildly inventive takes on the traditional clay vessel — include the joint presentation of the Lower East Side gallery neighbours Fierman and Situations (Booth 6.10); the Los Angeles gallery Emma Gray HQ (Booth 2.06); Gaa Gallery, representing Provincetown and Cologne; Lefebvre & Fils (Booth 3.13) from Paris; secret project robot (Booth P18); and Sebastian Gladstone and Harkawik (Booth 2.03). It's a lot of ceramics. — **NYT**

READ

APPLES NEVER FALL BY LIANE MORIARTY

Apples Never Fall follows the four Delaney siblings after the disappearance of their mother, Joy Delaney. The police soon identify their father, Stan, as a possible person of interest in her case.



FASHION TRENDS

Spanish singer Rosalia arrives for the 2022 Met Gala at the Metropolitan Museum of Art on May 2, 2022, in New York. The Gala raises money for the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Costume Institute. The Gala's 2022 theme is “In America: An Anthology of Fashion”. — **AFP**



HOT TOPIC

Philippine boxing icon and presidential candidate Manny Pacquiao casts his vote during the presidential election at a polling precinct in Kiamba town, Sarangani province, on the southern island of Mindanao on May 9, 2022. — **AFP**





find us on
TWITTER
Scan the QR Code or follow us on
www.twitter.com/omanobserver

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



SHARE A SLICE OF YOUR LIFE

We select three photos daily for our Instagram Top Picks of the Day. The rules are simple. Follow us on Instagram. Upload your photos. Tag us and use **#OmanObserver** and **#BeAnObserver**.



AROUND THE WORLD

HEALTH

WHO warns of obesity 'epidemic' in Europe



THE WHO SAID on Tuesday that "epidemic" overweight and obesity rates are linked to over 1.2 million deaths annually across Europe, calling for swift policy changes to reverse the dangerous trend.

Obesity rates in the region have ballooned by 138 per cent in the past five decades, the World Health Organization said in a new report, and are linked to a series of cancers and cardiovascular diseases.

Nearly a quarter of adults are now obese in Europe, higher than in any other region except the Americas, the WHO said.

"Overweight and obesity rates have reached epidemic proportions across the region and are still escalating", the health body's European office said.

"Raised body mass index is a major risk factor for non-communicable diseases, including cancers and cardiovascular diseases", WHO Regional Director Hans Kluge was quoted saying in the report.

Obesity causes at least 13 different types of cancer and is likely responsible for at least 200,000 new cases of cancer per year, it said.

"This figure set to rise further in the coming years", the organisation said in the new report.

Excess weight and obesity are estimated to cause more than 12 million deaths per year, accounting for more than 13 per cent of deaths in the region, it added.

PANDEMIC POUNDS

The latest comprehensive data available, from 2016, shows that 59 per cent of adults and nearly one in three children – 29 per cent of boys and 27 per cent of girls – are overweight in Europe.

In 1975, 40 per cent of European adults were overweight.

The prevalence of obesity among adults has risen by 138 per cent since then, with a 21 per cent increase between 2006 and 2016.

The Covid-19 pandemic is also linked to growing waistlines, especially as lockdowns promoted "an unhealthy diet or sedentary lifestyle", the report found.

It also revealed further health risks associated with excess weight.

"People living with obesity were more likely to experience severe outcomes of the Covid-19 disease spectrum, including intensive care unit admissions and death", Kluge said.

The authors also noted that the causes of obesity "are much more complex than the mere combination of unhealthy diet and physical inactivity".

Environmental factors unique to "modern Europe's highly digitalised societies are also drivers of obesity", it said, including the marketing of unhealthy foods and online gaming – especially among children.

The WHO called for policy changes to prevent obesity and promote healthy lifestyles, such as taxing sugary drinks and subsidising healthy foods while limiting the marketing of unhealthy foods to children.

"Policy interventions that target environmental and commercial determinants of poor diet at the entire population level are likely to be most effective at reversing the obesity epidemic", it stated.

The WHO's European region comprises 53 countries, including several in central Asia. — **AFP**

CULTURE

Mexican tiger fight ritual draws blood to bring rain



SEEKING TO appease the God of storms and end a drought, men and women in tiger costumes whip each other mercilessly into submission in an ancient ritual in southern Mexico.

"They say it's a drop of blood for a drop of rain", Karina Vicente says as she prepares to take part in the annual tradition for the first time.

"I'm very excited but nervous", the 22-year-old psychology student tells AFP in the town of Zitlala in Guerrero, one of Mexico's poorest and most violent states.

In the past, the 300-year-old indigenous ceremony to bring rain and plentiful harvests was only for men.

But these days, women also want to help keep the three-century-old tradition alive, even if the lashes do hurt, Vicente says.

According to tradition, blood spilled in the May 5 ritual, called Atsatsilistli, is an offering for the rain God Tlaloc.

The sound of each whip-lash represents a clap of thunder, the yellow colour of the costumes a drought and the whip a tiger's tail.

DOING BATTLE

Before the fight begins, the residents of Zitlala split into two groups and dance under the intense sun along steep streets, to the rhythm of banda, a type of Mexican music.

First, the male contestants enter the battleground

— the town's basketball court — to fight for about five minutes at a time, watched by crowds of spectators.

"Come on! Come on!" a burly, bare-chested man says, challenging his opponent. Minutes later, he raises his arms in victory, blood starting to seep from the wounds inflicted by his rival.



Referees stand by ready to separate the fighters if they break the rules.

The musicians of both sides play simultaneously, adding to a chaotic atmosphere. Soon the air is filled with the aroma of mezcal, an agave spirit that the contestants drink and use to wet their whips to make them more effective.

EQUALITY REPLACES MACHISMO

Three hours later, it is the women's turn. They greet and hug each other before and after the fight, unlike the

men. Within minutes, Vicente's opponent removes her mask in defeat after some well-aimed lashes.

"I felt good, proud!" Vicente declares, savouring her victory. The ritual ensures the rainy season begins punctually — a lifeline for a community that relies on corn and other crops, says resident

Cleofas Cojito, 60.

She welcomes the participation of women in the tradition, which was once so brutal that some contestants even died, Cojito says.

"Now there's equality. There isn't so much machismo anymore", she adds.

This year, around 30 women fought — compared with three at their debut in 2019 — and 200 men.

The next day, Vicente feels sore, but motivated.

"I'll fight again. We have to look after what we've already won", she says with a smile.

— **AFP**

A WINDOW INTO CONTEMPORARY OMANI LITERATURE



Dr Khalid Mohammed al Balushi
khalidalbalushi@hotmail.com

Serving our Local Community in the 1950s: The Road Project

The following is an English translation of an excerpt from "A Soldier from Oman: Memory's Nectar" by (ret.) Inspector-General Said bin Rashid al Kalbani

THE ROAD PROJECT AND THE SIX PIASTERS

Upon deciding in the 1950s to pave the road that went across our villages, the government summoned people to cooperate. We were to undertake the part that stretched from "Modhiq al Najed" till "Oqibaat al Hamr" in Wadi Dhala. Everybody from Miskan participated in this endeavour. The fathers would dig out big stones, and the children would move those stones away from the sides of the road till all the work was completed.

Enjoying working collaboratively, people wouldn't be held back by exhaustion. We young people would wake up at dawn, and after prayers, have our breakfast with what was available. Before the sun rose, we would arrive at the site. We were a group of twenty men headed by Abdullah al Kalbani, nicknamed "Ra'af shaat". On behalf of Shaikh Hamad bin Saif al Kalbani, Abdullah was to supervise the road-works, arrange for meals, and carry out all that was required for the completion of the project.

I remember once, upon feeling hungry, we, the young men, went to Said, the man in-charge of food, asked him for qahwa and dates. He responded rather sarcastically, "Lick your fingers", as an indication that we would have nothing to eat but our fingers. (It is known that people

in Oman use their hands when eating). He told us to go to the supervisor, Abdullah, who in his turn, accused us of being greedy and of having no manners; or else why would we think of eating before the elders had done so?

Working for the road project was a great experience I had in my life. I felt I did something to serve my community, and was proudly thrilled for what I got in return, six piasters! It was the first pay I ever received in my life. I started thinking what I could do with it. In a context where you couldn't actually buy much, I valued the money like treasure, and relished the thought of buying the simplest of my needs.

I recall all that with fondness. People would lovingly call each other with strange nicknames. Said, so famous for his nickname "deaf", that if you said "Said" no one would know who you were referring to. And if you mentioned his name with his tribe there was someone else with the same name and the same tribe. If you said "Said, the deaf", then everybody would, of course, know who you were referring to. There were other people most famous for their nicknames, like the "one-eyed", the "goblin", the "wolf" and the "demon". These nicknames were so accepted that they passed down generations. Their children are still called the sons of the "goblin", of the "wolf" or of the "demon".

art & life

Local Scene

f t i y l v @omanobserver

TUESDAY | MAY 10 | 2022

Diary of an Omani visitor to Korea:

“Kamsa Hamnida” to this country



By Hatim al Tai

Some said that 'travel has seven benefits' but when travelling to the Republic of Korea (known as South Korea), these benefits are magnified. The reason for this is that South Korea is one of the richest cultures in far East Asia and its people are some of the most exemplary when it comes to dedication and productivity. As a society, they also have a collective ambition of developing and enhancing technology.

The first thing a visitor will notice after getting off the plane is how Koreans love order. No matter where you look, Korea's massive cities display some of the best qualities in a modern space – well-organised and well-disciplined. Here are a few observations I've made when I visited the country.

A LONG-STORIED PAST

Korea's age as a country cannot be counted on fingers. It has been a witness to the second world war, the victory of the allied forces in 1945, the fall and end of the rule of the Japanese Empire on the island, the outbreak of a bloody civil war and even the division of the two Koreas (North and South). South Korea survived many of these turmoils and while it faced many challenging years, it managed to successfully build a modern society filled with peaceful development destined for glory. Perhaps it is important to mention that the Republic of Korea, until the fifties, lived on foreign aid and international support. In just a matter of a few decades, it successfully transformed into a developed country and is now extending help to various countries all over the world.

With the invitation of the Korea Foundation and as a part of its programmes to publicise their country and its successes, I joined dignitaries and parliamentarians from several countries to visit the country to gain an insight into their institutions and achievements.

The trip began in the capital Seoul – a city of about 10 million people divided into large groups of 25 neighbourhoods. Seoul is a progressive country that balances out green mountains with modern facilities and distinctly, a well-organised public transformation system for buses and trains.

Booked in Lotte Hotel, located in the city centre amidst skyscrapers and business centres and surrounded by luxurious and classy shops, I was made to stay in a room on the 34th floor which allowed me to enjoy the general view of the city from above. From the top, and with the mountains in the backdrop, made me feel as if I was watching a painting by a creative artist. Perhaps it was fate itself that allowed it but I also came during the season of the blossoming of the cherry flowers – a sign of the beginning of the spring season and the moment that the weather bids farewell to the cold winter.

THE KOREA FOUNDATION

Koreans are very efficient when it comes to their time management. Our work started quickly wherein we had an introductory meeting with Dr Gwan Lee, the head of the Korea Foundation. Before his promotion as the head of the Korea Foundation established in 1991, he worked previously as a university professor to the prestigious Seoul National University. The meeting allowed us a brief overview of what the foundation does which includes providing diplomatic activities that work to bring people together, organising programmes for foreign delegates' visits, and for supporting and publishing Korean arts and culture. What they do is tap into "soft powers" to add a positive presence on the global scene.

Gwan Lee elaborated on the importance of building bridges of cooperation and partnership between the Republic of Korea and the Arab countries and pointed out the various elements that Korea and the Arab countries own, which help to strengthen cooperation and move it forward towards broader horizons.

The next day's schedule was filled with interviews and discussions. We visited the Korean Parliament, which has about 300 members, representing different regions and states in Korea, and is responsible for legislation and control of the government and various state institutions. What I have noticed is that Koreans are proud of their language. There are a few English speakers, and this is perhaps one of the secrets of

their distinction. Holding to original identity is the fastest way towards uniqueness.

Korea Foundation assigned a translator (I named her Hyam) to us, who helped us a lot in conducting extensive and enriching discussions with the Korean people. I met with the National Association member, Mrs Jung Choun-Sook, who is responsible for several important subjects; including the issue of equality between men and women, and most importantly, she is the Omani-Korean relations development committee chair. It caught my attention this great interest in strengthening parliamentary diplomacy and establishing a specialised committee to strengthen bridges of cooperation with other countries.

Jung spoke extensively about the Korean parliamentary system and elections, and also highlighted several challenges facing Korean society and the importance of finding legislative solutions to them. The parliamentarian did not neglect to talk about the importance of developing Omani-Korean relations, expressing her desire to visit the Sultanate of Oman at the earliest opportunity, and she praised a lot of what she knew about Oman and its good reputation as a

Excellency Chung Jong-kun, Korean Foreign Ministry Under-Secretary, who spoke about the various political challenges facing the world, including wars, tensions and conflicts that represent a threat to international peace and security. He clearly and frankly referred to the wisdom of Oman politics and its clear approach to establishing peace around the world. He also spoke about the remarkable development in the Omani-Korean relations, especially as they are close to complete 50 years, as bilateral relations between the Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of Korea were established in 1974.

Talking about politics and diplomacy did not prevent us from clearly pointing out the promising investment, economic, and cultural opportunities that both Oman and Korea have, which would raise the relations between the two countries to higher levels in various aspects.

The Republic of Korea is talented at employing its soft power, taking advantage of its physical and technological capabilities. I was introduced to the International Cooperation Organization "Koika", which is part of the Korean Foreign Ministry, and it

overtime monitoring traffic and controlling violators or monitoring and limiting suspicious actions, all of that aimed to keep the city safe, secure, and stable. This system has helped reduce crime and traffic accidents through a highly accurate monitoring system.

HYUNDAI FACTORY

There is no doubt that a visit to Korea will not be complete without visiting its industrial fortresses, and on top of these forts comes the giant Hyundai factory, which despite intense competition from European and American technology, it has been able to excel globally in the field of the automobile industry. From the date of its establishment, 10 years later, it became an advanced auto-industry giant setting food in the global auto market and making sure that Hyundai cars are found almost in all the streets of the world.

What astonished me is that this large company developed its manufacturing systems not solely dependent on manual labour but rather a reliance on robotics. A quick browse through of their assembly process reveals how the machines are in-charge of

One of the most beautiful things I have noticed about the Korean people is that they sanctify work; indeed, one of the most important reasons for their advancement is their total commitment to work; where work is the most important priority in the life of a Korean person.

They applied the rule of "work is worship", where Koreans work long hours without tiring, because they turned work into a means of both self-realisation and dream of life realisation. Koreans love discipline, respect, and appreciation. When they meet, they bow down to greet or thank someone, saying "kamsa hamnida," which means "Thank You."

Korea represents an advanced model of modern civilisation, which is based on technological innovation and provides an elegant way of life.

OMANI DIPLOMACY IN KOREA

When I talk about the Omani diplomatic presence in Korea, I see our embassy in Seoul as an inspiration for activity and continuous work. The Oman Embassy in Korea is located in one of the finest Korean neighbourhoods, in a high-rise building. The embassy embraced the original and unique Omani architecture, and any visitor can notice the uniqueness of the building based on the foundations of the ancient Omani heritage, which derived its essence from Islamic architecture with a mixture of different cultures until it crystallised in an Omani crucible flourish with originality and uniqueness.

I met there his Excellency Ambassador "Zakaria bin Hamad al Saadi", the Ambassador of Sultanate of Oman to the Republic of Korea, and I found him a wonderful example of the Omani ambassador abroad.

The ambassador represents the spirit of youth full of enthusiasm towards work, with all energy and activity. From the first moment of the meeting until its end, the smile never left his face, and he maintains the wonderful Omani nature, with his calmness and strong charisma, full of modesty at the same time.

His Excellency the Ambassador possesses extensive knowledge that always fascinates his listeners, in addition to his diligent follow-up of events and developments in various fields, and he is working to utilise all of this in evolving the Omani-Korean relations. Here I point to the serious discussions between the Republic of Korea and the Gulf Cooperation Council countries to conclude a free trade agreement. Which is a step that would support the improvement of the Gulf-Korean relations.

I had a walking tour with his Excellency, on which we enjoyed a night's walk in the safe streets of Seoul; where we walked through the town in the charming spring-time.

One of the most beautiful things that I learned during my visit to Korea is that the most famous, finest, and most delicious grape type is called "The Bright Muscat Grape," a fruit that represents for the Koreans a strategic crop. Where it is used in many aspects, and it is sold at a high price, the price of a kilogram may reach the equivalent of 10 Omani Rials, and this type of grape is characterised by its wonderful sugary taste with little acidity, and its large round shape without seeds.

The history of "Muscat grapes" goes back to the period of the Portuguese presence; The Portuguese took the seeds of Omani grapes from Jebel Akhdhar to grow them in Europe, and it was a great success due to the nature of the weather there. And 30 years ago, the Japanese conducted successful experiments to develop this grape through genetic engineering, and when it arrived in Korea, it achieved great success. The truth is that when I saw this Omani grape flourishing in the far east, I wished that it would return to our beloved country, and we would grow it in large areas.

In conclusion, I don't remember being happier when visiting another country, than when visiting the Republic of Korea. It is a country that captivates you from the first sight, catches your eyes, steals your mind, and ignites your heart with joy, happiness, and enthusiasm.

The Koreans have impressed me with their culture of love for work, fondness for excellence and distinction, and at the same time not neglecting to enjoy the joys of life. That is why I would say "Kamsa Hamnida!"



friendly and peace-loving country.

STUDENT MISSIONS

I presented to Mrs Jung the importance of increasing scholarships for Omani students to study at the advanced Korean universities in the fields of technology and other sciences and knowledge. I suggested establishing training programmes for students from Omani universities to train, qualify and improve their skills in major Korean companies such as Samsung and Hyundai, during the summer period to gain experience, acquire great work culture, and other skills in communication, task performance and job commitment.

On the third day, a meeting was arranged with the speaker of the National Association, Mr Jang Seong, and I was amazed at the beauty of the exterior and interior architectural design of the National Association building, with its multiple sections and a large hall that hosts parliamentary sessions.

The president of the National Association explained the importance of Parliament's work in providing great services in the field of research, studies on public opinion polls, and supporting members of Parliament with all the extensive studies they need to help them take the necessary decisions. He mentioned to me that about 15 researchers who are PhD holders work in the National Association, along with a large number of competent assistants.

This was followed by a meeting with his

represents the development arm that works to establish projects in many countries of the world to fight poverty, disease, ignorance, building strategic partnerships with many countries in various fields of development, and organising humanitarian aid in various fields of development.

It always astonishes me the interest of East Asian countries to strengthen ties of cooperation with the countries of the world, on purely humanitarian grounds, although they are aware of the extent of their soft power and its impact, they are very keen to enforce these soft powers, to achieve development goals that promote the human being, without interfering in countries internal affairs, or talking about political aspects related to local conditions of countries, and this is what should be paid attention to and maintained to achieve a future that is based on solid cooperation with various countries.

MULTIPLE VISITS

The trip schedule – as I mentioned earlier – was full of meetings and visits to several sites and institutions, and our trip included a visit to the smart city "Anyang", which is located outside the capital Seoul. It is called a smart city because, within the last 15 years, it was able to make happen the ideals and theory of what makes a smart city where everything is interconnected and well-coordinated including the police.

From this visit, we learned that Seoul is equipped with about 6,500 surveillance cameras throughout the city that worked

installing parts of the cars with minimal supervision from factory workers who are then supervised by a select group of engineers.

Hyundai has evolved to an exceptional level that it has shown us its first car powered by environmentally friendly green hydrogen energy. The car is planned to be revealed this year, and it is expected to conquer the world in the next few years.

KOREAN DRAMA AND MUSIC

The impact of Korean culture on drama and music can be found everywhere. Some of their best television series are not only viewed all over the world they matured to include different subtitles including Arabic. Even in Gulf countries, Korean series are easily found on different satellite channels. Ironically, Turkish series are adapted from many Korean dramas, and for this reason, we find Korean shows finding TV lovers everywhere.

Perhaps the most well-known example of Korean "soft power" dominating the consciousness of the world was the introduction of the song "Gangnam Style." It has achieved international fame, and to date, boasts more than 4 billion views on YouTube so far. Gangnam is one of the modern neighbourhoods in Seoul which is known for its restaurants and cafes. Korean cuisine is characterised by healthy food and it highly relies on vegetables. "Kimchi" or Korean pickles is an essential dish on every table in Korean homes.